



SHE SHALL HAVE MUSIC WHEREVER SHE GOES!

RSCM OXFORDSHIRE DIOCESAN CHOIRS' FESTIVAL 13th OCTOBER 2018 - BANBURY

This year's RSCM Oxfordshire Annual Choirs' Festival was held in Banbury, north Oxfordshire, famous for its catchy little nursery rhyme, 'Ride a Cock Horse', the written history of which goes back to 1874:

*Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady ride on a white horse;
With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall have music wherever she goes.*

On Saturday 13th October the RSCM Festival certainly lived up to the famous nursery rhyme 'she shall have music' with 35 junior choristers and 15 choirs from Oxfordshire, three choirs each from Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, a total of 140 attending in the magnificent church of St. Mary's, Banbury. The church made us most welcome and provided us with excellent tea and cakes following the rehearsal for which we were all most grateful.

The present church is a late Georgian building erected in the late 18th Century and consecrated in September 1797. Its predecessor was a splendid mediaeval church which had fallen into disrepair and had become dangerous. There used to be three crosses in Banbury; the High Cross, the Bread Cross and the White Cross but these crosses were pulled down at the end of the 16th century by the Puritans. The present cross was erected in 1859 to celebrate the wedding of the then Princess Royal to Prince Frederick of Prussia.

The festival followed the usual pattern for these events. Since August, church choirs from the Diocese of Oxford had been rehearsing the music chosen by the conductor for the festival in their own churches. A week before the event, pre-festival rehearsals are arranged, one of which was held in All Saints'. The final rehearsal, with our distinguished conductor and organist, commenced at 2pm, three hours before the Festival Evensong at 5pm.

Our inspiring conductor was Kerry Beaumont, Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral and a British concert organist. Kerry has been Director at Coventry Cathedral since 2006. It always amazes me how RSCM Oxfordshire manages to attract such exceptional musicians to work with us at these festivals. It is of immense value to all who attend and we do get a tremendous benefit from their musical knowledge, exceptional talent and experience.

Our organist was Cynthia Hall, FRCO, who has played the piano since the age of 4 and went on to learn the organ while teaching philosophy in the USA.

The rehearsal began with some vocal warm up exercises. On this occasion Kerry explained that when we sing up and down the scale on the 3rd and 7th notes sing louder as that will keep us in tune! We began rehearsal with the

Anthem, *Evening Hymn, "Te lucis ante terminum"* ("Thee, Lord, before the close of day"). Composed by Henry Balfour Gardiner (1877-1950), it is a setting of the Latin compline hymn "*Te lucis ante terminum*" for four voices and organ, in both English and Latin. It was published in 1908 and is regarded as Gardiner's best-known work and a classic of the English choral tradition.

The Introit was a lovely piece but had proved quite a challenge initially! '*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*', music by Sir Edward Cuthbert Bairstow (1874-1946), words from the Liturgy of St. James and published in 1925. It achieves its mysterious effect at the outset by using tenor and bass parts in octaves.

The Preces and Responses (*Responses in A Sharpe*) were composed by John Reading (d. 1692) and Edited by Michael Walsh. Part of *Psalm 118* was sung to a beautiful chant composed by Gwilym Edward Beechey (1938-2015). The 'Mag and Nunc' chosen by Kerry was the glorious setting in *F Major* by John Ireland (1879-1962). The sermon was preached by The Right Reverend Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford. His theme was 'What is the centre of the universe?'

There were two hymns: the first was the much loved *Tallis's Canon*, by Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585) Kerry arranged the fourth verse to be sung in canon (unaccompanied) starting with the basses – altos – tenors – sopranos. This was very effective. The final congregational hymn was '*O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end*', the tune '*Wolvercote*' written by William Harold Ferguson (1874-1950) and words by John Bode (1816-74). The final descant and arrangement was by Kerry Beaumont.

The service closed with Cynthia Hall playing the magnificent Buxtehude *Prelude and Fugue in D* Bux WV 139.

IDB
16/10/18