

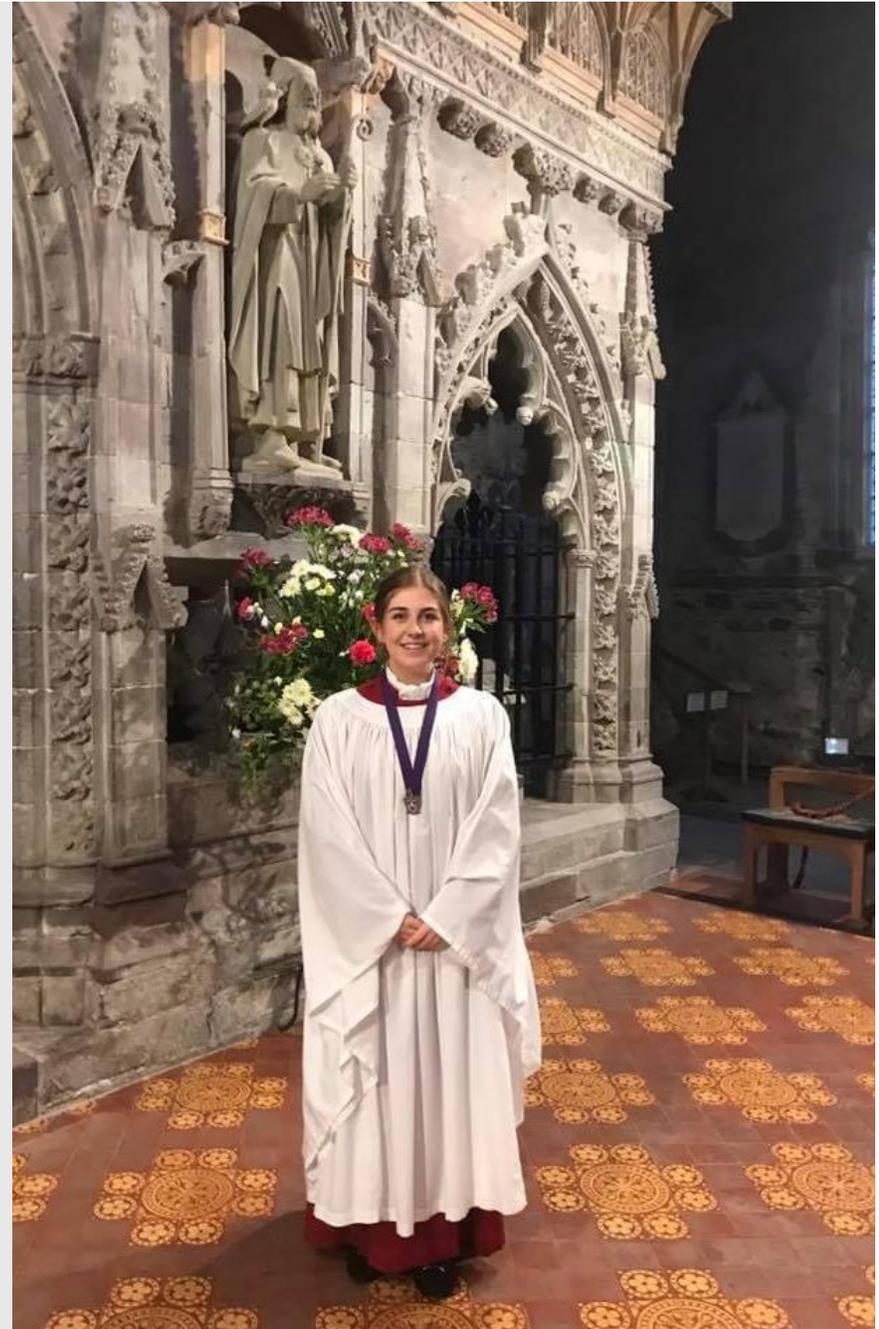
Welcomed with open arms: Girl choristers at St Davids Cathedral

By Megan Rees



A little about me

- Currently studying MA in Musicology at University of Bristol
- First Class Honors BA in Music at University of Bristol
- Former girl chorister at St Davids Cathedral (2014-2018)



My dissertation topic

- Required to write a 10,000 word dissertation as part of my undergraduate degree
 - An interest in cathedral music
- When arriving at university I quickly realized that St Davids Cathedral is unique
 - The introduction of girl choristers at St Davids Cathedral contradicts Salisbury's claims
- My dissertation investigates the introduction of girl choristers at St Davids in 1966

Why is this topic so important?

- Little mention of St Davids Cathedral within scholarship on the Anglican choral tradition
 - Why have historians and academics ignored such a seismic shift?
- Scholarship of the last decade focuses on biological and developmental differences between boy and girl trebles
 - I wanted to begin to fill this gap in academic literature

Key questions within my dissertation

- Why did Boorman introduce girl treble voices at St Davids Cathedral?
 - Why has this story been lost?
- Was the repertoire affected by the fact that the choir largely contained girl trebles?
 - What was the legacy of Boorman's decision?

How did I go about researching this topic?

- St Davids Cathedral Library was an extremely helpful resource
 - A huge thank you to librarian Mari!
 - Chapter Service Books
 - St Davids Music Festival programs
- Conducted a series of interview with:
 - Original girl choristers from the 1960s
 - Local individuals who recall the occasion
- Current members of staff and clergy at St Davids Cathedral



Peter Boorman and boy choristers of St Davids Cathedral (May 1954)

Chapter 1

The introduction of girls to St Davids Cathedral Choir

- Boorman arrived at St Davids Cathedral 1953 – number of boy choristers decreasing at an alarming rate
 - Boys were not emotionally nor musically mature
 - Other pastimes caught the boys attention
- Caught the attention of Welsh national press – “Choir may disband after 500 years”
 - Boorman created his own marketing strategy

WANTED!



YOUR Cathedral Choir badly needs sharp-witted boys (8—11) who are

ALIVE

to the opportunities, musical and otherwise, it offers; and whose parents are

DESPERATE

to see their sons doing an important, historic and masculine job in providing the music of Wales' National Cathedral.

REWARD

is paid in cash, quarterly. Opportunities of recording, broadcasting and T.V. work. Recitals at other churches. Thorough musical training. Travelling expenses where necessary.

(Two Alto and one Tenor Lay Clerk and an Organ Pupil-Assistant are also needed).

Details and conditions from :
PETER BOORMAN, Organist and Master of the Choristers,
THE CLOSE, ST. DAVIDS. Telephone 364.

The turning point: 20th April 1966

- Problematic in the lead up to a BBC radio broadcast – 20th April 1966
 - Measles swept across primary schools in St Davids
 - Nerve-wracking situation for Boorman
- Approached girls' choir of Ysgol Dewi Sant, St Davids Secondary School

REGISTER OF

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London

DATE	DAY	HOUR	SERVICE	OFFICIANT	NO. OF COMMUNICANTS	PREACHER	TEXT	NOTES	COLLECTIONS						
									For	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
April 10 th	EASTER DAY	6.00	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	33.					2	10	9.			
		7.00	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	70.					9	1	6.			
		8.00	Sung Eucharist	J.E. Jenkins	125.					10	4	0.			
		9.30	Agnes Benedict	J.E. Jenkins	40.					3	13	0.			
		11.0	Matins	J.E. Jenkins						34	0	-			
12.15	Holy Communion	T. Halliwell	57			J.E. Jenkins	Cels 2. 24.		3	6	9.				
		6.0	Evensong	J.E. Jenkins		J. Kelly-Dunn	Stich 51 E		8	12	1				
				J. Kelly-Dunn	5					79	16	9			
11 th	Easter Monday	8.0	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	9.										
12 th	Easter Tuesday	9.0	Holy Communion	J. Kelly-Dunn	9+1										
13 th	Easter Wednesday	9.0	Holy Communion	T. Halliwell	7										
		9.30	Holy Communion												
		2.30						Mother's Union Communion Service (14 communicants)	16	14.					
14 th	Thursday	8.0	Holy Communion	J. Kelly-Dunn	8										
15 th	Friday	9.0	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	9.										
16 th	Saturday	8.0	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	5.										
17 th	Easter 1 st	8.0	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	60.					6	7	6.			
		9.20	Agnes Benedict	J.E. Jenkins	11.	J. B. Jones	John 1. 3.			-	15	6		envelopes.	
		11.0	Matins	J.E. Jenkins		J.E. Jenkins	S. John 80 th			12	1	7			
		6.0	Evensong	J.E. Jenkins		J. B. Jones	S. John 22. 27.			4	12	6			
										23	19	1			
18 th	Monday	8.0	Holy Communion	J. B. Jones	3										
19 th	Tuesday	9.0	Holy Communion	J.E. Jenkins	9										
20 th	Wednesday	8.0	Holy Communion	J. B. Jones	9										
		9.30	Holy Communion	T. Halliwell	8										
		4pm	Choral Evensong												

Broadcast (Potsdam) Boys did not arrive -
(Stamp sent in A. - back) used 6 girls from 459th
Devil sent

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(Stamp sent in A. - back) used 6 girls from 459th
Devil sent

Cymdeithas Gerdd Ysgol Dewi Sant

- Rosalyn Charles was able to build the musicianship of the girls
 - Group formed in Autumn 1966
- Students given opportunity to perform alongside professional musicians
 - Huge opportunities for the girls
- “Dad knew how good the musicianship was of the girls that he was anticipating of asking.....They were all A level students, so they were all good musicians. That’s the thing to remember about it is that they were all good musicians.”

(Arnold Boorman, youngest son of Peter Boorman)

The response in the local community

- This was generally positive
 - “Necessity was the mother of invention”
(Rosalyn Charles and Adrian Boorman, eldest son of Peter Boorman)
 - Men of the choir were extremely influential
 - Positive response filtered into the community

Chapter 2

Writing for girls' voices at St Davids: Sir Nicholas Jackson

- Do composers write differently for girl trebles in comparison to standard pieces of Anglican choral repertoire?
- Looked specifically at composer Sir Nicholas Jackson – musical director at St Davids Cathedral between 1977 and 1984
- 1983 Te Deum and 1977 Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in the Lydian Mode

41

Broadening of note values

Solo Treble

Son; Al so the Ho ly Ghost the Com fort er. Thou art the King of

Son; Al so the Ho ly Ghost the Com fort er.

Son; Al so the Ho ly Ghost the Com fort er.

Al so the ho ly Ghost the Com fort er.

p Sw(Strings)
Man.

Copyright Nichols Jackson 2008

A major 7 - A major

4

48

Glo ry O Christ, Thou aty the ev er last ing Son of the Father.

p Solo Tenor

When thou took'st up on thee to de li ver man, Thou

Ped.

Sir Nicholas Jackson's *Te Deum*

Broadening of note values

17

119

poco morendo

p

16

pp

rall.

Com fort er.

p

pp

A major chord

pp ma marcato

coll' 8ve

18

128

Treble Solo

17

poco meno mosso (♩ = 56-66)

pp dolce

Thou art the King of Glo-ry, O Christ.

ppp

O Christ!

ppp

pp marcato

8va b.

Benjamin Britten's *Te Deum*

Magnificat and Nunc Dimmittis

for Treble voices in the Lydian Mode

NICHOLAS JACKSON

Tempo rubato

Tempo rubato

ORGAN

mf

63

mf My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid. For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed for he that is mighty hath magnified me and Holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that

Sir Nicholas Jackson's *Magnificat* in the Lydian mode

Piu lento

Solo

NUNC DIMMITTIS

37

Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people. To be a light to light on the gentiles, and to be the glory of Thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy

f tutti

mf

3

Sir Nicholas Jackson's *Nunc Dimittis* in the Lydian mode

What did I discover in the music?

- From moment of arrival Sir Nicholas Jackson was able to use established girl treble line
 - Experimented with complex music
- Musical directors train girl choristers for a longer period of time (age 18 in St Davids)
 - Boy choristers sing for smaller window of time
 - Girls at St Davids had a much-enhanced musical training

Chapter 3

Balancing boy and girl trebles at St Davids Cathedral

- Uniqueness of musical life continues at present
- Principal treble line at St Davids is entirely female
 - Unlike any other UK cathedral
- What culture does this dependency create at St Davids?

What are the positives?

- Most cathedrals contain a girls' choir of some description
- St George Chapel Windsor, St Paul's & Westminster Cathedral are examples of those who do not
 - Preserving museum culture that isn't relevant to our society
- Both sexes in the choir mean members of community at St Davids feel represented
 - Ahead of curve with introduction of girls in 1966
 - Girls at St Davids are strong and capable musicians

- “I’ve always found the girls more work like in a rehearsal and very kind of focused and attentive....The boys seem to find that niche a little bit more naturally. They’re just a bit more outgoing in a sense.”

(Simon Pearce, organist at St Davids Cathedral)

- “I have generally found that the boys are much more enthusiastic and oblivious to the challenges of singing high music or long notes, whereas with the girls, it is a much more serious affair.”

(Luke Phillips, Tenor Lay Clark at St Davids Cathedral)

- “I think the most unique thing about the culture here is that the cathedral choir is drawn from locals and so there is a rich heritage of choristers across several generations within families. Often at cathedrals with boarding choristers they are not local to their cathedral. This means that they often don’t stay within the community in the future. This is why St Davids is unique.”

(Chris Limbert, Tenor Lay Clark at St Davids Cathedral)

What is lost?

- Boy chorister tradition at St Davids has faded
- Recruitment of boy choristers continues to be a problem
- Kerry Beaumont re-established the boys' choir in 1991
- Work had to be done in order for boys to be recruited

- Interesting observation – society has presented choral singing generally as a feminine pastime
 - Martin Ashley *How High Should Boys Sing?*
 - Introduction of popular culture in the 1960s
 - ‘Hard’ masculinity vs ‘Soft’ masculinity
- “Boys can perform one kind of music and appreciate, socialize or define cultural identity through others.”
- Society no longer accepts the exclusion of girls – encouraging but changes in gender performance
 - Changes within Anglican choral tradition as well as wider society
 - Difficult to draw a neat conclusion
 - St Davids is a victim of circumstance

Concluding Points

- Decision by Boorman in 1966 ensured choral foundation at St Davids was able to continue
- Sir Nicholas Jackson was able to experiment with complex repertoire because of established girl chorister tradition
- Strength of girl chorister tradition in present day shows tight knit community but boy chorister recruitment is problematic
 - Cathedral chorister tradition is fragile
 - Takes charismatic individuals to keep tradition alive
 - Further investigation is cathedral culture under musical directors
 - Comparison between St Davids and other provincial cathedrals
 - I wanted to pay tribute to the legacy of Peter Boorman and others