Mellor Church Choir Report 2023 *Tom Howling*

I mentioned in my 2022 report that I had been worried about numbers of tenors and basses and that this may threaten our future as a four-part choir. I am pleased to say that, following our **recruitment drive**, we are in a much more secure situation again. In fact, the current choir stalls are no longer big enough to accommodate the choir and we are looking, with the PCC, at ways of helping this happy situation. Despite this, we have been continuing to actively recruit this year – especially new children using our regular ‘pizza open-rehearsal’ initiative.

In 2023 we restarted the **‘External’ RSCM Voice for Life** award training for the first year following a break due to COVID. The training sessions took place on Saturdays in early 2023 leading to the examination day, hosted in Mellor for the whole of the Northwest region on 13th May. Congratulations to Rebecca Knight, Nathan Monk, Eleanor Rosser and Hannah Scott who all successfully completed their Silver Awards.

Choir members took part in two **singing days in Manchester** – singing Brahms’ *Ein Deutches Requiem* with the Hallé and a *Come and Sing Day* with Phillip Stopford organised by the ABCD (Association of British Choral Directors). These days were enjoyed by those more adventurous choristers who chose to attend.

Attentions were then focused on our Passiontide and Easter services which included a **Cross of Christ** service on Passion Sunday.

To mark the upcoming coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, a **Coronation Concert** was held in April, raising money for the church. This was well-attended and showcased some new music composed to celebrate the coronation (*The mountains shall bring peace* by Joanna Forbes-Estrange) and music by composers known to be working on new pieces for the actual service (including Andrew Lloyd Webber) and old favourites such as *Zadok the priest* (Handel) and *I was glad* (Parry), which included the new vivats!

When it came to the actual **coronation**, there was no room given for the massed ranks of choristers used for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, drawn from parish choir like ours across the country. However, our young choristers were able to recognise the choir stalls in Westminster Abbey where they had sung with Mellor Church Choir in 2022.

The choir sang for the **Installation of Andrew as our new vicar** on 12th July. The music chosen in consultation with Andrew included *I was glad* (Parry), *I give you a new commandment* (Nardone) and Andrew’s favourite hymn: *God is love: let heav’n adore him*. The Tawn family have been a wonderful addition to both our church and our choir.

July saw the traditional **Outside Evensong** head inside due to the stormy weather. We had ‘outside’ creation-themed music however, which this year included *Badgers and Hedehogs* by Andrew Carter. We hope for better weather in 2024.

The most impressive venue for the choir in 2023 was **Wells Cathedral** where we spent a week in August as the ‘choir in residence’ singing a total of seven services. Wells is a fine cathedral, and we were well looked after and made to feel very special. Highlights of the week included the cathedral cats, a high-level tour of the cathedral, dressing up as a bishop in the Bishop’s Palace, climbing Glastonbury Tor and open-air swimming on our day off, the cabaret (which brought both laughter and tears) and our team of organists playing the organ. Particular thanks must go to Kate Scott for organising the accommodation at Millfield School in nearby Street.

We had an ‘away gig’ in September when we were booked to sing for a wedding in the beautiful church of **St. James’ in Taxal**. We enjoyed singing for a bride who was a former head chorister in that church (which sadly no longer maintains a choir). Following the service we had a lovely walk and picnic in the local countryside, including a visit to Windgather Rocks.

In September, the choir also took part in the **Festival of Choirs** at St. George’s church in New Mills. It was great to see a strong representation from our church, both in the choir and congregation at that occasion which included singers from choirs from across Derbyshire.

In November, the choir put on a **Remembrance Concert** which included Fauré’s *Requiem* and a selection of *Songs of Farewell*. This was again well attended, and funds were raised to support the choir singing weekend at Fort Belan in North Wales.

We had a record attendance at **Fort Belan** for the rehearsal weekend where we prepare the music for Advent and Christmas. As well as lots of hard work, we had lots of fun including the inevitable cabaret.

December is always a busy time for the choir and again we took our part in Marple Bridge Winter Wonderland, Advent Carol Service, Rose Queen Carol Singing, and Carols at the Oddfellow’s Arms as well as the Christmas services.

The **Nine Lessons and Carols service this year had a French theme** – French composers, French tunes, French language… not necessarily all at the same time... Joyeux noël! The service was followed by fun at the choir **Christmas Party** in the Mellor Centre.

**Midnight Mass** was a special service this year – quieter in mood following all the frantic festive activities. The service featured music by William Byrd in the 400th year since his death, including the beautiful *Mass for Four Voices*.

**Christmas Morning** service featured more jolly carols, a sleigh ride, and a rendition of *We wish you a Merry Christmas* with our returning former choristers.

We greatly appreciate our team of organists – John LeGrove, Nathan Monk and Eleanor Rosser who greatly support and enhance the work of the choir and musical ministry of Mellor Church.

The ‘Vocal Development Group’ for primary school age choristers has continued this year, developing their musical skills and confidence. Thank you to John LeGrove for continuing to spearhead this initiative.

I would like to thank Andrew, our vicar, and the PCC for supporting the choir. I would also like to thank the choir steering group (CSG), choir members and parents of choristers for continuing to show their support.

We have a lot to look forward to in 2024 including a week-long residency in Truro Cathedral (29th July-4th August). Do come and see us if you can.