Mellor Church Choir Report 2022 *Tom Howling*

2022 started with a trip to sing the Sunday services in Westminster Abbey on the 2nd January. This was still with the background of COVID which had meant that the choir could not sing the Christmas Day services in Mellor. We were the first ‘visiting choir’ to sing services in Westminster Abbey since the beginning of the pandemic and they were very welcoming. The contrast with our previous visit in 2019 was notable – it was certainly not boiling hot in London in January and the crowds had not been allowed to return to the Abbey yet. There were times on the day when I was the only person in the whole Abbey. Thanks to the creativeness of Kate Scott we had choir accommodation in the Holiday Inn near St Alban’s and got a coach into the Abbey for the Sunday from there. We had a little New Year’s Eve party in the hotel, rehearsals in a very small meeting room and a meal out in a local pub. It was great having fun together and most of the choir could come and join in having got their COVID infections out of the way at Christmas. Unfortunately some people had to miss out as they were still isolating. The music went very well. Music included Darke’s *In the bleak midwinter* as the motet and Darke’s *Communion Service in F* as the morning setting and *Purcell in G minor* at Evensong within a short distance of Purcell’s grave. The friendly verger gave us our own little private tour of the Abbey after the evening service. It was lovely to see supporters from Mellor in the congregation even though we were not allowed to mix due to restrictions at the time!

We were soon back in London in February singing for a Monday Choral Evensong at St. Paul’s Cathedral where our very own Ben Collyer was in post as Organ Scholar. We got a big coach full of choir, supporters, robes and music very early from Mellor Recreation Ground all the way (with a brief service station stop) to St Pauls’ Cathedral. We were entertained with a fantastic St Pauls’ quiz on the coach on the way and videos (including Mary Poppins) on the way home. It was a really long day! Singing in the large acoustic and impressive building of St Pauls’ was an awesome experience for the choir. The younger choristers were allowed a day off school for such an educational experience. We sang Murrill’s *Evening Service in E* and Stopford’s *Do not be afraid*. The composer sent us greetings saying that he was ‘thrilled to hear that we were singing his little piece in such a big cathedral’. Thank you to all the Mellor folk who came to support us.

Another highlight of the year was the ’Platinum Jubilee Concert’ on May 14th. This was an ambitious concert of royal music sung by the choir accompanied by the organ and a ‘small’ orchestra of strings, 5 trumpets and percussion (including tymps and crash cymbals!). The choir and orchestra were crammed into the chancel with a backdrop of a large royal standard. The overall effect was very exciting. Highlights included Parry’s *I was glad,* Handel’s *Zadok the Priest*, Handel’s *The King shall rejoice* and Tallis’ evocative *Litany.* We managed to raise almost £1000 for church funds. Thank you to Caroline Monk for organising the ‘Mellor Platinum Jubilee Ensemble’.

Sadly the choir was called on to sing special services to mark the Queen’s death later in the year.

We greatly appreciate our team of organists – Nathan Monk and Eleanor Rosser as Organ Scholars who under Organist John LeGrove greatly support and enhance the work of the choir and musical ministry of the 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.

We were struck in the autumn by losing a significant number of tenors and basses which lead to a successful recruitment drive over Christmas to find some new back-rows to maintain our ability to function as a four-part SATB choir. More are still welcome!

In November, the choir were back in Fort Belan on the Welsh coast learning the musical repertoire for Advent and Christmas. A great time was had by all.

In December, we had a full return to all the carol services, Winter Wonderland, Rose Queen carol singing, choir Christmas party and even managed the Christmas Day morning service this year complete with *Sleigh Ride* percussion.

I would like to thank the PCC for supporting the choir in the absence of a regular vicar for most of the year. I would also like to thank the choir steering group (CSG), choir members and parents of choristers for continuing to show their support.

I think 2022 marked the full re-emergence from pandemic conditions. Although we did not have a summer tour this year, we made up for that by having two amazing trips to London. We have managed to recruit steadily with various initiatives including the famous ‘pizza rehearsals’. Chorister training is fully resumed and resources such as the choir website [www.mellorchurchchoir.co.uk](http://www.mellorchurchchoir.co.uk) continue to develop. We have a lot to look forward to in 2023 including a week-long residency in Wells Cathedral (31st July-6th August). Do come and see us if you can.