

Part 1.

Last September I completed 54 years as organist and choirmaster, and in January I handed over to Gina Eason, whom I knew well from working with her on 17 concerts with my chamber choir, Antiphonia. Last month I was touched to be given a generous book token by the church.



Music at Christ Church has been a most satisfying aspect of my life, and I am thankful for it. People have always encouraged me in my aim for high standards. The new organ in 1970 was a thrilling development, and choosing and practising appropriate music every week (with an evening service as well for 45 years, then in alternate weeks for 4 more years) has been deeply rewarding. I used a database of 2,460 pieces played for worship, with timings, seasons, dates and nationalities to help organise my choice to suit the occasion. Favourite organ composers include Tomkins, Buxtehude, J. S. Bach, John Stanley, Mendelssohn, Franck, Widor, Vierne, Karg-Elert, Langlais, Messiaen, Leighton and Mathias.

We have heard over 30 organists give recitals in our church, with 8 recitals a year from 2016-2020. The organ was extended in 1995 to balance the singing of the choir in the chancel and the congregation in the nave. This also made it better as a recital instrument. It involved altering the chancel pews. Never move pews on your own: one of them fell against my shin and led to interesting visits to the doctor. I have often co-operated with tuners, acquiring some skills to put small faults right, until at 82 I couldn't safely get up the ladder any more.

The church pews were removed in 2005. Apart from a joint Celtic communion in 2010, the flexibility of having chairs has hardly ever affected our worship style, and nobody enjoys moving them, but it has enabled multi-use for rehearsals and other events. When choir numbers fell below 12, I designed some choir desks to stand in a semicircle in the chancel to focus and project the voices. Then in 2011/12 the choir moved to its present position at the side of the nave.

Palm Sunday music (at evening worship until 1993) was always an occasion for extra music, and would include four anthems, or a cantata. Special memories include:

- 1966 Schütz - Seven Words (with strings)
- 1970 Handel - Messiah Part 2 (with strings and organ)
- 1975 Schütz - St Matthew Passion (soloist: Roger Norrington)
- 1976 Handel - St John Passion
- 1978 Haydn - Seven Words (with strings)
- 1981 Mozart - Requiem (with orchestra and soloists)
- 1982 Bach - Cantata 182.
- 1983 Handel - Messiah Part 2 (conductor: Arthur Head; organ: Anthony Cairns)
- 1994 Mathias - Lift up your heads, and Byrd - 5-part Mass (4 movements)

Evening carol services were held for 43 years, until 2008. Arthur Head played while I conducted, or the other way round.

Part 2.

I served as organist and choirmaster at Christ Church under six ministers: James Todd, Brian Treharne (for 25 years, and Brian, Sheena, Joanne and Heather all sang in the choir), Dean Tapley (he and Lydia both sang in the choir), Ian Howarth (who sang occasionally), Lynda Russell, and Jan Hofmeyr (sometimes he and Angela have sung with us).

The choir in 1965 was 32-strong and filled the chancel pews. It included Anne Brett (Cairns) and Steve Neal (who have, like me, completed 54 years) and Arthur Head, who died in 2008 after 43 years of singing, playing and assistant choirmastering. A Junior Choir of 4 boys and 2 girls was started in 1966, but was only intermittent after that. At its biggest it had thirteen members.

By 1972 Diana Dodson and Liz Howes (from the Junior Choir), had joined the main choir. José Henderson and Heather Ward came in 1975. There were then 18 singers, including 4 tenors. By 1979 the rich voices of Tom Bush and Richard Johnson were with us (for 1 and 2 years respectively). In 1983 we lost Edna Wakely, the leading soprano when I started, whose piano is still used in the Choir Room; but we gained Anne Scottow, who has now completed 36 years.

In 1985 there were 23 singers, including Brian, Sheena and Joanne Treharne. Barbara Litchfield sang from 1986 to 1995, and Hazel and Ernest Yu from 1986 to 2003. Heather Treharne joined in 1995 and we had an enviable soprano line in our then 15-strong choir until she left in 2007. After Ernest left, there were no more tenors, unless I sang while playing or conducting.

In 2002-4 Robert Blows, Hilary Porter and Julia Rogers came to us. Sue Huxtable joined twelve years ago in 2008, since when there have been no further additions, except for welcome help from Heather Ward, Patricia Martin and others for special musical services.

As time goes by, it only gets harder to organise anthems. With 600 items under our belt, it is no longer possible to tackle most of them since our numbers are down to seven or eight. Nevertheless occasional anthems have been possible even recently, and the value of rehearsing the hymns never goes away. Phrasing, mood, rhythm and, of course, pitch, always need attention, as well as knowing the notes. The dedication of choir members over the years has been extraordinary.