

A high-angle photograph of a large choir performing in a grand cathedral. The choir is arranged in several rows, with members wearing white and teal robes. They are holding sheet music and singing. The cathedral's interior is ornate, featuring large columns, arches, and a large organ on the right. A crowd of people is visible in the background, seated in the pews. The floor is a checkered pattern. The lighting is warm, with many small lamps illuminating the choir.

Celebrating 100 years

CHOIR SCHOOLS' ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2018



Front cover photograph: Choristers representing CSA's three founding member schools, with lay clerks and girl choristers from Salisbury Cathedral, join together to celebrate a Centenary Evensong in St Paul's Cathedral

2018 CONFERENCE REPORT



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As the Choir Schools' Association (CSA) prepares to enter its second century, it would be difficult to imagine a better location for its annual conference than New Change, London EC4, where most of this year's sessions took place in the light-filled 21st-century surroundings of the K&L Gates law firm's new conference rooms, with their stunning views of St Paul's Cathedral and its Choir School over the road.

One hundred years ago, the then headmaster of St Paul's Cathedral Choir School, Reverend R H Couchman, joined his colleagues from King's College School, Cambridge and Westminster Abbey Choir School to consider the sustainability of choir schools in the light of rigorous inspections of independent schools and regulations governing the employment of children being introduced under the terms of the Fisher Education Act. Although cathedral choristers were quickly exempted from the new employment legislation, the meeting led to the formation of the CSA, and Couchman was its honorary secretary until his retirement in 1937. He, more than anyone, ensured that it developed strongly, wrote Alan Mould, former headmaster of St John's College School, Cambridge, in *The English Chorister* and what a pleasure it was to welcome Alan to the conference!

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THANK YOU!

The exciting, and some might say unenviable, task of delivering a conference to celebrate CSA's Centenary was superbly met and executed by Neil Chippington and Simon Larter-Evans.

Between them they produced a beautifully balanced programme which celebrated our 100th Birthday with aplomb while keeping us focused on the 21st century and the challenges ahead.



NEIL CHIPPINGTON, CSA CHAIRMAN-ELECT AND
HEADMASTER OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE



OUR HOST, SIMON LARTER-EVANS,
HEADMASTER OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL SCHOOL



THE ASSOCIATION IS PARTICULARLY GRATEFUL TO THE DEAN OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL,
THE VERY REVEREND DR DAVID ISON AND HIS TEAM FOR SUCH A WONDERFUL CENTENARY EVENSONG.



CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS BY PAUL SMITH

Having celebrated the health benefits of singing in his first chairman's address at the 2017 CSA Conference in Durham, Paul Smith, headmaster of Hereford Cathedral School, was more hard-hitting this year. He said the risks to schools that educate the UK's cathedral and collegiate choristers are as great today as they were a century ago, for a variety of reasons. These include the government's attitude to independent schools; Paul believes that politicians of all shades issue ill-informed edicts, which purportedly seek to ensure the independent sector does its bit to justify charitable status, but in reality are an attempt to bully independent schools into making amends for the ill effects of successive government-imposed initiatives on the state sector.

He also highlighted the detrimental effect of initiatives such as the EBacc combined with financial cuts on music and arts provision for state school pupils, and expressed his concern

that in the light of rising school fees and declining congregational numbers, cathedrals, chapels and churches may not be able to continue to support choristers financially in the future.

However, Paul's speech also celebrated the unique nature of choir schools and was a rallying cry to colleagues to step up as their predecessors did a century ago in defence of music education in general and choristership in particular:

'The Choir Schools' Association has a job to do: we have to support those struggling to keep music alive in the hearts and minds of young people. We are expertly placed to do so, with hundreds of years of choral tradition behind us. If we do not rise to this challenge then we will all suffer as a result.'

Paul's speech can be read in full on the CSA website

ANDREW CARWOOD ON RECRUITMENT AND VOICE REGISTERS

Andrew Carwood, Director of Music at St Paul's Cathedral and himself a beneficiary of life-changing scholarships, began the afternoon's second presentation by agreeing with every word of Paul Smith's speech, before thanking the headteachers who make possible the demands made by directors of music on their high-achieving choristers. He went on to focus on two topics: recruitment and voice registers.

Concerns about recruitment are nothing new

He cited reports by his predecessors in 1896 and 1932 lamenting the fact that applications for choristerships were in decline. Today the discouraging factors include 'the lust for exam results' which means parents want to keep their children's noses to the academic grindstone; the attractions of on-screen entertainment at home; and the reluctance of parents to let their children board (although this is counteracted to some extent by the 'Harry Potter' effect).

Additionally, Andrew continued, 'I am shocked by the appalling lack of music in schools. Children are not experiencing music teaching, performance, singing or instrumental playing, so when the opportunity to be a chorister comes up they don't have the physical experience to realise what that might mean.' Finally, he added, there is the cost to cathedrals of maintaining their choirs, especially if they are offering choristerships to both girls and boys.

Any solutions, he suggested, must come from cathedrals/chapels/churches and choir schools working together to develop a strategic approach to advertising and recruitment, with larger institutions perhaps contributing a little more to the budget in order to ensure that the idea of choristership is kept alive nationwide. Nurturing of choristers needs to be careful, considered, loving and demanding, but it is a great start for children in their lives.

Turning to the issue of early voice change

Andrew began by stating his belief that the boy choristers of the past who supposedly continued to sing treble into their late teens were probably singing in their falsetto register. In his experience boys can still do this very effectively as long as it sounds good and is comfortable. However, children today have very different diets, eating larger quantities of both healthy and unhealthy food, which has resulted in a change of body shape; inevitably this affects voice production. The prevalence of singing in chest register as children try to emulate their favourite pop singers means that they are not used to accessing their head voices and have to be 'tricked' into singing high notes when they present themselves for voice trials. This is a particular problem with girl choristers, 'who want to sing like Adele'. Instead of making them aware of the dangers of damaging their vocal cords, schools are encouraging this.

Seeking more diversity

Andrew is proud that his choir at St Paul's reflects the diversity of London's population to some extent: 'I'd love to recruit more choristers from the BAME community: we must do more to reach parents from all backgrounds and encourage them to spot any musical gifts from an early age – some of the parents who have approached us in recent years have come as children are approaching



ANDREW CARWOOD (right), DIRECTOR OF MUSIC AT ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
WITH COMPOSER RICHARD SHEPHARD

*'If we're going for world class singing
we need to nurture young singers of both sexes'*

voice change. Music is transformative and we need to get this message to the heart of London's communities.'

On the subject of girl choristers

Andrew said that he is in no doubt that girls must sing: 'The emergence of girls' choirs is one of the best things that has happened to cathedrals for years.' He went on to explore the complexities of recruiting and training boys and girls and the differences between the two in terms of how and when their voices develop and their comparative learning styles. 'The brilliance of boys' choirs is based on ages 11, 12 and 13. When they are eight, nine or ten they don't really do much – then they take off. They know the place and the repertoire, their minds and

bodies suddenly develop very fast, and they become very skilful, leading to that very special flowering of their voices. Then comes the voice change, which for boys is disabling. For girls, however, the change is enabling – it makes their voices sound even better.'

Andrew touched on the difficulty of ensuring that workload was appropriately divided between two sets of choristers, planning singing opportunities for them after their choristerships finish, and resourcing their training.

'If we're going for world class singing we need to nurture young singers of both sexes,' he said, concluding that the possibility of introducing girls is under consideration at St Paul's.

TOM DAGGETT AND CHILDREN FROM ST SAVIOUR'S SCHOOL, POPLAR

Crossing the road to St Paul's Cathedral School, conference delegates were then treated to a demonstration of the work being undertaken with London schoolchildren by the Cathedral's OBE Organ Outreach Fellow, Tom Daggett. This embraces a substantial amount of singing as well as organ taster sessions and tuition.



Simon Larter-Evans (*seated*) and Tom Daggett,
with Paula Prichard-Duggan, Assistant Headteacher
of St Saviour's School



Tom founded and directs Hackney Children's Choir and runs class singing sessions both in schools and at the cathedral, visiting nine new schools every year while also developing close and sustained relationships with others. The children and their teachers benefit both from his musicianship – he is a former organ scholar of Lincoln College, Oxford – and from his enthusiasm for teaching and passionate concern for helping the disadvantaged.

Joined by a Year 5 class from St Saviour's School, Poplar, Tom taught them two songs from Jonathan Dove's 'Friday Afternoons' collection and delegates were impressed by the children's ability to understand and quickly read from the musical scores. Tom concluded his session by moving on to SS Wesley's 'Blessed be the God and father', which was unfamiliar to the children. They obviously enjoyed learning an extract from the anthem, but were taken aback by the enormous sound that came from most of their adult audience when CSA members were given the opportunity to join in!

EVENSONG & DRINKS



Evensong for those who wished to attend, drinks courtesy of Simon Larter-Evans, headmaster of the cathedral school, and an informal restaurant meal concluded the first day of the conference.





CAMBRIDGE RIVALS!

Pictured left to right: Alan Mould and Gerald Peacocke, former headmasters of St John's College School and King's College School alongside current heads Neil Chippington and Yvette Day



BBC RADIO 4 BROADCAST

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Day 2 began for Paul Smith and Andrew Carwood with a feature on CSA on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme. Paul travelled to Broadcasting House to be interviewed by John Humphrys about the history of the Association and the importance of choristerships, while Andrew and his St Paul's boys were recorded in their practice room rehearsing sections of Parry's 'I was glad' for the Centenary Evensong.

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER: DAVID LAMMY MP

The first keynote speaker of the conference day was the Rt Hon David Lammy, Labour MP for Tottenham, who explained how his primary school music teacher Mary Shepherd had noticed his promising singing voice and helped his family to arrange a council scholarship to enable him to take up a choristership at Peterborough Cathedral. He noted that Hackney Council's left-wing principles meant that only cathedrals that educated their choristers at state schools could be considered, hence the choice of Peterborough, which trumped Southwell Minster because of the shorter train journey.

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A 'CHORUS' OF CHAIRMEN



From left to right: Christopher Martin (1987-88), Roger Overend (2012-14), Gerald Peacocke (1985-86), Christopher Helyer (1982), Jonathan Milton (2008-09), Richard White (1999-2001), Brian Rees (2004-05) ...

How good it was to welcome back so many past CSA chairmen.



... Tim Cannell (2015-16), Paul Smith (2017-18), Chris Brown (1997-98), Richard Shephard (1989-90), Robert Western (1984), Howard Tomlinson (2002-03), Elizabeth Cairncross (2010-11)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: DAVID LAMMY MP

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“Sadly there are many young people today who never experience excellence in any part of their lives...”

Reunited with Miss Shepherd much later in life, David discovered that she had been very worried about the possibility of him being bullied at Peterborough because he was the only black boy in the school. In fact, he said, he suffered very little from either bullying or discrimination, becoming head boy before going on to be called to the English bar and becoming the first black Briton to study for a master in law at Harvard Law School. The type of education he received brought out the best in him and instilled a love of cathedrals and church music that has stayed with him ever since.

The discipline of rehearsals and services prepared him for the equally rigorous discipline of dealing with the notorious ‘red boxes’ of cabinet papers very early every morning during his eight years as a member of the last Labour government. ‘For me politics is not a job, it is a vocation. Others might think they couldn’t be bothered to deal with the red box if they were tired or ill, but that routine and responsibility instilled as a child enabled me to cope.’

Being a chorister also exposed David to ‘Middle England’ and an environment very different from the council estates where he grew up as one of five children of a single mother. If anything, he said, the gulf in society has become much worse now, with the culture of gangs and knife crime in London fed by ‘a hugely exaggerated parochialism’ that means gangs in Wood Green and Tottenham feel threatened by one another even though the two suburbs are only a mile apart.

‘Sadly there are many young people today who never experience excellence in any part of their lives – they don’t know what it feels like to sing a Mozart solo well or to excel in drama or sport. But once you’ve tasted that excellence and know what it feels like you can deploy it in other areas of your life.’

Recalling the Labour government’s commitment to arts education and to creating opportunities for all children whatever their circumstances, David pointed out that traditional systems of music

education with their emphasis on one-to-one tuition and individual practice at home don't suit working class children, whose parents cannot afford the tuition and whose homes do not offer enough personal space for practice.

He spoke of how he was inspired by visiting Venezuela and seeing for himself how the El Sistema system enabled young musicians to learn together through playing in orchestras. He regrets that in this country the pendulum has now swung too far towards English, maths and science and away from arts subjects; and he believes that the big theme of our times is not immigration as many people believe, but automation, which is killing jobs and taking away the opportunity for people to shine in a range of different forms of employment. He called for more vocational education and emphasised the need to prepare children with the skills and confidence to take on the many jobs of the future which have not yet been invented.



EARLY EMPLOYMENT OF CHORISTERS

A little light relief from the concerns raised by David Lammy's speech was provided by Dr Tim Hands, headmaster of Winchester College, who revisited a sabbatical research project into the employment of choristers, including those of St Paul's, as actors in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Tim's specific area of interest is in how Shakespeare viewed these choirboy actors – he never wrote for them, but Tim believes that they are the subject of significant references in several of his most famous plays, including *Hamlet* and in particular *Twelfth Night*.





DR TIM HANDS, HEADMASTER OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: ALEX OWEN

The afternoon's keynote speech was given by Alex Owen, Head of Marketing, Armed Forces for the Royal British Legion. He was an exact contemporary of cricketer Alastair Cook as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral in the 1990s, going on to Christ's Hospital School, Horsham, where he was principal trumpeter and band captain, to Durham University where he read archaeology and then to a ten-year career as an officer in the Household Cavalry, serving on the battlefields of Helmand Province and leading the mounted parade at Royal events such as Trooping the Colour.

HOW CAN WE SAY 'THANK YOU'

Alex described being a chorister as one of the seminal character-building experiences of his life. 'Being packed off to boarding school aged seven would have been a traumatic experience enough on its own, but add to that the early morning choir rehearsals under the late John Scott, evening services after a full day of school, instrumental practice, prep and working weekends, and it makes for a very unique childhood,' he recalled. 'I'm sure the life of a chorister has changed in the last 25 years but we were all indoctrinated to a life of routine and discipline at a very early age and because we only had each other to rely on we had to adapt to it fast. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that this made me a much more resilient person. Whether facing the austere "Weeks 1-5" at Sandhurst or adapting to living in a mud compound in Helmand Province, over a decade later I feel strongly that my formative years at St Paul's better prepared me for these hardships.

'I was never a star chorister,' he added, 'but singing a solo in a place like St Paul's Cathedral to a packed congregation is something that would give an adult professional pause for thought. We were expected to perform before we had reached our teens and it was terrifying. Being able to deal with, and then master, such pressure was



key and it remains key in my military and civilian career today.'

In addition to exemplifying the benefits of a chorister education even for those who do not go on to careers in music, Alex introduced the last phase of The Royal British Legion's First World War Centenary Commemoration. This will focus on saying 'thank you' to those who fell on the battlefields, those who returned home, those who served on the home front, on the farms and in the factories, and those who built a new world – our world. They included volunteers of every race and creed,



ALEX OWEN WITH CLIVE MARRIOTT,
HEADMASTER OF SALISBURY CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

from every colony and dominion of the British Empire; women, who played such an important part in the war effort; pioneers of medicine, science and technology ('if you've ever used a teabag, worn a wristwatch or donned a trench coat, you can thank the manufacturers who made these things commonplace during the war'), poets, painters and musicians.

Alex called for CSA to join the 'Thank You' movement as an organisation and as individual schools, by signing up as 'Thank You' schools, accessing specially-designed lesson plans, hosting thank you picnics or lunches, entering the Thank You Arts Competition (winners will perform at the Festival of Remembrance 2018 in the Royal Albert Hall), researching former pupils who fell in the Great War or organising their own commemorative events at any time during

2018, but particularly between 8 August and 11 November, the last 100 days of the centenary. Details of how to get involved are on the Royal British Legion website www.rbl.org/ThankYou





CELEBRATING 100 YEARS WITH EVENSONG

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The centrepiece of the Centenary Conference was a celebratory Evensong that afternoon in St Paul's Cathedral, for which the Choir of St Paul's was joined by the Girl Choristers and Lay Clerks from Salisbury Cathedral, and representatives of the Choirs of King's College, Cambridge and Westminster Abbey, directed by Andrew Carwood with organists Simon Johnson (Organist and Assistant Director of Music) and Nicholas Freestone (Acting Sub-Organist).

A new Choir Schools' Association Service had been commissioned for the occasion from Dr Richard Shephard, former headmaster of The Minster School, York, and a former chorister of Gloucester Cathedral; this jubilant setting showcases treble voices and was performed with exultant confidence by the massed choir, who also raised the roof in a thrilling performance of 'I was glad'.





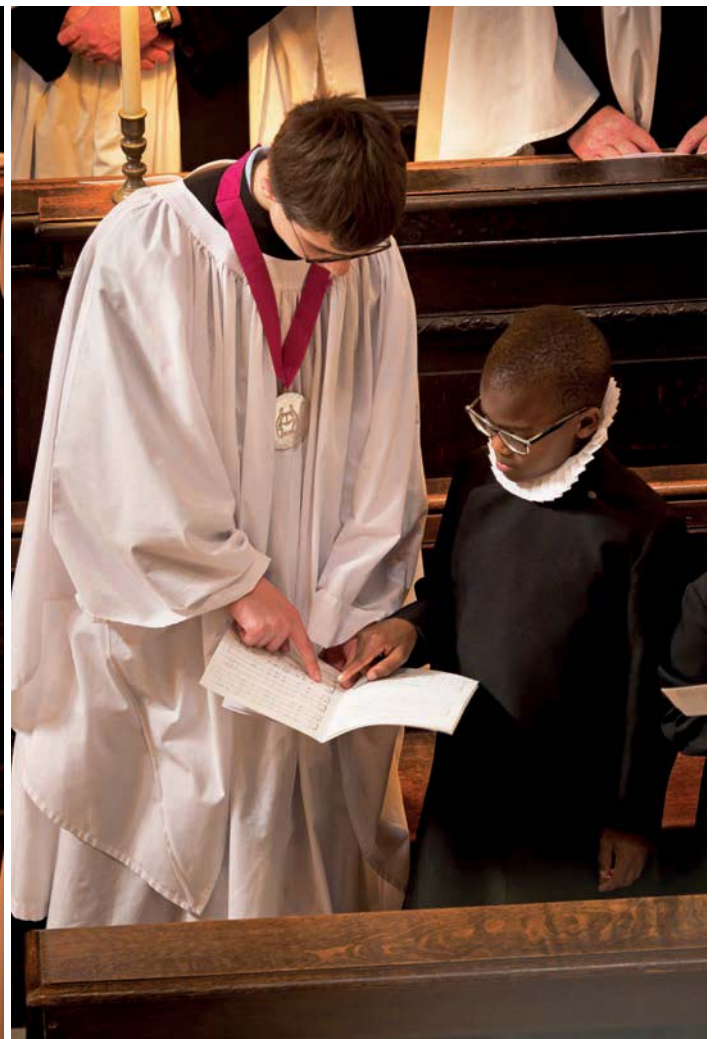
Readings were by Elizabeth Cairncross, outgoing Principal of Wells Cathedral School, and Paul Smith, whose tenure as Chairman of CSA will come to an end in August.



The sermon was by the Reverend Richard Coles, who recalled his time as a parish church choirboy and spoke of the importance of church music in his life and parish ministry.



LEADING THE PRAYERS *From left to right:* Richard White, CSA Director of Development; Jonathan Milton, Headmaster Westminster Abbey Choir School; Ndiana Essien, Deputy Head & OBE Chorister, St Paul's Cathedral; The Reverend Rosemary Morton, Minor Canon & Succentor; Grace Stephens-Spada, Dean's Chorister, Salisbury Cathedral





MOVING TO STATIONERS' HALL...

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Delegates and guests then moved to Stationers' Hall for a magnificent Conference Dinner. Entertainment was provided by Apollo 5 (below), a vocal ensemble that is part of the VCM Foundation music education charity, based at The Gresham Centre in the City of London. Several of the singers are former choristers, and they demonstrated their skill in performances of a mix of sacred and secular repertoire that left their listeners awestruck.

The after-dinner speaker was Duncan Wilson, OBE, CEO of Historic England, a recent St Paul's chorister parent and a passionate supporter of the English choral tradition. 'My day job is concerned with the fabric of cathedrals, each embodying a thousand years or more of history,' he said, 'but music is what makes them special, otherwise they are dusty relics.' He admitted that although an upsurge in the



popularity of cathedral worship has recently been identified, churches and cathedrals are completely disconnected from the daily lives of most people today.

The government has invested substantially in the fabric of cathedral buildings through the World War One Centenary Fund, but we need to find more ways of reconnecting our lives with the past in order to give





YVETTE DAY, HEAD OF KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE WITH FORMER HEADS, GERALD PEACOCKE (left) AND NICK ROBINSON

“The sound, the place and the people make up that very great British treasure that is our choral tradition...”

ourselves and our children a better future. Being a chorister had transformed his son from being too shy to sing in public into a boy who could sing solos on Ash Wednesday and in the ‘Messiah’. Duncan urged us CSA members to think of how we can engage more people with the world of cathedral music and open up such opportunities to more children.

Paul Smith concluded the proceedings by offering thanks to all involved in organising such a successful conference, but perhaps the most eloquent summing up of the event came from Yvette Day, head of King’s College School, Cambridge, in her thanks to Duncan Wilson. ‘The sound, the place and the people make up that very great British treasure that is our choral tradition,’ she said. ‘Could those three founding heads who met at Westminster Abbey one hundred years ago have imagined that their idea of an Association of Choir Schools would grow into a gathering like this?’



