

## Church music 2024-2025

It's been my pleasure, as usual, to look back on the past year of musical activities at St Andrew's, but also I have to record a sad event which greatly affected our musical life, and I will start with that.

We were all shocked and saddened by Harold Chaplin's sudden death in October. I would like to pay tribute to the enormous contribution he made to the musical life of our church (whilst recognising that he influenced all aspects of church life, owing to his enterprising nature and strong faith). An excellent singer and pianist (with expertise in both classical music and jazz), his aim was always to use his skills to enhance church music-making; he was an expert and loyal member of the choir, and revived the instrumental group to play at family services early in Alan's tenure as priest. Above all, he composed delightful music for the choir to sing, including many Christmas carols, and in the last year of his life completed his Communion setting, which we now use regularly. As his Parkinson's progressed, he was always inspirational in continuing his activities despite it, and in his attitude to both life and music, looked forward rather than back. I still find it hard to think that he will no longer be presenting me with a new composition, or taking his place in the choir pews.

However, I think it is fair to say that Harold's legacy manifests itself in the rest of his family! One of the main musical developments connected with the church this year has been the foundation of the Hertford Children's Choir by Rachel and Sam Chaplin. Rachel first contacted me and Alan about her idea last July, and we both felt that the idea should have the enthusiastic support of the church; I'm pleased to say that that has been the case. Rachel's vision is of a Hertford-wide community children's choir (previously non-existent), open to all 8-13 year-olds, but based at, and supported by, St Andrew's, which would also provide a performance venue and helpers at rehearsals. The intention is for the choir to sing at an all-age service once a term, thus increasing their families' contact with the church, and in the longer term some of its members might "graduate" to the church choir. After advertising widely in the autumn, and applying for grants with the invaluable help of Laura Ramsey, the choir started in January and has been a great success, as anyone who attended their fantastic first performance at St Andrew's on Mothering Sunday in a packed church will have seen. The church choir were delighted to collaborate with them to sing Rutter's "For the beauty of the earth" and we hope to sing together more in the future. We are now considering how we can widen our musical offer to the children in the town as we plan a further grant application.

Generally, musical activity within the church both within worship and in other contexts, has continued to be very lively. The choir continues its usual duties and its members are as loyal and committed as ever! The half-dozen young people in the choir are making great progress as singers. We were honoured to be asked to take part in a concert at St Andrew's as part of the Hertfordshire Festival of Music in June 2024. This Festival is now in its ninth season and has built up a fruitful partnership with the church as one of the Festival venues. Several members of our congregation are supporters of HFoM which brings internationally-known artists to the county and particularly to Hertford. They also concentrate on the work of living composers, and we were asked to sing a piece at the concert by Colin Matthews, who was in attendance! The choir rose to the challenge and it was good to be able to include the work of other living composers, including Harold, in our programme. HFoM held the Launch reception and concert for this year's Festival at St Andrew's in February, which was a well-attended and happy occasion, for which the church proved a good and welcoming venue.

The series of folk concerts organised by Chris Seward has seen St Andrew's welcome again the cream of the British folk scene – some artists visiting for the first time and others returning, so we are now a well-established folk venue. The concerts are always well-attended and of top quality. Chris has also been the driving force behind our fund-raising for, and now acquisition of, our new audio-visual system. No doubt this will be covered in other reports, but I would like to record how much this is appreciated by the church musicians. It has improved the sound at all-age services and the set-up for the instrumental group is easier. We are now able to make the electric piano easily audible throughout the church and are using it for worship songs more frequently as a result. Crucially, the choir in the chancel can hear instrumentalists playing in the North Transept.

Our worship band Flare will also benefit from the new system at events such as HarvestFest and Beers and Carols (as will the visiting musicians at these events). In 2024 Flare again played at these two popular afternoons, and were joined by instrumentalists from TMM.

Finally I'd like to thank our organists, David Boarder and Richard Prince, and also Mark Buck who still plays when he is not in China. Particular thanks to Sam Chaplin who now leads worship songs from the piano regularly, and to all the instrumentalists who play at all-age services. You make an enormously positive contribution to our worship.

Jane Eldred