

Southern Cathedrals' Festival at Salisbury: 15-19 July 2015

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Salisbury with Blackburn Connections

Five musical days with David & Ruth Demack and more friends - by John Bertalot

Idyllic can be a much over-used adjective, but it certainly describes the annual Southern Cathedrals' Festivals which are held in a 3-year cycle at Salisbury, Chichester and Winchester.

Those of us who enjoy superb Anglican music performed by highly professional choirs, soloists and orchestras are always enriched by everything we see and hear in those historic cathedral cities: the relaxed programme gives us opportunities to renew old friendships and to make new ones - some of whom come from far-flung countries. (See page 2)

This year, again, long-time friends **David & Ruth Demack** generously invited me to join them, and to travel from Blackburn to Salisbury in their hospitable car.

Historic note: David and Ruth were married in Blackburn Cathedral 46 years ago, when the dividing wall between the 1965 redecorated Nave, and the Transepts and East end had been removed. This was replaced, temporarily, by unsightly plastic sheeting.

The transformed Transepts and new Lantern Tower were almost completed at that time and, what's more, the brand new 1969 Walker organ was about to be installed.

Those were exciting years - comparable with the times we are now experiencing with the completion of our new Cathedral Close!



We had had a 4-rank Walker organ in the cathedral Nave from 1964-69, but the magnificent new organ, which had been designed by Dr Francis Jackson & JB, and paid for by William and Sarah Thompson of Burnley, was created by J. W. Walker & Sons of Ruislip. It would be dedicated in December 1969.

Two years later David very generously sponsored the new Blackburn Cathedral Chant Book - and so we agreed that he should become an honorary choirman of the cathedral. He and Ruth have supported the cathedral's music ever since

TWO MORE FRIENDS AT SALISBURY

So in July 2015 at the Salisbury SCF David, Ruth & JB looked forward to enjoying the company of **John Morley**, chief Steward of York Minster, who is a longtime friend and colleague of David.

JB also looked forward to renewing his friendship with **Howard Waddell JP** who was, for many years, the Head Virger of Blackburn Cathedral.

Howard is now Head Verger of Chichester Cathedral.

Dean Armstrong of Blackburn remembers Howard with particular gratitude for when Christopher Armstrong was waiting in his vestry to be installed as our new Dean,



Howard asked him if he needed anything. 'A gin & tonic,' was the answer. Within five minutes a sparkling G & T was in the Dean's hands! How Howard achieved this no-one knows!

SALISBURY

Our historic hotel, dating from the 17th Century just outside the enormous Cathedral Close, was most comfortable and is highly recommended.

On that Wednesday evening the Demacks, John Morley & JB



enjoyed a delightful dinner at the historic Silver Plough at Pitton. (Everything is historic in that part of the world!)



Afterwards, David was much taken by the sight of two historic Bentleys in the Silver Plough's car park!

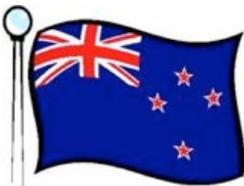


After breakfast on the Thursday morning we walked to the Cathedral to attend Choral Mattins.



Ruth Demack, John Morley, David Demack, JB and the recently restored Salisbury Cathedral

One of the delights of attending these Southern Cathedral Festivals is meeting friends and colleagues whom one may not have seen for many years. It happened again after attending that glorious Mattins which was sung by the Salisbury Girls and Lay Clerks.



PAUL ELLIS, from Christ Church, New Zealand, hailed me. I had last seen Paul in Princeton, NJ, 20 years ago when I was Director of Music of Trinity Episcopal Church in that American University city.

Paul had read my books on choirtraining and how I successfully incorporated the skill of immediately accurate sight-singing to choristers. He wrote one of the most extraordinary letters I had ever received.

He asked if he could fly from New Zealand to the USA to attend some of my choir practices to see how I did it!

Needless to say I was thrilled to bits by his request, but mightily challenged to make his journey worthwhile.

So I arranged for him also to attend rehearsals at the American Boychoir School in Princeton and the choir of Saint Thomas, New York, which has the finest professional church choir in the USA.



Paul remembered his visit to me most joyfully, especially when, towards the end of my church choir's full rehearsal, when we had 10 minutes to spare (for enabling one's choristers to sight-sing saves an ENORMOUS amount of time), I had brought out copies of Stanford's *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in A* which we had never sung.

Needless to say, my choir sight-read it absolutely accurately straight through, with every expression mark noted. They were thrilled, I was thrilled and Paul was thrilled. He said that that experience had made his journey from NZ worthwhile.

And Paul has continued to lead inspiring church music in NZ – for which he had recently been awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the RSCM. Thank you, Paul!

One of the modern works of art in Salisbury Cathedral is its enormous font, in the centre of the Nave.

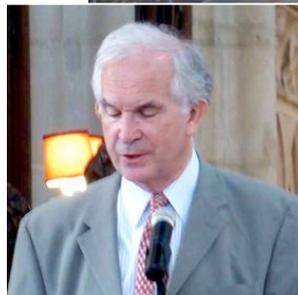


It's designed in the shape of an ornate cross, and filled with flowing water which reflects, so stunningly, the architecture of the Cathedral.

A story is told of a woman who wanted to take a photograph of the font, and so she put her handbag on what she thought was its highly polished surface, only to discover that the bag had disappeared into two feet of water!



Professor **John Harper**, former Director General of the RSCM, gave a fascinating talk that morning in the historic church of St Thomas, which has original wall paintings of the Last Judgement.



His subject was *Music and the influence of Magna Carta* (for we celebrate the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta this year).

His erudition was expansive and the examples he gave of the music of that era were sung by a small professional choir.



That evening there was a Reception in the cloisters for Patrons of the Festival.

We were welcomed by the Dean of Salisbury, the Very Reverend **June Osborne** who, clearly, is the maternal, efficient and most hospitable boss of that holy place.

We greeted a number of friends during the reception, whom we had met at previous SCFs, including at one from the USA...



...and David was attracted by a poster there advertising the exhibition of the finest copy of Magna Carta, which is held in Salisbury Cathedral.

He was determined that we should visit that exhibition on the morrow!



That evening there was an organ recital in the cathedral by **Naji Hakim** who is a renowned Lebanese-French organist, composer, and improviser. He studied under Jean Langlais, and succeeded Messiaen as organist at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris.

His playing was dynamic: he began with Bach's challenging Toccata and Fugue in F which he took at a rapid pace, playing the many tricky bits (especially the two break-neck pedal solos and the triple invertible counterpoint) with fluent ease.



A large TV screen had been erected in the Nave so that we could watch his manual (and pedestrian!) dexterity. He ended his programme with a brilliant improvisation based on two themes given to him immediately before the recital by **David Halls**, DoM of Salisbury Cathedral. They were the English *Greensleeves* and the French *National Anthem*!

His toccata-like contrapuntal skills brought down the house and, at the end, he incorporated *God save the Queen*, which earned him two standing ovations and an encore!



We left the cathedral via the North West porch which had been decorated with strings of tiny lights which continually change colour



Their effect was magical and so welcoming.

That evening, during an informal supper in our hotel, we four enjoyed the company of **Howard Waddell**, Head Verger of Chichester Cathedral, who is a delightful companion with a fund of engaging conversation.



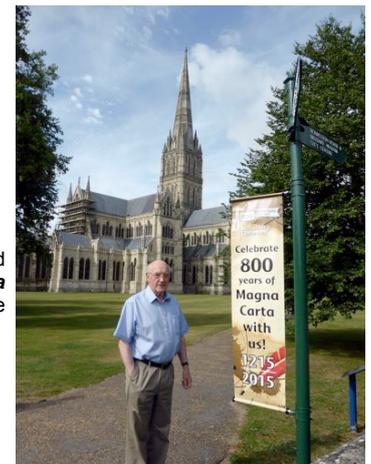
Howard reminded us that one of the patrons of so many artistic and musical events in Chichester Cathedral is **Patricia Routledge** who lives in that fair city. He had the pleasure of escorting her to London recently when they dined at the **INAMO** Restaurant in Wardour Street, where former Blackburn chorister **Noel Hunwick**, son of Blackburn Cathedral tenor, **Philip Hunwick**, is director.

Apparently Patricia Routledge enjoyed her INAMO visit so much (meeting all Noel's staff, too) that they stayed until nearly midnight.

JB had had the pleasure of meeting Ms Routledge eight years earlier when he had led a cathedral choristers' workshop at the Chichester SCF.



The next morning David led Ruth and JB to see the **Magna Carta Exhibition** in the Cathedral Chapter House.

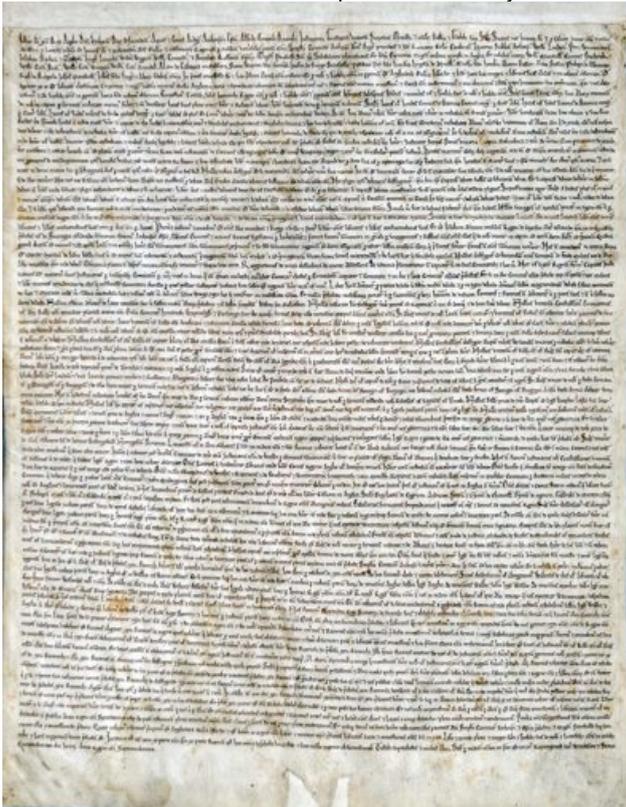


The vast Chapter House had plenty of room for the exhibition – no doubt there were electronic alarms (for the Salisbury *Magna Carta* is the best preserved copy in existence) but we couldn't see them.



There was just a polite notice in the booth at the far end, in which the irreplaceable *Magna Carta* was housed, asking us not to take photos of the actual document.

We didn't – but here's the official photo of that 800-year old *Carta*.



The writing was exquisite and so tiny, for vellum was expensive – this was created from the skin of a sheep – and so carefully prepared that it has lasted almost intact for eight centuries.

On the back of the booth was a translation of *Magna Carta*, and David pointed to the clause which allowed the City of London to 'enjoy all its liberties and customs' – for David is a Freeman of the City of London, which allows him to drive a flock of sheep over Westminster Bridge once a year for a fee of £50! (He hasn't done that – yet!)



As we left the Chapter House we noticed that there was a frieze of carvings right round that circular building – illustrating stories from the Bible.

This one shows the Egyptians being drowned in the Red Sea as they chased the Israelites who were making for the Promised Land.



How fortunate it is that these carvings are too high to reach – unlike the carvings in the Chapter House of Ely Cathedral which were all smashed during the religious upheavals in the reign of Edward VI in 1547. (If you don't know about that, look it up!)

It was time for a refreshing cuppa in the cathedral's superb and spacious refectory – which is combined with the cathedral's attractive bookshop.

It is built between the South Nave wall and the North wall of the Cloisters. It has an enormous glass roof which enables visitors to enjoy this unique view of the cathedral and



its spire.



Also there is an enormous photograph of the Cathedral Nave – shorn of chairs. A photo of that photo was called for!



As the rest of the morning was free we wandered around the cathedral as the combined cathedral choirs (girls and lay clerks) rehearsed for that evening's concert.

What a superb view we had of the entire length of the cathedral from the Easternmost chapel.



How very good it was to watch the three Cathedral Directors of Music rehearse the music for that ever-to-be remembered concert. Chichester (**Charles Harrison**) - *Bach Cantata 172*,



Salisbury (**David Halls**) - *Mozart Missa Solemnis*



and Winchester (**Andrew Lumsden**).



Andy's conducting of Handel's *Dixit Dominus* that evening was one of the most thrilling performances that JB had ever heard for he held the singers' eyes throughout, and his sense of dynamic rhythm was compelling.



There was an impressive Choral Evensong that afternoon sung by all three choirs and recorded by the BBC.

There was another unexpected coincidence from far-off days:



A lady greeted JB (she was the leader of the splendid orchestra which would play at that evening's concert).

'I'm Daphne Smith. My brother was a member of your St Matthew's Singers in Northampton, and you gave me some lessons all those years ago!'

What a joy it was to meet Daphne again, for JB remembers her so well as a vivacious young girl. She hasn't changed! Thank you, Daphne!

And after the evening concert David & Ruth Demack, John Morley and JB again rejoiced in the company of Howard Waddell, over a tasty snack and refreshing drinks in The White Hart.



Tomorrow would be a busy day for Howard for he would be Verging the Salisbury Cathedral Chapter at the great Festival Eucharist, which would be sung by all three choirs, with Bishops and Deans as far as the eye could see, and then he'd be returning to Chichester that evening to be ready for Chichester Cathedral's own busy Sunday.

The final day of the Festival dawned, Saturday 18th July 2015.
 We took our places early in the Nave, for it would be full for the Festival Eucharist.
 We noticed that the pillars of the cathedral, especially those supporting the central tower, were bulging.



The enormous weight of the tower and spire must have caused headaches for the builders all those years ago – but the tower and spire remain standing, although, if one looks closely, their supporting pillars do lean and they do bulge!



The Very Revd. Nicholas Fraying, former Dean of Chichester, on the left and David Demack on the right.



Next to Dean Fraying sat the former Surgeon General of the British Armed Forces. It was a most distinguished table!

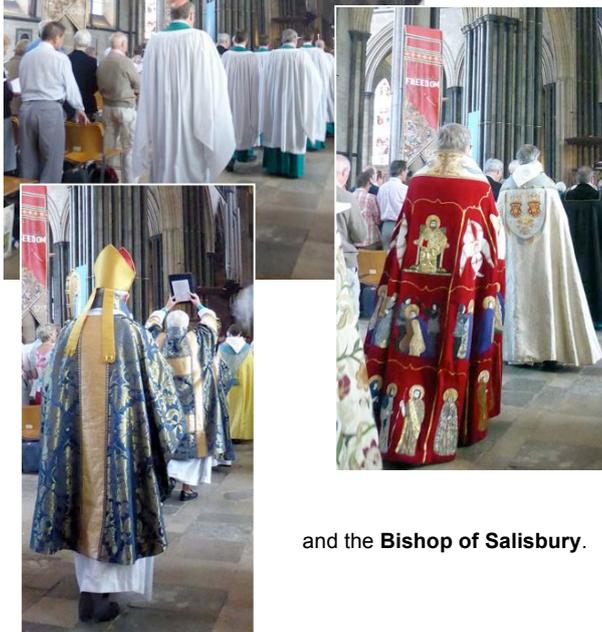
That evening we relished the final cathedral concert sung by the boys and lay clerks of the three cathedrals and the Salisbury girls: Elgar's thrilling *Give unto the Lord* conducted by **Andy Lumsden**, Elgar's exciting orchestral arrangement of *Bach's Fantasia & Fugue in C minor* conducted by **Charles Harrison**, and then a sublime and dynamic performance of Tippett's *Child of our Time* conducted by **David Halls**.



The processions of choirs and clergy were impressive.

David Halls following his choir.

Dean **Jeffrey John**, the Guest Preacher



and the **Bishop of Salisbury**.

The combined choirs sang Vienne's *Messe Solenne* which, needless to say, was glorious.

However the sound system of the cathedral does not enable the spoken word to be heard clearly – this happens in some other cathedrals! Therefore much of Dean John's meticulously prepared sermon was, alas, missed by many of us.

That service was followed by a lavish Luncheon in our hotel for Festival Patrons.



The soloists were *superb*: JB will never forget the sound of the soprano soloist's gossamer-like sustained high G as the choirs came in with the spiritual *Steal away to Jesus*. That moment was, for JB, the emotional high point of the Festival.



As we left the cathedral through the festooned lights in the NW porch, they gleamed green and blue in a gesture of colourful farewell.

Thank you, Salisbury, for a wholly inspiring Festival.

It's Chichester next year!