

Bath Abbey choir alumni Newsletter

July 2026



Staying connected

Celebrating Our Musical Community
Past and Present

Sharing your journey

Where Abbey music has taken choristers next

Keeping the Abbey family in tune

Alumni news from new and far



HELLO FROM HUW!

Welcome to the very first choir alumni newsletter from Bath Abbey – it's about time, I think!

If you've sung in the Abbey choir, you'll know that it has a habit of staying with you. Whether it's the music, the routine of services, or just the friendships (and the occasional long rehearsal!) something tends to linger.



This newsletter is a way of keeping that connection going – sharing a bit of what's happening in the Abbey now, and celebrating where choir has taken so many of you since.

Do keep in touch – we'd love to hear your news, and better still, to see you back in the stalls before too long.

Recent news

A Reunion to Remember at Evensong

An Evensong service at Bath Abbey on 7 February brought together current choristers and alumni of the Girls' Choir for a joyful reunion during the Friends of Bath Abbey service. The occasion also included a surprise celebration for long-serving chaperone Delyth Cardy, marking a significant birthday.

After the service, singers gathered in the Song School to continue the celebration – a reminder of the friendships and traditions shared across generations of the Abbey's musical family. In a particularly touching moment, the girls even sang Happy Birthday to Delyth in Welsh, filling the room with affection and good humour!

With the Girls' Choir's 30th anniversary approaching, we look forward to welcoming more alumni back to sing.



From Choir Stalls to Rowing Squad

Many will remember Hugo Jones, whose connection to the Abbey has remained strong since his chorister days. Alongside his musical contributions, he continues to serve faithfully as crucifer at the 11.30am service, a role he carries out with dedication and calm authority.

We were thrilled to hear that Hugo has recently been selected for the Olympic rowing development squad, where he will train with Team GB coach Tim Selby at Bath University. He has also represented Wales and the South West in the national rowing pairs competition in Nottingham. We send Hugo our warmest congratulations and every good wish for what lies ahead.



Ex-Chorister performs Organ Recital in Oxford

We are delighted to share news of Rafael Estrella, whose musical journey continues to flourish. Fondly remembered for his musicality and commitment during his time in the boys' choir, Raf has since taken up the organ, first studying with Dewi Rees and continuing his lessons with Adam Field. His hard work and developing artistry have already led him to contribute to several Abbey services and to perform in our Tuesday lunchtime recital series in 2025.

Most recently, he gave a 30-minute organ recital at Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford, which was also livestreamed for those unable to attend. It is inspiring to see Raf's musicianship growing so confidently, and we look forward to following his future achievements.

Alumni stories

Alan Dudeney (alumni 1948)

Now aged 93, Alan Dudeney reflects with gratitude on his three years as an Abbey chorister.

After an unsuccessful audition at Bath Abbey aged ten, a chance encounter in a local Co-op led to a second hearing with choirmaster Ernest Maynard – and a place in the choir. Within weeks Alan was singing solos; over three years he performed 129, including *Rejoice Greatly* at Christmas and Mendelssohn's *Hear My Prayer* in a radio broadcast he still describes as the most memorable day of his musical life.



Life in the choir was not all music. Mr Maynard formed a cricket team of choirboys to play the boys, with matches in Victoria Park and on the Recreation Ground – umpired by the Archdeacon. The boys won all three games, though one memorable moment saw Mr Maynard wading fully clothed into the duck pond to retrieve a well-struck ball!

Accompanied on one occasion by the young Raymond Leppard, Alan's Abbey experience laid the foundation for a lifetime in music and education. After teaching in secondary schools, he became a headmaster and built outstanding school choirs in Letchworth and at St Richard's, Richmond. Described on BBC Radio 2 as "the most broadcast choir in Britain", his 130-strong choir performed for thirteen consecutive years on Christmas television alongside stars including Petula Clark and Cliff Richard, and sang at venues such as the Royal Albert Hall.



In 2016, Alan received the University of Winchester's Alumnus of the Year award – fitting recognition for a life shaped by the Abbey Choir and his dedication to music.

Alice Usher (alumni 2016)



Katrina in Rip Van Winkle (photo: Craig Fuller)

It is a pleasure to reconnect with soprano and producer Alice Usher, whose career reflects the musical foundations she developed as a member of the Abbey Girls' Choir.

After her time at the Abbey, Alice held a choral scholarship at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, where she read English Literature. She went on to train at the Wales International Academy of Voice and at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, where she achieved the highest mark in her MMus year.

Alice is now Managing Director and co-founder of the award-winning, female-led company Gothic Opera, known for atmospheric productions of rarely performed operas with supernatural themes, and for keeping performances accessible while creating opportunities for emerging singers.

Alongside her work as a producer, Alice performs professionally as a soprano, including roles with Gothic Opera and with the Philharmonia Chorus. She also sings at Methodist Central Hall Westminster and across a wide range of operatic repertoire.



Complete the text from the Magnificat:

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat..."

TEASER

- a) 'he hath filled the hungry with good things'
- b) 'and holy is his name'
- c) 'and hath exalted the humble and meek'
- d) 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son'

(Answer below)



Looking ahead

30 years of the Girls' choir

2027 will mark a significant milestone as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Bath Abbey Girls' Choir.

Founded in 1997 under the inspirational leadership of Peter King, the Girls' Choir was among the first major church girls' choirs in the region. Over three decades it has made a distinguished contribution to the musical and liturgical life of the Abbey, singing regularly to a high standard and representing the community locally and beyond.



Membership of the Girls' Choir offers exceptional musical training, the experience of working as part of an ensemble, and opportunities that can be genuinely life-shaping. The confidence, discipline and love of music nurtured through choir membership continue to benefit former choristers long after they leave the Abbey.

We are proud of the role the Girls' Choir has played in broadening and enriching the Abbey's choral tradition, and we look forward to sharing details of anniversary celebrations and opportunities for alumni involvement as plans develop. See below for dates.

Alumni events

2026

Sunday 20th September – *BAMS Evensong* (all alumni welcome to attend)

Thursday 24 December – *Carol Praise!* (girls to sing)

2027

Saturday 9 January – *Britten's A Ceremony of Carols in the Abbey* (girls to sing)

Saturday 26th June – *Gala Concert featuring the Abbey Girls and other cathedral Girls choirs* – all alumni welcome to be in audience.

Sunday 27th June – *Boy and Lay Clerk alumni invited to sing at evensong*

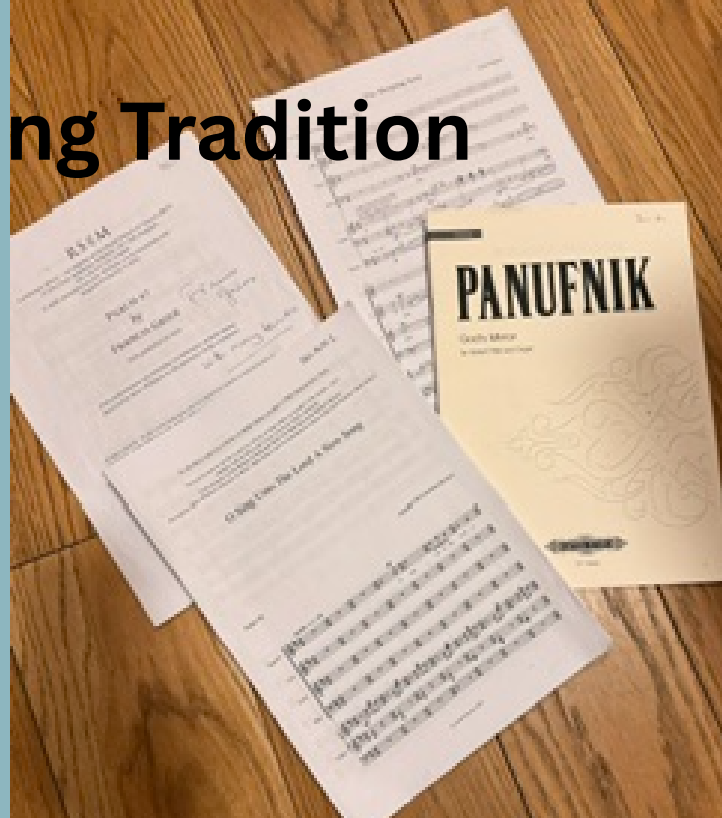
September/October tba – *Special evensong with Rededication of the Choir with the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Right Rev Michael Beasley* (all alumni to sing).

All further details to be emailed nearer the time.

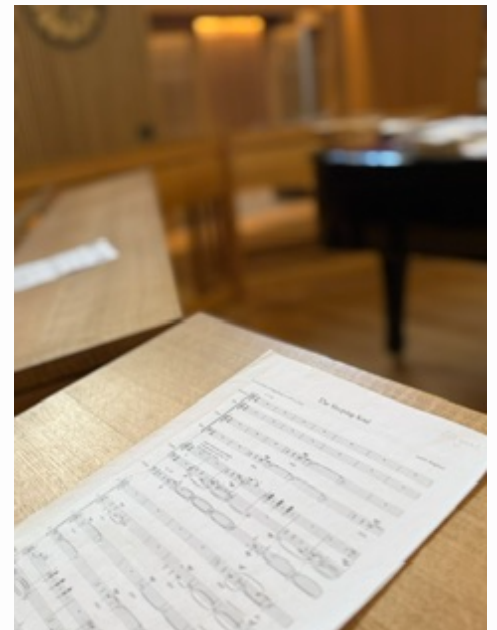
New Music for a Living Tradition

One of the most distinctive ways the music at Bath Abbey continues to grow is through the creation of new work written especially for its choirs.

Support from the Bath Abbey Music Society makes it possible to commission composers to write pieces that mark important moments in the life of the Abbey – ensuring that each generation of choristers contributes something new to its musical story. Commissions of this kind typically require several thousand pounds to bring to life, from the initial composition through to performance.



In recent years, this has led to a number of significant works. Roxanna Panufnik's *God's Mirror* was written to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Girls' Choir, while Judith Bingham composed *The Sleeping Soul* to mark its 20th anniversary—both pieces now part of the choir's living repertoire.



More recently, in 2025, Annabel Rooney composed *O Sing Unto the Lord A New Song* (Psalm 98) to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Boys' and Lay Clerks' Choirs. The work was first performed alongside the Boys and Vicars Choral of Wells Cathedral, in the presence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells—an occasion that brought together past and present in a particularly powerful way.

Alongside this, a new setting of Psalm 67 by Francis Grier was also commissioned for the same celebration.

These commissions do more than mark anniversaries. They give today's choristers the rare opportunity to premiere new music, to work with living composers, and to shape how the Abbey's musical tradition will be experienced in years to come.

It is through the generosity of supporters that projects like these continue to be possible.



Supporting the next generation

Alongside supporting new commissions and musical projects, BAMS contributes in many practical ways to the life of the choirs and organists — helping with choir tours, music tuition, recordings, transport and the wider opportunities that make choir membership such a formative experience for young people.

Many former choristers will remember the friendships, discipline, confidence and musical training that grew out of their time at the Abbey. BAMS exists to help preserve and strengthen those opportunities for the choristers and musicians who follow.

For those who wish to remain connected to the Abbey's musical life and support its future, becoming a member of BAMS is a valuable and greatly appreciated way of doing so. Further details can be found on the BAMS website at www.bathabbeymusic.org, or by contacting the music team.

Stay in touch

We strive to keep our alumni connected and informed about upcoming events. If you have not been receiving our emails, want to update your contact details, or have a story you would like to share, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Sarah at skettlety@bathabbey.org.

*“To sing is to pray twice”
St. Augustine*

ANSWER

c) "and hath exalted the humble and meek"

