

No. 17: 'A grand trip out' with the angels!

Back in 2011 at the Heritage Open Day, we were visited by Keith Moss, after which I spent many happy hours listening and making copies of a lot of his childhood reminiscences of Holy Trinity in the early 50s. I have lost touch with Keith but this month's blog retells, in his own words, a story of a momentous trip he had as a choirboy in 1951. I hope Keith will permit me to reuse this and hope he is able to get in touch to further regale me of stories like it!



"In February 1951 [the choir] entered, and eventually won, the national choirs competition. 1951 had been declared by the Government as a year to celebrate, there was to be the Festival of Britain exhibition in London and in addition all over the country there was to be musical competitions, cumulating in grand finals to be staged at the new Royal Festival Hall which was on the exhibition site adjacent to the river Thames.

"The first we boys heard about it was when it was announced by Mr Greenwood that we had entered. This sounded okay, but realisation soon dawned on us. To start with there was to be a local knock-out competition in Huddersfield in two months' time, and straight away we started with extra practices. This did not go down well as it involved another night a week when I could not play out. (*The choir normally practiced on two week-nights and sang morning and evening on Sundays, and also monthly at the old Infirmary*).

"Worse was to come as the competition day drew nearer, yet another evening was declared as a practice night. This to me was now getting silly as I was now singing with the choir six times a week. The day dawned, the competition was to be at the town hall, and to cut a long story short, we won.

"A few days later we were then informed the next stage was a Yorkshire knock-out, this was also to be held in the Huddersfield town hall; a mixed blessing, for with no travel, no cost was involved, but we boys did not see it that way. It would have been much more exciting to have had to go somewhere else. One thing was certain, our increased practicing was here to stay and inevitably as the competition drew nearer and the tempo increased the six days a week practicing became the norm.

"The day arrived; I suppose we were excited, although I am not sure; at that age you just did it because you were told to, but we won again. We had, it seemed, according to an article in the Huddersfield Examiner, 'having the good fortune to have a set of boys who sing with a very pure

and natural tone', whatever that meant! Perhaps now though the realisation was dawning upon us, - we were going to London!

"I and most of my fellow singers had never been to London; it was somewhere we had learnt about at school and was a long way away. One thing we did not realise at this stage was the sheer effort that was to go into this; all we knew was that as time proceeded the six practices became seven which became eight as the final run up to the competition got ever nearer.

"But there were many problems that we youngsters did not know anything about. How did you get a choir with parents and supporters of over 80 strong to London? Where would we stay? Who was going to pay? For most of our families did not have this kind of money. Fortunately the adults of this world realised this and quickly declared, by one means or another, none of the boys would have to pay anything.

"So began the fund raising. It was all over our heads, until we were told fund raising concerts were to be held at the town hall as part of the appeal fund and of course we were going to be performing at not one or two, but three concerts! One thing was certain, it was the start of our intimate knowledge of the town hall and its many rooms and passages. It was quite easy to get lost or misplaced and the lack of wrist watches worn by young boys in those days was to play its part. On one occasion we had sung in the first half and we were making use of the interval when we found it, - a room high in the roof completely equipped with table tennis tables! We were completely oblivious of the time and only when emerging down the narrow back stairs did we realise something was wrong. It was made quite clear to us we were in trouble and retributions would follow after the concert as the second half had been held up, and the 2000 in the audience had sat wondering what was going on, whilst everyone was looking for the erring choirboys. Angels we were not!

"The day arrived. We travelled to London by coach. No motorways in those days, so this in itself was a whole day's journey. Due to some hitches, we did not arrive in London until midnight, and as we were to sleep in an underground air-raid shelter left after the war, a good night's sleep was unlikely. This proved to be the case, as upon arrival mayhem quickly took over with the older boys vanishing to explore and the younger ones playing games with the boys from a school bunked next to us; all of this in the early hours of the morning.

"Worse was to come, for having finally rounded everyone up and got them into, or about to get into their bunks, the Reuters photographer arrived. Only those who were there know that half of the boys in the subsequent picture had hastily thrown some clothes back on for the photo, which in some instances did not include trousers.



"The morning dawned and more problems for the beleaguered men in charge as some of the older boys went off on the underground railway, got lost and created panic.

"After breakfast, we had a tour of London on a bus followed by lunch. This was followed by a last rehearsal in a local church hall. This turned out to be a disaster, our singing was terrible! I think it was the first time I had ever seen a grown man cry; Mr Greenwood did and into the bargain I was singled out for chewing a sweet whilst singing. But things looked up for at least us boys, as a police motorcycle escort arrived to take us to the Festival Hall. He was good enough to show how everything worked, this was much more exciting than singing. Unfortunately he got us lost, so we were late, it seemed fate was against us. From there on it was all a blur, I vaguely remember walking onto the stage, and if the town hall had seemed big, this was enormous! We duly waited our turn, we got up and sung, and then sat down and waited. Finally it was over and the results were announced, we had done it! We were, the 'All Britain Church Choir Championship' winners.

"For certain we were excited, but the paper head-lines; 'The choir surpassed itself, the boys sang like angels' went completely over our heads!

"The following day we went to the Houses of Parliament and got into trouble again; but this time not only the boys, but the whole choir and in particular our local MP, Mr Mallalieu. Someone had said the Westminster Hall we were in, had some of the best acoustics anywhere, and so Mr Greenwood asked if we could try them out, Mr Mallalieu agreed, so the choir duly gathered on the steps and sang 'The Lord's my Shepherd', to the tune Crimond. The parliamentary police did not appreciate it and we were waved away, but the American tourists were reported to have said, 'We are sure glad we came today, it was beautiful, and something we will never ever forget.'

"We duly arrived back in Huddersfield thinking 'that was it, it was all over' but not so, we were invited to a civic reception in the town hall, by the Mayor. I suppose the enormity of what we had achieved began to sink in, when the Huddersfield Examiner musical expert, a Mr S.H.Crowther said in proposing a toast to the Holy Trinity choir and their choirmaster Mr F. Greenwood, 'The singing of the choir in the Royal Festival Hall provided all who had heard it with a rare experience. In the blend of tone the choir gave them something that could hardly be bettered for sheer beauty of sound. The boys, on the stage dressed in their blue cassocks, looked like cherubs, incapable of any escapades, and sang like angels.'"



The choir is pictured with the Novello Trophy, a silver rose-bowl, at the town hall presented as champions of the competition. Frank Greenwood is holding the trophy, which was proudly displayed in church but later stolen.

Mr Frank Greenwood retired as Organist and Choirmaster in 1962 after serving 40 years at Holy Trinity. On the wall in the old 'choir' vestry is the brass name plaque that used to be on his house, 97 Trinity Street. The choir was disbanded in 1988.

In the church archives there is a recording of the choir in the competition, but sadly it is not currently playable. It is hoped that one day, we might be able to get it restored and once again hear the 'angels' sing!

Andy Barber
April '18



Note on Frank W. Greenwood.

Organist and choirmaster 1921-62. Born 1889, Frank started to learn the piano aged 7 and gave piano lessons from the age of 18, - many of his ex-pupils going on to be professional musicians. He married at Holy Trinity in 1913 and died on August 20th 1964. As a mark of respect his funeral service had a massed choir of past and present members, who remained silent, - there was no singing. Mrs Greenwood presented the church with her husband's piano, on which so many his pupils had been taught. It was placed in the Parish Hall, and is now in the Welcome Area. A trophy was instituted at the Mrs Sunderland Music Competition in his memory.