

Bristol Cathedral Choir Tour to Hannover, April 2010 - report

Even on the coach on the return from the successful tour to one of Bristol's twin cities, Bordeaux in October 2008, the tour staff were planning the next tour. Using the links created through the town twinning had been so helpful in the planning that Bristol's original partner, Hannover in Lower Saxony, Germany, was chosen as the next destination. The tour group this time included 31 Choristers and probationers (10 to 15 years old), 12 Lay Clerks and Choral Scholars, Mr Mark Lee - Director of Music, Mr Paul Walton - Organist, Mrs Sarah Jenkinson - interpreter, matron, trouble-shooter and author of this report, and Mr Jeremy Kirk, from Bristol Cathedral Concerts, who was the tour manager. The Canon Precentor, Canon Wendy Wilby, joined us by car and met up with us regularly throughout our stay.

Only five days after the hectic schedule of Holy Week the tour party set off on the long drive, taking with them an enormous birthday cake since it was Samuel Middleton's birthday the next day. The journey is always very long and there is no alleviating the boredom and tiredness, although DVDs were watched and much food consumed, with breaks at service stations for breakfast and lunch. First-time continental coach travellers were shocked to discover that they were expected to pay to use the loo and Jeremy Kirk, the tour manager, came to the rescue of those without small change on many an instance.

The final straw came at the end of an 18-hour journey as the coach turned off into the approach road to the youth hostel, which was to be our home for the next seven days. The road was blocked off as a premiership football match was taking place in the stadium which shared the road and a man suggested that we all unload our suitcases and walk the final bit! This would have been impossible as we were all exhausted, plus there were five cases full of cassocks, two boxes of music and loads of tuck and fruit to carry in addition to our own luggage. Fortunately Mrs Jenkinson was able to convince the young man to let us pass and we stopped outside the modern youth hostel and unloaded, assisted by Andreas, one of the ministers of the Marktkirche, who was to be our main contact in Germany. Hannah, the *Pastorin*, turned up to meet us shortly afterwards. At supper that night we enjoyed Samuel's cake and turned in for a relatively early night in preparation for an early start on Sunday morning.

Sundays are usually the busiest days in the choir week and the first day in Hannover was to be no exception. After a 6.30am wake-up call and typical German breakfast (bread rolls, jam, ham and cheese), we set off for our host church, where we were to sing the Eucharist service. Cathedral Choirs belong to a truly British tradition and the quality of their music-making is largely unknown in the rest of the world. We therefore enjoy very much watching the effect that the choir's singing has on the audience or congregation. The congregation in the Marktkirche was suitably impressed and we were made to feel very welcome there. After *Kaffee und Kuchen*, Mr Walton gave an organ recital and then, after a packed lunch (bread rolls, jam, ham and cheese) we had our first look at the town, with Andreas leading us. We caused quite a stir as we made our way through the streets in our uniforms, topped with tour hoodies, and enjoyed our first experience of public transport in Germany; in Hannover an integrated tram and underground system.

After a visit to the Herrenhäuser baroque gardens, including the grotto designed by Niki de Saint Phalle and the tallest fountain jet in the world, the Choristers continued on to the Historical Museum, which had put on *Kaffee und Kuchen* for us, and then we returned to the Marktkirche for our first concert, which was to feature their children's choir, the KiKiMus (Kinder Kirche Musik).



The repertoire for this series of concerts had been carefully selected by Mark Lee, with the choral pieces divided into three sections, interspersed with organ pieces. The first part was of pieces usually sung between Advent and Christmas, the second Lent to Easter and the third section some more forceful pieces. The repertoire was technically more challenging than the repertoire from the Bordeaux tour and the choir had made a CD for sale during the tour *Music for Hannover*. Composers included Britten, Lauridsen, Purcell, Tallis, Poulenc Lotti, Handel, Walton and Byrd. Three of the more modern composers represented in the repertoire had a more personal link to the choir. Phil Wilby is the Precentor's husband, David Bednall is currently sub-organist at the Cathedral and Rob Waters had until recently been an alto lay clerk and returned to fill a space in the tour party.

After the concert the Choristers were divided into groups and assigned to members of the KiKiMus, where the children quickly made friends. Montell Cunningham particularly impressed our hosts with his desire to communicate in German even if he made some mistakes. Then we had a typical *Abendbrot* (supper) which consisted of bread rolls, ham and cheese – are you beginning to see a pattern? The Choristers didn't let us down despite them feeling fed up with bread, ham and cheese, which we had eaten for five of the last six meals – and so we ordered pizza on return to the youth hostel, which was a welcome change as we knew what was to come for breakfast!

Monday saw a slightly later start (7:30) and a visit by tram to a German grammar school, with visits to classes in groups. All groups bar one were in English classes, with the unlucky ones having a Maths lesson with a teacher who spoke no English and expected the Choristers to join in with the work! Afterwards we heard a choir class sing two songs for us and were able to sing two pieces for them, tell them about the life of a chorister and the history of cathedral worship in the UK, before being divided up again for social interaction.

Lunch was in a nearby cafeteria run by the local church and was hot! We ate well before heading off to a reception with the Mayor in the town hall. The local press were there as the Choristers and Lay Clerks sang two pieces on the staircase of the fabulous hall and council workers were drawn out of their offices on the three floors by the beautiful sound. Thereafter we were received by the Mayor and were told the history of the twinning link and the town. We were seated in the council chamber and the mayor told the choir members what their job would be, were they the actual inhabitants of those seats. Maddy Lloyd (Year 5) was thrilled to discover that she controlled the finances of the city and Keith Donoghue (Alto Lay Clerk) gave us a giggle when we heard he was responsible for the equality of women – his wife found it especially amusing! In the Q and A session afterwards Samuel asked the Mayor if

it had been in this very council chamber that JFK had made his famous statement "*Ich bin ein Berliner*". The Mayor retained his composure as he replied that that had been in Berlin, but the gents on their trip to Berlin the next day did enjoy working on variations of the question!



That evening saw our second concert in the nearby town of Celle, where the local youth group gave us a hurried tour and provided a supper of...guess what? Yes, you guessed. Although the audience was smaller than might have been wished due to the venue only being confirmed one week previously, the standard was nonetheless high and we enjoyed ourselves.

Tuesday was the first day that the programme allowed for relaxation and the Choristers all went to swim in a pool in the northeast of the town. Fun was had by all! After a hot lunch back at the youth hostel, we went into town and went shopping, before changing for our concert in the Nikolai-Kirche. The audience there was much better and the church gave us a pizza supper, which was much appreciated.



Wednesday saw more leisure: this time a day in a theme park, the biggest in Europe, the Heide Park. While the staff reluctantly manned the base at the café(!), the Choristers went on a huge range of death-defying rides and bought too many fizzy drinks and too much junk food! This was finally a real holiday! The evening saw a hot

dinner in the youth hostel, attended by the officers of the Hannover-Bristol council, who had helped with publicity etc.

Thursday was a more cultural day, with a trip to Göttingen, via the Harz mountains. There we visited the Iberger Tropfsteinhöhle, a cave of lime stalagmites and stalactites, where a Bronze Age family's burial site had been discovered. The bones had been DNA-tested and descendants of this family have been discovered in the area. There was a proven link to one of the members of the Göttinger Knabenchor, with whom we were due to sing that evening!

The Göttinger Knabenchor provided us with a warm lunch, which got them off to a good start in our books, and then led four groups of Choristers round the beautiful city centre of Göttingen. Then the two choirs rehearsed prior to the final concert. The concert was spectacular and received two standing ovations. (The Göttinger Knabenchor is coming to Bristol with 40 boys aged eight to 20 and is looking for host families - please let Mrs Jenkinson know if you would be prepared to host someone for two nights, 13th and 14th October.) We arrived back at the youth hostel shortly before midnight and went to bed quickly.



We packed on the Friday morning and left at 11 a.m., arriving home eventually by 6:15 the next day, via packed ferries due to the flight cancellations caused by the Icelandic volcano, and bringing with us Chris Jenkinson, who had been stranded in Göttingen after an exchange visit. On the return journey we stopped in the beautiful city of Bruges for supper. Unfortunately traffic jams and road works put paid to our planned boat trip on the canals of Bruges, but we saw many of the sights on the long walk out to the coach park.

This was another extremely successful tour, and talk on the exhausting return journey was once again of the destination for the next tour in 18 months' time. Many thanks are owed to Jeremy Kirk for his meticulous planning of the tour and to the Music Department at the Cathedral for this excellent tour.

Quote of the tour: "I ain't got no cents" (an Amber Fudge original, repeated by many others).

Report by Sarah Jenkinson, BCCS Chorister Tutor