

All Saints' Church, Northampton

Liveryman Simon Godfrey has been a priest since 1982, having been a parish church chorister in his youth and thus has always been keen on the English tradition of Church music. In 1989 he became incumbent at All Saints' Church, Northampton, where the decision was made to create and develop a choral foundation. Today the results of this enthusiasm are evident in the article below. Parish churches have undergone a substantial decline in the last 25 years, and yet in certain places a vision for choral excellence has helped to buck the trend.

In 1995 a group of people in Northampton met to talk about the musical provision in local schools, and particularly the absence of any singing in all but a few state schools in the town and county. This group launched the Northampton Choral Foundation as a limited company with trustees and charitable status in one of Northamptonshire's fine country houses, and the charity began to attract enthusiastic interest and a funding base. Over a decade later some £360,000 had been awarded to a diverse number of musicians. In 1999 it was decided to bring together singers from across Northamptonshire to celebrate the Millennium – the Arts Council gave a generous grant, the local theatre trust provided a venue and a concert bringing together young singers, instrumentalists and entertainers entitled *Whatever happened to Nostradamus?* was conceived and performed to an enthusiastic audience of 500.

A number of donors wished to provide an enhanced appointment for the Director of Music post at the Civic Church of Northampton, All Saints. The church boasts a traditional choir of men and boys, as well as a girls' choir, and choral scholars who sing alongside the men. Recently the Church appointed Lee Dunleavy as Director of Music, fresh from York Minster. With his background of FRCO, cathedral posting, and Oxbridge organ scholarship, at surface-

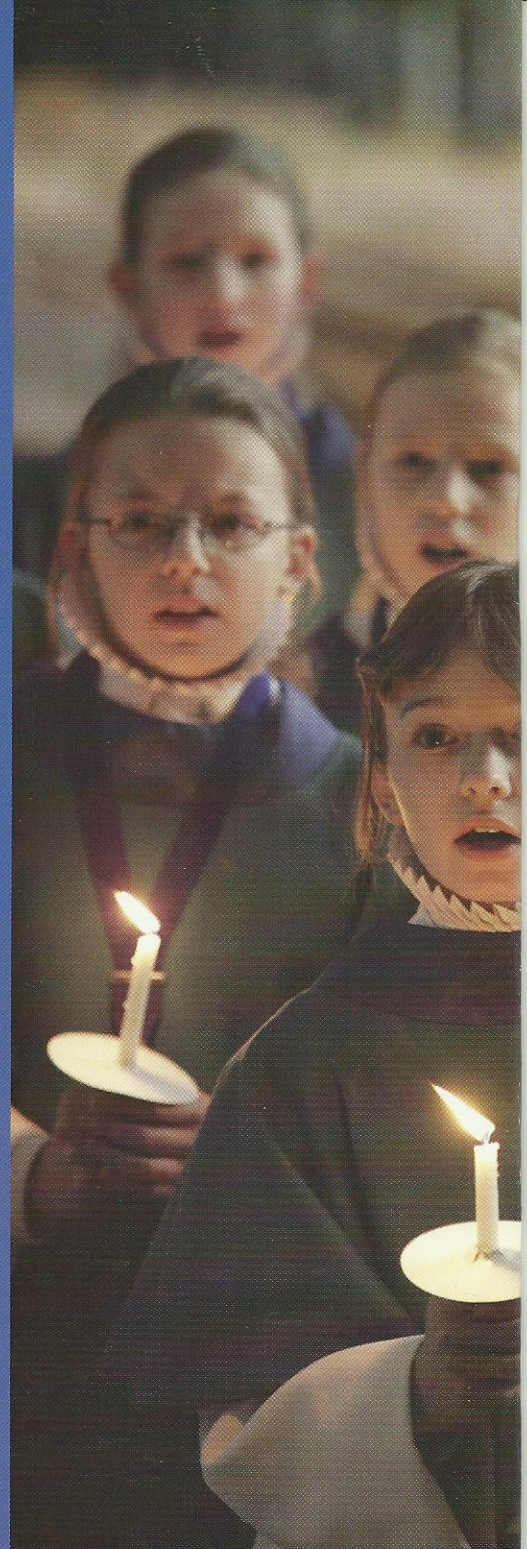


level it would appear to be a traditional appointment. However, Mr Dunleavy was appointed because of his work as both an exponent of leading youth music in schools, and for his commitment to teaching singing through sound vocal technique, rather than the traditional model of simply picking up techniques from colleagues.

One of the exciting spin-offs of the appointment is the annual choir tour programme. In recent years the choir has toured over fifteen countries, and in 2005 the girls' choir responded to an invitation by Mme Langlais to broadcast some of her late husband's choral compositions live on *France Musique* in anticipation of Langlais' centenary. In the centenary year, 2007, Mme Langlais will come to Northampton to give a recital, and to accompany her late husband's *Messe solennelle* at All Saints' Church, which is fortunate to have two large organs which enable an accurate performance of the work.

The foundation also arranges masterclasses on a biennial basis, and Dr John Rutter and Mr Andrew Reid have taken the last two. Grant making meetings continue regularly at which distributions are agreed and applications discussed. Of late it has been decided to form a library of musical scores and libretti for local singing groups to borrow. Recent grants have also included the purchase of reliable music stands, sheet music and the production of printed programmes for concerts. The work of the foundation is based entirely on voluntary labour and attracts many enthusiastic professionals and amateurs who give both time, energy and commitment in equal quantities.

Lee G K Dunleavy (Director of Music)
Liveryman Fr Simon Godfrey (Rector)
Northampton Choral Foundation –
Registered Charity No 1015522



Justin Sutcliffe

