

Reviewing the Situation: Choral Update  
by  
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We are the *Campaign for the Traditional Cathedral Choir*, so nothing could be more reasonable than to assume we know how many traditional cathedral choirs there are. On the face of it, a total is arrived at merely by adding up the numbers. In practice, the exercise is far from simple. Up-to-date information cannot always be obtained from the Internet or over the phone: it is only by being present at a cathedral over a representative period of time that one can really know what the situation there is. With so many cathedrals involved, that would be a tremendous undertaking. Despite the difficulty, however, and the inevitability of inaccuracies, I still think it worth trying to put some figures down. At the very least, it will save us from a sense of embarrassment and incompetence if we are able to give a reasonable estimate of numbers.

Paul Donovan, writing in the *Sunday Times* in October 2006, claimed that “25 out of 43 English cathedrals now have both boys and girls in the choir”. He would seem to have been referring only to Anglican cathedrals, though I question the accuracy of his figures. My own calculations suggest the figure should be 32 and not 25. Of course, the cathedral choral scene does not stay stable for long, and the revised number takes into account, for example, the recent establishment of a girls’ choir at Worcester. It is worth noting, too, that Donovan’s figures relate exclusively to cathedral choirs. According to the Campaign’s first object, however, we are in being “to champion the ancient tradition of the all-male choir in Cathedrals, Chapels Royal, Collegiate Churches, University Chapels and similar ecclesiastical choral foundations”. Therefore, it is important we extend the scope of any enquiry to encompass these other establishments. And while the tradition is supremely Anglican and English, it also has a presence among the Roman Catholics and in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

For the purpose of analysis, I decided to divide the various establishments (cathedrals, Chapels Royal, Collegiate Churches, University Chapels and the odd distinguished parish church) into three categories. The first category is for establishments whose choirs are totally and only traditional. (Of course, there will always be the odd occasion, especially during choir holidays, when other choirs might sing.) The second category is for establishments whose choirs are essentially traditional but which have some occasional elements of a different kind: e.g., a youth choir, a ladies’ choir or a parish-church choir, but not an equal-status, fully-fledged, modern-type girls’ choir. The last category is for establishments with (a) only a girls’ choir, (b) both a traditional and a girls’ choir or (c) only a mixed choir, of whatever make-up. Many or, indeed, most choirs in this category play a significant role in terms of hours of singing and the occasions on which they sing.

In a bulletin article published in 2003, *Ringing the Changes*, a survey was made of traditional choirs throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. Now, in 2007, I have carried out a further survey of the choral scene in these countries. The 2003 survey (with some slight corrections) is compared and contrasted with my 2007 survey and shown in the tables below. Note: ninety-two establishments were surveyed in 2003 and one hundred and four in 2007.

**CATEGORY ONE**

<b>2003</b>		<b>2007</b>	
England:	26	England:	18
Wales:	3	Wales:	2
Scotland:	2	Scotland:	0
Eire/N. Ireland:	7	Eire/N. Ireland:	5
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>25</b>

## CATEGORY TWO

2003		2007	
England:	10	England:	10
Wales:	0	Wales:	0
Scotland:	0	Scotland:	0
Eire/N. Ireland:	1	Eire/N. Ireland:	1
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>11</b>

## CATEGORY THREE

2003		2007	
England:	27	England:	48
Wales:	4	Wales:	1
Scotland:	6	Scotland:	11
Eire/N. Ireland:	6	Eire/N. Ireland:	6
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>66</b>

In Category One, what is striking is the high proportion of traditional choirs with a distinguished background. These are typically located in London, near to the seat of monarchy and government, in high-profile ecclesiastical cities such as Canterbury and Durham, or in those groves of ancient academe, Cambridge and Oxford. In 2003, as many as 14 of the 23 traditional choirs in England were of this type. Now, the proportion is even higher, with 13 of these prestigious choirs out of a total of 18 for the whole of England.

Is a subliminal message perhaps being sent out by such choirs, to the effect that they are what proper church choirs *should* be? In other words, their presence in public life, in broadcasting and on state occasions suggests that they are the 'real thing'. Some fidgety modernisers are certainly peeved at what they see as old-fashioned and snooty. Peter Phillips of the Tallis Scholars voiced his resentment in an article in the *Spectator* earlier in the year. He expatiated at length on the fact that these establishment choirs were still denying girls the opportunities they had been given elsewhere. Meanwhile, King's College, Cambridge, has narrowly missed being landed with a girls' choir. Apparently, the pressure to have a girls' choir was so great that it had to be appeased by a sop – the adult mixed choir that sings there once a week and which has contributed to King's being pushed into Category Two in this 2007 survey. I have no doubt at all that these remaining elite choirs will be the next ones to feel the pressure for change.

Category Two, but especially Category Three establishments, with separate choirs, are likely at some stage to face the challenge to go one step further and mix them. Reports from Wells, for instance, tell of a significant surge forward by the girls' choir. More generally, there is increasing talk against boys: they are not as good sight-readers as girls; they are less well disciplined, and so on. Couple all of this with parlous cathedral finances and the difficulty of recruiting boys and the outlook is far from bright. Nor should we be over-comforted that a cathedral is currently in Category One, for it does not necessarily mean a dean and chapter have set their faces resolutely against a girls' choir. Take Lichfield, for example: it has publicly declared that it would *like* a girls' choir. Only a lack of money stands in the way, it says. Of course, it might well be they would like a girls' choir. On the other hand, it might simply be a question of deflecting criticism by saying 'the right thing'.

Although these figures have the potential to depress, they also show clearly that the Campaign still has much which it might champion. If we do so with sufficient vigour, in some years hence, when the time comes to make a similar survey, we might note the trend for choirs to move down categories has been checked or even reversed.

## CATEGORIES IN DETAIL

- This survey covers Anglican and RC major choral establishments (cathedrals, Oxbridge Colleges, Chapel Royal, the odd major parish church, etc.) in the United Kingdom and Eire. It is in two parts. The first part is a recapitulation of the choral situation as described in the bulletin article, *Ringing the Changes*, which appeared in 2003, together with the odd correction/addition. The second part is a review of the situation updated to the present time. Total accuracy is not guaranteed, nor does this article purport to provide a fully-detailed picture. Nevertheless, a lot of care and effort have gone into the compilation of this survey and I feel confident it presents a realistic appraisal of developments since 2003.
- It is divided into three categories: (a) Category One: Establishments with choirs which are totally and only traditional. Of course, there will always be the odd occasion, especially during the holidays, when other choirs might sing. (b) Category Two: Establishments with choirs which are essentially traditional but with some occasional elements of a different kind – e.g., a youth choir, a ladies' choir, a parish-church choir, but **not** a quasi-equal, modern-type girls' choir. (c) Category Three: Establishments with (i) only a girls' choir, (ii) both a traditional and a girls' choir or (iii) only a mixed choir of whatever make-up, and in which all of such choirs play a significant role in terms of hours of singing and the occasions on which they sing.
- *Note: Unless shown as 'RC', establishments are Anglican..*

**CATEGORY ONE (Detail)**

2003 Survey	2007 Survey
<i><b>England</b></i>	<i><b>England</b></i>
Birmingham (RC)	Canterbury
Cambridge, King's College	Chichester
Cambridge, St John's College	Cambridge, St John's College
Canterbury	Durham
Chichester	Hampton Court, Chapel Royal
Durham	Hereford
Ely	Lichfield
Guildford	London, St Paul's
Hampton Court, Chapel Royal	London, Chapel Royal
Hereford	London, Queen's Chapel of the Savoy
Leeds Parish Church	London, Temple Church
Lichfield	London, Westminster Abbey
Liverpool	London, Westminster Cathedral (RC)
London, St Paul's	Newcastle
London, Chapel Royal	Oxford, Magdalen College
London, Queen's Chapel of the Savoy	Oxford, New College
London, Southwark (RC)	Truro
London, Temple Church	Windsor, St George's Chapel
London, Westminster Abbey	
London, Westminster Cathedral (RC)	
Newcastle	
Oxford, Magdalen College	
Oxford, New College	
Truro	
Windsor, St George's Chapel	
Worcester	
Total: 26	Total: 18
<i><b>Wales</b></i>	<i><b>Wales</b></i>
Bangor	Bangor
Cardiff (RC)	Newport
Newport	
Total: 3	Total: 2
<i><b>Scotland</b></i>	<i><b>Scotland</b></i>
Aberdeen	
Inverness	
Total: 2	Total: 0
<i><b>Eire/Northern Ireland</b></i>	<i><b>Eire/Northern Ireland</b></i>
Armagh	Armagh
Armagh (RC)	Belfast (RC)
Belfast (RC)	Dublin (RC)
Dublin (RC)	Londonderry
Londonderry	Londonderry (RC)
Londonderry (RC)	
Killamey (RC)	
Total: 7	Total: 5
<b>GRAND TOTAL: 38</b>	<b>GRAND TOTAL: 25</b>

**CATEGORY TWO (Detail)**

2003 Survey	2007 Survey
<i>England</i>	<i>England</i>
Brentwood (RC)	Birmingham (RC)
Carlisle	Brentwood (RC)
Chelmsford	Cambridge, Jesus College
Gloucester	Cambridge, King's College
Liverpool (RC)	Carlisle
Oxford, Christ Church College	Liverpool (RC)
Portsmouth	Oxford, Christ Church College
Southwell	Portsmouth (RC)
Tewkesbury	Tewkesbury
Winchester	Winchester
Total: 10	Total: 10
<i>Wales</i>	<i>Wales</i>
Total: 0	Total: 0
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
Total: 0	Total: 0
<i>Eire/Northern Ireland</i>	<i>Eire/Northern Ireland</i>
Dublin, St Patrick's	Dublin, St Patrick's
Total: 1	Total: 1
<b>GRAND TOTAL: 11</b>	<b>GRAND TOTAL: 11</b>

**CATEGORY THREE (Detail)**

2003 Survey	2007 Survey
<i>England</i>	<i>England</i>
Birmingham	Arundel (RC)
Blackburn	Birmingham
Bradford	Blackburn
Bristol	Bradford
Chester	Brentwood (RC)
Coventry	Bristol
Derby	Chelmsford
Exeter	Chester
Grimsby, St James Church	Clifton (RC)
Hexham Abbey	Coventry
Leeds (RC)	Derby
Leicester	Ely
Manchester	Exeter
Northampton (RC)	Gloucester
Norwich	Grimsby, St James
Peterborough	Guildford
Ripon	Hexham Abbey
Rochester	Lancaster (RC)
St Albans	Leeds Parish Church
St Edmondsbury	Leeds (RC)
Salford (RC)	Leicester
Salisbury	Lincoln
Sheffield	Liverpool
Southwark	Manchester
Wakefield	Middlesbrough (RC)
Wells	Newcastle (RC)
York	Northampton (RC)
	Norwich
	Norwich (RC)
	Nottingham (RC)
	Oxford, Worcester College
	Peterborough
	Plymouth (RC)
	Portsmouth
	Ripon
	Rochester
	Salford (RC)
	St Albans
	St Edmondsbury
	Salisbury
	Sheffield
	Southwark
	Souhwark (RC)
	Southwell
	Wakefield
	Wells
	Worcester
	York
Total: 27	Total: 48

<i><b>Wales</b></i>		<i><b>Wales</b></i>	
Brecon		Cardiff (RC)	
Llandaff			
St Asaph			
St Davids			
	Total: 4		Total: 1
<i><b>Scotland</b></i>		<i><b>Scotland</b></i>	
Dundee		Aberdeen	
Edinburgh		Aberdeen (RC)	
Edinburgh (RC)		Cumbræ	
Glasgow		Dundee	
Oban		Edinburgh	
Perth		Edinburgh (RC)	
		Glasgow	
		Glasgow (RC)	
		Oban	
		Oban (RC)	
		Perth	
	Total: 6		Total: 11
<i><b>Eire/Northern Ireland</b></i>		<i><b>Eire/Northern Ireland</b></i>	
Belfast		Belfast	
Cork		Cork	
Dublin, Christchurch		Downpatrick	
Downpatrick		Dublin, Christchurch	
Killaloe		Killaloe	
Limerick		Limerick	
	Total: 6		Total: 6
	<b>GRAND TOTAL: 43</b>		<b>GRAND TOTAL: 66</b>