

# Pitch-perfect abbey choir leads a moving memorial

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**It was the choir's first day back after the summer vacation and choirmaster Huw Williams expected they'd be a few short.**

There were also six new boys in Bath Abbey's choir on Sunday so tunefulness was likely to be an issue.

He needn't have worried. For the Queen's memorial service on Sunday at 3.30pm the huge swell of the choir's sound filled the cavernous space of the abbey church, combining the emotion of the occasion with the abbey at its best.

One choirboy's family was sitting directly behind the mayor's pew, including parents, grandparents and younger sister.

"Make sure you get the third boy from the left," his grandmother instructed the *Bath Chronicle's* photographer.

Every member of the choir was present – well, in a lifetime you don't get to sing at that many memorial services for your monarch – and they were perfectly in tune, even the six beginners.

Unusually the main doors of the abbey were opened and the mayor Rob Appleyard with the mayoress, council chair Shaun Stephenson-McGall and other dignitaries from B&NES Council processed to the front row of the nave.

The service was moving. All the personal feelings that accompany the words of *Abide With Me* seemed to be doubled by the extraordinary tone of Huw Williams' choir and the richness of Bath Abbey's organ.

Something about the acoustics of the abbey caught up the whole congregation and brought tears to people's eyes.

After the prayers for the country and the new King, the service



Choirmaster of Bath Abbey Huw Williams, standing, leads the music of the memorial service for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as Rev Canon Guy Bridgewater, Rector of the Abbey, seated, watches on; below, council chairman Shaun Stephenson-McGall, right, and Mayor Rob Appleyard among the civic party at the memorial service



ended with *The Day Thou Gavest Lord Is Ended*. Another weepy one, and naturally the national anthem, the first time in their lifetime that many had sung it in that form.

Standing under the majesty of Bath Abbey's organ with the power of that phenomenal instrument and the richness of Huw Williams' extraordinary choir flowing all around, the roof of Bath Abbey might have lifted up a quarter of an inch above its rafters as the congregation sang God Save the King for Bath and for the nation.

## Ex-MP recalls Queen's 'warmth and empathy'

A former MP for Bath got to know first-hand the Queen's warmth and sense of humour – and discovered that Elizabeth II was a keen user of Wikipedia.

Don Foster, now known as Lord Foster of Bath, was the city's member of parliament for 23 years.

From 2013 to 2015, he served as "Comptroller of the Household," a position which involved accompanying the Queen while carrying a white "staff of office".

Lord Foster recalled that during a state opening of parliament, one of the page boys fainted. The young man was mortified but proceedings continued and later the MP returned behind the Queen's carriage to Buckingham Palace where around 30 people gathered for a reception.

The Queen entered the gathering, spotted the page who had been unwell at the House of Lords and made her way straight to him through the crowd. Lord Foster said she reassured and comforted the page boy for over ten minutes, not only using her legendary sense



Former Bath MP Lord Foster of Bath

Picture: Paul Gillis

of humour to diffuse the situation, but telling him that he hadn't let the side down, and he could just get on with things without feeling ashamed.

"It was a lovely, lovely occasion showing her complete warmth and empathy," said Lord Foster.

On another occasion at the opening of the London Olympics, Lord Foster was in the royal box for the opening ceremony.

"Suddenly I realised that somebody had squeezed into the group with a drink and had joined in the conversation. It was the Queen. A lovely person. Warm. She could slip into any conversation without any ceremony."

When his position as Comptroller of the Household ended after the 2015 election, Lord Foster had to return his staff of office – a ceremonial stick assembled from two pieces with a screw fitting like a snooker queue.

Traditionally it would be broken in two at the end of his assignment and handed to the Queen but nowadays they are merely unscrewed.

"It's fascinating this business of breaking the stick in two," remarked the monarch after the service. "Why is that, I wonder?"

Lord Foster explained the tradition, which fascinated the Queen.

"And how did you discover that," she asked.

"I found it on Wikipedia, Ma'am," replied the MP.

"Oh Wikipedia, isn't it wonderful?" replied the Queen. "I learn so much on Wikipedia."

## Comment

By Cllr Kevin Guy, leader of Bath and North East Somerset Council



People from Bath and North East Somerset have been joining our nation in mourning, following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. A period of national mourning for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is under way, which will continue until the end of the day of the state funeral.

The chair of the council, Councillor Shaun Stephenson-McGall, on behalf of the council and the people of Bath and North East Somerset, has expressed his deepest sympathy to the royal family.

Her Majesty visited our area on a number of occasions and was much admired by people from across our communities.

As well as a being an exemplar of dignified, selfless public service, we must remember that, at heart, HM Queen Elizabeth II was a much-loved wife, mother, grandmother and great-

grandmother. It is with the royal family that our thoughts lie at this time.

We have made arrangements for floral tributes to be left at Parade Gardens in Bath, Keynsham Memorial Gardens, at the Hollies Garden, Midsomer Norton and at Haycombe Cemetery. Bath Abbey has been open for quiet reflection at the heart of our city and I would like to thank the abbey for their invaluable help and support at this time.

When the sad news came through of the death of Her Majesty, it was at the start of a meeting of the council's cabinet, and we suspended the meeting with immediate effect. During the period of national mourning, as a mark of respect the council is pausing council events, including community engagement activity and council meetings. Many national and local

events have also been cancelled or postponed. The council will continue to run its services although many of our staff are involved in helping with local arrangements, and my thanks go to them. There may also be some changes to service availability on the day of the state funeral.

I would like to thank everyone who has signed the books of condolence that the council established in the Guildhall, and in Keynsham and Midsomer Norton libraries. These will remain open until the day after the state funeral, which will truly mark the passing of an era.

Council flags have been flying at half mast. They were raised on Proclamation Day, and on the day following Proclamation Day were returned to half-mast.

I was particularly moved by the Local

Proclamation, which was made on the steps of the Guildhall. This reaffirmed the links between the sovereign and our local communities.

Despite modern communication methods such as social media, this allowed us to come together locally and reflect on the moment in our nation's history when the reign of our longest-serving monarch came to an end and our new sovereign succeeded.

As readers may be aware, I served in the Royal Navy. Readers may not know, however, that the Royal Navy is the only armed service where no oath of allegiance to the sovereign is required. This is because the loyalty of naval officers to the sovereign is taken for granted. This is and remains unwaveringly the case for myself.

God save the King.