

THE WELLS 1995 INITIATIVE

In many cathedrals there is a choir that sings services when the Cathedral Choir is away or, in some cases, sings an evening service on Sundays when the Cathedral Choir is no longer on duty. These choirs are named differently in the various cathedrals they serve but a general term would be "Cathedral Voluntary Choirs". Some voluntary choirs are of long standing, Chester, with a foundation around 1800, claiming to be the oldest, with several having celebrated their centenary. Others including Wells and Guildford were formed in the 1980s. However all tended to work in isolation and it was doubtful if anyone had a record of how many cathedral voluntary choirs there were or how they operated. Lynne Browning, Vice-Chairman of Wells Cathedral Voluntary Choir, thought it would be interesting to find out.

The Survey

A questionnaire was sent to the 42 Anglican cathedrals in England, 6 in Wales and to St Mary's, Edinburgh. One question enquiring about possible interest in an association of cathedral voluntary choirs received a positive reply from most voluntary choirs.

Voluntary Choirs Open Meeting

Interested choirs were invited to send representatives to an exploratory meeting in Wells on 6 July 1996. Members from the voluntary choirs serving Derby, Exeter, Guildford, Rochester, Southwell and Truro attended. There was general enthusiasm for the initiative and the **Association of Cathedral Voluntary Choirs** was formed with eighteen voluntary choirs joining during the first year.

THE ASSOCIATION OF CATHEDRAL VOLUNTARY CHOIRS

The main objects are:

To arrange events on a national or regional basis, the form of which would be at the discretion of the host choir

To share or exchange services between individual choirs

To provide a channel for the exchange of information and the discussion of mutually relevant matters.

It is also hoped that the Association will help provide a wider platform for modern liturgical music, specialist training and a network for directors, organists and singers on the move or requiring assistance.

Nationwide events are held at intervals of between eighteen and twenty-one months. As geography makes it difficult to have a committee of representatives from different choirs, the Association is run by one choir at a time. In addition to planning, financing and organizing a main event, the host choir will handle the administration of the Association during the period running up to it. It is also hoped that member choirs will arrange and invite "neighbours" to regional events.

The inaugural event was held in Wells Cathedral on Saturday 26 April 1997 under the direction of Dudley Holroyd. Over 170 singers from the choirs at Derby, Exeter, Guildford, Peterborough, Truro, Worcester and Wells sang Evensong and gave a concert. *Rejoice in the Lamb* (Britten), *Blest Pair of Sirens* (Parry) and the *Te Deum* as set by both Haydn and Stanford were the principal works sung under the baton of Wells CVC director, Dudley Holroyd and Exeter Cathedral VC director, Paul Morgan. Individual choirs sang four shorter pieces.