

## RSCM Annual Choirs' Festival

The Festival was held this year at Dorchester Abbey on 8 October. The Director was to have been Paul Hale, only just retired as Rector Chori of Southwell Minster. Unfortunately, he was rushed into hospital a few days earlier so, at extremely short notice and with no change to the Order of Service, Peter Smith, Chairman of RSCM Oxfordshire and for many years Assistant Director of Music at Magdalen College School, Oxford, assumed the responsibility. Needless to say, for those of us who know Peter, the result was an outstanding success. He was helped by the superb musicianship of Peter Holder, Sub-organist at St. Paul's Cathedral and sometime Organ Scholar at Southwell. The Revd John Paton, Precentor of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, led the service and the Preacher was the Revd Canon Adrian Daffern, Team Rector, Benefice of Blenheim and himself a former Precentor of Coventry Cathedral.

The theme of Canon Daffern's sermon was silence – *Be still, and know that I am God* – with organ illustration of the opening bars of Bach's Toccata in D minor and Beethoven's 5th Symphony. It is the silences (or rests) which make for the dramatic effect and which help to make those works so memorable. The big Bs (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms of the sermon) were matched in the music of the service by a Bullock introit, a Brewer setting of the evening canticles and a mammoth anthem by Bairstow, all three giants of 20th century English church music. But we could not be without some magnificent Bach in the closing voluntary, *the Prelude in E flat*, which Peter Holder played to conclude a fine occasion.

Nearly all members of the Choir of All Saints' Church participated, one of 20 church choirs represented at the Festival with the most southerly from California and the most northerly from the Wykeham benefice based around Sibford Gower. Janet Low is to be congratulated on and thanked for her thorough organisation of the Festival.