

Leipzig Birmingham Cathedral Choir tour October 2015

### 1. The Adventure begins!

As our 52 brave explorers checked in at the airport, they knew there was no going back.

Five of these were in the charge of their chaperone (nicknamed His Majesty). After they had survived security, they all set out on the flight. Several books and a phone were all that many of them had to survive on. After more security in Germany the group was free to embark on the final flight until they landed in Leipzig.

The first big task after the coach journey was to sort out who had which bed. This proved to be easier for some. Many ran into the room and sorted it out by who sat on which bed first.

### 2. Thomaskirche

After the first night, three of our heroes had their hunger satiated by the ample food at the breakfast buffet. Our 52 voyagers were separated because half of them had filled up a tram and the others were left behind. The courageous leaders safely led the stragglers to the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas's Church) where they would sing. The Thomaskirche was the church where Bach was the organist for nearly 30 years! Two practices and one lunch were enjoyed until the big moment. The first performance on the tour began... it was thrilling although somewhat nerve-racking. The amazing acoustics were startling to our choir as they have recently become used to echoes being dampened by scaffolding at Birmingham Cathedral. The acoustics especially enhanced the Bairstow Anthem called 'Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence'. After the first few pieces the choristers settled down and found that the hour and a bit seemed to last a much shorter period than Sunday evensong! The 650 people they performed to had queued up for the concert 45 minutes, and some people were turned away because the church was full.

### 3. Thomaskirche again

Sunday was to be the last day of formal choral activities. The Choristers sang a truly beautiful piece called 'If ye love me' by Thomas Tallis. They also sang the hymn by Bach, 'Ach Mein Gott Himmel Sieh Derein' that contained many complicated German words. The morning service contained a good opportunity for those that had a disturbed night to sleep as possibly the longest sermon ever took place there-what's more, in German!

### 4. Naumburg

After the service, they were free to roam in the hotel until they went to Naumburg Cathedral. People used this opportunity in different ways. Possible activities included, chatting, reading, sleeping, watching a film about Colditz, playing cards

etc. The clock was ticking away minutes like seconds, and the 2 or 3-hour break seemed to only take 20 – 30 minutes. Still, an hour coach journey was an opportunity seized by those in possession of a DS (which is an electronic device that you can play games on).

Many of the choristers were pleased as the Naumburg concert had the Hallelujah Chorus on the schedule! A quick tour around the site revealed many interesting facts about it.

The concert was raising money for refugees and in the audience was some people that had come from Afghanistan and, because people are not allowed to sing there, they had never heard singing and were blown away by the experience! Conceivably, the most challenging thing that the choristers had to do on the whole trip was to eat the whole of the main course at a nearby restaurant. It consisted of lots of pork in the form of steaks and dumplings. This challenge, many of them failed dismally.

### **5. Off to prison**

As the title suggests, the travelling people got put inside the four walls of Colditz. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war Colditz was used camp for unco-operative soldiers who had a habit of being good escape artists. The guide told some entertaining stories of escape attempts and devices used to help them escape, such as a puppet and a glider fixed together with porridge! As a group, the tourists all enjoyed the visit very much.

### **6. The Final Day.**

Sadly, Tuesday was the final day of the tour. This day, however, was the day of the Bach museum, something that many had been anticipating for a while. The Bach museum contained several original manuscripts of his pieces! There was an exhibition of his organ with all of the stops and pedals and an exhibition of Baroque instruments. Such as the Bassono Grosso (A bassoon), the theorbo (A type of Baroque guitar) and the lute (Similar to the theorbo but smaller). There were several computers with the full works of Bach to search through at leisure and listen to via headphones which definitely made it a massive highlight for most.

The final experience was a delicious lunch at the Panorama Tower restaurant, 29 floors up! The group sang former Leipzig resident Felix Mendelssohn's Kyrie Eleison much to the enjoyment of our Leipzig hosts. Thanks to the Birmingham city council for arranging this as Birmingham and Leipzig are twinned.

The 52 adventurers then made their way back to the airport. The five heroes were very tired but thrilled by their exploits in Leipzig.

Thanks a lot to 'His Majesty' for giving them a right royal time!

Christopher C (aged 11)