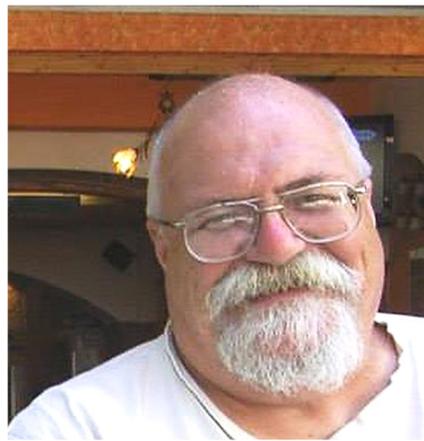


# I Heard a Great Voice

Dedicated to the memory of our dear friend and quire member

Christopher Bullough  
5<sup>th</sup> September 1947 to 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020

άνηρ άγαθός και φιλόσοφος  
a gentleman and a scholar



Front cover detail from "The Last Judgement" stained glass window by  
Edward Burne-Jones, Birmingham Cathedral

## Introduction

The members of Immanuel's Ground were deeply shocked and saddened to learn that Chris had passed away so suddenly and unexpectedly. Some of us had been singing with him just a few days before and he seemed so well and full of life that it was hard to accept what had happened. It was made even more difficult by the fact that it coincided with the beginning of the first Covid lockdown. We couldn't do any of the things people usually do in these circumstances. We couldn't come together to share our grief, to comfort each other with our memories, or mourn at Chris's funeral. We were left with a surreal emptiness and what we did not know at the time, is that it would be more than a year later before we were to meet each other in person again. Very early on we had the idea of collecting our memories of Chris together, to share with each other, and to record the huge contribution Chris had made to the quire during his time with us. Popular with everyone, Chris had forged some close friendships and we all felt his loss. In tribute to his friendship, his great musical ability, and wonderful singing voice, we have published this book which includes many of Chris's known favourite pieces and others which we feel sure he would appreciate.

### Stockport to Birmingham via Greece

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1947 began the life of a man who would fill the world with his love of music, the classics, and real ale.

Christopher Bullough was a much loved only child. His mother taught piano and Chris inherited her love of music, becoming a choir boy and taking part in various musical



performances at school. He was the first person in his family to attend university but never lost sight of his working class roots and his birth culture. Chris was proud of his Stockport heritage and was a loyal supporter of Stockport County FC throughout his life.

Chris's love of all things Greek began at the age of 16 when his parents, with help from his Auntie Gertrude, scraped together the money for him to go on a school trip. It was an eye opener for him

and it could be argued that this trip shaped his life. He fell in love with the Greek language and way of life and, in particular, the influence Ancient Greece had in the development of modern languages and cultures.

And so it was that in 1966, this down to earth young lad from Stockport arrived in Birmingham to study classics at Birmingham University. After an initial period of homesickness, Chris settled down and enjoyed his time as a student. He was popular and hospitable and many of the people he met during this time became lifelong friends.

Alongside his fascination with Ancient Greece, Chris harboured a love of music, in particular for singing, an interest that defined him throughout his life. Joining the Royal School of Church Music in 1965, Chris made friends with another young man, Jeffrey Skidmore. They discovered that they had much in common and a wonderful friendship developed. Jeff says that Chris was an inspirational character, with the appearance of being very down to earth but with the ability to surprise people with his well-considered take on things. The two of them set out to found their own choir, and Chris chose the name. Ex Cathedra was born, and it soon became a leading British choir. There were many adventures during this time including trips across Europe to perform concerts. Chris drove the minibus to Lausanne for the 1992 Olympics where the choir performed on Lake Geneva for the Birmingham Olympic delegates. In that time, Chris and Jeffrey became close, with Jeffrey describing him as his oldest and dearest friend. Chris continued to sing with his friends in Ex Cathedra for 25 years.

Numerous trips were made to Greece over the years, some more memorable than others. While at university, Chris and some friends drove their Trojan bus across Europe stopping off to explore Italy before making the final drive down to Greece. Much fun was had on the expedition despite the breakdown of the bus en route. Later on, Crete became a particular favourite, and in 2016 Chris realised a long held ambition of spending a whole summer over there. Some of us were privileged to visit him and experience Chris's delight at being able to share his favourite archaeological sites, not to mention the local bars and restaurants!



Chris loved his adopted city of Birmingham and became a well-known face around Stirchley, where he lived. He was a regular at the Union Club on Pershore Road, and then after its closure he became a partial lease owner of the Highbury pub. He was a lover of real ale and so supported his local micro-pub, The Wildcat Tap, not just with his custom but also by investing in their new premises. Anyone who attended a Stirchley Neighbourhood Forum meeting will remember Chris as the best heckler there. No one escaped a challenge from him on activities

that were to do with the development of the Stirchley area, whether it was a council member or a representative of Tesco.

Chris spent most of his working life in Cadbury's IT department (latterly ITNET) from where he was eventually made redundant. By his own acknowledgement, this was a low point for him emotionally; at around the same time, one of his oldest and closest friends had died, he was no longer singing with Ex Cathedra, and his beloved daughter, Flo, was now grown up and living in London. There was a void in his life, waiting to be filled...

## Enter Immanuel's Ground

As long ago as 1996, the name of Christopher Bullough could be found in the West Gallery Music Association's directory of members, but it was not until 3 November 2007, that he appeared in the flesh at St Mary's Church, Moseley, at the first ever *Sing Birmingham*. He had decided to respond to a blanket invitation we had sent to members of the WGMA whose names appeared in their directory, but whose faces we had never seen. Although we didn't know it, the invitation could not have arrived at a more opportune moment for Chris. He liked what we sang that day, and enjoyed the quirky nature of the members of the quire. He immediately joined Immanuel's Ground and, in many ways, the rest is history.

Chris was with us for well over twelve years, a pillar and leader of the bass line (although he did like to escape to the alto line from time to time), active committee member, secretary, and, eventually, our chairman. Never missing practice unless on his travels to Crete or other foreign climes, he has been of the greatest help and guidance over the years. He brought to us his experience in singing with Ex Cathedra, and his love of music – especially of the Baroque period. He had superb organisational abilities, evinced in the quire's Grand Day Out of 2017, (see 'Canals, Galleries and Dinosaurs' WGMA Newsletter Summer 2017) which was his greatest triumph. Chris was an optimist by nature, with general cheerfulness, bonhomie, and an ability to respond to everyone.



We shall miss Chris in so many ways. The glee with which he brandished a replica of Joseph Bonaparte's captured silver chamber-pot at the conclusion of the first half of *The Path to Waterloo* performance in 2015 still makes us smile. Perhaps most of all, we shall miss his Old Mother Christmas in the IGQ Mummers' Play.

Chris had a great sense of humour; he was extremely witty and incredibly sharp, entertaining all those around him with his great knowledge. He was also generous and kind, while his integrity was never brought into question. A true socialist, he disliked pomposity and privilege, and lived his life accordingly. He was a dear friend, always willing to help, and certainly willing to aim at the bigger picture for

Immanuel's Ground. Where he has gone, he will have taken with him a love of the beauty of music, our sort of music. He left us at the worst possible time, and we mourn his loss.

*Tha mas leípei* - We will miss him.

## Memories of Chris

Many IGQ members offered their own personal memories of Chris, some of which have a particular relevance to the music chosen for this book while others are completely random but capture the essence of Chris. These are recounted below.

### Tittering Amongst the Basses

Even when trying out a new piece, Chris rarely made mistakes but if he occasionally missed an entry, Ian Meddoms reports hearing a sotto voce 'bugger' in his left ear. Ian says, "Of course, Chris would come in perfectly at the next entry by which time I would still be tittering and mess it up completely. I think this sums Chris up; he combined a true appreciation of and desire for excellence but wasn't precious about it. He had a conviction that musical participation is the birth right of all and not exclusive to those privileged with gifts or education. *Go Feeble Tyrant* gave us a lot of amusement!"

### The Legend of Old Mother Christmas

When IGQ added a mummers' play to Christmas concerts, there is a myth that Chris was press-ganged into taking the part of Old Mother Christmas. He adopted a penetrating falsetto voice but jovially protested at having to cross dress, assuring us that it was 'only at weekends.' When performing it on home ground at Northgate Church, Warwick, the minister's vestry was designated for the exclusive use of Old Mother Christmas as it had a door opening directly onto the performance space, ideal for a quick change and entrance. On the night of the performance, some wag altered the sign on the door to 'Transvestry'. Chris feigned hurt but that twinkle was still in his eye!



However, according to Sheila Macadam, Chris needed no persuasion. The origins of a supposed reluctance lay perhaps in a myth which Chris himself might have created. No, he jumped at the chance, delighted to reprise a performance as a female character, 50 years after playing Rose Maybud in 1960 in a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Ruddigore' while at William Hulme's Grammar School for Boys, Manchester.

Old Mother Christmas notwithstanding, Sheila wanted to offer all the men of the quire the opportunity to take part in the play, and eventually she found enough individual



characters to keep everybody

happy. It was at the IGQ Annual Away Day in January 2010 that Sheila finally produced what was the foundation of IGQ Mummers' Play. The run-through was a riot, the ad-libbing and the inability of the cast to adhere to the script had us in fits, some of us laughed till we cried.

Preparations for the play continued during 2010; the script was quite basic and not demanding for the men of learning which comprised the male half of Immanuel's Ground. Costumes were researched, and historically Old Father - or in this case - *Mother* Christmas seemed to be dressed in green, rather than the red we have come to know over the past hundred years or so. Clothing Chris appropriately was a challenge. He was not a slim man, but eventually Sheila found, online, a green kaftan, with sizes up to a 72 inch bust, which she thought might do the job. Chris was not averse to wearing a kaftan, but bearing in mind at least some of his quire costume would have to be worn underneath, a measuring session was required in order to get the right size. One late October practice, during the tea break, and armed with a tape measure, Sheila attempted to circumnavigate his chest. Her arms weren't long enough, and she had to employ the services of Alison Biddle and they tackled the job together. They discovered Chris had a 52 inch chest, which was a surprise to

him. Thus reassured that she had the right dimensions, Sheila ordered the kaftan with a 72 inch bust. It fitted like a glove, and Chris revelled in the part, complete with a blonde wig with plaits, a straw bonnet and matching handbag. Star of the show, every time, bless him!

## The Nora Batty Look

Many of the men of IGQ wear knee breeches in their attempt to meet the correct standard of historical costume and are therefore often challenged in the hosiery department. Most use plain long white or cream football socks but a few, like Chris, had difficulty keeping them from partially slipping down giving rise to comments about looking like Nora Batty. Someone suggested that the solution for Chris would be to buy some plain white tights from a dance shop.

Chris duly ordered a pair of XXL and brought them to the parish church in Leamington Spa for a concert. At dressing time, he unpacked them for the first time, only to find that the bag was incorrectly labelled with his ample adult size, the contents being for a smallish child. This set us off into uncontrollable mirth and throughout the performance we dared not make eye contact. Fortunately, he had also brought his football socks, and thus Nora appeared with IGQ one more time!

## Late Night Drinking & Debating Society

Chris was, in every way, a 'larger than life' character, yet kind, generous and gentle with it, such that he will never be forgotten by anyone who knew him. A group of 'groundlings' used to meet in Warwick's historic inn 'The Punch Bowl' after rehearsal at Northgate Methodist Church. By the nature of things, the instrumentalists were nearly always the last to arrive so it usually fell to Chris to get the drinks in, which, in his generous nature, he unfailingly and happily did. Enjoyable, and usually enlightening, conversation would follow with many of us going home not long before midnight, to look up some obscure topic we had been discussing during the evening. Chris was immensely knowledgeable on all sorts of subjects – especially if it involved Greek, Latin or IT. You could not have wished for any better company, whether at rehearsals or in the pub afterwards. We enjoyed many wonderful evenings with Chris. What larks, Pip!

## Birmingham Cathedral Choir

Gill Cole, one of our altos, told us how she first met Chris in 1969, when he sang as a counter tenor in Birmingham Cathedral Choir alongside her late husband. After a few years they lost touch, until she attended Sing



Birmingham in 2013, and turned round to see who was the loud and accurate bass sitting

behind her. They soon recognised each other. After that, Gill joined Immanuel's Ground, and Chris regularly gave her lifts to rehearsals, concerts, committee meetings and various other gatherings.

Chris often mentioned his days in the cathedral choir; apart from the singing, he was especially fond of the beautiful Burne-Jones stained glass windows and if you were ever lucky enough to spend time with him in Birmingham city centre, he would always take the opportunity to visit the cathedral and show you these magnificent works of art.

### **Befriending New Members**

According to Chris, he was a very shy person which came as a surprise to many people because he always seemed so outgoing and gregarious. However, over the years Chris had developed a coping strategy and he was always sensitive to the difficulties other people sometimes felt in social situations. One of our newest members recalls how when she first joined the quire, she was so nervous that she didn't think she would be able to play her instrument but then, from across the room she spotted Chris smiling encouragingly at her. As chairman, Chris very quickly put her at her ease and made her feel very welcome. Still today, whenever she plays at home, she can hear the quire in her head, and more specifically, she can hear Chris's voice loud and clear, filling her with confidence and reassurance.

### **Ex Cathedra Sings West Gallery**

Chris organised several Christmas outings to Birmingham. This would typically take the form of dinner in 'The Old Joint Stock' followed by the annual Ex Cathedra carol concert by candlelight at St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter, with Chris generously providing mulled wine and mince pies in the interval. As early as May, he had booked the entire front row of the rear gallery. One year, after the applause for the final item had died away, the musical director, Jeffrey Skidmore, thanked the audience and pointed out IGQ as being responsible for supplying the encore piece - 'While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night' to the tune *Pentonville*. It was a historic moment for IGQ, and probably for Ex Cathedra too!

It is opportune here to thank Jeffrey Skidmore for letting IGQ have one of his own favourite pieces for the quire to sing - *Dulce Jesús mío* - although we sing it with our usual west gallery enthusiasm, rather than the dulcet silvered tones of Ex Cathedra!

### **Last Memories**

Ian Meddoms recalls the last time he saw Chris, just before Easter 2020. They had enjoyed such a lovely Saturday morning at a rehearsal in Birmingham for the congregational chorale for Ex Cathedra's Good Friday performance of the St John Passion. This event was usually very well attended but owing to the threat of a new disease, coronavirus, very few came and there were only two basses. Chris was in such good form both in terms of singing voice and the sense of humour for which we all loved him so much. A lady alto, seated next to Chris and Ian, was having to sing tenor and wanted to know how they came to be doing this and who did they usually sing with? Chris gave her such an enthusiastic appreciation of West Gallery and IGQ.

## Into a World Unknown

Jeffrey Skidmore, one of Chris's oldest friends and the MD of Chris's beloved Ex Cathedra, told us how he and his wife Janet played *Egypt* as a piano duet while he tried to imitate Christopher's inimitable, distinctive folk-baritone, 'And must my trembling spirit fly, into a world unknown?' This, a setting of Charles Wesley's hymn to a tune by James Leach, the quire had sung and played individually in isolation following Covid lockdown, exactly at noon on 28th March 2020, three days after Chris's death. Jeffrey had planned that the next Ex Cathedra season, with its opening concert scheduled for October 2020, would be called 'A New World', initially intended as celebration of Mayflower 1620, but instead he decided to change the title to 'Into a World Unknown' as a tribute to Chris. Unfortunately, because of the continuing pandemic, this concert was postponed and eventually took place in May 2021.



### GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO

A Canon of Four in One.

LORD, Tune my Heart within my Breast,  
And Frame it to thy Holy Will;  
And let thy Spirit within me rest,  
Which may my Soul with Comfort fill.

Mr. WILLIAM. TANS'UR.

[born 1706 at Dunchurch in Warwickshire]

## Acknowledgments

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Birmingham Cathedral for detail from *The Last Judgement* by Edward Burne-Jones.

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All members of IGQ for their memories of Chris.



**With grateful thanks to Gill Cole.**

**1943 to 2021**