

Memories of Beth Morris



From Margaret and Brian Bainbridge in Leighton Buzzard

Margaret and I were very disappointed to miss Beth Morris's funeral due to the adverse weather and road conditions. We joined Holy Cross choir at about the same time as Beth, nearly 40 years ago so we saw her very much as a fixture in church life. We found her very welcoming and helpful although she did get upset about a number of issues which concerned her. She had very definite ideas about how things should be done and didn't like it when people disagreed with her. She gave however long term and loyal support to several choir leaders and organists, and her role as choir librarian was crucial. Her interest in singing extended back to her roots in Stanmore and we were privileged to join her and Stanmore Choral Society for a residential singing weekend in Sussex which she had organised. No doubt many people in Holy Cross will be aware of Beth's legendary organisational ability as her involvement included Church Fairs, CRB checks, the 60s club, church collections, the Lunch Club, the Tea Club and of course Choir Librarian. Before retirement she had been an active primary school teacher and talked about her involvement with deprived children especially Romany families. She was an active supporter of "Save the Children" charity and was instrumental in raising funds with us via, for example, Christmas Carol Singing. Her mobility problems made life difficult for her but she was a reliable figure at many event and activities, getting there initially by walking, then using a bus and finally in her mobility vehicle.

Although we left Holy Cross four years ago, we cannot imagine Holy Cross without Beth. She was a dependable character and a long term friend. Life in the Church will not be the same without her and we shall really miss our reunions with her.

From Peter Hounsell

When Beth died, we started to make a list of all the things she did for and around Holy Cross Church. It was a long list. I worked with Beth in a number of these activities: the Parochial Church Council, the Worship Committee, two lots of Trustees, and as a signatory of the 60 Club – she would give me cheques to sign in her left-handed cheque book. However, I want to remember her as a devoted and long-serving member of the choir at Holy Cross, and not just for what she did, but for her personal qualities.

Beth was already a member of the choir when I joined; I can't remember now exactly when that was, but we sang together for a quarter of a century or more. For many years I sat next to Beth in church and at rehearsal; as far as Beth was concerned I had two advantages – I wasn't a tenor and I wasn't a soprano, so I less likely to put her off.

Beth had a mellow alto voice and she was an accomplished and experienced singer, but she revealed from time to time an underlying insecurity when a piece wouldn't go right for her. Something of a perfectionist she hated not to be able to perform a piece well, and would regularly practise at home.

Beth was thoroughly reliable, she scarcely missed a service or a practice, and I expect that her colleagues in Stanmore Choral found the same. Whenever we were arranging church committee meetings Beth would always remind us that she was not available on Monday evenings, their rehearsal night.

Beth's devotion to the choir was remarkable and in recent years we tried to accommodate the problems she had with mobility, and with her eyesight. As well as singing Beth looked after the choir's music. I don't think she expected public praise for this work, and many other similar things she did for the church, but she became irritated when these time-consuming tasks were taken for granted. She had high standards and expected it in others; she was most likely to become upset – and we can all remember outbursts of annoyance - when she felt that other people were not giving what they were doing their full attention and energy.

I last saw Beth at the evening service on Advent Sunday, a couple of days before she died. She didn't seem at all well and it was clearly a struggle for her to be there and to perform the music. But she was there, and the devotion to this choir and the music of this church over such a long period is an example to us all. Perhaps it is a blessing that infirmity didn't force her to give up the choir, and she was able continue singing to the end of her life. At the Christmas Carol Service and at Midnight Mass it seemed very strange to be singing in the choir without her. I will continue to miss her for a long time to come.

Funeral sermon by Neil Richardson Monday 20th December, 2010 Holy Cross Church, 2pm

Beth was so embedded in Holy Cross Church that when she died, it was at first quite difficult to tease out all the various strands of her activity.

I sat down with several people in the days after her death and we found such a broad group of things she was involved in, including:

1. Holy Cross 60 Club organiser
2. Direct Giving Recorder (very confidential info)
3. The co-ordinator of envelopes for those who contribute by envelopes
4. Minute Taker and Financial administrator for the Betham Trust
5. Minute Taker and Financial administrator for the Greenford Parochial Charity
6. CRB checker for Holy Cross
7. Craft market organiser
8. Lunch Club financial administrator
9. Electoral Roll Officer
10. Parish List information holder
11. Choir librarian
12. RSCM contact
13. She was the "Gift Aid" administrator for Holy Cross Church.
14. She held Church keys and was a responsible person if access was needed when the Wardens were absent.



This may not be an exhaustive list, and this does not take into account Beth's other activities with the Stanmore Choral Society and other organizations. What this long list of responsibilities says to me is that in Beth Morris, we had found a person with a huge sense of commitment and a deep sense of loyalty. Such qualities are rare and as it now happens, perhaps we didn't value and cherish Beth as much as we should have done?

There were reasons for that, of course! She could be prickly, defensive and quick to see criticism, even when none was intended, but however many times she felt a sense of annoyance, she soon returned cheerfully, getting on with the business and it has to be said, producing reports, information, financial statements and everything we would expect with accuracy, in good time, and with clarity.

Such qualities are hard to find and we will struggle to manage our affairs as Holy Cross Church until we find people to do all the things which Beth did.

One of the things I noticed about Beth was the manner in which she handled her recent illnesses. She spoke to some people about them, of course, but by and large, she turned up to everything at Holy Cross on time, and did her bit without complaining. She didn't want to burden me or others with too much of the details of her sickness and I regarded that as a strength. She took it on the chin and pressed on with life as normal.

She often spoke to me about how her inability to climb stairs was hampering her contribution to the Holy Cross Choir, so we moved the choir down to the ground floor in the Old Church, but in the latter months, even this was providing her with serious difficulties. But she did her best, her painful best, and the last time I saw Beth alive as at our Advent Carol Service on 28th November as she struggled to get off her chair and then struggled to walk up the step on the way out. It was very painful for Beth, obviously, and very painful to watch, but Beth didn't like offers of help, remaining independently minded to the end.

She did her best, and that was good enough.

One of the features of the list of Beth's activities is how many of them are there in support of others. Beth had a heart of gold and wanted to use her skills to make a difference, though such things as offering Christmas money for the elderly for extra fuel; in such things as reviewing the needs of Edward Betham School for a little extra money when appropriate; in such things as protecting children from potential harm; and in ensuring that those who gave money to the church had the best deal from the Tax-man. These are things which make a difference and Beth was fully part of these aspects of our Church's life.

We will miss Beth Morris. In her 60 years of life, she made a significant impact, and as we bid her farewell today, we are deeply conscious that we have lost a very important part of our church.

Beth in her sister Catherine's words

As an older sister, I probably did not often see Beth in the same way that others have. As a teenager to me, she was a little sister who was sometimes a nuisance, but as we became adults, finding our way in the professional world outside the family and when I saw her in her social groups, I saw a very different person. Beth was someone who showed determination, tenacity, loyalty, and had high expectations of herself.

Beth was born on a beautiful May Sunday, a quick and easy birth at home. She was then seriously ill while still a small baby, and had to be quarantined in hospital for several weeks. The quarantine period may go some way to explain why Beth was sometimes seen as a little abrupt and, with strangers, painfully shy. She always adored smaller children and showed remarkable gentleness and patience with them, relating more easily than I to our much younger cousins, which was probably why she was so successful in her chosen teaching career.

Beth did not grow into a person who could easily be made to do things against her will. One could never describe her as obstinate, however a quiet determination lay below the surface of her apparently easy-going nature. It was a waste of time and patience to tell her to hurry.

From a small child she closely related to the family cat and throughout her life, she always had at least one of her own. She once told me, that she never went looking for a cat, they found her. To Beth, her cat was a member of her family and was personified. At Christmas and birthdays, we all received a card and a present from whichever cat was in residence at the time.

She has always been somebody who would do her utmost to oblige in anything, but she would not be ordered or pushed about by anybody. Beth did not easily show her feelings, but the quiet determination was there, and although Beth found it difficult sometimes to express her thanks adequately, she was ever conscious of the generosity of others'. Recently, I noticed that she had begun to present me with little gifts, seeking out something that might be in order to express her thanks in her own special way.

In my experience Beth's frankness has always been her trade mark and nothing appeared to escape her notice. Until she went to school Beth did not catch colds. Apparently, one day she was given a box of handkerchiefs by an Aunt. She unwrapped the parcel, looked at it, wrapped it up again, and returned it, saying, "Could you give them to another little girl, because I never have a dirty nose". She was only three and a half years old at the time, and whilst the embarrassment for our mother was great she realised the truth of the statement.

Her sense of justice was very great, her sympathy usually with the other person. As a small child she guarded my rights more fiercely than her own.

Beth loved numbers. Her fascination with them began as a small child when as a family we played board games or the card game Canasta. She was able to add up columns of numbers at speed and seldom made a mistake. Our mother sometimes wondered if she might have been a good accountant. This numeric skill was something which underpinned much of the work she did in the numerous committees with which she was involved throughout her life. She so enjoyed her role within the Church Lunch Club.

To people Beth knew well she showed no shyness, she was an eager, demonstrative and relaxed person, who enjoyed the occasion.

As a family, with a father who told endless jokes, a sense of humour was inherent and necessary, and Beth joined in to the full extent. However Beth had no love of the ridiculous and clowns left her cold.

Her love of music has involved her in choral and church choir groups, throughout much of her life. Once involved she was 100% committed, she had no conception of half measures. From the Stanmore Choral Society and the Holy Cross church choir she gained long term friends and a great deal of joy.



Beth had avoided the internet and email facility for some time, but once she was able to "surf", she became an avid user. For Beth, her physical difficulties and mobility limitations were a strain to be endured and accepted, although her "scooter" presented a freedom which she had seemed to lose.

Beth never demanded a great deal of the world's goods. She was contented with what she had and never expressed a wish for much else.

In a sense, Beth was two people: someone who was shy with strangers and with whom she found it difficult to engage, and someone, who in a group of people who shared her interest and where she felt secure, a vital person contributing her skills to the full.

Beth Morris by Christeen George

I'm not sure how long I have known Beth Morris. I was first aware of her when I joined Holy Cross Choir around 1994. However in those days the choir was much bigger and I sat on the 'naughty row' with Carolyn Bennison so I wasn't too aware of Beth. I got to know Beth a bit better when I joined the Ealing Choral Society in 2002. I used to bring in leaflets advertising the concerts to choir practice and Beth would often comment on the programme. However for several years Ealing Choral Society and Beth's Stanmore Choral Society as well as meeting on the same evening also tended to select the same dates for their concerts.



Beth sat at the back as Stanmore Choral Society sing

A few years ago Ealing Choral Society changed their seasonal calendar and now the two sets of concerts no longer clashed. So I often went to Beth's concerts with the Stanmore Choral Society (often accompanied by Violet Alexander) and Beth and Violet often came to my Ealing Choral Society concerts. In July 2010 I left Ealing Choral Society and joined Uxbridge Choral Society. Beth took a real interest in my new choir and also seemed to know quite a lot about it – even putting me right about the name of the church where we rehearsed. On November 20th Beth and I went to Ealing Choral Society's concert. The choir sang Fauré's Requiem in the first half and Lux Aeterna by Lauridsen. Beth looked very unwell and I was conscious that in both halves of the programme the choir was singing a requiem. I drove Beth home and she was quieter than usual. I have often given Beth lifts home and she usually was quite chatty on the way back – in fact sometimes we would sit outside of her house for ages. But that night Beth didn't say much and she found it hard to get out of the car.

November 27th was the Stanmore Choral Society concert and they sang Haydn's Creation. Unfortunately I was unable to go to this concert but I asked Beth the next day how it went and it was obvious that she had really enjoyed singing in the concert. Although I saw Beth again that evening, I didn't speak to her again. I will always remember our final conversation as it was really light-hearted and happy.

Beth didn't always seem to be a happy person and her steadily decreasing mobility was a strain for her. However her music-making was a real source of fulfilment and happiness for her. Beth had innumerable roles at Holy Cross and so will naturally be greatly missed. I will be sorry not to hear her sing again as she had a beautiful voice and I will miss all our musical conversations.

My tribute to Beth by May Jeffries

I have known Beth for many years and she and her various talents will be sorely missed. She was an excellent cake maker and I recall how beautifully she iced my son's wedding cake although this was quite sometime ago. On one occasion when I counted the money with her which had been collected for Christian Aid and which took place in her bungalow, I remarked on the inspired tapestries she had done which were displayed on the walls of her room and which gave me the impetus to start cross stitching again. It is well known how much she was involved in Holy Cross, so many jobs she carried out some of which almost went unnoticed but which she enjoyed doing. Thank you for your inspiration Beth our mutual repartee and your sweet singing voice. Your untimely death has made us miss you so much.

Postscript by Neil

When I first met Catherine Ward, Beth's sister, to discuss the funeral arrangements, she told me that she had already chosen hymns for the funeral. I immediately thought, I hope that she has chosen "When morning gilds the skies" and I am pleased to say that I wasn't disappointed. It was an obvious choice for someone who loved her choirs and of whom it truly could be said:



Edward Caswall
1814-1878

My tongue shall never tire
Of chanting with the choir,
 May Jesus Christ be praised;
The fairest graces spring
In hearts that ever sing,
 May Jesus Christ be praised.



Joseph Barnby
1838-1895

The words were translated by Fr. Edward Caswall, an Anglican priest who joined Rome in 1847. The words are from the German hymn *Beim frühen Morgenlicht* published in the *Katholiches Gesangbuch* of 1828. Caswall's translation into English is really good. We sang the hymn to a tune called *Laudes Domini*, written especially for these words by Joseph Barnby.

The absence of Beth's ever-present persona has now left us all feeling bereaved. I expect to see her arriving in her buggy at any minute, on Sundays and Wednesdays, for Friday Choir practice at the rectory, and for numerous meetings and events. I think that we can all learn something from what happened. The fact is, as we all know, life is fragile and it can break at any time. We need to value the present moment and make the most of every opportunity that God sends our way, opportunities to talk, share ideas, learn from each other and be part of something bigger than our little selves. Life will always triumph, thank God.

