Michael Kibblewhite 1944-2023

It is with great sadness that we heard of the death of Michael Kibblewhite, Musical Director of Hertfordshire Chorus from 1977 to 2000. His superb all-round musicianship and passion inspired all those who were fortunate enough to sing with him.

Following his family's musical tradition (he was a great-grandson of Sir John Stainer and Sir Frederick Bridge), Michael Kibblewhite became a chorister at Magdalen College, Oxford, played the bassoon in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, and subsequently won a Music Scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge where he studied under Raymond Leppard and Sir David Willcocks.

He was later made a Choral Exhibitioner with choral conducting his specialty.

Firmly established as one of the leading conductors of choral music in the south-east, he received much acclaim for his performances of English music. If you sing in a choir in the East of England you will probably encounter singers who have sung in a choir he founded or directed.

He was Musical Director of Hatfield Philharmonic Chorus (later to become Hertfordshire Chorus), East London Chorus, Harlow Chorus, Harlow Boy's Choir, Cantate youth choir, Kings Lynn Festival Chorus, and Cambridge Chorale. Chamber choir Coro 94 is drawn from Cantate alumni.

His love of Italy led to numerous choir tours, singing in venues ranging from St Mark's Venice and the Duomo in Florence to small churches in remote villages in the Tuscan hills. He also took the chorus to Yugoslavia, Belgium, France, Austria and Israel. In 1995, as part of English Festival Voices, the Chorus opened the Saarland Music Festival performing Vaughan William's *Sea Symphony* with the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck.

Memorable concerts included performances of Arthur Bliss *Morning Heroes*, later recorded for Cala Records, Berlioz *Damnation of Faust*, Monteverdi *Vespers of 1610*, JS Bach *St Matthew* and *St John Passions* and *Mass in B minor*, Elgar *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony*, Verdi *Requiem* and many more, both home and abroad.

In the words of David Temple: *Though I only met Michael two or three times, and then only briefly, I was very much aware of his work for many years before I took over from him at Hertfordshire Chorus in 2000. In the 1980s and '90s there were very few 'non central London' choirs which leapt out to me at the time as extraordinary and Michael was director of all of those - Hertfordshire Chorus, Harlow Chorus and East London Chorus. His programme planning was bold and innovative and I remember his recording of Bliss's* Morning Heroes *and also the commission by Edward Gregson.*

Michael inspired great loyalty and he is still talked about at Hertfordshire Chorus 23 years later, partly because of his work with the chorus but also the wonderful legacy he achieved with his young choirs at Cantate.

His achievements have been so important that, even though he is no longer with us in body, his spirit and achievements live on.