

## GLOUCESTER CHORAL SOCIETY TOUR 5<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2012



Nearly 80 of us spent the inside of six days immediately after the Jubilee weekend taking the main choral items from our Jubilee concert to audiences in France (Metz) and Germany (Trier). Both cities are twinned with Gloucester and the organisers of twinning events there were our principal – and invariably helpful – contacts.

About 50 of us were singers, including three very welcome members of the Bristol Choral Society. There was also Peter King, our guest organist from Bath Abbey. The other members of the party were good companions to all, who gave out programmes at the two concerts and guided the wayward to where they would hear us best. Adrian Partington led the music as enjoyably as ever (though he burdened himself with about 5 other scores to learn during the coach journeys). The plans devised by our committee generally came off. To Adrian, Peter & the organising committee – and our ever-patient coach driver - we owe real thanks. It was a good trip for all.



**Nigel's holiday briefing!**

But it was not without incident. Indeed some of us irreverent hands (cf the hymn “hands and voices”) on the upper deck of the bus (the committee and Adrian occupying the wardroom on the lower deck) suggested that, as a party, we had undergone the tests faced by the contestants in the radio programme “Just a Minute.” We could not seem to avoid *hesitation*. On one occasion we left our starting point in the coach only to return twice because a key person had forgotten a key item – the Chairman’s speech in its German version and the concert programmes. On another occasion, because of faulty direction-finding, the driver had second thoughts and turned the coach in a village cul-de-sac near Verdun, bringing down some telephone wires in the process. And hesitation over other routes caused us to spend nearly an hour getting out of the Trier conurbation.

Many of the driver’s problems with directions were caused by significant *deviation* – lots of them on the roads at critical points. We had thought that British road engineers were masters at leading vehicles astray, but we discovered that they have nothing on the engineers in and around Metz & Trier. Several more u-turns in cul-de-sacs and at cross-roads were made in response to endless “deviations.”



**Rehearsing in Trier Cathedral**



**After the Trier concert, Elvin plays 'The girl from Ipanema' Good Jobim!**

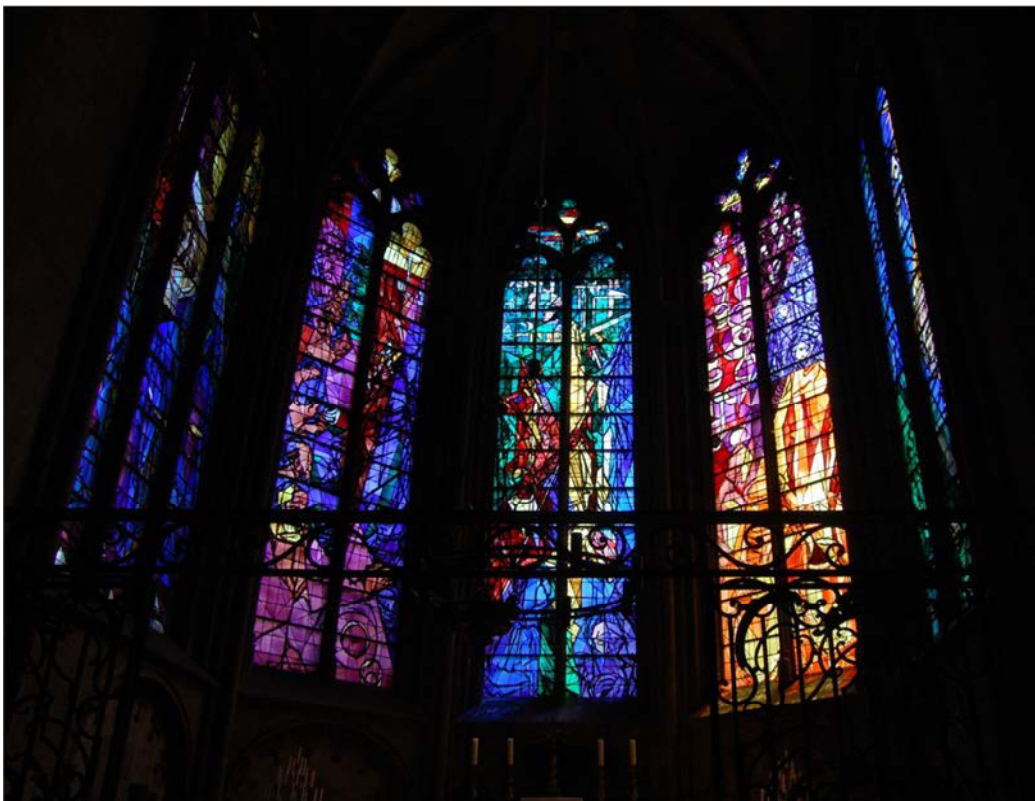
As to *duplication* we sang our concert twice, once in Trier Cathedral on the Thursday and then in Metz Cathedral on the Saturday. That was no bad thing: the second concert was more assured, even though the nave in Metz is enormously high - with Amiens, the second highest (after Beauvais) nave in France. But our choral sound travelled and we managed to make the audience sit up with our "Vivats" in "I was glad...". In Trier the height problem was not one for us, but for the organist. The organ and its integral loft were many metres above the nave, stuck, we know not how, to the upper wall of its north side, with the



organist probably some 40 or 50 metres from the choir and its conductor. It required the organist not to look too far over the edge and to play **ahead** of Adrian's beat all the time. In Metz the problem was that the organ was horizontally very distant. Peter King battled manfully with each beast and came out on top.

Before the Trier concert we sang Solemn Vespers for the Feast of Corpus Christi with the clergy and congregation in Trier Cathedral. "Clergy" included 5 or 6 Bishops, various Canons and sundry acolytes. They and the congregation would not have heard our contribution to the plainchant, but did hear us sing by ourselves Psalm 116 to an Anglican chant; Franck's *Panis Angelicus*; and Stanford's *Magnificat in C*. After that there was a more-than-decent audience to hear our concert. As Adrian pointed out, it was nearly a century since anyone had wished to "save the King" (via "Zadok the Priest") in a German cathedral

In Metz a much bigger audience turned up to hear us, drummed up partly by the Dean of the Cathedral who intervened at various times during our rehearsal to advertise our wares. A large and enthusiastic number of people nearly filled the giant nave. However, unlike the citizens of Trier, they did not stand for the Hallelujah Chorus, in spite of the fine upright example set by two of our good companions, in their duty nobly isolated in the audience. (Of course the example set by George II was more likely to be heeded in Germany).



**Jacques Villon stained glass windows in Metz Cathedral**

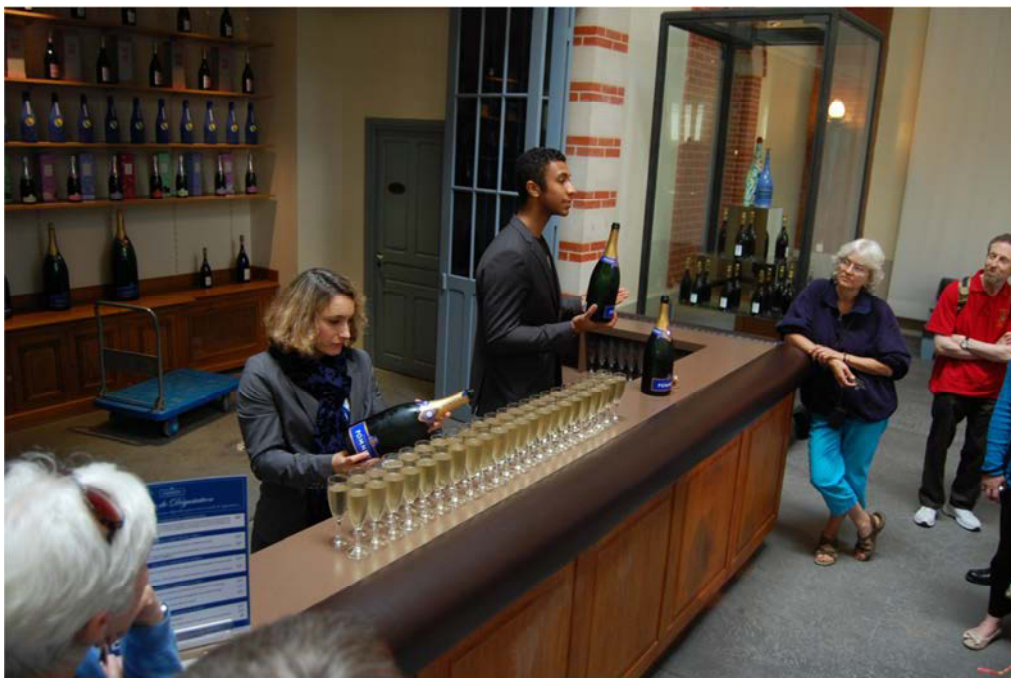
Music was the purpose of the tour. But for all there was a good deal of holiday about it. On the Wednesday we had a free day in Metz, which turned out to be a lovely city, criss-crossed by the river Moselle and easily accessible from our modern Ibis hotel on the river bank opposite the Cathedral. Trier had even more Roman remains than Metz, including the

famous Roman gateway, the Porta Nigra, and was equally well furnished with exciting-looking shops. Unfortunately for some of our number, they were all closed for the Corpus Christi holiday. The third great cathedral that we saw was that of Reims.

Sniffing the champagne air of Reims a party went also to the Pommery champagne cellars.



**Coach at Pommery Champagne House**



**If you didn't come to Pommery this is what you missed!**

In Metz in particular we spread around the many good restaurants: all came back satisfied with their choice. Supplementary eats were readily found in the Metz cake shops and the traditional French covered market. (After all we had to keep up our energy for singing.)



Lying under the celebration of the Jubilee and its music and underlying too the beauties of cathedral architecture and green and pleasant countryside was a much more harrowing theme, that of war. That largely open area of France and Germany has seen the fire and smoke and sheer destruction of two World Wars zig-zag to and fro across it. Nowhere was that more evident in and around Verdun, whose museum we visited, and in the 1917 exhibition in the Pompidou Centre Metz.



**Verdun Memorial Museum**

Miraculously the three cathedrals survived, though Reims had to be largely rebuilt after WW1. By travelling by car and coach from Gloucester via the Dover Channel ferry to our two destinations, we relied on the benefits of over 60 years of peace in Europe. No wonder in both concerts we gave of our best to Wesley's "Thou wilt keep him perfect peace"!



Without hesitation or deviation, we could all, duplicating each other, say that a good time was had by all.