

THE NORTH COUNTRY CHORUS ON TOUR

(England and Wales, June-July 1982)

One Singer's Reflections

By Linda C. McGoldrick

After two years of singing benefit concerts, hosting fabulous fund-raisers, eating baked bean suppers and Easter cakes, and groping through "Gerontius", the North Country Chorus was eager to embark for England.

On Monday, June 21, members of the Chorus arrived at the British Airways Terminal at Logan Airport in Boston around 7 p.m. By 9 o'clock all 405 passengers, including the 60 singers and 20 camp followers, were settled on board the sleek red-blue-and-silver 747. During the six-hour flight to London, spirits were high and jovial conversations began to cement new friendships among the group.

As we departed, the setting sun was an enormous red globe poised over Boston's skyline. But three hours later we met the same sun rising in a pink glow on the eastern horizon. The paradox of jet-age travel! In similar telescopic-time, we ate breakfast three hours after the crew had finished serving us dinner. The chances to sleep or even doze were minimal.

Tuesday, June 22: Rain and fog (what else did we expect?) greeted us at Heathrow Airport and was to stay with us most of the time for ten days. We clambered onto the two bright orange-yellow Happiway Spencer buses and met our drivers, George and Archie. In heavy rains we hurtled on the "wrong" side of the road to Oxford and only glimpsed the colleges of that University through shimmering curtains of silver. Onward to Banbury Cross where we saw the famous spire with the cross on top at the town's central crossroad. We all singsonged the nursery rhyme:

"Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross (cock horse = rocking horse)
To see a fine lady upon a white horse.
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes.
She shall have music wherever she goes."

So, too, the North Country Chorus.

Groggy from lack of sleep, we arrived in Stratford-on-Avon to be distributed in the rain to a series of B&B's (bed-and-breakfast inns) on Alcester Road. Some of us drew Brook House as our billet, run by Rosemary Banner, a hard-working "slip of a girl" with long, dark hair. Like giggling schoolgirls, five of us crammed into one room: Caroline Gale, Beulah Foster, Selenda Grow, Amy Jarrell, and me.

Between showers we walked past cottages and gardens festooned with lupine, roses, and foxglove to see Anne Hathaway's Cottage. Built in the 1400's and owned by 11 generations of Hathaways, the famous home of Shakespeare's

wife is crowned with a thatched roof which weighs 11 tons and is replaced every 25 years by a vanishing breed of craftsmen. Wire holds down the thatch to protect it from birds. The very rustic home has attractive bouquets of fresh flowers in every room -- a colorful contrast to the stark "black and white" surroundings.

We learned the origin of the expression: "to turn the tables." A thick, polished, wooden table top rests unattached to the trestle legs supporting it. The Hathaways would show the shiny side for company. When the family ate dinner, they would "turn the table" to expose the rougher side on which supper was then laid.

Wednesday, June 23: Coventry

The dark spire and hulking walls of the Old Cathedral loom through cloud banks as we weave through the city streets of Coventry in our buses. The geometric panels of the New Cathedral zoom skyward on a right angle to the ruins. The glass screen of the West Wall that divides the new from the old shimmers, creating an unusual illusion of angels moving, flying, soaring, marching to music amidst a parade of saints.

One's first inclination is to rush up the broad steps to the interior of the ruined cathedral. The impression is one of great tragedy. I could sense the horror of the sights people saw the morning after the bombing in 1940. Jagged walls, remnants of the brown sandstone pillars, and broken stained glass windows stand in mute testimony to the sorrow the survivors must have felt.

We learned that the reason the Old Cathedral collapsed, leaving the walls and spire intact, was due to the combination of four factors:

1. The Germans used fire bombs, not explosives.
2. Steel beams had been constructed beneath the roof during the Victorian period.
3. These overheated in the fire burning on the roof and false ceiling. They buckled.
4. As the massive debris fell on the sandstone pillars, they could not bear the weight and thus toppled over, destroying all within the church.

The following article written upon our return gives an impression of the effect of our performance that day of Fauré's "Requiem" in the New Cathedral, St. Michael's.

Requiem for a cathedral and memories of war

By LINDA MCGOLDRICK

Coventry Cathedral was the poignant setting for the first performance of the North Country Chorus on its recent concert tour of England. On the steps leading to the altar of the resurrected St. Michael's Cathedral, looking out into the immense, modern church, the 60 singers from New Hampshire and Vermont sang the seven pieces of the "Requiem" by Gabriel Faure.

Sung in Latin, the "Requiem" begins, "Grant them rest eternal." This concert was a gift from New England to England in memory of past bravery and sacrifice for the free world.

All who sang and heard the moving words reflected upon the sad story of Coventry and upon the people who had died there during World War II. On November 14, 1940, the 14th-century cathedral was destroyed by fire bombs when Coventry suffered the longest air raid of any British city during the war. Because the German bombers dropped incendiaries and not high explosives, the graceful spire and outer walls remain intact.

Out of the rubble a workman pulled two blackened oak beams and fashioned a grotesque cross. Before singing, the North Country Chorus members had stood in awe before this Charred Cross, silhouetted starkly

against windows barren of stained glass in the sanctuary of the ruined cathedral. Behind the Charred Cross are the simple words, "Father Forgiven." The message of resurrection through sacrifice pierces each visitor.

With deep feeling the Chorus could chant, "Have mercy, Lord. O save them from utter darkness."

The day after the bombing, which devastated all of Coventry, the surviving parishioners vowed to build anew. But 16 years passed before the new cathedral began to rise from the ashes. Many American towns sent funds to build the new cathedral; gifts poured in from nations around the

globe; and German youth came across the English Channel to assist the British in the construction. Appropriately, the theme of Coventry Cathedral is Christian reconciliation.

With haunting pathos Peggy Barrett Alt, noted music teacher in Littleton schools, sang the lyrical soprano solo, "Pie Jesu ... Blessed Jesus, grant them forever Thy eternal rest." The baritone voice of Robert Mead of Haverhill soared to the heights of the cathedral in his solo, "Unto Thee we offer our praise and prayer. Lord, accept our sacrifice for those whom we remember this day."

After the War a tragic irony about Coventry was

revealed. Early in November 1940, British intelligence and Prime Minister Churchill had deciphered Germany's secret code and knew in advance that Coventry would be bombed. Not wanting the Nazi enemy to know they had cracked the code, they decided they could not warn Coventry to evacuate. With sincerity the tenors of the North Country Chorus pleaded, "Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant them eternal rest."

A gigantic glass screen called the West Window links the ruined Coventry Cathedral with the new. An artist etched the glass with huge, trumpeting angels and stalwart saints. As it performed, the Chorus could look out to

the ruins and be in full sympathy with Coventry people who had met courageously their "Dies illa, dies irae ... day of trouble, day of wrath." How significant that the ruins were left to serve as a constant reminder of man's inhumanity to man.

Yet from the bitterness sprang hope. The new Coventry Cathedral and its mission of reconciliation among all people testify to the conquering nobility of mankind. This hopeful message was echoed in the spirited conclusion sung by the North Country Chorus under the talented director of Mary Rowe, "Luceat eis ... May Thy light perpetual shine upon them!"

After our performance we traveled to see Kenilworth Castle. Our tour guide "by popular demand" Ralph Aldrich informs us that a Castle is fortified for protection; a Palace is an unfortified home of the aristocracy. We cannot enter the Castle but splash about admiring the outer walls through swirls of fog. One can almost imagine the arrival of Queen Elizabeth I with her entourage to visit, as she often did, her favorite courtier, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, who expanded the Castle in the 16th century.

From there we toured Warwick Castle, by its own admission: "The finest medieval castle in all England." We climbed Guy's Tower; we visited the State Apartments and the Private Apartments; we thrilled vicariously to the weekend visit from H.R.H. Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, all portrayed with wax works by Madame Tussaud, the new owner of the Castle. In 1978 the Earl of Warwick sold the Castle because of the enormous burden of its upkeep, which was forcing him to sell off the Van Dykes and other national treasures. The Castle was begun in 915 A.D. but has been owned by the Earls of Warwick since William I, the Norman Conqueror, created the first Earl to thank him for his services in 1066 and all that. I'm impressed -- by the sense of history, royalty and pageantry -- until I duck out of a pelting downpour to explore the dungeon and torture chamber! Who can ever forget cringing in fear at the sight of the "oubliette" reserved for the worst enemies of the Earls?

Back to Stratford to attend "Much Ado About Nothing," truly a masterpiece of comedy and romance. Benedick, played by Derek Jacobi, and Beatrice, played by Sinead Cusack, are devastatingly attractive and adroit in their verbal parries and their peppery entanglements. The stage effects mesmerize us, too.

Thursday, June 24: A long day on the bus was delightfully relieved by a quick stop in York where we ran through crowded streets to see the Shambles (quaint Tudor black and white shops with leaning gables and crooked timbers bedecked with baskets of flowers) and the Minster, the biggest medieval cathedral in Northern Europe. Sadly, our short stay did not permit us to do justice to viewing its glorious stained glass windows.

We enjoyed watching out the windows of the buses as the green, rolling hills of Yorkshire streamed by; and we recalled James Herriot's works (All Things Bright and Beautiful, etc.) as we passed near Thirsk, his home town.

Our destination is Stockton-on-Tees, where we spend two days becoming acquainted with host families as we prepare for a joint concert with the Stockton Vocal Union on Friday, June 25.

The following page capsulizes our experience in Stockton, but space doesn't permit a full description of our visit on Friday to Hadrian's Wall and Durham City and Cathedral.

Americans, Britons share international language of music

By LINDA McGOLDRICK

People eager to hear a sampling of the American music which the North Country Chorus sang at four of its seven concerts in Great Britain are urged to remember Sunday, Aug. 22. On that date at 4 p.m., the North Country Chorus under the direction of Mary Rowe will perform a retrospective concert at the Congregational Church in Wells River, Vt.

To members of the Chorus, the "once more with feeling" performance will be tinged with nostalgia. For the encores of "Frostiana" selections, Negro spirituals, and folk songs will bring back memories of the concerts performed in Stockton-on-Tees, Manchester and Hereford, England, in late June.

To the people of those very different English

communities the North Country Chorus gave rousing renditions of sincere Americana, both in music and in friendship. Through music, the international language, the stereotyped image of the ugly American — brash, affluent, materialistic — was dispelled. When the British hosts welcomed this group of Americans into their homes for overnight stays, the personal exchanges soon dispersed any misconceptions about the typical Briton — formal, cool, reserved, "stiff upper lip, old chap." Mankind's similarities are greater than the differences.

To grasp an idea of how royally the English entertained the American choristers, picture this scene.

The two, enormous yellow-orange coaches

called "Happiway Spencers" pull up to the church in Stockton-on-Tees in northern England. Out pour 80 Americans. The Stockton Vocal Union members are waiting in the rain to greet the visitors and to escort them into the parish hall for a "high tea." High tea is a fancy buffet supper with a lavish spread of sausage rolls, quiches, cucumber sandwiches and vegetable concoctions.

The British hosts scurry about pouring tea (of course) and coffee, "black or white?" ("White turns out to be "regular" with lots of milk.) Then one is urged to sample the "sweets" — English trifle, raspberry pies, strawberries and double cream, elegant cakes, fruit compotes and pastries of all descriptions.

That's the informal welcome.

The formal welcome to Stockton awaits just down the main street at the City Hall. The North Country Chorus is to be greeted by the Lord Mayor. "Greeted by a mayor?", we think cynically, as we trudge along dampened sidewalks. The Britons' sense of ceremony is such that a grand occasion awaits the rustics of northern America.

We shake hands, one by one, in a grand salon with the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress. Both are bedecked with jeweled "chains of office" befitting their elected but largely honorific station. An attendant offers an elegant glass of sherry. In another ornate chamber we must sign the guest book. Please take these pamphlets about Stockton describing its heraldic shield and its history. Here's a souvenir, a book of matches, be-

cause Stockton's local hero, Dr. John Walker, invented "friction lights" or "lucifers" in 1826. And, best of all, do put on this blue lapel button, claiming, "I've Met the Mayor!"

In the imposing Council Room the Lord Mayor gives a florid speech. The Lady Mayoress smiles benignly. President Wilber Eastman of Groton, Vt., responds with pleasing words and the gift of the book by Robert Frost. The members of the North Country Chorus feel like ambassadors indeed.

There follows a rehearsal in the church, designed in the 17th century by Sir Christopher Wren. Each choir practices the numbers it will sing at the concert the following evening. Then the choirs merge to prepare two joint pieces. The Stockton director Michael Pritchard launches into "The

Heavens are Telling" from Haydn's "Creation." Within the choral work the triple solos are sung by Peggy Barrett Alt, soprano; Ralph Aldrich, tenor, both of Littleton; and Robert Mead, baritone, of Haverhill. Mary Rowe directs the two choirs in the finale of Handel's "Messiah," "Worthy Is the Lamb."

Amid applause and smiles of mutual congratulations, the singers, now bonded by the shared experience of musical exchange, sally forth to individual homes. The hospitable Britons, like their North Country guests, come from all walks of life. One host is the daughter of

a coal miner who worked the mines for 50 years in neighboring Newcastle. Others are doctors, solicitors, and Scottish chiefs; school teachers, industrialists, musicians and pensioners.

All serve bountiful late-evening suppers and then "a proper English breakfast." Friendships blossom as profusely as grow the gorgeous gardens which beautify every English home, walkway, marketplace and park. Upon leave-taking, the hosts give bouquets of flowers or corsages of dewy, red roses as tokens of friendship. The North Country Chorus members present momentos of

maple syrup and maple sugar. Singing fills the air and arms wave tirelessly as the Happiway coaches depart.

Through such person-to-person exchange, greater understanding and mutual respect can develop across national boundaries. If more tourists would take advantage of the many opportunities to become acquainted with the native people of the country one is visiting, would not a permanent, international peace be possible? To this question the 60 members of the North Country Chorus would carol in four-part harmony a resounding "yes."

Saturday, June 26: On the stroke of 4 p.m. the two buses pulled up in front of the impressive Town Hall in Manchester. The bells were ringing loudly, seemingly to welcome the North Country Chorus. As we struggled to carry our suitcases up gracious spiral stone stairways and down columned halls, we admired the incredible architecture of the triangular Hall, built in the late 19th century in 13th century Gothic style. Our hosts, the Rotary Club of Manchester East, twinned to the Rotary Club of Wells River and Woodsville, generously treated us to supper in the ornate Banqueting Hall. The carved oak panels in the ceiling bear faces of the flaming sun in gold leaf.

Our performance was held in the equally ornate Great Hall. The Chorus stood on the stage. On the floor in front of us were arrayed the young members of the Spurley Hey Wind Band (a high school group). The audience filled the spacious hall, but most of us focused only on the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress, resplendent in their gold chains of office. The "Lady Mayor" never smiled and only applauded politely. We could tell she was bored and worked even harder to please her, but the contrast between our gentle pipings and the blasts from the brass section of the Wind Band must have caused the audience considerable puzzlement.

We gathered after the concert on the landing outside the Great Hall to meet our hosts for the next two nights. On the mosaic floor of the landing was a pattern of bees, the symbol of Manchester's industry. I noticed that garlands of white strands bordered the landing and cotton flowers formed a stylized decoration on the mosaic floors beyond. Of course! The cotton textile industry was the basis of Manchester's economy for years, and its example caused Manchester, New Hampshire, to be created as a textile center in New England.

Sunday, June 27: The national anthem of Wales begins: "The Land of my fathers so dear to my soul./ The land which the poet and minstrel extol." It is rare indeed to find a country which stresses the artistic before the political. But the Welsh love music... and that small nation is full of Methodist Churches founded by the hymn-singing brothers, John and Charles Wesley. In what seemed a futile effort to "carry coals to Newcastle," the North Country Chorus traveled to Llandudno to sing at the morning service of the parishioners of St. John's Methodist Church. "Llandudno" means "church of St. Tudno," showing the strong religious emphasis of the town, which is also a summer resort on the shores of the North Sea.

Irish
It was a magnificent experience to sing before an audience of 500 people who appreciated choral music so fully! The minister clothed in a gray monk's robe wove an excellent sermon around the text: "Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives," (Matthew 26:30). We sang our sacred numbers: "Almighty God" (W. James); "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" (Watts); and "The Last Words of David" (R. Thomson), along with choral amens. In the parish house at the excellent luncheon served by

the women of the Church, we sang our "Thank-you song," composed by Louis Lamoureux of Peacham, Vermont. Half way through the ditty, we realized to our horror that we had not changed the words: "in your fair England" to "Wales!" From the response of the minister and his Celtic flock, we shall never forget henceforth that Wales IS a country -- not a spare-part country for England!

Indeed, Wales is a country of proud traditions and mighty castles. We drove through dramatic mountain passes on the fringes of Snowdonia National Park. We visited Swallow Falls at Betws-y-Coed (we pronounced it "Betsy-coed") and enjoyed the hillsides of varying shades of green, dotted with white sheep. Skillful Archie drove our bus at breakneck speed through the green tunnels of foliage -- "the leafy places" -- which cover the narrow roads between villages and the clusters of picturesque stone cottages. We drove past, but unfortunately did not visit, Conwy Castle, built in the 13th century in the shape of a Welsh harp with walls 15 feet thick.

This blue-stockinged Puritan from New England was surprised to spend Sunday evening at a very crowded British pub, the Horse and Farrier, back in Manchester. With a "lager and lime" or a "pint", Peggy Alt and her host, John Teal, and I settled the problems of the Irish, the Welsh, the Scots, the Colonies, and the Falkland Islands in short order, until we could barely see each other through the clouds of cigarette smoke.

Monday, June 28: On this day in Hereford we sang two concerts. One was held in the afternoon for a delightful audience of schoolchildren, all dressed in tailored and tidy uniforms of bright colors with freshly scrubbed faces, eager to enjoy our program of popular American tunes. Tenor Robert Buckley and Director Mary Rowe both did an outstanding job of bridging the gap between the Chorus and the children with light, humorous descriptions of our music. In the evening we sang for a very small audience of adults, mostly composed of our hosts. But at this concert Peggy Barrett Alt and Robert Mead performed brilliantly several scenes from "Porgy and Bess."

Between the concerts we met our hosts in Hereford. A picturesque cottage surrounded by four flower gardens, miniature manicured lawns, and an abundant vegetable garden greeted Edie Ann Emery and me... along with its most precise but charming owners, Dr. and Mrs. Baker. The home is quaint but very well decorated with small prints on curtains and wall-paper. Everywhere are antiques -- furnishings, wall hangings, pictures, drawings. Mrs. Baker showed us her collection of "vinaigrettes" -- tiny silver boxes all fancily carved, bearing a small sponge inside. Women used to soak the sponge with a substance like smelling salts to carry with them in case they were beset by "the vapours." When I asked Mrs. Baker why modern women didn't experience "the vapours," she quickly replied, "Why! We don't have the time, do we?!"

On June 28th, the news broke that the Royal Baby, born on June 21st when we set out for England, the first-born son of the very popular Prince Charles and Princess Diana, has been named William of Wales. He is the second heir to the throne after his father, the Prince of Wales, and might some day be crowned William V.

Tuesday, June 29: As we careened down the Valley of the River Wye, along the border of Wales and past the ruins of Tintern Abbey, we heard the tales of the fortunate few who stayed with the Bulmers, owners of the Woodpecker Cider manufacturing firm. They were rightfully awed by Monnington Court, built in the 1100's, completed in 1230. The dining hall had formerly been the "Moot Hall," with cattle kept in it so their body warmth would radiate into other rooms. Here the guests were served dinner on a table 1000 years old. The ballroom of the Court had once been the main bedroom for all in the house: aristocrats, men and women, servants, and dogs alike. A 450-year-old day-bed built at the time of King George II was an example of the first mahogany in England.

Archie, our bus driver, was overwhelmed by his visit to Monnington Court. He exclaimed, "Why, they even have a little church right on the property near the house. Everyone buried there is related!"

We crossed over the wide Severn River on the Bristol Suspension Bridge and continued on through the scenic countryside which we've marveled at all around England and Wales. A panoply of colors parades through the fields -- all shades of green and gold, with wheat, hay and "rape seed" as crops, divided into squares by bright green hedgerows. Magenta fireweed, lavender foxglove, and purple thistles grow on the roadsides amidst white Queen Anne's lace and daisies. Every now and then wild poppies interrupt the green, like red exclamation points.

Bath Abbey is beautiful! The Perpendicular Gothic creates a lofty, spacious, light feeling. The exquisite fan vaulting is most unusual -- looks like delicate scallop shells all over high ceiling atop the fluted column. The effect is, of course, uplifting -- sending my thoughts soaring up to God in Heaven. The color of the stained glass windows (mostly blues and reds) is vivid; the patterns unbelievably lovely. However, it is difficult to study the stories without having a greater amount of time to concentrate on deciphering the illustrations. I was puzzled and amused slightly by the red and gold chandeliers, formerly designed for gas and adapted to electricity in 1979. They really looked more suitable to a Chinese pagoda!

All around Bath Abbey are buildings and walkways relating to the Roman Baths, and then the elegant Pump Room. I was unable to see those since we only were permitted an hour-and-a-half, but I was determined to return with Paul the next week for a more thorough visit.

We hurtled off through the sunny (at last!) countryside to Wells -- to see the Cathedral in 20 minutes! Ridiculous, but a necessary limitation. I preferred Bath Abbey to Wells, but I liked the quick jog out through the Cloisters to the peaceful grounds of the Bishop's Palace. In the placid, cool-looking moat around the Palace swim all kinds of ducks and swans. We tried finding the bell which the swans pull with their beaks to alert the keeper that they're hungry.

We paused briefly at Glastonbury Abbey -- in ruins, after passing the Tor (hill) where, legend says, Joseph of Arimathea buried the chalice after the Last Supper and then went on to convert Britain to Christianity.

Our group is showing signs of fatigue, and some small factionalism is forming. Everyone, including me, is prone to say at least once a day: "Why don't they... ?" or "Wouldn't it be better if they'd only... ?" I know we all respect the efforts of Bill Eastman, the epitome of patience extraordinaire, as our tireless tour leader. But there did seem to be some frustrating delays in getting everyone to his or her night's lodging. And there is a growing sense of imprisonment (frustration) and isolation as the two busloads careen through the green countryside or the towns.

First in Hereford, then in Exeter, the buses drove hither and yon, backed and filled, turned and jockeyed, depositing people and luggage at spots in a slow and tortuous manner. So far, I've been very lucky.

Tuesday evening, June 29, I stayed in a threesome at a B&B called Trees Mini-Hotel on York Road in Exeter. My roommates were Caroline Gale and Beulah Foster -- good sports! Edie Ann Emery was in an adjacent single. We strolled through Exeter, discovering that the main street, High Street, had been changed into a mall for shoppers. We found our way to a delightful alley on which The Ship Inn stood -- a Tudor "black-and-white" with hanging flower baskets. The Inn had been a favorite spot for Sir Francis Drake in the late 1500's! After a dinner of steak (with French mustard on the side -- delicious!) for me, and Plaice (white fish) for the others, we walked to the nearby Cathedral. At 10 p.m. the daylight was still bright, and darkness falls after 10:30! The Cathedral was locked but the organist was playing. Above the tower a half moon was rising, milky white against the blue sky. A white flag slashed by a bright red cross flew from the tower -- and as I looked upwards at this colorful sight, I noticed the gargoyles, funny faces of all descriptions, human and fanciful, leering down at me from the heights. I laughed to see their droll expressions -- and I thought of "The Demons' Chorus," the most challenging and ominous section of "The Dream of Gerontius" which we would be preparing to sing during our next four days in Harlow.

Wednesday, June 30: A partly sunny day greeted us as we emerged from Exeter to head toward Salisbury and Stonehenge. We jostled through small villages and neatly fielded countryside. In Wiltshire we observed on a grassy hillside across a broad hayfield a finely chiseled series of heraldic shields and emblems cut into the ground down to chalky rock. The sight was similar to the mammoth chalk horse we spied in North Yorkshire.

I remarked that this is nothing more than "respectable graffiti."

One hour-and-a-half was allotted "to do" Salisbury! The tall, graceful spire on the Cathedral soars 404 feet high. The Cathedral stands surrounded by a grassy lawn with noble trees everywhere.

Inside the Cathedral in the Morning Room is a copy of the Magna Carta, 1215 A.D., one of only four existing copies. Fifteen were made at Runnymede after King John was forced to put his seal on the original. For some reason the original and eleven copies have been lost. I was amazed by the length and specificness of the Barons' demands! Two basic ones were, of course, the right to a trial by one's peers and the right to receive justice for all. I was surprised to see some rights for widows spelled out, including the right for a widow to remain in her husband's home for forty days after his death! Naturally, it is impossible to read the Great Charter, as it is written in Latin with many abbreviations and no punctuation.

The Cloisters offered a haven for a quick "cheese-on-brown-bread (whole grain)". We remarked with admiration that the English take every opportunity to grow flowers in every spot possible. Pink geraniums, blue lobelia and white allyssum cascade down from spagnum-filled baskets.

On we hurried to Stonehenge where ornithologists Edie Ann Emery and Thelma White pointed out skylarks hovering high above the meadow, singing shrilly. Silently in the distance came modern-day skylarks -- giant ones; huge helicopters from a nearby RAF base. Their noise deafens us only after they pass within view of the ancient rocks. As we walk around the circle of monoliths, looming mysteriously against a darkening sky, we ponder why? How? Somehow the inability of mankind to figure out the answers chills me as much as the cold wind that comes up. I pull on a sweater and don the ubiquitous raincoat.

Finally, after another three-hour bus ride, we arrive in Harlow and are treated to a fine buffet supper by the members of the Harlow Chorus. Greetings among friends made when the Harlow Chorus visited Vermont and New Hampshire three years ago are glorious to see and hear! Edie Ann and I are hosted by Sue Powell, a very fine young woman who teaches English at a high school called Burnt Mill.

Thursday, July 1: Rain! We enjoyed a quick breakfast of coffee, toast, and Welsh jam with Sue, who then whisked us off to St. Mary's Church to have our rehearsal alone with Michael Kibblewhite. The Church was cold and clammy -- but while waiting outside in the graveyard, Edie Ann and I spied a song thrush, a house martin, and a spotted flycatcher. The martin resembles our barn swallow and one swooped into an alcove to her babies in a nest high over our heads. The singing went fairly well as we all became more secure with most parts of "The Dream of Gerontius".

We rode the buses again to go visit Hatfield House, the regal home of the Marquess and Marchioness of Salisbury. An early section of Old Hatfield House or Palace remains -- containing a large banquet hall. We learned that here Henry VIII had kept his three children -- Mary Tudor, Elizabeth, and Edward (VI) during their childhood. The first Robert Cecil (pronounced "Sessile" from an early Welsh surname) became Elizabeth's Lord Burleigh, her closest counselor for forty years. In gratitude, she gave him property near Hatfield. In later years his second son helped the Peaceful Succession of James VI of Scotland (son of Mary, Queen of Scots) who became James I. James did not care for Hatfield and preferred Cecil's home -- so he asked Cecil to swap! Cecil did -- and became Earl of Salisbury, too. Twelve generations of that family have lived at Hatfield and the latest still lives there now.

The building is in the shape of an "E", constructed to honor Queen Elizabeth even though it was rebuilt in Jacobean times. Most impressive! I thought the gracious tour guide (an elegant lady in her 50's dressed in a chic style with well-coiffed gray hair) performed most admirably and entertainingly.

We rehearsed again that night at Burnt Mill School in Harlow under Michael Kibblewhite's flamboyant direction. It was a superb experience, being able to sing under such an energetic, dynamic, but creative director and to be supported by another knowledgeable, strong, and skilled choir. Michael rightfully acknowledged Mary Rowe's thorough and accurate preparation of the North Country Chorus for the singing of "Gerontius" on July 4th.

Friday, July 2: London Town! By bus from 9:00 to 10:30 -- right through the City of London over Tower Bridge, back over London Bridge, to Westminster Bridge. Peggy, Caroline, and I struck out quickly to catch the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace. A glorious sunny day -- bright and cool so we could hurry along lovely St. James Park, see the red-and-black soldiers practising at the Barracks, and make our way into the crowd in front of the Palace. The sense of ceremony and pageantry which the English display at every opportunity is incredible! The band played, the pipers piped, and drummers rolled as the soldiers and horses paraded along the street and through the tall iron gates. All I could see then were the tall, black, bearskin hats bobbing along above dots of scarlet as the Guard changed.

We then hurried along to find a bank to change money. Now one dollar is worth 1.75 pounds sterling.

Back along Birdcage Walk we scurried to visit Westminster Abbey. It is an overwhelming place -- too much to absorb all at once. How different it seemed to have the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier so humbly decorated and unguarded at the front entrance of Westminster Abbey while the Americans have a year-round Honor Guard for their Unknown Soldiers. The British guard the Queen with pomp and ceremony -- the living. Americans honor their dead with a similar sensibility. Is there a message or a conclusion in that?

Westminster Abbey was most impressive to me because of the tombs of Queen Elizabeth I (and Mary Tudor buried beneath her) and of Mary, Queen of Scots. Since reading the excellent account of the latter's life by Antonia Fraser, I have been fascinated by the lives of those two remarkable queenly cousins. That Henry VIII should be so overly concerned about the Succession and have a daughter who would outrank him; that Elizabeth should have no issue for succession; that Elizabeth would be jealous of Mary Stuart regarding the potential for overthrow and accession; and that, in spite of her own tragic life, Mary should be the victor in terms of her descendants serving as English monarchs -- all of these facts are remarkable to me.

That evening The Harlow Chorus gave a party at the Spinney School. Lots of good food and fun, and a fine time to share in song.

Saturday, July 3: Sue served us a "proper" English breakfast before a thorough rehearsal began at a different Comprehensive School at 10 a.m. and carried through to 1 p.m. Sue kindly deposited me at the Harlow Town Railway Station and I braved the British Rail Service, the last day before its strike. I was on my way to meet Paul in London! Others in the North Country Chorus visited Cambridge or other places with their Harlow Hosts.

Sunday, July 4: The attached article sums up our Harlow experience and describes the culmination of our concert tour: singing "The Dream of Gerontius" by Sir Edward Elgar on the evening of the Fourth of July.

The next day the North Country Chorus said their farewells to British hosts and to each other as members either returned to America or travelled independently to other parts of Great Britain. However, all would agree that the tour together was an unforgettable experience -- one that created a lasting bond among our singers and a firm foundation of pride in our shared accomplishments.

Now, Bill! Now, Mary!
England is conquered. Europe beckons!

No July 4 fireworks for chorus; only music on tour of England

By LINDA MCGOLDRICK

Can you imagine the Fourth of July without picnics, parades, and fireworks? Without the sight of the Star-Spangled Banner or the sound of Yankee Doodle Dandy?

The North Country Chorus can. Members of the Chorus, who recently returned from a concert tour of Great Britain spent Independence Day in Harlow, England, performing for their British

hosts, of course, July 4 is just another day.

So the North Country Chorus culminated its two-week tour on July 4 in a day of intensive rehearsing with 150 singers in the Harlow Chorus, three London soloists and 60 members of the Alberini Orchestra.

That evening, before an audience of 750, the concert featured the dramatic oratorio, "The Dream of Gerontius." This musical story of an old man facing

death and his final judgment before God was composed by Sir Edward Elgar, a composer well-known in Britain but whose major fame in America is for his "Pomp and Circumstance."

For three previous days the North Country Chorus singers had lived with choristers from Harlow, had been treated to family meals and had worked in joint rehearsals. The Harlow hosts arranged for their American guests to

visit London, Hatfield House, and Cambridge University. Then they threw a gala party with elegant edibles and festive floral decorations. Here the British and Americans, people with a common heritage and a mutual love of music, tossed tuneful bouquets to each other, offering madrigals, folk songs, humorous and popular pieces.

In true British tradition, there were congratulatory speeches by the leaders of

both organizations and exchanges of gifts of appreciation. At each of the seven concerts performed by the North Country Chorus in England and Wales, President Wilbur Eastman of Groton, Vt., presented a commemorative book about "Robert Frost, A Tribute to the Source", by Hanover resident, David J. Bradley and photographer DeWitt Jones. At most of its concerts the North Country Chorus sang portions of

the "Froctiana" by Randall Thompson, including "The Road Not Taken."

In this "hands across the sea" tour by the North Country Chorus, music was the common denominator joining people of many nationalities. But for most of the 60 singers from New Hampshire and Vermont, the highlight of the journey was the uplifting presentation of "The Dream of Gerontius," under the energetic direction of Michael Kibble-

white of Harlow with the assistance of Mary Rowe, director of the North Country Chorus, from Wells River.

It seemed ironic, perhaps, that Americans spent the Fourth of July, that historic event which marked the separation of the colonies from Mother England, in a joint concert with descendants of King George's redcoats. Yet how truly symbolic and optimistic that Americans from New Hampshire and

Vermont, from New England, would cooperate in friendship with their English kin to produce a glorious statement about universal mankind.

