**St MM Stories**

**Choirmasters**

Doc Barlow’s stories about WW1 were rich, horrible, awesome and captivating. He used to talk about taking his greatcoat off in the mornings in the trenches and it would remain in shape "standing up" - frozen solid.

The Doc talked of answering his front door one evening (I think he lived in Droylsden). A drunken and bloodied man was leaning against the wall, demanding that the Doc should stitch up his wounds. The brass plate on the door said "Dr. W. A. Barlow", so he’d assumed it was a surgery. I gather he was difficult to dissuade - I’ve a vague feeling Mrs Barlow may have fixed him up.

Christmas we went to Alti Hospital and sang carols. I remember Doc had a portable organ / keyboard and it did not work. Loads of the >trebles flaked out 'cos of the heat. Or perhaps it was just me. Moray Donaldson won the competition for mince pie eating.

Doc's rambling >stories about drinking soup from a tin can and having to finish it before the mud at the bottom melted. (Life in the trenches) And how fishing was cruel. Would you like to be dragged by a hook in your mouth? And when some random chap walked into the vestry wanting a toilet. He seemed to be desperate and Doc questioned/lectured him for ages before eventually directing him to the deluge.

Doc had us singing "Comfort O Lord " about twenty times, not because we kept getting it wrong , but because he liked it so much. I'm not sure that anyone else did.

One Thursday John Trueman got into ME's Herald and transferred the baby seat into the driver's seat. This must have been after the trebles had finished and the men were practicing. We hid in

the bushes to watch. ME did not seem to be amused. Later that evening. ME came round and spoke with Dad. Dad suggested to ME that it was probably the altos! Michael did not like having the Michael taken out of him. He could give it out.

Waiting for Mike in his Herald after Heaton Moor and windows steamed up – Pete DS was trying to write Gwynneth in mirror writing on back window – we gave up as no-one knew how to spell it

Mike E portentiously levered himself up to conduct the anthem with gravitas.

I remember when Mike heard he’d passed his ADCM qualification. I think this is the highest qualification a church musician can aspire to. He was clearly very chuffed, especially when the academic hood arrived, which he donned on special days, calling it “Excalibur”. I recall feeling proud for/of him. (or later Cadbury’s Dairy Milk!)

Mike called me to one side one choir practice and asked (told) me I was to become librarian. He went through a few things and then after a few weeks of doing the job, gave me a spoon. The spoon, he said, would open the North Transept door so I could open early and get the books laid out. Yes, I did that for years. In the dark days of winter, I was petrified!

Mrs English dolling out the icecreams one Saturday we had 4 weddings! – I guess with 4 fees it was a good pay day! (can’t spell Gwynneth)

Ending up at Mike’s at Xmas & trying to sober up!

I suppose though more than anything else it was the fear of dread when absent from choir, knowing that Mike would give anyone such a hard time for not being there. Looking back, it drummed in to me a great sense of loyalty

Being asked to leave by one of the choir masters who was particularly hopeless and refusing to go! Who would that have been?

Singing Vivaldi’s Gloria with piano at Stretford Grammar.

I remember having organ lessons from Martin Bussey and one day - being a poor chef at the time, had no cash so paid with a big bag of frozen chickens. I remember dumping them on the organ bench.

**Members of the Congregation**

Harry White and his often pre-engaged starter motor – he would lift the bonnet and with his little hammer and a short length of timber gently tap the offending motor to release the cog before managing to start the engine. I never knew this method to fail! Harry White "Archbishop", in consideration of his piety.

Sam Backhouse taking choir practice before service & playing piano sitting down when Mike E was away– we all wondered where he was.

Reg Green still riding his bike in his 90s with postman’s leg over.

Ted Searle’s and his stories of film stars he dated, props he made & dogs he rescued!!!

Church warden coming in to tell us to stop practicing xx mins before service (Mr Ashworth?)

The stalwarts of the Men’s Society: WAG Gallimore, Neil Evans, your Dad, my Dad, Harry White, Sam Backhouse, Graham Jones etc etc. The hotpot Harvest supper announcement at the Jolly Thresher; a bit like Dad's Army getting together for a social. The Vicar's Warden and the People's Warden. The bizzare fruit & veg stall at the Christmas Bazaar.

**Clergy**

And Joe Lowry, who believed that Jesus came to England. And did those feet? JL explained to us why

Christianity was superior to other lesser religions, as God came down to us, and others are striving to find something/ one.

Joe Lowry gave us 6d for a wedding – House Captains, Dep and Head Chorister got considerable more. However, when Jim Innes arrived, he saw my potential and offered me a broom to sweep up the confetti after each wedding before it stuck (he was very anti-confetti!!) for another 6d – wealthy man I was back in the day.

P G Wodehouse “Great sermon handicap” whenever Hugh Craig or Stuart Darlow were preaching. Both were programmed to about 17 minutes of what most of us regarded as utter boredom.

Joe Lowry’s wedding sermons, when he trotted out the same sermon for each marriage. We boys got so used to it, we’d mouth along with him, beginning “2,000 years ago in Cana of Galilee…”. The sad part was that Joe eventually started to show signs that his memory was going and he’d lose his thread. Sometimes, we’d quietly prompt him, but it felt really awkward.