

*This is the second of a series of occasional articles from former choristers letting us know what they have been doing since they left the choir. Helen Nightingale (nee Cope) is well-known to many of you and gives us a glimpse of her hectic life.*

Having had St Mary's Church as part of my parents' and grandparents' lives for so many years I was also desperate to turn the magic age of seven and join the Junior Choir I had heard as a little girl. Despite many an itchy ruff and a frequent telling off for talking (Kirsten and I were listening we promise!) the Junior and Adult choir at St Mary's were the best start to my musical education I could have asked for.

With the spark for learning and studying music ignited, I set off for Southampton University to study initially for a BA Hons in Music from 2005 - 2008 and achieving 2:1. I then decided to postpone getting a 'real job' and stayed on for another year to complete a MMus in Music Performance. I was frequently out and about during my week of studying playing in the University Wind Orchestra, singing in the Jazz and Gospel Choir and leading my own Saxophone quartet. In my MMus year of study I had the privilege to work for a charity called Sing For Your life which enabled me to deliver singing and music workshops to patients suffering with Dementia and Alzheimer's in various care home and hospital settings. It was a humbling and moving job that I am very proud to have been a part of.

Following on from studying it was suggested that getting a job would be helpful and so I embarked on setting up my career in music education. Initially I taught saxophone at Headington Girls' School in Oxford as well as teaching classroom music at a primary school in Huntingdon. More recently this has turned into teaching singing at Wootton Upper School and teaching from pre-school to year 6 at Stukeley Meadows Primary. I love the interaction with all ages and hopefully inspiring some of them to find their love of music and playing instruments.

In 2018 I happened to see an advert for Trinity College London for General Music Examiners and thought that I would have a go at applying. Luckily I was successful and I have had a wonderful first year working for the exam board, travelling all over the UK to examine everything I could imagine. (My knowledge of Guitar and Brass instruments has dramatically improved!) Last November 1 had the wonderful chance to go and examine in Delhi, India. It was a fantastic and slightly scary experience — my first solo flight at over 9 hours was actually not too bad. The students and teachers I met were so incredibly polite and the hotel was out of this world!

Whilst I was teaching at Wootton in 2013 I met Tim, a pretty cool jazz saxophone player who turned out to know a bit about church music and was also a bell ringer! After a few years of sorting our lives and various jobs together we got married in Turvey in July 2017 and it was a fabulous day, filled with all of the music that we both have grown up singing in our church choirs. I'm sure Jo the vicar asked me if I was ready for the concert before I walked into church, but it was most certainly a music filled day - we even managed to escape the dreaded first dance by playing a Stevie Wonder saxophone duet instead! Kirsten was of course one of my bridesmaids and we have been the best of friends since our junior choir days still singing together on regular occasions and usually found with tea and cake in hand.

I am incredibly grateful for the start that St Mary's gave me in music and I will always have fond memories of my time spent singing with the choir.

*Helen Nightingale*