

OBITUARY

Alan Taylor MBE, former Director of Music at Haberdashers Aske's Boys' School, Elstree, passed away on 22 November, St Cecilia's Day, at the Lister Hospital, Stevenage. He was 87.

Alan Bernard William Taylor was born in Bedford to Bernard and Nancy Taylor on 12 October 1931. His father was a civil servant and musician who taught piano and served as organist and choir master at St Cuthbert's Church, Bedford. Some of Alan's earliest memories were of singing himself to sleep accompanied by the sound of the piano in the room below.

Music was always an integral part of Alan's life. His musical talent was fostered by his father who introduced Alan to the piano and choral singing at the age of 5. Between the ages of 7 and 18, Alan studied the piano with Ethel Diemer, a former pupil of Clara Schumann. She shaped his technique and instilled a lasting awareness of the importance of musical interpretation. Alan also studied the organ, acting as assistant organist (in support of his father) at St Cuthbert's between 1944 and 1950, and began to compose. In 1949, he gained his LLMC Diploma at the Royal College of Music.

Alan won a scholarship to Bedford Modern School in 1941. Here he thrived, despite the rigours and anxieties of a wartime childhood. The School's lively musical life was supplemented by activities linked to the BBC's wartime evacuation to Bedford in 1942. Alan joined the BBC Singers every month to sing for the daily service. This was recorded for broadcast at St Paul's Church, Bedford or, as the BBC described it, '*somewhere in England*'. He attended BBC concerts given by visiting musicians such as Glenn Miller and Sir Adrian Boult (who, according to family legend, nearly ran Alan over on his way to a rehearsal). Alan left school in 1950 with A-levels in Music, English and French.

After completing national service in 1952, Alan studied music at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. Here, he admitted to a '*tremendous feeling of inadequacy*' but graduated with an Honours degree and a post-graduate diploma in education in 1956. His tutors, Hubert Nicholson, Thurston Dart, Patrick Hadley and Boris Ord, were some of the most influential and charismatic British musicians of their generation. One of Alan's favourite memories was hearing Boris Ord rehearse his new arrangement of the Christmas carol *Adam Lay Y'bounden* with the choir of King's College.

Sport was also important to Alan. As a pupil at Bedford Modern, he participated in various activities, including rugby (alongside Dickie Jeeps, the future England international), cross country, cricket, tennis and badminton. He excelled at Rugby Fives and captained the Cambridge University team which defeated Oxford in 1956.

Alan met his future wife, Julia Williams, at a school dance in 1949. Julia, then aged 17, quickly became the centre of Alan's life. They married at St Cuthbert's in 1956 before moving to Retford, Nottinghamshire. Here, Alan took up his first appointment as Director of Music at King Edward VI Grammar School and Julia began to establish her own career as a pioneering social worker, specialising in the care of the elderly. Their first child, Hilary, was born in 1957, and their second, Jeremy, in 1959. Jonathan, their third child, followed in 1963. Together, Alan and Julia forged a strong creative partnership, based on a shared love of music, the arts, gardening and foreign travel. But their family was always of central importance. They were proud, loving and supportive parents, juggling the multiple demands of family and professional life throughout their 40-year marriage.

Alan discovered music was at a low ebb on arrival at King Edward's School, but soon re-established it as a central part of school life. During his five years at King Edward's, Alan developed the philosophy of musical education which underpinned his work as a musician, teacher and composer. He believed absolutely that music offered something for everyone and consistently worked to engage everyone

and anyone in musical activity, regardless of their age or ability. For him, music was a source of pleasure, inspiration, creativity, comfort, achievement and, above all, community. Over the years, a great many people credited their appreciation of music to Alan's influence.

His next appointment as Director of Music at Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School in 1961 provided a fertile proving ground for his ideas. Alan was fortunate to join the School at a significant moment in its history. The School's visionary headmaster, Dr Thomas Taylor, was working to establish Haberdashers' as one of the leading schools of the post-war era. Dr Taylor appointed a team of exceptionally gifted teachers, broadened the curriculum and relocated the School from Hampstead to its current campus in Elstree, Borehamwood. Alan's work benefited from all these innovations. But Dr Taylor's strong personal interest and active involvement in music (he was a governor of the National Youth Orchestra) were vital. It was Dr Taylor's endorsement of music at Haberdashers' which resulted in the construction of a bespoke music school with state-of-the-art acoustics and soundproofing in 1975.

During his 35 years at Haberdashers', Alan established and maintained a first-class music department, building a team of talented instrumental and academic music teachers who excelled in their various specialisms. His inclusive approach to choral singing was supplemented by a carefully structured programme of instrumental teaching which enabled boys of every age and ability to engage with music. By the time Alan retired from teaching in 1996, Haberdashers' had more than 600 pupils learning musical instruments, four orchestras, three brass ensembles and numerous other instrumental groups. The annual spring concerts regularly featured more than 300 musicians, performing orchestral and choral works such as Elgar's cello concerto, the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the Verdi Requiem, *Carmina Burana* and the *St Matthew Passion*.

Christmas was always a busy period in the School's musical life, reflecting Alan's personal love of Christmas music. The annual School Carol Service at St Martin's-in-the-Fields, London and (from the 1980s) St Alban's Cathedral, was supplemented by regular performances at Christmas concerts with Leon Lovett's English Baroque Choir and London Oriana Choir in the major London concert halls. Taking inspiration from Sir David Willcox, Alan regularly arranged and composed carols for the choir to sing, a practice which was one of his greatest pleasures.

Haberdashers' growing reputation for high quality music-making attracted attention from leading professional musicians, resulting in invitations for the Haberdashers' choir to participate in musical performances elsewhere. The first was the inaugural performance of Anthony Hopkins' new work *A Time for Growing* at the Royal Albert Hall in 1969. An invitation for the choir to perform at the Berlin *Bach-Tage* festival of 1971 followed. Alan conducted a memorable performance of Bach's B Minor Mass, in which the choir was accompanied by the Cologne Chamber Orchestra and musicians from the Berlin Philharmonic. From these beginnings, Alan went on to work with all the major conductors of the period.

A personal highlight was the choir's participation in Sir Georg Solti's landmark production of Bizet's opera *Carmen* alongside Placido Domingo and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in front of the Queen Mother in 1973. Sir Georg challenged Alan to teach his choristers to '*sing like cathedral-chorister-urchins*'. Alan's success was such that the choir featured on the subsequent recording. For the next twenty years, the School was a regular contributor to Covent Garden's programme, with boy choristers performing in various productions, such as Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alongside Sir Geraint Evans, Jill Gomez and Sir Thomas Allen (1976).

Alan's remarkable energy was not confined to Haberdashers' during these years. He served as Church Organist at St Nicholas' Church, Elstree and St John the Evangelist, Stanmore. He was a rigorous yet sympathetic examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (with fond memories of examining convicted prisoners at HMP Wormwood Scrubs). He served as President of the Music Masters Association in 1988. Any remaining leisure time was devoted to gardening, decorating, carpentry or driving his family across Europe in a succession of Ford Cortinas.

After retiring from Haberdashers' in 1996, Alan's immediate priority was to support Julia in her final illness. Music was his consolation and focus after her death in 1998. He served as Course Director for the English Schools Orchestra for many years, accompanying the Orchestra on tour to Australia. His involvement with the Chipperfield Choral Society was a cherished source of friendship and personal pleasure, while offering a new outlet for creativity. Alan served as the Choir's Patron alongside Dame Emma Bell from 2011. Every year, he composed a new carol for the Choir to perform in its annual Christmas concert at St Paul's Church, Chipperfield. Delia Meehan, the Choir's Director, eventually persuaded Alan to publish his carols. Three volumes of his *Chipperfield Carols* were published between 2016 and 2018 and have proved extremely popular amongst amateur choirs.

Alan's contribution to Music and Music Education was recognised in 1982 with the award of an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours. He was made a Freeman of the City of London in 1997.

Alan is survived by his three children. His funeral will take place at St Paul's Church, Chipperfield, Kings Langley WD4 9BQ at 12.00 pm, to be followed by a reception at the Village Hall. Family flowers only. Donations if desired to the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity (for details see www.royalmarsden.org).

A service of thanksgiving for Alan's life will also be held at St Albans Cathedral on a date to be announced in 2019.