



Images from the D-Day anniversary weekend at Christ Church, Portsdown: (left): Bishop Christopher greets veterans on the Sunday; (middle): images from the 1940s tea party held in the church on the Saturday; (right): the bishop with Margery Budd, who brought a photo of her husband Stanley

# We honoured the nation's D-Day heroes

## Premiere of Evensong excites radio listeners

ANYONE walking past St Thomas's Cathedral in the build-up to D-Day may have spotted the huge BBC Outside Broadcast van, and the quietly waiting crowd of choral music fans waiting to be let in. Some were weekly regulars; some had travelled from far afield.

This gentle gathering was one of the first events of the D-Day commemorations – a special choral evensong by the Cathedral Choir and Cantate, the youth choir for girls and boys.

Inside, sun streamed through the stained glass onto the main nave decked with red and white flowers. Microphones were discretely taped to the walls and – at exactly 3.30pm – a red 'live' light clicked on and some quarter of a million listeners worldwide were tuned in to the sounds of this unique cathedral choir.

Some 40 choristers, led by Dr David Price, organist and Master of the Choristers, opened with the plaintive notes of *A Litany by Walton*.

This fittingly English a capella piece was composed when Walton was only 15. It hangs on the doleful line 'Drop, drop, slow tears', a setting of a devotional text by 17th-century writer Phineas Fletcher – a suitable prelude to the week's commemorations.

Then, came the first ever broadcast of a recently commissioned piece *Portsmouth Service*. Contemporary English composer Jonathan Dove wrote it last year especially for the

cathedral, in memory of the late parishioner William Groves, a beloved fan of Portsmouth's evensong.

This soaring 10-minute *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* was accompanied by Oliver Hancock on the 49-stop Nicholson organ to stirring effect.

St Thomas's unique architecture means its organ sits central to the main nave, producing a rich forceful sound. The choir rose to their full voice for Dove's austere beautiful canticle, building to a sonorous climax of full voice and organ.

After moments of reflection, and readings lead by Canon Michael Tristram, the choir rose again for *Psalms 36 and 46*, set by Stafford-Smith, adapted from Luther; a remembrance anthem: *O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem* (Howells), ending – exactly on time – with Stanford's *Organ voluntary: Postlude in D minor*.

As the red light switched off, and the broadcast came to its close, the hushed crowd quietly filed out. They were a mix of locals and regulars, such as Mr and Mrs Randell, who had come to see their grandson Elliot, 10, sing.

"He was wonderful," they said. "But, probably ready for his dinner now..."

One of the churchwardens, Sue Ward, couldn't help but comment: "It sounded superb; I've never heard it better". A fittingly poignant start to the city's D-Day commemorations.

## WE helped to honour those who fought for our freedom.

Seventy years after D-Day, we thanked those who had lived through the horror of war and fought for the liberation of Europe. We praised God for the sacrifice made by so many and prayed for a future of peace.

D-Day – 6 June 1944 – was the first day of the largest ever single military operation, which saw thousands of Allied troops land on the Normandy beaches. It marked a decisive shift in the war that ultimately saw the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Churches across our diocese played their part in the events to mark its 70th anniversary. There were special services, 1940s parties, lectures and exhibitions.

Bishop Christopher led a traditional *Drumhead Service on Southsea Common* at the start of four days of commemoration in the city. He welcomed HRH Princess Anne, who attended as Commodore in Chief of the Royal Navy in the Portsmouth area.

In the order of service, she wrote: "The anniversary will always be an emotional one, with memories of lost comrades, family members and the large numbers killed in those first days following the Normandy landings.

"They had no idea what they were to face, or what the effect of their efforts would be, but as we now know, D-Day marked the beginning of the end of the Second World War.

"This year is particularly poignant, because it will be one of the last milestones on which there will be sizeable numbers of veterans who were there on the day. We salute all those involved in Operation Overlord and 'We will remember them'."

Hundred of people crowded around the arena as Princess Anne inspected a



Above: the dean of Portsmouth Cathedral leads prayers at the Drumhead Service, with HRH Princess Anne; top right: the dean with Joan Scott Allen; bottom right: locals dressed up as Allied war leaders as part of the Droxford Country Show

ceremonial guard of honour from the Army, Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Air Force, as well as cadets and veterans holding standards aloft.

Then a makeshift altar was created with drums – replicating what happens on the battlefield. The service included hymns, accompanied by the Band of HM Royal Marines, music from Portsmouth Cathedral Choir and Cantate, prayers and readings. Princess Anne read the gospel reading – the Beatitudes passage in Matthew's gospel.

And the dean of Portsmouth Cathedral, the Very Rev David Brindley, led the act of Remembrance, which included the Last Post, the Reveille and the National Anthem.

Princess Anne then gave the salute as the military personnel and veterans marched past. She then took the time to speak to individual veterans in a special centre that had been created on Southsea

Common for the occasion.

Portsmouth Cathedral was again the centre of attention on the Sunday morning, as BBC Radio 4 broadcast a D-Day service live. There was a poignant moment during the service for Joan Scott Allen, who read out the final letter sent by her father, Arland Scott, before D-Day.

He was in the Canadian Royal Artillery and was based in Fareham from 1943. Joan was born in November 1943, so was only a few months old when her father embarked on the D-Day mission from which he never returned. He sustained a gunshot wound to the head on Juno Beach on June 8, 1944, was evacuated to Gosport, and died that day.

His final letter to the family said: "Give my daughter a kiss from her loving daddy and all my love and kisses to you darling. God bless you both for

me. Always your devoted and loyal loving husband."

Also reading at this service was cathedral chorister Ben Nash, 10, whose father Philip is Captain of HMS Defender. The service was led by the bishop and the dean and included Pie Jesu and Hymn to the Fallen by John Williams, from the film *Saving Private Ryan*.

The 8am service on Radio 4 was followed by the annual D-Day and Normandy Fellowship Service at 10.30am.

Christ Church in London Road, Widley, had played a significant part before D-Day, as it was the location for a prayer vigil at which Allied generals committed the invasion to Almighty

was available to watch.

The curate, the Rev Annie McCabe, said: "There was a real Pentecost feeling about the Saturday, with all sorts of different kinds of people enjoying themselves, abundant cake and everything free of charge."

The next day, the church hosted its annual D-Day service. This year, they welcomed Bishop Christopher as preacher, as well as military veterans and Havant MP David Willetts.

One worshipper, Margery Budd, who is now 94, brought along a photo of her late husband Stanley, who was a glider pilot and one of the first people to arrive in Normandy on D-Day.

And D-Day was also marked at Droxford, where Allied leaders spent two days putting the finishing touches to Operation Overlord on board Winston Churchill's private train, hidden in a secret siding. There was a talk about Droxford's role in D-Day given by Tony Williams in the church, a

Royal British Legion summer drinks party and a chance to meet people dressed as Churchill, Eisenhower and de Gaulle as part of Droxford Country Fair.

And the role of Droxford in the military operation was marked by the Red Arrows, who had just performed their precision aerobatics above Southsea after the Drumhead Service. They altered their flight plan to pass above Droxford and release trails of red, white and blue smoke 500 feet above the village.

• For more photos, see: [www.portsmouth.anglican.org/DDay70](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/DDay70).