

# Interview with Professor Adrian Butterfield

## Music Director of Tilford Bach Society

### What are your connections with Farnham?

**Adrian:** My family moved from London to Bentley in 1971 and then bought a house in Farnham in '72 because my father was offered a teaching post at Pierrepont School in Frensham. My mother still lives in the same house in Farnham (my father died in 1992). I went to school in Bentley, Farnham (St. George's Prep School in Castle Street) and Frensham before becoming a chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral as a boarder.

### Were you involved in any musical activities in Farnham as a young person?

**Adrian:** I sang in the choir at St. Andrew's Church under Steven Thomson. My violin teacher, Pamela Spofforth ('Spoff'), lived in Guildford and I performed in the area frequently including at the Maltings and at the Farnham Festival where I gave the first performance of Stephen Dodgson's Five Occasional Pieces which were specially written for me. My father played and taught the piano and was a member of the Farnham and Bourne Music Club.

### Why did you choose a musical career?

**Adrian:** I sang almost before I could talk (apparently!) and started the violin at the age of four. My parents put me in for an audition to be a chorister at King's College Cambridge and I was offered a place but Spoff persuaded us to send me to St. Paul's instead and she came to the school to teach me every week. I sang for 4 years there under the inspirational choirmaster Barry Rose who had come from Guildford Cathedral and I sang in the Queen's Silver Jubilee service in 1977. I then went on to St. Paul's School, Barnes, with a Music Scholarship, Trinity College, Cambridge, where I read music, and The Royal College of Music for two postgraduate years. I can't ever remember seriously thinking about doing anything other than music, to be honest!

### Why did you choose the violin? what instrument do you play?

**Adrian:** The violin sort of chose me, I suppose. We were looking after a guitar for some friends and I as an inquisitive four-year-old kept on wanting pluck the strings so I was given a violin instead! Switching to the baroque violin came very late, partly because I had perfect pitch and I wasn't at all sure I wanted to lose it (period-instrument playing requires performing at a great variety of different pitches). The experience of being a chorister and singing so much early music at that age had a great influence on me. Spoff was also influential in this respect and a number of her pupils went on to become period-instrument players. I later studied with Simon Standage who taught me a great deal about the style and I learned a lot more at Cambridge about the historical background of early music. I've had very few 'baroque' lessons in my life but have done a lot of reading, absorbed (and continue to absorb) much from my colleagues and worked out a great deal on my own.

### Who was the greatest influence or inspiration in your younger days?

**Adrian:** Early influences: my father's passion for music rubbed off on me from the beginning and his musical tastes were very catholic. Spoff was an incredible and dedicated teacher who guided me for ten years and gave me years of string quartet experience at the course she founded, Pro Corda. Singing nine services a week at St. Paul's taught me a vast repertoire of music and ensured that performing became part of my everyday life.

### **Who is your favourite composer?**

**Adrian:** Like my father I love a wide range of music including folk and jazz and the classic musicals of Gershwin, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin. I tend to think the best music is what I'm working on at any one time but it can't be denied that Bach is the composer I always love coming back to the most. Handel's music has such enormous emotional power, Haydn's its wit, Mozart's its perfection, Schubert gives us such pain and beauty, Beethoven possessed such staggering boldness - the list is almost endless. But Bach seems to be on a different plane, taking us out of this world and into the next. His faith gave him a strength and self-confidence, without a hint of arrogance, that I find truly inspiring and it's a privilege to be able to bring to Tilford so many great musicians who feel the same way.

### **What do you enjoy doing most?**

**Adrian:** Live performance is what sustains me and persuading others of the delights of the music I'm bringing to them is what gives me the most joy. I love passing on the knowledge I have acquired and the joy I get from the music I play to my students so teaching is a vital part of my life and I learn so much from it too. I've always been inquisitive about the lives and circumstances of composers of the past and my university training has helped me to know how to find that knowledge and how to present it to others. I seem to have to spend so much time organising and arranging my personal and musical life that I rarely practise as much as I would like though the pressure of a concert date concentrates the mind wonderfully!

### **How did you first become involved with TBS? When did you first play for TBS?**

**Adrian:** Denys Darlow, who had started TBS in 1952, first invited me to play in Tilford in the mid-1990's and I was appointed leader of the London Handel Orchestra in 1997. He had an infectious enthusiasm for both Bach and Handel (and many others, of course) and in bringing to light lesser known works, 'it's never done, you know!' being one of his favourite phrases. I have always had a great admiration for someone who founded two important festivals and who kept them going for so many years through sheer force of personality and passion for the music and I'm determined to keep building on the foundations he laid. I'm sad that Denys never received any official recognition for what he achieved.

### **Have you any special ambition still to achieve?**

**Adrian:** Special ambitions? I have performed many of Haydn's string quartets and would love to complete the set with the Revolutionary Drawing Room and I would also love to find the money to complete the series of Leclair sonata recordings that I've started. The Beethoven Violin Concerto is a special piece that I really want to perform again and maybe record. I have a desire to conduct Bruckner's 8th Symphony one day but I'm not sure that will ever happen!

### **How would you like to see TBS develop in the future? what things would you like to see added that are not done at present?**

**Adrian:** I'm extremely ambitious for TBS and would love to see the Festival eventually expand so that it covered two weekends and the days in between. I developed a passion for the music of Bach from a very young age and I want to share that love with children in local schools so that they don't miss out! TBS should be investigating Bach's cantatas on a regular basis and it would be wonderful if we could start a series of them with a view to working our way through them all. It would be such a joy, too, to record the major Bach works which would go a long way to putting Tilford on the musical map. Clearly a great deal of sponsorship would have to be found but a number of people are beginning to help us which is most encouraging!