

LIFE IN A CATHEDRAL CHOIR

by Joseph Bourne, age 12

I came to live in the Netherlands at the end of 1993, when my father became the priest at the Church of St James in Voorschoten. In September 1999, I chose to leave my Dutch primary school and became a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral in London. I would like to share with you something of my life as a chorister.

A typical week day

07.00: wake up (far too early!)

07.20: breakfast (cereal and toast)

07.50: choir practice

09.00: assembly

09.20: school starts

11.20: break

11.40: school continues

13.00: lunch break

13.40: school continues

15.40: school ends (20-minute break)

16.00: choir practice

17.00: Evensong

18.00: dinner

18.45: homework session

19.35: instrumental practice

20.00: free time (at last!)

20.45: go to dormitory

21.15: lights out!

Saturday

07.40: wake up

08.00: breakfast

08.30: choir practice

10.00: leave (to 15.00)

15.15: choir practice

17.00: Evensong

18.00: dinner

18.20: free time

20.00: tuck shop is open

20.45: go to dormitory

21.15: lights out!

Sunday

08.15: wake up (weekly change of bed sheets)

08.40: breakfast

09.15: choir practice

10.15: Matins

11.15: break

11.30: Eucharist

13.00: lunch break

14.30: choir practice

15.15: Evensong

16.30: leave (to 19.30)

19.30: free time

20.45: go to dormitory

21.15: lights out!

There are of course many interruptions to the routine. There are important occasions being celebrated or commemorated throughout the year in St Paul's. During my four and a half years at the cathedral so far, these have included the Golden Jubilee Service for Queen Elizabeth, the annual Lord Mayor's Show, the opening of the Millennium Bridge, two services following the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11th 2001, and the War in Iraq commemoration service - all of which were televised by the BBC. The Christmas and Easter programmes are massive, and there are lots of concerts with orchestras and other choirs. We have also recorded three CDs and recently been on a two-week tour of the USA, which included concerts in New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Detroit, St Louis, St Paul's in Minnesota and Atlanta.

As you might have noticed, I have quite a busy schedule. One of the downsides for me is living away from home, although my parents alternate with regular visits to me - and my good friends always keep me going through difficult times. I enjoy life at St Paul's because the education is great and the choir is good fun and offers lots of exciting experiences. I have just one more school year to go before I leave the choir in the summer of 2005, when I will be 13 years old.