

Eltham Choral Society London On Tow 2010  
in the style of the

# Bayeux Tapestry

- (1) Assembled masses and assorted hangers-on got off on time even after the A2 had tried it's best to delay one or two.
- (2) Arrival at the Tunnel was timed well and our courageous driver Joe managed to manoeuvre his extra-long, very big double-decker bus without any difficulty first time on board the Skylark.
- (3) Everyone had been handed their homework, a quiz on all things French which would later come in handy to while away the afternoon.
- (4) Arrival in France was quickly followed by a stop for lunch in a lovely spot. Ken and Bridget went off for a spot of bird-watching across the water whilst everyone else spotted them. Lovely food, reasonable facilities, all's well with the world. What could possibly go wrong?
- (5) Approximately 40mins later Bus slows to a crawling pace for people to drink in the scenery, or possibly to spot some more birds. What's that? A little voice tells us what we have suspected; there is a small problem with the engine; something to do with the Turbo-thingie. Fear not, we are to stop in a lay-by up the road to fix it, won't take long.
- (6) Now the fun begins as Joe rings Volvo for help.  
They will arrive in half an hour. Sun-bathing, reading, chatting and other pleasant pursuits ensue. 45 mins later, as nothing has appeared Joe and Maria use the emergency phone to see what's afoot. Big mistake. The Gendarmerie arrive, then the French A.A., then the Airforce, and a little man on his sit-on mower for good measure. One or two of the audience have now sampled the delights of the toilets supplied by the French equivalent of Dr Who's set designers, one a hole in the ground jobbie, the other "ok", all accommodated in space craft. Problem with coach still not sorted, something said about paying the police £1000 for not using the French A.A. who couldn't fix it anyway, or so the rumours grew.
- (7) 2 hours later no further forward, sunbathers have been mown, Quiz has been completed (!) Dianne has had plenty of time to draw the whole debacle, and Derek has managed to photograph everyone in Vicki's hat except the gallant gendarmes who refused, can't think why. Toilets becoming less and less salubrious. Joe tries his hand at fixing the thing himself.
- (8) Scene beginning to resemble a circus for emergency vehicles as a very large pick-up truck arrives which we are informed will follow us to Rouen, just in case Joe's meddling hasn't worked. The gendarmes leave at this point and the French A.A. none of whom have been the slightest bit helpful but will have earned them brownie points back at their headquarters and free drinks in a local bar somewhere as they retell their tale.
- (9) Pam comes up with a cunning plan to alleviate boredom. The old test for senility comes into its own. " My granny sent me to the shop and asked me to buy some apples" etc. --- E is for?, K is for? U is for? but I bet you all remember what W was!!!
- (10) Arrival in Rouen a little delayed, of course by now by three hours or so was added to by us taking the scenic route by every back street (sometimes twice) available to man, horse and donkey but not an extra-long double-decker coach.

(11) Ah! the Hotel St Sever is there tucked behind “the Retreat” for those condemned of wearing the wrong dress code in Rouen (poor St. J.). No key ceremony this year just a scrum at reception, help yourself to a room but make sure it has the right number of beds. Lifts to all floors large enough to accommodate all of Vickie’s wardrobe and Pam’s cocktail cabinet were a boon. Actually the lifts were larger than the rooms.

(12) The Hotel, having been informed of our demise earlier in the afternoon by the fragrant Maria, had graciously put back the mealtime by half an hour just enough time to swing a cat round the bathroom.

(13) After dinner the troops went on orienteering sorties into town and the rest of the evening was rather subdued by ECS standards but would be rewarded by an entertaining night of engineering works as Joe and Austin, the mechanic from England, yes – England, set to on the misbehaving coach. They eventually got to bed at 6.30ish, (having revved the engine on numerous occasions just to see if anyone was sleeping at all), well after dawn and just before the rest of us rose.

(14) The day is now Friday 4<sup>th</sup> June. Breakfast was a leisurely affair with decent coffee, lovely croissants and no-one sweeping the floors to get rid of us (please refer to Barcelona trip and the Hotel Vile.)

(15) The delight of the Metro came next and the puzzling machine that issued, or not, tickets. Off into Rouen amid the revellers commemorating the burning of Joan d’Arc. The sights of the Ville aux cent clochers were delightful although the “morning at Leisure” turned into a bit of a route march for some.

(16) Le Shopping – for le sandwich, in the shopping mall just next door, how very convenient! Did anyone buy their food there? Anyone for mouse and chips? ! One intrepid shopper decided not to accept this delicious offering after spotting the creature moving from aisle 6 to 7 obviously intent on its own groceries. Have kept quiet until now.

(17) All aboard the charabanc now for our ride to Argentan and do try to avoid mummy duck and her ducklings, duck in cherry sauce not ordered until Sunday. This town was seen by all on board as we drove in, round and over to find the car park where Joe could block as many unwitting residents as possible trying to leave.

(18) The next few minutes are a little blurred for the writer owing to her rather strange encounter in the garden. Whilst she enjoyed the delights of the outside toilet in the dark, Tim, meanwhile, was ever the gentleman in the modern equivalent in the car park. This one was all-dancing and all-singing had lights and was self-cleaning. What the unsuspecting Pat didn’t know was that one had to allow the door to close before entering. So as Tim, having made use of said toilet, gallantly held the door open for her to avail herself of the facility she was entering a very wet environment which became torrential, none of her doing I may add.

(19) Back in the church vestry the choir were sampling the changing facilities which were much smarter than previous trips and Mario had a separate one from the women which was a little disappointing for him.

(20) Then the church got better and better. They started to decorate it for us with bows and streamers and everything, it did look almost wedding like by the time they had finished, what a treat!

(21) Whilst the choir were rehearsing Derek helpfully became the courier-in-chief for walkers and using the “Step-by-step” guide to 15 historic places went off to complete the said route at speed. (No stopping, do not pass go, do not collect 200euros) please keep up.

(22) The rehearsal was hampered somewhat by Charles playing his organ in another church or so it felt. He was very far away but he had the lovely Maria to turn his pages and keep him company. Peter, our esteemed leader, at this point had no idea what lay ahead of him, or

what was in front of him which was literally a very strung-out choir, in more ways than one. It did not go well and no-one sang particularly well to make him feel any happier.

(23) At the end of the rehearsal everyone shot out of church and over the road for dinner and as much alcohol as was humanly possible to blank out the horror of what had gone before. Food was improved by the organisation and forethought of those who had not been singing especially Ken, an upright sort of gentleman and at this point **still standing**.

(24) Back to church where true to form all is now changed and we are to sing en bloc. (thank you for small mercies). Vicky where are you?

(25) Concert begins with a lovely French man saying lots of nice things about us, not sure where he got those ideas from but he seemed to be genuine, he did it very quietly and we sat looking intelligent as always. He may well have been remarking on the beautiful turnout of the choir and the footwear of the Bases. Peter saw his opportunity and tried a speech too. He started well but somehow forgot Zadoc, or Handel or what year it was written or something but his smile won him through and everyone clapped appreciatively, it wasn't until later that we realised they clapped at anything and not necessarily in the right places. Ah well you can't win them all.

(26) At the end of what actually was a very successful concert (considering the music, sorry I'm not one of Duruffle's biggest fans and well done soloists you did a sterling job) even Joe had listened to some of it before walking out, we were entertained with pear and apple ciders, beer, water and nibbles and best of all Money. Please see the chairman, I have not spent it on drinks! Lovely church, lovely people, lovely town pity about the toilets.

(27) Quiet journey home. Perhaps our wonderful, tuneful singing had subdued Joe and we arrived back in Rouen just before midnight. Pub round the corner shut, hotel bar shut good grief where does one have to go to find a drink round here. The three nurses knew!

(28) Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June. Our D.Day celebrations started quietly enough with only one or two coming into breakfast looking frayed around the edges. Vicky in outfit sept ou huit.

(29) Straight off to invade Bayeux for the third time, to man the beaches or sing. On arrival after an uneventful journey (not in little boats but our huge bus followed by our faithful shadow, Austin), a Frenchman greeted us by showing Joe where to park. Now has anyone tried to get a camper van into a space for a Ka? Think an extra-long double-decker coach and the space for a mini and you're almost there.

(30) Choir into church for rehearsal and shock, horror we were supposed to be singing the mass! This was not in our remit but I'm sure we could have filled the beach, sorry breach.

(31) Charles this time was in the same church as us but was sitting in a hole with only his eyes and above peeping out. What is it about church architects?

(32) No chairs this time for the choir as punishment for not singing the mass.

(33) Meanwhile our groupies set off for the highs and lows of Bayeux. What subsequently unfolded could have made us a fortune had we had the foresight to have a video camera. Joan – she of the hips and crutch last trip (not D'Arc), decided to rearrange all the work of her surgeon, and quite honestly thought she was not going to do this on her own. Ken NO LONGER STANDING. Where is all the help when you need it? They all passed by on the other side. That's the last time we send in troops to help them.

(34) Dining wise after the rehearsal we had a choice – stay with the coach which would take anyone down into the town, but no time for food, or walk quickly with Derek, 'cos he doesn't do slow, but he knew the way and he had a story to tell about someone falling and Ken being the hero picking her up. Funny how tales vary in the telling.

(35) After lunch which was well appreciated more sprinting produced a well-oiled, but slightly wounded group ready for the tapestry. Again we were herded round at speed past all the rude bits but got the general idea about Harry and Wills. Has anyone done their homework and got all the captions in the right order?

(36) Joan and Ken starting to slow up, can't think why. Sitting in the cinema might have had something to do with it. I think one or two of us may have fallen asleep or at the very least watched the film a couple of times.

(37) Gun shots were heard in the car park which definitely woke us up again so everyone raced, well hobbled really, away from the firing line, remember this is D.Day weekend, not a re-enactment of anything else. We're in France for goodness sake.

(38) Back to the church hall via various routes; shops, pancake houses, ice-cream parlours, crypts and museums.

(39)At the church hall which was the biggest yet as far as changing facilities Mario came up with a cunning plan. He could stand guard whilst the ladies divested themselves of their garments and he would not watch while they changed. I did try to put him off honestly ladies. One soprano, there's always one, tried to outwit the rest by not bringing her uniform. Much blowing and puffing followed as a few "friends" tried to help her out airing a pair of leggings that had graced the legs of another during the day.

(40)Chairs appeared from somewhere for us to sit on (there is a God) and the concert began but not before we had another little speech en francais by Monsieur "Pas de l'Yeux Rhone que nous" and into Tallis.

(41)Peter then introduced Duruffle with his ice cream cornet which had a very short flex and remembered who had written Zadoc.

(42) The emergence of the chairs which had until this moment not been apparent to the jovial, well-oiled choristers then caused some amount of consternation as we re-arranged ourselves carefully so the Mr and Mrs North did not share out the profits equally. Mrs N. had a chair and a space. Mr N. had nothing, nor could be seen.

(43)The end of Concert came and had thus far been well received considering the congregation had had to go home and then come back after the mass debacle and this is where Peter made his first faux-pax. An encore – whoops. We all sang the right notes – but not necessarily in the right order keeping up ECS traditions.

(44) OK where are the drinks? The nibbles? The money?

(45)Back to change and home quickly before anyone notices we've been here but we must use the facilities before we leave. Where are the toilet rolls? -- what is it with ECS and toilets?

(46) Coach home – poor Joe. Hey Joe I did warn him. Turn the air con off, put up the heating and people will go to sleep! This trick usually works. Rose and Vicky were not paying attention.

(47) Two hours later we arrive back at base camp and yet again no bar. Offers to take people down into the town were swiftly taken up by the nurses and the bosses, and Charles and Tim and Peter.

(48) Joe and his tachometer and Rod and Tony and a few others returned at 1am. Did Joe go to bed? No – the Irish pub was calling and off he went to get his hangover.

(49) BOOM FLASH FLASH.

(50) Wake up to heavens emptying (or some do. i.e. wake up). Breakfast by now the seams and ragged edges are showing – matchsticks in eyes etc. well - for those that chose to come down to breakfast. Others were quite fine.

(51) Maria comes into her own possibly boosted by the arrival of her mum, dad and aunty and sorts out possibility of opening the bus to stow the luggage with Austin's help. Joe nowhere to be seen.

(52) Joe still nowhere but Austin doing a sterling job and coach now ready Austin has been our shadow all weekend hasn't he been brilliant? Joe emerges desperate for coffee, coffee, coffee.

(53) We leave on time and down into Rouen for our final get together which was quite wonderful, lovely food, lovely companions, lovely drinks and rather nice toilet. Thank you speeches all round well deserved. These trips are a nightmare and there is always some hitch that has not been foreseen, the coach failing on the first day was spectacular, and makes it all worth while!

(54) Time to find said coach to go home. We all manage it except one. Where on earth was he going and why had he not spotted the enormous mode of transport we were all on? Rod is almost happy to go without him.

(55) Journey back to Calais uneventful, quicker than expected because we missed the turn into the service station and had to hang on until Eurotunnel.

(56) What unfolded at the tunnel was only really apparent to those of us in first class upstairs. Suffice it to say that Hitler is alive, well, living in Calais and working as a traffic director and not doing it very well.

(57) And the rest as they say is history, sewn into a very, very long piece of material that can be galloped round in 10 minutes but quite glorious unlike this very long and boring piece of prose.

I do hope you have enjoyed it, I'm sorry it's so long, it took the whole of Tuesday to compose and now I've got to draw the pictures.

Love – me

ECS on tour 2010.