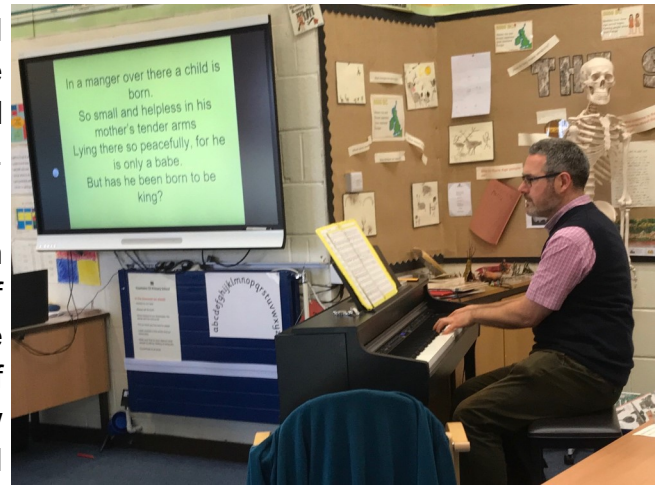


In the Autumn Term of 2018, the children and teachers of 11 village primaries near Ripon were beginning to get excited about taking part in a Carol Service to be held in Holy Trinity Church, Ripon.

The project had been extremely successful in December 2016 and 2017 and Andrew Roberts, of Winzer Music, had been approached to lead the project again. He had lots of experience of organising these events before and had many new ideas about how to involve over 250 children and their teachers.

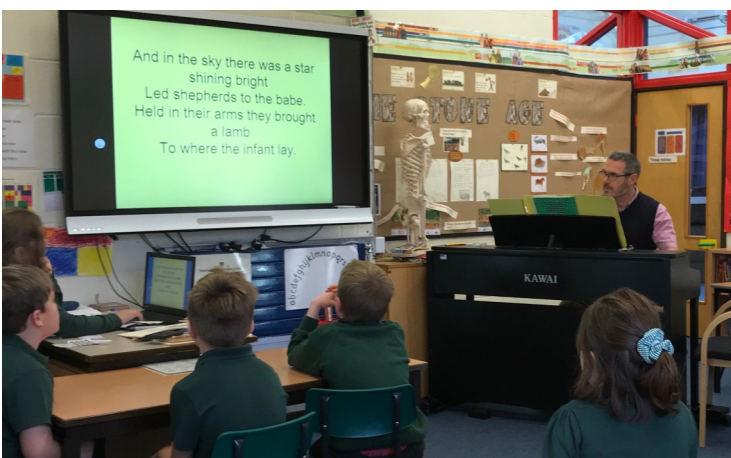


The preparations began in early July 2018 when headteachers were approached and a date was booked with Holy Trinity Church in Ripon. A superb performance space in the church with plenty of space for the performers and an invited audience of distinguished guests, headteachers and parents together with facilities below the church in the 'Arches' gave the schools the perfect venue. Andrew met with Sally Cowling, Headteacher at Bishop Monkton Primary to go through the Action Plan for the project and also discussed the exciting changes for 2018.

Funding for the 2016 Carol Service had come from the schools themselves, however small village primary schools have financial constraints so it was decided to approach the Mukherjee trust. Through their very generous support, the project was able to go ahead again in 2017.

The Mukherjee Trust were extremely impressed with the quality of the performance in 2017 and the ethos of the project involving so many small village schools that they were delighted to have been approached to fund the project again in 2018. A number of the Trustees came to the Carol Service in 2017 and thoroughly enjoyed the performance and were very keen to support the project in a number of ways.

During the Summer holiday, Andrew began to research suitable music and songs that the children would be singing as a 'massed voices choir'. He also put together backing tracks as well as Powerpoint slides that could be left with the schools. A rehearsal schedule was also decided upon and schools organised into geographical clusters. A review of the 2017 Carol Service was also undertaken.



In September 2018, all the schools were contacted and the headteachers delegated responsibility to the class teacher of the class that would be involved in the Carol Service. The focus was on classes of Year 2, Year 3 or Year 4 children (or a mixture of ages). It became clear that in a small number of schools the whole Key Stage would be involved. With this in mind, it was essential that new material was put into the Carol Service as a number of children from the

schools had taken part in previous years.

Information about expectations, rehearsal dates and songs and carols that the children would be learning and singing were emailed to the teachers. Rehearsal dates were confirmed to commence in the 3 weeks of October running up to half term with the second set of rehearsals in November.

Each school had an hour rehearsal with Andrew. He arrived with his keyboard and all the song lyrics and backing tracks on a USB ready to be downloaded at the school. After some singing warm ups, Andrew began teaching the songs to the children. The children and teachers were extremely enthusiastic and picked up the tunes and words really quickly. Following the rehearsal, the children were encouraged to learn the songs and rehearse them in school as well as learn words at home.

Each of the 11 schools were invited to think about an Individual item to perform at the Carol service. This could have been a song from their Christmas production, a reading, a poem or a prayer.



Over the half-term holiday Andrew went over arrangements for the Carol Service and put together a video to teach the signs for the carol 'Silent Night'. A Risk Assessment of Holy Trinity Church and Arches was also revised and made available to schools.

One of the highlights of the 2018 Carol service was to be revisiting 'signed' actions to the Twelve Days of Christmas with a difference! Each of the verses would reflect many of the activities that might take place in school running up to Christmas.



To add another challenge for the Children, Andrew decided to use the traditional 'We wish you a Merry Christmas' as a finale. The children had really enjoyed singing it in the 2017 Carol Service. However, to add a new dimension the song would be 'signed'. A video of the actions was filmed so that children and their teachers could learn the 'signs' and be ready to teach it to the congregation at the Carol Service.

Following the half term break, rehearsals in school began in earnest. The children quickly picked up the 'signs' needed to perform 'We wish you a merry Christmas' and were soon singing with great enthusiasm. In recognition of 100 years since the end of World War 1, the children learnt to sing Silent Night in German as well using sign language. An original composition by Andrew called 'Only a Babe' was a great hit in 2017 and had been asked by many people, including the City of Ripon Mayor, Councillor Pauline McHardy, to be included again.

Traditional Carols of 'O come all ye faithful' and 'O little town of Bethlehem' were taught and the backing tracks, as well as the Powerpoint slides with words, were used in each school to great effect.

It was wonderful to have Helen Johnson of 'Prima Musica' onboard again this year. Helen and Andrew met to go over the musical items for the Carol service as well as deciding that it would be best for Helen to play the organ for the congregational carols. Helen had been involved in previous Carol Services and always accompanied on the piano with great sensitivity and aplomb.





Final arrangements were put in place during November and V.I.P.s including trustees from the Mukherjee Trust; City of Ripon Mayor, Coun Pauline McHardy; members of the local clergy; headteachers; chairs of governors and parents were all invited to come and listen to the children perform and take part in the Carol Service. The local press were also invited to cover event.

On the morning of Monday 4th December Andrew, set up the church in order to accommodate the 250 plus children and their teachers for the morning rehearsal. The heavy furniture was moved to create a large open space for the children to sit. Mick Sewell was the 'Supervisor' for the day, on behalf of Holy Trinity Church, and ensured that everything would run smoothly for the Rehearsal morning, lunchtime and the Carol Service itself.

An area at the front of the raised platform was kept clear so that each school could stand and perform their individual item. Seating was reserved for the invited guests and the sound system was checked. Mark Varley had put together a Powerpoint presentation to be shown as people arrived for the Carol Service. This took advantage of the large screen and projection set up at the church. Each school was featured in the presentation and the school logo was used as well as information about Winzer Music (Andrew Roberts' music business) Prima Musica (Helen Johnson's music business) information about the Mukherjee Trust (sponsors for the event) and Holy Trinity Church and their chosen charity for the Carol Service—Toy Box, to raise funds to provide Birth Certificates for Street Children in Guatemala.

Mark had also put together a PowerPoint presentation for the Carol Service. Each school's individual item was on a slide with their logo. The use of the Screen ensured that we didn't need to print off 300 orders of service and also allowed clever use of Clip Art and other PowerPoint styles and animations. Paulette Morton from Sharow School did a wonderful job at keeping the slide show on track throughout the rehearsal and also during the Carol Service in the afternoon.



Picture courtesy of Ripon Gazette. Photographer Adrian Murray



At a little after 10.15am, 250 very excited and enthusiastic children arrived in the church. By 11am they were all eagerly awaiting the start of the rehearsal and a chance to put into practice all the hours of learning the songs they had all undertaken.

The 11 schools looked incredible as they stood on a signal ready to sing the first Carol. Each school sang with great gusto and all the weeks of rehearsal came to fruition.



Picture: Ripon Gazette. Photographer Adrian Murray

When it was time for each school to perform individually they had a run through and checked where they would stand as well as getting used to using the microphone, some for the first time!

The rehearsal progressed without any major hiccups. Soon it was time for lunch in the Arches and a welcome cup of coffee for the teachers and adults!



Soon the church began to fill with excited and extremely proud parents and grandparents together with all the invited guests who were shown to their seats at the front of the church.

Enthusiastic children from 11 village primary schools assembled at the front of the church and so began the 2018 Ripon Rural Primary School's Carol Service.

Chris Butler, Vicar at Holy Trinity Church, welcomed everyone and handed over the microphone to Andrew.

A rousing rendition of 'O come all ye faithful' opened the Carol service. Each of the children could be seen with beaming smiles and showed great enthusiasm in their singing.

The variety of items from each school added to the wonder of the occasion. Readings, songs, poems and items composed for the occasion were all performed with great care and confidence and showed how much rehearsal the children had all undertaken, both in school and at home.



The singing of 'Only a Babe' was beautiful and the children sounded angelic as they performed.

A real highlight for everyone was the singing of Silent Night. The children expertly sang a verse in English and then in German. A spine tingling moment was when they sang and signed the final verse.

The Carol service project 2018 has been a great success in bringing together village primary schools, who do not usually have the opportunity of working with other schools, on such a large scale. Each of the children gained in confidence during the project and enjoyed the experience of learning new songs and performing in a large venue. *(Andrew Roberts - Winzer Music)*