The world of church music is much the poorer for the sad loss of Malcolm Walker who passed away on December 21st after a very brave battle with cancer. We hold Diane in our thoughts and prayers at this time.

When Malcolm retired to Devon a few years back, it was clear from his energy and enthusiasm that he would make an impact. He became organist of St Andrew’s Tiverton and before long took on the position of Secretary of Devon RSCM. Whereas most of us find musical administration a chore, Malcolm seemed to love it, producing meticulous and thorough minutes, arranging events and really leading from the front in terms of commitment and encouragement to all around him.

Malcolm also served as Secretary and President of the Exeter and District Organists’ Association which he carried out with a similar level of skill and devotion.

Both Malcolm and Diane became valued members of the team of Guides at the Cathedral, and their combined knowledge of historical detail about the building became renowned.

One of Malcolm’s great achievements at the cathedral was his excellent book about the history and development of the Cathedral Organ, entitled ‘Heavenly Harmony’ written in conjunction with David Davies. This was a real labour of love for Malcolm, and the meticulous research involved is a testimony to his distinguished background as an academic. The book has received excellent reviews in national journals, and quite rightly so.

Most importantly, Malcolm was a great friend to us all, and a real inspiration as a man of faith and joy. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Andrew Millington
On Monday January 18th nearly four hundred people came together in the Cathedral to give thanks for the life of Malcolm Walker. His body was received into the Quire and four items were placed on his coffin, each speaking to a central part of Malcolm’s life. The Peter Bell was tolled once every minute for thirty minutes before his funeral, reminding us that Malcolm’s roof tours were timed to coincide with the reverberant chiming of the Peter. As it rang, the Cathedral Quire and the front of the Nave began to fill with people from many walks of life, a rich cross-section - reflecting Malcolm’s diverse career - who joined to celebrate his life. Malcolm was known locally, nationally and internationally, and thus it is hardly surprising that tributes to him came from many parts of the world. Malcolm had gained the respect, admiration and affection of many, and it was a privilege for all those of us attending his funeral to pay tribute to his gifts. Malcolm loved symmetry and order, and his life was shot through with some memorable coincidences. It seemed apposite, then, that the cold rain drizzled during the thanksgiving service for one whose experiments with a rain gauge in his childhood garden led ultimately to a career of such significant contributions to meteorology.

In her wonderful eulogy Dame Julia Slingo, a family friend and Chief Scientist of the Met Office, guided us through Malcolm’s life. Those of us who knew Malcolm primarily in connection with one discipline were not surprised to learn of his polymathic abilities and interests. We also learned some things about him that we might not otherwise have known: of his being named after Sir Malcolm Sargent, of his being captain of cross-country running at school, or of his having had a private audience with the Dalai Lama. His career as an academic, fuelled by a copy of ‘The Observer’s Book of Weather’ that he read as a boy, led to several important scientific publications. His ability and strength in marrying scientific, historical and socio-economic fields resulted in his tour de force summation of the history of the Met Office, published four years ago by Cambridge University Press. Although physically weakened by the illness at the end of his life, Malcolm continued to write, and thereby continued to share the insights of a sharp and vital mind. His love of birds prompted his own vision of being reincarnated as a robin, although his interest in

MALCOLM WALKER (1942-2015)
– a gentleman, and a gentle man.

‘If reincarnation turns out to be an option I should like to come back as a robin: he’s such a friendly little chap – and he’s pugnacious – but everybody loves him!’
ornithology was well-founded before he had cause to think seriously about life and death and his own journey. When he first knew of his illness he bore the news absolutely philosophically, showing a raw honesty in meeting his future head on. Would that each of us could do the same.

Malcolm wore his academic learning lightly, but, having the soul of an educator, he delighted in sharing his knowledge, and of interpreting it accordingly. He was a professional who, unusually, was able equally to engage with both theory and practice, and who had the patience, technique and good humour needed to enliven even the most obscure topic. As we heard at his funeral service, Malcolm’s peers at school remember him for his kindness and his thoughtfulness, as, indeed, do we.

Malcolm was a highly accomplished musician who never pushed himself forward. His colourful and sensitive organ playing was complemented by his approach to choir training which was part of who and what he was: a teacher, a mentor, and a positive force in people’s lives. His work with both the Devon Area Royal School of Church Music and the Exeter and District Organists’ Association was exemplary: his attention to logistical detail coupled with his musical abilities formed a winning combination. The success of both of these organisations was hugely enabled by Malcolm’s work.

I had the privilege of assisting Malcolm in writing the history of Exeter Cathedral’s organ and organists, and it was marvellous to witness him as a latter-day Sherlock Holmes disabusing us of those urban myths that surround iconic places and things. Watching him like a dog with a bone unearthing exactly why something had happened in the murky mists of time was as gripping as a soap opera, but, ultimately of course, more valuable. Looking through the Cathedral archives with him was a joy, as one realised that his mind contained a canon of information woven from his knowledge of history in general, and of Exeter Cathedral in particular. One shared in his frustrations at the undocumented holes in the timeline of history, and also in his glee at discovering something new.

Diane and Malcolm made an excellent team, and it was so rewarding to see how they brought their fields of expertise together in unfolding the story of Exeter Cathedral to countless visitors. Their contribution to the pedagogic programme for new Cathedral guides ensured accuracy and continuity in telling the story of a building so layered with the vicissitudes of centuries of history, and the Cathedral is indebted to them both for their love of the subject and for their care in telling it.

Although I did not know Malcolm and Diane before their Exeter days, I know that their partnership flourished from their first meeting in 1965. They married five years later, and the foundation upon which they built a lasting companionship led to a fascinating and hugely fulfilling life together.

In mourning Malcolm’s death and in celebrating his life, the Cathedral community joins with Diane in remembering, with great affection, a remarkable man. We offer her our sympathy and continue to give thanks for her place among us in the Cathedral family.

David Davies, Assistant Director of Music, Exeter Cathedral