



Wycliffe
Choral Society

Minutes of Wycliffe Choral Society Annual General Meeting Held at pm Tuesday 6th December 2022 At Wycliffe Junior School

Attendees: Chris Swain (MD), Nigel Baldwin (Chairman), John Cooper (Treasurer), Rosemary Robinson (Secretary) and 31 fully paid-up members of the Choral Society.

1. Introduction, Welcome and Apologies

Nigel Baldwin welcomed everyone to the 14th annual general meeting of the Choral Society as an independent charitable society.

Apologies were received from Joy Way, Pam Thorne, Mary Matthews, Katie Poole, Sue Charlton, Pam Swain, Jennifer Thorne and Judith Morris

2. Minutes of the thirteenth AGM held on 7th December 2021

The minutes had been circulated to all members and were approved by those members who had attended the meeting and signed with no amendments.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

4. Musical Director's Report

Chris Swain presented the attached report to the meeting

5. Chairman's Report

Nigel Baldwin presented the attached report to the meeting

6. Treasurer's Report and Approval of Accounts

6.1 John presented the attached report to the meeting.

6.2 John had previously circulated to all members copies of the Trustees Annual Report and Accounts, plus documents showing a profit and loss summary, historical and projected financial assets, historic membership numbers and ticket sales.

6.3 It was proposed by Trevor Bartlett, seconded by Fiona Henderson and agreed by a show of hands that the Annual Report and Accounts be approved.

6.4 PH asked why we had continued with a concert when the treasurer's budget projected a loss. It was explained that the committee decided that we should go ahead with a loss-making year to ensure that we rebuild the choir following covid lockdown. It was decided that the Society's funds were sufficient to support this, although it could not be done repeatedly. It was further explained that it was hoped that ticket sales would cover much of the concert costs, although in the event this time our ticket sales were much lower than expected. The annual total of members' subscription (over £5000) helps to cope with a concert shortfall and other in year expenses.

7. Election of Officers and Committee Members

7.1 Thanks were expressed to Jennifer Thorne and Gill Chester who have resigned from the committee the remaining committee members are willing to stand again.

7.2 Rosemary Robinson took the chair, and it was proposed by Janet Hudson, seconded by David Homer and agreed by a show of hands that in the absence of any other nominations for the post, Nigel Baldwin be re-elected Chairman.

7.3 Nigel Baldwin took the Chair, and it was proposed by Patrick Marks, seconded by Peter Hankins and agreed by a show of hands that the following officers and committee members be re-elected:

John Cooper (Treasurer)
Rosemary Robinson (Secretary)
Katie Poole
Pam Thorne
Gill Martin
Geoff Hudson

7.4 It was proposed by Alan Chambers seconded by Madeleine Fowler and agreed by a show of hands that the following members be elected to the committee:

Mary Matthews – proposed by Rosanne Jamieson seconded Rosemary Robinson
Sharon Brown – proposed by Patricia Jones seconded by Rosanne Jamieson
Colin Rudall – Proposed by Rosemary Robinson, seconded by Patricia Jones

7.5 Chris Swain agreed to continue as Musical Director (ex-officio), and Gemma Russell has agreed to continue as Wycliffe College Liaison (ex-officio).

7.7 Sectional representatives: Rosanne Jamieson (soprano), Pam Thorne (alto), Geoff Hudson (Tenor), and Patrick Marks (bass)

8. Appointment of Bankers

John Cooper, Treasurer, sought the approval of the meeting to continue with CAF Bank on condition that they are able to continue to offer us a secure service. There are four authorized signatories - John Cooper, Nigel Baldwin, Katie Poole and Rosemary Robinson.

This was proposed by Geoff Hudson, seconded by Patricia Jones, and agreed by a show of hands.

9. Appointment of Auditor or Certifying Accountant

Although there is no requirement to have the annual accounts inspected, the Treasurer stated that he would like to continue with the practice of an independent inspection. GCSD Chartered Accountants, who have served us since we became a charity, are no longer able to provide the service free of charge. Trevor Bartlett offered to provide the inspection.

It was proposed by Nigel Baldwin, seconded by Rosemary Robinson and approved by a show of hands that Trevor Bartlett act as our Independent Examiner.

10. Charity Commissioner's compliance

Katie Poole was not present and will be asked to confirm that we are compliant with the Charity Commission, and that she will submit the Charity Commissioner's Annual Return when it becomes due.

11. Any other business

11.1 Fundraising Suggestions:

In the light of our current cash shortage, ideas for improvements to cashflow were invited.

John Cooper emphasized the need to take control of the cashflow to ensure the future existence of the choir.

Trevor Bartlett suggested a light concert in the summer, with supper, soft drinks and a raffle, something he has been involved with in other choirs

Sam Tolley proposed a 'come and Sing', using online ticketing and involving the college more
Peter Hankins suggested a 'singalong'

Patricia Jones suggested that rather than simply selling to friends and family, members might be able to sell to other groups they attend

Rosanne Jamieson pointed out that many people, especially the elderly, find it unappealing to go out in the dark, so daytime activities may attract more interest.

The Chairman, Nigel Baldwin said that, for the next concert, we will return to giving each member of the choir two concert tickets to try to sell, as this had been effective in the past. He also stated that he would want the Committee to examine the issue more thoroughly at our Committee meeting on 26 Jan 23

Chris Swain said that, as he is no longer chair of the Painswick Music Society, he will have more time to devote to Wycliffe Choral Society events

Ann Cooper told the choir that she believes the financial slide had been going on since 2016 and something must be done.

11.2 Ongoing member input

It was proposed by Chris that we use some rehearsal time at the second rehearsal of term to discuss possible solutions to our cashflow problems, when the majority of the choir will be present. Members were asked to either let Chris or Rosemary know of their ideas or bring them to that meeting. .

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.04pm

Music Directors Report for AGM 6th December 2022

I'd like to begin with a big thank you to those who sang in the concert just over a week ago – when we did identically the same programme back in 2013, it was for our May concert, prior to the Tour to Krakow. Then we had 16 Tuesday rehearsals to prepare for it, whereas this time, we only had 11, so it felt like hard work, that was because it was. As you discovered last Sunday, if you hadn't realised before, (although the soloists make a great contribution it was essentially a choral programme, and you were on your feet for the best part of 11/2 hours. There was also quite a bit of division in the Coronation Anthems in all parts, except for the tenor, and for the altos in particular, which added to the amount of rehearsal time required. We had just about covered all the movements at least once, before our Half Term break and I headed off to HK, and I am most grateful to Julian Elloway for the sterling work he did at the 2 rehearsals he took in my absence.

In the final 2 Tuesday rehearsals for which I was back, I was most concerned about the Coronation Anthems, particularly the later movements of The King shall rejoice, but on the night, once I'd retrieved my baton, and you made a spine-tingling entry in Zadok the Priest, I felt confident that all was going to be well, and so it proved to be. You really rose to the occasion in both Zadok and The king shall rejoice and both went splendidly, with a fantastic contribution from our 3 trumpeters, who did a great job throughout the evening. We had probably spent the least time rehearsing the Schubert Mass, and the Credo in particular, lacked confidence at our final Tuesday rehearsals, but it was clear on the day, that at least some folk had done their homework and it went much better overall in the concert, with the forte passages especially, sounding really exciting. And so to the Vivaldi, I had no doubt that the fast and loud movements would be fine, which they were, but I was especially pleased with the shaping of the phrases, and the dynamic range we achieved in the slower and quieter sections, Indeed, you may be surprised to hear that Et in terra pax, was one of the highlights of the evening for me. We were well served by our soloists, of course, and it was a great pleasure to welcome back Hannah Quinn, Juliet Curnow and Andrew Hopwood, and to be joined by Wycliffe's new Chaplain, William Hamilton-Box. William hadn't sung for quite some time, and was hesitant about taking it on, but I had a lovely email from him the next morning, saying how grateful he was for the opportunity, and how much he had enjoyed it. I also had some lovely emails from member of the orchestra such as:

The programme was well chosen, with superb soloists in the choral works. I always particularly enjoy playing the Schubert Mass in G; a beautiful work.

It's always a real pleasure to play for you and the choir, there is a lovely atmosphere, and you do some lovely programmes - I really enjoyed Sunday!

I hope that your family, friends and acquaintances to whom you sold tickets enjoyed it too. The audience feedback I have heard, has certainly been very positive

A text from a member who had given fliers out at her Pilates class, reported, that one couple were raving about it, and will definitely come to the next one

So well done everyone – I think we can say that all the hard work paid off, and I certainly hope that you enjoyed singing.

Our May concert seems like a very long time ago, but many of you will remember, that we sang The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace, which we had first performed in 2012. Little did we know how prescient our decision to perform it again at this time would be, because of the dreadful events which were, and are still going on in Ukraine. It was however pleasing, that a retiring collection raised a total of £767 for the Disasters Emergency Committee in support of the victims – and this amount included the fee declined by Abdul Quddus our muezzin. The Armed Man is much easier than last Sunday's programme, of course, and although it is not to everyone's taste, there can be no denying that it makes a great impact, and many members of the audience said how moving they found it to be. There was just one work in the first half of the concert, Dies Natalis by Finzi for tenor and strings, in which our old friend Andrew Henley gave a most wonderful performance.

There's a lot more to putting on a concert than the music of course, and I'd like to thank those who help move furniture before and after our rehearsals and concerts in Chapel. The Chaplain thanked us, and wrote that he was very impressed, with how tidy it was when he arrived the next morning, and that the Chapel had never looked so well ordered. Thanks also to Patrick Marks who does a terrific job to work out our seating plan for concerts, and to those who volunteer to act as stewards, car park attendants and ticket sellers on the night, some of them not here this evening – not the most glamorous of tasks, but essential for the safe and efficient running of our concerts. We are also indebted to Ann and John for the splendid poster and programme, and to Katie Poole and Alan Chambers for taking on the selling of tickets to members. Thanks also to our librarians, Sharon Brown, Christine Brown, Sue Charlton and Mary Matthews, who have been a model of efficiency, and again had 3 copies per person to process this term, rather than the usual one or two. Thanks to those few who turned up to erase all those markings last Tuesday – it took nearly 3 hours so it would be good to have many more people next time please. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Lorna Everett at Gloucester Music Library, for her continuing cooperation for her efficiency in sourcing our vocal scores and orchestral parts wherever possible. These are not easy times for libraries, and, not surprisingly, the hire costs have gone up markedly in recent years but remain much cheaper than hiring directly from the publisher. For example, if you have had a good look at the accounts for our spring concert, you may have noted that the hire of the reduced orchestra version of The Armed Man and the Finzi Dies Natalis totaled nearly £600, so although the orchestra and soloists costs were relatively low, when we add in the hire charges and printing costs, the concert cost around £3,700 a loss of over £1200.

I would like to thank our accompanist, Dr Themis Toumpoulidis who is a pleasure to work with, and it's very good to have this connection with the College. Also of course Julian Elloway for taking rehearsals in my absence as well as playing in the recent concerts. We should also record our thanks to Wycliffe College, who provide our rehearsal and performance facilities at no charge. I would now like to thank Nigel, John and the whole committee, and especially Rosemary for all she does, not least in keeping us all informed via the weekly newsletters. Please show your appreciation in the usual way.

As you know, this is our 40th Anniversary year and, as some of you will remember, we celebrated both our 25th and 30th anniversaries with a dinner in Wycliffe Hall. Both were lovely occasions and the College has agreed to host our 40th Anniversary dinner on either Friday 31st March or Saturday 1st April – our choice. A show of hands suggested that Saturday would be the best option. This one will be slightly different, in that I would like to invite a number of selected former members, who for age, health or other reasons, have had to stop singing with us, but who have fond memories of their time in the choir, particularly those who came on one or more of our overseas tours, thereby establishing long lasting friendships, including indeed a marriage between 2 strangers who joined us on our tour to Tallinn in 2007. Their invitation will also mention that our current financial state is not a happy one, and give details of our revised patron and friends scheme, which was discussed the last committee meeting, and I hope will be finalised at the next one in January. We currently only have 2 Patrons and one friend, to whom we are very grateful, but to help get the society back on to a firm financial footing, it would be good to have several more. Based on my experience of PMS, my proposal to the committee is as follows:

Sponsor £100 or more per year, Patron £50 or more per year, and Friend £10 or more per year

Invitations to the dinner of former members, will not be conditional on giving a donation, of course, but I am confident that at least some will, and that this will go some way to alleviating our financial concerns of which John will give details in his report. We will give sponsors and patrons the option of having their name in the programme, or if they prefer, to remain anonymous. There is no reason why current members should not join the scheme, of course, though those who can, do already have the option of making a donation on top of their subscription. As you know, compared with other local choral societies our sub is pretty low, Stroud Choral Society, for example, is £240 a season I believe. I know one or two people already do make a donation on top of their £80, for which we are very grateful,

and if you feel able to do so, it would be much appreciated. Further details of the dinner and the patrons and friends scheme will be available in the New Year.

We resume rehearsals back in here on Tuesday 10th January when we have another lovely programme to get our teeth into, Mozart's Requiem and Coronation Mass. If you have works that you would love us to sing in our 2023-24 season, please do send me an email.

Do also tell friends, family and acquaintances that we would love them to join us in January, especially if they can sing, for what I am sure is going to be another rewarding term, and in the meantime, for those not singing on Sunday, I wish you all the best for Christmas and the New Year, and look forward to seeing you in January.

Chairman's Report for AGM 6th December 2022

Last year I said it had been a strange year. Well, it has been much better this year as we have gradually got back to something like normal not least with 2 successful concerts.

I begin by thanking everybody who helped to make the recent concert go so well. The audience numbers were disappointing despite our efforts to sell tickets. My home telephone number had been put on the flyers but only two people contacted me over a 3 week or so period. We sold 25 tickets through the Stroud Subscription Rooms which probably justifies the quite expensive 2 adverts we put in the Stroud News & Journal. I deduce from this that we the choir members remain the best source of selling tickets

I would like to thank those of you who dealt with ticket sales before the concert, manning the entrances, handling ticket sales at the door, directing the car parking, setting out the chapel the day before and clearing up after the concert. Then helping to clean all the music scores two days later. Thank you too to those gentlemen who did their best to implement the Safe Guarding arrangements that the College is now insisting upon. Our Treasurer John will give us some detail shortly about income for the concert but, in addition, I know that he is concerned about our overall financial position and a worrying decline in our overall financial assets.

I must also thank John's wife Ann for yet again constructing the magnificent programme - it really is the best I ever see around the world of concerts. Finally, thank you to Pam and Chris for looking after the soloists. And especially to Chris who works so hard not just to train us but to find the orchestra and soloists we need. Fortunately he knows that job backwards but I'm sure it takes a huge amount of his time and no doubt the occasional nightmare.

Concert costs continue to be our major expenditure - the best part of £2900 for the soloists and orchestra for the recent concert. As most of you know, we are very fortunate that, unlike many similar choirs, we are not charged for the use of the Preparatory School and the Chapel. I continue to get supportive and appreciative messages from Mr. Nick Gregory, the College Head. Chris and I work hard to keep him and his Head of Music Gemma Russell on our side. Similarly with our relationship with the Head of the Preparatory School and her Head of Music. Our recent most difficult challenge has been coping with the College's demands for more positive "safeguarding". It's not difficult to imagine why such a subject is growing like Topsy. We will have to continue to work conscientiously not to allow it to become our Achilles's Heel.

As I hinted above, our overall financial position is not good. We resisted for several years increasing the annual subscription which is way below that of similar amateur choirs in the Cotswolds but this September, as you know, we felt we had to increase from £70 to £80. Similarly we have kept concert tickets prices stable but I believe we will need to increase a little - probably to £15 - for next spring's concert.

We continue to take an interest in the South Cotswold Big Sing Group (SCBSG) - now made up of Stroud, Thornbury, Tyndale, and ourselves. Several members took part in this year's Cheltenham Festival in a performance of Mahler's 8th Symphony in Gloucester Cathedral. The Group recruited about 200 singers from the various choirs. Chris as usual trained about 50% of the singers mostly here in Stroud.

I am grateful to Rosemary who represents us in Group committee meetings especially when Chris and I cannot attend. She took on the task of Secretary to the Group a year or so ago and will continue to keep us all in the

SCBSG picture in her regular Newsletters - for which she deserves to be thanked publicly: they are excellent Rosemary so thank you for your consistent hard work.

After a considerable dip after Covid began to be got under control, our choir numbers have recovered a bit this term from about the traditional 80 to roughly 70. There will always be a gentle loss of members so please do your best to encourage some newcomers to join us next term. We really need another 10 to 15 not least to help our annual income.

Finally, let me turn to Chris and to all of you on the Committee and to other members to thank you for all the conscientious work you do to keep our choir afloat.

I thank you for the privilege of being your Chairman for the last year. As I have been saying for at least 8 years, it is about time someone took over from me (perhaps that might happen in about 15 minutes time!) but it has been a pleasure to continue to work with my splendid and hard working Committee and with the other choir members who help to make our Society hum along. Thank you everybody

Treasurer's Report for AGM 6th December 2022

Introduction

I will start with a few explanations, which will be much the same as for previous years. Many of you will have heard them before, but they are needed for those who are new (or have forgotten).

In their reports, Chris and Nigel have talked mainly of the calendar year now ending. However, the accounts I am presenting are for the financial year which began at the start of July last year and closed at the end of June this year. The accounts themselves have been prepared on the Receipts and Payments basis, which means that they record all transactions taking place during the financial year, even though some of those transactions relate to events occurring in the preceding or following financial years.

Although the accounts are broken down under various headings, again there is no breakdown by event. So that you can see how the various events turned out I have also provided a Profit and Loss Summary for the year. This includes all transactions relating to particular events during the year, whether those transactions were in the financial year or not. It shows, under Original forecast, what we planned at the beginning of the year and under Current, how things actually turned out.

Since the accounts themselves do not show clearly the Society's total assets at the year end, I have provided a table that does and that also shows the history to date. I have also prepared charts of memberships and of ticket sales for our main concerts.

The actual figures

We had a unsatisfactory year financially, ending the financial year with a substantial decrease in the financial reserve. When planning the year 2021-22, when the Society would come back to life following the Covid lockdown, your Committee assumed that both subscriptions and concert ticket sales, which constitute our main income, would be substantially reduced compared to previous years. We anticipated that this was likely to lead to a substantial deficit, to be met from our reserves, but felt that this was justified in keeping the Society running much as usual and avoiding discouragement of members and audiences. Although we hoped that the outcome might be better than this, it was actually worse. Although subscriptions almost met our estimate, concert receipts fell far short.

I do not think there is much point in going through the figures in detail, however I will be happy to answer questions, if anyone has any, before going on the current and future situations.

One thing I should say before going on, is that the usual Independent Inspector's report is absent. As the Society's annual receipts are below £25,000, it is not obliged to have an inspection at all. I am glad that we have had inspections and they have been done, free of charge, by the accountants GCSD. Unfortunately, limited resources mean they are now having to refuse new business and cannot do free work. Most small societies, such as ours, have a less formal independent inspection done by someone suitable (and who does not need accountancy qualifications). Perhaps a member might be able to suggest someone we could approach.

Current and future situations

Subscriptions have not improved and ticket sales remain low; both are below expectations again. Outgoings continue as expected, with the inevitable result we see. If we continue beyond the end of the current financial year in the same way, we will run out of money; we have to change. First, we need to discuss and decide what is wrong, then we need to decide what to do about it and then we need to monitor regularly what to do about it.

When preparing this report, I looked at my reports from previous years to provide a starting point. I was particularly struck by a passage in last year's titled "What is wrong and ways of improving". It would serve just as well now with

virtually no changes; a lot of what follows comes from there.

What is wrong and ways of improving

There are two ways of reducing losses; reducing expenditure or raising income (or both). Our expenditure has not risen and reducing it would limit what the choir can do; this would probably reduce its attractiveness, compounding the problem. Our income, however, is insufficient. We have two main sources of income; member's subscriptions and concert ticket sales. It would be possible to increase the prices of both, although that could reduce sales. At present, compared to similar choirs, we offer very good value. It would be interesting to hear members' opinions on increasing subscriptions, possibly substantially, and whether increasing ticket prices would make it harder to sell tickets. It may also be possible to find new sources of income. Patrons and Friends schemes are being considered; does any member have any other ideas.

In my report to the 2019 AGM, I mentioned ways of making the choir more attractive both to potential members and to audiences. I said that we all need to make efforts to ensure that they feel welcome, to help with any difficulties they may experience and to encourage them to believe that it is well worth persevering. As an example, before the lockdown we had instituted a mid-rehearsal break to encourage members to socialise, but since resuming, have had only a brief break with everyone encouraged to stay in their seats.

The road ahead

There are two parts to this. The first part is to identify the problems that exist and to determine the causes. The second is think up possible solutions, consider each one's likely effectiveness, choose one (or more), implement it and then monitor its effects. It is not enough just thinking of something, starting it and then hoping it works. I propose a step-by-step plan. For each step, make one person responsible for it, not for actually doing the work, but for monitoring and reporting on it. Publish, to all members, a list of who is responsible for what. When seeking suggestions or investigating, involve all members. We are in this together.

1. Seek suggestions for what problems there are. Then, for each:
2. Seek suggestions for possible reasons for the problem, especially those that have appeared or worsened over time. Then, for each problem:
3. Seek suggestions for solutions. Then, for each, before choosing one or more:
4. Investigate and discuss it.
5. For a chosen solution, estimate what effect it will have and when it will do so. If it is a financial solution, estimate how much money it will raise and when it will do so.
6. Monitor the effect it has, compare that with the target and report.
7. As financial solutions are adopted, add up their total benefit. If less than the total requirement, find some more.
8. As financial solutions are monitored, add up their actual total benefit. If less than the total requirement, find some more.

This may seem like a lot of work and unduly prescriptive. However, if the work is shared around widely it should not overload any individual and, although it is prescriptive, informal methods do not seem to have worked.

Several times I have stressed the importance of involving members, of asking their opinions rather than just guessing what they will be. I also want to stress the importance of members involving themselves; I sometimes get the feeling that people prefer to leave things to others. However, I am sure that if we all pitch in and work together we can be successful once more.