

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of AGM held on 28th Sept 2011 at Nantwich Methodist Church

Present The Chairman, Treasurer, Music Director and 53 members of the Society.

Apologies Cynthia Gorton, Marian Hay, Ron Kelley, Helen Kerr, Gwyneth Rollins, Rachel Pentecost, Margaret Whitehurst.

Minutes

The Minutes of the AGM held on 29th Sept 2010 had been distributed by e-mail/letter. Adoption of these as an accurate record was proposed by Joe Watson, seconded by Eileen Robertson and agreed unanimously.

Matters Arising – nil

Chairman's Report – Roger Boulton

This is the Trustee's report at the end of my second year as chairman. I continue my travelling and send back correspondence of items of musical interest encountered en route. Thanks go to all the committee for carrying on as normal during my absences.

It's been another good year:

Our programme started with a Singing Day before our first concert, An Evening with Mr Handel. Our Christmas Carol Concert followed that, and in the New Year we enjoyed a Messiah come-and-sing, raising £1000 for St Luke's Hospice. The highlight of the year has to have been the Spring concert of Fauré Requiem and Andrew Mildenhall's "Even so is Time". It was Andrew's piece that stole the show, summed up in a comment by one of the audience "Oh, and the Fauré was good too". It was John's insight that recognised the worth in Andrew's manuscript and his leadership that pulled it all together. Thank you to John for all your work and inspiration to us during the whole year. The Spring concert was also a fitting tribute to Louise Fordham whose generous bequest made possible the provision of a first class orchestra: with respect and fond memories. In the summer something lighter, Rossini's Petite Messe Solonelle which was neither petite nor particularly solonelle. A fuller, more critical appraisal is contained in the Music Director's report.

Also during the year we have sung at some events: Crewe and Nantwich Mayor's service, Rookery Hall Carols, Service of Declaration of the High Sheriff. Prestigious events raising the choir's profile and also helping to bring in much needed funds. Other fund raising activities have included raffles, 200 Club, grant applications and sponsorship. I encourage you all to support these activities and thanks to the choir members who have lead these.

The Society enjoys a healthy financial situation. Our policy on financial reserves is to hold an amount of £8,000.00 against unforeseen circumstances. This amount is presently held in an interest bearing account with Standard Life. The Treasurer's Report gives details of other monies.

May we welcome our new accompanist Simon Russell. He has already made his mark combining his considerable musical skills with a huge helping of humour. It is so important to have accompanist and musical director working in such accord.

Jean Atkin, a founder member of the choir retired at the end of 2010 and at the Christmas Concert she was presented with the appointment of Honorary Member of Nantwich Choral Society.

Sadly, last July, Jock Knight passed away. He had had a singing career of over 70 years and was appointed honorary member in 2008. We will sing at his memorial service next month. May he rest in peace.

The committee, as well as arranging the concert programme also manages the choir's affairs. This year we have dealt with constitution changes to comply with Charities' Commission rules on trustees and changes in rules of tax rebates. We have addressed ticket pricing, member's subscription cover and had formal feedback on members' views. To do this has meant being more structured but flexible in our approach. We have less committee but more co-opted members to share out the work. We now have job descriptions to help incoming committee members and a checklist of all-the-things-to-do-to-put-on-a-concert.

Looking ahead:

The programme for this 2011/2012 season is set out in the published leaflet and is on our web site. It starts with a singing day next month studying 'Classics of English Church Music'. Following that this term comes Haydn's Creation and the usual Carol Concert. Next term another come-and-sing, but this year Mozart Requiem to avoid a clash with the grand 40th anniversary concert of Messiah (with orchestra!). Being our 40th anniversary year our Spring Concert is Vaughan Williams, Sea Symphony, a big concert in the Civic Hall and, a novelty, it will be on a Sunday afternoon. In the summer, reciprocal concerts with L'Ensemble Vocal Arpège de Mâcon of Mozart Coronation Mass and Vespers: we visit them in May, they visit us in July.

I am encouraged by the social activities of the choir that brings an added dimension to our singing. We have our monthly pub night, regular socials after the concerts (thanks Vanessa and Fiona), an annual garden party, thanks Bob and Angela for this year and a regular newsletter (thanks Ron).

But thanks to all the committee, new members and re-elected ones for all their help and support and flexibility, not forgetting choir members who's valuable contribution we

cannot do without: raffles, after concert parties, fund raising, sponsorship, staging, logistics... too many to mention by name. All makes a successful year happen.

Thank you all

Treasurer's Report – Adrian Percy

I do not intend providing a line by line description of the accounts, since everyone can probably read them for themselves. However I will mention some specific aspects and provide explanations.

Once again it is possible to report another financially successful year when our accumulated fund has ended the period in excess of £21,400. This is despite what has been a costly year in respect of concerts performed. However this figure is down from last year's substantial accumulated fund of £27000.

It is worth highlighting on the concert account the fact that we are now regularly spending in excess of £20000 per year on concerts, this last year there being two concerts which required substantial orchestras. In addition the requiem concert had major printing costs associated with it, these being for the choral and orchestral scores of "Even so is Time", but these will appear as assets in our accumulated funds in subsequent years.

In general terms we now have no concerts or events which are giving us any financial return. At one time the Christmas concert used to be a money spinner, but now, limited by the numbers we are able to get in the church for a paying performance and maybe just a general decline in interest, we even run at a loss on this. This year it wasn't even the largest attended concert.

It does highlight the fact that maybe more needs to be done to sell more tickets. I appreciate there is a difficulty here for many people and especially where a couple may both be members of the society. However the figures for ticket sales are not great, the summer concert attracting just 139 people for what was actually quite an expensive event to stage. You may remember the need for two pianos and a harmonium. Overall for last year we had an income from concerts of less than half the cost of staging them.

You may say that that is why we pay subscriptions and to an extent that is also true, but that only covers £7500 of the £12800 loss last year. Budgeting for the staging of events and for the society in general is accurate, other than for the sale of tickets which always seems to come in under expectation.

As a brief aside at this time, I will take the opportunity to maybe justify a recent decision of the committee to remove the concessions and simplify our ticket pricing structure. You will see that most of the tickets sold are already concessions so to print and provide them is really just incurring additional cost and difficulty for front of house staff.

However we are fortunate in that we do receive grants and donations, although this year one grant which we have been in receipt of for a number of years has ceased to operate.

Last year we also received a donation from the estate of Louise Fordham for some £5000. We always said that that would be used specifically to help fund our March 2011 Requiem Concert which indeed it did.

However that was an unusual amount and having been received in the financial year 2009/2010 and being spent in 2010/2011, it rather makes the figures in overall surplus/deficit amounts for the respective year ends appear somewhat disproportionate. If we were to transfer the receipt of the donation into the year it was spent, we would only have a £3000 variation rather than £12000 variation between the 2010 and 2011 year end surplus deficit account.

Finally on the subject of income, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, on an annual basis, provides us with about £2000 of tax relief through the Gift Aid scheme. This is a scheme which, if you gift aid your subscriptions and you are a base rate tax payer, HMRC will give the society back the tax you would have otherwise paid. It is a substantial amount of money and is of benefit to us.

Next year however the rules for claiming are changing and we will not be able to claim the gift aid for circumstances where a benefit is seen to have been gained by those donating. The committee is currently considering this and as we see it at present, any benefit gained by members is purely from any teaching that has been received. To this end the one event that is purely given over to teaching is the Singing Day and as such it has been felt that this should continue to sit outside those events which are otherwise covered by the subscriptions. We are not saying there is no teaching content in any of our other rehearsals for concerts but at least we are probably more able to provide a blanket percentage content against which to make our application to HMRC. We look forward to seeing more formal guidance from HMRC.

This next year, our 40th anniversary, is going to be expensive, the sea symphony likely to be the most costly performance since the Dream of Gerontius in Chester Cathedral. And the Macon return trip will also have demands upon our funds. I have to say that John Naylor and Martin Jones are both doing some sterling work on seeking grants from various bodies to support these events and should we be fortunate enough to get them, we will certainly be in a good financial position. Without those grants then I think it is safe to say that next year our balance will not be what it is at present. But then again we bolster up our accounts so that occasionally we can do performances that are big and demanding and if our 40th anniversary doesn't warrant that, then what does?

That is all I intend to say, but will happily take any questions.

Question: The Ticket Income from the Messiah seems disproportionately high when looking at the numbers attending. Why is that?

Answer: There was a Sponsorship facility available at that event and the sponsorship money is included in the ticket income.

Question: What are the expenses regarding the Macon return trip? Will the trip be subsidised?

Answer: No – the expected costs will be for some hospitality and social events for the visitors from Macon.

Adoption of the accounts subject to audit was proposed by Joyce Clegg, seconded by Liz McCrone and agreed unanimously.

Subscriptions to remain at £90pa, proposed by Wal Kaye, seconded by Bob Pugh and agreed unanimously.

Music Director's Report – John Naylor

Thank you all for another wonderful season of music making in 2010/11. I look back on a really enjoyable Handel Evening at Coppenhall and particularly remember the swagger of the Dettingen Te Deum (bold choral singing spurred on by resounding trumpets), the delicacy of Simon's playing in the organ concerto and Zadok anointing Solomon with due musical ceremony. Our Family Carol Concert celebrated Christmas in traditional fashion and it was good to join once again with Nantwich Young Voices, especially in two new arrangements specially written for us by John Benson. In January we embarked upon Andrew Mildinhall's major new work 'Even Such is Time'. Despite our initial apprehension about tackling such a major enterprise, this turned out to be a really rewarding and memorable experience for us all from beginning to end. Organising all the creation and printing of vocal and orchestral parts, learning the music and then giving a very accurate and moving performance was a spectacular achievement. We were well served by our soloists Sue Marrs and Chris Booth-Jones (their performances are stunning on the recording) and by the very talented members of the Northern Concordia Orchestra, our own band of professional musicians. (Did you notice the amazing horn playing?) The performance of the Fauré Requiem in the second part of the concert was truly serene: the orchestral sound from all those violas was quite something. The whole concert was generally agreed to have been an entirely appropriate disposition of Louise Fordham's most generous legacy. We were able to devote a fair amount of detailed rehearsal time to Rossini's Petite Messe Solonelle which resulted in a confident and well crafted performance – one of the best I have experienced. We had some great soloists – it was good to invite our friends Cathy Benson and Harriet Goodwin back and particularly notable was the tenor – Peter Kirk's performance – I hope we'll hear (and see) more of him in the future.

In between these major concerts, many of us sang at the Mayor's Civic Service in Crewe and some of us sang at the Cheshire High Sheriff's Swearing in Service and others sang carols at Rookery Hall.

A few interesting moments behind the scenes: the bass soloist collapsed in the rehearsal at Coppenhall (but fortunately recovered), Simon was injured on the morning of the Messiah and the organist booked for the Requiems was taken into hospital on the

morning of that concert: by good fortune and purely by chance Andrew Mildinhall was at hand on both occasions. (Curiously he kept well away from the summer concert!) It was bitterly cold on the day of the Messiah performance – very much ‘in the deep mid winter’ and St Mary’s was accidentally double booked on the day of the summer concert so we had to juggle with setting up and concert timings. I often think of each season in terms of snakes and ladders.

We begin each term with a new work (sometimes partly known, sometimes completely unknown to all of us), gradually grow in confidence as we work on it together and then almost always reach a very good and convincing performance standard. Then next term we start all over again. For me, that’s a great part of the enjoyment of it all as we explore great music together – the performance is always the culmination of many weeks’ hard and I hope enjoyable work. I am truly grateful for all the support which you all give to NCS and to me personally: it’s a real pleasure and privilege to work with you all, especially as each season seems even more exciting than the last, and I think 2011/12 will be no exception.

Election of Officers

Chairman – Roger Boulton)

Vice-Chairman – Anne Barnard) re-elected

Vice Chairman – vacant

Treasurer – Diane Wheatley Proposed by Roger Boulton, seconded by Wal Kaye

Secretary – Adam Warner Proposed by Roger Boulton, seconded by Jenny Naylor

Committee members – Fiona Field)

Ester Harries)

Ron Kelley) re-elected en bloc

Rachel Pentecost)

Bob Pugh)

Eileen Robertson)

The meeting closed at 7.38 pm