

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of AGM held on 26th Sept 2012 at Nantwich Methodist Church.

Present: The Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary. Musical Director & 59 members of the Society.

Apologies: Ian & Ros Wells, Debbie Rowlands, Barbara Shone, Sheila Luke, Joyce Foster, Doreen Sillitoe.

Minutes of the AGM held on 28th Sept 2011 had been distributed by e-mail/newsletter & adoption of these as an accurate record was proposed by Wal Kaye & 2nd by Ron Kelley, all agreed.

Matters Arising – nil

Chairman's Report: Roger Boulton

This is the Trustees' report at the end of my third & final year as chairman.

It's been a big three years & we've done some adventurous programmes. It all started with 'Dream of Gerontius', my debut concert as chairman. Big, not just because of the scale of the work itself but also because, having performed it with Romsey Choral Society, in Chester Cathedral, a venue not familiar to us, we then performed it the following week in Romsey Abbey. And then the following year another big highlight: Andrew Mildinhall's 'Even Such is Time'.

This year continued in the same vein. We started with a singing day in October, then Creation in November and the usual Carols at Christmas. We departed from the norm by singing Mozart's Requiem for the come-and-sing day. And who could forget the spring concert of VW Sea Symphony surpassed only by David Greed's rendition of The Lark Ascending. To round off the year we arranged the exchange concerts with L'Ensemble Vocal Arpege de Macon, performing both here & away Mozart's Coronation Mass & Vespers, my swan song as chairman.

Sadly, late last year, Jean Nurse passed away. She had had a long association with the choir which was a large part of her life. Some of us sang at her funeral & money given to us in her memory was used to sponsor David Greed's playing of The Lark Ascending: a fitting tribute. May she rest in peace.

To perform such works to such acclaim is an impressive achievement due not just to the talents of conductor, accompanist & choir members but also, to our policy of hiring top professionals to accompany & sing solos with us: our performance is lifted, our audiences appreciate it, the orchestra & soloists want to return and. Most of all, the feedback from the choir members has been to endorse this policy. Taking considered risks in performing more adventurous concerts has led from success to further success. To underpin this, along with the existing programme plan & budget, strategic planning & marketing have latterly been a focus for the committee encouraged by the Arts Council when applying for grants. We now also have job descriptions to help committee initiates, an up to date working website, and check lists to make sure we forget nothing when setting up a concert venue.

With that in mind we have prepared another exciting programme for next season. To celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the founding of Nantwich Choral Society the highlight will be a re-enactment of the Society's first ever concert: Handel's Messiah at St. Mary's Nantwich, to be performed with period instruments. Our big work in the spring will be Bach Passion: St Matthew or St John depending on

whether we have obtained an Arts Council Grant. Departing again from the 'usual Messiah', the Come & Sing event will be The Armed Man. We will be doing 'the usual' Family Christmas Concert at St. Mary's Nantwich & Singing Day but this time at the church of St Boniface, Bunbury. We round off the season with a rendition of Puccini – Messe di Gloria at St Mary's, Nantwich. But see our website for more details.

It's been a good three years. We remain financially very healthy & our numbers continue to grow. Our policy on financial reserves is to hold an amount of £8,000 against unforeseen circumstances. This amount is presently held in an interest bearing Barclays Premium account.

Thanks to John Naylor for his inspired leadership & the excellent musical relationship built up with Simon Russell (accompanist) with his harmonious talents & humour: a great team to work with. Thanks to Anne Barnard, leaving the committee after six years: three as chairman, three as vice-chairman. Thanks to all the committee for their hard work & unending support, including all those people who have taken on a special responsibility: performed to perfection. Nantwich Choral Society was handed over to me in good shape, I trust I hand on the same to the new chair. Thank you all.

Treasurer's Report: Diane Wheatley

This year has been a sharp learning curve for me & I hope that I have not let you down. I must thank Adrian & Stephanie Percy, John Naylor & Roger Boulton for their help & support through the year. I also need to thank Ron for getting the report copied for us all.

The report has been circulated – a) Statement of activities, comparing 2010-11
b) Concert accounts
c) Treasurer's Report of Accounts – a full list of accounts with bank balances & accruals.

Bank Balances – Starting balance = £21,459.72

Closing balance = £20,482.35 – with accruals = £22,458.53

This has been a sound well balanced year.

Concerts – the concert account page shows the details but overall we are well within the budget with costs of -£5,966.65 compared to the planned budget cost of -£8,290.

We had surprising gains on the Creation & Carols concerts & the Come & Sing, Mozart's Requiem which helped compensate for the additional costs on the other concerts. We could have done even better if we had sold more tickets. It is a shame when the choir & orchestra outnumber the audience.

Grants – we have received £2,000 thanks to Martin's hard work which helped make our finances more secure. It certainly took some of the pressure off me.

Gift Aid – I apologise that the Gift Aid for last year has not yet been received although it has been claimed & is stated in the accounts. I'm having problems with the taxman but nothing that can't be sorted out. When it arrives the money will help towards our anniversary concerts. Can I please ask those of you who haven't filled in a Gift Aid form to consider gift-aiding your subscription. Which leads me on to –

Subscriptions – our income from subscriptions was £8,225 – a vital amount.

As we had a good year last year, the committee have agreed that the subscription should stay the same for another 12 months. However it will make our finances more secure & make money available for all our anniversary concerts if I receive the money sooner rather than later. May I ask those of you who pay the full sum to pay as soon as possible & those who pay by instalments, to pay in 2 instalments – now & in January.

Full subscription = £90 due now

Or 2 instalments = £45 now & £45 in January

Those who pay by direct debit, will you please check what you are paying & when!

Fundraising – Many thanks to Grace & David, Eileen, Barbara, Steph, Joe & anyone I've forgotten for all their hard work in raising funds for the Society. A grand total of £1,999 was raised last year. Thank you.

£594 of this money (with the fundraisers' approval & support) was placed in to a Social Fund which went towards the costs of the visit of the choir from Macon.

Macon Visit – organisation & social event costs.

An interesting & enjoyable visit which cost us £909.71 offset by £594 raised for the social fund. Cost of Macon visit = £315.71

The New Season 2012-2013 –

We have started the year with reserves of £22,458 of which £20,282.35 is in the bank.

This is our Anniversary Year with special concerts planned. With our current balance, your subs, a grant from the Arts Council & the overdue Gift Aid, we can cover the planned programme. If we can also sell lots of tickets & support all fundraising activities we can celebrate & enjoy our anniversary year & have some money left over for the following year!

Adoption of the accounts subject to audit was proposed by Roger Boulton & 2nd by Anne Barnard. All agreed

Subscriptions to remain at £90pa proposed by Diane Wheatley & 2nd by Sue Briscoe. All agreed.

Wal Kaye questioned why we need to retain £12,000 in the current account – Roger Boulton stated that there were no interest bearing accounts for Societies when we changed banks 3yrs ago. David Jones added that interest bearing accounts only exist for personal accounts. The amount held is necessary to support concert cash flow.

Roger Boulton thanked Diane for her clear & concise report.

Music Director's Report: John Naylor

Each year as I stand before you at the AGM of this Society, I reflect that we have had such a wonderfully successful year of making music together that the challenge for the year to come seems even greater if we are to continue our upward trajectory both musically & organisationally.

And yet we seem to go from strength to strength, & 2011-2012 was no exception.

You will recall that we started with a Singing Day at St. Mary's, Acton in which we explored a new volume of English Church Music. We had a balanced & enthusiastic choir on the day & we were all able to fit in the chancel of that lovely church & make full use of the excellent organ, played so expertly by Simon. Fortified by Eileen's tea, coffee & tray bakes, it was a very enjoyable occasion.

Our autumn concert saw a performance of Haydn's Creation: sometimes performances with organ accompaniment can be deemed to be a poor second best, but I rather think not on this occasion. Graham Eccles did a super job of virtuoso playing for us, & Lucinda Richardson & Peter Davoren thrilled us with their arias. The worm turned unforgettably in Adrian Blakely's Bass aria. As always, you rose to the occasion & it was a thrilling performance much enjoyed by all present.

Our Christmas concert once again involved Nantwich Young Voices – this has now become a tradition which I for one am keen to maintain. It was good to see families present & everyone joining in various carols with great enthusiasm – as usual a lovely start to the Christmas festivities.

In January we put on our customary 'Come & Sing event' – this time Mozart's Requiem. An amazing 160 singers turned up for what turned out to be a very good performance, accompanied on the organ by my good friend William Nicholson. In fact members of the audience to whom I spoke afterwards couldn't believe that as a complete choir we had only come together for the first time that day. As an experiment, we engaged student singers from the RNCM. One in particular showed great promise, but to be candid I would be reluctant to repeat the experiment & definitely not for one of our proper concerts: I had to do some fairly intensive coaching between the full rehearsal & the performance.

When I asked some time ago, as I do from time to time, what members would like to perform, more than one of you mentioned Vaughan Williams Sea Symphony. I must confess that I wasn't familiar with it, but we put a budget together & decided to go for it. What a triumph!

You may recall that we scheduled the performance on a Sunday afternoon (in fact Mothering Sunday) in the Civic Hall. There were 60 in the orchestra & 130+ in the chorus – Market Drayton Choral Society were our guests. The performance was a sell-out.

At the beginning we gave the second ever public performance of Vaughan Williams 'The Garden of Proserpine', a recently rediscovered & most interesting if dark & slightly sinister work for which we received a very generous grant from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust. I have never driven a Bentley, but I can imagine what it must be like after conducting David Greed & our fully professional Northern Concordia Orchestra in the Lark Ascending. It was, quite literally, fabulous. At the end you could have heard a pin drop. And then there was the Sea Symphony.

When we started to rehearse the Sea Symphony, some hearts grew slightly faint; John, how on earth are we going to learn this confidently enough for a performance? There were dark mutterings from Ron & Bob who had taken part in a recent Chester Festival performance about the 'Away' sections in the last movement. My standard response was 'trust me. I'm a conductor'! & even though we were still on the first half of the first movement after 4 rehearsals I was totally confident that we would rise to the occasion again, as indeed you did. I would at this point like to say a heartfelt thank you to Simon whose rehearsal accompaniments inspired us all to achieve great things, me included.

On the day, you gave a real performance – there was no hint at all of just getting by. There were no dodgy moments & no wobbly bits: the waves duly crashed, the sails billowed, the night on the beach was suitably spooky & the spirit of man eventually calmly embarked on a most moving final journey

with a hushed pianissimo. Cathy Benson & Chris Booth Jones, both experienced in their parts, were superb. Members of Market Drayton Choral Society will stop me in Morrisons to reminisce about a truly wonderful occasion which they, & I am sure we, will remember for a very long time.

However there was little time to rest on our laurels, & we had only 6 weeks to prepare for the performance of Mozart's Coronation Mass with our French friends in Macon. They of course had been learning it for many months previously, but we took it in our stride & gave a very good account of ourselves in St Vincent's Cathedral. Specially noteworthy were the 3 a capella pieces we performed by ourselves which received special praise for such sensitive singing by one of the professors from the local music conservatoire. In contrast, I'm afraid French choral singers only seem to know 2 dynamics – loud & very loud.

WE were delighted to welcome many of our French friends back to Nantwich on July 14th for specially commissioned arrangements of our National Anthems & the Mozart Coronation Mass & Vespers. Once again our orchestra were on fine form & much admired by our French guests.

So quite a year – including 2 major orchestral concert, an overseas trip, a sell-out Sing it Yourself Day & a memorable performance of Creation.

In the meantime of course we have been planning ahead for this year. The delights of Messiah with full period orchestra, St Matthew Passion with a major Arts Council grant & Puccini's Messe di Gloria will no doubt be highlights. I have spent much of this morning negotiating the percussion section for our Sing it Yourself performance of Karl Jenkins 'The Armed Man' in January: This has taken a bit of doing – we need a full set of tubular bells, a Mark tree, wind chimes, triangle, chekere, tambourine, snare drum, toms, 3 timpani, cymbals & a drum kit: oh & 3 players as well: what fun in prospect!

So as we embark on the 41st year in your Society's history I believe that we are in good heart. Our membership continues to rise, our finances, despite some expensive concerts last year, are in good shape & musical standards continue at a very good level indeed.

We have a very firm & I believe generally successful policy of encouraging new members & making them properly welcome when they come to sing with us: nothing is more off-putting to someone, especially the less musically experienced, than a choir who are cliquey, full of themselves & ignore new members. (A moments pause to thank the saintly Gareth Malone for his benign influence on the increasing membership of so many choirs.) Now moving swiftly on.....

We have an excellent, hard working committee & many other members who do so much to ensure our Society's success. Many of the very talented orchestral players who come time & again to play for us are amazed at the range & depth of what we do – they tell me that there are few other choral societies who perform to our standards so frequently with a fully professional orchestra & soloists. On the circuit, we have an excellent reputation, & they ask me how we achieve it all.

My standard response is unlike some other organisations we don't rely on just one or two people to make things happen, we have so many people helping in so many different ways - & as a result things get done & nobody has to do too much (well, too often at least).

Finance plays a major part, and as you will see from the accounts, roughly a third of our revenue comes from concerts, one third from subscriptions & a third from grants, sponsorship & most importantly

from additional fund raising activities including the 200 Club, the Christmas Raffle & matched funding. Thank you very much for all that you do to make these so successful.

In addition, one of our previous treasurers has astutely pointed out that the cost to the Society of mounting an ambitious work with a large orchestra is almost always less than something of more modest scope, simply because such occasions attract larger audiences, never mind grants & sponsorship.

It would be invidious to pick anyone out, but I would like to make some specific references: We are grateful to our friends here at the Methodist Church who make us so welcome in this place each Wednesday evening: it is a very congenial place to rehearse, especially on cold winter evenings.

We are also grateful to St Mary's Church for their helpful hospitality for our concerts. Peter Chantry has always been extremely supportive & I hope we will be able to convey the Society's thanks to him as he leaves to move on to new challenges.

Lastly, I have been privileged to work with outstanding chairmen during my time as your Music Director. Ron Kelley was chairman when I arrived & he (together with Jonathan Layfield as treasurer & his committee) did so much to put the society back on surer foundations which we have subsequently been able to build on. Anne Barnard took over & worked so hard & was so incredibly supportive as we began to aim higher in the scope & standard of our performances. Anne stands down from the committee after this meeting & I would like to thank her very much for her support & friendship to me: it is good to know that she will be continuing as our 'Ambassador at large'.

Roger Boulton has been an absolute tower of strength during his period as chairman. Unflappable, supportive, with a great eye for detail but able to see the big picture too, he has been equally enthusiastically supportive & never blinched at some of my more ambitious musical schemes. It is good that Roger will continue as Vice-Chairman – we will all appreciate his wise counsel.

I am very much looking forward to working with Elizabeth Lea as our new chairman: I know that she will be supported not only by our talented & hard working committee, but by all of you who I know have the best interests of this lovely society at heart.

I have said before, & have no hesitation in repeating that it is an absolute privilege & enormous pleasure to be entrusted by you with the direction of the Society's musical activities. I am very grateful to Simon for his talented & humorous support as our accompanist & to you for working so hard to enable us to make great music together.

So please let me know which works you'd like to perform in the future: I really don't mind whether it's Mahler's Symphony 1000 or Vivaldi's Gloria – Britten's War Requiem or Stainer's Crucifixion: as long as we bring the same levels of commitment & ambition for the best musical standards we can achieve together.

On that subject, & a rather heavy hint, - I really would like one day to conduct Joe Green's Requiem. Perhaps, on reflection not next year (even though it will be the bicentenary of the birth of the composer, more familiar as Giuseppe Verdi) because it would be another Chester Cathedral concert, but perhaps the year after in 2014!

I leave you with that thought & my very grateful thanks for all your support.

Election of Officers;

Chairman – Elizabeth Lea - proposed by Anne Barnard, 2nd by Roger Boulton

Vice-Chairman – Ron Kelley)

Roger Boulton) proposed en bloc by Rachel Pentecost,

Treasurer – Diane Wheatley) 2nd by Christine English

Secretary – Rosemary Jones - proposed by Diane Wheatley, 2nd by Ester Harries

Committee members – David Jones - proposed by Diane Wheatley, 2nd by Ester Harries

Ester Harries)

Fiona Field) Reappointed en bloc

Bob Pugh) - proposed by Roger Boulton

Eileen Robertson) 2nd by Jenny Naylor

Rachel Pentecost)

Roger Boulton handed over to Elizabeth Lea who thanked her nominees & thanked Roger for all his work for the Society.

The meeting closed at 7.42pm

Rachel Pentecost (Minute secretary)