

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of AGM held on 20th Sept 2017 at Nantwich Methodist Church.

Present: The Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, Music Director & 55 members of the Society.

Apologies: Steph & Adrian Percy, Barbara Schultz, Bob Pugh, Gillian Tucker, Gill Handford, Rita Davis, Marlene Flannery, Ann Ferguson, Sue Bridge.

Kay Foster took the chair & opened the meeting at 7.00pm

Minutes of the AGM held on 28th Sept 2016 had been distributed by e-mail/newsletter & were adopted as an accurate record

Matters Arising – nil

Chairman's Report: Kay Foster

Nantwich Choral Society Chairman's report 2016-17

In the season under review, we put on our usual four concerts: Andrew Lloyd Webber's Requiem and the Tippett Spirituals from *A Child of our Time* in November; our Family Carol Concert, featuring the Nantwich Young Voices, in December; Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at Easter; and John Rutter's Magnificat and *The Sprig of Thyme* plus other items in July. We also put on our usual educational activities: a singing day in October exploring many settings of *Ave Maria*, and a special 'come and sing' Messiah with orchestra in January that attracted around 200 singers.

The July concert was the second half of an exchange programme with our twinned choir, L'Ensemble Vocale L'Arpège de Mâcon, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the twinning of the towns of Crewe and Nantwich with Mâcon. Members of NCS went to Burgundy in May to perform the Requiem in Mâcon and by all accounts had a thoroughly good time, being made most welcome and entertained lavishly. We did our best with perhaps more limited funds when our French friends came here but nonetheless managed a reception in Nantwich Civic Hall, an evening party and a post-concert buffet. Almost everyone in the choir contributed to the success of this visit but I would particularly like to single out Ian Wells who led on overall organisation, Rachel Pentecost for hosting and catering the party and Anne Barnard for the post-concert buffet. We are also very grateful to the Town Councils and Mayors of Crewe and Nantwich for the reception which they put on for the French party and members of the choir.

During the year we continued to create and maintain links with our local community by inviting a number of guests to our concerts: three mayors (Nantwich, Crewe and Cheshire East) plus their consorts; Members of Nantwich Town Council; the Rev. Barry Wilson and the Rev. Bernard Moss and their wives; and representatives of the local WI, the Soroptimists, the Nantwich Players and the Crewe and Nantwich Twinning Association.

Thinking of the administration and organisation of the choir, in the last year we have agreed a policy on subscriptions and a procedure for complaints, which can both be

found on the Society's website. We already have a policy on Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults. Funding bodies that we deal with expect us to have this sort of documentation and it also helps with the day-to-day organisation of the choir. We continue our efforts to manage our financial affairs well and thriftily, with a reserve of at least £8000. In view of our current good financial situation the committee has decided that the members' subscription will remain at £90 a year for the 2017-18 season. Our membership total at the end of 2015-6 was 104.

Looking ahead to the next season, we are currently rehearsing the Verdi Requiem for performance at the Victoria Hall in Hanley in October. This concert, for which we will be joined by the Ceramic City Choir, is a big undertaking for us and a very special event, marking our 45th anniversary and the 75th of the Ceramic City Choir. The usual Christmas concert will be followed in the spring by the Dvorak Stabat Mater and Vaughn Williams Benedicite. In the summer, we will be singing Gilbert and Sullivan and we have been very fortunate to engage the services of the internationally-renowned G&S singer, Richard Suart, for this concert.

I would like to conclude my report by thanking all the members of the committee for their tireless work for the choir. Among our elected officers, Tina Jones is standing down as Treasurer, and Carol Seed is not seeking re-election as our General Secretary, although she has already taken on the organisation of singing days and come and sing events. Two of our members with special responsibilities are relinquishing them: Ian Wells, our legal advisor and exchange visit supremo, and David Jones who has passed over the organisation of singing days and come and sing events to Carol, though he remains our webmaster. I would like to thank all of these people very much for their contribution to the choir. I would also like to thank all the remaining choir members with special responsibilities, and indeed everyone who helps with all the myriad activities that keep us going, from moving chairs to raising funds. Our Music Director and Accompanist continue to make rehearsals a pleasure and inspire us to give our best in performances. My thanks to you all.

Kay Foster
Chairman
19th September 2017

Treasurer's Report: Tina Jones

Reports have been circulated

1. Concert |Account
2. Statement of Financial Activities
3. Balance Sheet

We have reduced our net assets over the year due to more concerts with orchestra. Concert costs have been £27,088 & income of £14,162. £735 over budget for the year – a net overspend of £12,925.

There has been more grant income than expected which included £5400 from the Arts Council for the Verdi Requiem.

The most significant overspend in relation to the previous years included 2 years invoices for the sound system.

Wal Kaye enquired about the use of the legacy – discussed at the August committee meeting – Some already used to assist St. Mary's in the purchase of a grand piano, digital harpsichord & the carol competition and agreed to increase our reserves from £8,000 to

£12,000 & subsidise expenditure on concerts to include more orchestras. Also to invest in a lapel mic.

Anne Barnard enquired about the results of the members questionnaire – members would like more info in advance re repertoire & concert dates. Post concert parties need more promotion. Meeting minutes will not be on the website but are available via the secretary for anyone wishing to read them.

Acceptance of the accounts delayed until 4th Oct due to delay in circulating reports due to computer issues. Proposed by Wal Kaye, seconded by Anne Barnard, all agreed. Please see the minutes of this meeting which are at the end of this document.

Kay Foster thanked Tina for her work through the year & her report.

Music Director's Report: John Naylor

Report for 2016/17 Season

I am often asked 'What is my favourite music?' and usually I reply that I don't really have a favourite composer or type – I usually enjoy so much whatever I'm working on at any given time. (However, I must admit that if really pushed, I'd probably nominate Bach as No 1 and Vaughan Williams as No 2).

Because I am lucky enough to perform quite a lot of music, each year that I prepare my report to you for our Annual general Meeting I have to scratch my head and root around my computer to remember what it was we sang some 12 months ago: now I've recalled it, some of it really does seem a very long time ago.

We began last year with another very successful Singing Day, based on the Ave Maria text. We were able to explore some 20 or so settings by composers ranging from Josquin des Prez to Stravinsky. Almost 70 people enjoyed the wide ranging repertoire and thanks to very generous printing sponsorship by Mornflake, they were able to take away with them a handsomely printed and bound copy of the music on which they had been working.

As we all know, requiems are very fully represented in the choral repertoire, but there are requiems and requiems! Last year we tackled Andrew Lloyd Webber's contribution to the genre, coupled with the Tippett Spirituals from 'A Child of our Time'.

We gave a respectable account of the Tippett, although I think we could probably do even better if we revisit them sometime in the future. The Lloyd Webber was a triumph of perseverance and diligence over initial expectation: it's tricky, with some challenging rhythm changes and harmonic progressions – the sort of piece that if it sounds wrong, it's probably actually right. I think it's fair to say that we all felt a high degree of satisfaction in having overcome most, if not all, the challenges it presents but we weren't too unhappy to be moving onto our annual carol concert.

As has now become traditional, Nantwich Young Voices joined us and the church was very full with an audience who seemed to join in with very good humour. Our friend James Hall was the soloist in the Vaughan Williams fantasia on Christmas Carols and there were noteworthy performances of Laurisdén's O Magnum Mysterium and a new addition to our repertoire – John Rutter's Candlelight Carol. Some of you will be pleased that I have made a mental note that this year will be less Rutter and almost all of you will be pleased that I'll plan less repertoire so that we finish in good time.

Christmas was hardly over when we were back in St. Mary's for a 'Come and Sing' day, this time Messiah but with the added excitement of an orchestra made up of local professionals. The young soloists, (all from the Royal Academy of Music) were excellent, and hard work though it was (Messiah usually is – never underestimate that great work,) the results were very rewarding. The feedback comments afterwards from many of those who took part were very complementary, not only for the music but also for the entire organisation which went into the day.

As I think we all know, some two years ago we received a very generous anonymous donation which the Benefactor, after some enquiries, hypothecated to a performance of Mendelssohn's Elijah which after much planning duly took place in March in the Civic Hall. What a triumph it was!

We had an outstanding group of soloists including Alison Philips who charmed us all with some superb soprano singing and Dingle Yandell singing Elijah very convincingly for the first of what I am sure will be many future occasions in his career. The Northern Concordia Orchestra were, as usual, quite superb and thankfully didn't take too much persuasion from me to maintain a good balance between themselves and the choir, even in the big choruses. The fire descended from heaven to great excitement, despite some very energetic entreaties there was no response from Baal, and the light shone forth brilliantly in the final chorus.

We had a very good audience even though it was Mothering Sunday and I think we can chalk it up as one of the outstanding events in the Society's 45year history.

John Rutter's Magnificat is really quite challenging and we didn't have very long to learn it before a party of some 30 of us set off to Macon to perform it in the Cathedral there with our friends of Arpege de Macon at the end of May. It was great to meet up with them all: they entertained us very generously.

Most of us who went on the trip and enjoyed the civic buffet lunch after the Friday morning Civic Reception will recall with surprise (and almost shock) when we discovered that there was a second main course to follow the wonderful first course which was more than a meal in itself. The concert itself included a performance of part of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony complete with saxophone, a French alto section who seemed permanently out of sync with everyone else and many French singers who made up in exuberance what they lacked in musical subtlety.

You will be pleased to know that at both civic reception and the concert our representative choir sang very well indeed. Some of us wondered as the Mayors of Crewe and Macon exchanged pleasantries and documents whether this was the first of a new set of post Brexit trade agreements – we buy their wine and they buy our cheese! In truth, it was a very happy visit and a great time was had by all.

So by the time mid-July came and it was time for the home leg of the exchange we had had time to polish up not only the Rutter Magnificat but also The Sprig of Thyme. Thank you to Nantwich Town Council who revived and entertained our guests most warmly.

Mainly at the French prompting, we resurrected the settings of the National Anthems which my friend John Benson very kindly re-orchestrated for the available resources and which sang to great effect at the beginning and end of the concert. Everyone seemed to enjoy the event, and again a great time was had by all.

Our exchanges are, I think, a very valuable addition to our choir's culture but there is no doubt they are quite demanding. I for one was really quite tired after the French visit here and many of us seemed to agree that a 5 year gap for that particular encounter is probably not too long.

So all in all, a great season. Three concerts with orchestras last year, some very varied and challenging music, and some very satisfying performances.

And now to a couple of problems, neither of them with easy or straightforward solutions:

As we have grown bigger as a choir, and as we (quite rightly in my view) continue to perform mainstream major works in the choral repertoire, often with an orchestra, performance in St. Mary's becomes more and more difficult. For instance, in the summer concert the sopranos had to be separated from each other (with unfortunate consequences at one point when those at the back were a bar in advance of those in front), and sight lines between me and many of the singers were rather inadequate.

I hasten to add that this isn't the fault of our excellent Concert managers – it's just a function of the layout in St. Mary's. we invested some years ago in modifying the front pews so that they could be removed, but unfortunately that improvement was lost when the reordering took place and we went backwards in terms of available space.

St. Mary's is such a wonderful place in which to sing, and often of course we need the organ, so I guess we'll just have to continue to work round the problems. Maybe when the alterations to the Civic Hall are complete we should consider more performances there, providing that the music is suitable.

Secondly, our excellent tenor section seems suddenly to have shrunk, although I must emphasise the reduction has been more in numbers than in quality. This time last year I think we had 16 tenors on the books, by the summer we had reduced to 10, and Eileen told me that at the last count we only had 6 available for the Verdi Requiem.

Tenors are usually the rarest of vocal commodities in most choir, so I very much hope that this diminution will only be temporary. In the meantime, Ladies particularly, if you come across nay tenors, please grab him (or indeed her) and persuade them to come along and join us.

Once again it gives me great pleasure to record grateful thanks to the members of our committee. I am often asked why Nantwich Choral Society is one of the most successful choirs that our professional orchestra players encounter. I usually answer that not only do we have an enthusiastic and talented membership, but we also have a committee (and others as well) amongst whom all the necessary jobs are fairly widely spread, so that it's not just a few who do everything, but many who so willingly and skilfully contribute their time and talents and do something.

I am personally very grateful to all of them, but especially to two people:

Kay who is incredibly helpful and supportive, and as chairman has gently but firmly continued to steer the Society's administration during the last year. We all owe her much for her dedication and wise leadership.

And Simon, who helps us all so much, seems uncannily to know where I am going to pick up in rehearsing a section of music before even I do, wakes the piano up at each rehearsal from its slumbers during the previous week, and occasionally (I understand) has been known to make encouraging remarks and gestures when my back is turned! He is a great colleague and a great asset to us.

Lastly, I am most grateful to you all, the members of Nantwich Choral Society.

To many people who enquired about choir in general, I am fond of quoting the same aphorism – that all the best choirs continuously reinvent themselves. We are sad to see some members move on from time to time for whatever reason, but we are always glad to welcome new members to whom we try to be as inclusive as possible from the moment that they attend their first rehearsal.

The choir is 45 years old this year. (I wish I was, although I also wish that when I was 45 I knew what I know now!)

Three of our founder members are still amongst us, Barbara Shone, Eileen Robertson and Sheila Luke. Many people have joined much more recently, and some very welcome people have joined this term. The musical contribution that you all make is equally valuable and I am profoundly grateful to you all for your diligence in rehearsal and support in general.

Each year I conclude my report with the same observation which is now truer than ever. It is a genuine privilege and pleasure to be your Music Director. We have the excitement of the Verdi Requiem immediately ahead of us, the results of our first ever International Carol Composition Competition, an adventurous Hiawatha Come

and Sing, Dvorak Stabat Mater and the Poulenc Organ Concerto in March, and a Gilbert & Sullivan Evening in the summer with Savoyard Richard Suart as our soloist.

I look forward to another year of great and enjoyable performances in the season ahead, and whilst we are working on each of these concerts, that will be my favourite music.

Thank you.

JTN 20th Sept 2017

Election of Officers:

Chairman – Kay Foster – proposed by Rachel Pentecost, 2nd by Maire Pedder

Vice-Chairman – Elizabeth Lea – proposed by Kay Foster, 2nd by Roger Boulton

Anne Nicol – proposed by Elizabeth Lea, 2nd by Diane Wheatley

Treasurer – Graham Harbage – proposed by Tina Jones, 2nd by Kay Foster

Secretary – Mary Harris – proposed by Carol Seed, 2nd by Tina Jones

Committee members Ester Harries)

Bob Pugh)

Eileen Robertson)

Rachel Pentecost)

Tony Powell)

Diane Wheatley)

Alison Davies)

Reappointed en bloc

- proposed by Cynthia Gorton

2nd by Wal Kaye

All agreed

AOB – Kay Foster conferred Honorary Membership of the Society to Eileen Robertson – a citation was present

The meeting closed at 7.52pm

Rachel Pentecost (Minute secretary)

Minutes of Extraordinary General Meeting held on 4th October 2017 at 7.30pm.

Present: the committee and 76 members of the society.

Elizabeth Lea (vice-chairman) took the chair.

Apologies: Kay Foster (chairman), Tina Jones (former treasurer).

Approval of the annual accounts for 2016-17

The accounts had now been circulated to all members of the society.

Wal Kaye proposed that the society should accept the accounts, and this was seconded by Anne Barnard. All present were in favour.

The meeting closed at 7.35. Secretary: Rachel Pentecost.