

Minutes
of the 2014/15 Annual General Meeting of Whitehall Choir
held at St Stephen's Church, Rochester Row
Tuesday 14 July 2015

Chairman: *Jonathan Williams*

Apologies were received by Alison Williams, Liz Walton, Lesley Kirby, Lesley Raymond, Alice Turner, Monica Darnbrough, Mark Graver, Daniel Lambauer, Ken Holmes, Kate Hand, Helen Audaer, Elena Fateeva

1. Minutes of 2014 AGM

Amendments: Item 2 "The Minutes of 2013" not 2014; item 4, para 2 to read "...by their commission and concessions to Westminster residents carrying Westminster City Save cards"; item 4 under Ticket sales to read ".... a small increase would have quite a positive effect".

The Minutes were adopted as a true record: proposed *Martin Humphreys*, seconded *Penny Prior*

2. Treasurer's Report 2014/15

The Treasurer, *Patrick Haighton*, delivered his report on the Season. The accounts would be finalised in August at which point they would go to the Committee, then to the Independent Reviewer, back to an SGM of the choir in order to approve the annual report for the Charity Commission. Having performed 4 concerts, including 2 with orchestra, the accounts projections showed a small surplus with income at £39,500 and expenditure at £39,000.

Choir subscriptions were donations, uplifted by 25% from Gift Aid. They paid for rehearsals and to subsidise concerts. The revenues from ticket sales made the difference between breaking even and making a surplus. He thanked those stalwarts who consistently brought in audience numbers.

He was concerned that we played to audiences way below the capacity of the venues. Our strategy should seek to correct this.

Patrick confirmed that the Carol Concert proceeds had been shared 50/50 with St Stephen's.

Jubilee Fund:

- the fund was established in 1994 to provide secure financial backing for the choir and to aid the choir's development. It was used for cash flow purposes. Further details could be found on the choir website, or from Patrick.
- There was currently £18,000 in the fund. £6,000 had been drawn down to help fund the last CD and the choir had hoped to transfer this back to the Fund at the rate of £2,000 a year for three years. He would like to transfer £2,000 this year.
- Currently the Fund rules stated that "at least 80% of the fund will at all times be maintained on deposit at an authorised UK bank or building society". Currently this gave almost no interest return and Patrick sought the meeting's approval to change the rule to 50% so that half the funds could go into longer term deposits, for instance charity investment funds, and half be kept, as now, in a Building Society.

Discussion on Jubilee Fund proposals:

- Repayment of £2,000: *Ian Williamson* (a Trustee of the Jubilee Fund) said that the £6,000 was lent on a 3 year pay back and an understanding that another request would not be made during that time. He did not want the choir to repay £2,000 but then risk having to return to the fund for more money. *Jonathan Williams* pointed out that good ticket sales for Athalia would ensure the transfer of £2,000.

- Change from 80% to 50%: It was requested that more thought be given as to where the 50% would be invested. Building Societies were supposedly totally safe. Further considerations were signatories for funds, the need for ready access and the ratio itself. Patrick agreed to come back with further details to discuss with the Committee.

Subscriptions:

Patrick would like to leave the subscription rate unchanged at £240 per year (with a £10 discount for single payment), this despite the move to St Peter's Eaton Square which would be more expensive and the probable loss of BIS support for printing. It was thought that there was no longer a justification for the £10 discount and a strong sentiment that it should be withdrawn. Patrick agreed to do so in the subscription round before September. It was proposed to leave the subscription rate unchanged (Ian Williamson, seconded Katherine Herzberg). All were in favour.

Records:

Patrick's database of choir members included address, contact details, age, tenure and civil service connections. These details were shared with Part Reps and Committee Members only. Financial details were not shared at all. From this data he had ascertained that more than half the choir are/were civil servants; ages ranged from 22 to 78. Some people had been singing in the choir since before the younger members were born. He was going to email each member of the choir with the contents of the database that concerned them for any corrections to be applied and to organise next year's subscription. He would also like to ask members for a photo of themselves and whether they had any special skills or interests that the choir could call upon. *Deb Dowdall* suggested that in future, when people joined the choir, they should be invited to tick a box to give their permission or otherwise to their photograph being used on the website and in publicity material.

Patrick asked if there was any interest in having a Choir Directory, for use only amongst members. At present people tended to go to their Part Reps for details. There was some interest. This could be another tick box.

3. Conductor's Report 2014/15

Paul Spicer delivered his report for the year (please see Annex A, including a review of the St John's Mozart/Schubert concert published in the quarterly Musical Opinion magazine). He reported on a season of wide ranging repertoire, one workshop and the auditions (for the whole choir). It had been a season of variety and of ups and downs. The auditioning was a useful stock-taking exercise: some choir members needed to work on elements of both vocal technique and reading ability. Pau was concerned by worsening punctuality at rehearsals. Greater personal responsibility was necessary to maintain standards. Recruitment in all voice parts, but particularly the tenors, was important. He was delighted by the Vaughan Williams concert at St Peter's Eaton Square and looked forward to the church being our new rehearsal home from September.

4. The Secretary had nothing to add: Paul's report covered the all the year's activities.

5. No specific motions had been received by choir members.

Jonathan Williams thanked the many people involved in the smooth running of the choir including those helping with programmes, printing, refreshments, photography. He thanked Joanna Tomlinson for finding concert venues and also the new rehearsal venue at St Peter's Eaton Square and Jackie Houghton for her invaluable help with front of house.

6. Committee Elections for the 2015/16 season

Philip Pratley thanked Jonathan for all his work as Chairman over the year.

Alison Williams was standing down as Alto Rep.

The following members were elected unanimously for the next season.

Chairman: Jonathan Williams
 Proposer: Monica Darnbrough
 Secunder: Hilary Davies

Treasurer: Patrick Haighton
 Proposer: Graham Hand
 Secunder: Sam Foley

Secretary: Joanna Tomlinson
 Proposer: Hilary Davies
 Secunder: Lesley Kirby

Business Manager: Penny Prior
 Proposer: William Longland
 Secunder: Katherine Herzberg

Librarian: Mark Graver
 Proposer: Jacky Erwtaman
 Secunder: Rose Chandler

Publicity (joint): Martin Humphries; Ruth Eastman
 Proposer: Deb Dowdall
 Secunder: Lucilla Poston

Webmaster: Richard Grafen
 Proposer: Laurie Grace
 Secunder: William Longland

BIS Rep: Philip Worley (co-opted)

Soprano Rep: Kate Goulden
 Proposer: Jacky Erwtaman
 Secunder: Katherine Herzberg

Alto Rep: Julie Dyg
 Proposer: Alison Williams
 Secunder: Katherine Howes

Tenor Rep: Alastair Tolley
 Proposer: Graham Hand
 Secunder: Philip Worley

Bass Rep: Daniel Lambauer
 Proposer: James Gourlay
 Secunder: Simon Lawson

Jubilee Signatories: Ian Williamson; Ken Holmes; Penny Prior
To be adopted at start of September term
 Julie Dyg was welcomed as the new Alto Rep.

7. Choir Strategy

(Please see Annex B: Jonathan Williams's Strategy Document).

Discussion:

Four Priorities:

Choir Development

Jonathan said that workshops and Come & Sings were activities for the whole choir. In the past a 40% attendance rate was typical. It should be more like 85-90%. On this basis they should be planned much further in advance than has been the norm. Some workshops might be better attended on a weekday evening. Paul said that they could sometimes take the place of a rehearsal. It should be an expectation on

new members to be committed to these extra activities. Ruth Eastman suggested using Anna Harvey for a vocal workshop.

How to fund these activities? Patrick said that the cost of these activities could not be included in the subscription. Maybe lower price for choir members than for outsiders/free to choir members bringing one paying guest. There could be a deposit and a charge.

Jonathan suggested an annual choir-building activity/social trip/singing trip. Ideas included socials and fundraisers in the Parish Room at St Peter's; workshops/Come & Sings in the countryside. The Committee would pursue these ideas.

Comments on Focus Group Points:

- Paul had never come across a 'repertoire committee' and thought it impractical as there were so many considerations. He was always happy to receive requests and suggestions.
- To help choir members feel more involved with the direction of the choir, there could be a regular survey/more interaction on the website. Direct questions to the members received a good response.
- Members would be encouraged to talk to their part reps and committee members in order to voice their ideas. Minutes of meetings and the Newsletter were also ways of finding out what goes on apparently 'behind the scenes'.
- In response to a focus group point about sight reading abilities, Paul did not think that it was possible to have a full choir of good sight readers.

Repertoire planning

- it was agreed that forward programming is currently too short, putting recruitment and publicity on the back foot. The ideal would be 2 years ahead with an absolute minimum of one year. Paul did not think that a sub-group working on this would help.
- It was suggested that certain standard works should be bought by members. For instance, Bob Porter only performs the Mozart Requiem, Faure Requiem and Vivaldi Gloria.
- Our July 2015 Vaughan Williams concert was an example of a programme that could be repeated at short notice, particularly as it did not involve an orchestra.
- Several people commented on how well our shorter programmes with no interval had been received. Paul commented that this was only possible with non-orchestral concerts.
- Concerts were nearly always on a weekday. This could be revisited.

Rehearsal Development

- There was general frustration expressed over choir etiquette at rehearsals. Paul said that the use of phones during rehearsal time was never acceptable. Latecomers were also a distraction. There was also a lack of respect shown when single parts were working with Paul: there must be silence from the rest of the choir. It was suggested that there should be an email reminder and then a regular verbal reminder of etiquette each term. Etiquette expectations should be included in the New Member's Pack
- Learning music: It was noted how useful it was when Paul spoke about new pieces. Likewise his email comments following rehearsals were very helpful.

Audience Development

- Prices were a sensitive issue. Some price differentiation might help. Jonathan commented that this would work well at St Peter's with its two distinct seating areas.
- one or two members were uncomfortable at the suggestion of a database of contacts who would receive regular updates on concerts and other activities, not wishing their friends to be hassled. Jonathan suggested that there would be an email maybe once or twice a term and the opportunity to unsubscribe. Members would also be able to send the emails personally rather than through the system. Deb Dowdall said that there were serious issues about putting email addresses on the mailing list without prior permission: people would need to opt in to the list.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm