



Minutes Wareham Choral Society AGM 2022

Monday 17th
October 2022
7:30pm at
The King's Arms,
Stoborough

1) Welcome to:

Eve Baker, Martin Baker, Hazel Carter, Rachel Cude, Gideon Daly, Ian Grocott, Neil Hirst, Janet Jones, Paula Kent, Mark Lapper, Bob Newnham, Judith Price, Tim Price, Teresa Rekowska, Sarah Welton, Brian Wilkins.

2) Apologies for Absence

Nancy Gibson, Maureen Bayliss, Hazel Ricketts, Mike Hampton.

3) Minutes of last year's AGM and matters arising

These were accepted as a true record and signed by TR. There were no matters arising.

4) Chairman's Report

Judith Price read her report as follows:-

This has been a year of mixed fortunes for Wareham Choral Society.

We began singing again, after an enforced period of inactivity because of the pandemic, at a time when other choirs were still wary about rehearsing again.

We moved our rehearsal venue from the URC to LSM because we thought it would be easier to implement good infection-control practices. We installed a sanitation station, set up a one-way system through the church, insisted that members remained masked until singing began, and organised seating so that everyone was well-spaced away from neighbours.

Hazel provided a Co2 meter. The level of Co2 in the atmosphere is a good measure of the amount of "breathed-out air" and hence the level of corona-virus particles in the air. We were reassured to find that the Co2 level at the start of a rehearsal was almost the same as that in the open air, and rose very little during the 2 hours we rehearsed, at all times staying well within safe limits.

No choir members contracted Covid, a fact we dutifully recorded every week using the Making Music app. National results from this app confirm that choral singing involves no higher infection risk if sensible precautions are in force.

The main work in our Christmas concert was a piece specially commissioned by us, The Dorset Jubilate, from Philip Singleton, a composer and trumpeter based at the University, of Surrey and written during the summer when lockdown regulations were still in force. This piece set the words of the Jubilate Deo interspersed with two well-known poems of Thomas Hardy, The Oxen, and The Darkling Thrush.

Philip not only played trumpet in the concert during the Jubilate (and in the excerpts from Messiah which we also sang) but attended one of our rehearsals. It was fascinating to rehearse a piece of music with the composer on hand to offer advice!

Paul Ellis was unable to play at the concert, so we were fortunate to get John Challenger from Salisbury Cathedral to accompany us instead. John has a growing national (and international) reputation as an organist, and during the concert treated us to renditions of Bach's Wacht Auf and In Dulci Jubilo.

So the concert was an artistic success. However, audience figures were below pre-pandemic levels, so we did make a financial loss.

The Easter term was not so successful. We had planned to sing Bach's The Peasant's Cantata, one of his few secular choral works, and Brahms' Song of Destiny, as well as Vaughan Williams 5 Mystical Songs. However, these are not easy works to learn and we were few in number. Then Hazel was was

unable to direct rehearsals for several weeks due to family problems and illness. We are grateful to Colin Davey who deputized at short notice for us, but it became clear as the concert date approached that we were barely concert-ready. The last straw was the fact that the Mayor's concert for Ukraine was to be held on the same day, so we regretfully decided to cancel the concert.

However, we bounced back and celebrated the Queen's Jubilee in June by holding a successful Jubilee concert in conjunction with Wareham Town Band, Emma Aldir's musical theatre group Top Notes and our friend Grace Lovelass. The LSM bellringers also rang for us at the end of the concert.

The programme had a "Last Night of the Proms" vibe, with a number of well-known patriotic songs, and a stunning anthem commissioned by the RSCM, setting some of the Queen's own words.

We had always intended this celebratory concert to be an event which involved other music groups as well as WCS, and we had hoped to obtain Arts Council funding to allow us to make it a free community event and to be able to offer a free glass of Pimms and some Jubilee cake on the Green to our audience as the bells rang.

So our committee worked very hard putting together a bid for funding. Despite producing what we felt was a convincing case for funding, our submission was not successful, and we did have to charge admission. We did go ahead with post-concert drinks, although we were rather let down by some inclement weather. Our thanks to Gerry Bayliss for insisting we do drinks and organising it for us!

We attracted an audience of some 90 people. This was very encouraging, since it is comparable to pre-pandemic audience figures.

During the year, we also welcomed two new members to our committee, Teresa Rekowska and Rachel Cude, who join our other new member Maureen Bayliss. I am pleased to say that all our new committee members have made significant contributions throughout the year.

However, although we have started singing again, we now have significantly fewer singers than we did before the pandemic. This is a problem which many choirs and music groups, and indeed other organisations, have been experiencing. It seems that many members, particularly elderly members, are still wary of meeting in groups because of the perceived risk of contracting Covid, or because they have got used to not having the go out to a rehearsal on a cold wet Monday in November!.

Reduced membership causes 3 problems:-

It means the choir is no longer financially viable.

It reduces the range of repertoire we can successfully sing.

It potentially reduces the size of audience we attract to our concerts.

Fortunately, WCS does have reserves of cash dating from the demise of the Guild. We have 2 years in which to restore our numbers to a level in which we are financially viable again.

During the summer we mounted a publicity campaign to recruit new members. Teresa has also had some success in recruiting sponsors from local businesses, and in persuading the former MP and Arts Minister David Mellor to be our patron.

And, finally, as the WCS year ends, so does my tenure as your Chairman. Most of you will know that I was in hospital for 6 weeks during the summer following an operation to remove a cerebral haematoma. Although I continue to make a successful recovery, now is the time for me to hand over the baton after 10 years as Chairman, and I shall not stand for re-election.

I will continue to sing with WCS and will continue to support the choir in any way I can.

My ten years as Chair have been a wonderful experience enhanced by an amazing team.

Bob has done so much more than compose excellent minutes. He has used his artistic talents to produce posters of exceptional interest and he has unfailingly researched music to order so that every session has been productive.

He has supported my suggestions to sing in unusual places although it has meant transporting chairs to barns and churches including the chapel on St Albans Head and the fossil museum at Kimmeridge and the Hotel at Kingston overlooking the Purbeck hills. (I should record that LSM has allowed us to borrow chairs for these unusual venues.)

Eve has been an excellent treasurer and ensured that funds were available for our exploits and Sarah and Maureen have been stalwart committee members.

In September last year we held meetings to recruit additional committee members and were pleased that Teresa and Rachel have joined us. It was clear from the beginning that we had

attracted 2 exceptional members. When I was hospitalised Teresa stepped forward and has proved herself to be an excellent Acting Chairman.

So we go forward into next year in hope!

5) Music Director's Report

In Hazel's absence, Teresa read out Hazel's report as follows:

This report covers the year from September to September and it was with great joy that we resumed rehearsals in September 2021 following a break of 18 months for COVID. However things were not as they had been previously. We were in Lady St Mary church so that we could be properly spaced and with good ventilation. It was a joy to be together making music again although it took quite a while to settle into the new 'space' and we inevitably found that hearing both myself, and each other was not always easy, but we tried various solutions (microphone and moving people around) and we made the best of what we could do, in the space with the "Covid safe" restrictions that were necessary.

Our programme for the December concert included "Excerpts from Messiah and other Christmas pieces" along with our newly commissioned "Dorset Jubilate" written by Philip Singleton for Choir, Organ, Soprano and Baritone soloists, with obligato Trumpet part – most interestingly representing the song of a thrush in musical setting of Robert Hardy's Poem "The Darkling Thrush".

I was always confident that WCS would be able to sing Dorset Jubilate although it felt maybe inaccessible to start with as so much was in a different style and harmonic language to other music we have worked on. It helped that the vocal parts were well written not to be too high or low, or have difficult lines in themselves, although the harmonic language was unfamiliar initially. As we were in LSM church and with the organ so integrated into this piece (and the need for the choir to be used to it) we used the organ for rehearsals with Paul Ellis accompanying as normal.

Our other pieces were very much enjoyed too although the Handel is tricky and detailed it was also more familiar (at least in style!) to many choir members! The committee worked hard to promote Dorset Jubilate and the publicity generated a fair bit of interest including on social media – where our soloists helped us to spread the word about our concert too.

I have to say that the concert on 4th December sticks in my mind as being one of the most enjoyable I have ever taken part in. It was so clear that the choir were so pleased to be singing a concert again, the soloists equally so, and I know that more than one person commented "The DJ hasn't been out of the cupboard since before lockdowns!". Rehearsals with all soloists, and John Challenger who was playing the organ as Paul Ellis was unavailable, had taken place in November so we were all ready to go on the day!

I think the concert was well received – Dorset Jubilate was maybe a little unexpected in style. I had a good number of people say to me that they'd like to hear it again before judging it – which means it wasn't disliked, but just different! I felt that musically we pulled everything together very well. John Challenger was surprised at my offhand "yeah, last rehearsal was terrible but that's OK..." until I explained that I have learned that WCS rarely sings well on a last rehearsal but then 'pulls it out of the bag' on the day – and once again you did. You did yourself proud, and me! Philip Singleton was delighted with the first performance and the "Thrill of hearing music you imagined in your head actually there in real life!" Our team of pro musicians were great working together on all the music and 'gelled' well together making it even easier to fit all the pieces with the choir, and having Phil to add trumpet to our Christmas pieces, as well as our vocal soloists & choir pieces, and John's two seasonal pieces of Bach organ music, made a great concert. We allowed the audience to join in with 3 short carols, bearing in mind the concern about aerosols and Covid. It was a good concert – in every way. Different maybe, but good!

After our Christmas break we resumed rehearsals with a programme reviving the Vaughan Williams "Five Mystical Songs" which had been abandoned when covid forced the cancellation of our Spring 2020 concert. Also on the list was a little known adaption of Bach's "Peasant Cantata" for choir which is full of bright almost madrigal like choir choruses, and a wonderful rich romantic piece of Brahms – the "Song of Destiny". Again, a varied programme but well balanced and 'safe' after the risk taken of doing something so different as a newly commissioned work! Rehearsals started well, still in LSM church but with Paul at the piano this term.

Given the new "omicron" version of Covid we were still taking care to be spaced, and encouraging testing before rehearsals, but I think there was greater caution among some choir members and numbers were lower than previous term. But the music was good and we enjoyed several rehearsals getting to grips with it. Husband and wife team Richard and Abigail Hooper were booked as soloists for

our concert. Unfortunately I was forced to be absent from rehearsals through late February due to a family emergency, and then being taken into hospital myself followed by being signed off until just 10 days before the concert date (with no assurances that I would be well enough to conduct then). Paul Ellis had been covering rehearsals but a plan was obviously needed for the second half of the term, and Colin Davey was approached to step in for a few weeks. Unfortunately everything transpired against our spring concert, with it then being announced that the Mayor was planning a concert the same day in aid of Ukraine... and reluctantly the decision was made that we shouldn't compete with this and the concert was cancelled.

This left the summer term. We had already planned on a "Jubilee Celebration" concert and it had been suggested that we should join with other local music groups to make this a 'town' event rather than just WCS. We were fortunate to have Grace Lovelass the local soprano available and very willing to sing with us, Wareham Town Band were soon on board too, and "Top Notes" brought their young people to sing some songs from the shows. Once again there seemed to be no end of unfortunate hindrances with a double booking of the church necessitating a change of date among other things! However a programme was set, scores sourced and rehearsals resumed. We were once again low in numbers with several members who would normally have been with us unable to attend for a number of reasons including holidays, family emergencies, and medical reasons. But we adapted the programme a little to include works relevant to the Jubilee Celebration but which would work with smaller forces, and once again WCS did themselves proud.

The concert was well attended and very much enjoyed by all who came to it. I'm not going to deny that it was a very stressful day for me as rehearsals didn't really go according to plan through no fault of the choir, and I remain very grateful for their patience and Grace's that day as we worked with Wareham Town band whose members seem to have a slightly different way of working. Likewise for the patience and support of those who came as 'extras' to boost our numbers of singers. For me the joy was that this included both of my teenage children at their request – what few probably saw was that they (along with my ex-husband) appear to be experts at setting up and dismantling staging too! The members of the committee worked very hard for this concert behind the scenes – with staging, wine, publicity, and many other things and I'm equally as grateful to them.

With all our local musicians, Paul at the organ, Grace as soloist, and the audience joining in for some very well known 'last night of the proms' type items at the end, the concert was well received and enjoyed by all – singers and audience alike and WCS once again sung well with a varied programme. The final part of the evening was the local campanologists ringing the church bells for us in celebration!

Of course, although WCS rehearsals stopped for the summer after the concert this was NOT the end of the work for the year. The committee had been preparing a recruitment campaign, and we have been fortunate to have Rachel, Maureen, and Teresa join the committee during the last year, with some new ideas and fresh perspective.

During a worrying time when Judith was unwell Teresa offered to step up and chair our committee in the short term so that we could continue working for this year and planning, and I'm very grateful to all the committee for all the behind the scenes work that they do. Especially Bob who does a huge amount 'unseen' such as sourcing scores, forwarding emails, putting programmes and posters together etc. I am also grateful for Judith's support over the years she's been chairman and to Teresa for stepping both in the short term, and now ongoing, to allow Judith to step back and continue to concentrate on her continued recovery.

And needless to say, my thanks too for Paul for his excellent piano and organ playing during rehearsals and concerts, but mostly to YOU. To Wareham Choral Society for your commitment, your support, your good humour, and your singing. Looking forward to more of it....

6) Treasurer's Report

The financial statement for the year is given below. Eve reported that we were operating at a loss, in part because of the exceptional expenses of commissioning a new work this year, but mainly because of the drop in income due to the drop in membership since the pandemic. We have reserves to last us 2 more years, so we need to recruit!

Receipts and payments for year ending 31 August 2022

Receipts

Subscriptions	3275
Ticket sales	2261
Interest received	2

Concert programme ad sales	20	
Refreshment receipts	38	
Gift Aid	422	
Total Receipts		6018
Less Payments		
MD fees	2835	
Accompanist's fees	1695	
Composer's fee	1350	
Soloists' fees	1105	
Venue cost	455	
Posters, programmes etc	571	
Music Hire	150	
Advertising	706	
706		
Rehearsal space hire	1030	
Insurance	95	
Making Music membership	38	
Donations	20	
Hire of Glasses	20	
Total payments		(10,130)
Net deficit for the year		(4,112)
Current Account opening balance	820	
Deposit Account opening balance	12261	
13081	13081	
Net deficit for the year	(4,112)	
Current Account closing balance	975	
Deposit Account closing balance	7992	
Accumulated fund	8967	

7) Election of Officers

Judith Price is not standing for re-election as Chairman. Our Acting Chairman Teresa Rekowska is prepared to stand as Chairman. Bob Newnham and Eve Baker are prepared to stand again.

Teresa read out the following statement in support of her candidature:

I have been a member of WCS and the Soprano section since September 2021.

Before moving to Dorset in February 2021 with my husband, Ian Grocott a member of the Bass section, I was a member and Publicity Officer for Andover Choral society and previous to that I was a member and Secretary of the Variations choir in France for 9 years. I have been Acting Chair for WCS since July this year.

I am a retired Human Resources Manager and worked as part of the Senior Management Team for an American Manufacturing company in Middlesex, overseeing the recruitment, training and well-being of over 150 staff.

I believe my past work experiences and serving on choir committees have given me the tools to become your Chair. I am a confident leader, can make effective decisions and work well in a team; listening and encouraging full team participation. I am happy and confident at networking and to represent our organisation.

I have enjoyed my short time as Acting WCS Chair and working closely with Hazel and the committee. I am committed and excited to help move WCS forward into a sustainable future with more members, a new Patron and sponsors and more collaborative works with other choirs and orchestras. I am passionate about bringing the joy of music to Dorset through the beautiful voice of WCS.

No other nominations had been received. All 3 officers were nominated, seconded and elected nem con.

8) Election of Committee Members

Other members Maureen Bayliss, Rachel Cude and Sarah Welton are prepared to continue on the committee. No other nominations had been received. All 3 members were duly nominated, seconded and elected nem con.

9) Presentation to Judith Price

On behalf of WCS, Bob Newnham presented Judith with a bouquet of flowers, chocolates and sparkling wine, and a certificate conferring honorary membership for life from next term onwards, thanking her that her tenure had been marked by unswerving commitment, enthusiasm and energy. She had outlasted 3 Music Directors and 2 accompanists!

The following statement is Judith's response after the meeting, included in these minutes for the record.

I should like to record my deep appreciation for WCS's generous and delightful gifts.

I was overwhelmed by their generosity! The Bouquet of flowers is glorious – the chocolates yummy and the wine went down in a toast to the society!.

The framed Certificate is my pride and joy and to be considered worthy of Honorary Membership is an enormous boost to my confidence

The society has overcome several problems during the year and the members have rallied to the cause – small numbers - Covid – and finances running low but these things have been overcome before and will again. I am no longer the Chair but one of a productive team and I look forward therefore to being a support in whatever aspect is needed. Teresa is ambitious and knowledgeable and with her enthusiasm our future is assured.

10) A.O.B.

Teresa urged members to complete the membership survey by the end of the week if they had not already done so, She reassured members that Rachel would be carrying out a full analysis of the results and the committee would act on its findings.

Teresa also asked members to sign up for the Armed Man Come&Sing on Nov 5th. We plan to perform this at our Remembrance concert in Nov 2023, together with Faure's Requiem.

Our Spring concert will include Mozart's Coronation Mass. It is not clear whether there will be Arts Council or other funding for community events to mark the Coronation of Charles III, as there was for the jubilee. If there is, WCS will apply for support for this concert.

More details of next year's plan will be available soon.

Teresa recorded her thanks to The King's Arms. Who are our sponsors for the year, with Corbin Fencing sponsoring our Christmas concert. She noted that these were the only 2 businesses who responded positively out of some 50 she had asked. She was however hopeful that once David Mellor becomes our Patron, his influence will bring in more sponsors. Teresa and Rachel will meet David soon.

Brian Wilkins noted that the Talbot Village Trust had large funds to distribute and had in the past had difficulty finding suitable recipients. We might not qualify because we are out of their area., but it would be worth trying. The committee would do so.

Paula Kent suggested we should meet socially as well as for singing. We could do this, say, once a month, but not on a rehearsal evening. Bob Newnham noted that we had tried meeting in a pub after rehearsals years ago, but the practice petered out. Committee will pursue this option further. The Christmas party will be held in the King's Arms this year.

Tim Price requested that we do less PE at the start of each rehearsal, and it was generally felt that we spent a bit too much time on warming up exercises in general.

Bob Newnham 24/10/2022