

BISHOPWEARMOUTH CHORAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of last year's AGM have been published on the Society website – under Members' News.
Anyone without access to these can request a paper copy from the Secretary (Tel: 522 7721).

Members should note that the Annual General Meeting due to be held on

Wednesday 2nd September 2020, 7.30 p.m.
at Sunderland Minster.

**has been cancelled due to the difficulties of coming together during the Covid-19
situation.**

BISHOPWEARMOUTH CHORAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 2018/2019 SEASON

This was held at Sunderland Minster, on Wednesday the 4th September 2019. The meeting began at 7.30 p.m. with Christine Alder in the chair and 46 members of the Society present.

Apologies for Absence : LL, PB, LT, DC, PR, NS, DC, and EA

Minutes of the last A.G.M. : These had been previously circulated and were unanimously accepted as a true record.

Matters Arising : None

The following reports were presented at the meeting and are reproduced below.

The Chairman's Report : This report was presented by C.A :-

At this time last year, we were looking forward to our 70th. season. A remarkable landmark, and one of which we should be justly proud. Plans had been laid, a new logo prepared, a challenge issued, and we stood on the threshold of what promised to be a very special year.

I have to thank everyone of you here this evening, and those not able to be present, for your contribution to what turned out to be such a memorable year. Our concert programme was of course integral to this. My task this evening is not to go into details of this, that is for David to do, but I must pay tribute to the happy and close co-operation which exists between committee and conductor in the planning of our annual programme, and to thank him for the many hours of hard work which he puts in throughout the year, outwith rehearsal time, in order to bring our concerts to such a high level of performance.

Our year started disappointingly as, in October we had to cancel our performance at the Citizenship Ceremony due to lack of singers for a balanced choir. I trust that we shall have opportunity in the future to support this worthwhile venture. However, our Autumn Fair in November was more successful, and our thanks as ever to Elizabeth Midgley for her organisation and leadership. Our Autumn term rose to a most successful climax with the first concert, "In Terra Pax" and "Dona Nobis Pacem".

My friends will tell you that taking a bath can be a very productive event for me, in addition to the added bonus of cleanliness. the Chairman's Challenge was indeed thought up in the bath! Remembering how we had celebrated our 50th. year, (we had a special committee, a flower festival, a formal dinner and a garden party), I wanted to try something different, to involve everyone. I wanted it to be a year when we got to know each other better, and for it to be what you wanted it to be. So the challenge was born. The committee undertook to provide one event and each section of the choir asked to plan their own event. And so it began to take shape.

The first delight was that, without being asked, David and Christopher Murray offered us one of their rather special concerts. What a musical treat it turned out to be. We had a good audience, and wonderful music making. It really set the standard for 2019.

Hard on its heels came the singing day led by Aidan Oliver. Due to some very generous donations we were able to offer this to you free of charge. Aidan lived up to his reputation and gave us an excellent workout on "Creation", and really helped David in preparation for our special Anniversary Concert.

But before that, on 1st. March, many of us hied off to the "Peacock" for a social singing evening with the tenors. This was a great evening of popular song, led by the tenors (after much practice), but sadly with a reduced accompaniment, as Mike was recovering from a rather nasty cycling accident. Happily no lasting damage was sustained.

The basses had prayed hard and well and the sun shone on our coastal walk, followed by fish and chips and entertainment. I have to say that "The Sound of Music" will never be the same for me again!

Sandwiched between these two events was "Creation". My Committee meeting minutes state that it was everything we had hoped it would be. I think that sums it up perfectly. A fitting tribute to our founder Clifford Hartley, and to all members of the Society who, over the last seventy years, have brought us to where we are today.

Having exercised our voices and our feet, the sopranos decided to exercise our brains! So a Quiz Night was organised. Again a great success, even if it did confirm for me the chasms which exist in general knowledge.

Our last concert of the season involved much language tuition by Angela Lishman, for the "Chichester Psalms", but of course our brains were now in excellent shape so that was no problem. Well, not much!

Our challenging year drew to close with a trip on the Tanfield Railway. The Altos realised that sitting and eating was also important. Again the day was hot and sunny, the scenery spectacular, the afternoon tea gargantuan, and a great time was had by all. But our year had not quite ended, as in July our Young Singers gave us a lovely evening of music. Indeed a memorable year.

As I was writing this report, and reviewing the past twelve months, I was even more forcibly struck by what an enjoyable time we had. More people took part in social events, more planned them, and I feel that as we got to know each other better we grew as a choir, which can only be of benefit in months to come. However the downside of this is that our rehearsal break is getting too long. May I urge you to listen for the bell, and more importantly obey it and promptly retake your seat so that we can finish promptly also.

So, our 70th. season finishes today with this meeting, and we start the 71st. in a few minutes time.

My sincere thanks to our retiring committee reps. and to Eileen and Sheenagh and the rest of the committee for their unstinting work throughout the year. To Eileen Bown for her accompaniment and her work with our Young Singers, giving them the opportunity to experience what we so much enjoy, namely singing in a choir.

Thank you all for supporting me this past year. I hope that we can use it as a firm foundation for the future. This coming season is challenging, but I know you will rise to that challenge and enjoy it.

The Treasurer's Report : The Treasurer, SR, presented by the following points :

- We have celebrated our 70th anniversary in style musically. For this we have utilised some of our cash assets.
- The “self-funding” social events produced a surplus in excess of £700. Added to this were donations from Members, Patrons and BYS allowing the orchestra lights to be purchased in time for the March concert. Thanks to all involved.
- David and Christopher performed in the Minster, also raising funds for the Society. Thank you and I’m sorry I missed the concert.
- Income from Raffles and coffee is similar to last year’s, and that of the Hire Library has increased. Thank you Vera, Linden and Stephen.
- Christine spoke and you listened. By the Wednesday prior to the June concert, all ticket money and extra tickets had been given to me. I enjoyed the Friday and Saturday rehearsals as I knew everything was ready for the concert.
- Subscriptions will remain at £100 for 2019-20 with a £20 student concession available. Please ask if you want to pay in instalments. I will also give you details to pay online if you need them.
- Finally, thanks to all who contribute to the running of the society.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for all her quiet and diligent activity to ensure our financial circumstances are acceptable.

There were no questions and the accounts were unanimously accepted.

The Conductor's Report was given by D.M :-

This season was always going to be a very special one, celebrating as it did the 70th anniversary of the Society. It did not disappoint, and there were many many extras which all added up to a year which was extremely sociable as well as musically fulfilling. It was lovely to see that happening, and many thanks for all the hard work that went into that, particularly as ever by our hard working and hugely committed Committee. Thanks as ever to them for all the hard work they do and for the meticulous planning they implement throughout the season. Thanks also to Eileen Bown, who remains an irreplaceable person in the musical success of this choral society, playing for rehearsals, taking sectional rehearsals, providing her lovely young singers whenever we need them, and occasionally even braving the challenges of playing Bernstein with me and three percussionists! Thanks also this year must be extended to each section of the choir in organising four very enjoyable nights out. Now I am not going to talk about those in detail, I’m leaving that to Christine, but let me just say please don’t feel you have to wait another 70 years before organizing some more of that sort of thing – it is a lovely way of bringing the choir together in a very sociable way. I will, as ever, deal with the main musical events of the season.

It started with a really tough cookie, Vaughan Williams’ masterpiece Dona Nobis Pacem, surely one of the greatest anti war works of the twentieth century. I had already been working at this piece with my Hexham

choir towards their performance in September 2018. Some of the tenors from this choir very kindly came and helped out with that. I can remember saying to you all early on in rehearsals that we would have to try and sing the 2nd movement every week where possible. That was at the end of a tortuous rehearsal where you all looked wrung out and in a state of some shock having grappled with the difficulties and complexities of this music for the first time. The piece as a whole is very powerful and an undoubted masterpiece. I hope you enjoyed learning it although it wasn't an easy journey. We paired with it a piece which I've never done before, - that was Finzi's *In Terra Pax*. It was the most gorgeous piece of music, - I can't really understand why I haven't done it before! Full of fabulous passages especially for the soprano and baritone soloists, and exquisite orchestral writing telling the Christmas story in a very special way. In terms of the pairing with the Vaughan Williams it was actually a perfect match as there were only a few short passages for choir so it didn't take up a huge amount of time in the learning. To sing the solos we had a fantastic team – Rachel Nicholls and Mark Nathan. I knew they were fantastic because they'd sung *Dona Nobis* at Hexham so I booked them again on the night of the Hexham concert.

And as usual we had a fantastic orchestra. Massive, as I kept threatening. But wonderfully powerful and expressive adding a whole set of new dimensions to the music. It was indeed a powerful performance, and we added into the mix Butterworth's *Shropshire Lad Rhapsody*- again a piece I've been aware of but have never done. Its beautiful and very evocative written by a young composer killed in the first world war. So the concert had definitely theme of first world war remembrance to it, and as such it was our own special contribution to the 2018 centenary. We were celebrating our 70th season and commemorating the war at the same time. A marvelous concert and a brilliant start to the season. Also the fruits of a huge amount of hard work by you all.

The New Year saw us tackling Haydn's masterpiece *The Creation*. This was a very significant choice as it marked the anniversary not only of the 70 year history of the Choral Society, but also the anniversary of the first ever performance of the Society, which was this very piece, the *Creation*. I have to say that from my point of view this was a sheer delight from start to finish. The music is simply wonderful and very very uplifting and full of joy. It is beautifully written for the voice and a delight therefore to sing. It is a large work but the difficulty is not great as a general rule. The precision required, however, in the quality and refinement of the singing, the phrasing, the attention to dynamic details and the delivery of the text were all quite sufficient to keep us all very busy. Then in the middle of the rehearsal schedule we all enjoyed the most wonderful day with Aidan Oliver, who not only led us all through the piece with his wonderful skills as a choral conductor, but also shared all sorts of insights into the piece, and gave some historical contexts to how it came to be written after Haydn had visited London and heard Handel's oratorios. These were not only informative but, in my opinion, enriched and informed the performance we were working towards. A great day.

I was also personally very lucky to be able to add to this sense of enrichment as I had a half term trip to Vienna, and amongst everything else managed to do there, I made sure to go and see Haydn's house, where he had actually composed the work. Inspirational! And I actually saw the picture of Haydn at the last public performance of *Creation* before he died – that was truly amazing.

Also in the run up to the concert at the end of March, my son Christopher and I were able to give a recital here in the Minster, which was well supported and we both enjoyed doing it very much – its always very nice for me to be able to make music at that sort of level with my son.

Well when we came to the performance things really couldn't have been better. We had a fantastic team of soloists. Laurie Ashworth, always dazzling, exceeded all my high expectations with her amazing coloratura: her voice was perfectly suited to this music. Also outstanding in their contributions were the tenor Jorge Navarro Colorado and the bass Timothy Dickinson. There is a lot of work for soloists in this piece, and some of that

work calls for finely tuned ensemble singing. These three singers were so very well matched not only in the blend of their voices but also in their fine musicianship. They were a delight to work with.

Again the orchestra was a major component in delivering such a fine performance. Especially admirable on this occasion were the woodwind. The many solos and highlighted woodwind ensembles were really exquisite in this performance. We are lucky to be able to call on such a talented array of players, all from the North East. And of course the choir weren't half bad either. I did feel that as we'd had a generous amount of time to spend on the piece, the confidence and conviction with which the music was delivered was especially noticeable, and this was surely one of our best performances ever. Really sophisticated stylish singing with pretty much all of the details we'd worked at coming to fruition on the night of the concert. All in all a hugely enjoyable and rewarding project, and a worthy commemoration of the beginning of a journey begun 70 years ago.

The summer saw us embark on a very different project, with repertoire that couldn't have been more removed from Haydn. Bernstein's Chichester Psalms, written for the Chichester Festival in 1965, proved to be extremely challenging. with their difficult cross rhythms and the text being in Hebrew. Extremely difficult. It took quite a long time to get these into the voices and into the memory, and sadly we had to forgo one of our other smaller pieces, Barber's Adagio. I knew from past experience that this piece too takes a lot of learning with subdivisions in the parts and extremely complex harmonies. With the slowness of learning in the Bernstein this really couldn't be accommodated in the same programme. The other two Copland pieces, Ching a Ring Chaw and Stomp your Foot, however, were learnt quite easily and proved to be a lot of fun. But right up to the last week of rehearsal the Bernstein proved evasive and the last Wednesday before the concert rehearsal was not a happy one, with serious shortcomings caused I think by sheer lack of retention. A tough rehearsal followed by another on the Friday restored things to normal and we were ok on the Saturday, - in fact I thought the performance was rather good. It was a fun first half, with the two Copland pieces kicking things off to a jovial and boisterous start, and we had really lovely contributions from our President Anne Marie Owens – who we were all delighted to see there as part of our celebrations – and of course the Young Singers, winning the hearts of the audience as per usual. The Symphonic Dances from West Side Story seemed to go down well – I was just as pleased, as it had not only been a lot of hard work in terms of rehearsal, but also I had had to go through both percussion and piano scores with a fine toothcomb and check everything was going to fit. Which of course it wasn't quite. So adjustments had to be made to the piano scores, and Andy, the leader of the percussion, wrote down the original five percussion players to three – so we could afford to do this concert – and also the original nine percussionists in the Chichester Psalms were written down to three as well – a lot of work.

All in all this last concert in the season proved to be a fitting end to an outstanding season. It wasn't without its difficulties but we certainly got there in the end and the rather refreshing sounds and textures of 20th century American music were something that really suited a summer programme and went down extremely well with the audience.

The season ahead of us is a delightful mix. We start with one of my favourite Britten pieces, St Nicolas. Set for choir, gallery choir, strings percussion, piano duet and tenor solo, this amazing piece tells the story of the life of the saint through a whole set of musical pictures, almost snapshots of his life. The ingenuity of the settings shows Britten at his cleverest and at his best. It is a dramatic work, involving audience participation who stand and sing the hymns, and the processing from the back of the church of the three pickled boys, brought back to life in a miracle that the saint performed. The interaction between the main the choir and gallery choir is also very dramatic and uses the space in a very interesting way.

And with it in the same programme by way of huge contrast we are singing Monteverdi's delightful motet Beatus Vir, for choir and two violins and continuo. A very delicious little piece, full of slightly tricky rhythms and changing metre. The strings will perform Britten's delightful Simple Symphony, which is constructed from music he wrote as a child. It has rather tongue in cheek titles such as Playful Pizzicato and Frolicsome Finale

The New Year sees us performing that great work, Bach's St John Passion. Shorter than the St Matthew, and more dramatic, it contains sublime music from beginning to end, and for the chorus there are long reflective contrapuntal movements but also lots of very exciting outbursts of very dramatic crowd portrayals. Lots of opportunities for soloists to shine, and the whole story told through the tenor recitatives. This will be a pretty tough cookie but immensely rewarding to learn and sing, as it is some of the greatest music ever written.

The summer sees us doing another great work in the choral repertoire, the Brahms Requiem. We will perform it in the version for piano duet, rather than orchestra. Yes its cheaper. But actually this is my preferred version. It is more intimate. It shows the detail of the choir textures more clearly – they are not covered by a big swathe of orchestral texture. And then there is more possibility in terms of flexibility in terms of rubato and tempo. And as a special bonus we get to do this piece twice. We are repeating, I have to tell you by popular request, our experience of 2018 when we repeated our summer concert which was the American Songbook at St Mary's Whitley Bay – where I have a concert series running. I have just agreed that our Brahms Requiem will be the last in that series in 2020. Apparently our concert in 2018 was one of the most popular of the series. They loved the choir, they loved the music and it was a particularly lovely warm evening and the sales of white wine went through the roof! So they want us back. So on June 20th we will perform this programme here at the Minster and exactly a week later on June 27th we'll perform it at St Mary's.

So I am once again looking forward hugely to our next season together and to lots of really excellent music making between now and next June.

Two reports had been previously provided via the web-site (and not presented verbally) but are presented here.

The Patrons' Officer's Report was prepared by K.A.

Looking over the past twelve months I am delighted to report this 70th Anniversary Year has been a wonderful year of celebration. We, as Patrons, have given strong support in both concert attendances & joining in the Chairman's Challenge Events boosting not only ticket sales but fund raising too.

Once again there is a slight increase in numbers giving us a total of 48 Patrons. We have 1 new Life Patron, 2 new Patrons plus 1 new Family.

The breakdown of our Patrons is as follows:-

Life Patrons	22	among which - 1 School 1 Honorary
Patrons	26	among which – 19 Senior 3 Adult

2 Family= 4 named patrons

The Patrons' Fees remain the same as last year.

2019-2020 Season Fees:-

Senior Patrons	£12
Adult Patrons	£25
Family	£36
School	£50
Life	£120
Corporate	£150

Please remember any updates or new email addresses are important. If possible, forwarding them to me is most helpful.

I'm delighted to report, thanks to the generosity of two of our patrons, this year & also our future pre-concert drinks receptions are now being funded. Such support is gratefully accepted by the Society.

The increase in Patrons' ticket sales has also been most welcome. Our numbers once again exceeding our allocation, particularly at the Spring Concert, being the highest number sold, ever! A good note on which to end.

The Concert Manager's was prepared by D.C :

70th Anniversary Season - 1st Concert: – Dona nobis pacem R V Williams, In terra pax : Finzi

Many thanks to Chris and Phil who were volunteered, by Liz White, to put up the staging. Their help meant we were finished and ready for rehearsal by 6.45pm with only the cross struts left to stabilise the back row.

Lighting still a concern especially now that the orchestra have their lights. The Choir still have a problem of which the church is well aware and money raising is in hand to rectify this although it is a big expensive job and not likely to be solved in the near future. Apologies for the heating shutting off during the Saturday afternoon rehearsal; the cause was a stray code put in to cope with monthly Saturday Vintage and Craft Fair.

The Minster was cleared and returned to normal by 10.20pm – thanks to all who helped to return the church ready for morning worship. Unfortunately the percussion player's van was blocked by restaurant owner car and it took a while to locate the driver before we were all able to go home.

Chorus numbered: Soprano 23 Alto13 Tenor 11 Bass 10 Total 57

Lost property: 1 leather holdall with boxed music stand light (retrieved later).

Big orchestra, heavy sing, 'Beat, Beat, Drum', fabulous sound.

2nd Concert:- Creation : Haydn 70th Anniversary Concert

This excellent concert was a fitting tribute to the founder of the society, Clifford Hartley.

The staging was erected, including chairs, by 6.40pm thanks to Liz White's helpers. The pews and chairs were moved on Friday morning by Gordon (caretaker) and myself in preparation for the concert. We also cleared the dais in preparation for the staging and put out chairs : 4 rows of 3 in the North and South side aisles and 3 rows of 12 behind the back pew. A leaking water heater in ladies toilets was sorted by choral plumber Ms White.

Everything was cleared and the church returned ready for Sunday worship by 10.50pm – later than usual due to the longer concert.

Chorus numbered: Soprano 22 Alto 15 Tenor 12 Bases 11 Total 60
Lost property: 3 gloves 1 pr specs(claimed) 1 broly (added to Minster collection of brollies!)

3rd Concert: 20th Century American Classics 22nd June Minster

Preparation for the concert:- Gordon (caretaker) was on holiday in Benidorm, so I persuaded a certain Stephen Cox to help with the furniture moving (he's used to this as he does something similar for St Aidan's Church Hall!!). We moved 2 pews from each side to accommodate the smaller size of the orchestra. Chairs were put in 3 rows of 12 at the back of the Nave and in the side aisles 6 rows of 3 each side (most of these were not needed but at the previous concert there was a shortage of seats in the Nave). We moved the piano to the front in preparation for the hired piano coming and cleared the dais of church furniture. The hired piano arrived on Friday morning and was taken away Monday at 10.45am. The piano tuner duly arrived on Saturday morning to tune both pianos.

The chorus numbers were lower than previous concerts so I decided to change the stage set up. We left out the back row of staging (nicknamed the mantelpiece!!) which meant that no diagonal struts were needed – thanks to Mike who has fixed these struts for many concerts they may be needed again if the chorus size increases. The back black rails are designed to fit the back sections which are a different length to the first 4 rows of staging so thanks to '**MRS WHITE'S BOYS**' for sorting it out, as it meant overlapping the rails. Despite these changes the staging was still completed by 6.30pm. This meant that the whole chorus was on the staging which gave more room on the front of the dais which was used by the young singers and percussion players. Thanks to all who stayed behind at the end to dismantle the staging (back rails removed first) and return the church to set up for Sunday Worship - which was completed by 10.20pm.

Chichester Psalm words were very tricky especially for tenors and basses but we nailed it in the end.

The Chorus numbered 46 singers. Soprano 20 Alto 10 Tenor 8 Bass 8 and the Young Singers

Lost Property: One makeup bag – recovered later by the soloist.

Observations from concerts/rehearsals

Please, please, please make sure you are **not** the one who holds up the choir when getting on and off the staging at concerts. At one concert a latecomer held up the whole chorus, making everyone late onto the staging – make sure it is not YOU!! After the interval it is really necessary for everyone to be aware of the line they are in on the staging and their position in the chorus so that it looks professional when we return to the stage.

Please make sure you are:-

In the correct line - in the correct place - ready to move - ready to sit down when prompted.

It needs everyone's full attention – the audience notice these things as it is their first view of the choir.

And – please don't turn your backs to the audience – for obvious reasons!!

The 10min break during the Wednesday rehearsal seems to get longer each week. This needs to be tightened up as some people take no notice of the call back to rehearsal. Please return to your place ASAP after the bell/last orders.

Can anyone remember what was memorable about the Wednesday rehearsal on 5th December?

Reminder: It really is not necessary for bottles of water to be taken on stage for the concert.

Our continued use of the upstairs Choir Room for split rehearsals means that the Tenors and Bases learn the notes quicker and are warmer in winter!!.

Patrons pews/chairs

Although it was a good idea to replace the middle pews with more comfortable chairs this has not worked out in the long run due to the logistics of moving large solid oak pews back to their original place at the end of the concert. At one point we were moving 12 of these pews – this is just not physically feasible even with the trolleys.

Extra Events 70th Anniversary

Saturday 19th January Excellent Concert given by David and Chris Murray.

Saturday 9th February Singing Day - An Exploration of Creation led by Aidan Oliver

Aidan rehearsed the choruses and gave interesting insights into the composition of the work.

Friday March 1st Tenors Social Evening in the Phoenix - great sing-a-long and guitar playing!!

Saturday 11th May Basses Whitburn Coastal Walk – Fish and Chips – Great weather after a week of rain. Great entertainment not mentioning the singing nuns.

Friday 7th June Sopranos Pie and Pea Night in Whitburn Parish Hall with fiendish Quiz.

Sunday 7th July Altos Tanfield Railway trip which I am told was a lovely event. Unfortunately I was unable to attend.

'Singing is good for you'; and we have done loads of that this last season. So be ready at the start of rehearsals/concerts, learn the music, watch the conductor, keep with the beat and follow the conductor's interpretation in rehearsal and performance.

The Chorus members of the society at the last count consisted of 26 Sopranos, 15 Contraltos, 11 Tenors and 13 Basses a total of 65 with over 40+ members attending every event, and concert numbers varying from 46-60 – well done. I look forward to a challenging 71st season starting with St Nicolas : Britten; Beatus vir : Monteverdi, St John Passion : Bach, etc.

As always I would like to thank David and Eileen for their hard work and patience especially with the T & B learning of the Chichester Psalms.

I would also like to thank everyone who helps set up & clear away for rehearsals and concerts in the Minster; we pride ourselves in leaving the Minster neat and tidy, ready for Sunday morning worship. *With everyone's help and the assistance of 'Mrs White's Boys' we can setup and clear away in under an hour before and after each concert. This is a huge achievement and relies on all members to play their part even if it is only moving a few chairs – it all helps.*

Also thanks to those who make the rehearsal interval coffee; run the coffee mornings, organise the weekly raffle (*You have to be in it to win it!!!*), those who make the concert interval refreshments and Young Singers supporters, all those this year who arranged 70th Anniversary events, in fact everyone who mucks in and helps in any way - these things don't happen by magic and all money raised keeps the society going, ready for its 71st Anniversary!

Election of Officers – These were conducted as follows :

For the post of		Proposed by	Seconded by	
Chairman	C.Alder	FG	MA	carried by meeting
Secretary	E.Watson	FG	MA	carried by meeting
Treasurer	S.Riddle	FG	MA	carried by meeting
Soprano Rep.	E.Midgley	JL	VV	carried by meeting
Bass Rep.	Paul Bates	MA	IW	carried by meeting

Any Other Business :-

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.05 p.m.

Eileen Watson,
Hon.Secretary.