



PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATION

Sunday 18 June 2023 | 'The Knights' Chamber

AGM MINUTES

Attendees

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Samuel Barber, Hon. Treasurer* | 12. Richard Ludlow |
| 2. AnnaMaria Barnes* | 13. Andrew Maddocks |
| 3. Tansy Castledine, Director of Music* | 14. Catherine Maddocks |
| 4. Elizabeth Cunningham* | 15. Michael Rendle |
| 5. Anthony Davis | 16. Alex Spires* |
| 6. Oliver Hamilton-Box, Hon. Auditor* | 17. Chloe Spires* |
| 7. Matthew Hardy* | 18. Olivia Timms, Music Department
Administrator |
| 8. Tim Hurst-Brown, Chairman* | 19. Revd Dr Rowan Williams, Canon
Precentor* |
| 9. Alison Halliday | |
| 10. Andy Halliday | |
| 11. Louise Laprun, Hon. Secretary* | |

1. Apologies

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Richard Akister | 16. Christopher Menheneott |
| 2. Richard Bates | 17. Ian Moorhouse |
| 3. Tom Bates-Bourne | 18. Robert Morton |
| 4. Christopher Bathurst | 19. Bradley Odep* |
| 5. Mary Boyall | 20. Alice Risdon |
| 6. David Clifton | 21. Matthew Searles |
| 7. Frank Close | 22. Dominic Spires |
| 8. Sarah Cooper | 23. Jacob Spires |
| 9. Peter Davies | 24. Jeremy Spires |
| 10. Christopher Gower | 25. Dave Stanley |
| 11. Peter Handley | 26. Richard Townhill |
| 12. Sebastian Harper* | 27. Anthony Tupman |
| 13. Spencer Knaggs | 28. John Watson |
| 14. Edith Laprun | 29. Simon Wilkinson |
| 15. David Lowe | 30. Arnold Wills |

**PCOCA committee member*

Many of whom gave their best wishes for today.

Tim Hurst-Brown led a moment of silence in memory of Andrew Torbell, who was fondly remembered as a real pillar of the annual reunion.

2. Minutes of last year's AGM

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 18 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record, other than an error in the Hon. Treasurer's report (amend 'month' to 'year'). These were proposed by Matthew Hardy, seconded by Ollie Hamilton-Box, and endorsed by all.

3. Matters arising

Item 8: Dr W. Stanley Vann memorial

Rowan Williams reported that both the Fabric Advisory Committee and the Cathedral Chapter had approved the new 'Director of Music' marking to replace the current gold-leaf floral design and sellotaped label on the 1890s carved oak choir stall, seventh seat from the east end of the cantoris, on which the Director of Music sits every day at Choral Evensong.

While this won't explicitly mention Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers' Association or Dr W. Stanley Vann, the Association's gift will be officially recorded as part of the statutory requirements. Additionally, the inscription on the two existing memorials to Dr Vann could be renewed.

Rowan was unsure of the projected costs since a specialist contractor has not yet been engaged. Matthew Hardy was directed to refer to last year's minutes to address his question about a potential surplus.

Mark Robertshaw commented that the OCA might end up with a surplus, depending on the fees for an architect/designer and heritage craftspeople. Various ideas were suggested by Sophie, Frank, Tansy and Elizabeth, including a named bursary for singing lessons, a set of music, or a chorister medal.

Following last year's agreement to remove this item from the agenda, Richard Ludlow requested that this item is re-added to the agenda for next year's AGM.

4. Hon. Treasurer's report

Samuel Barber read his annual report:

Good afternoon, and thank you for attending our AGM.

I trust that you have had chance to look at the summary account documents that have been shared, which have been signed off by our Hon. Auditor Oliver Hamilton-Box.

Last year was a steady year for us financially, with the OCA yielding a 'profit' of just over £1,500 for the year. This does include some donations made to the OCA that are reserved for specific purposes, such as the Dr Francis Strawberry Tea.

Our postage costs were once again near zero due to the successful campaign Louise ran to eliminate this method of communication distribution in 2020. The only charge in this category being for delivery of goods used at last year's reunion.

Annual subscriptions in 2022 were up from 2021; we now have one less fee-paying member at £15 per year and eleven more at £25 per year.

Our liquid asset position at the end of the year has improved from £6,499.64 in 2021 to £8,178.51, this despite a donation of £1,000 primarily due to the Cathedral Choir being authorised at last year's AGM.

Although I am, as Hon. Treasurer, still concerned about the asset level of the association, given the current economic climate and inflationary pressures, I am confident we can once again look to donate a sum to the Cathedral Choir and recommend a donation of £1,500 be approved today. Any more than this may risk us becoming unable to organise large events either as reunions or directly as fundraising efforts for the Cathedral Choir due to poor cash flow. However, personally I would like to see the Association be able to continue to support the current Cathedral Choir both in the short term, and for future generations. I believe that many members would agree with this sentiment.

Assuming this £1,500 donation is approved, I would like to send personal thanks to members Dave Stanley, Vaughn Townhill, Anne McDonald and many others, without whose generous donations this would not have been possible.

I would remind members that if we all paid our £25 membership, we could donate over £10,000 pa to the Choir.

The Executive Committee, in particular Louise and myself, have made efforts to ensure that every event organised by the Association makes a profit or breaks even, thus ensuring that any donation made by members, including annual subscriptions, can end up reaching the Cathedral Choir. Louise and I make every effort to use free or ultra low-cost platforms to provide updates, bookings and all services to our membership wherever possible to help further this aim and keep wasted expenditure as low as possible. This, I hope you will agree, is reflected in the account's expenditure.

On this note I will now end my report and now take any questions regarding my statement, after which I propose we vote on a suggested donation to the Choir of £1,500.

All attendees were in favour of the £1,500 donation towards the Cathedral Choir. Tansy Castledine gave her grateful thanks and advised that the Association should clearly specify how the gift should be used: for example, a recording, commission or tour.

The adoption of the Hon. Treasurer's report was proposed by Elizabeth Cunningham and seconded by Andrew Halliday. Tim thanked Samuel for his excellent stewardship of the OCA accounts, and Oliver for his role as Hon. Auditor.

5. Hon Secretary's report

Louise Laprun read her annual report:

Thank you for joining us today. We were delighted to have sung under the direction of Tansy Castledine again at Evensong, and we're grateful to her, the Music Department and the clergy for hosting us today.

Because of scheduling constraints during the summer term, this year's reunion is taking place on a Sunday. We're aware it's Father's Day, but this was deemed acceptable to most committee members based on an internal poll.

The decision not to hold a dinner today was influenced by several factors, such as allowing attendees to spend time with their families if they celebrate Father's Day, a reasonable end time for those needing to travel home, limited availability and quality of suitable venues in the city centre, high costs and logistical challenges associated with hiring Peterborough Cathedral, and the desire to avoid placing financial burdens on individual committee members or the Association itself by covering expenses for staff expected to attend, speaking guests and room hire fees.

Last year, we enjoyed a pleasant lunch at Côte Brasserie instead, and we may consider organising another lunch or dinner there in future. Following the success of informal drinks in 2022, we've reserved a private area free of charge at The Queen's Head to provide a convenient gathering spot for attendees after this meeting. I hope to see you all there!

As we discussed at last year's AGM (see item 7 in the minutes), the committee is open to our members' suggestions and feedback, and I have some insights from our online survey to share with you today:

An equal number of votes were in favour of the reunion taking place in Summer or 'no preference', with Autumn following closely behind. 63% of members preferred Saturday, 31% Sunday, and 28% had no preference. (Please note that these won't add up to 100 as you could select more than one preference per question!) 52% of members were in favour of a dinner as part of the reunion, with informal drinks also being popular with 29%, and lunch or no preference receiving 23% each. Someone suggested afternoon tea instead. 35% of respondents are willing to pay up to £50, with a maximum of £40 being the next popular choice with 16% of the votes.

Several responses mentioned that the opportunity to meet with other Old Choristers and sing with the current choir is the primary purpose of our reunion. *"It's always a wonderfully nostalgic event – I love catching up with familiar faces and singing together in such a superb building!"* But enjoying a formal dinner together is mentioned as a special way of achieving this. One member helpfully suggested arranging the dinner once every five years instead of every year to ensure its sustainability.

Someone proposed creating short videos for social media featuring Old Choristers explaining how music has remained a part of their lives, or how being a chorister has influenced their future. They suggested showing these videos to choristers leaving school to encourage them to join. They also highlighted the importance of continuing to explain the membership fee and offering the first year free to new joiners – this is something we've done in the past for the dinners.

Travelling for one member takes over four hours, so they suggested a two-day event. Another member mentioned that Saturday is more convenient from a travel perspective. Some are missing today's event due to prior commitments or illness, but expressed the hope to attend next year. A senior member conveyed their desire to attend but that their declining health has prevented them from doing so. They shared memories of their time as a chorister with Bishop Blagden, Dean Christopherson and Canon Precentor Southeard and wished everyone a good reunion.

Someone else expressed challenges in attending due to having a young family and not being local; however, they'd like to attend when possible and thanked everyone involved in keeping the event running. Multiple members kindly expressed their appreciation towards the committee for our efforts in keeping the event going.

Finally, my warmest thanks to everyone who pays their £25 annual subscription, as well as those who donate on top of this amount. Please do consider giving this amount each year (or £2.50 a month, if that's more manageable) if you don't do so already, so we can support our Cathedral Choir. As Samuel also mentioned, if everyone did so, we could donate £10,000 every year, which would make such a difference! Details of how to give and why can be found on our website, and in OCA correspondence.

Thank you.

The Hon. Secretary's report was proposed by Ollie Hamilton-Box and seconded by Alex Spires.

Andy Halliday requested that the reunion dinners could be held every other year, instead of every five years, preferably on Saturdays.

The video idea was well-received, and Richard Ludlow suggested that they could be valuable not only for recruitment to the Association but also for attracting prospective chorister parents.

Tansy Castledine mentioned that Youth Choir members finish being full-time choristers at the age of 13 but may not consider themselves 'Old Choristers' as they continue to sing as part of the wider Cathedral Choir. Louise recalled that a recent constitutional change was made to include Youth Choir members and former Scholars, Lay Clerks, Organists etc. as PCOCA members. The committee agreed to discuss this matter at the next meeting.

Andrew Maddocks raised concerns about whether "Old" Choristers is the most suitable name for the Association. He also questioned whether it was possible to be a member without paying their subscription. Louise clarified that while many individuals do not pay due to ambivalence, ignorance or lack of inclination, there are others who contribute significantly more than the recommended amount. She highlighted that maintaining communication with all members, including the majority who do not regularly contribute, is crucial for future support and engagement. Since there are no specific perks associated with being a paying member, it's not currently detrimental to keep those who have signed up (since the GDPR came into effect in 2016) on the PCOCA MailChimp list.

Richard shared that the Cathedral Chapter had paid 'life membership' after his £30 joining fee, and thought that some members might prefer to contribute towards different musical charities, such as the Cathedral Music Trust (CMT), instead. He suggested a lower annual reunion price for paying members as an incentive. Matthew Hardy expressed that different rates might be complicated to organise, and stressed the importance of giving back having experienced the benefits of being a chorister, especially as it's not too expensive.

Tansy emphasised that the budget allocated to Peterborough Cathedral Choir is very small compared to its output. Although a recent grant from the CMT has helped with scholarships, finances need to be managed carefully to make ends meet.

Due to limited resources, the Cathedral Choir and Association are unable to contact everyone individually for financial assistance. Tansy proposed a viable solution of sponsoring the Scholars to conduct a phone-round campaign. However, due to GDPR restrictions, this would need to be done via email since phone numbers aren't necessarily available. Elizabeth pointed out that it's easier for people to ignore emails, so suggested that Louise could ask members to provide their phone numbers in the next correspondence to facilitate communication.

Tim Hurst-Brown conveyed his gratitude to Louise and acknowledged the burden of responsibility carried by the Hon. Secretary.

6. Election of officers

Sebastian Harper had informed Louise that he would like to step down from his position in the committee.

Tim Hurst-Brown unexpectedly announced his retirement from his role as Chairman. Having joined the committee in 1973, shortly after leaving school, he later became Hon. Secretary and served as Chairman for the last six years. He advised that this was not a post to be taken on lightly.

Richard Ludlow expressed that Tim was a fount of knowledge and wisdom, and proposed that Tim should be elected Vice President. Alex Spires recognised Tim as a stalwart of the committee, and formally thanked him on behalf of the committee for his fifty years of service to the Association, including compiling the annual newsletter.

Tim said that it was a great pleasure to be involved for half a century, and that he was more than happy to continue editing the newsletter for the time being.

Matthew Hardy (proposed by Richard Ludlow and seconded by Tony Davies) and Ollie Hamilton-Box (proposed by Samuel Barber and seconded by Elizabeth Cunningham) put their names forward to run as Chairman. Louise Laprun recalled that the post had previously been held by the Dean.

Tansy agreed to conduct a blind vote, which resulted in six for Ollie and seven for Matthew.

The remaining officers were all happy to stand for another year.

- **Hon. Secretary** Louise Laprun: proposed by Elizabeth Cunningham, seconded by Richard Ludlow
- **Hon. Treasurer** Samuel Barber: proposed by Alex Spires, seconded by Matthew Hardy
- **Hon. Auditor** Ollie Hamilton-Box: proposed by Richard Ludlow, seconded by Alex Spires

The committee was re-elected en bloc, proposed by Tim Hurst-Brown, seconded by Andrew Maddocks, and all present were in favour.

Chairman: Mr Matthew Hardy

Hon. Secretary: Ms Louise Laprun

Hon. Treasurer: Mr Samuel Barber

Hon. Auditor: Mr Oliver Hamilton-Box (*Once a Chorister* representative)

Committee:

- Ms Tansy Castledine, Director of Music*
- Revd Dr Rowan Williams, Canon Precentor*

**ex officio*

- Miss AnnaMaria Barnes (junior representative)
- Miss Chloe Spires (junior representative)
- Ms Elizabeth Cunningham
- Dr Sophie Eser
- Mr Bradley Odep
- Mr Mark Robertshaw
- Mr Alex Spires

7. Next year's reunion

Following the feedback previously discussed, Louise Laprun agreed to find a Saturday in June 2024 on which to hold the next annual reunion, preferably including a dinner.

*Post-meeting note: **Saturday 08 June 2024** and **Saturday 21 June 2025** have been held in the cathedral diary.*

9. AOB

Thank you

Andy Halliday recounted that the music led by Tansy Castledine at Evensong was wonderful, and that it was marvellous to sing with over 50 current choristers. Given the conversation of the future of the music, it was important to keep it going.

Tansy passed on her sincere thanks to the Old Choristers for their support. She reported that there are an additional 50 children in Years 3 to 6 in the newly formed Junior Choirs, which represent the wider city.

In memoriam

Louise Laprun and Tim Hurst-Brown passed on the following news:

John Strickson

We were sad to learn of the death of John Strickson on 17 March 2023, who was just over 90 years of age. John was Assistant Organist at Peterborough Cathedral in the 1950s, and happened to be The Very Revd Ian Black's former Choir Master in Stratford-upon-Avon.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 18:30.

Minutes submitted by Louise Laprun on 26 June 2023