

CHES VALLEY MALE VOICE CHOIR

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2015



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Almost mid-summer already and including the French tour we have seven concerts under our belts. Where does the time go? We start this Newsletter was input from Tony Usher on our recent trip to France.

1. CHOIR TRIP TO WESTERN FRANCE

25 to 29 MAY 2015

Chess Valley Male Voice Choir have just returned from a trip to Western France during which it performed in three splendid venues - Orleans Cathedral, Alencon Basilica and Chartres Cathedral. The group comprised 70 people including 30 singers, Sheila Cornall – musical director and Becky IZARD – accompanist and soprano soloist. The tour

was a major success musically, culturally and socially.

The choir performed in three spectacular venues which gave very different musical experiences. Our performance was commended by Sheila “The end result was a confident, musical sound in a wide range of repertoire, including some challenging pieces”. Orleans cathedral was an enormous space with a two second acoustic delay and complete audibility in all parts of the cathedral. Rehearsal was difficult until it was pointed out by Christian the Sacristan that the cathedral was designed to project the priest’s voice when at altar level. Good advice. Raising the choir a few feet made a dramatic improvement to sound quality. An unexpected encore was satisfied by the choir singing “Eli Jenkins Prayer”. Perfect for the acoustic. Alencon basilica, a slightly smaller building was memorable due to the cooperative and friendly basilica staff. We had help from Charles Savatier and the priest, Father Loic, who refused to accept our donation. The relaxed atmosphere resulted in what was probably the best performance of the tour. This was aided by an appreciative and vocal French audience. Chartres cathedral was the grandest of the venues. Very busy with tourists and their guides. Additionally there was a major restoration project in operation. A very busy and stressful environment. Unfortunately this resulted in the cathedral staff finding it necessary to restrict our access and

rehearsal time. However, the part of the cathedral we used for the concert had been newly restored and was splendid. The choir, was positioned in front of the high altar from where we sang very well and had a really appreciative audience. An extra bonus was the opportunity to attend a concert by some music students from Syracuse University a couple of hours before our concert. They sang sublimely but did not have the interaction with the audience that our choir had. A big tick for Sheila’s French. Becky’s contributions were also received very well by audiences and provided a very important contrast to the choir.

All three medieval cities were really well worth visiting and contributed to the enjoyment of the trip. Restaurants seem so much better and cheaper than our local places. The choir stayed in Chartres which was a jewel and the hotel beautifully central. An extra treat were the spectacular illuminations all around the city but especially on the cathedral. These all contributed to making the trip a great cultural experience.

Socially the tour was a great success and certainly assisted the mixing of all on the tour. It was impossible to stroll around the cities and not bump into other choir members. It was also good to welcome previous choir members Lyn Bowen and Allan Morgan. Allan gave us one of his famous songs. The final tour

dinner was an excellent end to a great tour.

The tour was organised and led by the excellent triumvirate of Sheila Cornall – musical director, Roger Smith – tour organiser and leader and Peter McLoughlin organiser and facilitator of the venues. His excellent French was a vital contributor to the success of the tour. This triumvirate held the tour together in the face of a multitude of problems. These included two singers having to drop out at the last minute due to ill health, injury to a supporter, uncooperative cathedral staff, delay at Calais as the ferry had to re-dock due to a medical emergency, lost passport, and our traditional idiosyncratic coach company – it's no wonder Roger took to his bed as soon as he got home.

Although it was a major effort logistically, musically and emotionally this was an excellent tour and let us hope we can repeat the experience in the future. It certainly provides a focus and boost for choir performance and comradeship.

2. AGM Reports

We held our 2014 AGM on the 10th of March and whilst well supported there were some of you who could not make it so the reports are reproduced below. It is also a chance to help reinforce Sheila's comments on how we can improve our performances. Mike Armstrong resigned as our Chairman after leading us admirably for 15 years and Roger Smith proposed a vote of thanks for his hard work and commitment over such a long period. Mike is succeeded by Jeremy Wyman and we look forward to his leadership. Jeremy has a few words to say later in this Newsletter.

Musical Director's Report

In the following report, I will summarise the events of the year past and look forward to future concerts and plans.

Looking at the big picture over the past 12 months, I believe that the choir has had some very successful concerts, most of which have included some performances of a high standard. There have been moments of high drama, excitement and enthusiasm where you have approached new repertoire with greater enthusiasm and determination! At other times, small, irritating habits have perhaps detracted a little from the quality of some items - these are the things we must be sure to overcome if we are going to achieve greater consistency when we perform.

In the course of the year, we have performed at St Mary's in Chesham, in Ashley Green Village Church, here on 'home' territory in the Methodist Church, in the Free Church in Amersham, and, of course, at Broadway Baptist Church. Not forgetting those of you who also braved the Xmas chill at the King's Head in Old Chesham.

Generally speaking, audience numbers have been very encouraging – which has sometimes been a bit of a surprise when considering the numbers of tickets we have sold prior to the concerts. Reactions have also been very supportive and encouraging and we should be especially grateful to our regular groupies who are now musically experienced enough to make observations about our progress or even our shortcomings!

The quality of our young solo performers has continued to be fantastic! Since they performed with us in the course of the last

year or so, most, if not all of them have continued to be awarded prizes at festivals and competitions. To mention a few – Sarah Smith (saxophone – St Mary's) is now studying at the Royal Welsh College of Music. Jonah Halton (tenor), who sang at the same concert, was awarded countless numbers of scholarships for top ranking Conservatoires and is off to the Guildhall in September. Heather Cossins (oboe) has been awarded a scholarship to the Royal Northern College in Manchester (as well as elsewhere!). Becky Howitt, still only 14 has just won through to the second round of the Rotary of GB and NI Young Musicians competition. So, young performers who really value the opportunities we are able to give them and that you are able to enjoy their skills and musical talents.

And an 'innovation' this year was the debut of the Christmas Belles at our Christmas Concert – for many, this was a daunting experience, but I thoroughly enjoyed rehearsing with them and getting to know them a bit more in the weeks prior to the concert. They were a joy and I hope they will be participating in other events in the future.

Members of the choir have continued to give support at the Chesham Arts Festival as stewards and I know the festival committee is extremely grateful for your help and for the generous bursaries the choir presents every year to support young musicians.

Over the next few months, we have several exciting concerts on the horizon. Guests of Amersham Rotary and the Amersham Community Choir on Saturday, performing in a new venue (the recently built King's Church). The choir festival at Beaconsfield – a totally new venture, - returning to

perform at St Mary's in Chesham, a new venue in St Paul's Church, Chipperfield, and a Cream Tea event in Great Missenden in July. And, of course, the small matter of 3 cathedrals in France – Orleans, Alencon and Chartres.

I have tried to maintain a steady introduction of new pieces into the choir's repertoire over the past year and in doing so have also tried hard to maintain a variety of styles and genres. I am aware that because of the demands of the cathedral authorities in France – and even one church over here – we have been weighed down a little by more 'serious', religious repertoire, but it will stand us in good stead I am sure as we continue to develop our repertoire for events nearer to home too. I am also very aware that not all of you will be going to France, but I hope you feel that you are more than playing your part in learning and performing these new pieces so they become established stock of songs.

The 'Cream Tea' event in July (Sunday 5th in the afternoon), will be a more light-hearted event, and allow us to 'lighten up' the repertoire – so please be there! I have already introduced one golden oldie and there are some new, hopefully quick to learn numbers coming your way soon.

Being able to have 'split' rehearsals on some evenings has been invaluable to help us learn repertoire more quickly, more thoroughly and to make better use of your time during a rehearsal. I am very grateful to Becky for her invaluable input here and also to the church for allowing us to use this additional facility on occasions. In addition the wonder of modern technology and the even more wonderful skill possessed by some to be able to put it to good use, is also coming to our assistance! Huge thanks to Rupert for being able to provide

everyone with rehearsal files to support what we do in rehearsals. I have heard several members say how much they value these files. At this stage, it's important to say that they are a support and not a substitute for rehearsals themselves!

As I re-read my comments from last year's AGM – and yes, tonight's is not the same report, you may be surprised to hear – my thoughts about future development could almost be the copy and paste part of this report, although I am pleased to say that some improvements have been made, but I will address and refer to last year's observations as I set out this year's points for consideration.

- Regular and punctual attendance at rehearsals AND concerts – I know many of you have other interests and commitments, but do please get here if you possibly can. And if you know you're not performing at a concert, it's still vital to attend rehearsals especially if we are adding new songs to our repertoire. They will make an appearance at future events.

- Regarding concerts, we were recently in danger of having to pull out of an event to which we had given the choir's support because of an unbalanced choir – despite members having committed to it but then withdrawing at a later date. The committee spends a lot of time arranging venues, liaising with other organisations and researching new things to do. As a choir, we owe it to ourselves and each other that if we commit to an event we then don't go and change our minds. The choir needs to give a positive presentation every time it

appears – a positive performance, to show folk what we are about.

- Preparation for rehearsals and concerts has now been helped by the development of the RRFs – Rupert's Rehearsal Files. So, if in doubt, refer to them please. If you are still uncertain, please make requests to go over things at rehearsals, especially when we have 'split' rehearsals.
- Always prioritising our presentation – not just at concerts, but get into good habits at rehearsals too. Sitting posture, standing posture, holding books, hands by side in memorised songs, cut the chatting and listen to other parts which could impact on your own. This is a copy and paste from last year – it still needs work! And I would add – heads up, faces up, look happy and confident even though you may be feeling lousy underneath! If you look happy and confident, your audience will feel the same way!
- Rehearsal set up. We need to review how we use space at rehearsals so that each vocal part is more aware of what is going on in the rest of the choir and how this awareness can impact on the overall performance. Currently first tenors are too far away from second basses. We have been told that the large hall may be available – this needs to be considered as does the possible implications of setting up and dismantling the rehearsal.
- Membership. We need to recruit more members – it's great to see new faces and we welcome those of you who have joined us in the past year. Ideas about recruitment,

dragging folk along kicking and screaming – please put on your thinking caps and let the committee know what we can do! BUT, we are also losing folk. I know you would want to join me in expressing our huge and very sincere thanks to Joseph Kerrigan (founding first tenor) and George Arch (almost founding second bass) for their commitment and fantastic musical support over the years. Not only were their musical skills and contributions second to none, but both of them in their very different ways, were wonderful characters, full of wit – of varying styles and quality! – forthright opinions and great kindness. They are sorely missed and I wish them well.

- Singing without copies. As you are all well aware, I had hoped to be able to include a certain numbers of items in concerts which we could sing without copies. Musically, I believe this improves the quality of the performances we give, and their presentation. However, I am very much aware, and in fact have been made aware, that this approach is causing anxiety and concern amongst some members of the choir. It has also shown up some weaknesses in accuracy of part singing when those who struggle to memorise revert to singing melody lines instead of harmony. With choir numbers as they currently are, we are not in a position to have members not singing in concerts or even resigning because of this. I agree that some folk with copies in files and some without doesn't look great. There are a number of alternatives which I will discuss with the committee.

Thanks, -
Committee for support and hard work.

Librarian.

All members – superb group and camaraderie amongst the group and your dear ladies.

Becky.

Chairman's Report

After our very successful trip to Ghent in 2013, we felt a year of consolidation was in order for 2014, rather than arranging another adventure to foreign lands, or to those unknown territories North of Watford.

Nevertheless we've had a busy and enjoyable year, starting with our stewardship of the Chesham Arts Festival in February, where we once again awarded bursaries to two up and coming young musicians, Thomas O'Shea and Claire Haynes, who both performed at our Autumn Concert in October.

We performed in St. Mary's Church Chesham on the 15th March, and in Ashley Green on the 3rd of May.

In July, we held another 'Six of the Best' Concert, which, while poorly attended, was a most enjoyable evening, such that The Amersham Band have requested that we arrange another concert in the same format, but this time holding it in the late afternoon, and on a Sunday, in the hope of garnering a larger audience. A date of the 12th June, 2016 has been proposed.

On the 12 September we had our Choir Dinner, well organised by Tony Usher, and his wife Elizabeth.

Some scintillating anecdotes from a local country bumkin – aka John Fox, and the mellifluous tones of Brian Prior, rounded off the evening.

The Autumn concert, in Amersham Free Church, was a great success, and as previously

mentioned, featured our two bursary winners.

The Christmas Concert, in the Broadway Baptist Church, exceeded all expectations in terms of attendance, with almost 300 people in the audience. It was a wonderful atmospheric evening, helped, in no small part, by the inclusion of the Christmas Bells into the programme, thanks to Sheila's initiative, and her choice of material and direction sets the standard for future events.

Last year, I mentioned succession planning. Some of your current committee members have served for many years, and have done sterling work for the Choir, but it is important that we look to the future, and ensure that the stewardship of the Choir continues to be in good hands, by encouraging younger members to take over the various responsibilities of the committee.

Tony Usher has already handed over his role as Secretary, to David Fishley, who has taken over seamlessly, and is doing an excellent job, and our Treasurer has expressed a desire to hand over his responsibilities, when a successor can be found.

Which brings things round to me. I have had the privilege and honour to have served this Choir for 17 years, most of which have been as your Chairman, and it is time to hand things over to a new pair of hands.

I'm pleased to be able to be able to say that Jeremy Wyman has agreed to take on the role as from today, and I wish him well. I would like to thank all my committee members for the help and support they've given me over the years, and I'm sure that Jeremy will receive the same.

I therefore propose that Jeremy Wyman be elected as Chairman, with immediate effect.

Mike Armstrong

Choir Finances

Bryan Long brought good news when presenting our financial reports. We ended 2014 with a surplus of £1,259.83 compared to a deficit of £100.02 for 2013. He confirmed that the committee had therefore agreed there would be no increase in our subscriptions for 2016.

Bryan advised that the Charity Commission were keen to ensure that organisations have appropriate reserves which they recommend is equivalent to 6 to 12 months of expenses. So we are OK in this regard.

On a sadder note Bryan advised that he wished to relinquish his post as Treasurer and was thanked for his 11 years of service.

3. Committee feedback

One or two members have asked for information on the topics discussed at our committee meetings. Below is an outline of the main items discussed at our last meeting in May.

- Our Librarian Derek Hearn was co-opted onto the committee
- JW will be providing a private video copy of our Christmas Belles' performance at the last Christmas concert.
- An update on information for new members is being prepared by TU
- BL updated the committee on the financial status of choir.
- BL will hand over the role of Treasurer to Malcolm Read at the end of June 2015 and we look forward to

welcoming him to the committee.

- BL is making the necessary arrangements for BK, MR and DF to become Trustees of the choir.
- Committee and Sub Committee responsibilities were discussed. We have three Sub Committees and they are: -
Publicity – RS, TU JW + PMcL and AB where required.
Programme – SC, RS, JW, and JR.
Concert – SC, AR, JW + refreshment person and Concert Manager. This committee is to update the list of actions for concerts. The Sub Committees can co-opt other members of the choir with required skills and terms of reference are to be drawn up. If any choir member has ideas or skills that they believe could be of benefit to any of the Sub Committees or the main Committee please discuss with a committee member.
- Concerts since the last committee meeting were reviewed for ease of venue audience numbers and viability etc.
- The arrangements for the forward concert programme to the summer break were also reviewed.
- Attracting new members. We have lost several members recently and various ways of attracting new members were discussed including getting coverage in local press and the Your Chesham publication.
- Attendance at rehearsals and concerts. The committee were concerned that many rehearsals and some concerts were poorly supported and discussed how we can encourage fuller attendance.
- Ticket sales and concert promotion. Various suggestions were discussed

and the Publicity Sub Committee are to consider how best we maximum media coverage.

- Choir singing without music. This longstanding issue was fully aired and SC advised that those choir members who want to sing familiar pieces without music can do so. The subject to be reviewed in 12 months.
- Choir reserves. JW is to produce a paper on the choir's policy to be reviewed at the next committee meeting

4. Our Annual Dinner reminder

CVMVC ANNUAL DINNER 2015

FRIDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2015
7pm for 7.30pm

£25 per head

CHARTRIDGE GOLF CLUB

The committee have decided to repeat this event which was very successful last year. The format, buffet dinner and cost will be the same as last year.

This is a three course buffet.

Wide range of salad starters

Gammon, Salmon and Vegetable Lasagne

Fresh Fruit Salad and Apple Pie.

Wine and soft drinks on the table

Superb homespun entertainment to follow

We hope as many choir members and guests will take part to make the event another big success

To aid planning it would be a great help if you could indicate whether you intend to come to the dinner.

Please let Tony Usher know
tonyusher@btinternet.com

01494 785454 or grab him at
rehearsal

5. Choir Diary

Below are details of the choir's activities to the end of 2015 plus an outline of what the committee are looking at for 2016.

Sun July 5th. Perform at Great Missenden Church as part of their cream tea and music programme.

Tues July 14th to Tuesday 25th August no rehearsals – summer break.

Tues September 1st resume rehearsals.

Fri September 25th Choir Annual Dinner.

Sat October 17th Annual Concert at Amersham Free Church.

Tues October 20th to Tues 27th no rehearsals –autumn break.

Sat December 19th Christmas Concert (venue to be confirmed)
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2016 outline (some dates provisional)

Sat March 5th Beaconsfield Festival of Choirs (not confirmed as only a week before our next concert)

Sat March 12th Host a joint concert with Harrow Choir. Venue TBA

Sun June 12th? Six of the Best Concert with Amersham Band

Possible joint concert with Honley Male Voice Choir. TBA

Oct Annual Concert. TBA

Dec Christmas Concert. TBA

6 A word from our new Chairman

You will have read about the workings of the sub committees: Publicity, Programme and Concert. These sub committees are appointed to make change happen, particularly in response to member's feedback.

We need, as a whole choir, to work to recruit new members. Not to create a huge choir but simply to replace those who have left. If you know of anyone who might like to join please think about encouraging them to join.

Your committee would like to spread the load of the role of concert manager. If you can take on this role, and the more the volunteers the fewer concerts that will need to be covered in any year, please let me know.

7. Administration

A further reminder for each member to tick the rehearsal register each week and to indicate their attendance at Concerts.