



Minutes of the 43rd Annual General Meeting held at 9.00 pm on Wednesday 16th October 2019 in Aspley Guise Village Hall

At the table: Tessa Cox (in the Chair), Peter Snelling (Treasurer), Siân Rees (Secretary), Vanessa Skelton (Minutes Secretary)

1. Apologies for absence

Carol Yirrell, Gina Johnson, Molly Fitzgerald, Inta Batsman, Margot Male, Keith Attenborough, Sharon Cashman, Peter Skelton, Maria Breslin, Gill Shelvey, Jonathan Haskill, Sarah Mazzone, Jonny Price, Ralph Mazzone, Marion Hill, Joanna Wood, Helen Benton, Ros Mansell, Penny Miller, Barbara Titchmarsh, Sue Dixon, Judy Barker, Peter Horrocks, Peter Wade, June Lockley, Imogen Allen, Shelia Edwards.

2. Opening remarks from the Chair

Tessa welcomed members to the 43rd Annual General Meeting of the Danesborough Chorus.

3. Minutes of the 42nd AGM and matters arising

Members were asked if they had any comments or queries on the minutes, which had been displayed on the Choir's website. None were forthcoming, so Siân Rees proposed acceptance of the minutes, with Jenny Harris seconding. No one opposed. There were no matters arising that were not covered on the agenda.

4. Chair and Trustees' report

The Chair had prepared a formal Trustees' report, from which she read. She informed the meeting that the report would be submitted to the Charity Commission and would appear on their website in due course. The report is appended as an annex to these minutes.

5. Treasurer's report

The Annual Accounts had been circulated. Peter Snelling, the Treasurer, confirmed that 2018-19 had been a very successful year financially, with a surplus of well over £5,000, despite his original budget of a small deficit. The primary reason for the excellent year had been the good ticket sales for the joint concert with Bedford Choral Society. There had, after skilled negotiation, been good publicity from the theatre, including an email shortly before the concert date to all theatre goers on their records with an interest in classical music and opera. The Bedford Choral Society had bought into the event, and their ticket sales had been excellent. The April concert sales had been good, but the summer concert had been disappointing – a higher number of sales had been expected for the Vespers. Other positive factors had been wedding revenue, and donations, the latter largely from a very helpful donation of over £500 from Susanne Minocha's firm. Peter added that he had predicted a small surplus for the current year, but that sadly ticket sales for the current concert were very poor so far. Despite the healthy starting place, if these did not improve we were likely to be faced with problems for the future. He added that Neville's Funeral Services had informed him that they would be continuing with their sponsorship for the current year – they also contribute to the Choir's running costs via advertisements in the programme. He ended by thanking Barbara Titchmarsh for the sterling work she did by bringing the items needed for the coffee break every week – several hundred pounds are contributed a year from coffee takings, and her work is invaluable, making the task of preparing the coffee very much easier. He added that she would very much like a deputy –

probably such a person would not actually be called on to do anything, but to have someone she could call on in an emergency would be helpful.

Ian Colcott asked what was the 'restoration levy' that was shown in the expenditure column for the Autumn Concert. Peter explained this was a levy charged by the Theatre on all ticket sales. All Ambassadors Theatre Group venues imposed this charge.

Margaret Horton asked what the 'training' item, with no expenditure showing referred to. Peter said this could have been omitted, as the Choir had not undertaken any training either last year or the year before – but if it did so in future, the costs would be shown in this row of the accounts.

Jeremy Hopkinson proposed adoption of the accounts, Ian Colcott seconded the proposal. No one opposed and the accounts were formally adopted. Tessa thanked Peter Snelling from the Chair, for all his hard work as Treasurer.

6. Election of Officers and Committee Members

Tessa asked if anyone else would like to stand as Chair. No one responded and Tessa said she would be willing to stand again. Beverley Thompson proposed her election, and Susanne Minocha seconded. The proposal was carried unanimously.

Siân Rees indicated a willingness to stand again as Secretary. No other nominations being forthcoming Gerrylyn Roberts proposed her, with Kate Atalay seconding. A show of hands indicted that the Choir were in favour.

Peter Snelling said that he would stand again as Treasurer. There were no other nominations. Eric Benton proposed him, with Jeremy Hopkinson seconding. The proposal was carried unanimously.

The Chair explained that two of the current members of the committee (Jenny Harris and Michael Palmer) had finished their three year term of office, and asked if there was anyone willing to stand in their places. She explained that the task was not onerous, and that new ideas and views were welcome. Regretfully no one came forward. Of the other members, Kate Atalay stepped down, but David Roberts, Susanne Minocha and Jeremy Hopkinson were willing to stand again. Tessa proposed the adoption of these members en bloc, and Vanessa Skelton seconded. This was accepted on a show of hands.

7. Approval of change of charitable status to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and the new CIO constitution

Following on from the last AGM, the committee had drafted a new constitution, complying with the requirements for incorporation as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, which had been circulated. The Chair asked if members approved. Euan Henderson asked if an explanation of the reasons for the change could be given to the Choir. Susanne Minocha explained that being a CIO afforded the Trustees of the Choir personal protection from any liability incurred by the Choir – in these days of litigation, this was thought to be advisable. She further explained that the change in constitution was the first step in the process – if accepted the Choir would then apply to the Charity Commission for the status of CIO. Beverley Thompson asked what a 'natural person' (referred to in paragraph 12 (3) of the draft constitution) was. Susanne explained it meant a 'person' rather than an incorporated body such as a company. Peter Snelling explained that a new bank account would be necessary once the change had taken place, which would involve a lot of work, but he confirmed that the change would have no effect on the amount the Choir can raise by way of Gift Aid. He also said that the MK Chorale had already gone down the route – Ian Colcott confirmed this. Ian Smith proposed that the Constitution should be amended in line with the new draft, with David Roberts seconding. This was passed without opposition. James Allen then proposed that an application should be made to change the status of the Choir from that of a Charity to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This was seconded by Jenny Harris, and was again carried without opposition. Jeremy Hopkinson, Susanne Minocha and Siân Rees were thanked for all their hard work on the issue by a round of applause from the members.

8. Subscription for the 2019-2020 season

The Treasurer proposed that the current year's subscriptions should be set at £155 per member (£300 for joint members). Jeremy Hopkinson seconded this, and the vote was carried unanimously on a show of hands. Peter explained that with this increase, he hoped there would be a small surplus at the end of the year. He asked anyone who was paying their subs on line to please let him know once this was done – this made it easier for him to chase those who hadn't paid before the deadline of the end of October arrived (after which the subs rose by £5.00). He also asked members to take care they used his current email address, rather than the old one.

He was asked how Easyfundraising was performing, and he replied that the contributions received by the Choir were dropping off. Tessa said that she had noticed that fewer retailers were in the scheme now, and some of those who were were imposing conditions making it more difficult to get the funding. Michael Powles said that he had discovered that if trying to pay a large sum by instalments for a purchase to which Easyfundraising attached, the contribution would only be allowed on the first payment – but he believed by contacting the retailer directly it could be possible to obtain contributions for the Choir on all the instalments.

9. Any Other Business

- (a) Euan Henderson asked to speak to the recent announcement from the committee that concert dress for men should change. He said that he had been shocked by the announcement, and asked members to think back to the consultation that had taken place before the dress for women had changed. He argued that there should similar consultation before a change in men's uniform. He went on to say that he did not like the proposal itself for several reasons. Firstly, the concept of 'black shirts' holds very difficult connotations. Whilst Moseley's Black Shirts had operated a long time ago, he argued that the association was still current, and referred to the recent trouble at a football match in Bulgaria, where black shirts could be seen. Secondly, he argued that most men possessed a few white shirts in their wardrobe – but for many black shirts would have to be purchased. Finally he said that to avoid constantly hitching their trousers, some men needed to wear braces, and the current uniform offered them the opportunity to cover these. He asked for a straw poll to be taken as to the men's views, as he was aware that a vote could not be taken at the AGM, and also that the committee should reconsider the matter.

Several counter arguments were advanced: the wearing of dinner jackets made the Choir appear elitist and stuffy; many other Choirs now stipulated black shirts for men as concert dress; it was necessary for many women to purchase black skirts and tops especially for concert wear. James Whysall said he felt very strongly about the matter – he would hesitate to wear a black shirt, both from the ideological viewpoint and because he felt it was depressing for both the wearer and for the audience. An informal straw poll was taken amongst the men present, which showed a majority in favour of the change.

After some discussion it was agreed that the committee would reconsider the matter, and that, to avoid the need for purchasing black shirts before the final decision, concert dress should remain as 'black tie' for the next concert.

- (b) The Chair said that singing with the Choir would not be half as fun without Ian to lead us, and asked that he should be thanked. A heartfelt round of applause followed.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.50 pm.