

**Minutes of the St Mary's Music Association (SMMA) Annual General Meeting
held on Sunday 8 March 2020
in the Parish Rooms**

Attendees: Andy Colebrook (Acting President), Bron Ferland (Chair), Oli King (Director of Music), Steve Cass (Treasurer), Jim Butler (Publicity Secretary), Karen Goddard (Secretary)
Other SMMA Committee Members: Nell Bacon, Peter De Vile, Alison Lawrence, Gill Gibson, Anne Cass, Hannah Razzell.

- 1 The Acting President welcomed everybody. The Chair confirmed that the meeting had been properly advertised.
- 2 **Apologies for absence** had been received from Jeremy Allen, Sue Sylvester-Bradley, Otilie Sefton, Karin Fischer-Buder. There were 24 people present.
- 3 **Adoption of the Minutes of the previous AGM**, held on 3 March 2019. The Minutes were adopted and signed by the Acting President.
- 4 **Matters arising:** None.
- 5 **Correspondence:** None reported.
- 6 **Chair's report:**
Bron welcomed everybody and thanked Andy Colebrook for standing in as Acting President during the interregnum.

She confirmed that the SMMA committee has continued to meet in alternate months throughout the year and meetings have been mostly very well attended. At the first meeting of the year Alison Lawrence was co-opted, who continued to lead the social activities of the Junior Choir and James Marsh who reported regularly on the Brass Group and the Choral Scholars. She stated that Karen continues to be a very efficient secretary, Steve has completed another sterling year as Treasurer, Jim continues to draw up all the publicity material and Peter, as well as nursing the organ gently along, has found organ recitalists and (with Caroline) looks for opportunities for the choir to sing Evensong at a cathedral during the year. Gill continues to mastermind the provision of refreshments for the lunchtime concerts and together with her husband Paul, puts on the annual mulled wine and mince pie event. Nell and Hannah (together with Tim) were responsible for the brilliant curry evening in September and Otilie has now assumed responsibility for the monthly articles in the Church magazine. The committee is made up by the inclusion of Oli as Director of Music, Anne as leader of Joyful Noise and Jeremy as our organist, though we don't expect him to travel up for the meetings. Bron expressed thanks to all of these people for their continued support throughout the year.

Bron reported on another successful series of eight lunchtime concerts from late May to mid July. She felt that attendance figures were lower than previously for the latter half of the season, but financially the income was within a few pounds of the previous year. The mixture of some new and some familiar programmes seemed to work well and plans were already set for the 2020 series to begin on 3 June. The occasional series of four organ recitals drew reasonable audiences for four very different programmes. The SMMA Festal Evensong in June saw the choir singing Sumsion: They that go down to the sea in ships for the first time; whilst Charles Cowper who had sung with the choir during his year as Parish Assistant, preached the sermon. This year the Festal Evensong would be held on the final Sunday in June due a clash with the Parish Weekend.

Usually the choir has looked forward to singing Evensong at a cathedral at some point in the year. Despite every effort 2019 was to prove the exception. Caroline and Peter booked a return visit to Coventry Cathedral and organized everything in their usual efficient manner. On the Wednesday before the Saturday we were to sing, Oli received notification that, the visit had to be postponed, due to a rock concert adjacent to the Cathedral. Fortunately, the local coach company agreed to refund our booking, rather than insist on payment in full for late cancellation. The trip was rearranged for November and in September the cathedral staff advised us of a double booking. At that point, we declined a further slot and decided to look elsewhere. We are booked to sing at Birmingham Cathedral on 20 June and hope that a number of supporters from the congregation will join to catch up with Jenny and David.

We are now in the second year of the Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholarship. It was unanimously agreed that we should offer a second year to Elliott as we wanted to build further on the very good progress made in his first year. The scholarship was designed to run probably for one or possibly for two years, entirely at the discretion of the appointees, the PCCs of Saffron Walden, Wendens Ambo and the SMMA. Currently the paperwork is about to be agreed which will start the process of advertising for a new Scholar from next Autumn. All parties are very pleased with how successful this first appointment has been.

The SMMA Bursary for 2019-20 was awarded to George Cass, who has been using it towards his singing lessons. We are grateful to Sophie Faith who has once again provided vocal training to our Choral Scholars – and who still, as a parent, volunteers to do the vocal warm up for the Junior Choir each Friday. We have spent quite a lot on new music this year – much of it towards the purchase of a full set of Messiah scores for the choir. We are already making good use of these and plan to hold a fundraiser concert performance of the Messiah in October. We have also photocopied some music, notably Oli's new Adam Lay Ybounden at Advent and James's winning carol at Epiphany.

We currently have 18 Juniors, 14 Joyful Noise children and 10 Choral Scholars, which makes 42 Under 18s on our books. We have to provide sufficient Responsible Adults for 30 Joyful Noise practices, 36 Wednesday Junior Choir practices, 46 Friday practices (both Junior and Choral Scholars) throughout the year – plus Sunday services on at least 46 occasions, plus Evensongs, plus Carol Services and extras. Without our RAs, it would be impossible to deliver this programme for children and young people with appropriate safeguarding in place. Thank you to everyone who helps here! However, finding sufficient people willing and able to help is becoming more and more difficult. Oli went on a big recruiting drive last weekend and a number of parents and some additional members of the adult choir have agreed to be involved. We need to continue to involve as many others as we possible can, that way the load can be more easily shared around. If you can help at all, or if you know someone who can help, please speak to Bron.

In conclusion we have had quite a full year and I have already given thank yous. In his absence we thank Jeremy for his work. Finally, thanks on behalf of the SMMA to Oli, our great Director of Music, for his boundless ideas and enthusiasm.

There were no questions.

7 Treasurer's report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2018:

Steve provided the treasurer's report. He explained that exact year-on-year comparisons are tricky because of variations on activities affecting both income and expenditure. He reported that income for 2019 was considerably down on 2018, but that was due to 2018 activities, including the well-attended Durufle Come and Sing and the Remembrance Day devotional offering, which also incurred costs. He also reported that purchase of music was much higher this year, partly due to the purchase of a full set of Messiah vocal scores for the choir, as already mentioned. Steve further reported that the 2018 Remembrance Day offering was donated to the Help the Heroes Charity, but featured in the 2019 accounts. Steve reported that 2019 was the first full year of expenditure for the Organ Scholarship, which included the bursary given to the organ scholar and also the tuition fee for lessons.

In response to a question about the organ scholarship fund, it was confirmed that the four contributory parties are: the SMMA, Wendens PCC, St Mary's PCC and the Community Fund. Steve reported that the money in the community fund was sufficient for several years of £272 annual contribution. Oli confirmed that people could donate towards the £400 SMMA annual share of the project, if they wished.

There were no further questions about the accounts. The accounts were received.

8 Director of Music's report:

Oli explained this was the tenth report which he has given on behalf of the church music at St Mary's. In this time, the church has been simply blessed with strong clerical leadership which has been both hugely supportive, and full of insight in equal measure. He felt this makes carrying out his music making duties in this environment such a

hugely rewarding and stimulating joy. Musically speaking, the SMMA has sung and played some great music, but occasionally the focus also needs to be on consolidation and ensured continuation. He felt that the period of interregnum is proving to be just this. He stated was pleased that the adult choir was running at capacity and once again running a short waiting list. At the time of writing, numbers for both the Junior Choir and Joyful Noise were also looking very healthy. He reported that Brass Group numbers were stable, though did suffer from a lack of regular first trumpets. Oli reported that in September we gave a sad but hearty farewell to Graham (our Brass group Secretary) and Jenny as they moved to Scotland. Graham devoted many hours toward keeping the brass group on the straight-and-narrow. The brass group made a stealth appearance at their last service at St Mary's. Oli was extremely grateful to Philip Dudfield who had kindly agreed to take over Graham's good work. Our Choral Scholars still contribute massively to our choir and continue to be a succinct teenage social group in their own right: ten-strong. Their annual concert in September always proves to be one of the absolute top occasions in the year and their 2019 concert was no exception.

Oli reported that current and former members of the choir have enjoyed some success this year: choral scholar George has been promoted to the National Youth Training Choir, James (Junior Choir) won first prize in the Saffron Walden Choral Society Carol Competition, William (Junior Choir) came a very respectable runner up. Peter Dockrill (former choral scholar) is now singing in the back row of the Chapel Choir of Kings College Cambridge, and Liam Goddard (former choral scholar) continues to sing with the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge.

Oli reported that Elliott, the organ scholar continued to add much to our life, and had conducted and accompanied the choir on a number of occasions, regularly playing at services both at St Mary's Saffron Walden and at Wendens Ambo. Elliott was now in his second year and would be coming to the end of his term at the close of this academic year and the search would begin shortly our next organ scholar. Oli said he sincerely hoped that Elliott would stay in touch with SMMA and would perhaps join the choir as a choral scholar for the duration of his secondary education. Oli might continue teaching him on a private basis.

Oli reported that such is the amount of music covered in one year, it sadly isn't possible to itemise everything. He picked out some highlights: In April 2019, we sang Bob Chilcott's towering St John Passion – this was a new undertaking and one which the choir appeared to like getting stuck into. The Passion also features five great hymns which were incorporated into Sunday morning services in the weeks leading up to Holy Week. Such was the success of this, we decided to run the same work again this year. We also had two chorister weddings - which is always a highlight. The choir had also sung a relatively large amount of new service music including a number of new motets and anthems of varying proportions, and a new set of evening of canticles. Oli said it was always a careful balance between making sure that the original repertoire, or bedrock of the choral repertory is preserved, whilst also pushing forward and musically challenging ourselves. In November, we gave David Tomlinson as best a musical send-off as possible. The brass group took a lead in this and played a number of new hymn arrangements along with a simply stunning version of 'Nun Danket' by Karg Elert. Amongst other music, the choir also sang a beautiful setting of Irish Blessing, again by Bob Chilcott. The Christmas season came and went, with a massive quantity of music was covered by all our musical teams.

Looking forward, Oli reported on plans for a full choir visit to Birmingham Cathedral in June, an organ outreach concert in September, a fundraiser performance of the Messiah in October and a joint project with Mencap/Side by Side. He also explained he was looking to establish a folk style band to support the family service, with a first appearance at the March Family service.

Oli reported that the church instruments are much utilised both by us and by a host of visiting musicians. He reported that the main church organ was now starting to deteriorate to the point where a plan for the way forward requires serious consideration. Oli felt that the organs and pianos of the church are absolutely crucial to the essential functioning of our long held musical tradition and he hoped to be in a position to report back more on this in the relatively near future.

Oli stated that all of the musical activities at St Mary's can only take place due to the hard work of a number of people. He thanked all the members of the SMMA for their continued support. The SMMA fund much of our music making and also provide a tremendous amount of support of virtually every kind. Oli thanked Peter De Vile for his

painstaking maintenance of the church organ and organization of cathedral visits. He thanked our wonderful librarians Margaret and Hilary who chase-and-cajole, shake-and-stir our choir into making sure that they have the right music at the right time. He thanked Alison for her work with Junior Choir and Anne for her tremendous work with Joyful Noise. Oli thanked Gill for her work maintaining the choir robes. He thanked Jeremy, his right-hand man, for continuing to play, conduct, deputise and much, much, more. He thanked Bron for all of her help, patience and oversight of much of the considerable admin that goes with a large set of choirs and ensembles - the task is almost endless! He thanked Rachel and Andy and other supporting clergy, and Gill and Denis our Church Wardens, who give so much of their time towards keeping everything in order and functioning amazingly smoothly, especially in this time of interregnum.

Oli closed with a quotation from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Music will help dissolve your perplexities and purify your character and sensibilities, and in time of care and sorrow, will keep a fountain of joy alive in you."

9 Agree amendments to the constitution:

The proposed changes to the Constitution had been circulated in advance with the meeting papers.

Bron outlined the changes:

- To deem all parent of Junior Choristers and Choral Scholars as Members of the SMMA.
- To extend the term of SMMA officers to four years (from three years) before re-election.

All agreed with the amendments to the constitution, with no abstentions.

- 9 Elections:** The positions to be elected were: Treasurer (4-year term); two ordinary Committee Members (3-year terms). Steve Cass was re-elected Treasurer (proposed: Karen Goddard, seconded: Bron Ferland). Otilie Sefton was re-elected Committee Member (proposed Hannah Razzell, seconded Steve Cass). Nell Bacon was re-elected Committee Member (proposed: Jim Butler, seconded Bron Ferland).

10 Acting President's remarks:

The Acting President stated that he felt he was acting in a privileged position, and in that capacity thanked the SMMA on behalf of everyone who attends the church for all that they do: to enhance worship week by week, at weddings, funerals, concerts and social life and generally enriching lives through music. He mentioned the contribution of the Brass Group, enhancing particularly special liturgical occasions and farewells. In the previous minutes the President had likened SMMA to the crown jewel of St Mary's and as a newcomer he could see that was true; that the quality and depth was absolutely outstanding and the association was thriving. He thanked Bron, as Chair for her continued leadership over the last 12 months in difficult personal circumstances, showing dedication and fortitude. He expressed thanks also to Oli, as Director of Music, for his inspiring leadership of the choirs and scholars, setting the tone. He reported on a joke "What is the difference between an organist and a terrorist? You can negotiate with a terrorist" and commented that this is not true at SMMA, where relations are cordial and constructive at all times. He thanked Oli for his good humour and cooperation, and Jeremy for his excellent playing on behalf of all who worship at the church. He also thanked Elliott for his playing and for being the first Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholar. He thanked Anne Cass for taking on Joyful Noise, providing an important start for the nurturing of young voices. The Acting President commented that the SMMA provided a seed bed in nurturing faith amongst the young and also older members of the choir: a pearl beyond price. He thanked the SMMA for being a place where faith can grow. He expressed thanks to all who organise the work; the committee, treasurer and all musicians week-by-week.

In closing the Acting President stated there is nothing to compare with sung worship, with human voices blending together in song. He felt when a choir sings it can move, inspire and convert. Every time a choir and congregation comes together it is something unique and unrepeatable. There are different people present, different offerings being made; and each time we give ourselves. He stated that whoever becomes the new Rector will have the full support of the SMMA; and will certainly appreciate the gem that they inherit in this Association. He closed in prayer.

11 Any Other Business

There was no AOB.