

FCOCA Chairman's report for AGM (via Zoom) 12th September 2020

FCOCA is struggling with recruitment and retention of members. Several member associations are down to 2 or 3 active members, and I use the word "active" loosely as some of our most ardent supporters are quite elderly. On a more positive note, we have had a number of new (albeit tentative) enquiries about joining our merry band, particularly from non-cathedrals church choirs who have a former-chorister association. One of the greatest challenges that Cathedral-standard choirs have at present is recruitment of choristers. When I was a lad I felt it was an honour to be chosen to sing in such a choir, but today there are many more conflicting calls on a child's time and their parents' finances. As I look back on my tenure as Chair of The Federation, I wonder what have been my good and bad.

For the past 5 years I have always felt it to be a great honour to be Chairman of The Federation. I loved being a chorister at Durham Cathedral and I learnt so much that I have used since then – excellent music tuition, a love of church music and architecture, Teamwork, Concentration, Professionalism, and Performance. One of the joys is attending the Federation Festivals. Being a member of FCOCA has allowed me (and you too) the opportunity to visit magnificent cathedrals, listen to superb music, and meet so many like-minded former choristers. We all have that in common. The fantastic chain of office may be a tad unwieldy to wear and a security worry when travelling, but it has helped me meet some very special people that I probably wouldn't have met elsewhere: Royalty, Bishops, Deans, Mayors, famous composers, and some fine boy and girl choristers.

I am pleased that FCOCA has been working closer with Cathedral Music Trust (CMT), Friends of Cathedral Music (FCM) and Diamond Fund for Choristers (DFcC) <https://cathedralmusictrust.org.uk/> We have much in common including a love of cathedral-style music and a desire to keep the traditions going, and a recognition that we had to change to better meet the challenges of the modern world. The trustees of FCM launched a new charity Cathedral Music Trust to better suit the needs of the twenty-first century, and to work as an umbrella organisation for the work of FCM and DFcC. Nick Hodges, Arnold Wills and I have met senior members of CMT/FCM several times as they have kept us up to date with their new organisation, structure and aims.

Here at FCOCA, we move with the times, whether we like it or not. All our communication is now electronic, be that email, website, video-conferencing, and we now have a presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter). I am pleased that FCOCA has continued to publish our magazine Once a Chorister, now online. I have had the privilege of being the editor for the past 3 years, following the sterling work done by Michael Barry and then Richard Watts. I hope to publish Once a Chorister again in November 2020, so if you have any news or articles of interest please send them on to me. Secretary@fcoca.org.uk

Life at the top has not always been easy: GDPR and child safeguarding issues, attending funerals of many chorister friends locally and around the country, and reading the old-testament lesson from Judges with all the unpronounceable names, un-rehearsed!

I was recently reminded that Durham Cathedral OCA was a founding member of The Federation, and I was the third Chairman from Durham following on from Gordon Berriman and Alan Oyston. I leave you in the capable hands of Nick Hodges who has served valiantly as my Vice-Chair for the past 5 years. I thank him particularly for his support and friendship, but also the help and support given by other members of the committee without whom I would not have been able to do the job. I shall continue to serve you and The Federation as Honorary Secretary.