



Chairman's Update



Normal service has been resumed

Many members of Associations affiliated to the Federation continue to sing even though, for some, it will have been many years since they left the choir to which their Association is linked. I am still on the deps list at St Mary's, Warwick, though my main outlet for singing is Cheltenham Bach Choir and a group called The Damian Singers. The latter was formed 28 years ago as a "cathedral visiting choir" and over the last, nearly three decades, we have sung in most of the cathedrals in England. We have even ventured north to Edinburgh on one occasion. Like all choirs, we have been silent for the past 18 months during the pandemic but we had our first outing in August (I am writing this piece having just returned home) singing the daily services for a week at Ely Cathedral, which is where, of course, we should have held the Federation Festival in October, that will now take place next year.

I cannot begin to express what a huge pleasure it was to return to the choir stalls and sing the office of Evensong and the Sunday services or how emotional it was realising just how much we had missed not doing so for so long. We received the warmest of welcomes from the cathedral staff who are very much looking forward to the Federation's visit next year. Coincidentally, we had the benefit of a sermon on Sunday morning at Choral Eucharist from John Marshall who, in addition to being the retiring Chairman of the Ely Choir Association, is also a Lay Reader and preaches regularly at the cathedral and local parish churches.

We wish all of our Choristers, in whatever place they may be, a joyous and safe return to regular choral worship. It is not until something is taken away one realises just how important it is; none more so than the fellowship of making music together and doing it in the place where so many have gone before us.

Saying thank you

When someone does you a good turn or provides a service, are you in the habit of saying thank you? My guess is that you are, but, in my conversations with members of Affiliated Associations, I learn that, in some places, there is no formal appreciation given for their service when choristers leave their choir. This to me sounds like a missed opportunity. It's a great feeling when we receive a thank you for something we have done and it is no different for choristers, who have enhanced the worship in the places where they have served; some, for many years

This has to be the opportunity to give them a lasting memory of the time they have spent with their choir and church, in the hope that it will encourage them to remain connected and engaged in future years as a member of the extended congregation.

Many Affiliated Associations have a **valediction service** at the end of term for leaving choristers when they might present them with a lasting memento of their time served. This might be in the form of a certificate, a tie (for the boys/gentlemen) or scarf (for the girls/ladies), a book, perhaps a bible or prayer book. For many years, the Federation has provided, free of charge, a "leavers" membership card giving the name of the chorister, the choir and stating that the choir association is affiliated to the Federation. This card may be presented in certain places who offer free or a reduced entrance fee and/or a discount in the gift shop or café, and are available from the Federation's Membership Secretary (membership@fcoca.org.uk).

We would love to hear about your valediction process with, perhaps photos, which we can include in **Once a Chorister** or on our website. Don't miss the opportunity to encourage a chorister to stay in touch. Once they are gone, they are gone and will only return if they believe they were appreciated.

Squaring the circle

I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet with **RSCM Director, Hugh Williams** in July over Zoom. We discussed how our two organisations can work together supporting choral music in worship. Founded in 1927, **The Royal School of Church Music** is an educational charity committed to promoting the study, practice and improvement of music in Christian worship, supporting thousands of churches across the UK and worldwide.

A major initiative from the RSCM this year sees the first International Chorister Day on Sunday 19 September. A recent circular from the RSCM says this about the event:

RSCM International Chorister Day is a celebration of the amazing opportunities that being a chorister provides, at all levels from our great cathedrals to small parish churches.

Becoming a chorister is the start of a lifelong journey. It means gaining singing skills and a musical education and inspires a love of choral music. Go to our website www.rscm.org.uk and click on GET INVOLVED to learn more about the event and see some of the experiences choristers have shared with us in the lead-up to International Chorister Day.

The chorister tradition is a living one, envied across the world. But like anything, if you take it for granted it will wither and fall away.

Choirs need a supply of fresh, new voices to become part of the next generation. It is vital to invest in that living tradition; and this is what the RSCM is encouraging today.

I hope that our future relationship with the **RSCM** and with **Cathedral Music Trust (CMT)**, which I wrote about in my last update, will lead to a stronger, collective voice in support of choral singing in the UK and elsewhere.

Were you there?

Whilst on the subject of the RSCM, a stalwart of past Federation events, Jeremy Hardwicke (Chester), who now lives in Shropshire and who I was in touch with recently, wonders if anyone remembers singing in the **RSCM Festival Service held on 20th June 1951** in the Royal Albert Hall. According to the listing in the RSCM archive, it was the last visit to the hall made by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as a princess before she became Queen in 1952.

Jeremy tells me that over 500 choristers took part and at least 50 fainted during the event. He remembers that Chester was generously hosted by All Saints Church, Twickenham at the RFU headquarters and they had a visit to the South Bank site.

If you, or anyone you know, attended this event do drop me a line at chairman@fcoca.org.uk and I will pass it on to Jeremy.

Future articles

I am very keen for this "**Chairman's Update**" to be the catalyst for discussing issues relevant to you, our members. In my conversations with Association this year, a number of common themes have occurred and I would like to provide the opportunity to begin to air them through this medium.

I would really appreciate any thoughts you have on the following subjects:

- GDPR and maintaining member contact data
- Safeguarding
- Using social media

Please send any thoughts you have on these subjects to me chairman@fcoca.org.uk

Finally, some reminders

Have you paid your **subscription** to the Federation for this year (or previous years). Our Honorary Treasurer sent out invoices for 2021 subscriptions in the spring. Though we keep our costs to a minimum, we do have some expenses, chiefly around insurance and your contribution is gratefully received and very important to us. In return, the Federation insurance policy provides you with Public Liability cover for events that you hold. We have not increased annual subscriptions for many years but it may be necessary to do so if the Federation is to maintain a compliant database and develop the organisation in other areas, subjects that, no doubt, will be discussed at the AGM.

The 2021 AGM will take place on Zoom of **Saturday 16th October at 2pm**. Notice and invitations will be sent by the Honorary Secretary shortly, In meantime, please make sure the date is in your calendar.

It's no too late to submit articles for the **2021 edition of Once a Chorister** magazine, which will be published in November. Please send your copy to secretary@fcoca.org.uk.

Nick Hodges

Chairman, FCOCA

You are receiving this newsletter because either we have you on our database as the contact person for your association or we have had some contact with you personally i.e. in the "Meet the Chairman" sessions. I would like to continue to write to you but if you do not wish to receive further communications from me, please reply to the email to which this newsletter was appended with REMOVE in the subject line.