



Chairman's Update



Welcome to my first, formal, **Chairman's Update**. I am keen for the Federation to be communicating with its member associations more regularly and so, in addition to the **News Sheet** from our Honorary Secretary, following Executive Committee meetings, I will now be sending an update 3 times a year, in January, May and September. It will include news of developments at the Federation, items from the choral world, which you may find interesting and any important matters you need to be aware of.

Unfortunately, my first piece of news is that, sadly, the **2021 Annual Federation Festival**, due to take place in Ely in October, is being postponed until 2022. The Society of Ely Choristers came to the difficult decision at their meeting recently. The driving factor was the demographic of the average Festival attendee, which tends to be those more susceptible to the effects of COVID 19. It is hoped that the Ely Festival will now be held in September 2022. We will ensure that, once confirmed, it will be announced on the Federation website www.fcoca.org.uk.

Meeting the members

On being elected Chairman of the Federation last September, I made the commitment to meet with every one of our member associations in my first 12 months in the role. Because of COVID, these meetings were always going to be on-line, which, given the amount of time we are all spending on Zoom (other video conferencing platforms are available) was always going to be somewhat of a challenge.

I am delighted to say that, by the end of April, I have met with 18 associations and it has been a fascinating experience. I have talked with associations that are just about managing to hold things together to those who have been immensely successful in growing membership and moving with the times.

The purpose of these "**Chairman's Chats**" is for me to find out more about how our members operate and what challenges they face. It also provides an opportunity to find out what the Federation should be doing as the representative body of former chorister association and where we can help our membership. What has come out of these discussions has been pretty consistent. The challenges include managing and maintaining data i.e. former chorister contact details, attracting younger, former choristers to take part, encouraging people to join the committee and persuading the former girl choristers to engage with the association.

What has also come out of the meetings is affirmation that, those who have been choristers, value the experience highly and appreciate all of the life-skills learnt during their time as a chorister and the positive impact it has had on their personal development and careers. When asked, "*What should the Federation be doing to support you?*" back has come the answer, be more voluble about the importance of preserving our chorister tradition and encourage former choristers to engage with their choir associations. In short, the Federation should be the advocate for celebrating choristership. We are now working on how we can progress this idea and I am inspired by the mantra "**Celebrating Choristership**". We are working closely with **Cathedral Music Trust (CMT)** and I and others from the Executive Committee are talking with former choristers now in the public eye to finesse the idea and promote it to a broader audience. You may be aware of the recent announcement from CMT that the TV and radio personality, **Alexander Armstrong**, himself a former chorister, is to be their Ambassador. We were delighted to have the opportunity recently to meet with Alexander (on-line) and discuss how we see our two organisations working together to support our choral tradition.

Thinking about brand

Having spent most of my working life in a sales and marketing environment, I came to understand the importance of "brand" in the success of organisations. Few organisations retain the same brand throughout their existence and most invoke a refresh from time to time.

The Federation was formed at the end of the first decade of the 20th century to represent the interests of cathedral former chorister associations. Since then we have welcomed other choral foundations into the family, including Oxford and Cambridge colleges, school chapels, such as Eton and St Michael's Tenbury Wells and parish churches, such as my own association, St Mary's Warwick, all of which aim to maintain a very high standard of cathedral style musical worship.

Some of our members are "old boy" school associations and some see the Federation as a male dominated organisation, which is not consistent with the fact that cathedral girls' choirs have now existed for a full 30 years. I believe we need to embrace change if we are to survive the next century (or even the next decade). We have to look as though we belong in the 21st century and that we are forward thinking. Choral music in worship has always moved with the times. It has adapted to the fashion of the day and challenged the status quo and, I believe, we must do the same.

I really do feel it is time for change but I fully appreciate that wholesale change may not sit well with some of our members. A past Federation chairman and a current Vice-President, suggested using the title of our annual magazine, **Once a Chorister**, as an alternative name for the organisation. The more I have thought about this the more the idea has grown on me. Once a Chorister expresses exactly who we are. It is simple and has a feel of modernity about it but, also, as Alexander Armstrong commented when I suggested the idea to him in our recent conversation, it is **inclusive and infers always a chorister**. It could be used in isolation or in combination with our full, formal title and it lends itself to abbreviation (OaC). At the end of this newsletter I have included some ideas of how a new branding might be expressed around this concept. I am no graphic artist and I would appreciate the help of someone who knows more about design to finesse these ideas. It is my intention to present the ideas to the Executive Committee at its next meeting in July but I wish to share them with you, first and ask for your feedback and views.

Final thoughts

Do you produce a newsletter for your members? If so, please share it by allowing us to post it to our website. We have a specific page for association newsletters and we would love to see more associations contributing. If you don't issue a newsletter, perhaps you might consider doing so. Communication is key and one of the positives that has come out of my Chairman's Chats is how important the newsletter can be in maintaining contact. If you've never produced a newsletter, take a look at those on our website and, if I may recommend, take a look at the **Blackburn Cathedral** offerings. Organist Emeritus, John Bertalot, produces a **monthly** newsletter for the Blackburn association filled with really interesting articles, which is really reaching its audience.

Have you received an invitation to join me in a Zoom meeting but not yet had chance to reply? I have a number of invitations outstanding, where I am waiting to hear. If so, can I encourage you to respond? As I have said earlier, these meetings have proved very helpful and lots of ideas have come out that we can share with one another. I believe that everyone who has taken part has taken something positive away from them.

Don't forget that the last issue of **Once a Chorister magazine** can be found on our website. Go to the Home page to find the link if you've not yet seen it. Our next FCOCA News Sheet, from our Honorary Secretary, will be with you in July and my next Chairman's Update will appear in September. **Your feedback is vital**. We are not looking for praise but we do want to know if we are getting this right or wrong and, more importantly, what we can be doing to help you to develop your association. We now have a Development Team who are charged with growing and supporting our membership.

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.

Brand concepts

As mentioned above, I have been playing with the concept of using "Once a Chorister" as our brand name, alongside "Celebrating Choristership" and "Once a Chorister, Always a Chorister". As you can see, I need help! If you are (or someone you know is) able to help turn these concepts into a workable scheme please email me chairman@fcca.org.uk In any event, we need your feedback. Drop me an email and tell me what you think.

ONCE A CHORISTER

THE FEDERATION OF
CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATIONS

