



# St Albans Cathedral Ex-Choristers' Association

## Chairman's Report for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008

The period since the Inaugural Reunion in June last year has been quite eventful with quite a few achievements and only a few disappointments.

### **The Committee:**

How do the committee members come to be sitting here today? In September last year the organisers of the previous reunion felt that it had been such a success that an association should be formed in order to provide a point of contact, between current and former choristers of the Cathedral and Abbey Girl's Choirs, and Cathedral Musicians with a view to renewing or developing friendships rooted in their musical experiences within the Cathedral on a regular basis over the years to come.

At the final review meeting the outgoing organisers asked four people; Bob Staten, David Martin-Smith, Simon Colston and myself, as Chairman, to establish the St. Albans Cathedral Ex-Choristers' Association.

### **Aims & Objectives:**

It soon became clear that there were three or four main things to be done:

- Establish the organisational framework, including the committee structure and membership criteria, together with a set of working practices within an informal constitution.
- Establish the membership database; it was agreed at the outset that, unlike some other Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations, membership would be extended to former Masters of the Music & Assistant Organists, former Precentors, former Organ Scholars together with members of the Cathedral Choir and the Abbey Girls' Choir.
- Develop and maintain an internet website as a primary source of communication.
- Seek short term funding to ensure our ongoing activities, including this year's reunion, whilst at the same time developing a financial strategy for the future which would ensure the sustainability of the Association.

### **Performance**

In all these aspects I believe we have been reasonably successful.

Organisationally we now have a Patron in Dr John Jeffrey who has already shown great interest in our success and a President in Dr Peter Hurford whose commitment, encouragement and support over the last months has been greatly valued. The committee carry out their jobs almost entirely via e-mail, including communications with members, although we have ensured, and will continue to ensure that members without e-mail receive all our communications by post.

We have established a database of nearly 500 names and potentially well over 300 active members with whom we communicate by e-mail and post.

We have also launched the website which contains our newsletters, details of membership, events etc.

As you will hear from DMS shortly, financially we have been very fortunate in receiving a further grant from the Cathedral Music Trust. We have also received generous personal donations and funds from the Former Choristers Association which was disbanded up in 1990.

One mild disappointment is that communications generally tend to be one-way unless there is a specific reply required for an activity, e.g. the 50<sup>th</sup> Choir Camp, today's reunion or the purchase of the 2008 Directory. Perhaps this should be expected but regrettably there have been no offers of help in respect of the committee vacancies that were advertised in the last newsletter.

Again, on the positive side, when I look at the various choirs over the years, and see how they have developed and continue to develop, I realise that we have been, and are, very fortunate to have had some quite brilliant and world renowned Masters of the Music, a few but extremely talented Assistant Organists, two of whom have directed the Abbey Girls Choir in addition to their duties with the Cathedral Choir. We wish Andrew Lucas and the Choirs every success over the next year and we hope Simon Johnson enjoys his new role at St. Paul's Cathedral from September.

We should also celebrate the successes of our Organ Scholars who do an immense amount of hard work. A few have moved on to exciting appointments include James Davy, James McVinnie currently at St. Paul's but moving to Westminster Abbey; Peter Dyke and Robert Sharp to name just a few. We also wish our current Scholar Richard Pinel every success in his new post at Magdalene College Oxford and look forward to welcoming and hearing Alex Woodrow, his successor.

### **The Future**

Turning to our future objectives and the strategies that need to be tackled:

The long-term sustainability of the Association is a major challenge and I believe we need to ensure that we have the right organisational structure in place with effective succession planning at all levels. We need to stimulate our membership, especially our younger members, to take an interest in the management of the association. We also need to make special efforts to ensure the finances of the association are robust for future years.

We all know the choirs at St. Albans are unique and for very good reasons. The same goes for this association; I have seen some other Cathedral Old Boys' societies that are steeped in history and formality and that is fine, but what I treasure at St. Albans is our traditional uniqueness and informality. Accordingly I see my personal mission as leading the management of the association and its activities in a manner which balances the interests of the 'oldies' (like myself), who like to spend time looking back at what we did in those 'good old days', with a focus on today and our 'youngsters' (i.e. 15 to 40 year-olds) and how we can support the musical life of the Cathedral and Abbey Girls' Choirs.

I do appreciate that our young ladies and gentlemen, particularly those in secondary and tertiary education have many demanding priorities and preferences but perhaps when studies are concluded and careers are established one or two will step forward to help manage the Association.

During the next months the committee will be reviewing all these areas and, assuming no one else steps up to the position of Chairman, I am giving my commitment, subject to your various confirmations later in this meeting, that I will continue to lead the Association through the next reunion in 2010.

Before concluding this report I should like to comment on a project that has emerged to establish an electronic and physical archive of the Cathedral Choir. When the Association took off, I tried to find out as much as I could about the Choirs' history and was quite amazed to find very little in the Muniment Room archive. The archiving process is now underway and you will see some examples in a display at the reception a little later and in this regard I am indebted to a number of people, including John and Maureen Adams, Dr David Kelsall, the Cathedral Archivist, Peter & Pat Hurford, Barry Rose and former choristers; Raymond Hughes, Bob Fitzsimmons, Alan Godfrey, John Tournay, Harold Page, Jeffrey Collins, Rogers Covey-Crump and Ian Woods who have supplied photographs and helped identify the people in them, some going back as far as the early 1900's.

It is intended that the archive will include formal photographs of the choirs, photographs and tales of the choir camps, tours, special events, special people and also a catalogue of all recordings and broadcasts ever made. If anyone has personal mementos of their time in the choir which they would like archived then please let us know.

Finally I should like to thank a few people; The Dean, Dr Peter Hurford and Andrew Lucas, Master of the Music for their encouragement and support. Also, Moira Dean and Gemma Saunders from the Cathedral Office for their commitment to the Association; to Chris Sharp who developed our Website, to David Ireson and Christine Blackie for their advice and guidance at, and since, handover and to all those who have helped make today happen. Last, but certainly not least, a big thanks to my fellow committee members Bob Staten, David Martin-Smith, John Adams, Simon Colston and Libby Godlee for all that they have achieved since the inception of the Association.

Thank you.

Malcolm G. Bury – Chairman (5<sup>th</sup> July 2008)