



# NEWSLETTER

February 2019

**This is the 2nd newsletter about the choir, its singers and ‘what’s going on’. The website remains the main fount of knowledge but the Editor wishes to thank choir members cajoled to submit items that have made this edition so interesting.**

## **DIARY UPCOMINGS:**

Spring Term starts Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2019

Half Term Break - 20 February 2019

Last rehearsal: Wednesday 27 March, 7.30 pm – St. John’s, Wellington

Saturday 30 March, 7 pm (please note early start) Concert: Bach St Matthew Passion, St John’s Church

May AGM St. John’s Church Hall, Wednesday 22 May 2019 7.30 pm

## **PEOPLE YOU SIT NEXT TO:**

### **No.1 Sue Ryan sadly OUT**

It will come as no surprise to most of you that my career path was as an Administrator culminating as Private Secretary to Ministers in the House of Lords (including Viscount Astor – think family fame/infamy Clivedon, Profumo and Sam Cam); interesting and at times exciting but long and often unsociable hours and not particularly family friendly! So two more children later and a bigger house move to Norfolk saw my dream job disappear to take on the supervision of the renovation of our Edwardian home (admin of sorts). Living in a new area I decided that the best way to meet people was to “get involved” resulting in my joining two PTAs and eventually becoming Chair of both as well as concurrently Chair of Governors of the local High School (leading to involvement in a working Party with the Norfolk CC Education Department); still renovating with a husband working away during the week. I’m sure their Lordships were easier at times than the competing priorities of three committees!

After several years, we decided we wanted more land, less house and moved to Devon and I decided to step back from volunteering which is when singing came back in to my life. Like most of us, singing was an integral part of the school years and after being cast in the lead of the school musical “Alice in wonderland” (the long hair played a big part) I realised how invigorating and uplifting singing could be. All through my teens I sang with school and in my 20s I frequented numerous Folk Clubs and indeed in my late 30s sang at my own wedding reception with the group I was then involved with in Herts. But in Devon a new opportunity beckoned; an invitation from the Head of Music at Blundell’s School for parents to join the school and staff for a yearly performance. So, much to the chagrin of my children, I duly turned up and got my real taste of choral and four-part harmony singing (school was all girls so sop/alto/descant was my main experience) and I loved it, rehearsing with the school one lunchtime and the parents one evening each week. When we moved to Wellington I continued my association with Blundell’s until my youngest left and then I joined Welly Choral which I thoroughly enjoyed. My enthusiasm (showing up early) was obviously spotted and I was approached with a view to becoming Secretary; an administrator and full circle!

So now we are in Wales and the next curve of my musical adventure will be the Aberystwyth Choral Society, a ‘round’ trek over the mountain of 60+ miles and an hour each way (plenty of time to warm-up

and practice) and co-incidentally we are singing Haydn's Creation – the first work I sang with WCS – another circle completed. *(Sue Ryan)*

## **No.2 Lucy Watson- temporarily new secretary - welcomed IN**

I started Choral singing at school where I sang in Sherborne Abbey, and continued at University and sang in York Minster. I have been very lucky to sing in such wonderful buildings. After University I trained as a nurse and did not sing again until I moved into the Community and could commit to regular rehearsals. I joined Swindon Choral Society in 1995 when they were singing Britten's War Requiem for the 50th Anniversary of the end of WW2. This was with choirs from USA, Germany and France so a huge undertaking and quite daunting as my first sing after a long break. However I am still singing. I joined Taunton Choral Society when I moved to Somerset and then came over to Wellie Choral when we sang Elijah a few years ago which was just too tempting - we signed the register at our wedding to 'He Watching Over Israel'. I have heard the St Matthew Passion sung many times but never sung it myself so I am looking forward to this term with excitement. *(Lucy Watson)*

**Wellington Choral Society is lucky to have amongst its members, several couples, one such duo with their musical memories is: Brian ( Bass) and Pam (multi singer alto and tenor) Sharp.**

In 1978 Brian and I left Surrey and brought our family to live in Somerset. We had both worked in the BBC for many years in Central London and found the change to the open spaces and fresh air of the West Country most refreshing.

At the time of our move our children were of school age - Tim 10 and Verity 9. In subsequent years they both attended Wellington School. At one of the first parents' evenings that we attended, we met Michael Foster who was then the school's Director of Music. He also was new to conducting Wellington Choral Society which Brian and I joined in 1981, when they tackled an unaccompanied performance of Benjamin Britten's 'Hymn to Cecilia'. We met weekly in what was the 'primitive' Moose Hall in Wellington where there was always a friendly and welcome coffee break, even then! As the Society was not in the happy position of having generous funds, the concert expenses had to be kept to a minimum. The staging consisted of wooden boxes of varying sizes which were uncomfortable and difficult to stand on especially when Michael Foster involved the Wellington School choirs to join us for concerts. What luxury we enjoy nowadays with the wonderful staging recently acquired! Although we found this unaccompanied work in four parts challenging, we enjoyed it nevertheless and that was the start of our long connection with WCS.

Brian is an accomplished craftsman (though he won't admit it). He made a cello for Verity, our musical daughter, which she played on several occasions in the orchestra for WCS. He then went on to make an even better cello, and is currently part way through constructing a third. He also made (from a lime tree...not a kit) a harpsichord which has been used more than once within the orchestra of WCS performances and elsewhere. He also made a violin which our son, Tim, played for many years before I took over the bow and achieved my ambition of being a member of the Wednesday Orchestra in Taunton, which, at that time was conducted by Dawn Lankester who left us when she was appointed Musical Director of WCS in 1995.

As a youngster I sang in my local church choir in Surrey, which was where I first encountered singing in a mixed group. Once we were settled in Somerset both Brian and I sang in the annual Somerset Summer Chorus, conducted by John Cole. I was a member of Taunton Choral society for several years. Later on I became a member, for ten years, of a small choir called Taunton Camarata (now named Collegium) alongside Gillie Curtis and Rosemary Clarke-Lowes.

Brian has been a member for 38 years, was Treasurer from 1997-2005 and Chairman for 3 years from 2007-2010. More recently I was a committee member for 3 years.

We've thoroughly enjoyed our long involvement with the Society and who would have thought that from such simple beginnings as 'not being used to singing in four or more parts', or 'singing unaccompanied' or 'singing in languages other than English' we can now proudly look back and remember the exciting and challenging concerts that we have performed with the society under the directions of Michael Foster, Dawn Lankester, Guy Turner, Julian Ross, Elizabeth Hayley and now of course, Laurence Blyth. Happy memories indeed. *(Pam Sharp)*

### **AND PLEASE WELCOME our new members:**

**Sopranos** – Cheryl Dedman, Di Jerrold, Priscilla Owen, Gibby Swaine

**Altos** – Tilla Brading, Felicity Parry, Janet Piper and returnee Ros Young

**Tenors** – Tony Bennett, returnee, David Yeomans

**Bass** – Ian Piper, Andrew Tresidder

## **REVIEWS**

### **Concert**

There is no point in repeating the already circulated excellent reviews and comments received about the last concert. But for the first time in over 20 years of WCS membership, I found myself sitting at the back of the audience. The comparatively smaller than usual choir sounded wonderful, the voices not being inhibited by the high arch that separates the choir when singing from the eastern end. However, it was odd that the 'stars' of the concert – the performers and the orchestra - were in darkness whilst the audience lit up. I realise that setting up lighting presents a problem and that some lights were faulty, so it must have been difficult for choir and orchestra to see their scores. But on reflection, given the theme of remembrance and sorrow, maybe beautiful singing out of darkness was the plan - it certainly added to the ethereal contemplative atmosphere. *(Editor)*

### **Christmas at the Wellesley 2<sup>nd</sup> December**

One week after our Remembrance concert, 17 volunteers from the choir braved the Sunday evening elements to take part in this event arranged by the Wellington Arts Association.

We were asked to arrive early to practice a new version of "I saw 3 ships". This turned out to be in a minor key and mostly on 4 notes!!

We were accompanied by the Wellington Silver Band who played for all the audience carols very well if a little loudly! That done we took our seats to listen to the other 15 acts. A number of young children performed song, dance and ballet to a variety of piped music and the adults both young and older recited and sung mostly carols in unison again to backing tracks. We were also assailed by a somewhat strident version of Pie Jesu!

Finally our turn beckoned so we left our seats and went round the outside of the building to enter the wings to be ready to walk on. As we entered the stage lights were dazzling but we quickly gathered around Laurence on the keyboard and gave our all to "Still Still Still" and "Joy the World" in full 4 part harmony. Both were well received. We then had to wait until the very end in order to sing the new version of 3 ships with the whole cast.

Overall it seems that feedback was good with praise for being properly accompanied, with harmony rather than unison and being able to hear all the words. So all 17 went home feeling satisfied with what we did.

We may have interested some potential members or even more audience, only time will tell!

*(Simon Johnson)*

## Quiz

Though the number of members who attended was disappointing, an entertaining evening was enjoyed by everyone there and we succeeded in raising nearly £400 for the society. A very pleasing result.

I look back on a fun evening, expertly handled by an excellent Question Master. The quiz competition itself was very close throughout the night and ended in a tie with a play-off question deciding the winning team. A highlight for me was the repartee that bounced around between team members and the competing tables throughout the evening.

It was a great shame that only 32 members, friends and family came along, the prizes for the raffle alone, raised in part from various local businesses, were deserving of an attendance of 100. I can only reflect on how much better off financially the society would have been had the event been supported at that level, as we had hoped. Always the optimist, I believe we should try this format for bringing members together and for raising funds again.

Finally I'd like to thank in particular, committee member, Ann Holland, for organising the event and her son Graeme for running the evening as Question Master so well. My message as the departing Chair of WCS is- we must find ways to augment our normal income from concert and membership fees, our first attempt at a quiz night shows it can be done, whilst, at the same time, meeting socially and having fun. So, let's do it again and to all members- come and join us next time for a great evening. *(Michael Maddock)*

EDITOR'S COMMENTS: It was indeed great fun, but a poor attendance given the size of the choir. A lot of effort had gone into making this event a success aided and led by the excellent quiz master. An extremely generous array of raffle prizes had been gleaned from local traders, which should, had there been more people, accrued an even greater profit. Please do consider attending the fund raising social events organised by the committee. These extra funds help to keep the subscriptions down whilst offering a chance to mix with choir members you might not know.

## Wells – Where Christmas Begins!

Sing for Somerset - Carols in Wells Cathedral 2018

After many years Elizabeth McDowell handed over the organization of this marvellous event to Lucy Watson and myself.

Those of you who have participated over the years will acknowledge the special buzz that goes with starting the carol season as early as November, joining with singers from a wide variety of choirs and performing for a very good cause in such a superb place. I have a soft spot having lived not just in Wells but in the Bishops Palace, Cathedral Close in the 1980's. We are in safe hands under the baton of Laurence- who took over from Liz Hayley, previously initiating the connection with WCS.

We had 80 registering to sing with a good attendance at the four rehearsals, held in Taunton. As ever we are blessed to have coffee and cakes courtesy of Sandra, Liz and team which I am sure helps mould all the different choirs into one - the Somerset Voices.

Saturday 15th December saw many of us board the Berry's coach and rendezvous in the nave for the afternoon rehearsal with the Mid Somerset orchestra, before enjoying the hospitality of the hosts, Somerset Community Foundation, for supper in the cathedral café. This gives us a chance to forge links with each other in a convivial atmosphere, valued by us all, and this year to shelter from the icy cold rain which greeted us!

The service of readings and music included many favourite carols, Rutter arrangements such as the Star Carol and 'Still, Still, Still' an Austrian Christmas carol and lullaby whose melody is a folk tune from the district of Salzburg, the tune appearing first in 1865.

As yet we do not know how much was raised by the collection on the night but the Somerset Community Foundation (founded in 2002) currently manage over 84 funds, supporting hundreds of local charities,

voluntary groups and social enterprises in Somerset with over £7.5 million of investment. The organisations they help operate below the radar, quietly helping those most in need. For many it's the last line of defence against poverty and exclusion. Again I have a personal connection as a volunteer with the charity Promise (Route 1 Advocacy) which receives financial support from the community foundation, for which my special thanks.

Our commitment is always hugely appreciated by the organisers and the standard achieved, commendable. We hope that it will continue as an important part of our outreach long into the future and encourage new members and friends with open arms come September. *(Bridget Goldsmith)*

**STOP PRESS**, Just confirmed date for next year is **14<sup>th</sup> December** in your diaries now! *(Editor)*

## **THE MESSIAH FROM SCRATCH**

The Royal Albert Hall's - Scratch Messiah' The Really Big Chorus - with 5,000 Singers

After singing the Messiah twice with the W.C.S., Anita and I went to the Royal Albert Hall last Easter to hear it performed. Expecting an overwhelming experience we were some-what under-whelmed. It lacked that, feeling part of it experience. So when Liz McDowell, who had sung this Scratch Messiah 4 times before) spoke of the chance to actually perform it at the R.A.H. ourselves, we thought long and hard... about who would look after the dogs.

We didn't know that 'Scratch' performances were annual events at the R.A.H.; no rehearsals, just straight in; your own confidence the only yard stick. Fickle fortune had also found a day free for our busy former M.D., Liz Hayley who had jumped at the chance to not only sing in what she would normally direct but also to sing at the R.A.H. and amidst so many fellow chanteurs. So on the day WCS were singing at the Wellesley, a party of 7 from WCS plus Liz Hayley joined the 5,000 voices making the pilgrimage, including whole choirs, which is why we had to book our seats in May.

So Liz M. liaised with Liz H. and tripped over travel and trains, whilst I was tasked with meetings and meals. No problem with that. In South Ken. there is a place that goes back to post war: 'Daquise' is still that fine Polish restaurant today — I'm happy to say — that my father started in 1948. This was our meet and eat place.

Liz Hayley beat us all to the table; indeed to the cake as well! The menu needed explaining; new dishes were discovered and a fine (late) lunch was had. Then off to the R.A.H. A motley procession... toward that whirling current... laughing and buoyant, with curves!

Amongst an array of foreign voices (there were singers from 18 countries, as far as Russia and New Zealand) we found our respective: entrances, stairs, landings, corridors and SATB seats, after a climb. The buzz in the auditorium was tangible. Piers Makin and I found our Bass seats high up next a very precipitous edge; one seat away from it thankfully. With the Sops. (Anita, Sandra and Eliz. McD wearing the uniform blue tops) below us and the Altos (Liz H, Bridget Goldsmith and Cindy Makin wearing red tops) were way over t'other side and neither phone nor waving got them to spot us. In asking those around us, "Are you Spanish?", I had committed the best of international faux-pas, for they replied with indignant courtesy: "No, no... Catalanian!". The Spanish hallelujah does pack a mean Hhhhaa! Certainly we were not under-whelmed. A memorable event indeed. Our neighbours had come a long way to sing in this; by the end I think we'd come a long way too. I certainly might go back this year and do the Mozart. *(Julian Dakowski)*

EDITOR'S comments. Those of you who sang in the Wells Carol Service in Liz Hayley's tenure will remember the spine chillingly wonderful singing of 'In the Bleak Mid Winter' by Lorna Anderson. Lorna explained that as a very green from Glasgow to London student at the Royal College of Music, she had not been inside the Royal Albert Hall, even though it was next door, until David Willcocks (who initiated these Scratch performances) invited her to sing the solo soprano voice. So for her initiation into the vast magnificence of

the RAH she found herself standing surrounded by a mass of blue on one side – (sopranos) and red the other- (altos).. (*The Really Big Chorus does send information of events to WCS – see also 'Holidays' below*)



## MISCELLANEA

### Up coming events:

Somerset Chamber Choir are singing Rachmaninov Vespers at Kings School Taunton at 4.00pm on Sunday 17 Feb.

Milverton Concert Society- St. Michael's, Milverton

Vision String Quartet, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 7.30 p.m

Adam Walker, James Baillieu, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 7.30 p.m.

Young Musicians Platform, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7 p.m.

www: milvertonconcerts.org.

### Thinking of Singing on Holiday?:

<https://www.runbysingers.org> - see website for full details of summer 2019 programme of specialist singing courses and holidays. Bookings can be made on new website.

Highlights for 2019 include a Summer School in Lincoln with King's Singer's Nigel Perrin and Jeremy Jackman, a chance to sing in Barcelona's Sagrada Familia - and our popular midnight Mozart Requiem in Vienna. A member of AITO, RunBySingers has been arranging singing courses for individuals since 2003. We are all choral singers ourselves and join in every event.

Scratch Performances and away days:

[www.trbc.co.uk](http://www.trbc.co.uk) - The Really Big Chorus, which very efficiently organises the Scratch performances including The Messiah From Scratch reported by Julian Dakowski, also runs other events and holidays: 4-7 April - Haydn's the Creation in Athens, 12<sup>th</sup> May- Verdi Requiem in the Royal Albert Hall, 14<sup>th</sup> July, Orff's Carmina Burana and in August a summer school plus in 9-16 October a choral cruise on the River Seine.

If you are Scratch singer, you can get a 12% discount on ChoraLine., when ordering type SCRATCH in discount box.

<https://oxenfoordinternational.co.uk/> Oxenfoord International Singing Summer School, Introduced to the Editor by Elizabeth Hayley, one of the accompanists, is for solo singing or trainee accompanists of any age with 1:1 coaching. If you know of any young singers or pianists (wishing to become accompanists) educated in state schools please see the click on 'Bursaries' and for extra information click on 'Search'

For those who have sung at Wells a few years ago there may be some familiar faces in the photo archive.

## **A TAX Message from Chairman**

*Dear Members,*

*Current HMRC regulations mean that any part of members' subscriptions that are attributable to paying for tuition cannot be included in Gift Aid calculations as it is considered to pay for a service. Having spent time consulting with Making Music, our advisers on these sorts of issues, and with other choral societies, your committee has reached the conclusion from the latest available financial figures that the appropriate proportion of each members' subscription attributable to **tuition** taking place during our rehearsals, which does not qualify for Gift Aid, is 5%.*

*This means that, should a member need to complete the Gift Aid Section of a self-assessment tax return for the current tax year (6th April 2018 to 5th April 2019), the contribution from your membership which qualifies for Gift Aid is reduced by 5% to £76.00 for a full year and £38.00 for a term.*

*This figure can change from year to year. In future we will advise you of the amount to include in a tax return as soon as we can, but at the latest before subscriptions are payable at the start of each year. Should any members require details on the method of calculation of these amounts, we will make them available at their request.*

*Best regards, Mike Maddock Chair.*

## **AND FINALLY!**

Editor told of a cartoon of a skeleton holding a conductor's baton with caption: 'Waiting for the choir to look up!'

*The next newsletter will be sent out in August, so please submit any fun and interesting stories or coming events that could be included to Editor : [lizziebiffmcd@gmail.com](mailto:lizziebiffmcd@gmail.com)*