



## Chair's Update January 2023



Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations

### New Year Greetings

On behalf of my fellow, Once a Chorister, Executive Committee members, I send heartfelt wishes for a peaceful, prosperous and healthy New Year.

Having navigated the two years of pandemic, last year we saw a slow return to normality or, what is referred to by many as, the “new normal”. As reported in my October update, it was a huge pleasure to meet, in person (a phrase that has entered our vocabulary with new meaning) at Ely for our annual Festival celebrating choristership. Slowly, attendance numbers at services have been improving giving rise to the challenge of whether to cease on-line streaming to encourage others to return. On the other hand, on-line streaming has brought the pleasure of choral worship to many unable to attend “in person” because of health or location.

Every New Year brings new challenges to add to those previously unresolved. 2023 will be no different. The greatest of these may prove to be the perilous state of the world economy. The aftermath of the pandemic, global environmental issues and, of course, the tragic conflict in eastern Europe are likely to have a direct impact on the institutions and culture we value so highly in our society. Rising costs are already proving to be a real challenge for many of our cathedrals and churches. Energy bills are soaring - not good news for the guardians of buildings that were not designed with energy efficiency in mind – as are many other costs. We have heard of places that have had to reduce the number of choral services offered each week in a bid to reduce costs. We know that choral foundations are expensive to maintain and may be seen by some as an “easy win” when looking to save money.

I mentioned in my report to the AGM in September and published in this year's **Once a Chorister magazine** that many organisations which rely on volunteers have struggled to maintain an existence as a result of the impact of the pandemic. This includes those who provide safeguarding for many choirs, fundraisers, guides, cleaners, servers, committee members of choir associations and former chorister associations. Collectively, those of us who have enjoyed the privilege and benefits that being in a choir have given us need to do all we can to support the current choirs in the places where we once sang. It would be very sad, indeed, if we were to lose a musical tradition dating back hundreds of years and the training it provides for future professional musicians.

**Once a Chorister Magazine 2022** was published on our website last month. If you have not already read it, do please use the link to this bumper edition which can be found on the Home page of our website at [www.fcoca.org.uk](http://www.fcoca.org.uk). I am immensely grateful to our Honorary Secretary, Alastair, for bringing this edition together and all the work that this entails. I am sure he would appreciate your feedback and any suggestions for how to make this even more successful in future years. Do email him at [secretary@fcoca.org.uk](mailto:secretary@fcoca.org.uk). Also in the magazine you will find details of the **2023 Festival** to be held at Warwick. This year the church of St Mary, in Warwick and its choir celebrate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation and we will be sharing in that celebration. Plans are now well advanced and

booking for the event will open in April. Although the town is not blessed with a large hotel, there is plenty of suitable accommodation in Warwick and its environs. A list of suggested places to stay is given in the article in the magazine and early booking would be recommended. If you do stay outside the town, there is ample free car parking within easy walking distance of the church where all of the events will be held, with the exception of the Festival Banquet, which is a short walk from the church.

If you have seen the magazine you will have read that Llandaff Cathedral has established a Music Foundation to support the Director of Music, which will encompass the cathedral choir association, the parents association and the former chorister association. Chair of the Choir Association, Elizabeth Atherton, who has two sons in the choir, has been appointed Music Foundation Executive. Elizabeth is keen to make contact with former Llandaff Cathedral Choir members to begin to create an alumni and supporters association and enable former choristers to rekindle past friendships, make new ones through the alumni network and support the work of the Music Foundation. I am delighted to report that the Foundation has applied for affiliation to **Once a Chorister** and has offered to host a Festival in 2024 (20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> September). Former choristers and anyone wishing to make contact with Elizabeth may do so using this email address - [music.foundation@llandaffcathedral.org.uk](mailto:music.foundation@llandaffcathedral.org.uk). Llandaff has been affiliated to the Federation in the past and last hosted a Festival in 1969. It will be a delight to welcome them back into the **Once a Chorister** family and we look forward to celebrating with them next year.



I was very pleased to learn after our Ely Festival last year that Anna Lapwood had been appointed an Ambassador for the Cathedral Music Trust alongside Alexander Armstrong. Anna is Director of Music at Pembroke College, Cambridge, organist and broadcaster and Associate Artist at the Royal Albert Hall. She is a strong advocate of music education and specialises in bringing music to children from impoverished backgrounds both at home and abroad. On her appointment she said, *"I am thrilled to become an Ambassador for the Cathedral Music Trust. I strongly believe in the transformative power of music and the importance of musical opportunities for all. In recent years, the Trust has positioned itself not just as a provider of financial aid to choirs in need, but also as integral to conversations around participation, education and excellence, and I am really excited to work with them to consider how we balance the need for innovation with the beauty of tradition."*

**THE  
RODOLFUS  
FOUNDATION**  
*inspiring tomorrow's singers*

I have been asked by Ralph Allwood, former Director of Music at Eton College and now freelance choral director and Artistic Director of The Rodolfus Foundation to forward details of their choral courses for 2023. The Foundation runs residential singing courses for young people: the Junior Courses for children aged 8 to 15 and the Choral Courses (previously known as The Eton Choral Courses) for young people aged 16 to 21. They have also now started courses for adults (from 21 up). Ralph said in his message to me, *"I do find those who have sung in Cathedral choirs love to come on courses because they get the standard of music they were used to. Often choristers who have just left the cathedral miss it so much that to do some more music to a comparable standard, while meeting other enthusiasts, is wonderful for them"*. Posters for both the Junior/Choral and Adult courses are appended to the email alongside this update.

## Looking Forward

As previously mentioned, it was a delight to hear from Llandaff and receive their application for affiliation and offer to host a Festival in 2024. At least we know now that Warwick will not be the last Federation Festival. We do, however, still face an uncertain future. We are fully aware of the challenges facing many of our affiliated members, which is in common with many volunteer led organisations, as I have noted previously. Persuading people to give of their time and join committees is an uphill struggle and, unless we can encourage people to do so, our organisations will cease to exist. We have to ask the question whether our organisation has a purpose. Do people still want to attend whatever events it offers or have such events run their course? There is little point in going to the effort of organising and putting on an event if the only people who attend are those who organised it plus, maybe, one or two others. For some former chorister associations this may have been the case in recent years. I noted that one association that has had very good attendance at previous reunions, reported a disappointing turnout this year.

My term of office as Chair of **Once a Chorister** is due to end in 2025. Both our Honorary Secretary, Alastair and I have indicated that we will not continue in role past that point and at this present time we do not have prospective successors in place. Unfortunately, our Vice Chair stepped down from the committee at last year's AGM on health grounds. In the tradition of the Federation, the Vice Chair would succeed as Chair. As none of the other Executive Committee members have indicated their interest in taking up either role, we are in urgent need to recruit new members to the team to ensure its longer term continuance. Please do contact either Alastair ([secretary@fcoca.org.uk](mailto:secretary@fcoca.org.uk)) or me ([chairman@fcoca.org.uk](mailto:chairman@fcoca.org.uk)) if you or any members of your association would be interested in joining the Federation Executive Committee.

## Finally, a thank you



I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to Arnold Wills (left) for his unstinting support during his 2 years as Vice Chair of the Federation. It was with deep sadness that I had to accept his resignation from the Executive Committee on health grounds. Arnold has been the perfect Vice Chair; always challenging, always questioning, always seeking to see things in a different way but always 100% committed to the survival of the organisation. Not only have I appreciated his wise counsel but I have also valued the friendship we have forged, which, I am sure, will endure for very many years.

**Nick Hodges**  
Chair



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