



Chair's Update October 2024



Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations

Thank you, Llandaff.

The Federation held its **Once a Chorister Annual Festival** at Llandaff Cathedral over the weekend of 20th to 22nd September during which some 40 delegates representing 13 Associations affiliated to the Federation were in attendance.

Our heartfelt thanks go to Stephen Moore, Director of Music, Aaron Shilson, Assistant Director of Music and Petra Barry, Communications Manager at The Cathedral School, for everything they did to make the weekend so memorable with sublime music, engaging activities, faultless organisation and a warmth of welcome only to be found in Wales.

We must also thank the Dean and Chapter for generously hosting the event. Dean Jason had only been in role for two weeks and Canon Precentor Ian joined the team in February. Though both new to their roles they embraced the Festival wholeheartedly and led our worship so wonderfully. Mention was made particularly by a number of the former choristers about the quality of the singing of the versicles and responses by Canon Precentor, who studied both music and theology and enjoyed a successful career as a professional singer and vocal coach.

Llandaff is located less than 3 miles from the centre of Cardiff and the Cathedral nestles at the bottom of a steep, tree-lined hill in the centre of the "village". Fortunately, its Victorian restoration left intact many of the ancient characteristics and features of this pretty and perfectly formed building, with much of the medieval church, dating back to the early 12 century, still existing.



We held our AGM after lunch on Saturday and the full minutes will be posted onto the Federation website in due course. In the meantime I would mention that the main topic under discussion was where the Federation goes from here. As I have reported previously, we currently have no offers to host future Festivals/AGMs and that both Honorary Secretary, Alastair Pollard and I will be stepping down from our respective roles next year, having been in post for 5 years. We do not have anyone proposed for either role. These issues have been the subject of much discussion at our Executive Committee meetings over the last couple of years, but remain unresolved.

At last year's AGM in Warwick, it was agreed that we would undertake a survey of our membership to see how much support there is for the Federation. I reported at

this year's AGM that, excluding those Associations represented on the Executive Committee, I had received responses from just 10 Associations, only one of which positively said they would support future Festivals. However, there was enthusiastic support from those present at the AGM for continuing to hold gatherings whenever and wherever possible in the future. We agreed that it doesn't have to be an annual event, though it would be nice to continue the tradition. We also reminded delegates that it does not have to be the full 3 day event that it has been in recent years and that the Guide to Organising a Festival, which can be found on our website, was revised in 2021 and states that it is for the hosting Association to decide the shape and duration of the event and that it should focus on one day – probably a Saturday. At that time we also agreed that, if practical, the AGM should be held at the same time as the Festival, which might also be part of some other event being held by the hosts, such as their own choir reunion.

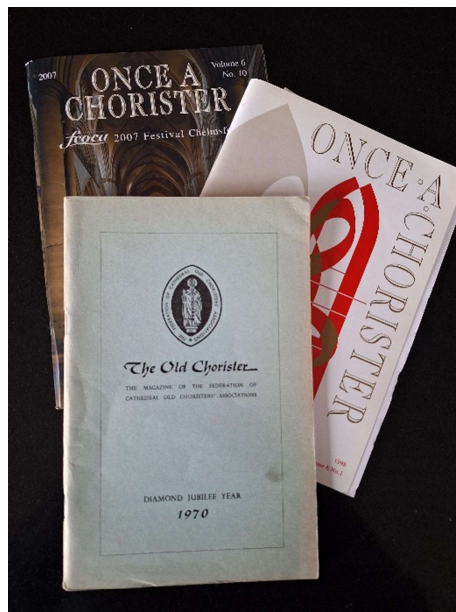
We fully appreciate that many of the Associations, which have in the past been very active, are no longer endowed with lots of eager hands to organise events and keep the Association alive. A number of the Associations represented by their emblems on the Chairman's Chain of Office, no longer exist and we continue to hear of others who will be closing or merging with other bodies. This led one of the delegates at the AGM to suggest that the future existence of former chorister organisations would benefit greatly from the support of the current Directors of Music and Music Departments. I agree with this view entirely and can point to a number of Associations where this is the case, notably the hosts of our last two Festivals, Warwick and Llandaff. I resolved to contact as many Directors of Music that I can in the coming months to enlist their support for their former chorister Associations and, where no Association exists, to consider the benefits of having one. My fellow committee members will do all they can to support this with direct contact with Associations.

Whatever the outcome of our actions over the coming months, the Executive Committee is fully committed to ensure the continuance of this 114 year old institution. Please consider how you might host a gathering for the Federation. Perhaps you have a special anniversary you wish to celebrate and do so with others. If you are holding your own gathering of former choristers, could the wider audience of the Federation be invited to hold their AGM in the morning and join you for evensong in the afternoon? Could we hold our AGM in or somewhere close to your cathedral/chapel/church and join you for your regular evensong? If we are to survive, and I am sure we can, we just need to think about approaching what we do in a different way as there is little point doing the same thing and it not being supported.

One final word on Llandaff. *"Altogether, it was a superlative occasion, and I know full well that what many of us try so say about it in retrospect, cannot ever convey fully our feelings of overwhelming happiness, thankfulness and gratitude – both to Llandaff and its folks, and to the choral tradition of which we are justifiably proud to be part."* These were the words of Gordon Berriman in his Chairman's review of the 1969 Festival held in Llandaff in the 1970 Federation magazine *The Old Chorister*.

We know from the programme for that event shared by Gilbert Lloyd (Llandaff Old Chorister) that nearly 200 people attended that Festival but I am sure that all those who attended the 2024 Festival would echo those words of The Reverend Canon Berriman.

The Old Chorister Magazine was renamed in 1988, **Once a Chorister**, the branding we have been using for the Federation since 2022. In 2016, following the death of Michael Barry, who had been editor of the magazine from 2001, the decision was taken to only publish the magazine on-line as an electronic document. Since 2017 the editor has been Alastair Pollard who has combined this with, firstly, his Chairmanship and, latterly, Honorary Secretary roles. The magazine has followed the same format since its early years with articles related to choral music and those who are involved in it, reports on meetings and Festivals and, primarily, reports from Associations and music departments on their activities over the past year.



This is the last call for articles/reports for the 2024 edition, which should be sent directly to Alastair at secretary@fcoca.org.uk before then end of October. Please encourage your Director of Music to submit an article. Pictures, supporting articles, are always welcome.

Nick Hodges
Chair



Email: chairman@fcoca.org.uk

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. 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. Contributions to any discussions mentioned in the newsletter may be sent to me, Nick Hodges, at the email address shown: or to the Honorary Secretary at secretary@fcoca.org.uk.