



# FEDERATION OF CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATION/ONCE A CHORISTER

Saturday 13 June 2026 | The Knights' Chamber | Minster Precincts |  
Peterborough Cathedral

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Lincoln Cathedral on Saturday 13th June 2026, commencing at 1:00pm

## 1. Federation Prayer

The Chairman requested a moment of silence to reflect on the recent passing of Ayrton Westwood, President, East Anglia & Southeast Representative, true friend of the organisation. Following this, Nick Hodges paid tribute to his friend and mentor, Geoffrey Holroyde (Director of Music at Warwick died just before Christmas aged 97). Michael Lake added George Barlow, who sang in Chelmsford Cathedral Choir, also died recently. Nick Hodges marked the passing of Dr. John Bertalot (Blackburn) who was a long-standing supporter of Nick especially during his tenure as Chairman.

The Chairman read the Federation Prayer.

## 2. Welcome and Chair's update

The Chair of Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Association, Samuel Barber, welcomed 21 representatives to the meeting.

Attendees:

Nick Hodges (Warwick), Michael Lake (Chelmsford), Tristan Harding (Ely), Ian Henderson (Rochester), Alexander Baker (Peterborough), Charles Cunliffe (Peterborough), Chloe Spires (Peterborough), David Lowe (Peterborough), Elizabeth Cunningham (Peterborough), Oliver Hamilton-Box (Peterborough), Samuel Barber (Peterborough), Richard Watts (Westminster Abbey), Richard Lilley (St Albans).

The Chair continued with his update:

*Once again, good afternoon and thank you, truly, for joining us today.*

*This is my first AGM as Chair of FCOCA, and I want to say what an honour it is to stand before you in this role.*

*I'd like to begin by thanking the committee — and Nick, Alastair, and Michael in particular — for the support and dedication you've shown as we've found our feet. Together, I believe we have a real opportunity to lead this organisation*

*through a genuine period of renewal — one that ensures FCOCA not only survives, but thrives, long into the future. If things go to plan, we should comfortably make our 250th anniversary sometime in the 2160s.*

*Many of you will already have noticed some of the changes we've been making — to our digital infrastructure, our accounting practices, our communications. Over the past six months, the focus has been on getting the foundations right: making sure the bedrock is solid before we build something ambitious on top of it. I believe we're now in a position to do exactly that.*

*But before I share that vision, I want to reflect briefly on something that affected me personally earlier this year.*

*I learned of the closure of Blackburn Cathedral's Old Choristers' Association. I found that genuinely saddening. Generations of former choristers from that great city — with its proud history in music, in industry, in community — no longer have a dedicated place to come together, to tell their stories, to support one another. And Blackburn is not alone. Across the country, associations have quietly folded, or been absorbed into broader 'Friends of' groups. Organisations like the Cathedral Music Trust do wonderful work, but their focus isn't on former choristers specifically. That space — *\*our\* space* — is shrinking.*

*I don't see that simply as a problem. I see it as a calling. It is, I believe, distinctly *\*our purpose\** to be the place where former choristers — from across this country, and indeed across the world — can come together.*

*So — what does that look like in practice?*

*Today, I'd like to share a high-level vision for a refreshed organisation, which we plan to formally unveil at our festival in Norwich later this year. I'll ask that comments and debate are held until the relevant agenda items — but I wanted you to hear the shape of what we're proposing before we get there.*

*These are genuinely ambitious ideas. I won't pretend otherwise. But I think the moment calls for ambition.*

***\*\*First — we open up membership.\*\*** Not just to individuals, but to churches, choirs, and other associations. We want to become a genuine network, not just a club.*

***\*\*Second — tiered membership.\*\*** We'll introduce several levels of membership, with meaningful benefits at higher tiers. This will significantly strengthen our ability to fund the work we want to do.*

***\*\*Third — a new name.\*\*** We are proposing to rename our organisation the *\*Choristers Alumni Network\** — CAN, for short. And our tagline? *\*Decades of Experience Chorally\** — or DEC. I rather like that.*

***\*\*Fourth — digital-first membership.\*\*** We'll be removing physical membership cards — the operational complexity simply isn't worth it — and replacing them with a digital card, alongside revamped merchandise: new pins, ties, brooches, and more.*

***\*\*Fifth — a new legal structure.\*\*** We propose registering as a company limited by guarantee, with each member holding a nominal £1 guarantee on joining — a one-off, lifetime commitment. Beyond that, we'll offer tiered annual membership. Voting rights will be tied to dues-paying membership: association members will carry 100 votes, individual members 1 vote, and non-dues-paying members, none. Annual fees will be set — in 2027 money — at a minimum of £50 for associations, £20 for standard members, and just £1 for students and those on low incomes, with the ability to adjust for inflation annually.*

***\*\*Sixth — a CAN Choir.\*\*** We want to establish a choir with a very specific ambition: to hold a 'Big Sing' each year, working toward a world record for the largest choral Evensong ever assembled — with a target of 2031, in partnership with the Cathedral Music Trust.*

***\*\*Seventh — a strengthened festival.\*\*** Our annual festival continues, but with much greater emphasis on outreach — bringing more former choristers together, and ensuring each festival raises funds both for our organisation and for the host Cathedral and association.*

***\*\*Eighth — a Support Hub.\*\*** A dedicated resource to help former choristers with employment, volunteering, work experience, and more. Because our shared experience doesn't just connect us — it can actually open doors for one another.*

*\*\*And ninth — a data-sharing framework.\*\* We want to be able to help new or reformed associations get off the ground quickly, by sharing relevant records of former choristers from a given choir. We believe this could be transformative for the future of the wider movement.*

*Now — I know that's a lot to take in. And I know some of these proposals are, by any measure, radical.*

*But consider this: there are over 70 Cathedrals in the UK alone, plus hundreds of colleges, chapels, and churches with rich choral traditions — and likely thousands more around the world. If just one former chorister from each year group at each UK Cathedral were to join our network, we would have well over 3,500 members. Many of them will never have had the chance to properly celebrate the experience that shaped them — whether because they've moved away, because their local association no longer exists, or simply because they never knew there was somewhere they could belong.*

*We want to change that. With the vision we're setting out today, we aim to build something that genuinely lives up to the original mission of this organisation — because the world has changed enormously since the FCOCA was founded, long before the \*Titanic\* ever left Belfast.*

*The choral tradition is extraordinary. It deserves an organisation worthy of it.*

*Thank you for listening.*

### 3. Requiescat in Pace & Apologies

Apologies for Absence: Arnold Wills (Peterborough), Carl Jackson (Vice-President), Alastair Pollard (Durham), Philip Sowley (York), James Lancelot (St. Paul's), Gordon Hughes (Oxford Christ Church), Ian Henderson – due to technical issues (Rochester) *\*\*\*Remembering those who have died was covered in item #1\*\*\*.*

### 4. Minutes from 2025 AGM

The minutes of the 2025 AGM had been circulated prior to the meeting, and were accepted as a true record of the meeting except for the following: Elizabeth Cunningham (Peterborough) requested an update to the apologies to record Samuel Barber, Oliver Hamilton-Box and Bradley Odep. Michael Lake (Chelmsford) requested a change to the list of Vice Presidents.

### 5. Hon. Treasurer's Report

*Good afternoon, everyone.*

*Thank you so much for being here — it's a genuine pleasure to deliver my first report as Treasurer of the FCOCA.*

*I want to begin with a word of sincere thanks to Michael Lake. Nearly a quarter of a century in this role is a remarkable achievement, and his handover was nothing short of exceptional. It felt less like passing over the books and more like being handed an entire library, with the weight of history contained within them, but Michael put me at ease, for which I am truly grateful. Michael, thank you once again, and I hope I can do justice to you and our eight other predecessors who have stewarded these finances over the past 116 years — that's a legacy I don't take lightly.*

*You should have in front of you both a Profit & Loss account and a Balance Sheet for 2025.*

*I want to be upfront: these accounts have not yet been audited. We are currently in the process of finding an auditor willing to review the books pro bono, and we expect that to be completed by the end of August — well before the festival and our next committee meeting. I wanted to be transparent about that from the outset, I do not take my task of finding any efficiencies we can make lightly.*

*With that noted, the headline figures are genuinely encouraging. Last year, the FCOCA made an operating profit of **£799.83**, and we hold net assets of **£44,038.82**, with **£10,838.82** in current assets. For an organisation of our size and heritage, that is a solid position to be building from.*

*Looking ahead to 2026, we've already been busy. We've digitised our accounts and membership charging processes and we expect to launch a digital-first booking platform for the festival in Norwich in the coming weeks. As you've already heard from Samuel, there is a broader programme of change underway, aimed at growing our revenue, raising our profile, renewing our mission, and — crucially — deepening engagement with younger generations of former choristers.*

*These are exciting times, and I believe the financial foundations are firmly in place to support the ambitions we've heard about this afternoon.*

*On that basis, I'd like to put this report to a vote of the membership — and if the membership is willing, I'm very happy to stand for another year as your Treasurer.*

*Thank you.*

Nick Hodges wanted to pass on his congratulations to Bradley. He queried on how the membership payments compare to previous year? Bradley confirmed that he would advise this at the next committee meeting. Samuel added that more members had been approached. Michael confirmed that £660 of membership fees came in from last year. Nick clarified that he would like to see how 2025 compared to previous years. Samuel and Bradley took an action to investigate this and confirm back to the committee.\*\*\*

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Membership subscriptions comparison:

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| 2024                | 33 |
| 2025                | 27 |
| 2026 (Year to date) | 13 |

The report was proposed by Nick Hodges and seconded by Michael Lake, and adopted by all present.

## 6. Hon. Secretary's report

*It is my pleasure to present my report as Honorary Secretary of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations. Having taken on the role in October, I have been fortunate to inherit an organisation built upon the dedication and hard work of many individuals over a considerable number of years. Before continuing, I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to my predecessor Alastair Pollard as Honorary Secretary and to our former Chairman Nick Hodges for their guidance, support and encouragement during my first months in office. Their willingness to share their knowledge and experience has been invaluable, and much of the progress outlined in this report has only been possible because of the strong foundations they established and their continued support during the transition.*

*Whilst this has been a year of strengthening our communications and administrative arrangements, it has also been a year in which we have begun developing relationships that have the potential to significantly raise the profile of the Federation and further our aims.*

*The Federation Committee met in January to review our activities and priorities. In addition, the Chairman, Treasurer and I have met monthly throughout the year, supported by regular communication between meetings. This has enabled the Executive to maintain momentum and ensure that work continues to progress between formal meetings.*

*I am grateful to all committee members and association representatives for their engagement and support.*

*One of our principal areas of focus this year has been modernising our communication tools. To that end, the Federation website has been refreshed to provide a more modern and accessible presence. We have also migrated our communications to EmailOctopus, giving us a more professional and efficient platform through which to communicate with member associations and individuals.*

*Alongside these developments, we have developed an outline communications plan which will guide our future activity. Social media represents a significant opportunity for the Federation to broaden its reach and raise awareness of our work. During the coming year we will seek to strengthen our presence in this area and identify an individual willing to take responsibility for social media management on behalf of the Federation.*

*Alongside improvements to our communications, we have also begun establishing relationships with organisations and individuals whose support may help us increase the Federation's profile and influence.*

*A few weeks ago, I was delighted to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury as she visited the Peterborough Diocese and the Cathedral. I was particularly pleased to discover that she was already aware of her patronage of the FCOCA and expressed a genuine interest in the work of the Federation. We have ambitious plans to build upon this relationship in the months and years ahead, and I believe there is significant potential for the Federation to benefit from a closer association with our Patron as we seek to celebrate and promote the contribution of cathedral choristers, past and present.*

*In March, I had the pleasure of meeting Jonathan Mayes of Cathedral Music Trust. The meeting was extremely positive, and I am grateful for the encouragement and support he offered. We are now exploring opportunities to develop a partnership between our organisations, recognising our shared commitment to the preservation and promotion of the cathedral music tradition.*

*Looking ahead, we also hope to establish dialogue with the Royal School of Church Music and explore how the Federation can work alongside other organisations that support church and cathedral music throughout the United Kingdom.*

*The Federation exists, above all, to foster fellowship among former cathedral choristers, and it is therefore particularly fitting that this Annual General Meeting is followed by the Peterborough Reunion. Such gatherings remain at the heart of what we do, bringing together old friends, strengthening connections and ensuring that the unique experience of cathedral choral foundations continues to be celebrated long after a chorister's service has ended.*

*The year ahead presents exciting opportunities. By strengthening our communications, developing new partnerships and increasing the visibility of the Federation, we can continue to build an organisation that honours its traditions whilst remaining relevant and engaging for future generations.*

*Finally, I would like to thank our Chairman, Treasurer, fellow officers, committee members, association representatives and all those who volunteer their time in support of the Federation. I would also like once again to acknowledge my predecessor and our former Chairman for their continued advice, encouragement and friendship. The Federation benefits enormously from the commitment of those who have served it over many years, and I am grateful for the support I have received since taking on this role.*

*I look forward to working with you all in the year ahead.*

## 7. Matters Arising

### 7.1 Safeguarding

The Committee would like to update the Constitution with particular reference to ensuring all Committee members complete basis Church of England Safeguarding Course. Further to this, the Federation would also report any concerns raised during an event to the local safeguarding officer of the host.

This was proposed Elizabeth Cunningham (Peterborough) and seconded by Alex Spires (Peterborough).

### 7.2 Website

Samuel asked for feedback on the website. David Lee (Eton) asked if other associations can copy the model and if it could be marketed. Samuel offered to share guidance on how to set it up, domain to use etc. He added that news is posted on the website from other associations, and the the FCOCA can share their news on the central website. Richard Watts (Westminster Abbey) added that there are lack of members who wish to volunteer to take on these roles and that the Dean and Chapters need to lend their support. He asked how does the Exec propose to help with this.

### **7.3 Identity**

Samuel opened the floor to questions. David Lee queried the name and why it is changing from Once a Chorister and recommended to stick with the name for at least five years as it is identifiable and inclusive. Elizabeth Cunningham (Peterborough) added that for growth, CAN is inclusive for groups, Once a Chorister is better for individuals. Richard Watts added that there is a large change to the purpose and could be a constitutional change. Nick Hodges remarked that a lot of thought went into the change to ensure that churches and colleges are welcome. He added that the Constitution needs to be updated as it outdated.

Nick would recommend that the name should be held onto for a few more years. He agreed that OaC continues.

Samuel added that we cannot use both names and this was agreed and added that the history will never change.

David Lee proposed to change the constitution and this was seconded by Nick Hodges.

Elizabeth added that using the word Chorister can be a blocker as many people come to church music as adults. Simon Mold (Peterborough) added that the media do not have a concept of distinguishing what a chorister means.

Simon Mold added that schools have Cathedral-like choirs, will they be in scope? School music is always under pressure and they would welcome help. Schools have very good alumni network and one of his old schools used the network to help current students. Samuel confirmed that this one of the strategies that the Executive Committee is developing.

Richard Watts asked for clarity about the idea of having individual members, has the whole point of the OaC changed? Samuel confirmed that this is not changing, just evolving. Samuel added that a previous reason for removing individual membership was due to technical challenges at the time, whereas the technical capability now exists.

### **7.4 Membership Proposal**

The chair put to the attendees that the OaC should move to a limited company by guarantee, much like the way the Cooperative works.

Full details will be shared, but the intention is to create financial security

Question from David Chapman (Peterborough), the proposal should be given to the whole membership, not just those at the AGM. Samuel clarified that the proposal is put to the wider membership and that the committee makes the decision, he also clarified that the annual companies house charge is currently £50.

David Lowe (Peterborough) asked if the Constitution would still be valid with company registration? Samuel advised that it would become Articles of Association. Nick Hodges added that it must be decision by committee. What is the line between individual membership and association membership? Samuel advised that this choice of the individuals, but one does exclude the other.

The idea of moving to a Limited Company by Guarantee and that the membership structure is to be presented to the Committee and then circulated to the membership was proposed by Charles Cunliffe (Peterborough), seconded by Michael Lake and voted through unanimously.

## **8. 2026 Festival**

Oliver Hamilton-Box confirmed the dates for 2026 Festival will be the 26<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> September in Norwich. Planning is well underway with the events for the day agreed between the Norwich Dean & Chapter, Master of Music, and the Ex-Choristers Guild. The event looks to be extremely exciting and the invitations will be circulated to the membership within the coming weeks.

## 9. Election of Officers

Richard Lilley has decided to step down in his role as Membership Officer, and Richard Watts has already handed over the reigns as Website Officer. Alastair Pollard has opted to stand down as North and Ireland Rep, as has Stephen Milner as South West Rep. With the sad passing of Ayrton Westwood, the President and East Anglia & South East reps, roles are also vacant. It was previously agreed that the Chairman of the hosts of the current year would assume this post. Following the proposals on tiered membership, it was proposed that these roles (excl. President) are to become Ambassadors of the OaA. However, all of the committee have elected to carry on in the capacity of committee members.

The Chair invited anyone present to make themselves known if they would like to stand for any position on the Committee and Executive Committee. Due to no volunteers making themselves known, the following were (re-) elected to hold Office and agreed unanimously:

| Office                          | Name                | Association       |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| President                       |                     |                   |
| Chair                           | Samuel Barber       | Peterborough      |
| Hon. Secretary                  | Oliver Hamilton-Box | Peterborough      |
| Hon. Treasurer                  | Bradley Odep        | Peterborough      |
| <b>Association Ambassadors.</b> |                     |                   |
|                                 | Nick Hodges         | Warwick           |
| <b>Committee Members</b>        |                     |                   |
|                                 | Richard Lilley      | St. Albans        |
|                                 | Richard             | Westminster Abbey |
|                                 | Michael Lake        | Chelmsford        |
|                                 | Stephen Milner      | Salisbury         |

This was proposed by David Lee and seconded by Nick and passed unanimously.

## 10. AOB

Oliver Hamilton-Box mentioned that there is no host identified for 2027 yet and that this presents an opportunity for a venue to step forward. Nick has advised that Norwich will demonstrate that Festivals can be organised within 1 year. Samuel added that Exec are running bookings for Norwich which will streamline activities but also show how easy it can be to do.

David Lee confirmed that Eton is still working on hosting in 2030, but this is not yet confirmed.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 14:26.