



Minutes of the Committee meeting held at 3 Ackroyd Place, Shenley Lodge, MK5 7PA on 5 September 2023

Present: Tessa Cox (in the Chair); Ian Smith; David Roberts; Peter Snelling; Julia Dickens; Siân Rees (minute taker)

Action

1 Apologies and welcome

Tessa welcomed members to the meeting and passed on apologies from Vanessa Skelton, Imogen Allen and from Nick Wood who had been invited to observe.

2 Minutes of 9 May 2023 meeting – approval and matters arising

- 2.1 Tessa pointed out a discrepancy in the minutes (item 14) regarding the date of the AGM which should be 11 not 9 October. This needs to be amended. **Siân & Vanessa**
- 2.2 The date of the November 2025 concert has had to be changed to 29 November.
- 2.3 Ian confirmed that Paul Carr has been engaged as organist for the concert on 25 November 2023.
- 2.4 Susanne Minocha had not yet been contacted regarding the return of GDPR documentation. Ian offered to speak to her to arrange the return of consent forms. **Ian**
- 2.5 Tessa had not been able to pursue the proposal for a centralised data storage system. However, Chris Jolly, treasurer of the Milton Keynes Youth Choir, had informed Tessa that the Youth Choir receives a charity rate for their storage system. It was considered worthwhile continuing to explore the idea of a centralised system. **Tessa**
- 2.6 The minutes were accepted as accurate.

3 Treasurer's report

3.1 Management Accounts 2022 -2023 Season

Peter noted that the concert costs had been roughly on budget and the overall loss was less than had been anticipated at the start of the season.

Audience numbers were slightly above budget for the concerts in November and March but for the second year in a row, audience numbers were down for the summer concert. This was concerning as the summer concert is usually the main event of the year.

Peter explained that although the orchestra fee for the March and June concerts was identical, there was a difference of £1000 in the cost of music hire.

3.2 Budget for 2023-2024 Season

Peter highlighted a number of ways in which he has managed to reduce the projected deficit for the season.

- Engaging less expensive soloists e.g. for the March concert we will be hiring students from the Royal College; the cost of the jazz group for the summer concert has been reduced from £3000 to £1000;
- Raising the membership subscription fee to £200;
- Increasing the price of the two higher band tickets for the March concert by £5.

Peter noted that as wedding income had virtually disappeared in the 2022-2023 season he had reduced the budgeted figure for this season to £750. One possible explanation for the lack of wedding bookings has been the closure of the Woburn Sculpture Gallery and it is likely to remain closed for the foreseeable future.

Peter had budgeted for slightly higher audience numbers for the June 2025 concert as *Mass in Blue* had brought in a good audience when Danesborough last performed it.

David suggested increasing the price of our concert programmes to £2.

Peter had anticipated an income of £250 for the Come & Sing event but pointed out that this was a nominal figure as this will be the first time Danesborough has held such an event and it was therefore difficult to predict how popular it might be.

Membership numbers continue to be a cause for concern. The budget assumes that there will be 85 members this season but Peter said he would like to see the number rise to 90 which would bring in an extra £1000. Currently 82 members have confirmed that they will be returning.

Amanda had not received a single membership enquiry either in response to the adverts placed in free magazines or social media posts. **Tessa** thought it might be worthwhile finding out from current members where they put up Danesborough publicity material. She offered to put out a sheet at the first rehearsal for members to indicate where they publicise our concerts and recruitment. Ian said it would be useful to include a column where people can indicate which social media platforms they use to publicise Danesborough Chorus.

Tessa

The draft budget was approved by the committee and Tessa thanked Peter for his work in preparing the accounts.

3.3 July Budget Meeting

David gave a brief summary of the meeting held in July attended by himself, Peter and Ian to discuss ways to reduce concert costs for the 2023-2024 season.

Concert 1 — 25 November 2023, Rutter *Gloria*, Patterson *Magnificat* and Bruckner *Motets*

David had ascertained at the summer concert that the Woburn organ was not as flat had previously been thought (A4 = A438 Hz). It would not therefore be necessary to hire an organ for the November concert.

Hiring orchestral parts from libraries rather than from publishers could reduce costs further. The hire cost for the orchestral parts for the Rutter *Gloria* would amount to £18 per month plus postage and packing.

Unfortunately, as Julia confirmed, the orchestral parts for the Patterson *Magnificat* are only available from the publisher and are quite costly at £195 plus postage and packing.

Concert 2 — 23 March 2024, Bach *St John Passion*

David reported that he had been in touch with the Josephine Baker Trust and that Danesborough Chorus had been added to their list of approved choral societies. This has enabled us to hire soloists from the three London schools of music and will reduce the cost of hiring soloists for this concert from £3000 to £1200.

We have 64 copies of the new Novello score and if sufficient choir members own their own copies it may not be necessary to hire any extra. **Julia** said she would find out how many choir members have their own copies.

Julia

Concert 3 — 29 June 2024, Todd *Mass in Blue*

David had investigated the possibility of hiring a jazz group from the Royal College of Music which would help to defray the cost of this concert. **Ian** has booked a jazz group led by one of his former students.

Ian

It will also be possible to save money by hiring a piano from LSM Pianos in Northampton rather than using Markson Pianos in London.

The concert programme had been finalised. In addition to *Mass in Blue*, David had proposed performing *Fly me to the Moon* which can be hired from South Chiltern Choral Society and Ken Storry's *Gospel Express* of which we own 104 copies thereby keeping hire costs to a minimum.

Tessa thanked Ian, David and Peter for meeting in the summer and reducing costs for the 2023-2024 season where possible.

4 Closing the Danesborough Chorus (Charity no. 279281)

Gift aid for the old charity still needed to be completed. Peter and Imogen would be meeting to finalise this.

Peter & Imogen

5 Future scheduled events for the 2023/2024 season

25 November 2023, Rutter *Gloria*, Patterson *Magnificat*, Bruckner *Ecce sacerdos, Locus iste & Afferentur regi*

Ian will ask Tim Hawes for permission to record the Bruckner motets during the concert which we will then be able to put on the website and use in social media posts. Weinberger, the publisher of Patterson's *Magnificat*, declined permission to record the performance of his work.

N.B. Alina Orchestra had declined permission to record the summer 2023 concert.

Julia mentioned that libraries which have lent music would like to be acknowledged in our concert programmes.

David

David said there had been a slight misunderstanding between Stuart Brown and himself regarding the writing of programme notes for the summer concert. **David**

would need to ascertain whether Stuart wished to continue writing programme notes in the future.

David

23 March 2024, Bach *St John Passion*

Ian has received a response from the Royal College of Music and has now approached individual students. He was able to confirm that Sam Harris will sing the part of the Evangelist and Sam Hird will sing the part of Jesus. Ian has contacted the soprano who performed the part for the MK Chorale in March 2023. [Following the meeting the soprano informed Ian that she was unavailable.]

29 June 2024, Will Todd *Mass in Blue, Fly me to the moon, Ken Storry Gospel Express*

Ian highlighted the fact that the old and new editions of *Mass in Blue* are not compatible. Ian has band parts for the old edition but offered to pay for band parts should we decide to use the new edition. The old edition was considered to be easier to read and provided we can source enough copies it was decided to use the old edition. David discovered that Epsom Choral Society has 90 copies of the old edition.

Ian has emailed a soprano soloist for the *Mass in Blue* and is waiting for a response.

Tessa said that should we require a relief rehearsal accompanist in the summer term the accompanist from her Gospel choir would be willing to stand in.

6 Proposed joint concert with Milton Keynes Chorale – Summer 2025

A meeting between the representatives of Danesborough Chorus and the MK Chorale has now been fixed for Wednesday 20th September at 10.00am at Will Swann's house. Tessa, Ian, Peter and David will attend on behalf of Danesborough and Will Swann, Mark Jordan and Anne Wood will be representing the Chorale. Their treasurer has sent his apologies.

**Tessa,
Ian, David
& Peter**

7 Publicity & Marketing

Tessa suggested that the Communications Sub-committee should meet more frequently. Currently meetings are convened once a year but given the need to ramp up our publicity both for recruitment and concerts Tessa thought it would be advisable to meet three times a year. **Tessa** said she would be willing to chair the Communications Sub-committee but would ask Jenny Harris if she would be willing to carry on the task of coordinating meetings. Tessa noted that the Sub-committee needed more direction and guidance from the full Danesborough committee.

Tessa

We currently rely on members to advertise our concerts in the areas in which they live. It would be useful to know where they put up posters and distribute flyers to avoid duplication (see item 3.2). Peter said that Milton Keynes should now be our target area.

It was important to ensure that we have reciprocal adverts in the concert programmes of other choirs in our area. David pointed out that this does already happen. We regularly advertise in the concert programmes of Polymnia, Bedford Choral Society, MK Chorale and Alina Orchestra.

Tessa recommended that in the long term we might want to consider altering our current scheduling arrangements so that we are not bound by school term times. There would less risk of clashing and competing with performances of other choirs.

8 Website

Yvonne and Jenny had recently met to work on the website's Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). One of the problems for us is that our choir does not include a town in its name which makes it harder for potential new members to find us. In order to move Danesborough Chorus up the list of Google search results Yvonne and Jenny have made a few changes to the home page. They have added a new heading to the home page and made sure that the names of key towns in our area are mentioned. They had also updated the information that should appear in Google searches for each page of the website.

They now need choir members to play their part to move us up the list of search results. They requested that choir members are asked to do two or three Google searches a week over the course of the next few weeks. They should be asked to use search terms such as 'Choir Leighton Buzzard Milton Keynes' and 'Choral singing Bedford Milton Keynes' but **without** using the term 'Danesborough Chorus'. **Tessa** offered to announce this at Wednesday night's rehearsal and to compose an email enlisting choir members' assistance and explaining how to conduct the search.

Tessa

Yvonne had also spent considerable time identifying websites that mention Danesborough Chorus and wondered if anyone was responsible for updating the information on these websites. Sian said she regularly advertises concerts and, where applicable, recruitment on many of the websites Yvonne had identified.

The committee thanked Jenny and Yvonne for their work on the website.

9 Forthcoming 50th Anniversary Season 2024-2025

Anniversary dinner

Ian had received a response from Harry Adam regarding the proposed anniversary dinner at his golf club in Leighton Buzzard. Harry said he was willing to make enquiries on behalf of Danesborough and that he might be able to receive a member's discount. The golf club is also celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025 and as there will be many events taking place during the year we would have to be flexible with our dates.

Other possible venues were suggested including Tilsworth golf club, the Open University and Cranfield University. The Inn at Woburn would be too small for the anticipated numbers (circa 100 – 120). [Subsequently Peter had contacted Cranfield University which has a venue catering for up to 200.]

Tessa will ask choir members for any recommendations they may have for a suitable venue.

Tessa

Friends Reception

It was decided that a pre-concert reception should be held for Friends on 16th November 2024, the *Messiah* concert. **Tessa** said she would contact The Inn at Woburn which had hosted the 40th anniversary reception for Friends and ask for a quote.

Tessa

10 **Come & Sing Event 2nd March 2024 at Mary Adams Hall, Woburn Sands**

Julia has ordered 120 copies of *Carmina Burana* costing £15 to hire through the inter-library loan scheme.

Tim Grant-Jones has been booked as accompanist for the day.

Peter has set a budget of £720 for this event. It was decided to set the ticket price at £15 which would include refreshments although participants would be asked to bring a packed lunch. We would also offer homemade cakes for which participants could make a voluntary donation. Choir members would be asked for volunteers to make cakes. Volunteers would also be needed to help out on the day with setting up the venue and serving refreshments.

Tickets will be sold online at WeGotTickets. **Siân** offered to sell tickets to choir members during rehearsals.

Siân

It will be necessary to advertise the event in the January editions of some free magazines as some do not produce a February edition. The deadline for publicity for some publications is early December 2023.

Siân

11 **AGM – Recruitment of new committee members and replacement Chair**

A replacement chair had not yet been found. **Tessa** said she would make an announcement at Wednesday evening's rehearsal asking members to consider taking on the role and to consider standing as ordinary committee members. Committee members were delighted that Nick Wood had agreed to stand as a committee member.

Tessa

12 **Risk Assessment for rehearsals**

The rehearsal risk assessment for the 2023-2024 season was approved by the committee. A fire drill will be carried out on Wednesday 20th September. **Siân** would need to update the list of qualified first aiders since one of the qualified members had now left Danesborough. She would ask at rehearsal whether any suitably qualified members would be willing to add their names to the list.

Siân

13 **Equality & Diversity policy review**

The committee accepted the recommended changes to the policy including the change of policy title to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

14 **Future meeting dates**

11 October (AGM); 14 November; 7 May 2024; 3 September; 9 October 2024 (AGM)

The committee meeting scheduled for 9 January 2024 will need to be altered as Ian has a clash. A new date will be fixed at the next committee meeting in November.

David offered his apologies as he is unable to attend this year's AGM.

15 **Any other business**

- 15.1 Peter informed the committee that Frosts Garden Centre in Woburn Sands has invited choirs who might wish to sing there during the run up to Christmas to register their interest. Slots are available on a first come first served basis on Saturdays and

Sundays in November and December. **Peter** will try to book one of these dates for Danesborough. **Peter**

- 15.2 Peter said that Vanessa had encountered a problem hiring out copies of the Rachmaninov Vespers to another choir. After the invoice had been sent to the hirers another choir enquired about hiring the same work but insufficient copies could be offered. The first choir then decided they no longer needed the copies but it was now too late to offer them to the second choir. Vanessa wondered whether we should have a formal contract for hirers. **Peter** said he would take a look at the hire contract used by the Linsdale Singers. **Peter**

Ian suggested that on this occasion it would be reasonable to request reimbursement of postage and packing.

- 15.3 Stuart Freake was thanked for carrying out PAT testing of Danesborough electrical equipment all of which passed.
- 15.4 Tessa raised the issue of van hire and insurance. She had become aware of the fact that only those born before 1 January 1997 are eligible to drive Category C1 vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes. This would rule out anyone born after this date being able to take over the job of driving the hire van on concert weekends from Peter Skelton who would, as of 2025, no longer be able to carry out the role.