

WIMBLEDON CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 29 September 2025 at St Marks Church Wimbledon

The meeting began at 19.35 with Alex Youel in the chair and approximately 122 members and 1 apology.

Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 30 September 2024

Approval of these minutes was proposed by John Hewitt and seconded by Jessica Kohler. They were agreed with no dissenting voices

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Music Director's Report – Daniel Mahoney

What a year it has been. It's been a distinct pleasure to make music with you all over the past twelve months at Wimbledon Choral. In that time, we've presented together four programs and six performances including an enjoyable come & sing alongside our November, Christmas, Cadogan Hall, and summer concerts, plus SingFest.

Reflecting briefly on each concert in turn, **Music of the Stars** in November 2024 was a celebration of Cecilia McDowall's music alongside treasured works of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and our very own Michael Higgins, supported by the City of London Sinfonia. The Christmas concerts were a festive event. It was my first time experiencing the *Twelve Days of Christmas* and indeed meeting the Christmas Fairy. David Gooderson's readings were a perfect pairing for the atmosphere of the event.

February's Come & Sing on Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* proved a good opportunity to get to know more about Haydn's style and the tradition of his Masses. It was important to welcome new faces to sing with us for the day, which in turn has garnered interest from a number of additional singers. Such events are important for us to do, and I look forward to when we can produce our next Come & Sing.

Our concert at Cadogan Hall in April was musically full. We were joined again by CLS as well as a great set of soloists. Dobrinka Tabakova was pleased with our performance of *Centuries of Meditations*. CLS made great work of Grace Williams's *Sea Sketches*, and the Chorus sang with full voice in Haydn's *Nelson Mass*. The soloists commented on the quality of sound from the Chorus in this concert as well as the closing one of the season in June.

The season-closing collaboration with Wimbledon High proved more successful than expected. The Wimbledon High singers added positively to the Rutter, and it was encouraging to witness the fruits of their musical education in their set in the first half of the concert. We are grateful to Will Ford for his work preparing them and in general for logistics regarding the concert. Russell Hepplewhite was greatly enthused with the premiere of his *from: "Gravity Archives"* as part of his *Living Voices* project, quickly getting in touch with me to see whether there might be future avenues to explore related to that set of new works.

This year, I am excited to perform the Dvorak *Requiem* at Southwark Cathedral. It will be a splendid concert that should resonate musically and spiritually in that beautiful space. It's hard to believe that we will be in the Albert Hall only two weeks later for *Carmina Burana*. I'm looking forward to beginning rehearsal for that on 6 October, including our additional Saturday rehearsal focused solely on that work. Please be sure to review the rehearsal schedule for details of what is to be worked on each week this term. For Christmas, we're excited to be joined by Merton Music Foundation's young

singers in the afternoon concert to make a more family-focused performance while also saving on the amount of music we need to learn in total for the day.

I am grateful to all of the Altos who were heard for Voice Tests in June and July. There remain a handful to hear, which we will do shortly. I look forward to hearing the Sopranos this coming year.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to all members of the Committee who were essential for our combined success in my first year as Musical Director. Most importantly, I want to go on record thanking Michael Higgins for his artistry, collegiality, and friendship throughout last season. I literally could not have done it without him, and all of Wimbledon Choral is grateful for his many years of service as our outstanding accompanist. They are big shoes to fill, but we are grateful for the work Ben Giddens has done so far this season.

We have a lot to look forward to with the world premiere of Tarik O'Regan's *Critical Mass* at Cadogan in April. It will be wonderful to pair that with the Mozart *Solemn Vespers*. I am excited for SingFest in May and looking forward to returning to Holy Trinity Sloane Square in June for Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* alongside a number of other Psalm-themed works, including the recent psalm setting by Joanna Marsh premiered this past spring at Chichester Cathedral.

Chair's Report – Alex Youel

This time last year I found myself reporting on the successful recruitment of our then new Music Director, Daniel Mahoney. A year on, I am delighted to be able to continue celebrating his appointment. *This* year, I find myself again reporting on the successful recruitment of a new member of our music team, this time our new accompanist, Ben Giddens, following the departure after no fewer than 17 years' service of the remarkable Michael Higgins. Whilst I'm not looking to take any personal credit for these appointments, can I invite you all this evening to please show your appreciation of all that Daniel and Ben have already achieved to date and what we are sure they will achieve with us in the future!

This is also the right time to express my grateful thanks for the entirely voluntary work of your Executive and Full Committees, without whose dedication, efficiency and creativity we would not be in our current strong position as a Choir. Can I ask you to join me now in showing our appreciation for the unstinting work of these unsung heroes?

Looking back, and as I have said in my annual report to you, we have surely had a fantastic performing year, in venues from the Cadogan Hall and Holy Trinity Church in Sloane Square, to St Mark's Church and Wimbledon High School here in Wimbledon, and St Paul's Church in nearby Southfields. The breadth of our music has ranged from "Music of the Stars" to Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, Rutter's *Mass of the Children* and a world first performance of Russell Hepplewhite's *Living Voices, Gravity Archives* - plus Christmas Carols, a Haydn "Come and Sing" and the remarkable Merton Singfest, which we hosted and led as a choir and which was supported by no fewer than 17 other choirs, old and young.

Looking forward, and indeed looking around the room this evening, our membership is strong and still growing, which is so encouraging. (More tenor and bass voices still needed please!). Our finances are in good heart, which you will hear more about from our Treasurer John Gale in a moment. Our Friends have remained loyal and passionate supporters, and we plan to clasp them ever more closely to our collective choral bosom. We remain ambitious and eager to stretch ourselves. And we have a fantastic year ahead to look forward to, starting very soon with Dvorak's *Requiem* at Southwark Cathedral, a quick dash into Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* at the Royal Albert Hall, leading the respectful singing at Remembrance Sunday in Wimbledon Village, Christmas Carol concerts at St Paul's and then our world premiere next April of Tarik O'Regan's *Critical Mass*. And recently we have been investigating a fantastic opportunity to sing in the heart of London, at no less a venue than Westminster Cathedral. It's a big venue, and it will require an equally big commitment from us as a choir – but it would be a wonderful, uplifting place in which to raise our Wimbledon Choral voices.

Can I please have a show of hands as to how many would be keen for us to explore it further? (Thank you).

So in this positive, forward-looking vein it again gives me the greatest possible pleasure to present my report as your Chair, and to invite us all to continue delivering great performances, with our trademark passion and precision, the distinctive hallmarks of our happy and thriving Wimbledon Choral Society.

Treasurer's Report – John Gale

As Treasurer, it is my duty to present to you the Annual Trustees Report and Accounts for the financial year ended 30th June 2025.

This document has been made available to you well in advance and I do not propose to go through it in detail. I have received no queries in advance of this meeting. Following the annual Independent Examination, the Report was approved by the full Committee at their meeting held on 4th September and signed.

Pages 1 to 3 comprise the Trustees Report and most of this follows a format prescribed in Charity legislation and guidance. I don't think this requires any further comment.

Page 4 is the report from our Independent Examiner. I wish on behalf of Wimbledon Choral to thank Annette Cowley for her excellent work in performing this task for us.

Page 5 sets out our receipts for last year i.e. all the money we received, together with the payments i.e. everything that we spent. I hope that I have used headings which make sense to you all, but please do ask if there is something that you do not understand.

I hope you will be pleased to see that despite a loss on concerts of just over £16,000, this was more than covered by the surplus arising from our ordinary receipts and payments – although I should point out that the tax recovered covers not just the year to 30 Jun 2025 but also the year to 30 Jun 2024. The reason for this is that in 2024 HMRC took nearly 3 months to pay us whereas this year they took less than 2 weeks, thus both claims were received in the same financial year.

Page 6 sets out our total assets which, in addition to our current and deposit accounts includes amounts owed to us by choirs who hire our music and our investment with M&G which has shown a healthy increase in value for the year.

Page 7 contains extra notes for members only, essentially showing the results of each of our concerts in the year (note 2) and the breakdown of our reserves (note 3).

I think I can say that our reserves remain at a healthy level and sufficient to cover future obligations. In the current financial year, we will incur significant expenditure on the commission and its premier, perhaps later in 2026 the recording of that commission and also the long awaited revamp of our Website.

Question - there was a substantial increase in the amount of gift aid – have the rules changed? The tax recovered covers 2025 and the year before as the tax office took a while to pay us.

Question – to explain how the funds are allocated – the commissioning and recording fund appears to be the same as last year. That was the income received for that purpose and we have not yet spent it. The £10,000 payment for the commission was not taken from this fund but from reserves as the fund was insufficient.

Question – why was there such a deficit on the Wimbledon High concert – it made a surplus of £11.

Question. – ticket prices for Wimbledon High – there were a series on communication breakdown s and things changed at the last minute. Ticket prices would not have been at that level if things had gone to plan.

The accounts were offered for adoption by the members:

Proposed by Fiona Harvey and seconded by Mary Coggins. Agreed. There were no dissenting voices.

Members Contributions for 2025-26

The proposals for subscriptions are as follows:

Full subscription	£215
Reduced Rate for the Registered Unemployed	£90
Reduced Rate for those aged 25 or younger	£90
Rate for full time students	£30

Proposed by John Paramore and seconded by Stephen Jack. Agreed. There were no dissenting voices.

The Annual Trustees Report and Accounts were approved unanimously.

There was a vote of thanks for Annette Cowley who is the independent reviewer of our accounts.

Election of Executive Group and Officers

The role of concert co-ordinator is a co-opted role and appointed by the exec committee and Paula Lambe remains in the role.

The following officers were proposed for election to the Executive Group of the Committee: -

Alex Youel	Chairman	Ian Gleeson	Vice Chairman
Tracy Sherman	General Secretary	John Gale	Treasurer
Anna Lemmon	Publicity Officer		

These elections were proposed by Neil Dennis and seconded by Christine Evans and carried unanimously.

The following officers were proposed for election to the Committee: -

John Britton	Librarian	Laura Stewart	Membership Secretary
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These elections were proposed by Tilly Richarson and seconded by Sarah Harris and carried unanimously.

Thanks was given to Peter Hickson for his 17 years of service as the Bass voice rep.

The following Voice Representatives were proposed for election for a two-year term: -

Therese Kennedy-Laing (Sop 1)	Sarah Harris (Alto 2)
Rob Owen Bass 2	

These elections were proposed by Peter West seconded by John Hewitt and carried unanimously.

Policies and Explanation of WCS organisation by Ian Gleeson

We thought that a short explanation of how the choir is run behind the scenes might be helpful, especially for new-ish members.

The choir is a registered charity and as such is regulated by the Charity Commission.

The main governing body of the choir is the **Full Committee**. This consists of 15 members, including the holders of the main executive roles, plus the librarian (John Britton), the membership secretary (Laura Stewart) and the voice reps.

The Committee meets around three times a year. Its role covers a wide range of responsibilities, including setting the strategic direction of the choir, making the key decisions related to the running of the choir, approving the major financial decisions and setting policies which ensure the choir is properly and well governed. Of course, the most important set of responsibilities is around ensuring that the choir meets all the governance standards expected by the Charity Commission, in terms of prudent management of the choir's finances and reserves, the safety and protection of its members and audiences when in rehearsals or concerts and the general conduct of everyone and everything relating to the choir.

The Full Committee (and choir) are served by the **Executive Committee**. It has three key roles: 1) prepare strategies, decisions and budgets for approval by the full committee; 2) execute the decisions taken by the full committee; and 3), within the direction set by the full committee, oversee the day to day running of the choir – that means everything that goes into planning, marketing and staging our concerts; making sure we have rehearsal spaces, concert venues and musicians booked; costing everything we do and ensuring we are living within our means; working on the new commissions; ensuring our music programmes are financially viable, exciting, varied and consistent with the ambition, reputation and standards of the choir; and so on.

The Exec Committee typically meets three times a year, usually soon after each concert. Let me introduce the members of the Exec Committee: the chair, Alex; the executive secretary, Tracy; the treasurer, John; the concert manager, Paula; the marketing and publicity manager, Anna; and me.

There is a vacancy on the executive committee for a sponsorship person. If you are interested in this role, please let me know.

You will have noticed there are two people who I haven't mentioned and who are fundamental to the running and success of this choir and all our enjoyment – our musical staff: Daniel and Ben. One way to define the work of the Exec Committee is that it should take on as much of the choir's administration as possible, so that Daniel and Ben can focus all their time and talent on the music, from selecting months in advance what we perform, right through to the final note of each concert. They are of course fully involved in all the musical decisions. Daniel is part of the Exec Committee and the Committee; and I am sure that Ben, like his predecessor Michael, will be an important sounding board for Daniel and the Exec on musical decisions.

My final point is that the members of these committees are all volunteers and give up quite a lot of their own time because of their commitment to and passion for this choir and so that we all have the best possible experience as members of the choir and give our audiences something to remember. Personally speaking, when I took on this role two years ago, I was very surprised by the amount of work, some of it really detailed work, that goes into keeping this operation running smoothly.

But it is not just all the people I have mentioned this evening: running this choir really does take a village. So many of you help out in so many different ways – the teas every week; opening and closing the church; all the catering accompanying our various events; the Christmas lunch; the end of season party; helping to hand out the music; partners and others helping out at concerts. I am sure I have missed people and I could go on. But it just shows that this choir really does depend on as many people as possible contributing some of their time over and above the rehearsal schedule. A big thank you to everyone who does volunteer! And a big appeal for more people to volunteer.

New Website

Now, there's one volunteer I haven't mentioned. And I have left him to last, not because he deserves a special mention (although he does), but because it's a neat segue to the next item.

Neil Dennis gives up far more time than most to the choir and in particular to administrating the website, ensuring that it is kept up to date keeps us all informed about rehearsal plans and aids, and helps promote our concerts to the public. It is a sometimes thankless task, as the site is quite old and recently has been vulnerable to some technical issues. So thank you to Neil.

For the past year, a small group of us have been working on how to modernise and upgrade our site, adding some new functionality. This is still a work in progress, but we have finalised the scope, the core objectives of which are to make the site more mobile-friendly, give it a more modern look and feel, make it a better platform for marketing our concerts and incorporate a dedicated members only area. There's not much more to say at this point other than we have now gone out to tender.

If any of you know anyone who works in web design and who might be interested in bidding for this work, then please do pass me their contact details. The more bids the better. The next stage will be for the small sub-committee to review the bids and then recommend to the Committee a preferred supplier. Hopefully, after that, we can work quickly with the new supplier. But I am not at this point going to commit to a launch date.

Let me thank the small committee – Suzette Pettit, Sarah Sculpher, Anna Lemmon and Neil.

Any Other Business

Three charities presented to the choir as to why they should be chosen for the 6pm Christmas concert. (The afternoon concert will have two children's choirs singing and they are part of a charity so they will have the afternoon charity slot). They were Amber Trust, Colour Strings and Merton Mencap.

A suggestion was made to have the programme available digitally as lots of football clubs have stopped producing them. John answered that last year's receipts for the programmes was in line with production. If we went digital, we would still have all the costs of design but no way to recoup costs. We could make the digital format available and it would be an agenda item for the exec meeting.

The meeting closed at 20.41.

In the interval, the choir voted and Amber Trust was chosen to be the charity for the 6pm Christmas concert.