



Chair's Update September 2023



Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations

Wow! What a fantastic Festival weekend that was

Warwick excelled itself – but I would say that, wouldn't I? It being my home turf and my association. However, I really do believe that everyone who attended would agree that this was a Festival in the “old” style, with a full programme of events over the three days, superbly organised (nothing to do with me) and some sublime music. After the absence of Festival in 2020 and 2021 and the 2022 event at Ely overshadowed by the death of our late Queen, it felt as though we were, at last returning to normality. There will be a fuller report in this year's, Once a Chorister magazine but there are few things I would like to mention.

St Mary's is not a big church; not in the order of our great cathedrals but it is historic and sitting in the cosy surroundings of the 14th century chancel for evensong sung by the boys (only half of them as the other half were caught up in traffic due to a nearby road accident) and gentlemen, one became apparent of that history. Returning after supper for Compline sung by the gentlemen of the choir in the equally medieval, Beauchamp Chapel, felt deeply spiritual and moving, in much the same way as Compline did in the Lady Chapel at Ely last year.

On Saturday, in addition to the delights of the AGM (more later) and a fabulous organ recital given by Coventry Cathedral's Director of Music, Rachel Mahon, Evensong was delivered by the full choir of boys, girls and gentlemen, “thickened out” by Festival delegates. As much as I would have loved to have been singing in the choir, I chose not to do so but to listen and enjoy from the congregation – and was I glad I did. I have rarely heard Stanford in B flat and O, Thou the Central Orb performed so well with such power that was beautifully controlled and with such subtlety. I was wasn't alone in thinking that as also in the congregation were two former Warwick Directors of Music and the former Director of Music of New College Oxford who felt likewise.



We were not only celebrating choristership, as the Federation does every year, but we were also celebrating the 900th anniversary of the founding of St Mary's and its choir, and we were doing so as part of the annual reunion of the Guild of Ex-Choristers of St Mary's. It was a huge pleasure for me to see once again former choristers, Stan who had travelled from Canada and was deputy head boy when I joined in the choir in 1956, Alan, who was head boy when Stan was a junior boy and Pete who preceded both of them and celebrates his 89th birthday this year and is still a volunteer guide at the church. For me, this is what Once a Chorister events are all about, being in the present and celebrating what being a chorister has meant to us and remembering the past and all the fun times we had.

The AGM was held in the church on Saturday afternoon and attended by representatives from 11 associations. There have been up to 54 association affiliated to the Federation in the past but not all attend AGMs. Regrettably, no new names came forward for election to the Executive Committee and the existing committee was re-elected en masse. As reported last year, we were hopeful that a Festival in 2024 would be hosted by Llandaff Cathedral but we believe that this may be in doubt. This leaves us with a challenge. Where and what next for the Federation. It was clear from comments from delegates at Warwick that no one wants this to be the last Festival of the Federation but, it might be that, for the time being, we have to reduce our activity until the next generation comes along to pick up and carry the banner. The Executive will be meeting in the next few weeks to consider our next steps, though we have already agreed that we need to have a dialogue with our membership and seek their feedback on what they expect of their Federation. To this end, I will be writing separately and individually to each affiliated association with a short questionnaire over the next few weeks.



Recently, Federation Vice President, Ian Henderson, very kindly collected some papers from Eton College which had been found in their archives. They consisted of a complete set of the documents relating to the 27th Annual Festival held at Westminster Abbey over the weekend of 3rd to 5th November 1950. Looking at these papers, how different things were then. Seventeen associations were represented at the Festival with nearly 250 delegates. The home team had the largest contingent, as they have at every Festival (with the exception of the home team) I have attended. They were followed by Lincoln who sent 39 delegates. So, some things don't change. What was really interesting was that the cost of the full weekend, including B&B accommodation at the Imperial Hotel, Russell Square for two nights, was £3 5s 0d, or, in modern parlance £3.25. According to the Bank of

England's inflation calculator, that equates to around £91 in today's money. Someone must have been able to do a very good deal on hotel and banquet costs to keep it as low as this. Watch out for more on this in the **2023 Once a Chorister magazine**.

Talking of which, now is the time for you to be submitting your articles for this year's edition. Articles about your association and its activities and from your Director of Music (etc) about choir activities in the last academic year are welcomed. Copy deadline is the end of October and should be sent to the Federation's Honorary Secretary, Alastair Pollard, who edits the magazine which is published on our website, at secretary@fcoca.org.uk. Pictures are welcome as are any articles pertaining to choral music that you think might interest fellow readers.

Nick Hodges
Chair



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