

# AYLESBURY FESTIVAL CHOIR

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

held on 27th May 2020 via Zoom due to the COVID-19 crisis  
at which 19 people were present

1 **Apologies for absence** had been received from Brenda Horne, Bob Shellard, Rowena Gibbons, Sheila Hill, Rupert and Alison Nixon.

2 **Minutes of the previous meeting** held on 16th May 2019 had been distributed and no comments received. Acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Bob Shellard, (who had indicated his willingness to be either a proposer or seconder in his absence), seconded by Kate Atherton and unanimously agreed.

### 3 **Treasurer's report**

Lyn Williams presented his report as follows:-

"First of all, I'd like to thank my predecessor, Viv Bailleux for leaving our accounting records in such good order and for leaving copious notes for me explaining everything that needed to be done — she really made it very easy for me to take over from her.

First of all, a few comments on last year's accounts, which Viv commented on in detail in her report for last year's AGM (based on provisional accounts). We ended up with a surplus of £2,476, helped considerably by £2,031 of donations during the year, and £1,750 of extra Gift Aid, both on these donations and on a large donation from the previous year.

Regarding this year's provisional accounts — as usual, these are not finalised as the financial year ends in August, so they include a number of estimates.

The year has been affected considerably by the Covid-19 virus and resultant lockdown, with no spring concert, no quiz night, and no physical AGM. We were also unable to have the summer season that many of us were looking forward to. Below are the key points to highlight:

- We incurred a deficit of £628 resulting from our autumn concert. However, the expenditure included the £700 cost of commissioning the "Gloria del Fuego" from Nick. Excluding this, we made a small surplus.
- Following the decision to cancel our spring concert, the Committee decided nevertheless to pay the agreed concert fees to both Nick and Rowena (in her concert role as alto ringer) and to make a contribution to the soloists and other musicians we had booked. These costs amounted to £518.
- Rehearsals (including music hire) produced a small deficit of £304, very similar to last year's deficit of £302. Again, the Committee decided to pay both Nick's and Rowena's agreed rehearsal fees to the end of the spring term.
- Our carol concert was a little more ambitious this year, but ticket sales were disappointing, so the resultant deficit of £289 was higher than last year's £77.
- Gift Aid receivable at £1,016 was much lower than last year's £2,712, which included the £1,750 referred to above on large donations received.
- At £996, income from fundraising was significantly lower than last year's £1,450. As usual, the 100 Club contributed the lion's share at £666, but this was £248 lower than last year, with income decreasing by £98 and prizes increasing by £150. There were also decreases in "Happy Birthday" income of £120, carol singing income of £50 and rehearsal refreshments of £43.

- While donations are well down on last year, we did receive a very generous donation of £200 from Bob Shellard to sponsor one of our spring concert soloists. Since we hope to hold our spring concert later this year, we plan to put this amount towards the cost of one of our soloists then; if not, we shall discuss with Bob what our alternative plan should be.
- Our insurance premium has increased by £52 from last year. This was due to Bedgrove Junior School requiring us to increase our public liability cover to take into account the increased value of equipment they have on site.
- Other main variances from last year relate to the AGM, to the quiz night and to the 60<sup>th</sup> year celebrations in June 2019.

The result of all this was a (provisional) deficit for the year of £508, compared to the £2,476 surplus in 2018/19. Fortunately, our prudent Committee took full advantage of the sunshine of recent years to ensure our roof wasn't leaking, with the result that we still have reserves of almost £20,000, which provide very welcome shelter from the current storm”.



MUSIC DIRECTOR  
Nick Austin

PRESIDENT  
Piers Maxim

AYLESBURY FESTIVAL CHOIR

Financial Statements year ending 31 August 2019

Income and Expenditure Account for the period ending 31 August 2019

**INCOME**

	Concert 1	Concert 2	2018/2019	2017/2018
	£	£	£	£
Concert Ticket Sales	1,229	2,107	3,335	2,356
Programme sales	55	64	119	103
Refreshments at concerts	74	111	185	157
Carol concert			255	0
Workshops			0	804
Members subscriptions	2,658	2,928	5,585	5,709
Music Hire	154	380	534	256
Gift Aid			2,712	1,148
Interest			0	2
Fund Raising			1,450	1,830
AGM			58	55
Quiz Night			173	278
Donations			2,031	376
Grants			0	515
60th year celebrations			190	5,000
Total Income			<u>16,627</u>	<u>18,589</u>

**EXPENDITURE**

	Concert 1	Concert 2	2018/2019	2017/2018
	£	£	£	£
Concerts	2,374	2,083	4,457	4,287
Carol concert			332	0
Workshops			0	845
Rehearsals	2,963	3,018	5,980	5,737
Music hire	120	321	441	231
Making Music			200	130
Insurance			91	91
Staging storage			515	421
Secretarial			8	28
Equipment			0	62
Website			45	267
AGM			166	36
Other			187	61
60th year celebrations			1,729	0
Total Expenditure			<u>14,151</u>	<u>12,196</u>
Net Surplus/Deficit			<u>2,476</u>	<u>6,393</u>

Aylesbury Festival Choir is a Registered Charity (No.297856) supported by Aylesbury Vale Arts Council and is affiliated to Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies.  
Website: <http://www.aylesburyfestivalchoir.net>



MUSIC DIRECTOR  
Nick Austin

PRESIDENT  
Piers Maxim

**Balance Sheet at 31 August 2019**

	2019		2018	
	£	£	£	£
<b>Current Assets</b>				
Cash at Bank - General Account	15,067		13,328	
- 100 Club	5,598	20,665	4,684	18,012
Debtors	80	80	161	161
		20,745		18,173
<b>Less Current Liabilities</b>				
100 Club	230		230	
Sundry Creditors	96	326	0	230
<b>Net Current Assets</b>		20,419		17,943
<b>Represented by:</b>				
<b>General Fund</b>				
Opening Balance		17,943		11,550
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year		2,476		6,393
<b>Total</b>		20,419		17,943

Signed..... *P. Maxim* ..... Date *9/1/2020*

Chairperson

Signed..... *N. M. Barkell* ..... Date *20/12/2019*

Independent Examiner

**AYLESBURY FESTIVAL CHOIR**  
**Provisional Income and Expenditure Account year ending 31 August 2020**  
**for AGM 27th May 2020**

**INCOME**

	Autumn 2019	Spring 2020	2019/2020	2018/2019
Concert Ticket Sales	1,526	0	1,526	3,335
Programme sales	63	0	63	119
Refreshments at concerts	95	0	95	185
Carol concert			222	255
Members subscriptions	3,010	2,596	5,605	5,585
Music Hire	239	216	455	534
Gift Aid			1,016	2,712
Fund Raising			996	1,450
AGM			0	58
Quiz Night			0	173
Donations			215	2,031
60th year celebrations			0	190
<b>Total Income</b>			<b>10,193</b>	<b>16,627</b>

**EXPENDITURE**

	Autumn 2019	Spring 2020	2019/2020	2018/2019
Concerts	2,312	518	2,830	4,457
Carol concert			511	332
Rehearsals	3,138	2,827	5,965	5,980
Music hire	187	212	399	441
Making Music			200	200
Insurance			143	91
Staging storage			515	515
Secretarial			13	8
Website			45	45
AGM			0	166
Other			80	187
60th year celebrations			0	1,729
<b>Total Expenditure</b>			<b>10,701</b>	<b>14,151</b>
<b>Net Surplus/Deficit</b>			<b>(508)</b>	<b>2,476</b>

Net figures

Concerts	(628)	(518)
Rehearsals	(76)	(228)

Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Alan Hamilton, seconded by Bob Shellard and unanimously agreed.

#### 4 **Music Director's report**

Nick Austin presented his report as follows:-

"Until recently AFC continued to be the highlight of my music-making week; and we all know what brought that to a halt!

Speed of learning and attention to detail have been excellent throughout the year and the standard of singing still continues to rise.

Autumn 2019 saw us with a popular Choral Classics programme. This was an outstanding concert in every way: fabulous tuning in the two a cappella numbers (*God so loved the world & Locus iste*), stunning singing from our soprano soloist, Felicity and (the highlight, for me) a roof-raising finale in *Blest Pair of Sirens* with Ben in magnificent form on the organ.

The Come & Sing *Hallelujah Chorus* had a fabulous response on the night, and I was also delighted with AFC's performance of my commission: *Gloria del Fuego*.

It was only a short hop from here to our Christmas Concert. It was (for a second time) quite an achievement putting it together in so little time. The combination of a good body of people who either know pieces, or can learn them very quickly, coupled with a real joy in making music in ANY form was very helpful! We had the friendly & skilled players from the Galliard Band again – if they carry on like this, they may even convert me! We also had St Mary's Brass for the first time. Talented, loud and fun would probably be them in a nutshell.

The audience was down on the previous year but then we were battling some other events which we knew nothing about in advance. I'm sure, with careful marketing, we could make the event more self-sustaining, financially.

Then, in the New Year, we started work on our April Programme. Lollipops Galore!

Progress here was terrific and much of what I thought I already knew about the choir was confirmed in an evening Workshop with Greg. He gave me some fresh pointers for the future which we started to put into place almost immediately. I have no doubt that this concert (with brilliant soloists & chamber orchestra) was going to be an absolute corker, and then...

As I write this I have absolutely no idea what the future holds & how long it will be before we can resume our music making. It's amazing just how much the population are relying on 'The Arts' to see them through this time. One hope I have is that those same people will fight for those arts in the future instead of allowing them to become something only for the wealthy & privileged.

Huge thanks, as always, to our very own Rowena. She continues to dazzle us with accompaniments that really aren't friendly to ordinary humans! Her support of me, as MD, and the choir during rehearsals & concerts is invaluable.

Lastly, my thanks to all the committee for the hard work that they all put in on our behalf. I hope Mike won't mind me saying this...but I know, for absolute certainty, that his meticulous way of working is one of the bedrocks of the society. His leadership of a dedicated team of volunteers is massively appreciated!

Here's to the future – whatever it holds!"

#### 5 **Chair's report**

Mike presented his report as follows:

"Well, to coin a phrase, "What a difference a year makes!". This time last year we were looking forward to the final event in our 60th Anniversary Year, the Buffet Lunch Party. Now we are wondering when, maybe even if ever, we will meet to sing together again. COVID-19 has had, to repeat a much-used phrase, an "unprecedented" effect on AFC. We are, of course, not alone in this, and many are wondering what the long-term effect on musicians will be. The Committee remains

optimistic that some form of communal singing will be able to resume at some point in the planned Autumn Term, but my confident statement last year, referring to our foundation year, that “we can proudly claim to have been singing continuously ever since” does now seem somewhat hubristic.

At the date of writing we cannot say how the next months will progress, so your Committee has a number of options which we will keep under review. We recognise how much enjoyment you found in our rehearsals for the postponed “*Gloria!*” concert, and also how much effort everyone put in. Our options aim to avoid wasting that hard work where possible, without jeopardising the other plans we have. To give you an idea of what we might propose, while recognising none of these might work out exactly as stated:

1. If restrictions are lifted fully by the end of July at the latest, that will give us August to plan a concert properly (Committee meetings etc.), and in this case we could have “*Gloria!*” on 5th September (AMC is provisionally booked). We'd have 2 rehearsals (27th Aug, 3rd Sep), then the concert, then move on to “*Messiah*” as planned. q 1
2. If restrictions are lifted fully a bit later, say during August so we could meet again early September, we don't think a full concert is possible, but would like to consider a more informal performance of what we have recently rehearsed for “*Gloria!*”, but without soloists, to be held at BJS towards the end of September. This would not be an extensively advertised concert, but we'd see it as chance to celebrate surviving, and do that with family and friends. Then we'd carry on with “*Messiah*”.
3. If restrictions are lifted fully even later, say October time, we think “*Messiah*” would then be out of the question, but we could reschedule “*Gloria!*” as our (full) concert in November. Then we would need to re-plan our programme for the following seasons.
4. If restrictions go past the end of the year...let's not go there!

Although you have not heard much from us since lockdown, your Committee has kept in touch (including agreeing on the above options), and I would like to state here my appreciation for the support and teamwork they all demonstrate. We even held our first “virtual” meeting on Zoom, although I must confess this was at Nick's prompting. It's not my most comfortable medium. Just see how uneasy I look in the photo...



I'm not going to call out names this year, just to say...Pat, Lynda, Jean, Sheila, Lyn, Kate – thank you! I'd also add a mention for Nick, who has kept me on the path of what is possible, and eased the contacts with the soloists and musicians who were to be involved in “*Gloria!*”.

Back to happier times...we did indeed hold that Buffet Lunch Party. We had a very enjoyable lunch at Weston Turville Golf Club, where our invited guests included Helen Blakeman, who had been our Conductor from 1984 to 1994, and Barbara Fell, the only surviving member of the original group which became December Festival Choir in 1958. Members past and present enjoyed the opportunity to chat and catch up with each other and to share musical memories, and we had a celebration cake. We were also pleased to



welcome five of our previous Chairmen, covering a period of 27 years. However, the photo here possibly shows you why I prefer to refer to my role now as simply “Chair”?

The Lunch was a happy social event, and gave the Committee an idea that other social activities might be of interest to choir members. Committee members cannot themselves take on the organising of such activities in addition to their other duties, but we have offered support to other members of the choir who propose an event which they are prepared to organise, possibly as a group. Regrettably, nobody has yet come forward – but the offer still stands!

Maybe I should actually say something about the music? AFC is truly fortunate in having the services of an optimistic, and only occasionally grumpy (“Smile!!”), Music Director in the person of Nick Austin, and an exuberant, highly competent, and tolerant, accompanist in the person of Rowena Gibbons. I know we all benefit from their professional support in our endeavours.

We did of course have that very successful concert at the end of last year, a selection of “*Choral Classics*”; was anyone else somewhat daunted by being faced with *Blest Pair of Sirens* at the end of the evening? Highlights for me:

- *Gloria del Fuego*, a new piece by one N. Austin, actually written to commemorate our 60th Anniversary, so very much “our” music.
- Felicity Davies, sometime accompanist for us, back as a soloist and taking on her real love as a singer.
- A mass audience participation in the singing of the “*Hallelujah Chorus*”. I must confess I was a bit nervous about this; Would we get any volunteers? Would the singing be ragged? Would the audience pick up the mood? Oh ye of little faith! I should really have trusted Nick more, because it was a great success. Lots of audience enthusiasm (with some secret singing along) and probably about 20 extras up on stage with us, including one David Lidington, of whom more later. But clearly, great music overcomes all obstacles.

We also repeated the Christmas Carol Concert, but with a lot less success than in 2018. Was it the weather? A better attraction for the children elsewhere? Not enough advertising? Not enough support from our own members? Whatever the reason(s), the Committee will need to think carefully if we are to repeat the experiment this year (all things being normal of course).

Last year we had two failed attempts to visit Malvern for an away day with Piers Maxim. Piers has a long history with AFC, and has been our President in recent years. However, his career now takes him away frequently and contact has been difficult to maintain. Therefore, this year the Committee has agreed with Piers that his time in the role of President has come to a natural end. We are grateful for his support and assistance over the years, particularly, in my case, for his advice when we were recruiting Nick (a task early in my time as Chair).

I am delighted, however, to let you know that Sir David Lidington has kindly accepted the Committee’s invitation to become our new President, starting from the date of the AGM. David has been a good supporter of AFC in our audiences, where of course he was an invited guest as MP for Aylesbury. He is also a singer, tenor of course, and has been heard singing along from a seated position during some of our Handel performances. As I said earlier, he came up on stage for the mass singing at our last concert. I have pointed out to him that, as President, he and Helen will still be invited guests. Maybe that was what convinced him?

I hope you find some, ideally all, of the above interesting. On behalf of the Committee may I extend our hope that you and yours stay healthy and safe in these troubled times, and that we are able to sing together soon, under more normal conditions. As government guidelines become clearer, we shall work hard to ensure rehearsing and performing remain safe activities, but if anyone is worried do please let us know your concerns”.

## Happier Times!!



### 6 **Election of Officers and Committee Members**

As explained by Mike previously, to help us through the current situation due to COVID-19 restrictions, all committee members have agreed to remain in post at least until a normal meeting can be held. There were therefore no nominations and no elections held during this AGM. This contravenes one of the conditions of our constitution, but the committee regard these exceptional circumstances as justification. It may be that if there are to be any changes to the current committee, they can be covered in an EGM next term.

### 7 **Any Other Business**

Lynda had received a letter from Bob Shellard in which he had requested that the following be minuted: "That a sincere vote of appreciation be minuted to all members of the AFC Committee for undertaking the wholly exceptional heart-searching and planning necessary to keep us all safe during the COVID-19 emergency and laying the tentative groundwork to enable us hopefully to return in good voice before too long".

Mike referred to the options outlined in his Chair's report for resuming our music making, none of which, as he pointed out, may actually occur. Nevertheless, the committee is duty bound to keep on top of all developments. Enquiries had been made of BJS and Aylesbury Methodist Church to find out what their thoughts are as regards outside lettings in the future but unsurprisingly both organisations were unable to give any firm information and are being guided by Government advice. The unknowns are:

1. Will the government allow large groups to meet?
2. Will the school allow us back in? Even if it did, what about hygiene? Would we be expected to disinfect chairs, etc?
3. There is also the issue of the requirement for social distancing which in terms of Aylesbury Methodist Church would apply to both staging and possibly the audience. How many people would feel safe to come out?

Pat asked if there was any deadline by which we should make a decision.

Nick commented that in Italy there is talk of re-opening theatres but he felt it will be a while before there is any clarity in the UK with regards to choir rehearsals and concerts.

Mike commented he was aware that the Southbank Centre is not opening until next April.

Nick said he is due to have a meeting with other musicians soon to discuss the current situation by which time there might be more information to hand.

The AGM concluded at 7.55 pm.