

Reading Male Voice Choir

Minutes of a committee meeting held online on 8 October 2020

Present: Members: John Painter (JP), chairman; John Adams (JA), deputy chairman; Martin Butler (MB), secretary; John Kay (JK), treasurer. Section Leaders (SLs): Dave Allen (DA), Jeremy Jones (JJ), David Ewens (DE). Officers: Clive Waterman (CW), musical director; Hayley Tull, (TW) deputy musical director; Andrew Evans (AE), assistant secretary/publicity officer; Alan Broodbank (AB) Health & Safety Officer; Jon Saverton (JS), Social Secretary; Steve Richardson (SR, Publicity; Nigel Shaw (NS), Stage Manager.

Minutes: Andy Sherwood

Apologies: Paul Lyden

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| <p>01/20 Minutes: of the meeting held on 31 July were agreed to be a correct record.</p> | |
| <p>02/20 Matters arising from the minutes: There were no matters arising.</p> | |
| <p>03/20 COVID-19 – Return to Rehearsal The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the choir’s return to normal operations after Covid 19 and what actions may be taken to facilitate a partial return before them. Three papers were circulated for consideration at the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chairman’s Report – COVID-19 (JP)• Risk Assessment and Proposed Safe Systems of Work (AB)• Musical Director’s Report – Suggestions for Possible Rehearsals (CW) <p>A pre-planning group of JP, JK, AB, AE, CW and HT had considered the Return to Rehearsal Risk Assessment (RA) prepared by AB, and presented it to the committee to consider, adopt and share with the choir as a consultative exercise. The RA recognised the choir as a high at-risk grouping due to age, gender and infirmity, and set out the mitigating action to address this, including social distancing and no mingling; and wearing face masks at all times, including when singing.</p> <p>There are two possible venues to consider for rehearsals, both with a COVID-secure capacity of 30 – 40:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hawkedon (taking bookings from 6 November)• Christ Church Woodley (taking bookings now) <p>All choir members had been asked at the end of September to complete a Return to Rehearsal survey run by Making Music, and the Chairman’s report set out the results of this: 80% had taken part, and 60% were prepared to return to live rehearsals if safe, indicating that there was a majority support to resume safe live rehearsals.</p> | |

AB advised that the Committee and Officers have a responsibility to provide a safe working environment and system of work for members of the choir; and choir members also have a duty to co-operate with the measures set down. In producing the risk assessment, AB had compared it with good practice advice issued by Making Music, and taken account of comments made by CW and JP.

SR endorsed the RA, while noting that it could be difficult to enforce breaches of the RA as the choir is a charity rather than a working environment.

CW commented that to make rehearsals work it would be necessary for reasonable elements of all four sections of the choir to participate at any one session; that at this stage he had no information on which men were prepared to return; that consideration needed to be given to accommodating those who don't; and that to ensure social distancing it may be necessary to have reserved and numbered seats. CW requested a screen as the conductor of a choir is the most vulnerable person as singers are facing him and HT. CW also mentioned that there are specialty masks available for singers, with a larger space in the area in front of the wearer's mouth, at a cost of around £15 per item.

The meeting discussed the relative merits of the two rehearsal venues. CW noted that the number and age of people attending each venue could be a relevant factor, with schoolchildren at Hawkedon compared with a range of users of the church at Christ Church, including another choir who do not sing in face masks. The choir's presence at Christ Church on Friday evenings would interfere with their cleaning schedule for Sunday services. Parking at both venues should be considered

JP commented that the choir mainly consists of elderly men, some with significant illnesses that put them at high risk which must be recognised. This was highlighted and addressed in the risk assessment, and a return to rehearsal could be contemplated as long as it is planned, organised and run within the RA. There would be mitigation in that the choir members would wear masks, not mingle, and shields for CW and HT were to be provided. There was also the option of stopping a rehearsal if they were seen to have become too risky. The choir risk assessment did not consider the differences in the two possible venues, which would be done as a separate exercise, and it may be necessary to provide additional adaptations at each venue to take local risks into account; and it may also be necessary for CW and HT to have their own risk assessment/s. It was important that we are able to demonstrate that we have taken all reasonable measures to reduce risk as much as possible and that we understand fully these measures.

JP proposed that the next steps should be to circulate the RA to all choir members for comment, and to hold a special choir Zoom meeting to consult on it and the options for returning to rehearsals; to be accompanied by a survey of all choir members to establish whether they would be prepared to return to live rehearsal under the mitigating action set out in the RA, if this continued to be permitted by the Government.

CW noted that he will need to know who wants to come to rehearsals to ensure a reasonable balance of attendees over the 4 sections.

SR suggested producing a lay persons' guide to the RA for choir members unfamiliar with the more formal way in which risk assessments are put together.

JP noted that the RA would require committee members to do jobs such as door control, registering attendees for track and trace, and controlling seating. All would need to ensure there is not any mingling as this is the basis on which we may contemplate re-starting rehearsals. There would need to be discussions with administrators at both venues to agree safe working practices at each venue. This would be done by JP, MB, AB and SR visiting both venues. In terms of capacity and social distancing, we had the Hawkedon floorplan but did not yet have that for Christchurch.

The Committee noted that Hawkedon was the choir's established base, and also where its free storage facility is located. Care therefore should be taken about moving to Christ Church and losing our regular Friday evening booking at Hawkedon. On the other hand Christ Church may offer less risk of infection. A decision was not required straight away, but it was important to get local risk assessments for both venues, whilst doing our very best to maintain our very good relationship with Hawkedon.

JP invited comments from section leaders and other committee members. The following matters were raised:

- The choir's objective is singing, but there is a split between members who wanted to return to love rehearsals and those who didn't, which could be divisive if not addressed; under the RA, a live rehearsal would be a necessarily distanced and cold environment and we could not perform to an audience; legislation may change at any moment possibly making any work carried out pointless.
- With spirit, good will and co-operation a return to rehearsals may be workable. Although we will not be able to perform to people it is important that we keep the choir alive even if it only a core of 20-30 people so that we can resume as a full choir in time.
- It would be useful to investigate using the wi-fi at the venue so that people who don't want to be there in person can participate in a zoom rehearsal.
- There are some groups of choir members meeting already to sing, in small numbers, within the Rule of Six and following Government guidelines on hand cleansing and social distancing. Subject to Risk Assessment, this model could be extended to engage a wider number of choir members in singing;
- The small groups work well in the togetherness they bring, but are limited in terms of musical practice in the absence of a Conductor or Accompanist, and there is the problem that the small groups are learning without any guidance and could be going the wrong way.
- There is a will especially from newer members to get rehearsals going as soon as possible; and there may be scope to expand the number of small groups to include more men in advance of re-starting formal choir rehearsals.
- Some choir members of the choir still work, which makes it difficult for them to

attend daytime sessions.

- The results of the Return to Rehearsal survey may have changed as a result of the recent upturn in cases of Covid-19, and can only be seen as representing the mood of the choir at this point in time.

There was a general feeling of reservation and pessimism as to whether it would be practical or permitted for rehearsals to restart in November, especially as some had encountered Covid cases close to them or had vulnerable family members; again mitigating factors were mentioned, and the risk assessment is some proof that the situation is being taken very seriously. However the situation changes, it is important that as much preparation work as possible is done so that the choir can re-start as soon as this is possible. Some Committee members of the choir are trustees, and are in trust to ensure that the choir survives and that this is owed to past and present members of the choir.

AGREED:

- 1) **The outline results of the Return to Rehearsal survey were noted, to provide the basis for planning a return to rehearsals, when this was permitted under Government Regulation;**
- 2) **The Return to Rehearsal risk assessment, and CW's suggestions for possible rehearsals, were adopted for circulation to and consultation with the choir membership prior to making any decision to return to rehearsal, subject to SR adding a bullet point lay person's guide to the RA; and**
- 3) **An open "Zoom" meeting be held to discuss the risk assessment with all choir members invited;**
- 4) **With regard to venues:**
 - **AB, MB, JP and SR to visit Hawkedon School to discuss to and risk assess a possible return to Hawkedon for rehearsals and in regard to access to the container'**
 - **AB, MB, JP and SR also to visit Christ Church, and undertake a comparative risk assessment of both venues.**

JP MB

SR

JP MB

AB MB JP
SR

AB MB JP
SR

04/20 Secretary's Report:

The Secretary had circulated a written report.

The are no concert bookings until April 2021 at the earliest, with no Christmas concert this year at the Minster, but May or June 2021 are more likely to be viable.

The Christmas dinner booking is still available at Caversham Heath for a maximum of 60 people divided in to two rooms, along with other social distancing measures.

Hiring an outside act may be possible, as was choir members recording their own pieces for playing on the evening. The event would have to be finished by 9pm, therefore starting at 6pm. It would be plated service at each table, with a choice of 2 Orv 3 courses, drinks also ordered from the table (not the bar). Raffle tickets can be allocated to tickets and prizes wrapped.

It was **agreed** that levels of interest be sought from choir. It was considered unlikely that former members of the choir would be interested this year.

For the proposed 50th Anniversary Concert next November at the Concert Hall there is

MB

not yet a definitive costing and there will not be one available until March, but the date (13 November 2021) is pencilled in.

05/20 Social Secretary's Report:

JS is looking for other events, but a possible visit to Brooklands Motor Museum cannot happen due to Covid.

JS

06/20 Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer had circulated a written report, to which he added two things:

- All concerts in 2020-21 have now been removed from the forecast, adding a negative £1100 to the deficit.
 - It is now estimated that we will be spending £2400 more than income.
- In all the impact of Covid-19 on the choir's finances will likely be around £5000 debit. However the choir does have excess reserves and the situation is as comfortable as could be expected.

To date £700 of subscriptions have been received which have been allocated as donations on which gift aid can be claimed.

**There being no further business the meeting was closed
The next meeting of the committee will be held on a
Date to be agreed
Venue or online yet to be agreed**

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