

HARLESTON CHORAL SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on Monday 13th October 2025

at 8.15pm in The Church on London Road, Harleston

Caroline and Jo welcomed Justin and choir members and declared the meeting open

- • **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Sharon Springsheim, Heather Cunningham, Lesley Thomas, Mike Cox, Will Herschel – Shorland, Martin Stoll, Rosemary Cox, Anne Plested, Felicity Todd, Angie Wilson, Anna Clampin, Carol Hammond, Pat Thompson, Linda Bradley and Sharon Steadman.

- • **Minutes of the last AGM (held on Monday 7th October 2024)**

The minutes were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

- • **Report by Music Director**

Justin delivered his report (see attached). This was proposed by Caroline Rodbourne and seconded by Jo Curry.

- • **Report by Chairs**

Caroline delivered their report (see attached). This was proposed by John Awty and seconded by Amanda Fletcher.

- • **Report by Treasurer**

Malcolm delivered his report (see attached). This was proposed by John Awty and seconded by Jenny Hyams .

He had also brought along copies of the annual accounts for choir members that wanted them and these will be filed with his report.

- • **Appointment of Auditor**

Mr Robin Farrar was, again, appointed as Auditor for the year. This was

proposed by Malcolm Butcher and seconded by Jo Curry.

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- **Bonus Ball**

Fiona was asked if she wanted to say a few words so she reiterated the importance of members taking part in this. With the increasing number of members, just one pound from everyone makes a big contribution to our funds.

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- **Election of Committee members for the year 2025/26**

Caroline Rodbourne, Julia Awty, Malcolm Butcher and John Awty were all due for re-election this year and have all agreed to stand again. This was put to the vote and they were re-elected.

Jenny Hyams and Heather Butcher are standing down, leaving 2 vacancies. The nomination of Peter Coulson was proposed by Joe Manero and seconded by John Formston. The nomination of Fiona-Catherine Thompson was proposed by Ruth Cawcutt and seconded by Kathy Smith.

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- **Date of next AGM: Autumn term 2026**

MUSIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT – HARLESTON CHORAL SOCIETY AGM – MONDAY 13TH OCTOBER 2025

We are heading towards the end of our 25th Anniversary year and what a year it's been! But more of that a little later.

Last December we presented a beautifully sung and played performance of Haydn's Missa Sancti Nicolai with our usual quartet of superb soloists. There were many other highlights in this concert, including Blow blow thou winter wind in memory of Joanna – with lovely flute accompaniment by Tony, John Rutter's The twelve days of Christmas and a really excellent version of Ding dong merrily on high!

In January we commenced our 25th anniversary year properly, commencing with rehearsals for Carmina Burana. Little could we have known then how it was going to turn out! As I've said elsewhere I consider our performance to be a real career highlight and it was one of those electric magic evenings when everything came together. The dynamic soloists, the superb Percussion East, sterling playing from the two pianists, Katie and John and an extraordinary evening of singing from the choir. The reception and standing ovation at the end was testament to all the hard work and commitment you put into making this piece such a success. I hope you all feel so proud of your efforts – I know I was so proud of you all.

We are concluding our season this year with Handel's Messiah, which is already well under way in rehearsal. We are fortunate to have been able to assemble our four soloists again for this, and I'm hoping the evening is going to be as memorable.

I can also now reveal the pieces for next summer we will be presenting. Puccini's Messa Di Gloria is the main piece and the second half will be Brucker's Magnificat and Schubert Mass in G. David and Laura will be returning as soloists, joined by a baritone new to us, Julian Chou Lambert.

The choir continues to grow and thrive and I still have many exciting pieces for us to do in the future. On a sadder note, the loss of Karen to the

society has been something I have particularly felt. We collaborated on several projects together and I shall miss her very much. I do want to thank John Witchell very much for being so willing to step in and help us out so admirably.

As always many thanks to the committee for keeping us going through this period – especially Jo and Caroline who jointly have held the responsibility of the running of the choir.

Long may we keep up this standard of performing and singing and thank you all for your continued part of this journey!

JOINT CHAIRS' REPORT

2025 has been a very special year for our choir, our 25th Anniversary, which we have celebrated in style and will continue to do so with this year's Christmas concert, featuring Part 1 of Handel's Messiah, which was sung at our very first concert back in 2000. It has been a wonderful year under Justin's inspiring direction in which we have gone from strength to strength both in numbers, musicality and the enjoyment of making music together .

We began the year with our Christmas concert in St John's Church when we sang Haydn's Misa Sancta along with carols and festive favourites including wonderful contributions from our soloists, Laura, Joanna, David and Aleks, ably accompanied by Karen and the Harleston Chamber Ensemble. As ever, we served mince pies and wine and a most festive time was had by all.

One of the things we do as a choir is to hold social events, such as after concert coffee mornings so that members have an opportunity to mingle and socialise more than is possible at normal practices. We started the year, appropriately enough on January 25th with a Bring and Share buffet to celebrate our anniversary at St James Village Hall. This was attended by over sixty members, both past and present, including Nathaniel Gee, the son of Ann Gee, our founder. It was a very special occasion and we would like to thank all involved for making it so, especially Linda Barden for the splendid display boards showing the history of the choir and Stella for organising the beautiful celebration cake.

In March we had our usual Quiz Evening, again at St James Village Hall. This event has become well known for the quality of the quiz itself and the food, indeed we have already had enquiries as to the date of next year's quiz. We even had to put out extra tables and it really was a lively and enjoyable evening. Huge thanks to John for being a formidable quiz master and to Julia and her team for the delicious meal.

Another HCS tradition is our annual Garden Party, which was held this year in John and Julia's lovely garden in All Saints when the weather was kind, the food plentiful and delicious again and the garden quiz challenging. Many thanks to them both for hosting and to the team for setting it all up.

In August we held a very successful Come and Sing Messiah Workshop, again at St James Village Hall. More than sixty attended, including several non-choir members travelling from afar, who were most appreciative of the welcome and Justin's skilful conducting and teaching.

Of course, the main event of our 25th celebrations was performing Carmina Burana at Archbishop Sancroft High School. This was a very ambitious undertaking, needing a bigger venue than St John's, in order to accommodate the choir, soloists and the childrens' choir, two grand pianos and a massive amount of percussion instruments. Huge thanks to Justin for having the vision, the skill and energy to bring it altogether. The choir has never sung better, Hannah, David and Oskar were wonderfully expressive soloists, Percussion East were brilliant and Katie Vaughan and John Witchell played the two pianos magnificently. It was a triumph reflected in the standing ovation we received at the end. What a wonderful and memorable experience for us all.

We now look forward to ending the year with the Christmas Concert, which will again be held at Archbishop Sancroft High School because the choir has increased so much in size. Our sympathies go to all at the church of St John's over the recent fire. This church has been very much a part of the history of the choir and we do hope to be able to sing there again some day. As previously mentioned, we will be singing choruses from Part 1 of The Messiah as well as a selection of carols, mostly chosen by you, as well as items from our four soloists.

Very sadly our Karen, our wonderful accompanist for many years, has had to step down from playing with us due to long term ill health. We very much miss her brilliant playing, sensitive accompanying and her great sense of humour. We send her all our best wishes for her recovery and do hope that one day she may be back to play for us again.

In the meantime we are very lucky to have found John Witchell and Henrietta Birtchnell to accompany us and we are very grateful indeed to them. Meanwhile the search, not an easy task, for a full time accompanist continues.

We do have a lot of people to thank for their contributions to the life of the choir. It really would not be the thriving and growing organisation that it is without a lot of hard work by them. First of all, the Committee as a whole who devote a lot of time to ensure things run as smoothly as possible. Stella, who stepped down last year as chair, has continued to play a vital role supporting both Jo and myself; Malcolm for his efficiency as Treasurer; Amanda for being an organised and unflappable

Secretary; Julia for her sterling work as Librarian and chief cook, John as Membership Secretary making sure that members are kept up to date with regular emails as well as captaining the staging team; Jenny for her unstinting work as Publicity Manager; Heather for producing our programmes and posters, Nikki for assisting Malcolm and all her work on the upcoming Making Music Platform; John Formston for the quiz, licensing and banners and Fiona for her invaluable running of the Bonus Ball and our raffles. We, as joint chairs, are very grateful to all of them.

In addition we would like to give huge thanks to Paul Cope who runs our website and who is being incredibly helpful in the transition to the Making Music Platform. It is a lot of work, which he does freely because of his wife, Joanna's, devotion to the choir.

Most importantly we thank Justin again for his vision, hard work and positive encouragement, which have enabled us to achieve performances of such high quality while at the same time, making the process of learning and rehearsing so enjoyable.

Finally we couldn't do it without you. Thank you all for turning up each week and supporting us and making Harleston Choral Society the wonderful organisation it has become. Ann Gee founded the choir as a community choir and it remains so, having served the people of the area, both as members and audience, for 25th years. She would be very proud of her heritage. Here's to the next 25 years.

HARLESTON CHORAL SOCIETY
Committee Meeting
15th September 2025
Financial Report

The Summer term subscription income came to £2,865 which has given us for the year a total of £8,875. Because of greater choir numbers this

year the income from subscriptions was £1,150 greater than last year. Income from Gift Aid also considerably increased from £1,250 to £1,572. The total income for the year was £18,825 compared to £14,627 last year.

The bonus ball income for the year was £563 compared to £550 the previous year.

This is important for the choir and although this is totally voluntary it would be encouraging if it were to be increased in conjunction with the number of members we currently have. On a weekly basis we average £29 per week which means less than half the choir contribute. A further £10 per week would bring in another £200 a year, as half the funds go to the winner each week.

This year we have had some successful fundraising from both the quiz night and also the raffle held at the Anniversary lunch in January. The net profit from these events was £739. Additionally the workshop income exceeded the expenditure by £354.

We were also extremely fortunate to receive a grant of £500 from South Norfolk Council which was initiated by John Formston. This was an additional benefit to the expenditure incurred to support the concert in June.

We had two concerts in the year providing an income of £5,000. The number of people attending the concert in June was over 200 which was the largest audience we have ever had. The venue at Harleston Sancroft Academy was extremely good enabling us to accommodate two grand pianos and a percussion band.

The stage was a bit of a squeeze but the concert was a great success. The Christmas concert held at St. John's Church was also extremely enjoyable. The costs for the two concerts came to £8,428.

The financial position in September 2024 was £7,444 and at the end of the financial year on 31st August it was £7,757. So we have had a lot of activity in the year and the costs have broken even. It obviously helps enormously that the choir numbers are high, currently about 70 chorists. This helps provide the funds with which we run this choir. So we can consider this year as being a good financial success.

Malcolm Butcher - Treasurer

