



# Chair's Update



## Welcome to a New Year

May I start by wishing you a peaceful, prosperous but, above all, healthy New Year. I am sure we all hope that we continue to make progress through the COVID-19 pandemic and that 2022 is a better year for us all compared to the last two. The evidence is that CORONA virus will be with us for some time and may well impact what we can and cannot do over the next 12 months or more. We are very much looking forward to the Federation AGM/Festival in Ely in September (9th – 11th), preliminary details for which can be found in the 2021 edition of **Once a Chorister, now available on our website.**

New Year is a time we often look back at what has happened, as well as forward and much has happened in the last 12 months. Since the beginning of last year I have had meetings with over half of our member Associations and they have proved to be helpful and interesting in equal measure and I hope the participants have also found them so. As we were unable to hold our AGM & Festival in Ely, the AGM took place on-line as did our Executive Committee meetings. Given we come from all four corners of the country, this proved an efficient use of time. I also met with Cathedral Music Trust (CMT) and the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) to begin the dialogue on how we can work together to further the cause of choral music.

We have made progress in our communications with the wider world, our more regular newsletters being part of this. Once a Chorister magazine was published in November on our web-site and my thanks go to all the contributors and, especially to Honorary Secretary, Alastair Pollard who collected, collated and edited the publication again this year. We have received a few more newsletters for posting on our website and I encourage all member Associations to send us your newsletters for inclusion on our website, if appropriate, or an edited version if preferred.

In addition to our activities, in April, CMT announced the appointment of TV and radio presenter, Alexander Armstrong as their Choral Ambassador and I was delighted to meet him over Zoom to discuss the objectives of his role and how the Federation could work with him. In July the RSCM announced **International Chorister Day**, which took place on 19th September with the aim of celebrating the benefits of choristership.

In October, CMT hosted a special concert in partnership with Coventry Cathedral, in aid of the Diamond Fund for Choristers. Directed by Rachel Mahon, fifty young singers representing ten cathedrals and greater churches across the Midlands, came together in Coventry. A number of Associations managed to hold "in-person" reunions, notably St Mary's, Warwick and Salisbury Cathedral who both focussed their events on celebrating 30 years of their respective Girls' Choirs.

Looking forward to 2022, the highlight for the Federation will be the AGM/Festival weekend at Ely and we hope that many more Associations will be able to return to face-to-face events. If you are holding an event, please do invite the Federation to join you. I will make every effort to be there and, if I am not able to, my Executive Committee colleagues have said they will try to do so. Also, do allow us to promote your event on our website and Facebook page. Send us the details in the format you would like it posted and also send us a report with photos after the event. As you will see in *Once a Chorister*, **Coventry Cathedral** celebrates the 60th anniversary of the consecration of the new cathedral over the weekend of 21st – 22nd May. Former choristers from the choir at the consecration will come together to sing evensong with the current cathedral choir on Saturday 21st and Federation member Associations are invited to attend.



The final of **BBC Songs of Praise, Young Chorister of the Year 2021** was broadcast on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. The winner was a girl chorister (Ruby) from Guildford Cathedral. We send our congratulations to her, all at Guildford and, of course, all the other competitors in this year's competition. In the words of judge, Lesley Garrett, "it is good to know that the future of choral music in the UK is in safe hands".

## GDPR & Data Management

I recently received an email from a member Association asking if the Federation had a policy on websites and data security. Unfortunately, I had to answer that though we had a GDPR policy we did not have a policy specific to websites or social media. I know it is a question that has challenged many not-for-profit and "social" organisation and I would like to call on our membership to share their experiences and opinions on this subject and the wider one of compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).



On the subject of websites, the question was being asked specifically about whether access should be limited to individuals who can be confirmed as having a connection with the website owner (i.e. Association) or should it be left open for all to access. I suggest that the answer will depend on each Association's objectives and who they wish to reach through their website. Restricting access to a website is not that difficult, especially for anyone who has experience of building websites. Access to other forms of media – and I am thinking specifically of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram etc. – is very much easier to control and, again, will depend on who the Association wishes to reach. With Facebook, for instance, it is perfectly possible to have a page that is accessible to the whole world and a separate page where access is limited to only those who are directly connected to the Association i.e. a known former chorister, so that any sensitive information can be protected.

The broader aspects of GDPR are more challenging for member Associations, as I discovered in my on-line meetings in the last 12 months. It is very easy to transgress the rules even when one is trying to be helpful, as I have found out personally. I suspect for many of us, it is some time since we put the GDPR rules in place and wrote our policy on the subject and, over time, it becomes very easy to forget the regime in which we should be working and apply the rules to the letter.

My view is that, in addition to the 7 principles of data protection, there are 3 primary considerations for organisations such as ours. The first is who manages the data? For some Associations, this has been taken out of their hands and data is managed by either the church (cathedral etc.) or school. This leads to a potential problem that the audience the Association may wish to reach could be limited. It may not be possible to include non-singing members in the database or even current members of the choir. It may not be possible to include lay clerks or choral scholars. It may also impact the frequency with which an Association is able to communicate with its members. "We don't have the resources to do more than 2 mailings a year", I heard from one Association. The alternative of the data being managed by the Association brings its own challenges, not least of which is resources and who has the time to devote to ensuring the database is compliant and kept up to date.

My second consideration is what data is maintained? In this electronic, data friendly age, with everyone "connected", surely, all we need is an email address. It is true to say that these days, people are more likely to change their postal address than their email and you are more likely to maintain contact through this medium than any other. However, it is also useful to know where members are geographically located, the years they served in the choir, what voice part they sang (if not a treble), etc., etc., etc. It's not long before the data on each member becomes significant. Collecting it in the first place is a challenge in itself but maintaining it is something else.

The third consideration is how you store and maintain the data? In the "good old days" it would have been simple. A card filing system or a ledger would have been the answer. Where the data is maintained by the church/school they are likely to have a commercial database system which provides the flexibility to manage the data in a variety of ways. Many Associations do not have the affordability to go this route as they face not only the cost of the software but also the cost of tailoring it to their specific needs. The latter, of course, can be significantly reduced if a willing expert can donate their time to completing the task. Not going the commercial database route means you are probably left with Excel (or similar spreadsheet software) as the solution, which is difficult to share if more than one person requires access to the data. This may result in each person who requires access to the data having their own version of the data, which then becomes difficult to manage within GDPR requirements.

I hope that this brief look at the challenges facing members of the Federation will encourage a debate and a discussion about solutions. Do please let me know how your Association manages data. How do you stay in touch with your membership? What are the challenges you have faced and overcome to keep your Association alive, vibrant and current? How do you maintain the integrity of your website, Facebook page or other social media?

I do believe we can help each other with our experiences and I am happy to share your views through these regular newsletters. In the meantime, you'll find the Federation's GDPR Policy on Security and Privacy on our website and guidance on the subject on a variety of other websites, including this, which I have found very helpful and clear <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>.

The UK Government GDPR guide can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation>.

## Support for Choirs

In the not too distant past the Federation kept a record of the support provided by member Associations for their current choirs, which we published on the website. As it fell out of date and we weren't informed of initiatives being delivered by Associations, the list was withdrawn. We would like to reinstate it. Do you support your choir in some way? Perhaps you provide bursaries or pay for singing lessons. Do you fund a scholarship or contribute to choir tours? Perhaps you pay for an annual party or contribute to some fun stuff for the choristers at Christmastide. Whatever you do, please let us know about it and we will maintain an up-to-date list on the website.

## Survival – A Call To Arms

In my article for the 2020 edition of Once a Chorister, my first as Chair of the Federation, entitled A Manifesto for Change, I set out some objectives to ensure the long term survival of the Federation. I believe we are making progress to meeting these objective but we still have a long way to go. To help us secure the Federation's future I am calling on you, our members, for help. Every organisation depends on people. Without them nothing happens. It is people who organise events, write minutes, collect money, send newsletters, manage data, create websites etc.



Successful organisations are those that plan for the future and plan for succession. With every respect for my fellow members of the Executive Committee, none of us is getting any younger. If we fail to recruit our successors then the Federation will cease to exist and we will have failed in our duty. In normal times, for organisations like the Federation, recruitment takes place when people meet but we have not met, in person, for over 2 years and those conversations that might have taken place have not done so. If you – or any member of your Association – would like to join the Executive Committee, we would be delighted to hear from you. We meet 3 or 4 times a year, now, usually by video conference and the more people we have involved, the less the burden on any one person. We are also looking for help in two specific areas. We need to update and develop our website and we also need to implement a database/data management system. Any help or guidance you can provide in either of these areas, as a member of the Committee or not, would be very gratefully received.

**Nick Hodges**

**Chairman, FCOCA**

**Email: [chairman@fcoca.org.uk](mailto:chairman@fcoca.org.uk)**

**You are receiving this newsletter because either we have you on our database as the contact person for your Association or we have had some contact with you personally i.e. in the "Meet the Chairman" sessions. I would like to continue to write to you but if you do not wish to receive further communications from me, please reply to the email to which this newsletter was appended with REMOVE in the subject line.**

**Contributions to any discussions mentioned in the newsletter may be sent to me, Nick Hodges, at the above email address: or to the Honorary Secretary at [secretary@fcoca.org.uk](mailto:secretary@fcoca.org.uk).**