

St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, Past Chorister Association

Our Annual Service of Choral Evensong with the Cathedral Choir took place on the 26th February, 2012, the first Sunday in Lent. The music sung included Martin Neary's Responses, Psalm 119 (vv 17-32), the Stanford Bb Evening Service and Stanford's Anthem *As now the sun's declining rays*.

Following the success of this Service (at which numbers increased), other news of our Association is as below.

The Association's AGM took place on Monday, 14th May in the Cathedral Lounge. Happily, there was a larger attendance from last year, guaranteeing a successful and enjoyable evening.

The business consisted of a Welcome by the Chairman, Apologies for absence from those unable to attend the meeting, Obituaries (involving a period of silence during which we remembered not only Canon Reggie Chisholm and Billy Neely but also those Past Choristers who are currently suffering from ill-health), the adoption of the 2011 AGM Minutes, the adoption of the 2011-12 Accounts, the Elections, and other Association affairs. Results of the Elections are as follows:

Chairman, Peter Hunter,

Honorary Secretary, Andrew Swain,

Honorary Treasurer, Christopher MacLaughlin,

Committee Members, Vernon Clegg, Eddie Officer, Alastair Rendall, and Noel Smyth.

It was with great joy that we welcomed Dean Mann as our Honorary President. The Dean spoke of his delight at being part of the Association and his optimism for the future in terms of restructuring the Choir under our new Master of the Choristers (Mr. David Stevens), the overall development of music at the Cathedral, and everyone working together in warm and all-embracing fellowship for the good of St. Anne's.

Business included Vernon Clegg's motion to initiate past girl choristers into the ranks of the Association. This motion was unanimously passed at the AGM. Vernon was thanked for the extensive work he has undertaken in contacting various English cathedrals and college chapels in relation to possible Association emblems for the girls rather than ties, as presented to the boys. The details of this area are currently being considered by the new Committee.

Eddie Officer was asked to share his news regarding an invitation to attend events in London celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Eddie, along with the late Dermot McConnell, had the great privilege of representing St. Anne's while singing at the Queen's Coronation in 1953.

David Hoskins left the treble line in the summer, moving into the adult section to sing tenor. Congratulations to David on his many years of service to St. Anne's Choir. Over the years, David has attended numerous RSCM courses and other church music events. He is currently studying for his A2 Examinations and we wish him well in this studies and future musical endeavours.

The Annual Dinner took place on Friday, 28th September 2012 at 7.30pm in Rockmount Golf Club, Carryduff. Numbers this year rose to 32 and we were delighted to have our visitors with us. They included the Dean and Mrs. Mann, Ian and Jean Barber, members' wives and recent widows of Past Choristers.. It was particularly pleasing to see John Johnston and Gavin McBride (from Jonathan Gregory's era) present, with their wives. It was also a joy to have Roderick Smyth with us again. Roderick is currently training for the Church of Ireland Ministry.

Our Guest Speaker at the Dinner was the Dean who gave us a very informative talk on the Cathedral Mosaics and the current restoration.

It was with great sadness that we all heard the news of the death of one of our longest-standing members, Weir Johnston (1928 – 2012). Weir was a member of St. Anne's from an early age and sang in the Choir for over sixty years. .

It was a joy to see some fourteen members of Association in the Cathedral Choir Stalls, forming a choir to sing at Weir's funeral on the 8th November. The PCA Choir was augmented by members of the Cathedral Choir, past and present, who had expressed a wish to sing. The hymns sung were 'Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side' and 'Praise my soul, the King of heaven', while the Psalm was 150 to the Stanford setting. It was such a joy and privilege to do this one last act for Weir. He was always 'there' for us all, in the Choir as a boy and adult, at meetings, and in good times and bad.

A small group joined the Choir of St. Mark's, Dundela, for the singing of Advent Carols on Thursday, 29th November. It was a joy to see members of the PCA in the St. Mark's Choir Stalls. Music sung included 'Remember, o thou man', 'Gabriel's Message', 'A tender shoot', 'The Blessed Son of God', 'Come thou, Redeemer of the earth' and the 'Matin Responsory'. The singing ended with Captain Brennan's 'The Virgin's Hush Song'. Some PCs had not sung this since their days as trebles! Light refreshments were served afterwards when new friendships were made and old ones renewed.

Following the Committee's decision, at this point, to present any future girl choristers with inscribed copies of *Messiah*, Vernon Clegg would like to thank all those who were in correspondence with him regarding their arrangements for presentations to girl choristers. Vernon received details from many cathedrals and college chapels, and is most grateful to everyone for taking the time to write and sharing their ideas.

We hope to arrange the following events during 2013:

- periodic luncheons
- talks by past choristers
- DVD evenings of Cathedral Music and related topics
- participation in a concert with the Choir of St. Mark's, Dundela, in April
- a summer outing
- the Annual Dinner in September
- 'Come and Sing Advent Carols' with the Choir of St. Mark's, Dundela

Peter Hunter