



FRIENDS NEWS

Issue 13 January/February 2021



FROM THE CO- CHAIRS

Dear Friends

You will find within this edition of our quarterly newsletter two tributes to our late Vice-President Peter Thompson, prepared respectively by Marilynne Davies, Deputy Director, and Jenny Goodwin. Jenny is our longest-serving Member. We don't intend to add to their thoughts save to say that we will both miss Peter very much; for his knowledge and his experience, his always sound guidance, his support, but most of all for his delightful friendship.



As throughout this pandemic, the Committee, recently expanded by the addition of Tom Moore, Deputy Director and the appointment of Alastair Martin, Trustee, has continued to operate and to monitor the continuing situation and its impact upon our hopes for as early a return as possible to singing together.

We have had to take a decision, together with our partners in the venture, to postpone again the NHS charity concert planned for 26th June. Unfortunately it was not going to be possible even to commence rehearsals, as planned, in April. In addition there was no guarantee that the venue, the Convention Centre would have reopened in time for the concert and we do not know when the position as to social distancing and mask wearing will change.

We had put together a choir of approaching 400 singers. It is very disappointing to have to postpone, but the concert will now go ahead in June 2022. We have also removed from the HCC diary the earlier concert date, 19th June.

We intend however instead, in these unusual times, to extend our 2020/2021 Season into the Summer months in the hope that we can at least get together to rehearse and to make up for lost ground. If we are able to rehearse together then we would hope also to arrange an impromptu performance.

Interest is already being expressed in the advertised role of Choral Director and we will, by the time of the next newsletter hope to have made significant progress towards an appointment. The choir will be closely involved in the selection process.

We are all of us feeling the ongoing gap in our existence that is the joy of making music together, and of performing for our audiences. We are looking forward hugely to getting back to our HCS lives, and to renewing friendships with our fellow singers and of course with our supporters.

Best Wishes
Amy and Paul

CONCERTS UPDATE

We are currently hoping to hold four concerts in the 2021-22 season, notably Messiah with Brian Kay conducting and the Manchester Camerata, on 11th December 2021. The twice postponed Rossini and Puccini concert is now planned for March 2022 – with the same soloists and Manchester Camerata as originally planned, Andrew Padmore has been invited to return from his HCS retirement to conduct the concert, he having rehearsed the choir in its preparation for the original scheduled date. However as covid restrictions are still changing we are not able at present to confirm our plans, rest assured as soon as we are able to you will be the first to know!!

PETER THOMPSON

As many of you already know our Vice President Peter Thompson died in mid December. We thought we could not let this Newsletter go out without a tribute to his contributions to HCS so we asked two members who worked with him for many years on the Committee and who were also very good friends with Peter and his wife Margaret for their thoughts.

From Marilynne Davies

Peter with his wife Margaret joined HCS in 1976. It was, for Peter, the beginning of a long and active association with the Society.

His potential was recognised almost immediately when, after one year as a member, he became Concert Manager. This was the first of many roles he held. He was a committee member, Business Manager, Chair of the Artistic sub-committee, Deputy Chairman of the Society. and had two tours as Chairman, from 1990 to 2005 and from 2016 to 2018. This is an awesome record and his detailed knowledge of HCS was unrivalled. It was, therefore very fitting that he should be made a Life Member of the Society in 2005 and Vice President of the Society in 2018 -an honour that he cherished greatly.



Committee Member 1991



Addressing the choir at the HCS 70th birthday party in 2018

Peter was a very meticulous man and his record keeping was exemplary. He was able to produce minutes of meetings and appropriate documents spanning all the time he had held office in the Society! As Chairman he ran an efficient meeting allowing members to make appropriate contributions and he communicated effectively with the Society as a whole. He was also closely involved in the appointment of the last three Music Directors

However, HCS was not the only interest in his life. He was an ardent cricket fan and liked nothing more than being at Headingley with friends for a Test Match. The tickets for 8 friends for the 2021 Test Match had already been purchased in 2020 -such was his forward planning.

Peter was very active in two particular charities. He was for some considerable time Chairman of the Yorkshire Dales Branch of the MND Association initiating and implementing fundraising with considerable success. He was also Chairman of Harrogate Mind and received a Community Oscar for Chairperson of the Year.

Married to Margaret for over 50 years they both enjoyed a wide range of music and brought their children up to appreciate music too. Peter was a devoted, supportive and interested Grandfather and he liked nothing more than having a family meal with lots of fun and laughter.

We will remember him with joy and with gratitude. It was a privilege to have known him.

Marilynne Davies



With Marilynne at one of our rehearsals

And from Jenny Goodwin

It was my privilege to have worked alongside Peter for many years when I was secretary to the Society. I took over that job in 1983, at which point Peter was the concert manager, having succeeded my brother, Andrew Hitchen, in that role the previous year. Peter remained concert manager until he took over as the Chairman from Christopher Bradnock in 1990 – a position he held until 2005.



With Beryl Pankhurst (our previous accompanist) at her retirement presentation

This was always my experience of working with Peter and together with John Littlewood as Treasurer, I knew that the Society was in good capable hands – it was my good fortune to be part of that team and I look back to those days with great pleasure. It was only after a number of years of knowing Peter and Margaret that I discovered that they had been married on the same day as Philip and myself!

Jenny Goodwin



Peter (on the right) with Jenny's husband Philip

The Chairman's job is a huge one – not only being the one at the helm of a busy and successful society but being very active behind the scenes. Chairing the committee and heading its work is only one aspect of it – dealing with many queries and occasional complaints is all part of it and, as Robin Basker wrote in the first concert programme after he took over from Peter in 2005: 'Peter has faced whatever problem has been thrown at him with characteristic clarity of thought, humour and calmness. Never were these qualities better displayed than when a full-blown performance of 'Messiah' had to be turned into a 'come and sing' performance in Christ Church as the result of the sudden recognition of structural problems in the Royal Hall'.



Peter and Margaret on holiday

COMMITTEE REPORT

The following is a summary of items discussed by the Executive and full Committee since the last newsletter in October 2020. As you would expect all meetings have taken place online by Zoom. As always if there is anything you think we should be discussing at a future meeting please let Ruth know.

Admin matters

All relevant policies have been kept up to date as per our Action plan.

Membership Matters

More membership queries have been received and we are really looking forward to the time when we can start rehearsals and welcome all these new people. Online rehearsal material is still available for Members and our Deputy Music Directors Marilynne and Tom are working on something new for online learning, with the invaluable assistance of members Robert Brown and Francis O'Sullivan.

New Music Director

The Trustees have been working on the background admin needed to advertise for a new Music Director and the advert is being circulated widely. Ideally the recruitment process will include an opportunity for candidates to take part in a rehearsal with the choir.

Future Concerts

The Trustees are still hoping we will be able to hold a full season of concerts in 2021-22.

Finance

We currently have very little expenditure and we have suspended payment of subscriptions, however some members have continued voluntarily to pay their own subscription and we are very grateful to them. If any other members or friends wish to join them Treasurer Gill welcomes any funds. Current expenditure is mainly linked to paying a "Furlough" payment to Tom - although we have not been able to claim this back from the government.

MEMORIES

Jenny Goodwin recently looked through some old concert programmes which triggered a few memories. "Before I started to attend concerts I remember hearing my father, Edmund Hitchen, rehearse on the piano many of the pieces listed in the early days - Elijah, Judas Maccabeus, The Seasons, Mystic Trumpeter, Solomon, Songs of the Sea, Dettingen Te Deum - and still have all those copies given to Dad. The earliest one I remember attending was on 29th October, 1952 when Marjorie Jones was the soloist. She signed Dad's copy of the Music Makers, which is the one I sang from when we performed it recently. That concert took place in Victoria Park Church.

I also remember the then conductor Iles Pulford, although Joe Nicholson had taken over by the time we joined. Many of the early concerts were given in churches - usually Wesley or Victoria Park Methodist church which stood where the Everyman Cinema is now. In December 1955 the concert was one of Elgar and Stanford and the soloist was Megan Jones who also sang in our church choir at Wesley. I seem to remember she came to tea between the rehearsal and concert for a bit of extra practice.

When Dad played the organ for concerts in churches, he was joined on the piano, first by Mary Hobkinson, who I remember so very well, and then by Alice Smith. Alice was the wife of Joe Smith who was Chairman when Philip and I first joined in 1966. Alice was also an organist (at St. Mark's) as well as a pianist and I was at school with their daughters. Margaret, their younger daughter, was the soprano soloist at two of our concerts - in May 1964 and December 1971.

Ewart Dodson took over from my father as one of the rehearsal accompanists in 1965. But for many concerts in the Lounge Hall and Royal hall he was joined by my father playing on two pianos, sometimes augmented by a small orchestra. I also remember the Douglas Hall orchestra from Leeds. He (Douglas) also had a piano shop and we bought our piano from him in 1965.

WHAT ONE MEMBER HAS BEEN DOING IN LOCKDOWN

In the last edition we missed one tale from lockdown as it arrived just too late for publication.

BROADCASTING FROM HOME



One of the things that has kept me busy and sane during the last few months has been Harrogate Hospital Radio. I joined the station 11 years ago & I have presented the Monday Evening Request show ever since, first weekly & at the moment fortnightly. I also have a show on Sunday lunchtimes. There are 2 modern studios hidden away at the District Hospital down a corridor & up a flight of stairs. The great thing about a Request show is that all kinds of music can be played & everything from choral classics to pop & the musicals is on offer. The station is now available online & anyone can listen-you don't need to be a patient- we can be contacted by phone, text, email or directly through our website & app. We are now Harrogate's oldest radio station, having been on air 43 years.

The station has also (in normal times) had outside broadcasts from The Great Yorkshire Show, & The Knaresborough Bed Race & yours truly reported live from near the finish line in Harrogate during the Tour de France in 2014, although I don't think anyone could hear me! Being on air has also given me a chance to plug our concerts shamelessly over the years!

Lockdown has brought new challenges however! Initially the studios had to close in the first lockdown apart from recorded music. But in the summer I was able to resume the Request show from home! By means of a Cleanfeed link to the studio (a bit like Zoom) I can broadcast from my own home computer with the help of a colleague in the studio as the station studio is allowed to broadcast again now. This has sometimes caused some interesting connection problems- the other week the link failed just before the programme was due to start & I had to use my crackly landline for the 2 hours, my mobile phone signal having failed as well!

Visit www.harrogatehospitalradio.org.uk or download our free App to listen any time. When lockdown is over we will also need more request collectors & helpers, so please contact us!

Simon Berger
Tenor 2

This Newsletter

If there is more you would like to read in this newsletter, or if you have a contribution then do let us know by getting in touch with Carolyn, the Friends Secretary – email friends@harrogatechoral.org.uk