

Welcome to our March Newsletter and the second in the new format. Thank you for all your positive feedback following the letter in November, and I look forward to receiving many suggestions for future content and improvement! Indeed, in this the year of the Monkey, and following a very successful Annual General Meeting last week, Cliff has already embarked on a programme designed to improve our singing, so there will be no 'monkeying about' in 2016! Unless of course someone writes a musical 'chronicle' or two perhaps, about monkeys that is... In this issue we look back to Christmas, say farewell to a good friend, welcome a new one, hear 'news from the sticks', profile a new member and look forward to the future.

For many of us Christmas is a special 'choir time', and 2015 was no exception. Our visit to Dunham Massey was particularly enjoyable. We performed in the Great Hall, a very different venue to the usual dining room, and a different acoustic, but somehow a more intimate and festive atmosphere with memories of the House's own earlier family celebrations not far away. And the mulled wine, delightful as ever, helped us to relax and prepare, as we waited for the next group to arrive...



Our Christmas concert at All Saints in Cheadle Hulme was also very well received, one of our 'best ever' some thought, and an excellent atmosphere.

However, Christmas was also the time when one of our most respected and loyal members decided to retire. When I joined the choir nearly five years ago, I was privileged to sit next to this gentleman, and not having sung in a choir for a long time and with very rusty sight-reading ability, he was my guide and support for many months. I shall miss him as we all will. Fortunately I have persuaded him to contribute to this issue, so here is **Ron Birks**, and, in his own words, his 'musical story'...



'From an early age singing and music in general has been a vital part of my life. I was a boy chorister at St. Peter's, Newton-le-Willows and at my secondary school sang many of the bass/baritone roles in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. (The Mikado, Don Alhambra, Sir Despard Murgatroyd, Pirate King, King Hildebrand etc.) Later I sang with Warrington Male Voice Choir and Sale and District Choral Society. Both were conducted by

Alfred Higson who was my singing teacher at the time.

I was a founder member of the William Byrd Singers with whom I sang for 25 years. At the same time I was also singing with the B.B.C. Northern Singers and the Balmoral Opera Group who gave semi-staged performances, in costume, of the more well known Mozart operas. I sang the roles of Don Alfonso in *Cosi fan tutte*, Leporello, Commendatore, Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, Dr. Bartolo and Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Papageno and Sarastro in *The Magic Flute*.

I also became very involved in the musical life at Sandbach School, where we sang extracts from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Meistersinger* and Mozart operas.

I was invited to sing with the Laurence Singers when Cliff found himself short of a second bass. Fortunately I was able to help and enjoyed singing with the choir and working with Cliff so much that I asked if I could stay. The rest is history!

I have enjoyed my time with the Laurence Singers immensely. I wish them well and look forward to being in the audience whenever possible.'

Thank you Ron, and we hope to see you again soon.

Fortunately, thanks to Cliff, and Siona in the altos, we are pleased to welcome back **Martin Smith**, (husband to Siona) into the basses to sing along with Peter and Chris in the second basses. An experienced singer who we hope will enjoy his time with us again.

And now for 'news from the sticks', and **Hilary Ward** who left us last year and now lives in Ansley in

North Warwickshire. She has joined two choirs, the Coventry Philharmonic and the 'Spires'.

She writes: 'The Coventry Philharmonic performed the Rutter Magnificat and Jenkins Armed Man, both familiar pieces before Christmas, and in January we did the Schubert Mass in E Flat with the Coventry Phil Orchestra. There are about 120 to 130 members, so a bit different from The Laurence Singers. I think the tradition is for the choir to sing large works, but is quite taken with my suggestion of Chilcott's Little Jazz Mass so a little more variety is creeping in! The other choir, 'Spires', is much smaller, about the same size as The Laurence Singers. They performed an original piece, composed by one of the members to some poetry written by a lady who came from Arkholme in Lancashire, one of the 'Thankful Villages' which lost no men from the village in World War 1. It was a very moving piece which we sang for Armistice Day in Coventry and again in Lancaster Priory. In June, we are doing Shearing's settings of Shakespeare's 7 Songs and Sonnets, another of my suggestions!'

And here is the view from Hilary's back window, looking out over fields, a valley and to the village on the hill, called Arley...



Susan Wilson, one of our younger members, joined us last year and has been persuaded to share her profile with us...

'Before joining the Laurence Singers in 2014 I was a member of



the Glasgow Youth Choir which I joined in September 1999 when the conductor came to my school to audition for entry. As a member of the junior section I had many great experiences, singing on the watchnight Christmas service to the then president of South African Goven Mbeki, performing as backing vocals for an ABBA tribute act, and appearing on Balamory. I became a member of the senior section when I was around fourteen, singing for two years as a member of both sections. The senior section is a ladies choir composed of young voices performing a mixed repertoire similar to that of the Laurence Singers. With the senior section I went on a small tour around France and Belgium, culminating in a concert at Disneyland Paris. I also had the privilege of singing to the Queen and Prince Philip as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, and I appeared with the choir on 'Songs of Praise' when it was recorded in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. In 2012 I was pleased to be given the 'Chorister of the Year' award by the choir for my dedication and attendance at both rehearsals and concerts'

And now a reminder of our concerts for the rest of this year...

- **Sat March 19th** Altrincham Methodist Church for Christie's Proton Beam Research Fund. Mixed Prog.
- **Sat April 23rd** Wilmslow URC for choir funds, Favourite Sacred Choruses
- **Sat June 18th** Bramhall Methodist Church for Bramhall Ambulance Charity. Mixed programme
- **Sat Oct 8th** Wilmslow URC 'Jazz' concert with John Rotherham Trio
- **Sat Nov 26th** Dean Row Church, Christmas music and Readings
- **Sat Dec 3rd** Dunham Massey, provisional date
- **Thurs Dec 22nd** All Saints Cheadle Hulme – Annual Christmas Concert

And finally...

We now have a Publicity Officer, namely our own **Debs Grace**, from the sopranos. She has a background in journalism and PR, and is leading a team which includes **Ian Shaw**, who designs our posters and **Nick Lloyd**, who has recently redesigned our website. Go and take a look!

Our dedicated facebook page is: [facebook.com/thelaurencesingers](https://www.facebook.com/thelaurencesingers) and we are now on Twitter, at twitter.com/laurencesingers!

Exciting developments which we hope will promote us to our audiences and aid recruitment. So until our next newsletter in September...

Best Wishes, Peter Bowers.