

Wetherby Choral Society AGM 13 October 2025

Chairman's Report

As I come to the end of my term as Chairman of Wetherby Choral Society, I've been reflecting on what a remarkable period this has been – and what a privilege it has been to help steer this wonderful choir.

In June 2022, I was reporting on our journey through Covid, and our anxiety for the future. How to begin rehearsals as safely as possible? How to manage concerts when an outbreak could result in last minute cancellations? And how would our finances cope with fixed costs and unknown subscription numbers and ticket sales? But our resilience shone through and we managed to perform every concert to the delight of our audiences.

In October 2023, the Committee undertook a comprehensive update of paperwork, chiefly the Constitution and also the Members Handbook, largely due to Malcolm's dogged determination. In addition, four years of claims for Gift Aid were submitted to HMRC by Kathy, a huge undertaking which considerably helped our finances.

In October 24, I reported on our successful collaboration with the RNLI in the joint celebration of the Choir's 50th anniversary together with the 200th anniversary of the RNLI and their 'Sing to save lives' campaign. A fabulous souvenir programme was created as a memory of this remarkable concert. Following on from this success, I was honoured to be asked by the music charity *Making Music* to write a blog for their website, plus an article for their magazine, in celebration of our work with another charity – a great way to promote our choir to a wider audience!

And finally, this last season has been nothing short of spectacular. We've travelled through some of the greatest works in the choral repertoire: Handel's Saul, Handel's Messiah, Dvořák's Stabat Mater, and, to bring it all to a mighty close, Mendelssohn's Elijah.

Our annual Messiah was, as ever, a highlight – a true Wetherby tradition. Once again it sold out, and once again the local community told us that, for them, Christmas doesn't really begin until they've sat in our audience and heard those opening notes. Long may that tradition continue!

But the crowning moment of the year - indeed of many years - was Elijah at Ripon Cathedral, performed jointly with our friends at Ripon Choral Society. 'Epic' was how many of our members described it, and I couldn't agree more. 250 singers, a large orchestra, and that stunning cathedral setting – it was music-making on the grandest scale. It was also an emotional evening, marking the retirement of our Music Director, John Dunford, after an extraordinary 32 years of leadership. It's hard to overstate what John has meant to this choir. He has shaped our sound, challenged us, inspired us, and guided us through countless masterpieces. We gave him the send-off he deserved. Not only that unforgettable performance of Elijah, but also a wonderful farewell dinner at Wetherby Golf Club where he was presented with thoughtful gifts, including a delightful oil painting capturing him mid-rehearsal – a fitting tribute to a man who has devoted so much to live music-making in Wetherby.

One of the things that always strikes me is how Wetherby Choral Society consistently punches above its weight. Many choirs of our size content themselves with more modest programmes. Not us. We field orchestras and soloists, tackle the big works, and put on four concerts a year. That's no small feat, and it's something for which we should all be hugely proud. Your efforts in fundraising have always been magnificent, and not only has this

Wetherby Choral Society AGM 13 October 2025

Chairman's Report

provided much needed extra cash to fund our concerts, but it has brought us together as friends.

Sadly, our member Julia Cockram, and a former member Arthur Faulkner, passed away this year. They are much missed and their families are in our thoughts.

So, in my final year as Chairman I want to give a heartfelt thank you to each member of our Committee. It's been a joy working with you – though I suspect you've kept me on the straight and narrow more times than I realise. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge how marvellous Malcolm has been in keeping everyone informed and on task, and also to praise Kathy Hart for her meticulous handling of our accounts. I'm also grateful to Chris for coordinating fundraising, Christopher for handling membership, Kate for her multi-talents coordinating with St James Church, organising refreshments, and writing newsletters for the Friends group, Kathy Brownridge for organising soloist hospitality, Sarah for promoting publicity, and Liane for being that oh so useful extra pair of hands. And my thanks of course, to every single member of the choir. Your commitment, energy, and enthusiasm are what make this Society so special. Without these we could not have jointly undertaken successfully such a rigorous and inclusive process in appointing our new Music Director, Charlie Murray. I feel confident that Charlie will do an outstanding job for us. His coaching skills, his competence and temperament have already impressed choir members during rehearsals. Also, our delightful accompanist, William, has captivated members over the last year, and his shared friendship with Charlie means we are blessed with a wonderful musical team!

Naturally, there are many people outside of the Committee who I would like to thank on your behalf. Until I was on the Committee I had absolutely no idea how many things needed doing to run a choir well! Many thanks to Gill Midgley (ticket sales), Tony Gooch (rehearsal seating and staging), Pam Leaf (archivist), Enid Doyle (banners/posters around Wetherby), Julie & David Spoors (organising music hire), Hilary Marsden (concert programmes), Fiona Hogan (publicising concerts in parish/church magazines), Charlotte Meek (Soloists wine) and Lois Page (Facebook), and Chris Bishop (whose many roles include assisting with our website, tickets, flyers and programme printing and the thankless task of being our concert manager!). Thanks too to our helpers with fundraising - Greg Warren (100 Club), Pam Leaf (making CDs for use as rehearsal aids), Bren Walter (raffle) and special events coordinators including Hilary & Stephen Clarke, Graham Reed, Jackie Faulkner, Anne Sweet, Jean Basson and Lynne Shaw. And finally I'd like to give special thanks to my husband Wayne who is my rock and my sounding board. Frequently ousted from his own home for committee meetings, always willing to do jobs for the choir, and always supportive of all our concerts. You are a star!

It has been an honour and, genuinely, a real pleasure to serve as your Chairman. I'm stepping down with a full heart, grateful for the music we've made together and excited to see where the next chapter takes us. I'm sure Chris Outram will do a fantastic job, and that you will all give her your full support.

Wetherby Choral Society is in safe hands, and with the same spirit, ambition, and sense of fun, I know the future will be every bit as bright – and every bit as joyful – as the past.

Thank you,

Wetherby Choral Society AGM 13 October 2025

Chairman's Report

Heather