

St Albans Cathedral Ex-Choristers Association

THE CATHEDRAL AND ABBEY CHURCH OF ST. ALBAN

Affiliated to the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations

Minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting

Held at 13:00 on Sunday 12th October in the Chapter Room in Cathedral House.

Attendance in St Albans

Paolo Baroni, Malcolm Bury, Nick Coleman, Moira Dean, Will Fox (Director of Music), David Ireson, Peter Jeffs, Very Rev'd Jo Kelley-Moore (Dean of St Albans), Richard Lilley (Chair), Tony Price, Barry Rose, Ian Woods.

Attendance via Teleconferencing

Mike Hurford, Simon Trott (minutes).

Welcome and Reflection

The meeting was chaired by Richard Lilley. The Dean welcomed us and thanked the Association for our ongoing support of the music in the Cathedral. She was pleased to be able to introduce us to Will Fox the cathedral's Director of Music, the first incumbent to hold this title.

In her opening prayer we were bidden to give thanks for the gift of music which has drawn people into this place, and inspired and enriched the lives of many.

Apologies

have been received from:

Stephen Darlington, James Davy, Jeremy Meager, Andrew Parnell, Mat Taylor.

Minutes of Annual General Meeting 2024

The file location of the 2024 minutes had been published with everyone's invitation to the AGM. RL asked those present if there were considered to be inaccuracies or omissions. No comments were forthcoming, so were adopted as a true record of that meeting.

Chairman's Report 2025

Welcome back to St. Albans, whether you're here in person or have joined on-line. We last met on 15th June, last year for our AGM and to bid farewell to Andrew Lucas who had been the Master of Music at the Cathedral for 26 years. It was a wonderful experience, once more, to join fellow ex-choristers and members of our ECA singing Choral Evensong, no doubt bringing back memories for many, of good times spent in this place over previous decades.

Andrew was a strong supporter of the ECA and in the development of the choristers. He had mentored numerous organ scholars over the years and held the highest of standards, he left big shoes to fill. The Dean and Chapter had a challenge on their hands to find a suitable replacement and conducted a thorough and robust selection process.

The outcome of which was the appointment of Will Fox who we welcomed to the Cathedral just over a year ago. I am delighted that he has accepted our offer to become a Vice President of our association and look forward, now that he has had time to settle in, to working more closely with him establishing stronger links with the Music Department.

I must congratulate the Dean and Chapter on their selection and appointment of Will. I have had the pleasure, not only of witnessing his professionalism and achievements while attending services in the Cathedral but also as a member of the St. Albans Bach Choir, rehearsing each Monday evening and having sung three concerts and carol concerts during his first year. I have no doubt he filled those 'big shoes' and wears them comfortably making them his own, achieving positive changes to Cathedral music life for the benefit of all.

There were further big changes since we last met within the music department as Tom Winpenny, the Assistant Master of Music and Director of the Girls Choir stepped down after 16 wonderful years. Tom has made his mark, accompanying daily services,

nurturing the girls' choir and championing the organ in performances of new and old works, around the world.

And after a very successful two years at St Albans as Organ Scholar, Oliver Morrell has been appointed Sub-Organist of Winchester Cathedral, starting last September. We wish all three of 'the old guard' well in their future endeavours.

The Music department has since been boosted by the appointments of Dewi Rees (Assistant Director of Music) and Conor McGlone (Organ Scholar). Dewi is already a member of the ECA as he was a previous Organ Scholar here.

Sadly, since we last met, a number of our members have passed away. Several of us joined friends and peers at the funeral services of John Adams, Richard Hurford and Dr Simon Lindley. Tributes can be found in our Spring edition of Alban Notes, published earlier this year.

At the end of the summer term of 2024, we were joined by the following former choristers who were valedicted; Selma Klemming, Ethan Roberts, Harry Stewart, and Romilly Veal. Valedictions at the end of the summer term this year swelled our numbers with the following joining our membership; Leo Gardner, Alby Farrar-Hockley, James Stewart, Nova Balasuriya, Amelia Crook, Beau Kemp, Eva Powell, Lucille Taylor-Neale, Elise Keen and Isabelle Nnaji. We welcome them all and

hope to see them at future ECA events and learn of how their lives and careers flourish. We continue to provide a yearbook, greeting card and FCOCA membership card to all valedicted choristers.

Retired lay-clerks Simon Barton and Derek Harrison have also recently become full members of the ECA.

Notably there have been fewer ECA events recently than in previous years and just the one Alban Notes publication. Your committee intend to publish a new edition in the coming weeks and welcome news and information you, the members would like to share. I would like to keep the tradition of receiving termly updates from the Music department to share with you, so we can keep abreast of developments and events within the Cathedral choirs.

At our last AGM I was delighted that Nick Coleman, our 1970s committee rep was elected as Vice Chairman. His appointment to this position has certainly 'eased the springs' behind the scenes, resulting in many conversations and sharing of ideas and information ensuring the association remains in a strong place. As always, I remain grateful for the support and efforts of our committee including our Honorary Life Members. Their dedication and commitment to the ECA is unwavering. We'll speak in more detail shortly about the Yearbook, but this, Alban Notes and planning meetings such as the AGM don't happen overnight. There is much work conducted by a few committed members who willingly give up their time. Again, I'd like to give personal thanks, and thanks on behalf of the wider membership to the whole committee but in particular Tony Price and Simon Trott. They keep our ECA going year after year and often keep me in check. Having them on the committee benefits all of us and professionalises the association, ensuring news is shared with you all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd like to conclude my Chairmans report for this year with my thanks to those of you who have been able to join our AGM, to those of you who keep in regular contact, to the committee for your time and support and to our music department for their current and on-going support.

Treasurer's Report and Financial Statement

ST read JM's prepared statement to the meeting, summarised thus:

Opening balance at 15th June 2024 **£1,390.62**

Income:

• Donations at Andrew Lucas's farewell event	310.00
• Donation from MB for book sales	90.00
• Overpayment to RL for refreshments purchases (15/6)	65.00
• SumUp credit on 2/4/25	32.00
	£497.00

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Expenditure:

• ECA expenses (for Andrew Lucas's farewell event)	175.70
• Web hosting for 2024 (to TP)	52.00
• Web hosting for 2025 (to TP)	52.00
	£279.70

Closing balance at 9 October 2025 **£1,607.92**

The new SumUp facility has already made a difference to our income as it allows ECA Members, friends and visitors to use our website to make donations on line.

An invoice is expected from the FCOCA for our annual subscription, estimated £20 - £25.

No comments were received from the meeting, so the statement was thereby accepted.

Election of Committee Members

RL stated that all the existing committee members have indicated they are willing to stand for re-election. No other nominations have been received. RL therefore proposed that all the existing committee be re-elected for another year. All present accepted this with a show of hands, with no objections, the proposal was carried.

The committee therefore remains as follows:

Richard Lilley	Chairman
Nick Coleman	Vice-Chair, and 1970s representative
Jeremy Meager	Honorary Treasurer
Simon Trott	Honorary Secretary
Tony Price	IT and Communications Manager
Trevor Jarvis	Representative for the Cathedral Choir 1950s
Nic Gibbon	Representative for the Cathedral Choir 1960s
Paolo Baroni	Representative for the Cathedral Choir 1990s
Helen Charlston	Representative for the Cathedral Girls Choir
Laura Johnston (nee Hicks)	Rep' for the Cathedral Girls Choir
Nina Vinther	Representative for the Cathedral Girls Choir

In response to WF's question, RL stated that the committee meets 3 – 4 times a year on average, using online facilities to decide on meeting dates, and for teleconferencing actual meetings.

Cathedral Girls' Choir 30th Anniversary Celebrations

ST read a prepared statement on this subject:

The ECA committee is aware that 2026 marks 30 years since the inauguration of the cathedral girls' choir. Malcolm reported at our recent meeting that from his archive of Herts Ad' cuttings this event did not occur overnight. On 19 June 1995 it is reported that initial invitations went out to the public for singers to come forward for audition. On 9 January 1996 auditions took place for their first rehearsal, and only on 9th June 1996 was the first cohort of choristers admitted to the Cathedral Choir, sharing the first service that day.

At that meeting, the committee agreed that this is an important anniversary, and we are beginning to plan an appropriate event. As ECA secretary I am proposing that we form a special working group tasked with the planning, and would like to suggest that our membership is consulted in the near future to generate interest in this, and seeking assistance in the planning and maybe inviting girls' recollections of their service in the choir's early years.

Moir also reported at our meeting that the Cathedral Music Trust celebrates its own 30th anniversary, and that planning is already under way for a formal event in March next year to mark this milestone. The possibility of a joint event with the ECA is under consideration.

The Dean emphasised that there is no longer any gender distinction, whereby the girls are now members of The Cathedral Choir in the same sense as the boys and lay clerks. RL commented that the committee has 3 female ex-choristers, and the intention is to reach out to all female ex-choristers to generate wide interest in such an event.

WF responded that it is very likely that a special service or even a concert will be arranged with the cathedral choir, which presents the ECA with an option of some form of reunion. It is to be hoped that other ideas will be stimulated by the ECA's publicity, so this should be considered to be 'the moment' when consultations are started.

Discussions prompted BR to recall that he was present on the day of the first rehearsal. The girls were invited to "sing something" to start the rehearsal, and no doubt a little bemused, responded with "Happy Birthday" (priceless!). BR strongly recommended that our planning should involve Andrew Parnell, and ST was pleased to be able to advise that Andrew has already confirmed that he wishes to be involved.

MB stated that he has some photographic material from the time.

ECA Archive

RL reported that PB is currently tasked with coordinating efforts to make our archive material more accessible. The Dean stressed that finding appropriate space on cathedral premises for this material is a considerable challenge, and advised us to take the approach of cataloguing and progressively digitising our material whilst we consider how it could be made more available online. This would seem to make its physical location less problematic.

ECA YEARBOOK

RL stated that we intend to publish the next issue of the Yearbook quite soon. This has been given extra impetus by the St Albans Cathedral Music Trust who are planning for their own 30th Anniversary. The Trust is keen to strengthen links with the ECA, and have intimated the possibility of assisting with the costs of publication of the next yearbook if we are able to be ready for distribution at their celebration concert on 12th March at Hatfield House. So, it's skates on for gathering updates to members' profiles via the next Alban Notes due out very shortly, and a significant editing job for TP!

FCOCA

RL reported that the FCOCA (Federation of Former Choristers' Associations) in its present form has been in danger of folding due to declining numbers of affiliated associations, and the imminent retirement of its long-standing chairman and secretary. However, at their recent AGM and festival held in Lincoln, a rescue package was announced whereby the leadership of the Peterborough Association would take over the management of the FCOCA 'lock stock and barrel'. The three 'managing' officers at Peterborough will become the chair, secretary and treasurer of the new rebranded association. An ambitious business plan has been put in place involving a full program of events and online facilities, with the focus of membership shifting from cathedral associations to individual ex-chorister members.

Cathedral Choir News

We were very fortunate that both the Dean and the Director of Music were able to join our meeting. WF reflected how lucky we are in St Albans for the support and goodwill surrounding the development of music in the Cathedral. He reported that at the recent choir recruitment day, 10 schools had responded with 100 children attending. Of these 55 were invited to audition for 10 places. Singing teachers are employed for both girl and boy choristers. Timetabling changes are in train to balance their workloads over rehearsal and service attendances. An interesting discussion ensued about the desirability of achieving 'parity' of ages between boy and girl singers, other musical bodies based in the cathedral, and the choir's preparations for BBC work in the future.

The Dean reflected that the current 'model' for supporting music at St Albans is a flourishing one, and entails reaching out beyond the cathedral walls into schools and other social settings.

Other business

MB expressed concerns about **waning interest** in ECA activities from 'younger' generations, and from female members in particular, prompting an interesting discussion about a perceived loss of the 'special status' of cathedral choirs possibly due to the effect of current DEI issues, and potentially the desire by the cathedral to widen the 'special experience' of music making in this place. MD observed that there was a strong turnout of about 40 for the girls' choir's 20th anniversary. RL therefore hopes that the upcoming anniversary might be a catalyst for greater involvement.

BR gave an optimistic update on **Andrew Lucas's** progress at Winchester, and quoted the names of several of his contemporaries at St Albans who have gone on to important positions at the BBC and elsewhere, each of whom could provide interesting updates to our Yearbook.

NC speculated that there may be scope for ECA involvement with **IOF events** next year.

The meeting closed at 14:00. 6 ECA members were going on to join the cathedral choir later for evensong.