



# **LOWER WINDRUSH CHORAL SOCIETY**

## **TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT For the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023**

The Trustees are pleased to present their report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ending 31 August 2023. This report is to be presented at the Annual General Meeting to be held on Monday 11 December 2023.

## Section A: Reference and administration details

**Charity name:** Lower Windrush Choral Society

**Registered charity number:** 1152661

**Charity's principal address:** 5 Chalcroft Close  
Ducklington  
OX29 7TP

**Trustees who have managed the charity during the year:**

Trustee name	Office (if any)/Dates if not full year
Diana Gordon	Joint Chairman
Jane Chapman	Joint Chairman
Bellanne Lethbridge	Until 8 January 2023
Theresa Rees	Treasurer
Jonathan Harvey	
Jennifer Insch	Until AGM on 28 November 2022
Stewart Carlisle	Appointed at AGM 28 November 2022, resigned 22 February 2023
Terence McNamara	Music Director
Phillip Morton	
Susan Lakie	
Naomi Coombes	Appointed 4 October 2022

## Section B: Structure, governance and management

**Governing document:** Constitution of Lower Windrush Choral Society, March 2013

**How the charity is constituted:** As an Association

**Trustee selection method:** Election by members at the Annual General Meeting. The Trustees have the power to co-opt additional Trustees to serve until the following AGM, and subject to the overall cap on Trustee numbers.

## Section C: Objectives and activities

**Objects of the Society set out in its constitution:**

The charity's objects are:

- (1) to advance, improve, develop and maintain public education in, and appreciation of, the art and science of music in all its aspects by any means the trustees see fit, including through the presentation of public concerts and recitals;
- (2) to further such charitable purpose or purposes as the trustees in their absolute discretion shall think fit but in particular through the making of grants and donations.

**Main activities undertaken for the public benefit in relation to these objects:**

Our main activity is the performance and promotion of choral music. In planning the Society's activities, the Trustees have complied with the duty under section 4 of the 2006 Charities Act to have due regard to guidance on public benefit published by the Charity Commission. In 2020/2021, the Society's Officers undertook a comprehensive review to ensure that the subscription charges and music provision were affordable to all, including those of modest means. Their recommendations for concessionary rates were adopted by the Trustees in September 2021 and now form part of the current arrangements for membership.

## Section D: Achievements and performance

### Concerts and performances

The year 2022-23 saw the Society returning at last to “normality”, following all the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our performances during the year were:

**26 November 2022** – Mendelssohn’s wonderfully tuneful oratorio *Elijah* in Witney Methodist Church. With four excellent soloists, who were much appreciated by audience and choir alike, this was a memorable event, attended by about 160. The Committee had been concerned still at the willingness of our supporters to come to large gatherings and opted to make this a “donations” concert, i.e. not ticketed. In the event, our budgeted deficit on the concert was about £700 less than expected. So, all in all, a very satisfactory result both financially and musically.

**10 June 2023** – **Brahms’ *German Requiem***, again in Witney Methodist Church. As in 2016, when the choir last sang this glorious work, we performed the two-piano version, and the Trustees were very grateful to the Music Director for the use of his own grand piano as one of the two instruments. This was a ticketed event, our first for five years (!), and we attracted about 140 to hear us, resulting in a deficit of c. £700 on the event – again a better result than budgeted. Before the event, we were fortunate to be able to have two rehearsals in the performance venue, which helped members adjust to their concert positions and to the acoustic of the church. The Committee has noted that continued awareness of singers’ sightlines is important, although, as the Music Director himself has observed, members should also take some responsibility themselves for this. (There is no point in suffering in silence!) There was also one rehearsal devoted to a session led by Quentin Hayes, our ‘usual’ baritone soloist, to help the choir prepare for this concert. The Music Director reported that the choir had been much more assiduous than usual in watching his conducting during this concert, which is very encouraging, and we hope this will prove to be a permanent shift in behaviour. A slightly nerdish fact about this concert was that it was the first LWCS concert to have a QR code on its poster to access the online ticket outlet. Whether anyone used it is unknown as online sales have still not taken off!

**2 July 2023** – ***Choral Evensong and Concert Spirituel*** performed by the Lower Windrush Chamber Choir in St Giles’ Church, Standlake. Despite pessimistic predictions by those with local village connections, a more than respectable congregation/audience turned out for this evening service and performance, which was followed by a drink at the bar. From the donations received and the bar proceeds, the Society was able to cover the concert costs and make a contribution to church funds.

### Management matters

**Membership.** Numbers in the main choir have been between 53 and 54 during the year. The bass section has benefited particularly from our new arrivals, such that the numbers of altos and basses are now comparable. Although it is perhaps invidious to single out any particular change in membership, the Trustees did mark the departure of Gill Salway (tenor) after the December concert. Gill was been a founder member of the Society and, at one time, Chairman. On leaving the Society, she was presented with a lifetime free pass to LWCS concerts for herself and a guest, and we hope to see her frequently at our events in the future.

Seventeen people joined the Chamber Choir for the year.

**Rehearsal venues.** Witney Congregational Church has continued to be a convenient and obliging venue for the choir. With the still-present threat of infection, we continue to provide some ventilation to the room, which may become more of a challenge to our tolerance as the winter progresses. A new more curved rehearsal layout has been introduced and this has improved members’ ability to hear other voice-parts. During the year, the Chamber Choir’s rehearsal venue of Cokethorpe School ceased to be available, and they moved to The Music Room in Eynsham. This venue continues to be used by the group in the 2023-24 season.

**Other rehearsal arrangements.** Having previously reduced the length of rehearsals by half an hour to 1hr 30mins, at the urgings of members who were keen to get home earlier (particularly in winter evenings), the Trustees decided (this time at the urging of the Music Director) to increase it again, by 15 minutes, but it was agreed to start at 7.45 pm rather than 8.00. For the benefit of those who find it difficult to arrive by 7.45 because of work commitments, the MD now endeavours not to introduce new material in the first 15 mins. Although the choir does not usually have a separate accompanist, in the lead-up to the Brahms concert in June, we were accompanied at several rehearsals by Sally Rumsey in order to allow the MD to concentrate

on conducting and to be more visible. There is some provision in budgets for the use of an accompanist, when useful and when a suitable one is available, but the Trustees believe there is more benefit to having one in the later stages of concert preparation.

**Funding of concerts.** In their report last year, the Trustees warned that it was becoming increasingly difficult to see how the Society would fund the more expensive concerts, once our current concert reserves were exhausted. The fees paid to professional musicians have increased markedly in recent years, but our ability to sell tickets at premium prices has not. Employing an orchestra is expensive because of the number of professionals involved.

During the year, the Trustees consulted members in a two-stage survey. The first part sought views (leaving aside matters of cost) on how important it was to members to have the opportunity to sing with high-quality professional soloists and/or a professional orchestra (as opposed to just a piano or organ). From this, it appeared that having professional soloists was particularly valued. The second stage of the survey then set out the financial background and explained that putting on expensive concerts would require additional income – either in the form of increased subs, substantial fund-raising efforts by members, or identified and substantial forms of external funding such as sponsorship or grants. From this it appeared that our members had very little appetite for these measures, and were content to employ professional orchestras only occasionally for special events. On this basis, our reserve is likely to sustain the Society for several years. Recognising that selling tickets for concerts is something of a chore for members, we expect to continue having some concerts as “donations” events, but to continue with some ticketed concerts so that the expectation of paying to listen to us is not completely lost.

Although some members have enquired about the possibility of collaborating with a local amateur orchestra, the Trustees have been mindful of the Music Director’s concerns about the limited rehearsal time available with such groups and the need to have players who can adapt quickly to his instructions.

**Choir guidelines.** During the year, the Trustees agreed and issued new guidelines - both for prospective and existing members. Those for new members outline what we normally expect of entrants to the choir in terms of their musical abilities and experience, and they provide greater transparency about the necessary pre-requisites without which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to contribute positively to the choir, and to feel comfortable within it. We continue to be a non-auditioning choir, however.

In a similar vein, the revised guidelines for current members attempt to set out realistic expectations for what is needed to be a useful team member. The document points out the collaborative nature of choral singing, and encourages openness about problems – musical and otherwise.

**Publicity.** Having been elected in October 2022 to the Board of Trustees, Naomi Coombes took over as Publicity Officer when Jenny Insch stepped down at last year’s AGM. She has been very busy on our behalf during the year expanding the Society’s social media presence. The old Facebook page has been closed and a new one opened. Frequent new posts now appear on both Facebook and Instagram to keep us in the minds of our followers. As more of them share our content, we increase the reach of our messages. There is little doubt that social media has become an important way for us to spread the word about what we offer, and its importance will only increase.

**Governance and risk management procedures.** In February, the Trustees approved new governance and risk management procedures for the Society. Whilst these are not legally required, we recognise it to be good practice that we place on record the ways in which the Society mitigates against its risk of failing to fulfil its stated Objects and the financial controls that it operates to ensure the effective and secure use of the Society’s funds for their intended purpose.

**Trustees.** As already mentioned, Jenny Insch stepped down as a Trustee at the AGM in November 2022, having served since 2015 as Publicity Officer. In addition Bellanne Lethbridge decided to resign from the Board in January 2023; she had held the office of Secretary from 2017 to 2021. Stewart Carlisle, having been elected in November, resigned in February. So, for much of the year, the Board has been continuing with eight members, compared to its maximum size constitutionally of eleven. Whilst interest from members in joining the Board of Trustees is always welcome, this is particularly so when it is under full strength, but in any case organisations need new blood. The Society will not run itself, and we encourage members to consider what they could, and perhaps should, offer.

The Trustees now usually hold their meetings on Zoom, in order to eliminate travel time and costs, and avoid driving on dark cold evenings!

**Section Leaders and other roles.** After the November concert, we had two new Section Leaders: Melinda Taylor took over the Alto role from Margaret Williams, and Lucy Elphinstone took over from departing Gill Salway to look after the Tenors. Later in the year, Sue Lakie took over from Bellanne Lethbridge as Soprano Section Leader. Jack Gordon continues as Bass Section Leader.

The Trustees wish to record their gratitude to all Section Leaders, current and recently "retired", for their support during the year in keeping in contact with their group, and communicating any concerns and issues to the Board. It's an important role. Similarly, many thanks to Jenny Macdonald, who performs the role as Chamber Choir Coordinator and to Jack Gordon, as Music Secretary. We are also most grateful to Chris Sawyers for stepping in to administer the issuing of tickets for the June concert, and to Richard Osman for printing them.

### **Other achievements and activities**

**Carol-singing.** The choir was invited by Witney Rotary Club to sing carols in the Market Square in December 2022 to help raise funds for their charities, and a cheery group of members turned out on a very cold Saturday morning for this event. The Rotary's bucket-shakers raised over £1000, some of which we can perhaps take some credit for! It was in any case a sociable and enjoyable event.

**Social events.** After a very congenial summer party in early September 2022, held at the house/garden of Jane & Robert Chapman in Bampton, we were also able to once again hold a Christmas/New Year party. However, in view of the increased member numbers and the disinclination still of many people to gather in very confined places indoors, it was thought prudent to split it into two, with members offered a choice of date. Jenny Macdonald kindly offered her house for the first one on 7 January, and the second followed on 21 January at the house of Diana & Jack Gordon. The Trustees are very grateful to all party hosts. Despite these having been bring-and-share supper parties, which greatly eases the catering burden, we recognise that it is still a non-trivial commitment.

Jenny Macdonald is clearly a glutton for punishment, however, as she very generously also hosted a summer party, open to all members, after the Chamber Choir concert on 2 July, and even organised the supper. The final social event of the choir-year was a summer picnic party, again at the Gordons, on 19 August.

No Society funds have been used to pay for the food or drink provided at these parties. Where appropriate, members were asked to make cash donations to cover what they had consumed and these donations were sufficiently generous in covering the actual costs that a credit balance remains to be carried forward; this is available to contribute towards future party expenses.

There have also been several choir 'socials' after rehearsals during the year, at which we break a little early from singing and have a chance for a drink and a chat. These are valuable opportunities to get to know new choir-members, and those you don't sit anywhere near in rehearsals. These are alcohol-free occasions out of respect for the wishes of our host rehearsal venue.

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Last, but by no means least, we again wish to place on record our heartfelt thanks to Terry McNamara, our Music Director. We are indebted to him for guiding us musically through another varied and successful year with his customary skill and humour.

We are also extremely grateful to our band of helpers, many of them old members or drawn from the families of existing members, who assist on concert days with a range of tasks – manning the doors, selling programmes, serving refreshments.

## Section E: Financial review

### LOWER WINDRUSH CHORAL SOCIETY

#### RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS ACCOUNTS

**FOR THE YEAR 1 SEPTEMBER 2022 TO 31 AUGUST 2023**

#### Section A Receipts and payments

	2022-2023		2021-2022	
	Unrestricted		Unrestricted	
	£	£	£	£
	Payments	Receipts	Payments	Receipts
<b>Receipts</b>				
Members' subscriptions		8,508		8,194
Donations received - non-concert		63		166
Gift Aid reclaimed		1,638		1,210
Easyfundraising, GiveAsYou Live and Amazon Smile income		101		83
<i>Concerts: (note 1)</i>				
Concert - donations & sponsorship to Society		1,547		2,078
Concert - tickets and programmes sold		1,882		-
Concert - gift aid reclaimed on donations		351		496
Concert - net refreshments		31		(28)
<b>Payments</b>				
<i>Rehearsals:</i>				
Professional fees & expenses	5,310		4,540	
Rehearsal venue hire	935		970	
Music - (net receipt)/ cost after members' payments (note 2)	(37)		62	
<i>Concerts:</i>				
MD, soloists & instrumentalists - fees, expenses, gifts, scores	3,790		2,030	
Equipment hire	740		720	
Venue costs	276		190	
Programme costs	163		110	
Performing Rights Society fees (note 3)	79		-	
Publicity	100		74	
Cancellation insurance	53		96	
Donation to Church	70		-	
<i>Other expenses:</i>				
Administrative expenses	263		57	
Website fees	179		179	
Making Music subscription (note 4)	140		98	
Insurance (excl cancellation cover for concerts)	46		47	
Donations	100		100	
Social expenses (note 5)	(94)		140	
<b>Total Receipts</b>		<b>14,121</b>		<b>12,199</b>
<b>Total Payments</b>	<b>12,113</b>		<b>9,413</b>	
<b>SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR</b>		<b>2,008</b>		<b>2,786</b>

**Notes:**

1. Elijah performed by the main choir in November followed the previous year's pattern of asking for donations, as did the Chamber concert in July. For the Brahms concert in June tickets were sold.
2. Music is purchased at the best rates available sometimes from several sources, and sold to members at an average cost. Extra copies are purchased for the library. The timing of the purchases does not always line up with the year of performance.
3. The PRS charge relates to concerts in the previous year.
4. The Making Music subscription is based on choir turnover for the preceding year.
5. Social expenses this year includes a credit of £130 to be carried forward. This represents the amount contributed by members towards social events that was in excess of the actual costs of those events.

#### Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

	£	
Net reserves at beginning of year	11,604	8,818
Result for year	2,008	2,786
<b>Net reserves as at 31 August 2023 / (2022)</b>	<b>13,612</b>	<b>11,604</b>
<b>REPRESENTED BY:</b>		
Barclays Bank account	13,612	11,604
<b>AVAILABLE ASSETS</b>	<b>13,612</b>	<b>11,604</b>

### Commentary on financial statement

When subscriptions were reviewed in the summer of 2021, prior to the re-start of normal rehearsals after Covid, the Trustees used a conservative estimate of the number of members. As it turned out, not only were old members keen to return, but many new members were attracted, so numbers held up well in 2021-22, and have continued to do so in 2022-23. This has resulted in healthy surpluses in the last two financial years and therefore there has been no increase in the subscription rate for 2023-24, despite some expected increases in our costs.

Whilst the accumulated reserves may seem large, these can be, and almost certainly will be, chipped away at by successive deficits on concerts in coming years, particularly when we decide to do a larger concert involving an orchestra.

The Trustees are very grateful to all individuals who have made donations to the Society during the year.

### Reserves

The unrestricted reserve comprises the main choir fund and the separate fund designated by the Trustees for the chamber choir. They believe that it is appropriate to maintain the distinction between the two to assist in planning for any future chamber choir activities.

	Main choir	Chamber choir	Total unrestricted funds
Balance 1 September 2022	10,926	678	11,604
Net concerts	(1,585)	125	(1,460)
Net non-concert	3,471	(3)	3,468
Balance 31 August 2023	12,812	800	13,612

All reserves are held in the bank account.

### Reserves policy

The policy of the Trustees is to maintain such a level of reserves as will ensure the long-term viability of the Society and enable it to continue to fulfil its objects for the foreseeable future. Over recent years, reserves have been successfully built up to cover approximately six months of non-concert related expenditure together with a significant contribution towards the costs of the next major event. This approach is felt by the Trustees to fulfil their stated policy.

### Accountant's report



I have reviewed the Receipts and Payments Accounts set out on page 6 and can confirm that they are in accordance with the books and records presented to me.

M J Alexander FCA  
The Crofts  
Witney OX28 4AD

## Section F: Declaration

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' report above.

### Signed on behalf of the charity's Trustees:

Signatures		
Name	Jane Chapman	Diana Gordon
Position	Co-Chairman	Co-Chairman
Date	20 November 2023	