

Brockham Choral Society

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held 2 September 2025

Chairperson: Jane Stride

Present: 29

1. Apologies for Absence: Fred Adilz, Sue Adilz, Jess Donnison, Victoria Harding-Rolls, David John, Jan John, Sandy Luff, Mary New, Robin Potter, Mick Rance, Eiluned Slot, Mary Suckling, Anne Washtell, Mary White, Ray White, Gerri Wild, Sylvia Williams.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held 3 September 2024. The adoption of the Minutes was proposed by Christine Thomas, seconded by Moira Sinden, and agreed unanimously, and the Minutes were signed as correct.

3. Matters Arising There were none.

4. Chairperson's Report Jane reviewed the main events of the year, including the social events and the recruitment (ultimately unsuccessful) of a new MD. She also thanked all those who had contributed to the successful running of the choir and its concerts and other events, and expressed her hope for a choir Tour in the future. The full report is attached to these minutes.

5. Annual Financial Report and Accounts Graham Carter reminded members that this was his first year as Treasurer, and he wanted to thank Mick Rance for his training and guidance and his significant contributions to the preparation of the Accounts, and also to Ed Criswick and to Nick Hands-Clarke for their contribution to the Report, and to David Sinden for his work as Examiner. There had been an overall loss for the year of £2,968, resulting in net assets of £15,862, which (with the staging) resulted in a carry forward of £21,392 – although the figure was a little less than last year due to Fred Harrison's bequest, Graham felt it had been a strong year for the choir financially and we were in a healthy position going forward. On subscriptions, last year the AGM had agreed to increase these and 52 members (reduced from 56 the previous year) had paid for the full year which the committee had confirmed as their policy position. On their own these had barely covered the cost of rehearsals, but including Gift Aid refunds meant these costs were covered. The committee were not proposing to increase subscriptions this year; the budget for the year was based on a minimum of 52 members, though we were aiming to have 56 – recruitment of new members was everyone's business. He expressed his gratitude to Victoria for her work on co-ordinating subscriptions. Friends subscriptions were important and welcome, bringing in £550; the committee had agreed to increase the subscription level from £25 to £30 for 2025/26, with continuing benefits, and it would be good if we could increase numbers (at present there were about 20 Friends). He expressed his thanks to Alison Everness for her work as Friends Secretary.

As Treasurer he had come to realise the importance of Fundraising for the choir, and with experience from other choirs he felt our efforts, led by Estelle, were exemplary. Last year had raised £2,535, of which £737 came from the Mole Valley Community Lottery; the Brian Unwin evening and the Quiz Evening were particularly successful, with the raffle alone raising £380 – thanks to Mary Suckling for organising that. He

expected to maintain a similar level of fundraising in the coming year to help offset the significant costs of concerts. The concerts during the year had incurred a deficit of £8,986 which was significantly higher than budgeted because of the decision to have an orchestra for the Spring concert performance of The Creation, instigated by member feedback and helped considerably by member donations and the legacy from Anne Tennent. However, the audience for the Elgar concert was fewer than expected which affected ticket income. He expressed his thanks to Maria for all her work as Ticket Secretary, and pointed out that tickets were sold by only 50% of members – he felt it was everybody's responsibility to sell tickets and that we needed to sell at least 200 for orchestral concerts (and for our December concert, with a brass accompaniment). Ticket prices were currently set at £20 for orchestral concerts and £15 for others – feedback was welcome on this, but a survey last year indicated that ticket prices were not a barrier to selling tickets. He also thanked Jenni Lee-Potter for her efforts on music hire; and referred to the need to have appropriate prices for refreshments at concerts. We would again apply for a grant from the Humphrey Richardson Taylor Charitable Trust. Finally, he invited questions on the Report and Accounts.

Questions

- Anne Mitchell asked whether the expenditure on music hire was for just choir music or whether it also included orchestral scores. Graham thought it was probably for both – he would check; Jenni pointed out that hire prices were increasing.
- Estelle Earnshaw said that in future we would be able to use proper charging for interval refreshments at St Martin's instead of asking for donations (although we had previously benefitted from generous donations for drinks).
- Neil Williams asked whether dropping the discount for pre-concert sales of tickets had affected sales. Jane felt it hadn't, and said that £20 was a very reasonable ticket price given that we have an orchestra of two dozen professional musicians, and suggested we needed to be prouder of our choir and in promoting it.

The adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts was proposed by Neil Williams, seconded by Tony Earnshaw and agreed unanimously.

Examiner Graham said that David was prepared to act again in this role next year. Estelle Earnshaw proposed David Sinden as Examiner, this was seconded by Anne Slack and agreed unanimously.

6. Musical Directors' Reports There were two reports, one covering the first two terms by Cole Bendall, and the second by David Swinson covering the Summer term. These were read out by Briony Bowen. Both reports covered the performances in these terms, and both expressed their gratitude to Marion Lea, our accompanist, as well as to Jane for her leadership. In addition, Cole emphasised the need for new people to join the committee. The reports are attached to these minutes. Jane reported that David had been very helpful in the aftermath of Dan Miller standing down from being our MD, and had agreed to be our MD for the next two terms, although he wouldn't be able to attend every rehearsal – the first one in September would be taken by Dale Chambers, who had previous associations with the choir. She hoped the choir would show their gratitude by focussing on the words and being happy. Anne Mitchell thought that David helped us raise our game by focussing on the text, and passed on

audience comments about the clarity of the text in the Summer concert. Briony said there was considerable feeling in the committee that the choir needed to show respect to MDs by not talking during rehearsals.

7. Election of Chairperson Briony took the Chair for this item. She said that Jane had agreed to stand again, and was therefore nominated by Briony, seconded by Jenni, and agreed unanimously.

8. Election of Committee Members Jane expressed special thanks to the two committee members who had decided to step down after giving many years of exceptional service – Reuben Suckling (who had however agreed to carry on as Concert Manager) and Estelle Earnshaw. A small presentation was made to both. Briony said the remaining committee members were prepared to stand again: Briony Bowen, Graham Carter, Nick Hands-Clarke, Jenni Lee-Potter and Christine Thomas. In addition there were two new nominations for the committee – Ed Criswick (nominated by Estelle and seconded by Anne Slack) and Alison Everness (nominated by Romey Criswick and seconded by Nick Hands-Clarke) There being no other nominations, the new and existing committee members were approved unanimously. Briony pointed out that members could attend committee meetings, and the committee could also co-opt additional members.

9. Any Other Business

a) Audio tracks Ed Criswick said it had been his intention for some time to put some audio tracks of the choir singing on our website; this had been delayed partly because of the lack of suitable recordings. During the recruitment exercise for a new MD, some of the candidates had mentioned that our website lacked this resource. Therefore Ed had pulled together various recordings, including those made at the recent Summer concert, and had put some audio tracks on the website. There was a selection from “Messiah” on the Home page, and other tracks available in the Choir Photos, Audio Tracks and Videos page, with a link to it from the Members area. He hoped to be able to add to these in the future. Jane thanked Ed for all he did for the website.

b) Future concert dates Neil Williams said it would be useful to have these dates available on the website, eg for booking holidays etc. Jane explained that dates had been a bit uncertain pending the appointment of a new MD, but that dates for this choir year were now fixed: 6 December, 28 March 2026 and 13 June 2026. Ed said that he would make sure the dates for concerts and other events for the year were put on the website. Briony pointed out that dates after this would need to be agreed with whoever was our MD then. Neil commented that we could try out Sunday concerts. He also said that his friends had very much enjoyed the picnic style informal concert.

c) Thanks Romey thanked Jane on behalf of the choir for her leadership and for managing to lead the choir with charm and efficiency.

10. Date of Next AGM Jane said that as some key people would be away at the beginning of September it was proposed that the first rehearsal would be on 1 September 2026, with the AGM on 8 September combined with a rehearsal. This was agreed, and the meeting was closed.

Brockham Choral Society - Chairperson's report

September 2024 – June 2025

The year began with the AGM on Tuesday, September 3rd, which was well attended. Mick Rance gave his last report as Treasurer and he was thanked for his hard work for the committee. He and Ed Criswick were both standing down from their committee roles and thanks were expressed to both for their commitment to the running of the choir. Jenni Lee- Potter was nominated to the committee and duly elected and I was re-elected as Chairperson. All other members of the committee were happy to stand again.

The autumn term began on Tuesday, September 10th, when we started rehearsing for our Elgar concert, scheduled for December 7th 2024. The programme consisted of two choral songs ('As Torrents in Summer' and 'Serenade'), The Enigma Variations and The Music Makers, with the Southern Pro Musica, soloist Judy Louie Brown, mezzo soprano and conducted by Cole Bendall. There was very positive audience feedback, and the choir really enjoyed working to give a very skilled performance of this challenging work. Earlier in the term, on September 21st, we held a successful Elgar workshop day, attended by members of other choirs and some of these were able to sing with us in the concert.

The concert for the spring term was 'The Creation' by Haydn. Originally we were intending to perform this with a piano arrangement – mainly due to financial considerations, but for a variety of reasons, it was decided that an orchestra would be in the best interests of the performance. Cole had researched the possibility of securing The British Sinfonietta. The extra cost incurred by having another orchestral concert was an issue, but members of the choir contributed generously to help with finance and a legacy we received in February from a former member, Anne Tennant seemed to confirm our decision. Money also came from various social fund-raising events. The concert was very successful and we had three truly wonderful soloists; Lorna Murray (soprano), David Walsh (tenor) and Ross Cumming (bass). Marion Lee was the pianist. It was conducted by Cole Bendall and this was, in fact, our last concert under his leadership.

At the end of 2024, Cole announced that he would be leaving us early in 2025, having secured a position with another choir in the area. This was clearly something of a surprise, but he was able to work with us until the end of spring term and secure the afore said excellent soloists and orchestra. We were sorry to see him go, as we had achieved a great deal under his direction, but we acknowledge the needs of his career. We thank him for his excellent musicianship and tuition during his five and a half years with us and wish him well.

At the beginning of 2025, therefore, we faced the task of advertising for a new Musical Director. It was decided to try to find a new director for September 2025. In addition, we needed to find a temporary conductor for the summer term. We were fortunate in being able to secure David Swinson to work with us from April 15th and to conduct us for our summer concert.

Under the Chairmanship of Ed Criswick, whose methodical and thorough approach made the work run very smoothly, we advertised for and interviewed a number of

candidates, two of whom were eventually auditioned on April 22nd. We appointed Dan Miller, who was a clear winner with the choir. However, although he had accepted the post and was looking forward to his time with us, we received the news in late July that he had been offered a prestigious post at Reading University and would now *not* be able to fulfil his contract with Brockham. This was a considerable blow, with only a month left before the new choir year. We are extremely grateful, once again, to David Swinson, who has very kindly agreed to be our MD, with a definite commitment till the end of the spring term.

The summer concert was held on June 7th at St Paul's Church. It was a very special event as it was arranged to celebrate one of our former members, Fred Harrison. Fred had been a prominent and long-standing singer in the bass section and had also left the choir a legacy. The concert consisted of music from shows- which Fred himself had sung in- opera choruses which reflected his love of opera and a second performance of Guy Turner's 'Travels with my Pigeon', which we performed first in 2010, when Fred had a key part. There was also a very special performance of a piece called 'The Bass', commissioned by the choir, with words by Tony Earnshaw and music by Ian Assersohn. David Swinson conducted the choir with great sensitivity and Marion was, as usual, a wonderful accompanist. There were also a couple of solo items, performed by Anne Mitchell and Graham Carter. It was nice that Fred's son, Chris, was able to attend the performance and we also welcomed Ian Assersohn and his wife. The picnic – style concert worked really well and there was a warm and celebratory atmosphere – the music was good too!

For the choir to work well and to put on successful workshops and concerts a huge amount of work is necessary. I must acknowledge the commitment of the committee and thank them for all they do. Thanks are due to Jenni for her sterling work as our librarian, Nick is tireless in helping with photo copying, Charity Commission matters and liaising with St Martin's. Reuben continues his excellent work as Concert Manager and is a constant source of advice and Chris has been amazing with her work on the Music Selection Committee and being the contact with St John's School. Estelle has done excellent work on producing concert programmes and organising social events, while Graham is invaluable as our Treasurer- a very onerous and demanding role. Briony is a highly efficient secretary and we are grateful to her for introducing the weekly email of choir notices- such a simple and effective idea, but one we hadn't thought of before!

Thanks are also due to others in the choir beyond the committee: to Anne Mitchell for looking after publicity, to her and Peter for their design work, to Mick Rance for his continued help with financial matters, to Alison Everness for looking after the Friends, to Tortie and Mary for their work as Membership Secretaries and to all the Voice Reps. We are also very grateful to Maria for all her efficient work with tickets and huge thanks are due to Ed for his work with the website and on concert programmes. We must also thank Phil Slack for his vital work on Grant applications. We are also indebted to all who put up the staging on concert days, help on the door and the bar, help with orchestra teas and with dismantling everything at the end of the evening. There really is a huge amount of work involved and without it the choir couldn't function as it does. It has been another busy year from a social point of view. In October we had the hugely successful 'Evening with Brian Unwin', organised very efficiently by Estelle and compèred by Tony, with delicious in-house canapés and wine. In February we had a Quiz evening at Rialto, with questions by Ed and me and a tasty buffet. At both events

we had a raffle, superbly organised by Mary Suckling and, in addition to having very happy social occasions, a considerable amount of money was raised to help choir funds. On June 10th, following our final concert of the year we had a very successful 'end of term' event- a walk on Holmwood Common and curry at the Red Chilli.

There were other things which happened during the year. We sang carols at Broome Park Nursing Home and at the Beaumont Home in Reigate. This was followed by a Christmas gathering at The Red Lion in Betchworth, ably organised by Estelle. The piano was tuned, we got a grant for £500 from the Elgar Society, we finally managed to get our publicity banners, designed by Estelle and funded very generously by Angela Haeems and , for the summer concert, we moved to a new ticketing system, after consultation with various people. Thanks to Tony for setting this up. We said goodbye to Sue Tanton at the end of the spring term as her house move finally happened. She was thanked for her commitment to and work for Brockham.

As we move into another year, we welcome David as our Musical Director, and we are very excited about working with him. We also look forward to having our wonderful Marion to help us as always at rehearsals- we thank her for all she does. The programmes for December and March are settled and it should be an exciting musical year ahead. Attracting new members, particularly younger ones, remains an ongoing concern. In addition to the Elgar Workshop in September, we did have two Open Rehearsals at the beginning of the spring term. I have to say that the response was somewhat disappointing. We can only keep trying. There is also the issue of some sort of tour, which , unfortunately, did not get off the ground last year. This is something to think about and to consider realistic possibilities for the future.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to everyone in the choir. It is indeed a very positive and welcoming, as well as talented group and I look forward to a wonderful year ahead.

Jane Stride

Musical Director's Report on Brockham Choral

September 2024 – April 2025

It is with a blend of gratitude and reflection that I present this report, sharing the musical endeavours and achievements of Brockham Choral Society during the 2024–2025 season up to April. This period has been marked by ambitious programming, collaborative excellence, and the unwavering dedication of our members.

1. Concert Performances

- **Elgar (7 December 2024):** Our winter concert at St Martin's Church in Dorking was a tribute to Sir Edward Elgar's choral and orchestral works. The program featured a selection of his part-songs, an arrangement of the Enigma Variations by George Morton, and the premiere of my own reduced orchestration of *The Music Makers*. The choir's meticulous preparation and emotive delivery, alongside Southern Pro Musica and mezzo-soprano Judy Louie Brown, culminated in a performance that resonated deeply with our audience. Our reviewer aptly noted, "This was choral singing at its best. There was not a note wrong and the audience was transfixed." Strengths in this concert included fully committed engagement with the text and intense dramatic music; I was also glad that we committed only to doing these works – as mentioned throughout the process, I'd always rather you perform works at your absolute best than stretch you to beyond tiredness.

My announcement of my departure came at the tail end of the Elgar rehearsal process. After some discussion, the agreement was made that I'd stay for the remaining Spring term.

- **Haydn's *The Creation* (5 April 2025):** Our spring concert showcased Haydn's *The Creation* at St Martin's Church, accompanied by the British Sinfonietta. This collaboration brought a rich orchestral texture to Haydn's masterpiece, allowing the choir to explore new depths of musical expression. The performance was met with enthusiasm, reflecting the choir's adaptability and commitment to artistic excellence. Particular thanks to those who helped provide additional funds to bring in the orchestra. Thanks also to Lorna Murray and David Walsh (who returned after working on 2022's Bach St Matthew Passion) and Ross Cumming in his first concert at Brockham. This was a playful and fun concert and a lovely event to go out on.

2. Acknowledgments and Reflections

As I conclude my 5½-year tenure with Brockham Choral, I am profoundly grateful for the journey we've undertaken together. The choir's evolution, marked by a willingness to embrace challenging repertoire and a commitment to musical growth, has been truly inspiring, especially given barriers of fundraising, covid and challenges to the choral eco-system. Brockham Choral continues to thrive because of its willingness to collaborate, its strength of programming and its commitment to vocal excellence which I strongly believe it should not abandon. I can't name all the highlights; the tour, away days, so many great rehearsals and concerts, but partnerships with Surrey Youth Choir, AAM, Reid Consort, Covent Garden Sinfonia, Southern Pro Musica, British Sinfonietta and some stellar soloists will live very much in my mind.

I extend my deepest thanks to our committee members past and present, led by Jane Stride as chairperson. Your tireless efforts behind the scenes have ensured the smooth

operation and progression of the choir **and I'd make an additional plea to anyone who has not served on committee – in the committee, you will find kind, caring and supportive people just working together to help the choir thrive. Just as your voice is needed in the choir, your voice is especially needed to maintain its future and your input is genuinely welcome – please consider joining.**

To Marion: Your exceptional musicianship and unwavering support have been integral to our rehearsals and performances; I'll miss working with you and hope you continue to find success with the choir. And to the choir, your dedication, trust and passion have been the cornerstone of our successes. The generosity displayed by members in supporting projects exemplifies the spirit of this ensemble. I am grateful.

While my departure precedes the upcoming summer concert, I have every confidence that Brockham Choral will continue to thrive and achieve new heights under future leadership. The foundation we've built together will undoubtedly support the choir's ongoing artistic journey. I hope we will find other opportunities to collaborate in the future; in the meantime, I'm wishing you all continued success and fulfilment in the seasons ahead.

Warm regards,

Cole Bendall

April to June 2025

It was with a mixture of excitement and trepidation that I arrived at my first rehearsal at the end of April. I was excited to renew my acquaintance with a choir I had directed for five years thirty years ago but I was mindful of the fact that it was a choir in mourning for the loss of a much-loved member, Fred Harrison. My task was to prepare a programme designed to celebrate the life of Fred, his exuberance, joy and talent.

We started with the only sacred piece, John Rutter's popular paeon to nature, 'For the beauty of the earth'. This is routine repertoire for British choirs and the perfect opportunity to present well blended and shaped unison phrases. The danger is that the journey of the narrative can be overlooked in the quest for beauty of tone; I hope we managed both. More challenging were the opera choruses that followed. Here we were singing in character, trying to convey a wide range of colour and dynamics. And we were singing in different languages! Rossini's 'Villagers' Chorus' from 'William Tell' charmingly evokes a pastoral scene of simple joy in community, whereas Verdi's 'Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves' from 'Nabucco' is a lamentation of lost identity. 'Cachucha' from Sullivan's 'The Gondoliers' is a raucous dance devoted to epicurean pleasures. Singing one after another, switching from matronly domesticity through emaciated desperation to exuberant youthfulness, demanded quick changes of mindset and character, and I believe these were cheerfully and enthusiastically embraced.

The first half concluded with a revision of Guy Turner's 'Travels with my pigeons', a previous commission for the choir. In the premiere, conducted by Andy Phillips, an important comedic role of narrator had been taken by Fred, and it fell to the courageous Tony Earnshaw to reimagine this, which he did with aplomb. Kudos also to Reuben Suckling for his fine accordion playing and mischievous donning of a French beret.

It was a real pleasure to perform in St Paul's Church, where we were made most welcome. The church was set up like a restaurant, with audience members sitting around tables with friends. The extended interval was designated as dinner time and much enjoyment was taken in good company, food and drink.

The second half began with the important commission from Ian Assersohn, dedicated to Fred, with text by Tony Earnshaw: 'The Bass'. I hope we did this justice. I expect it was an emotional experience for many as the lyrics and music conveyed so much about Fred's character. We were delighted that Ian, the composer, and Fred's son could be there to join us in remembering the much-cherished bass. I am sure that Fred would have been pleased that we then quickly shifted to music rather lighter and more frivolous in nature. Our songs from the shows included 'Sunrise, sunset' from 'Fiddler on the Roof', 'Some enchanted evening' from 'South Pacific' and a medley from 'Oklahoma'. A highlight was Anne and Graham's beautifully performed duet from 'Gigi', 'I remember it well'. An emotional evening was brought to a close with two deeply poignant songs: 'You'll never walk alone' from 'Carousel' and 'What a wonderful world'. Graham had the daunting task of singing the famous solo, one of Fred's favourites, and he did so with great skill and sincerity.

It was a genuine pleasure for me to witness the choral society in such good health. Numbers seem to be good with plenty of talent across all voice parts. I am particularly grateful to Jane, who leads with such charm and efficiency, for inviting me to look after this term and to Marion for being such a brilliant and supportive accompanist. It was lovely to see so many old faces and to meet so many new ones. I wish you all every success with your new conductor.

David Swinson