

Ashford Choral Society

Founded: 1857

Conductor: Matthew Raisbeck

Chairman Dominic Urand - Secretary : Virginia Brown

Newsletter: August 2022



Turbulent Times

After a very successful season post-pandemic there will be some changes this year. Our new Chairman, Dominic Urand, and the committee have worked very hard with Matthew to ensure that these are positive and lead the society in the right direction. However 2022 has proved quite turbulent in several unforeseen ways, which will mean major changes for the Society going forward.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN Rehearsal and performance spaces



Ashford School, our rehearsal venue for many years, will no longer be allowing external users access to their facilities due to changes in their Safeguarding Policy. This decision came completely out of the blue and despite strong representations we were unable to change their decision – although they did allow us to stay and finish rehearsals for the May concert, which was a small concession! This is a shame but does present us with the opportunity to move to a new venue that suits our needs well.

As members will be aware, the difficulties of finding a suitable rehearsal space around Ashford are considerable – many suitable facilities are already booked for Tuesday nights, or cost a great deal more than our rent for Ashford School.

Matthew was keen that the main criterion was for a space with a good acoustic. The Brake Hall provided plenty of room but the very high ceiling did mean that it was difficult to hear other parts singing.

After looking at various locations, it has been decided that our new rehearsal space will be St Mary the Virgin, Church Road, Willesborough. It is, by a significant margin, the most cost-effective option and is currently used as a rehearsal and concert venue by Ashford Sinfonia and Invicta Singers.

I am very aware that this is a significant change and that change is not always easy. Parking at Willesborough is less plentiful. Though Willesborough Medical Centre's car park (behind the church) will be available to us, some people will need to park considerably on roads near the church. We suggest a dry run before rehearsals begin on 6 September to work out the best route and check out parking.

I would also strongly encourage members to car share to reduce car usage and congestion. Of course if you have issues or concerns about the venue please speak to me or Virginia so the committee can fully consider your concerns or help overcome any issues.

On top of the problem of weekly rehearsal space, the Society has also had to contend with a post-Covid change of management at the Gulbenkian. The choral risers in the Colyer-Fergusson are being taken out of use and a large raised stage is being installed on the floor of the hall. This is, of course, extremely disappointing but please be assured that the Committee are working hard to find another, comparable performance space and approaches have been made to Saga Pavilion and elsewhere. The hope is to be able to return to Canterbury at some point in the future. We will keep members informed as to developments.

In view of the loss of Colyer-Fergusson, it is fortunate that the Society has a long-term, friendly relationship with Wye Church where the organ has recently been completely refurbished – so for the time being the Society will perform at Wye Church. This, to an extent, dictates what can be performed – but seating and standing arrangements are under active consideration by the committee to ensure the Society continues to perform as professionally as possible.

Members will also note that our regular Christmas Carol Concert will be at Wye this year. This is because we were unable to book a Saturday in December at St Mary's Ashford, despite contacting them in good time. The space at Wye will enable us to provide seating, something that was never possible at St Mary's.

The new Season programme

With our new rehearsal and performance spaces now secured, we can look forward to performing under Matthew's bâton some well-known works, as well as a piece – the Vierge Messe Solennelle – which the Society has never sung before. Haydn's Creation – which we were due to sing under Paul Young in May 2020 – also makes a welcome return to our programme.

Programme for 2022-23

- **Tuesday 6 September 2022 - First rehearsal of the 2022-23 season**
- **Saturday 12 November 2022- Handel Samson at Wye Church**
- **Saturday 10 December 2022 - Carol concert at Wye Church**
- **Saturday 25 March 2023 - Fauré Requiem and Vierge Messe Solennelle at Wye Church**
- **May 2023 - Haydn Creation (date and venue TBC)**

Other dates for your diary

- Tuesday 11 October - AGM after a short rehearsal
- Tuesday 3 January 2023 - first rehearsal of 2023
- Tuesday 11 April 2023 no rehearsal

Music Scores

- **Scores for hire for the forthcoming season**

Scores will be available for hire at the first rehearsal at £2 a copy. We now have a card machine for payments, but if you are paying by cash the exact money would be appreciated

- **Buying your own scores**

If you wish to buy your own score, the one to get is the New Novello Choral Edition, edited by Donald Burrows.

New Treasurer Needed

After 17 years of incredibly loyal and efficient service, our Treasurer, Hugh Cooper, has advised that he wishes to stand down, so we are looking for someone within the choir who can take on the role of Treasurer for the Society. Ideally we need someone who could take over from Hugh at the AGM in October 2023.

Hugh, whose background is in education, emphasises that no specialist accountancy knowledge is required for the post and states that his own financial background is limited to household budgeting.

Hugh has produced a short job description and summary of the Treasurer's year (one side of A4!), available on request.

Hugh has said he would be very happy to work with the new Treasurer for as long as it takes to ensure a smooth hand over. Anyone interested in the Treasurer's role should contact Virginia by email or talk to Hugh at the first rehearsal of the season.

Become a Friend of the Society

Friends (or Patrons) of the Ashford Choral Society play an invaluable role and their annual contribution is most appreciated.

If you would like to become a Friend of the Society, please let us know. Yearly contributions start at only £30.

Happy Birthday, Eunice

Eunice Smith has sung with the Society since she was at school. Apart from a break when living abroad, she has remained a faithful, enthusiastic and dedicated member of the choir ever since. Eunice was Secretary of the Society for 25 years, and until the first lockdown kindly hosted committee meetings at her home.

Eunice is also the author of The Life and Times of Ashford Choral Society, a fascinating booklet that covers the Society's history until the 2000s. A copy of this history is now available for everyone to read on the ACS website.



Welcome Joshua

It's not every day that we celebrate baby arrivals among the Society's members, so we are delighted to welcome Joshua John Town, son of Penny Town, alto and committee member.

Joshua is also first grandson to Jane Miller (soprano and vice-chairman) and nephew to Rosie Miller (soprano). Joshua arrived 3 weeks early on 15 July, weighing 5lb 7oz. Penny reports that he is currently very busy discovering the world and exercising his vocal cords.



Subscriptions 2022/23

The society welcomes new members of all ages and abilities – so if you have friends, family or colleagues who have been thinking about joining a choir, bring them along. There is no charge for the first two rehearsals and scores will be made available free of charge.

The annual subscription is £100 – under 25s join for free.

All subscriptions are due in September, preferably by BACs online banking or standing order rather than by cheque or cash payment since there is a cost to the Society of banking these.

Bank details, and any Gift Aid advice, will be available from Hugh Cooper, our Treasurer, at the first rehearsal. Anyone interested in paying their subscription by instalments should talk to Hugh.

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