

DMVC Chairman's Report, 3 June 2024.

Madam President, Music Director, Accompanist and members, I present the Chairman's report for 2023 – 2024.

I extend my thanks to everyone for your support throughout the year, both individually and collectively and especially to the members of Committee and the officers of the Choir.

I wish to thank especially:

Mark, our vice chairman, for his support, for standing in for me during my period of leave, and all of you for your understanding during that personal and difficult period.

I also want to thank all of you for your generous donations to the Marie Curie Hospice in Nicola's memory.

You won't be aware how much work Michael, our honorary secretary, does behind the scenes, which you do not see but which I know is very time consuming and always to the highest standard.

David is our honorary treasurer and he looks after the accounts immaculately both on a day-to-day basis and in preparing our accounts for the auditor.

They both deserve our great appreciation and, to prepare for the future I know that each would appreciate an assistant, so if you have the time, skills, commitment and the wish to have DMVC continue long into the future, please have a word with either to offer your services.

I wish to thank all committee members for your support in so many ways, especially in our recruitment campaign when Ed led the way. Dave has looked after the maintenance of the Hall and the trailer. He and Roy also voluntarily erected a fence along the rear of the car park, their work saving us a very significant amount of money, so to you both I extend our thanks.

Norman has continued to maintain the website and for this we are really appreciative

My thanks also to Ed who leaves the committee after five years and to Mark and Dave who complete their terms as section reps.

It is right that I recognise the contribution over twenty-two years which Norwood has made as the department officer and thank him for his contribution during this time. I extend a warm welcome to Graham as he undertakes the role.

Emma has been with us now for three seasons and continues to develop her role. I recognise the contribution which she has made during this present season.

And now, I wish to welcome Christine to the fold. She joined us early in the new year and has shown her musical skills both at the piano and in front of us when Emma has been unavailable. I do hope she has an extended period with us and that she and Emma form a talented team to provide our future leadership.

At the end of every year it is customary to look back, to self-assess, to decide what has gone well, to decide what could have been better and what should not be repeated.

My aims for the year were:

1. To continue to enjoy singing.
2. To continue to improve the quality of the choir's singing.
3. To continue the development work begun by David and Ed.
4. To encourage new men to join the choir.
5. To increase the number of engagements in the choir's itinerary.

I hope we achieved some of them:

To enjoy and improve our singing – As our engagements intensified in the final few weeks of the season, I believe our concentration improved and our performances reflected our efforts.

To continue the development work carried out by my predecessors – David and Ed – I'm not so sure that we achieved this aim.

To encourage new men to join the choir – we certainly managed to get nine new men through the door but only Josh has stayed – well done Josh. Why did the others not stay? – this is something which must be addressed by committee and a solution found before we embark on another recruitment campaign.

To increase our number of engagements – well this could not be classed as a success. We had two engagements before Christmas in 2023 – one in October and one, a carol service, in December. We also had a sing-along at the Copelands Care Home in December.

The Spring period was also quite bleak but we sang at Ballyblack Presbyterian Church in March and took part in the Bangor International Choral Festival where, unfortunately, we were not placed.

It is sad to say that a number of other engagements were for the funeral or celebration services of members or former members.

During the year we said goodbye to members Edwin Dunlop, Ivor Morrison, Ken Magill and Clyde Bell and to former members Alec Ireland and Sam Campbell. We were privileged to sing at four of these services and to be represented at the other two services. These men contributed well over two hundred years of singing the Choir and they helped enormously to achieve its very high standard of performance and success.

Personally, I remember Ken Magill's service particularly because about an hour before it was due to begin, we discovered that we had no-one to conduct the choir. I took responsibility and decided that I would do it. I must tell you that it is something that I will never forget. To stand in front of DMVC and hear the sound that we produce is an amazing experience. Thank you for that and for your support on that occasion.

So how do I assess my performance as your Chairman. I'm afraid it fell below the standard that I expect from myself and I believe there is one major reason for that conclusion and there are other supplementary reasons.

When Robert Wilson was our leader, Robert was permanently on Committee, he was able to plan ahead, perhaps even years, and he had so many contacts in the field of music upon whom he could call, or who could call upon him if they required a choir performance. When we lost Robert, we lost much more than a musical director, we lost the man who had the vision for the choir and who was loyally served by all the members.

We have never replaced Robert.

I say all this because in Robert's time, his permanence meant that the Chairman's role could be carried out on a one year basis but now, in just one year, I found it difficult to provide the vision and leadership which I believe the Choir requires. Indeed, I found it difficult to get a grasp on the role.

The role of Chairman should last much longer than a single year. My view is that unless we address the leadership of the Choir in a more permanent manner, rather than on a year to year basis, then the Choir will not develop or progress as we all wish.

I feel also that we must address our repertoire. There are many compositions which are standard for any male voice choir and which we must always maintain in our repertoire, but we must consider expanding that repertoire with music that we can perform at concerts and which will encourage those in the audience to return for another performance.

I am reminded of the President's comments at last year's AGM when she produced the programme of our sixtieth anniversary celebration to inform us that we were singing mostly the same pieces at our ninetieth celebration. Indeed, at our most recent concert we sang compositions which were taught to the Choir by Robert Wilson.

For next season I estimate that we will have 34 practice sessions and at 2 hours per session, that provides 68 hours of practice time. I see this as a great opportunity for development and to enhance the repertoire of DMVC.

For many, many years we were the top choir in Northern Ireland, if not far beyond. Choirs such as Portadown aspired to achieve our standard. Now we are striving to achieve their standard having been beaten by them in competition on the last two occasions when we sang against them.

I know and understand that we are an amateur choir made up of volunteers but, we are keen to come to the choir hall, to sing and to commit to our performances and I dearly wish that when we next take to a platform, we will have new compositions in our repertoire which the audience will enjoy and which we will enjoy singing.

I do hope you understand my views which are expressed for the good of DMVC in the desire that we will again, very soon, become the Choir

which others will see as the benchmark for male voice singing not only in Northern Ireland but much further afield.

Thank you.