

**ALTON COMMUNITY CHOIR**

**Minutes of the Committee Meeting – 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017 at The Friends Meeting House,  
Alton at 19.00hrs.**

**Committee:** Ann Foulkes (Chairperson), (AF)  
Helen Brown (Minutes Secretary), (HB)  
Sue Lawrence (Treasurer), (SL)  
Jenny Hallett (Membership Secretary), (JH)  
Carolyn Robson (Musical Director), (CR)  
Barbara Parry (Publicity officer), (BP)  
Pete Stephens (Committee member), (PS)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>Action / Comments</b>
Apologies	Helen Brown	Minutes – PS/HB
Minutes of the last Meeting	Approval of the minutes of the committee meeting held on Thursday 19 <sup>th</sup> January 2017. Proposed by PS, seconded by SL. The minutes were signed	HB to notify ACC by email that the draft minutes are available
Matters Arising		
Finance	As at 08.02.17 Charity Fund                   £ 733.85 Overseas Fund                 £469.80 General Funds                 £6,792.00 Total                               £7,995.65	Thanks to Sue Thanks to Denise who will provide cheque to SL of recent Choir raffle proceeds The raffle takings average approx £24 weekly
Membership	Currently 63 members. 2 vacancies	Thanks Jenny
Correspondence	30.1.17 Email re summer concert and joint concert with Basingstoke Hospital Male Voice Choir – see future events	
	3.2.17 enquiry via SL re possibility of ACC singing at a wedding – declined as CR unavailable	
	E-mails regarding lyrics of ‘Tom of Bedlam’ and ‘If I was a Blackbird’. Discussed at length. See Addendum and page 6.	To be discussed in choir forum. See Addendum.
	11.2.17 – Hampshire Traditions at Whitchurch.	HB circulated info to ACC 11.2.17
Recent events	No recent events to discuss	
Forthcoming events	9.3.2017 pre-Choir practice get together planned	Fresh supplies needed.
	17.6.2017 Choir evening concert at Cecil Sharp House. Camden, London. 7.30pm onwards. CR finalising concert timing details with Sally Davies ( CSH) Publicity press release for trip to Cecil Sharp House	HB provided quote for 36 seat coach £450, 49 seat coach £500. HB to book when finalised  in hand - BP
	Summer Concert – options discussed, preferred to be an event jointly organised by ACA and our Choir – ticket sales £5 to ACA and the donations to ACC choir charities	TBA, to be discussed with choir and Haydn Chappell PS/BP

<b>Item</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>Action / Comments</b>
	Possible joint choir concert with Basingstoke Male Voice Choir in Autumn, more options and dates to be discussed (in aid of Cancer Treatment Centre Fundraising)	BP/PS and Alastair Gordon
	Possibly a local Choir Concert for CHIKS Indian charity. A request from Robin Radley to CR.	Further dates and plans to consider, CR / Robin Radley
	Possible Choir visit to Brittany	HB provided coach travel costs. (Approx £3500). However, a 2017 trip may not be possible this year, but CR to follow up with choir friend organisers
	Possible Choir twinning visit to Pertuis, France	Not planned for 2017, possibly 2018, TBA
Website	Lyrics and soundfiles of proposed songs on website	BP
Publicity	Choir picture of Herborn singing to be used at present for publicity	BP
AOB		
Next meeting	TBA	

Minutes submitted by Pete Stephens in absence of HB.

Proposed by – Ann Foulkes

Seconded by – Barbara Parry

## Addendum

### Correspondence re lyrics of 'Tom of Bedlam' and 'If I was a Blackbird'

Email from Peter Foulkes to HB - 27.1.17

Further to yesterday's evening's comments on lyrics I have done a little research on 'Tom of Bedlam' and 'If I was a Blackbird' which may be of interest to Carolyn.

I note that the Steeleye Span version (below) leaves out the 'Gypsy slut' verse which worried Penny.

I also note that there are (at least) 2 versions of If I was a blackbird – one for female and one for male voices (latter below)

The (female voices) version we have may prove tricky for a mixed choir – unless the bass section is allocated 'oohs and aahs' rather than words.

An interesting dilemma. Regards, Peter

#### **Lyrics to Boys Of Bedlam – Steeleye Span version**

For to see mad Tom of Bedlam  
Ten thousand years I'd travel  
Mad Maudlin goes on dirty toes  
For to save her shoes from gravel

Chorus:

*Still I sing bonnie boys, bonnie mad boys  
Bedlam boys are bonnie,  
For they all go bare and they live by the air  
And they want no drink nor money*

I went down to Satan's kitchen  
For to get me food one morning  
And there I got souls piping hot  
All on the spit a-turning

Chorus

Me staff has murdered giants  
And me bag a long knife carries  
For to cut mince pies from children's thighs  
With which to feed the fairies

Chorus

This spirit's white as lightning  
Would on me travels guide me  
The moon would shake and the stars would quake  
When ever they espied me

Chorus

And when that I have murdered  
The man in the moon to a powder  
His staff I'll break and his dog I'll shake  
And there'll howl no demon louder

Chorus

For to see mad Tom of Bedlam  
Ten thousand years I'd travel  
Mad Maudlin goes on dirty toes  
For to save her shoes from gravel

Chorus

### **If I was a Blackbird – Silly Wizard**

I am a young sailor, my story is sad,  
Though once I was carefree and a brave sailor lad,  
I courted a lassie by night and by day,  
Oh but now she has left me,  
And sailed far away.

*Oh, if I was a blackbird could whistle and sing,  
I'd follow the vessel my true love sails in,  
And in the top riggin' I would there build my nest,  
And I'd flutter my wings o'er her lily white breast.*

Or if I was a scholar and could handle the pen  
Once secret love letter to my true love I'd send  
And tell of my sorrow, my grief and my pain  
Since she's gone and left me  
In yon flowery glen.

I sailed o'er the ocean, my fortune to seek  
Though I missed her caress and her kiss on my cheek  
I returned and I told her my love was still warm  
but she turned away lightly  
And great was her scorn.

I offered to take her to Donnybrook Fair  
And to buy her fine ribbons to tie up her hair  
I offered to marry and to stay by her side  
But she says in the morning  
She sails with the tide.

My parents, they chide me, oh they will not agree  
Saying that me and my false love, married should never be  
Oh let them deprive me, or let them do what they will  
While there's breath in my body  
She's the one I love still

Email from Helen Brown to CR - CC to Peter Foulkes - 28.1.17

Hi Carolyn. Please see the message from Peter - he's obviously been busy doing some homework. Helen

Email from Peter Foulkes to CR, AF and HB 12.2.17

I had hoped that my 27/01/17 email would initiate a discussion on the suitability of material presented to the choir. This has not happened so I propose that this issue be considered by the committee. Kindly include this as an agenda item for the 16<sup>th</sup> Feb meeting.

Whilst acknowledging Carolyn's autonomy in choosing material I do believe there should be an 'appeals facility' available when ACC members raise objections on the grounds that the lyrics are inappropriate and/or offensive. The vast majority of songs in our repertoire do not cause problems but two recent

additions (*Tom of Bedlam* and *If I was a blackbird*) generated immediate reactions, in session, from some of the choir. These comments were not fully discussed – I believe there should have been a follow-up with members giving them an opportunity to express their views and explore any options available. The potentially offensive nature of some of the 'Bedlam' lyrics is readily seen and the 'gender-categorisation' problem identified in 'If I was a blackbird' caused discomfort amongst some of the men who evidently are expected to follow lyrics clearly penned for females only. To my knowledge this is the first time that the ACC men have been asked to follow female lyrics.

Please feel free to distribute this, and my previous email to committee members. I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Regards – Peter

Email reply from CR to Peter 12.2.17

Thank you for your emails which Helen has forwarded.  
I am copying in the whole committee so that we can discuss this on Thursday at the committee meeting before the rehearsal.  
Regarding Tom of Bedlam I have found some other versions too; it is a song that some love and some hate.  
But we can have a follow-up as you suggest and discuss available options for both songs with the choir. Just for the record The Bonny Barque the Bergen is sung from a female perspective.  
Thanks. Carolyn

The contents of the emails were discussed. The views at the meeting were noted and will be sent to Peter (see page 6).

It was decided CR and AF would discuss this with choir members during the following choir practice, followed by a 'show of hands' as to how to proceed;-

Do we continue singing 'Tom of Bedlam' and 'if I was a blackbird' in the new choral season?  
Those in favour – 25, Those against – 0. Those not minding either way - 7

The Committee's view follows; HB sent message below, as an attachment to an email to Peter Foulkes - 26.02.17

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your e-mail of 12/02/17 which was discussed at our committee meeting last week.

"Tom of Bedlam" provoked extensive discussion and differing views among the committee members and Carolyn said she was willing to drop it if a significant number of choir members were opposed to it, but she would need to know quickly. Some of the points made in our discussion were:

- that the images in it are quite disturbing
- that it is a very old, traditional song reflecting an attitude towards mental illness which was common in UK for many centuries (and that many traditional songs mention things that would not be acceptable today e.g. Polly Vaughan mentions bribing a judge)
- that ongoing awareness of historical attitudes towards social issues is an important factor in ensuring we do not slip back towards them
- that any performance of the song would be preceded by an introduction explaining the context

On a more practical level this arrangement was written by Sally Davies, the leader of the choir at Cecil Sharp House with whom we will be singing in June, and there is a proposal that both choirs should sing it together as a finale. We would therefore need to sing the current words.

As the committee were expressing such a wide range of views it was decided to consult those members of the choir who were at practice that evening. After some discussion a show of hands was taken. Nobody voted to drop the song immediately, but a significant minority asked that the position be reviewed after the June concert with the possibility of either dropping the song then, or dropping certain verses, or amending some of the words.

"If I were a Blackbird" provoked a much shorter discussion and the committee were unanimous in the view that we are a mixed choir and would expect to sing songs expressed from both male and female points of view. An exclusively or predominantly male section of the choir would not usually take the melody on songs narrated by women, and a female section would not usually take the melody of songs narrated by men, but all parts are expected to provide harmonies.

ACC Committee