**Brian Woodley – Nomination for President’s Award

Testimonials**

1. What he has brought and what he continues to bring to the choir. Every choir would benefit from a Brian. Not every-one is lucky enough to have one.

The Blackheath Choir was founded (as The Ascension Choir) in 1971. From the outset Brian demonstrated a willingness to take on roles that might be unpopular or difficult to fill-such as responsibility for liaising with the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) at a time when the choir had a link to the adult education service. An inveterate record keeper he remains the custodian of the record of what the choir has sung, where and when as well as the list of future potential repertoire suggested by the committee and choir members.

He was a key member of the team that formalised the choir in 1987, initially taking on the role of Secretary, a post he held for 5 years. This was a critical position involving the drawing up of the choir’s constitution and the establishment of the principles that should guide its operation. He was similarly involved a few years later in the choir’s transition to become a financially independent registered charity.

In recent years he has taken on the role of concert manager, a role which has expanded as the choir has steadily become more ambitious in the works performed and as it has increased its use of orchestras and instrumental groups. He always ensures that the concert venue is properly prepared (and cleared away) and that the siting of the different sections of the choir reflects the needs of the music and the conductor. But also, within these constrictions, he is very sensitive to the needs of individuals and will do his upmost to ensure they are met.

He remains a coopted member of the committee where he uses his lengthy experience and attention to detail to great effect. Discussions are better informed as a result. And for more than half a century he has been a mainstay of the tenor section, an accomplished, accurate and reliable singer.

All these roles have contributed very significantly in different ways and at the different times to the growth and health of the choir. In each one he has always gone the extra mile in ensuring the job is not just done but is done well. We remain a community choir which aims to expand the musical horizons of it members while continuing to present an attractive programme for audiences and an enjoyable and rewarding experience for members. Brian over the 52 years life of the choir has been central to this.
2. I have been Musical Director of Blackheath Choir for over thirty years after five as its accompanist. Throughout Brian Woodley has been a tower of strength in so many ways. As choir secretary he was on the audition panel for my selection. His superb organisational skills were always evident along with the ability to spot details that others had missed . He has kept meticulous records and as a result, when planning a season we can draw on his extensive knowledge of all the works the choir has sung. When Brian stood down as secretary he retained the post of concert manager, creating seating plans, writing and distributing concert instructions, and leading a team to erect our staging and seating. This is all done for love, and he is also a dedicated and extremely competent member of the tenor section. In fact he is so good in every way that other local music groups bemoan the fact that they don't have 'a Brian' to manage them.! I heartily support his nomination for the award.
3. I can confirm that Brian has been a loyal and conscientious member of the choir for well over forty years.

Not only as one of the Tenor section but also as concert manager … a vital role that involves a lot of organisation. It has meant that all our concerts have gone smoothly and the rest of us can concentrate on singing … knowing that, staging, seating plans, timing for rehearsals, refreshments, looking after soloists, checking that the venues are open before we get there and closed and put to rights after we leave … all ‘just happen’. Brian also is the person to go to if we want to know if or when or how often we have sung a particular piece … his records go back to the choirs beginnings.
4. Brian makes an amazing contribution to the choir. He is our concert manager, organising a group of volunteers to help sell tickets on the door and drinks at the interval, he oversees the building and dismantling and storage of the stage at concerts, and the moving of (heavy!) church pews before and after concerts, creates our seating plans, and writes our instructions for "sits and stands". During concert rehearsals he also checks how we sound from the back of the church.  Of course, he also sings in the concerts, he probably just doesn't need as much practice as some of us do.  At normal weekly rehearsals Brian is often standing at the door to welcome us as we arrive, and at the end of rehearsals he stacks all the chairs. Brian sits on our committee and is involved in planning our future repertoire - regularly seeking ideas from choir members of pieces we might want to sing, while also maintaining his encyclopaedic knowledge of pieces we have previously sung, and the year(s) in which we sang them. This is probably not even half of what Brian does, and he does it all with great charm and good humour.
5. I have worked closely with Brian in the Blackheath Choir for nearly thirty years – during which I have been Chair, Committee Member and fellow Tenor. His contribution to the choir has been – and continues to be – extraordinary. He manages all aspects of our concerts – from printing tickets to assembling staging, from seating plans to interval refreshments – with amazing dedication and attention to detail. He has also been a great colleague and supporter of the choir more generally, helping to identify future repertoire and using his vast experience to great effect. As our Music Director once put it ‘Every choir needs a Brian’ – though few have been as fortunate as us in Blackheath.
6. I joined the choir over 40 years ago and Brian was one of the first people to welcome me to the group and put me at ease. He soon became a valued and reliable friend both to me and my husband, Keith, who shortly became a choir member himself. Brian was already a well-established leading member of the tenor section but that was only the half of it. The choir did not yet have a formal constitution and committee structure but he essentially acted as a choir secretary supporting our musical director. Thus he ensured that rehearsal and concert arrangements ran smoothly and that choir members were kept well informed. After a few years a formal structure was established and Brian became a member of the new choir committee continuing to perform efficiently and with good humour the essential role of concert manager (and more) until the present day.

On a personal note, I have much cause to be grateful to Brian. At the end of the late 1980s, I was elected as chair of the choir six months or so before Keith became seriously ill and, after a year, sadly died. Without any need for discussion, Brian quietly took on most of my duties as well as his own thus ensuring that all choir matters were properly covered whilst I could spend much more time focussing on my husband and family. I have never forgotten his kindness and care at that time.

7) I have known Brian Woodley since I joined the Blackheath Choir (then the Ascension Choir) in 1983. The choir was then a local authority evening class, and Brian was already heavily involved as our main link with the local authority, keeping attendance records etc. A few years later he was a leading member of the small group that managed our transition to becoming an independent charity, and he has served on the choir committee wholeheartedly in various capacities ever since. Most notably he has been the choir’s concert manager for at least 25 years, planning, organising and executing the many details that make a concert run smoothly. Throughout the 20+ years of my Chairmanship of the choir I knew that I could always depend on Brian to think ahead and act in the best interests of the choir and its supporters, and to be an able leader of his team of helpers. He is also a mainstay of the tenor section, an accomplished, accurate and reliable singer.