



MEMBERS' HANDBOOK (Incorporating the Rules and Regulations of the Society)

Welcome to Towcester Choral Society. We hope you will enjoy singing with us. We have put a few notes together to help you to find your feet:

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Welcome to Towcester Choral Society. We hope you will enjoy singing with us, making good music and making friends.

At Towcester, we very strongly believe in supporting all our singers so that they can develop and gain in confidence in their singing. The rehearsals begin with a warm-up and then we learn the music set for the term. We always aim to cover a wide range of music and appeal to all tastes. In the winter term we will cover Christmas music, in the spring term we cover music for an Easter concert and then we have a lighter mixture in our summer term when we may learn excerpts from musicals, jazz, folk or various other genres. This means that there is a lot of music to learn so regular attendance is very important.

Once a person has joined the choir they are asked to attend all rehearsals on Tuesday evenings as this will enable them to learn all the music that we need to get through. It is clear that sometimes absences are unavoidable but if a member misses too many rehearsals they will find they are unable to sing in the concerts as they won't know the music.

Towcester is a vibrant, progressive and growing choir with a great deal of camaraderie and spirit. We also arrange extra events, workshops, come and sing events (where people are encouraged to give it a go), fundraisers and social activities throughout the year. We aim primarily to enjoy singing and enjoy performing wherever and whenever possible.

With best wishes,

Helen

Helen Swift
Musical Director

2. Objectives

Towcester Choral Society exists to improve and develop members' abilities in choral singing and to enhance the public's appreciation of music.

3. Equal opportunities

Membership is open to all over 16 years old who complete our voice test. We aim to treat our members equally regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, class or socio-economic background. We hope you enjoy singing with us.

4. Attendance

To derive the greatest enjoyment and to ensure the best possible performance at concerts, it is important that members attend rehearsal if at all possible. Although the occasional absence is inevitable, members should regard attendance as a commitment.

5. Behaviour

Members are expected to behave with courtesy towards the Musical Director, Accompanist and other members and should not indulge in excessive chatter during rehearsals. If you are unsure of a musical point, please ask the Musical Director rather than your neighbour, who may also have misunderstood. As well as being unreliable, opinions sought from a neighbouring member are distracting to others.

6. Paying your subscription

The annual subscription for the forthcoming season will be set at the AGM. The current annual subscription is £150. For full time students below the age of 25 there is a reduced rate of £50. Subscriptions are payable in September. The Treasurer will provide details for paying by bank transfer, which is the preferred method. If you are a UK taxpayer please complete and return the Gift Aid form which will allow us to reclaim the tax at no cost to the member.

The full subscription may be paid in three £50 instalments at the beginning of each term. The instalment payment option is available for the convenience of members, but the full annual subscription is payable even if a member decides to opt out of singing for part of the year.

We believe that singing (with all its health and social benefits) should be open to all regardless of means. A fund has been established to cover part of / the whole of a member's subscription in case of financial difficulty.

A member seeking financial support should approach either the Treasurer or the Chair in confidence. This can be by email or other means as suits the individual. For further details of this support please see the Member Support Fund Policy on the TCS website.

The society has made money available to open this fund, but we would be interested to hear from any members who wish to contribute additional money.

7. Obtaining music

Music for performances will be provided by the Society and issued by our Librarian. Please be patient when we need to order extra copies. There is not enough room in our rehearsal venue to store all the music we own so to alleviate this problem members keep some of it in their own homes.

If you make notes on any music, please do so lightly using a soft 2B pencil. You must rub out all your marks before returning your copies – **especially for music we have borrowed**. If we return borrowed music defaced with pencil or other marks, we may be charged for the cost of a new copy. Towcester Choral Society cannot bear this extra cost and offending members will be asked to pay whatever charge is set by the lender.

Borrowed music will be collected soon after the concerts. We will be charged for any music we fail to return and if you lose your copy, we will have to pass the cost on to you. Please take good care of the music that is in your custody and remember to return it if you leave the choir.

8. Concert dress

Concert dress, especially for ladies, varies according to whatever is appropriate to each concert. Instructions will be issued a few weeks before each concert. Unless advised otherwise, gentlemen should wear a black evening suit with a white dress shirt, a black or coloured bow tie and black shoes. Ladies should provide their own black dress or skirt/trousers and tops, but, where pashminas / scarves etc. are required, these will be provided by TCS.

9. Communication

A notice board will be on display at rehearsals. As well as choir items, it also gives information about other musical activities which might be of interest.

We have a website containing a range of information about the choir. To view this, visit www.towcesterchoralsociety.org.uk.

You are welcome to approach any member of the committee with an idea, comment or item of concern. As our rehearsal schedule makes it difficult to speak to people, we will try to ensure that at least one committee member is available fifteen minutes before each rehearsal, should you wish to speak to one. You may also contact committee members by e-mail. Contact details for committee members will be displayed on the noticeboard.

10. Annual General Meeting

This will take place after the end of each season, usually in early July. 21 days' notice will be given and members wishing to submit motions for discussion must do so no later than 14 days before the date of the AGM. An agenda will be published no less than seven days before the meeting. The agenda will not include a slot for Any Other Business. However, a short session will be held after the conclusion of the formal business to discuss any matters to which a formal motion is inappropriate, typically suggestions or matters of information. Topics should be notified to the Secretary seven days in advance to allow time for views to be considered.

11. Extra-curricular activities

From time to time, we are asked to perform outside our normal concert schedule, such as Midsummer Music, at weddings or funerals and at charity events. Volunteers are sought from the membership but, occasionally, it may be necessary for us to select a subset of the volunteers to ensure a balance between voice parts or to cope with space constraints. We also perform in public places, such as Towcester Racecourse, Towcester Leisure Centre or a shopping village, to raise our profile. These events usually take place during the daytime, often at weekends and a special rehearsal may be required.

Many members take advantage of invitations to join singing days organised by other bodies, such as the Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD) and The Really Big Chorus (TRBC). TRBC organises two or three events each year at the Royal Albert Hall and is an excellent opportunity to sing with orchestral accompaniment in a venue which most people only ever enter as a member of the audience. For some members, taking part in TRBC's scratch performance of Handel's *Messiah* is an annual fixture. TRBC also organises singing holidays in various parts of Europe. Although not cheap, these are lots of fun and a few members take advantage. Outside events will be announced at rehearsal, emailed to members, and/or details displayed on the notice board.

We want our members to enjoy their membership as fully as possible and apart from singing, we arrange occasional social and fundraising activities, including quizzes and meals.

Our committee members will be pleased to receive any ideas you may have for a social event particularly if you are able to help in organising it.

12. Schedule of rehearsals, performances and events

A schedule, setting out rehearsals, performances and any known events for the season will be distributed in September each year.

13. Committee

The committee is responsible for running the Society and the committee members are trustees of the charity. New committee members are elected at the AGM and serve for an initial term of three years. At the end of their initial term committee members may stand for re-election for up to two further three-year terms. Typically a third of the committee stands for re-election each AGM and new vacancies arise when a committee member stands down.

Joining the committee is a rewarding experience and is a good way to increase knowledge of what is involved in managing a charity. Please talk to any of the committee members if you are interested in finding out more.

There are 3 roles required by our constitution plus up to six other committee members:

Chair: Chairs committee. Responsible for overall direction and management of the Society. Approach the Chair with anything you think we should do, or do differently, good ideas etc., or just anything you are worried about.

Treasurer: Keeps the accounts and leads on financial matters. Collects subscriptions and monies for trips, events etc. Please advise the Treasurer of any change in banking details.

Secretary: Takes minutes, writes correspondence, makes bookings, applies for licences. Acts as first contact point for enquiries from outside the choir.

When a committee member is elected to one of these 3 roles, they may go on to serve for a maximum of 3 three-year terms in this role but will still need to be re-elected every 3 years.

Committee member: Up to six committee members cover responsibility for a range of tasks essential to the running of the society. The major tasks are:

- Stage Management: Responsible for all technical arrangements and equipment.
- Front of House: Looking after concert catering, raffle, presentations, door management and anything else required to ensure a successful production.
- Publicity and communications: Includes press releases, web site, social media, production of posters, programmes and tickets for concerts.
- Librarian: Managing music owned by the choir; obtaining music from libraries or elsewhere when necessary; distributing and retrieving music.
- Social events: Arranging singing trips and social events; fundraising events.

- **Membership:** Welcoming prospective members and guiding them through the recruitment process. Maintenance of member records and attendance register. Sending cards, flowers, etc. to members absent through ill-health.
- **IT management:** Ensuring that the society makes the best use of the web site, social media and any other potentially useful form of electronic communication.
- **Ticketing:** Organising production of tickets, sales outlets / mechanisms.
- **Policies and procedures:** Ensuring good practice as an amateur choir, legal compliance and adhering to the requirements of Charity Commission.
- **Risk management:** Assessing the risks related to any event and what mitigations are appropriate to manage the risks to an acceptable level.
- **Equipment management:** Ensuring that the Society's assets (or any borrowed / hired equipment) are kept in a safe and fully functional state ready for use.

These roles are divided between the six committee members according to their aptitude and the time they are able to devote. Clearly a great deal of work is involved and committee members may seek help from other choir members, whilst retaining responsibility for ensuring that the work is carried out.

The names, contact details and photographs of each committee member will be displayed on the noticeboard from the beginning of each season. Please feel free to approach any member of the committee with any ideas or matters of concern.

Musical personnel:

Although not members of the committee, our Musical Director and Accompanist are crucial to the running of Towcester Choral Society. The current post-holders are:

Musical Director:

Helen Swift



Accompanist:

Rowena Gibbons



Helen and Rowena are responsible for all things musical. Feel free to approach them at rehearsal with any issues to do with performance or rehearsal. However, both have other jobs and very busy lives, so please direct any queries regarding the general running of the choir to a committee member.

14. Finances of the Society

Towcester Choral Society is a charity primarily funded by its members' subscriptions, and also supported by profits from performances, grants (where available) and general fund raising. The Society pays for a professional musical director and accompanist, hire of premises / sundry costs for rehearsals and concerts, maintenance / replacement of equipment, insurance and other running costs.

Balancing income and expenditure year by year is the challenge the Treasurer and the committee seeks to manage. In order to be able to pay 'unexpected' bills the Society has a 'reserve fund' separated from the rest of its accounts. The level of the reserve fund is decided by the committee based on recommendations from the Treasurer and Chair. It will be reported in the accounts each year at the AGM.

15. Policies

Details of the following policies can be found on the website, as well as a copy of the constitution.

- Conflict of interest
- Equal opportunities
- Health and Safety
- Safeguarding
- Data privacy
- Member Support Fund