

RBCS Chair's Report on 2011

I am delighted to report that 2011 has been another very good year for RBCS, thanks to the efforts and contributions of you all, and, in many cases, your nearest and dearest. In particular thanks again go to Sue Heath-Downey for her musical leadership and to committee members for all their work through the year.

We performed our usual three concerts, with musicians to accompany us at every one of them. We performed on five other occasions, including the Entrance Shaft (Grand Entrance Hall) of Brunel's Thames Tunnel and Udderbelly on South Bank. We commissioned a video of the Shaft performance, which incidentally got us a mention on national radio and local TV news. Members had other opportunities to sing at the Brunel Museum, in Normandy and at three summer salons led by Sue in July/August. That's quite a range of venues and formats.

We aimed high with our musical ambitions. We performed the UK première of Paul Sarcich's Percussion Mass and the second performance of Philip Norman's Carol Interludes, on both occasions with the composer in the audience! We sang Mozart's powerful Requiem and Coleridge-Taylor's expressive Hiawatha and a range of shorter pieces and songs. We have put a lot of energy into our publicity efforts, happily with some success, witness the appearance of the Lady Mayor at our Christmas concert in full robes, very stately. Singers and audience numbers were both up on 2010. At no charge, one of our supporters produced for us a very smart new website, and RBCS now is on Twitter as well as Facebook. We have invested in banners to publicise our concerts, made contact with local Tenants & Residents Associations, and distributed flyers at local Community Council meetings. And that's on top of the sterling efforts made by choir members and friends to spread the word.

There is a social angle to the choir, of course, and in addition to the after-rehearsal gathering in the Mayflower pub, and refreshments after performances, we organised our first and very successful summer barbecue.

We have improved how the choir runs itself. We produced our first Welcome Pack for new members, agreed a Diversity Statement and are feeling our way towards creating an effective 'voice rep' role to support singers. We have added new collections of madrigals, European Sacred Music and Opera Choruses to our scores library.

We benefited from funding from a private sponsor for musicians at the Spring concert, from Rotherhithe Community Council for the Brunel Tunnel shaft performances, from Grassroots Grants to pay for our musicians at the summer concert, more from Grassroots Grants to invest in scores, and from United St Saviour's Charity to help with running costs. To all of those funders we are extremely grateful, as we are to Time & Talents, St Mary's Church Rotherhithe and St James, Bermondsey, who provide us with excellent venues for rehearsal and performance. The funding has enabled us to reach higher, and to plan further ahead, knowing that we will be able comfortably to cover our core costs.

All of this provides a good foundation for 2012. Already I can see some challenges:

- Becoming a registered charity, as we are now required to do
- Securing further grant funding – although things are much tighter generally, being a registered charity will give us access to new private sources of funding.

There will be new opportunities too, and I'm looking forward to those even more than the challenges. We are already exploring how we can best take advantage of the opportunities that the London Olympics will bring and hope to be able to develop our local repertoire and perform it more widely in the area.

Thank you all for your support.

Clare Birks

RBCS Chair 2011-12

7 February 2012