



# Group Hero award 2022

Award: **Group Hero**

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**Making Music member group: Beckenham Chorale**

**How many members in the group? Approx 70**

**Name of nominee(s): Nigel Britten, Choir Chairman and Sally Moran, Choir Membership Secretary**

## **About us**

Beckenham Chorale is a mixed choir of about 70 members. We sing a varied repertoire of choral works. In recent years we have sung Bach's Magnificat, Mozart's Requiem, Dvorak's Mass in D, Handel's Messiah, Verdi's Requiem and Tippett's A Child of our Time. We have recently celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We perform 3 concerts a year in St. George's Church Beckenham and have had Sing Days in recent years with John Rutter and Brian Kay.

Our next concert in November will be Mendelssohn's Elijah which we are singing in conjunction with Coro and St Paul's Sinfonia.

## **Statement**

Nigel's role was crucial in guiding us safely back to everyday life as we emerged from lockdown restrictions. We continued with Zoom rehearsals as returning to in-person singing proved challenging because our previous rehearsal space was too small. To solve this issue, Nigel led a small group to assess how we might best resume live singing and source a bigger space. Using his excellent interpersonal skills, Nigel significantly improved the relationship with our performance venue. Over several weeks he negotiated an agreement to allow the entire choir to rehearse in a considerably larger space. He consulted all members and instructed safety guidelines to ensure all members returned soundly. At the same time, his research and preliminary work on our new website continued unabated.

Many choirs have an 'older' demographic, and ours is no exception. Sally's role has been equally important in facilitating the return of our members to resume singing. However, this did not happen overnight. Her patience, diligence and total commitment to the role meant she kept in touch with every one of our choir members throughout the pandemic. She has been gently encouraging and understanding our 70 choir members' many and varied concerns, anxieties and viewpoints. By

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May 2022

offering her support throughout the pandemic, Sally has helped our older members overcome these barriers and return happily to live rehearsals. Our choir is now going from strength to strength, with a brilliant future ahead!



**Nigel Britten**

Nigel was only a very few years into his chairmanship of the Beckenham Chorale (where he had succeeded a notably successful and engaged predecessor) when the pandemic struck.

The Chorale is, like many another society, reliant on a core membership of increasing maturity, who therefore have more to fear than some others from an unknown and communicable virus. Nigel directed his committee and supported me (as Musical Director) with a light touch, but nonetheless with an absolute determination that a duty of care was owed to those who had, over many decades, given so much to the choir.

In his view continuity was key and since the rest of the world was moving their operation online then so would we! I am not a particularly technically minded MD and so allowing me to be equipped to communicate with the Chorale was an early challenge, and one which Nigel mastered by a combination of his own expertise and an admirable willingness to seek help where he needed it.

We ran a full program of weekly rehearsals, and it was Nigel's idea to punctuate these from time to time with a "special" (a lecture on Music Theory for those who felt they might benefit, a session on sight reading skills and – rather charmingly – the Musical Director's choral *Desert Island Discs*, which Nigel compered with great aplomb).

All this might sound like a pleasant way of marking time until the pestilence passed, but it was much more proactive than that. It was crucial that our membership remain engaged, safeguarding the choir, but also to support those for whom a weekly social interaction was of utmost importance.

Over the period when we were not able to meet in person, the drop-off from attendance online was negligible.

The Chorale returned to live rehearsals, some tentatively of course. The feeling that we are not only viable but actually growing in numbers is, to a huge degree, down to Nigel's determined leadership. I have much to thank him for.

Mark Griffiths (Musical Director, Beckenham Chorale)



### **Sally Moran – Membership Secretary**

Sally has been our Membership Secretary for a few years now and has always had a great “hands-on” relationship with our 70-80 choir members. Little did she realise that a year and a half of no choir on Tuesdays was going to make her even busier!

Sally (along with Chairman Nigel) is responsible for our e-communication with members. At the onset of lockdown she collated and maintained a database of choir volunteers ready and willing to help anyone in need. Through our early attempts at Zoom rehearsals, along with technical guru Eamonn, she supported and encouraged a number of our older (and not so old!) members, refusing to be beaten as we all struggled with new technology. This enabled a large majority of our choir to become regular Zoom attenders. Along with Chorale Secretary Tricia and myself, she was part of an editorial team which from the very beginning of lockdown produced a regular e-newsletter, Tuesday Treats. Her contribution was essential, not just in our fortnightly Zoom meetings but specifically in managing, over 35 issues, the vast amount of correspondence these publications generated. It simply wouldn't have been the same without her.

All pretty impressive so far but it's in her role as we returned to live singing that I feel Sally has really excelled. Our Safeguarding Sub-Committee - of which she was of course a member – paved the way but each choir member is different and each individual appetite for return tempered by situation, health, family circumstance, lockdown experience and many other factors. It is a tribute to Sally's personal qualities of determination, perseverance, patience, gentleness and good judgment that we

find ourselves not only back in business but back with a rising membership, a real sense of unity and purpose, and an ambition for an even greater future!

Jo Groves

Chorale Librarian & Committee Member