

York Minster Choristers' Association and The Francis Jackson Choral Fund.

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The Association was inaugurated over a hundred years ago as the York Minster Choir Old Boys' Association (YMCOPA) and held its first reunion AGM and Dinner on 3rd October 1907. Some sixty-six Old Choristers attended this first reunion and it was reported in the "Yorkshire Herald" - "The many 'old boys' gathered together found that it was indeed pleasant to renew old friendships and association, and to once again sing together within the grand old Cathedral". In 1910 YMCOPA was a founder member of the national Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations (FCOCA) and Arthur Hardgrave (York) became its first chairperson. York was host to the first Annual Festival of the FCOCA on 6th July 1912 and has hosted subsequent festivals in 1938, 1960, 1977, 1992 and 2012.

On 19th January 1997 girls were admitted into the York Minster Choral Foundation, marking a key moment in the development of the Minster's choral tradition. The Association was duly renamed to York Minster Old Choristers' Association (YMOCA) and was pleased to welcome its first two female members in the summer of 2007.

In 2010 the Association revised its constitution to reflect a desire expressed between members and the Minster to collaborate more closely with the current Choristers and Songmen to make a positive contribution to the continuance of that choral tradition. The fundamental change was that Association membership now commences on being "read in" to the choir. The Association is now named the York Minster Choristers' Association (YMCA). Associate membership of the Association is also available by application to any other person sharing our objectives, as outlined above, and detailed in the Association Rules.

AGM and Annual Reunion

Although our scheduled Reunion could not take place in 2020 the AGM for that year was conducted by Zoom on 15th October. No date for a 2021 Reunion was set at the meeting in the light of the ongoing COVID Pandemic and associated measures restricting social events, which continued throughout the year. In the interim there has been no activity, other than a few enquiries from members.

The closure of the Minster School in 2020 has resulted in us losing our traditional home venue, and base for our Reunion, with its associated catering facilities. The education of the Minster choristers now comes under the aegis of St Peter's School in York. Accordingly, the YMCA Committee is now looking to examine the options for an AGM and Reunion in 2022. These will not necessarily take place on the same day, and will quite possibly take a format significantly different from those of recent years.

Traditionally our Reunion has commenced with Eucharist in the Minster at 10am followed by the AGM and Reunion lunch. After Choral Evensong in the Minster, the

day's events have in recent years concluded with a short reception in the Chapter House and presentation of a cheque from the Francis Jackson Choral Fund (FJCF) – see below - leaving those attending free from about 7pm. A social event for the evening of Friday of the Reunion weekend has occasionally been planned, if there was sufficient demand, for the benefit of those able to be in York for the weekend.

The Committee invites Members to contribute to the discussion regarding Reunion arrangements for 2022, taking the opportunity to consider alternatives to the traditional arrangements, though any plans will clearly have to include the proposed Reunion fitting in with the new arrangements for the Choir, St Peters School and address the need for a new venue for the day's events, other than those which take place in the Minster.

The Francis Jackson Choral Fund (FJCF)

In 2005 York Minster Choristers' Association embarked upon an important initiative with the foundation of **The Francis Jackson Choral Fund**. The Fund is a registered charity (No. 1112876) for the sole purpose of raising funds to support the continuance of the great choral tradition at York Minster. The Dean & Chapter have reported that each chorister's scholarship costs some £10,000 pa. The scholarships enable the choristers to be educated at St Peter's School, and normally represent 60% of the total cost, though a higher percentage can be met. The intention is that no suitably talented child should be denied a chorister place because of financial reasons. The objective of the FJCF is to support a minimum of two, and a target of four, choristers per annum.

Dr Francis Jackson, the Fund's Patron, was born in 1917 and was a chorister at York Minster from 1929 to 1933 under Sir Edward Bairstow. In 1946 he became Organist and Master of the Choristers and continued to hold this post until he retired in 1982. Upon retiring, he continued to write music and give recitals in York Minster and around the world, and was an inspiration to many. He continued to compose until his death in January 2022 at the age of 104.

At the Fund's inception Francis Jackson said: "I would like to commend most strongly the appeal and its splendid objective, which is to help keep alive the age-old choral tradition in York Minster. Having been a chorister myself, a parent of two and a grandparent of three (one of them a founder member of the girls' choir here at York), as well as a choirmaster for almost half a century, I have been able to observe, at close quarters, the beneficial effect of a chorister training. It has been a wonderful and fulfilling experience".

"I cannot express sufficiently the enormous advantages and privileges of an education based upon the regular singing of great music in the cathedral service and in an incomparable setting. The fundamentals of music and ensemble performance are learned naturally and effortlessly, along with the discipline that this exercise requires. I have never ceased to give thanks for the inestimable benefits gained through a long association with what is a very rewarding and intensely pleasurable pursuit."€™

Words of support from Keith Jones, erstwhile Dean: “York Minster is not only the shell of a great building. It is a living, worshipping, Spirit-filled being. Music is as much a part of what York Minster is as the glass, the carved stone and woodwork. The English church has a great tradition of choral church music, and I am delighted that The Francis Jackson Choral Fund will help to encourage and provide for it in the future.”€™

How to Give to the Francis Jackson Choral Fund

FJCF welcomes all forms of giving. No amount is too small. You can donate online at www.justgiving.com/francisjacksonchoralfund . For those who wish to make a regular donation we are able to provide a standing order form. A copy of the current publicity leaflet for The Fund, including a form, can be downloaded in PDF form [here](#) . As a charity we are can take advantage of Gift Aid; if you are a taxpayer, we can recover a further 25p for every £1 donated. If you have any enquiries or would like to make a donation to the fund, please email yorkmca@outlook.com

York Minster Choristers' Association Membership enquiries

If you are a former Chorister or Songman of York, a member of another Cathedral Choristers' Association, are otherwise interested in membership or have any other queries please contact us via: yorkmca@outlook.com or write to: Hon Secretary, YMCA, 116 Chaul End Road, CADDINGTON, Beds. LU1 4AS.

YMCA Officers

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- The Dean of York

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Committee Members

- Mrs Margaret Horner
- Stewart Pearson.
- Rev John Roden
- Philip Sowley
- Graham Titchener

Trustees of The Francis Jackson Choral Fund

- Michael Backhouse
- Roger Boulton
- Stewart Pearson
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Associated Organisations

The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations (FCOCA) produces the magazine *Once a Chorister* annually, usually in the spring. This is available online at onceachorister.org

We continue to support the aims and works FCOCA. The 2021 Festival of The Federation scheduled to take place at Ely was postponed and will now take place over the weekend of 9th - 11th September 2022. Members of any affiliated Choristers' Association may attend. Full details and booking links are available on the Federation website fcoca.org.uk