

Our chairman River King writes:

The idea for a new choir in Kingsbridge originated when I saw a flyer for a drop-in singing session run by someone I had not heard of called Ruairi Edwards in Totnes just before Christmas 2023. On impulse I emailed him, asking if he would come and teach in Kingsbridge if I managed the organisation for him. He replied yes, lets talk after Christmas.

We met in early January when I went to his class in Totnes which was very inspiring. Afterwards we chatted and decided to give it a go. We agreed it would be a not-for-profit community choir with no auditions or requirement that members should have any experience of singing in a choir. The date was settled for 23rd January at the Kingsbridge Care Hub. I asked a few friends to put out notices on Facebook and sat down to wait, expecting maybe 10 to 15 people.

The shock came when I found we had 45 booked to come, which was the maximum for the venue, and more people were turned away. Luckily, on the day, I had help on the door from couple of friends who managed the rush while Ruairi and I set out the chairs in the room. The evening was electric, and we were amazed at the sounds and harmonies we made so quickly. Ruairi's teaching and conducting was incredibly stimulating, far from many people's experiences of choirs in the past.

In the following days, after hasty calls to several other venues I finally found the 6th form lounge at Kingsbridge Community college. This venue was much bigger and at our second meeting we had 60 singers.

As we continued with weekly rehearsals our singing grew more confident and more tuneful. Each evening Ruairi would start off with exercises to help us relax and let go of our daytime concerns. We were learning to breathe deep into our lower abdomens and to allow our voices, our instruments as he called them, to produce sounds without effort. He taught us everything by ear without written music, so we really developed the quality of our singing. He encouraged us to listen both to ourselves and to each other so we developed a greater appreciation of how our voices intermingled in harmony with each other. We were learning a mixture of songs including Wild Mountain Thyme and Let It Be, some African songs, mantras, as well as songs he had written himself. He even encouraged a few brave souls to sing solos standing up in front of the rest of the choir.

Exciting as this was, it was still a struggle to manage all the finances, having to collect cash payments from everyone as well as email addresses for future contact. We tried to keep a register of who was coming in, but in the hectic rush things got quite muddled. I would then have to take the cash back home and kept it in a drawer until our bank account was opened.

At an early session we asked for volunteers to help and over the weeks several people came forward. Ali Denham took on the role of Volunteer co-ordinator and started a rota of people to welcome singers at the door and collect payments. The bank account took a few weeks to open, but eventually was up and running, and Helen Hirst offered to be our treasurer. Sarah Game said she was happy using XL spreadsheets and would set up a system for keeping records of our membership, which by the end of February was around 70. Rhona Griffin offered to handle our communications, and is now answering the myriad of enquiries, plus dealing with venues and event organisers, as well as overseeing Health and Safety.

At the end of the summer term Alison Theaker organised a delightful social event on a sunny day at Chillington village hall where we entertained each other with solo songs and dances, and feasted on wonderful cakes that members had brought.

In the autumn term Ruairi introduced us to sheet music which was new for quite a number of us. He soon had us singing Leonard Cohen's Allelujah in harmony which everyone enjoys.

Towards Christmas we worked hard to prepare a program of carols to perform on the street at Kingsbridge Celebrates Christmas. Sadly this was cancelled due to extreme bad weather, but we made up for it with a brief appearance on the bandstand singing our carols, however the highlight was when some 60 of us went down to the Seven Stars and sang songs to a rather surprised and bemused audience of regulars out for a quiet drink.

And this year in 2025 Alison Bailey has joined us to look after our website and also to act as backup for the membership secretary if needed.