

Chairman's Report to the AGM, March 2011 (abridged)

Welcome to the 2011 Annual General Meeting. Thank you for re-electing me as Chairman. I should like to begin by remembering AESS member Maureen Lehane who has died after a very long battle with a degenerative illness that was extremely difficult to diagnose and treat. Also I am sad to say that Rae Woodland, although still living near Aldeburgh is not well enough to continue her membership.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the committee of the Association for all their work.

Judy is an excellent secretary and also has judged and continues to provide her house as a venue for auditions. Sue has continued to find the best opportunity for our funds in a limited market and also to prepare papers for the Charities Commission and this meeting. Marian produces excellent newsletters for us. Stephen, Marian, Betty, Sarah, Pat and Jean have all helped with judging in London and as far away as Leeds as we strive to be as regional as possible. Jean has again splendidly organised tonight's dinner. Carolyn organises the Junior Competition, Stephen organises the Senior Competition and he and I combine to deal with the newest Intermediate age group. Stephen also works tirelessly to pass on information to our large email group of members which helps to keep the AESS in the minds of all. Pat Williams, our Membership Secretary has a year-long job trying to collect subscriptions – this month for example after many reminders from Pat I am still trying to catch up with 5/6 members who have not paid for last year. It is difficult as we do not have enough members to make Direct Debits a financial viability and some members tend to forget the letter that arrives in March. It does seem a shame however that members who no longer wish to continue their membership do not at least say so when efforts are made to contact them.

With the centenary approaching in 2013, it would be good if all members could try to find one new member each. I am delighted that recently I managed to make contact with Susannah Waters who won the Senior Competition in 1989 and was the only past winner that could not be found. She has now been added to the list. Several new members have arrived through the requirement of the 18-23 year old competition that the application form is supported by an AESS member. However I know it is difficult to ask people to join something

new in today's financial climate –even for only £20 per annum. I recently wrote, duplicated and sent 550 A4 pink flyers which were inserted in the AOTOS (Association of Teachers of Singing Magazine). Many AOTOS members are also AESS members already but even so, Pat has not received a singing pink application as yet!

I am grateful to many who have helped to try to find information about the beginnings of the Association to aid our Centenary celebrations. The archive that I have only goes back to the 1930's so I am most grateful to Catherine Lambert, Garry Humphreys, Niven Miller, Edward Brooks and Lyndon van der Pump for their thoughts and indeed in Lyndon's case for copies of old speeches which have proved most helpful.

The highlights of the AESS year have been listed in the papers for the Charity Commission that you have. The three competitions all produced excellent winners. We have just had the second final of the newest 18-23 year old competition, the Courtney Kenny Award, held in Whitgift School which was won by Raphaela Papadakis. I should like to thank all those Directors of Music who have kindly provided their schools and looked after us so well and indeed Judy and Coral Gould who have allowed us to use their houses free of charge in Richmond and Burton on Trent. Last year's Patricia Routledge Competition was won by a fine soprano Helen-Jane Howells, who has since been working at Glyndebourne. The field overall was not quite as strong as usual. It was sad, that despite much reasoned argument the RCM still charged £400 for the use of the college – the first and so far –only time that this has happened. The final in May will be at Trinity Laban Conservatoire and Linda Hirst is to be thanked for her help in securing the use of the Peacock Room. Last November's Junior Competition, held at St John's School Leatherhead was won by Rosanna Cooper, who sang with a most mature sound. She came from Lincoln Minster School and the school has been most anxious to stage the 2011 preliminary round and final there this year. The committee felt that this would be a good regional experiment and we could see how entries might be affected. There will still be a preliminary round in London. The panel of judges and I all felt that the standard of speaking and indeed what to include in the 'themed' idea of the recital was poor. Many candidates came on and said "My name isand my first song is.... and now my poem is.... etc. I have therefore, in consultation with that panel and the committee drawn up a few ideas for the junior candidates and their teachers about how they might think of innovative ways of devising a 15 minute recital. These notes will be sent to all applicants and are also available on the website. Another thing, seemingly unique, about the

AESS competitions is that we always give feedback to all competitors at every stage including after the finals. This is most important and I receive many grateful comments from competitors who are pleased to have helpful ideas on how to improve their communication skills. I should like to thank Matthew Dickins for all his work keeping the website up-to-date. One of the items to view on the web is a fascinating set of photographs and commentary about the life of Catherine Lambert. Some of us here today were present at the RCM two weeks ago when a DVD made by Norbert Meyn and Janis Kelly was shown of Catherine giving a master class and talking about her life. Catherine was present with friends and family. The AESS helped to sponsor this DVD in gratitude for all Catherine has done for the Association.

As well as sponsoring the DVD we have also given small sums to help two London Song Festivals organised by members William Vann and Nigel Foster – one is happening this month and the other in November. We have also agreed to sponsor an item in a CD of Kipling speech and song to be recorded by tenor member Ben Hulett.

Thinking of the Centenary once again, I am delighted to say that both Catherine and Courtney Kenny have written to say that they have made long-term provision for the continuation of their competitions. I have also received an anonymous donation of £600 for a £200 prize to be added to the Catherine Lambert Recital Prize for the best spoken element for the next three years.

Future events include a concert of Madeleine Dring music in Chichester in May and a possible tribute to Michael Head. Our President Robert Saxton is working on something for us. A masterclass will be given at Lincoln Minster School as part of the Junior Prize and of course there will be competitions in May, November and next March and more newsletters as well as a stream of information to your email. Please look at the website. Those members without electronic communications will still receive important information by post. Any ideas for the Centenary will be considered. Pat Williams has included a preliminary questionnaire about possible Centenary ideas with the subscription renewal notices. This has already brought £260 in donations and an offer to stage an English music concert from a member who is a choral conductor.