**Annual Report September 2013-14**

At the beginning of this year Bee had family commitments which prevented her from leading the Choir, so it was very fortunate that Mike Yeomans, who had worked with us during the summer for a wedding, agreed to take over until the end of October. This got the group off to a good solid start and ensured we were prepared for the Christmas period, which turned out to be very busy. Mike is now our permanent pianist.

Our first engagement was in November, outdoors at Mount Stewart. It was a mixed experience and we will definitely want to be indoors, or at least under cover, if we do that again. And then Christmas was upon us. As well as singing at the Christmas lights switch-ons in Kircubbin and Portaferry, we were asked to be ‘the Choir’ for Portaferry Community Carol service, in the Presbyterian Church. This was a great experience. The acoustics are lovely there, and the Choir sang with great beauty and confidence in this welcoming space. We were much complimented, and paid! We also gave our own concert in Maxwell’s, which was poorly attended but very cheerful.

In January we began working on our Midsummer Music. We felt that the addition of musicians would be an enhancement, so we asked 3 friends to accompany us in the Irish music section of the concert. They were Paddy Craig, percussion, Trish Clarke on fiddle – both local, and Fran Byrne from Dublin on accordion. The music was quite hard for us, and took an enormous amount of work and faith but in the end, together with our musicians, we put together and performed a concert of which we are truly proud. This was held in the Presbyterian Church in Kircubbin – a beautiful venue which we hope we can use again.

We also took part in Voluntary Arts Week by having an open evening, to which one person came, and a really happy session at Barrhall nursing home in Portaferry. We must try to do more events like this last one. Everyone loves a sing-along!

In addition, several members took part in the Belfast Philharmonic ‘Come and Sing’ day, and a few went to St Anne’s Cathedral for a similar event. It takes a bit of courage to attend this sort of event – singing from scratch, whatever your ability – and everyone really enjoyed the experience.

We paid off the keyboard this year, bought Mike a proper keyboard stool and explored further technology with recording equipment, which turned out to be really useful, as we could record songs for our guest musicians and then email them the file as they were not able to attend every rehearsal.

As is our custom we were able to give £120 each to Marie Curie and The Gateway Club.

Money is an ongoing topic. We raised our fee to £4 per night, and decided to charge £50 for engagements that were not charitable. With the need to meet our running costs, and buy all our sheet music to comply with copyright and to build up a library, we needed to boost our funds, so there was a big fundraising effort. These included a Seed Swap, again hosted by Donna, a car boot sale, starring Parsley the cockerel who did not get sold but was a real crowd puller! But the really Big Event was a pub quiz hosted by the Saltwater Brig which raised a very good sum indeed. Thanks must go to Madge and Christine who did most of the legwork, getting lots of local sponsorship, and roping in Paul Reilly from UTV to host the quiz. A really great night out! We also asked Cheryl to join the Committee and take on publicity as she has such good ideas.

This year we are determined to get our Choir ‘out there’ to a wider audience. To this end, Christine and Bee agreed to set up a website, which has now been achieved, (truthfully, with very little input from Bee). Christine has built us a beautiful site which includes links to Youtube for our songs and to gmail, and a members page where we can post song-parts for us to learn. We are also on Facebook.

We have been sad to lose some members this year, but very pleased to welcome 3 new women who have proved to be strong useful singers. We are keen to attract more of course, so have started the year with a big presence in the local press.

In all, a year in which to be proud of our achievements. Musically the group has continued to grow in confidence and ability and we have explored a really wide variety of music. Financially we are in a sound position at the moment. Many thanks must go to the Committee this year. Meetings have been faithfully attended and issues efficiently dealt with.

But perhaps the nicest aspect of all is the social side. Real friendships have been forged, and we have had two lovely parties at Carolyn’s house as well as the after-concert hooley at Sara’s with two of our musicians. Great fun indeed.

We look forward to another year of hard work, fun and great achievement.

***Bee Kupicha***

***Choir Leader and Chair***

***September 2014***