

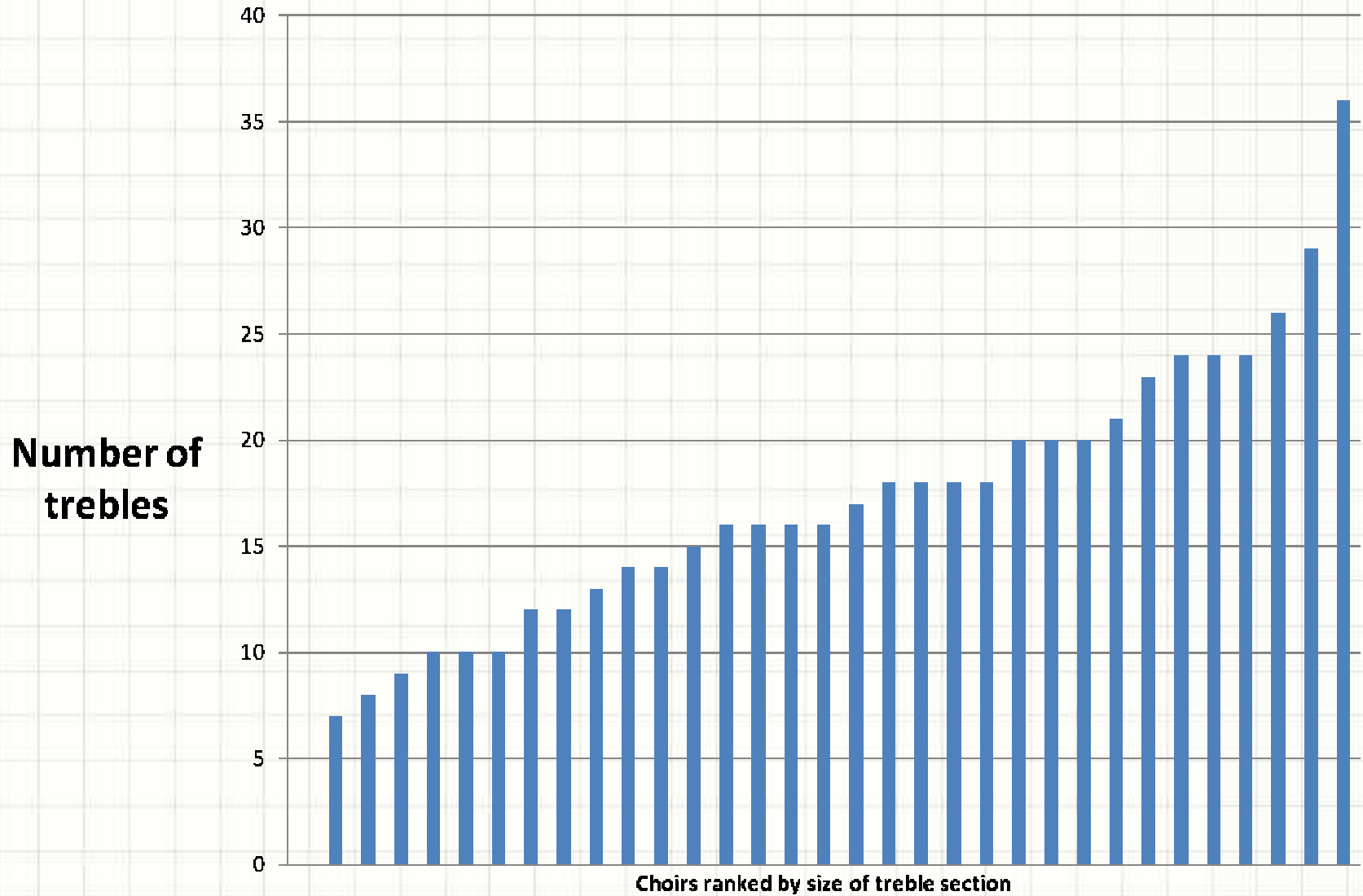
TREBLE LINE – RESULTS OF THE SURVEY 2011

Berkeley Hill
St Leonard's Church, Hythe, Kent

How many choirs with treble section?

- Now about 60 parish churches in UK with a treble section (may have other choirs)
- Survey in 1982 found AT LEAST 144 (probably two or three times this number)
- Survey in 2011 achieved 31 responses (another 2 since then)

Chart 1 Number of boys in each choir responding to survey



Sizes of choirs

- Wide range of boy numbers – 6 to 36
- Median 17, common bunching at 10 or 16, 18 (most) and 20

Table 1 Number of choirs by change of size and present size group

Size of treble section	Expanded by more than a quarter	Remained about the same	Contracted by more than a quarter
Small (up to 15 boys)	2	7	2
Medium (16-20)	3	7	
Large (over 20)	3	5	
All	8	19	2

No sign of general collapse

- In last 5 years few have seen boy numbers shrink
- Viability is possible at all choir sizes – but some suggestion that small choirs are more vulnerable
- These are the successful choirs – their strategies obviously allow them to be sustainable
- What to they do to achieve this?

Underparts

- Ex-trebles (at school) are common (23/29)
- No clear relationship with numbers of trebles and older men (see diagram)
- Numbers of men quite stable

Chart 2 Numbers of trebles and numbers of choir men.

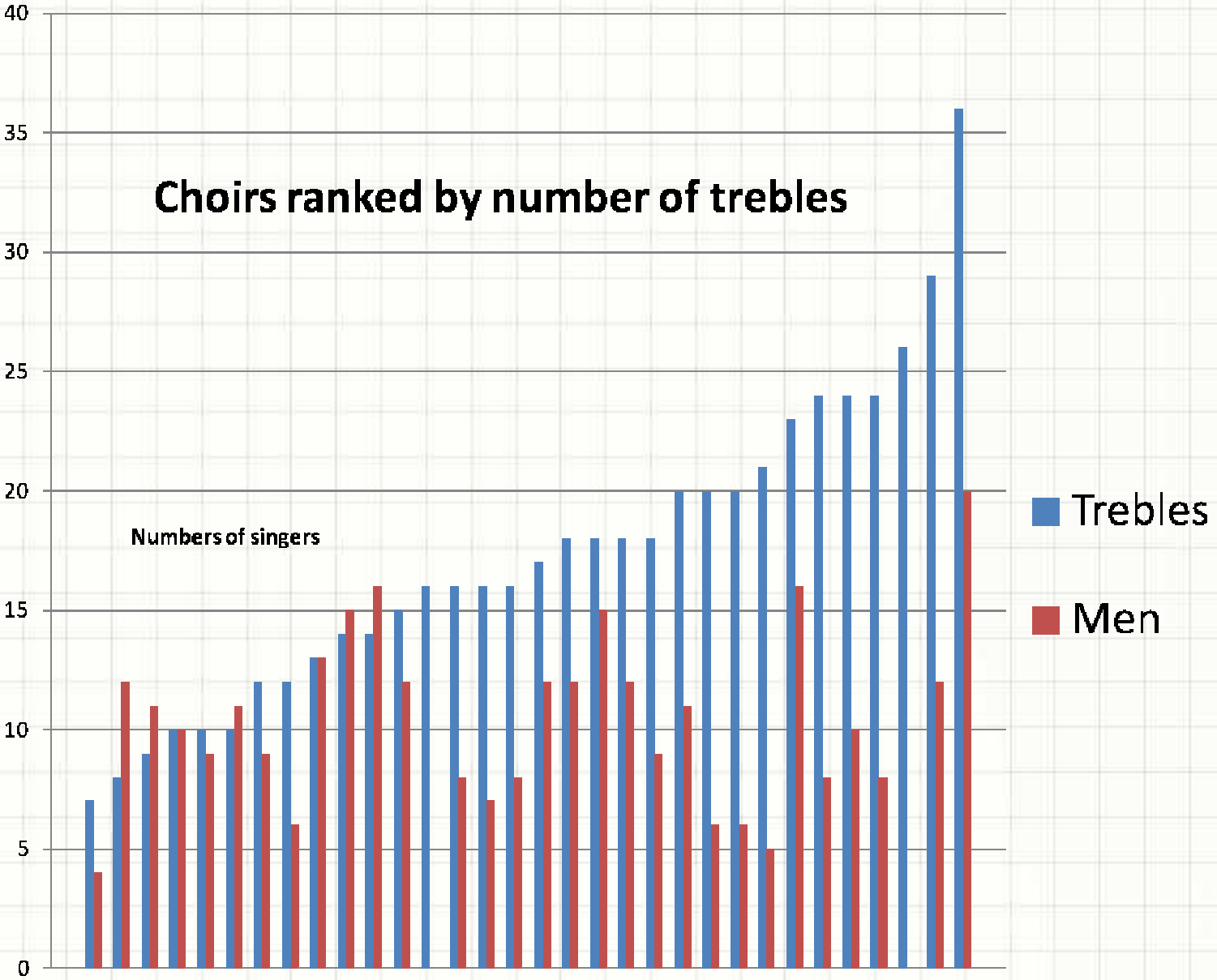


Table 2 Number of choirs by change of size of men's section and present treble size group

Size of church's treble section	Expanded by more than a quarter	Remained about the same	Contracted by more than a quarter
Small (up to 15 boys)	1	10	1
Medium (16-20)	1	8	
Large (over 20)		7	1
All	2	25	2

Girls and women's sections?

- Most churches with a treble section ALSO have another SEPARATE choir with girls or women (some have three choirs)
- Various degrees of integration (social, with men singers etc.)
- Many advantages cited (workload, social, equal opportunities, recruitment in schools etc.)

Table 3 Numbers of churches with and without other choirs containing girls/women sopranos

Size of church's treble section	With a girls/women choir	Without a girls/women choir	All choirs
Small (up to 15 boys)	9	3	12
Medium (16-20)	8	2	10
Large (over 20)	6	2	8
All	23	7	30

Payment to trebles

- Almost universal, mostly monthly
- Amounts varied (£1 to £30), but mostly small
- Various views of importance to recruitment and retention
- Main function - a token of membership, proficiency (graded) and appreciation

Table 4 Choir activities

Size of church's treble section	Number of choirs	With regular social activities	Trip with overnight stay	Cathedral deputising	Trip abroad
Small (up to 15 boys)	12	9	8	8	5
Medium (16-20)	12	9	8	9	7
Large (over 20)	8	8	6	6	7
All	31	25	21	24	18

Chart 3 Number of years choir director has been in post, ranked by size of treble section

Number of years in post

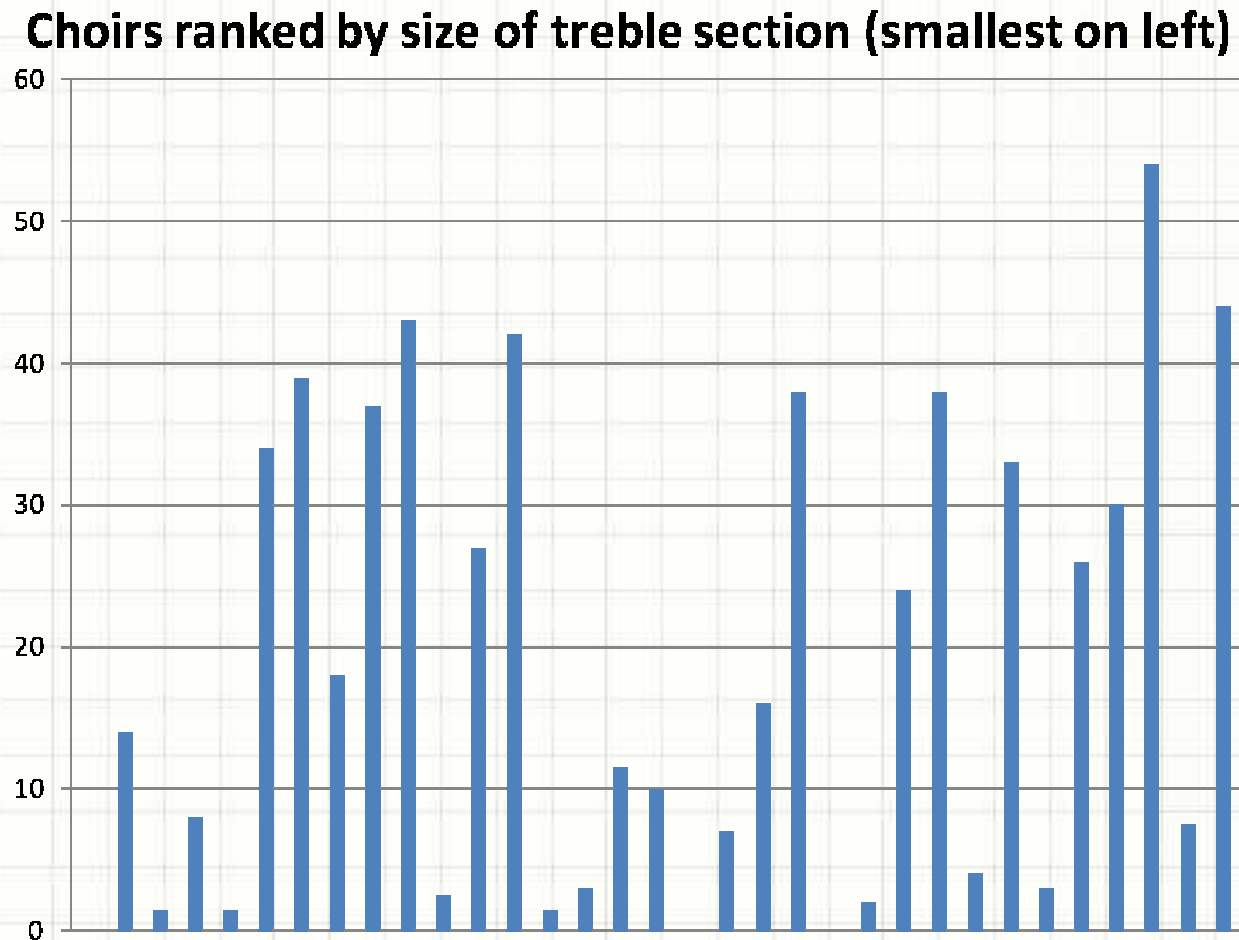


Table 5 Age of choir director

Size of treble section	20-39	40-59	60 and over
Small (up to 15 boys)	2	4	6
Medium (16-20)	3	4	4
Large (over 20)	1	4	3
All	6	12	13

Table 6 Cost to the church of the choir

Size of treble section	Less than £5000	£5000 to £10,000	Over £10,000
Small (up to 15 boys)	11	0	0
Medium (16-20)	7	2	0
Large (over 20)	4	3	2
All	22	5	2

Church support to choir

- Generally cost less than £5k (large ones more often cost more) – not including Director
- Most have separate budgets (20/30)
- Almost all had an assistant organist or choir director (30/32)
- Almost all churches 'appreciated' the choir
- Widespread confidence that the future of the choir was assured (30/32)

Table 7 Recruitment and retention of choir men

Size of treble section	Number of choirs	Problems with recruitment	Problem with retention
Small (up to 15 boys)	12	4	1
Medium (16-20)	11	8	0
Large (over 20)	8	7	3
All	31	19	4

Recruitment of choristers (Annex A)

- Active and systematic approach to recruitment
- Multiple channels of communication – personal and impersonal (includes brochure, DVD)
- Visits to schools almost universal (30/32)
- Import - letters to parents of 'selected' boys underline the benefits of choir membership
- Schools will usually facilitate sending letters to homes (addresses not usually released)

Attitude of schools

- Key to recruitment success for most choirs
- Church school generally easier to access
- General difficulties
 - Making contact
 - Gender issues (lessened if there is a girls choir)
 - Unhelpful attitude of head or governors
- Helpful to stress the benefits to the school of the presence of trained choristers

Initiation and retention

- Benefits perceived by boys will differ from those seen ex post by adults and Directors ('pay' and 'trips'?)
- Diverse views on 'easy entry' or 'deep end' approach to new choristers (age-related?)
- Rehearsals must be engaging and 'fun'
- Boys need opportunities to see they are making progress (graded training scheme)
- Music must be challenging – rehearsals planned
- Tours and Cathedral visits useful
- Each boys needs to feel he is 'special'

Parental involvement

- Often takes place, and is beneficial, but has wide variations
 - Some suspicious of what goes on in churches
 - Newsletters and open times useful
- Can parents be involved in the social and 'club' choir activities?
- Choir has to place realistic demands on family time

Summary

- Treble Line choirs are generally in good health (but what about those that have folded?)
- They are proactive in recruiting using a range of techniques
 - stress different positives for schools, parents and boys
- They have various strategies for retention
 - making singers feel 'special'
 - opportunities for attainment by individuals (training scheme) and the whole choir (trips etc)
 - present boys with musical challenges (achievable)
- Strategies need to be adaptable to the changing circumstances in which choirs find themselves



**QUESTIONS AND
COMMENTS?**