

Let All Men Sing

Celebrating 21 Years

New Mill Male Voice Choir

Shalliley Books

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“Happy 21st birthday to everyone involved with the New Mill Male Voice Choir past and present. I’m looking forward to your concert in Huddersfield Town Hall with be The Band of the Yorkshire Regiment. Wishing you many more years of success and joyful singing.”

Cheers Jason

Foreword - Thom Meredith

I would like to begin by congratulating New Mill Male Voice Choir on reaching its 21st birthday and also by thanking the choir for asking me to write a few words by means of a forward to this, their booklet commemorating that achievement.

Our voices are our most personal means of communication and self-expression. Sending texts, emails or even letters might convey an idea or give information, but a phone call or better still a face-to-face conversation tells us so much more about what a person is feeling, thinking and trying to convey. For me, singing is an extension of that most essential part of being human – the need to communicate feelings, thoughts and moods and, by doing so, to interact with other members of our species. Studies have been carried out on the effects of our voices on others and, more importantly for singers, the effects on ourselves of singing. The very act of singing releases endorphins (the brain's 'feel good' chemicals) that are thought to create a feeling of wellbeing and even to relieve stress. In addition, singing as part of a choir creates a host of social and intellectual benefits that have led current government education guidance documents to recommend that every child in every school is given regular opportunities to sing.

In this area of Yorkshire we are blessed with a rich tradition of music making and many male voice choirs and brass bands came into existence because industries providing employment to large sections of communities, gave the workers little time for relaxation and enjoyment in the workplace. One outlet that enabled people to escape from their mundane day-to-day tasks, was the setting up of musical groups or organisations. While the industries are no longer a focal point of employment, the musical

heritage they unwittingly generated continues to be an important part in the lives of many and I feel very strongly that we need to encourage that to continue.

The face of music education in the country is changing with the creation of local Music Education Hubs. These hubs are charged with the bringing together of all those in an area who are delivering any kind of musical activities and ensuring that anyone can be signposted to musical events, concerts, rehearsals, societies which may be of interest to them. This is surely an ideal opportunity therefore for amateur music making organisations to form links with the new hubs and indeed other groups in order to support the work of schools by enabling young people to see an obvious progression from the opportunities going on within schools to those happening outside. If we can encourage a desire for long-term involvement with music that caters for individuals throughout their lives from an early age, we are surely benefitting those individuals, the communities in which they live and the traditions we wish to uphold.

To keep our wonderful choral traditions alive, there are also various things which, to put it bluntly, we simply must get right. We need to create a welcoming atmosphere within our choirs; to have purposeful and enjoyable rehearsals; to make our members feel that they are progressing and improving; to be inclusive rather than exclusive; to ensure that those who lead (both administratively and musically) are good at their job; to create partnerships and collaborations across the community; to give our members the regular challenges and rewards of performances and, possibly most important, to ensure that our choirs create that sense of community and support which enabled them to become such a strong part of our culture in the first place.

I will end by drawing attention to the fact that musical tastes and trends have always been evolving and that attempting to halt this tide of progress is rarely successful! The direction in which male voice singing is travelling may well be changing, but if we are all prepared to adapt and to embrace innovative ideas, new challenges and high quality repertoire, surely we can only benefit our members, our audiences and the future of the genre we love.

Thom Meredith (Principal of Kirklees Music School and Musical Director of Colne Valley male Voice Choir)

Preface

We were not tempted to write a formal date-to-date account of New Mill's 21 years. Rather, we chose a series of moments that illustrate choir development. Whilst the approach may seem to lurch from rehearsal to concert to tour, it nevertheless reflects the real life of a choir; a background of relative peace interspersed from time to time with short sharp bursts of action.

There are as many reasons for joining a choir as there are members. An affinity with music is a good start. Some singers enjoy a weekly two hours away from day-to-day pressure in the company of men who sing. Others thrive on the company and the camaraderie that spills over into social activities like cycling, crown-green bowling, clay-pigeon shooting and trips to the brewery. Whatever their starting ability and confidence, most singers improve and want to keep improving, striving for their personal best. These private meanings find their ultimate expression during rehearsal weekends away in Llandudno or Scarborough.

The short sharp bursts of action are the concerts where we entertain in public. Some are free, but many are not and attracting a paying audience can focus the mind. Receipts may go to local projects, charities or fund-raising for other choirs and musical ensembles. Our programme peaks at the Huddersfield Town Hall when we share the stage with a high profile guest (Willard White, Aled Jones, Morriston Male Orpheus Choir, Julian Lloyd-Webber, Alison Balsom). Singers, conductor and pianist are all on their musical mettle and the choir and supporters alike work hard to ensure a commercial success.

Touring (Italy, Catalonia, Czech Republic, Poland) combines the best of the personal and the public, and we and our supporters also get to go on holiday.

We were not a competition choir until 2009 when we became South Yorkshire Champions at the Don Valley Festival held at the Elsecar Heritage Centre. We repeated the success in 2010 and came second in 2011. Performing with others helps to measure development, but being judged by a professional adjudicator is something else.

Along this jerky journey we hope the reader will appreciate how, since November 1991, the choir has improved, not only in technique and performance, but also in imaginative administration.

We still have fourteen members from 1992/93 singing and we are open to men of all vocal abilities. We have a solid footing in the male voice repertoire (Welsh hymns, spirituals, operatic extracts etc) whilst taking on more modern material (Lennon and McCartney, Robbie Williams). We are loyal to our local supporters (Christchurch, New Mill; BSF, Low Moor; Huddersfield Town Hall) and yet we are willing to try some adventurous venues (Theatre Royal, Wakefield). We have also embraced the age of the computer (www.newmillmvc.org.uk) and made four CD recordings.

Dave Walker

Introduction

I am delighted to be asked to write the Introduction to this book celebrating New Mill Male Voice Choir's 21st anniversary.

When Len Williams and a few singers met up in The Duke of Leeds little did they know if the group would survive. I am glad to say they not only survived but thrived!

Thanks must be given to so many people who saw the choir develop into a fully fledged organisation. There are so many who have given up their valuable time and served on committees, contributed to this book, carried pianos around and a host of other unsung hero jobs, that to start listing names would be an impossible task. You know who you are and thank you very much.

From a musical angle words are difficult to find to express the debt we owe to Elizabeth Hambleton, who was our Musical Director from 2001 until 2011. Also included in this dedication is our accompanist Anne Levitt, who will be retiring in the summer of this year after 10 years. Many thanks to you both.

Now we have reached our majority Alan Brierley is our Musical Director and he will be assisted by our new accompanist Emma Binns. We all look forward to the next 21 years and wish all our supporters all the very best.

Adam Brown, Chairman NMMVC

Untitled

Near Huddersfield, there in New Mill, in Green Jackets we have
some men.
Dougie played us the choir singing; Alan told us the how and
the when.
Conceived quite by chance in a pub, so romantic its growth but
quite strong
The choir became South Yorkshire Champions before they'd
been going too long.
We salute both you and your choir, your presentation's brought
pleasure to all;
May you go on singing in harmony, and your enjoyment of it
never pall.

(written by a lady in the audience at Slaithwaite during a presentation of 'Green Jackets')



1. Music-Making in the Holme Valley

Leisure and Industrialisation

Since the nineteenth century, West Yorkshire has been bursting with music and musical activity, with Huddersfield being particularly energetic. Huddersfield Choral Society, formed in 1836, is deservedly held up as a fine example of the town's musical excellence. In addition, between 1820 and 1914, thirty choirs, brass bands and orchestras were formed in Huddersfield, and a further sixty appeared in the Holme and Colne Valleys.

The Industrial Revolution, which in Huddersfield's case centred on woollen textiles, brought with it greater leisure time for people of all classes, and from 1830, large numbers of people, with differing abilities and from all sections of society, began to take part in music, sports and other pastimes. It is, for example, from this period that Yorkshire's rich heritage of club cricket originated. Several factors influenced the blossoming of musical development in the area: first, the growth of non-conformism, especially the role of music and singing in the Methodist chapels; second, the support and patronage of the mill-owning elite. Some might say that this was due to genuine concern for the well-being of their employees. Others point out the need for discipline in the new factories, and singing was thought to encourage sobriety, punctuality, and hard work – something it still does today, of course! (or perhaps we should pass over sobriety, and as for punctuality – how can you tell when a tenor is at your door? Well, he can't find the key and he doesn't know when to come in); third, work patterns were flexible in the textile trade. For example, weaving was done in the home well into the nineteenth century, making use of unsocial hours, thus allowing time off for rehearsals; fourth, civic pride was growing, and competition to be the best became important. The Mrs Sunderland annual music

festival, for example, was inaugurated in 1889, whilst in 1887, the Huddersfield Glee and Madrigal Society won the Welsh National Eisteddfod held at London's Royal Albert Hall. In addition to winning and losing, late nineteenth century music-lovers began to express themselves in leisure by paying to watch others perform, taking payment for playing, teaching or conducting and helping their choirs and orchestras become business-like and commercially successful.

Looking at the Holme Valley and New Mill in particular, records show that in the 1850s a choral society was based at the old Duke of Leeds public house, performing pieces by composers such as Handel. It is interesting to note that almost 150 years later, the New Mill MVC was also founded at the Duke of Leeds, albeit a newer building. New Mill Church's choir was formed in 1873, singing without break until the present day. There has also been a Holmfirth Choral Society since the 1850s, and the Holmfirth Sing, an annual unrehearsed concert open to all, takes place every Sunday before Whit in Victoria Park, and has done so since 1882.

Holme Valley MVC was set up by Irwin Silverwood in 1910, rehearsing at the Royal Oak, Thongsbridge which, incidentally, was later used by New Mill MVC as its rehearsal venue. The choir won the Welsh Eisteddfod at Caernarvon in 1921 but sadly, losing members since 1943, it disbanded in 1950 when Mr Silverwood retired. In 1924, a choir was convened by Mr F Brook at New Mill Club and Memorial Room, the present rehearsal venue for the New Mill MVC. An orchestra followed and by 1935, they were performing concerts, pageants, revues and shows. Netherthong MVC began in 1926 under Arthur Sanderson, rehearsing at Netherthong Zion Sunday School. It had a purple patch between 1955 and 1958 winning five consecutive contests, including two

at the Mrs Sunderland festival. It is said that 26 of its members were still rehearsing in the 1970s.

Coming up to date, other local choirs who are still singing, include Holme Valley Singers, Vocal Expressions and Honley Ladies.

Finally, New Mill (1991) is proud to join Colne Valley (1922), Skelmanthorpe (1934), Honley (1936) and Gledholt (1948) as the fifth and youngest of Huddersfield and District's fine male voice choirs.

David Walker and Alan Hicks

Church, Music and New Mill

Dave Walker talks with Geoffrey Richardson

The 96 year old Connaught Court, Fulford, York, resident has three things running through his veins: music, church and New Mill.

He began music as a Christchurch chorister and is especially proud of his solo in the anthem to celebrate the church's centenary. Introduced to accompaniment by his mother, a good singer, he took piano and then, at 16, organ lessons eventually graduating at The Royal College of Organists (1938). His first appointment was to a quartet. Subsequently, he was resident organist, choir master, accompanist and recitalist with Holme Valley MVC, Gledholt Methodists, Brunswick St Methodist, Christchurch, New Mill, the Masonic Lodge and The Royal Cinema, Plymouth (a 'Compton' that came out of the floor to entertain 3000). Despite coordination problems, he still plays for his fellow residents. He retired from formal organ-playing in 1959, becoming Churchwarden of Christchurch, a post he held for 24 years. Geoffrey Lockwood

(the current organist at Christchurch and neighbour of New Mill Club) and Brett Mellor were a choirboys under his wing.

After Honley Grammar School and medical duties in the army

(El Alamein, Sicily, Italy and Aramanche, Arnhem), he followed his father as managing director of Copley-Marshalls, a cotton mill that put the stripes in pin-stripe suits amongst other things (making New Mill MVC's jacket cloth for example). His mother was the daughter of Tom Atkinson who founded our famous New Mill butcher's shop. The slaughterhouse must have been somewhere in the car park behind Geoffrey Lockwood's house.

Edgar Dickinson was a good pal from the local Masonic Lodge.

Holme Valley MVC, the first choir to go to London and cut a record, was the best choir he has heard and played for. The reasons for this include the good balance between voices and the musical interpretation by a regular conductor, especially pianissimo. Apparently six basses could easily manage bottom C. When Irwin Silverwood's health failed and the choir disbanded, other choirs benefited, including Honley and Netherthong. Post-war, music in the valley was plentiful with churches prominent. Geoffrey played regularly for a popular concert party and an 'Orpheus Male Voice Quartet'. More recently he came to know Len Williams well, in the role of accompanist to many of the soloists who sang with New Mill and Len's operatic group rehearsals. Geoffrey admires our enthusiasm and ability to attract singers.

Both Hade Edge Band and New Mill MVC have visited and performed at Connaught Court.



Singing in the 1950s

I joined Slaithwaite Parish Church Choir at the age of 9 or 10. Our choirmaster was Organist Frank Chorlton, a great tutor with lots of patience. My father played soprano cornet for Slaithwaite and Linthwaite band and my grandfather played the violin.

The highlight of our year took place on Christmas Day afternoon when a group of choristers were requested to sing carols at the homes of local mill-owners. They had splendid Christmas parties for their children and grandchildren and the presents around the tree were something to behold, compared to our own. When the collection bag went round it was amazing. I had never seen as many large white fivers! We went out for about four hours, before returning to the vestry for the share out. Many times I took home more money than my father earned in a week as foreman at the Iron Foundry.

As a member of Slaithwaite Cricket and Bowling Club, I played with top tenor, Jack Bamford, who sang with the renowned Colne Valley MVC. After matches, if we'd won, we'd have a sing in the local and Jack would always give us 'Pratty Flowers', 'Love Could I only Tell Thee' and 'Rose of England'. Jack asked me if I'd be interested in joining his choir. Imagine his horror when I told him, despite coming from a musical family, I couldn't read music. Colne Valley MVC had a successful Musical Director by the name of George Stead, but to be accepted you had to audition, choosing your own piece, and then be given another piece to sight-read and sing. It didn't happen.

Edward Sykes

2. The Early Years



2011-12



1992



1993

Len Williams

The first ever public performance of the choir at Hepworth Village Hall and the first song, 'Gwahoddiad'. The sound man off 'Last of the Summer Wine' recorded the event, after which we all repaired to the pub to listen to our performance. Talk about smug faces, and 'from out of the mouths of babes' etc.!!

If not already covered by other correspondents, could I mention the contribution made by the late Len Williams. He really did give confidence to a group of unruly men who were merely pub singers, to enable them to perform on stage before an audience. Perhaps forgotten during the fullness of time.

Jim Butterworth, former Chairman

And as they say “The rest is ... “

Twenty one years! - it seems only yesterday that the first stirrings of vocal talent appeared in New Mill to become the New Mill Male Voice Choir. When we look at the choir’s origins we see a group of ordinary lads, from a multitude of backgrounds, coming together in a local pub to enjoy singing. This combination of diversity, desire to sing and having fun, has been one of the choir’s strengths and has enabled it to grow and develop into the thriving organisation we see today.

We owe a lot to these early pub choristers who, under the musical guidance of Len Williams, a retired Welsh opera singer, were able to overcome the difficulties and trials of forming a group of men capable of producing a musical sound which satisfied them and which people wanted to listen to and appreciate. Len’s musical ability and application to the task in those early days cannot be underestimated. His time with Welsh National Opera provided him with his knowledge of singing and vocal sound production and his ‘Welshness’, stimulated his desire to be successful. With the support of a local, Brett Mellor, Len was able to transform a group of pub singers into today’s concert ready choir.

The pub in question, the Duke of Leeds (the Duke) in New Mill village, was, at that time, owned by Brett Mellor, publican and well-known ex-police officer who could sing very well when the mood took him. Quality real ale was served at the Duke, and ‘proper’ pork pies were available supplied from Atkinson’s



Len Williams and Brett Mellor

By kind permission of The Examiner 1991

butchers next door owned by another chorister, John Mallinson and his brother. Ale, good food and friendship - perfect prerequisites for a good lads’ night out! Other regulars provided a ready source of potential choral talent. We thus had the right ingredients needed for the formation of a male voice choir.

The first semi-formal choir activity began with teaching sessions arranged at Len Williams’ home in Burnlee, Holmfirth. Len had recently moved from North Wales with his wife Catherine, who had taken up a music teaching post with Kirklees Metropolitan Council, the local authority for the area. Len was looking for opportunities to use his musical talent and background to fill his spare time, and teaching singing to eager choristers helped him settle into his new home in the Holme Valley. He was a Welsh speaker with a smattering of Ital-

ian and his operatic roots provided him with the tools needed for the task. Knowledge of voice control and vocal sound production enabled him to successfully teach non-singers the rudiments of the game. John Mallinson recalls when Len said if enough signed up to a choir he would work the first year for free. And he did.

Choral singing with Len Williams must have had a profound effect on these lads for they soon had the desire to take musical matters further. They took advantage of a one month free offer to the new choir of the use of a local school. The first of these was attended by John Mallinson and Barry Meeres in November 1991. According to John only seven or eight turned up in the first week, but a flood of hopeful choristers arrived in subsequent

weeks so that about fifteen were there when the first music was handed out by the newly chosen Conductor and Musical Director, Len Williams.

The musical piece handed out that night was, unsurprisingly, 'Gwahoddiad' (An Invitation), the famous Welsh male choir song which, probably to Len's disappointment, was learnt by the budding choir in English - maybe learning to sing and to speak Welsh at the same time was beyond even these willing individuals!

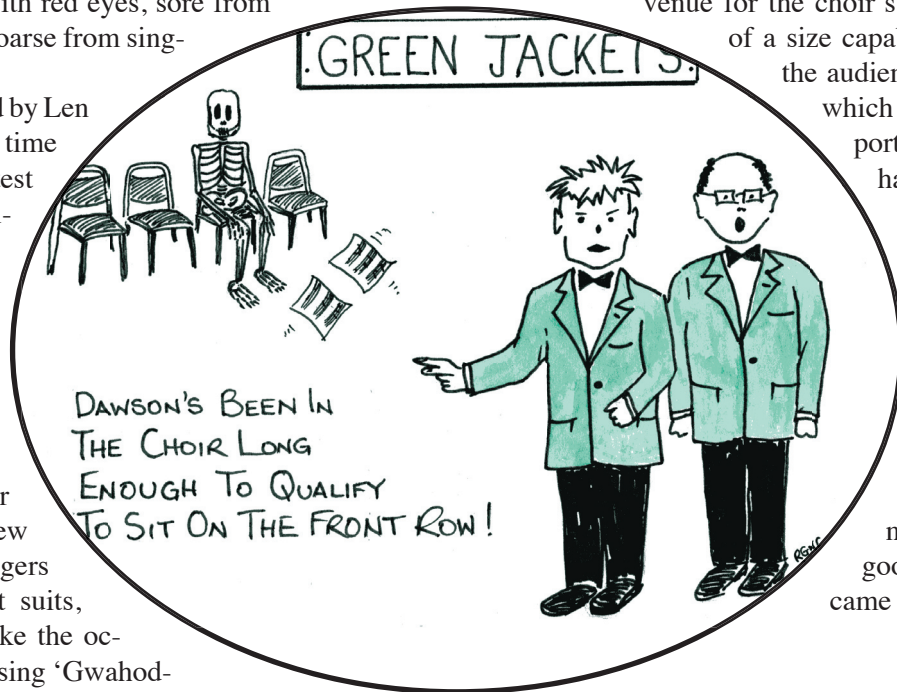
The Duke of Leeds pub provided a showcase for singing and having a good time after practice on Tuesday nights in those early months and the fun had by all is a memory these early singers will cherish. Arriving home with red eyes, sore from laughter at Brett's antics and hoarse from singing, took some explaining.

In March 1992, it was decided by Len and the choir that it was about time to spread wings a little and test out the newly learnt choral talent, so an invitation went out to wives, partners and selected friends to a performance to demonstrate the confidence in singing that the recently named New Mill Male Voice Choir had achieved. A formal dinner was arranged at Durker Roods Hotel in Meltham, a few miles from New Mill, and singers were encouraged to don best suits, preferably dinner suits, to make the occasion special. The attempt to sing 'Gwahod-

diad' and 'Softly as I Leave You', the only songs known at that time, was not surprisingly something to be greatly remembered! The event did, however, assure wives and partners that on Tuesday evenings their menfolk had indeed been learning to sing, and not, as some may have believed, participating in any secret liaisons!

The first formal concert the choir gave was in the village hall at Hepworth village, about two miles south of New Mill. By this time 9.5.92. Len believed that a sufficient number of songs had been learnt by the choir, to a high enough standard, for a public audience to be entertained. Hepworth Village Hall made a good

venue for the choir's first outside venture, being of a size capable of holding fifty or so in the audience and having a stage from which to sing. Probably more important at that time was that it had a suitable pub adjacent to the hall (The Butchers Arms) to provide refreshment as and when necessary. There are memories of a rush for a pint at half time, all believing that the second half would be improved by the liquid intake! Sad to say this was not, however, the case, but good reviews from those who came made up for it.



Doug Shuttleworth



The first ever public performance of the choir at Hepworth village hall, the first song, 'Gwahoddiad'. The sound man off 'Last of the Summer Wine' recorded the event, after which we all repaired to the pub to listen to our performance. Talk about smug faces, and 'from out of the mouths of babes!'

Jim Butterworth, former Chairman

Hepworth Gala Night

Hepworth Players Proudly Present
the inaugural performance of

NEW MILL MALE VOICE CHOIR

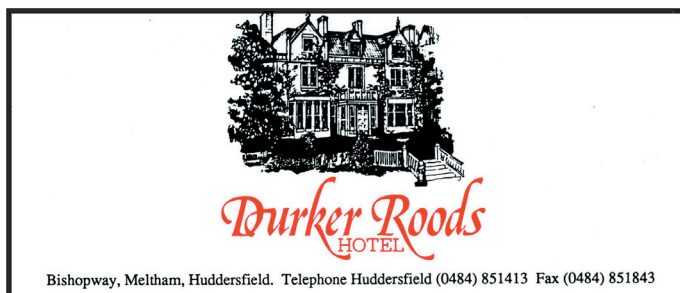
together with
a theatrical performance by

"THE PLAYERS"

plus
an extravaganza of supporting acts

Friday 8th & Saturday 9th May 1992

Tickets: £2.00



Early Minutes

Early minutes record a meeting on 19.1.91. when the following were present: Brett Mellor, Peter Hirst, Simon Jenkins, John Mallinson, John Mitchell, Mark Kenworthy and Paul Rickets. The next meeting recorded was on 29.10.92 when Ray Thompson was in the Chair, Kevin Howley was secretary and Barry Meeres treasurer. Items discussed included charity status, the keeping of accounts and a constitution.

Only three more meetings are in the archive. Discussions about Cardiff, ties, Atlanta, a piano, music, Low Moor, Llangollen and local concerts are recorded. On 18.3.93. Mr Bearne was to be asked about the tuning of the rehearsal piano. He was the head of Lydgate special school. By 1994, choir practice had moved to Wooldale Primary.

A Durker Roods menu is also in the archive. Though not dated, it must be from the same period as above, maybe that first dinner when the new choir sang two songs.

Our Famous Butcher

1991 was a milestone year for me. Firstly, along with my brother, I acquired the long established 'Atkinson's' butcher in the centre of New Mill. This meant that I was to be my own boss for the first time and in charge of my own future. A very exciting prospect.

But little did I know that shortly after I was to embark on a journey that would change my life completely. In November of 1991, along came New Mill MVC! Like a bolt from the blue, or green in this case.

How the choir was formed has been well documented (in practically every programme since) so need to go into that. At that time Brett Mellor was a good friend of mine and landlord of the Duke of Leeds and was always full of ideas, some good, some not so good. He had been pestering me for a while to go along to a choir practice at Lydgate school. The first was organised by Brett and presided over by Len Williams, who I didn't know. I was hooked from the very first meeting and haven't missed many since.

John Mallinson

Steel Toe Caps

Graham Dawson and I came together to our first rehearsal. We'd had a brief encounter with Bradford Choral a few weeks earlier, but decided against it as their next concert was somewhere like Settle. Besides that, we were well out of our depth.

The first few weeks were fun. I think we were learning four songs. I changed to first tenors after a short while and left Graham with seconds on the front row.

The biggest surprise was when Len announced we were going to do a concert. This wouldn't faze any new recruit nowadays, but this was the first, and it was a shock. I didn't think for one minute that I had come to a choir practice to perform on stage.

It was in Hepworth village hall, a few weeks in the future. I'm not sure whether I had my charity shop DJ by then. We probably did because, come the big day, I turned up in brown shoes. Having been ridiculed by one who was a regular performer in DJ, I was left with a dilemma, half an hour before our first concert, and I didn't have any black shoes. What's to be done? Then I remembered Totectors Shop floor engineering company supplied steel toecaps to protect your feet from damage in work. I rushed home. Work saved the day. Black shiny brogues, never worn because I preferred last years brown ones. The steel shoes and I performed on stage and no one knew the difference.

Last of the summer wine sound engineers were in the audience and recorded us. We all thought we were fantastic as we listened in the pub afterwards.

No, I don't still wear the steel toe cap shoes on stage!

Selwyn Hill

Youth Policy

I joined the choir in 1992 at the ripe old age of 20!!! As I walked into my first practice I remember thinking, 'Is this really going to be for me?' The rest of the choir were at least 20 years my senior. I can't remember how, but I ended up a baritone. I soon realised singing was fun and the sound created was quite tuneful.

Mark Shuttleworth



Early rehearsal

By kind permission of The Examiner



Taken at Holmfirth High School, prior to Wooldale Old Folks Treat concert

By kind permission of The Examiner 15.5.1993.

A Scottish Import

Our arrival in Yorkshire was fortuitous in placing us as neighbours to a man from Wales who had the inclination to start a male voice choir and this followed his operatic singing career in London. An invitation to join soon came and this was the start which would take me on a road to learning new disciplines and making new friends. Many in the choir would enjoy their first experience of music and of performing on many stages. We would also visit many places that we would not otherwise have contemplated and horizons widened for all involved.

Word spread quickly through friends and work colleagues and a varied band of enthusiasts - some better than others - would collect and numbers grew steadily. It was interesting to watch this group forming with members from all parts and many occupations and waiting to see how the group dynamics would work.

While all the varied groups kept their identities, music was the key which kept them together and working for one another and so it has been since with a welcome for everyone and a desire to improve.

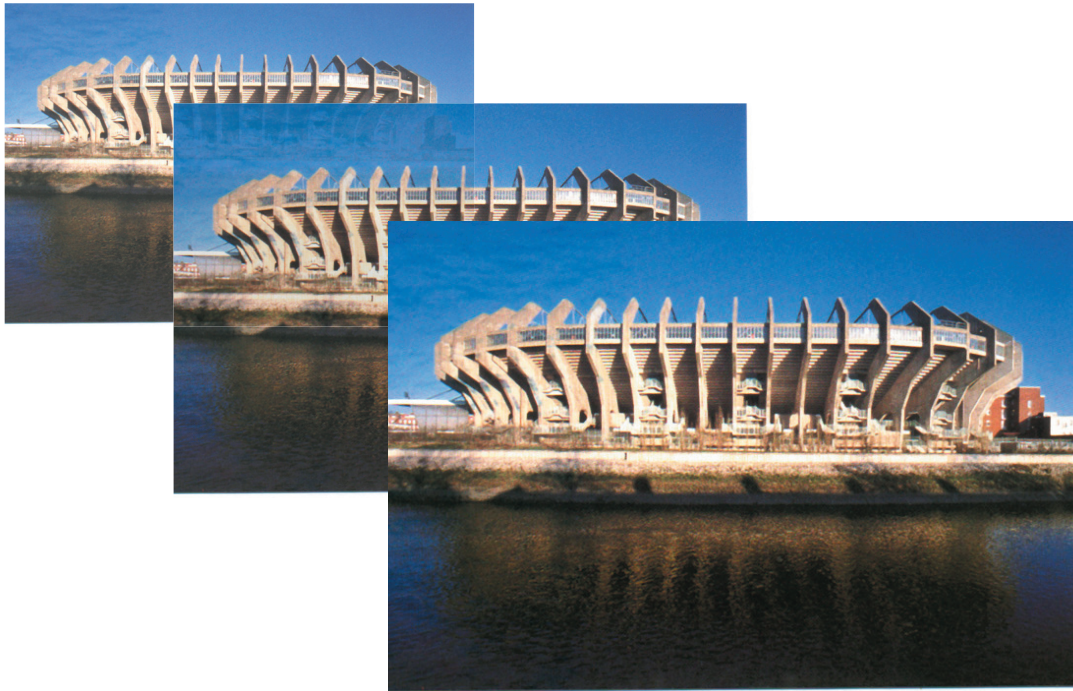
With numbers growing steadily and the strong Welsh influence it came as no surprise that a trip to Wales was planned and the prospect of singing with ten thousand Welshmen in Cardiff Arms Park was one not to be missed.

Bob Carrick

3. 1993

The World Choir

Cardiff Arms Park



By kind permission of The Examiner 24.5.1993.

The 1993 Examiner piece noted that the choir had grown to 50 singers, all who were looking forward to the concert in Cardiff. A Victorian Weekend concert in Kirkby Lonsdale, Huddersfield massed choirs (1992) and, in March 1993, a St David's Day evening at Holmfirth High School with Hepworth band had been successful.

Cardiff

The first 'Big-Time' event for the new choir came in 1993, just eighteen months after its formation. A massed choir concert in the Cardiff Arms Park stadium was an exciting opportunity for the raw lads from New Mill. Len Williams' home territory, the Principality of Wales was an obvious choice for New Mill Male Voice Choir to take to the big stage for the first time!

As fortune would have it, New Mill Male Voice Choir had been invited to join two massed events in 1993, both sadly to be held on the same day, 29 May. New Mill conductor, Len Williams took the initiative, choosing the South Wales World Choir concert, to be held at Cardiff Arms Park, with Shirley Bassey as the star performer.

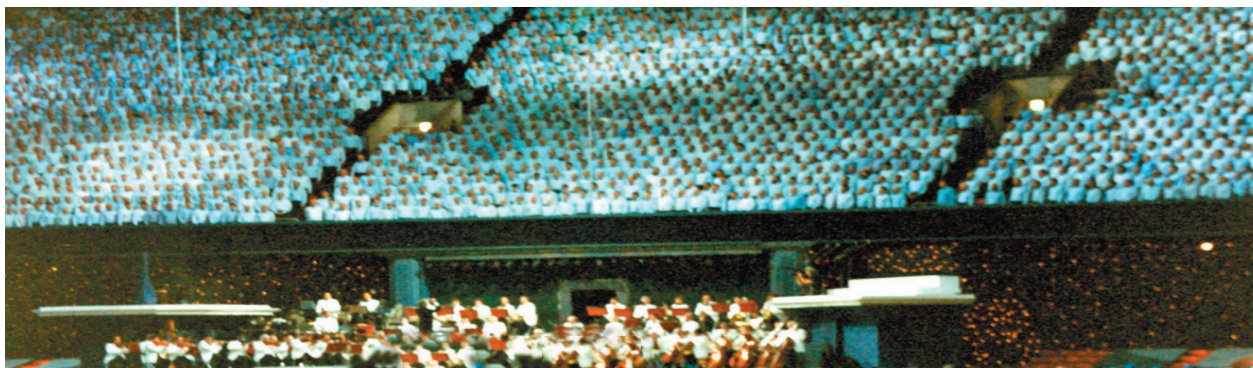


Photo from Barry Meeres

A massed choral event is the coming together of many choirs to provide audiences with a 'big' musical sound, not usually possible with an individual choir. The make-up of choirs may be all male, all female or male/female but, there is no doubting the thrill that can be experienced when singing together 'en masse' with like-minded people. For such a young, newly formed choir as New Mill, the experience that could be gained by singing with dedicated, mature choristers from other famous choirs could not be over-estimated.

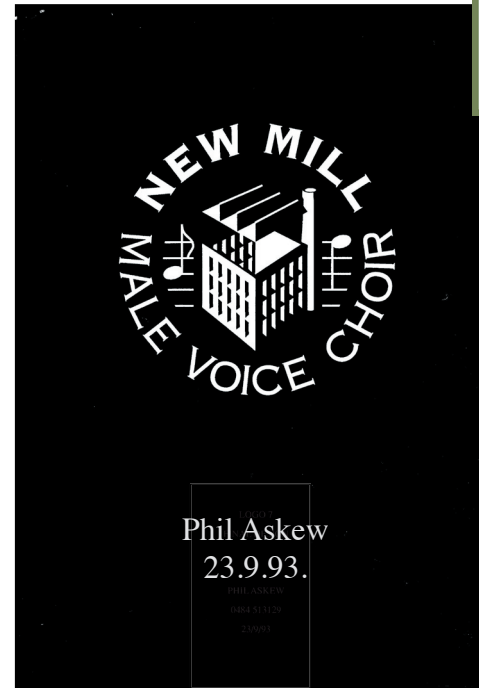
This concert was to be the second such event for an organisation founded by a Welsh business man, Wyndham Lewis. The first was also at Cardiff, the previous year, with Tom Jones as the star guest. Some members of the choir at the time were disappointed that they would not be able to mix with other local choirs such as Honley and Gledholt who were singing at the Royal Albert Hall in aid of Yorkshire Cancer Research but the decision had been made and arrangements for travel and accommodation had to be sorted out. This persuaded a group of members to stay at the

Caravan Club site in Cardiff, fortuitously located within walking distance of Cardiff Arms Park.

The concert itself was a magnificent occasion held in the National Stadium of Wales, soon to be demolished and completely rebuilt. Owain Arwel Hughes was conductor of both the 8,500 strong choir and full orchestra. The soloists were boy soprano, Oliver Sammons; harpist, Catrin Finch; tenor, Winford (or should it be Wynford?) Evans; and powerful bass/baritone Patta Burchuladze from Georgia in the former USSR. The biggest thrill of the evening, (after the performance of the choir, of course), was the guest appearance of Shirley Bassey, then very much in her prime. She captivated the audience with such songs as 'Hey Jude' and 'Big Spender', with the choir providing vocal support! This lady won the hearts of the men during the rehearsal where she showed her true class - what a performer!

Much of the repertoire chosen for the massed choirs was in Welsh. Len Williams' upbringing provided New Mill with a big advantage - the choir had a ready-made Welsh tutor! Such hymns as 'Gwahoddiad' and 'Deus Salutis' set a strong Welsh tone and, as most of the choirs taking part were from Wales, this helped the Brits and other non-Welsh speakers to get by. Other songs included 'Were You There?' and 'Jacob's Ladder'.

Doug Shuttleworth



**Logo design
Then and now**

The Ballad of New Mill Male Voice Choir

Last year in our village the men did enquire
As to how they should go about forming a choir.
So they gathered together all them as could sing
And them like as couldn't they also did bring.
They taught them just how for to Doh Ray Me Fah Soh
And when to be hurried and be slow.
But nobody stopped when they came to a rest
Cause each man was singing the time he liked best.

There were fat men and thin men and tall men and small
With black hair and grey hair and some non at all.
They practised and practised each Tuesday night
Trying to get it harmoniously right.
The basses and tenors oh how they did go
Whenever they came to a fortissimo.
But even in passages marked double pee
They shook the whole place down as loud as could be.

Now the folk of New Mill were as pleased as could be
To think that they had their own choir don't you see,
And promised when all the right notes they could sing
A famous opera star they would bring.
In uniforms green so proud and pristine
They sang out their hearts to a man.
And finally they did it, they did it just right
Singing in Town hall with Sir Willard White

Now time passes on, the choir is twenty one
And some of our members are gone
To that state of Grace where they now take their place
In the ranks of The Heavenly Choir.
But with members new our singing we pursue
From Beethoven, Beatles to Brahms.
Italy, Poland and Spain have heard our refrain
But we're home in New Mill once again.

John Rotchell

(Can also be sung to the tune of 'My Grandfather's
Clock')

4. 1994 - 1997



Early Concerts

Of the venues, there are a few one would hope never to return to! My advice is never accept a booking for a CID party at 'The Woodman', Thunderbridge. One evening, after rehearsal, we sang our hearts out from a circular balcony for a mass of severely drunk detectives, and their lady friends on the floor below. I doubt they 'detected' our presence at all! Avoid also a nameless working mens club where our performance was seen as a major intrusion into the bingo session and bar service, or maybe we had just delayed the appearance of the stripper! Perhaps even our 'top secret high security' deployment into the SAS barracks in London was little better, but what a unique opportunity.

The highlights, in addition to The Albert Hall and Huddersfield Town Hall, were as follows: Elland Road before a game, Cardiff Arms Park with Shirley Bassey as a 'support' act, the McAlpine Stadium soon after it opened, 'Last of the Summer Wine' 25 year celebration dinner at Holmfirth Civic Hall, Holmbridge when 'Compo' took up the baton, and an ad hoc show on an aeroplane en route to Italy.

Ian Lister, former Chairman

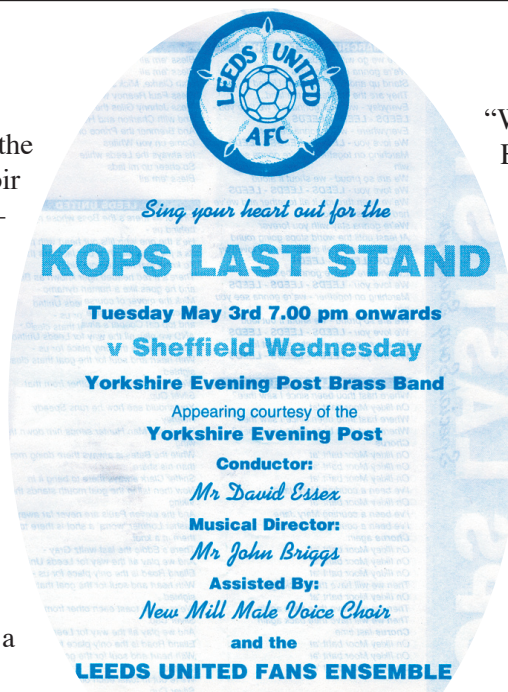
Kop's Last Stand

Life was never dull during the formative years of the choir and Len William's close relationship with John Briggs, the internationally renowned concert pianist, often presented us with interesting opportunities.

Imagine a hectic sales office. I'm busy trying to arrange a sales conference and I receive a panic phone call from Len which went something like this,

"Alright boy! We've got a problem."

"Okay Len, what can I do to help?"



"Well it's like this see. The choir has been invited to sing at Elland Road, Leeds, to commemorate the closing of their 'Spion Kop' and we don't know any of the songs!"

"Okay Len, when does this event take place?"

"Next Tuesday," and he put the phone down.

Luckily, one of my colleagues was a Leeds season ticket holder. I persuaded him to hire a dinner suit and, overnight, he became a member of New Mill MVC. On Tuesday 3rd May 1994 he helped lead us, ably assisted by Len, John Briggs, the Yorkshire Evening Post Brass Band and the Leeds United Fans Ensemble. A tremendous pre-match event including '16 Tons' by Leeds legend, John Charles, and I'll never ever forget the shouts of "Sumo!!" "Sumo!!" when John Briggs walked on the pitch. He took it in his stride.

The final score was Leeds U 2 - Sheffield W 2. It didn't matter. It was the end of an era.

Graham Dawson

1994 Huddersfield Town Hall

By kind permission of Greaves, The Photographers



The Choir Wardrobe

Selwyn Hill did a stalwart job for many years of looking after the choir's wardrobe. He passed the job onto a new choir member, Mark Fisher, who found that he didn't enjoy the duties, so he called for volunteers to step forward to take over the task. Being a little slow I was the one who failed to take one step back at the muster and found myself volunteering for the job. It must be said however that after months of coping with the unoriginal sallies of 'suits you sir' and 'will you be measuring my inside leg', I've settled happily to my responsibilities.

New Mill weavers, Bower-Roebuck, make cloth for the famous all over the world. It was at this very mill that the cloth used to make our uniform jackets was dyed and woven to our specification.

Our famous roll of green cloth is now kept at 'Tor Design and Marketing'. This excellent tailoring company, based in Leeds, specialises in making suits for choirs and brass bands throughout the North of England. They are not cheap and one of the biggest problems I have with my wardrobe duties is the gradually expanding girths of members. As gentle living and socialising with beer or madeira cake replaces a more strenuous physical workaday routine I would encourage all the choir to consider their daily regimen, not only would it save us money but we could really make an impression on stage.

Paul Morgan



**1996 New jackets, cloth courtesy of Bower-Roebuck,
New Mill. Uniform covers supplied by
the landlord of The Duke of Leeds**

Blame Selwyn

Securing £6,000 for the purchase of cloth for the famous green jackets from the Council for Arts and Sports was a major development for the choir in I think 1994-1995. A special committee to choose the colour was headed by Selwyn, so blame him!!!

The main reason we secured the money was because I was interviewed by a chap from the Arts Council at the then McAlpine Stadium, who had been contributors to the building of the stadium. I polished the plaque in the foyer acknowledging this grant before his arrival. He was very impressed, and after a walk round the ground, gave me the cheque, having commented on the shiny plaque.

Jim Butterworth, former Chairman

Dressing up

Before Green Jackets, it was dress suits. John Mallinson had never owned one and had to go into town and buy one. So he and a pal arranged to visit the Greenwood's sale - dress suits for £50. As they walked through the door, guess what? A dozen choristers had beaten them to it - join the queue.

The Wrong Trousers

Interesting what you overhear waiting for rehearsals and concerts.

'You've lost weight,' said Selwyn in the Chapter House.

'Yes, about three and a half stone,' replied Ray.

'How do you get stuff to fit?' They exchanged knowing glances.

'How many green jackets have you got now?'

It gradually became clear to the listeners. When Ray returned to the choir he was putting on weight and Selwyn was uniform supremo. There must have been weekly or monthly accomodating measurements and adjustments. Just the jacket though. To cover his embarrassment, Ray bought his own trousers. He actually finished with three jackets, two now with other singers.

Ray looks well on it. Selwyn gave him a wry smile and asked if he could borrow his cook book.

1997 Yorkshire Festival of Music

After a lot of hard work and good fun, in 1997 we appeared in our biggest venue to date, 'The Royal Albert Hall'. Who'd have thought it 'New Mill', the choir that people said wouldn't happen or couldn't last appeared as part of 1000 voices concert for 'Yorkshire Cancer Research'. A very moving experience and a grand weekend away. We were very well represented with over 40 singers and resplendent in our almost new green jackets that have become our trademark.

John Mallinson



Songs And Secrets

The 'songs' bit is easy to explain but the 'secrets' bit is more tricky!

A former Choir President, the late Fred Stallard and choir member Brett Mellor, had connections with the Army and as a result we were invited to sing at a special event, which is where the 'secrets' bit comes in.

Being sworn to secrecy because of the nature of this particular performance, in February 1996, I seem to remember that the boys were not allowed to inform our other halves of our destination until the day we set off! Well it's not every day you would be asked to sing for the SAS Regiment - in Chelsea Barracks - especially when London is on Amber Alert!!!

On arriving at our 'secret' destination we were checked in to our sumptuous accommodation, namely two barrack rooms with bunk beds, with the usual banter as to who should have the top bunk. Unfortunately en-suite facilities were not available at this time, but suitable arrangements had been made, across the corridor!!!

Having overcome one or two minor problems, the 'singing' bit was very well received, after which we were told supper would be served, with mention being made of Beef Wellington, plus various trimmings. I forget what cuisine did arrive, but sadly it was not Beef Wellington, nor was there a great deal to go round. The bar in the sergeant's mess was, however, open for business so liquid refreshment was on hand to numb the disappointment of being foodless.

It was all too soon to return to our palatial bedrooms, oh sorry, bedroom singular. Was I the lucky one to have Graham D on top I asked myself? London on amber alert was bad enough, but now

the possibility of 'hover-duvet alert' was uppermost in my mind, and our good friend Derek D made sure he had a suitable place to light his pipe before slipping neatly into his nightshirt. It soon became apparent that noises, other than vocal, would be the order of the night (so to speak), given the collective amount of alcohol that had been consumed, but once we settled down all soon became quite on the western front.

Rumour has it, that during the night some SAS boys came into our room and removed objects that had been hidden as part of their training, which, if it is true, they passed with flying colours. Whether they had to take evasive action as a result of choir members

visiting the en-suite facilities at regular intervals is also unknown, although (if you will pardon the language), they would have had ample warning following the cry of, "bugger, forgot I was on the top bunk" from a certain Dougie S. Indeed, they might have taken similar action when the aforementioned chorister forgot a second time later in the night. You couldn't make this up really, could you?

We did of course make it through to the morning, but I seem to remember an army breakfast was not on the itinerary, although an excellent greasy spoon up the road from the barracks had been recommended. My recollections are that it was a particularly sunny morning, and my 'hover-duvet' pal and I had a very pleasant morning constitutional down to the River Thames and back.

Over the past 20 years our choir has had a good number of memorable moments, as you will read in other parts of this book, but this SAS trip must rank as being one adventure never to be forgotten!

Ray Thompson





**1997. Ray Thompson and Neil Poynter
at the Low Moor recording of
'Mills Alive 1'**

Photos by Ian Day



Soloist

As I got more comfortable I was ready for a new challenge. One night at practice Len Williams announced plans to record a CD. He needed three soloists to sing the verses of the 'Holmfirth Anthem', also known as 'Pratty Flowers'. I jumped at the chance and was invited to Len's house along with David Haigh and Richard Green for an audition. It went well and I was to sing the first verse. The day of the recording came and I stood in Low Moor church, Bradford, shaking like a leaf. From memory, I think it took two takes but listening to it afterwards I was very happy with the sound.

Mark Shuttleworth



5. 1998

The Picturedrome Holmfirth



Community Links

It goes without saying that when we perform we do the best we can, but what we sing depends on who we are singing for, and why. Concerts usually involve raising money, either for ourselves or for others: charities, other choirs and ensembles. Money is not the point, however, when we sing at care homes, relax in a pub or when we join friends in celebrating a milestone such as an anniversary (Hade Edge Band 2008; Worrall MVC 2011). Weddings and funerals, especially for choir members and their families, are very important to us.

We are committed to strong community links. In a sense any concert we do locally is a community link, and there have been plenty of those, starting soon after the choir was formed in 1994 when we sang alongside 'Last of the Summer Wine' star Bill Owen 'Compo' at Holmbridge Church Hall. There are many other links. We rehearse in New Mill Club, help out with New Mill Gala and perform our annual Christmas Concert at Christchurch, New Mill. Our shirts come from Team Spirit, Holmfirth, our jacket cloth from Bower Roebuck, New Mill. Our uniform travel covers were donated by the landlord of The Duke of Leeds. On two occasions, we have entertained the end-of-filming Last of the Summer Wine party, held at Holmfirth Civic Hall.



*Simon Wood and Hade Edge at
Huddersfield Town Hall*

'Men in Green Jackets' is a light-hearted audio-visual presentation about the history of the choir, presented by Alan Hicks, who does the talking, and Doug Shuttleworth, who operates the computer/projector. During the several years in which they have been doing this, they have spoken to more than 70 community groups from Barnsley to Bradford, have sold several hundred pounds of choir CDs, and donated over £1000 to charity, since they do not take a fee themselves. The talk also helps to promote the choir, reaching potential new audiences and perhaps getting new recruits for the choir.

Perhaps the most memorable local event was the gala opening of The Picturedrome, Holmfirth, on 26th November, 1998, when we shared the stage with Holme Silver Band and students from Holmfirth High School's drama department. The first Picturedrome was a converted roller-skating rink at the bottom of Dunford Road, referred to by The Holmfirth Express as The Electric Picturedrome. On Easter Monday, 1913, The Holme Valley Theatre opened, overlooking the river. The projector box was positioned outside the cinema. Electricity was generated by a gas engine installed in an outbuilding. The projectors are thought to have been cranked by hand. The first films were silent, music courtesy of an early record player. The Examiner covered the opening, referring also to Bamforths, the well-known postcard company. It is said that their motion pictures were premiered at The Valley Theatre. Live acts also appeared. The Huddersfield library contains one theatre programme from February 1930 for 'Dick Whittington! - A Revuesical Pantomime', the same year that talkies were first shown. The Valley Theatre changed to a bingo hall in 1967. In 1997, Andrew Bottomly bought it and leased it to Peter and Rachel Carr who re-opened it as a cinema and venue for live acts in 1998.

We have been back to the Picturedrome, courtesy of Peter, for an evening gig at the Box Office bar complete with a free drink and pork pie - a very different experience to a formal concert! We could hardly hear ourselves and no one else seemed to be listening.



Mrs Angela Roberts, cinema proprietor Peter Carr's mother, cuts the opening ribbon. She is with Peter and projectionist Philip Bradley.

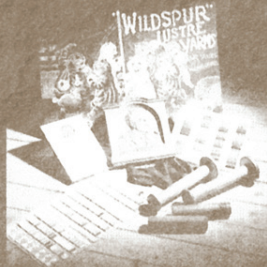
Courtesy of The Examiner 26th November 1998



COPLEY MARSHALL & COMPANY LIMITED

present

GRAND CENTENARY CONCERT



At Huddersfield Town Hall on Saturday 12th June 1999

Guest Artistes

BLACK DYKE BAND (1855) Musical Director - James Watson

HOLMFIRTH CHORAL SOCIETY

Musical Director - Kenneth Rothery

Accompanist - Geoffrey Lockwood

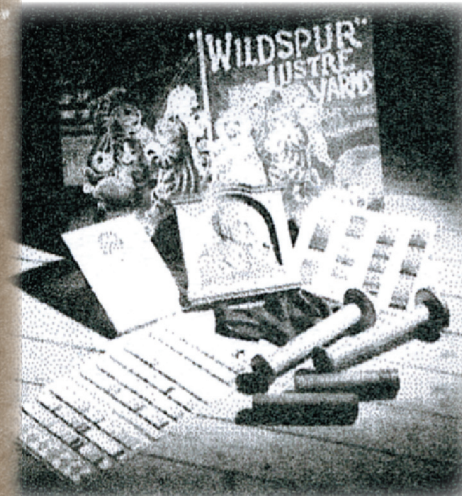
NEW MILL MALE VOICE CHOIR

Musical Director - Len Williams

Accompanist - Neil Poynter

Guest Compere

MARTYN LEWIS CBE



12th June 1999

**100th anniversary Copley
Marshall & Company Ltd.**

**Freddie Stallard,
New Mill's president, was the link.**

Lawrance and Sue Park: the first time we've sung at the wedding of a chorister. A sunny day, a full church, glorious music, a radiant couple and a lovely wedding.

Hilary Pollard (2012)



6. Touring



All cricket clubs, and rugby clubs come to that, have their tours – well, so do choirs. Tours are eccentric celebrations of sport and music beyond the familiar middens of, in our case, West Yorkshire. One outcome from travelling and singing in exotic locations is the accidental bonding that takes place between the participants. Some would say that this results from the natural development of warmth and empathy for one's fellow-man. Others, of a less generous disposition, might cite the copious sampling of local ale as the lubricant responsible for the deepening of somewhat tenuous friendships.

The second outcome from a choir tour is the improvement in individual singing technique and collective musical quality - the result of being together for longer than an average rehearsal. Whilst winning and losing cricket and rugby matches, for the amateur, can be less important than the craic, choir concert performance on tour is consistently good to excellent.

Unlike most sports, wives and families also go on New Mill MVC tours. 'Men Only' is reserved for rehearsal weekends in Llandudno and Scarborough. Kirkby Lonsdale is said to have been the first tour. Since then, we have been to Northern Italy (including Verona and Venice), Barcelona, the Czech Republic and Poland - hence the final outcome from a choir tour is a visit to a place we would not normally consider as a holiday destination.

Kirkby Lonsdale

The Kirkby Lonsdale Victorian Weekend, usually held on the first weekend in September, is especially memorable. This event involved the choir performing in the Parish Church on the Saturday of the weekend, and usually the concert was well attended. Themed weekends like the Kirkby Lonsdale provided a short holiday, much appreciated by choir members. The town was usually decked out to give the feel of the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Many singers chose bed and breakfast accommodation, or one of the local hotels, and the caravans were based at sites near to Kirkby Lonsdale. The area is a popular tourist spot in Lancashire, though within the Yorkshire Dales National Park boundary. Within a year or two the camping group had negotiated the use of the rugby club situated about five minutes walk from the town. This more private location became the centre for pre-concert get-togethers and, of course, for rowdy outdoor parties afterwards, though on one occasion the septic tank in the car park overflowed and some vans had to move to avoid the consequences.

Doug Shuttleworth



Sublime to the Profane

I had learnt some of the local songs from pub singarounds and having sung some of my collected songs, I was asked to perform at a choir concert in Kirkby Lonsdale Church as part of the Victorian Fair.

This was to be my first performance as a soloist with the choir and I chose a humorous Jake Thackray song 'Castl-eford Ladies Magic Circle' which had been well received at other venues.

I thought the performance went well but at the end of the concert a Senior Church Warden, in thanking us, said that we had sung songs from the 'Sublime to the Profane' and glared in my direction.

In a blinding flash, I realised that I had sung a song about Black Magic in their church and he was not amused. I don't thank they had to reconsecrate, but the point was made.

Since that experience I have carefully considered my concert repertoire and become wiser (I hope).

John Senior

No Contest

The Kirkby concert one year was followed, in the rugby club, by a talent contest between two teams from the choir. Habitual organiser, Brett Mellor, invigilated from a bar stool with a towel round his head. He also lead one of the teams into which he co-opted Catherine, Len William's wife and superb soprano. The amount of applause from those not taking part announced each successful act. Neck and neck and nearly stop tap when at last Brett played his ace. Achingly beautiful and those who weren't crying were hollering and stamping their feet. Game over.

Our Overseas Tours

The old hill-top fortress near Lake Garda, our off-the-cuff rendition in the arena at Verona to the accompaniment of the appreciative stage-builders tapping out the rhythm on the scaffolding, our concert in Venice requiring transport, piano and all, by water taxi.

Whilst the actual concert venues in the Czech Republic might not have been too special, seeing Prague, Cesky Krumlov and Karlovy Vary (not forgetting Budweiser Budvary brewery) certainly was.

The one that got away - probably the most amazing venue would have been the Olympic Stadium in Atlanta in the year before the 1996 games as part of The World Choir. Was it a con? Or was it mismanaged? We never found out, but at least we can say that New Mill MVC was once booked to perform there!

Former Chairman, Ian Lister

A new millennium: the choir goes international

For those on that memorable first choir tour abroad, enjoy this nostalgia trip. For the rest, here's an idea of the excitement and the camaraderie of the choir's ground-breaking foreign tour?

May 27th, Manchester Airport; destination Milan and then Lake Garda. Forty plus excited middle-aged men with their wives and in some cases families (90 of us in total) off on a crusade. The fulfilment of a long-held ambition of our founder and then Musical Director Len Williams, sadly now deceased. Hard work and perseverance by the committee, in particular Andy Johnston, made it happen.

Day 1; a trip to the nearby historic hill town of Rivoli Veronese for our first ever concert on foreign soil. Scheduled in a fortress at the top of a hill, we had to walk from the car park up to the venue. The choir was well rehearsed and ready to go, but where was the piano? With John Briggs, the concert pianist and friend of Len Williams, who was on his way from Yorkshire with the keyboard in his car. Frantic mobile phone calls at horrendous international call charge rates established that John was lost. The choir nevertheless went ahead with its programme, Len using his tuning fork to give us the opening notes. We managed, although this was not one of our finest performances.

Day 2; many got romantic at Romeo and Juliette's balcony in Verona, some toured Lake Garda and others did the gondoleering in Venice.

Day 3; the highlight must be the performance by choir on the steps of the Verona's fabulous Roman Amphitheatre, home of the renowned Opera Festival. In the blazing mid-day sun, high on the steps, we provided the hundreds of tourists and a bevy of workers building the huge set for the next performance, with a

show-stopping rendition of 'The Anvil Chorus' from Verdi's opera 'Il Trovatore'. Whether the audience enjoyed it we will never know, but we certainly did – and the builders stopped building! Some say they hammered in time to the anvil. Many of us celebrated with a fabulous meal in the square, followed by grappa (Italian spirit). The then choir secretary David Illingworth (sadly no longer with us) and his wife Sheelagh missed the coach home. They had to stay the night in Verona and got back next morning by public transport – oops!

Day 4; a concert at La Rocca on a small island on the banks of Lake Garda at Riva, accessed via a footbridge. We needed our keyboard and an audience. Inspired, we donned our green jackets and poured out onto the narrow streets of Riva accosting anyone we met and giving out free tickets to tourists and locals. What a triumph that was; the open-roofed venue was full and the audience loved it.

Day 6; the famous parish church of the Venetian artist, Tintoretto. Only accessible on foot and the nearest landing stage several bridges away. The keyboard was duly carried along the streets and over the bridges escorted by a procession of choristers, looking very much like a funeral. On arrival, we met the parish priest and asked "Where shall we put the piano?" "Over there next to our excellent and recently tuned piano," he said. I can't remember much about the concert but I am sure it went well.

Add on a table tennis knockout, won by Geoff Gill; lazing round the pool at the Hotel Royal; the Dolomites; the ferry and cable car rides around the lakes and mountains; Padua and the fabulous artwork in the museum - wonderful memories. "Si E Vero".

Ged Faricy



Madonna dell'Orta
Campo Madonna dell'Orta, Venezia

CONCERTO

con
**NEW MILL MALE
VOICE CHOIR**

Holmfirth, Inghilterra

direttore - Len Williams

programma di musica corale classica e
popolare gallese

Venerdì 2 Giugno ore 21.00

Ingresso Libero - Free Entrance

New Mill Male Voice Choir tour to the Czech Republic – Summer 2002

Of the overseas New Mill MVC's tours, the Czech Republic stands out in my mind as the best. It provided the members of the choir and their followers an insight into a beautiful country which suffered under the communists prior to the 1990 bloodless revolution. From a personal point of view, it allowed me meet again the brave men and women I worked with in former Czechoslovakia, employed by Allied Colloids, who also employed me for much of my working life.

The choir visit came only twelve years after the fall of communism, a time when I was traveling regularly with work to the former East European countries. I had to endure 'meat free' days (once a week), when it was forbidden for any person to consume any meat or meat product! Can you imagine Tesco's or Morrison's taking all meat from their shelves every Wednesday and police having the right to enter restaurants and even your home to check that you were not indulging in a meat orgy? There would be riots in the streets! In those former Soviet satellites, shortages required draconian measures to prevent total collapse of the system and starvation of the people. We don't know how lucky we are!

The tour was the first major overseas event for our new conductor at that time, Elizabeth Hambleton. Our accompanist was Sheila Asquith, a first for her also and one of many splendid stand in performances we enjoyed from her until her retirement. The tour was organised by NST, a Blackpool based company specialising in music and group tours. They provided a full hotel and travel package, recommending a two-centre tour to Prague and Cesky Krumlov in the south of the country. Guided tours of the

best sights of both cities was included along with a guide, Walter, who spoke excellent English. In addition, to provide a fuller experience, I was able to arrange, through former colleagues in Prague, a number of special events sponsored by Allied Colloids Ltd. Jerry Rudovsky, a close friend who lives in Prague, was able to overcome some of the more challenging requirements for the tour, such as securing a suitable electronic keyboard for our concerts. Remember this was only twelve years after the fall of communism, items of this kind were still hard to come by!

Through Jerry's son, who sang with a local Prague boy's choir, we performed in Prague's famous 'Hall of Mirrors', the top choral venue in the country. Jerry followed this by an evening in a cellar restaurant, with a special local meal and a musical performance comprising a folk group and a clever chap who could play the musical saw. All was kindly financed by Allied Colloids Ltd! Of particular pleasure for me was the arrival of old Eastern European friends and work-mates for the concert in Prague and the restaurant afterwards. The famous Czech beer flowed.

The following night, some of the choir attended the famous Prague opera, followed by a meal in a top Italian restaurant. A day visit to Karlowy Vary, the famous spa town in the west, provided a fine outing, though samples of the famous waters, in my opinion, did not compare with the Czech beers. An open choir concert in the town centre colonnades rounded off a great visit to the north.

Our hotel in Prague was practical but uninspiring. The hotel in Cesky Krumlov in the south was a former castle, located on a tight bend on the river Vltava (which also flows through Prague), a much more appropriate place for a quality choir! The facilities were excellent, with spectacular views over the river and the World Heritage town in which the beautiful 16th century streets

and buildings were a pleasure. A boat race was held; a timed transit between two bridges during which we could easily have lost half the choir if the maritime genetic make up of we British had not prevailed!

A coach tour to nearby Budweis, famous for Budwar beer, allowed the men to continue their sampling of excellent Czech brews.

There is no doubt that as we ate, drank and sang out way through the final evening in the Czech Republic, all agreed that this tour had been something really special!

Doug Shuttleworth



Cesky Krumlov



Prague



Photos by Ian Day



Poland 2007



We sang at the Chopin Institute, Warsaw, Krakow University, Mariacki church, Krakow, and at the bottom of a salt mine.

- and at Auschwitz. I'm not sure how many sang. Some cried. It was meant to sound like 'Peace on Earth'.

Our tour guide was pretty and smartly dressed, early 20s and well-spoken. There was not an ounce of emotion as she told us of the massive loss of life - and the rest. To sing was the least we could do.

Photo courtesy of Terry Dean



7. 2000 Cutlers Hall Concert Sheffield



Unforeseen Benefits

A much appreciated benefit from choir membership is always to have the best seats in the house for watching, listening to and really feeling the vibes of a brass band in full flight from close up. There were so many, but the aces were Brighouse and Rastrick, The Yorkshire Imps and mighty Black Dyke. Musicians so talented - percussionists so cool! Do you want to know the most startling truth I learnt from these musical extravaganzas? A good brass band performance leaves behind a very wet stage!

Former Chairman, Ian Lister



Idris Jones (never been to Wales) was our choir chairman in the year 2000. He was a gentle giant of the Bass section with the ability to produce some wonderful rumbling low notes. As managing director of Brook Tool Engineering Co he was instrumental in sponsoring a "Musical Extravaganza" at the superb Cutlers Hall, Sheffield to celebrate the 21st anniversary of a subsidiary, namely Universal Drilling and Cutting Co.

The concert was performed by ourselves and our guests the world famous Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band (Musical director Mr David Hirst) with Mr Tony Capstick of Radio Sheffield being our Master of Ceremonies for most of the concert. The remaining part was taken up by him in celebrations of a not so temperate nature.

Idris was a proud man on this occasion and showed his generosity at the Whitley Hall Hotel at Grenoside with a wonderful buffet supper after the concert.

Idris has since retired from the choir but has put together a letter of congratulations to us in our 21st year.

Ian Day

Quarry House Farm,
High Flatts,
Upper Denby,
Huddersfield,
HD8 8XY

A major event for the choir was a sponsored concert held on the 5th Feb. 2000 in the Cutlers Hall Sheffield. Together with the world famous Brighouse and Rastrick Bands, where over 400 people sat down to enjoy the evening, guests were transported via coach to and from the Cutlers Hall. Food to Whitley Hall where a buffet supper was provided. As chairman of the choir at the time I was very proud to represent both the choir and the sponsors at this very successful event.

Idris Jones





**Gaham Dawson, John Bowden,
Steve Davies, Len Williams with
the video.**

From The Examiner

2001. 'A Decade of Song' was a professionally produced video, combining footage of a Huddersfield Town Hall concert and views of Venice, Verona and Lake Garda. John Briggs is at the Town Hall.

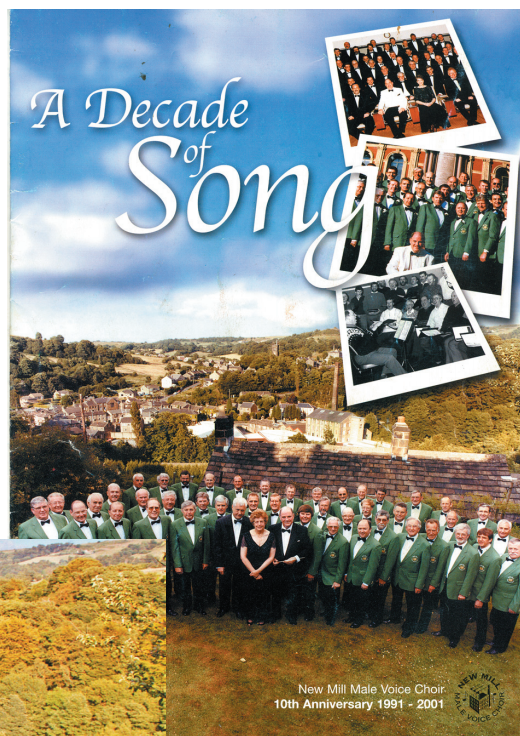
Photos from Ian Day



**Town Hall concert programme
20th October 2001
With Hade Edge Band and Vocal
Expressions ladies choir**

10th Anniversary Picture

Courtesy of Greaves Photographers Ltd
6 & 7 Union Bank Yard
New Street, Huddersfield HD1 2BP



8. 2003-2004 Grand Venues



My First Concert

My debut was at Blackpool. I remember well volunteering to attend as a guest and perhaps sell a few CDs. It would have been a nice day out for me, no pressure. However the outcome was quite different! Elizabeth wanted me to sing, though I was only familiar with about half the programme. I remember her words when I told her of my predicament, “Well, Edward, you still have two weeks to learn the rest.” Widespread panic set in. I pointed out I hadn’t a uniform, apart from trousers. Having no blazer, I thought I was ‘off the hook’. No way. Elizabeth would see to it.

Further panic. How do I learn eight songs in a fortnight? I transferred the words onto small cards, then developed a holder comprising two ‘bulldog’ clips and a ring joining them together. Problem solved - the top clip attached to the collar of the man in front and the lower clip to hold the card - sorted!

Disaster. The concert was videoed and shown on the big screen, in the auditorium, so I could not use my finely tuned equipment. I enjoyed the concert nevertheless and more to the point, so did the audience.

Edward Sykes



Blackpool and Scarborough

Whilst we put on some fund-raising concerts purely for ourselves, many are on behalf of others. Some of these come from a local contact, sometimes from within the choir. Beneficiaries have included Lupus, Candlelighters, Parkinsons' Disease, Mc-Millan Nurses, Anchor Trust and Forget-Me-Not. In addition, we have helped raise money for local and national organisations. For example, massed choir events at Cardiff Arms Park, Sheffield Arena, and twice at the Royal Albert Hall in aid of Yorkshire Cancer Research.

In 2005, we took part in two concerts as part of the international relief effort for the tsunami victims. We have also helped out Save the Children and York Against Cancer - both at the Riley Smith Hall, Tadcaster - as part of our rehearsal weekends (2008 and 2009), and again for York Against Cancer at York Minster in 2011.

In 2003, we were particularly privileged to perform for Inner Wheel and Rotarians at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool and the Spa, Scarborough. Jocelyne, my wife, was National President of Inner Wheel (the organisation for wives and relatives of Rotarians) at the time. Her National Conference was held in Blackpool, and as part of the evening entertainment, she arranged for Blackpool Corporation to commission the choir to perform in the Winter Gardens, in front of the Mayor and Mayoress of Blackpool, and an audience of approximately 2,500 conference delegates. The Winter Gardens is the largest true theatre in the UK, and the only theatre outside London to have hosted a Royal Command Performance, so it was an awe-inspiring venue for the choir.

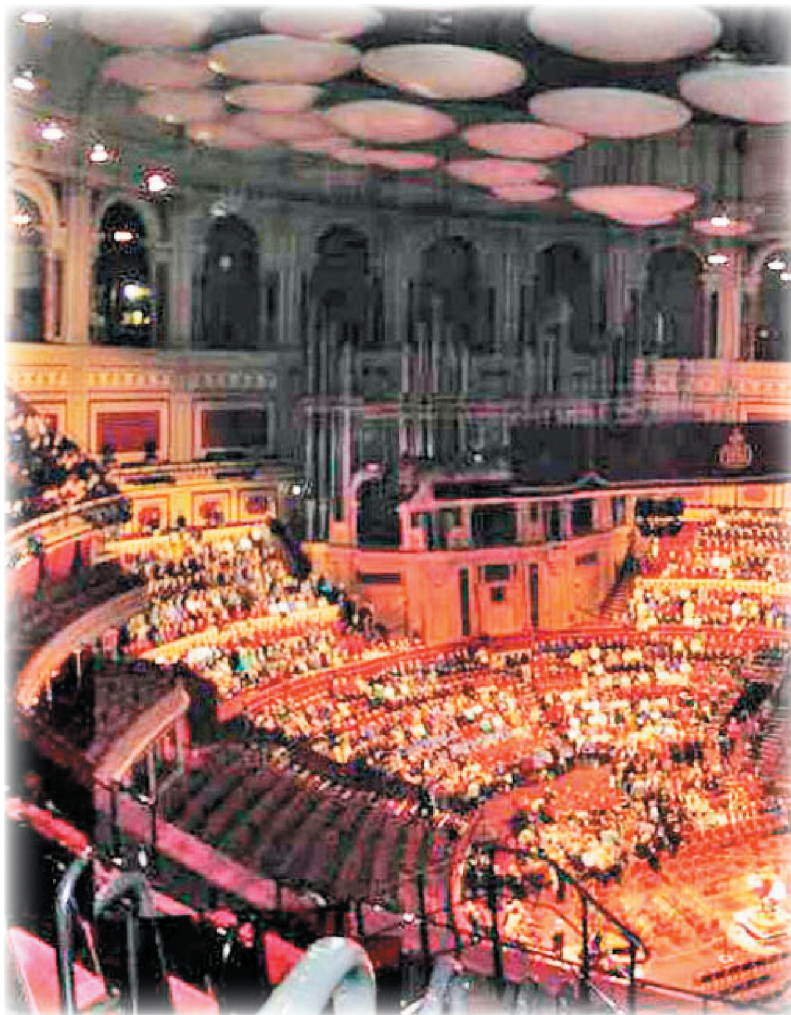
As conference delegates were attending from all over the British Isles and Southern Ireland, it was Jocelyne's wish that the

choir's repertoire should encompass songs from all these parts, and a programme was chosen to reflect this, with English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh items, interspersed with solos from the guest artists, Thom Meredith and Elaine Clelland.

The 48-strong choir's first item was, most appropriately, 'With a Voice of Singing'. Thom also shared the platform with the choir in its rendition of 'The Rose'. The regional pieces followed, including 'The Fishermen of England', 'The Rose of Tralee', an unaccompanied version of 'Myfanwy' in Welsh, and 'Eris-kay Love Lilt'. Elaine delighted the audience with Verdi's 'La Vergine' sung with the choir's choral backing.

As the concert in Blackpool had proved such an outstanding success, the 2003 District Governor of the Yorkshire Rotary District, Rotarian Robert Jackson, invited the choir to entertain 1000 delegates at the Spa Grand Hall in Scarborough, during his District Conference in October 2003. The following night, the choir travelled to Helmsley to sing in the Arts Centre there.

Derek Haigh



The Royal Albert Hall

Two of the biggest concerts, after Cardiff, were the Yorkshire Cancer Research massed choirs at The Royal Albert Hall (25th Oct 1997 and 1st Nov 2003). Transport and all the accommodation for participants, wives, family and supporters must have been tough to organise and expensive.

Both trips included a half way comfort and refreshment stop at Stowe School.

Numerous rehearsals preceded the 1997 curtain-raiser at Huddersfield Town Hall, where conductor Roy Firth impressed with his enthusiasm and musical knowledge. The Examiner music critic was especially taken by the quiet passages in 'Evening Pastoral'.

Bill Relton conducted both Albert Hall concerts. His trademark was a set of wide bright red braces which got a cheer every time he put his thumbs behind them.

Sunday morning everyone bused it down in Covent Garden.

Ian Day

The 2003 concert, at which Sellers International Band, The Yorkshire Building Society Band, 13 Ladies Choirs, 42 Male Voice Choirs and a guest Choir from the Netherlands shared the stage, was compered by Gordon Kaye.

Eight more male choirs and the introduction of the ladies had swelled the numbers enormously compared to 1997. We baritones were nearly on the top row just under the gallery. We struggled to hear Bill on occasion and Covent Garden was uncomfortable.

The pieces we knew (not in Russian) were received well.



The East and North Yorkshire Weekend October 2004

The members of the choir are seasoned tourists who take the rough and the smooth with the same shrug of the shoulders. They were unusually aroused however at the prospect of performing in Scarborough, at 'The Spa'. Childhood memories perhaps, being on the same stage as Max Jaffa, who knows. The disappointment was thus the more poignant when it didn't turn out as expected. The best was yet to come the following evening at Helmsley.

The choir's appointment in the Grand Hall was for 9:45pm after The Rotarians had dined. If the last thing they wanted was to do at that time was to listen to a male voice choir, they can be forgiven, as frankly, we were rubbish. Camp followers thought the first half was the best especially the livelier numbers. One of them, who will remain nameless, described 'Calm is the Sea' as wincingly flat. It was not totally our fault. The late start, a flat piano too far from the choir, basses too far from the baritones (normally to be welcomed), the dry hot atmosphere and a large empty space which gobbled up our sound all conspired to limit the performance quality. I could only hear myself, Ray Birkenshaw and Allen Hicks. Together we made a fine trio, but that wasn't quite the point.

The interval included a stout party singing the new Rotarian Anthem, which she did twice, with relish. The audience needed something to applaud.

The high point was the short journey home - ascending in the lift as many a Victorian evening-suited spa-goer would have done. Rows of bright lights illuminated the gaudy promenade arcades, sparing the calm dark sea and ghostly waves.

It's a fair way to Helmsley across N. Yorkshire, one of England's biggest counties with the fewest people. The journey was relieved by 'Wartime Weekend on the Railway', an annual celebration of life in Pickering and surrounding districts during World War 2. We didn't see the parades of the Home Guard, the evacuees, or the Land Army girls. But we did see policemen in funny hats carrying air raid warden helmets. And men in uniform - John Rotchell's wife Delia has always been a sucker for a man in uniform; well, John was in The Boys Brigade. A woman swung along the street wearing stockings with vertiginous seams, not entirely oblivious of the frisson she induced in men of a certain age.

Helmsley is a market town and home to the remains of a twelfth century castle. The gig was in the 'Arts Centre', formerly a Quaker meeting house, with a capacity around 140.

Stephanie Hellawell was with us again, but sadly her fondest admirer, Edgar, wasn't. She sang about seven numbers, three from 'Les Miserables' and 'West Side Story', finishing with a jazzy piece. Brilliant.

Graham compered incomparably, disarmingly candid about the previous night's clientele. Were there any rotarians in the Arts Centre?

The camp followers occupied the first three rows. Big mistake. But they were fulsome in their praise despite being aware of who was singing and who wasn't and who was putting their back into it.

The concert was an outstanding success. Confident and relaxed, we didn't let history get in the way. To put it simply - super venue, a well organised event, singing of top quality and an enthusiastic audience.

A weekend of contrasts. Differences to learn from.

The Hambletons ordered the best meals in the Helmsley 'Italian'. Eddie regaled us with a tale about a Japanese vase which no one could understand why he'd bought - including Elizabeth. She's happier now though, as it's recently been valued at £1200!



Helmsley Arts Centre gave us free beer in the interval – marvellous! Ibbo and Clive told stories of childhood and adolescent Salford days. Ibbo was apparently the only one sober working the last steam tug on the Manchester Ship Canal - doesn't bear thinking about!

The only cheer we got in Scarborough was when Derek Haigh walked on stage.

Elizabeth arranged a few private cues to keep us going in the new pieces. 'Marry me' was to be signaled by her wedding ring. All seemed sound enough. She went over them all again and raised her left hand - everybody shouted "ring".

9. 2005

The Tsunami Concerts

Concert of hope for



Tsunami Disaster

with

Cantorion Colin Jones

and

New Mill Male

Voice Choir

at

St. Mary's Church,

Betws-y-Coed

Sunday, January 23rd. 2005

at 5.00 pm

Two Concerts

It's been suggested that choir life is a calm slow movement with the occasional high point of activity. Indeed, one of the choir's attractions, for some, is the opportunity to put day-to-day worries to one side, for a couple of hours at least.

Except for the small question of concerts and the occasional informal sing in a pub, usually winding down from rehearsals or a concert, we have little contact with the outside world. Then something comes along which takes everyone by surprise. On Boxing Day 2004, a tsunami occurred in the Indian Ocean, killing over 230,000 people in 14 countries. Waves of 30 metres were recorded.

At the end of our Llandudno rehearsal weekend, 23rd January 2005, we joined Cantorion Colin Jones in Betws-y-Coed, N Wales, for a charity concert. £1400 were raised for the disaster relief fund. 27th February, we took part in Huddersfield in Harmony, again in aid of the victims of the tsunami. This concert, at Huddersfield Town Hall, was the brainchild of Graham Dawson, who brought together Honley and Gledholt MVCs, Honley and Marsh Ladies, Vocal Expressions, Sellers International and Hade Edge bands, compered by Harry Gration, raising, with an Examiner raffle, £20,000.

Milestone

A big milestone for me was the first time I heard Cantorion in Huddersfield Town Hall lead by the legendary Colin Jones. Male voice choir singing at its very best. Mind-blowingly loud one second, amazingly quiet the next. Billed as the Welsh 'choir of choirs'. Picked men from the best male choruses of North Wales. Nothing can quite describe the inspiration I gained from hearing them. They were like a breath of fresh air and a group that we could possibly model ourselves on. Although we of course couldn't be them we could aspire to be the best we could be.

John Mallinson

A Triumph

The Betwys concert was a triumph. It's one thing to visit the Welsh borders and sing. It's quite another to go into the Welsh-speaking heartlands of North Wales and come away knowing we'd gone down well.

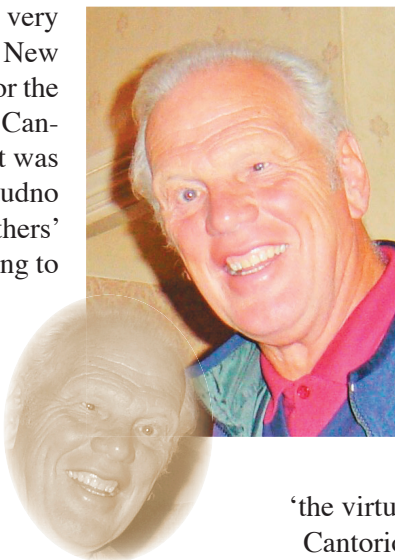
As we waited in the wings, I felt much as I used to prior to a big rugby match. More wound up the longer the delay or in modern parlance, focused and in the zone. Rod Gooch, who'd sat in the audience with Alan Dalgetty, had a wobble in his voice when he spoke at the next rehearsal - so proud he was to be a part of the choir.

New Mill and Cantorian Colin Jones Raise the Roof in Betwys

Members of Cantorian Colin Jones were very pleased that their friends from Yorkshire, the New Mill male voice choir, were able to join them for the Tsunami Relief concert which Steve Gardner, Cantorian's secretary, organised earlier this year. It was fortuitous that New Mill were visiting Llandudno on one of their regular weekend 'get-togethers' and, at such short notice, were happy and willing to support the event.

The early evening concert, held in St Mary's Parish church, Betws-y-Coed, attracted a large audience and the church authorities are to be congratulated on helping organise what proved to be a successful event. The scale and suddenness of the disaster which struck S.E. Asia, inevitably, had spread sorrow and dismay around the world. Local people were obviously affected and made every effort to promote and support the musical occasion.

It proved to be an entertaining concert which triggered high emotion and genuine concern for those unfortunate people suffering around the Indian Ocean. Both choirs were on top form. New Mill opened the proceedings with their usual flair, commit-



ment and enthusiasm, performing a variety of songs which the audience thoroughly enjoyed. Cantorian made its contribution in the second half before joining with New Mill for a rousing rendition of the American Trilogy to close the concert.

Organisers and listeners were delighted with the event, considering it was hastily arranged, in that it enabled the choirs and many individuals the opportunity to express their support for the tsunami victims. It was obvious that most people taking part and attending the concert would have agreed with the comment, made much later at the tsunami memorial service held in St Paul's Cathedral, that even in the face of great disasters the human spirit will prevail and

'the virtues of kinship and co-operation will shine through'.

Cantorian Colin Jones wishes to thank New Mill for their continuing friendship and cooperation and look forward to 'working' with them in the future. The concert collection did raise a splendid total of £1702.00 in aid of the tsunami relief fund.

Terence Brockley, Chairman of Cantorian 2005

Hello New Mill Male Voice Choir

Cantorion Colin Jones would like to send their best wishes and a Happy Birthday to the New Mill MVC who celebrate (November 2012) 21 years since being formed.

We (Cantorion Colin Jones) have held concerts with New Mill in Huddersfield Town Hall on two occasions, and also at William Aston Hall, Wrexham which we enjoyed very much and hope that we can do so again in the near future.

Cantorion Colin Jones wish New Mill MVC all the success for the future, and may you have another 21 years of success.

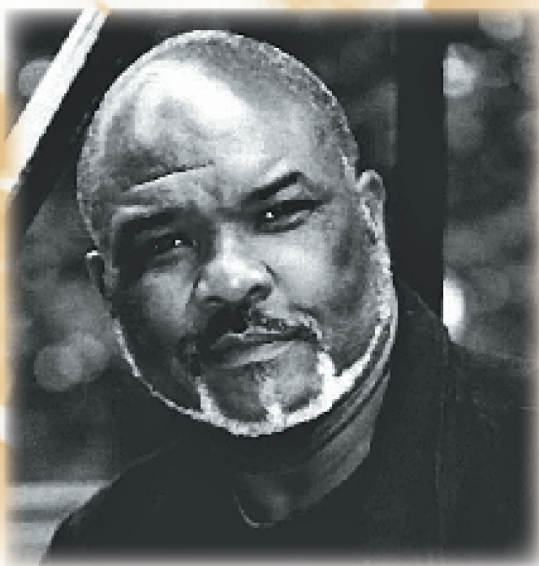
“HAPPY BIRTHDAY”

Kind Regards

Arthur (CANTORION COLIN JONES)



10. 1996/98/99/2010/11 Star Quality



Sometimes as an accompanist you're asked to play for someone extraordinary, as happened when Sir Willard White was the guest artist at the choir's concert at Huddersfield Town Hall. Quite often, artists of his calibre arrive for a concert with an entourage making outrageous demands for fresh Himalayan water or exotic fruits unknown to Yorkshire folks! Sir Willard was the complete antithesis of this. He arrived on foot, alone, with just a small music bag and from the first moment did everything he could to create an easy atmosphere for rehearsal. We had an hour to ourselves and when we began, I asked him how he would like a certain passage to be played. He replied, in that gorgeous bass/baritone voice "It will be as though we're dancing together." A reply I like to think he only ever used for me! At the end of the concert he thanked me profusely and made me feel as though I'd performed with – and not for him. After graciously signing autographs and posing for lots of photographs he left in the same unassuming way he'd arrived. A gentleman, a gracious human being and an absolute star.

Anne Levitt

"Now that you have come to the fullness of 21 years, into adulthood you carry that ability to bring smiles to faces, and hearts swell with the sound of what you so enjoy! SING ON, you nurture your souls and all souls hearing.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY NEW MILL MVC!!!

You've got it so SHARE IT! MANY HAPPY RETURNS!!!!"

Sir Willard

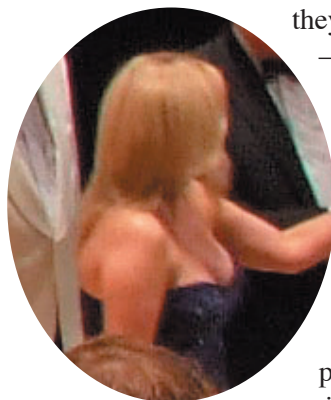
Following the success of Sir Willard White in 2006, the choir decided to host regular “big name” concerts at Huddersfield Town Hall. This could be considered a risky strategy since the costs of organising such concerts are high, and it would be imperative that the Town Hall was filled to capacity to ensure both musical and financial success.

It was therefore with a certain amount of trepidation that Aled Jones was booked in 2008. As it happened, any likely problems soon evaporated. Such was Aled’s popularity due to ‘Songs of Praise’, ‘The Choir’, and, of course, his childhood version of ‘Walking in the Air’, that the Town Hall was almost full on the night of the concert. We followed this up in 2009 when we invited the premier Welsh male choir, the Morriston Orpheus Choir, to share the stage with us. Again, we were blessed with a very good audience who certainly got their money’s worth with over 150 male voices on stage. The 90-strong Morriston Choir was conducted by its gorgeous Musical Director, Joy Amman Davies. I don’t know how



the Welsh lads kept their minds on the music but they did, and gave a splendid performance – New Mill MVC didn’t do so badly either. Joy was promptly renamed ‘June’, as with the very fetching low-cut gown she was wearing, there was every danger that she could be ‘bustin’ out all over!!’


Next, in 2010, we were so pleased to welcome the internationally renowned cellist, Julian Lloyd Webber. Whilst he gave a wonderful performance, I was particularly entranced by the fingers of his petite Chinese accompanist, Di Xiao. Sitting



just a few feet from the piano, I saw the way she almost caressed the keys, and yet she could get so much power from them despite being such a slight figure herself – truly remarkable! Then in 2011, we shared the stage with one of the world’s foremost trumpet players, Alison Balsom, accompanied on the Town Hall’s great Father Willis organ by David Goode. Alison was an absolute delight – her playing was superb, she looked and sounded fantastic, and off-stage she was completely non ‘Diva-ish’.

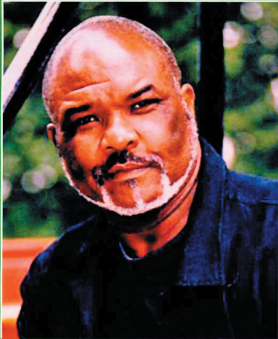

So far, then, the choir’s gamble with ‘big names’ has paid off. We have had a series of extremely successful high profile concerts, which have brought world-renowned performers to the Huddersfield stage, and it is fair to say that on every occasion, New Mill Choir has certainly held its own. As for the future – well that, as they say, is another story.

Alan Hicks




New Mill Male Voice Choir Presents

Sir Willard White

Souvenir Program

Saturday 18th March 2006
Huddersfield Town Hall



New Mill Male Voice Choir
with

Julian Lloyd Webber

Accompanied by Di Xian

Huddersfield Town Hall
Saturday 9th October 2010

Sarah Ogden - Soprano
Christa Ackroyd - Composer

Supporting
and Can

New Mill Male Voice Choir
IN CONCERT WITH SPECIAL GUEST

Aled Jones

7.5pm Saturday October 4th 2008
at Huddersfield Town Hall



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of the choir on 01484 684953

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New Mill Male Voice Choir
in concert with

Alison Balsom

David Goode - Piano

Sarah Ogden - Soprano
Ewan Gilford - Pianist

Huddersfield Town Hall
Saturday 8th October

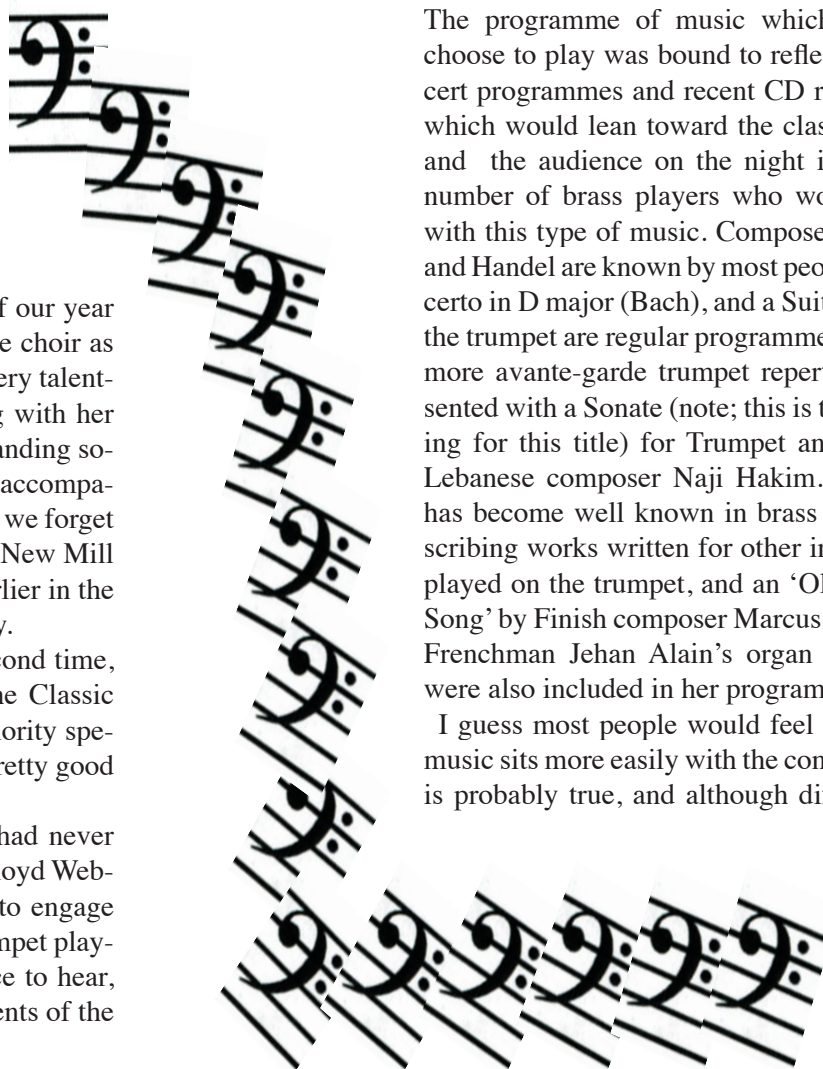
The ALISON BALSOM Concert

Huddersfield Town Hall
8th October 2011

For a number of years now the central feature of our year has been the October concert, known to all in the choir as 'The Big One'. In 2011 our main guest was the very talented female trumpet player, Alison Balsom, along with her organ accompanist David Goode, and our longstanding soprano friend of the choir, Sarah Ogden, with her accompanist on this occasion, Ewan Gilford. Neither must we forget that this 'Big One' was the start of a new era for New Mill Male Voice Choir, following the appointment earlier in the year of a new Musical Director, Mr Alan Brierley.

Just prior to our concert Alison had, for the second time, been crowned 'Female Artist of the Year' at the Classic BRITs. With female trumpet players being a minority species, neither did it go un-noticed that she was a pretty good looking lass as well!

It is fair to say that the majority of the choir had never heard of Alison, and following the name Julian Lloyd Webber from the 2010 concert, it was a bold move to engage her for the highlight concert of our year. As a trumpet player myself, this was a particularly exciting chance to hear, and share the stage, with one of the finest exponents of the instrument of recent years.



The programme of music which Alison would choose to play was bound to reflect previous concert programmes and recent CD releases, most of which would lean toward the classical repertoire, and the audience on the night included a good number of brass players who would be familiar with this type of music. Composers such as Bach and Handel are known by most people and the Concerto in D major (Bach), and a Suite in D major for the trumpet are regular programme inclusions. The more avante-garde trumpet repertoire was represented with a Sonate (note; this is the correct spelling for this title) for Trumpet and Organ by the Lebanese composer Naji Hakim. Alison Balsom has become well known in brass circles for transcribing works written for other instruments to be played on the trumpet, and an 'Old Swedish Folk Song' by Finish composer Marcus Lindberg, along Frenchman Jehan Alain's organ piece 'Litanies' were also included in her programme.

I guess most people would feel that this type of music sits more easily with the connoisseur, which is probably true, and although different from the

norm, I would like to think that most of the audience went away feeling that they had heard playing of exceptional high quality and technical ability, from an artist at the top of her game, very easy to work with and generous with her time in conversation back stage.

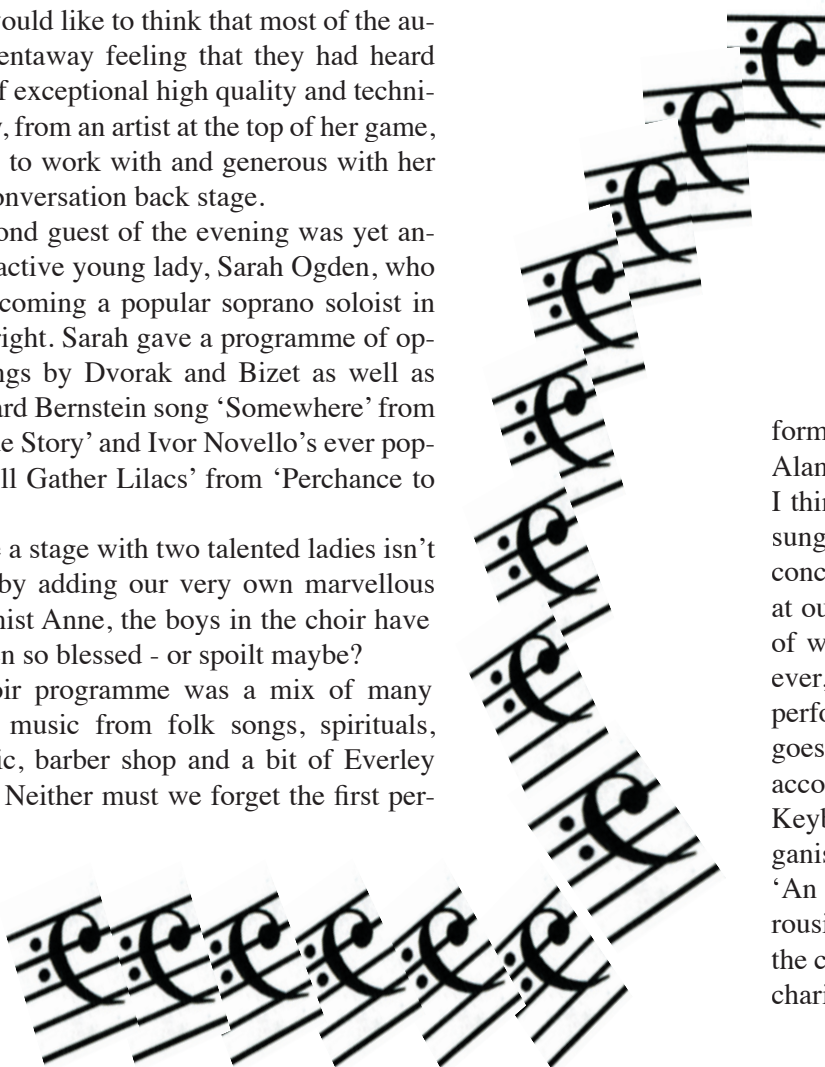
Our second guest of the evening was yet another attractive young lady, Sarah Ogden, who is fast becoming a popular soprano soloist in her own right. Sarah gave a programme of operatic songs by Dvorak and Bizet as well as the Leonard Bernstein song 'Somewhere' from 'West Side Story' and Ivor Novello's ever popular 'We'll Gather Lilacs' from 'Perchance to Dream'.

To share a stage with two talented ladies isn't bad, but by adding our very own marvellous accompanist Anne, the boys in the choir have never been so blessed - or spoilt maybe?

The choir programme was a mix of many styles of music from folk songs, spirituals, film music, barber shop and a bit of Everley Brothers. Neither must we forget the first per-

formance, in full, of 'The Cole Porter Medley', arranged by Alan Simmons. Taking just over seven minutes to perform, I think it is the longest single item the choir has ever been sung. It is fair to say that the piece caused some degree of concern within the ranks when we first started rehearsing it at our January workshop – too many songs all at once, lots of words and a few different styles all in one mix – however, it has become a favourite in our repertoire, with regular performances growing in confidence, and most important, goes down really well with our audiences. Alison Balsom's accompanist for the evening was David Goode, the Head of Keyboard Studies at Eton College. This incredibly fine organist in his own right joined in the final item of the concert, 'An American Trilogy', which gave our concert in 2011 a rousing end which allowed the New Mill Male Voice Choir the chance to make a generous donation to Alison's personal charity, 'War Child'.

Ray Thompson





“Many congratulations on reaching your 21st birthday! I have very happy memories of playing at your concert and hearing all those rich Yorkshire voices! May you continue to go from strength to strength in the years to come”.

Julian Lloyd Webber



“Penblwydd hapus iawn - a very happy birthday to you all at New Mill Male Voice Choir for reaching this milestone of 21 years. We the Morriston Orpheus Choir hope that you have a fantastic year of celebration and music making. We as a choir still talk about the wonderful concert we shared with you on October 10th, 2009 at Huddersfield Town Hall. We have very happy memories of the great welcome that you gave us, and to perform together at such a prestigious and historic venue is something that we will cherish forever - what a night! Best wishes for the future”.

from Joy, Jo, Alice, Les and the boys

11. 2009 - 2011 Elsecar

The Don Valley Festival at Elsecar was New Mill's first foray into the competitive world. Fifty subdued choir members arrived, looking excited, determined, nervous and brave in turn, but all ready to sing their best. After each choir had sung we naturally congregated by the bar and I noticed a definite change in attitude among the boys. Somehow the self-deprecating "Oh, we're only doing this for experience," didn't ring true any more. We really wanted to win - and we did! The choir was jubilant. As for Elizabeth and I - we did what all great women do at times like this - we cried.

Anne Levitt





I have to mention our first competition win at Elsecar. We set our stall out to win it and persuaded choir members to go along. Fantastic win.

John Mallinson

I'd been nervous during the week prior, and I was nervous on the day, enough to set the rash off. Our practice session was so good and I worried we'd peaked too soon. Then I was fine during the performance and relaxed in the interval. We were second at least.

I was momentarily shocked when we won, then warm and pleased and then kite high. It didn't last, I got lost in Barnsley on the way home. A week later, I'm in my traditional position of faint amused disbelief and the rash is improving.

Belonging to New Mill Male Voice Choir has suddenly become that bit more important. But what would have happened had we not gone on first?

Don Valley Festival

The Arts, Music & Drama

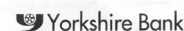
Male Voice Choir

Evening Gala Competition

at **Elsecar Heritage Centre**
on Sunday 28th March 2010 at 7.00 p.m.

Adjudicator: Joan Foster
GNSM, ARCM, PGCE, PGCA.

Sponsored by:



Charity No. 1043437

12. 2011 Sheffield Cathedral York Minster



Choirs and Churches

Religions, of all denominations and flavours, are punctuated by rituals that must be recognised and venerated. Communities seek to commemorate momentous events, seasonal changes and the passage of everyday life with gatherings that invariably involve singing. Everyone can join in and be part of the event. Everyone can contribute something and feel that they belong.

So what's this got to do with our choir?

A large percentage of our concerts are staged in churches, both grand and small. Our repertoire is studded with religious songs. The best have the power to raise the hairs on the back of the neck of both singer and audience alike. When we have performed them on occasions that are already emotionally charged they have produced an atmosphere that you can almost touch. No one forgets singing at a wedding or a funeral.

The choir have been fortunate to sing at some of the finest Churches in Yorkshire, including York Minster and Sheffield Cathedral. The latter was in the company of Worrall MVC and Weybridge MVC at Worrall's 40th anniversary concert and introduced us to BBC Look North's news queen Christa Ackroyd, the compere for the night. Later that year she officiated at our own concert with Julian Lloyd-Webber in Huddersfield Town Hall.

The history of a building is often lost on the choir when preparing for a concert. You can feel its presence but the detail passes you by. Prior to singing in the Nave we were seated in the Chapel of Saint George, a chapel commemorating military campaigns around the world and the armed forces who took part in them. Our view of the Nave was restricted by the unique 'Screen of Swords' which is fashioned from swords and bayonets presented to the Cathedral by members of the 1st Battalion the York and

Lancaster Regiment on its disbandment in 1968. The swords point upwards, the bayonets down signifying a laying down of arms. The Chapel is full of military references but most of us were probably thinking various random thoughts or perfecting the technique of soundlessly un-wrapping a 'throat soother' to take much notice.

The soprano soloist that evening was Kathryn Adam. Coincidentally, Kathryn was later to be named Young Welsh Singer of the Year 2011, a competition sponsored by the Morriston Orpheus Choir, our guests in Huddersfield Town Hall in 2009. A small world.

I have to confess that I remember very little of our own performance. About halfway through I know that we all got the feeling that we were really 'on song' and producing a great male voice sound. Several items were outstanding. In contrast to the choir's solo spot the joint items were always going to be tricky. 'The Grand March' from 'Aida' was an adventurous piece for an all-male ensemble to attack but attack it we did. The combined talents of all three choirs were deployed and away we went. I suppose we can say that we started together and finished together. What happened in the middle was something of a blur as we tried desperately to keep up with the furious pace set by the conductor and accompanist. We found ourselves standing cheek by jowl



with our fellow choristers, our score six inches from our eyes and resting on the head of the gent in front. Turning pages was practically impossible. But the audience was kind and applauded our efforts and what had preceded this finale had been good. Christa was fulsome in her praise, like only a seasoned 'pro' can be, and she had a ball conducting all three choirs in 'Speed Your Journey'. So many men obeying her every command!

In our own small way we added to the history of the building on that night. We turned up and sang, like many before us, and added our layer of sound to the thousands already embedded in the stone walls of the Cathedral façade.

Steve Flynn



York Minster

After our concert at Sheffield Cathedral as guests of Worrall MVC we prepared for our second Cathedral concert.

A choir committee member had attended a concert at York Minster and thought “could New Mill stage a concert there?” After a deal of research and with the knowledge that only a very small number of applications were successful, it was decided to give it a go. A carefully prepared application was submitted and accepted so Steve Flynn’s dream was now a reality. We were going to sing in one of the most magnificent buildings in the country/world and a place dear to all Yorkshiremen.

Cathedrals are by design, imposing. They take up a vast space, have a great effect on the space around them but still manage to convey a feeling of ‘spacelessness’. The expanse contained within the colossal structure does not seem to be trapped inside, but seems to go on forever. This architectural perception can be daunting to the casual visitor and evokes a feeling of humility and insignificance relative to the larger scheme of things.

How should we project our feeble voices without being overwhelmed by the environment? The natural inclination is to lower your voice to a whisper as soon as you crossover the threshold. Alan fortunately had prepared us well by requesting us to be particularly diligent in watching his directions for how long we should hold the notes and when to stop. This would enable us to see and hear the effect on the day. We rehearsed ‘Let All Men Sing’ as a voice test and were reassured without feeling overconfident about the time it took for the sound to reverberate back. The visitors to the Minster seemed impressed: a number enquired about the concert and bought tickets.

Carl Deis’s arrangement of ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ is a relatively

recent addition to the choir’s repertoire; the first airing was at Huddersfield Town Hall in 2009. It was reported as the highlight and has remained as an inspiring favourite in subsequent performances. Carl Deis’s arrangement starts almost at a whisper and builds ever so gradually with small rises and falls to an intense volume for ‘Thine is the Kingdom’ toward the end, finishing with a gentle ‘amen’.

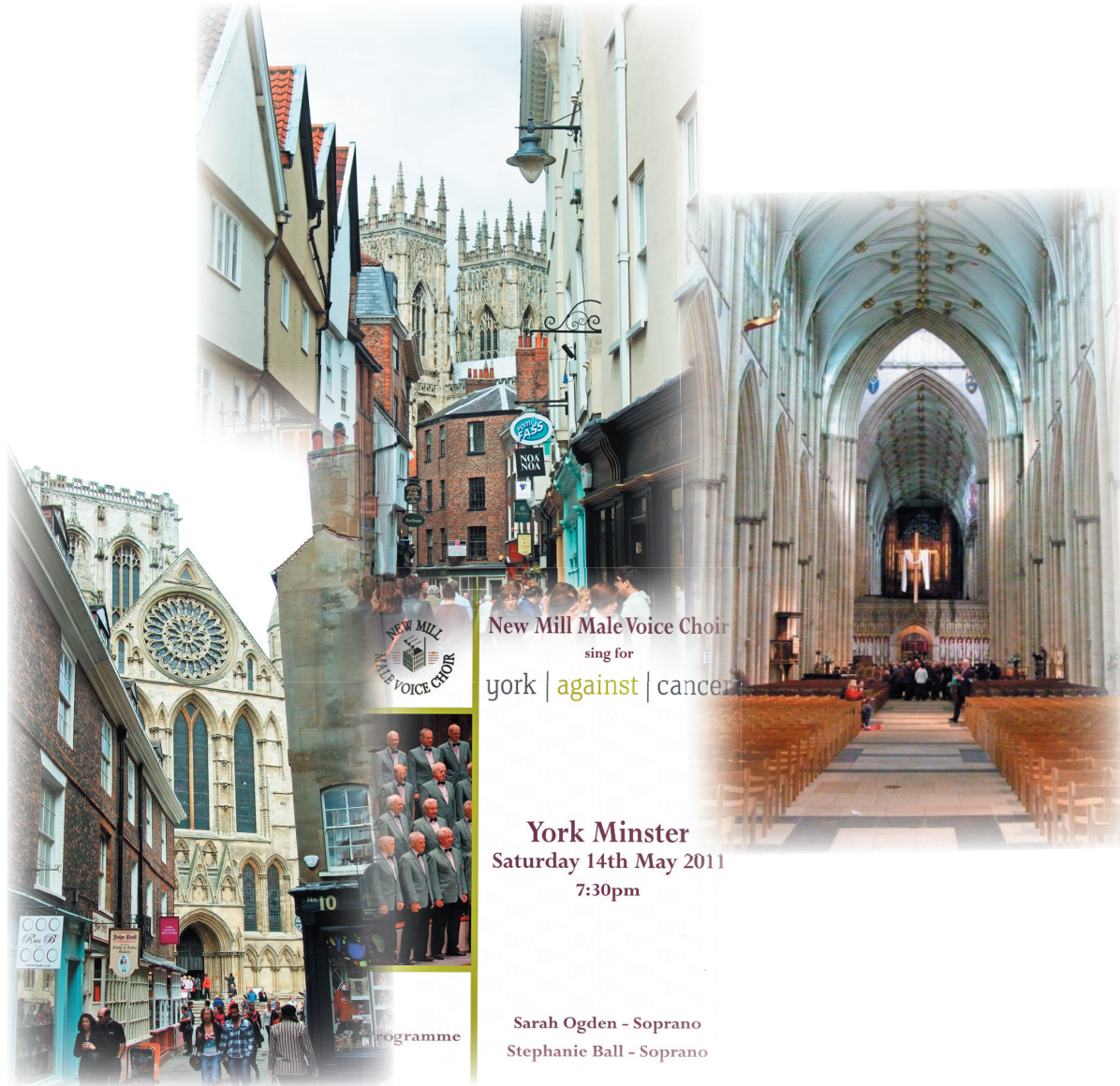
The experience of singing the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ at Huddersfield Town hall was one of filling the whole auditorium with sound. Would we be able to manage a similar feat at the Minster? It was much more difficult to assess the effect of the complex acoustics from the steep-banked choir stage. However the positive looks and reaction from the audience made it clear it had been a rather special sound.

I am not sure how long it was planned before, or even if it was a last minute inspiration, but for the start of the second set, we were instructed to line up in two columns and proceed to either side of the nave and then stop and face each other across the aisles. We then sang the raucous shanty ‘Johnny Come Down to Hilo’ to the surprise and obvious enjoyment of the audience.

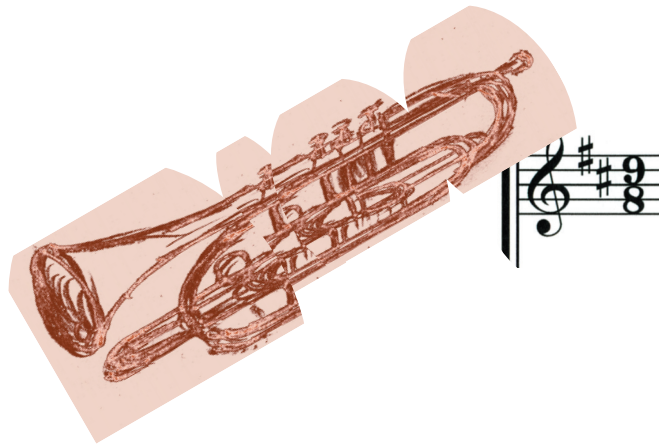
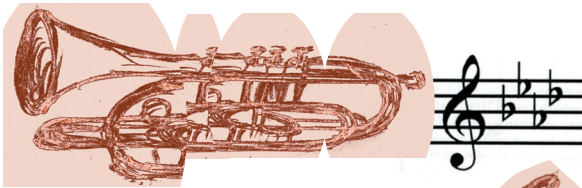
We are privileged to have Stephanie Ball and Sarah Ogden as regular guest sopranos at New Mill MVC organised concerts. At York their solos and duet filled the Minster with glorious sounds - ‘wow’.

‘My Lord What a Morning’ is another choir favourite. My Lord what a day would sum up our York Minster experience.

Charles Turner



13. Rehearsals



Rehearsal Rooms

Lydgate School - early 1990s

Wooldale Junior School - 1990s

Royal Oak, Thongsbridge - built in the 1780s to accommodate clothiers travelling to and from market, many from Huddersfield Cloth Hall (opened 1766). Closed down around 2006 and now private residences. New Mill MVC rehearsed here until the early noughties.

New Mill Club

What can you say about rehearsals?

- somewhere you go every week and don't like to miss.
- a fixed point, a bit like work, a bit of structure in the life.
- a people comfort zone - blokes you enjoy hanging out with, albeit for two hours a week.
- not quite the same as a shed, but close.
- time away from the job, housework, gardening, TV and shopping.

Two hours a week for twenty-one years, given time off - say six weeks a year - is a quarter of a year, a season. Which season would you like? Is the choir winter, spring, summer or autumn? Could be autumn for most of us - brown yellow leaves, crisp mornings, 6.00 pm wine on the verandah - one long autumn of rehearsal. Time for reflection. It's more than half over. More behind than in front. Realistic but not giving in, not yet.

Some choose to meet between rehearsals. Gluttons for punishment or spending time with mates who share the same interests. Perhaps simply extending the time away from the things you have to do, but don't want to.

A new skill; a relearned skill; or no skill at all? It doesn't matter. Almost everyone gets well enough in tune. It never goes perfectly. Always something to work on - quiet period of silence afterwards, and then another flick of the pages. Let's try bars so-and-so again. Very different to a concert - only one chance there, like batting in a cricket match.

Once a year, for a new year weekend, the choir sets off for a rehearsal weekend. Plenty of singing, plenty of laughs and plenty of food and drink. Llandudno and Scarborough. Donald Lister specials.

It's what I look forward to every week

John Hanwell, a new choir member in the bass section, on being asked if he was enjoying the choir said that even though he may have had a bad day at work or felt too physically knackered to get out of the chair, he needed no motivation to come to rehearsals. It would have to be something serious to keep him from his Tuesday night sing because he enjoyed the camaraderie so much. "It's what I look forward to every week", he said.

I was able to tell him that I had held exactly the same sentiments for the last 21 years.

Sometimes the singing can be a bit 'iffy'. However when we are approaching concert pitch and we know we are ready it can be great. The 'craic' after the hard work of rehearsal over a pint and ham sandwich is equally part of the process. It is where the various contingents of the choir bond - whether it be the cyclists, the runners, the walking group, the skiers or the caravanners. This is where plans are made to pursue those interests, inevitably involving some singing in a hostelry somewhere. This is where the trials and tribulations of Huddersfield Town and Sheffield Wednesday are debated at length. This is where side splitting jokes are exchanged and bonhomie thrives.

This is not just about singing. This is where the spirit and mettle of a group of pals is forged which leads to a passionate and harmonious choral sound - on occasions giving the audience the 'tingle factor'.

David Haigh



New Mill MVC's current rehearsal venue, New Mill Club

- 1871 - Discussions about a Public Hall began in January
- 1920 - Grove House purchased from Mrs Bower for £1000
Mr Roebuck, Glendale Mills, agreed rent, lease or
purchase of the adjoining field
- 1922 - Opening of New Mill War Memorial Institute
- 1947 - Establishment of New Mill Bowling Club
- 1951 - Changed to New Mill Working Men's Club
- 1964 - Extension constructed
- 1966 - Extra car-parking and floodlights



Clive Hetherington and Ged Faricy had been in dispute for weeks over some mathematical nonsense. Donald usually booked us in for a meal at a pub half way to Llandudno and the two Turings resumed their free and frank discussions over cow pie. Index fingers to the fore and robust dynamics. It simmered non-too gently throughout the weekend and beyond.

A small group shared the stage in a downtown hostelry with a sixty year old 'Willy Nelson' look alike complete with pony tale and scouse accent who'd seen better days. He was 'the turn' at a 40th wedding anniversary, a north west collage of bruisers and babes from whom you wouldn't buy a second hand car. When he introduced his numbers he dropped in the odd name, such as, "I remember when John Lennon said to me ...". One of us told the party that we sang, so we did, and brought the house down. Well they'd been there since opening time. It's quite nice to be able to do it.

Two late arrivals. Rupert of course, looking for attention. Everyone ignored him. And Mark from Australia - impressive.

One year, Anne was shopping in New York so Sheila Asquith stepped in as accompanist. There are too many buttons on these fancy keyboards. We were never entirely sure what sort of piano, organ, harpsicord, banjo or whatever was coming next. It was a relief to get the metronome.

Glimpses of Llandudno

John Rotchell and I were room buddies and guess what he fell asleep to? The Home Guard Manual 1941.

We were light the first morning for the first rehearsal, light even of Elizabeth, our musical director, and Chairman Graham. Where were they? Only in the basement ballroom, setting out the chairs and wondering where the rest of the choir was.

After coffee Elizabeth thought we'd have sectionals, so the ballroom would now come into play. Basses and baritone tones would stay on the ground floor. Mackie, a tenor, had other ideas as he waltzed in without a care and sat waiting. Elizabeth had to tell him, otherwise he'd still be sat there.

After midnight in the hotel, Rod and Dave were at their best. On the strength of their recent successful Christmas sixties revival tour of Huddersfield's rest homes, they are about to embark on a short tour of Bhagdad's well women clinics. A blue comic also did a set. No great change from his day job which was selling tat, wholesale. The following morning, a serious senior moment was experienced by all the late night choir members. Few could recall any of his stories.

Back at New Mill, Brian Higginbottom had put himself forward for the Annie Laurie audition. On tour, he sung a solo beautifully with a twinkle in his eye and modestly accepted the rapturous applause. The other auditioners withdrew.

During a regular game of pool, I casually mentioned that Marilyn and I were celebrating our wedding anniversary over the bank holiday weekend.

David Haigh asked politely, "Are you doing anything special?"

"Yes, we've booked a quiet romantic trip to Llandudno - at Osbourne House on the front, dinner at the famous St Tuddno's Restaurant next door but one."

David's jaw dropped, "But it's our wedding anniversary that same weekend and Chris and I have booked a quiet romantic weekend in Llandudno and we are staying at St Tuddno's on the front."

The pool stopped and a minutes silence ensued while it sank in. Neither of us had any inkling of the others plans. What's the 'probability' of that happening?

We each had a great weekend, the four of us just meeting up briefly late on the Friday night to toast our joint celebrations

Ged Faricy

There was lots of downtime between takes which needed to be filled somehow, chatting mostly.

2005
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar
School. Wakefield
CD recording
'In Harmony'

Clive Hetherington is now apprenticed to an art teacher. Alan Dalgethy went on one about the creativity of software programming. Ken Jagger reminisced at length about Holmfirth High School rugby. A marathon from the master of short pith.

Lapsing from religion is always a good one. I reluctantly share a methodist past with 'Ibbo'. Terry Dean and Andy Johnston confessed to a prior leaning towards the left foot. It then deteriorated into abuse, funny but unprintable. As were Our Chairman's alleged remarks about Banbury - something about a cock horse. Terry has a wickedly off-balance sense of the ridiculous when it comes to our revered institutions.

And the perennial Len stories - sad, funny and angry in equal measure. You weren't a fully paid up member of the choir until you'd been scolded by the great man.

All a bit like the hapless constable Dogberry, referring to the elderly Verges in 'Much ado about nothing'

'A good old man, sir; he will be talking:
as they say, when the age is in, the wit
is out. God help us!'



14. People



Len Williams – founding conductor

A choir does not just happen by accident – those early aspiring choristers at the Duke of Leeds would never have made it without a leading light to guide, nurture and train them; and boy, were they lucky! – that leading light was none other than a recently retired Welsh opera singer who had shared the stage with such greats as Sutherland, Gobbi, Pavarotti, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir John Barbiroli, and international pianist, John Briggs. He obviously knew a thing or two about singing (!) and was able to forge a rabble of a few pub singers into a sixty-strong choir able to hold its own on any concert platform. To put it simply, without Len Williams, there would have been no New Mill Male Voice Choir.



Len was born in 1943 in Penrhiwllan, near Cardigan, West Wales, into a devout Welsh Methodist family. His father not only led the local choir, but was also its chief soloist, and Len followed in his father's footsteps as a singer. At the age of 18 he won the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff, as a baritone, although in later years, he trained as a tenor at the Manchester School of Music, where, incidentally, he met his wife, Catherine – a fine singer and choral conductor in her own right. He went on to join The Welsh National Opera, and also appeared as a freelance artist with many other operatic companies, before finally retiring in 1988.

I first met Len in 1993. He was an evening class tutor in singing at Holmfirth High and I was a student. David and Sheelagh Illingworth were also on the course. One of our pieces was 'Skye Boat Song', the one about Bonny Prince Charlie escaping. Many years later, at a choir rehearsal, he told us he'd visited Scotland's west coast in search of the subject of his favourite song. His face dropped as he described the scene. Had he imagined that 'Over the Sea to Skye' was a long way, a substantial journey requiring preparation and not to be undertaken lightly or frequently? Picture him at the Kyle of Lochalsh, crestfallen at the site of the toll bridge.

Elizabeth Hambleton - Musical Director

Alan Brierley - Musical Director

Huddersfield Polytechnic - studied piano, organ, clarinet,
singing and conducting

Teaching posts in Halifax and Huddersfield

Head of Music, Moor End Technology College - retired
2006

Conductor Huddersfield Methodist Choir (Huddersfield
Voices) - from 1984

New Mill MVC Musical Director - from 2010



Freddie Stallard



John Bowden



Malcolm and Sheila Asquith

Presidents

Chairmen

Ray Thompson
Brett Mellor
Ian Lister
Jim Butterworth
Idris Jones
John Mallinson
Graham Dawson
Adam Brown

Pianists

Elizabeth Alberti
Sue Ogden
Neil Poynter
Elizabeth Hambleton
Anne Levitt

Treasurers

Barry Meeres
Eric Gowling
Steve Davis
John Rotchell
Tom Ashworth

Secretaries

Kevin Howley
Ian Lister
John Senior
Selwyn Hill
Dave Illingworth
Bob Carrick
Adam Brown
Andy Johnson
John Rotchell

Choir Soloists

David Marshall
Garry Culverwell
Ged Faricy
Ray Thompson
Mark Shuttleworth
John Senior
Rod Gooch
David Haigh
Bret Mellor
John Mallinson
Adam Brown
Eddie Sykes
Donald Lister
Richard Green
James Paskell

David Illingworth

Pressure of work in 1991 meant that Dave was unable to join the bunch of regulars from our local, The Boot & Shoe, who were the founding members of the choir. A couple of years later, when we were running our own business, he realised that it was possible to arrange his life to fit around choir rehearsals. He threw himself into his new interest and before long I noticed that, while he had always had a good baritone voice and sang along with any music playing at home, he was now singing in tune. He made many friends in the choir and our social life was revolutionised. As Secretary, in addition to singing, he made the best use of his organisational and sales skills. Three moments, from towards the end of his time as secretary, stand out for me. First, Dave's role in taking the brunt of the crossfire during a major choir dispute in the early noughties. Second was Valley Voices, the joint concert with Honley Ladies in Holmfirth Church which was largely organised by us both but which he was too ill to attend. Third, the choir's wonderful singing at his funeral and all Ian Lister's help in the preparation.



Sheelagh Illingworth

I only knew Dave because of the choir. Like most of us, your mate brings you along and you think this is alright, especially having a drink and a sing after practice. The third week your mate doesn't turn up and I was hanging around the bar of the Duke of Leeds wondering what to do, when a chap with a beard and all his own hair smiled, raised his arm and said "Ah Mr Ibbo, they do an excellent pint of hand-pulled Tetley's in here". From then on Dave's familiar greeting was to set me at ease in thousands of pubs as we set out after each practice and concert to find a decent pint.

Dave will be remembered for many things but perhaps most of all for the Valpolicella Incident in Italy. We had had a wonderful day in Verona, sang in the Amphitheatre, gawped at the tombs of the Scaligeris, peered over Juliet's balcony and finally staggered into a restaurant and ordered its finest Valpolicella. Dave and Sheelagh were so impressed that we had to order four more bottles for immediate consumption followed by some Grappa. How we all laughed when they missed the coach back to Limone. Now some people in the choir would have been mightily upset at being stranded, but a day later, after a night in Verona and a quick introduction to Italian public transport, Dave and Sheelagh arrived back. Dave smiled, raised his arm and said "Ah chaps; they do an excellent Valpolicella in Verona."

But what we should all remember Dave for, apart from him being an intelligent, upstanding and all round decent bloke, was his role as Choir Secretary during some of the most trying upheavals in the development of the choir. When it came to a head and it was obvious that the emotional, social and managerial changes in the choir could no longer be delayed, it was Dave who provided the calm, thoughtful and sensitive guidance, leadership and procedures that resulted in us being the better, happier and well-run

choir we are today. All of us are indebted to Dave Illingworth for that.

As we all get older and are due to shuffle off this mortal coil, we know that, unless the bus goes over the cliff on the way to Llan-dudno, we won't be standing before the Pearly Gates with our mates and you may feel a bit apprehensive on your own. Don't worry - as the gates open and you scan the Heavenly Host and start to wonder where your section is, look into the top left hand corner. There will be a chap in a green jacket, a beard, and all his own hair who will smile, raise his arm and say "Ah Mr Ibbo, Mr Mackie, Mr Lister, Mr.....(insert own name here) they do an excellent pint of hand-pulled Tetley's in here."

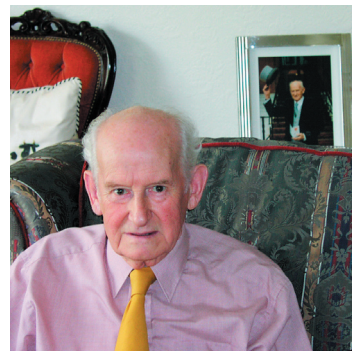
John Ibbotson (from time of funeral)

What comes to mind when you say the word stalwart? - a broad knotty oak beam that stops your house from falling down? an unfussy shepherd keeping his flock more or less in line? a football manager from the lower divisions, one eye on survival?

My Thesaurus's synonym for stalwart is David Illingworth. I first met David and Sheelagh as fellow choral students of Len Williams at Holmfirth High School. We did stuff like 'Skye Boat Song'. I had him down as a bass. He certainly spoke like one, and occasionally sang like one, as some of us baritones sometimes do.

DW 2004

Edgar Dickinson MBE



- Born 1923.
- Honley Grammar School.
- Apprenticed engineer at Hopkinsons.
- Agricultural contractor.
- 1948 bought Longley Farm from Jonas Hinchliffe. 30 acres with a cottage and a cowshed. Produced bottled milk.

Starting with cream, he couldn't make enough, so he had to buy milk in, from 200 or so farms and dairies. Aged 35 (1958) he went to Manchester Domestic Trades College to learn about milk hygiene and pasteurisation, hence yoghurt, cottage cheese, butter and crème fraîche. He retired aged 75 (1998) but he couldn't keep still so bought a disused mill in Barkisland letting out 30 industrial units. The Venue became well known for dinner dances and charity events.

President of Hade Edge band for over 20 years.

Benefactor and President of New Mill Male Voice Choir.

On 6th December 2005 he was awarded MBE for services to the community.

At the rehearsal before his funeral, John Mallison paid Derek his highest possible compliment, "Derek was never any bother."



David Hinchliffe was a truly gentle person who didn't seem to have any dark corners. He was the guy I looked to, for a smile and a sigh, a quiet moment and few words of solace.



I remember going to an open evening recruitment drive with Alan. He was a bit reluctant, but, by the time they were half way through the first song, he was hooked. His highlight was Albert Hall. He was not the most outgoing of people, but I know he really valued the friends he made. I will always be grateful for the kindness and support shown to us by choir members, both during his illness and afterwards.

Chris Ripley writing about husband Alan

15. Spin-Offs

Put around 50 mature men together with a common interest in singing, you will quickly discover, with patience and expert tuition, they can sing in four parts and sound good. It doesn't mean that they have anything else in common except most are well past their athletic prime. Many alliances do form however. Some are tight cliques, others are loose groupings where the 'membership' ebbs and flows. Here are a few I could put names and faces to;

Caravanners, sun-tanners, ex-pats and gym rats,
Heavy drinkers, heavy thinkers, trumpet players, sooth-
sayers,
Organic bakers, micky-takers, runners and joggers,
gardeners and loggers
Teachers and preachers, straight talkers, fell walkers
Writers, right-wingers, folk singers, old swingers
Dropouts and artists, sculptors, conductors
Ballroom prancers, Morris dancers, computer geeks and
techno freaks
Lawyers, accountants, political wets, the hunting, shoot-
ing and fishing sets ...

Andy Johnston



Cycling

In 1996, I re-discovered the pleasures of biking after a gap of a mere 25 years. The exhilaration and freedom of a minor road, an empty track, the rush of wind in the hair (now a distant memory), a hard climb - fantastic. When I joined New Mill MVC, the fit types were heavily into Sunday morning running and it was only gradually that a biking gang developed. Pioneers were David Haigh (who knows every minor road and track within a 10 mile radius of Totties), Rod Gooch, John Senior, Ian? and Eric Gowl-ing, soon joined by Geoff Gill, Ibbo, Ged Faricy, Paul Morgan, and Graham Evans as they grew fearful of future replacement knee joints. Steve 'Mr Cool' Flynn and Rob (not quite a choir member but very close!) are recent additions. Steve gave us a new dimension in bike fashion awareness. We now wear expensive Rapha merino wool vests, wind-resistant Roubaix winter trousers, Sealskinz socks, fast wicking summer shirts with three back pockets, buffs and padded lycra shorts. In the technical department we have front suspension, grooved saddles and we use clip-in SPD pedals complete with cleats. One recidivist, who shall be nameless, insists on using a comical 1960s cape to ward off the rain while the rest of us wear high-tech breathable reflective jackets.

A focus for the biking year is the September MTB Challenge, run by the Holmfirth Scouts over a very testing (i.e sadistic) course, raising money for charities including Sight Savers, NSPCC and Childrens' Homes in India, generously supported by the choir. Our regular jaunts are on Sunday mornings. Rain, sleet or shine- we usually meet at my house and set the world to rights over a ' nice cup of tea' before doing a ride of 15-20 miles.

We have enjoyed some staggeringly good boys-biking-breaks: coasts and castles from Inverleithen to Berwick and down the Northumberland coast; Hartington in God's Own County, Derbyshire; two Coast to Coast jaunts (Whitehaven - Newcastle and Morecambe - Bridlington).

Whilst we have different riding standards, we never compete. The faster ones wait for the laggards. Some maintain their bikes properly, some leave a bit to be desired and anyone can have a puncture.

A bike has many parts, and so does a choir. When all the parts work together it is just brilliant!

Andy Johnston

Eggheads

It all seems so long ago now, but it began with Steve Flynn asking whether anyone would be interested in appearing on 'Egg-heads'. We didn't think very much more about it until suddenly there came a request to attend an audition in Leeds.

This consisted of six fellas being asked questions on a range of subjects, all of which were answered incorrectly. A camera test followed and we thought that was that. The choir were thanked for the support that they would have given but which would not be needed - or so we thought.

Then, to our astonishment came the invitation to appear. We duly turned up at the BBC studios in Glasgow to be dosed in talcum powder (it stops the light reflecting from noses and bald pates - Terry Dean used a lot), before making our actual appearance.

We had rehearsed our little ditty beforehand (it went down well on the train, but not so well in the hotel room at three in the after-

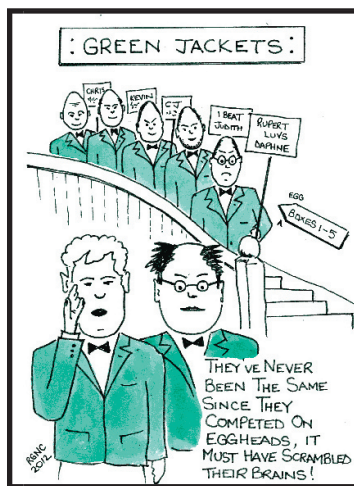
noon, to judge by the hammering on the wall (what were they doing in the next room at that time?) and duly performed it when requested by the chairman.

The undisputed star of the show was Mr John (call me Hartmann) Ibbotson, who amazed us with his detailed knowledge of Belgian First World War fighter pilots.

The Eggheads team were delightful people and, being the last to record that day (they do FIVE shows a day!!) we had ample opportunity to chat to them, before emerging on to the streets of Glasgow to work our way through the £15 per head allowance, so generously granted by the BBC. This took about ten minutes and the rest of the evening devolved into a blur. I have a vague recollection of singing Santa Lucia in some Italian restaurant or other, but I understand that despite this – or because of it – the bill came to considerably more than £15 per head.

It was a great experience and thanks go to Steve for organising it. Just why it took thirteen months to be screened is one of those impenetrable show business mysteries. But at least we all were able to claim to be one year younger than we really are.

Rupert Wilson



Caravanning

The 1993 Caravanning 'event' at Cardiff, associated with the World Choir concert, turned out to be the first of many for a group of about half a dozen choristers, wives and friends. Camping both kept accommodation costs to a minimum and provided an opportunity for some fun.

Several visits were made to a Kirkby Lonsdale.

The 1994 concert to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Prince of Wales's investiture was cancelled almost at the last minute, but as many had booked onto the local campsite we went anyway. After the usual communal barbecue the singing started and before long an audience of other caravanners had assembled and even the once grumpy site warden came out to join in.

These successes led to members going away 'sans concert' and many happy nights were spent at Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire, Gloucester (where we witnessed a very high Severn Bore) and several times at picturesque Easingwold, N Yorkshire, where we hired the perfect show venue, a barn for barbecues and home-made entertainment.

Sadly the number of members owning caravans has declined and the regularity of trips away has diminished, but those who continue to fly the flag for caravanners enjoy their weekends away.

Richard Green

Clay Pigeons

Bear-baiting, cock-fighting and shooting live birds, especially pigeons, were popular sports in the nineteenth century. Whilst some people still shoot live birds, pigeons were replaced by clays in 1880; a mixture of lime and pitch, launched into the air by a spring-loaded arm on a cast-iron base.

One Summer evening, twelve singers met with six instructors from 'The Boot and Shoe Gun Club' at the Longdendale boar shooting ground in the Peak District National Park. After a cup of tea and an induction, armed with cartridges and earplugs, the twelve shot at five different targets in succession over two hours. An added interest was an antique muzzle-loader from 1850, demonstrated by Steve Kennet. All the singers had a go, mightily impressed by the two-foot flame that spouted out the barrel every shot.

The coveted Choir Shooting Trophy was won by Dave Marshall. The group retired to the Dog and Partridge at Bordhill for a savoury buffet and several pints of cask ale. The night ended with a selection of suitable musical favourites.

John Mallinson 2004

Safe Anchor Trust

October and some of the choir and partners took up the offer of a trip on a narrow boat, but first, pie and peas at the 'Leggars', Dewsbury marina. The boats belong to Safe Anchor Trust, a charity we will sing for in 2005 at Huddersfield Town Hall, celebrating their first 10 years. Trips are available for community groups of all ages who haven't had the chance of a relaxing boat

trip: wheelchairs-users, people with learning difficulties or who struggle to walk, vulnerable individuals with family problems. My role is to keep them safe and pass the time of day, make it fun and give them a chance to steer or open a lock. The boats have special decorations at christmas, including a grotto and gifts from Abbey and Asda.

The Trust's three partners are W. Yorkshire probation service, British Waterways and W. Yorkshire Police. Offenders clear tow-paths as part of community service and the Police run a schools programme which gives the kids projects away from unhelpful influences. Over the past year and a half, Cummins Turbo Technologies volunteers have kindly supported the Safe Anchor project by helping to crew the canal boats and assist with negotiating the many lock gates along the Huddersfield canal system. Safe Anchor has found the support given by Cummins volunteers extremely useful and we have received extremely positive feedback both from Safe Anchor volunteers and Cummins volunteers alike.

When the kids go away with a spark of what life can be really like then it's made my day.

Ian Day 2004

Eastwood Ho - Ale that Warms the Hearts of Men

The frequency of moans, such as "the beer's crap" and "it's that keg rubbish", hints at a collective interest in good ale. Committed to excellence in singing, it is only natural that members of New Mill Male Voice Choir pursue the highest standards of drinking and 'the craic', even to the point of exploring the brewer's art. At

numerous post-concert analyses in 'The Star' at Lockwood, we discovered that Eastwood and Sanders (Fine Ales) Ltd, a Halifax firm, offer weekday evening visits.

6.30 pm, 14th April, and a skulking band of the usual suspects hung around New Mill Club, waiting for a coach. Rumours that several desperate individuals had been seen there since lunchtime were greatly exaggerated. As we were about to set off it was noticed that the coach contained some non-choir members. All were seemingly owned as friends and neighbours, but I wasn't convinced by one quiet bloke at the back.

It's an industry standard marketing ruse in the 'real ale' community to conjure names which invoke an image of rustic testosterone-addled earthiness, like 'Old Badger Fart' and 'Ploughmans Crotch'. Eastwoods have their share - 'Baht 'at' and 'Nettle thrasher'. But breweries also have a penchant for what I call the 'hairdressing salon syndrome', you know the sort of thing, 'Curl up and Dye' and 'Just a Snip'. Eastwood's was no exception. 'Born to be Mild', 'Calderd Ale' and 'Beyond the Pale' were their pithy take on this genre.

Our host, Martin Ogley, showed us the art of brewing. But not quite before we'd got started on a couple of hand-pumped ales set up for our visit. Excellent brews but with that something extra that delights beer drinkers - they were free! Throughout the talk we were encouraged to top up our glasses and it was here I encountered that weird phenomenon much seen in the sandwich queue after practice on Tuesdays. It doesn't matter when you go to wait for food and beer, you will always find Terry at the front. Spooky!

Then to the adjacent pub, not at all like your normal real ale pub. No technical college lecturers sporting beards and chunky sweaters, cuddling sleeve glasses to their armpits, droning on and

on about the beer instead of drinking it. The customers here were much like your typical small town pub locals. They warmed to us and joined in those songs they knew from our informal repertoire.

Back at New Mill I noticed the little bloke who nobody had owned at the start of the night, sheepishly getting off the coach after everyone else. He smiled, waved a copy of the local bus timetable at me and said, 'Fantastic service'.

Clive Hetherington 2005

Underground Music Cult

Thursday evenings, once a fortnight, several members NMMVC have been spotted disappearing deep underground in Upperbridge, Holmfirth. Not to listen to male voice choral pieces that's for sure. They are supporting 'Holmfirth Live' music sessions at which people of any age and any ability can have a go in any style, taking advantage of the friendly authentic audience. The talent on show is astonishing.

As choristers, we have all experienced the buzz of performing live preceded by the nerves of the big occasion. Going it alone is even more daunting and it has been fascinating to watch new soloist grow in confidence and maturity.

Every week is different, so drop in.

The sessions are now held at Brambles, Holmfirth.

Ged Faricy 2006

Crown Green Bowling

Fingers and thumbs have been the order of the day nearly every year at the choir's annual bowls evening at Brockholes Bowling Club. Frequently the organiser is asked "is it crown green?" to which the standard reply is "is there another sort?"

Choir members and their wives/partners have competed for right to display the magnificent six inch high plastic and e.p.n.s. NMMVC Bowls Trophy on their mantelpiece for the subsequent year. Two games are usually more than enough exercise for most, where upon we retire to the club for a well earned drink, the traditional pie and pea supper, and presentation of prizes. Generally we have been blessed with good weather, but there has always been a quiz or indoor bowling (yes- there is such a blood sport!) in case of rain.

Uninitiated members sometimes have difficulty understanding the vagaries of finger and thumb bias, (especially those left handed members), and the effect of the 'crown'. This has resulted in the occasional minor domestic disagreement, much to the amusement of others! In addition to the conventional bowling matches we have had 'nearest bowl to the £5 note', or 'nearest to the bottle of wine' competitions to bring some variety to the proceedings.

Richard Green

16. Let All Men Sing?



My time with the choir was really special and singing for the Summer Wine cast and crew and the SAS down in London are two of the highlights I remember. I left the choir in the mid nineties due to relocating to Wigan and now live in Talysarn, North Wales with my partner Elaine and two sons, Oliver and Sam. I have thought about joining a local Welsh Male Voice Choir but singing all the songs in Welsh puts me off. I believe understanding the words when singing is very important to the feeling that's portrayed in the music.

Mark Shuttleworth

When I recall my time in the choir, which was essentially the first half and a bit of the existence to date, many memories come to the fore. Recollections of the great camaraderie and up-lifting, spine-tingling music of course, but also of the experiences and opportunities which choir membership brought us.

It all seems a long time ago, and a long way too! Best wishes as you celebrate your 21st birthday.

Former Chairman, Ian Lister,
Da Nang, Vietnam

What do I make of being in a choir? It's been a big challenge. I have no musical experience and play no musical instruments. I joined on my own, encouraged by a few drinks with Len, who left almost immediately afterwards. I've found the choir complex socially. For example, buying someone a drink is not easy. Some of the guys in the choir have been in the same round since before I was born, and some of the rounds they inherited from their fathers. If you attempt to buy someone a drink you are asking them to betray their round-buddies, and if you accept a drink you are committing yourself, and your descendants, to a round for the next several hundred years. What do you do?

Stephen Dufton 2006

I've no musical background except for singing soprano in church before my voice broke and a failed attempt to learn the trumpet at high school. During my first six months with the choir I has grown in confidence and improved as a singer.

Paul Morgan 2010

The main reason I have stuck it out being in NMMVC is because it is a great bunch of people to be around, all working on new songs together. I imagine it will never get boring. Everyone shows respect for each other. The choir aim is around choir members and not about competitions.

Mark Fisher 2006

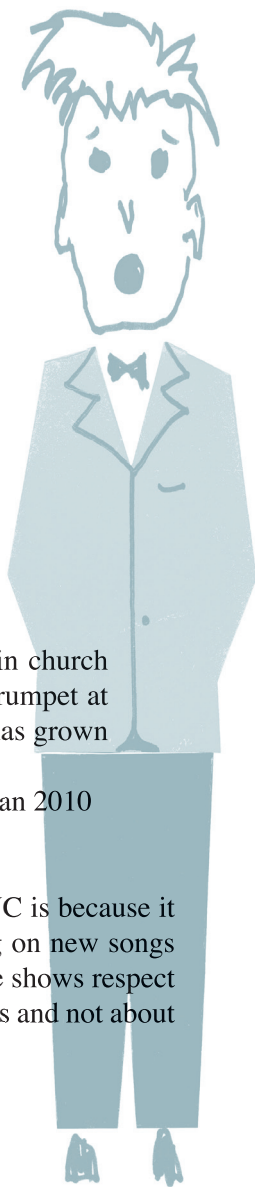
I hadn't given any great thought to choral singing, but after an invite to the newly formed Male Voice Choir in New Mill I went to my first rehearsal in May 1992 and was immediately smitten.

The choir is a very important part of my life, where performing, although very enjoyable, is almost incidental to the excellent craic and fellowship afforded by the rehearsals and social elements.

Rod Gooch 2005

The best thing for me about the choir is the comradeship. There are all walks of life here and you feel you can bond to any one person or group. A prime example of this friendship was on our annual trip to Llandudno when one night, my room mate, Ibbo, retired to bed saying he'd leave the bedroom door ajar. Rod Gooch and Dave Haigh retired soon after, and, noticing our door open, promptly closed it. Yours truly thus found the door locked and loud tappings failed to wake a comatose Ibbo. Rod and Dave heard though and emerged from next door. They said they'd seen the open door and closed it. Spotting my predicament, Dave said, 'We've a spare bed you can have'. I was undressed and in bed before he'd turned to shut and lock the door. True friends.

Peter Kennedy 2007

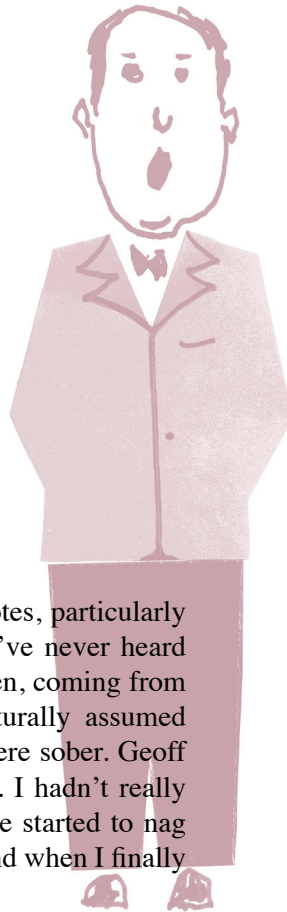


I joined the choir in 1994. Despite dad playing euphonium in a brass band and my Junior School head overdosing us on Paul Robeson and Andy Stewart, I suffer from that relatively common choir malady known as dissonance. I'm also a member of the elite deaf section, so I don't have a lot musical going for me. Could it be that I appreciate our spine-tingling harmonies simply through friendship and camaraderie? Well maybe not since I sit between Clive and Andy.

Geoff Gill 2005

I'm still not totally sure of all my notes, particularly the choir standards most of which I've never heard before. In fact, up to the age of sixteen, coming from an Irish Catholic background, I naturally assumed everyone sang in Latin when they were sober. Geoff Gill persuaded me to join New Mill. I hadn't really thought about joining a choir until he started to nag me – nagged me for years, he did – and when I finally retired I had no excuses left.

Tom Ashworth 2011



I came late to singing by accident, looking for pastimes in a new community having had a late career move. In common with a lot of choir members I find a lot of pleasure in working with an entirely new subject and I'm sure we all find it quite therapeutic.

Bob Carrick 2006

Since schooldays I've enjoyed singing and performing. Harmonising with others is a great stress buster. I love the diversity of the choir membership and the warm, unforced, non-judgemental welcome that new members receive.

Graham Evans 2005

I was a born again singer, having performed as a child and a teenager in church choirs and other musical groups. I took the discipline like a duck to water, eagerly awaiting the next practice night and later relishing the thought of our next concert. Fantastic feeling. Fantastic choir.

John Mallinson

A member since day one when the current Chairman, that Dawson chap, dragged me along to the first rehearsal at Lydgates School. I was proud to be elected the choir's first Chairman. Professional musician for most of my life, music is still my hobby, so I have been blessed to have an enjoyable pastime which has also paid the bills.

Ray Thompson 2006

My Personal Singing Journey

My journey began following a 1998 Christmas Carol sing in a pub in Denby Dale. Idris Jones and another guy, unbeknownst to me at the time but I later found out was called Brett Mellor, invited me to attend a choir rehearsal in January. Whilst I'd sung at the renowned Christmas Carol sessions at 'The Fountain' at Ingbirchworth since I was seventeen, I was far from accomplished and certainly no chorister. I was promised that the choir was made up of friendly, mostly musically untrained guys who enjoyed good craic. A natural introvert, I thought this could be an opportunity for me to put some of my fears behind me and take a risk - and not just sing in a pub fuelled by alcohol! Jennifer said "Yes, go for it."

The first few choir rehearsals were difficult for me and no doubt for the singers unfortunate enough to be seated around me! I vividly remember acute embarrassment at being unable to pitch notes picked out on a piano. However, after a few lessons from Len Williams, the choir MD, learning how to breath properly and project the voice, and hours sitting at the piano at home, I gained the confidence to sing in the bass section.

My first choir concert was a very gentle introduction at a local elderly residential care home. I was up and running and loving every minute of it.

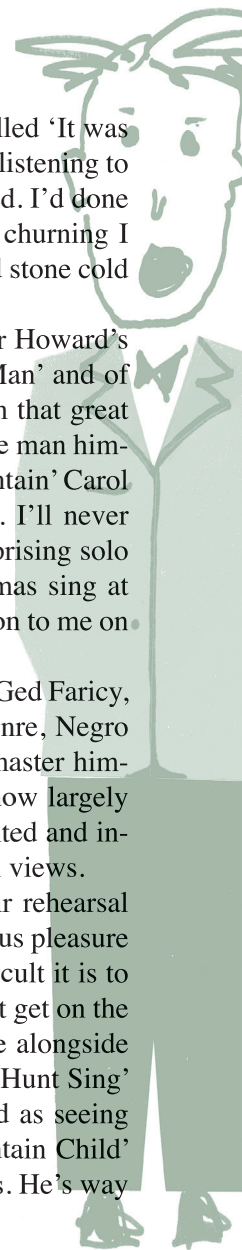
I had only ever sung a solo to my new love Jennifer, wending our way home on the back roads from 'The Fountain': a slurred rendition of 'Passing By' (to the tune of 'Deep Harmony' as is the local custom). My next challenge, which took a few years to overcome, was to stand and sing in front of the choir. The annual Llandudno rehearsal weekend was a perfect opportunity. Such is the camaraderie and support that a sympathetic audience

was guaranteed. 'O'er the Mountains', sometimes called 'It was Night and the Moon Illuminated the Sky', learned by listening to old recordings of Arthur Howard was warmly received. I'd done it! Knees knocking, buttocks clenched and stomach churning I had stood up and performed in front of my peers - and stone cold sober!

No stopping now. I'd learnt other songs from Arthur Howard's repertoire, particular favourites being 'The Muffin Man' and of course 'Missus Olroyd'. Also many other songs from that great trio of local singers: Will Noble, John Cocking and the man himself Barry Bridgewater. Barry took over the 'The Fountain' Carol Sings following the death of Cyril Latimer in 1990. I'll never forget the look on his face after my unlikely and surprising solo spot performing 'The Christmas Goose' at a Christmas sing at 'The Dog and Partridge' - Barry has been an inspiration to me on my singing journey.

'Holmfirth Live', an 'Open Mic' event started up by Ged Faricy, gave me the chance to stretch to another musical genre, Negro Spirituals, particularly those songs recorded by the master himself Paul Robeson. He is one of the great, but alas now largely forgotten, performers of the 20th century. Multi-talented and intelligent, unfairly pilloried for his deeply felt political views.

Performing at 'Open Mic' events, in pubs, on choir rehearsal weekends and at other venues has given me tremendous pleasure over the years. Fellow introverts will know how difficult it is to stand up in front of people and perform - I still cannot get on the dance floor or sing karaoke! But now the nerves live alongside the buzz. How proud I was to win the 'Haydn Thorp Hunt Sing' trophy a couple of years ago. However, not as proud as seeing my nine year old son Michael win the 'Merry Mountain Child' singing trophy two years on the trot for U8s and U12s. He's way





ahead of me already in confidence and ability.

There is one big final hurdle to overcome – performing a solo wearing the Green Jacket! Two of the most memorable choir ‘hairs standing up on the back of your neck’ moments for me were Gary Culverwell with ‘I’se Weary of Waiting’ and Dave Marshall’s equally impressive, eloquent and emotional rendition of ‘Bui Doi’, both to capacity Huddersfield Town Hall audiences. Fantastic individual performances from untrained singers, backed by the choir in full voice, each lifting and inspiring the other to maximum effect – special moments indeed.

My journey continues ... Steve Davies

As a kid I had bright red curly hair and a bad stammer and went to a rough and not very good school. So I had a difficult time. However I discovered that when you sang, you didn’t stammer and so I joined the school choir. About seven years ago I met Donald Lister and Graham Dawson, who three years later encouraged me to join the choir; yes I know some of you may wish I hadn’t.

Bill Judd 2011

I met Martin Dey at Woodsome GC and learned of New Mill Choir. Whilst ever I have new songs to sing and words to learn I will keep my brain active and away from dementia. The best thing I would like to come across to you all is my love for music and the beneficial effects it can have on one’s life. Something that cannot easily be put in to words. One has to experience it to know.

Richard Barrand 2011

An average student at school, I sang in the school choir and played trombone in the first junior band to be sponsored by the colliery band.

57 years later I joined the choir. It’s been wonderful enjoyment in the company of men from so many different backgrounds. I am proud and honoured to be part of New Mill Male Voice Choir.

Charlie Hall 2011

I have always loved music and enjoyed the rich sound of a male voice choir. For me, music is relaxing and healing and singing has a wonderful way of lifting the spirits. Thanks to Ed Turner, who brought me to a rehearsal. Despite little musical experience, the choir’s comradeship, picking up with old friends and making new ones, made me feel at home. Learning new skills has been a stretch, but very rewarding.

Robert Coombs 2011

View from the Podium - I

S Heindley, 4.30 pm, Friday afternoon, seated comfortably, the wind in the right direction for the coke works, Eddie keeping an eye on the Yorkshire score.

How did it begin?

We'd already seen New Mill at St Paul's when Joy played with the Girls' High band. We thought the choir sang fine. Then Len rang, needing a stand-in pianist for a similar concert. I liked the repertoire, the whole experience really. Something said he was going to ask again, maybe even about being permanent. I began in June 2000 and played for two years. Then the MD's job came vacant. Will I? Won't I? Many people kindly said I should, but Colin Jones was most influential. I started as acting MD for the Town Hall Cantorion concert when Colin accompanied, continued on the Prague tour with Sheila Asquith and took up the official role in September 2002 when Anne joined as pianist.

And the important mileposts in your New Mill journey?

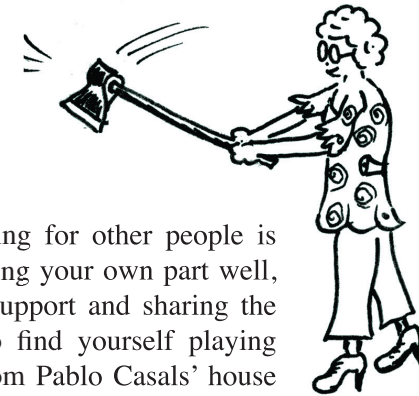
There were lots. Having said that, the choir was fertile ground, ready something different, something fresh to aim at. That's why the music sub-committee worked so well. It was informal, came up with the goods in terms of repertoire and ideas for concerts and soloists, and shared equally the blame and the plaudits.

Anne was a massive support. We were both new. My preferred style is relaxed and comfortable. You guys give up your time and work hard. No need for stress. Anne and I were of the same mind and you all saw, week in and out, how we were together. We wanted you to enjoy and improve at the same time.

Colin and Cantorion gave us a boost, when we went to their Betwys sessions at St Mary's. Sure, they were technically better and we couldn't match them, but we took on their discipline and commitment. They were so friendly. It was a jump-start.

We always moved on after rehearsal weekends. Working hard at singing and getting to know each other. Nothing changed fundamentally, but we were tighter and more confident. I was worried before the Tsunami concert in Betwys. I needn't have been. Could we keep going? Yes we could.

The Big-Name concerts were big for us too. Willard was the first and the most powerful. Keith Bradley, Eddie's cousin, not only taught Willard science in Jamaica, but was also involved in school productions. Would Willard sing for us? Yes he would. You men weren't sure, but what a buzz you all got. An internationally renowned star: he needn't have bothered, but he did. 'Bu Doi', phew, someone said if we'd done it right at the end, no one would have gone home. You had to get on his wavelength though. Whilst he was going through some stuff with Anne, I said to him, 'The men will be ready at 5.30 to rehearse the joint items.' 'What if I'm not?' 'We'll do it without you.' That concert proved the men could organise it and sing it with the best. So we did it again. The Morriston one came through the music sub-committee trying to get the score for 'Blaenwern'. I tracked down Alwyn Humphreys and he simply wondered whether Morriston might perform in the Town Hall. Yes.



Elsecar was great for us as well. Whether you agreed or not, it still did us good, particularly as previous experiences had been poor. It's like music exams. Concentration, don't let the side down and enjoy the rewards. It's a general message. Continuous search for fresh challenges. Something to look forward to, fresh to aim at.

My final point is personal. 2005, in conversation with Andy Johnson, Joy's wedding in Leamington came up. 'Do you want us to sing?' Thirty odd made the trek, bed, breakfast, hotel, caravan whatever. It was brilliant. I'm not sure the men know how much we appreciated it.

Yorkshire 'ad 'em five down for forty-odd. Eddie smiled and hugged himself.

Dave Walker talks with
Elizabeth Hambleton

The women in our lives, Elizabeth and Anne, guide and cajole us to be the best we can be. There they are, going ten rounds every week with the likes of us crusty old lifers. In and amongst rehearsing, Elizabeth runs music theory sessions. We learned that music is simply a matter of pitch and rhythm. I totally lost it in complex time, spending the next half hour daydreaming pleasantly of waitresses.

Llandudno 2003

View from the Keyboard

Playing the piano is a joy. Playing for other people is something special. Not only playing your own part well, but creating a balance, being a support and sharing the musical experience. You can also find yourself playing in some extraordinary places. From Pablo Casals' house in Barcelona to York Minster; from Auschwitz to Royal Leamington Spa; from a Polish salt mine to an engine shed in Barnsley!

Whilst playing for Sir Willard was one of the highlights, all of my ten years with New Mill Male Voice Choir have been filled with laughter, friendship, wonderful music and the company of extraordinary men. My admiration and affection for them knows no bounds.

Anne Levitt

Elizabeth keeps on smiling whatever. More than a figure-head, sleeves rolled up in the muck and bullets.

Ann gives it the angry sweeping arpeggio, with something barely decipherable just under the breath.

CD recording 2005





View from the podium - II

You could almost say that I was thrown in at the deep end when I began my association with New Mill MVC. I had seen them in concert, but when I stood on the podium to take my first rehearsal they hardly knew me from Adam - well they did actually because Adam sings second tenor!

Not much rehearsal time before the competition at Elsecar - the choir had triumphed the two previous years and with me at the helm they came second!

A charity concert at Huddersfield Town Hall gave us a chance to get to know each other before the prestigious York Minster concert. Superb setting, wonderful acoustics and performing 'Johnny Comes Down to Hilo' from the sidelines, tenors facing baritones and basses across the audience, was thrilling.

Then sharing the stage with Alison Balsom, fun Christmas concerts, a weekend workshop in Scarborough and the first performance of 'Angels'. All in all, quite a baptism.

The podium is a happy place to try and help the choir extend its repertoire and develop phrasing and expression. I often remind myself that as long as the guys in front of me enjoy singing, I'll remain in that privileged position.

Alan Brierley

Still singing despite Kirkby sacrilege

I joined New Mill Male Voice Choir in 1992 shortly after it had been started, having been approached by my neighbour Doug Shuttleworth who had attended early rehearsals.

The choir was still in its infancy and the first committee was formed to formalise proceedings. When the first Secretary moved away from the area, I took on the post of choir Secretary and was able to bring some expertise learnt from previous organisations.

My music skills comprised, an early foray into Piano, a basic ability to learn by ear, and burgeoning folk guitar skills learnt at Folk Clubs along the way.

My father had been a member of Penistone Combined Choirs and I had been taken as a child to listen to their concerts and some of the New Mill repertoire was somehow familiar.

Singing with New Mill Male Voice Choir has certainly improved my voice, sight reading, and the camaraderie is a weekly high point.

Despite the Kirkby 'sublime to the profane', I have been asked to perform at many functions through the years connected with the choir members, and the bookings are still coming in. It's an ill wind !!!

John Senior

Getting Started

In the late 1960s, I spent four happy years singing with Kendrick and Jefferson MVC, a paper stationary company in West Bromwich. I moved back to Yorkshire, but didn't sing for 30 years, until I joined New Mill in February 2003.

It was hard going, after an absence of 30 years. I thought I'd left it too late. At the time, we were encouraged to change places. So I sat next to Jack Bex, who politely asked how I was getting on. I told him I was struggling with the high register. He didn't have a problem, but he found the softer sections difficult. I was comfortable in these so I thought we'd make a decent combination. Soon, we were practising a song with a passage containing a good number of notes in the high first tenor register. At the vital part I dropped off and left it to Jack. To my amazement he dropped of as well. Jack hadn't any problem with high notes because he didn't sing them.

It was down to Jack that I decided to persevere. Ten years later the high register is no longer an issue. So well done Jack.

Edward Sykes



Afterglow

What about the 'afterglow' asked the Chairman of Morriston male voice choir in 2009.

This is the perfect description of our feelings when winding down after the elation and emotional drain of a performance and retiring to a pub 'for the afterglow' has been added to the choir vocabulary.

There are choir members who would argue we do not do ourselves any favours singing after a couple of pints as alcohol does not enhance vocal prowess. Pub singing, nevertheless, is a highlight for myself and a significant number of choir members. It has a relaxed atmosphere and allows a wider repertoire, ranging from the sacred to profane. A surprising number of individual talents have been uncovered and the variety and list of favourites has grown.

The procedure is usually the same, we ask the bar staff if it is all right to sing. Invariably Ged will pitch 'Bread of Heaven', usually followed by 'Hail Smiling Morn' and off we go with a right good sing along: 'Sloop John B', 'The Wild Rover', 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' and 'Danny Boy' are the standard fare. These are interspaced with requests for 'Mrs Olroyd' (Steve), 'The Water Rattle' (John), 'The Village Pump' (Edward), and "the one about the hod carrier who won't be at work today, Derek." Then the inevitable "You can't sing that Ibbo, do the one about the logger who stirred his coffee with his thumb."

Pub singing is about fun, comradeship and nostalgia. Probably nostalgia is as good as it used to be after all.

Charles Turner

A Few Thoughts of Mine

I joined the choir just over a year after its formation, around late 1992 I suppose. Many years earlier I had, been a member of my local church choir at Coley, near Halifax, becoming part of the bass section in due course. My son, already a member of New Mill MVC, persuaded me to join.

Len Williams was of course MD and the accompanist, an excellent pianist, was Liz Alberti. The most significant thing at the time to me was the different type of music that I now sang, in company with many bass voices within a choir consisting of men, rather different from the usual church choir of sopranos and altos.

The aim of the choir then, and mine also, was to be good enough to perform at concert level, with the stage to ourselves, at many local venues and beyond if possible. Over the years, this was achieved with great success. One of the most important stages to me was when we received our uniform. This gave the choir its own identity. We were proud to appear as New Mill MVC in our green jackets. Psychologically we'd made it! We had a long way to go, and still have.

Many things stand out in my memory relating to concerts and choir holidays. First, our excellent visit to Limone on Lake Garda in Italy. We were giving a concert at Riva del Garda at the head of the lake. A large circular theatre, with I think, an open roof. Because the coach was unable to park near the building we had to carry the piano and our equipment the last few hundred yards past many holiday-makers. As the choir assembled on stage to start the concert, the theatre was empty apart from our wives. Then, during the programme, people began to trickle into the hall and fill the seating. By the last song, the auditorium was full,

standing room only. The singing had gone through the open roof and attracted them all in.

Second, also in Italy. We were due to give an evening concert at the Madonna dell'Orta in Venice. At the rehearsal that morning, Len came to me and said I had to sing the solo in 'I'se Weary of Waiting' as the chorister who normally sang the piece was indisposed. If I wished, as I'd not done it before, I could have a music stand in the right place and sing from a copy, but I must sing the solo! I did it successfully I hope. But what a venue for a first time.

Third, poignant moments. When we visited Auschwitz in Poland, after being shown around the former concentration camp, we sang in front of the wall where hundreds had been shot. 'Let there be Peace on Earth' and not a dry eye in the choir or in those watching. Then in Salou, to say farewell, 'The Irish Blessing' in the foyer of the hotel before we left for the rest of our Barcelona holiday. These are moments that one has to experience to fully understand the emotion.

During my choir years there have been happy times, sad times, a time when the choir might have folded, but it has been good to me, creating many friends, singing in places one would never have believed possible. All I can say is "New Mill Male Voice Choir, thank you".

Donald Lister

Some thoughts from the ladies

‘Where’s mi shirt’

As the girlfriend, fiancé and wife of a former brass band fanatic who is now a singing fanatic and member of New Mill MVC the prospect of being a ‘widow’ has never been a consideration for me.

Attending concerts, listening to good music, well performed and enjoying the lively social scene with the good friends that I have made has been a real pleasure.

Formal concerts are not the only enjoyment, the camaraderie and bonhomie generated by post concert sing-songs in the pub are always appreciated not only by the choir and supporters but also by the other customers, which is a great way to spread the word about the joys of singing.

I’ve had a lot of laughs too. Did you hear the tale about the member who turned up to a rehearsal in odd shoes?, or about the member who burnt a hole in his uniform jacket after mistaking a dressing room mirror light bulb for a coat hook? - you just couldn’t make it up!

A pathetic ‘where’s mi shirt’ and the ironing of the same does deflate from time to time, but you win some you lose some – this is particularly true if you are married to a post-war baby boomer man, I am sure many of you will agree!

Kathryn Evans 2012

The Boys, the Band and Britannia

Tissues abounded during Annie Laurie and for one particular person when her husband looked at her during ‘She’. The first joint piece went well, and supper followed. Some of the boys were in serious trouble when, having been allowed to get to the excellent pie and mushy peas before the crowds, they didn’t bring any for their significant others.

After the interval (and being fleeced for £5 per raffle ticket) the boys performed two watery pieces (already in floods of tears and now water?), ‘Sailing’ and ‘Bridge Over Troubled Water’, bound together by a beautiful performance of ‘My Love is Like a Red Red Rose’ (better had be in view of her heritage).

Carol Hetherington, The Venue, Saturday 21st May 2005.

Sir Willard White

The joint singing of Bui-Doi from Miss Saigon certainly set the hairs on the back of the neck rising. Amazing. Moving. When did the chaps get so good?

Kate Johnson, Saturday 18th March, 2006.

15th Anniversary Concert

Almost 15 years ago I went to Hepworth Village Hall to watch Dave sing in his first concert with the choir. I didn't know what to expect but since becoming a member he has talked of little else. I can recall that tiny hall and being pleasantly surprised, not only by the singing but also the enthusiasm and camaraderie.

How quickly the years have passed. The enthusiasm is still there, and 'American Trilogy', 'The Way You Look Tonight', and 'Bui-Doi' (take care Dave Marshall isn't head hunted by 'The West End') illustrated just how much their singing has improved.

Christine Haigh, Huddersfield Town Hall, 21st October, 2006.

The Green and the Reds with a Touch of Last Night of the Proms

Why does it always seem to rain when the annual Venue concert comes round? Not that it dampened the enthusiasm or quality of the choir and Hade Edge band.

The choir finished the first set with the enjoyable 'Short-nin Bread', successfully demonstrating, by snapping their fingers and singing, that men can do two things at the same time. However, we would have been presented with the icing on the cake if they could just smile now and then.

Pauline Gooch, The Venue, Saturday, 13th May, 2006.

From Reluctance to Enthusiasm

When he were 'nobbut a lad' at Moldgreen Council School my husband was put off singing when the teacher told him to be quiet during a singing lesson, "Because you grunt," she said. So he shut up and took no pleasure in singing and never opened his mouth to sing again.

THEN, goodness knows how many years after, Edgar Atkinson joined NMMVC and asked said husband to go along to an open evening. Brian was reluctant at first but urged on by Edgar, myself and a friend he agreed to go.

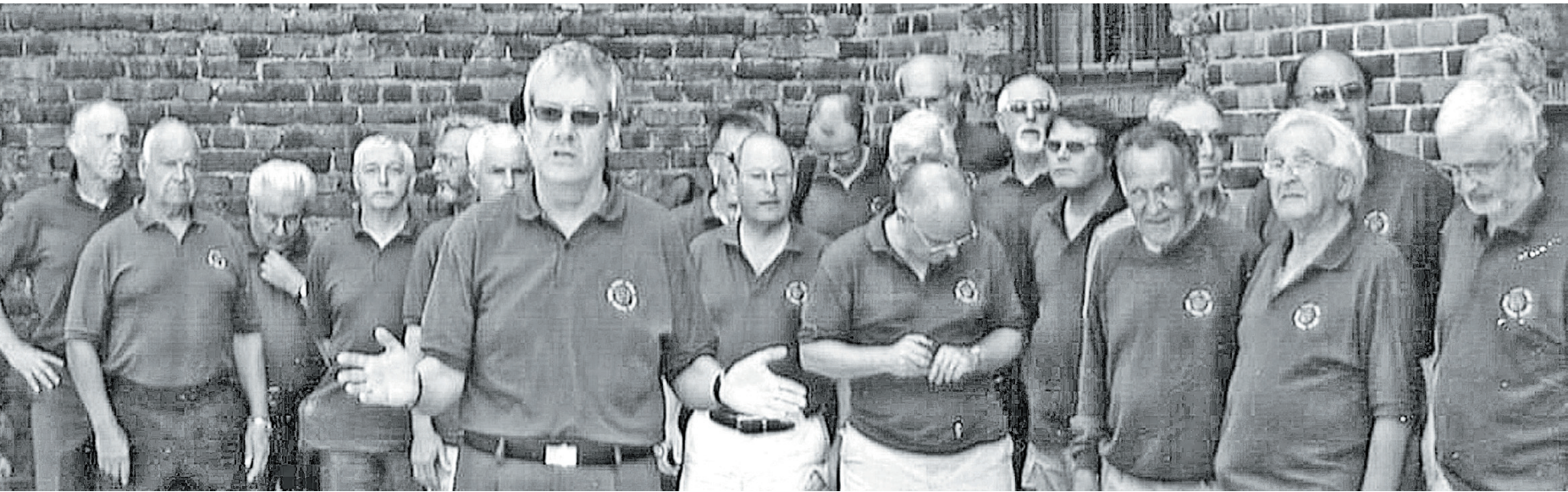
And that as they say is history. It is very difficult for me to persuade him to go anywhere else on a Tuesday evening – that's choir night and my goodness am I reminded to have an early meal ready when it's baritones' section practice!

Now he loves to sing with the choir, preparing for it meticulously. And I enjoy coming along to concerts with my 92 year old aunt and a friend. Aren't the Choir tours good?

Hilary Pollard 2012

17. The Next 21 Years?

Earlier in this book we suggested that leisure activities are one of the ways we use to express ourselves and make sense of our world. In the late nineteenth century, workers (textile in our case) found rewarding outlets in village sports and music. These needs have not changed, but the world around us has. There are nowadays a million and one other attractions, particularly for younger people. Rural and early industrial communities have changed so much as to be barely recognisable; work and family patterns are different – hence the proud image of worker choristers is declining, even in the valleys of South Wales. What we have now are choirs of mainly retired people, although the pride is still there.



In addition, the wealth of stories in this book about what happens (and the feelings that result) when choristers come together to rehearse, bike, go on holiday or perform, suggests that the choir, in common with most leisure pursuits, certainly fulfils a need for relaxation and fellowship.

New Mill MVC is open to men of all ages and singing abilities. We have excellent professionals to coach us, whose skills and expertise we value and respect. Choir administration is voluntary. The Committee members try to distil the 50+ varied personal agendas into a common direction – no mean feat at times. Nevertheless, in 21 years, a group of pub singers has transformed into a cohesive, coherent sound, with a wide and varied repertoire and an enviable concert programme, and we know our musical limitations.

So which way is the choral wind blowing for choirs at our stage of development? It's sad to say that 'Reality TV' has led the way. 'Only Men Aloud' have introduced dynamism, choreography and glamour into what has been a traditionally static and aural approach to choral singing, which is perhaps unsuited to modern popular tastes. 'Fron' has a recording contract. Its output is now peppered with lavish, if somewhat sickly-sweet, orchestral arrangements, making heavy use of electronics and studio sound mixing. The results might be anathema to the purists, but they have certainly sold well amongst the CD-buying public. New Mill at least has a website and a presence in the social networks. We do need to keep ourselves aware of current trends and adapt to them. The Committee has a sense of this and it does try to digest what is required into palatable chunks. We are continually assessing the balance between the personal needs for singing and fellowship, and the demands of the wider, commercial world.

Many choirs are finding their numbers dwindling as their ageing members 'drop off the ledge' and are not able to be replaced. It seems only a question of time before they will have to disband or merge with other choirs with similar number shrinkages. This problem is likely to be exacerbated as the pension age rises and potential recruits from the recently retired consequently diminish, or at least only join at a later age, with the result that their 'choral lifespan' is also reduced.

There is no quick and easy solution to this difficulty. The choir will, of course, keep its doors wide open and welcoming to new recruits. It will try to ensure that its profile is kept high both locally and further afield. It will continually strive to expand and improve both its repertoire and performance standards. By these and other means, we may be able to stave off decline for several years to come – but the era of the traditional male voice choir may be drawing to a close, and it could then become a question of either embracing radical change or the inevitable downward spiral into oblivion.

Perhaps the time has come for the choir to consider twinning arrangements with one or more choirs in other parts of the UK, or even abroad. A basic common repertoire and set of performance standards would need to be agreed so that on the twinning visits, the two choirs would be able to perform together, thus boosting numbers on the stage, and making the overall experience for the audience more memorable.

Brass bands have managed to get strong infusions of young players into their ranks, working alongside long-standing older members. How have they done this, especially at a time when schools music services have been cut? What makes playing an instrument in a brass band 'cool', but singing in a choir 'uncool'?

These are questions which should be asked and explored.

Maybe the County Cricket structure might give a lead. Here, promising youngsters are drafted into a progression of youth sides – Under 15's, Under 17's, Under 19's – leading to an Academy Side, then onto the Second Eleven, and finally the senior First Eleven team. This would obviously be too lengthy and complex a process in choir terms, but Thom Meredith at Colne Valley MVC is showing the way with his youth choirs from which, it is hoped, male voice choir members of the future will be drawn.

Has anybody out there got a crystal ball!!

Dave Walker and Alan Hicks

