

TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



BRIEF HISTORY 1991

By Norman Martin
Registrar & Honorary Archivist

JANUARY

Friday January 18th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

With the first engagement of the year the Choir was reunited with the Band of the Welsh Guards (Conductor Lieutenant Colonel P. Hannan B.E.M.). it was in this venue in 1987 when they first performed together. The proceeds were in aid of the same body – the Welsh Guards Charitable Funds – but this time it had a special significance owing to the Gulf Crisis. It was a comfortable start for the Choir because as the concert was organised by the Band, the night belonged to them. The Choir's contribution was limited, but none the less, greatly appreciated by the large audience, while the band performed to their expected high standards and a good night was had by all.

FEBRUARY

Monday February 4th

HTV Culverhouse Cross, Cardiff

The Choir commenced the making of the television show "Highway" by travelling to the HTV Studios in Culverhouse Cross, Cardiff. Leaving Treorchy at 6pm and arriving at 7pm where tea and biscuits were served and the Choir staged at 7.40pm for a sound recording, so no dress suits were worn. The set-up for the sound recording was different as all of the participants, Sir Harry Secombe, a 24-piece orchestra led by Robin Stowell and the Choir were in the studio. The evening's performance was conducted by John Cynan Jones with the Choir singing two songs with Sir Harry Secombe and orchestra – one song with the orchestra and one unaccompanied. The performances went smoothly and quickly with the unaccompanied item taking up most of the time. Such is the dedication of choristers that despite many going on the Scotland trip last weekend, there was an excellent attendance for the recording. The Choir departed at 9.30pm

Tuesday February 5th

St Peter's Church, Pentre

The choristers again gave an excellent attendance as they assembled at 6.30pm at St Peter's Church, Pentre for the next stage in the making of the "Highway" programme – the first time for it to be dedicated to an organisation rather than an actual place. This time it was the full treatment with lights, cameras and plenty of takes! The Choir filmed two items of the soundtrack. Another star of the show was Cliff Morgan. The choristers staged at 7pm and remained there until 9.10pm then it was home time – until tomorrow!

Wednesday February 6th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

The excellent attendance of choristers continued today despite the fact that it was filmed from 2pm at the theatre. A small, invited audience were present to see and hear Sir Harry Secombe and the Choir make the "Highway" programme. The choristers staged from 3.10pm and performed until 3.55pm. Then they dispersed and changed from dress suits to ordinary clothes for the final assault on the programme. At 7pm they met in the rehearsal room and the filming finished at 8.45pm. It is thanks all

round to everyone for their splendid contributions to and the patience and fortitude in the making of this special “Highway” television programme. Norman Kay, the HTV Musical Director and Honorary Member Ronnie Cass was ever present throughout the three days. The choristers can be justly proud of their efforts in their attendance and performance and this was verified when the producer congratulated them on their professionalism.

Thursday February 21st

City Hall, Cardiff

Despite this very busy period the Choir managed to “squash” in this engagement! This was the World Squash Championships sponsored by Leekes, and it was a charity gala dinner with the Lord Mayor of Cardiff Cllr John Smith present. The dinner was held in City Hall, Cardiff. Arriving at 9pm and staging an hour later the Choir performed with their “racket partners” the Christie Tyler Cory Band. The guest artist was the ebullient character Mike McCabe and as the evening was organised by Nigel Phillips it had all the trimmings of the razzamatazz of show business. Part of the Choir’s programme was video recorded by EMI and this is being used to promote the next record. The concert finished at 11.45pm.

Sunday February 24th

Due to the extended news report on the Gulf War the “Highway” programme was not shown.

Tuesday February 26th

The Annual General Meeting was held in the rehearsal room. In reverting back to the previous system of voting for the posts took place. For the role of Chairman John Davies and Alun Hughes stood – and John Davies was elected. For the role of Vice Chairman Roger Morse and Fred O’Brien stood – and Fred O’Brien was elected. Finally for the position of Public Officer, Norman Cox, Rees Thomas and Robert Turner stood – and Robert Turner was elected. A presentation of Long Service Certificates were made to John Davies and Geoffrey Morris. Haydn Erasmus, the retiring Chairman, gracefully bowed out of his long-caring positions on the Committee. The appreciation of Haydn for his admirable contribution to the Treorchy Male Choir was sincerely expressed by all.

MARCH

Sunday March 3rd

The “Highway” programme was shown tonight, but owing to the pressures of television time and money, it was cut by half! The Choir’s contribution was shown in full.

Saturday March 9th

Central Hall, Coventry

After a period of nine years the Choir returned to Central Hall, Coventry. Leaving home at 2.45am they arrived at Coventry at 5.40pm but had problems finding the venue! Eventually after many circuits and enquiries the Choir reached the hall at 6pm and after a short rehearsal there was a buffet before the commencement of the concert at 7.30pm. There was a change to the musical team in that Marcelle Berry (Bishop’s Cleeve) was the page-turner in the absence of Mary Cynan Jones. This concert

marked the first appearance of the year for Mair Roberts. The proceeds of the concert were in aid of the Coudon Court School and Community College Choir who will be visiting Coventry in Connecticut USA in 1992. It was pleasing that the Choir opened the second half with "The Lord's Prayer" under the conductorship of the Head Girl of the school. The concert was also memorable for Cyril Bevan (58) and Evan McCarter (79) as "Happy Birthday" was sung to them. As always with such a splendid hall, a large appreciative audience and everyone on their toes, the excellence of the performance was amply demonstrated by the tumultuous applause from the audience. With the presentation of bouquets to the ladies and a centenary mug to the conductor, the concert concluded at 10.20pm and one group on the "late" bus enjoyed the hospitality of the Coventarians Rugby Club.

Saturday March 15th

Aberavon Sports Centre

The Choir travelled to Aberavon for a combined rehearsal for the forthcoming EMI Christmas Carols record. Meeting up with Morryston Orpheus and Pontarddulais Male Choirs at 6pm the rehearsal saw the three conductors, John Cynan Jones, Alwyn Humphreys and Noel Davies take their allotted times. Each of them received appreciative applause at the end of their "stint". Overseeing it all was Gordon Lorenx. The proceedings finished at 8.15pm and despite heavy fog on the Bwlch, the buses reached Treorchy at 9pm.

Friday March 29th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

To maintain the "winning streak" the Choir and the National Fuel Distributors (Park & Dare) Band took to the stage for the 26th consecutive Good Friday Concert. The event attracted another full house. Doug Firstbrook travelled from Australia for the performance which also saw Choir President Cliff Taylor from Bridgwater in attendance. Paul Cosh, the Conductor of the Band had his lifelong ambition fulfilled when he stood in the ranks of the first tenor section for the singing of the National Anthem. One of the combined items performed was the Pilgrims Chorus from Tannhauser. The last time the Choir performed this with a band was in Sophia Gardens, Cardiff with the CWS Band (Conductor Alex Mortimer) in 1963. The concert heralded the arrival of Robert Turner as Publicity Officer as the programme contained his first contribution. With the presentation of a bouquet by Dean Powell (1T) to Marion, another enjoyable Good Friday Concert was completed.

APRIL

Sunday April 14th

Brangwyn Hall, Swansea

The Choir travelled to Swansea to meet with Morryston Orpheus Male Choir, Pontarddulais Male Choir, the Band of the Welsh Guards and a selected orchestra to make a Christmas Carol album for EMI. Reaching the hall at 9.30pm, recording commenced. Lunch was taken at 12.15pm and after two tea-breaks the record was concluded at 6.50pm. With the rehearsal and recording of the Band's solo item, the day was concluded at 7.35pm. Then the choirs and band put on their full regalia for a photograph to be taken. A video recording was also made to promote the record. This long day ended with the buses reaching Treorchy at 9pm. It was a long 13-hour

engagement and one remembered by Richard Davies (2T) and Owen Wall (2B) who made their engagement debut.

Saturday April 27th

Borough Theatre, Abergavenny

The Choir travelled to Abergavenny to perform in the recently refurbished Borough Theatre. It was a small, intimate hall with excellent acoustics. The pleasure given by the performance of soprano Anne Marie Davies and John Cynan “ruling the roost” musically and orally, was amply displayed by the wrapped attention and the warm-hearted appreciation from the capacity audience. With the presentation of bouquets the concert concluded at 10pm and one bus enjoyed the delights of the Conservative Club. Owing to a sudden illness, this was the last engagement for Mr John Cynan Jones as Conductor of the Treorchy Male Choir.

MAY

Sunday May 5th

An emergency committee meeting was held in the home of the Treasurer due to the sudden illness of John Cynan Jones. It was resulted that the engagement in Tonypany on Thursday be postponed and the service of Jonathan Gulliford be solicited for the engagement in Leek. Now to await the return of the Secretary from holidays and the doctor’s report on John Cynan.

Tuesday May 7th

The choristers were informed of the events and actions to continue the activities of the Choir during John Cynan Jones’s illness. The concert on Thursday in Llwynypia was postponed and the tickets will be valid for a new date. The HTV engagement will be handed to Morryston Orpheus Choir. A rehearsal with Jonathan Gulliford will take place next Thursday and he will lead the concert in Leek. A “get well” card was signed by the choristers for the Conductor.

Saturday May 11th

All Saints Church, Leek

The Choir made their first appearance at the Leek Arts Festival in Staffordshire under the leadership of guest conductor Jonathan Gulliford. Leaving home at 1.15pm and arriving at the venue four hours later, a rehearsal was held a letter from John Cynan Jones was read by the Chairman, expressing his thanks to choristers for their concern about his well being and wishing them a successful concert. The secretary also gave the disturbing news of the sudden illness of Mrs Enid Mallin, believed to be a brain haemorrhage. During the rehearsal it became obvious that the church was not only a magnificent building but also a splendid one acoustically. The confidence between Mr Gulliford and the choristers grew throughout the evening. The concert took place before a packed audience and the conductor soon displayed his talents. The soloist was the dependable Mair Roberts and with everyone raising to the challenge of the circumstances it was a most enjoyable concert. This fact was left in no doubt by the tremendous appreciation of the audience. The late bus had problems as it decided at Williamstown not to go any further! Despite all efforts a new bus was brought from Maesteg, resulting in a very late night for some!

Thursday May 23rd

Grand Pavilion, Porthcawl.

The concert in Porthcawl was again under the leadership of Jonathan Gulliford. The rapport and confidence is continually improving. The artist was Margaret Millington who has appeared several times with the Choir and Marion played magnificently for both the soprano and Choir alike. Although not an ideal venue, the response from the audience showed their appreciation and pleasure of the evening's performance. The proceeds were in aid of the Sandville Home. After the presentations the concert concluded at 10.10pm with choristers enjoying the buffet the High Tide Inn. Whilst there they were asked to sing "Myfanwy" and received an anonymous donation of £50 for Choir funds and a further £60 for Sandville.

Thursday May 30th

At tonight's rehearsal the letter of resignation as Conductor of the Treorchy Male Choir from John Cynan Jones was received and read to the choristers. The feelings of sadness and regret was obvious as Mr Jones had been associated with the Choir as a chorister, Associate Conductor and Conductor for more than 25 years. Mr John Davies (Chairman), paid tribute to him for his unstinting care and concern for the Choir and his brilliant musicianship in maintaining the standard of performance and taking the Choir into realms of new music. His contribution to the Choir speaks for itself. He has conducted 1,901 rehearsals, 664 engagements including 38 television shows, 20 LP records and four overseas tours to Canada (1980), Strasbourg (1981), Canada (1985) and Australia (1996). Also his incredible contributions to arranging music, typing copies, editing records, writing sleeve notes etc. cannot be underestimated. His outstanding musical ability and his commanding presence was admired and respected by all. It is the sincere wish of everyone that the sudden illness which robbed the Choir of his services will soon improve and he will enjoy a happy retirement.

JUNE

Thursday June 6th

At tonight's meeting a letter was read from Jonathan Gulliford in answer to the offer of the conductorship of the Choir. He thanked the Choir for the offer and stated his enjoyment with the Choir during this period. However, due to his commitments to Cor Meibion Pontypridd, his students and music lessons, felt that he was not ready for the challenge of leading such a large, famous Choir. With the greatest of regrets he declined the offer. On the following Wednesday and advert for the post of Conductor appeared in the Western Mail

Saturday June 15th

Civic Hall, Bedworth

For the seventh time the Choir appeared in the Civic Hall. After a short rehearsal at 5.40pm a buffet lunch was served and the concert started at 7pm. The capacity audience showed their enjoyment and appreciation of performances by Mair, Marion, Jonathan and the Choir with a rousing applause, cheers and laughter. A very pleasing concert debut for David Williams (2B). The Wig and Pen Hotel was the hostelry for the late bus.

Monday June 17th

Mr John Haydn Davies M.B.E., the Founder Conductor of the reformed Treorchy Male Choir and its Conductor Emeritus passed away today. It is the end of an era. Words are inadequate to describe the qualities of John Haydn Davies. His dynamic personality, his quiet charm, his dedication, his determined was such that he commanded respect and admiration from all. As Conductor he took the raw, but eager body of men and produced one of the finest choirs in the land. In the process he revolutionised the art of choral singing such that the style and tone of singing were copied, and his excellent arrangements in constant demand by many other choirs. All choristers under his baton will say,

*“Great things he has taught us
Great things he has done
And great our rejoicing through knowing him”.*

Friday June 21st

Today the funeral of Mr John Haydn Davies M.B.E. took place. At the service in Blaenycwm Chapel a large number of choristers were present and attending were Mr Clifford Taylor, Noel Davies (Conductor) of Pontarddulais Male Choir and twenty five of their choristers in uniform. A representation from Morrision Orpheus and many former Treorchy choristers were present. Despite his illness John Cynan Jones was there to pay his last respects and conduct the Choir. In the Chapel two hymns were sung with the congregation and the Choir's tribute was his arrangement of "Jacob's Ladder". At Llwydcoed Crematorium, as Mr Davies was a Life Member of Pontarddulais Choir, Noel Davies and Gwyn Evans (a former Treorchy chorister) joined Bryn Howells, Idris John, Bert Stephens and David Trembath as bearers. Another two hymns were sung and the Choir's tribute was "Arglwydd Mae Yn Nosi". Mr Glynne Jones (Conductor of Pendyrus Male Choir) was present. So was put to rest one of the finest Christian gentlemen one could meet on life's journey.

Sunday 23rd & Monday 24th June

In her radio programme "With Music in Mind", Beverley Humphreys paid tribute to Mr Davies and played "Kwmbayah". In his radio programme the Choir's very old friend Alun Williams paid tribute to Mr Davies, reminiscing of the "All Together" programmes and stating the value of Mr Davies as a musician and a gentleman. He played a section of "Crossing the Plain".

Thursday June 27th

Libanus Chapel, Treherbert

Is it coincidence or something more profound that the first concert after the death of Mr Davies was Libanus Chapel, Treherbert, where the Choir last appeared under his baton in 1963. Before the start of the concert the Chairman made a moving tribute to the Conductor Emeritus and a minute's silence was held. The concert was in celebration of the centenary of St Alban's Church in Treherbert and was the first "home-ground" concert for Jonathan Gulliford. With soloist Alyson Davies, the Choir rose to the occasion with a most enjoyable concert.

Saturday June 29th

Sherbourne Abbey

The Choir made its first visit to Sherbourne by leaving Treorchy at 1.20pm and arriving at the Abbey at 4.50pm. After leaving the M5 the choristers had a picturesque

journey through the pleasant countryside and villages of Somerset and Dorset. On arrival the Choir had a short rehearsal in the bandroom with the Parc & Dare (NFD) Band with whom the concert is shared. The Abbey is a magnificent building, architecturally, structurally and acoustically and was founded in 705 A.D. Such a venue seems to have an inspirational effect and Jonathan Gulliford, Marion and the choristers responded to the occasion. "Cwm Rhondda" was sung in memory of John Haydn Davies. The performance of the Choir and Band was rewarded with tremendous applause and a standing ovation. The concert was compered by Gerald Pitman, Chairman of the Sherbourne Society and the proceeds were in aid of Cancer and Leukaemia in Children. After the concert a get-together took place in the Digby Tap. A very successful first concert in Sherbourne.

JULY

Thursday July 11th

At tonight's rehearsal the Chairman announced the new conductor is John Jenkins, Music Advisor to West Glamorgan. He lives in Clydach, Swansea and will make his debut on Sunday July 21st. He is the third person named "John" to lead the Choir!

Saturday July 13th

Winchester Cathedral

Another cathedral catapulted the performance of the Choir! Leaving Treorchy at 2pm and arriving at 5.40pm, the rehearsal took place in this magnificent cathedral. Here it was proved that not only was it a magnificent structure and wonderfully ornate but acoustically nearly perfect. As the last visit to Winchester the Hampshire Youth County Band shared the stage with the proceeds in aid of the Youth Band Funds. The Choir put something extra in this performance to show Jonathan Gulliford their appreciation for his invaluable contribution to the Choir during its troubled period. This was the last concert of his assistance period. An added incentive was the fact that part of the Choir's performance was to be broadcast on the BBC. The band's funds were greatly enhanced as there was a capacity audience present and all performers left in no doubt of their enjoyment of the concert by the volume and length of applause. During the interval the choristers were elated when it became known that the new conductor, John Jenkins and his wife Wendy were present and they spoke to many of them. The concert finished at 10pm and the first hotel went to Stonthorpe Hotel for a buffet while the second headed to the barracks of the Light Division. This was easier said than done as the bus got completely lost and finally stumbled upon it at 11pm. As the barracks was only two miles from Winchester it was a late arrival indeed! The Officer's Mess were holding their Summer Dinner and under the conductorship of Jonathan Gulliford an impromptu concert was performed for 20 minutes and then on to the Sergeant's Mess. The arrival home was 5am! The dawn was not distant!

Sunday July 21st

Tonight's rehearsal is the start of a new era for the Choir as the Chairman introduced the new conductor, John Jenkins. This announcement was greeted with applause from the choristers. Mr Jenkins spoke of his pleasure, privilege and honour at being the conductor of the Treorchy Male Choir and his hopes and aspirations for the future of the partnership. After the first rehearsal the omens are of the continued success in the quality of singing and the standard of performance associated with the Choir.

SEPTEMBER

Tuesday September 3rd

At tonight's rehearsal Mr Jenkins brought his first piece of music for the Choir to learn. It was "At the River" adapted by Aaron Copland.

Thursday September 26th

St Illtyd's Church, Llantwit Major

Tonight saw the commencement of the third era of the Choir as John Jenkins conducted his first concert. The venue was St Illtyd's Church which stands on what is the most important site in the history of Christianity in Wales. Illtyd established his church and monastery there in 500 A.D. It is one of only a few parish churches in Glamorgan to be a Grad 1 Listed Building. The venue was packed out for the concert which was most satisfying as the proceeds were for the Church Restoration Fund. The artists was Miss Rachel Davies, a most excellent harpist and the daughter of John Davies who assisted the Choir at the piano last week. Tonight Clive White (2B) sang the solo in "Battle Hymn" for the first time. It was a "getting to know you" concert between Conductor and Choir and although there were a few blemishes and mistakes, it was a good start to the rapport between both parties. These were felt only by the Conductor and Choir as the response from the audience was most appreciative and the singers left the church to a standing ovation which continued until the last chorister left the church.

Saturday September 28th

Town Hall, Burton on Trent

The Choir started on a wet, blustery day for the first visit to Burton on Trent by leaving Treorchy at 3pm. Forging ahead through the wind and rain before reaching Streatham Services where a gearbox malfunctioned on one of the buses. Eventually a bus from Yeoman Bus Company of Hereford arrived after a 2hour and 20minute delay. The Choir finally reached the Town Hall at 8.30pm. Fortunately the concert was shared by a school band and choir who performed the whole of the first half and the Choir didn't actually perform until 9.30pm! From the first note it was evident this hall was excellent acoustically. This was definitely another "getting to know you" concert with the confidence of the Conductor transmitted to the choristers and they responded to every move he made. Such was the enjoyment of the audience that their response evoked four encores. The concert finished at 10.20pm with a buffet. It can be said that of the first visit to Burton on Trent, "out of disappointment and despair of the journey arose a splendidly supreme concert."

OCTOBER

Thursday October 10th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

It was a baptism of fire concert for John Jenkins as he made his debut at the hometown theatre. This was the 10th annual concert of the Choir. At his request choristers attended the hall earlier for a short rehearsal where he expressed his thanks to all for their efforts and his confidence of the outcome of the performance. A message from John Cynan Jones, wishing them all the best for the evening, was read to the choristers. Before the commencement of the concert the Chairman announced

the presence of Mr and Mrs J. Gemmell. He is the new “leading light” in the James Hardie Plc of Australia. He was welcomed with a standing ovation from the Choir. On the stage Mr Davies then paid a moving tribute to John Haydn Davies and John Cynan Jones for their contribution to the Choir’s formation, training and success. He then introduced John Jenkins with the conviction and confidence that he would uphold and maintain the standards set by the two previous conductors. The concert demonstrated the improving bond between conductor and Choir and of his emergence as a “link man”. The artist was Derek Walker who appeared with the Choir five years earlier and his wonderful voice and pleasing manner again won over the audience. The success of the concert was demonstrated by the enthusiastic response from the audience.

NOVEMBER

Thursday November 21st

At tonight’s rehearsal another forward step in the continuance of the Choir took place when Mr Andrew Badham was introduced as the new Assistant Conductor. He spoke of his pride and pleasure of being appointed and gave a short synopsis of himself and his musical organisations he has been connected with. He then conducted “Gwahoddiad” and at the end of his contribution to the rehearsal the choristers applauded him.

Saturday November 23rd

Rose Theatre, Tewkesbury

For the first concert after the Mid West of America Tour the Choir travelled to Tewkesbury to perform at the Rose Theatre, where incidentally Eric Morecambe had his fatal heart attack. After a short rehearsal the concert started with the excellent soprano Elisabeta Ghitescu who also has a bubbling personality. Her accompanist was our old friend Bryn Davies. With the conductor’s wife as a page turner, the enjoyment of the performance by the capacity audience was evident from their appreciative applause. The soprano certainly enhanced the evening with her involving the Choir and audience in her performance of “The Laughing Song”. The concert was organised by Marcelle and Norman Berry in aid of St Paul Hospital.

Thursday November 28th

Bethania Chapel, Tonypany

It was a “home fixture” tonight with a concert in aid of Llwynypia Hospital. Again with such a fine chapel, a responsive audience and an excellent soprano named Iona Jones, it was an enjoyable evening. The last time the Choir was in this chapel was in December 1967.

DECEMBER

Saturday December 14th

Derby Cathedral

To end a most traumatic year, the Choir paid a return visit to Derby. Leaving home at 1.30pm they arrived at the Cathedral at 6.45am. owing to the late arrival of the buses due to fog, no rehearsal was held. It was soon obvious the cathedral was not only a majestic setting by a marvellous acoustical structure. With Mair Roberts and the De

Ferrers High School Brass Band sharing the stage and John Stiles of Radio Derby, the capacity audience (including the Lord Lieutenant and Lord Mayor) had a wonderful time. The singing of the carols brought a most satisfying concert to end the year's performances. One of the audience, Bethan Ward, had a memorable evening as "Unwaith Eto" was sung to her in celebration of her Ruby Wedding Anniversary. The proceeds were in aid of the Home Farm Trust. The concert finished at 10.15pm and following a buffet both buses left because of the severe weather conditions. A police escort ensured a smooth departure for the Choir out of Derby.