

TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



BRIEF HISTORY 1997

By Norman Martin
Registrar & Honorary Archivist

JANUARY

Thursday January 9th

In celebration of the Choir's 50th Anniversary, Cllr Russell Roberts, the first Mayor of the new Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council, invited the Choir to the Mayor's Parlour in Pentre. He spoke of the value of the Choir in promoting the virtues of Rhondda far and wide and of the reputation and esteem the Choir had won nationally and internationally. In reply the Choir Chairman Meurig Hughes thanked him for the invitation and assured him that the Choir would continue to support events in the new County Borough.

Saturday January 25th

Torch Theatre, Milford Haven

The Choir made its first visit to Milford Haven and arrived at the Torch Theatre for 6.10pm. this was not a large theatre and it had been sold out for months. With this intimate atmosphere and warmth of the welcome and appreciation of the Choir's performance, it was a successful debut. This engagement was unfortunately the last to be conducted by John Jenkins

MARCH

Tuesday March 4th

A feeling of disappointment and regret pervaded the rehearsal room when the Secretary announced the resignation of Mr John Jenkins. Since he became conductor in 1991 his work pattern changed dramatically when he came a schools inspector. This position required him to cover a large area of England and Wales and his workload and travelling increased considerably. This, couple with a period of indifferent health, brought the realisation that he could no longer devote sufficient time to the Choir that was needed to maintain the high standard. John took his first rehearsal on Sunday July 21st 1991 and his last rehearsal on Tuesday February 4th 1997. Over this period he conducted 402 rehearsals. His engagement record started on Thursday September 26th 1991 at St Illtyd's Church, Llantwit Major and ended at Milford Haven in January. During his period he conducted 162 engagements. He took the Choir on three overseas tours. The first, to the Mid West of America in 1991, just a few months after becoming Conductor. Then followed the 1993 Atlanta Tour and the 1994 California & Colorado Tour. Nine television appearances, three recordings and two radio broadcasts were made under his baton. Despite such an extremely busy 5 ½ years he maintained the musical excellence set by the previous conductors. He broadened the repertoire further with such vastly varying musical tastes from the Kullervo Symphony by Sibelius to the Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen. Mr John Jenkins was a gentleman. His wit, charm and approachable manner endeared him to one and all. It was a privilege to have known him and he will be fondly remembered.

Thanks for the memory
Of rehearsals Tuesday and Thursday nights
Arrangements that were right
Engagements in cathedrals, church and hall
Overseas tours pleasant to recall
Radio, recordings and television too

My how the years flew.
How rewarding it was

Friday March 14th

Brangwyn Hall, Swansea

Again in such a difficult time owing to the sudden loss of the Conductor, the request to Andrew Badham to assist the Choir was readily answered. After only one rehearsal, he conducted the Choir in the Brangwyn Hall, Swansea. The proceeds were in aid of Singleton Hospital and the other artists were the splendid Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen Band (BTM) and conductor Steve Sykes. This was the Choir's first appearance with this band. Diane Fuge (soprano) was the artist in the John Davies Memorial Concert in 1993 at the Park & Dare Theatre and she also performed this evening. Her accompanist was another old friend, Sian Davies, the daughter of Bryan, who appeared with the Choir in her younger years. The performance of the Choir was as if Andrew had never left us. It was bright, crisp and full of the expressive interpretations associated with the Treorchy Choir. The evening was undoubtedly a musical success, professionally compered by Penny Roberts of BBC Wales.

Monday March 24th

Today was the funeral of Clifford Chislett (Life Member). Cliff was a member of the pre-war Choir and joined the present one in 1954. He became Librarian in 1968 and remained in that office until 1989. Cliff was made a Long Service Member in 1975 and a Life Member in 1986. Very many choristers and former choristers were present at the Wesleyan Chapel in Treherbert and the Llwydcoed Crematorium. The bearers were Gwyn Morgan, Fred O'Brien, Alun Morris and Alun Davies. In tribute to him "Arglwydd Mae Yn Nosi" was sung. The singing was conducted by John Cynan Jones who graciously offered his services on this occasion. Cliff was a diligent and faithful chorister and will be sadly missed.

Friday March 28th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

Andrew Badham conducted tonight's 32nd Good Friday concert in the Park & Dare Theatre. The band, as always was the British Fuel (Park & Dare) Band under their latest conductor Richard Adams. Before the concert the choristers were issued with the 1996 "Excelsior" from Dean Powell. Each member had an appreciative letter from John Jenkins giving the reason for his resignation as a spinal disorder which will be operated on in May. He thanked those who supported him and gave his sincere best wishes for the future of the Choir.

APRIL

Tuesday April 8th

The Chairman introduced the Guest Conductor, Mr Alun John, to the choristers. He thanked him for offering his services to assist the Choir during this difficult time. Mr John replied stating his pleasure at being able to conduct the Treorchy Male Choir, and was looking forward in great expectation. The response from the choristers was as expected – appreciative applause.

Thursday April 10th

The announcement by the Chairman in rehearsal brought a sense of relief and satisfaction. It was the news that the new Conductor of the Treorchy Male Choir is Andrew Badham. He was Deputy Conductor under John Jenkins for two years and had assisted the Choir in its time of need. This appointment meant that the period of uncertainty was over and the Choir could look forward to a bright and settled future and an exciting, challenging time.

Saturday April 10th

Civic Hall, Aylesbury

After period of 13 years the Choir returned to the Civic Hall. The concert was another rung in the ladder in the history of the Choir. It was conducted by the inspiring and confident Guest Conductor Alun John. The artist was Ros Evans and with a full house and choristers full of eager anticipation, the evening was most successful. The beneficiary of the evening was the RSPCA Blackberry Farm Centre, who must have been highly delighted with the support. After many speeches and presentations, including a commemorative plaque to Mr John, and to Brian Bates who arranged the Choir's contribution, the concert ended at 10pm and a social evening took place in the bar.

MAY

Thursday May 8th

Tonight's rehearsal brought back memories of early days and the unforgettable John Haydn Davies as his grandson Daniel joined the Choir. What a pleasure to re-tune the musical links with the maestro's family.

Wednesday May 21st

Mansion House, London

The Choir started a new chapter tonight as it gave its first engagement under the new Conductor, Andrew Badham. Last night he gave his first rehearsal, now to his first engagement! What a start! What a venue to commence the new partnership. It was in the Lord Mayor of London's residence, Mansion House. The building of the House began with plans in 1728 by James Gibbs who asked for the designs. In 1737 a design by George Dance the Elder was accepted and from the time it was first occupied in 1752 the Mansion House has been one of the grandest Georgian town palaces in London. To enter the building was a challenge with so much security and checks and then it was up and down the magnificent staircases to the ballroom in the Lord Mayor's living accommodation. The beautiful sights left choristers breathtaking. The choristers were called to their places on the balcony overlooking the wonderful main banqueting hall. From this vantage point the Choir performed to entertain the Lord Mayor and 200 invited guests for 30 minutes. The hall was splendidly acoustic and the reception was tremendous. The first bus left at 11pm while the second found a rave pub in the heart of London with typical city prices of £2.50 a pint!

JUNE

Tuesday June 10th

The musical ties with the Davies family were further strengthened tonight when another of John Haydn's grandsons, Rhys, joined the Choir.

Thursday June 19th

Gorffwysfa Chapel, Skewen

The concert was with the same organisation – Coedffranc Junior School Choir and Band but in a different venue than last time. Once again the children provided a very pleasant and enjoyable evening with their music teacher proving to be a very able accompanist and compere. The late bus enjoyed the hospitality of the Crown Hotel.

Saturday June 21st

All Saints Church, Dulverton

The Choir enjoyed another first with its initial visit to Dulverton. The buses arrived at the Brushford Parish Hall at 6.35pm where tea and biscuits were provided and the choristers changed into their dress suits. It was a new experience for Marion and Mair as their changing room was the disabled toilet. The buses took the team to the All Saints church, a fine church with magnificent stained glass windows and ornate wooden interior. The growing confidence in each other – Conductor and Choir – was reflected in a splendid evening's musical enjoyment, which was amply demonstrated by the standing ovation from the audience. A special moment for John Weaver as the Conductor announced his wedding anniversary – one week old! The concert finished at 9.30pm, then back to the parish hall for buffer. A special memory for David Foulkes as the lights dimmed and a well lit birthday cake was brought in to celebrate his 50th birthday. With the first visit to Dulverton the choristers felt they had made a good impression, musically and socially, on the people of the area and had many new admirers.

JULY

Friday 11th, Saturday 12th & Sunday 13th July

Southampton Dock / Enchantment of the Sea

The choristers were stunned with expectations as they travelled to a weekend engagement to perform another fantastic "first" – to take part in the naming ceremony of a luxury cruise liner in Southampton Docks. The start of the great adventure saw the buses arrive thirty minutes late, before heading off. During this period a letter of congratulations from Mr John Jenkins was given to the choristers. By evening the choristers reached the Ibis and Novotel hotels in Southampton Docks, most comfortable hotels. After checking-in, supper was served and on completion choristers enjoyed the delights of the Victory Inn, where in appreciation of a jovial evening choristers were given a "Dempsey" pint glass each.

On Saturday morning, with the satisfaction of a hearty breakfast and with luggage loaded, the buses left the hotels at 8.30am and took choristers to the quayside. Here with expressions of awe and wonderment the choristers first saw the magnificent Royal Caribbean luxury cruise liner, The Enchantment of the Sea. Passing through the tight security the choristers boarded the liner and were in complete admiration and astonishment at the wonders of this breathtaking creation. The captain of this magnificent vessel was Svien Petterson. The ship was 916 ft long, weighed 74,000 tonnes, had 11 decks and an average cruising speed of 22 knots. Its passenger capacity

was 1,950 along with 760 officers, staff and crew. The price of such a vessel was a cool \$3.2billion.

After threading through the labyrinth of corridors to find their cabins and deposit luggage, the choristers assembled in the “Centrum” of the liner for a rehearsal at 9.30pm followed by a rehearsal on the quayside with the Royal Marines Band. Then it was over to the Carousel Lounge for another rehearsal at 11am and lunch was taken in the Windjammer Restaurant at noon. At 2pm the choristers reassembled in the Centrum in their brand new blazer and greys uniform for the first time to perform to the milling passengers on the various decks. A great number stopped and listened to the singing and were generous with their applause.

Returning to the quayside at 2.45pm, choristers were ready for the main event of the weekend, the splendid Naming Ceremony. This started with a fanfare from the Royal Marine’s Trumpeters, followed by the marching and playing of the Royal Marines Band and the Pipes and Drums 1st Battalion Irish Guards – all resplendent in their respective colourful uniforms. This splendid display gave great satisfaction to the 1,200 invited guests. The singing of the American National Anthem was undertaken by the very fine black American singer Hal Frazier. This was followed by the singing of the Sailor’s Hymn, “Eternal Father Strong to Save” by the Choir. This was sung unaccompanied by just a note from the band’s trombone and added to the musical enjoyment as displayed by the ovation from the guests.

The spiritual blessing was made by the Rt Rev Jonathan Gledhill, Bishop of Southampton and Rabbi Thomas Salamon. The naming of the liner was made by Mrs Colleen Fain (Godmother) who released the world’s largest bottle of champagne containing the equivalent of three crates of wine and named her “Enchantment of the Sea”. This met with the firing of cannons, ticket-tape showers, water cannon displays and firework bonanza from the ships in the harbour. A truly memorable ceremony.

Returning to the liner for food in the Windhammer Café and while waiting for the liner to cast-off everyone was thrilled once again by the performance of the combined bands in ceremony of “Beating the Retreat” and were full of admiration and respect of them. As the liner cast-off the played of “Auld Lang Syne” by the combined bands added a delightful finale to the celebrations. While the “Enchantment of the Sea” sailed majestically down the Solent, the choristers changed into their dress suits and assembled in the Carousel Lounge for the evening’s performance. During this performance many choristers suffered a strange feeling, causing some concerns, until it was realised it was simply the movement of the liner. The reception during and at the end of the performance left no doubt that the audience had enjoyed it. This was the last requirement for the Choir and the rest of the voyage was spent enjoying the splendour of the liner and enjoy the free hospitality. What splendour and what hospitality! The staff were courteous, all food and drinks were free, the VIP passengers were friendly and talkative and a festive atmosphere prevailed. Many choristers went to see the Petula Clark Show in the liner’s first class theatre. The cruise around the Isle of Wight continued until the liner docked at Southampton at 5.45am after travelling 101 nautical miles.

On Sunday morning breakfast was served in the My Fair Lady Dining Room and the choristers left the liner to board the buses for home at 9am. One retired to the enjoy of

the Sergeant and Warrant Officer's Mess at RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire. This was one of the most enjoyable weekend engagements. The sight of this incredible liner was one of amazed bewilderment. The size of it awe-inspiring. The décor artistically beautiful. The refurbishment was exquisite. It was indeed a floating palace. Luxury personified. The treatment and attention given to the Choir was faultless. As always the choristers endeared themselves to everyone with their warmth, kindness and sense of fun. The response from these attributes conveyed the feeling that everyone enjoyed the association as much as the choristers. It will be with happy heart and fond memories when the choristers think and reminisce of this unbelievable engagement.

Friend Ahoy – farewell, farewell
Grief unto grief, Joy unto joy
Greeting and help the echoes tell
Faint – but Eternal – Friend Ahoy!”

SEPTEMBER

Thursday September 11th

Salem Chapel, Blaina

A return visit to Blaina – the last time was September 1993. This was the first engagement after the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales in a car accident in Paris. To mark the utmost respect for her, one minute's silence was held before the start of the concert. The Choir sang “The Lord's Prayer” and Mair Roberts sang “Pie Iesu” in memory of her/ for probably the first time the Choir faced Mair so the choristers could at last truly see her! Again at the end of the concert another minute's silence was held in memory of the Mother Teresa. Quite an eventful first engagement for David Coleman (1T).

OCTOBER

Sunday October 5th

St David's Hall, Cardiff

The Treorchy Male Choir's 50th Anniversary Concert was held in St David's Hall, Cardiff organised by Melody Music Company. The Management Director is Mark Burrows – son of Stuart – and Dragon Associates. The surplus from the concert will go towards the payment of a documentary DVD. The new spirit abroad with the choristers manifested itself in this concert. 88 choristers staged – the most since 1991 – full of confidence in the conductor and themselves. This coupled with two world-class artists in Rebecca Evans and Dennis O'Neill and their brilliant accompanist Ingrid Surgenor. Coupled with the near capacity audience, the evening's performance was a magnificently memorable one. This was especially so for the four choristers making their debut in Wyndham Davies (1T), Derek Baldwin (1B), Dewi Jones (1B) and Mike Russ (2B). The effervescent applause evidently displayed the audience's enjoyment and the pride and satisfaction at giving such a memorable performance was evident to the choristers. Andrew Badham, Marion Williams and Heather James are forging a secure bond with the choristers with augurs well for the future. With the presentation of bouquets to the ladies and a pleasing gesture as Rebecca Evans gave a red rose from her bouquet to Dennis O'Neill and Andrew Badham, the concert finished at 10.20pm.

Thursday October 9th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

The 16th annual concert was marked not only by the excellent performance of the Treorchy Comprehensive School Orchestra (Conductor Phillip Heir) and the Choir but also the recognition of the contribution to the Choir by John Jenkins as he was presented with his Honorary Membership Certificate from Chairman Robert Griffiths. He also received a suitable inscribed Choir shield from Secretary Islwyn Morgan and Choir tie from Treasurer John Mallin. Mr Jenkins spoke of the happy time he spent with the choir and wished Andrew Badham all the success in the future.

Thursday 23rd – Sunday 26th October

For the first time the Choir made its way to the north of England with a weekend of concert in Stockport, Halifax and Carlisle. The buses left at 10am and a tour itinerary was issued to choristers. A stop was made for Brian Bates as he had organised the weekend and a compulsory stop took place in Worcester before arriving at Stockport Town Hall at 6.15pm. The venue is popularly known as the wedding cake because of its white Portland stone façade and tiered clock tower. It was built in the early 1900s in the Renaissance style and dedicated for public use by the Prince and Princess of Wales on July 7th 1908. From the start it has played a key part in the life of the borough and remains one of its most famous landmarks. In the magnificent, ornate hall, the concert took place before a capacity audience. The choristers were determined to start the tour with a first-class performance. The soloist was Cecilia Eleri Smiga, who hails from Wrexham, and accompanied the Choir for the weekend. The enthusiastic response from the most appreciative audience left no doubt of the success of evening's performance. The concert concluded at 9.35pm and the choristers were taken to the hotel in Preston, where the nearby fish shop was invaded by hungry choristers.

On Friday morning after an excellent breakfast, it was time for the choristers to go "on the town" and invade the markets, shops and restaurants before leaving for the concert in Halifax. The concert venue was the splendid Victoria Theatre and here the choristers had to be on their toes as the artist was the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band (Conductor David Hirst). This was especially so as the band had won the British Championships in the Royal Albert Hall, London on the previous weekend. The audience were naturally full of pride for their band with the impressive winner's cup on display front of stage. During the concert Robert Griffiths recalled the last time the Choir appeared with the band in the City Hall, Sheffield in 1974. He asked how many Welshmen were in the band and five stood up! He then asked how many bandsmen had been in that concert but none stood! When he asked the choristers, several rose to the applause from the audience. To mark the friendship between the two musical organisations the Chairman presented Mr Rawlings (Band Chairman) with a Choir plaque. The rapturous applause at the termination of the performance demonstrated the audience's enjoyment and the choristers were proud that their efforts had evoked such a response and that "honours were even".

On Saturday the choristers had a free morning before departing for Carlisle at 2pm via the beautiful scenery of the Lake District. Arriving at the Sands Centre at 5pm after a journey of 110 miles, the concert in this new complex was before a lively, vibrant audience which included the Mayor and Mayoress of Carlisle. Also a pleasure to see

old friends Harry Errington and Ken Alderson. The reaction from the audience was the same as the two other engagements – spontaneous and sustained applause and choristers were delighted to learn that the concert was broadcast to the city's hospital services. During the concert several presentations were made by Mr Robert Griffiths (Chairman) including a Choir plaque to Brian Bates (Hon. Member) for his unflinching and financial support of the Choir. Also to Judy and Nigel Chivers who assisted Brian for many years in organising concerts for Choir funds. Brian presented gifts to Andrew Badham, Marion Williams and Cecilia Smiga. The performance was that quality which gave enjoyment to the audience, hospital patients and staff. The buses left for Preston where a happy hour was spent letting the hair down at the hotel bar.

In Sunday, after a hearty breakfast the buses left at 10.3am, one for home and the other to renew friendships at RAF Cosford. It was with cautious optimism that the choristers approached the North of England Tour. This was the first time the Choir visited the area and the "fear of the unknown" is always present. The tremendous response from the audience at all of the concerts quickly dispelled any forboding. It was not only the standard of performance, but also the behaviour, commitment and self discipline that impressed the people. This earned the Choir many new friends and admirers. A most successful tour in every sense of the word.

NOVEMBER

Sunday November 9th

For the third consecutive year choristers too part in the Remembrance Service at the Treherbert and Blaenrhondda War Memorials. Present were contingents of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the Royal Navy, Air Force, Army and many various organisations. The services were conducted by Rev Reaney and ten wreaths were laid. A Choir wreath was laid by Jack Knappgate at Treherbert. Jack had been decorated while in the Royal Navy during World War II. At Blaenrhondda Ieuan Lawrence laid a wreath as he was a Prisoner of War. Two very appropriate choristers.

Saturday November 22nd

Moriah Chapel, Llanelli

After a time lapse of 14 years, the Choir returned to Moriah Chapel in Llanelli. After a short rehearsal and a splendid buffet, the concert commenced at 7.30pm. this engagement brought back happy memories to those choristers who were in the concert with the Hywel Girls Choir in the Odeon Cinema in 1954, as the organisers and participants of the concert were the Hywel Girls Choir and the Hywel Boys Singers, conducted by John Hywel Williams the son of the original conductor J H Williams. The standard of performance of the present choir certainly enhanced the reputation of the two Hywel Choirs. The high quality of tonight's performance by them brought sustained appreciation throughout the evening and a standing ovation at the end. Contributing to this feast of music was Mart Stuart, the tenor, who charmed the audience with his performance and David Geoffrey Thomas, a very fine organist. The gelling together and understanding between Andrew Badham and the Choir is ever improving and the majestic sound produced from near silence to mighty roar, enthralled the listeners. A wonderful concert for Ceri Rees (1T) who made his first appearance on the concert platform.

Friday November 28th

St David's Hall, Cardiff

Tonight the Choir performed another splendid engagement at St David's Hall for the BBC Radio programme "Friday Night Is Music Night". The artists were Susan Bullock (soprano), Arthur Davies (tenor), Karl Raymond (baritone), BBC Concert Orchestra, Conductor Barry Wordsworth and compere Robin Boyle. This musical treat was enjoyed by the large audience. Despite the limited time for rehearsal of the combined items, the evening was a great success. This was largely due to the very conducting of Mr Wordsworth, who indeed was most impressive throughout the evening. The wonderful rapore of the Treorchy Team resulted in another most successful performance. The grand finale of artists combining with a performance of "We'll Keep A Welcome" brought this excellent programme to a resounding close.

DECEMBER

Thursday December 4th

The Conference Centre, Harrogate

It was reminiscence time as choristers returned to Harrogate for the first time in 18 years. They arrived at the Court Hotel, Harrogate at 6.30pm, the one where the choristers stayed on the previous occasion. With time to change into concert dress, an excellent meal followed and the choristers left the hotel for the Conference Centre for 8.30pm. After a short rehearsal the performance took place before the invited dinner guests of the Peugeot Car Company and their response to the singing left no doubt of their enjoyment of the performance. Indeed many of them were on their feet with shots of encore circling the room. The Choir shared the stage with Jimmy Tarbuck, the noted show business personality. After the concert the choristers sampled the delights of the hotel bar for a sing-song. Sunday saw a hearty breakfast and the buses left at 9.30am, with one stopping at RAF Cosford for a refreshing afternoon.

Saturday December 13th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

For the fifth time the Choir performed in a concert for the Rhondda Boys Club Appeals Committee in the Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy featuring a whole array of local musical talent. A fine way to round off a remarkable year.