EXCELSIOR

RECORD

FOR THE YEAR 1998

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Edited by DEAN POWELL, *Publicity Officer*
and Sub-Edited by ISLWYN MORGAN, *Secretary*
with the assistance of
NORMAN MARTIN, *Registrar and Honorary Archivist*

The front cover of this special edition was taken from one of the first issues of the magazine when the choir was called 'Treorchy and District' and not 'Treorchy Male Choir'.

1998
TREORCHY MALE CHOIR

President:
BRIAN BATES, Esq.

Conductor Emeritus:
JOHN CYNAN JONES, M.Mus., A.T.C.L.

MUSIC STAFF

Conductor:
ANDREW BADHAM, L.W.C.M.D.

Accompanist:
RHIANNON WILLIAMS, L.T.C.L.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Chairman:
ROBERT GRIFFITHS

Secretary:
ISLWYN MORGAN

Treasurer:
JOHN MALLIN

Vice-Chairman:
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DEAN POWELL

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NORMAN MARTIN

Librarian:
IVOR LOCK

Assistant Librarian:
KEVIN BRIDGEMAN

Honorary Members—Tom Jones, Ronald Cass, Jon Schoffield, John Tucker, Brian Bates, Evan L. James, Harold Woody, Douglas Firstbrook, John Reid, James Kelso, Brian Anstee, Edward Fraser, John Jenkins.

First Tenor	Second Tenor	First Bass	Second Bass
Howells, Bryn	O'Brien, Fred	Hale, Terry	Davies, Alun
Morgan, Gwyn	Foulkes, David	Howard, Geoffrey	Morris, Alun

ABOVE—Committee members of each section

Bevan, Cyril	Arundel Roger	Bailey, David	Brabham, Paul
Bridgeman, Kevin	Costin, Andrew	Baldwin, Derek	Evans, Gareth
Coleman, David	Goodfield, Cyril	Bowen, Alan	Griffiths, Robert
Davies, Wyndham	Green, Ron	Coulthard, Terry	Hopkins, Robert
Evans, Arwel	**Griffiths, Ben**	Daniels, Ray	Iles, Alun
Feldon, Lyn	Harris, Joe	Downton, David	Jacobs, George
Hopkins, John	Hillman, Don	Edmunds, Phillip	Jones, Bryn
Jackson, Ben	Horgan, Gary	Erasmus, Haydn	Jones, Peter
Jones, Paul	John, Idris	Evans, Eifion	Lawrence, Ieuan
Jones, Tom	Langley, Derek	Evans, Paul	Lewis, Ken
Knapgate, Jack	Llewellyn, Ivor	Gale, Len	Mallin, John
Lethbridge, Dennis	Martin, Norman	Hughes, Meurig	Morris, Peter
Lewis, Alwyn	Moses, Jack	John, Mervyn	Peachy, Mike
Llewellyn, Dilwyn	O'Brien, Andrew	Jones, Dewi	Rosser, David
Lock, Ivor	Owen, Edward	Jones, Gwilym	Russ, Michael
Morgan, Eric	Owen, Geraint	Lewis, Alan	Strabel, John
Morgan, Islwyn	Powell, David	Locke, Roger	Summerhill, Llew
Morse, Roger	Reynolds, Ian	Moore, Derek	Taylor, Clive
Parfitt, Haydn	Rogers, Colin	Morgan, Maldwyn	Tippet, Ray
Parfitt, Melville	Simcox, Ken	Owen, Keith	Trembath, David
Pate, Tom	Walton, Ron	Sands, Michael	Waldin, Ken
Phillips, Wyndham		Sprague, Leigh	Williams, David
Powell, Dean		Stacey, Daryl	
Rees, Ceri		Stephens, Bert	
Spanswick, Clive		Wales, Leighton	
Stephens, Reg		Watkin, William	
Vaughan, Tony		Wilcox, Mel	
Weaver, John		Williams, Brian	
		Williams, David	
		Williams, Ivor	

Life Members:

Ieuan Davies, Edmund Evans, Michael Gale, John Hopkins, Ben Jackson, Islwyn Morgan, **Ben Griffiths**, Norman Martin, Clibum Willis, Haydn Erasmus, Sam Griffiths, Eilir Wright, Reg Davies, Robert Griffiths, Ieuan Lawrence, John Cynan Jones, John Mallin.

FOREWORD

BY MURRAY MCLAGGAN
THE LORD LIEUTENANT OF
GLAMORGAN

One of the nicest things about the Lord Lieutenant's job is that many of the duties which it entails are also delights. There are no more delightful duties than attending Treorchy Male Choir concerts in support of charity, or civic and other occasions which include a contribution by the choir.

I have done enough choral singing myself to be able to recognise supreme artistry when I hear it; and the standards of expressiveness, diction, balance, control and quality of sound regularly achieved by the choir are not, as far as I am concerned, excelled anywhere.

There are many deserving causes and institutions in Mid Glamorgan and outside, which owe a tremendous amount to the choir's unstinting commitment and support. I am immensely grateful for the pleasure you have given me over the years.

Please keep it up – as I am sure you will – and accept my thanks and very best wishes always.

EDITORIAL

"And the night shall be filled with music
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like Arabs
And silently steal away."

(Wordsworth)

IT IS with the greatest of pleasure that I welcome you to the fiftieth anniversary edition of *'Excelsior'*. For half a century this journal has recorded the continued success story of our beloved choir and I wish to dedicate this special issue to those members who had the foresight to launch the very first edition. It is thanks to them, that *'Excelsior'* is now regarded as one of the longest-running publications by any amateur musical organisation in the world.

When I took over the role of publicity officer and editor of this magazine more than six years ago, I remember feeling as if someone had bestowed upon me a priceless fragment of Welsh history. The journal is not only distributed to friends and admirers world-wide, but is also carefully logged in the national libraries and in the royal family's archives at Windsor Castle. When you come to realise this, you understand that *'Excelsior'* is more than a pleasure to compile, it's an honour and I offer you my heartfelt thanks for allowing me that opportunity. Long after we are gone, copies of our magazine will continue to stand as a testimony to the history of the world's greatest male voice combination. Once more, may I take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to this issue.

Fifty years ago the choir continued to enhance its image as a leading choral force while maintaining its enviable reputation for musical excellence. Indeed, little has changed in Treorchy. Refusing to rest on our laurels, we continue to entertain audiences in all manner of venues and 1998 was no exception. From wet and windy mountainsides to awe-inspiring churches and castles, the choir has been fortunate once more to enjoy a variety of settings. Television broadcasts have also played an important role, especially the performance before eight million viewers on the *'Watchdog'* programme and our appearance on the feature film, *'A Light in the Valley'*.

The first concert in Warrington, started the trend for sell-out performances which continued for most of the year. Weekend visits to Skegness, Buxton, Rawtenstall and Widnes were occasions to remember and it's at this juncture I must pay tribute to those choristers who, despite being involved in a serious road traffic accident, still managed to travel to the Yorkshire concert hall for the performance.

Probably one of the most memorable events of the year was the engagement at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich. It was a pleasure to welcome our conductor emeritus, John Cynan Jones, back on stage for the first time since his retirement seven years ago and we greatly appreciate his willingness

to assist the choir whenever possible. It was also an honour to sing before private audiences in Cardiff Castle and the National Museum of Wales, plus the opportunity to entertain audiences in Bath, Lyme Regis, Axminster, Ditchling, Bedworth and the many venues closer to home.

Since the music of Treorchy Male Choir was first recorded in a Rhondda chapel by the Qualiton Record Company more than forty years ago, we have released an impressive number of commercial recordings. It is extremely difficult to judge how many compilation albums have been released featuring our music, but without even considering this number, the choir has still produced 47 individual records, making us undoubtedly the most recorded choir in Wales, and arguably, the world.

During the year we released a further two records to add to our collection. The first was actually made way back in 1957 at the Miners' Eisteddfod in Porthcawl when we exchanged musical greetings with legendary singer Paul Robeson who was in a studio in New York.

This unique event was first released as a 78 rpm record, but this year it was re-released on CD, called *Freedom Train and the Welsh Transatlantic Concert*. Just a few months later another album was released – the live recording of our fiftieth anniversary concert in Brangwyn Hall, Swansea two years ago. Plans are now under way to make another new recording during the spring of 1999.

The annual concert in the Park & Dare Theatre was one of the most emotional evenings I can remember. Not only did we present four choristers with commemorative watches for fifty years unbroken service to the choir, but held a minute's silence in memory of a fellow half-century chorister in Benny Griffiths and our choir president Cliff Taylor. Their contribution to the choir is immeasurable and we salute their memory as we mourn their passing.

Like the rest of the choir, I was delighted to learn that Brian Bates has accepted the invitation to become our new president. I can think of no other individual outside the immediate choir who has contributed so much to its continued success.

Waving a very fond farewell to both Marion and Heather was difficult to say the least. Just a few weeks after Marion returned to Treorchy in February, 1989 I joined the ranks of the First Tenor Section and can well recall her kindness and support to the young 16-year-old who stood in the Treorchy choral arena looking more like a martyred Christian than a Roman gladiator. Similarly, I must also thank Heather for her kindness and reassuring smile during her relatively short period with us. But most of all I wish to thank them both for their massive contribution to the choir following the resignation of John Jenkins. It was undoubtedly a period of major concerns, but these wonderful ladies were our pillars of strength who, along with Alun John, kept us on an even keel until Andrew was appointed as our new conductor. To them, we will be forever grateful.

So what of the future? Well, as always, there is much to look forward to. Plans are under way to visit Australia, Canada and the United States of America during the next two years, as well as performing in some of the UK's most splendid concerts halls and cathedrals. It was a real pleasure to welcome Rhiannon Williams as our new accompanist. Coupled with the superb talent of Andrew Badham, we can rest assured that Treorchy will continue to lead Welsh choralism well into the new millennium.

D.P.

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MY SINCERE thanks to you all for the enthusiastic and friendly way you greeted me on being presented as your new president at the concert in Bath with the Silver Ring Choir. I was present at the first concert you gave with that choir in the splendid Assembly Rooms in 1974. I am not a gambling man, but would never have bet (I wonder what the odds would have been!) that nearly twenty-five years later I would be asked to become president of such a famous and prestigious organisation as Treorchy Male Choir – known and loved all over the world for all that is best in male choral singing.

As your president, I should be looking forward to the future prosperity of the choir, while also explaining why the honour you have bestowed on me takes me back over so many happy years I have spent in your company. How well I remember concerts in just about every part of the country and the dedication and determination choristers have shown so that the concert on the night would be the best ever.

More recently, the enjoyment of my trip with you to California and Colorado and the tremendous weekend on board the '*Enchantment of the Seas*' luxury liner. There are also memories of so many friends who are no longer with us and are sadly missed. I will resist trying to name them all, but I know their memories are cherished by everyone who knew them.

The choir has enjoyed another year of immense achievements, highlighted with your visit to the Royal Naval College in Greenwich. Sadly we were forced to say goodbye to Marion Williams, our splendid and devoted accompanist for so many years, and Heather James, her equally talented associate.

With Marion's help we were able to engage the services of our charming and gifted young accompanist Rhiannon Williams. I am sure that along with Andrew, they will become a tour de force in leading this most famous choir of ours to fresh glories.

When one is involved with Treorchy Male Choir for so long, one realises the truly great sacrifices that wives and sweethearts have to make. A warm thank you to them for all the support they continue to give to the gentlemen of the choir.

By the time the next edition of '*Excelsior*' is published we will be in a new millennium. So as this one closes, may I wish all our friends, wherever they may be in the world, good health, good fortune and good singing for the future.

CONDUCTOR'S NOTES

IT HARDLY seems a year since I wrote my article for the last edition of '*Excelsior*', how quickly time passes, and what a year it has been! A year of change, and yet by contrast, a year of consolidation.

What of the year of change? We have sadly said farewell to our accompanist of the last ten years, Marion Williams, and also to our associate accompanist, Heather James. Both are first rate pianists in their own right, and were totally supportive at all times to the choir and soloists alike.

One of the joys of live music making is that it is a living, breathing entity, where performers are able to respond and interact with different types of audiences, varying locations, and the general mood of the occasion. Marion and Heather were supreme exponents of this art, and were easily able to switch from accompanying a choir to accompanying a soloist, a discipline which requires much expertise, sympathy and mutual understanding. This was often achieved on pianos which varied from the sublime to quite frankly, the ridiculous. Their contribution to the continued success and standard of the choir was immense, and I would like to take this opportunity of personally and publicly thanking them for all their support and commitment during our short time together.

But time goes on, and circumstances change. We were all extremely pleased when Rhiannon Williams accepted the invitation to become the new accompanist toward the end of last year. She is certainly proving her worth and we are now all beginning to reap the benefits of working and rehearsing together. Her first full concert with the choir, a relatively short time after her appointment, was last September, in Buxton Opera House. From the outset the standard and control of her playing was certainly an indication of what

we could expect from her. That expectation is now bearing fruit and I know that we all wish Rhiannon many happy years of music making with the choir.

A year of consolidation. When I took over as your conductor I felt that the choir needed a period of relative stability during which time we could consolidate some of the standard repertoire in readiness to build for the future. As I have found out, this is a difficult task given the regular concert commitments of the choir, and the influx of new members over the last year all needing to learn the standard repertoire. Consequently introducing new music has been rather slower than I had anticipated, but I am generally very pleased with the progress that has been made during 1998. This is in no short measure due to the commitment of each individual member and I would urge everyone to redouble their efforts to attend as many rehearsals and concerts as possible. It goes without saying that both are equally important.

It is very difficult to pick one highlight out of the many and varied engagements of 1998. The concert in October in the Park and Dare was, for me, one of the highlights. It was a joy to see well in excess of ninety choristers on stage and also to welcome Ros Evans to sing with the choir on home ground. The warmth of the ovation which we received that evening bears tribute to the standard of music making from the choir, the accompanist and the soloist. It was of course entirely fitting that the official presentation to Marion Williams took place in Park and Dare, home territory for her, and that it was carried out so eloquently by our Conductor Emeritus, John Cynan Jones.

Rhiannon Williams, accompanist and Andrew Badham, conductor of the Treorchy Male Choir.

I know that the concert at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich was another very successful evening. I was unfortunately unable to be there, owing to a previous commitment, and I would like to thank our Conductor Emeritus for agreeing to rehearse and conduct the choir at this engagement.

Looking to the future, the whole choir and I, were very pleased when Brian Bates accepted the invitation to become our new President. No one works harder for this choir than Brian and I look forward to further developing our working relationship in the years ahead.

Finally, let me thank each and every one of the you for your support during 1998. I look forward to my first recording with the choir during 1999 and to the many performances which have already been accepted on our behalf. I am very honoured and proud to be your Musical Director and feel certain that with your continued support and commitment we can take this choir into the new millennium in a way which befits its proud history and reputation.

FEELING AT HOME IN TREORCHY

by Rhiannon Williams, Accompanist

WHEN I received a phone call from Islwyn Morgan in April, 1998 informing me that I was to become the new accompanist of the Treorchy Male Choir, I cannot begin to express how proud and honoured I felt at this great opportunity. An opportunity that has continued to bring me so much happiness and a new sense of direction in my life.

Before coming to Treorchy I had already experienced the art of piano accompaniment in a variety of different ways: competition festivals, choirs, various examinations, my own children's choir and as musical director of the Anwen Little Theatre. However, I can truly say that playing for Treorchy has given me the greatest pleasure of all, and I thoroughly enjoy coming to rehearsals as much as the concerts themselves.

I have also been taken aback by the friendliness of the men in choir and want to say a big thank you to all those who have made me feel welcome and helped me settle in so well to the Treorchy family. After all, being only the fourth accompanist in just over fifty years and following in the footsteps of such wonderful musicians is not an easy task.

I am always touched when listening to the wonderful sound of the choir under the excellent leadership of Andrew and to see the dedication and commitment on the men's faces. It has to be seen to be appreciated. I also feel equally as proud of my dad who, having suffered with viscerative colitis for 25 years – which I have also inherited – is now a member of the baritone section and very much looking forward to singing in the choir in 1999.

Before I finish with a verse which is a particular favourite of mine, I would like to add that I am really looking forward to sharing in the future of the choir and hope to remain accompanist for many years to come. My best wishes to you all.

"To be born Welsh is to be born privileged.
Not with a silver spoon in your mouth,
But with music in your heart
And poetry in your soul."

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS
"Farewells, Greetings and Expectations"

NINETEEN-NINETY-EIGHT was a year of mixed emotions of sadness and joy, satisfaction and expectancy. Firstly, sadness because of the passing of our president Cliff Taylor and chorister Benny Griffiths. Cliff was a true gentleman and helped the choir enormously in the 1950's and 60's. As the director of Polikoff Factory he was instrumental in helping us obtain our first uniform and frequently granted the BBC use of the canteen for our broadcasts and concerts. He regularly attended rehearsals and concerts and his words of encouragement helped spur us on to great achievements. It was a unique moment for me to present him with Life Membership in 1985, an honour he so richly deserved and one he was proud to receive. We did not see a lot of Cliff after he moved to Bridgwater but I know he thought a lot of us and it was fitting that a contingency of the choir, together with the conductor emeritus John Cynan Jones and his wife Mary, attended the funeral. It was a moving occasion and his family appreciated our presence.

The loss of Benny was also a great shock to us all. Although he had stopped travelling to concerts he was regularly at rehearsals. We had a lot in common – apart from our surnames. Both born and bred in Pentre, played football for Pentre Athletic, Pentre Boys' Club and joined the choir as young men. He was one of those diminishing members in our ranks who worked all his life as a miner, only finishing when Ty Mawr Colliery closed. His astonishing escape from being trapped underneath the cage at pit bottom was incredible. Benny was a stalwart of the Second Tenor section, as well as being a first-class chorister he was a committeeman from 1968 to 1991. A popular bus steward, his cheery smile welcomed hundreds of visitors to our practice room. Made a Life Member in 1980, it was sad that he did not receive his 50-year service watch at the annual concert – an item that was later presented to his wife, Marion.

There was sadness also at the leaving of Marion Williams and Heather James. Heather joined three years ago as associate accompanist and quickly earned our respect, not only for her talent at the piano, but her charm and warm personality. We hope she will recall many happy occasions when she looks at the crystal bowl presented to her by the choir. Marion indicated last year that she intended to end her ten-year association with the choir, but when the time came it was still a very sad occasion. Her contribution to the choir has been immense. She first played for us while preparing for the National Eisteddfod at Bala in 1967. Marion, who was at home in Treorchy while on vacation from university, temporarily replaced Tom Jones who was taken ill. In giving us the winning marks at the competition, the adjudicators praised her playing and this fact was incorporated in the inscription on the Welsh crystal rose bowl presented to her at our annual concert. Her contribution to the success of the choir will always be remembered.

Our new accompanist, Rhiannon Williams, has indeed settled in very well. The rapport with our conductor is good and I am sure we can look forward to a long and successful partnership. Brian Bates was appointed Cliff Taylor's successor as president of the choir. His support over many years has been greatly appreciated and I am sure he will fill the post with dignity and distinction. It was with great pleasure I presented the 50-year service watches at our annual concerts to four great servants of the choir – Ben Jackson, Ieuan Lawrence, Norman Martin and Islwyn Morgan. Their contribution to the organisation is a fine example to us all.

It is a great pleasure to write in this fiftieth anniversary edition of the *'Excelsior'*. In the first edition, the aim of the choir was stated as being: *"to achieve a degree of efficiency which will enable it to renew and maintain the glorious traditions of the old Treorchy Male Voice Party"*. I think will can all take credit in saying we have done just that and a great deal more. Looking to the future, we must all resolve to give our full support to our young musical staff by being regular at both rehearsals and concerts and, given this support, can look forward to the coming year with confidence, expectancy and excitement.

THE CONDUCTOR EMERITUS WRITES...

LET me begin by thanking the officials of the choir for inviting me to conduct the choir for one last concert in the wonderful surroundings of the Royal Naval College Chapel at Greenwich last May. This was a really memorable experience for Mary and I, enabling me to team up with Marion once again before her retirement as accompanist to the choir, and to appear professionally with Eldrydd for perhaps the last time. However, even such a wonderful evening was tinged with sadness, for, inevitably, as I faced the choir, I noticed there were faces missing from the ranks ....*"Those angel faces...which we have loved long since and lost a-while"*, as Cardinal Newman puts it so graphically in his great hymn *'Lead, kindly Light'*.

I wish to construct my article around five rather significant dates in the history of the choir. The first refers to the second Saturday in August, 1952, the venue, the National Eisteddfod of Wales at Aberystwyth – a great day for us all. I won the organ-playing competition in the morning, Mary and I had our one and only ever row at lunch-time (we made it up in the evening!), and Treorchy Male Choir gained its first ever victory in the Chief Male Voice Competition. On that very damp afternoon, John Davies conjured a truly magical performance from the choir, but he was the first to acknowledge that the piano accompaniment to Schubert's setting of the *'Twenty-third Psalm'* had been a decisive factor in the victory. The pianist that day was, of course, our beloved Tom Jones, with whom I was to serve both as associate conductor and conductor.

The second date is November 1st, 1985, the venue the magnificent Roy Thompson Hall in Toronto, the occasion being the final concert of the second Canadian tour. On that evening Jennifer Jones was our accompanist, giving a performance that surpassed anything that we had ever heard from her previously. After the concert the General Manager of the hall escorted us to the Green Room, where we autographed the vellum Celebrity Book, Jennifer writing her name immediately below that of the great Welsh diva, Gwyneth Jones.

The third date is Saturday, August 12th, 1967, the venue once again the National Eisteddfod, this time at Bala, in North Wales. Tom Jones no longer felt well enough to accompany the choir, but he recommended a young local music student, a pupil of Mary Rees, in his stead. Her performance that day guaranteed her name a place on the roll of honour of the choir, for, just as with Tom in Aberystwyth, so the adjudicators singled out the accompanist to the Treorchy Male Choir for special praise – her name was, of course, Marion Williams. Two of the three test pieces were unaccompanied, but the third, *"Moliant fo i Dduw anfeidrol"*, from Bach's *"Christmas Oratorio"*, began with a fiendishly difficult piano solo (a reduction of the full orchestral score), a 24-bar introduction leading to the choir's first entry. It had to be played absolutely perfectly, in time, at speed, and with a crescendo which would either launch the singers successfully or condemn them to a ragged entry from which they would find it extremely difficult to recover. Everything had been planned with that almost military precision that has long been our hallmark at Treorchy, but that introduction HAD to be played, in a 'pressure-cooker' atmosphere on that stage, before that capacity audience in the pavilion and also to the tens of thousands of radio listeners. I am particularly pleased that clear reference to this has been included in the inscription on the rose-bowl which was presented to Marion at the Annual Concert, for Marion was there to help me at the outset of my career as well as being our accompanist at the very end of it, in Greenwich.

Marion has served as choir accompanist for many years with distinction, following the example of Tom and Jennifer. Many are the miles which she has travelled to concerts, many are the occasions when she has had to make do with substandard pianos, late arrivals and a lack of adequate changing facilities, sometimes even having to contend with the odd cantankerous conductor! But also, let us not forget the many, many lonely miles which she has travelled by car to and from choir rehearsals in Treorchy from her home in Barry, in daylight and darkness, in all weathers, in all road conditions. ALSO let us not forget the thanks which we owe to MICHAEL Mallam, Marion's husband, without whose support none of this would have been possible. We must now turn from the past to address the future: as we bid farewell to Marion, we welcome Rhiannon as her successor. It is a remarkable coincidence that Rhiannon is a former pupil of Marion's; in addition to looking lovely and playing the piano beautifully, she is also a fluent Welsh speaker. CROESO, Rhiannon!

Finally, two more important dates. In my speech at the Annual Dinner of the choir in 1982, I delivered the charge that we should ensure that young men came forward to take the choir into the 1990's; history reveals that that was accomplished very successfully. Then, on Thursday, October 13th, 1988, during that year's Annual Concert, I delivered a further charge that there MUST be a choir in Treorchy in the year 2000, and that it must be a great one... although, rather prophetically, I added that it was unlikely that I would still be its conductor! To the members of the choir, as your Conductor Emeritus, I now say: it is your bounden duty to support the new partnership of Andrew and Rhiannon, just as you supported me, with Tom, with Jennifer and with Marion for so many years, in order to ensure that the reputation of Treorchy Male Choir will be maintained and enhanced. Make no mistake, there are new fields to conquer, new challenges to be met, new audiences to beguile, new countries to visit, new music to be learned and performed, new standards to be set, new friends to be made. God bless you all! I am more than ever proud to be able to sign myself...

John Cynan Jones,
Conductor Emeritus,
Treorchy Male Choir

AN AMERICAN TRIBUTE

Recollections of my visit to Treorchy
by John Flinn,
Travel Editor, San Francisco Examiner

ONE drizzly night we drove up the most famous coal valley of them all, the Rhondda, to the town of Treorchy. In a little stone schoolhouse, stout, barrel-chested men were filing in and taking their places in concentric half circles.

Mostly unemployed coal miners, these men are members of the world-renowned Treorchy Men's Choir.

Begun in 1883 as a way to keep miners out of trouble, the choir has performed for royalty, toured the US and recorded with Ella Fitzgerald and local-boy-made-good Tom Jones. It has produced fifty records and CDs, making it possibly the most-recorded male choir in the world. Virtually all proceeds from performances go to charity.

As the men took their places for their rehearsal, I couldn't help believing that the choir has filled a huge void in their lives, sustaining a sense of purpose and community since the closing of the mines.

In blue jeans and sweat shirts, hands clasped behind their backs, the

men peered through bifocals at their sheet music. They sang in English and Welsh, but it was the latter that captivated me.

Spoken Welsh does not fall sweetly on my ear, but as the men's voices blended and echoed off the wooden floor and metal pipes of the schoolhouse, the sound was hauntingly beautiful - *"Mi glywaf dyner lais yn galw arnaf fi, i ddod a golchi 'meiau i gyd yn afon Calfari..."*

"Ah Welsh," said one chorister during a break, *"We call it the language of heaven"*.

The Choir enjoying a reception with the Mayor and Mayoress of Warrington prior to the concert at the Parr Hall.

THE PUREST SOUND
A REVIEW OF THE CONCERT AT DUDLEY TOWN HALL

by Sally Munro

THE board said it all – 'Sorry – sold out'.

As the first sound of the valleys swept over a spellbound audience and drenched everyone in the purest of male harmony we knew the evening was going to be memorable.

It is 22 years since the famous Treorchy Male Choir made its Dudley debut and it has returned again and again.

To listen to over 80 male voices sing *'The Soldier's Chorus'* from *'Faust'*, (sung by the original choir in 1895 before Queen Victoria) is a hair-raising experience only equalled by the inspiring *'Men of Harlech'* which still recalls for me the stand by the South Wales Borderers portrayed in the film *'Zulu'* when more Victoria Crosses were gained by the Welsh few against the might of the many.

The harmonious programme balanced Gilbert and Sullivan, excerpts from Verdi and arrangements including *'Cavatina'* and *'Memory'* from *'Cats'*.

'Tydi a Roddaist' with its deep amen section, and the haunting appeal of *'Myfanwy'*, the loveliest of love songs, brought lumps to the throats of all the Welsh speakers.

Last year Andrew Badham was appointed conductor. This performance proved that Andrew, like his predecessors, continues to uphold the choir's standards and he wields the baton with pride.

Accompanist Marion Williams, a native of Treorchy, deserved the applause for her fluid playing. Soloist Ros Evans dipped into her extensive oratorio repertoire and tempted with pieces from Mozart and Ivor Novello.

Her lovely voice and shapely figure was a perfect foil against the backdrop of tiered evening clad figures sitting with disciplined stillness, hands resting on knees, as though hewn from rock.

When the final echo of *'Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau'* died away even the audience was silent before raising the rafters.

It seems a welcome will always be found in Dudley for the boys from the valleys.

IT'S BEEN AN HONOUR

by Marion Williams, Accompanist

HAVING been born and bred in Treorchy, I have been associated with the choir, either through friends or relatives, from a very young age. I can remember the overwhelming pride and joy I felt when, with a group of friends in my first term at university, I attended the Royal Concert at London's Royal Albert Hall on St. Cecilia's Day to hear you sing in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. I never imagined that one day I would join you on the concert platform as your accompanist. It was, therefore, with great pleasure that I accepted the invitations, first of all, to accompany you at the National Eisteddfod in Bala in 1967, then to be your deputy accompanist in 1970 and eventually to be accompanist in 1989.

The last nine-and-a-half years have proved to be some of the busiest and most enjoyable years of my life. I should like to thank all the people I have worked with – conductors John Cynan Jones, John Jenkins and Andrew

Badham, for their hard work and dedication, associate accompanist Heather James for her valuable help and contribution, and last but not least, you as choristers for your loyalty and enthusiasm. I have benefited enormously, not only from the musical experience of accompanying a world famous choir and eminent soloists, but from the opportunities you gave me to travel to places I had hitherto never been – both in this country and in America.

To have performed in such places as the town halls of the Midlands, our own St. David's and Brangwyn Halls, the Mansion House, London and the magnificent setting of the chapel of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, to say nothing of the wonderful people I have met in connection with these concerts, have been privileges I shall always treasure. One event of a different nature which stands out in my mind, is the naming ceremony of the *'Enchantment of the Seas'* at Southampton in July, 1997. The opulence and splendour of the lifestyle aboard this beautiful ship overshadowed the disappointment of my having to play an electronic keyboard (not exactly my favourite instrument!) and the trip around the Solent gave us all an insight into luxury cruising, making it a truly memorable occasion.

Looking back over the years I spent as your accompanist, I saw many changes in a relatively short period of time. The choir had previously had the stability of only two conductors in forty-five years, but I was the first accompanist to have worked with three conductors in nine-and-a-half years! The unfortunate illnesses of John Cynan Jones and John Jenkins, forced them both to resign within a few years of each other, but your determination and commitment as choristers, together with the help of Alun John as guest conductor, saw us all through these sad and difficult times.

I also saw the passing of several very faithful choir members and of course our dedicated president, Cliff Taylor. Cliff was one of the kindest and most sincere gentlemen I have ever met and I always thought what a hard act he would be to follow. I was therefore delighted when I recently heard that Brian Bates had been appointed as his successor. Like Cliff, he too has been an ardent follower for many years and I am sure that he will give you his undivided loyalty. I should like to give him my very best wishes in his new role.

I was very pleased – and indeed, proud – to be able to hand over to such an able and enthusiastic former pupil of mine as Rhiannon Williams as the choir's new accompanist. I sincerely hope that she will gain as much pleasure from her work as I did and achieve as much musically as when she was studying with me.

I wish you all continued success in the coming years. Long may you give your audiences as much pleasure as I have had from being your accompanist.

PRESS REPORTS

"Wales' most famous male voice choir promise a heavenly evening of music"

Buxton Chronicle

UPLIFTING BEAUTY
A REVIEW OF THE CONCERT AT THE EMBASSY THEATRE, SKEGNESS

by Peter Emmens

THE Treorchy Male Choir came back to the Embassy Theatre, for their third Skegness concert and somehow managed to outdo even the excellence of their previous visit. We enjoyed an evening of music at its purest and best – men standing stock-still on stage without amplification and with nothing to distract from the beauty of their singing. The result was lovely and on several occasions quite magical.

Much of the credit for that must go to Andrew Badham, the choir's new conductor, who was here in Skegness for the first time (if you don't count a holiday when he was a boy!).

Surprisingly young to be occupying such a prestigious position, Andrew has, in less than a year in charge, succeeded in tightening the choir's already remarkable musical discipline. They were as one voice in the unison passages, and blended beautifully when they sang in harmony.

Beginnings and endings were immaculate and I was particularly impressed by the way that, in difficult phrases of several words, each word was made discreet and distinct, but without any sense of loss of legato line, an impressive achievement with so many men singing together.

The choir had begun with opera, including the *'Nabucco'* favourite, *'Speed Your Journey'*, and a truly beautiful performance of *'The Peers' Chorus'* from *'Iolanthe'* The first half ended with three Welsh hymns and the second half included a lovely setting of *'The Lord's Prayer'*, and there was such an intensity of feeling in the way the men sang these religious songs that I almost feel they were my favourite items of the evening.

But there was also an a capella version of *'Kwm Bah Yah'* and a Mike Sammes arrangement of the haunting *'Cavatina'*, with an exquisite pianissimo ending. Plus *'Send in the Clowns'*, of course, and that lovely Welsh love song *'Myfanwy'*, without which it ought to be illegal for any Treorchy programme to be considered complete and which Andrew Badham introduced as an encore, but half an hour before the end of their programme, because, he said, there was no way to follow 'My *Way*', their final song.

Yet follow it they did with the Welsh National Anthem, whereupon the whole audience rose as one, in what was in effect a standing ovation.

After the concert, the only complaint I heard was that it hadn't been long enough. I doubt if it ever could be to satisfy me anyway, and I am left with the memory of an evening of song to delight in and savour; two hours of uplifting beauty.

A FRIENDSHIP UNLIKE ANY OTHER

by Judy and Nigel Chivers

ALTHOUGH we have been following the choir for nearly sixteen years, we knew of them long before that. I first heard the name of Treorchy Male Choir when I went to work with Brian Bates in 1980. Marian was very ill and spending more time in a London hospital when I went to help her with the book-keeping work of Brian's decorating business. He always seemed to be setting off to a concert somewhere around the country and I often thought he was mad for travelling hundreds of miles every weekend to hear a lot of men sing. How boring!

He kept telling Nigel and I that we didn't know what we were missing and it took us some considerable time before we relented. So we all set off one Saturday afternoon in June for our first experience of your singing at a concert in Cleevedon Parish Church.

One question remained: Why hadn't we said 'yes' before? I suppose many of us have preconceived ideas about Welsh choirs and unfortunately Nigel and I both had these. But how very wrong you proved them that night. We were overcome with the wonderful singing, a sound we have heard many times since and never tire of.

From that first concert we have forged a strong bond of friendship with you. The support you gave Nigel and I during his illness six years ago will never be forgotten. We have been delighted to help in any way possible with the concerts Brian has arranged and I thank you for the plaque you presented to us at Carlisle. This certainly takes pride of place on the wall at home with Nigel's Royal Marines plaque and picture.

May we all share in the beauty of your singing and your friendship for many more years to come. Bless you all.

WALES' PREMIER CHOIR
A REVIEW OF THE GOOD FRIDAY CONCERT AT THE PARK & DARE THEATRE, TREORCHY

by Eben Smith

THE setting couldn't have been more perfect to unite Treorchy's two great institutions – the world-famous choir and prize-winning Parc and Dare Band, in an unforgettable Good Friday concert.

Don't get me wrong, the band was great but the main attraction was the mighty male choir. They certainly didn't disappoint, because from start to finish their professionalism was total and shone through to create a superb result. It's no wonder they're in demand throughout the country, and indeed the world, making them fully deserving of the title of Wales' premier male voice choir.

The 95 evening-clad gentlemen combined to produce a heavenly sound with *'Myfanwy'* and *'Send in the Clowns'*. While powerful renditions of *'Comrades in Arms'* and *'My Way'* shook the theatre to its very foundations.

But what moved me the most was the soul-stirring rendition of the Welsh folk song *'Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl'* by young tenor Dean Powell. It was fabulous.

A truly great night out – I can't wait to hear them again.

THE CHORAL SINGER

Baritone committeeman Geoffrey Howard came across the following humorous list of musical terms – the contents of which seem quite apt when thinking of our choir.

Mixed Choir

A group of singers who can defeat any soloistic tendencies to the greater good of the whole.

Opera Chorus

A group of singers who can't.

Male Choir

A choir, usually with dedicated singers, high standards and a competent director.

Chorister

*1) **the Professional*** – The Professional sings in one or more of those slick well-known choirs that can do fast notes *really* fast. The skills they require are a high level of innate musicianship, phenomenal sight reading, a first-rate sense of rhythm and pitch, and the ability to work well with the singer next to them. These skills are not essential for soloists.

*2) **the Amateur*** – The very best amateur singers sing in male choirs, which can give many professional choirs a good run for their money. Many of these singers could have been professional, but had more sense and became miners, firemen, teachers, journalists and unemployed.

Choral Societies

Great, lumbering masses, most of which were founded many years ago and still sing the *'Messiah'* in exactly the same way as they did then. This is helped enormously if there are (and there usually are) the original members of the choir still singing who can vaguely remember how it goes – a true authentic performance.

Director

Someone who conducts the choir. Why they are not called 'a conductor' is anyone's guess.

Recruitment Drive

An appeal for new choir members. Don't mention an audition if you want anyone to turn up. But mention an overseas tour and they'll come out of the woodwork.

Librarian

Has the thankless task of getting the music in time for the first rehearsal, and the impossible task of getting it back again for photocopying.

Registrar

Keeps a register of who's turned up for rehearsals and concerts and gives any absentees a friendly telephone call to see if they're unwell. The best registrars manage more than half the rehearsals themselves.

Vocal Score

Has the choral parts only, or the choral parts with the orchestral part arranged for piano. When you actually hear the piece with the orchestra for the first time, some passages which you relied on for your cues bear no resemblance to the notes in front of you. Remember *'Finlandia'* boys?

Contemporary Music

Usually extraordinarily difficult, dissonant music that most choirs won't touch for love nor money.

BBC Singers

Highly skilled professional choir which will sing contemporary music for money.

A FIRST CLASS CHOIR
A REVIEW OF THE CONCERT AT
ALL HALLOW'S COLLEGE, LYME REGIS

by Keith Jenkin

THE Axe Valleys enjoyed one of the finest musical evenings for many years when the Lyme Regis Town Band supported the internationally renowned Treorchy Male Choir in a grand concert.

To describe the choir's performance adequately would result in an ensuing dearth of superlatives – suffice to say that in the course of the evening they demonstrated very positively the reasons why they are at the top of the tree in male choir terms.

In four, for me, all too brief, sessions they showed all that is best in male singing: controlled power, excellent muted sequences and a very fine tone running through the whole rendition.

They opened with the *'Soldier's Chorus'* from *'Faust'*, followed by *'Speed Your Journey'* from Verdi's *'Nabucco'* and on a rather lighter note *'March of the Peers'* from *'Iolanthe'* by Gilbert and Sullivan. These pieces were beautifully sung and, as they were well known to most of the audience, set the evening very positively on its way.

There followed, after the band had taken centre stage for a period, a quartet of pieces in the Welsh language, very naturally tailored to, and demonstrating the strengths of that country's male singing.

'Sanctus' came first, followed by *'O Iesu Mawr'* (an unaccompanied piece in deep harmony which I found a joy). Next came *'Unwaith Eto'*, memorable for the quality of tenor soloist Dean Powell and finally *'Tydi a Roddaist'*.

Treorchy opened the second half with *'Fantasia On Famous Welsh Airs'* followed by the negro spiritual *'Were You There'* and *'The Lord's Prayer'*. Then, after a further interlude of band music, they brought the musical entertainment to a close with four more modern pieces, all arranged by Mike Sammes. *'Cavatina'* from *'The Deer Hunter'* was followed by *'Memory'* from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *'Cats'*. Third came *'Send in the Clowns'* and finally a version of *'My Way'*, made famous by Frank Sinatra.

All in all, this was a most memorable musical evening for all of the people who gathered to enjoy it. It had quality in abundance, great variety and, for me, and for others, the singing of *'Land of My Fathers'* which brought an end to the proceedings far too soon.

EXCELSIOR
1948-1998

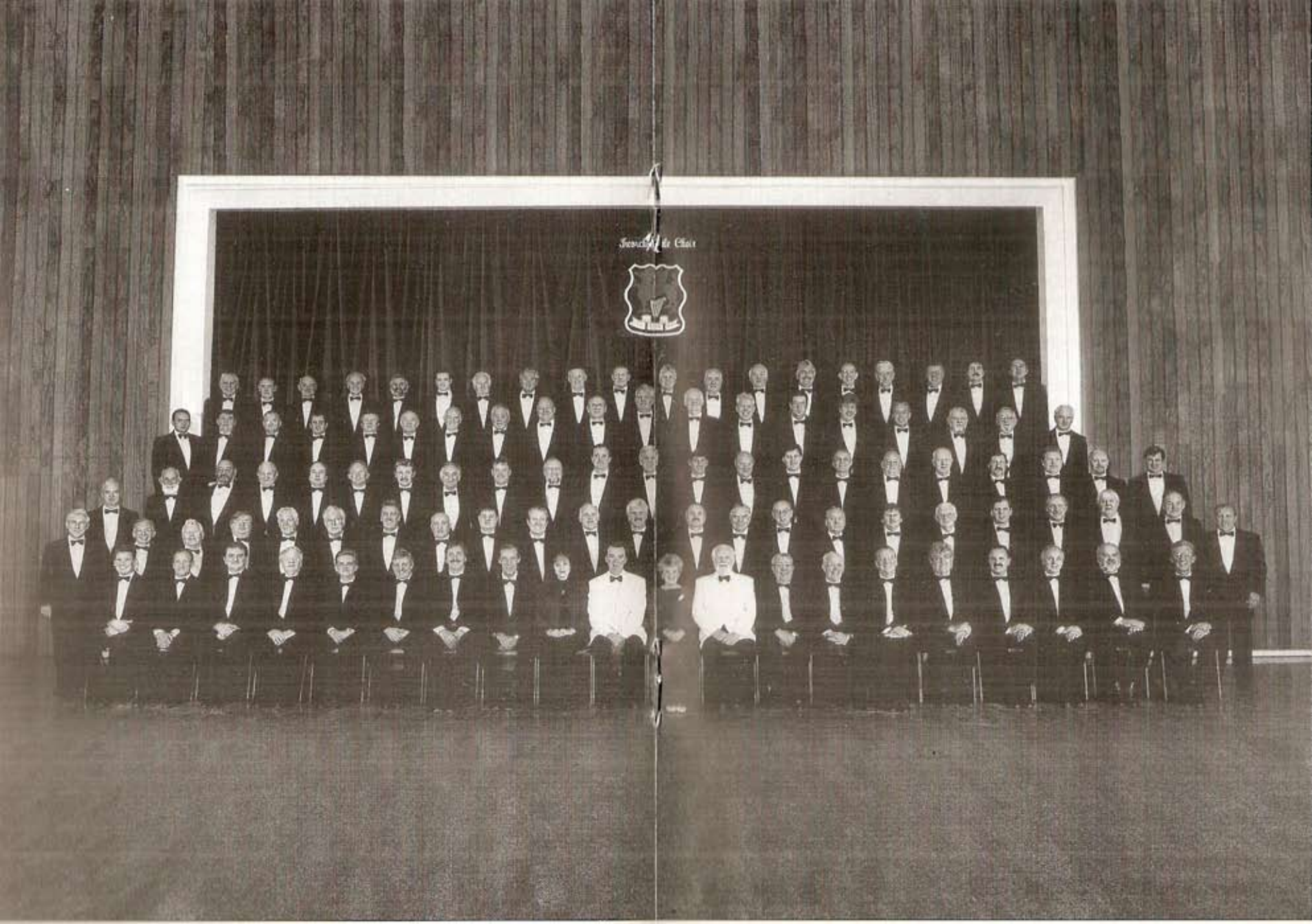
A Celebration of Fifty Years as the Voice of the Treorchy Male Choir

"We have selected the title 'Excelsior' for our journal, because we feel the essence of an ideal is something which is almost impossible to attain."

W. J. 'Donna' Griffiths

PRIME Ministers and presidents, archbishops and authors, singers, film stars and royalty have enjoyed reading *'Excelsior'*. For the past fifty years it has stood as a testimony to our continued success as the most famous male choir in the world. *'Excelsior'* is a declaration of our achievements, highlighting concert engagements, overseas tours, eisteddfod wins, recordings and a reminder of the many distinguished individuals we meet through our music making.

Yet, *'Excelsior'* is much more than that: for friends and admirers abroad, it has become their only link with the choir's many activities. For every chorister it is regarded as a personal record of magical memories associated with a marvellous Welsh institution. But uppermost it is a journal of how Treorchy continues to remain at the forefront of choral music through the continued dedication and commitment of every one involved.


French of the Class

'*Excelsior*' made its first appearance in April, 1948, after a request was made to the management committee by chorister William Wilshire, to publish a monthly journal. The suggestion was adopted and Keri Evans, R. Williams, 'Donna' Griffiths and Ernest Lewis joined him in forming a sub-committee. Fifty years later and '*Excelsior*' has certainly come a long way.

During that time a total of eight choristers have been honoured in becoming its editor, assisted by an army of sub-editors from the choir ranks. Life may have changed dramatically in the last half-century, but the original format of '*Excelsior*' has altered very little. Naturally, additional ideas have been developed, but the Conductor's Notes, Chairman's Address, Editorial, and a selection of press reports still remain essential ingredients.

For the first two years, '*Excelsior*' appeared as a quarterly magazine before developing into an annual publication. Copies, which now number more than 25,000, have been distributed to almost every country on the globe, making it one of the longest-running publications by an amateur musical organisation in the world.

In celebration of this magnificent achievement I have endeavoured to compile a few of the highlights of our famous journal.

Published by Pentre Printing in Llewellyn Street, the first ten pamphlets were sold for three pence, and later six pence each. They included crosswords, a musical quiz and even columns of local information regarding sport, marriages, illnesses and other topical news. John Haydn Davies made his views on the new journal known from the very start: *"Let fame be its spur and let it scorn delights and live laborious days in its muse-inspired mission to convince others of Treorchy's goodwill, and the surety of its aspirations."*

A full editorial team was set up with 'Donna' Griffiths at the helm, who later went on to serialise the history of the original Treorky Male Choir. It was an easy enough task for him as his wife was the grand-daughter of the original conductor, William Thomas. Fred Pullin, the deputy press officer of the National Coal Board contributed a number of articles in the early days, following the choir's performance at the NCB Boxing Finals in Wembley before HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

As each edition unfolded John Haydn's intense devotion to the choir became all the more apparent. With each eisteddfod he addressed the choristers like a general preparing for battle, but even in defeat he would set a tone of dignity by congratulating a rival choir on their success. In one of the last quarterly editions in 1950, concern was shown over the depletion in male choirs and the conductor was sure that radio sets were the cause; although he had little to worry about because the greater majority of choristers in Treorchy's ranks were below 30 years of age.

In 1953 '*Excelsior*' became an annual record with Dewi Hopkins as the new editor. Coronation year included a visit to Glasgow and subsequently an

elegant article by Farquhar Macdonald, conductor of the town's police choir was printed. During the following year the choir was renamed *Treorchy Male Choir*, no longer *Treorchy and District* and T. J. Dilwyn Jones took over the reins of editorship following Mr. Hopkins' resignation after moving away to Cardiganshire. The magazine was printed by Caxton Press, Treorchy, and featured its first Foreword by Cllr. J. G. Elias, the first Mayor of Rhondda Borough Council.

With each new year came even greater success for the choir. Eight national eisteddfod wins, five miners' eisteddfod first prizes and more semi-national victories than anyone would have imagined. Naturally, the '*Excelsior*' recorded each success as the choir's fine reputation rapidly grew, becoming regarded as a household name. The demand for more editions of the magazine was greater than ever. The list of individuals who contributed to it over the years reads more like a Who's Who catalogue of some of the most distinguished people in the country. This trend started with the likes of Hugh Gaitskell, Lord Ogmore, Mansel Thomas, Lord Robens, Arwel Hughes and Sir Ben Bowen.

In 1960 Mal Morris was elected editor, a post he retained for ten years – and what a decade it was: the first stereo recording, the first overseas tour to Switzerland, the resignation of John Haydn Davies and the appointment of John Cynan Jones, a new president was elected in Cliff Taylor and the choir made its last appearance in the competitive arena. Norman Martin made his first major contribution to the magazine in 1963 when he became the choir's new registrar – a position which he still retains after more than thirty-five years.

Composer William Mathias opened the 1965 edition and praise was showered on the success of the magazine. Treasure Gwynne Williams called it: *"Our literal yoke and proves a winner every year,"* while committee member John Phelps said: *"It is without doubt our finest ambassador – being read at one time or another all over the world. From a very small number of copies printed for the first issue, the demand has become so great that the 500 we now print is hardly sufficient to meet everyone's needs"*. The '*Western Mail*' echoed the same thoughts: *"This famous magazine is the shop window of a great choir."*

Following the recording of '*Pride of Wales*' for the Gramophone Co. Ltd. (HMV), senior record producer Brian Culverhouse was the first to congratulate the choir on its successful album. Cliff Taylor wrote the first of many articles as the new president and Lieutenant Gareth Jones of the Royal Army Education Corps said '*Excelsior*' was *"a record unsurpassed in the annals of any choral organisation."* It seems ironic that R. J. Shepard, the Inspector of Schools, should write the foreword for the 1969 edition because coincidentally he is the father-in-law of former conductor John Jenkins.

With news of a forthcoming performance on the Tom Jones Christmas show, great excitement was reflected in a variety of articles featured in the

THE EDITORS

"Its existence is a tribute to the inspired vision of the men who initially created it and those who continue to produce it."

W. J. 'Donna' Griffiths 1948-1951

Dewi Hopkins 1953-1954

T. J. Dilwyn Jones 1955-1959

Mal Morris 1960-1969

John Mallin 1970-1979

John Davies 1980-1990

Robert Turner 1991-1992

Dean Powell 1993-

magazine. Actress Rachel Roberts and Producer Ronnie Cass paid tribute to the choir's involvement in the TV special, while most of the 1969 edition was devoted to the retirement of John Haydn Davies after twenty-three years as conductor.

A new editor came into force in 1970 with the appointment of John Mallin – like his predecessor, he remained in place for ten years. Sir Cennydd Traherne, the Lord Lieutenant of Glamorgan was one of many eminent individuals who wrote the magazine's Foreword during this time – along with Wynford Vaughan Thomas, Alderman Glyn James, Cliff Morgan, Rt. Hon. George Thomas, Gwyn Thomas and Lord Parry, the chairman of the Wales Tourist Board. It was a new golden era for the choir. Competition entries may have been a thing of the past, but the choir made up for it in so many other ways – particularly with a string of annual commercial recordings for the EMI company and appearances on TV shows with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Julie Andrews and Burt Bacharach – every publicity officers' dream!

Moreover '*Excelsior*' was becoming known as the home of the stars with Tom Jones, Sir Harry Secombe and later Max Boyce writing lengthy articles on the happy times they spent in the company of the choristers. '*The Rhondda Leader*' regarded it as: *"An eloquent publication about a choir which does so much to enhance the name of Rhondda throughout the world."* Accompanist Jennifer Jones featured regularly over the years, as did record producer Bob Barratt, Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, VC, founder of the Cheshire Homes and chairman Reg Coates, following the choir's regular concert appearances at the Chippenham Great House.

John Davies held sway again for ten years as editor and like Donna Griffiths, had a deep interest in the pre-war years of the choir, particularly the latter part of the 19th century. The 1980's was a time of marvellous overseas tours and its was Norman Martin's extensive history of each trip to Strasbourg, Australia and on both occasions to Canada, which helped to give readers a true taste of each special moment. The commemorative issue of the legendary tour of Australia in 1986 featured the chairman of James Hardie Industries, John Reid, plus organisers Jim Kelos and Linde Macpherson – while the complete history of the tour speaks for itself! Professor Glyn Davies, Dr. R. Brinley Jones, Professor Gareth Alban Davies and Sir Alastair Burnett were all given a voice in '*Excelsior*' during those memorable years.

With the appointment of Robert Turner as editor in 1991, more major changes were occurring. It marked the passing of the great John Haydn Davies, the resignation of John Cynan Jones, the appointment of John Jenkins and a tour of the Mid West States of America just a few months later. Each event was given due prominence in the '*Excelsior*', but sadly, Robert's position was cut short owing to ill health and Dean Powell was elected as the choir's youngest publicity officer at the age of twenty-one.

His interest in the origins of male choral singing in Rhondda were quick

to come to the surface, with a number of articles appearing in the *'Excelsior'* on the pre-war choir, especially the male choir which existed in Treorchy between the two world wars. A further two American tours to Georgia, California and Colorado proved fascinated reads, while the rest of the magazines were filled with an impressive list of contributors.

Politicians such as Allan Rogers, John Redwood, Lord Callaghan, Rt. Hon. Lord Major of London, Rhondda Mayors David Morgan, David Rees and Kate Rees and even Prime Minister John Major rubbed shoulders with Professor Dai Smith, Professor Peter Hennessy and entertainers Brian Blessed, Glyn Houston, Brian May, Jeff Hooper, Noel Edmonds, Richard Todd, Joan Fontaine, Su Pollard, Roy Noble and Petula Clark. A series of articles by other male choir conductors, featured the likes of Glynne Jones, Alwyn Humphreys, Noel Davies and Dr. Terry James and not forgetting the many friends and admirers who were quick to put pen to paper for the benefit of *'Excelsior'*.

Thousands of copies, hundreds of contributors and countless hours of enjoyment for every reader. May this publication continue for many years as the voice of our more famous male choir.

"Long may these men sing Excelsior!"

RAISING THE ROOF AT CARDIFF CASTLE

by Ros Stanger

MANY wonderful things come out of vending machines at the drop of a coin. But none as memorable as the combined voices of the Treorchy Male Choir.

The choir performed for the officers and members of the Automatic Vending Association of Britain at Cardiff Castle on the occasion of their first National Conference on April 30th, 1998.

A conference in Wales was very appropriate for two reasons. Firstly the AVAB's chairman, Dan Blake was born and bred in Abersychan, Gwent. And secondly because the one essential to make vending machines work – coins – are made in Llantrisant! And to mark this latter link, the guest of honour at the dinner was Roger de L Holmes, Chief Executive of the Royal Mint.

But it wasn't thoughts of money which thrilled the audience; it was the sound of the choir under conductor Andrew Badham. The Banqueting Hall was full with diners before the choir arrived and it seemed impossible that they could breathe, let alone sing, once they were packed in. But sing they did. And with such excellence that by the end the entire room-full of diners was standing and saluting them.

PRESS REPORTS

"The country's premier choir."

Western Mail

VICE ADMIRAL MICHAEL GRETTON, CV
DIRECTOR OF THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD

IT IS with great pleasure that I send my best wishes to the Treorchy Male Choir. My first occasion to hear – and see – the famous choir was at the Royal Naval College Greenwich in May, 1998, when they performed under John Cynan Jones in the college's magnificent chapel. The wonderful harmony which reverberated around the building is an experience I will never forget, and I do hope I can find another opportunity to encounter the Treorchy sound in the not-too-distant future.

While it was a wonderful occasion, especially as the choir was joined by Eldrydd Cynan Jones and Crispin Steele-Perkins, it was tinged with sadness as the final occasion that The Duke of Edinburgh's Award could hold an event at Greenwich under the White Ensign of the Royal Navy – rather special to me as I have studied at the College and my wife accepted my proposal of marriage on the steps of the Painted Hall during a Greenwich Ball!

Which leads to my lack of musicality... I should be the last person in the world to contribute to *'Excelsior'* as I cannot read a note of music, but my wife and daughters have encouraged me to listen, especially to the human voice. My three daughters inherited their mother's singing ability and they have all derived huge pleasure and a sense of achievement from their talents. My wife sings with the Wayneflete Choir, whose performances are mainly in Winchester Cathedral with the Cathedral Choir under David Hill. Thus I have listened to some beautiful singing in Winchester and at the girls' school – so I am sort of qualified to comment on the Treorchy at Greenwich – it was magnificent!

But what is the connection between music and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award? Although the Award is normally associated with backpacking in the mountains, there is much more to it. It is a programme whose objectives are to develop character and good citizenship in young people through educational and physical training, self discipline and service to the community. This is pursued through a wide variety of interests with a challenge to the young to attain high standards of achievement and endeavour.

Music can be involved in at least three sections of the Award. The main one is the Skill Section, in which an instrument or voice can be offered, but

teaching music – especially to those who may not normally get the opportunity or exposure to music – is an option in the Service Section, and dance or aerobics can be done in the Physical Recreation Section. All we seek is *improvement* and not achievement of a particular grade. And finally, I would not be surprised if some youngsters find room for their Walkman in their backpack for the Expedition or Exploration – the fourth section of the Award!

The Award is very active in Wales, where 5,051 new participants started their own programmes last year. The majority are doing so through their schools, but there are some exciting developments in further education, the National Health Service in Wales, a school exclusion unit in Pembrokeshire and with the probation service in several other areas.

So there is the connection, however indirect, between the Treorchy Male Choir and the Award – indeed, I wonder if there are any Award Holders in the choir? It was wonderful to have the choir's contribution to our final event at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Mae Gwobr Dug Caeredin yn dymuno pob lwc i Gôr Meibion Treorci!

PRESS REPORTS

"It is reassuring to know that Treorchy is in as much, if not more, demand today as it was 50 years ago. They are forced to turn down two-thirds of their engagements because many performances are booked a year in advance."

South Wales Echo

"Whenever Treorchy performs it promises to be a heavenly night in the company of one of the finest male voice choirs in the world".

Buxton Advertiser

CLIFFORD THOMAS TAYLOR ('CLIFF')

President and Life Member
of Treorchy Male Choir
19th October, 1915 - 24th April, 1998
Funeral Service on 5th May, 1998
at Taunton Deane Crematorium
Somerset
"Justorum animae in manu Dei sunt!"

The Service

MARY and I were privileged to join the chairman, officials and representatives of the Treorchy Male Choir at the funeral service for our President, Mr. Cliff Taylor. We joined Cliff's son, Paul and his wife, Cliff's second wife, Marjorie, and her daughters, and a large congregation in paying our final respects to this gentlest of gentlemen – a great servant of the Treorchy Male Choir. Appropriately the entrance music was our recording of *'Myfanwy'* – a performance which Cliff loved dearly, and the hymns included *'Cwm Rhondda'*. During this very moving service the officiating minister gave a long eulogy, but this was only because there was so much to say about Cliff, the husband, the father, the colleague, the friend.

The Man

At the choir's Annual General Meeting in February, 1967, Cliff Taylor was elected to succeed the late Iorwerth Thomas, MP, as only the second President of the Treorchy Male Choir. Cliff, a native of Barry, was a Chartered Accountant who became Managing Director of Polikoff International, the clothing factory located in Ynyswen, which, under his guidance, became the major employer in our locality. Choir secretary 'Donna' Griffiths (who had a special way with words) wrote of Cliff's appointment, *"In him the Rhondda has a worthy champion who, in his public utterances, sings her praises, and never fails to strike a note of optimism for the future. Despite the heavy calls upon his time he attends rehearsals and concerts whenever possible, and takes a lively interest in all the affairs of the choir. When we meet he usually greets me with, 'What can I do for the choir?' This is typical of the man."*

In his first Presidential Address for *'Excelsior'*, Cliff wrote, *"I joined the Polikoff factory 18 years ago, and more than ever I find it well worth while commuting to Treorchy each day. Though not in fact a Rhondda man, I sincerely trust that over the years I have perhaps become one of its adopted sons."* These were prophetic words indeed, for Cliff was to serve diligently as President of our Choir for no fewer than THIRTY-ONE years, a record that is unlikely to be equalled.

Cliff's association with the choir went back much further than 1967, for he was always happy to place the Polikoff canteen at the disposal of the choir for charity concerts, choir dinners and radio broadcasts, the long-running BBC Wales *'All-together'* series being particularly popular. Cliff was an accomplished speaker; his presidential speeches at the annual dinners were always greatly appreciated, and his contributions to *'Excelsior'* were eagerly-awaited gems. He would be seen in the audience at many concerts and was totally at ease in any situation… ever the figurehead of the choir. His attitude was immediately apparent in an article which he wrote in 1968: *"How well the choir sang at the Centenary Concert for the Royal National Institute for the Blind at Barry – my home town. How proud I was to wear my 'Cor Meibion Treorci' blazer that evening."* Ten years later he wrote, *"I very proudly wore my blazer, along with my choir tie, to concerts, and this gave strangers the impression that I could sing!"* – a wonderful example of Cliff's delicious dry wit.

Cliff and Iris always took great delight and pride in the successful career of their son, Paul, who became a Lecturer at Lancaster University. Retirement from work came in 1977 and brought a new hobby in the form of palaeontology – *"the posh name for fossil-hunting!"*, as Cliff described it – an interest which was to immortalise the Taylor name in geological circles. With his wife, Iris, Cliff collected and assembled a world-famous collection of trilobites, following it with an equally famous collection of fossil plants. In an article for the important scientific journal *'Nature in Wales'* Cliff summed up his efforts as follows: *"In total Iris and I spent 380 days 'in the field' over a period of ten years from 1975 to 1984."* It was typical of their generosity that Cliff and Iris should decide to donate their collections to the National Museum of Wales and to the Natural History Museum respectively so that they might be viewed by a wider audience and also become available for use in future scientific research.

Cliff was greatly saddened by Donna's death in 1980, and further tragedy came with the death of Iris in 1985. Cliff had been Churchwarden at Merthyr Dyfan, working with the retired Canon Dennis Brown, who, by a remarkable coincidence, had been my Vicar at St. Martin's, Roath, and my mentor as an organist. It was 'Father Brown' who was to officiate at Iris's funeral service at Thornhill Crematorium. Not surprisingly, Cliff's contributions to *'Excelsior'* ceased until 1993. In the meantime he had met Marjorie, and they were married in 1988, moving to a new home in Bridgwater, Somerset. He and Marjorie continued to attend concerts, but it became apparent that Cliff's health was failing, though his 1993 article for *'Excelsior'* was full of humour, quoting the famous Tom Jones *"104 pints, please!"* and the Ella Fitzgerald stories from those marvellous days at ATV in Elstree. He admitted that he could no longer drive his car long distances, but, under Marjorie's loving care, they continued to appear at the choir's west country concerts. It was typical that at his final concert – in Weston-super-Mare – Cliff enjoyed the performance from the comfort of his wheel-chair.

The Friend

My first encounter with Cliff Taylor took place just before Christmas during the early 1960's when he arrived at 1 Hermon Street to deliver a Polikoff Christmas O.A.P. hamper to Mary's mother. I was amazed that the Managing Director should be performing such a menial task, but I soon came to realise that kindness and generosity were vital features of Cliff's character. By 1966 I had become associate conductor and was preparing to travel to the Royal Albert Hall in London for the Royal Concert… in a distinctly tatty dress suit. Somehow or other Cliff got to know of it, and Sam Griffiths was detailed to take my measurements during the next practice. Cliff saw to the making of a superb new dinner jacket in the latest style, selecting the materials and supervising every step of the manufacturing process personally!

Many of our choristers and their wives were employed at Polikoff's and Cliff knew them all by name, taking an interest in their health and well-being, talking to them as a friend rather than as their employer. I was always charged to keep him aware of choristers' illnesses or bereavements, for he would visit them in hospital or at home. Every one of my stays in hospital was marked by an early visit from Cliff, as were Mary's, when he would invariably impress the nurses by the size of the floral bouquets he brought for the surprised patient!

Cliff was a wise counsellor, especially in the early days of my conductorship, when great tact and patience (never my strong points) were needed, and I know that he was always ready to offer sound advice to officials of the choir on professional and financial matters. He would often telephone on the day following a concert to talk knowledgeably about the performance and to ask me to thank the lads for providing him with so much enjoyment. I can still see his tall, erect figure, bright, flashing eyes and broad smile, with the outstretched arm waiting to grasp my hand in congratulation. He was delighted to discover that I had completed a Subsidiary Course in Geology at University, for we enjoyed many discussions on technical matters, and my visits to view his fossil collections at his home in Barry were a source of great delight. It was no accident that he chose to name both his houses, 'Croeso'… which, translated from the Welsh, means 'Welcome!' for that was exactly what one received on every visit.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Marjorie, Paul and all Cliff's family and friends, and we thank God for his presence among us for so many happy years. May he rest in peace and rise in glory!

"And all the trumpets sounded for him… on the other side!"

(John Bunyan)

John Cynan Jones
Conductor Emeritus

BENNY GRIFFITHS
(Aged 74 years)
74 Prospect Place, Treorchy
Died on Wednesday, 26th August, 1998
Buried at Treorchy Cemetery on
Wednesday, 2nd September, 1998

"Lower him gently into his grave,
One of the gentle, one of the brave,
Lower him gently,
Let him lie under his native earth and sky."

I FIRST came into contact with Benny through Pentre Boys' Club, where my father was an official. Benny was one of my boyhood heroes – one of the star players in the fine Boys' Club soccer team which was to develop into the famous 'Pentre Athletic' of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Twinkle-toed Benny played mainly on the right wing and wove magical spells around defenders, scoring spectacular goals, but making more for his colleagues. Many were the injuries which he suffered at the hands of uncompromising full backs who tackled him unfairly in full flight – and the grass-less Griffin Field was an unforgiving surface on which to fall!

When I joined Treorchy Male Choir I was welcomed warmly by Benny, who ensured that everyone knew that he and "John bach" (as he always insisted on calling me) were "Pentre boys". Over the years I came to value his friendship, his reading and singing of music, and his intense loyalty both to the choir and to myself as conductor. He was fiercely critical of our own performances and his comments on an unsatisfactory evening's work could be withering. He would brook no criticism of his beloved second tenor section, and often took me to task for some remark which I had made to them... and then his face would break into a broad grin as he realised that I had been joking all the time!

Towards the end of my period as conductor I observed that Benny's health was deteriorating, though, characteristically, he never complained. Occasionally I would question whether he was fit enough to undertake a long journey to a concert. He would reply, politely, but quite firmly, that it was his DUTY to be there, and that *"As long as I am able to stand, I will sing"*, adding, *"And, in any case, I knew that the second tenors were going to be a bit short tonight!"*

One of Benny's many roles in the choir was that of 'Welcomer'. He would make it his duty to welcome the many visitors to rehearsals, to talk to them about the choir's current work, to introduce them to the conductor during the interval and, not least, to ensure that they signed the Visitors' Book. One of his lesser roles was that of guardian of the notice-board – putting it on display at the beginning of every practice and removing it to safety at the end – and woe betide any chorister (or even the conductor himself!) who added or removed any notice without asking Benny's permission.

One of the last of the great 'characters' of our choir, Benny's sense of humour was unequalled, and his 'Malapropisms' (or 'Bennyisms!') legendary. He served as a committee member for the second tenor section for no fewer than TWENTY-FOUR years, and had also performed the thankless task of being a bus steward. Benny possessed a lovely light lyrical tenor voice which blended well with the rest of his section, a result of the fine musical training which both he and I had received at Pentre Junior School.

For many years Benny had been happily married to Marion, to whom and to whose family and friends we extend our deepest condolences. Benny spent his entire working life in the mining industry, and he joined the Treorchy Male Choir in 1948. He was awarded his Long Service Scroll in 1971 and his Life Membership Certificate in 1980. It was a cruel disappointment that Benny passed away before being able to receive the gold watch marking his FIFTY years service to the choir, as no one deserved it more than he. It was an honour for me to conduct over sixty choristers, past and present, at Treorchy Cemetery on a sunny afternoon in September. They raised their voices in a moving performance of *'Gwahoddiad'*, and as the final *'Amens'* died away we were acutely aware of Benny's presence among us, and of his approving smile... especially for the second tenors!

"Lower him gently,
Let him be asleep unto eternity.
Lower him gently,
Let him lie under his native earth and sky."

(Idris Davies)

John Cynan Jones
Conductor Emeritus

A TIME TO REMEMBER

by Heather James

THE telephone rang and I was asked if I was available to play for the choir for a weekend of concerts in the Widnes area in June and I jumped at the opportunity of spending a little more time with the choristers for my last concert. I was extremely happy when I found that Ros Evans was the soloist. To have one of the best singers I can think of who has an excellent rapport with audience and choir alike and who is good fun to be with ensured that the weekend would be a success.

After a long coach journey, punctuated by George's excellent Welsh cakes, we took over the hotel for the weekend. The other guests, including a wedding party, seemed not to mind – in fact, they asked the choir to sing to their guests around midnight!

The trauma of the weekend was that, on the Saturday, four of our troops had a car accident on the way up. I understand what it must have been like after one of those pit disasters. We were all so concerned that it heightened our emotional state by at least ten notches. And when they turned up and were able – just – to appear on stage, the singing entered another planet.

I had never been with the choir after a performance at 'drinking time', and felt so happy to share the wonderful after-concert 'high' with them all. I was bought two drinks by one of the top tenors – for which I was grateful – and the 'accident' group kindly included me into their 'kitty': what a privilege! I now realise that drinks are not a casual matter in this choir; it's a serious business, and the money has to be carefully worked out first!

On the Sunday Andrew Badham, Ros and I, along with several others, walked into Widnes to locate the Queen's Hall where we were to perform. We found it, but were not as clever as Fred who managed to get inside – only to discover that there was no piano! We couldn't find any eating places of consequence so we returned to the hotel for an excellent Sunday lunch. I thought how ironic it would be if, for my last concert with the choir, there was no piano! However, the organisers were quick to arrange for a new upright to be delivered from Liverpool by 5.30 p.m. that evening when we were due to rehearse. It arrived at 5.20 p.m.

I had told Andrew to keep things light as my heart was rather heavy; but there was no escape when Bob Griffiths, the chairman, presented me with the beautiful certificate and said a few words, and Norman took some photographs. I was very tough. If I could have played the *'Soldier's Chorus'*, then I would have been fine – but *'Myfanwy'*, followed by *'My Way'* was too much for me. After the applause died down Andrew needed a chord for the encore – but he just had to play it himself!

Before I left to come home on the early coach, two of my special 'chums' gave up five minutes of their precious drinking time to say goodbye. A wonderful weekend which I shall never forget – the culmination of three very happy years spent with a fine choir. As John Jenkins said to me initially: *"They will treat you like a queen"* – and so they did.

PRESS REPORTS

"The town of Treorchy has been recognised as the hometown of one of the world's greatest male choirs from as long ago as 1883."

Cheltenham Gazette

"Wales' premier male voice choir".

Rhondda Leader

A MUTUAL ADMIRATION

Dear Dean and the Treorchy Male Choir,

Thank you so much for sending me the *'Excelsior'* again this year. I found it very interesting and am glad to hear that the choir is flourishing and active.

I do hope that some day when my theatre work brings me again to Wales, I will have the opportunity to hear the choir at first hand.

A random thought: wouldn't it have been a wonderful musical experience if the Treorchy Male Choir got together with the Grimesthorpe Colliery Brass Band to give a concert? What a marvellous volume of sound that would be!

With all best wishes,

Richard Todd

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

By Harry Errington, Carlisle

HOW often do you hear that expression? It's a bit silly really because no matter how you look at it, fundamentally be it from a map or from outer space, it's still the same size! Of course, the more (?) intelligent ones amongst us will say that's not what it means, it's because of the speed of travel, getting from one part of the globe to the other and quickly meeting friends and relatives.

"Ah", said those amongst us who are considered not to be so intelligent. "Oh, you think you are a clever so and so! Well let me tell you something, I knew it all the time! Just listen to me mate!"

Friends and I were in the Highlands of Scotland last May, and pulling into the grounds of our favourite guest house we noted another car parked there. Next morning at breakfast we exchanged niceties with the driver and his wife. Between mouthfuls of porridge and later bacon, eggs, and slices of haggis from the one caught in the glen (it escaped from the previous Burn's supper!) it turned out that they were Canadians and from then on the conversation (in between fried bread and haggis by then, because if the haggis is the slightest undercooked it still tries to escape!) went like this:

Canadian: We come from Canada.

Me: What part?

Canadian: All of me, ha ha!

Me: Oh *(thinking, I had a right clever dick here)*

Canadian: We're from Ontario. I emigrated to Canada some years ago and became a naturalised citizen, and this is my wife, she's a Red Indian. But I really come from Wales.

Me: Oh *(cunningly resisting the temptation to fall into the trap of asking*

"What part?" I wasn't going to be caught in that anatomical equation. So in my best Etonian accent I ventured...) And from what geographical part of Wales actually did you emigrate?

Canadian: Aberystwyth.

Me: That's interesting, we go to Wales twice a year at least.

Canadian: Oh, and what part?

Me: *(quick as lightning I got my revenge)* Every bit of us! Actually we go to the Rhondda for concerts by Treorchy Male Choir. They toured Canada some years ago.

Canadian: Yes, as a matter of fact we played host to two of them. I don't know anything about one of them, but I corresponded with the other for quite some time. Somehow we lost touch and I don't even know if he's still alive.

Me: What's his name?

Canadian: Bryn Howells.

Me: I know Bryn Howells is very much alive I can assure you. If you give me your address I will make sure he gets it.

Both the Canadian, Dr. Richard Daniel from Gravenhurst, and Bryn were astounded by the coincidence, for half an hour either side of breakfast it may never have happened. Friendships were renewed and I have a confession to make – the Canadians weren't as I portrayed them, indeed they were very nice people, and after all – it's a small world 'isn't it'?

AN INSPIRING PERFORMANCE
A REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL CONCERT
AT THE PARK & DARE THEATRE, TREORCHY

by Richard Evans

THE annual concert by the Treorchy Male Choir in their hometown is always a highlight, and this year's concert was outstanding.

With 100 men in the ranks, the choir performed each item with excellent clarity, diction and pronunciation, as conductor Andrew Badham controlled them with military precision. Ends of phrases were crisp and clear, crescendos were controlled, as if listening to one voice, and the quieter moments were inspiring.

I'll be the first to admit that choirs are not usually my cup of tea, and operatic choruses are not a particular favourite. But Gilbert & Sullivan's *'March of the Peers'* made a rousing start to the night, followed by some marvellous Welsh hymns which were made for choirs like this.

Without a doubt Treorchy has certainly benefited from the light arrangements of *'Cavatina'*, *'Impossible Dream'* and *'My Way'* – they were inventive and sung with feeling.

Soprano Ros Evans proved to be the perfect soloist with this band of men, combining a wonderful rich sound with a marvellous sense of humour which compliments the choristers so well. Together, they're quite a combination.

A memorable evening indeed.

GOLDEN YEARS, GOLDEN VOICES

CONGRATULATIONS were in order at the Annual Autumn Concert for a group of very special Treorchy choristers who were presented with wrist watches to commemorate fifty years unbroken service each to the organisation.

The 'Golden Boys' were Honorary Secretary Islwyn Morgan, Registrar & Honorary Archivist Norman Martin, former committeeman Ben Jackson and second bass singer Ieuan Lawrence.

Sadly, the ceremony was marred by the passing of former committeeman Benny Griffiths. He had also achieved fifty years service to the choir, but it was with the deepest regret that we learned of his passing just a few weeks before the concert. We hope that his wife, Marion finds comfort in the knowledge that he was held in the highest regard and will treasure the watch as we're sure Benny would have done.

COMIC CHORAL CAPERS

FOLLOWING last year's article on comic moments in the life of Treorchy Male Choir, the demand has grown for more funny tales. Thanks to everyone included below for being good sports – and especially thanks to your 'so-called' friends for spying on you!

Jack Moses took plenty of criticism during the AGM this year. During the meeting the chairman called on Derek Langley to speak on behalf of the choir's auditors. Jack turned to another chorister and asked: "Well who's Derek Langley?"

The response being: "He's in the same section as you and you lived next door to each other for two years!"

Paul Brabham's (otherwise known as 'The Shadow') dedication to music knows no bounds. During the Greenwich concert the organist had a lot of problems with bright sunshine glaring in his eyes while he played. So Paul was asked to stand between the player and the window to allow him some shade!

Talk about *'Steal Away'* – Ivor Williams had some pretty bad luck earlier this year when his car was broken into. And do you know what they stole? His collection of Treorchy Male Choir sheet music. Fortunately the music was later found, allowing the police to look for someone completely illiterate in tonic solfa notation.

Dean's wandering eye caused him a nasty accident during the trip to Widnes. On Sunday morning he accompanied two of his fellow choristers to the town centre and was walking through the empty shopping arcade when one of his friends said: "Look at that young lady over there." As quick as a flash Dean turned to look and kept walking forward at such a pace that he hit a lamp-post! He was later seen nursing a bag of ice on his forehead in a nearby pub!

The second tenors have got some well-off members you know. Take a look at Norman Martin for instance. He was travelling on the choir bus one day and happened to mention he had bought a new car. One of the choristers asked: "Did you have it from brand new?"

"No," Norman responded, "I had it from Cardiff."

As a front-row man, Alwyn Lewis is always confident of his words, shame about the titles of songs though. In one concert he was heard remarking, "I think we're finishing off the first half with *'Cafeteria'* from *'The Deer Hunter…'*!

John Weaver had his fair share of problems this year. His beloved caravan was stolen from a site one weekend and he had only just bought a huge sack of barbecue coals and a new gas cylinder before the incident occurred. With a not-so sympathetic voice, Phil Edmunds announced that South Wales Police are now searching for someone "who feels the cold"!

Our involvement in the *'A Light in the Valley'* feature film led to us spend a very wet and windy Sunday morning singing high on the Bwlch mountain. Second bass Alun Davies inquired: "Does this mean we're getting rid of auditions in favour of an intensive mountaineering course instead?"

During our visit to a local pub prior to the concert in Axminster's Guild Hall, the choristers all joined in with the karaoke evening they were were holding there. When one of the regulars started to sing *'Day Dream Believer'*, the choristers were quick to get involved. But one particular member turned to his musical comrade and said: "These karaoke machines astonish me. How on earth do the singers remember all the words?"

Keep it up gentlemen!

COMRADES IN SONG

by Grenville Jones

Conductor, The Silver Ring Choir of Bath

I WRITE as the conductor of the Silver Ring Choir, shortly after a very successful concert in Bath with the men of Treorchy and Rhiannon! I read with interest Andrew Badham's notes in your last *'Excelsior'*. As the 'new' conductor of the Silver Ring (and only the third in its 47-year history) I shared his trepidation at taking over a choir with a reputation for excellence. My 'second job' started in September, 1997.

To your readers and choir members I would respectfully like to point out the considerable pressures on the person out in front! Apart from rehearsals, music, MC duties, one has to constantly be 'thinking ahead'… what will be in the programme in six months time? How do I keep the choristers happy ALL the time (that's a difficult one!), AND there's family, work and other commitments!

So much hangs on one pair of shoulders, but this is not a conductor's

complaint! I know that Treorchy, like the Silver Ring, has a professional attitude towards its management – it is really a successful small business.

And so, to the Treorchy Male Choir, hearty thanks to each one of you for your inspirational singing in the Bath Forum on November 21st. A packed hall of 900 enjoyed every item and every note – we have received so many messages of praise. I know that everyone connected with the Treorchy will have a very successful and enjoyable 1999. My best wishes to you all.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

1988

The choir undertook the first of three 'furniture fortnights' for the Christie Tyler Company by performing ten consecutive concerts in the City Hall, Cardiff. Choristers also appeared on *'This is Your Life'* at Teddington Studios, London to honour Cliff Morgan. Jennifer Jones resigned as accompanist after seventeen years and the choir made the *'Myfanwy'* television programme and the *'Together'* record with Sir Harry Secombe. They also accompanied Morlais, Ferndale, Cambrian and Pendyrus Choirs in the *'Rhondda in Harmony'* concert at St. David's Hall, Cardiff under the baton of Owain Arwel Hughes.

1978

The choir sang at the 50th anniversary concert of Morlais Male Choir and also performed for HRH Princess Alexandra at the Rhondda Sports Centre. They made the *'Climb Every Mountain'* record and were honoured by the Rhondda Recognition Committee for their work in promoting Welsh culture. Wyn Davies sang *'Three Bells'* ('Jimmy Brown') for the first time and Barry John chose the choir's recording of *'Myfanwy'* as one of his *'Desert Island Discs'*. Congratulations were also in store for Haydn Erasmus on being awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Honours List.

1968

Treorchy made two stereo records called *'Pride of Wales'* for the Gramophone Company and *'Blessed the World That Sings'* for BBC Records and undertook a tour of Cornwall. Islwyn Morgan was elected assistant secretary and the choir was invited to sing for the Zambian Rugby Team at Treorchy RFC.

1958

During the year they appeared in Llandaff Cathedral, made four *'Aelwyd Y Gan'* radio broadcasts and three Qualiton Records. One of which, *'God Bless The Prince of Wales'* was on sale in the shops just sixteen hours after recording – making it the quickest making/selling time of a commercial record. The choir gained their fourth consecutive win at the Royal National Eisteddfod in Ebbw Vale and won the Miners' Eisteddfod in Porthcawl. During a concert in

Trerhondda Chapel, Ferndale they welcomed a promising young tenor to the stage called Stuart Burrows.

1948

Treorchy held its first celebrity concert in Bethlehem Chapel with Linda Parker and William Parsons. The composer of *'Close Thine Eyes'* was in the audience and asked to come on stage to conduct the item. The first edition of *'Excelsior'* was published and the choir competed in its first eisteddfod in Treorchy on the test piece *'Nidaros'* – coming second. They won the Llanharan Semi-National Eisteddfod and the Pontllanfraith Eisteddfod late in the year. Sam Griffiths made his first appearance as a baritone soloist in Ramah Chapel and the choir made its first radio broadcast, *'Export Only'* from the Reardon Smith Lecture Theatre, Cardiff.

Pre-War Memories

1938

Distinguished conductor W. D. Evans resigned due to ill-health and on July 26th Arthur Davies ("a man of culture from Swansea") was appointed his successor. Choir treasurer Fred Morgan died following an accident at the Parc Colliery, he was 33. And one evening in September two men, who would have an immeasurable effect on the future of Welsh choral music, visited the practice room as the choir rehearsed *'Mordaith Cariad'* (Voyage of Love). They were the new deputy conductor and accompanist – John 'Haydn' Davies and Tom Jones.

1928

Under the direction of John Isaac Jones the choir won the Penygraig Welfare Eisteddfod and came third in the Pontypridd Semi-National Eisteddfod behind Williamstown and Pendyrus. A fund-raising concert was arranged before a capacity audience in the Abergorky Hall, where the choir performed *'Last Days of Pompeii'*, *'Wandered'* and *'Homeward Bound'*.

1918

After the twenty-year absence of an established male choir in the town, the Treorchy & District Male Choir was finally getting on its feet. Tom J. Jenkins was elected secretary and conductor John Pugh engaged accompanist E. T. Thomas to take part in their weekly rehearsals at the Park Hall, Cwmparc.

1888

Despite winning frequent local eisteddfodau under the baton of William Thomas, the choir withdrew, without apparent reason, from the Royal National Eisteddfod in Wrexham.

PRESS REPORTS

"When it comes to Welsh choirs, one of the first names to come to mind is the famous Treorchy. This is an institution known the world over."

Rhondda Leader

ATTENDANCE RECORD

During the year 77 rehearsals were held (Tuesday 40, Thursday 36, Sunday 1) and 31 engagements.

CENTURY CLUB (100% attendance)

Rehearsals	*Engagements*	
Fred O'Brien	Fred O'Brien	Edward Owen
Alan Bowen	Alan Bowen	Ron Walton
George Jacobs	George Jacobs	Haydn Erasmus
Alan Davies	Alan Davies	Mal Morgan
David Powell	Jack Knapgate	Keith Owen
Leigh Sprague	Islwyn Morgan	Leighton Wales
	Reg Stephens	William Watkin
	Jack Moses	

NIFTY NINETIES CLUB (90% attendance)

John Hopkins	Leighton Wales	Cyril Bevan
Bryn Howells	William Watkin	Lyn Feldon
Jack Knapgate	Paul Brabham	Dean Powell
Dennis Lethbridge	Robert Griffiths	Gary Horgan
Ivor Lock	Robert Hopkins	David Powell
John Weaver	Bryn Jones	Phillip Edmunds
Gary Horgan	Peter Jones	Paul Evans
Jack Moses	David Rosser	Len Gale
Norman Martin	John Strabel	Geoffrey Howard
Edward Owen		Derek Moore
Haydn Erasmus		Robert Griffiths
Paul Evans		Robert Hopkins
Terry Hale		David Rosser
Derek Moore		Michael Russ
Keith Owen		John Strabel

CHORISTERS' BALANCE SHEET

IN	*OUT*
Lee Sprague	Michael Jones
Gareth Thomas	Gareth Thomas
Royden Owen	Royden Owen
Ray Daniels	
Tom Jones	
Andrew O'Brien	
Gwilym Jones	
Brian Williams	
Llew Summerhill	

NUMBER ON BOOKS – December 31st, 1998

1T	2T	1B	2B	TOTAL
30	23	32	24	109

CONCERT ENGAGEMENTS 1998

February	
Saturday 28th	Parr Hall, Warrington
March	
Saturday 14th	Town Hall, Dudley
Thursday 26th	Comprehensive School Hall, Tonypandy
April	
Saturday 4th	Embassy Theatre, Skegness
Thursday 9th	Paul Robeson Room, Treorchy (Paul Robeson TV programme)
Friday 10th	Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy
Tuesday 14th	Parc Chapel, Cwmparc (Paul Robeson TV programme)
Thursday 23th	National Museum, Cardiff
Saturday 25th	All Hallows' College, Rousdon, Lyme Regis
Thursday 30th	The Castle, Cardiff
May	
Friday 15th	Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich
Saturday 30th	Civic Hall, Bedworth
June	
Thursday 4th	The Pavilion, Porthcawl (Paul Robeson TV programme)
Thursday 4th	The Rehearsal Room, Treorchy (The Coal Project TV programme)
Sunday 7th	The Bwlch Mountain (The Coal Project TV programme)
Sunday 7th	The Rehearsal Room, Treorchy (The Coal Project TV programme)
Saturday 13th	Village Hall, Ditchling
Saturday 20th	All Saints' Church, Barry
Saturday 27th	Astoria Ballroom, Rawtenstall
Sunday 28th	Queen Hall, Widnes
July	
Saturday 18th	Osborn Memorial Hall, Boscombe, Bournemouth
September	
Saturday 12th	Opera House, Buxton
Saturday 19th	Capel Newydd, Llandeilo
October	
Thursday 8th	Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy
Saturday 10th	Comprehensive School, Llantwit Major
Friday 23th	Sports Cafe, Cardiff Bay (Watchdog TV programme)
Saturday 24th	Guild Hall, Axminster
November	
Sunday 8th	The Cenotaph – Blaenrhondda The Cenotaph – Treherbert
Saturday 21st	Forum Theatre, Bath
Wednesday 25th	Tynewydd Labour Club