

TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



BRIEF HISTORY 2004

By Dean Powell, Publicity Officer
& Honorary Archivist

JANUARY

Saturday, January 24

The Town Hall, Walsall

At 2.30pm the coaches left Treherbert for the 270 mile journey to Walsall and another concert organised by Honorary Member John Tucker, this time held in aid of Walsall Rugby Club - the home club of former Welsh international Rupert Moon. We reached the Town Hall at 6pm and held a rehearsal in this magnificent auditorium, an absolute joy to perform in. With such brilliant acoustics, the choir did its utmost to take full advantage of their surroundings and did so to excellent effect. The quality of singing was almost breath-taking in parts, particularly *Sanctus*, *Speed Your Journey*, *Lords Prayer* and all the lighter numbers which brought the audience of 700 people almost to their feet. We also enjoyed the benefits of former comprehensive school headmaster Mel Thomas as compere for the evening which was another joy. His hilarious anecdotes and wonderful poetic tribute to the choir was quite unforgettable. Our guest soloist was mezzo-soprano Kate Woolveridge who typically enchanted the audience of 700 people from beginning to end. Following the engagement we retired to the nearby Walsall RFC, with the late bus arriving in Treorchy at 4.30am. Tonight marked the first concert for Paul Devonald (2B).

FEBRUARY

Saturday, February 7

St John's Church, Coleford

Leaving Treherbert at 3pm we travelled the 130 miles to Coleford in the Forest of Dean to perform in the absolutely delightful St John's Church. What a glorious, gothic structure. Also featured in the evening concert was the Forest of Dean Male Voice Choir and soloist Helen May and all the proceeds went to the Great Oaks Dean Forest Hospice. The engagement was another outstanding success for both organisations, with Treorchy showing its true professionalism of course. Enjoying the benefits of the acoustics around them, the choir certainly displayed a very high standard of musical excellence. The audience of 400 seemed more than delighted with the performance which was displayed in their enthusiastic applause following every item. Following the concert the Treorchy choristers joined our new found friends in the local cricket club for a social evening, returning to Treorchy by 3.30am

Tuesday February 17

Treorchy Rugby Football Club

For more than a week BBC Radio Wales broadcast from venues throughout Treorchy. The series, called Radio Wales Comes to Town: Out and About in Treorchy, featured a host of BBC presenters, along with various individuals from that particular town. One evening following rehearsals, a group of choristers visited Treorchy RFC Clubhouse to broadcast on a programme presented by Ton Pentre-born Dewi Griffiths.

Saturday February 21

The Corn Exchange, Newbury

The choir undertook a 240mile journey to the Corn Exchange, Newbury for what was something of a very different concert arrangement than choristers were used to. Conductor, Andrew Badham was unable to attend the concert and therefore deputy conductor Edgar Taylor took to the podium. Unhappy about addressing the choir, he invited PRO Dean Powell to comper the concert. It was a task he accepted and carried out with the professionalism and good humour. Soloist for the evening was Justine Platts. Prior to the concert, for its audience of 450 people, choristers were invited to attend the Mayor's Parlour in the centre of the town. Choristers were treated to a superb buffet and drinks and the choir secretary presented a plaque to the Mayor Coun Peter Greenhalph. The concert itself was in aid of Newbury Hospital Helpers League. Despite some initial apprehension from the choristers, the concert was a total success and marked a welcome return to Newbury after 26 years. The choristers were first-class in their ability to perform with a new conductor. The hugely appreciative audience made it clear they were not content with hearing the entire programme alone and required two further encores to "bring the house down." Following the engagement, choristers headed for Newbury RFC clubhouse for food and drinks.

Tuesday February 24

Welsh National Opera, Cardiff

A hugely disappointing evening for all concerned and one which infuriated a number of frustrated choristers from the outset. Following months of hard work, choristers combined with Cwmbach Male Choir for a rehearsal at the WNO building on John Square, Cardiff. The occasion was to rehearse the incredibly complex Hughes Mass, composed by the late Arwel Hughes. His son, Owain Arwel Hughes, had decided to include the item in the forthcoming St David's Day Concert at St David's Hall next month. However, after a short rehearsal - and despite four months preparation - the conductor decided to remove the entire piece from the concert programme because he did not feel it was of the highest musical standard. Choristers were hugely disappointed and returned home unhappy with the decision after spending so many months in rehearsal.

Wednesday, February 25

Parc and Dare Theatre Lounge

The series of BBC broadcasts from Treorchy continued with the Nicola Heywood Thomas show from the Parc and Dare Theatre lounge. Although not an official engagement, it was still felt the choir should have a presence. The group of 20 choristers were invited to perform a selection of numbers while Dean Powell and Norman Martin sat on a panel with Tyrone O'Sullivan to discuss the history of the choir live on air.

MARCH

March 13 - April 3

Tour of Australia (see separate report)

APRIL

Friday, April 9

Parc and Dare Theatre, Treorchy

The first concert in Wales since the end of our triumphant Australian Tour was in our own hometown. The choir's 38th Good Friday concert was something extra special. For the first time in a number of years we had successfully filled the Parc and Dare Theatre with 750 seats sold. Following the success of the tour, Dean Powell was once more invited to comper the concert - a post he would continue in future engagements. His appearance in the second half dressed in full "Aussie" gear including a corked hat, kangaroo, boomerang and didgeridoo caused plenty of laughter from the enthusiastic audience. The Parc and Dare Band joined us on stage of course - this time with former choir accompanist Rhiannon Williams in their ranks. It was a hugely successful "welcome home" concert for all concerned.

Saturday April 23

The Town Hall, Stourbridge

Departing from Treherbert at 3pm, the coaches undertook a 119 mile drive to Stourbridge in the West Midlands – our first visit to this town. We reached the Town Hall at 6.30pm, had a brief rehearsal and then prepared for the evening concert, organised by Choir president Brian Bates. It was a great disappointment to see only 150 in the audience, however, the choir gave a first-class performance once again. The soloist for the evening was Ros Evans, soprano. Despite the small crowd, we still enjoyed an encore at the end of the concert. Following the engagement the late coach visited the Kidderminster RFC for refreshments and left at midnight.

MAY

Saturday May 22

Civic Hall, Bedworth

Leaving Treorchy at 3.30pm, we departed for an "old favourite" of a concert hall in Bedworth. Choristers were filled with excitement for another day and evening out together, which was displayed with the typical good humour on board the coach during the 300 mile round trip. We arrived at the Civic Hall at 6.30pm, just in time for a quick rehearsal amongst the familiar surroundings. Following a drink in the bar the relatively small choir of just 56 men took to the stage for a terrific concert before an audience of 700. The choir certainly displayed all the wonderful qualities that have made us so popular. Our soloist, Kate Woolveridge, was at her best, winning over everyone in her midst. Tonight saw the first public performance of Alan Simmons's arrangement of *Amen*. The late coach finished off the night in the delightful little Stoneleigh Village Club.

JUNE

Saturday June 5

St George's Trinity Church, RAF Halton

What an incredible night to remember. The venue was first class, the choir was marvellous and the audience was just perfect. Their wonderful reaction to every one of our items was quite startling. The concert was in aid of St Michael and All Angels Church in Halton village. Our venue, a lovely church which didn't look dissimilar to Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church in California, was filled to capacity with its audience of 500. In fact, tickets had sold out weeks in advance. The guest soloist for the

evening was soprano Susan Coates, daughter of the late Reg Coates from Chippenham and this was the first full engagement for Helen Roberts as accompanist, a task she carried out with utmost professionalism. Also in attendance was Station Commander of RAF Halton Group Captain the Honourable D P Murray OBE FCMI RAF. The concert was actually organised by Brian Bates, along with local man Bill Morrison and in the audience was our old friend Robin Woodruff who organised a number of concerts for Blackberry Farm Animal sanctuary. Sadly, Robin's wife Ann is seriously ill with cancer. The concert was introduced by Rev (Wing Commander) Adrian Gatrill and with the first note performed, we were assured of a night to remember. The choir was superb throughout the night while the audience, who showed such incredible enthusiasm, were obviously delighted. What was also most memorable, and rather poignant, was the performance of *For the Fallen*. Tomorrow marks the 60th anniversary of D-Day and we felt it appropriate to perform this item, asking the audience not to applaud at its conclusion. A very touching tribute indeed. With a vote of thanks on behalf of the church given by organiser Michael Sanders, the vicar returned to the podium as we joined in prayer before finishing the concert with *Gwahoddiad*. Presentations were made to all those who had taken part. The choir travelled 360 miles to and from the concert engagement.

Friday June 18

Cheltenham Town Hall

Tonight was always going to be a difficult concert. It actually marked the final concert to be organised by our esteemed president Brian Bates. After more than twenty years Brian has decided the time has come to no longer organise concerts for the choir. It must have been a very difficult decision for him to make, and it was certainly one that the choir did not wish to hear, since his hard work has helped raise more than £100,000 for choir funds over the years. Tonight compere Dean Powell paid tribute to him from the stage and invited him to speak to his hometown audience (of 600 people) - in the very venue where he organised the first choir concert all those years ago. It was a very poignant moment indeed. The concert was assured of another success in this fine auditorium, complete with its marble archways, balconies and impressive stage. The choir gave a first class performance throughout and although the audience appeared rather subdued at the start, they certainly displayed their total enthusiasm as the concert continued. Tonight's performance was in aid of Speakeasier, the charity that funds aids for people with lost speech due to Multiple Sclerosis. The founder of the organisation, Steve Brisk, came on stage to thank everyone for attending. Mezzo soprano Helen May was unwell and unable to attend the concert as planned. Fortunately our dear friend Ros Evans came to our rescue and was guest soloist for the night. We performed *Amen* for the second time, and enjoyed fulsome applause for each and every item. Another successful performance indeed. Choristers relaxed in a nearby club before undertaking the 102 mile journey home to the Rhondda.

Saturday June 26

All Saints Church, Sheepy Magna

Organised by the Sheepy and District Community Arts Group, this evening's concert was held in the picturesque All Saints Church, some 170 miles from home, in the centre of pretty little Sheepy Magna where we were offered the warmest of welcomes. Complete with glasses of wine and Welsh cakes, we felt very much at home in our

surroundings. A capacity audience of 200 greeted us, many unable to find enough chairs and sitting behind the choir as we performed. The soloists for the evening were Kate Woolveridge and for the first time we welcomed bass John Church. They performed a duo from *Phantom of the Opera* as their final item. The concert was a total success with the choir giving a first-class performance. The programme perfectly suited the ideal acoustics of the church. The religious items were typically inspiring, while the full scale works such as *Comrades in Arms*, *Martyrs of the Arena* and *March & Entrance of the Peers*, fully displayed the choirs' ability to tackle powerful works. This marked the first concert for new chorister Gareth Rees (1B).

SEPTEMBER

Saturday September 18

Royal Forest of Dean College, Coleford

Leaving Treorchy at 4pm, the choir travelled 70 miles to Coleford in the Forest of Dean for the second time this year. Tonight they performed in the College Theatre with the Lydbrook Brass Quintet and with guest artiste, soprano Stephanie Corley. The event was actually organised by the band itself who were delighted with our attendance. The near capacity audience of 500 people appeared equally as thrilled with our performance, which only consisted of 15 items given the amount of other performers also booked for the engagement. The coaches visited Warrall Hill Sports Club before returning home at midnight. Tonight marked the first concert for Derek Thomas (1B).

OCTOBER

Saturday, October 2

Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl

Travelling 259 miles to North Wales, via Shrewsbury, for the first time in many years, choristers were to stay overnight in neighbouring Colwyn Bay. Having settled into their rooms, the buses then left for the rather depressing seaside town of Rhyl – their first visit to this venue. With its derelict hotels and rapidly deteriorating seafront, Rhyl was hardly the holiday destination that it once was. On arrival at the Pavilion Theatre, choristers were surprised at the general untidiness of the venue. Litter was strewn throughout the auditorium. The concert also included two soloists – John Eifion Jones and Sian Wyn Gibson. Chorister Dean Powell was compere for the evening, introducing many of the items bilingual. The choir gave a thrilling performance, with the appreciative audience of 500 people rewarding each item enthusiastically. It was a concert filled with all that is best in the male voice choir repertoire, including Welsh hymns and opera choruses along with warhorse numbers like *Comrades in Arms* and *Martyrs of the Arena*. Unfortunately, the wrong key was played for the beginning of *Myfanwy* and this was subsequently left out. Following the concert many of the choristers retired to their hotels for the remainder of the evening. On the following day the coaches left Rhyl at 10am with the early coach returning to Treorchy by mid afternoon. The later coach stopped in Shrewsbury for the entire afternoon, enjoying the warm reception at a local pub before returning to the Rhondda by early evening.

Thursday October 7

Parc & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

The Choir's 23rd Annual Concert in its hometown theatre saw choristers share the stage with their friends of the Treherbert Band. It was a hugely enjoyable concert, particularly since the choir numbered more than 80 on stage for the home crowd. Welsh hymns and warhorse numbers were the order of the day, culminating in a thrilling finale of *Entrance & March of the Peers* with choir and band.

Saturday October 30

St Andrew's Church, Chippenham

Choristers were delighted to make a return visit after 16 years to Chippenham, 91 miles away. It was particularly appropriate that the concert, held in aid of the Rotary Club of Chippenham and their charities of Cancer Research UK and St Nicholas School Hydrotherapy Pool, featured soloist Susan Coates. It was due to Susan's late father, Reg Coates, that the choir enjoyed such a close relationship with the people of Chippenham. It all began when chorister Haydn Thatcher, at the request of Mr Coates (whose wife was born in Pentre) arranged a visit of patients of Great House, Cheshire Homes, to a rehearsal in Treorchy. From the visit the association of the choir with Cheshire Homes and St Andrew's Church began. The first engagement on Saturday October 2 1971 included a visit to the Cheshire Homes and a performance for the patients in the grounds. It was followed by a concert in St Andrews Church and this dual concert pattern was continued for the next four engagements. In 1973 they returned again, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Great House, and in the visit in 1975 a presentation of 30 bed lockers were given to the patients, paid for from the proceeds of the previous concert. An autographed pictures of Group Captain Leonard Cheshire was presented to the choir and the evening concert was broadcast on local television channels. The Group Captain attended the concerts in 1977 and a Treorchy Male Choir Room was actually opened at the Great House itself. The last concert was held in 1988. It was delightful to make this return visit, particularly since many of Mr Coates's relatives were present in the capacity audience of 550 people inside the church. The concert was a marvellous success and audience and choristers alike celebrated such a memorable evening.

NOVEMBER

Friday November 26

Assembly Rooms, Bath

Tonight's concert marked the return to the Assembly Rooms after more than 18 years. The splendid auditorium in the heart of the historic Roman town provided a wonderful setting for this special evening of song. Also present, armed with a camera crew, was young filmmaker Sean James Cameron who is making a DVD of the choir. The concert, in aid of the British Heart Foundation, also featured soloist Eloise Routledge. It was also a special evening for accompanist Helen Roberts. She first came into contact with the Treorchy Choir during a concert in Bath last year when we shared the stage with the Silver Ring Choir - for whom she was the accompanist. Tonight she appeared as Treorchy's accompanist and was received with rapturous applause from the "hometown" audience. The concert featured all that is best in the male voice choir repertoire, culminating in an ecstatic applause from a very appreciative audience. To celebrate the occasion, both coaches enjoyed the

refreshments at the nearby Bear Hotel before the 89 mile journey home.

DECEMBER

Thursday December 2

Soar Chapel, Pontygwaith

This evening's concert was organised by former choir chairman Bob Griffiths who has recently undergone treatment for cancer. Bob felt it would be a marvellous opportunity to show his appreciation for all the care afforded him during his illness if he organised a concert in aid of Tenovus and Macmillan Nurses. The concert was held in Pontygwaith and attended by a number of choristers – and music staff – from neighbouring choirs in Pendyrus and Morlais, making up an audience of some 150 people. The engagement saw Bob perform a selection of monologues and soloist Dean Powell performed a selection of Scottish, Welsh and show music. This was the first time for the Treorchy Choir to appear in this venue. The concert opened with a selection of Christmas Carols and saw the choir perform its usual varied repertoire, along with some major items in *Comrades in Arms* and *Martyrs of the Arena*. With plenty of Welsh items on the programme, the audience appeared delighted with the concert which raised somewhere in the region of £800 to be shared between both charities.

Saturday December 18

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

Celebrities joined forces with the choir to celebrate Christmas in a star-studded concert in London. Leaving the Rhondda at 11am, choristers travelled 190 miles for an early afternoon rehearsals. Choristers performed with stars from the big - and small - screen for a charity concert in aid of well-known charity SOS (Stars Organisation Supporting Cerebral Palsy). It took place in front of a very large audience of 400 people in the Queen Elizabeth Theatre - part of the Festival Hall complex on the city's Southbank. This was the second year running for the Treorchy Choir to top the bill at the concert, called Stars at Christmas and organised by Bob Reader - the son of famous "scout gangshow" organiser, Ralph Reader. Last year the charity's president, Dame Vera Lynn joined the choir on stage but she was unable to attend this event due to a recent hip operation. Instead the choir shared the stage with Vince Hill, Liz Smith (of Royle Family fame) and former Coronation Street villain Brian Capron who played serial murderer Richard Hillman. The concert was compered jointly by Treorchy chorister Dean Powell and actress Sylvia Syms. The veteran star of such films as *Ice Cold in Alex* and more recently the *Poseidon Adventure*, added an extra sparkle to the evening's entertainment. Following one of Treorchy's performances she turned to the audience and said: "To hear that type of singing makes you wish you were Welsh." Also on stage were talented youngsters from the Yehudi Menuhin School, guitarist Simon James and the Hillcrest Harmony Singers. The Choir led the audience in the carol singing and also performed a large selection of Welsh music and songs from the shows. Afterwards they were treated to a late night celebration in The Hole in the Wall pub, Waterloo before returning home through the snow during the early hours.