

# NEWS & VIEWS

227 SUMMER 2022



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<b>4</b>	<b>Crawford's Corner Chairman's Chat</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Puzzle Page</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Marsh Commercial</b>
	<b>Conference Report</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Oh, what a night!</b> <i>Bestwood Male Voice Choir</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>Rayburn Tours</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Young and eager</b> <i>Churchdown Male Voice Choir</i>	<b>15</b>	<b>Oh, what another night!</b> <i>Bestwood Male Voice Choir</i>	<b>7</b>	<b>Majestic</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Singing together apart</b> <i>Banchory Singers</i>	<b>16</b>	<b>100 years of singing 1922-2022</b> <i>Biddulph Male Voice Choir</i>	<b>9</b>	<b>Lindsay Music</b>
	<b>Vacancy – Musical Director</b> <i>Sonara Singers</i>	<b>17</b>	<b>Pre-dinner entertainment</b> <i>The Glasgow Phoenix Choir</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>Fred.Olsen</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>As Long As I Have Music</b> <i>The Leaside Singers</i>	<b>19</b>	<b>Puzzle Solutions</b> <b>How I like to receive articles</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Trybooking</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>158 years and still going strong!</b> <i>Tamar Valley Male Voice Choir</i>	<b>20</b>	<b>The Officers</b> <b>Meeting dates</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Banks Music</b>
					<b>Lynn Oakes</b>

**Autumn 2022  
228**

**Last date for copy  
30 August**

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# Crawford's Corner

## Publications Officer - Bob Swallow



Sumer is icumen in.

Here we are with the Summer issue of News & Views. Not a big issue but one which is approaching

the sort of magazine that we had before life became a more awkward thing to live.

We have had an Annual Conference at the proper time of the year and I believe it went well. See what you think by reading

the report that I have produced.

Choirs are once again performing in public and are raising funds for those who need help and support.

The Banchory Singers show us that when there are difficulties with rehearsing there are always ways to overcome them if you are determined.

A number of choirs have celebrations for the long existence of their choirs and the long service of many of their members

Bestwood Male Voice Choir show us that not only are they back to singing as a choir but they have joined other choirs in Midlands East to work and sing together and raise funds, as are many choirs, for the problems faced by Ukraine.

How about Biddulph, then? A century of sinning to celebrate. 'Between 1939 and 1949, the choir gave a legendary 390 concerts to raise funds for 'Forces Comforts' and aids to charities'. that is an amazing quotation from their history.

# Chairman's Chat

## NAC Chairman - Brenda Wilkinson



Well, for the most part we have survived one of the most challenging times, haven't we? I can remember the total despondency when we were imprisoned in our own homes with virtually nothing to look forward to, but that 'bulldog spirit' within us broke those chains and we

managed, through technology, to keep in touch and maintain some sort of choir practice.

When we were first released from that isolation, the new challenge for many was returning to that wide world of human contact; some embraced it and others were very timid to the point that some choirs made the decision to disband.

Getting back to what we consider normal is going to be a long process for a lot of us, taking baby steps all the time, but the enthusiasm I can feel from the choir reports in this magazine tells me that our choral future is beginning to look rosy once more. Even so, I have to say please take care and look after yourselves because this virus is still lurking in the shadows.

This year's conference was held at the Castle Green Hotel, Kendal.



Castle Green Hotel by Best Western, in Kendal is perched on the edge of the Lake District, set in 14 acres of garden and woodland overlooking Kendal Castle and Lakeland Fells. The hotel is on a hillside

which makes for wonderful views but a number of challenges for those members who struggle with mobility.

The accommodation is on one level and the conference facilities on another with no lift between the two.

### 1 April - The 'fools' arrive

The officers set up the welcome station, so it was easily seen by those arriving to book in and collect their conference booklet and badges.

When I arrived, the officers were grouped

close to the dining room, and we ordered sandwiches and chips for our lunch. The chips were a big discussion topic as they were chunky and were regular cuboids. We were interested to think what they did with what had to be trimmed to create these chips.

The officers met at three to decide who did what and when then Celia left us to begin her 'Come and Sing' which would normally have been a joint effort between herself and Karl Harper, but Karl backed out of conference at the last minute, so Celia was on her own. Liz Moulder, Group Chairman of Midlands East, lent a hand, or rather a pair of hands to accompany the singing.

At half past seven the delegates began to assemble for our Gala Dinner. The meal was well presented and, I believe, enjoyed by all. In the past we have had either a group of entertainers or a soloist to play or sing for us as we let our meal settle and enjoyed some wine. The last couple of years have been different as it was hard to find people locally who could entertain us. We had a couple of monologues performed by a delegate and some solo songs, again accompanied by Liz from another delegate.

After the entertainment I slipped off to bed. I don't stay up late nowadays.

## 2 April - Sessions and Sailing

The next morning, after breakfast I went to look at the trade stands and greet those people who I see at conference every year and those who have come for the first time. The trade stands were in the same room as the seminars so that when you had a good look round you didn't need to go far to be ready to enjoy the first speaker.

Celia introduced our first speaker was Alan Bullard. He has been writing music all his life and frequently takes commissions for choral societies, church choirs, orchestral societies and ensembles. Alan grew up in London and studied at the Royal College of Music and Nottingham University.

Alan began by giving us a note and getting us to sing some scales. We began with a major scale and then moved to a minor scale. We then sang phrases which were then joined to make a song. We then split into four sections and performed the song as a round.

Two years ago, we were in lockdown and worrying about getting concerts going and working in choral singing. That worry has really not gone away so Alan said how wonderful it was to be there and singing. What did we do during lockdown? We did rehearsals on Zoom providing social opportunities which was great, but the singing was pretty pathetic. Some recorded voices separately and then put the voices together to create group singing. Alan did some of this and wrote a little song called *Rainbow* which he recorded with members of his family. We rehearsed the song in sections and then did the first performance done all together in the same room at the same time.

As a child he learned to play recorder and found that he liked to write his own tunes but kept forgetting them so discovered blank music sheets which he filled.

He tired of writing for one instrument and eventually Mum and Dad bought a cheap upright piano for him and with piano lessons, away he went. In secondary school he began singing as a treble and ended as a bass. He Went to RCM, then taught music in a Poly.



New music has not been much in demand over the pandemic as choirs are only just getting back to work and updating themselves on their own music.

He did some work on YouTube to get his music out there.

Alan introduced a piece he wrote 20 years ago, *Be Joyful* which he wrote for Group 20 and performed in Ely Cathedral. We practised a section from this work.

Alan showed us a copy of the Oxford Book Of Flexible Songs which he has edited and offers a variety of forms for choral singing,

voices in unison, 2, 3 and 4 parts and piano/organ.

After a break for coffee Alan returned. Having heard that we were going on a boat trip in the afternoon he taught us a four-part round called *Floating Along*. We then practised *Juanita* from the Oxford Book Of Flexible Songs showing us the flexibility of the song.

Alan then told us a little more about his education at RCM. Then he went to Nottingham University then ended up teaching at Colchester Institute.

We then looked at *My Hands I Lift To You* written for his son's wedding. He explained some of how he composed the music, showing when the words speak of lifting hands the tune rises.

We finished with a French folk song and then the oldest song in the book *Sumer Is Icumen In* which, again, is a round. At that point lunch was icumen in.

After lunch we had what has come to be known as our Speed Dating session when five of the trade stands had ten minutes to present their products and services. It is always good to hear this session.

Alan Bullard returned after our coffee break to Talk about cantatas he has composed. *Wondrous Cross* and *O Come Emmanuel* which are available on YouTube.

Another round was taught. 'This is a perfect fifth, this is a perfect fourth, major third, minor third, two semitones and an octave'.

He went on to explain about how he has combined various carols. He did one of these for an American choir, *A Light In The Stable* the Nativity story with the tune based on *Of The Father's Love Begotten*. There is a section which combined two tunes for *Away In A Manger* the American favourite and the English version. Another movement of this piece is based around *Il Est Ne Le Divine Enfant*. The last movement combines *Of The Father's Love Begotten* with *The First Nowell*.

At the end of this very festive talk, we had to leave to go for the coach that would take us to a cruise on Lake Windermere. Now you may wonder why a cruise on the day we have our Gala Concert? You know how it has been recently. It was not possible this year to have a Gala Concert be-

cause there weren't enough choirs able to perform for us. Instead, we had a rather pleasant sail on Windermere and returned for dinner and an evening of talk and tittle.

### 3 April - Tim, Trains... time for home

On Sunday morning we began the day. Post breakfast, with a seminar from our dear friend, Tim Knight. He began by explaining that last year he was asked to stand in for Douglas Combes and had come well prepared. This year he thought he might get Covid at the last minute and Douglas would have to stand in for him, so he hadn't come as well prepared. Of course, he began by showing us a photo of an English Electric railway engine of which he owns a fifth. He went on to explain what he does now as a composer and arranger, a conductor and choral director of three Yorkshire choirs (two of which he founded). He is author of best-selling choir and concert management books. He publishes his own music and that of a number of different composers.

Tim runs a music college in Leeds which is a charity providing music services and education cheaply to take music to disadvantaged people. They currently have 250 people receiving music lessons a week. They go out to schools in some of the most deprived areas renting musical instruments at £1. He also runs Singing Days.

He told us about Francis Jackson, choir-master York Minster, who died last year at

the age of 104. Tim gained entry to York Minster choir by singing *Some Enchanted Evening* when he was six and was influenced by him for a number of years. He only remembered Francis losing his temper and shouting twice. Each time he did he sent out for ice creams for the whole choir so, of course, they always tried to get him worked up. Tim is where he is because of this man.



He told us about his latest book 'Getting The Best From Your Choir', a boxload of tips for choral directors. He wasn't able to bring any copies with him as it was so new, it was not due to be published until 1 May.

Tim explained about bubbling, where an American conductor took his choir and ar-

ranged them in groups of different singers, sopranos, altos, tenors and basses rather than having only one section of each. He ended up with six choirs standing next to each other giving a wonderful 'surround sound'. Tim went through a number of the ideas available in the book and the audience enjoyed many of the fresh ideas and suggestions.

The book is now available and would be well worth the investment of all musical directors.

We then sang the first line of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* in a number of different styles, opera singers, nuns or monks, pirates and George Formby, showing we are capable of singing in many different voices. As Brenda Wilkinson said at the end 'We can always guarantee that we are entertained, we're made to laugh by Tim, and the friendship continues and forever will do.'

After coffee we arrived at a slightly more serious part of conference in the form of the 95<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting at which all the usual things were done and I'm not going to spend time repeating it all. Then followed a Member's Open Forum which discussed what we had done over the weekend. After that those who remained said their farewells and conference closed for another year.

*Crawford*

## Young And Eager

### Churchdown Male Voice Choir – South West - Adrian Law



Jacob aged 5 is very eager to join Churchdown Male Voice Choir. He has a full uniform, including a waistcoat with the choir's emblem on it. His great uncle Colin Acton, with over 50 years' service under his belt, is Jacob's great hero.

The photo was taken on the occasion of the choir's concert on 26 March in aid of the Gloucestershire Hospital Trust's new state of the art scanner.

The only downside to Jacob becoming a

member of the choir in the future is the distance of 60 miles between his home and Churchdown. He has attended several concerts with his parents and grandparents, his first occasion being when he was only a few weeks old.

Perhaps we can persuade his family to move a little nearer.

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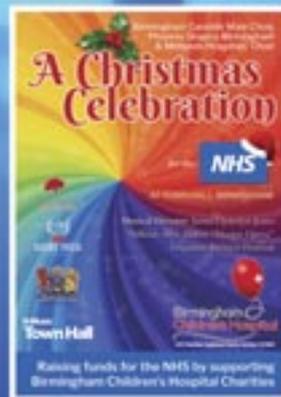
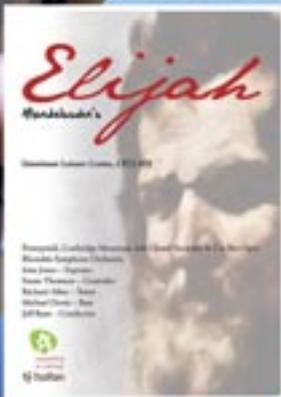
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# Singing together apart

## Banchory Singers – Scotland East - Dave Valentine



From tentative beginnings early in the first COVID lockdown, Banchory Singers went on to make good use of online singing to sustain the choir and add to the learning experience of its members.

Banchory Singers is a community choir, drawing its members from the Aberdeenshire town of Banchory and its rural hinterland. When the first COVID lockdown hit, our musical director, Tara Leiper, was quick to sound us out about continuing to meet and rehearse online using Zoom. Although none of us knew how this might work most of the choir were keen to give it a try. As Tara said herself, she 'was unsure if we would be able to sing together in a meaningful way that would keep the singers' voices toned up and provide musical and social stimulus to keep everyone motivated to attend'. For Tara this was a period of rapid learning using YouTube training and, mostly, trial and error. As every singer now knows (if they didn't before), it is impossible to sing simultaneously online because of the varying time lag experienced as each signal travels over the wires.

In the early weeks we kept our ambitions low whilst we all became familiar with the basic online operation. Tara billed it simply as a 'singalong' and, with some basic pointers on how best to sing each number, we aimed to do no more than

sing some favourite songs in the virtual company of all the little thumbnail screens showing our fellow choir members. Tara provided us with the words and a recorded accompaniment so that we could practise between sessions. In the group sessions she played those tracks, or live keyboard, whilst we muted our microphones and sang along. In spite of lockdown, choir was still a fun part of our week when we could 'give it lalady' to well-known songs like *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, the *Lewis Bridal Song*, *We'll Meet Again*, *Weigenlied*, *Boyce's Alleluia*, *Thank You For The Music*, *Walking Back To Happiness*, and many more.

At the end of most sessions, we would all take off our microphone mutes to sing one last chorus together. The resultant cacophony, caused by the time lags, always reduced us to laughter and we said our farewells with big grins on our faces. A real tonic in those difficult times.

We also wanted to maintain our social connection and adopted a couple of regular interactive features. Each session (we began with two 40-minute sessions a week – yes, the free Zoom option) included a five-minute break when we divided into random breakout rooms of four or five members for a quick 'news' about how we were getting through lockdown; and occasionally members were invited to

take a turn to address the whole choir on a subject of their choice. This way we got to know more choir members than only those we sat beside during pre-lockdown rehearsals. In addition, we heard about people's hobbies, stand out holidays, musical tastes and even life stories. We even had a social night with quizzes and games, again making use of the breakout groups feature, and the drinks and nibbles were always our own choice!

The ranks of our choir swelled at this time as we welcomed singers whose choir had not continued online, ex-choir members who had moved away, and far-flung friends and relations.

By the time summer 2020 arrived we were all quite confident with the technology and the choir committee met with Tara to decide on where to go next. Tara proposed that, as usual we should work towards a Festive Concert at Christmas time but in the knowledge that it would more than likely be a virtual concert. This was agreed, as was an investment in Tara's Zoom subscription so that we could run rehearsals for a whole hour.

Tara had been thinking about the pros and cons of online singing and this is how she put it in a paper she wrote.

'When working on repertoire I use several

practice strategies. The first is leading from the piano and singing/playing a vocal part while the other parts either listen or sing their part against me if they know it well enough. This is great ear training because usually in rehearsals individuals do not have to keep a single line by themselves, but the online platform means that individuals are all singing solo at home. Singing solo at home means there is no team vocal support around the singer, and this can be disconcerting and affect confidence as you get no feedback as to your accuracy, but it does mean you are not under scrutiny and so for some singers they can let go a bit more and really sing out and enjoy and not worry about the sound they make.' (Tara's full paper is available here <https://bit.ly/3xk6WPW> )

It was also clear to us that Tara was putting in a lot of effort to make online singing work. She admitted that it 'was very labour intensive for the MD and more tiring than face to face singing'. It was time for a short break before the concert rehearsals began.

Our autumn term looked more like our usual MO as we worked on the concert repertoire with guide tracks for each part

and rehearsals that were more focused on producing a good sound. A new activity for the choir members was to begin recording their individual contributions to each song. This was quite intimidating for many of us, not being used to hearing ourselves, but we got there. Tara took all the individual tracks and mixed them together with our accompanist's track to produce a recording that reproduced the full choir sound. Several songs were given a video track composed of a slide show of thematically chosen photographs contributed by the members. Others had a recording of us all appearing to sing together on Zoom. A high point was a song, *We Are Stronger Than We Believe*, which Tara composed using quotes from choir members reflecting on how we all made it through lockdown. The Festive Concert was a big success. We sold tickets on Eventbrite and had a large world-wide audience.

After the festive break we went through the same process again to produce another virtual concert in May.

In July of 2021 we had our first get together in over a year – an outdoor rehearsal. This was good fun on a sunny

summer's day, but we realised that it would not be a viable option as autumn wore on. Our eventual solution was to split our weekly two-hour rehearsals doing one, with social distancing and mask wearing, in our usual venue, preceded on another day by a Zoom rehearsal which prepared us to make best use of the short live rehearsal. This worked well and in December we held a single Festive concert with a smaller than usual, mask wearing socially distanced audience. It wasn't back to normal, but it was great to be singing live together.

Carol singing together on Banchory High Street in the rain wasn't quite so great, but we still smiled through it.

Since the new year began, we have returned to two hour, live, socially distanced, indoor rehearsals where individuals choose whether to wear a mask. Now, as our Spring Concert approaches, we feel closer to how it was pre-Covid and are grateful that, thanks to our MD, we were able to find a way to keep together and keep singing through all the challenges and disappointments of lockdown restrictions.

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# Vacancy – Musical Director

## Sonara Singers Midlands East – Anne Eaton

Sonara Singers is an all-female choir based in South Normanton Derbyshire. We practise every Monday, excluding Bank Holidays, at the Post Mill Centre, South Normanton.

We are looking for a new MD who can take us forward post Covid. Although we are now back singing, and enjoying our rehearsals and concerts, our numbers have reduced. However, we are a friendly, and enthusiastic choir. We currently total 36 ladies and are keen to recruit more. The current age range of our singers is from 36 to 84! Our repertoire is eclectic, and we enjoy new challenges, as well as remembering our old

songs. All of our songs are learned and we do not use scripts during concerts.

Candidates should be aware of the role of MD, have MD experience and have an abundance of energy, enthusiasm and drive. We would also need a candidate with excellent communication skills and a sense of humour. Our new MD will help us maintain our present high standards and continue our development.

Remuneration is by an honorarium, currently paid monthly.

Applications, in the form of a CV and

covering letter, should be sent to the Chair – Anne Eaton, at

[anne.eaton.ae@gmail.com](mailto:anne.eaton.ae@gmail.com).

**Closing date for applications is 1 June 2022**

Applicants will be invited to interview, where you will be asked to perform with the choir, as well as having a discussion with key members of the committee.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, via the e-mail above, or on 07521979435 if you have any queries.

# As Long As I Have Music

## The Leaside Singers – Midlands East – Simon Chandler



Fifty years ago a Church Gresley based group called the New Methodist Singers decided that a change of name was required. This was partly to broaden the appeal of the choir and bolster the 17 strong membership but also as an early group concert had featured the compere asking what this 'New Method of Singing' involved, to considerable merriment. Taking the local Maurice Lea Park as an inspiration the Leaside Singers were born.

Some of the first members of that choir still sing with us, including my own parents – Terry, a fellow Tenor, and Christine

Chandler who is currently the head of the choir – and the Wiltons. No doubt some of you will have known Alan Wilton who was a pianist, singer, composer and until his sad death last year, the Musical Director of the choir from the beginning. Unfortunately, many choirs have had similar losses over these difficult pandemic years, and we take their memory with us as we strive to rebuild for the future.

There have been plenty of highlights over the years, from early competition success to the many weddings, Christmas and charity concerts and one trip to Halifax

where their programme described us as 'Internationally Recognised' which might be stretching a point. Up to now our one trip overseas was a well-remembered trip to Pithiviers in France where our various hosts treated us liberally to French cuisine, wine and sunshine in turn for some song. A return trip surely is overdue. We have of course appeared at many concerts with other local and well-known choirs that often appear in these pages, including Gresley Male Voice our near neighbours and the Boundary Singers who share the same practice space as ourselves. The Midlands has long been a well-spring for folk who have a yearning to perform music together and has survived the end of the collieries and potteries that produced so many of them.

History and celebrating friends past and present is forefront in our minds as we practise for our 50 Anniversary concert on the 21 May at the nearby Gresley Old Hall. We have chosen a range of music from across the choir's years, from the early spiritually inspired music such as *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* through Abba and Andrew Lloyd Webber to Westlife. We also consider ourselves very fortunate to be joined by local girl-made-very-good Har-

riet Eyley, who performed with us as she was starting out as a Soprano and has since performed with The Welsh National Opera and even at the Palace. She will be accompanied by talented pianist, Alan Hutchinson, another local talent from Ashby-de-la-Zouch. I think we can say we are as excited to hear them as the paying audience will be.

The choir has been practising hard to do

its part, and all choirs will know how tough it has been to get back into the swing after the enforced absence but being back together has been a real joy. Tears were certainly shed during the first time singing together, and close bonds reformed between people of numerous backgrounds. We would, of course, love some new singers to come and join us for future concerts and events, to bolster the ranks and help us move forward for... well

let's hope for another 50 years at least. More information can be found on our Facebook page or by chatting to one of us at a future event.

Over recent concerts our signature tune has become *As Long As I Have Music* and it sums up being in a choir very well. As long as there's a song for us to sing may there be singing by The Leaside for years to come.

# 158 years and still going strong!

## Tamar Valley Male Voice Choir – Cornwall – Rosemary Cole



Five founder members of Tamar Valley Male Voice Choir, based in Callington, East Cornwall, have amassed 158 years of male voice choir singing between them! What a joy it was, after 2 years of cancelled annual Choir Dinners because of lockdowns and Covid restrictions, to be able to invite the Chairman of the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs, Phil Taylor, to join the choir for dinner and to present long-service certificates to the men involved. And what a surprise it was to them! Covid had to play its part, of course, and one of the five, John Springham was laid low with it and unable to attend.

Chris Leggatt, with 42+ years of male voice choir membership, John Springham, 40+ years, Bob Berry, 30 years, Ray Hinton 26 years and Eric Cruse, 20 years, have all been enjoying practices for concerts far and wide, which have brought in many thousands of pounds for charity.

What is it about male voice choir singing that has kept them all at it for so long? Well, here are some of their thoughts:

Chris: 'The pleasure of singing, both as an individual and to an audience, is immeasurable.'

John: 'I've enjoyed male voice singing for just over 40 years, nonstop!'

Bob: 'I love male voice choir singing; it has taken me all round the world, socializing with both men and women.'

Ray: 'I enjoy the camaraderie and the tingle up my spine when the MD gives us the thumbs up after an excellent performance.'

Eric: 'The camaraderie, the practices, the concerts – I'd be lost without it.'

There are other less obvious benefits too, of course. Singing has definite physical health advantages; it also stimulates the

brain, lowers stress levels, exercises the memory and you can make new friends, travel with the choir, liven up your social life and have fun!

In Tamar Valley Male Voice Choir we have a very supportive Ladies' Group who help at concerts and whenever needed. They are currently rehearsing for one of our in-house choir fun evenings when we all let our hair down. The choir was 16 on St George's Day (23 April) and has been described as 'a family'. We've travelled together throughout the UK and in Europe, singing to raise money for charity – most recently for the crises in Afghanistan and for Ukraine. With Director of Music, Rosemary Cole, Accompanist, David Crocker and Chairman, Charles Westlake, the whole choir is proud to be able to celebrate the loyalty to male voice singing of our long-service members. Long may they continue singing with us!





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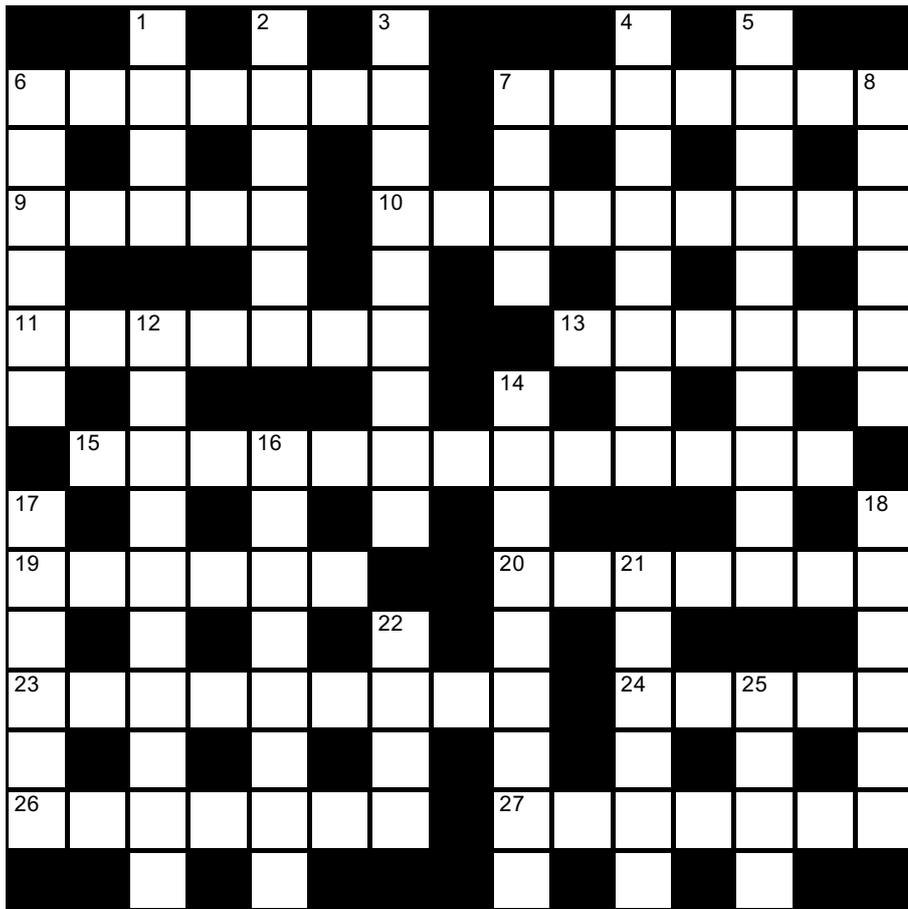
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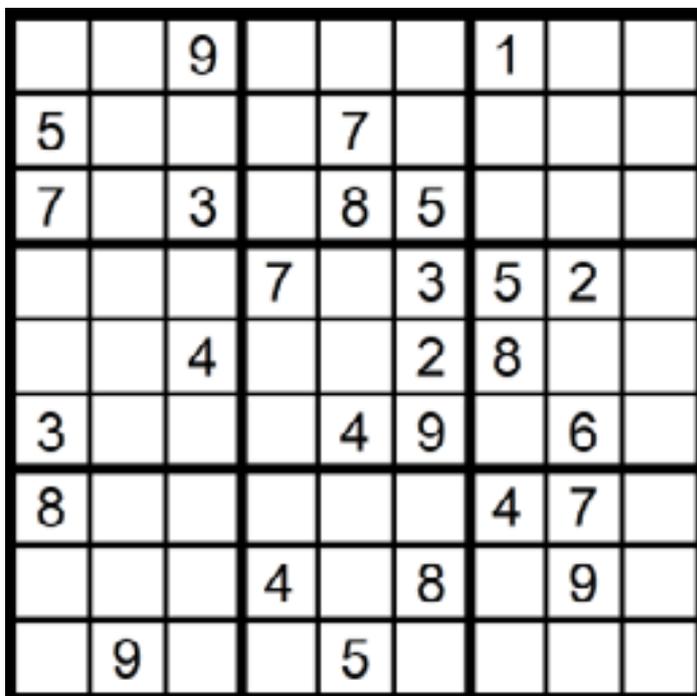


## Across

- 6 Show technical skill (7)
- 7 American car is a convertible caption (7)
- 9 farewell (5)
- 10 Baggage examination (4,5)
- 11 A brilliant solo passage can daze potentially (7)
- 13 Peculiar looking red vat may promote a product (6)
- 15 A dealer in supplies for vessels (5,8)
- 19 Failed to hit again (6)
- 20 Atheist (7)
- 23 Not a vowel (9)
- 24 Prominant side (5)
- 26 Tease or mix a dusty purplish pink colour (7)
- 27 A woman plaintiff (7)

## Down

- 1 Sage (4)
- 2 Season of mists (6)
- 3 Unlikely success somehow can't chafe (3,6)
- 4 Not reversible (3-5)
- 5 Front man on the bow of a sailing vessel (10)
- 6 Turn pale (6)
- 7 No longer current (4)
- 8 Writing in code
- 12 Make mechanical or routine (10)
- 14 What's it worth? (9)
- 16 Rustic music? (8)
- 17 Sounds like a more disgusting merchant (6)
- 18 Sounds like a fee for wrongdoing (6)
- 21 What a laugh (6)
- 22 Gape turns a new leaf (4)
- 25 Not yours (4)



**SOLUTIONS  
PAGE 19**

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# Oh, what a night!

## Bestwood Male Voice Choir - Midlands East - Peter Fletcher



The choir was delighted to be back singing live on Saturday 12 March with a Spring Concert at Hucknall Central Methodist Church, celebrating the life and legacy of the Choir's founder, Len Hogg.

The concert was a huge success, with a capacity audience and raised £1,300 which was donated in full to the fund for 7-year-

old Leila Hallam, from Calverton who has rhabdomyosarcoma, a rear life threatening children's cancer. The fund was originally formed to take Leila and her family to Disneyland but having already passed the target of £20,000, the family have decided to donate any additional money to the Rhabdomyosarcoma Clinical Trial.

Only a week before the event, the choir was concerned that ticket sales were quite low, but word soon got round and on the night it was wonderful to see the church packed out. With the Ukrainian flag respectfully draped over the compere's rostrum, the concert got off to a very emotional start with everyone standing as the Ukraine National Anthem was played over the church's sound system.

After a long enforced 'Covid break', the audience showed tremendous appreciation for Bestwood MVC's repertoire with some old favourites including the *Lord's Prayer*, *Take me home* and the appropriate and ever popular *What Would I Do Without My Music?*. Under Musical Director, Mirek Rus and with accompanist, Philip Miles making his debut concert performance, new items

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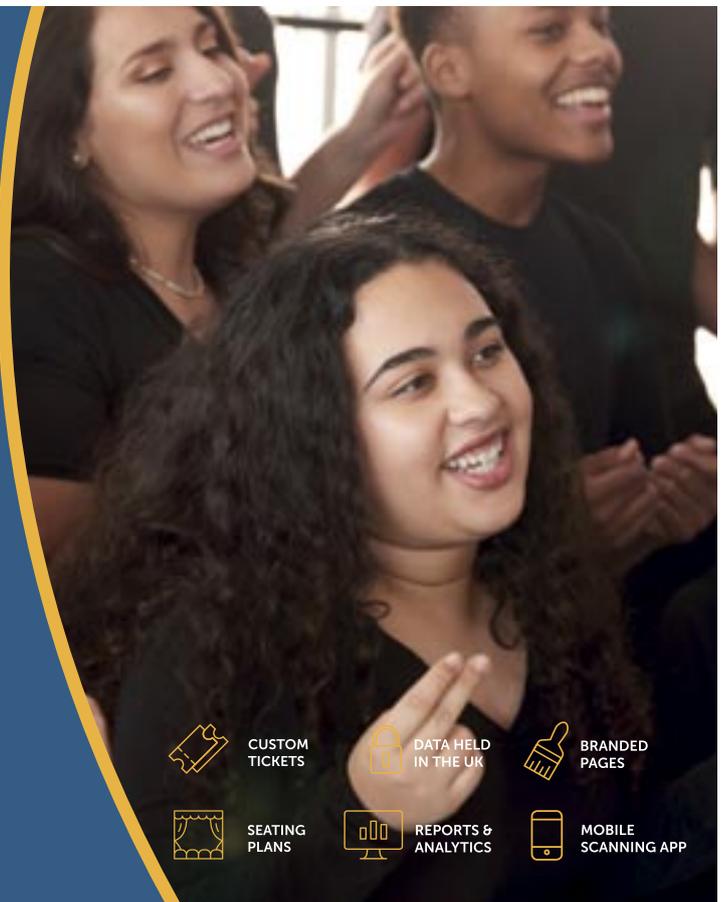
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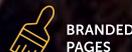
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such as *The Fields Of Athenry*, *Shine* and *The Water Is Wide* were also included.

As if that was not enough and adding, lovely contrasting voices, Bestwood MVC was joined for this special occasion by the wonderful Rolls-Royce Ladies Choir from Derby, under their Musical Director, Christine Hunt, and accompanied by their pianist, John Lord.

Holding the whole evening together with his usual brand of humour, jokes and one liners was Bestwood MVC's President, Comper and member of the baritone section, John Pritchard. It was also John



who suggested that the proceeds from the concert should go towards Leila Hallam's charity, which was boosted by both choirs and Hucknall Central Methodist Church very generously waiving their fees.

If any men are interested in joining Bestwood MVC, they are always looking for new members of any age and would welcome anyone interested on Tuesday evenings, 7.30 - 9.30 at Bestwood Village Community Centre or visit

[www.bestwoodmvc.org.uk](http://www.bestwoodmvc.org.uk)

for more information.

# Oh, what another night!

## Bestwood Male Voice Choir - Midlands East - Peter Fletcher



On Sunday 1 May six East Midlands Male Voice Choirs made up a massed choir of 135 singers to perform a unique concert at St Paul's Church, Daybrook in aid of the crisis in Ukraine. Bestwood MVC were joined by Carlton MVC, Mansfield & District MVC, Radcliffe-on-Trent MVC, Sandiacre MVC and South Notts Men's Chorus, together with guest mezzo-soprano soloist Katherine Dryden for this extremely successful event. However, unfortunately owing to a number of positive covid tests Eastwood Collieries MVC had to sadly withdraw from the event at the eleventh hour.

The concert got off to an emotional start with both the choirs and the audience joining together to sing the Ukrainian National Anthem and closed with our own National Anthem, followed by a blessing from the Revd Jacqueline Bull, Vicar of St Paul's. The concert programme included a number of audience participation pieces, including *Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer*, *I Vow To Thee My Country*, *Oh Danny Boy*, *Jerusalem*, *Imagine* and *How Great Thou Art* and *O Lord My God*.

The almost full house audience of around 170 showed their appreciation with extremely enthusiastic applause and dona-

tions, with the concert raising over £3,000 towards the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Fund. Many of the audience complimented the professionalism of the choirs for coming together as a massed choir at such short notice without prior joint rehearsals.

At the end of the evening Mirek Rus, Musical Director of the organising Bestwood MVC, thanked the other MDs, soloist, accompanists, audience and in particular the team from St Paul's Church for their wonderful hospitality and generous provision of interval refreshments.

For those unable to attend the concert, donations can still be made at the Just Giving page <https://bit.ly/3Khvg8D>

# 100 years of singing 1922-2022

Biddulph Male Voice Choir - Midlands North - Ian Barber



Our choir was founded in May 1922 by brothers Edward and Thomas Roberts, local builders, who sang in their local Methodist church choir in Station Road, Biddulph. The choir members were all drawn from the local area and comprised of miners, potters, and steel workers, many of whom sang in church choirs. Although male voice choir singing was nothing new, this was the only choir in the Biddulph area at the time. These were hard times just after the Great War, and it's thought that many joined a male voice choir to rediscover the feelings of friendship, fellowship, and camaraderie missing in their lives since the end of the war. These feelings are still so important today and are found in abundance in all male voice choirs.



The Choir's logo, adopted in 1993, features the local landmark Mow Cop Castle and the Staffordshire Knot, both symbols of the steadfastness and stability of North Staffordshire, which like the choir has weathered the years and withstood the test of time. The Staffordshire Knot dates from 750-850 AD, and is the heraldic badge of the 'Stafford' family who, through Morag, Lady Stafford, approved its use by the choir. It remains unconfirmed that the initial purpose of the knot was to enable the Sherriff to hang three criminals in one go.

With the choir formed, Ed became its first conductor until he was tragically killed in a

road accident on 9 July 1924. His brother Tom then succeeded him in the role and the following year led the choir to its first award, top prize at the 'Wesleyan Eisteddfod' in Talke, Stoke-on-Trent, deposing the choir who had won the championship for the previous four years running – some achievement. Tom continued in his role as conductor for a further fourteen years when in 1937 a rift in the affairs of the choir led him to being replaced by Tom Johnson.



During the years 1937-1957 the choir expanded considerably and achieved much success in both competition and concert hall. It is recorded that between 1939 and 1949, the choir gave a legendary 390 concerts to raise funds for 'Forces Comforts' and aids to charities. Numerous broadcasts were also made, nine London theatre concerts were given, and the choir represented Staffordshire at a choral festival at Harringay, London, in 1947. The choir was 'Congratulated not only for the way it had kept together during the difficult war years, but even more so for its sustained efforts on behalf of local charities... its services are in constant demand'.



In the years that followed, the choir's fortunes declined with the changes in the pattern of public entertainment and tastes. The spirit of fellowship which is so much a feature of any choir must have been sorely tested, but the choir managed to hold together over the next twelve years in spite

of having no less than eight conductors and a membership of less than twenty.

In 1969 a local music teacher Gwenda Jones was persuaded to fill in the conductor's job on a temporary basis. This she agreed to do and stayed with the choir until her retirement in 2013! Under her leadership the choir's membership rose to over eighty members.

There then followed a 'purple patch' for the choir during which they were regularly performing twenty concerts a year. In 1970 the choir started to present an annual concert series at the prestigious Victoria Hall in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent which ran for over forty years. These concerts saw the choir sharing the stage with some of the most prestigious military and civilian bands in the UK.



From 1976 the choir enjoyed concert tours to several European countries including Italy, Germany, Holland, Norway, Switzerland and Austria and enjoyed considerable success in many competitions including a third place at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. The choir also organized and ran a successful music festival attracting musicians and choirs from around the UK.

Following the resignation of Gwenda Jones after more than forty years, the choir appointed local musician, Daniel Keen as musical director in 2013 and continued with its regular concert programme including singing at the Anglo Welsh Festival of Choirs at St David' Hall in Cardiff and at Birmingham Town Hall.

In 2017 the choir appointed Anthony



Marks as its musical director, following Daniel's resignation, and under his guidance the choir continues to flourish having performed again in Cardiff in 2018 and being engaged for many concerts lo-

cally, raising considerable sums for charity.

Like so many more, the choir was silenced during the Covid pandemic and the following lockdowns, and sadly lost several

members to illness during this time. However, the choir is now back to full face to face rehearsals and preparing for what appears to be a very busy Centenary Year of concerts, including a memorial concert for those choristers who sadly died during the pandemic. The highlight of the year will be the Centenary concert in September when we will again be sharing the stage with one of the UK's top brass bands.

Given the fact that more popular music is now being arranged for male voice choirs, and that people now appear to be slowly returning to live performances, the choir is looking forward to the future, and possibly another '100 years of singing'.

# Pre-dinner entertainment

## The Glasgow Phoenix Choir - Scotland West - Anne Kay

The choir's first engagement of 2022 took place in the Merchants' House of Glasgow when we provided some pre-dinner entertainment at the inaugural dinner hosted by the Lord Dean, May Storrie, who is a great supporter of the choir. Although we only sang for about 30 minutes, choir members were elated to be singing in public to an appreciative audience. Cameron, our conductor, was also very pleased with the choir's sound, which he'd been having some difficulty judging as we had been adhering to socially distanced rehearsals in a large, airy church.

Our next event and first proper concert of the year was in late April and was one that we'd spent most of this year's rehearsals preparing for. Usually, in the spring, we perform a concert in the main hall of Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Two years ago, we had intended to sing for the first time in the new auditorium at the concert hall which belongs to the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Sadly, that event was cancelled because of you-all-know-what. The new auditorium has been described as 'acoustically perfect'. Though none of us was quite clear what that might mean, the experience in the smaller hall was wonderful. The sound was vibrant and clear, and it felt like an easy space to sing in. Our accompanist for the concert was the multi-talented Gordon Cree and our special guest was mezzo-soprano Cheryl Forbes.

The concert programme was very varied and included sacred music, Scots' songs, spirituals, modern, international and easy listening music. The audience gave every appearance of thoroughly enjoying everything that we threw at them. Cheryl sang four sets within the programme and had chosen a perfect selection to link up with our own items. And what a voice! Not only was Cheryl's singing, in her beautiful, rich voice amazing to hear, but her performance of each song was superb.

While our programme included some old favourites, Cameron had mixed in a good selection of revived pieces from our existing repertoire as well as a range of music that was completely new to the choir. The newest piece though, was commissioned by the choir to celebrate our platinum anniversary - *Opening* - composed and arranged by our Honorary President, Bob Chilcott. The words were written by his regular collaborator, Charles Bennett, whose award-winning poetry has been published to wide acclaim. The words celebrate the start of something new, with emphasis on the change from winter darkness to the light and hope of spring. It offers a great analogy for the reopening of all the things that have been so affected over the last two years with its key message of hope for the future. *Opening* is a joy to sing, and its premiere received a rapturous welcome from the audience.

I'm sure many choirs will add it to their repertoire in future years. We are very grateful to The Provincial Grand Lodge of Glasgow for sponsoring this composition and we are especially grateful to Cameron for all his hard work in preparing us for the entire concert and for the first public performance of *Opening*.

Looking ahead, on Saturday, 7 May, the choir will be singing in the glorious surroundings of Paisley Abbey. The concert is in aid of ACCORD hospice. This year, ACCORD is celebrating 40 years of providing palliative and end of life care to people living with or affected by a life limiting illness in Renfrewshire and parts of East Renfrewshire. A compassionate approach supports patients and their families in the community, at home, and in the hospice. A great cause that we are honoured to support.

At the end of May we will be undertaking our first tour since September 2019, when we visit the beautiful Isle of Skye for a three night stay and three concerts in various venues across the island. Our last visit in May 2019 was a great success and we are looking forward to this return trip. The final public event of the season will take us to Bannockburn to sing in a concert to raise funds for Ukrainian refugees. Unusually, we have been asked to participate in a private event in July – a wedding in the beautiful Scottish countryside. Sadly, we don't get to wear our posh hats – ah, well!

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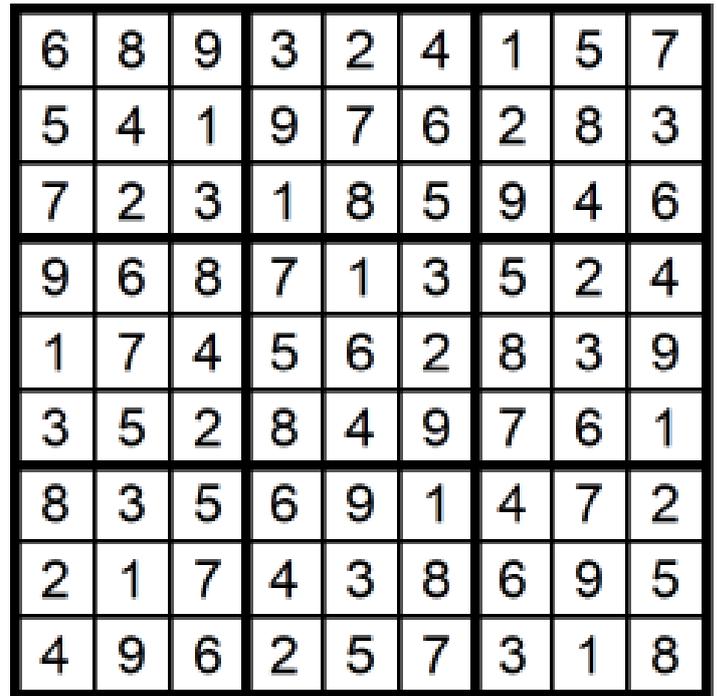
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- Start with the name of your choir.
- Then the NAC group your choir is in.
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