

NEWS & VIEWS



233 SUMMER 2024



A Choir With Community At Its Heart
Decibellas



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A business of Marsh McLennan

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Crawford's Corner

Publications Officer - Bob Swallow



I'm sitting at my computer on a warm and sunny Sunday in early May thinking, what should I be writing in Crawford's Corner for the Summer issue of News & Views?

It is really helping that, at last, we have a day that feels as if summer is on the way. As our Chairman has pointed out, writing below, there are many choirs, in recent days, celebrating major anniversaries for their choirs. I thank them so much for sending in their histories. What wonderful times they have passed through and, hopefully, will continue with into the future.

Isn't it wonderful to celebrate our accompanists and their continuing hard work with our choirs. I was so pleased to put that picture on page 7 of Elizabeth Ellis taking a breather and to read of all the fantastic things she has done with her

'family, Brythoniaid Cor Meibion Y.

It's great to hear that Steeton MVC are in a film. What memories must that keep in store for their future.

One of the things I am always looking for when thinking about News & Views, is where is there a great picture for the front cover. It is always a problem because most photographs I receive are in landscape form. This is because all pictures of choirs are lengthways. It makes it difficult, because, I don't want to chop off the singers at either end. That's not fair, and as a singer in the first tenors with my choir, I was always towards the end. I also remember that as a young man I gained my Queen's Badge, together with two friends in The Boys Brigade and, when we had our photographs taken with the Mayor of Hull, I was standing at the end and had not made sure I was shoulder to shoulder with my friend. The photograph appeared in the Hull Daily Mail with me cut off and

I was mentioned beneath as 'Robert Swallow also received an award'. This memory from my past has made me sensitive to 'cutting people off'. When I got an image from Decibellas of their choristers, I thought, 'what a cracking image for the front cover' and didn't feel too guilty about the two blonde ladies I had to trim off the picture as their faces were out of focus and would not be recognisable. I hope you agree it is a great picture.

I am pleased that the conference went well and only a little disappointed to be missing out on conference for the first time in many years. My thanks to Pete Carlyon who sent me a report of what happened 'at sea' and I hope everyone who went had a good time.

Now read on and remember, if you want to make the front page send Crawford a picture the right way up.

Chairman's Chat

NAC Chairman - Brenda Wilkinson



This edition of our magazine certainly has an uplift feel about it with anniversary celebrations taking place and the tentacles of the pandemic fading more and more, leaving space for excitement and forward planning.

Change is the only constant and over the years I have said that choirs have to be mindful of their audiences and embrace new music for them to enjoy, and guess what, the choir reports in this edition prove that it's happening. There is a lot of

new music out there worthy of exploration and this time the concentration has been on upper voices, but I'm sure the other voice parts will be catered for next time.

The NAC's legacy fund was presented earlier this year and we are starting with a training and development day aimed at choral directors, and you can read all about it on page 6.

Two years ago, I signed the contract for this year's conference on board MS Bquette and was really excited about it but ended up not being able to be with you. To say I was upset is an understatement, but everyone said that they enjoyed

themselves and that's what really matters. We are back on dry land for 2025 in the Leeds/Wakefield area.

We have very few youth/junior choirs in our membership and really, they should be nurtured because they are our future. There is an article and a link about a book A Young Person's Guide to Vocal Health which is a shortlist finalist in the Music & Drama Education Awards 2024. And on the subject of voices, Tim Knight has published his 49 *Tips to your Singing Voice*.

Have a wonderful summer of music making.

Music Review Summer 2024

Liz Moulder - Music Review Officer



Having retired a few years ago as an MD of a ladies' choir after thirty years in the post, it has been delightful to research and study the continuing stream of new compositions that are now available for the upper voices. But I offer no apology for beginning with a composition by Alan Bullard in 2009, *Tread Softly*. Published by OUP, this little gem is a lovely setting of Yeats' poem, 'He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'. It needs attention to vowels and secure, even tonal quality and requires all singers to listen to each other throughout. Beginning with a beautiful unison melodic line it gradually builds up through two, three and finally four parts. The melody moves through a combination of subtle passing modulations harmonised by lower voices then with a floating descant. A contrasting triplet melodic line is introduced before quietly ending on the feeling of a pedal bass which leads to a four part chordal finale. A gentle accompaniment supports throughout as the parts gently decrescendo into the distance. You will not be disappointed.

My second choice is Bob Chilcott's *Remember Me* published in 2012. This was

written in response to the tragedy on the island of Utoya in Norway when 68 young people lost their lives in 2011. It is a setting of Christina Rossetti's poem. The close harmony SSA arrangement is a joy to learn and the contrasting modulation along with the change from three part to unison singing all adds to the overall effect. Like the Alan Bullard, the piano accompaniment is subtle and atmospheric whilst allowing the voices to express the words unhindered. And it comes with sign language instructions. I have performed this as well as conducted it, and believe me, the sign language becomes an integral part of the performance.

Full of the Moon composed in 2015 for SSAA is an incredible, atmospheric piece reflecting the composer, Christopher Gunnings' background of film and TV music. (Look him up, you will be impressed). This is available in both printed and digital format from Banks Music Publications and if you want a challenge, this is it, but it will be so much fun! Excellent diction is imperative and a variety of sound vocal skills to interpret the words required throughout. From staccato to glissandos, tonal colour on the 'yowls', to the ability to sing pianissimo, your choir will learn so much from studying it. Take it steady and enjoy

every moment of it. And when you are ready to perform this piece, it will be well worth it to see the effect it will have on your audience. I wish I still had an upper voice choir.

Instrument of Peace published through Cypress Choral Music is composed by Kelly Marie Murphy. An SSA arrangement, the words are a setting of a St Francis of Assisi prayer. The opening is sung in close harmony gently moving along until a sudden poco accelerando, fortissimo section, with interesting rhythmic variety, modulation and tempo changes gives a climax which then gently subsides before a pause allows for a gentle two bar finale allowing the listener to focus on the words of the last phrase 'Make me an instrument of peace'. A useful piece for so many occasions.

And to finish with, hot of the press in early April was Tim Knight's *49 Tips to your better singing voice*. Part of a series of 'little books' this straightforward manual is useful for those with little knowledge of how the voice works and how to look after and get the most from it. This will be followed by *49 Tips to help you choose what to sing*, which will be released in the last week of April. Priced at £5 they are available from www.timknightmusic.com

NAC Legacy Funding

Liz Moulder

The spring 2024 issue of News and Views saw the launch of our legacy funding initiative for choirs and their MDs. Available as a loan, grant or part funding, money is available to support members in developing their knowledge and expertise in shared experiences with like-minded choirs. Queries are welcome so don't hesitate to get in touch. Also, please check the spring edition for further information and the application form.

You may also have noticed posters on the NAC Facebook page advertising Dr Edward-Rees Harry's musical directors' workshop in Reading on 6 July. Edward has written an article giving further information and participants will gain so much from his expertise and knowledge, shared in a gentle, supportive manner. There are also places for observers; this is an opportunity not to be missed.



Training And Development Day

Edward Rhys-Harry



In an exciting development, the NAC is supporting a training and development day for choral conductors, led by Dr Edward-Rhys Harry.

Edward has many years of experience working with and mentoring choral conductors of all ages and experience all over the world and is known for his insightful, and sensitive coaching, as well as his impish sense of humour!

The day will focus on smaller works for mixed (SATB) choirs by composers such as Gibbons, Pergolesi, Martines, Mozart, Finzi, Tallis and Bruckner - with participating conductors able to choose from the list of works provided beforehand. The day is designed for conductors of all abilities and experiences and that's not all! The conductors who sign up will be working with a supportive and encouraging choir – The Harry Ensemble –

www.harryensemble.com.

Edward will mentor the conductors for the day in a workshop environment with the choir of some 35 members – a wonderful opportunity - in a day that promises fun, laughter, trying things out, but also learning and inspiring confidence in each conductor (and observer) who takes part.

Edward said, 'I am really looking forward to working with the conductors who sign up for this. It really does promise to be fun, encouraging and hopefully developmental for all of us and how often do we get the chance to work with choirs that aren't our own? If you are reading this and would like to take part but feel somewhat daunted, please know that I believe days like this should be supportive and positive – and I know the choir feels the same way. So don't delay – we'd love to meet you, sign up today!' For more information about Edward visit his website: www.edwardrhys-harry.com.

Official observer places are also available for those curious to understand how training and development for conductors is delivered but do not wish to take part as conductors.

This is a new opportunity for conductors, assistant/deputy conductors or even 'sometimes' conductors to learn new or develop existing music direction skills for the betterment of our rehearsals and those singers we lead so we hope that the limited places will fill up quickly!

Lunch not provided.

Places are limited so if you think this is something you'd like to do, please do contact the following to book:

webmaster@nationalassociationofchoirs.org.uk

Event date:

Saturday, 06 July 2024 -
10:30am to 5:00pm
(with breaks including a lunch break)

Ticket Prices:

Conductors: £90,
you pay £25 after subsidy by NAC
Legacy Fund.
Observers: £25
you pay £15 after subsidy by NAC
Legacy Fund.

Location:

Wesley Methodist Church
Queens Road
Reading RG1 4BW
Berkshire
United Kingdom



Elizabeth Ellis

Brythoniaid Cor Meibion Y - Wales N/Cheshire W - Phillip Jones



After every concert all choirs love to hear and read lovely comments as to how well they have sung etc but rarely does the accompanist get a mention. And where would we be without them. The Brythoniaid Choir from Blaenau Ffestiniog in North Wales is no exception. In 2024 the choir will be celebrating 60 years of existence since its formation by a local man, Meirion Jones, reaching the heights of 110 members in the 70s and 80s to more manageable 75 members today.



The second milestone, however, is in a way, more remarkable and it involves the choir's accompanist, Elizabeth Ellis who this year celebrates 40 years of uninterrupted service to the choir. Elizabeth, born

in the Rhondda Valley, lived in various parts of Wales, the family moving due to Elizabeth's father being a Fire Officer before arriving in Dolgellau where he became Meirioneth's Chief Fire Officer. At 15 years of age Elizabeth won the Sheila Mossman Prize after attaining the highest marks in the country for a grade 8 practical piano exam, quite a feat. Having graduated from the Royal College of Music where she won the Chapell Prize for her aptitude on the piano, Elizabeth went on a musical journey which saw her play as a soloist all over Europe, Russia and appearances in the United States.

In 1984 whilst on a summer break in Dolgellau she took a part time job with the Meirioneth Tourism Office in Dolgellau and during a quiet period in one of the local museums she had music copies in front of her when in walked the afore mentioned Meirion Jones who instantly saw the music and invited Elizabeth to his choirs next rehearsal to 'try out' and the rest, as they say, is history.

Elizabeth has travelled extensively with the choir playing in the great concert halls the length and breadth of the country and beyond. She has visited Buckingham Palace on two separate occasions. In 1992 she was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal College of Music.

Although Liz has had many memorable events with the choir she remembers two

in particular. In 1996 performing with the superb Breton Folk artist, Alan Stivell, before a crowd of 10,000 people whilst in Lorient at the Interceltique Music Festival. The second, more unique event was performing with the choir at the famous Festival N° 6 in Portmeirion, North Wales, for seven years on the trot, singing cover versions of songs from The Pet Shop Boys, Chic, Manic Street Preachers and Rag'N'Boneman to huge audiences at unique locations. She views the choir as her 'family' and has been through good and bad times with them but the friendship and singing continues. Thank you, Elizabeth.



We are sure that all choirs would wish to say a huge thank you to all accompanists for their professionalism and support. We couldn't do it without them.

Facing Difficulties

Steeton Male Voice Choir – Yorkshire N and E - Ian McDonald



In the Autumn Edition of the magazine, News And Views, I noted our Chair, Brenda Wilkinson, is alluding to the difficulties some choirs are facing. We too are aware that local choirs have folded, and picked up news from England and Wales that some Male Voice Choirs have folded and are declining or amalgamating. We even heard of a famously prestigious Welsh Choir being in difficulties.

I thought other choirs might be interested in our recent developments as we tried to face up to the issues of declining numbers and the age profile increasing.

Over five years ago we decided to act on the advice being offered by Tim Knight, the MD from Leeds MVC. He provided extensive ideas on planning ahead and making changes for a changing world. We were aware that there are more people singing in Community Choirs and 'Rock' choirs and the like but that men were not particularly being attracted to MVCs.

Our then MD left the choir, and we took the opportunity to try and tackle the issue of MVCs presenting as 'Male, Pale and Stale' as outlined by Tim.

We advertised for a new MD but with the clear remit of planning for a changed future. We wanted to refresh the repertoire, our 'look' and concert programme to appeal to a wider audience and hopefully attract younger singers. At the same time, we did not want to 'throw the baby out with bath water' and wanted to retain el-

ements of traditional MVC singing. Most of our concerts are now joint ventures with a range of solo artists including a well known Jazz Sax player, a classical violinist, community choirs, guest MVCs, bands and school groups.

Whilst we were underway with all this, we were approached by a film company to provide a 'chorus' for a film called 'Ilkley' (starring Derek Jacobi and Roger Allam amongst others). This film was to be in the style of Greek play, and it was a dark comedy. We duly got involved in it and it involved a considerable amount of time and effort by about fifteen of our guys. There were plans for the choir to travel to London for the Premiere and other events, but Covid struck.

The film was eventually released on streaming services but in a very much reduced format and was retitled as 'Say Your Prayers'. It was shown locally in small cinemas, and I think it is still available on Prime.

However I also had a lengthy conversation with the director Harry Mitchell (over a pint!) and was discussing the idea of how a MVC could form the basis of a comedy/drama series in the style of Jimmy McGovern's 'The Street'. Acknowledging that all MVCs have an eclectic mix of characters from diverse backgrounds I felt it could be the basis of a drama series or even a documentary. The director was taken with the documentary idea and set about making one. He interviewed several

of us before the pandemic and afterwards came back to do some scenes of us recording and interviewed the MD.

We had almost forgotten about it all, but he contacted us recently to tell us it was completed. and was being considered for some Film Festivals.

I think it does a great job of making clear the realities facing all MVCs and is very enjoyable. It is not very long (13 minutes) but is very effective and worth a watch.

Anyone could watch it on the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/user28324352/canningforever?share=copy>

or : on our website (Steeton Male Voice Choir)

It is difficult to formally assess the impact of our changes but what I can tell you all is that we recovered our numbers to pre-covid levels (having lost five or six members) and have attracted some younger men including one 29 year old! We have 5 new recruits just in recent months and they are really enjoying it. We are hoping to use the documentary to further aid recruitment.

We acknowledge that we will never get back to our numbers of 15 to 20 years ago, but we have a decent sized choir with 50+ on our books and we appear to be in relatively good heart.

Food for thought.

A Choir With Community At Its Heart

Decibellas – Wales North/Cheshire West – Helen Arnold

Way back in 2009, a group of women from Tarporley, a sleepy town in Cheshire, met up to discuss starting a choir. Up until then, anyone keen to sing had to travel many miles for a choir – often difficult for women with a full-time job and a family to run. So, in January 2010 a group of around 30 women from the local community and with a love for singing, gathered at the local primary school one Thursday night. Decibellas was born with its motto of 'sing with all your heart'.

After just a handful of rehearsals, experienced local accompanist and talented pianist, David Bird, joined us and he is still our accompanist today. Around ten of our founding members still sing with Decibellas and they remember that our first performance was at an open-air concert in Tarporley alongside other acts, in support of our local church tower appeal. We sang one song, namely ABBA's *Mamma Mia* in three parts. How we have progressed since then!

Decibellas has grown into a non-auditioned choir of nearly 80 upper voices between the ages of 30 and 85. We are still based in Tarporley, Cheshire, but 40% of our singers come from villages all over the county. Our repertoire caters to a wide range of tastes - including musical theatre, pop favourites, secular and spiritual pieces - under the baton of Musical Director, Marcus Williams, who has been with us since 2016.

We hold two ticketed concerts a year in the beautiful St Boniface Church in Bunbury, Cheshire in July and December, our run only halted by the Covid19 pandemic. During the pandemic we marked our tenth anniversary; unfortunately celebrations in-person had to be postponed to January 2022 when we invited the legendary Bob Chilcott to a workshop for Decibellas members and singers in the wider community.

Decibellas is a choir for whom charity in the community, alongside our love for making music, has always been at our



core. Over the years, we have raised thousands of pounds in aid of charities such as local church appeals, Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, Teenage Cancer Trust, The Hospice of the Good Shepherd, Slavery International, St Luke's Hospice, Save the Children, Sightsavers, Northern Lights charity, Mind and DKMS blood cancer charity.

In January 2022, our own charity application was accepted, formalising our commitment to supporting other charities and providing a public benefit to our members and the wider community. Since then we have given grants of £7,000 to children's mental health charities such as Visyon, Platform for Life and Motherwell and several local community charities including OPAL, Fallen Angels and church charities.

Alongside our ticketed events, we also sing at all sorts of other events too. For several years, we have been invited to sing at St Luke's Hospice's Light Up A Life memorial event in Winsford, Cheshire at Christmas and in 2022 we were thrilled to be part of The Platinum Proms at Chester

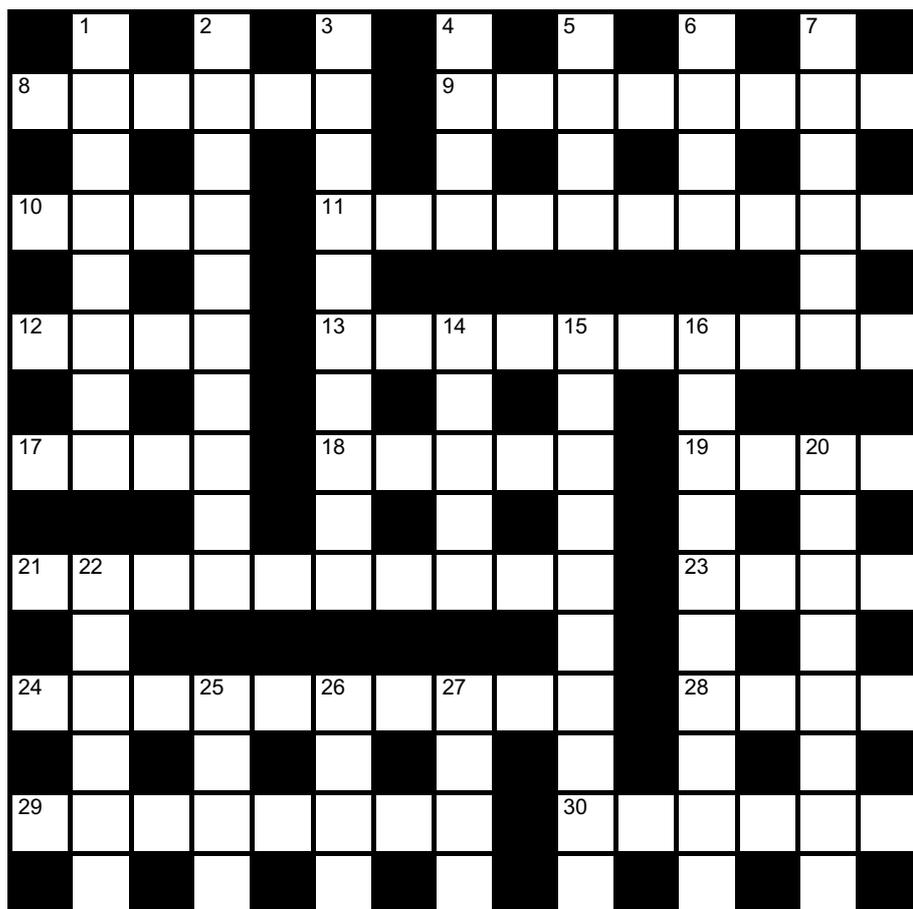
Cathedral to celebrate the late Queen Elizabeth II's Jubilee. Also in 2022, we performed at the inauguration of the High Sheriff of Cheshire, Jeannie France-Hayhurst, a Decibella herself and part of the Soprano 2 section.

In fact, not only do we sing in Cheshire, we have taken the choir on tour to the Amalfi Coast in Italy in 2016 and to Budapest in Hungary in 2018. Our latest international tour was to Sicily at Eastertime this year, where we sang in the Basilica in Syracuse and in Sicilian towns, Acireale and Taormina.

Decibellas is a non-auditioned choir with a waiting list! Our numbers are controlled by the number of singers we can fit on our concert risers but we continue to improve as a choir and as a team. Each year we strive to support our community with grants and with local performances, keeping music-making and community at the heart of what we do.

Further information from: Helen Arnold, Marketing for Decibellas T: 07857 284498

PUZZLE PAGE

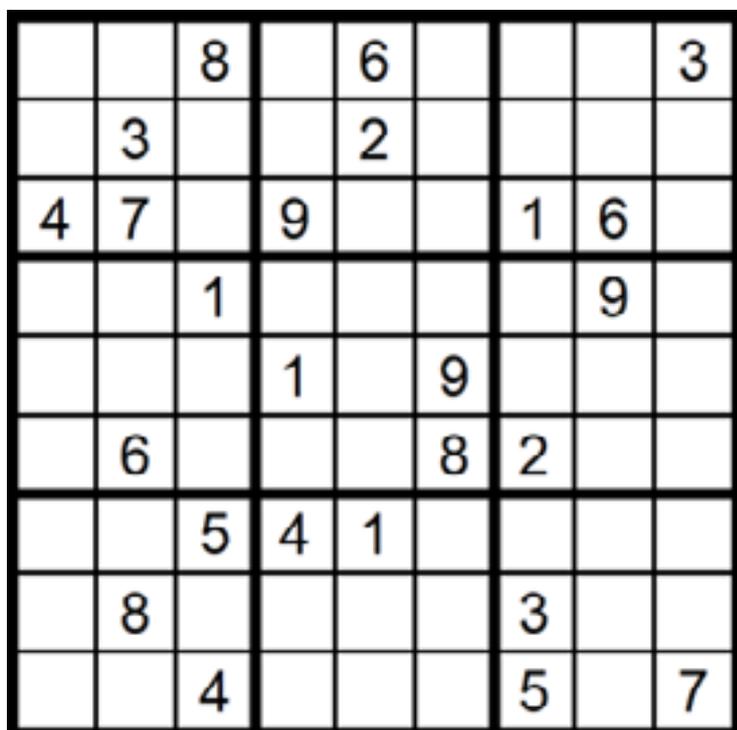


Across

- 8 Good king Henry (6)
- 9 Related to a particular area (8)
- 10 A sort of salamander (4)
- 11 A written record a sprint cart translated (10)
- 12 Coffin that sounds like booze (4)
- 13 Middle water splashes (6,4)
- 17 Get together what sounds like a drain (4)
- 18 Seasoned juices (5)
- 19 A mixed up male might limp (4)
- 21 A good place for alcohol (3-7)
- 23 Suspend and let drop (4)
- 24 Knicknamed John stabbed (10)
- 28 Catch sight of (4)
- 29 Become calm (5,3)
- 30 Cleopatra's sewing equipment (6)

Down

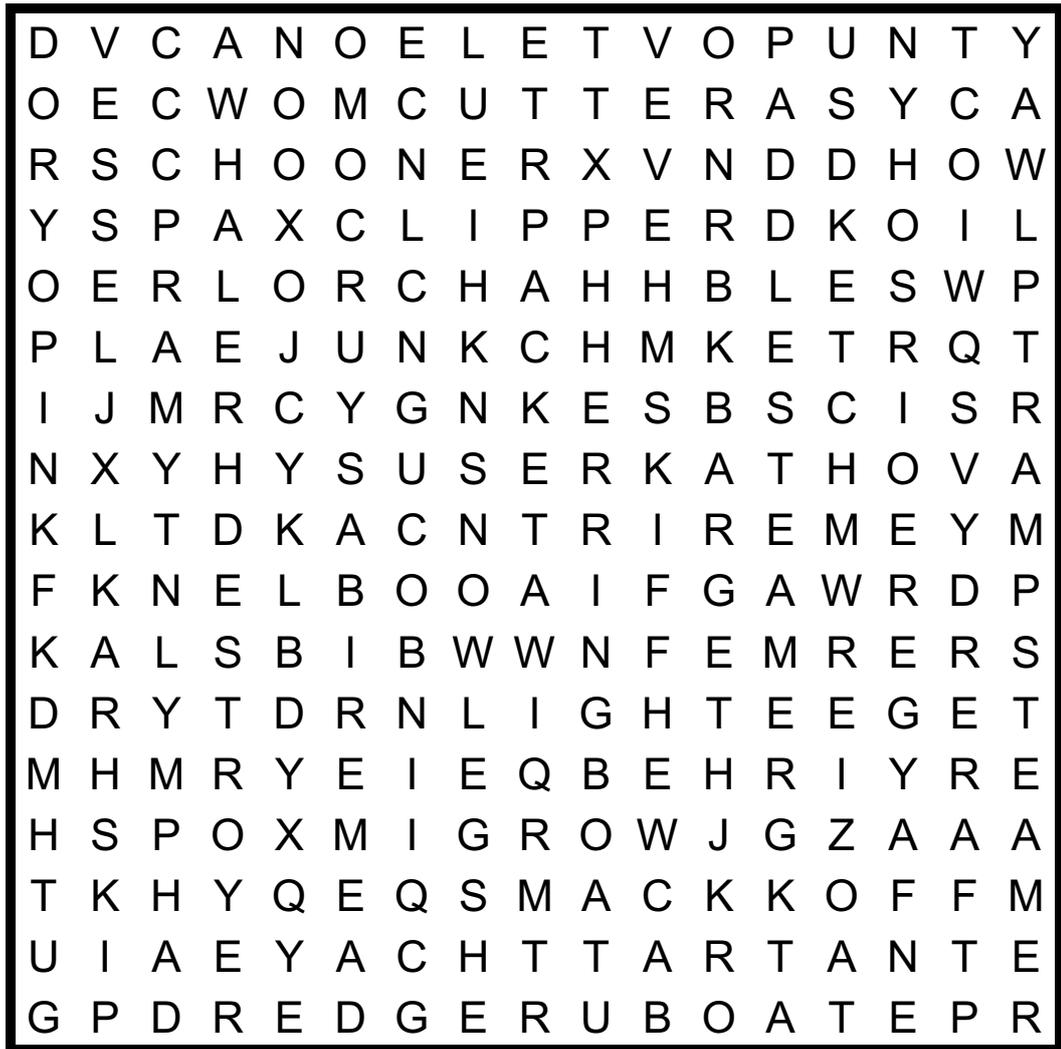
- 1 Faithfulness comes to a tidy Life (8)
- 2 A question not needing an answer (10)
- 3 Not black and ordinary (5,5)
- 4 Something that might sound like auspice (4)
- 5 For a long time (4)
- 6 Cruel, uncouth person (4)
- 7 Russian chess master (6)
- 14 Flow off gradually and make weak (5)
- 15 Not giving up (10)
- 16 Rich and quality shoes (4-6)
- 20 Go to jail in one corner (8)
- 22 Tastelessly showy (6)
- 25 Coarse curly-leafed cabbage (4)
- 26 Not before or after (4)
- 27 Fate becomes Greek cheese (4)



SOLUTIONS PAGES 22/3

To have your own copy of this page to work on go to www.nationalassociationofchoirs.org.uk and look for the latest copy of News & Views then print the page. Easy!

Boat Wordsearch



- | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------|
| Ark | Dory | Light | Reed | Trireme |
| Barge | Dow | Liner | Schooner | Tug |
| Bireme | Dredger | Lorcha | Scow | U-Boat |
| Brig | Fly | Lymphad | Ship | Vessel |
| Canoe | Gig | MTB | Skiff | Whaler |
| Clipper | Herring Boat | Packet | Skip | Wherry |
| Cob | Hoy | Paddle Steamer | Smack | Xebec |
| Cutter | Junk | Pink | Snow | Yacht |
| Dandy | Ketch | Pram | Tartan | Yawl |
| Destroyer | Koff | Punt | Tender | |
| Dhow | Launch | Raft | Tramp Steamer | |

A Choir Is Born

Cotswold Male Voice Choir – South West - Steve Allsup



1950s - Smiths Choir

The end of the war in 1945 saw Britain become the world leader in the new Jet Age. Gloucestershire was one of the hubs of this expanding industry which attracted workers from other regions. One of these was Dave Williams who moved from Swansea to take a position as a precision engineer at Smiths Industries, now GE Aviation, in Bishop's Cleeve outside Cheltenham. His family joined him a year later.

Dave was an accomplished singer and pianist who had won prizes at Eisteddfod

events from an early age. In the Welsh tradition of communities having their own choir, Dave put out the word that he wanted to form a works choir. Spontaneous discussions were followed by a formal meeting of 18 men in the canteen on the 19 May 1949 to ratify the formation of the Smiths Male Voice Choir and appoint Dave as 'Party Conductor'. The Company offered some finance, sheet music was ordered, and a choir was born.

Dave's title changed to Musical Director.

His intention was to hold the position 'until someone else took over'. This was to take 28 years! His often repeated saying at rehearsals was 'If you sing fortissimo, people will hear you. If you sing pianissimo, people will listen to you.' This emphasis on 'light and shade' is still preached today. Within five years the choir had grown to over 30 and had quickly gained a reputation for a varied repertoire. At this time, it was also decided that sheet music would not be allowed at concert performances. All attention must be on the conductor. This rule still stands today.

In 1976, to reflect a membership which now included non-Smiths men from further afield, the choir was renamed 'The Cotswold Male Voice Choir'. This had the extra benefit of attracting even more non-Smiths members. Fast forward to 2024 and the choir is about to celebrate its 75th anniversary. Nearly 400 members have passed through its ranks. How many of the original 18 could have thought they were making such history?

www.cotswoldmvc.org



1963 - Rehearsal

Our first 80 years

Coalville Male Voice Choir – Midlands East - John Seditas



A group of like-minded men came together in February 1944, and Coalville & District Male Voice Choir was formed. The Chairman, Ernest Evans, stated that the need for a Male Voice Choir in the district was not only for the present, but for the future and for the time when men would return from the forces, providing an outlet for their energies and a leisure time activity.

An advert in the local paper indicated that the first practice would be held in the school room at Marlborough Square Methodist Church on 17 February 1944. It is interesting to note that on the same day that advert was published, there were stories in the press about British and Allied forces fighting around Monte Casino in Italy.

42 years later, Coalville Male Voice Choir sang in the beautiful church of the Monastery at Monte Casino. Members of the choir, Arthur Bevin and Reg Wardle laid wreaths at the war memorial.

Harry Toon took up the baton for that first practice in 1944. Such has been the dedication of the conductors, he was the first of only six to hold that position from that first night until the present day.

During the early years the choir was active in both festivals and concerts, appearing in many areas of the Midlands. The choir performed live for the BBC in 1947, showing tremendous progress in those early years.

The choir decided to simplify its name in 2010 from, Coalville and District MVC to, Coalville MVC (probably to save money on ink).

Performances over the years have raised many thousands of pounds for local and national charities.

Venues have been very varied, from massed choir events at the Albert Hall, Cardiff Arms Park, and The Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham to local care homes.

We were honoured to perform for Princess Anne at the opening of the new Burton on

Trent Brewing Museum. Our annual weekends away are eagerly anticipated, singing in mostly coastal resorts from Scotland to the Isle of Wight. Exceptions have been trips to Norwich and Birmingham. All proceeds from these concerts are for the preferred charity of our hosts. There were so many memorable events over the years impossible to relate here. An example is when the choir performed impromptly in Liverpool Cathedral singing *Morte Christe*, a cappella.

As with many choirs, the Covid pandemic disrupted us badly, but we have recovered and are progressing really well and the future is looking good, under the excellent direction of our MD Paul Hayward MMus, BMus(Hons) and the indomitable Tom King, our accompanist. The music we are working on this year has a nostalgic theme, with reference to the war time circumstances on that first practice day in 1944. Our MD Paul Hayward has produced some tremendous arrangements of old favourites including *White Cliffs of Dover* and we will attempt some 40s 'Swing' music. There are several events planned for this 80th year, with concerts around our own patch in Leicestershire, and social events and dinners.

Looking forward to the next 80 years.

www.coalvillemvc.co.uk



120-year Anniversary

Gresley Male Voice Choir – Midlands East – Clive Lawton



2024 marks a milestone for the choir having been in existence for the past 120 years. The choir takes its name from the parish of Church Gresley, on the Southern tip of South Derbyshire. In 1904 at a Methodist Men's Sunday, five brothers and two cousins from the same family along with 8 other Members of the congregation formed a male voice choir. The minister was so impressed with the singers that he suggested they continue as a choir. They called themselves the Church Gresley Primitive Methodist Male Voice Choir. More members joined and the demand for the choir to perform within the Methodist Circuit quickly rose.

In 1927 the choir wore its first uniform and travelled by charabanc to the London Semi National Eisteddfod where, against stiff opposition, they took first prize. At this point the choir shortened their name to The Gresley Male Voice Choir.

The choir has functioned continuously throughout two world wars and two pandemics. Rehearsals were continuous during the recent Covid Pandemic via Zoom. It continues to meet for rehearsal on Wednesday and Friday evenings.

We are very fortunate in having our ladies' group of supporters, called "Mavoro Ladies", who help with hospitality when entertaining dignitaries and visiting choirs or fundraising for the Charities we help. Their support, since they formed in 1978, has been unwavering and has helped the choir immensely. We could not thank them enough for everything they do.

The choir has won many auspicious competitions through the years and has many trophies to its credit. Performing up to sixteen concerts each year to raise funds for local and national charities and civic functions together with reciprocal choir engagements, the choir is a busy organisation. We are looking forward to a visit from our good friends from Norfolk "The New Sheringham Singers" on a reciprocal visit later this year. They will be joining us at the "Crow's Nest" within the Barton Marina complex at Barton Under Needwood. The concert is our annual Charity Concert and will take place in June. We have performed with these wonderful ladies, several times, in Sheringham, and we are delighted that they are able to join us in South Derbyshire and East Staffordshire this year.

Over the years the choir has travelled extensively, visiting the United States of America where we were invited to sing at the Disney Epcot facility. France, Belgium Holland and Germany and the Republic of Ireland have also been visited on tour. This year we will be travelling to Gloucestershire and while on tour will have the pleasure of singing with Churchdown Male Voice Choir and the Springfield Singers from the Forest of Dean. We have also been afforded the privilege of singing in two very prestigious places of worship, Gloucester Cathedral and Tewkesbury Abbey, both of which are wonderful opportunities for our choristers.

In our role of honour are the names of former presidents, chairmen, musical directors, accompanists, secretaries, and treasurers

going back to the formation of the choir in 1904. There have only been 6 Musical Directors in 120 years of our existence.

Choristers are entered into the role after 21 years' service and are awarded a commemorative plate. At our Christmas Concert this year we will have the pleasure of awarding a 21-year plate to Derek Bartlett who served as Secretary of the Choir for 12 years. We will also be presenting a 35-year service citation to Lewis Washington and a 40-year service citation and life membership to Stephen Hickman who until this year was the Choir Registrar. Stephen is one of the choir's longest serving soloists and is always a pleasure to listen to. Amazingly we have a 65-year service citation to award this year and the recipient is Peter Baker. Peter travels 44 miles every Friday from his home in Stoke Golding to our rehearsal rooms in Newhall. He only ever misses if he is too ill to travel and this journey is repeated when we have Concerts. His dedication to the Choir is exemplary. Music and the love of singing runs very strongly through Peter's family. His father was Musical Director of Gresley Male Voice Choir from 1948 until 1977 and Peter's Brother Julian was a Gresley Chorister and the Musical Director of Moira Male Voice Choir before it sadly disbanded several years ago. We are very fortunate in having such commitment from our ranks.

Many members have been awarded recognition for their continued support of the choir in previous years and many more will receive awards in the future. Life membership is awarded where the

chorister has shown exceptional commitment to the choir, including high attendance at rehearsals and concerts, and being involved with the organization and activities of the choir.

In 2023 we were honored to have Bonaventura Bottone consent to be appointed our honorary President. He has performed with the choir at our Celebrity Concerts in the past and was delighted to accept the Honorary Presidency.

Rehearsals are held at Newhall Methodist Church, Chapel Street, Newhall, DE11 0TU.

on Wednesdays 7.30 to 9.00 and Fridays 7.30 to 9.15

You will receive a very warm welcome so please come along and enjoy making music with us.

The choir has an extensive repertoire covering classical, operetta, grand opera, music from the shows, popular music, part songs and religious music.



Mission Statements:

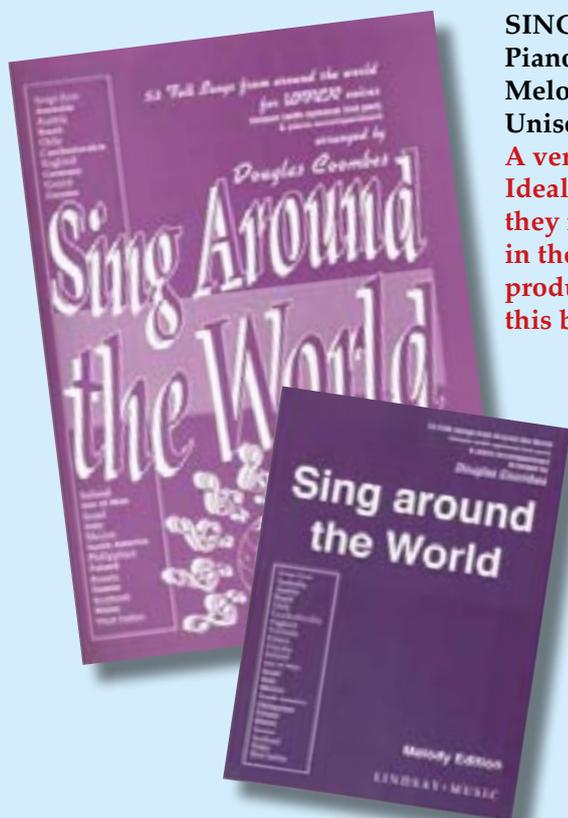
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97th Annual General Meeting 35th Annual Conference Weekend 17-19 April 2024

It is good to break a pattern in things. Previous conferences have taken place over weekends and in hotels placed around the country so as to enable different choirs to attend more easily. This year was an exception to that pattern. The Fred.Olsen flagship, The Bolette, needed to reposition from Southampton to Liverpool ready for the next main cruise. We were given the opportunity to board that ship and enjoy the facilities during the 2-day move between ports.

The idea first sounded strange, full of problems like 'Where do I park my car and how do I get back to it?' but in the end, everything worked smoothly and the conference was enjoyed by all who attended. The Fred.Olsen team even upgraded us all to lovely Balcony Junior Suites. It also took place mid-week and that was a complete difference from previous meetings.

Having got everyone aboard (including a few other groups of people) and settled into cabins, the AGM was held at 4.30 in the Auditorium at the aft of the ship. During this important part of the NAC's year, our Chairman, Brenda Wilkinson, was unable to attend because of a recent illness but she sent a message of good wishes to all attendees. Celia Johns, who has been an officer of the NAC for many years and most recently the General Secretary, had decided to retire and she was wished well for her future and thanked for her previous hard work. Nominees for the Committee were then voted into office for the coming year.

At 7.00, we all gathered in the Bloomsbury Restaurant right at the aft of the ship and with the setting sun shining through the rear glass windows and the wake of the ship churning behind us, we were able to enjoy a wonderful evening meal. Happy

and contented people were then able to wander the various facilities on board where live music was provided by a variety of professional musicians in a lovely informal manner. After 10.00, the team of Bolette's own singers and dancers presented an hour-long musical to a packed theatre. On my way back to my cabin, I was lured to a small lounge bar by the sound of a piano and a man singing lovely old songs in a calm and quiet slow jazz manner. I just had to sit and take it all in for a while and thoroughly enjoyed his music, played with such style and skill. It



provided a lovely calming influence to the end of what had been a busy day.

On Thursday morning, breakfast was available in a couple of places, either as a full service

or as a buffet style. For the rest of the morning, we provided two seminars for members and these took place in the Auditorium. Firstly, Dr Douglas Coombes, MBE, presented us a session during which we were encouraged to take part in various activities and sing



along in some exercises, all presented in his usual friendly manner.

After a brief break for coffee, the second session was presented by Tim Knight who used the theme of Sea Shanties to get us to apply style, emphasis and meaning to the songs, paying attention to the lyrics and themes of the songs we sang. It was very appropriate to the sea in view outside the windows.

Lunch was then available in several places

throughout the ship. This theme was great throughout the short cruise. Apart from our more formal evening meals, we were able to decide where and what to eat in different places on the ship. It was all very easy and informal and at all times, the ship's crew were outstandingly helpful and friendly in whatever was asked of them.

Thursday afternoon began with the various Trade Stand attendees presenting their facilities and materials to us. We received input from Joan Lind of TryBooking, Abigail Meades of Marsh Commercial Insurance, Anne Parker of Tim Knight Music, Carole Lindsay Douglas of Lindsay Music and then Ellie Fulcher of Fred.Olsen. All of those supporters of the NAC are able to aid our choirs in various ways and we are always grateful for their input and attendance.

Following the trade presentations, we held the Member's Open Forum that gives attendees the chance to make their points directly to the Officer Group. Several pertinent observations were made for which we are very grateful. This provides a wider viewpoint and set of ideas that enable the NAC to move forward and that was certainly the case this time. Thank you to those members who gave their observations so clearly.

Delegates then had a chance to wander the ship, grab more to eat or drink or look outside to watch the progress north though a relatively calm sea. The Fred.Olsen team then hosted a private drinks meet for the NAC members and that was immediately followed by the evening 5 course meal at which we took the opportunity to wear more formal clothing, just because we could!



At 9pm, a comedian appeared in the theatre, livening the atmosphere for the audience. At 10:15pm, the NAC "KENTWOOD Show Choir" made use of the ship's superb theatre to present their hour-long concert, joined towards the end by the ship's own professional cabaret group for a wonderful conclusion.

Again, on my way to my cabin for some really needed rest, I heard some music that grabbed my attention. A trio comprising a singer playing an electric bass, a violinist and a guitarist, were playing beautifully arranged songs in dance timings. Some other passengers, people with dance skills, were enjoying the chance to tango and waltz to what had effectively become their own dance band. As previously, I just wanted to sit and listen. The

trio had superb musical skill and the live music was awesome.

Friday morning came and the ship had docked in Liverpool in the early hours of the morning. An early breakfast was enjoyed and we had to disembark by 7:30. We gathered on the port beside the Liver Building. For those with cars at Southampton, coaches were provided to return us to that port and after a smooth, unhindered journey, we were back at our cars by 2:15pm. All in all, it had been a unique experience. We held our meetings as required, enjoyed the seminars, relaxed in excellent cabin facilities and indulged a variety of good food. The downfall? We can't do this every year and now have to invent new and different experiences. Do you have a good idea for a way in which

we could present our AGM and conference? Don't keep the idea to yourself then, so contact us. Who knows? The use of the mini cruise seemed like an impossible idea to start with.

Finally, it might be accepted that this whole event just took place because various people did what they volunteered to do. Volunteer or not, I do believe that our own Clive Lawton, who is our Conference Coordinator, worked way above and beyond to put this event together and he is to be congratulated for his efforts. He made many people very happy.

Peter Carlyon
General Secretary and Webmaster



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70 Years Of Singing

Pendle Ladies Choir - Lancashire North - Caroline Greaves

Betty Willoughby of Pendle Ladies Choir recently celebrated a fantastic achievement, 70 years of singing with the same choir. Betty has sung with the same family of choirs since being a child. Initially with the Nelson Civic Primary and Junior choirs before moving into Nelson Civic Ladies Choir, all under the leadership of the late Ted Parr MBE. The choir has recently changed its name to Pendle Ladies Choir. During her time with the choir she has been part of some major successes, including winning first prize at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod, and most recently winning Lancashire Choir of the Year 2023 under the leadership of current musical director John Garrett.



Betty continues to be an active choir member, and will be with the choir when it competes at the Eskdale music festival in Whitby, and at the choir's next concert which will be on Saturday 11th May at St. Thomas's Church in Barrowford in Lancashire.

Betty was presented with flowers and an engraved glass to mark this special occasion.

Pendle Ladies Choir meet every Wednesday evening at 7.30pm during term times at St. John's Methodist Church in Colne.

Check us out on Facebook Pendle Ladies Choir or our new website e-voice.org.uk/pendleladieschoir

A New Name After 65 Years

Pendle Ladies Choir - Lancashire North - Caroline Greaves



Nelson Civic Ladies Choir has re-branded as Pendle Ladies Choir after 65 years. The choir took this decision after much consideration, and consultation with all members, but most felt it was the right time to change. For many years the choir has been based in Colne in Lancashire, and has members from throughout the Pendle area. Most of their performances are in Colne as the town has become a hub of entertainment for the Pendle area. The choir performs regularly for local charities and each year performs a

summer concert for a specific charity. This year the nominated charity is Lancashire Women.

The original name dates back to 1959, when the original choir was formed from the Nelson Civic primary and junior choirs formed by the late Ted Parr MBE. The ladies choir was formed from a small number of sixteen year old girls in the Junior Choir who were anxious to continue singing with young people of their own age group. This small band of ladies went from strength to strength and over the

years gained recognition as an outstanding choral group. The current choir still has over 50 active members some of whom have been with the choir for many years. Our longest serving member, Betty Willoughby has sung with us for over 65 years. All three choirs were based in Nelson, and were supported by the now defunct Nelson Town Council.

It was a difficult decision to change the name as there is a lot of history attached to the Nelson Civic Choir name. There have, of course, been pinnacles of achiev-

ement which stand out - most recently they were named Lancashire Choir of the Year 2023. Past achievements include first prize in the Ladies Choir competition at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod, and 1st prize winners in the BBC Television 'Grand Sing'.

It has broadcast on radio and television on numerous occasions and whilst concert engagements will always be a major part of the choir's calendar, competing against other choirs on festival platforms throughout the length and breadth of the country helps to keep the choir on top form. In

the past 12 months as well as the Lancashire Choir of the Year competition, the choir travelled to the Isle of Man for the Festival of Choirs.

The two children's choirs re-branded some years ago to be Pendle Children's and Pendle Youth Choir, so it seemed a natural progression to become Pendle Ladies Choir. The choir continues under the musical direction of John Garrett FLCM, LTCL, BAHons, MISM. and accompanist Elizabeth Cockshott and is looking forward to a bright new future. To celebrate the new name the choir invested

in a new choir uniform.

Pendle Ladies Choir meets weekly during term time on Wednesday evenings at St. John's Methodist Church in Colne, Lancashire.

If you want to see the choir performing they will be singing on the 11 May at St. Thomas's Church in Barrowford, Lancashire in a concert to support the church and their annual charity concert will take place on Saturday 29 June at St. John's Methodist Church in Colne, Lancashire.

Rosemary Retires

Viva Musica Choir - Midlands South West - Lorraine Newman

In May 2023 Rosemary Phillips retired as Musical Director of Viva Musica Choir, after 34 years in the role. From the inception of the choir in 1989, Rosemary always ensured the high standards that the choir has become renowned for. The choir has an excellent reputation with a wide ranging repertoire and has performed at Symphony Hall in Birmingham, Worcester Cathedral and enjoyed two tours in Europe. As an acclaimed singer and music teacher, Rosemary inspired the members of Viva Musica Choir to challenge themselves and perform at their best. The choir celebrated Rosemary's new role as President of Viva Musica at a special evening at Hagley Golf Club in June with many current and retired members, to express thanks for all her hard work and dedication to Viva Musica. I, like many members, cannot express how much the choir has meant, not only in the beautiful music we have performed, but also in the friendships, support and wonderful adventures that being in Viva Musica has led to.

The choir was delighted that Andrew Biggs, Viva Musica's accompanist, has taken on the role as Musical Director. Andrew is an exceptionally talented musician and teacher, who not only continues to accompany the choir, but conducts from the piano. Members of the choir are excited to be part of the choir's new chapter under Andrew's leadership.



Viva Musica's A Time and Place concert took place on Saturday 14 October at St James Parish Church in Stourbridge. The concert began with *Let There Be Music* by Young and *The Music's Always There With You* by Rutter. Andrew's own arrangement of *What A Wonderful World* by Theile was performed by the ladies of the choir. There were solos from Debbie Wright, John Gripton, Elizabeth Haney, Wendy Priestnall, Matt Terrado, Gaby Walley and Sarah Fellows, as well as *Evening Prayer* performed by Laura Cox, Pippa McLean, Louise Kelleher and Fiona Walley. The choir was joined by special guest The Palm Court Trio who accompanied the choir during the concert, as well as their own items *Embraceable You* by Gershwin and *Czardas* by Monti. The concert was a great success as well as raising money for Mary Stevens Hospice.

On Saturday 9 December Viva Musica performed the sellout annual Christmas Concert in Stourbridge. The programme included Christmas carols, music from *The Messiah* and festive favourites. Sopranos Debbie Wright performed Handel's *How Lovely Are The Feet*, Elizabeth Haney sang *The Little Road To Bethlehem* and Laura Wright sang the classic *Have Yourself A Very Merry Christmas* by Blane. Andrew arranged the ensemble piece *Good Enough For Him* by Stead-Man-Allan lead by tenor Andy Walley. Andrew brought to the Christmas repertoire his own arrangements of *Ding Dong Merrily On High*, *Ragtime Carol*, *Deck The Hall* and *The Christmas Song*. The evening ended Rutter's *New Year* followed by mince pies and wine.

Viva Musica will be performing on Saturday 27 April at St John's Church as part of the Hagley Music Festival, at The Ruskin Centre in Stourbridge on Saturday 18 May and in the pretty village of Kinver on 22 June at St Peter's Church.

Viva Musica Choir welcomes new members and if you are interested in joining the choir please see our 'Contact Us' page on our website, Facebook page or for further information or call 0121 550 5581. Rehearsals are held on Tuesday evenings at Ham Dingle Primary School, Stourbridge DY9 0UN.

50 not out!

Newquay Male Voice Choir – Cornwall – Jim Christophers



2024 sees Newquay Male Voice Choir celebrating its Golden Anniversary. We are doing this in fine style with a series of special events and activities while looking to raise funds in aid of Prostate Cancer UK. Things began with the publication of a souvenir brochure reminiscing about the choir's history since November 1974 when a group of 12 gentlemen from the Claremont Methodist Church in Newquay decided that they would like to form a 'proper male voice choir'. The brochure contains photographs of the choir over the years and reflects on the influence of the 5 different MDs the choir has had to date. There are too many significant

events to mention here but some of the most memorable are the visits to the Royal Albert Hall in London to sing as part of massed choirs representing the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs, the early visits to Cwmbrian in South Wales establishing links which continue to this day, hosting numerous visiting choirs to Newquay and making return visits back 'up North', and singing on the huge main stage of the Boardmasters Festival. On a lighter(?) note, there is the time the choir almost lost a prominent baritone overboard on a voyage by sea to a concert in Fowey, the time a second tenor dropped his glass eye on the floor of a Church just

prior to a concert and got everyone down on the floor to look for it and the famous 'Full Monty' fund raising event that brought the house down – and some trousers! The challenge of COVID is recalled with much poignancy but also with a real sense of comradeship and pride that we faced it together and emerged strong and confident once it was beaten.

As with most other male choirs in Cornwall, Newquay MVC has within it a smaller capella group, Oll an Gwella (Cornish for All the Best). This group has proven to be very popular in entertaining and supporting local community and charity groups, in performing at weddings and funerals and taking to the stage in festivals, both at home and abroad. It has raised thousands of pounds for charity. All this is also recognised and celebrated in the brochure.

We are grateful to a number of local businesses who supported this project through advertising and especially Hendra Holiday Park, Henwood Funerals and Wax who are sponsoring choir activities during the year.

Our first major event was our Grand Anniversary Dinner at which present and past members of the choir sat down together to enjoy a splendid meal before adjourning to the bar (as choirs tend to do)



to socialise more informally with a song and a lemonade or two. A large display of memorabilia, especially photographs of the choir and gifts from visiting choirs encouraged much conversation about the 'good old days' when Cornish choirs were larger and contained a good number of younger men.

We have also commissioned a piece of music from well-known Cornish polymath, Nick Hart, so we are busy learning *Music on the Water*, an emotive and challenging composition that has as its inspiration low lying fingers of sea mist that occur around the Cornish coast. We can't wait to present this to an audience later in the year.

No major celebration in a choir's history would be complete without a 'tour' and in May we are meeting up with good friends in the Maesteg Gleemen Male Voice Choir while spending a weekend away in South Wales. For us this is a return visit having had the pleasure of hosting Maesteg here in Newquay in 2022. To help boost our

choir numbers we are delighted and very grateful to be joined by some choristers from Holman-Climax, Kerrier, Marazion Apollo, Nankersey and St Stythians Male Voice Choirs. Just one small example of the fellowship that exists between local choirs. There will be singing in the valleys and anywhere else you are likely to encounter us over the weekend.

Finally, we have our Grand Gala Golden Anniversary Concert in St Michael's Church in Newquay on the evening of 22 November, almost 50 years to the day of the choir's formation. We will be joined by some very good friends, internationally renowned mezzo-soprano and granddaughter of Roy Magor, the second MD of the choir, Anna Burford-Magor, legendary Cornish musicians, Alastair Taylor and Clive Ellison, and the wonderful mixed choir, Canoryon Lowen (the Happy Singers) led by Nick Hart. It is at this concert that we will present the proceeds of our anniversary year to Prostate Cancer UK.

To parody a well-known advertising slogan, Newquay MVC is not just any male voice choir; it is a Cornish male voice choir, and one that is very proud to be so, believing that it roots it in a culture and heritage which sets it apart from those choirs who exist beyond the River Tamar. This does not in any sense mean that the choir is introverted or unfriendly because Newquay MVC takes every opportunity to perform with other choirs both at home in Cornwall and when travelling further afield. It values and enjoys the opportunities this offers to meet, share with and learn from choral groups of all kinds but particularly other male choirs, sharing a common sense of comradeship while experiencing the culture and heritage of other places. It sings with commitment and confidence, producing a sound which engages and entertains audiences wherever and whenever they perform.

Long may this continue.

Shortlisted

A Young Person's Guide to Vocal Health - Olivia Sparkhall



A Young Person's Guide to Vocal Health has been shortlisted for an award.

Olivia Sparkhall's book, on everything young people need to know in order to look after their voices, has been shortlisted as a finalist for the **Music & Drama**

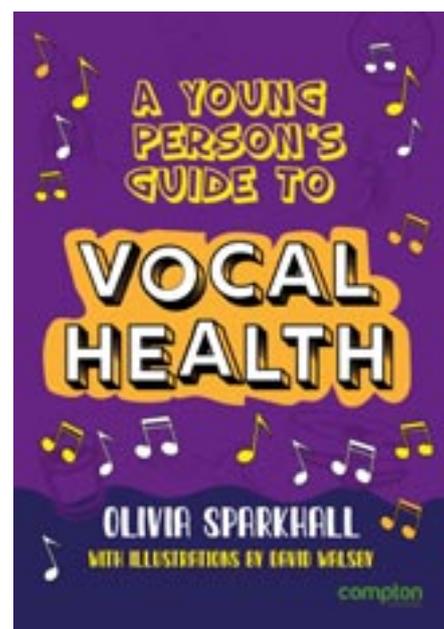
Education Awards 2024 in the category 'Outstanding Music Education Print Resource'.

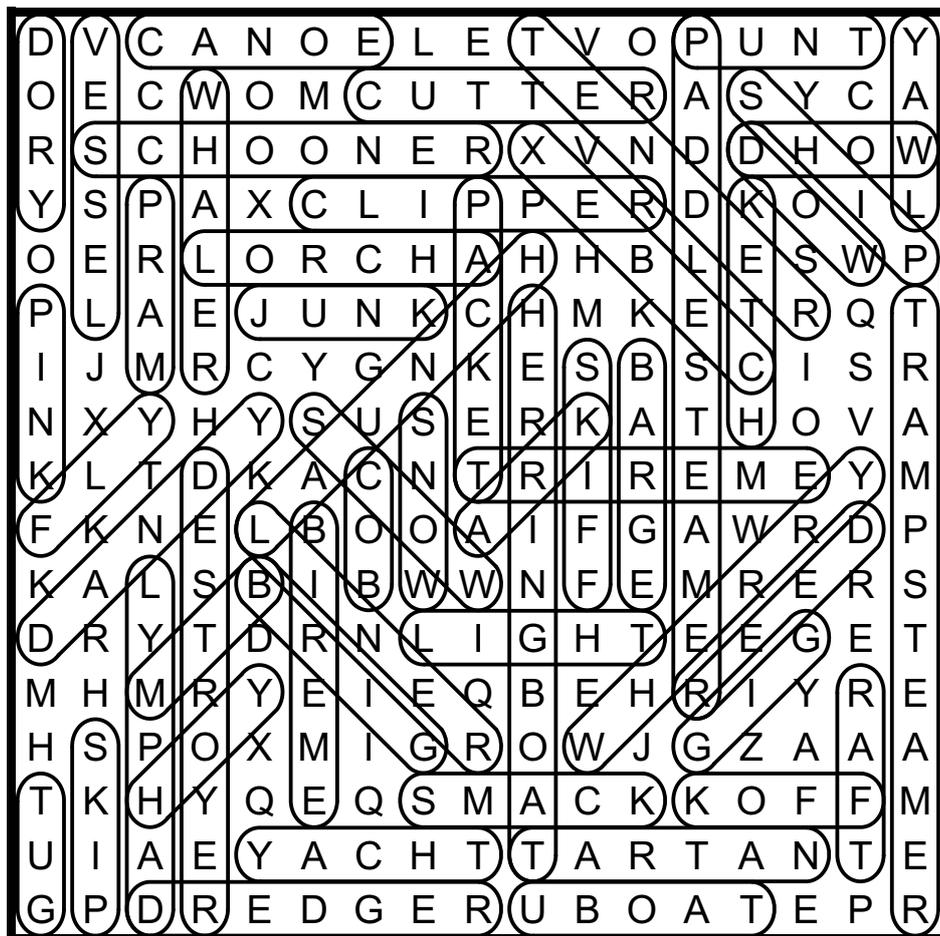
The awards team write, 'this achievement speaks volumes about the outstanding quality and innovative endeavours of your work.'

'The prestigious awards ceremony takes place at the London Marriott Grosvenor Square on the 22nd of February 2024, where we will unveil the winners and the highly commended.'

It is an incredible honour to have been shortlisted for this award alongside some phenomenal colleagues. My heartfelt thanks goes to the judges for selecting A Young Person's Guide to Vocal Health as being worthy of this accolade.

More info about book here: <https://oliviasparkhall.wixsite.com/sparkhallo/a-young-persons-guide>





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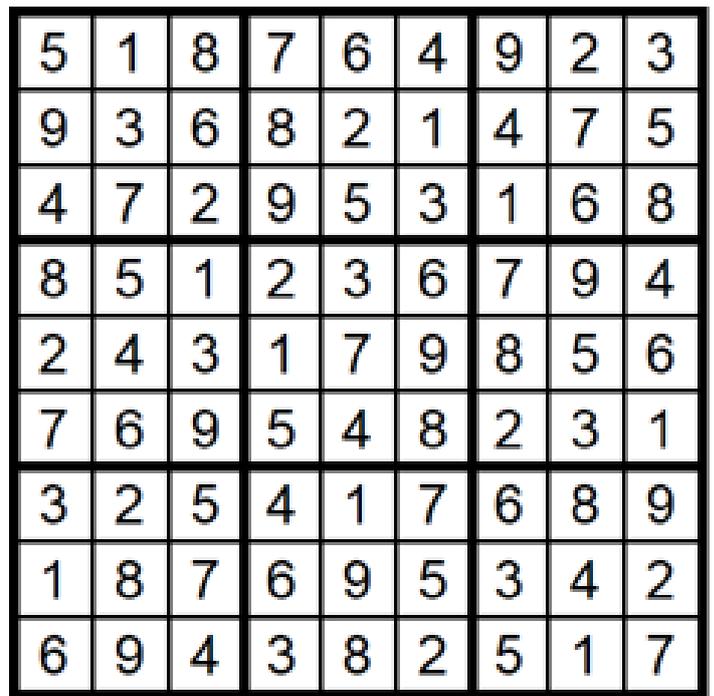
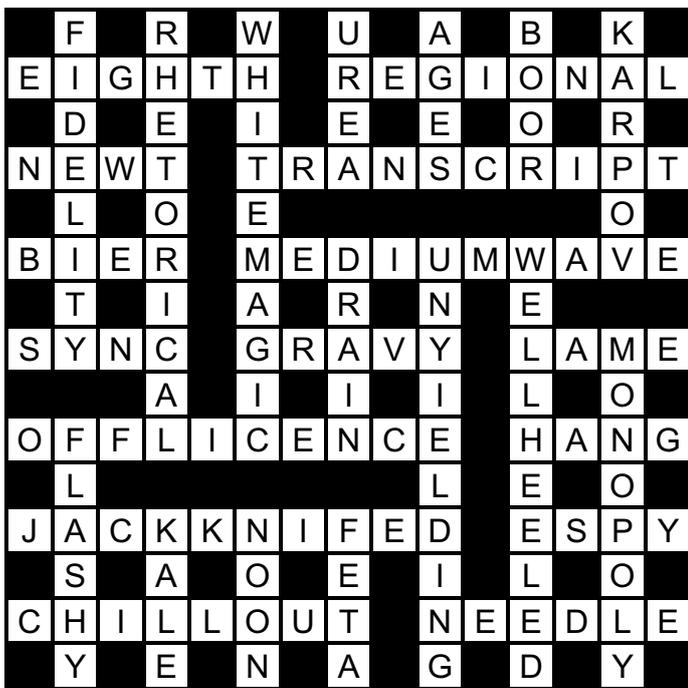
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‘Wow! that is a long email address’, I hear you say. Yes it is but you will find that once it’s in your computer you can just start to type it and your computer will offer to finish it for you.

Many of our contributors love to show their prowess by sending in wonderful finished articles with **coloured** headlines, five different fonts and many underlinings, *italics* and **bold** bits. Then, of course, I have to spend time taking them all out before I can set their article up the way you will see it in the magazine. I’m afraid I also have a thing about exclamation marks. I allow one per article. Anymore I remove.

KEEP IT SIMPLE!

PHOTOGRAPHS

Send me pictures as high resolution .jpegs of 1mb or more, minimum 300 dpi.

HOUSE STYLE

- We use Calibri 10pt in News & Views. (If you don’t have this, don’t worry I can soon change the one you use.)
- Set your paragraphs to single space with no spacing before or after paragraphs.
- Start with the name of your choir.
- Then the NAC group your choir is in.
- Tell me who has written it.
- Write your article.
- Quotes use single speech marks (same key as @ but without the shift).
- Dates do not include st nd rd or th
- Abbreviations do not have full stops.
- Song titles are shown in italics.
- Please do not put photos in the text.
- Don’t use am or pm in times.
- Unless the word ‘choir’ is part of a title it should NOT have a capital letter.
- Your choir is singular so ‘the choir is’ not ‘the choir are’

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9 January - Zoom

Members Open Forum

30 September - TBA
27 January - Zoom

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