



Pontnewydd Male Choir

CHOIR NEWSLETTER

Year 24 AUGUST 2020

This month's birthdays.

Neil Dixon (B2) Wednesday 5th
Doug Hopkins (B1) Wednesday 26th
Peter Cox (B2) Friday 28th

Robert Powell (B2) Thursday 13th
Phil Evans (B2) Thursday 27th

All post-WW2 babies - not one tenor gets a mention – we'll never hear the last of it

Choir news.

David Wilkes, (T2), has recently resigned as a chorister after long and dedicated service of about 17 years. He reluctantly accepts that Father Time has gained the upper hand and doubts that he'll be any more mobile when things get back to normal. We'll miss you Dave!

Part practices and Wednesday evening meetings (via the ZOOM app) continue. M.D. **Martyn** is determined to introduce the choir to new pieces and to sing in Hebrew is a first for the choir. We also look forward to singing an arrangement of the haunting melody that was the theme in the film "Band of Brothers". Attendance is a bit erratic partly because of internet connection difficulties. Gallery view often provides views of puzzled and occasionally frustrated faces, and hands often move towards the camera as the chorister attempts to switch on the sound – the result is frequently the opposite of what was intended! The meeting on the evening of 22nd July was a bit different because the 'host', **Doug**, was sailing on the Norfolk Broads and his plans went a wee bit aglay. He'd intended to be safely moored and, instead, was still sailing at 7:00pm. However, the meeting (only slightly delayed) went ahead thanks to our multi-talented M.D. and Doug eventually joined us when Thomas had safely moored the boat somewhere in the middle of the north sea.

It appears that a number of choristers are managing to get a break outside Torfaen. North and west wales and even across the border in the north-east of England have heard southwalian accents – unfortunately restricted to speech not to song. Science claims that singing is more likely to spread Covid -19 to anyone within a half-mile radius because of the force needed to produce the sound of the dulcet tones of a typical south wales tenor.

Choir members will have received an email from secretary **Martin** with a link to a bit of research being carried out by the University of York. You are

invited to complete a ten minute survey that involves the type of research that is mentioned in the next section of this newsletter. The choice is yours as to whether or not you want to be involved.

More general choir news.

Given below are extracts from further communications received from the WAMC Secretary, **Chris Evans**. The letters contain a wealth of detail, some of which is given verbatim and some which has been summarised. Any inaccuracies are the fault of your editor. Pedants (like your editor) will have to ignore the occasions when he doesn't seem to know the difference between *practice* (the noun) and *practise* (the verb).

Late July update: 358 cds and 28 dvds have been sent to 193 Care Homes and 36 cds have been sent to hospital radio stations in Wales.

The Senedd Committee dealing with the impact of Coronavirus on Culture and Sport in Wales has met formally on two occasions but they have so far concentrated on evidence from the WRU, FAW, broadcasters and representatives of the professional music community. The WAMC is an active partner in the Singing Network (involving a variety of UK based music organisations) and a lobbying letter has been sent to the government's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. However (quote) "*It seems clear that we will need to raise our game in Wales if we are to obtain the necessary funding and advice from the Government to reinstate our choral community. Much of the interest so far from Government has been on the 'elite' part of the sector – major venues, professional and semi-professional orchestras and performance organisations. Therefore we intend to launch a lobbying campaign in the next couple of weeks in order to raise our profile in the media and to target key politicians at both a Wales and UK level who might be able to advocate on our behalf.*"

It's obvious that there's still a long way to go before light is seen at the end of the tunnel but, at least, the WAMC are being pro-active in what can be done to get things back to some semblance of normality. The Welsh Government's current advice on 'guidance for a phased return' to group activities can be found on their website at <https://gov.wales/culture-and-heritage-destinations-and-venues-guidance-phased-return>. WAMC Executive Member Derrick Rowlands and Secretary Chris Evans have recently been part of a working group set up to advise the Arts Council for Wales on reopening live activities. They emphasised a number of the issues affecting such activities.

53 choirs (just over half, including PMC) sent responses to the survey carried out in June and here are some of the key points:

- The vast majority of member choirs ceased their activities in mid-late March 2020. This included *practise* and performances. In all 454 events were cancelled; the majority were local concerts but some more significant events were also cancelled e.g Annual Concerts.

- Half of the concerts cancelled were being organised to support local and national charities.
- More than 40 of the concerts were hosting concerts with guest choirs from the UK and overseas.
- 42 choir tours in the UK and Europe were cancelled.
- A number of financial elements have been impacted – performance income, fund raising, member subscriptions, lost insurance and travel costs and income from letting owned premises.
- 43 member choirs provided accurate assessments of financial losses incurred from March to June 2020 with a total estimated incurred loss of £139,900 – an average of approximately £3250 per choir, with the most significant single loss being £15,000.
- All choirs report that they have made arrangements for choristers to come together in *same* (?) way in order to at least be kept informed of developments. Some choirs have embraced social media to keep in touch socially and in some cases to maintain musical *practise*. However, a small number of choirs highlighted the difficulty in keeping in touch because of lack of access to social media and expressed concern over the number of choristers falling out of contact.
- 3 of the responding choirs own their own *practise* premises and another retains the premises on a long-term lease. The other choirs rent or are given various types of *practise* space. There are clear financial threats in the future whether a choir owns or rents *practise* space.
- Optimistically, 50% of the responding choirs are taking bookings for 2021 and beyond. Some have booked their Annual Concerts for 2021. The WAMC major Massed Voices concerts in Cardiff and London have been delayed (?) by one year.

Summing-up – the main issues raised by choirs include:

1. Impact of social distancing and hygiene requirements on future *practise* arrangements.
2. Potential closure of *practise* venues.
3. Possible closure of many of the remaining small, indoor performance venues.
4. Older choristers with underlying illnesses may be excluded from choirs.
5. Loss of interest in choral music during a prolonged break.
6. Vulnerability of choristers and audiences.
7. Decline in singing skills during a prolonged break.

Half of the choirs were bullish in their attitude to the future viability of their choir but recognised that there would be challenges and changes. A small number are pessimistic about their continued existence with some predicting a significant drop in membership because of the age of many choristers. There were also concerns about a loss of interest amongst choristers and audiences.

Enough talk about Covid -19.



How many photographs have been sent for possible inclusion in the 2021 choir calendar?

This photograph includes only one current chorister so is submitted for inclusion in the choir archives not the calendar. But how many of you know why it has special significance in the history of the choir?

Last month's teasers:

One of the small bones in each ear is named a *stirrup*. There's also a *hammer* and *anvil*.

"*Able was I ere I saw Elba*" reads the same backwards and is a *palindrome*. Another example of a palindromic *sentence* is "*Madam, in Eden I'm Adam*." *Individual words* like *noon* and *racecar* are also palindromes.

A "billion" in New York is 100,000 but in London is (traditionally) 1,000,000.

Here's the answer to that subtraction sum.

£	s	d
5	7	4½
---	3	14
1	12	6¾

You needed to know that there were 4 farthings in a penny, 12 pennies in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.

Finally, can you work out this classic arithmetic puzzle?

A man died and his sons found 19 gold sovereigns in his desk with instructions that said the oldest boy Ian had to have half of them, Lyn had to have a quarter of them and Martin had to have a fifth of them. The seemingly impossible situation caused much scratching of heads until uncle Mansel turned up and said "I can sort that out – borrow this sovereign". So, after some new calculations, Ian happily accepted 10 sovereigns, Lyn accepted 5 sovereigns and Martin accepted 4 sovereigns. One coin remained so Mansel then took back his sovereign and went home. How do you explain that?

Roy Fisher.....Editor.