



Mevagissey Male Choir

Raising funds and raising spirits since 1974



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No: 41



Our Christmas programme got off to a colourful start – report inside

A HEART-WARMING START TO THE YEAR!

‘Such a wonderful atmosphere’. They were the words on many people’s lips as Cornwall Hospice Care launched its 40th anniversary celebrations on Saturday 25th January. And we were delighted and honoured to have been asked by CHC to kick them off with a ‘40 Voices Concert’ at St Andrew’s Church, Tywardreath.

A packed church paid tribute to this popular charity, which provides free specialist care to terminally ill patients, their carers, and their families, in Cornwall.

“It was a wonderful evening and you all sounded amazing,” said CHC’s Tamsin Thomas, our compere for the evening.

It was our third recent opportunity to sing in support of CHC, having performed at the same venue in November 2015, with Canoryon Lowen, and then as recently as June 2018, in Lostwithiel.



Note the cheery smiles in our posed photo

The programme put together for the evening by Graham Willcocks once again demonstrated the diversity of our repertoire, from 'Nessun Dorma' and Bizet's 'Au Fond du Temple Saint' to 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and 'Mr Blue Sky', accompanied as always by Second Tenor Graham Hoskins' guitar, and including our two newest pieces, 'California Dreaming' and, making its debut, 'Let the River Run'.

Midway through the first half we were treated, to two songs by Bass Saul Sandey, with his brilliant rendering of Masefield's 'Sea Fever', as set to music by John Ireland, and 'Ol' Man River', from 'Showboat'.

Ms Thomas also cleverly made use of the time it takes to manoeuvre the choir on and



Saul Sandey sings of going down to the sea again – but why are his colleagues so serious?

off the risers to introduce key figures from the CHC, with their amusing and informative memories of the charity's early days.

A prolonged interval allowed old friends to meet and chat over pasties and soft drinks, (although choir members were left to salivate under strict instruction by our MD not to eat until the singing was done!).

Our soloist in the second half was another Bass, Peter Bowker, who, guitar in hand, gave us *'The Grey Funnel Line'*, written by a friend of his, Cyril Tawney, in 1959.



Peter Bowker recalls the anguish of the Grey Funnel Line

The concert was rounded off by our *'Back to the '60s' medley'*, which, Graham told us, we'd never performed better! And, with that, many of us headed for the nearby New Inn, to finish the evening in the customary way.

The CHC programme notes offered "a heartfelt thank you to the Mevagissey Male Choir who have supported our charity over many years and who continue to help us. They are very much part of our ongoing story."

Event organiser Judy Lawton, who takes much credit for the success of the evening, confirmed later that the concert grossed over £1,100 and with net proceeds of almost £900! Not bad for an event that was not designated as a fund-raiser, but as a celebration!

We are now looking forward to January 2021, when the CHC team want us to help them sign off their anniversary year with another concert. It is hoped that this might be at the rejuvenated Hall for Cornwall!

A Cornish Night with Red River Singers



Red River Singers wait as we hear about Penhaligon's Friends

To perform in January is unusual – to put on concerts in both January and February is almost unheard of! But on Saturday 22nd February we found ourselves at Truro Methodist Church, as guests of the Red River Singers, for a fund-raiser for Penhaligon's Friends, a Cornish charity supporting bereaved children, young people, parents and carers throughout Cornwall and the Isle of Scilly.

It proved to be a thoroughly entertaining evening, with a proper contrast between two excellent accomplished choirs. The Red River Singers, who are based in Pool and take their name from the nearby river, have been singing since 2012, specialising in Cornish songs, from pub songs to carols, and including many in the Cornish language.

It was they who began proceedings, with a set that focussed on mining, starting with the '*Bal Maidens Chant*', an arrangement by their leader, Hilary Coleman, of a traditional piece. This was followed by '*The Cornish Mines are Dyin'g*', which ran into the traditional South African song, '*Shosholozza*'; '*Shining Down on the Sennen*', and '*Hard Rock Cornish Miners*'.

Two of their 40-plus singers then performed an enchanting duet, *Cornwall is Calling*, before Baritone Robin Murphy, reprising his Brewery Christmas role as MC, called us to the stage for our first set of five, comprising four of our latest pieces and the popular '*Anthem*' from the musical Chess.



Who's our MC Robin Murphy being rude about here?

Following a 15-minute interval, we heard a little more about Penhaligon's Friends from Jerry Drew, their fundraising and communications officer. The charity was founded 25 years ago and its team – five full-time, five part-time and over 80 volunteers - helped support 875 children and young people last year.

Red River returned with a set of songs about the sea, including '*Finest Ship*' a story of two Cornishmen lost on the Titanic, and ending with '*Kerra Kernow*' (*Beloved Cornwall*), a modern-day Cornish anthem – in Cornish, of course.

Second Tenor Paul Pearce then gave us the moving '*Empty Chairs at Empty Tables*' from *Les Miserables* – perhaps for the last time, as it will soon be appearing on the Choir's own repertoire – followed by Saul Sandey with his powerful version of '*O! Man River*, the Paul Robeson favourite from *Showboat*.

The concert concluded with three more from us, the last of which was our eleven-minute long 'Back to the '60s' medley.

We were indebted to Bass Andy Gill, who, with his wife, Sheila, worked hard to get the concert on. Andy sang with both choirs! The evening raised over £350 for Penhaligon's Friends.

Many singers from both choirs retired to the nearby Rising Sun for further traditional singing, once throats had been suitably lubricated.

A BUSY CHRISTMAS STARTS AT HOME (i.e. MEVAGISSEY)

With 2020 off to such a busy start, it seems so long ago now that Friend of Mevagissey Male Choir, Sylvie Thwaites, was messaging to say: "Well that's it, Christmas has officially started..... An awesome concert performed by Meva Ladies Choir, Meva Male Choir and youngsters from Meva school. We were treated to a great programme of seasonal music Thank you all."

Sylvie appeared to speak for many with her response to our Christmas concert at St Andrew's on Friday 6th December. It has become a tradition in recent years to invite both Mevagissey Ladies Choir and the children's choir from Mevagissey Community Primary School and, as always, they contributed enormously to the event.

It was the first of four Christmas concerts and the decision was taken from the start to abandon our jackets and ties in favour of more festive Christmas sweaters or shirts. A year before, at our St Austell Brewery concert, we had elected to dress informally, and it proved so popular that our chairman and MD agreed to do so for all our seasonal events this time.

We may have been dressed informally, but Bass Bill Collins was impeccability itself as he introduced the Ladies Choir, who, admirably conducted as always by Barry Farley, gave us four pieces. Next, it was our turn on the risers. Our first set of four included a debut outing for *'California Dreaming'*. Ok, not exactly a Christmas song, but Graham was so keen to sneak it in that he seized on it's 'winter's day' theme as a reasonable justification. He didn't get much argument from us, as it's a popular addition to our repertoire.

Once Baritone Phil Johns had led us with this solo in *'Mary's Boy Child'* we trooped off to allow the children to take centre stage. Once again, they brought the house down. They performed three pieces – their own choices – beginning with *'When We're Together'* from *'Frozen'* (there's that winter theme again); *'Higher and Higher'*; and the more traditional *'Child in a Manger Born'*. It was awe inspiring to see how many of the children were brave enough to take on a solo line!

After a brief interval, the ladies returned with five pieces, following which we made our way on to the risers again. But before we embarked on our final set, the opportunity was taken to award Black Badges to four more members deemed to have "made a special contribution to the running, well-being or reputation of the Choir": Peter Bowker, for his extraordinary fund-raising success and initiative; Graham Hoskins, our Treasurer, for his diligence and hard work in looking after our funds, including organising tickets and programmes for our concerts; Nick Nicholls, our excellent Chairman who oversees everything we do and keeps us all in order; and yours truly (Mike Tate), Publicity Officer (all pictured below). On a purely personal note, I can only say I was proud to be honoured in this way. I joined the Choir in 2011, where I was immediately welcomed and since when I have made a host of good friends.



Nick receives his Black Badge from deputy Chairman Stephen Gibson, in red.



Graham, centre, is presented with his award



A Black Badge for Peter



And one for the Newsletter Editor!

These formalities done, we launched into our final set of four, which took us intriguingly from 'White Christmas' to 'Blue Christmas' – an increasingly popular offering. At which point the ladies returned for a joint Merritt finale – 'Hark the Glad Sound'.

When it was all over, many of us, including the ladies, retired to the Social Club for refreshments.

We're on the telly - again!

Two days later, on Sunday 8th December, we could be seen on the BBC's 'Songs of Praise' with our rendition of 'Do You Hear What I Hear?', recorded 15 months earlier in Paul, near Mousehole. It was our second consecutive Christmas tv appearance. It even drew a compliment from Chelmsford, Essex, from where Keith R Poole wrote to say "Just watched you all on Songs of Praise, guys. Well done, good singing, I even joined in."

Singing with the old...

Another day, and we were singing again, this time at Penrice House, Our 39th visit to the Porthpean Penrice residential home. One of the nice things about the Christmas concerts is that that we include a number of familiar carols that the audiences can join in with, and it's particularly rewarding to see the Penrice residents – and there was a full house! - singing as soon the evening began with the inspiring 'While Shepherds Watched', sung to the popular Lyngham tune.

As usual, we restricted our performance to one set, comprising, with the community singing, 13 pieces. Our singing over, we were once again treated to a magnificent buffet, a spread not to be missed. Perhaps it explains why this event is attended by more members than almost any other!

Having said our goodbyes, a hardy number of singers made their way to the nearby Polgooth Inn – fewer than usual, sadly – but we put on a great show, leading the punters in some more carol singing. Our hosts were delighted – as were w with free pint they gave us.

...and the young!

The following evening some of us were at St John's for, coincidentally, the church's 39th annual Christmas Singalong. This is not a formal choir event, but we have always been invited along by MC and founder Geoff

Wheildon, who after 39 years, was handing over to Alister Berry. For many of us, this is one of the highlights of the Christmas period, seeing so many children taking part – they probably outnumber the grown-ups - with not a mobile phone in sight, except those held by adults taking photos.

As always, a local child with serious health problems had been chosen as the recipient of the evening's proceeds, and 16-month old Elsie Bolt, with a whole series of medical issues, broke everyone's heart as she smiled and gurgled at the audience from Alister's arms on the platform.



Audience awaits start of Singalong

On to St Augustine's

It was four days before we sang again, this time at St Augustine's of Hippo in St Austell, where we were raising funds St Petroc's, Cornwall's charity for the homeless. As we had no guests, we had a more extended programme for the evening, which included solos from father and son Paul and Alex Pearce, and a handful of Cornish carols. The audience was disappointingly small, with fewer than 100 in attendance, but it was a successful concert, nonetheless.



A rousing climax to Blue Christmas



A quiet moment for accompanist Matt and soloist Paul



A million gallons of beer divide us from our audience – what an inspiration!

We get ‘bounced’ at the Brewery!

Finally, on the afternoon of 21st December, we pitched up at St Austell Brewery, where we discovered, to our dismay, that the room in which we had performed the previous year was now dominated by a bouncy castle. Instead, we been allocated a gallery in the room that housed the beer vats, situated on the floor below. Our audience faced us across the yawning chasm through which the tops of the vats protruded.

Once we had retrieved the Basses from the bouncy castle, we got under way, led, in Graham’s absence, by Mike S Thompson who, with the aid of the stentorian tones of our excellent compere, Baritone Robin Murphy, generally succeeded in communicating across the abyss with the many who had come to hear us.

As in the previous year, our performance contained a mix of our seasonal and regular programmes, with ‘*Anthem*’, ‘*California Dreaming*’, ‘*We Rise Again*’, and ‘*Mr Blue Sky*’ interspersed with more traditional pieces. The event, recorded by BBC Radio Cornwall, was free to enter, with donations going to Brewery Trust.

Dinner for 50+

The festivities weren’t completely over. Our annual dinner and dance – to which all Friends are invited – took place on 18th January at the Carlyon Bay Golf Club, where, as usual, we enjoyed first class meal, with excellent service, and danced to the inimitable ‘Double Brandy’, who, over the years have learned exactly what we like to hear.



↑ *The ladies show the way*

← *There's more room to move on the risers!*

↓ *Table 5 – suitably fed and watered!*



In between rehearsing for our two early concerts, and grappling with new pieces, we have continued to record more of repertoire for our next CD. Many recent favourites, like 'Mr Blue Sky', 'Tell My Father' and the '60s medley' are already in the can. We've still one or two to add as this newsletter goes to be, and much work remains to be done even then, but hopefully it will see the light of day later this year. We are particularly indebted to Bass Chris Williams for setting up the mikes and recording equipment at St Andrews whenever it's needed, and for the more technical work involved in his studio.

CONGRATULATIONS...



... to Bass George Phillips on his 80th birthday. A Mevagissey man – well, he lives here now – George is currently demonstrating his versatility at our concerts with his harmonica-playing on 'Tell my Father' – see left!

AND FOR OUR NEXT PIECE...

With 'Let the River Run' and 'California Dreaming' now meeting Graham's criteria for public performance (well, almost) we are now learning again. Paul Pearce has been relieved of the haunting 'Empty Chairs at Empty Tables' from Les Miserables that he performed so well as a soloist so that we can sing it in four parts. Just hope we can do half as well as he did – Graham will insist on it!

We are also about to embark on 'Lungs of the Earth', commissioned by Nick Hart and written by Matt Douglas for next September's Cornish Choral Event at the Eden Project. We will be singing on the Saturday, 26th September.

Oh, and given the popularity of both 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and our 'Back to the '60s medley', we have now embarked upon a Queen medley. Wish us luck!

YOUR SUPPORT IS ALWAYS WELCOME

As you know, we have no membership fee at Friends of Mevagissey Male Choir, and this newsletter is free. However, we do welcome donations to the Choir, to help pay for our music, our music team and our uniforms. These should be made by cheque, made payable to Mevagissey Male Choir and sent to our Treasurer Graham Hoskins at 71 Tehidy Road, Tywardreath, PL24 2QD, or preferably via BACS: Sort Code: 20-74-20 and account number: 70717940. Please write your surname followed by 'MMC Friend' in the payment reference field.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Venue	Comment	Time
2020			
Sat 4 April	St Bartholomew's Lostwithiel	With Tamar Valley MVC	7:30pm
**Sat 28 Apr	Jubilee Hall	Choir Entertainment Night	7.30pm
Sat 2 May	Portscatho Memorial Hall	Roseland Festival	7:30pm
Sat 30 May	St Allen's, Truro		7:30pm
Sat 20 Jun	Centenary Chapel, Camborne	With Four Lanes MVC	7:30pm
Mon 29 Jun	St Andrews, Mevagissey	Feast Week concert	7:30pm
Sat 25 Jul	Yealmpton Gospel Hall		7:30 pm
Mon 3, 10, 17, 24 Aug	Mevagissey Harbour	Quay concerts	7.45pm
Sun 30 Aug	Bude RNLI Day	With Beaufort Choir	<i>tbc</i>
Mon 31 Aug	Mevagissey Harbour	Quay concert	7.45pm
Sat 26 Sep	Eden Project	Sing Eden	<i>tbc</i>
Sat 16	Birmingham Symphony Hall	Massed Cornish Choirs	<i>tbc</i>
Sat 17 Oct	Wiveliscombe		<i>tbc</i>
Sat 14 Nov	St Augustine's	For St Petroc's	7:30pm
Sun 6 Dec	St Austell Brewery	Christmas fair for Merlin MS centre	7.30pm
Fri 11 Dec	St Andrews, Mevagissey	Christmas concert	7.00pm
*Mon 14 Dec	Penrice House	Private concert	7.30pm
Sat 19 Dec	St Austell Brewery	Christmas concert	2:30pm
2021			
**Sat 16 Jan	Carlyon Bay Golf Club	Choir Dinner & Dance	
<i>Wed 20 Jan</i>	<i>Hall for Cornwall</i>	<i>Cornwall Hospice Care 40+40 Voices</i>	
Sat 23 Oct	Chapel Street, Mousehole	With Mousehole MVC	

* Private **Non-singing event – all welcome *italics = to be confirmed*

Thanks again to all those who assisted with reports, photos etc, and, in particular, Carolyn George and Jane Stubberfield.