



Mevagissey Male Choir

Raising funds and raising spirits since 1974



www.meva-choir.co.uk
Registered Charity No: 298985

Spring 2017

No: 31

We were all devastated to hear of the loss of our popular Bass, Steve Flavell.

A tribute appears inside.



Did we ever have a more attentive audience?

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR MEVA MEN

We were delighted in early November to be contacted by the Mevagissey Primary School who asked if a contingent of choir members would come into the school and teach the children a few Cornish songs. There were plenty of volunteers and, on the day, ten of us turned up to spend a magical hour or two with the kids. And what quick learners they were!

In no time at all, they had formed a choir of their own, and

were competing against neighbouring schools. Our next step was to invite them to sing at our Mevagissey Christmas concert, which you can read about elsewhere. Now they are booked for our Feast Week concert, on Monday 26th June – and we're looking forward to popping into the school again some time soon to run them through a few more pieces. Won't be long before they're teaching us, we reckon!

Guy Fawkes, Eat your Heart out!



Could they be discussing Meva Capella's finer points?

We have found ourselves competing with all kinds of extraneous noises in the past – seagulls, motorbikes, sirens, spring to mind – but few of us could remember singing to a background of such a loud firework display as we did at St Paul's in Charlestown.

Perhaps we should have known. After all, there was a bit of clue in the date (note to Concert Secretary – avoid bookings on 5th November!). Actually, it was not too much of a distraction, although it did seem that the loudest bangs were reserved for Meva Capella, who nonetheless delivered *'I Really Don't Want to Know'* and *'All My Loving'* unflinchingly. And it didn't appear to deter people from coming. The church was almost full – could it have been the free glass of wine with every ticket?

The Parish of Charlestown was created in 1846, in response to the rapid population growth during the first half of the 19th century as mining and industrial activity increased, but there is an air of mystery surrounding the building of St Paul's. Indeed, Canon Hammond wrote in 1897 that "the Church, alas, has never been wholly paid for; some say that is why it has not prospered more."

It seems the building fund ran out of money in 1851, due in part to the closure of Charlestown United Mine in 1849. So, by early 1851, when services commenced, the Church may have been a barely completed shell, with the planned spire missing; a situation which would remain for 120 years. Between 1846 and 1851, the congregation held services in a room near the present Pier House Hotel. The church's foundation stone was laid by Sir Charles Graves Sawle of

Penrice House on 27th November 1849, and the building consecrated in 1851, but the collapse of mining in the area between 1850 and 1870 caused many people to leave and the parish became a quiet backwater, reflected in the fact that so few improvements in the church were made until well into the 20th century. The congregation remains active, however, in raising funds to maintain and improve the charming buildings; hence our appearance. The concert was organised by locals Pauline and Colin Bristow, as part of their church roof fundraising programme. Crackerjacks notwithstanding, we revelled in the excellent acoustic, adding a couple of new pieces, *'Home Lovin' Man'* and *'The Way We Were'*, to our more familiar

programme, and bringing back *'Song of Cornwall'*.

So, too, did soloist Paul Pearce, delivering *'For Your Eyes Only'* and *'It Was a Very Good Year'* in his usual faultless style.

The event was admirably compered by Bass David Leeson and the evening ended with a trip by some of us to the nearby new restaurant, the Longstore, where remaining diners were, either to their horror or delight, entertained by 20 or so choristers in full afterglow voice.



Always nice to spot someone you know in the audience!

FREE PINTS AT THE POLGOOTH!

The following evening, Sunday 6th November, some 15 or 16 Choir members gathered at the Polgooth Inn, just three or four miles from Mevagissey, to fulfil a request from St Austell Brewery for some singers to help celebrate the pub's 100th anniversary. Beer and singing - where else could they turn but to Mevagissey Male Choir?

St Austell Brewery have been incredibly supportive of our Choir over the years so when the invitation came in there was no debate – particularly when we heard there was a free pint for each singer. Unfortunately, they only wanted a dozen or so of us – we were singing in a pub, after all! - so some had to deal with their disappointment.

As it wasn't a formal performance, we weren't in uniform and sang without accompaniment but we believe we succeeded in winning over a whole new bunch of friends for the Choir. Second tenor Graham Hoskins – he of the Bo Rap guitar – brought along a programme of around a dozen songs, and his pitch pipe. We performed a number from our current repertoire – *'Anthem'*; *'Only You'*; *'Blue Moon'*; and *'Fat Bottomed Girls'*, together with a few singalong Cornish pub songs.

Free beer, an appreciative audience, no musical director to chastise us – and a wonderful welcome from mine hosts Alex and Tania. Heaven!

Steve Flavell



'Steve loved his grandchildren - and he loved his ice cream!', says Anna

We were all shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the passing of our dear friend and colleague, Steve Flavell, earlier this month, at the age of just 68. Steve had been in poor health for some months, but nonetheless was bravely and cheerfully still attending concerts towards the end of last year, and none of us were ready for the news when it came.

When Steve joined the Choir Basses in 2003, he brought not only his deep-rooted love of singing but also his great enthusiasm, infectious humour and a wonderful sense of fun. He threw himself into all our activities with gusto, ever coming up with new ideas and lending a hand where it was needed. It was only in the final stages of his illness that he was forced to resign his posts as Vice Chairman and Librarian.

Although born in Romford, Steve arrived in Cornwall as long ago as 1982, when he took up a geography teaching post at Penair School in Truro, having spent the previous five years at a British Army school in Germany. With him came Carolyn, his Plymouth-born wife, and their young children, Claire and Alex, to live first in Portscatho and later St Mawes and Truck, just outside Probus. In the late '80s Steve joined St Austell Sixth Form College, and, in 1997, the family moved to Gorran Haven.

Five years later, tragedy struck with the sudden death of Carolyn. It was a huge shock for Steve but, as the years went by, Steve became friends with Anna, a colleague at St Austell, and eventually they married in 2008.

Steve loved people. He was devoted to his family and extended family, but made countless friends and enjoyed a very active social life. A keen cricketer in his younger days, he won many trophies playing bridge, he learned ballroom dancing, with Anna, and they swam regularly in the sea at Gorran and loved walking the coast path.

And then there was his singing. Given his love of music – he was a keen Gilbert & Sullivan participant since he was a teenager, a berth in Mevagissey Male Choir was probably an inevitability. Steve also sang with other groups and was a founder member of The Press Gang. Both were honoured to be asked to sing in St Andrew's on 16th March as nearly 300 people came to say farewell to Steve. We will all miss his cheery grin, his friendly and encouraging words and his sheer exuberance.

The final word goes to Anna: "Yesterday was so special with a huge feeling of love for Steve surrounding us all through that amazing service which he had planned! He loved Press Gang and the Mevagissey Male Choir and he wanted a 'choir funeral' at St Andrews. I thought the singing from both was just wonderful, so thank you all for taking part. I think and hope that everyone went away feeling uplifted by the whole experience. What a wonderful tribute to a very special man. I feel so lucky and privileged to have been his wife."

‘DOC’ JONES



Choir members were also saddened to hear of the passing on 31st January of Honorary Member Dr John Jones - or "Doc", as he was known locally.

George Phillips reminds us that Doc "became a staunch member of the Choir shortly after moving to Mevagissey in 1996, putting his strong Welsh tenor voice to good use, both in the Top Tenor section, and in solo spots - for which he was always ready!" Musical Director Graham adds, "John was a valued member of the 1st tenor section and a soloist of confidence and ability."

Doc moved to Cornwall after retiring from the World Health Organisation, where he had worked as a part of the UN team that was sent to disaster areas such as Chernobyl, to deal with the aftermath and help plan the relief arrangements.

For the past couple of years, he has lived in a care home near his family in Northampton, where he had "a fantastic time", according to his son Hugh. "He started a choir of residents which met every Monday and held six public concerts. Singing was everything to him and, just a week before he died, he was singing solos with a strong voice...he could still hit top G!"

Hugh visited his father most days and had "long conversations about Cornwall, the Choir and the many concerts he took part in". He would like his family's heartfelt thanks to be passed on for "the wonderful companionship that the Choir showed towards Doc".

Doc will be missed by all those who knew him, and our sympathy and commiserations go to John's wife, Judith, and his five children and their families. His funeral will take place at 1pm on Monday 27 February 2017, at Nazareth House, 118 Harlestone Road, Northampton, NN5 6AD, and will include a recording of 'Sanctus' by the Mevagissey Male Choir.

Children's Hospice Benefits as We Strut our Stuff at the Seahorse

One of our more unusual concerts took place on 12th November, when we took part in a variety show at the Seahorse Centre in nearby Pentewan. The event had been organised by Jaime Hughes on behalf of the Children's Hospice South West, which was celebrating its 25th anniversary.

The Seahorse is effectively a clubhouse for the Pentewan Sands holiday park, with a huge bar area and stage on the first floor above a large swimming pool. We found ourselves rubbing shoulders with magicians and mid-teen girl dancers, in an atmosphere more reminiscent of

'Britain's Got Talent' than our more traditional haunts. It was all a little daunting in some ways, and we were a little unsure as what kind of reception a bunch of men of a certain age, suited and booted, might receive.

We needn't have worried. Nobody was applauded more enthusiastically than we were. Jaime had asked us to perform two sets, of just 15 minutes each - but with an hour's break in between! Not ideal, but we were still bathing in the afterglow of our Cyprus tour, so nothing was too much trouble.

Having arrived at 7, we finally got on stage some time after 8, delivering five pieces – *'Anthem'*, *'Mevagissey Bay'*, *'Home Lovin' Man'*, *'The Way We Were'* and *'Hail to the Homeland'*. Despite the unfamiliar constitution of the audience – a far greater variety of age than we are used to - we were tremendously well received. Pleasantly surprised, we trooped back to the *'Crow's Nest'*, a room put aside for performers at the back, where we munched the pasties that had been thoughtfully provided. It was well after 9 before we were summoned back on, having taken the opportunity to enjoy the other talent on view – the dancing schoolgirls, an *a capella* ladies group, a young female soloist and, of course, the magician. We finished our stint with *'Floral Dance'*, *'Song of Cornwall'*, *'Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit'*, *'Cornish Hearts'* and *'We Rise Again'*. The reception was almost riotous. Carolyn George, who does such a magnificent job snapping us from the most difficult places, was so blown away she forgot to remove her date setting!

The party continued with what was billed as a *'late night disco'*. So we made our excuses and left, some for our beds, others to the nearby Ship Inn for a little peace and quiet – and a somewhat subdued afterglow.

The real reward came a few days later when we learned from Jaime that the evening had raised an amazing £1,650 for the hospice. *'It went really well'*, she wrote. *'Please thank all the choir. It was the kind help from people like yourselves that enabled us to put on a great show.'*

It was a pleasure, Jaime.



Basses on 'the dark side' again

MEVA KIDS STEAL THE SHOW!



These kids were just sensational!

In December 2012, we invited the Mevagissey Ladies Choir to join us for a Christmas concert at St Andrew's. We liked it so much that we've been doing it every year – and this time we got the Mevagissey Primary School to take part, too. What a result!

Fourteen of the kids that welcomed some of guys during their visit to the school a month before, turned up on Friday 9th December with assistant head Rebekah Baily to delight us with three beautifully-performed Christmas pieces that had us at one moment amused and the next in awe.

A packed church also had the pleasure of hearing, for the second year running, the flute skills of Theo Fleming. Theo, who is Head Boy at Falmouth School, where our accompanist Matt Fox is Head of Music, had the audience entranced with his playing of 'Dance of the Snowmen', 'Walking in the Air', and 'Sleigh-Ride'.

Our thanks go to all those who took part, including the Ladies Choir, with Barry Farley and David Robinson, their MD and accompanist respectively.

And, of course, to St Andrew's and the Rev. Danny Weadon.



Our MD – either entering the Christmas spirit or drinking it!;

Penrice – 35 Years and Counting

Back in December 1981, the Choir thought it would be a nice idea to perform a Christmas concert for the elderly residents of Penrice House, in Porthpean, on the coast road from Mount Charles to Pentewan. It became a habit and, 35 years later, we are still doing it. And so, on Monday 12th December, we made our way down the long, dark tree-lined drive to the 500-year-old former dwelling of the Sawle family, to entertain the 29 residents and the wonderful staff.

Penrice House had entered into its new role only ten years prior to our first visit, and followed the passing of Mrs Joan Rosemary Cobbold-Sawle in 1971. As the only surviving child of Admiral Sir Charles John Graves Sawle, she succeeded to the Sawle estate on her father's death in 1932. She had married into the Cobbold brewing family, but left no heir, and, under the terms of her will, the property, and much of the proceeds of the estate, went to establish the rest home for the elderly that we know today.

There's little room for variation in Christmas concerts from one year to the next, of course, so it was a fairly conventional formula that was followed, beginning with getting the entire room involved with a rousing rendition of *While Shepherds Watched* to the popular Lingham arrangement. There followed a mixture of traditional carols, some Cornish and several pieces from our new CD. Meva Capella pitched in with a couple of their own.

As always, an extremely generous spread awaited us in the guest room, which we tried very hard to do justice to. It is hard to think of any of our venues where we are better looked after. Thanks again to everyone at Penrice House.

Numbers were severely depleted at the Polgooth – our customary post-Penrice stop – due primarily to confusion over dates. We had already booked the pub for our afterglow on the following Saturday so we weren't expected, and numbers were light. No matter, there was beer and we could sing. So all was right with the world.

(NEARLY) ALL CHANGE ON COMMITTEE

Our 43rd AGM took place just before Christmas and saw David Leeson relinquish the Treasurer's role after almost ten years. His contribution has been immense, and members recorded their appreciation. They also thanked Tony Scarratt, who was stepping down after two years as Secretary. Tony had barely passed his voice test when he was pitchforked into the job following the retirement of Michael Collings, and we are all grateful for his contribution. David and Tony are succeeded by Graham Hoskins and Mike Tate, respectively.

With Steve Flavell stepping down as he continued to battle his illness, we also needed to find a new vice chairman and librarian. Former chairman Stephen Gibson, now relishing his freedom post retirement, put himself forward and got both jobs. And Bernard Hocking, a long-time Choir stalwart, and always voice of wisdom in committee, had decided to pass on the Almoner's baton. It was readily picked up by Bass Andy Gill.

AN EVENING OF FUN AT ST JOHN'S



Choir Members' red hats visible beneath organ pipes

It's a great way to start Christmas. One-time Mevagissey MD, Geoff Wheildon, masterminds a delightful Christmas singalong at St John's in St Austell, and gets us along, in an informal way – i.e. no uniforms, and seasonal jumpers and hats – to help put some oomph into the singing. Although we reckon the children, who make up half the numbers in the packed audience, would manage perfectly well without us!

Accompanied by a dozen or so members of the St Austell town band, we rattled through some 20 pieces, from 'Silent Night' and 'We Three Kings' to 'Santa Got Stuck up the Chimney' and 'I Saw Mummy Kissing Santa Claus', with joyous contributions from everyone, and especially the kids.

Proceeds go each year to a particularly deserving local child, and this time an appeal was made on behalf of Logan, who bravely put in an appearance.

These are wonderful annual events and always get a strong turnout from our members.

Tin Gee Gee Trots in for Christmas Debut



Who could they be laughing at?

Our last concert of the year was held on the 17th December, the final Saturday before Christmas, at Holy Trinity, St Austell, a handsome building with a fine vaulted ceiling and excellent acoustics. The beneficiaries were St Petroc's Society, which raises funds to help the homeless in Cornwall with accommodation and other practical support and, during the interval, we were told about how the need, which increases annually, is addressed by the society. As our Chairman, Nick Nicholls, remarked at the conclusion, it was sobering to think about the plight of some people at this time of year and it was our pleasure to do something to help.

The programme for the evening included many of the tracks that comprise our new Christmas CD, '*Sing for the Child*', and was well received by the audience, who joined in lustily with the congregation's carols. But it was otherwise notable for the solo debut of Peter Bowker, the man with a song for all seasons, who, accompanying himself on the guitar, took us back to Victorian England with a rendition of *The Tin Gee Gee*, a ditty sung to him by his father to send him to sleep as a very young boy.

Subtitled *The Lowther Arcade* (a site on The Strand, London, now occupied by HM The Queen's bank, Coutts & Co., but which, in those days, was home to a toyshop), this touching ditty records how, by sleight of hand, the singer gave



succour to a tin soldier and helped him to his heart's desire, under the Christmas Tree. I sang the song to my kids, says Peter, and they have taught it to theirs - so the grandchildren all know it as well - in true aural (or is it oral) tradition." Aaah!

Prompted by Graham Willcocks, Peter added a new final verse to provide a happy ending more in keeping with seasonal sentiments and, by the end, there was hardly a dry eye in the house.

Regular stars Paul Pearce and Phil Johns once again delighted

Peter Busker – sorry, Bowker – remembers his days in Victorian London

respectively with solo performances of 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' and 'Mary's Boy Child' before Peter Bowker,

The proceedings of the evening were brought to a close by our Chairman, who thanked all those who had assisted with the practicalities of running the Choir during the year, but made a special presentation to Matt Fox for his work in building up the number of teach track recordings which so many members of the Choir find so very useful.

Many members of the Choir then retired to the Polgooth Inn, the traditional venue for our last afterglow of the year, to wassail with a pasty, a pint and the good folk of that village.



Soloist Paul Pearce acknowledges accompanist Matt Fox

CHANGE OF VENUE FOR DINNER TURNS OUT TO BE A WINNER



MMC mutual support group

Out of adversity comes opportunity. When the Bosun's Diner restaurant in Charlestown, regular venue for our annual dinner/dance over the past few years, wrote belatedly in November to inform us that they couldn't honour our Christmas booking this winter, we were thrown into some disarray. We had booked the band, we had all put a note in our diaries and we wondered whether we would find a suitable alternative at short notice.

We needn't have worried. After considering a number of options, we settled on the Carlyon Bay Golf Club. And what an extraordinarily successful evening we had on Saturday 14th January.

Sixty members, wives and friends sat down in plush and intimate surroundings, to enjoy a first class Christmas menu, served by a genuinely friendly and attentive staff, for whom nothing was too much trouble.

Once the eating was done, and the well-stocked table of raffle prizes emptied, Double Brandy, our regular musical entertainment, struck up with the '60s and '70s dance music that they excel in and which proves so popular among our members.

All in all, it was an extremely convivial evening that allowed so many of our members, and, in particular, their other halves, to socialise in an environment that for once did not have the men distracted by a singing commitment. For many of us it had echoes of the recent Cyprus trip.

So, we have Sir Tim Smit's 'Lost Gardens of Heligan', which acquired the Bosun's Diner in 2016, to thank for rescuing this event, which some had begun to think was outrunning its useful life. Past disappointments were forgotten and it seems more than likely that the decision to shut the restaurant in January, for whatever reason, will ensure that it will continue – although probably not at the Bosun's Diner!

WHAT FRIENDS SAY

It's always nice to hear that we're doing something right and from time to time we receive wonderful messages of support and appreciation. Here are just a few:

I just want to say how much I love your new CD. I put it on every night before I go to bed. I've heard many choirs over the last few years but none compares with yours. And thank you for keeping me in touch with everything you're doing through your newsletter - **Di Mitchell, Tywardreath**

Attending your rehearsal last September was a highlight of our trip to England. As a chorister, I am impressed by your sound, your musicianship and your leadership. Your CDs are now a staple in our house, and impress all our guests! The shining gem of our visit to Mevagissey was after the rehearsal at the Fountain Inn pub. I will remember always the glow on every face as they sang 'Cornwall My Home'. That moment was a testament to what music does for the soul -

Steve and Idell Stein

Mashpee, Massachusetts

I am sitting in my London flat listening to a CD which I bought on the harbour at Mevagissey on Monday 29th August. I just want to tell you how much I adore my CD! I was walking the coastal path with my boyfriend and we were sitting eating fish and chips and watching dolphins out at sea when we heard musical sounds coming from the inner harbour. To our surprise we found your choir singing in very smart blazers. It was the highlight of my holiday. I knew and loved most of the songs, the setting was fabulous and the whole atmosphere was 'magical'. I bought the 'Mevagissey Bay' CD and have played it over and over again. I love all the tracks, especially 'Angels', 'Hallelujah' and Bohemian Rhapsody'. Being a great Freddie Mercury fan, I was very impressed by your guitar player.

*If I lived in Cornwall, I would make a point of coming to all your concerts, but I live in London. However, I am walking the whole of the coastal path in stages so shall be returning next year to walk the next section. I really hope I will be able to come and watch another of your performances. Your choir sing **so** beautifully and must bring so much joy to SO many people.*

Sally Adams, north London

PLEASE HELP!

As we embark on a new season, you'll hopefully forgive us for mentioning how much we rely on YOUR donations to fund the Choir and its activities, including this newsletter.

We are currently learning a number of new pieces, all of which we think you will like. But new music is expensive. The proceeds from almost all our concerts go to charities and good causes. So we rely on our August quay concerts, our CD sales, and our members' own annual subscriptions to generate the funds we need to buy our music and fund our other expenses. And on you! Please give generously to ensure the continuing prosperity of our Choir.

€1,000 EACH FOR CYPRUS LADIES' CHOIRS

It all seems so long ago now but it was hugely gratifying to hear from Graham Rundle that our concert at the Kourion amphitheatre at Limassol in October had been even more successful than we imagined. After all expenses, the two Military Wives Choirs – Akrotiri and Episkopi – received more than €1,000 each. And remember, we made a similar amount for the Royal British Legion, when singing with the Achord Ladies earlier in the tour.

2017 DIARY

Date	Comment	Venue	Time
Fri 7 Apr	Social Evening	Mevagissey Social Club	7.30pm
Sat 29 Apr	Int'l Competition Hosting	St John's, St Austell	7.30pm
Fri 12 May	With St Mewan Community Choir	Tbc	tbc
Sat 3 Jun		St Swithin's, Lancell	7.30pm
Mon 26 Jun	Feast Week Concert	St Andrew's, Mevagissey	7.30pm
Mon 17 Jul	Stithians Show	Stithians Show Ground	tbc
Mon 31 Jul	Quay Concert	Mevagissey Quay	7.45pm
Mons 7, 14, 21, 28 Aug	Quay Concert	Mevagissey Quay	7.45pm
Sun 8 Oct		Holsworthy Arts Theatre	2.00pm
Sun 15 Oct	Harvest of the Sea	St Andrew's, Mevagissey	4.00pm
Sat 21 Oct	With Mousehole MVC	St Andrew's, Mevagissey	7.30pm
**Thu 30 Nov	AGM	Mevagissey Social Club	7.30pm
Sat 9 Dec	Christmas, with Ladies and School	St Andrew's, Mevagissey	7.00pm
Tue 12 Dec	Informal Christmas Singalong	St John's, St Austell	7.30pm
<i>Fri 15 Dec</i>	<i>Christmas concert</i>	<i>Holy Trinity, St Austell</i>	<i>7.30pm</i>
**Mon 18 Dec	Christmas concert	Penrice House	7.30pm

2018

Sat 13 Jan	Dinner/Dance	Carlyon Bay Golf Club	7.30pm
Sat 5 May	<i>With Cyprus Ladies</i>	Minack Theatre	7.30pm

** = private

Italics = provisional