

MEVAGISSEY MALE CHOIR

SPRING 2014

NO. 20



Graham Rundle presents MMC's new shield to Torpoint Ladies' Sylvia Fraser

Our next concert is on Saturday 10th May, when we return to the Minack Theatre, where we will be singing with the Military Wives. The concert starts at 7.30 pm. For tickets, please visit our website – www.mevagisseychoir.co.uk

Meanwhile, tickets are still available for our Gala Concert at Eden on 30th May.

PEARL FISHERS SURFACE AT TORPOINT

After more than a year in rehearsal, the Choir has finally unveiled in public its interpretation of 'Au Fond du Temple Saint', the popular aria from Bizet's opera, 'The Pearl Fishers'. The venue was St James Church in Torpoint, where last month we shared a wonderful evening of singing with The Torpoint Lady Singers and a group of young ladies known as The Torpettes.

It was our Choir's first concert of 2014, and a golden opportunity to perform not only Pearl Fishers, as the new addition has become known, but also to reprise 'Comrades in Arms', number 1 in our 200-plus repertoire,

and a piece that only the longer-serving members could recall performing. Both will feature at Eden on 30th May – and quite likely at the Minack on the 10th.

Pearl Fishers has been long in the gestation not only because of the intricacies of the rhythms and melodies, but also because we sing it in French! And a good job the Choir make of it too, according to a friendly Frenchman living in Mevagissey who was chivvied along to a practice evening by Top Tenor Dominic McVeigh to hear us. "Magnifique", he was heard to mutter!

Our Torpoint audience were appreciative, too, including the Torpoint Ladies – and praise from peers is always special. In her gracious note, to club secretary Michael Collings, the TLS's Chris Trethewey referred to our "rich, inspiring singing", adding: "We all enjoyed the evening so much".

Just eight members comprised the Ladies choir when they formed in 1987, but now they number 30, and, over the years they have raised over £40,000 for various charities. The 14 Torpettes began as the *'Ronettes'* in their school musical, *'The Little Shop of Horrors'*, last year and won an award and certificate of commendation at the Plymouth Music Festival with their classic Motown repertoire.



The award winning Torpoettes

TLS, directed by Sylvia Fraser and accompanied by Sue Westwell, opened the concert with *'Stormy Weather'* and a *'Fiddler on the Roof'* medley, and were followed by the Torpettes with Billie Holliday's *'Strange Fruit'* and their own musical director, Emma Luing's arrangement of *'Only You'*. We then performed *'Comrades in Arms'*, *'Anthem'*, *'Floral Dance'* and *'Cornish Hearts'*.

After the interval TLS entertained us with *'The Nuns' Chorus'*, *'Ave Verum'*, and *'O Rejoice that the Lord has Arisen'*, before a delightful performance of *'On My Own'* from *'Les Miserables'* by the Torpettes. Mevagissey followed with *'Nessun Dorma'*, *'Angels'*, *'Bohemian Rhapsody'* and *'Pearl Fishers'*, and the evening ended with a rousing rendition of *'Trelawney'* by choirs and audience combined.

The Torpoint Ladies became the first recipients of the new shield that the Choir has commissioned as a presentation to offer host choirs, and it was presented on the night by Chairman Graham Rundle to the TLC MD, Sylvia Fraser.

ROBIN HUNKIN HONOURED



Robin Receives His Black Badge at Torpoint

The evening at Torpoint was particularly memorable for Baritone Robin Hunkin, who was presented with the Choir's coveted Black Badge. The Black Badge is awarded to members who have given exceptional service to the Choir and none has been more deserving than Robin, who works tirelessly in support of the Choir, and particularly in support of local Mevagissey events, including the Feast Week. He is the section leader of the Baritones, sings in the choir quartet, Meva Capella, and does a splendid job as soloist on 'Homeless'. He is also playing a leading role in the planning of the Eden gala Concert.

Chairman Graham Rundle did the honours, presenting Robin with the badge at the end of the event at Torpoint.

Graham and Secretary Michael Collings have also recently presented Honorary Member Certificates to Jack Hicks, John Jones, Mike Watson and Ernie Williams

Eden Beckons

We are rapidly approaching our Gala concert at Eden on 30th May and the Choir has been hard at work rehearsing the special programme we will be performing on the evening. Songs have been chosen from each of the four decades of the Choir's existence, beginning with the first piece ever performed and concluding – well, almost - with our most recent – *Au Fond du Temple Saint* from Bizet's 'The Pearl Fishers'.

We are very excited about the prospect of singing a number of these pieces with the Cornish Symphony Orchestra and we are particularly looking forward to welcoming the Plymouth Military Wives to our neck of the woods after the huge success of the joint concert we put on last year in Ashburton. Local soprano Alison Harvey will also be reprising her solo performance of *Whispering Hope*, one of the most popular tracks on 'Mevagissey Bay'.

Approaching 500 people are expected to attend the event in The Eden Gallery Room, which, with its delightful views over the magnificent Biomes, should be an appropriate venue for what promises to be a spectacular night. At the time of writing, tickets were still available.

ITV comes to St Andrew's

Our rehearsal for Minack and Eden was interrupted on 7th April by the arrival at St Andrew's of an ITV reporter/cameraman to film us in practice for pre-publicity purposes.

It meant bringing the risers and uniforms to practice and we spent the first part of the evening singing 'Angels' several times over so that we could be 'shot' from different angles. The ITV man also took time out to interview Chairman Graham Rundle, (pictured here under the lights) Musical Director Graham Willcocks and founder-member Robin Hunkin.

As we went to press we were still awaiting news of the date on which the footage is going to be aired, but there is little doubt that this would represent important publicity for the Choir and, in particular, the Eden event. There has already been plenty of coverage in the local media, while Robin Hunkin and myself were interviewed at length by Tiffany Truscott on Radio Cornwall.



We are extremely grateful to St Austell Brewery who not only designed and printed the tickets for the event but in addition, furnished us with some excellent posters. The Brewery are also producing a 20-page programme for us, with photos of the Choir over the years.

..... The Minack and Sterts, too

Two other concerts will make this a truly memorable summer. Before our appointment at Eden, we will be returning to the Minack, the spectacular open air theatre at Porthcurno and scene of one of our most vivid recent memories in 2012. We'll be back there on 10th May and the Plymouth Military Wives will be joining us here, too – I suspect people maybe starting to talk!!

Then, on 7th June, we shall be performing at Sterts Theatre, the 'theatre on the moor', situated on the edge of Bodmin Moor near the village of Upton Cross. This time our guests will be Cornwall's Military Wives, the Culdroses.



Yes, I know they're all smiling, but it IS the Mevagissey Male Choir, pictured this month

SPECIAL DAY FOR LAWDAY



Simon and Jane on Pentewan Beach

Saturday 22nd February was a particularly special day for one of our members. Simon Lawday, who has sung with the Basses since 1990, married Jane Stephens, stepdaughter of Simon's fellow Bass, Steve Flavell.

The ceremony took place at Mount Charles Methodist Church, St Austell, where Jane was baptized. The service was conducted by Rev John Kendall. Brian Mitchell, until recently the Choir's regular accompanist, played the organ, and the White River Gospel choir, of which Jane and her mother, Anna, are members, sang before the signing of the register.

With every one of the 160 seats taken, it was standing room only in the church! For the benefit of our lady readers, Jane wore a beautiful fitted ivory lace dress embellished with diamante and sequins, and a short diamante-edged ivory veil. Jane's sister, Victoria (Vick), was chief bridesmaid and she was accompanied by Esmé (9) and Louis (6), Steve's grandchildren, as bridesmaid and pageboy. The bridesmaids wore knee length dresses, Vick in fuchsia chiffon and lace with navy satin shoes and Esmé in navy lace with her very first pair of sparkly 'high' heels! The girls carried beautiful bouquets of ivory roses, fuchsia spray roses, gypsophila and grasses. Louis wore a mini-version of the groom's party's suits with ivory waistcoat, fuchsia ruche and handkerchief and very proudly carried the beautiful ring cushion.



Jane was given away by her proud father, Keith Stephens, and best man was Simon's foster brother, William, whose wife, Victoria (Tori), read 'The Blessing of the Hands' during the service.

Tea and cake were provided for those not going on to the reception at The Seahorse Centre, in Pentewan, where nearly 80 guests joined Jane and Simon for a 3-course meal. The lovely wedding cake, made by Anna, was cut, followed by the happy couple's first dance and the evening continued with a performance by Press Gang, a local singing group, comprising mainly Choir members, including Simon and Steve. Everyone heartily joined in all the choruses! An evening buffet and disco brought the evening to a close.

I'm sure all Choir members and Friends wish Simon & Jane a long and happy life together.

A Prior Engagement for James



James Gill's New Facebook Photo!

It's congratulations, too, to Baritone James Gill, who has announced his engagement to Naomi Griggs. James, who, has been singing with the Choir since 2009 and Naomi celebrated with friends and family at St Austell Rugby Club.

It must have been hard for them to find a date, given James's Choir commitments – he also sings with the Octet – and his decision to take on the role of Arthur Kipps in *Half a Sixpence* for the St Austell Amateur Operatic Society.

James auditioned for Kipps – the lead role and one requiring him to be on stage throughout almost the entire production – in the autumn of 2013 and has dedicated the last few months to the part. Those who saw the show, which ran every night during the second week in April at St Austell's Keay Theatre, were full of admiration and applause for his performance. He certainly made Dad Andy, who sings with our Bass section, a very proud man.

Choir Welcome Brightens Mark's Dark Day

September 30th 2013 is a day that new Second Tenor Mark Dooling will long remember. It was the date of his first ever Choir practice. It was also the day that he learned he was being made redundant!

Just two hours before he walked through the doors at St Andrew's he had been told he no longer had a job. As it turned out, he couldn't have wanted for better therapy. "I was made to feel so warmly welcome by the whole Choir for



Mark and family just after two of the boys had performed in a concert in Atlanta

all of that evening," he says, "that it blew away any negative thoughts I might have otherwise had." What greater tribute can there be to the friendship and camaraderie of our Choir than that? And it was a sentiment that was to be repeated in February when, on passing his voice test, "once again I was made to feel so great by the whole choir."

A Yorkshireman from Bradford, Mark now runs his own digital marketing business, providing web hosting, social media marketing, online retailing and other web services. He has always worked in the software industry and spent the 'noughties' in Atlanta, Georgia, with his family – wife Tracey and three sons, Adam, Nathan and Jordan. All bar Nathan, who is pursuing a music degree in the USA, returned to the UK in 2010 and, after a couple of years of "paying extortionate rents in Greater London", he says, "we looked for a cheaper commutable place to live, preferably by the sea." And they arrived in Mevagissey. "We got the whole package except the commutable bit!"

They also got Top Tenor Dominic McVeigh as a neighbour and it wasn't long before Mark had been "press-ganged" into trying the Choir. Dom convinced me that I had a good singing voice, just based on the timbre of my speaking voice" he admits; "proof that flattery will get you anywhere!"

Mark hadn't sung in public since performing in a school production of 'Oh! What a Lovely War!' 35 years ago – although he did play **ELEVEN** parts in that! Perhaps it was that First World War connection that persuaded him to choose 'Comrades in Arms' for his voice test!

He hasn't looked back. "I must admit I do enjoy the beer and the atmosphere in the little sessions we have in The Fountain after practice nights. "It's all just rousing and rollocking good fun."

The Man Who Minds Our Money



David with grandchildren at St Austell Station

David Leeson spent a lifetime helping children with learning difficulties. He could hardly have had better preparation for his role as our Choir Treasurer!

It was David's skill and dedication in this field brought him to Mevagissey in 1978, to take on the Headship of a local Special School. It didn't take me long, he says, "to realise just how wonderful it would be for our two daughters to grow up here". And so here he stayed, joining the Choir as a Bass within a couple of years and taking over as Treasurer in 2008.

David's earliest years were spent on the coastal cliff tops of North Yorkshire. When his father returned from war, the family bought a grocery shop in nearby Thornton-le-Dale, a village nestling in the lee of the moors between Pickering and Scarborough. (David still manages inherited properties there – check out www.sunnyvistaholidays.com on the Choir website!

Both parents were musical; Mum played second violin in the Hull Philharmonic Orchestra - once under the baton of Sir Henry Wood! - and Dad had been a church choir member. Mum was also a pianist and organised lessons for the young David. Soon he was singing along to the tunes he was playing and, by the time he was eight, he found himself in the church choir!

He went on to sing in his secondary school choir, in Boy Scout 'Gang Shows' and other social events. As a teenager, he took jobs as a temporary postman, a country club waiter and, his favourite, a keeper in a small zoo, working with elephants, big cats, snakes, penguins etc – "not so different from hotel work, really!", he says. It also gave him one of the scarier moments of his life, retrieving an engagement ring from the alligator pool!

Following his teacher training in Coventry, he soon found he had a talent for work in special needs – not just academically, but also in after-school activities, such as canoeing, camping, hill-walking and climbing. One of his greatest triumphs was helping put on a performance of 'Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat' at a multicultural inner-city school with terrible social problems. "It turned out to be quite a spectacular event", he recalls.

David, whose daughters have graduated and moved upcountry, now lives in Tywardreath with partner Kath, and

Muffin, a little Jack Russell/Sporting Lucas Terrier who recently won the Grade 1 South West Small Dog Agility Championship. “Crufts, here we come”, he says.

Favourite Choir moments include singing in a massed choir in the Royal Albert Hall, giving a recital in Westminster Abbey and sharing the stage of Plymouth Theatre Royal with the Band of the Royal Marines; as well as “watching Choir members and their wives trying to master their canoes on the Dordogne River!”

David has always loved the outdoor life, whether climbing in North Wales, inner city dinghy sailing, camping amid sulphur fumes and boiling mud in a volcanic crater in Naples, witnessing the devastation of Yugoslavia’s Skopje earthquake, exploring France in his camper van, or simply walking the Cornish landscape. “Life has been pretty interesting, amazing and rewarding so far...”

He is a huge asset to the Choir and we are very lucky to have him! (OK Dave? Am I let off my subs now?)

NOTES FROM AN OLD FRIEND



Donkey serenade – Paul and friend in the Pyrenees

On the next page, we are publishing the first of a series of observations and reminiscences by Paul Newman, a former Choir member who no longer lives in Cornwall.

Paul arrived in Cornwall in August 2000 to work in the horticulture team at the yet-to-open Eden Project, having just completed a career-change horticulture course near his home in Bath. Not expecting to stay more than a year or so, he found temporary accommodation

in Mevagissey, “which I loved”. In the event he stayed eight years,

“partly”, he says, “because I was enjoying myself, and partly due to a serious road accident in December 2001”.

It was the late Mike Lawday who introduced him to the Choir, where he sang as a Bass until he finally returned home to Bath in March 2008. He still sings, with a small mixed (SATB) choir called CitySound. performing a varied repertoire that he says is “quite similar to that of MMC”. Paul remains a Friend of the Choir and popped into a practice night last summer – and for the usual ‘refreshment’ in The Fountain afterwards.

Read on for the first instalment of his story.

‘Rarely Have I Felt So Contented’

by Paul Newman

About twenty of us men are standing around in groups, relaxed and contented, in the bar of the King’s Arms, Mevagissey, supping pints of good Cornish beer, peering enquiringly at large plates of sandwiches, or scooping up sausages and chips from an enormous platter provided ‘on the house’ by the landlord. It is Monday night and we have just finished our practice in St Andrew’s Church.

After a period to allow the beer and food to work their magic, a whispered conversation leads to Robin pulling out his little tuning pipe, and blowing into it to produce a barely audible ‘G’. People suddenly move closer, sliding past one another to stand near to somebody else from their own ‘section’, and the four-part harmony of ‘*Lower Lights*’ swells, softly filling the bar; bass, baritone, second and sweet top tenors weaving rich and mellow harmonies.

Faces glance at each other, taking the measure of the tempo, feeling the rise and fall of the individual line blending, or sparking off the other three parts, ears straining for other voices singing the same line, and fine-tuning their contribution, eyes growing abstract with concentration and glowing with contentment. We all love our music and get that quite unexplained and unexplainable thrill from making music together.

When we finish, there is a round of applause from other customers. Some are locals, some holiday-makers, usually identifiable because they obviously didn’t expect to hear singing in the pub. Perhaps some of the locals will join in the next piece; they may know one of the lines of the harmony. In Cornwall it doesn’t take much to make people sing.

Evenings like this will turn out to be perhaps the most treasured memory of my years in Cornwall. Rarely in my life have I felt so contented, so, well, just plain happy. Recent medical opinion tells us that singing has a beneficial effect on us, both physically and psychologically.

Companionship must surely do the same. And a pint of beer, too, transforms the world into a better place to be!



Enjoying the Pyrenean version of a pint of Tribute



MEVAGISSEY MEMENTO

The Choir has been considering for some time that it would be appropriate to have some kind of memento to present to choirs with whom we share concerts. Graham Rundle was tasked with finding something suitable and came up with the shield, pictured here. The photograph on the first page shows Torpoint Ladies' Musical Director Sylvia Fraser receiving the first of these from Graham last month.

Any stories or comments for the Newsletter?

Please contact:

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CONCERT DIARY

Sat 10 th May	Minack Theatre	Choir Funds	7.45pm
Fri 30 th May	Eden Project	40 th Anniversary Gala Concert	7.30pm
Sat 7 th June	Sterts Theatre	With Culdrose Military Wives	7.30pm
Mon 30 th June	St Andrew's Church, Mevagissey	Feast Week Concert	7.30pm
Mons 28 th July, 4 th , 11 th , 18 th , 25 th August	Mevagissey Quayside	Quay Concerts	7.45pm
Sat 4 th October	St Michael's Church, Bath	With Bath Silver Ring Choir	7.30pm
Sun 5 th October	Crediton	Details to Follow	
Sun 19 th October	St Andrew's Church, Mevagissey	Harvest of the Sea	4.00pm