

MEVAGISSEY MALE CHOIR

SUMMER 2015

NO. 24



SIX OF THE BEST!

*Back row; l to r: Roger Daniel (TT); Roger Mitchell (ST); Robin Hunkin (Br);
Ron Hocking (Bs); Front Row: Jim Hunkin (TT); Gil Blamey (ST)]*

Our next concert is at St John's, in St Austell, as hosts for the CIMVC Festival starting at 7.30 pm.

For further information check out our website – www.meva-choir.co.uk or visit our Facebook page.

ONE THOUSAND UP!

In the next few days, Mevagissey Male Choir will be performing its 1,000th concert! Who among those 20 men who gathered at Mevagissey Sunday School in November 1974, could have imagined it? Six of them – Gil Blamey, Roger Daniel, Jim Hunkin, Robin Hunkin, Ron Hocking and Roger Mitchell – are expected to be on the risers with us on 2nd May, to celebrate this special moment in our history.

The venue is St John's Methodist Church, St Austell, where we will be hosting an evening for the Cornwall International Male Voice Choral Festival. Coming hard on the heels of last year's 40th anniversary celebrations, this landmark is a tribute to the dedication of the many members who have sung with the Choir for so many years.

Our first ever concert took place on 17th April 1975, at our 'home' church St Andrews in Mevagissey, five months after Gary Mitchell and Geoff Pollard led the founders in their first practice. What a lot has been achieved in the meantime. We have given concerts in the USA, Canada, Germany, France, Holland, Portugal and the Republic of Ireland, as well as in Wales and Scotland. And we have performed three times in Westminster Abbey, the only male voice choir, we believe, to have done so.

A total of 70 choirs will be taking part in what will be the seventh CIMVC Festival, which takes place over five days from 30th April to 4th May at 50 different venues throughout Cornwall. Eleven countries will be represented, besides the UK, and we will be joined at St John's by choirs from Switzerland, South Wales, Somerset and Surrey.

Sadly, one founder who will be missing is Bass David Foard, who passed away last month. A tribute to David can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Singing for Comic Relief

We were delighted to be asked to make a contribution to Red Nose Day on Friday, 13 March. The venue was the Cornish Mutual Assurance Office, in Newnham Road, Truro. Around 30 members took part, but, at the time of going to press, it was not known how much had been raised.



Concert 999 – A Very-entertaining Evening

So, what about our 999th concert? It took place on Saturday 18th April at St Symphorian's Church in Veryan on the Roseland, our first visit since September 2012.

St Symphorian is a French martyr, and the first priests at Veryan were monks whose mother-house was in France. The church still contains some Norman features, and doorway arches and windows that are probably 13th century. Its arcade of pillars date to the 14th, while the font is a mediaeval copy of a Norman design. A striking feature is the way in which the floor slopes upwards towards the altar, reminiscent of many northern French churches.

We were warmly welcomed by Revd Canon Douglas Robins – 'Father Doug' – and the evening was expertly compered by Bass Bill Collins.

Two of the 16 pieces we sang – '*We Rise Again*' and '*Only You*' - were making their debut, and both were well-received. We also revived a couple that we hadn't done for a while – '*Softly as I leave You*' and '*Bridge Over Troubled Water*'. They went down well, too!

We did have a problem with '*Angels*', however, with ear-splitting feedback forcing Graham Hoskins to abandon his guitar accompaniment part way through. The church's hearing aid loop turned out to be the culprit and it was switched off for the next piece, '*Bohemian Rhapsody*', allowing Graham to pick up his instrument again and make his usual highly effective contribution.



David Leeson (right) Proudly Collects His Black Badge

Applause was due, however, to Matthew Fox, who seamlessly picked up the missing '*Angels*' guitar accompaniment on his keyboard.

The programme had suggested that the Octet would perform midway through the first half, but, with four members absent, they were unable to do so. Second Tenor Paul Pearce gamely stood in, with his rendition of '*It Was a very Good Year*'. Paul also featured in the second half, with '*Strangers in the Night*' and '*Mona Lisa*'.

A highlight of the evening came as we were about to break for the interval. Acting chairman Nick Nicholls, after thanking the organisers of the concert and the audience for their attendance, called forward David Leeson from the ranks of the Basses. David was presented with the Choir's Black Badge, a symbol of Choir's appreciation of the immense amount of work that he has put in during his 35 years with the Choir, latterly as Treasurer. Obviously moved, David declared himself to be "very, very proud". As we are of him.

WITH THE LIONS AT LEMON STREET

Our first concert of the year took place on Saturday 7th February, in Truro's indoor Lemon Street Market, where we were the 'special guests' of the Lions Club of Truro.

The Lions had arranged a Cornish Night to raise money for Little Harbour Children's Hospice South West, at Porthpean near St Austell, and had invited us to sing in what was, for us, a different kind of venue. Well over a hundred paying customers crammed into the first floor gallery, raising just under £1,100 for this very worthwhile cause. And the concert was recorded for broadcast on Hospital Radio the following day.

We had prepared two sets of eight, primarily Cornish, songs in each, in between which the audience were entertained by Cornish comedian 'Twurzle', Cornish bard and raconteur Hilary Keam, and Bert Biscoe and Pol Hodge, known as Dew Vardh, or the Two Bards. However, as the evening began to overrun, we were forced to drop four of our intended pieces, thankfully this did not appear to have any impact on the success of the evening.

In a letter to our Concert Secretary, Ken Hart, President of



Hilary Keam entertains the audience



the Lions Club of Truro, spoke of a "fantastic performance complemented by the efforts of your musical Director Graham Willcocks and accompanist Matthew Fox. I have had many comments from those attending, telling me how much they enjoyed your music," he added.

"I would like to put on record this Club's appreciation of the assistance given by the Choir in helping to achieve this sum. Many thanks for your help and I wish the Choir well for the future."

David Foard



David (right) with Peter on the quayside

We were all deeply saddened to learn in March of the passing of David Foard, a founder member of our Choir and, until failing health last year, a regular presence in the front row of our Bass section.

David and his twin, Peter, who we lost in 2009, were among the 20 who turned up at the local Sunday School in November 1974 to witness the birth of the Mevagissey Male Choir. As the years went by, he derived enormous pleasure from the concerts and overseas tours, including those of the Cornish Trelawney Choir, which he was also later to join, and the Mevagissey Choir remained his abiding interest up to the end.

After completing successful apprenticeships at Percy Mitchell's boatyard, David and Peter found work on the Thames in Surrey, and then at aircraft manufacturer Vickers Armstrong in Weybridge. David loved his sport, and, living near London, he was able to indulge himself watching Hall and Griffith, and May and Cowdrey at Lord's, Palmer and Nicklaus at Wentworth and England thrashing Scotland 9-3 at Wembley.

During his visits home, David fell for the charms of District Nurse Sheila Peaks, and they married in Mevagissey in 1963, before setting up home in Lightwater, Surrey, where son Ian and daughter Alison duly arrived.

When work fell off at Vickers, David joined the White Fish Authority where, as Marine Surveyor, his role was to inspect newly-built fishing boats. Eventually, in 1971, he was given the opportunity to transfer to Plymouth, allowing him to move his family back to Mevagissey.

Home again, he embraced an active social life, joining Gorran Cricket club, re-joining St Austell Golf Club and, with Peter, re-launching the Mevagissey Gig Club, where he became the first chairman.

Following his retirement in 1990, David revived his woodworking skills, building beautiful grandmother clocks and other artefacts. His monuments are the lectern and display cabinet at St Andrews. Ever active, he and Peter could often be found swimming down at Polstreath well into their 70s.



Proud Grandad!

Those who knew David best, describe him as 'a true Cornishman, hardworking, loyal and with strong values, who made a genuine contribution to the community'. Those of us who sadly had insufficient time to get to know him better, would find it impossible to find anyone to say an unkind word about him.

Our frequent visits to the beautiful Noss Mayo on the south Devon coast, are a legacy from David's WFA connections and it is poignant that our latest invitation, to sing there in July 2016, arrived at around the time he left us. He will be deeply missed there, as he will be everywhere.

David's funeral service took place at St Andrews on Wednesday 18th March, where, at Sheila's request, we sang '*Softly as I Leave You*' and '*Speed your Journey*'.

GOODE? HE'S THE BEST!

Those who attended our Christmas concert at St Andrews in December will remember Nick Nicholls presenting one of the Choir's new commemorative shields to Gerald Goode. Many readers will know Gerald, if only by sight, but many more will have benefited from the voluntary work that he has put in on behalf of the Choir for the past 27 years. If you



Gerald listens as Nick Nicholls lists the many reasons for his Award

University, "when you sang 'The Creation', with a girl accompanying on kettle drums, and atmospheric lighting effects. It was a fantastic experience."

As for our current repertoire, Gerald is less keen on the more modern pieces that are being introduced, preferring our traditional choir music - and anything with a Cornish connection. "Although my favourite pieces are *"Anthem from Chess"* and *"Speed your journey"*.

Has he never thought of singing with the Choir? "When we were in Canada," he remembers, "Harold Miller (our former Music Director), said to me 'It's about time you joined the Choir', to which I replied 'Harold, I can't sing'. His response to this was "I've got 63 men standing in front of me, who all *think they can* sing!"

"I do take part in the pub singing but I wouldn't be any good with concerts – or perhaps I don't want to show you up!" he laughs. Perhaps it's time we persuaded him differently!!

bought a raffle ticket at one of our events, or threw money into a collection bucket, the chances are that you came face to face with him.

Gerald has been involved with the Choir since 1988. "When I heard they were touring Canada in 1990 I asked if anyone outside the Choir could go," he recalls. "They said 'yes', and I inquired if I could help in any way". He was asked to help with fundraising. That was 25 years ago – and he's still doing it.

Mevagissey born and bred, and the youngest of three boys, Gerald gained his City & Guilds certificate as a painter and decorator in 1968. Apart from four years as a glazier in the '70s he spent his working life as a self-employed decorator..

Since retirement in August last year he has been assisting Gary Mitchell, one of the Choir's founders and its first Music Director, in making of a DVD recalling the lives and times of local Mevagissey people. When finished, the plan is to present the DVD to the Mevagissey museum.

The Canada trip sticks out as his most memorable time with the Choir, and particularly the concert at Brook

SECOND TENORS GET A ZOMBIE ADDICT



Mike and Sarah look on as another hopeful Bass attempts the voice test

We're guessing, but we reckon our new Second Tenor is the first Choir member to have survived a zombie attack. "I always enjoy a good zombie film", says Mike Thompson "and recently Sarah (his partner) was given a "zombie experience" for her birthday. We had to 'survive' in an abandoned shopping centre in Reading which was overrun with zombies!"

Well, whatever turns you on - although, come to think of it, perhaps it was ideal training for joining the Second Tenor section, because it was shortly afterwards that he appeared at his first practice session. Creating some confusion, as we already have a Mike Thompson - in the Basses!

Mike lost no time passing his voice test – singing 'Only You' (wouldn't 'We Rise Again' have been more appropriate for a zombie, Mike?) - but then, he'd had some experience. "I'm the son of a preacher man," he explains, "plus my mum has a fantastic voice, so I grew up with singing all around me. I was lucky enough to be in choirs at school and university and, wherever I've been, I've always looked around for a choir to join".

But he's never sung with a male voice choir before. "The depth, softness and strength that a good number of male voices can produce has a powerful and unique effect", he says, adding "I'm currently enjoying this with 'Mansions of the Lord'. He also remembers with obvious pleasure how much he enjoyed the two small community choirs he sang with while in Melbourne. "Looking back," he adds, "Australian folk music has a lot of Cornish roots to it."

Mike only came to Cornwall in 2014. Having emigrated to Australia three years before, family issues forced him and Sarah to return to the UK last year. They found themselves sharing a bungalow in St. Columb with Sarah's Mum and sister, who had themselves returned from Spain and Bristol respectively. On a visit to Mevagissey, they "fell in love" with the place and "took a punt on starting a new business," he says. In next to no time, the popular 'Tea on the Quay' on the West Wharf had opened for business.

Naturally enough, Mike heard us singing on the quay in August, and afterwards in the Fountain, where Baritone Stephen Gibson invited him along to a practice evening. "Singing is one of my favourite things - nothing blends strangers better than a good sing and I wanted to meet some new people around Meva," he explains.

When he's not singing, or socialising with zombies, Mike is "exploring all the bits of Cornwall I've yet to see." His verdict so far? "Everyone has been hugely welcoming, and I'm enjoying seeing familiar faces around Meva." He didn't say, though, whether any of them reminded him of that shopping precinct in Reading.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

As readers are aware, membership of Friends of Mevagissey Male Choir is now free. However, we do, of course, continue to welcome your donations – indeed, without them, we would find it harder to buy in our music, uniforms, etc., and to fund our travel and other costs.

So we would like to thank the following who have donated so generously to Choir funds recently. Your support is warmly welcomed by all members of the Choir:

Diana Jane Evans, of Epsom, Surrey; Mr & Mrs Michael Evans, of Horsham, Sussex; Arthur & Lynne Leigh, of Bridgewater, Somerset; Lt Col Douglas Robertson, of Weybridge, Surrey; Kathryn Smith, of St Austell; Yvonne Thomas, of St Blazey; Alan & Sylvie Thwaites, of Mevagissey; Rosemary Tyrrell, of Mevagissey; and Jill West of Redhill..

You can donate to Choir funds by sending a cheque, payable to Mevagissey Male Choir, to Michael Tate, Hillside House, Biscovey Road, Par, PL24 2HW.

- AND TO OUR CHAIRMAN

Graham Rundle informed us last month that he was stepping down as Chairman of the Choir's Committee. His duties will be taken on by Vice Chairman Nick Nicholls until further notice.

In the meantime, the Choir has placed on record its thanks and appreciation for the hard work and drive shown by Graham during his tenure. He was instrumental in a number of improvements and innovations over the past 15 months, and his energy will be missed, although we hope he will continue to support us with his ideas from the ranks of the Top Tenors.

More Military Wives for Mevagissey

We are looking forward to singing again with the Plymouth Military Wives choir in July, this time at the Guildhall in Plymouth. We are also pleased to report that their Culdrose colleagues have agreed to join us at the Minack next May. In June we will be taking part in a St Austell Feast Week concert at the Holy Trinity Church with local community group, NoteAbility and Alison Harvey, who hopefully will reprise her version of '*Whispering Hope*' which features on our Mevagissey Bay CD. Sadly, owing to prior commitments we have had to turn down a request to sing aboard 'The World' when she visits Fowey in August, thus missing an opportunity to repeat our experience of 2007.

CONCERT DIARY

Date	Venue	Event	Time
Sat 20 th June	Holy Trinity Church, St Austell	Feast Week jt concert with NoteAbility and Alison Harvey	tbc
Fri 24 th July	Guildhall, Plymouth	With Plymouth MWC	tbc
Sat 1 st August	Sticker Football Field	Funds for MS centre and MNDA Cornwall Motor Neurone	7.30pm
Mons 3 rd , 10 th , 17 th , 24 th , 31 st	Mevagissey Quay	Quay concerts	7.45pm
Thurs 20 th August	Fowey Town Quay	Fowey Regatta Week	6.30pm
Sat 6 th September	St Augustine of Hippo, St Austell	Flower Festival	tbc
Sat 24 th October	Chapel St Methodist Church, Mousehole	Jt concert with Mousehole MVC	tbc
Sat 28th November	Probus Church		7.30pm