

# MEVAGISSEY MALE CHOIR

SUMMER 2014

NO. 21



*The Minack in May – what a prelude to our Gala concert at Eden!*

As of Monday July 28<sup>th</sup>, we are back on the Mevagissey quayside for our five summer Quay Concerts. These start at 7.45 every Monday evening until August 25<sup>th</sup>.

For further information check out our website – [www.meva-choir.co.uk](http://www.meva-choir.co.uk) or visit our Facebook page.

## LIFE AT 40 BEGINS WITH A BANG!

Well, if our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is going to top that, it will be some concert. What a night we had at Eden on 30<sup>th</sup> May. As Cornish Guardian columnist Alan Cooper said, before leaving his seat: “What a fantastic concert. Everything came together perfectly. Well done everyone.”

In fact, I can do no better than record Alan’s Guardian commentary:

“On Friday May 30, in the gallery at the Eden Project, the birthday boys (and not a few girls) were ready to give the packed audience the works. And give it they did. Choir members sang their hearts out, from the thrust of

Comrades in Arms to the delicate sound of ‘Goin’ Home’ Dvořák would be proud of that; we cried, from Verdi’s ‘Speed Your Journey’ to ‘Whispering Hope’ (with Alison Harvey as soloist); from Puccini’s ‘Nessun Dorma’ to the quieter meeting of two fishermen in Bizet’s ‘Pearl Fishers’. All this and much, much more brought the audience to its feet several times.

There were guest artists as well. The Plymouth Military Wives’ Choir, under one of its deputy musical directors, Rob Young, sang with great precision and gusto, a truly professional sound. Ralph McTell, influential in the folk

scene since the 1960s, led the choir and had them eating out of his hand in *'Streets of London'*, a masterpiece which has rightly made him famous.

As an accompaniment to the choir, as well as providing some important solo items of their own, the accomplished Cornish Sinfonia, directed by David Frost, showed yet another side to the wealth of talent available in Cornwall. Nick Hart took on the role of master of ceremonies. Yet another musician of considerable ability, he showed us another of his talents as a very entertaining and witty MC.

“What an evening – what a birthday.”

And what a tribute, indeed, from the editor of *'Sing Aloud'*, a respected musical director in his own right.

Long-serving members of the Choir said they couldn't remember a concert like it, while our greatest followers said we'd never sung better. And those hearing the Mevagissey Male Choir for the first time professed to be astonished at the quality.

And yet, in the afternoon, it had all looked so unpromising. Our rehearsal with the Cornish Sinfonia orchestra threw up one problem after another. Had we bitten off more than we could chew? It required all the musical expertise of Graham Willcocks and orchestra MD David Frost, and the technical knowhow of sound engineer John Cornfield from Sawmills Studio to overcome the numerous difficulties.

But overcome them they did and the 400-strong audience got a show. As the audience took their seats they were greeted with a magnificent slide display of the Choir's history, masterfully put together by second tenor Des Honey, as the orchestra played an overture. The Choir's music programme was chosen to reflect each of the four decades, and began with *'Comrades in Arms'*, the first song ever sung in concert. Hopefully, everyone will by now have received a



copy of the programme, so I won't list the rest here. For the second time in a month, we welcomed the Plymouth Military Wives (PMWC), while Alison Harvey sang the lead in *'Whispering Hope'* as beautifully as ever, and the second half brought the appearance of our 'surprise' guest Ralph McTell, whose *'Streets of London'* smash hit was enjoying its own 40-year anniversary. Ralph, who lives locally, has been a friend of the Choir for many years, and made it clear he was delighted to be part of our celebrations.

The concert concluded with a rousing version of *'Morte Criste'* by our Choir and the PMWC as one, a fitting finale to the evening. Although of course, it wasn't over. Singers and audience had a couple of hours in very delightful surroundings to mingle and chat – and, yes, to sing again, rather more informally.

One of the most gratifying sights on the night was seeing no fewer than eight founder members of the Choir on the risers. Bravo to each and every one.

Huge thanks are due to everyone who contributed to the event, from those, led by Robin Hunkin and Bill Reeve, who spent the previous six months pulling it together, to those who prepared the venue, and the sound systems. Special mention should perhaps be made of Bill's sterling efforts in getting ITV to run a piece on the Choir, which included a performance of Robbie Williams' *'Angels'*, in advance of the concert.

But it's really a thank you to everybody; the Choir, the Orchestra, our special guests, the audience, the Eden Project, St Austell Brewery, our sponsors, our advertisers..... everybody!

Finally, here are a few comments:

"It's been wonderful working and singing alongside you gents, all the girls keep asking 'when's the next one!'" - *Mechelle Cooney, Plymouth Military Wives Choir.*

"Congratulations to the Choir! Last night was a brilliant event, and I was absolutely delighted to be a part of it!" - *Alison Harvey:*

"A lovely evening spent listening to and playing with Mevagissey Male Choir and Plymouth Military Wives Choir at Eden Project" - *Ralph McTell*



## Going Down a Storm at the Minack

Sou'westers, thermal underwear, sleeping bags .... all were present, if not necessarily obvious, as we prepared for what was forecast to be stormy night at the Minack on 10<sup>th</sup> May. As it happened, we shouldn't have worried – well not too much, anyway. It wasn't exactly a balmy evening but the rain pretty much held off and the blustery wind wasn't too big a problem, except for Graham Willcocks and his sheets of music! It certainly wasn't as cold as two years ago.



But what a fantastic night it was. Can there be a more stunningly picturesque place to sing? The turquoise of the sea, lashed into white foam by the wind, in the evening sunshine, and then the dark shapes of the cliffs silhouetted in the background once night fell, with the singers picked out by the theatre lights.

Nobody was more overwhelmed than the Plymouth Military Wives, our guests for the evening and with whom we had shared such an enjoyable evening in Ashburton last October. Their 'oohs' and 'aahs' as they peered over the theatre walls to the Porthcurno beach below perfectly captured the atmosphere, while their beautiful black and purple pashminas added magnificently to the colour of the evening, growing in radiance as dusk descended.

As Mechelle Cooney, PMWC Events Coordinator, commented later: *“Enjoyed ourselves is an understatement. As an original member of the choir, I have sung in some wonderful venues but that is top of the list so far, stunning. All the food was glorious, everybody so helpful, couldn't do enough for us, thank you very much for making it such a memory that us girls will remember for a long time. How could you not perform on such an occasion, in front of a capacity audience of 700?”*

I can't do better than record the words of Mr J Chapman, from Oxford, who was part of a 12-strong family contingent. *“I felt I had to write to say thank you to all the members of your superb choir for making our visit to the Minack Theatre so memorable. We thought your choir was wonderful, the variety of music plus the presentation was a real joy. You must all be so proud to be members”.*

Mr Chapman added that the Military Wives Choir *“certainly lived up to their billing and reputation. They were terrific and to watch them in that setting was really quite special”*, while Adrian Wilton, our compere, was praised for his *“good clean Cornish humour”*.

*“Thanks to you all,”* he concludes, *“this was a superb concert, and I know was so appreciated by the vast audience. Congratulations on your 40 years, and may you go from strength to strength”.*

What a fantastic tribute. And the icing on the cake was a call from the Minack to invite us back in May 2016 – which of course we lost no time in accepting.

## A Message from the Plymouth Military Wives Choir



Here's what Lorraine Smith, Chair of the PMWC, had to say: *“Both events celebrating your 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary were thoroughly enjoyed by all our members, musical director and accompanist. We were looked after very well at both Minack and Eden and were overwhelmed at the opportunity perform at such prestigious venues. On behalf of Plymouth Military Wives Choir I would like to express our huge thanks and appreciation for the exceptionally generous donation to our charity.”*

## CULDROSES BLOOM AT STERTS



Those who wondered how we could follow Eden will surely acknowledge that we gave it a pretty good shot at Sterts on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June.

It was the third in our run of prestigious venues, and, despite its nearby location, for the vast majority of Choir members Sterts was a new experience.

Otherwise known as 'the theatre on the moor', Sterts is an atmospheric open air theatre near the village of Upton Cross on Bodmin Moor. Open air, but with a

permanent awning to protect visitors from the elements.

Once again, we were joined by a Military Wives choir, but this time it was the CuldRoses, Cornwall's only branch of the movement, comprising wives and partners of serving personnel, as well as some who are in service, or have served, themselves. Home to the Royal Navy's Merlins plus a sizable proportion of its Sea Kings, RNAS Culdrose – just outside Helston on the Lizard Peninsula – is the largest helicopter base in Europe, with some 75 aircraft and 3,000 personnel. It is the biggest single-site employer in Cornwall, pumping £100m into the local economy every year.

Under the inspired musical direction of Georgina Davies, Head of Music at Mullion School, the CuldRoses have, in their two short years, established an impressive repertoire ranging from John Rutter to Pharrell Williams.

They performed five pieces in each of their two sets, of which their moving interpretation of '*Mansions of the Lord*' was a particular favourite, concluding with what has become the Military Wives movement's anthem, '*Stronger Together*'.

To close the evening the Choir made its way back on to the risers to join the CuldRoses in *Morte Criste*.



## PEARL FISHERS – CATCH OF THE DAY AT FEAST WEEK



*"That's the first time I've known a standing ovation at a Feast Week concert."* So commented Graham Willcocks at the end of this year's event, which took place, as always, in St Andrews, on Monday 30 June, and in front of a full house.

So rapturous was the applause at the end of our last piece, the increasingly popular *'Au Fond du Temple Saint'* from Bizet's *'The Pearl Fishers,'* that we had no choice to sing it again! Bit of a 'hostage to fortune' that, but it got a similar response, so we must have made a decent fist of it.

We were joined for this glorious finale by the two altos, two tenors and two basses who comprised the Truro Cathedral Choral Scholars, the evening's special guests. Apparently, choral scholars usually spend one or two years with the cathedral choir, either pre or post university. In addition to their cathedral choir commitments, they perform as a group in their own right at concerts and private functions, and their two sets of their own delightfully individualistic repertoire, one in each half, certainly delighted the Feast Week audience.

Our own programme began with *'Comrades in Arms'* and saw a popular return of *'The Owl and the Pussycat'*, featuring Top Tenor Roger Daniel. We also performed *'You Raise Me Up'* – soloist Paul Pearce; *'Blue Moon'*; *'The Rose'* – soloist Terry Coplin; *'An American Trilogy'*; *No Arms Can Ever Hold You'*; *'Angels'* – guitar solo Graham Hoskins; *Bohemian Rhapsody'* – guitar solo Graham Hoskins; *'Mevagissey Bay'* – soloist Paul Pearce; and *'The Floral Dance'* – soloist Bill Collins.

Adrian Wilton, long-time friend of the Choir, compered the evening, keeping the audience amused during the inevitable to-ing and fro-ing on the risers, with his special brand of Cornish humour. And thanks are due too, to Graham Willcocks, and to Matthew Fox, for his inimitable piano accompaniment.

## Directing the Choir “now a Pleasure rather than a Challenge”



*“We have become the most entertaining and technically proficient choir in the county”*

Having already written at length about two chairmen, our treasurer and secretary, and our deputy music director, I thought it time to learn a little more about Graham Willcocks, our Musical Director.

It's an opportune time because Graham has recently become the Choir's longest-serving MD, overtaking the still revered Harold Miller who served for 17 years.

Born and brought up in Plymouth, Graham says he had a wonderful musical family life – how would we ever have guessed? His parents were involved with the Plymouth Gilbert and Sullivan Fellowship as far back as he can remember. “*You could say I cut my teeth on G and S*”, he says. His father Gordon – how good to see him, and his wife, Joan, at our recent Feast Week concert - started the highly successful '*Pilgrimages*' barbershop chorus, which Graham himself started to direct in 1985, winning the first of two national championship gold medals in the same year.

In 1993, having had enough of the barbershop competition 'treadmill' (his word!), Graham, crossed the Tamar and eventually his job as a domestic appliance engineer brought him to Par, where he lives with wife Denise who, until recently, sang with Champagne Ladies. Between them they have two daughters and a son, and twin granddaughters.

Graham joined our Choir, *“hoping to sit in the back row and sing 2nd tenor”*. He didn't get away with it, as he was recognised immediately by Dennis Drew, our then chairman, and was appointed assistant MD within a few weeks. He became MD in 1996, one month before the Choir's tour to Georgia in the US. So he's now completed his 18<sup>th</sup> year.

Since then he has stacked up a series of favourite memories - *“Brian Mitchell playing that wonderful pipe organ in Westminster Abbey, our 40th anniversary concerts with the Military Wives choirs, our superb recordings with Chris Williams doing a wonderful job. And the first time we sang ‘Easter Hymn’ in Newquay with my sister Kim. That really sticks in my mind. We have done so many concerts where the audience have cheered, stood up and applauded. Singing in the Hall for Cornwall, receiving the biggest plaudits of the evening from audience and fellow performers alike. All moments I treasure...”* His favourite piece? *“Probably Pearl Fishers. Or Anthem. Or Nessun Dorma. Or Deep River, or Hallelujah, or Homeless or... so many.”*

Music is Graham's life. When not on Choir business, he's often helping out others, including assisting Champagne Ladies sharpen their competitive edge – *“always welcome and such a talent”*, one told me. But on the rare occasions that he wants to get away from music, he and Den embark on caravan holidays – they're just back from a four-day stint at the Boconnoc Steam Fair.

When I asked Graham for his proudest moment in music, there were many contenders. For starters, two gold medals as MD of the Pilgrimages, and another gold medal as lead singer in 'GILT EDGE', the first quartet to represent Britain at the international convention. It was in Salt Lake City in 1996 *“in front of 10,000 screaming Americans - a ‘squeaky bum’ moment, I can tell you!”* Then there was directing the Pilgrimages at the Burma Star reunion in the Albert Hall in 1996, sharing the stage with Vera Lynn. *“That night can still bring tears to my eyes.”*

But then he said: *“I am so proud of our choir, Mike. Together we have become the most entertaining and technically proficient choir in the county. Directing the boys has at long last become a pleasure instead of a challenge, because I know they will come up trumps whatever challenge is thrown at them. It's taken a long time to get there but we have arrived and I'm looking forward to the future.”*

Now, there's a vote of confidence in what we're doing!

## Mike Publishes his Penguin Book!



June was a memorable month for Mike Thompson, one of the newer members of our Bass section. He took delivery of the first print run of Juan Salvador, the remarkable, and delightfully told, true story of how, in South America his early 20s, he rescued a penguin from a deadly oil spill, and of the penguin's subsequent life at the boys' school where Mike, writing as Tom Michell, was working.

Mike, who has illustrated to book himself (as shown here) has already been interviewed by Radio Cornwall, and by the Cornish Guardian, and has even been approached by a film company who want to make it the lead in a second series of films they are producing for television!

## HOW MARSHALL PUT ME TO THE TEST

*Former member Paul Newman continues his reminiscences:*

It was Mike Lawday who pointed me in the right direction. Mike worked at the Eden Project and I was talking to him about living in Mevagissey and my unsuccessful search for a handy choir. Mike was puzzled. 'What's the problem? Mevagissey has one of the best choirs in Cornwall. And I sing in it.'

The 'problem' was that I had been picturing a choir of the Choral Society type, the type I knew about; I thought male choirs were peculiar to Wales. So I was dubious, but Mike urged me to come along and have a listen.



That first Monday evening changed everything. Spotting a possible new recruit lurking at the back, Graham Willcocks insisted I come forward and sit facing the Choir, exposing me, self-consciously, to the full effect of the Choir. When I heard the sound they made, I knew I had to be part of it.

Marshall Tamblyn was an imposing man, a retired farmer from Pelynt, with a resonant and mellifluous bass voice, and a considerable reputation throughout the county as a soloist. He took me under his wing, had me sit by him during practice, so that he could 'keep an ear' on me. One evening, in his rich Cornish accent, he announced that it was time I took my voice test: a daunting ritual to win admission to full singing membership of the Choir. I made excuses, floundering with pathetic lack of confidence. Marshall let it ride for a few weeks, then tried again, this time stopping my objections dead: "It's all arranged – after tonight's rehearsal!"

The voice test has made many aspiring new members quake in their shoes. The leaders of the four sections stay behind after practice, and you have to sing your line, in a song of your own choosing 'against' the other three parts, to show that you can sing in tune and hold your part in the harmony.

I chose '*Morte Criste*'. At the end of the first verse, Graham broke in: "Stop, stop, stop. I've heard enough of this. Paul here is the only one who's anything like in tune; the rest of you are all over the place!" Amid sheepish grins and warm congratulations from them all, we hurried to the King's Arms - where I thought perhaps I should buy them all a drink!

## Dibb Doubles Up



For the second issue running, we have a wedding to report. Alan Dibb, one of the Choir's top tenors, married Lesley Fish in glorious sunshine on the afternoon of 22nd June. The venue was Trenythron Manor, in Tywardreath, with its stunning views across Carlyon Bay.

Lesley wore an ivory Alexia strapless dress with a delicate lace shrug with pearl beading and silver embroidery, edged with floral lace.

Lesley's daughter, Sally Fish, and Alan's twin daughters, Amy Lovegrove and Beth Doyle, were bridesmaids. There was no best man, but the bride's and groom's respective sons, Simon Fish and Ian Dibb, were the witnesses.

Readings were delivered by Sally, by their grandchildren - Emmy Lovegrove, Ethan Lovegrove and Sophia Doyle – and by Mandy Brewer.

Around a hundred guests, including many members of the Choir, celebrated with the happy couple during the course of the day – and long into the night! They also organised a boat trip from Fowey to Golant on the following day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, when the wedding cake – decorated in icing with an image of the Eiffel Tower, where Alan proposed – was finally cut. They set off for a honeymoon in Croatia on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

I'm sure we all wish them every happiness.

## More Reasons for Celebration

Good luck, too, to Matt Fox, our accompanist, who will be getting spliced in Plymouth on 2<sup>nd</sup> August to his fiancée Carolyn, a nurse at Derriford.

And finally, congratulations to Top Tenor Jim Hunkin and his wife Iris who celebrate their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on 25<sup>th</sup> September.

Photos of both events for the next edition please!

Any stories or comments for the Newsletter?  
Please contact:

Mike Tate – 01726 812046 or [miketate@live.co.uk](mailto:miketate@live.co.uk)

## SINGING WITH A CAPPELLA IN GORRAN

In our last full outing before embarking on this summer's Quay Concerts, we travelled the short distance to St Goran Church on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July for a joint performance with *A Capella*, a mixed singing group from Penzance.

Formed in 2007 by their MD Sheila Farmer, and comprising around 30 members, *A Cappella* specialise in 15th and 16th century renaissance music and made a fascinating contrast to our normal repertoire. Each choir performed two sets of five pieces in between which we were treated to two pieces by soprano Joyce Edwards who entranced the audience with beautiful renditions of 'What is Life', from Gluck's opera, 'Orfeo ed Euridice', and 'Can't Help Lovin' That Man' from 'Showboat'.

*A Cappella's* programme was very varied with several pieces in foreign languages, including Latin. Our own programme comprised only ten pieces, in two sets, but included two that we haven't sung for quite some time – 'Jesus Shall Reign' and 'Voice of the Child'.

The evening was a very warm one and hard work in particular for our Top Tenor – and Secretary – Michael Collings, who also sings with *A Cappella*. (Indeed it is he we thank for setting up the concert.) Apart from the extra singing, there were several crucial tie changes! It was also pleasing to see John Hodgson, a former Choir Top Tenor and former editor of this newsletter among *A Cappella's* numbers.

## CONCERT DIARY

Mon 28 <sup>th</sup> July	Mevagissey Quay	Quay Concert	7.45pm
Sun 3 <sup>rd</sup> August	Mevagissey Quay	WW1 Project	10.30am
Sun 3 <sup>rd</sup> August	Heligan	WW1 Project	2.45pm
Mons 4 <sup>th</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup> , 18 <sup>th</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> August	Mevagissey Quayside	Quay Concerts	7.45pm
Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> September	Redruth Methodist Choir	Joint Concert	7.45pm
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> September	Tywardreath Church	With Cor Mebyon Dowlais	7.00pm
Sat 4 <sup>th</sup> October	St Michael's Church, Bath	With Bath Silver Ring Choir	7.30pm
Sun 5 <sup>th</sup> October	Crediton	Details to Follow	
Sun 19 <sup>th</sup> October	St Andrew's Church, Mevagissey	Harvest of the Sea	4.00pm
Sat 6 <sup>th</sup> December	St Andrew's Church Mevagissey	Christmas Concert with Ladies' and School Choirs	7.30pm
Mon 15 <sup>th</sup> December	Penrice Carol Concert*	*Private	7.30pm