



Côr Meibion Llanfair ym Muallt

Builth Male Voice Choir

50th Anniversary Dinner : Saturday 1 December 2018

After Dinner Speech from Luned Jones

Dame Shân, Guests, Vice presidents and Members of Côr Meibion Llanfair ym Muallt /
Builth Male Choir (1968 – 2018)

The present male choir was founded during the Autumn of 1968 when a group of enthusiasts led by Jack Francis met at the Cricket and Rugby club. Jack's dedicated work laid the foundation for the ensuing 50 years. Jack was a native of the Welsh speaking community of the Swansea Valley, well versed in the choral singing traditions. After military service in the 2nd World War he took up a teaching post at Builth High School before being appointed Deputy Headmaster at Builth County Primary School. He made his home in Builth and shared a love of art with his wife Winifred and both contributed to the Choir's uniform with designs for a tie and a blazer badge. Mrs Francis also provided the painting featured on the sleeve of the Choir's first LP recording. Jack conducted the Choir until his retirement shortly after the Choir's second visit to the London Welsh Male Voice Choir 1000 voices at the Royal Albert Hall in 1984.

Ceinwen Buffon, from Hundred House, was the Choir's first accompanist until she left the area on getting married in 1973. It is lovely to see her with us tonight. She was succeeded by myself. When Jack retired I took over the conductor's baton and Ann, Ceinwen's sister in law, became the new accompanist. In recent years I have shared the conducting duties with Adrian.

On the 20th April 1970 the Choir, with 33 choristers on stage, gave its first official concert, compéred by Elmer Grindley, at the village hall in Garth. Still singing are current President Allen Evans, Compére and former Chairman Gwynfor Evans and Glyn Powell, who were there in the Choir's infancy, as was our oldest member, former President and former Chairman John Probert who boasts the longest continuous service to the Choir. All are now life members, as is Bob, the Treasurer for the last 30 years. Another early member and former Chairman, David Jones, has recently returned to the ranks.

During the years that followed, the Choir entertained locally and competed at local Eisteddfodau.

Abram Davies recalls an engagement further afield in June 1970, when the Choir was invited to sing at the Barn Club in Birmingham. However the clientele were more interested in watching the World Cup and in their bingo session! A stop on the way back at Bewdley, ending in a singsong, restored the Choir's spirits.

The Choir's early funding was by a weekly collection of a shilling from those attending the Monday night practices. In 1990 an annual membership subscription was introduced. Other income came from donations for performing in concerts, fund raising events such as jumble sales, car boot sales, BBQs and discos. Entertaining guests at the Hampton Hotel, Llandrindod and a weekly tote gave a regular income which paved the way for the first proper uniform prior to the Choir's first appearance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1982. Recently renting a Charity shop for a week has proved to be an excellent source of funds.

Recordings have been another good income generator. The first LP was recorded at the Jubilee Hall, Llanellwedd, in 1980 and was initially funded by loans from choir members which were repaid as soon as sales permitted. This was followed by another four recordings.

The Choir spent many happy years practising at the Cricket and Rugby Club in Garth Road, but the time came to move on. We were very nomadic for a time. We rehearsed in the vestry at Horeb, the Primary School in Park Road and then in the dining room of the Greyhound Hotel. We were happy there until new proprietors at the Greyhound asked us to leave and we moved to the Church Hall. The Greyhound was sold again and we were invited back, this time to the function room upstairs. The problem of getting a piano upstairs was overcome and we have been happy there for several years. Thank you, Ali.

Trips, especially ones involving staying a few nights away, have played an important part in the Choir's development and have given enormous pleasure to those who supported them.

We have had many enjoyable trips in the UK. Visits to the Royal Albert Hall stand out. There have been ten such visits to date, each one special, whether they were the tenth visit for some or the first for others. On occasions, these events led to additional appearances at prestigious venues like the Millennium Theatre and St David's Hall, Cardiff and the Symphony Hall in Birmingham. There have been many other joint singing ventures with other choirs, mainly locally but also at Cardiff Arms Park featuring 10000 voices with soloists such as Dennis O'Neal, Dame Gwyneth Jones, Shirley Bassey and Tom Jones, and with Des O'Conner and Russell Watson at the Welsh Festival of Remembrance at St David's Hall.

There have been visits to many places in the United Kingdom. Naming them all would make too a long list. We made a few visits to RAF Boscombe Down. We experienced the tightening of security as the years passed. On one trip a choir member was taken to the guard house at the gate. We did not realise that it was serious until he was only released when he was identified by an officer of the choir. One concert at Boscombe Down was interrupted when fire engines and a bomb disposal team arrived following the discovery of an unattended package in an adjoining room. This package turned out to be the Choir's supply of cassette tapes. Fortunately a controlled explosion was unnecessary.

Choir members were having a quiet drink in Amesbury when we saw that there was a wedding taking place at the church opposite. We crossed the road, interrupted the bride's arrival with a rendition of "Love Changes Everything". I think this was the first of many wedding engagements.

The Norwich trip was very special for Malcolm Morrison and Sue, helped by Steve Vipond. We met up with retired chorister Elwyn Davies on the Friday night and our Concert venue on Saturday, a packed St Peter Mancroft Church, was a highlight. We were fortunate to have Shân Cothi as our soloist for this trip.

The Choir has had many enjoyable trips abroad, each one with a special memory or two. Our first trip was to Blaubeuren in 1989. The choir and supporters filled two coaches. Madam Eleanor Davies came with us as guest soloist. We had three good concerts. The first concert took place at the Abbey in Blaubeuren. The alter screen there was so precious that we had to be locked in back stage. When the concert was over the shutters were opened at the back of the church where refreshments were served. The choir were given two tickets, one for food and one for a drink. Vic Morris was in charge of distributing the tickets and a merry time was had by all. Another engagement showing our hosts' generosity was our "Supper at the House of The Fire Brigade"

We have visited Bad Rappenau several times and paid two visits to Meriel. On our first visit we walked along the Oise to Auvers. There we visited the church made famous by Van Goch's painting, followed by a visit to the cemetery where he is buried next to his brother. Walking along the graves the late Theo Jones commented "You won't see a Jones buried here", but he was proved incorrect - we get around.

We have visited Contrexville and the Netherlands and made two special visits to Cesky Krumlov, where we met a survivor of Sir Nicholas Winton's Kindertransport. She had been to school at Llanwrtyd.

We had an interesting visit to War Memorials in Belgium and France, where David Power shared his comprehensive knowledge of the area and its history. The highlight was singing "Soldier's Farewell" in a spine-chilling, emotional Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres. The experience of taking part in this ceremony will never be forgotten.

Our first visit to Dublin was made special by our invitation to sing at the British Embassy. Imagine how Ann and I felt when we stepped into the embassy limousine that was sent to pick us up from our hotel.

We have also had the privilege of welcoming visiting choirs and bands from Britain, Europe and America, sharing the stage, experiences and enjoyment with them.

There have been many special performances. Here are some that readily come to mind:

The honour of singing at the Cistercian Abbey Notre-Dame du Val, near Meriel, with its superb acoustics.

We sang Willy Richter's "Creation" in a little hillside church above Heinsheim and "Soldier's Farewell" at the Menin Gate.

A special for me was conducting the choir and The Band of the Welsh Guards when we sang "Entrance and March of the Peers", from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Iolanthe".

Enjoying Charitable status ourselves, we have had pleasure and enjoyment in raising thousands of pounds for a variety of Charities and voluntary organisations. We endeavour to encourage and promote the making of music in the community by inviting local schools and individuals to share the stage with us. We sponsor the annual Jack Francis music prize at Ysgol Calon Cymru. The profits of next year's St David's Day Concert will be donated to Cerddoriaith Ieuencid De Powys, South Powys Youth Music.

The Choir has maintained membership in excess of 50 voices for many years, and has been enriched by the experiences it has enjoyed over the last fifty years. Long may it continue.