



Pontnewydd Male Choir

Celebrating 120 Years

1904 - 2024

CHOIR NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY issue

Year 29 February 2024

Well, what a year this is going to be for the choir as we celebrate 120 years of continuous existence since its founding on the 28th August 1904. We have a full programme of celebratory concerts and special events as we proudly mark this remarkable achievement and each edition of the newsletter this year will contain contributions from choristers and ex-choristers of reminiscences and reflections of their time with the choir.

This month we also celebrate:

- February 2 marks Candlemas in the Christian church as it was the day on which all the candles that were to be used in the coming year were brought into church and blessed – so it was the Festival Day (or ‘mass’) of the candles.
- February 2 is Groundhog Day – a common term in the UK but one that marks an American tradition. It is the day we find out whether winter will last six more weeks or call it quits early.
- February 10 is the Lunar New Year. Celebrated widely throughout East Asia, and is associated with the Chinese Zodiac. 2024 is the Year of the Dragon. How appropriate!
- February 13 is Mardi Gras (aka “Fat Tuesday” or Shrove Tuesday), which is the final feasting day before the Christian tradition of Lent begins on the following day, Ash Wednesday.
- February 14 is Ash Wednesday, which marks the start of the 40 days of Lent.
- February 14 is always Valentine’s Day. Heads up, lovebirds! – but a word of warning - our own renown florist, Ron Burnett, informs us that a dozen imported red roses will set you back anything from £72 to £95! However, experts within the choir reassure us that Marks and Spencer roses are much cheaper, whilst Cadbury’s Roses are cheaper still!

Did you know:

- It might not feel like it but February is the third and last month of meteorological winter in the Northern Hemisphere. So, cheers up - Spring arrives next month!
- In February 1886 the Cardiff Coal Exchange was opened and, at one time, it determined the price of coal worldwide. It is reputedly where, in 1901, the first million-pound business deal was made.
- On February 2, 1848, U.S. and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended their war. The U.S. paid Mexico \$15 million in exchange for California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas. What a bargain!
- In Welsh, February is sometimes known as “y mis bach,” which means “little month.”
- On February 19 1881, Wales played their first ever rugby international, against England at Blackheath, London.

February birthdays.

Huw Williams (B1) Thursday 15th Paul Wellington (T2) Sunday 25th



PLEASE CONTACT PONTNEWYDD MALE CHOIR AT
CONTACT@PONTNEWYDDMALECHOIR.COM
TEL: 01633 770 204 MOBILE: 07715 252 160





Chorister updates.

Thankfully we have a much more positive health bulletin this month as choristers continue to recover from coughs, colds and chest infections and it did not impact too much on attendance at practice. Baritone **Mike Willis** remains a notable absence though following his hospitalisation after a which coincided with a bout of pneumonia. Second tenor **Paul Wellington** is also suffering with a severe chest condition that has kept him away from practice in recent weeks,

However, we have seen the welcome return to regular practice of baritone **Jeff Williams** as the health of wife Christine continues to improve, whilst **Bill Adshead**, **Wayne Parfitt** and **Huw Williams** have returned following extended holidays to the Antipodes and beyond!

To all those sick and suffering choristers we extend our best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery and look forward to welcoming them back into the fold.

Choir uniform

With our busy concert schedule fast approaching I think it's wise to advise choristers following the recent Christmas and New Year festivities to check that their choir uniform still fits. The good news is that we have a good stock of suits, trousers, blazers etc that may provide the solution. More than that, confidentiality is assured! Also, a reminder that our grey suits were supplied by Slater's in Cardiff and they are still offering a free alteration service. – Haydn Noonan can bear witness to that!

While I'm on the subject, we have a vacancy for a chorister to take on the responsibility of managing our wardrobe, so if anyone is interested, please let me know. You could say we're looking for a suitable person!

Vice Presidents

As we embark upon our anniversary celebrations, a reminder to encourage family and friends to support the choir by becoming a Vice President. The membership package will include:

1. A Vice President identification of pin badge
2. A copy of our monthly newsletter
3. Advanced notification of all choir events
4. Complimentary ticket to our annual concert to include reserved seating in prime position
5. Complimentary concert programme
6. Invitation to exclusive Vice Presidents social event - cheese and wine/buffet evening to include short concert and afterglow
7. Meet and greet with Choristers

An annual Vice President membership will cost £30 for individuals and £50 for husbands/wives/partners.

Lyn Birch has taken on the role of Vice President's Secretary and all enquiries should be directed to him. His contact details are:

Mobile number: 07972 760660

Email: lyndonbirch@gmail.com

Engagements.

The choir's first engagement of the year was a visit to Thomas Gabrielle Nursing Home in Old Cwmbbran, to sing to the residents. An excellent turn-out from the choir was made more satisfying when we were pleased



to see ex-chorister and bottom bass, Bernard Morgan, in the audience. Members of the choir are pictured here with manager, Nanette Virgo.

Our next engagement is a significant one for PMC as we are delighted that the renown Morryston RFC Male Choir have accepted our invitation to perform a joint concert at the Victory Church,

Cwmbran on Saturday 24th February at 7pm. Formed in 1979, Morryston Rugby Club Male Voice Choir (Côr Rygbi Treforys) has a hard-earned reputation for a very high standard of performance, with its repertoire ranging from traditional choral hymns associated with male voice choirs to songs from West End musicals, operatic choruses, spirituals and much more.

Tickets are an absolute bargain at only £8!

PMC Confirmed Bookings

Item	Date	Arrival Time	Venue	Address
Joint Concert with Morryston RFC Choir	24/02/24 Saturday	6:30 7:00 start	Victory Church	Greenforge Way, Cwmbran. NP44 3BA.
Parkway Hotel	02/03/24 Saturday	7:30 8:00 start	Parkway hotel	Cwmbran Drive, Cwmbran NP44 3UW
TOUR	8 th -10 th March 2024	TBC	Palace Hotel Paignton	The Palace Hotel, Esplanade road, Paignton, TQ4 6BJ
120 th Annual Concert	27/04/24 Saturday	7:00 start	Congress Theatre	Congress theatre Cwmbran Town Centre
Holly Lodge nursing Home	09/05/24	3:30 4:00 start	Holly lodge Nursing Home	1 Ton Road, Cwmbran, NP44 7LF
Caerleon Festival	05/07/24 Friday	5:45 6:15 start	Caerleon Amphitheatre	Broadway, Caerleon, Newport, NP18 1AY
Wedding	25/08/24 Saturday	TBC	Holy Trinity Church	44 Church Rd, Pontnewydd NP44 1AT
120 th Anniversary Dinner	31/08/24 Saturday	TBC	Parkway Hotel	Cwmbran Drive Cwmbran NP44 3UW
Concert at Ledbury	28/09/24	Coach leaves Cwmbran at 5:00pm TBC 7:00 start	Ledbury Theatre	The Market Theatre Market Street Ledbury HR
New Inn Pensioners	10/10/24	7:00 start	New Inn Hall	New Inn Hall NP4 OPZ
Wedding	20/04/25	TBC	San Fraed House	LLanvihangel Gobion, Abergavenny NP47 9BA



Musical background

Here is the background to some of the new songs in our repertoire:

Hallelujah, a song written by Leonard Cohen which is about love and sadness, remorse and hope. The song includes several biblical references, such as the line "she cut your hair.." which refers to the story of Samson and Delilah. He also talks about King David and Bathsheba in the line, "you saw her bathing on the roof. her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you.."

He actually wrote something like 80 drafts before settling on the final version.

16 tons is a classic folk song by Merle Travis about a coal miner and based on life in the mines of Kentucky, USA. It's a commentary on the struggles faced by the working class, particularly those employed in the coal mines, and deals with exploitation, debt and the continuous cycle of work.

"16 tons" refers to a practice of initiating new miners. In the mid 1920's a miner tended to haul 8 to 10 tons a day, whereas for new miners, the other miners would slack off so that the new miner would have to haul up to 16 tons on his first day.

The line "another day older and deeper in debt" and the line "I owe my soul to the company store" are a reference to the truck system and to debt bondage. Under this system, workers were not paid cash; rather they were paid with non-transferable credit vouchers that could be exchanged only for goods sold at the company store. This made it impossible for workers to store up cash savings.

Memorable experiences - Keith Jones remembers.

One of my most memorable experiences was when we were on our last tour to Normandy, I think in about 2014? We sang in Bayeux Cathedral and during the walk from the bus to the Cathedral our MD Pauline fell and was quite badly shaken up.

Although Pauline was clearly not feeling well, she insisted on conducting us, but at the interval felt unable to continue, so asked me to conduct the second half. It went very well and was enthusiastically received by the large audience, many of whom were tourists. I shall never forget the standing ovation from the large audience as the Choir marched off down the centre aisle of that wonderful Cathedral. I felt so proud of the Boys at that moment!

A memory which I shall always cherish was on our Tour to Yorkshire in September 2017. On the morning of our departure, we were informed that both Pauline and Martin Carey had been laid low with a sudden bout of some virus that was going around and they were unable to travel. That meant me being MD for the tour, quite unexpectedly.

The highlight for me on that tour was our joint concert with our host Choir Steeton MVC in a Church in Keighley. I was so pleased with how we sang and again I remember the pride I felt for the Boys as we marched out to a standing ovation. This was followed by a memorable Afterglow in a local hostelry which was one of the best I can ever remember.

Note from the Editor:

I also remember this "afterglow" as being particularly memorable. It was held in a pub called the Airedale Heifer and was the first concert conducted by Steeton's new MD, Catherine Sweet, and the first "afterglow" that she had experienced. What an introduction! Many of the choristers' wives will remember the occasion too, for not only did they considerably reduce the pub's stock of gin but also their stock of striking gin glasses!

Just to make it a third; I remember being MD for a performance at the Raglan Festival in about 2005. I cannot remember why I was standing in for Walford who was MD at the time, but possibly he was ill or on holiday. We were supposed to be performing the concert at Raglan Castle, but for a few days before the Saturday Concert it had rained incessantly making an outside performance seem impossible. The decision came on the morning of the Concert when we were asked by the



Festival Organisers to sing in Raglan Church instead of outdoors at the Castle. So we went ahead and gave a very well received performance in the Church. About halfway through the first half a large group of young people quietly entered the church and took their seats. At the interval I spoke to them and it turned out they were a group of French students on an exchange visit with local schools and colleges. They had never heard a Welsh Male Choir before and were so bowled over by our singing that they gave us a standing ovation as we filed out of the Church.

So there we are - three Standing Ovations when I was so proud of the Boys' performances. I know they are personal to me but I hope they are memorable to Choristers and Supporters who were present at these concerts too.

Ladies Committee

Continuing their fund-raising activities for the choir, our hard-working Ladies Committee have arranged a social evening at The Forgehammer Club (formerly the RAFA Club) on Saturday 23rd March at 7pm. Tickets cost £8 and include a buffet.

Best February joke

What the difference between a £20 steak and a £50 steak? February 14th.

Please let me have your ideas on what we should include in future issues of our Newsletter.

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Best wishes
Ian