



Newsletter for September 2007

The 58th Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on Monday 22nd September 2008 at The Leys Primary School at 9pm.

Resolutions from your Committee:

THE SUBSCRIPTION FOR THE SEASON 2008/2009 SHOULD BE SET AT £99 (FULL RATE) AND £66 (CONCESSIONS).

The minutes of the 57th Annual General Meeting and the accounts will be available at the meeting.

Welcome back to the 2008/2009 season! I hope that you had a restful holiday time. I am very glad to report that Robin completed his trek as planned – but I'm sure he'll tell us more about that!

In this edition of the newsletter you will find the rehearsal dates for this term. Also heading my call for items to be included in the newsletter Fred Andrews has provided a potted history of the Choral Society (for which I am very grateful!)

Rehearsal Dates:

September	1, 8, 15, 22, 29
October	6, 13, 20, 27
November	3, 10**, 12*, 17, 24
December	1, 8**, 10*

Notes:

** Rehearsal on the 10th Nov and 8th Dec will be at St. George and St. Andrew's at the normal time.

* Date to be confirmed later in the term

We are also performing at the Arts Centre on Saturday 20th September 2008. I have a list of those wishing to take part in this. If I do not have your name on my list, or if you are in any doubt as to whether you have signed up, please come and see me!

Recruitment Drive

We (the committee) really want to expand our membership, so any ideas for this would be gratefully received. I will be talking about this in more detail shortly!

The Early Days of the Choir.

In 1963 when I arrived in Stevenage, choral singing was very well established and a thriving activity. Prominent among the groups then were the Ladies Choir, the Stevenage Male Voice Choir, the Orchard Singers and later the Barnwell Singers.

The Ladies Choir decided that they would like to become a mixed voice choir and began to seek uncommitted men to join them. Many of these were key workers, men who were specialists in business and industrial firms whose role in Stevenage was to help to establish trained workers for the New Towns Industrial and Commercial Endeavours and were seconded from well established companies setting up in Stevenage. Among them the late Arthur Warne, Kerry Hicks, (Organist and choir master of Walkern Church) with members of his church choir and myself joined and became, with the Ladies, The Lawrence Choir, under Lawrence Smith a B.A.C. employee whose leadership took the choir to be successful entrants in festivals at Cheltenham and Northampton, as well as several venues in Stevenage including St George's Church.

By 1966/7 many of the key workers, having completed their tasks in Stevenage, were being recalled to their home bases, leaving the choir very short of men. Such was the imbalance that by early '67 the Ladies decided to revert to their original title and the Lawrence Choir was disbanded. The remaining few men and eight ladies decided that they would like to sing together and a group of 16 singers (8 of each gender) became the nucleus of what was to become Stevenage Choral Society! In June 67 Arthur Warne and Betty Warne, Kerry Hicks, Joan Shiel and myself sat down and decided that we would persevere as S. C. S. with Arthur as Chairman, Kerry as temporary conductor, yours truly as Hon sec and Treasurer.

Over the next two or three years, small concerts were arranged and performed at Whitwell, Benington, Wymondley, Walkern, Hemel Hempstead as well as St George's. We had appointed our first conductor, Peter Carey (a master at Alleynes School) who conducted most of these concerts. Our membership began to flourish and all together it was a most enjoyable period.

Our first concert at Whitwell, entertaining the Whitwell Ladies Evening Institute, with only our original 16 singers was particularly memorable because in repayment for our rendering of Ballads, Spirituals and Sea Shanties, we were sumptuously fed with homemade cakes and tarts and copiously watered with some very good home made wine! Our accompanist at this time was Mavis Retalick, succeeded by David Gosling.

The Stevenage Symphony Orchestra (under the baton of Peter Wigfield) were at this time predominant among the towns musical groups. Peter wanted to extend the scope of musical activities by performing, at least once a year, a combined choral and orchestral performance of a major work. To this end he invited the officers of the principal choral groups to join him in an endeavour to form a society combining the talent of all instrumentalists and singers, still enabling small groups to continue to provide chamber type concerts but with the ability to perform under his leadership major choral and orchestral works.

Emanating from these discussions emerged the Stevenage Music Society, with one Chairman, one Secretary, Publicity officer and Librarian and of course himself as Musical Director.

The onerous task of ensuring that good communication and accurate recording of events taking place fell to Elsie Selkirk who, with her husband had so successfully arranged the first exchange

visit with an overseas Choir a couple of years previously. A number of concerts took place where the combined resources of the Music Groups were involved culminating in a performance of Haydn's, 'Creation', in St George's Church on Sat 24 Feb 1968 were the Ladies Choir, conductor Lawrence Smith, the Male Voice Choir, conductor Roger Judd, The Orchard Singers, Choir Master Gordon Dale and the Stevenage Symphony Orchestra, leader Molly Burns and ourselves, the whole conducted by Peter Wigfield. At this time the President of the Society was Elizabeth Poston.

Some amalgamation of Choral forces took place with many of the Barnwell Singers joining with the Choral Society which reached a peak of 120 members at this time. This really was a most important period for the Choral Society, when, with works including Mahlers Symphony 2, Verdi's Requeim, Handel's, 'Messiah' and 'Zadoc the Priest', Elgars 'Dream of Gerontious' Bachs 'St. Johns Passsion' and many more under their belt, the Society could take their place with the finest choirs in the county. During these years our accompanist was Cilla Dennis.

Unfortunately almost every Society has its highs and lows. When in 1987 Peter Wigfield accepted a post in the South West, we had to find a M.D. to replace him. Several interviews and trials took place resulting in the appointment of Stephen Mould who hailed from Australia. For a time the Society continued to function as it had under Peter Wigfield, where Brahms, 'A German Requiem', was performed with Jack Hobbs leading the Orchestra on May 16 1987 in St George's, followed by Berlioz's 'Childhood of Christ' in December, but then it seems a difference of opinion became apparent between the Orchestra and Stephen, which resulted in the Orchestra deciding to become separate entities again, although the Music Society was never disbanded.. At this time, the Choir, somewhat disillusioned, dropped to a low of 45 members and Stephen left us.

This unhappy state of affairs didn't last long, however, for we had the great good fortune of gaining Trevor Hughes as M.D. and Marion Davidson as Chairperson. This was a dynamic duo which, together with Graham Pointon as our accompanist and linguistic mentor and a dedicated committee, was to raise the Choir not only to its past glories but beyond it! Shelagh Sherwood, Virginia Cole and then Glenda Bozwood Davies as Hon Secs, Carol Stokes, our long standing Publicity Officer, Sheila Howard and Jane Apling our Librarians, Dick Trollope and Tom McLachlan as Treasurers, a much more orderly and business like atmosphere prevailed in the structure of the Choir and although we were all saddened when Trevor was unable to continue with us through illness, the Good Lord smiled upon us and sent us Robin Osterley!

I have dwelt in not too much detail with the early days. The date and sequence of events being somewhat blurred in my memory now and I do apologise for glossing over many important events and the names of many individuals who were so important in the development of the Choir, an example comes to mind now, it was a concert in St George's when we had the privilege of singing in front of Malcolm Williamson, then Master of the Queen's music and Dr John Rutter, one of our greatest modern composers, and arrangers, Sir Harold Wilson then Prime Minister and his wife Mary,(we performed a poem of hers which was set to music), as well as the Mayor and Mayoress of the Boro'.

Many visits like the one to Norwich Cathedral, to sing in Russian the Rachmaninov Vespers. Our concerts with other Hertfordshire Choirs in the Royal Albert Hall which I never dared to dream about, flood back in my memory from time to time and I confirm my enormous pride and joy in being a part of the Choir all through these times. It was about this time that Marion Davison, Chairperson for many years, retired which was a great loss to the Choir. Now however with the events of the immediate past and present being so well chronicled by our conscientious and capable Hon, Sec, Heather Heritage, there is no need for me to say more! Fred.