



Mevagissey Male Choir

Raising funds and raising spirits since 1974



www.meva-choir.co.uk
Registered Charity No:298985

Don't forget, we're on the telly on 16th December!

Check the BBC listings for Songs of Praise.

No: 37



AS SEEN ON TV – OR WILL BE SOON!

What a summer we've had! Since singing at the Minack in May, we've performed at Truro Cathedral, given five terrific concerts on the quay, celebrated the wedding of our new deputy musical director and been filmed for a Christmas edition of 'Songs of Praise'.

Hopefully, you've already got the date in your diaries! Sunday, 16th December is the day we'll be appearing on your tv screens, although we haven't been given a time yet.

In fact, it all happened in a rush. It was only on 20th August that we received a call from a BBC researcher asking if they could record us for a programme in their

Advent season. A no-brainer, you would think.

Except, they wanted to do it on 8th September. That gave us just 19 days. And, given that we would be spending the next two Mondays on the quay, we would have only one chance to rehearse – Monday 3rd September. And rehearse we would have to as they wanted a Christmas piece, and we haven't sung them since, well, last Christmas! Oh, yes, and we would have to go to Penzance for the recording.

Still, our Musical Director was up for it and so was everyone else to judge by the response. We had a bigger turnout than we get for most concerts! Just to record two songs!

Come the day, and the coach, paid for by the tv company, set off at around 9. The producers wanted to record us in the early afternoon, with the main congregational service being filmed in the evening and our bit eventually integrated back at the studio.

We had been asked to be ready to sing at midday at St Pol de Leon Church, in Paul, a mile or two west of Penzance. The church, which houses the Memorial to the crew of the Penlee Lifeboat, dates back to 490, but was largely rebuilt after being burned by Spanish invaders in 1595.



Lights! Camera! Action! (Not sure about the Action)

It took a couple of hours all told, but we recorded two pieces, 'Do You Hear What I Hear?', from our Christmas CD, 'Sing for the Child', and 'Lower Lights', an all-time favourite of the Choir and its followers.

Helped by the church's excellent acoustic, we appear to have done ourselves proud. The producers were delighted – and so too was our MD!

Within hours, someone had posted part of the performance on Facebook, which was promptly seen by the producers of the Cornwall TV Channel. Consequently, ten days later, we found ourselves recording again, this time at home in St Andrew's. Again, two pieces were chosen – 'Anthem', which can already be seen on our own website, and 'Tears in Heaven', which will be available shortly as well on www.cornwallchannel.co.uk.

Brian Mitchell



We were all deeply saddened to learn in August of the passing of Brian Mitchell at the age of 87. Brian had been Mevagissey Male Choir accompanist virtually since its beginning in 1975 until handing over to Matt Fox in 2012 and was revered by all for his organ-playing.

Born to Percy and Enid Mitchell, they of the Portmellon boatyard where Mevagissey Male Choir has its roots, Percy Brian Mitchell loved music, learning piano as a child before progressing to the church organ at St Andrew's.

Eventually he became resident organist at St. Peter's in Mevagissey and the accompanist for our Choir, along with others such as Treviscoe, Mevagissey Ladies Choir, St Austell Choral Society and various soloists. He was awarded 'The Cornwhylen Cross' by the Cornish Gorsedd for his contribution to Cornish music.

A CD of his music was made and, as a finale to the celebration of his life, which took place at St Andrew's on 15th August, the congregation listened to him playing one of his favourite pieces – *'The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba'*.

Brian's last position was at St. Gorran Parish Church, where he played into his early 80s. It will be here, on 16th March 2019, that our Choir will join with the Mevagissey Ladies to pay tribute to Brian as a plaque is placed in his honour. If you would like to read Gary Mitchell's full eulogy, you can find it here: <https://www.meva-choir.co.uk/mitchell>



ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL QUAY SEASON

Once again, all five of our quay concerts proved hugely successful. Only for the third were we driven into St Andrews, and this by the exceptionally high tide rather than the weather.

Sadly, MD Graham Willcocks was unable to join us for any of them, due to ongoing medical treatment, but Mike S Thompson did a sterling job in his absence, leading us through a varied programme that included one or two of our newer pieces, some old favourites and a few Cornish songs.



Mike is much appreciated by choir members



Mevagissey Museum volunteers celebrate 50 years

Although the tide got the better of us for the third concert, on the 13th, we were back on the quay on the 20th and 27th, again playing to large crowds around the harbour.

Thanks go to our comperes, Graham Rundle (twice), Bill Collins, Peter Bowker and Andy Gill, to Chris Williams and his team for setting up the equipment, to those wielding the collection buckets (special mention for Gerald Goode and Carolyn George) and Geraldine Way and her team for CD sales (nearly 60 sold).

And, of course, to Mike Thompson.

It was at the first, on 30th July, that we learned of the passing of Brian Mitchell. It was a sad moment for all who knew him and the Choir paid him tribute at the end with a rousing performance of 'Morte Christe'. It was as if he could still be heard accompanying us on the organ.

The evening had begun with a few spots of rain, threatening to send us inside, but we braved it out and the clouds moved on. No such problem for the next one, a lovely night on the quay. We had decided to donate the funds we raised to the Mevagissey Museum, which this year has been celebrating its 50th anniversary.





It is always so inspiring to see so many people listening on the quay – young and old!



Letting our hair down afterwards at The Fountain – although looking again, there doesn't seem much hair about!

…AND SO TO YEALMPTON



It was great to have Graham back at Yealmpton

It was only last summer that we made our first appearance in Yealmpton (pronounced "Yamt'n") in Devon's South Hams, some eight miles from Plymouth. Shirley Hrydziuska, of Yealmpton Gospel Singers, explained in a local newspaper article. "It was standing room only last year – a terrific evening. And afterwards everyone piles into the local pub for a drink and to continue the singing."

Deriving its name from the River Yealm that flows through it, the village is home to a 400-year-old stone cottage which, legend has it, was home to Old Mother Hubbard that featured in the nursery rhyme. It is also the site of Kitley Caves where green marble was famously quarried.

So it was that on 21st July we found ourselves again in the bright, open, Yealmpton Methodist Church. As a venue, it is a delight to sing in and we managed to give the audience a few pieces that they wouldn't have heard the year before – 'You Are So Beautiful/Wind Beneath My Wings', 'Tears in Heaven' and 'The Way We Were' among them.

Paul Pearce treated the packed audience to 'For Your Eyes Only' and 'Strangers in the Night' midway through the first half, at the end of which Shirley's Gospel Choir kept everyone entertained with 'I've Got a Home in Story Land', with a delightful clapping and tambourine accompaniment, and 'Working on the Building'.

The second half also had the benefit of two solos from Paul, 'Empty Chairs' and 'When I Was 17' and the Choir closed with its increasing popular 'Back to the '60s' medley, which had the audience enthralled.

Jan Harrison-Jones was to comment on social media that same evening: "Fantastic evening at Yealmpton Methodist Church watching your concert. Well done, you were all amazing."



After availing ourselves of the excellent sandwiches and tea provided by our hosts, we – and they – retired, as last year, to the Rose & Crown for something a little stronger and a relaxed sing through our ‘pub’ repertoire.

Sunlight streams in as our Yealmpton audience awaits the start

Truro Cathedral – ‘a splendid concert’

What a wonderful place to sing! If not, apparently, quite as good for listening. That was the verdict on our July concert in Truro Cathedral as, sadly, some people were unable to hear the compere and soloists adequately, and we regretted not having taken the mike that we recently invested in.

Having said that, despite initial concerns, the event drew a good audience and there was no problem hearing the Choir. Which was good, because we sang well.

Soaring above the surrounding rooftops, Truro Cathedral has been described as “a triumph of Gothic Revival Architecture”. Designed by leading architect John Loughborough Pearson, it was completed in 1910 and is one of only three cathedrals in the UK with three spires.

It was ten years since we had last sung there, although in 2008 it wasn’t our own concert. This one definitely was; we were raising funds for the Prayer Book Society.

Our programme, through which the audience was expertly guided by our compere, Top Tenor Graham Rundle, included many of our newer pieces, although Graham had also inserted ‘*Calm is the Sea*’ and ‘*Deep River*’, neither of which we had performed for a while.

This was interspersed with two solos from Second Tenor Paul Pearce - Frank Sinatra’s ‘*Strangers in the Night*’ and ‘*Empty Chairs at Empty Tables*’, from ‘*Les Miserables*’, an outing for Meva Cappella with ‘*In My Room*’, and a debut for Basses Peter Bowker and George Phillips, on guitar and harmonica respectively, with ‘*Dirty Old Town*’ – a reference, Peter was quick to add, not to Truro but his home town, Salford.

John St Brioc Hooper of The Prayer book Society wrote thanking “Mr Willcocks and everyone involved; Mr Fox, your brilliant accompanist, soloists, MC and all the boys in the choir” for a “splendid concert”. He added: “Everyone said how much they enjoyed the programme and we were all moved by the encore which ended the evening”, he was referring to ‘*Lower Lights*’, of course.

Congratulations to Mike and Sarah



What a year it's been for Mike Thompson. The one with the 'S'! Mike, who joined the Baritones in 2015, stepped into the breach when Graham Willcocks was forced to miss our Minack concert. Then he found himself conducting us through all the quay concerts. Oh yes ... **and he got married!**

Mike and Sarah, who is mine hostess at 'Tea on the Quay' on Meva harbour, tied the knot in September. The ceremony took place in Looe among family and close friends before they returned to St Ewe to party. And it was some party!

All Choir members had been invited – provided that we sang. The newlyweds wanted an 'afterglow-style' performance to entertain their guests before the hog roast was served. The





Trying to get Choir members away from the bar

promise of free beer was enough to ensure a good turnout. We didn't make a bad job of a Mike's chosen repertoire, ranging from 'Calm is the Sea' and 'My Lord What a Morning' to 'The Larks Song' and 'Cornwall my Home' – although it was noticeable that our MD made himself scarce at this point!

Thankfully, the weather was fine because Mike and Sarah had had the wonderful idea of

providing outdoor games for everyone to enjoy – tug o'war, skittles, races etc. The celebrations went on long into the night. Our congratulations and best wishes go to Mike and Sarah.



...and it all ended with great fun in the sack!

Deputy MD

We should also properly congratulate Mike on his appointment as Deputy Musical Director this summer. As many know, Graham Willcocks has been battling with health issues since the beginning of the year – now largely resolved, we understand – and was forced to miss a number of our practices and even one or two concerts. Mike stood in with no complaint and did an admirable job, so it was decided to formalise his position. Well done, Mike. It means that, even though you're married now, you'll still be able to make **some** decisions!

ROD PREPARES FOR LIFE IN THE BASSES – IN NEPAL!



Celebrating the Nepalese 'holi' festival – he'll be so at home among the Basses

A funny thing happened to Rod Richardson on his way to the Choir. Rod stuck his head into one of our Monday practice sessions last year, left his details, then disappeared. Turns out he spent five months in Nepal, working in a school. So it wasn't until this summer, and his move from Devon to St Austell, that we saw him again, since when he's graduated to become a full-time member of the Basses.

It wasn't Rod's first visit to the Himalayas. Twelve years earlier he had upped and left for Tibet. "It was a life-long ambition", he explains, and the bright idea he had on his return that time was start a business manufacturing yurts. "It was a rush of blood to the head," he admits but it coincided with the start of the 'glamping' trend. "We sold everywhere from Norway to Australia and rented them, with all the trimmings, for festivals etc." He's since sold the company but his own yurt was recently put to good use at Mike Thompson's wedding!

Born and educated in Birmingham, Rod trained as a teacher and taught Science and Maths in his early years, in Nuneaton and Shrewsbury. He

then switched to an approved school in Newton le Willows between Wigan and Warrington, "where the M6 is cobbled", he jokes. Here he set up a service for problem teenagers. He couldn't have known then how useful this would prove as he settles in to life among the Basses!

However, health issues eventually drove him south, with Judy, the wife he met at college, and their two sons, and he became a freelance management trainer in Devon, developing his own consultancy business and beginning his long association with Cornwall. He did a great deal of work with what became Cornwall College Business School (based in St Austell). "I loved this work, helping people, especially those with health issues, to become self-employed."

But Rod didn't finally cross the Tamar to live until earlier this year, now wanting to be closer to his family, including his son, who had become a Fire Officer in St Austell some years before. During his visits to Cornwall, however, he had become aware of our Choir and, once committed to the move, and missing his singing, he decided to look in on us in St Andrews.

He has plenty of experience, having belonged to a church choir from the age of 8 to 19, and sung with other groups before joining, and running for three years, Birmingham's Jug of Punch Folk Club. Here, he arranged a series of concerts, including for HM Prisons. (There's that connection with the Basses again!) While in Devon, he sang with the choir at Plymouth's Theatre Royal before joining a shanty crew.

Rod says he's always enjoyed the outdoors and has started walking the coastal path. Should be a breeze after Tibet and Nepal. He's also taken up painting again. So what does he make of us all so far? "I enjoy the sense of community in the town and the choir and look forward to being part of it and to singing for as long as I can".

Sally's got us sewn up



Sally Adams, from north London, is among our biggest fans and has written before to tell us about the embroidery she has been stitching as she walks the South West Coast Path. Well, now it's finished, and has been framed – with MMC in prime position, as she promised.

“Your **FABULOUS** choir made a huge impression on me and I have put you in the centre, above the dolphins. The night we heard you singing we had just seen dolphins swimming towards the harbour and we wondered if your voices had been the attraction?” Sally has told us before how she and her friend first came across us singing on the quay two years ago by chance.

Her embroidery tells a story, she says. “I carry my piece of white linen and threads in my rucksack and stitch into it every evening (or on trains, buses, etc) anything that happens. The first night on our walk a seagull swooped and flew off with our entire supper in front of our eyes. I had to put him in!

“We had a fabulous walk through the purple heather past the tin mines. We walked miles over sandy beaches and saw lots of swimmers (you can't see them in this photo, but you can in the real thing). We walked past Bedruthan Steps, and Cape Cornwall, which I also loved. We saw a sunset behind St Michael's Mount. The highlight was the dolphins in Mevagissey and then hearing **YOU! THANK** you.”

Thank YOU, Sally. We are honoured indeed!

Sally has sent us this photo, although she points out that much of the detail is too small to see here. The real thing is 32 inches by 20!

THANK YOU

Many of you are kind enough to support us with your donations, whether on the quayside in August or in the Fountain on Monday evenings. Over the last three months we have also received generous gifts from others by cheque, or electronic transfer. We are extremely grateful. Without your support we would be unable to continue updating our repertoire with the new and challenging pieces that we believe you like to hear. So, **please**, keep them coming!

THANKS TOO

... to Carolyn George, Sylvie Thwaites, and others for keeping the newsletter supplied with wonderful photos of the Choir and its performances. And to Jane Stubberfield and Graham Hoskins for their more technical contributions.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Venue	Comment	Time
Fri 8 Dec	St Andrews	Christmas concert	7.30pm
*Mon 10 Dec	Penrice Hse, Porthpean	Private	7.30pm
Sat 15 Dec	St Augustine's, St Austell	Christmas concert	7.30pm
Sun 16 Dec	BBC TV Songs of Praise	Recorded in September	tbc
Sat 22 Dec	St Austell Brewery	Afternoon Christmas concert	tbc
**Sat 19 Jan	Carlyon Bay Golf Club	Dinner/Dance	7.00pm
Sat 2 Mar	Bethel Church	Church anniversary concert	7.30pm
Sat 16 Mar	Gorran Church	Brian Mitchell tribute	7.30pm
Sun 16 Jun	Caerhays Castle	Cancer Research	tbc
Sat 22 Jun	St Peter's Church, Noss Mayo		7.30pm

* Private. ** Friends of the Choir welcome.

Please check our website for updates.