

# MEVAGISSEY MALE CHOIR

SPRING 2015

NO. 23



*Félicitations aux Charlestown Enfants!*

Our 2015 season begins at 7.30pm on 7<sup>th</sup> February, when we join Truro Lions for a Cornish Evening in support of Children's Hospice South West at Lemon St Market, Truro.

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

## CHARLESTOWN CHILDREN ARE OUR CHRISTMAS HEROES

Bravo Stephen Gibson, our Baritone and former chairman, and his Charlestown School. Towards the end of November we were dismayed to discover that our annual St Andrews joint Christmas Concert with Mevagissey Ladies Choir and the Mevagissey School Choir had been scheduled for 6th December, the same evening as the Harbour's Christmas lights ceremony! Consequently, the children wouldn't be available – and the chances of a good turnout would surely be diminished.

In stepped Stephen, who, as Head Teacher at

Charlestown, offered the services of his own school choir. Phew! His 10- and 11-year-olds, pictured here, and led by Deputy Head Mrs Celia Leonard, not only rode to the rescue but almost stole the show, bringing the first half of the concert to a close with a delightful selection of carols that included 'Silent Night', sung in impeccable French, and 'O Come All Ye Faithful' in Latin. (So, let's have no more complaints, boys, about 'The Pearl Fishers' and 'Ave Maria'.)

And we needn't have worried about the size of the audience. The combined appeal of the Charlestown

kids and the Christmas lights ensured a full house.

The Ladies, conducted by Barry Farley, opened the concert with Mozart's *'Dona Nobis Pacem'* and followed this with *'In the Bleak Midwinter'*; *'Star Candles'*; and *'Fantasy on two English Carols'*. After the children had sung, we began our set with the popular Lyngham arrangement of *'While Shepherds Watched'*, in which the audience were invited to join, the Cornish traditional *'Star of Bethlehem'*; *'Mary's Boy Child'*, with Baritone Phil Johns as soloist; and *'O Holy Night'*, apparently the nation's favourite carol.

Next, the Ladies Choir returned with their *'Gershwin for Girls'* medley; *'The Holly and the Ivy'*; *'Sing We Now of Christmas'*, a traditional French Carol; and *'A Carol'*, by D.B. Daniels. We then performed, for the first time, *'Mansions of The Lord'*, the moving piece from the recent film *'We were Soldiers'*; another Cornish traditional, *'Bethlehem Star'*; a second new piece, the Catalan carol *'What Shall We Sing For The Child'*; and *'White Christmas'*.

How fitting it then was, just before the finale, for Vice Chairman Nick Nicholls to take the floor and call up Gerald Goode, a long-term and dedicated supporter of the Choir, for a presentation. Gerald can be seen at all our local concerts, and if you've been to any of our quay concerts, you will have seen him, bucket in hand, collecting funds for the Choir. Nick presented Gerald with one of our new commemorative shields, a token of the Choir's deep gratitude.

To round off a wonderful evening, the two adult choirs then combined for Cornish favourites, *'Joy to the World'* and *'Hark the Glad Sound'*.



*Gerald Goode receives his well-earned Choir shield from Nick Nicholls*

## ..... and so to Penrice

Nine days later, on Monday 15<sup>th</sup>, we were in St Austell to fulfil our longest standing annual engagement, the Christmas visit to Penrice House, in Porthpean, where we have been entertaining the elderly with a carol concert for many years. Once again the visitors' lounge was packed with residents and staff as Choir members arrived to be greeted with a choice of champagne or mulled wine. Alcohol before singing is frowned on by our Music Director so, of course, we all politely declined (I've been told to say!).

The concert got off to a rousing start, following a similar programme to that performed in St Andrews, including our new pieces, *'What Shall we Sing for the Child'* and *'Mansions of the Lord'*. We also introduced a number of popular carols, such as *'Away in a Manger'*; *'The First Nowell'*; *'O Come All Ye Faithful'*; and *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, to give the audience a chance to open their lungs. Halfway through we were treated to a delightful rendition of *'Silent Night'* by our Meva Capella quartet (and a less seasonal encore, *'Bye Bye Love'*). Our scheduled final piece was, once again, *'White Christmas'*, but we couldn't get away without an encore, for which we turned to old favourite *'Lower Lights'*.

Our hosts were afterwards as generous as ever with their hospitality, providing a wonderful buffet that Choir members tucked into with relish. After saying their goodbyes, many members then made the short, but traditional, trip to the Polgooth Inn, to reprise our Christmas repertoire in a lively afterglow.



*Entertaining the Penrice Residents and Staff*

## ST JOHN'S SINGALONG – A SPECIAL OCCASION

In between these two more formal Choir events, many members turned up for the traditional Christmas Sing-along at St John's Church in St Austell on 9<sup>th</sup> December. Brilliantly organised and orchestrated by former Choir MD, Geoff Wheildon, the event has become one of the highlights of the year, and plays to a packed audience comprising at least 50 per cent schoolchildren.

Geoff's programme for the evening is a blend of popular carols and Christmas favourites such as *'When Santa Got Stuck up the Chimney'*, and *'I saw Mummy Kissing Santa Claus'*. Some, like *'The Twelve Days of Christmas'*, include actions that lead to great fun and hilarity. Although the Choir is not invited formally, we are asked for 'volunteers' to help the evening along. Many of us find it a special way to start Christmas.

### Christmas Hit has Echoes of Mevagissey



*Neil Ingram is second from the left in the Breakfast TV studio*

Anna Flavell, wife of Bass Steve, has spotted a connection between our Choir and one of the most popular plays on the UK airwaves this Christmas. The song was the poignant *'1914 - The Carol of Christmas'* and the link is Stuart Ingram, a Tenor in the early days of the choir. "Sadly," says Anna, "Stuart died all too soon some years ago, but his son, Neil, is carrying on the choir singing tradition, and was a member of the combined services choir, *'Military Voices'*, that recorded the Christmas hit.

"Neil joined the RAF in 2002," Anna tells us, "and lives in

Somerby, Leicestershire, with his wife, Annie. They have a three-year-old son, Aiden, and are expecting their second child this month. Neil has done active service in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has also been to the Falklands. He joined the RAF Spitfires Choir three years ago and, just before Christmas, they were chosen to take part in the video recording which was filmed at the Grave of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey."

Neil and his colleagues also appeared on Breakfast TV, and took part in various radio interviews to promote the song, which was produced to raise funds for the Services' benevolent funds - The ABF, the Soldiers Charity, the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund.

The recording made the A playlist and was heard frequently on Radio 2. It got to number 4 in the UK independent charts and reached 59 in the main singles sales charts at Christmas. Well done, Neil!

## BOPPING AT THE BOSUN'S

Our annual Christmas Dinner & Dance, as always, took place in January. More than 70 Choir members, wives and partners pitched up at the Bosun's Diner in Charlestown on Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> turned up for the event, admirably organised again by Social Secretary Simon Lawday, with the inestimable help of Geraldine Way.

Once again we enjoyed an excellent meal and danced to the popular music of the *'Double Brandy'* duo, who appear to be able to judge the mood of the evening brilliantly. But then, they have been entertaining us at these events for at least eight years now (no-one seems to know exactly how many!)

Special guests were Billy Moore and Lynne Porter from the Fountain, and many said how good it was to see two former chairmen, Baritone Mike Watson and Top Tenor Anthony Sandham, in attendance, with their respective wives, Pam and Trudy.

We've already booked next year's!



*Let the Dancing Begin...!*

## WORK STARTS ON CHRISTMAS CD

At long last we have begun work on recording a Christmas CD. The very idea has been a matter of contention. Some feel it would be a good money-spinner, others that we spend too long learning carols that we only sing a couple of times a year. But the Committee has ruled – a Christmas CD there shall be.

Tommy Williams, the recording engineer son of Bass section leader Chris, was available on our last practice night before the Christmas break, so we got to work, nailing our first four tracks. Tommy and Chris had positioned microphones at various strategic points around the chapel, absolute silence was called for and we launched into the 'first take', hoping that no motorbike would roar past or seagull awaken from its slumbers.

It took a while, but we just about nailed '*Mary's Boy Child*' before soloist Phil Johns' voice gave out, and then managed to get '*White Christmas*' and the two traditional Cornish carols, '*Star of Bethlehem*' and '*Bethlehem Star*' in the can. Tommy was free again on our first return to St Andrews after Christmas, so we recorded '*What Shall We Sing for the Child*', at the umpteenth attempt, and then, '*O Holy Night*', to Graham Willcocks' utter astonishment, in one 'take'.

There, for the moment, the CD is parked. Even the most ardent Christmas lovers draw the line at singing carols in February, apparently, so we'll return to the job next winter. Meantime, if you have any thoughts about carols or Christmas songs that might suit the Choir's skills, do let us know.

## Basses Boss it at the Bowl

For the second year running, Social Secretary Simon Lawday organised a Choir bowling evening at the St Austell Bowling Alley – the "Ozzle Bowl". Eighteen Choir members and partners 'bowled up' on the Saturday evening of 29th November, occupying three lanes. Silly hats added an element of farce and humour - a black bowler, emblazoned with "champion bowler", for successful 'strikers', and a 'jester's' cap for duffers who put two balls down the gutter!



Overall winner over the aggregate of two games was Bass section leader Chris Williams, while fellow Bass Steve Flavell scored the highest individual game. At the end of the evening, some of the participants retired to the "White Hart" for welcome relaxation and refreshment!

Thanks go to Simon. It was a fun evening and there were plenty of requests for a follow up evening along similar lines – he is now considering a 'Beer and Skittles' evening in a pub with a traditional wooden bowling alley.

## TONY SCARRATT ELECTED CHOIR SECRETARY



The one event in the year where you wish for unremarkable proceedings and early end, is the Annual General Meeting. Thankfully, 2014's formalities on 4<sup>th</sup> December were concluded with little disharmony and reasonable expediency.

The only change of note was the unopposed election of Baritone Tony Scarratt as Choir Secretary. Tony succeeds Top Tenor Michael Collings, who is stepping down for personal reasons (although staying with the Choir), and who drew warm applause for the terrific job he has done in recent years. I think Friends of the Choir would all agree.

Our new Secretary has been a member for not much more than year, but comes with huge experience, having done a similar job for the Ilfracombe Male Voice Choir, which he helped found over 20 years ago. We wish him well.

Chairman Graham Rundle briefly reminded us how successful 2014 had been, with the sell-out concert at the Minack, the Anniversary concert at Eden, and other highlights like our evening at Sterts, our trip to Bath and Crediton, the WW1 commemorations at Mevagissey and Heligan, shown on the world's media, and our annual Quay concerts, in which we thrilled thousands. We had also strengthened our links with the Military Wives in Plymouth and Culdrose.



And we also attended the wedding of our talented accompanist, Matt Fox and his bride, Carolyn in Plymouth.

We introduced a new bespoke memento to present to visiting choirs, launched a new range of leisure wear, and designed new external publicity displays, information boards and posters, with a new indoor pull-up banner kindly donated by former Top Tenor "Doc" Jones. We also had TV and extensive national and local radio coverage, while our own website boasted over 10,000 hits.

Graham's words were echoed by MD Graham Willcocks, who described 2014 as "an incredible experience". "The highlights for me at the standout Eden event were the wonderful *'Pearl Fishers'* and singing with that ultimate professional Ralph McTell. The Military Wives Choir was cheered to the rafters and the joint piece, *'Morte Christe'*, sent shivers down my spine because it was so atmospheric."

Graham thought the whole evening had been "superbly run" and thanks went to Chris Williams and John Cornfield for the sound system, to Alison Harvey, for her delightful contribution and to Nick Hart – "a wonderful musician, a lovely man and a great friend of the choir."

He also thanked Matthew Fox, "a great talent", Graham Hoskins for his guitar work, and Cedric Bray for "having the bravery to sit behind the piano in Matt's absence" over the last year.

## Jeff Returns to his Roots



*The Med behind him, Meva before him - Jeff in Tunis, 2011.*

Could there ever have been any doubt that Jeff Cundy would pass his voice test? After all, his cv lists three chapel choirs, barber shop (which must have impressed our MD) and even country singing.

Having spent the latter part of his career in the Middle East, however, he has in recent years been starved of the opportunity to stretch his vocal chords. Returning to Cornwall on his retirement, he couldn't wait to get started again. "I needed an interest to enjoy, so I joined the most renowned Choir in the area", he explains (he says all the right things, too!)

Jeff was born in Nanpean, the youngest of five children, but his father sadly passed away when he was only 17 – "it was such a shock at the time, as we were a very close family up to that point." They were brought up in the Methodist Chapel, where Jeff sang in the Chapel Choir and learnt the piano at the age of 10. "I played until I was 12 – and then I discovered motor bikes." He still is a big fan of motor sport, loves production car trials and is a keen follower of F1.

Clearly the preoccupation with motorbikes didn't last *that* long, however, because, at the age of 21, he married Mollie. They have two children, both of whom live in London - a daughter who, with her managing director husband, has three children, of her own, and a son, who is single, and a chartered surveyor.

Now retired, Jeff was an engineer, and spent 20 years as Service Operations Manager with the Caterpillar dealer in Saudi Arabia where, as we've noted, male choirs are in short supply.

Having settled on Mevagissey as his 'choir of choice', Jeff, who has joined the Baritone section, says, "I have found the repertoire amazing, and I am still getting around the amount of songs involved." His favourite? "*Fat Bottomed Girls*' is very entertaining, and a pleasure to sing." But for his voice test, he went for the rather more cultured, '*The Mansions of the Lord*'.

There's something else that's impressed Jeff. "I would like to mention that I have found all the choir members very welcoming when we get together to practise, and I look forward to joining you all after practice for a pint. I am looking forward to attending the planned concerts and to getting to know all the songs and members."

## Auntie Connie Unearths a Second Tenor

We have Christian Iliff's Auntie Connie to thank for our new Second Tenor. It was she (Connie Warren) who spotted one of our recruitment posters while out one day early in 2014, after Christian had told her he had heard the Imerys Male Voice Choir singing in Fowey church that Christmas.

"I must be able to do better than that", he thought ... no, seriously, it clearly made an impression on him, so much so that he told Auntie Connie who jotted down our contact details when she saw the poster, and passed them on to him when he arrived at his new home in Par in January last year.

Christian hails from Cheshire. He was born in Nantwich, and grew up in Sandbach, but he knows Cornwall well, having spent many a holiday here with the Cornish end of the family (Connie was born a Farley), and he is clearly thrilled to now be living in what he calls the 'best part of the country', where he works as a sales manager for Jefferys, the estate agents. Sadly, he has had to leave behind his daughter Abbie, who presented him with his first grandchild, Jacob, only last November. She still lives in Staffordshire, as do his partner Karen's two sons and daughter – and her own grandson.

To help compensate, Christian has decided to indulge his

passion for classic cars now that he's in Cornwall. "I've always had an interest but never got around to owning one until last year, when I bought a Triumph Stag for Karen as an early 50th Birthday present" (must have been *years* early, eh Karen?). They then acquired an MGB GT, which they did up and sold, before purchasing another Triumph Stag which they had fully restored. "When we picked the car up to bring it home after all the work had been completed, someone ran into the back of it! We hope finally to have it back in February this year."

Christian's other keen interest is leisure boating and sea fishing – can't think what he's doing in Cornwall, then. It started when he visited Lake Windermere, where he purchased his first power boat and 'learned the ropes', before graduating to a larger vessel, and venturing on to the sea in North Wales. It was just one more step to fishing, I suppose.

Singing just never occurred to him. But he's taken to it like a duck to water. He passed his voice test with '*Mevagissey Bay*' and his favourite piece currently is '*Bohemian Rhapsody*.' Neither of which have yet been heard by Auntie Connie. Look forward to seeing you this summer, Mrs Warren!.



*Christian in his natural habitat*

## MORTE CHRISTE IN STITHIANS – WHAT A PRIVILEGE!

*Former Choir Bass Paul Newman, now living in Bath, concludes his memoir:*

Our concerts had no point if they were not entertaining. To this end, one of us would act as compere to introduce the Choir, speak about the pieces, maybe tell a joke. Baritone Mike Watson had great style. He would occasionally offer the Choir's collective professional services to the audience. Perhaps somebody wanted to build a house? Perfect. We had a bank manager to organise finance and an architect to design it, a digger driver to dig the footings, a choice of builders, electricians and plumbers. The garden? – yes, we could provide a gardener. And maybe you'd like a boat, too? – we had a boat-builder and a sailmaker.

Each concert included solo 'slots'. Perhaps Marshall might sing an exquisitely sensitive 'Danny Boy', or Meva Capella, our quartet, would perform some barbershop. And it wasn't all serious. Matthew, the Under-Butler at Caerhays Castle and a considerable character, had a fine line in comic songs. At a concert in Minehead he began the third verse of his song only to find that Brian did not come in on piano. He held the first note dramatically, waiting for the piano to start. Nothing. He could not see Brian from where he was, so he stopped and walked calmly round the corner of the stage to see what was going on. Everybody could hear an amount of scrabbling about. In due course, Matthew reappeared, looking totally unflustered (he was an Under-Butler, after all!), and resumed his position at the front of the stage, where he returned to the interrupted note . . . . the piano came in and away they went. At the end, tumultuous applause: the audience clearly thought this was all part of the act! (We later learned that Brian's music had fallen off its stand, scattering all over the floor!)

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A very black, very foggy winter evening.

Because of working late, I'm making my own way, driving through narrow twisty lanes where I've never been before. The village of Stithians is round here somewhere, infernally high up on these swirling moors between Redruth and Falmouth. Cornwall is an immense county when you try to get to remote parts of it via the mass of tiny crooked lanes which wriggle through its hills and deep valleys – nowhere flat at all.

Stithians Male Choir is celebrating its 60th anniversary up here in the fog this evening, and has asked Mevagissey and Mousehole choirs to join them. That's quite an honour. But I'm late and lost. My headlights reflect straight back off the fog and I flick between dipped and full beam as I fight for every yard of progress. I manoeuvre awkwardly past a car coming the other way. We wind down our windows and I find it is some of my colleagues, lost like me.

Eventually it begins to make sense. But the road approaching the chapel is parked up for half a mile, cars in every place wide enough to allow other vehicles to pass. I know now that I will miss the start of the concert. Perhaps I should just go home?

I park a long way off and tramp resignedly up the pitch-black lane. Ahead, a glow appears. The chapel materialises as a great, gaunt, square building, high up, with all its windows blazing, stabbing shafts of light into the suffocating fog. I hear the sound of singing leaching out from the cosy-looking interior into this external bleakness. Too late!

But I creep into the entrance lobby thinking I can perhaps find my place at the interval. I am angry with myself for being late, although nobody seems concerned. I find my place on one of the traditional wooden galleries that occupy each of the four sides of a large brightly-lit building, which is absolutely packed with people. Where did they all come from?

In the second half, each choir takes a turn. Then, in the final part of the evening, all three join forces and sing pieces that everybody knows. The effect is thunderous, magnified further by enthusiastic playing from the organ. I can feel myself getting emotional. This, I suppose, is the Cornish Methodist culture, grown out of hard ways of working and living, and out of a dogged non-conformism and individualism. This is the culture that created the great male voice choirs of both Cornwall and Wales, still seen in the way that people in these parts love to sing given any excuse. It is a bygone culture really, but this evening opens a window on it.

Finally, to my joy, we come to my favourite *Morte Christe*. As the organ strikes up, an electric surge of excitement shoots down my spine. The singing erupts. Everybody seems to love this piece; every voice in the place is raised to its maximum volume, either with the tune or the relevant harmony line. I get carried away, putting every ounce of energy into the glorious base line until – at the last verse – I suddenly break down, too choked to sing, and have to stop.

I can only stare with wonder at the rows and rows of glowing, animated faces raising the roof in this isolated place of light and sound, while all around us swirls the dank fog of the wide, bleak moor. I'm not Cornish, but I've been welcomed here into this glimpse of old Cornwall that not many outsiders get to experience. It feels a huge privilege.

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When the time came for me to leave Cornwall, taking leave of the Choir was perhaps the hardest part of it. At the end of my last practice evening, Graham announced that we would sing one final item, *Morte Christe*. I knew perfectly well why Graham did this; I think perhaps everybody did. I sang for this last time trying desperately to burn the moment into my memory, as a permanent record of my time in the Choir.

Paul's recollections will no doubt have resonated with many. His regret at having to leave is clearly profound. How good then that our 'stocks' are replenished by others who evidently find the social life of this Choir as much fun today. Like new boy Christian and partner Karen pictured here at 'the Ozzell'.



## FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER

Just a reminder that there is no longer a fee for membership of the Friends of Mevagissey Male Choir, but that we do welcome donations. And thank you for all the generous contributions we have seen recently. Finally, if there is anything you'd like to know about the Choir, do please get in touch.

Meanwhile my thanks go to a number of people for their help in preparing the newsletter; Anna and Steve Flavell and Alan Dibb for contributions to this edition in particular; and to Carolyn George for her photographs, Graham Hoskins for his proof reading and Jane Stubberfield for her production expertise.

## CONCERT DIARY

Sat 7 <sup>th</sup> February	Lemon Street Market, Truro	In association with Truro Lions for children's charities	7.30pm
Sat 2 <sup>nd</sup> May	St John's, St Austell	Host for CIMVC concert	7.30pm
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> June	Holy Trinity Church, St Austell	Feast Week jt concert with CuldRoses	tbc
Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> August	Sticker Football Field	Funds for MS centre and MNDA Cornwall Motor Neurone	7.30pm
Mons 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , 17 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup>	Mevagissey Quay	Quay concerts	tba
Thurs 20 <sup>th</sup> August	Fowey Town Quay	Fowey Regatta Week	6.30pm
Sat 6 <sup>th</sup> September	St Augustine of Hippo, St Austell	Flower Festival	tbc
Sat 24 <sup>th</sup> October	Chapel St Methodist Church, Mousehole	Jt concert with Mousehole MVC	tbc
Sat 28 <sup>th</sup> November	Probus Church		7.30pm
Mon 14 <sup>th</sup> December	Penrice House	Christmas Concert	7.30pm