

Côr Meibion Gwalia The Gwalia Male Choir

The first 50 Years 1967-2017



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The 'pages' correspond to the years ie 67-17

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A few programmes and photos have been scanned and can be sent electronically. Otherwise they, along with copies of Tempo Gwalia, can be viewed in the Archive. For more information please contact the Secretary at gwaliachoir@gmail.com



Côr Meibion Gwalia (The Gwalia Male Choir) 50 Years 1967-2017 A History

Introduction from the Chairman

I joined the Gwalia in 1975 and, apart from occasional absences when the demands of family and career took precedence, the choir has been a constant for almost two-thirds of my life. The reasons why people join choirs vary tremendously - I know someone who joined because there was nothing on TV on Wednesday evenings! In my case, the then chairman of the choir, Dafydd Gwynfor taught with the wife of a mate of mine from college and persuaded him to join and he in turn got me (and four others with Welsh roots - we were all at college together) to join as well. My Mum was from Johnstown near Wrexham (her dad ran the winding gear at Hafod pit) and Dad was a Welsh-speaker from the Rhondda (his dad worked down the pit in Treherbert) but I was brought up in England. I don't speak Welsh and don't read music but that doesn't seem to matter if you enjoy singing and the camaraderie. Many of the choristers don't know what each of the others does for a living (as it happens, at one stage there must have been at least half a dozen teachers and an equal number of surveyors), and I used to compare it to being in a rugby club but without getting all muddy and sweaty.

As well as giving me many friends, being in the choir has provided the opportunity to do things that very few people get to experience - singing in major concert halls, on TV, on film sound-tracks, in the Closing Ceremony of the London Olympics and on Horse-Guards Parade to name just a few. And there are health benefits too! My doctor could not believe I smoked over twenty a day - he said I had the lung capacity and blood pressure of someone 20 years younger, and put this down to being in a choir (even so I have given up!). There has been a lot of debate about how to keep up the numbers of those participating in male voice choirs (see the Western Mail article written in 2008 by one of our young basses). I don't know what the answer is, but joining the Gwalia was one of the best decisions I ever made and I recommend anyone who has not experienced such a choir to give it a go.

Editor's Disclaimer:

In putting together this history I've tried to be as accurate and impartial as I can, but if there are any views that you disagree with or don't like, blame me and not the Choir.

In the pages listing the Gwalia's activities year by year I have relied for the information on documents such as old programmes which have been kindly donated or lent by many people. If it looks like not many engagements took place in a particular year it is because we can't find documents for everything that we did. Occasionally I have managed to make <u>scanned electronic</u> <u>copies</u> of the documents and they can be emailed to those who are interested. Where there has not been time to scan every document I have put a note on the relevant page and they can be viewed in the choir's <u>archive if</u> you first contact the Secretary. Many photos have been generously donated; a few have been scanned and others are available to view in the archive. Most of them are not dated but it has been possible to take an educated guess and put them with documents relating to roughly the correct year.

Where people have reminisced about a particular event I have reproduced it in the relevant year in italics. Speaking for myself, my memory might be a bit 'hazy' (well they were very good trips!) and I apologise if my versions of events are not as other people remember them.

Steve Davies 2017 gwaliachoir@gmail.com

Introduction The formation of the Gwalia

Côr Meibion Gwalia was formed in September 1967, many of its members previously having been in the London Welsh Youth Choir and the London Welsh Male Voice Choir.

LWMVC had been formed in 1902, but disbanded at the outbreak of the First World War. The London Welsh Association was founded in 1920 in Baker Street with Margaret Lloyd George its first President. In 1928 a new headquarters for the Association to serve as a memorial to those who fell in the Great War was proposed by Picton Davies, David Lloyd George and Sir Howell Williams who donated and financed premises in Mecklenburgh Sq (opened in1930) and construction of a new building on an adjacent site fronting Grays Inn Rd which opened on 5 November 1937*(1)*. In the meantime, LWMVC had been re-formed in the 1920s only to disband again with the coming of the Second World War.

The London Welsh Association Youth Choir was very active and successful during the 1950s. However, members were required to retire at the age of 30, and this was one of the reasons why LWMVC was re-established in 1961 *(2)*. The conductor in 1967 was Lyn Harry, a charismatic and flamboyant individual who was accused of having a 'fling' with the accompanist (the wife of one of the choristers), something he denied. The committee felt that it was bad for morale and the public image of the choir, and at an EGM recommended that the Musical Director be dismissed. Some members agreed, but others thought it was a private matter, and the recommendation was narrowly defeated. The committee resigned en bloc with immediate effect, together with quite a few of the choristers, and a few more leaked away afterwards.

However LWMVC was committed to a summer tour of Switzerland and, shortly after the EGM, this went ahead with Haydn James as conductor. On its return the choir split. Elwyn Roberts became LWMVC's new Chairman. The Treasurer, John Hiett, tried to get the two halves of the choir together again, but there seemed to be too much bitterness. Lyn Harry went back to Wales and in 1969 became conductor of the Morriston Orpheus. To the surprise of many, at the end of Morriston's 1975 tour of Canada, Lyn Harry decided to remain there, and later formed the Canadian Orpheus. He died in 2006.

The breakaway group formed a new choir that, under the chairmanship of Dafydd Gwynfor Jones, became Côr Meibion Gwalia - The Gwalia Male Choir, 'Gwalia' being old Welsh for 'Wales'. The choir attracted new young members and soon became larger in number than those left behind; LWMVC's first concert after 'the split' had 28 on stage and the photo of the Gwalia from 1968 (below) has 40. Initially the Gwalia held its rehearsals in an upstairs room of the Prince of Wales pub, in Drury Lane, Covent Garden, before moving to Castle St Welsh Chapel and then to the London Welsh Centre in Grays Inn Rd. A plaque of Welsh slate commemorating 50 years since the founding of the choir, is mounted on the wall in the Prince of Wales and was unveiled by choir President Cerys Matthews in June 2017.

The Gwalia appointed a composer, Michael J Lewis, to be its Musical Director, but he was suddenly offered the opportunity of writing the music for a major film starring Katherine Hepburn (which in due course led to even greater success in Hollywood). A young Owain Arwel Hughes was asked to stand in for a critical three-month period in which the choir had a BBC audition, concerts in Pontefract and St George's Hall, Bradford and a week later, a concert in Wigmore Hall, the famous London Chamber Hall. Many years later, having become one of the world's foremost conductors, Owain brought the two choirs together in various charity concerts in the Royal Festival Hall and the Royal Albert Hall *(3)*.

Since these beginnings the Gwalia has not only helped to keep Welsh music and choral singing alive but has also brought it to the attention of a wider audience. The following Summary highlights some of our key personnel and achievements over the last 50 years.

Acknowledgements for the above to John Hiett, Dai 'Rep' Edwards, and Dr Haydn James. Also: (1) http://www.londonwelsh.org/about-us/history-of-the-centre/ (2) http://www.londonwelshmvc.org/about/history (3) Owain Arwel Hughes' Autobiography "My Life in Music" published by University of Wales Press (Chapter 6) And: "City Mission - The story of London's Welsh Chapels" by Huw Edwards published by Y Lolfa (Chapter 14)

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An early concert programme said:

'In addition to performing the popular choruses long associated with Welsh Male Voice Choirs, Côr Meibion Gwalia intend to break new ground by introducing a high standard of music performed according to the highest possible standard of male voice singing. The repertoire will thus range from the polyphonic music of the High Renaissance to modern compositions of the contemporary scene.'



The President's silver Badge of Office designed by Gareth Lewis

Presidents:

The Gwalia's President from its formation until his untimely death in 2004 was His Honour Judge David Griffiths. Dai Pres, as he was affectionately known, practiced as a family solicitor in Bromley, Kent before he was elevated to the bench (one of very few solicitors to have achieved this). He was not one of the singers, but came to many of the Gwalia's concerts, and particularly enjoyed 'blooding' new members on the choir's many trips abroad. Dai was accompanied on these trips by his wife Anita Williams who was a superb soprano, eisteddfod winner and a bard. Anita took part in many of the Gwalia's concerts. One of life's 'characters' Dai continued as the choir's President after he retired back to Llandovery and was a very generous supporter of the choir for 37 years.

At the beginning of 2005, BBC journalist and broadcaster Huw Edwards became the Choir's President a position he held until the beginning of 2017 when he handed over to author and radio & TV presenter Cerys Matthews MBE.

Chairmen:

The first Choir Chairman was Dafydd Gwynfor Jones (1967-71 & 1973-76). DG had a great bass voice and was known as 'The Pope'. A headmaster in north London, DG was very involved with London Welsh Rugby Football Club and the Voyagers sports charity.

The longest-serving Chairman (1976-94) was Dr Ifor James. He had a lovely tenor voice, a wicked sense of humour and a wealth of 'slightly off-colour' rugby songs.

Several other Chairmen have served the choir over the years, but another that deserves mention for his contribution to the choir as a soloist and all-round entertainer is Ted Sellick. The tribute in the memorial songbook that was produced after he died in 2013 said:

In 1978, a couple of students who knew that Ted liked singing in the pub - just round the corner from his sign-writing business in Islington - suggested he go along to the London Welsh Centre in Gray's Inn Road. The little man with a Captain Birdseye beard and a twinkle in his eye joined the Gwalia as a top tenor. Soon he became one of the Choir's key members performing solos in concerts and keeping everyone entertained in the bar afterwards. Ted was a thoroughbred Londoner, without a drop of Welsh blood in his veins. But he loved the Choir and we loved him. Ted contributed selflessly to the life of the London Welsh Centre in so many ways: the signage and other work he carried out in the building were just as important as the musical evenings he presented. He was the Gwalia's chairman from 2005 to 2012. Ted was a lovely man and it is a real privilege to have known him.

Secretaries:

The Choir Secretary from 1967-75 and 1996-99 was John Evans (died 2005). Another great character, John was one of the choir's Top Tenors. He was brother to Dame Anne Evans the famous soprano. His mother 'Auntie Nellie' supported the choir, the LW Club in Grays In Rd and Borough Chapel for many years and was awarded an MBE for her services to the Welsh community in London (her sausage sandwiches on a Wednesday night were legendary). John was a central figure in the life of the London Welsh Club, and was a cornerstone of the Gwalia. He and Wynne Davies were a formidable 'double-act' and ran the choir for over 30 years.

Wynne Davies was Secretary from 1975-96 and then became Chairman until his sudden death in 1999. Lynn Thomas wrote: Wynne had unshakable belief in, and commitment to, the Gwalia. Despite all his other official duties, he seemed to be able to do as much as several men in his untiring work for the Choir - not least because he was, in himself, a "ministry of all the talents". He was a strong conviction-led, yet consensus-seeking Chairman; a fluent, humorous, audiencepleasing compère; a convincing figure as a "front man for the organisation"; a musically and culturally literate Welshman; a man of huge organisational skill and, which is more, the diplomacy necessary in motivating and unifying a lot of strongminded Celts.

The Secretary keeps the Choir running; it is an often thankless task and involves lots of hard work behind the scenes. As well as John and Wynne there been only two other Secretaries in the life of the Gwalia - Dave Hurlbut who did unstinting work for 14 years (1999-13) and Geoff Rogers who took over in 2013.

Musical Directors:

The choir has always attracted the highest calibre of musician both as conductor and accompanist. The distinguished people who have filled these roles are listed in the section 'Summary and Highlights', but one person worth mentioning here is Wendy Halden. Wendy began as our pianist in 1973 and, after 8 years became our Musical Director, a post she held from 1981 to 1996 when she retired to west Wales (died March 2012). Under Wendy's leadership the choir had many notable achievements (which can be seen in the following pages) but the greatest must be winning the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales in Fishguard in 1986.

Vice Presidents and Honorary Members:

An early programme lists the Vice Presidents as: Mrs K E Phillips; T J James; D Harries Jones; Gwilym Jones; Cliff Morgan; Idwal Parcel; Dai Rees; John Williams MBE

We now call VPs 'Honorary Members'. They are not singing members of the choir but are recognised for the support they give in numerous ways to the Gwalia. HMs as at 2017 are:

Iola & Bob Bilson; Brian & Rita Clark; Winnie Desair; Huw Edwards; Megan Evans; Lionel & Pam Griffiths; Colin Hill; Bryan & Iris Howells; Haydn James; Lynne Jones; Gwen Rees; Mary Richards; Glenys Roberts; Joan Sellick; Dave Sweet; Bob Trevor; Ron 'Tidy' Williams.

Choristers:



Members shown on a 1968 photograph of the Gwalia are:

Ivor 'Top note' Evans; Haydn 'Square -Jaw'; John Thomas; John Grove; Ivor Buxton; Wynne Davies; Howard Jones; Dai 'Biscuits' Griffiths; Dilwyn Griffith; Elwyn Evans; Gerald Anthony; Cliff 'Boxes' Davies; Ieuan Hughes; Haydn James; Bryn Morgan; Dai 'Dep' James; Tom Morgan; John Evans; Dafydd-Gwynfor Jones; Graham Martin; Edgar Morgan; Ellis Jones; Glynn 'Four eyes' Thomas; David Cramm plus 16 others who we can't identify. (40 total)

Current Members (2017):

T1: Pat Barnett; Mark Bevan *(Compère);* Tony Jenkins *(Treasurer & Trustee);* Barry Jones; Rod Rhys-Jones; Stuart Street; Paul Williams.

T2: John Ball (*Committee member*); Owen Jenkins; Marc Jones; Paul Miner (*Committee member & Trustee*); Geoff Rogers (*Secretary & Trustee*).

B1: Steve Davies (*Chairman, Concert Secretary & Trustee*); Aron Harris; John Harrow (*Librarian & Trustee*); Richard Hopkin; Dave Hurlbut; Russ Jones ('*Father of the Choir'*); Ian Lealman-Strutt; Ian Lewis; David Marsh; Anthony Weaver.

B2: Mike Davies *(Marshal);* Clive Jones; Robin Roberts; John Slater; John Taylor; Gwyn Thomas. *Accompanist:* Wyn Hyland MA ARCM

Musical Director: James Hearn MMus ARCM LRAM FRCO





Registered Charity No: 1169319

Whilst drawing from the Welsh community in and around London, the Gwalia Male Choir is open to anyone who shares a passion for singing and enjoying themselves. The repertoire ranges from traditional Welsh hymns and folk-tunes, well known opera choruses and spirituals, to lighter numbers including pop tunes and hits from Broadway musicals. The choir is in demand for public concerts, cabarets, weddings and other private functions, frequently performing in Cathedrals, concert halls, churches, hotels, clubs, offices and village halls throughout the UK. The Gwalia makes recordings, radio & TV appearances and commercials, and also tours regularly. The Choir's President is author and radio & TV presenter Cerys Matthews MBE.

In its illustrious 50 year history Côr Meibion Gwalia has been a prize-winner at the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales and the Llangollen International Eisteddfod, has performed in London's Royal Festival and Royal Albert Halls, St James's Palace, on the rugby pitch at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium, and even appears on the sound-track of a Hugh Grant movie. A number of choir members took part in the Closing Ceremony of the London Olympic Games. The Gwalia was honoured to be invited by Her Majesty's Government to sing in the Drumhead Service on Horse Guards Parade to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of VJ Day. Concert tours have been made to Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy and last year performed in northern France to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme.

The Gwalia rehearses on Wednesday evenings in the London Welsh Centre, 157 Gray's Inn Road WC1X 8UE, where a warm welcome is extended to visitors and anyone interested in joining the choir. To book the choir for your next function please contact gwaliachoir@gmail.com. For more details please visit: www.gwaliamalevoicechoir.org.uk

Highlights:

The following Summary highlights the Choir's key personnel and achievements over the last 50 years.

Musical Director:	Accompanist:
1967-68 - Michael J Lewis	1967-68 - Robin Barker
1968 - Owain Arwel Hughes	1968-69 - David Kram
1968-69 - Michael J Lewis	1969-72 - Ingrid Surgenor
1969-72 - Dr Terry James	1973-81 - Wendy Halden
1972-74 - Brynmor Llewelyn Jones	1981-86 - Jane Watts
1974-77 - Ifor Evans	1986-91 - Tom Jackman
1977-81 - Michael Thomas	1991-93 - Jenny Trew
1981-96 - Wendy Halden	1994 -98 - Michael Pugh
1996-2001- James Hearn	1998 -2001 - Jenny Trew
2001- 04 - Lyn Evans	2001 -04 - Carys Hughes
2004 - Kim Kirkman; Michael Thomas	2004 -11 - Chris George Duckett
2004 -12 - Janet Haney	2012 - Siwan Rhys; Hannah Gill
2013 James Hearn	2012 - Wyn Hyland

President:	Chairman:
1967 - 2004 - His Hon Judge David J Griffiths	1967-71 - Dafydd Gwynfor Jones
2005 - 2016 - Huw Edwards	1971-73 - Tom Morgan
2017 - Cerys Matthews MBE	1973-76 - Dafydd Gwynfor Jones
	1976-94 - Dr Ifor James
Secretary:	1994-95 - Tony Rees
1967-75 - John Evans	1996-99 - Wynne Davies
1975-96 - Wynne Davies	1999-2003 - Ellis Jones
1996-99 - John Evans	2003-04 - Dave Sweet
1999-2013 - Dave Hurlbut	2004-12 - Ted Sellick
2013 Geoff Rogers	2012 Steve Davies

Royal National Eisteddfod:	Llangollen International Eisteddfod:
1974 - Carmarthen (1 st Prize)	1969 - 2 nd Prize
1975 - Criccieth	1972 - Prize-winners (3 rd)
1980 - Dyffryn Lliw (Gorseinon)	1976
1986 - Abergwaun (Fishguard) (1 st Prize)	1979
Ref: "Do you hear the people sing? The Male voice Choirs of	2000
Wales" by Gareth Williams published by Gomer Press 2015	
Pontrhydfendigaid Eisteddfod:	Bedford Choral Festival
1976 - 1 st Prize-winners	$2010 - 2^{nd}$ place
1980	
1984 - Prize-winners	

Overseas Tours:	1992 - Brittany & Normandy, France
1972 - Naples, Italy	1993 - Antwerp, Belgium
1978 - Wuppertal, Germany	1995 - Meggenhofen,Austria
1980 - Wuppertal, Germany	1998 - Dublin, Ireland
1982 - Poperinge, Belgium	1999 - Antwerp, Belgium
1983 - Wuppertal, Germany	2000 - Dublin, Ireland
1984 - Prague and Brno, Czechoslovakia	2004 - Geneva, Switzerland
1985 - Heilbronn and Lowenstein, W Germany	2007 - Dublin, Ireland
1987 - Lowenstein/Wuppertal, West Germany	2009 - Antwerp, Belgium
1988 - Gouda and Veenendaal, Holland	2014 - Lombardy, Italy
1990 - The Hague/Appeldorn, Holland (2000 Voices)	2016 - Northern France
1991 - Antwerp, Belgium	

Discography:

- Cor Meibion Gwalia, 1979, Black Mountain Records
- Travelling, 1986, Grasmere Music
- Celebration, 2006, Casmara R.E.D.
- **O Gymru. Celebrating the first fifty years of The Gwalia Male Choir**, 2016 Auburn Jam Music

The Choir also appears on:

- March of the Spirit, Mikis Theodorakis/LSO, 1970, Polydor
- *Back Into the Future*, Man, 1973, UA Records *see also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNo92jS0HJ4*
- *Comrades in Song*, **10th Festival of 1000 Welsh Male Voices 1986**, 1987, BBC Records & Tapes
- *The World's Largest Men's Choir*, (Festival of Dutch and Welsh MV Choirs), 1990, EuroSound Inarco bv
- Beautiful Dreams, Chris De Burgh, 1995, A&M
- **The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill, But Came Down A Mountain** (film soundtrack), 1995, Epic Soundtrax *see also:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnBVyJvT-GU
- Deep Inside My Soul, Centenary Festival of Male Choirs 2002, 2003, Black Swan
- Lost Horizons, Lemon Jelly, 2002, XL Recordings

Other recordings:

Sir Geraint Evans; Shirley Bassey; Richard Harris; Anne Evans; Richard Stilgoe.

TV, Radio and Film:	Children In Need
Albert Hall: St David's Festival (1.3.75)	Mary O'Hara Show
Horse of the Year Show. Olympia (1976)	The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill, But Came
Not The Nine O'Clock News (4.5.80)	Down A Mountain (Hugh Grant) (1995) (Film
BBC Fairfield Halls (1982).	soundtrack) Epic Soundtrax
R2: Queen Mother. Festival Hall	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnBVyJvT-GU
The Whistle Blower (Michael Caine) (1986) Film	Jack Dee Show (not broadcast) (1997)
Soundtrack	Roundhouse, Camden. Channel 4 (June 2001)
The Queen's 40 th Anniversary. Earls Ct (1992)	BBC Radio London (2012)
Life of Lloyd George	VJ Day commemoration live broadcast by BBC
Blue Peter	from Horseguards Parade (2015)

Concert Venues:

We have been privileged to perform in concerts, cabarets, weddings and, occasionally, funerals in many churches, hotels and other venues, mainly around London and the South East, too numerous to list individually. Listed here are some of the more unusual or memorable venues:

Abbey Road Studios (1995)	Lord Mayor's Show (1998)
All Souls Langham Place (2007)	Maltings, Snape, Suffolk (1978, 1987)
Antwerp Cathedral (1991)	Manoir aux quat Saisons (2006)
Arundel Castle (?79/'81)	Mansion House (2008)
Banqueting House, Whitehall('97,'98,'00 '01 '03)	Millennium Stadium, Cardiff (2012)
Birmingham Town Hall (1974)	National Liberal club (1997, 2015)
British Museum (1999)	Natural History Museum (1997, '98, '00, '01)
Broadcasting House (2012)	Norwich Cathedral (1981)
Cadogan Hall (2008)	Olympia Exhibition Centre (1976)
Café Royal (1981)	Olympic Stadium (2012)
Cecil Sharp House (2015)	Painters Hall (2011)
Central Hall, Westminster (1982, '92)	Piccadilly Circus (2016)
City Temple (2000, '02, '14)	Ritz Hotel (2014)
Dominion Theatre (1982)	Roundhouse, Camden (1973, '8?, 2001)
Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane (1974, '8?)	Royal Academy (2009)
Earls Court (1992, 2014)	Royal Albert Hall (1969, '70, '75, '86, 2002)
Epsom Race Course (1997, '98)	Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (2015)
Excel Centre, Docklands (2014)	Royal Festival Hall (1983)
Fairfield Halls, Croydon (1969, '82, '97)	Savoy Hotel (1968, 1976?)
Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2014)	Sky TV (2014)
Great Hall, Westminster (2012)	St Clement Danes, Strand (2009)
Greenwich Naval College (2013)	St George's Hall, Bradford (1968)
Grosvenor House Hotel (1981, '8?, '97)	St James's Palace (1989)
Guildhall (1989?)	St James's Piccadilly (1995, 2014)
Hampton Court Palace (1979?)	St John's Smith Square (1971, 1982)
Horseguards Parade, Whitehall (2015)	St Paul's Cathedral (2011, 2014)
Kempton Park Race Course (1992, '94, '98)	Statenhal, The Hague (1990)
Kensington Roof Gardens (1998, '17)	Theatre Royal, Plymouth (1982)
Labour Party conference (1989, '92)	Trafalgar Sq (1993, 2010)
Landmark Centre, Teddington (2010, '14)	Victoria & Albert Museum (1992)
Lansdowne Club (2009)	Wembley Conference Centre (1977)
Lensbury Centre (2007)	Westminster Abbey (1991, '96)
Longleat (2006)	Wigmore Hall, London (1968)

Adverts:

Whitbread Tankard (1974); Furst Lager; Time Magazine; Carling Black Label; Guinness (1978?); Harp Lager; Trancopal *(sleeping tablets - sung to the tune of Brahms' lullaby);* Scottish Power; Win Wales (2010)