

Côr Meibion Gwalia
50 Years 1967-2017 A History
CHAPTER 3: 1978-1982

1978

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Dr Ifor James

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Michael Thomas

Accompanist: Wendy Halden

Saturday 29 April 1978 - Visit to London of Mannerchor Union Choir from Wuppertal, Germany. Joint Concert in the Great Hall, Goldsmiths College, New Cross SE14.

Conductors: Michael Thomas and Jurgen Fleischer. Accompanists: Wendy Halden and Heinz Becker.

Helen Gilheany (soprano). Gareth John (cello). *(see scanned programme)*

Steve Davies says: This was the first time the Wuppertal choir from West Germany had come to London. Their chairman got in touch with us when they decided to visit the UK. He had fond memories of Welsh choirs from his time as a prisoner of war in south Wales. He said they had a good life in the prison camp - the British guards would leave the gates open so the prisoners could get back in when they got back from the pub!

This visit was the first of many exchanges to be made by the two choirs over the next few years, before the German choir was disbanded.

When we went to Wuppertal in October '78 we were put up by the German choristers in their homes, and the next time they came to London we returned the favour. This was quite difficult as many in both choirs did not speak each others language - most of the German choir were of a generation immediately post war where English was not taught in schools - but we got by with sign language and dictionaries.

I remember my guest Rolf Köhler was very surprised at how far we all lived from the London Welsh Centre, and how long it took us to get to rehearsals. When we visited Germany later that year we stayed in our German friends' houses. Wuppertal is an industrial city made up of 5 towns (a bit like Stoke on Trent), and Männerchor Union choir were all from the town of Ronsdorf, and it didn't take long to walk to their clubhouse and concert venues. Wuppertal is famous for its Schwebebahn, the electric monorail that opened in 1901 and links all the towns along the river valley - it is unusual in that the carriages hang from their roofs over the river under a network of steel arches.

Home to many heavy industries, Aspirin was invented in Wuppertal by Bayer, but it didn't do much good for one of our basses, Ron Dodge, when he tried to indicate to his host one morning that he had a bad hangover from the excesses of the night before. His host kindly provided him with a pain-killer - when Ron said it was a bugger to swallow but he managed it, his host explained that it should have been taken 'another way'. From then on Ron was known as Ron Suppository! Living with a family did not suit everyone and in subsequent years we stayed in hotels.

Over the years we sang in many venues around Wuppertal, the last occasion being in the open air in the Zoo! Ken Brickell says: Another happy memory was from Wuppertal on the day that we went into town to try to find someone who could translate "Knees up Mother Brown" into German for us. We got pissed and the Wuppertalers looked on in amazement when we sang it that evening. That evening also served up Diana Ross, etc. I can still remember "Knie hoch Mutter Braun" perfectly! And Dafydd Gwynfor staying with the blacksmith and his wife. As we left, the wife gave Dafydd a note that said, "Thank you for coming. We hope you have a "gut fahrt all ze vay home".

? 1978 - Bromley Rotary Club

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden

Solos: Michael Thomas (organ). Anita Williams (soprano). Gareth John (cello) *(programme in archive)*

?Summer 1978 - Westminster School *(programme in archive)*

Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist: Julie Jones

With Westminster School Jazz Group and members of the school music dept.

Guinness Advert: *Steve Davies says: I may have the wrong year, but around this time we made a TV advert for JWT (one of the biggest agencies in the world) for their clients Guinness. They had a series of ads showing how popular the brew was in the regions - Yorkshire shepherds, Cornish fishermen etc. We were the Welsh miners. We started off early in the morning in the Bulls Head on the Thames in Chiswick. They had a professional actor and all the rest of us were extras. Everyone in the pub seemed to be drinking Guinness! We couldn't smoke but to add atmosphere they filled the room with smoke machines. To begin with the tray of pints was passed back to the bar each time they wanted to shoot another take, but, as the morning wore on, pints would disappear off the tray. After a good lunch provided by the location caterers we went to a little old school in Ham where we pretended to be miners having our rehearsal after work (they had done some mining shots in Wales without us) before going to the pub for a Guinness. There was window behind us and one of the crew had to stand outside holding a branch he had pulled off a nearby tree. We sang Myfanwy over and over again. The actor was sat in the centre of the choir, and as Dai Box and I happened to have light coloured shirts on we were placed on either side to in effect 'highlight' him. This meant that when the ad was broadcast I was in the close up - my 2 seconds of fame!*

Sat 16 September 1978 - Concert: London Welsh Centre

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden

With Anita Williams (soprano). Catherine Smart (violin) *(programme in archive)*

27 October 1978 - Gwalia visit Wuppertal, Germany.

28.10.78 Joint Concert in Durselenhaus, Wuppertal.

Conductors: Michael Thomas and Jurgen Fleischer. Accompanists: Wendy Halden and Margot Alm.

Mary Lloyd Davies (soprano). *(programme in archive)*

? November 1978 - Gala Concert. Snape Maltings

.....

1979

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Dr Ifor James

Secretary: Wynn Davies

Musical Director: Michael Thomas

Accompanist: Wendy Halden

July? 1979 - Llangollen International Eisteddfod

(date?) 1979 - Recording of 'Côr Meibion Gwalia' vinyl album. Produced by Black Mountain Records.

Recorded at the London Welsh Club, Grays Inn Rd, London.

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden

?1979 - *During the time when Michael Thomas was conductor ('77-'81) we sang in Arundel Castle, the seat of the Duke of Norfolk in Sussex. I cannot find any documents showing what date this was. We were part of the cabaret at a grand dinner at the end of a week where executives from an American company had been flown over, taken to Stratford on Avon, Stonehenge, London and then by steam train to Arundel. Security was very high with the army guarding the exits, however they weren't good enough to stop us nipping out to the pub in the town.*

We also sang in Hampton Court Palace at a similar dinner - again I can't find the date.

.....

1980

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Dr Ifor James

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Michael Thomas

Accompanist: Wendy Halden

Sunday 4 May 1980 - St Joseph Catholic Church, Wuppertal, West Germany

Joint Concert with Mannerchor Union, Ronsdorf, Wuppertal.

Conductors: Michael Thomas and Prof Hartmut Klug. Accompanist: Wendy Halden.

Solo: Anita Williams (soprano)

?July 1980 - Royal National Eisteddfod in Lliw Valley (Gorseinon)

Under 40 Voices. 8 Choirs. Not placed.

Test pieces: Dilys Wamal (False Phyllis)(E Thiman) and Arglwydd Da Nid Wyf Deilwng (Victoria)

1980(?) - *Steve Davies says: We may have also competed at the 'Bont' Eisteddfod (Pontrhydfendigaid) in Ceredigion in 1980 as well but I can't find any documents relating to it, other than a schedule from our 30th anniversary that refers to it. It also says we were there in '76 and '84. I recall going there quite soon after I joined the choir in late '74 and being told we were defending champions. Maybe it was '80 and I had been told we had won it before but not the year before. Wynne was able to get the use of the Goldsmiths College Students Union minibus and he asked me to go over and pick it up. There was a good mix of older choir members and a few youngsters like me. It was quite a long drive, involving a pub (or two) on the way. Bont is a tiny village with a couple of chapels, a couple of pubs and a massive pavilion which had been built by a Sir David James a philanthropist who had made his money in the dairy business and cinemas in London.*

We had been given an early rehearsal spot in a chapel, and we then had several hours to kill before the actual competition. Maybe it was this time lag or the pub where we waited that contributed to a very poor result. After the competition we waited for the adjudication and then went back to the minibus which I had moved to a better parking spot earlier. We waited for Ron but he didn't turn up, and it was now getting late, so we assumed he'd got a lift earlier and we set off to Aberaeron where we were staying in the Castle (or was it the Feathers?).

The disappointing result didn't dampen our spirits too much and we were having a good time in the bar in the early hours of the following morning when Ron walked into the hotel looking immaculate in his dinner suit, red frilly shirt and bow tie (the then uniform of the choir); not a hair was out of place although he was complaining that the sole of one of his patent leather shoes was flapping about. When he saw the minibus had gone (from the original position) Ron had decided to start walking and managed to hitch a lift with a milk lorry. He said, 'After about 5 minutes the driver chucked me out and I thought I'd offended him, but it turned out that it was because we had reached Aberaeron, which meant that before I got the lift I must have walked almost 20 miles!'

3 October 1980 - London Welsh Club, Grays Inn Rd.

Party with Mannerchor Union.

Sunday 5 October 1980 - London Welsh Club, Grays Inn Rd.

Joint Concert with Mannerchor Union, from Wuppertal, W Germany (MD: Jurgen Fleischer)

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden.

With Dylan Singers (Musical Director: Hefin Owen). Trumpet Solo (un-named) (see scanned programme)

3 November 1980 - BBC Television. Not The Nine o' Clock News.

Steve Davies says: we were booked to sing a song, to the tune of Men of Harlech, about what Keith Joseph was doing to industry in Wales. At the last minute the actors' union Equity objected to us taking part, but the producers asked us to come along anyway, in uniform, and sit in the audience. Comedian Mel Smith explained as the camera turned to us that it was intended at this point to have a Welsh Male Voice Choir but as a result of union objections the piece would have to be done by actors 'who aren't Welsh, can't sing and are not entirely male'. After they had sung, the camera swung onto us and Mel said 'what do you think boys?' and we all gave a raspberry and a thumbs down. 10 seconds of TV glory! It was reported in the Daily Telegraph - see below

Daily
Telegraph
4.11.80

... of gambling ...
"blackened" by the bookmaker,

EQUITY FIVE REPLACE CHOIR OF 50

By PETER KNIGHT
Television Staff

EQUITY, the actors' union which last week stopped recordings of a church congregation being used for the funeral service of Doris Archer in "The Archers," was instrumental in reducing a choir of 50 last night to five.

The choir was to have appeared in the BBC 2 programme "Not The Nine O'Clock News."

Instead of the 50 members of a Welsh male voice choir making a 15-second appearance in an item on Sir Keith Joseph, five members of equity appeared in their place singing about the troubles of their union.

Mr Sean Hardie, co-producer of the series, said last night that he had called Equity to inquire whether it would be possible to use the male voice choir in the programme, but had been told that union members would have to be used in the item.

A BBC spokesman said that the male voice choir would have cost £200, but Equity members would have had to be paid £45 a head to appear in the programme.

Ban denied

Equity last night denied that they had vetoed the use of the choir. A spokesman said that they had received only an informal approach from the BBC about the item.

The spokesman said: "It would be ludicrous to say we banned the choir. We were never formally asked for permission for it to appear."

LEGS LOST IN TRAIN MISHAP

failin
Las
that l
off £4
a prot
making

Using
"Ludlo
with a
Blue w

But o
Friday,
£8,000
Eamon
rans at

Mr L
of his l
last che
Schofiel
fairly b
he coul

And l
owed £1
maker.

At l
Tudor-s
Helens,
day tha
off the
can go
legally-
know
such a

"If t
restricti
should
that I re
was no
their rul

Over
makers
bets, "so
stand agit

'He kne

For Schofield's
said that Mr
known the grou
he started his
"There was no
preventing Mr
winning by lim

"We woul
that permit
gamble £1.5
ample oppo

He add
£10,000 li
average
chance

was t
M
t

1981

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Dr Ifor James

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Michael Thomas (to June). Wendy Halden

Accompanist: Wendy Halden. Jane Watts

11 February 1981 - Concert Balham Old People's Association

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden.

The cheapest bar in London!

14 February 1981 - President's Charity Concert. Bromley.

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden.

13 March 1981 - Café Royal, London W1

Sunday 29 March 1981 - Concert Broxbourne Civic Hall

Conductor: Michael Thomas. Accompanist: Wendy Halden.

Helen Gilheany (soprano). Richard Braebrook (tenor)

11 April 1981 - '*The Brixton Riots and the Gwalia Thin Red Line*' - Steve Davies writes:

There were two Brixton Riots within four years of each other (the other was 28 Sept 1985) and I can't recall whether this incident was in '81 or '85.

We were going to sing at a concert in Bletchingley, Surrey, and a coach had been arranged to take the choir from Grays Inn Rd to the concert. A few of us who lived in south London decided to go direct, and after the obligatory pint in the Whyte Harte we went over the road to St Mary the Virgin church to wait for the rest of the choir. The church filled up and the appointed hour for the start of the concert was getting closer and there was no sign of the others; this was in the days before mobile phones and there was no way of contacting them. Eventually Doctor Ivor said we'd better make a start and sing some songs that the few of us (9 or 10?) knew fairly well. So the 'thin red line' (in those days our uniform was red shirts, dj's and bow ties) took their place at the front of the church and then, just as Ivor was explaining that we had somehow 'lost' the rest of the choir, there was a creaking from the back of the church as the door slowly opened and in came all the others. The concert started late but was a great success.

Our compere Elwyn explained what had happened: they left on time and were making good progress when the coach stopped at the traffic lights on the A23 in the centre of Brixton. On one side was a rioting 'mob' and, on the other side, police with riot shields! As the coach was being rocked the driver shouted out of his window; maybe it was because he was from Jamaica, but whatever he said the coach was allowed to pass on.

However, that wasn't the cause of the delay. Construction of the M25 immediately to the north of Bletchingley had been completed but, the section west of its junction with the M23 was still being built. The driver had assumed he could get off the motorway at this point, but it was only when a choir member at the front of the coach pointed out they had gone past Gatwick and were well on their way to Brighton that they realised they had missed the turning to Bletchingley. Luckily for the 'thin red line' they got there just in time.

Thursday 24 April 1981 - Kings College Hospital

26 April 1981 - Grosvenor House

Michael Thomas resigned in June 1981. He had been our MD since March 1977 and in that time we performed at the Snape Maltings, Arundel Castle, Wuppertal, Horton Kirby, and Balham.

Summer? 1981 - Maidenhead Town Hall

Saturday 31 October 1981 - Concert: Norwich Cathedral

Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist and Organ: Jane Watts.

Glenys Roberts (soprano). Richard Braybrook (tenor) (see scanned programme)

December 1981 - Annual Dinner Dance, Mount Royal Hotel W1. 153 members and guests.

Tempo Gwalia: Our in-house magazine edited by Eddie Parry started in February. 7 issues were produced in 1981 and they can be viewed in the Gwalia archive.

1982

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Dr Ifor James

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Wendy Halden

Accompanist: Jane Watts

Concerts:

Sat 9 January 1982: (*deep snow!*) Concert, St John's Smith Square

Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist Jane Watts.

Mari Williams (mezzo soprano). Gwawr Owen (harp).

Part 2: Cherubini D Minor Requiem (*see scanned programme*)

15 January 1982 (?)- Concert in Dublin with the Dublin Welsh

1 March 1982 - St David's Day Concert, Fairfield Hall, Croydon. Broadcast on BBC radio.

Conductor: Owain Arwel Hughes

With BBC Concert Orchestra. Kenneth Collins (tenor). Sioned Williams (harp). Cwmbach Male Choir

Wed 10 March 1982 - Concert: Maidenhead Town Hall.

Marilyn Rees (soprano); Kevin Jones (bass)

Fri 19 March 1982 - Concert: Royal Engineers Barracks, Mill Hill.

After-concert reception in the Sergeants' Mess.

Easter 1982 (?) - visit to Brittany

Sun 7 March 1982 - St David's evening Service, Central Hall Westminster

Sat 27 March 1982 - Concert for Bexley Welsh Society, Chislehurst Grammar School Centenary

18 April 1982 - Dominion Theatre, London (*see programme in archive*)

Sir Harry Secombe and Friends

Charity Gala Concert organised by the Medical Aid for Poland Committee

Part 1: Johnny Wiltshire Orchestra; Sir John Gielgud; Karolinka Polish Dancers; Tom Baker; Mazury Polish Dance Company; Bob Carolgees; Lorna Dallas; Dickie Henderson; Jamie Michael Stewart; Rolf Harris. Part 2: Spectrum; Robert Lansing; Joan Hinde; Kenny Cantor; John Briggs; Keith Harris; Alfred Marks; John Boulter; Gwalia Male Choir; Sir Harry Secombe.

Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist Jane Watts.

(*see story about Harry and Ron in 1977*)

Sat 22 May 1982 - Concert: London Welsh Centre.

Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist Jane Watts.

Catrin Ley (soprano). Carys Wynne Hughes (harp). Maurice Williams (tenor)

(*see programme in archive*)

29 May 1982 - Concert: Stadhuis, Poperinge, Belgium

Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist Jane Watts.

Toc H. Ypres.

Sat 7 August 1982 - Cricket Match Gwalia v Voyagers

Streatham Common

Sunday 24 October 1982 - Theatre Royal, Plymouth

(*see press cutting from Western Evening Herald 25.10.82*)

Introduced by Angela Rippon

Gwalia (London) Male Choir; Conductor: Wendy Halden. Accompanist Jane Watts.

Swansea Male Choir; Dulais Valley Ladies Choir; Budleigh Salterton Male Choir; Glenys Roberts

(*see scanned programme and 2-day itinerary*) (*archive copy of programme is autographed by Angela Rippon*)
The Gwalia was 57 voices on stage

Thurs 4 November 1982 - Park Lane Hotel. London Welsh Golf Club Dinner

Sat 6 November 1982 - Harrow Welsh Annual Concert

Sat 11 December 1982 - Gwalia Annual Dinner Dance. Mount Royal Hotel, Marble Arch