

**Côr Meibion Gwalia**  
**50 Years 1967-2017 A History**  
**CHAPTER 6: 1993-1997**

**1993**

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Dr Ifor James

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Wendy Halden

Accompanist: Jenny Trew

**Committee '93/'94:** President His Hon Judge David Griffiths (Dai Pres); Chairman Dr Ifor James; Hon Sec Wynne Davies; Hon Treas David TA Griffiths (Dai Carpets); Subs Sec Bill Pritchard; PRO John Evans; Committee: Tony Rees; Dewi Thomas; Gareth Lewis; David Hurlbut; Brian Howells; Bill Henderson; Simon Charles; Monty Crocker.

**Sat 13 February 1993** - All Saints Church, East Sheen Ave.

**Sat 20 February 1993** - Marie Curie, Hampstead

**Sun 21 March 1993** - Concert. Mid Sussex Arts Festival. Martlets Hall, Burgess Hill

**Fri 26 March 1993** - Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane W1

*I think this engagement at the Grosvenor House was part of a series of very lucrative late-night after-dinner cabarets we did for a US firm (Chrysler or Rank Xerox) who brought over their top sales people from each of their regions. The small band of the Grenadier Guards marched up and down the dance floor and we sang America The Beautiful, Jerusalem etc. During Land of Hope & Glory the audience all stood up with their hands over their hearts because they thought it was our National Anthem.*

**Sat 8 May 1993** - Watford Welsh

**17 May 1993** - Cabaret Gala Night, British Association of Women Entrepreneurs, Hilton, Park Lane

**Tues 8 June 1993** - Grosvenor House

**Sat 26 June 1993** - Concert. St Mary's Church, Stratfield Mortimer, Bucks

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Jenny Trew. Ted Sellick (tenor). Dewi Thomas (bass). *(programme in archive)*

**Mon 12 July 1993** - Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane W1

**Sat 31 July 1993** - Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea

Dewi Jones.

? **Café Royal** -

**Sat 25 September 1993** - Sunbury on Thames

Sian Meinir; Jenny Trew

**Sat 9 October 1993** - Concert. St Lawrence Church, Effingham

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Jenny Trew (Tom Jackman?). Dilys Morgan (soprano). Ted Sellick (tenor). Dewi Thomas (bass). *(programme in archive)*

**Sat 16 October 1993** - Orpington

**Sat 30 October 1993** - Concert. St Jozefkerk, Heide-Kalmthout, Antwerp.

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Jenny Trew (Tom Jackman?). Chantal Krekels (mezzo-soprano and violin). Ralf Leenen (mandolin). Dirk de Hertogh (guitar). *(see scanned notice)*

**Sun 31 October 1993** - St Willibrorduskerk. Eucharist.

*(programmes, Itinerary and photos in archive)*

**Sat 20 November 1993** - Charity Concert in aid of Meadow House Hospice at Guinness Club Hall, Park Royal NW10

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Jenny Trew. Ted Sellick (tenor). Dewi Thomas (bass). Plus The Singing Barbers. *(programme in archive - it says 'Soft Drinks at Bar'!)*

**28 Nov 1993** - Metropole, Brighton. PMA Telecom (cancelled?)

**9 December 1993** - Trafalgar Square - singing carols around the Christmas Tree lit up by Norwegian ambassador

**Thurs 16 December 1993** - Concert with Dylan Singers. Stamp Lecture Theatre, Hammersmith Hospital in aid of Help Hammer Cancer.

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Jenny Trew. Ted Sellick (tenor). Dewi Thomas (bass).

Dylans: conductor Meinir Ottaway, Accomp Maria Fitzgerald (*programme in archive*)

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## **1994**

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Tony Rees

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Wendy Halden

Accompanist: Michael Pugh

**18 January 1994** - Cabaret: Royal Lancaster Hotel, Bayswater

*Paul Gray recalls: We sang at the Royal Lancaster Hotel on 18 January 1994; 5 December 1998; and in 2000.*

*After most of these occasions we adjourned to the Archery Tavern (by the stables in Bathurst Place), which was my watering hole in those days. On one evening, even Ted S. was "stopped" by a loud mouthed job drinking there, who decided to disrupt our usual singing by singing loudly and discordantly against us.*

### **? Coventry?**

**Sun 20 February 1994** - Concert. St Marks Church, Hamilton Terr, St Johns Wood NW8

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Michael Pugh Sian Meinir (mzzo soprano). Carol Foulkes (soprano).

Paulo da Silva (tenor). (*see scanned programme*)

**12 March 1994** - Concert; Lee on Solent Tennis Club, Portsmouth

**?Whitbread Brewery** Chiswell St Barbican

**18 March 1994** - Cabaret, London Welsh Rugby Club, Old Deer Park, Richmond.

This was the traditional 'Smokers' Evening' held on the eve of the England v Wales rugby international

**16 April 1994** - New Eltham Methodist Church

**Thurs 5 May 1994** - Wyllyotts Centre, Civic Hall, Potters Bar for the Rotary Club.

**18 June 1994** - Weybridge. Dilys Morgan

**22 June 1994** - Gala Evening, Kempton Park Race Course

**6 July 1994** - St Jude's Church, Hampstead

**Sat 9 July 1994** - Taunton Showground, Somerset

Concert with the David Price Quartet (*coloured leaflet in archive*)

**Sydney Welsh?**

**Grosvenor?**

**Sat 8 October 1994** - Concert: All Saints, East Sheen SW14 for League of Friends of Barnes Hospital

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Michael Pugh. Ted Sellick (tenor). Dewi Thomas (bass). (*programme in archive*)

**22 October 1994** - Civic Centre, Berkhamsted for local Welsh Society

**CitiBank?Nice Work TV??Pinewood?**

**26 November 1994** - St Mary the Virgin, Monken Hadley, Barnet in aid of NSPCC

**30 November 1994** - Castle St. Lloyd George?

**Sat 10 December 1994** - Gwalia Dinner Dance, Holiday Inn Bloomsbury WC1

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## 1995

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Tony Rees

Secretary: Wynne Davies

Musical Director: Wendy Halden

Accompanist: Michael Pugh

**16 February 1995** - Abbey Road Studios. Soundtrack recorded for 'The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain'. Film starring Hugh Grant. Released in 1995.

*Apart from recording humming and oohing we sang Men of Harlech in Welsh - see*

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnBVyJvT-GU>*

**5 February 1995** - Horton Kirby

**4 March 1995** - Chobham Rugby Club Welsh night

**25 March 1995** - Concert. Holy Trinity Church, Eltham.

Conductor: Michael Pugh. Accompanist: Jenny Trew. Beverly Warboys (soprano). Ted Sellick (tenor). (see scanned programme) The programme is undated but it refers to the recent release of The Englishman... Hugh Grant film, and the forthcoming tour of Austria in May (which was 1995).

**15 May 1995** - Artists from Wales at LW Centre

**25-30 May 1995** - Concert tour of Austria. Megahoffen.

Reports of the trip are contained in issues 35 and 36 (Jan '96) of Tempo Gwalia - see archive. Several photos are in the archive. Lined up for the photo in the open air theatre in Bauernhof are the following:

Back row: Ifor James; Michael Pugh (accompanist); ? James (Ifor's nephew); Price Davies; Gareth Rees; Dave Sweet; Bryan Howells; Simon Charles(?); Tommy James; Rhodri Moseley; Idwal Jones; Bill Pritchard; aerion ?; Huw Edwards; Gareth Lewis; Lionel Griffiths; Ron Tidy Williams; Vernon Hill; ?; Ceri ?; Paul Grey; Lynn Thomas. Front Row: John Evans; Dai Carpets Griffiths; Wendy Halden (MD); Ted Sellick; Ellis Jones; Emrys Davies; Tony Rees; Steve Davies; Russ Jones; Dave Hurlbut; Dewi Trains Jones; Jim Dinkley; Ron dodge; Erfyl Evans; Richard Mitchley. (35 singers)

*Steve Davies says: I didn't fancy spending 2 days on a bus so I and a few others flew to Munich and got a taxi to our destination in Austria. Those on the coach said it was quite a tedious journey.*

*On the way back the coach stopped for a comfort break on the autobahn. One of our supporters, Lod, didn't get back on board in time and got to the coach park only to see the back of the coach disappearing down the slip road. He didn't know what to do - he didn't have any currency and didn't know where he was. Luckily he saw a car with GB plates and when they heard his story they were prepared to give him a lift to England. When they told Lod where they were going he declined their offer because they weren't going to Kings Cross! In the meantime the Gwalia people on the coach said 'Has anyone seen Lod?' - those on the lower floor said he was upstairs and those on the upper deck said he was downstairs. Eventually they realised they would have to go back for him. The coach came off at the next junction and went back along the autobahn. Lod's heart dropped as it went past the service station and he thought the coach was going back to Austria; in fact it had to go to the next junction in order to turn round and come and back to where Lod was stranded. Having made a long journey even longer, Lod had a 'mixed reception' when he got back on board.*

*The journey became longer still when, a little bit later, the clutch on the coach broke. Luckily Ron Tidy was able to fix it with a coat-hanger and a bootlace.*

*Transport problems were a regular feature of Gwalia trips abroad - see France 1977, Holland 1988, Antwerp 1999 and Dublin 2000.*

*From Rhodri Moseley:*

*I confirm I was on the trip to Austria. About the Lod story, we bought a cowbell at the first service station inside Austria and he wore it around his neck for the rest of the trip so that we wouldn't lose him again. (It worked!).*

Tempo Gwalia 35 Autumn '95

## A TRIP TO AUSTRIA

Nia Davies

25 May '95

7 a.m. near the Russell Hotel, Bloomsbury.

For some the journey there had begun an hour or so before. The Kingsbury Coach - a double-decker continental style, arrived. (Remember Pontypridd Choir's misfortune in bringing the wrong type to the 1000 Voices in Holland?) At least, bridges would be no problem to us. Into the bus we separated ourselves into upstairs and downstairs or sheep and goats. An uneventful journey to Dover was followed by a pleasant trip on the ferry, 'Pride of Dover'. For some of the boys a trip to the duty free shop to load up the beer was the first call. We were soon approaching Calais. No passports were requested thanks to free passage in EEC countries,

The short pleasant journey was over. We were on foreign soil. The journey to Metz was pleasant but certainly not short. We were thankful to see our rooms and to have a good meal. The hotel was typical of a modern road house and could have been anywhere in the world.

If we thought the journey to Metz was long then the one to Austria was even longer. We travelled on the autobahn and every so often Dai Carpets would bounce downstairs to Brian, the driver, and hand over the money for the toll. The signposts indicated places remembered from history - Metz, Tours, Verdun, Stuttgart, Saarbrücken, Mannheim, Augsburg and Munich, each with its associated memories. From Munich we turned south to the mountains and to Austria. Were we glad to see Megahoffen!

A night's rest and next morning's blue sky and bright sunshine renewed our energy and lifted our hearts.

Our stay in Austria was delightful, with many of us trying out our rusty or newly-acquired German.

One can recall a dinner served by the monks and touring the Abbey at Kremsmünster. Wonderful treasures there brought the history of the Austrian Empire back to life. The gold and silver, and the paintings were breathtaking. Who can remember the huge fish in the piscatorium? The views of the lakes and mountains were idyllic in the sunshine.

The Gwalia has sung in many and varied venues. An open air theatre converted from farm buildings was a first. The singing was excellent under a starry sky. The next night saw a change of venue - a Lutheran church - a beautiful interior but very hard upright pews! The singing was again excellent - the unaccompanied works bringing tears to the eyes, even though most of us had heard them many times. This was a truly memorable occasion.

Another memorable event was when we nearly lost a fellow traveller! Then the coach broke down! The former gave us a good topic of conversation, the latter a good opportunity to chat. Somewhat later than intended we arrived at Kaiserslautern to a delicious meal with wine.

Next morning we set off for the last day's journey. Through France to Belgium, and soon the signposts said Calais. The ferry this time was the 'Pride of Calais' - a beautiful boat - a pleasant meal - a walk on deck in the sunshine - and before long the white cliffs of Dover were to be seen. Were the authorities reluctant to let us in? Here was the first border control; an immigration officer came on board - all passports scrutinised. The O.K. given we were on route for London. Each one departed with cases and lasting memories. I'm sure all will agree we had excellent company, excellent food and wine - and above all, excellent singing.

*Michael Pugh was the Gwalia's accompanist and Austria was his first overseas tour with us. We kidded him that every new tourist had to be initiated by the President - it was an 'Old Gwalia Tradition' (invented that weekend). These are Michael's memories of the trip.*

*Emrys Davies and Ron Tidy would keep the coach entertained during long coach journeys and would offer passengers 'tea or coffee?'. 'Captain/Steward' Emrys would make it, and his glamorous assistant Ron would deliver it. Hence the cabin crew of 'Luft Cymru' was born.*

TEMPO GWALIA No. 36

#### THE AUSTRIAN TOUR - THAT OLD GWALIA TRADITION.

Michael Pugh

It was my first tour - what could I expect? The itinerary had been given out, hotels booked, crates of beer ordered, sleeping arrangements sorted, dentists visited - we were ready.

I arrived at Russell Square at 6.30 a.m. dragging my suitcase and somewhat dishevelled, having stayed up all night to pack, thinking naively I could catch up with sleep on the bus journey to Dover.

The bus arrived and a mad rush was made for the back seat. This was important. As at school the most important people sat at the back of the bus. This had to include the Pilot and Co-pilot of LUFT CYMRU (named after their German sister company, Hufthansa). The President and his wife and other dignitaries were already on board. Apparently it was my job to secure the flight deck, as a hijack manoeuvre was expected at any minute. Anyway, a smooth take-off was achieved with almost everything in its place.

First touch-down was at the Elephant and Castle, where we picked up Co-pilot, Ron Tidy. Brian, our driver, announced that there would be no smoking on the bus. Silence. As we were to spend most of our time on the bus, this was a shock to the system. To cure nicotine deprivation take another antibiotic.

The cruise to Dover went smoothly. Unfortunately the driver had been given his route instructions in the wrong order. A committee meeting was held to find a man to tell the driver!

The following day was Friday, May 26th, and it proved to be worth two Friday 13ths rolled into one! As we left Metz heading for Vienna via Linz we had a comfort stop and Dai Carpets somehow walked into a glass door and almost crushed his coccyx when he hit the ground. Reflexology and massage were tried to ease his pain.

Time rolled slowly by. There is a limit to the number of jokes known by even John Evans. Dai Pres's hamper had gone. The booze was running low, and no one had had a cigarette for 5 hours. No one knew either where we were - on the Austrian equivalent of the M25 actually. People began to wish they had gone to Porthcawl or Clacton on a day trip. Luft Cymru was no more. It had been taken over by Circle Airlines apparently. Meanwhile Dai's coccyx stopped throbbing but a huge bump appeared on his head. Cans of Ribena and coke were offered him to soothe his injury. Hysteria was setting in and 'one liners' flowed faster than the beer.

Then the driver's sense of humour failed because people at the back were smoking as we passed Salzburg for the second time. By now the journey from Metz had taken 3 hours, Finally, after the bus had gone along country lanes so narrow that undergrowth and bits of trees were dragged along with us, we arrived at the cider farm five hours late and were greeted almost hysterically by Wendy.

Our hotel was a wonderful, archetypal Austrian *gasthaus* in a delightful setting. Following the Long Established Gwalia Tradition (LEGT) most of the choir headed for the bar.

On Saturday some of us went to Wells. Here we ate a wonderful meal and helped celebrate Ron Tidy's birthday before returning to rehearse. The concert (held in the open air) began with an Alpine band, followed by the local choir singing a selection of songs by Richard and Johann Strauss. The choir was enthusiastic and well trained. Unfortunately something of a wind sprang up and blew away some of my music. The concert was superb, as was the 'cabaret' which followed in the *gasthaus* when Emyr was ceremonially initiated.

The following morning ended with a visit to a lake for lunch where we drank and sun-worshipped. Emrys was entranced by all the hayfields and kept wanting to 'roll in the hay'. On the way back Emrys fell asleep until Walter, the Austrian driver of the mini-bus, called, "Where's the old man who wanted to roll in the hay?"

The concert that evening was in a wonderful church which had an acoustic any musician would die for. This was one of the most moving concerts in my time with the choir. I shall never forget the performances of 'Close Thine Eyes' and 'Ritters Abscheid', Ted Sellick's 'Standchen' and Glenys Roberts's beautiful Grieg, 'Ich liebe dich'. I felt it was an honour to be there.

At the reception which followed, presentations and votes of thanks were made. There were photocalls. There were rocketing sales of Gwalia tapes. Both concerts had been a tremendous triumph, and best of all - the party was yet to begin. So, in L.E.G.T. we got back to the *gasthaus* for some serious partying.

The beer flowed all night. Lots of camaraderie and fun was had by all - and no one could string a decent sentence together! Then came the strip show. There seems to be a tradition that if you join the Gwalia (this big Gentlemen's Club) then you must be initiated in order to join the Grown Ups and be no longer an apprentice but a full-fledged member of the team.

These were not my thoughts when I stood bare chested on that chair showing my 44 double-D chest for all to see. I was actually thinking that what chances I had with that barmaid were definitely blown - and by the lads. Mortification was what I felt when I stood with my blindfold on and the left leg of my trousers rolled up, and with no shirt.

I was embarrassed, and giggled at the thought of Jenny, my predecessor as accompanist, having to do this! If she did, then where are the pictures?

Night rolled on into dawn.

The following morning, with no time for breakfast, I rushed downstairs, pulled my suitcase down the last step - and it burst open and spread my clothes all over the front courtyard of the *gasthaus* to a standing

ovation from the assembled crowd. What more could the Gwalia possibly want to know about me now? They'd seen me half naked. Nothing was sacred. The thought of spending another two days - or would it be three? - on that bus did not fill me with great enthusiasm. However, there would be more room this time as some had decided to fly home instead.

We said our goodbyes and got back onto the bus which began to trundle off towards Germany. I don't remember much of the journey back save leaving our new Vice-President, Lodwig, in a filling station and driving for almost 20 minutes before anyone noticed. I also remember the cowbell which was attached to his neck after we had returned and picked him up! No more should he go a-roving.

Near Heilbron the bus broke down and we played scrabble in the lay-by. Ron Tidy came to the rescue by trying to mend the accelerator cable with his bootlace, and inspiring the song:

*When the cable comes from Heilbron  
For Luft Cymru I'll be there,  
With my little bit of bootlace  
I'll be there.*

We arrived at our German Hotel 3 hours late and I wondered if this bus was jinxed. The following morning came too soon. I was exhausted. Once again we had to get on that bus to get to the ferry. After stocking up with duty frees we boarded the bus for the last time - bound for London, and home.

**Sat 24 June 1995** - Concert. Trellech Festival, Trellech Parish Church, Monmouth  
Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Michael Pugh. Beverly Humphreys (soprano)  
*(see scanned programme and photo) (more photos in archive)*  
*Steve Davies says: I think this is the famous 'Batman Incident'.*

*Whilst we were performing we became aware of a small bat flying round the church, and watching it gave us something to do while the soloist (a renowned local celebrity) was doing her bit. As the concert went on, the poor old bat was getting more and more tired and eventually, while the soloist was doing her second set, it landed exhausted behind her on the floor between the choir pews where we were sitting. Without distracting the soloist, but in full view of the audience, Ron crept out of the pew and gently picked up the bat and went down a side aisle and took it outside. Ron politely waited until the soloist had finished before returning to his seat as the audience was giving rapturous applause - the soloist had been oblivious to the bat rescue and assumed the extra loud applause was for her, but the audience had actually been watching the whole rescue and were really applauding Ron! Needless to say, as Ron got back to his seat we were singing 'Da da, da da, da da, da da, Bat-man'. We all stayed in a hotel in Chepstow after the concert.*

**3 July 1995** - Birmingham. JBA Ltd

**13 July 1995 Chris de Burgh recording** - See scan of CD cover - issued 1995

*Paul Gray says: My 59th birthday! After recording with Chris de Burgh, he took us to a nearby Greek restaurant and paid for our lunch.*

**1995 (or '94?)** - Nice Work TV at Pinewood? Citi Bank?

**Sat 14 October 1995** - Concert and Cherubini Requiem. St James's Piccadilly

Conductor: Wendy Halden Accompanist: Michael Pugh. Sian Meinir (mezzo soprano). Jane Watts (organ) (see scanned programme, and in archive)

**19-23 October 1995** - visit of Mannerchor Union Choir from Wuppertal, Germany.

**21 October 1995** - Friendship Concert, LW Centre

**2.12.95 ?** Children in Need at the BBC with Chris de Burgh

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## 1996

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Wynne Davies

Secretary: John Evans

Musical Director: James Hearn

Accompanist: Michael Pugh

**Thurs 11 January 1996** - Westminster Abbey Funeral of Chairman Tony Rees followed by committal at Golders Green crematorium. (Order of Service in archive)

**27 April 1996(?)** - Charity Concert: Horton Kirby, Kent

**15 May 1996** - Concert: London Welsh Centre

**12 June 1996** - Concert: Appledore, Kent

**9 September 1996** - Cabaret, Westminster

**Sat 12 October 1996** - Concert in aid of RNLI. All Saints' Church, Biddenden, Kent.

Conductor: James Hearn Accompanist: Michael Pugh. Claire Seaton (soprano). Edward Sellick (tenor) (see scanned programme)

*The choir has a lot of connections with Kent and this part in particular - partly because Dai Pres lived there.*

**27 October 1996** - Shirley Bassey's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday recorded at London Weekend Television studios on the South Bank. (broadcast 11.1.97)

We have lots of photos in the archive - they show Jimmy Tarbuck compering with the choir behind him.

There's a video of the whole show. We are at 14.36 minutes singing her hit 'Kiss Me Honey, Honey, Kiss Me' which we change to 'Kiss me Shirley'.

<https://shirleybassey.wordpress.com/2016/10/27/happy-birthday-shirley-the-60th-birthday-special/>

Steve Davies recalls:

27.10.96:

*"There was the usual hanging around as we waited for our turn to rehearse and Ron and I were desperate for a cigarette. Because of all the high ranking politicians and celebrities, security was very strict. They did not want us wandering in and out of the building, so when we asked where we could have a fag we were directed to the Bar. As Ron and I were dressed in our choir uniform (which at that time was dinner suits, white shirts and bow tie) we looked like the other guests, and there was no problem getting into the bar where we helped ourselves to a free glass of wine and had a cigarette whilst rubbing shoulders with the likes of Tom Jones, Lionel Blair (as Tarby said, Tony Blair's great grandfather), Michael Heseltine and John Prescott.*

*Luckily Ron had brought his 'best' briefcase, otherwise we might have had trouble getting into the bar. Ron had two 'briefcases' in which he kept his valuables (cigarettes, lighter, loose change, keys and spectacles which he'd bought second hand from a charity shop) and one of them would always be at his side - he had a Co-op plastic carrier bag for everyday use, but on this occasion he had brought his 'best' briefcase - a Threshers Off-licence bag. None of the guests commented, but I think I detected quite a number of very envious glances at Ron's latest fashion statement.*

*I remember Clive Anderson interviewing Gorbachev in the next door studio (the programme was broadcast on 3 Nov 1996). A few of us were in the gents toilets when Gorbachev came in."*

*When Mikhail S. Gorbachev (1931-) became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, he launched his nation on a dramatic new course. His dual programme of "perestroika" ("restructuring") and "glasnost" ("openness") introduced profound changes in economic practice, internal affairs and international relations. Within five years, Gorbachev's revolutionary program swept communist governments throughout Eastern Europe from power and brought an end to the Cold War (1945-91), the largely political and economic rivalry between the Soviets and the United States and their respective allies that emerged following World War II. Gorbachev's actions also inadvertently set the stage for the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, which dissolved into 15 individual republics. He resigned from office on December 25, 1991. To this day he refuses to talk about his encounter with the Gwalia.*

**16 Nov 1996** - Concert LW Centre

**27 Nov 1996** - St Brides

**14 December 1996** - Gwalia Dinner Dance, Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria SW1

**15 Dec 1996** - Islington

**21 Dec 1996** - Alexandra Palace

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**1997**

President: His Honour Judge David Griffiths

Chairman: Wynne Davies

Secretary: John Evans

Musical Director: James Hearn

Accompanist: Michael Pugh( Jenny Trew?)

***The Gwalia - its impact on one back row baritone (1983-97)  
by former MP for Monmouth, Huw Edwards***

*The Gwalia has left a permanent mark on the lives of many of its members. The impact the choir has made to our lives is very different and personal but there are some common themes. This is just one reflection of the role of the Gwalia has played in one past member's life, a former back row baritone.*

***The introduction:*** *Fifty years ago I was young teenager who regularly attended Capel Y Boro, in Southwark Bridge Road, where my father was the Minister. The chapel had a rich musical tradition, not just good congregational singing but members who were active in the cultural societies of the London Welsh community. One member, John Evans, whose mother 'Aunty Nellie' was a stalwart Gray's Inn Road and whose sister is the renowned soprano Dame Anne Evans, was one of the key founder members of the Gwalia. He would tell us about*



*the success of the new choir competing at Llangollen and the National Eisteddfod and going to big rugby matches. It all sounded so exciting and I knew I would be part of it one day.*

*That day came when I was in my early thirties and returned to London having been away at university and starting my first lecturing jobs. That first Wednesday I was sat in the back row of the baritone section and given a piece of music by Bryan Howells with its distinct numbering in the corner. The first piece to be rehearsed was Llanfair. I was familiar with the hymn but picking up the baritone line from the music was a new challenge. Fortunately, I was sitting next to Cerith Davies who had a rich and cultured voice and he helped me a great deal. The next piece was Nant y Mynydd followed by others from the programme for a performance a few days later. I knew I had arrived. This was my music and the warmth of the welcome from choir's members made me feel immediately part of it.*

**The Experience:** *Within weeks we were on tour to Wuppertal though I recall I couldn't really afford the trip. Wynne Davies, Secretary of the choir, just insisted that I got on that coach at Russell Square. It was a wonderful experience - the laughter and characters on the bus, the overnight voyage to Zeebrugge, performing with the German choir and the after concert socialising. Sitting up all night drinking with Choir President Judge David Griffiths on tour was the key initiation test for a new member and I think I passed. For the first time socialising and singing hymns and other songs went together. Hymns such as 'Sarah' and Diolch i Ti sung in the bar were so beautiful while Ted Sellick's Banana Boat Song and Russ doing 'I had a dream...' helped define the character of our informal repertoire. Some members were known by their rather unexotic names - 'Dai Carpets', 'Dai Boxes', 'Dewi Trains' and 'Motorbike John'. You never knew their full names and sadly, I never knew 'Boris the Bucket'.*

*Part of the special experience of being in the choir was singing at world famous concert venues, fine cathedrals and grand hotels as well small village halls in Kent, Norfolk and Gloucestershire. There was also the experience of being at Royal events and the occasional TV performance. Further tours abroad followed to Austria, Germany, France and Belgium to perform in beautiful places. And after all concerts there was the singing in the bar afterwards. We all made many friends among the choir members and with the wives, girlfriends, sons and daughters who were part of the Gwalia family. There was also the mixed choir that competed at the National Eisteddfod. It was like a Welsh village but as Bob Trevor observed 'fortunately we don't have to see each other every day.' In my thirties, this was a great social life and was certainly more enjoyable and fruitful than any night club. That sense of belonging was important for someone like me who was born and brought up in the Welsh community in London. It was a distinct but also peculiar and ambivalent upbringing: chapel every Sunday, a father who was a Welsh preacher, my mother referring to Neath as 'home', supporting Wales in rugby. I was aware of cultural institutions like the National Eisteddfod, attended the annual Gymanfa Ganu and St David's Day Festival in the Royal Albert Hall. That upbringing also gave me some appreciation of the history, culture and politics of Wales. Yet this was a world that local friends and schoolmates were unaware of, dismissed and sometimes ridiculed.*

*To be part of Gwalia and London Welsh life was to feel part of a community in which all these traditions were understood and appreciated. And I learned so much from those friends in the Gwalia who reflected the culture, language and humour of north, south and west Wales and who brought their own professional backgrounds and contributions to the choir. Members with no Welsh background embraced all that the choir represented and contributed greatly to it. Wendy Halden, with many fine accompanists, helped define our character and reputation including winning at the National Eisteddfod in Abergwaun.*

*Like others in the choir, career decisions took me away from London for several years at a time but in the late 1980s I was back, living in Brighton and commuting to the Gwalia every Wednesday. By then I was considering standing for Parliament for a Welsh constituency. The 1989 Labour Party Conference was held in Brighton and I was asked if I knew a choir that could perform on 'Welsh Night'. The Gwalia agreed, the only condition being that we did not wear the symbolic red rose. Neil Kinnock joined us to conduct the community singing and it was another memorable night in the history of the choir.*

Two years later we returned to Brighton but by this time I had been recently elected as Labour MP for Monmouth following a sensational by election victory in May 1991. BBC Wales turned up to my first Gwalia rehearsal in Gray's Inn Road to film Wales' newest MP. That was the end of what Andy Warhol would have described as 'my 15 minutes of fame'. The young political correspondent, also called Huw Edwards, went on to be the distinguished BBC broadcaster, author of that superb book on the Welsh chapels of London and even became President of the Gwalia.

I lost in the 1992 Election and returned full time to the Gwalia but was re elected to Westminster as MP for Monmouth in the Blair landslide of 1997 and squeaked back in at the 2001 General Election with a small majority. Being an MP is a privilege and being part of the Welsh political fraternity was an immense honour for me. It can, however, be hard on family life and MPs sacrifice their personal interests and hobbies.

**The legacy:** I ceased to be an MP following the 2005 General Election but settled in Monmouth having married Tess in July that year. My best man was Geraint Anwyl who was a fine top tenor and a great friend since a Gwalia trip to Aberystwyth.

It took several years to adapt to post political life and a new freelance career as a training consultant but I had a happy family life and some good friends in Monmouth including Aneirin Hughes, an established Welsh actor and musician. One evening, in a local pub after a Wales international that involved too much beer and some rough singing, he said 'why don't we form a choir.' What started as a few guys rehearsing in his sitting room, grew to over 30 within months and included former Gwalia members Richard Mitchley and Peter Webley. Most had never been in a choir or ever performed in public and only a couple of members were Welsh speaking. We labelled ourselves 'a drinking club with singing problems' at first but we soon had to take things more seriously. Monmouth Male Voice Choir - Cor Meibion Mynwy was formally established in 2012 and moved, after some controversy, to a new rehearsal venue at the Monmouth Conservative Club. Aneirin Hughes was our first Musical Director and my experience with the Gwalia seemed to qualify me to be Chairman.

Our first Annual Concert was in July 2013 at St Mary's Priory Church Monmouth. Our guest choir was of course - the Gwalia. It was a nervous time. Gwalia members and supporters were booking hotels. Would there be an audience? Is the new Monmouth choir ready for a formal concert performance? Advance ticket sales were very poor but on a hot summer's night the large church was packed to overflowing and the start of the concert had to be delayed. James Hearn was conducting the Gwalia with Wyn Hyland as accompanist. It was an incredible night with another friend, Bill Mackie, former Principal Bass at Welsh National Opera, doing superb solos. Several former members of the Gwalia were in the audience. The two choirs joined together for the finale. In a flash of inspiration, the compere proposed singing Gwahoddiad (Invitation) as a final encore and invited the former Gwalia members in the audience on to the stage. Up they came - Dafydd Thomas, John Asquith, Huw Herbert, Ron Tidy and quite movingly former Gwalia Chairman Dr Ivor James. The post concert reception was in the Monmouth Con Club and the Gwalia presented each of Monmouth choir with the new handbook of songs compiled in memory of Ted Sellick. One of those songs was Ron Tidy's classic - 'Duw it's hard, it's harder than they will ever know'. To hear him sing that song in that venue filled me with a sense of great pride and a sense of ironic satisfaction. Dave Hurlbut, myself and quite a few from both choirs went on to a local pub till the dawn came up. The Gwalia trip to Monmouth had been a success.

Monmouth MVC has since become an established choir and performed on the pitch before a Wales - Scotland rugby international under Dr Haydn James, competed at the National Eisteddfod in our own county of Monmouthshire and sang in the Wales Festival of Remembrance at St David's Hall. We have a great conductor in Ian Russell and accompanist in Helen Stidolph and we also have our names - 'Postman Matt', 'Sargent Stan' and 'Richard III'.

**The gratitude:** As the Gwalia celebrates its fifty years, this former backrow baritone can give thanks for the contribution the choir has given Wales and the London Welsh community, for the enrichment the choir has given to our lives and for the opportunity to enjoy many memorable times and know so many fine friends. Happy 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Huw Edwards, Monmouth

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**Sun 9 February 1997** - Concert organised by the Knights of St Columba, at the Chicken Shed Theatre, Cockfosters, in aid of the Vita et Pax Monastery and Chicken Shed Theatre Company.  
Conductor: James Hearn Accompanist: Michael Pugh. Carolyn Foulkes (soprano). Edward Sellick (tenor) (see scanned programme) (*press cutting in archive*)

*It was disconcerting seeing the whole of the front row occupied by monks in bright white robes.*

**28 February 1997** - Cambridge / Cowbridge?

**9.4.97** - Wembley

**27 April 1997** - Horton Kirby

**Sat 10 May 1997** - Concert. London Master class presents A Showcase of Young International Soloists with Guest appearance of Gwalia Male Choir. St Cyprians Church, Clarence Gate, NW1

Conductor: James Hearn Accompanist: Michael Pugh. (*see scanned programme*)

**June 1997** - Appledore

**7 June 1997** - Derby Day, Epsom Race Course.

*We sang with the Gurkha Band on the finishing line as the Queen drove down the course. Our singing was amplified on all the grandstands and people said we sounded like a choir of several hundred! We were wearing our second uniform of black blazers and choir tie; we must have looked like officials or security because Dewi Trains and I later managed to just walk into the stand where the Royal Box was.*

**17 June 1997** - Concert: Tenterden

**Wed 17 Sept, 24, 26 September 1997** - Grosvenor House Hotel. Late night cabaret for Electronics Industry Ball & Awards with band of Grenadier Guards

**Fri 26 September 1997** - Charity Concert with Richard Stilgoe and Friary Guildford Brass Band at Fairfield Halls, Croydon.

**2 October 1997** - Stoke Poges

**18 October 1997** - Totteridge

**19 October 1997** - Grosvenor House Hotel. Guests of Belron International. Late night cabaret with band of the Welsh Guards

**3.11.97** - Concert

**Tues 18 November 1997** - National Liberal Club Gwalia's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**19 November 1997** - TV Recording for Jack Dee Show with Rich Hall. Recorded in the Village Hall in Whiteley Village Surrey. We had to sing (Nothin Like a Dame?) after inhaling Helium from a balloon. The scene didn't work and it was never broadcast.

**Thurs 27 November 1997** - Cabaret: Banqueting Hall, Whitehall

**14 December 1997** - Natural History Museum with London Symphony Orchestra