

Worldwide

BAY OF PLENTY MEN'S CHOIR

David Cantwell

Our Bay Of Plenty Men's choir here in New Zealand has been able to practice regularly for the past 12 months and while COVID had its effects we largely escaped intact. We had our first concert in November last year followed by Christmas programmes in 4 retirement villages / rest homes.

This year we started in March owing to personnel availability. We sang at Keith Bowen's funeral service at the end of June. Keith was the founding member of the choir and directed it for 10 years before handing the baton to me. He continued to sing in the choir and also do arrangements for the choir, three of which were sung at our concert on the 1st of August. The choir continues in good heart with some younger men joining us, and while our numbers are not large we have a good blend on all our 4 parts.

This is probably one of the saddest editions of Choirlink I have had to produce, with so many choirs closing and choirmen passing. Some are still singing, though, so let's continue to pray for the ongoing work, but also for those who are experiencing loss as a result of closure. We give Him thanks for all that has gone before, being confident that nothing we do in His name is ever wasted. Yours in Christ, Vaughan

Thanks, David, for the news. More recently, parts of NZ have returned to lockdown so we pray that this will be brief, and hope to hear more in due course.

SYDNEY CHRISTIAN MALE VOICE CHOIR

David Gordon

We were delighted when we were able to practise again in person in April, and lined up a presentation in mid-July at a large retirement complex. Unfortunately, COVID restrictions forced us to stop practising in May - but we resumed in June, and were looking forward to the July presentation; however, at the end of June the NSW government re-imposed the ban on singing. As of now the government is easing the restrictions, and has indicated that singing can resume from 1st Dec. We usually break from early Dec. to late Jan. - so unless there's a huge surge in COVID cases, and the clamps are put on once more, we're looking forward to singing again in 2022.



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Welcome to another edition of Choirlink! Since the last one in July, restrictions have eased across the UK and most choirs have met to take stock, for better or worse. Council have also had their usual September meeting (via Zoom - what would we do without it?) so we begin with their report setting the scene for the season ahead.

COUNCIL REPORT: SEPTEMBER 2021

Ian Stangoe, Chairman

Council met through Zoom on Wednesday 8th September. Ian welcomed Keith Youngman and Vaughan Reynolds who were attending for the first time, and recalled the recent passing of Gordon Wells who had served many years on Council.

Ian opened with a reading from Romans 8:26-32 noting in v28 'we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to HIS purpose'. It is a reminder to us all that the future is in the Lord's control and will.

Paul had issued a financial statement which shows a healthy bank balance. We discussed potential ways this could be used for the benefit of choirs.

A productive review of the state of the choirs highlighted a further decline in numbers of choirmen attending, having reduced by about 20% over the last year. Some choirs had closed due to lack of numbers or balance [see later]. However on a positive note, many choirs are now meeting together despite the uncertainty of opportunities for outreach and festivals

resuming in the known future.

It was agreed to look into the possibility of an associate membership list for those men from closed choirs wishing to continue participating in events with other choirs. It was also agreed that, due to uncertainty of being able to host events, the Scottish Festival should be postponed until the situation became clearer about singing

together in large numbers.

The way ahead may still seem uncertain and marked with trepidation, but we should continue to pray that the Lord will lead and guide, having the assurance that He is in control.

Mike closed the meeting in prayer.

In Christ, Ian

United Kingdom

HIGHLAND GOSPEL MALE VOICE CHOIR

Ernie Collinson

The Highland Choir has successfully managed to continue meeting and rehearsing about every two weeks by Zoom throughout the summer months with the much appreciated guidance and organisation from Musical Director Eileen Mackintosh. Two of these were arranged from New York as she spent family time on vacation!

As the Coronavirus restrictions have started to ease in Scotland allowing more freedom of movement, the opportunity to meet up 'face to face' has arisen and indeed been enjoyed. There was great rejoicing at the first meeting which was also our A.G.M, held within

the church hall in the village of Fortrose near Inverness.

This new found 'freedom of fellowship' was extended further in August when the choir members supported an outdoor fundraising event at a public park in Inverness in aid of local charity 'Bear Necessities'. The weather stayed warm and dry for the event which was well supported, raising £850.



was formed in 1956. John Lipscombe, who was a founder member, went to be with the Lord on 16th September aged 99, just 19 days before his 100th birthday. John sang 2nd bass, was a good soloist and also gave the epilogue at many of the Gospelaire's engagements over the years. He was most reliable and seldom missed an engagement. He even produced a brief history of the choir to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Unfortunately because the Gospelaire's lost a number of men due to old age with its attendant health problems, whilst others passed on to Glory, the choir ceased to function in January 2019. However John, and a few of the remaining choir members, joined the Exeter Male Voice Praise Choir. John was present at the last Exeter Choir engagement in March 2020 just prior to the first 'lockdown'. In recent months John's health declined. His sight and hearing deteriorated to such an extent he could not read and could barely hear anything.

John was a lifelong member of Upton Vale Baptist Church in Torquay, a busy local preacher and sang in their Choir. He also served some time as a deacon. Back in the 1950's he was also involved in open-air work. There was nothing he liked better than preaching the

Gospel in word and song.

Our thoughts and sympathy go to his wife Elsie and the family. It was a privilege to have known John as a friend and brother in the Lord. We shall miss him.

NEWS FROM THE NORTH WEST AREA

Mike Dewhurst

The Bolton Choir commenced rehearsals again on Friday September 10th. We have put together a Christmas programme and have 2 engagements in December. To begin with we are practising fortnightly to ease our way back into singing again and to get used to meeting together. A good number of the choir turned up and this gave us encouragement for the future.

The Morecambe choir met on Monday 6th September to look at their situation. Sadly, because of falling numbers and difficulty in presenting a good witness within MVP, they have decided to close the choir.

Orton – The choir has had a meeting a number of weeks ago and have decided to continue. Rehearsals are to commence in the near future but no actual date has been set.

suddenly when visiting his son and family in Denver, USA. Win had been ill for some time with Parkinson's so it was a blessing that this happened with his son's family at his side, plus his daughter who lives nearby. Barbara, his widow, has returned to the Bristol Area and has settled in Winterbourne. Shortly after, another member, Euan Thomas, passed away again unexpectedly. A third member, David Hulse, has moved away, and another, Paul Berry, lost his wife, Rosemary, and himself suffers from poor health.

With the relaxing of Covid rules the choir met on Saturday, 21st August to discuss what we felt the Lord had in store for us. We had two new men join us from Melksham: David Darby and Alan Dolding, and it was agreed for us all to resume fully in October.

Unfortunately, since that meeting I have been diagnosed with a heart problem caused by a little-known disease, AL Amyloidosis. Although I generally feel quite well I do get periods of severe breathlessness, and treatment is recommended. This will entail a period of intense medications including Chemotherapy for three days each week. Consequently I have had to step aside from the choir for at least six months.

As a result, a special meeting had to be called for 6th October. After discussion, it was reluctantly agreed to close the choir. Whilst we were fairly strong and balanced, age and infirmity are having an effect with no one able to take up the roles of leader or secretary. Also, Rosemary Raybould can no longer continue as pianist due to health issues and failing eyesight. Moreover, the closure of most evening services has robbed us of many engagements.

We believe that we are "going out on a high" having faithfully served the Lord in our Ministry for well over 60 years in the Bristol Area. This sad evening concluded with a wonderful time of prayer thanking the Lord for His goodness and leading of the choir over the years and, of course we just had to sing "We'll all be there". Much time was spent afterwards saying our farewells and reminiscing about our years together and what the choir and FMVP has meant to each one of us over the years. We give Him all the honour and Praise.

TORBAY LOSES LONG SERVING CHOIRMAN

Colin Reynolds

The Torbay Gospelaires M.V.C.

The choir also attended a Festival of Praise at Buckie Methodist Church in September, hosted by the Moray Choir, along with other members from Aberdeen, Peterhead and Northern Ireland producing a wonderful sound from over 40 Male voices [see next item!].

We were saddened at the loss of Morag, the wife of our colleague and former chairman, Donnie Cumming and although not singing, several members attended her funeral in support and appreciation to give praise to the Lord that she is rejoicing in Heaven and free from pain and tears.

The choir's first tenor section has been substantially reduced due to death and accident recently, and we pray that the Lord will lead us to men able to sing with us, especially those of a younger age.

A new chairman has been appointed and we look forward to Tom Simpson's guidance and inspiration in the forthcoming months. We have also been praying that the on-going health problems of his daughter Laura continue to improve.

God willing we expect to return to our regular meeting place on 4th October to resume normal rehearsals once more.

MORAY MALE VOICE GOSPEL CHOIR

John Buchanan

In spite of the many restrictions imposed upon us, the walls of Buckie Methodist Church echoed with the sound of praise on the last Saturday of September (our annual Festival date). A smaller choir than normal, socially distanced from the congregation of wives and friends, a choir socially distanced from each other and facing away from the congregation, together united heart and voice to lift high the name of Jesus. It was so unusual, so different but so thrilling to meet in fellowship with each other and to praise our God who has provided such a great and wonderful salvation through His Son and brought us safely to that moment, through this pandemic.

Together congregation and choir sang praise to the Saviour, individuals offered prayers of thanksgiving for God's goodness and faithfulness and guidance for the future. We remembered with gratitude our brothers and sisters who had gone to their eternal rest and prayed for their families. Our hearts were uplifted and challenged through the ministry of God's Word by Dr Sam Gordon. What a rich blessing it was to

gather, even in such unusual circumstances and in such a non-traditional way, with brothers and sisters from England, Northern Ireland and all over Scotland. How good is the God we adore, our faithful unchangeable Friend; whose love is as great as His power and knows neither measure nor end. 'Tis Jesus the first and the last whose Spirit shall guide us safe home; we'll praise Him for all that is past and trust Him for all that is to come'.

PURLEY GOSPEL MALE VOICE CHOIR
Allan Turner

It is with great sadness that I have to report the closure of Purley Gospel Male Voice Choir.

This choir lasted more than 65 years but with the reduction in numbers to four, including me as conductor, it was impossible to actually call ourselves a choir any longer.

Age and infirmity as well as a significant number of deaths were the causes of the reduction. Even without COVID this was inevitable, as most younger men seem unattracted by the dedication and learning needed for choral singing.

Personally I hope to stay repre-

senting London on the committee and as London's representative on the National Council.

I pray that other choir leaders will take steps to find others to sing but fear that this could be difficult in today's Christian context.

May God bless you all,

Allan

UXBRIDGE MALE VOICE CHOIR
Gerald Durrant

The choir at last began meeting again in August and we have continued to meet into September. We have put together a Harvest programme for an engagement at South Ruislip Christian Fellowship in early October and have been asked to organise a Christmas service there at the end of November. Also, Kings Church, Iver have asked us for a Carol Service in early December.

We give thanks to God that we are at last singing together again, and are particularly grateful to be offered engagements and would pray that more would come.

Lastly, we also understand that the Luton Choir has begun meeting again, for which we praise God.

LONDON & HOME COUNTIES CHOIR NEWS
Keith Youngman, Chairman

In the south-east we are benefiting from an earlier relaxation of restrictions than in other areas which is allowing some choirs to get back to practising. As mentioned earlier, the Uxbridge choir even has an early October engagement and Christmas engagements planned. However most choirs are experiencing a fall in the number of choirmen as 18 months on, either age and infirmity has caught up with some, or they are still being cautious about mixing with others. Sadly the Purley choir has closed and the Suffolk choir is not now big enough to undertake their own engagements. In both cases the remaining choirmen are still committed to the movement and will join engagements with other choirs when convenient. I believe this situation is reflected across other areas of Great Britain.

So what can be done? Firstly we restrict our choice of music to songs and their arrangements to pieces more suited to smaller groups and secondly, recruitment. The subject of recruitment is something that has always been part of the agenda at L&HC committee meetings and we do not have a clear solution to it. In the

Hertford choir we have found personal invitation works as well as anything: you hear a man singing well in a service and ask him if he would consider joining. Whilst the songs would be considered by some to be dated, the message they portray is still relevant and there is a joy about being able to harmonise with others in the delivery of that message. This is something we can get over to prospective choirmen.

There are many words of encouragement in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament letters to the young Christians. In these challenging times we can reflect on such words, "...encourage one another daily,.....we have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (Hebrews 3).

BRISTOL EVANGEL MALE VOICE CHOIR
Paul Davies

My apologies that I did not issue any news for the last Choirlink but, like most, I didn't have any!

During the lockdown periods we "lost" two long serving and faithful members who received their Home Calls although not through Covid. Win Watkins passed away