



Welcome to the October lockdown special.

## Covid-19. Coronavirus Pandemic — Update

The Choir has been in hibernation since the end of March, together with most of the choral world, while we await scientific clarification and government advice on the COVID19 effects of singing. We have also cancelled all our concerts for the rest of 2020. Each month we have hoped to be able to get back to some form of rehearsals subject to social distancing rules while waiting for more information from the Welsh Government.

Last newsletter we suggested that we aim to restart full rehearsals again on the 14 January 2021 at the earliest. It has been pointed out that this is a Thursday so the earliest start date will either be the 12th or the 19th January. This of course remains subject to lockdown restrictions and the confidence of choristers to return, and will be confirmed nearer the date.

If restrictions are lifted sufficiently it may be possible to hold some short sectional rehearsals later this year although the rule of six currently applies (indoors).

Excellent work has been undertaken by David Poole in measuring up the existing rehearsal spaces at Ebenezer and working out how many singers can fit in any rehearsal space within the distancing rules. We are also drawing up risk assessment guidelines so that, when we do restart, we have a safe environment to sing in.

Recent rule changes allow up to 30 people to rehearse outdoors providing social distance rules are adhered to. Beaufort MVC and Llantisant MVC have both undertaken outside rehearsal at local RFC grounds.

Following a rise in COVID infections across the UK this number may well reduce further both outdoors and indoors.

**Congratulations to our chorister Nonogenarians Trevor Challenger on his 99th birthday and Tec Jones on his 95th birthday**

**Trevor Challenger** was born in 1921 in Wells Street, Llanhilleth. After his marriage he lived on Commercial Road before moving to Syffrwd. He worked in the Llan pit from 1936 to 1964, then went to Llanwern until 1975. In 1975 he worked for ICI until ill health forced his retirement in 1982.

In 1984 he joined the choir at the invitation of his brother in law Fred Hatton. He had previously been courted to join the choir by Gwyn James who also sang with the



Excelsior Choir, Llanhilleth, which was conducted by Horace Crayford while Veda Rideout played piano. Trevor was not a member of any other choir before Abertillery Orpheus Choir but had sung in local clubs.

In 1984 the Choir was conducted by Martin Budd with Joy Havard as the accompanist. At that time there were 81 choristers in the choir including 21 top tenors, of which Trevor was one.

Despite having to take a break from Choir when his wife became ill, Trevor completed over 25 years with the choir and continues to support the choir at their concerts

Congratulations also to former chorister **Tec Jones** on his 95th birthday. Tec was part of the Bwlch contingent and sang bottom bass . For many years he also collected the cons for the choir. He reluctantly retired from the choir due to health issues and now lives in Bridgford, Nottingham.

The Choir also send belated birthday wishes to current choristers Fred Griffiths and Rob Stokes who celebrated their birthdays in September.

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The socially distanced get together of choir members on Sunday 1st November at Festival Park, Victoria, Ebbw Vale **will now not happen** as it falls during the Wales wide Firebreak period. We hope to rearrange at a later date. Please keep an eye on the choir's facebook page for more details.

## **The Weary Wild Walkers (WWW)**

The idea for an established AOMC rambling group really came about after Lyn Smith and I had walked 108 miles through four English counties to raise money for a local Women's Refuge. In doing so we both completed our first ever national trail challenge. Not that walking was a new venture for me. Like most people of my generation I walked everywhere.

As a child to and from school twice a day, and this was after several miles up and down country lanes and through fields to fetch the dairy herd for early morning milking. Growing up we would all have played different sports, and many of us continued this long after formal education ceased. Too few of us though make the transition to a life time of rambling, yet there is no better way to experience the rhythm of the natural world in all its diversity or to appreciate the landscape that shaped our ancestors and now holds them close. Of course rambling has no age restrictions, or fixed commencement date and can be enjoyed by people of all abilities. The trick is for us to ramble within our limitations.



The Weary Wild Walkers is now in its second year and following a brief interlude at the start of the pandemic has remained active throughout. It is fair to say our rambles are on the strenuous side, but then we walk in the mountains, hills, and valleys', of Powys, and Gwent covering distances from ten to twenty miles. We are six strong and our latest recruit Bernard Assinder was given a rousing hand after completing 13 plus miles in the Usk Valley in September.

The WWW is open to anyone with a connection to the choir. However, because we are serious ramblers' people who join us need to be 'match fit' and properly kitted out. It is appreciated that not every member of the choir is able to clamber hundreds of metres up a steep incline, or hurtle down a ravine before being taken out by one of Charlie Spracklen's shuddering life-saving tackles, but I would encourage everyone to take up some form of regular walking/rambling within the boundary of their abilities.



I honestly believe that walking in a group is one of life's great social activities. To tramp a landscape that never fails to excite or inspire, with family or friends, is a shared experience that lifts the spirits and lingers long in the memory. For me, in this era of preening individuals and superficial values, nothing captures my attention like the natural world in cyclical habit and clothing. Oh yes.

The WWW do sup the odd pint for refreshment, whilst resting weary limbs. Rhymney's Bevan goes down rather nicely. Well it did in the garden of the Goose & Cuckoo, Upper Llanover.

All of us understand the mental health benefits derived from choral singing, but I can confidently state the physical health benefits of walking.



For anyone who wants to join us but is concerned at their current fitness levels, WWW has a three, or six months training programme that will get you in shape.

Finally, the current lockdown prevented Kevin Harris, and our newly elected WWW President Gareth Smith (a prospective future chorister) from joining those of us who live in the Borough. So in true WWW fashion, the diehards amongst us who could make it on the day made for glorious hills above our homes.

As the writer Jack Kerouac once said: *'There was nowhere to go but everywhere'*.

Mick Bishop

## Wales RFU — 2020 International fixture list

### FRIENDLY (WARM UP)

24 October		France vs Wales
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### 2020 Six Nations (remaining matches)

24 October	Round Four	Ireland vs Italy (Dublin)
31 October	Round Five	Wales vs Scotland 2.15 pm (Llanelli)
31 October		France vs Ireland 8.00 pm
31 October		Italy vs England 4.45 pm

### Autumn Nations Cup — Group A Teams: England, Wales, Ireland & Georgia; Group B Teams: Scotland, France, Italy & Fiji

13 November	Round One	Ireland vs Wales 7.00 pm
14 November		Italy vs Scotland 12.45 pm
14 November		England vs Georgia 3.00 pm
15 November		France vs Fiji
21 November	Round Two	Wales vs Georgia 5.15pm (Llanelli)
21 November		Italy vs Fiji 1.45 pm
21 November		England vs Ireland 3.00 pm
22 November		Scotland vs France 3.00 pm
28 November	Round Three	Wales vs England 4.00 pm
28 November		Scotland vs Fiji 1.45 pm
28 November		France vs Italy 8.00 pm
29 November		Ireland vs Georgia 2.00 pm
5 December	Finals	Winners Group A vs Winners Group B
5 December		Runners Up Group A vs Runners Up Group B
5 December		3 <sup>rd</sup> placed Group A vs 3 <sup>rd</sup> placed Group B
5 December		4 <sup>th</sup> placed Group A vs 4 <sup>th</sup> placed Group B

Home matches for England, Scotland and Ireland will be played at Twickenham, Murryfield and the Aviva Stadium, respectively. Wales are due to play matches at Parc y Scarlets, Llanelli (but that will depend on lockdown)

## Meet the Choir



### Concert Secretary - Phillip Tolley

I joined the choir in 2016, a couple of weeks before the choir visited Beverley and Driffild in Yorkshire. I have always sung from being a boy soprano through to a slightly worn pensioner, both as a soloist and as a chorister. I began singing professional in 1981 as Alfred in 'Die Fledermaus' in Plymouth. In 1988 I appeared in the British Premiere of Donizetti's 'Torquato Tasso', under Carlo Rizzi, at the Buxton Opera House and also covered the role of Clotarco in the British Premiere of Haydn's 'Armide'. I was also lucky enough to create the role of Hlestakov in the World Premier of Peter Dawes' opera 'The Government Inspector'. When not singing I worked as a Classical buyer for HMV and an IT Project Manager with the MOD.

My father-in-law had been a founder member of the Morlais Male Voice Choir, in Ferndale, Rhondda so when I moved to Wales I sought out a Male Voice Choir to join and was very lucky to find one of the very finest on my doorstep.

### Social Media Manager - Kevin Harris

My late father was in Tredegar Orpheus until his National Service call up in 1958; my 'mam' and him were also in the Tredegar Amateur Operatic Society as were all my uncles, aunties, great uncles and aunties from the 1950's to the mid 1990's; I sang in the school choir; went to chapel every Sunday; and also performed in school concerts. You would think that putting that much into a community would be grounds enough to want to carry on this great heritage. So why did I join the opposition at Abertillery when Tredegar themselves have a world class Orpheus of their own? Simple really..... Lyndon Smith. I met this fellow chorister in 1991 when we both worked at Mitel Telecom in Caldicot.

I did not join the Abertillery Orpheus Male Choir until 2006. Not because my passion for singing had diminished but because it was difficult trying to balance family life with young children and a career in Telecommunications & Technology, that was taking me all over the world. I could not make the commitment earlier, despite Lyndon asking me every week over a few beers to consider it.