

Our Rich History

2000's - 2014

The New Millennium

The choir entered the new Millennium in good heart and as fine a fettle as at any stage its history. Membership stood at around the 85 mark and was well distributed among the four parts. Competition success continued. In the year 2000, at the Mrs Sunderland Musical Festival the highlight again was the winning of the Prize Winners' Challenge. In 2001 we entered the Male Voice Choir Class at the Blackpool Musical Festival and returned with the top prize.

Travel and concert highlights included an overseas visit to France in 2000, where the choir joined in the Sunday morning mass in Rouen Cathedral. Then came two excellent concerts in the Cathedral of Chartres and in Montevilliers Abbey. Organist Darius Battiwalla had been invited by the choir to partake in the French tour and performed magnificently as a soloist and in choir items requiring organ accompaniment.



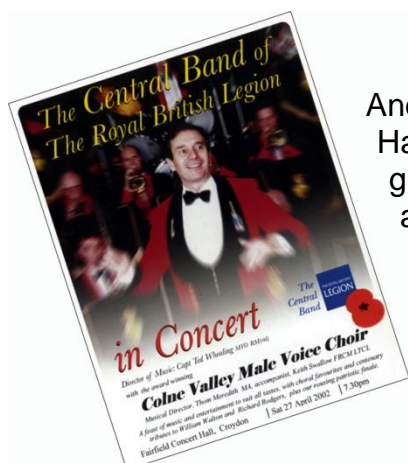
In February 2002 the choir appeared in concert at the Preston Guild Hall with the Leyland Band conducted by Richard Evans – the first of several such concerts with 'Dick the Stick' and the various bands under his leadership.



In a trip to the Coleraine International Choral Festival in Northern Ireland in 2003, the Choir gained a creditable 2nd prize, and were popular performers.



Members look forward to their Northern Ireland tour



And in April 2004, the Choir performed in the huge Fairfield Hall in Croydon, South London. We were the invited guests of The Central Band of the Royal British Legion and its Musical Director, Captain Ted Whealing.



Increasingly keen to work with young people, the Choir, later that year, did a concert in Huddersfield Town Hall with Halifax Young Singers, conducted by Thom Meredith's wife, Lynn Hudson. The two Choirs came together for a most enjoyable finale with the young singers interspersed among their 'slightly' older counterparts.

The Choir's 2004 annual Christmas concert in Huddersfield Town Hall was with Grimethorpe Colliery (UK Coal) Band and Borough Organist, Gordon Stewart, as compere. It seemed to be generally accepted as having been the best Colne Valley Christmas concert ever.... and there have been some 'good uns' in the past. Band, Choir and all concerned received a spontaneous full standing ovation at the end of the concert. The Band's conductor? Oh yes, that man again, Richard Evans.

2005 – Our first Cornwall tour

At the end of April the Choir made its first visit to the Cornish International Male Voice Choral Festival. Colne Valley were top British choir being placed a creditable second to the winners, Riga University Choir from Latvia. In addition the Choir sang to capacity concert audiences in Truro Cathedral and at Bude. This followed a very enjoyable 30 minute sing earlier that day in the massive Temperate Dome of the Eden Project.

In October Colne Valley swept the board at the Biddulph Music Festival near Stoke-on-Trent. Sandwiched in between these two competitions was a memorable concert in Keswick's 'Theatre by the Lake'. It holds just less than 400, but what appreciation that capacity smaller audience showed to the Choir on the Saturday night of the August bank holiday weekend. At the end, the audience just didn't want to let the Colne Valley singers go. This again turned out to be the first of many visits.



By Lake Derwent at the Theatre by the Lake, Keswick 2008

December 11th brought the Choir's Christmas Festival Concert at the Town Hall with Grimethorpe Colliery (UK Coal) Band and "Dick the Stick" at the helm again. An absolutely full 1,100 seat audience gave both Choir and Band an exceptional reception; standing to applaud at the concert's end.

One week later, the Choir were invited to join in Marsden Silver Band's festive concert at St Bartholomew's Church in Marsden. This has turned into almost a 'traditional' regular feature to Christmas in the Colne Valley.

The events of 2006 started off in early February with a charity concert in Holy Trinity Church, Huddersfield with Colne Valley joining the Halifax Young Singers. The proceeds of the concert amounted to the magnificent sum of £2,450, going to the very worthwhile cause of Kirkwood Hospice in Dalton, Huddersfield.

The last Saturday of February saw the Colne Valley Choir once again winning every class we entered at the Mrs Sunderland Musical Festival. In the evening The Choir Prize Winners' Challenge, open to winners of seven of the Festival's Choir Classes, the Colne Valley men took the Festival's top choral prize, being presented with the Jessie Jameson Centenary Baton.

BBC Songs of Praise

In March 2006, along with Marsh Ladies, we did another BBC Songs of Praise programme. This time we were in the beautifully-lit St Thomas's Church at Longroyd Bridge.

In 2002, we had gathered by the Huddersfield Narrow Canal at Tunnel End to sing - at least for the cameras. The sound we recorded was later overdubbed for TV.

Express & Chronicle, October 4, 2002

● **LOUD AND CLEAR:** Looking immaculate in their green jackets, members of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir are pictured performing for the BBC's *Songs of Praise* programme which was transmitted on Sunday. They sang two hymns — one an unaccompanied version of *Breathe on Me Breath of God* and *God is Working His Purpose Out* for which they were joined by Marsden Band. They were filmed at Tunnel End, Marsden, on the banks of the recently-restored Huddersfield Narrow Canal. The canal was the theme of the programme which saw Anne Kirkbride travelling through the Standedge Tunnel to her native Lancashire



On tour again, in Huddersfield's twin town of Besançon, one of the many highlights was the concert in the Grand Kursaal in Besançon and a very appreciative French audience.

'Concert on the Hill'

Another regular feature of the Choir's programme is the annual open-air event at the Huddersfield YMCA Rugby Sports ground. As the sun goes down over the field, the amplified Lindley Band and choirs - Honley and Colne Valley - start into 'Last Night of the Proms' music. The audience sways and waves Union Jacks and, as everyone sings 'Land of Hope and Glory', fireworks blaze over the back of the stand.



In November J. Brian Shaw retired from his position as Deputy Conductor of the Choir. Brian, who joined the Choir in 1961, was, for more than twenty five years, Deputy Conductor. Norman Dearnley, on behalf of the Choir, expressed our grateful thanks to him by presenting him with a limited edition ceramic tea pot in the form of a grand piano.

2007 – Winners in Cornwall

The Choir and its supporters spent an extremely successful four days over the May Bank Holiday weekend at the third biennial Cornwall International Male Voice Choral Festival, where 60 Choirs and almost 3,000 singers from 11 different countries participated.

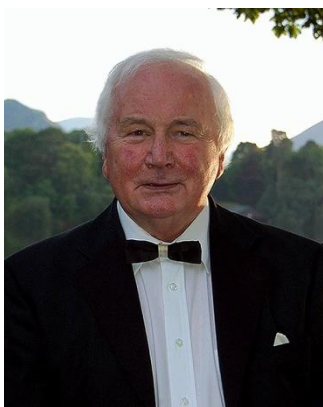
The Choir had a busy programme of concerts but Saturday afternoon was reserved for competition.



The Choir pulled off the 'Big One' by gaining 90 marks for their 12 minute performance to win the Large Choir Class, improving on the second prize position gained at the previous 2005 Festival.



Thom Meredith was presented with the winning trophy. Later, at the evening Gala Concert, a second trophy was awarded to Colne Valley as the 'Overall Best UK Choir'.

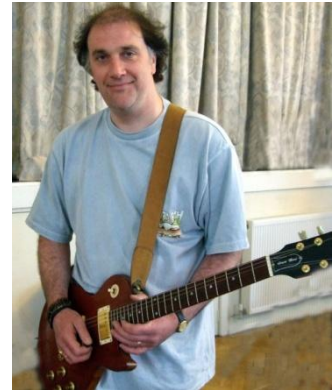
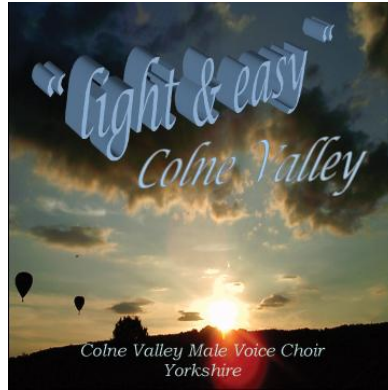


In May, Keith Swallow reached a musical milestone to which few can aspire. His fifty years as accompanist to Colne Valley Male Voice Choir was celebrated in style on 21st May with a dinner for 200 people at Bertie's Banqueting Suite with entertainment being provided by singers from Opera North. Tributes were received from Choir Patron, Lord Harewood, several musical notaries and the many friends of Keith and the Choir.

2008

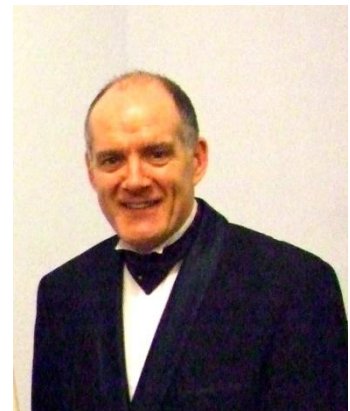
On Wednesday 23rd April 2008 we were once again in the Town Hall for one of our stranger events: the Choir joining forces with the Kirklees Youth Symphony Orchestra in a promotion to launch a DVD, featuring the art of Dry Stone Walling and the ways our traditional stone walls contribute to the distinctiveness of our local countryside.

The end of May was reserved for the recording of nineteen items at Linthwaite Methodist Church for a new CD entitled "Light & Easy Colne Valley". This latest CD was released in early July in time to promote its sale at the summer concerts and is still a popular download. [See our Recordings page.](#)



Recording engineer, Mike Briggs checks a take with Thom. Choir member, Simon Durrans, plays bass on an Elvis track.

In August, the Choir travelled to Scarborough to perform at Queen Street. Conducting the Choir, in the absence of Thom Meredith was Dr Simon Lindley who had taken the two previous rehearsals. Also performing at this concert as guest artiste was cornet virtuoso, Phillip McCann.



Keith Swallow as usual was accompanying the Choir but also provided solos in his own right.

Our association with the inestimable Dr Lindley - an honorary member of the Choir - continues to this day and the Scarborough Festival has likewise become a regular and enjoyable engagement in recent years.

On the last Sunday in August the Choir made its' third visit in four years to the Theatre by the Lake, Keswick.

The Choir sustained the whole programme with its own soloists and Keith Swallow.



2009

At the Mrs Sunderland Music Festival in Huddersfield Town Hall the Choir won the Male Voice Choir Class and the Kirklees Choir Class.

Once again the Choir were extremely pleased to take part in the biennial Cornwall International Male Voice Choral Festival but this time we went as an invited guest Choir as Thom was an adjudicator.

'Colne Valley Boys' established in 2010



June 2010 saw the first public performance of Colne Valley Boys.

They appeared with the men in a joint concert at Holy Trinity.

They were very excited and their performance was enthusiastically received.

The Choir had decided with Thom, some time before, to back the formation of a boys' choir.

We wanted to engage with children less likely to join in choral singing – boys – and also to 'sow the seeds' for potential recruits into the men's choir in later years.

One of the most delightful spin-offs has been the regular sing-along promotional events the Choir began to do in primary schools all over the Colne Valley and other parts of Kirklees.



‘Sainsbury’s Perfect Christmas’



Sainsbury's

**PERFECT
CHRISTMAS**

In October 2010, a top TV and film casting company asked us to perform at a week's notice in a Christmas TV advert with Jamie Oliver, their celebrity presenter.

The Choir sang a version of 'All Through the Night' at the shoot in the Yorkshire Dales hamlet of Halton Gill, north of Skipton. During breaks in filming the Choir entertained crew and extras to an off-the-cuff concert. Jamie joined the choir for a memento photograph.

Although the final advert lasted about 45 seconds on TV, the outdoor shoot took over eight hours, starting at four in the afternoon. It was well after midnight before we set off on the long coach-ride home. Thermals were a must in those cold twilight hours





The specially written lyrics were provided by the production company only one hour prior to the Choir's one and only rehearsal; the actual music and harmonies, in the form of an mp3 file, being relayed to the Choir via an amplified mobile phone.

On site we rehearsed in the cow shed. Re-recording the sound track in a Manchester studio was another marathon session a few days later.

2011 - A competition – and no Thom to lead us

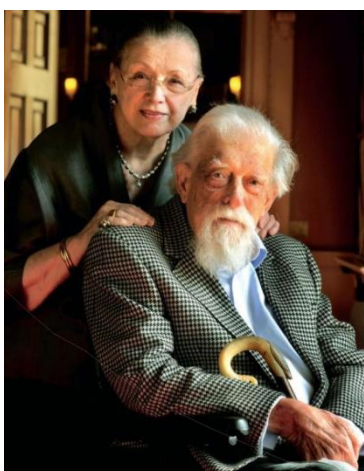
We were In Whitby for a weekend in April to compete in the Eskdale Music Festival, assembling around the Pavilion when news came through that Thom had been taken ill and could not be there.

“What to do?” was on every ones’ lips. Keith Swallow and our rehearsal accompanist, Philip Baxter, were there and after a brief discussion the committee concluded that we would carry on and that Philip would take the baton.

‘War Trumpet’, an exacting piece was substituted, preventing us being judged in the male voice class but we went on to win three firsts & a second prize on the day. We were all delighted but none more so than Philip.



Death of our Patron



The 7th Earl of Harewood passed away in July 2011; he had been patron of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir for more than 60 years. It was with pride that the choir were able to sing at a Service of Thanksgiving in the grounds of Harewood House. His widow, Patricia, Countess of Harewood, subsequently took on his role as Choir patron.

On the theme of remembrance, the staff of Huddersfield Royal Infirmary Intensive Care Unit had a wonderful idea to hold a service of reflection for relatives & friends of those dear to them, who had died in the Unit during the previous year. Saint Paul’s Hall was the venue. The Choir led the singing. There were readings and candles were lit – a moving remembrance – and an event which, once again, we have done on several occasions.



2012 – Charity Concerts and a significant organisational change

The choir returned to the Mrs. Sunderland Music Festival in February entering four classes and came home with four wins.

On the 17th May in Huddersfield Town Hall, Colne Valley presented its own major



charity concert in aid of Kirkwood Hospice and The Forget-Me-Not Children's Hospice. Stage guests were Black Dyke Band and our own Colne Valley Boys. Subsequently we were able to present each charity with a cheque for £4,340.



Choir Secretary, Stuart Baxter, stepped down after 27 years of looking after the Choir's administration. The Choir made him Vice President a few weeks later, in gratitude for a job well done.

Stuart joined us as a bass in 1979 so he had already done 33 years as a singer by the time this award was made.

To the Choir's great good fortune, Jenny Baxter stepped in as the new Choir Secretary – the first time a woman has held the role – and she quickly won the support of members, not least for her efficiency and good humour – qualities she shares with her predecessor.

2013

The singing year starts again quickly after Christmas festivities and in rehearsal we were focussing on the Mrs Sunderland competition in February. Our music committee selected Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho (John Rutter) and Antiphon (Vaughan Williams) for the male voice class.

Come competition day we won 1st prize, graded, 'A – Outstanding' and with the adjudicator adding, "John Rutter's setting gave you plenty of opportunity to prove that you are indeed a Rolls Royce Male Voice Choir". We ended the day gaining first prize again in the Winners Challenge.



Next a charity concert in early April to help 'Iris Ministries', a Christian orphanage in Mozambique, was held at Holy Trinity Church. Carer Ruth Donaldson (Mama Ruthi) is the daughter of our own Jeff Bamforth, Choir stalwart, bass and former Chairman. The concert raised £1,500.

Returning to the competition scene, choir and supporters headed off to Cornwall again for the International Male Voice Festival staged over the Mayday weekend.



We sang in the Gala Concert in Truro Cathedral on the Friday night. Sunday was a busy day, singing first at the Eden Project, followed by a concert in Falmouth.

In the competition on Saturday afternoon, we were narrowly beaten into second place by a choir from Germany.

We did however win the title: 'Overall Best UK Choir' title again.



Maestros- Scarborough musical evening in late summer: joining Simon Lindley organ & piano, the Choir, Keith Swallow & Philip McCann on cornet, all under the baton of Thom Meredith.

Suddenly it was Christmas time again and our 45th Christmas Festival Concert. The Choir's Music Committee, for many years under the highly-respected chairmanship of baritone, David Hirst, seems to have an uncanny knack of picking a brass band to work with that is currently one of the best in the World. This year was no exception. It was Brighouse & Rastrick Band, that, once again, was our guest band – and very good they were, too. Our other guests were Colne Valley Boys.

The Huddersfield Examiner reviewer summed up; "A gold star event".



The following week we ended the year together with Marsden Silver Band for a festive concert in Marsden Parish Church.

Here audience participation is taken seriously especially in The Twelve Days of Christmas marshalled by compere, Peter Armitage M.B.E.

Brighouse & Rastrick – back again for December 2014

25th and 125th Anniversaries



The Huddersfield Mrs Sunderland Music Festival started back in the reign of Queen Victoria and 2014 was a special year, when the festival celebrated having run for 125 years.

The Choir first won a prize at the Mrs Sunderland festival in 1925, so our association is deep-rooted. So we were pleased to help them mark their 125th anniversary.

The Choir's work began on the Saturday before competition day when we were invited to sing at the "Celebrating Success Concert" of past winners, sharing the stage with our friends from Lindley Junior school



On Competition day, Colne Valley Male Voice Choir competed again.

We won in the Male Voice Choir Class.

In the "Choir Programme", a much bigger class of ten choirs, we were beaten into second place by 'Choros Amici'.

The tables were turned however in The Choir Prize Winners Challenge, when Colne Valley Male Voice celebrated by, once again, winning the Jessie Jameson Baton as Leading Choir of the Festival.

Stuart Baxter showed off some of the silverware.

The year 2014 also marked another milestone:

25 years on....



Choir Chaplain and long-standing member, John Radcliffe, presented Thom Meredith with a medal to mark twenty-five years of service as Musical Director and Conductor of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir.

"It seems incredible to me," said Choir Chairman, Roger Fielding, "that a quarter of a century has gone by since that fresh-faced youth took a rehearsal that so impressed us that we gave him the job.

And what a good decision that was! And how fortunate we are that we've managed to hold on to him!

He gives us the same good vocal advice almost every week and still manages to stay patient when we forget to follow it. We all know we wouldn't have been able to perform to the standards of excellence we sometimes reach, had Thom not been around to show us the way; help us reach our best."



As is typical, we also enjoyed a full programme of concert engagements during the year 2014 and in early 2015 – which, being recent, can best be seen either in either the 'Events' or the 'Newsletter' sections of the website.