

Our Rich History

1940s – 1950's

A country at war

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the decision had been taken to carry on as far as was possible with rehearsals. Despite wartime restrictions and the absence of some members in the Services, Colne Valley Male Voice Choir took part in many charity concerts and musical services, both locally and in Leeds, Bradford and Ilkley, raising upwards of £3,000 for various funds.

The Choir had lost its Conductor, George Stead, due to conscription and it was not until August 1946, on his return, that the Choir was able to get back to normal.



Harold Lumb

During his absence the brunt of the rehearsal and local concert work was undertaken by Harold Lumb, the deputy conductor. During this time, the Choir, perhaps out of necessity, engaged guest conductors.

This became another tradition the Choir continues to this day: we gain a fresh perspective and a refreshing change of approach, making a virtue out of those odd occasions when our Musical Director is absent. For the annual Huddersfield Town Hall March and October concerts, guest conductors, notably Leslie Woodgate, Herbert Bardgett and Alfred Higson were engaged. Mr Higson was the conductor of the Manchester CWS Male Voice Choir; a friendly rival of the Choir on many occasions.

On Mr Stead's return and with the resumption of competitive musical festivals, the Choir entered at Blackpool in November 1946. They were successful once again in being awarded the first prize, thus continuing where they had left off in 1939, making it effectively five wins in succession.



Heddle Nash

Among the guest artists appearing at the concerts in this period were such well known singers as Heddle Nash, J Henry Cummings, Roderick Jones and pianists Dame Moura Lympny, Nina Milkina and Shulamith Shafir.



Silver Jubilee celebrations



The March 1947 Town Hall concert was celebrated as the Choir's Silver Jubilee concert. Appearing with the Choir were Kathleen Ferrier (contralto) and virtuoso pianist, Cyril Smith. It was an outstanding success, the Town Hall being filled to capacity with an enthusiastic audience. Included in the Choir's programme was Wagner's "The Holy Supper of the Apostles" and Brahms's "Alto Rhapsody" with **Kathleen Ferrier** as soloist.

The concert was also noteworthy for the first public performance of a composition by Mr Stead - "A Song of Thanksgiving" - a setting of Psalm 46, dedicated to the members of Colne Valley Choir "with grateful thanks for the safe return of our men from HM Forces".

This setting subsequently turned out to be the first of several works by Mr Stead for the Choir, mostly based on psalms, which were destined to be published and widely acknowledged as masterpieces of male voice choral writing.

A notable first at Llangollen

Despite the immediate post war win at Blackpool, the run of successes in the competitive field was not to be maintained at the major competitive festivals during the remainder of the 1940s and through the 1950s. In July 1947 the Choir entered the first Llangollen International Eisteddfod and were placed sixth. Nevertheless, being drawn first to sing on the day in that competition, the Choir will always hold the distinction of being the **first male voice choir to sing at Llangollen**.

Though being successful in Blackpool in 1948, disappointments were encountered at the Welsh National Eisteddfod at Rhyl and with fifth place in the finals of 1951 Festival of Britain held in London, though an isolated win at Blackpool was recorded in 1954.

Much of the credit for keeping the Choir going through what was a critical phase, must go to George Stead. During this period, when new members and new voices were needed, George nurtured what he had with care. He pursued a policy that kept interest alive and so made it more attractive for new singers.



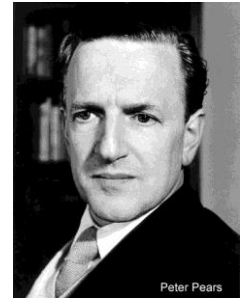


GEORGE E. STEAD is, during the day, clerk and cashier with the Huddersfield Building Society. At nights he rehearses and/or conducts four choirs, including the Bradford Festival Choral Society which sang before Queen Victoria in 1858. His musical week: Monday: Colne Valley Male Voice choir, 70 strong, inveterate prize winners at Blackpool musical festival. Tuesday: gives private singing lessons. Wednesday: Huddersfield Vocal Union (mixed)' 60 voices. Thursday: Golcar Baptist church choir. Friday: Bradford Festival Choral Society, 250 strong.

Excerpted from The Strand magazine: December 1949. Picture thanks to Strand magazine by John Gay of London

Performances receive wide acclaim

There were two outstanding highlights in the 1950s. Firstly the performance of Stravinsky's "Oedipus Rex" at the Leeds Festival in 1953 with the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Principal Conductor, **Joseph Krips** and with soloists, including **Peter Pears** (who with Benjamin Britten had founded the Aldeburgh Festival a few years earlier).



The London Symphony Orchestra's, Conductor, Josef Krips, with George Stead and Choir members at rehearsal in Slaithwaite, before the Leeds Concert in 1953

The Choir's performance of this work received wide acclaim from critics in the press and must rank as one of our greater achievements.

Then, over Easter in 1957, with some trepidation the Choir made its first and very successful visit abroad to Essen as guests of the Schubertbund choir. The Colne Valley men were made most welcome, staying in the homes of our German hosts and being generously entertained by sightseeing tours and receptions. The two concerts, given by the Choir in the magnificent new Saalbau complex and in a local church were much appreciated.

A great find



It was for this first foreign tour that a very young man named **Keith Swallow** came with the Choir as accompanist and solo pianist. His partnership with Mr Stead and succeeding conductors, together with his musicianship, greatly enhanced the Choir's performance.

He has been with Colne Valley ever since; one of our greatest assets.