

Voice *of the* Valley

Colne Valley Male Voice Choir

January 2016

New Vice President

It's a great honour, said Chairman, **Peter Denby**, for someone to be elevated to Vice President. It's a lifetime appointment that marks great service to the Choir. A nominee not only has to be accepted by me as a serious candidate, but then has to be endorsed by the current Vice Presidents and then our recommendation has to be approved by a vote of the full Management Committee.

In **John Lees** case, Peter told the Choir at Monday's rehearsal, he was supported unanimously at each stage. "I'm proud," he said, "To welcome you to the very select band of Vice Presidents. We all considered that your contribution to the Choir's ongoing success made you an outstanding candidate."



John didn't make any reply but his face beamed with pride as the Chairman made his remarks. He informs VotV that he first joined Colne Valley Male Voice Choir in the early sixties, when he was twenty-one - well over 50 years ago.

"I was involved in at least two of the hat-trick of wins at the **Llangollen International Eisteddfod** in 1960-61-62. **Ben Fairclough** was a neighbour of ours and he took me along to a rehearsal in Slaithwaite, at that time not at the Conservative Club but the Socialist Club on the other side of Manchester Road.

Having taken a break of some twenty years I re-joined in 1996 to find that a musical Svengali by the name of **Thom Meredith** was in charge and the choir was and still is on the up and up.

So now I've completed well over thirty years and I'm still enjoying every minute. I have had the pleasure of being Choir Chairman between 2011- 2013 and I'm very much aware of the, so many, famous names, who held the office before.

What I wanted for the Choir then is much the same as I want for it today: and it is simply 'perfection'. Members may say that this is a lofty notion but we are already a very good choir and each Monday evening we all receive a singing master class. It's an endless and rewarding journey. So, I commend this ambition to all and - if we just take on board and implement what we learn - we might just get somewhere close!"

I look forward to my lifetime role as Vice President, I am very grateful to the Choir and I will certainly give it my all."



Alan Beastow hands out his voice tablets to John Lees and Alan Whitehead – date unknown

When I Fall in Love

The Editor was pleased – on his return from foreign parts - to see that the new issue of music for the Choir's Spring and Summer concert programmes included that most wonderful romantic ballad, made famous by **Nat King Cole**.



***When I fall in love, it will be forever
Or I'll never fall in love
In a restless world like this is
Love is ended before it's begun
And too many moonlight kisses
Seem to cool in the warmth of the sun***

***When I give my heart it will be completely
Or I'll never give my heart
And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too
Is when I fall in love with you.***

The music for 'When I Fall in Love' was written by Victor Young and Edward Heyman wrote the lyrics. Many artists recorded it, though the first hit version was sung by Doris Day and released in July 1952.



To whet your appetite, , if you have access to the internet, there's a version that's technically remarkable.

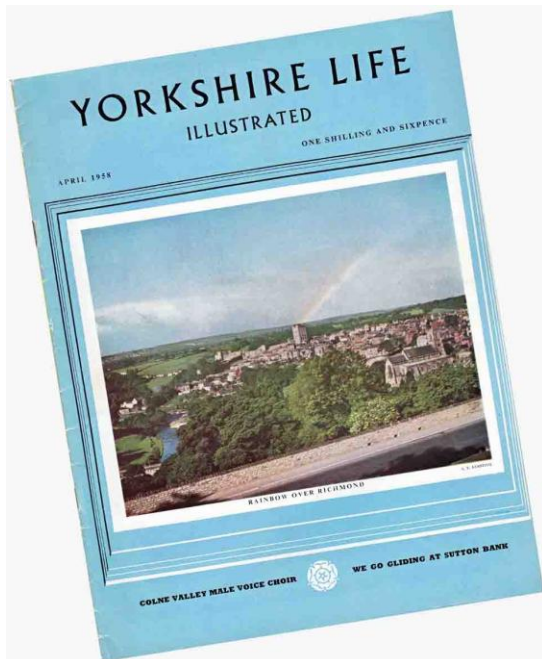
It features Nat King Cole himself singing with his daughter, Natalie Cole, in a special arrangement of the song made in 2013.

Nat died in 1965, but clever video and music editing enabled his daughter, Natalie, to create an award-winning duet.

Natalie, herself, died in 2015 - but the song will live on for ever



COLNE VALLEY'S WONDERFUL HERITAGE



A passion to "get it right"

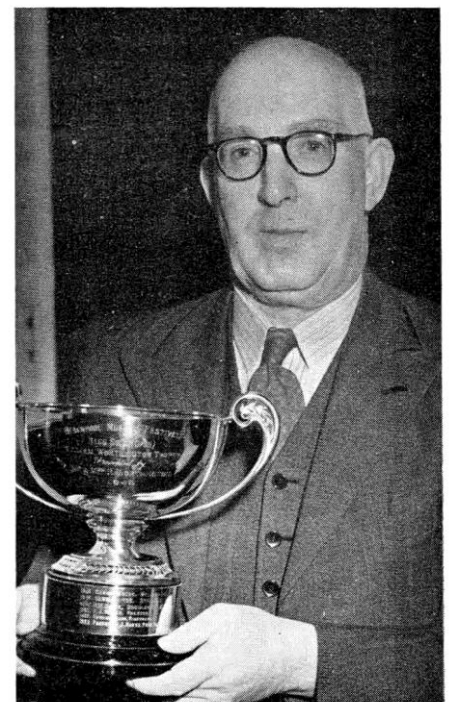
That, says **MAURICE COLBECK** is the quality which has ensured the success of the Colne Valley

Article from *Yorkshire Life Illustrated* of April 1958

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It was the Brighouse Musical Festival of 1933. The adjudicator, Dr. J. F. Staton, was not mincing his words as he pointed out the faults of the competing choirs. One particular triplet, he said, had not been sung correctly by any choir. Had any single member of any choir, he asked, managed to get it right? A singer marched unhurriedly to the platform. Yes, he said, he'd sung it properly. Delightedly, Dr. Staton recommended that the officials award a special prize to this paragon.

Whether or not he got one is not recorded. But the story, I think, gives a clue to the success of that remarkable group known as the **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir**. Good voices they have in abundance; teamwork too; fine leadership - certainly, with such a talented and inspired musician as **George E. Stead** wielding the baton. But all these would have proved insufficient alone without the passion for "getting it right" which gave a Colne Valley man the confidence, twenty-five years ago, to assert that whatever the others had done - he'd sung it as it was meant to be sung.



George E. Stead, conductor since

1924, has spent many years in the service of choralism. Here he is pictured after winning the bass solo class at the 1954 Blackpool Musical Festival.

This meticulous observation of every nuance of the composer's intention has rendered critics and adjudicators almost lyrical.

Listen to **Herbert Howells** commenting on their performance of *The Homecoming* at the 1937 Lytham Musical Festival: "So came the malevolence of that hurricane . . . Lonesome was this musical house and dark and petulant and edged with clarity . . ."

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At the "Mrs. Sunderland" Musical Festival at Huddersfield in 1936, **Sir Hugh Robertson**, though equally moved, was more restrained. "This piece (I May No Longer Dream) may one day have a better performance," he said. "I hope I may be there to hear it."



Stories of this choir's exploits have been headed "**Millmen Sing to Success**". Just why the textile areas should be so prolific in fine choirs is hard to say.

Perhaps it is simply that good singing requires rehearsal almost to the point of drudgery. Colne Valley men know what hard work is and they've a positive relish for the job which at first sight simply can't be done.

"These gallant Northerners," wrote one critic, "have stamina for the wildest feats of choralism." This picture, which shows them rehearsing under deputy conductor Harold Lumb, captures some of the vigorous concentration which has brought them to the front rank.

Wagner's strange work 'The Holy Supper of the Apostles', which struck terror into even some valiant Colne Valley hearts, impressed George E. Stead as 'just up our street.' It was one of the test pieces at the Blackpool Musical Festival, at which the choir had already won first prize for two years in succession. One day before the festival, Mr. Stead told a startled chorister, "I heard 'The Holy Supper of the Apostles' sung last night . . . in my sleep, and I shan't be satisfied till Colne Valley can sing it like that."

Their eventual success brought almost the entire audience simultaneously to their feet, and at the end of the festival the conductor was borne shoulder-high from the platform. Of the four choirs competing, one had failed to answer the roll call, another gave up after struggling through several sections, and though the third completed the work, it was Colne Valley who, in the words of one critic, electrified the crowded Opera House."

When at last the applause died down, the adjudicator, Herbert Howells, confessed himself baffled as to how perfect pitch had been maintained throughout the vast work. "Even **Richard Wagner** did not think a choir could do that," he added, "for he suggested that a harpist should be available to give the choirs the right pitch at the start of each movement," (Incidentally they were to achieve not three, but five successive victories at Blackpool.)



*Josef Krips attends a rehearsal
in Slaithwaite in 1953*

It would be impossible here to recount the list of successes since the choir was formed in 1922, but it is worth mentioning that having survived early disappointment they began their career as first prize winners at Batley in 1923 and since then have carried off forty-three first prizes at festivals all over the North of England. They have sung at the Festival of Britain, have broadcast regularly, and, last year they went to Essen as guests of their German counterparts Der Schubertbund.

Josef Krips, the eminent Austrian Conductor, said after the Leeds Festival of 1953: "Sla'wit - such a name, but such a choir, capable of undertaking music as difficult as Stravinsky. Here I found a true example of art among working men."



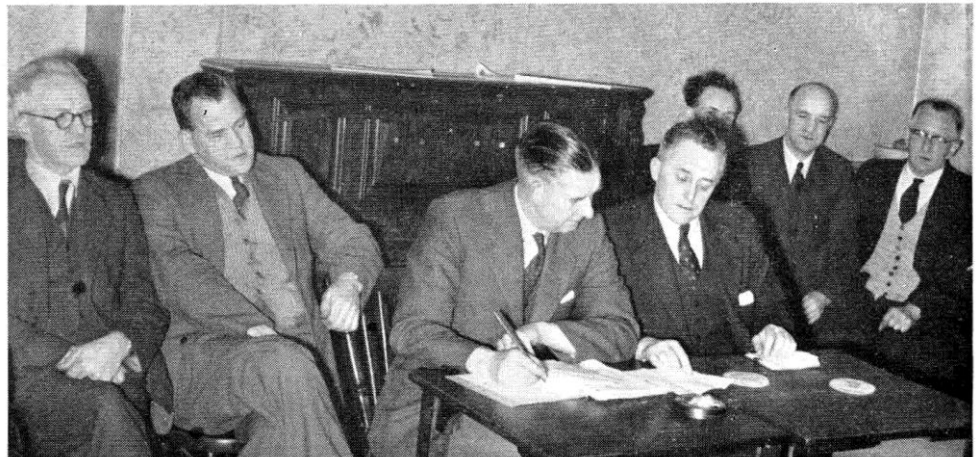
Keith Swallow, though still in his early twenties, is already widely known as an accomplished pianist. Last year he succeeded Ernest Cooper as the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir's accompanist.

To-day, older members recall those early difficulties which, at one stage, almost caused the choir to disband; they remember the struggle for adequate membership; recall how, anticipating their silver jubilee, the eighty-four members resolved that every single voice should be re-tested.

During the absence of "George" (Mr. Stead) on war service, the deputy conductor, **Harold Lumb**, held the baton. He it was who had often told his fellows in earlier years, "I shan't be satisfied till we beat Colne Orpheus" (conducted by his great friend, the late **Luther Greenwood**)'

Colne Valley did beat their near namesakes of the Red Rose - at Wharfedale in 1935, and afterwards, a Colne Valley baritone tapped the shoulder of the opposing conductor: "We've knocked at your back door a varry long taam, Luther." he said "but you've had to let us in at t'finish."

That is the spirit which sustained the choir during its period of struggle, as it will in the future. For whatever honours have not yet been accorded to them, the Colne Valley singers need not worry - they'll 'ave to let 'em in at t'finish'.



The committee in session. From the left, Ernest Walton. Hilton Haigh, Ben Fairclough (secretary), Ronald Hill (president since 1953 and a member for over twenty-five years), John W. Kennedy, Ted Green (treasurer) and Percy Fairbank.



Showing in Yorkshire Cinemas in 1958



Built in Leeds by Charles H Roe this double-decker was on Yorkshire roads in 1958



A certain age

Michele Hanson

It isn't always clever to follow the example of Americans. They love guns, their steaks are too big, they fought against free healthcare, they're more or less obliged to say their prayers, and a frightening number of them admire Donald Trump. But when it comes to music in schools, they are streets ahead of us. Because their Senate has just approved the **Every Student Succeeds Act**, which will reduce over-testing, return power to local districts, and make music a core subject.

Yes, music!

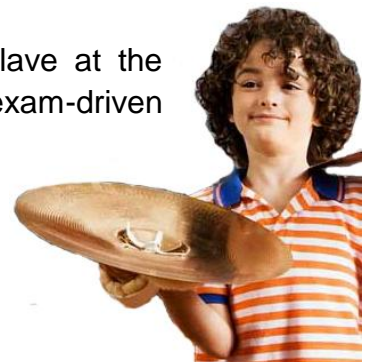
No such luck here, with endless testing, teachers leaving in droves and the National Plan for Music Education in tatters. It promised that every child would learn a musical instrument. Fat chance. Try taking a child out of class for 15 minutes nowadays for an individual music lesson, as we used to in the 70s. They would miss some swotting for a test or wreck a target - and, anyway, what would the child play and how would they learn? What school could pay for instruments and one-to-one tuition? How could they ever build up an orchestra, for poor as well as rich?

Many do, because excellent teachers work themselves almost to breakdown, slaves to the dreaded music hubs, often on zero-hours contracts, because they know music is worth it. If you want to encourage collaboration, socialising, civility, creativity, responsibility and self-confidence, don't bother with citizenship classes. Just have an orchestra. They'll do all of that and more. And playing in one makes you feel good. I know because I do it. It's a lifesaver. But what's the point of telling Nicky "head prefect" Morgan that? I may as well tell my tortoise. And, anyway, she is working for a rubbish ministry.

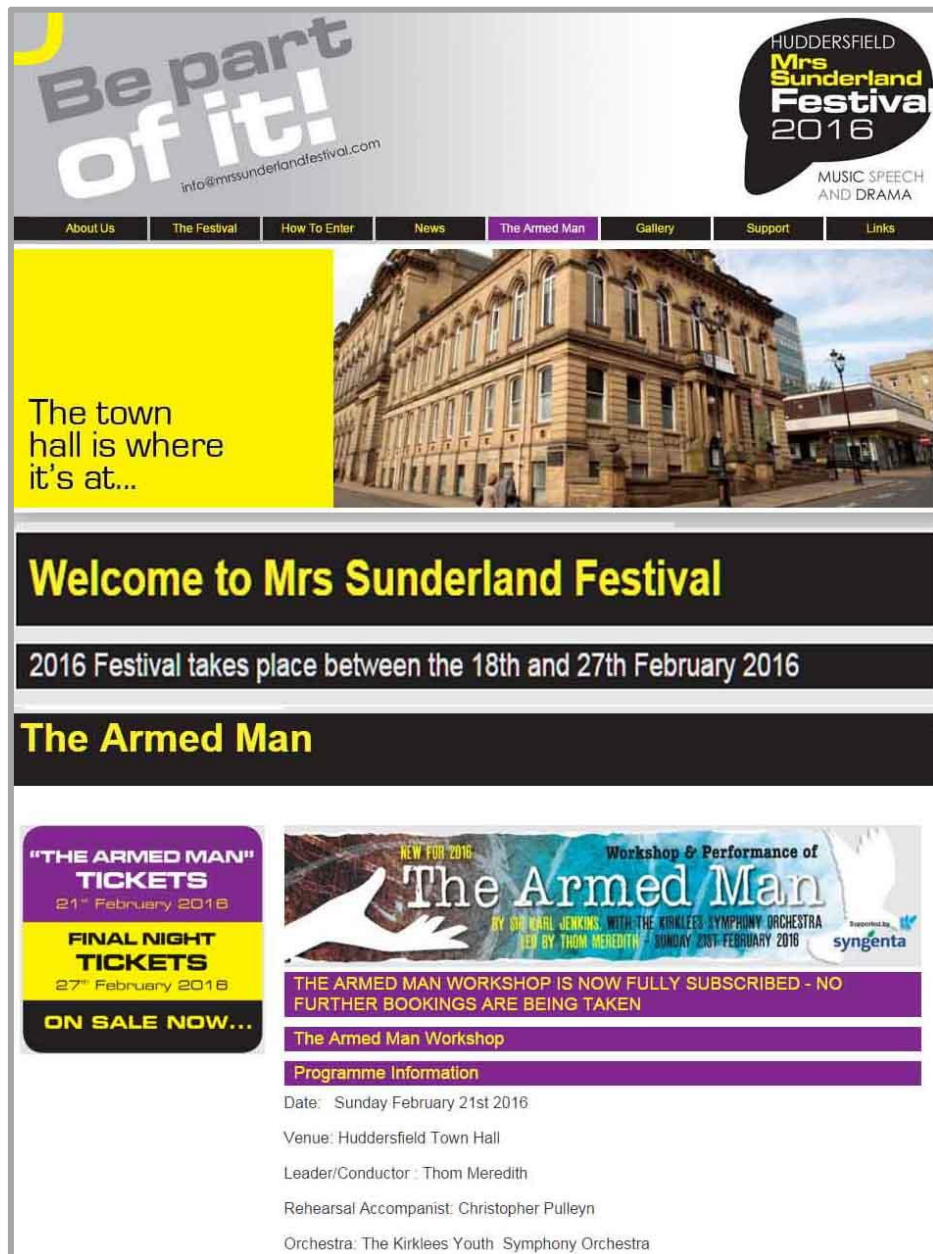
"Could you get a worse system?" says Fielding, 30 years as a slave at the chalkface. "Did they sit down and work out as divisive, stultifying, exam-driven and competitive a curriculum as they possibly could?" Yes.

Every child, from any background, should have a chance to play music if they so wish. And they all can. It's a myth that music is difficult; a useful myth, for our tight-wad, snobby government.

Copy music, not war.



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The Armed Man Workshop

Programme Information

Date: Sunday February 21st 2016

Venue: Huddersfield Town Hall

Leader/Conductor: Thom Meredith

Rehearsal Accompanist: Christopher Pulleyn

Orchestra: The Kirklees Youth Symphony Orchestra

The Choir not only supports the Festival and 'The Armed Man' but will also be involved in this year's competitions.

Saturday afternoon 27 February

1:30 pm: Class 93 Male Voice Choir – 21 voices & over

2:30 PM Class 95 Choir Programme

- and, with luck, on - **Saturday evening 27 February**

7:00 pm: The Last Night of the Festival including Choir Prize Winners Challenge

Get the full story! See our new website:

colnevalleymvc.org.uk

Voice of the Valley Editor: John C Clark

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