



## Frank still loves his music

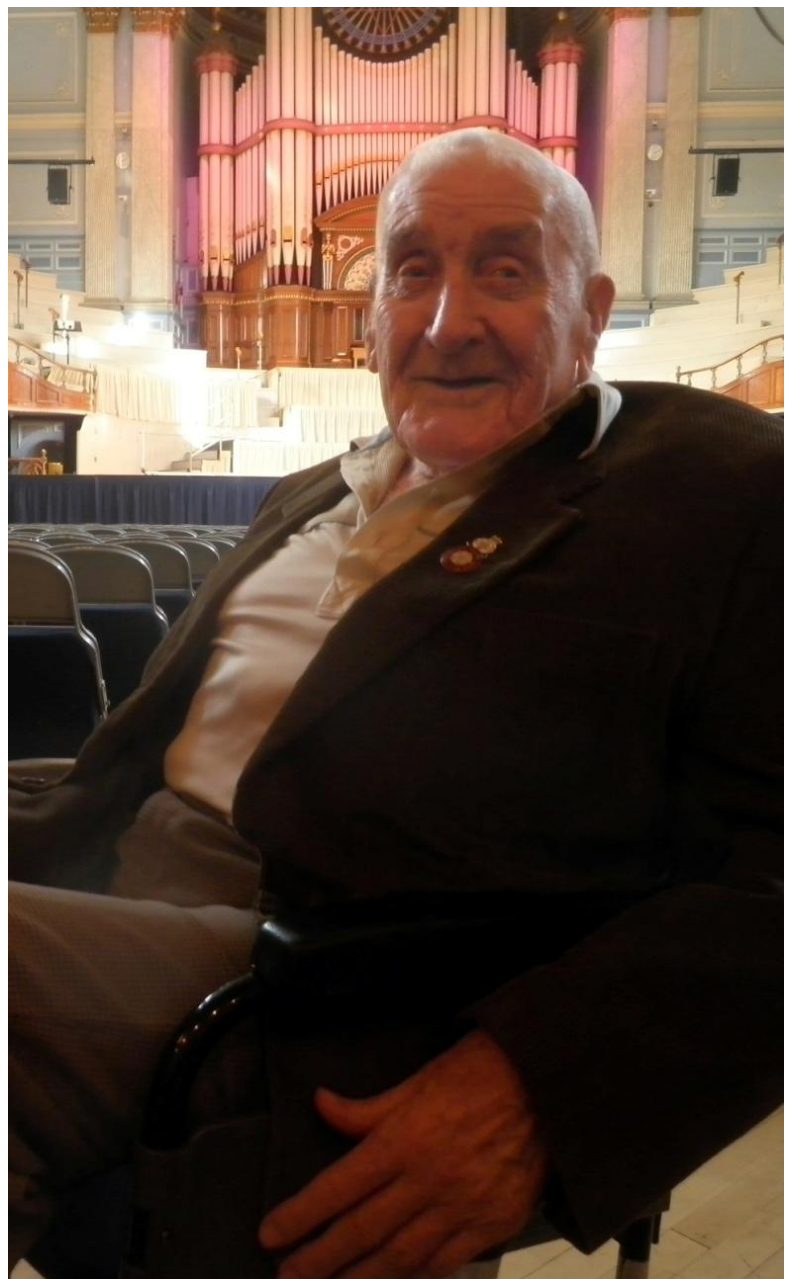
“I still love music,” says retired Choir member, **Frank Littlewood**. “I can’t get to Choir anymore or - anywhere much these days - but if I can get to hear a concert, I’m happy”

Frank, long-time bass and former military bandsman, was speaking at the Town Hall in Huddersfield, where he had got to hear Gordon Stewart playing one of his Monday Lunchtime organ recitals. This was the ‘Halloween Special’ with Gordon in a cape under spooky lighting playing Camille Saint-Saëns ‘**Danse Macabre**’ amongst other mad pieces.

“And it was great to see old chums there - including **Noel Clark**, **Ken Parkinson** and **Raymond Ellis**,” added Frank.



It’s certainly a fine way to spend a Monday lunchtime, opines *VotV* Editor, John Clark. The Father Willis organ is a fabulous instrument and Gordon is a player of astonishing quality.”





"About a year ago," writes baritone, **Michael Parkinson**, "I happened upon a website entitled **"Every Man Remembered"** which promoted the idea that we should give some thought to those who gave their lives whilst serving their country in the First World War.

Looking through, I discovered a man who shares my surname, **Parkinson**, but is not related to me. I was intrigued to discover that 42154 Private Thomas Parkinson served in 5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers as I also did later. I left a dedication on the website saying that I wished I had known him and shared his hardships.

Recently I noticed a date which presented itself as significant. His Battalion was positioned in the Ypres Salient as part of 164 Infantry Brigade heavily engaged in the battle of the Menin Road Ridge near St Jullien 20th to 23rd September 1917. It was here that Thomas received wounds from which he died on 24 September. As soon as I saw this, without further thought, I said aloud, "I'm going".

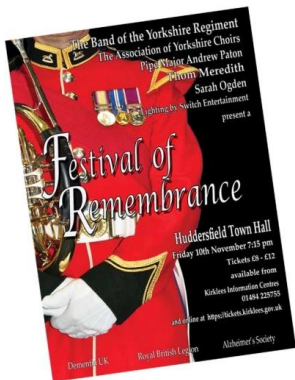
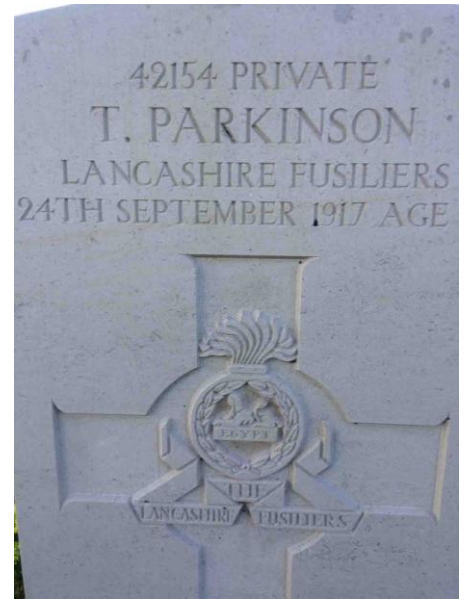
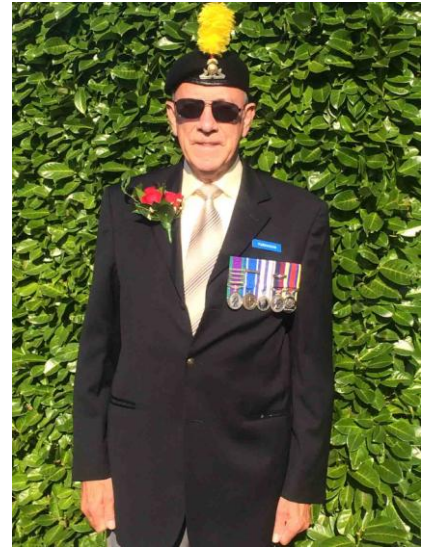
I planned and executed my mission to find the cemetery where his headstone is located. I made my way to Belgium and exactly one hundred years to the day I did find Thomas's headstone in **Mendinghem Military Cemetery** near Poperinge. I laid some poppies and also three red roses, remembering the Lancashire connection.

I spent time reflecting on the courage, stamina and spirit of this man who died in terrible circumstances in the service of his King and country. "Indeed, Thomas, you shall be remembered". The experience filled me with humility and also pride at having made the connection.

Coincident also are the facts that Thomas had a wife called Jane and I have a daughter named Jayne. He left his family at 147 Arkwright Street, Liverpool and, on joining up, my family home was 147 Broad Oak Lane, Bury. It is likely that his descendants may still live in Liverpool.

My personal details: Born Bury, Lancashire, 29 June 1943 (74 years). Enlisted 23854406 Fusilier Parkinson in February 1961 (aged 18 years). Subsequently enlisted as aircrew in the Royal Air Force serving 34 years including many conflicts across the globe. Having raised two children - long grown up and flown the nest - I now live alone in Doncaster where I ended my service career.





As well as the formal acts of remembrance, there was a concert held at the Huddersfield Town Hall, on November 10th, which featured – alongside the Band of the Yorkshire Regiment - a handful of others with connections to our Choir – not least our inestimable Musical Director, **Thom Meredith**.

It's the end of the 1916 winter and the conditions are almost unbelievable. We live in a world of Somme mud. We sleep in it, work in it, fight in it, wade in it and many of us die in it. We see it, feel it, eat it and curse it, but we can't escape it, not even by dying.

- Edward Lynch

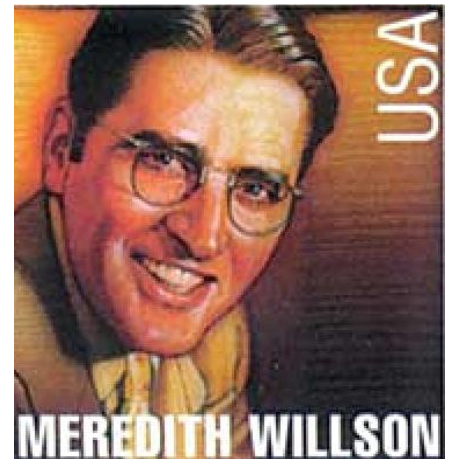


## Almost ready for our Town Hall Christmas Concert



Yes, Christmas is coming and the Choir is getting ready. Rehearsals are going well and last Monday we felt the first stirrings of the Christmas Spirit as we rehearsed some of those schmaltzy old favourites everyone likes to hear every festive season.

'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas' we sing in Meredith Willson's **'Pine Cones and Holly Berries'**.



There are still tickets available in the Area and the Gallery. Check out seats with Kirklees online or on the phone at 10484 225755

<https://tickets.kirklees.gov.uk/enGB/shows/colne%20valley%20mvc%20christmas%20concert%202017/events>

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**Colne Valley M.V.C. Christmas Concert 2017**  
 Christmas music with the choir and Brighouse and Rastrick Band

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Dec 2017

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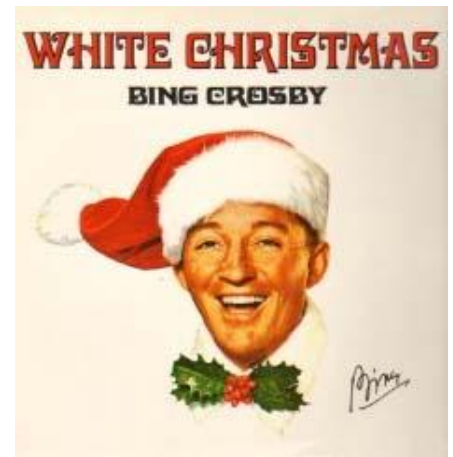
# Boys Concert



Colne Valley Boys Christmas concert at St James' Church has come to be seen as a great way to spend a pre-Christmas Saturday afternoon.

The Boys are great and with the talented 'Musica' Band and the 'Colne Valley Community Choir', there'll be plenty of musical fun to be enjoyed.

The boys will be singing, Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas' amongst other fabulous tunes.



## Peter Hatton has an Anniversary.

Stalwart and second tenor, Peter Hatton is seen here, rocking a late 60's style outfit, with wife, Jenny.

They are, recreating the year 1967 - the year he and Jenny got married.

It's quite something to reach 50 years.

We wish them many more happy years together.



# My 60 years as a member of the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir

- the Reverend John Radcliffe writes to VotV

## Knocking Knees

In 1957 at the age of 18 yrs, I was asked by a foreman joiner at **David Brown Tractors**, Haigh Stead, if I would like to join the CVMVC. I took him up on his invitation and with a bit of persuasion from **Norman Dearnley**, who also worked at 'tractors', I plucked up courage and went for a test.



The piece of music I chose was, "If I can help somebody as I pass along". In those days **G.E. Stead** played the piano for the test and the full committee sat in judgement.

(Here's for a version by **Billy Eckstine**, made for Nat King Cole's last ever TV show in the same year, 1957 - though obviously, John's rendition would have been better.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cr8GuM002w&list=RD1cr8GuM002w&t=36>



After I had sung, with knees knocking, I was informed by **Ben Fairclough**, the secretary, I'd passed and would be singing baritone.

What an experience to sing alongside **Willie Swift**, **Harold Lumb** and **Clarence Calverley**, all members of the Vale Singers besides being CVMVC Members.

There was not a bus from Meltham to Slaithwaite for the choir practice, so I used to catch the Marsden bus and walk down to Slaithwaite from the top of Varley Road. We then practised at the **Socialist Club**. After the rehearsal, more often than not, I had to walk back to Meltham (all weathers).



This was until I plucked up courage to ask **Keith Swallow** if I could have a lift with him, at the time he drove an Austin A35 but with the speed of an Aston Martin!

I still have a newspaper cutting from the Colne Valley Guardian whose editor was Vice President of the Choir, **Clarence Roberts**. The report

said that one snowy night when no buses were running, one member walked from Meltham and back.



## Strong Drink

The first competition I sang at was at Blackpool in 1958. At this festival you had to sing in the afternoon and if successful you sang in the final at night. So we got through to the final and George Stead's parting shot as usual was "Na' then lads no chemic!", but the members of the Vale Singers went straight into the pub.



After we sang at night, the adjudicator, **Sir Thomas Armstrong** came out with his opening comments: "These men have been drinking!" We didn't even get placed.

On the Monday following, **Mr Thomas Smailes**, at that time Librarian and strictly teetotal, promptly resigned. Following this, the Committee asked me to take on the job.

## Rats

I served 17 years as Librarian, moving all the music out of the cellar, which was being eaten by an infestation of rats, when we moved to our new home down at Slaithwaite Con. Club.



## Choices

My first experience of the **Llangollen Eisteddfod** should have been on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1960 but I got married instead at **St. James Church, Slaithwaite**. The Choir took First Prize. But I was there, when we won the following years.

I also remember the visit to **Morrison Male Voice Choir** when the choir got a 10 minutes standing ovation after singing George Stead's, Psalm 126.



John is 3<sup>rd</sup> from the end on the front row in this shot from a recording of Yorkshire TV's 'Stars on Sunday'.

Haven't times changed over 60 years; we could sing 60 voices at Llangollen, with 5 reserves for each section.

I have enjoyed the sixty years with the Choir and think of all the friendships over the years, sadly many now not with us.

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## Peter Davies writes:-

GREAT to hear from you.

Thank you so much for VotV. I was most interested in the articles about recruitment in general and about recruiting younger people in particular. I'm delighted that you've signed me up to receive it regularly. Thank you.

Sadly, my research in 2012 showed a few other issues with male voice choirs too, some of which many of those who direct male voice choirs will not want to hear. You folk in Colne Valley Male Voice Choir can consider yourselves fortunate that you are unaffected by my country-wide findings!

In 2012, my research showed:

1. Only 15% of those who directed Male Voice choirs had ANY musical qualifications whatsoever (including 'O' Level Music or equivalent);
2. Less than 10% had any form of degree in music and even then mainly instrumental performance or musical theoretical rather than choral qualifications;
3. Less than 2% had any form of choral conducting qualifications or had been on any sort of choral conducting course.

Most directors directed male voice choirs having sung under directors who'd sung under directors, who'd sung under directors (several generations back) that might at one time have had some form of choral / musical qualifications. And, equally alarming was the general feeling I found that, despite not having any real understanding of choral conducting and certainly no qualifications, most directors had no intention of going on any form of course or experiential training. Now, qualifications are far from everything but not wanting to go on a course either.....?!!

By my estimates there are about 500 male voice choirs and that number is declining. We've lost around 80 choirs in the last 10 years or so.

These things combined, along with further work I've undertaken when providing consultancy to a range of choirs over the years, lead me to a worrying broad-based conclusion to which notable exceptions will be found:-

- There is a dearth of understanding of the voice and how it works.
- Few are aware of the wider male voice repertoire available, not only here in the UK but from Europe, the Baltic States and USA.

- Choirs are often disinclined to sing anything other than full four part harmony. Thus many choirs limit themselves to repertoire items that might not be at all suitable for new entrants to singing.

Add all that to an interesting (but unintentional) bias among members of choirs (supported by Musical Directors because it is in their comfort zone, too) to sing in a style they know rather than be tempted into pastures new.

And the result is, we get choirs that find it difficult to recruit members and keep those they manage to attract because the music is “not right” for new singers unused to singing an under-part let alone four part harmonic structure.

So maybe it's no surprise that the number disappearing is far greater than those forming. Sadly the age range of established choirs sees to that. When I joined **Huntingdon Male Voice Choir** as Director 23 years ago, I was one of the youngest in the choir. Sadly, despite frequent recruitment campaigns, I still am.....!!

But it's not all bad news and there are signs of improvement. I'm delighted that some new male voice choirs are springing up. Things are changing and, at last we are seeing new guys coming along and staying. BUT very few are in the 30-40 year old age bracket I was in when I started directing.

To recruit and keep new members, all of those involved with male choirs must want and understand the necessity for change so that we can attract and sustain new membership. Otherwise, sadly, we will all see the demise of this wonderful art form.

I'm not trying to be downbeat here, but simply reporting on findings and observations from my researches and from working with choirs from across the country both before and since the time I spent directing the Festival in Cornwall.

I'm sure someone will shoot me down in flames and I'd be delighted to be proved wrong. As I said, things are changing.... Slowly!

All very best wishes to Thom and everyone in CVMVC. Long may the choir prosper.

Peter

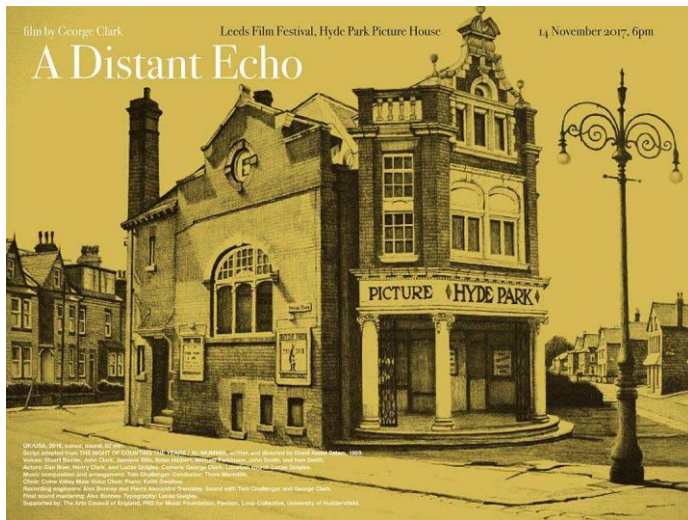
Peter Davies

Choral Director & Consultant



*Singing weekends, workshops and choir consultancy*

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## Art-film gets Headingly Screening

**George Clark's weird film** got its Yorkshire Premiere the other night in arguably another one of the world's greatest cinemas.

Second tenor, **John Clark**, (relation), one of a handful of Colne Valley Men there, explains in the post-screening Q&A how Colne Valley came to be involved in recording the sound track.

The film involves the 'Guardians of the Tombs of Ancient Egypt - the Guardians of the 'old ways'.

It was when he said he wanted us because, 'we were the 'Guardians of Yorkshire Culture' that we got hooked.

It was pleasing to hear that the Choir's evocation of the sound of the wind in the desert - the aim of Tom Challenger's strange music - came across so successfully.



## Winter Joke

Well, it amused me!





# Colne Valley Male Voice Choir

Est 1922

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And see the website to get the full story: [colnevalleymvc.org.uk](http://colnevalleymvc.org.uk)