



## Another Great Night at the Town Hall

That indispensable musical beginning to the Christmas season - **Colne Valley's Male Voice Choir's Christmas Festival**, took place at Huddersfield's magnificent Town Hall on Sunday night.

50 years on:

This current run of Town Hall concerts has now reached its **50<sup>th</sup> consecutive year** – so no surprise that the event is embedded in the town's cultural calendar.



And Sunday's concert was as enjoyable as any. At least, that seemed to be the general view amongst the 1,000 plus people who were there.

This year we had the very popular **Colne Valley Boys** and, arguably the World's Best Brass Band, **Brighouse and Rastrick Band** as our guests. (B&R had been our guests, too, at the first one of the series back in 1969.)

Simon's dad took this photo at the 2016 concert- in 2018 the audience stood once again to join in 'Hark the Herald'

Historians may argue that the Choir had performed many times at Christmas at the Town Hall since we started in 1922 - but it was in 1969 that the Choir decided it would organise its own event, instead of being guests at others' concerts. It was risky - losing a fee and gambling on sufficient tickets being sold to cover the hire costs and the fee for the band.

But it worked out well enough and on Sunday we were doing it for the 50<sup>th</sup> time.

(Special thanks to Roger Fielding for master-minding the ticket sales - hardly an empty seat!)

## The maestro makes his half-century



Even more remarkably, our accompanist that first evening was one **Keith Swallow**.

He has brought his dazzling pianoforte skills to be at every single one of the 50.

We are hugely indebted to him for his consistent support.

This photograph of him cannot be dated but might well be from around then.

Once again Keith's presence at the sequence of Christmas concerts doesn't mean that 1969 was his first appearance with Colne Valley Male Voice Choir.

Unbelievably, that goes back still many a year. Indeed Keith had been appointed to accompany the Choir and play solo spots some 12 years before. Surely no one can beat that record! Here he is circa 1957.



And Keith was in his element playing a glorious accompaniment to the Choir's newest offering - a fine and dramatic version of that favourite anthem, "**How Great Thou Art**."

Keith shown here at the Town Hall in December 2017 continues to be an inspiration.

Some said it wasn't 'Christmassy' but this premiere showed off the skills of the Choir to magnificent effect and, in the stunning acoustic ambience of the Town Hall, had great impact on our audience.

VotV suspects this will be a showpiece in our Cornwall appearances in 2109.



## A Christmas Cracker of a Concert - says the 'Examiner'



# The Huddersfield Daily Examiner

Christmas is coming and tonight was the 50<sup>th</sup> Christmas Festival hosted by the famous Colne Valley Male Voice Choir, with guests Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band and witty compère Dr Simon Lindley.

We heard the unmistakeable and matchless Colne Valley sound time and again in festive favourites such as Deck The Halls, typified by chordal refrains in which a sprightly tenor section responded to some hearty bass melodies.

Thom Meredith, the choir's conductor, coaxed a wonderful range of expression from the singers, maximising the vast choral potential at his fingertips as in Band of Brothers and The Candlelight Carol, both his own stunning arrangements. We heard beautiful phrasing and each voice part knew its place; hushed when in the background and strong singing for melodic lines.

The choir's perfect choral blend really came to the fore in The Little Road to Bethlehem a lovely a capella number.

The choir's finest moment was its outstanding performance of How Great Thou Art, an arrangement completely suited to this choir, which had immediate choral impact, the men singing with utter conviction. Forget this week's charts, this is my Christmas Number One!

The world class brass band, conducted by Dr David Thornton were delicate in the small ensemble arrangement of Away in a Manger and daring in Auld Lang Syne, showcasing the unbelievable skills of virtuoso euphonium soloist Chris Robertson. They dazzled in Trepak and were wonderfully daft in the musical comedic Bare Necessities featuring charismatic tuba soloist Dave Hebb!

Speaking of soloists, the choir had local lad Raymond Ellis (tenor) up its sleeve for a knockout rendition of The Holy City in which the men's sensitive singing created an angelic ambience.



The sight and sound of The Colne Valley Boys was endearing. Quite a throng of older lads and a modest front row of younger boys. Inspiring to see this bunch singing their hearts out, especially in Wake Me Up, with its different parts, and making an impact in this huge space. Well done! Special mention must go to soloists Jacob Sykes-Kenworthy and William Taylor for their confident and accomplished singing in Because of Him.

Accompanist Keith Swallow and Chris Pulleyn again showed us their pianistic prowess this evening, especially in the more flowery accompaniments of Mistletoe and Wine (Keith) and Believe (Chris).

As the song says, 'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas' thanks to the musicians who entertained us tonight with their super seasonal programme concluding with We Wish You a Merry Christmas, a snappy arrangement by choir member James Blagborough.

And fantastic to see not an empty seat in this packed Town Hall. This was a terrific evening's entertainment, a real Christmas cracker!

**Suzanne Smelt**

The Band was on magnificent form.



Photo: Gordon Ratcliffe

Earlier this year at the prestigious **Saddleworth & Oldham District Whit Week Banding Competitions**, Brighouse and Rastrick had come away with 'overall winners' status for the third year running, winning first place in six different venues. At each one they proudly displayed their trophy as 'National Champions' and by all accounts their playing was superb. Musical Director, **David Thornton** is quoted as saying, "We always prioritise phrasing, musical character and quality of sound, as well as the required ensemble precision."

And that was certainly apparent in their performance at the Town hall on Sunday, particularly in their fabulous rendering of Eric Ball's spectacular, '**Kingdom Triumphant**'.



Old friend of the Choir, **Dr. Simon Lindley**, was on stage, once again.

As always, Simon did an excellent job as concert compère, introducing the items as they came up, with not only his usual benign and enthusiastic manner but also with evident deep knowledge of the music on offer.



And individual flair was there aplenty, too.

This was clear in the Band's first set, when, Principal Euphonium Player, **Chris Robertson** took the solo part in the 'Fantasia on Auld Lang Syne' and played it with haunting beauty, backed up by flawless ensemble support.



Especially enjoyable was **Dave Hebb's** entertaining, comedic and ever-so-clever E<sup>b</sup> Bass solo in the '**The Bare Necessities**' from the Disney version of 'the Jungle Book'.

Choir members regarded themselves as privileged have such musical skill onstage with them.



Photo: Lynn Durrans



## 50 up for Keith but first for Chris

Keith may have done all fifty - and veteran Baritone, **David Hirst**, too, but for one young chap this Town Hall concert was 'Number One.'



This is newest recruit to the Choir, **Christopher Pilgrim**. He's just achieved membership and he's about 60 years younger than them - or, come to that, the previous 'new member' whose biography figured in last Voice of the Valley, **Trevor Bowers**.

### Chris tells the VotV Editor:

*"I'm 24. I live in Keighley. I sang in **Halifax Young Singers** from the age of 9 and left at 20. That was to study zoology at Bangor University. I graduated this July. While I was there I went on a field trip to Florida, looking at wetlands and volunteered with the **Atlantic Whale and Dolphin Foundation** in Tenerife.*



Ed: looks terrible: watch the video....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD3IHxSvEk>



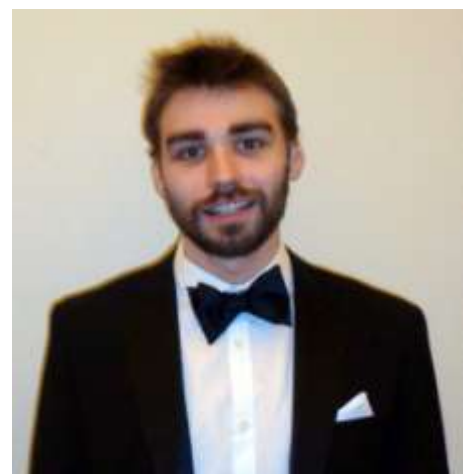
*Back at my studies, I wrote a dissertation on the effect of eutrophication (nutrient pollution) on invertebrate populations in two Welsh lakes.*

*I've been seeing Thom Meredith for singing lessons on and off since I was about 16. I'm currently also singing with **All Souls Amateur Operatic Society**, in Halifax, and have often sung with **Skipton Choral Society**; I also play the Drums."*

VotV caught up with Chris during the interval.

*"It's been great. I've got a vague memory that I might have sung here with a choir and a band when I was smaller with Halifax Young Singers. But this is something else! I'm really enjoying it."*

Not a bad way to start your singing with Colne Valley!

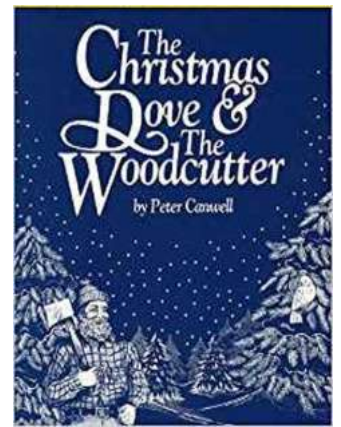


## And as for the Colne Valley Boys ....

What an experience it was for them to be part of such a prestigious event.

As usual they were charming, enthusiastic and musically accomplished. They sang beautifully with the men in the rather 'schmaltzy' '**Mistletoe and Wine**' - making it engagingly sentimental without being too saccharine.

Perhaps the highlight of their set was '**Because of Him**' from **Peter Canwell's** musical drama, **The Christmas Dove and the Woodcutter**.



This fine piece featured two soloists from the Boy's Line up: **William Taylor** (left) and **Jacob Sykes-Kenworthy** on the right.

They did a grand job to make the item memorable - well done Boys says VotV.



Boys, men and Band came together - in this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Armistice to perform **Michael Kamen's** song from 'Band of Brothers', '**Requiem for a Soldier**'.

Again, some may say, it's not 'Christmassy' but if Christmas is not a time of peace and goodwill: then what is it? Our audience, certainly, seemed moved by the performance, which provided a dramatic end to the first half of the programme.

Boys gather in the Town Hall Reception Room ready to perform.

The audience thought they were terrific!







## Traditional Christmas was not neglected ...

There was plenty of the traditional Christmas music, too - enough to make our audience happy.

They got to sing along to '**Hark the Herald**' as usual and got to listen to much-loved carols such as Michael Head's lovely, '**Little Road to Bethlehem**'

Then they had the fun of swaying to and fro to the Band and Choir's version of '**The Snow Waltz**'.

Once again, the concert finished with **Gordon Langford's** all-time-favourite '**Christmas Fantasy**' bringing together the wonderful Band and our excellent Choir in a medley of festive songs.



photo Lynn Durrans



Now bring us some Figgy Pudding...



I say finished - there was also a post-script - the choir sang an unaccompanied 'bon-bouche' as an afterthought: '**We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**', pleading for '**some figgy pudding**' in the traditional way.

But this version was slightly different: this had been arranged by our very own, **James Blagborough**, bass stalwart and Music Committee member

**A fine end to a fine night!**





## Chris steps up....

Our last rehearsal before Sunday's concert was on Friday at Slaithwaite. A rather glum, **David Hirst**, told the Choir that **Thom Meredith** had been forced to take to his sick bed with something rather nasty.



**But then Christopher Pulleyn took the podium.**



He'd given up his 'Opera North' social event at the last moment to come down and he really stepped up - the concerned mood began to lift.

He led us through the full repertoire with real verve and skill.

Much of the music was new. If, once or twice, he didn't manage to spoon-feed each section with a clear entry signal or didn't quite as convincingly mime the lyrics we are, in any case, all supposed to know by heart, then these were tiny peccadilloes.

It didn't stop a few taunts, mind you. *'Better get it right, Chris, you'll be doing it for real on Sunday!'*

Final rehearsals are traditionally pretty terrible but Chris left us feeling good and confident that - if Thom couldn't make it - Chris would do a magnificent job.

(**VotV** learns, too, that Keith Swallow was under the weather, too.) Even Chris would have been hard-pushed standing in for both maestros!

Well, as it turned out, Thom, though still 'full of cold' did appear as did Keith and Chris and all put on a terrific performance.

**Heroes all three**





# The Friendliest Concert We Do?

Once again we will be the guests of the fabulous **Marsden Silver Prize Band** at the Parish Church in the village.



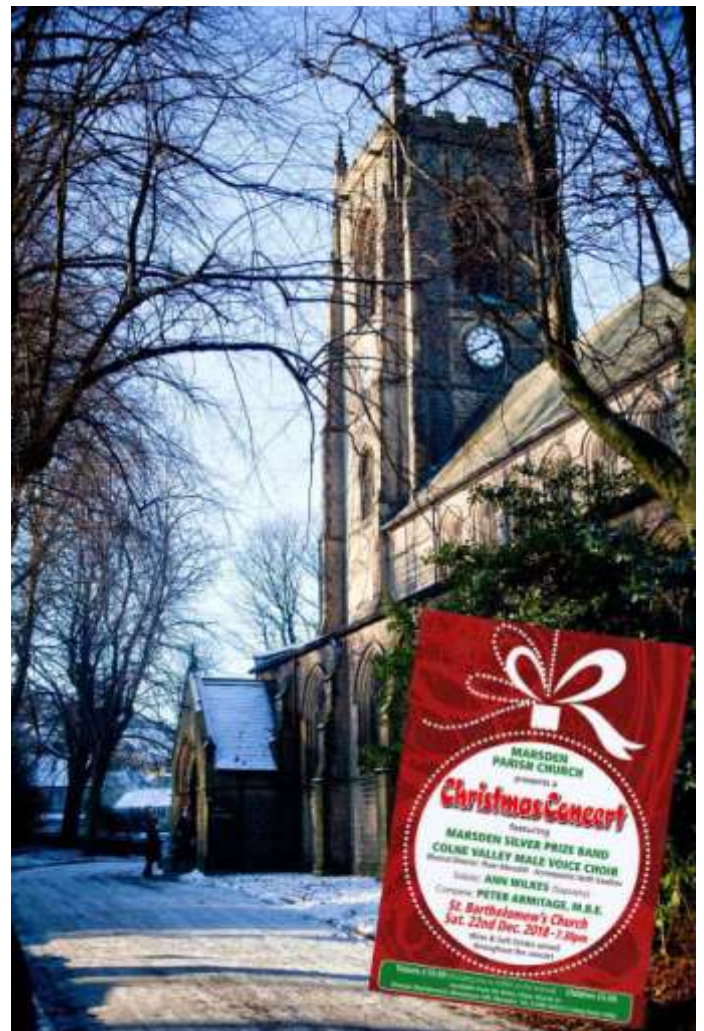
That's on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> at St Bartholomew's.

This is the first Christmas Do in Marsden with new band conductor, **Andrew Lofthouse** at the front.

It's always relaxed, convivial and full of the festive spirit.

If you are a regular, you won't want to miss it

And if you've never been before, do it this year. 'Strictly' will have already finished this season so no reason to stay at home. Come down. You'll really enjoy it.





You can join in...

Men - Come and try us out!

Women – Send your men down to Slaithwaite - it'll do them good!

**Men, our present  
to you this  
Christmas!**



**Est 1922**



**Come and sing with us in  
the New Year from  
Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2019!**

Colne Valley MVC is always ready to welcome new members. If you enjoy singing and ever wondered whether Colne Valley MVC would be right for you, then the best way to find out is to just come and join in for a few rehearsals! When you first come you can either just sit at the back and see what our rehearsals are like or join in to sing straight away. It's that simple! Our doors are always open to prospective members!

We are not only focused on giving fun and inspiring performances but also developing singing talent led by Thom Meredith, our long standing Musical Director.

**Our rehearsals are on Monday nights (except Bank Holidays)  
7.30-9.30pm at Slaithwaite Conservative Club, HD7 5HF.**

For male singers aged 8 to 18 years old, Colne Valley Boys also led by Thom Meredith, rehearse every Monday in term time 5.30 – 7pm at the same rehearsal venue. Prospective members and parents would be welcome to come along to any rehearsal to find out more.

If you would like more information contact Joe Stones on  
01484 323431/07889 658365 or visit our websites.

[www.colnevalleymvc.org.uk](http://www.colnevalleymvc.org.uk)



[www.colnevalleyboys.com](http://www.colnevalleyboys.com)



# Our Boys in concert

Our very own Boys' Choir started the festivities off with a cracker of a concert at **Slaithwaite, St James's**. Once again the amazingly talented children of **Musica Youth Brass** joined the Boys.

"This is one of the best of the Christmas events" said Choir Secretary, **Jenny Baxter**, in promoting the event and she proved to be quite right. Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> was simply a 'lovely afternoon'.



Great Thanks to **Thom** and to the Boy's up-and-coming Pianist, **Christopher Pulleyn**.



**Great Thanks**, too, must go to our tenor, **Matt Houston**, who, with sterling support from wife, **Linda**, once again organised a very fine event.

In November, Matt had reported to the Choir's Management Committee that it's not been an easy time for the Boy's Choir recently.

"It's always the case," he said, "That there is a turnover as boys' lives change. And this year quite a number have gone on to college etc, creating vacancies. Related changes in the organisation and funding of music in schools have also contributed to making it unusually difficult to find replacements. Lower numbers," he added, "Would impact the choir, financially, too."



## **‘We stand behind the Boys....**

... was the Committee’s response. **‘And we’ll tide them over in the expectation of better days to come.’**

It then went on to agree a substantial vote of funds and proposed a number of other measures to support them.

Choir members should note that the adult Choir’s financial status is robust and that supporting the Boys is clearly in line with the Choirs’ charitable objects - ‘to promote the study, practice and performance of music for male voices, and to promote music through concerts and other activities.’

## **Musical Director for both choirs, Thom Meredith, writes...**

*“Please could I put on record how grateful I am to the Committee and therefore also to the Choir for their generous support to Colne Valley Boys as reported in the minutes of the last meeting.*

*It’s a very difficult climate at the moment for encouraging young people to get involved in activities such as this and it’s quite an achievement that CVB has survived so successfully for 9 years already.*

*The donation from the choir has redoubled our commitment to continue the work we started over 9 years ago. Hopefully some more concentrated recruitment in the New Year will help to replenish numbers and secure the future of the group.*

*Best wishes and thanks”*

*Thom*



Boys and men rehearsing together for the Town Hall Christmas Festival



And looking forward to next year....

# Colne Valley Male Voice Choir ENGAGEMENT DIARY 2019

Strange to relate the diary for 2109 looks thinner than usual. That's because a number of engagements, which are 'in the pipeline' are yet to be confirmed.

Readers should keep an eye on the website for the updates as they come through. Perhaps the biggest event next year is our tour to Cornwall.

[colnevalleymvc.org.uk](http://colnevalleymvc.org.uk)

**Thursday 2 May to Monday 6 May.**

**Cornwall International Male Voice Choir Festival**

Competition and concerts across the county from our Newquay base



**Saturday 6 July**

**Concert on the Hill**

Music and Fireworks at Salendine Nook: we're with Lindley Band, Lindley Junior Choir and Honley MVC

**Saturday 17 August:**

Scarborough Music Festival at Queen Street Central Methodist Church

**Sunday 15 December:**

**Christmas Concert with Brighouse & Rastrick Band** at Huddersfield Town Hall

**Saturday 21 December:**

Much-loved Christmas concert as guests of **Marsden Silver Prize Band** at Marsden Parish Church

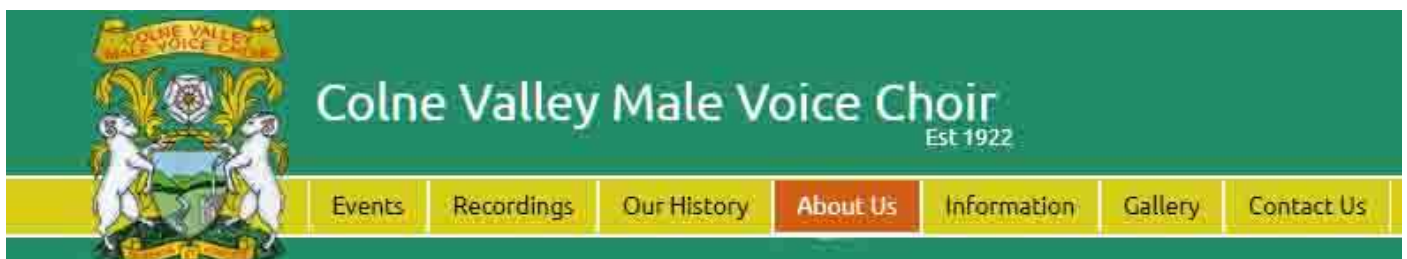






Photo: Rowan Crompton

Voice of the Valley wishes all its readers a  
Happy Christmas and  
a Prosperous New Year in 2019



Editor: John C Clark      Secretary, **Jenny Baxter**, is on 01484 645192.      Ring her to join our Readers' List or for other queries.      Our fine website is at [colnevalleymvc.org.uk](http://colnevalleymvc.org.uk)