



## Recruiting for the Boys: School's Tour 2109

Readers will know that the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir founded a 'boys' choir about 10 years back. Well, in order to recruit a new cohort of boys - some of the initial members are in university now - as many men as could, joined our unflappable leader, **Thom Meredith**, in a lightning tour of Colne valley primary schools on Thursday - 6 schools in one hectic day.

We rocked up at about 8:45 at **Marsden Juniors** on a cold, wet, miserable day - but it soon turned joyful. About 200 kids, most of them dressed as characters from books (March 7<sup>th</sup> was World Book Day,) filed in as we sang John Rutter's jazzy version of '**Joshua fit the battle of Jericho**'.



On the small stage at Nields Primary school

It seemed most of them knew the story about how Joshua had the trumpets blown and urged the children to shout so loud they broke down the enemy's walls.

So, that's our story" said Thom, "Our Colne valley contribution to World Book Day".

Then Thom invited the children to consider the different parts of the Choir, as each part, from, bass to tenor, sang South African song, '**Amen Sityakudumisa**'.

"Then this is where the magic happens," said Thom, "We put the four parts together and 'fingers crossed', we get harmony." He then got the kids to sing the drawn-out soprano call 'Masiti' and we were straight into our first joint performance.



Get the feel of it from this video made by teacher, **Stephanie Lawton**, at **Meltham Moor** primary school later in the day.

*"Whole school singing with Colne Valley Male Voice Choir this afternoon - what a brilliant assembly". 'How completely wonderful - joyous singing.' said one teacher.*

<https://youtu.be/r5eLMRQHcHo>

Sticking with the stories theme, Thom then got the kids to consider some of the poetic text to our next song. '**Let the river run, let all the dreamers wake the nation**', suggesting that the 'dreamers' were people with ideas and vision; people - maybe like our audience - who might one day create changes that will spread across the country.

And then about 20 of us men, with **Eric** on double bass, with **Chris** at the piano, **Barry** on bongos, **Stuart** on congas, and **Michael** guiding a troupe of volunteers on shakers, gave the 'CVMVC World Premiere' performance of the **Carly Simon** song. And it was terrific!

Certainly, by the end of the day, after the seventh performance, we were definitely getting the hang of it! (There's no recording, fortunately, but here's a fine version done by a mixed youth choir from New Zealand, which we'll soon be able to match.)



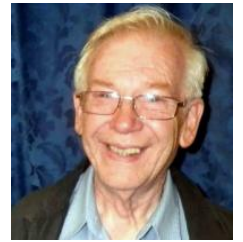
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hhg1U09kKo>



Add in the controlled chaos of three songs overlapped and with 'dance moves' in the '**Gospel Medley**' and you have a bunch of kids and men all having a great time.



One little one was so impressed she made bass, **Chris Hartley**, a present of a picture she'd just done. Whether it shows choir members or audience members or whether it's about something else entirely, Chris was sure but he was mightily touched by the generosity of the gift.



## You couldn't make it up!

After our half hour at Marsden, baritone, **Michael Parkinson**, grabbed his coat and dashed out to drive the mile or so to our next venue. (We only had about 15 minutes between performances.) He was distraught to find his keys were missing from his coat pocket.

Michael spent most of the next hour scouring the school hall or, out in the rain, searching the yard between school and car park in increasing desperation seeking, and failing to find, the car keys he must have dropped. Then more time calling the RAC and trying to source spare keys.

Meanwhile after the Nields Primary School concert, first tenor, **Ken Farr**, put on his coat and was perplexed to find a set of car keys in his pocket.

Finally, singers, keys, coats and equilibrium were restored in time for the afternoon gigs,

"You can't blame Ken at all," said a relieved Michael.

"Same coat, same make, same colour, same length. Identical even down to both coats having the same missing top button"



Michael, Ken, coats and keys reunited

## Recruitment is the aim

The point (not just the excuse) for this exercise was to attract more boys to singing with our CV Boys choir.

*"It was great to see you all in school today. Always enjoyable and too short! We have a lot of enthusiastic young people at our school and some very talented musicians amongst them. Hopefully your visit today will inspire some of the other children to join the Boys choir."* **Stephanie Lawton**

If the enthusiasm of staff and children says anything, we can hope for a good handful of new members.



The complex organisation of this whistle-stop tour - six concerts in six different venue in the space of one school day was most skilfully achieved by 'Boys' **Fairy Godmother, Linda Houston** and her partner, **Matt**. It all went very smoothly – invariably an indicator of lots of hard work behind the scenes.

**Well done Matt & Linda.**

And here's a chance to see both Boys and Men

Put this date in your diary.

Men and boys together for a happy afternoon of music and singing in our home village, Slaithwaite

That's on March 24th. What could be better?







## Lord Lovelace revisited

Voice of the Valley recently wrote a piece about Lord Lovelace, who came home from the war to find his home destroyed and his wife gone. In our last issue, VotV had depicted the story as a medieval fantasy about knights and castles. Take another look at the video set to CVMVC's own recording of the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7N-tmjexVo>

**But maybe that's not the whole truth about Lord Lovelace and Charles Causley's poem.**

Music Committee chairman, David Hirst, has been in touch with added gems of information that cast last newsletter's take on the poem into a new light.

### David remembers....

"I phoned him, you know." David told VotV, "When the piece was in rehearsal. I wanted to check; was it Lord Lovelace - 'lace' as in shoelace or 'Loveless' as in helpless?"

'Oh, it's love-less, definitely not 'lace' the poet was quick to tell me."

Causley went on to explain that many a soldier or sailor in the Second World War had come back home after years away and had found their homes bombed in enemy air raids. And quite often their wives or sweethearts were gone away and untraceable. Some returning servicemen re-enlisted, some never quite got over their despair.



**"He told me this with such poignancy" says David, "That I couldn't help wondering whether his poem might be about his own life - that the experience he gives Lord Lovelace might in some way be a mirror of his own."**

"He hadn't known that his poem had been set to music. Later I sent him a cassette tape with our Colne Valley recording. And he rang back to tell me he was thrilled with the recording, with the Choir's rendering and with **Goff Richard's** excellent dramatic music that brought out the darker undertones of the story."

## So should there be a rethink?

Well Causley's remarks to David certainly caused VotV Editor, John Clark, to rethink the poem, which up till then he had viewed as a sort of medieval fantasy.

Could it be seen as a much more modern story grounded in real life? Might it just as easily be depicted as a tale of a returning serviceman from WW2 discovering his former home destroyed and his lover gone?

And could it be a tale about Causley's own life?

We do know that much of his work is autobiographical. At one point, when asked about his life he did say, **'It's all in the poems.'**

And we do know some things that suggest strong parallels in his own life,

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## So, what do we know about Charles Causley?

Charles Causley was one of the great poets of his generation. He lived his whole life in Cornwall except for the years he served in the Royal Navy during WW2.



After training, he joined the destroyer, HMS Eclipse, at Scapa Flow as an Ordinary Seaman Coder. Convoy escort duties took him to West Africa, and then Gibraltar, and later to the Pacific. He was one of very few war poets from the lower ranks and served as a coder on the aircraft carrier HMS Glory, witnessing the surrender of the Japanese commanders there.



He was demobilised in 1946. On his return he moved back home and worked as a primary school teacher in Launceston.

From a heavily edited article by 'The War Poets' Association', we learn that "Charles Causley was unusual amongst the first rank of poets who saw active service in the Second World War. First and foremost, he survived.

The floodgates of his poetry only really opened after the war, in an ordinary civilian working life underpinned by naval experience, lore and language - as well as a powerful sense of 'survivor's guilt'. That haunted - and haunting - blend of reflection on comradeship, loss and anger informs many of his poems drawing upon war in one way or another. Some recount evocative episodes from Causley's six years of service.



But war, especially 1939-45, seems always inescapable. Even poems with no immediate connection to the conflict often subtly signal its lasting power and influence.”

He never married. “Because he was a lifelong bachelor, people thought he was homosexual. It troubled him.” writes his friend, Susan Hill, in her obituary. ‘I would have married,’ he said to me once, ‘..if ....’ and his sentence rather trailed off.”

He spent his later years, living alone, in a modest terraced house in his beloved Launceston, before dying in 2003.

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## So, is the poem autobiographical?

Is it a disguised medieval setting for events in Causley’s own life?

Well, it’s not impossible.

Charles Causley probably isn’t Lord Lovelace in any direct and literal sense but it might be fair to conclude that he knew, in a very personal sense, Lord Loveless’s story.

We also know Lord Lovelace is a fine song, written to fine music by Goff Richard and that it derives from a fine poem by a master poet,

Our very own Colne Valley poet, **Simon Armitage**, in a documentary, ‘The Poet’, broadcast by BBC4 during Causley’s centenary year, 2017, makes this comment:-

Simon says:-



*“Causley’s important. In the stepping stones, in the human chain of literature, he forms an important link. He’s a hand over- through Hardy, through Auden, through Betjeman - and then it’s his turn.”*



# An old friend writes....



*Hello Choir,*

*It's nice to see "Lord Lovelace" return. I have mixed memories of this terrific piece. When my friend John Clark "bullied" me into coming to a rehearsal for the first time, Lord Lovelace was being prepared for competition. Sitting in for the first time was very daunting; I couldn't get the words, or remember the tune ... I felt completely out of my depth.*

*I'd been put in the basses to start with and I remember how kind and encouraging James and the other guys were to a complete novice .... You'll be ok they said, but you're not a bass. They were right on all counts; I found my home in the second tenors, learning so much from Basil, Peter and the rest of the "engine room".*

*I soon found with practice and encouragement even I could get to grips with "Lord Lovelace"; so it is with fondness I remember this song, as my first tentative toe-dipping into the world of the male voice choir.*

*Joining the men of the CVMVC was one of my best decisions, and I look back at my time in the choir with great fondness.*

***Lord Lovelace rides again.***

*Best regards to all,*

*Howard Chadwick*

*(ex second tenor, now relocated to Scotland)*

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## Memories of Ken

Not many photos exist of Ken Denton, onetime Choir member, recently deceased. But here's one from 2010.

The Choir was at **Halton Gill** in the Dales, filming for the **Sainsbury's Christmas Advert**. (You'll notice Jamie Oliver in the centre).

During the incessant breaks as technicians prepared shots etc, the Choir gave an impromptu concert to the delight of everyone on set. It also helped keep us warm, outside in the near freezing weather, after about eight hours filming to capture the few seconds of the advert. This shot was taken at about midnight.

Ken, if you haven't spotted him, is at the front row right.





## Keith steps down.....

Keith is the chap who keeps Colne Valley Male Voice Choir in good financial health. Our Treasurer for 26 years, Keith has just decided it's time to step back from looking after our finances.

A Second tenor, Keith tells VotV, "I'm not stopping singing with the Choir; I've been at it for 45 years. I'm just handing over the Treasurer's post to a new team. Baritone, **Simon Durrans**, ably assisted by his book-keeper wife, **Lynn**, will gradually take on the task over the next couple of months and we expect the formal hand-over will be ratified at the AGM in July."

Keith had been hinting his stint was coming to an end, so the Management Committee wasn't entirely surprised - more grateful we've been so well managed over so many years.

At the last meeting, **Peter Denby**, on behalf of the existing Vice Presidents, and with the full support of all the Committee, invited Keith to become a **Vice President** of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir in recognition of his many years of service to the Choir as Treasurer. Keith was happy to accept this invitation.

## .....and John Radcliffe, too

In a second major change, the Choir's longest serving member, John Radcliffe, wrote to tell Choir Secretary, **Jenny Baxter**, that he was stepping down as a singing member. VotV followed up: "Me and Enid are both feeling our age now. It was wonderful to sing in the Town Hall Christmas concert last December but I suffered with my back standing on the risers, so it felt like time to call it a day. I've been in the Choir for over 62 years.

It's been a great pleasure to be part of it - I looked after the music library for many years and I've been Choir Pastor as well as a baritone. I'll always keep in touch."

**VotV says, Thank you, John**

## Old Guard reunites over lunch.

John - until very recently the longest-serving singing member and **John Smith** - now the oldest singing member - met up for lunch with long-serving treasurer, Keith, the other day, to swap a few anecdotes.



What's been your favourite song? asked VotV. No consensus at all but about 45 perfectly good possibilities. They'd have trouble on 'Desert Island Discs'.



# Raymond invents new I-phone charger



Just a few turns of the wheel every hour or so and  
the battery in my mobile is good to go!

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**Colne Valley Male Voice Choir**  
Est 1922

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