



Town Hall Christmas Concert has so many high points

“It’s always difficult to pick the highlight from a concert with so many excellent points.” writes VotV editor, John Clark. “But, for me, it probably came when the audience and the Choir offered warm, enthusiastic and sustained applause at the conclusion of the solo spot by pianist, **Keith Swallow**.”



Certainly they were applauding his keyboard dexterity and the performance quality of his rendering of Tchaikovsky’s ‘Waltz Christmas’ but, more perhaps, they were acknowledging his years of dedication to the Choir.



Most of the audience already knew but compère, **Simon Lindley**, reminded them that Keith had been the Choir’s accompanist for well over six decades and that, after this, his **51st consecutive Town Hall Christmas Concert**, he was planning to move to semi-retirement. The audience’s generous applause was to thank him not just for this concert but also for his astonishing longevity as a top-class musician.



The night had so many more high spots. Once again the town hall was packed - once again thanks to ticketing supremo, **Roger Fielding**, for tireless effort - and well over a 1,000 people participated in what has become an indispensable feature of the Huddersfield Christmas season.

The evening began with the lone, plaintive, treble voice, asking '**Who is he in yonder stall?**' It's a piece that builds in strength as the first singer is joined by the rest of the Boys Choir and then by the full but restrained force of nearly 60 men and finally by the mighty **Brighouse & Rastrick Band** to create a stirring crescendo; 'Tis the Lord, O Wondrous story, Tis the Lord, the King of Glory' And after, the music returns to the peace of the Nativity stable with the quietest of endings. It's not a piece that evokes riotous applause, rather there is a reverent silence before the applause starts. It was emotional and the writer thought, once again, what a privilege it is to be part of these wonderful and precious occasions.

Our guests, Brighouse & Rastrick Band, under the direction of the night's conductor, **Russell Gray** rapidly showed us why they are one of the leading brass bands in the country with a display of stunning musicianship. I particularly liked their version of '**Carol of the Bells**' by Ukrainian, **Mykola Dmytrovych Leontovych** - terrific, rapid, crisp and virtuoso playing and a fabulous percussion section.



Our excellent compère and long-time friend of the choir, Dr Lindley is a man who knows his medieval church Latin. So when he introduced the audience to the men and the boys combining in Gustav Holst's version of '**Personent Hodie**', he was able to cue the audience in to what the words, we were singing, meant. It had been a challenge in rehearsals to remember the words but, on the night, we pulled it off - they came out clearly enunciated and with emphasis in the right places - phew!



It's clear that **Colne Valley Boys** can steal the hearts of the audience. And so they did, yet again, in their solo numbers, especially the ever-popular '**Walking in the Air**' from 'The Snowman.'



The first half finale was another high point. Both choirs and the band came together for '**You'll never walk alone**'. This is a hit song from the musical, 'Carousel', but over the years it has taken on a life of its own in popular consciousness. One strand of this, for Choir members, at least, is the thought that the version we sang was arranged by our deputy pianist and stand-in conductor, **Philip Baxter**, now sadly departed and still much-missed.

The second half was brilliant. There's a kind of feedback loop that operates. Performers realise that the audience is enthusiastically on their side and that encourages them to richer performance, which, in turn, raises still further the audience enjoyment. So it was with, **Dan Forrest's** version of the popular hymn, '**How Great thou Art**' with its stirring range of choral dynamics and its 'Rachmaninoff-esque' piano accompaniment bringing out the best in the Maestro.

And again, in lighter vein, we had **Lynn Hudson's**, playful version of Winter Wonderland, with the basses providing a cheeky commentary.

The evening concluded with band and Choir together, with our fabulous Music Director, Thom Meredith, conducting **Goff Richard's**, '**A Merry Little Christmas**' - a beautifully-crafted medley of popular carols and Christmas songs.



Thom, sporting as very snazzy shiny jacket for the finale, once again master-minded the whole evening - meanwhile 'man of the night', **Keith Swallow**, with typical diffidence, wondered what all the fuss was about.



What a night!





‘Me too’, says tenor Stuart

Your editor was talking the other day to veteran first tenor **Stuart Iles**, about the Town Hall concert and mentioned that it would probably be Keith Swallow’s last one as he was planning to step down.

“Me too” said Stuart. “I also reckon this one will be my last one.

My health isn’t the best - and, like Keith - I’m knocking on a bit. We are both well into our eighties and it’s getting a bit tough, these cold winter nights getting across from Saddleworth every Monday.

I’ve had a good run. It’s been great and I shall miss it but I think it’s time for me, to step down, too.”

The Editor had heard that Stuart had gathered quite a collection of Choir memorabilia and urged him to bring a few samples for VotV.

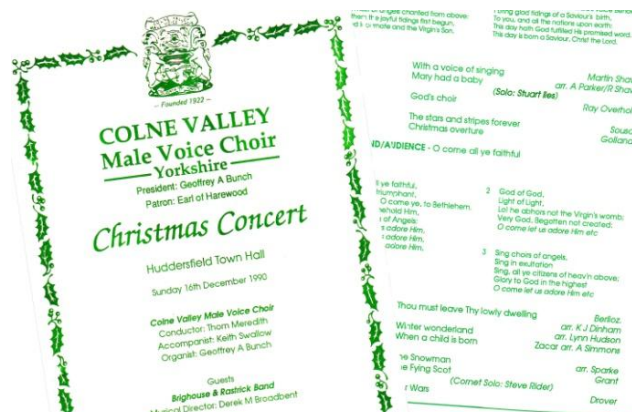
What follow are Stuart - and wife, **Brenda’s** - recollections of close on 34 years of close association with the Choir:-



Quite a collection - he wasn’t kidding

“In 1986 C.V.M.V.C. were going to Germany and contacted Saddleworth Male Voice Choir to see if any of their singers wanted to join them.

*That was my introduction to the Choir; about six of us went. When we got back I was asked by the late **Melvin Smith** to join the choir. He said, ‘Sing with us when you are not out with Saddleworth’ and that’s what I have done for the last thirty three years.*



I was asked to help the choir by singing solo spots in some concerts, including in the Town Hall.

The most memorable were Clifton (Nottingham), Jablonec (Czechoslovakia) and the Villa Marina in the Isle of Man.

Stuart sang 'Mary had a Baby' at the 1990 Town Hall concert.



Stuart is the tall, bearded chap on the first row on this 1992 visit to the Czech Republic.

ST MARY'S CHURCH, CLIFTON

CLIFTON

MUSIC & FLOWER

FESTIVAL

THURSDAY JULY 4th 2002
FRIDAY JULY 5th 2002
SATURDAY JULY 6th 2002

ORGANISED BY THE
ST MARY'S FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

Reverend David Milner
 Clare Ashton
 Keith Elkins
 Lesley Whitehead
 Mike Ashton
 Lynne Smith

SATURDAY JULY 6th 2002

THE COLNE VALL MALE VOICE CHO

Musical Director
Accompanist

Thom Meredith
Keith Swallow

THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID
O SACRUM CONVIVIM
MORTE CHRIS
 [Solo - Stuart Iles]

THE LORD'S PRAYER
 [from 'African Sanctus']
I WAS GLAD [Psalm 122]

GWAHODDIAD
LILY OF THE VALLEY
WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

THE HOLY CITY
 [Solo - Sam Blagbrough]
ANOTHER DAY
RIDE THE CHARIOT
 [Solo - Arthur Quarmby]

TOM THE PIPER'S SON
PSALM 126

IN THE GLOAMING
 [Solo - Norman Dearnley]
YELLOW BIRD
LOVE COULD I ONLY TELL THEE

Randall Thompson
 Lodovico Viadana
 Emrys Jones

David Fanshawe
 Herbert Sumson

arr. John Tudor Davies
 arr. Edmund Walters
 Trad. arr. Denys Hood

INTERVAL

Stephen Adams arr. Dori
 Delyth Rees arr. Valerie I
 arr. William Henry Smith

Piano Solo
[Keith Swallow]

Edmund Walters
 George E Stead

Baritone Solo
[Raymond Ellis]

Lady Arthur Hill arr. Doris Ar
 Norman Luboff arr. Marcel G
 J M Capel arr. Doris Arnold

In 2002, at the lovely Clifton Village Church, Stuart again had a solo contribution.

I looked forward to all the competitions, particularly, the National in Rhyll Pavillion, Cornwall, Coleraine, Cork and Newcastle on Tyne and, most specially, singing with the winning choir at Llangollen in 1998 and 1999.



Looking forward to the Coleraine trip - Stuart's mentor, Mel Smith, is 4th from left

The concerts that stand out in my memory are singing in Croydon, Huddersfield Town Hall, the Albert Hall but my two favourites are Rouen and Chartres Cathedrals.

I have enjoyed my time with C.V.M.V.C.; making many friends. It's been the greatest of pleasures being directed by Thom (who walks on water!) and accompanied by Keith.

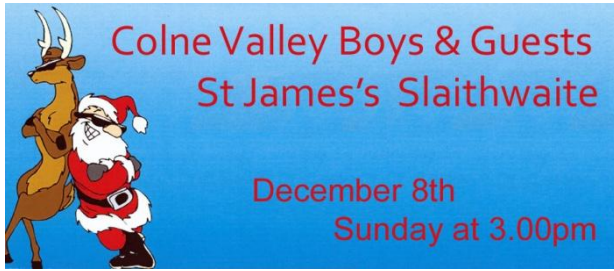


I could have been born and lived anywhere in the world but as it happened only a cock-stride from Slaithwaite.

I have been a very lucky man."

We wish you well,
Stuart & Brenda





Boys Concert was terrific

Sunday last saw Colne Valley Boys, once again, hosting their Christmas Concert: one which is embedding itself in local knowledge as an excellent start to the festive season.

They appeared with **Kirklees Musica Youth Brass Band** and with the ad-hoc '**Teachers Choir**' from Kirklees schools. All this talent was knitted together by **Thom Meredith**, helped by the boys' accompanist - and soon to be principal accompanist to the men, **Christopher Pulleyn**.

The Boys - 11 small ones and 6 seniors - may have been a little depleted by availability and illness but they certainly shone in quality. They were excellent, as were the teachers and the band.

It's a happy event and the many Choir members, who were there, enjoyed being invited out to join Boys and Band in the finale pieces: 'Pine Cones' and 'Rudolf'.



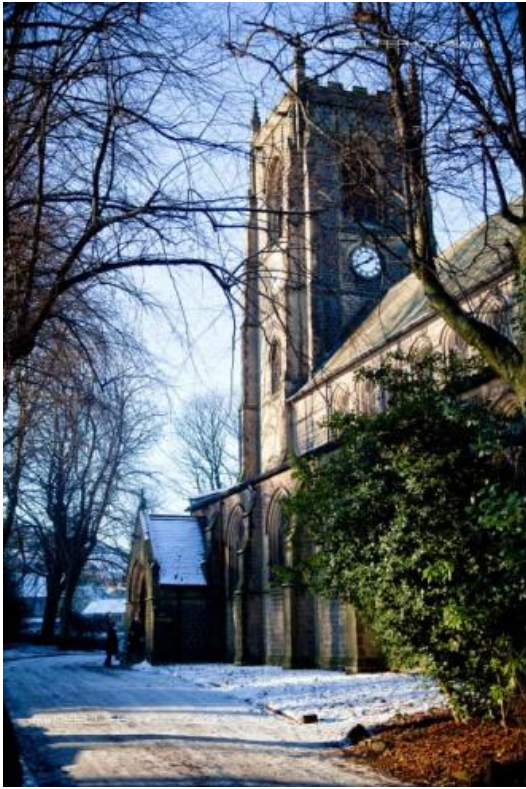
As usual, much praise should go to **Linda Houston** and to her husband, first tenor, **Matt**, for supporting and organising this lovely concert.



The Boys sang, '**It feels like Christmas**'. Here's the original Muppet version to help you catch the mood they evoked on Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIRpGj7LWS4>





A night of joy at Marsden

Marsden Silver Prize Band held its annual Christmas Concert in the heart of the village at St Bartholomew's Parish Church and Colne Valley Male Voice Choir were privileged to be their guests.



And what a joy it was, not only for the performers but also for the hundreds of Colne Valley locals who turn up - it seems more each year - to fill the Church and enjoy this very special relaxed and friendly concert.



Our jovial host, as ever, was Marsden's very own **Peter Armitage**, who got the show started, welcoming the audience and introducing the band.

"Marsden Silver Prize Band" he said, "was formed 130 years ago and has been part of the fabric of the village and the Colne Valley ever since.

And we're proud of it"

The Band gave us many reasons to renew it in their first set.



Our compere, then went on the say, “At this point we generally have a young female soprano to do a solo spot. This year we have a male, a baritone and someone maybe not quite so young - **Thom Meredith**” In his first set, Thom sang excerpts from **Messiah**, always much-appreciated by Huddersfield folk.

Then, before he introduced the Choir, Peter said, “He told me not to make a fuss but I can’t not say something about **Keith Swallow** in this his last concert before retiring as the Choir’s accompanist.

It’s phenomenal - nearly 63 years in the job, fitting the Choir in with all his professional engagements, as a solo pianist and as the accompanist to hundreds of the most talented musicians in the country”.

The audience agreed and applauded warmly. Keith played a bar of the Chopin ‘Death March’ and hid behind a column.



Keith prepares for the Town Hall concert last Sunday

The Choir's two sets were terrific; perhaps the most musically demanding was Sir Arnold Bax's setting of a medieval carol, '**Now is the Time of Christymas**'.

For this we were again joined by talented flautist - as we had been in the Huddersfield Town Hall the week before - **Issy Haley Porteous**.

It's a very demanding piece for flute, piano and choir but Issy brought clarity and excellent communication to the piece.

And she joyously enriched '**The Holly and the Ivy**' in the second half.



Issy Haley Porteous

Well done, Issy



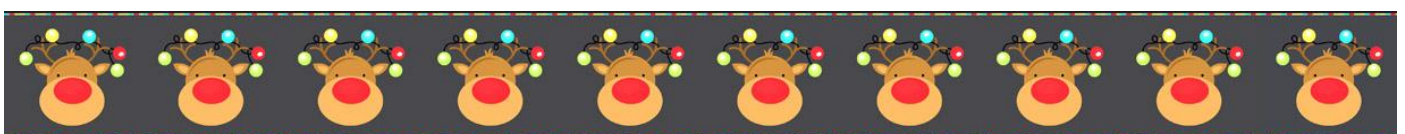
How it looked in Marsden in 2017

After the interval, the Choir once again performed admirably, with a set of more informal pieces, including the Jerry Hermann song, '**We need a Little Christmas**'

But the culminating musical performance came from the fine Band, very ably led by conductor **Andrew Lofthouse**. His solo in the band's Jazz version of '**O Holy Night**' was simply stunning. But to my mind the performance of the night was Andrew's own arrangement of '**Mary, did you know?**' After an extensive vote of thanks to the many local people who make this friendly concert possible, the Band, Choir and audience joined in the final number; Goff Richards, '**Merry little Christmas**'.



Andrew Lofthouse: led a fine Band in a fabulous evening

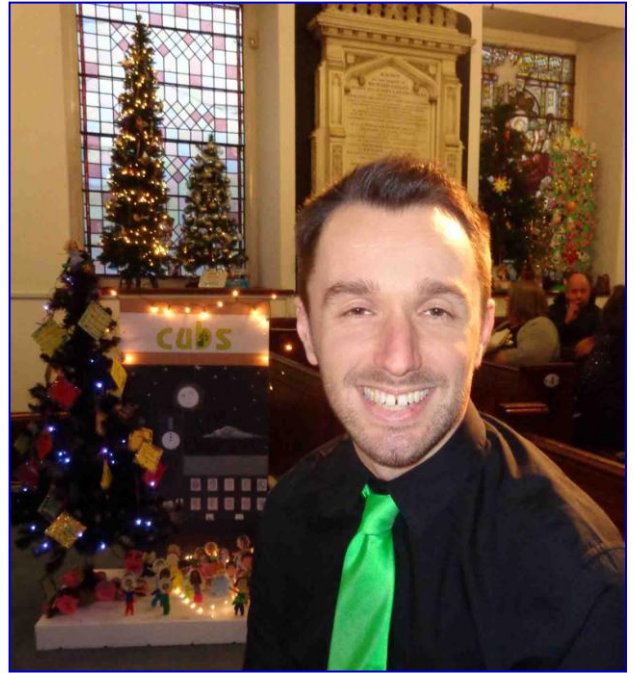


Chris Pulley talks to VotV

*"People might have heard that I will be absent for a few weeks in the first few months in my new position as **Principal Accompanist** to the Choir.*

It's a strange way to start a new job, you might think. So I'm writing to put the Choir and our followers in the picture and to let you know exactly what's happening.

*Last year I decided to leave **Opera North's** education department. I had been working there for about 5 years. In that time, I'd been given amazing opportunities to work with the MainStage side of the company, accompanying Opera North choristers, artist recitals, playing for rehearsals, and performing with the orchestra.*



*I realised I had so much more to learn and I felt it was time for me to move on. So I decided to push myself, and audition for the Junior Fellowship Repetiteur position at the **Royal Northern College of Music**. This is a short-term position that is offered to developing artists, to help them gain skills in rehearsal for full scale Opera productions.*

*There is **only one place offered** at a time, with no tuition fees, and a scholarship provided too, and I was fortunate enough to have been offered the position this year. Having established and developed a career with no formal music conservatoire education, this is a big stamp of approval and great for my CV.*

You essentially become a member of staff, and your responsibilities are to accompany all rehearsals for the two big Opera productions in the year, to coach the singers on their roles, and to accompany vocal students in competitions, recitals, master-classes and opera scenes.



*I've just finished working on the first Opera production which was **Poulenc's 'Dialogue des Carmélites'**, based on a true story about nuns that martyr themselves in the French Revolution.*

I already feel I've learnt so much and developed my playing from the experience, in a variety of ways.



*The second opera I'll be working on next term is **Mansfield Park** by **Jonathan Dove** - a much lighter opera based on Jane Austen's book. It's quite modern, but melodious and I am enjoying getting started with it.*

***And here's where my engagements problem appears:-** Unfortunately the college's production schedule for their operas calls for rehearsals on Monday evenings - something I didn't actually realise until after I started in September! I'm tied in and it means I won't be at Choir rehearsals with the men or the Boys.*

*This is such a prestigious and worthwhile experience that I am so grateful to be able to do it, and I'm grateful to **Thom** and **David Hirst** for understanding the opportunity it provides me with. It should benefit the choir too when I return a better pianist and vocal coach.*

***It's definitely a brief delay!** I love my Choral work and I love staying local. I will be with the Choir starting in January and then back again regularly from mid-March onwards. And I do expect to be able to play for the choir at the **Mrs Sunderland Competition**.*

So, my apologies to the Choir, for not being with you very much in my first few weeks. My choir work is priority! I hope you'll accept that in the grand scheme of things, it isn't really such a long time I'm away for.

Thanks,

Chris



Joe makes an offer

Colne Valley Chairman, Joe Stones, has set himself a target - he wants 100 singers in the Choir by the time we reach our 100 years anniversary in 2022.

So he's keen to encourage more men and boys to discover how good it is to be part of our great Choir.

Here's his message to anyone who might be wondering about it - Come down on a Monday night and try it out - it could be the best thing you do in 2020.



Men, our gift to you this Christmas!



Est. 1922

Come and sing with us in the New Year from Monday 6th January 2020!

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 along to a few rehearsals. When you first come, you can either just sit and see what our rehearsals are like or join in and 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 in developing singing talent, led by our long standing and eminent Musical Director, Thom Meredith.

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

For male singers aged 8 to 18 years old, Colne Valley Boys also led by Thom Meredith, rehearse every Monday in school term, 5.30 – 7pm at the same rehearsal venue. Prospective members and parents/guardians 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 www.colnevalleyboys.com



COLNE VALLEY MALE VOICE CHOIR ENGAGEMENTS DIARY 2020

Saturday 22 February

Mrs Sunderland Music Festival and competitions

Sunday 29 March

Afternoon at St Paul's Hall, Huddersfield: **'Concert for Keith'**
Maestro Keith Swallow, operatic bass, Paul Hudson & other guests



An unmissable date



Sunday 17 May

Afternoon concert with Colne Valley Boys in Slaithwaite Church

Saturday 27 June

Evening concert in Halifax Minster

Saturday 4 July

Concert on the Hill - Music and Fireworks again at Salendine Nook
We're with Lindley Band, Lindley Junior School Choir and Honley MVC

Saturday 22 August

Concert at Scarborough Music Festival in Queen Street Methodist Hall

Saturday 19 September

Joint concert with Marsh Ladies in Holy Trinity Church (date may change)

Sunday 13 December

Christmas concert at Huddersfield Town Hall with guests B&R Band

Saturday 19 December

Christmas concert: guests of Marsden Silver Band at Marsden Church (tbc)



Voice of the Valley

Editor: John C Clark

Keep in touch with the Choir and its activities Just send your name and email address to Choir secretary, Jenny, at jennybaxter@btinternet.com and we'll add you to the Readers' List for our most enjoyable email newsletter, 'Voice of the Valley'. After that it will arrive automatically in your email once a month for as long as you care to receive it. It's completely free – you can be sure we won't use your address for any other purpose - and it will both entertain you and keep you up to date with what the Choir is up to.

And don't forget to check out our website:

www.colnevalleymvc.org.uk

