



Kick in the teeth

On Monday (May 17th) we were jubilant: able to meet up, able to get together and sing together for the first time in 14 months. Yes, there were all sorts of precautions and our rehearsal room could only accommodate the choir in two halves - but we were back singing and it was great.



The following day the government had a change of mind. Our reunion turned out to be very short-lived and now we are - effectively - back in lockdown with only Zoom to fall back on.

It's a blow.

On May 17th the view was that the number of singers who could meet up was limited by the size of the rehearsal space and the Choir's adherence to various precautionary measures.

For **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** our rehearsal room was large enough to allow up to 20 singers to convene with appropriate distancing. So Group A met first and was followed after an 'Air out' period with group B. Most members were thrilled to be back.

But by May 18th the rules were amended. Now **only 6 singers** can congregate indoors. In practice that means rehearsals 'in real life' are off the menu once again.



The Government seems to be taking the view that whilst it's OK to allow 8,000 football fans to gather together, to sing, 'Abide with Me' at full volume and to roar on their teams on the pitch, that a mere 20 men - probably all doubled-vaccinated, sanitised, in a well-ventilated space and kept two metres apart - would be engaged in too dangerous an activity to be allowed at the moment.

(Oliver Dowden – the minister responsible)

Sounds dubious, doesn't it?

And it's a big disappointment.

“I suppose Mondays at the Con Club are off, now?”



“I'm afraid so.” writes Thom Meredith, “Such a shame that the guidance has changed - it felt so positive to be back together, singing again...”

There are lots of petitions flying around as these latest guidelines seem ludicrously unequal.

But we'd better do what's right - the Choral Society were all ready to rehearse on Tuesday evening and called their rehearsal off when the new guidance came out.”

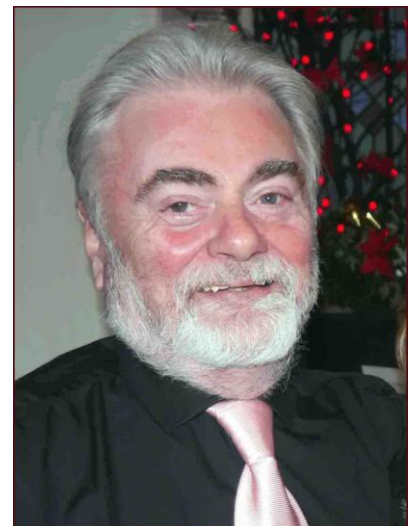
Thom

“Isn't it a shame that the government in its wisdom decided to change the rules the day after we got back together again at last.

At least for the men. **Colne Valley Boys** choir is still able to rehearse.

And hopefully we will all be back to it soon.”

Matt Houston



The Government's volte-face was reported as follows:-

From Harriet Sherwood, Guardian Online May 23rd:-

Distraught choirs forced back to Zoom after late Covid rule change in England

The communal elation of last Monday didn't last as the government decided that singing still presents a health risk



The Royal Choral Society at the Royal Albert Hall in London, 2014. The choir will perform Handel's Messiah at the weekend.
Photograph: Kevin Day

There was an emotional atmosphere in a large, modern church in Guildford, Surrey, last Monday evening as members of the **Vivace Chorus** sang together for the first time since March 2020. Savouring their reunion, they focused on favourites such as Bach and Mozart.



“There was a real feeling of camaraderie and connection,” said **Gill Perkins**, a soprano in the amateur choir.

“It’s a shared experience that we’d taken for granted before, and then missed so much. One person said she felt she’d got her life back.”

The choir was delighted to resume rehearsals for concerts and performances this summer. After 14 months on Covid-enforced Zoom, the Vivace Chorus was back in business.

At exactly the same time almost 200 miles to the north, the **Rotherham Tuneless Choir** was also meeting. Composed of people who love singing but aren't very good at it, the choir was thrilled to find five new members as well as local MP Alex Stafford at its first session in months.

"It was a really good night. People were glad to be back and were saying they can't wait until next week," said choir leader **Becky Power**. The choir belted out 'Que Sera, Sera' and the Dave Clarke Five's, 'Glad All Over'."



Becky Power

But the next day brought crashing disappointment to the Vivace Chorus, the Rotherham Tuneless Choir and thousands of other amateur choirs across England.

Without warning, the government updated its guidance to say that, in England, non-professional singing could take place only in groups of up to six people indoors. The new rules – published the day after a significant relaxation of Covid restrictions, and contravening musicians' expectations – were met with anger and despair.

"I was absolutely fuming," said Power. "It's contradictory and confusing and has completely messed up all the hard work we put in." Perkins reported a "deluge of anger and upset".



Anna Lapwood, director of music at Pembroke College, Cambridge, tweeted:

"This is ridiculous and another blow to our industry ... why are people allowed to eat in crowded restaurants when choirs can't meet socially distanced in well ventilated rooms?"

Glen Dempsey, assistant director of music at Ely cathedral, posted:

"10,000 football fans singing in football stadiums, dozens singing in pubs, yet only six are allowed to sing in our cavernous cathedrals, churches, theatres and concert halls."

Dempsey said it was the latest blow for professional musicians who run amateur choirs or perform with them. "It's difficult to see what the dangers are regarding amateur singers that don't apply to professional singers."



He was forced to cancel a rehearsal for the cathedral's 60-strong voluntary choir on Friday. "It's back to Zoom," he said. "It seems that every other bit of society is opening up but choirs are facing a retrograde step."

The Association of British Choral Directors said that the advice, "diverges from what we had been led to believe, that non-professional music activity would return outdoors and indoors in England from 17 May, without limits on numbers other than those dictated by the size of a venue (in order to allow for social distancing)".



"This update was deeply disappointing for all of us who have spent so much time carefully planning indoor rehearsals and we are concerned that the guidance for amateur singing imposes unreasonable and unworkable restrictions that other leisure and amateur activities are not currently facing."

In the Commons, **Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden** told MPs he shared the frustration over choirs, but "the decision was made on the basis of very clear public health guidance". Concerns have been raised over the past year that singing may increase transmission of the virus.

'But the restrictions had no solid evidential basis' said **Bob Chilcott**, a choral composer, conductor and singer.

"I think what's really upset people in the artistic community is the complete inability to engage with the fact that we have a strong cultural life in this country and we have to keep it alive."



"Music was not seen as a priority despite the fact that **about 2.2 million people are members of about 40,000 choirs**", he added.

Perkins said: "We don't have as powerful a voice as football, we don't have huge economic power, and it doesn't feel like we're being listened to."

Dowden did add that he hoped full rehearsals and performances could resume on June 21st assuming the final stage of the roadmap is implemented.

Voice of the Valley hopes so, too!

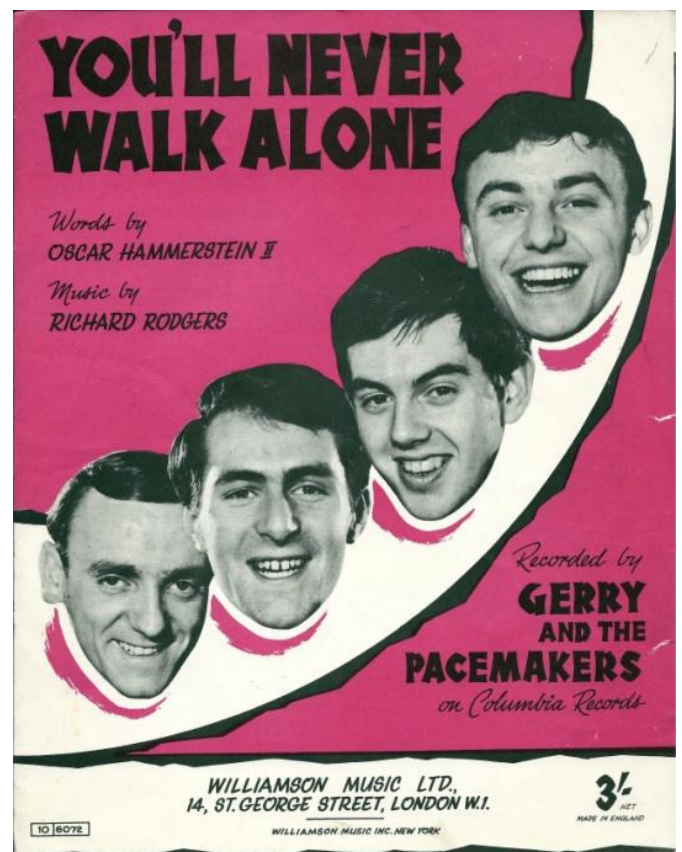
David Hirst writes.....

Reprise on your article from January's VotV, noting that **Gerry of Gerry and the Pacemakers** had passed away...

"Today I was sorting out a lot of old stuff including lots of music that I used when performing in Clubs many years ago and I came across this three bob – that's three Shillings - (15p) copy of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' with Gerry (Marsden) and the Pacemakers pictured on the front.

On the first page of the actual music it reads.... with great warmth like a hymn.

*They actually recorded the song in 1963 and thereafter it soon became the 'Anfield Anthem', beloved of **Liverpool Football Club** fans*



I was on the same bill as Gerry



I didn't mention it to you back in January, but it reminded me that in about 1968 I appeared on the same bill as them at a club in **Newton Aycliffe**, Darlington.

A girl soloist and I sang in the first half. Gerry and the Pacemakers, running late, literally rushed in to set up for a quick 30 minute 'Topping the Bill' spot. And just as quickly they rushed off again to a late nightclub gig in Newcastle, leaving the two of us to 'calm the audience down' and finish off the evening's show.

I have always liked this song from the musical **Carousel** and used it many times when performing.

However, that evening I was pre-warned by the Club's administration not to sing it that night, but in fact in the circumstances I had already decided not to do so.

Gerry certainly did sing it and it was very well received, but I think the Pacemakers would have been very brave if they were to sing it in later years on the turf of the 'Toon Army', **Newcastle United's** partisan football Geordies.

I have got to say I think the Choir's CD rendering with Marsden Silver Prize Band Band recorded in 2003 and replicated many times since with the Choir's many other performances with other Brass Bands, is absolutely brilliant, all enhanced by **Philip Baxter's** Choir arrangement and the wonderful and haunting band parts by **Steve Bradnum**, leaving 'shivers down the spine'.



Click on this link to hear our version: <https://youtu.be/Ulh7SNCKkll>

Muntra Musikanter gets back to singing together

Old chums and rivals, the fabulous Finnish Choir, Muntra Musikanter, have been in lockdown, too.

The Colne Valley men performed with the Muntra Musikanter in the last Cornwall International Male Voice Choir Festival.

They emerged to some kind of live rehearsal on May 24th and seem to have been almost as pleased about it as we were.

Muntra Musikanter is at Teater Viirus, Helsinki, Finland. "4th May 2021

'Finally singing along with many singer brothers again despite a slightly chilly evening.

Muntra Musikanter wants to take the opportunity to thank Helsinki's Teater Viirus for the fine Amphitheatre they let us have for tonight's reunion.'



Best wishes to them - let's hope their return to normal live rehearsal and performance runs more smoothly than ours has.

'Voice of the Valley' wins award



Your editor was surprised and most pleased the other night in Slaithwaite, when Choir Chairman, Joe Stones, said 'John, hold on a minute I've got something for you.' And he passed over a little box.

He then told me 'that the Management Committee, on behalf of the Choir, had decided that a small thank you was called for to recognise the contribution that the 'Voice of the Valley' has made to the Choir over the worst of the period of lockdown, when we been so shut off from our music and from contact with each other.'

Well it gave me a warm feeling.



I've traded the gift card for a bottle of very posh whisky.

It's not the sort you gulp down. It's the sort of whisky that you approach reverently and savour every little sip - so it'll last me months. (probably)

And I shall think of the kindness of the Choir and recall that warm feeling.

Thank you, chaps

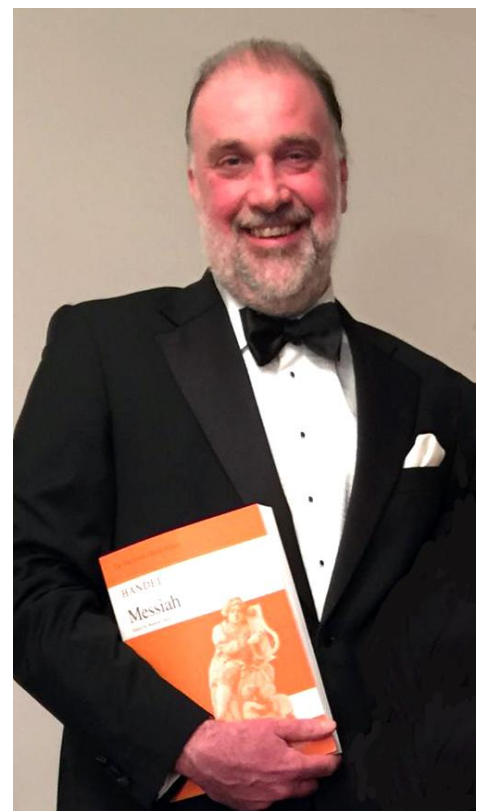
Simon wins again

The winner of the last 200 Club draw was a familiar name in the list of luck winners - yet again, it was Baritone, **Simon Durrans'** number that was drawn out the barrel, winning him just about enough to cover his initial investment for another twelve months. Well Done, Simon.

And well done **Kieran Chadha** who just scooped £185!

You can maybe be as lucky! Get a 200 Club number now

	<p>Just one pound a week buys you one of the 200 Club numbers.</p> <p>There's a good chance of winning: £45 in prize money weekly, £185 in the monthly draw and two whopping £1,000 draws each year.</p> <p>Even if you don't win, you win - because half of the fund supports Choir concerts and performances.</p> <p>Contact Choir Secretary, Jenny, on 01484 645192</p>
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Well it made Ralph smile...

Veteran tenor Ralph Munt sent me this... 'miles per gallon' message...

Something for the magazine.

It made me smile, he writes....

'The average person walks 900 miles a year & drinks 22 pints of beer.

Therefore the average person does 41 miles to the gallon. Not bad!'

Regards

Ralph

Well, it's quite amusing, Ralph, but have you done the maths?

To get 41 mpg you have to drink 22 **gallons** of beer - 176 pints - that's about half a pint a day (which sounds a plausible average, just about.)

But walking 900 miles per year?

900 miles pa walking is about 17 miles a week, more than 2 miles a day - is that credible?

VotV set out to find the truth...

According to the NHS the average British person walks between 3,000 and 4,000 steps a day.

10,000 steps - depending on the length of your stride - is the equivalent of walking about 5 miles, which may sound like an awful lot if you're not particularly active.

Three to four thousand steps works out at about 12.3 miles per week - just 640 miles per year - and that does count pottering about in your kitchen as part of the mileage.

Therefore the average person does about 29 miles to the gallon - at most

Not that good really!

Unhealthy Britain: half of adults walk less than a mile a day – survey

Poll commissioned by Cancer Research UK finds 52% of adults walk only 2,000 steps a day, figures described as ‘worrying’ and likely to increase cancer risk.



A new poll has found half of UK adults walk only a mile a day or less, and 17% less than a quarter of a mile.

Britons are being urged to take to their feet after research showed more than half of adults walk less than a mile a day.

A poll of 2,198 adults conducted by YouGov and commissioned by the charity Cancer Research UK found that on average 52% of UK adults walk a mile a day or less during the week – the equivalent of 2,000 steps – and almost a fifth (17%) walk less than a quarter of a mile.

The survey asked people what stopped them walking. About a third said a lack of time puts them off walking more; while a quarter put their inactivity down to bad weather.

Smaller numbers said they did not feel safe walking on their own, while others put it down to the fact there wasn't anywhere nice to walk near them.

The long-term benefits of being active have been shown in numerous studies. A person who walks between 7,000 and 10,000 steps a day qualifies as “moderately active”, according to the UK National Obesity forum.

Cancer Research UK has warned that inactivity increases the risk of cancer. About 160,000 people a year die from cancer, the charity said, but thousands of these cases could be prevented by regular exercise.

The charity also said being active helps people maintain a healthy weight, which also reduces the risk of cancer. Being overweight or obese is the single biggest cause of preventable cancer in the UK after smoking. It is linked to 13 types of cancer including bowel, breast, and pancreatic.



Katie Edmunds, Cancer Research UK health information officer, said: "These are worrying figures. While our frenzied lifestyles can make it tough for people to find time to keep active, any level of exercise is better than none, so building some moderate activity into your daily routine can really make a difference."

She added: "For many people a spot of brisk walking is the easiest way to do this ... As well as causing mood-lifting chemical changes in the brain, you'll enjoy a sense of achievement from taking on a new challenge."

To motivate people to get walking, Cancer Research UK is encouraging people to get fitter by challenging them to take 10, 000 steps a day this June.

Send me a picture, tell me your news....



We had a false dawn but the times of social isolation, continue and VotV readers, whether singers or audience-members, still can't meet each other except in penny numbers.



But we can keep in touch.

Let the VotV Editor know if something happens to you, that might be of interest and has some - connection - however tenuous - to the Choir.

Doesn't matter if you are not very confident writing, I'll help you put into publishable shape.

Voice of the Valley Editor: John C Clark
Ring Choir Secretary, Jenny, on 01484 645192
to join us or join our Readers' List or for other queries

And see our website to get the full story

colnevalleymvc.org.uk

Colne Valley



Male Voice Choir