

Voice *of the* Valley



COLNE VALLEY MALE VOICE CHOIR NEWSLETTER

CHRISTMAS UPDATE

More news from that magnificent night at Huddersfield Town Hall

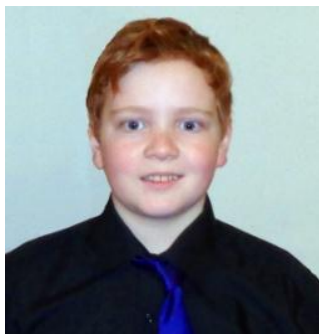


A magnificent hall, richly decorated for Christmas, a magnificent brass band and two magnificent choirs made for a happy return to Christmas traditions in Huddersfield last night.

This was the return on December 12th 2021 of the annual **Christmas Festival** concert by **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** with their regular guests, **Brighouse & Rastrick Band** and **Colne Valley Boys**.

A happy return, indeed, to a festive tradition which has run every year for well over half a century. (Except, of course, for last December, when the Choir had with colleagues, Marsden Silver Prize Band, created a remarkably successful Online Concert on YouTube.)

It was good to be back!



Talented organist, **Caius Lee**, had played a spirited introductory fanfare on the Town Hall's wonderful Father Willis organ as the audience settled.

Then the house lights went down, silence filled the hall and boy soloist, **Oliver Parr** sang the first few plaintive lines of '**Who is He in Yonder Stall**'. The band and choirs joined in and the volume grew.

It was in those first few, magic moments that audience and performers alike knew it was going to be a joyful return.

Admittedly, the choirs went about in 'dress' masks to match their dress suits until they came out to perform.

They assembled onstage further apart from each other than would be typical in order to preserve a measure of social distancing.

All the Town Hall staff were masked and everyone in the audience, too, most of the time

The masked man on the right is Tom Law.



Maybe, the Town Hall maybe wasn't quite as packed as usual. There were fewer people there than the number of tickets sold - one assumes that some who planned to come were put off by concern about the 'Omicron Variant'. Nonetheless, there were close on 700 in the room, seemingly determined to have a good night.

Once again our genial compère was the very knowledgeable, **Dr Simon Lindley**, introducing the programme. He it was, who, early on, invited the audience to enjoy that fine carol, '**Christians Awake**'.

But this time - and for the first time ever - he suggested concert-goers might be best advised not to rise and join in but if they really wanted to sing then to keep their masks on to do it.

Drat Covid!



But back to the music

Sunday's concert held few musical surprises and none the worse for that! We were coming back - or at least as much as Covid will allow - to the normal and traditional; fine singing and the very highest quality of playing by the band - surely an ensemble of world-class calibre.

On this occasion they were led by cheerful, Danish-born, **Stig Mærsk**.

Their performance of Morten Lauridsen's, '**O Magnum Mysterium**' was hauntingly beautiful. It is in the slower, quieter items that musical mastery is most evident and this band demonstrated it to the full.



It is perhaps invidious to pick out individual players from the superb assemblage of musicians that is **Brighouse and Rastrick Band** but their euphonium soloist in '**O Holy Night**' was perhaps this reviewer's favourite.

Brilliantly done; **Dan Thomas**.



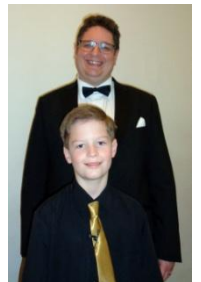
Colne Valley Boys did a brilliant set



Perhaps the highlight of the first half was when father and son duo, **James** and **Richard Cooke** took the verses of Leon Dubinsky's, "**We Rise Again**".

This fine and moving modern anthem builds steadily and, when both the choirs and the band join in, it reaches a grand full-forte, climax.

This thrilling ending brought forth loud cheers from an enthusiastic audience.



Especially memorable in the second half was that evergreen Victorian melodramatic story, '**The Star of Bethlehem**' a piece arranged specially for Colne Valley Male Voice Choir by their long-time conductor, **George E Stead**.

George had been at the head of the Choir for 44 years until 1969. His fine version of the classic by Adolphe Adam, was sung in memory of him and his recently deceased daughter, **Muriel**.

were many of the Choirs' items by the pianist for Colne Valley Boys and the newly-appointed accompanist for the Senior Choir, **Christopher Pulleyn**.

(Concert photos: thanks to Connor Lennon, Sophie Stones and Lendl Sifaka)



The audience had been having a wonderful evening and they were far from disappointed by the choice of finale. It was to be, announced Simon, that always popular compilation of traditional yuletide songs by that clever musician, **Goff Richards**. As is customary, it was our highly talented Musical Director, **Thom Meredith**, who conducted both Choir and Band, leading everyone onstage and most of the concert-goers in the hall singing along, through a medley of favourite festive tunes, which culminates in the Choir wishing the audience, "**Merry Christmas**".

Take a bow, Thom





A cracking do at Marsden

Two years after the last one, **Marsden Silver Prize Band** were back for their Christmas Concert at Saint Bartholomew's Church - and once again **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** were honoured to be their guests in a night of fine music and Christmas bonhomie.

It's come to be seen as an essential part of the Marsden Christmas - the event that really gets Christmas cracking.

And this year a good audience was keen to join once again in a jolly and entertaining part of the village's and the valley's heritage.

And the band was excellent. Musical Director, **Andrew Lofthouse** and his accomplished team of musicians performed brilliantly. A superb solo in 'Away in a Manger' was performed by **Jason Evans**.

They were well supported by the Choir reprising their Christmas 2021 repertoire with gusto and subtlety as the music demanded, led as usual by **Thom Meredith**.





Two of the 'masked men' from the Town Hall; Kieran Chadha and Chris Pilgrim with Matthew Dennis, left

The concert was compèred by new guy, **Barney Stevenson**, who MC'ed proceedings in a brisk and friendly way; especially brisk in Marsden's favourite, the hectic '**Twelve Days of Christmas**'.

This item, in particular, brought back memories of long-term compère **Peter Armitage**, who with Band President **Brian Boothroyd**, didn't survive long enough to see this annual concert make its return. Two spectacular pieces were performed in their memory; '**How Great Thou Art**' by the Choir and Eric Ball's '**Kingdom Triumphant**' by the band.

Marsden's vicar, **Graeme Holdsworth**, stepped in to sum up the evening: 'It has been a great night' was the gist of his oration - and he was right!



Veteran second tenor, Keith Fielding; one-time pupil at 'Clough' - see below.



A Roydhouse Christmas

I lived in **Linthwaite** all my unmarried life. My family home was just off **Hoyle Ing** about 300 yards below the pub, later named '**The Sair**'.



The area was known as 'Roydhouse', I can only suppose that was a colloquialism pulled from addresses around, Royds View, Royds Avenue etc. **That's me, the little one, at the back.**

Nearly all the locals migrated to Church or Chapels on Sundays; mine was **Christ Church, Linthwaite**. I joined the choir when I was around 10 years old, and went to practice one day a week. The choir master was **Hubert Sykes** and the organist **Reg North**. I was, of course, a treble. We sat on the front row.



When **Christmas** came around, the hymns became carols; this always went down well as these we knew pretty well all the way through.

We, the Roydhouse lads, would get together along with a fair sprinkling of choir boys and set off carol singing. We would pick houses of people we knew well, form a group and belt out at least three carols, before knocking on the door, not the one-liner we get today 'We wish you a merry Christmas'. Rat a tat tat.

We did sound good, remember no accompaniment just our voices, and we really enjoyed the 'noise' we made, quite a number of the small cottages off Tommy Lane, would open their doors to listen better and many a time invite us into the kitchen while singing, and then give us a drink and a bun.

Most of the money we earned would be threepenny bits, sixpences and sometime the biggy, a half crown; that was a difficult one to share out.

They were good, simple, safe carefree days, when I was about 10.



Hoyle Ing during the winter was a super sledging track, as there was very little traffic during that time. The road was not a priority, although our local farmer managed to create tracks when he had to deliver milk etc.

So we took over the footpath, I'm not too sure how well that went down with the residents, but lads will be lads!

The hill is quite steep, maybe 1 in 3, so the sledges 'chased on' a bit. We were keen to see what was fastest; was it the sledges with wooden runners covered by steel tape from the baling process, or the classy stainless steel tube ones or mine with runners made out of half inch bar formed similar to an ice skate runner. There was no sitting upright for me, belly smack and steering with my toes. I would go out wrapped up warm with long trousers tucked into the top of my wellies. The trousers would be discarded ones of my older brother. I didn't own a pair of long pants until I was 13.

My gloves were a pair of long woollen socks, I would arrive back home at teatime (when it was dark), exhausted, wet through and with snow packed down inside my 'wellies'. Then came the 'hot ache' in my hands, which I had to suffer while thawing them in warm water.

Next day we were out as soon as possible to go through the same 'torture'.

This picture shows nearby 'Causeway Side'.



Happy days, and no 'pandemics' Well, there probably were - but at the time nobody bothered about measles or chicken pox. Indeed we were encouraged to go play with the kids who had got it so we could perhaps catch it and have it over with at an early age. Was that 'herd immunity'?

Then it happened, my previously 'sweet' treble voice suddenly had a mind of its own, mid-note it would crack into a lower key, then back up again, it was out of control, I would be around 13 going on 14, but it heralded the end of treble singing.

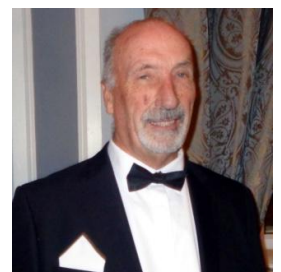


At around 17 years old I returned to the choir to sing as a Tenor, not only was I now on the back row, 'we had females' in the choir stalls!

Most girls sung Soprano matching the boy treble voices, there were however at least two ladies that preferred to sing Alto, which was a real boost for Hubert Sykes who had kept the Alto 'sound' within the choir for a number of years. I say girls as they ranged from 13 to 17, no adult ladies.



Geoff Bedford, CVMVC second tenor,
(... who has just enjoyed his 82nd birthday.)



A fond farewell to Ralph

The Choir had been greatly saddened to hear of the passing of baritone, **Ralph Munt** early this month. So we were proud to be present in force at the funeral at St John the Evangelist on Monday. Well over thirty members were overflowing from the choir stalls in the little church where friends and relatives gathered to hear something of Ralph's life and to give him a good send-off.

His son, **Andrew**, gave his recollections of his father. He explained how Ralph had come to join the Choir as a result of a little subtle persuasion by his wife, Margaret. Simon added that, once accepted into membership, he never looked back.



Ralph, seen here at the Town Hall in 2017 sang with us for close on 30 years. And he clearly loved it, telling his fellow members when awarded his long-service badge, *"How pleased I am to be a member of this choir. Over the last 25 years, it's given me more pleasure than I can find words for. I look forward to every Monday's rehearsal and to every concert we do. And, for as long as I can manage it, I'll be here every Monday for years to come!"*

We had heard that Margaret was keen for us to sing Dan Forrest's dramatic reworking of that old Wesleyan hymn, **"And can it be?"** This fine and deeply moving arrangement had been sponsored by Ralph and Margaret. It was clearly dear to their hearts.

But we also heard that Thom had had some misgivings - could we do it and Ralph justice?

Two things then led him to believe it was a possibility. Firstly, enough members indicated that they were keen and able to attend and secondly the inestimably skilful, **Keith Swallow** was ready to come out of retirement to play for us all.

It turned out to be a wonderful, deeply moving rendition of a great piece and especially poignant for the Choir, many of whom were choking back tears.

Our warmest thoughts remain with Margaret and family.

We shall miss you, Ralph. (16-7-37 to 1-12-2021) **RIP**

More nostalgia

This remarkable film shows Colne Valley in the 1950's.

It was compiled from film shot by, **Lucy Fairbanks**. Miss Fairbanks was apparently a primary school teacher at '**Clough**' for many years and an avid film-maker, bringing her colour camera out, to record many scenes of rural life in the Colne Valley.

'I'm reliably informed by at least three Choir members that they went to 'Clough' too' says VotV editor, John Clark. And that I got the wrong 'Clough'



It wasn't, they were quick to point out, the school at Clough Head above Slaithwaite but rather 'Linfit Clough' in the foot of the valley near Linthwaite.

This was **Geoff Bedford**'s local school from his '**Roydhouse**' years. Second tenor, **Keith Fielding**, was another who attended and **Adrian Calverley** thinks he's probably in the films somewhere. See if you can spot him.

The school is still there; today, it's known as Linthwaite Clough Junior & Infants.

Her films have become precious social history documents as the times she depicts slip off into history.

The music that the compilers put onto the scenes is by our friends, **Marsden Silver Prize Band**.

It's quite long - about 49 minutes but it's lovely and you can dip in and out through the episodes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2QX5OxNNMo&fbclid=IwAR18zvmESTnpRZBGxjOEI5Lnwi7bbzzoA87W05g6bRxdXvuA6-Gg4ZoAw5M>



Don't forget the 200 Club - an excellent last minute gift ...

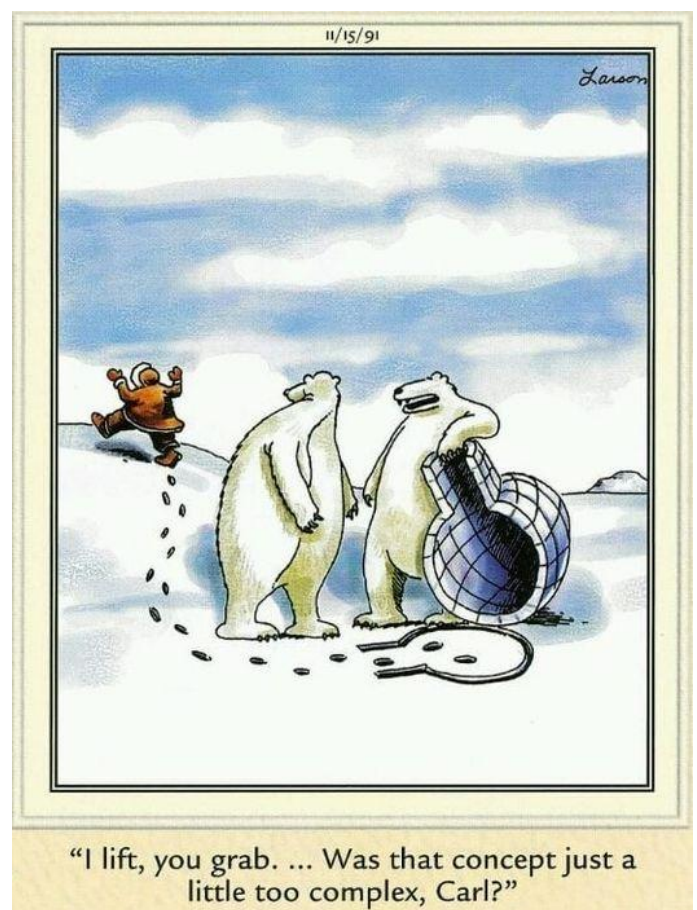
.. Yes, get your loved one a number in the 200 Club draw.

Lucky owners have an excellent chance of winning big prizes and CVMVC gets a few quid, too, to keep the show on the road.

	<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 me smile...



Bring us a candle' for Christmas



That ever-so-talented singing family - the Marsh's - have brought out a Christmas Song with their usual mix of cheeky, good-humoured musicality.

And while you're on YouTube check out the number they've done for Prostate Cancer UK. The children's granddad was successfully treated for it.

It's called, 'Mack the Knife' but the words are somewhat different to Kurt Weill's original.

Click here for Bring us a Candle:- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxymWffEA60>

And click here for the prostate song:- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkVLe_ql2dw



Everyone at Colne Valley Male Voice Choir, including Voice of the Valley editor, John Clark wishes our readership a Very Merry Christmas and All the Very Best for 2022.

