



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 of the annual **Christmas Festival** concert by **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** with their regular guests, **Brighouse & Rastrick Band** and **Colne Valley Boys**.

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.

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.)



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.

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**.

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 his death in 1969. His fine version of the classic by Adolphe Adam, was sung in memory of him and his recently deceased daughter, **Muriel**.

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



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



Colne Valley Boys concert gets the festive season off to a good start

Sunday 5th saw the boys give their Christmas concert at St James Church, Slaithwaite,. Quite a few of the men joined them to sing their final number - something of a tradition these days.



Once again, they appeared with their guests, **Musica Youth Brass Band**.



There's no doubting the skills these young people conjure up to bring joy to their listeners. Together they provided the audience with a pleasant and easy-going afternoon of seasonal musical entertainment. It seems to me that the Boys keep the standard of their singing very high.

Of course no small part of this success is down to the team that keeps the Boys in business, **Thom, Matt, Linda and Chris.**



Well done, everybody!



David does 25

Thom claps, John Radcliffe, smiles and **David Rogers**, clutching his new 25 year service medal, enjoys the applause of his fellow Choir members but wonders what the weirdo with the camera is doing standing on a chair.

(just trying to get a better angle - Ed)

Congratulations, David



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.

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.

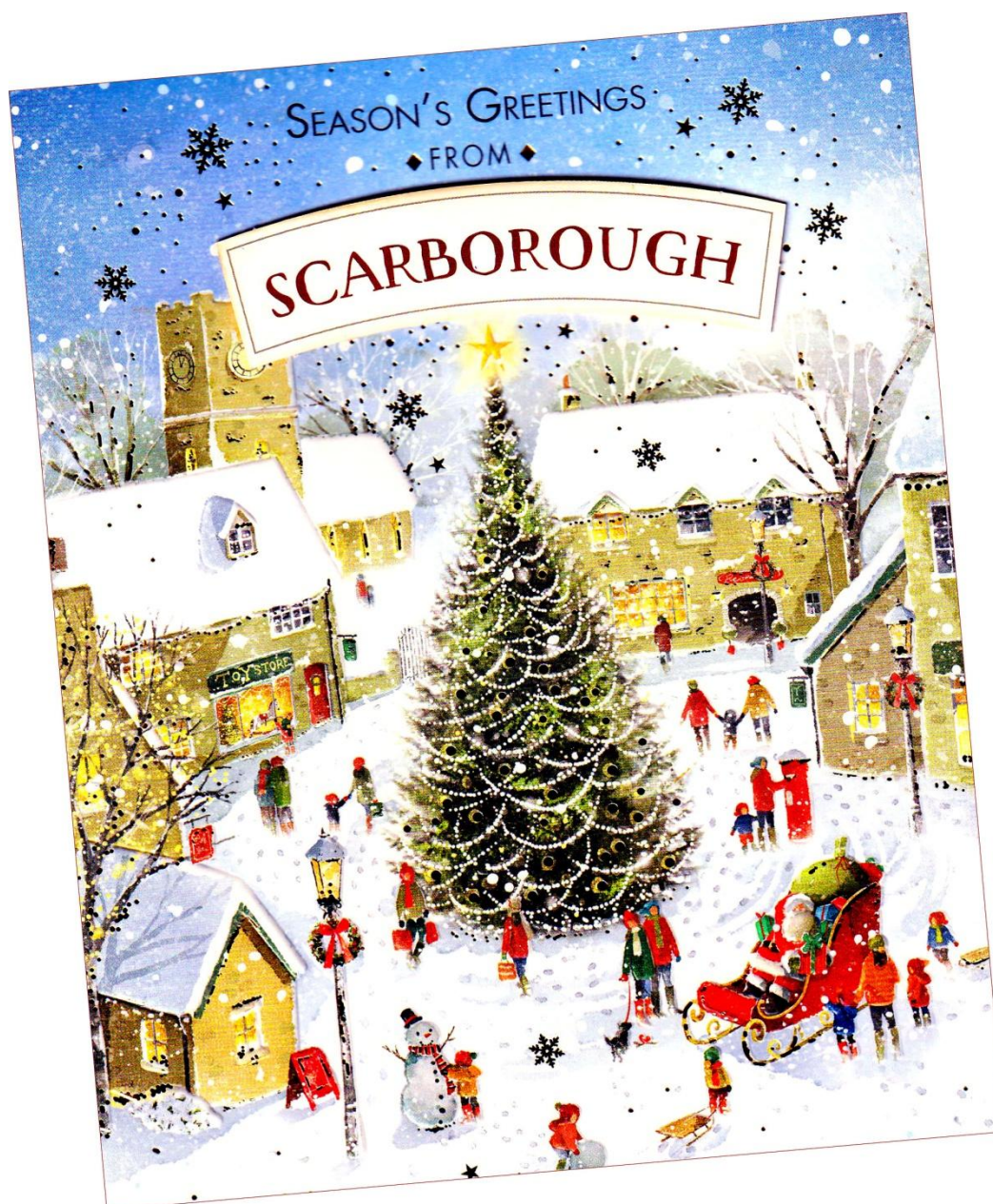


*Geoff Bedford, CVMVC second tenor,
(... who has just enjoyed his 82nd birthday.)*



Our patron sends a card

The irrepressible, Christine Cox, sends us greetings from Scarborough.



MERRY CHRISTMAS AND
A HAPPY NEW YEAR

To all members of Colne Valley
Male Voice Choir

With warmest wishes
from Christine Cox

Keep — singing !!

Here's hoping for a brilliant
concert next year. Keep well
everyone.

She writes

*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all
members of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir*

Keep Singing

*Here's hoping for a brilliant concert in Scarborough
next year.*

Keep well, everyone

With warmest wishes from

Christine Cox

Marsden Concert still to come



There's still more pleasure in store.

Two years after the last one **Marsden Silver Prize Band** are back for their Christmas Concert at Saint Bartholomew's Church – and once again **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** are 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.



Marsden Silver Prize Band seen here in their 2020 Online Concert with CVMVC

Very sadly, no Ralph this Christmas

The Choir was greatly saddened to hear of the passing of baritone, **Ralph Munt** early this month.



Ralph, seen here at the Town Hall in 2017 was a stalwart member of the Choir who sang with us for close on 30 years.

He had been in poor health for a good while, but his kindly nature and good humour remained always evident.

After a short decline in the last few weeks he passed away at Leeds General Infirmary aged 84 years.

You could rely on Ralph for a smile and a bit of banter. In one of my earliest editions of VotV, your Editor mistakenly called him **Roger** Munt in an article and was quite embarrassed by the error. Subsequently, whenever I got the chance to have a chat, Ralph would contrive to get my name wrong, too. There was never the faintest hint of meanness in the joke and he would always be supportive and positive in his attitudes.

He clearly loved singing with Colne Valley, reliably performing in our concerts, telling his fellow members when he was 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!"*

And though he was ill, he returned to rehearsals after the end of lockdown and probably hoped he would get to do another Town Hall Christmas Concert. Sadly it was not to be.

So, it was especially poignant for the Choir at the Town Hall when we sang Dan Forrest's skilful 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 and many a Colne Valley singer had a lump in his throat when we performed it on Sunday.

For those who can make it, Ralph's funeral is to be held at **3.00pm on Monday, December 20th at St John the Evangelist Church, Denby Lane. Please note, this is a change in venue to the one originally announced.** The post code is **HD8 8UN**.

Our warmest thoughts go out to Margaret and his family.

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

Men who sing

Bass, **David Clarke**, came across a piece on BBC Wales, about a traditional male voice choir and how important it is to its members' social, physical and mental well-being and the communities it is rooted in.

A film-maker, Dylan Williams, is behind a movie, '**Men Who Sing**' which seemingly is about to reach cinemas shortly.

The story resonated with David and he thinks it might well ring bells with other VotV readers.



Bonds of a male voice choir - now on film.



A documentary about a male voice choir and their friendships as they try and keep the tradition of singing alive will be shown in cinemas.

Men Who Sing is a portrait of the **Trelawnyd Male Voice Choir** in Flintshire. It deals with the importance of friendship in later life.

The film also looks into the relationship between producer **Dylan Williams** and his father **Ednyfed** (aged 91).

The film follows the choir's efforts to renew and reinvigorate their membership - something Colne Valley has been quite successful at, post-pandemic - and an ongoing priority in our Centenary plans.

It also follows the Welsh choir as it prepares for a competition at a Music Festival in Northern Ireland. CVMVC has always seen competing as a spur to excellence and our first opportunity, post-Covid, will come in the **Mrs Sunderland Music Festival** in February. We'll be looking to add to our 50 first prizes in this competition since we won it first time in 1929.

To see the trailer for this movie go to this link: <https://youtu.be/4KADpW3ikaM?t=51>

Williams, who is based in Sweden, decided to return to Wales when his father phoned him and said he had sold the family home and had hired in a skip for unwanted possessions.

He said: *"I felt the need to go back and the sight of my father in this empty home, where I was brought up, was very moving. I followed him to choir practice that evening, where he's been a member for 70 years, and in that room he started singing with all these men that I remember from my childhood, and that was when I knew this was a film I wanted to make."*

The choir is back rehearsing in person after Covid moved practice online



Conductor, **Ann Atkinson**, has led a number of male voice choirs, including **Froncysyllte Male Voice Choir** in Wrexham.

She said 'Men Who Sing' would resonate with other choirs.

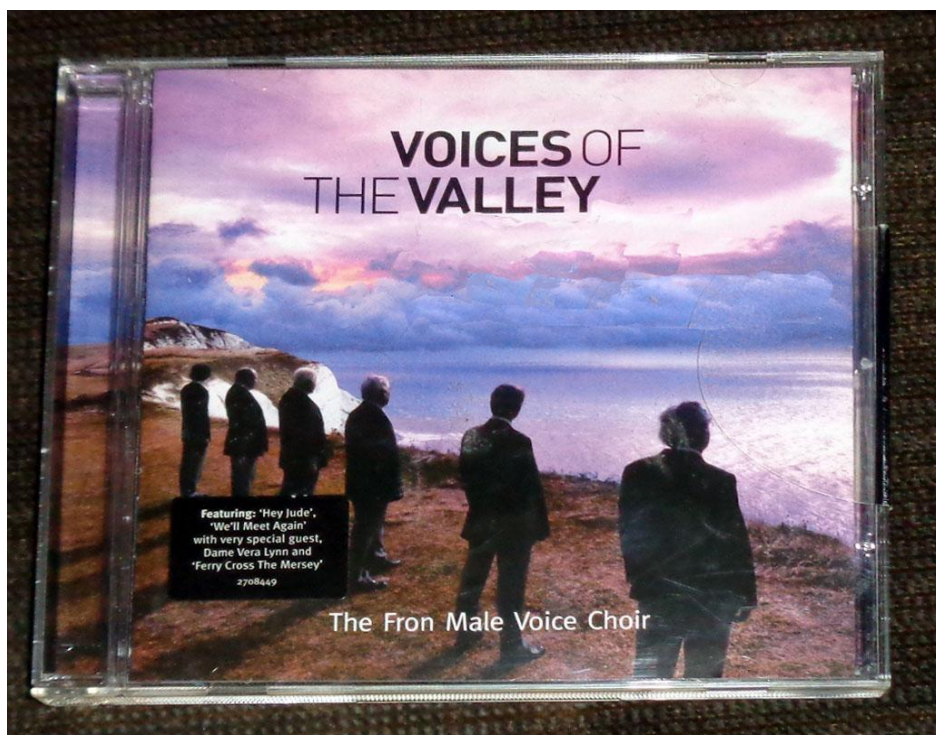


"From the point of view of the age bracket, the relationships, like a brotherhood really. I can see that in all the choirs I've been involved with. It's a very important thing," she said.

"They go that bit further for each other. If someone's got a hospital appointment, shopping, the list is quite endless. It's a very special bond."



Short of a Christmas gift?



Here's a CD that Christine Cox spotted. As an avid reader of Voice of the Valley, its title clearly tickled her fancy.

Obviously, I don't want to plug another choir's CDs. But they do say 'The Fron' are pretty good.

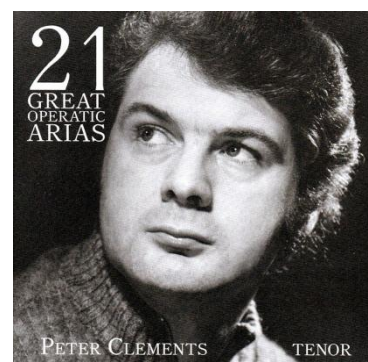
If you want any Colne Valley Male Voice Choir CD's, which are obviously superior, you can still get them. You'd be best advised at the moment to email Choir Secretary, Jenny Baxter.

(Many readers will remember that Ralph & Margaret Munt were a fixture at Colne Valley Concerts for many years, selling our CD recordings to our audiences.)

Or you could do worse

..... you could do worse than look out for a newly released CD from Slaithwaite-based Operatic Tenor, **Peter Clements**.

A pal of his has recently compiled some classic arias Peter recorded onto a new disk which you can get at **Hillside Harmonies**, just by the Hand-made Bakery, on the canal front at Slaithwaite.



But best of all ...

	Just one pound a week buys you one of the 200 Club numbers.
	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.
	Even if you don't win, you win - because half of the fund supports Choir concerts and performances.
	Contact Choir Secretary, Jenny, on 01484 645192

Best of all, 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.



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 Head School above Slaithwaite for many years and an avid film-maker, bringing her colour camera out, to record many scenes of rural life in the Colne Valley.

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

The music that the video compilers have edited 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=IwAR18zvmEStnpRZBGxjOEI5Lnwj7bbzzoA87W05g6bRxdXvuA6-Gg4ZoAw5M>



'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.

