



A celebration of a life well-lived.

On September 29th, friends, family and the men of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir gathered together to say goodbye to Keith Swallow. In the church at New Mill, very close to where he was born 92 years ago, many of those that loved and respected him joined in a Service of Celebration.



Keith had been our accompanist for many decades and the solid core of all that the Choir has achieved. We sang 'The Irish Blessing' for him.

Keith's choices of music were played and **Geoff Druett** gave a fine eulogy, that captured Keith's personality, his great musicianship, his love of home and his engaging modesty.

It was a deeply moving service. But, for all that, rather joyful - truly a celebration of a life well-lived.



For an update of the video of the Choir singing this anthem, made to celebrate the Choir's Centenary Year, go to this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4htY4IBLjM>

Voice of the Valley marked some of the remarkable achievements in his life with the Choir and in the very successful career he made for himself as a wonderful pianist. Slightly edited and updated versions of these articles follow. The Editor hopes you will be reminded of Keith's great contribution and will take pleasure in the memories we have of him. Enjoy

Keith Swallow 4th March 1931 - 20th August 2023

RIP

The year is 1957....

A group of Yorkshiremen leave Huddersfield. It's a Saturday morning. It's April 20th. The year is 1957. The men are the men of the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir; amongst them a young chap by the name of **Keith Swallow**.

They are heading for **Ringway Airport** to catch a flight out.



Flying is still uncommon. For most of the Choir it's their first time on a plane. The airport, just outside Manchester, has only just been finally released by the RAF for exclusive civilian use.



Two planes are needed for the flight to Düsseldorf. One of them is a **Vickers Viscount**. (The one pictured is the actual one that crashed into a house in Wythenshawe, only the previous month.) The other is a '**Pionair**' - a Dakota DC3 variant. Each arrives safely and without incident.



Once on the ground, they are met at the airport by recording engineers of the **British Forces Network**. They want to document this famous choir's visit for later broadcast.

It will be a radio feature item for the thousands of British soldiers stationed in West Germany. It's newsworthy when there's a, still uncommon, cultural exchange between two countries, which only a few years before had been in bitter conflict with each other.

Many of the Choir members, of course, had been part of the war effort. The military focus, now though, is no longer on the battles of World War II but on the 'Cold War' threat from communist East Germany and the Soviet-Russian dominated states of Eastern Europe.

The Choir is en-route to **Essen**. All through the Ruhr the signs of war damage remain visible - come to that, there's still plenty of war damage in Britain - but the mood in both countries is of economic growth and regeneration.



Indeed, so upbeat is the national mood that later that year Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, can claim – to much sceptical laughter: 'You've never had it so good!'

Reconciliation and cultural contact is in the air. Music is the common factor in this case - one that led to contacts with (and the invitation from) Essen's **Schubertbund Männerchor**.

The Choir's trip, even though the members are being put up by the hosts, is expensive for what is just a long Easter weekend. The Choir has been busy fundraising and has had to find about £1,200 - enough to buy a very pleasant terraced house at 1957 prices.

A working man's weekly wage packet is about Twelve Pounds, One and Sixpence and a woman's just Six Pounds Six Shillings (£12.08 and £6.30 respectively.)

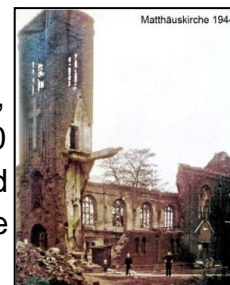


The young **Keith Swallow** has joined the Choir just for this trip, taken on as the tour accompanist and solo pianist.

The following day, Easter Sunday April 21st, the Choir give their first performance, with Keith at the keyboard, in the **Matthäuskirche** in the Essen suburb of Borbeck. It's a new church, only recently opened. The previous building had been destroyed by fire in the war.



Keith plays a solo spot to great acclaim, including two pieces by Granados. (About 60 years later, Keith recorded a CD called 'Dances with Piano'. It included the piece he performed as a solo in West Germany.)



The following morning, Easter Monday, the Choir performs again in the temporary 'Saalbau' a civic centre, likewise, undergoing reconstruction. It's a huge success.

Both Keith and conductor, **George Stead**, are presented with bouquets. It seems that - as men - they both show some embarrassment at being given flowers but handle it with aplomb.

These were Keith's first engagements with the Choir (discounting a 'Rehearsal Concert' at the, now defunct, **Zion Chapel**, on Olney Street, Slaithwaite on March 13th).



former Zion Baptist Chapel

He was offered the position of accompanist during the Essen trip and asked for a week to think it over. Fortunately he accepted. It was 63 years later when he stepped down in December 2019.



He kept his links with the Choir as 'Accompanist Emeritus', continuing to play when called upon - brilliantly as always - and, without any word of exaggeration, that's a fantastic achievement.

Thank you, Keith

Voice of the Valley meets

Keith Swallow (2022)



“It’s no achievement really. Time just passes. I don’t want any fuss made about being with the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir for 60 odd years. It’s such a long time. I’ve forgotten most of what happened all those years ago and to be honest - I’m 91 now - so many of the people I worked with are long gone.” It was with such typical self-effacement that Keith Swallow began his interview with Voice of the Valley. The Editor thinks readers will see it another way - as a tremendous and rare accomplishment.

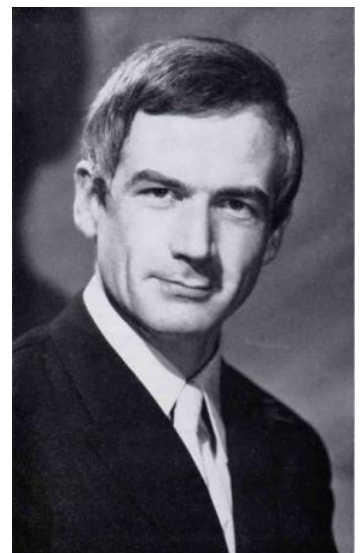
Keith certainly remembers the **Essen Tour** – his first tour with the Choir and the start of his long association. **George Stead** was the conductor. Keith recalls that George felt the German pianos weren’t right and asked Keith to try transposing but that didn’t work either. It turned out that continental tuning is just a bit different to English and it grated with George Stead, who had perfect pitch. ‘It’s in the cracks’ - between the notes - said George but he soon adjusted and led the Choir perfectly. Keith, who claims not to have perfect pitch, hardly noticed and played his solo spots quite happily “I was offered the accompanist’s job on that trip and I’ve been here ever since.

I’d known about CVMVC for years before I joined. They had a terrific reputation and did concerts with guest artists of international repute, so I went to many of their performances.

I’m as local as they come. I’ve lived in the house my grandfather built in New Mill for donkey’s years and that was only 100 yards or so away from my parents’ home where I was born in 1931. My dad worked in the offices at Hepworth Pipe and I went to school nearby, at what is now **Honley High School**. I did have a few lessons when I was seven or eight, which I hated. So I’m mostly self-taught. Playing the piano was hard work. I just desperately loved music.

Just like the Choir I got involved with the **Mrs Sunderland Music Festival** and have had links with it for decades. I seem to recall I won the ‘**Rose Bowl**’ one year as a teenager. (Ed:- that was probably February 1948, some 75 years ago.) Then came the **Royal Manchester School of Music** and my degree. There was ‘National Service’ in those days, so after college, I found myself in the Army for two years, based at Catterick.

So, at 26, when I started with Colne Valley my professional career was just getting under way. It worked out very well. I never felt much need to move away. Other musicians said, I should have a ‘pied a terre’ in London but it seemed to work without. I’d had a car since I was 17 so travelling the country from my Yorkshire base suited me - and it kept me in touch with the Choir.





I think it was at a Colne Valley MVC concert that I saw **Kathleen Ferrier**. She was the biggest star then and she had such stage presence. I was awe-struck. I was about 15.”



Later I worked on many occasions with another wonderful contralto, **Constance Shacklock OBE**, who later sang in the original staging of **‘The Sound of Music’**.



And it definitely was at a CVMVC concert that I came across **Owen Brannigan**, the bass recitalist. We struck up an association that lasted for twenty years or so. He was very popular and we went on tour all over the country. He was a ‘Geordie’ and would always finish his concerts with Geordie folk-songs. But when we performed together, he didn’t do, ‘Cushy Butterfield’. He said it was ‘vulgar - only suitable for football matches. I gained from having a Yorkshire base then. Many of his concerts were in the North-east. It was a lot easier getting to Newcastle from New Mill than it would have been from London.



I can recall, though, one day getting a call from London. ‘What are you up to, Keith? Put your ‘tails’ in the boot and drive down here. We want you to play at **The Albert Hall** tonight.’



This was for one of **Sir Malcolm Sargent’s** Christmas concerts, accompanying star soprano, **Sheila Armstrong**.”

Then another time I was asked could I play for a young singer who had recently arrived in the UK. ‘You’ll like her, they said,’ She’s a Maori princess.’

Well I did like her. She was fabulous. She’s still well-known today - as **Dame Kiri Te Kanawa**.

And wherever I went on tour in England and abroad, in recording studios and broadcasting it seemed to work out that I could mostly get back on Monday evenings for rehearsal with the Choir.

I had a good career as a classical pianist and I worked in partnership with many fine musicians but I could nearly always pencil Colne Valley concerts into my schedule. I’ve been very lucky.



Especially now, when I’m semi-retired, the Colne Valley links are important. People have been very kind.

Of my more recent memories of the Choir, I was very pleased by our victories in Cornwall, being judged, **‘Best Choir in the UK’**. In the old days we used music. Now we work without copies. But mostly, it’s the direct guidance from our conductor that makes the performance. We are so very lucky to have **Thom** at the helm. I was here, of course, when he arrived and it’s still a great pleasure to work with him.”

A piece for Keith...

Voice of the Valley Editor, John Clark, mentioned to Keith that he had dug out a clip suitable for a 60th anniversary. It was **Victor Borge** who fools around at the piano with exquisite comic skill.

“I saw Victor Borge once.” said Keith. “He was very funny. But I noticed that every gesture, every word and note, was precisely calculated and rehearsed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKeqaDSjy98>

I liked **Les Dawson** playing the piano more. He always gave you the impression that awful piano playing came naturally to him. I practice like Les Dawson all the time.”

So VotV is happy to add a Les Dawson clip too. Enjoy!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMOOrsWxh5mg>



Peter Denby writes.....

Peter Denby, seen here helping Keith mark a mere 50 years as our piano player, sent the following remarks back in 2007 – which he later updated for a mere 60 years of Keith’s tenure.



“On behalf of all members past and present of our illustrious choir I am happy to convey, most sincerely, our congratulations to Keith on reaching this remarkable milestone - 60 years and still going strong!

I find it difficult to believe that 10 years have passed since this photograph was taken. The occasion was Keith’s 50th anniversary as Choir accompanist. The venue was Berties Banqueting Rooms, Elland, and a more memorable occasion could not be imagined. As was to be expected, Keith was persuaded to entertain his guests - or was it a case of ‘paying for his supper’?

Much has been said of Keith’s outstanding performances over the years, but no one who attended the 2015 Cornish International Music Festival will forget his incredible accompaniment of Antiphon from the Vaughan Williams Five Mystical Songs which received special praise from the Adjudicators.

Keith’s repertoire knows no bounds and maybe nothing better shows the range than his accompaniment of our very own **Raymond Ellis** singing T.C. Sterndale-Bennet’s Song Cycle, ‘**Mary Had a Little Lamb.**’ Hilarious it may be but Keith insists it really is most ‘tricky’.

Thanks, Keith, for 60 glorious years accompanying the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir. Many of our lives have been enriched by listening to your music and knowing you were always there to rescue us.

Peter Denby,

Vice President and Chairman

Keith Swallow & the new boy

Keith stepped down from the role as principal accompanist just slightly shy of 63 years after starting; continuing his long association with the Choir as 'Accompanist Emeritus' and after the Christmas Concerts of 2019.



The main role passed to our new chap, **Christopher Pulleyn**.

Chris is deeply saddened by the death of his mentor. He said of him, "*Keith was very special - a legendary pianist - 63 years as accompanist to CVMVC and a superb musician whose professional career saw him touring around the country playing for some of the biggest names in the music world.*"

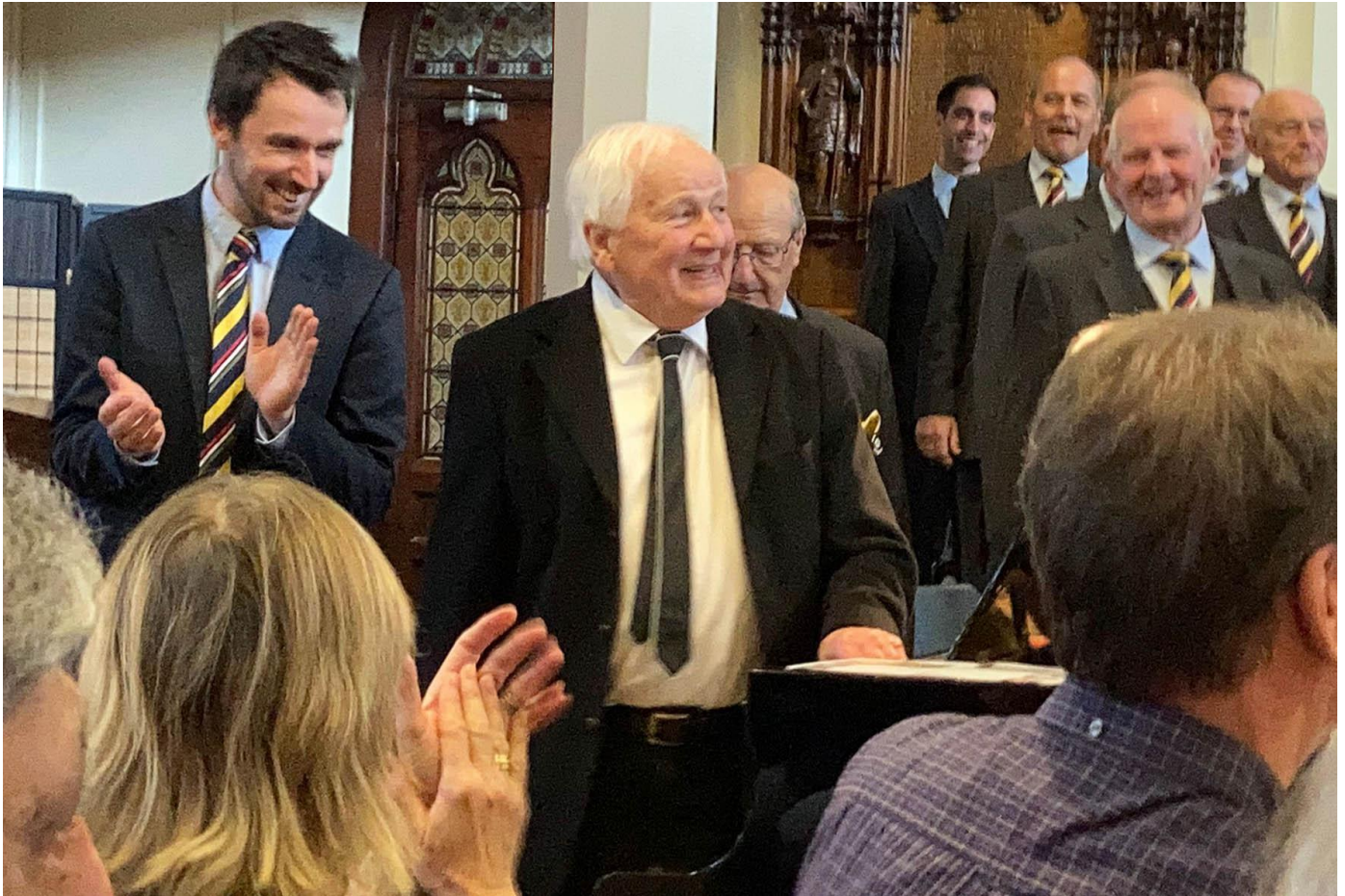
Here we see Chris and Keith having fun together and delighting the audience with a duet at the 'Concert for Keith' in March 2022. Go to this link.

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



It was at the same concert that, apart from collaborations with Chris, Keith played a few solos.

This is the link to one of them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yzvo_-mKJCs



And in other news...

Raymond does 40



An important milestone in the singing life of veteran baritone, **Raymond Ellis** was marked the other night at rehearsal. It's at least 40 years since Raymond joined the Choir. Another veteran, **David Hirst** - who has been in the Choir for over 60 years - made a little speech of appreciation of Raymond's many virtues and talents.

Raymond, not only a fine singer but a noted wit and raconteur, thanked the Choir for the honour - he now gets Life Membership and no longer has to pay fees.

Raymond has recently re-joined the Management Committee, whereas David has just stood down - particularly - as the hugely-valued Chair of the Music Committee.

We thank them both and wish them many more years of comradeship and song.



Roger & Christmas Concert tickets

"Christmas comes up faster than you'd think." warns **Roger 'Ticketing Supremo' Fielding.**

"It's time to get your tickets for the Big Christmas Concert.

Get 'em off me as my tickets are cheaper.

When they go to the Town Hall Hall for sale, they add on a few extras that the Choir doesn't. If you look on their website there appears to be few tickets on offer. But that's because I've still got most of them and they've been selling fast.

Get your tickets off me as quick as you can, for soon I'll have to restore the tickets to Kirklees and they'll appear on their website but with all the Town Hall supplements."

Contact me by email or ring me on 01484 846262. I've still got good seats for you.

For email use: rogerfielding1@gmail.com

"This Christmas Concert is very important to the Choir's financial health. We always have a big audience and a great atmosphere but we would like to see the place packed to the rafters on December 10th."



"Thanks - and how about buying tickets as Christmas presents for your friends?"

Lynn's concert

Lynn Hudson (Thom's better half) conducts **Carlton Community Choir** for mixed voices. Her choir is performing at Golcar on Saturday 7th October.

Other CVMVC connections come from soloists, **Thom Meredith** and **Damian Stirling**, whose father, **Ben Stirling**, recently joined the Choir, following the LAMS project.



*CCC
(Halifax)*

**Carlton Community Choir
(Halifax)**

Director: Lynn Hudson
Accompanists: Craig Cockerill, Ned Smith

Autumn Concert

Saturday October 7th at 7pm
at St John the Evangelist, Golcar

with soloists
Thom Meredith and Damien Stirling

Admission free
A retiring collection will be taken in support of St John's

It'll be fun!

Welcome return of Joyce 'the voice'

Last Monday night, the Choir was very pleased to see the return of Voice Coach, **Joyce Tindsley**.



Most of us remember her leading a terrific voice workshop on our Centenary Day celebration in May 2022.

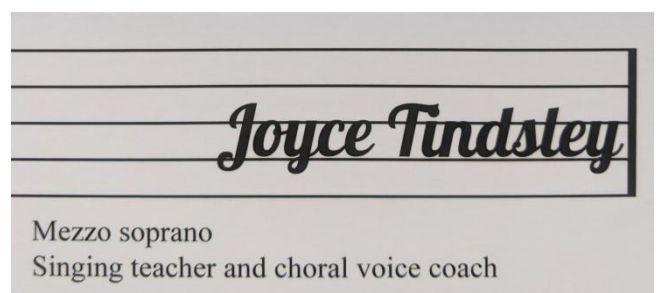
It was a clear request from members to have more vocal coaching, so everybody was pleased when Joyce appeared in Slaithwaite to take Monday's rehearsal.

And what a good session it was, full of helpful tips and techniques to try out, then take away and practise. I expect everybody, these last few days, has been trying singing through lips closed tight enough to grip a drinking straw...

....and doing her recommended vocal exercises for at least 10 minutes a day.

Joyce is not just talking from her long experience as a singer and choir leader; no, she's got plenty of academic study to back her up.

A couple of years ago, Joyce completed a three-year MA in Vocal Pedagogy, so she has lots of sound ideas and up-to-date research that relate to vocal problems and the development of better vocal quality at individual and group level.



Better than that though, her visit was relaxed, thought-provoking and good fun - though she did work us quite hard.

Much of what she told us, reinforced what our inestimable conductor, Thom, tells us 3 or 4 times every rehearsal - but which we constantly seem to fail to remember. So getting, sometimes similar, information in novel format might, we hope, make it 'stick'.

The men were appreciative - thank you, Joyce

At the Watershed

Our friends at the Watershed - just across the road from our rehearsal room - have a very special workshop and performance coming up soon.



AMAZING ACAPELLA WORKSHOP

with

MOUTHFUL QUARTET

SUNDAY 1ST OCTOBER 10 – 4pm

THE WATERSHED, BRIDGE ST, SLAITHWAITE, HUDDERSFIELD HD7 5JN

£40 (a limited number of concessions at £20)

Followed by an evening performance by Mouthful also at The Watershed

Your contributions are very welcome



As we start into autumn and the nights draw in, your Editor reckons you might find a few minutes to send your contribution to Voice of the Valley. We really like getting your pictures and stories.

If your tale has some connection with the Choir and its members and activities - even if the connection is a bit vague - send me a draft and I'll help you get it ready for publication.

Email: cvmvc_newsletter@yahoo.co.uk

And, if you haven't signed up to the email version of VotV just yet, send me an email and I'll add you to the readers List. Then - and for as long as you care to receive it - VotV will land automatically into your email inbox every few weeks to let you know what the Choir is up to

For general queries about the choir: - Ring Choir Secretary, Jenny, on 01484 645192

And see our website to get the full story.

A banner for the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir website. On the left is the choir's crest, which features two white rams holding a shield with a cross and a banner that says 'COLNE VALLEY MALE VOICE CHOIR'. Below the shield is a banner with the motto 'VERITAS LIBERABIT VOS'. To the right of the crest, the text 'Colne Valley Male Voice Choir' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, with 'Est 1922' in a smaller font below it. Below this text is a navigation bar with five buttons: 'Events', 'Recordings', 'Our History', 'About Us', and 'Information'. On the far right of the banner is a large QR code.