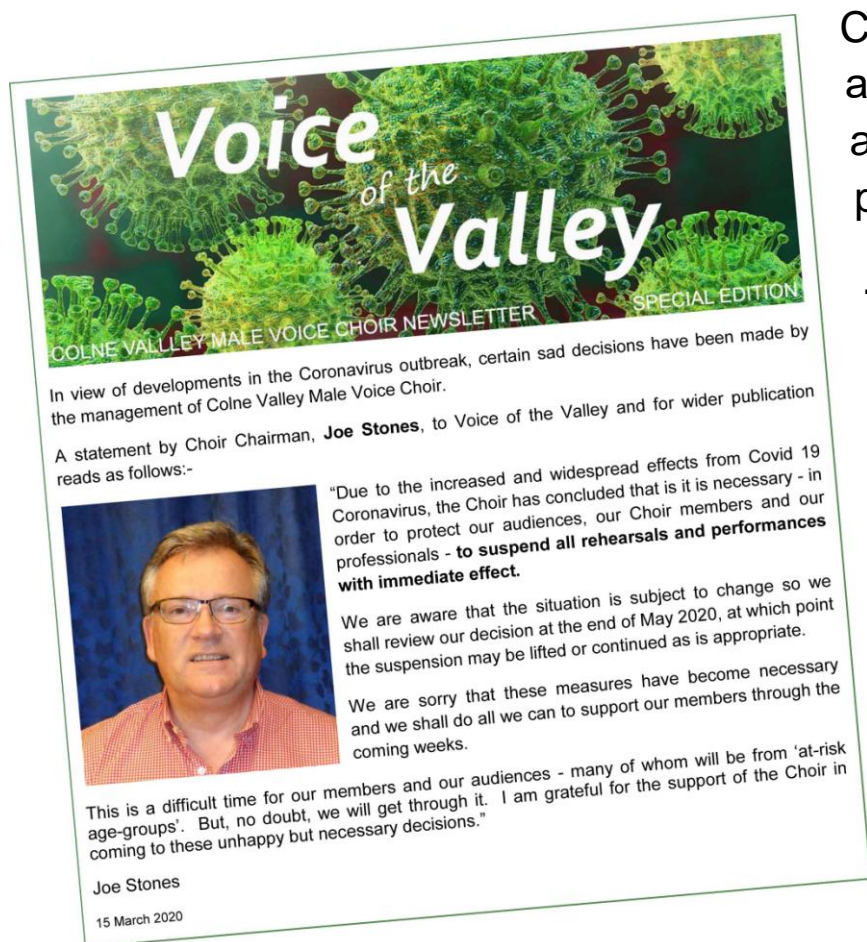




The Pandemic - 5 years on

A special edition of VotV went out in the middle of March 2020.



Chairman, Joe Stones, announced a 'temporary halt to all Choir rehearsals and performances....

.... Little did we know then, that Joe's announcement would herald an epoch-defining period in national and world history.

About a week after the CVMVC decision, Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced the first lockdown in the UK, ordering people to "stay at home". It was the start of

the 'Covid Era' that, five years on, is still having repercussions that are only slowly fading away.

This article charts your Editor's views on the ways in which CVMVC weathered the Covid storm and, after all the doubts, struggles and turmoil emerged as strong - maybe stronger - than we were at the start.

These were some key features of the way CVMVC got through the Pandemic.

First of all we realised that perhaps the biggest threat was losing touch with each other.

We made lots of effort to combat this...

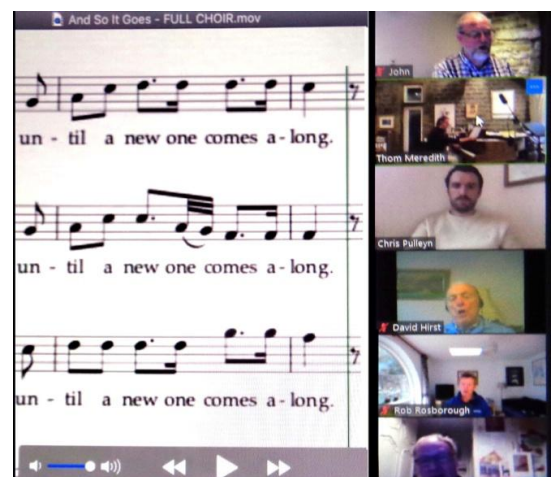
The awful 'Online Zoom' rehearsals.

We got to see Thom, Chris and most of our fellow Choir members. We could exchange greetings and a bit of banter. But we couldn't sing together; (something to do with 'latency' - everybody's internet connections working at slightly different times.)



Thom would sing through the parts of a song, but in the repetition space, we all - in our spare rooms, hooked up to our laptops and desktops - sang forlornly into empty air, unable to hear anything but the Zoom backing track and our own feeble voices.

But we got a hint of camaraderie and we persevered.



Online concerts were brilliant



These were a triumph.

The Choir worked towards a 2020 **Online Christmas Concert** with our usual colleagues from Marsden.

These were **The Marsden Silver Prize Band** and long-time compère, **Peter Armitage**.

It was probably - his last public contribution before his sad death in the new year.



Producing our Christmas songs for the YouTube Concert was a laborious process for Choir singers and a heroic process for tech-savvy **Chris Pulleyn**.

He and Thom put together a soundtrack for each voice part which included at the start a regular timing beat. Once downloaded by individual singers, we each, in our own homes fiddled with earpieces which, as unobtrusively as possible, played us the version of the song we were trying to record.

Dressed up like numpties in our dinner suits or Christmas jumpers we then set up our computers with camera and microphone to create our individual recordings. For your editor - and I gather - for most other members these recording sessions were an ordeal. It took me about 15 takes to coordinate with the timing beats and then to give an even plausible-looking rendition. Worst still, the playback was deeply embarrassing. Do I really sound that awful? Finally, I would settle for a version which wasn't quite as bad as the rest and then I could attempt to '**WeTransfer**' it on to for the next stage. That in itself was a struggle for many of our less tech-savvy singers, often also constrained by grindingly slow broadband connectivity.

The next stage was where **Chris Pulleyn** created the magic. Using specialist software he took the individual recordings, synchronised them with the timing beats and produced one master soundtrack. I suspect he was able to doctor it a bit to improve the sound quality. Then he combined the video contributions in interesting ways to make a performance, which didn't sound half bad.

'Look North' raises the profile

For our Spring Online Concert, the Choir made links with the BBC. A substantial feature on '**Look North**' meant some of our composite performance was broadcast to, maybe, 4 million TV viewers.

You can see the feature on his link. It's a good watch.

https://youtu.be/OXfL8x9_REc



The online concerts, sent out via YouTube, reached audience numbers - around the world - far in excess of any audience we might have got physically into the Town Hall. They did the job, too, of keeping the Choir together and helping us keep in contact with those who no longer could see us live.

Management looks after finance

During the pandemic Chairman, **Joe Stones**, beavered away to keep the Management Committee active. He realised that, while at the start of the outbreak the Choir had been in good financial shape, we were now facing a collapse in income. No rehearsals, no concerts, no ticket sales - no income! He also realised that keeping our 'professionals' was crucial to our survival.

So how to deal with the shortfall? Joe grappled with these issues and kept the Committee engaged. Various initiatives were pursued. The membership agreed to keep on paying their subs during the awful Zoom rehearsals. The 200 Club continued and various 'Just-Giving' and similar donation schemes meant we did attract some income from our 'Online concerts'.



But Joe realised more was needed. He made contact with **The National Lottery** and started exploring the **Community Fund**.



After an heroic effort by Joe, by treasurer **Simon Durrans**, supported by **Raymond Ellis** and others, a bid was submitted and in October 2020 the Choir was awarded a grant just short of £10,000 to carry on our activities.



Thanks to **Norman Brown**, we also secured some financial support from West Riding Masonic Charity - **the worshipful brothers of Iuventutis Lodge No.9338**. They formally presented us with a new, portable, piano and other needed equipment, when we finally returned - in dress masks - to a half-empty Town hall in December 2021.



A false dawn

We got the **all clear to return to live rehearsals** on Monday May 17th 2021.

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. Now only 6 singers can congregate indoors. In practice that means rehearsals 'in real life' are off the menu once again. Our reunion turned out to be very short-lived and now we were - effectively - back in lockdown with only Zoom to fall back on.

It felt like a kick in the teeth.



Live rehearsals do finally resume.

Then, on Monday 19th July - two months later - we were back. So-called '**Freedom Day**' we didn't reckon could be real, for we knew Kirklees had seen around 1,600 new Covid cases in the past week and most experts were predicting a great wave of new infections to follow on from Monday's removal of restrictions. So what we decided on was a big step towards what we used to have but nonetheless quite a way from what we had known as normal for the last 98 years.



We consulted all members beforehand. 'If you want to come together and sing and feel safe with that then these are the criteria to follow. Equally if you feel it's not safe, not right for you, that's fine, too' was the burden of **Chairman Joe's** message to singers. The plan was to gather at the back entrance of our local Church, Saint James's in Slaithwaite, promptly just before rehearsal at 7:30pm. It is a much bigger building than our nearby rehearsal room with much greater airspace for ventilation and air circulation. More significantly it offered plenty of room so that members could all congregate but keep properly distanced from each other.

And our precious professionals, particularly, young **Chris Pulleyn** and, not quite so young, **Thom Meredith** could also stay a sufficient distance apart. Most of our singers, of course, have been 'double-jabbed' for weeks but not all. For any who were concerned the 'Zoom' operation would continue.



Most of our singers opted to join the 'real-life' rehearsal.



Arriving singers were to be greeted at the church door by tenor, **Matt Houston**, who, with wife, **Linda**, has done such formidable work in keeping both our Boys' choir and the men's safe and functioning. Singers were to be 'temperature-tested', guided to hand sanitation, reminded about mask-wearing and directed to an allotted singing position at two metres distance from their neighbouring members.

The rehearsal was planned to run for 45 minutes, followed by a good break, outdoors, allowing any aerosol to be ventilated out before a second session of 45 minutes.



VotV does its bit

Not wanting to brag, but all through Covid, our online newsletter went out every two weeks - twice as frequently as is normal. Your Editor reckoned it must have helped to keep singers and audiences engaged with the Choir in those dark times.

Similar initiatives served the same purpose. Quiz nights were organised, for example, helping people to keep in touch. Our AGM's went online - not popular events but members nevertheless valued the contact.



Online AGM - Raymond can't stand it.

Thanks to **James Cooke**, who added practice versions of our pieces to the website and to the many readers, who offered pictures and stories that kept the newsletter and the website topical.



It's worth noting how important these contacts were. All round the country, choirs were losing touch with their members and audiences. When Covid began to relent, memberships had dwindled and audiences weren't coming back. Choirs were no longer able to afford their 'professionals'. All round the country, post-covid, handfuls of remaining members reconvened to look for a way forward but concluded that there was no way back. Dozens, maybe hundreds of choirs that had run successfully for years disbanded and disappeared.

Colne Valley didn't disappear

Our male voice choir weathered the storm.

We resumed with our first concert to a live audience with an informal concert at Saint James's in our home village on October 3rd 2021. Sure the audience was small but it did exist. Shortly afterwards we returned to our big Christmas Concerts at the Huddersfield Town Hall and Marsden, wearing our 'dress masks' for safety's sake. We were allowed to remove them when singing. Our loyal audiences were lower in numbers but it was great to be back performing.



Covid did strike

The Choir returned to Competition at the Mrs Sunderland in February 2022, winning no prizes but singing really well. We were crammed into a small, hot and stuffy rehearsal room to warm up.



A few days later the first reports of positive '**Lateral Flow Test**' results began to come in. The Choir, having largely avoided Covid though all those pandemic months, had finally got it. (**Thom Meredith** got in very early on in March 2020 and kept himself isolated for a while.)



Upwards of twenty singers succumbed - and many gave it to their partners at home. Some reported it was 'Nothing to write home about'. They wouldn't have noticed until, urged to test, they discovered a positive result. Others said they struggled to get out of bed and dragged themselves around like zombies not feeling human again 'til weeks after. The rest of us got what seemed like a bad dose of flu.

Incidentally, it's good to report, that while some of our members passed away during the pandemic years, to the best of our knowledge, none died from Covid.

Our best post-infection initiative? - LAMS.

Early in 2023 CVMVC kicked off its 'Let all Men Sing' Programme. The idea was to re-engage with our local communities as we started our post-covid rebuild. Thom and Chris had agreed to run it if we got 8 men to roll up and commit to eight singing sessions to be followed by a one-off concert.



As it turns out about 38 men turned out and participated eagerly. The programme was a huge success; not only for the cohort of men but subsequently it helped massively to rebuild our profile in the community, to rebuild our audience numbers and a substantial number of participants went on to reinvigorate the whole Choir.



After three successful reiterations of the project - together with the rest of our initiatives - the Choir is as strong - arguably even stronger- than it was before Covid struck.

So how did we cope with the Pandemic?

We have as many singers as we've had for decades and we are singing as well as ever. Our Choir is nearly back to break-even on its current account and is financially secure. Audiences come to enjoy us in as big numbers as any this century. And our future looks bright.

Well done to all who contributed!



Camaraderie, chips and chuntering -

- what more could you want?



About 50 men from the Colne Valley set out for Whitby the other week.

We went to participate in **the Eskdale Music Festival and Competition** at the theatre by the seashore on Whitby's North Bay.

It was a grand day out

We took to the stage in the 'Songs from the Shows' class, singing 'Come What May' from Moulin Rouge. **We won first prize** and felt we thoroughly deserved it.



Subsequently we sang even better. Going by our adjudicator's comments we reckoned we'd win again but when it came to the announcements both audience and Choir members were surprised: Sacred Music class - 2nd prize and Recital Class - joint 3rd.

There may have been a little bit of chuntering. But the programme showed our adjudicator mostly worked with schools' festivals. Maybe he maintained that 'primary school ethos' and maybe he and the organisers wanted to make sure that **everybody got a prize**. And happen he was right.



For new man, **Michael Rice**, and his partner, Joanna, the trip was well worth it. He tells Voice of the Valley:-

'I've been singing with the choir for just over a year now and I'm really enjoying it. I used to sing quite a bit at school, but hadn't done much since then until I moved to Huddersfield. A colleague encouraged me to give it a go, and I'm so glad I did. Singing at the competition in Whitby was my first big event, and it was great having my wife, Joanna, come along too - it made it even more fun. I'm looking forward to more performances and competitions over the next few months. Thanks to everyone for being so welcoming.'

In any case we had a good day at the seaside and the fish and chips were excellent



& Piano 25

Our wonderful **Chris Pulleyn's** Festival is returning this month.

& there is a great range of performances in the programme.

& with a superb singers and instrumental virtuosi lined up.

& with something for all tastes and age groups.

& it will all be happening in the Colne Valley.



https://andpiano.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025_Brochure.pdf



& you can check out the programme

& get you tickets on the link above:-



First Impressions

"It is a year since I passed my vocal assessment and became a member of the CVMVC and I thought it worth reflecting on that year.



My decision to seek membership was influenced by the enjoyment and challenge provided when I signed up for the 'Let All Men Sing' programme in the New Year 2024.

Then I heard the Choir at full power at the LAMS concert. Who could not want to be part of that?

LAMS was a relatively pain-free way of entering the male voice choir world and developing some understanding of the CVMVC way of doing things.

Joining a new organisation is always daunting but - among CVMVC's great strengths - are the friendliness and approachability of its members.

These strengths helped enormously when I was confronted by a pile of music most of which was unknown to me. Thanks to Thom's leadership, help from choir members and the excellent rehearsal tracks, I ascended a very, very steep learning curve.



*Putting aside the LAMS concert my first 'professional engagement' was at **Golcar Parish Church** and the second was the 'Town Sing' - two contrasting events that to me symbolised the choir's ethos.*



*These were part of a series of events, with or without folk groups and brass bands, but the **Halifax Minster** concert sticks in my mind; this was my first formal concert suited and booted in a dinner jacket.*

When I arrived I thought I'd walked into a convention of head-waiters. While on the subject of clothing, being fitted with a choir-issue three-piece (plus choir tie and pocket square (a hankie)) was an experience I won't forget quickly (cue jokes about 'suits you, sir').

The summer activity, of course, was surpassed by Christmas (or should be it 'Christemas?'). This meant a new repertoire where even the familiar carols were often very different.

CVMVC engagements at Christmas got me involved in events ranging from the Town Hall to the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary. I've not enjoyed Christmas so much for ages.



This spring saw two tours of schools to raise the profile of the Boys' Choir as well as encouraging the children's interest in music.

These were memorable for me because of, first, the children's sheer enthusiasm, and second, because I was astonished by how many knew 'The Wellerman'!



Now the controversial bit. Aren't competitions fascinating? As well as an opportunity to hear comparable choirs they are an opportunity to try and work out how some adjudicators reach their decisions. Unfathomable doesn't quite describe it.

What is clear is that, like God, adjudicators move in mysterious ways. Whoever said 'It's taking part, not winning that counts' was neither a male voice choir member nor a Yorkshireman. I don't think it will be long before the first AI-powered adjudicator is available.



So, it's been a very full, very busy, and very demanding, but happy and enjoyable, first year.

Joining LAMS and then CVMVC were two of my better decisions - great fun but hard-work (home-work at my age?)

More than that, being part of a community working towards a common goal is incredibly worthwhile and rewarding and for these opportunities I'd to thank the members of CVMVC.

Only twenty-four years to go before I qualify for my long service award."

Andrew Taylor.

Quilts



Judith and **Linda** (respectively, partners to Choir stalwarts, **David** and **Matt**) have been amongst the main movers in the Marsden Quilt saga.



Not so long ago, whilst clearing the vestry at Saint Bartholomew's, a group of women parishioners came across a box, containing a long-forgotten quilt, that had been sewn by the ladies of Marsden church round about 1895.

They set about restoring it and fairly soon they decided that making a contemporary recreation would be a good idea.



The result is a fine new quilt matching the spirit of the ancient one but reflecting the life of the Valley today. After two years of group effort the quilt was put on display for 'Cuckoo Day'.

Included is a patch showing the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir on song in the village.



**St Bartholomew's
Church - Marsden**

Last chance to see the
quilts side by side for a
while

MONDAY 5TH MAY

1130 - 1330



The old quilt is quite fragile so opportunities to view them both side by side will be rare, But you can see them on May 5th.

Well done, you Ladies of Marsden and thank you for including the Choir.

Happy Birthday, Andrew

Choir photographer, **Christine Wilson**, sends VotV this story to go along with her pictures:

Hi Mr Editor,

'Love this photo of the Choir with Andy and his family & friends together celebrating his birthday at the Golf club.

Andy has just realised he's not the only Andy Leyland there! His wife Christine had bought the masks of him as a surprise.

Below Andy is thanking everyone.

He surprised me. I didn't expect the Choir to be there performing at his do. What a fun time!

Definitely one for the VotV!

The audience loved it they wanted an encore and they got it Brilliant

Andy also performed with the Choir on that wooden drum thing sorry I can't remember its name.'

(The Cahon - ed)

Christine

x



Colne Valley Male Voice Choir
Est 1922

Events Recordings Our History About Us Information

