



Rollercoaster ride at Festival ends on a high.

It was a rollercoaster day for the **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** as it attended the most prestigious **Huddersfield Mrs. Sunderland Music Festival**.

'It's a celebration of great music and singing that has run since 1892,' said **Chairman Stephen Roberts**, joyfully remarking on this year's event.



'We have seen 11 days of performance and over 5,200 performers in this wonderful Town Hall. It's a great festival, so smoothly run by our '**Yellow Helpers**' - and you should tell everyone about it.'



Our Choir participated in the final day; the musical climax of the choral components of the festival.

Colne Valley men entered two competition classes and it was a rollercoaster sort of day with many a rise and fall of emotions.



Photo: Andy Symons

But Voice of the Valley is pleased to report that we finished the day on a high, participating in the '**Gala Final Concert**' for **competition Winners**.

Amongst them was the '**Mrs Sunderland Young Musician of the Year**' prize winner, a French-horn player of astonishing accomplishment, **Toby Johnson-Jones**.

It should be noted that he was accompanied in his gala performance by our very own **Chris Pulleyn**.

He has had a very busy couple of weeks playing piano for dozens of up-and-coming performers.

Well done, Chris

How, then, did we get to the Winner's Gala Concert?

Well, first we sang in the Male Choir class.

But, as you can see, we left the stage a little deflated with a third prize.



The trick with competition performance... opines your Editor... is to prepare scrupulously beforehand and then perform to the very best standard that you can manage. It doesn't matter whether you win or lose. There's nothing you can do about your competitors, nor about the idiosyncrasies of the adjudicator. These things are beyond your control but if you sing to your best you have no grounds for misery.

Unfortunately even the most upbeat of our members would probably concede that we have regularly sung the chosen pieces better than we managed to on Saturday. Maybe it was just too early in the day!

In the afternoon the Choir entered the second competition, the so-called 'Choir Programme'. This featured seven excellent choirs of both male and female voices. We knew the competition would be tight.

"You can sing these pieces really well." said Thom just beforehand. *"Don't worry just enjoy, just enjoy singing"*.

And so we gathered in the backstage corridor, determined to do just that.



We knew from the competition earlier in the day that the adjudicator, **Ben Costello**, had a powerful background in Musical Theatre and was less concerned by the techniques of choral accuracy than he was by the choir's capacity to convey intention and drama.

Our first song was a rousing anthem, '**Let there be Light**'. Then came the hauntingly beautiful '**O Shenandoah**' and finally that striking declaration of courage from the musical, 'Man of La Mancha', '**To Dream the Impossible Dream**'.

Our choice of repertoire contained much that would appeal if we could only deliver it.

We took to the stage and delivered.



Afterwards, we listened in the hall to many of the other competitors. They were really good.

And then our adjudicator took to the stage. "**What an extraordinarily good class.**" he began.

Mr Costello did a beautiful job of talking about each choir's performance, focussing mostly on what they did well and - as we suspected - on how well each of them 'sold' the ideas and the composer's intent.



It was clear he liked us, but also clear that he found very much virtue in many performances.

So we could not anticipate his final declaration....

'Winners with an 'outstanding' grade: Colne Valley Male Voice Choir'



The audience was thrilled, we were thrilled and Thom was thrilled.

Such a comeback after a disappointing morning.

And...quite an achievement for a Choir that is still regenerating after many departures and new arrivals.

Word is that adjudicator, Ben, had a tear in his eye when we sang 'Shenandoah' and specifically asked that we sing it again in the Gala Concert.

We are aware of our glorious heritage - such a lot to live up to - but we emerged with a record-breaking 52nd First Prize Victory at this showpiece festival. Though we have won in the Male Voice Choir section many times in the last few years, this was our first 'Rosebowl Victory' for 'mixed choirs' since 2013.

There was some rejoicing backstage.



What a star you are, Thom Meredith.



The Choir seemed pretty pleased.



And Damian's a star, too.

Incidentally, Damien Stirling, (former Colne Valley Boy and now proud member of the Second Tenors in the main adult Choir) was very busy in the Mrs Sunderland Festival.

He performed in eight competition classes and won one 3rd place prize and two 2nd prizes but, better still, **won four cups** - three for first prizes and then the coveted '**Rosebowl Trophy**' for **Musical Theatre Performance**.



He was also amongst the small handful of winners invited to participate in Ben Costello's, Music Theatre Master-class.

Well done, Damien

Chairman Kieran adds.

'Huge congratulations for Saturday's performance at the Mrs Sunderland Festival. It was very gratifying to see our weeks of hard work pay off in such spectacular style.

Even without the accolades, I would have been very proud of how the Choir performed - but taking home prizes makes it extra special. Well done and thank you to you all.'



Raymond Ellis

Anybody - whether as concert-goer or performer - who's had any association with the Choir (unless, of course, that association has been very recent) will be deeply saddened to learn of the death of Raymond Ellis.

One of the most generous-hearted and kindly men you could ever hope to meet, Raymond was a loyal Choir member, joining the baritone section over 43 years ago and becoming a **'Life Member'** and remaining a mainstay throughout the years that followed.

He had been dealing with poor health in recent months but he rallied after major surgery and returned briefly to rehearsals in the autumn. Sadly, his original illness returned and he passed away early in February in his 80th year of life.



Raymond was not only a much-loved member of our Colne Valley Choir; he was also a proud participant in the life of the Colne Valley community. He was raised in the Colne Valley and was a pupil at Colne Valley High School in the 1960's.

(back row, 2nd from right)

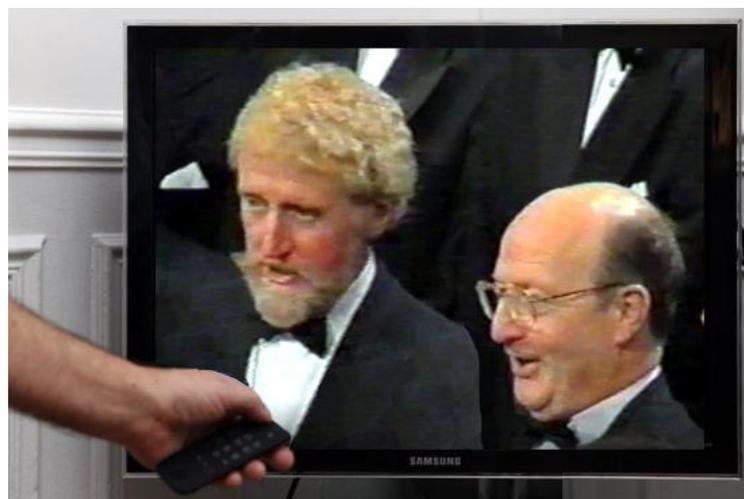
Amongst his many contributions to the community, he was a keen supporter of the Colne Valley Museum; a fine museum of local history, based in Golcar.



And what a voice!

For decades, Raymond was one of the go-to singers whenever solo spots were called for. His rich baritone timbre was much in demand at concerts.

We are fortunate to have a recording of the Choir performing in the Llangollen Eisteddfod in 1998, when Raymond and tenor, **Arthur Quarmby**, took the solo roles in **'Rejoice in the Lord Alway'**; a performance that (for a record-breaking fifth time) won Colne Valley Male Voice Choir the top spot in this most famous choir festival and competition.



Click here or on the TV to enjoy their beautiful duet and the Choir's powerful accompaniment. <https://youtu.be/UDkT2gwTHx0>



Amongst his many accomplishments were his mischievous sense of humour and his great skill as a raconteur. It would have been typical of a Raymond solo spot for him to tell a cheesy story.

It mattered not a jot to him or to his audience whether they'd heard the tale before. Who can forget 'Painting the Parrot', 'the Goat in a Well' or 'A Bird for Christmas'?

It wasn't the stories, it was the magnificence of the way he told them that held listeners rapt and convulsed in laughter.

Raymond worked closely with Maestro Keith Swallow at the piano on what was their masterpiece comic song - Sterndale Bennett's Anthology, 'Mary had a Little Lamb'. Voice of the Valley has found a rare recording of this terrific party-piece. Even though the quality of the recording is poor, Raymond and Keith's performance shines through and it is evident from the audience's laughter how brilliant his delivery is. (Click here or on the image below.)

A YouTube video player interface. On the left is a small portrait of Raymond Ellis. To the right of the portrait is a play button icon and the text "Raymond Ellis and Keith Swallow" and "Raymond Ellis - The Song Cycle Sterndale Bennett". Below this is a waveform visualization of the audio. The waveform starts at 1:45 and ends at 4:08. The video player has a black background.

<https://hearthis.at/cvmvc/raymond-ellis-the-song-cycle-sterndale-bennett/>

He will be missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

The Choir sang the '**Fourfold Amen** in his honour the other night at rehearsal and Chairman Kieran took the opportunity to send, on our behalf, our sympathy and warm thoughts towards his wife Linda and to their children and grandchildren.



There will be a private family service on March the 4th. This will be followed by an open '**Service of Celebration**' later that morning at 11 o'clock. This will take place at the **Golcar Providence Methodist Church**. (That's at Knowl Road, Golcar, Huddersfield, HD7 4AN).

The Choir will take the opportunity one last time to sing in his memory.

Raymond Ellis: RIP

11th December 1946 to 5th February 2026



Birthplace of 'Bread of Heaven' saved

Supporters raise £73,000 to secure future of a Welsh Valleys chapel, where beloved hymn **Cwm Rhondda** was first sung.



There can't be many stronger contenders for the title of 'Most Rousing Welsh Hymn Ever' than '**Cwm Rhondda**'.

And only in the voices of a great male voice choir can it sound at its very best.

*Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:*

*Bread of heaven, bread of heaven
Feed me now and evermore.
Feed me now and evermore.*

So, readers of Voice of the Valley will be interested to learn about the origins of this fine anthem and they'll be pleased to hear that the chapel where it was first sung has been saved by community action from further decline after years of neglect.

It was in 1907 when **John Hughes**' classic hymn was first performed to celebrate the installation of an organ in the **Baptist church** near **Pontypridd**.

Click here for Côr OrpheusTreforys/ Morryston Orpheus Choir's version.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5NOVcefEYU>

Pontypridd Male Voice Choir took a role in saving the chapel - the first home of a piece of music that is still in the repertoire of Male Voice Choirs worldwide.

Here in Yorkshire's Colne Valley, our librarians recently redistributed copies of **Owain Arwell Hughes**' arrangement from 2012 so we can refresh our memories before a performance with **Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band** coming up on the 28th of March.

That will be at the '**Amazing Grace Concert of Hymns and Marches**' where **Colne Valley Male Voice Choir** will be the guests of that most wonderful of brass bands in our magnificent **Huddersfield Town Hall** on the 28th of March.



VotV thanks **'The Guardian'** and its reporter **Steven Morris** for these excerpts and pictures....

'The Welsh Valleys chapel where the beloved hymn Cwm Rhondda - also known as Bread of Heaven - was first sung is safe in the hands of local people after a successful fundraising campaign.'

*A community group has taken ownership of **Capel Rhondda** in Hopkinstown, near **Pontypridd**. Rhian Hopkins, one of the leading lights in the campaign, said: "The purchase of Capel Rhondda demonstrates what is possible when people come together."*

The composer John Hughes wrote Cwm Rhondda in 1907 to celebrate the installation of a new organ at the chapel. The Grade II-listed building closed in December 2024 after years of declining congregations and was put up for sale by the Baptist Union of Wales. Donations came from across Wales and beyond. Some contributors said they were giving in honour of family members who had sung in the choir; others simply because they loved the hymn.

*Mark Drakeford, representing the Welsh government, was treated to a performance of Cwm Rhondda by members of the **Pontypridd Male Voice Choir** when he visited to celebrate the purchase. He said: "It was an honour to visit Capel Rhondda. Hearing the choir perform the hymn in its birthplace was a moving experience.'*



ColourMagic

One of the Choirs' unsung heroes is second tenor, **Geoff Bedford**. Amongst his many contributions, Geoff has made it his business to find sponsors and advertisers for Choir programmes. Over the years this has raised many hundreds of pounds to help keep the Choir financially buoyant.



One of the advertisers Geoff brought in is a local firm, 'ColourMagic'. At Voice of the Valley we are always happy to mention our sponsors and supporters and it turns out that the guys behind ColourMagic have quite a story behind their growing business. Geoff tells us....



ColourMagic Auto Repair Shop was founded by two hands-on, passionate vehicle restoration enthusiasts - Scott and Antony. With a shared commitment to quality, they've built a business specialising in expert car respraying, panel preparation, body repairs, minor damage and refinishing. Find us at Unit 2, Waterhouse Mill, Albert Street, Lockwood.



The 'Birth of ColourMagic'

This is a story of courage, and belief in their own ability to make this work.

It starts with two men suddenly out of work.

Scott and Antony had both been working for Premier Coachworks for over 12 years and more when in May 2025 Premier decided to cease trading and close. After spending a short while trying to find work in the area, Scott and Antony realised, as they have a great friendship and both have a strong work ethic, that going into business together was really a no-brainer.

This prompted a search for premises that fell within their quickly-put-together budget. Luckily they came across a unit on Albert Street. The unit was just the job, already it could accommodate several cars, and the location is fine.

Also, a little bonus was that their previous boss at Premier, was more than happy to see them now covering car paint repairs, was generous, and 'gifted' them quite a few pieces of spraying equipment.

Scott admitted times are still tough, 'as the 'word of their company still has to spread, and we are now hoping to build up our reputation'. Scott adds, 'We are more than happy to work long hours, we never turn a job down and we open our doors at the moment at 06.30hrs.'



It's been a tough time for this enterprising duo. During his time with Premier, approx. three years ago, Scott was struck down with a Stage 4 colon tumour, the size of a grapefruit, which was dangerously attached to his Aorta. The decision was made to have chemotherapy first to shrink the Tumour, it was so intense that he had to take up residence in a ward at St James Hospital Leeds and had an almost daily course of the Chemo.

He was told the next step, was a very fragile operation, to remove the tumour, but not in any way damage the Aorta. This they did, and Scott recovered, well you know the rest of this story.

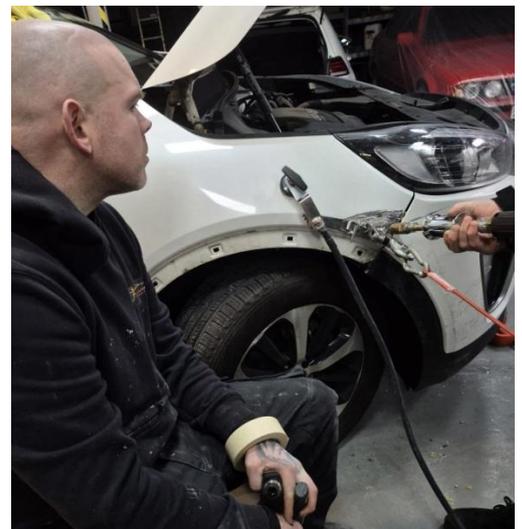
And it's not as if the mutual care and determination was all one-way - in fact Antony himself suffered during lockdown when he fully ruptured his Achilles tendon and even with a serious injury and a full leg cast he still never missed a day of work. This kind of determination and attitude from both lads is one of the reasons ColourMagic was always going to be a success.

Geoff adds. "I was more than happy with the work to repair a 'scrunch' on the rear nearside wheel arch of my Lexus.

Taken in one morning and the following morning ready for collection, they worked their magic to render the 'dink' invisible.

I paid them on the spot. And then I twisted their arm to place an advert into our 2025 Christmas programme."

Thanks Geoff, says VotV. And, if any of our readers want a car repaired, you know where to go!



Best of luck to ColourMagic

It's not too late - new style LAMS still available

You are still in time for the 'Let All Men Sing & Friends' community initiative. It's starting on **Saturday 28th February** and continuing on **Sunday March 1st**.



This year it will be a bit different. **Thom** and **Chris** will lead workshops at the **Civic** in **Slaithwaite**. And then after the Sunday afternoon session, participants will perform in a **Celebratory Concert** with the main Choir and Colne Valley Boys Choir in support - at **Saint James's Church** in **Slaithwaite** - to begin at **4:30pm**.

The concert is open to anybody. Do come and enjoy a range of fun performances.

Tickets are just £5.00. Doors open at 4:00pm

And even more exciting - this year it's '**LAMS & Friends**'; that is it's open to all voices - not just men but women and children, too.

So far something around 40 participants have registered (of which about half are females). There's no suggestion that we will limit the number of people who can come. **You can just turn up**. But nonetheless it would be helpful to sign up in advance.

No FOMO....

Don't miss out. Follow this link to the LAMS website and book you and your family in. You won't regret it!

www.letallmensing.co.uk



Spooky Men coming to Yorkshire



WE ARE COMING TO THE UK says Stephen Taberner

....and because it is our birthday, it is a birthday tour. we dearly hope you can join us. there will be various beautiful birthday shennanigans, specifically, we will revive various time encrusted bon bons from our back catalogue, as well as other sweet surprises, and our usual dramatic voyage through beauty, boofiness, and stupidity.

and so, we shyly present:.....

THE SPOOKY MEN'S CHORALE

25 years of pointless grandeur

UK TOUR 2026

DATES INCLUDE FOR YOU NORTHERN FOLK

Wed 1 July – **LEEDS**, City Varieties
Thu 2 July – **SETTLE**, Victoria Hall
Fri 3 July – **KENDAL**, Brewery
Sun 12 July – **LIVERPOOL**, St George's
Mon 13 July – **MANCHESTER**, Stoller Hall

All info, updates and tickets at: www.spookymen.com

thank you for your indulgence, bless your socks, all 147 of them

stephen taberner
spookmeister

Watch them do their own peculiarly quirky version of Bohemian Rhapsody. Click on the TV below.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EvtPq-qvMg>

Join the Club



Supporter of CVMVC, resident of Blyth Bridge Staffordshire (home to the Foxton Steam Railway) and general enthusiast for choral singing, Margaret Green was the owner of the **lucky number** drawn electronically in the 200 Club the other night at rehearsal.

Your Editor was briefly disappointed it wasn't his name that was called out but he quickly realised it wasn't a total bust - Margaret Green is your Editor's sister - so it's all good!



I now have the decision to make - whether I tell her or not! I suppose I should.

Still, as they say, you've got to be in it to win it. Tom Jennings says he's got a handful of numbers unsold so get in touch with him and claim a number – perhaps for your sister.



£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 Tom Jennings at:-
200club@colnevalleymvc.co.uk



Do bear it in mind....

Please remember that your Voice of the Valley Editor, John Clark, is always interested in hearing from readers. If you've a picture or a story or an event that's interesting and has some vague connection with Colne Valley Male Voice Choir, then please do get in touch at newsletter@colnevalleymvc.co.uk



And for the fuller picture - see our website



Colne Valley Male Voice Choir
Est 1922

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