

# COR MEIBION BRYMBO MALE CHOIR

## LOCKDOWN NEWSLETTER No 3

July 2020

### Message from the President

I hope that you and your loved ones are well and keeping safe.

We are experiencing a worldwide problem in the Covid 19 virus pandemic so I hope that you are all obeying the rules to keep safe, especially the “Golden Oldies”, of which I am one of course and all of you with underlying health problems. Like many of you I can now understand what it is like to be a caged bird. So far I’ve had 17 weeks of self-isolation so it is with great relief that I can experience some freedom, albeit limited. We should remember though that if you want the rainbow you must put up with the rain. How future choral life will be effected is anyone’s guess but I’m sure that like me, you are all looking forward to return to practice and maybe even performance again. When we are able to return, however, it must be done in the correct way. It will be essential to have a safety review to establish how we can return while taking in the individual needs of all choristers including their feelings about meeting in groups. It may be some time before we can meet and then probably a further delay before audiences are allowed to assemble to hear us sing. It may seem that this will never happen but by staying positive and upbeat we will come through this difficult period to once again enjoy the camaraderie that is part of being in a choir. Keep safe.

Peter.

### Voice Representatives

We are sad to report that the VR of the 1st Bass Section, **Reverend Sam Erlandson** is to leave the choir due to relocation to the Llanrhos area where he will take up a more senior position in the church. He will become the Dean of Aberconwy and have responsibility for two parishes, St Paul's Craig y Don, in Llandudno and St Hilary's, Llanrhos. Sam has a deep affection for the Brymbo choir and would like to remain associated in some way. He reports that the church at Craig y Don is a superb concert venue and he would welcome us there at any time when it becomes possible. Sam has always been a highly valued choir member and will be very much missed.

We wish him well in this new position.

As one door closes another opens and it is pleasing to report that **Chorister Rob White** will make a welcome return to the role of 1st Bass Voice Representative. Rob was forced to relinquish the role some years ago due to serious illness in the family that meant his attendance at practice and other meetings could not be relied upon. All is now clear on the health front and Rob is looking forward to resuming his duties. He is a talented and experienced musician as his short biography in this edition shows. In the next Newsletter edition Rob will explain the role of Voice Representative more fully. Good luck in your new position Rob.

## Music or Boxing? From John Smallwood

It was in 1962 when I started to box brought, about by a bully in school. This lad would pick on other boys, It was a Friday afternoon when he decided to have a go at me and we got into a good old scrap. I got the better of this lad by holding him down on the ground with my knees on his shoulders and that was that fight over for me I won, he lost. Up to this point I had never punched anyone in the face. As I walked away he jumped me from behind knocked me to the ground and held me down in the same way as I had done to him but the difference was that he punched me several times in the face giving me a black eye, cut lip and bloody nose.

At that time I worked for a barber and every Friday I would go from school to his shop to help clean up and prepare for the Saturday, when I arrived at the shop the barber, also named John, was horrified to see what had happened to me, I gave him a full account of what went on explaining that he had punched me in the face several times when I was on the ground, something I would not do to him or anyone else. The barber's shop backed onto a billiard hall and at the end of the hall was a boxing club. John marched me through the hall to the club and explained to the club trainer what had happened. The trainer was a little man with an Irish accent so strong that I couldn't understand a word he said except he used the f word a lot. His name was Johnny Mullan who said he would teach me how to \*\*\*ing punch and that is how it all started.

I had to train twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday, nights which was a problem for me because, at the time, Dad was band master and brass teacher at Llay Band and had practice on the same nights. We had no car then so bus was the only transport and of course I would intentionally miss the bus to go to boxing training. Eventually my Dad made me choose between boxing and music. I chose boxing and he gave me his full support from then on.

I trained hard for weeks and boxed with different club members. One especially was Les Mc Ateer who was a light middleweight and member of Birkenhead [Willaston](#) Club with his brother Gordon. Les came over to Wales for extra training and would spar and box with me and strongly highlighted the importance of footwork. Les and Gordon later became professional boxers but always showed an interest in our club..

As for my boxing future I had my first fight at Kinmel Bay army camp near Rhyl against an army cadet. I won easily on points and then went on to have five more fights. One special fight was at the Golden Gloves Club Liverpool with big names on the bill most of whom turned professional in later years. The fight was hard but again I won on points. For some reason it was difficult for me to get fights and I found myself boxing guys with far more boxing experience than me. By now I had had six fights with six wins, oh plus one disqualification but we won't go into that!!

It was three months before my next fight came along and it was a big one. A team from N. Wales were to box a team from Rotterdam the following January. Wales v Holland. Three of our club members had been selected to represent N. Wales, Just two weeks before Christmas our trainer Johnny Mullan, who was also assistant Manager to the Welsh Team, took me to one side and said that a guy had pulled out of the team and my name had been put forward to replace him. Of course I was delighted to box for Wales but also very nervous. Two days before Christmas Johnny Mullan called around to my house to confirm that I would be boxing at The Pavilion Theatre on Friday 15th January for the Wales team against the Rotterdam Team. He said that I should state my age as 18 not 17 in line with the rules at the time. This was no problem to since I would be 18 in a few months. The big day arrived and we all got into a minibus for the rip to Rhyl. Arriving at the Pavilion we were shown the dressing rooms at the rear of that famous stage. I was put with two big guys, Geoff Davies from Wrexham and Carl Gizzi from Rhyl. Gizzi was a well-known amateur and would be turning professional the following year. They both gave me words of encouragement telling me not to be nervous and to take deep breaths before my fight. The loud speakers bellowed out the introduction to the events of the evening and after all the introductions the first boxers were introduced. Representing N. Wales John Smallwood against a boxer from Rotterdam whose name I can't remember, (continued on next page)

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The first fight of the night!!

I could not believe it!!!

We had to stand in our corners for the national anthems, with my knees knocking I glanced around the theatre and I could see Les and Gordon McAteer standing by the entrance to the dressing rooms. Both were wearing distinguished trilby hats, black with coloured feathers and they had come to support us. That gave me the extra encouragement I needed, I had to do well.

#### First Round

The referee checked us both over, all was well and I stood in my corner in my green shorts and vest waiting to start. The bell went and the fight started. I felt good, my footwork was quick, I moved around throwing left punches and right jabs. My opponent was older than me and did not move around very much. I caught him with a right-hand punch that put him down on the deck. I had put my full body weight behind the punch knowing that if it caught him it would do some damage. The referee was Vernon Alan and I had met up with him before, remember that disqualification? There followed a few minutes of chaos. Instead of starting the count the ref pushed me to a neutral corner, brushed my gloves down the front of my shorts and walked across to my opponent who was still down on the canvas. He then started the count at least 5 seconds late. The other boxer got to his feet on a count of six but should very clearly have been counted out. There was mayhem in my corner, they were absolutely furious and during the break they told me to wade in and nail the Dutch boxer in the next round. Finish him off

#### Second Round

I gave him three or four good left punches then the big one. I brought my right arm over again full body weight behind the punch and caught him on the bridge of the nose. Game over I thought but no, he was staggering about but remained on his feet. Following the massive right I was in a lot of pain in my shoulder and hand. What I had done in my enthusiasm was to leave my thumb outside the glove giving it no protection. The pain was severe and I could only box the last minute of the round with my left hand.

#### Last Round

Telling my trainer of the pain in my hand and shoulder he told me to get in and finish the \*\*\*\*ing fight off and I did. The referee decision was a draw. Considering I boxed the end of the second round and all the last with my left hand. That was a good result in my book.

My trainer told me to report to the doctor however the doctor was busy checking other boxer's and all I wanted was a drink to help numb the pain, After a few drinks and the night's entertainment had finished we returned home. I had a lot to drink for a young lad but it helped with the pain. The following morning I got up for work my hand was swollen like a cricket ball and I could not move my shoulder as the pain would shoot down my arm. I was taken to Chester Hospital and found to have a broken thumb and dislocated shoulder! I was in plaster for twelve weeks.

Needless to say that was the end of my boxing career, although I did box for Wales!!

Music or Boxing?

Wish I'd stuck with the music now!!

III

### **WHO COULD IT BE?**

One member of the choir cycled 77 miles on his birthday and during the month leading up to his birthday he ran 77 miles in the local hills.

Pictured here with his cycling carer, who is he?

Answer in the next issue.



## 66 YEARS OF SONG AND MUSIC from Rob White

My mother told me that I could sing and whistle along to songs on the radio, or simple ones she played on the piano, by the age of 4. I have a recollection of singing a Jolson song called “California here I come” at about that age. Why that song, written about 1920, I am not sure, but I think my father used to sing it a lot and I must have copied him.

My mother was a very talented musician, but tragically went totally deaf just 3 years after I was born. Despite this handicap, she was still able to play the piano from sight and memory and with natural “feel”. She also played the violin and reached grade 8 level in both instruments. When I reached the age of 7, my mother encouraged me to learn to play the piano and helped me with my daily practice. I progressed quite well until, like many others, I stopped playing between grades 4 and 5. I became much more interested in sport in my early teens and played fullback and in goal for the school football team. I did not totally neglect music though, as I learned the basics of violin playing at school and was a second violin in the school orchestra.

I have hardly played the piano since the age of about 13 but my mother’s early encouragement and having violin lessons at school, gave me a good grounding in music.

Aged about 17, I took up playing the guitar and at that time my interest in folk music and song started. My first public folk performance was in a room above “The Bear” public house in my home city of Nottingham. I sang a couple of “bluegrass” songs, one of which was “Bury me beneath the willow”, accompanied by a school friend on guitar. I have been singing and playing folk music ever since and this became my main musical interest. I did solo spots at folk clubs and occasionally I even got paid! In 1975, while living in Hertfordshire, I sang and played guitar in a folk duo called, not very originally, “Bob and Pete”. In 1974 I joined the St. Albans Morris Men as a dancer and when I moved up to Wrexham in 1979, I joined the Kinnerton Morris Men, again as a dancer, however, after two years or so, one of the musicians left, so I volunteered my services as a fiddler and quite quickly learned many of the dance tunes using the knowledge of the instrument I gained when playing at school.

I am still a member of Kinnerton Morris and play the fiddle at all practices and most dance outs. I stopped dancing 2 years ago when my doctor told me to stop to avoid permanent damage to my Achilles tendons. Our oldest dancing member is 83 and thinking of retiring this year! They are pictured here in full regalia.



I was never in the school choir or a church choir, but I had always been interested in taking it up at some time. The first choral music I sang was Barbershop (an American “tradition”) four-part unaccompanied harmony with the “Clwyd Clippers”, based in Mold at that time. I joined in 1987 and sang “Lead” (like 2<sup>nd</sup> Tenor) and later Tenor (top tenor). The Clippers sang in Competitions at the annual British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) Conventions held in different cities and towns throughout the UK. The best we ever did was 5th place I think. However, we did win an International Competition in Sligo, Ireland with a 1st prize of £2000.

I left the Clippers in 2004 and shortly afterwards, formed a Barbershop Quartet we called “4 Square”. I sang tenor in the quartet who are pictured here in full throated song.



The quartet existed for about 5 years until the untimely death in 2009, of our Lead singer, Rod Stone. The quartet performed at numerous weddings and receptions, with musical theatre societies and at small concerts and functions.

We also did 2 big charity concerts at Rhyl Pavilion and Theatr Clwyd. (continued on next page)

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Several choristers will remember Rod Stone as a leading light in the Wrexham Musical Theatre Society and the later “New Start“ breakaway society. Stan Crabtree, Baritone in the quartet, played a part in obtaining “references” for Shirley before she was appointed accompanist to the choir.

Just before the quartet finally folded, I attended a performance by The Brymbo Male Voice Choir at “The Crick “, having seen it advertised and been told about it by the late Pete Nicolson . Within a few weeks I was at rehearsal and before I knew where I was, I was a full member, singing First Bass and on tour with the Choir in October 2009. As you all know, I am still a keen member and enjoy every aspect of Choir activity with a wonderful group of people. I have just recently agreed to take on, for the second time, the role of First Bass Voice Rep. When I can, I join other folk musicians and singers at a regular Monday night “session” at the Wickstead pub in Nantwich. Also, two or three of us perform together, at small events put on by local societies and interest groups, churches and occasionally, the National Trust at Erddig where I work one day a week as a volunteer gardener. Since lockdown started, we have got together on “Zoom” to play and /or sing in turn while the others join in with microphones turned off, as it is not possible to have all joining in together. We have also done some recordings to which other parts have been added to “stitch together” a performance with a reasonable sound. However, there is nothing like the real thing , as they say, and I would love to get back singing and playing again with the Choir and other musicians. It remains to be seen when and how it will be possible to return to something approaching normality.

I the meantime keep safe, fit and well and keep practicing!

### **Message from the Musical Director**

Greetings! I Hope you are all keeping well. Firstly many thanks to those choristers who have been using the Warm-up video, if you haven’t tried it yet feel free to have a go! Unfortunately singing together in person is still a problem and although there are some research groups working on how much risk it poses, there are no definite conclusions as yet. Rest assured we will come back to rehearsals as soon as it is safe to do so. Congratulations to Noel and Kelvin on their charity support exertions. There is also pleasing news that John Owen is back from recent hospital treatment and has now taken on the duty of managing the Engagements Diary.

As you will have read elsewhere, two members of our group are, sadly, leaving. Tom has accepted a job abroad, but the door remains open should he wish to return. I think he would have proved to be a popular and talented accompanist.

Sam in the 1<sup>st</sup> Bass has been given new duties at St Paul’s in Llandudno and St Hilary’s Lanrhos as well as being appointed Area Dean of Aberconwy- quite a promotion! Many congratulations. Very best wishes to you and your young family and many thanks for all your support for the choir in both singing and playing.

It has been pointed out that you will all struggle to learn words for the Xmas Wedding without your Xmas folders. It is, of course, still uncertain whether this event will go ahead but once the couple have made their choice from the list we can possibly print the words for you in the appropriate Newsletter – Watch this space! Let’s hope we will be back in rehearsal well before then. To be ready for resumption you should take very seriously the comments of the Stage Manager later in this Newsletter.

Our Editor has asked me to provide an amazing anecdote for this month’s issue instead of my usual puzzles, yes, that was me! I’m not sure I can compete with Syd’s need for speed or the witty contributions of a Lancashire lad- but here goes. I should warn you that the following includes some shameless name dropping! (continued on next page)

## Music College Days from Shirley Newman

I suppose a lot of my fondest memories are from my days at the Royal College of Music in the late 1970's. I had auditioned at various places, some of them more local to where the family was living in Essex but as my father said at the time "you don't say no to the Royal College of Music"

I had many wonderful experiences there. Singing in the first performance of African Sanctus with the composer conducting us, in front of our honoured guest, the last surviving granddaughter of Queen Victoria- Princess Alice, to turning up to a friend's singing lesson to busk my way through an aria from Carmen only to find I was playing in front of the world famous King's College English Tenor: Robert ( call me Bob ) Tear! Who I've since found out was, in fact, Welsh.

Weirdly though it's not these famous musical figures that stick in my mind the most, but a brief encounter I had with the British star of stage and screen Sir John Mills. I had just finished a busy day at college and was coming out of the rather grand main entrance to the Albert Hall steps, when I looked up to see a very familiar face. My mouth must have fallen open in amazement and shock as I realised who it was - I couldn't speak! It's one of those moments when you think of lots of things you would have liked to have said but your mind goes completely blank.

Sir John was in London to film a version of The 39 Steps with Robert Powell, Ronald Pickup and Timothy West among others. I fully expected him to ignore me, after all I was just a young music student, but he saw my look of shocked recognition and gave me the most wonderful warm smile with a twinkle in his eye as if to say "Yes it is me actually!" before striding off with that very distinctive energetic walk he always had in all his movies. He was 70 years old then but still very healthy looking and in fact lived to the ripe old age of 97 only passing away in 2005.

The next day the scenes at the beginning of the movie were filmed right outside the College entrance in Prince Consort Road. Special paving stones were laid to fit the pre First World War setting, but apart from that the stage was set as this part of London had changed very little in more than a century. Some of us watched the filming from the organ loft window where we wouldn't be seen in shot. Then it was lights camera action!

A horse-drawn carriage pulls up outside the main entrance and a man strides energetically into it while a young woman pushing a baby in an old-fashioned pram and a very elegant vintage car passes by. It was only when I watched the film years later that I realised the man was Sir John as he enters the carriage from the other side, out of view from our window, which was right at the top of the College building and very small. The film was made in 1978 and is still considered by many to be the best version ever made. The crew were there the whole day, but the finished sequence only appears on screen for a few seconds. The last climatic scene where the hero, Robert Powell, hangs onto the hands of Big Ben, which was filmed at Pinewood studios, is the most famous. It's a very exciting thriller and well worth a watch if you've got time on your hands!

It contrasts interestingly with another chance sighting near the Albert Hall of the famous pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim: but that's another story!



## Puzzle Solutions

### Newsletter No.1 Crossword Solutions:

**Across:** 2.Tom. 5.Glyn Hughes. 9.Bass 11.The Lily of the Valley 12.Four 13. Yesterday  
14.Tom Jones.

**Down:** 1.Some enchanted Evening 3.Brymbo Steel Works 4.Nothing like a Dame 6.Rhys Meirion  
7.Andrew 8.Bryn 10. Piano

### Newsletter No. 2

Guess that Tune: 1. Welsh National Anthem 2.Calon Lan 3.American Trilogy 4 Happy Birthday  
5 The Rose 6 Benedictus 7.Yesterday

Anagram Solutions: Bernard Davies. Carl Jones. Mike Taylor. Kelvin Griffiths. Peter Furber.  
Cynan Jones. Ray Davies. Sam Erlandson. Derek Lloyd. Gerald Francis. Mike Taylor.

## Ode for our Times

Three score years and ten, Oh my!  
I never would have thought it,  
And as for this old virus, well!  
I'm glad I never caught it.  
It's thanks to social distancing  
All at my wife's insistence  
Cause I'm past my best and knackered  
And don't have much resistance.  
So what is my next milestone then  
After all is said and done  
I'll just milk my Gas board pension  
And live till I'm a Ton!

Both these odes are from our well  
known published poet  
Chorister Robert (Bob) W. Reid.  
(Retired gas fitter and septuagenarian)

## Furiously Forgetful.

Yes I'm furiously forgetful  
And have been for some time now  
I once was just forgetful  
But now it gets to me, and how !  
I'm terrible with numbers  
And have been so all my life  
Some folks think I am kidding  
So I say go and ask the wife  
She thinks I am a dimwit  
A dullard, a dolt a fool  
Cause counting on my fingers  
At my age, it just aint cool  
Now when it comes to spelling  
Well I'm pretty good at that  
Words like svelte and constitution  
recognition, psychotic, cat !  
But where my life just falls apart  
Is naming simple things  
Words like colander and mirror  
And a host of other things  
I can see the item on the shelf  
As clear as clear can be  
But as to what the damned things called  
Well it's a mystery to me ?  
So this annoying problem that I have  
is driving me insane  
Am I a raging nutter  
Or just a man of little brain ?  
Who knows ?

## Letters to the Editor

Sir, Secrets of a happy marriage.

In view of the stresses of lockdown I thought that I should share the secret of our long and happy marriage.

Twice a week we go to a nice restaurant, have a top-class meal, a little quality wine and the companionship of fellow diners. She goes on Tuesday and I go on Friday. We sleep in separate beds - hers in Bradley, mine in Chester. I take my wife everywhere, unfortunately she always finds her way back. I asked her where she'd like to go for our anniversary, "Somewhere I haven't been for a long time" she said. So I suggested the kitchen. We always hold hands. If I let go she shops. She has simply scores of electrical gadgets. When she said she had too many gadgets but nowhere to sit I bought her an electric chair.

Remember that marriage is the number one cause of divorce. Statistically 100% of all divorces started with marriage. I married Miss Right; I just didn't know her first name was Always. I haven't spoken to her for eighteen months - I don't like to interrupt. The last time we had a fight it was my fault. She had asked "What's on the TV?" I replied "Dust".

In the beginning God created the earth and rested. He then created man and rested. God created woman. Since then neither God nor man has rested.

I sincerely hope that these insights and ideas help to keep your marriage long and happy.

Yours etc

Name and address supplied.

**(Editor's note)** In view of the controversial nature of this letter we have omitted Syd's name)

**Master Baker Ainsley.** From our Food Correspondent

During the lockdown 1st Bass Ainsley has been using his Loaf. As many of you will know, before Covid19, he was a regular swimmer. Each weekday he would go to Waterworld Wrexham at 8.00 am, don his speedos and swim dolphin like along the lanes. However from time to time his arrival at the end of a lane would coincide with some of his many swimming friends. He would chat about many and various subjects including science, politics, religion etc. They would also often chat about food, cooking and baking. Ainsley began to benefit from these chlorinated chats and, with the advice of his friends, would often go home to experiment with his new found knowledge. He has now become a competent cook and baker. He can produce all kinds of meals, bake bara brith, pasties and regularly bakes his own mouth-watering bread as the photograph shows. Masterchef next?



**Tales from the Turnstile** from our Sports Reporter

**New Technology in Wrexham?**

Nigella is away on a training course to learn the operation of the new “**Turbostile**” being developed by the Racecourse ground in conjunction with Glyndwr University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the London School of Economics. In anticipation of grounds reopening, with Covid19 social distancing, the time taken for a spectator to transit the normal turnstile is much too long and will lead to significant delays. Using modern **48V powerful Stepper Motor** technology it is now possible to process 10 spectators a minute through the “**Turbostile**”. There have been teething troubles during the trials. Some volunteers have experienced severe burns, others extensive bruising and, in up to 5% of cases, broken limbs, requiring helicopter evacuation and hospital treatment. On the plus side there haven’t been any deaths. If he survives, Nigella will report in the next issue.

**Fom the Stage Manager** John Smallwood

**Covid 19**

It is possible that your Committee may be able to arrange a meeting of Choristers in the not too distant future. More information about this will come through your Voice Representatives when that time comes

With this in mind please note the following guidance.

To avoid risks of viral transmission and to stay personally as safe as possible **you** should always maintain social distancing both indoors and outdoors with people **you** do not live with. **You** should only have close contact with others in your household or support bubble.

**PLEASE keep these points in mind and follow the guidance that applies at any given time as it changes in the coming weeks and months. By doing so you are helping to protect yourself, your family, the NHS, your community and your fellow choristers. In the interests of us all, please stay safe. The age profile of our choir makes us particularly vulnerable to this virus..**



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