





RESEARCH
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DESIGN & GRAPHICS
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Foreword

What a wonderful lifetime of memories I have of 'our choir', back to the days when, as little children, we asked Dad, on awaking the morning after a festival, "How did you go on?" to be told, "We won." and in learning the top part of new pieces when the top tenors came to learn their parts in "the front room" at home, at their part practices.

Where do these memories take me? – from selling programmes, as a schoolgirl, in the packed hall and balcony of St Mary's School at the first Celebrity Concerts, to the auditorium of the Royal Festival Hall in London; from local churches and chapels to the magnificence of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral; from a cold winter's night by the Christmas tree in the Memorial Gardens and the summer afternoons by the Bandstand in Whitaker Park, to the huge marquee in the Welsh hillside arena at Llangollan; from services, concerts and festivals all over Lancashire and the North, to those in Ireland, Holland and Germany.

Our choir gives us such a wide range of dynamics and emotions which thrill us in so many ways – from the beauty and tenderness of 'Quiet Sleep', through lullabies and tender love poems, to the shrieks, hideous howls and demoniacal laughter of 'Ghosts High Noon'; from the prayerful pleas to God for His presence, to the praises of thanks and hallelujah; from the pastoral beauty of our folk songs to the rollicking enjoyment of those from abroad; from the interpretation of our English language to the learning of the words of the ancient and foreign languages of the Latin and German pieces.

Under the guidance of their conductors the 'boys' of our choir sing so magnificently, words which they would find it difficult to say aloud in everyday conversation. They enjoy their singing and blend so well together, from the gentle pianissimo humming to the full chordal fortissimo. They have given great pleasure to many people over 75 years, both at home and abroad, through services, concerts, recordings and broadcasts. Long may they continue to do so.

Freda Tomlinson

Derby Terrace,
Rawtenstall.

The “Ten Commandments” as written for Glasgow Orpheus Choir

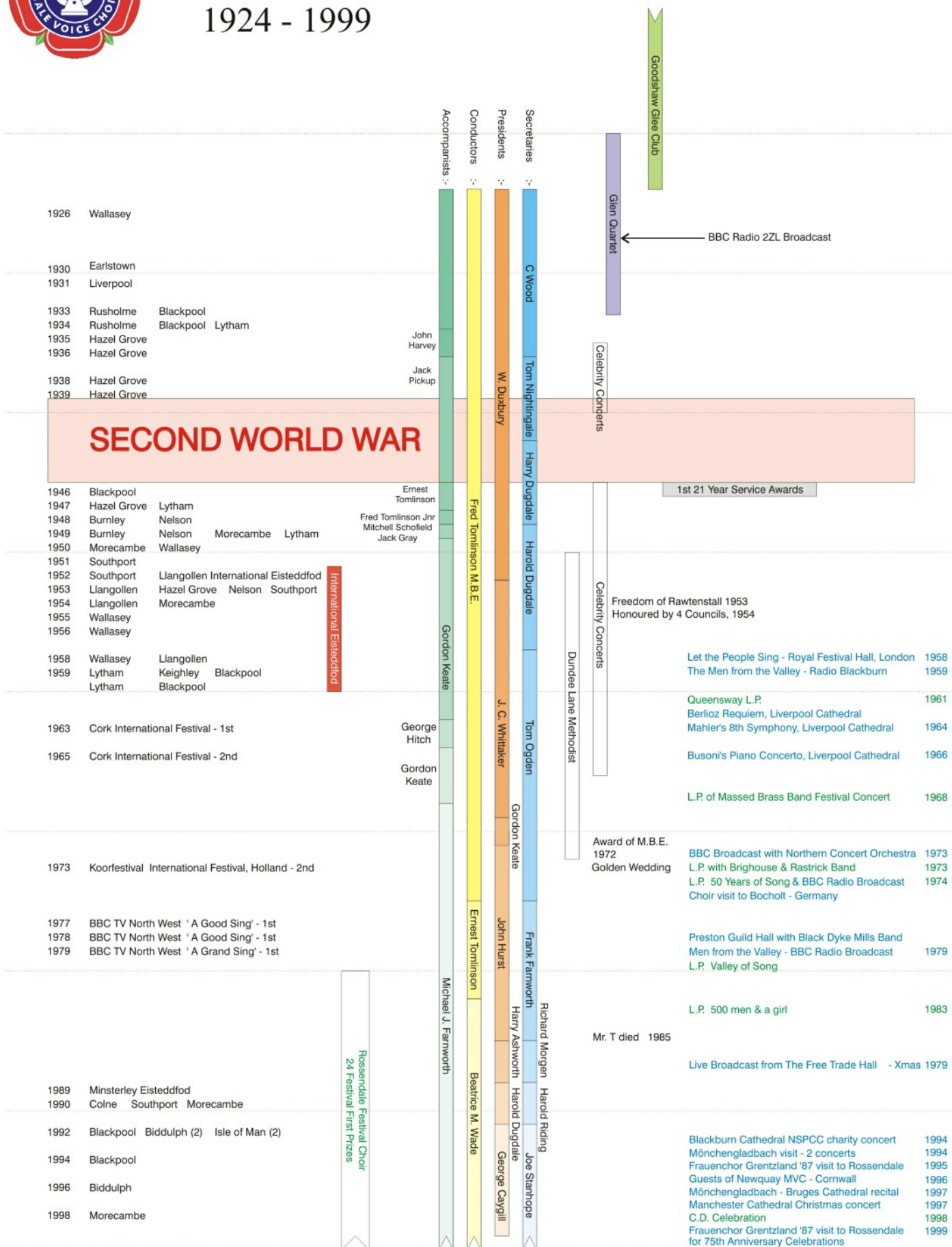
Committee Proposal:- It is respectfully suggested the following
‘Ten commandments’, slightly amended, be
adopted by Rossendale Male Voice Choir.

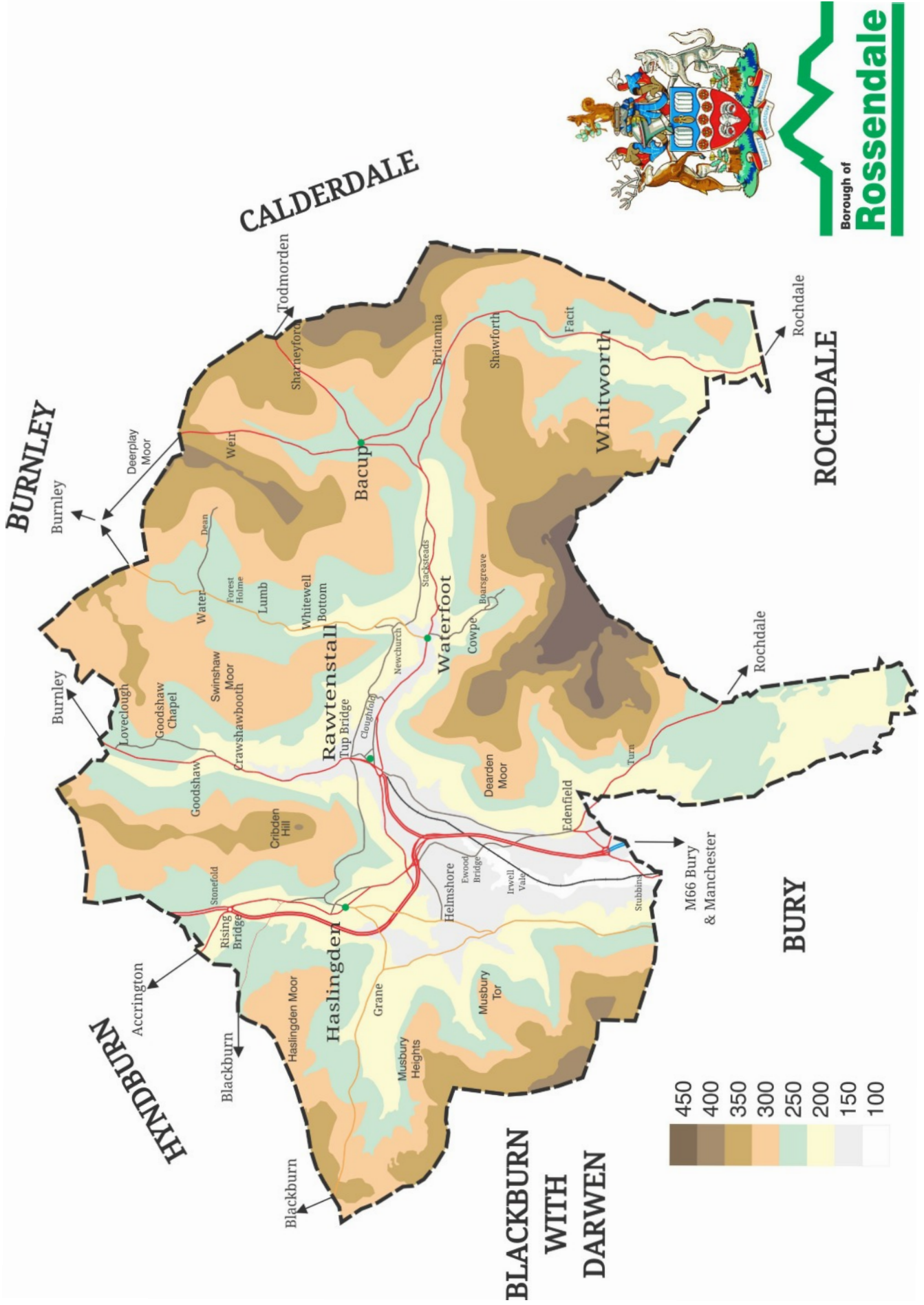
1. Remember Friday Evenings to keep them wholly – for the
 Rossendale Male Voice Choir.
2. Thou shalt not tarry without the gates.
3. Thou shalt give ear unto the voice of thy conductor and hearken not
 to the babbling of thy neighbour.
4. Thou shalt not raise thy voice above thy neighbour’s for this is the
 whole choral law.
5. Thou shalt not worship thy score unduly; for the eyes are the
 windows of the soul, and if they be glued to the paper, how shall thy
 soul be lighted?
6. Thou shalt not lean upon thy neighbour, but cultivate thine own
 understanding; for he that followeth his neighbour from bar to bar
 shall stumble and perish, but he that counteth his own time can no
 wise enter in at the wrong place.
7. Thou shalt not grouse.
8. Thou shalt not contemplate thy neighbour’s hat, nor his coat, nor
 any new thing that is thy neighbour’s, lest when thy turn cometh
 thou art taken unawares and utterly confounded.
9. Thou shalt not break any covenant with the Rossendale Male Voice
 Choir to follow after thy wife, nor thy best girl, nor thy second best
 girl, nor thy friend, nor thy enemy, for the choir will not hold him
 worthy that turneth his “Yea” to “Nay”.
10. Honour thy Choir and thy Conductor and forget not the Examining
 Committee that thy days may be long in the choir.



ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE CHOIR

1924 - 1999





Chapter 1

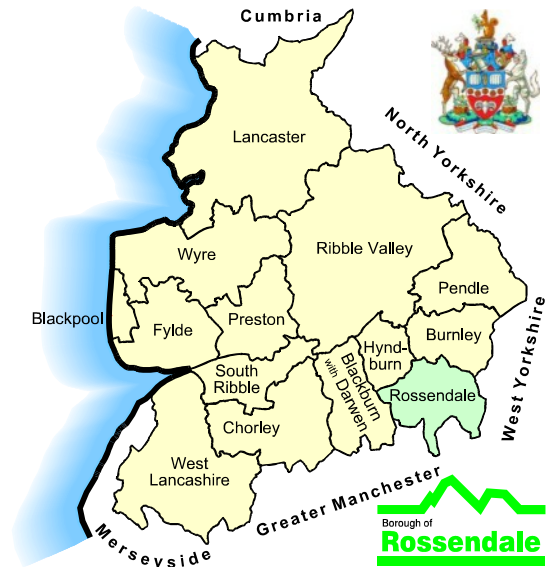
“The second star from the right and straight on ‘til morning.”
J. M. Barrie.

One of the most common questions asked of the choir at festivals and concerts around the country is, “Where is Rossendale?” Since a dip into the History and Geography of Rossendale may help one to understand the development of choral singing in the valley, then that is where we should start.

Rossendale is an area of some 30 square miles situated in South-East Lancashire, tucked into a spur of the Pennine Range. It is surrounded by many of the old towns of the Industrial Revolution, Burnley, Blackburn, Accrington, Bury, Oldham and Rochdale.

It is a historical backwater. The Romans got as far as Musbury Tor, probably sent out a patrol to spy out the land and, when they reported back, immediately turned left and went to Ribchester instead. The Danes and the Saxons fought a battle on the hills above Bacup. Cynics would say that the Danes were seeking to punish the Saxons by keeping them penned up in the valley but in truth the Saxons were chasing their enemies back from whence they came.

Rossendale was part of the Forest of Blackburnshire. William I gave the Honours of Lancaster and Clitheroe to Roger de Poitou, who founded the castles of Lancashire and Liverpool. It passed through



numerous hands; Henry I used it as a chase because deer and other wild animals were plentiful. Indeed there are still deer to be seen on the hills above Bacup. Some of the game has been retained in the place names in the valley:- Boarsgreave, Sowclough, Wolfenden, Deerplay, Buckearth, Stagsteads (now Stacksteads), Badgercote and Foxholes. The missing ingredient was people. Even in the 13th century there were only thirteen vaccaries or cow farms in the area. They did, however, give rise to many of the place names of the area, Cloughfold and Newchurch among them. Rossendale was held by the Crown until Charles II gave

“He has a voice like a cinder under a door”
Comment by a tenor about an unfortunate colleague.

it to General Monk, the Duke of Albemarle. Finally, in 1767, the Duke of Buccleugh became possessor of the Forrest of Rossendale and that family still holds the freehold.

As time passed and the population grew, hill farming and weaving formed the major occupations. The Civil War does not appear to have disturbed its tranquillity although in 1642, part of the Parliamentary Army under Colonel Shuttleworth and John Starkie Esq. was stationed at Haslingden. By the time John Wesley made his reforming way through the hills and used the phrase, “the wild men of Rossendale”, the Non-Conformist Churches were well established in Rossendale. Among them was the old Baptist Chapel, commenced in 1760 at a cost of 191 pounds. The ‘Deyn Leyrocks’ worshipped there between 1740 and 1850.

Like the woven fabrics of the time, much of the music of the valley was home made and in the early days all their interpretations of the great masters was of home growth and nurture. The people of Dean Valley were celebrated for their excellence as musicians, both vocal and instrumental. It was from this that their appellation of ‘Deyn Layrocks’ or the ‘Larks of Dean’ arose. They met in each other’s homes in turn and practised together the compositions, both sacred and spiritual, which our country has in such abundance. Many of their own pieces bore the impress of abilities far beyond the mediocre,

they included, ‘Spanking Roger’, ‘Bocking Warp’ and ‘Judgement Realised’, which are still sung at the Annual Sermons Sunday at Goodshaw Baptist Church.

Edwin Waugh recalled in “Home Life of the Lancashire Factory Folk during the Cotton Famine” (1861-1865, when cotton workers supported the North in the American Civil War):- ‘Up in the Forest of Rossendale between Deerplay and Swinshaw there is a little lonely valley, a green cup in the mountains, called Dean. The inhabitants are noted for their love of music. In the twilight of a glorious Sunday evening in the height of summer, I was roaming over the heathery waste of Swinshaw towards Dean in the company of a musical friend of mine who lived in the neighbouring clough. We saw a little crowd of people coming down a moorland slope far away in front of us. As they drew near we found that many of them had musical instruments; and when we met, my friend recognised them as working people living in the district and mostly well known to him. He enquired where they had been and they told him that they had ‘bin to a bit ov a sing deawn i’ th’ Deyn’. “Well”, he said, “can’t we have a tune here?” “Sure yo’ can, wi’ o’ th’ plazur i’ th’ world”, replied he who acted as spokesman. They ranged themselves in a circle around their conductor and they played and sang several fine pieces of psalmady upon the heather scented mountain top’.

“It’s meant to be a happy song and you’ve got a face like a dead fish”
Fred Tomlinson to Harry Weldon during rehearsal

In the 19th century the Valley was being opened up to the outside world. By 1830 there were 50 spinning mills in Rossendale, wholly or partially water driven. By 1844 there were 80 spinning and weaving mills and 10 bleaching mills. Between 1846 and 1852 the railway was built from Bury, first to Rawtenstall, then Waterfoot and finally to Bacup. In its first six days of operation 12,279 passengers booked to travel on it. In 1843 the majesty of the law arrived in Haslingden in the form of a police sergeant and two constables. In 1887 the first tramways were built. A far cry from the days of the 18th century when travellers between Waterfoot and Rawtenstall used to say a prayer before setting out on their journey.

In 1854 Edward Rostron came from Yorkshire to establish the first felt works in Rossendale which became one of the leading felt manufacturing areas in the country. Felt slippers probably came from local felt workers fashioning rough slippers from pieces of felt. By 1895 Tricket's were employing 1,000 workers. From slippers to shoes is, to coin a phrase, only a small step. Quarrying and coal mining were major local industries by 1880. The 'Haslingden Flag' was used to pave the 19th century towns and cities of Britain and was even exported to the Continent.

The rail link to Bury was cut under the Beeching plan in 1970's but fortunately the M66 arrived shortly thereafter putting Rossendale in touch with the Motorway network. A little later railway enthusiasts re-opened the East-Lancs. Railway and this has brought in many people to enjoy the delights of Rossendale – it's great walking country.

In 1955, a man called Hobson, writing in the Caernarfon Times headed his piece, "Rossendale Valley of Song". The Rossendale Male Voice Choir some 30 years later called one of their records by the same title. There may be other places with claims to the title but the Valley has had a tradition of singing and making music for over 300 years. The people sang in churches and chapels, Harvest, Easter and Christmas, Weddings, Christenings and Deaths were all celebrated with warmth and sincerity. They even played and sang for the sheer joy of making music. The Lancashire dialect, with its broad vowel sounds, is ideal material for a rich, singing tone. In 1924, all these ingredients came together: the love of music, the need to sing, the vowels waiting to be shaped and the rich seam of talent waiting to be plucked from choir stalls of churches up and down the Valley. They came into the talented hands of one man, Fred Tomlinson, and the Rossendale Male Voice Choir was born.

Jim Hayes fainted during a choir performance. The choir kept on singing and Jim was dragged behind the choir where he was tended by another member. The song continued and a man appeared from the wings. "*Are you a doctor?*" he was asked. "*No,*" he replied, stepping over the recumbent Jim. "*I'm going to the toilet.*"
The choir sang on.

FRED TOMLINSON

CONDUCTOR 1924 - 1976



Chapter 2

“If music be the food of love, play on”.
Shakespeare “Twelfth Night”.

Goodshaw Glee Union, (Conductor, Vernon Peel and Secretary, Alfred Peel), was formed just after the turn of the century and in its short life it had a reasonable success at the local Festivals, winning six first prizes. In 1924, plagued by falling numbers, they ran into financial difficulties, having incurred debts of one hundred pounds. In an effort to find a way out of their problems, they put an advertisement in the local paper, inviting men interested in choral singing to a meeting at Spencer’s Café, Bank Street, Rawtenstall, on Friday, 14th March.

According to an article in the Rossendale Free Press exactly 40 years later, Fred Tomlinson joined Goodshaw Glee Union just after the end of the First World War. He must have been delighted to accept his friend, Joe Ashworth’s suggestion that they should go along to the meeting. It is unlikely that anything short of being tied to the bedpost would have kept him away.

At the meeting, Fred took the chair and after great deliberation a number of resolutions were carried. First and foremost it was resolved, “That the Goodshaw Glee Union be disbanded and that a new choir be formed, taking over all debts and assets, with headquarters at Rawtenstall and that the new choir be named ‘The Rossendale Male Voice Choir’”.

Embodied in the rules was the aim, “To promote and further the interests of choral singing in the Valley”. It was agreed that Fred Tomlinson should be appointed temporary conductor until, “We get somebody proper.” The records do not show whether the meeting reached this decision or whether Fred agreed to do the job until someone else came along. The choir minute books do record the fact that Fred was re-appointed on a yearly basis until 1933 when the position was made permanent.

It is likely that other members of Goodshaw Glee Union joined the new choir. Certainly Ernie Birtwistle, who sang with Fred in the Glen Quartette, was a founder member. The only other name the records show is Bill Parkinson.

Goodshaw Baptist Chapel was the place at which the “Larks of Dean” worshipped in the 18th and 19th centuries. The centre of singing merely moved two miles to the south.

This was at a time when the male choir was undergoing a fundamental change. Choirs like Goodshaw were alto-lead following in the tradition/footsteps of the Glee Clubs of old, where the adult members of church and cathedral choirs, with their strong alto lines took a secular role. There is evidence however that by 1924 Goodshaw Glee had tenor-

At one choir rehearsal the choir were going through the “Hallelujah Chorus” at some length. They moved on to look at a drinking song. *“What can we say about this after what we’ve been singing,”* mused Mr. T. aloud. Quick as a flash back came the reply, *“The thirst after Righteousness.”*

lead pieces in their repertoire and therefore the transition was made easier for Rossendale which was to be a tenor-lead choir.

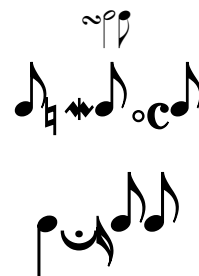
The lovely alto tone of the likes of Alfred Peel (to be heard for many years to come in St John's Church, Crawshawbooth) became an anomaly. It was some years before the alto sound disappeared entirely from some tenor-lead choirs, obtruding into the notes the true tenors found too high for comfort. But Rossendale was fortunate through its history in finding top tenors who could revel in their primary role.

Since a choir is only as good as the person who stands at the front it would be helpful to spend a little time with Fred Tomlinson and look for the attributes that he brought to the job of shaping the choir into the choral force which it became.

Fred Tomlinson was born in 1893. He was called to the colours in the First World War and served in Egypt and France advancing to the rank of sergeant. At the end of the war he returned to the valley and his job at Ilex mill. He became a member of Goodshaw Glee Union and was secretary of its offspring, the Glen Quartette, which he formed with Dave Langland, Fred Gott and Ernie Birtwistle. At some stage Reg Trippier took over from Fred Gott. Fascinatingly enough, the quartet retained the alto-lead format very suitable for the intimacy of the

'smoking concerts' which were its normal fare. The Quartette was reasonably successful both in concerts and at Festivals where they collected over 80 prizes. The accompanying extract from their brochure shows adjudicators using the same words that appeared on the Choir's adjudications in later years.

The Glen Quartette sang on numerous occasions on Radio 2ZL and kept up a lively correspondence with the producer. These contacts and experiences were to prove useful in the future.



"The Quartette that really sings." – Granville Bantock.

D. LANGLANDS, F. TOMLINSON,

Tenor

Baritone

R. TRIPPIER,

Tenor

E. BIRTWISTLE,

Bass

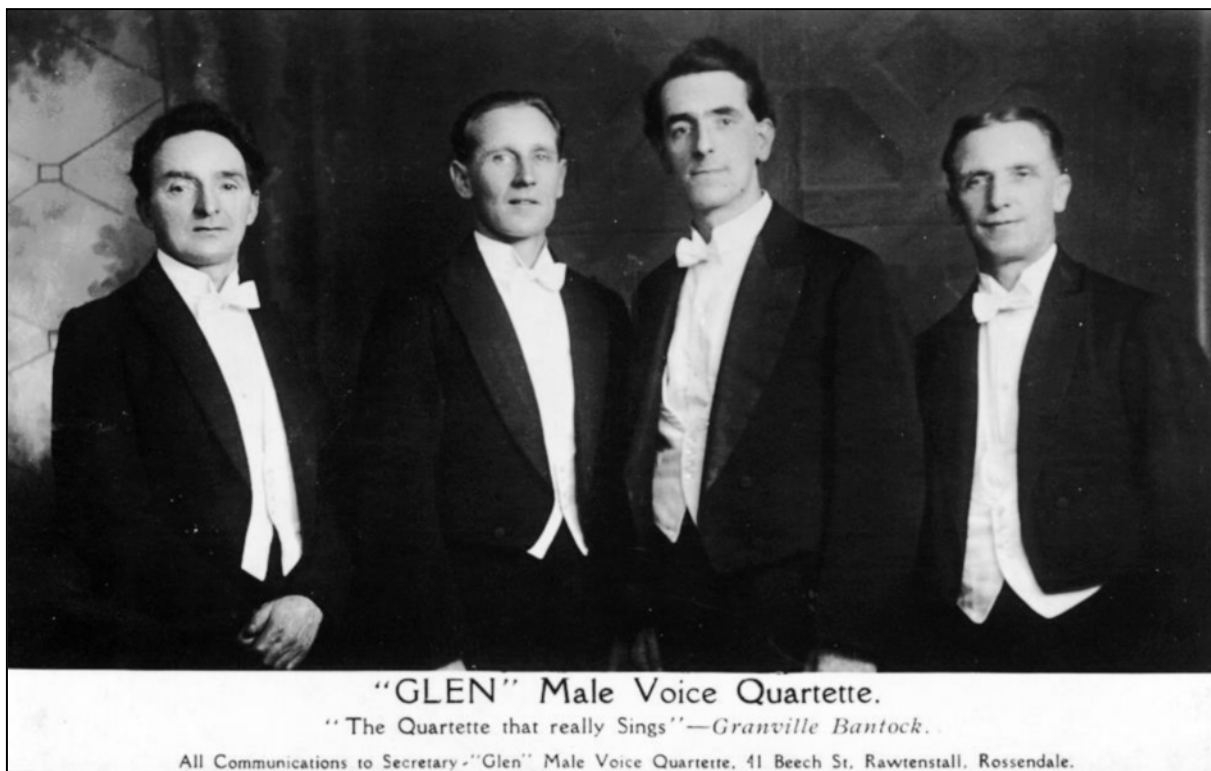
H. WEST,

Accompanist

Whole or Part Concerts.

SONGS, DUETS, PART-SINGING, Etc.,

With an Entertainer if desired



Adjudicators' Remarks

H. GREENWOOD Mus. Bac. (Organist, Rochdale Town Hall), Bacup 1923
Excellent blend and quality. Clear, resonant, yet of hushed expression.

A. HERBERT BREWER, Mus.Doc. (Organist, Gloucester), at Buxton:-
Nice smooth tone. Clean chords. They move as one. Got right into the heart of the words and music.

Sir RICHARD TERRY, Mus.Doc (Organist Westminster Cathedral), at Blackpool:-
Blend and assemble good. Distinct musical feeling. They sing with animation and vigour.

A. HIGSON, F.R.C.O., at Bacup 1924:-
Good balance. Nice blend. Chording very good. Nice variety.

GRANVILLE BANTOCK, (Professor of Music, Birmingham University), at Leeds:-
The voices blend with harmonious effect. Expression sympathetic and heartfelt. The music flowed with ease and even movement.

J. LYON, Mus.Doc. at Lytham:-
Artistic! Good blend! a first class quartette.

JULIUS HARRISON, (of National Opera Fame), at Blackpool:-
*A beautiful start – a very well chorded and balanced quartette.
 A well-studied performance – expressive and moodful and with fine contrasting movements.*

HERMAN BREARLEY, Mus.Doc. at Bacup:-
*Their singing has character and lilt and flow in it, an accomplished performance.
 There is style and finish in this quartette.*

In 1922, Fred married May Culpan, a pretty, young schoolteacher and went to live at 41, Beech Street, Rawtenstall. In August 1923 May gave birth to their first child. It is reported that when Fred went upstairs to see the new baby he found May in tears because she had wanted their first child to be a boy. Fred comforted her and said, "Never mind we'll call her Freda and perhaps the next one will be a boy". Freda, who was there at the time, has no recollection of the story. Ernest was born in November 1924. The family kept track of his age because he is as old as the choir. Two years later James (Jimmy) was born and, finally, May got her wish and Fred Junior made his appearance.

The children were all bright and musical. Fred recalled them rolling about on the floor laughing at the humour they found in a musical score. The boys, in their turn, passed for the Manchester Cathedral Choir School, the local Grammar School and finally to University. Freda went to Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School then opted for Teacher Training College, she was to become headmistress of Crawshawbooth County Primary School and Cloughfold County Primary School. Ernest became a professional composer and arranger. Jimmy went into the technical side of the recording business. Fred Jr. went into entertainment and was singer, choral director for such shows as "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and "The Two Ronnies".

Fred (senior) eventually became foreman of the closing room at Ilex Mill in Rawtenstall. A slipper/shoe factory whose working practices would have been the despair of Mrs. Thatcher. There was always time to pass the time of day with your friends and it is said that Fred's desk was always full of music.

Sunday morning Fred and his family went to church. He was the choirmaster at St. Mary's Church in the centre of Rawtenstall and only a stone's throw away from Derby Terrace where they eventually resided. Fred was a great reader of Scripture and sometimes after the Service he could be seen in earnest conversation with the minister. In the end he transferred his loyalty to St. John's, Crawshawbooth where he became choirmaster.

In the porch of St. John's there is a photograph of the church choir in the 1930's. There are over twenty men and boys pictured there. It was men from church choirs throughout the valley that formed the backbone of the Rossendale Male Voice Choir.

There were about 27 members when the choir was formed. By 1933 the number had risen to 44. F. Alcock, G. Allen, H. C. Ashworth, J. Ashworth, R. Abbott, R. Carter, D. Bray, E. Bailey, E. Birtwistle, R. Berry, F. Farnworth, H. Finney, H. Foulds, A. Heys, B. Hatton, H. Hamer, G. Hannah, H. Howarth, H. Halliwell, H. Hanson, H. S. Howarth, J. Harvey, J. Heap, R. Holt, W. Howarth, L. Ingham, J. Ingham, F. Law, G. Lord,

*"What's that note you're singing?" Harry asked his next door neighbour.
"It's a top C," came the reply. "There's no top C in this piece, let's have a look."
There was a short pause while the inspection took place and then,
"That's not a top C, it's fly muck, you idiot."*

H. Longland, T. Nightingale, T. Ogden, E. Pickup, H. Suart, H. Place, A. Stansfield, F. Tomlinson, C Woods, W. Woods, J. Woods, E. Whittaker, J. Gregory, L. Bradshaw and C. Schofield. By 1935, according to a choir list for the Blackpool Festival, there were 51 choir members.

In the early days the choir, along with local brass bands, used to give concerts in Whitaker Park on Sunday afternoons. One member would stand at the gate with a cap by his feet and encourage people passing through to make a contribution. They shared the money among the various performing groups. Money was not always forthcoming, after one such outing the cap watcher confessed, "I couldn't forshame to take more than two bob". With this and other efforts, the debt they had inherited was cleared off within two years.

Fred knew that there was only one way to develop the choir on the proper lines. The men had to be shown that what he was saying about phrasing and word painting was right, that the collective sound had to convey to the listener what the arranger/composer had in mind when he wrote the piece.

He took them on the road that he and the other members of the Glen Quartette had trodden so successfully. He took them to competitive festivals. Such festivals came into being about the turn of the century. For example: Isle of Man in 1891, Colne 1900, Lytham St Annes 1901 and Hazel Grove 1920.

There are various reasons given for their development; perhaps the ethos of the Rossendale Music Festival is as good as any, "*In musical competition, the idea is not to beat each other but to pace each other on the road to excellence*". Certainly they fulfilled Fred Tomlinson's aims. They provided competition, allowed the choir to hear the way others performed the same pieces and they heard the adjudicators pronounce on their efforts and those of their rivals.

The early festivals covered a tremendous range of musical activities. In 1958 the Southport Festival had 78 classes covering Pianoforte, Vocal, Strings, Youth Orchestras, Organ, Choirs and Verse Speaking. The entries into the various classes prove their popularity with the musical fraternity. For example, in the Operatic Class, there were 44 entries.

The adjudicators for each class had a scale of marks, provided by the British Federation of Music Festivals, which acted as a guide to their decisions. In the Choral Class they listened for accuracy of notes and time, Tone, Balance, Blend, Intonation, Attack, Pronunciation, Enunciation, Expression, Pace and Rhythm for 50 marks and General Effect scored another 50 to bring the score to 100.

In recent times the local festivals have suffered a decline which reflects a change in the way the Great British public seeks entertainment. The piano, once a feature of most homes has been replaced by the television set and the

Upon exiting a pub one Saturday night to complete their journey home the choir found that a car had been parked effectively blocking their exit. With great resolve they lifted the car and placed it on the steps of the pub. They did not hang around to see what would happen.

desire to be entertained rather than to entertain. Festivals, which are, by and large run by enthusiastic amateurs, and rely upon Patrons and the generosity of local councils, are finding it difficult to recruit new, younger helpers and financial restraints bear down more and more heavily.

It is probable that some of the repertoire of Goodshaw Glee Union was acquired by the new choir, as well as members with experience of singing at competitive festivals because Goodshaw Glee in their 20 years as a choir had won at six such contests.

In those days Festival Committees invariably chose two, sometime three, set test-pieces. Such test-pieces were specifically chosen – their composers were sometimes the adjudicators! – to make the highest demands on all aspects of a choir's technique. This helped bring choirs to standards hard to achieve via normal concert-giving. Such pieces ensured continuing additions to a choir's repertoire, often tried out in concerts prior to a festival and certainly featured afterwards to demonstrate why the choir won. (Or was robbed as the case may be).

The first success came in 1926 when they were successful at Wallasey Festival singing "Lock the door Lariston". The adjudicator commented, "They took their risks like men." A few months later they noticed that the piece was being used by another Festival. They entered and got trounced. "At least," said the adjudicator, "this choir heard how it should be sung." Festivals are indeed places for learning. "Don't be over-confident", 'Learn to lose gracefully,' and 'Each adjudicator has his own ideas', are phrases which spring to mind.

The choir steadily grew in numbers. The repertoire increased and slowly but surely those qualities were developed which would eventually bring the choir to world-beating levels of achievement; fine tone and blend; power without strain, a soul-stirring pianissimo which became one of its hallmarks; to sing as one man in putting over the feeling of the words, producing impeccable interpretations of the composers' wishes.

The pattern of music-making settled down to what has been the basis of the choir's activities ever since. There was the ongoing demands of concerts, an average of at least one a month. Besides local concerts at venues like Cawl Terrace Co-op and Longholme Methodist, there was no shortage of requests from farther afield, with concerts in St Annes and with Middleton Apollo Male Voice Choir.

The balance was drawn between concert-giving and entering competitive festivals. Between 1930 and 1939 the choir won 12 first prizes at Festivals in Lancashire.

In 1936 a new dimension entered the choir's activities when Mr T. proposed that the choir should sponsor an annual series of Celebrity Concerts. His driving force was the desire that audiences in Rossendale should have the opportunity to hear some of the great singers of the day, and at prices that everyone could afford. All this the choir took on with enthusiasm in addition to its regular commitments of concerts and festivals. Such a ground-breaking enterprise deserves a chapter to itself.

Chapter 3

The Celebrity Concerts 1936-1966

Who better to explain the origins of the Celebrity Concerts than Fred Tomlinson. This letter was written in reply to a request for more information about the concerts, by Arthur Fear, a baritone who sang in the Concert on the 25th February 1940.

*Arthur Fear Est.,
43, Green Lane,
Edgeware,
Middlesex.*

Dear Mr. Fear,

Arriving home with your request fresh in my mind and with the feeling that "there is no time like the present" I thought I may as well try to knock one or two facts together regarding the Celebrity Concerts promoted by the above organisation. The idea was first passed on to us by Mr. Fox, who accompanied you today and who is, incidentally, the conductor of the Middleton Apollo Glee Union. The Middleton people have been giving this type of concert for quite a few years and with no little success. As I told you, Mr. Duxbury, our President, made the first move by sending a letter to the local paper and pointing out that the choir was always willing to give its services free to help along any good cause and, therefore, was entitled to a little more recognition than had hitherto been given it. He appealed for 500 persons with an interest in choral singing to become Associate Members of the choir by paying 2/6¹ per annum for which they had the privilege of coming to three concerts and bringing along one friend. The first and last of these concerts were to be given by the Choir and a Celebrity and the middle one by a local Celebrity and the Choir's own amateur soloists with the occasional part song by the whole choir. When I tell you that on the first season we had Frank Titterton and a violinist (T. B. Sidebottom) of the Halle Orchestra and Heddle Nash and again the violinist as well as the local Celebrity, you will readily appreciate the splendid "value for money" represented by this our first effort. It worked out at 5d. per head per concert provided that a person came to all three concerts and brought a friend. Needless to say we lost a few

¹ 2/6 = Half a crown = 12 ½ pence today

pounds on the first season – not a great deal, but enough to show us that the membership fee was too low, and with this in mind we made our plans for the following season. I may add here that the Choir is the only voluntary musical organisation in the district that has managed to keep its head above water and was therefore able to stand the slight reverse without suffering any real harm.

However, the following season we approached our 500 subscribers and asked them if they were prepared to pay 2/6 per annum again, but informed them that we did not intend to let them bring along friends etc. this time, unless, of course, the friend was prepared to become an Associate Member and pay his or her 2/6. The response was magnificent and no less than 1,168 Associate Members were taken on, and I can say without fear of contradiction that half that number again were turned down because we had not a hall in the district that could accommodate more than 1,200. We changed the day of the Concerts from Tuesday to Sunday, and moved to the Pavilion Cinema (the first season's concerts were given in St. Mary's School Room but seating accommodation was not too good, hence the move). For the first concert we had Norman Allin, Bass and a young cellist from Manchester (Hayd'n Rogerson) and things were looking up when the local revenue man came along and made us pay 4d. on every member. This was rather a nasty blow but by a little economy and effort we managed Peter Dawson at the final concert having had the local affair in the middle. We decided to pay to the Choir from these concerts the sum of 5 pounds per concert as extra rehearsals and music were necessary to increase the repertoire of the Choir. The end of the season saw us able to grant 5 pounds to the Rossendale Workpeoples' Hospital Fund and carry forward a balance of about 12 pounds. In the meantime our Mr. Duxbury¹ had been on the track of the Revenue man who assured us that we would have to pay up again if we promoted another series under the same conditions. After some consideration I wrote to "brass hats" in London and sent all the information I could regarding the concerts along with the concert account and told them that the primary aim was to promote and further the interests of Choral singing in our district. They granted us exemption on the conditions that the music we gave was of educational value to the public and a programme was to be sent to them as early as possible before the entertainment, so that they could see I suppose, that we were keeping our part of the bargain. I will give you now a brief account of the following season – 1,150 members at 2/6, 1st. concert, Isobel Baillie and Walter Widdop, 2nd concert local celebrity (Miss Phyllis Westby) and Choir, 3rd concert Harold Williams and Janet Hamilton-Smith, 10 pounds to the Hospital Fund and 5 pounds to the St. John Ambulance Brigade. The success of the idea

¹ Mr Duxbury was President of the R.M.V.C.

was now assured and we were making plans for another good season when war broke out. We took the risk and changed from Sunday evening to afternoon and cut out the middle concert and still the demand for membership was almost as strong as ever.

Not having completed the accounts for this season yet, I cannot say definitely how much will be available for charity but I can assure you that it will be in excess of the 15 pounds paid last year. On March 31st we hope to have our own Celebrity concert, which we had to miss, and this will be for one or other of the War charities. We shall give first chance of admission to our own Associate Members on producing their cards and if that does not fill the hall the public will be allowed to come in. There will be no charge for admission but a silver collection will be taken. I think that is all I can tell you about the history of our Celebrity concerts except that the Vice-Presidents of the Choir are admitted free of charge but if they want to bring their wives or friends they have to obtain a ticket in the ordinary way which is not always easy. Seats are reserved for the V.I.P's in the balcony this being the only concession made regarding seating. All the other people have to take their chance for the good seats and the Town Clerk and labourers can be seen sitting side by side in what are normally the "sixpennies". I think that is one of the good points of the idea, it does away with class distinction. The normal working of the Choir is simple enough. The Conductor approves all new members and each one pays a subscription of 3d. per rehearsal if he is in work. If he is not he is not troubled. We rehearse once a week and sometimes twice when we are nearing a Festival. The Choir pays the travelling expenses of its members to these Festivals. We manage to pay our way with the money we win (sometimes) at these affairs and by engagements in local chapels and schools. I don't think I can say much more about us, except that we thoroughly enjoyed to-day's concert. I think it will be the last big Celebrity concert as I expect that Military Service will have claimed a good number of our members by next season. I hope that you find the information of use and with every good wish for your continued success, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Fred Tomlinson

The mayors of the three Rossendale Boroughs decided to raise the spirits of the people by organising a concert at the Public Hall in Haslingden. They were fortunate enough to engage the services of The Halle Orchestra and their very famous conductor, Sir Malcolm Sargent. The concert was a great success and the mayor of Bacup was deputed to give the vote of thanks. He stepped forward, "Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to thank Sergeant Malcolm and his Band" admittedly it's not a choir story but it seemed a shame to leave it out.

Mr. T. was right. The last Celebrity Concert of the war years took place on Sunday 31st March, 1940 and the concerts were not resumed until Sunday, 31st October 1946.

The Rossendale Male Voice Choir Committee, which supported Fred Tomlinson in his efforts, were helped in their search for larger premises by Mr. Harold Sutcliffe, a local solicitor, who arranged for them to hire the Pavilion Cinema. Wearing a different hat he also organised the Association Football Fixture list. In 1949 the concerts were moved to the Picture House, where they remained until the concerts came to an end in 1966.

The artists came from a variety of sources. The local singers and instrumentalists were known to Fred and the committee. Fred Junior, the youngest Tomlinson, brought in some of the up and coming talent because he was associated with the Northern School of Music and they also sought help from agents in Manchester and London.

As the letters opposite show they were not always successful in getting the people they wanted:-

By 1947 the Members' subscriptions had risen to 5/- but they still had 1,094 members. However, costs had more than kept pace with income. Nevertheless they

donated 40 pounds to charity at the end of the season.

London, July 15, 1938

My dear Mr. Tomlinson:

Mr. Robeson has asked me to thank you for your letter, and to say how sorry he is, not to be able to come to Rossendale, as you suggest.

He joins me in wishing you every success with your work.

Sincerely, regretfully,

Eslanda Goode Robeson

London, June 30, 1939

My dear Mr. Tomlinson:

Thank you so much for your letter. Mr Robeson is now in New York, and will return to England this summer to make a film. As soon as the film is finished, he will return to America, where he will be touring for the whole of the next season. So far as we know now, he will not be back in England until the Autumn of 1940.

*With greetings and best wishes, I am,
Sincerely, regretfully,*

Eslanda Goode Robeson

NOTE:- Paul Robeson was an internationally famous bass singer and film star from the 1930 – 1950's

Fred Tomlinson had a remarkable gift for dialect. He could start in Scotland and do every dialect right through to Cornwall. He recalled the story of two men in a railway carriage talking to each other and one said, "I know from your accent that you're from Yorkshire". His companion smiled and said, "Well no, I'm from Lancashire but I've not been well".

The choir members helped to set up the extra staging required for the concerts and to dismantle it afterwards. They also had outside help and in March 1947 the committee resolved that:- "Mr. F. Tomlinson, 37, Beech Street, Rawtenstall be made an Honorary Vice

President of the Choir in recognition of the excellent work he did in the preparation of a platform for the Concerts at the Pavilion Cinema and that a letter be sent to him informing him of the fact".

Choir Tribute in Dialect
Free Press March 19th 1960

Folk teks ther entertainment i' monny different ways,
i' pictures an' i' dancin', i' variety an' plays,
I' moter cars an' chara bangs, i' aeroplanes an' bykes,
An' ther's scores o' folk as does naught else but cater to eaur likes.

Ther's some whose biggest interests lie i' church an' Sunday School,
An' then agen ther's others likes to dabble i' a "pool"
Ther's chaps mun av ther football on a Satdy afternoon,
An' women likes a social an' to 'eer Sinatra croon.

Ther's golfin' deaun at th' Howard Brigg, Ther's tennis up i' t'park,
Ther's cricket an' ther's th' bowling green, An' courtin' after dark.

But to top all these 'ave mentioned, if yer giving me a treat,
Is the Male Voice Choir Concert on a winter's Sunday neet.
An' the last were no exception to them we'n ad afoor;
Instead of ever gettin' stalled, ah like 'em more and more.

Them soloists a Sunday neet were fit for onny stage,
Wi' airs fro' sweet simplicity to operatic rage.
Yon lass should ceaunt'er blessins, she's gotten quite a few;
A pleasin' voice, a regal form, an' comely features too.

'Er partner, Owen Brannigan, a deep resoundin' bass
Wi' tones a reaund an' mellow as avhe heard in' onny place,
A repertoire both long and wind, a diction crisp and clear,
Sang songs as couldn't but please 'is sternest critic's ear.

An' as for th' lads as forms eaur choir, ther far aboon my pen,
It's a miracle such 'armony should come fro' mortal men.
Neau through all this peroration ah hope you'll get my text,
At them we'n ad are past and gone an' ahm waitin' for th' next.

Jack o' Jos's

In 1966/7 the concerts ended. There were a number of factors involved. Mr. Tomlinson was 70 years old, costs continued to rise – Gigli, for example, wanted 400 guineas to appear. As one wag said, “Tha’ knows he’ll sing aboon one fer that”. Some choir members were concerned about the amount of time and effort going into the preparation and, of course, television arrived. Memories remain.

The artistes throughout the years were entertained to a meal at the Queen’s Hotel, Rawtenstall, before the concerts. At one of them, the conversation turned to the awarding of the Dunmow Fitch, an annual award for the couple judged to have lived together most happily in the past year. One guest turned to her husband and said, “I’m sure if we had entered we would have stood a good chance of winning because we never quarrel”. Owen Brannigan, from the other end of the table, boomed, “How dull!” End of conversation.

At one concert the start had to be delayed because the singer discovered that her dress was the same colour as the curtains and realised that only her hands and face would be visible. However the story which is most often recalled of those days concerns the top tenors who were in the habit of taking a crate of beer backstage so that they could refresh themselves when they were not singing. They emptied the crate and had a whip round and gave the money to a stagehand with the request that, at the earliest opportunity, he should return the crate and get a refill. The soloist finished her aria and received a well deserved round of applause which redoubled as the stage hand, crate on his shoulder, took a short cut across the back of the stage.

The Celebrity Concerts were revived briefly in the early 1970’s.

The lecturer was well into his discussion of the Kinsey Report and he decided to do a survey among the audience of their nocturnal activities. Hands waved in the air for every night, once a week etc. until only the little old man on the front row was left. The lecturer looked down at him and said, “ *O.K. once a year if you say so but why are you smiling?*”. The man looked back at him and replied, “*It’s tonight.*”

Fred overheard a group of choir members exchanging jokes and this was his contribution.

DETAILS OF CELEBRITY CONCERTS 1936 - 1940

Date	Venue	Artistes		Guest Accompanist	Choir Conductor	Choir Accompanist	Choir Soloists
Tuesday 6-Oct-36	Schoolroom St. Mary's	Frank Titterton T.B.Sidebottom	Tenor Violinist	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	H.Ashworth
Tuesday 15-Dec-36	Schoolroom St. Mary's	Annie Stocks	Mezzo Soprano	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	H.Ashworth H.Finney H.Haworth G.Allen J.Ingham
Tuesday 9-Mar-37	Schoolroom St. Mary's	Heddie Nash T.B.Sidebottom	Tenor Violinist	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	H.Haworth
Sunday 3-Oct-37	Pavilion Cinema	Norman Allin Hayd'n Rogerson	Bass Cello	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	
Sunday 12-Dec-37	Pavilion Cinema	Sarah Buckley	Contralto	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	H.Foulds H.Ashworth H.Hanson H.Haworth G.Allen J.Ingham
Sunday 6-Mar-38	Pavilion Cinema	Peter Dawson Harry Howarth	Baritone Violinist	Hubert Greenslade	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	H.Haworth
Sunday 2-Oct-38	Pavilion Cinema	Isobel Baillie Walter Widdop	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	
Sunday 11-Dec-38	Pavilion Cinema	Phyllis Westby	Soprano	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	H.Foulds H.Ashworth H.Hanson H.Haworth J.Ingham G.Allen
Sunday 5-Mar-39	Pavilion Cinema	Janet Hamilton Smith Harold Williams	Soprano Baritone	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	
Sunday 10-Dec-39	Pavilion at 3pm	Luella Paikin Frank Titterton	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	
Sunday 25-Feb-40	Pavilion at 3pm	Elena Danielli Arthur Fear	Soprano Baritone	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	
Sunday 31-Mar-40	Pavilion at 7.45pm	Ruth Naylor Henry Wendon	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Pickup	

DETAILS OF CELEBRITY CONCERTS 1946 - 1950

Date	Venue	Artistes		Guest Accompanist	Choir Conductor	Choir Accompanist	Choir Soloists
Sunday 6 Oct 1946	Pavilion Cinema	Oscar Natzka Walter Midgeley	Bass Baritone Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Ernest Tomlinson	
Sunday 8 Dec 1946	Pavilion Cinema	Sylvia Brierley Chumleigh Hind	Soprano Violinist	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Ernest Tomlinson	J.Ingham H.Ashworth T.Ogden
Sunday 2 Mar 1947	Pavilion Cinema	Gwen Catley Mary Jarred	Contralto	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Ernest Tomlinson	
Sunday 5 Oct 1947	Pavilion Cinema	Laelia Finneberg Nowakowski		Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Ernest Tomlinson	
Sunday 30 Nov 1947	Pavilion Cinema	C.Herbert Whone	Violinist	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Ernest Tomlinson	H.Ashworth J.Ingham J.Kay T.Ogden
Sunday 29 Feb 1948	Pavilion Cinema	Ada Alsop James Johnston	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 3 Oct 1948	Pavilion Cinema	Ruth Packer Roderick Jones	Soprano Baritone	Herbert Fox	Jos Warburton	Fred Tomlinson(Jnr)	
Sunday 5 Dec 1948	Pavilion Cinema	Leeds University Madrigal Group (Conductor : Fred Tomlinson Jnr.) The Gryphon Quartet (Accompanied Robert Gordon)			Jos Warburton	Jack Adamson	G.Keats J.Ingham H.Ashworth T.Ogden
Sunday 6 Mar 1949	Pavilion Cinema	Nancy Evans Owen Brannigan	Contralto Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Gray	
Sunday 2 Oct 1949	The Picture House	Henry Wendon Redvers Llewellyn	Tenor Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Jack Gray	
Sunday 4 Dec 1949	The Picture House	Joan Burns	Pianoforte	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	J.Kay J.Ingham & duets Harry Ashworth
Sunday 5 Mar 1950	The Picture House	Ruth Naylor Richard Lewis	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 1 Oct 1950	The Picture House	Jennifer Vyvyan Howell Glynne	Soprano Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 3 Dec 1950	The Picture House	Mark Hulme	Pianoforte	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	A.Crowther G.Holt, H.Smith J.Kay, C.Baxter J.Ingham H.Ashworth

DETAILS OF CELEBRITY CONCERTS 1951 - 1955

Date	Venue	Artistes		Guest Accompanist	Choir Conductor	Choir Accompanist	Choir Soloists
Sunday 4 Mar 1951	The Picture House	Marjorie Thomas Rowland Jones	Contralto Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 7 Oct 1951	The Picture House	Maureen Springer Max Worthley	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 2 Dec 1951	The Picture House	Bacup Orchestral Society Leader : T.Platt Conductor : A.Lord		- -	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	H.Marshall G.Holt, H.Smith A.Crowther S.Crowther J.Ingham, H.Ashworth
Sunday 2 Mar 1952	The Picture House	Nancy Thomas Arthur Copley	Contralto Baritone	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	Souvenir Programme One Shilling Profit to go toward Rawtenstall Civic Hall Fund
Sunday 5 Oct 1952	The Picture House	Elsie Morrison Gwent Lewis	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	Charles Baxter
Sunday 7 Dec 1952	The Picture House	Marion Callear Gerald Keenan Manuel Alvarado Sheila Kay	Soprano Cello Piano Accompanist	- -	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 1 Mar 1953	The Picture House	Joyce Gartside Norman Tattersall	Soprano Baritone	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 4 Oct 1953	The Picture House	Joan Butler Robert Bradley	Soprano Baritone	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 6 Dec 1953	The Picture House	Joan Taylor Nina Walker	Soprano Pianoforte	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 7 Mar 1954	The Picture House	Constance Shacklock William Herbert	Contralto Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 3 Oct 1954	The Picture House	Adele Leigh Nowakowski	Soprano Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 5 Dec 1954	The Picture House	Joan Burns Edith Chatterton	Pianoforte Soprano	- -	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 6 Mar 1955	The Picture House	Marjorie Thomas Gerald Davies	Contralto Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 2 Oct 1955	The Picture House	Amy Shuard Owen Brannigan	Soprano Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 4 Dec 1955	The Picture House	Jennifer Nuttall Mary Baines	Violin Soprano	David Wilde	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	

DETAILS OF CELEBRITY CONCERTS 1956 - 1960

Date	Venue	Artistes		Guest Accompanist	Choir Conductor	Choir Accompanist	Choir Soloists
Sunday 4 Mar 1956	The Picture House	Geraint Evans David Galliver	Bass Baritone Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 7 Oct 1956	The Picture House	Heather Harper Thomas Round	Soprano Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 2 Dec 1956	The Picture House	Barbara Robinson Rodney Friend	Contralto Violin	John Ogden Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 3 Mar 1957	The Picture House	Constance Shacklock Inia Te Mata	Mez Soprano Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 6 Oct 1957	The Picture House	Helen Watts William McAlpine	Contralto Tenor	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 1 Dec 1957	The Picture House	Sylvia Jacobs Roger Best Gerald Hind	Soprano Viola Pianoforte	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 2 Mar 1958	The Picture House	Jean Reddy Norman Lumsden	Soprano Bass	Herbert Fox	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 5 Oct 1958	The Picture House	Marion Studholme John Mitchinson	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 7 Dec 1958	The Picture House	Dorothy Lockett Ladies Choir		Winnifred Holt	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 1 Mar 1959	The Picture House	Monica Sinclair Roger Stalman	Contralto Bass	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 4 Oct 1959	The Picture House	Norma Proctor Howell Glynne	Contralto Bass	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 6 Dec 1959	The Picture House	Elizabeth Harwood Paula Dean	Soprano Contralto	David Coar	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 6 Mar 1960	The Picture House	Jacqueline Delman Charles Craig	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 2 Oct 1960	The Picture House	Jean Tyler Gordon Holdom	Soprano Baritone	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 4 Dec 1960	The Picture House	Mary Baines Barbara Robinson James Hunt	Soprano Mez Soprano Oboe	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	

DETAILS OF CELEBRITY CONCERTS 1961 - 1967

Date	Venue	Artistes		Guest Accompanist	Choir Conductor	Choir Accompanist	Choir Soloists
Sunday 5 Mar 1961	The Picture House	Joan Stuart George Allen	Soprano Bass Baritone	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 1 Oct 1961	The Picture House	Eugenie Castle Robert Thomas	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Gordon L. Keate	
Sunday 3 Dec 1961	The Picture House	Venessa Gold Meriel Dickenson Brenda Kay	Soprano Contralto Clarinet	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	John R. Law	
Sunday 4 Mar 1962	The Picture House	Barbara Robotham John lawrenson	Contralto Baritone	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	John R. Law	
Sunday 7 Oct 1962	The Picture House	Elizabeth Simon Kenneth Bowen	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 2 Dec 1962	The Picture House	Elizabeth Vaughan David Lloyd	Soprano Pianoforte	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 3 Mar 1963	The Picture House	Audrey Brice Norman Lumsden	Contralto Bass	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 6 Oct 1963	The Picture House	Felicity Harrison John Holmes	Contralto Bass	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	George F. Hitch	
Sunday 1 Dec 1963	The Picture House	Patricia Clark Edgar Fleet	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	George F. Hitch	
Sunday 1 Mar 1964	The Picture House	Rae Woodland John Mitchinson	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	George F. Hitch	
Sunday 4 Oct 1964	The Picture House	Elizabeth Robinson William McAlpine	Soprano Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	George F. Hitch	
Sunday 7 Mar 1965	The Picture House	Norma Proctor John Cameron	Contralto Baritone	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	George F. Hitch	
Sunday 3 Oct 1965	The Picture House	Lloyd-Straus-Smith Richard Standen	Tenor Bass	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 6 Mar 1966	The Picture House	Janet Price Sybil Michelow	Soprano Contralto	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 8 Oct 1966	The Picture House	Joe Evans Noel Noble	Coloratura- Soprano Bass	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	
Sunday 5 Mar 1967	The Picture House	Margaret Duckworth Edward Darling	Contralto Tenor	David Lloyd	Fred Tomlinson	Jos. Warburton	

There were 72 Celebrity Concerts and we had the pleasure of listening to:

44 Sopranos, 18 Contraltos, 26 Tenors, 28 Bass, 9 Guest Accompanists, 9 Choir Accompanists
2 Cellists, 1 Viola, 1 Oboist, 1 Clarinetist

Chapter 4

“Please don’t shoot the pianist he’s doing his best.” Anon

“A pianoforte is a harp in a box.” Leigh Hunt

The choir accompanist is an essential part of any choir. Invaluable at rehearsals and in performance. Rossendale have been blessed over the years to have accompanists who were prepared to give so freely of their time. It is obviously crucial that they are ever present because although the choir can function if a tenor or a bass is away it is much more difficult to replace the pianist. When the choir is considering an engagement the first people to be consulted are the conductor and the accompanist.

Belated recognition then for John Harvey 1934-36, Jack Pickup 1936-39, Ernest Tomlinson 1946-7, Fred Tomlinson Jr. 1947, Mitchell Schofield 1948, Jack Gray 1948, Gordon Keate 1949-68, John R. Law 1962, G. F. Hitch 1963-65

Special mention should also be made of Jossia Warburton, Joss to all his friends who was ever present from the choir’s early years until his retirement in 1976. Joss’s official title was Deputy Conductor and in 1946 the committee added the title of Deputy Accompanist. He was a lovely man. He gave the Tomlinson children their first piano lessons and Ernest is particularly appreciative of the 8 years he spent from 1933 under Mr. Warburton’s tuition and encouragement. Joss was organist and choirmaster at Sion Baptist Church, Higher Cloughfold from 1929 to 1976. Ernest recalls that as a 16 year old he was given the opportunity,

with Joss at his side, of for the first time playing the organ for a whole service.

Joss’s service to the choir was quiet and unassuming. The second tenors went to his home for part practices round his grand piano and he was always available if the conductor or accompanist was away. He directed the choir for the 8 months of Mr T’s absence in 1948 for an eye operation. The choir were deeply indebted to him and Fred greatly appreciated his musical talents in the years they shared together.

The present accompanist, Michael Farnworth is the great nephew of the founder conductor, Fred Tomlinson. His grandfather, Frank, was a founder member and his father also called Frank has been with the choir since 1953 and still sings with the second tenors. His mother and his wife are also members of the Ladies Choir.

Michael showed an interest in music from an early age. His parents bought an old piano when he was 6 years old and he started by playing nursery rhymes and simple tunes by ear. Michael started piano lessons with Madge Platt from Crawshawbooth, shortly after his seventh birthday and by the age of 8 had already won his first festival in Nelson, winning again the following year. In the following years he entered many more competitions, winning at festivals such as Fleetwood, Burnley, and Colne

Joss rehearsed the Zion Baptist Church choir every Thursday night. He always caught the last train from Cloughfold to Summerseat. The Station Master used to leave his key so that Joss could lock up for him. The key was dropped through the letter box on the way home.

As a child and young teenager one of the highlights of Michael's Christmas was the Choir Party when Fred gathered the children together to conduct their singing of Christmas carols. He could not wait for his voice to break so he too could join the choir and in 1968 at the youthful age of 16 he joined the ranks as a second tenor. Gradually as he learned the repertoire he began to play the accompaniments and made his debut at the Massed Bands Concert at Belle Vue in 1969 when he was introduced to the audience by the soloist, Ian Wallace.



Michael J. Farnworth
Accompanist Since 1969

In 1995 the choir was asked to do a concert at Haslingden British Legion on Remembrance Sunday. The club provided a large keyboard for the concert but as nobody knew how to play it they allowed Michael to borrow it for a few weeks and find out how it worked. The concert was a great success with two sing-a-long medleys of war songs accompanied by a full 'Marching Brass Band' courtesy of the keyboard. Following the concert the club agreed to sell the keyboard to the choir on condition that the choir return for the next two years to do similar concerts.

Alongside his accompaniment of the choir he became a proficient club organist in the 1970s and early 1980s. This style of accompaniment was very different and he has been able to pass on to the Choir the experience gained playing this type of popular music, as can be heard in pieces such as 'Let It Be Me'.

While the keyboard can never replace a piano it enables the choir to perform in venues such as Rawtenstall Cricket Club where there is no piano. It also provides a wide range of sounds from a Church Organ for pieces such as Gwhoddiaid and Morte Cristie to a Steel Band Sound for the calypso Yellow Bird.

Michael has always taken part practices from his early days with the choir. Such practices were once a regular feature in the choir's learning process, however it is now more common for him to take separate full choir rehearsals on Monday evenings. The aim of this is to teach the whole choir the notes and the rhythm as quickly as possible and to get as much of the dynamics and shape correct as is possible in the time so that Beatrice can then concentrate on the tone production and interpretation which makes the RMVC so successful.

Ernest Tomlinson says *"Michael had to cope with the demands I would take for granted with professional colleagues. The more smoothly the instrumental contribution goes the easier it is to overlook the dedication and hard practice involved."*

Beatrice Wade says *"Michael is an outstanding accompanist and his 30 years experience playing for the gentlemen is invaluable. We work as a team. Michael's great asset is the way he plays the introduction to a piece which sets the mood for the choir."*



Christmas Party c. 1950



May Tomlinson (Centre) and The 'Natterers'
Bring and Buy 1963



Christmas Party c. 1960

Chapter 5

The 'Knitters' and 'Natterers'

Strictly speaking, the Natterers came first. In other places they may have been called the Ladies Section. Under the leadership of May Tomlinson, they got together in the 1930's to raise money to help with choir funds and for the annual Christmas Party. They met, usually on Tuesdays at each other's houses and planned their next 'Bring and Buy' or other fund-raising activity.

When the war started the ladies turned their efforts towards doing their bit for the war effort. They chose to provide comforts for the Merchant Navy and became the 'Knitters'. Through the next five years they continued to meet and it is more than likely that a fair bit of nattering went on but they also kept their fingers busy producing a stream of socks and balaclavas. ('Socking it to the enemy' – Sorry, it slipped out.)

After the war the ladies continued to meet, even as late as 1973 they were still busy raising money for the choir's overseas fund to help the choir go to the International Koorfestival in Holland.

In 1982, as part of her 90th birthday celebrations, Mrs. Tomlinson planned a special tea party for her friends the 'Natterers' who still met on a regular basis at each other's houses.

The choir would be the first to recognise the part played by their wives in the support they offered at festivals and concerts. They probably knew the repertoire almost as well as the men and were among their sternest critics. May, in particular attended every concert to make sure that Fred was

always immaculately turned out. The support continues to this day.

At the end of this chapter is a competition devised by May and her daughter Freda, as part of their fund-raising. If any reader manages to complete it there is every possibility of a prize for the first person who returns the completed list. Actually there will be great rejoicing throughout the land because, so far, only 35 out of 50 fish have been discovered.

When war started/broke out in September 1939 there began an understandable decline in the choir's activities. Celebrity concerts already committed to continued until March 1940. But more and more members of the choir joined the forces or became increasingly involved in extra duties, as Air Raid Wardens, or members of the Home Guard, Fire Watchers and so on.

The choir made a point of continuing the Friday rehearsals throughout the war, these became more of a social occasion. Members on leave would always come along and were invited to choose their favourite items. Fred's second son James was conscripted to sing or help in the choir. Fred, now Sergeant Tomlinson of the Home Guard (later Lieutenant) was still at the helm.

At some point the Haslingden Arts Club Choir was founded with Mr.T. as conductor. It was funded by the Council for the Encouragement of Music & Arts. (C.E.M.A.)

Normal concert-giving activities were suspended, but the remaining choir members came into their own when helping out the Rossendale Amateurs in 1942 for a production of the Gilbert and Sullivan "Pirates of Penzance". Few amateur dramatic societies can have secured a more well-trained set of singers, whether as Pirates or Policemen. Harry Ashworth took the key role as Sergeant of Police (he was in fact a special policeman) and his "A Policeman's Lot is not a Happy One" brought the house down. "With Cat-Like Tread" is still in the choir's repertoire. With that success behind them the choir's participation in the Rossendale Amateurs 1943 production "Ruddigore" was a must. A member of the audience on leave from the RAF, Fred's eldest son Ernest, was particularly impressed with the famous "A Ghost's High Noon" chorus as Murgatroyd's ancestors bring the portrait gallery to life. It so inspired him that many years later, he wrote a new arrangement of it especially for the choir.

Rossendale was considered to be a reasonably safe area and a number of children were evacuated and placed with families throughout the valley. Some did not take to this new life style and returned home. Others loved it so much that they stayed on after the war. Two of them joined the choir when they were old enough.

By 1946 many of the serving members had been demobilised and the choir

went back on the Festival trail winning at Blackpool. Over the next few years they won a further 8 first prizes at Lytham, Hazel Grove, Burnley, Nelson, Morecambe and Wallasey.

In 1948 Fred Tomlinson had to go into hospital for surgery on a detached retina. The operation was not successful and when he returned home the choir went up to his house after the rehearsal to welcome him home. They gathered outside his front door and sang one of his favourite pieces, "Quiet Sleep". The words are by Charles I and are most appropriate, "Close thine eyes and sleep secure"

From then on the choir made an annual pilgrimage to Fred's house. Every Christmastime, after singing round the Christmas Tree at the Cenotaph, they would walk up to his home and sing for him. May would welcome them in for coffee and biscuits.

The damaged eye had another effect. Members of the choir thought that Fred was singling them out because they thought that he was looking at them accusingly. It so disconcerted one member that he left the choir.

The choir little realised that they were about to enter an era which would make them one of the most well known choirs in the country. The Celebrity concerts had restarted and ahead of them lay Llangollan, Radio Broadcasts, Brass Band Concerts, Television and overseas Festivals.

The Valley was comparatively "Raid Free" but an incendiary bomb did explode on some waste ground and a crowd gathered to watch it burn. An Air Raid Warden (not a choir member obviously) arrived on his bicycle and weighed up the situation. He took off his cape and covered the flames with it. The cape disappeared in seconds. Our hero stood in perfect silence for a moment and then mounted his bike and rode off.

48. Bottled or draught
49. A saintly head
50. Grandmama's finery

Name

Address

.....

All entries to reach Mrs. F. Tomlinson, 6, Derby Terrace, Rawtenstall, not later than November 30th 1964.

They should be sent in separate envelopes marked COMPETITION in the top left-hand corner.

The winners will be announced in the Rossendale Free Press on December 12th 1964, together with the answers.

ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE CHOIR

WOMEN'S SECTION

FISH COMPETITION

ENTRY FORMS 6d. each

Set out below are 50 questions, the answer in each case being the name of a Fish.

Three Christmas Parcels will be awarded to the first three correct solutions opened after the closing date. Should there not be three correct solutions, the prizes will be divided between the ones with the most correct answers.

The competition is open to any Male Voice Choir member, Associates and friends, and any number of entries may be made, but on separate forms, and in **separate envelopes**.

Further copies may be had from Mrs F. Tomlinson, 6, Derby Terrace, Rawtenstall, or from members of the Choir.

The following example is given:--

Dicken's house, not Jack's Bleak

1. Treasured by the bride
2. Also heather
3. Head of the Church
4. Beheaded, completes defeat
5. Suggests safety

6. Sounds illuminating
7. Rung at closing time
8. At the back of a Cockney's boot
9. Put
10. More heather, coloured
11. Under a foot
12. Jack
13. Henry and I --- but
14. Complain
15. A snowy lure
16. With an R you dig it
17. An aspirated pain
18. Hush for a vessel
19. Pay a postman
20. Turn this for road
21. Move, Jack
22. Hen roost
23. A letter leads to a champion
24. Owned a weed
25. Would one smoke it?
26. Beheaded, a little brook

27. The cup that cheers
28. A porpoise trod on its tail
29. Beheaded, a quantity of paper
30. A Biblical stone, usually found in tins
31. Hiding it may perturb others
32. Sounds like a famous boxer
33. The fourth letter precedes the first two
34. Unerring part of a boat
35. The first part likes the second
36. Roman salt and Scotsman
37. Toss and tumble
38. Used to describe clouds
39. A cross expression
40. A Dickens' verger
41. Like violets or drains
42. In Wales you are stichin' it
43. But in Devon you skin it
44. A thousand in the present
45. How to treat ale or wine
46. Pin your gate on with this
47. The bird with this is always male

Chapter 6

Intro to the Post-War Story

By 1946 the Rossendale Male Voice Choir had resumed its pre-war role. Most of the serving members had been demobilised and recruitment gathered apace. Invitations from churches and other bodies could now be answered positively and the time-honoured pattern of concert engagements was re-established. Celebrity Concerts started again in October 1946. The choir went back on the Competitive Festival trail, winning at Blackpool in October. Over the next few years (between 1946 and 1959) they won a further 28 first prizes at Lytham, Hazel Grove, Burnley, Nelson, Morecambe and Wallasey.

A mentioned on page 27, Mr T. was kept away from the choir following his eye operation. Fortunately the choir had the loyal zeal of Joss Warburton to rely on. As Deputy Conductor he took over the choir in Fred's absence and he was successful in continuing the principles laid down by Mr. T. and blossoming as a conductor in his own right he conducted the choir in its Celebrity Concerts in October and December 1948 with great distinction.

Mr T. returned to the choir early in 1949. He was fortunate in having under his control a body of singers who were coming to the height of their

powers, with young blood swelling the members all the time. By 1950 choir numbers had passed the 60 mark and was reaching towards 70 by 1952.

This brought problems in those competitions where choir members were limited to 60. Present-day choir member Vernon Riley, recalls the trepidation felt by younger members as to whether they might have to be left out of the choir when the axe came down at the count of 60.

For the first time Rossendale was able to compete on equal terms with prestigious choirs such as Felling and Colne Valley. The glories of Llangollen and overseas festivals were ahead of them, as were concerts with major brass bands and other high profile events. An early feature of Rossendale's post-war progress was the increasing number of invitations from the BBC to undertake radio broadcasts. At first broadcasts were for the North of England Home Service, Increasingly there came programmes for the full nationwide Home Service. The Rossendale choir were, before long, to make an impact on the vast listening public which, bearing in mind that the BBC had a monopoly in broadcasting, would be hard for even television to rival these days.

THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Head Office : BROADCASTING HOUSE, LONDON, W.1

Broadcasting House, Piccadilly, Manchester, 1

TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAMS: CENTRAL 8444

Our reference... 12051/DLH/BB/M/54709th October, 1959 (Date)

DEAR SIR/M

The Rossendale Male Voice Choir

We offer you an engagement to perform for broadcasting or for recording for the purpose of subsequent broadcast reproduction as follows:

SERVICE	REHEARSALS
<u>N.E.H.S.</u>	
DATE OF RECORDING <u>15th October, 1959</u>	
TIME OF RECORDING <u>7.30 p.m.</u>	<u>7.00 p.m.</u>
STUDIO <u>Kay Street Baptist Schoolroom</u>	
DATE OF BROADCAST <u>To be arranged</u>	a. A Lover and His Lass
TIME OF BROADCAST <u>To be arranged</u>	b. Come, Landlord Fill
TYPE OF MATERIAL REQUIRED <u>As arranged</u>	c. The Pace-Egging Song
PROGRAMME <u>Inserts to "The Northcountryman"</u>	d. Fire, Fire My Heart
	e. Lure, Falconers, Lure
	f. An Evening's Pastoral
FEE 1. Broadcast performance(s) or Recording Session(s) for the purpose of Clause 15(c) overleaf. <u>Two Guineas (£2 2s. Od.) each song TOTAL - £12 12s. Od.</u>	
FEE 2. Mechanical Reproduction for the United Kingdom (including simultaneous broadcast overseas): (Payable in respect of each such reproduction not covered by Fee 1:— see Clause 15 (d) overleaf.) <u>One Guineas (£1 1s. Od.) each song</u>	
FEE 3. Mechanical Reproduction overseas only: (a) First five reproductions: <u>Eight shillings and five pence (8/5d.)</u> <u>each song</u> (Payable in respect of each reproduction not covered by Fee 1:— see Clause 15 (d) overleaf.)	
(b) Subsequent Reproductions: <u>Four shillings and three pence (4/3d.)</u> <u>each song</u> (Payable in respect of each such reproduction.)	
(c) BBC Transcription Service <u>Two Guineas (£2 2s. Od.) each song</u> (see Clause 15 (e) overleaf.)	

N.B.—Fees under 2 and 3 above are payable only if a broadcast reproduction is given.

The above offer is contingent on your compliance with the conditions below and overleaf:—

1. That your signed acceptance, together with all necessary particulars, is in our hands by RETURN.
2. That full programme particulars, in accordance with the attached Programme Form, are supplied. In this connection we must particularly stress the necessity for the accurate timing of each item and for the supply of composers', arrangers' and publishers' names in every case.
3. That you shall personally attend all rehearsals and performances as provided above.

Yours faithfully,

THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

A 88456

Name Fred Tomlinson, Esq.,
Address (For the Rossendale Male Voice Choir)6 Derby Terrace,
Rawtenstall,
Rossendale.

North Regional Programme Executive.

P/345/NR/P 1-59 500 A.E.B.

Chapter 7

B.B.C. Broadcasting 1951 – 1980

“I had the radio on”. (Marilyn Monroe, asked what she really wore for a calendar photograph)

One of the great mediums of communication in this century has undoubtedly been the radio. The air waves were filled with every conceivable form of entertainment: Music, variety, debate, plays and sports commentaries all had their adherents. The programme producers had their hands full providing the material for the listeners.

Mr. T.'s radio experience goes back to 1928 when the Glen Quartette were invited to sing on 2ZL for the exorbitant fee of six guineas. They performed four Lancashire folk songs, one of them, the “Peace¹ - egging song”, was later arranged by his son Ernest for the choir.

In the same way, when the choir became well known, the programmers approached Mr. T. once more. Once contact had been made they made regular appearances in a number of shows:

The Northcountryman :

A miscellany of speakers and topics from the North. Ernest's arrangement of “Pace¹ - egg” was broadcast in 1960.

It's Choir Night : -

introduced choirs from all over the North-West.

Friday Night is Music Night:-

A weekly programme of light music for everyone with the BBC Concert Orchestra and brass bands such as Wingates Temperance and CWS Manchester.

Music Makers :

Another programme about choirs in Britain. This produced a letter from a Rossendalian working out in Nairobi.

“u ite by chance I looked at the Cable and Wireless Programme at about three minutes to six this evening and saw to my amament that the choir were singing . . there aren't many people who will have the thrill of hearing their own townsfolk singing on a Nairobi programme .

Give my regards to Miss May'
(Mrs.Tomlinson)

Dorothy Kirk.

Folk Songs 1965 :

“Red Rosy Bush” arranged by Fred Tomlinson Jr. made its first appearance.

¹ “Peace” and “Pace are synonymous

The choir had an engagement to record for the B.B.C. Fred was not enamoured by some of the chording in one piece arranged by Doris Arnold. On the day of the recording the choir went through a rehearsal and halfway through were stopped by the producer with the plaintive cry, “*Could we have Doris Arnold back please.*”

In 1957 the choir were invited to take part in the BBC 'Let the People Sing' competition. This was a weekly knock-out between 140□ choirs which reduced to a final between 2 Children's choirs, 2 Mixed choirs, 2 Ladies, 2 Youth and 2 Male Voice choirs. Before the contest began, each choir had to tape a programme and submit it for adjudication to the BBC. These adjudications would be used to award the final placings at the Final Concert.

In 1958 the choir sang against Swindon MVC and moved on into the second round where they beat Treviscoe MVC. In the semi-finals they defeated Nelson Excelsior Choir and set themselves up for a visit to London and a concert in the Royal Festival Hall.

Ernest, Mr T's eldest son, also took part in the concert. He conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra in his own composition, "The Cinderella Waltz". Rossendale and Bromley and District MVC sang their groups and Bromley were duly declared the winners. The result appeared to surprise the audience who must not have been aware of the adjudication arrangement. The choir spent the weekend in London and came home well satisfied. They reached the final again in 1959 and once again were placed second.

1958 also produced a recording of the Massed Choirs Concert at Llangollen where Rossendale achieved their fourth win and "Talk About from the North" – Theme and Variations for a Musical Family, in which Frank Dixon talked to the Tomlinson's. In 1959 the choir were featured in a programme from Blackburn Radio called, "The men from the Valley". In 1962, 1964 and 1966 the choir were invited to sing in Liverpool Cathedral. (see later pages)

In 1972 the choir were invited to help in the production of a programme called "No Drink, No Drink for Me." Stanley Williamson, who also produced, "The Waters of the Irwell" for TV, also featuring the choir, wrote: It's about the Temperance Movement which began in Lancashire. The script includes a number of early temperance hymns and songs. There are three that need a choir and I'm pretty sure you would know all the tunes..... The choir did the programme and dutifully sang, "I am an English Navy", "Self-Deceived" and "The Young Abstainer", although the chorus,

*"Pure cold water, water give to me,
For I'm an English navy,
from drinking customs free"*

May have sent a shiver down one or two less than teetotal spines.

Owen Brannigan was a great international bass singer and he sang at a Celebrity Concert for the choir. Years later at the final of the Let the People Sing□competition in the Festival Hall in London in 1958, the choir were competing and Harry Hanson spotted Owen Brannigan. With typical Northern charm he went up to him and said, "Bye gum, Owen, lad, you've put a bit of weight on." Not forgetting to pat the aforementioned portion.



No Drink, No Drink for Me: 8.0 pm

8.0 No Drink, No Drink for Me

We agree to abstain from all liquors of an intoxicating quality, whether ale, porter, wine or ardent spirits, except as medicine . . .

The story of the Temperance Movement, from the signing of the first pledge, in a cheese merchant's shop in Preston in 1832, down to the present day; with some of the hymns, ballads and recitations composed in support of the cause.
*Sing a Song of Saturday,
Wages thrown away,
In the gas-lit 'public',
Faltering footsteps stray.
When the home is reached at last*

*All the money's gone:
Isn't that a grievous sight
To have to look upon?*

Narrator DAVID MAHLOWE

Other parts read by

GEOFFREY BANKS, JOHN FIELDING

RONALD HARVI, HARRY MARKHAM

JOHN PICKLES, BRIAN TRUEMAN

PAUL WEBSTER

with the ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE

CHOIR, conductor FRED TOMLINSON,

and children from ST STEPHEN'S

JUNIOR SCHOOL, Little Harwood

Written by NORMAN LONGMATE

Producer STANLEY WILLIAMSON

The Water of Irwell

T.V. film documentary

In 1958 BBC (North Region) devised a T.V. film documentary to be called "The Waters of Irwell." The River Irwell begins just above Bacup at Deerplay where the memorial stands. The film would follow the course of the river from Deerplay to its spillage into the Mersey in Manchester, taking in the Bacup Coconutters and Manchester University rowing eights on the way. Rossendale MVC was not only to be featured but would provide the background music too. The music chosen was the "Spanking Roger." Since this was originally written for full choir Ernest was called upon to arrange it for male voices.

One studio experience is worth recalling. After "Spanking Roger" had been recorded the producer wanted more shots of Mr. T. conducting, for which purpose the music was played back. It soon went dead but Mr. T.

thinking that this was part of the exercise carried on conducting in the silence - expressions and all. When the sound was restored, to the producer's surprise, it came back in exact synchronisation with his beat. Fred had a strong sense of pulse, a rare quality, which gives music its perfect timing and lilt.

One sequence in the film showed St. Mary's Church, Rawtenstall, then picked up Mr. T. setting off from his home to attend choir practice. As Joe Ashworth pointed out, it wasn't really true to life because it didn't show him going back for something he had forgotten.

The Waters of Irwell was played continually at the Radio Exhibition at London's Olympia as a demonstration recording on screens all round the exhibition.



Bill Torevell was a fervent choir member. In later years he became the first Chairman of the choir. He was on his way out of the house one Friday night to the choir practice when his wife said, *"Bill, I don't think you should go tonight, I think that the baby's on its way."* Probable answers on a postcard, please.

Grand Messe des Morte (Requiem Mass) by Hector Berloiz

Charles Craig – Tenor

BBC Northern Singers – Chorus Master – Stephen Wilkinson

Rossendale Male Voice Choir – Conductor – Fred Tomlinson

Liverpool Philharmonic Choir – Chorus Master Dr. J. E. Wallace

BBC Northern Orchestra – Leader – Reginald Stead

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – Leader – Peter Mountain

Conducted by George Hurst

At the time, Berlioz Requiem in Liverpool Cathedral was regarded as the “Highlight of the Choir’s existence” by the Rossendale Free Press. Some of the choir officials ranked it with their appearance at the Royal Albert Hall and winning Llangollen for the third time. The other papers were equally impressed.:-

The Guardian: The male choruses in the Hostias and Agnus Dei are at any time among the most haunting pages of the “Requiem” and they were sung last night with expressive beauty.

Daily Telegraph: The combined choirs were magnificent. There is no other word.

Daily Mail: The quality of the performance was magnificent – whether the full impressive swell was filling the cathedral and being held in every corner, or whether the choirs were simply whispering, the effect was thrilling.

Daily Express: Two massive orchestras. Three glorious choirs. One of Britain’s greatest conductors. One of the most magnificent cathedrals in the world. This was the scene of vast

splendour when the BBC mounted a vast musical venture to mark forty years of sound broadcasting.

Letter to the Editor of the Free Press:

Sir,

Please permit me to express in your columns, on behalf of the Rossendale Male Voice Choir, our grateful thanks to the employers of labour for their willingness in allowing “time off” to our members in preparation for the recent broadcast performance of the Berlio□ “Requiem”.

It will be appreciated that, hard though the choir worked in the weeks preceding, without attending the three rehearsals of the combined choirs in Liverpool, our choir’s contribution could not have even hoped to prove worthy of the occasion.

Having been chosen to sing certain movements on our own, it was essential that every man should attend full rehearsals. This, thanks to our employers, we were able to do.

Signed:

Fred Tomlinson

Many choir members sing in their local church choirs.
At one church practice the choirmaster said,
“Right then, Come ye who love the Lord, to Southport” (the tune).
One member called out, “Where are the rest of us going”.

In the programme produced by the BBC they had the Latin text of the “Requiem” and alongside it they printed the English translation. In the weeks before the performance they also provided the choirs with a phonetic guide on how the words should sound.

For example:

Introitus

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion; et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem; exaudi orationem meam.

Ad te omnis caro veniet.

Kyrie eleison, christe eleison, Kyrie eleison

Rest eternal grant them O Lord; and let light perpetual shine upon them.

Thou, O God, art praised in Sion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed in Jerusalem.

Hearken unto my prayer; unto thee shall all flesh come.

Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us! Lord have mercy upon us!

Phonetics

Roy-kwee-aym ay-tear-nahm doh-nah ay-ees doh-mee-ay.

Ate looks pear-pay-too-ah

Loo-chay-at ay-ees tay day-chayt eem-noos day-oos, een zee-ohn.

Aygz-ow-dee oh-ra-tsee-oh-naym may-ahm, ahd tay cah-roh

Ohm-nees cah—roh vay-nee-ate.

Day-foonk-teece kee-ree-ay.

Ay-lay-ee-sohn kree-stay ay-lay ee-sohn.

To be on the safe side the choir invited a local Catholic priest to come to their rehearsals to make sure that they got their pronunciation spot on.

On the way over to the performance, Bob Berry and Harry Hanson, two close friends and members of the top tenors, were sitting together on the coach. As they travelled along Bob turned to Harry and said, “*Harry, I’ve left my copy at home, but it’s alright because I know it*”. Harry’s reply is not recorded. (The full work lasted 1□ hours)



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Fortieth Anniversary of Broadcasting

THE BBC NORTH REGION

presents

Grande Messe des Morts

(Requiem Mass)

by

HECTOR BERLIOZ

in

LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL

(By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter)

on

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER 1962 AT 8.00 p.m.

Doors not open before 7.15 p.m.

The audience are asked to be in their seats by 7.50 p.m.

THIS PROGRAMME ADMITS ONE

Price 10s. 6d.

CHARLES CRAIG

(tenor)

BBC NORTHERN SINGERS

Chorus master STEPHEN WILKINSON

ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE CHOIR

Conductor FRED TOMLINSON

LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

Chorus master DR J. E. WALLACE

BBC NORTHERN ORCHESTRA

Leader REGINALD STEAD

ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Leader PETER MOUNTAIN

Conducted by

GEORGE HURST

NOTE BY ROBERT COLLET

BERLIOZ wrote a number of large-scale works for ceremonial occasions. They are the descendants of the numerous works written for public occasions by French composers during the revolutionary period. They include the *Te Deum*, the *Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale*, the cantata *L'Imperiale*, and the Requiem. Of these, the Requiem (the *Grande Messe des Morts*) is both the most personal and the most monumentally impressive. Apart from some material from an earlier work, *Resurrexit*, which he adapted in the second number, it seems all to have been composed in a matter of about three months in 1837—Berlioz was usually a rapid worker. It received its first performance on 5 December of this year at a commemorative service in the Church of the Invalides in Paris for the men who had died in the capture of Constantine in Algeria.

So much has been written and talked about the four brass bands that are used in three out of the ten numbers that the idea has grown up that the work is most remarkable as an assault on the nerves on a scale previously unprecedented in the history of music. It is now generally realized, however, that the quieter sections contain some of Berlioz's most personal music, full of a sombre yet tender lyricism. Moreover, throughout the greater part of the work, the quality that most characterizes the orchestral writing is its economy and restraint. It is certainly one of the three or four most important works in his whole output.



Grande Messe des Morts
Requiem Mass by Hector Berlioz
Friday 23 November 1962

LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL

(By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter)

FRIDAY, 29 MAY 1964 at 8 p.m.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society

PATRON: HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

and the

British Broadcasting Corporation

present

MAHLER SYMPHONY No. 8

with

HEATHER HARPER	(Magna Peccatrix)	Soprano
MARIE COLLIER	(Una Poenitentium)	Soprano
ELIZABETH VAUGHAN	(Mater Gloriosa)	Soprano
JANET BAKER	(Mulier Samaritana)	Contralto
NORMA PROCTER	(Maria Aegyptiaca)	Contralto
RONALD DOWD	(Doctor Marianus)	Tenor
RAIMUND HERINCX	(Pater Ecstaticus)	Baritone
JOHN HOLMES	(Pater Profundus)	Bass

Raimund Herincx appears in place of John Shirley-Quirk.

LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC CHOIR	(Chorus Master: Dr. J. E. Wallace)
BBC NORTHERN SINGERS	(Chorus Master: Stephen Wilkinson)
WIRRAL COUNTY GRAMMAR SCHOOL, GIRLS	} (Conductor: Doris Parkinson)
THE WIRRAL SINGERS	
I.M. MARSH PHYSICAL EDUCATION COLLEGE	(Chorus Master: W. E. Walters)
LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL BOYS' CHOIR	(Chorus Master: Ronald Woan)
BOYS OF ST. TERESA'S CHURCH AND EDMUND CAMPION, ST. HELENS	(Chorus Master: Patrick Booth)
ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE CHOIR	(Chorus Master: Frederick Tomlinson)

Organ: NOEL RAWSTHORNE, ERNEST PRATT

ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Leader: PETER MOUNTAIN

BBC NORTHERN ORCHESTRA

Leader: REGINALD STEAD

Conductor:

CHARLES GROVES

LIST OF PERFORMERS

Mahler's Symphony No.8

Liverpool Cathedral Friday 29 May 1964 at 8pm
Conductor Charles Groves

Mahler composed his Eighth Symphony during 1906-7, and conducted its first performance in Munich on 12th September 1910, six months before his death.

The B.B.C. issued a pronunciation guide to all the vocalists. The first four lines are reproduced here, out of the four foolscap pages which the B.B.C. produced, to show the care that was taken to get everything right.

Main Chorus

Waldung, sie schwank heran
valdoong *ēe shvankt hairaan*

Felsen sie lasten dran
felēen see Lasten draan

Wurzeln, sie klammern an
voorseln *ēe klammern an*

Stamm dicht an Stamm hinan

Shtam dicht an shtam hinaan
(-ch as in Ger.'ich')

There, that should be clear
enough to everyone.

Most of the hard graft was done at the choir's own rehearsal room. All the choirs and orchestras were only brought together on the Thursday before the actual performance. Fred wrote to Charles Groves on the 4th June:-

Dear Mr Groves,

Many thanks for your grand letter. I'm eagerly awaiting tomorrow's rehearsal so that I can watch the lads' faces, - and hear their comments when I read it out to them.

To have taken part in such a wonderful work was - as one of our chaps put it - worth every minute of every hour we put into rehearsing. As for me, I confess to having had a feeling of trepidation before Thursday's full rehearsal. I couldn't see how it was possible for any man to weld together so huge a mass of performers in only one practice. Mind you, I know that if it could be done, then you were the man to do it, (and don't for heaven's sake think this is a bit of back-scratching, that's one thing I'm not given to.) You see there may be many orchestral conductors, many choral conductors, but those who combine the two attributes are not so frequently met with. Add the fact that some of the choralists are just amateurs with little experience of professional conductors, and you will see I could look forward to our Rossendale choir's contribution.

One thing my 40-odd years as an amateur conducting amateurs has taught me is that confidence in the man in front is the vital factor. When those same amateurs join with accomplished musicians in such a work as Mahler's 8th, having utter and complete confidence in their conductor, then I say it is little wonder that the over-all effect of the performance is one prolonged thrill, - and will be prolonged for years to come. Finally, a heartfelt Thank you (this time I will say it) Charles, for the honour paid to our choir and me in being deemed worthy of collaborating with you on such a great occasion.

With every good wish to you and yours.

Always, (signed, Fred)

P.S. I think I could recognise your back view having had a good view of it last Friday.

*Oh! Fred is Fred, not Frederick
(signed, May Tomlinson)*

Three memories of that rehearsal. The first is of the whole ensemble, orchestras, choirs, and soloists in their full stride only to be stopped by Charles Groves, who said, "Miss -----, third bar, middle line, your note is F sharp not F natural, please". The second concerns the Rossendale choir when everyone was asked to be seated and then Rossendale were invited to stand and sing the section they were working on.

When they had finished, Charles Groves turned to the other choristers and said, "That is the tone I want from you all". Finally a little story recounted about Ernest Schofield who is now the choir's esteemed Chairman. During a break in the rehearsal he went down to the crypt where they were serving tea. A harassed lady said, "I'm sorry but we're out of saucers". "Never mind," said Ernest, "I'll just have to drink it out of a cup".

Although the Lancashire Evening Telegraph headlines the broadcast, "Tomlinson's tonsils on BBC", the Daily Telegraph and Morning Post more soberly said, "-----Charles Groves was rewarded by choral singing of superb richness and intensity and by fine work from the eight soloists.

But the hero of the evening was Mahler, and Mr. Groves did right to hold out the score to the audience at the end.

Sunday, 31.6.64

Dear Fred,

Thank you a thousand times for the splendid singing of your men and for all the hours they and you gave to Mahler 8. I hope we shall be able to collaborate

again before long and I hope you will convey to all the boys my heartfelt gratitude.

Kindest regards, also to Mrs. Tomlinson, whom I know only by telephone.

Yours ever,

Charles

(Groves, conductor of the Mahler 8th.)

Busoni Piano Concerto Op.39

Liverpool Cathedral 1966

Conductor Charles Groves

Soloist - John Ogden

Rossendale renewed their acquaintanceship with Mr John Ogden who had appeared as guest accompanist for Barbara Robinson and Rodney Friend at a Celebrity Concert in the Picture House in December 1955.

The Busoni Concerto had a chorus for male voice choir and orchestra. Rehearsal time was limited and Ernest Tomlinson came to the rescue by recording the orchestral part so that the choir could rehearse with the proper accompaniment.

This was the third and last performance by the choir at Liverpool Cathedral. It did not make the same impact on the collective memory of the choir as the Berlioz and the Mahler but nevertheless it was a compelling piece of work.

The subscription of 3 old pence a week (if in work) would now be the equivalent of ☐40 per year.



Mahler Symphony No. 8
Friday 29 May 1964

Chapter 8

International Festivals

International Eisteddfod Llangollen 195261

Committee Meeting May 13th 1952

Item 3

The following list of engagements be officially accepted:

June 14 th	<i>Lytham Music</i>
June 29 ^h	<i>Whitaker Park Aft. 3pm</i> <i>Evening 7.30pm</i>
July 12 th	<i>Llangotlen International</i> <i>Eisteddfod</i>
Aug. 19 th	<i>Edgeside Park Aft 3pm</i> <i>Evening</i>
(kt. 4 th	<i>Concert at</i>
Oct.	<i>1st Celebrity</i>
Oct 12 th	<i>Newchurch</i>
<i>Unitarians</i>	<i>Congregational</i>
	<i>Churc</i>
Nov. 9 th	<i>Trinity Churc</i> <i>Haslingden</i>
Nov. 16 th	<i>Empire Theatre</i>
<i>Bacup</i>	<i>2nd Celebrity</i>

Committee Meeting June 3rd 1952

Item 5c

The arrangements for travelling to Llangollen be left to the assistant secretary.

There are no other references to that first visit to Llangollen. It is commonly supposed that Mr Tomlinson expressed a desire to go and have a look at the Eisteddfod and decided that, if they were going, it would be a waste of time and money not to compete.

The adjudicators should be credited with the phrase "flat faced comedians" because that was how they announced the winners, "In first place those flatfaced comedians from Lancashire, Rossendale Male Voice choir." Their remarks fully

Male Choirs, not exceeding 60 voices

- (a) 23rd Psalm Schubert
- (b) Serenade Borodin
- (c) An original composition by a composer of the competing choir's own country, sung in any language

FIRST ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE CHOIR, ENGLAND

(a) This was a most impressive performance. The voices, blend, control and gradation were all that we could desire. In addition there was a warmth and a depth of sincerity in their utterance of the Psalm. Here we had that love and beauty which we all recognise as inherent in the Psalm, and also in the music of Schubert. The performance was full of outstanding features of excellence and never failed to realise what we had in mind as an ideal — even occasionally, an unobtainable ideal. Grateful for this experience.

(b) This was a manly wooing, and every man (in the last page) excellent as a lover. 97
What a lucky woman

(c) "The Herald" (Edward Elgar) 94

(d) A fine choice in which the choir again revealed its technical competence, and its appreciation of the musical subtleties and especially the harmonic difficulties of the work. Their resources are wonderful, and they have power of penetration into the inner meaning of the music and the intentions of the composer. Fine musicianship.

94
285

NO ROCKETS FOR ROSSENDALE?

Emulating Elizondo

From our Special
Correspondent

LLANGOLLEN, SUNDAY

"Great happiness reigns in the town of Elizondo. Rockets have been fired read a telegram received here this week after a Spanish choir won two first prizes at the Eisteddfod. What did they fire in Rossendale Lanes. When it became known that the Rossendale Male Voice Choir had won the international trophy for male voice choirs with the remarkable result of 95 per cent for the three pieces they sang?

There were fifteen entries for this class, among them choirs from Holland, Spain, France and Austria. Birkenhead, five times competitors in the Festival and twice firstprize winners, were the favourites. They came on next to last, very spruce in their claretcoloured blazers, and gave a performance which justified the confidence of the tipsters. Rossendale followed, an unknown quantity here: quintessential Lancashire in the wealth of those mobile, rather flat comedians' faces that our grey pastures produce in such numbers.

Of their singing it need be said only that they ran out nine marks in front of Birkenhead, with totals of 97, 94 and 94 for the two testpieces — Schubert's setting of the Twenty Third Psalm and a serenade by Borodin — and their own choice, Elgar's "The Herald."

The report on the left appeared in the Sunday Telegraph, Sunday 13th July 1952.

Committee Meeting
August 12th 1952

Item 4 Any Other Business

The trophy won by the choir at the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen be inscribed with a suitable plate and presented to our Conductor, Mr Tomlinson. as a souvenir of this great occasion. The Plate to read: 'Won by the Rossendale Male Voice Choir 1952 and presented by the members to their conductor, Fred Tomlinson Esq. '

The choir returned to Llangollen the following year. This is in the tradition of festival competitions everywhere. If you win, your return as a gesture to the Festival and to offer your neck to the chopping block.

The test pieces were: 'Ave verum Corpus' in Latin and 'Brindium beviam.' The own choice piece was 'Tiger Tiger' Armstrong Gibbs. The marks were 96, 92 and 89 for a total of 277,

SECOND EISTEDDFOD
TRIUMPH

Singing sixteenth out of seventeen competitors from Italy, U.S.A., France, Austria, Spain and Norway, the choir repeated their triumph of last year. The spokesman of the Board of Adjudicators, Dr. J. Frederick Staton, said of Rossendale's singing, "... This is what we've all been looking for during this competition – that full rich tone we have come to expect from a British male voice choir. In their first piece they transformed this marquee into a cathedral. The organlike quality was apparent throughout, especially in the lovely "16ft. stops of the second bases."

Rossendale Free Press

July 18th 1953

At night the Rossendale choir as tradition premier winner last year, had the If honour of opening the international to the concert. They sang, Mendelssohn's the "I'm a Roamer", Sir Hugh Robertson's "The Old Woman" and the arrangement by Ernest Tomlinson, eldest son of the conductor, of J. P. McCall's "Boots". Verum

The choir left for home at 8pm and, as was

was usual, made a stop for a small libation on the way. The pub was for a cheerful with a fire blazing bright and merrily in the hearth. Part of the choir formed a group around the warmth, discussing the day's events. Norman – elegantly dressed in a new pale grey suit, was just about to speak when a cloud of soot fell down the chimney. Showing remarkable presence of mind, he put his hand protectively over his pint glass. His friends expected no less.

The news of their victory was announced in a stoppress item in the local sports newspaper before they arrived home at midnight.

No firing of 'Rockets', but the Rawtenstall Borough Council decided to reward the choir for its achievements over the years, particularly for the two victories at Llangollen. On 8th December, the choir were invited to St Mary's School, Rawtenstall for the presentation of an Illuminated Album.

In 1953 the choir entered and won four more festivals at Hazel Grove, Nelson, Lytham and Southport.

Hey, Fred, what do you think of Frank
"What room does he work



Rossendale Male Voice Choir and Supporters
Llangollen 1953

From the Freedom Book



Note This event took place before Rawtenstall, Haslingden, Bacup and Whitworth became the Borough of Rossendale.

At the end of the ceremony the choir gave a concert. The last item was the singing Of "Grace Before Meat" with music by Ernest Tomlinson and words by Fred Tomlinson. This is the only time that Fred Tomlinson wrote the words to a piece of music.



1953 Fred Tomlinson receiving the Freedom of Rawtenstall
Civic dignitaries of Rawtenstall, Haslingden, Bacup and Ramsbottom
Tony Greenwood M.P. and President Clifford Whitaker

In 1954 the choir began to prepare for Llangollen. This time there was an added incentive; the treble. The test pieces were:

"O vos omnes" sung in Latin, English or Welsh
French,
For their own choice piece they chose a madrigal, Thomas Morley's "Hark, Jolly Shepherds",

As in previous years, neither of the test pieces is in the repertoire and have to be ordered. An extra night is arranged for partpractices and the notebashing starts. Fred Tomlinson, in the meantime, steep himself in the words and the music. If in doubt, he would consult with his eldest son, Ernest, who is now established as an arranger and composer of light orchestral music.

Eventually the parts report that they 'know' the notes and at a full rehearsal Mr. T. takes them through each piece, explaining the story and the atmosphere he is looking for. Slowly the pieces come together. Ernest is invited in to listen to the chording and the local priest arrives to check on the Latin pronunciation. All too soon the day arrives, It took four coaches to transport the wives, friends and supporters to Llangollen and they joined the 37 who were there on the final day of the Festival. Only 8,000 were allowed into the marquee but loud speakers relayed all the competitions to the crowds outside.

There was an international field of seventeen choirs from Spain, Latvia, Germany, U.S.A. and Norway. Rossendale sang in fourth place and Dr. Herbert Wiseman, for the six adjudicators, said they had reached a unanimous decision. On the pieces he remarked:

Male Choirs, not exceeding 60 voices

- (a) "O vos omnes" (T.L. de Victoria, 15351611)
- (b) "Coronach" (Mansel Thomas)
- (c) An original composition by a composer of the competing choir's own country, sung in any language.

FIRST ROSSENDALE MALE VOICE CHOIR. RAWTENSTALL, ENGLAND

- (a) A Splendid, solid opening — founded on very well poised 2nd Basses. Lovely detail at the entries after the 1st double bar — and in the section the details of the partwriting were beautifully touched. The lines were all lovingly sustained and shaped and it was all a very moving experience. 92
 - (b) This had eagerness in its words — a fine texture and a real feeling for tragedy of it all. It is personal concern of everyone of them. Details such as grading of tone — the final sostenuto, etc., all arose from their inner feeling. 95
 - (c) "Hark, Jolly Shepherds" (Thomas Morley)
Vital, rhythmical — a real dance — with an appreciation of the meaning of the words. A great build up to the final climactic cadence. 95
- 282

STOP PRESS continued
CLOSE OF PLAY
Rawtenstall . v. E. Lancs. 1535.
43.All.

ROSSENDALE CHOIR WINS

Rossendale Male Voice Choir
today won at Llangollen
International Musical Eisteddfod
. This makes it the Third
successive win.
Secnd.Yale Glee Club.
Third. Birkenhead Male V. C

THE TIMES. SATURDAY. JULY 17 1954

Rossendale Choir's 'Treble' At Llangollen

Conductor Chaired By His "Boys" In Scene Of Great Jubilation

At the Committee meeting in August it was decided that the Trophy won at the International Eisteddfod should be presented to the Mayor, Burgesses and Aldermen of the Borough of Rawtenstall in December at St. Mary's School.

The Parks Department celebrated the win with a floral tribute in the Memorial Gardens of the Choir Badge made from 3,000 flowers. In October there was a meeting in the Public Hall, Haslingden, attended by Mayors of the four townships, Tony Greenwood M.P. and the Chairman of Llangollen U.D.C. to commemorate the choir's achievement in winning the "Treble".

In answer to the congratulations, Mr Tomlinson replied, "It is difficult for a man to say that he has now realised his life's ambition. But all my life I have watched this choir (my 'baby' if you like) grow to maturity. I have always wanted them to belong to all Rossendale, which is why I suggested the title 30 years ago. Now Rossendale has indeed embraced us and made us belong to them. That is what I have always wanted". After the speeches the choir took over and finished the evening with a rousing concert.

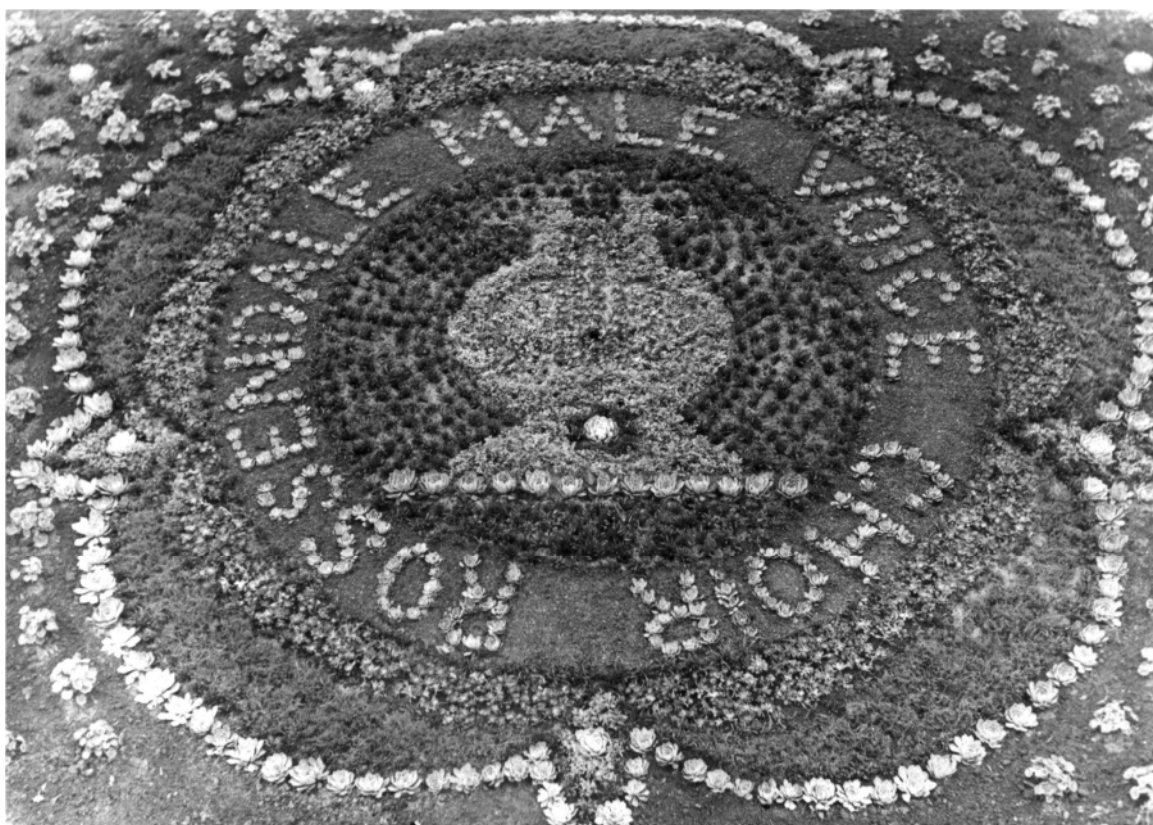
Alf Stansfield was a great character. He could be seen rushing down Bank Street in Rawtenstall shouting, "Can't stop now I'm off to see my accountant." Turf accountant that is. His greatest claim to fame however was his ability to spot the nearest pub to any engagement and be off the platform and in the bar before the rest of the choir were off the stage. He did this at a concert at Stonyhurst College. What he did not appreciate however was that the College had laid on a buffet after the concert with a barrel of beer to wash it down. It was to be two hours before the coach set off down the long drive of the College to pick up a somewhat bemused Alf at the bottom.



Llangollen 1954



Llangollen 1954



The Parks Departments Tribute in the Memorial Gardens
1954



“The Treble” Llangollen Eistedfod 1954



Whitaker Park, Rawtenstall

One week after Llangollen 1954

The following year, the choir could only manage third place. The winners were an Italian choir, the Societa Corale "G. Rossini" from Modena. The conductor was so overcome that he fainted and the presentation had to be delayed whilst he recovered.

In the evening Rossendale took part in the concert which is the climax of the Festival. Besides the 8,000 people in the marquee there were another 30,000 on the surrounding hillside. A thrilling close to the day.

Caernarvon Times 1955 ROSSENDALE: valley of Song

by A. Hobson

.....But if you ask the Rossendale singers for the secret of their success, they will answer in one word, "Fred". If you tell them that their singing has given you a profound spiritual experience they'll say; "Ay well, does ti see, Fred understands them things: tha carn'd elp id", which, being interpreted, means that their choirmaster and conductor, Mr. Fred Tomlinson, is a man of rare gifts. He is in fact all that was needed to fashion out of the Rossendale tradition, a world beating choir.

In nearly all of the hundreds of letters from people of high standing in the musical world that Mr. Tomlinson has received since his first victory at Llangollen there is the assumption that his is a highlytrained professional musician. Far from the truth. He works in a slipper factory. He is self taught by men whose qualifications, like his own, were not diplomas, but a accurate ear, a keen intelligence, a strong will and an ardent love of music.

That he is a competent musician goes without saying; but that is not the secret of his success. A skill in mimicry, a vivid imagination, a gift for leadership, a tireless industry — all these play their part, but Mr. Tomlinson's genius lies in his understanding of the men he leads. He knows how to be "Fred" without losing one atom of the respect due to him as "Mr. Tomlinson", and there is nothing that endears a man so much to a Lancashire heart. The men of the choir are devoted, not only to their music but to their master and to see them, as well as to hear them, when they are singing is an unforgettable experience.

The choir were unplaced in 1956. They had to settle for fifth place out of an entry of seventeen. In the following year they returned once more to the fray and achieved second place although well beaten by the Moravian Teachers' Choir, from Czechoslovakia. The numbers in the class had swelled to twenty three from England, Wales, Germany, Spain, Norway and Eire.

During the afternoon Mr. T. and the choir visited the BBC recording studio at Llangollen, where he was interviewed and the choir sang their own choice piece, "It was a Lover and his Lass." It was later broadcast on the Light Programme.

In 1958 the choir pulled off a unique fourth win at Llangollen. They sang, "Coro di Soldati Rivoltati", "Miserere Mei" and for their own choice piece they chose, "Back and Side Go Bare". The marks: 92, 86 and 96 for a total of 274. Of their own choice, Dr. Sydney Northcote remarked, *"Just Fancy! Singing a drinking song to a panel of judges in Wales! But what a drinking song! And what a*

The Valley of Song" the title of the choir's first C.D. was first used in 1955 by the author of an article in the 'Welsh Monitor' which praised the R.M.V.C. for their achievements at Llangollen. The main thrust of the article was to express his sadness that the Welsh people did not come to listen to one of the best choirs in the country.

Mr. Tomlinson put this fourth victory down, not just to the tremendous hard work that everybody put in, but to his secret weapon; his newly acquired tape recorder, which he used to tape the rehearsals and then played back to the choir to show where the faults were to be found.

This year, for the first time, the choir stayed for the Sunday evening concert, in which they had a place of honour in the centre of the stage. They took part in individual and massed pieces during the second half of the concert.

Tired, but eminently satisfied, the choir members and supporters reached Rossendale in the early hours of Monday morning.

The choir attended Llangollen for three more years but only had a third place in 1961 to show for their efforts.

Nevertheless, their record of four first prizes as well as a second place and two third places has never been equalled in the history of Llangollen. They were never placed lower than fifth in their ten visits to the Festival.

They are very popular with Llangollen audiences. I am not surprised. In Wales they can understand and admire a man like Mr. Tomlinson, absorbed so much, as he is, in a love of poetry and music, emotional, and, yes, sentimental, too.

Evening Telegraph July 7th 1960

Men behind the Music

by Albert Matthias

"Gentlemen! Let's try it again" Instinctively I turned and gave

my attention too. I was attending a rehearsal of Rossendale Male Voice Choir: the voice was that of their founderconductor, 67 year old Mr. Fred Tomlinson. It compelled attention and could appreciate why this well drilled choir has brought fame and distinction to a valley proud of a long tradition of song.

"Gentlemen!" I heard it a lot that night for, ever courteous, Mr. Tomlinson so prefaced anything he had to say. In his comments, criticisms and commands there was a fascinating range of undertones of encouragement, cajoling and even downright reprimand.

It could not be otherwise, Mr. Tomlinson is a perfectionist. Once he has decided on his interpretation of a piece, he spares neither himself nor the 'boys' in his determination to get just that. This was a rehearsal for another visit, on Saturday, to compete at Llangollen International Music Eisteddfod, scene of the choir's most brilliant triumphs, including a unique 'hat trick' of 1952/53/54. Two years ago they were first again.

The test pieces include 'The Return' and the rehearsal became absorbing for the way in which Mr. Tomlinson strove for its full dramatic effect. 'Hodie Christus Natus Est' is sung in Latin and Mr. Tomlinson gets expert advice to make sure that the choir's enunciation is correct. The third piece, their own choice is 'the Smuggler's song' and a fine rollicking tempo it has too, capturing the daring and the mystery of the raiders galloping through the night.

There is nothing one-sided about these rehearsals. Members put forward their own suggestions for improvements and best of all is the mutual understanding and good natured chaff that provides relief from the exacting pursuit of perfection.

"Gentlemen! Let's see how far we can get without copies". That is the test. A nod to Herbert Stuart on the piano, "Bert, give us a chord" and Mr. Tomlinson takes them through the piece. Every eye is on him and his facial expressions show how much he is living the music: those persuasive, expressive hands control them with a certainty of someone making music on an almighty but delicate instrument. As the final notes die away, Bert strikes a chord. There are smiles all round. They are all delighted, "There you are, spot on".

During the break, members were told of the arrangements for the Llangollen trip. 'Full battle order' it is to be, dress suits because once again they have the honour of singing at the concluding concert of the Festival.



1958 – First Choir Uniform

International Music Festival
C  rF  ile T  stail Chorcaighe
May 1963 and May 1965

The Choir committee had been looking to broaden its horizons for some time. By 1961 an overseas fund had been established and enquiries made about the Cork Festival and the Arezzo Festival in Italy. It was decided to postpone an overseas visit for at least twelve months when B.E.A. quoted ST). 19s. Od. plus transport from Dublin to Cork and  35 8s. Od. plus transport from Milan to Arezzo.

By 1963 their funds were healthier and thoughts turned once again to Cork. This time the terms were more agreeable and the Cork Festival committee were very helpful with the travel arrangements and accommodation. The choir members were expected to pay for their own bed and breakfast accommodation; the daunting sum of 32 shillings and sixpence. 

The choir and their supporters travelled by coach on Friday evening to Liverpool airport and there boarded two D.C.3 Dakotas for the flight to Cork. The D.C.3 sits taildown on the tarmac; as Harold Dugdale remarked to his brother, Harry, "I didn't know we had to walk uphill to Ireland". Ernest Schofield recalls watching the first aeroplane landing on the runway where it was met by a mechanic who proceeded to pump up the tyres.

They arrived at Cork Airport and boarded the coach for Cork. Passing through the city they were held up by a

  32 shillings and sixpence =   1.42  

car parked badly in the road. Ever resourceful, some of the men got off the coach and bounced the car to a safer position. Eric Royle said that he knew they were in Ireland because the little old lady sitting sedately in the back seat didn't blink an eye while the car was being manhandled away from the coach. They eventually arrived to be greeted by members of the Festival committee and escorted to their lodgings.

The Festival was unique in the way it staggered the classes to accommodate the distances and places from which the choirs travelled. For example: The Male Voice Class started on Wednesday evening at 8pm when Sunbeam Male Voice Choir gave their voluntary group of songs. On Thursday, they became the first choir to sing in the Male Voice Class. On Saturday, Rossendale and Seven Towers M.V. Choirs sang their voluntary pieces and the Class pieces. The Class was completed on Sunday when St. Finbar's M. V. Choir sang.

The Test Pieces were:

Full Fathom Five Dunhill
If Thou Art Near J. S. Bach
Rossendale's Own Choice
Quiet Sleep Dunhill

The Result:

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Rossendale M.V. Choir | 256 |
| 2. | St. Finbar's M.v. Choir | 242 |
| 3. | Seven Towers M.V. Choir | 239 |
| 4. | Sunbeam M. V. Choir | 235 |

At the Cork Music Festival some of the choir went along to the Town Hall where a dance was in progress. Soon they were all having a thoroughly good time. One of them, who shall remain nameless, was laughing so much that his false teeth flew out. No one seemed to have noticed and so he nicked them un, popped them back in and carried on dancing.



Town Hall Reception Cork 1963



Town Hall Reception Cork 1963

Two letters best sum up the weekend:

"Lyndale"
Victoria Cross, Cork.

Dear Mr. Tomlinson,

On behalf of "St. Finbars M. V. Choir" and on my own behalf, may I offer you sincerest congratulations on your success at our Festival here in Cork. I was greatly impressed with your singing particularly your noncompetitive recital.

For my choir it was a great satisfaction to realise that we were placed 2nd to such a magnificent choir as your own.

I hope you all enjoyed your short stay in Cork and, who knows, we may meet again in the future at another Choral Festival.

Once again, sincerest congratulations,

Yours faithfully, signed

Arthur E. Weeks

Askive Guest House
Cork 20.5.63

Dear Bilannany, (Bill and Annie Siddall)

What a triumph! Not a great class perhaps, but the great thing for me was "audience reaction" I couldn't get away from handshaking strangers. Smiles and pats all round (I nearly said smiling Pats). It was too late for me to take the Trophy to the airport as I'd hoped. A car was laid on, but we were delayed.

Same with remarks. Too late for much talk. Mr. Howells had his usual comment re "the dying race of tenors". "Only in 2 or 3, maybe 4, did we get a glimpse of that round quality we looked for". The chap here (prop.) is an official of the Festival and he's promised to get me a look at the adj.(adjudicator) written remarks. This A.M. ma and I went round to the office of the "Cork Examiner" to ask about pictures. (The handing over of the trophy by the Lord Mayor was one.) If the choir pictures are obtainable

I'll get a small quantity — and make arr. for more to be sent by post if wanted. The trophy itself is a lovely thing. Shaped like a spacerocket (silver) with wings or fins on the side, a lyre with 4 strings on the top of the column. The whole on a black wooden base; all in all it measures about 12 ins. Ma has made a drawing of it and is sending it to Freda. The prize money is £75. I've asked for it to be sent to Tom. (Ogden, choir secretary).

If I get the adj. Remarks in time for the "izaneers" (eyes and ears), be sure I'll send 'em off. An old seafaring chap (so he said) came up to me last night; said he'd heard "Fishermen of Eng. " hundreds of times (sic) but none anywhere near so good as we did it. "Every man meant every word" was how he put it.

(May takes over the letter). You should have seen me nursing the trophy last night. We'd to go up to the top for all our clothes etc. etc. and kept getting stopped all the way. The mayor gave dad a envelope and he screwed it up in his pocket. One of the men said, "Be careful of that — its something in". So ma had to take charge along with the trophy. When dad asked how long we could keep it — they said "Oh! It's yours". It's a personal trophy and of course dad wanted to give it away straightway 'til ma put her foot down. I could have clocked him (what's Bacup done anyway?). Well, I borrowed a long box (of straws) to cover the silver while we went across the road waiting for transport. I'll have to wrap it well in soft woollies to bring it home.

(Fred again. We got 256, Finbar's 242, Seven Towers 239. 171 get a local paper through to you later. However must catch the post, though I don't like wasting this 'ere space at t' bottom.

*Lots of Love, From
(signed Fred and May.)*

Fred and May had stayed on for an extra day to collect the trophy. The choir were flying out above the Irish Sea before they were told over the intercom that they had won.

In 1965 the Choir returned to Cork and were placed second to their old rivals Felling M.V. Choir, with an Italian choir, Societa' Corale from Modena placed third.

The choir had a great time and were asked to sing on Sunday evening in a noncompetitive part of the programme. At 9.30pm they were accompanied to Cork Airport by members of the Festival Committee who remained with them until the 'plane left at 10pm.

Get Weel Quick

Having read of an accident which befell Mr. Fred Tomlinson of 6. Derby Terrace. Rawtenstall, in the "Rossendale Free Press" dated Saturday 6th May 1972, the author Clifford Heyworth sends his "Best Wishes" to Mr. Tomlinson the FounderConductor of the Rossendale Male Voice Choir, in the form of a Dialect Poem.

Ay, dearo'me, 'tis sad to see
In't "Rossendale Free Press", Fred, O're thee,
Life doesna give a mon a chance,
When all its troubles come at once.

It nevers rains but what 'twill pour,
An' th' harder does — sooner it's o'er,
So keep thy pecker up an' feel
Ther's theawsands wantin' thee get weel.

Tha cannot laugh when t' "Funnybone"
Wi' th' elbow joint is eawt o'
tone, An' neaw tha's had a fall in
t'street, Tha'll ha' to conduct wi'
thy feet!

So, sit on t' table, swing thy legs,
They'll keep to t' beat, as thy foot
wags, An' in "this hour of
splendour soft", Sweet voices raise
thy praise aloft.

For they are "Comrades true in Arms",
Like — "Silver Hill" an' "Crimond" charms
So does their "Harmony" so "Deep",
In "Silent Worship" reawnd thee creep.

Then — 'get weel quick' an' paddle noan,
Let's ha' thee wom, for tha'rt eawr own,
Thy pain is eawrs, an' weel it
beThat all thy friends so feel for
thee.

Aw'm sendin' these few verses, Fred,
Because Aw know what will be saidIn t'
ranks ut Rossendale Male Voice Choir,
No mon's esteem war ever higher.

So lein upon yon "staff" areight,
An' "quaver" noan in life's hard feight,
Keep reight end up like "Tommy" fishin',
An' get weel quick — 'tis what we're wishin'.

Thine gradely, Bill o' Bow's.

International Koorfestival
Holland 1973

After the 1965 success in Cork the choir's 81 year old conductor decided that Rossendale's days of entering competitive festivals were over. From now on Fred would devote himself and the choir to the activity he enjoyed most, concert giving. Just how fruitful this was is described in the next chapter.

In 1972 however there came news of a competitive festival to be held in the Hague, Holland in 1973 and Mr.T. found himself carried along on a growing tide of enthusiasm in the committee and choir for Rossendale to compete once again on the international scene.

The Koorfestival in 1973 was the first to be documented in detail in the minutes of the choir and it shows how much preparation went on behind the scenes and how seriously the committee took its obligations.

15th August 1972

The Hague

The Secretary read out a circular from the International Koorfestival 1973 and the President read the Festival Rules saying the Festival will be held on June 5th — 9th 1973 and divided into categories A, B, C and D. After discussion it was decided:

- a) *Mr. Caygill to make enquiries about the cost of travel etc.*
- b) *Secretary to write to Festival enquiring which category we would be in — also*

20th September 1972

Item 5 : The Hague —

The Secretary read a letter answering our queries regarding the Festival.

a) Entrance Fee: 37.5 pence per member b) The choir would compete in category A of Male Voice Section because of Festival record.

c) The choir would compete on Saturday 9th June 1973.

After a long discussion during which the treasurer quoted the estimated costing of fare and accommodation by Elsmere Travel from Friday 8th to Sunday 10th June would be £37.20 per person, it was decided the Secretary should report all the details to the choir on Friday 22nd September and leave a week for them to think it over before deciding on the 29th September.

18th October 1972

Item 5, International Koorfestival:

The Secretary reported there were approx.

50 members wishing to take part in this

Festival. Full discussion of this matter and

suggested the second half of rehearsal

Friday 27th October

- 3) *That the choir be made aware of the 100% commitment required for this venture to be a success.*
- 4) *That a special subcommittee be formed to organise events to raise money for this Festival (approx. £400.)*

Note

Rawtenstall Council donated £100,
Haslingden Council £50.

7th February 1973

Item 4 The Hague Festival

...a block booking has been made for the party for the following times, also refreshments for each journey: Leave M/ c 1720 hrs. Friday, Return 1750 hrs Sunday. It was decided that all members should have their passports not later than the end of April. Mr Martindale (Rep. For Elsmore) asked that the final date for names of all the party should be in by 5th May.
7th March 1973

Item 4

.....A suggested itinerary for the whole trip. This was accepted as quite satisfactory. The original quotation has been reduced to £34.00 and final room pairings should be received no later than 5th April. International Festival advises that the Baad Hotel was only 10 minutes walk or 4 minutes by tram from the Festival Hall.

1 April 1973

Item 4 Koorfestival 73

Elmsmere Travel informing the choir that the Travellers Insurance Co. would only insure the three passengers outside the age group (Mr. & Mrs T. and Joss Warburton) provided they were given the whole party, It was agreed to insure With this company.

Test Piece • "Laudate dominurn "

It was decided the Secretary writes to the Festival Music Committee for permission to sing this piece a "Full Tone up" after trying it in this key at rehearsal.

15th May '73

Item 4 Koorfestival

.....Informing the Festival Committee that the RMVC own choice would be "The Herald" Elgar. The choir would be competing at the Hall "Nederlands Congressgebouw" at 14.20 on Saturdayalso the choir was to take part in the Festival Concert on Friday evening.

Once the decision to go to Holland had been made, the choir began partpractices. Each of the four parts met, by arrangement, at different locations to rehearse their parts. The second tenors, for example, went to Joss Warburton's house and gathered round his grand piano. It was Joss who, in earlier times, taught Mr. T's children to play the piano. The first tenors went to Fred's house.

There had been a choice of test piece. "Laudate Dominum" and "Carmen Vagabundis." "Laudate" in certain parts calls for a double choir. It is in Latin and is marked in 6/2 time which caused some furrowed brows. As the parts were absorbed they were brought together and the piece slowly took shape. All too quickly the time arrived to set off for the airport.

“.....if only the basses hadn't got drunk at Lytham.....”

extract from a letter reminiscing about the good old days to Fred

The choir assembled on the runway for a group photograph and sang "Two Roses", an old choir favourite. During the flight the pilot requested an encore because he hadn't heard the first effort. The choir duly obliged and sang "Two Roses", this time at 20,000 feet over the North Sea.

It is a peculiar fact that travellers are inevitably drawn to toilets. Certainly it was true for a number of the choir who made their way down into the toilet at the airport. They were very impressed by the beautiful white tiles and gave the acoustics an A plus. They tested them out by singing "Please don't burn our toilet down," which received what can be described as a standing ovation.

The choir had been delayed in flight and had to go to the Concert Hall for the Evening Concert in their travelling clothes, shedding raincoats and hats as they walked on stage. They unanimously declared it the best concert hall they had ever seen. Superior in every way to the Festival Hall in London.

Annual General Meeting 29th
June '73

President's Remarks:

....not least to the choir's success in Holland. This success proves how good you can be when rehearsed to such perfection by Mr. T. It does you credit to take on the best in Europe and come second. A great achievement of which you must feel justly proud. I certainly did. I thought the result a fair one. Helsinki University Choir did have the

edge, but this choir was made up of Musical Graduates and Undergraduates and they had rehearsed everyday since February. A bit like tennis — where does amateurism finish and professionalism begin.....

The Helsinki University Choir were well worth their first place. Rossendale came second in front of choirs from Holland (three), Germany (two) and Bulgaria. After the competition, the choir met up with Sir Charles Groves, who was one of the adjudicators. He had conducted them in the 1960's at Liverpool Cathedral. Of their own choice piece "The Herald", he said: "A first rate dramatic interpretation with every word crystal clear."

For the choir to raise themselves to such a standard after years away from competition was a remarkable achievement, especially since the set piece, Laudate Dominum, was for double choirs. This meant splitting the choir, each half singing as an independent unit, each achieving the inspired tone quality and interpretation characteristic of the full Rossendale choir. Mr.T. was understandably fond of quoting, in a convincingly halting German accent, what the conductor of one of the German choirs said to him afterwards about Laudate Dominum

"You are the only choir that sang Psalm 150 happily. That is the only way to sing Psalm 150!

This strikes at the very heart of what Fred's genius was able to bring from his singers that word 'colouration'.



International Koorfestival, Holland 1973



International Koorfestival, Holland 1973

Chapter 9

1965 1973 The Concert Years

After the 1965 visit to Cork, Fred Tomlinson took a rest from Festivals and for the next few years devoted himself to the concert circuit. One of the results was a series of concerts with the premier bands of the country, which became one of Mr T's fondest memories.

First and foremost were the Toc H Brass and Voices Concerts at St. George's Hall, Blackburn from 1967 — 73 featuring such bands as City of Coventry, Fairey Aviation and Fodens combined under the baton of Harry Mortimer O.B.E.

Through the same time period the choir also took part in the Massed Band Concerts at King's Hall, Manchester, again with an impressive list of top bands including: Black Dyke, Grimethorpe Colliery, Wingate Temperance, C.W.S. Manchester and B.M.C. It was at the 1969 concert, which had Joan Turner and Ian Wallace as soloists, that Michael Farnworth, our everpresent accompanist made his debut at the age of seventeen. Ian Wallace made a point of leading him to the front of the stage to introduce him to the audience.



1968 was a particularly busy year for the choir:

March	R.A.F. Association 50th/ 25th Anniversary RAF/RARA
June	T.U.C. Centenary Celebrations with Felling MVC Harold Wilson PM gave a speech but did not sing.
June	Sheffield Festival of Brass
September	Massed Brass at Belle Vue Manchester
October	Toc H Men o'Brass

And throughout this and every other year requests for concerts kept coming in. School Halls, Churches, Chapels, Town Halls, you name it, they've sung in it.

In 1970 the choir was featured in the first concert, in Bolton's Victoria Hall, of the Northern Concert Orchestra, recently founded by Ernest Tomlinson, now broadcasting regularly from Manchester. In June 1973, only a month after the Holland

Festival, BBC Radio Blackburn (now radio Lancashire) sponsored a Summer Prom in Blackburn's King George's Hall to pay tribute to father and son, Fred with his choir and Ernest with his orchestra, also

broadcast on Radios Manchester, Merseyside, Stoke and Medway.

The choir's busy life continued. The schedule for the forthcoming 1973/4 season will show the range of engagements undertaken by the choir.

1973

June	King George's Hall, Blackburn with NCO
8 th September	St John's Church, Crawshawbooth
9 th September	St Luke's Church, Crawshawbooth
September	Record — 50 Years of Song
29 th September	St Luke's Hess Bank
5 th October	Manchester Road Methodist Haslingden
13 th October	King George's Hall Blackburn Toc H
26 th October	Accrington Art Club
3 rd November	Brandlesholme Methodist Bury
24 th November	St Ambrose School, Rawtenstall
1 st December	Salvation Army, Heywood
15 th December	Annual Party, St Ambrose School

1974

12th January	St Stephen's Church, Bury
10th February	Dundee Lane Methodist, Ramsbottom
23rd February	Besses o' Th' Barn
9th March	United Reform Church, Hess Bank
23rd March	United Reform Church, Leigh
6th April	*Rawtenstall Pensioners Association
28th April	Whitworth Civic Centre

*part of the rental agreement: £8 per week plus one free concert

When, at the age of 80, Mr. T. was asked for some of his favourite memories, one of them was having sung in Dundee Methodist Church on 25 consecutive occasions from 1950-1974. The choir enjoyed the smaller concerts because it put them nearer to the audience and made the singing a more personal experience.

It has been impossible to collate all the concerts which the choir has given over the years. They range from the sublime like singing for 37,000 people at Llangollen in 1958 and in Truro Cathedral

in 1997 to the ridiculous of outnumbering the audience because the promoter forgot to advertise the concert.

For the choir the important part of any concert is to sing to the best of their ability. They are their own greatest critics. They love singing but most of all they love to sing well. The venue is not the most important thing. The week after they sang in the final concert at Llangollen they were to be found singing in Whitaker Park giving an openair concert for the local council.

Leaving a concert one evening some of the choir crossed to the car park and saw a car stuck in the mud. They went to help. One got in the back between the two lady passengers to add extra ballast. The front seat passenger was brought to the back of the car to help push. Two other members ranged themselves on each side of the car and the most intrepid joined the passenger pushing at the back.

With the people in the car bouncing energetically in the car and the men outside heaving and straining, the car suddenly began to move. At that precise moment our hero at the back remembered that he was wearing a new overcoat. With great presence of mind, he contrived to land on top of the passenger and hurriedly got to his feet by placing his hand on the back of the man's head to lever himself away from the mud. They did not wait around to be thanked. (Names supplied on request.)

Th' Rossendale Choir

T'other neet aw left tele, an a gradely good fire,
Aw went to th' owd Chapel, to yer th' Rossendale Choir
A pal said to me "We're in for a threet" Aw said aw 'ope so,
it's a blooming cowl neet, To goo eaut to yer th' Rossendale
Choir.

They started ther programme fer us to admire,
Tyeau cudn't yer nowt nobbut th' Rossendale Choir
Theau 'ardly dare breath I' th' delicate part, Then comes
crescendo an gan thi a start They grip thi does th'
Rossendale Choir.

They sung fer a soul, just latly gon' I'gher, Aw 'ope as hoo
yerd that Rossendale Choir.
Aw know if hoo did, hoo wud cuckold wi' glee, Hoo liked a
good sing an hoo often towed me. Hoo's like to 'ear th'
Rossendale Choir.

Yo'd think sum o' th' lads wud bi fain to retire, But Oh! Bless
ho' naw, not fro th' Rossendale Choir. They sing theer wi' gusto,
they oknow ther' part, Ther' is no retirement, wheer ther's music I'
th' eart. An it's theer, I' th' Rossendale Choir.

Ther' conductor Fred, they know wat hell require,
An' as often as not, hell make um perspire,
Wen'e stons utin front, 'e knows wot 'es doin', Fer wen he
conducts, ther's no piece they'll ruin, Naw not that Rossendale
Choir.

Praise Ye the Lord, that's a piece to inspire. An' didn't they
sing it that Rossendale Choir. Aw thowt once er twice as th' roof
wud bi raised An aw felt in mi 'eart, th' Lord 'ad bin praised, Wi
them lads o' th' Rossendale Choir.

Solos, duets, they ner seemed to tire,
An th' chap at piano, wer well wuth 'is fire,
They gan sum good stuff, no triflin' thing, An by gum
they con eght as weel as they sing, Con them lads o'
th' Rossendale Choir.

Aitch Aitch

The early seventies were very exciting for Mr. T. and his family. In 1972 he and May celebrated their golden wedding. Congratulations flooded in and the party naturally included 'the boys' from the choir.



No sooner had the excitement died down when he heard that he had been awarded the M.B.E. in the Birthday Honours list. Since this was also Fred's 80th year and the year in which he took the choir to the Koorfestival in Holland there was a great deal to celebrate once again.

1974 was the choir's 50th Anniversary. It was celebrated locally with a Dinner/Dance which every person of note attended. The BBC recognised the occasion by producing '50 Years of Song' which looked at the life of the choir from its inception in 1924.

1974, then, was a good year but it was also to be the end of an era. Inevitably, Mr.T. looked towards the time when he would retire. He had always carried the hope that when that time came one of his sons might be in a position to take over. Ernest, the eldest, who after 21 years based in London, had moved back with his family in 1968 to live in Longridge, only 21 miles away, in the farm that had been in his wife's family since 1722. Ernest was as busy as ever composing and conducting and was approached somewhat diffidently by Mr.T. several times. The deciding factor in the end was the choir's invitation to go

to Rossendale's twin town Bocholt in Germany in September 1976, which Mr.T. nearly 84, felt would be too demanding for him. The story is taken up in Ernest's own narrative later in the book.

Mr.T. continued to take a keen interest in the choir. He attended concerts from time to time, offering valuable comments. On practice night Ernest always allowed time for discussion about the choir, sometimes with the aid of recordings. When Ernest himself retired after 6 years with the choir Fred was gratified to see 'his' choir's future assured in the sure hands of Beatrice Wade.

In 1984 Mr. T. had a fall and broke his thigh. He was admitted to Fairfield Hospital in Bury, but sadly he suffered a heart attack and died. The tributes to his memory came from all over the country. They are encapsulated in the following, first from Harry Ashworth who later became the first choir member President of the choir:

"I joined the choir in 1925. Mr. T. welcomed me with open arms and it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. He was a perfect gentleman, a great leader of men and a brilliant musician. What he did with a bunch of working men is beyond belief. Rossendale is proud of him. The name of Fred Tomlinson MBE will be written in the history of music."

The second tribute came from Clifford Heyworth (Bill o' Bowes), the well known Lancashire dialect poet, who had long admired Fred and the RMVC. As always his tribute was in verse:

MAN OF MUSIC

Man of music mourned by many,
Sadness touches hearts of men,
Knowing his sweet voice is silent,
Alas, to hear it not again.

But the long day softly closes,
Leaving harmony that charms,
Echoing — as he reposes,
Sincere, true, "Comrades in Arms".

"Silent Worship" be the singing,
Of his Ross'dale Male Voice Choir,
Pray his soul is ever wingingTo
"The Holy City" higher,

May the joy he brought to others,
Linger on in future days,
That his band of "Singing Brothers",
Harmonize his name in praise.

Now his "Evening Hymn" is ended,
And "Lead Kindly Light" is said,
For his counsel so well blended,
"Thanks be to God", for Brother Fred.

Clifford Heyworth
Bill 'o Bows.

Written as a tribute to the memory of the late Fred
Tomlinson Who died 5th September 1985.



Fred Tomlinson MBE
1892 1985

ERNEST TOMLINSON

CONDUCTOR 1976 - 1981



Chapter 10

Ernest Tomlinson

Ernest was born in the same year that the choir was founded. He has the same early memories as elder sister Freda, of mum and dad returning from a festival at romantic sounding places like Hazel Grove and Wallasey, and, half awake and sleepy, asking, How did you get on?'and hearing, We won.'before falling fast asleep.

There was never a time when music was not an integral part of his life and that of Freda and his younger brothers, James and Fred. Their father gave singing lessons in the front room of 41, Beech Street, Rawtenstall to help supplement a barely adequate family income or to coach R.M.V.C. soloists. Musical evenings were a regular feature of family life.

Ernest's mother was also very musical and took a keen interest in all the music making.

At the age of six Ernest was a chorister at St.John's Church, Crawshawbooth, where his father was the choirmaster. Father's gift of imparting perfect tone-quality was

exemplified when Ernest was being coached for his first solo. The vicar, concerned that he was too quiet for such a big church, was asked to stand at the far end and listen. He was soon won over.

Fred Tomlinson worked as foreman in the slipper shop at Hoyle and Hoyle's mill (pronounced Oiloils), namely Ilex



Mill opposite Rawtenstall Cricket Club. His children used to go to meet him on Saturday lunchtime when he finished work. Joe Ashworth, a founder member of the choir, used to greet them as they arrived with, 'Who's the best conductor in the world?' Back would come the dutiful reply, 'My dad.' Joe christened Fred

In a reply to a question about ladies joining the choir Ernest said
"Ladies can join the choir if they can sing baritone"
So far there have been no takers

Bantock, a reference to Granville Bantock who, along with Hugh Roberton, Julius Harrison, Armstrong Gibbs and others were so influential in their praise and criticism of the choir at the Festivals they adjudicated.

His father's training was the key factor in Ernest (with just two others) being accepted into Manchester Cathedral Choir in 1933, from the hundreds of hopeful boys who patiently queued for

children soon followed. This was to prove a long and fruitful association. Joss was a second tenor in the Rossendale Male Voice Choir, was the Deputy Conductor and, when required, its accompanist.

By the age of 12 Ernest was playing piano in part-practices at the family home and here he came into direct contact with the workings of the choir and its repertoire. It was here, also, that his mother organised the Natterers' choir wives who raised



Fred, James, Ernest & Freda
Outside Manchester Cathedral 1937

that crucial audition (it took two evenings). Brothers' James and Fred junior followed him in 1935 and 1937 respectively. This fulfilled an ambition that their father had cherished for them since, as a boy, he had gone to the Cathedral and met the organist Kendrick Pyne. At the same time, Ernest began to take piano lessons. His first teacher being intimidatingly strict, his father wisely asked Jossia Warburton to take over. The other

money to pay for the choir children's parties, which were held initially at Spencer's Cafe, Bank Street, Rawtenstall.

Bill Auty was a very good bass singer and a ready wit. After the first of one of his solos, the announcer suggested that if the lady Bill had been singing to would form a queue at the end of the concert Bill would sign her autograph. Bill said, "Joe's a lovely man but not too bright, he was scratching his head from the inside last night and knocked his cap off."

1936 was also the year which saw the start of the Celebrity Concerts (see Chapter 4). Freda and Ernest were detailed off as programme sellers, Freda in her Grammar School uniform and Ernest in his Eton suit. Ernest's memories are of the way those great singers, responding to the unceasing applause, sang encore after encore, and of being captivated by the Male Voice sound, so different from that of the Cathedral men.

In 1939 he retired as head boy of the Cathedral choir and, following the outbreak of war, the choir school was transferred to Thornton Hall near Blackpool until July 1940 when the Cathedral authorities closed the school because of rising costs. Ernest and James joined Freda at the Grammar school but Fred Junior was admitted to the choir of King's College Cambridge.

The war led to choir practices becoming more of a social occasion. Many of the members were called up into the forces and when on leave would come to the rehearsal and request old favourites. Sergeant Tomlinson, later Lieutenant, was still at the helm. The choir also lent their talents to other organisations as in 1942 when they helped the Rossendale Amateurs with their production of *Pirates of Penzance*.

Harry Ashworth took the key role as the sergeant of police and his *Policeman's Lot* brought the house down. With Cat-like tread is still in the choir repertoire. In 1943 they helped with *Ruddigore* and much later in the story Ernest arranged *Ghosts High Noon* for the choir.

Ernest's activities proliferated, from the Grammar School he went to Manchester University and the Royal Manchester College of Music to study composition, organ and clarinet together with the obligatory participation in their choirs and orchestras. In 1942 he became organist and choirmaster at All Souls, Ancoats in Manchester. In his spare time he joined the Air Training Corps and played clarinet in the Waterfoot Home Guard Orchestra.

He was called up in 1943 and joined the R.A.F. He was granted early release in 1946 as a student and returned to his studies. He also joined the RMVC at the same time as other members were demobbed and came home. The choir began the second phase of their existence, and from here Ernest himself takes up the story.

One winter's night on the way back from a festival at Hazel Grove snow began to fall heavily and road conditions started to deteriorate. By the time the coach reach Rossendale the driver decided that he couldn't risk stopping on the steep road and Harry Hanson was told to jump out of the slowly moving coach. Out he went, straight into a snow drift. He was pulled out by a policeman. As he made his way home via the churchyard some snow slithered off a large angel on a tombstone. *"My God,"* said Harry, *"they're getting up"*.

CHAPTER 11

1946 - 1976

On my demobilisation from the RAF in October 1946 it was natural for me, despite all the catching up I had to do with my composition course at Manchester University and organ at the Royal Manchester College of Music, to become a full member of the Rossendale Male Voice Choir. My old piano teacher Joss Warburton much preferred to sing 2nd Tenor than play piano, and as I enjoy accompanying more than any other kind of musical performance it was natural for me to take over that role. It worked to my advantage too. I hadn't played an organ for 3½ years and I had to get back into practice to complete my college course. At that time the choir often gave concerts in churches with some fine organs still in service. I also sang 2nd Tenor in unaccompanied items, so experienced in the best way possible my father's approach to interpretation and voice training.

My father was a genius - I choose my words carefully. His choir-training abilities were worthy of the highest professional circles. But it's clear - and a recently discovered recording of an interview he gave with BBC Radio Blackburn years ago confirms this - that the ambitions he had for his children in the end nullified any wider ambition he could have had for himself. His joy became making music to his friends and to do this at the highest level.

It was a particular combination of gifts that made father such a unique practitioner. First, he had an intimate knowledge of the workings of the voice, what produces good tone in all its variants according to the needs of interpretation. If he had any ambitions as a young man it was as a singer. He used to tell us of the lessons he had with certain star teachers and we still have the books on voice production he must have read avidly. He taught his children to sing properly from the earliest age so we were well schooled in those technical matters of breathing properly, holding oneself properly, where to place the chin, the tongue, the napper - you name it. We also heard the results of the lessons he gave to his pupils most evenings in the front room. But no amount of knowledge about how to sing properly is of value unless you can impart that knowledge to others, and have the ear to know just what a particular voice, and, significantly, combinations of voices, can achieve and what needs to be done, physically and psychologically, to bring it about. Father had that special quality to be able to bring out the ability to sing, not just to those with special vocal gifts, but to anyone who wants to, and to do so with such consistency that a whole choir of disparate previously untrained voices could be brought to a unanimity of sound which makes

"An amateur practices until he gets it right, a professional practices until he can't get it wrong"
Ernest Tomlinson.

choral singing such a breathtaking experience. One example will give an idea what I mean.

One of the first of the new pieces we learned in those early post-war years was Harold Noble's arrangement of Mendelssohn's **I am a Roamer**. The slow middle section of the song starts with the whole choir unison on a held fortissimo middle C to the word "Thank" (. . . the good stars" etc.). By now we knew the piece, so, one practice when the word "Thank" was sung I marvelled what a glorious sound it was. Not so! Father's impassioned shout shut the choir up immediately. He then took each part in turn and told them just how to enunciate that vowel according to whether they were top tenors, 2nd tenors, baritones or basses. "Now sing it." They nearly blew me off the piano stool! "One voice" was the only way to describe it, and it was the way the choir sang with "one voice", however complex the music, that was one of its great achievements.

Father used to say to me, "Anyone can sing loud," (not true, of course, if it's proper tone you want!) "it's singing quietly that's difficult." Constantly over the years I've heard comments about Rossendale's unique quality in quiet pieces, a truly moving experience. Few choirs sing really quietly. To do so with a tone that carries a pianissimo to the farther reaches of a hall or church calls for expertise of the highest order.

The second of father's special gifts was his feel for interpretation. He

once said to me, "I'm a poet", the implication being, "rather than a musician". What he meant was that his feel for the meaning of words was something he could put across in his interpretations. What he asked of his choir, as few choral conductors appear to do, was to put words across as a unified body exactly how a top solo singer would interpret those same words. By demonstration and constant moulding and remoulding this he achieved to a degree I have never met in any choir even at the so-called highest level. Furthermore, the interpretation he aimed for was always the right one. The performances we've all heard where the conductor seems to get it all wrong, almost as if they're conducting some other piece, was not Rossendale's way. This ability to hit just the right interpretation was a major factor in RMVC's success in competition, in turn enhanced the third of father's special qualities usually called charisma which I'll say more about later.

By 1947 the choir had returned to its pre-war standard and was moving on. Among competitive festivals I recall our taking part in were firsts at Wallasey and Hazel Grove. I can't remember which concert/festival we were going to when we set off hopefully from a Rawtenstall covered in snow. ("There were so much snow up Cowpe I nearly fell deawn Kearns Mill chimney.") As the coach went through Manchester one wag was heard to say, "It said on twireless there were six inches o' snow i' Manchester; I reckon they must a

At a rehearsal for a 500 men and a girl concert one of the men was taken ill. Seeing him lying there one of the singers shouted out,
"If that's a tenor send for an ambulance."

measured id lengthwise." Individual concerts are hard to recall after all these years. Appropriately I remember the one in the Ernest Street Baptist Church, Accrington. When I went for an early practice I found stops on their three-manual organ that seemingly hadn't been used for years, causing quite a few unwanted whistles and groans which, fortunately, were cured by the time of the concert!

In December 1947 Ernest moved to London to take up a job with an arranging firm and also the post as resident organist at a Mayfair Church. For the next 21 years the RMVC existed in letters from his parents and from the Rossendale Free Press. Holidays also provided an opportunity to fit in a RMVC rehearsal. His visits usually led to an invitation to listen to a new piece and added to his reputation as a spotter of wrong notes.

Clearly Ernest had no role in those vintage years of the choir although he urged his father to choose Elgar's 'The Herald' when he wrote about his intention to enter the Llangollen International Eisteddfodd in 1952. He believes 'The Herald' to be the finest Male Voice piece ever written, with a dramatic story tailor-made to bring out the very best of Rossendale's powers of interpretation.

Ernest's war service did not stop him composing. Among his output were several male voice pieces, one of which was rediscovered in 1998 some forty years after it was arranged. Finding suitable

material is difficult but, thanks to a book of poems given to his father by the then president Tom Duxbury, 'To a Southern Friend' was published by Curwin in 1955 and dedicated to his father and RMVC. The part-song was chosen as the test piece for Lytham Festival in 1958, which Rossendale won.

The BBC's 'Let the People Sing' competition specified that a folk song should be one of the programme items. Ernest was only too delighted to have the opportunity to arrange first 'The Pace-Egging Song', then for later ones 'Bridgewater Fair' and 'The Mare and the Foal'.

The years 1947 to 1950 or so saw the RMVC's prowess rise to new heights. It's worth pointing out that all the choir's achievements in competitive festivals pre-war were as a "second division" choir. Before the war and for some years after, big festivals like Blackpool had a class for A choirs, say up to 80 voices, attracting 5 or 6 major choirs, notably Colne Valley and Felling, and one for B choirs, up to 50 voices, which might well attract 25 or more aspirants. The two test-pieces were always fixed by the festival to be sung first in the afternoon then, for the selected top 3, again in the evening. We entered for Blackpool B Class in October 1947 - hiring a Rawtenstall Corporation double-decker bus to get us there - and did not even get selected for the evening "finals". It's a measure of the choir's progress that by the '50s it was competing with Felling and Colne

A singer is someone who hears a pretty girl singing in the bath and puts his ear to the keyhole instead of his eye.

Valley and regularly beating them. Some aspects of this were revealed to me when I was invited to appear as guest conductor in Felling's own 75th Anniversary celebration in 1995, where I talked to several of their older members, who recalled the Felling/RMVC rivalry. I also met Havelock Nelson, a regular adjudicator from those days, who had good things to say about the Rossendale of old and of the new Rossendale, with its three choirs, under Beatrice Wade. "They win everything"

In 1968, after 21 years in the London area, I moved north with my family to Longridge, near Preston, to the farm that had been in my wife's family since 1722. Insofar as I now had contact with the RMVC it was in the role more or less as before, the occasional visit in my time-honoured spotting wrong-notes role. But there were some memorable highlights too.

A prime objective when we decided to move to the North was to start my own orchestra here. I had done quite a lot of broadcasting and recording over the years, but there's something missing when music is made only in studios, however large your unseen audience might be. I was determined to prove to the increasingly sceptical powers-that-be that my kind of music could be just as successful in the concert-hall. The opportunity came when the BBC, to my surprise I have to say! took up my suggestion of starting a Northern Concert Orchestra based in Manchester, employing the many fine free-lance

players of this area. From its first broadcast in 1969 we were given 3 or 4 broadcasts a year for the next 8 years or so. This gave me the perfect platform to become involved in live concerts. Some persistent promotion was eventually rewarded with its first live concert in Victoria Hall, Bolton, in 1970. To increase the programme's attractiveness - and to keep down the number of orchestral items we would only have one rehearsal to perfect! - I asked if the RMVC could take part. So again, this time for a full concert, father and son appeared on the same bill as conductors. The Victoria Hall was full and with an enthusiastic audience this made a great send-off for the new orchestra. Talking to the stage-manager afterwards he was full of praise. Searching for words, he gave the concert the greatest accolade he could think of. "D'you know," he said, "It were better ner a brass band."

In June 1973, came the event that really brought our two careers together. This was due to the enterprise of John Musgrave, Manager of BBC Radio Blackburn, (now Radio Lancashire). At that time local radio, to a degree regrettably not matched these days, took seriously its duty to encourage and represent local music-making. John Musgrave conceived the idea of featuring in a summer programme my father and his Rossendale Male Voice Choir, and me, with my Northern Concert Orchestra. Radio Blackburn did a great job in publicising the event, so that the invited audience represented a full

"If you stand close to him you can hear the sea."
Frustration sometimes creeps in.

house in King George's Hall, Blackburn.

I was naturally keen to include several items in which dad's choir was accompanied by my orchestra. Provided the orchestra and choir performed up to their highest standards - which they did - and given the build-up by John Musgrave in his role as announcer - you could say this was a concert that couldn't fail. Both father and I revelled in the way our two ensembles excelled themselves both individually and in consort, and in the warmth of the audience appreciation. Particularly poignant was the rollicking performance of Mendelssohn's **I am a Roamer**. Having played piano for the choir's first performance of the piece in 1947 it was exhilarating to direct full orchestra in the same accompaniment. Amongst the many highlights we have both been fortunate enough to experience this was in some respects the most memorable of all.

To me the most revealing aspect of that concert was the reaction of the orchestral players to father and his choir. Here were top professionals, some of whom had played under Beecham and Barbirolli. Furthermore, they regularly provided backing orchestras to major Choral Societies all over the North and beyond. But in the Rossendale Male Voice Choir here was something special. For professional orchestral players to enthuse over any

conductor, let alone an amateur one, is rare indeed. After the concert congratulations to father from members of the orchestra were warm and sincere. Dad even won a kiss from a young lady cellist!

It was that experience above all others that brought home to me that third gift that father had, these days called "charisma" which lifts performance, whether by amateur or professionals, to heights its participants can only wonder at.

A similar concert took place in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall at Christmas 1975, this time with Marcus Dodds conducting the orchestra, by now the RMVC and NCO feeling like old friends.

The scene, King George's Hall, Blackburn, the audience are in their seats, the orchestra files in and the choir followed them and sat behind them. In the hush before the concert started Roger Clarke leaned over and whispered to his neighbour, "*Billy, take your trilby off.*"

Chapter 12

ET as conductor of RMVC - up to Bocholt

The hope that I might one day take over from him as conductor of the Rossendale Male Voice Choir had clearly been in my father's mind once I had moved back to Lancashire. I can't remember just when he first asked me if I would take over - without any specific time in mind - but I had to decline, as I think he expected me to. I was as busy as I'd ever been as a composer, with broadcasts and concerts now and again with my professional orchestra to add to the burden - not to mention trips to London once or twice a month to attend council meetings as a composer director of the Performing Right Society.

One happening brought about an abrupt change of mind. It was something I was told about some time after it happened. Apparently, probably early in 1975, my father had suffered a blackout relaxing in his sitting room after choir practice. He'd simply clicked off into unconsciousness. Obviously this was desperately worrying for the 2 hours or so when he could not be wakened. He came to, apparently no way the worse, but obviously, to everyone but himself, this put a whole new perspective on his future as

conductor. When I heard about it this was for me the decisive moment. Pros and cons went out of the window and I let father know I would be willing to take over the choir at any time he wanted. Nothing was said about the crisis and Jean, my wife, recalls how I took her by surprise by suddenly saying that I had offered to take over the choir. Let me stress though, that if the choir's qualities in my father's hands had not been such special ones which I felt strongly were worth someone's making the attempt to preserve, I would have found acceptable reasons for declining. How I was going to fit the time in I couldn't say, and in fact I found myself with several months to think about it. Father carried on just as before and no particular time was postulated as to when I should take over.

What brought the matter to a head was the pending visit of the choir to Bocholt in Germany, Rossendale's twin town, in September 1976. It was in 1975 that father decided he could not make the trip, so it was up to me to say I was prepared to do so.

Mind you, there were a lot of bridges to cross yet! Father was still the choir's conductor, and there were murmurs in certain quarters that the

In 1976 the choir traveled to Bocholt which is Rossendale's twin town. On their return home Ernest received a letter from Paul Hestert, the President of Bocholt's Kolping Choir.

"....there is still spoken the impressions, the enjoyment, the warmths, of your welcome and your hostility....." Hopefully he meant hospitality but in truth they gave the choir a great time.

group going there shouldn't be called the RMVC at all! 'Members of' perhaps, or even given another name. Father too, was more than a little worried when he learned that only about 30 were prepared to go. I was somewhat bemused by all this; as a pro there was no way I would have expressed my willingness to go if I had had any doubts about the quality of the choir. "Pick at random any 30 members of your choir," I forcibly said to dad, "and you will have a choir to do you proud."

The pending trip to Bocholt, then, was the catalyst that decided father that now was the right time to retire and for me to take over. His last big concert was on 31st January 1976 at Ilkley, together with the Yeadon Old Band. He decided that the final "concert" he would conduct was for his friends at Dundee Lane United Reformed Church, Ramsbottom on Sunday evening February 8th. This was by far the choir's longest standing engagement. I have programmes for every year dating back to February 1953.

The following Friday - the 13th - was, as far as I can work out, my first rehearsal of the RMVC as its conductor. From then on, for the next 6 years it was, for me, an entirely new way of life, as a conductor the busiest I've ever spent, with many wonderful experiences to look back on with gladness and gratitude.

I was genuinely concerned that what I'd seen happen to other choirs (and bands), with half the members leaving when a new conductor came along, wouldn't happen here. The choir's loyalty and keenness to give me support was most heart-warming, though I knew eventually there would be all sorts of new ideas and methods which might strain that loyalty.

One of the first things I did was to ask for a rostrum, so that every member of the choir could actually see my beat. By the way the joiners in the choir so enthusiastically offered to take this up I could have been swamped with rostrums!

However, it was decided on one member, Ken Venus, to take the job on. He kindly gave the rostrum to me as a personal gift and it has done yeoman service ever since. Eventually we also had rostrums so that the back rows of the choir could be raised, again helping the communication process. Moving on a bit, this smoothed the way in that most formidable of tasks a conductor has to face, which I didn't dare do at first, namely asking singers to move from the position they had held for years and stand somewhere else! E.g. I always feel the overall sound is better when strong voices sing from the back of a team rather than the front. The dismay of those two great singers, Harry Hanson and Harry Ashworth,

The choir were rehearsing in Preston Guild Hall for a Christmas Concert with Rossendale Ladies and Black Dyke Brass Band. A snag arose at one point when the band conductor admitted that they did not possess the band parts for one of the carols. Ernest got out some sheet music paper and wrote out the individual band parts in about twenty minutes. The other amazing part of the story is that the band immediately played it through.

on being asked to move to the back row, would, I gambled, be more than compensated for when they realised the prominence of their lofty new position on rostrums. But that's going on a year or two.

I well remember my first concert, which was in Christ Church United Reform in Morecambe, on March 6th, 1976, for one particular reason. The programme had already been picked by my father and I duly did my best to lead the choir to a performance worthy of him. With a 7 o'clock start and a 20-minute interval I would expect a programme to end well past 9 o'clock. To my chagrin we were off the platform just after 8.30. Seeing my embarrassed look Harold Dugdale, later President, explained. "Ah but your dad always had a lot to say about the pieces before we sang them." Observing my dismay at such a prospect he said, "I tell you what, the choir will do the introductions for you in unison choral-speak!" Clearly, after all those years, they had father's introductions off by heart! So it's worth recalling that other facet of his conducting, the care with which father studied the songs, their meanings and their background, with a view first of all of bringing this home to his singers, and then as additional interest to his audiences. For my part though, I've always found introducing the items the most taxing part of conducting. My answer was to give the choir 5 or 6 more items to sing per concert!

With the choir's concert season in full swing my immediate task was to reach a rapport with the choir well

enough to do full justice to the engagements. First rehearsals were mainly about my getting to know the choir's repertoire. I deliberately built my forthcoming programmes of items I knew would show the choir in its best light, and which, at the same time, I knew I would enjoy putting over as I imagined my father would have done. Sometimes in rehearsal I would ask the choir to sing a piece to me, not conducting at all.

After Morecambe, one of my first concerts was one which had been arranged long before, with my Northern Concert Orchestra in Chorley Town Hall June '76. This followed a similar pattern to that in King George's hall in 1973. These concerts were an ideal run-up to the trip to Bocholt due off on September 17th. Particularly pleasing was the concert in St. Gabriel's Church, Blackburn, on September 8th, at which incidentally, Horace Tattersall, who conducted Blackburn Music Society for many years, was a warmly supportive member of the audience. This concert was also the first at which the contralto Florence Jackson appeared as soloist, and she continued to serve the choir throughout my tenure as conductor.

As far as the Bocholt experience is concerned, from my point of view it was a most enjoyable and rewarding trip and set the seal on my future relationship with the choir.

The first thing that occurred to me was to arrange one or two German folk-songs, which we would sing in German. I chose **Die Lorelei**, ideal to

The usual reasons for being in a pub. *"Two pints, please."* The pints arrived and were duly examined. *"Landlord, do you think that you could put a double whisky in it, please?"*, *"No problem, sir,"* said the landlord, eager to please. *"Then fill it up with beer instead."*

do justice to the choir's beautiful quiet singing and, in complete contrast, **Muss i Denn**.

I should say that in 1960, after attending some recording sessions of my music in Germany, I had taken immediate steps to learn German. This was to prove invaluable to me in later years, with various recording sessions conducting German, not to mention Czecho-Slovak, orchestras.

These two new arrangements were my first experience of trying out the choir with something new of mine. At first I had all sorts of misgivings, particularly with **Die Lorelei**, which didn't begin to sound like that piece I had, or thought I had, in my head (the composer's nightmare!).

As it happened my wife and I were on a camping holiday abroad during August. Indeed, having at the last minute found an extra verse for **Muss i Denn** I arranged that and sent it to

many examples I was to have over the next few years of the choir coming up with something extra, professionalism I like to call it, in a way few amateur groups could match.

The Bocholt trip itself I look back on with unallayed joy. It began with a coach ride over to Hull - in the process of which we found that a certain choir member had left his passport at home and he travelled both ways without it. The mayoral car sent in hot pursuit carrying the document broke down on the motorway and never caught up with the coach. Then there was the overnight boat trip across the channel. Hearing that a famous choir was on board the public address announced that we would give a performance at a certain time. So we sang 5 or 6 of our favourite items - though the rolling ship was rather too much for one of the singers. We were allotted our cabins. By an accident of planning Frank Farnworth found

the choir from abroad. I need not have worried. In my absence, with Richard Haiken, the deputy conductor in charge, the choir had set about **Muss i Denn** and particularly **Die Lorelei** so as to greet me on my return with a performance that they were determined would surprise me. Their smiling faces, at my pleasure in hearing such a transformation, I can see to this day. That was the first of

himself billeted with two young ladies but the management soon put a stop to that nonsense.

When our coach arrived in Bocholt we were made very welcome. There were hosts and hostesses for each member of the choir who soon made themselves known to us at a lunch they had prepared specially.

In the afternoon we needed to rehearse in the hall where the concert was to be held. Naturally, with the exception of the two German folk-songs I had arranged, our contribution was to be entirely of items the choir had been scoring with for years. My role was no more than to recreate the performances that my father had conducted and as such resounding success was assured. I was keen to keep secret the fact that we were to sing two German folk-songs in German. With the help of a German colleague I had prepared an introduction to read out in German, which ended simply by telling them we were to sing "two folk-songs which perhaps were known to them". I think I was as moved as I'm sure choir and audience were at the performance of **Die Lorelei**. Before the applause died down Michael Farnworth started the introduction to **Muss i Denn**, which started them off clapping and a great experience it was.

The reception after the concert sticks in my memory for a very personal reason. I was determined that no one should learn that the following day was my birthday. As the supper celebrations neared their close, cousin Frank (Farnworth) who is almost exactly the same age as me, in response to a question from a neighbour, called across to me, "How old are you, Ernest, 51?" I couldn't resist it. I looked at my watch with a flourish - it was now 12.15 a.m., "No, 52," I said. The penny dropped and the tune then was "Happy Birthday to you!" which, incidentally, all our German friends knew too. "*Glücklich Geburtstag!*" was the greeting by the

children of my host and hostess the following morning when I came down to breakfast.

In the course of conversation - my German was tested to the full! - my host asked how it was that the men could sing so beautifully in German. The answer was that I made sure they never saw the German words, but only the transcription of them into phonetic sounds. After all, singing in English involves shaping the correct vowel sounds for every note in a way quite differently than in speech. A well-trained choir can extend the same disciplines to a foreign language quite readily. Nevertheless, it's always a surprise and delight when it happens so beautifully.

That morning we were taken for a walk round Bocholt by our hosts and later in the day came the boat-trip down the Rhine to Cologne, which the choir found fascinating. They were particularly struck by the size of the Rhine. It made their river Irwell look like a stream. The day ended with a meal at their hosts lodge (Shoemakers Halle).

Choir members have recalled with affection the sing-song in the bar going over. Speaking for myself - despite what others might contend - I remained my normal abstemious self. Coming back over was a different matter and the convivial sing-song in the bar hit musical heights, which few of the non-RMVC patrons could have experienced before! I confined myself to port & lemon and discussed the composition '4½ minutes' which is played in total silence.

"The men were invited to sin in the Catheral"
A misprint in these pages. Sadly it's been put right.

My main objectives in taking over the choir can be summarised as, first, to learn how to convey the qualities of voice-production, tone-colour and word-painting that had been father's special achievement, secondly, to bring a new approach to programme-building, introducing greater variety, with general audiences in mind, whilst remaining true to his male voice traditions, and thirdly, to insist on new standards of accuracy and precision.

With interpretation I did not anticipate problems since my father's approach and mine were identical on most aspects, which however, didn't prevent endless discussion on the few points we disagreed about!

From the word go, though, the basic requirement was to bring the choir under the control of my baton.

In the run-up to Bocholt the obvious way to ensure success was to reactivate the interpretations so effectively put over by my father. I well recall at one of our pre-Bocholt concerts an enthusiastic member of the audience complimenting me with the words "You had the choir in the palm of your hand". Wrong! At all times the choir was controlling me! Here I'll take the lid off some of the hidden truths of conducting not normally admitted.

In my various experiences of guest-conducting, where an orchestra, band or choir has been trained by someone else, there's a clear limit to what you can bring to a performance, even of

your own compositions. It becomes instinctive to sense how they want to perform and by directing that inspire confidence and bring out the best of them. In my first outings with Rossendale there was no point in doing otherwise.

The skills called upon are much the same as an accompanist acquires - and I'd been doing that for 40 years - where you develop a near-telepathic sense of what soloists or choirs are going to do. After all, for 90 to 95% of the time in any concert the conductor doesn't direct, he underlines what the choir/band/orchestra has been trained to do. That's how you like it, that's what rehearsals are for.

However, the conductor must be able to take genuine control the instant he needs to. There are places in most pieces where the conductor will vary his interpretation from performance to performance, perhaps only slightly, but enough to give it the essential sense of spontaneity. Furthermore, a performing group, amateur or professional, is always heightened in a concert in a way well-nigh impossible to simulate in rehearsal and unforeseeable things happen.

A choir, or just some members of it, due to over-enthusiasm, nerves or unusual acoustics, can find themselves taking a route they have never done in rehearsal and chaos threatens. At that point the conductor must have the technique instantly to grab the choir (orchestra or band!) before things really go wrong; or at other times a choir might uncontrollably "set off at tboogart", as

father used to say, unless you can immediately put the brake on.

The trouble was that though rapport appeared to be developing nicely in my early rehearsals, when it came to the concert, a fail-safe mechanism took over and the choir reverted unconsciously to the exact performance they had given under father! So, it was a return to my earlier act, giving a convincing impression of directing the choir but in fact completely in their hands!

The crunch came in a concert in the school of St. Mary's Church, Haslingden in January 1977. It was one of those concerts where, for some reason or other, the choir could not lift itself above the ordinary, not helped by the fact that the piano was awful, and a semitone flat, with two crucial notes missing. There came a point in **The Little Road to Bethlehem** when I decided to move the pace on a little. Where previously I wouldn't have risked it, I thought, "Blow it! I'll do it my way, come what may!" Predictably, things started to go wrong. Half the choir came with me but the other half stayed behind. I made no attempt to rescue the situation and just ploughed on. Eventually the stragglers woke up to the fact and by degrees got themselves back into ensemble. It must have sounded pretty messy for a spell. But it was from that experience I date my beginning to take real control of the choir!

The obvious way to counter such problems was to introduce new repertoire, which we had already started doing before Bocholt. The first two new pieces we bought were Wagner's **The Roman War Song**, which became a standard opener for concerts, and **Ol'Man River**. I also began to introduce new arrangements of my own. The first were **Ma Belle Marguerite**, **Dusk** and **The Keeper of the Eddystone Light**. But all this takes time and I had no wish to desert the superb concert items in the choir's repertoire.

Harold Dugdale, who later became President of the choir, was invited to join by his brother Harry. He went down to the rehearsal room one Friday night and as he said "*No one asked me if I could sing*". The only question asked was "*Heaw much con he sup?*"

Chapter 13

The Men From The Valley

My "apprenticeship" was put to the test in a fascinating way from late 1976 through to early 1978. This was when Keith Daniels, a producer for BBC Radio Blackburn (now Radio Lancashire) conceived the idea of compiling a documentary programme about the choir, to be entitled **The Men from the Valle**. Before starting, he contacted me and asked first if I approved the idea and secondly if I minded him recording interviews with members of the choir. I agreed wholeheartedly, with the reservation that my interview should take place after I had heard the recordings made by members of the choir. As someone who never resents comments and criticisms (provided I'm allowed to answer them!) and learns a lot from them, I hoped that my plain-spoken friends would in no way be inhibited by the experience. And so it turned out. Keith made recordings with choir members over quite a time during 1976 and 1977.

He was anxious also to obtain recordings of the choir itself, to illustrate his narrative. He obtained some from the BBC, including our TV recording of the **Hippopotamus Song**. Others we recorded down at the pensioners' **Two Roses**, including a hummed version to cover the Introduction by the Manager of Radio Blackburn John Musgrave, **Die Lorelei** - with audience applause added - to back up the Bocholt experiences. A problem was the lack of suitable recordings made during

father's time to illustrate some of the occasions he talked about. Standard items, like **Quiet Sleep**, **23rd Psalm** and of course **Two Roses** were still in repertoire and presented no problems. Even BBC recordings of the choir's Llangollen successes were inadequate for one reason or another (a marquee is as bad a venue for sound as you can get!). One part of father's interview he was particularly keen to illustrate was where he quoted the Llangollen adjudicator's remarks on the choir's 1953 winning performance of Viadini's **Ave Verum Corpus**. "Lovely sounds. Second bass at last. The real thing. What intensity, warmth, tone of purple. Each part entering with a blessing. Urgent, and all sung from their hearts to our heart. We had no need to worry about notes. *O Jesu* was wrung from their hearts."

Keith asked me if the present choir could make a recording to simulate that performance. This piece was quite new to me, but knowing that a good number of those who had given that performance were still members I agreed to do this, with one proviso. The piece itself is built of several short self-contained sections. I said to Keith, "If you let us rehearse the piece a section at a time, record it that way, and then can splice it all together, we can do it."

And that's what happened. I took 30 seconds or so at a time, asked the choir to sing it to me. From this I could readily deduce the way father had interpreted it. I did whatever

"If you dropped a baritone and a bass out of an aeroplane, which one would hit the ground first?" Answer 1. Who cares. Answer 2. The bass because the baritones are always late.

rehearsing was needed to bring it up to scratch, then gave Keith the go-ahead to record just that section. If it wasn't quite right we recorded it again. And so it went on with each section in turn. Keith later did the perfect job of splicing the sections together and there it was, the Llangollen performance. (To fake the perfect performance by such means is commonplace in the recording world.)

Later, when my father was revelling in listening to Keith's programme, in my matter-of-fact way I unthinkingly remarked what a pity it was we hadn't been able to get a recording of the actual Llangollen performance. "But that was it!" father said. I kicked myself for telling him, and shamefacedly had to admit that in fact we had recorded it down at the Pensioners'. This was too much for him to take in. That we could clinically have concocted a simulation of one of his great performances was a concept quite foreign to his understanding. He subsequently quizzed several choir members, and I don't think he quite believed it even then.

Keith's documentary had taken a long time to put together. But in the end it was worth it, and *The Men from the Valley* won an award later in 1978 for the best documentary from a local radio station, which included the commercial as well as the BBC ones.

Keith told me what a thrill it gave him to hear those forthright Lancashire voices rolling round the London arena where the presentation ceremony took place. I recall John Musgrave saying how he found the Lancashire people the most forthcoming in speaking their minds, and certainly this showed in that documentary.

Interviews with choir members were those with Harry Hanson, Harry Ashworth, Joe Stanhope and Russell Dale. An absolute gem is the basso-profundo of Harry Ashworth, ending with :-

"It's like Ah said when Ah completed mi 50 years. For a team of workin' lads who've achieved what we've achieved it's bin a jolly good team, and I for one am extremely grateful because - just you think - it's took us to Ireland twice, Holland, Germany, Festival 'All in London, the International Eisteddfod four or five times in Wales, among other things. Now, where else in the world can you get all that for nowt?"

I was really pleased to note that all four choir interviewees weren't backward in saying something about their new conductor. What mattered was their warm supportive attitude; though I'd a lot to learn yet, it seemed I was coming along nicely!

By the time I had the last word in my interview months had gone by and I was well run-in. Most revealing (bear in mind I didn't hear them until long afterwards) were the way each of them talked of my 'orchestral' conducting.

Russell Dale:-

"There's no conductors in the world have the same ideas. Now Ernest is different in the sense that musically with orchestrational pieces and what have you, his experience is vast, and we find that he's conducting the choir just like he would an orchestra, which for us is something new. It's a case of Ernest is there, he's beating time. Fred had a different attitude altogether. He stood there and he moved us with his hands, with his facial expression and all the rest of it, to get the word picture, the musical tone just the way he wanted

<p><i>"If he had half a brain he would be a half wit."</i> They're still at it.</p>
--

it. Now Ernest's idea is that first of all we have to be musically correct. When we're musically correct then we can put the final touches of tonal quality."

Joe Stanhope:-

"Ernest has this quality of listening to sound and what he is after is a perfect tone married to perfect pitch. What he hasn't got yet, I know he won't mind me saying it, is the ability his father has to extract from us the correct tone all the time, and interpretation. We can still interpret, because we've still got Fred's memories with us, you see. What I'm hoping, and Ernest is working on it like mad, is to get that coming with the other qualities that Ernest has."

Harry Hanson:-

"E's more modern in 'is ways. 'E's more instrumental. 'E wants things dead on the beat and that, whereas Mr. T looked for volume, tone, a round tone, a tone which Rossendale 'ad for years and years on it own. It sounded like an organ. And that's the tone. Well Ernest is a great musician but e's got to learn 'ow to make the tone."

Harry Ashworth:-

"E's essentially a professional orchestral man. 'E's so pedantic. 'E wants things doing just like this and just like an orchestra."

Quite true! My conducting technique had been carefully developed over many years with orchestras and minimum rehearsal in mind. Orchestral rehearsal rarely gives enough time for more than one run through plus, if you're lucky, a little time on the more awkward bits. Sometimes one records or performs without having had any rehearsal at all. So an absolutely clinical, orthodox right hand beat, with baton, is essential if players are to give of their

best, leaving left hand gestures and facial expression to take care of itself. But I found that with my various guest-conducting spots with amateurs, including choirs, that those same fundamental techniques are the surest way to immediate rapport with the participants.

After years of knife-edge performances it took me a little time to come to terms with the assuredness that a well-rehearsed choir gives you. Given that confidence I learned to relax the clinical aspect, yes, even put the baton down!, and think a little more about the inspirational role of a conductor.

I mention all this because I've long acknowledged that it was my week-in, week-out choir conducting that brought a new dimension to my work as an *orchestral* conductor too. Orchestras must see a purely functional beat when they need it. (It mystifies me how many conductors, including some of the greatest, to players' dismay, consider such things beneath them as they soar into the realms of charisma.) But players, as they glance up at key moments, also like to see the same commitment by way of facial expression and gestures as a choir member expects if they are to give that little bit extra that makes all the difference between a good and a memorable performance. Thus, in later years, orchestras in Bratislava and Dublin, New Zealand and Canada, have responded to a touch of the Rossendales, as their recordings clearly demonstrate.

Chapter 14

Repertoire Problems & New Arrangements

A good example of Cause and Effect. Ernest was ideally placed to recognise the problem of aging repertoire and skilful enough to arrange new material not only for RMVC but also for the Ladies Choir.

A sometimes intractable problem for me was with works in repertoire in which in varying degrees the choir had become implanted with inaccuracies of one kind or another.

With few exceptions, every choir I've known that has sung the same pieces year after year has let wrong notes creep in, which then stick and are very difficult to eradicate. The reason is very understandable. It's difficult enough to spot wrong notes when sitting listening, but unless they are blatant ones, very difficult to spot in performances. Conductor and choir concentrate first and foremost on communicating their fine interpretation. In performance they must think ahead; noticing what hasn't gone quite right is meaningless since it's too late to do anything about it. It's understandable that when performance of a piece seems to be going well that you don't want to spend rehearsal time on them. Nevertheless this is essential if a choir is not to let performances slip to an unacceptable standard. As I've said to choirs many times. It isn't up to me to justify insisting on the right notes, it's for you to find any justification for singing wrong ones.

As a composer I learn valuable lessons from the mistakes choirs slip into. There are many places (hardly ever with truly greats though) where the resultant version is the way the composer should have written in the first place! In such cases, unless chosen as a competition piece, I might well accept the modification, indeed have often been a co-conspirator in changing notes - including some in my own compositions. This honed my writing technique most effectively with the objective: that it should be easier to sing the right notes than the wrong ones.

But all too often the notes that get smoothed away are the very ones that create the poignant effect that the composer is seeking. If they're difficult to pitch the choir has to learn to savour them. If it can't - understandable in some pieces - only constant reminders in rehearsal will keep them where they should be. In passing, a basic reason for the assuredness of Barber Shop chordings is that the movement imposes strict rules as to which chords arrangers are allowed to use. Several basic ones, not even marginally discordant, and fundamental to any normal choir, are simply banned.

To browse through my early programmes is to remind myself, which of the choir's repertoire I readily kept in service. The process of correcting inaccuracies had mixed results. The choir was very co-operative, the "leaders" of the separate parts would take it upon themselves to put right - with extra part practices - notes that had gone astray. However, certain items we could never get back to what they should be. With one or two, I reluctantly turned a deaf ear, but others I just couldn't accept and dropped them.

The piece I was most reluctant to drop, which I felt I just had to, despite representations from Billy Torevell and others, was **The Bandits' Chorus**. It was arranged for, and dedicated to, my father and the Rossendale Male Voice Choir by Dr Sidney Northcote (I still have his manuscript). It was a piece designed to show off the very qualities which he, a regular adjudicator, so much admired. But one passage, which comes twice, is near-impossible. Being an unaccompanied item the arranger felt obliged to give the choir notes Verdi wrote for orchestra. It involved the bottom basses jumping nearly two octaves, from bottom F to top E, then proceeding in semitone steps down to A. The baritones then follow, taking their E down to C. Unfortunately, the basses always hit E flat rather than E natural, and in the most confident way made their 7 notes cover the same ground as the keyboard only has 6 notes for. The baritones also hit E flat and sang 4 notes in the space of the keyboard's 3. I tried over

and over again to get it right. We nearly did it but back it went. Eb it was and Eb it stayed. Since at the end of the passage both bass parts arrived at exactly the right notes it all sounded very convincing. Should I have kept it in? In every other aspect it was just the kind of piece I welcomed into programmes.

An interesting sequel came when some time later I heard **The Bandits' Chorus** sung by 1000 Welsh voices in the Royal Albert Hall, London. Presumably to keep the different choirs together the piece was accompanied on the organ. When it came to the above-mentioned passages I took delight in hearing 1000 Welsh voices (or at any rate 500 of them), jumping unerringly to the same E flats and singing exactly the same non-notes as Rossendale did! The accompanist, having, one assumes, learned in rehearsal that the notes the choir sang weren't available on that or any other organ, simply stopped playing, picking up again only when the offending passages were out of the way!

Instilling accuracy is one thing. I found it a considerably greater challenge learning how to convey the choir's characteristic qualities of tone and word-painting. As I recalled from many years as an observer, Rossendale's special prowess in these things was dependent on constant reminders from father week-in, week-out, year after year.

There would be new members coming into the choir to whom I would have to try to impart the self-same

qualities. The task was rendered easier by the very fact of the long-serving members being there as examples of all my father stood for. But there was a limit to what I could do in full rehearsal. There were always some voices that needed some personal coaching if they were not to jeopardise the unity of tone desired. So I conceived the idea of having workshop sessions for half an hour before the Friday rehearsal, taking each part in turn. I found that by taking a passage say three singers at a time, I could hear individual voices in a way that avoided any diffidence

they might have at being heard individually. (Like father, I don't believe in formal auditions for a choir set up to perform a service to a community.) And in the informal atmosphere of 8 or 10 of them sitting round a piano I could address individual singers in ways they could modify their tone to gel with the desired sound, as exemplified, most likely, by the colleague sitting next to them.

"I wish I'd thought of that," said father, an accolade the like of which never came my way before or since!

ARRANGEMENTS

Though for many years I had concentrated on composition rather than arranging, the obvious way to introduce new repertoire for the choir was to arrange some pieces myself. Several I could adapt from existing arrangements, including **Mad Dogs and Englishmen** and **Donke^o Serenade**. Others I made especially for Rossendale.

As I got to know the singers I knew I could ask more of them than I would dream of doing in other circumstances. In **Donke^o Serenade** at one point the choir divides into 8 parts, the topmost going up to high *Db*, calling for a beautiful falsetto from the tenors in a register not heard since the days of Alto lead male voice choirs, whilst the bottom basses go down to

the very low C, which only one or two can actually reach. The whole sound covers 3 octaves and a bit, surely a record of some sort! In the **Hippopotamus Song** I used tenors high up in 4 parts to be followed by basses also in four parts, making their dramatic entry down below. What amused me here was the difficulty I had getting the basses to sing "Mud, mud etc" in a Lancashire accent, so well trained were they in the RMVC's beautifully cultured vowel sounds!

One of the choir's war-horses **The Wolf** was too good an item not to keep in repertoire. But after many performances, way over the top by now, I longed for a replacement. I then recalled **The Ghosts** - **High Noon** from Gilbert and Sullivan's **Ruddigore**. This I freely adapted to make it a choir showpiece. Rehearsing this brought home to me more than anything else father's skill. Though many of the words and the spirit of them was exactly the same as **The Wolf** - "grisly, grim goodnight", "when the night winds howl" etc. - the chaps needed to be coached from scratch to come to the desired tone-colours and word-painting. The way every single interpretation point was drawn from the conductor alone brought a unity to the choir's performances which was a major contribution to its success

After a year or two with Rossendale it occurred to me that I hadn't written any piece that might join the repertoire of quiet, slow, unaccompanied pieces, which to many brought out the most memorable and distinctive Rossendale sound, and which the choir-members themselves seemed to enjoy most of all. That was what moved me to arrange **I Gave M** - **Love a Cherr**. My work on this exemplifies what I said above about the art of composition. Having first carefully planned the shape of the work my first harmonisation took me less than an hour one Monday morning. But it took me three days, constantly

returning to it, modifying it, trying different harmonisations, assessing the flow of inside parts and the bass line, and all the rest, before I was satisfied it was as good as I could make it. Not surprisingly this was the piece father considered the best of my arrangements.

It has been a continual joy to know that RMVC and indeed the Festival Choir have kept the Tomlinson connection by performing some of these arrangements.

With a view to keeping learning to a minimum, it was fun finding pieces that the two choirs could sing together. Some male choir pieces lent themselves readily to simply giving the ladies the tune too, perhaps adding a little easy harmonising - **Speed Your Journe** - and **Nile Chorus** - or letting the ladies take over a solo line. in **Soldier, Soldier, Won't You Marr Me** and **Yesterda**. **Funiculi, Funicula** was one that came in for an effective refurbishment.

I must also mention the arrangements my younger brother Fred made for the choir. His lovely arrangement of **Red Ros** - **Bush**, introduced to the choir in 1965, became a firm favourite. He also made a hilarious arrangement of the dialect poem **Bowton's Yard**, by the Lancashire poet Bill o' Bows.

Chapter 15

Working with Dad

Since it was above all to serve my father - and my mother, his ever-present helpmeet in all choir activities - that was my driving force, he was, naturally, the one person I turned to in my quest to keep his traditions ongoing. I always went up to 6 Derby Terrace after Friday's rehearsal, once or twice taking up a recording for him to comment on. Strangely enough, it took a little time for him to overcome the worry, which I never understood, that criticism from him was no longer appropriate and would be resented. He didn't attend many concerts, but once he had overcome that diffidence, such remarks as he made were cogent and helpful.

I soon found though that he became most concerned if he felt I was departing from his time-honoured way of presenting the repertoire pieces. Many of these were new to me and it was fascinating to try to deduce from the way the choir sang them to me just how father had put them across. When I'd got it right, to my own and - I assumed - his satisfaction, it was puzzling to find that I hadn't!

Much of the problem came from the way an interpretation develops when a choir (or a band, or a soloist. . .) performs the same piece year after

imperceptibly on the previous one; rallantandos, pauses, dynamics and all the rest become exaggerated. Slow pieces tend to get slower and slower, fast pieces faster, though with dad this latter tended to work the other way in his concern that every word should be heard. With a piece I came to fresh I was somewhat disheartened to find I wasn't reaching "his" interpretation. Then I came across some early recordings of the same pieces when, lo and behold, my "pedantic" (his word) interpretations matched his own of earlier days! Sometimes the reverse happened: "Why do you hold that chord so long?" I should have replied, "Because that's the way you did it." Then it began to dawn on me that he had returned to basics and what he was mentally conjuring up was the choir's ideal performance 25 to 50 years previously! Never a dull moment.

There were some interpretation points of course where my way and his were fundamentally at variance, which didn't deter him from trying to get me to see the error of my ways! I used to ask, "Why do you worry about that 5" rather than enjoying the fact that for 95% of the time you and I are exactly as one?" (Expressions of support from mother in the other chair - she hated any controversy.)

year. Each performance builds

Father was a genius in varying tonal character according to the spirit of the words, subtly different between the caress of a love-song and that of an Ave Verum, between the joy of a war-like song and that of a hymn of praise. I was looking for even more vocal variation e.g. American accents in *Nothing Like a Dame*, at other times a deliberate avoidance of Rossendale's characteristic expressiveness, preferring to let beautiful music speak for itself. ("Doesn't mean a thing" - F.T.!) When father was specific, as suggesting to me how to get a snarl in the ha haas'

of **The Ghost's High Noon** this was great. But at other times he had a message, which in some mysterious way conveyed something to the chaps but left me puzzled. I remember asking his advice about the unison bass passage in Wagner's **The Praier**, seeking technical help on voice production so as to retain the glorious tone he'd always achieved. Father thought for a bit, then said with all the intensity with which he would address the choir "You can't *command* the Deity, you can only *implore* the Deity".

Male Voice Arrangment and Compositions □□ Ernest Tomlinson

Anvil Chorus
Blow the Wind Southerly
Cease Thy Affections
Donkey Serencade
Ghosts High Noon
I Gave My Love A Cherry
It Was A Lover And His Lass
Little Drummer Boy
Mad Dogs and Englishmen
Music In The Moonlight
Nina From Argentina
Pace Egging Song
The Stately Homes of England

Alto Rhapsody
Boots
Die Lorelli
Dusk
The Hippopotomus Song
I Will Give My Love An Apple
The Keeper Of The Eddystone Light
Ma Belle Marguerite
The Mare and The Foal
Muss I Denn
The Old Superb
Phil The Fluter

Mixed Voice Arrangment and Compositions □□ Ernest Tomlinson

Blow Away The Morning Dew
O Soldier Soldier
Sing
Yesterday

Funiculi Funicula
Rakes Of Mallow
The Drummer And The Cook

Fred Tomlinson Jnr

Red Rosy Bush
Bowtons Yard

Fred Tomlinson Snr

This Lonesome Valley

Chapter 16

Festival Of Song

1977 was the start of what turned out to be a particularly busy period, with various unforeseen activities to add to the one or two a month concert schedule.

The men came to my support in a most rewarding way in a concert on November 12th, 1977. Thanks to the good offices of its conductor, Horace Tattersall, and chairman, Harold Smith, Blackburn Music Society, a choral society of 150-plus singers, put on my **Festival of Song** in celebration of the Queen's Jubilee at King George's Hall, Blackburn. This work is a compilation of some 37 of my compositions and arrangements, in which well-known folk-songs are interspersed with original settings of English lyrics. In the Blackburn choir, like most mixed choirs, the ladies outnumbered the men by two to one. The concert had been planned before I took over Rossendale, but now, despite a busy schedule, I asked the choir if they would participate in the celebration. And so it was agreed. There would be a group of songs by Blackburn alone, a group by Rossendale, after which the two choirs would unite. The soloists, to perform between choral groups, were to come from the Blackburn society, with one guest, and also Florence Jackson. I had also always wanted to have my orchestral folk-dances performed with actual dancers, and the Central Manchester Country Dance Club agreed to take part. Besides performing six pieces already in repertoire, Rossendale had to learn the tenor and bass lines of no fewer than eleven pieces quite new to them. I was diffident in asking such work from

them, but it was they who volunteered extra rehearsals.

With about equal numbers of men and women I tried my preferred lay-out of choirs, tailor-made for my kind of scoring, with ladies to the conductor's left and men to his right. The change was too much for three elderly ladies. Having sat in the same seats all those years they weren't going to move now. The Blackburn secretary came to me much concerned. "You'll have to tell them." "Not me," I said, "It's your choir. I tell you what, I'll arrange a folk-song especially for them: **We shall not be moved.**"

The concert itself was one of my career highlights. The Rossendale addition made a superb choir, not least in the confidence they brought to the ensemble. Seventeen of the pieces were first performances, and if you know how hard performances for a composer are to come by you will appreciate how important this concert was to me.

This was the last occasion on which my orchestra and choir came together. In 1977 the BBC, cost cutting as is its wont, axed my Northern Concert Orchestra along with other free-lance teams. It had had a good run for its money, and we were still playing for 30 or 40 live concerts a year, mainly for choral societies. However, having proved all I wanted to prove in the live field I decided in 1978 to hand my pending orchestral engagements over to Manchester Camerata and concentrate on the choir.

Chapter 17

BBC TV A Good Sing

Also in 1977 the BBC Northern Region TV put on a programme featuring North West Choirs, called **A Good Sing** - later **A Grand Sing**. Choirs were to compete in different classes - Children, Ladies, Men and Mixed - the winners in each programme to go on to the final. We were asked to take part, and it was important to leave no stone unturned to ensure that we could do full justice to ourselves. It was this that decided me to put to the choir committee the idea that we should do a concert in Longridge, which was by now (as it still is) my home town. As far as I know, this concert, on November 27th in the Civic Hall, was the first concert the RMVC had itself put on outside Rossendale.

One of the conditions of the **Good Sing** competition was that choirs would be allowed up to three instruments to accompany them. This was somewhat unrealistic, since choirs just don't do that. But it suited me! For some time I had thought of adding Flute now and again to Michael's piano, and this gave me the opportunity. Mentally scanning all the flute players I knew I remembered Jane Rowlands, who had played professionally for my orchestra and was now teaching in Blackburn. Jane agreed to join us and became a soloist with the choir in most concerts from then on.

A regular instrumental spot in a programme became a new ingredient

in my quest for variety giving added effectiveness to the vocal items that followed.

With the typical TV attitude that vision is more important than sound, the choir was arranged in a diamond shape, rising steeply from front to back. Furthermore the studio was completely dead acoustically, no reverberation whatsoever, making it very difficult for singers to hear themselves and thus overcompensate. But here was where Rossendale's experience was to show through, able to give vital performances however strange the set-up. Not surprisingly, to me at any rate, the Rossendale choir won on the night and went on to the final.

After that first recording, conductors and others met for a drink with the producer Gerald Harrison and adjudicator Audrey Langford. I had not met Audrey before. She told me that when the Rossendale choir entered the studio she said to herself, "These are pros." There was something about their confident bearing that already suggested potential winners. Where she got that impression remains a mystery to me, recalling Harold Dugdale's remark, "*Rossendale go onto a platform like they're fallin' off t'back of a lorry*".



For the final celebration programme the BBC, only a week before the recording, asked if I could provide a piece which could bring together the three winning choirs, the Youth choir (girls), the mixed (the Linden Singers of Colne) and us. The popular Funiculi, Funicula sprang to mind and this was accepted. The fact that it was to be sung from memory made considerable demands on the choirs. Since everyone knows the tune, to learn the words was the main priority. The BBC typed out the words to send to the choirs in advance of the music coming from me. Amusingly, a slip of the typewriter put one line as: "Some think that eyes should keep from coyly glancing upon the fly" instead of "upon the sly". And this was a line I'd given to the girls of the youth choir! Keeping the arrangement simple, and giving each choir something on their own all helped with the memorising. It was (typical BBC) a lot to ask of the choirs. Some of the Lindens, to whom I'd delivered the music with a bare three days to spare, had prepared bits of paper with the words on, which they pinned to the back of the singers in front of them. I gave the bulk of the harmonising work to the Rossendale, as I knew they would, as usual, turn up trumps, giving extra rehearsal time so as to do a professional job.

We went on to win the following two years' competition, now called A Grand Sing. Again, the BBC sprung an assignment on the last programme, to get all the choirs to join in the signature tune, SING! So this was another whiz round giving the various choirs their music. The instrumental backing was provided by the one-off RMVC ensemble - Jane on Flute,

**CHOIR DOES
ROSSENDALE
PROUD -
AND SECRET
IS OUT**

WELL, did you see it? Rossendale Male Voice Choir on the "telly," Tuesday night, and didn't those men do well?

With a hearty rendering of The Hippopotamus Song — yes, the one about mud — and La Belle Marguerita, the 56-strong choir broke all records on the BBC 1 programme A Good Sing.

The judge, Audrey Langford, former opera star and famous music teacher, awarded 88 marks, the best score for a male voice choir in the series, eight more than the previous best.

She thought the Rossendale men's performance was "gorgeous."

She said: "I can only possibly say that because before they uttered anything, it was an almost tingling atmosphere. They were not afraid of sound like some choirs. That is what I liked so much about them."

"Their tuning and sense of humour was marvellous. I really cannot find much I do not like, and I tried."

A delighted conductor, Mr Ernest Tomlinson, told the Free Press: "They all did tremendously well. It is not easy singing with cameras staring you right in the face."

Although the last programme will not be screened until next Tuesday, we can reveal the choir won its section.

That means an appearance on an all-winners' programme on 17 February (BBC 1, 10 15 pm).

Michael on Piano, Hilary Farnworth on tambourine, and my son Geoffrey on guitar, and a jolly time was had by all.

Chapter 18

Competitive Festivals

To enter competitive festivals is one of the most valuable things a choir can do. Whether or not one agrees with the adjudicators' decisions - and argument about these is the lifeblood of the movement! - there's no doubt it obliges choirs to concentrate on reaching the highest standard they are capable of. Enter a competition and the conductor finds it far easier to get over to a choir the importance of getting all those details and techniques right. It certainly sways any doubter who hates time spent on exact accuracy to point out that wrong notes are the one aspect that aren't subject to differing opinions! Holland apart, the choir hadn't entered a competition for many years, and several choir-members tackled me on the matter.

The concert schedule when I took over being at least one a month, sometimes more, planning for such an enterprise was rather tricky. However, my main reason for delaying a decision was the choice of the test-pieces - in those days usually set by the festival rather than allowing 'own choice' items. I saw no point in mugging up pieces unless they were suitable for the choir's repertoire. Eventually, Freckleton offered an attractive programme plus - perhaps more to the point - prize money much higher than had been seen in any of the standard festivals. This was a new

ploy, clearly to attract top choirs. The two test-pieces were **Sound An Alarm**, an arrangement of the well-known Handel aria and the **Pilgrims' Chorus** from Wagner's opera **Tannhäuser**. Both had been RMVC winners over many years. **Sound An Alarm** was always a piece enabling top tenors in particular to shine. **Pilgrims' Chorus** begins with the famous Rossendale pianissimo and ends, with its equally impressive unison, with the whole choir reaching a fortissimo top F. But the middle section - oh dear! With its slinky chromaticism it has spelt insoluble problems for most choirs. It's a long unaccompanied passage, the moment of truth coming when the piano comes in - with most choirs way off pitch. Rossendale were always on pitch at that point; the trouble was the notes they sang to get there were somewhat arbitrary. I then learned the hard way how difficult it was to get notes right that had been wrong for years. The old notes kept slipping back but we managed it in the end. Unfortunately we sang it perfectly at the final rehearsal, the time-honoured formula for getting it wrong on the day! The adjudicator's comment on our uneasy middle section was tempered by his wonder that we arrived at the right notes at the end!

Never mind. In coming second, the choir received considerably more prize-

money than they'd ever had coming first!

The BBC's annual *Let the People Sing* series was still in being so in 1978 I decided to follow in father's footsteps and entered the choir

Unfortunately, the time set for our recording was 10.30 a.m. one cold Sunday morning in February. How they expected any choir to lift themselves to performance standards I know not. The lads did their best and the performance was very creditable, except for one thing - we went flatter and flatter as we went along. This was one aspect of the RMVC's singing that I'd never had to worry about. It's a common hazard for any choir gradually to lose pitch in an unaccompanied item and the hardest fault to eradicate. That it was no problem with Rossendale I put down to their training; correct tone automatically integrates hearing and sound. But this time we dropped a semitone in three items and a full tone in *Drunken Sailor*. Apart from the incredible sound of the basses on bottom C at the end I don't count this one of our successes!

The Festival Choir having established itself it was agreed that the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Festival of 1981 was an attractive one for the three choirs to enter. From the male choir's point of

view there was a set piece worth learning as an addition to repertoire. I also long had the desire to try my hand at that great part-song, Elgar's *The Herald*. The Festival Choir's test piece was Elgar's *My Love Dwelt In A Northern Land* and our own choice *The Drummer and the Cook*. For various reasons our joint rehearsal was very limited. On the day we met at a school on the way to Newcastle, if my memory serves me right, and optimistically cobbled together our joint performances.

The Festival Choir didn't do anything like justice to itself in the Elgar and we were rightly criticised. In our *Drummer and the Cook* we were a strikingly different choir, but understandably not enough to make up for the inadequate Elgar.

The men worked very hard in their own class and gave a good showing. As usual one queried the views of adjudicators. What particularly incensed me, as a professional, was his admission, as if that was perfectly good enough for us lot, that he'd only looked at the test piece on the train coming up. But we couldn't grumble at coming fourth. The main thing was to be satisfied we gave of our best.

Fortunately for the Rossendale cause the ladies under Beatrice Wade won their class.

Chapter 19

BBC Manchester "Alto Rhapsody"

In 1979 BBC Radio Manchester invited the choir to take part in a performance of Brahms' Alto Rhapsody in a broadcast concert featuring the soloist Alfredo Hodgson with Manchester Camerata Orchestra. The choir performed admirably with one tiny exception. They were criticised in the next day's *Daily Telegraph* for their untidy start. He put it down to the long wait they had during the alto's solo, but in fact it was entirely the fault of the conductor! It was due to an anomaly that I've seen jeopardising many performances over the years. Whereas choirs sing up to the conductor's beat, orchestras play way behind it, most crucially at starts and changes of tempo. To me it's inexcusable for professionals to take no account of this factor when working with amateur choirs. (Many a talented young player

has told me how scared they've been on joining a professional orchestra, taking weeks to learn just when to come in.) You can get an orchestra to play up with the beat because I've done it (absolutely essential if you are accompanying a soloist). Speaking to the conductor after the Brahms performance he said, "Ah yes, I like my orchestra to come in when my downbeat is on the way up". I rest my case!

Brass Bands often present the same problem - the better the band the later they tend to play. In rehearsing choir and band in a joint item in a concert with Manchester CWS in 1980 at certain crucial points I had to tell the choir, "Don't follow my beat, listen to the band and follow them"

Two choir members went to a football match and at half time they felt hungry and said to a little boy standing near by,

"Here, son, go and get us two meat pies and get one for yourself".

The boy returned, a half eaten pie in his hand and said

"Here's your change mister, they only had one left."

Chapter 20

Recordings

We are fortunate that recordings are available of the RMVC's performances over 50-odd years. Many of these came to light when dad's store of recordings, first of the 78s, later tapes, were passed over to me some years ago. The earliest was made by an enterprising one-man recording firm who parked his van outside Lowther Pavilion for the Wallasey Festival on 7th June 1947. A cable to a microphone on stage and he took a chance, recording each item and selling the individual 78s on a first-come first-served basis. I think it was Tom Ogden, the choir's long-standing secretary (and a lyrical 2nd Tenor and soloist) who bought it for the choir. This was the choir's winning performance of *I am a Roamer*. Enshrined for posterity is the fluff I made on piano in the opening introduction.

Most recordings were taken down off radio, or sometimes provided by the BBC producers themselves from the studio. Three Elgar part-songs from a broadcast around 1949 were produced privately on 78s; I recall playing them with pride to colleagues in London.

The first recordings sponsored by the choir itself were for its first LP, issued in 1960, recorded in the school of Kay Street Baptists', where, if I remember

rightly, the choir used to rehearse at that time.

Some recordings of the choir's *Let the Peoples Sing* triumph (and non-triumphs!) are around, clearly taken off the air, with atmospherics to add authenticity. A Radio 4 programme *50 Years of Song*, narrated by Brian Trueman, includes items not recorded elsewhere not to mention a revealing interview with father. The recording of the 1973 joint concert of the RMVC and my Northern Concert Orchestra are particularly poignant.

In 1974 the choir sponsored its second LP, also called *50 Years of Song*, for which brother Fred wrote the sleeve notes. This was recorded in two sessions at Haslingden Public Hall,

The programme wasn't selected in advance. The choir just went through its favourite items. I recall dad having great difficulty in getting the true Rossendale performances in the empty hall, and for the second session wives and associates were invited to come along for the choir to sing to. Three full tapes were the result and after some detailed listening sessions father chose the final programme.

The BBC kindly sent me a copy of our recordings the choir made in my time for *Let the Peoples Sing*. But as we

lost pitch in all four items these aren't for public consumption!

The idea of making an LP of the choir had been simmering in my mind for some time. The obvious choice for a recording company was Chandos. Its founder, Brian Couzens, had been a friend and colleague for many years, back to the days when his idea of running a major record company was just a distant dream. By 1980, this dream was coming true, but he was not yet so overcrowded with commitments that he was not ready to consider an approach from us. A fee was agreed, dates were fixed and it was up to us to pick a suitable programme and to rehearse to as high a standard as we could.

The venue chosen for the recording was St. John's Church, Crawshawbooth, the sessions being the evening of Friday, and Saturday morning and afternoon, July 4th and 5th, 1980. In any such venue there is always the matter of traffic noise, but in the event this didn't create too many problems. Naturally, the programme I chose consisted of well-established repertoire items. The instrumental team too were well used to working with the choir, Michael Farnworth on piano, Jane Rowland on Flute, Pete Whitfield on Bass Guitar and Violin and piano-duettist in **Old Super**, with Hilary Farnworth on Bongos, Frank Farnworth was conscripted to operate my electronic synthesiser in the whistling wind of **The Ghost's High Noon**.

The concert grand piano hired for the occasion was a Bösendorfer. For all its beautiful tone, however, it had gremlins in it: the dampers kept sticking, with notes sounding on where they shouldn't have been. There was a real danger the recordings would be unacceptable. Fortunately, Michael got to work with Blutak and other Heath Robinson bodes and the sessions were saved - just!

Having kept recordings of one or two places where the piano messiness forced us to re-record a passage, the choir managed, quite rightly, to negotiate a reduction in the bill!

My basic concern was, would the choir do justice to themselves. It is not easy to bring to a recording the heightened sense that a concert, and an expectant audience, brings to a performance. In the event this did arrive. What seemed to inspire the choir as much as anything, was the wonder of turning up at St. John's to see, first Brian's big Mercedes van parked outside the church, then, once inside, microphones all over the place, including two suspended at a point high under the lofty ceiling, the high profile recording equipment set up in the vestry, plus, so that Brian and his two expert sons could see what was going on, a closed circuit television - quite a novelty in those days. The wondering "we're in the big league" effect did its work! Mind you, a certain choir member, who shall remain nameless, said Rossendale sang well because they knew how much they were paying for it all.

Be that as it may, I couldn't have hoped for a better response from the choir. To record 20 items in such a short time was - well, it's that professionalism again. From a personal point of view, it is great to have a tangible - audible - record of some of what the choir achieved during my time with them. After the scheduled recordings were finished, by early that Saturday afternoon, I asked Brian to use the spare time to record two other items. The first was the **Roman War Song**, and yes, Harry Hanson did get that top B flat - his presence is unmistakable! The other was **The Lark in the Clear Air** and it is interesting to note how close it is to the performance under father in the choir's 1974 LP. It's worth pointing out that by then a third of the singers had never sung under my father.

The good fortune of having the co-operation of a major recording company bore fruit in the sales of the

LP worldwide. It also received national radio's seal of approval with broadcasts on BBC Radio 2 (**There is Nothing Like a Dame**) and Radio 3 (**What Shall We Do With a Drunken Sailor**) which is something of a record.

Unfortunately, when in 1995 Chandos decided to issue it on CD they omitted from the booklet anything of the choir's history. It was as if I was still the conductor. To include no mention of my father's time, nor of its later flourishing under Beatrice Wade, was a mistake I felt really dismayed about and asked them to put right.

A choir member drove over to a business meeting in Leeds, Yorkshire. He finished the meeting and decided to return home via Bingley where he stopped and went in a pub for a bite to eat. To his horror he found that he had left his wallet and cheque book at home. He asked the landlord where the nearest Barclay's Bank was and went into the bank and asked to speak to the manager. He explained his dilemma and the manager asked where he banked and if he knew anyone in the branch. He supplied the name of the assistant manager and a telephone call was duly made. After a brief conversation the manager handed the phone over and said, *"He says that he's never heard of you but to be on the safe side he wants you to sing the first two lines of "O Praise the Lord."* Jack duly obliged and Les Warburton, a fellow choir member and assistant bank manager said, *"Morning Jack, you were flat"*. Jack duly got his money.

Chapter 21

Concert Highlights

For all the high profile events of TV and radio, recording and the like, a choir's main purpose as a community choir is concerts, bringing choral music's unique experience to live audiences. It's not easy to keep up the expected high standard concert after concert and I found that my own capacity to bring the best out of myself was much dependent on the extent to which the choir would lift itself to the required degree of commitment. Certain concerts stand out as giving that something really special, in keeping with Rossendale's highest traditions.

One of the most rewarding engagements we undertook was at Theatre Mold, North Wales, on October 9th, 1978, in a concert featuring the star Mezzo-Soprano Rhiannon Davies. It was a late booking, the organisers, I gathered, having been given back word by a famous Welsh choir who had been scheduled to appear. No better incentive could have been devised to put the Rossendale men on their mettle. Knowing from long experience how dead acoustically theatres can be, I asked (as I almost invariably did in any concert) that we should arrive there early enough for us to have a rehearsal so the choir could get used to the acoustics.

I look back on this concert as one of the choir's very best performances.

With Schubert's *Great is Jehovah* now in our repertoire Miss Davies kindly agreed to sing the solo line. Paradoxically, the way the choir was keyed up to give of its best produced one near disastrous moment. This was the first time we performed *The Ghost's High Noon* so I too was keyed up. When it came to the bass entry on the second verse I prepared myself by looking towards them a bar before they were due to come in. Such was the high tension between us the basses responded instantly and duly came in a bar too soon. Thankfully, both the tenors and Michael skipped a bar too and I don't suppose anyone noticed. As I said to Jean afterwards, "I don't dare scratch my nose these days or the choir will respond in some way!"

After the concert many expressed their warm appreciation. One elderly member of the audience singled me out, mentioning his enjoyment of the RMVC going back to Llangollen days. In a marked Welsh accent he delivered one of those remarks I continue to treasure: "You're not as good as your father yet; but the repertoier man, the repertoier"

Heptonstall in Yorkshire is another that sticks in memory. Also special was one at the Theatre of the Forest, Grisedale, on Cup-Final Day 1981

when, thanks to Arsenal's second goal in injury time, the match didn't go into extra time, otherwise I reckon I and the choir would never have got up there in time.

The concerts which brought the Ladies' and Men's choirs together were especially memorable. The concert in Oldham's Queen Elizabeth Hall on October 19th, 1980 was a new enterprise, being sponsored by the joint choirs.

The highlight of the joint choirs' outings was being guest artists in Black Dyke Bands Christmas Concert at Preston's Guild Hall on December 15th, 1979, in which each of our three choirs were featured. In the band and choir finale, Gordon Langford's *A Christmas Fantasy*, I couldn't resist reverting to an earlier role and singing along with the tenors.

But for me the most memorable concert was on September 8th, 1979 in Accrington Town Hall. On the face of it nothing special. But various factors came together to put the men into a state of enhancement which made them a joy to conduct. It was our first concert after the summer Holiday.

It's a fine hall to sing in and Accrington was just far enough away to avoid what I call the Home Ground Effect (I found some local concerts the most difficult to bring the choir up to their true prowess) and just near enough for the Well Show Em Effect to take hold.

In all my multifarious conducting work, professional and amateur, certain episodes, some short, some long, stand out in memory as representing the height of conductor-performer rapport. One such episode came during our performance, in the second half, of Gounod's dramatic *By Babylon's Wave*, when, as one, we gave a new performance. As we generated a new intensity in the words "Then shalt thou, desolate, forsaken, Be torn from thy fane and thy throne", fleeting eye-contact with one of the choir's oldest members brought an almost uncanny sense of harmony with the Rossendale of old.

A list is put on the notice board for members to tick off before a concert or a festival so that it is known who will be there. One member who is an ever present will never put his name on the list. When charged with this dereliction of duty he said, *"The only time I put my name down to go to a concert I got the runs and couldn't go."* He still refuses to defy the Gods.

Chapter 22

Professionalism

In Keith Daniels' *Men From the Valley* documentary for BBC radio Blackburn in 1978, there was a contribution from the brilliant international pianist John Ogden. He had been the accompanist at a Celebrity Concert in 1956 to Barbara Robinson (contralto) and Rodney Friend (Violin - also an artist of international renown) all of whom were then students at the Royal Manchester College of Music. The letter to Keith from New York by John Ogden (by now commanding a fee some 300 times what Rossendale had paid him) included the following:

"I remember my visit as a very happy occasion. One couldn't help marvelling at the sheer exuberance and professionalism of the choir and its conductor, Fred Tomlinson."

When professional musicians use the term 'professionalism' with regard to amateurs it's a rare commendation. It means they recognise and welcome (with relief, it's so rare!) the same approach to music-making as they have themselves. Nothing less than full commitment is good enough, to bring the music making and all the accompanying organisation to the fullest potential one is capable of; and to be able to bring out the best of oneself when it comes to performance.

No better example of Rossendale's professionalism comes to mind than the choir's performance and demeanour at the Royal Festival Hall, London in 1958 for the climax of the BBC's *Let The People Sing* competition. Though the fellow-finalists Bromley Male Voice Choir won the competition on the strength of the recordings made for the Knock-out stages, it was Rossendale who stole the show. Having conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra in my *Cinderella Waltz* early in the concert I enjoyed the rest of the concert standing in the wings. The BBC had chosen a piece to be sung by the joint choirs. I took delight in noting how the conductor Stanford Robinson, having soon got the measure of the situation, pointedly ignored the Bromley choir with heads in copies and directed his conducting at the Rossendale men, responding enthusiastically without copies.

Being able to rely on the lads' professionalism all through my years as conductor was a vital factor in bringing so much reward.

There was a feeling here and there, put into words one AGM, that as a professional I didn't understand those for whom this was just a leisure activity. True! if leisure activity means shunning the need for hard work and settling for second best.

Fortunately Ken Heys and others soon spoke up against that attitude confirming the dedication needed for the kind of choir Rossendale was and should continue to be.

Mind you some examples of unprofessionalism were not easy to eradicate, notably the tendency of some – infuriating to pros as it so obviously lets down their own friends – to turn up late to rehearsal when they could well have arrived on time. At my suggestion the choir established the post of Chairman to help take care of such disciplinary matters that should not be the concern of the conductor.

So Bill Torevell became the choir's first Chairman. So keenly did he respond that at the next practice the whole choir was assembled at 7.55pm ready for me to ascend the podium. This was so 'professional' it felt like Musicians' Union days again, having to await the stroke of 8.00pm before being allowed to start.

I can't claim we kept that up. My only answer to late starts was to keep going on longer at the end of the rehearsal, as if daring singers to leave before I'd finished.

Solo work and accompanying makes considerable demands on 'professionalism', and in other circles, having had to cope with the kind of 'amateurism' that is so hard to counter, we were most fortunate in having attracted soloists who could

keep up the high standards worthy of the choir.

A special word is due to Michael Farnworth, still serving the choir after his yeoman service under the Tomlinsons, father and son. 'Accompanist' is an inadequate word when so often the piano is a co-partner with the choir and soloist and at other times a featured soloist. It's a role that cannot be accomplished satisfactorily without the same perfectionist approach. Michael had to cope with the demands I would take for granted with professional colleagues. For instance, he had to learn different piano parts according to whether our flute was sharing the accompaniments. The more smoothly the instrumental contribution goes the easier it is to overlook the dedication and hard practice involved.

One other crucial point. I'd been used to amateur *singers* 'rising to the occasion' but my experience of amateur *players* was often of the reverse. Suddenly under the spotlight of the concert or recording, nerves would take their toll and the assured performance heard in rehearsal would no longer be there. This was never my worry with our Rossendale instrumentalists and it's good we have recordings to prove the point.

Chapter 23

FINALE

When I took over Rossendale I took no thought about how long this new assignment would last. The overriding consideration was that I would not retire until and unless a successor could be found able to carry on the same traditions and high standards. It was clear from the way Beatrice Wade had made such a success of the Ladies Choir that if she could take on the Male Voice Choir too this would be the ideal way to ensure its continuance.

By the end of 1980, with 14 concerts scheduled for 1981 and with pressure of my composition and other work building all the time, I began seriously to look to the possibility of handing over my directorship of RMVC. Indeed my problems were such that sometime during 1981 I asked Beatrice if she could take over some of the rehearsing. This she did, and so effectively that nothing was more inevitable than that she should be asked if she could take over the choir fully. It didn't seem realistic to expect her to accept other than in the short term, so it is a joy to see the three choirs flourishing under Beatrice 19 years later.

The 'take-over' came as smoothly as I could have wished. My final concert was in Derby's prestigious new Assembly Rooms on November 8th, 1981, in support of star turns Kathleen Lewis (Soprano) and that great popular pianist Semprini. I knew Semprini well, my orchestra having given several concerts with him since 1975 or so. The choir's first

engagement with these two artists was on the 27th September in Stockport Town Hall. For the Derby one I looked for a finale in which soloists and choir could all join. So **Funiculi, Funicula** was subjected to yet another adaptation. Kathy Lewis took on more or less what the Rossendale Ladies had sung, Semprini sat with Michael at the grand piano playing the top part of my piano-duet accompaniment, with Jane on flute part of the 'orchestra' too. Altogether it was a fine way to sign off. Much to my relief, the choir hadn't twigged that this was my last concert, Beatrice having agreed to take over for the last two concerts of the year. So my retirement came about accompanied by no fuss whatsoever - exactly the way I like it.

That I found myself writing at such length, and had retained so many clear memories of my six years as conductor shows just how important and rewarding a time it was.

Though I had known the choir all my life, it was not until I came to direct it myself, particularly when starting from scratch with new pieces, that I came fully to appreciate the depth of my father's commitment to his ideals. Insofar as I was able to hold those Rossendale characteristics, when our LP was made in 1981, a good third of the members had never sung under my father, this was only feasible because from the older members I could activate those especial qualities instilled by my father over so many years.

BEATRICE M. WADE

PRESENT CONDUCTOR
SINCE 1981





CHAPTER 24

Beatrice M. Wade

In 1981 Ernest's professional life caught up with him and he decided reluctantly that he must give up his position as conductor of the choir. Fortunately he gave the committee good notice of his intentions. He also, fortuitously guided them in the right direction towards a successor because in 1979, in an interview on Radio Blackburn, he said (of Beatrice Wade):

" A conductor who asks all the right things - She trains the voices correctly and above all she imparts the right sense of musicianship - it is a gift which very few people possess."

The committee put their thinking caps on. There were good links with the Ladies Choir, men had wives who sang with the Ladies, they had seen Beatrice in action at Festivals and they had heard her sing at earlier concerts and so it was soon agreed that Miss Beatrice M. Wade should be approached and asked if she would

take over as conductor of the R.M.V.C. To the benefit of all concerned Beatrice accepted the challenge.

Beatrice's father was a master baker who opened his first shop in Nelson. When the business grew they moved



to Accrington. Later in search of a less stressful life Mr.Wade moved to Morecambe to become the owner of a boarding house. It was here that Beatrice spent her early childhood and her father was able to follow more keenly his love of sport, in particular, football and he became a director of Morecambe Football Club. However

"Music is like poetry, when you sing, you paint a picture with your voice"
Beatrice Wade

the longing for their home town and friends became apparent and eventually they moved back to Accrington where he became an Alderman on Accrington Town Council and he was appointed secretary of Accrington Stanley F.C. Beatrice grew up with 'Sport' and 'Sportsmanship' and has followed all aspects during her life, so it is second nature for her to prefer working with the choirs as a 'Team', always insisting that she is only a 'cog in the wheel'.

Beatrice was encouraged to develop a wide range of interests. She became an outstanding swimmer and this helped to develop a good breathing technique which stood her in good stead when she began her singing career where breath control is so important.

Her parents insisted on that old fashioned virtue, "If you are going to do something then you do it to the best of your ability." On one occasion Beatrice had a singing engagement and felt under the weather. Her father said, "People are waiting to hear you sing, you cannot let them down." Another lesson learned, 'Always keep your word.' Beatrice sang at the concert. Shortly afterwards she fell ill with pneumonia.

On another occasion Beatrice arrived home after a very successful time at Morecambe Festival (over the years the only trophies she hasn't won there are for Tenor and Bass.) She was surprised at her mother's seeming lukewarm pleasure at her success.

"Always remember," her mother said, "No one can win if others are not prepared to take part and accept defeat." The lessons she learned from her parents are at the core of her being and still provide the precepts by which she still lives.

In her youth, valuable experience was gained in many ways. One must bear in mind that this was before the "Box" was installed in many homes and which now has the tendency to take over our leisure time. Beatrice was encouraged to follow a wide variety of activities.

She was a Sunday School teacher in the Primary Department, playing the piano and teaching little ones to sing, using actions that helped the music along. Piano lessons had started at the age of seven and seemed to go on forever. Beatrice admits readily that the music theory didn't go down as well as the actual playing but she wasn't allowed to give up.

A carrot was offered, if she kept up the theory, she could follow some other pursuit at the same time. Her choice was something quite different - Elocution - and what a wonderful teacher she found in Miss Wooler. Every lesson was of immense interest; she didn't just teach correct speech, but how to communicate in conversation. A subject would be chosen as you went in and off you had to go, talking for at least five minutes (Not easy). The meaning and spelling of difficult or unusual words had to be mastered, along with poetry, books, acting and memory development.

"He who sings, prays twice."
Saint Augustine

Much later, Beatrice came to understand the advantage gained in learning skills in the correct order: Piano, speech then singing - for a singer requires all three in order to communicate with the audience. Words should paint a picture through the music and they are vital to interpretation. If you don't understand the beauty of the words, how can you interpret the immense feeling which some pieces demand - They can - if you let them, touch your very soul.

Choral experience was gained when Beatrice joined Burnley Municipal Choir under their conductor, George Altham, who was a contemporary of Fred Tomlinson. In those days they performed most of the well-known oratorios. Learning to sing these great choruses was to prove invaluable when, much later in life, she took over the Rossendale Choirs. Her favourite works were: Haydn's "Creation", Mendelssohn's "Elijah", Vaughan Williams' "Sea Symphony" and especially "The Dream of Gerontius" by Elgar who is her favourite British composer. This latter performance will always remain memorable because she was chosen to sing in the semi-chorus. This was for Beatrice the icing on the cake. The contralto soloist was the renowned Marjorie Thomas who took time to thank everyone with a special word of praise to those in the semi-chorus - a fine example from a great singer, which did not go unheeded. Beatrice became an instant fan and when, years later, she took a pupil to the

Royal Academy, London, to audition, who should come along to have a chat but Marjorie Thomas, now one of the Principals at the Academy.

Beatrice spent a short time appearing in "Gilbert and Sullivan" shows but the interest wasn't there and so she spent a number of years in a "Concert Party" with other trained and experienced singers. Many of them had the same singing teacher, the accompanist was brilliant and so they all had the opportunity to perform to a high standard. They had a great time and gave, on average, one concert each week.

Beatrice then turned her attention to Music Festivals, which she enjoyed. The challenge of competing against others of high ability and seeking always to maintain a good standard took endless hours of practice and dedication.

It was through Festivals that Beatrice came to know, personally, many other competitors with similar interests and in time, lasting friendships were formed. Nineteen years ago she received, along with Doreen Hacking, an invitation to meet the Mayor of Rossendale, Mrs. Sheila Oldham, who said that it was her ambition to start a Music Festival in the Valley to commemorate her year in office. Beatrice accepted the challenge and all her experience of the Festival Circuit came to her aid and she and Doreen organised the first Music Festival in Rossendale. Thanks to her Festival friends and her boundless

"To sing well you have to have a deep understanding of the words so that you can express properly what they mean."
Beatrice Wade.

energy it was up and running less than twelve months after the meeting with the Mayor. The festival is still thriving and some of her friends still enter to this day and those who retired enter their pupils. This kind of support Beatrice finds a very humbling and at the same time, a very rewarding experience. Helping behind the scene are members of both the Ladies and Male Voice Choirs. Without their help it would be a very difficult, if not an impossible task.

Beatrice is often asked why she didn't become a professional singer. The answer is quite simple. She feels that she would have missed out on so much because family, friends and a host of interests have filled her life to overflowing.

When, in turn, both her parents succumbed to serious illness, Beatrice, without hesitation, gave up her musical career and devoted her time and energy to their welfare.

These were the dark days but as one door closed another opened. Two ladies whom she had never met came along and suggested that she help them form a choir. She will be eternally grateful to Doreen Hacking and Velma Hoyle for that initial visit. She was dumbfounded to realise that they were actually suggesting that she be the conductor. About fifteen ladies turned up to the first rehearsal along with the accompanist, Constance Heald. It is unlikely that Beatrice realised what new experiences were to

follow from that first rehearsal but they enabled her to put the sad years behind her and to start to look forward.

The transition was also helped because Beatrice began to teach again. She is very proud of the fact that three of her pupils were admitted to the National Youth Choir of Great Britain; each had to pass an entrance examination at the Cheetham School of Music, Manchester. Through this they gained valuable experience in choral singing at a young age and had the opportunity to travel extensively at home and abroad. One of her pupils graduated at the Royal Northern School of Music, Manchester, receiving her diploma from Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Kent. Five of her former pupils are now teachers of music in their own right and Beatrice still makes herself available to offer advice.

Beatrice has always described herself as a singer rather than a conductor, hopefully guiding singers into making the most of their talents. She is constantly amazed at the wealth of talent in the Valley. She often stresses that the voice is the only musical instrument not man-made and that it should be acknowledged as a precious gift. She feels that it is her duty to bring out the most in every voice so that each person can experience the thrill of a good performance. She endeavours to put all the singing techniques she has been taught over the years by

"It's getting too hot in here, I'll have to take something off."
Beatrice, to the accompaniment of applause.

professionals into each rehearsal. She is most insistent on good "vowel" sounds because they give the quality of tone necessary for a good performance.

The Ladies first engagement was at Haworth Art Gallery, Accrington, where Beatrice was due to give a recital. She thought that it would be a useful experience for people who had never stepped onto a platform before. Many festivals and concerts later they sang at one of the final concerts at Llangollen before some 3000 people without batting an eyelid.

Ernest Tomlinson mentioned earlier his association with Dr. Havelock Nelson, who, like himself, was a well-known composer and arranger. He, too, was a friend of Beatrice's up to his death and often sent her pieces he had arranged or composed for ladies voices. There was always a personal note written over the music. The last one she received just said, "To Beatrice - the happy conductor", what a tribute. Her own medical doctor and Havelock had been brought up as neighbours and had attended the same university and so Beatrice became the "messenger" between the two "doctors".

Yet another of Ernest's friends, Horace Tattersall, was well known to Beatrice. He once adjudicated her and, at the time, she was fully convinced that he was paying little attention to her singing because he seemed to write nothing down. When she received her adjudication there was just one word

written on it, "Bravo". Years later, when Beatrice was conducting the Ladies in rehearsal, Horace came several times to see how she was getting on, as did Fred Tomlinson. Their helpful advice, criticism and encouragement meant a great deal and they were able to guide her with their vast experience. It was most magnanimous of these two outstanding conductors.

When she accepted the position as conductor of the R.M.V.C. Beatrice admits on reflection that she didn't fully realise what she was about to take on board. For a woman to follow in the hallowed footsteps of two brilliant conductors and for her to tell men what to do - what an opportunity. How would the men react? Beatrice admits that she felt as though she was walking on eggshells in the beginning and that the feeling of trepidation and of butterflies in the stomach have never quite gone away. In spite of all the trials and tribulations and the occasional "tears at bedtime" she has never given in. She says it has been one of the most difficult, but at the same time, rewarding experiences of her life.

A soloist or a choir needs more than anyone, the services of a good accompanist and here Beatrice is the first to admit how much she has been blessed by pianists prepared to give their outstanding talents so willingly. The Ladies Choir's present accompanist is Renee Halstead, who came on a temporary basis, and has now been with the Ladies Choir for 15

"If you fail to prepare, Be prepared to fail"
Anon

years. Beatrice insists that Michael Farnworth who has now been with the Male Voice Choir for over thirty years since the age of 16 is the backbone of the organisation and she regards him as irreplaceable. Pianists and conductors must work together, in fact, so much so that you get under each other's skin and know exactly the mood and response of the choir and audience. It is this telepathy between everyone on stage that can create success. Michael and Beatrice work well together, because they both realise that only "Practice makes Perfect". Unfortunately, it is also a well-known fact that "Perfection" is always just out of reach – but they will keep on trying.

As a singer Beatrice has won over 200 prizes at Festivals throughout the North of England with numerous Rose Bowls and Major awards in Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Oratorio, Operatic and Lieder Classes. She has also appeared as guest soloist in Oratorio, Recitals and Concerts all over the North. In the light of her success with the choir it is worth looking at some of the comments of adjudicators on her solo performances because they point to the attributes which she brings to her preparation of the choir.

A singer who reveres words.....

A singer of poise and distinction....

*Creates a lovely atmosphere.
Lovely word colouring....*

A strong sense of scene and close

attention to what the composer asks for.....

Diction fine, complete phrases, pure and level tone....

Beatrice would always immerse herself in the words of a song, researching its background and looking at how the arranger expressed the words in his music. Adjudicators will later reflect how she brought her earlier experiences to the benefit of the choir.

In spite of Beatrice's early fears she and the choir developed a good working relationship. Beatrice, as part of the learning process, did what Mr. T. had done sixty years before; she took the choir back on the Festival trail. This time, however, there was a difference. Beatrice took three choirs with her. The third choir was the Festival Choir, which was formed shortly before Ernest Tomlinson resigned. He and Beatrice co-operated in the formation of the Festival Choir by the simple expedient of asking the Ladies and Male Voice Choirs if they would like to sing together.

Before suggesting the idea, Ernest had gone down to the ladies practice one Wednesday evening and unbeknownst to anyone, stood in the anteroom and listened.

"The first thing I heard was the ladies being put through their paces on voice production - vocal exercises rather than actual pieces (I would never have had

"Sing with your ears."

Beatrice M. Wade

Not one of those 'Don't try this at home' stories. Simply an instruction to be aware of the other parts of the choir and the people around you.

the nerve!). As the rehearsal proceeded I recognised in Beatrice Wade all the right priorities, things I'd always taken for granted to see under my father - perfect voice production, and the use of this to bring out the best of the interpretation being purveyed."

Ernest put the idea to the men and met with a mixed reception. Some were worried that it would mean deserting the male voice concept, others were concerned about the extra rehearsal time involved and whether it would mean the Ladies getting all the tunes and the glory. The attitude of the doubters in the end was, "Well just this once." Very few members of either choir made a decision not to join the Festival Choir.

The positive side, which in time won over the doubters, is the fact that the decision led to the birth of a very fine choir. In most amateur mixed choirs the ladies outnumber the men by at least two to one, often more. A choir with the men equalling the ladies makes for a glorious sound unattainable in the normal way. Furthermore the men in mixed choirs never seem 'match-fit' so to speak. They are inclined to sing, especially the tenors, as if they are of secondary importance to the ladies. Our tenors, used to taking the lead, contribute a confident sound often missing in normal mixed choirs.

Beatrice and Ernest's first objective was to make a good showing at the Bournville Festival. The three choirs

duly took first prize in their own classes. The Festival Choir, using its title for the first time, was singled out by the adjudicator, Derrick Cantrell, who commented favourably on the idea of combining female and male choirs and awarded the Rose Bowl to the Festival Choir.

Ernest continues: -

"I found it taxing enough taking on just one choir. So I have some idea of the dedication and sheer hard work needed to achieve great things with three choirs, as Beatrice Wade has done. It's good to be able to rejoice in the continuing success of the men's and ladies, choirs. But we should not underestimate the unique service the Festival Choir can make. To motivate singers committed to their chosen activity is a lot to ask. But it's because of the standards the ladies and men reach in their separate activities that gives a conviction and confidence about their joint performances which a normal mixed choir is rarely able to emulate. The Festival choir is unique in offering the ladies/men a balanced sound that is and always has been fundamental to the composer's inspiration in writing choral music."

Beatrice has always insisted that the Festival Choir is a bonus for the other two choirs. It provides a new dimension at both festivals and concerts. At festivals, in the early years it provided a new opportunity to pit themselves against different opponents and in joint concerts it

At a concert the choir was singing 'Nirvana' when there was a tremendous crash at the back of the hall caused by some staging falling over just as the choir was singing, *"The dumb Gods will be shattered, the temples old decay."*

gives the audiences a much wider choral repertoire.

Later, when it became apparent that there were occasions at Festivals when the three choirs would be competing against each other, there was a rethink. Nowadays the Festival choir only competes in mixed classes where the test piece is worth learning because it can be used on other occasions or where there is an own choice mixed class.

So far the Festival choir has achieved 25 first prizes at festivals such as Bourneville, Minsterley, Blackpool, Morecambe and Biddulph.

The Male Voice Choir had an immediate success at the Colne Festival. This was followed by one or two other wins but at Blackpool Music Festival in 1984 when they took first prize the adjudicator said, "It's good to see that Rossendale are back". This engendered the feeling that they were once again capable of competing – and giving a good account of themselves.

Beatrice's teaching was finally paying off. At Morecambe, where they won the Male Voice Class and the Evening Recital Class, the adjudicators used phrases which reflected in full measure what she had been trying to achieve: -

*Attack in full measure.... Superb opening.... Beautifully done
Convincing in style..... Effortless...
What musical point to the phrasing...
Detailed musical singing portraying*

outstanding choral discipline...

*True expertise - but boys! You should
CHERISH your conductor.*

The 'boys' returned to the rehearsal room knowing what Beatrice's reaction would be,
"Thank you all. You sang very well.
Let's get on.

Southport Music Festival in 1985 was the first of a number of occasions when the three choirs have swept the board. The civic reception was a very pleasant occasion.

Blackpool Music Festival was also the scene of a remarkable triumph. In 1995 the choirs won every choral trophy and if that is a record never likely to be bettered, Beatrice also won the hundred pounds first prize in the raffle. She later shared the money equally between the Ladies and Male Voice Choirs.

Morecambe Music Festival however provides the outstanding, even unique, example of continued excellence. Beatrice, before conducting the choirs, competed as a soloist at Morecambe Festival and she has her name inscribed on every trophy in the Ladies' Classes. The choirs in their turn have, over the years, won every choral class. The committee of Morecambe Festival wanted to make a special announcement about this achievement this year (2000) when RMVC won the Male Voice Class but Beatrice declined the offer.

At a mixed rehearsal Beatrice said,
"Right, let's try, 'Feelings'."
From the safety of the back row came the quip,
"Get your hand off my knee."

Unique in one man's view was the win in the Biddulph Festival. He described it thus. "We had won the Male Voice Class and were singing last in the evening Choral Class. By the time we made our way on stage the hall was packed because as every choir finished they went into the body of the hall and sat down. Indeed, it

was standing room only and it looked as if every conceivable space was filled. We started singing our group and I was gradually aware of a feeling of emotion coming from the audience. The air seemed to be charged with excitement and when we finished our final piece the place erupted. It was a wonderful moment."



Choirs earn civic salute

Choirs sang for their supper at a civic reception in the Town Hall, Rawtenstall, last week!

After their outstanding success at the Southport Music Festival, when the Rossendale Festival, Male Voice and Ladies'

Clegg, arranged a reception to congratulate them on their achievement.

And, after the presentation of a framed certificate on behalf of all the people of Rossendale, the Festival Choir sang Sing and the male Voice Choir sang Two Roses.

Councillor Clegg is pictured handing the

certificate to Miss Beatrice Wade (conductor). With them from left are: Mavis Bell and Michael Farnworth (accompanists), Ernest Schofield (chairman), Harold Dugdale (president), Doreen Hacking and Richard Morgan (secretaries). (C5670)

CHAPTER 25

Traveller's Tales

Isle of Man Music Festival 1992

When the choir were invited to compete in the Centenary Festival, they, and the Ladies Choir accepted with alacrity. The men in particular wanted to overturn a defeat inflicted on them by a Manx Choir at Southport the previous year. The deciding factor was, as always, what was the test piece. It turned out to be

The men had thoroughly enjoyed the weekend, not just because of the singing but because it gave them the opportunity to get together on an informal basis as well. They returned to Rossendale resolved to repeat the experience and, in 1993, they accepted an invitation to compete in Cardigan.



a Russian folk song, "Stenka Razin." There were two problems, firstly part of the song was in Russian and secondly the piece had a solo lead. The first obstacle was cleared fairly easily when it turned out that one of the choir spoke Russian and the second problem was resolved when Beatrice made the solo voice into a quartet.

The choir duly took their revenge by winning both the Male Voice Class and the Evening Recital Class. A member of one of the other competing choirs commented, "*It's the first time our choir has been awarded 91 marks and come third.*"

The Festival Choir also competed in the Mixed Class and having sung they were making their way off stage when the adjudicator's assistant asked the choir secretary to go and speak to him. Off Doreen trotted and returned looking somewhat perplexed because the adjudicator had requested to be allowed to conduct the choir at the end of the class. At the end of the class the adjudication took place and the choir were placed second. They then dutifully filed back on stage and he conducted them. An experience he described as, "*Like driving a Rolls Royce.*"

It rather begs the question doesn't it?

Cardigan Eisteddfod 1993

Although the Eisteddfod was on at Cardigan the hotel the choir was to stay at was in Tenby which is about 30 minutes coach drive away from the contest. This was as nothing compared with the drive down on Friday, the day before the competition. In other circumstances it would have been described as a beautiful day, the sky was blue and the sun shone. Unfortunately it shone on the coaches taking the choir to Tenby. The men sweat, the ladies perspired and they eventually arrived.

Chorally it was not a success. None of the Rossendale choirs succeeded in attracting the attention of the adjudicators. The Festival Choir was thought to have a reasonable chance because there were only two choirs in the Mixed Class. The other choir was from Australia and, having heard them in rehearsal, the mixed choir knew that they had a fight on their hands. Beatrice thought they were brilliant. At the end of the class they heard the adjudicator lament the fact that there was no Welsh choir in the class to maintain the standard required by the festival. He then refused to award a first prize and he awarded second place to the Australians with Rossendale third.

The weekend was rescued by the hospitality of Tenby Male Voice Choir and the beautiful weather. Tenby entertained the choirs with Sunday lunch after which the choirs sang together before returning to the hotel to climb aboard the coaches and head

for home through the delightful countryside.

At Sunday breakfast one of the men was eating a solitary breakfast and looking somewhat downcast. Two of his friends sat beside him and asked what his problem was. "You know the sing-a-long we had last night on the terrace? Well, at 2.15am somebody complained and the manager came along and told us off and sent us packing." Commiserations were offered but since they'd been kept awake by the din it was somewhat half hearted. "The trouble is", he complained, "I can't find anyone else who will admit to being there".

Monchengladbach, Germany September 1994

The Rossendale Ladies Choir received an invitation from Margret Esser, the conductor of Frauenchor Grenzland, a Ladies Choir from Monchengladbach. She had heard them sing at a concert in Bocholt which is Rossendale's twin town. She invited them to spend a weekend in Germany and share a concert with them. The Ladies, however, were committed to visiting Bocholt and so Beatrice suggested that the Male Voice secretary should write to Frau Esser asking if the men could act as replacements.

The letter was duly written and a favourable correspondence followed which resulted in an invitation being issued for the choir to visit Germany on the first weekend in September 1994. It was decided that the choir would follow previous mini-breaks and

It is vital to have enthusiastic members in the choir, particularly if they're good at fund raising. One such is Ian Walkden who has a penchant for running quizzes. Occasionally he gets his tongue in a knot and on one famous quiz night he announced,
"Question 18 had 6 parts and here are the 7 answers."

booked into the Queen's Hotel in Monchengladbach. This avoided placing too much strain on our hosts and it also meant that the men stayed together as a group.

Rossendale as they set off for Hull before travelling overnight on North Sea Ferries. It is rumoured that some of them slept on the way over. They were received with great friendliness



The programme included a number of German pieces, which were learned phonetically under the guidance of Frank Farnworth who has visited Bocholt on a number of occasions and had decided to learn the language. The details of the programme were sent off to Margret Esser because they arrange programmes in Germany with a different regard for which pieces fit together. The choir left Beatrice and Margret to sort it out but there was no real disagreement.

Homework done the choir were picked up by Fraser Eagle and received a farewell wave from the Mayor of

by their hosts who gave them a meal before escorting them to their hotel to prepare for the first concert at the Stadthalle, the main concert hall in Monchengladbach. There was a capacity audience and the choir performed well.

On Sunday after breakfast the choir were given a tour around Monchengladbach and Wickrathberg before being given a meal, the highlight of which was an array of cakes and gateaux which filled six trestle tables to overflowing. Seconds and thirds were the order of the day. In the evening the choir gave a second

concert with Frauenchor. The venue was a pretty little Rococo-style church in Wickrathberg next to the room where the Ladies rehearse. The comments were very pleasing:

There is not a choir in Germany which could have sung Schubert's "Du Bist die Ruh" as we have heard it tonight.

Miss Wade has opened up a new dimension to the choir's performance and its reverent and beautiful bel canto rendering of Schubert's "Sanctus" visibly moved the audience to tears and tumultuous applause.

All too soon Monday morning arrived and the choir set off for home waved off by members of Frauenchor who had already accepted an invitation to visit Rossendale in 1995

Visit of Frauenchor Grenzland September 1995

When the choir returned from Germany they were determined to make the visit of their newly acquired friends a memorable one. They asked their future guests what they would like to see and the favourites turned out to be the Lake District and York.

On the first day of the visit some of the men drove over to Hull to greet the Ladies as they stepped ashore and they escorted them to Rawtenstall where they were served lunch by choir members at the rehearsal room in the Unitarian Church.

After lunch they were taken by the scenic route over the moors to the

Friendly Hotel in Burnley so that they could have a rest and prepare for the concert at All Saints High School, Rawtenstall with Stacksteads Band and Rossendale Ladies who came to offer their support in the mixed pieces. A capacity audience was very appreciative of the varied programme and Frauenchor Grenzland came in for unstinted praise.

On Sunday the men hired a coach and accompanied their guests on a tour of the Lake District. The weather continued to be kind and apart from Doug who stepped back to take a better photograph and fell in a duck pond, a good time was had by all. On their return to the hotel the men had arranged a buffet dance in the hotel ballroom which everyone enjoyed.

The following morning many of the choir went to the hotel to see their guests off and to wish them a safe journey home via York

Newquay, Cornwall 1996

At a Friday night rehearsal the choir had a visit from Alan Taylor, the conductor of Newquay Male Voice Choir. He came originally from Bury and was visiting relatives in the area and he asked if he could listen to the rehearsal. He was made welcome and that was the beginning of a friendship that led to an invitation to spend the weekend in Newquay as guests of N.M.V.C.

With the help of Alan and his wife Katherine the weekend was planned in some detail. It was one of the

busiest that the choir has ever undertaken. They arrived at the Victoria Hotel, Newquay and after the evening meal they started off with a Sing-a-long with their hosts at the hotel. On Saturday they journeyed to Truro where they gave a recital at the Cathedral before sailing down the River Fal to Falmouth. Returning to the hotel they had evening meal before changing into their uniforms to walk across the road to give a concert with Newquay at the Wesleyan Church.

On Sunday they took the coach to St. Erth to board the train which took them on the coastal route to St. Ives for an afternoon of sightseeing before returning to the hotel for a meal. After the meal the choir set off for their final concert at Wadebridge. The concert was again shared by our hosts who paid the choir a great complement by going round to the back of the audience to listen to the choir perform. The choirs shared the platform at the end of the concert to sing "Gwahoddiad" which Rossendale had learned for the occasion. Members of other choirs sitting in the audience were invited up on stage to join in. A great night.

The week-end had been blessed with glorious weather and on Monday morning the choir and an inflatable sheep which appeared in a number of photographs of the holiday, duly wended their weary but highly satisfied way home. By common consent the most memorable part of the visit was the recital in Truro Cathedral. It was a profoundly moving experience and reduced at least one listener to tears.

Monchengladbach Revisited September 1997

The R.M.V.C. were invited to revisit to Germany shortly after the Ladies returned home and they readily agreed. They got down to serious rehearsal of new repertoire heartened by a letter from Margret Esser who wrote, *"I have told the conductors of the two German choirs who are appearing in the concert not to sing Schubert because they cannot do it as well as you."*

In September the choir set off for Germany travelling via Zeebrugge so that they could give a short recital in Brugge Cathedral and also do a spot of sight-seeing before travelling on to Monchengladbach. The Cathedral proved to have a tremendous echo which, thanks to Beatrice's anticipation, they managed to incorporate into the performance by letting the echo catch up after every phrase.

By Friday afternoon the choir had settled into the Queen's Hotel once more. The Ladies came to claim them and take them off to a reception, which occupied the rest of the day. Saturday was the day of Princess Diana's funeral and so, before going to meet their friends they found a delightful little garden, where, at the appropriate time, they stood in silence before singing "Sunset Poem".

The afternoon was free and they took the opportunity to take in the local sights and to buy gifts. In the evening they travelled to the Stadthalle for the concert which was a great success.

"If I'd known it would be like this I would have joined a Rugby Club."

A penitent confessing after the StadtHalle concert
and subsequent celebration in Monchengladbach.

Via their interpreter they requested permission to sing a tribute to Princess Diana and sang "Sunset Poem" and the Welsh hymn "Gwahoddiad". The audience was emotionally responsive to both pieces.

On Sunday the Ladies took the choir to the village of Monschau in Nordeifel National Park. A great experience enjoyed by everyone. They returned to Wickrathberg for a meal, presentations and singing.

Monday morning saw the choir en route for Ostend, waved off by their inexhaustible German friends. Ostend provided a last chance to buy gifts and to admire the sights before going on to Zeebrugge to catch the ferry home. The choir are due to return to Monchengladbach in 2001.

In all these travelling stories no praise is too high for Beatrice. She readily admits that she is not the best traveller in the world. Imagine someone who packs and repacks her bag, locks and relocks her front door to make sure the alarm is on and you may have some idea of Beatrice setting off on a trip. Yet she offers her full support and advice for each journey as well as doing the difficult things like rehearsals and programme preparation. It may not be emphasised enough, but before the choir goes anywhere Beatrice is the first essential requirement.

Travelling and room arrangements are usually quite amicable affairs but on this occasion one of the members complained that he had spent a sleepless night because his room-mate

snored. Someone volunteered to change places and, aided by a set of earplugs donated by a friend, spent a peaceful night and indeed overslept. The original sufferer reckoned that he had another sleepless night because he could still hear the snoring through the wall

Church Stretton Shrewsbury 1998

The choir received a request via one of its members to give a concert in Church Stretton. In terms of time it was at the extreme edge for a one-day concert and so enquiries were made about staying over and returning the following day. John Griffith's, the organiser, was extremely helpful and arranged B & B accommodation in the locality. Each member had agreed to pay their share.

The choir set off early on Saturday morning accompanied by Carol Whaley, a soprano who had sung with them on a number of occasions. Shrewsbury was the first stop for a spot of sightseeing where Beatrice was approached by a young girl who asked her for money. Loathed to hand over money Beatrice took her to MacDonald's and bought her a beefburger "No thankyou" said the girl, "I'm a vegetarian". – a one all draw.

The coach then went on to Church Stretton where John Griffith and his band of volunteers were waiting. They were driven to their accommodation to change into uniform before being taken to the "Plough Inn" where a

*"The notes are correct, even if they are not in the right order."
Any part practice.*

meal had been arranged by the choir. After what proved to be a hearty repast they strolled down to the Community Hall for the concert.

The audience was very responsive and after the concert many of them stayed on to share a social evening with the choir. As the stamina of individual members waned they were gathered up and driven back to their rooms. The following day the choir set off back to the Valley. They had made many new friends and they have been invited to return. The journey home was broken by a visit to Ironbridge.

It would be almost impossible and somewhat tedious, to make a list of all the concerts which the choir has given. For example, between 1982 and 1989 the choir gave 64 concerts, in spite of a committee ruling in 1978 that the choir should accept no more than two concerts in any one month. This number does not include, of course, the three or four festival visits each year which have brought the choir, under Beatrice's guidance, 25 first prizes. For the statistically minded here are a few numbers to conjure with:

The biggest live audience was 37,000 at the evening concert after the 1954 Llangollen win.

The smallest audience was 22 at Heptonstall when they forgot to advertise the concert.

The Radio and Television audiences must be counted in hundreds of thousands.

The highest concert (20,000ft) to a captive audience must go to the rendition of "Two Roses" which the choir gave at the request of the pilot on the way to the Hague Festival.

The lowest should perhaps go to the impromptu rendition of "Please don't burn our toilet down", given down in the lavishly equipped toilets at Amsterdam Airport. The choir had sensed that it was acoustically a good place to sing and set out to prove it

The longest engagement must go to Dundee Lane Church where the choir sang for 25 years between 1953 & 1977

The choir was singing at a concert at St. James the Less, Rawtenstall, in aid of the Restoration Fund. The announcer turned to Father Lupton and congratulated him on the fine job the restorers had done.

"Who did it?" he asked, "I'd like to give them a call to see if they can come along and give the choir a face lift."

There was a pause while Father Lupton looked the men over.
"You couldn't afford it." was his verdict.

CHAPTER 26

So, You Would Like A Concert

Apart from the 'Big Occasions' the choir does a number of concerts each year in the North West. The requests come in from Churches, Charities, Local Authorities etc. and the requests have to be considered carefully because the organisers, in their enthusiasm, do not always think things through as they should. Where possible the Secretary will visit the venue and discuss the concert and try to get answers to some pertinent questions.

1. *Is there a piano? Is it in tune? Where is it? Ideally the answer would be " Yes, it's tuned regularly and it will be put exactly where you want it. Sadly, on occasion, the piano is half a tone down and three keys don't play and in any case it's upstairs in the balcony. The classic piano story concerns the grand piano used during the recording of the last C.D. 'Celebration'. When the first session was underway it was found that one or two of the base notes were sticking slightly. The problem was overcome but before the second session four weeks later the Secretary telephoned the studio where the piano was housed to ask if the piano could be checked and offering to send a piano tuner. This request was queried because the piano had not been used since the recording. The sticking keys were mentioned and brought forth the reply, "Why, will you be using those notes again?" For those venues without a piano, do not despair, the choir has a keyboard.*

2. *Is there enough space for the choir? It is difficult to picture the amount of space a group of 40 plus men with piano and conductor can take up. Even after a visit things can go wrong; at Mytholmroyd the choir arrived to find that their space had been taken over by the Harvest Festival and they gave the concert surrounded by fruit and vegetables.*

3. *Is there a toilet? Beatrice's first question - and a place for her to change and for the choir to hang their hats and coats. At one delightful venue the organisers put the men in the social area - with a bar- and kept it open.*

4. *What's the parking like? For local concerts the choir travel by car and it's most disconcerting to find the venue guarded by double yellow lines.*

5. *Will there be an interval? The shape of the concert depends upon whether or not there is a space in the middle. Church pews, for example, are not ideal places to spend two hours without a chance to stand, stretch and try to rub some circulation back into to offended areas. However it's your concert and we'll do whatever you ask.*

After the visit the request is taken back to the committee. Beatrice and Michael consult their diaries because their presence is a must at any concert. A check-up call is also made to the secretary of the Ladies Choir in case Beatrice's diary is not up to date. The list is put on the notice board to make sure the men are available. All on board? O.K. we'll come. It is assumed that the concert will be properly advertised. Sadly that is not always the case. At Heptonstall the choir gave a concert where they outnumbered the audience by two to one because no one knew they were coming. A great pity because the choir gave a great concert.

Take heart you would be concert givers. Sometimes the choir decides to give a concert because it offers something a little out of the ordinary. This was certainly the case when the choir went to Church Stretton, Shrewsbury

CHAPTER 27

Or learn to sing and give your own concerts

You have probably gone through the stage of singing in the bath. The shower's all right too but the water can spray into your mouth at a climatic moment.

Are you through Karaoke Stage 1 and Stage 2? You know, first you sit in the pub and you listen to other hopefuls perform and you think, "I could do that - and better". Then you summon up your nerve and have a go. Sheer bliss! Move over Pavarotti.

Your best move now that you have proved to yourself that you can sing is to join a choir, preferably one of the Rossendale choirs, I'll leave you to decide which one because your voice needs training and its more fun learning and singing together.

You will find that singing is a whole body exercise if you want to do it properly. Along with your colleagues you'll be reminded how to stand comfortably, how to breathe - and when. How to appreciate the marriage of words and music and a number of other suggestions all aimed at helping you to produce a better sound.

Learning in a group is fun and the companionship is great, everyone in each part is on hand to help although they can get too enthusiastic. Bill Torevell, late chairman of the choir had a most expressive elbow for anyone foolish enough to stand near him and sing a wrong note.

If you decide to go solo instead then you need a voice coach because even

top professionals go back to their teachers on a regular basis to make sure that they are doing everything right. While you're about it get an up to date book on singing so that you can check upon what your teacher is saying.

The problem is that having read the book and memorised all the techniques you cannot be certain that you are singing as well as you should. That is where Beatrice is at her formidable best. Over the years of training with good teachers and of singing with great success at festivals she has acquire an encyclopaedic knowledge of composers, arrangers, of sounds and poetry and has the rare ability of knowing what a piece of music requires, how to get the correct vowel sounds and how to get the choir to sing with one voice.

It cannot be put into words. Although there are books on voice production it is an inherent gift, a talent, which cannot be passed on. Fred Tomlinson had it and Ernest, his son, called him a genius. Beatrice has it and unfortunately it cannot be bottled and so another chance to make a fortune goes up in smoke.

Just remember that singing should be for fun and pleasure not only for yourself but also for your audience. Indeed if you are singing for others you should feel duty bound to give of your very best and that means getting all the help you can. Keep on singing.!

CHAPTER 28

Christmas Time (Mistletoe and Wine)

The place of Christmas in the choir calendar has always been significant but it has changed and developed over the years. In the early days there was the Christmas Party for the members to look forward to. The Natterers played a key role in raising the money and providing the food. The choir would also join in the singing of Christmas Carols round the Cenotaph, in Rawtenstall, usually led by Fred Tomlinson.

to cover a wide range of Christmas Music. There are also special occasions as in 1992 when the choir were invited to sing at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester for a BBC Radio Broadcast. Again in 1997 the choirs were invited to sing with The Greater Manchester Police Band at Manchester Cathedral for their annual Christmas Charity Concert. One year later the choirs and band shared a platform at Accrington Town



After the choir sang outside Mr. T's house to welcome him home from his eye operation, it became the custom to walk up to his house after the Carol Singing and to sing outside the house before being invited in for biscuits and coffee. Later, following his death, the men sang in The Centre at Rawtenstall and latterly at Asda and made a collection for charity.

Christmas is also the time when the choir is in great demand for concerts. Under Beatrice these have become great occasions. With the Ladies Choir and a Brass Band it is possible

Hall. The demand for tickets was such that for the following year the concert was moved to a bigger venue.

A great deal of credit for the development of the Christmas Concerts must go to Beatrice Wade. She firmly believes that the choirs should perform to the largest possible audience to make the rehearsals and performances of the choirs worth while. At the same time she does not decry any engagement and she gives as much commitment to conducting outside Asda as she does in Manchester Cathedral.

Church carol cheer

★ THE sounds of Christmas rang through Christ Church, Walmersley, on Friday night.

★ The Rossendale Male Voice and Rossendale Ladies Choir took the lead in a carol service at the church which ran the gamut from Away in a Manger to White Christmas.

★ Pictured (top): Parishioners join in the singing.

★ Centre: Sorting out the music for the service. From left: Lynne Johnson, Michael Farnworth (accompanist), Beatrice Wade (conductor), Joe Stanhope, (secretary, male voice choir), the Rev Brian Stannard, Doreen Hacking, (secretary, ladies choir) and Renee Halstead (accompanist).

★ Bottom: The Rossendale Male Voice Choir and Rossendale Ladies Choir.



CHAPTER 29

Internal Celebrations

In the Rule Book there is only one indication that the founding members thought about rewarding loyalty. "Any member who completes 40 years with R.M.V.C. will cease to pay the subscription fee. The fee at that time was three old pence per week and it must have proved to a tremendous incentive to the men to keep attending rehearsals.

In 1945 the committee decided to award shields to any member who had served in the choir for 21 years. The end of the war probably prompted the move rather than waiting for the more traditional 25 years.



Ernest Schofield the current chairman and a member for 50 years, giving Norman Naylor his 60 year trophy.

Beatrice giving Harold Dugdale his award for 50 years service. Harold was the sixth President of the choir.



Harold Dugdale handing Bill Torevell his award for 50 years service. Bill was the first Chairman of the choir when the post was created in 1977.

Since then it has been necessary to recognise and reward members who have spent most of their adult lives in the choir. The photographs show some of the recipients receiving their awards:



George Caygill being congratulated for 50 years service in the choir. The five members at the front had a combined total of over 200 years service.



Beatrice M. Wade being presented with a certificate from her choirs for her dedication on their behalf.

CHAPTER 30

75th Anniversary Celebrations 1924 – 1999

The choir decided to celebrate its 75th. Birthday in style. In fact Beatrice had set the ball rolling in 1974 when she suggested that they ought to celebrate in 1994 for their 70th. year but it sometimes takes a little while for them to get up to speed and it was not until 1998 that plans were set in train to have a party for their 75th. anniversary.

In the end it turned into one of the longest running birthday parties of all time and contained most of the elements you have read about in previous chapters. It began with a long standing engagement at the local cricket club and was followed by the first organised event, "Songs of Praise," held at Goodshaw Church, Crawshawbooth, because that was where the Dayne Layrocks used to worship and also where Goodshaw Glee Union started from. Rossendale Ladies Choir and the choir from Crawshawbooth Primary School also took part.

Two weeks later came the first Celebrity Concert with Alwyn Mellor, soprano, from the Welsh National Opera as the guest artiste. Alwyn is a local girl although she now lives in Cardiff. The concert, at the Public Hall, Haslingden, where the Civic Dignitaries gathered to pay tribute to the choir after their 'hat trick' at Llangollen, was a great success and set the celebrations off to a flying start.

It would be appropriate at this point to include a comment by Ernest Tomlinson who attended the Alwyn Mellor concert.

" One thing I have long said about choral music; it's the only leisure activity where the merest amateur can perform alongside the greatest without any feeling of inadequacy. It's not just being in the same team as Len Hutton or Tom Finney, it, for some glorious moments, lets you perform at the same height of achievement.

There could be no better demonstration of Rossendale Male Voice Choir's dedication to the highest standards, than the concert in honour of the choir's 75th. Anniversary in Haslingden Public Hall on April 25th 1999. First, the choir itself gave top line performances of all their items. I was particularly moved by their rendering of my 'I Gave My Love a Cherry' arrangement, as if revealing to the composer aspects he was experiencing for the first time.

But, secondly, the concert was particularly demanding by way of learning new pieces, even singing with German and Italian words in support of the guest artist Alwyn Mellor.

Then, thirdly, the event called for a great deal of forethought to make sure that the presentation - stage settings, entries and exits etc. were of the highest standards.

It's that word 'professionalism' again. If you do a job at all you do it properly. It gave me for one, every confidence that despite the ever - changing circumstances of today's world, the unique achievements that have been, and are, Rossendale's, will continue into the foreseeable future."

A well deserved tribute at this point to Mary Stansfield and Audrey Wolfenden who helped to create the atmosphere at the concerts by doing floral arrangements at the various venues and also to Pat Farrington and May Nuttall who were ever present at the concerts and made themselves available to do anything that needed doing.

As a thank you to the children's choir for their help in the 'Songs of Praise' concert, the men offered to sing at a school concert in the school hall. The resulting concert was packed with parents who were far more interested in listening to the children than to the men but they managed to get a little of the limelight back by joining with the children in Ernest Tomlinson's arrangement of "Sing" at the end of the concert.

In May the choir entered Morecambe Festival without winning although in the Evening Recital Class the choir experienced one of those rare moments where the occasion takes over and you can feel the audience responding and you know everything is right. If it could be bottled it would make somebody a fortune.

The second Celebrity Concert took place in the Trinity Baptist Church,

Bacup with Janet Lancaster, who was a contemporary of Alwyn Mellor at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. She lived there and later in Rochdale and has now returned to live in her native Rossendale Valley. Along with her professional engagements, she is now following in Beatrice's footsteps teaching singing.

At the beginning of the second half of the concert Janet was asked if she would stand slightly to the left because someone in the balcony had said that she could not be seen too clearly. Janet duly moved and started to apologise. Then she looked up and said, "Goodness me! it's my Mum and Dad." Another capacity audience and another great concert.

By this time the choir felt that it could walk on water and in September they set out on their most ambitious plan. The Frauenchor Grenzland Ladies Choir came for a visit and so the men set out to entertain them and to put on a Buffet Dance as a 75th. Birthday Party to which they invited all past members as well as the Rossendale Ladies and Frauenchor.

Our German Friends were given lunch before being escorted to the hotel in Burnley and in the evening were the celebrity guests at the concert held in their honour at St. Mary's Church, Rawtenstall with Rossendale Ladies and the 2nd Rossendale Scout Band. After the concert and another great night, the ladies returned to their hotel to prepare for their visit to Chester the day after. On their return they joined the other 200 guests to celebrate

R.M.V.C. birthday. On Monday the men went over to Burnley to see their guests off on their journey home via York.

Two weeks later the choir fulfilled an engagement to sing at a Festival of Music in Cloughton, West Lancashire. The outstanding memories of the concert are probably the buffet, which was served in a Marquee at the interval, with wine and the singing of Schubert's "Sanctus."

In October the choir staged its last two Celebrity Concerts. The first, with William's Fairey Band had been arranged for over a year and went very well but the second came somewhat out of the blue when Alan Taylor, conductor of Newquay Male Voice Choir visited the choir at its rehearsal room to ask if the men would give a concert with Newquay when they came up to Southport on holiday at the end of October.

The choir accepted the extra challenge and arranged the concert at Longholme Methodist Church in Rawtenstall. They helped Alan to work out an itinerary, which would allow the N.M.V.C. to tour round Clitheroe and other pretty spots in

Lancashire before finishing up at the "Jesters" for a slap-up buffet before the concert. Unfortunately one of their coaches broke down and they arrived with barely enough time to snatch a bite to eat before driving to the concert. The concert started ten minutes late but the singing, particularly the combined pieces made up for it. Alex Cronshaw, a young flautist, brought a delightful contrast to the programme. After the concert the choirs returned to the "Jesters" for a final get together before the guests set off for Southport.

The year was rounded off at three Christmas Concerts. The first was at Manchester Cathedral with The Greater Manchester Police Band and Rossendale Ladies, the second was at Walmsley Road Church with the Ladies and the last one saw the choirs being reunited with the Police Band at the Civic Theatre in Oswaldtwistle. All three were sung before capacity audiences and were a great reward for the six weeks of rehearsal that preceded them.

It was a fitting end to a wonderful year. To quote Beatrice once again, *"You've worked hard, you've sung well, now let's get on."*

During a rehearsal of, 'Sweet Lass of Richmond Hill', the basses accompany the tenors melody line with a Bm Bm sound. Beatrice stopped the choir and asked the basses to sing more quietly. The rehearsal restarted only to stopped almost immediately for Beatrice to ask where the tenors were.

"We were listening to the Bums" came the reply.

“We’ll take an interval now, Gentlemen”

This is a good time to look back on my stewardship of the choir. When I took over, I was apprehensive to say the least. We have enjoyed wonderful times, great concerts and successful festivals.

The Gentlemen are always totally dedicated to give of their best and there have been times when I have been reduced to tears by the beauty of their performance.

In the eyes of Fred Tomlinson the RMVC were his “boys”, to Ernest, they were his “lads”. To me they are my “gentlemen” in every sense of the word. Whoever has the pleasure and honour to stand in front of Rossendale Male Voice Choir in future years can rest assured it will be – for them – the thrill of a lifetime. The choir will never end – music, voices and harmony will always sound throughout the Valley.

Now let’s get on, we have work to do.

Beatrice M. Wade

CHAPTER 31

The Final Strands

Programme Building

Programme design could be a fascinating study in its own right. It should always start with questions: -

What material is up to concert standard? Beatrice always tries out possible pieces to make sure. If polishing is required it's done.

Is there a balanced choir? Holidays and illness take their toll and if for example, someone is missing from the quintet in 'Stenka Rasin' the performance suffers.

What soloists are available?

What is the venue? Churches, school halls, concert halls, will each have its own cross section of the public to be catered for.

Given satisfactory answers to the above the planning can start. In the early days Mr. T. had a limited repertoire at his disposal and his programmes reflect the fact. In 1933 the choir gave two concerts on the same day at St. Annes. In the afternoon they sang eight pieces interspersed with six pieces by soloists, a violin solo and two piano pieces. Interestingly two of the choral pieces were 'The Herald' which featured in their first victory at Llangollen in 1952 and 'Lock the door Lariston' which gave them an early festival success. In the evening there were seven choral pieces, seven solo

or duet items and the violin and piano soloists. People who attended both concerts would not have heard one repeated item.

In later years Mr. T. developed a rapport with the audiences and he spent time talking to them describing the items and getting the audience into the right mood to appreciate them. There is no record of how Fred set about creating a programme. Certainly there is light and shade, humour and drama but running through it all are his efforts to educate the listeners in the detail of each piece. As Ernest found out to his cost, two identical concerts conducted by father and son differed in time by some thirty minutes.

Ernest has very clear ideas on programme-building. He believes that, too often, musical directors of vocal or instrumental ensembles, large or small, and indeed soloists, cannot overcome their desire to present the kind of music they specialise in and are highly skilled at, and that this may lead to a sameness in presentation.

In mixed programmes this can be very effective but in a full concert, especially to the less specialised listener, the undoubted attractiveness of the offerings begins to pall. This is particularly relevant to a male voice choir, where the basic sound is at a low register and chords are all closely spaced. Ernest resolved to introduce

a greater variety in the repertoire items chosen. Remember that he was already committed to bringing in six or seven extra items to fill in the time which his father spent talking to the audience. He arranged some 'fun' items for the choir, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 'The Hippopotamus Song', 'Belle Marguerite' and others.

Some choirs prefer to sing unaccompanied. It is a paradox of the musical scale that the notes a choir (or string orchestra or brass group) tunes to naturally are slightly but significantly, different from those played on a keyboard. This is why Barber Shop groups cannot use accompaniments. Ernest believes that accompaniments provide contrast not least because of the difference it makes to unison singing. The choir should listen closely when not singing to absorb the message it brings. This message is echoed by Beatrice Wade who asks the choir to listen to the introduction to a piece because it sets the tone of the rest of the music. Ernest further emphasised the importance he placed on the accompaniment by introducing flute, guitar, bass guitar, violin and percussion instruments at appropriate times. He is positive that this enrichment also provides a valuable contrast, which makes the items that are the choir's chosen forte even more effective.

The skills acquired in studying the craft of composition, the shape of a piece of music, where to place the tune in the structure of the piece so that the audience is held for the duration of the item is equally

important in the construction of a programme. Besides the obvious considerations; what makes good openers and climactic finales; where best to place challenging items; where relaxing ones; the right spots for deeply moving items and the fun items and all the rest. What's often missed is the need to look at a programme from a purely abstract musical point of view. Where you need quick and musical tempo items to offset slow ones; the appropriate flow of keys; contrasts in tempo and lots more considerations. At the end of the day musical needs have to take precedence, it is vital in holding audience without their consciously knowing why.

Beatrice, with her long experience of solo singing and of preparing programmes for literally dozens of concerts for all three choirs, has what, at first glance, is a personal approach to programme building. Surprisingly, however it echoes Ernest's thinking to a great degree. This is because there are only some twenty to twenty-four items in a concert and of necessity each piece is multi-purpose, it may carry within it a number of the qualities which Ernest mentioned and therefore have a legitimate claim to different positions in the programme.

Beatrice starts with the current repertoire, which would invariably include items by Ernest such as 'Apple', 'Cherry' and 'Ghosts High Noon' and checks with the section leaders that each part agrees with the list. Suggested extra items may be included and parts of the various pieces may be gone through in

rehearsal. The pieces selected are gathered together and she selects and reselects until each group makes musical sense and the groups form a pattern which takes the listener through a wonderful cohesive collection of sounds.

There are usually three or four items in each group and the number of groups will depend upon whether or not there is an interval. Beatrice will start with roughly thirty current items and two or three extra items are always included at the bottom of the choir's programme in case she has the timing of the concert wrong or the audience ask for an encore.

It would be interesting to present Ernest and Beatrice with the same material and ask them to prepare a programme. There might be variations but overall the concert programmes would have the same feel to them. All brilliantly sung - of course.

Accuracy

There is a dichotomy in choral music between the Art of expressing the lyrics and the Science of producing the correct notes. If both are done to perfection then you have the best of both worlds and the composer will be a happy man.

Mr. T. would probably describe himself as a WORDS/music man. He would take a new piece and hold part-practices until they reported back that the notes were in place. The whole choir would then rehearse the piece

together so that the tempo of the music could be established between the four parts and the chording meshed. In the meantime he would be studying the words for every nuance so that the full meaning of every word and phrase was understood. This was the interpretation that he instilled into the choir. He thought that the words were of paramount importance and had been known to say, "Providing the time across a phrase stays the same, then I feel it is right to shape the words to their best effect." The effect on the notes would be marginal but the words would have their full meaning.

Ernest was a NOTES/words man. He believes in absolute accuracy in notes, dynamics, tempi etc. according to the composer's or arranger's intentions. This stems from his own approach to composing and the same dedication that characterises his colleague's attention to detail. Composers of all kinds have been his friends for years, conducting their pieces and even rearranging them at their behest. He feels privileged to represent their aims in performance. This makes it difficult for him to accept the attitudes that in effect suggest that a composer's carefully worked out details are unimportant compared with the singers' desire to make it easy for themselves.

In his view it is imperative to get the notes right. Only when that is accomplished can the choir move on to matters of tone, interpretation and the rest. The conductor and choir should be alert constantly to make

sure that wrong notes don't creep in and get too ingrained to be easy to correct.

Beatrice is a WORDS/MUSIC woman. In an ideal situation she would study the piece for some time before starting to rehearse it. Michael and Beatrice have developed a good working relationship in rehearsals. He is a brilliant rehearsal accompanist. The first section of the new piece will be taken part by part. The parts will sing with each other, Tenor and Second Tenor, Baritone and Bass, Baritone with Second Tenor etc. until the chording is secure. While that is going on Beatrice is insisting in the words being pronounced correctly, that the tone carries through all the parts and that the words follow the shape of the music. In the meantime Michael is checking the tempo of the piece and watching out for wrong notes. If any member is not sure about a note or a phrase he queries it and it is put right.

If there is a lot of work in hand then Michael holds separate note - bashing rehearsals. Beatrice takes the night off and the choir gets down to slogging out the notes. Michael makes sure that the tempo is right and draws attention to the shape of the piece but the rest is left to Beatrice. This is not her preferred way of working but it usually comes out right in the end.

Although the three conductors appear to come at rehearsals from three different directions, the differences are not as stark as it would appear.

They would all three agree that good tone, attention to pitch and balanced chording are essential. They would, perhaps, put the words in a different order. They would all accept that the end result should be beautiful singing.

Soloists

A special word is due to the soloists from the choir itself, who provided the contrast between items given by the full choir. Fred Tomlinson had a great array of talent to choose from, some of whom could without doubt have made it in the professional sphere. Harry Hanson, a tenor who was offered a place at La Scala in 1945 and declined because he preferred Rossendale and his friends.: Harry Ashworth, a true bass, who stayed with the choir for over fifty years and finished up as president of the choir; George Allen, a lovely bass baritone who did accept professional engagements but stayed loyal to the choir, and others. Brian Lonsdale, Harold Smith, Charles D'eath, Cyril Smith, Harold Finney, Harry Dugdale and his brother Harold who also served as president, Joe Hitchen, Sid Crowther and his father Alan, John Kay, Tom Ogden, John Ingham, George Holt, James Harvey, Harold Foulds and Frank Jones. Some of these made their way to Mr. T's house in the evening after work and he would coach them in singing technique. He charged them the princely sum of 6 old pence (2 1/2 new pence).

When Ernest took over the soloists who had served the RMVC for so many years decided by degrees to bow out and early replacements included John Entwistle, Bill Auty, Ken Howker, Ken Heys, Vernon Riley and Noel Woods. From the earliest days Ernest thought it would be an advantage to have a lady singer. He asked Florence Jackson, a teacher colleague of his wife's, and a fine and dedicated contralto, if she could do some solos for us. She agreed and missed very few concerts in the six years he conducted the choir.

A bonus in using a contralto was that it gave Ernest the idea to include the 'hymn' from Brahms' 'Alto Rhapsody' in the repertoire. He also arranged 'Blow the Wind Southerly' and 'Soldier, Soldier Won't You Marry Me?' for Alto Solo and choir.

Another important soloist was Jane Rowlands, flute, who shared the concert platform for several years from 1977. She also played on the C.D. Valley of song.

Sometime in 1977 Ernest was approached by the Soprano Gloria Swain, from Manchester, saying how keen she was to have the opportunity to sing with the choir. She offered to come along to a Friday night rehearsal and give an audition. He took her up on her offer and she proved to be an asset to the RMVC. She sang in several concerts in 1978 and 1979. Her co-operation gave Ernest the chance to bring back into the repertoire a work the choir had not sung since before the war, Schubert's 'Great Is Jehovah the

Lord,' so powerfully effective for Soprano and Male Choir. Other sopranos also sang this piece with the choir, Sean Lewis at Longridge and at Cliviger in March 1979 the soloist was Beatrice Wade.

Beatrice would agree with Fred and Ernest that soloists give more variety to a concert and to the list of soloists must be added the name of Charles Crowley. She has also liked the idea of encouraging local talent such as Janet Lancaster, winner of the Rose Bowl at the first Rossendale Music Festival 18 years ago who now has her feet firmly planted on the professional ladder. She was, incidentally, a former pupil of Beatrice; Carol Whaley, another winner of the Rose Bowl was a firm favourite with the choir and sang with them on numerous occasions, as did Maureen Kelly. Instrumentalists were also encouraged; Alex Howarth (Cronshaw), flute, whose father sang in the basses and a young trumpeter Tom Sugden spring readily to mind.

Small Groups

Small groups of singers from the main body of the choir have always been an intriguing offshoot of the choir's activities. The main rule seems to have been, 'If it doesn't interfere with the running of the choir, leave it alone.'

The Glen Quartette actually began in the days of Goodshaw Glee Union and, led by Fred Tomlinson, was still active in festival and concert work until the early 1930's.

Charles Baxter, a fine baritone, formed the Dalian Singers in the 1960's. The other members also came from the R.M.V.C. They performed well, appeared on the radio and had a television audition. There was however controversy because some of the members of the main choir felt that their activities interfered with normal rehearsals.

Ernest Tomlinson has always liked the idea of small groups and was delighted when, in 1977, eight members of the choir got together to form a Barber Shop group. He brought in Tony Oresko, a young guitarist to accompany some of the items (Yes he knew that Barber Shop is unaccompanied) and the group

took over the solo spot at one or two concerts. Later on, Ernest set up a small group from the choir. He and his father disagreed about the concept because Fred had always been concerned about the effect an 'elite' group would have on the other members of the choir.

Today there is a small group called 'Kaleidoscope', which is composed of members from both the Ladies and Male Voice choirs. They have had success at local festivals, taken part in concerts and produced a CD. Michael ensures that everyone understands that the Ladies and Male Voice Choirs have first call on their services and there is general approval of the project.

THE VALLEY OF SONG

Rossendale is a valley of contrasts, surrounded by hills - great walking country. The people take time to get to know you but once that barrier is down they are friendly and loyal – great neighbours.

The 'Valley of Song' was first used by a Welshman of all people, to describe Rossendale. Singing was part of the way of life of valley folk long before that. It started in the churches and with the Dayne Layrocks, continued in Goodshaw Glee Union and on to Rossendale Male Voice Choir. It should also encompass Haslingden Mixed Choir and Rossendale Ladies which had its roots in Dame Florence Fielden's Choir

However the Rossendale Male Voice Choir has spanned the decades ever since Fred Tomlinson took up the reins in 1924. He transformed the aspirations of ordinary working men who just wanted a 'good sing' into a nationally famous choir which achieved great honour.

As they sang through the years the world changed around them. Television, that box in the corner, affected people's lives more than anything else. The churches lost their choirs – once the life blood of the RMVC – and still they sang on.

Fred handed over the reigns to his son Ernest whose lasting contribution was the large number of arrangements he wrote exclusively for the choir. Ernest in his turn gave way to Beatrice Wade with whom the choir have achieved 24 first prizes as well as an equal number as part of the Rossendale Festival Choir.

The choir has served the valley well. They are great ambassadors for Rossendale and it is certain that the people of the valley appreciate them.

Long may the partnership continue.

List of Choir Members

This is not a complete list. For a variety of reasons the registers were not kept fully up to date. If anyone is missing please accept our humble apologies. The first group of names cannot be placed with accuracy in a particular part. You may also find that a name is in the part where they started their choir career eg. Ernest Schofield our current chairman is listed in the Baritones when he now sings Bass.

Alcock F.	Hamer H.	Lord G.	Woods W.
Abbott R.	Howarth H.S.	Nightingale T.	Woods J.
Bradshaw L.	Harvey J.	Pickup E.	
Carter R.	Howarth W.	Place H.	
Hatton B.	Ingham L.	Woods C.	

FIRST TENORS

Banham M.	De'ath C.	Jordon J.	Taylor A.
Bayliss T.	Dugdale H.	Knowles H.	Telford B.
Berry R.	Dugdale Hy.	Knowles S.	Trippier J.
Bibby D.	Farnworth F.	Nowell K.	Valentine B.
Buckley J.	Finney H.	Nuttall C.	Wadsworth R.
Clemens T.	Foulds H.	Parkinson W.	Walkden I.
Cook E.	Guest J.	Radcliffe P.	Wallwork J.
Cropper J.	Hanson H.	Royle E.	Walsh H.
Crowley C.	Holt B.	Smith B.	Walsh R.
Cunliffe A.	Holt G.	Smith C.	Wells W.
Cunliffe J.R.	Holt R.	Smith H.	Whitter K.
Dale R.	Ingham J.	Spencer R.	
Dewhurst G.	Jones F.	Stansfield A.	

SECOND TENORS

Abbott R.	Evans E.	Ogden T.	Tomlinson A.
Atkinson	Farnworth F.E.	Rigby J.	Tomlinson E.
Bailey G.	Farnworth M.J.	Riley V.	Torevell W.,
Baxendale T.	Firth D.	Sacks R.	Trippier I.
Black D.	Fishwick F.	Slater F.	Wallwork J.
Booth H.	Gorton S.	Slater H.	Wallace I.
Brooke S.	Hannah G.	Spencer S.	Walsh H.
Brooks W.	Hayes J.	Spencer W.	Warburton J.
Dixon A. W.	Higgins J.	Stansfield J.	Ward J.
Dowling D.	Hill J.	Stanhope J.	Welton H.
Caygill G.	Hill K.	Stiller V.	Whittaker H.
Eastwood J.	Kay P.	Sutcliffe M.	Willan J.
Emmett T.	Kelly P.	Taylor H.	
Entwistle J.	Lancaster W.	Taylor S.	

BARITONE

Adamson J.	Halliwell H.	Lockhart G.	Starkey N.
Ashworth A.	Hamer J.	Lord A.	Suart H.
Ashworth Aqu.	Haworth H.	Malloy D.D.	Sydall W.H.
Beetham P.	Heap J.	McEvoy F.	Taylor K.
Belshaw D.	Heys A.	Mud H.	Tomlinson F.
Britcliffe C.	Heys K.	Naylor N.	Trippier R.
Calvert C.	Heyworth A.	Nolan F.	Tunncliffe R.
Cheetham G.S.	Higgins R.	Page F.	Venus K.
Crowther S.	Hoyle J.	Parkinson P.	Walton B.
Cull L.	Hoyle S.	Pye P.	Walton M.
Cunniff. W.	Innes.	Riding H.	Whittaker E.
Dawson R.	Lally J.	Schofield D.	Whittaker H.
Farnworth P.	Law E.	Schofield E.	Wilkinson J.
Gathergood F.	Law F.	Seal D.	Wood N.C.
Griffen A.	Lee D.	Smith R.	Wood C.
Haigh K.	Lee K.	Snape H.	
Halliday K.	Leech T.	Standring J.	

BASS

Allen G.	Dean S.	Howarth N.	Monks
Ashworth H.	Dearden D.	Howker K.	H.,Nuttall F.
Ashworth J.	Drinkwater D.	Jones D.	Nuttall L.
Auty W.	Farrington K.	Kay J.T.	Paul N.
Bailey E.	Fisher J.W.	Keate G.L.	Pidsley B.
Baxter C.	Gathergood A.	Latham S.	Schofield C.
Billington A.	Gregory J.	Law F.	Scholes P.
Birtwistle E.	Griffen A.	Leech G.	Slater N.
Bray D.	Hacking D.	Lonsdale B.	Tattersall B.
Capell W.T.	Hakin R.	Marshall H.	Tucker B.
Chilton G.	Higgins S.	Mawdsley A.	Warburton L.
Clarke R.	Higson N.	McIntyre W.	Wolfenden T.
Cook J.	Hill G.	Melling A.	
Crowther A.	Hitchon J.	Mizon E.	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Just as a choir concert is the result of co-operation between the conductor, the accompanist, the choir and the audience of course, so, too, this history was only made possible because of the articles, pictures and other memorabilia which was so freely donated by choir members and their families. It is to be hoped that the result will bring back happy memories.

Grateful thanks are due to all contributors, particularly Ernest Tomlinson and Beatrice Wade and to those who offered constructive encouragement. The anecdotes were collected over time when members of the choir were reminiscing about times past. It only needed someone on the coach to a concert or a festival or round a table in a pub to say, "Do you remember.....?" for someone in the group to start telling a favourite story.

A very special mention for Michael Farnworth and of course his trusty computer. He has been tireless in his efforts to help produce the book and he is responsible in large measure for the layout of the book and its graphics.

A final story which, hopefully, sums up this history.

Two choir members were trudging back home through the snow after a choir practice. "I wasn't for coming out tonight," said one to his friend, "but it were worth it."

Amen to that.

Joe Stanhope.