



## A Triumphant Farewell to a wonderful musical career



Picture – Didier Garcon

Norman Morris conducts the combined choirs at the Festival of Choirs

### Mug-shot



The choir photo-gallery will be updated next term, with a view to de-criminalising some portraits and rejuvenating others!! See page 2 for latest on mug sales.

### Special Feature



Why Jersey cows on our front page?  
Read page 3 to find out.

# A Tribute to Norman Morris

by Gwyn Arch

I first met Norman in September, 1964 when we both became founder members of staff of Bulmershe College of Education - the teacher training college in Woodley. I was director of Music and he ran the Education



Picture - Didier Garcon

Norman talking to Gareth Malone

department. When I discovered he was an outstanding musician with a passion for choral singing I asked if he

would run a student mixed voice choir while I organised a girls' group (at that time 70 per cent of the intake were female.).

Within a couple of years both choirs were giving concerts over a wide area and within five, competing at Llangollen. During the next ten years Norman's choir (labelled the Folk Choir) twice won first prize in the folk section competing against some of the best amateur choirs in the world. The girls' choir managed second place once!

Norman and I made many international tours together. For example, in the summer of 1973 the two groups gave 18 concerts in three weeks travelling 5000 miles in a Greyhound bus between New York and Denver.

He always worked the choir, and himself, very hard, and his standards were very high. That only seemed to increase his popularity. In 1969 several of the Folk Choir who had taken teaching jobs locally asked him to form a new independent choir so they could continue to sing under his direction. That is how the Phoenix began, and to this day it has many ex-Bulmershe members.

I had great admiration for Norman as a musician and fine pianist. We must have spent hundreds of hours (mostly on buses) discussing the finer points of choral direction. I shall miss him enormously.

## Talking Point

In perusing some archive material the editors came across an edict of yore that members could only sing in a concert if they had attended four out of the six rehearsals immediately before a concert. This contrasted with the current rule that a singer must attend two out of three rehearsals before a concert. During casual conversation it was suggested that the old rule allowed "more flexibility", and we thought the matter worthy of discussion. Without prejudice we offer the following.

The present ruling seems harsh on those singers who know the pieces and have attended regularly, but just miss two of the three weeks, which may not be consecutive. On the other hand, a literal application could mean that someone, could miss four rehearsals, when new material is being learnt and polished, and turn

up for the last two, and be entitled to sing. This seems at best quite improper.

Under the old ruling, the singers in the former case would be allowed to sing, and those in the latter case would not. Moreover, provided that only one absence occurred in weeks four, five or six, there would be no difference in the application of the two rules.

There is the additional factor of the timing of the concert, since it is not often that we introduce new material in concerts towards the end of the season.

We offer this for your consideration and have no editorial axe to grind. Do let us know how you feel.

**The Editor**

## Befriend a Fisherman!

If the Baritones appear to be sucking on more than their fair share of Fisherman's Friends these days it's all down to Tony Boyd.

They're currently not sold in Russia, but sales are massive elsewhere (e.g. 72 million packets sold in Germany). But Tony recently negotiated a deal with a Russian client to be that country's sole distributor. As he

left the meeting he was given a box of 100 samples "for your choir".

Says Tony: "I don't know about the other sections, but they're regularly used by the Baritones - hence perhaps the high quality of our singing!!

**Ed:** Hold on Tony. The gift was for your CHOIR - not your SECTION! Time to start spreading them around!!

**We would like to thank Didier Garcon**, a bass singer with the Phoenix, who provided all of our concert pictures. Didier has been taking photos and videos of the Phoenix almost since he joined in 1987. Each of their tours has been published on VHS, then on CD's or DVD's. During the performance his camera was on a tripod in the balcony and all those pictures were taken by him from the stage using a remote control! On behalf of the choir we thank the Phoenix Choir for inviting RMVC to take part in their 40th anniversary celebrations. **Ed.**

## Mug Sales

103 mugs have been sold to date. The break even target is 133, and we will probably achieve this by the end of the summer.

The proceeds from the sale of the remaining 119 mugs will go to choir funds, but possibly some could be used as presents for visiting choirs, - for instance some will go to Austria.

**Andrew Evans**

# Moosic to His Ears

## Seb Boston – a Profile by Norman Rees

To get to know Seb one should first perhaps look to Jersey. Cattle from this small Channel Island have spread throughout the world making Jerseys the second largest breed on the planet. And Seb has played a part in it.

He was born in 1929 on a smallholding near Oxford. Times were hard. "There were no mod cons. We had no electricity - just oil lamps and candles. And no running water, - it all had to be pumped from the ground. Fortunately we had staff to help."

Things changed just before the war when the family moved to Wilcote Grange, a 370 acre farm 20 miles to the west. Seb's father, who up until then had been an up and coming artist, had developed a deep interest in the raising of Jersey cattle and set

about establishing his own pedigree herd.

"As we became established, we began winning major Championships" Seb said. "Later the farm also became a centre of learning for agricultural students from all over the world. We also pioneered the use of artificial insemination and were the first to supply semen to farms around the country.

With success came his father's election to President of the English Jersey Cattle Society and also Chairman of the National Cattle Breeders' Association.

The young Seb shared his father's interest in Jerseys and in his late teens began gaining international work experience. A stint in France was followed by a whole

year on a dairy farm in Denmark. Seb was just 20 when he and another young man were given the responsibility of looking after sixteen valuable pedigree bulls and breeding cows being exported by sea to Australia. The cattle were in wooden pens open to the elements on the hatches and stern deck.

"In heavy seas water was often spilt from our buckets before

we could get it to them. Or they were being swung around so much they couldn't reach to drink it. Strong waves smashed the back of the cowsheds and they had to be replaced and strengthened." Seb said.



Seb with his daughters at his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party



Greek Jester being disembarked at Melbourne

It was a tribute to Seb that before disembarkation in Melbourne all animals were pronounced fit and well.

Seb's voyaging didn't end there. After a few weeks on dry land visiting Australian farms he set off on the 2,500 mile sea journey to New Zealand for another year's work experience with a farming family on the North Island.

He headed back via Canada and America dropping in at other Jersey cattle farms along the way before meeting up with his father in the Eastern states.

"He had a final treat in store for me." Seb said, "We returned on the Queen Mary!"

Seb was soon judging pedigree Jerseys at major agricultural shows

throughout the UK and Ireland, and after getting

married and starting a family he decided to strike out on his own.

"I bought the farm next door", Seb told me. "After a lot of hard work we were making good headway when my pituitary gland failed. I was ill for several years and now with five children to put through school I had to move on."

Seb joined the Intervention Board in Reading overseeing surplus grain mountains for the Common Market and it was here he saw a poster advertising the choir and decided to try us out. He'd previously sung with the Oxford Operatic Society and the Cheltenham Choral Society.

And we're lucky to still have Seb with us. Driving to a concert in Eton in 1991 he was in a head-on crash. He

suffered severe head injuries and major damage to his hips and legs. For some time there were doubts whether he would survive.

"I can't remember the crash", Seb says "I had a memory lapse that lasted for some two years. Seb has never driven again.

His journey to rehearsals by bus and train takes two

and a half hours and explains why

he leaves rehearsals early for the journey home. He's grateful to Les Horton who picks him up and takes him back to Reading Station.

And finally what about his regular lengthy exchanges with Gwyn that often lighten up our rehearsal time. "They just happen", says Seb. "We're of the same generation and understand each other."



Seb at Friday night rehearsal

# Unsung Choir Heroes

## Paul Buckle – Programme Notes

I've been producing our concert programmes from my study at home for the past twelve years. By my reckoning that's around 17,000 of them! And it's not as straightforward as it looks.

My first job is to pull together and get agreement on the text needed by the concert organisers and the guest artists. Invariably, details from the Musical Director on what the choir will sing and in what order, will be the last to appear!!

The formatting and the text itself then has to be approved and here a word of thanks to Ray Little, our defender of the English language, without whom the job would be a lot harder.

Having got everything assembled and typed, there's the matter of copying and folding typically 120 programmes per concert.

There is also responsibility for the design, approval and production of the programme cover printed in batches of 2,000.

Our overseas trips provide an extra challenge. The trip to Barcelona required 600 programmes in Catalan, courtesy of our Spanish agent, while for Düsseldorf, Clive Pugh's wife Rita did the translation into German. By far my biggest challenge was our trip to Lithuania. There, any text subject to public distribution must have Government approval. That was resolved with a dizzying round-robin of e-mails between me, a Lithuanian woman



Paul constructing the next concert programme

translator from the BBC monitoring station in Caversham and a contact at the cultural centre in Vilnius!

Our programmes produce only a small amount in revenue, - but by doing them ourselves we retain control of this important part of our presentation.

## The Secret's Out!

Ever wonder why just about every MVC you can think of has at least one Welshman in it? Documents archived over 100 years ago are now available under the 'Freedom of Information Act' and the answer to that particular question is at last available in the public domain.

On St. David's Day 1907, from the pulpit of the Ebenezer Wesleyan Chapel in Aber Drin Conme, near Bala, the Rev. Meredith Caradoc ap Cadwalader, urged every Welshman unfortunate enough to find himself on the wrong side of Offa's Dike to join a male voice choir, or face eternal hellfire and damnation, in the after-life! "After all" said the fiery minister thumping his fists on the enormous Bible, "We've taught the world how to play Rugby [Webb Ellis had double L's in his name so that makes him Welsh!], "now let's show them how to sing!"

So he sent messages to chapels up and down the principality - from Builth to Bangor, from Llantwit Major to Llanfairpwllgwynn ...gogo..thingy. The rallying cry was taken up by Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and even the Hare-Krishna followers from Cwm Lookyou. 'Join a Male Voice Choir' was the slogan on the lips of coal miners from Rhondda and slate miners from Bethesda.. Even the shepherds on the lonely Brecon Beacons encouraged hill-walkers, lost tourists and soldiers on exercise to sing for their country.

However, there is also a dark and somewhat sinister side to this revelation. When this 'call to sing' reached the ears of the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, he immediately summoned David Lloyd George to get his views on the potentially damaging

'situation' fermenting in Wales - were the natives getting uppity again, should we build another dike? The wily Lloyd George saw a golden opportunity to further the Welsh cause, and even to help him on his way to Prime Ministership. From 1908 onwards, with David Lloyd George's blessing, exiled Welshmen were 'planted' - like spies - into male voice choirs throughout the Empire. Their remit was:

1. To encourage the singing of TTBB music in the Welsh language.
2. To discourage the singing of TTBB pieces that had been anglicised; e.g. Myfanwy, Llanfair et.al.

3. To report back to The Welsh Office any MVC contravening these ideals.

4. To perform in Wales, from time-to-time, to show that they aren't 'mangling' the 'Language of Heaven'.

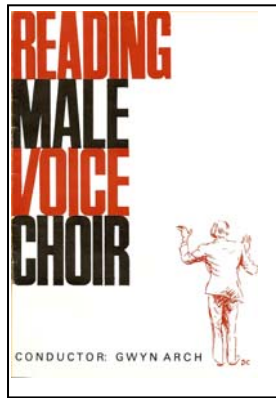
Now, if you think that this is a load of nonsense, look at our own choir - are there any Welshmen in it? Do you sing Welsh music? Have you in the past sung in Welsh? Will you in the future sing in Welsh? Didn't Lloyd George, who incidentally knew my father, become Prime Minister in 1916? Food for thought, eh?



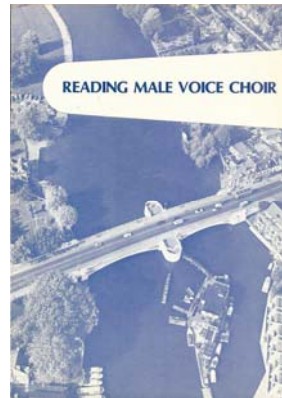
RMVC Welsh contingent keeping their usual low profile.



1974



1981



1982



1990?

## Cover Story

by Norman Rees

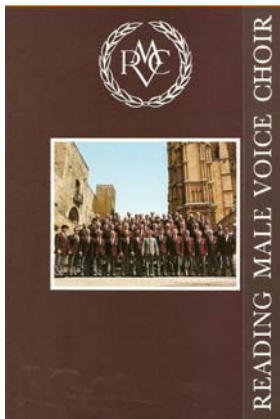
Over the years the choir's programme covers have been many and varied. The oldest we can find in the archive is top left from a concert shared with the Bulmershe Girls' Choir at St Mary's Church, Sreatley in March 1974. In our repertoire that night were *Speed your Journey*, *The Pilgrims' Chorus* and *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Next to it, the design with the distinctive drawing by David Caplan probably dates from the late 70's and was still in use for our 10th anniversary concert on 24 April 1981. Gwyn's selections that night included *Three Hungarian Folk Songs*, *Blowing in the Wind* and *If I Were a Rich Man* from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The aerial view of Caversham Bridge from 1982 was in use for at least two years.. This one is from a concert in January 1984 at Eton College in aid of the Kenneth Moore Memorial Fund introduced by Frank Bough. Included were *The Water is Wide*, *Shenandoah*, and *Gospel Train*.

I'm not sure of the date of the Hexagon concert sponsored by the Reading Chronicle, but inside was a medley of Jolson numbers to be sung by the audience. Is nothing original?! Below it is the programme for a celebration concert we did with the Sainsbury Singers in 1988.

Some of our most imaginative covers have been inspired by overseas tours. Our present cover has been in use since 2006 and according to Paul could last for some years to come.

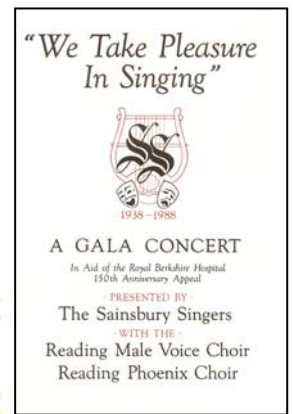
N.B. If these old covers bring back a few memories, let's hear from you. We hope to have more stories from the choir archives in our next edition.



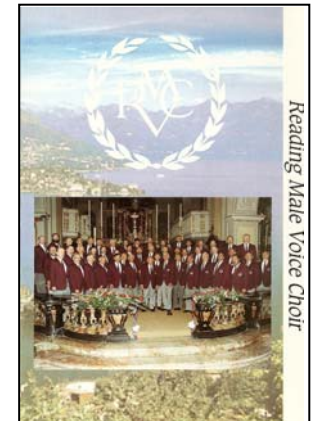
Majorca 1987



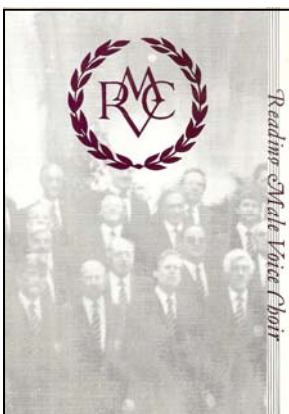
Norway 1989



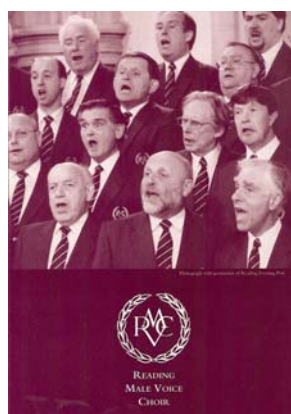
1988



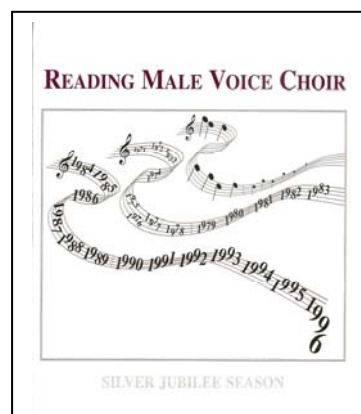
Italy 1993



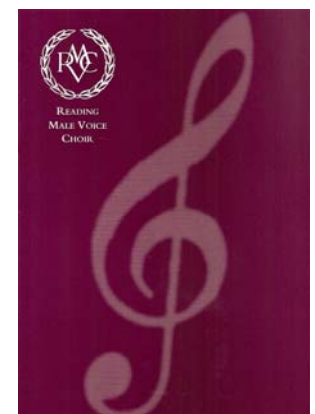
1991/92



2002



1996



1996-2005

# Observations on the Haka

## Gwyn Arch

I see the inclusion of the Haka into our concert programme as adding another dimension to our performances, adding yet more variety and interest to our repertoire. Variety has always been an aim but, as time goes by, finding new ways of achieving it gets more problematic. I always thought the Haka idea a promising one, but was very unsure that it would work. However, the team has worked long and hard at it and I thought their effort at Emmer Green a big success in spite of the

limited space. The audience obviously thought highly of it and I think it is there for the long haul. We must try to find ways of permutating the formation to allow for the different physical circumstances. This is because unless we can perform the Haka we can't sing the other numbers and they are now beginning to settle down. Many congratulations to the team. If they get any better they'll begin to frighten me!

## Bob Pitts

I was concerned that our first outing of the Haka should go well and hoped that we would be well-received and would not offend anybody. Needless to say, I was mortified when I found out that there was a lady from New Zealand in the front row! I immediately took a unilateral decision not to tell anyone, apart from Jim Grufferty, so as to not put undue pressure on my fellow 'warriors'. As it happened, the lady from New Zealand

was right in front of me, so I let her have it, so to speak. I was mightily relieved when she told me afterwards how much she had enjoyed it!!

There are still a few things that we have to iron out and each venue will bring problems due to lack of space etc., but we will rise to the 'challenge'.

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## John Clark (baritone) – a welcome return



I am delighted to be returning to the choir after six years absence. I originally joined in 1982 and did 20 years holding a long list of posts starting with accommodation officer, then secretary, treasurer, and finally logistics manager. Keith Ternent and I were instrumental in building the valuable relationship with the Head Partnership [solicitors]. Three years ago I retired from Waitrose Bracknell where I had held various senior Buying positions, the most recent launching Ocado and then merging Waitrose Direct with John Lewis Direct.

My wife, Lindy, who retired last year from Reading Borough Council [Housing] is now a Witness Support volunteer at the courts in Reading and Newbury. I spend many pleasant hours managing the Station Gift Shop at Toddington, buying stock for it and making significant profit for the Gloucestershire/Warwickshire Steam Railway.

My daughter, Victoria, is an Operations Manager [Carriers] for John Lewis at Chelsea and my son, Peter, is a detective constable based at Maidenhead. I also enjoy training a young labrador, driving a Morgan around in the sun, and gardening in that order

## David Walters (second tenors) – new member



It's a great thing being a part of RMVC. After all, on a Friday evening how better to unwind after a week at work than to do something you enjoy. I have found the choir comprises a set of super chaps who are a real pleasure to be with. I last sang regularly as a chubby schoolboy and had almost forgotten that along with the pleasure there's an awful lot of hard work.

I moved to Reading from my home town of Swansea in 1999. I am employed as a consultant with Coffey Geotechnics Ltd looking at contaminated soil and water and their effect on human health and the environment. I serve as a member of the committee of the local branch of the Geological Society, I row and also umpire rowing races at regattas in the Summer.

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## Letter to the Editor

### Should Football Use Modern Technology To Assist Referees?

I feel I must respond to the letter in the December RMVoice.

The short answer is 'Yes'. Referees have said for many years that they would welcome any technology or systems which would assist them on matters of fact. Therefore, if a 'proof without failure' system can be developed that verifies when the ball has crossed the goal line (or any selected line) then we must take advantage of it. However, when we look deeper at assistance to referees by the use of modern technology, many questions need to be answered.

Referees would support any method that gave the opportunity to immediately rectify incorrect decisions, but when would they consult it? If a player, for example, falls to the ground in the penalty area, does the referee

stop play immediately and take counsel from a TV watcher, or allow play to continue until ball is out of play? Football followers say, 'consult technology for major decisions'. In my fifty years association with the game I have yet to establish what decides a 'major decision', so are we saying all free kicks, advantages or off side decisions should or must be decided by 'modern technology? All referees would say' " I hope not".

For issues of fact (e.g. has the ball crossed the goal line?) I would say that if you could introduce technology without delay then do so. However, for the other issues during the game, the debate is how and when to apply the technology without spoiling the challenge of the game, for watchers, players and referees.

Ted Wiggins

# I Wonder What His Wife Said!

Now we know! After rolling home from the Town Hall concert our choir ladies had this to say:

From the beginning with the beautiful singing of the Bach Choir through to the wonderful performance of the Phoenix itself it was an occasion not to be missed and the children were delightful. RMVC excelled itself. In my opinion it was the best performance in recent years. You sang really well and Deus Salutis with the organ was most impressive. I must mention the part played by Gareth Malone – his remarks were amusing, interesting and brief!

**Rita Pugh**

The concert provided something for everyone to appreciate. I enjoyed the sweetness of the children's voices and the skills and training of the Reading Phoenix Choir, but I wasn't completely convinced by the Basingstoke Ladies' choir. Regarding RMVC, the Sound of Silence was the best I have heard it with Ray's voice clear and strong. The moment that made the hairs stand up on the back of my neck was the final part of Deus Salutis accompanied by the organ when the deep richness of the all male voices combined with the power of the organ in a wave of sound. I thought I was about to see Gwyn levitate. Gareth Malone's compèring was witty and informative and set the right tone for the audience and the closing pieces by the massed choirs came off well.

**Sue Evans**

The Bach choir had a lovely sound, the children as always were great but the Basingstoke Ladies were my least favourite. I am a bit biased as regards the next choir! Your entrance looked very professional and your first 'Let there be Light' was spine tingling. 'Goin' up a yonder' was an excellent finish to your programme. The Phoenix was excellent and the joint numbers were all right. Although I wasn't too keen on 'Alleluia'.

**Rosemary Appleby**

Picture – Didier Garçon



The choir was splendid on Saturday, in particular I noticed the contrasts of loud and soft - well done guys! Could Gwyn be allowed to have a smart black jacket with Choir grey trousers? I think it would contrast better than the grey suit. He is, after all, the Man In Charge.

**Alison Evans**

Needless to say R.M.V.C. rose to the occasion, I thought the programme had good variation (multifarious). My only criticism was the "Alleluia", too long and didn't work with so many voices.

**Pat Wiggins**

Although this concert was a celebration to mark the 40th anniversary of the Reading Phoenix Choir, they were more than generous in sharing the concert equally with their four guest choirs creating a true "Festival of Choirs".

Each choir presented us with a taster of their normal repertoire which resulted in an entertaining and varied programme. Clive Waterman once again showed that he can inspire young children to produce beautiful music. Gareth Malone was the ideal compère - appealing to young and old - and the acoustic was flattering to everyone.

Having been granted the dubious privilege of opening the second half of the concert RMVC immediately captured our attention with a rousing rendition of "Let there be light". Gwyn Arch is to be congratulated on his choice of numbers which showed the choir at its best - they sang with confidence and attention to detail and should feel proud of their performance.

**Sue Bryant**

What an evening! It doesn't get better than that.

The choirs brought such diversity of music and presentation which was thoroughly enjoyed by all my party from start to finish. We all appreciated 'our boys' and were especially proud of 'our musical director' displaying his talents for arranging. The Alleluia was such a fitting finale totally enjoyed by everyone.

What can we say about the children? A tear came to my eye on more than one occasion brought on by the magical sincerity of these young voices so enabled by Clive, - a complete delight.

This very special evening was brought together in such a natural and professional way by Gareth Malone. He brought humour and sincerity to this wonderful occasion.

**Susie Peake**

An excellent concert and RMVC's contribution was warmly received by the audience.

However, I overheard two ladies saying in response to 'Let there be light' that the choir had been singing it for far too long!

I particularly liked the clarity, brevity and fluency of the compère, which RMVC needs to emulate.

**Julia Little**

# Reflections on the Festival of Voices Concert



Photographs courtesy of Didier Garcon