



March 2005

an extract from "In Tune"

The Quarterly Newsletter from the **Oxford Welsh Male Voice Choir**

Musings from a past member.

In 1945, economic migrant, Neil McColl, arrived in Oxford, unlike the founding fathers of the choir, I didn't walk but came by train.

I had been singing with an amateur revue company for a few years when in 1950 I was approached by two Scottish colleagues who were members of the "Welsh Glee Singers". They enthused about the choir and thought that I would enjoy the camaraderie. My wife, Betty - who's father Ieuan had walked from Wales to Oxford with the then chairman of the choir (Morgan Williams, an excellent bass baritone), thought it was a good idea to give it a try.

We both went along and listened to a few practices, following which the choir-master, Willie Davies, took me through a voice test. "Top Tenor for you" he said. In those days that wasn't the end of it. If the singers in the designated section felt that your voice didn't fit or you were putting them off, the Chairman asked you to leave.

The practice room was then in the St Christopher Primary school, now redeveloped as up-market apartments. The heating was a free-standing stove which drew draughts from all directions. We didn't even have that on school holidays!

I recall a number of members of that choir, but only two of them are still with us. The Haydns - Evans & Cooper, one a past president the other the current one. Not forgetting the ever present Eileen Hayes. I also remember the choir master, Willie Davies, who knew what he wanted from the choir, and how to get it. Balance, good tonal values from the vowels and you dare not put a consonant in the wrong place.

The Choir was very much into competition work and the standard was very high. It was so much easier then when television was something that most people had only heard about, and practices were twice a week. Cars were few, which meant that any concert or competition more than a couple of miles away had to be by coach.

At that time Haydn Evans (Baritone) and Harold Bull (Tenor) were soloists and duettists. Harold eventually had to move to Thame with his job as inspector with the Prestcold Division and I was asked to replace him to sing with Haydn.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with the choir and have especially fond memories of the practices with Haydn Evans and Eileen Hayes on the piano at Haydn's home.

I must congratulate Len Jose on his article "1970-2000", it was so well recalled and researched. Well done Len. One name that has just come to mind is Barrett Reynolds, a magnificent bass, whose speciality was "The Flea". He wasn't with us very long but Haydn Cooper & Eileen will remember him.

As chairman of the 50 years celebrations, I am well aware of the strain and responsibilities on John and his committee. My best wishes for a happy and successful go to them and the choir as a whole.

N.M McColl.