



CounterPoint



MARCH 2015

Prudhoe Gleemen Male Voice Choir

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PATRON CONTACT

The choir is happy to consider concert engagements. We ask a third of any **profit** made as our fee. All concert requests should be made to the Secretary in writing. Contributions to CounterPoint are always welcome, especially from members and patrons. If you have something you would like us to include in future editions, please get in touch with:

Ian Warburton – Editor Tel: 01661 833614

Email: iwarburton_2000@yahoo.com Please note the underscore before 2000.

Have you visited our website?

See all about the choir at **www.prudhoegleemen.org.uk**

Cover: Thanks to Bob McAlpin for his pic of the Chatanooga Choo Choo; you'll be hearing more about this at concerts later this year

COUNTERPOINT

When my time comes, a piece that I want to have played at my funeral is In My Life by the Beatles (I also want the Angel's Farewell from Elgar's Dream of Gerontius but that's another article!). That hauntingly beautiful song by John Lennon reflects in its opening lines about the places and people that have shaped the singer's life and acts as a reminder to us that so many of the people whom we've met on our own way have helped form who we are today.

Since the last issue of Counterpoint, three such people once in our ranks have died. Jim Tulip was a member of the choir at the time of his death and Dick Robinson and John Bond had stepped down in the last few years for health reasons after very many years with the choir. There will be appreciations of all three of them further into this issue.

All of us will have people about whom we've cared deeply and who have informed us by their lives and examples but who are now no longer with us. In the case of Jim, Dick and John, we are impoverished by their deaths but the richer for having sampled the various gifts that each of them brought to us. Let's try to remember them and others like them in the time to come and always be thankful that they were once there with us.

Ian Warburton

PS Many thanks to those who've answered my previous request and submitted items for this issue. It all makes the editor's job easier!

ANNUAL CONCERT, SATURDAY 6 JUNE, 7:00PM

We are returning to the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle, and our guest soloists will be two Academy students from the Samling Foundation. This a registered charity, based in Hexham, which for the past twenty years has been nurturing the talents of young classical musicians. Four years ago the Samling Academy was launched, working with Newcastle and Durham Universities and the Sage, Gateshead, to help and encourage young singers and pianists in the North-East who could be contemplating a professional career. Those chosen to be part of the Academy have the opportunity to benefit from a series of weekend workshops with established professionals and we are supporting their programme by giving two of these extremely talented singers a platform on which to perform. _We hope that you will encourage them at the concert and there will also be an opportunity at the end of the concert to make a donation towards the work at Samling – the choir will match your donations, up to £100, from our funds.

A coach has been booked for those who wish to use it; it will travel from Stocksfield through Prudhoe, Crawcrook and Ryton only, so hoping to avoid the late return for some passengers as happened last year. Please book your seat early so that, if demand is high, we have time to book an additional coach

The Patrons' Evening Concert will take place on Saturday 18 July; this is the choir's opportunity to thank you, our Patrons, for your support throughout the year. More details and a reply slip will get to you around the time of the Annual Concert but we

give you advance warning in case you are booking your holidays!

NB With this issue of Counterpoint you will find a letter requesting renewal of Patrons' subscriptions and an order form for the Annual Concert tickets.

Neville Fairbairn

NEW MEMBER

We are very pleased to welcome Peter Foster to the baritones. Peter joined us last autumn and we hope he will have a long and enjoyable stay with the choir.

FANCY BECOMING A GLEEMEN CHOIR MEMBER?

Contact Neville Fairbairn—Secretary—Tel. 01661-832162 or just come along to one of our rehearsals on a Monday evening at Prudhoe Methodist Church, 7:15pm.

NEW PHOTOGRAPH

You'll see that on the back page of this issue we've published a new photograph of the choir, to replace the one taken two years ago. The new photograph was taken before practice on 2 March and we are most grateful to Karen Read for attending to take the photograph and for her good humour and attention to detail during the session. You can now get the previous issue of the magazine out and see who's come and who's gone since the last photograph was taken.

Jim Tulip, 2nd tenor

31 March 1919—15 October 2014



Picture: Karen Read

JIM TULIP: AN APPRECIATION

Remember that saying, you're never too old? Jim Tulip proved that conclusively by joining the choir when he was already 70, yet living and remaining in our ranks long enough to collect his 25-year badge earlier in 2014. Having been widowed in 1989, Jim was persuaded by two of his late Chapel friends, Wilf Hocking and Alf Brown, to join Gleemen. Jim duly found an empty chair in the second tenors, settling himself next to Dick Robinson, who became a lasting friend.

In a tribute to Jim, Gleemen Chairman John Clark described his kindness, humour, reliability and loyal service throughout, in a period which included around 20 years of service on the committee.

Jim's service and record with the Choir will long be appreciated and I hope that his example and influence will have a lasting effect on the choir ethos for many years to come. We shall all miss his friendship (and generous distribution of Werther Originals!) but what I shall miss most of all, whether face to face or over the phone, is Jim's personal greeting, "how are you today, bonny lad?"

A much abridged and adapted version of Howard Taylor's funeral eulogy, used with his kind permission

Dick Robinson



Dick joined the choir in 1959 and remained in our ranks until 2011, when ill-health forced his retirement at the age of nearly 90. He was a Yorkshireman by birth but had spent almost all his life in Northumberland. After some years working for Hoover as an engineer, he then spent nearly 20 years building up the business at Robinson and Cowell up to his retirement in 1982, which gave him more time to pursue the hobbies of caravanning, golf, fly fishing and singing.

He sang first with Ashington Choir and Acomb British Legion Choir prior to joining the Gleemen, where he remained for over 50 years, doing a tremendous amount for the choir during this time. In his latter years in the choir, he struck up a friendship with fellow second tenor Jim Tulip, who predeceased him by only a few weeks.

We extend our sincere sympathy to his wife Norma and son Richard. Another son, Malcolm, sadly died in 2013.

John Bond



John was born in Kent but moved to Northumberland in his youth and spent many years working in the horticultural department of Newcastle University.

He was very generous in his community, giving his time as a volunteer guide at Hexham Abbey. He was also an active member of the Red Cross and I remember frequently seeing him with his wife, Sybil, (also in picture) acting as first aiders at a number of community events, most notably including the Prudhoe Aged People's Treats. In his later life he became involved with the new Prudhoe branch of the University of the Third Age.

John was a quiet, unassuming, kindly member of the choir and he and Sybil enjoyed coming on the various trips away in which the choir took part. We send our sincere sympathy to Sybil at this sad time.

GLEEMEN CONCERTS

Saturday 13 September

There was an excellent attendance on the part of the choir for the opening concert of the season at Crawcrook Centenary Methodist Church. This was a splendid concert, given to a thoroughly appreciative audience. A selection from our programme was presented, ranging from the high jinks of Widdicombe Fair to the sombre moment or two of For the Fallen, not forgetting an operatic set, a trip to Italy for four of its most famous melodies and the delights of Oklahoma. We had no fewer than eight soloists/duettists on parade, their choices lending plenty of light and shade to proceedings. All in all, this was a really enjoyable evening, topped off by a lovely supper, and we appreciate the invitation very much.

Saturday 27 September

For the first time that I can remember we were invited to Coxlodge Methodist Church to give a concert as a contribution to its Harvest Weekend. The Church is a relatively modern one, its foundation stone having been laid in 1963, and it has a pleasing acoustic in which to sing. The attendance was perhaps

less than the organisers had hoped—it was just as well that a goodly number of our own supporters was there—but there was no mistaking the warmth of the welcome and it was good to see the church well decorated for the season. As ever, we gave a selection from the current programme, including three Russian and four Italian songs, and there was a strong Geordie flavour to a very enjoyable set of solos. We thank Coxlodge Methodist Church for the opportunity to share in its Harvest.

Saturday 11 October

It was a pleasure to return to Westerhope Methodist Church to give a concert to a good number of people in the audience and very appreciative they were, too. Our man on the ground there is Robin Lyall and it was wholly fitting that he should have sung a couple of solos. We were sorry that another of our soloists, Brian Ash, was unable to be present—and he was missed—but we are grateful to Howard Taylor for singing an additional solo to cover this. As ever, we presented a selection from the current year's programme, which seemed to be very much to the taste of our audience. We had been promised an excellent supper afterwards and this was duly supplied. But a sad note in retrospect—this turned out to be the final concert in which second tenor Jim Tulip took part before his death just a few days later. We miss him terribly. Elsewhere in this issue you'll find an appreciation of his full life and all he meant to us.

Monday 8 December

The choir made its customary annual trip to Corbridge to take part in the carol-singing event associated with late-night shopping there. It was a clear but bitterly cold evening but the singing of the various groups involved would have warmed the hearts of those listening. Those of us who arrived a bit early were fortunate enough to hear the beautiful singing of one of the local school choirs. Our own selection was well varied and we enjoyed singing it. Thanks to the Hexham Silver Band for so ably accompanying us during the evening.

Monday 15 December

We were very pleased to receive an early re-invitation to Westerhope Methodist Church, this time to present a concert of seasonal music at the invitation of Westerhope Local History Society. It can be difficult to find enough varied Christmas music to fill a full evening with the choir as a whole and its soloists but everyone involved worked hard at it and I think the History Society appreciated the result. Their reaction to the items presented certainly suggests so. Following the concert we were treated to an absolutely sumptuous buffet supper. This and the fellowship going with it set the seal on a good evening.

Thursday 18 December

We were asked by Tyneside Samaritans to sing a selection of Christmas music for about 45 minutes in the main square at the Metrocentre, with collectors available to do some fundraising as we sang. What we sang was a selection of our standard

Christmas items. We enjoyed the occasion but it was inevitable that our audience would come and go a bit and this is what happened. Nevertheless, it was good to have assisted in raising the sum of £194.52 for this most worthwhile organisation, which incidentally celebrates its 50th anniversary on Tyneside in April 2015. We wish it well as it continues its very important work, responding to the suicidal or despairing.

Saturday 20 December

We don't often get this sort of trip out in the time around the Shortest Day but were pleased to respond to an invitation from Heighley Gate Garden Centre to come and sing a couple of slots of 40 minutes or so each on the busy Saturday morning before Christmas. We were very fortunate with the weather, which allowed us to attend on a nice, bright winter morning, rather than the blizzards that might have accompanied us at that time of year. We just had time for a nice cup of coffee in the cafeteria before beginning the first of our two stints and the break in the middle allowed those running late to buy some last-minute Christmas shopping. By this time our Christmas selections were well rehearsed and I think that those listening to us liked what they heard. Many thanks to the staff for inviting us and in particular for their very prompt attention when one of our number was taken temporarily ill towards the end of proceedings. Happy to say that, with a little help from all involved, he made a fairly quick recovery.

TRADITIONS AND TALES FROM THE GREEN ROOM

Choir members are generally required to attend a venue at least half an hour before the start of a concert. If there is a spare room at the back (or side) of the performance area, hopefully large enough to accommodate over forty big lads and a couple of slim ladies, it gets commandeered and we get marshalled into it. We call this, in traditional theatrical fashion, “the Green Room”.

After mutual greetings and a bit of light banter, we find somewhere to shed our outdoor clothing and our music bags and perhaps inspect the plumbing. There then follow about five minutes of mutual preening. Collar buttons are fastened, ties are straightened, cuff-links are checked, trouser bottoms are un-tucked from boots and jacket shoulders are brushed to remove debris, with rather less aplomb than is seen on Downton Abbey. A sudden slap between the shoulder-blades is the traditional method of signalling that one is in need of a valet. Then one of our members will make a formal announcement that he can't remember where he left his music folder. This is a pleasant ritual, as it seems that a different chorister is chosen each time to play the part of “the misplacer”. I think this nice piece of choir folklore may even pre-date “Black Rod”.

Next comes the “warm up”. Our musical director Judith leads this with a few arpeggios, by which, after a few coughs and splutters (and maybe the traditional lozenge or “Fisherman's Friend”) we attempt to tune our vocal instruments to the required

standard, whilst some of us are still recovering from smarting shoulder-blades.

Next, control is handed over to Neville, our Secretary. Neville has been sent out previously to scout the terrain as covertly as possible. His traditional job is to formulate a cunning plan, so that the contents of the Green Room can be disgorged into the performance area with military precision. Upon his return from this reconnaissance mission, he has the task of shuffling our ranks, often in a confined space, into some sort of layering system. An extra benefit of this technique is that it removes that irritating glare from freshly polished toe-caps. Then, on the word of command, this well-designed structure will magically unfold into an orderly queue that can re-fold into a neat panorama of dapper chaps ready to be admired by our audience. Well, that's the plan.

Hopefully, all the lads will now have a clear view of Judith. But oh; what about Alison, our accompanist? Some of us in the top-tenor line have this clever trick of eclipsing the sight-line between conductor and piano. I understand that this is another long-standing tradition, as, too, is that cute little shimmy dance that tenors do to remedy this problem. Perhaps not as entertaining as the NZ rugby “haka” but it's a fine way to start a concert. And why not? After 112 years, we can take pride in our strange traditions.

Pete Barrett

NO NAUGHTY WORDS, WE'RE GEORDIES!

It's well known that several of our choral pieces contain lyrics which have been translated from their original languages. What may be less well known is that some of the original lyrics were sanitised by their respective translators to avoid offending the sensibilities of polite British society. Suffice to say that our Mediterranean cousins seemed to be less inhibited in their prose when penning their thoughts about life, death and romance. Or maybe it's a contemporary thing; pre-Victorian language was more basic and visceral than would suit our modern tastes.

I recall my English Literature classes, where certain pages of Shakespeare and the romantic poets would be grubbily thumbed, with evidence of quiet sniggering at the back of the classroom. These memories came flooding back recently when a plea went out from our Secretary to help locate some missing copies of "Matona", last performed by Prudhoe Gleemen in 1981. After a quick Google search, I found "Matona, Mia Cara". Hey, Neville, we can't sing that; it's a bit rude! A little more research revealed that there is also an expurgated version, meaning that the lyrics are less like a rugby song or whatever other game Orlando di Lasso was passionate about when he wrote it. Now, if we do get around to performing this, no doubt our chairman will rise to the challenge of explaining the original lyrics to our audiences. Well, perhaps not!

Pete Barrett

WHERE EVER YE GAN YE'RE SURE TO FIND A GEORDIE

My father, Bill Connor, was in World War I as an engine driver, driving troop and ammunition trains and on one occasion King George V. A few years after the end of the war he went to try to find the grave of his friend who was killed just before the end of the war. He found the name in the register and walked into the cemetery. Towards him came a man dressed in an old army coat, Wellingtons, a spade and a black beret like all Frenchman wore. My father in his halting French then asked the man the way to the grave. With a big smile the man said, "Now, Geordie, where the heck do you want to be and where du yee cum from?" My father said, "Well, a cum from Byker," to which the man replied, "Well, a cum from Warlsend!"

He explained that, as he had no living relatives, he had applied for the head gardener's post at the cemetery. He had married a French girl and lived next to the cemetery. He then showed my father his brother's grave and several others and said, "Every day I say hello to them all and tell them what I will be doing that day and that I will never leave them. When I come tomorrow, I'll come to your friend's grave and tell him that you've been to see him and I bet he'll be pleased." Well done, that Geordie.

Bill Connor

THE ART OF CHORAL SINGING

‘When one loves one’s art, no service seems too hard.’

The American writer O. Henry’s characters said this back at the beginning of the 1900s but I feel it is particularly relevant to Male Voice Choirs today.

We love *our* ‘art’—we love to sing and that is why we have chosen to band together as a choir. It is the sound of men’s voices in harmony, a sound that has been a tradition in England, possibly parallel to the development of industry in this land. There is more than just singing in this, though. There is the getting together and the bonding that take place with the creation of sound harmonies.

For our art to be *complete*, though, it must meet an audience and it is in the stage presentation and the total involvement in the pieces we are singing that our performance as a choir reaches fulfilment.

Phillip Wilkins

STOP PRESS

As we went to press we were sorry to hear of the death of former choir member Bob Bunn, who was with us from 1990 to 2006. There will be an appreciation of Bob in the next issue.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2015:

Correct at time of publication. More may be added later.

Saturday 28 March 7.00pm NAC Choral Spectacular at Sage, Gateshead – 900 singers. Tickets from the Sage, £16.50

Saturday 9 May 3.00pm Blyth Central Methodist Church – no tickets, collection

Saturday 6 June 7.00pm Annual Concert, Royal Grammar School, Newcastle. Full details elsewhere in CounterPoint

Saturday 18 July 7.00pm Patrons' Concert and supper, Prudhoe Methodist Church

Monday 20 July start time tbc Choir Dinner, Ryton Park Hotel, cost £17.45 per head. Choir members, patrons and guests welcome. Names to Neville Fairbairn, please

Saturday 12 September 7.00pm Haltwhistle Parish Church

Saturday 10 October 7.00pm Centenary Methodist Church, Crawcrook



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The Prudhoe Gleemen Magazine.

www.prudhoegleemen.org.uk