

This is the current editors final voicemAle. Thank you to those who have contributed articles during the past two years. A very special thanks to Barry Havenhand who has faithfully provided interesting pieces, without him there would undoubtedly have been many blank spaces ! Thanks Barry.

## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

The past year has been a happy and successful one for our Choir with improved performances at concerts and an increase in our Choir membership.

Unfortunately our enthusiastic and hard working Chairman Paull Robathan, had to undergo major surgery,

but we hope is now on the road to a good recovery.

Sadly Val Hill who was a Life Member and former Assistant Music Director passed away after a Long illness, she

will be sorely missed - a Tribute Concert in her memory is being planned for next year.

I've had the privilege of serving as your President since 1981 and have celebrated with you the Choir's Golden, Diamond and 70th Jubilees. I hope to do so on your 75th in 2021!

Whatever you plan to do at Christmas and New Year I wish you and your families a very happy time and every success to the Choir during 2020. David Gill



First rehearsal of  
2020

8th January

## MENIN GATE

Along with a good number of choir members and their partners, Lesley and I boarded the coach at 5.30am at Junction 24 for the trip to Rotterdam. As with all the 'best laid plans of mice and men', things didn't run smoothly, mainly thanks to our Continental 'allies' the French, who decided it would be a good time to go on strike. Having to forego the prearranged meal at Ypres, we made our way to the Menin Gate for the evening Last Post ceremony. There was a huge crowd present and, despite a bitter wind, the choir was in excellent form. I had been given the great honour of laying a wreath on behalf of the choir in remembrance of the many thousands of men who laid down their lives for us. I asked permission to also represent my old regiment, the Grenadier Guards. By sheer chance the choir formed up right in front of the Grenadiers names on the memorial. It was a very moving experience that I shall never forget and, thanks to the assistance of John Capell, I was able to mount the dozen or so steps safely. It will stay with me forever - thanks Steve Reed and TDMVC.



There is to be a black tie choir dinner at  
Oake Manor Golf Club  
on February 20th 2021

## Autumn Leaves Concert Review (Tony Slavin)

St James Church    Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Taunton Deane and Four Lanes choirs came together at St James Church, Taunton and demonstrated the brilliance of male voice choir singing. Both individually and then together they displayed the best of this genre of choral singing.

On this occasion, unfortunately, I was not able to take my place in the second tenors but fortunately for me I was able to sit in the audience and enjoy an evening of really fine entertainment.

Taunton's first set of well known, to them, songs brilliantly conducted by Chris Grabham, in Nick's absence, showed off the fine qualities the choir have built up over the past few years, a rousing opening, passionate and emotional story-telling and sincere sentiment. Each section holding their parts well and with clear diction. It was a real pleasure to hear I Have a Dream and Tell My Father which are now choir and audience favourites.

Four Lanes, a renowned choir in their native Cornwall sang with assurance and warmth; particularly Bring Him Home and You Raise Me Up in their opening set. They started the second half with a religious zeal but got back to earth with a very good rendition of our Diamond Jubilee commissioned song, the Perfect Male Voice Choir. It was sung with great humour, which the audience enjoyed and made me wonder why we no longer sing it!

Taunton's final set combined Anthems, Hallelujahs & Saints along with Let it be me, and brought loud applause from the audience, very moving stuff.

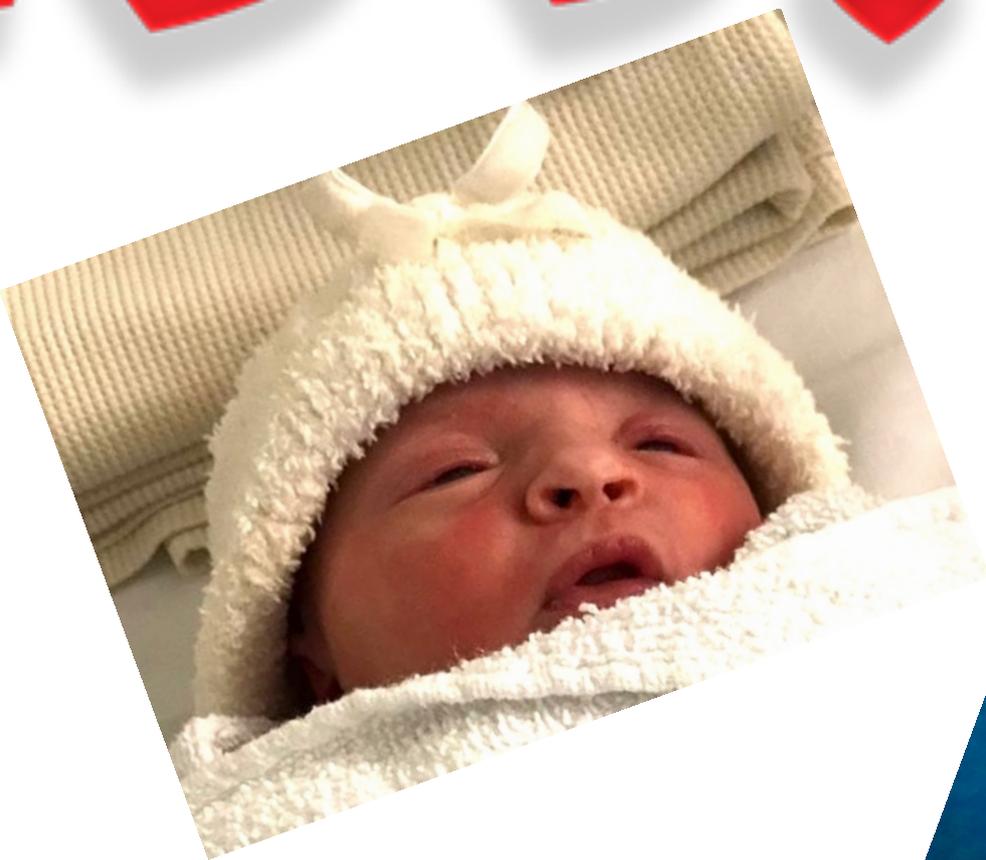
The two choirs combined for Llanfair and African Prayer and demonstrated the power and emotional feelings in both songs when the 90+ choristers 'let rip'. Four Lanes MD, Tim Hoskin, although suffering a severe cold, displayed wonderful Cornish wit and raised many a laugh. Chris Grabham revealed a real empathy with our choir which was appreciated and points to a brilliant future for him. I'm sure Hazel raised a sigh of relief when she learned that Bohemian Rhapsody was not in the programme!



It all started when, back in '16, Mike Fortune told Phil Knowles that he was taking guitar lessons. The two agreed that they would get together once in a while to go through some songs. Soon after, Mike recruited bass player Stuart Gifford and the newly-formed trio played their first gig at a St Patrick's Night do at St Audries Bay in March 2017, accompanied by Sarah (former landlady at the Holman Clavel) on fiddle. The as yet un-named band planned to take part in the Choir's entertainment evening at the hotel in Newquay where we were all going to stay during the Cornwall Festival in May 2017. (We were billed as "The Elderly Brothers", although it was later discovered that another outfit had laid claim to that tag.) It was there that Alan Hooper joined, completing the current line up. Fresh from our Cornish triumph, the band started to rehearse every Monday morning at Phil's place and, over the following months, began to build up a repertoire of mainly country, rockabilly and traditional American numbers to add to the Irish songs we had learned for St Audries Bay. Regular appearances at several local residential homes and senior citizens' clubs followed, with occasional sessions at the open mic nights run by Milverton Music Club. The band invested in a PA system, purchasing a second-hand powered mixer and speakers. The issue of the band's name was eventually resolved. "The Good, The Bad and The Elderly" had been on the cards until it was found that, yet again, someone else had beaten us to it. So what better alternative could there have been but to pay tribute to our very own hillbilly, Mike Fortune – the man who got us all together. And so it was that the band became "The Blackdown Hillbillies". It can be pretty hard work sometimes, trying to get it "right", but it's always tremendous fun, making music in the company of friends and watching people enjoy themselves. The rock'n'roll lifestyle? Well, perhaps not. A mug of cocoa before bed is probably more like it!

## The Blackdown Hillbillies





## CONGRATULATIONS

*To David & Ann Marie Kelly  
On the recent birth of Calista,  
their FOURTH granddaughter.*



## SINGING IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEART, from Paddy O'Boyle (and he should know ! )

The neurosurgical unit in Bergamo in northern Italy, like many Italian hospitals, is not a welcoming place for patient relatives or accompanying persons.

The emphasis is on providing effective care for seriously brain-damaged individuals, many of whom, have been retrieved from the ski slopes.

And so it was with us. Our 13 year old son had sustained a severe head injury whilst skiing and was thought to have only a 5% chance of survival. He had been on life support and monitoring for several weeks but appeared to be making progress.... and miraculously starting to wake up.

Thus, we found ourselves in a large 20 bedded recovery ward with other patients of all ages and variable levels of consciousness. We were very privileged..... both of us were medics and I was neurosurgical trained. My wife was an anaesthetist and a native Italian speaker.

It was therefore to the advantage of the ward staff to permit us to help to look after the 'English Boy'.

The overall care was quite outstanding with particular emphasis on suitable nutrition ...and immaculate nursing care. We became friendly with several of the staff many of whom had very extrovert personalities. What really impressed us was the singing therapy !

One of the nurses would say 'OK lads, time for some action' and click on some background music. Perhaps it would be a popular Italian song or even a classical aria.

There was an astonishing change of atmosphere as the attention of all these semiconscious people was aroused and focused by the music.

All of those who could manage would join in to the best of their ability. Those unable to vocalise for whatever reason would attempt to participate by moving whatever parts of their body they could in time to the rhythms. This would happen every day and frequently on every change of shift. The nurses and physiotherapists provided this most natural form of exercise particularly for the cardio- respiratory system..... but also for general muscular well-being and the prevention of deep vein thrombosis. This had a profound effect on me.

I have never forgotten it and I never will. Perhaps that is one reason why I feel singing is so very important. Certainly that was the case for the Italian patients.

'Singing for Breathing' classes have been introduced to certain NHS hospitals some 25 years later ( quite quick for acceptance of new ideas in medicine ). These are to help with breathing in people who have chronic chest diseases, particularly with severe 'breathlessness'.

This can be very frightening for the individual, and has been likened to impending suffocation or drowning. Not surprisingly it may cause severe depression that the body is not working properly.

At present these classes are hospital based and patients may arrive direct from the wards still attached to their 'drips' and lugging their oxygen cylinders. Others from the community arrive panting and wheezing but greeting old friends and looking forward to a good communal sing...a bit like Taunton Deane Male Voice Choir ?? Then the group leader starts the music and, after some breathing exercises, familiar tunes from Vera Lynn to the Beatles and Elton John are belted out. The transformation is quite remarkable and the positive effect on each and every person at the end of a session

is quite palpable. I am taken back to that recovery ward in Italy all those years ago and, you know, I think it happens each week on a Wednesday night here in Taunton as well.

"There are many good reasons for singing....and one has just entered my head: If I man does not sing when he's living...how the hell will he sing when he's dead ?

## STRANGE ENGLISH.

### IN A BANGKOK TEMPLE:

It is forbidden to enter a woman, even a foreigner, if dressed as a man.

### NORWEGIAN COCKTAIL LOUNGE:

Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar.

### DOCTORS SURGERY, ROME:

Specialist in women, and other diseases.

### RUSSIAN MONASTERY:

You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian composers, artists and writers are buried daily, except Thursdays.

### ROME LAUNDRY:

Ladies, leave your clothes here and spend the afternoon having a good time.

### ABU DHABI SHOP:

If the front door is closed, please enter through my backside.

### CITY RESTAURANT:

Open seven days a week and weekends.

Thanks to Alf Anstee

**To all those members whose  
birthday falls outside the choir  
season:**

**Happy birthday to you,  
Happy birthday to you,  
Happy birthday dear  
(FILL IN YOUR OWN NAME )  
Happy birthday to you.**

**Sing to the tune  
“Happy Birthday To You”**

## BRIAN PARKES.

T2

It was 1st February 1963 and the country was in the midst of one of the worst winters it had experienced for many years.

On that day, I found myself standing outside New Street Station in Birmingham, shivering, looking like an ethnic minority, trying to attract the attention of a taxi driver so that I could be taken to my Mum and Dads house.



I was in the Royal Air

Force at the time and had just returned from a two year posting to RAF Steamer Point in Aden.

In Aden, there had been two seasons of weather; the hot season and the cool season. Whatever season it was, the hours of work remained constant at 7.00 am to 1.00 pm, six days per week,

Because the temperature was too hot to work. It is difficult to say that I enjoyed my 2 year tour, but one thing is for sure, those years were the best I ever encountered.

There were also occasional guard duties to be undertaken. One particular site was called X Group and I believe that was where ammunition etc was stored. On one occasion, a particularly keen, young Security Officer decided to test the alertness of the guards and attempted to break in. He was spotted by one of the guards who called out "Halt, who goes there". The Officer replied "Donald Duck" to which the guard responded "Waddle forward and quack your number". Sadly, he was put on report and disciplined for use of incorrect responses. What a shame.

I did eventually get home to be greeted by my Mum and Dad and a wonderful coal fire.

**Saturday 1st February  
2020**

**Concert at St Andrews  
Wiveliscombe with the  
Wiveliscombe  
Town band**

## From JACK DENNIS T2

Hi Editor

Thought I should round off your truly brilliant and extraordinary stint with my story which I have been promising for along time!

I was born during the war, the second one, in Ancoats, Manchester. During the late 1920s this had been one of the worst slums in Europe and not much better in the 1940s. This district is often referred to as the world's first industrialised district and within a square mile there lived around 30000 people including many Irish, Italians and Poles.

Ancoats had a huge number of cotton mills which ran 24 hours a day as well as canals, railway lines and sidings, rubber works and chemical factories. Nearly everybody lived in back to back terraced houses with outside toilets, no bathrooms, one cold water tap and an open coal fire for heating. My parents had a sweets and tobacco shop which was one of five shops owned by my Grandad. For the area we were comparatively well off. Lots of children were not so fortunate having only one set of clothing and a pair of boots which had to last from one Whit Monday to the next ( if you were a Protestant).

I spent a lot of time with my Grandma who was blind and spent a lot of time by herself. I was very skilful at throwing coal back into the fire when it fell onto the rug! Once a week I would take three or four elderly ladies to the blind centre ( now buried beneath Man City's football ground) so they could do crafts, play dominoes and sing together. They used to give me 3d if I sang The More We Are Together ( top volume of course!)

I also used to sing for my other Grandad who always liked Where Did You Get That Hat and The Old Red Barn.

I went to St Jude's Primary School where our Headmaster, Mr Davies had formerly been a music teacher. He spent many hours teaching us English folk songs and church songs and this gave us all a great love of singing. Thanks to the Germans we had countless bombed-out houses to play in and many bomb sites to play football on but woe betide anybody who did a slide tackle on those shale chippings !

When I was 10, I was entered for the 11plus exam to be ready for the next year. Somehow I passed and went a year early to Ducie High School which was in Moss Side. The school had a particularly strong sporting tradition and a real mix of pupils. It was often said that in the courts of law it was possible to have both the accused and barristers from Ducie High!

Quite a number of leading sportsmen came from my school but I guess our most famous pupil was the actor John Thaw who was in the year below me. I was very keen on sport and played, football and cricket for the school and represented the county as a sprint hurdler and broke the English Schools' record in this even. We eventually moved to the leafy suburbs of Wythenshawe under Manchester's slum clearance initiative. I played for one of the leading boys' clubs in the

county and after the Munich Disaster was invited to play in trials for Manchester United. My Dad, who would not eat bacon because it was red and white, was appalled. I was not signed but could have signed for Everton if the manager of the boys' club had passed on their interest to me. I eventually signed for Southport who at that time were a full-time professional team in the third division. Although I played a number of games including a youth cup match against Manchester City. However, I was never going to be good enough to be a professional player.

I eventually worked a bit harder at school and was interested in going to train as a journalist or join the police force but the Headmaster said I was more cut out to be a teacher and I eventually went to Sheffield University School of Education. Prior to going to Sheffield it was suggested I should work as an unqualified teacher and had a brilliant year teaching in an all age school in Salford. The Headmaster was a truly inspirational man and teacher who helped me enormously and taught me a huge amount about being a teacher.

During my time at Sheffield I was persuaded to join the G and S group and sang many roles including that of Marco Palmieri in the Gondoliers as well as leading parts in The Mikado. I also played soccer for the First XI for three years.

In 1963 I returned to Salford to teach PE, English and History at a boys' school opposite the dock entrance. At this school I discovered rugby league and later coached extensively.

In 1968 I went to Southport to teach in a senior approved school, St Thomas More School which was run by the Liverpool Catholic Schools' Association. This school looked after boys who were aged 15 to 18 and had all come through the courts for a variety of offences, some of which were very serious. This was a great change from the ordinary state school and it took me a while to acclimatise but in my late 20s I was made Head of Education.

In 1971 I applied to do a year's advanced teaching and social work course at Newcastle University. When I graduated in 1972 I was appointed as Head of Olands Observation and Assessment Centre in Milverton where we assessed the needs and placement of children who were taken into the care of SCC and other south west counties.

We had a large residential unit staffed by care workers and a team of teachers, psychiatrists and psychologists.

During my time at Olands we assessed 3000 children. In September, 1985, I commenced a part time social work degree at Exeter University. This was a welcome diversion from what was a very stressful and challenging job. Part of what kept me fairly sane during this period was distance running and I ran dozens of marathons and half marathons all around the country. The highlights were two London Marathons and a hair raising Paris Marathon.

When I retired in 1995 I had enough free time to return to singing and in 1999 was dragged along to TDMVC by my very good friend Alf Anstee.

After a few minor reservations I settled into the baritone section alongside choir legends like Alan Richards and Brian Reynolds. I guess the camaraderie was almost as important as the singing?

At this time the choir was quite small, rarely more than 35 strong, with a preponderance of baritones and basses. The tenor one section was always very small and rarely had more than 4/5 members and quite often the great Tony Osmond and Graham Salter were the only top tenors. I was eventually persuaded to sing top tenor alongside another of the choir's greatest talents Jonathan Farey who helped me enormously. I recall one of the baritones asking us to sing quieter when we were singing Delilah as we were drowning out their section!

The present choir bears no resemblance to the choir I joined in 1999 in terms of numbers and quality of singing.

One of my proudest achievements was to organise the first choir trip to the Royal Albert Hall in 2003. Just walking into the arena was quite overwhelming. I subsequently organised two more trips to this world famous venue. Overall we went to the RAH on six occasions.

I served on the committee as Social Secretary from 2001 until 2007 and as Publicity Officer from 2001 until 2010.

It has been a privilege and pleasure to be part of TDMVC

Jack Dennis

*Thanks Jack, lovely story which brought back many of my own memories, I remember playing on bomb sites around the destroyed tenements in Liverpool . Seems like a life time ago. Well I suppose it is ! Ed.*

## Message from the Chairman

As Ron Williams lays down his editorial baton we lament the loss of an excellent editor and the quality he has brought to VoiceMale. I hope we can find a way to get close to the same variety and quality next year. Thank you Ron from all of us.

Because next year is a big one – the 20/21 season will see us celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the formation of the choir in 1946. In February 2021 we are holding a gala dinner which is already being organised by Steve Reed and John Capell. There are plans afoot for a range of concerts that will take us back to our roots in Rowbarton and to Cornwall for another Male Voice Choir Festival trip.

I am so grateful to Phil Knowles for stepping up to take on the Concert Secretary role. It is a great relief to me, and I expect to the rest of you, because the level of detail and organisation needed fits much better with Phil's capabilities than it does mine! This does mean we are looking for someone who wants to consider taking over from me as Chairman in 2021, becoming Vice Chairman in May 2020 and sharing in the excitement and splendour of our big year....email me quietly if you are interested, or if you think there is a someone who would do a great job, I will be discreet.

Already Phil has recruited a number of concert managers and is getting his teeth in to the programme for the next year and beyond. We have a schedule of events already for 2020 as you will have seen, and more to be arranged depending on the choirs with whom we might sing both home and away. If you have any specific occasions or musical partners that you think would be good for us please talk to Phil.

Back along the 2020 Vision Group carried out a comprehensive review of where we were and where we should plan to be by ... next month! Over the last few years the committee has worked with the 2020 Group to respond to the choir's hopes and expectations and we continue to try to deliver on every item in the 2020 list. Probably the most annoying for you and for me is the uniform. We have failed to find any supplier for a Royal Blue blazer at any price, let alone a reasonable one. David Capell thought he had found a supplier, but it turned out that the blazer was Navy like our current one, he is not the only one to have got to that culdesac. In the last couple of weeks I have come to the end of the trail on searching for a Royal Blue replacement for our current blazer; to explain why I reproduce below some of an email from Canoldir Choir from Birmingham who wear a Royal Blue blazer and who I contacted to find their supplier

"Hi Paull

Thanks for your email about a source of royal blue jackets.

Unfortunately we have not found a solution to this problem either! However, I can run you through the various avenues we have explored, albeit unsuccessfully, in case it saves you wasted time in going down a dead end.

Slater Menswear used to source our royal blue jackets from a manufacturer called Brook Taverner. Unfortunately at the same time that Slater's withdrew from the corporate clothing market, Brook Taverner also decided to pull the plug on supplying royal blue jackets. Despite having an excellent working relationship with Slater's, they failed to be able to source an alternative.

Having been well and truly landed with this problem I began hunting round for a solution. Local tailors would make jackets .....providing we supplied the material ..... quoting eye watering prices from £194 to £345.

In desperation I approached Brook Taverner direct to ask if they would (a) give me advice on sourcing the royal blue material or (b) reconsider their withdrawal from the market for royal blue jackets. This got me nowhere as they claimed no longer to be able to source the material.

I investigated whether material could be sourced from China via a contact with a Chinese import company.....not really a viable option unless you want a container full....

While at Worcester Cathedral recently for a concert with several local male choirs, I took the chance to bend the ears of the uniform managers of the four choirs wearing royal blue blazers about this problem and drew a total blank. Basically everyone was in the same position as ourselves. One uniform manager had recently retired from 40 years in the clothing industry and he hadn't been able to find a source for royal blue jackets which was rather telling.

Fortunately, thus far, I have been able to supply new members with a jacket from our stock but going forward we will be at the mercy of taking pot luck as to availability of particular sizes and hence we are considering reverting to a penguin outfit ..... dress suit or black suit/ bow tie/ white shirt etc, as the only viable solution. In truth it may well prove less of an expense on choir funds than the cost of the blue jacket.

The only other thing we have explored is using a tailor skilled in alterations to cannibalise a couple of jackets to make one. So far we've not had to resort to this extreme measure.....particularly as many of our jackets were made at a time when choristers had a chest size that was greater than their waist size whereas the reverse now applies.

I'm sorry I can't be the bearer of better news but do feel free to contact me again if I can remotely be of any further assistance." Ed Richards, Uniform Manager, Birmingham Canoldir Male Choir.

This is depressing. The solution is not clear if we wish to change the blazer. On the other hand the navy blazer we wear now is available for £30 from Pegasus. They also supply beige and black. I am going to recommend to the committee that we consider sticking with the current blazer, but change the trousers to a slick pressed style in either dark grey or maybe even beige?? We could afford to source the blazers and probably the trousers from our reserves which would alleviate a potential significant hit on budgets from moving to an expensive jacket or even dinner suit. PLEASE let me know what you think.

In the New Year we plan to run a weekend (probably Saturday) workshop with Rhiannon Williams who is Musical Director of Cowbridge, formerly MD of award winning Wessex and a judge in choral competitions. With Nick, Hazel, Chris Grabham and Karen Paul we will have a strong musical team and with all of them and Rhiannon working together we should have a valuable session where every section gets serious scrutiny and support. Chris Grabham is taking a course on Choral Conducting as part of his degree and we are evaluating how we can offer ourselves to help him in his course, possibly by a special series of rehearsals – and maybe even a competition entry – so that Chris and the choir can demonstrate their strong bond to support his learning and our development.

So much more to say, but I am in danger of taking over VoiceMale so I will stop. By the time you read this we will have sung around the bandstand, many of you will have sung at the nursing home where Val was resident. On December 18<sup>th</sup> we have our last rehearsal, raffle (bring prizes, buy tickets!) and Joanna from the Temple will be serving us coffee and mice pies!!!

Have a wonderful Christmas and come back ready for a roller coaster ride for the next 18 months.

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From Nick and Elaine

It is good to see and hear the buzz of enthusiasm at the end of all our rehearsals. We have had a fruitful year where we have given several important and successful concerts. I was particularly grateful to Chris Grabham who took the helm during my break down under. We rely, as do all male voice choirs, on the songs we know well, inserting the odd new piece as and when ready. We do have some tricky songs in our learning repertoire such as Bohemian Rhapsody and Bui Doy which have been performed successfully, and I hope to add **Cavatina**, selected **60s songs, You are so beautiful/Hero** and the recent revival of **Perfect Male Voice Choir** in the new year.

We work hard in practices, music is learnt very well and quickly in rehearsals but there is still that problem of remembering the words, and in contact with other choirs, we are not alone in this. We must be sure to do homework during the week to secure what we do, going over words and using the backing tracks thoroughly. Early in the new year, I am looking forward to meeting up with Rhiannon Williams who is coming to do a workshop with us.

We have several local concerts to prepare for, but time also to work on adding the new songs to our repertoire. As always, I am indebted to Hazel for her skill on the piano and for the experience and advice she brings every week.

Wishing you all a very happy and healthy Christmas.

Cheers

Nick and Elaine.

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## **A Prayer for Christmas – Robert Louis Stevenson**

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.