

**STEETON MALE VOICE  
CHOIR  
(SINGING SINCE 1908)**

# **Steeton Chimes**



Dry Stone Walls in Wales!

**Number 89**

**July 2016**

## From the Secretary's Desk:



## Choir News

We are delighted to welcome John Boyle back to our ranks and our new potential choir member, John Hudson, is enjoying rehearsing and the SMVC welcome. I believe I have a very strong possibility of a further new recruit and will keep everyone informed. Sadly we have lost a stalwart of the baritones in John Hirst who has retired from the choir after what he acknowledges were some very happy times. We do hope to see him occasionally doing his Fake Thackery numbers. Recruitment continues to be a priority and we now have a small team actively working on ideas to source new recruits but I would reiterate Alan's plea for you all to consider asking friends and acquaintances if they may be interested – the younger the better!!

Pat is delighted with the new piano and is exploring its many additional sound features to enhance our already splendid accompaniment.

I continue to pursue plans for our 2017 tour – my inclination is to go for the option around Amsterdam and The Hague but I am awaiting costings for various options and will let you all know what the committee decide ASAP.

Our Wales tour is generating visits from New Harmony and Pontnewydd Choir next year and Port Talbot are very keen to visit us as well but we were unable to fit them in this year.

Could I remind, particularly newer members, of the Desert Island Disc feature in the Chimes. It gives you all the opportunity to write about your favourite pieces of music and why they are important to you. The format is similar to the radio show i.e. you choose the pieces of music (8) and explain their importance, plus identifying a book and a luxury to help you survive on your personal desert island. I would be grateful for contributions.

I would also like to remind choir members about their Pen Portraits.

Could I thank Nikki Talbot and Janet Bastow for their tour photos used in this edition.

If possible please contact me and forward articles to

[ianmcd51@hotmail.com](mailto:ianmcd51@hotmail.com)



Port Talbot Concert – the railway whistle!



Port Talbot Afterglow

John's final afterglow appearance in SMVC uniform!!



### **Musical Director's report:**

This is something we should all read at least once a week! Make sure you read to the end. Written by Regina Brett, 90 years old, of the Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio.

"To celebrate growing older, I once wrote the 40 lessons life taught me. It is the most requested column I've ever written. My odometer rolled over to 90 in August, so here is the column once more:

1. Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
3. Life is too short – enjoy it.
4. Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and family will.
5. You don't have to win every argument. Stay true to yourself.
6. Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
7. It's OK to get angry with God. He can take it.
8. When it comes to chocolate, resistance is futile.
9. Make peace with your past so it won't mess up the present.
10. It's OK to let your children see you cry.
11. Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
12. If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it.
13. Everything can change in the blink of an eye, but don't worry, God never blinks.
14. Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.
15. Get rid of anything that isn't useful. Clutter weighs you down in many ways.
16. Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.

17. It's never too late to be happy. But it's all up to you and no one else.
18. When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take no for an answer.
19. Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the good shoes. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.
20. Be eccentric now. Don't wait for old age to wear purple.
21. No one is in charge of your happiness but you.
22. Frame every so-called disaster with these words 'In five years, will this matter?'
23. Forgive
24. What other people think of you is none of your business.
25. Time heals almost everything. Give time time.
26. However good or bad a situation is it will change.
27. Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
28. God loves you because of who God is, not because of anything you did or didn't do.
29. Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.
30. Growing old beats the alternative of dying young.
31. All that truly matters in the end is that you loved.
32. Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.
33. If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.
34. Envy is a waste of time. Accept what you already have, not what you need
35. The best is yet to come...
36. No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.
37. Yield.



38. Smile

39. Life isn't tied with a bow, but it is still a gift.

40. Always watch the conductor!!!

I just could not resist changing that last one.

**Alan Clark**



Relaxing in the National Botanic Garden of Wales – well worth a visit!!

## **Some Celtic Reflections**

I had two pre-conceptions before we embarked on the South Wales tour; namely that the area was a post-industrial wasteland and secondly that in no way could SMVC match up to the noted Male Voice Choirs of the Valleys. How wrong I was on both counts!

The Cwmbran district proved to be a pleasant green semi-rural landscape (at least the parts we passed through on the coaches) and the immediate environs of the Parkway were peaceful and attractive. Perhaps more significantly our choir sang so well that we were equal if not better than our Welsh counterparts. This verdict was gained from the enthusiasm of the audience applause, some very favourable comments from the host choir members and the fewer than usual facial grimaces directed at us by our M.D. during performances.

The hotel experience always figures large on our enjoyment or otherwise. I thought the Parkway was superb, easily deserving of its 4-star status. Every facility was first-class, from bedrooms, dining rooms, bars, and function room. The crowning glory for me was the spa and pool - excellent. The breakfasts were a treat, both staff and food of a high order. The only criticism I heard during our stay was of the Sunday evening Buffet where the absence of some hot dishes was deemed to lower the standard.

The weather played its part too; whilst not brilliant it could have been far worse. Cardiff proved to have a great many tourist attractions. Cardiff Bay with the Millennium Centre and the Welsh Assembly building I particularly liked. Incidentally, we had to go through a thorough body search in the latter in case we were intent on blowing up their showcase project.

The concerts went really well and our comperes, Peter, David and Harry did us proud. The Afterglows had us all full of praise and gratitude to our generous hosts.

Finally, I felt that the Tour was an outstanding success. Our gratitude must go to all concerned with the organisation especially Ian who did the brunt of the work, to Alan, Pat and Noel for raising the standard of our music, to Richard, Martin and John D and to all the Women, Women, Women who supported and encouraged us. Memorable highlights (there were many more) : The cheers of the guests after our contribution to \*THE WEDDING\*, our Chairman demonstrating his jiving skills, the banter between bus B coach driver and passengers, Jeremy's look of consternation when we thought we had left Ron Crossley behind in the hotel on Sunday, and David Barraclough's fine solo in our own Afterglow,

**Ron Horne 2nd Tenor**



### **From Bill and Anne Pratt**

The couple from Cwmbran that we met on holiday, John and Rita, really enjoyed the concert with New Harmony Singers and the super friendly afterglow party.

We would like to thank all concerned for a successful trip to South Wales.

**Cardiff visit:** Maggie and I were part of the hardy band who ventured into Cardiff on the Saturday of the tour. We visited the National Museum. One of the exhibitions was particularly focused around the Welsh Regiments who were involved in the battle of the Mametz Wood (one of the most significant and bloody battles fought by Welsh soldiers during WW1).



It inspired works by artists and poets who were serving at Mametz. It was very moving and made us think carefully about the importance of our relationships with our European neighbours. Below is Sospan Fach by Robert Graves which we thought particularly pertinent to a visiting choir.

### **Sospan Fach (The Little Saucepan)**

Four collier lads from Ebbw Vale  
Took shelter from a shower of hail,  
And there beneath a spreading tree  
Attuned their mouths to harmony.

With smiling joy on every face  
Two warbled tenor, two sang bass,  
And while the leaves above them hissed with  
Rough hail, they started 'Aberystwyth.'

Old Parry's hymn, triumphant, rich,  
They changed through with even pitch,  
Till at the end of their grand noise  
I called: 'Give us the 'Sospan' boys!'

Who knows a tune so soft, so strong,  
So pitiful as that 'Saucepan' song  
For exiled hope, despaired desire  
Of lost souls for their cottage fire?

Then low at first with gathering sound  
Rose their four voices, smooth and round,  
Till back went Time: once more I stood  
With Fusiliers in Mametz Wood.

Fierce burned the sun, yet cheeks were pale,  
For ice hail they had leaden hail;  
In that fine forest, green and big,  
There stayed unbroken not one twig.

They sang, they swore, they plunged in haste,  
Stumbling and shouting through the waste;  
The little 'Saucepan' flamed on high,  
Emblem of hope and ease gone by.

Rough pit-boys from the coaly South,  
They sang, even in the cannon's mouth;  
Like Sunday's chapel, Monday's inn,  
The death-trap sounded with their din.

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The storm blows over, Sun comes out,  
The choir breaks up with jest and shout,  
With what relief I watch them part--  
Another note would break my heart!

### **Robert Graves**

We would also recommend you look up 'Aftermath' by Siegfried Sassoon



Re photo : For Wales Trip Members Only - Guess Who?

The Annual concert is rapidly approaching and **the Ladies Group** would appreciate contributions, especially "bottles". We are also putting together a Christmas Hamper and items for this would be welcome. Thank you in anticipation for your contributions, you never let us down!

We welcome any of the new ladies to our meetings on the third Monday in each month; we meet at Steeton Hall around 7.30pm. If you are shy about coming just give me a call and we can arrange for one of us to meet you. My number is 01282 545084.

Regards - Christine

**Eric Stowe** passed on a snippet from a daily paper. It featured a photo of the 3 Tenors with a quote which read as follows:

'All too often the big stars carry on even when their pitch wobbles, their tone hardens and their stamina fades.'

He added 'surely this cannot be said of the little (or dim) stars of Steeton!'

### **Presentation to Peter Lofts**



One afternoon at the end of April, David Borley (Chairman) Alan Clark (Musical Director) Len Wilson (President) and Stephen Fenton (Webmaster) went to Peter Lofts' home to present to Peter a certificate of appreciation in recognition of his contribution to the choir, particularly his creation and maintenance of the choir archive. Our President made the presentation to Peter in front of the other three choir men representing the whole choir and a similar number of Peter's family. Here is Len's presentation address.

"Friends, when Peter joined the choir it didn't take me, and others, long to realise that here was a man of ideas!

Those with ideas for the choir's improvement are valuable . Those with ideas and the will and the willingness to take on jobs very much in the background are invaluable. Those men of ideas who have the ability and the drive to make

an outstanding success of their back room tasks, voluntarily undertaken, are as water in the desert - rare and precious indeed.

Apart from a few minute books and even fewer account books mouldering in an upstairs cupboard and a cardboard box containing a few mementoes of tours and visits to other choirs there was nothing to record what we have liked to refer to as our Century of Song - simply because nobody really bothered. Until Peter came along.

I don't need to tell the present company what Peter has done since becoming our archivist; 13 large and beautifully presented volumes telling the story of our choir. He has been assiduous in collecting material from far and wide. mounting displays when asked and generally giving us an archive that any choir, or any other organisation for that matter, would be proud to own. Perhaps one day the archive will be the basis of a written history of our choir and if it is, Peter Lofts' name will deservedly find a prominent place because without his work on our behalf such a history simply couldn't be even attempted.

It is my privilege, Peter, to ask you to accept this certificate, acknowledging your contribution to Steeton Male Voice Choir, not just as the choir's archivist but as a stalwart of the choir, as a friend and most congenial colleague. And not least for bringing with you another stalwart, worker and friend - your Jean!"

Len Wilson

**Eulogy to Peter Lofts** (this was delivered at the funeral and many of the choir did not manage to catch it all and other were not able to attend but Peter's brother was pleased to let me have a copy for The Chimes).

Peter was born in Leeds on the 13th of February 1938 to Joe and Eileen. Joe was the son of a soldier who had served in India and Eileen was one of five siblings who were brought up in care. Neither had received much in the way of formal education, which said more about their circumstances than about their intelligence or abilities.

Peter went home from the maternity ward to sleep in an orange box; a proper child's cot was an unaffordable expense. He was only a few months old – it might even have been only a few weeks – when he suffered a major health scare. He was diagnosed with something called intussusception, which is even more difficult to spell than it is to say. It meant he needed an abdominal operation – a major challenge for a tiny tot but he was a fighter and he survived.

The early years were spent in a tiny back-to-back terraced house in Leeds, which became tinier with the arrival of me, 18 months later and some ten years later sister Josephine. Father Joe earned very little as a housepainter and had periods of unemployment which meant clothes were frequently second-hand or home-made, and there were times when if you wore a hole in your shoe you had to stuff a piece of cardboard in because the money to mend them just wasn't there.

At school Peter showed great promise but when he approached school-leaving age the big question was: could he be allowed to stay on into the sixth form in the hope of going on to university or would he have to leave and get a job to boost the family's income? It was a difficult, even agonising choice.

Fortunately the local vicar was someone who knew all too well what education could do for a promising student: his own brother had been a president of the Oxford Union who later rose to be a cabinet minister and life peer. So the Reverend Mayhew pleaded Peter's case with his parents and in the end they agreed. Peter went on to academic success, first at grammar school and then at Leeds university, where he gained a degree in textile chemistry. In 1959 he was joint student of the year along with fellow student Peter Horne – still a friend after all these years. They each received a cheque for £2.10 shillings.

He followed his degree with a doctorate in the epicuticle of wool. It was a long, hard, technical grind and he was justifiably proud of the title Dr Lofts, which he kept throughout his life.

In 1965 Peter joined the American firm Johnson & Johnson and travelled the world on their behalf as Research and Development Manager. His career was mostly in healthcare. He was a pathfinder, an inventor and a pioneer who oversaw the development of many new products. He was, for example, a significant member of the team that created that ubiquitous household product the J-cloth.

Eventually, for economic reasons, a new managing director did away with Peter's department and he was made redundant. It was a heavy blow but a CV which he wrote around that time reveals that he already had plenty to be proud of from his work at J&J. A few examples:

Peter:

- \* Instituted cost-saving programmes which ultimately led to a new factory with 14 production lines.
- \* Saved many tens of thousands of pounds with a novel absorbent for a feminine hygiene product.
- \* Developed a prototype dissecting swab of much greater performance (and profitability) than the conventional one.
- \* Worked on new methods to treat chronically infected deep wounds.
- \* Recruited, trained and directed staff and filed five product patents.
- \* Served as president of the World Non-Woven Fabrics Association and represented the company on many other technical associations.



Employed by other companies Peter went to work and consult on materials used in nuclear, biological and chemical warfare (yes, apparently!) and on the development of industrial filters.

So this was a serious man. But that didn't stop the children having many fun bathtimes testing the waterproof materials he brought home!

Work with Yorkshire Water and the NHS followed before retiring.

Throughout Peter's career his motivation was the health and well-being of his fellow-man and woman. His contribution was considerable and its impact is felt today: a professional legacy that his family is proud of.

He and Jean met at the local church youth group. They performed and produced revues and plays but mostly danced. Peter's favourite was the quickstep. In fact he liked it so much that even when the band was playing a waltz or a foxtrot Peter still danced the quickstep! He learned to jive too, just to please Jean. Not easy jiving with legs that long!

They married in 1962 in Leeds in a characteristically low-key ceremony with a finger buffet and a disco. They moved to Crosshills soon afterwards and started their family. He was a loving and devoted father – a hands-on daddy before the phrase had even been invented. Years later the loss of Philippa was incalculable.

Peter was a man who put a huge amount of effort into getting things right – and he expected others to do the same– not just in the technical area of his work but across the whole of his life. So, for example, when he came to inspect the Crosshills house as it was in process of construction, Peter looked at the half-finished brickwork where the kitchen window was going to be and found it wanting. So he simply put a hand on it and gave it a shake that sent the whole section tumbling to the ground. "They'll hopefully get it right next time" was his comment. And they did!

The one thing that can be said about Peter without any fear of contradiction is that he never in his life carried any extra weight! Mostly, I suppose, it was in his genes but he was always active, either in organised sport or leisure activities. A childhood friend recalls playing cricket against Peter in a game where the wickets were chalked on a garage door: "Peter was bowling so fast, we couldn't get near the ball, let alone hit it." He played for his grammar school and later was a member of Gargrave cricket club where he was that odd but useful creature, a right-handed bowler who batted left-handed. In fact he was playing cricket the day Samantha was born. He was adamant he always wanted girls – but he took the precaution of encouraging Jean to be in Yorkshire in case their subsequent arrivals were boys. Always thinking ahead!

In later life he renewed his interest in bowls and played indoors in winter and outdoors on the green in summer. He was a keen cyclist throughout his life.

Peter loved the limestone country that was on his doorstep but he didn't just walk the Dales. Those long legs took him up hills in Scotland, Wales and Austria – always with many true, life-long friends. As a veteran he did the Haworth Hobble several times, always memorable outings. He persuaded the family to do the Three Peaks – although not all in one go as he did. Their initial reluctance turned into fun, an appreciation of a challenge and something special to do with Dad.

Peter was a man with a strong social conscience. He served as school governor when the children were at school and later became a member of the Hospitals Board at Airedale General.

He also joined the Bradford Institute of Health Research on the Quality and Clinical Excellence panel. He cycled to Keighley on Sunday mornings to help Muslim boys with their maths and English homework. This led to an expedition with the boys to Malham in the earnest hope of passing on his love of the Dales to some of them. He also joined a group of like-minded people who accompanied adults with learning difficulties on walks.

Peter had a lifelong love of classical and church music. He was a boy chorister and an occasional soloist (the regular treble was frustratingly good) and he once appeared with other choir members at Leeds Grand theatre with the Carl Rosa opera company. But it wasn't until the year 2000 that his vocal chords got their biggest opportunity. This was when he joined the Steeton Male Voice choir – an event which was to add enormously to his (and Jean's) social life for the next 16 years. When the lads sing you will understand why Peter was so proud to be among their company.

Peter's scientific mindset never left him. He had a lifelong quest for knowledge. Anyone who challenged him on a matter of scientific fact was on a very sticky wicket indeed. As described by his daughters: "he had a brain the size of a planet." Even towards the end, when I rang to ask how he was faring with his oxygen equipment, there was no bitter complaint about how cumbersome or inconvenient it was – something he was surely fully entitled to do. Instead, what I got was an exquisitely detailed description of exactly how it worked and what a marvel of technology it was. That was the mark of the man.

When he was 72 he became a Grandad. Over the years he gained such pleasure from his own children and now he was able to do it all over again with Sylvie, Margo and our Ed. What joy.

We didn't all see eye-to-eye with Peter, whether it be politics, religion, DIY, map-reading or the best way to cook a Yorkshire pudding. However, his stance was always considered and principled and that means a great deal. Peter was modest, with a strong work ethic and family commitment. He was compassionate, honourable and fair, tender-hearted and loving – and a steadfast friend.

There will be many of you who know, as we do, that Peter approached his illness with characteristic dignity and resilience, with tolerance and with grace.

He sought the best from people and truly believed that everyone has a best that they can give.

Now cracks a noble heart – Good night, sweet prince. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! May he rest in peace.

**John Lofts** (who pointed out that he had compiled this with the help of the extended family)



Performing in the Botanic Garden



No he is not praying!!

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