

PARKSIDE COLLIERY MALE VOICE CHOIR



OUR STORY 1969 - 2013

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Parkside Colliery, Newton - le - Willows

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Esprit de Corps

Parkside Colliery started producing coal in 1964 and at the time it was forecast as having sufficient reserves for 100 years of mining. It was, therefore, reasonable to assume that everyone at Parkside considered they had a job, with many years of employment at the colliery. Thus, it was important, at that time, to generate an “*Esprit de Corps*” at the colliery and to unite the workforce under one banner — PARKSIDE.

This was not a Family or Village pit with a local community but a new colliery with men drawn from a very wide area. Community life away from the colliery was virtually non-existent. Several events were held over the first years to try to create a community spirit at and away from the colliery. There is no doubt that this was uppermost in Horace Smith’s mind when he announced his idea of starting a Male Voice Choir at Parkside.

Now, over 45 years later the colliery may have gone, we are still enjoying that community spirit within the Choir and sharing it with our audiences and keeping the name alive.

In 1969

Horace Smith, Deputy Colliery Mechanical Engineer and an avid Male Voice enthusiast, had the idea of starting a Colliery Male Voice Choir. He discussed it with the then Colliery Manager Bill Holdsworth and his immediate boss Bill Bullen, Colliery Mechanical Engineer. Both men agreed to give all the support they could. Notices were put up around the colliery advertising a meeting and inviting the interested to come along and discuss the possibility of starting a choir.

The Meeting

The meeting took place in the Colliery Rescue room and was well attended by both surface and underground workmen. Horace won the day and it was agreed to put the “wheels in motion” to form the PARKSIDE COLLIERY MALE VOICE CHOIR. Bill Holdsworth agreed to become President, Bill Bullen - Chairman, Wilf Shaw (Cost control officer and Choirmaster of St Luke’s Church, Stubshaw Cross) – Conductor, John Croston (stores) - Pianist, Jimmy Scarborough (Assistant Surface Mechanical Engineer) - Treasurer, Joe Genner (Safety Officer) - Secretary, Horace Smith – Public Relations Officer (PRO).

St Thomas's Church Hall, Ashton in Makerfield was hired and the first rehearsal took place on 27th January 1970. Present were, Bill Bullen, Horace Smith, Jimmy Scarborough, Joe Genner, John Croston, Paul Housley, Bert Farrimond, Jack Johnson, Gordon Robinson, Bill Gregory, Frank Lyon, Bill Marrow, Arthur Whitter, Harold Bond, Bob Smith, John James, Harold Williams, Brian Evans, Stan Talbot, Elvin Roberts, Bob Simm, Wilf Shaw, Ron Sankey and Frank Collier (Great Britain Rugby League International)

Apologies to anyone left out, but the names are from memories of Founder Members.

After a few weeks Paul Housley who was a member of Ashton Male Voice Choir brought along Mr Handel Jones (not just by chance) the Conductor of Ashton MVC, who was asked if he would lend his experience into getting this new choir off the ground.

Ashton MVC were struggling due to lack of numbers and indeed folded up the following year. Handel readily agreed to take the choir under his wing and proceeded to bring along several experienced chorists from Ashton MVC to help out; Albert Halliwell, Tom Evans, Ken Lockett, Derek Hayes, Bob Lake, Eric Watson, Jack Clegg, Bill Houghton, Harry Taylor, Bill Steel, and Eddie Shawcross. Handel then contacted Miss Marie Taylor (a well known music teacher in Wigan) and asked if she could recommend some one who would be interested in playing piano for the choir. Miss Margaret Brown, a pupil of Miss Taylor's, duly arrived.

Margaret was accompanist for the choir until 1976, and again 1986 to 1989 becoming Deputy conductor the year before she resigned. Margaret had even chosen one of the choristers for her husband.

Enthusiasm was high and Handel felt the excitement of welding together this newly formed choir. He is reported as saying, "It has been my ambition for as long as I can remember to get together a good choir."

The object of the choir shall be:

To promote and encourage the singing of Choral Music, to offer concerts to charitable institutions both as entertainment to them and pleasure for members in providing such entertainment.

Two concerts were then arranged before the choir offered themselves to the public:

22.8. 1970 Wigan Co-operative Society Hall, for retired Miners

27.9. 1970 Platt Bridge Methodist Church

The first Official Committee Meeting took place at the Colliery

On Thursday 11th June 1970 at 10am, where it was agreed to hold the Inaugural Concert in Ashton Library Lecture Hall on Wednesday September 30th 1970 at 7:30pm. It was also agreed that each member should be dressed in dark trousers, black shoes, white shirt and black bow tie, (monies for blazers had not yet been raised) and also provide a dress for the accompanist. It was anticipated that

demand for tickets would be excessive and therefore to limit the number of seats to 250. Each member of the choir would be restricted to 6 tickets each, to be sold at 3/6d each (17 1/2p)

During this meeting Derek Taylor took over as Choir Secretary and Wilf Shaw became the Treasurer.

Future Committee meetings were then held in the Cross Keys at Bolton Road until 1974 when they again reverted to the Colliery Conference Room until the Colliery Closed.

The need for money to support the choir was uppermost in Horace's mind and it was just the sort of challenge he enjoyed. He wrote to every firm that had any contact with the colliery for donations. Reg Winstanley, Vice President, who was at that time leasing plant-hire equipment to the colliery, sold an old JCB and donated the proceeds to the choir funds. This was still not enough to buy blazers, so Horace then applied to Coal Industry Social and Welfare Organisation CISWO and succeeded. Thus the first choir blazer badge depicted the coal board emblem and motto *E TENEBRIS LUX* (Out of Darkness, Light) with the initials CISWO underneath. This was used until 1983 when our present badge, depicting an oil lamp, pick and shovel, still with the same motto, was donated by the Colliery Welfare Committee.

In 1973

it was generally agreed that the choir was good enough to make a professional recording, but where to get the funds? Again Horace rose to the challenge and contacted CISWO for finance. This time they wanted to come along to a rehearsal to hear the choir and to see how many members there were. On the appointed evening Ashton Library was packed to capacity with choristers, Horace had enlisted every man he could to turn up for the occasion. The Representatives were impressed but the money for a recording never came. [Insert picture](#)

On Boxing day

1970 the choir was asked to tour the wards of Wrightington Hospital and bring some Christmas Cheer to the patients. It has now become a tradition and we have been visiting the Hospital every Boxing Day morning for over thirty years.

Arrangements were made in 1971 for the first Celebrity Concert to be held at the Queens Hall, Wigan on Saturday 22nd of May. Two thousand tickets were ordered and one thousand programmes. Handel Jones stated that the Guests, Joanne Moore and Alan Burrows would require a fee of six guineas each.

Mr Keith Lewis was Compere and there were twenty six stewards. The evening was a huge success.

Except for the years (1982 — 1986 inclusive) the choir have hosted a Celebrity concert every year with famous Bands; Grimethorpe, Wingates, Fairey, Carlton Main, Frickley, Manchester Police, Foden's Motor Works. The Marple Band, CWS (Manchester), Golborne Prize and BNFL and stars; Kathleen Lewis, Maryetta and Vernon Midgley, Wendy Picton (Euphonium), Iris Williams, Amanda Roocroft, Anthony Mee (2), the Manchester Boys Choir, the Three British Tenors (2), Miriam

Bowen & Joanne Thomas, and Jane Doran.

The first Annual General meeting was held in St Thomas's Church Hall on 25th May 1971. Mr Bullen (Chairman) thanked Mr Horace Smith for his efforts in getting the choir started, Mr Handel Jones (Conductor) thanked the members for their efforts and said he had no doubt they would progress to the top of the tree. The choir gave twelve local concerts that year in addition to attending the North Wales Music Festival, held in the Miners Welfare Club, Point of Ayr Colliery.

Margaret Brown - Pianist and Stan Talbot - Bass entered individual classes and were both "Highly Commended"

In 1972

The choir joined the National Association of Choirs. Later that year a recording was made at Starphonic Sound Studios, Manchester, at a cost of £37. A thirty-seven minute tape was produced from which it was proposed to extract a "piece" for Radio Manchester and the rest to make a record in the future. The record was never made but the choir did broadcast on BBC Radio Manchester at 8.00pm on Tuesday 28th November. The first of many over the years.

In June the choir traveled to Leeds to record the ITV show "Stars on Sunday". The show was very popular in the seventies and the massed choirs were shown at the opening and closing of the programme.

In 1973

Monday rehearsal was moved to Ashton Library Lecture Hall and we are grateful to Wigan Leisure Services for their continued co-operation.

June 9th 1973. Returning from an outing nearly saw the end of the choir, the coach overturned, crashing into a ditch and landing on it's roof. There were thirty-seven passengers on the coach and twenty-seven received treatment for minor injuries, only one was detained in hospital, with a dislocated shoulder.

Quote from a newspaper at the time

"As diesel oil flowed from the shattered fuel tanks, the singers freed their pianist Miss Margaret Brown, who was trapped on the back seat. Other passengers lined up to sing hymns as a rescue team worked."

In 1974, Dick Potter, who had joined the choir in 1971 and was a very well known Lay reader in the Church of England, became the concert Compere. Dick was never short of a story to tell, all of which he swore were true! A job he continued to do until ill health forced him to retire in 1992.

After the first flush of excitement with a new choir, attendance began to fall off and a Questionnaire was circulated to the choir asking for comments. A meeting was held with the President, Mr Daniels, in the chair, to evaluate the answers. He stated that there did not appear to be the major problems that the committee imagined and made the following points:

1. The Choir must accept majority decisions
2. Consider variation in venues and programmes
3. Consider a home visitor

It took a long time to implement the latter but an Almoner, Ken Millard, was appointed 1993. The other observations were noted and attendance did improve as the year went on.

In June 1974 the choir auditioned for Hughie Greens "Opportunity Knocks" at Manchester. It was not used that year but Hughie asked for its return in 1975 for another audition, this time dressed in overalls and wearing pit helmets and lamps. Unfortunately, the show came off the AIR before it was shown.

11th December 1975 Horace Smith died, In his memory a Silver Bowling Cup was purchased and called "THE HORACE SMITH TROPHY". It is played for every year and Jack Lowe won it no less than 8 times. (Still competed for Ed. 2013)

Saturday 24th April 1976 the choir travelled to London, to appear at the Royal Albert Hall for the thirtieth reunion of the Burma star Association.

The show was produced by Ralph Reader CBE, with Guest Speaker Earl Mountbatten of Burma. Guest Artists were; Dame Vera Lynn, Russ Conway, the Regimental Band of the Scots Guards, The Bands of the Brigade of Gurkhas and the Band of HM Royal Marines. On Sunday 25th April the choir led the singing of Hymns and presented an accomplished rendering of Schubert's setting of the 23rd Psalm at the Morning service in St Georges Chapel, the Chapel of the Knights of the Garter, which was relayed to H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.



Dame Vera Lynn with Choir members after their performance at the Burma Star Association Reunion at the Albert Hall London in 1976

In 1977 the choir was invited to sing at the closing ceremony of the National Coal Board's first Mining Festival, at the Opera House, Blackpool on Sunday 6th November. The choir walked in from the back of the hall wearing Pit Helmets, lamps and overalls.

All the lights in the auditorium were out and showing on the stage screen was a pit headgear with the sound of coal being wound through the shaft. The entrance was effective and many said afterwards that they had a lump in their throats during the choir's entrance as they sang "Guide me O Thou Great Redeemer".

In October 1978

Mrs May Moore came to help out as our accompanist and stayed for 6 years. In the late summer of 1979 Handel's health began to fail and in October of that year Mr John Myers was asked to help out until Handel recovered. Unfortunately, Handel's health did not improve and in 1980 he reluctantly resigned from his post as Conductor. In gratitude for his services he was made a Vice-President of the Choir.

At the 1980 Annual General Meeting John Myers was appointed as Conductor. John was an experienced conductor, he acquired his first real taste for choral conducting when he became the deputy Conductor of Ashton MVC more than 30 years previously. He was also involved with other choirs and Operatic Societies in the area, not only as Musical Director, but also as a singing and acting member. Outstanding Experiences in the following years were:

1981 Forum Hall, Wythenshaw, Combined Choirs and Guest Semprini

1982 & 1984 Manchester Free Trade Hall. 500 voices

1983 & 1985 Radio Manchester Carol Concert, Manchester Free Trade Hall

1986 & 1987, GMex Centre, Manchester 1000 voice.

1988 & 1990, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. Massed Choir

1990 Preston Guild Hall, Combined Male Voice Choirs for the Lancashire Association of League of Hospital friends.

1991 the choir was awarded a Certificate of Merit - For Outstanding Service – to that Association.

1989

was a year of both great joy and sadness, Bill Bullen our Chairman and Co-Founder of the choir passed away after a short illness and our Ex-Conductor Handel Jones died.

The joy was that the choir made its first recording "STOUT HEARTED MEN" something both would have been very proud to have been associated with. Horace would surely have been dancing on a cloud with glee.

At the Choir AGM. in 1990 our Conductor John Myers resigned. Neil Williams was invited to join us and was appointed Conductor from Monday 18th June

Memorable concerts with Mining connections were:

Sunday 14th September 1980 at St Thomas's Church Golborne when a Stained Glass Window was dedicated to the ten Miners who lost their lives in the Golborne Colliery explosion on the 18th March 1979. Again at the same church for the 10th Anniversary Service on Sunday 19th March 1989. Yet again at the same church in 1999 for the twentieth anniversary.

1990, Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire, to entertain Disabled Miners.

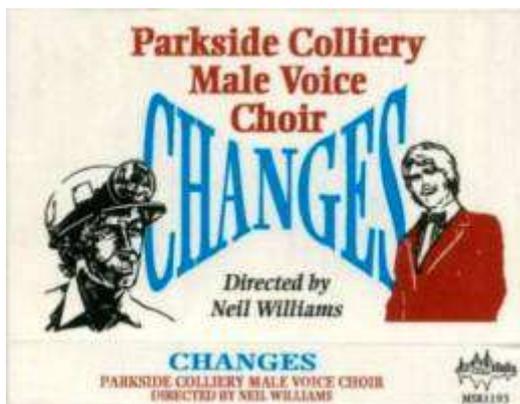
1990, St Helens Parish Church to mark 450 years of Mining in the area, the service was taken by the Most Rev. Derek Warlock, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, Right Rev. David Shepherd, Anglican Bishop of Liverpool and Rev. Dr. John Newton, Free Church Moderator

1992, Morning Service for the Institution of Mining Engineers, at Blackpool.

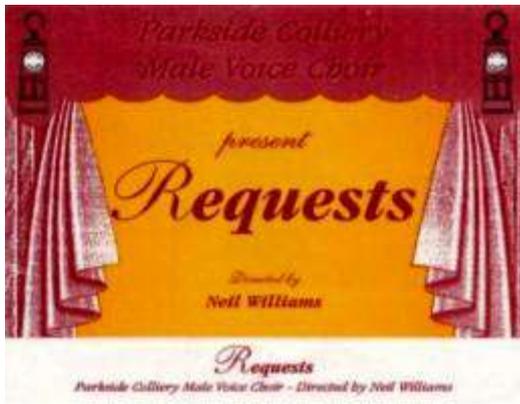
- 1992, St James Church, Haydock Dedication of a Memorial to commemorate the "Wood Pit" disaster of 7th June 1878.
- 1992, Coal Heritage day, Chatterley Whitfield, Mining Museum, Staffordshire.
- 1993, St Oswalds Church Ashton-in-Makerfield, Funeral Service of Lord Gormley (former President of the National Union of Mineworkers).

In 1991

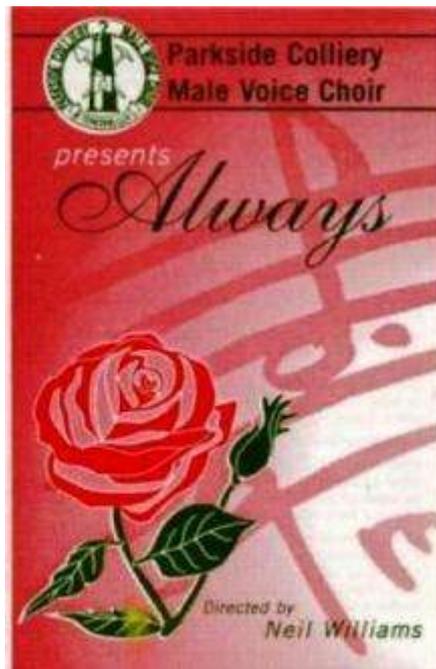
as part of our 21st year Celebrations we made our second recording "COMRADES". This was a mixture of traditional and more modern items. It proved so popular that we quickly followed it up with a third "CHANGES" this time taking a break from the more traditional Male Choir numbers, by producing Music to entertain all age groups.



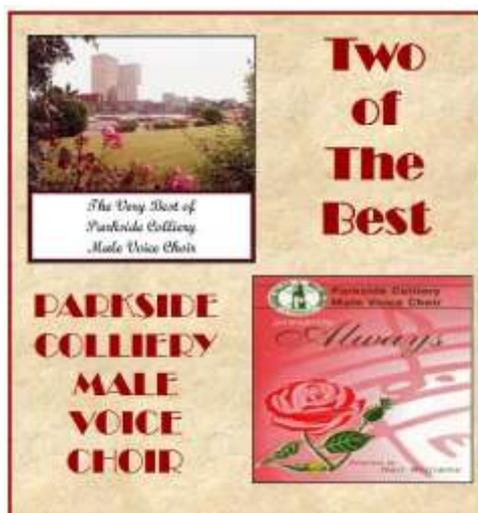
The fourth recording "REQUESTS" was made in 1996, and included items requested by concert audiences.



“ALWAYS” the fifth recording was produced in 1999 and contains songs which, hopefully, will be with us always.



We Produced our first CD a compilation CD taken from our cassettes called The Very Best of Parkside Colliery Male Voice Choir and most of the cassettes have been digitised and copied onto CD we not have a twin pack available at concerts called two of the best (ED 2013)



1995

in addition to our normal concerts we sang for the "PARADE OF WAAFS" on VE Day at Southport Theatre, and the "BURMA STAR" Association VJ Service in the Floral Gardens, Southport.

We enjoyed a Celebration Dinner in March when ten Founder Members were presented with miniature miner's lamps to mark twenty-five years service, and a memorable Thanksgiving Service for the Choir in St. Thomas' Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield.

1996 - We opened our Concert Programme with a 'D' Day Normandy Veterans Association Concert at Highfield, St Matthews, followed by a memorable concert at Wigan Baptist Church with Joanne Moore (Soprano) and Richard Lea (Organ). 1997 we made our first tour of Cornwall with joint concerts at Newquay, Tintagel and Nankersley. It was in this year that we decided to bring on board Associate Members and they have been a tremendous benefit to the Choir financially and supportively.

In 1998 we had a reciprocal visit from the Tintagel Male Voice Choir. A concert at Southport Floral Hall for the Convention of Ancient Order of Foresters and a Celebrity Concert with "The Three British Tenors"

In 1999 we hosted the Newquay MVC and undertook a tour of Bournemouth and Swanage, three concerts.

Copies of "The History of Parkside Colliery" was presented to the Choir by the author Geoff Simm.

As a new century was born we have had reciprocal visits by the Rodillian Singers of Wakefield, sung at the MEN Arena, Manchester in a "2000 in 2000" concert, again toured Cornwall (Truro Tintagel and Newquay), hosted a joint concert with the Cor Mebian Cwn Garw from Bridgend and joined in a Queens Golden Jubilee concert at the Opera House, Blackpool. We also gave two further Golden Jubilee concerts at the Monaco, Hindley and St Oswalds RC Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield. Rachel Dixon joined us as deputy Accompanist. The choir is delighted to have another accomplished musician on board.

The Choir Rules and Constitution were formulated.

Bert Farrimond was made the first Life Member of the Choir.

On a sad note our Musical Director, Neil Williams, resigned on the grounds of ill health, after holding the baton for twelve and a half influential years. The choir continues to perform items arranged by Neil. Alexander S. Wallace was appointed

as M.D. and Conductor in April 2006

Festivals

The choir had, from 1972, entered at least one competition each year in places such as, Freckleton, Morecambe Bay, Blackpool, Southport and Wigan, usually coming away with a second or third place. In 1981 at Wigan we were awarded first place in the Male Voice Section but in 1983 it was decided that competition work was too time consuming and that it would be better to concentrate our efforts in entertaining the public. A decision we have never regretted.

Over the years the Choir have sang in many places, London, Blackpool, Southport, Leeds, Preston, Manchester, Liverpool, the list goes on and on, but probably the place we look forward to the most is Wales. In 1991 we were invited to give a concert in Holy Trinity Church, Mostyn Street, Llandudno to replace a Welsh choir. In 2003 the choir will sing at that same church for the 13th consecutive year in the "Sunday Night at Eight" series.



Llandudno

Farewell to the Past

There is so much more which could be told of concerts we give each year. Our close relationship with Wigan and Leigh Hospice and Wrightington Hospital, the struggle to maintain momentum and attendance during the strikes of 1971 /72, 1973/74 and 1984/85. Of the many people over the years, Singers, Conductors, Secretaries, Treasurers, Deputy Conductors, Accompanists and Associate members, all of whom have played a part in the shaping of Parkside Colliery Male Voice Choir. Their dedication has ensured that the choir will continue well into the future. With the advent of the internet the choir launched it's website.

The New Millennium

The Choir continues to grow and in the 2000's we have continued to provide concerts in the local area and afar. We still make our annual pilgrimage to Llandudno now performing in St John's Methodist Church in Mostyn Street. We have represented Wigan in Angers France and have taken part in the Massed Choir event in the Royal Albert Hall in aid of Cancer research.



Arriving in Angers (France)



Singing in the Abbey Church Angers

The choir have sung at remembrance services honouring those killed in mining disasters at May Pole Pit (Abram), Kid Glove (Golborne) and Pretoria (Atherton / Westhoughton).



Parkside Colliery Male Voice Choir sing at the memorial service at Abram Parish Church

August 17th 2006 Abram Church Photo from Wigan Evening Post

We have raised £1400 at a concert in Leigh in aid of the Wizz Kidz Charity



Our accompanist of many years, Margaret had to retire due to ill health her deputy Rachel Dixon was appointed principle accompanist.

We have celebrated our 40th anniversary with a concert in Ashton where we were joined by the Riversiders an Ashton based ladies Barber shop choir. We have also had a number of joint concerts with a Sale based Ladies Choir.

In 2012 we took part in the Queens Diamond Jubilee celebrations we also held a Come and Sing training day from which we gained many new members.

We were approached by Garndiffaith Gleemen MVC from South Wales for a joint concert that was held at Stubshaw Cross which raised over £1000 and donations were made to Parkinson's research and the North West Air Ambulance.



Also in May 2012 Alec our Musical director decided that his business commitments made it necessary for him to step down as MD.

The position of MD was taken over by Paul Witkiewicz in October 2012 and Shade Chort was appointed assistant MD, Shade also acts as our deputy accompanist, also in 2012 we again took part in the massed choir concert in the Albert Hall, London in aid of Cancer Research.

In 2013

the choir took part in the St.Helens Adult learning week, with an exhibition and concert in the central library and a street concert in the town centre. We again held our annual concert in Llandudno and had a return concert with Garndiffaith Gleemen MVC in South Wales where we performed at their 65th Anniversary celebrations and had a long week-end in Cardiff.



Adult Learning week, Central Library St Helens

The Annual concert at St. John's Methodist Church Llandudno was voted our best ever by the Llandudno organisers and our associate members.

The Choir sang two items from their Welsh collection including the specially arranged version on Calon Lân "from memory" (no copies) which was well received and we were complimented on our "Welsh"

It was with regret that we sang at the funerals of a number of members and members emeritus including that of our long time accompanist Margret

In September we were invited to sing the Opening Concert at the Ashton-in-Makerfield Festival when we had a guest tenor singing the solo spots he was Tom Loughlin a local teenager who had be voted Wigan area young musician of the year.

To be continued

