



## “AS IT HAPPENED”

The Story of the  
**2018 AWMC Tour of  
Scotland, England and Wales**  
*(compiled by Christine and Philip Manktelow)*



**Day 1 Melbourne to Edinburgh:** A big group gradually gathered at Tullamarine to begin the flight to Glasgow, a long haul flying non-stop, with touchdowns in Singapore and Dubai, but the group was surprisingly fresh when we emerged from the Glasgow baggage carousel area, to wait for our rendezvous with bus drivers Mike and Andy.



Gradually more familiar faces arrived at that meeting point, choristers who were already in Scotland, so that by the time we walked out the doors, into the Glasgow rain, there were 50+ excited travellers.

By late afternoon we had driven across country to Edinburgh and checked into our hotel in Princes Street, across the road from the famous Scott Monument.

Most of the group had been 27 hours in transit, but were amazingly chirpy and able to enjoy the welcome drinks and dinner, where we had the opportunity to meet members of Linlithgow Rugby Club Male Voice Choir.



*LRCMVC T2 Alan Nutt—one of the many friendly faces who joined us for dinner.*

**Day 2 Edinburgh to Linlithgow:** A fine, cold but sunny day to start our touring experience. After a post-breakfast rehearsal it was ‘all aboard’.

We stopped to see The Kelpies, two enormous mythological creatures in the shape of horses which used to tow the boats along the canals.



Back on the buses, we arrived at the nearby Falkirk Wheel for a ride on a boat which allowed us to experience this engineering marvel which transports boats from one canal to another in a smooth 5-minute ride, replacing 11 locks. It only uses as much power as 8 electric kettles!



*Found The Kelpies featuring as a decorated cake in a Linlithgow High Street cake shop!*

It was a short drive to Linlithgow for a rehearsal, followed by a welcome reception. There were speeches from our host Cr Dave Ting, Deputy Provost West Lothian; John Cunningham, Lord Provost and Vice Admiral of the Forth; Fiona Heslop, Member of the Scottish Parliament for Linlithgow; and Chris Thomas, Chairman of LRCMVC. Gifts were exchanged, and this very friendly gathering set the tone for a most enjoyable concert.



A young piper led the two choirs, and their guests, out of the reception and up the cobbled street to



the concert venue, St Michael's Parish Church, next door to the ruins of Linlithgow Palace which was the birthplace of Mary, Queen of Scots.

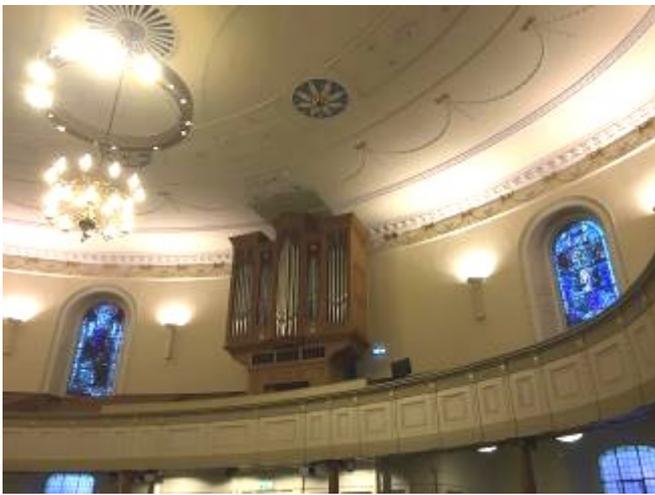


The audience thoroughly enjoyed the music presented by the two choirs, and our soprano Ayşe. With Tom's encouragement they joined in enthusiastically to sing the 'G'day, G'day' chorus.

After the concert there was an afterglow back at Linlithgow Rugby Club. Lots more singing and conversations—Linlithgow's choristers were amazingly hospitable and friendly.

**Day 3 in Edinburgh:** This was a drivers' rest day, so following the post-breakfast rehearsal, choristers were free to spend the rest of this fine and sunny day as they wished.

In the evening, there was a concert at St Michaels and St Georges Church West, in George Street. This concert came about through the efforts of Colin and Myrtle Hughes, and their friend James Stewart who took up the challenge of being the local organiser of a concert by the choir in Edinburgh, the birthplace of Myrtle Hughes.



The church is a beautiful space, with a very interesting history. For this concert there was no other choir involved, just our choristers and our own soloist, Ayşe. Again, the audience was very appreciative of the program of music and there was lots of happy chatter during the post-concert refreshments.



**Day 4 Edinburgh to St Andrews:** A non-singing day, apart from the post-breakfast rehearsal. Yet another lovely sunny day as we boarded our buses. We headed north to see the beautiful Scottish landscapes of Fife—our destination was St Andrews, for more LRCMVC hospitality.

Four of their choristers travelled with the group, providing 'tour guide' information. One of their members, Colin Wells, is Past President of St Andrews New Course Golf Club and had arranged for our group to have lunch in the buffet, and to spend time at this historic golf course.



*LRCMVC members waving goodbye in St Andrews*

After departing St Andrews we returned to Edinburgh via Dundee and Perth, giving us more images to take away of the fertile, productive and green countryside of Fife.

**Day 5 Edinburgh to Newcastle Upon Tyne:** This was our first test of the logistics of moving a large group out of one hotel, onto buses with their luggage, choristers working together as porters.



Another fine and sunny day as we travelled south to Berwick Upon Tweed for lunch, then on to Newcastle Upon Tyne. Our hotel is right on the waterfront, giving us great views of the famous bridges across the River Tyne.



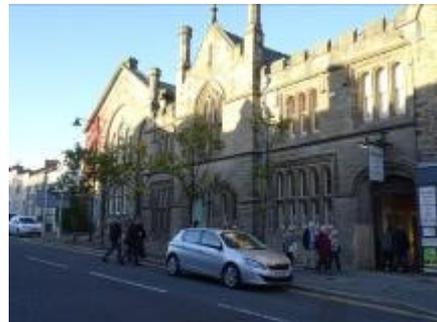
Everyone enjoyed having a welcome dinner together at the hotel, which provided the opportunity for our two 'policemen' (aka Shane and John) to introduce their quirky fun and games, imposing fines on various choristers which will be collected during the tour, and then donated to a local charity.



After dinner Tom led the singing of 'Senzina', much to the surprise and delight of the guests dining in the adjoining restaurant area.

**Day 6 Newcastle Upon Tyne:** A surprisingly warm day, 19° and windy, for our free time in Newcastle Upon Tyne. Everyone did their own thing—Roman ruins, local public transport trips, laundromats, op shops, sleeping, or just exploring streets, bridges, and historic buildings.

Back on the buses for a 4.45pm departure, driving to The Exchange in North Shields for a concert with Backworth Male Voice Choir led by Andrew Clarence.



It was a pleasure to walk into the rehearsal and find a choir of 60+ voices—the combined sound and energy from over 100 men singing in that relatively small auditorium was thoroughly enjoyed by the very appreciative audience.





Ayşe charmed and delighted the audience, who enthusiastically sang along with her during 'I Could Have Danced All Night'. And hearing her sing 'Anfonaf Angel' with AWMC was spine tingling.

After the concert all of the choristers and their partners were able to spend time chatting over a drink in the adjoining bar area. There was a lighthearted exchange of gifts—it was a case of 'kangaroos to Australia' rather than 'coals to Newcastle'!



*Presentation from Gerry Killen, BMVC*

Finally, we were treated to a local delicacy for supper—pies with mushy peas. For some this was a first-time experience ...



**Day 7 Newcastle upon Tyne to York:** This was a day mostly spent in transit, but we were able to enjoy a brief lunchtime whistle stop at Whitby, soaking up some of the feel of this quaint little harbour town, which has such a strong connection to Australia through Captain James Cook living there.



More gorgeous landscapes for us as we crossed the beautiful North Yorkshire moors, vast rolling open spaces dotted with sheep.



Mid-afternoon we arrived in York, settled in, and the second Tenors took the opportunity for a short sectional rehearsal with Tom. Our music team have been so generous with their assistance, and the men really appreciate all the help they are being given.

Then we were able to enjoy another welcome dinner together, before going our separate ways to enjoy the sights and delights of this beautiful city.

**Day 8 and Day 9 York:** It's not all play—each day begins with a 1 hour rehearsal after breakfast, and Ayşe has been sharing her operatic singing experience to lead the warmups, teaching new techniques.



For the rest of both days in York it was 'every man for himself' as people explored York all day .

On Day 9 choristers assembled at 5.30 to walk 30 minutes through York to York City Church.



We were greeted with warm and cheery smiles from York Philharmonic Male Voice Choir, a group of 35 singers under the direction of Berry Lewis. The sound produced in that auditorium, where YPMVC rehearses each week, was just amazing. You could feel the energy and shared enjoyment of singing as the two choirs went through their paces.



The audience responded with great enthusiasm to the music presented by both of the choirs, and

gave a standing ovation to Ayşe when she performed 'Summertime' from Porgy and Bess. Michelle's accompaniment of Ayşe's music also drew huge applause from the audience.



Concert proceeds were to be donated to the Lord Mayor of York's Christmas Cheer Fund, and we were delighted that The Lord Mayor, Councillor Keith Orrell, and his wife, Judith, the Lady Mayoress, were able to attend the concert.



There was a surprise connection between YPMVC and Australia which we all learned about during the concert. Colin Hockridge, choir historian, told of how a local Welshman decided to compose a song and enter it into the competition for a new Australian anthem, back in the 1970's. YPMVC made the recording which was sent off to Australia.

It didn't win the competition, as we all know, but AWMC was presented with a copy for our own showcase back at home—certainly a memento with a difference!





After receiving a standing ovation from the very enthusiastic and appreciative audience, choristers walked back through the streets of York to our hotel where YPMVC joined us for an afterglow. There was continual chatter and laughter as the choristers got to know each other, and then launched into some impromptu singing.

Richard Kay from YPMVC led his men in a very funny sea-shanty drinking song, and then Tom led the combined singers in 'Little Innocent Lamb' which was also great fun.



Finally there was the formality of thankyou's from our President, Neil Kinsey, and YPMVC Chairman, Graham Kay, and presentation of a plaque from AWMC, bringing to a close a great evening of energetic and inspiring singing and making new friends.

**Day 10 York to Chester:** A big group travelling in a coach means lots of luggage to move when we check out of our hotel. We're getting better at it, with practice ...



We left York and headed towards

Chester via Holmfirth for lunch—a delightful little village nestled in a valley in the Yorkshire moors. A local character with a very broad accent, Garry, came onto the bus to give a 1 hour guided tour aboard the coach, and talked about all of the connections his village has to television series (Last of the Summer Wine, Call The Midwife, Last Tango in Halifax, Happy Valley etc etc).

We arrived late afternoon in Chester, only had a 1 hour turnaround to get unloaded, changed into uniforms, back on the bus, and drive to Chester Town Hall for the rehearsal with two choirs—City of Chester Male Voice Choir and Flint Male Voice Choir.





The concert was a sell-out, and the audience was given a great program. Each choir performed 5 songs, and Ayşe wowed them with her wonderful soprano voice.



Finally all three choirs came together for the last bracket. The three Music Directors each conducted the combined choirs for two songs. The concert itself was titled 'World in Union'. It was a great honour to have Mike Williams, the arranger of the song 'World in Union', present at the concert to hear this song presented as the Finale. The sound of 100 men singing in that beautiful and historic space was thrilling for the audience, and there was a standing ovation at the conclusion.



(photo provided by W777 Photography)

As usual, there were some formalities and speeches, in the historic council chamber upstairs. AWMC has a historic connection with FMVC stretching back over 30 years, when AWMC first visited Flint and was billeted with choristers. Strong friendships were formed which continue to this day. A Charter of Friendship had been exchanged between the two choirs all those years ago, and on this visit our chorister, Shane, read the Charter again. It was re-presented to FMVC by chorister Tony Dickinson, who had been the President at the time of our first visit, and had signed the original document.



*John Growcott, Vice-Chairman of FMVC, John Walsh, Secretary of CCMVC, with Neil Kinsey, President of AWMC, exchanging gifts.*

Finally, the Lord Mayor of Chester, Councillor Alex Black, presented Neil Kinsey with a beautifully engraved silver tray as a memento of the visit by AWMC.



**Day 11 Chester to Llanberis:** Tom was kind to 'the boys' today, after two days with concerts, so this was the first day without an after-breakfast rehearsal. We were able to get away by 8.45am to head towards Llanberis. The route took us along the coastline and we were amazed at the sight of literally hundreds of wind turbines offshore, as far as the eye could see.



Arrived at Llanberis in time for a group photo—everyone rugged up with coats, hats, scarves and gloves, as the weather was distinctly colder than we have been used to. It was then 'all aboard', and we set up on the Snowdon Mountain Railway to climb to the top of the mountain.



The views from the train were absolutely breathtaking as we climbed the mountain on this amazing track with it's cog system between the normal rails. All the way up we passed walkers, and there were even some very hardy adventurers riding mountain bikes. It must be wonderful to be young and fit!



When we reached the station at the top, some of the group felt adventurous enough to tackle the bracing climb to the actual summit, fighting our way through the cloud and mist and wind to climb some very precarious stone steps. Less than 100 metres, but quite a challenge regardless!



Back at the bottom, and in sunshine again, there was an impromptu 'Hiraeth' on the platform, then back onto the bus for the drive to Conwy.





In Conwy there was time to visit the Castle, walk along the harbourside, see the amazing railway line box bridge, see the smallest house in Britain, or check out the local High Street shops. Back to our



hotel for an early dinner together, then for some it was an opportunity for a rare early night.

**Day 12 Chester:** There was not a full after-breakfast rehearsal today. Instead, sectional rehearsals were led by Tom for Tenor 2 and Bass. Given the number of people with colds, coughs and bad throats, lots of the men are struggling with singing early in the morning, so they jokingly referred to this session as their 'audition'.



After the rehearsals, we had a free day in this lovely city with its striking black and white buildings. This was a day filled with variety—shopping, sightseeing, catching up with old friends,



cream teas, watching the street buskers, strolling along the canal, Evensong at the Cathedral, meals in local pubs and restaurants. A great opportunity for people to relax and really enjoy being in this lovely city of Chester. A group of choristers took the opportunity for an organised boat trip on the River Dee, and one of the sights which they enjoyed was the beautiful iron bridge at Aldford built by Thomas Telford in 1824.



In the evening there was dinner together provided at the hotel, and another opportunity for some silliness with Shane and John handing out more fines for misdemeanours....

**Day 13 Chester to Whittington:** A full rehearsal after breakfast, which was followed by the Tenor 1 and Baritones sectional 'auditions'.



A few choristers emptied their pockets as we prepared to get on the bus to Whittington...



As we travelled there was a rehearsal with a difference—the men all sat in their sections on the bus, and Tom took them through their paces to prepare for the evening’s performance.



We travelled towards nearby Oswestry, with a short stop to look at the amazing Pontcysyllte aqueduct which was completed in 1805 to carry the Llangollen canal over the River Dee.



Upon arrival at Whittington we were treated to an extremely generous high tea by the ladies of the local Women’s Institute.



This was a great opportunity to mingle with members of the Orthopaedic Male Voice Choir, and enjoy the generous hospitality offered to us.



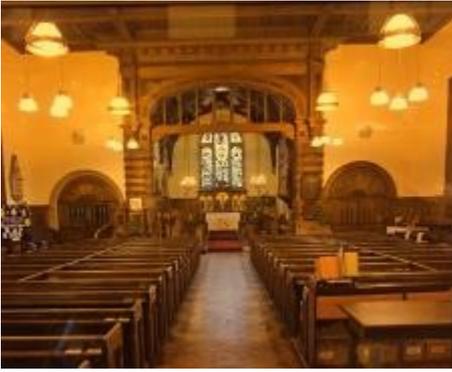
*Sue and Ian Mackie being sociable with OMVC*

A short walk from the hall to the church took us past Whittington Castle—an ideal group photo opportunity.



While the men all went to the church for the joint rehearsal of the two choirs, the women were treated to a guided tour of the castle site by Sue, the site manager (dressed as a medieval housekeeper). It was a fascinating hour spent learning the history of the ruins and the landscape, as well as the people who were part of the story.





St John The Baptist Church, Whittington was an unusual shaped building, with a wonderful wooden ceiling. It was full to bursting, and very hot, so both choirs dispensed with jackets.



The concert was compered by Andy Young, Chairman of Orthopaedic Male Voice Choir. Ayşe absolutely wowed the audience again with her beautiful singing, and Michelle's accompaniment was loudly appreciated by the audience.



Andy Young, OMVC Chairman and compere, made presentations to the MDs and accompanists, and to Ayşe, of a pen and pencil set whittled by a founding singer with this choir which is celebrating its 50th anniversary year.

Neil Kinsey made a thankyou presentation to Harry Pickavance, Deputy Chairman, who had been the local organiser for this full-house and thoroughly enjoyable concert. Afterwards, it was across the road to the pub for a short afterglow, with rousing singing of 'G'day, G'day', 'Rachie', and 'Senzenina'.

**Day 14 Chester to Liverpool:** Another after-breakfast rehearsal, then onto the buses by 10.30am to travel to Liverpool. Fine and cloudy day, 18°, so very comfortable for travelling.

The group was joined by Andrew Lacey, a friend of Neil Kinsey's who has lived in Liverpool for many years, and who acted as a tour guide, providing lots of local knowledge as the bus travelled first through Port Sunlight, and then around Liverpool.

Port Sunlight was a very interesting social development to look at, built by a progressive industrialist in the 19th century. Building a totally new community to house his workforce, Lever was socially very progressive as an employer, and the community and its buildings is still a thriving place to live.



First stop in Liverpool was the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King Liverpool, a vast and light filled space with amazingly colourful glass windows and lantern. The choir and Ayşe had 1 hour allocated for performing. There were challenges aplenty, with no grand piano as promised, a keyboard which could barely be heard, and difficulties with pitching in such an echo-filled space.



Two hours later we were performing a different program in a similarly vast space at Liverpool Cathedral, with soaring stone walls and vaulted

roof space, together with huge stained glass windows. The performance was much more confident in this space, and was certainly appreciated by members of the public visiting the Cathedral, and finding beautiful music being presented by a male voice choir, and a female soprano working together.

We then had a short time to explore Liverpool—some took a ride in the hop-on hop-off bus, others went to the Cavern Club for a bit more music, others followed up their Beatles interests, and many just took time to walk, eat a meal, and get to know a little more about Liverpool.

**Day 15 Chester to Cardiff:** This was a day in transit as we travelled south and into Wales for our next concert. There was no morning rehearsal, to enable us to get away early, and have a couple of hours around lunchtime in the delightful village of Ludlow.

There was a market in the village square, and people really enjoyed the lovely warm and cloudy day, ideal for wandering. Some shopped, some explored Ludlow Castle and its gardens, others visited 15th Century St Laurence Parish Church and even climbed the tower, and everyone found somewhere to have lunch, whether it was the 13th Century Rose and Crown pub, or in Costas—each to his own.



*View from the top of the church tower.*

From Ludlow we steadily continued south, passing into Wales and making our way across the Brecon Beacons, a lovely soft landscape of gently folded hills, and sheep everywhere, of course. Checked into our hotel in Cardiff and the men immediately went into a 1 hour rehearsal, prior to everyone getting together for a shared dinner at the hotel.

**Day 16 Cardiff to Abergavenny:** After such a warm and balmy day yesterday it was quite a shock to wake to grey skies and light rain, and just 11° maximum. Post-breakfast full rehearsal, then everyone was free until 4pm to do what they wanted to do in Cardiff. Some did a free walking tour (in the light rain), some looked for a laundromat, others shopped, slept, ate, or did sightseeing—again, each to his own.

Onto the bus for 5pm departure, we arrived at Our Lady and St Michael Catholic Church at 6pm, straight into a joint rehearsal with Beaufort Male Voice Choir. Again, such a warm and friendly welcome from the choristers, quickly making us feel relaxed and at home in their company.

It was a pleasure to find our patron Dr Haydn James and his partner Eleanor waiting inside the church, and Tom was delighted to extend an invitation to Haydn to conduct the choir for one of the items on the program, 'Let It Be Me', which Haydn had arranged. A quick rehearsal with Haydn then followed.

For the first time on this tour all 27 available choristers were on stage, which lifted everyone's spirits. Beaufort MVC had over 40 on stage, so the combined sound was very impressive. The compere, Dean Powell, had sung with Treorchy Male Voice Choir, and his very entertaining patter helped to make the evening very funny and enjoyable.



A particular fuss was made about the impending retirement of Margaret Davies, who has been the accompanist for BMVC for 50 years, a tremendous record of service. Presentations were made at the end of the concert by Graham Lewis, Chairman of BMVC, and Neil Kinsey responded with a small gift for BMVC as our thankyou.



Straight after the concert we all moved to the adjacent parish hall for supper—a very generous spread was provided and when everyone had filled their plates the singing began again. Among other things there was a rousing rendition of 'Stout Hearted Men', 'Senzenina' led by Ayşe because Tom had lost his voice, and a very funny ditty from BMVC which had everyone laughing. The Australians reluctantly filed back onto the bus at about 10.30pm for the drive back to Cardiff, after a thoroughly enjoyable concert experience.

**Day 17 Cardiff:** After breakfast there was a sectional rehearsal for Tenor 1 and Baritones, and then the whole day was left free for people to do whatever they wished.

**Day 18 Cardiff—Banbury—Northampton:** After sectional rehearsals for Tenor 2 and Bass, this was another of the transit days, getting everyone from one hotel to another. Weather warm and sunny. Unfortunately we had bus problems. Had changed to a different bus because of London emissions regulations, but we needed an unscheduled stop to fix a cooling problem. We took the opportunity to inspect a quaint Cotswold stone building behind a lovely dry stone wall. Only cost 20p each...



Back on board, we continued on to Banbury where everyone went their separate ways to find lunch.

Saw the beautiful bronze statue of the lady with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes.



Settled into our Northampton hotel, then gathered for dinner together, and the long-anticipated return of the moral police, Shane and John, who continued with their fines for misdemeanours. At the end of the dinner we were joined by some of the choristers from Northampton Male Voice Choir, and their wives, and many of the group took the opportunity to chat and share a drink with the visitors who are arranging some unexpected activities for us tomorrow.

**Day 19 Northampton:** After the post-breakfast rehearsal we all made our way on foot to the Guildhall for a civic reception, and a guided tour.



We were welcomed to this most impressive landmark by the Mayor of Northampton, Tony Ansell, and his Mayoress Jayne Crofts. The Mayor gave a kind welcome speech and made a presentation of a beautiful painting of the Guildhall. In return he was presented with a choir CD.



*L-r AWMC President Neil Kinsey, Mayor Tony Ansell, NMVC Concert Secretary David Walsh.*

Kate Wills, a local historian, then led the group on an extremely interesting and entertaining tour of the Guildhall building, explaining the features of the façade stonework, the rooms, and even the cells in the basement which some ‘tried out’.



While in the actual Guildhall the choir had the opportunity to gently sing ‘Calon Lân’, and experience the lovely acoustic of this historic space.



*Learning about the work of the Council chamber.*

After dispersing for a quick lunch, many of the group then gathered again at the National Leather Collection which had been opened up specially for us, courtesy of the organising skills of David Walsh, NMVC Concert Secretary. It was a fascinating exhibition, full of surprises, led by the Manager, Philip Warner. Our Bernie was in his element, given his long work history in the shoe making industry.



Back to the hotel for a quick change, then onto the buses to take us to Abington Avenue United Reformed Church, and our final community concert for this tour, sharing the stage with Northampton Male Voice Choir. And what a choir they were— over 70 voices, with lots of younger men who had recently joined following a big recruitment drive. This concert was the first time more than 30 newcomers had sung on stage with NMVC.

Before the on site rehearsals we all enjoyed a very generous supper which had been prepared by the NMVC Hospitality Team. Then it was sound checks, stage placement organising, and on with the show.



The sound produced by NMVC was just amazing, with 70+ strong and confident voices. When such a large group of men go from singing whisper-quiet to raising -the-roof loudness it is just so exciting and enjoyable for the audience. Their MD, Stephen Bell, has clearly trained them to an extremely high standard, and it is no surprise that they ranked so well at a recent eistedfodd.



Then it was our turn to sing, and the reception our much smaller group of 27 singers received was really heart warming. Our Welsh pronunciation was complimented highly, especially when we confidently led the combined choirs in singing 'Gwahoddiad' in Welsh, which NVMC doesn't normally attempt. The applause was hugely enthusiastic.



Ayşe absolutely wowed the audience with her choice of songs, accompanied so amazingly by the lovely Michelle. Only Ayşe could sing the 'Habanera', flirting with the men of both choirs, getting them up to dance, and even getting the Mayor of Northampton up for a twirl, in the spirit of the moment.

There were speeches and presentations from John Waller, NMVC Chairman and Neil Kinsey. An impromptu suggestion that NMVC come to sing in Australia drew enthusiastic applause. Lovely flowers were presented to Ayşe and Michelle.



Then it was time for the combined choirs' finale number, 'American Trilogy', and with the addition of an organ accompaniment it was a really dramatic and rousing end to the concert. There was a standing ovation from the very enthusiastic and appreciative audience, and so without any fuss there was an encore from the combined choirs—'When The Saints Go Marching In', which provided a really uplifting and happy finish.

Straight after the concert the choristers poured out of the church, and into the pub which was only 200m down the road, for more singing and talking, and exchanging of contact details between choristers. It was clear that many new friendships had been established between two choirs with very similar musical leadership. All agreed that this had been a wonderful final community concert, and that our time in Northampton had been really well spent.

**Day 20 Northampton—London:** Another of those transit days, with suitcases everywhere, and lots of time in the bus, then milling around at our destination waiting for porters to deliver suitcases so the whole thing can start all over again...

It made things very easy to have the evening meal provided at our hotel, then everyone was free to disperse and do whatever they wanted.



**Day 21 London:** No early morning rehearsal today, so people were free to follow their own interests after breakfast, getting to know London for the first time, or re-visiting familiar special places in this vast city.



The men gathered at 3.30pm for a full rehearsal prior to getting onto the bus to travel to the Jewin Chapel for a joint rehearsal of the overseas choirs from 7-10pm. Our choristers joined forces with choristers from Perth, as well as an American, Norwegian and a Swedish choir, with conductor Edward Rhys Harry taking the rehearsal. Members of the London Welsh also came along to support the rehearsal.

We were very proud to hear our own Michelle as the rehearsal accompanist. For this Festival Michelle has been appointed the deputy accompanist, and has to be ready to step up at short notice. The reality of what the Royal Albert Hall concert will be like is finally becoming very clear.

While the men were working hard, a group of the wives (+ Robert, who is an honorary WAG) walked to 'The Britannia' pub nearby for a relaxed meal together.

**Day 22 London:** This was another completely free day, so that everyone was able to do whatever they felt like (or do nothing, which some of the sickies preferred), until we were all due to gather at 3.30pm to get onto the buses for the drive across London to Australia House.



Our reception was held upstairs in the Downer Room, where we were welcomed by the High Commissioner, The Hon. George Brandis QC. A short concert performance concluded with 'G'day, G'day', with the audience joining in the fun enthusiastically. The choir's Patron, Dr Haydn James, was also in attendance with his partner, Eleanor.



*Choristers, with Tom and Michelle, were joined by Ayse, Haydn James and Hon. George Brandis QC.*

Then it was time for photos, drinks and nibbles, and lots of chatting.

This final small concert performance was the first time on the tour that all 27 choristers were on stage at the same time. For every other concert there has been at least one or two missing, mostly due to the sickness which seemed to follow the touring group



*Bus drivers, Mike and Andy, enjoyed themselves.*



*The High Commissioner chatted with guests, and happily posed for photos.*

After the reception we returned to the hotel, and people made their own arrangements for dinner. Earlier in the day we had seen members of many other choirs checking into our hotel. When a small AWMC group found themselves at 'The Britannia', we met up with a large contingent from Monmouth Male Choir.

Inevitably, after dinner someone began to sing, and before long the other patrons in the dining room and pub were treated to lots of enthusiastic singing. Not exactly an afterglow—would you call this a pre-glow?

At times Tom needed to step in and establish the right key, but it was all good and friendly fun!



**Day 23 London:** At last, the big day arrived, the reason for the tour — our participation in the 26th London Welsh Festival of Voice at the Royal Albert Hall. It was mayhem at the hotel, as members of the 5 choirs staying at the Copthorne Tara hotel assembled in the lobby and prepared to make their way to the venue for a long day of stage placement, official photographs, and a full program rehearsal.

As usual, not all of our group was present at the schedule assembly time of 11am, but these happy and excited choristers posed for one last photo before setting off to walk to Royal Albert Hall.



Tom took the London cab option to get himself to RAH—you need to arrive in style when you're preparing to conduct The Queen...

Members of the support crew gathered late in the day to make their way to RAH, sharing London cabs. What an adventure!



We all nearly burst with pride when our Tom and Michelle took to the stage, with the Band of the Welsh Guards, and fanfare trumpeters and bearskin hats and gold braid aplenty. No-one does pomp and ceremony quite like the English! Then the concert began, as Tom and Michelle led us all through The Queen.

The concert was all that we could have hoped for—a full house audience, Aled Jones as the very natural and relaxed compere, and wonderfully talented soloists (two Welsh sopranos and a Welsh baritone, and an amazing cello player as well). What a feast of music we were presented with. The singing of the men was just amazing—almost 1000 voices singing, almost whisper quiet in some of the songs yet every word could be heard. And when they came to the 'amen' they nearly brought the roof down, the sound was so loud and clear above the Band of the Welsh Guards, and the mighty rumbling organ (referred to by Aled Jones as 'The Beast').

All those rehearsals, the worries and anxieties about learning the repertoire, and remembering the Welsh, all seemed to fade away as everyone on stage rose to the occasion, and gave a mighty performance. The audience clearly wanted more after the final song, so we were treated to a wonderful Welsh encore 'Gwinllan a roddwyd i'm gofal'.



Then it was time for the choirs, their Music Directors, and accompanists to be introduced to the audience, and there was loud applause and cheering as each choir took its bow. Picture above shows the spotlight on Tom and Michelle as AWMC had their moment of glory.



Back to the hotel choristers and their supporters had completely taken over the two restaurants and bars. Once there were drinks in plenty of hands, Tom started off the singing with 'Calon Lân', and for the next 3 hours it was just one song after another. Most were tuneful and full of harmony, some needed a bit more work, some fizzled out part way through, some were known by everyone (like 'Rachie'), some were local party-pieces. What was consistent was the enthusiasm and happiness of those present, making new friends through the common language of music.



Members of the Norwegian choir wowed everyone with their amazingly clever and clear harmonies, as they gave us some sparkling and entertaining songs. Listening to them sing in Norwegian made Welsh sound relatively easy!

#### **Day 24 London to Windsor, then home...:**

The wonderful tour finished with a great lunch at the Royal Adelaide Windsor Hotel, where memories were shared and thanks were given to those responsible for its planning and execution. Unfortunately many of the touring party were unable to attend this final event. The usual frivolity of our Sergeants at Arms through the trip culminated in a fabulous £150 being raised for a children's charity. Our drivers, Mike and Andy, did not disappoint with their "awards", and great fun was had by all as everyone prepared for home or onward travels. Neil and Mike (and their wives) looked visibly relieved that the journey was coming to an end.

Thanks to everyone for a wonderful, fun and successful tour.







**Members of the 2018 UK Tour Group**

Alastair and Siân ANDERSON

Tom BUCHANAN

Mark CARTER

Vicki CASEY

Tony and Joan DICKINSON

Clive and Nathalie DICKINSON

John EVANS

Gerry and Julie FREESTONE

Tim GIBSON

Ayşe Goknur SHANAL

Harry and Jean HAMILL

Cedric and Lauren HOWARD

Shane HÜBNER

Colin and Myrtle HUGHES

Neil and Chris KINSEY

John LANSDOWNE

Ian and Sue MACKIE

Philip and Christine MANKTELOW

James and Carrie MARRS

Peter McALPINE

Mike and Maree McCORMACK

Anne McKEOWN

Michelle NGUYEN

Robert PATIENCE

Bernie RUMBLE

Tim SHEPPARD

Linton SMITH

Guenter and Inez STEINBRECHER

Lane and Helen SUTTON

Neil and Jennie TOYNE

Max and Lois WALKER

Bob WILSON

Lew WILSON

James YOUNG

Phil and Glenise YOUNG