

Welcome to the last Newsletter for 2020 – the year that will be remembered for the pandemic.

Who would have thought that a physical get together would have been possible a month ago?



It is a measure of Victoria's progress that thirty-four choristers and their significant others – sixty-one people in total - were able to gather at the Mornington Rose garden on the 19th of December. This was the first such gathering since March.



A flower arranging demonstration was appropriate given the venue, which was enjoyed in lovely weather.

The usual formalities observed at the annual break-up were observed again!

James Marris was formally installed as the Incoming President.



And there were other awards on the day. Philip Manktelow, my predecessor as editor of this Newsletter, and patient transcriber of much music (hello Sibelius) was awarded Life Membership.





Noel Moore was awarded a twenty year service award, and Craig Chambers was recognised for fifteen years of service in his absence.

Neil Toyne received a ten year award



And so did John Lansdowne.



Choirs find themselves particularly vulnerable before a disease spread by droplet infection. It was reported that an

American choir sang a concert around August this year. Sixty sang, and fifty-seven tested positive to Covid afterwards. Nonetheless, we will be back. So will the others who share our particular passion. They are all worth a listen....

Australian Welsh Male Choir

We are the Australian Welsh Male Choir, and we consider ourselves to be pretty good. We are very conscious that we are the inheritors of a long and intensely proud tradition of singing.



We trace our beginning to a group of Welsh immigrants, and although time and immigration policies have resulted in a choir with very few Welshmen, we remain devoted to a fine musical tradition. Like Victoria Welsh, we have been complimented on the purity of our Welsh – by the Canon of St David’s Cathedral, no less. And like the other two male choirs, we sing 25% of our repertoire in Welsh. This Newsletter is a tribute to the Welsh choirs of Melbourne and Geelong. All of them. All of us would like to think that we are the best of them, but the truth is that all of us have pretty good track records, and all of us do different things and do them well.

If you like choirs, and you enjoy Welsh Choirs in particular, you are very well served in Victoria. Get along and listen to the choirs as opportunity presents itself... You’ll be happy that you did!

Cymreig. Victoria Welsh Choir.

Croeso i Vic Welsh



We are Victoria Welsh Choir (Vic Welsh for short), a traditional Welsh men's choir. As the most Welsh Welsh men's choir in Australia:

- At least 25% of what we sing is in Welsh (it's in our constitution) - often it's a lot more
- Our Musical Director since 1994, Faleiry Koczkar OAM, is a native Welsh speaker
- We hold weekly Welsh pronunciation classes a have been complimented on our pronunciation by audiences in Wales
- Our appearances in the Welsh National Eisteddfod in 1999 and 2004 were the first by any expatriate Welsh choir since 1929
- We have led the singing at Cymanfa Ganu Hymn Festivals held by the Welsh Church in Melbourne since our foundation
- Every four years or so we go on a concert tour to Wales and sing with local choirs.

In our green jackets, dinner suits or black shirts, we have brought *hwyl* to audiences in Melbourne, Victoria (south-east Australia) and beyond since we were founded by seven Welshmen in 1980.

Geelong Welsh Ladies Choir.



The Geelong Welsh Ladies Choir was formed in 1998 at the request of the National Celtic Folk Committee, which at this time was comprised of representatives from all Celtic National Clubs, including the Welsh Society of Geelong Inc. The latter's President, Mr Keith Hughes, his wife Mrs Enid Hughes, Mrs Doreen Mann and Mrs Jeanette John were all committee members.

With the encouragement and support of Mr Hughes and the Welsh Society of Geelong Inc., a few Welsh people began to organise what would be the founding choir. At this time at local Welsh functions a small group of ladies would perform. This group included: Mrs Doreen Mann, Mrs Betty Kenneally, Mrs Beryl Hatton, Mrs Betty Davies, Mrs Glyneth Cooper and Mrs Jeanette John.

Through using various local networks and asking Mrs Bev Thomas to play for the group, the choir was born. Initially it boasted 18 members, singing in two-part harmony. Before July of that year Jeanette John was appointed as the Musical Director. The choir's inaugural concert was July 8 1998, held at the Belmont Bowls Club. It is from this humble beginning that the choir began to grow and perform in Geelong, the regional districts, Ballarat and Melbourne before setting the goal of an International Tour of Wales in 2004.

Since then the choir has developed a highly respected reputation and has toured New Zealand, forming many musical relationships across the Tasman as well as connecting with the Welsh Communities especially of the North Island.

We were indeed grateful for the continued support of the Welsh Society of Geelong Inc. as they auspiced the choir's structure and organisation for many years until the choir became an incorporated body in its own right.

Today, the Geelong Welsh Ladies Choir boasts a current membership of 30 Choristers.

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir



The Melbourne Welsh Male Voice Choir was formed in 1984 and since then it has grown from a small group of enthusiastic singers into one of Australia's acclaimed male choirs.

There is a warm and welcoming culture within the choir and while we take our singing seriously, we don't take ourselves seriously at all. In fact, we have a lot of fun!

The choir is busy with 8-10 performances each year, including performing at major venues such as the Melbourne Recital Centre. It is also well organised with a very capable and active organising committee.

The choir honours its Welsh roots by singing at least 25% of its repertoire in the Welsh language, Europe's oldest living language. However, as a proud multicultural Australian Welsh choir we believe that good music is not limited to one language. Consequently, recent concerts have included Welsh, English, South African, Italian, Latin, Maori, Aboriginal and German songs.

Many of our performances feature experienced and talented professional guest artists and each year we organise and run the **Singer of the Year** competition for promising young singers.

With regular national and international tours, this is a choir that is energetic and with a growing reputation for excellence.

Not bad for a bunch of blokes of varying musical experience, who simply like to get together each week to have a sing.

Musical Director – David Ashton-Smith OAM

David Ashton-Smith has been Musical Director since May 2016. David is well known in the Melbourne music scene and in 2016 was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to music.

A classically trained singer, who rose to become principal baritone during his nine years with the English National Opera, he has performed and taught in many institutions on his return to Australia and brings a wealth of experience to his role

with the choir. For David, this is his first all-male choir.

Accompanist – Simon Walters

Simon Walters, our accompanist, emigrated to Melbourne in April 2010 from the UK, lured by his wife who is Australian. A professional musician since 1994, he is a practiced sight reader in a variety of styles and is still in demand in the UK for arrangements, transcriptions and backing tracks, despite being on the opposite side of the world.

Mornington Peninsula Welsh Ladies Choir



This group of ladies came together on the basis of an idea from Helen Selby, whose husband is a chorister with the Australian Welsh. Helen saw no reason why her Spouse should have all the fun.

Some of the ladies from Voices of Frankston, and some of the other Australian Welsh partners came on board, and the choir became its own entity in 2018. Tom Buchanan agreed to take on the job of Musical Director. Currently, the choir has around 35 members. They are shooting for 50, and they are not an auditioned choir, so any of our lady readers

who like to sing might like to join them in their Sunday rehearsals in Frankston.

Some highlights of the Choir's brief history are concerts at the Melbourne Recital Centre (in conjunction with *Excelsis*), Singing in the Pub at Kirks in Mornington with Australian Welsh, and a very successful free concert at the Frankston Uniting Church. The Choir has also celebrated the *Gymanfa Ganu* at St Michaels Collins St, in conjunction with the other choirs mentioned in this Newsletter.

Current President Trudi Mackenzie is of the belief that the choir will weather the current Covid crisis well. Zoom meetings and telephone communication have kept the feeling of camaraderie strong, and interest remains high.

The information above is taken directly from the home pages of the choirs concerned, with the exception of Peninsula Ladies, whose President kindly made time for an interview.

And now to the Welsh in the wide world away from Wales...

In my wanderings round the Internet I have come across the Master's thesis of one Arthur Festin Hughes, submitted to the University of Adelaide in September 1994. It is entitled *Welsh Migrants in Australia: Language Maintenance and Cultural Transmission*. All 500 pages of it.

Hughes argues that "Welshness" survives primarily as an outgrowth of Welsh language use. The thesis fills some 500 pages and here I am unashamedly 'cherry picking' some of the interesting bits. The

entire thesis is available on the net. Just search the title.

The major destinations for Welsh emigrants in the nineteenth century were United States and Patagonia, in Southern Argentina, with Australia and some other destinations as minor players.

According to Hughes, and his many sources, the most successful of these ventures was the Patagonian one, because the colonists were permitted to run the venture as a Welsh-speaking enclave in Argentina.



PLANT YSGOL YR ANDES.

Once a change of policy mandated [redacted] knowledge of (and use of) Spanish in general society, the colonists were brought gradually to use the dominant language of the region, though there are apparently still families where Welsh language is spoken at home.



Welsh Patagonian flag - Google

In United States, as in Australia, the economic benefit of English as a language led to the collapse of attempts to encourage the widespread use of Welsh.

In the view of Hughes and his sources, it is likely that economic pressure will gradually force the use of English as a first language in Wales in the long term. In the

meantime, we will continue to honour the Welsh language and the history and culture of those who speak it.

Would you like to support us through the Covid emergency?

To make a donation please email treasurer@awmc.org.au with your details and we will send you a receipt.

Account name: Australian Welsh Male Choir

BSB:633 000: A/c number: 132 170 028.

Many thanks to our Patrons and Sponsors. We are most grateful to all who help to cover the substantial costs for a choir of our size, especially to Mr Baillieu Myer AC, Mrs Tamie Fraser AO, and Dr Haydn James.

Dingley Village 3172 (03)9551 6699

Our Sponsors:-



615 McClelland Drive Langwarrin Vic
3910. (03) 9789 8266.



FOOD • WINE • ENTERTAINMENT • FUNCTIONS

774 Esplanade Mornington, Vic 3931
(03)5975 2007.

Your Community Bank®



Dingley Village Community Bank
11/79 Centre Dandenong Road



print design websites

South Dandenong

N.B. Deadline for inclusion of articles is the 20th day of February, April, June, August, October, December. David Brown. Editor. All correspondence to Secretary AWMC

COMING EVENTS

Readers will appreciate that Covid 19 makes any forecasting impossible. There are some plans in the pipeline, but firm commitments are being tentatively chalked in for 2021. It is difficult to see a time when a group of 40 men will be allowed to assemble in front of a large audience, though recent events (in Victoria at least) give cause for some optimism. When we know more, we will pass it on quickly to you.

Stay safe and well till then!