

A POTTED HISTORY

OF THE

RUSHMOOR ODD FELLOWS MALE VOICE CHOIR

1960 - - onwards.

Why it started ?

1959 8th April; first 'Music for you' concert inaugurated by Geoff Waller. (several future members of the "ODDS" take part, and Brian Daniel's wife, Meg. she was also in the 100th MFY). Geoff loved entertaining and was well known locally, especially in Old Folks Homes. He established a list of interested people who were invited to the concerts free of charge, they were asked to contribute via a collection taken during the 'tea' interval to defray costs, any surplus going to charity. This was the basis of the system still used by the "ODDS" for Princes Hall concerts.

At about this time, Geoff was asked to form a male voice choir to provide competition at the Aldershot Festival.

How it started

1960 Several local male singers were invited by Geoff. Waller to form a choir for entry into Aldershot Festival as competition for the only other entrant (Weybridge MVC.) These singers met to practise after the Grosvenor Road Methodist Church choir regular thursday evening rehearsal usually in the Wesley Hall. A meeting was arranged at Geoff's home in Birchett Road and after much discussion there was unanimous agreement to call the choir "THE ODD FELLOWS " now usually abbreviated to the "ODDS". The name was academic as we only expected to sing once ! There were other meetings in Geoff's attic room, which had to be approached by carefully climbing stairs past rooms containing slumbering children. These meetings were sustained with biscuits and coffee supplied by Geoff's ever supportive wife Jean, who, right up to Geoff's retirement, continued, tirelessly, to help, in countless ways, so that the smooth running of any event was assured.

The "ODDS" atmosphere

The meetings forged the beginnings of what was to become the "ODDS" own unique fun laden, club like -- to quote Clive Barker -- atmosphere. Laughter was endemic, any difficulties were 'smiled away' by Geoff, a technique he used with great effect whenever a problem arose.

The formative years.

Initially, the "ODDS" performed several times each year mainly for Geoff's 'Music for you', concerts. In later years many of these concerts included Geoff's daughter Ruth as Guest artist, often billed as the only 'Female' ODD, a mantle now worn by the choir's accompanist, Margery Wakefield.

There were combined concerts with other groups, particularly, The Robinswood Singers under their founder, Margaret Jones and also, Rebecca Coulter's Choirs in Cove and Fleet. These enabled the "ODDS" to join in a wider range of music, in particular G & S. As many members of the "ODDS" have been soloists in their own right, there has rarely been the need to import artistes for a particular concert. For instance, in the nine

performances of 'Merry England', concert version, given locally in the 60's, all the male soloists and chorus were supplied by the "ODDS" including Geoff, who took part as well as conducting.

Some highlights over the years.

1963 Special 21st. Aldershot Festival Choral award.

1963 Godalming Music Festival (May 11th.)

1965 November 15th. First visit to Cranleigh Monday Club. arranged by Richard Clennell's Father who had retired to Cranleigh.

Between November 1967 and May 1968 there were MFY concerts on the first Saturday of each month. In most of these "ODDS" members took part, including, taking round the tea! By now the "ODDS" had a library of 55 pieces of music.

1966 Geoff revived the Grosvenor Road Music Society and over the next six years he organised and conducted, Elgar's Gerontious, Verdi's Requiem, Handel's Messiah, Walton's Belshazzars Feast and Elgar's The Kingdom. The Orchestra and Choir were augmented and the "ODDS" were very much involved. Particular mention must be made of Cliff Stone the 'Court Jester' of the choir, Cliff worked as hard as anyone and harder than most helping to establish the "ODDS".

Geoff was an experienced and accomplished conductor and the panache with which he guided some of the more volatile professional artistes was often the subject of 'whispered' remarks within the choir's ranks.

1967 "ODDS" branch out into concerts as a male voice choir separate from the 'Music for you' format. In 1967/68 the "ODDS" gave five concerts as well as taking part in seven 'MFY' concerts, one with other participants and a performance of Verdi's Requiem all organised and conducted by Geoff.

1968 November 11th. First subscriptions collected; 10/- (50 pence)

1968 December (2nd, ?) First meeting to form a committee and put the "ODDS" on a more formal basis. Bill Compton agreed to be Treasurer. Cliff Stone, Secretary, Bob Reeds, Librarian and Colin Wilson accompanist / deputy conductor. Up till this time Ted Luck had deputised whenever necessary.

The "ODDS" had now arrived! There were nineteen regular singers.

Up till now most rehearsals had taken place in Wesley Hall behind the Grosvenor Road Methodist Church, with, perhaps, a few more memorable occasions in the old 'Tin' Church in Sandford Road, the last rehearsal here was on November 30th. 1970, renowned for the rattle when it rained.

From January 1969 Geoff. started using the new Library Hall for M.F.Y. concerts and the Choir also decided to rehearse there once a fortnight. At first, every choir member contributed 2/6d. (12½ pence) towards the cost of hiring the hall, collected at each practice.

During these early years the fun element of "ODDS" performances developed, short interludes were inserted to break up the singing and keep some of the more 'lethargic' customers awake, after all, the concerts were FREE albeit with a voluntary collection.

There were some very fine singers in the choir, but none were averse to joining in the tomfoolery. One instance bears mention. The choir were instructed to wear old ties at a particular concert, halfway through a concerted choir piece the secretary, Cliff Stone, went to every singer and cut his tie off with a large pair of scissors, needless to say the audience loved it!

Between 1960 and 1977 the "ODDS" were averaging nearly eight concerts per year, this increased to an average of thirteen per year between 1977 and 1982.

1970 April 11th. Half the choir got lost in the fog on the way to Battersea Methodist Church, a small group kept the audience happy until the rest arrived, Ian Wood strained his voice singing too many operatic arias! Has it ever recovered?

1973 July 3rd. First "ODDS" charity concert at the Princes Hall, given for the Ockendon Venture. (This was the first time the "ODDS" had used the Princes Hall) By the end of 2000 they will have used the Princes Hall 60 times for their own concerts.

1973 The Cranleigh Monday Club entered the "ODDS" as potential competitors in the B.B.C. programme "Opportunity Knocks" As this involved day time recording the "ODDS" were unable to take part.

At a concert on the 17th. February at Farnham Memorial Hall; Colin Wilson and Don Carter sang 'The Rivals' with Bill Compton at the Piano. The versatility of choir members has always been there!

1974 February 13th. G & S concert at Princes Hall with John Heddle Nash.

1974 July 7th. AGM at Cliff Stone's house. Bill Compton relinquished post of Treasurer, this was only his first stint.

1974 December 3rd. Music for You at Princes Hall using all music either composed or arranged by Colin Campbell, with Peter Franklin (Tenor), Robinswood Ladies Choir, After Eight Singers and pupils of Barnsbury School Woking.

1975 March 24th. The choir turned up to sing at Harewood Hall, Horton Hospital near Epsom, the only audience were four tea Ladies who were given a short concert before the choir retired to a local hostelry, dressed in dinner jackets, to imbibe and sing till closing time.

1975 AGM. at Cliff Stone's home. 27 active choir members, 19 projected practice dates.

1975 May 10th. Aldershot Festival --- 1st. Place in class. The "ODDS" were awarded the Festival Banner for best adult choir.

1975 Autumn. John Heddle Nash agreed to become the first President of the "ODDS"

1975 Odds Tie first mooted, discussion started concerning a Choir uniform, Ted Luck and Dave Webb were the driving force here. It was also agreed that we should organise an open evening on December 15th. 1975 and also in December 1976. This was the start of the "ODDS" social life!

1975 November. The "ODDS" formed part of the 'Princes Singers' backing a G & S concert with Donald Adams, Thomas Round, Marilyn Hill Smith and Jean Temperley.

1975 December 15th. "ODDS" first open evening.

1976 At the AGM. Ted Luck agreed to design a Logo. The first "Dress" item was the Tie.

1976 Tuesday December 7th. Gala MFY. Concert at the Princes Hall with Jean Temperley deputising for John Heddle Nash at the last minute. After the concert the first group photograph was taken.

1977 July. Geoff. Waller produced the first Brochure, voted a great success by the Choir.

At the AGM. it was suggested that a projected eleven concerts between September and the following July was "pushing it" !

1978 Tuesday 4th. July. Princes Hall, The "ODDS" take part in the one hundredth 'Music for you'

1979 4th. December Princes Hall concert with John Heddle Nash. Colin Wilson conducted four items.

1980 April 28th. Princes Hall concert to celebrate 21 years of "Music For US" and also Geoff and Jean's 22nd. Wedding Anniversary. This concert was the 108th. programme in the 22 seasons of "Music For You".

1981 Geoff. retired. Geoff invited Colin Wison to take up the Baton which Colin readily accepted.

1982 January 3rd. Dinner at the Hogs Back Hotel (our own entertainment) £7.50 per head John and Joan Heddle Nash also attended and took an active part as did Geoff and Jean.

1984 Mike German donated a filing cabinet for music. Fred.(Tithie) Titherington retired as accompanist.

Margery Wakefield became regular pianist. Secretary, Bert. Lampard, paid tribute to Paul and Gill Phelps for all their help with copying. This still applies!

About this time the Welsh contingent, headed by Colin Wilson, decided that the "ODDS" should cross 'Offas Dyke' and do battle in Wales.

1984 Rhymney Valley Eisteddfod -- 3rd. in class.

1985 Choir's jubilee year. Concert at the Princes Hall with John Heddle Nash and Cynthia Glover.

1987 Rhymney Valley Eisteddfod -- 2nd. in class, by one mark!

1990 Welsh National Eisteddfod -- 3rd. in class.

1990 & 1994 visits to Oberursal. Kolpingchor visit the "ODDS" in 1991. Several long-term friendships forged.

1990 December, "ODDS" 35th. Anniversary. Richard Baker guest compere for Christmas concert.

1992 & 1996 1000 voices at the Albert Hall, as guests of the London Welsh MVC,

1992 May 31st. Geoff Waller's 80th. birthday celebrations in Bristol.

1992 & 1993 10,000 voices at Cardiff Arms Park.

1993 April 24th. Falklands Memorial Service, Wellington Barracks London, Followed by a Gamanfa Ganu at Sunbury. (Quite a day !!)

1994 Atlanta, USA. 'nough said. But the small group who went did have a great time ! Apart from the secretary having his wallet pinched, he learned that that the interior of American Police Stations are not like the Films !! He also learned that camaraderie within the ranks of the "ODDS" can be strong especially with the connivance of Margery Wakefield.

1994 29th. September. Choir President John Heddle Nash died. A group of "ODDS" sang at John's funeral, 18th. October.

1995 September, visit to Dublin. Singing at Lansdowne Road and Guinness ! With a visit to that unpronounceable place on Anglesea on the journey home.

1995 May 6th. & 8th. Hyde Park, 50th. Anniversary of "D" day in front of 250.000 people. WHAT A DAY ! Followed by singing in front of Buckingham Palace on the Monday (choir member Ken Paddon spoke to the QUEEN).

1995 December 19th. With Tunbridge Wells M.V.C. London Guildhall for the Royal British Legion. We discovered that Bill Compton had been stationed near Raymond Baxter (so did Raymond Baxter !)

1995 & 1996 March. Portsmouth Festival. 1st. in every class entered on both occasions!

1996 June 8th. At Selsea an idea was mooted which grew into the "ODDS" Supporters Group. Less 'Agro' for the social secretary, well done Gill Smedley !

1997 May. Visit to Rushmoor by Mag'sher Mannorchor from Oberursel.

1997 AGM. agreed that Delme Bryn Jones be asked to become Choir President and Gerald Howarth MP Vice President, both accepted the invitation.

1996 - 1997 - 1998. Concerts with other choirs and American and Russian Bands.

1997 Christmas Eve. The "ODDS" perform 'live' on Meridian Television. Broadcast from the Bush Hotel, Farnham.

1998 May 17th. The "ODDS" perform at the Princes Hall for the 57th. time, with guest choir from Sydney Australia, their second visit to us.

----- At 8.30pm. on 3rd. September 1998 Geoff. Waller died at his home in Bristol ----- Nearly 40 years after the meeting in the attic room of his home in Birchett Road Aldershot when the "ODD FELLOWS" choir was inaugurated.

The above is an attempt at showing some of the high spots in the first 40 years of the "ODDS" existence. Let us not forget that the "ODDS" is more than just a choir, it is a collection of male singers without whom the Choir would not exist ! Names are invidious, any mentioned here are used to illustrate a point. Over the years more than 140 singers have joined the "ODDS" and are still joining, More than fifty are currently singing, other have moved on, and, of course, there are fond memories of those who have joined the Celestial Choir. Without a doubt every single past or present "ODD" has played his part.

As with any succesful group, the smooth running of the choir is dependant on elected committee members and other ex - officio helpers. Ever since 1968 when it became obvious that Geoff would need help, member of the choir have been willing to assist. Treasurers :- Bill Compton for a total of 14 years (quite a record), Mike Peace, Jim Waddell and John Warburton. General Secretaries :- Cliff Stone, Peter Windram, Bert Lampard, Dick Bowsher, all of whom worked so hard for the choir. The present secretary has endeavoured to compile this history. Librarians :- Bob Reeds, Steve Petch and John Loader. Social Secretaries;- Brian Daniels, Ken Whitney and Peter Weller. All the other committee members who, have, and still are, playing

their part. Also, of course, several choir members like Brian Maskell, Richard Clennell and Tom Clay, beaver away in the background, and have done for years, with little recognition. More recently Clive Barker and Roger Ellis have both filled the post of Chairman with aplomb, Roger's organisational abilities are renowned. We must not forget our assistant conductors Ted Luck, of fond memories, and Morley Glover with Steve Petch wielding the baton on one occasion.

To keep within easy reading bounds much has had to be left out but, in spite of this, memories still come flooding back; Geoff's violin hidden in the piano, Colin Campbell's brilliant piano playing and humour, even when playing the 'Hotpoint'! Dick Jackson (that impeccable musician) unexpectedly waltzing across the stage with Rex Morris while Geoff and Colin were playing a 'serious' piano duet. The 'drag' items. The first few 'Music For You' concerts in the Wesley Hall with candle lit tables, and how could we forget the 'après concert' parties at Roy Williams home.

In the first years of its existence the "ODDS" gained a considerable local reputation, in later years this has expanded to become national and even international.

There has always been a unique flavour to "ODDS" performances, born of the original approach to the entertainment of others in those early days.

LONG MAY IT CONTINUE

I.W. June 1999

Since writing the above the choir has undergone several changes. Following a grand Millennium concert in the Army's Maida Gymn. Sunday April 30th. 2000. with guest choirs Dowlais MVC from Merthyr Tydfil, Mag'scher Mannerchor from Oberursel, the Alder Valley Brass and the Choir's President Delme Bryn Jones as soloist. Colin Wilson decided that he would retire at the end of the year.

January 2001 saw a restructured "Odds" choir with Steve Petch as conductor and Morley Glover as associate conductor, the concerts to be organised by a 'concert sub - committee'.

In May 2001 our President Delme Bryn Jones died at his home in Wales.

2002 and a decision to accept the offer to take part in a ten choir concert in Croydon's Fairfield Hall also the London Welsh Centenary Festival of Male Choirs in the Albert Hall, thus keeping up the tradition of ever bigger and better.

In January 2003 Dr. Hadyn James, Musical Director of, among others, the London Welsh Choir, agreed to our request to become our choir President, he is a busy man, should you attend international rugby matches the chances are that he will be conducting the pre-match singing. On being asked he said that "He would be honoured", the choir certainly is!

Over recent years many local Homes for Old Folk have concentrated on caring for older people most of whom are not so willing to stay up late, as a result there are less opportunities for evening concerts at these establishments. This change has enabled a small group made up of, retired or otherwise available, "ODDS" to visit many of the homes for afternoon concerts, which is exactly how Geoff Waller started his concerts all those years ago! It has taken about fifty years to complete the cycle! These, more intimate, occasions have a different feel about them and can be very enjoyable; usually ending with a social chat over a cup of tea.

GEOFFREY CYRIL WALLER 1912 - 1998

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HE WAS ALDERSHOT'S 'MR. MUSIC'

"I have so many blessings in my life". With these words ringing in my ears I took my farewell of Geoffrey Cyril Waller not realizing at the time that I would never see him again. It was typical of the man that he should think only of others bestowing blessings on him when he was the one who gave so much. On the 3rd of September 1998 only a short while after my visit Geoff died and the world is poorer at his passing.

I first came to know Geoff in the early fifties when I started competing in local music festivals. He asked me to take part in one of his 'Music for you' concerts in the old Wesley Hall in Aldershot. That was the first of many joyous occasions until Geoff's retirement in 1981. By then we were performing regularly in the Princes Hall in Aldershot and raising many thousands of pounds for local charities.

Geoff was a printer by trade. He and his brother Allan worked in their shop situated in Birchett Road. The business had been taken over by their Father in 1916.

Being self employed Geoff was able to work 'flexi-time' as we now call it, which gave him the opportunity to indulge himself in his love of music making. As well as the monthly 'Music for you' concerts there were full scale oratorios using professional soloists with augmented orchestra and large chorus, all organised and conducted by Geoff. Jean, his wife, with Ruth, John and Thomas their children, all became used to hearing hours of repetitive piano playing and singing, as Geoff learned the music he was about to conduct, for he was a perfectionist and made sure that he knew all the music at least as well as any performer and probably better than most. There are many musicians who have this ability but very few who can correct a mistake without, even mildly, upsetting the performer, Geoff could do this for, above all, he was a kind man, he was also a happy man, so laughter was endemic, and this drew people to him, ensuring that there was never a shortage of performers and helpers.

Over the years Geoff conducted orchestras and prize winning choirs until in 1960 he formed the Odd Fellows Male Voice Choir. This choir based in Aldershot and now known as the Rushmoor Odd Fellows MVC. has grown from the original twelve or so to a current fifty plus. More of a glee club than straight choir it still retains Geoff's original ideas on how to entertain an audience. Several of the original members ensure that this concept is not lost. The "Odds" as they are affectionately known are, probably, the most obvious reminder of Geoff's musical efforts over the years retaining his ideals of presenting good music with humour as an unexpected bonus.

As choirmaster of the Grosvenor Road Methodist Church in Aldershot [now, sadly, turned into flats] Geoff led a church choir of high standard and many choir members helped with his other secular music making. He had been appointed Choirmaster in 1940 but almost

immediately volunteered for military service, joining the RASC on his 26th. birthday. and for five years he served, mainly abroad, attaining the rank of Sergeant and receiving the honour of being mentioned in despatches.

In January 1975, "Hampshire" magazine printed an article about 'Aldershot's Mr Music'. At that time it seemed to us that, somehow, Geoff and his music, would go on forever, we were all enjoying ourselves so much, the future appeared to stretch far ahead with unending concerts and laughing, clapping audiences ever appreciative. The concerts do go on. Unfortunately, Geoff is no longer with us, but, he has left a legacy. Those of us who knew and, dare I say it, loved him, are richer as a result of having known him. He said " As a Printer I earn my living - but music is my life " He was certainly instrumental in bringing pleasure to many, a pun that, I know, would make him laugh, and he was always smiling, but the one thing that stands out like a beacon in my memory, is the fact that he never got annoyed, come what may Geoff would smile.

Yes, Geoff, you had many blessings, and you left many more, particularly with those of us who had the privilege of enjoying the music making of "Aldershot's Mr. Music ".