

What a difference two months can make! Melbourne is emerging from one of the longest lockdowns anywhere. The last few rehearsals chart the progress of the whole state. From October's Zoom –



To November and live rehearsals with masks –



And back to social distance in December.



The process is considerably smoothed by the fact that all choir members and music staff are vaccinated.

Readers will be aware that baritone John Lansdowne passed away during the lockdown, on July 26th. His Memorial Service was postponed until larger

gatherings became legal, making the last months difficult ones for his wife, Jan, and the family and friends.

The Choir helped to recognise a life well-lived at Christ Church Dingley on November 28th.



We hope that we were able to help in bringing some closure to what has been a long drawn-out period of mourning for John's family.

We were able to feel like a normal, performing choir when we were invited to the Elgee Park vineyard on the Mornington Peninsula to entertain Mr. Baillieu Myer and guests assembled in what felt like a "proper concert"

It was pointed out that Mr. Myer had been instrumental in our last three public appearances – one at Cranlana in Toorak, one at the McClelland Sculpture Park, and this one. We continue to be in his debt.



Ready to go at Elgee Park - and not a mask in sight. Photo B Flitton.

We were more than usually impressed by our soloist for the day. Rachael Joyce has a magnificent voice, and a splendid stage presence for one so young. We hope to hear a great deal more in the future.

As is usual at this venue, choir and guests were invited to partake in refreshments after the concert. Estate wines were offered for tasting, too.



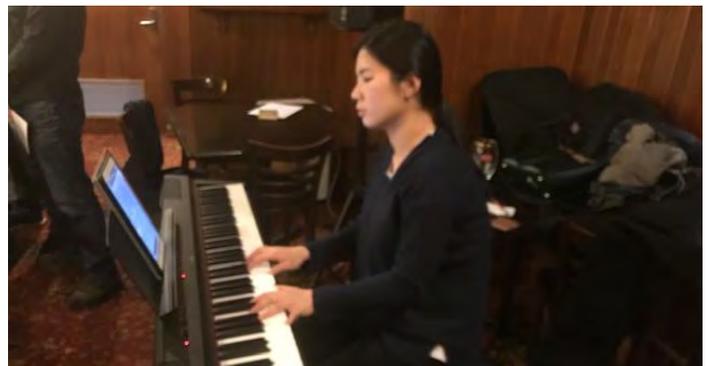
Beauty and the Beasts. Sorry boys!

We were abruptly reminded of just how fragile “covid normal” is when second tenor Arthur Poole tested positive and needed to isolate. Arthur is double vaccinated, and otherwise fit. He likened his illness to a severe flu even so. Because other members of the choir had had some contact, everyone needed to test. Fortunately, Arthur had kept it to himself, but Village Baxter rehearsals were cancelled for the balance of the year.

Which brings us to our “Singing in the Pub” event. Kirks on the Esplanade at Mornington advised that their staffing was inadequate for a large crowd, and so cancelled until 2022.

The Charles Dickens Tavern, our Melbourne singing venue, were able to go ahead. So on December 15th the City Chapter choristers, helped by a good smattering of the Baxter choir, had an excellent hit-out. As usual, Mina Yu accompanied, and Tom Buchanan conducted.

There was good support for the evening from the choir, but covid seems to have made many people uneasy about socialising – there were very few patrons in the tavern who were not directly associated with the choir. A step in the right direction though!



I should reluctantly congratulate our patron, Haydn James, on the Welsh victory over Australia in the Rugby. Ah well! There’s tournament always next year!

Congratulations to Paul Tregalis and Neil Armstrong, both of whom passed their auditions and are now full members of the choir. Sing well boys!

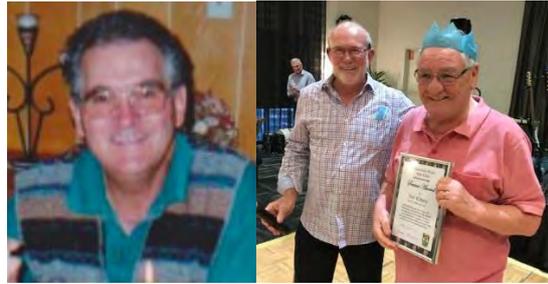
And so to the last function of the choir’s year on December 17th. The annual breakup at the Frankson RSL club. This is the occasion where contributions by Choristers to the life of the choir are recognised.

This year was a bumper one!

Ten year awards went to John Annable, David Brown,



Shane Hubner, Lindsay Richardson,



Twenty-five year awards were received by Alan Peter (who was also confirmed as an honorary life member) and Dominic Xeureb.

And Maurie Richardson



Fifteen year awards went to Len Charlton, Philip Manktelow, and Barry Tucker.



Roy Buckley clocked up 30 years, And Harry Hamill a pretty remarkable 35!



Allan Peter and Peter Murray were confirmed as life members-



Twenty year awards were received by Neil Kinsey, Ron Lofts, and Barry Richardson.



And Ken Kelly was farewelled by the first tenors after a fourteen year stint. We wish him well in Queensland.



Welsh Christmas customs



pepper Mari Lwyd, calennig, plygain... there are several Welsh Christmas and New Year customs and traditions.

Last updated: 03 November 2009

Plygain - singing from 3-6am on Christmas Day



Congratulations to Chas Johnson on winning the Christmas Hamper.

And many thanks to Maree Mc Cormack, and to Bunnings for their donation of other prizes. Much appreciated.

In the dark hours on the morning of Christmas Day, before the cockerel crowed, men gathered in rural churches to sing. They sang mainly unaccompanied, three or four part harmony carols in a service that went on for three hours or so. That's Plygain.

This is a tradition which still thrives in parts of mid Wales. Watch an archive clip of [Plygain in the 1960s](#).

And so this is Christmas, to quote John Lennon. I'm sure most readers are hoping for a really good one. From the archive pages of BBC Wales, here are some Welsh traditions for the festive season.

Taffy - a Christmas Eve custom

Got a sweet tooth? Why not re-live an old Welsh custom this Christmas? Taffy-making.

This is how families whiled away the dark hours of Christmas Eve's night, leading up to the Plygain service. Toffee was boiled in pans on open fires and - this is a nice twist - dollops were dropped into icy cold water.

The taffy curled into all sorts of shapes - like letters. This was a way of divining the initials of

- [Archive](#)
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the younger, unmarried family members' future loves.

Mari Lwyd - the grey mare that brings good luck

Imagine hearing a knock on your door around Christmas and being challenged to a battle of rhyming insults by a man with a scary horse with a skull-head. That's the Mari Lwyd - Grey Mare - a pre-Christian custom that's still acted out in parts of Wales.

Make a Mari Lwyd - with or without a horse's skull

Making your own Mari Lwyd could be tricky, as you'll need to get hold of a horse's skull and jaw. However, it may be possible to improvise with polystyrene or cardboard instead.

Stick on false ears, plug big shiny glass marbles into the eye sockets and give the head a mane of ribbons. Stick the head on to a broom handle, hold on to it and wrap a white sheet - just long enough to reach the ground - around yourself so the head sticks out at the top.

Hold on to the broom handle and clack the Mari Lwyd's jaw against the top of the skull as you go from door to door, visiting your friends this Christmas and New Year.

Wassail - before mulled wine and punch, there was this

This is a tradition that went hand-in-hand with Mari Lwyd and other Christmas get-togethers. Just as we drink mulled wine and punch at Christmas and New Year parties nowadays, a

Welsh Christmas at the turn of the century involved drinking from the wassail bowl.

These bowls were often elaborate, ornate and many-handed. The bowl was filled with fruit, sugar, spices and topped up with warm beer. As it was passed around, the drinkers would make a wish for a successful year's farming and a bumper crop at harvest time.

Although the wassail bowl has been a tradition in Wales for many years, its origins are not uniquely Welsh. According to reader Sasha Clarskson, "The word derives from the Anglo-Saxon "Waes Hael!" ('wax hale' in slightly more modern language). It means be or grow healthy, and started as a toast at yule in pagan times, becoming the name for the drink that was toasted and then, even later, singing at yule/Christmas hoping to be rewarded by that drink or by other favours."

Calennig - trick or treat, Welsh style

Was trick or treat invented in Wales? Well, for centuries here in Wales, something very similar has been going on. Not at Hallowe'en, but on New Year's Day. Ever heard of calennig?

From dawn until noon on New Year's Day, all around Wales, groups of young boys would go from door to door, carrying three-legged totems, chanting rhymes, splashing people with water and asking for calennig - gifts of small change.

Make your own calennig - on Twelfth Night

Take three short sticks - as long as lollipop sticks - and stick them into the bottom of an apple, as if they were stool legs. Now the apple all round, hedgehog-style, with cloves, almonds, corn ears, etc. Stick a sprig of holly and a candle in the top of the calennig. Come New Year's Day, you'll be ready to play your part in making sure this ancient Welsh tradition doesn't die out.

Hunting the wren

On Twelfth Night in Wales, groups of men would go out Hunting the Wren. The tiny bird would be caged in a wooden box and carried from door to door. Householders would pay for the privilege of peeping at the poor wren in the box. [*The Clancy Brothers had a song about this custom in Ireland. Ed.*]

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.

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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

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COMING EVENTS

By now we are all used to the notion that Man proposes and COVID disposes. Any forecast is subject to change.

The choir remains committed to singing at Kirks on the Esplanade in Mornington on the last Wednesday of every month. But lockdowns may render this impossible.

Similarly, we sing, when it is legal to do so, at the Charles Dickens Tavern in Collins Street on the last Wednesday.

There are also several concerts planned:-

27th February. Gymanfa Ganu. St Michaels Church, Collins St.

3rd April. Christ Church, Dingley.

14th May. Uniting Church, Frankston.;

22nd June. All Saints Church, St Kilda.

August (to be Confirmed) Village Baxter.

16th September – Western Australian Tour

16th October. Sorrento Activities Centre

November.(to be confirmed) St Peters Box Hill

Langwarrin Retirement Village (to be Confirmed)



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If you've made it this far, I wish all readers of this newsletter a very Merry Christmas, and a spectacular New Year!

Stay safe and Well.

David.



Mari Iwyd