

**THE BRITISH
MALE VOICE CHOIR:
A HISTORY AND
CONTEMPORARY
ASSESSMENT**

VOLUME 1.

CHRISTOPHER ROBIN WILTSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

THE BRITISH MALE VOICE CHOIR

Secular male voice choral singing in Britain as a self-regulated, self-financed musical and social organization is the basis of this study. The opening chapters examine the form, repertoire and composers of, respectively, the catch and the glee, in the context of the gentlemen's meetings at which the music was performed. Whether at the catch-singing in the homes of late seventeenth century Oxford clergy or at the Georgian club where glees (with alto lead) held sway, it was educated men from the upper and middle strata of British society who were involved and in terms of organization and repertoire, these meetings are presented as antecedents of what, in the early years of the present century, became the male voice choir. The influences of protestant churches, changing social conditions, musical fashion, choral competitions and education are shown to combine in widening the social range within choir membership leading to public popularity and, through improved standards, to respect from the music profession during the first half of this century. The involvement of choirs in competitions is examined in detail in Chapter 4, this area of activity providing an enormous stimulus to their musical and social well-being.

The chronological structure is completed with comment on post-war musical retrenchment and partial ossification. Chapter 5 also reviews the detailed statistics on contemporary British male choirs collected in the author's national survey carried out over a three-year period (1988-91). The repertoire of original music is discussed in the subsequent chapter, supported by 64 illustrations with reference made to 250 works by over 120 composers. Finally, a comparative study places current British male choir

work within a European context. Discussion on the future concentrates on problems of recruitment and implications for the survival of this neglected arm of the British choral scene.

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PREFACE

Throughout a ten year period working professionally with male choirs as composer, arranger, conductor and adjudicator, I have become all too aware that, despite the individual enthusiasm and commitment of thousands of members, the male voice choral movement has many problems. To understand the root causes of these, I have examined the influences of organized religion, social upheaval, education and nationalism and considered the way in which these elements have played vital roles in the development of the male choral medium. This in turn led me to propose how and why these forces have to a large extent disappeared, leaving an ageing membership of organizations which could be said to be approaching the status of aural exhibits in a cultural Heritage Centre. The principal stumbling blocks to progress, recruitment and, indeed, survival, would appear to be the choirs' limited choice from what is, in fact, a very wide repertoire together with their general unpreparedness to encourage further development of that repertoire.

For the preparation of this study, I am indebted to many: the secretaries, librarians and members of a host of male voice choirs throughout the country for their cooperation in the research for Chapter 5; the officers of Colne Orpheus, Colne Valley, The Cooperative Wholesale (Manchester) and Nelson Arion Glee Union choirs for making Minutes available and to those of Abertillery, Biddulph and Felling choirs for granting permission to re-produce choir rules; the secretaries of Britain's male voice choral organizations and federations; William Elkin, Boosey and Hawkes, Gwynn Publishing, Max Music, Novello (Music Sales Ltd.), Oxford University Press, Robertson

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CHRISTOPHER WILTSHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

The secular male voice choir, in the form as known in the last decade of the twentieth century (with two-tenor, baritone and bass layout) first appeared in Britain slightly over a century ago, although its roots go back several centuries earlier. Despite this one hundred years of tradition, the male voice choir movement has (particularly since the middle of the present century) suffered neglect and lack of appreciation, only some of which has been of its own making. This disregard on the part of the concert-going public at large as well as the media was amply illustrated in the Autumn of 1990, when BBC Television, in conjunction with a leading supermarket chain, produced a series of programmes under the title *Choir of the Year*. It was presented as a competition by elimination but, with an eye to audience figures, each programme contained a varied selection of choral styles from madrigal groups and chamber choirs to Barbershop and Gospel groups. With features included on choir tours, costumes and other peripheral items, the forty-minute slots were magazine programmes on choir activities in Britain, of interest to choral singers and laypeople alike. Of the hundreds of choirs which auditioned, one male voice choir was included in one edition of the show. Forming an introduction to this choir, an excerpt was shown from a pre-war black-and-white film in which a young Welsh miner was cancelling a date with his girlfriend because of his choir practice. A later "clip" from the same film, inserted during the brief edited *fortissimo* extracts of the televised choir's programme, showed a

group of miners standing around the piano in a pub (beer glasses in hand) presumably at the rehearsal alluded to. Thus, in a few minutes of 1990 television time, all the misconceptions and ignorance of the media concerning male voice choirs were encapsulated, for the choir concerned was from the North-East of England, did not contain a single miner and much of its programme (of original male choir music by Dvorak and Vaughan Williams) was sung softly although the transmission only produced passages rendered in a full-blooded *forte*. Even the use of this particular film clip was poorly chosen as the producer was presumably unconcerned that the majority of male voice choirs in Wales had their roots in the Nonconformist church (particularly Methodism) and therefore the beer-drinking at rehearsal was almost certainly cinematic licence.

To an extent, this licence can be forgiven because, amongst the dreadful media muddle and ignorance of present-day male voice choir work and the BBC's perception of *all* such choirs as comprising strident Welsh miners, the one feature (however non-contextual) in this television production which was relevant, indeed crucial, to the development of male singing in Britain was the conviviality and sociability suggested by those glasses of beer. Men socializing and imbibing have always sung and, in our times, this seemingly fundamental sociological phenomenon has produced vast improvised male choirs at sports stadia such as Anfield and Cardiff Arms Park. Whether as much under the influence of football fervour as alcohol, the result is the same - the choral conviviality and closeness of the terraces has produced more performances of *You'll never walk alone* from *Carousel* than composer Richard Rogers

ever received on the stage. Similarly, *Cwm Rhonda*, with two-part work in the chorus, ringing round the capital of Welsh rugby expresses that same oneness of mind (as well as emphasizing the significance of Nonconformist hymnody on male voice choirs).

In no other arm of the British choral movement is there such diversity as in male voice choirs. Ranging in membership from a dozen singers (which would constitute a madrigal group in mixed voice singing) to one hundred and sixty (which would be a full-scale choral society in SATB terms), male choirs have roots in areas as diverse as religion, camaraderie, charity, industry and sport. There are Methodist, Jewish and Gospel male voice choirs, groups formed through rambling and rugby clubs, by air raid wardens, policemen and fishermen, in heavy engineering works and collieries. Their music ranges from Elizabethan madrigals, through eighteenth century rounds and catches, the nineteenth century glee, Victorian ballads, hymns and folk songs, to purpose-written part songs of the 1920s and 1930s and, latterly, arrangements of mid-twentieth century light music in addition to original music by contemporary composers. Alongside all of this, there is the music of many distinguished nineteenth century composers. Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Dvorak and Rossini are only some of the composers who contributed to the repertoire. Debussy, Poulenc, Stravinsky, Bartok, Kodaly, Janacek and Britten were also attracted to the medium.

Of all the reasons male choirs have been formed, comradeship would probably be the most widespread. Whether this was through the brotherhood of the work-place, the church or the club or merely through, to many, the unbeatable joy of working together in song, the result is always a spirit of relaxation and release. Paradoxically, in those

choirs not associated with one specific business or work-place and where membership is drawn from all walks of life, the proud boast often is that members do not concern themselves with the affairs, mode of work or lifestyle of their fellow choristers. Choir night brings men together for the music only and this in itself breeds an enormous commitment often envied in other branches of choral singing. Conviviality, the "après-sing", for which, as has been suggested, male voice choirs have a certain reputation, comes only when the serious business of concentrating on time, tune and tone is complete. This aspect of conviviality has a long history in the early glee clubs and before and is not, of course, restricted to the British Isles. The Liedertafel movement in Germany in the nineteenth century also established the eating/drinking singing/smoking evening as being a popular way for a man to spend his leisure time although not all of the groups had a Schubert as its host.

Although male choirs are legion in America, especially on the University campuses, their popularity is more than matched by Barbershop singing which developed as a unique American choral medium in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Barbershop movement eventually spread to Britain around the time of the Second World War (particularly through the film industry) although the British Association of Barbershop Singers was not formed until 1974. This Association is affiliated to the American SPEBSQSA - the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, founded in 1938 - and represents the work of hundreds of choirs, both male and female, whose performance standards are high and whose commitment and skill is as notable as that in traditional male voice choirs. Their

harmonic vocabulary concentrates almost exclusively on the language of popular music from the Thirties and Forties, and staging, costumes and choreography are an integral part of their performance routine. This, and the aim to produce a different sound through different methods, sets the Barbershop choruses quite properly apart from the mainstream of male voice choir work and as such the movement is not included in the present study.

Whilst the male voice choir repertoire, as already described, is probably more comprehensive than in other choral areas, it is a regrettable fact that many male choirs concentrate on a limited number of concert items from limited sections of the repertoire. This possibly accounts for the undeniable fact that the term "male voice choir" usually conjures up in the layperson and, more particularly, in the professional musician, a visual image of elderly gentlemen (probably Welsh) performing to an equally ageing audience. The aural image would be one of Negro Spirituals or hymn tunes sung in a lugubrious tone, over-laden with sentimentality. Whilst there was, and to an extent still is, justification for this perception, there is some evidence that the movement is prepared to rid itself of its post-war (or even pre-war) image and that there is a realization and determination to ensure that male voice singing continues to play a full part in the British choral scene. The organization and business sense of the male choir has often been the envy of mixed choirs and it is this efficiency which must be ready to promote the movement and impel it successfully into the next century. However, a great deal of prejudice and misinformation will have to be expunged for this goal to be reached. If these elements are to be removed, many more precise facts

need to be uncovered and the role of the male voice choir and its repertoire must be more widely appreciated. Question marks are bound to remain over the future of the male choral movement in Britain but a correction of wrong assumptions and the erasure of misguided opinions may help in defining what needs to be achieved in order to maintain the male voice choir as a significant element in British choral activities.

The first steps in this defining procedure should include some appreciation of the long, well-focused history of British male singing organizations. Far from being purely a working-class phenomenon involving Welsh miners, the movement has roots which stretch back through the nineteenth century glee clubs to the catch clubs of the eighteenth and late seventeenth centuries. It is with the latter male singing societies and in particular the English catch that the genesis of the British male voice choir is discovered.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CATCH AND CATCH CLUBS

Although the connection between singing and the consumption of alcohol is to prove important in the development of male choral work, it is not suggested that this link was always present. The early history of formal Western music was, after all, dominated by male singing and it is not postulated that, for example, *organum* arose through the vocalizing of groups of inebriated tenth-century clerics. However, Carl Orff has reminded us in *Carmina Burana* that pre-Renaissance monastic life was not without its allocation of alcohol-induced revelry. With wine being a liturgical necessity as well as an obvious source of hygienic refreshment, later ecclesiastical characters such as Father Dom Perignon were able to find a niche in bibular, if not musical, history alongside the Carthusians of Chartres and the Benedictines, both renowned for their liqueurs. Thus the developmental road from Orff's *In Taberna Quando Sumus* to the bawdy songs of the rugby club shower or bar would not be difficult to trace and one of the landmarks on such a journey (and one which has particular relevance to the history of today's male voice choirs) would be the English phenomenon, the Catch.

By the time the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club had been established (1761), the catch had existed for at least two centuries as a peculiarly English form (there being no evidence of its equivalent in continental Europe). The term has, at

various times, been used to describe anything in canon form and, as such *Sumer is icumen in* has been referred to as an antecedent. However, this is to miss the point that the individualizing feature of the catch is not its canonic construction, important though that is, but its textual matter and the manner in which that text is used. References to catches in, for example, the Elizabethan playwrights almost always have a context of revelry, celebration, jocularly and/or drunkenness and, aside from the context, the script containing these references can often be littered with puns on the word catch. Shakespeare gives us the following in *Twelfth Night*¹:

Sir Toby: ...Shall we rouse the night-owl in a catch, that will draw three souls from one weaver? Shall we do that?

Sir Andrew: An you love me let's do't: I am dog at a catch.

Clown: By'r lady, sir, and some dogs will catch well.

Sir Andrew: Most certain. Let our catch be *Thou Knave*.

Clown: *Hold thy peace, thou knave*, knight? I shall be constrained to call thee knave, knight.

Sir Andrew: 'Tis not the first time I have constrained one to call me knave. Begin, fool: it begins *Hold thy peace*.

Clown: I shall never begin if I hold my peace.

Sir Andrew: Good, i'faith. Come begin.

(They sing a catch)

Sir Toby's line to "draw three souls from one weaver" alludes to the three-part song using one melody and at the same time mentions one of the many tradesmen who, at the time, were well-known for catch-singing. On Malvolio's entrance we learn of more tradesmen-singers:

Malvolio: My masters, are you mad? or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do you make an alehouse of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, or time in you?

Sir Toby: We did keep time, sir, in our catches. Sneek up!

This punning is entirely in keeping with the probable derivation of the term since, in a canon, the parts appear aurally to be chasing each other but never catching up. This "chasing" also gives rise to the theory that the term derives from the Italian *caccia* meaning a chase (of the hunting variety). There is, too, a possible link with the forfeit songs which were researched by the English folk-song revivalists in the early years of this century. Here, the emphasis was on "catching out" the other singers and *The Cobbler and Tinker*, collected by Lucy Broadwood and J. Fuller-Maitland from a Sussex gamekeeper in 1892, demonstrates how these songs were sung (Ex.1). In her Folk Song Journal article,² Lucy Broadwood comments on the Sussex singers:

Whilst sitting together over their beer or cider they usually included such songs as tests of quick-wittedness or - as time waxed late - of sobriety. The solo singer having given forth his phrase, it was the duty of his companions each to sing the syllable or word that fell to his lot, all taking part in the chorus. The singer who failed to provide the right word at the right moment had to pay for a pot of beer on behalf of the company.

The song also appeared contemporaneously in the Leicestershire minefields where, in 1895, the same researcher noted the miners using a variant of the tune and substituting the words "with a basket full of coal dust" to provide the forfeit phrases. Having quoted a three-part catch from 1780 (see Ex.2), Reginald Nettel³ concludes that "the trick of splitting up the words 'cobbler' and 'tinker' is transferred to a one-part song." Since there is no evidence available that these forfeit songs were a nineteenth century invention or development, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the simpler idea (of singing one melody split between several singers) could have been developed *into* the canonic catch in earlier times.

Whether this type of convivial activity, which surfaced at the time of the late

nineteenth century English folk-song revival, therefore pre-dated the Elizabethans and their catch-singing must remain open to conjecture. What *is* certain is that the singing of catches (of part-singing as distinct from the unison forfeit songs) was widely known in Shakespearean times. Edward Naylor⁴ catalogues many references to the involvement in catch-singing of colliers, smiths, tinkers and coziars (cobblers) by playwrights such as Richard Edwards, Peele, Beaumont and Fletcher and Sir William Davenant as well as Shakespeare. The audience would have been conversant with the catch technique, as those watching the plays included the very tradesmen to which the playwrights refer. Andrew Gurr⁵ has shown that the whole range of Elizabethan society could be represented at the theatre. Whilst his sample was necessarily small, Gurr was able to identify members of each of the four strata as suggested in Holinshed's *Chronicles* of 1577⁶. The whole of England knew of catches because, it seems, the whole of England, from knights to knaves, was involved in their performance.

A further crucial element which determined the catch genre was the nature of the chosen text. This varied from the risqué to the downright obscene. Whether the subject matter was drinking, politics or women (the main areas covered), what we would now call schoolboy lavatorial humour was pre-dominant. This may explain why the catches were never widely published and therefore never found a place in public performance. Doubtless the composers would have felt this lack of public exposure a right and proper thing - the catches were, after all, originally for private performance. However, even the Victorians could not deny the fact that the fifty-four catches of as eminent a

composer as Henry Purcell formed a sufficiently significant proportion of his output as to be made available to scholars and performers. When Edward Rimbault⁷ published his *Rounds, Catches and Canons of England* in 1862, he acknowledged the work of his colleague, the Rev. J. Powell Metcalfe, in "wading through seas of filth to extract a few drops of sweet perfume for the adornment of our volume." These excremental oceans were to be found in the books of the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club. Of their "filthy rubbish" he writes:

Wit and humour often give place to ideas and expression that would not come from the lips of the lowest costermonger. And yet these words were sung - and no doubt relished - by gentlemen, *noblemen! Heaven save the mark!*

Rimbault was thoroughly concurring with the general opinions of William Jackson of Exeter⁸ who, in 1795, wrote at great length about the catch and its humour:

This odd species of composition, whenever invented, was brought to its perfection by Purcell. Real music was as yet in its childhood; but the reign of Charles II carried every form of vulgar debauchery to its height; the proper era for the birth of such pieces as, 'when quartered, have ever three parts obscenity and one part music'. The definition of a catch is a piece for three or more voices, one of which leads, and the others follow in the same notes. It must be so contrived, the rests (which are made for that purpose) in the music of one line being filled up with a word or two from another line; these form a cross-purpose or catch, from whence the name. Now, this piece of wit is not judged perfect, if the result be not the rankest indecency.... It may ... be said that the result of the break is not always indecency. I confess there are catches on other subjects - drunkenness is a favourite one - which, though good, is not so very good as the other: and there may possibly be found one or two upon other topics, which might be heard without disgust; but these are not sufficient to contradict a general rule, or make me retract what I have advanced.... I confess that I never heard a catch sung but I felt more ashamed than I can express. I pretend to no more delicacy than that of the age I live in, which is very properly too refined to endure such barbarisms - I was ashamed for myself - for my company - and if a foreigner was present - for my country.

This "cross-purpose" is a significant feature of the catch and is one which can only properly be appreciated in performance, the manuscript not yielding the hidden

meaning which can sometimes be created by clever juxtaposition of syllables. Very often as will be seen in Purcell's catches, the musical setting can highlight a pun and this dwelling on a part of a word to create a seeming profanity resolving into innocence has passed into and remained in the province of the bawdy song ("A So-, A So-, A Soldier I will be).⁹ From the seventeenth century onwards, most catches, such as Willam Crawford, Lay Vicar at St. Paul's during the Restoration period, were quite prepared to distort the metre of a poem -

Here dwells a maid whose name is Sis,
You may come in and kiss.
Her whole estate is seventeen pence a year
Yet you may kiss her if you come but near.

- so that, in performance, the setting produces "you may kiss her whole." In Walsh's 1731 publication, the collector even omits the "w" in case alcohol had dulled the brains of his singers. John Hawkins, in his *History of Music* 1776, when defining a catch, describes this effect as "wherein to humour some conceit in the words, the melody is broken and the sense interrupted in one part and caught again or supplied by another."¹⁰ In connection with Hawkins, another, less salacious, example of this feature can be given, as in the same year Charles Burney also brought out a separate history of music. John Wall Callcott produced a catch including the words:

Have you Sir John Hawkins's History?
Some folks think it's quite a mystery
Burney's history I like best.

The part-singing here is planned so that one hears "Sir John Hawkins - burn 'is history." It is not difficult to imagine how this extra element of humour might have affected the catch singers. The wonder of it is, bearing in mind the ever-present

alcohol and given the nature of the words, that any singing could ever be accomplished or that any of the more hilarious numbers could be completed. It is not clear whether William Jackson's reference to Purcell bringing the catch to perfection was a compliment to that composer or condemnation. However, the editorial staff producing the Purcell Society Edition,¹¹ which contains all of the composers' catches, obviously agreed in some measure with the eighteenth century Devonian and with their closer contemporary Rimbault, as many of the words were sanitized for publication in 1922. This was not simply a matter of occasional words or phrases being substituted although this was often the case - "damn the thinking" became "hang the thinking" and "So kiss my arse" was replaced by "So go your way". More importantly, whole texts were re-written. In *Since time so kind to us do prove* (Ex.3), a picture of seduction/rape, only the first two lines survive, after which the Edwardians were asked to sing:

Who calls without. Oh fie the door is shut
You're the boldest man that e'er I knew
Be off the neighbours sure will hear
Farewell, farewell my dear

The thwarting of this gentleman at the hands of the Purcell Society is as nothing compared to the fate of Sir Walter Raleigh. This catch, *Sir Walter enjoying his Damsel one night*, (Ex.4) is based on an account of the renowned Elizabethan's sexual skill but the editors decided that it would be better to concentrate on a more acceptable and well-documented vice when they replaced the whole text with the following:

Sir Walter enjoying a pipe in his chair
There enters my lady with her nose in the air.
"Pray my darling" says he "what has brought me this pleasure
For so busy are you, you have no leisure?

"How can you sit there, surrounded by this smother?
No longer will I stand such treatment at your hand
Tommorrow I go home to mother."

Whether it is accurate to sense some frustration on the part of the editors, Messrs. Fuller-Maitland and Barclay Squire, in replacing such earthy stories with anodyne texts such as this is open to conjecture. The use of phrases in the new version such as "enters my lady", "brought me this pleasure" and "treatment at your hand" may be subliminal but it seemed that on occasions when the whole text was re-written, the authors left just sufficient imagery in the lines to produce a nod and a wink from the gentlemen in their Twenties audience. "Plump Joan" and her exhortation for more vigorous sexual intercourse (Ex.5) may have been replaced by Georgina in a "spoiled dress" and the lines may be clumsy doggerel but the Purcell Edition staff still managed to paint the right picture, replacing explicitness with implicitness:

Young Colin cleaving firewood sound
Soon fuel chopping hot work found
And gladly stopp'd when he heard a cry
His sweetheart he saw lay prone hard by.
Georgina had fallen and spoiled her dress
(Her state I'd best leave for you to guess)
She cried for assistance out of her distress
"Oh Colin do help me from this mess"
The swain did nought but stand and stare
Ne'er had he seen a sight so fair.
She cried "Hold your Georgina, out your hand
I vow to do anything you command."

Musically, Purcell almost always contrived to produce admirable counterpoint in his catches. The rhythmic independence of *Young Colin cleaving*, with the typical dotted melisma on "laughing" and "bed" plus the strong, pointed rhythm on "Ahem", sets this apart from, for example, the rather four-square example by Willam Ellis (Ex.6). In the

longer catches, Purcell gave himself space to demonstrate harmonic as well as rhythmic deftness, as in *Bring the bowl and cool nantz* (Ex.7) where the minor mode combined ^{with} the use of sequences produces a fluidity in tonality which lesser composers found difficult to achieve. In *Once, twice, thrice I Julia tried* (Ex.8), the five-bar phrase and the overlapping of the text at the final cadence are reminiscent of several moments in the *Dido and Aeneas* ground basses. Since there are no references to the authors, we have to presume that Purcell, in common with other catch composers, penned the lyrics himself or set lines offered to him by his drinking companions or between them bowlderised existing poems. There are examples of the same basic text being set by different composers - the text of Richard Brown's catch (Ex.9) was later taken up by Jonathan Battishill, whose 4-part version appears as:

Here on his back doth lay Sir Andrew Keeling
And at his feet his mournful lady kneeling
But when he was alive and had his feeling
She laid upon her back and he was kneeling.

Many such paraphrases would have been written, together with translations from Latin texts, versions of published poems (*Young Colin*, for example, is found in Thomas D'Urfey's *New Poems* of 1690) and lines from plays. Judging by the output, shortage of lyrics was not a problem which caused the catch composers much concern. They also showed little concern as to the tessitura of their compositions. There seems little allowance for the fact that the ad hoc company of singers would probably contain both tenors and basses as the range of the songs was often as wide as a thirteenth). This poses the question as to how the tenors coped below written middle C¹² and how the basses managed above the stave. If the gentlemen moved easily into an alto voice

(which is quite likely in view of the ecclesiastical connections) this would seem to solve the problems, although the starting pitch would be crucial. In the informal performance situations which would have existed before the setting-up of organized clubs, one suspects that the first singer was trusted to pitch the catch in a suitable key and thereafter the party managed as best it could. Considering the amount of liquor which the songs themselves suggest was present, refinement of tone and tuning was not immediately a major consideration, a state of affairs which was addressed by the more formalized clubs.

The publications by Thomas Warren which began to appear annually in 1763 and to which Rimbault took such exception, were dedicated to, and obviously largely for the use of, members of the Noblemen's and Gentlemen's Catch Club of which Warren was the devoted secretary. However, even earlier, there were significant publications in the history of the catch. In the Library of King's College Cambridge there is a manuscript dated 1580 containing "...in this rowle¹³ divers fine catches, otherwise call'd Rounds of 3, 4 and 5 parts in one, of 9 and 11 parts in one wth merry songs to passe away the tyme in honest mirth and solace." Thomas Ravenscroft's *Pammelia*¹⁴ appeared in 1609 with the subtitle *Musick's Miscellanie; or mixed varietie of pleasant Roundelays and delightfull Catches of 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 parts in one*. Of the hundred or so titles, some were ordinary street cries but many were establishing the tradition of associating catch-singing with drinking. Amongst these is *Hey, Jolly Jenkin* which Chappell¹⁵ quotes as the catch referred to by Samuel Harsnet in 1604 being sung by tinkers "as they sat by the fire with a pot of good ale between their legs". Ravenscroft produced

another collection in 1609 - *Deuteromelia; or the second part of Musick's Melodie*¹⁶ - to which he added the subtitle *Qui canere potest canat - Catch That Catch Can*. A third publication was his *Melismata*¹⁷ of 1611, again intended, as he suggested in his introduction to *Pammelia*, for those "whose love of music exceeds their skill," being "pleasing without difficulty." Judging by the repertoire they maintained, many directors of male voice choirs in later centuries would have applauded Ravenscroft's aims.

In 1652, compiler John Hilton took up the punning title of *Catch That Catch Can*,¹⁸ producing for publisher John Playford "a choice collection of Catches, Rounds and Canons for 3 or 4 voices." In his address "To all Lovers of Musick" he wrote:

And these Catches also, which I have now published by importunity of Friends, to be free for all men's catching; only my wishes are, that they who are true Catchers indeed, may catch them for their delight, and may they that desire to learne, catch them for their Instruction. But let those that catch at them with detraction (as that is a catching disease) catch only the fruits of their own Envy. I am confident, that they cannot make better, cannot injure these, which your favourable Acceptance may make good to him that is your Friend, JOHN HILTON.

Since he obviously felt that his selection was beyond just criticism, a second edition was published in 1658. In 1667 *The Musical Companion* appeared in which well over half of the two hundred and eighteen compositions were catches. The second part of *The Musical Companion* in 1685, the year before Playford's death, ran for ten editions (the last being in 1730) thus giving some indication of the popularity of the songbooks. The Thomas Walshes, father and son, took up the mantle of chief publishers of music in London in the first part of the eighteenth century and *The Catch Club or Merry Companions*¹⁹ which appeared around 1731 was a collection of the best of Ravenscroft

and Playford, an anthology, therefore, of late seventeenth century catches. All of this publishing activity indicates that catch-singing was as popular and widespread during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as it had been in the Elizabethan era.

THE EMERGENCE OF ORGANIZED CLUBS

Events which can be seen as having great significance in terms of organized male singing however occurred during the Commonwealth period. Private music meetings began to flourish particularly in the cathedral cities where there were trained musicians, denied by the Puritans their normal musical activity. Some of these redundant church musicians turned from anthems and psalms to lighter fare. One such was William Ellis, formerly organist at St. John's College, Oxford, who penned catches such as *My Lady and her Maid* (Ex.6) and who, judging by this effort, was prepared to tackle the most indelicate of subjects with vigorous good humour. Since an entry fee of 6d was charged at the weekly meetings in Ellis's house in the late 1650s, the occasion was more of a private club than a public event. Both abounded during the Restoration period. Samuel Pepys' diary refers to these informal occasions, the entry for 21 July 1660 reading: "Went to the Six Clerks Office...dined at a club at the next door, where we had three voices to sing catches"²⁰ and he refers elsewhere to "Playfords new Ketch-book, that hath a great many new fooleries in it."²¹ It was the clerics, however, who seemed to be prepared to formalize meetings into weekly events and Dean Henry

Aldrich, another Oxonian, who continued where Ellis left off, invited members of the Cathedral Choir to his rooms in Christ Church College. Aldridge's catches first appeared in the 1685 *Musical Companion*, alongside those by Purcell and Blow, and at his meetings in the final decades of the seventeenth century he instituted certain rules to maintain standards of performance and attendance. Penalties included drinking beer instead of the fine claret which the Dean thoughtfully provided for his guests/members. Insistence on quality in performance was matched by his interest in quality of liquor judging by the catch which Aldridge wrote on the subject (Ex.10) - a composition which tells us a good deal about the anything-but-pious Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University.

Here, then, we have the genesis of the male voice choir. Weekly meetings, discipline, a musician as leader, financial contributions - all features of the present-day male choirs. In the 1667 edition of John Playford's *Musical Companion*²² the dedication reads "To his endeared Friends of the late Music-Society meeting in the Old Jury, London" and the popularity of these publications points to the fact that there must have been many "Music-Society meetings" up and down the country although detailed documentation is sparse. When his son Henry produced the 1702 edition, it was intended "chiefly for the encouragement of Musical Societies which will be speedily set up in all the chief Cities and Towns in England."²³ Playford supported his future-tense optimism by offering advice and printing copies of "standing rules ... put in handsome frames to be put up in each respective room the societies shall meet in."²⁴ He also anticipated the spreading of the catch club movement to wider shores,

mentioning, as well as "the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland," the developing colonies or, in his words, "Foreign Plantations."²⁵ Ireland, in fact, came into the picture a little earlier in that a Catch Club was set up by the men of Dublin's Christ Church and St. Patrick's Cathedrals in 1679 and thus can lay claim to being the first club established for men's singing.

As in the later development of the glee, the role of the church musician in the appreciation and performance of the catch can be seen as vital. Viewed from the end of the twentieth century, it seems strange to associate leading figures in cathedral music with the promulgation of musical forms where the words were generally licentious to a degree. However, unlike twentieth century society, these gentlemen had not suffered the piety, sanctimoniousness and smugness, richly laced with hypocrisy, of the Victorians. Even the Puritans, whilst abandoning formal church music, were not known to devise bans on other sorts of music-making - how else did the meetings of William Ellis take place in Oxford and what use did Cromwell have for the instruments he maintained at Hampton Court? We should not, therefore, find it surprising that Dr. William Hayes, organist firstly of Worcester Cathedral then of Magdalen College, Oxford where he was also Professor of Music, should recommend catch-singing as a means of improving choral singing in churches. In the introduction to his *Catches, Gleees and Canons for Three, Four and Five Voices* (1757) he writes:

...not to mention how much (catch-singing) contributed to the *Improvement* of the younger Practitioners, enabling them to sing readily at sight...I cannot help wishing it may prove an Inducement to others, my Brethren of the Cathedrals especially, to encourage and promote such (Catch) Societies...; well knowing it will contribute greatly to their own Satisfaction, the Improvement of those who may stand in need of their Assistance, and thereby, not a little, to the just execution of *Church-Music*, or the support of any other *Choral Performance*.²⁶

Hayes showed his affection for the social side of the catch-singing when, in 1765, his dedication was "with all Respect and Esteem to the Worthy Members of the CATCH CLUB or PHILHARMONIC Society at the King's Head Tavern in Oxford, for whose Amusement they were intended by their very affectionate Friend, W.H."²⁷ In these publications, Hayes followed the pattern set by Dr. Maurice Greene in publishing the catches in score as opposed to a continuous melody with various marks to show the point of entry for each part (see Ex.11). Greene, another pillar of the ecclesiastical music establishment (organist of St. Pauls at twenty-one, then of the Chapel Royal and ultimately Professor at Cambridge) was the first to use the scoring system in his *Catches and Canons for Three and Four Voices* in 1747. As was customary, the composer assumed a modesty in explaining why the pieces had reached publication ("...some partial Friends have prevail'd upon Me to trust the following little Piece to the Press") and offers advice as to their execution ("...each Singer is desir'd to take particular care not to be too loud for the rest of the Company.") He adds "(The catches) are put in the Treble Cliff (sic) in order to be of more general use, many persons having taught Themselves and Others to Sing by Playing upon Treble Instruments."²⁸

With these last two composers and their publications, we reach the time of the formation of the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club in 1761. As has been observed, this was not the first such Club but it *does* represent the first about which there is a fund of precise information as to its organization and conduct of meetings and as such is a significant landmark in the story of male choirs. The Minutes of the Club²⁹ show that at an inaugural meeting in November 1761 there were nine members

present, three of whom were Noblemen (the Earls of Sandwich, March and Eglinton). In the following April, sixteen further members were admitted and in 1763 nine 'Privileg'd Members' joined, these last being the professional singers who provided the expertise to guide the non-musicians through the often intricate catches. The first meetings were held at the Almack club but from 1767 the Thatched House Tavern in St. James's became the headquarters of the organization. Lord Gladstone, in quoting some of the Rules, supplies us with a detailed picture of the conduct of the weekly gatherings:

Any person whether Member or Other may decline his song when called upon, provided he drinks a glass of wine as an acknowledgement of his inability to sing. The person who sings in rotation must not quit his seat, but those who accompany the Song must come to him.

If any person who takes a part in any piece of music during the first round, is found deficient in his part, and actually sings out of time or tune, or stops before the piece is finished, he is to drink a glass of wine of any sort at that time on the table, at the requisition of any Member, and by order of the President.

No person is permitted upon any pretence whatsoever to practise any Music, whilst the Club is sitting; nor is anyone allowed to open a Music book except when a Catch is call'd for, and during the time of a performance.

All freedom of conversation is permitted as becomes a Society fill'd with men of rank and of liberal Education, except upon Political topics which are not to be introduced, upon any pretence whatsoever, nor religious subjects.

No coffee, tea, or other such heterogeneous beverage is to be brought upon, or drank near the table where the Club is seated upon any account; but if a Member either for himself or any other submits to call for such unnatural mixtures, they must be carried to a distant table, and the parties concern'd must take them at that place, with a due sense of the Society's indulgence.

All coffee, tea, etc., must be paid for by the Member or Members who call for them, and must not be charg'd in the Society's account upon any pretence whatsoever.

No question is to be debated at the general weekly meetings, as it must necessarily break in upon and interrupt the course of those meetings, but all matters of business are to be referr'd to a Committee, and to be discuss'd there, and they are either to be receiv'd, rejected, or recommitted by the Society upon the report.³⁰

Of the seven points raised here, that concerning "freedom of conversation" is noteworthy. Whilst it is no longer, as here, specified in the rules of male voice choirs, the proscription of politics and religion as topics for open discussion is still observed and any such comment from a conductor is likely to meet with some (albeit good-natured) disapproval. This lack of contentiousness has always been a matter of some pride with male choir members although few would realise its long history or, indeed, that at one time it was "written-in" to the activities of their ancestors. Many of the other "rules" mentioned here refer to the prerequisite liquor but the mention of *the table* suggests a limitation on the number of members. The un-dated engraving³¹ illustrating the frontispiece of the Essex Harmony (p.29A) shows about fifteen singers at such a table although the presence of violin, cello, serpent, horn, flute, bassoon and three clarinets or oboes (these players have their backs to the artist) suggests that this is a later scene from after the turn of the nineteenth century. By this time, clubs such as that at Canterbury were building quite sizeable libraries of orchestral music, and glees, part-songs and instrumental items were ousting the catch. The more informal nature of catch-singing is best viewed through the eyes of cartoonists such as Hogarth in his *A Chorus of Singers* from 1732 (which shows boys in attendance and the accompaniment of double bass and harpsichord) or, later, Rowlandson in *The Brilliants* of 1801. Gillray's *The Union Club* from the same year depicts an hilariously chaotic situation amongst the singers/diners. From these scenes, albeit with the cartoonist's licence to exaggerate, it would be unthinkable that the catch-singing was not accompanied by movement and gesture, often, one suspects, of a somewhat crude nature judging by the

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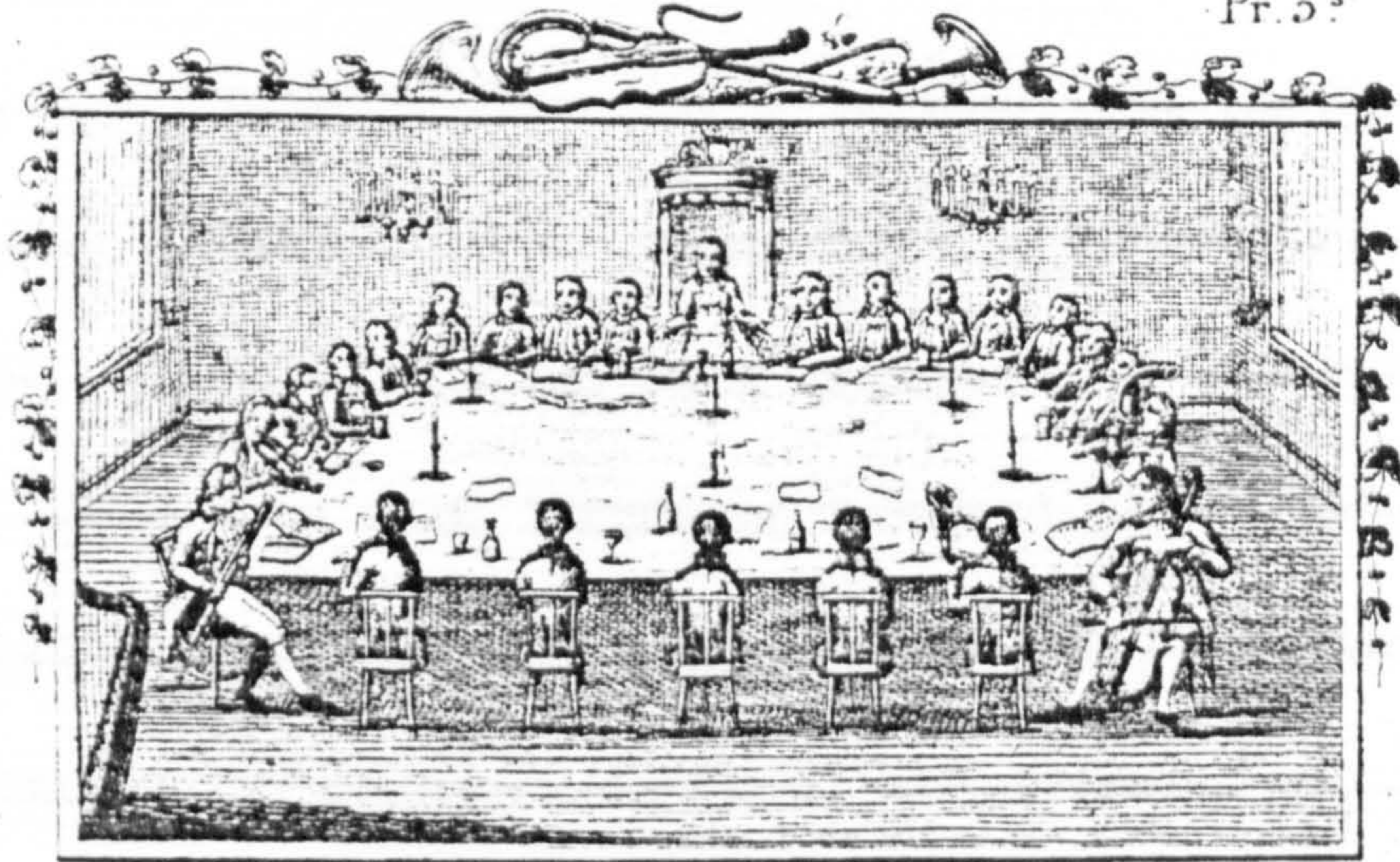
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“Life’s a Bumper,”—a Scene at Tideswell, about 1820.

texts. Some catches were *designed* for actions as in Stephen Paxton's *If hungry my nose* in which the singers are instructed precisely at which point to take a pinch of snuff and when to sneeze. The group of Derbyshire singers shown on page 29A represents the informal and relaxed nature of much catch singing in the 18th and early 19th centuries.³²

Through the Lists of Subscribers in collections produced in the last decades of the eighteenth century, B.W.Robinson³³ has shown that, while there was a concentration of catch clubs in London, cities and towns throughout the land spawned such organizations, among them York, Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford, Edinburgh and Dublin. Robinson also quotes an advertisement in *The Morning Herald* November 30th 1787 designed to recruit members for a new Catch Club in London:

As there are many Gentlemen in this Metropolis who have a natural propensity for singing Catches and Glees, and who have never had an opportunity of improving themselves in company. This advertisement is intended to bring such together; and that a Club is established under the name of the Modern Catch Club, at the Newcastle Tavern (in an elegant room) Newcastle-street, opposite Somerset-house in the Strand, and to be held every Monday evening at seven o'clock, when a Gentleman, fully qualified in the musical line, will attend to give private instructions till the hour of nine; after which, the members will pass the evening agreeable to the articles of the Society. No gentleman who has a turn for Catch singing need be afraid of offering himself as a member, as the practice before the club opens will soon put that diffidence aside. Any Gentleman, during this week only, by addressing a line to the Secretary of the above Society, and leaving at the bar, mentioning his place of abode will be attended to, and a ticket of admission for the next meeting sent him. There will be no honorary members in this Society, nor any one admitted who is not perfectly respectable.³⁴

One difference here with the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Club is that the professional was only allowed on the premises to teach *before* the club opened. This could have been to offer a different ambience to the club or may have been the result of

uncomfortable experiences with professional musicians without the requisite respectability.

THE THOMAS WARREN COLLECTIONS

Certainly the Noblemen could not complain about the quality of the musicians who attached themselves to their club. Most of London's leading professionals were involved in the first few decades, amongst them Thomas Arne, Jonathan Battishill, Dr. Hayes, Joseph Baidon, Samuel Webbe and Thomas Wall Callcott. Many of these enthusiastically entered the various prize competitions for Catches (as well as Gleees and Canons) which the Club instituted in its second year, 1762. It fell to the lot of a founder member, secretary Thomas Warren, to administer these competitions throughout his years of office - he died soon after resigning in 1794. Gold medals were presented along with a cash "premium" of £5 to the winner and Warren prepared the catches, entered anonymously, for performance and included the successful compositions in his publications which he produced annually for twenty years until 1793.

When viewed overall, it seems rather unfair that Warren's Collections should have attracted such vehement condemnation from Edward Rimbault in the late nineteenth century. The volumes contain texts to gleees and ordinary canons which could only be described as harmless and respectable in the extreme. There are, it is true, catches which continue the Restoration tradition. Joseph Baidon was the first Catch Club prizewinner with a drinking catch entitled *When is it best?* but Warren also included,

in his 1772 volume, Baildon's *Adam caught Eve by the Furbelow* (Ex.12). Purcell would no doubt have chortled as the musical setting produces references to "furbelow" rather than to a decorative ruff (on a fig leaf?) The "cross-purpose", as William Jackson had described it, produced by leaving gaps in the setting so that voices answered each as in conversation, is found in many of the catches in Warren's books. *Prithee Nicky, drink to Dicky*, (Ex.13) by an unacknowledged composer, finds two parts alternating as Dick proves himself "a Blockhead, an Ass," the latter term often proving useful with the catchers as a rhyme for "glass." Another anonymous catch, *Game of Tredille*, (Ex.14), also has elements of this technique and serves to demonstrate that harmless pursuits with a Lady such as a game of cards could provide inspiration (even if the lady was caught cheating). Although politics were proscribed as a topic of conversation, it was, apparently, possible to sing about the Rotten Boroughs. Luffman Atterbury, another Catch Club prizewinner, used the hocket-like technique in *The Canvas* (Ex.15) to point up the humour of the Squire standing, falling, living and dying "dead drunk." Thomas Arne's *The Maid* (Ex.16) is a proper catch only in the first eight bars while the folly with Molly is explained. Thereafter, the piece continues as a part-song although the conversational style of the catch is maintained until the final section when it is decided that Moll should decide the paternity argument and homophony reigns.

Warren's Collections of *Catches, Canons and Glee's for three, four, five and six voices* were "humbly inscribed To the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the Catch Club at the Thatch'd House Tavern, St. James's by their much obliged and devoted servant Thos.

Warren" and were printed by Mary Welcker in Gerrard Street Soho. Most of the originals was destroyed by fire so the copies within the library of the Canterbury Catch Club are particularly valuable. Also in the same library are catches by local composers including, not surprisingly, some on cricket (*The Kentish Catch* being one obvious title) and there are other volumes besides Warren's dedicated to The Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club (by Baildon, for example). A further volume, undated but likely to be from the earlier decades of the nineteenth century is entitled *Amusement for the Ladies* "being a selection of the favourite Catches, Canons, Glees and Madrigals as performed at the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club". The pieces are by "Drs. Arne, Allcock and Cooke, Messrs. Atterbury, Callcott, Danby, Paxton etc." and the very title plus the inclusion of the term madrigal indicates that the boisterousness of the catch idiom was beginning to be left behind. In Clementi's *Collection of Catches, Canons, Glees, Duets etc.* dating from the very early years of the century, the catchers were, however, still rhyming "ass" with "glass", the latter being, as before, "pushed about." Nonetheless, a greater proportion of the contents consisted of part-songs masquerading as glees, or canons such as that part-shown in Ex.17 where there is perhaps more typographical than musical interest.

* * * * *

The dilution of the term "catch" in the early nineteenth century is reflected in the activities of the clubs. The Canterbury Catch Club was, despite its title, more of a glee club-cum-orchestral society, true catches rarely being included on its (printed) programmes, though doubtless they were performed in the early hours of the morning

at the end of the official meetings. By 1850, The Round, Catch and Canon Club, formed ten years or so earlier, was hiring "two boy trebles after dinner at each meeting" demonstrating that, at least for the more formal part of the fortnightly meetings, part-songs and glees were of considerable importance. It was thus from the mid-nineteenth century that the bawdy catch lost the attention of organized male singing groups. The tradition itself metamorphosed into that of unison songs rendered at the "song and supper" rooms which themselves became the early Music Hall. These items were published in early Victorian times in volumes with titles such as *The Randy Songster or Flash, Smutty and Delicious Songs*³⁵ although both the publications and the performances were driven out of the public domain as the second half of the century progressed. Performance therefore developed as an oral tradition and many of the songs are today only heard in relative privacy, despite modern publishing laws which allow this area of social history to be documented in some detail.

The importance of the catch in the development of male choral work is therefore the part it played in the social activities of educated gentlemen from Restoration times onwards. It was through the catch that clubs were formed and, while the drinking, conversation and, later, the eating were equally important, the ostensible purpose, the catalyst, was the catch-singing. As distinct from the bawdy songs of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which more often than not, took the form of a salacious set of words fitted to well-known melodies, the catch had specific musical characteristics and qualities. Good catches were not easy to compose - this is reflected in the fact that the best of the genre were written by the more skillful and talented composers. It is, of

course, the social organization of the clubs which can be seen as influential in the development of the male voice choir rather than the catch *per se* but without the catches there would have been no catch clubs. The present-day average male voice choir member would doubtless find it difficult to describe a catch (even if the musical term was known to him) and only slightly less troublesome to perform. Yet, in this peculiarly English musical form lies the genesis of the activities of thousands of men who make up the membership of late-twentieth century choirs. Bearing in mind the more immediate Nonconformist ancestry of many male choirs, the typical member would, despite today's more relaxed view of scatological material, not be too proud or impressed by the starting point for his hobby. Nonetheless, for many there would be more than a sly grin at the activities of their forebears.

NOTES ON CHAPTER ONE - THE CATCH AND CATCH CLUBS

- 1 There is no evidence as to the precise tune sung at performances in Shakespeare's time. The play was written in 1600 and therefore one of two settings seems likely. One existed in the 1580 collection by Thomas Lant (see Vlasto s. "An Anthology of Rounds" Musical Quarterly Vol.40 1954 p.231) and another setting appeared in *Deuteromelia* in 1609. See also Footnote 13.
- 2 Broadwood L. "Songs Connected with Customs" Journal of the Folk Song Society Vol.5 No.19 (1892) p.216
- 3 Nettel R. Sing a Song of England (1954) p.192
- 4 Naylor E.W. Shakespeare and Music (1965) pp.14-16
- 5 Gurr A. Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (1987) pp.59-72
- 6 *ibid.* Gurr refers to an article entitled "A Description of England by William Harrison" contained in Hollinshead's *Chronicles* of 1577. The four groups concerned are Nobles and Gentlemen, Citizens and Burgesses, Yeomen (rural smallholders) and Artisans and Labourers. The first two were identified through correspondence and Royal Court Circulars whilst the remainder appeared frequently in the legal Courts usually as having caused an "affray". These were not infrequent as the playgoers were easy prey for pickpockets, and prostitutes would move through the crowd seeking customers. Amongst the lower orders, mention is made of tailors, tinkers, cordwainers (shoe makers), sailors, porters, servingmen, drovers, grooms, butchers, felt-makers and carters. Thus we can be sure that Shakespeare's puns and the musical items would not have gone unappreciated. See pp.49-54
- 7 Rimbault E.F. The Rounds, Catches and Canons of England (1862) p.XXXIII)
- 8 William Jackson of Exeter (1730-1803) was an essayist of some significance as well as being a composer (with operas produced at Covent Garden, Drury Lane and in Bath, Edinburgh and Dublin) and organist (at Exeter Cathedral from 1777 until his death). This passage was included in his "30 Letters on Various Subjects" published in 1782.
- 9 See Speaight G. (ed.) Bawdy Songs of the Early Music Hall (1975)
- 10 Quoted in Stephens J. "Rounds and Canons from an Early Tudor Song Book" Music and Letters (January 1951) p.34
- 11 Barclay Squire W. and Fuller Maitland J. The Works of Henry Purcell (1922)

- 12 What actually constituted Middle C in the Restoration period and into the 18th century has exercised the minds of many musicologists, notably Alexander Ellis in his articles on "*The History of Musical Pitch*" published in The Journal of the Society of Arts (March 1880) pp 293-336. Considering the informality of catch singing, the following assertion by Arthur Mendel may be noted: "While it may be possible to determine at what pitch certain works were performed on given occasions in earlier centuries...it will hardly be possible to determine...what key the composer 'really intended' them in." "Pitch in the 16th and early 17th centuries" Musical Quarterly (July 1948) p.30
- 13 The manuscript is unusual in being a roll of parchment. See Vlasto S. op.cit. pp.222-234.
- 14 Pammelia: Musicks Miscellanie, "or Mixed Varietie of Pleasant Roundelayes, and Delightful Catches. Ravenscroft; ... 1609"
- 15 Chappell W. (ed.) Popular Music of the Olden Time Vol. 2 (1855-9); revised by H. Wooldridge as Old English Popular Music (1893). Reprinted by Dover Publications, New York 1965
- 16 Deuteromelia; "or the Second part of....such delightful Catches. Collected, and in part composed, by Thomas Ravenscroft; ... 1609"
- 17 Melismata. "Musicall Phansies, Fitting the Covrt, Citie and Covntry Hvmovrs. Ravenscroft; ... 1611"
- 18 Catch That Catch Can, "or a Choice Collection of Catches, Rounds and Canons for 3 or 4 Voyces. John Hilton; London." First edition 1652 Unabridged re-publication Da Capo Press, New York 1970
- 19 "...being A Choice Collection of the Most Diverting Catches for Three and Four Voices."
- 20 Latham R. & Matthews W. The Diaries of Samuel Pepys Vol.1 (1971) p.205
- 21 ibid. Vol.8 p.168
- 22 See Robinson B.W. & Hall R.F. The Aldrich Book of Catches (1989) p.12
- 23 ibid.
- 24 ibid.
- 25 ibid.

- 26 *ibid.* p.13
- 27 *ibid.* p.14
- 28 *ibid.* pp.12-13
- 29 *ibid.* p.14
- 30 Gladstone W. The Story of the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club (1930)
- 31 Reproduced in Scott H. The English Song Book (1926)
- 32 The central figure is one Samuel Slack who had been placed by the Duke of Devonshire under the tutelage of Reginald Spofforth. Slack was later commissioned to sing before George III and became choirmaster in the Derbyshire village of Tideswell. He died in 1822 (Reproduced in *The Musical Herald* (July 1897) p.209)
- 33 Robinson and Hall *op.cit.* p.16
- 34 Quoted in Robinson and Hall *op.cit.* p.17
- 35 Speaight G. *op.cit.*

CHAPTER TWO THE GLEE AND GLEE CLUBS

It was Georgian refinement and Victorian modesty which directed the attention of male choral groups away from the salaciousness of the catch towards more publicly acceptable topics such as the world of nature, classical subjects, gentle conviviality and, if human relationships were involved, polite courtship. Such were the areas chosen by the composers of glees and thus the glee and its associated "parties" and clubs can be seen as pivotal in the development of male voice choral singing. Before embarking on an examination of the glee form, its composers and the clubs at which glees were performed, an explanation of the term itself is essential as its use has often been inappropriate and misleading.

With its roots in Anglo Saxon and Old English (*gleo, gle, gliw*), the word glee has far wider connotations than our modern usage implying mirth, joy, rejoicing. These words apply to only some of the following in William Barrett's list :

Thus, Callcott's *Father of Heroes* is described as a serious glee; Spofforth's *Fill high the grape's exulting stream* a convivial glee; Dr.Arne's *Come shepherds, we'll follow the hearse* an elegaic glee; Webbe's *The mighty conqueror* a Bacchanalian glee; Stevens' *It was a lover and his lass* a pastoral glee; Rock's *Let the sparkling wine go round* is described on the printed copy as a 'cheerful' glee; Bishop's *Mynheer van Dunk* and Caldicott's *Humpty Dumpty* are called humorous glees;

and Shore's *Willie brewed a peck o'maut* is called a comic glee.¹

Apart from its use in Middle English as a "bright colour"² all other known uses of the word glee seem to revolve, if but loosely, around the idea of diversions and entertainment.³ Sport, jesting and mockery are implied by the word up to Shakespearean times. The Bard uses the derivative, *gleek*, on just three occasions, each time meaning "to mock".⁴ As a musical entertainment or melody, glee can be linked to the Anglo Saxon "gligg" which often simply meant music. Chaucer used the word as implying a musical instrument⁵ as well as entertainment⁶ or, again, just music.⁷ In later periods, glee-maiden was a poetic description of a harp.⁸ The term "gleemen" still exists in the title of some male voice groups⁹ and this word can safely be claimed as originating in Saxon England. It was always used in the plural, a single member being referred to as a minstrel. Of the two types of gleemen, one consisted of instrumentalists and singers, the other of entertainers, *gliggamen*, providing tricks and feats of dexterity, tumbling, jests and juggling.¹⁰ The bands of gleemen appear to have been highly privileged favourites, often entering the houses of the nobility uninvited yet always welcome. By the fourteenth century, the profession seems to have fallen into disrepute with a proliferation in the numbers of gleemen and in their demands. Edward II's edict¹¹ in 1315 placed restraints on their activities and, despite the formation of guilds in the fifteenth century, their credit continued to sink such that in Elizabethan times they were grouped in statutory terms alongside vagrants, rogues, vagabonds, tinkers and pedlars.

As applied to a form of musical composition, the word glee first appeared in 1652

when a song in Playford's *Select Ayres and Dialogues* is described as "a Glee, with chorus for three voyces". The composer was one Charles Colman and the title, *To Bacchus*, is a reminder of how much the catch, with its ubiquitous themes of conviviality and cordiality, was still very much in favour. In 1667, the second book of the *Musical Companion* announced on its title page "Dialogues, Glees, Ballads and Ayres for 2, 3 or 4 voyces". Strangely, over the next century the term gradually disappeared such that Dr. Johnson, in 1755, was defining glee in its modern sense, meaning "joy, mirth and gayety" adding "It is not now used except in ludicrous writing or with some mixture of irony and contempt". Thus William Hayes' collection of *Catches, Glees and Canons* (1757) and Thomas Warren's *Catches, Canons and Glees* (which began appearing annually from 1763) can be thought of as a starting point for the glee proper.

The eighteenth century glee, as a musical form, can be defined as a vocal composition for three or more voices (one to a part), unaccompanied, originally for male voices with alto lead, having sections contrasted in mood and tempi as dictated by the text. Thus the construction is not unlike some of the madrigals by the Elizabethan composers in whom there was a revival of interest during the eighteenth century. The Madrigal Society, formed in London in 1741, focused patriotic attention on the music of Morley, Weelkes and Wilbye and others of the school through reprinting and encouraging the composition of "modern" madrigals by means of competition and performance. Many of the glee writers were members of the Madrigal Society thus it can fairly be assumed that the madrigal had some direct influence on

the shape and form of the glee. The textural relationship has been well described by William Gatens in suggesting that "whereas the Georgian madrigal consisted of harmonically saturated counterpoint, the glee was composed of contrapuntally enlivened harmony."¹²

It is likely that the term glee emerged in the 18th century as a way of differentiating the style (and intentions of the composer) from the more robust round or catch. It also made possible the composition of part-songs to include sopranos which the subject matter of the catch precluded. Although the male domination of the genre remained throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some glees, from relatively early on in the period, were written for combinations including Sopranos. In the glee, the treatment of women became more Romantic and stylised. In 1795, the publishers of *Appollonian Harmony* thought fit to include on the book's title page "The words consistent with female delicacy". Further differentiation was necessary from the madrigal and from the anthem, in which there was little independence of parts and whose words were sacred rather than, as in the glee, secular.

References to glees in nineteenth century novels are legion. Jane Austen in 1811 probably means the glee as defined above when she writes "There is to be some very good music from professionals,¹³ three of them glee singers".¹⁴ By the 1840s, the term was being used more loosely. When Emily Brontë describes a Christmas evening with the Gimmerton Band and singers she relates: "After the usual carols had been sung, we set them to songs and glees".¹⁵ This suggests that the "songs" would have been solo items as distinct from concerted performances, for which she reserved the word

"glees". However, these offerings were more likely to be part-songs, whose character had been influenced by the German style, rather than true glees especially as there were "a trumpet, a trombone, clarinets, bassoons, French horns and a bass viol" present. Dickens refers to "itinerant glee singers"¹⁶ which in 1838 could have implied any type of part-singing: Walter Scott romanticizes by describing "a strolling *gleewoman* with her viol preparing to play beneath the windows."¹⁷

THE MUSIC, STYLE AND COMPOSERS

It is hardly surprising that there has been a good deal of terminological confusion regarding the glee, as even with the same composer and publisher, the inconsistency in nomenclature is marked. William Beale, for example, had several works included in the Orpheus Series which Novello published towards the end of the nineteenth century, one of which, *In the Pleasant Summer's Day* (Ex.18), is described as a glee and conforms well to the type. After the first eight bars, the texture is slightly broken up and the quaver movement achieves the necessary momentum and variety. At "Flow'rs around Strew the ground" there is a change to triple time and a new rhythmic motive arrives at "On the wing, sweet birds sing". Harmonically, the writing is typically straightforward, the augmented sixth in bar 50 being the most adventurous moment. "But when hoary winter comes" brings a change of mode. The opening of the fourth section contains some simple counterpoint although the homophonic texture is soon restored and the *Piu Animato* "merry merry hearts" propels the glee to a climax and to the (Andante) final section. There are virtually no dynamics as these matters were often left to the performers; the simplicity and innocence of the piece beget

charm. By comparison, *To a Kiss* (Ex.19), has none of this variety, being a straightforward partsong with little or no textural or rhythmic interest. Yet it is published as a glee. *Harmony* (Ex.20), on the other hand, is advertised as a partsong yet has all the features found in the first composition, that is, textural variety, four sections dictated by the words and including some chromatic harmony in the *Allegro Moderato*, a triple time section ("Here thy choicest gifts impart") and a bright final passage, duly celebratory and positive. In other words, this "partsong" is a glee. *Go Rose* (Ex.21) is called a glee on the title page and basically conforms, although the writers in the eighteenth century would not have included a note-for-note reprise (or indeed any sort of reprise). Thus, in the group of four pieces, one is a true glee, one is a partsong but called a glee, one glee is a partsong and another is a glee with a feature (the reprise) more reminiscent of a partsong.

Even if we move back to an earlier composer, the one generally considered as the greatest exponent of this truly English form, we find anomalies. Samuel Webbe's glee *Glorious Appollo* achieved great popularity in the nineteenth century probably because of its simplicity in performance (ninety-six homorhythmic bars of D major harmony and one chord of E major) and because of the jolly nature of the text ("Sing we in harmony", "glee and good humour our hours employ" etc.) Yet it is, as Barrett observes¹⁸ "scarcely worthy to be called a glee" being "only a harmonized air of the most primitive character". This Victorian politeness cannot hide the contempt Barrett feels for what is a weak composition of surprising banality. Not that all of the most popular glees in the glee club programmes were so poor. Thomas Cooke's *Strike the*

Lyre became the "signature tune" of the Bristol Orpheus Glee Society, opening (after the National Anthem) every one of their concerts from 1878 onwards. This feature was later copied by the neighbouring Bath Orpheus Glee Society and programmes up and down the country as well as musical competition syllabi show the extent of the song's popularity (Ex.22). With the text so full of references to the musicians' art ("Of harp and trumpet's harmony" "Anthems of the opening sky"), the first section is swept joyously along to an imperfect cadence leading into the Andante. The occasional chromatic note is the only harmonic embellishment, as in the final section at "anxious lovers burn". It is not difficult to imagine the gentlemen of Bristol lustily projecting this seventy-year-old paean of musical praise at their Colston Hall concerts at the turn of the century.

Not all of Thomas Cooke's glees were so clear cut and concise. *Shades of the Heroes* runs to two hundred and eighty nine bars on twenty seven pages of score encompassing over half a dozen sections. There are elaborate tempo indications within the first section (Ex.23) and elements of cyclicism appear in the recitative-like solo phrases. Elements, too, of reprise occur (cf.Exs.24 and 25), as well as some daring chromaticism for "a distant wind roars". The almost obligatory triple time section provides a lyrical interlude after the "joy of the shell". For such a long glee, Cooke wisely introduces sufficient tonal contrasts (the modulations are welcome if mainly unadventurous), sensibly rests some parts at times therefore providing a three- or four-part texture and includes plenty of dynamic suggestions. His five-part writing is mostly genuine (Ex.26) while at other times the basses double in octaves in

instrumental fashion with the second tenor the equivalent of an awkward viola (Ex.27). Despite the length, it would seem that Cooke intended this to be a true quintet glee although he allowed for an effective entry of a "Chorus" in bar 209 on the C minor phrase "Raise, ye hundred bards". Thereafter, the chorus alternates with the solo quintet.

Reginald Spofforth was another composer who, judging by the references in nineteenth century concert programmes, managed to produce a highly successful glee. Along with Webbe's *Glorious Apollo* and Cooke's *Strike the Lyre*, his *Hail Smiling Morn* (Ex.28) ranked high in the popularity stakes and yet, like the first-mentioned, it is a considerable musical disappointment. The lack of any harmonic imagination, presumably deemed unnecessary for these distinctly trite words, the single-section structure and the obvious, at times slightly awkward, rhythms and setting, combine to produce a work which does no service to the term 'glee'. The bar's rest after "darkness" at the climax and the recommencement *piano* for the final crescendo are perhaps the only telling moments. The accompaniment would have been added for this later nineteenth century edition. It may well be that the very obviousness and technical simplicity is what appealed to the glee clubs members and their audiences. Fortunately, many of Spofforth's glees contained much more interesting work. In 1793 he obtained two prizes for glees at the Catch Club and a set of *Six Glees* published in 1799 established his reputation.

Certainly, in the case of Webbe, it would be unfair to include only his *Glorious Appollo* in the present discussion. The opening section of *Discord, Dire Sister of the*

Slaughtering Power written in 1772 (Ex.29) has strength in its shape and harmonic movement, with a splendid sense of climax on the alto's top B flat. "While scarce the skies" begins in a forthright manner and interest is maintained with the imitative phrases; the swing into C minor coinciding with the repeat of the opening lines, produces an effective moment at "Small at her birth" - the *piano* C major chord is telling; saving up the descending chromatic bass for the latter stages provides the bass with a wonderful sweep down an octave and a half. In bar 24, the second tenor provides a "bass" line which does not appear in the rehearsal piano part presumably because academic sensibilities were offended by the "incorrect" second inversion this produced. The final F major section strikes an effective balance between simplicity of approach and musical/textural interest.

Samuel Webbe's work as a glee composer heralded what Barrett refers to as the Golden Age of glee writing. As an apprentice cabinet-maker, the young Webbe discovered his musical leanings through playing on a harpsichord he had been set to repair. After earning a livelihood copying music, he found success with his settings of the Mass as well as with the glees. Of the latter, he wrote over three hundred, two hundred of which were published. Often using his own texts, Webbe produced settings which showed continuity of musical thought and purpose. Such titles as *When the Winds Breathe Soft*, *A Generous Friendship* (1768), *Great Bacchus* (1778) and *Swiftly from the Mountains brow* established him as the most influential glee-writer of the age. He also excelled in other forms however, winning nine prizes for canons and seven for catches.

Apart from Webbe, the other major eighteenth century glee writers were the Paxton brothers, Stephen and William, and John Danby. The latter's prize-winning glee of 1783, *Awake, Acolian Lyre* was sung at a service of re-dedication in July 1897 when, through the efforts of J. Spencer Curwen¹⁹ and David Bapcic,²⁰ refurbished tombstones were unveiled in Old St. Pancras Churchyard, the burial place of Webbe, Stephen Paxton and Danby. The conductor of the Bristol Madrigal Society, George Risely, officiated and in his speech he noted that "for many years the names of Webbe, Paxton and Danby figured in the list of prize-takers in...competitions, Webbe having gained twenty-seven Prize medals in all". Stephen Paxton's glee *How Sweet, How Fresh* was a prize-winner in 1779. His brother's best known piece *Breathe Ye, Soft Winds*, although published as a glee is, in fact, a partsong (Ex.30).

John Wall Callcott and Richard Stevens both made important contributions to the glee repertoire in the second half of the eighteenth century. The former found his way into the profession through glee competitions and, after obtaining a degree in music at Oxford, he helped form the Glee Club in London in 1787. *O Thou, Where'ere thy Bones* and *Go, Idle Boy* both won prizes for Callcott whose best work seems to have been the three-part glees he composed after lessons with Haydn. Stevens, too, gained prizes at the Catch Club with, amongst others, *See What Horrid Tempests Rise* (1782) and *It was a Lover and His Lass* (1786). The six part glee (AATTBB) *The Cloud Cap't Towers* is an almost Handelian setting of Prospero's speech in *The Tempest*; one of his Ossian settings, *Strike the Harp in Praise of Bragela* has an obligato accompaniment suggesting that, even before the turn of the century, the seeds were

sown for the diffusion of the glee style. William Horsley was the son-in-law of Callcott, publishing five collections of glees thought by Barrett to be "models of graceful form and vocal excellence".

Of the nineteenth century glee writers alongside Thomas Cooke, Sir John Goss made his mark with works such as *Ossian's Hymn to the Sun* and *There is Beauty on the Mountain*, two of a set published in 1825. *The Harmonicon*,²¹ reviewing the latter work, declared: "Mr. John Goss has produced a lovely piece of vocal harmony, under the name of a glee, to which we beg to draw the attention of the many societies spread over this island; for they will now very rarely meet with a composition of the kind that has half its beauty".²² A close contemporary of Goss was Samuel Sebastian Wesley, whose glee *I Wish to tune my Quiv'ring Lyre* (Ex.31) was awarded a prize by the Gentlemen's Glee Club in Manchester in 1833. Though having only two different tempo markings, there are definite sections within the opening passage, notably the vigorous counterpoint for "When Athens' sons advanced to war". Some effective scoring too is found at "Or Tyrian Cadmus roved" with second tenor and bass doubled at the octave. The clashes in bars 34-37 help to propel the piece along in a positive way. The passage "Fired with hope" establishes the tonality of E, therefore the reprise of the opening music for "The dying chords are strung anew" has musical point as well as pun. The longer note values for "All, all in vain" prepare the way for the triple time section. This is perhaps protracted but the reprise of the second strain "In songs of bliss" in the tonic (the first appearance having been in the dominant) and the addition of a Coda helps to balance the section happily against the dynamic resolve of the more



contrapuntal first passage. The tonic "recapitulation" is also ammunition here for the argument that the glee often reflected instrumental forms and structures. With this in mind, the form of the glee proper could be thought to have its roots in the Fantasies or Fancies of Purcell where each section was based on a figure or motive which, when exhausted, gave way to a new idea and its subsequent development. Yet, as with other comparisons which have been made with Sonata Form and Rondo, this connection seems spurious when the construction of the glee was so obviously determined by the text.

Wesley, as with other composers in the mid-nineteenth century, is remembered more for other areas of work, such as the music of the Church of England, than for his glees. In the case of Sir Henry Bishop, although he wrote glees, his stage works and partsongs were a far more important part of his output. John Liptrott Hatton produced a few glees but concentrated also on partsongs and Covent Garden. Thus, such composers moved away from the glee, influenced for different reasons by men as diverse as Mainzer²³ and Mendelssohn.

The glorious century of glee-writing will remain between 1760 and 1860 during which time innumerable glees, not only for ATTB but also for SATB and other combinations, were produced. Neither David Baptie's "upwards of 23,000 partsongs published in Britain between 1750 and the 1880s"²⁴ nor Barrett's "nearly 25000" can be thought of as very reliable because many efforts did not reach the stage of publication. These were written by countless amateur composers throughout the land. For every cathedral organist composing glees there were several hundred church musicians and

others turning out pieces for domestic and local use, the link between church music and the glee being the use of the male alto. Estimating the number of compositions available during the "glee century" is made more difficult by the publishers who were often less than precise in the clefs they used in the printed copy. For example, a bass (singer's) part might be printed in the treble clef as for a tenor, the hope being, presumably, that one copy would provide for various vocal combinations and that the flexibility would increase sales. Regarding the top line, the implication often was, as David Johnson²⁵ suggests, that the upper part in the treble clef could be managed as desired by either tenor or alto (in the appropriate octave) "changing gear" as unobtrusively as possible as the line dictated.

Later publishers also tended to have genuine ATTB glees transposed to suit SATB or, as in the case of Baidon's *Once In England's Age Of Old*, published as if written for sopranos which the composer in the mid-eighteenth century would most likely not have intended. The present edition (Ex.32) dates from 1916 and is a fine example of a standard glee which would work well as TTB or TBB. Despite the commercial ways of the publishers, a great service to the nations' singers was performed throughout the "century" in that collections were issued in a steady stream. Mention has already been made of Warren's Collections which appeared annually between 1763 and 1791. Webbe published his own glees in nine volumes and Horsley edited seven volumes of Prize Glees from the Catch Club competitions from 1763 to 1794 under the title *Vocal Harmony*. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, three volumes called *Amusement for the Ladies: Being a favourite collection of Catches*,

Glees and madrigals contained works by sixteen composers including many under discussion. Page's *Festive Harmony* was published in 1804 containing "the most favourite madrigals, elegies and glees selected from the works of the most eminent composers". Callcott's glees were collected by Horsley into a two-volume publication in 1823: Goss' *Six Glees and a Madrigal* appeared in 1826. Hawes' collection of Spofforth's glees followed in 1830. One Burford Gibsone published a *Table Book of Glees for Male Voices* in 1840 while Beale's collection of thirteen glees was published posthumously by subscription in 1879. By this time, the renowned *Orpheus Series* was in circulation from Novello. This collection of "Glees and Partsongs for Male Voices" had grown to two hundred and fifty four titles by 1893 and was to continue to grow, in influence as well as size, well into the twentieth century. Alongside the *Orpheus*, Novello published *The Glee-Hive* which was not however exclusively for male voices and which was not restricted to glees (being "a collection of Glees and madrigals with ad lib Pianoforte accompaniment"). The 1893 catalogue shows that just over half were glees, the remainder being described as madrigals and balletts. The importance of the *Glee-Hive* really rests in being the collection through which many successful glees were made available to clubs and quartets. *Discord, Dire Sister, Swiftly from the Mountain's Brow* by Samuel Webbe, Spofforth's *Hail Smiling Morn*, Stevens' *Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind* and *Strike The Lyre* by Thomas Cooke were all published at this time in the *Glee-Hive*.

As numerous as the clubs and as multitudinous as the melodies making up the musical glee were, of course, the texts and their sources. Webbe, whose literary

aspirations were not limited to the English language, wrote a great deal of his own lines for his glees but sometimes employed poets of repute. Congreve, for example, supplied the words for *Thy Voice, O Harmony*. Richard Stevens set many of Shakespeare's songs as glees including *Ye Spotted Snakes, Sigh no more, Ladies and Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind*. He also set Ben Jonson in *From Oberon in Fairyland*. Stevens, Cooke and Goss all made settings of the Gaelic Ossian²⁶ poetry. Callcott also used Ossian as well as the apocryphal Ballads published in a collection in 1784. The work of Thomas Chatterton²⁷ and Matthew Lewis²⁸ also attracted him. Henry Carey's²⁹ lines were drawn upon, by Stevens amongst others, as in *To Be Gazing on Those Charms*: William Shenstone³⁰ provided the text for the Earl of Mornington's *Here In Cool Grott* for SATB as did Thomas Gray³¹ for Danby's *Awake, Aeolian Lyre*, Thomas Percy³² for John Stafford Smith's *Return Blest Days* and Byron for Wesley's *I Wish To Tune My Quiv'ring Lyre*. There is, in addition, a multitude of unknown or unacknowledged authors. The diversity of sources is an indication of how attractively adaptable the structure of the glee could be. The changes of mood between the verses of a poem could be reflected in the different musical material which occurred from section to section and, as the Barrett quotation at the start of this chapter makes clear, the subject matter could cover the whole gamut of human emotions. The search for fresh words to set would also be an explanation for the wide-ranging styles represented as composers, amateur and professional, trained and untrained, sought uncharted territories for their literary inspiration.

ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES

Taking a lead from the well-established Madrigal Society (1741) and The Noblemen's and Gentlemen's Catch Club (1761), glee clubs began to spring up everywhere, attracting interest in the form through performances and competitions. The Anacreontic Society, founded in 1766 "for supper and the singing of catches, glees and songs" opened each meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern in the Strand with the glee *To Anacreon in Heaven* by John Stafford Smith. Mention has been made of John Callcott forming The Glee Club in London in 1787, he having two years earlier sent in nearly one hundred entries for the Catch Club competition. Before this date, the Canterbury Catch and Glee Club had opened its doors (1770) and the Liverpool Appollo followed in 1796. (By 1871, this society was "in possession of a library of between three and four thousand glees"³³). William Horsley founded Conectores Sodales in 1798 specifically for the singing of glees, the name having been suggested by his father-in-law Samuel Webbe. The Worcester Glee Club began in 1810, the Gentlemen's Glee Club of Manchester in 1830: in London, the Round, Catch and Canon Club (glee-singing included) started in 1843; the Bristol Orpheus Glee Society and the Abbey Glee Club (again in London) began operations in 1844 and 1845 respectively: the City Glee Club began their meetings at the London Tavern in 1853. This proliferation helped to establish the glee as a uniquely English form and it may well have been that jingoism played its part in the setting up of clubs throughout the kingdom. In those parts of the world known in the nineteenth century as Greater Britain, glee societies also flourished, witness the setting up of the Poona Glee and

Madrigal Union in 1869 and similar organizations in Australia and New Zealand.

Solo quartets, or Glee Parties/Unions as they were known, flourished too in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1867, The Sappho, Alexander and Quaver Glee Unions were advertising their services and for these three, there must have been as many thousands entertaining at celebrations and concerts throughout the land. From 1890, Messrs. Sexton, Hast, Formington and Norcross -the Meister Glee Singers - were taking full page advertisements *The Musical Times* with press reviews from their nationwide tours. Apart from singing by Royal Command to Queen Victoria, the group toured America and Canada, clearly the leading party of its kind by the end of the century. Not surprisingly, this quartet, in common with others, had an agent to make arrangements and bookings for them. Thus, the Meister Singers were represented by Willam Sexton of Picadilly whilst another successful group, the Celia Male Quartet, engaged Messrs Barth and Black according to advertisements in the musical press. Arnold Bennett, in *Clayhanger*, paints an evocative portrait of a Potteries Quartet which made an impression on the novel's young protagonist, Edwin:

Messrs. Arthur Smallrice, Abraham Harracles, Jas Rawnpike and James Yarlett rose, stepped heavily on to the little platform, and stood in a line with their hands in their pockets... They had no music. They knew the music; they had sung it a thousand times. They knew precisely the effects they wished to produce, and the means of production. They worked together like an inspired machine. Mr. Arthur Smallrice gave a rapid glance into the corner, and from that corner a concertina spoke - one short note. Then began, with no hesitating, shuffling preliminaries, nor mute consultations, the singing of that classic quartet, justly celebrated from Hull to Wigan and from Northallerton to Lichfield, *Loud Ocean's Roar*. The thing was performed with absolute assurance and perfection. Mr. Arthur Smallrice did the lapping of the small waves on the foam-veiled rocks, and Big James in fullest grandeur did the long and mighty rolling of the deep. It was majestic, terrific, and overwhelming. Many bars before the close Edwin was thrilled, as by an exquisite and vast revelation. He tingled from head to foot. He had never heard any singing like it, or any singing in any way comparable to it. He had never guessed that song

held such possibilities of emotion. The pure and fine essential qualities of the voices, the dizzying harmonics, the fugal calls and responses, the strange relief of the unisons, and above all the free, natural mien of the singers proudly aware that they were producing something beautiful that could not be produced more beautifully, conscious of unchallenged supremacy - all this enfevered him to an unprecedented and self-astonished enthusiasm.³⁴

Double quartets, both professional and amateur, were also popular and it is not difficult to imagine how many large clubs grew from these informal beginnings.

Investigation into the libraries of the clubs shows not only the enormous number of glees which found their way into the singers' hands but also that a glee club usually followed far more varied activities than the name implies. The beautifully hand-written catalogues of the Canterbury Catch and Glee Club, which flourished between 1770³⁵ and 1865, show that the club owned around eleven hundred different glees as well as five hundred catches, seventy six songs and one hundred and eighty five duets. The inventory of 1801 lists twenty two glee collections including some of the Thomas Warren volumes. What began as a purely vocal group soon expanded into instrumental work. In all, the orchestral library consisted of some three hundred and forty overtures catalogued into nine sets. The importance of the club in the musical and social life of the Kent town can be gauged from the brief article written by a former member³⁶ in 1875 soon after the demise of the club:

Commencing in a very humble public tavern by some half a dozen musical citizens meeting to sing glees and catches, it rose to be the chief estate of Canterbury. Within the memory of many now living the orchestra comprised some fifty performers and the Club consisted of about five hundred members, numbering among them the resident Gentry, Clergy and leading Tradesmen. Thenew members were proposed by a member and balloted for. No citizen could be admitted unless a member. No apprentice or minor could ever be admitted. Visitors were admitted by payment on the last night of the season only. Admission, half a guinea, one year's subscription, one guinea.

The Club was renowned throughout England for its famous music and for its

gentlemanly atmosphere; and visitors were numerous, consisting of Officers of the Army, Country gentry, and Commercial travellers. When the Mayor paid an official visit, his name was inserted in the *Charter Glee*. The M.P's of the City, and Candidates for that office, always attended, and great was the speech-making. The famous motto of the Club was 'Harmony and Unanimity' and politics were rigidly excluded.

This important Club lasting nearly ninety years - 1779 to 1865 - had a beneficial effect on the City as, in the first place it was a school for vocal and instrumental practice, and during this period an army of 'young-in's' were brought up and wended their way to the metropolis. Sir George Elvey, son of Dr. Stephen Elvey, Hobbs, Hawes, Goulden, Shoubridge, Dyson, Tom Young *et hoc genus*, vocalists and instrumentalists were constantly in practice. A full rehearsal always took place on Saturday evening for the Wednesday concerts, of which thirty were given from the first Wednesday in October to the last in March.

The first, and almost perpetual Chairman, was Charles Delmar Esq. The most rigid order was kept, rarely did any disorderly visitor interrupt, the cry of 'Turn him out' was swiftly raised. When the programme was concluded the early birds retired, and for some forty years the after evening was celebrated by amateur free and easy singing, the mirth growing fast and furious till the small hours. No Bruce³⁷ being then in existence, our grandfathers made a night, and often too, a morning of it. Gin punch in half pint mugs was the beverage, and the mutton-pie man, Hagell, supplied the solids.

The room in Orange St., now called the Appollonian Hall, was built for the Club about 1800, and there the meetings were held for some forty years. The Club then removed to the Guildhall Concert Room where it remained until the new Music Hall in St. Margaret's St. was built for it about 1850, where after a lingering decline it expired in 1865. The Hall was uncomfortably large, the old members died off, and innovations were made on the ancient rules, citizen visitors were admitted at one shilling, music hall comic singers and stars from London came down and swept away the larger part of the funds, party spirits began to divide the City and the end came. Ichabod! When will the citizens be wise enough to revive this happy institution?

There follows a list of the members of the orchestra, in total a well balanced chamber orchestra of twenty-six players but without violas. Vocalists numbered nine plus "five Chorister boys who sang frequently". A typical programme in 1825 (also hand-written and with most of the composers unacknowledged) shows a mixture of glees, duets and solo songs with overtures at the beginning, as a centre-piece and at the end of the concert. The ubiquitous *Glorious Appollo* often featured. By

the 1850s, the programmes show some movement away from the vocal element with instrumental solos, duets and ensembles relegating the gleees to two or three only per night. A colour print of the club circa 1856 shows quite clearly the motto "Harmony and Unanimity" on the proscenium arch above the orchestra. At the side are top hats on hooks and a small gallery for the "chorister boys". The members are seated at long tables which take the weight of the gin punch and mutton pie while clay pipes are much in evidence. The scene is one of great conviviality and one can easily imagine the "free and easy singing" taking over when the official concert had been completed. The "key" to the picture lists the professions and trades of those present, representing a cross-section of Canterbury worthies from silversmith, lawyer and banker to tanner, plumber, tailor and bookmaker, not forgetting the Cathedral organist and the Music Master of the Kings' School. From the illustration and the commentary, it would appear that the tanner and the plumber must have been master craftsmen owning their own businesses as the ethos suggested is one of a Gentleman's Club run by and for the comfortable middle class of Canterbury. This is further underlined by the one and a half guineas payable on entry to club membership. Since no mention is made of any professional tuition being on hand, a certain amount of musical literacy is also presupposed, in turn implying a degree of education and *ergo* financial security.

The *raison d'être* of the club seems to be summed up in the *Charter Glee*, a composition by Thomas Goodban who for thirty years was the Leader of the orchestra:

To Appollo and Bacchus our offerings let's bring,

And join hearts and voices their praises to sing,
Relaxing from labour, and all cares beguiling,
How happy we're met at our Club so inviting.
Here's a pipe and good liquor our spirits to cheer,
And Music's sweet sounds so delightful to hear,
Here's social good fellowship all hearts inspiring,
And mirth and good humour on each face sits smiling.
Then with pleasure abounding, its fame far resounding
Let's be merry and happy at our meetings so rare,
From contention restraining and order maintaining
Here's success to our Club, and a health to the Chair.

Having led the orchestra for so long a time, one hopes and presumes that Mr. Goodban's bow was mightier than his pen. Nevertheless, his lines have some significance in terms of male choir principles - the "contention restraining and order maintaining" concept is one found in the *dicta* of the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club from a century before and in the rules of the male voice choirs a hundred years on.

With organizations which began as glee clubs rather than catch clubs, the emphasis remained more firmly on vocal work although the social nature of rehearsals was still of significance. In 1871, a few years after the Canterbury Glee and Catch Club closed, John Spencer Curwen, on behalf of the *Tonic Sol-Fah Reporter*, visited the Bristol Orpheus Glee Society, which had been founded in 1844:

The 'Orpheus', as the Bristol people familiarly call it, consists entirely of men. There are forty members. These are mostly of middle age, and include merchants and professional men. As a consequence the society stands high in Bristol. It gives but one concert a year, when it has no difficulty in getting 1,200 of the *elite* of the city to attend; and no sooner is one concert over than all the tickets for the next are taken up. The members pay a subscription of £2.2s a year, and this seems to produce more money than the society knows what to do with. An ingenious plan has been hit upon for disposing of the surplus. Every member who is present when the roll is called receives eighteen pence from the Secretary during the evening. Meetings are held every fortnight all the year round with short intervals at holiday times. One evening in the year, and

one only, is a 'treble night', when a number of ladies are invited to assist in the rendering of partsongs by Mendelssohn and others, written for a mixed choir. The rules for admission into the fraternity are strict. A would-be member is introduced to the committee by a member, and if they approve he is proposed and seconded at the next meeting of the society. A fortnight later he is balloted for, and six black balls exclude though this veto is rarely exercised. There is no musical examination. The society meets in an hotel which is to Bristol men as the London Tavern is to Londoners.

Entering, I found a large and lofty room well lighted and comfortably warmed. It was oblong, and tables were ranged round three sides of a square with a small table for the conductor in place of the fourth side. In front of each chair a reading desk was placed on the table, and a group of music books was placed at its side. I looked up and saw at one end of the room a long table with appliances for a tea, while at the other there were evident signs of impending bread and cheese and beer. A rap from the conductor's baton brought the members, who had been chatting in groups, to their seats. There were some thirty-six present. The practice began; but it is not the custom of the Bristol Orpheus Society to stand up. They sit through their practice; they sit even through their concerts. It was now eight o'clock, the usual hour of commencing, and the music went on till nine, when half-an-hour's adjournment for supper took place. The members now repaired either to the 'beer' or the 'coffee' end of the room, and enjoyed themselves as companions usually do under the circumstances. The expense of the refreshments is borne by the general fund of the Society and can of course be well afforded with a £2.2s subscription. During the recess, the balloting for new members took place, and at nine-thirty the music was resumed, the meeting ending at ten.

The sociability of the Society's meetings is their most marked feature and whether choirs generally can take a hint from it may fairly be asked. I am inclined to think that this feature has done much to keep up the Bristol Society. It is a sort of club, where you can always reckon on seeing your friends and having a chat with them, and from a musical point of view each member feels that he is something more than a pipe in a living barrel organ which the conductor turns. Music is linked with the pleasures of society and friendship, and all of them gain by the union. The concerts are merely public rehearsals. The hours of singing and of adjournment for tea are the same as at the practices. Tea is provided as well as the music for a nominal price (3s.6d) and there is no reserving or numbering of seats. Nor are the musical arrangements in any way different. The visitors hear only men's voice glees and choruses, with occasional solos in them, but there are no songs interspersed, and a pianoforte never comes near the society.

Another feature of the society which a visitor at once notices is that the members meet for their own pleasure, not that they may grind up for a concert. The rehearsals are an end in themselves, instead of so much drudgery to be gone through in order to appear in public. The pleasure is in the fortnightly meeting, not in anticipating the next concert. All this gives a tone of ease and satisfaction to

the rehearsals which is very attractive to everyone concerned. Cannot other choirs take a lesson in this respect?³⁸

Curwen's comments on the amount payable for membership subscription draws attention to the social standing of the clubs and their members. The established wealth and prosperity in ports such as Bristol and Liverpool and industrial centres like Manchester in the nineteenth century meant that subscriptions of one guinea (in Manchester in 1830) or two guineas in Bristol forty years later were perfectly possible for the middle-class merchants and professional men. At the same time, these fees would have closed the doors of the clubs to, for example, a Great Western Railway engine fireman who, in Bristol in the early 1870's, received a weekly wage of 20 shillings³⁹. Curwen's description of the concert-goers as the *elite* of the city combined with the details of membership, blackballing *et al*, paints a picture of a club of some exclusivity. The 3s.6d concert ticket, too, would exclude a railway signalman on 16-20 shillings per week.³⁹ The comments on the convivial aspects of the proceedings underline the common factor between all male voice singing clubs from whichever century and under whatever name, be it catch, canon, glee, madrigal or, as in the twentieth century, the male voice choir.

Apart from the lack of instrumental music, one noticeable difference between the Bristolians and the Men of Kent is that in the former case the beer and coffee was taken in "adjournment" whereas in Kent, once the main programme was over, the singing and imbibing continued together. There was also no mention by Curwen of smoking, which at clubs was by no means un-common. Smoking Concerts, advertised as such, were, in fact, a feature of the social life of many music

organizations (especially in the larger cities), becoming especially fashionable in the 1880s. The leader writer in *The Musical Times* of February 1882 comments:

The recent establishment of Smoking Concerts in the metropolis is scarcely so much a proof of the advance of smoking as of the advance of music. The fact is that many persons accustomed to enjoy a cigar or pipe in the evening, and also exceedingly fond of listening to the performance of good works, have begun to see that the gratification of the one desire need not interfere with the occasional gratification of the other, and the result is the growth of the entertainments at one of which a few evenings ago we 'assisted'. Of course with a full orchestra, and a programme containing some of the best of our standard compositions, not only the total absence of ladies, but the arrangement of tables intermingled with seats, appeared strange to one accustomed to attend evening concerts at St. James's Hall; but then the stiffness inseparable from fashionable assemblies was replaced by an air of luxurious enjoyment which appeared thoroughly in consonance with the feelings of the audience: and when the performance commenced the few who desired to converse were effectually hushed by the frowning looks of the musical majority. We can confidently affirm that the characteristic feature of the concert was faithfully preserved, for not only the audience smoked, but the Conductor, the stringed instrument players, and the performers upon wind instruments too when they could get a chance. It was remarked by many that Beethoven sounded much better when, instead of sitting between two elegantly dressed ladies in a sofa stall, you could recline at your ease, and combine the aroma of the music with the fragrance of the weed.⁴⁰

The above concert was obviously purely instrumental but the many advertisements at the time demonstrate that Glee Clubs also encouraged the fashion. Ye London Gleemen, at their first Smoking Concert in 1883, managed to sing a full programme of madrigals, glees and choruses ranging from Weelkes to Wagner although whether the performers, as the players above, joined in with the smoking is not made clear. The rules of many societies listed Smoking Concerts as being obligatory activities, hence the Civil Service Vocal Union's rule "That the society give three concerts during the season - Two Smoking Concerts and a Ladies' Night". Despite this, some conductors and choir trainers were obviously opposed to the

whole idea and scathing in their criticism. L.C.Venables, conductor of the South London Choral Institution and Principal of the South London Institute of Music, when discussing Glee Clubs, felt that "if in districts thickly populated by the artisan class a taste for this class of music could be cultivated to supplant...the Smoking concert, a great advance in musical culture would be effective (sic)."⁴¹

It would be impossible to estimate how much influence the activities of glee clubs had on young performers who were to take up the profession and excel in other musical fields. Elgar, as a boy, attended meetings of the Worcester Glee Club which had been formed in 1810. In *The Musical Times* appeared the following:

Cathedral lay clerks and citizen amateurs week by week joined their forces in a feast of vocal harmony and right good fellowship. An additional accompaniment to these unaccompanied glees...was furnished by churchwarden pipes solemnly smoked by the senior Apollos. The proceedings always commenced with *Glorious Appollo* and seven other glees and two songs completed the programme."⁴²

An unacknowledged author, described as "a well known musician of that city" provides another contemporary picture, from around 1870:

The Worcester Glee Club was founded in 1810 and held its meetings at the Crown Hotel weekly, from October to April, on Tuesday nights. These meetings were famous in their day, and brought together a large number of the citizens. The lay-clerks of the Cathedral were the mainstay of the vocal music, and they were reinforced for the 'instrumental nights' once a month by the leading professional and amateur performers in the city. The Elgar family became associated with the club about 1843, in the person of Mr.W.H. Elgar, father of Edward. He played second violin...Corelli was largely drawn upon, Handel's Overture to *Saul* was a favourite, and Haydn's symphonies were often heard. The rich store of our great glee writers furnished the vocal music, and they were very well done in those days. Not many songs were sung, and they were of a healthy, vigorous type...People came from far and near; one old clergyman from Bromyard was a regular attendant, walking in on Tuesday, staying at the hotel all night, and walking back on Wednesday. Commercial men so timed their journeys as to be at Worcester on a Tuesday, and one of the fraternity showed his appreciation of the pleasure he received by presenting to the club a grand pianoforte....

Mr. Edward Elgar was drafted in to play first violin when a small boy, Mr. Spray being leader, and Mr. A. R. Quarterman pianist. Mr. Henry Elgar⁴³ (who had joined in 1850) rendered very able assistance at the harmonium on 'instrumental' and ordinary nights. Great changes had taken place in the instrumental music - Rossini, Auber, Mozart, Wallace, Balfe, Bishop, Bellini, and others being represented by overtures. The glees etc. of S.S. Wesley, Walmisley, Beale, G.W. Martin, Goss and Cummings were added to those of the old composers, and the modern English and German partsongs found a place in the programmes, which also contained a goodly number of high-class songs. For about two years Edward was accompanist. In this his marked ability was at once manifest, though he would always insist that he was not a pianist. His accompaniments were a great delight to singers and audience. Programmes had now been printed for some years. In 1879 we find him announced as 'pianist and conductor', and four members of the family appear on the list of the band, which then embraced all the woodwind. The young conductor and leader, as was to be expected, brought forward music of the modern school, which he arranged for his small means with great skill, and took great pains to rehearse the young players in their, to them, perhaps difficult parts, no doubt gaining in this way much knowledge which has proved very useful. Many pieces of his own composition for the glee party, band, and solo voices appeared in the programmes, and were always received with favour and created an interest in the future of the young musician, though few at that time discerned the bright light which was to break upon these later days.⁴⁴

Musically, Worcester ran more along the lines of the Kent Club than that of their West Country neighbours which no doubt suited the teenage Elgar. The grounding in the basic English vocal repertoire plus orchestral classics and the opportunity to conduct and arrange must have proved invaluable. With no mention of comestibles and even the smoking done "solemnly", the Worcester Club presents itself as a thoroughly musical establishment. Had it not been, perhaps the young Elgar would not have become so heavily involved.

The more usual picture of the Glee Club is, indeed, one where the modern usage of the word applies and competitions during the glee century were often for "cheerful" (sic) glees. When A. J. Caldicott died in 1897, the story was recounted of how his by then famous cheerful glee *Humpty Dumpty* came to be written. This report also serves

to illustrate how defining a glee in 1877 was by no means straightforward:

Twenty years ago the Manchester Gentlemen's Glee Club offered two prizes of £20 each for the best serious and cheerful glees. No less than 114 compositions were sent in by eighty composers, of which sixty were cheerful and fifty-four serious (we mean the glees and not necessarily the composers, who were doubtless all serious in their intentions). After due consideration the judges awarded the prizes to Mr. Henry Lahee for his setting of *Hence Loathed Melancholy* (cheerful) and to Dr. Henry Hiles for *Hush'd in Death* (serious, naturally). But before deciding upon the prize-winner of the best cheerful glee, the adjudicators gave their award to another glee called *Humpty Dumpty* as being the best musical composition; but they left it to the Committee to decide whether they (the committee) could accept it as a glee. The committee, perhaps largely composed of serious men, decided that *Humpty Dumpty* hardly met *their* requirements as a glee, but was more of the nature of a musical joke! Their decision was duly communicated to Mr. Caldicott, whose expectations must 'have had a great fall', though he did not re-compose nor 'put Humpty together again'. Notwithstanding this 'fall', the 'musical joke' was duly performed by the Manchester gleemen, and, nothing daunted, Mr. Caldicott conducted his *Humpty Dumpty* in person. Although encores were not allowed, the composition met with such unanimous approval that the composer was obliged to accede to the loud demands for a repetition. The chairman then announced, amidst the vociferous applause of Humpty Dumpty's admirers, that the committee had unanimously decided to give a *special* prize to Mr. Caldicott. Who will say that he did not enjoy the fruit, if not the wall-fruit, of his labours?⁴⁵

Many of the glee clubs and societies published well-defined rules of membership and conduct. Those of the Manchester club, which was founded in 1830, were outlined in *The Harmonicon* and provide a typical example:

The Club to consist of 50 members

The subscription to be £1 per annum, out of which a cold supper to be provided.

An entrance fee of £1 to be paid by every member for the purchase of music.

Every member to be allowed to bring one friend each night (paying for his supper), but no gentleman to be admitted twice, unless residing at more than six miles from the Manchester Exchange.

Members not present at half after seven o'clock, to forfeit 2s; not attending at all 2s.6d.

Singing to commence at half after seven: supper to be on the table at ten, and the chair to be vacated and the room quitted at twelve: no refreshments of any kind to be brought into the club room before supper.

The meetings to be held on the first Wednesday of every month, from September to April both inclusive.

A President, Vice-President and four Stewards elected every night for the succeeding meeting: the President to make the selection of Gleees, and appoint the parties to sing them; the Honorary secretary giving sufficient notice to such parties.

At the last meeting for the season, the committee for the next season to be elected by the members at large.⁴⁶

These dictates have the advantage of conciseness. The rules of the Bristol Madrigal Society,⁴⁷ a male-voice organization established in 1837, numbered twenty-two plus a further eleven "Rules for the Ladies Night". Such comprehensive choir regulations covered every eventuality from the mundane listing of duties ("The conductor shall have the direction of the rehearsals and public performances"⁴⁸ - Bristol Royal Orpheus) to essential and practical rules aimed at maintaining standards of performance and behaviour. Absence from rehearsal was censured ("If any member absent himself from five successive meetings he shall, in the absence of any satisfactory explanation, be subjected to exclusion from the Society, on the vote of a majority of the members, expressed by ballot." - Bristol Madrigal Society): the Society of Bristol Gleeman sought to protect the standards at rehearsal - "That no member shall be allowed to sing at a concert who has not qualified himself by attending at least six practices preceeding."⁴⁹ The same Gleemen made it possible for members to borrow music for private practice - "Any member of the Society may borrow music on his making application to the Librarian at one of the ordinary meetings, and paying a deposit of 2s 6d; such music to be returned in good condition to the Librarian on or before the next practice night. A breach of this rule, in any respect, will subject the member (for a first offence) to a fine of five shillings."⁵⁰ Overall, the approach in the successful clubs was totally business-like and in this respect we again learn that the

gentlemen belonging to the societies were wealthy men who were prepared to put their own business experience and acumen into running an efficient, well-managed organization.

Most of the glee clubs instituted Ladies' Nights and these were specially arranged events with as much emphasis on the socializing as on the music-making. Nothing was specified in the rules, but one presumes that wives, fiancées and appropriately chaperoned single girls made up the guest list. Every thought was given to the comfort of the ladies and to that end the use of the club room or hostelry was eschewed in favour of surroundings deemed more suitable for the fairer sex. The Bristol Orpheus used the Colston Hall, while the Bristol Gleemen hired the Victoria Rooms, Clifton, as did the Madrigal Society. *The Musical Times* drew on *The Harmonicon* for the following details concerning Manchester's first such event:

The Club closed its first season - on April 28, 1831 - with an 'extra meeting', at which about 350 ladies and gentlemen were present. We are told that 'the Salford Town Hall was tastefully fitted up for the occasion, and wines, cakes, fruit etc. were provided in the ante-rooms, as refreshments between the parts into which the selection was divided.' Many glees were sung, the programme being diversified by three songs, and Chopin's Grand Polonaise Brillante was played by Mr. R. Andrews. 'It may be necessary to explain' apologetically says the writer in the *Harmonicon*, 'that the songs and the Polonaise were introduced in order to afford that variety which ladies not accustomed to glees, and into the merits of which they may be supposed, therefore, not to enter so readily, might have thought agreeable.'⁵¹

The special arrangements catering for the *musical* tastes of the ladies seems peculiar to Manchester.

Remaining with the Manchester concert of 1831, one item on the programme was a glee composed by Mr. Andrews, the Chopin exponent, using the words of *Strike the*

Lyre. The version which has survived is, of course, the one already discussed by Thomas Cooke. Cooke had responded to the following advertisement in the Manchester Courier of June 20, 1831:

The committee of this club, being desirous of encouraging the composition of English Gleees, hereby offer a PREMIUM of FIVE POUNDS for the best SERIOUS GLEE and another of similar amount for the best CHEERFUL GLEE, to be submitted for their approbation, it being expected that such as are sent in will be written for the occasion, and distinctly understood that none shall be sent to them which have been before the public in any manner whatever.

Composers becoming candidates are requested to put some distinguishing mark or motto on the gleees they transmit, and a similar one on a *sealed* envelope containing their name and address, which envelope will not be opened until the Prize gleees have been fixed upon.

The Compositions to be sent must be delivered to the undersigned on or before the first of September 1831.⁵²

The story is continued by *The Musical Times*:

No fewer than 46 compositions - 25 serious, 21 cheerful gleees - competed for the premiums. Of the composers who entered the fray, 24 hailed from London - 'all of whom, with an exception of two, are eminent in the profession', so *The Harmonicum* records - 'seven came from Manchester gentlemen, the remainder from Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, York, Bristol, Hull and Plymouth.'...Among the names of the competitors ...are those of T.Attwood Walmisley (Croydon), and his father T.F.Walmisley, H.R.Bishop, T.Cooke and Vincent Novello. The premium for the serious glee was won by Bishop...while for the cheerful glee Vincent Novello with his *Old May Morning*...came off victorious over Tom Cooke in his *Strike the Lyre*. Cooke seems to have taken his beating in a generous spirit, as very shortly after the contest, he caused the son of his opponent to publish his glee and, moreover, he dedicated it to the club that had offered the premiums... Judged by its subsequent success nothing could be more appropriate than the 'motto' selected by Cooke for his *Strike the Lyre* - it was *Nil Desperandum*. May not unsuccessful competitors in similar contests be encouraged thereby.⁵²

Apart from its anecdotal interest, this advertisement confirms the popularity of the glee and the glee competitions. The club was newly established and therefore had no reputation in the organizing of such events, yet it could attract entries from as far afield as Scotland and Plymouth where presumably the Manchester Courier was not easily

obtainable. The winner, Bishop, was forty-six years old and well established through his work at Covent Garden and yet felt, presumably, that the premium was sufficiently attractive. Even if winning did not always secure lasting fame and fortune, the interest aroused and the publicity the composers received suggests that the glee competition movement helped further the widespread dissemination of the form throughout and indeed beyond the "glee century". As late as 1909, when an improvement to the quality and tone of canteen concerts in the Armed Services was considered, the solution reached involved the setting up of glee clubs. In a report drawn up by Lieut.Colonel B.R.Ward and presented to a meeting at Brompton Barracks, Chatham, in August of that year :

...it was pointed out that it has long been considered desirable to form some central body for the encouragement of music in the Services. Probably the most hopeful method of reaching this end would be by the formation of glee clubs. The advantages of the performances given by these clubs over the ordinary unorganized concert, are that they interest the musical man, who soon tires of unison singing; and that they exercise a pleasant and useful social influence by bringing together in practices those interested in music. Moreover, they further form a nucleus of musical men in a regiment or ship, who can thus assist in the bettering of ordinary canteen concerts and singsongs.⁵³

Only two months later, the first concert of the Naval and Military Union was reported thus:

A number of unison songs were sung with great verve by the men, who thus afforded evidence of vocal capacity from which much may be expected. The most notable performances were Sullivan's 'The Long Day Closes' and two other glees sung by the Glee Club of the Royal Naval Barracks at Chatham. We hear that in view of the concert the members of the club displayed so much enthusiasm that they practised no less than four evenings a week. From all this, it is obvious that the Union has made an excellent and auspicious start, and we are justified in cherishing a hope that its operations will now soon spread over both Services. The new book of partsongs selected by the Council of the Union was in circulation at the concert. It is a collection of twenty men's voice pieces mostly of a popular

character, which, as stated in a preface, the Council hopes may prove useful to conductors of clubs as a guide.⁵⁴

THE DECLINE OF THE GLEE

The Naval and Military Union was not to be the last club formed for the singing of glees or at least with the word glee in its title.⁵⁵ By the turn of the century, however, the glee was in decline. The reasons are not too complex and revolve around education, changing fashions and the demise of "the bearded altos" as Mendelssohn called the English male alto.⁵⁶

Although the distinguishing feature of the strict glee was the all-male ensemble with alto lead, it must be remembered that throughout the glee century composers were making four-part settings with sopranos. Numerically, these SATB glees were considerably less in evidence than even the TTB and ATB three-part pieces but five and six part settings including sopranos were produced including Webbe's *Pretty Warbler Cease To Hover* (SATTB), Callcott's *O Snatch Me Swift* (SATBB), and Mornington's *O Bird of Eve* (SATTB). Thus the "threat", as some saw it, of the female singer breaking into the male preserve of glee-singing was always present. One particular indication of the demise of the male alto can be seen through an examination of the numbers in the Festival Choruses throughout the nineteenth century. Whereas in 1834, the Birmingham Festival Chorus had forty-eight male altos (and no contraltos), by 1900, under a heading "Exit Male Altos!", *The Musical Times* reported:

For the first time in the history of the Festival there were no male altos in the chorus. In Mendelssohn's time (1846) the alto part was sung entirely by men...Since the meeting of 1867 there has been a steady decrease in the number of these gentlemen altos. They dwindled down to nine at the last Festival, and now they have disappeared altogether. It may not be without interest to mention that the

employment of lady singers in the alto section of the Festival chorus was due to Costa, who first introduced them at the Festival of 1849...in the proportion of 17 of the fair sex to 59 of the hirsute-adorned species.⁵⁷

Numbers for the Leeds Festival Chorus show the same decline - forty-two male altos in 1883 with seventeen contraltos, sixteen to fifty seven in 1886 and eight to eighty four in 1901.⁵⁸ The same story is found at the Huddersfield Choral Society. In 1902 it was reported that there were nineteen males and sixty seven contraltos whereas "thirty years before there had been only two contraltos".⁵⁹ Peter Giles draws attention to the Purcell Commemoration Chorus of 1895 where the chorus in Westminster Abbey "assembled and conducted by the staunch Purcellian Sir Frederick Bridge contained only eighteen altos as against forty four contraltos. We do know however that the alto solos were taken by men, Lay Vicars of the Abbey choir".⁶⁰ It could be claimed that Mendelssohn encouraged the rise of the contralto (and consequent demise of the male alto) when in 1847 he wrote for contralto in *Elijah*, thus setting the pattern for oratorio solo quartets throughout the rest of the century and up to the present. However, even before this date, a letter in *The Musical World* (in 1836) drew the readers' attention to "a situation in which myself, and others who have the misfortune of being denominated counter tenor singers, are placed by the introduction of female contraltos in most of the festivals and concerts instead of the legitimate altos."⁶¹ A key word here is "misfortune" - altos were already beginning to feel a persecuted group, a situation which was to remain until the time (and beyond) of Alfred Deller. There was of course, in the background, the spectre, as some saw it, of the Italian castrato and this strengthened the view of the uninformed that the alto voice had to be linked to

effeminacy (hence, possibly, Mendelssohn's "bearded altos" comment). The hostility to the castrati dates back to Handelian times. To some xenophobic Englishmen, almost anything linked to Italian opera was bound to be worthy of contempt. Thus the words of Henry Carey, written over one hundred years earlier, would have had a great deal of sympathetic support in some quarters:

But when a Castrate Wretch, of monstrous size,
Squeaks out a Treble, shrill as infant cries,
I curse the unintelligible Ass,
Who may, for ought I know, be saying Mass.⁶²

Various letters of protest and defence of the English male alto appeared in musical journals during this period, including the following in *The Musical Times* (1884):

May I crave space in your valuable paper to protest against the gradual disuse of the 'alto' voice in our leading Choral Societies? It is, I think, a very great mistake to do away with altos and substitute contraltos in oratorio music, at all events. Curiously enough, at one of our most celebrated choirs this is being gradually done, as I am informed, through the conductor holding the opinion of ladies' superiority, while he himself is an alto, and has several relatives in the profession with that voice. Hoping my protest will avail to lessen this (as I conceive) injustice to a very useful and beautiful voice.⁶³

Two years earlier, a correspondent had a suggestion as to the alto's weakened position and a remedy:

In the article on 'Male-Voice Choirs' ... a remark is made as to the unhappy scarcity of altos. Undoubtedly such is the truth, but I think a remedy might be found by endeavouring to offer more encouragement towards cultivating this voice. Although stronger than the contralto voice, the latter is always chosen by our choral societies before an alto, in rendering an occasional quartet. Alto vocalists are never heard at ballad concerts, simply because there are no songs especially written for them. Let some of our song-writers try the experiment of composing for them, and watch the result. An alto's scope is so limited that many, for the sake of appearing at concerts as soloists, sing in their lower (generally baritone) voice thus invariably deteriorating, and often killing, their falsetto register. Singing-masters, too, might study the production of the alto voice a little more, for as a rule they know nothing about it. With a little attention to the matter, I have no doubt but that the number of good alto singers might be largely increased.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, the hoped-for "experiments" by composers seem not to have taken place, and the decline continued. Some "singing-masters", however, were aware of the problem (or a potential market). In 1895, for example, one Mr. Frost, "sole Alto Vicar-Choral of St. Paul's Cathedral" was advertising his services to train alto voices at his residence. Likewise, in 1907, Novello brought out a treatise called *The Adult Male Alto or Counter Tenor* although by that time the stable door had been open for too long and the alto had, if not bolted, wandered from the main musical scene. Not surprisingly, it was the smaller clubs and more informal choirs who felt the effects most. In the early 1860's, Thomas Hardy was apprenticed in the drawing-office, at 8 St. Martin's Lane, of one Arthur Bloomfield who ran an office choir. We are told that "slack times in the office were used for practising glees and catches"⁶⁵ and Hardy remembers Bloomfield's plea "If you meet an alto anywhere in the Strand, ask him to come and join us."⁶⁶

A still earlier (1879) correspondent rose to the defence of the alto detailing many of the complexities of the situation with particular reference to the partsong and its implications for the alto:

I contend that the substitution of contralto voices for male altos, especially in glee and anthem music, completely alters the effect produced, and not for the better. Let a quartett (sic) written for alto, two tenors and bass be sung by four men's voices, and the alto will have somewhat the effect of a high, brilliant tenor. Sing it again with a female or boy in the part and you will find it has lost nearly all the brilliancy which characterized the first arrangement. People say there are no male altos abroad. Perhaps not; but I could name many German partsongs by Kucken, Mendelssohn, Kreutzer and others, which are little, if at all, lower than many of our so-called 'alto' parts.⁶⁷ In the Sol-fa Reporter series I have seen two books of part-music, for 'men's voices'...which include many of our best 'alto' glees, most of them in their original keys....and I should like to ask how they are to be sung if *not* by counter tenors? The editor says indeed that they are to be sung by 'high tenor' voices using their 'thin' register and *not* by 'the male contralto

or counter tenor voice' etc. (the usual amount of abuse), but it is not quite clear to me how this is to be done. A very high-voiced tenor may no doubt sing *one or two* extremely high notes in a song, but when he has a long string of G's and A's, followed by B or C, it will be found too heavy for him to sing in tune, besides seriously injuring the voice. I question if even Mr.Sims Reeves⁶⁸ himself would stand such a test. True, there are so-called 'tenors' who can perform the feat, but may they not be 'old friends' with new names'? May not their 'thin register' be suspiciously like *falsetto* ? I have frequently met gentlemen possessed of fine alto voices which they seldom use because they were told that alto was not a man's part and that only women should sing it. That being so, these fine natural altos wasted their voices in futile attempts to transform themselves into basses or tenors, which nature had never meant them for... I would ask any musician who has heard glees sung by such excellent altos as Mr.John Foster⁶⁸ or Mr.Baxter,⁶⁸ what finer singing he would desire or could even imagine? In conclusion, let me very earnestly disclaim anything like antagonism to contraltos. So far from that, I am on the most friendly terms with many of our contraltos here, not a few of whom I highly esteem: but my idea is 'there's room enough for all in the world of music.'⁶⁹

The writer here again draws our attention to the defensive position the alto was taking up ("the usual amount of abuse") and also highlights many areas of debate concerning the difference between alto, counter tenor and falsetto singing, beyond the scope of this chapter. In his writings c1900, L.C.Venables declares that "Men with natural or well-cultivated alto voices are scarce, and when discovered it will be commonly found that they have made singing, in whole or in part, a profession, and will not attend a choral society without payment."⁷⁰ This aspect may well have contributed to the disuse of the male alto and even, as professionals in an amateur world, to the amount of "abuse".

Defence of the glee came from other areas of musical activity, not just from singers. . Dr. Spark⁷¹ of Leeds, in a lecture to the Bow and Bromley Institute in October 1881, pleaded for a "better recognition of native talent and for a more general cultivation of glee singing in the home." He felt that the glee was a native of England and that

"English people should preserve the traditions of the last generations in this regard."

Dr. Spark had taken the Yorkshire St. Cecilia Quartet with him to illustrate how the glee was "far superior in musical quality to many of the sickly ballads and flimsy opera choruses now sung."⁷²

The debate at the time was therefore well and truly under way and the battle lines were quite definitely drawn. Even in leader articles, *The Musical Times* in this period was bemoaning the lack of altos, at the same time using the term which was to take over from the Glee Club for reference to men's singing:

A considerable amount of erroneous impression is rife as to the existence of male-voice choirs in this country; such choirs are really far more numerous than is generally supposed. There is also some vagueness in the term 'male-voice choir': to the old-fashioned home-bred English amateur, a male-voice choir would signify a body of voices, having of necessity *alto* singers for the upper part of the composition sung. To the modern continental tourist amateur, newly returned home from his annual trip to the German Fatherland, the male-voice choir would be remembered as a lusty chorus of tenors and basses only: and perhaps if the tourist could divest himself of a little of the glamour which almost inevitably attaches itself to all *foreign* memories, he would be able to recall some faint reminiscences of not a few voices which were hard, thin and unsympathetic, and of physiognomies strained apparently almost to apoplexy.

The old English school of glee-writing and glee-singing is still flourishing amongst us, not perhaps quite as vigorously, and certainly not as publicly, as in days gone by. Our monster halls and concert-rooms are not favourable for the public display of this class of composition; still, there are at least eight or nine clubs in London alone, where the English glee and the equally national catch are cultivated and performed. At the head of these clubs is the 'Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club' which, founded in 1761, is, as of old, supported by amateurs and professionals who share in the performance of compositions by Arne, Battishill, Webbe, Callcott, Horsley and the many other deceased and living musicians who have contributed to the large store of English glees which Mendelssohn told Horsley the country ought to be proud of, not only for their special nationality but also for their beauty and fine musicianship. Dublin boasts of two male voice clubs of very high repute, and many kindred associations exist in the provinces. The clubs already named have the advantage of male altos, without which the male-voice glee cannot be efficiently and effectively rendered. *Unfortunately of late years male altos have been somewhat rare, and the voice combined with musicianly skill still rarer.* Those who care to know what a well-

developed male-voice glee is, should study the works of the composers before named, and also the few specimens left us by Sir John Goss; in these will be found compositions of a far higher kind than *Glorious Apollo* and *Breathe soft, ye winds*. Of male-voice choirs of a more eclectic kind, there are half-a-dozen, perhaps more, in London, whose mission is carried out in a thorough and artistic spirit; these Societies, existing under various titles, perform English and exotic madrigals, part-songs, masses, choruses, motetts (sic) etc. sometimes with and sometimes without accompaniment, as necessity and circumstances dictate. Other Societies exist devoted exclusively to the practice of modern German part-songs and the English imitations of them; these compositions do not demand the cultured taste or musicianship necessary for the understanding and performance of the English glee, but are attractive from their prettiness, being as a rule merely harmonised melodies. The simplicity of the vocal parts and the tunefulness of the melodies would doubtless make the practice of these compositions much more general, but for the fact that the upper voice parts are written for high tenors such as are to be found in Germany, but are not common here.⁷³ (Emphasis added)

The date of the article, 1882, is timely in that the writer seems to cover the then current position quite comprehensively. Whilst commenting on the lack of expertise in male alto singing which, as we have seen was resulting in falling numbers in mixed choruses, he puts the glee in perspective vis-a-vis the "Societies existing under various titles" who were concentrating on other forms. Quite what is meant by "exotic" madrigals is not clear - presumably Palestrina and Lassus. What is more significant is the frequent references to music of the "German Fatherland" and the "merely harmonised melodies" which constitute the German partsong. These are referred to by Sir John Stainer in an article entitled *The Influence of Fashion on the Art of Music*.⁷⁴ Stainer links the rise of the partsong with the other changes in the English musical scene. His approach to matters of musical and harmonic development may be simplistic but his arguments have the merit of being clearly presented *and* based on matters he was experiencing in his own, highly successful, working life:

Fifty or sixty years ago the glee, a pure English school of composition, was a great favourite in the home. Musical families...used to sing glees regularly in the evenings

for their own pleasure and that of a few friends, and there were many glee clubs. As you all know, we possess a very large literature of this class of composition, a large proportion of which is of a distinctly high order of merit. Perhaps I ought to point out that the glee differs from a part-song not only in the fact that there should be only one voice to a part, but also because all the parts must be flowing and melodious and each part must have an importance of its own. Hence, in the more elaborate glees there is a considerable amount of imitative and contrapuntal writing, beautiful and interesting, but of course requiring good musicianship in all the voices...The part-song, as its name implies, so far from having independent part-writing and contrapuntal devices, is nothing more or less than a harmonised melody, the harmonisation never being elaborate or complicated; it should not be so. Part-songs, as you all know, are of German origin. They arose from the fact that musical people, and especially students, found some harmonies an agreeable addition to the hundreds of simple folk songs so well known to all, and so loved by all...The harmonised German folk song soon found its way into England, and with it a large number of compositions in the same style by the best German composers at that time, amongst them Mendelssohn, to whom we probably owe the real popularising of the part-song in this country. Being much easier of performance and allowing a large number to 'join in', and also one might say 'prop each other up' when any little difficulty had to be surmounted, the part-song took a powerful and permanent hold; the fashion of home glee singing died out, and this beautiful form of composition is only now kept alive by the survival of a few of the old glee clubs in London and by the choirs of our provincial cathedrals...

There was, however, one particular reason for the pushing out of the old glee by the new intruder, the part-song, which is of some interest. It is this. Concurrently with the introduction of part-songs, there were beginning to spring up all over England church choirs; the clarinet, bassoon, and violoncello were ousted, and with them the West-end vocal quartet, which, under the pretext of leading the congregation, which it sometimes did, also showed itself off, which it always did. It is of universal experience that if you want to keep a choir together, especially where easy and congregational church music is used, you must make them study some other class of music and widen their interest in the art. The part-song was the very thing wanted for this purpose; easy, sprightly and effective; a few, of various styles, could be thoroughly mastered by a series of weekly practices in the parish schoolroom or elsewhere. If you look at the early numbers of *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* (which is its full title), issued by Alfred Novello, you will find side by side with cheap and easy church music, such as chants, settings of the Te Deum, and simple anthems, a regular series of part-songs.

As a church musician, Stainer must have been well aware of the situation appertaining to the instrumentalists and their ousting from the services, a situation beautifully catalogued in Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

The "series of weekly practices" points to a further element which strengthened the rise of the partsong and abetted the demise of the glee, namely musical education. The burgeoning of the Mechanics Institutes from the 1820s and their associated singing classes, the work of W. E. Hickson (the "father" of English school music), of Joseph Mainzer and his "Singing for the Million" movement, of John Hullah and John Curwen (champions respectively of the fixed- and movable-doh sight-singing systems) is all documented in Chapter Three. However, this flowering of musical education, and particularly the method of singing at sight, is highly significant in the context of the glee because, as Stainer points out, the (German) partsong, with its straightforward homophonic texture, was eminently more suitable for class teaching purposes. The working class men who were attracted to or encouraged to take up the new methods of musical education would have known little of glee clubs, the membership fee and necessary social standing for membership proving beyond them. Since singing classes would have been mixed, the men would doubtless have sung in their natural voices, knowing little of the tradition of the male alto which, as has been shown in Chapter One, was historically the preserve of the cathedral and court. Since the whole concept of the spread of educational opportunities gained so much support from lower and lower-middle class Nonconformists, this further isolated, in the musical field, the male alto whose voice had for so long been the essential ingredient in the true glee. To add another nail in the coffin of male alto singing, the propagation of the "partsong" by publishers was sometimes carried out through such devious (no doubt to displaced male altos, treacherous) means as publishing glees by Webbe, Stevens, Spofforth and

Cooke under the general title of Partsong.

Thus, the 1880s in Britain saw the beginnings of the male voice choir as it was to be known until the present day. As with all matters of musical development, this was a transition period during which the glee and the TTBB partsong existed side by side. The life of the glee was extended, through enthusiasts, into the twentieth century, with competitive festivals, for example, running classes for the "new" TTBB arrangement of voices while the classes for glee singers specified "choirs with alto lead". Glee continued to be composed through competition: the Appollo Griffin Glee Society was organizing a competition⁷⁵ "for a glee ATTB equal voices without accompaniment" in 1889. However, the Glasgow Glee and Catch Club was moving with the tide when it specified in the 1893 glee competition that "the top part must be laid out for tenors, not altos, as in most old glees".⁷⁶ The Manchester Gentlemen's Glee Club Prize⁷⁷ in 1897 was for "a cheerful Glee, not a partsong". In their 1878 competition, there had been one hundred and fourteen entries. As late as 1902, the Coronation Prize Glee Competition⁷⁸ was organized "in order to stimulate the practice of glee-writing". Nevertheless, Romantic music, especially from the Continent, the advent of the contralto, the large mixed choral societies and festival choruses, the disappearance of widespread domestic glee-singing, the advent of wide-spread music education and the rise of the partsong proved too mighty an array of adversaries for the English glee. Above all, it needs to be remembered that the glee was peculiarly English. William Barrett's book on the glee is virtually a history of Western music so keen was the author to place the form in as wide a musical context as possible. His patriotic call to

Englishmen to repudiate the "land-without-music" charge might appear a little too full of Victorian jingoism and rhetoric but the basic truth in his claim for the uniqueness of the English Glee is undeniable:

For Englishmen and searchers after truth there will be found no greater incentive to a patriotic defence of their musical qualifications as members of a great nation which has borne no inconsiderable part in the cultivation and encouragement of music, than in the examination of a particular branch in which their countrymen hold a position entirely unique ... How they have helped and fostered their art in various ways may be gathered from this attempt to trace the Historical Development of the Glee and Part-Songs.⁷⁹

NOTES ON CHAPTER TWO - THE GLEE AND GLEE CLUBS

- 1 Barrett W. English Glees and Partsongs - an enquiry into their historical development (1886) p.79. William Alexander Barrett was Vicar-Choral of St. Paul's Cathedral, Music Critic of the *Morning Post* from 1867 until his death in 1891 and also sometime editor of the *Monthly Musical Record* and *The Musical Times*. He also co-compiled a dictionary of music with John Stainer.
- 2 "What I am worthely wrought with wurschip, i-wys! For in a glorious gle my gleteryng it glemes". York Mystery Play 1440. Now obsolete. *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*
- 3 There are other dialectical usages, e.g. in Lancashire glee can mean a squint; in Scotland, the meaning is sometimes "astray" (as in Burns' "The best laid schemes of mice and men/Gang aft a-gley").
- 4 "Nay, I can gleek upon occasion" *Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.01
- 5 "And smale harpers with hir glees/Sate under hem in divers sees" *House of Fame*. Quoted in *OED*
- 6 "We han none other melody ne glee Us to rejoyce in our adversitee" *ABC* - in *OED*
- 7 "For though the best harpeur upon lyve/Wold upon the best sounyd joly harpe/That ever was...He sholde maken every wighte to dulle/To here his gle, all of his strokis fulle" *Troilus and Creseida* - *OED*
- 8 "We would rather see two or three pretty girls and a glee-beam...than the whole of them". O.W.Norton *Army Letters* 1903 - *OED*
- 9 Annfield Plain Gleemen (Durham), Prudhoe Gleemen (Northumberland). The term was also taken up in America to describe male voice choirs.
- 10 From the Norman word "jongleur".
- 11 Details of this decree are quoted in Chappell W. Popular Music of the Olden Times (1859) - reprinted (1965) Vol. 1 p.30.
- 12 Gatens W. Victorian Cathedral Music (1986) p.94
- 13 In his address to the South London Musical Club in 1884 (reported in *The Musical Times (MT)* March 1884 p.160), Joseph Barnby claimed that "at one time all glees...were exclusively sung by professional musicians". This

generalization is difficult to accept and would seem to emanate from the heavy involvement of church musicians, especially alto singers, in the early development of the glee.

- 14 Chapman R. (ed.) Jane Austen's Letters - Thursday 18th April 1811 to Cassandra Austen - (1952) p.269
- 15 Brontë E. Wuthering Heights Penguin Classics (1985) p.100
- 16 Dickens C. Nicholas Nickleby - quoted in *OED*
- 17 Scott W. The Fair Maid of Perth Phoenix (undated) p.120. Later descriptions in the novel of the gleewoman/gleemaide indicate a "professional wanderer", a "female minstrel" with a "disreputable occupation" (Ch. 32) who sang "in Norman French" (Ch. 30)
- 18 Barrett op.cit. p.229
- 19 Son of the promoter of tonic sol-fah
- 20 Author of Sketches of the Glee Composers c1880
- 21 *The Harmonicon* was one of a number of nineteenth-century musical journals. Others included *The Monthly Musical Record*, *Amateur Musician*, *Musical Courier*, *Musical Examiner*, *Musical Opinion* and *The Tonic Sol-Fah Reporter*.
- 22 Quoted in *MT* April 1901 p.226
- 23 Mainzer's work is described in some detail in Chapter 3
- 24 Quoted in Johnson D. *MT* November 1979 p.200
- 24 ibid.
- 26 The name Ossian became known throughout Europe in 1762 when James Macpherson published the poems he had "discovered" of the Irish warrior-poet Oisín. The poems were, in fact, largely of Macpherson's invention although they won wide acclaim and were a central influence in the early Romantic movement in Britain.
- 27 Chief poet of the 18th century Gothic literary revival, Chatterton was England's youngest writer of mature verse and precursor of the Romantic movement. He died aged 18 in 1770.

- 28 1775-1818 The Gothic novelist and dramatist who achieved overnight success with his novel *The Monk* (1796)
- 29 c1687-1743 Poet, playwright and musician chiefly remembered for a collection of his poems set to music which included *Sally In Our Alley*
- 30 1714-1763 William Shenstone, a contemporary at Oxford of Dr. Johnson, was a poet and amateur "landscape gardener", a term he was the first to use. He was influential in reviving the ballad, co-operating with Bishop Percy on *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.
- 31 1716-1771 Another precursor of the Romantic movement, remembered for his celebrated *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*.
- 32 1729-1811 His *Reliques* (see above) awakened widespread interest in English and Scottish traditional balladry, formerly ignored in literary circles.
- 33 *MT* December 1871 p.318 - report on the 74th Anniversary Dinner
- 34 Bennett A. Clayhanger Penguin Modern Classics (1953) p.83
- 35 There is some contradiction in the precise date for the beginnings of this club. An article in *The Music Student* of 1920 suggests 1770 while in the *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicles* (1943) the date suggested is 1779.
- 36 The former member wrote the account in 1875 or 1885 (the dates mentioned do not correspond). He was a Mr. Welby and a copy was kept by Mr. John E. Wiltshire, one of the last surviving members of the club. It was he who was able to pass on the manuscript to the editor of *The Music Student* in 1920.
- 37 From the context, a nightwatchman or possibly some sort of Kentish curfew.
- 38 Reprinted in Venables L.C. Choral and Orchestral Societies (c1900) p.134
- 39 McKenna F. The Railway Workers 1840-1970 (1980) pp.138 and 68
- 40 *MT* February 1882 p.77
- 41 Venables op.cit. p.134
- 42 *MT* October 1900 pp.642-643
- 43 Uncle of Edward

- 44 *MT* op.cit.
- 45 *MT* December 1897 p.811
- 46 Originally published in *The Harmonicon* June 1831 - reprinted in *MT* May 1905 pp.312-313
- 47 Reprinted in Kidner W.J. How to start a Men's choir 1901 p.24
- 48 ibid. p.29
- 49 ibid. p.31
- 50 ibid. p.33
- 51 *The Harmonicon* op.cit. pp.312-313
- 52 ibid.
- 53 *MT* August 1909 p.516
- 54 ibid. November 1909 p.715
- 55 A member of the Workington Orpheus Glee Society complained that "although the Glee is attached it has not any significance because we have performed nothing but sacred works". *MT* Apr.1895 p.263
- 56 The phrase is attributed to Mendelssohn in *MT* November 1900 p.730 in an article concerning the Birmingham Festival but is only a passing reference. Without context, it is impossible to know if Mendelssohn meant this as a jibe or as a harmless way of describing a singer peculiar at the time to the English musical scene.
- 57 *MT* November 1900 p.730
- 58 Scholes P. The Mirror of Music (1947) p.58 and *MT* Nov. 1901 p.732
- 59 *MT* April 1902 p.240
- 60 Giles P. The Counter Tenor (1982) p.52
- 61 ibid. p.54
- 62 Carey H. Satyr on the Luxury and Effeminacy of the Age (1729)

- 63 *MT* June 1884 p.360
- 64 *ibid.* February 1882 p.100
- 65 Gittings R. *The Young Thomas Hardy* (1975) p.60
- 66 Hardy F.E. *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (1962) p.45
- 67 Probably in *The German Glee Book* - a collection of music for Men's Voices TTBB edited by Alfred Stone, (at one time conductor of the Bristol Orpheus), published by P.Smith and Sons of Bristol
- 68 Sims Reeves was one of the leading tenors of the Victorian era, author of *The Art of Singing*. John Foster (1827-1915) was an organist and former chorister at St.George's, Windsor. He was one of the four alto lay vicars of Westminster Abbey Choir in the later years of the nineteenth century. Nothing is known of Mr. Baxter although it can be presumed from the context that he was a leading alto of the day.
- 69 *MT* December 1879 p.661
- 70 Venables *op.cit.* p.53
- 71 Willam Spark (1823-1927) had been a pupil of S.S.Wesley at Exeter and Leeds, later becoming organist at Leeds Town Hall.
- 72 *MT* Nov. 1881 p.582
- 73 *ibid.* January 1882 pp.18-19
- 74 *ibid.* July 1899 pp.459-460
- 75 *ibid.* August 1889 (front page) - the club, which operated in the Brixton area of London, offered a prize of £10.10s
- 76 *ibid.* July 1893 p.424
- 77 *ibid.* December 1897 p.799
- 78 *ibid.* April 1902 p.218
- 79 Barrett *op.cit.* pp.350-351.

CHAPTER 2 - APPENDIX A - COMPOSERS

BAILDON, Joseph (1727-1774) Barrett (see Note 1 Chapter 2) reported Baidon as the winner of the first prize given for a Catch in 1763 and this was followed with another prize in 1766 for *When gay Bacchus fills my breast*. He was Lay Vicar at Westminster Abbey and from 1762 was organist at St.Lukes Old St. and All Saints, Fulham, in London. Ten Catches and four glees were included in Warren's Collection.

BARNBY, Joseph (1828-1896) Director of Music at Eton and later Principal of the Guildhall School of Music, Barnby was knighted in 1892. His works include oratorios and part-songs but he is chiefly remembered for his anthems and, particularly, hymn-tunes.

BEALE, William (1784-1854) Beale met with some success in "reviving" the art of madrigal writing. A chorister at Westminster he later pursued a career in the Navy, returning to the Chapel Royal after having won the Madrigal Society Prize in 1813 with *Awake Sweet Muse*. He became organist at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1820 but the following year returned to London for posts at Wandsworth Parish church and St. Johns, Clapham Rise.

BISHOP, Henry (1786-1855) Most of Bishop's career was associated with the theatre starting at Covent Garden (1810), moving to the King's Theatre, Haymarket in 1816 and going back to Covent Garden in 1830. This last move was after ten years as Musical Director at Vauxhall Gardens. University appointments included Edinburgh (from which post he was asked to resign for giving no lectures in two years) and Oxford. His main occupation seems to have been "rewriting" the operas of Mozart and Rossini as well producing "cut" versions of Shakespeare. He is now remembered for partsongs and vocal pieces such as *Home sweet home*. He received a knighthood in 1842.

CALDICOTT, Alfred J. (?-1897) Chiefly remembered for his humorous glees (as in *Humpty Dumpty*) and catches (*The Cab Catch*, a four-part canon), Caldicott's *A Message for Phyllis* won a prize at the Lyric Vocal Union 1890

CALLCOTT, John (1766-1821) The son of a Kensington bricklayer, Callcott studied with Henry Whitney, organist of Kensington Parish Church. He also learned the clarinet and had singing lessons with Rienhold, a well-known bass. His first glee, written at the age of eighteen, was published in Warren's Collection. Later, he obtained his B.Mus at Oxford and, in 1857, he was a founder member of the Glee Club. He was made an honorary member of the Catch Club in 1785.

COOKE, Thomas Simpson, was of Irish background. After early composition lessons with Giordani, he built a career as a violinist in Dublin (as his father before him) and

later as a singer. He wrote for the Crow St. Theatre and from 1806 to 1812 ran a music shop before his success in operatic roles took him to London. He sang at the Lyceum in 1813 and at Drury Lane where he was the principal for 20 years. From 1828-30 he was musical manager of Vauxhall Gardens. He was versatile, playing nine instruments, taught Sims Reeves (see Note 68 Chap.2) and won Glee Club prizes with *Hail, Bounteous Morn* 1824 and *Come Spirits* 1830.

DANBY, John (1757-1798) A regular prize winner at the Catch Club (ten prizes between 1781 and 1794), Danby was organist at the chapel of the Spanish Embassy, Manchester Square, in which post he composed masses and motets. He published several books of glees as well as a textbook entitled *La Guida alla Musical Vocale* in 1757.

GOSS, John (1800-1880) The son of an organist, Goss was under Stafford-Smith (q.v.) at the Chapel Royal and later became organist at St. Paul's (1838) and composer to the Chapel Royal (1856). Most of his compositions were of necessity sacred but his glees achieved great popularity. He published several treatises on organ-playing and harmony.

HATTON, John Liptrott (1809-1886) Hatton was a theatre conductor and composer in London. A versatile musician, he made a reputation as an entertainer and singer of comic songs. *Simon the Cellarer* and *To Anthea* are his two songs to survive in the ballad section of soloist's repertoire.

HORSLEY, William (1774-1858) Encouraged by Callcott (q.v.) before his first appointment to Ely Chapel, Holborn, he formed the club "Concentores Sodales" in 1798. Callcott appointed Horsley organist at the Asylum for Female Orphans in Westminster; in 1800 he gained his B.Mus at Oxford and after several other appointments, finished his career at the Charterhouse, where he was succeeded by his pupil John Hullah. Horsley maintained a friendly correspondence with Mendelssohn. As well as glees, he published a collection of canons, another of psalm tunes and wrote three symphonies. He was the son-in-law of Samuel Webbe (q.v.).

MORNINGTON, Earl of (1735-1781) A successful glee composer, publishing about thirty including the prize-winning *Here in cool grot*, Mornington was also an accomplished harpsichordist. He was able to progress via studies at Trinity College, Dublin, to a degree at the University there and subsequently to a Professorship in 1764. He moved to London in the 1770s and remained there to the end of his life. He was probably created an Earl by George III in 1760 because of his musical skills: he was immortalized by Thackeray in the lines "Most musical of Lords/Playing madrigals and glees/Upon the harpsichords".

PAXTON, Stephen (1735-1787) Paxton was a prize winner with glees such as *How sweet, how fresh*. He published collections of glees some of which were also included in Warren's Collection.

PAXTON, William (1737-1781) The brother of Stephen, William also obtained prizes for glees and for two canons (*O Lord in Thee* 1779 and *O Israel, trust in the Lord*) at the Catch Club but he was also known as a cellist and produced several works for that instrument.

SPOFFORTH, Reginald (1770-1827) Spofforth was born at Southwell (Notts) and became a pupil of Benjamin Cooke at Westminster Abbey. He was also closely associated with William Shield at Covent Garden as pianist in the orchestra. Spofforth was a Catch Club prize winner (1793) and member of Horsley's (q.v.) "Concentores Sodales".

STAFFORD-SMITH, John (1750-1836) The son of the organist at Gloucester Cathedral, Stafford-Smith was sent to London as a chorister under James Nares at the Chapel Royal. He studied the organ with William Boyce. With numerous prizes for his glees and thirty nine of his compositions included in the Warren Collection, Stafford-Smith proved one of the most prolific composers of the time. However, most of his mss., bequeathed to his daughter, were lost when her estate was sold by order of the Commissioner for Lunacy, the daughter having been committed in 1844.

STEVENS, Richard (1753-1837) Born in London, later a chorister of St. Paul's, Stevens studied the organ and held appointments at the Temple and the Charterhouse. He was appointed to Gresham College in 1801 and won prizes at the Catch Club (1782 and 1786). In his ten glees in Warren's Collection, he made particular use of Shakespeare and Ossian. He was one of the first composers to claim an interest in his published works, signing all copies and thus instigating an early type of royalty system, leaving a valuable collection of music to the Royal Academy.

WALMISLEY, Thomas Forbes (1783-1866) After early studies with the organist of St. Paul's, Thomas Attwood, Walmisley went on to become organist at St. Martin-in-the-Fields from 1814 to 1854.

WALMISLEY, Thomas Attwood (1814-1856) The son of Thomas Forbes, he also studied with Attwood, showing great musical precocity, becoming organist at Croydon Parish Church at the age of 16. Posts followed at St. John's and Trinity Colleges in Cambridge and later he became Professor of Music at that university.

WEBBE, Samuel (1740-1816) Born in London, deprived of his father in infancy, Webbe's mother apprenticed him to a cabinet-maker. At nineteen, his mother died, and he became a copyist at Welcher's music shop in Gerrard St., Soho. This employment brought him into contact with music teachers with whom he studied ardently, at the same time devoting himself to mastering first Latin then French and Italian. He quickly developed skills in composition and began to earn a living as a teacher. His interest in languages was unflagging as he added German, Greek and Hebrew to the above list. In all of these, it is claimed, he was fluent in the written and spoken word. Although acknowledged as the master of the glee, Webbe also wrote a

great deal of church music (he was organist at the chapel of the Sardinian Embassy) as well as operas and instrumental quartets.

WESLEY, Samuel Sebastian (1810-1876) Educated, after early instruction from his father, at the Chapel Royal from 1820, Wesley held a succession of influential appointments in several Anglican cathedrals, notably Hereford 1832, Exeter 1835, Winchester 1849 and finally Gloucester 1865. He campaigned avidly for improvements in church music, his many anthems forming the core of his compositional output.

CHAPTER THREE - ESTABLISHMENT, RESPECT AND ACCLAIM

In order to appreciate in full the developments in male choral work at the end of the nineteenth century and the change from the glee club ethos to that of the male voice choir as it established itself in the British musical scene, steps have to be retraced. At the same time, a wide range of social, educational and religious manifestations need to be addressed, the chief of which is the way society at large metamorphosed during one hundred and fifty years of industrial revolution. When, in 1715, Abraham Darby began smelting iron using coal instead of charcoal at his Shropshire furnaces and when he constructed the contemporary miracle of a bridge of iron beams and struts, he could not have known what social and political upheavals he was setting in motion, upheavals which would change the face first of Britain, then Europe and eventually the developing world. Darby's bridge-builders relied on the only joints they knew for the Iron Bridge, the mortice and tenon of the woodworker, thus using methods of the soon- ^{ugh} to-be past even at the very confinement of the infant Industrial Revolution. From this cradle grew what some saw as a monster, others as a messiah. Growth and development went hand in hand as Shropshire's Coalbrookdale filled with furnaces, mines were dug, supplying canals constructed and the mighty Severn distributed the creations of the offspring of Darby's vision.

The map of England, in terms of population density, changed more dramatically in

the years 1730 - 1790 than at any time before or since. Families flooded from the fields to the centres of employment, sometimes not moving very far as the very pastures they had worked disappeared under spoil-tips from the mines, were dissected first by canals and later by railways, or were commandeered for larger mills and potteries. Street upon street of cheap housing was constructed where there had been cattle grazing; villages became towns and towns became cities as the vast Northern industrial empires of Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Liverpool were established. In Wales, the population flow was largely southerly, to the valleys and the coal (and later steel) townships of Merthyr, Pontypridd and Blaenavon. This concentration of people into high-density habitation was the setting for enormous changes in social habits, in pastimes and recreation, in religious and cultural attitudes and values. The social ground was therefore made fertile for the advent of the Nonconformist Church, of philanthropists, educationalists and politicians, all of whom, for different reasons, wanted and needed, to be influential in the lives of the cogs and gear-wheels who provided the labour for the industrial money-machines. At the same time, movements towards "improvement" and reform influenced the growth and development of British music in a wide sense and therefore helped nurture male choir singing. Members of the present Shropshire male voice choirs at Shifnal, Newport, Bridgnorth, Much Wenlock and at Perkins Engines and the Midland Electricity Board choir in Shrewsbury, must ponder sometimes on how close they are to the scene of the cataclysmic, historic events which resulted quite directly in the tradition which promoted their choirs' formation.

Although the established Church was slow to perceive the needs of its newly-

distributed flocks, other religious bodies soon became aware of the importance of such issues as education. Darby himself came from a strong Quaker family and although the Society of Friends was not directly concerned with musical education (music rarely playing a part in their Meetings for worship), they were often in the vanguard setting up schools and reading-classes. For other Nonconformists, however, singing was a most significant element in spreading the "Word" and thus great attention was given to ways of improving the art. Individuals such as Samuel Gregg, a mill-owner at Bollington in Cheshire, opened Sunday Schools in the 1830s which included singing classes, later to develop into small glee groups. John Strutt in Belper, Derbyshire, was, at the same time, encouraging his employees to take musical instruction, establishing a school and financing concert trips outside the area. While men like these were the exception rather than the rule, it is an indication of how social consciences were being woken, especially in relation to child labour and education.

The relationship between the later nineteenth- and early twentieth- century strongholds of Methodism and the areas of devoted male voice choir activity is of relevance here. The swathe of activity in both fields followed John Wesley's journeys from Cornwall and Devon, up through Bristol into South Wales, across into the Midlands, to Yorkshire and Lancashire, across to the North-East and up to Clydeside. Yet, the industrial rides of this Anglican vicar and his legacy of Nonconformist activity were only responsible in part for the development of male voice choirs in these areas. He did, after all, visit East Anglia and other less densely-populated areas where the male voice tradition did not develop even though Methodism took root. Density of

population was the key factor in the establishment of communal activities such as choirs. Methodism may often have served as a channel and provided the organization and buildings, but the sheer numbers had to be there in the first place for male choirs to be successfully launched.

Wesley himself, whilst encouraging singing as a religious duty and pleasure, was aware that music could be a distraction from thoughts of God. To most Methodist mill- and factory-owners, singing was a harmless communal activity which induced good manners and civilizing habits and which helped to keep employees honest and sober. As the nineteenth century progressed, it became more and more the case that, if the average working man should become actively or passively involved in music, this would most likely occur through Methodism or as a result of principles influenced by the Nonconformist churches. The system amongst the Primitive Methodists of giving laymen a chance to manage their church's affairs, whilst not associating with the political and economic progress offered by Owenism, certainly encouraged local leadership. The oldest existing male voice choir in England, for example, Colne Orpheus Glee Union in Lancashire, had its beginnings in a Methodist Reading Room. On the occasion of its Golden Jubilee, the founder conductor, J. P. Hey, writes of the choir's inception:

Its start was a very humble one. About the year 1884, a body of young men in connection with the George Street Wesleyan School decided, if the Trustees would furnish them with accomodation, to commence a Reading Room. The Trustees acceded to the requisition, and rooms in the basement of the School were placed at the disposal of the young men for Reading Room purposes. A committee was formed, with the late Mr. Fred Heelis as the Secretary. Mr. Heelis was just the man for the position, energetic, pushful, and in fact, a real live wire, as the modern phrase has it. (He became one of the heads of Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons.) Under his direction the Reading Room proved a great success, and actually ran a monthly

magazine for the benefit of the members. To help the finances of the concern, it was decided to hold a Tea and Concert, the members to serve the tea and provide the concert. This was a great occasion and to see the young fellows serving tea in swallow-tail coats and white waistcoats was a sight for the gods. But the real 'shine' was the concert, when the budding Sims Reeves and Santley's (sic) showed what they could do. These affairs were held annually in January of each year, and for the 1886 concert the committee asked me to form a small glee party to sing two or three easy glees as part of the programme. The concert proved a big success, and not the least successful of the items were the efforts of the Glee Party.

As soon as the affair was over, I was asked to continue the Glee Party as one of the activities of the Reading Room. The idea was put into proper shape - a meeting was called of all members likely to be interested, and I was invited to be the conductor, Mr. W. Hazlitt was appointed Secretary, whilst the Treasurership was placed in the capable hands of Mr. Robert Hartley. The name of the newly-born fledgling was ultimately settled as 'The Colne Wesleyan Orpheus Glee Union', the name 'Wesleyan' being included as it was intended to confine membership to members of the Reading Room, or to those connected with the Wesleyan Church.¹

The word Wesleyan was discarded in 1889 in order to open out the prospective membership, especially as there had been problems finding sufficient male altos - using half-a-dozen boys was not found to be successful. The plan must have met with some success as Mr. Arthur Hartley² (the President in the late 1980s) who joined the choir in 1931, can remember the choir performing songs with alto lead even if the altos had to be retrieved from the bass section where their natural voice lay.³

EDUCATION, PATRONAGE AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

The thirst for musical education in the nineteenth century was only part of a pattern that encompassed much political and religious thought. Nonconformity was but one of the many traceable, interweaving threads in which the male voice choirs found themselves inextricably bound. Many of the educational innovations may not have had a direct bearing on the activities of the male choristers but the climate, in rural as well

as urban areas, was being created whereby the working man could begin to involve himself in cultural matters. The Mechanics Institutes, for example, began in the 1820s with the intention of bringing enlightenment to the working classes. By the middle of the century there were over seven hundred such organizations in rural as well as industrial areas and music appeared in the timetable of most. Concerts or "Tea Parties with music", as described at Colne, were a regular activity and often formed the basis of glee parties and ultimately male voice choirs. It was not unknown for Italian lessons to be organized for the benefit of solo singers, and concerts of Handel and Haydn were common. There was, though, a tendency for the Institutes to become clubs for the lower middle class leaving those at the very bottom of the social range to what were referred to as "free-and-easy" performances in taverns, tea gardens and music halls. Considering the deplorably overcrowded housing conditions for the nineteenth-century poor, especially in the major cities, it was hardly surprising that the entertainment at the taverns, where there was light, heat, relative comfort and good company, should prove so attractive. Popular music-making was synonymous with eating and drinking. The "sing-songs" and amateur glee-singing in the bar parlours and eating houses were supplemented by professional entertainers. Thus, the tavern concert formed the grass roots of the later music hall. Clubs and saloons in London, such as The Wrekin, Evans', The Coal Hole and The Cider Cellar,⁴ became haunts of writers, actors and musicians, as we know from the works of Dickens, Thackeray and Landseer. Many of these venues throughout the land became formalised as glee clubs where glees and madrigals were sung until midnight; after this the "free-and-easy" began, the songs

becoming more ribald and the atmosphere more akin to the eighteenth-century catch club.

Inevitably, the Nonconformist church felt that it had to try to counter the threat to social stability of the inebriated working man. Enterprises were established such as Emma Con's Temperance Music Hall in 1884 at the Royal Victoria Coffee Hall in London's Waterloo Road where serious programmes alternated with ballad concerts and variety shows. Samuel Morley donated a substantial amount of money to keep this concert series afloat and the eventual outcome was the formation of Morley College.

Elsewhere, various musical figures tried to encourage the masses to attend concerts. Letters to Charles Halle in Manchester from mill-workers and factory hands show their gratitude to him for the one-shilling seats at the back of the concert rooms in the 1880s. Other organizations to offer music to the lower orders in the larger conurbations were The Early Closing Association (which included a Musical Society for shop assistants), The Kyrle Society (which in 1877 ran art exhibitions as well as concerts), The Musical Guilds (influenced by Ruskin's writings), The National Sunday League, The Working Men's Concerts (Manchester), The Council of the Working Men's Association (4d per Concert), The South Place Concert Society (formed in 1878) and the Ancoats Recreation Committee which organized free Sunday concerts in the North-West. The Clarion Vocal Unions of 1895 saw music as a weapon in the Socialist armoury and as such (along with the Owen Halls of Science where political interests were predominant) were frowned upon by the Nonconformist-orientated institutions.

Munificence from non-musicians took several forms. Patronage of the large-scale provincial music festivals was established from the end of the eighteenth century and manufacturers, colliery- and mill-owners (usually Nonconformist) were found building chapels and thus providing much-sought space for concerts as well as worship. The improvement in the art of instrument-making brought with it a parallel improvement in playing and men like George Meakin purchased sets of wind instruments for his workers in the Potteries.⁵ With such acts repeated in other industrial areas, the brass band movement was born, using the simplified treble clef system of the military band. Meakin also paid £200 in 1887 to Hanley Corporation to subsidize concerts as well as helping to purchase the new organ for the Victoria Hall in Hanley (one of the Five Towns of the Potteries).

Back in the choral sphere, large-scale festivals were developed at which, in extreme instances, over three thousand choristers might join forces. Such events began in the 1850s at The Crystal Palace usually for Handel and Mendelssohn oratorios producing, inevitably, a coming together of a cross-section of the population. Whether any genuine social contact took place when bankers and butchers stood side-by-side in the bass section cannot be gauged but the fact that there was a membership which crossed the divides of class is undeniable. Apart from the new halls which were built in the provinces to house these mammoth concerts, the most significant aspect was the repertoire. The programmes of Handel, Mendelssohn, Gounod and Stainer, with their largely straight-forward diatonic harmonic language, made for ease

of self-improvement on the part of the performers and the thirst for higher standards in singing, especially at sight, was unquenchable.

THE SIGHT-SINGING REVOLUTION

Self-improvement, however, needed structuring and the system of sight-singing classes which developed through the nineteenth century was crucial to the flowering of the male voice choir in the early years of the next. In the 1830s, the most significant figure working in this field was Joseph Mainzer who based his teaching on the writings of the Parisian music educationalist Guillaume Wilhem. Mainzer's "Music for the Millions" had an enthusiastic following, if not quite the numbers implied in its alliterative banner heading, such that in 1844 Novello incorporated *Mainzer's Music Class Circular* into their new publication, *The Musical Times*. Mainzer's technique was to hold public lectures-demonstrations of sight-singing followed by the setting up of smaller weekly classes where the work was carried on by his disciples. On one occasion, he hired a large sailing boat and took several hundreds down the river Thames as far as Dartford, singing all the while. The movement was widespread and not without social implications. A letter in *The Musical Times* in 1842 from Newcastle considered how to "devise a means of organizing a class or classes among the pitmen"⁶ and the following month there was a response announcing "an Introductory Lecture to the formation of a working mens' class in a densely populated part of Newcastle".⁷ In the same year, in relation to Mainzer Classes, the *Cork Southern Reporter* wrote of "many an hour drawled away in listless inactivity", recommending singing classes as

an antidote.⁸ One lady felt moved to write that "before my husband went to [singing] class, he used to be out every evening but since then he has always stayed at home and practised singing with the children."⁹

As the debate concerning the most effective way to propagate sight-singing developed, Mainzer, to his credit, advocated a competitive approach/arguing, in effect, that there might be many different ways to approach the same problem. Others were less flexible in dealing with the matter of the fixed-doh which was central to Wilhem's *Method of Teaching Singing*, and on which Mainzer's work was based. This had been published in an English edition in 1841 by John Hullah who had, a year earlier, opened a school at Exeter Hall in London "for the instruction of Schoolmasters of Day and Sunday Schools in Vocal Music".¹⁰ He claimed a cross-section of clergymen, lawyers, doctors, tradesmen, clerks, mechanics and soldiers as well as school teachers in attendance, and it was he who continued to champion the fixed-doh method over the next decades. To others, the complications of the fixed-doh method when singing in "difficult" keys was only one problem encountered through the Wilhem method. It was argued that it pre-supposed some degree of literacy and thus appealed more to the middle class than the uneducated working class. Hullah, who aside from his Exeter Hall School also taught over this period at several of the London teaching colleges (including St. John's, Battersea, St. Mark's, Chelsea and Whitelands) was eventually appointed Government Inspector of Music. This was in 1872, by which time his insistence on the fixed-doh method had produced schisms in musical pedagogy.

Meanwhile, at a conference of Nonconformist Sunday School teachers held in Hull in

1841, John Curwen, a Congregationalist minister, was appointed to investigate ways of teaching sight-singing, the aim being simply to improve congregational hymn-singing. Curwen travelled to Norwich to meet Sarah Glover whose reputation for teaching very young children in her Sunday School class to sing at sight had attracted his attention. He saw that her combination of a movable-doh plus hand signs gave more flexibility than Hullah's method, the signing being an obvious advantage if the system was going to be effective with illiterates. Over the next few decades, Curwen established the Tonic Sol-Fah College in London in order to train teachers in the method. He also founded a publishing house for magazines such as *The Tonic Sol-Fah Reporter*, which later became *The Musical Herald*, and for part-songs notated in tonic sol-fah. It soon became standard practice for works, including Oratorios, to be published in two editions, standard staff and tonic sol-fah. By the 1880s, his son John Spencer Curwen was able to claim that eighty per cent of music teaching in elementary schools used the tonic sol-fah system and he wrote in *The Musical Herald* that "the power to sing at sight had become so common as to excite no remark."¹¹

Nevertheless, contemporary reports suggest that the situation was rather uneven throughout the land. Extracts from the annual reports of the Education Department in the late 1880s, for example, reveal that in three hundred Hertfordshire schools "nearly three-fourths had been taught by ear, about one-seventh by the 'movable do' and tonic sol-fa, and the remainder by 'Hullah'".¹² In Harrogate, on the other hand, the Inspector of the time reported that "In about a score of schools in my district part-songs are tastefully sung; in about a dozen...the 'movable *doh*' enables the children to read from

music," whereas elsewhere in Yorkshire it was reported that "In very few schools in my district are the children taught to sing from notes." In Chester it was observed that "Singing from notes is taught in a larger number of schools and singing with expression is less rare". "In schools where the tonic sol-fa system is adopted, the singing also has a vigour and interest not to be met with in other places" was the conclusion from Dorset. Whilst the Devon Inspector reported that "Singing by note is exceptional", in Worcester, the latter was seen as "not a paying subject".

Estimates and figures apart, the influence of the tonic sol-fah movement on the British choral movement was undeniably immense. Tonic sol-fah choirs regularly participated in major competitions and adjudicators frequently commented on the clarity of the sound and the "ringing" quality brought about by their true intonation.¹³ Many of the country's leading choral conductors had a thorough background in the sol-fah method. Chief of these was Henry Coward, Nonconformist, temperance campaigner and conductor of the Sheffield Festival Chorus which Elgar chose to give the first performance of the Coronation Ode in 1901. On the debit side, the tonic sol-fah system can be held largely responsible for the welter of banal, unimaginative vocal works which appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even with the movable-doh and allowances for chromaticism within the basic tonality, any *real* harmonic enterprise was stifled when publishers needed music which could be produced in both formats or, as later, in combined notation. It should be remembered that this was an age of commercial enterprise and the ethos of competition was overwhelming. The publisher had to make sure his part-songs would sell. He knew his

market and it would not be unfair to say that the music had to appeal to that market whether the product was thought by some critics to be banal or not. The situation was acutely summarised by one of the school inspectors writing about school repertoire:

It is painful to see big boys and girls stand up to sing the insipid doggerel (sic) wedded to pointless melody which fills up most books of school songs. Shall the teacher be advised to teach by note? The children shall wearily climb the staff to find, when they reach the temple of music at the top, plenty of rubbish like what (sic) they left below. Better no instruction in music than that which leads to the natural conclusion that music is stale, flat, and unprofitable. The knowledge will soon be forgotten, the disgust will not.¹⁴

Quite apart from being a relevant homily for the teaching of music in *any* age, this passage from Her Majesty's Inspector's Report highlights the problem brought about by a method which was intended to open wide the gates of musical literacy and taste. A further disadvantage of the sol-fah vogue was that Catholic music was cut off from widespread dissemination by the Nonconformist entrepreneurs as being musically unsuitable and suspect on religious grounds. Thus, while vocal scores of *The Messiah* and *Elijah* were easily available in sol-fah, transcriptions of, for example, Verdi's *Requiem* were not. Curwen's own views restricted the publication of all but the most proper of glees and part-songs with a frequent proscription on songs related to the love of ale or women. Thus it seems that, despite becoming extremely rich through the business side of the movement, Curwen never lost sight of the real purpose, as he originally saw it, of the tonic sol-fah system. His son wrote:

The method was the indirect means of aiding worship, temperance, and culture, of holding young men and women among good influences, of reforming character, of spreading Christianity. The artistic aspect of the work done by the sol-fa method is indeed less prominent than its moral and religious influence.¹⁵

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That may have been the opinion of a son whose father, above others, was responsible for the phenomenon (for it was nothing less) of the British nineteenth century sight-singing movement. The religious influences may, however, not have been uppermost in the minds of the burgeoning music publishers¹⁶ nor in the minds of the masons and craftsmen building the new city concert halls or larger chapels, nor the music retailers, nor indeed in the forefront of the thoughts of the many thousands of Britons involved in the actual music-making. The concert hall, church, chapel, music hall, public house, even the park and street, were all centres of musical activity at the time when male voice choirs as we know them today were coming into existence. In the 1871 census, there were twenty five thousand registered musicians and music teachers. This had increased to forty seven thousand by 1911. Seventy thousand people attended the 1907 Crystal Palace Brass Band Championships. The combined population of the Colne and Holme Valleys near Huddersfield was fifty five thousand in 1901 and it still produced fifty six musical societies around this time.¹⁷ Clearly, music was not a minority pastime; choirs and conductors were suitably lauded and recognised; streets were named after composers. By the end of the nineteenth century, music had become an important national industry. Making and listening to music formed a vital part in the lives of the vast majority of the population.

THE EMERGENCE OF MALE VOICE CHOIRS

Such was the extent of the proliferation in organized musical activities that local newspapers rarely recorded the setting up of the "new" male voice choirs. Of the dozen

oldest existing choirs in Britain, most have no early archives or newspaper cuttings marking their birth. This is understandable when so many choirs grew from informal quartet party activities; the choir would only come to the attention of the local press after a major concert by which time the group could well have been in existence for some years. This is the case, for example, with Warrington Male Voice Choir (Cheshire) which was conducted by W.S. Nesbitt and whose first recorded concert was at the local Parr Hall in 1901. In fact, two male choirs existed in Warrington at the turn of the century. The second, Sankey Bridges Male Voice Choir, was formed in 1899, taking its name from the Sunday School in which it rehearsed although this name was soon changed to Warrington Apollo Choir. The choirs existed in friendly rivalry until the death in 1911 of the Apollo conductor, H.Berry. Nesbitt, who also conducted the Manchester Orpheus Choir, was able to fuse the two ensembles and the name Warrington Male Choral Union was used from that time until 1981, when "Warrington Male Voice Choir" was re-instated.

Like Colne Orpheus Glee Union, the choir at Midsomer Norton in Somerset had its roots in the Nonconformist church. In the 1890s, male members of the congregation at the High Street Methodist Church, some of them Sunday School teachers, would continue their singing after the Sunday evening service at the house of a local postman, Mr. A. Ladd, their song book being the *Gospel Male Voice Chorus Book*. Many of these gentlemen were miners at the Norton Hill, Colliery. By 1898, the group was formalized as the Midsomer Norton Wesleyan Male Voice Choir, under the direction of Harry Gould. As in so many male voice choirs, a family tradition was maintained in

terms of the post of conductor, with Harry's son, Raymond, taking over in 1937. Raymond's son, Martin, assumed responsibility in 1968 and was still conducting the choir in the early 1990s.

Across the borders, in Wales, the emergence of male choirs (*Cor Meibion*) was even more deeply rooted in Nonconformity, much more so than in any tradition of Welsh music. The contemporary, widespread idea (tantamount to myth in the minds of many musicians) of Wales being a "Land of Song" can only have arisen from the poetry which had been kept alive through centuries of bardic activity and which was, and still is, imbued in delivery with the rise and fall of musical phrases and cadences. The provision of improvised melody to this poetry with harp accompaniment, *penillion*, was the only "tradition" which was genuinely musically Welsh. This had received further encouragement in the late seventeenth century when the Italian triple harp became more widely used throughout Wales and such exponents as John Parry developed their technique further than playing merely for *penillion*.¹⁸ The triple harp was superseded by the pedal harp and the piano in the late nineteenth century and with it the *penillion* tradition faded, to be kept alive later in the twentieth century only by specialist societies and individuals. A longer-lasting tradition arose through religious reorganization. It was in the 1730s that a native Methodism arose in Wales - the Methodist Revival - and official separation came about in 1823. By 1880, four-fifths of the population was Nonconformist and this was the springboard which launched the new musical tradition for choral performance in the country:

The life of Wales has been transformed by Dissent. The preservation of the Welsh language, the revival of her literature, the awakening of her spirituality, the development of her education, even the cultivation of her choral singing - perhaps

the most striking and distinctive feature of her social life - can be traced to the fertilizing energy of Nonconformity. Wales has worked out her salvation in her own way... She has composed her own hymns and sung them to her own airs... Nonconformity found Wales derelict: it has reared up a new nation.¹⁹

John Roberts and other activists in the church introduced the *cymanfa^a ganu* - the hymn-singing festival - and congregations flocked to the chapels to join in hymns whose melodies sometimes had an ancient bardic background while others were borrowed from English sources. About this time, in the 1860s, the tonic sol-fah system reached Wales and the two movements were polarized by the setting up of the National Eisteddfod. A watershed in terms of recognition for Welsh music-making, was the visit of a South Wales choir to the National Music Meetings at Crystal Palace in 1872. This event was one of the first choral competitions organized along modern lines and the winning performance from the Welsh choir was warmly received by the London press. The concept of the Land of Song was truly born.

Unfortunately, the early history of individual Welsh male choirs is not so well documented as is the case with some English choirs. The Ebbw Vale choir, for example, dates its origins from an illuminated address, dated 1919, which celebrates thirty five years of service by the then conductor, suggesting the choir was in existence from at least 1884. Of other surviving choirs, Cardiff Male Choir lost all of its early archive material when the headquarters of the choir's activities, a Public House in Canton, was bombed in World War Two, but 1898 is the date claimed as its starting point. Beaufort Male Choir has a choir photograph which can be dated to 1900 but the date handed down from older members is earlier still, namely 1887. The choir at Dunvant, a village near Swansea, is linked in local legend to the local stationmaster

and the date 1882:

Isaac Peters...was black-bearded, gimlet-eyed and a 'bit of a handful'. To some he was 'that...Russian' not because he looked like Rasputin but because in those days anyone 'different' i.e. born outside Dunvant, was a Russian. He it was who started the station waiting-room choir from which we descend.²⁰

By 1895, Thomas Coslett Richards was conducting what by now was known as the Dunvant Excelsior Male Voice Party at the Ebenezer Congregational chapel, rehearsing after Sunday morning service from 11.30 until 1pm. Today, the choir, with a membership of one hundred and forty would doubtless fill the chapel without room for an audience.

Rhos Male Choir (1891) and Haverfordwest (1896)²¹, are two more existing groups whose nineteenth-century origins were again in the chapel and colliery. Several choirs in Wales which began at this time disbanded for a variety of reasons but have since been re-formed. Treorchy had a male choir in 1883 competing in a local tavern but today's choir dates from after World War Two.. Similarly, the present Dowlais choir (1965) had a previous existence, a choir being founded in the village in 1899 by the legendary conductor, Harry Evans, himself Dowlais-born.

Back in the north-west, details of the early days of other English choirs still operating today are more clearly defined. The staff at the huge complex of the Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS) buildings in Manchester were largely male in the last years of the century and in 1899, from the more musically orientated (probably church and chapel members), a singing class was formed. Within a few years, the class became a fully constituted choir with the president of the CWS, John Shillito, becoming the choir's first president and its secretary, Thomas Brodrick (later Sir Thomas Broderick)

serving as Vice President. The first recorded public concert was given on November 12th 1903 in aid of the Lord Mayor's Fund for the Unemployed. The Manchester CWS is therefore the oldest existing "works" choir in Britain. Membership was limited to thirty staff of the Society, this being Rule Three of the 1904 Rule Book. In the same book are set out the objects of the choir, principal of which was "the cultivation of musical taste and efficiency amongst its members and the promotion of social intercourse generally amongst the employes (sic) of the Cooperative Wholesale Society."²² The subscription was fixed at "1d per week, payable at each meeting." The organization of whist drives became allied with the singing although there were strict rules on the introduction of non-Society participants. For example, the latter were required to play at least the first hand of the evening with a member to qualify for a prize. Early concerts, such as that on January 27th 1904, included a "Coon Song and Bone Solo", evidently a crossover from the then popular minstrel shows, and a "Ventriloquial Interlude", from the music hall.

The conductor of the C.W.S. choir, Mr. Evans, appears to have had disciplinary problems, reminding the gentlemen at the 1907 Annual General Meeting "that there is such a word as 'order'. And that in future we should endeavour to make our appearances more satisfactory." Perhaps because of this emphasis on order and "appearances", by which is presumably meant concert performances, and because it was felt Mr. Evans could not achieve his own aims, a letter was sent to the committee in the next month:

Gentlemen, we beg to give formal notice to introduce...the question of obtaining the services of an acknowledged efficient tutor, to take periodical rehearsals of the

choir.

Edwin Andrew, Arnold Brogan, Fred Smith.²⁴

It was, however, "decided not to pursue the subject further."²⁵ Five years later, on January 5th 1912, Mr. Evans threatened resignation "unless all members stay to the end of rehearsal."²⁶ In fact, it was over a choral contest that he eventually left, commenting in his letter of resignation "I should appreciate [contests] better if they were genuine."²⁷ (The choir had been placed eighth in a competition at New Brighton). This year must have proved an unsteady one for the group as in May, at a special committee meeting, there arose:

...the necessity of calling upon several members to resign

F. Ray - For indifference

J. Kershaw - Advanced age

J. Moran - Inability to attend 'punctually' rehearsals

E. Turner - Not class enough

W. Allott - Eyesight²⁷

Of these, the most mystifying would seem to be Mr. Turner's dismissal, unless there were echelons within the CWS below which it was deemed impossible to achieve the principal aim of the "cultivation of musical taste and efficiency."

The first mention of competitions in the CWS minutes was at the AGM on March 25 1909 when it was, however, decided not to enter the contest at Hull. Various amalgamations, with the CWS Orchestra and its Musical Society were voted on and rejected. Through all of these minutiae can be seen the forming of attitudes and setting up of procedures which came to be accepted into the organization of male voice choirs across the country and which, in various forms, remain today. On the other hand, few choirs today would think of dismissing members from their ranks for any of the above

reasons.

Alongside Colne Orpheus, in the cotton-mill areas of Lancashire, Nelson Arion Glee Union began life in 1887. A re-union was recorded in 1908 to celebrate 21 years of the choir and as this was attended by a founder-member, Joe Ingham, it is safe to assume that the starting date was confirmed. The choir was formed by a breakaway group (under Joe Ingham) from the Excelsior Glee Union.²⁸ Records show that the men rehearsed in the front room at the home of one of the singers, Ned Atkinson, until, growing from eight to twenty members, new premises were found. It was Mr. Atkinson who suggested the name of the Greek poet and musician and today Arion's lyre is incorporated into the choir's official badge along with a laurel wreath - an apposite choice considering the comprehensive successes the choir was later to attain. Even when established as a choir, as distinct from a glee "party", the quartet and double quartet aspect of the choir's work retained real significance. A minute of December 14th 1896 shows that "in order to undertake engagements at a reasonable fee...we form 2 quartetts, an Octette and a Double Octett." The fees ranged from one guinea for the quartet "in town" to three guineas for the "Full Party". In the following year, a dispute over what percentage of the fees should be kept by the quartet and octet members (twenty per cent or fifty per cent) provoked the resignation of the conductor, Isaac Thompson. The matter was resolved after deputations were sent to Mr. Thompson (the resignation not being accepted) and a re-writing of the rules was carried out.

This highlights not only the importance of the quartet party but also the strict,

business-like organization which characterised male choirs then as now. Rules were referred to often in these early minutes. Fines, for example, were levied first of all in 1896:

April 27 1896 : Resolved that Fines be levied 1d late, 2d absent. Times 7.40 Mondays and 8.10 Fridays. Harry Ashworth to be allowed till 8pm on Mondays.

On Monday May 4th, the above rule was amended by a "unanimous Resolution"

to read thus -

That any Member working overtime at his Daily Occupation, causing him to be late (or absent) from Practice, he, on reporting to the Secretary during his next attendance, be exempt from fines.²⁹

These handwritten minutes of the Nelson Arion choir (the earliest is June 1895 when the choir had been in existence some eight years) give a detailed insight into the workings of the early male choirs. In some ways, their regulations reflected those of the glee clubs but the absence of food, drink and smoking from rehearsals and the wider social make-up, set the choirs apart from the earlier societies. As late as 1910, the Arion membership subscription was only 6s per year which amount, compared with the annual five guinea subscription the Bristol Orpheus gentlemen were paying forty years earlier, illustrates that the working man as distinct from the business man was now heavily involved in the male choral scene.

On reading these and minutes of other choirs formed in the period 1890-1920, one of the most striking features is the choir's importance in the community. Through singing at concerts for local charities, especially hospitals, leading church services and giving concerts in the public parks and halls, the choirs reached a comprehensive audience. Local pride was reinforced through successes at competitive festivals and a great deal

of time was spent at committee meetings discussing which festivals to enter and the consequent arrangements for travel (waggonette, corridor coach, saloon or smoker) and refreshment (picnic or a "meat tea"). Serious consideration was given to the make-up of the "team" for competitions with attendance records being taken into account and, on occasions therefore, certain members were asked not to sing in particular items or even specific passages. The majority of choirs' minutes record an almost obsessive approach to attendance, with fines, exhortation by letter or deputation, and summonses before committee all being used to cajole those with less than one hundred per cent commitment. When joining the more successful choirs, voice tests were held and sometimes gentlemen were asked to undertake a probationary period with the "party" or to re-apply after embarking on a course of singing lessons.

Aside from the domestic business of the choir however, it is often the picture painted of events at concerts that can be the most valuable pointer to emerge from choir minutes. In Manchester C.W.S. secretary's report 25th March 1914, for example, there is comment on:

...the unseemly rush for refreshments before soloists had completed their items at the interval, the detraction [sic] almost proving on one occasion fatal to the efforts of a vocalist...To ask you to sit through the whole concert with no smoking except at the interval...was a very bold move...but 'The end has justified the means'.

Although local newspapers were not reporting the establishment of choirs, the correspondents of *The Musical Times* kept up a steady flow of information on new ensembles, simultaneously helping to demonstrate that this was a time of gradual change as the glee-orientated ATBB groups and the "new" TTBB layouts overlapped. In April 1882 for example, the Lothbury Male Voice Choir (one of the earliest uses of

the title), conducted by T.B. Evison, announced "a Concert in the Great Hall, Cannon St. Hotel in aid of funds for the British Home for Incurables, Clapham Rd."³⁰ An advertisement was placed (October 1883) for "Mr. Geaussant's Choir...the formation of a male voiced choir of 100 voices" adding "Names of gentlemen possessing thoroughly good voices of full compass" could be forwarded.³¹ In Scotland (September 1884), the Glasgow Select choir was reported as "especially rich in the male voice element...and the fact has suggested the giving a little more prominence...than hitherto, to part-music for men's voices."³² In the following month, it was announced that "A male voice Choral Society has been started in connection with the 3rd. Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers, being rather a revival of one which had been allowed to die."³³ Mention is made, in a Glasgow music review, of "Mr. Taggart's Male Voice Choir"³⁴ although in November 1885, the reviewer of this "highly promising amateur choir" remarks that "it is rather uphill work to create a taste here for male voice music."³⁵

Yet, at the same time as these new male voice choirs were being formed, some gentlemen preferred to retain the glee format and implied make-up. "The Comus Glee Club, a new male voice Society, gave its first concert...at Peckham 15 December 1890"³⁶ and "The Sheffield Male Voice Glee and Madrigal Society, formed last year, has been reorganized with Mr. J. Rogers as conductor."³⁷ The choir was later described as including "leading church choristers of the city" which may explain its predisposition to the older forms. This last item was in the same edition (June 1897) as a report from Carlisle : "The Male Voice Choir is a new departure in the Border City, having only been formed last October."³⁸ In May 1892, Mr. Moonie's Male Voice

Choir in Edinburgh gave "evidence of careful rehearsal and skillful leading."³⁹ "Wimbledon Male Voice Choir began its 3rd. season on the 5th inst. The flourishing condition of the Society is very gratifying, for no country possesses a richer repertoire of this branch of music and its widespread appreciation is most desirable"⁴⁰ wrote the correspondent in October 1896. The male students of the Royal Academy of Music had formed a choir by 1899 and during the first decade of the century references to male voice activities by Eryri (Carmarvon and Llanberis), Birmingham Victoria, Belfast, Conway Male Voice Choral Society, The Goosens Choir (Liverpool), Southport Vocal Union, The Railway Clearing House Music Society, Manchester Orpheus and Plymouth Orpheus represented what could only have been the tip of the iceberg in this burgeoning of the genre. Of an early concert by the Risely Male Voice Choir of Bristol in 1901, *The Musical Times* commented:

[George Risely] conducted a highly successful rendering of Mendelssohn's *Antigone*, Gernsheim's *Salanis* and Grieg's *Landerkennung*... The choir, numbering nearly 160 voices, displayed superb tone and sang with great vigour and excellent expression...⁴¹

In February 1897 the same magazine tells us that, at the Cumberland Musical Festival, the Seaton Male Voice Choir (Tyneside) was "composed of colliers" and was "led by a fellow workman."⁴² Indeed, it is through the lists at competitions throughout the country that the extent of the sheer numbers can be gauged, particularly as the twentieth century unfolded. In North Lincolnshire in 1902, no fewer than ten choirs entered the competition class at Brigg for village male voice choirs.⁴³ Quite possibly, some of these were ad hoc groups or even the tenors and basses from church choirs but it nevertheless reflects the interest and expansion of male voice singing at the time.

Other encouragement came from musicians of the calibre of Henry Leslie who was one of the country's leading choir trainers. In 1864, *The Musical Times* reported that "one of the most interesting features of the concert [by Mr. Leslie's choir] was Mendelssohn's Cantata *O Sons of Art* written for male voices with the accompaniment of wind instruments",⁴⁴ while the following month he included "selections from Gounod's *Mass for Male Voices* with organ accompaniment".⁴⁵ Leslie persevered with the policy of exploring the male voice repertoire - presumably his sopranos were not unused to taking second place to the menfolk. Ten years later, his concert "contained three part-songs (by Mendelssohn) for male voices never before given in public."⁴⁶ and in his twenty first concert season, Leslie included Mendelssohn's *Antigone* with a "full band and selected choir of two hundred male voices."⁴⁷

The Royal Choral Society was also aware of the vogue for male voice music and on March 9th 1899 gave the first London performance of Wagner's *The Holy Supper of the Apostles*, under Sir Frederick Bridge. Written in 1843, the work is a male voice *tour de force*, being scored for three separate choirs and full orchestra. For the Royal Choral Society to decide on this massive undertaking underlines the contemporary popularity and significance of male choral work.

Not surprisingly, publishers, too, were willing to promote male voice singing. Novello, in a translation from the German by Sabilla Novello, published *81 Partsongs and Choruses in progressive order for the cultivation of part-singing with instructions for forming and improving Male Choral Singers*. This was in 1857 in Novello's *Library for the Diffusion of Musical Knowledge* and the following appeared in the

Introduction:

In our age, the fashion appeared of part-singing for male voices only...[being] much employed in private life...wherever...such social song is in vogue.

The reference is, of course, to German society and this publication could be seen as the starting point for the incursion of TTBB music into the otherwise glee-orientated ATBB male groups. *Music for Male Voice Choirs* being "choice German four-part songs" followed in 1866 as did a steady trickle of Mendelssohn (*Antigone, Festgesang, Vintage Song* and many more over the next few years). *The Volunteers Vocal Handbook* edited by Jules Benedict "for male voices and intended to be sung when marching" was available in five volumes (1865). In 1878, Novello's enormously significant *Orpheus* series of male part-songs and arrangements was begun. To help promote their own publication, Smith and Son of Bristol, in an edition by Alfred Stone, published a collection of Teutonic part-songs with the contradictory title *The German Glee Book. Of Psalms and Hymns for Men's Voices* arranged by Sir Herbert Oakley and "intended for the use of University students, the Army, Navy and male choirs", the reviewer in 1889 felt that "it cannot fail to be of great service."⁴⁹ *The University Song Book* for "undergraduates in particular and University men in general"⁵⁰ presumably found similar acceptance in 1902, one of a series of such student anthologies. *The Scottish Students Song Book*⁵¹ first appeared in 1891 and contains over two hundred songs either fully arranged in four parts throughout (TTBB) or, in some cases, with only the chorus harmonized. The nine sections include "Songs of the Gown, Songs of Revelry, Songs of Love, Divers Ditties" (mostly folk and traditional songs from various parts of Britain), "Soldier Songs" and "Plantation Songs". In the Introduction,

John Stuart Blackie, Professor of Music at St. Andrews University, had some interesting observations to make:

To the scenes of daily life that are naturally most fitted for lyrical treatment, the life of the young men at our Universities should no doubt contribute its significant share. But in Student's Songs, strictly so called, and student life musically treated, our lyrical repertory hitherto shews a face only a little better than an absolute blank. It is otherwise in Germany. In that country songs of a specifically academic type occupy a distinct and generally recognised place in the lyrical literature of the country. What the reasons may be for this deficiency of music in our academical presentation, one may partly guess. Perhaps John Bull, with all his good qualities, is not such a musical animal as the German, delighting more in strong blows than in nice sentiment; and his brother Sandy, made naturally of no less excellent stuff, and from whom, considering his antecedents, better things might have been expected, has undoubtedly suffered in the artistic side of his nature by the unfortunate division between religion and the fine arts, which grew up in him as a reaction against the despotic ceremonialism of the Stuarts. But these days are past. Notwithstanding the sour religiosity and dogmatic rigidity of certain Presbyterian Doctors in the far North, anthems and hymns and organs present themselves now without offence even in the most distinctly free of Free Church places of worship; and any taint of unmusical severity which our academical youth might have inherited from the stern Calvinism of those times may now be considered as passed away, and the present volume of popular and patriotic School and University Songs issued by the representatives of the students of Scotland, will help to inaugurate a new era in our academic life, when piety shall no longer be associated with gloomy looks, nor music with frivolity.

Little wonder then, with this significance attached to the publication, that so much care was put into its preparation by representatives from the four Scottish universities of the time, with a special company having been set up, with eight shareholders, to supervise the production of the elaborately bound volume. By 1912, the same publishers had produced *The British Students Song Book*⁵² and in the Preface the editor-in-chief, A.G. Abbie paints a vivid picture of the environments and circumstances in which he imagined his collection of male-voice songs would be performed:

As the spirit of the student knows no time or place and endureth the same while the sun shines and waters roll, may this song book, like its famous forerunner, so charm the ear and fill the heart of the British student that old college men, sweating

through Malay swamps, mucking in the Klondyke, broiling on the veldt, tossing on northern seas, immured in Indian cantonments or camping in the Never Never Land, shall handle its pages with the tenderness of the lover and cherish it with the faithfulness of a Briton.

Several other books appeared on the training and teaching of male choirs including E. Davidson Palmer's *The Training of Men's Voices (and the Secret of Voice Production)* in 1892 and *How to Start a Men's Choir* by Walter Kidner (1901). This deals in some detail with "Vocal Constitution", analysing and discussing the features of Alto, Tenor and Bass voices with exercises to obtain what the author calls the *voce mista* - the mixed voice - in top tenors. There are sound and sensible articles on accompanied and *a capella* singing, repertoire, financial and business constitution, competitions and rules. In this last context, an appendix carries examples of sets of rules from over a dozen choirs from England, Wales and the Ulster Male Choir. Walter Kidner was himself a distinguished chorus-master. Born in 1851 in Weston-Super-Mare and largely self-taught except for summer courses at Curwen's Tonic-Sol-Fah College, his working life began at the factory offices of W.D. and H.O. Wills, cigarette and tobacco producers, in Bristol where he later conducted their five hundred voice choir. In 1886 he founded the Bristol Gleemen, with his former employer, Sir Frederick Ellis, as President and the ninety-strong choir achieved widespread fame in the west country and beyond for its refined, pure-toned singing. Kidner's insight into business administration (he was for over thirty years General Manager of the Bristol Musical Festival) combined with his successful career as a tenor soloist, his wide experience with half-a-dozen choirs and additionally his ability as a teacher at Bath Girls High School and the Training College for Men in Bristol, uniquely placed him as qualified

to publish what he described as "this brief account of the *modus operandi* of a male-voice glee choir."⁵³

Of all the music publishers active at the end of the nineteenth century, none produced more textbooks and collections for choirs than J. Curwen and Sons Ltd. The lists were comprehensive and almost always the publications were available in both tonic sol-fah and staff notation (or Old Notation, as it was called). *The Apollo Club* collection "of Choruses, Glees and Partsongs &c" and the *Apollo Leaflets* ("Old Notation on one side, Tonic Sol-Fa on the other") were probably among the firm's best sellers. The thirty-two-page booklet, *The Orpheus Club*, was a "Graded Course of Instruction in Choral Singing for Men's Voices" edited by J. Spencer Curwen himself. In it, he carefully graded his exercises and included frequent paragraphs headed "Summary of Teaching", and there is a wide selection of short part-songs and rounds, some by the editor. The book pre-supposes a knowledge of tonic sol-fah, moving quickly on to methods by which it may be translated to the stave. The alto voice is hardly mentioned, the vast majority of the four-part exercises and songs being laid out for two tenors and two basses (with the first bass part written in treble clef as for tenor). It is therefore safe to assume that this un-dated publication would have appeared towards the end of J. Spencer Curwen's life (he died in 1916).

Interest was added to the burgeoning British male choir scene by the visits of continental groups. Some of Gounod's choruses and motets for TTBB had been made available through Novello, and this no doubt helped to stimulate attendance at the concerts given by the "Chorales" (male choirs) at the French Festival in Brighton in

1881. The choirs were noted as consisting "of amateurs of the working classes...showing very good training, and all, without exception, having the power - so conspicuously lacking in English choirs - of keeping up to pitch during a long unaccompanied piece."⁵⁴ Later, in 1904, a male choir from Vienna, composed, we are told, of railway officials, gave a concert in St. James' Hall in London. "The execution of the choir...was simply splendid and the audience was roused to an insistent encore."⁵⁵ The Cologne Mannergesangverein made visits to Britain in 1853, 1854, 1857 and 1883. On their fifth visit the choir consisted of "about 150 gentlemen of the educated classes" and their singing drew "unstinted praise" from Dr. William McNaught, one of this country's leading adjudicators. However, he added, patriotically, "with vivid recollections of recent performances by some of the finest male voice choirs in the North of England, loyalty impels us to record that we are not out-classed in this department."⁵⁶ This 1908 tour of the Cologne choir came about as a response to the visit of Henry Coward's Sheffield Festival Chorus to Cologne in 1906. English male choirs, too, were tempted to travel, with the Manchester Orpheus Glee Society competing in the Orpheonists Competition in Paris in 1907 and Southport Vocal Union giving a series of concerts in the French capital the following year. In 1910, the Manchester choir crossed the channel again, this time to Germany. Choirs also travelled within Britain. The most common reason was for competitions but "exchange" concerts also took place - for example, between The Bristol Gleemen and Pontypridd Cor Meibion in 1896.⁵⁷ The Bristol Orpheus Glee Society was invited to London in 1889 and 1890)⁵⁸ and, as a result of their London visits, ninety members of

the Orpheus sang to Queen Victoria at Windsor in December 1895 and therefore were able to bear the title The Bristol Royal Orpheus Glee Society.⁴¹

As throughout the age of the glee, competitions were organized for the composition of new pieces for TTBB choirs although, during the last quarter of the century, the medium needed less stimulation through competitions than the glee needed for its survival. Thus, in May 1886, the South London Musical Club (founded in 1875) offered a "Prize of £10 for the best setting for Two Tenors and Two Bases, with free Piano accompaniment"⁶⁰ and this was followed in 1888 by a very similar competition (the prize now 10 guineas). Meanwhile in Nottingham, the Glee Club in July 1886 offered prizes of £10 and £5 for "the best glees for four male voices".⁶¹ Similarly, the Appollo Griffin Glee Society of Brixton offered ten guineas for a glee, specifying "ATTB equal voices without accompaniment",⁶² pursuing the true glee genre. This was in August 1889. By September 1893, The South London Club was having a limited change of heart and their prize was for the best "secular composition for ATTBB plus piano".⁶³ The Glasgow Glee and Catch Club in the same year stipulated in their competition that the "top part must be laid out for tenors, not altos as in most old glees".⁶⁴ The overlapping of the old and the new can thus be clearly traced.

Few choirs could attain the laurel wreath of regal respectability but nonetheless the enthusiasm and commitment for male voice choral work was well established by the end of the first decade of this century, such that most choirs would have considered themselves fit for the Monarch. A commentator in *The Musical Times* in 1909 referred to the "gradual growth of Male Voice Choirs in the Midlands" as "an important factor,

for there is so much beautiful music written for this vocal combination which never obtains a hearing in public."⁶⁵ Choirs throughout the land were attempting to rectify this situation.

* * * * *

The next decades, up to the early years of the inter-war period, were to see the establishment of many choirs whose musical skill and public esteem has never been surpassed. A host of choirs blossomed and faded but some have withstood the rigours of two World Wars - and the necessary curtailment or reduction in activities - to remain healthy and vigorous until the 1990s, still with musical aptitudes and high standards although without the public recognition. In Derbyshire, for example, Church Gresley Primitive Methodist Choir was formed almost by chance in 1904 when the Minister complimented a group of gentlemen led by George Walton on the male voice items given at a chapel function. With this encouragement, the eighteen men set about the formal establishment of a choir which quickly built a reputation for itself in competitions. Despite having to re-form after the Great War, it continued its pre-war successes culminating in a triumph over the Welsh opposition at the Semi-National Eisteddfod at Central Hall, Westminster. The fifty-seven "colliers and clay workers from South Derbyshire", it was reported, "carried all before them."⁶⁶

In Scotland, Clydebank is another choir whose formation came about by chance. The story is told by John Billings, latterly Secretary of the choir:

On 16th November 1899, Bob Deacon, one of the members (of the Clydebank Rovers Rambling Club), entraining [sic] at Glasgow Central Station to take up a post in Rangoon, was seen off by the Rovers. With time to spare before his departure, they serenaded him with ballads, ditties, Scots songs etc. Also present was a Renfrew man, Charles Rennie, who recognised the potential in the voices

(being a keen musician) and suggested they form a choir. They met in December, formed the choir and had their first practice in January 1900.⁶⁷

Along the Clyde at Greenock, the Greenbank Male Voice Choir was formed in 1905 in the manner of a glee club. The first name suggested but unadopted was in fact The Greenock Amateur Glee Club. There was a restriction on membership (initially to thirty six), with the first subscription of two shillings "to defray the cost of music." The following extract from the Secretary's first report, dated 19th April 1905, demonstrates the very cordial and gentlemanly approach taken by the officers of the choir:

I would like to impress on the members the necessity of keeping together and giving as regular attendance as possible and the result of such will no doubt be beneficial to yourselves as well as to the whole choir. Regarding next session (that is if you decide to continue the Choir) I am sure you will find it more enjoyable at the practices as we will all know one another better and I am sure Mr. Easton, the conductor, will have some fine work for you to study as he knows you better now and knows what you are able to do. In closing this brief report I have to thank all the members for their kindness in consenting to join the choir and for their assistance to make the sessions so successful.

Jas B. Lugton Hon. Secy

The deferential attitude displayed in the final sentence is a far cry from that of other contemporaneous choirs who, from a very early stage, were imposing fines on, rather than making polite entreaties to, members whose attendance was irregular. Perhaps because of this attitude, by 1914 the choir was without a conductor and a member of the committee wrote to Hugh S. Robertson of Glasgow:

...to ask if it would be convenient for three of our number to have an interview with you on Thursday 4th June at 7pm

Signed "Yours respectfully", the original intention was to seek guidance in appointing a conductor but, in fact, the committee at the interview in Craig's Smoke Room obviously offered the job to Robertson. An undertaker by trade, Hugh Robertson had

already established himself through the Glasgow Orpheus Choir as a leading chorus-master and thus the invitation is indicative of the standards sought, indeed expected, in the male voice world. Robertson's reply displays respect:

Dear Mr. Marshall,

I have a stock answer to all offers of conductorship and that answer is no. In your case and because I believe in your enthusiasm and in the musical possibilities of your town, I have taken some time to consider the matter. I regret to say that my answer must again be no. I should have explained to you that last year I had a kind of nervous breakdown and only managed to scrape through my musical work. On that ground alone I am baulked. I must expand what I have and must set my face against taking up any other responsibility. I thank you most cordially for having thought of me and I feel duly honoured: I shall help you in any way I can. I will be quite willing to give you a night or two next season and in making a new appointment my advice and counsel are entirely at your service. You have the making or marring of a strong musical force in your hands and I recognise how crucial the matter is. Let me hear further from you.

Yours sincerely

Hugh S. Robertson

Within three weeks, the Minutes show that Mr. Frank Bisset (president of the Bach Choir and of the Orpheus Choir) had agreed, subject to some conditions, to take over as conductor. The Greenock choir must have been delighted to acquire the services of such an influential gentleman who was later to become the first vice chairman of the British Federation of Musical Competition Festivals. From minutes of other choirs, it would appear that similar heart-searching and advice-seeking on the part of committee men throughout the country would have been a feature of male voice choir life at the time.

Choirs were appearing in a wide variety of industrial occupations. In Runcorn, Cheshire, the leather tanning industry was the starting point, in 1910, of a male voice quartet from the Highfield Tanning Company which the following year had grown into

a Widnes Festival prize-winning "choir" of twelve members. By 1916, the choir numbered over fifty and, as with so many choirs, high points were reached in the decades after World War One:

The Highfield Male Voice Choir obtained the premier award at Warrington Musical Festival on Saturday... The Adjudicator, Dr. Caradog Roberts, said 'They had beautiful voices, producing a charming blend of tone...A very effective and "coaxing" rendering. This choir knows how to sing a love song'.

From 1927, Highfield's Annual Celebrity concerts were established, with soloists such as Isobel Baillic, Denis Noble, Albert Sammons, Gladys Ripley, Heddle Nash and Norman Allin.

A year earlier, in Northern Ireland, the mixed-voice Clonavon Factory Choir, comprising employees of Spence, Bryson and Co. Ltd., linen manufacturers, ceased operating. Thus, the tenors and basses had the opportunity to establish their own choir in Portadown, largely through the organizational ability of a Spence Bryson manager, George Lutton. The composition of the 1926 Portadown Male Voice Choir was six first tenors, three seconds, five baritones and seven basses. As with so many groups, increases in size and ability brought festival successes. Although independent of its industrial birth, the choir maintained links through rehearsing in the canteen of Spencer Bryson's factory until 1975.

Thus, the 1920s and 30s emerge as the golden era of British male voice choral work, in musical terms, in audience popularity and in general public awareness. Chronicling the rise and fall of one choir is to point to the activities of dozens of such organizations spread throughout the land. The story of Bebside in Northumberland, for example, can therefore be seen as typical.⁶⁹ Many choirs were nurtured in the

seemingly barren soil of unemployment in the depressed north-east of England in the 1920s. On a pitheap at Bebside a notice appeared, signed by "A Music lover", asking anyone interested in singing to attend a meeting at the Bebside Methodist Church. This occasion was obviously well supported by men anxious to cling to an activity of purpose and comradeship which could counteract their enforced daily idleness. On September 1st 1921, thirty three men attended the first rehearsal of the Bebside and District Male Voice Choir at the Mechanics Institute. The list of names at that gathering reflects the strong family atmosphere immediately established, there being four Tates, and three each of Storeys, Summers, Robinsons and Gardiners. Whether because he was first on an alphabetical list or because of his musical surname, Billy Bell was appointed conductor. Perhaps he was the original "Music Lover". In any case, at the first meeting there could have been little time for singing as officers were elected and rules were established. Members were to pay threepence per fortnight and buy their own music, having first paid one shilling entry fee. Annie Bainbridge was appointed accompanist and it is noted that "Mr. Bainbridge would be paid 2s 6d a night for the hiring of the piano".⁷⁰ Repertoire was chosen by the conductor and copies were ordered in "Sol Fa or Notation" (ie staff notation). Most choir members, it is claimed, could read music in one of these forms although reading was not essential for membership. Politics were barred so that the choir could later sing to Conservatives Party members in Morpeth and Labour supporters at Ashington. Members were of different Christian denominations, too, so that supporting church services could be ecumenical.

The titles of the first music ordered by the Bebside choir are of interest on two counts: firstly, the seven pieces seem to form the core repertoire of all male choirs from the 1890s onwards and, secondly, they are listed without acknowledgement to composers. Even today, male choir librarians store music alphabetically by title not composer. Bebside's first songs, with some composers' names appended, were:

In Absence	Percy Buck
The Soldier's Farwell	Kuchen
When Evening's Twilight	
Comrades in Arms	Adam
The Long Day Closes	Sullivan
Martyrs of the Arena	de Rille
Lull me to Sleep	

Before their first concert, membership had increased by seventeen, with two more Robinsons, additional members of the Summers family and a third Langley joining their relations in the choir. The date was December 28th 1921 and the venue was the Bebside Methodist Hall. The guest artiste, Gladys Smith, was paid 10s 6d and soloists from the ranks earned themselves five shillings each. From this point, progress was swift and the year from September 1922 to September 1923 saw the choir undertake over twenty concerts and engagements in the area, as well as enter and win four competitions. By 1930 the membership was fifty three and competition successes continued. Soloists of the stature of Stiles Allen, Isobel Baillie, Norman Allin, Heddle Nash and a young Owen Brannigan sang at their concerts in the Thirties: Bebside gave a forty-minute BBC broadcast on April 27th 1938.

In many ways, Bebside was the epitome of the male voice choir in the decades forming the heyday of the genre : a conductor from a Nonconformist background

(Billy Bell was a strong teetotaler), the business-like organization, the reliance on competition successes to recommend themselves to local concert-promoting charities, the mixture of English and Continental repertoire, and the consequent engagement of nationally-known guest artists, all of which culminated in the final accolade - a BBC broadcast. Typical, too, of many choirs is their story as continued after World War II - a period of decline in numbers, an ageing membership and changing personnel (Bell died in 1952). Coupled with changing social circumstances and tastes, this meant that by the Seventies the membership was almost exactly the same as at that first meeting fifty years earlier, and the choir disbanded in the 1980s.

This profile in terms of formation, growth and decline can be paralleled in many parts of the United Kingdom. In another mining village in Somerset, for example, (at the far end of the country from Bebside), an octet formed in 1918 developed by 1921 into the fully-fledged Timsbury Male Choir with Oliver Janes as conductor. Mr. Janes directed the choir for thirty years, through to its high points of success in festivals at Bristol and Kingswood, until handing over to his son who conducted the choir for the next thirty years. The observations of Kenneth Janes help to fill in some of the details of those early male voice singing days in the West Country:

In the early days of the choir, when I was 18, we used to rehearse in the old school after Mrs. Lewellyn had swept the floors and all the dust had settled. In the corner you had a lovely big fire burning and a tortoise stove...You have to remember that...the members had previous experience in their church and chapel choirs and they weren't afraid to sing...To sing in a male voice choir, you didn't need to read music. You'd learn your part off by heart. I would attach more importance to the man who can't read music but has a good voice than to a man who reads music. The man who reads music doesn't learn the thing off properly...We had fathers and sons in the choir. Three generations of Frickers were in the choir: Sam, George and George's three sons.⁷¹

Neighbouring Midsomer Norton's male voice choir was another group from a strong Methodist background and the Rule Book current in 1911 (see Appendix 3A) demonstrates an ordered, business-like efficiency. Finance was guaranteed through the two shilling entry fee and the one penny per week subscription. Yet another west country mining village, Frampton Cotterill (near Bristol) produced, like Bebside, a male choir in 1921. Unlike Bebside however, the impetus here seems to have been not unemployment but a strike at the local colliery, Coalpit Heath. Between April of that year, when the idea was first mooted, until December, the membership soared to seventy, with practices held in the Hebron Chapel. After a brief interruption following the death of the founder conductor, the choir resumed activities in 1925 when Charles Smith was appointed. Mr. Smith retained this position for fifty years during which time, as with Bebside and Timsbury, many prizes were won at competitive festivals. At the Diamond Jubilee Concert (1985), twenty three singers took part; by the end of the decade, numbers were down to nineteen.

The rise and fall of some other long-established choirs is sometimes uneven. Church Gresley, for example, stopped activities altogether during the World Wars. In other instances, the chart has a double curve. Nelson Arion, in Lancashire, after their high points in the Twenties, reached a nadir from which they had to climb in the early Thirties before George Altham re-built the choir and took them back to competitive success, notably against the large Welsh choirs at the National Eisteddfod at Denbigh in 1939. Another slump in the Fifties saw the Arion turn to a Yorkshireman, Jack Smith from Steeton. He, and later his son Frank, was able to re-place the choir in a

position of eminence just as Lawson Berry had done in the early 1920s.

Welsh choirs also waxed and waned as did some of the ex-patriate Welsh groups which had been formed in different parts of England. Unemployment in South Wales in the late Twenties was approaching thirty three per cent and many young men either emigrated or moved within Britain to cities where job prospects were higher. With the expansion of The Pressed Steel Company in Oxford for example, many Welshmen were drawn to the area and from them, quite naturally, sprang first an octet (at the Cape of Good Hope public house near Magdalen Bridge) and eventually, with support from the local Liberal MP and a Congregational Minister, the Cowley Male Voice Choir.⁷² Within a few years, the name Oxford Welsh Glee Singers was adopted and the choir was winning competitions and friends both in Wales and the South of England. Despite the name, there were no glees in their repertoire and few of the young men from the valleys could speak their native tongue. Their high points were again in the 1930s. On one occasion, in 1939, Sir Walford Davies and Sir Hugh Allen, playing piano duets, appeared with the choir at a charity concert. There was a brief revival in the post-war period, with joint concerts alongside Morris Motors Male Voice Choir (1952) and a Home Service broadcast in November 1955. In the Golden Jubilee booklet of 1978 however, demise is anticipated:

...unless a new generation of choristers is found, commonsense suggests that the Party must die. It is too much to hope that young people will turn to this kind of music-making when professional perfection is available at the touch of a radio or television switch. It is doubtful if sponsorship would buy in the necessary new blood. Survival to date undoubtedly stems from its Welsh origins; there is a rather symbolic irony in the recent election of a Scotsman as its Chairman.

LEADING MUSICAL DIRECTORS

With male voice work carrying such a high profile in British musical life in the inter-war years, it is not surprising that conductors should emerge with the charisma combined with musicianship that created for them something akin to legendary status. J.C. Clarke built up an enormous reputation around the turn of the century with his competition-winning Southport Choral Union and a picture in *The Sunday Strand* in April 1906 shows a man of resolution and dignity standing in front of his thirty-eight strong choir. Unfortunately, Mr. Clarke's pedigree and history are not documented but about one of his rivals at Northern festivals, Luther Greenwood, rather more is known. Throughout his career with the Colne Orpheus Glee Union, Greenwood received plaudits from the country's leading adjudicators. Herbert Howells at Lytham Festival in 1932 is reported to have asked for an interval after Colne's performance of Bantock's *Lucifer in Starlight* "to recover his judicial poise and calm."⁷³ "I will make no bones about it, ladies and gentlemen" said Howells from the platform, "here was a touch of the grace of God. This was indeed singing."⁷⁴ The *Guardian* correspondent, referring to the same performance wrote:

Confronted with the inspired art of Luther Greenwood and his fellow men of Colne, one can only bow the head in silence and be eternally grateful.⁷⁵

Such, then, was the reputation and presence Greenwood had built up in the choral sphere. His early career, however, had been as a violinist. Both his father and grandfather were string players and his uncle, Harry Greenwood, had a music shop in Nelson, along the valley from Colne. In his boyhood days in the 1880s, the young Luther was therefore surrounded by music both at home and at the Mount Zion Church

where he became leader of the Sunday School choristers and, at the age of nineteen, conductor of the Chapel Choir. It was with the male voice element of this group that he had his first taste of competitions, entering the contest at the Cloth Hall in Nelson in 1900. At the same time he was studying the theory of music with a local teacher and travelling to Manchester for violin lessons with Ernest O'Malley of the Halle Orchestra and later with Arthur Catterall, its leader. Greenwood's father, however, was against the young man embarking upon the precarious life of a professional violinist and Luther went into the family cotton manufacturing business. This meant that he remained in Colne, joined the Orpheus as an alto (an increasing rarity in the area at the time) and in 1909, at the age of 28, was appointed conductor. He maintained his string playing, leading various local orchestras and forming the Clef Club String Quartet in 1919. He always maintained that if vocalists could develop the aural awareness needed for chamber music, most of the conductor's problems would be solved. He was also in charge of Accrington Cooperative Choir and Keighley Vocal Union (both mixed-voice) and the Barnoldswick Glee Union Male Voice Choir.

Nevertheless, it is with the Colne Orpheus choir, recording at St. John's Wood, broadcasting from Savoy Hill for the radio station 2LO, singing at the London Palladium or St. Andrews Hall Glasgow that Luther Greenwood will be remembered.

Sir Hugh Robertson enthused:

To see your men standing up, face-fronted, shoulder to shoulder, unified in thought and endeavour; to hear their voices blending, harmonizing, declaring, lulling, picturing - I ask you, where in all the world could you get a sight and sound to beat it.⁷⁶

Likewise, the organist of Chesterfield Parish Church and renowned adjudicator, Frederic Staton, expressed himself with equal enthusiasm:

Orpheus with his lute was as nothing compared with Luther and his Orpheus.⁷⁷

Setting standards which composers could recognise and respect was probably the most enduring of Greenwood's qualities. Granville Bantock's commendation is more formal than the foregoing but nonetheless similarly carries weight and authority:

Mr. Luther Greenwood is a musician of high and splendid qualities...I can imagine no one more capable or better qualified by knowledge and experience to undertake the duties of a musical director and advisor. I would myself have implicit faith in his musical judgement. He is a man to command not only respect but esteem.⁷⁸

In 1928, Bantock attended a Colne Orpheus concert to hear the first performance of his *Valley of Vision* which was an unsolicited gift to Greenwood and the choir. This "Bantock Night" also included the presentation to the composer of a silver cigarette box. In return, he "presented from the publishers and himself an autographed copy of the work *The Seven Burdens of Isaiah* of which the *Valley of Vision* is the big smoke."⁷⁹ Bantock, therefore, was seen to be prepared to show his "respect and esteem" in a manner and on an occasion "which may never come the way of the choir again,"⁸⁰ and indeed, never did.

A Welshman who proved to have a significant part to play in the male voice field was Harry Evans, born eight years earlier than Greenwood at Dowlais near Swansea. ^{Merthyr !!} The fifth child of a family of ten, he learned staff notation from his father (an iron worker and keen amateur musician) and tonic-sol-fah from his eldest sister. By the age of five, he could play hymn tunes from the latter notation on the harmonium. As with Greenwood, Evans' father was opposed to his son moving into a musical career,

although his main worry was that the boy would be struggling without some academic background. Thus, he insisted that, at fourteen, Harry should go to Abermorlais School, Merthyr Tydfil, as a pupil-teacher. He worked assiduously, passing exams in science, mathematics and art but was always heavily involved in music especially as organist and conductor:

I started from home, [he says], at 7.30, in order to be at the morning class (two miles away) by 8 o'clock. School began at 9: the dinner-hour was devoted to study; and then very often I finished the day with a wild rush up to Dowlais to accompany the choir for an hour or so. I do not know how I managed to get through it all; but I had an indulgent headmaster, who let me off to fulfil engagements as accompanist at Eisteddfau and concerts. Saturday was a *free day*, but only so far as school duties were concerned as I was occupied in teaching the pianoforte and organ from early morning till late at night.⁸¹

Despite winning a Queens Scholarship to Bangor Normal College, Evans opted to continue as a full-time teacher at the Merthyr school and in 1897 progressed to an Associate of the Royal College of Organists diploma (the first Welshmen to gain this award). In addition to his two hundred member mixed choir in Dowlais, he conducted the Dowlais Male Voice Choir and, at Merthyr, a Ladies Choir. Of the latter, we discover that:

These ladies, all of a social position, combined with his Dowlais male-voice choir in a performance of 'Hiawatha's Wedding Feast,' an occasion which proved the levelling influence of music, as many of these fair vocalists sang on the same platform with the working men whom their fathers employed. 'But these working men,' Mr. Evan proudly observes, 'were all gentlemen, and they could *sing* - indeed, the result was in many ways the best singing I have ever secured. The Dowlais male-voice choir was formed by me in 1899 with a view of competing at the Liverpool National Eisteddfod of 1900. We worked hard for twelve months, and when the fateful day arrived we sang tenth in the order of eleven choirs, one of them being the Manchester Orpheus, which has since achieved fame; but we came off easy winners: thereby was saved the honour of the Welsh nation, as all the other choral prizes that week had been won by English choirs. This Dowlais choir gave concerts in various parts of South Wales, and during Easter, 1901, we sang at six concerts in London with success'.⁸²

Evans' work with the Dowlais men ended after only three years when he was drawn away from his native land by the offer to conduct the Liverpool Welsh Choral Union. His reputation as a conductor and, particularly, adjudicator progressed swiftly from that point. Thus, he cannot be claimed as a male voice choir director in the same way as Greenwood. However, that a man of his successful and musically sound background was involved with male choirs certainly enhances the standing of Welsh male singing which in many ways was not as flourishing as in England at the turn of the century.

Reading conductor Alfred Higson's programme notes for the Warrington Male Voice Choral Union Annual concerts in the 1920s, one senses in him a musician of some astuteness and sensitivity. He conducted this choir for forty years (from 1919 to 1959) and was also in charge of the Cooperative Wholesale Society Male Choir in Manchester, to which organization he gave a similar period of service. Higson was ready to introduce Warrington audiences to original works by Arnold Bax (in 1924) and Poulenc (in 1926) as well as pieces by Bantock, Stanford, Elgar, Coleridge Taylor and Rutland Boughton. At the same time he did not neglect the part-songs of Schubert, Mendelssohn or Schumann nor the classics of the English glee repertoire (Webbe and Paxton) and the Elizabethan madrigalists. He engaged such artists as Leonard Hirsch as well as the usual favourites of the concert and oratorio circuit like Norman Allin and Peter Dawson and, in the 1940s, Eva Turner and Harriet Cohen. His work is acknowledged in the choir's 50th Anniversary booklet in 1951:

Those who were priveleged [sic] to attend the first rehearsal with Mr. Higson in Thewlis St. School at once realised that they were in the presence of genius, and, with the passing of time they were to discover that genius was girt about with wonderful personality and had a breastplate of supreme tact and patience.⁸³

The son of a head gardener, Alfred Higson was born in 1873 at Timperley near Manchester and Dr. Harry Coy, conductor of the Sale Choral Society, took responsibility for his early musical education. From the age of twenty two, Higson held a series of posts as church organist in and around Sale and Manchester and by 1899, after collecting various Licentiate and Associate Diplomas from the London conservatoires, he was advertising his services as a "Teacher of Organ, Pianoforte, Singing and Theory of Music".⁸⁴ In 1907, he founded the Sale Musical Society, a mixed choir; he became conductor of the Warrington and Manchester male choirs in 1919, later in life adding to his responsibilities the Earlesfield Town Ladies Choir. His reputation as a choral trainer was forged through the competitive festivals and he probably remains the only English conductor whose choirs have won the mixed, male and female classes at the Welsh National Eisteddfod. Public acknowledgement for Alfred Higson was widespread. He became the first Freeman of the Borough of Sale in 1945 and in the New Year's Honours List in 1949 was awarded an O.B.E.

Another conductor honoured by the nation was George E. Stead M.B.E. of the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir. This group, like Higson's, also began in the Twenties, as the Colne Valley Mens Vocal Union, with Stead taking command in 1924. His acute sense of pitch had been discovered during his time as a choirboy at the parish church in Slaithwaite near Huddersfield and his father, Richard, a euphonium player, bandmaster and adjudicator, was keen to develop his son's obvious gift. Sarah Stead, Richard's third wife, was the first of several piano tutors in George's early training whilst the boy also travelled to Halifax and later Blackpool for singing lessons. In the

early 1920s, at about the same time as Colne Valley Male Voice Choir was coming into existence, George Stead became choirmaster at Slaithwaite Zion Baptist Church. It was therefore no surprise when he was appointed conductor of the male voice choir on Sept. 1st 1924. Despite winning notable prizes for his bass solos at festivals such as the Mrs. Sunderland Competition at Huddersfield and being heavily involved in the teaching of singing as well as conducting, Stead remained an amateur music-maker, his occupation being that of a clerk at the offices of the Huddersfield Building Society.⁸⁵

Under Stead, Colne Valley choir was successful at various local festivals culminating in first place at the then prestigious Mrs. Sunderland Festival in 1929. From this point, the number of the choir's successes moved purposefully, one might say, "steadily", upwards. Apart from a broadcast from Manchester alongside the Northern Studio Orchestra in January 1932, there were first prizes at Sheffield and Blackpool music festivals in 1935 and a total of six other first places at competitions in 1936. George Stead was an exceptional musician, singing the notes at the start of unaccompanied pieces without the aid of piano or pitch-pipe. He demanded (and received) an extraordinary degree of commitment from his singers, sometimes calling rehearsals on Bank Holidays. It would only be a conductor of this standing and respect who could produce, as Stead did, a performance of Wagner's composition *The Holy Supper of the Apostles*, which stayed in pitch throughout the first forty unaccompanied pages (without the harpist which Wagner suggested on the score might be necessary). The feat was confirmed by the adjudicator, Herbert Howells.⁸⁶ When

Stead was called up for military service in 1945, the choir engaged guest conductors Lesley Woodgate and Noel D. McAdam, both of whom had BBC connections, as well as Herbert Bardgett, chorus-master of the Huddersfield Choral Society, and Alfred Higson. By these means, Stead's standards were maintained and, on his return in 1946, Colne Valley was able to secure the trophy again at the Blackpool Festival. In the following Silver Jubilee year, Cyril Smith and Kathleen Ferrier were the guest artists at the choir's annual concert. The main work, with the popular contralto, was Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody*, an indication of the quality of music which the conductor was always seeking. The following tribute came from Reginald Jacques in that Jubilee year of 1947:

I remember with very real pleasure the magnificent singing of the Choir under the direction of Mr. Stead. There was so much to admire in the clarity of diction, cleanness of attack and the vividness of tone. Singing like this sets a standard of which this country should be proud.⁸⁷

It was at a meeting in 1924, presided over by Fred Tomlinson, that a resolution was passed "That the Goodshaw Glee Union be disbanded and that a new choir be formed (taking over all debts and assets) with headquarters at Rawtenstall and that the new choir be named the Rossendale Male Voice Choir".⁸⁸ Tomlinson was thirty-one at the time and for the next forty years his name was linked to this Lancashire choir which he took to success after success in competition work. Like Stead, Tomlinson remained an amateur musician, earning his living as a foreman in a slipper factory.⁸⁹ One of a family of nine, his musical education came through his membership of Rawtenstall Parish Church and, after World War One, from a variety of singing teachers in Manchester and Bradford. To those who knew him, his knowledge of the voice and his

charismatic ability to project his interpretations was startling. He would hold no auditions, relying on his own ability to mould the material presented to him. In 1972 he was awarded the M.B.E. for his services to choral music in the region of Lancashire where he had spent the whole of his life.

Tomlinson's two sons, Ernest and Fred Junior, also entered the music profession and the latter proved to be a talented arranger. He even had the temerity to arrange some North-East folk songs for the Felling Choir from Tyneside, always a friendly but serious rival, at major competitions, to his father's ensemble. Felling's mentor and legendary figure was Tom Mearis who had taken over as conductor when the choir was in its third year. The choir's formation, in 1920, had a Methodist impetus and Mearis himself was organist at various Nonconformist churches in Gateshead. Being a piano- and organ-tuner by occupation, Mearis was closer to the music profession than some of the previous conductors discussed. Like Stead, his sense of pitch was acute and on more than one occasion at competitions he complained bitterly about the pitch of the pianos provided and preferred to give the starting notes of the unaccompanied works himself.⁹⁰ An ardent tonic sol-fahist, Tom Mearis always claimed, according to founder member Tom Usher (recalling events at the age of 86) that "only through this system was the intonation found to be true".⁹¹

This generation of legendary figures, Higson, Stead, Tomlinson and Mearis, along with W.S. Nesbitt of the Manchester Orpheus Glee Society and Irving Silverwood of Holme Valley, had one advantage over the earlier generation of male voice heroes such as Luther Greenwood at Colne Orpheus, Lawson Berry at neighbouring Nelson

Arion, Harry Evans at Dowlais and J.C. Clarke at Southport: national newspapers in the inter-war years were interested in male voice work, reflecting and at the same time generating public interest. The *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily Dispatch*, *News Chronicle* and *Daily Mail* regularly carried reports of competitive music festivals as well as of special events in the world of male choral singing. The broadcasting authorities, too, were aware of the potential audience. The tenors and basses of The Wireless Chorus (formed in 1924) which became the BBC Chorus in 1935, often broadcast concerts of the standard male voice repertoire. Additionally, under Leslie Woodgate and Harold Noble, the BBC Men's Chorus (a convenient *Radio Times* appellation as there never was a separate male choir) championed some of the newer part-songs by Holst and arrangements by Vaughan Williams. With the existing interest of the musical magazines and periodicals, this radio exposure was another element which ensured that the male choir in the Twenties and Thirties was given consideration alongside the mixed choirs and large choruses which continued to flourish in this period. The gentlemen then had a degree of respectability in the eyes of the media and the wider world of music-making which their work was not to receive again.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 3 - ESTABLISHMENT, RESPECT AND ACCLAIM

- 1 Colne Orpheus Golden Jubilee Celebrations (1936) p.3
- 2 In conversation with the author
- 3 For frequent references to the male alto and his "natural" voice see Giles P. The Counter Tenor (1982)
- 4 For detailed references see Pearsall R. Victorian Popular Music (1973) p.16
- 5 See Nettel R. Music in the Five Towns (1944) p.52
- 6 *Musical Times (MT)* July 4th 1842 p.8
- 7 Ibid. Aug. 15th 1842 p.36
- 8 Reported in *MT* July 4th 1842 p.8
- 9 *MT* Aug.1st 1842 p.18
- 10 Quoted in Pearsall R. op.cit. p.113
- 11 Quoted in Nettel R. op.cit. p.9
- 12 *Journal of the Society of Arts* April 2nd 1880 p.405
- 13 References to this "ringing" quality are found frequently in adjudications and in reports of the work of conductors in the early years of this century.
- 14 Op.cit. Sept. 24th 1880 p.846
- 15 Quoted in Pearsall op.cit. p.119
- 16 Novello and Chappell flourished, not only with part-songs but with magazines such as *The Harmonicon*, *Musical World*, *Musical Standard* and *The Musical Times*
- 17 See Walton and Wolvin (eds.) Leisure in Britain 1780-1939 (1982) p.102
- 18 Handel is said to have been impressed when he heard Parry playing during a visit to London in 1746 (Sadie S. (ed.) The New Grove Dictionary, Vol.20, p.163, 1980 - article on Welsh music). However, this could not have been (as is

sometimes suggested) the stimulus for composing the Harp Concerto Op.4 No.6 as this was composed some ten years earlier, appearing in an interval of the premier of *Alexander's Feast* on 19 Feb. 1736

- 19 Llewelyn Williams W. The Making of Modern Wales (1919) p.122
- 20 Lewis E. Dunvant Souvenir Brochure - Canada 1985 (1985) (no pagination)
- 21 From the date of a public concert in March of that year
- 22 Cooperative Wholesale Society (C.W.S.) Male Voice Choir Rule Book 1904
- 23 C.W.S Minutes - Annual General Meeting March 17th 1907
- 24 Ibid. - Committee Meeting April 9th 1907
- 25 Ibid. May 7th 1912
- 26 Ibid. January 12th 1912
- 27 Ibid. - Special committee meeting May 17th 1912
- 28 The Excelsior MVC, the third choir in the area, ceased operating in the 1970s
- 29 Nelson Arion Glee Union - Minutes of committee meeting April 27th 1896
- 30 *MT* April 1882 p.219
- 31 Ibid. October 1883 p.560
- 32 Ibid. September 1884 p.519
- 33 Ibid. October 1884 p.586
- 34 Ibid. November 1884 p.638
- 35 Ibid. November 1885 p.669
- 36 Ibid. January 1891 p.40
- 37 Ibid. June 1897 p.406
- 38 Ibid. p.414

- 39 *Ibid.* May 1892 p.282
- 40 *Ibid.* October 1896 p.68
- 41 *Ibid.* January 1901 p.45
- 42 *Ibid.* February 1897 p.303
- 43 Hull Times April 19th 1902
- 44 *MT* March 1st 1864 p.245
- 45 *Ibid.* 1864 p.260
- 46 *Ibid.* March 1874 p.415. The songs by Mendelssohn were *Waken Lords and Ladies, Festal Greeting* and *Land of Beauty*.
- 47 *Ibid.* March 1876 p.403
- 48 Detailed reference is made to this publication in Chapter 6
- 49 *MT* July 1889 p.427
- 50 Advertised in *MT* August 1902 p.538
- 51 *Scottish Students Song Book* (1891) Bayley and Ferguson
- 52 *The British Students Song Book* (1912) Bayley and Ferguson
- 53 Kidner W. How to start a Men's Choir (1901)
- 54 *MT* October 1881 p.512
- 55 *Ibid.* July 1904 p.444
- 56 *Ibid.* July 1908 p.454
- 57 *Ibid.* June 1896 p.401
- 58 *Ibid.* July 1889 p.410
- 59 *Ibid.* February 1899 pp.84-5
- 60 *Ibid.* May 1886 p.249

- 61 Ibid. July 1886 p.377
- 62 Ibid. Aug. 1889 Frontispiece
- 63 Ibid. Sept. 1893 p.577
- 64 Ibid. July 1893 p.424
- 65 Ibid. Dec.1909 p.803
- 66 Burton Daily Mail Nov.28th 1927
- 67 Letter to author March 28th 1988
- 68 Runcom Weekly News Sept.11th 1925
- 69 Bebside and District MVC 1921-1989 - details from an unacknowledged typescript compiled from references to choir committee Minutes
- 70 Ibid. - from minutes read at the first practice on September 21st 1921
- 71 Unpublished article held in choir archives
- 72 Bedwin R. Fifty Years of Song - A brief history of the Oxford Welsh Glee Singers (1978) p.9
- 73 Luther Greenwood - In Memoriam (undated and unacknowledged) p.11
- 74 *Daily Express* - quoted in Colne Orpheus Golden Jubilee Celebrations (1936) p.50 (unacknowledged)
- 75 *Manchester Guardian* June 4th 1932
- 76 Colne Orpheus Golden Jubilee Celebrations p.44
- 77 Ibid. p.45
- 78 Luther Greenwood - In Memoriam p.12
- 79 Colne Orpheus Minutes - Secretary's Report - AGM Feb.17th 1929
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 *MT* Aug.1907 p.521

- 82 Ibid. p.522
- 83 Warrington Male Voice Choir Fiftieth Anniversary booklet - unacknowledged
- 84 Parish magazine St. Mary Magdelene, Ashton, Manchester December 1899
- 85 Details from Colne Valley MVC Silver Jubilee 1922-1947 and from an essay compiled in December 1990 by the then Vice President of the choir, Ernest Shaw in collaboration with Miss Muriel Stead, daughter of the conductor.
- 86 Colne Valley MVC Silver Jubilee 1922-1947 (1947) pp.51-2
- 87 Ibid. p.45
- 88 Rossendale MVC History 1924-1964 (1964) p.3 (unacknowledged)
- 89 Article in *Lancashire Life* May 1974 p.71
- 90 Recollected by his daughter in conversation with the author
- 91 In conversation with the author

CHAPTER 3 APPENDIX A

Midsomer Norton
Wesleyan
**MALE VOICE
CHOIR.**

Rules.

Rehearsals at the
Wesleyan School every
Tuesday at 7.30.

Punctuality and
Regular Attendance
is
Essential to success.

DATE.	1st week	2nd week	3rd week	4th week	5th week
19					
Jan.					
Feb.					
Mar.					
April					
May					
June					
July					
Aug.					
Sept.					
Oct.					
Nov.					
Dec.					

Member's Name. W. D. ...

Midsomer Norton
WESLEYAN
Male . Voice . Choir.

OBJECT.

To assist in the Social and Moral elevation of its members, by seeking to instruct them in the noble art of singing, and to render help, whenever possible to any who are striving for another's good.

Rules.

(MEMBERSHIP.)

1. Applications for membership must be made to the Committee in writing, who shall, if agreeing thereto, place such upon a probation of 4 weeks, the Conductor to hear and examine meanwhile, and report to the next Committee meeting, who shall then give final decision.

Officers & Committee.

PRESIDENT. MR. T. GOULD.

VICE-PRESIDENT. MR. A. CLARK.

CONDUCTOR. MR. H. GOULD.

DEPUTY CONDUCTOR. MR. F. GOULD.

ACCOMPANIST. MISS M. CROUCH.

SECRETARY. MR. F. E. BOULTER.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY. MR. A. J. ROWDON.

TREASURER. MR. W. V. GAY.

REGISTRAR. MR. S. GAY.

COMMITTEE.

Messrs. J. J. PEARCE. G. GOULDING.
A. LADD. J. GAY. M. MELLIAR.
and F. BRIDGES.

DATE.	1st week	2nd week	3rd week	4th week	5th week
19 11					
Jan.	602				
Feb.					
Mar.		503			
April					
May					
June					
July					
Aug.					
Sept.					
Oct.					
Nov.					
Dec.					

2. That new members pay an entrance fee of 2/- after serving their probation, and receiving notice from the Secretary that they are accepted.

3. That members contributions shall be one penny per week, each week of practice.

4. Any member absenting himself from four consecutive practices, shall send to the Secretary a written excuse, or shall cease to be a member of the Choir.

5. Any member whose arrears exceed sixpence, having been notified by the Secretary, shall be dealt with by Committee.

6. Any member requiring a second copy of music shall pay for same.

MANAGEMENT.

7. That the business of the Choir be entrusted to a Committee of not less than six members with the Officers.

8. That upon a written request signed by six members the Secretary shall call a General Meeting.

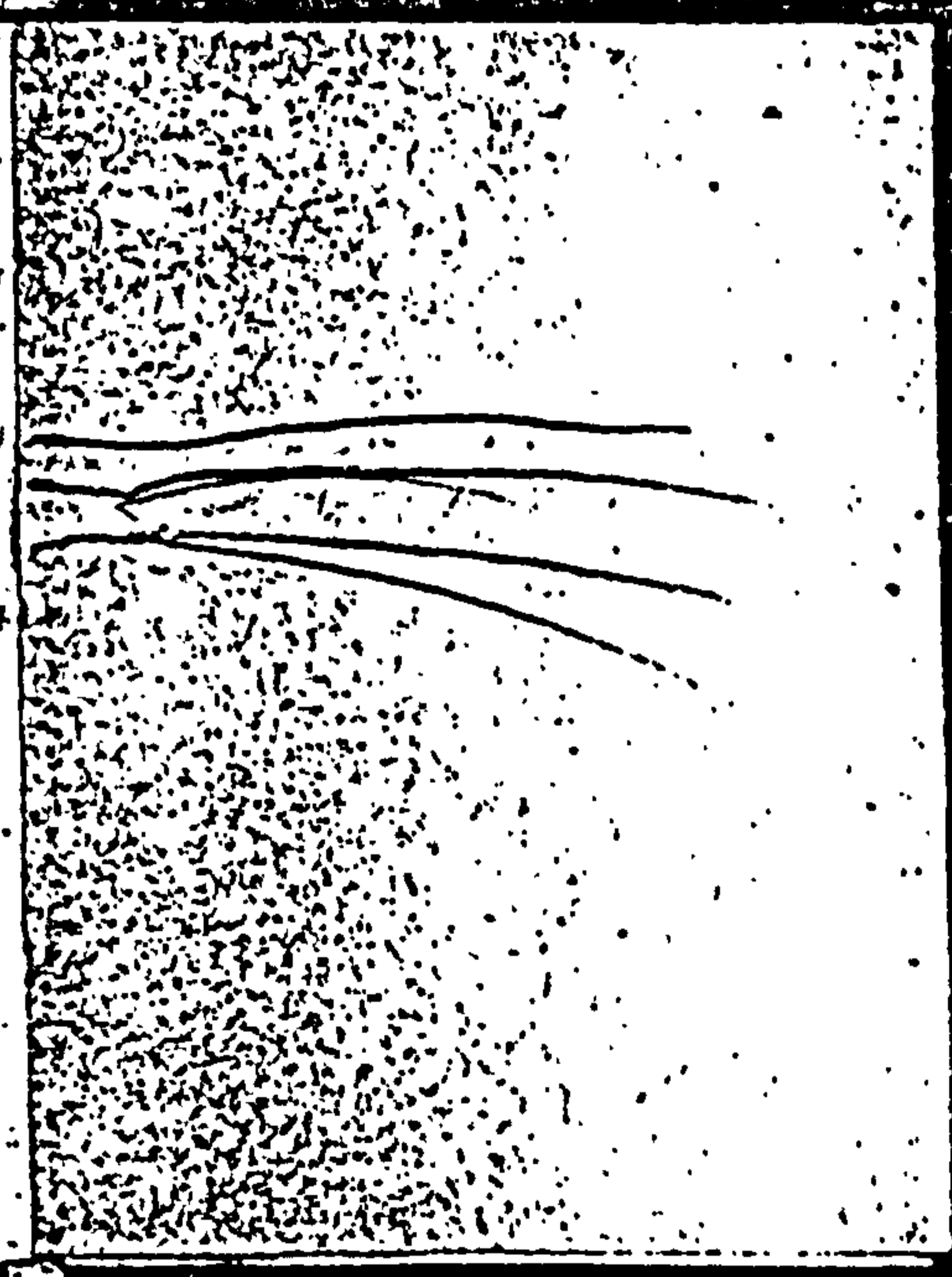
Duties of Officers.

The Conductor shall have direction of the practices and public performances.

The Treasurer shall receive and disburse all monies, under the direction of the Committee.

The Secretary shall take minutes of all meetings, issue all notices, attend to the general correspondence, keep a catalogue of the Music, and have charge of the property of the Choir.

The Committee (7 to form a quorum) shall transact the business of the Choir make arrangements for its meetings, select and approve new music, and the programmes for public performances.



CHAPTER FOUR - THE COMPETITION FACTOR

In an age when competition in every sphere of activity was a powerful driving force and when the ethos of enterprise, personal and communal, was paramount, it would have been surprising if the arts in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century could have remained unaffected by this Victorian ethic. The manner in which the railway companies fought over routes, literally racing each other to build lines in all directions, even if this meant crossing the most difficult terrain, epitomises the intensity of industrial competition. Companies within specialist areas, such as the Potteries or the steelworks of South Yorkshire, competed fiercely for orders and expansion. In sport, the organizing forces in soccer brought into being the Football Association in 1863 as more and more towns and cities, as a matter of local pride, put their efforts into establishing regular teams and building grounds for the Saturday afternoon match. The Rugby Union was formed in 1872, the same year as the first international match (between England and Scotland). It was in the 1870s that the County Championship was established in cricket and in 1878 the first ever Test Match in Britain was played, against Australia. The mecca for tennis was set up at Wimbledon in 1877, the year of the first championships. Even the churches could not escape the competitive spirit with a proliferation of nonconformist sects all seeking converts. The Free Church of England, for example, began in 1863, General Booth

began marshalling his troops into the Salvation Army in 1865 and the Presbyterian Church of England was formed in 1876.

The influence of competition - through the competitive festival - on the organization and development of male choirs was profound. Indeed, in the 1927 *Coming-of-Age Souvenir* of the Todmorden (Lancashire) Male Voice Choir, it is stated that "Previous to the formation of the choir, a meeting was called by Mr. T.H. Lees and Mr. S. Beaumont...the object being to form a *competitive* choir" (emphasis added) and Todmorden was only one of very many choirs which were formed specifically to enter the competitive field. Frederic Staton, who was one of the country's most influential adjudicators during the inter- and post-war periods, declared:

Nobody can possibly deny that the development of male voice choir singing has been almost entirely the result of the Competition Movement.¹

This is an overstatement of the case as there were other factors, not least the existence of two hundred years of male choral work in England, which would have to be considered. Nonetheless, it is certain that the gentlemen responded to the challenge of competition and the inducement of prizes (preferably financial) in a direct and enthusiastic manner. Few would have stopped to consider that the principle of declaring one performance of a song to be superior to another could be at all inartistic or that the adjudicator's choice has to be so subjective as to be at best suspect and at worst invalid. There was no compunction in treating the choral competition in the same way as a football match, the masculine spirit of grit and determination and capacity for hard work being challenged in a like manner. The choirs were often referred to as "teams" (with "team managers"), members were "dropped" and

"substitutes" were standing by. In some cases, there was even a "bag carrier" nominated, the "kit" being copies of music, a music stand and baton rather than boots and shirts.

The concept of competition in musical performance has an extensive history. It dates from the Pythian Games in sixth century Greece and continues through the thirteenth century contests of the Minnesingers at Wartburg, the eighteenth century competitions between Handel and Scarlatti in Rome and Mozart and Clementi in Vienna, to the popular events held at inns in eighteenth century England. Here, catches and partsongs were sung and, almost certainly, the proceedings were dominated by men. Schumann, who for a brief period was conductor of a male choir, adjudicated at competitions of the Men's Singing Society in Brussels in 1851 and again in the following year in Dusseldorf.² The significant difference between the foregoing and the choral competition system developed in England in the late nineteenth century is the inclusion in the latter of a previously prepared cantata or oratorio for massed performance. As a finale to the day's proceedings, this work was often conducted by one of the adjudicators which helped to emphasize the spirit of comradeship and communal pleasure the event hoped to foster.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WELSH EISTEDDFOD

Lurking somewhat indefinably - because it was largely undocumented - behind this development, was the long history of the Welsh eisteddfod. These medieval gatherings were originally held to determine the professional duties of the bards and the term eisteddfod (literally, a "session") came into use in the eighteenth, century often being

associated with events, as in England, at taverns.³ With interest in choral singing being focused by the advent of tonic-sol-fah and the promulgation of religious song by the Nonconformist churches, a more formal presentation of eisteddfau began. By 1880 a National Eisteddfod was in existence. However, over the next twenty years, with the successful growth of the English festivals, it was the fate of the Welsh events to suffer in comparison. As there was no Welsh school of music, in any sense of the term, many English adjudicators were employed and English choirs more often than not triumphed at the competitions. Criticism centred on the quality of test pieces, money prizes and the cut-throat attitude they engendered, and the standard of training of Welsh choirs. Of the interest shown in the choral competitions at the Royal National Eisteddfod meeting at Bangor in September 1902, the *Musical Times* correspondent wrote:

Everybody felt that this interest was not so much in the success of this or that choir, but in the struggle for supremacy between English and Welsh choirs. As nearly all the principal prizes fell to English choirs the results will no doubt have a far-reaching effect in Wales.... It is not that the standard of Welsh choir-singing has deteriorated, but rather that English choirs, educated in another atmosphere of influence, are generally more highly trained and better led. The recent growth of the competition movement in England has keenly stimulated and sternly educated choralists, and it has given many 'born' choir-trainers a chance of exercising their capacity. Meantime, Welsh choirs generally have remained where they were years ago, and have been almost impervious to criticism. It is now for the Welsh to take counsel together and to no longer imagine a vain thing. They must bow to the necessity of making choir-training a science. No one will deny that Welsh singers have great capacity; their inspiration and enthusiasm are often extraordinary and electrifying. But the potter who shapes this magnificent clay needs more art, and a wider knowledge of what has been accomplished elsewhere. The fact that Welsh choirs are seldom or never heard at English competitions is significant.⁴

In 1903, a male voice choir conductor from Southport wrote to *The Musical Times* complaining about "tawdry, sensational...music that is not worth the immense amount of work which has to be devoted to its preparation for a competition".⁵ The magazine's

columnist elaborated, at the same time taking further the point in the September 1902 report concerning English choirs being "educated in another atmosphere of influence"⁶

:

The letter from Mr. J.C. Clarke (who is the conductor of one of the best male-voice choirs in the country)... deserves the serious attention of the authorities responsible for the choice of music used at Welsh Eisteddfau. The fondness of Welsh male choirs for realistic and picturesque music of a rather low art-value is remarkable. The hurly-burly of a battle with its moans and gasps of the wounded, the roaring of lions - if not the wagging of their tails - earthquakes, hurricanes, catastrophes, are the subject-matter over which the fervent Welsh choralist loves to vent his tense emotionalism and to tear his passion to tatters. It is often magnificent and thrilling, but is it music? The evolution of this situation is interesting. Most of the existing English compositions of the best class for male voices have been influenced in their style and, what is more important, their choice of resource, by Cathedral traditions. The top part is almost invariably only possible for a high male alto, a class of voice not at all common in Wales. Hence Welsh choirs have been hard pressed to find varied music to suit their TTBB constitution. In this stress they were led to use adaptations of pieces selected from the ample repertory supplied by well-known French composers for the innumerable male voice choirs in France, and they soon found that this dramatic and nervous music was suited to their particular genius. The next step was for Welsh composers to imitate more or less successfully this style of composition. The question now is, should Welsh choirs continue to lavish their splendid natural capacity on music for which musicians generally have little respect, and the practice of which tends to render them incapable of performing the finest music and unable to pit themselves against the best English male choirs?⁷

The writer could equally well have referred to well-known German composers and his remarks concerning the male alto were by this time beginning to date, as much of the better quality English music was now being designed for tenor lead. However, his point about the head voice emphasizes a matter which had been noted earlier. The report on the National Eisteddfod of 1899, for example, had included the comment that

✓ "Dr. Hild's glee was beyond the capacities of Welsh male-voice choirs in general thanks to their almost utter neglect of the proper head-voice register and the forcing

upwards of so-called chest notes."⁸

The link with the continent was emphasized again at the International Male Choir and Solo Voice Competitions held in Cardiff in December 1903. Despite its title, only English and Welsh choirs, seventeen in all, participated:

The foreign element was however present in the person of M. Laurent de Rille, a notable French musician, who came from Paris for the purpose of adjudicating, a task in which he was assisted by Mr. George Riseley. Another foreign import was the test-pieces, which were 'Song of the Crusaders', an effective dramatic chorus written for the occasion by M. de Rille, whose compositions for male-voice choirs are widely popular in France and Wales, and 'The King of Worlds' by M. Dard Janin (Principal of the St. Etienne Conservatoire of Music). Again, to still further emphasise the Franco-Welsh alliance, the thrilling chorus 'The Martyrs of the Arena' by M. de Rille, was also performed - very finely- by the massed choirs, under the baton of the composer... The contest lasted practically the whole day, and the result was that Mr. Nesbitt's Manchester choir indisputably won the first place and the prize of one hundred guineas... It is notable that the victory was gained by the performance of a class of music not much practised by English choirs, but which is regarded as peculiarly adapted to Welsh fervour and style. The lesson received was not wholly pleasant to Welsh feeling, but it is part of the inexorable evolutionary process which we hope and believe will result in Welsh conductors and choralists attaining the success to which their splendid natural ability entitles them to look forward.⁹

Part of the problem seemed to lie in the attitude of the Welsh singers to the adjudications and to the performances of rival choirs. In 1908, Manchester Orpheus won the premier male voice choir class at the National Eisteddfod and adjudicator William McNaught commented that the decision of the four Welsh and one English adjudicators "could not be challenged on the ground of national bias. But unfortunately, owing to the propensity of Welsh competitors to question all decisions against them, there has already been some regrettable newspaper correspondence on the subject."¹⁰ Two years later, commenting on Welsh competitive choirs in general, Dr. Frederick Cowen had "noticed...that there is no desire...to listen to the efforts of

others" and that there was "a certain insularity and narrowness of those instincts which do not seem to yearn for anything beyond their local efforts."¹¹ Criticism was not reserved just for the choirs, nor was it the sole province of the English copy-writers of musical periodicals. The distinguished Welsh adjudicator Harry Evans referred to many of the perceived ills of the Eisteddfod itself in an article written in 1907:

There are cases where excellent and suitable pieces have been chosen, but generally speaking Eisteddfodic (*sic*) selections are of a haphazard and promiscuous nature, with no thought of artistic development. If the National and the chief local gatherings could only be induced to fall in line, the smaller ones would follow. At present, choirs generally exist solely for competitive purposes, and the competitive spirit - which has become unhealthy owing to the large money prizes - has such a firm hold upon the choirs that it is almost impossible to induce them to undertake serious work for Art's sake. One fears that in singing the test-pieces their thoughts are centred on winning the prize and beating the neighbouring choirs rather than on the music they are performing....There was a time when choirs competed purely for the love of music, when the prizes were small, £10 and £15, and when sight-singing was always included. But now the prizes are enormous, £200 for instance, and no sight-singing is required. But worst than all, the test-pieces do not make for progress. A comparison with present day programmes with those of twenty years ago, reveals the fact that no more demands are made today in vocal music, either from the executive or interpretative points of view. Also the same test-pieces are selected over and over again and are sung by the same choirs. In many instances these test-pieces are not worth the attention of the splendid voices that sing them. Eisteddfod committees have actually been known to be compelled to change a test-piece (which might be somewhat new) at the instance of these choirs, who promise to attend the Eisteddfod only on the condition that one of their favourite 'chestnuts' is chosen. The result is that it is a common thing to hear a choir sing one of these pieces in an inferior manner to what they did in previous years. And then what becomes of all the magnificent choirs that have been heard in Wales of late years? What is their artistic record? The winning of prizes is not an artistic record!... But unless something is done to stem the strong tide of Eisteddfodic anti-progress, the future will indeed be a gloomy one.¹²

Harry Evans was supported by his fellow countryman, the composer D. Emlyn Evans, who lamented the absence of what he obviously considered had been a worthwhile feature of eisteddfodau:

We have travelled a considerable distance on the downward path... One looks back with regret on the period when the most capable of our choirs, led by our ablest conductors, were content to enter the arena of song solely for art's sake, and to be proud, not of the performance of certain announced test-pieces alone, but to submit themselves also to a more trying ordeal technically speaking, namely 'reading at sight'.¹³

Each of these Welsh musicians bemoaned the fact that choirs no longer entered "for Art's sake" and the implication that participation was merely to gain a trophy is clear. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to pinpoint exactly when choirs ever entered competitions solely for the love of music since even some of the early reports of activities "on the field" resemble the less savoury aspects of contact sports competitions rather than an event of artistic purpose. In 1893, for example, Dowlais Harmonic Society disgraced themselves with public quarrels when members who were not able to travel to the Chicago Exhibition in 1893 objected to the choir's prize money (£205 in 1892) being banked to subsidize the trip. They argued that some members were therefore being deprived of their share of the money that they had helped to earn. This may be construed as merely a domestic squabble caused by a few malcontents but the singers of Dowlais were obviously prepared to dispense with Art when Mammon was present.¹⁴ Of the Eisteddfod at Abergavenny in 1888 a correspondent wrote:

I regret to say a disorderly scene occurred in connection with the competition for the prize of £10 between choirs of male voices. The first seven choirs had sung and the Abergavenny Minstrels took up a position on the platform to sing when cries were raised which continued for over a quarter of an hour. It was afterwards explained that the whole of the choirs present must compete or the prize could not be awarded. The choir then was allowed to sing but little attention was given to their efforts.¹⁵

One presumes that the Minstrels had been prepared to sing without some of their members who had not attended sufficient rehearsals and who might therefore spoil the

performance. An unfair advantage could therefore have accrued which those with the Eisteddfod rule-book in their hand were not slow to point out. Strict adherence to rules (as in sport) was demanded.

In the same article containing D. Emlyn ^{Evans} Williams' regrets concerning the "downward path", there is a comparison of the test-pieces in the chief choral classes at the 1908 Blackpool Festival and the Royal National Eisteddfod at Llangollen planned for the same year. Scarlatti, Arensky, Bantock, Cornelius, MacDowell, Brahms and Tchaikovsky are included at Blackpool, all *a capella*, whilst at Llangollen seven out of the nine pieces are by Welsh composers and only two are to be sung unaccompanied.¹⁶

For the male voice choir class the selections were:

Blackpool :

The Patriot's Vow	Cornelius
A War Song	Bantock
Sorrow's Tears	Cornelius
The Crusaders	MacDowell

Llangollen :

Treasures of the Deep	J.H.Roberts
Sons of Gwalia	D.Jenkins

With English festivals ignoring their works, it is hardly surprising that native Welsh composers should hope to have their music included in eisteddfod syllabi. Equally, some of the titles quoted for the Blackpool competition (which included two by a German composer) seem to be tainted by the type of meretriciousness complained of in relation to eisteddfod choices. However, an indication as to the relative merits of the Welsh pieces is evidenced by Granville Bantock's withdrawal from his position as adjudicator at the Welsh event on the grounds that the works were inadequate for such

an important occasion.

Defence of the situation at eisteddfodau was offered from time to time and in *The Musical Times* a correspondent from across the border in Chester offered some very valid points:

Much has been written in various newspapers and journals anent (*sic*) the recent defeats of Welsh choirs and the selection of music for competition. While agreeing in the main with many of the criticisms both Welsh and English, there seems to me to be a strong point very much overlooked, namely the circumstances attending the formation of choirs in Wales.

1) Of what material are they formed? Generally speaking, of the respectable working-classes, men with families, whose total earnings are anything between fifteen and thirty shillings a week.

2) What opportunities have they for studying vocal culture? Generally speaking, none.

3) By what means do they learn their music? By the system of Tonic Sol-Fa taught in the Day Schools and small classes held by senior members or conductors of small choral societies.

4) What opportunities have the teachers had of studying vocal culture? Practically none. How, therefore, can they convey that which they never learnt, and compete successfully with English choirs who have the means and opportunities at their very doors?¹⁷

"T.E." of Chester went on to suggest that, per head of population, more of the "wage-earning classes" in Wales involved themselves "in the furthering of Art" than in England and, since there seems to be a plethora of music teachers in England, some of them might like to "try their chances of making a living where real artistic culture, generally speaking, can neither be had or paid for." He suggested residence "in the Principality and working among those who would be only too pleased to avail themselves of the privilege." Large parts of Wales certainly were economically disadvantaged at the turn of the century compared with England and so the basic argument in the letter seems indisputable. It is not without social significance that in

1899 at Tonypany the prizes for the conductors of the first two male choirs included a pair of boots and a pair of trousers. Yet the Nonconformist churches, the source of so much tonic-sol-fah teaching, were stronger in Wales than anywhere else in Britain and, as Harry Evans showed, there existed pupil-teacher posts through which talented young musicians could train.

As a result of all the adverse comment and publicity the eisteddfau received in the early years of the century, an Association of Choral Societies and Eisteddfod representatives was formed in 1908 whose first object was

To provide a central organization for choir conductors and Eisteddfod secretaries, and generally to do all such things as from time to time may be necessary to elevate the status of choirs and Eisteddfau, and promote the advancement and progress of music."¹⁸

There were a considerable number of other objects in the constitution and these, combined with an unwieldy executive of over forty members, may have been the reason for the Association's seeming lack of success. Certainly, such an organization could not have been helped by the lack of orchestral societies with which to combine for oratorio work, nor by the absence of any conservatoires from which a new generation of conductors could emerge.

With no background in a *capella* singing and with their eisteddfod committees choosing from a narrow, unimaginative range of music, the cor meibion (male choirs) were trammelled. A pattern of inevitability was established from which few choirs escaped and elements of this have filtered down to the end of this century when English male choirs in competitions with Welsh are predictably preferred. Against a background of some beautiful singing of indifferent music and Nonconformist zeal for

hymn-singing, competitive tensions were graphically caught in a report published in *The Musical Times* concerning the National Eisteddfod held in Corwen on August 7th 1919:

The male voice choir contest took place in an atmosphere of tense excitement that occasionally flamed up into a threat of disorder. Fortunately the singing of a hymn served to calm the gathering. To one accustomed to the patience and placid good humour of a London crowd, there is something almost terrifying in a gathering where the emotions lie so near the surface that they may be roused and soothed by means that would leave the Saxon cold. Here a word of praise is due to the officials in charge - known as the conductors - who were ready with an oration of any length, grave or gay, wherewith to fill up gaps. When the savage breast refused to be soothed by words, the conductor struck up a hymn, and had the audience singing in less time than an English chairman would have taken to decide on the tune or key. As is usually the case with those who are gifted with a ready tongue, the conductors talked too much, and occasionally delayed the proceedings, but of their eloquence, tact and domination over the crowd it is difficult to speak too highly. There might easily have been some ugly moments in the over-heated and congested hall today but for their never-failing supply of homilies and anecdotes - the latter producing such roars of laughter that I regretted my ignorance of Welsh till a native informed me that they were mainly chestnuts.

Of the twenty-one male-choirs who had entered, eighteen appeared. The tests were Vaughan Thomas's 'The Lost Love' (Wordsworth's 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways'), sung unaccompanied, and D. Protheroe's 'Invictus', a setting of Henley's well-known lines. Both pieces left a good deal to be desired as music. The first almost entirely failed to express the poignant personal feeling of the poem, and the second, in spite of some dramatic moments, was spoilt by the conventional character of most of the means employed for emotional purposes, the *coda* being especially weak.

The strife was long - nearly three-and-a-half hours. With few exceptions the choirs displayed beautiful tone and blend, the best of them, in breadth and sonority, suggesting organ-tone. The chief failure was in regard to intonation, few ending the unaccompanied song without a slight loss of pitch. In 'Invictus' the more chromatic passages - which also happened to be very loud - caused trouble, many of the choirs forcing and sharpening painfully. The best of the singing was wonderfully good. The amount of discipline that must have gone into the production of such ensemble made one wonder why our not too economical government does not spend a few thousands of pounds on male-voice choralism as an antidote to Bolshevism. It would be difficult to imagine anything less suggestive of industrial unrest than the sight of these men - nearly two thousand of them altogether, and many of them from South Wales collieries - singing difficult music from memory, absorbed in their task, obedient to every sign from their conductor (never stopping to reflect that, after all, he was an autocrat!) and fighting as keenly

as any of their mates at football. Nobody stopped to demand a soviet, and there was no talk of downing voices.

The choirs varied greatly in size - from sixty to a hundred and thirty - and it looked as though the heavyweights were going to carry the day. but a Lancashire choir, Nelson Arion (Mr. Lawson Berry) gave us a new version of the old North Country saying by proving conclusively that a *very* good little 'un is always better than a good big 'un. Tredegar Orpheus (Mr. J.D. Evans) came second, and one of the largest choirs, Williamstown (Mr. Ted Lewis), was a close third. The verdict was a long time coming, and a good stiff dose of hymn singing and eloquence had to be administered to the anxious partisans. With this event, the competitive side of the proceedings came to a splendid finish.¹⁹

Such reports, with their descriptions of actual events inside the tent, the size of choirs, singing from memory, the informed comment on the music and its performance, the direct analogy with sport, with even some political comment included, are a treasury of information. Moreover, similar reports were to be found in every daily newspaper, national and local, throughout Britain in the first forty years of this century. From the South Wales News in 1927 we find that almost a decade after the War, matters were only improving slowly. "Our Music Critic" had been congratulating some choirs on their progress but continued:

...others still run in the old grooves, cut deeply twenty years ago by work that is a good mechanical exercise for the voices but cannot be called music. Even where we find a kind of enthusiasm of the right character, it is frequently set in the Handelian or Mendelssohnian grooves and there is no progress from year to year. But of course the worst kind of grooviness is that which runs in the *On the Ramparts* and *The Martyrs of the Arena* type of chorus, sung with the precision of a German military step.²⁰

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHORAL COMPETITIONS IN ENGLAND

It should not be inferred that English choirs exhibited any less keen a sense of competition than their Welsh comrades in song. Rather, it seems that their festivals, as the events developed, were organized along smoother lines. Perhaps, also, the English

temperament could cope with the trauma of competition, the waiting between performances and the anxious moments leading to the announcement of results with more tolerance and equanimity than their Celtic counterparts who apparently needed hymn-singing and oratory as an antidote to anxiety and stress. Interestingly, it was through his experience as an adjudicator at the Welsh National Eisteddfod that John Spencer Curwen founded, in 1882, a competition along modern lines at Stratford in East London. Before that time, his father had organized tonic-sol-fah competitions in the years 1860 to 1862 at the Crystal Palace and at the Exeter Hall. There are also references to music competitions held in Middlesbrough from 1865²¹; in Manchester in 1855 Prize Glee Singing was held at the Belle Vue Gardens,²² and Prize Singing for soloists and glee parties took place at the Temperance Hall in Bradford in 1864²³; the year 1872 saw the start of the festival at Workington in Cumbria.²⁴

The first of the National Music Meetings at the Crystal Palace also took place in 1872 from where *The Musical Times* reported that "amongst the choral bodies, the Bristol Choral Union (Men's Voices), by its admirable and legitimate style of singing, balance of tone and evident appreciation of the composers' intention, fairly carried away the palm."²⁵ Ironically, these meetings were organized by a Welshman, Willert Beale, and the mixed-voice class the following year was won by a choir from South Wales. This prompted the *Morning Post* to declare "that the disinterested spectator forgot even the dearness of coals and shared the pleasures enjoyed by the Welsh miners in their triumph."²⁶ The test pieces for male choirs in 1873 included music by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Schubert. Numbers were limited eighty

members and this time the winner was the Liverpool Representative Choir. The view of the commentator on this occasion was that "...the most satisfactory exhibition of training and real musical culture was afforded by the Male Voice Choirs",²⁷ an indication of the high standards the element of competition was extracting from the gentlemen.

From this time on, there was a proliferation of competitive festivals not only in the major towns and cities - Manchester and Liverpool in 1874, Sheffield 1881, London 1882 (for choral societies in the London district only) - but also, most significantly, in rural areas. This movement had been spear-headed by Mary Wakefield, a mezzo-soprano who had studied with, amongst others, Alberto Randegger and Edvard Grieg. In 1885, she introduced competitions for vocal quartets at the village flower show on her father's estate at Sedgwick near Kendal (then in Westmorland).²⁸ The idea of such contests soon spread and Miss Wakefield found herself addressing meetings throughout the country. By 1904, there were thirty four (largely rural) festivals in operation²⁹ which Miss Wakefield saw principally as a system of music-teaching and for which she claimed "no originality... it (being) a development of the Welsh Eisteddfod minus the stocking-knitting and literature competitions of that well-known function and, in our locality, minus also the pot-hunting element for we have no money prizes."³⁰ It is clear that the principles behind Mary Wakefield's initiative were as much social and educational as musical. She had many allies in her cause, none more so than Miss Mary L. Egerton of York. By the end of the century, she too was addressing meetings on choral competitions and at Brigg, Lincolnshire, in 1899, she

was answering the question "What is the real use of Choral Competitions?"

Now let us take a glance into an ordinary country house, hall, farm or cottage on winter evenings. What are most of us doing? The minority may be pleasantly and usefully employed, the majority are doing nothing, or what amounts to nothing, or worse than nothing. We are most of us living our own lives in our own little circles, we know and we consequently care nothing about those neighbours who are not in our own class, whatever that class may be, neither is there any special reason why we should, for we have no interests in common. This is the more to be deplored in these democratic days, seeing that could we all be in a position to find out each others good qualities there would be far less mischief made about the "classes and masses". It seems to me we might greatly improve on this kind of life. How are we to do this? I think you will agree with me that nothing cements friendship and good fellowship more than a common interest - and this brings me to my point - why shouldn't we make music a common interest? It is an art, which is ready to hand, and so easy to cultivate together in a pleasant way. In most villages we always have a certain number of people who interest themselves more or less in the music of their Churches and Chapels. Others again do a little music at home, playing and singing on their own account. But here their music stops; they know no more about its possibilities of pleasant intercourse - I am speaking of the generality of people - there are of course exceptions and delightful exceptions to this rule. Something is wanted to put a more genial spirit into our village music; and this I plead is what Choral competitions succeed in doing. We all like to go one better than our neighbours and if kept within reasonable limits, nothing is more inspiring (*sic*) than a friendly rivalry. Remember, this spirit lies in all the games and sports for which we English are so famous; we compete with each other, and yet as a rule we remain the best of friends all the time. You will find that Choral competitions act in the same way. They give just the right kind of spur to music - the spur of emulation. My own experience so far in Yorkshire has been that in the villages where these competitions have been taken up, they have brought together everyone who has the least taste for music, and made them as keen as possible; and this has been done in the Vale of York (quite a different country than the crowded West Riding parts) where I was assured most positively that everyone was far too slack to move in the matter. Exactly the reverse has been found to happen, in quite a number of places. The social aspect of the undertaking is also very encouraging, numbers of people have told me how they have enjoyed the gatherings at their practices in the winter. I also know of many friendships having been made in consequence. And here I must urge most emphatically that to be successful these competitions must be conducted on absolutely undenominational grounds. Music has nothing in common with sects or persuasions; when she puts on religious apparel, she appeals to all alike, Protestant, Catholic or Dissenter; when she dons her secular garments she equally appeals to all: therefore in common reason religious differences should be kept out of our minds altogether on this subject.³¹

This appeal to the virtuous aspects of competition which, by implication, forms part of the English psyche, coupled with the aim of improving social intercourse in the village community, forms the cornerstone upon which the competitive movement in Britain was built. It was yet another Mary, Lady Mary Lygon (later Trefusis), who took up the challenge of establishing an association to organize what quickly became a national movement based on the precepts set out by Wakefield and Egerton. This was at a London meeting convened by Mary Wakefield in 1904 and it was at the residence of the Dowager Lady Beauchamp in Belgrave Square on May 17th that Lady Mary Lygon presided over the formation of an Association of Musical Competition Festivals. The presence of members of the aristocracy demonstrates the philanthropic zeal attending the project. Henry Wood and Arthur Somervell were also present, the latter proposing the resolution:

That this meeting expresses its approval of the formation of an Association of Competition Festivals, having as its object a yearly Congress to be held in London, at which papers on subjects specially connected with these Festivals could be read by well-known authorities, and discussions held on all matters of interest or difficulty.³²

Miss Wakefield and Willam MacNaught were appointed joint Secretaries *pro tem*, the latter having sent a letter of apology for his absence - he was "just completing a round of about five weeks' constant adjudications during which I reckon to have faced about 10,000 competitors. Others, of course, have been similarly engaged elsewhere."³³ Miss Wakefield emphasized the *festival* aspect of the competitions thus:

I could not miss this opportunity of calling your attention very briefly to the one point I claim to be original, and adopted in many modern Competition Festivals, and that is the work done by the choirs in the music *not for competition*. To balance *competition*, in my mind *combination* is absolutely necessary, and I do not believe the greatest power for instruction is reached by these Festivals until this

combined work is arrived at. It is the co-operative system adapted to musical requirements. Works can be performed and knowledge of music gained, by separate instruction and massed results, which astonish even those who have had experience of years' standing. To all those who have not yet undertaken it, I commend *music learnt not for competitive purposes* as the highest attainment of the most useful competition lever; therein speaks the voice of a great art quite directly to its humblest votaries, calling them to serve it, without emulation, without rivalry, but simply as '*Music, sacred tongue of God*'.³⁴

This statement is not without significance in terms of the male voice choir situation at the time because, when Miss Wakefield's earnest entreaties were acted upon, it was almost always the mixed voice choirs which combined with local instrumentalists to perform works by Mendelssohn, Handel or Gounod and thus provided the festival with a Grand Finale. Excluded from this activity, it was little wonder that the men were left to contemplate only the competitive side of the proceedings, drowning their sorrows or celebrating on the train or charabanc journey home instead of witnessing "the sacred tongue of God" in combination with other choristers. From a practical point of view, the idea of spending a great deal of time and effort learning tenor and bass parts from an oratorio which they could never perform at their own concerts would not have seemed particularly worthwhile. Furthermore, when one considers how hard the men strove to reach their peak of hoped-for perfection, common-sense prevailed. It would be difficult to imagine the choir concerned in the following article taking the same care over a Gounod SATB work as they obviously did with a male voice arrangement of an Elgar chorus:

For the purpose of non-identification I will locate the rehearsal in the village of Loom Fowt. If the place is mythical, the members of the choir are human beings filled with a desire to win the first prize in a competition soon to be held in a neighbouring town. The *first* prize, not the second, nor the third, is to be won by these worthy Lancastrians. The Loom Fowt choir consists of forty voices, mostly cotton-mill workers and colliers, leavened by the inclusion of the learned village

newsagent, whose decision is absolutely final whenever methods of pronunciation are in dispute.

The conductor of the choir, Silas by name, is likewise conductor of the village brass band. He is a 'gradely musicianer' who earns his daily bread in the humble occupation of 'twisting-in' at the little weaving shed down in the valley. Tonight, this 'gradely musicianer' has forgotten all about healds and reeds, for he is living in the atmosphere his soul loves best - an atmosphere which he would permanently breathe were it possible for his body to subsist upon atmosphere alone. He is about to take his choir through that magnificent chorus of Elgar's, 'The Challenge of Thor', and as I am well known to the conductor and his committee, they have granted me the privilege of remaining in the practice room during the progress of this momentous reherasal.

The conductor stands before his choir without a copy of the music, for he has committed to memory every note of that wonderful chorus. 'Neau then! are yo' ready? Hauve a minnit. As this has to be sung at th' competition 'beaut 'companiment, Ah'll just gie yo' three little beats like this (!!!) afore yo' start, an' then yo' mun brast off like clockwark. Piano, mind yo', *piano!* Neau then (*sotto voce*), one, two, three':

I am the God Thor

I am the War God

I am the Thunderer

The conductor claps his hands and immediately there is silence. With his eyes fixed on one of the basses, he sarcastically remarks: 'Ah towd thee at th' last practice, Tummy, that th' art o' part-singin' wer' to thry an' mak' th' tone seaund as if it aw coom fro' *one* v'ice. Neau when tha geets to that D flat on th' fust part o' th' word "Thunderer", tha'rt not supposed to be sellin' coal, an' tha'rt not supposed to be sheautin' at a football match. If Ah've to spayke to thee ony more, tha'll be one 'at winno' sing wi' this kyre i' th' competition'.

After a little homily upon the wickedness of wasting valuable time, another start is made:

Here in my Northland,

My fastness and fortress

Reign I for ever!

(*Tenors and basses*)

Here amid icebergs

Rule I the nations

Another clap of the conductor's hands; this time it is the tenors who are at fault. 'Well! of all th' wake stuff 'at ever Ah yeard i' me life, this is th' wakest. Yo're noan sittin' on icebergs, yo're singin' abeaut 'em. Do let us ha' some tone. Thry an' imagine yo're on Crowden Moor i' th' middle o' winter an' i' th' dead o' neet, wrapped up in a fur-lined o'ercoat, wi' a drop o' summat warm an' stimmulatin' i' th' pocket an' 'ondy to geet at. Just thry, their's good lads! Neau then, from mark B agen.'

At this attempt the effort is decidedly better, and the singers are allowed to proceed:

This is my hammer,
Miolner the mighty.

'*Stop*' cries a thunderous voice from among the basses. It is the learned newsagent, our specialist in pronunciation. He is about to exercise his authority, granted by the Committee, to stop the singing whenever he detects anything wrong in that particular department. 'It's thee, Smiler', saye the learned newsagent. 'Ah've tow'd thee times beaut number 'at tha munno' bring thy coal-pit manners to these rehearsals. Tha may talk abeaut a "hommor" as mich as tha' likes when tha'rt i' th' pit, but when tha'rt here it'll ha' to be "hammer", with an aspirate on th' fust letter. Dunno' let me ha' to tell thee ony more.' (To the conductor) 'That'll do, Silas. Tha con proceed.' He did!³⁵

There is, of course, an element of condescension in this article. Presumably the author saw fit not to identify the choir because he knew the majority of *The Musical Times* readers would find a great deal of humour in the description of the rehearsal and also in the attempt to reproduce the Pennine dialect, as indeed, eighty five years later, would today's subscribers. This attitude was prevalent amongst writers in the London musical journals and there were often political innuendos too - for example, in the articles quoted on page 148 and the *Morning Post* comment on page 150. However, the article gives us a very rare glimpse into the way a rehearsal would have been taken and illuminates the dedication and enthusiasm which male choirs brought to their performances at small, rural festivals (numbers of which by 1908 approached seventy). It represents a determination to win but also a need to improve and learn and this virtue would have gladdened the heart of Mary Wakefield and her colleagues.

During the period immediately after World War I, it became clear to the officers of the Association of Musical Competition Festivals, and especially to one of its founder members, Lady Mary Trefusis, that it would be of benefit to all festivals if some scheme of co-operation could be established between the small rural festivals and the

very large competitions (at Glasgow and Birmingham, for example). The latter, together with the extensive festivals which had developed in coastal resorts such as Blackpool and Morecambe, had tended to operate independently and thus standards and even methods of assessment varied which caused problems as adjudicators moved from festival to festival.³⁶ Lady Mary, an excellent pianist and choir-trainer when she was not acting as Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen, had shown her resourcefulness and enterprise in 1913 by securing financial support for the Association from the new Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. She managed to persuade the Carnegie representatives in Dunfermline to continue financing what, in 1921, became the British Federation of Musical Competition Festivals.

The Federation was of immense importance to choirs both indirectly, in providing assistance, information and suggestions for the festivals to operate efficiently, and directly in practical matters. For example, through the Federation, special Railway Vouchers were negotiated with the Railway Clearing House,³⁷ enabling choirs to travel reasonably cheaply and comfortably. In some areas, special trains were supplied solely for choirs. If neighbouring Nelson Arion, Colne Orpheus and Nelson Excelsior choirs all decided to enter the Blackpool Festival (which they frequently did), a rake of fifteen coaches packed with male choristers would draw into the station at the seaside town for the day's competitions, returning in the small hours. Welcoming parties were not unknown for the returning victors and performances of the Prize Winning song on the station platform would be demanded before the triumphant vocalists and their supporters trudged home.³⁸ Travel was not always by rail. Road transport was often

employed especially if an early start was required. When Nelson Arion won the Welsh National in 1919, the men had left at 5am "by Motor Charas"³⁹ returning at 1.30am the next day. On this particular occasion, and perhaps because the charabancs were cheaper than the trains, wives accompanied the gentlemen. That this was exceptional is suggested by the secretary's wry comment in the minutes:

Whether (the wives) had anything to do with the success perhaps I had better not say??? They might 'appen want to goa agean.⁴⁰

ADJUDICATORS AND ADJUDICATIONS

During the first years of the century, the male choirs therefore had a net-work of festivals throughout the country at which they could test themselves against each other and against the musical mind of a professional. Few of the leading musicians of the day failed to become involved in the competitive movement so the choirs had the benefit of opinions and comment from the finest in the land. In the early days, of course, John Curwen and his son John Spencer led the field, supported by the singer Alberto Randegger, church musician Joseph Barnby, academics like Ebenezzer Prout and composers such as George Macfarren. At the 1897 Earls Court Diamond Jubilee Year competitions, Arthur Sullivan, Alexander Mackenzie and Hubert Parry were involved, the latter two being, at the time, principals of the Royal Academy and Royal College respectively. Choir trainers like Henry Leslie and Henry Coward undertook adjudicating as did composers Walford Davies, Coleridge-Taylor and Granville Bantock. Elgar was adjudicating at Morecambe in 1911, and names like Vaughan Williams, Arthur Somervell, Hugh Allen and Ernest Newman joined the lists which eventually read like a *Who's Who* of British music. Singers, too, were prepared to

share their experiences. The Irish baritone Harry Plunkett Greene became one of the principal adjudicators in the 1920s at the same time as musicians such as Hugh Robertson, Julius Harrison and Herbert Howells became frequent names in festival programmes. Drs. Sargent and Boult were especially connected with those festivals which included orchestral music in their Final Concerts.

Thus it was that the competition movement strengthened the liason between the worlds of the professional and amateur musician. This already existed, of course, at the mammoth choral performances staged at the annual Birmingham, Leeds, Norwich and Sheffield Festivals. At these events, the large amateur choruses which formed the basis of what became the English oratorio tradition were conducted by many of the conductors and composers (often in their own works) mentioned above. That they were ready to embrace the competitive system, and thus the male voice choir, speaks volumes for the place of the competitive festival in British musical life in the first half of this century.

The busiest adjudicators in the first decades of the century were undoubtedly Harry Evans and William MacNaught. The latter's influence on the competitive movement cannot be estimated. He was constantly propagating the ideas and concepts of competition - the stimulus to education and improvement - defending the movement from attack and demonstrating a commitment and enthusiasm for which he earned enormous respect and affection. In 1908, he wrote an article in *The Daily Mail* where he supported its banner headline *The Great Choral Revival* by stressing the part played by competitions. MacNaught, in his writings generally, seemed to delight in

championing the work of male choirs and this occasion was no exception:

We are in one of Blackpool's sumptuous halls. The choir of working men come from Habergham, a pit district not discoverable on the map or in the "Post Office Guide". With resonant rich voices they sing appallingly difficult music and make an audience of five thousand eager listeners hold their breath with excitement and emotion.

The piece is Elgar's "Reveille", a wonderful composition born of the composer's experience of northern choir singing. How did this choir - as fit to sing before the King and Queen as any choir in the land - gain this splendid technique, this power to interpret the moods of modern composers?

In the first place, by virtue of their natural capacity and the genius of Mr. Hitchen, their conductor, and for the rest by lessons in the severe school of competition.⁴¹

MacNaught was obviously sympathetic to the needs and achievements of the less able choirs and this is probably the reason for his success as an adjudicator. In the same article, he writes of the village competition where "you may hear an ill-balanced choir, composed of children, women and rough men, who sing clumsily, and yet with a simplicity and earnestness that invite sympathy rather than criticism."

Most of the singers in the male voice classes would have considered themselves anything but "rough" and would have been very upset with any judge who suggested the same. As in the sporting world, the "referee" was always the one at fault in the case of disappointing decisions and choirs were alert to seeming inconsistencies in adjudicators' judgements. Some choirs, from the early days of competition, exercised sensible caution in terms of choosing their festivals. In 1903, Nelson Arion were undecided about the Lytham competition: "until we know pieces *and judge* we cannot reply finally".⁴² (Emphasis added). At times a tinge of bitterness and rancour is detectable: "We were beaten by our friends the Habergham Glee Union, at least, Dan Price Esq. said so, and as he was the adjudicator, we have to abide by his decision."⁴³

The Colne Orpheus secretary reported in 1922 that "At Blackpool, we did not qualify for some unaccountable reason. We were left in a quandry (*sic*)."⁴⁴ Again, in 1929, a year in which the Orpheus had already won at six festivals - "The fly in the ointment was Wallesey where the apparent whim of the adjudicator robbed us of being able to say of 1929 festivals 'We are seven'."⁴⁵ Across in Manchester, the secretary of the Co-operative Wholesale Society wrote to festival organizers asking them to reply "advising us as to the best way to protest to Mr. H. Evans against his placing us 8th at New Brighton."⁴⁶ Choirs often consoled themselves with the thought that a decision had gone against them despite popular opinion. The secretary of Colne Orpheus wrote: "At Blackpool on Oct.22, our luck with Sir Ric^d Terry and his co-adjudicator 'Fellowes' was out, but we have the consolation of knowing it was far removed from the view of a vast majority of the audience."⁴⁷

With feelings often running high at festivals, it was not surprising that choirs should wish to organize themselves into a type of union which could represent the views of competing choirs. In 1920, officers of the Todmorden (Lancashire) Male Voice Choir wrote to choirs in their area on the matter and thus the Association of Competitive Choirs was formed for just this purpose. The membership was largely, but not exclusively, male voice choirs and within a few years conferences were being organized and the word "national" appeared in the title. Eventually, at an undocumented moment in time, the National Association of Choirs evolved. It was the infant Association which, in 1927, reacted strongly at its second annual conference to the statement made from the platform of the King's Hall, Ilkley, by Sir Walford Davies

condemning money prizes. The view of the Association was that any cash awarded to a winning choir was a return on the financial outlay made from choir funds and by individual members. The details concerning the male voice choir competition in London in the early years of the century illustrate the argument:

The enthusiasm and enterprise of many provincial choirs are among the most gratifying features of our national life. It is easy to adopt a superior pose and to deprecate the value of much of this activity on the ground that it appears to be stimulated only by competition and prizes. But the undeniable excellence of the artistic results so frequently achieved in this way do not suggest either sordid motives or vanity; rather, they display a laudable desire to attain a high ideal in execution, a willingness to submit to the disciplinary pains and penalties essential to this end, and a perfectly legitimate pride in publicly exhibiting the results of skilful and strenuous endeavour before a responsive and critical audience. This appreciation is suggested by the recent visit of several provincial choirs to the Queen's Hall on the occasion of a competition of male-voice choirs... The prize of £50 fell to the Southport Vocal Union, who, under their highly capable conductor, Mr. J.C. Clarke, gave excellent performances of the test pieces. Some particulars regarding this choir and of the arrangements made for their brief visit to the metropolis will serve to illustrate the spirit with which the organisation is worked. The choir is drawn from the middle and working classes, the latter predominating. The expense of conveying the fifty or so members to and from London was £70. Each member contributed 22s. on the condition that a return was to be made if the choir won the prize, and the remainder was made up by local friends. All the wage-earning members also gave up a day's pay and their out-of-pocket expenses. The choir left Southport at 8.50am., and arrived at the Queen's Hall at 6pm. After singing last of the seven choirs, they awaited the tediously delayed adjudication, and then left St. Pancras at 12.15 midnight, arriving at Southport at 6.30am. ...We have singled out this instance of the bracing effect of competition as typical. The members of the Southport Union were prepared to make a pecuniary sacrifice equal to at least a season's subscription to a 'fashionable' choral society in order to prove their ability, and at least learn a lesson. But the other provincial societies represented on this occasion, from Swansea, Cardiff and Oxford, deserve quite as much credit for their courage and enterprise. They may return to their furrow poorer in money and perhaps sadder in spirit, but yet they have gained an abiding lesson. Defeat to the best spirits is the path to victory.⁴⁸

The British Federation entered the money-prize argument in an official capacity in 1924. Under gentle pressure from the Carnegie Trust, to which financial rewards were

anathema, the suggestion was made to festivals that they should use their prize money to make travelling grants available to all choirs. This would enable the singers to attend for the sake of the music, the friendly rivalry and the lessons to be learnt from the adjudicator. The reaction recorded in the Nelson Arion minutes was echoed elsewhere and suggests that winning money was more than simply a matter of recouping costs:

That with regard to the question of money prizes at Musical Festivals being dropped in favour of grants we do not see our way to agree with this, and that in our opinion, if any alteration is made it should take the form of increasing the Prize Money to be given to the choir obtaining the largest number of points as is the case at present, *otherwise you take away the interest to win.* (Emphasis added).⁴⁹

The minutes of near-neighbours Colne Orpheus show a full measure of agreement on this point, mentioning that the members "favour and support the continuation of Prize Money and disapprove of any system of Grants and Merit Awards".⁵⁰ Colne Valley committee declared that it, too, was "not in favour at present of knocking off money prizes".⁵¹

The issue of "fairness" which the Association of Competitive Choirs championed, has never been, and will never be, resolved. Throughout the history of competitions in Britain, the search for parity has led, among other things, to several attempts to have the adjudicators screened. As early as 1907 the committee of the Southport Competitions introduced this idea, to the consternation of a reporter from *The Musical Times*:

We have left to the last a description of the method of adjudication adopted. The three judges in all the important classes were screened and separated and not permitted to confer, and they gave no detailed criticisms, the results in figures being announced by a member of the festival committee. Then, in case a furtive look at a programme might enable them to discover which choir was singing,

another order of numbering was announced from the platform. Further, an objection was made to the secretary collecting the marks from the three boxes, or 'bathing tents', as Mr. Noble aptly described them, because in doing so he might be tempted to make revelations. The judges so 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in', were three of the most foremost men in the profession, viz. Dr. Cummings, Mr. Coleridge-Taylor, and Mr. Tertius Noble; Dr. Challinor and Mr. R. J. Forbes also assisted. The separation of the judges was the worst feature of the plan. A rapid exchange of ideas in the box is one of the best safeguards against mistakes and the surest means of arriving at the average mind. As it was, the figures showed that in more than one case the opinion of two judges was over-ridden by the contrary opinion of the remaining one, because of the adoption of different standards of marking. We cannot help thinking that the whole tone of the competition festival movement will be lowered and the cause seriously damaged if this method of treating the judges is generally adopted. A fine aroma of friendly trust and mutual respect will be displaced by an odour of suspicion. A judge with a reputation to lose has the strongest possible motive not to show a bias, especially as he works in public in the fierce light that beats about the adjudicator's throne. His great anxiety is to arrive at a fair and honest conclusion and be true to himself. We trust the Southport committee, in their praiseworthy zeal for perfection, will not persevere in a scheme which has been condemned alike by competitors, audiences and adjudicators.⁵²

Mr. John James, an adjudicator from the town of Hanley in the Potteries, added the professional's viewpoint:

It is an insult to ask any adjudicators to accept such conditions. If conductors and adjudicators would have the courage to decline to have anything to do with festivals that foster this method, it would cease immediately. I have refused to adjudicate under similar circumstances until the 'bathing van' has been removed. I appeal to various executive committees to adopt methods in harmony with our Divine Art so that we may have perfect ensemble with competitors and adjudicators.⁵³

Yet, as late as 1953, the National Association of Choirs (N.A.C.) - then, as now, with a membership dominated by male choirs - sent delegates to the Annual Conference of the British Federation of Music Festivals asking if adjudicators could be screened. Herbert Wiseman, then Vice-Chairman of the Federation, rejecting the suggestion, asserted that "we would not like, in fact would refuse to work, behind a screen."⁵⁴ Other appeals from the N.A.C. at the same Conference, all in the interests of

"fairness", included public balloting for order of performance (it being widely regarded as being disadvantageous to sing first) and for the exclusion of competitors from the hall (the logic of which seemed to escape every delegate). For many years, a campaign was organized by the N.A.C. to outlaw "Own Choice" pieces on the basis that the adjudicators were not comparing like with like.⁵⁵

These ideas, emanating, it must be remembered, from an Association formed originally by male choirs, reflect the attention some of the gentlemen paid to the sharper edge of competition. The principles of the brass band movement, with its league tables, promotions, relegation and balloting for order of balloting at competitions, have never, happily, seriously infiltrated the choral movement. Many choir members over the years, probably a silent majority, have never unduly worried about such details of alleged unfairness. Nevertheless, some always have and it is often the more vocal minority, seen as keen and enthusiastic on choir matters generally, who find themselves elected to committees. Any antagonism, however, has been directed at festival organizers while, fortunately, relations between choirs over competition matters have been far less volatile. Hence the Colne Orpheus decision in October 1923 "that the choir send congratulations to Mr. A. Higson and Warrington choir on last Saturday's success"⁵⁶ was only one of many such messages sent between choirs during this period. There was even room for allowing "free transfers" of singers for special events. In August 1923, Nelson Arion agreed to Colne Orpheus' request to borrow two tenors and three baritones to sing at the Blackpool Competitions and in April the following year the Arion minutes record that "we ask the same five Bottom

Basses of Colne Orpheus to help us out at Rentrevoiles that helped on a previous occasion."⁵⁷ The men from the Orpheus were paid seven shillings expenses and one wonders how other smaller, less well-financed choirs at the competition would have regarded the "fairness" of the mighty Arion entering the temporary transfer market. Some choirs were quite open about attempts to entice members from other choirs. In 1927, Colne Valley resolved that "the Secretary visit a few of the choirs in the district and try to secure new members for our own choir".⁵⁸

ON THE COMPETITION FIELD

In the competition hall itself, the organizers tried, not surprisingly knowing that they were dealing with many a barrack-room lawyer, to ensure fairness. Details of the regulations regarding minimum and maximum choir numbers were printed in the programmes so that any member of the audience could check that this rule was adhered to. There were often two classes for male voices choirs and at the turn of the century these would have been for choirs with alto lead or tenor lead. Some choirs continued to include alto-lead glees in their repertoire until almost the end of the Thirties with some basses moving up to take the alto lines. However, the practice was discontinued by most groups in the post World War 1 period. Thus, the custom developed of dividing the classes numerically. The programme for the 1923 Morecambe Festival states that for Class 41 Male Voice Choirs (A) "each choir must consist of at least 20 voices and not more than 40 voices" while Class 42 Male Voice Choirs (B) was for "at least 16 and not more than 36 voices"⁵⁹ with choirs allowed to

enter only one class. The subtle difference in numbers may have had as much to do with the ability to fit all of the choristers into the hall (there were twelve present that day) as with the self-standardizing which choirs applied - the B choirs were generally acknowledged to be smaller, less-experienced and had correspondingly less-taxing test pieces. It was almost always agreed at English festivals that some upper limit on choir numbers should be applied to minimize the advantage in terms of blend, power and impact which could accrue to the large well-established choirs from urban and other well-populated areas. In the pre-World War One programmes of the Lytham-St.-Annes Festival, the notice appended to each *a capella* class again indicates an attempt to be fair to competitors, adjudicators and audience alike: "Strict Silence is requested after each unaccompanied piece until the Chord has been struck."⁶⁰ Only after the pitch has been checked, by all, could the applause of supporters burst forth and one can imagine the groans of despair or the opposition's delight when the often long and complicated test piece was heard to have slipped imperceptibly down a semitone or, worse, to have been forced upwards by some over-enthusiastic vocalizing.

In the same programmes from Lytham are found not only the words of the test pieces, printed in full (a factor common to most festivals in the first decades of this century) but also very detailed notes on the songs and their composers. Sometimes the notes concentrated on the music itself, as in 1909 when Elgar's *Reveille* was set:

This work is a rugged, virile setting of Bret Harte's poem, dealing with the call to arms of the American North in the cause of anti-slavery. To suggest "the tramp of thousands, and of armed men, the hum" as well as "The quick alarming drum," writes Mr. A.E. Jaeger, "great and masterly use is made of the rhythmical staccato quaver-figure, occasionally for the basses alone, in monotoned bare fourths, while to the tenors (ff) is given the reiterated 'Come, come.'"⁶¹

With less-well-known composers, biographical notes seemed to suffice. Partnering the Elgar in 1909 was a song by C. Lee Williams who was, apparently, "the fifth son of Rev. David Williams, Rector of Alton Barnes, Wiltshire... born in 1852. In early boyhood he was placed in the choir of New College, Oxford...etc."⁶² None of this detail would have aided the audience's appreciation of the setting of *To Celia*. Occasionally, the anonymous compiler of the programme notes allowed himself to digress and include some political comment, as in the following, written in 1911, on Bantock's *Marching Along*:

... a setting of the first of Robert Browning's three "Cavalier Tunes", of which he writes that "though for the most part lyric in expression, they are always dramatic in principle, being so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine." The reckless loyalty, with its animal spirits and its dash of grief, the bitterer because grief must be dismissed, is true to the time in its heartiness and gallant bluffness, and this is faithfully reflected in the musical setting. Quite recently the "Westminster Gazette", commenting on the selection of this piece, said that choirs singing this Royalist ditty "may congratulate themselves that they live under an Asquith administration, and not one headed by "King Pym."⁶³

Adjudicator/composers were, it seems, popular. It was promulgated by the male choirmen that one could not argue with the adjudicator's view on the interpretation of his own composition; one possible source of unfairness - the subjective thoughts of a third party coming between performer and composer - was therefore eliminated. In 1906, at the Mrs. Sunderland Festival in Huddersfield, Roland Rogers, for example, adjudicated his own *Break on the Cold Grey Stones* in the male voice class. At Buxton in 1929, Granville Bantock adjudicated a small entry of three choirs when his *Midnight* was set for the men and there was a similar number of entries in 1935 at the same festival when Armstrong Gibbs heard his magnificent setting of *Tiger, Tiger*.

Two years later, Gibbs was at Huddersfield working alongside Thomas Dunhill and the test pieces were Gibb's *Go Lovely Rose* and Dunhill's *Puck's Song*. It was a special thrill for the successful choirs to be told they had fulfilled the composer's expectations.

Another cause for the gentlemen's concern regarding parity in competitions was the actual marking system. In the early days, the adjudicators were left to their own devices and it can be seen from the published results that the marks would sometimes be out of a possible one hundred or one hundred and twenty or one hundred and fifty. In some festivals, the competition was extended over two sessions and the aggregate of marks produced a winner. At the 1914 conference of the Association of Competitive Music Festivals "it was decided that judges should be free to adopt any system of marking they pleased."⁶⁴ The conference discussion may have been prompted by the action of Walford Davies in awarding full marks at Ilkley in May of that year to both Nelson Arion and Holme Valley Male Voice Choir for their performances of *Lorraine*, *Lorraine*, *Loree*. Perhaps there was irony or even cynicism in Davis's marking as he had drawn praise at the Westmoreland Festival in the previous April where "... his remarks on the multiplication and over-emphasis of points were admirable, for this is one of the evils which may so easily be induced by competition..."⁶⁵

In 1921, the new British Federation of Musical Competition Festivals tried to rectify this confused situation by setting up a sub-committee (which included Adrian Boult) to advise and recommend a standard mark sheet. This duly appeared, with a very detailed scheme whereby tuning, diction and other matters of technique were to be marked out of ten, leaving fifty marks for Interpretation (see Appendix 4a). The main instigators,

Harry Plunket Greene and Hugh Robertson, repented "in sack-cloth and ashes"⁶⁶ in 1929, admitting that adjudicators had better things to do than be "Chartered Accountants."⁶⁸ The business of adding up so many numbers and trying to write a constructive criticism at the same time had led to most adjudicators simply filling in the final total first and then going back to the various columns and entering appropriate numbers. Thus the male choirs, in common with the SATB and ladies choirs, had to be satisfied with a system of euphemisms (which only began to disappear in the late 1980s) whereby seventy five per cent represented a very feeble performance, eighty per cent was adequate, eighty five per cent very good and ninety per cent and above outstanding, with the intervening numbers used for positioning.

MEDIA INTEREST

As with all matters relating to choir concerts and charity events, the national and local press were involved in publishing not just the results from the competitions but also verbatim reports of adjudications. In addition, there was commentary on the quality of test pieces, on the principles behind the competition festival movement and on other social as well as technical aspects of the competitions. *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* seemed particularly interested in the wider issues of the principle of competition in the Arts although in 1920 that great champion of both competitions and male voice choirs, William McNaught, had to take a *Daily Telegraph* contributor to task in the pages of *The Musical Times* for misunderstanding the workings of the festival movement:

The Holme Valley Male Voice Choir introduced a new excitement into London

music for a few days during last month. The choir was brought up to sing at a concert of the British Music Society, and afterwards appeared at the Palladium. Its resonant tone...its fine drill, and its grip of expression were very stimulating. The first quality in the singing was cleverness, and choral cleverness is sufficiently rare in our southern regions to be refreshing when it does appear, even to those who are fully aware that it is not the ultimate goal in choral work and that the typical northern choir has other and more refined faculties in its grasp. It is well known that the school from which these faculties spring is the Competition Festival, which has built great things out of the helpful material of northern voices. But a writer in the *Daily Telegraph*... has been led by the singing of the Holme Valley Choir into wrongly estimating the tendencies of the competitive idea... He writes: 'Briefly, this choir appears to be a direct product of the Competition Festival, to be a living example of the artistic dangers of that movement. One may congratulate Mr. Silverwood and his choir upon their efficiency - an efficiency that implies much keenness and discipline. But efficiency alone will not make music, even if it wins points in competitions. This anxiety to make "points" only resulted yesterday in an exaggeration (chiefly dynamic) that was at times startling. The strident opening of Elgar's *Feasting I Watch* was a case in point; for here was a reflective and dignified poem not merely misunderstood but destroyed.' Without casting any doubt on his musical judgment of the singing, one may question the moral he draws from it.

If the Holme Valley Choir was as bad as he says - ('here a crescendo without meaning, there a decrescendo, commas in the text inflated into semi-colons and full-stops') - then it was a living example, not of the dangers of the competition movement, but of the dangers it strives to overcome. There are so many people without experience of our festivals who are ready to seize upon any opportunity for criticising them, that a somewhat misleading opinion published with the full authority of *The Daily Telegraph's* musical stall should not pass unnoticed. If the competition movement were in the hands of unimaginative people, and were left to develop on sporting lines, there would be a danger that mere cleverness and ear-tickling display would 'win points' from the sporting and musically-blind referees. But the movement is, happily, better shepherded. Its artistic utility is in the hands, not of secretaries and committees, but of adjudicators; and it is not complimentary to the eminent musicians - men susceptible to every refinement in music and its interpretation - who have set the standard at competitions for the last thirty years, to accuse them of such narrowness as to exalt technical display. With any adjudicator worth his salt, as most of them are, a too strident opening in *Feasting I Watch* would count as a fault and lead to a 'loss of points.' One would have thought this obvious. It is hardly fair to saddle the competition movement with the existence of errors it strives to check.⁶⁸

On this occasion, McNaught does not appear convincing - he seems to have missed the *Telegraph's* point that if the Holme Valley Choir was as good as its reputation,

publicity and place at a British Music Society concert suggests, and if it was indeed a product of the competition movement, then why does it still produce a stridently ineffective opening of the Elgar part-song? The implication is that the choir should have eradicated faults at the competitions. Certainly, any Holme Valley readers of the newspaper would be more likely to take the view that anything enabling a choir to win points at a competition, be it called effect, discipline or cleverness, is valid. Surely, the men would argue, that is what we compete for? Dr. McNaught's more esoteric and aesthetic approach would probably be lost on many of the male choir members in the Twenties, as indeed it would be seventy years later in our own time.

From the detail included in local newspaper reports in the early part of the century, one can only presume that there was an extensive readership considerably interested in matters of choral balance, blend and tone control, as is shown in the following report on the male voice choir class at the 1904 Brigg (Lincolnshire) Festival. This notice appeared in the *Hull Times* concluding with the results which show a refreshing honesty in the marking:

A conspicuous fault of the BRIGG choir... was a lack of restraint which resulted in tumultuousness. In *The Boys From Wexford* the rendering was somewhat spasmodic. Still it was obvious that the singers had been carefully trained and they sang with precision... The choir from SPILSBY was conducted by a lady. They sang... with commendable smartness of attack and finish. Into the other number there crept a little harshness at the *forte* passages and there was some untunefulness at times. BARTON was represented by a choir whose conductor exercised a splendid watchfulness... There was no harshness or tendency to shout and no forcing in the loud passages... The good quality of the first tenors was well revealed in the second piece... SCUNTHORPE sent a very capable body of male singers in the Appollo Choir but their ensemble in *He who trusts* was not quite what it might have been and there was just a sense of want of refinement....
Barton 103, Scunthorpe 101, Brigg 91 Spilsby 48⁶⁹

The above forms only a part of a much longer report on a mere four choirs singing two songs each. At the time, there were over seventy festivals affiliated to the Association of Musical Competition Festivals in addition to the Welsh Eisteddfau and it can be presumed that the service provided by the *Hull Times* was mirrored around the land. Brigg, though a small village, had developed an important festival largely through the interest of Gervase Elwes (a distinguished tenor soloist) and his family who lived locally. The leading adjudicators of the day were engaged, including professional colleagues of Elwes such as Plunket Greene, and the proceedings were often enlivened by the presence of Percy Grainger who would present his own piano transcriptions or some Liszt Hungarian Rhapsodies during the final concert. This would account for the more than usual interest shown by the journalists in Hull, some fifteen miles and a ferry journey away across the Humber. Since all of the festivals, large or small, became focal points for the cultural activities of their communities, detailed newspaper reporting was taken for granted although it was only the larger festivals which caught the attention of the national press. By the Twenties, the events on the North-West coast, at Blackpool, Morecambe, Southport and Lytham secured most of the headlines because of their sheer size, and the choirs and solo singers began to regard a prize at these festivals as something of a Blue Riband. The scope of the Morecambe Festival can be judged by the Preface to the 1905 Programme (see Appendix 4B). The presence of Edward Elgar (a personal friend of the Chairman, Rev. Gorton), Henry Coward and William McNaught ("the Prince of Judges"), with deepest apologies from Hubert Parry for his absence, the budget of over £1,200, the four

thousand competitors, a chorus of over three hundred for the final concert and a recital by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wood would obviously tempt Fleet Street away from the Great Wen to what Elgar described as the musical centre of England. Little wonder then that the male choirs wanted to be seen to be in such company, especially as the composers were paying them the compliment of providing new material for them year by year.

The Musical Times, for its part, found that there was so much interest in the competitive movement that from 1899 it published a special supplement (a re-print from its sister publication *The School Music Review*) so that festivals could be comprehensively reported. Test pieces were listed, as were participating choirs and the results. Adjudicators' comments were summarized and matters germane to the movement were discussed. In the January 1911 edition, a full list of music set at the Blackpool Festival in the previous October was published from which it can be seen that the men were required to learn part-songs by Brahms, Bantock, Cornelius and Coleridge-Taylor for choirs with a tenor lead, while music by Stanford and Lee Williams was featured for those with an alto lead.

* * * * *

Whether due to the already noted suspicion that many male choirmen (or their committees) held for the established choral competitions or because the men felt that their organizational prowess could produce something more rewarding, there always have been competitions organized by male voice choirs for, as it were, their own consumption. The first full Year Book (1923) of the British Federation of Musical Competition Festivals lists such an event in Cheshire. The Congleton Male Voice

Choir Festival included, in addition to the main classes for male choirs, competitions for mixed voices, solos and instruments. In December of the previous year, Mexborough and Swinton (Yorkshire) Railwaymen's Male Voice Choir organized its first competition, with an entry of twelve choirs. The Oldbury Musical Festival, in what is now the West Midlands, was organized in 1927 "by the Oldbury Male Voice Choir... (and was) held at Messrs. Accles and Pollocks Sports Ground, Oldbury."⁷⁰ Similar events were also organized in the late Thirties by Darlington Male Voice Choir and by Burslem Orpheus. Sometimes the initiative came from member-festivals of the Federation who were often able to organize classes on request for embryonic male choirs. A delegate at the Federation Conference in 1933 relates:

I had a letter to the Leamington Festival a year or two back which pleased me very much. It said "We are ten farm labourers, fond of singing. Is there any class in your festival which we could enter?" ... I went to the village to see the writer and found him fearfully keen. I said "We can fix you up in the Festival" and I put in a 2-part Male Voice class."⁷¹

This cooperation between male choirs and festivals, demonstrating support for the work of the British Federation has, in turn, been acknowledged by the Federation. Courses for their conductors were organized, pre-war at the Royal Academy of Music and post-war at the Federation's Downe House Summer Schools. Leading conductors in the field were invited to speak on the subject of male voice work at Federation annual conferences. Fred Tomlinson of Rossendale and Ronald Riley of Colne Orpheus Glee Union, for example, addressed the 1959 conference.⁷²

During the period of World War Two, the festival movement itself, through the British Federation, thrived, having benefited from the first-ever dispensation of

Government funds for the Arts (through the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts). However, new classes in the festivals were concentrating attention on the young and on instrumental music in particular and, over the next fifteen years, there was a gradual decline in the number of entries from choirs - mixed as well as male voice. The ever-present problem of transport costs became more pressing and the situation was highlighted at the Federation's annual conference in 1961 when the Chairman, Sir Knowles Edge, remarked on the absence from festivals of the large choirs - "... almost economically impossible units... so expensive to move...feed...accommodate, and so impossible to take on many occasion during the seasons to festivals...(We are) losing something which in itself helped to make the Festival Movement."⁷³ What Sir Knowles would have found hard to admit was that, by the early Sixties, the concept of the competition movement as an educational tool for choral singing had been largely completed. In the early days of the festivals, the annual competition was the only chance many amateur choir conductors had to learn something of what was expected of them. They relied on the festival for repertoire, learnt from the work prepared for massed performance conducted by the eminent adjudicator, learnt from the adjudicator's comments and from hearing choirs other than their own. Post-war improvements in standards of musical education, however, had broadened the scope of activity such that, particularly in the mixed choir field, choir conductors often had formal training in general musicianship if not in the specific techniques of choral direction. The yet more accessible radio provided not only concerts but talks on music, theoretical and historical. The need to compete declined

therefore at the same time as the expense of competing increased and the link between declining involvement at festivals and the lessening of influence and public awareness of the male voice choir is no coincidence. Fewer entries led to declining interest as the gentlemen only really enjoyed competing when the field was full and the competition keen.

In some respects the present-day, specialist competitions for male voice choirs have filled the near-vacuum in the competition field, although these generally occur to mark anniversaries (as when Nelson Arion celebrated its Centenary in 1987 or Highfield (Cheshire) its 80th birthday in 1991). However, there are a number of established annual competitions, the oldest of which is the Cornwall Open Championship for Male Voice Choirs. This is a classic example of male choir activity involving charity work and business support. In 1980, the Rotary Club of St. Austell, several of whose members sang in local choirs, initiated the competition to fulfill a perceived need amongst Cornish choirs and to provide a way of producing revenue for distribution to charities. In the first ten years, over £7000 has been distributed to music groups, school music departments and choirs in the area. English China Clay International make available a marquee in the grounds of their Headquarters, John Keys House; money prizes (initially from the local Rotary Club but later self-financed) approaching £2000 are offered to the winning choirs in three classes - Intermediate, Advanced and what is termed the Concert Class. In this, instead of the usual test piece plus own choice, the choir is given ten minutes programme time to fill as they please. There is a ballot for order of performance but the adjudication is open.

The only disappointment (with over thirty choirs affiliated to the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs) would appear to be that entries have varied between as few as five and never more than ten choirs. Some have travelled from Wales and Yorkshire to participate.

The South Woodham Ferrers Festival of Male Voice Choirs in Essex was instituted in 1984 through the initiative of the South Woodham Ferrers choir and has grown to involve some dozen or so choirs mostly from the South-East. Thus, this event can also be seen to be filling a need since that area of England is not over-populated with male choir organizations. Sponsorship has enabled the offering of £200-£300 prizes and thus a ballot is held for order of performance. Unfortunately, the choice of Test Pieces over the years has been singularly unimaginative and lacking in enterprise and the hope still is that some of the sponsors will provide money to commission new works. For the time being, the Festival itself is doing little to forward the cause and development of male choral work. It might be said to be helping to arrest its demise although a glance at the 1989 Festival Concert programme reveals that, of the fourteen items, thirteen could have been (indeed, often were) included in programmes as far back as 1929. Welsh hymn-tunes, German part-songs and Verdi opera choruses form the core of the work. Obviously, to find songs that as many as a dozen choirs will be familiar with and can produce at concert standard without an inordinate amount of work, inevitably means progressing at the pace/ability of the weakest. Undoubtedly, the majority of the men enjoy singing the well-known standards just as, no doubt, their audience are thrilled to hear them. One is nevertheless bound to question whether

a competition and concert in this form can actually thrive and develop musically and artistically.

No such charge of moribundity can be levelled at the Northern (later National) Male Voice Choir Championships held in Huddersfield as, apart from the first year of the event (1985), a new test piece has been commissioned for each competition. After an ultra-cautious start, some worthwhile pieces have been forthcoming and one looks forward to more widening of the repertoire in areas of previous conservatism.⁷⁴ Major sponsorship has enabled prizes of £3000 to be offered and the result is that each year a dozen or so choirs assemble at the Town Hall, are marshalled by the organizing choir, Gledholt, to compete for what to most choirs would appear to be a small fortune. It is a sad reflection on the attitudes of some, probably most, conductors and choirs taking part that the financial incentive needs to be so very large before new music of some contemporary substance is undertaken. The hope always is that, having tasted the vivid, the colourful, the substantial, the new, conductors will learn how to convey such ideas to their singers and that, together, they look for other works in the same style. In this sense, the National Championship is a beacon in the usually-pervading gloom of the standard male choir repertoire. It seems churlish therefore to point to the organizers' mistrust of adjudicators - whom they shut up in a plywood box - and their unwillingness to let a choir show its own initiative and enterprise in an own choice piece. Of these two issues, the first is probably the most contentious as, far from ensuring fairness, it actually militates against some choirs. As one adjudicator explained,⁷⁵ the walls of the box, with holes drilled to allow the sound through, tend to

filter out the tenor sound so that choirs with already weak tenors are placed at a disadvantage in matters of balance. These issues devalue the event but are presumably inevitable if the committee is not prepared to face the malcontents they would expect at the end of an "open" session. They have perhaps discovered by now that, even with balloting for order of singing, with closed adjudications and with all the choirs singing the same pieces, there will still be complaints, if only from those conductors who realise that unsighted adjudicators are limited in the teaching they provide.

This type of competition has, of course, lost touch with much of the original aim and purpose set out by the philanthropic Edwardian ladies who pioneered the choral competition movement. Solely to find a winner on the day was never the intention and whilst it is true to say that, without the enthusiastic support throughout this century of the male voice choirs the competition movement may not have flourished so readily, the point has now been reached where the gentlemen could be said to be stifling the most important aim. In their quest for fairness, the educational aspect of the proceedings is in danger of being lost and whilst there are more and more very competent conductors and accompanists working with male choirs, evidence suggests that more education and training is still required. This is particularly true if the repertoire is to develop along lines which will ensure a continuation and furtherance of the male choir rather than its mere metamorphosis as an inter-war-period museum piece. Unless things change quite dramatically, never again will an adjudicator be able to write about male voice choirs in competition:

...(there is) no doubt that male choirs throughout Scotland and England, in vividness and picturesqueness and that sense of zeal, far oftener rose to the top of

vocal accomplishment than in any other form of technique.⁷⁶

NOTES ON CHAPTER 4 - THE COMPETITION FACTOR

- 1 Staton F. How Success at Musical Competitive Festivals is Won (undated) p.5
- 2 In Sadie S. (ed.) The New Grove Dictionary, (1980) p.847, reference is made to Schumann travelling in August 1851 "to Antwerp to judge a competition for men's voices" organized by the Belgian Men's Singing Society: also in Latham A. The New Oxford Companion to Music (1983) mention is made of Schumann being on the jury and conducting at Dusseldorf the following year.
- 3 Boyd M., "Eisteddfod", Sadie S.(ed.) op.cit.
- 4 *The Musical Times* (hereafter *MT*) October 1902 p.661
- 5 *MT* July 1903 p.482
- 6 ibid. October 1902 p.661
- 7 ibid. July 1903 p.453
- 8 ibid. September 1899 p.617
- 9 ibid. February 1904 p.119
- 10 ibid. October 1908 - in Extra Supplement *The Competition Festival Record*
- 11 ibid. September 1910 - in Supplement
- 12 ibid. August 1907 p.523
- 13 ibid. August 1907 p.526
- 14 ibid. July 1892 p.403
- 15 ibid. May 1888 p.291
- 16 From the evidence of contemporary reports, vocal parts in a *capella* pieces were often doubled on piano. The report in *MT* February 1904 p.119 on the Cardiff Eisteddfod mentions that "some choirs used the piano forte to support the pitch...Surely it was a regrettable weakness..." Others such references are found in the Competition Festival Record published as a Supplement to *MT* from 1899 onwards.
- 17 *MT* October 1903 p.611

- 18 *ibid.* January 1908 p.21
- 19 *ibid.* September 1919 p.475
- 20 South Wales News March 11th 1927
- 21 *MT* February 1913 (Supplement) p.3
- 22 See Scholes P. (ed.) Oxford Companion to Music 9th Edition (1955) p.213
- 23 *ibid.* p.213
- 24 From correspondence in the archives of The British Federation of Festivals, Macclesfield, from John Mounsey, then Chairman of the Workington Festival, to the Federation secretary, dated March 1st 1987. However, in *MT* February 1911 (Supplement), reference is made to that year's festival as being the thirty-sixth, suggesting a starting date of 1875.
- 25 *MT* August 1872 p.562
- 26 *ibid.* November 1911 (Supplement) p.8 - quoting from the *Morning Post*
- 27 *ibid.* August 1873 p.176
- 28 See Newmarch R. Mary Wakefield (1912)
- 29 The thirty four festivals are listed in the report of the formation of the Association of Competitive Choirs *MT* June 1904 p.393
- 30 Wakefield A.M. "The Aims and Objects of Musical Competition Festivals and How to Form Them", Reprinted in *The Dominion* Autumn 1904
- 31 From "An Address on Choral Competitions" given at Brigg, October 14th, reported in *The Linley and Lincolnshire Star*, October 21st 1899
- 32 *MT* June 1904 p.393
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 *ibid.* p.392
- 35 *MT* September 1908 p.597

- 36 This problem occupied the minds, and pens, of many interested parties, including a *Daily Telegraph* journalist, in the columns of the *MT* Competition Festival Record Supplement particularly from January - October 1913.
- 37 Copies of these Vouchers, which offered discounts to choir members, are held in the archives of the British Federation of Festivals, Macclesfield.
- 38 Details from conversation between the author and Mr.Arthur Hartley, President of Colne Orpheus Glee Union, in May 1990
- 39 Nelson Arion Glee Union Minutes of Annual General Meeting January 1919
- 40 Op.cit.
- 41 *The Daily Mail* November 5th 1908
- 42 Nelson Arion Committee Minutes October 19th 1903
- 43 ibid. Whitsun 1911
- 44 Colne Orpheus Glee Union Annual General Meeting Minutes January 5th 1922
- 45 Colne Orpheus AGM Minutes January 1930
- 46 Manchester Cooperative Wholesale Society Male Voice Choir Committe Minutes September 15th 1913
- 47 Colne Orpheus AGM Minutes January 1928
- 48 *MT* January 1903 p.19
- 49 Nelson Arion Committee Minutes December 31st 1924
- 50 Colne Orpheus AGM Minutes January 16th 1925
- 51 Colne Valley Committee Minutes December 1st 1924
- 52 *MT* August 1907 p.546
- 53 ibid. p.540
- 54 British Federation of Music Festivals Year Book 1954 p.18
- 55 ibid.

- 56 Colne Orpheus Committee Minutes October 26th 1926
- 57 Nelson Arion Committee Minutes April 24th 1924
- 58 Colne Valley Committee Minutes March 28th 1927
- 59 Morecambe Musical Festival 1923 Programme pp.38-39
- 60 Lytham St. Annes Musical Festival 1905 Programme p.20
- 61 Lytham 1909 Programme p.30
- 62 ibid.
- 63 Lytham 1911 Programme p.23
- 64 *MT* Supplement August 1914
- 65 *MT* Supplement May 1913
- 66 British Federation of Music Festivals Year Book 1930 p.30
- 67 ibid. p.31
- 68 *MT* June 1920 pp.401-402
- 69 *The Hull Times* April 30th 1904
- 70 *West Bromwich Weekly News* September 9th 1927
- 71 British Federation of Music Festivals Year Book 1934 p.53
- 72 The competitions at Biddulph (Staffs.) and Penistone (West Yorkshire) which operate today are organized by the respective local male choirs but the classes run the usual gamut of solo vocal and instrumental competitions as well as choral work. The Penistone Festival was re-born in 1951 as the choir's contribution to the furtherance of community work at the time of the Festival of Britain
- 73 op.cit. 1962 p.28
- 74 More details on these commissions appear in Chapter 6 - Repertoire
- 75 In conversation with the author, April 1993
- 76 Frederic Staton - *Ayrshire Post* April 15th 1927

CHAPTER 4 - Appendix 4B

PREFACE TO THE MORECAMBE COMPETITION FESTIVAL BOOK 1905

It is with great regret that I announce that Sir Hubert Parry will not be with us. When we printed our list of Conductors and Adjudicators, including Sir Hubert Parry, Principal of the Royal College of Music, Sir Edward Elgar, Dr. Coward of Sheffield, Dr. McNaught (the Prince of Judges), and Dr. Sinclair, conductor in the Three Cathedral Choir Festivals, we asked ourselves, "What remains for another year? Had we not best prepare for an end, and bring the Festival to a full close with a flourish of trumpets?" But apparently this Grand Finale is not to be yet, for Sir Hubert Parry is not allowed to come. He writes, "I most faithfully kept the date open but... I am at present in the doctor's hands and he says it is utterly and entirely out of the question for me to think of going to Morecambe..."

We deeply regret this on our own account, but none can be so selfish as to wish Sir Hubert to incur any risk... That Sir Edward Elgar should be with us again is more than we dared to hope. One jocose critic ventured recently to suggest on his acceptance of the Birmingham University Chair of Music "that now the centre of music in England may be supposed to have shifted from Morecambe to Birmingham." It would not be for the first time that Birmingham had proved to be the centre of an art (for there was a Sir Edward Burne-Jones, as there is a Sir Edward Elgar), at least we are reconciled to the shift of the centre, provided that Morecambe is included in the circumference of the circle.

Our Festival is assuming in some ways alarming proportions. Cromwell was wont to say "a man never goes so high as when he knows not where he is going." Had we known when we issued our first leaflet of four minute pages that it would develop into a book of fifty pages, and that it would involve dealing with over 4,000 competitors, and entail an expenditure of over £1,200, we doubtless should have hesitated.

We feel that it is time that our burden were more widely shared, but our patrons and council, though most generous in their financial aid, seem studiously to avoid public meetings, and pay us the compliment of leaving us to do the work.

I must draw attention to the leading features of this year's Festival.

First and foremost is our great concert on Friday night. We are confident that it will prove a notable musical event, for we have spared no pains to secure success. We have with us a musical magician, Dr. Henry Coward. As Ovid asks about another,

Quod mare non novit, quae nescit Arione tellus?"

He would bring music out of a stone, but he has not to deal with stones, but with the living results of our fifteen years work. We can now draw on a large musical constituency. many of the chorus have sung in various open and local classes. We have formed two centres for training, one at Lancaster under Mr. Aldous, a second at Morecambe under Mr. A. Davies. Mr. Speed is bringing a reinforcement from Southport, a section also comes from Kendal. These form a chorus of 300, and have already been welded into one by Dr. Coward. The Nelson orchestra, trained by Mr. Townsley, under the direction of Dr. Coward, will be augmented by professionals from Manchester and Sheffield. We have as principals Madame Emily Squire, Mr. John Coates and Mr. Charles Knowles. The works selected are "King Olaf" (to be conducted by Sir Edward Elgar), and "Blest Pair of Sirens." Works worthy to represent our two great English composers.

On Wednesday the Children's Choirs will give a Cantata by Sir Frederick bridge, specially written for our Festival.

On Thursday our audience will have the delight of hearing Miss Muriel Foster in a song cycle.

Saturday is a day of Competitions, when we have to deal with 2,480 competitors. The combined Male Voice Choirs in the evening will give Schubert's "Song of the Spirits," accompanied by the Colne Orchestra.

We have made a further draft on the apparent inexhaustible sources of Choral Music. Our library now includes 140 composers, and 359 selections.

For the first time we include a work by Richard Strauss, Schubert's "Song of the Spirits" has been published for us, and also a second work by Cornelius. This last, when it has been sung fourteen times, as it will be in the Challenge Shield Class, will still for many doubtless contain beauties unrevealed.

We claim that our music is of the best. We wish we could claim the same for the words. Our poetic literature is the richest in Europe, yet it is not seldom represented by sorry stuff, but when we come to some English translations of German partsongs notably those of American manufacture, is it too much to say they lack both sound and sense?

In conclusion may we ask for the kind cooperation of conductors and choirs. The decision of the judges is only thoroughly popular with one choir - with that choir which is placed first. Choirs of such excellence as many of those who honour us with a visit doubtless all deserve a prize. Competition is a means to an end, and like many other means not wholly satisfactory. May the consideration and courtesy of the judges meet with an equal measure of these graces from the competitors, and though the defeated may often feel sincere pity for the ignorance of those who fail to perceive

their merit, let them accept the adjudication as at least the best in England that can be given.

I have ventured to write a slight historical sketch of "The Sagas of King Olaf," with the hope of assisting some to a fuller appreciation of Sir Edward Elgar's great work.

In conclusion I must refer to the loss sustained not only to us, but to the wider world of music, by the early death of Mr. Arthur Johnstone, of the "Manchester Guardian." We shall greatly miss his stimulating presence. May we at least not forget the high standard which he was the first to demand from us. May we achieve some of the results for which he so strenuously and so fearlessly laboured.

C.V.GORTON

May 1905

President

P.S. - We are thankful to be able to announce that Mrs. Henry Wood will sing on the Wednesday evening two cycles of songs, probably selections from Grieg and Schumann's songs for children, and that Mr. Henry Wood, the distinguished conductor of the Queen's Hall Orchestra, will play his wife's accompaniments. Mr. F.Corder, Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, will act on Saturday as one of the judges.

CHAPTER 5 - POST-WAR DEVELOPMENTS AND THE MALE VOICE CHOIR IN THE LATE 1980S

The Second World War probably had less effect on the British male voice choir than the Great War. Apart from the reduced numbers slaughtered on battlefields (there being no real equivalent to Ypres and the Somme in the second conflict), the higher average age of male choirs' membership meant that fewer were drafted into active service. Obviously, this did not lessen the disruption to activities as those left behind became involved in firefighting, Red Cross and Home Guard duties. Add to this the restrictions on travel, shortages of paper for publication of music, the blackout and other exigencies of wartime, and there were bound to be, for some choirs, problems which could not be overcome. Ironically, for the first time ever, the arts in Britain received an injection of Government money. Funds were made available in the interest of morale and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was established. Through bodies like the Pilgrim Trust and the Carnegie organization, grants were made to concert societies and education bodies to encourage active participation in the arts at that dark time in the nation's history. The British Federation of Music Festivals, the umbrella organization concerned with competitions, benefited in this way enabling it to emerge from the war more financially sound than it had been in 1939. Thus, the post-war male choirs' own musical battlefields were ready for them enabling a resumption of the friendly though serious rivalries - which had

been a feature of choir development - when politico-military activities ceased.

During the war years, many choirs could claim an unbroken sequence of rehearsals and concerts, the war effort providing a spur to their charitable work. Others which had stopped singing, such as Gresley in Derbyshire, resumed in 1945 and was soon building up numbers and entering the competition fray with renewed commitment. Other choirs re-formed, often creating a new choir from an amalgamation of two weakened groups. This was the case in Lancashire where the Great Harwood choir was formed from two male choirs based on local churches. Some brand new choirs rose from the ashes of the war particularly where new comradeships had been forged - one such was a choir of air-raid wardens. Ex-Servicemen's choirs took a little longer to become established and some of these are still in existence although numbers are, of necessity, dwindling, despite membership being opened to non-service personnel.

Thus the immediate post-war period was a time of consolidation in the male choir world - consolidation, but very little development musically. Looking at the history of, for example, Colne Orpheus Glee Union as detailed in its 1886-1986 celebratory booklet, it is significant that most of the text is concerned with the years up to 1946, while the next forty years are dealt with relatively briefly. It would appear that not a great deal happened of import in the choir's history, being very much a case of "more of the same". The male voice repertoire remained largely unchanged, as can be seen from concert programmes and festival reports of the time. Much less new music was being written although the British Federation, in organizing the National Competitive Festival to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951, set aside funds to commission

new partsongs for the choral classes. The male voice piece came from the pen of Armstrong Gibbs and was a setting of Walter de la Mare's *The Listeners*. When the fifty-seven-year-old conductor Tom Mearis, received the premier award from the hands of Princess Elizabeth, his work and that of his choir, Felling, reached a zenith.¹

Other choirs, too, were on the crest of a wave in the post-war years. Rossendale's progress chart extended through the 1950s - during which period there were three consecutive wins (1952-4) at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod - and into the next decade, winning the Cork International Choral festival in 1963. Singing at the BBC Light Music Festival in 1958 was a very special occasion for Fred Tomlinson, the choir's conductor, as it was his son, Ernest, the celebrated composer and light-music arranger, who conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra throughout the Festival. Some long-established and distinguished choirs moved in the other direction. Nelson Arion, riven with dissensions in the early 1950s, found their nadir, which makes their subsequent climb to major honours (through the work of first father and then son Jack and Frank Smith from over the border in Yorkshire) all the more remarkable. Colne Valley's activities reached a peak of distinction when, as part of the Leeds Festival in 1953, a performance was given of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* with the London Symphony Orchestra under Joseph Krips. Ernest Bradbury in the *Yorkshire Post* and his fellow critics from the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* were generous with their praise for Colne Valley's singing. Krips, after rehearsing at the Slaithwaite Socialist club, was delighted with the quality of the choir and insisted that "everything comes from enthusiasm and the love of music, and here I discovered a true example of

art among the working men."² This involvement in the wider world of "classical" music was exceptional for a traditional male choir and the vision and commitment of George Stead, Colne Valley's conductor, can once again be seen as influential in the conception and execution of such a major event. Five years later, the same choir gave a concert at Huddersfield which included Wagner's *Holy Supper of the Apostles*, the first occasion on which the choir sang the work with full orchestral accompaniment. On the same programme were Schubert's *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern*, with the original accompaniment of violas, cellos and basses and Brahms' *Alto Rhapsody*. Without doubt, if programmes like this were seen to be part of the normal repertoire of male choirs today, many more professionally trained musicians would be interested in the movement.

With hindsight, and leaving aside the exceptional, it can be seen that this period of post-war consolidation had a direct bearing on the present-day problems in the male choir world. Consolidation can only serve a useful purpose for a finite period of time after which should come regeneration, progress and development. This is precisely what did not happen. To their credit, some male voice choir officers were aware of the situation. At a committee meeting of the Colne Valley choir in 1947, it was decided to "approach Lesley Woodgate³ and get his ideas on new music for the choir"⁴ and by 1949 Frank Netherwood, the choir's Chairman, told the annual general meeting that he had "taken the opportunity of appealing to composers to produce more music ... for Male Voice Choirs, for the emphasis nowadays seemed to be on Orchestral Music."⁵ It took two years for Mr. Netherwood to gain a response but at the 1951 AGM he was

able to report "that Sir Ernest Bullock had written specifically for, and dedicated to, the choir a set of Five Songs."⁶ Significantly, it was to a composer of a previous generation that Netherwood had turned (Bullock was by then in his sixties) just as, thirty years later, the organizers of the Northern Male Voice Choir Competition turned to Herbert Sumsion (then nearly 90) to write their first test piece.

Even though there may have been an awareness of the problem on the part of the more prestigious choirs, little was achieved and the extent of the musical stagnation in the area of male choral work can be appreciated by looking at developments in singing education and in publishing, particularly in the decade of the Sixties. Many trainee teachers, at college or at In-Service Courses, were being encouraged to explore what became known as the "Kodaly method" of singing instruction using the composer's *66 Two-Part Exercises* and *Biciana Hungarica*. Boosey and Hawkes had first published these in 1957, with new English version following in 1968. This move spawned conductors who, having discovered the repertoire and their own potential, were happy to progress to such Kodaly classics as *See The Gypsies*, the wordless four-part songs for their Youth Choirs or *Jesus And The Traders* for the mixed adult groups. John Paynter and Peter Aston at York University were demonstrating how Darmstadt techniques could be applied in the educational field: Universal Edition pioneered voice (if not traditional "vocal") works by Bernard Rands and George Self. "New Sounds" became almost a catchword for these publications. On the more conservative side, Oxford University Press produced *Carols For Choirs* in 1961. This collection not only contained new pieces by Arnold Cooke, Phyllis Tate and William Walton but also

provided new harmonizations of traditional "Christmas fayre", thus freshening the repertoire of many a mixed choir. Throughout the Sixties, Novello produced a steady flow of new SATB pieces by composers such as Gordon Jacob, John Joubert, Willam Mathias, Arnold Cooke, Humphrey Searle and Lennox Berkeley of the older school, Robert Sherlaw Johnson, Reginald Smith-Brindle, Martin Dalby, John McCabe, Jonathan Harvey, Roger Smalley and David Blake of a more recent generation. At the same time, and helping to maintain a progressive balance, more reliable performing editions of seventeenth century music was reaching conductors. The French A Coeur Joie movement arrived in England in 1964 becoming the Sing For Pleasure organization which today is a lively, nation-wide collection of children's, youth, mixed and ladies choirs - but which has very little if any support from male choirs. The British Youth Choir became another new organization on the choral scene, beginning life in the early 1970s.

The fact that SATB groups, youth choirs and some ladies choirs were ready in the next decades to attempt (if not *en masse*) the more unusual, the more adventurous, sounds and textures of, for example, contemporary Scandinavian music, reflects the influence of those formative years of the Sixties on their conductors who were at that time in adolescence or early in their training or career. However, since male choirs were not given to appointing young, newly-trained, enterprising conductors, these developments passed the gentlemen by. Without knowing it, they found themselves shunted into a choral siding down which they continue to steam despite the efforts of a few individual conductors and choirs to turn the siding into a loop which could rejoin

the main line.

In the male choir field, any post-war development which existed, came not in musical matters but rather in an extension of previous activities which in turn led to the ossifying of the repertoire and a reliance on all things traditional. Male choirs found their level as purveyors of occasional music. From Royal Command Performances at the London Palladium and Burma Star gatherings at the Royal Albert Hall to investitures and even firework displays in Hyde Park, the services of the male choir were often called upon, the Welsh choirs being particularly useful at Royal events. Broadcasting continued to embrace the male choirs in the fifties - the Oxford Welsh Glee Singers, for example, had a complete half-hour to themselves on the Home Service of the BBC in November 1955 - and with the advent of Local Radio in the late Sixties and early Seventies, more and more choirs found themselves given air time. However, these were not the occasions on which to break new ground in terms of repertoire. The hymn-tune, folk song arrangement (including the ubiquitous Spiritual) and opera choruses were the order of the day (or rather, the producer) and it was not long before the television channels realised the financial advantage of using the warm, comforting sound of the male choir for their early Sunday evening religious programmes. Hymn-singing led by a male voice choir has proved a regular feature of *Songs of Praise* and other similar media Christian programmes through to the present day. Paradoxically therefore, at a time of general musical atrophy, there was something amounting to almost a surge in new or re-formed male choirs (see p.240). This situation can only be explained by the media exposure choirs were receiving. Not for

the last time in British artistic life was the musically uninteresting and unenterprising given public approbation through the popular appeal of radio and television.

Additionally, there were other extensions of activities to distract the male choirs from any thought of change or development, matters which could cushion them from considerations of repertoire or the recruitment of younger singers. As travel, inland or overseas, became more readily available, there was, during the first twenty years or so of this half century, an upsurge in the number of choirs undertaking exchange trips with other choirs. The Welsh choirs, who from their early days had been great travellers, found that their network of ex-pat groups throughout the world provided them with opportunities to take their songs to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and even to unlikely places in South America. English choirs tended to stay within Europe which might have helped them more in the matter of developing their repertoire as they were given the opportunity to hear pieces new to them by composers of their host country. Sadly, there has been little evidence of any beneficial influence on repertoire from these sources.

The excitement and, in some cases, new dimensions offered by such trips tended to militate against travel to competitions within Britain. The local council or business firm proved much more amenable to sponsoring a visit overseas than, for example, to Blackpool and it is ironic that, just when the competitive movement was modernizing its attitudes and adopting a more business-like approach to organization, the Federation of Music Festivals found that it was losing the support of the larger-scale choirs which had proved such an attraction to audiences in the inter-war period.⁷ The

situation was not helped for the Federation by the existence of new BBC competitions in the late Sixties such as *Let the People Sing*. When this programme, which attracted a good deal of interest in male voice circles, was laid to rest, BBC Radio Wales filled the gap during the early Eighties with its *Male Voice Choir of the Year* competition. At about the same time, events for male choirs sprang up in the south of England (in Cornwall and at Woodham Ferrers in Essex) and in the north (at Huddersfield). Since the organizers of these latter events needed to attract entries, the chosen test pieces tended to be somewhat conservative, again militating against change and reinforcing tradition. However, the Huddersfield competition, from its second meeting in 1986, commissioned a new piece each year in an attempt to force choir conductors to re-think their approach. This welcome move, discussed later in Chapter 6 , was most certainly not the norm.⁸

Other events which strengthened the use of traditional approaches were the massed choral concerts at places like the Royal Albert Hall in London and also at some venues in Wales. Bringing together twenty or thirty choirs which could all be expected to sing the same songs meant relying on the standard repertoire. Therefore, whether these events were organized by The London Welsh Association, The Federation of Police Choirs, Yorkshire choirs, massed English male choirs or the Cornish or Welsh Federations, the programmes inevitably had the same tired look. A prospective audience member would know what to expect from these massed concerts and that was, and remains, for these occasions their strength (large, contented audiences promising financial stability) and their weakness (a repertoire which could largely have

been sung in 1935). They are symptomatic of the way in which consolidation after the war became stagnation, which in turn explains why a forty-five year period in the history of male choir singing in Britain can be summed up in a very few pages - musically, artistically, aesthetically very little happened. This stagnation has taken its toll both in terms of the respect which is no longer forthcoming from composers and musicians in other fields and in the diminished acclaim from the concert-going public. Viewing the situation from 1988, the prospects for change in the future looked bleak, therefore that point in time seemed as relevant as any to review the make-up and activities of male choirs in Britain.

THE 1988 SURVEY

There is an interesting, though not unexpected, mixture of the positive and negative, optimism and pessimism, forward thrust and conservatism to be drawn from the results of a series of questionnaires which formed the Survey. Various organizations helped in identification of choirs and in distribution of the material. In the case of the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs, the first questionnaire, requesting basic information on choir origins and present membership, was sent to member choirs along with routine correspondence from the Secretary. The Welsh Associations supplied detailed lists of choirs and their secretaries and the handbook of the National Association of Choirs provided contact with some eighty English choirs. Not all of the choirs traced were approached. Membership of organizations such as Male Voice Praise and the Police Federation of Male Voice Choirs are represented by a sample group. Central

Public Libraries, Local Education Authority Music Advisers as well as competition organizers supplied information to supplement the lists from official associations and a total of six hundred and twenty five choirs were identified throughout Great Britain. Doubtless there are more but not in such numbers as seriously to distort the picture presented by the chosen four hundred and forty nine choirs initially contacted. The seventy one per cent response immediately demonstrated an interest on the part of choir conductors and secretaries in disseminating facts about their organizations and therefore, as some expressed it, "raising their profile". From this seventy one per cent (ie three hundred and fifteen choirs), the response to the second considerably more detailed questionnaire, was again supportive - seventy eight per cent. A third questionnaire was sent to the small group of choirs able to answer positively concerning enquiries on commissioned works. Finally, fourteen choirs chosen for their close geographical proximity supplied information regarding socio-economic groupings, and two hundred members from four choirs answered questions on the pattern and extent of their concert attendance and home listening.

ORIGINS AND NUMBERS

The geographical distribution of the choirs shows the expected concentrations in the industrial North and Midlands in England plus Cornwall (a mixture here of industry and isolation) and industrial Wales (see p.255). The southern imbalance has been minimally corrected by ex-patriot Welsh choirs, sometimes known by name (Oxford Welsh, London Welsh) but often formed through individual Welsh enthusiasm and zeal. While most choirs have been content with the plain term Male Voice Choir for

their official title, some of the older choirs retain the connection (so popular in the nineteenth century) with the Greek gods, notably Orpheus, Appollo and Phoenix. The term Gleemen, with its medieval connotations is sometimes used in choir titles; likewise Glee or Glee Union, although rare, still survives. Clarion, Singers, and Male Chorus are other variants. Welsh choirs tend to refer to themselves as male choirs, a translation of *côr meibion* although Orpheus, Gleemen and Glee Society are not unknown in the Principality.

Information supplied concerning foundation dates of present day choirs reveals that formations have occurred steadily throughout this century (see graph on p.256), with the oldest choirs rooted in the late nineteenth century. The upsurge after the World Wars is not unexpected: more apposite is the number of choirs formed during the 1960s and 1970s when the gathering effect of television was generally to discourage activities outside the home.⁹ The fact that the figures include many instances of choirs reforming during this period can be related to the new media coverage the traditional sound and sight of male choirs was attracting. The figures might also present a picture of fathers of the new teenage television generation abandoning the television and looking for interests of their own. This is also supported to an extent by the figures on present age groups of members. Several recent formations have been as a result of schisms within choirs. Amalgamations of choirs with falling rolls also account for some of the more recently formed choirs.

Of the six options suggested to choirs on the reason for their formation (p.257), thirty one per cent claimed church or chapel associations and this is possibly the only figure

to remain consistent throughout the century. From the lists of participating choirs at competitive music festivals at the turn of the century, a ratio of three church-allied choirs in ten would seem appropriate. Percentages in other areas of manufacturing and industry reflect the widening catchment area over the last fifty years. No precise figures are available but pre-World War Two the percentage of choirs associated with collieries would have been far in excess of the eight per cent in the 1988 Survey.¹⁰ The interesting result in this area is the thirty seven per cent of choirs which claimed to fit in to the "Other" category. Of these one hundred and eighteen choirs, one significant statistic would appear to be the thirty "Community" choirs. In a real sense, of course, the colliery or works choirs were "community" choirs but the term as used by contacts here indicates the wider community of village, suburb or town. Various explained as "Village Community", "Community members", "the desire to reform local choir", or "through enthusiasm of the local community", their formation dates range from 1951 to 1974. Another total of some note is the thirty choirs formed by "a few friends getting together for a sing", very much in the tradition traceable from the informal catch clubs of the eighteenth century.

Significant among the statistics regarding membership numbers (p.258) is the size of Welsh choirs in comparison with choirs in the rest of Britain. Choirs with an average of over sixty members emphasize the strength of the male voice tradition built up in Wales from the turn of the century. This tradition has reliably, until recent times, continued to attract members and, most importantly, younger members. In the breakdown of the choirs into tenor 1, tenor 2, baritone and bass, it will be noted that

the baritone part is consistently the fullest although, in the case of the Welsh choirs, only just outnumbering the first tenors. The comparatively smaller number of tenors in the non-Welsh choirs may well be explained by the influence of the glee and the cathedral tradition where the male alto, far from being a high tenor was, more often than not, a natural baritone or even bass. The Welsh choirs had little tradition in the singing of glees therefore, from inception, their choirs largely emulated the German layout of two tenor parts. Physiognomy, too, may have played a part, in that, as a race, the Celts tended to be smaller than their Anglo-Saxon cousins and the archetypal tenor has never been a tall, robust man but rather a person of small frame.¹¹

AGE RANGES

Of all the statistics collated during the survey, the ones which are probably of most importance with regard to the future of the male voice choir movement concern the ages of members, conductors and accompanists (pp. 259-260). The youngest members appear to be in Northern Ireland but as the sample number was limited to five choirs the average age of forty seven may not be too significant. The comparatively "young" membership in Wales (average forty nine) contrasts notably with England's fifty four and one is reminded of J.S. Curwen's description of the Bristol Orpheus Society members in 1872¹ as being "~~all in their~~ ^{mostly of} middle age."¹² Choirs are sensitive about the ageing of members and many choir contacts were unable to plot exact figures in answer to the relevant question, relying more on an educated guess (many replies were "about 50" or "50 plus"). If, as seems likely given this sensitivity, the figures erred on the lower side, the true average age in England is likely to be closer to fifty six. This

issue occupies the attention of many (although by no means sufficient) conductors and choir officials. There is nothing intrinsically "wrong" with a club or society of this type having an average age in the mid-fifties but it often produces difficulties in terms of recruitment. Accepting that many male voices do not "settle" until the early twenties, it is this age group which is most likely to be discouraged by the pronounced late-middle-age image of the average choir. Yet it is this very age group which the movement needs for future development. Many choirs have found that growing up together produces a tremendous sense of commitment amongst the singers and officials. Unfortunately, growing old together, when leadership in musical and administrative terms begins to lose energy, vitality and panache, can only result in eventual disbandment. Membership numbers drop and as the average age rises there is even less likelihood of younger men joining. When the present average age of members is considered together with the fact that twenty two per cent of conductors are sixty one or over with a further thirty one per cent between fifty one and sixty, the problem becomes more acute. Additionally, the vital role of accompanist is today filled in forty seven per cent of choirs by players over fifty. In effect, the choirs sow the seeds of their own ageing in that so often the camaraderie engendered and the commitment and dedication built up, means that the choir becomes part of the members' lives. They then find it very difficult to sever their connections, just as conductors find it difficult to ask them to do so. In some cases, choirs set up non-singing or associate membership so that the break is not total but in most cases the singer whose vocal powers have long since been depleted is tolerated until there is a

voluntary cessation of activities or death intervenes. Very few choirs institute re-auditions which is a useful and tactful way of reminding senior choristers of their responsibility and waning powers.

The problem, though, is more acute at the other end of the age range. There are, after all, many fine singers, particularly in the baritones and basses, operating successfully into their seventies. Apart from the obvious problem of non-identification with the age group of their fathers, and grandfathers, the younger potential choir member is more often than not, faced with a dated repertoire. Admittedly some new members simply accept the standard male voice diet on the basis, presumably, that they opted to join the choir knowing the sort of music they would be performing. But light music arrangements are still thought of as demonstrating a "modern" approach, even if these pieces consist of Beatles music from the 1960s.¹³ There are very few attempts to explore other contemporary music or to widen horizons to deal with the extensive library of nineteenth century original works which might appeal to the younger singer. Thus the new member is fed the same fare as one joining forty years previously, with occasional forays into "modernity" for festival test-pieces and light music "Radio 2" arrangements for concert finales. Nelson (Lancs.) Arion Glee Union, one of the most consistently successful competition choirs in the 1980s, has instituted a Youth Section from which the main choir can feed. However, this can only succeed, given, as here, a healthy numerical size of the senior choir (one hundred plus) and a well-deserved national reputation. Other conductors adopt a policy of taking in younger men, almost regardless of quality of voice, necessarily accepting their inexperience, while at the

same time being prepared to reject prospective members in their top fifties. Again, though, this depends on the choir being in a position to audition (which implies acceptance or rejection). Many choirs welcome "allcomers" as is shown in the relevant responses in the second questionnaire where it was shown that fifty nine per cent of all choirs do not hold auditions for membership (see p.258)

In order to keep the questionnaires to a reasonable length (and thus to encourage responses), several relatively important areas could not be covered, one of which has to do with the age, not of the members, but of their audience at concerts. Broadly speaking, all amateur musical organizations, choral or orchestral, are supported by a regular audience of friends and associates. Thus the audiences for a choir of fifty-five-year-olds is likely to be largely in the same age group. In 1989, Felling Male Voice Choir (Tyne and Wear) conducted its own survey which covered this point and discovered that forty eight per cent of its audience at an Annual Concert were aged sixty one or over and a further thirty seven per cent were in the forty six to sixty age bracket. At the same time, the choir was not surprised to identify sixty five per cent of its audience as female. Whereas a twenty-year-old might recognise the musical pleasure and satisfaction he experiences as a choir member, one can imagine how difficult it would be to persuade his peer group, less motivated by the love of singing, to attend a concert. Thus, audiences, too, grow old with the choir and tend to take up the same conservative approach to repertoire. The vicious circle is set up with choirs singing music they know their audience likes (the audience, after all, are supporting the choir or its charity through admission money) therefore eschewing any more

enterprising approaches in the freshening of the repertoire. Of all issues confronting the male voice choir movement in the 1990s, none is more important than recruitment of younger men both as singers and conductors.

COMMISSIONING NEW WORKS AND BRASS BANDS PARALLELS

With this picture of conservatism, it is hardly surprising to discover that only twelve per cent of choirs in the Survey could claim to have commissioned new works over the previous fifteen years (p.261). Of this percentage, a significant amount of the compositions were provided by the choirs' conductors. The number of pieces by established composers was minimal. The remainder are doubtless worthy composers having produced interesting works sometimes with financial assistance from Regional Arts Associations but they are not musicians with national, still less, international, reputations. (A review of some of the pieces mentioned in the Survey is found in Chapter 6). The appearance of Willam Mathias, Alun Hodynott and Grace Williams in the list reflects the fact that the Welsh Arts Council has been very prepared to make money available to choirs for new works. Despite this, little seems to have changed since the post-war years up to 1970. In his study of Welsh choral music of this period, Arnold Thomas lists only nine works for male voice choir out of a total of fifty-five pieces reviewed, representing the work of thirty-three different composers.¹⁴

This situation is in stark contrast to that at the turn of the century with Elgar, Bantock and Edward German, among many others, regularly composing partsongs for male voices. Similarly from the 1930s to the 1950s, Herbert Howells and Armstrong Gibbs were among national figures who were supplying a steady flow of well-written,

imaginative additions to the repertoire. The equivalent composers today do not write for male voice choir. If Richard Rodney Bennett, Robin Holloway, Peter Maxwell Davies, Oliver Knussen, Wilfred Josephs, Geoffrey Burgon or Carl Davis were commissioned to write works for male voices they would no doubt, if time allowed, be prepared to use their creative powers in the medium. However, it is likely that the constraints placed on them regarding style and, particularly, harmonic vocabulary, would be such that the initiative would founder. The vast majority of male choir members learn by rote. "Reading" music often means no more than knowing the names of the notes on the staff. Singers with the ability to read at sight are very rare. This means that teaching atonal or heavily chromatic pieces, especially *a capella*, is a very long and tiring process for conductors and singers alike. Whilst any of the composers mentioned (and the list could be longer) could write skilfully and imaginatively in a not-too-chromatic style, one doubts if the project would interest them especially if only a small amount of money was available. With the financial restraints of the 1980s placed on Regional Arts Associations, decisions on the dispensation of funds often depends on the degree of enterprise being shown by the commissioning body. Male voice choirs, with their not very high standing in the wider world of the performing arts, generally find it difficult to persuade selection committees (made up of "serious" musicians and administrators) that the request for help towards, for example, a four minute work with piano accompaniment indicates any degree of initiative or enterprise. In fact, the opposite accrues in the sense that, for most choirs, approaching a composer, let alone any of those mentioned above, would show "initiative and

enterprise" of a very high order. As an indication of the unwillingness on the part of choirs to seek help, nine of the sixteen Regional Arts Associations in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland could find no mention of male choirs applying for financial help in the period 1984-1989. Three others, the Northern, North-West and Yorkshire Arts Associations had between them, in the same period, a mere five requests, four of which were granted. In Wales, thirteen works were commissioned by male groups between 1984 and 1989 with financial assistance from the Welsh Arts Council, although only seven choirs were involved (one choir receiving help on four occasions). For these works, ten composers were used, eight of them Welsh.

The attitude to new compositions taken by the vast majority of male voice choir conductors in the late 1980s could well be summarized in an article written ^{in 1961} by the then conductor of the Treorchy Male Voice Choir.¹⁵ The author calls on his considerable reserves of what appears to be Nonconformist oratory in extolling composers to think carefully about performers and audience alike:

The composer cannot communicate with an audience without the partnership of the performer... Choirs will not sing well if there is no enjoyment, although they will work hard to master difficulties when they have a sense of growing enjoyment and understanding. Composers must keep this always in mind. Spurgeon said: 'We must preach according to the capacity of our hearers. Jesus said: Feed my sheep, not feed my giraffes. We must not put the fodder on too high a rack by our fineness of language but use plainness of speech.'

Although it is generally true that audiences wish to be charmed and entertained rather than to be edified and improved, concerts, wisely used, provide a channel of propaganda for good contemporary music... But we could do with more tunes with a lilt to set the toes a-tapping and to lighten the heart. John Milton, the Puritan lover of 'hymns devout and holy psalms' found time for:

Sport that wrinkled care derides

And laughter holding both his sides.

Give us bold and vigorous words. Avoid the metaphysical (sic) and symbolic. With its wide dynamic and emotional range the male choir is a splendid medium for dramatic themes. In the Old Testament there is a store of fine material.

Let modern composers throw open the doors of beauty, truth, and spiritual refreshment to all according to their capacity to receive. Let them not withdraw into artistic isolation saying:

We are the precious few,
All others will be damned.
There's only room for me and you:
We can't have heaven crammed.

The article was written in 1961 and, sadly, it is undeniable that most male choir conductors would still probably endorse the tenor of the piece. Asking a reputable composer to provide something including "tunes with a lilt" etc. and avoiding "symbolic" words but using "plainness of speech" so that the audience can be "charmed" rather than "edified" would be more than enough to daunt all but the purely commercial composers. Allowing for artistic integrity still less a modicum of originality does not seem to be included in the writer's canon.

The parallel with the brass band movement is apposite here. The mentor of male voice part-songs in the early years of the twentieth century was Granville Bantock and his equivalent in the brass world was Percy Fletcher, with Hubert Bath and later Denis Wright as other influential band composers. With Julius Harrison and Armstrong Gibbs continuing the Bantock-Elgar tradition of male voice choir compositions and with composers such as Gustav Holst and John Ireland supplying first-class original music for both media, the development of both the male choir and the brass band can be seen to have continued on parallel tracks during the first half of this century. The importance of competition, too, was a further significant similarity. Where the brass and male voice worlds divided was the point in time when Elgar Howarth and Wilfred Josephs began writing for bands and where Harrison Birtwhistle provided

Grimethorpe Colliery Band with *Arias* to perform at the BBC Promenade Concerts in 1973. The brass bands of the 1960s and 1970s could cope with this "new music" because the instrumentalists were all trained readers, therefore, if the conductors had the interest and enterprise, "modern" pieces could be attempted. Approximately two-thirds of bands in the National Brass Band Qualifying Championships have paid conductors, about ten per cent of whom would be full-time professionals with no other form of employment.¹⁶ With this expertise working in the field, the breadth of the contemporary repertoire for bands widened significantly, with composers such as Derek Bourgoise, Richard Rodney Bennett, Edward Gregson, John McCabe and Geoffrey Burgon all contributing substantial works. Urged on by the intense competitive element of the Championships, the only limitation for bands wishing to work towards the new repertoire has been in preparation time, bearing in mind that brass band audiences were not always ready for the newer sounds and therefore the standard band repertoire had to be maintained. Thus the leading bands, to keep their audiences, balanced their programmes to cope with their less sophisticated listeners, at the same time not losing touch with post-50s developments in composition.

Comparing the relative skills, therefore, of band and choir conductors, the telling statistic in the Survey in respect of the latter is that only thirty per cent have had some formal musical training or background (p.259) and of these, many have basic diplomas which do not bear full relationship to the task of choir-training. The majority of this thirty per cent are "professional" in that their main occupation is as music teacher, lecturer or LEA Adviser. Very few (six per cent) are full-time free-lance

professionals with especially developed skills and training in the art of conducting. Obviously, conducting can be, indeed can only be, developed with experience and there are some dedicated amateur conductors who have the charisma and sufficient musical background to produce choral performances which are of a very high musical standard. It is not unusual, though, in these cases, for repertoire to be limited and Achilles heels abound in terms of determining matters of style and tempi (especially in music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and in handling scores with any degree of rhythmic complexity. This is made abundantly clear to those professional musicians involved throughout the country as peripatetic adjudicators at competitive festivals.

Despite the divergence in developmental paths, the response in the Survey regarding concert work with brass bands (p.261) reflects the box-office appeal which applies (especially in the North of England) when a band appears on stage with a male choir. For special occasions, a wind band, often from the Services, is employed although in these cases the choir has to be very certain of the financial return to cover the high cost of using Her Majesty's musicians. At most of these concerts, the singers alternate with the bandsmen, combined items being a rarity. The reasons for this are as much to do with the availability of suitable arrangements as it is with the singers reluctance to be over-powered by an ensemble which, by its nature, is not used to providing a mere accompaniment. Again, the equation militates against success in this area in that only the more experienced bands are going to be able to accompany with any subtlety and these tend to be the expensive groups. Despite the problems, hiring a band in order to

achieve a capacity audience at, for example, the choir's principal concert of the season - the "Annual" - remains an option and this is reflected in the seventy one per cent who "infrequently" share their concert platform in this way.

ADMINISTRATION

Turning to choir administration and operation, the picture which emerges from the Survey is encouraging. The nineteenth century glee clubs were often organized along very business-like lines and, in Chapter 2, reference has been made to the way members brought their own initiative and business acumen to bear. Much the same can be said for the majority of today's male voice choirs. Only four per cent operate without a committee (p.261) and seventy seven per cent have some form of Constitution. The latter is very often set out in a printed set of Rules and the three examples in Appendix 5A demonstrate the desire to run an efficient organization, presenting all "legal" matters clearly and logically. Thus any barrack-room lawyer is at one and the same time kept in check and also helped in his understanding of constitutional rights should the need arise. The fact that these three choirs come from three different areas does not suggest that their rules are representative of their region. Neighbouring choirs can, and often do, have different approaches to such matters as subscriptions (weekly or annually), membership application (open or by audition) and choice of music (by conductor or committee). "Objectives", as can be seen here, are expressed in detailed, lofty phraseology or in terse, pointed sentences but they generally amount to the same idea of cultivating the art of choral singing for the appreciation of the general public.

As with any organization, the problems of financial stability loom large in the minds of choir administrators. Surprisingly, just over thirteen per cent of choirs have no subscription, an annual income which the majority regard as an essential base (p.262). Approximately twenty per cent of choirs with subscriptions collect them weekly and there are often various differentials for unemployed or retired singers. Also notable is the number of choirs (thirty five per cent) who organize no specific fund-raising activities. Over half of the total organize some sort of Draw; "other" events to which reference is made in the questionnaires run the usual gamut from auctions, beetle drives and barbecues to race nights and waste paper collections. In many of these instances the support of the ladies committee/circle is crucial. These groups often operate on a regular basis (perhaps supplying refreshments at rehearsal) and will sometimes target a specific area of high financial demand such as an overseas trip or a new set of uniforms. The fact, though, that less than half of all choirs have such female help possibly reflects the tradition, still strong in some choirs, that women and male choirs do not mix. Older members of today's choirs will claim that forty years ago, some choirs would have come out in open revolt at even having a female soloist at a concert. Today, there is still some distrust at the involvement of wives and girl-friends. For many men, the rehearsal night is a "social evening" with friends, ending at a hostelry, and traditions in this direction seem to die hard. There appears to be no geographical pattern in this behaviour.

In terms of the political attitude to self-help and sponsorship of the Arts in the 1980s, it is not surprising that some choirs have attempted to attract businesses to

support their activities. Some have had success in this area with connections built up between themselves and local breweries or local radio. Obviously, it is only the larger choirs who can attract this sort of sponsorship. "Works" choirs naturally take advantage of some financial support automatically even if only in the provision of rehearsal premises, note-paper etc. Indirect sponsorship (educational discounts on the hire of school premises for rehearsals, for example) is the most that the majority of choirs can hope for in this direction (p.263).

Less than a third of choirs are registered charities (p.263) and, as such, many cannot take advantage of the revenue available through covenanting their members' subscription. By claiming back from H.M. Inspector of Taxes the current rate of tax paid by each covenanting member, additional revenue can be produced which most choir Treasurers would welcome. The production and marketing of tapes and records of the choir can also show a more than useful return. However, as with other areas mentioned, the choir needs to have a healthy membership in terms of numbers in order to generate interest and enthusiasm amongst families and friends who, in the main, represent the customers for these enterprises.

With an average of eleven or twelve concerts per year to organize, it is not surprising that over a quarter of choirs operate on not one but two weekly practices. A variety of premises are used for rehearsals, with the majority of choirs using school, church or community halls. Very few choirs have their own premises although this did feature among the fourteen per cent "Other" statistic (p.264). Five choirs in the Survey possessed their own premises : Hartland Male Voice Choir (Cornwall)

share with the Town Band, Donaghadee (N.Ireland) have had their own hall since 1981 and three Welsh choirs (Ebbw Vale, Tredegar Orpheus and Swansea) rehearse in their own accomodation. Swansea's premises were purpose-built. Works choirs and those associated with sports clubs naturally claimed to rehearse "at home".

Deputy conductors, usually drawn from the ranks, have a low profile in the organization of male choirs (p.265). Although seventy per cent of choirs claimed the existence of a deputy, their actual work would seem to be very limited, with only the rare opportunity of conducting a concert. This puts the deputy at a tremendous disadvantage in that he is unlikely to improve in technique or confidence without some sort of exposure. Also, the respect necessary from his colleagues could only be properly achieved if he could be seen to be capable of taking over in the unavoidable absence of the principal conductor. The suspicion is that many choir conductors jealously guard their position, a degree of autocracy which is also often noted in the more general organization of the choir. The choir which is run by the members via an elected committee with the conductor concentrating solely on musical matters would seem to be a rarity. On the other hand, quite properly, most conductors have either total control, or at least the final word, on choice of repertoire but "Selection committees" are not uncommon. The best of these, however, would appear to be those dominated by the opinion of the appointed musician especially if that person is hoping to guide and develop the potential of the choir in terms of repertoire.

CHORAL FEDERATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

With three quarters of all choirs claiming membership, various local and national choral associations and federations play an important part in the activities of male voice organizations (p.264). The proportion is highest in Wales where ninety one per cent belong to the Welsh Association of Male Voice Choirs. This Association was established in 1962 as a direct result of a meeting convened on February 24th by Cyril Evans, the Entertainment Officer of Cwmbran Urban District Council in Monmouthshire. Sixteen choir representatives attended and the items for discussion concerned various aspects of the male voice competitions at the annual eisteddfau but the concept of an association also found its way into the debate. Further meetings held throughout South Wales that year led to an inaugural meeting at the Royal Hotel, Cardiff on October 13th 1962 at which aims and objectives were discussed and officers elected. Of the twenty six choirs sending delegates, Blaenavon, Pendyrus, Treorchy and Cambrian were represented on the newly-formed committee. As membership throughout Wales grew, member choirs in the North decided to form a separate "branch" and this came into being in 1967. There are bi-annual meetings of a national executive committee for the exchange of ideas and information but each section is now autonomous with memberships of over eighty in the South and almost forty in the North. Apart from disseminating information and advice, each association organizes tri-annual festivals of male voice choirs (generally under the title *1000 Voices*) at the Albert Hall in London with dress rehearsals at venues in the Principality. These concerts were first organized in the early 1970s by the London

Welsh Male Voice Choir which continues to arrange its own massed voice concert on a bi-annual basis (also at the Albert Hall). The associations liaise with the National Eisteddfod committee on choice of music and the South Wales branch has published some especially commissioned arrangements.

The Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs was formed in 1983 and propounds similar ideals to the Welsh fraternity. It is financially self-supporting through choir subscriptions and is a Registered Charity. The committee consists of two representatives from each choir so that the quarterly assemblies must resemble more of a conference than a committee meeting, there being over thirty member choirs. As well as the dissemination of information, the Cornishmen also organize gatherings at the Royal Albert Hall for members. Similar choral jamborees in London also play a part in the activities of the Federation of Police Male Voice Choirs with, for example, twenty-four member choirs taking part in the 1986 Albert Hall concert. Such is the draw of this venue that county choirs sometimes form ad hoc associations in order to promote such events. In 1991, for example, choirs from Yorkshire gathered at Kensington - nine hundred and seventeen singers from twenty five choirs. The appeal from the point of view of the singer is the experience, not just of singing in such a renowned concert hall, but of sharing the platform with several hundred like-minded souls in a well-disciplined orgy of sound. One thousand Welshmen lustily chorusing *Cwm Rhondda* is sufficient to move all but the most resolute of English rugby football supporters - the sound can be overwhelming in its passion and fervour. One of the drawbacks, however, (already noted in this context), is that, of necessity, the

programme will be of tried and tested favourites. Thus, again, any enterprising conductor whose choir contracts to participate in an Albert Hall extravaganza will find much of his time taken up with the ubiquitous *Comrades in Arms* and similar works. As one conductor, who delights in exploring the vastness of the repertoire, has expressed it: "My own choir did not take part in the recent Albert Hall concert because my departure from the norm meant that we did not know most of the 'lollipops' of which the programme consisted and I was not prepared to give up rehearsal time to learn them at the expense of my own planned programme."¹⁷

Although there is not a full-scale federation of male choirs in England, there have been Albert Hall festivals involving English choirs, one such taking place in 1987. There is, however, an embryonic organization - The English Association of Male Voice Choirs (Western Division) - which centres itself in the Gloucester-Hereford-Worcester area. It was formed after a meeting of choir representatives in November 1981 which had been held to discuss participation in a local radio competition. At the inaugural General Meeting in May 1982, eight choirs made up the membership and this figure has remained constant. Combined choir concerts are a feature of the Association's activities and one of its four specific "Objects" is "to encourage composers and arrangers to produce original music and modern arrangements for the furtherance of male voice music".¹⁸ In the early years, this aim seems to have been hampered by lack of funds.

One possible reason for the lack of success in widening membership of the English Association is the fifty three per cent membership by male choirs of the National

Association of Choirs which, as its name implies, is not limited to any one type or gender of choir. At about the same time as the British Federation of Competitive Musical Festivals was founded (1921), an Association of Competitive Choirs was established largely through the efforts of some male choirs who felt that, in their dealings with competition organizers, some sort of co-ordination was required. This would certainly account for the preponderance of male choirs in the total membership of what is now the National Association and the theory would be supported by the known attitude of most choirs to the competition scene. The male voice members play a very full part in combined concerts throughout the fifteen geographical groups of the N.A.C.

Two other Federations deserve attention, the first of which is the Lanarkshire Festival of Male Voice Choirs. Again, there is incomplete evidence as to the precise origins but it seems likely that the organization came into being just after World War Two when a competitive festival was held, probably under the aegis of the then Lanarkshire County Council. The Council's Education Department maintained this event largely with school choirs but also retained a festival concert for local male choirs. By 1979, the organization had become independent. There is quite a formal Constitution and the principal aims are concerned with the arrangements for the annual concert, given by the twelve member choirs and with the disposal of the resulting finance.

Britain's Male Voice Praise choirs are part of an organization with links in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.A. With a membership here of over one hundred choirs, it constitutes the largest of all the nation's federations although, as the member

choirs confine their activities to leading services in evangelical churches, it does not carry an enormous amount of public awareness. The movement itself developed through the work of James McRoberts in Glasgow during the Thirties. Born in Greenock in 1899, McRoberts remembers in early childhood being taken by his father to the local Gospel Male Voice Praise choir practices. Later, he heard the Albatross Mission Crew, a group of men from the Northern Isles which, in 1910, sailed a two-masted barque from port to port in Scotland conducting Christian Missions. Their four-part singing made a lasting impression on the eleven-year-old James. McRoberts contends that the early domestic hardships (his father died when he was seventeen and his engineering apprenticeship was interrupted by World War I) "set the iron in my very blood".¹⁹ After the War, he joined the Glasgow Tabernacle Male Voice Choir, later becoming conductor. This was at a time when many young men were banding together after the Evangelical Crusades of persons such as D.L. Moody. From this, a lifetime's work developed, culminating in the formation of the festival movement in March 1935 which brought together Male Voice Praise choirs at the Glasgow Tabernacle for Christian witness.

The concept of Male Voice Gospel singing spread throughout Scotland, across to Northern Ireland (there are still nine Male Voice Praise choirs in Belfast alone), down to London and back to its birthplace by way of the Midlands and Tyneside. The London and South of England Area Festival of Male Voice Praise was formed in 1948 from which there was devolution in 1961 when the South West Area was formed and the newly-named London and Home Counties Area Festival of Male Voice Praise

began its work. The London Festivals came into existence after the combined concert at the Kingsway Hall in London in 1950. A more ambitious project was carried out in the following year when five hundred and twenty two voices formed a choir for the All Britain Festival of Male Voice Praise organized by the redoubtable James McRoberts. This event was at the Royal Festival Hall on two evenings in September and November. After six years annually on the South Bank, the Festival moved to the Albert Hall.

McRoberts published several song books which were "meant to be nourishing spiritually and to bring life and health to singer and hearer alike... Musical gymnastics were avoided. Highbrow and lowbrow types were not allowed. The music must always illustrate the words, and never must the words be made to illustrate the music."²⁰ He propounded tonic sol-fah and his first volume, *The Moody Centenary Male Chorus Book*, was published, in the 1930s, in this system only. Leading musicians of the day such as Walford Davies and Hugh Robertson acted as advisers on the second (*The Scottish*) which had dual notation. The musical education within the books was comprehensive, including vocal exercises, charts on notation, changes of key, rudiments and "articles on the meaning of song itself."²¹ "Our pattern in singing salvation," McRoberts has said, "moves in a square circle - as four-square as they make 'em as regards both words and music. We get tired of fancy cakes, but we always find hunger best met with plain bread and butter, and folk are basically hungry when it comes to soul satisfaction. The use of song must always be directed Godwards".²² Presumably it was a mixture of boyhood influence and tradition plus the

"plainness" of sound which maintained the movement as exclusively male orientated. At no point in his writings does MacRoberts suggest why a choir including females should not sing God's praises equally as effectively as men.

In 1964, McRoberts and his wife made a six-month, thirteen-hundred-mile conducting and public relations tour of North America, travelling the triangle between Toronto, Chicago and New York which says much for the energy and doggedness of the sixty-five-year-old. He died in 1976 and although over the past thirty years, membership has dwindled (as much through the secularization of society as through the gradual though general decline in male voice work), there are still over sixteen hundred singers, spread from the Orkneys to the Isle of Wight, proving that McRobert's burning zeal for carrying the message of salvation through male voices still glows.

CONCERTS AND TOURS ABROAD

Although not on the scale of Mr. and Mrs. McRobert's adventure, a significant number of choirs, almost half of those in the Survey, have undertaken overseas trips at some point in their history (p.266). The experience of sharing a concert with, in particular, a Continental choir can be a salutary one. The ease and frequency with which the European choirs sing in languages other than their own and the far more sophisticated nature of the repertoire of the better choirs often takes British groups by surprise. To those with ears to hear, the limitations of the standard repertoire in the United Kingdom becomes abundantly clear and this learning process is probably the most important musical function of overseas visits. The Survey figure for Wales (eighty per

cent) is double that for the rest of Britain and this is explained by the existence of expat organizations throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. These societies are often very keen to arrange concert tours combined with holidays so that their members can hear their compatriots from the valleys at first hand singing *Myfanwy*, *Laudamus* and other favourites. The Welsh Federation has member choirs in Australia, Canada and South Africa and substantial tours have been undertaken through these connections, particularly to Canada. In 1986, Godre'r Aran Choir from Llan^mwchlynn toured part of Australia, New Zealand (both Islands) and Hong Kong over a three week period. This was their seventh tour abroad, previously having visited the USA in 1969, Canada in 1971, both countries in 1974, Brazil and Argentina (where, in Patagonia, there are strong Welsh associations) in 1977 and Australia in 1981 and 1983. The Dunvant Male Choir's visit to Canada in 1985 was organized through the Welsh Societies of Hamilton, Kingston, Toronto and Ottawa and was repeated two years later over a two week period with an extension into the United States of America.

The ambassadorial nature of these events is always emphasized in the souvenir brochures which include greetings from local city and council mayors, the Welsh Tourist Board and, in the case of Dunvant, a message from HRH The Prince of Wales. Yet, on these tours, the repertoire listed in the brochures contains largely traditional Welsh hymn tunes and arrangements such as *Morte Christe*, *Nant y Myn^hdd* and *Myfanwy*, with some opera choruses and spirituals for "balance". In this respect, the choirs, rather than being ambassadors for Welsh music, play the part of mobile heritage centres. The phrase "institutionalized xenophobia"²³ has been used in

connection with the burgeoning heritage industry throughout Britain in the late 1980s. To an extent, it can also be applied to Welsh choirs abroad - proud of their traditional repertoire and sound but not seeing it as part of their brief to encourage native composition by taking new pieces with them. If they did, this would demonstrate that not only is tradition alive but that Welsh musical development is active rather than moribund. A glance at Welsh achievements in the field of opera and instrumental work reveals an abundance of talent and vitality, of which ex-pat Welshmen should be made aware and of which they should be equally proud.

These full-scale tours are less-easily organized by English choirs although many of the latter have formed liaisons with European choirs, notably in Holland and Germany whereby exchange visits are made. The friendships forged through the hosting of the visitors in members' homes helps to ensure that, once made, the links are long-lasting. Sometimes, the trips abroad are to take part in international competitions when, again, the hospitality of a local, or relatively local, choir can make the enterprise possible. Again, support groups often help enormously with the funding of these journeys and, as in other areas of choir management, connections within the choir can prove most helpful. If a member or official of the choir works for an airline company or travel agent financial pressure can be eased. The ambassadorial male voice choir is often given a measure of local publicity and this sometimes means that local government can offer limited financial support, although this is another aspect of funding which has suffered in recent times. Similarly, choirs have been finding that the cost of any overseas trip has meant more and more strain on the pockets of individual members as

the choir itself can provide less by way of subsidies. This is where the support group and special fund-raising campaigns play a vital role.

Many choirs, often for financial reasons, limit themselves to visits within the British mainland and contact made in this way is not restricted to male choirs - there is often happy cooperation with mixed, ladies and, on occasions, youth choirs.

PUBLICITY

Whether through travel, charity work or success in competitions, publicity is essential to any thriving choir and many male choir organizations produce brochures for promotional work. These can vary from glossy booklets with sophisticated art-work to basically-produced typed handouts. Programmes for concerts are usually the responsibility of the concert organizers (often a church or charity) but the annual concert with a celebrity guest or guests is usually the time when a commemorative programme is produced with details of the choirs' recent activities, lists of Patrons and a message from the Chairman or President. Throughout the year, supporters are kept in touch with the choirs' dealings through newsletters. Again, these vary tremendously, in frequency (some regular, some very occasional), in production (ranging from typed bulletins to glossy art-paper magazines) and in content. Contributors offer a range of in-house stories, articles, poems, competitions and comment. The choir diary and the ubiquitous message from conductor or chairman are other regular features. Titles vary from puns - "... Mail", "Sharp/High Notes", "Vocal" - to the lofty - "Homines Vocales" - to the mundane - "Newsletter".

Within the male voice choir world, the best publicity of all is thought to be success at

competitive festivals. Entering the choral arena (p.267) occupies a significant amount of organizational as well as musical energy touching on all aspects of the choirs' administration. Coaches have to be organized for the competition day, accomodation arranged should an overnight stay be necessary and there are the usual secretarial form-filling duties. The songs, whether a test piece or an own choice, have to be fitted in to the choir's current repertoire (or, conversely, the repertoire is built around the competition pieces). Extra rehearsals are often demanded, despite the fact that inevitably the two or three festival works take up more and more time at routine rehearsals. All of this is undertaken because the average choir member regards the competition rather like a football match - one goes to win, anything else is failure. The homily from Sir Walford Davies which is often quoted on syllabi and programmes of competitions within the British Federation of Festivals, runs: "The object is not to win but to pace ourselves along the road to excellence". This educational aspect is sadly neglected by many choristers and it is well known in male voice circles that into Davies' dictum the word "only" is to be inserted after the negative and before "to win". Choir conductors at festivals are often frustrated by the reluctance of many members to listen to other competitors. Their absence is often explained on the loyal basis that their own choir would have been the only one to sing the test piece correctly and that, usually, all the other own choice pieces have been heard before therefore what is there to listen to? Further, the adjudicator does not really have a great deal of experience with male voice choirs (often, sadly, true) so his/her judgement is not to be trusted - unless, of course, one belongs to the winning choir.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS : OTHER MUSICAL COMMITMENTS

This reluctance to listen is symptomatic of the lack of involvement on the part of members in wider musical activities. Whilst all would describe themselves as "music-lovers", the statistics on page 269 suggest that three quarters of male choir members seldom or never attend orchestral concerts or opera, one half seldom attends the theatre for musicals and one in three does not listen to live choral/orchestral music. For members of a movement actively involved in music-making, these figures reveal a certain degree of insularity. This itself is another contributory factor to the slow pace of change in repertoire and should be considered in relation to socio-economic groupings within the membership.

In his study²⁴ of the National Association of Choirs, made in 1968, William Tyson found that the most striking facts to emerge in his analysis of, as he phrased it, "What kind of people sing in choirs" concerned the occupations of men who sing in male choirs as opposed to mixed groups:

Forty nine per cent of the men in Male Voice Choirs are in the manual worker group whereas only twenty four per cent of the men in mixed choirs are employed in that kind of work. There is a complementary difference in the proportion of professional men in the two types of choir, twenty four per cent in the mixed choir but only eleven per cent in the Male Voice Choir. The proportion of supervising employees is also much greater in the mixed choirs, the comparative percentages being thirty eight against twenty eight.

It is difficult to provide scientific figures for today's choirs not least because, for various reasons concerning job satisfaction, social awareness and the grading of wages within an occupation, job descriptions as entered on questionnaires, have become

much more sophisticated and diffuse over the intervening twenty years. However, as an adjunct to the 1988 Survey, the occupations of male voice choirmen in Sheffield (the membership of two choirs), was compared with those of men from three mixed choirs in the city to produce the evidence presented on page 268.²⁵ For confirmation, the exercise was repeated in Huddersfield, on Tyneside and in Wales. Thus it is shown that, broadly speaking, the numerical bias towards the weekly-waged or semi-skilled groups is less striking than the forty nine per cent in the 1968 report but is still nevertheless apparent. Bank managers, solicitors and company directors are found in both mixed and male choirs but very few lorry drivers, coal miners or bricklayers participate in mixed voice singing. That this is directly related to the (early twentieth century) origins of the male voice choir cannot be questioned. Choirs were very often formed where there were a large number of men working at the same premises and it therefore follows that the gentlemen concerned were largely "manual workers" employed, as they were, in heavy industry. Doctors, lawyers, accountants and bankers did not, and still do not, work together in sufficiently large numbers to produce, as a recreational activity, a male choir.²⁶

Thus it is a *sine qua non* that the male voice choir, as distinct from the nineteenth century glee club, had its roots in working-class conditions, attitudes and values. As has been shown in Chapter 3, brass bands, tonic sol-fah classes and choirs were encouraged in the nineteenth century by the church and by the new middle-class factory owners as a means of channelling and controlling the aspirations of the populace. This heritage shows through in the 1988-90 Survey. European "classical"

music has always been the preserve of the aristocracy, the upper-classes and, later, the new middle-classes. Manual workers knew little of Monteverdi or Mozart and Chopin's drawing-room recitals in Paris were not intended for the cab-drivers. Whilst progress in this direction was made in the late nineteenth century, particularly in Britain with the enormous festival choruses recruiting from the lower orders, the very fact that, in the late 1980s, the price of tickets at Covent Garden could still be as much as fifty per cent of the average national wage suggests that little progress has been made from the days of the 1872 Bristol railway worker contemplating the two guinea subscription to the Royal Orpheus Glee Club.²⁷ It is this heritage of middle-class dominance combined with lack of education (or educational opportunities) and, in the case of the young, self-perpetuating lack of parental interest and encouragement, that must surely be responsible for the situation suggested by the figures concerning concert attendance. The relative infrequency in concert-going is not explained in terms of lack of facilities. The cities and town concerned (Sheffield, Newcastle and Huddersfield) provide opportunities for hearing touring opera (or, in the case of Huddersfield, visiting English Opera North at Leeds) as well as for attending regular choral and orchestral music.

Economic considerations could well play a part especially among the C1 and C2 groups and yet the general (dis)interest in "classical" music is emphasized by the breakdown of figures concerning home-listening habits of the male voice choir members (p.269). Three quarters of choir members would watch an orchestral concert and one half an opera on television, but Radio Three is low on the list of most

frequently used radio stations. However, with its more populist approach in terms of disc jockey style presenters plus advertisements and regular travel and weather information, Classic FM is beginning to make an impact with the gentlemen, hence its showing in the second and third choice places in the relevant questionnaire. Similarly, classical music and opera do not feature highly when the record and tape libraries of the men are scrutinized. However, listening to the lighter classics and to other choirs obviously does have quite a significant place during the members' leisure hours.²⁸

Finally, it is relevant to mention that few male choir members are likely to be drawn into the company of SATB groups. Mixed choirs are perceived as likely to favour what is thought of by the men as a "cultured" and sophisticated repertoire of madrigals and nineteenth and twentieth century part-songs. Choral societies perform full-scale oratorios and orchestrally accompanied setting of the Latin rites. Little of this material can be taught, still less successfully learnt, by rote and very few of the male choir membership read music in even the most elementary manner. The tradition, from the catch club days, of excluding ladies for reasons of propriety, the background of the gentlemen's club atmosphere of the glee organizations, the marching, drinking and patriotic songs forming the male voice repertoire in the early years of the century and the syndrome of a night out with friends away from their women, combine to supply a formidable array of reasons why male voice choir members do not often sing in mixed choirs and do not identify with the ambience of an SATB ensemble.

Thus, from the 1988 Survey, the focussed picture which emerges of the "typical" British male voice choir indicates a group of forty eight fifty-three-year-olds most of

whom would have joined the choir without audition. The choir would have an approved constitution, a committee, probably belong to a choir Federation and be conducted at weekly rehearsals in a church or school hall by an amateur musician with the help of an amateur accompanist, both of similar ages to the members. There would be an annual subscription of about £8 (affordable, since most members come from the lower to middle income bracket). The group would quite likely receive financial help from a ladies committee, could expect to take part in about a dozen concerts a year (mostly for charity), with the likelihood of one competition per year and the occasional overseas trip. Members could expect to sing very little, if any, music written in the past fifteen years, would be unlikely to perform with a brass band, and, for the majority of members, the choir would be their only regular musical experience, active or passive. Those seeking such a group would have fewer problems if they lived in Cornwall, the Midlands, the North of England or Wales. This, then, is the pattern of membership for some twenty seven thousand male choir singers throughout Britain in the early 1990s.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 5 - THE MALE CHOIR IN THE LATE 1980S

- 1 On Mearis's death in 1956, Gibbs produced a beautiful setting of *To My Heart* (words by Clement Paman c. 1600) as a tribute to this fine musician
- 2 Crowther S. A Jubilee of Song - Colne Valley Male Voice Choir 1922 (1972) p.23
- 3 Composer and arranger Lesley Woodgate (1902-1961) was well known in male choir circles through his work with the men of the BBC Chorus.
- 4 Minutes Colne Valley Male Voice Choir Oct.7th 1947
- 5 ibid. 29th August 1949
- 6 ibid. July 30th 1951. The songs concerned were *The Despairing Lover*, *Fain Would I Change That Note*, *Nightpiece: To Julia*, *Love's Colours* and *To Electra*, all a *capella* and with texts from the seventeenth century.
- 7 See Chapter 4 p.187
- 8 References to this competitive event will also be found in Chapter 4 (p.190) and Chapter 6.
- 9 Cinema audiences fell from 22.7 million in 1955 to 9.6 million by 1960. Marshall A.(ed.) Guinness Book of Movie Facts and Feats (1988) p.182
- 10 In 1930, there were 2,510 working coal mines in Great Britain. In 1990 there were a mere 265. Mines: Year 1930 - HMSO (1931) and Schwartz P. (ed.) Guide to Coal-Fields (1990)
- 11 Despite approaches to University departments and to specialist organizations such as the Voice Research Society, neither of these claims can, it seems, be supported by scientific evidence. It is acknowledged that there are exceptions to the rules proposed here.
- 12 See Chapter Two p.59
- 13 This attitude was illustrated by the Vice President of Penarth Male Voice Choir in a newspaper article on the World Choir event in May 1992 - "It's better than it used to be. People are singing things from *South Pacific* or even later shows." *The Independent on Sunday* May 24th 1992

- 14 Thomas D.E. Survey of Choral Composition in Wales 1945-70 Bangor Univ.M.A. (1970)
- 15 Davies J. "The Contemporary Composer and the Male Voice Choir", Welsh Music Spring 1961 p.9
- 16 From correspondence between *The British Bandsman*, the main organ of the brass band movement, and the author
- 17 Comments added to questionnaire
- 18 English Association of Male Voice Choirs - Objects III
- 19 Tuck J. Singing Salvation (1966) p.14
- 20 ibid. p.60
- 21 ibid. p.63
- 22 ibid. p.71
- 23 Simon Needham - notes on his photographic exhibition - Untitled Gallery, Sheffield Autumn 1988
- 24 Tyson W. The National Association of Choirs - Its Past, Present and Future - dissertation for Diploma in Advanced Education - Manchester Univ. 1969
- 25 Social gradings are based on the Joint Industry Committee for National Readership Surveys (JICNARS) definitions:
 - A Upper Middle : Higher managerial, administrative, professional
 - B Middle : Intermediate managerial, administrative, professional
 - C1 Lower Middle : Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial administrative or professional
 - C2 Skilled Working : Skilled manual workers
 - D Working : Semi- and unskilled workers
- 26 In the comparatively rare situations where this accrues, male voice choirs have been known. For example, the London Stock Exchange had such a choir from the early years of this century until the 1980s and in the mid-1950s a Ministry of Education Men's Chorus was formed comprising thirty or forty civil servants, rehearsing in their lunch hour
- 27 See Chapter Two p.59

28 Involved in the sample of two hundred members were high profile choirs whose reputation would doubtless be an attraction to the more interested, open-minded or even musically literate singer. This could have had a bearing on the figures, suggesting that an even higher proportion of members eschew the concert hall than the present figures suggest.

Biddulph Male Voice Choir

CONSTITUTION

CONSTITUTION AND CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP

NAME _____

1. NAME

THE BIDDULPH MALE VOICE CHOIR formed in 1922 comprises a society of men constituted to share the pleasure and satisfaction, the cultural effort and discipline of learning and singing Choral Music.

2. OBJECTS

(a) The aims and objectives of the Choir shall be:

(i) to encourage, foster and cultivate brotherhood and good fellowship amongst its Members;

(ii) to encourage, disseminate and sustain to the best of their ability a higher level of awareness and enjoyment of choral singing and music amongst as many people as possible.

(b) The aims and objectives of the Choir shall be attained by such means as may be considered appropriate, including:

(i) singing and participation in services at Churches and Chapels of any denomination;

(ii) the entertainment of the public and the support of charitable causes by the presentation of concerts and similar entertainments in Churches, halls and public places;

(iii) the organisation of and participation in music festivals and competitions;

(iv) the levy of a regular subscription on all the Members.

3. MEMBERSHIP

(a) Membership of the Choir shall be subject to the approval of the Choir Members Committee but shall not arbitrarily be refused to any person, nor subsequently terminated, provided that:

(i) application for Membership is made in accordance with the procedure established by the Choir;

(ii) the applicant is in possession of a moderate voice and musical sensibility sufficient to satisfy the Conductor (in association with other Members as may be required by the Committee);

(iii) the applicant upon provisional acceptance, attends a satisfactory proportion of rehearsals over an initial period of three months and thereafter continues to attend rehearsals in a consistent manner and pays the required regular weekly subscription;

(iv) during his Membership he upholds, to the best of his ability the Constitution, Aims and Objectives of the Choir and cares in a proper manner for any copy music, uniform blazer or other properties loaned to him by the Choir. Any such uniform blazer or other properties shall be worn or used only for, or in connection with official Choir engagements.

(b) A Member shall not be eligible to take part in any concert, festival or public performance unless he has attended to the satisfaction of the Conductor, a sufficient number of rehearsals in the period prior to the performance.

(c) No Member, whether Chorister, Committee Member or Official shall, unless specifically authorised or directed by the Choir, assume the responsibility of speaking on behalf of the Choir or publicly expressing his personal views as being the considered policy or views of the Choir. Membership will be immediately withdrawn from any person found to be deliberately or consistently disregarding this restriction to the detriment of the Choir.

4. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

(a) The Annual General Meeting of the Choir to which all Members shall be invited and eligible to attend shall be held each year not later than 15 months after the holding of the preceding Annual General Meeting for the purposes of:

(i) reviewing the progress and achievements of the previous year through the consideration of reports submitted by retiring Officers of the Choir;

(ii) appointing Officers and a Choir Members Committee (hereinafter referred to as the 'General Committee') to serve and undertake the business of the Choir for the ensuing year;

(iii) considering any competent business of general interest and concern to Members.

(b) At least 21 days clear notice shall be given to the Choir of the date of holding of the Annual General Meeting at which time all Members shall be issued with:

(i) an Agenda for the Meeting;

(ii) a Statement of Accounts for the preceding year.

(c) The Annual General Meeting shall normally be called for a Sunday morning in the first half of September.

HONORARY MEMBERS AND VICE-PRESIDENTS

(a) The Choir at its Annual General Meeting may, on the recommendation of the General Committee and subject to the approval of two-thirds of the Members present and voting, appoint Honorary Life Members and Vice-Presidents.

(b) Honorary Life Membership will normally be conferred upon men who have served the Choir well over a considerable number of years.

5. HONORARY MEMBERS AND VICE-PRESIDENTS (cont.)

- (b) Honorary Life Members shall have all the privileges of Membership during their life-time but shall not be required to pay Membership Subscription.
- (c) Vice-Presidents will normally be elected from persons who have the interests of the Choir at heart (but who might otherwise not be eligible for Membership) and who consistently demonstrate their interest either financially or by other particular means at their disposal. Vice-Presidents shall normally be elected or re-elected for a three year period and shall be accorded such privileges as the Choir shall from time to time decide.

6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- (a) The Principal and Other Officers of the Choir and Members of the General Committee shall retire each year at the Annual General Meeting but shall be eligible for re-election.
- (b) Nominations for election as an Officer or Member of the General Committee shall be made at rehearsal meetings during the four weeks preceding the Annual General Meeting and shall be regulated as follows:
 - (i) each nominee shall be proposed and seconded on an official nomination paper by two Choir Members;
 - (ii) no Chorister shall nominate or second more than three candidates for election;
 - (iii) election of Officers shall precede the election of Committee Members. Nominees failing to be elected to an official post shall be eligible for election as a Member of the Committee and their names included in the ballot for the Committee.
- (c) No Chorister of less than one year's service shall be eligible for election to the General Committee.

6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS (cont.)

- (ii) DEPUTY CONDUCTORS to assist the Conductor in all possible ways.
- (iii) ACCOMPANIST to play the piano at rehearsals and to accompany and support the Choir at all their engagements.

8. GENERAL COMMITTEE

- (a) It shall be the duty of the General Committee to develop and implement the general policy of the Choir in accordance with its declared aims and objectives and, subject to any conditions imposed upon it by the Choir at a General Meeting; to provide for the administration, management and control of the affairs and property of the Choir.
- (b) The Committee shall consist of the Principal and Other Officers of the Choir and ten ordinary Choir Members to be elected at the Annual General Meeting.
- (c) All Members of the General Committee shall have equal voice and vote in the proceedings of the Committee.
- (d) In addition to the elected and ex-officio Members, the Committee may co-opt further temporary Members in a consultative, non-voting capacity.
- (e) The Committee may delegate any of its powers to Sub-Committees:
- (f) As soon as possible after the Annual General Meeting a first meeting of the General Committee shall be convened at which appointments shall be made as follows:
 - (i) CHAIRMAN of the Committee;
 - (ii) VICE-CHAIRMAN of the Committee;
 - (iii) TWO LIBRARIANS to be responsible for all music and the keeping of records of all Choir engagements;

6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS (cont.)

- (d) No Chorister of less than three months service may propose or second a nomination.

7. OFFICERS

- (a) The Principal Officers of the Choir and their duties shall be as follows:
 - (i) PRESIDENT to conduct the business of the Annual Annual General Meeting; to endeavour to enhance the standing of the Choir; to further and support its interests by such means as are available to him;
 - (ii) SECRETARY to be responsible for the proper conduct of all business relating to the Choir and its activities; to arrange and prepare agenda for and maintain records of all Meetings.
 - (iii) TREASURER to be responsible for the proper conduct of all the finances of the Choir including the banking and investment of its income, the payment of its debts and the presentation annually of a Statement of Accounts.
 - (iv) CONDUCTOR to be responsible for training, teaching and rehearsing the Choir and conducting them at all engagements as they may arise; to undertake and ensure the voice testing of new applicants for Membership and the periodic re-assessment of established Choristers as may be deemed desirable by the Conductor.
- (b) Other Officers of the Choir shall be appointed or elected according to the needs of the Choir and the range of its activities and shall normally include Officers with duties as follows:
 - (i) ASSISTANT SECRETARIES to carry out specific delegated duties and generally assist the Secretary in any way he or the General Committee may require.

8. GENERAL COMMITTEE

- (f) (iv) SENIOR AUDITOR to serve for one year;
- (v) JUNIOR AUDITOR to serve for one year and eligible in the subsequent year to become the Senior Auditor;
- (vi) A FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE.
- (vii) A MUSIC SUB-COMMITTEE.
- (g) Principal Officers of the Choir shall not be eligible for election as Chairman of the Committee.
- (h) The General Committee shall meet at intervals of not more than six weeks.
- (j) The Committee shall not be responsible for, nor have power to expend, a sum greater than the limit of financial liability which shall be £2500 or such other sum as may be determined from time to time by an Annual General Meeting.

9. QUORUM

The Quorum at the Annual General Meeting or at a meeting of the General Committee shall be two-thirds of the eligible Membership of the Choir or the Committee respectively.

10. FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE

- (a) The Finance Sub-Committee shall have overall responsibility for the guidance and regulation of the Choir's finances and shall have particular regard to:
 - (i) the approval of the Statement of Accounts for the Choir's financial year terminating on the 30th June, to be presented by the Treasurer to the Annual General Meeting;
 - (ii) advising the General Committee in the light of available funds as to the nature or amount of presentations or honoria to be made to retiring Officers in acknowledgement of services rendered during the preceding year.

10. FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE (cont.)

- (b) The Sub-Committee shall comprise the Treasurer and six Members elected from the General Committee provided always that no recipient of an honorarium shall be present during the discussion of honoraria.

11. MUSIC SUB-COMMITTEE

- (a) The Music Sub-Committee shall be responsible to the General Committee for:
- (i) advising the Committee on the broad musical policy to be followed by the Committee;
 - (ii) the selection of all copy music;
 - (iii) the selection of musical items and the arrangement of programmes.
- (b) The Sub-Committee shall comprise the Conductor, the Deputy Conductor and such additional Members as the General Committee may direct.

12. AUDIT

All Choir accounts for the preceding year and the statement of accounts prepared by the Treasurer shall be audited by the Choir's appointed Auditors before the Statement of Accounts is submitted to the Annual General Meeting.

13. ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Alterations to the Constitution shall be subject to the assent of not less than two thirds of the registered Members of the Choir present and voting.

Any such proposed amendments shall be submitted to the Secretary in sufficient time for inclusion in the Agenda and consideration at the next Annual General Meeting of the Choir.

Approved and adopted 12.9.76.

President D. Machin, Chairman R. Cumberlidge, Secretary E. Bracegirdle

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APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

In accordance with paragraph 3(i) of the Constitution, application for Membership of the Choir shall be made by Form of Application submitted to the Secretary.

The Form of Application sets out CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP—NEW MEMBERS as follows:

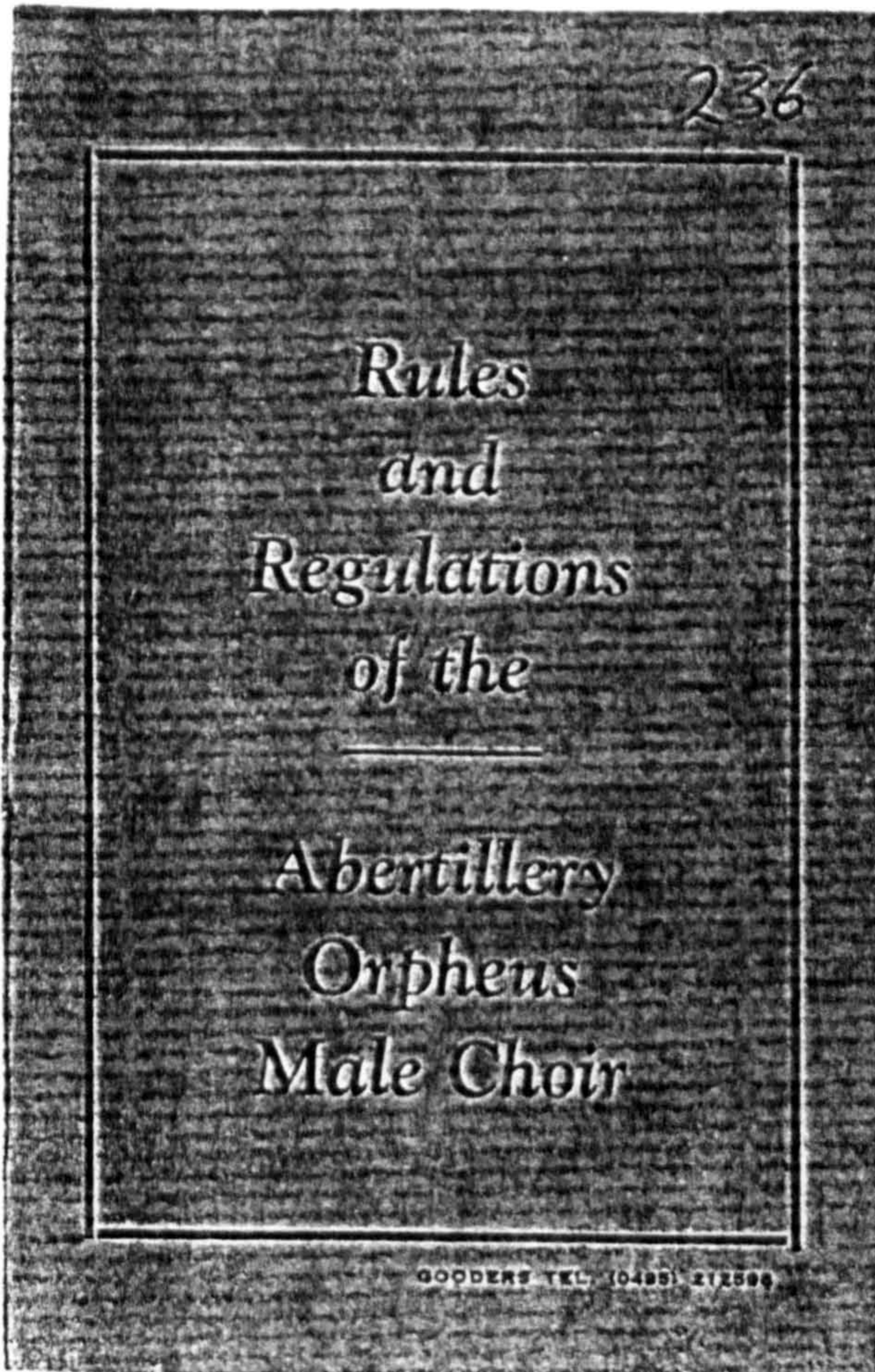
- (1) Anybody interested in joining the Choir should first make an Application, before attending any rehearsals, either by letter to the Secretary or by completion of the form below.
- (2) The Application will be brought by the Secretary to the Choir Committee at their next meeting. In the meantime the Applicant will be given a voice test by the Conductor along with another capable Member, the result of which will also be considered by the Committee.
- (3) Pending the decision of the Committee, which will be notified to the Applicant as soon as possible, he may attend and participate in regular choir rehearsals.
- (4) The Applicant, if accepted by the Committee, will be placed in the section of the Choir for which the Conductor considers he will be best suited in both his own and the Choir's interests.
- (5) The Applicant's first three months attendance will be regarded as a probationary period, during which he will be expected to attend all rehearsals, unless through sickness or work or other satisfactory reason GIVEN to the Secretary, his absence cannot be helped.
- (6) On satisfactory completion of the probationary period the Applicant will be formally accepted as a MEMBER of the CHOIR, and will be required to pay the weekly subscription which will be collected by the Subscription Secretary. He will also be issued with a Choir blazer (on loan) and a copy of the Choir's written CONSTITUTION.

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The BIDDULPH MALE VOICE CHOIR was founded by the brothers Ed and Tom Roberts in the year 1922.

This CONSTITUTION was prepared and submitted by a Sub-Committee comprising S. Hinks, J. Lawton and R. H. Pill and was adopted by the Choir at its Annual General Meeting in September, 1976.

This SECOND EDITION printed September, 1983.



(b) to undertake public performances of male choral singing and by so doing and where appropriate to assist recognised public charities within and without the town of Abertillery subject only to any restriction that may be necessary in regard to distances to be travelled;

(c) to undertake such other activities as may from time to time be determined which are not inconsistent with (a) & (b) above.

Management Committee

3 (1) The Choir shall appoint at its Annual General Meeting each year a Management Committee which shall consider and make recommendations to the Choir on all aspects of the administration, business, conduct and promotion of the Choir.

3 (2) The Management Committee shall meet monthly on the second Thursday in the month and at such other times as may be deemed necessary for the efficient conduct of the business of the Choir.

3 (3) The Management Committee may appoint such Sub-Committees from amongst its members, or from the Choir generally, as it considers necessary for the more efficient conduct of the business of the Choir

3 (4) The composition of the Management Committee shall be as set out in

2

General

1 (1) These rules and Regulations made at the Annual General Meeting of the Choir held on the Second day of February, 1979 supersede all rules, regulations or standing orders previously made relating to the government and conduct of the Choir.

1 (2) No addition, deletion or amendment shall be made hereto except by general consent of the Choir at an Annual General Meeting, fourteen days prior notice of any proposed addition, deletion or amendment having been given to the Secretary of the Choir provided that an extraordinary general meeting may be convened to deal with any urgent matter that may arise in relation to the Rules and Regulations.

Twenty one days notice, indicating nature of urgent matter, shall be given of the holding of an extraordinary general meeting by at least 3 members requesting such a meeting.

1 (3) The Choir shall continue to be known as "The Abertillery Orpheus Male Choir". (Cor Meibion Abertyleri.)

Objectives of the Choir

2 The objectives of the Choir shall be:—

(a) to cultivate and promote an appreciation of musical art particularly in relation to male choral singing;

1

Appendix 'A' hereto.

3 (5) The Musical Director and Accompanist shall be ex-officio members of the Management Committee.

Musical Director

4 (1) The Choir shall appoint at its Annual General Meeting in each year a suitably qualified person to be its Musical Director.

4 (2) Subject to 4 (3) below the Musical Director shall be responsible for the repertoire of the Choir and its concert programme and shall have sole control of the Choir in relation to its musical performance at rehearsals and at concerts.

4 (3) The Management Committee may make such suggestions to the Musical Director in relation to 4 (2) above as it may from time to time consider appropriate

Accompanist and Assistant Accompanist

5 The Choir shall appoint at its Annual General Meeting each year suitably qualified persons to act as Accompanist and Assistant Accompanist. Where persons are to be newly appointed to these positions the Musical Director shall be consulted and his approval given before an appointment is made.

3

Membership of the Choir

6 (1) Applications for membership of the Choir shall be made in accordance with such conditions as may be specified from time to time by the Management Committee acting in conjunction with the Musical Director.

6 (2) Such conditions shall include a Voice Test as specified and carried out by the Musical Director.

6 (3) The Management Committee shall have the right, in the interests of the Choir and its Objectives, to refuse membership to any person.

6 (4) The Management Committee shall consider and make recommendations to the Choir on continued membership or otherwise of a Member:-

(a) whose attendances at rehearsals and public performances are irregular and where no satisfactory explanation for such irregularity has been given to the Management Committee;

(b) who fails to meet his financial obligations to the Choir;

(c) who conducts himself in such a manner as to reflect unfavourably upon the reputation and good name of the Choir whether at rehearsals, at public performances or generally when actively associated with

4

the Choir, not being Officers of the Choir, to audit the Accounts of the Choir and may appoint persons to carry out the duties of Sick Visitors and Music Librarians.

Financial Matters

9 (1) Each Member of the Choir shall contribute weekly to the Funds of the Choir such sum as Choir may determine from time to time provided that in cases approved by the Management Committee the contribution may be waived.

9 (2) Each new member of the Choir shall obtain a Dress Suit through the Equipment Fund operated by the Choir and shall reimburse the Fund therefor by payments of such amounts and such times as may be laid down at the time of his admission into membership provided that where a new member is able to satisfy the Equipment Fund Officers that he possesses a suitable Dress Suit he may be made exempt from this requirement.

9 (3) The financial year of the Choir shall be from the 1st January to 31st December.

9 (4) As soon as may be after the end of each financial year the Accounts of the Choir shall be made up and audited by the members appointed for that purpose. Reports on the Accounts and the auditing

6

the Choir.

Presidents and Vice-Presidents

7 (1) The Choir may appoint at its Annual General Meeting in each year a President or Joint Presidents.

7 (2) The Management Committee may appoint Vice-Presidents provided that the total number of Vice-Presidents at any one time shall not exceed the number specified by that Committee.

Officers

8 (1) The following Offices shall be filled by the Choir at its Annual General Meeting in each year:-

- (a) Chairman
- (b) Vice-Chairman
- (c) Secretary
- (d) Treasurer
- (e) Publicity Officer
- (f) Stage Manager
- (g) Transport Officer
- (h) Equipment Fund Officers (2)

8 (2) The duties, responsibilities and powers of the above Officers are set out in Appendix B hereto.

8 (3) The Choir shall also appoint at its Annual General Meeting two members of

5

the Choir shall be made at the Annual General Meeting. A copy of the audited accounts shall be available for inspection 2 weeks prior to the A.G.M. by any member of the Choir.

Nomination for Office

10 Nominations for the various Offices and for the Management Committee of the Choir shall be made on Notices displayed for that purpose at least 21 days before the Annual General Meeting provided that the current holder of any Office shall automatically be considered to be nominated for re-election unless he indicates otherwise at the Annual General Meeting. Voting shall be by ballot if the Choir so wishes in any particular case. In the event of no written nominations being made for a particular office - verbal nominations will be accepted at the A.G.M.

Copy of Rules and Regulations

11 Each Member of the Choir shall be provided with a printed copy of these rules and Regulations. Each new member of the Choir shall be provided with a copy of these Rules and Regulations on formal admission to the Choir. No plea of ignorance of these Rules and Regulations shall be entertained as an excuse for infringement of them.

7

APPENDIX A

Composition of Management Committee

Musical Director - ex-officio

Accompanist - ex-officio

The Chairman

The Vice-Chairman

The Secretary

The Treasurer

The Equipment Fund Officers

The Stage Manager

The Publicity Officer

The Transport Manager

2 members appointed at the Annual General Meeting by each of the four Voice Sections of the Choir, and such other co-opted members as the Choir may determine from time to time.

8

Treasurer

To be responsible for the finances of the Choir (other than the Equipment Fund); to prepare a balance sheet and statement of accounts at the end of each financial year; and to prepare in conjunction with the Secretary such financial returns as may be required for various outside agencies.

Publicity Officer

To promote the Choir, and to enhance its reputation through the Press, the Media and by any other means and in so doing to foster the objectives of the Choir.

Transport Officer

To make all arrangements in relation to the conveyance of the Choir to and from engagements provided that the letting of contracts with omnibus companies for such conveyance shall be determined by the Management Committee from time to time.

Stage Manager

To be responsible for the staging of the Choir at public performances; to ensure the wearing of approved dress at such performances; and generally to control staging discipline at public performances subject only to such directions as may be given by the Musical Director.

10

APPENDIX B

Duties, Responsibilities and Powers of Officers of the Choir

In indicating below the duties, responsibilities and powers of the various Officers of the Choir, it is emphasised that the Choir is a democratic organisation and all matters affecting the policies, finances, administration and public image of the Choir shall be determined democratically by the Choir acting on advice and recommendations made by the Management Committee and the Officers. In exceptional and urgent circumstances the Musical Director, the Chairman and the Secretary may act jointly in the best interests of the Choir.

Chairman

To act as head of the Choir, in all matters save those reserved to the Musical Director having due regard at all times to the democratic nature of the Choir.

Vice-Chairman

To assist the Chairman as need arises and to act in the absence of the Chairman.

Secretary

To be responsible for the administrative and secretarial work of the Choir.

9

Equipment Fund Officers

To be responsible to the Management Committee and to advise on the operation of the Equipment Fund; and to report to the Management Committee as soon as may be after the end of each financial year on the financial position of the Equipment Fund.

FELLING MALE VOICE CHOIR

Established 1920

* * *

RULES

Election of Officers and Committee

5. The Officers and Committee shall be elected by a majority of the members voting (by ballot if necessary) at the Annual General Meeting which shall be held on the last Friday in January or on any other date sanctioned by the Committee. Nominations for office shall close one week before the Annual General Meeting.

Management

6. The Choir shall be managed by a Committee consisting of the Chairman, Director of Music and/or Conductor, Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Secretary, Assistant Treasurer and three other members of the Choir one of whom shall be elected by the Committee as Vice-Chairman. A member who is also a member of another male voice choir shall not be eligible to serve on the Management Committee.

7. The Committee shall meet each month or at such times as business warrants. Five members shall form a quorum.

8. The Director of Music, Conductor and/or Deputy Conductor, Accompanist and Deputy Accompanist shall be appointed by the Committee at their last meeting before the Annual General Meeting.

RULES

* * *

1. The Choir shall be called "FELLING MALE VOICE CHOIR".

2. It shall be non-political and non-sectarian.

Object

3. To interest the public in the arts and in particular the art of singing by assisting in and taking part in concerts and similar activities.

Officers

4. The Officers of the Choir shall consist of:—President, Vice-President(s), Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer.

Membership

9. A member shall be a person approved by the Director of Music after audition and whose membership is ratified by the Committee.

10. A member who has rendered exceptional service to the Choir may, on the recommendation of the Committee, be elected at the Annual General Meeting as a Life Member of the Choir.

11. Any former member wishing to re-join the Choir shall make application to the Secretary for re-admission. Such application shall then be considered by the Committee who may require the applicant to undergo a further voice test.

12. Members are expected to attend all rehearsals and to take part in concerts and contests where qualified to do so. Rehearsals shall be held every Friday evening; and on other evenings where necessary commencing at 7-30 p.m.

13. A register of attendances shall be kept. This will be reviewed by the Committee and a member may be requested not to take part in any concerts or contests when attendance at rehearsals does not meet the requirements of Committee.

Finance

14. The subscription shall be agreed at the Annual General Meeting.

15. The financial year of the Choir shall terminate on 31st December. The financial position shall be reviewed monthly by the Committee.

16. The books of account shall be audited in January, by two Auditors appointed at the Annual General Meeting.

17. Reasonable out-of-pocket expenses may be allowed at the discretion of the Committee to all members attending concerts, contests etc.

Music

18. The music shall be in the care of Librarians who shall be appointed at the Annual General Meeting.

19. All music is the property of the Choir and must not be sold or loaned without the sanction of the Committee. No music may be borrowed by a member for any purpose without permission from the Senior Librarian.

20. The Director of Music shall be responsible for the choice of music.

21. Programme selection shall be the responsibility of the Director of Music and where the number of singers for contests or other occasions is limited he shall name those he desires to take part, subject to the application of Rule 13.

General

22. Should the necessity arise. Officials may be elected at a Special General Meeting which shall be called with 14 days notice and at the request of at least 12 members of the Choir.

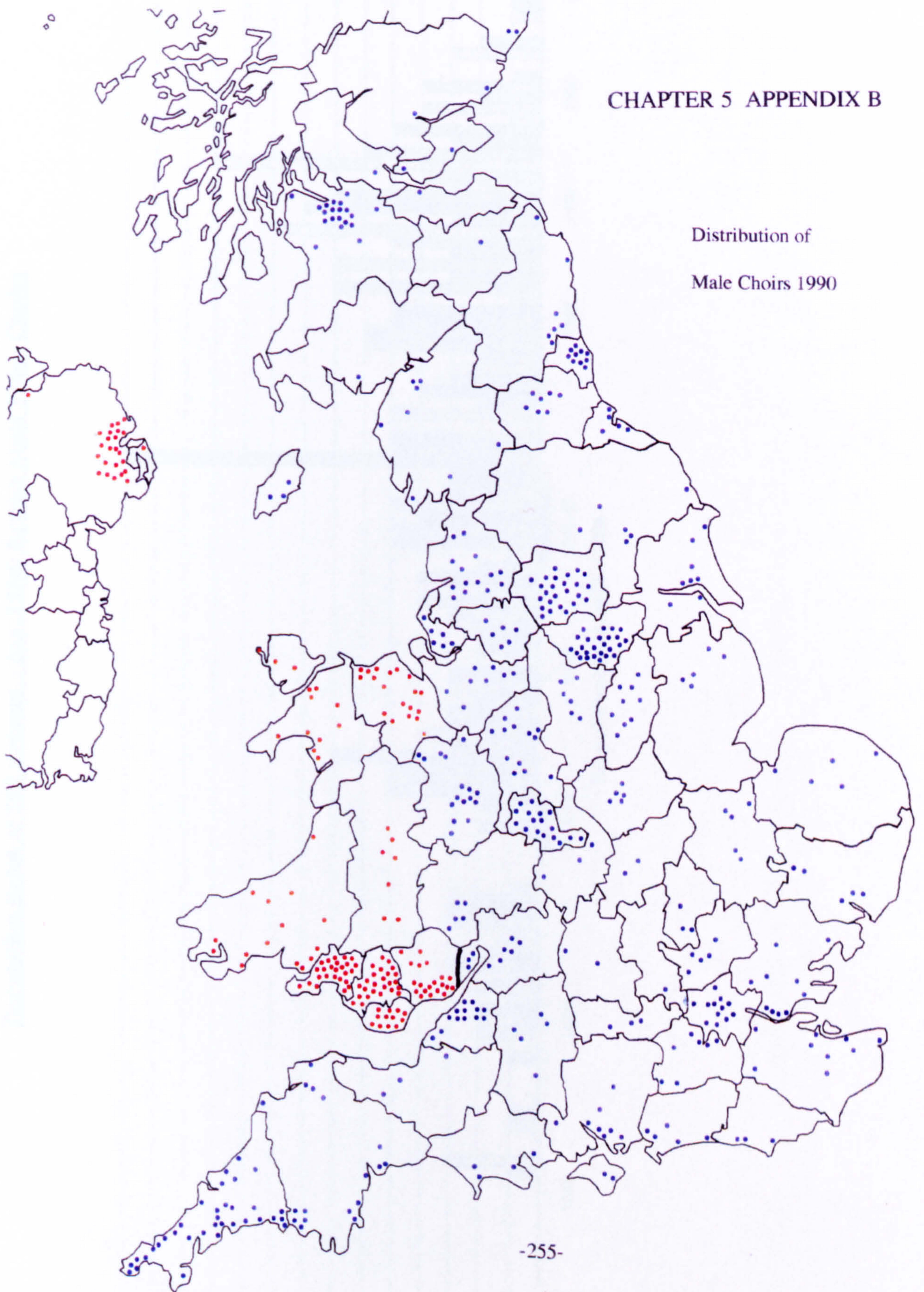
23. The Rules of the Choir shall only be altered at the Annual General Meeting or at a Special General Meeting duly called, provided that no alterations shall be made to the Rules that would cause the choir at any time to cease to be a charity at law.

24. If upon the winding-up or dissolution of the Choir there remains, after the satisfaction of all its debts and liabilities, any property whatsoever, the same shall not be paid to or distributed among the members of the Choir but shall be given or transferred to some Charitable Institution to be determined by the members of the Choir at or before the time of dissolution.

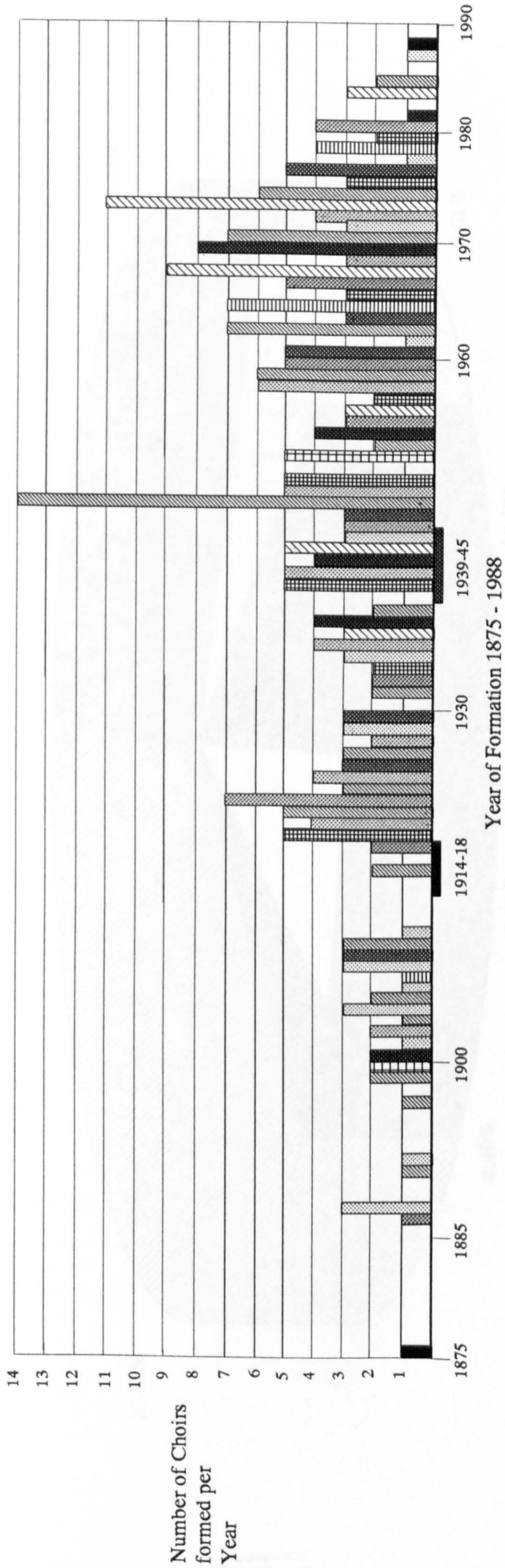
25. A copy of these Rules shall be given to each member.

CHAPTER 5 APPENDIX B

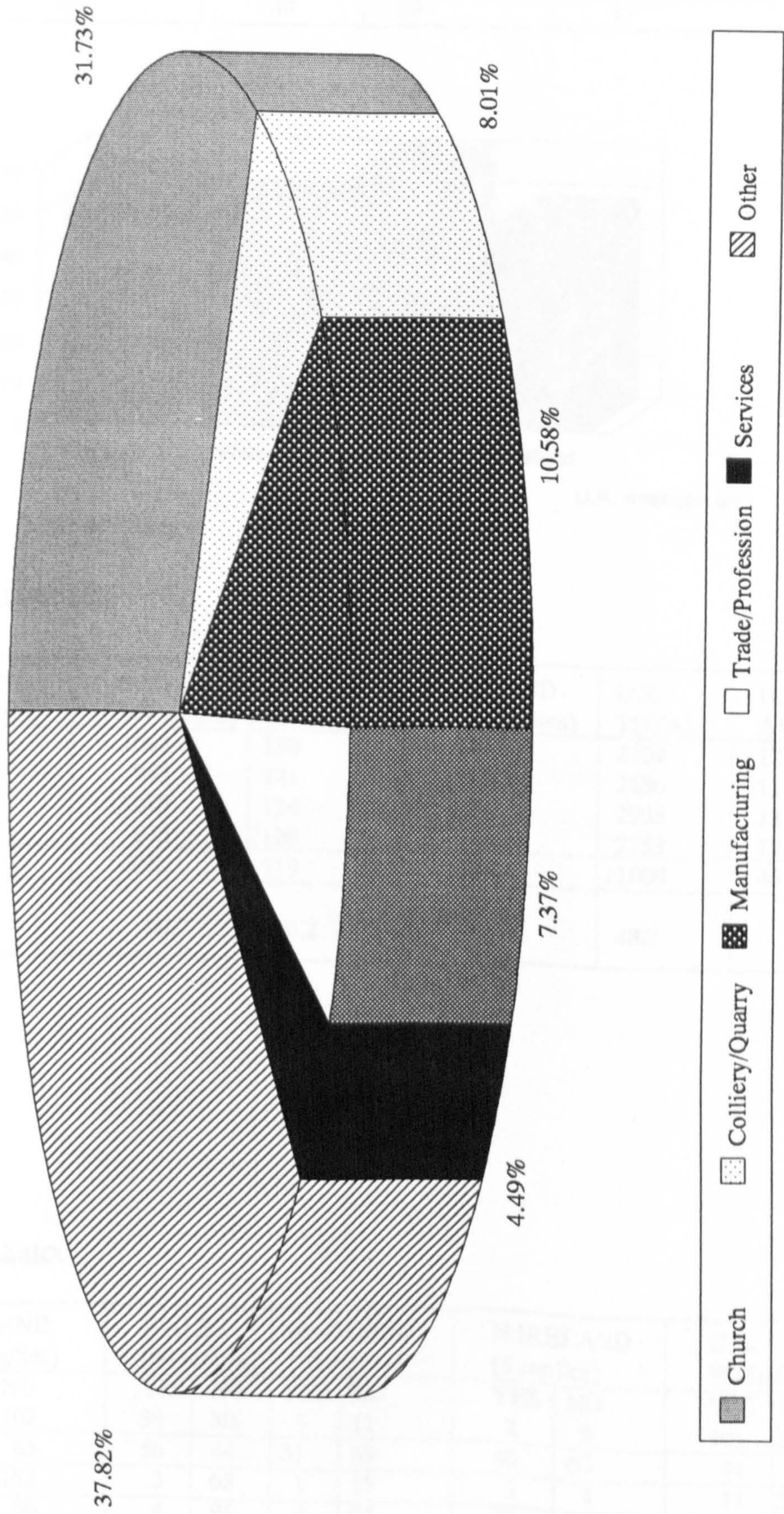
Distribution of
Male Choirs 1990



Formation dates of 302 present - day(1988) British Male Voice Choirs

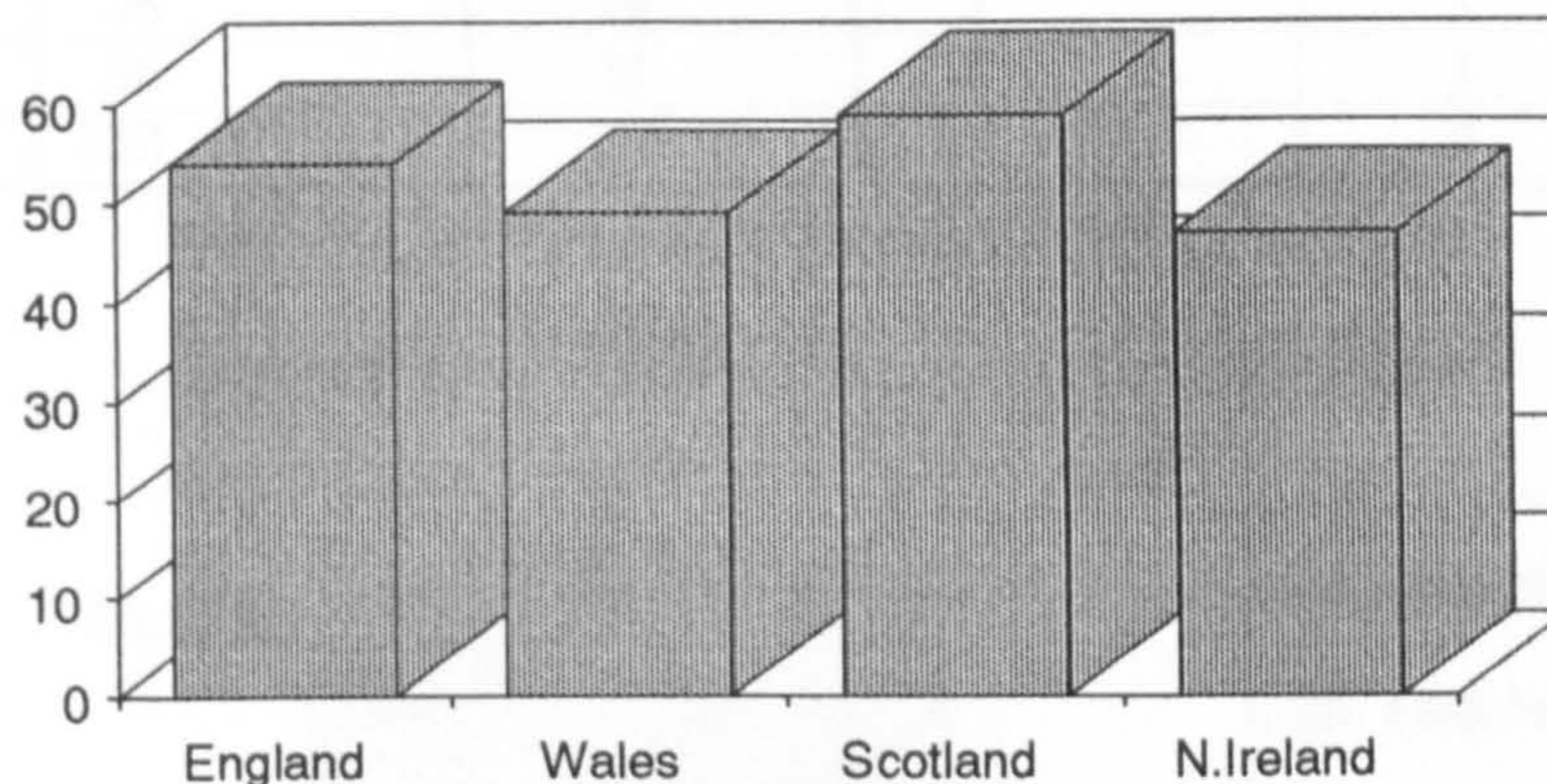


Choir Origins



Choir Membership : Average Age

	ENGLAND (146 replies)	WALES (63 replies)	SCOTLAND (15 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Average Age Totals	7858	3113	892	235	12098
Mean Age	54	49	59	47	53



U.K. Average: 53

Choir Membership : Numbers

	ENGLAND (140 replies)	WALES (67 replies)	SCOTLAND (15 replies)	N.IRELAND (4 replies)	U.K. TOTAL	U.K. AVERAGE
Tenor 1	1495	1063	130	41	2729	12
Tenor 2	1418	953	121	44	2536	11
Baritone	1726	1079	134	46	2985	13
Bass	1611	975	128	45	2759	12
Totals	6250	4070	513	176	11009	48
Average Choir	44.6	60.7	34.2	44	48.7	

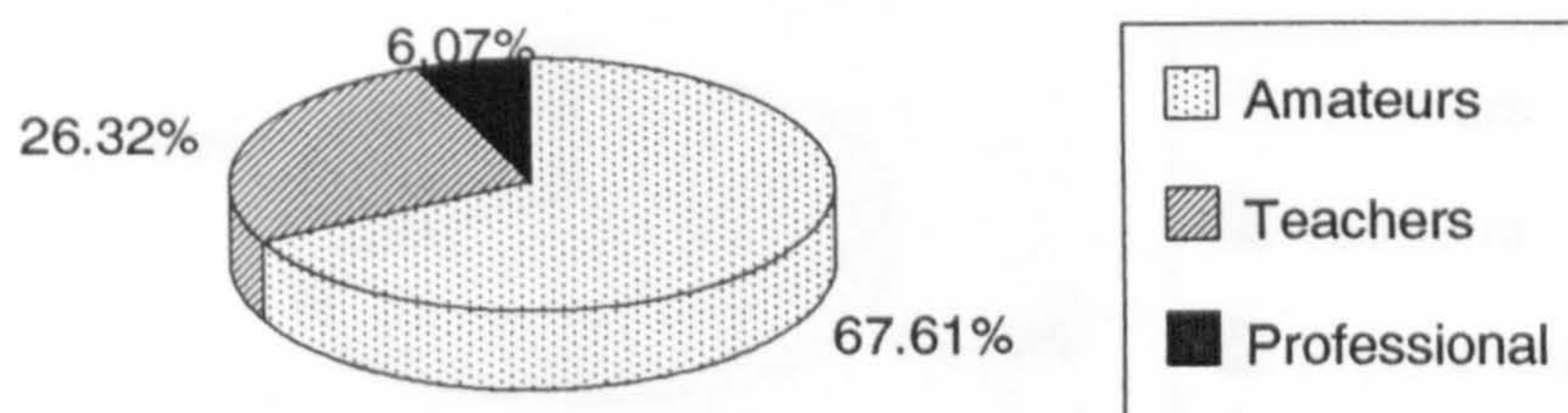
Choir Membership: Entry

	ENGLAND (158 replies)		WALES (68 replies)		SCOTLAND (16 replies)		N.IRELAND (5 replies)		U.K. TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Auditions	56	102	38	30	5	11	2	3	101	146
%	35	65	56	44	31	69	40	60	41	59
Re-auditions	6	152	3	65	1	15	1	4	11	236
%	4	96	4	96	6	94	20	80	4.5	95.5

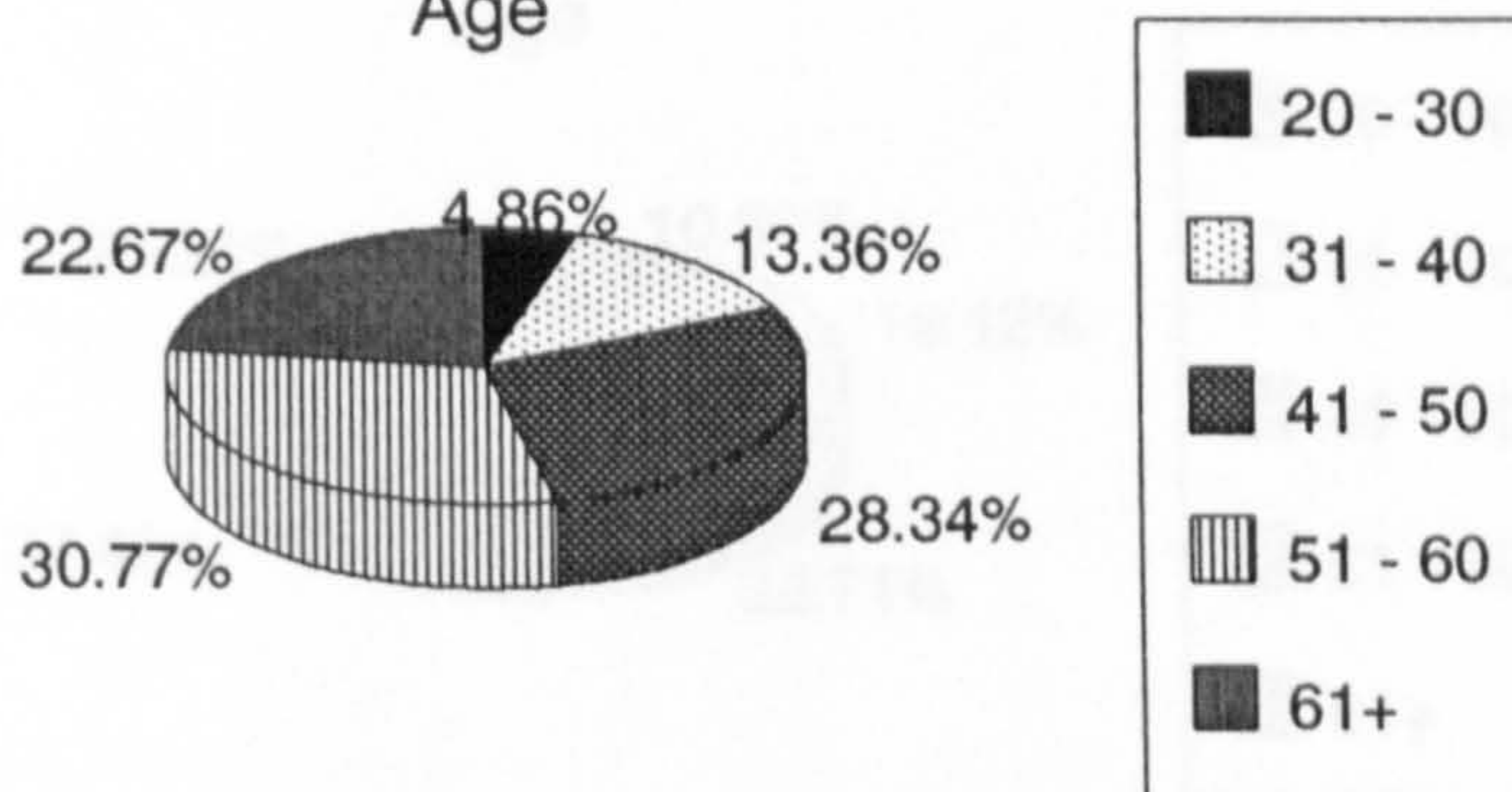
Conductors: Musical status, age, qualifications

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Amateurs	115	38	10	4	167
Teachers	29	29	6	1	65
Professional	14	1	-	-	15
Age: 20-30	5	4	2	1	12
31-40	15	14	4	-	33
41-50	44	19	4	3	70
51-60	56	17	3	-	76
61+	38	14	3	1	56
Yes	36	31	5	1	73
No	122	37	11	4	174

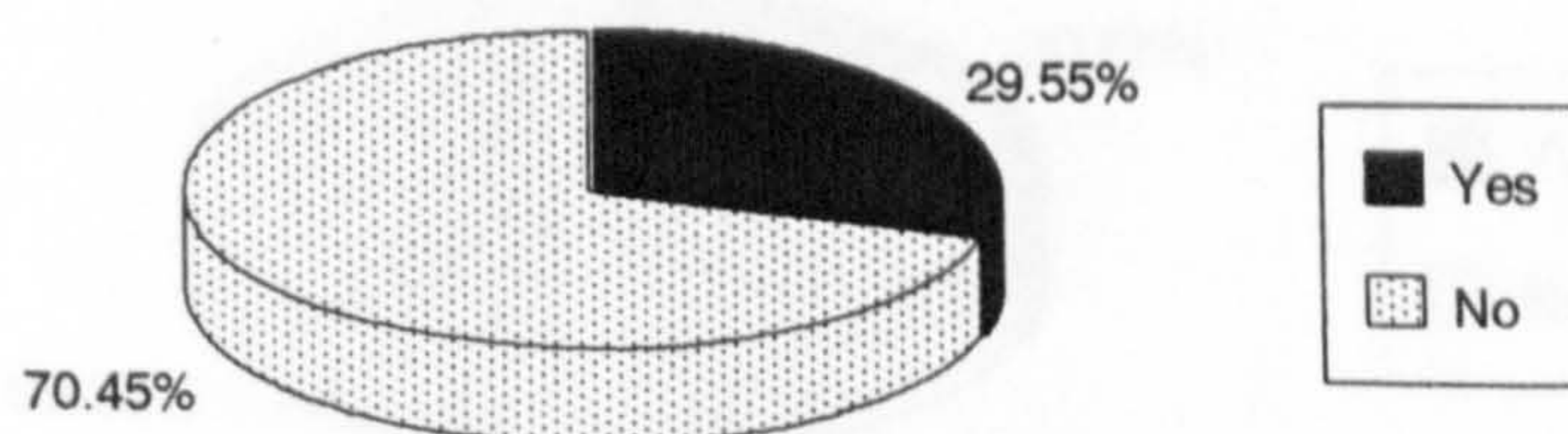
Status



Age



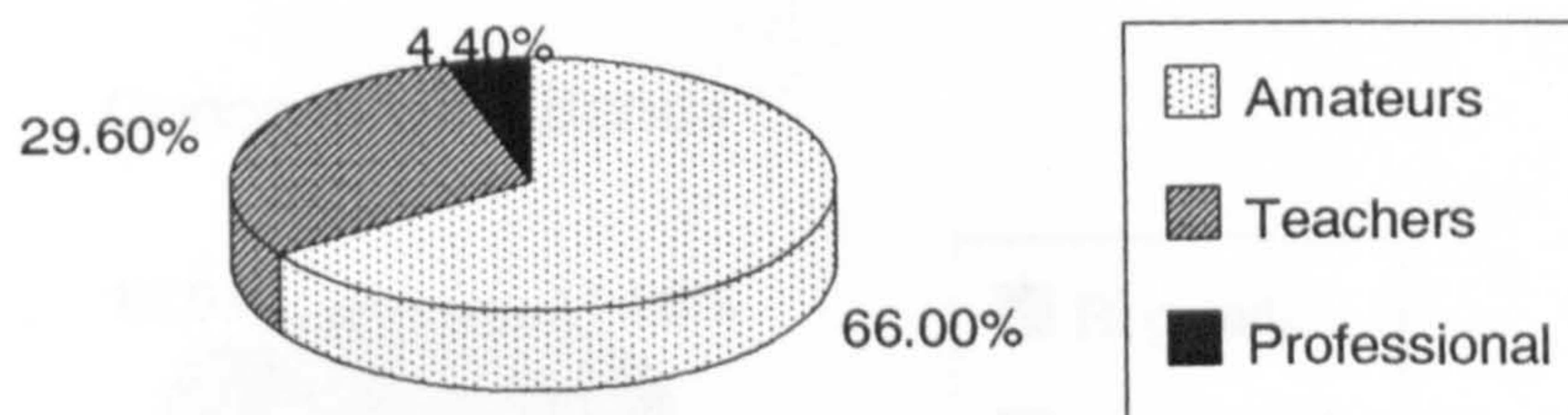
Qualifications



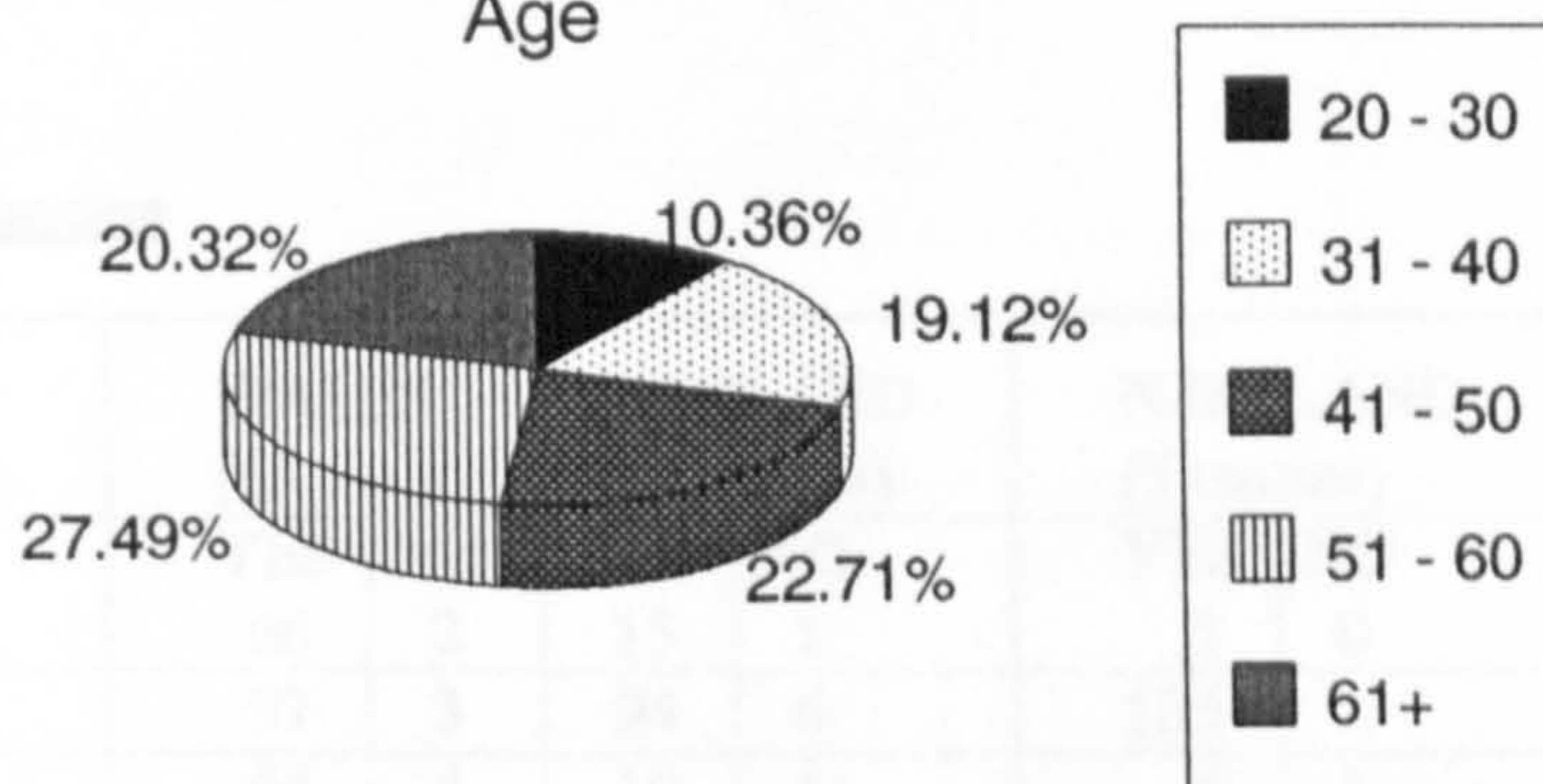
Accompanists: musical status, age, qualifications

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Amateurs	111	42	11	2	165
Teachers	42	24	5	3	74
Professional	9	2	-	-	11
Age: 20-30	6	16	2	2	26
31-40	28	18	1	1	48
41-50	37	17	2	1	57
51-60	51	13	5	-	69
61+	40	5	6	1	51
Yes	39	31	5	2	77
No	123	37	11	3	174

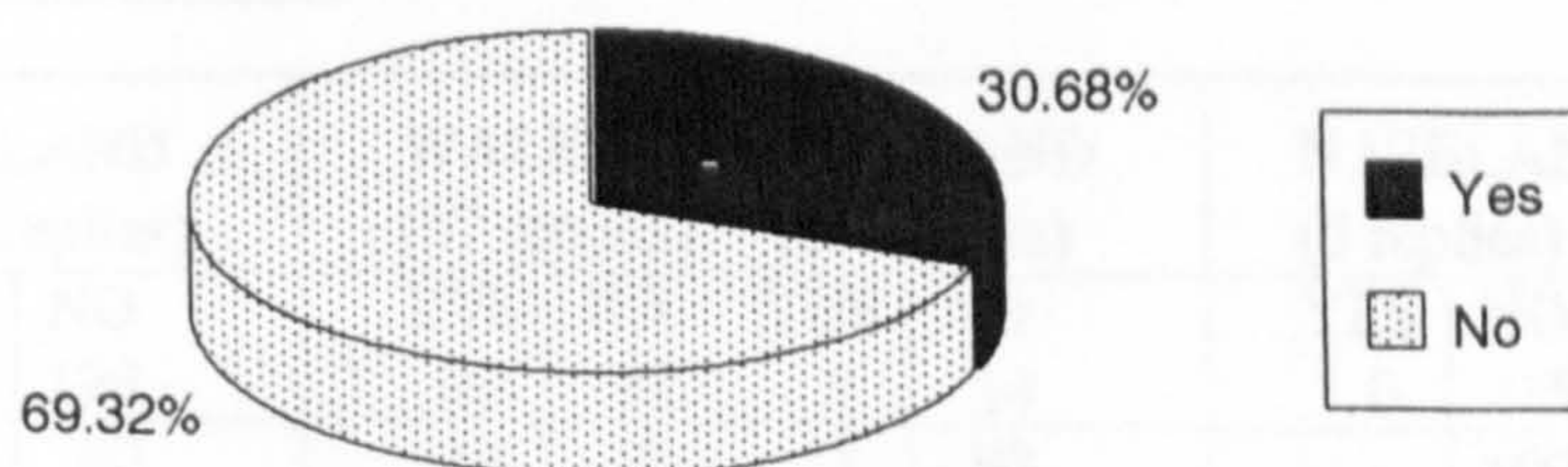
Status



Age



Qualifications



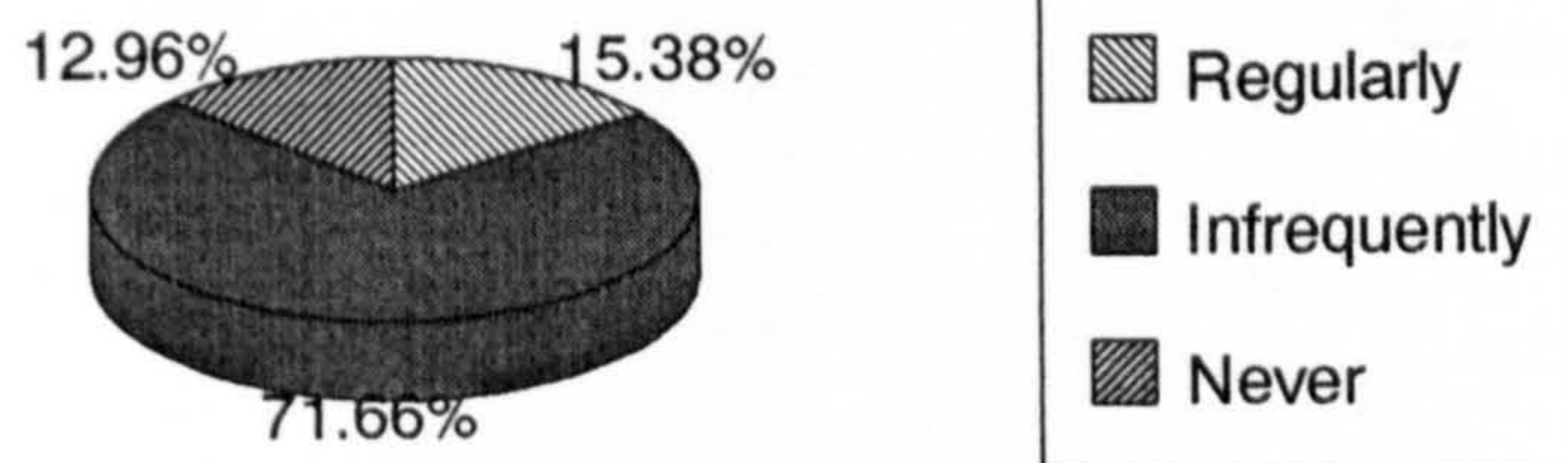
Commissions in the last 15 years

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Number	17	12	-	-	29
%	11	17			12

Concerts: with Bands

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Regularly	31	7	0	0	38
Infrequently	109	54	10	4	177
Never	18	7	6	1	32

Concerts: with Bands



Choir Membership: Organisation

	ENGLAND (158 replies)		WALES (68 replies)		SCOTLAND (16 replies)		N.IRELAND (5 replies)		U.K. TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Committee	151	7	66	2	15	1	5	0	247	10
%	95	5	97	3	94	6	100	-	96	4
Constitution	113	45	64	4	10	6	4	1	191	56
%	71	29	94	6	63	37	80	20	77	23

Choir Membership: other than singing

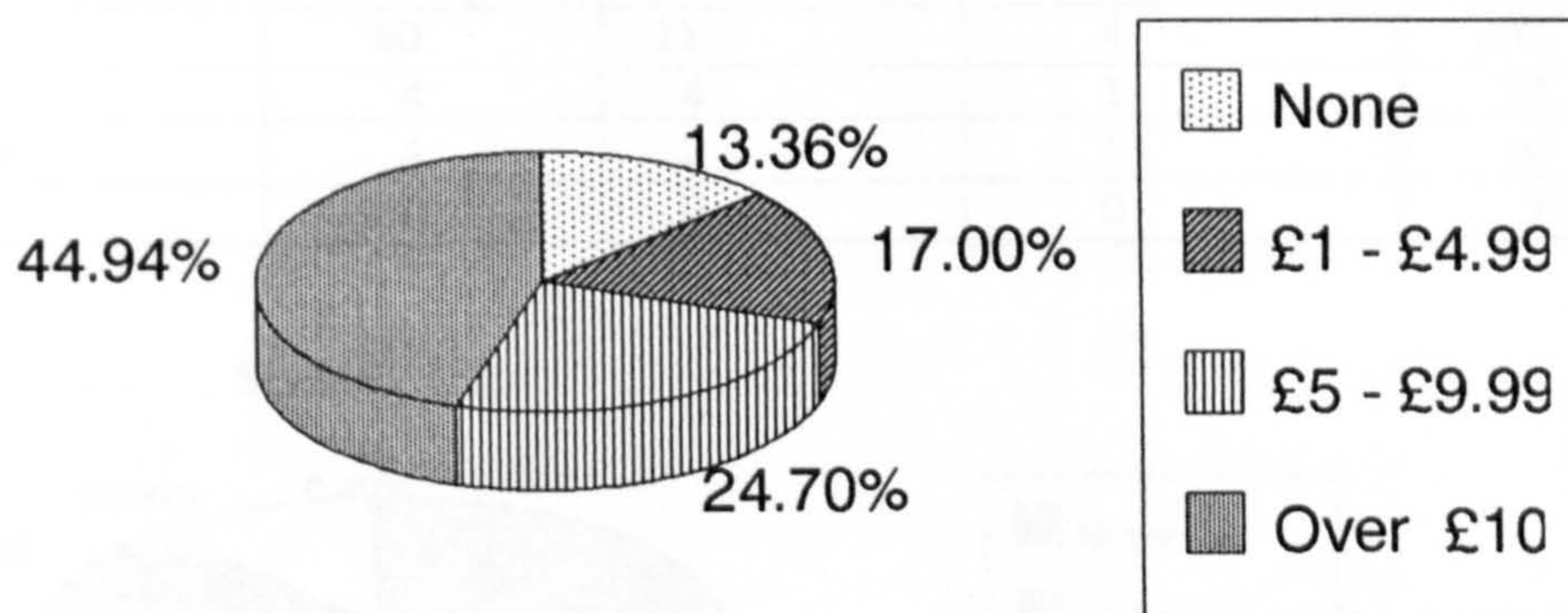
	ENGLAND (157 replies)		WALES (67 replies)		SCOTLAND (15 replies)		N.IRELAND (5 replies)		U.K. TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Choir Associates	31	126	20	47	1	14	0	5	52	192
%	20	80	29	71	7	93	-	100	21	79

Annual Subscriptions

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
None	16*	14~	3	-	33
£1 - £4.99	24	12	5	1	42
£5 - £9.99	42	13	5	1	61
Over £10	76	29	3	3	111

* 5 Collect subscriptions weekly
 ~ 1 Collects subscriptions weekly

Annual Subscription

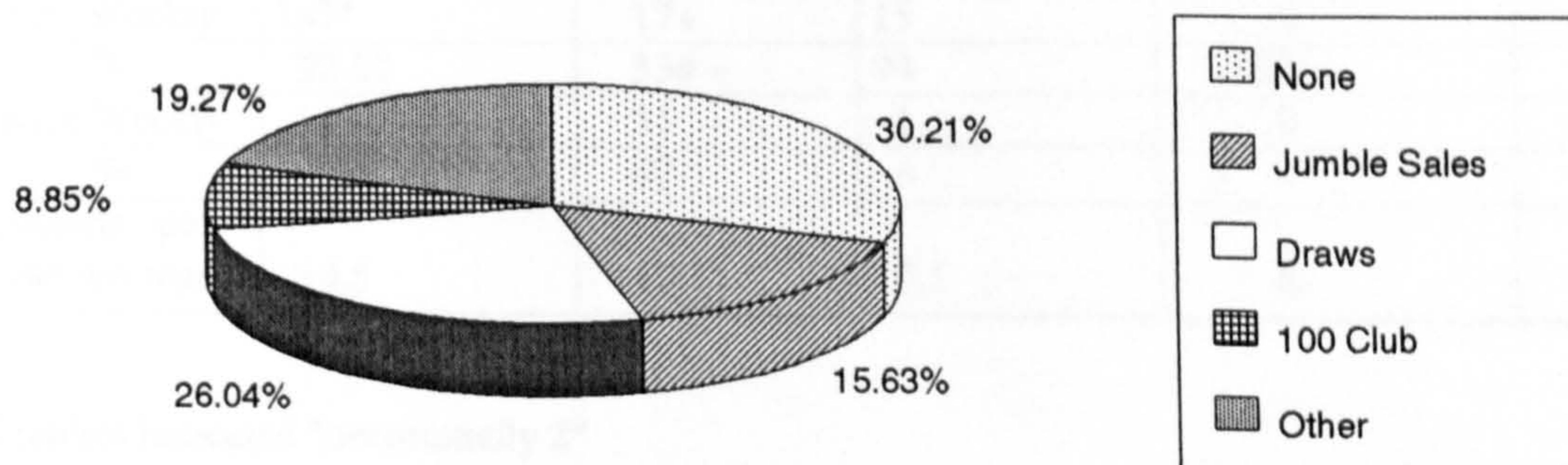


Fund Raising

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
None	58	12	12	4	86
Jumble Sales	30	13	-	-	43
Draws	50	40	1	1	92
100 Club	17	23	-	-	40
Other*	37	15	3	1	56

*Collections, Dances, Coffee Mornings, Fetes/Fairs, Sale of Tapes/Records, Bingo, Waste Paper, Sponsored Events, Tote, Race Nights, Auctions,

Fund Raising

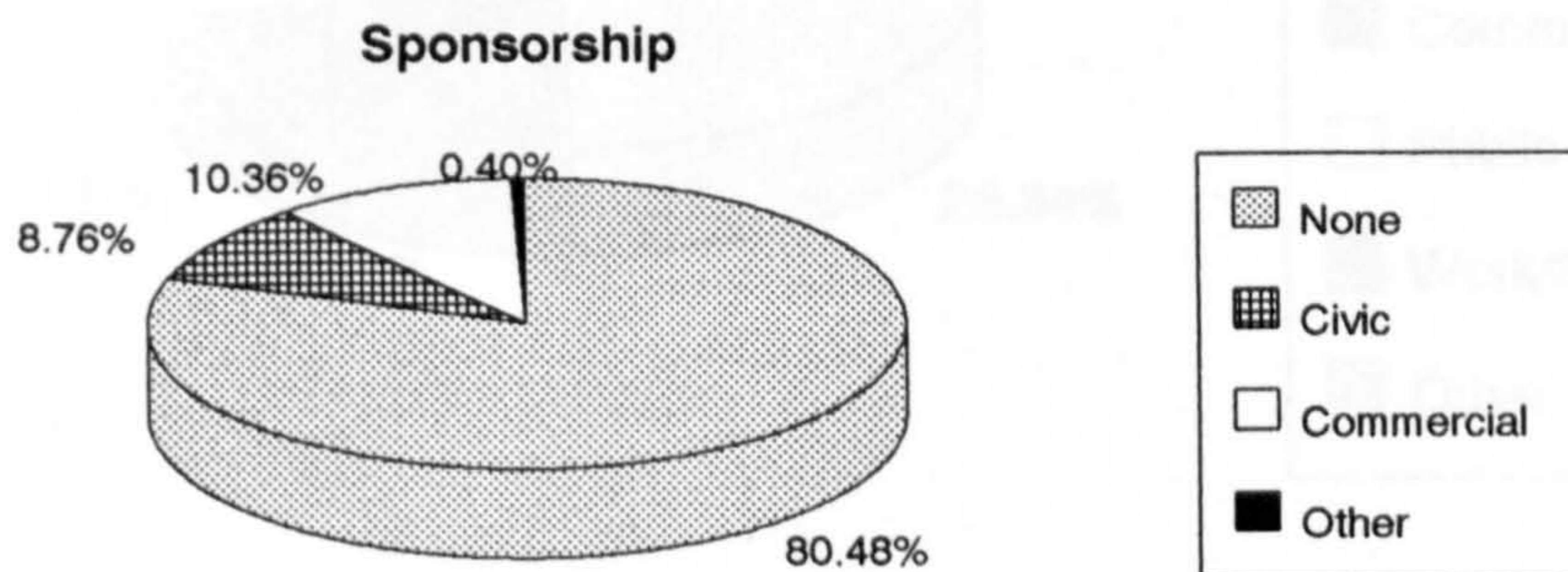


Support Groups

	ENGLAND (158 replies)		WALES (68 replies)		SCOTLAND (16 replies)		N.IRELAND (5 replies)		U.K. TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Number	62	96	41	27	1	15	0	5	104	143
%	39	61	60	40	6	94	0	100	42	58

Sponsorship

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
None	127	60	11	4	202
Civic	13	4	4	1	22
Commercial	19	4	2	1	26
Other	1	0	0	0	1



Registered as a Charity

	ENGLAND (152 replies)	WALES (67 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Yes	37	36	1	1	75
No	115	31	15	4	165

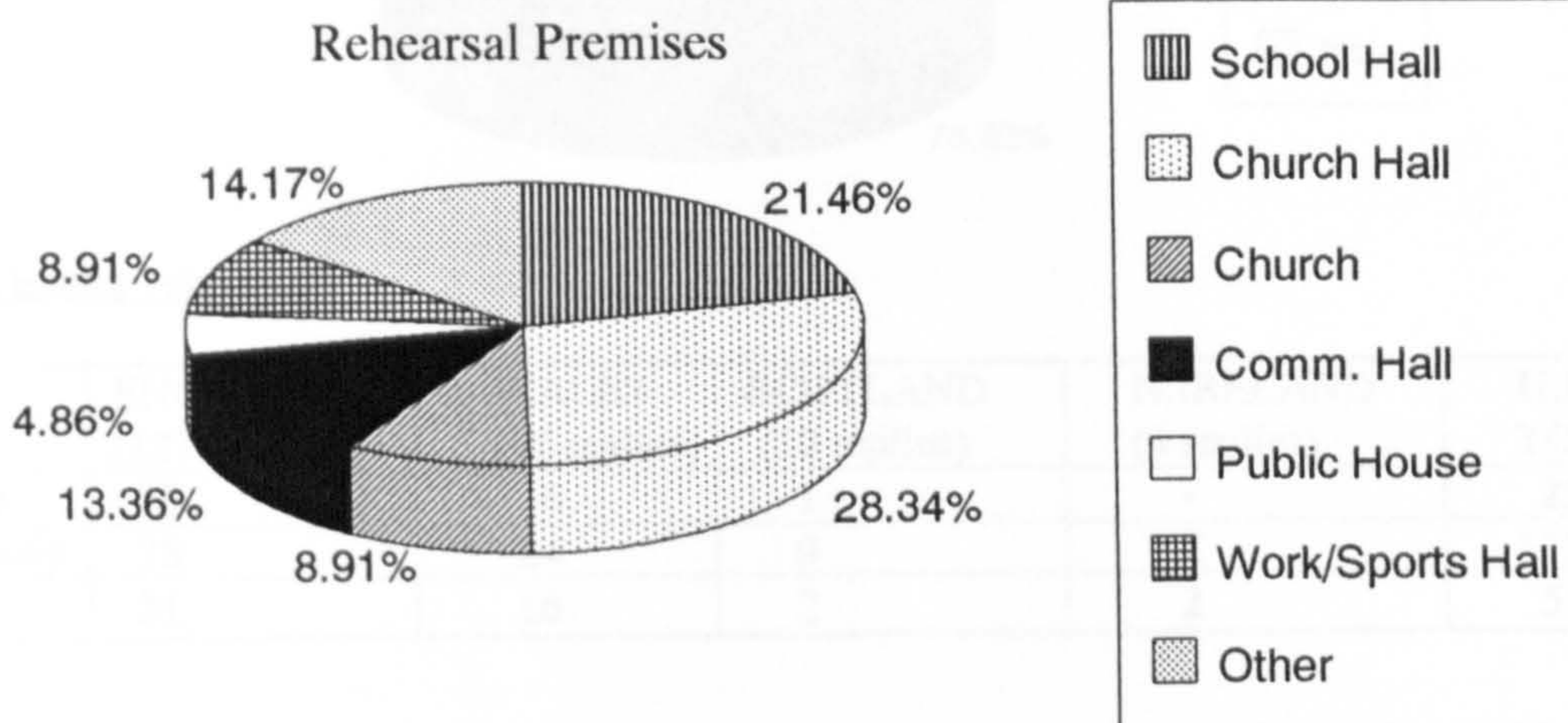
Rehearsals: Concerts

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Once Weekly	147*	17+	15	5	184
%	92.52	33# ~	94	100	74
Twice Weekly	11	51	1	0	63
%	7.48	67	6	-	26
Concerts per Year(Average)	14.5	17	7.5	8	11.75

* 6 replies indicated "occasionally 2"
 + 1 reply indicated "occasionally 2"
 # 1 reply indicated "occasionally 3"
 ~ 1 reply indicated "thrice weekly"

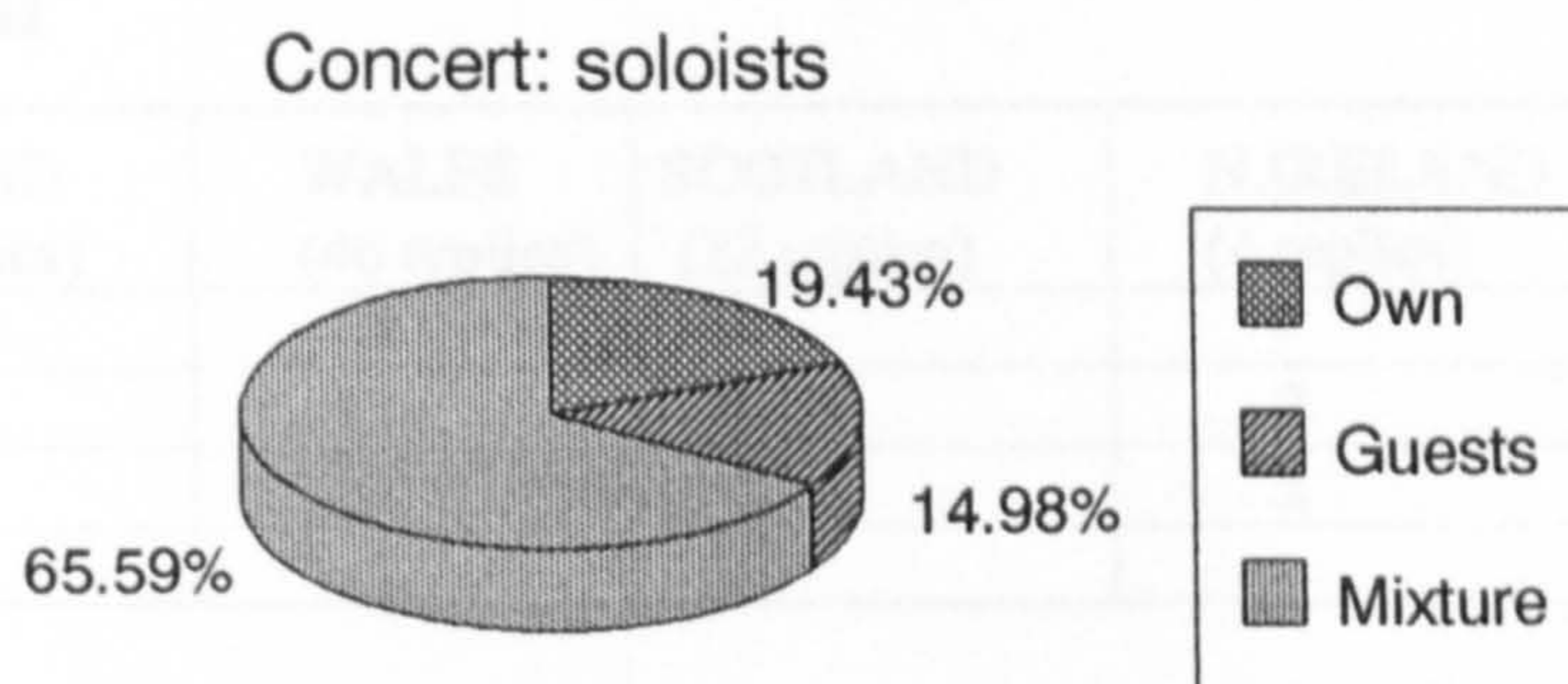
Rehearsal Premises

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
School Hall	28	21	4	-	53
Church Hall	50	13	5	2	70
Church	20	2	-	-	22
Community Hall	19	11	3	-	33
Public House	7	2	3	-	12
Work /Sports Hall	17	4	-	1	22
Other	17	15	1	2	35



Concerts: Soloists

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Own	35	8	5	0	48
Guests	18	16	1	2	37
Mixture	105	44	10	3	162

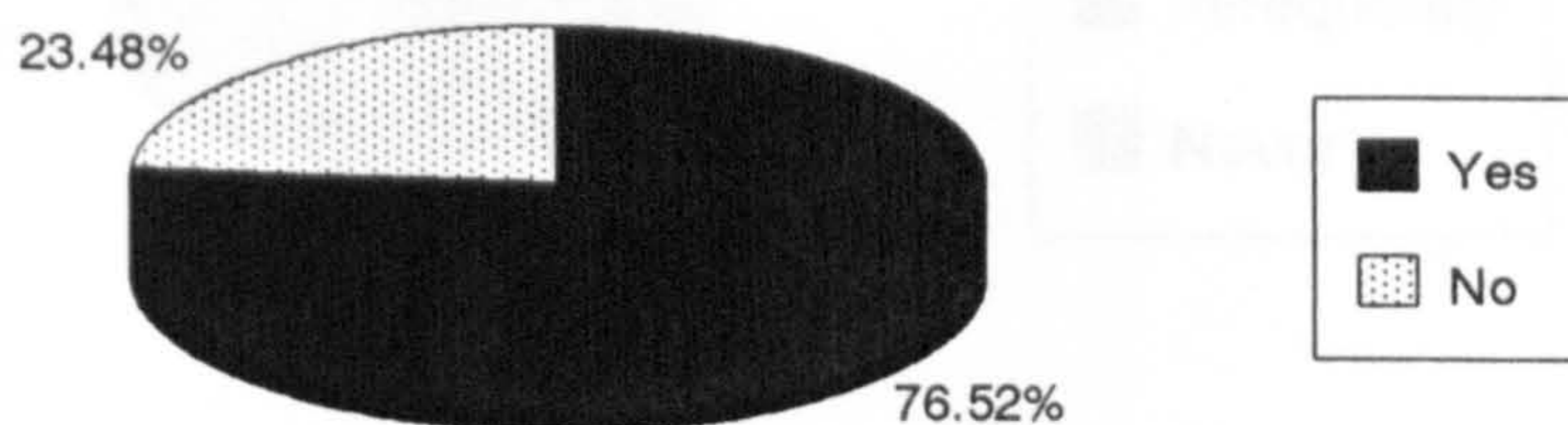


Choir Membership: Choral Associations

	ENGLAND (156 replies)		WALES (68 replies)		SCOTLAND (16 replies)		N.IRELAND (5 replies)		U.K. TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Choral Associations	111	45	62	6	7	9	5	0	185	60
%	72	28	91	9	44	57	100	-	76	24

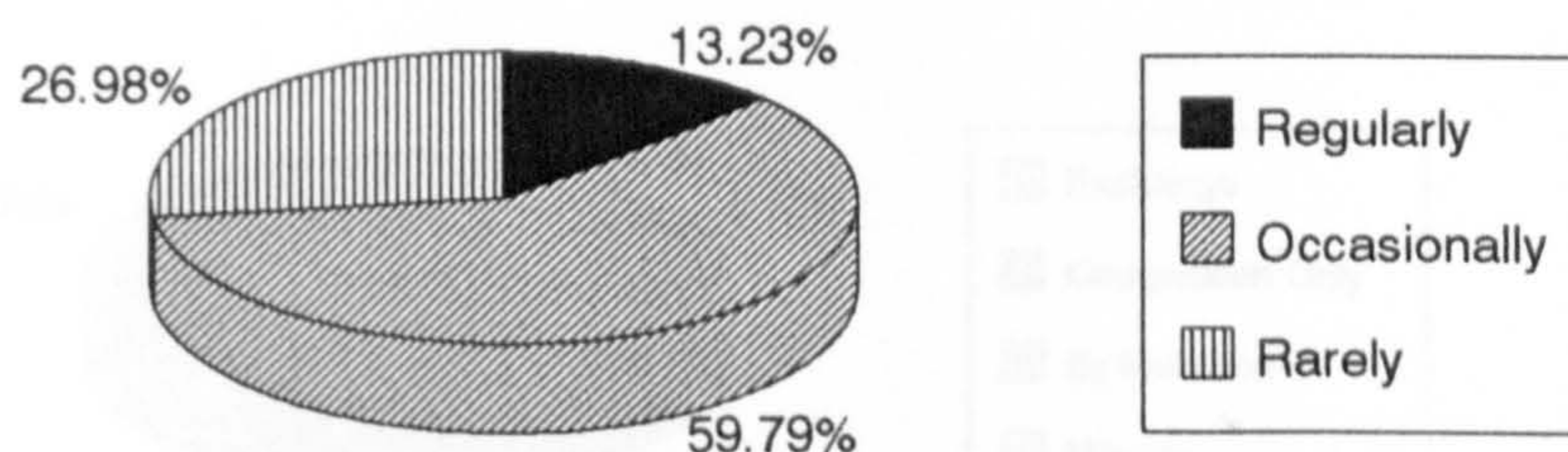
Deputies

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
YES	127	46	12	4	189
NO	31	22	4	1	58



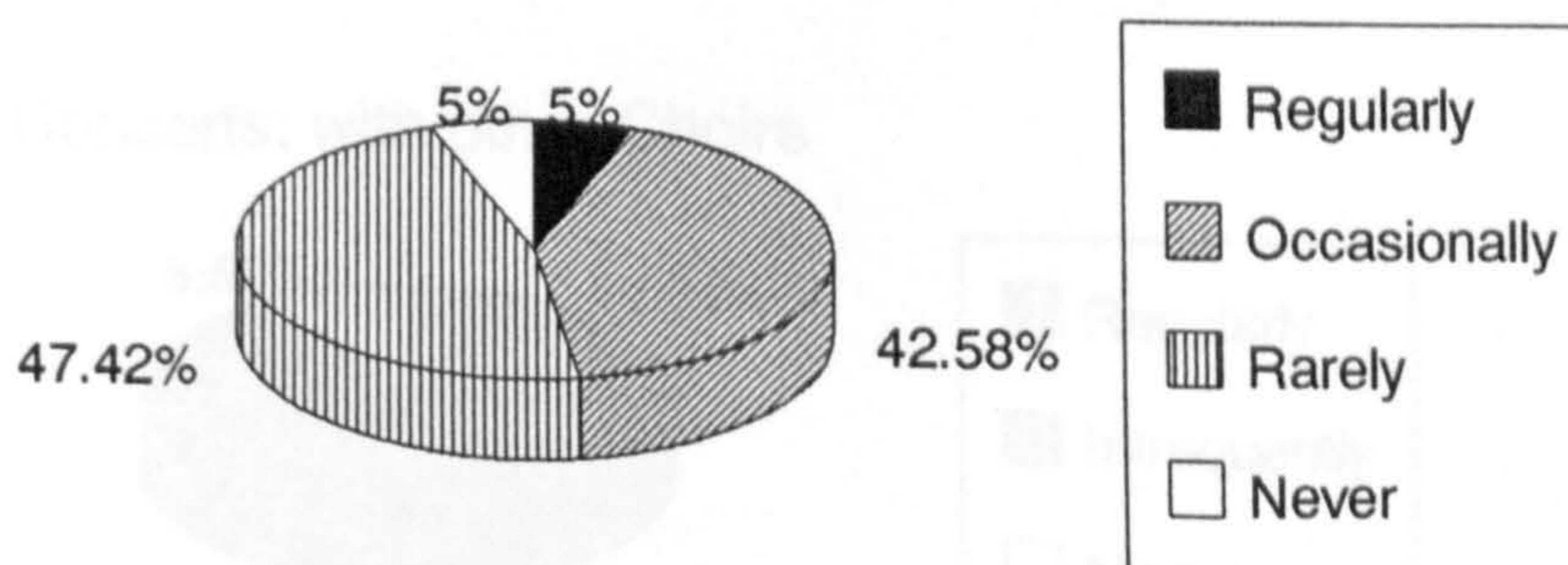
Deputies: taking rehearsals

	ENGLAND (127 replies)	WALES (46 replies)	SCOTLAND (12 replies)	N.IRELAND (4 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Regularly	18	6	1	-	25
Occasionally	78	24	9	2	113
Rarely	31	16	2	2	51

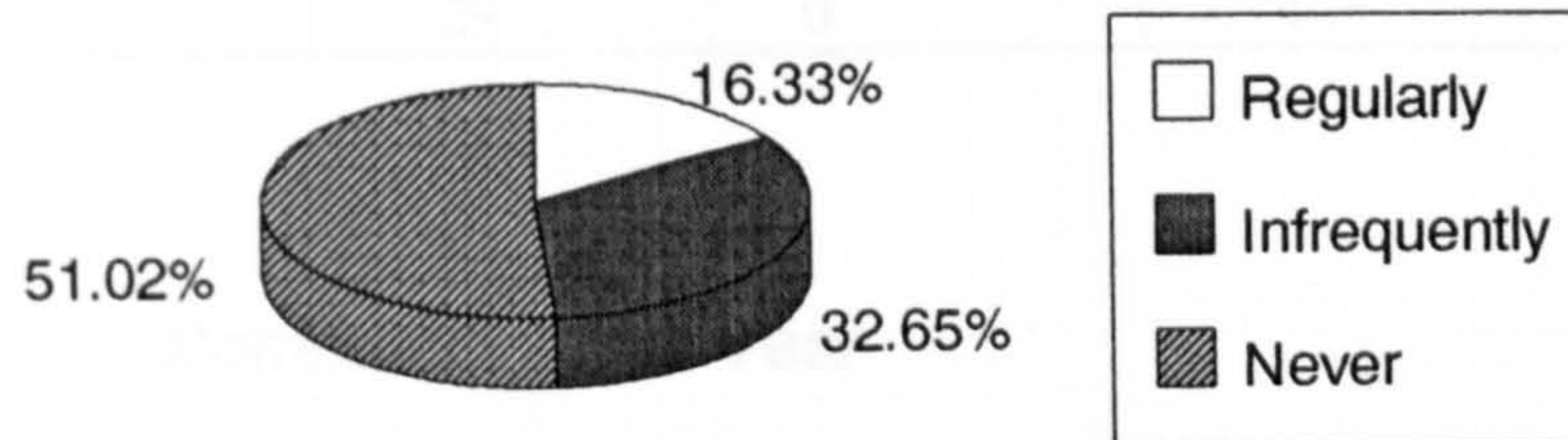


Deputies: taking Concerts

	ENGLAND (127 replies)	WALES (46 replies)	SCOTLAND (12 replies)	N.IRELAND (4 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Regularly	6	3	1	-	10
Occasionally	58	15	5	2	80
Rarely	54	27	6	2	89
Never	9	1	-	-	10

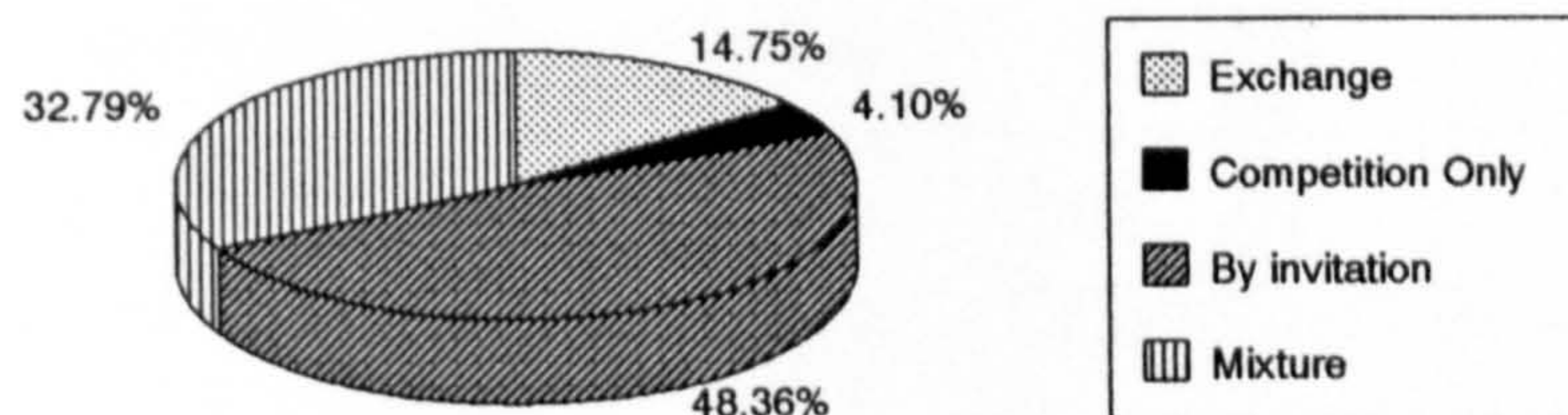


	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Regularly	15	23	0	2	40
Infrequently	48	31	1	2	82
Never	95	14	15	1	125



Overseas Trips: raison d'etre

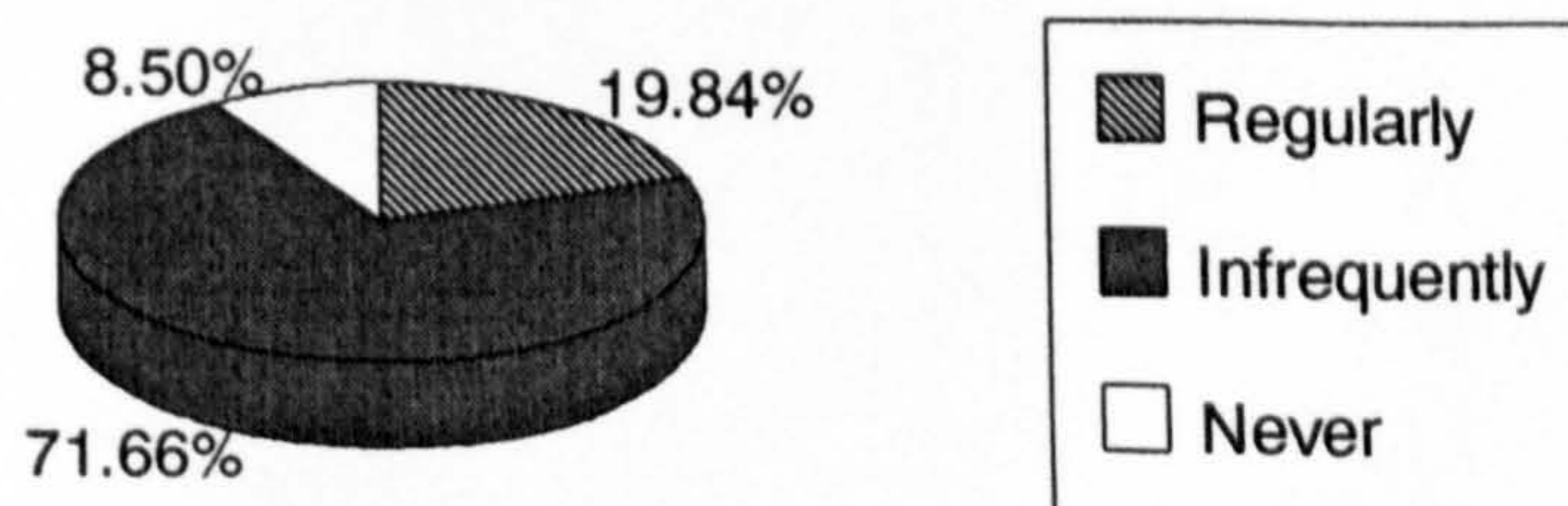
	ENGLAND (63 replies)	WALES (54 replies)	SCOTLAND (1 reply)	N.IRELAND (4 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Exchange	15	3	-	-	18
Competition Only	2	0	-	3	5
By invitation	25	32	1	1	59
Mixture	21	19	-	-	40



Concerts: with Other Choirs

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
Regularly	39	9	1	0	49
Infrequently	107	53	13	4	177
Never	12	6	2	1	21

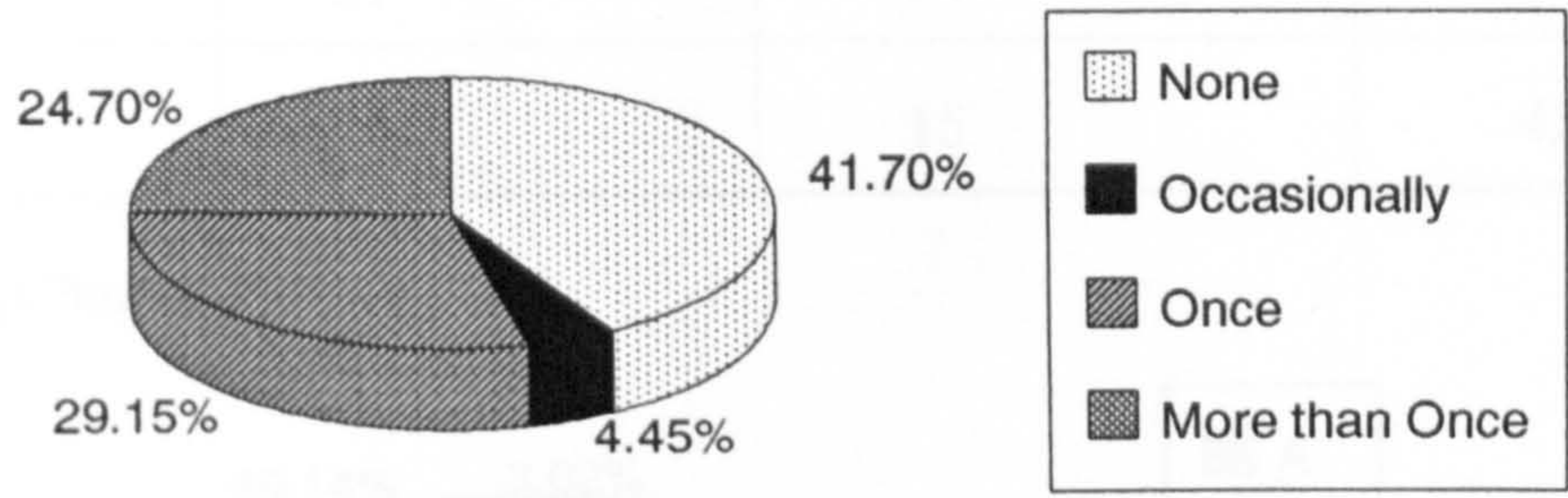
Concerts: with other Choirs



Choral Competitions per year

	ENGLAND (158 replies)	WALES (68 replies)	SCOTLAND (16 replies)	N.IRELAND (5 replies)	U.K. TOTAL
None	68	22	12	1	103
Occasionally	10	22	0	0	11
Once	52	16	4	0	72
More than Once	28	29	0	4	61

Competitions per Year



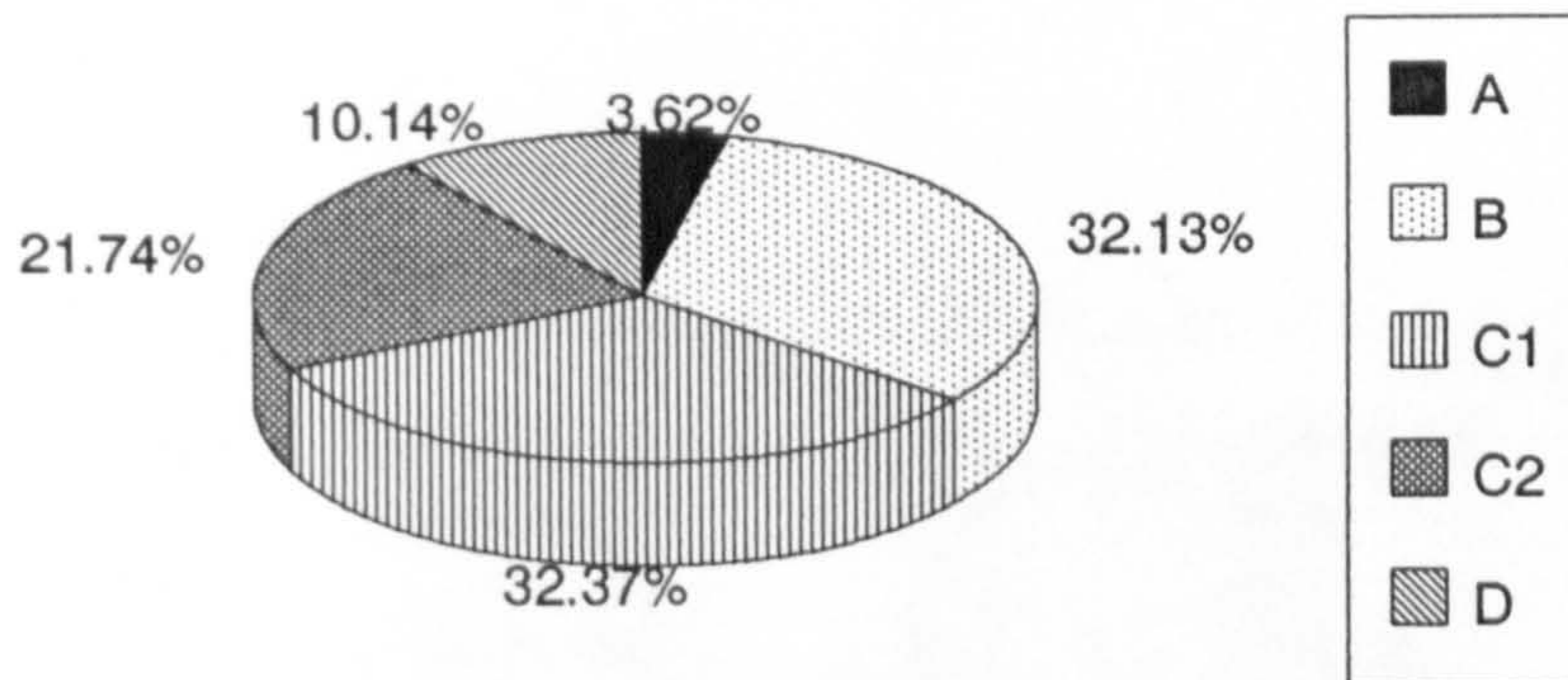
Choral Competitions per year by Region

Frequency	England (158 replies)	Wales & West (35 replies)	North Wales (14 replies)	Scotland Total
None	68	6	7	31
Occasionally	10	20	20	11
Once	52	0	7	72
More than Once	28	0	1	61
	0	0	0	0

Male Voice Choirs: Socio/Economic Grouping

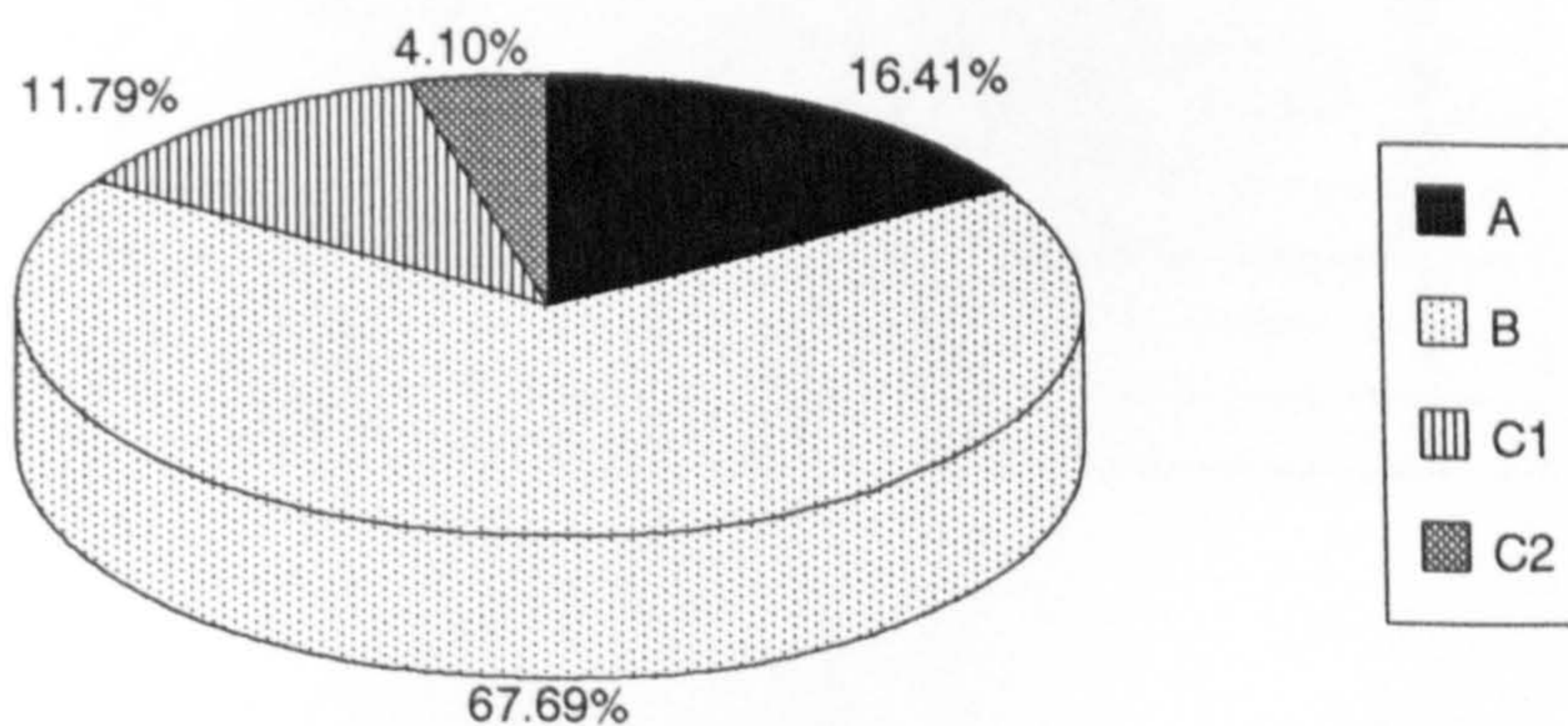
Social Group*	Yorkshire (117 replies)	Tyne & Wear(83 replies)	South Wales(114 replies)	Sample Total
A	8	5	2	15
B	78	22	33	133
C1	63	21	50	134
C2	45	31	14	90
D	23	4	15	42

* See Footnote 23 [Chapter 5]



Mixed Voice Choirs: Socio/Economic Grouping

Social Group	Yorkshire (125 replies)	Tyne & Wear(26 replies)	South Wales(44 replies)	Sample Total
A	19	6	7	32
B	83	20	29	132
C1	16	0	7	23
C2	7	0	1	8
D	0	0	0	0



CONCERT GOING AND HOME LISTENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Note: all figures are percentages of responses from 200 choir members.

Choir Concerts respondents were most likely to attend:

Male Voice Choirs	66
Mixed Voice Choirs	32
Ladies Choirs	2

CONCERT ATTENDANCE

Type	Monthly	Quarterly	Bi-annually	Seldom/Never
Choral/Orchestral	5	25.5	32	37.5
Orchestral	2.5	5	19.5	73
Opera	1	7	17	75
Musicals	1	13.5	33	52.5
Pop	0.5	0.5	4	95
Jazz	3	2.5	6.5	88

HOME LISTENING: RADIO

First Choice		2nd. Choice		3rd. Choice	
Radio Two	32.5	Classic FM	20.5	Classic FM	19
Local BBC	22	Radio Two	17.5	Radio Three	16.5
Radio Four	17.5	Local BBC	17	Radio Two	14
Classic FM	12.5	Radio Four	13.5	Local Ind.	14
Radio One	4.5	Local Ind.	11	Local BBC	12
Local Ind.	4.5	Radio One	10.5	Radio Four	10.5
Radio Three	4	Radio Three	9.5	Radio One	7
Radio Five	2.5	Radio Five	0.5	Radio Five	7

HOME LISTENING: TELEVISION

Classical Concert	YES	78.5
Opera	YES	50.5

HOME LISTENING: VYNIL / COMPACT DISC / CASSETTE LIBRARY

Most		2nd. Most		3rd. Most	
Choirs	25.5	Light Class.	23	Choirs	21
Easy List.	25	Easy List.	21	Light Class.	19
Light Class.	21.5	Choirs	17	Classical	15
Classical	15	Classical	14	Solo Vocal	15
Pop	6	Solo Vocal	11	Easy List.	12
Opera	3.5	Opera	9	Opera	8
Jazz	2.5	Pop	5	Pop	5
Solo Vocal	1	Jazz	0	Jazz	5

CHAPTER SIX - THE MALE VOICE REPERTOIRE

It is a matter for regret that these fine choirs should waste their abilities on continual repetitions of old numbers of little musical value, when they could do so much with the good things at their disposal¹

For a comprehensive survey of music which composers have, over the past four hundred years, provided for adult male singing, a typical programme given by a British male voice choir in the last decade of the twentieth century must be the most depressing starting point. Programmes such as that shown in Appendix 6A, can, today, be heard the length and breadth of the country, the content giving no clue as to location - a truly "national" collection of British male voice fare. It is depressing not just because there are few songs included with real artistic merit - that, after all, is a subjective matter - but because very little effort seems to have been made to find pieces which show genuine musical imagination or creativity. Again, a semantic argument could ensue - there were probably many in the audience entranced by the images conjured by Pfiel in *Calm is the Sea*. If the audience went home content, having sat through a programme of well-known and well-loved music, why should anyone merely reading the programme find it depressing? Some of the answers have already been given in the previous Chapter and, in terms of the recruitment of younger members, this collection is a prime example of how and why numbers of male voice choirs are shrinking and, in many cases, disappearing. The real disappointment comes when, valued judgements concerning quality apart, this is set against the background of what has been written, what is available and, therefore, what could be sung. The

fulfilment which choir members seek, is achieved through learning their material and sharing this with an audience that will provide funds either for a charity or for the choir to continue its activities, or both. Seen from the personal, educational standpoint of the singer, it is certain that, working only with the type of music shown in this programme, the average choir member would be deprived of deserved stimuli. He certainly would have the intellectual capacity, if well taught, to appreciate the difference between common-place dross and skilfully written, imaginative music and this material does not afford him the opportunity to develop such critical faculties. The use of the word "average" is important here as, undoubtedly, there would be some singers *not* able to appreciate varying aesthetic levels and who would view this "typical" programme as verging on the esoteric. Nonetheless, it has been shown by some conductors that, after a carefully introduced leavening of the erstwhile bland diet with music of harmonic and rhythmic interest and subtlety, choir members soon begin to appreciate that being given a musical and intellectual challenge can add a further dimension to their search for choral fulfilment. They also begin to recognise quite quickly those pieces which are lacking in sufficient harmonic variety and colour, pieces which are texturally ineffective and word settings which disregard the text in metre or imagery. Almost certainly, the average member would not be able to verbalise in this manner but the reactions to sessions spent on musically unsatisfying songs can be quickly noted by any astute conductor.

The saddest feature of this authentic programme is the very small percentage of music composed specifically for male voices. Of the eighteen pieces prepared, there

are three whose composer had male voices in mind. Of these, two are from stage works by Wagner and Romberg and the third is the Pfiel. The remaining items are arrangements of songs which could perfectly well be sung by mixed choirs. This is not, of course, to discount the value of arrangements entirely. Alan Simmons' arrangement of the 1970s ballad *Softly as I leave you* has a weak coda but in other respects draws on some very telling harmonic and textural ideas. Likewise, the concept of the darker tones of male voices presenting spirituals from the deep South of the United States is not without some artistic recommendation. However, with three such songs, two Welsh hymns and two examples of "modern" show music on the programme, there is little room left for the presentation of much of the glorious repertoire left by, for example, English composers in the first half of this century. Few would claim that in the one example here Roger Quilter is particularly well represented with *Non Nobis Domine*. The solo items should not be disregarded in any analysis of a male voice choir concert and here they reflect the continued interest in the Edwardian ballad and Negro spirituals, with the John Ireland item shining like a beacon in the morass of mediocrity. Why this situation developed has been referred to in the previous chapter during the discussion on the qualifications of conductors and on the arch-conservatism of audiences.

There are some arrangements which, in a discussion on male choir repertoire, have a rightful artistic place in that they have been made by composers who can add their own stylistic individuality to the genre. Aaron Copland and Bela Bartok are two whose freshness and awareness of style bring a new dimension to the folk music of their

respective countries. However, too often arrangements from SATB pieces, even by their composers, have more to do with commerce than artistry. Stanford's *The Bluebird* is a pertinent example in that the solo soprano sounding the single word "blue" at the end of the first line, often spell-binding in performance, should never be replaced, as it has to be in the TTBB version, with a tenor voice. Publishers cannot be blamed for adopting a market-place mentality and the temptation to produce a successful mixed-voice song in male voice format often proved irresistible. Nevertheless, some of the arrangements thus produced have strayed too far from the composers' conception to be valid. The past tense is significant from the view-point of the 1990s because there are no major (and very few minor) publishers producing male voice songs at this end of the century. As the output of new SATB works slows, the relevance of arranging for other ensembles disappears. Nevertheless, the repertoire has, from the turn of the century, been satiated with arrangements, of folk songs, "national" melodies, hymns, glees, together with songs from light operas and musical comedies. Indeed, many arrangements, notably of Welsh hymns and Negro spirituals, have become synonymous with the male choir world such that to disregard them when dealing with repertoire would seem almost a blasphemy. Likewise, the classic arrangements by Doris Arnold, who did so much work for the BBC in its early days, have become part of the fabric of male choir work. Songs such as J.M. Capel's *Love Could I Only Tell Thee* and *Arise, O Sun* (composed by Maud Craske Day) have been immortalized in her splendidly vigorous and moving versions.

For the present purpose, however, this plethora of arranged material is to be

disregarded partly because of its vastness but mainly because, in order to put the limited repertoire of the average 1990 male voice choir into perspective, a concentration on music composed with the basic TTBB formation in mind (and a consideration of the manner in which this music is being ignored) heightens the extent to which the potential of male voice choral work is being obscured.

Bibliographies of male choral music have been produced in America² and made available in this country and these dispense with the impossible (and, more often than not, unrewarding) task of listing arrangements. Professor William Tortolano, of St. Michael's College, Vermont, makes this clear in the title of his book *Original Music for Men's Voices: A Selected Bibliography*.³ This was first published in 1973 and in the Introduction Tortolano refers to the only other English language compendia - J. Merrill Knapp's *Selected List of Music for Men's Voices*,⁴ which appeared in 1952 and Kenneth Roberts's *A Checklist of Twentieth Century Choral Music for Male Voices* (1970).⁵ Of the first, Tortolano comments that "it suffers from the persistent problem inherent in any such study: new material is being published and old titles are being withdrawn."⁶ Obviously, at this distance from 1973, the same now applies to his own work. Regarding the *Checklist...*, Tortolano comments on the fascinating titles, "including works little known from Scandinavian composers. But a main problem is the unavailability of a large portion of these works. Moreover, many works listed are out of print. All this does not make the checklist any less valuable as musicological research."⁷ Tortolano's stated intention, like Knapp's, was to assist the choral conductor in his or her quest for fresh material thus they both begin with Medieval and

Renaissance music. Today's male choirs do, in fact, sing music from the sixteenth century and this will be discussed when that point in the chronology is reached. However, for the purposes of the present Chapter, which is not attempting the same task as the American professors, a more realistic starting point for a study of the repertoire of the twentieth century British male voice choir is the early nineteenth century, the time of the glee in England and the part-song in France and, particularly, in Germany.

THE GERMAN PARTSONG

Whilst it is almost always impossible to locate accurately the genesis of any musical genre, there is a strong case for considering Carl Maria von Weber as the progenitor of the German nationalist part-song. In the early years of his career, moving between concerts in Breslau, Leipzig, Bayreuth, Nuremberg and Stuttgart, Weber would have been aware of the effect on the population of the Napoleonic invasions in Austria and southern Germany. He soon became imbued with nationalist fervour so that by the time his career had taken him to Berlin, in 1812, he was ready to become involved in *Liedertafel* activities - "a body which had originated and burst into patriotic flames from the smouldering fires that underlay the oppression by the French invader ... the far from extinct national spirit was there, swiftly finding expression in songs whose general themes were the fatherland, hearth and home, freedom and honour."⁸ The movement itself had been established in 1809 by Carl Zelter of the Berlin Singakademie. Loosely modelled on the Meistersinger guilds, the aim was to foster the composition and performance of new lieder and choral music. Zelter's monthly

meetings quickly became in turn a model for the many men's singing societies formed throughout Germany in the early decades of the nineteenth century. His own male choral compositions for the Liedertafel, of which there were approximately one hundred, reflect the patriotism and anguish felt during the Napoleonic occupation of his part of Europe.

Thus it was for such a group of singers that the 26-year-old Weber began writing patriotic songs in four parts, two each of tenor and bass. His fervour was increased the following year when the Battle of Leipzig was won, Napoleon was driven back over the Rhine and poets and musicians enjoined in an orgy of German glorification. It was in the following year that Weber began his settings for male voices of poems by Theodor Körner, who had been killed in action at Gadesbusch. The eleven poems which make up the cycle *Leier und Schwert (Lyre and Sword)* Op.41-3, were, according to Donald Grout, "the first of thousands of similar patriotic effusions"⁹ If not quite the first, two in particular, in the words of Weber's pupil Julius Benedict "at once raised his popularity to an almost unprecedented degree wherever the German tongue was spoken, and wherever the German heart beat."¹⁰ These were No. 2, *Lutzows wilde Jagd* and No. 6, *Schwertlied* and each attained the status of accepted national melodies if not anthems. The former first appeared in Britain in *The Harmonicon* in 1829 and again in 1852 in *The Musical Times*. A Welsh language version was published in 1861 but its commercial success was assured once a tonic-sol-fah version was published in the Novello Orpheus Series in 1879. It attained its status despite the appearance of an arrangement of *The Huntsman's Chorus* from Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* which

covered much the same musical ground. In its three lusty verses, with limited but effective chromatic colouring and the wild cry from the basses, "Lutzow" made an immediate impact on British choirs. In fact, the song became so well known on this side of the channel that one hundred and thirty years after the original was composed, Julius Harrison was able to exploit its appeal by writing his *Fantasia for Male Voice Choirs: The Wild Huntsman*, based, as he explained in the score, on Weber's melody for Körner's poem (cf. Exs.33 and 34). *Schwertlied* was published as *Bright Sword of Liberty* and is even more compressed, with the four verses each only eight bars long. This itself was probably a recommendation to the late Victorian male choir singers (Ex.35).

These, then, were the models which lesser composers in Germany used over the next decades. Musicians such as Conradin Kreutzer, Joseph Graetz, Johann Gansbader, Adolf Müller, Karl Reisiger and the Bernhards Klein and Romberg were all keen to provide male part-songs for meetings of the *Liedertafel* movement. The harmonic simplicity and directness of works by, for example, Friedrich Kücken and Franz Abt made them not only appealing to male singing groups in Germany but also, later in the century, eminently exportable. In the 1893 Novello catalogue, there were a dozen songs for male voices by the latter composer while Kücken's *Soldier's Love* (Ex.36) had been popular in Britain since its publication here in 1876 and was still in the 1893 lists along with another seven of the composer's works.

In 1857, Joseph Alfred Novello published No. 11 in his Theoretical Series of the *Library for the Diffusion of Musical Knowledge*. This was a volume by Hans Nageli

and Johann Pfiesser entitled *81 Part-Songs and Choruses, in Progressive Order for the Cultivation of Part-Singing with instructions for forming and improving Male Choral Singers*.¹¹ The advertisement claimed that the songs had been "adapted to a variety of patriotic, moral, and elevating sentiments, in the English language, closely imitated, by Sabilla Novello, from the original German poems by the celebrated authors whose names are appended to each piece".¹² The claim was made that, since the work had been for some time, a text-book "in all German and Swiss singing schools", the publishers felt that it would "supply a want long felt by those who know its value as a musical handbook for adult male singing schools, but who were prevented from using it by its former German text". After six chapters of "very ample instructions for the proper and systematic Cultivation of Part-Singing", there appear thirty "Elementary Part-Songs" which consist mostly of 8-bar phrases, setting words by, among others, Goethe and Schiller (Ex.37). Nos. 31 to 48 are labelled "Songs", all strophic, with titles redolent of German nationalism (Ex.38), while the next group are entitled "Burden Songs". The outstanding features of these are that only one stave is used (Ex.39) despite the four-part writing, and each song has solo or solo quartet passages. The subject matter of the text shows little difference to the preceding pieces. The final dozen entries are called "Choruses" and display examples of what are referred to in Chapter 5 of the "ample instructions" as "dialogue-like duets" by which is meant that some attempt at polyphony is present. Had the volume¹³ been a selection of music by a dozen or so different composers, it may have proved a valuable anthology of mid-nineteenth century German part-songs. Unfortunately, despite their admirable and

authoritative tract on cultivating male choral work in the opening chapters, neither Nageli nor Pfeiffer show much flair as composers. A glance at the examples quoted bears witness to their lack of imagination particularly in relation to harmonic colouring. However, there is no reason to doubt that the appearance of the *81 Part-Songs and Choruses* engendered interest and enthusiasm for the genre in Britain especially as the editor of *The Musical Times*, who at the time was Joseph Alfred Novello himself, was prepared to reprint the whole of the opening chapters and to add comments to the text:

In the manufacturing towns of England, where large numbers congregate in mills, &c., the recommendations of Nageli and Pfeiffer could be carried out with great facility, and a noble source of amusement and improvement would be opened to the working man. Cheerfulness and health are ever the result of singing...

The publisher also expresses a hope that the present English edition will be the means of extending the effects of the authors' philanthropic wishes to all Britons, and to the readers of the English language throughout the world.¹⁴

Doubtless if John Curwen had obtained the rights to publish this work, producing a tonic sol-fah version, its influence would have been more widespread. Certainly, the book did not become the standard pedagogic reference Novello hoped it would - for example, it does not feature in any correspondence concerning male choral singing nor is it mentioned by the writers of articles on the subject. However, it does give us many examples of the part-song genre which was beginning to invade the world of the glees.

Perhaps it is a more significant pointer to the taste and musical intellect of English conductors of the time that Novello had more success, in terms of male voices, with songs by a composer of considerably more talent than either Nageli or Pfeiffer. With Mendelssohn as a friend of the Novello family, it is hardly surprising to find that

Sabilla was also responsible for the translations of his male part-songs when her brother, Joseph Alfred, began to publish them. The advertisement in 1857¹⁶ for the six Opus 50 songs is headed "For singing in the open air", possibly a misleading reference to the songs Mendelssohn composed for mixed voices - *Lieder im Freizein zu singen* and we learn that, contrary to later practice where only English words were provided, this edition carried the text in both languages - "To the original German poetry is added an English translation and adaptation by Sabilla Novello."¹⁵ The first and third of the set have texts by Goethe (*Turkisches Schekenleid* and *Sommerlied*) while Eichendorf is the poet for both No.2 (*Der Jager Abscheid*) and the final song (*Wanderleid*). The fourth of the group is a setting of Heine's *Wasserfahrt* while the author of *Liebe und Wein* is unknown. All are unaccompanied except for No.2 where the hunter is joined by four horns and a trombone. Mendelssohn was continuing the tradition of the Liedertafel begun by Zelter, Weber, Klein and Romberg although we gather from his letters that he was not totally enamoured of the male singing clubs. By choosing from the works of the finest poets, he was able to raise the ubiquitous drinking song above the level of the norm, as in the third and final song of the Op. 75 set - a three-part *Trinklied* to Goethe's words. Just as *Der Jager Abscheid* carried on the Weber tradition of depicting the joy of the hunt, so *Comitat* (one of two songs Op.76) could be considered the starting point for many "Comradely" songs which appeared thereafter. The Op. 120 set of four pieces begins with another hunting song to words by Sir Walter Scott and this was included in the concert given by Henry Leslie's choir in London, February 1874. On that occasion, a reporter commented on:

... three part-songs for male voices never before given in public, although, judging

not only from their intrinsic beauty, but from their enthusiastic reception, it is not likely that they will return to the obscurity from which they have emerged.¹⁷

The songs concerned, with Sabilla Novello's English titles added, were *Jaglied* (*Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay*), *Morgengruss des Thuringischen Sangerbundes* (*A Festal Greeting*) and *Im Suden* (*Land of Beauty*). The rescuer from obscurity was, of course, Joseph Novello, and so it is no surprise to read his review¹⁸ extolling the virtues of the songs on their publication later in the same year. He wrote of the "excessive tunefulness" of the Scott setting, finding the others "charmingly harmonized" and "exquisitely refined". Of the fourth song in the set, Goethe's *Zigeunerlied*, he suggested that the "short phrases of a quaint and rugged character" helped produce an "extremely dramatic" work. Certainly, some aspects of the scoring are individual - the frequent octave writing between first tenor and baritone and the antiphonal use of other voices on the interjection "Willie wau" etc. (see Ex.40). Between Opp.76 and 120 come the two sacred Op.115 songs *Beati Mortui* with a text from the Apocalypse and *Periti Autem* from the books of Daniel and St. Matthew. Again, the reviewer in *The Musical Times* gave these a glowing notice and undoubtedly, such paens of praise would have had an influence on a public already won over by the composer's *Elijah*. Of *Beati Mortui* we read:

...a placid theme, deeply sympathetic with the words, breathes throughout that pure and fervent expression of faith so observable in all the choral music of its author¹⁹

Periti Autem, the report continues, was

... written with a masterly hand for the voice throughout. The treatment of the words "Our God saith: I will exalt them" is excessively beautiful, the repetition of the phrase in the different parts having an excellent effect. With any choir where reliance can be placed upon the male voices alone, there can be little doubt that

these choruses will become favourite pieces... we believe that they have never yet been heard in England.

Whether it was their "masterly" writing (see Ex.41) or the publisher's salemanship, the songs, in a translation by Natalia MacFarren, became established in the competition arena later in the century and can still be found on occasions as test pieces one hundred years later. Another posthumous publication which was later used in competitions was an extract from Mendelssohn's unfinished opera, *Lorely*. Known as *The Vintage Song* in William Duthie's translation, this was first performed in England on 17th October 1868. With its opening drone suggesting a stylized "folkiness" and through the ebullient part-writing (see Ex.42), this testimony to the composer's love of his favourite Rhenish wine would no doubt have proved very attractive to English glee clubs as they moved away from the alto lead and sought quality German songs for their new TTBB formation.

This development was also helped on its way by the large-scale works Mendelssohn wrote for male voices. His early cantata, *Begressung*, with wind accompaniment plus cellos, basses and timpani, was first performed in Berlin when the composer was nineteen. However, the most significant male choir works belong to Mendelssohn's last six or seven years. *Festgesang*, for solo quartet chorus and brass, was commissioned for an outdoor performance at the unveiling of a statue in Gutenberg in 1840; *Gotte segne Sachsenland*, also with wind accompaniment appeared in Dresden in 1843; Schiller's *An die Kunstler*, was composed with brass accompaniment for an event described on the English edition as "the first meeting of the choirs of Germany and Flanders at Cologne, 1844".²⁰ Apart from these festive pieces, there were two other works which

according to contemporary reports made an impact on the mid-nineteenth century English male voice scene. Among Mendelssohn's first duties at the Berlin Academy of Arts in 1841 was a personal commission from Freidrich Wilhelm IV for a setting of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Eric Werner suggests that this "made a substantial contribution to the popularization of Greek tragedy: the success was sensational and was considered epoch-making".²¹ The first performance was at Potsdam . Four years later, Mendelssohn produced *Oedipus at Colonus* which, not surprisingly, was in very much the same style as *Antigone*. The success of the two works in Germany was matched by English approbation, with the first British performance of *Antigone* being at Covent Garden on January 2nd 1845 under George Macfarren, while *Oedipus*, at the instigation of the Prince Consort, had its British premiere at Buckingham Palace on February 10th 1848. After a delay of some twenty years, Novello produced both pieces in the mid-1860s and an excerpt from *Oedipus* was included as a test piece at the National Music Meetings in 1872. Henry Leslie gave a complete performance of *Antigone* " with full band and selected choir of 200 voices"²² as part of his twenty first concert season in February 1876. In the previous December a stage version had been produced at the Crystal Palace and, following its success, *Oedipus* was staged in June 1876. Compared to their efforts in December "Mr. Gadsby's forty chorus singers found it even more exacting to sing from memory..." However, "the fine chorus 'Thou comest here to the land' was...redemanded, and the grand storm chorus was warmly applauded".²³

The texts of these works may well have meant more in mid-nineteenth century

Germany during the setting up of a unified German state than at the time of the London performances by Henry Leslie. The political and philosophical implications of Sophocles' story were probably not been appreciated by English choir members - it was left to Jean Anouilh and Berthold Brecht to explore these analogies more fully in the 1940s. However, it is not difficult to see why the works found favour with English choirs and audiences. Acting as the Greek chorus, the singers would have revelled in the drama of the harmonized recitatives (Ex.43) and the melodiousness contained in the many pages of unison writing (Ex.44). The music accompanying the spoken passages, such as Creon's realization of his responsibility in his wife's suicide, has ubiquitous diminished sevenths flashing through the score and the singers no doubt relished the excitement at the moment (Ex.45) when Creon acknowledges the treachery of his rebelliously defiant niece Antigone.

Novello was also responsible for introducing English choirs to the male voice part-songs of two other Teutonic composers, the second of whom, Peter Cornelius, was four years old when the first, Franz Schubert, died in 1828. Indeed, soon after publication, one of Schubert's songs from 1824, *Der Gondelfahrer* D.809, was set for the male voice class at the National Music Meetings in 1872 and his *The Night is Cloudless and Serene* (probably *Nachtelle* D.892, composed in 1826) was a choice for the same event in the following year. Most of Schubert's one hundred songs for male voices were written for private performances at his lodgings. The virtual police state that existed in Vienna during the second decade of the century, with surveillance of the University and much official censorship, resulted in the proliferation of meetings of

young men in coffee houses or homes. Thus, at his lodgings with Josef Witteczek in Erdberggasse and later, with the painter Moritz von Schwind, Schubert provided songs which were intended for a few voices only per part. In this, the works stand somewhat apart from the songs performed at the traditional Liedertafel. Far from being vehemently political, his songs were assiduously hedonistic. Schubert produced drinking songs (*Trinklied im Winter, Trinkleid im Mai*) and love songs (*Selig durch die Liebe, Der Entfernten*) with the young men only occasionally straying on to political or nationalist connotations as in *Hier umarmen sich getreune Gatten*. This had a text by Schiller, one of over thirty poets Schubert used in his male voice canon. Occasionally he ventured into Britain for Walter Scott (*Bootgesang*) and Ossian (*Bardengesang*) and into Italy - for *La Pastorella* D.513 (c.1817) in which he retained the original Italian of Goldoni's poem. However, the vast majority of his poets were Austrian or German.

The twelve *Terzets*, composed between April 1813 and May 1816, consist of six Schiller settings, the Ossian referred to above, and five songs to poems by von Holty. The pieces are slight, verging on the unsubstantial but were nevertheless attractive enough for Oxford University Press to produce nine of them in 1928 in an edition by William Gillies Whittaker. This was done, no doubt, in an attempt to woo the more discerning conductor away from some of the feeble Gallic offerings popular at the time. From the outset, publishers almost always offered only English translations, one of the reasons being that the major competition festivals such as Blackpool insisted that all works should be sung in English, a rule which has only been revised in very

recent times. The eighth of the *Terzets, Mailed*, not only has an uninspired translation in the 1928 Oxford edition but the second tenor part has been notated for first bass, suggesting that tenors in 1928 were, as now, in relatively short supply (Ex.46). *Sensucht* D656, written in April 1819 but not published until 1867, is in a worthier class. It has a text by Goethe and, while there is perhaps an over-reliance on augmented sixth chords for the modulations, there are without doubt some very beautiful moments (Ex.47 bb 6-8). The equivalent passage ("Seh' ich an's Firmanent nach jener Seite") on reprise swerves away to finish in C major (Ex.48) whereafter the chromaticisms match the intensity of the words and lead to a climax on the neapolitan chord. Many of Schubert's other male voice songs are straightforward strophic settings, as in *Nacht* D983c, which is the fourth of *Vier Gesänge* probably written in 1822. Although later English composers adopted a good deal of Schubert's style - Sullivan, for example - they seldom were able to lift the shape and length of the phrases out of the obvious as Schubert does here on "und auf uns Kernieder schauen" (Ex.49).

Schubert's finest contribution to the male voice repertoire was *Gesang der Geister über den Wassen* not in the March 1817 version for a *capella* TTBB (D. 538) but in the 1821 setting (D.714b) for TTTTBBBB accompanied by two each of violas and cellos plus bass. The sketch for this was made in December 1820 and it was in the following year that Schubert revised and completed the work. Neither version was published in his lifetime, the final manuscript appearing in 1858 (as Op.167) and the sketch in 1891. Goethe's poem offers the analogy of flowing water and Man's journey through life.

Where rugged boulders oppose the water, Schubert doubles the vocal basses (here in unison) with "angrily foaming" cellos (Ex.50) while the violas double the hymn-like writing for the tenors (still divided into four). He also uses a favourite technique from his symphonic writing, that of long sequences - Ex.50 is repeated a semitone higher, first *fortissimo* then *pianissimo* before subsiding into Eb major for the stream to glide through flowery valleys. Again it was Novello who brought the piece to this country although its length and the unusual accompaniment probably militated against many authentic performances.²⁴

Despite the fact that the majority of Schubert's male voice songs were written between 1813 and 1816 (when the composer was still only nineteen), there was not a year of his life when he was not at some time or another involved in writing for the medium. Indeed, it is not without significance that when a concert was planned to celebrate his music in March 1828, he produced *Schlachtgesang*, a rousing double chorus work for male voices. In the same year, he also worked on *Hymnus an den Heiligen Geist*. This was for two each of tenor and bass soloists plus four-part male voices and, after scoring the accompaniment in the May for wind instruments, he made a version for orchestra in the October. The following month he died.

Peter Cornelius obviously held Schubert's music in some esteem for two of his male voice songs are based on the Viennese master's compositions - *Grablied* is a vocal version of the *Death and the Maiden* song as used in the String Quartet in D minor, and *Reiterlied* is a re-working of a Schubert March for piano duet.²⁵ To move from the genius of Schubert to the considerably less-gifted Peter Cornelius and claim for the

latter a greater influence on the repertoire of late nineteenth/early twentieth century British male choirs is, once more, to bring into question the musical aptitude of the average conductor. This in part, however, can be explained by the availability of more of Cornelius's output than Schubert's. It is not difficult to appreciate that the average choir member at the time of the British appearance of Cornelius's music (1905) would be much more likely to warm to the concepts of the work tactfully called *The Patriot's Vow* (or, to give the composer's own poem its original title *Der Deutsche Schwur*) than the philosophy suggested in Schubert's setting of Goethe's *Gesang der Giester uber den Wassern*. To make a further and more practical comparison between the two songs, the chromaticisms in Ex.50, would be far more difficult to translate into tonic-sol-fah than would the harmonic shifts of Cornelius - in Ex.51, the move from Db major to G major is bold but clean, with the singers able to adopt the new doh in bar 5. Further, the Cornelius is somewhat akin to the glee, with which the late Victorians were so familiar, in that the piece is divided into relatively short sections, complete with changes of time signature. The composer was a disciple of first Liszt (in Weimar in the 1850's) and then (in Vienna and Munich in the following decade) of Wagner and he is chiefly remembered for his opera *The Barber of Baghdad*. To British male choir members in the opening decades of this century however, he was revered for two pieces in particular which became extremely popular - songs no self-respecting male choir could be without. Reference has already been made to the first of these, *The Patriot's Vow*; the second was *The Old Soldier's Dream*. This is scored for two choirs laid out as TTT and TTTBBB although there is no attempt to use the groups

antiphonally. The basses announce the twentyfour bar section in A flat minor which forms the basis of the piece and whose main feature is the switch to the mediant minor for the second phrase, enharmonically written as B minor (Ex.52 b5). Thereafter, the tenors take up the lead, repeating this whole section in E flat minor until, with the scoring becoming fuller, the A flat minor section is reprised. The text is therefore repeated three times, there is no sense of development or progress other than the thickening of the texture and the *forte* ending and yet the choirs obviously found it stunning. Mention of it in an article in *The Musical Times* in 1906 elicited this correspondence:

Dear Sir, - I have been reading your very interesting article upon Peter Cornelius and his works. Referring to his 'Old soldier's dream,' I noted the statement that several male-voice societies had included it in their programmes. Allow me to say that the Bristol Royal Orpheus Glee Society placed it in their programme in February last. The composition was taken up *con amore* by the members of the society, and it proved to be such a favourite with the audience that in all probability we shall include it in the programme of our annual concert in February next. May I also add that Mr. George Riseley, the conductor of this Society, thinks very highly of this composition, and we fully intend to give it a rendering that shall be worthy of the music.

Yours sincerely,

20-21, Broad Quay, Bristol.
September 3, 1906

J.F.W. Tratman
(Hon. Secretary).²⁶

In 1905, by arrangement with Breitkopf and Hartel, Novello produced a volume of fifteen male voice songs by Cornelius, which included the simple but very effective settings of the Latin texts *Requiem Aeternam* and *Absolve Domine*. One of his finest pieces is *O Venus O Venus - Ode to Horatius Flaccus* where the erstwhile "fault" of creating an unrelenting four part texture seems to intensify the music, especially at the climax on the reprise of "O Venus Regina Cnidi Paphique". The unusual phrase

construction, with alternating triple and duple time-signatures, as well as the astonishing opening (where the music slides into A major after just four bars of A flat) provide a degree of interest and originality not always found in Cornelius's output. However, to English choirs, nothing he wrote could match the appeal of *Der Alte Soldat*.

Before leaving the German influence, Robert Schumann's contribution should not be ignored especially as he was, for a year, the conductor of the Dresden Liedertafel (succeeding Hiller in 1847) and also acted as judge at male voice competitions. He wrote four sets of partsongs for men's voices and of these twenty two pieces, no fewer than sixteen appeared in the Novello Orpheus catalogue by the last decade of the century, thereafter to be chosen as test pieces at competitions. One of the main criticisms of the nineteenth century German partsong for male voices would concern the squareness of the homophonic writing and the almost total absence of counterpoint. This, plus the composer's lifelong interest in the music of Bach, could well have been the starting point for Schumann's *Ritornelle* Op. 65 which consists of seven canons for various vocal combinations. The texts are by Ruckert and the second of the set (Ex.53) is a straightforward drinking song. No. 3, *Bluth oder Schnee!* has three solo tenors singing in canon against a four-part chorus while No. 5 (Ex.54) is two-in-one at the fifth with a Coda.

The *Ritornelle* were composed in 1847 and earlier that same year the Op. 62 *Drei Gesänge* had been completed. The three texts were by Eichendorff, Ruckert and Klopstock and it was this latter poet's setting, *Schlachtgesang*, which Novello offered

to the British choirs in 1875 as *Battlesong*. The best-known song to groups this side of the English Channel was, however, from a still earlier set, the 1840 Op. 33. Heine's poem *Die Lotusblume* obviously had a special appeal to Schumann he set it as a solo song in his Op. 25. Here, in the four part male choir version, the readiness to avoid the overfull texture which marred so many of the genre (witness Ex.55 *Die Minnesinger*, the second in the group of seven) plus the beautiful shift from an imperfect cadence in Db major to E major at the words "und ihm entschleiert sie freundlich" demonstrates its justifiably popular success (Ex.56). The *Fünf Jagdlieder* Op. 137 were written in 1849 and Schumann followed Mendelssohn's lead in including parts for four horns to enhance the cry of the hunt. In the same year there appeared the composer's largest scale male voice work, the *a capella* Op. 93 motet *Verzweifle nicht im Scherzenstahl* (*Despair not in the valley of woe*), another Ruckert setting. The use of two four-part choirs plus solo voices gave Schumann scope for variety of texture and tonal colour as well as for antiphonal effects. In 1852, an orchestral accompaniment was added presumably to help choirs overcome some of the problems associated with the more chromatic moments. Two other works from the late 1840s, *Zum Anfang* (more Ruckert) and *Drei Freiheitgesänge* (which had an *ad lib* accompaniment of wind instruments) were not published until 1928 and 1913 respectively. *Das Glück von Edenhall* for TTBB (with tenor and bass soloists) and orchestra appeared as Op. 143 in 1853.

With only one set of male voice partsongs to his name (the *Five Choruses* Op. 41, which are essentially military songs) the contribution of Brahms to the British male

voice choir repertoire was limited to two larger-scale works, *Rinaldo* Op. 50 and the *Alto Rhapsody*. The former was completed in 1868 with a text taken from Goethe and whilst it is in no sense an opera, it *does* have a continuous structure and a central character, with the male chorus commenting on the drama, in the manner of a Greek tragedy. Its first performance (1869) was given in Vienna, by the male choir of the Akademische Mannergesangverein, a chorus of some three hundred university students. It was in April 1876 that the work was first heard in Britain although at this Crystal Palace performance there were serious problems. There had been "many voices absent from the final rehearsal, therefore the concluding chorus was omitted and the choral portions preceding were ineffectively given... Semi-choruses were given to perfection by the London Vocal Union..."²⁷ By the following May, the male voices of the Crystal Palace Choir attended a few more rehearsals and were able to give the first complete and successful performance, not in London, however, but in Cambridge. Brahms used Goethe again for the text of the *Alto Rhapsody* where the support function of the male chorus is, during the final section only, in "sharing the hymn for man's restoration."²⁸ Over the next few years, the work became very popular, not only with all-male choirs but with the tenors and basses of mixed choral societies, often appearing in programmes at festivals where a celebrated contralto may have been engaged.

WALES AND THE GALLIC CONNECTION

If measured in availability of music, the influence of the more acknowledged French composers on the British male voice scene would appear limited. Gounod, it is true,

produced some very popular mixed voice works (*Mors et Vita*, for example) and he *did* write for male voices. There are several settings of the Mass and his *Soldier's Chorus* from *Faust* has continued to appear on concert programmes to the present day. Nonetheless, his dealings with John Bull suffered considerably after a commercial wrangle with Novello²⁹ and also by virtue of his Catholicism which would not have endeared his work to the Nonconformist Curwen. There was certainly a great deal of male choir interest in France as the male voice Orpheon movement had engendered some two thousand societies between its inception (by Guillaume Wilhelm in 1815) and the turn of the century. Wilhelm advocated the teaching of singing in schools and it must have been very rewarding for him to watch his ideas flourish. Gounod was appointed Director of the Orpheon de la Ville de Paris in 1852 and held the post for eight years; annual concerts were held at the Trocadero with fifteen hundred performers; the Military Orpheon was set up in 1843, and in 1860 three thousand Orpheonistes travelled to London to give concerts. However, it was another composer involved in music education who, using the Orpheons as his motivation, provided songs which, by the second decade of the twentieth century, no self-respecting male voice organization could be without. He was Francois Anatoule Laurent, born circa 1828 and who, after early intentions to become a painter, turned to music, eventually gaining the rank of Inspecteur Général du Chant du Département de la Seine in Paris. It was in this post that he served as vice-president on the commission established to organize an International Musical Competition for Choirs, Orchestras and Bands in Paris in May 1912. Although in his eighties, he produced two test pieces for the

occasion including the male voice class song *Les Cavaliers de la Nuit*. Known by now as Laurent de Rille, his reputation *vis-a-vis* male voice singing rested on a dozen songs produced in this country by Novello and Curwen with titles such as *The Trumpet Sounds* and *The Destruction of Gaza*. A newspaper correspondent, hearing this last piece from twenty eight competing choirs at the Leicester Festival remarked that it was "the sort you need to hear if you are in search of evidence to disprove the assertion... that the singing male is an intelligent animal."³⁰ It is doubtful if the opinion of a music critic had any effect on male voice choirs of the time especially as another of Laurent's works, *The Martyrs of the Arena*, was to achieve a legendary status becoming a standard part of the male voice repertoire since its first appearance in England in 1905. The Curwen edition of this piece includes a picture of a Roman arena below which we read:

M. de Rille says that he was moved to write this chorus by seeing the picture of the hungry lion ready to spring and devour the praying Christians in the arena... Much as M. de Rille has written, he has never been more inspired than in this deeply touching work...Singers who desire to put life and reality into their renderings will do well to look at this picture and read through the words.

Written in a manner not unlike the English glee, with relatively short sections in varying tempi and keys, the English version by J. Stallybrass delivers the final words and thoughts of the doomed martyrs who remain strong in their faith (Ex.57). The paucity of musical ideas is well matched by the doggerel:

And when the life-blood is pouring
And day is darkening into night
O living God, to Thee our souls are soaring
And death is the dawning of endless light

- and yet choirs of all sizes and pretensions welcomed this into their repertoire with a fervour that ensured its permanence. Even in the 1990s, wherever massed choirs assemble, one of the pieces the promoter of such an event can be assured will be known to all choirs, certainly by the older members, is *Martyrs of the Arena*.

These full-blown, picturesque, dramatic works found particular favour with Welsh choirs who, along with their English counterparts, equally enthusiastically rallied to the call to arms of a work from fifty years earlier, Adolphe Adam's *Les Enfants de Paris*. Remembered for his operas, Adam, who was for seven years until his death in 1856 Professor of Composition at the Paris Conservatoire, somewhat anticipated de Rille in providing a format, again like the glee, where musical ideas followed the shape of the text (Ex.58). The song, in its English version by Stallybrass, ranks alongside *Martyrs* as one of the all-time "greats" of the British male voice repertoire. With the title *Comrades in Arms*, it is not difficult to appreciate why, in the period before and particularly after the War to End All Wars, the gentlemen took so readily to the sentiments allied to such direct, harmonically naive, music -

Your cause is right and right is might
Then play the man and win the fight.

These Franco-German influences on the repertoire of the nineteenth century male choir in Britain were more easily tempered in England than in Wales. The English organizations, it should be remembered, were still, for most of the period, glee clubs in which the part-songs were led by the male alto. The subject matter of the glees, as has been shown, was likely to be far removed from the hunting, drinking, marching and fighting songs of their continental cousins, whose countries were wracked with

territorial aggression for much of the nineteenth century. Thus, a balance was maintained within the English male choral scene. In Wales, however, where there was not the tradition of glee singing, still less of choirs with a male alto lead, the fervent nationalism of continental composers, especially when couched in allegorical terms so appealing to the Nonconformist mind (as in *Martyrs*), gained a firm foothold. The Gallic connection was strengthened in December, 1903, when Laurent de Rille and Dard Janin (Principal of the St. Etienne Conservatoire) adjudicated at an "International Male Choir Competition" in Cardiff. Each brought with them a specially composed test piece, *Song of the Crusaders* and *The King of Worlds* respectively, and the seventeen choirs gave a massed performance of *Martyrs of the Arena* under the composer's baton.³¹

In this atmosphere at the turn of the century, when there was much talk of setting up a Welsh College of Music and reforming the eistedfodau, it comes as no surprise to learn that composers were encouraged by such competitions as the one organised by the National Eisteddfod for "a SHORT, ORIGINAL WORK ... by a Welsh composer, preferably on a Welsh subject and written for *Male-Voice Choir*, Soloists and Orchestra."³² The name of the winner of this event is not recorded but it may well have been Enos Watkins whose work *The Light of the World* was published in the year of the competition (1909) with the proud heading "First-Prize Setting for Male Voice Choirs" (Ex.59). Although nothing is recorded of Mr. Watkins' career, we gather from the score that he had completed FRCO and ARCM diplomas. In this achievement he was not alone as a succession of promising Welsh composers and organists travelled

eastwards to Oxford, Cambridge and London to gain not only first but also higher degrees. Ignoring the reservations of the English press,³³ these musicians continued to produce pieces such as *The Son of God Goes Forth to War* (Mr. Jenkins's "thoughtful and musicianly"³⁴ Test Piece at the London Eisteddfod in February 1904) and *The Destruction of Pompeii*. This last was by D. Christmas Williams and was used in the Grand Chair Eisteddfod at the Queens Hall in February 1903 and again at the Royal National in August of the same year. The complexity of the music was suggested as a reason why seven out of fourteen entries failed to appear at the latter event and why choirs had to rely on piano support to find their way through this "fine specimen of a type of composition very much affected by Welsh male-voice choirs."³⁵ Christmas Williams, who later completed a B.Mus at Cambridge and then a D.Mus at Dublin, had originally studied with the doyen of Welsh composers of the time, Joseph Parry, who had completed much of his musical education even further afield, in New York. Parry's lasting contribution to the male choir repertoire is the part-song *Myfanwy* Op.4 No.3. It was first performed in Ffestiniog at the end of May 1875 and published by Isaac Jones in Treherbert. Later editions appeared in America (1885) and the 1931 edition of this classic piece, published (by D.J. Snell in Swansea) some twenty-eight years after the composer's death, carries the Bardic pseudonyms of the authors (Ex.60).

Cyril Jenkins - not to be confused with the 1904 Eisteddfod composer - studied with Harry Evans, Stanford and, briefly, Ravel. For a man very critical of standards in Welsh music-making,³⁶ he produced some works for male voices obviously still influenced by the music of de Rille. For example, his setting of Byron's *The Assyrian*

Came Down, written for the Maritime Choir, Pontypridd, uses much the same harmonic language and is cast in the form of an English glee with different musical material for each section of the poem (Ex.61). This was Jenkins' Op.7 and by Op. 81, in Thomas Hood's *The Lee Shore*, his harmony, although still over-reliant on minor ninths, was showing a little more subtlety as augmented sixths and chords with a diminished fifth began to permeate the music (Ex.62).

THE WIDER REPERTOIRE

While the nineteenth century English (and Scottish) choirs were busy with their glees and partsongs, with occasional forays into the dramatic Gallic style, and while the Welsh concentrated on the latter, a great deal of male voice music was necessarily (through not being made available in Britain) passing them by. Choirs would have been unaware of the handful of part-songs by the first Viennese school - Mozart's contributions, K.429, 471 and 623, are all for two tenors and one bass with solo voices and piano; Haydn's *Dreistimmige Gesänge* are for a similar layout; Beethoven's *Song of Farewell* and *Song of the Monks* are *a capella* but also TTB. The considerable number of extracts using male voices from the works of Berlioz would have similarly eluded them - *Quid Sum Miser*, *Hostias* and *Agnus Dei* from the *Requiem* are all for male voices as is the *Chorus of Magicians* from *L'Enfance du Christ* and several choruses from *The Damnation of Faust*. English choirs would have enjoyed Dvorak's Op. 43 - three songs with piano duet accompaniment of which the most effective is probably *Tra Vichka Zelena (Dew on the Meadow Grass)* - although the same composer's *Stabat Mater* Op. 58 may not have appealed to the choirs as they emerged

chrysalis-like from the ethos of the glee club. Certainly Rossini's touching *Chant Funebre*, written in 1864 on the death of his friend Meyerbeer and accompanied only by a muffled drum, might well have become a favourite had it been available. Bruckners's many motets may have proved somewhat austere but the sentiments of *Trosterin Musik* - the healing power of music - would have struck sympathetic chords. Similarly awesome would have been the music of Liszt - settings of Psalms 18, 116 and 129 for male voices, a *Mass*, a *Requiem* and a *Te Deum* as well as some part-songs and a major role for TTBB in the *Faust Symphony*. Grieg's part-songs, on the other hand, would have proved very acceptable, based as they were on Norwegian folk tunes - Grieg thought highly enough of them to leave instructions that two of the set of ten should be sung at his funeral in September 1907, including his favourite, *The Great White Host*. Also on a smaller scale, the five songs by Saint-Saens, a group from Max Reger and the eight by Louis Spohr (including setting of Korner's poems) could well have suited the competition situation in the male voice classes.

Male choirs had to wait until well into the present century before the Cherubini *Requiem in D minor* was published in England but they had some experience of Italian music through the opera choruses of Verdi notably the *Soldier's Chorus* from Act 3 of *Il Trovatore* and *The Bandit's Chorus* from *Ermani*. These excerpts began to form an additional component of the choirs' repertoires and ranged from Mozart's *Magic Flute* choruses and Beethoven's *O Welche Lust* from *Fidelio*, to Gounod's *Soldier's Chorus (Faust)*, Rossini's *Chorus of Hunters (Act 2 of William Tell)*, Sullivan's *March of the Peers* from *Iolanthe* and, inevitably, Wagnerian extracts. These included the marches

in Act 3 of *Die Meistersinger*, the *Roman War Song* from *Rienzi*, the Act 1 *Parsifal* music (*Zum letzten Liebesmale*), and the Pilgrim's Chorus from *Tannhauser*. Not many choirs would have attempted the second scene, *In Fruh'n versammelt*, of Act 3 from *Lohengrin* although some did attempt a Wagner non-operatic work. In the spring of 1843, the young Wagner was commissioned to write a work for the Dresden Mannergesangfest. It is possible that he conceived the idea for the piece after reviewing a performance of Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, for on the reverse of his critique he had sketched out the titles of various sections under the title *The Feast of the Apostles*. This was in early April and, since the first performance was on July 7th, it can be presumed that the actual composition did not occupy Wagner for an inordinate amount of time."³⁷ Certainly, the influence of Mendelssohn is apparent in that the textures, the frequent soaring unisons, minor ninth chords and the dramatic treatment of (Wagner's own) words are all features very reminiscent of *Antigone* and *Oedipus*. The scoring is for three choirs with full orchestral accompaniment. Two of the choirs should be equal in size, with a smaller one to represent the Apostles. Performances of this lengthy work have, not surprisingly, been rare. The first in England was probably at the Birmingham Festival in September 1876 where it was greeted with anything but approbation, *The Musical Times* correspondent commenting on "an undue monotony of colour throughout the work" and suggesting that "...human throats were never intended to contend against such an incessant uproar as was permitted to reign supreme in the orchestra..."³⁸ The conductor on this occasion was not mentioned by name but when the Royal Choral Society gave the first London performance in March

1899, Sir Frederick Bridge conducted and was commended for taking "the greatest possible pains in the preparation of Wagner's difficult and complicated music, (deserving) all praise for the success attending the performance under his able direction." The music had "dignity and noble loftiness," had "remarkable features" and "manifestly made a deep impression."³⁹ Individual choirs known to have attempted the piece include the Plymouth Orpheus Male Voice Choir in December 1917 when the choir was accompanied by the R.G.A string band.⁴⁰ Of the more prestigious choirs in the first half of this century, Colne Valley (under George Stead) made a speciality of the work. Many others would have found the opening *a capella* section too taxing in terms of maintaining pitch⁴¹ particularly through the more chromatic passages such as in Ex.64


* * * * *

The image shows a musical score for a chromatic passage. It consists of several staves of music. The notation includes various note values, rests, and accidentals, illustrating the chromatic nature of the passage mentioned in the text. The score is presented in a standard musical notation format with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat.

ELGAR AND BANTOCK

With both composers having a strong Birmingham connection - a disenchanted Elgar relinquished his professorial duties to the younger musician in 1908 - it was always likely that Edward Elgar and Granville Bantock would become involved in the musical competition movement (through the large-scale event held in Birmingham) and hence with writing for male choirs. The time and conditions were right for an injection of new part-songs of quality by British composers. Help was needed in the development of choral and interpretative techniques beyond the glee without total recourse to German nationalism and Gallic pictorialism. Elgar and Bantock between them set a pattern, as well as a standard, in providing (almost always) well-crafted songs to suitably chosen texts, a standard which was to be emulated by a succession of British composers through to the half-way point in this century.

Elgar's personal connection with the competition movement was through his close friend, Canon C.V. Gorton, Rector of Poulton-le-Sands, who was the founder, and for many years Chairman, of the Morecambe Festival in Lancashire. In 1902, Elgar dedicated his *Five Part-Songs* Op. 45 ("translations from the Greek of Marcus Argentarius") to Sir Walter Parratt at Windsor as an acknowledgement of the latter's invitation to compose the *Coronation Ode*. Two of the five were set at the Morecambe competition in 1904 and in a letter to Alfred Littleton at Novellos, Elgar wrote "I wish you cd. have heard some of the choirs singing - impromptu - in the moonlight on the sands at Morecambe *Feasting I Watch*."⁴² This song, the last of the set, became and remains the most commonly performed and is still in frequent use at festivals. In some

ways this is a condemnation of the musical judgement of successive generations of choir conductors as it is by no means the best. The inappropriate setting of the opening phrase (see Ex.64 -  is what would have been expected) and the repetition (more or less note-for-note), of the first nine bars (which music is also used as a coda "They also have their lyre and crown") help to produce a relatively slight song with only the flowing imitative figures at "Then anon I wreathe my hair" rescuing it from the insubstantial. No.1 *Yea, cast me from the heights of the mountain* is similarly epigrammatic and tries to cover too wide a tonal range (*ff* to *ppp*) in its twenty-three bars, with a consequent unsettling effect in performance. From that point of view *It's oh! to be a wild wind* is more successful although, with a dynamic range of *p* to *ppp* and mildly erotic words, this fourth song in the set proved less suitable to festival organizers wishing to choose test pieces for their syllabi. *Whether I find thee* and *After many a dusty mile*, which combine many Elgarian features in terms of harmonic colour and melodic shape, complete the set which was first performed at the Royal Albert Hall on April 25th 1904 by the London Choral Society under Arthur Fagge. The songs had appeared in print, with German as well as English words, in the previous December.

Apart from *A Soldier's Farewell* from 1884, these *Five Songs* were Elgar's first essay in male choral writing but he returned to the medium again in 1907 with *The Revcille*. Written for his friend Henry Embleton (secretary and treasurer of the Leeds Choral Union) with a text suggested by William MacNaught, this setting of Bret Harte's poem verges on the epic, comprising over one hundred bars of fairly chromatic *a capella*

writing. Described by Jerrold Northrop Moore⁴³ as "a dialogue between the drum of compulsion and the philosophic conscience," it was those drums, "quick alarming," "solemn-sounding" "fateful answering" which caught Elgar's imagination, providing him with ideas on which he could build a powerful work of dramatic conviction, culminating in the trumpet proclamation and "the drum, Lo! was dumb." (Ex.65) The composer was writing for the large, full-throated Northern choir he had experienced at festivals, dividing his singers into eight parts at times and, towards the end, hoping some basses could sing B flat below the stave. Completed on Christmas Day 1907, the first performance was at the Blackpool Festival on 17th October the following year. Now rarely performed because of its length and technical demands, *The Reveille* remains Elgar's most significant male voice work.

In 1923, Robin Legge commissioned two songs from Elgar for the DeReske Singers, a group of American pupils of Jean DeReske who duly gave the first performances at the Wigmore Hall on November 13th 1923. For the first of these pieces, *The Wanderer*, Elgar made an adaptation of words he found in the Restoration Anthology *Wit and Drollery*. Then, using the pseudonym Richard Mardon, he wrote his own text for *Zut! Zut! Zut!* Subtitled *Remember*, the latter is a marching song, almost in the Teutonic tradition of one hundred years earlier. The opening lines "Come! Give it a lift, our old-time march song/ Sing with a will, sing with a thrill" give a flavour of the glorification of battle which was still part of the artistic psyche of those who had not been involved at first hand in the horrors of World War One. "How they fiercely fought for freedom/ And glad our land and proud to breed 'em" the lines continue and

Elgar does little musically to raise these words above commonplace jingoism, yet it is not difficult to imagine how popular the sentiments would have been with choir members in the early 1920s. The composer offered both songs to Novello for one hundred guineas but the music editor, John E. West, found them "rather *cheap* for Elgar - *cheap* without being sufficiently *interesting*."⁴⁴ After suggesting that, in view of this unsatisfactory offer, the songs should be torn up (which Henry Clayton, company secretary at Novello's, refused to do) Elgar settled for a fee of fifty guineas, having been told that "we never do, and never can, sell part-songs for men's voices in large quantities."⁴⁵ This last comment suggests it was only a few "competition" choirs which were prepared to tackle modern music. However, the anecdote as a whole again reflects the judgement of male choir conductors for, perusing the music, one is bound to agree with West (particularly in relation to *Zut! Zut! Zut!*). Yet commercially, the editor was mistaken because *The Wanderer* became a great favourite with choirs (twenty eight choirs sang it at the Leicester Competitive Festival in 1927), it is still sung today and, as such, would have made a handsome return for Novello on an investment of twenty five guineas.

Elgar's final work for male voices was written in the summer of 1925 which was, of course, late autumn in terms of his compositional season. *The Herald* is another battle-glory song but in Alexander Smith's poem Death is seen attending an old king after a successful campaign and Elgar, using wide-ranging and frequent modulations, several tempo changes and effective dynamic contrasts, imbues the text with poignancy and no little tenderness. The unison, "I come", after the Herald has been summoned and the

unusual final cadence are also moments of characteristic pathos (Ex.66). As in all of his male voice output, Elgar is able to demonstrate an efficient grasp of what is singable without, in general, diluting the strength of his musical ideas and imagination or losing his feel for colour and climax.

Bantock, by contrast, more frequently fell below the standard of his best work. Peter Pirie has aptly summarized the situation by writing of the 'larger works: "Sifting out what is good in his music from what is merely note-spinning is so formidable as to militate against frequent performances..."⁴⁶ Much the same can be said of his male voice pieces which, leaving aside the plethora of arrangements,⁴⁷ were legion. His association with the competitive movement and his involvement as an adjudicator was considerably more widespread than was Elgar's which goes some way to explain why his output of male voice songs was five or six times that of the older composer.⁴⁸ An unremarkable setting of Burns' *My love is like a red, red rose* gave conductors licence to employ the *molto espressivo e con rubato* style which was still a feature of part-singing in the first decades of the century.⁴⁹ That Bantock (or his publisher) also intended such pieces to find favour in the traditional glee clubs is emphasized by the composer's "NB" on the score: "The 1st tenors may be strengthened by the addition of male altos". Such assistance was no doubt welcomed on the top B flats. Miniatures like this and the later (and more subtle and flexible) setting of Byron's *She walks in beauty*, made Bantock a popular composer with male voice choirs, some of which were prepared to work hard at his more substantial offerings. A performance of *Lucifer in Starlight*, for example, so delighted the composer at the Bantock evening held by the

Manchester Orpheus Glee Society under W.S. Nesbitt in 1911, that he decided to dedicate the piece "to these gifted men and their leader." In this work, George Meredith's *Sonnet* drew some imaginative strokes from Bantock in a six-part and, at times, highly chromatic, setting. Myrrha Bantock, the composer's daughter, recalls how William MacNaught had commented "How anyone could set these words to music is most marvellous. It is one of the most remarkable pieces Bantock has ever composed." She continues:

There is one passage in which Lucifer gazes at the stars and sees them kneeling rank on rank, which is profoundly impressive and the kind of imaginative writing which made a direct appeal to the composer. I heard this piece sung at Birmingham by a number of competing choirs, and although I was very young I have never forgotten the strange and compelling effect which my father achieved with male voices. Everybody present was moved, and the applause after each choir had sung was tremendous.⁵⁰

Bantock always managed his modulations so that time was allowed for a tonic-sol-fah choir to establish the new tonality. Whilst Ex.67 seems complicated and would no doubt frighten the vast majority of late-twentieth-century choirs, the seventh chord on G acting as a hinge between B major and D flat major (b.5 of *Larghetto*) is the only treacherous piece of choral writing. His fondness for augmented chords ("Now the black..." and "Arctic snows") would have given the music a wild, adventurous feel in 1911 and the long, treading build-up to the words "Around the ancient track marched rank on rank/ The army of unalterable law" remains an extraordinarily effective passage.

Bantock's choice of poets reflects his intelligent interest in verse form. *O sweet delight*, with words from Thomas Campion's *Third Book of Ayres*, is one of the

composer's finest short part-songs. Even the common-place sequence (Ex.68), (a device he over-exploited in, for example, *The War Song of the Saracens*) is surely used here to reflect the spirit of Campion the composer. The Henry Newbolt settings - *Drake's Drum*, *Hope the Hornblower* and *The Fighting Temeraire* were produced post World War One and contain little of the chromaticism of *Lucifer* and as such were eagerly taken up by many choirs and festivals. The most effective of the set, and probably the only one to be included in late twentieth century concert programmes and competitions, is *The Fighting Temeraire*. Bantock's most striking ideas in this work appear at the "far bell ringing At the setting of the sun" where the tenors, and later the basses, toll on the word "bell" - more subtle and telling than imitating bells - while the "phantom voice" is provided by chromatic triplets (Ex.69) Occasionally Bantock turned to the Bible for texts. *The Burden of Damascus*, for Irving Silverwood of the Holme Valley Male Voice Choir, is the first of seven settings from Isaiah but there is little to indicate Divine inspiration in this song. "Ah the uproar of many peoples which roar like the roaring of the seas" produces a passage of tedious banality and reminds us that Bantock was an uneven composer, at times producing mediocre music for worthwhile texts or, worse still, poor music for weak texts. One such is *Festival Song*, written for the 1909 conference of the National Union of Teachers in Morecambe. One presumes that his brief was to provide a song which could be sung more or less at sight as part of the conference activities and the opening gives an indication as to the paucity of inspiration in text and music (Ex.70). The 1926 *Choral Suite*, however, to words by the eighteenth century poet William Collins, demonstrates

Bantock's ability, in songs such as *Ode to Evening*, *Queen of Love* and *The Ghost March*, to provide ideas of warmth and substance. His interest in matters Eastern, which he was able to pursue on his travels as a Trinity College of Music examiner, explains such male voice choir titles as the *Choral Suite from the Chinese*, *Suite from Cathay* and *Kubla Khan*.

* * * * *

If Elgar and Bantock were the pioneers in the field of new, testing choral works for male choirs, many other British composers were ready to take up the challenge, building on and developing that tradition. However, there still existed some competition for the domestic talent from the influx of continental part-songs. Pieces by Kunhold, de Koven and Kreutzer still appeared in programmes as did, particularly, those by the German composer Freidrich Hegar. Two of his songs became associated with the northern competition circuit, not least because the translations were by Canon Gorton of the Morecambe Festival. *The Phantom Host* is based on Widmann's poem which outlines the story of an early eighteenth century Swedish general who, leading his men on a homeward march from Norway, witnessed all but five hundred of his ten thousand troops perish in the extreme cold. Hegar's treatment is somewhat akin to the style of de Rille - full-blooded climaxes using diminished seventh chords, thick textures and wide-ranging dynamics (Ex.71). Similarly, in *Walpurga*, the shrieking and biting "till the blood out-spurred" over-uses the minor ninth chords but there is more harmonic flair in the quieter sections (Ex.72) and this raises Hegar's works above the level of de Rille. *Walpurga* was published in Britain in 1909 undoubtedly building on

the success of the earlier *Phantom Host*. In the post-war period, for obvious reasons, Hegar's songs were treated with some disdain in the musical press. When reviewing the Welsh National Eisteddfod in September 1921, *The Musical Times'* critic wrote:

Hegar is synonymous with Germany and all that is meretricious and theatrical in choral music and the only excuse for *The Phantom Host* is that it offers choirs an opportunity for the making of obvious effects.⁵¹

The writer goes on to claim that, in the early years of the century, the Emperor himself protested at the inclusion of this piece at a National Choral Festival in Germany and the experience induced the Kaiser to initiate a collection of German choral music with an emphasis on folk song. The *Kaiserliederbuch* was published in 1907.

As well as German meretriciousness, the well-intentioned English composer also had to compete for attention with a considerable number of very slight works. Comic glees like Henry Bishop's *Mynheer Vandunck* and Mackenzie's *Franklyn's Dogge Lept Over a Style* were very popular, as were Hatton's *Absence* and Sullivan's *The Long Day Closes*. James Kidner was only one of several composers who set Longfellow's *Lull Me To Sleep* (for the Society of Bristol Gleemen) and various musicians were invited to write for competitions - Dr. F.A. Challinor, for example, produced a setting of Shelley's *I Arise From Dreams of Thee* for the Southport Competitive Festival in July 1908. The Curwen Edition, main rivals to Novello's Orpheus series, included two new songs which have remained in the repertoire of many choirs - R.W. Atkinson's *The Mulligan Musketeers* and, in 1911, *The Song of the Jolly Roger* by C.F. Chudleigh-Candish, both of which songs contain a plethora of pom-poms, rumpety-drums, rub-a-dub-dubs, yo-ho-hos and ha-ha-has to amuse choirmen and audiences alike.

Chudleigh-Candish seemed to specialize in sea-songs as his other extant songs from 1912 and 1922 respectively are *Who Sails With Drake?* and *A Song of the Armada*.

Charles Villiers Stanford's nautical contribution was on an altogether more elevated artistic plane. In 1904, he produced *Songs of the Sea* (to poems by Henry Newbolt) for the eminent baritone Harry Plunket Greene. Although the male chorus is *ad lib*, it makes a very positive contribution in the second and fourth movements, *Outward Bound* and *Homeward Bound* even if it is a little superfluous in the more vigorous songs such as *The Old Superb*. His four other contributions to the male repertoire, which included settings of Thomas Moore (*Hush, sweet lute*) and Henry Constable (*To his flocks*), did not attain the same popularity as the *Songs of the Sea*.

Plunket Greene's father-in-law, Hubert Parry, wrote three part-songs for male voices which were published in 1910. The telling simplicity of *An Analogy* (poet unacknowledged) contrasts with the two carefree pieces Parry wrote for the Gloucester Orpheus Society. *Hang Fear, Cast Care Away* has bouncing 6/8 rhythms in its opening ("Thou and I and all must die/ And leave this world behind us") while *Orpheus*, for which Parry supplied the amusing text de-bunking the Orpheus myth, is equally light-hearted and obviously intended as a tribute to that distinguished West country choir (Ex.73). Like Stanford, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor also produced a male voice setting of *Drake's Drum* but *O Who Will Worship The Great God Pan?* became the best-known of his handful of male voice songs. He was heavily involved in the competition movement and this setting of Robert Buchanan's poem was a popular festival committee choice in the first decades of the century. Although not often a test piece,

Percy Fletcher's 1913 setting of the dramatically cruel story of a vicious husband in Charles Kingsley's *Lorraine Lorraine Loree* was a popular "own choice". More harmonically daring was his 1921 song, Byron's *Vision of Belshazzar*, a large-scale *a capella* work of over one hundred bars. The opening unison B flats bring William Walton's later work to mind and at times the choral writing is no less intensely chromatic (Ex.74). Of Edward German's contribution to the male voice repertoire, only one of his three part-songs, *O Peaceful Night*, seems to have stood the test of time.

Walford Davies turned to Rudyard Kipling for his *Hymn Before Action*, a song which appeared in 1899 and, not surprisingly, grew in popularity up to and beyond the Great War:

The earth is full of anger
The seas are dark with wrath
The nations in their harness
Go up against our path

The Musical Times reviewer acknowledged that the setting had "already been so widely recognised as to render description unnecessary and praise superfluous."⁵² By the outbreak of war, Davies was forty-six and, although too old for active service, he decided that his own war effort would include the organization of male singing.

He talked much about bringing together a Male Voice Choir that should sing spirited songs to the troops and inspire an enthusiasm to sing among themselves... So Walford... summoned his ex-choristers Union and other like-minded friends, arranged folk-songs, traditional songs and hymns for men's voices and began to search the camps and hospitals where his ministrations would be welcome."⁵³

This was in 1915 and later that year he went to France to continue the same work, giving informal talks on music as well as organizing sing-songs at camps near Boulogne and Etaples. Later still, in 1918, Davies was asked to establish a choir in the

newly-formed Royal Air Force at Hastings and it was this connection which eventually led him to compose what is still the official RAF March Past. Davies's main contribution to the male voice repertoire was therefore mostly in the field of arrangements but he did not limit himself entirely to battle hymns. *Dominus Illuminatio Mea* appeared in 1913 as his Op. 38. This was for TTBBB, a *capella*, to words by R.D. Blackmore.

Post-war, composers such as Rutland Boughton became more involved with male singing. Boughton was, from 1914, the National Conductor of the Clarion Vocal Union, an organization founded in 1895 by Montague Blatchford for "the cultivation of musical taste and the development of unaccompanied choral singing as an asset in the propagandist work of Socialism."⁵⁴ His part-song *The Blacksmith*,⁵⁵ dedicated to Steuart Wilson, reflects this interest at a time when pacifism was equated with socialism - Boughton first joined the Communist party in 1925 - hence "Under the blacksmithing of Thor/ Anvil and steel together swore/ World-oath of peacc." The writing for choir approaches a virtuoso style, requiring very strong yet well articulated singing from the basses (see bar 6 of Ex.75) and particularly clear and flexible voices amongst the tenors. The text of Boughton's other important piece for male voices is an adaptation, made in 1926, of a scene from Shakespeare's *Henry V. Agincourt*, described in the subtitle as a "Dramatic Scene", is scored for solo voices in addition to the standard TTBB and has an orchestral accompaniment.

In male choir terms, Vaughan Williams concentrated his efforts on arrangements of folk songs - there are twenty such for male voices. The 1909 incidental music for a

Cambridge production of Aristophanes' *The Wasps* involves a male-only chorus but his one published part-song, *Fain would I change that note*, which appeared in 1927 was, in fact, an arrangement of an SATB version from twenty years earlier. However, the composer's other contributions to the male choir repertoire are invaluable. Largely in two-part writing, the rumbustious setting of *Back And Side Go Bare*, an excerpt from his opera *Sir John In Love*, has proved itself by deservedly remaining in many choirs' concert repertoire since it was made available, in 1931, as part of the cantata *In Windsor Forest*. One of Vaughan Williams' most exciting pieces of choral writing, however, is the Scherzo movement for male voices from the *Five Tudor Portraits* of 1935. The setting of John Skelton's part dog-Latin part English *Epitaph on John Jayberd of Diss* (again, largely two-part) is a test of any choirs' powers of articulation although the piece also contains flowing cantabile phrases (as on "Carmina cum canis" in the central section) and a bucolic final passage after "Asinum et mulum".

In contrast to both Vaughan Williams' limited output of original male voice music and Delius's single contribution - *Wanderer's Song* - Gustav Holst produced a number of significant works. Walt Whitman's poetry attracted many composers during and after World War 1 and Holst's 1914 setting of *Dirge For Two Veterans* contains some splendid and beautifully moving moments especially in performance with the original accompaniment of brass and percussion (Ex.76). The "sad procession" seems to anticipate so much of Holst's later music (not least the Op. 53 male voice choruses). The fourth set of the *Hymns from the Rig Veda* (1912) is for male voices and, again, the composer is able to produce moments of great intensity and beauty. Ex.77 shows

the central section and reprise of the *a capella* third song, *Hymn to Manas* (the spirit of a dying man). Dividing the baritones not only maintains a good balance against the already-divided tenors but also appropriately helps to lighten the texture ("To bathe thyself in radiant light") and makes more effective the entry of the basses at the recit-like reprise. Technical and musical judgements like these are found in all four of the songs in the set which makes the work's infrequent appearance in programmes all the more regrettable.

The Op. 53 *Six Choruses* by Holst are translations from medieval Latin lyrics by Helen Waddell whose novel the composer had used as a starting point for his chamber-opera *The Wandering Scholar*. *Intercession* and *Good Friday* are respectively as severe and sad as the *Drinking Song* is genial. *A Love Song* is the first of the two-part canons, the other being *Before Sleep* where the tenors' A minor is answered by the basses' F minor. The longest song of the set is the penultimate *How Mighty Are The Sabbaths* where "the majestic seven-four must have reminded (Holst) of the first Whitsun festival at Thaxted."⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, much is lost by the substitution of a keyboard for the original string accompaniment, especially in the coda of *A Love Song* where there is an intensity in the string discord which can not be produced on organ or piano. Of Holst's other male voice songs, *As After Thunder* and *The Homecoming* use poems by Masfield and Hardy respectively while the two-part pieces, *Song of the Lumbermen* and *Song of the Shipbuilders* have texts by John Whittier.

Part of the problem in dealing with the male voice repertoire in the 1920s is that so many successful solo and SATB songs were arranged for the gentlemen to sing it is

sometimes difficult to know, in the case of largely undocumented minor composers, what is original and what is not. For example, Edward German's *Rolling Down To Rio* was a very popular male choral item yet it began life as a solo ballad. Similarly, Henry Balfour Gardiner's setting of Masefield's *Cargoes*, enjoyed by many male choirs, was originally conceived for mixed voices. Both of these pieces are included in the bound volume *A Selection of Part Songs for Male Voices* which Novello produced in 1925. This tome, obviously intended for inspection on the counters of music shops, contains no fewer than ninety-one TTBB songs and thirty-eight ATBB, all printed full-size octavo. To help selection, the works are identified as being "Grade 1, easy; 2, moderate; 3, moderately difficult and difficult" and asterisks denote the availability of tonic-sol-fah editions (for seventy-three of the one hundred and twenty-nine pieces). The selection, for obvious commercial reasons, is very wide - from Eisenhofer to Elgar, Boyce to Bantock and Weelkes to Lee Williams. Thomas Dunhill is included and he makes it clear that his works are original male voice choir songs. The first of his four Shakespeare settings Op.62, *The Wind And The Rain* (from *Twelfth Night*) was dedicated to the Cleveland Harmonic Choir of Middlesbrough, for many years one of the North East's leading male choirs, and the last, *Come Away Death* to "Davan Wetton and the Choir of the Baltic Exchange," in the City of London. In this setting, Dunhill shows a particularly sensitive awareness of verbal inflection. Together with the others which complete the set (*It Was A Lover And His Lass* and *Who is Sylvia*) the composer provides splendid examples of the many well-wrought original part-songs available to choirs in the Twenties.

FURTHER WELSH CONTRIBUTIONS

Wales, in the first decades of the twentieth century, continued to produce a plentiful supply of composer/scholars. Caradog Roberts, for example, was a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists by the age of twenty two (in 1900) and later became the youngest Welshman of his day to gain a Doctorate at Oxford. His settings of Tennyson (*Crossing the Bar*) and Longfellow (*The Sword of the Spirit*), made towards the end of his life, show further refinement in the development of the Welsh part-song. The modulations of the former piece, written for the Neath Eisteddfod in 1934, (one year before his death), are less contrived, the passion more convincing and the composition has some element of development instead of relying on the episodic nature of works from earlier decades (Ex.78). It was also in the Thirties that Welsh composers like Vincent Thomas were producing *De Profundis* and Bryceson Trehame *The Ravens of Owain*, both pieces full of emotional climaxes on the subjects of death-defiance and revenge and both aimed at the Eisteddfod test piece market. Similarly, E.T.Davies' *The Winds* later found a niche in the competition field with many choirs finding this setting of A.J.Perman eminently singable and not devoid of imagination and energy.

While seeming to ignore the earlier caveat concerning arrangements and original music, dealing with the Welsh male choir repertoire without reference to the hymns so beloved of the choirs from the valleys would be to ignore an historical and rich vein which has been mined by choirs way beyond the borders of the Principality. From the mid-nineteenth century, the Welsh non-conformists had not taken readily to the

evangelical songs of Sankey and Moody. Caradog Roberts commented that they were "too light in character", adding: "We are fond of the German chorale, and our hymn-tunes have been based on that style. Breadth and dignity run through our tunes."⁵⁷ These undeniable attributes were fully exploited by Mansel Thomas in the decade after the Second World War when he produced male choir arrangements of several well-known hymns, complete with elaborate piano parts. The enlargement in scale of these tunes resulted in the "works" gaining recognition as the equivalent of new "compositions," being considered as based on the hymn tune rather than a mere arrangement. For example, a hymn tune by G.H. Jones to words by David Charles (1762-1834) became known in Thomas's arrangement as *Deus Salutis*. "O Mighty Lord, give thou thy hand" begins the English translation and a glance at the coda (Ex.79) shows the classic Amen ending which became the hallmark of these incredibly popular publications. Two other well known contributions in this genre by Mansel Thomas are *Hyfrydol* and *Llanfair*, both of which have the perorative Amen ending. The tune *Hyfrydol* was by R.H. Prichard (1811-1901) and the original words were by William Williams (1717-1791) who wrote under the Bardic pseudonym Pantycelyn. Williams also provided the text for the melody *Llanfair*. The latter was composed by the blind weaver from Llanfechell, Robert Williams (c1781-c1821). Originally called *Bethel*, the tune was made known to the musical world at large when Vaughan Williams included it in *The English Hymnal*.

Mansel Thomas modelled his arrangements to some extent on the work of an earlier Welsh musician, Daniel Protheroe. Well-known for his compositions such as *Invictus*

and *Nidaros*, Protheroe took the hymn tune by William Owen, *Bryn Calfaria*, and, in 1932, produced an arrangement entitled *Laudamus* for the Sherman Park Lutheran Choir in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, (where he had spent most of his working life). The middle verse of the three has a key change to accommodate the melody in the baritone line and this pattern (followed by Thomas in, for example, *Hyfrydol*), was also dutifully emulated by another post-war arranger, John Tudor Davis, in one of the best-known male voice hymn arrangements of all time - *Gwahoddiad*. Ironically (bearing in mind Carodog Robert's views quoted earlier), this hymn, by an American, Lewis Hartsough, was among a number which were translated from the Sankey collection and published in Welsh by John Roberts (Ieuan Gwyllt) in *Swn y Juwbili* between 1874 and 1878. Beginning life as *I hear Thy welcome voice*, Hartsough's hymn was re-named *Gwahoddiad* in *Llyfr Emynau a Thonau*, the hymn-book of the Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodist churches, published in 1929. Tudor Davis, who only in recent times retired as conductor of the Rhos Male Voice Choir, provides lyrical counter melodies in the very full piano accompaniment with *quasi* harp writing in some passages. The chorus ("I am coming Lord, coming now to Thee) with the obligatory "Amen" is guaranteed to bring any male voice concert to an emotional conclusion.

An equally famed hymn with no transatlantic connections and which is, in fact, an original male voice composition, appeared in the 1950s. The Rev. Griffiths, preaching at the Congregational Church at Manselton, Swansea, was asked by the organist, Emrys Jones, to listen particularly to the introit he would play that Sunday as it was a new piece which Jones hoped would suit his Manselton Male Voice Choir.⁵⁸ *Morte*

Christe was thus previewed and obviously approved as Jones' setting of the Isaac Watts hymn *When I survey the wondrous cross* has won its place in the hearts and voices of every male choir in the land. With a melody spanning an 11th, Jones eschews the change of key for a baritone verse (although they are given half of the melody in verse two). For variety, therefore, he includes a solo tenor with hummed accompaniment *a capella* for verse three and a stirring unison at the start of the last verse. The harmony is simple to a degree (wholly diatonic, the only chromatic chord appearing in the piano/organ link between verses) but the overall effect is moving.

One of the most significant Welsh contributions to repertoire, in that its influence is still felt fifty years and more after its inception, came from the music publishing company set up in 1937 by W.S. Gwynn Williams who was editor as well as proprietor. Born in 1896, the only son of an amateur musician, William Sidney was privately educated before attending the local grammar school in his native Llangollen, at which time he learned the piano and violin. Being trained firstly in medicine and then later becoming an articled clerk with Denbighshire County Council, Williams drifted towards music through his association with the Gorsedd of Bards and through some broadcasting for Eire Free State Radio. From these sources arose the opportunity to adjudicate at the National Eisteddfod. This was in 1927 and it was his subsequent work for the music publishing firm of Hughes and Son that led him to set up his own publishing house in Llangollen. The business flourished, especially as he later created a ready market by establishing the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen which had been a dream of both Gwynn Williams and Harold Tudor, a journalist with *The*

Liverpool Echo. The latter had worked in Wales on behalf of the British Council during the war years and had witnessed the songs and dances of European refugees domiciled in Wales. Having been chairman of the music committee of the Royal National Eisteddfod, Gwynn Williams needed little encouragement in fulfilling this dream and he was the Eisteddfod's musical director from its inception in 1946 until his death in 1978. The catalogue from his publishing house provided fresh material for all voices but it was especially useful in broadening the repertoire of male voice choirs in his native country and beyond. He cast his net wide and in each edition, whether of a Hungarian folk song (as in *Dana Dana*) or a Norwegian part-song such as Kjerulf's *Bridal Party*, the text was always provided in singable English and Welsh versions as well as in the original language, in tonic-sol-fah and staff notation. The latter reflects Williams' only formal musical qualification in that he was as an Associate of the Tonic Sol-Fah College, London whose examination he passed when he was seventeen.

It was in the area of sixteenth and early seventeenth century motets and madrigals that Williams focussed a great deal of his attention. Thus his *a capella* catalogue included many works by Palestrina, Viadana, Lassus and des Pres in addition to composers such as Handl and the English madrigalists. Such was his zeal that, towards the end of his life, he was honoured by the Italian government in recognition of his services to Italian music. His editions were adopted by competitive festivals in England as well as by the eisteddfodau and it was through Gwynn Williams that many male voice choirmen first discovered the pleasure of early music. On the basis that many of the original sixteenth century collections were designated *ad aequales*, there

seems nothing inadvisable in suggesting that an "equal voice" choir should sing, for example, Handl's *In Nomine Jesu* (Ex.80). However, the combination of the editor's inadvisable time signature (giving no hint as to the harmonic rhythm - in this case in minims), the frequent "hairpin" crescendi and diminuendi, the accents to "correct" the inflections, when allied to the inexperience of conductors in dealing with polyphonic writing as fluid and natural as this, has, over the years, resulted in many inappropriate and style-less performances. Many conductors, standing before eighty to a hundred men, have obviously felt the need to keep slavishly to the bar line and thus, with an overlay of dark-hued sentimentalism, have contrived to make Palestrina sound like an Edwardian church anthem or Weelkes to resemble a marching song. In Ex.81, the non-realization of the minim beat, with conductors beating a strict four, makes nonsense of both the final bars and the passage "And deep despair doth overtake me", to say nothing of the breathing and tuning problems presented. Similarly, in Viadana's *Ave Verum Corpus*, "conducting" lines which are so obviously free has resulted in awkward accents and an unsettling of balance and tone (Ex.82). As long as competition organizers set music of this period, music which was never intended to be sung by more than a handful of voices still less to be "conducted," and until a great more understanding is shown by male voice choir conductors, adjudicators will continue to endure un-stylish singing at unsuitable speeds with inappropriate tone. Gwynn Williams was able to make available to male choirs a wealth of music which had been largely unexplored by male choirs and the fact that Lassus' *Bonjour, Mon Coeur* and *Matona, Mia Cara* and Josquin des Pres' *El Grillo* have been experienced by

many hundreds of singers is commendable. Nonetheless, a complete revision and re-issue of the catalogue would be an even greater service now that scholarship has become more refined over the past fifty years.

ENGLISH COMPOSERS IMMEDIATELY PRE- AND POST-WORLD WAR 2

In the 1930s, and for the next two decades, one of the most significant English composers for male voices and the man on whom fell the mantle of Bantock, was Cecil Armstrong Gibbs. Once more, we find that this was largely through a strong connection with the competitive system - he was one of the country's leading adjudicators and became vice chairman of the British Federation of Music Festivals, a post he held for 15 years. With encouragement from Adrian Boult, Gibbs studied with Vaughan Williams at the Royal College of Music (where he later taught) and his music is redolent of the Englishness associated with his mentor, often coupled with impressionistic colourings reminiscent of Delius.

Of his one hundred or so part-songs, over thirty were for male voices, his style showing no marked development in that the harmonic language of his 1929 part-song *Into Exile* is basically un-changed in *Tranquillity* which he composed for the Plymouth Clarion Choir in 1957. His life-long friendship with the poets Sir Mordaunt Currie and Walter de la Mare bred in Gibbs an acute perception of the subtleties of stress and meter necessary for successful settings of the English language. This awareness can be seen in his 1934 work, for Irving Silverwood and the Holme Valley Male Voice Choir, using Currie's *Haunted*, where the dual time-signature gives the composer the required

flexibility (Ex.83). His use of the opening motive in an augmented version to lead into the Coda is a most telling moment. Similarly, his final line, hovering between A minor and the eventually unresolved dominant chord of a song which always gravitates towards G minor, proves suitably magical and haunting in performance (Ex.84). Gibbs was always happiest using a homophonic texture. His attempts at counterpoint, as in *Marston Moor 1644*, (again to a Currie text) belong more to the church anthem composers of forty years earlier (Ex.85 from b.9). This is not to say that he was unable to produce effective imitation, witness the madrigalian flavour of *It was a Lover and his Lass* (Ex.86). This song appeared in 1932, the same year as his setting of Blake's *Tiger, Tiger* and a comparison illustrates a stylistic point - that Gibbs produced a "style" suitable for the text in front of him. His Shakespeare song is a reversion to the world of Weelkes and Wylbie (complete with bouncing rhythms and false relations) without resorting to pastiche. The Blake song is as powerful and frightening as anything the composer produced, with the baritones and basses growling their semitonal lines in the long build-up to the climax "Dare its deadly terrors clasp?" (Ex.87). The augmented chords in the lyrical phrases which follow ("Did he who made the lamb make thee?"), especially the final one on the dominant F#, help to make Gibbs' repetition of the opening statement inevitable. The setting of *The Jovial Beggar* in 1934 was for the Felling Male Voice Choir on Tyneside, a group which was later to give the winning performance of Gibbs' *The Listeners* (de la Mare) at the National Competitive Festival in 1951. In each of these songs, Gibbs manages to produce music to match the individuality of the texts and therefore the duplication of Byron's *There be*

none of Beauty's daughters is enigmatic. The two different settings are separated by eleven years (the first was in 1937) and in each the music for the two verses is substantially the same, modified only as the intensity of the thoughts demand.

Most of the music of Armstrong Gibbs was published by Boosey and Hawkes in the Winthrop Rogers Edition, the General Editor of which was Julius Harrison, at one time a pupil of Granville Bantock. Harrison turned more to composition when increasing deafness forced him to relinquish his career as a conductor. That he should produce a *Fantasia for Male Voices* based on Weber's generic *Lutzlow's Wild Chase* comes as no surprise when one remembers that, in his early career, he was recognised as a Wagner specialist and therefore he must have become imbued with Germany mythology and legend. The remainder of his male voice output includes *Night, Song of the Bards* and *Marching Along*. The last of these is a spirited setting of Robert Browning's poem for baritone solo to which the composer has added a male chorus (Ex.88). At this distance in time it would be difficult to ascertain whether Harrison was capitalizing on the success of a solo song or hoping to find success for it through the choral version. The arrangement was made for Maurice Vinden, conductor of the London Male Voice Choir and Booseys presumably felt that it had potential as they were prepared to make orchestral parts available.

Few British composers in the decades surrounding the second World War ignored the male voice medium. However, songs such as John Ireland's *They told me, Heraclitus* and *Island Praise*, Gerald Finzi's *Thou did'st delight my eyes* or Constant Lambert's *Fear no more the heat of the sun* with their wide-ranging chromaticism and flexible

meters were not the type of song most male choirs were seeking at the time - the conservative outlook to repertoire was already becoming established. These compositions were more likely to be performed by the men of the BBC chorus than by a conventional male voice choir. With the co-operation of Lesley Woodgate, who himself produced over two dozen pieces for male voices (mostly, however, arrangements), the chorus-master in the 1950s, Harold Noble, involved what became known as the BBC Men's Chorus in a wide range of part-songs as well as larger scale works. The latter included broadcasts of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* and Petrassi's *Coro di Morte*. Although this music was outside the realm of the amateur male choir, Noble was able to use his experience to produce excellent part-songs for use at competition festivals. One such, still in the repertoire, is his setting of Browning's *King John*. Choirs and competition committees have made a habit of retaining interest in individual songs such as these. Another is the superb setting by S.W.Underwood (a West Country organist and choirmaster) of Ivor Gurney's poem from the World War One trenches entitled *The Fire Kindled* ("God, that I might see Framilode once again"). Similarly, Arthur Warrell's *In St. Paul's*, written in 1933 for Herbert Pierce and the Barclay's Bank Male Voice Choir, has retained its place in the repertoire as has Herbert Howells' *The Winds Whistle Cold*, written for the Lydney Male Voice Choir in 1924.

Benjamin Britten's involvement with male choir music dates from 1937 when he and W.H. Auden collaborated on a BBC Radio production in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne called *Hadrian's Wall* in which members of Felling Male Voice Choir were

accompanied by a string quartet and percussion. The score for this has never been located. However, apart from male chorus passages in his stage works (such as the chorus of Rustics and Fishermen from *Gloriana*), Britten's enduring contribution to the male choir repertoire is a piece originally written for three solo voices and sent, in 1943, as a present to his friend Richard Wood and fellow-prisoners in a German prisoner of war camp. *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard* is one of the most exciting works in the male voice repertoire as well as being vocally, dramatically and musically the most rewarding. The beautifully shaped lines of the opening narrative and coda provide a sublime framework for the headlong rush of the page-boy with news of Lady Barnard's impending adultery and the speed of her husband's horse as he gallops back to catch the lovers *in flagrante* (Exs.89 and 90). The composer signalled his approval of a full chorus version by including, in the 1952 published edition, a piano duet accompaniment.

Michael Head was yet another composer who had a strong association with the competition movement and although his main output consisted of solo songs for his own accompaniment which were later to be taken up so readily by selection committees, he was persuaded (by the Sylvidae Male Voice Choir of Jersey) to make two psalm settings one of which has found a niche in the repertoire. *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord* suffers a little in performance through having the baritone and bass writing rather too close but the words are set with all Head's customary skill and care for the English language (Ex.91). His brother-in-law Alan Bush was also involved in male choral writing. He included a setting of Randall Swingler for male voices in

the last movement of his Piano Concerto (1937) and also produced a magnificently virile work, to a poem by his wife Nancy Bush, called *Men of Felling*. Lennox Berkeley's *Ask Me No More* Op.37 and *Three Songs* Op. 67 were produced in 1952 and 1965 respectively and show his customary charm and feel for colour. It is a fair assumption that Kenneth Leighton's *Three Psalms* Op.54 and Robin Milford's *Benedicite* were not written with the traditional male voice choir in mind, especially as the latter has an orchestral accompaniment. Works such as Humphrey Searle's *Rhyme Rude to my Pride* (for two altos, tenor, two baritones and bass) reflect interest in such groups as The Kings' Singers for whom were written Malcolm Williamson's *The Musicians of Bremen*, Peter Dickinson's *Winter Afternoons*, Paul Patterson's *Timepiece* and Richard Rodney Bennett's *House of Sleep*. The two five-part *Motets* by Sebastian Forbes and Peter Aston's *Adam Lay Ibowndyn* would similarly tax the musicianship of the large-scale male choir although Denis Apivor's *The Hollow Men* would seem to demand the weight of tone which the traditional choir could produce. The score of this sixteen minute work reveals a beautifully constructed realization of T.S.Eliot's words and has particularly pointed orchestration. The first performance was given in 1950 by the London Symphony Orchestra and the men of the BBC chorus under Constant Lambert. This is doubtless one of a series of works which no longer can be heard since the professional BBC chorus has been reduced to a handful of singers - financial restraints militate against the performance of expensive rarities of this sort.

THE MALE CHORUS AND MAJOR EUROPEAN COMPOSERS

Throughout this century across Europe, composers were using the male voice medium in pieces which rarely find their way into the general repertoire. In 1906, *The Musical Times* eagerly awaited Richard Strauss's *Bardegesang* Op.55 which concerned the slaughter of fifty thousand Romans by the Teutons in 9AD commenting that the subject "should give the redoubtable Richard II ample opportunity for infusing a sturdy barbaric flavour into his music..."⁵⁹ Strauss scored the voices for this work in three four-part choirs but in the Op.76 song cycle for male chorus and orchestra *Die Tageszeiten* he restricted himself to one TTBB choir only. Busoni's remarkable C Major Piano Concerto Op.39 (1904) has a male chorus in the final movement. The composer insisted that the singers should be unseen by the audience and was hoping "to add a new register to the sonorities which precede it."⁶⁰ He used words, in a German translation, from the Danish Oelenschlaeger's poem *Aladdin* but, as E.J.Dent has remarked "...the final chorus...is free from Liedertafel taunts at which critics scoffed. One may indeed wonder why an essentially Italian work should end with verses in praise of Allah... The actual meaning of the words hardly matters."⁶¹

Schoenberg's six pieces for men's voice Op.35 are *a capella* but his *A Survivor from Warsaw* uses a very large orchestra to accompany the narrator with the men singing the Hebrew text in unison. As well as in *Oedipus Rex*, Stravinsky used a male chorus in *Le Roi des Etioles* and in the short cantata *Babel*. This 1944 work uses a narrator declaiming words from the Book of Moses, a large orchestra and a two-part chorus. At the point in the text where the Lord "scattered them abroad from thence upon the face

of the earth," the music has a striking similarity to that of the *Symphony of Psalms* from fourteen years earlier (Ex.92). Sibelius's five-movement orchestral epic *Kullervo* Op.7 has a male choir in the third movement (twenty minutes long) and again in the finale. The same composer's equally nationalistic cantata *Origins of Fire*, was premiered in 1952 in Cincinnati by the Estonian State Male Choir.

In choosing male voices for these works, all of the composers involved were, as Busoni himself indicated,⁶² giving less consideration to continuing the Mannerchor (or its national equivalent) tradition than they were to finding the correct tone colour for their compositional purposes. In a work like Petrassi's *Coro di Morti*, for example, which is described as a "Dramatic Madrigal", the text by Leopardi discusses the nature of existence after death and thus the lower voices would seem an obvious choice. The accompaniment of three pianos, brass, double basses and percussion further emphasises the nature of the words.

Compared with these full-scale, orchestrally accompanied works, it was always likely that the straightforward part-song would find its way more easily into the repertoire of the traditional choir in any Western country and many composers responded accordingly. Bartok's contribution, not surprisingly, tended to cover the area of folk song arrangements rather than original work although his treatment of, for example, the *Five Slovak Folk Songs* (1917) raises the pieces above the norm through his authoritative handling of the relevant modes. Although Kodaly did not actively encourage male voice choirs, preferring, in his educational singing programmes, to concentrate on the mixed voice ensemble, he nevertheless produced nineteen

partsongs for TTBB including a *Soldier's Song* which includes obligato trumpet and drum, and a sparkling *Tavern Song* (with three soloists voicing opinions on the quality of the wine and service). His *Songs from Karad*, in the English editions published in the 1950s, had texts provided by Nancy Bush which were in turn often based on translations by Matyas Seiber. Seiber himself provided what has become almost a male voice "modern" classic in his *Marching Song*, based on a Hungarian folk tune. The two songs by Leos Janacek, *Laska Opravdiva* and *Ach, Vojna, Vojna* were written in 1876 and 1886, the second being dedicated to Dvorak. An English version of these pieces, in translation *True Love* and *A Soldier's Lot* has been edited by the Czech composer Antonin Tucapsky - the songs form only a small part of Janacek's output for male voices.

Sibelius's dozen part-songs for male voices have a mixture of Latin and Finnish texts. Stravinsky's *Introitus: In memoriam T.S.Eliot* has a text from the Requiem Mass and the two-part chorus has an accompaniment of harp, piano, gongs, timpani, viola and string bass. The same composer's *Four Russian Folksongs* are TTBB with optional four horns. Not surprisingly, considering his prolific output, Hindemith composed a group of male voice songs, nine in all - his varied choice of poets included Hoderlin, Whitman and Brecht. Poulenc's *Chanson a boire* was used by some enterprising competition festivals as far back as the 1920s and although this particular song is for the standard layout of TTBB, the composer experimented with several others - two of the *Quatres Prieres de Saint Francois D'Assise* are for TBB and two for TBBB.

TRANSATLANTIC MUSIC IN THE BRITISH CHOIR REPERTOIRE

American composers have been prolific in their work for male voices and a reasonable amount has been made available to British choirs. Fenno Heath's *Beat! Beat! Drums!* is a setting of Walt Whitman in which the composer draws a good deal from the tapping, the pounding of drums. Heath provides vivid climaxes and a vigorous accompaniment using an almost Hindemithian language of fourths - certainly the music has little to do with any American tradition of the Copland variety. Copland himself produced more arrangements than original music, although there is plenty that is individual about his treatment of the *Old American Songs*. As with many composers, it is possible to take male voice extracts from his stage works (as in the TTBB song *Stomp Your Foot* from *The Tender Land*); the *Song of the Guerillas* is notable in having a text by Ira Gershwin. Ron Nelson's *Behold Man*, like the Heath, is more in the North European tradition and was commissioned by the Brown University Glee Club, while Randall Thompson took words from the Second Book of Samuel for his popular *The Last Words of David* which he dedicated to Serge Koussevitsky. Virgil Thomson, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, William Schuman, Charles Ives, Roy Harris, Henry Cowell, Howard Hanson, Elliott Carter and Leonard Bernstein all made contributions to the male repertoire. Samuel Barber's setting of the Stephen Spender poem *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, with an accompaniment consisting of three timpani, is a beautifully crafted work. The texture is, for the most part, simple with traditional imitative passages held together by the ostinati timpani part and a reiteration within the song of the title words. Barber keeps his fullest writing for "All under the

olive trees" where the line twists in agonizing semitones at the end of each verse (Ex.93). This superb piece can only leave the male choir conductor wishing desperately that Barber had produced more than this one diamond for his music library.

In terms of America, it is relevant to mention that the stage musical has also provided choirs with original material, in the European tradition of the nineteenth century operatic excerpts from Verdi and Wagner and those from the Savoy Operas (such as the Peers' Chorus from *Iolanthe*). Shows like *Paint Your Wagon* (Frederick Loewe) and *Guys and Dolls* (Frank Loesser) have been cannibalised for lively concert items although the *Fugue for Tinorns* from the last-named should be sung by solo voices. *Standin' on the Corner* from *The Most Happy Fella* (also a Loesser score) and *There is nothing like a Dame*, from Richard Rogers' *South Pacific*, are other songs which can and do take a place in the repertoire as being written specifically for male voices.

MORE RECENT BRITISH MUSIC

The lack of new music for British male choirs was highlighted in Chapter 5 when the results of the 1988 Survey showed that very few choirs were endeavouring to remedy the situation by commissioning new works. There are oases, however, in the desert of the past fifteen years. In 1987, Skelmanthorpe Male Voice Choir (W.Yorkshire) gave the first performance of *The World of Light*, commissioned, with the financial assistance of Yorkshire Arts, from Leeds University lecturer James Brown. Scored for soprano, mezzo, male voices and orchestra and using words by Henry Vaughan, the work is in three movements. The outside slower movements are complemented by a

vigorous central *Allegro agitato* where the choral writing is mostly in two parts only, making for greater clarity in the texture and hence, at this speed, the diction (Ex.94). Another Yorkshire choir, Bolsterstone, commissioned songs from Andrew Carter although these, *William the Conqueror* (1985) and *The Treasures of Great Britain*, are both light-hearted pastiche in contrast to the erudition of the James Brown work. In Tyne and Wear, Hetton Lyons published *Psalm 33*, written for them in 1986 by the American Carl Zytowski although, as a publishing venture, this was an individual enterprise for this one particular work and was made possible through connections with the printing trade. The setting, with piano accompaniment, would be daunting to the average choir but it lies effectively for the voices. A setting of Psalm 67 *Let the People Praise Thee* by Antonin Tucapsky was made for the 25th Anniversary of the Audley and District choir (West Midlands) in 1980. Back on Tyneside, Felling Male Voice Choir gave the first performance in 1988 of Stephen Dodgson's evocative setting of Hardy's *A Country Wedding*. The solo violin lines against the otherwise *a capella* chorus wittily illustrate "For he's gone to fiddle in front of the party" and add poignancy to the final lines:

When we went to play them to church together
And carried them there in an after year. (Ex.95)

Although *The Country Wedding* was not a work commissioned by the Felling choir but performed at the invitation of the composer, this renowned group had, as long ago as 1961, through Northern Arts, asked Alan Bush to provide them with what turned out to be a striking and powerful work (with words by Nancy Bush) for performance at the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen. Called simply *The Men of Felling*, the acerbic

piano writing gives focus and emphasis to the story of the miner's struggle against the tyranny of the earth and their capitalist masters.

Of the works mentioned in the Survey (see Chapter 5) as being commissioned from Welsh composers, Alun Hoddinot's *Green Broom* (for Pontardulais in 1986), Grace Williams' song-cycle *Ye Highlands and Ye Lowlands* (for Barry in 1972) and the William Mathias setting of *O Salutaris Hostia* (Rhos Orpheus 1973) are among the more significant. The Mathias is a particularly intelligently-crafted work, needing crisp rhythmic articulation and chording (Ex.96). These works apart, there are a handful of other Welsh pieces which could well be used by male choirs if the desire and initiative could be developed. Amongst these is *Owain ab Urien* by David Wynne. Scored for a modest accompaniment of brass and percussion, the work dates from the years 1967 to 1971 and is Wynne's most distinguished choral work. The composer maintains his own personal mode of expression, one which, because of his atonal techniques, would normally appear very foreign to male choir ears. He does this by "avoiding any dilution of his harmonic idiom by combining amateurs and professionals and carefully providing his amateur choir with reasonably easy vocal parts, diatonic when heard singly, but whose effect in combination is often atonal."⁶³ Yet, even when such a composer chooses a subject from Welsh legend and goes to some lengths to accommodate the harmonic conservatism of the male choir tradition, performances of the work have, it seems, been rare.

Since 1986, the year of its second event, the Northern (later National) Male Voice Choir Competition has been commissioning new test pieces annually. The organizers

began by approaching the 87-year-old organist-composer Herbert Sumsion who provided a setting of Psalm 122 *I was glad* which, stylistically, could well have been written in the 1930s but which, nevertheless, made some choirs realise that it was possible to perform recently penned works without members resigning *en masse* especially when a £1000 first prize was the inducement. After this ultra-conservative start, Goff Richards (well known in the brass band world for his light-hearted arrangements and compositions) produced, for the following year's competition, the rollicking *Lord Lovelace*. Subsequently, Grayston Ives, a former King's Singer, composed *A Crown of Praise* and veteran arranger and conductor Arthur Langford supplied *King Hal*, a necessarily episodic work characterizing the wives of Henry VIII. This move on the part of a new competition towards extending the repertoire and the aims of choir conductors, however cautious, was wholly admirable and demonstrated that there was an awareness in some circles of the need to rejuvenate the male voice repertoire. Indeed, the 1990 competition provided a piece which attempted to move away from the merely celebratory and, as such, was particularly welcome. Written by Bill Connors, to his own text, *The Unanimous Dance* is a witty and imaginative re-working (in a sense, paraphrase) of Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat*. It requires a great deal of subtlety and tonal refinement, containing as it does some very striking and inventive moments (Ex.97).

* * * * *

For today's British male choir, it would be perfectly possible to promote individual concerts entirely of mainland European nineteenth century part-songs or of twentieth

century works, a programme solely of British pieces, of Early Music or of songs written for the stage - all original music for male voices. Indeed, some choirs could specialize in one of these areas in the same way as some mixed choirs. Whilst to a "serious" music lover or critic this would seem to be an admirable state of affairs, the ethos of male voice choir work militates against such concert programmes being offered. Choirs, through their conductors, prefer to dip into the vastness of the repertoire. Change is not something which becomes the choirs or (more importantly they would claim) their audiences. Few choirs feel the need to solicit new audiences from, say, local concert-promoting societies and certainly the latter would be very surprised to have an approach from a male voice organization. Yet members of the public who enjoy a concert of mixed-voice part-songs would find equal pleasure in those of a male choir provided the pieces were carefully chosen so as to reduce the obvious limitation in tone and pitch contrast available to a choir without sopranos or altos. Broadcasting opportunities for the male choir are few. When they occur, they are generally on television rather than radio, the choir being employed precisely because it is redolent of nostalgia. Often, the purpose is to provide full-blooded, traditional, non-conformist hymn-singing of a sort seldom heard in today's thinly-populated churches. The choirs are almost forced by their ageing audience as well as their ageing membership to perpetuate the aural image of bye-gone sounds.

Publishers can be of little assistance in the matter of developing repertoire because any new pieces of originality or freshness would largely remain on their shelves due to the conservatism of the choirs and there is no profit in such a situation. "New" music

which is published tends to be harmonically naive arrangements or rather bland, unadventurous, original settings aimed at the average-to-weak choir. There are few, if any, publishers willing to take the financial gamble of producing substantial, imaginative music for what is, in truth, a shrinking market. Newly-commissioned pieces for major competitions, with a guarantee of copy sales possibly reaching four figures, *do* find their way on to the market but fewer and fewer choirs in the present decade regard themselves as "competition" choirs although all can claim some festival successes somewhere in their history.

Therefore, in terms of repertoire, and despite the enormous breadth and scope of available music, the tried and tested are tried and tested again and again (successfully, it seems, in terms of singers' and audiences' satisfaction). The copies wear thin and dog-eared (even supposing they are taken out of the library for revision) just as the heads in them become greyer and the sounds become less resonant. It is quite possible - although, to many, dismaying - to imagine that, in twenty or thirty years' time, male choirs will still be filling their concerts with the material shown in Appendix 6A and discussed at the start of this chapter. Whether or not there will still be an audience to whom they could sing can less easily be imagined.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 6 - REPERTOIRE

- 1 *The Musical Times (MT)* Oct. 1927 p.940 - concerning a concert in Cardiff by the Royal Mountain Ash male Choir ("recently returned from an extended tour of America").
- 2 The founders of the American school of music, men such as Edward MacDowell, George Chadwick, Arthur Foote and Horatio Parker, all received their musical education in Europe, especially Germany, and, on returning home, continued to write male voice music in the style of the Mannerchor and Liedertafel movement. Thus, the foundations were laid for a continued interest in male voice singing in the U.S.A.
- 3 Tortalano W. Original Music for Men's Voices (1973)
- 4 Knapp J.M. A Selected List of Music for Men's Voices (1952)
- 5 Roberts K. A Checklist of 20th century Choral Music for Male Voices (1970)
- 6 Tortalano op.cit. p.7
- 7 Tortalano op.cit. p.7
- 8 Saunders W. Weber (1940) p.72
- 9 Grout D. A History of Western Music (1960) p.554
- 10 Benedict J Weber (1926) p.89
- 11 *MT* November 1857 p.147.
- 12 Hans George Nägeli 1773-1836 was a Swiss composer, publisher and writer on aesthetics. He founded the Zurich Singinstitut in 1805, devoted to maintaining the humanistic and social ideals of Pestalozzi. Nägeli is credited with writing, in 1826, the first treatise on musical appreciation. Johann Michael Traugott Pfiefer was born in Bavaria in 1771 and was an active educational reformer as well as composer. He collaborated with the publisher Nägeli on several enterprises. He died in Switzerland in 1849
- 13 Nägeli G and Pfiefer J. 81 Part-Songs and Choruses (1857)
- 14 *MT* September 1859 p.110
- 15 *MT* June 1857 p.53

- 16 Mendelssohn was obviously unhappy with the nationalist fervour engendered at Liedertafel meetings. Writing to his sister on October 24th 1840, he refers to the Silver Anniversary event of the Leipzig Liedertafel: "... they sang so false and talked more falsely and when it became peculiarly tiresome, it was in the name of 'our German Fatherland'." Three days later, he wrote to his mother: "I say nothing about the silver wedding-day of the Leipzig Liedertafel, for I have not yet recovered from it. God help us! What a tiresome thing our German Fatherland is when viewed in this light! I can well remember my Father's violent wrath against Liedertafels ... and I feel something similar stirring within me." He may well have been thinking of this seemingly uncomfortable nationalism when he wrote to his close friend Carl Klingemann (August 1st 1839): "In quartetts (sic) for male voices alone, both for musical and for other reasons, there is something prosaic in the four male voices which has always been perceptible." *See Mendelssohn's Letters from 1833-1847* ed. Paul and Carl Mendelssohn Bartholdy - translated by Lady Wallace - London 1863 pp.210, 214/5 and 174 respectively.
- 17 MT March 1874 p.415
- 18 MT June 1874 p.520
- 19 MT June 1870 p.502
- 20 Novello edition dated 1869
- 21 Werner E. Mendelssohn: A New Image of the Composer and His Age (1963) p.374
- 22 MT March 1876 p.403
- 23 MT July 1876 p.524
- 24 This did not deter the Morecambe Festival committee who set the work as a test piece in 1905, the year of its first publication in Britain.
- 25 *Grableid* Op.9 appeared in the Novello Orpheus Series (No.406) in 1906 entitled *Pilgrim's Song*. Similarly, *Reiterlied* was No.426 in the same series, being published in Britain in 1908. The Schubert duet in question is No.2 from Op.40.
- 26 MT October 1906 p.683
- 27 MT May 1876 p.459
- 28 Musgrave M. The Music of Brahms (1985) p.79
- 29 Hurd M. Vincent Novello - And Company (1981) pp.76-78 and 86-87

- 30 *The Birmingham Post* 10th October 1927
- 31 *MT* February 1904 p.119
- 32 Advertisement in *MT* August 1908 p.494
- 33 These were fairly frequent if the *MT* can be regarded as a yardstick. The criticisms can best be summed up by referring to *MT* Feb.1912 pp18-19 which suggests that "some scheme for musical education of Wales is long overdue. The race...lags behind in the search for progress...(the people) suffer from an insularity all the more insidious because it is so unconscious..."etc.
- 34 *MT* March 1904 p.168
- 35 *MT* September 1903 p.598
- 36 See "Notes on Welsh Musicians " p.324
- 37 This is discussed in detail in *MT* March 1899 p.165
- 38 *MT* October 1876 p.618
- 39 *MT* April 1899 p.245
- 40 No explanation is offered as to the initials "R.G.A."
- 41 See Chapter 3 p.137
- 42 Moore J.M. Edward Elgar - A Creative Life (1984) p.439
- 43 ibid. p.523
- 44 Moore J.M. Elgar and His Publishers Vol.2 (1987) p.831
- 45 ibid. p.833
- 46 Pirie P. "Granville Bantock", The New Grove Dictionary Vol.2, (1980) p.125
- 47 No publishers lists are traceable of Bantock's arrangements
- 48 From the titles in advertisements on published copies of the songs, it can be estimated that Bantock produced in excess of 40 individual male voice songs plus six works with between three and seven movements in each.
- 49 See Chapter 4 p.169 in quotation from *Daily Telegraph*

- 50 Bantock M. Granville Bantock (1972) p.55
- 51 *MT* September 1921 p.619
- 52 *MT* June 1900 p.390
- 53 Colles H.C. Walford Davics (1942) p.107
- 54 *MT* May 1914 (Supplement). For more details on the Clarion movement, see also Walton and Wolvin (eds.) Leisure in Britain 1780-1939 (1982) p.107
- 55 Frederick Staton seemed to realise the significance of the words and music when, in his adjudication of Colne Valley's performance in 1926, he wrote "... the abiding impression was the strangely moving sight on this memorable May Day of these men from mart, mill, or forge in the grip of an overpowering emotion as they sang from the Boughton work:
 What I make is peace amid this clang of war, shaping the
 stubborn steel of all men's will
 (Colne Valley Orpheus Secretary's Report at AGM 1926)
- 56 Holst I. The Music of Gustav Holst (1968) p.133
- 57 Interviewed in *The Musical Herald* January 1912 p.3
- 58 This anecdote was related to the author by Dr. Rhydian Griffiths whose father was the Minister concerned.
- 59 *MT* June 1906 p.389
- 60 Dent E.J. Ferruccio Busoni (1974) p.149
- 61 ibid. p.148
- 62 ibid. p.148
- 63 Jones R.E. Composers of Wales 3 - David Wynne (1979) p.34

APPENDIX 6B : NOTES ON WELSH AND ASSOCIATED MUSICIANS

DAVIES E.T. 1878-1969 In his early days, Davies was accompanist for the Merthyr choir of the great Harry Evans. He later became Director of Music at the University College of North Wales

HARTSOUGH Lewis 1828-1919? (sources differ) Hartsough was born in Ithaca, New York. At the age of twenty-three, he became a Methodist minister but ill health compelled him to retire to the Rocky Mountains. Here he began the Mati Mission and wrote hymns and hymn tunes, eventually moving to Mount Vernon, Iowa, where he died. He edited the music edition of *The Revivalist* (c. 1886).

JENKINS Cyril 1889-1978 - Born in Dunvant nr. Swansea, Jenkins' early career was in Australia and the USA where he became Director of the Salt Lake City Choir. On returning to the UK, he became Director of Music to the London County Council and Vice-President of the London Symphony Orchestra. He was noted for his critical attitude and progressive views on Welsh music and when asked what was the greatest stumbling block to Welsh musical progress replied "The noble-hearted admiration for what you would call musical rubbish that, of course, is due to bad taste brought about by sheer ignorance." (Wales Vol.5 Nov.1913 p.36)

JONES Emrys 1898-1971 Jones was organist at Manselton Congregational Church in Swansea for fifty years from 1921 until his death. He served in the Royal Flying Corps in WW I but was too old for service in the second war. However, his work as an air raid warden put him in touch with a group of male singers from which he formed the Manselton and District Male Choir immediately after the war. This choir later became the Swansea Male Choir, still operating at the time of writing.

JONES Griffith Hugh 1849-1919 Llanberis-born, Griffith Jones became a head teacher in a Primary School. He wrote the Hymn tune *Llef* in memory of his brother Dewi Arfon.

OWEN William (of Prysgol) 1813-1893 Owen was born in Bangor, spending his early life working in the quarries. He later attended music classes, was strongly associated with the temperance movement and wrote many hymn tunes, the most famous of which was *Bryn Califaria*.

PARRY Joseph 1841-1903 Parry's family went to America when Joseph was thirteen, therefore his musical education was in New York. He returned to win prizes at Swansea in 1863 and Llandudno in 1864 and remained to study at the Royal Academy of Music with Sterndale Bennett. He later gained a Doctorate at Cambridge and returned to America to establish a musical institute from which he retired when he

was made Professor of Music at Aberystwyth. He also set up a school of music in Swansea; composer of the hymn tune *Aberystwyth*.

PROTHEROE Daniel 1866-1934 Protheroe was born in Ystradgynlais nr. Swansea, his early training being with Joseph Parry (qv). He emigrated in 1886 to the anthracite coalfields of Scranton, Pennsylvania where some 10,000 Welshmen formed 10% of the population. Protheroe conducted local choirs and took a B.A. in music at Toronto University. He moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1894 to direct the Lyric Glee Club "... one of the finest male organizations west of the Alleghanies" (The Cambrian August 1900 No.8). His compositions include 19 choruses for male voices including *Invictus* and *Nidaros* and a work for male voices and orchestra entitled *The Britons*.

ROBERTS Caradog 1878-1935 Roberts was the youngest Welshman to gain a D.Mus at Oxford. Born in Rhos, his early years were spent as a joiner but he was encouraged to take up serious musical study by the distinguished organist Roland Rogers. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists in 1900: from 1914 to 1920 he was Director of Music at the University College of North Wales in Bangor. Of the Eisteddfodau he said "That is where we are hard hit by the English whose conductors are usually trained musicians. In Wales... often our conductors know little more than the choirs." (*The Musical Herald* January 1912 p.3)

THOMAS Mansel 1909-1986 On winning the Rhondda scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music at the age of fifteen, Thomas studied under Benjamin Dale. He composed prolifically - over one hundred and fifty song compositions and arrangements. He joined the BBC in Cardiff in 1936, playing a leading role in the development of the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra and later (1950) becoming becoming Head of Music for BBC Wales. Thomas was a key figure in the post-war renaissance of Welsh music

THOMAS Vincent 1873-1940 Vincent Thomas was born in Wrexham but spent most of his life in London. A self-taught musician, he left his banking career in 1912 to devote himself to music. For a time he was one of Beecham's conductors and was Musical Director to the London Conservative Association. He conducted the Westminster Choral Society and at Eisteddfodau in Swansea and Neath.

TREHARNE Bryceson 1879-1940 Treharne studied in Merthyr before winning a scholarship to study piano in London with Herbert Sharpe. An Erhard Scholarship took him to the Royal College of Music where he was taught by Franklyn Taylor, Ernst Pauer and Edvard Danreuther. After a distinguished studenthood, he emigrated to Australia to take up the post of Professor of Piano in Adelaide.

WATKINS Enos 1877 - ? Probably of Welsh extraction, Watkins was born in Wolverhampton. By 1909 he was organist and choirmaster at Richmond Hill Congregational Church, conductor of Richmond Hill Male Voice Choir (for whom he

wrote *The Light of the World* - see p.279) and conductor of the Bournemouth and District Congregational Choral Union.

WILLIAMS Christmas 1871-1926 Williams was in born Llanwrtyd, Brecon and at 17 went to Cardiff for lessons with Joseph Parry (qv) whose assistant he became at the South Wales Music School. After gaining degrees at Cambridge and Dublin he found early compositional success at the National Eisteddfod. He later taught in Merthyr from 1895.

CHAPTER SEVEN - A FUTURE PERHAPS

The very survival of the male voice choir in Britain on anything other than a very modest scale is under threat. This is a conclusion which can be drawn from the 1988 Survey. The failure to freshen repertoire and the high average age of members are but two of the indicators pointing towards a gradual demise. The tradition of male camaraderie in song commands a long history and it is a tradition, carrying its own sound and repertoire, which has spread beyond the shores of Europe. Understanding what is meant by "the tradition" and witnessing how British male choral singing can be viewed in the context of mainland Europe and the Commonwealth, can (through similarities and dissimilarities) help to bring the British situation into focus. This itself is a useful exercise when considering any future the movement may have.

TRADITION AND LEGACY

In any discussion on the British male voice choir, the words "tradition" and "traditional" appear with a frequency that suggests synonymity. The adjective is certainly useful in setting apart the TTBB formation from the work of barbershop groups or small, specialist ensembles, and it also implies secularity. Further, the word pin-points repertoire. It remains "traditional" to sing hymn tunes arranged by Welshmen, spirituals of the negro American arranged by white Europeans and "festival

pieces". This last category is approved by choirs as a necessary evil in being seen and heard to remain skilled enough to be "competitive" although the songs themselves will seldom be included in a normal concert programme. There is the "tradition" of being boys together away from wives - many Welshmen would agree with the light-hearted suggestion that it was

... all Mam's fault. It was she - so they say - who was the boss, who doled out the pocket money to the men, who went to chapel and who ran the home. What, then, was left for the man of the house to do? There were the pigeons of course but, after all is said and done, they are only birds. Then there was the garden and the allotment but that was only seasonal work and all very lonely. If you stayed in too much you'd soon get in the way, so why not go to the choir (the male voice choir, not the mixed one which was for families).¹

There is the "tradition" of drinking together, (for which there is rather more sociological support than the above), of playing in sports fixtures together, with the obligatory chorus in the shower or afterwards in the bar. Many choirs were maintained or re-formed in the second half of this century simply because there had always been a choir associated with a certain village (or town, works, pit, church, area) and local feeling was sufficiently strong to ensure that the tradition was carried on. Nostalgia, endemic in the average man past the age of fifty, has played, is playing and will continue to play a crucial role in any future the male voice choir may have. Nowhere is this felt more strongly than in Wales. Viewed from the last decade of the twentieth century, much that has made Wales great and individual has been seen to disappear. Its chapels are fewer and, as in the rest of the kingdom, those remaining are relatively empty. It follows, therefore, that chapel hymn-singing, Wales' most traditional of musical activities, has lessened, some would say was approaching extinction. Korean

and Taiwanese steel is preferred to that from Port Talbot; the coal industry is in its death throes and, to compound the misery, Welsh rugby union is at its lowest ebb ever. In the mind of Cardiff solicitor David Wyndam Lewis, one of the reasons for this last national catastrophe was that the pre-match atmosphere at home international matches had gone - "we had forgotten how to sing."² The legendary Cliff Morgan claims that "the singing put a yard on every stride and shove and twenty yards on every kick to touch or at goal."³ Therefore, having persuaded the Welsh Rugby Union to accept a male choir to lead the singing before international matches, Lewis set about promoting the most spectacular public relations event in Welsh male voice choral history. With one hundred and sixty participating choirs, four bands from the Guards regiments, a choir-boy, a pop-singer and two opera singers as soloists, his mammoth charity event at Cardiff Arms Park in May 1992 was televised live throughout Wales. Its purpose was to remind Welshmen of another tradition which is in danger of dying, that of male voice singing, and in particular to win younger men to the fold of the Cor Meibion. True, in the eight-thousand-strong ensemble, one in three of the participating choirs was English and the inclusion of one Italian group, two from the Ukraine and two ex-pat choirs, one each from Australia and South Africa, hardly justified the chosen title *World Choir*. Nevertheless, the importance of tradition, heritage and nostalgia could not be better exemplified especially with the choral content of the programme including four Welsh hymns, four opera choruses, a spiritual, *Comrades in Arms*, Albert Hay Malotte's *The Lord's Prayer* and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

The very existence of an event like the World Choir concert, is a reminder of the

extent to which European male voice choralism had been propagated throughout the world. In the nineteenth century, this was achieved through colonialisation and in Britain's case was concomitant with every other type of export, cultural, industrial, scientific and social. From the glee clubs of the Raj and the townships of Canada to the goldmines of the Antipodes, the rafters of mess-hall and Town Hall rang to the sounds of glees and partsongs which could also have been heard in Biddulph or Barnsley. Strangely, the nineteenth century Australasians favoured the title Liedertafel for their clubs although at the time of the First World War these titles soon disappeared. There were two such organizations in Melbourne before the turn of the century. One, the Metropolitan Liedertafel, was formed in 1873 and by 1882, it had a membership of ninety (plus a waiting list) and an annual revenue of £1,500. Their repertoire included all the large-scale Mendelssohn works. The entire business management was vested in the performing members and its efficiency can be measured not only by the bank balance but by the fact that a trip could be organized for eighty of the members to Sydney, a distance of some six hundred miles by train, to give "five concerts in one week, singing each time to an immense audience."⁴

In New Zealand, the Wanganui Liedertafel came into existence in 1898 with thirty founding members. Music was borrowed from the Wellington Liedertafel and the 1905 choir photograph shows the same preponderance of the middle-aged amongst the thirty-nine members as one finds in today's choirs. In the 1920s the membership was sixty and later in its history a notable event took place in 1948 when the newly formed National Symphony Orchestra of New Zealand accompanied the choir.

That the choir has maintained its unbroken history is due to the keen sense of

fellowship engendered within the membership and its ranks have included labourer, artisan, teacher, office worker, professional and executive. Each one having a love of harmony to contribute to the pleasure of singing in parts.⁵

This tribute could, of course, have been written about practically any male voice choir throughout Britain. Contemporary comments were not always so appreciative of the male choirs. Of Wellington's Liedertafel, *The Triad*, New Zealand's leading music magazine, suggested in 1910 that it was "so thoroughly British. It is so reliable, so respectable, so discreet and mostly...so dull..."⁶ Again, this was a charge which no doubt could have been levelled at many of their counterparts in Britain. In Christchurch, as well as the Liedertafel which was formed in 1885, the Addington (Railway) Workshops Male Voice Choir came into existence in more recent times "in an attempt to put music into the lives of workers in that industry."⁷ The Wellington Commercial Travellers' and Warehousemans' Association choir began their work in 1920, singing *The Soldiers' Chorus*, *In Absence* and Coleridge Taylor's *The Viking Song* as well as *Strike the Lyre* (from the glee period), *Down Among the Deadmen* (Bantock) and *The Song of the Jolly Roger*. All of these songs were no doubt reminding the settlers of "home" and would have been found in choral programmes throughout New Zealand including those of the Dunedin Male Voice Choir on which King George, in 1927, bestowed the title "Royal".

Similar developments took place throughout the then Empire as the colonizers established their new homes and towns. Many choirs were established in Canada where enthusiasm for the competitive movement spread very quickly thus providing the gentlemen with an incentive and adding focus to their rehearsals. Numbers of

festivals remained small (there were only six Canadian competitive festivals affiliated to The British Federation of Music Festivals by 1930) but the scope and catchment areas of these events was extensive. That the male choir movement put down deep roots in this part of North America is suggested by the fact that, even in more recent times, newly-formed choirs have appeared. The six-village rural township of Osgoode, near Ottawa, established such a choir as recently as 1979, to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the town's foundation. The fifteen founder members, mostly farmers, have seen the choir grow to its present forty-one, playing their part in widening the repertoire, from the exclusively religious (though ecumenical) material with which they began, to embrace the "traditional" (British) folk song and drawing-room ballad. The choir celebrated its 10th Anniversary by visiting Holland, the Dutch having a special affection for all things Canadian through the extensive involvement of Canadian troops in the liberation of their country in 1945.

It would be erroneous to interpret the Osgoode story as a sign of meaningful regeneration throughout Canada. True, a new choir, developing and building up its numerical forces would seem to offer hope for the future. However, as the general attitude and approach of the choir, as exemplified by its repertoire, seems rooted in the past, it is difficult to imagine an enormous number of young singers being attracted to the choir's activities. Again, it seems another case where maintaining the tradition is regarded as more significant than the forward development of contemporary choral work. As in Canada, the general picture in the Commonwealth countries has close parallels with the situation in Britain. In many parts of Australasia, for example,

enquiries regarding the strength of male voice choirs will solicit replies couched in terms of the past. The implication always is that at one time male choirs would have been found in every community and township, however small. Certainly, the traveller through Queensland or New South Wales in the early 1990s and stopping off at Toowoomba or Newcastle could hear this tale. Choirs still in existence, as in Dunedin, New Zealand, are undoubtedly ageing - with Returned Servicemen's Association choirs this would seem self-evident - and any real numerical strength will only be found in the larger cities through the Welsh ex-pat choirs. The large Melbourne Welsh choir, for example, was represented at the Choir of the World event in May 1992. Even among the Welsh fraternity, however, the picture is uneven. The average age of the Montreal Welsh Male Voice Choir, which visited Britain in 1990, was almost certainly higher than that of English choirs. It is difficult to see how much longer that particular type of choir, as with many similar British ones, can continue particularly with a membership of less than thirty. By contrast, the Canadian Orpheus choir, formed in the 1980s by the émigré former conductor of the Morrision (Swansea) Orpheus choir, boasts a membership of over one hundred.

MAINLAND EUROPE AND BEYOND

On the continent of Europe, the extent of male voice choir activity is also uneven. The Osgoode Township Choir, for example, would have found a healthy male voice choir situation in Holland. Within the membership of the Royal Dutch Singers League (founded in 1852) there are two hundred and forty male choirs although there are a further six hundred operating independently of the League. In population terms, this

represents one choir for every eighteen thousand people (compared with one in ninety thousand for the United Kingdom) and the average age is estimated at late forties rather than the mid-fifties as in England.⁸ Unfortunately, early records concerning Dutch choir history were lost during the Second World War. However, it is safe to assume that organized male singing was established in the early decades of the nineteenth century if only because, even further north, in Finland, there is a definitive starting date of 1819. At this time, students returning from Uppsala University in neighbouring Sweden, formed a choir in Turku, similar to the one they had enjoyed in their undergraduate years. Other choirs developed in academic circles as the members took up posts throughout Finland. In 1838 the all-male Akademiska Sangforeningen was established, Finland's oldest choir still in existence. The principal language in Finnish universities in the early nineteenth century was Swedish but in later times Finnish-speaking students, encouraged in the 1860s by the first choirs singing in Finnish, began breaking away from the established groups. It was in this way that a splinter group from the Akademista formed the (all-male) Helsinki University Chorus, a choir "which has since become a byword in Finland's choral history".⁹ After independence in 1917, several choral organizations were established, the present-day Association of Male Voice Choirs of Finland dating from 1936. There are at present 152 member-choirs, a number which has remained consistent since 1960 and which therefore suggests little slackening of interest in male choirs. However, officers of the Association estimate that there are in all about three hundred male choirs throughout Finland, representing one choir per sixteen thousand head of population. The average

choir membership is between thirty three and thirty eight while the average age is put at between forty five and fifty.¹⁰ One of the foremost male voice conductors and composers in Finland is Eric Bergman whose works, such as the harmonically advanced and texturally adventurous *The Birds* for choir, baritone and percussion, demonstrate how far British choirs have fallen behind in terms of awareness of twentieth century choral technique. At their London concert in the autumn of 1992, the Helsinki University Chorus, for example, brought with them no fewer than three world premieres, by Paavo Heininen, Jouko Linjama and Bergman, all exploring contemporary treatment of the choral instrument.¹¹

Other Scandinavian countries, too, embraced the male voice sound in the nineteenth century. The most influential figure in Norway was Halfdan Kjerulf (1815 - 1868). Apart from composing some forty original compositions and making over fifty arrangements of folk songs for male voices, Kjerulf, in 1845, began the Norwegian Students Choir. The oldest choral group in Norway today, it is now the official University of Oslo choir and travels widely throughout Europe and America. In the membership of the Norwegian Choir Association, there are one hundred and eighty-four male choirs. There are yet more choirs outside the Association although no figures exist. However, even without them, the statistic per head of population is one in twenty three thousand. Numbers within the choirs vary from double quartets to choirs of between seventy and eighty members but, unlike Holland and Finland, the average age is described by a Choir Association official as "high" and it is acknowledged that "from time to time some of the choirs cease to exist."¹²

Since it was a fountain-head for the formation of TTBB choirs, it is not surprising to find that in Germany male choral singing is, at least numerically, stronger than anywhere else in Europe. In 1990, there were more male choirs in the old Western Germany than female and mixed choirs put together - nine thousand four hundred - representing an incredible situation of one male choir for every six thousand six hundred citizens.¹³ On that basis, an English city like York would be supporting twenty-one choirs instead of the single male choir which does exist there. The Deutscher Sangerbund, the largest national singing organization in the world, is divided into State Singing Federations, figures for which show male voice singing to be less extensive in the south and southwest and that there are more mixed choirs than male in Berlin. However, in most states, the national figures are reflected. The yet more significant statistics, in view of what has been shown to be the case in Britain and is hinted at in Norway, are those which compare membership over the preceding fifteen years. Here, we discover that the number of *mannerchore* has decreased from ten thousand five hundred and seventy-nine in 1976 to the 1990 figure quoted above, while the *frauenchore* have increased from one thousand three hundred and seventeen to two thousand and ninety-five by 1990. A similar increase over the same period is found for the *gemitschte chore* - four thousand five hundred and eighty-three in 1976 to six thousand one hundred and forty. The suggestion in Germany, therefore, is that young men are more likely to join a mixed choir (there were over eighteen thousand male singers under the age of twenty five in the 1990 figures) and that male choir strength is thus diminishing. No figures are available for the former East Germany but

this same situation of decreasing numbers is highlighted by illustrations in the booklet produced to celebrate the centenary of the Leipzig Mannerchor in 1991. A photograph taken in 1921 shows a choir of almost two hundred singers compared with the centenary picture of just thirty four members. At the time of writing, it is too early to say what effect reunification will have on male voice singing in the old East Germany. If the Leipzig experience has been repeated throughout the state over the past seventy years, then there will be very little alteration to the overall figures when the Deutscher Sangbund publishes its subsequent Yearbooks. One can only speculate as to whether there will be the economic means, the will, or the interest, to revive choirs which faded under the previous regime.

In other parts of Eastern Europe, the situation regarding choirs is often affected by national economics or it is in the hands of politicians. Poland, for example, being by West European standards a poor country, has a Union of Choirs and Orchestras to which only seventy male choirs belong, although there are more outside of the organization. The average age of members is fifty and typical choir membership numbers are between 45 and 50.¹⁴ The Red Army Choir, formed in 1928, is likely to be affected by the dramatic events in the former Soviet Union and similar changes will no doubt be forced on, for example, the Mosa Pijade choir from Belgrade. This group has specialised in the cultivation of Jewish traditional music and its conductor for many years, Emil Cossetto, arranged a great deal of Yugoslav folk music for the choir. In Czechoslovakia, the Slovak Teachers Choir, one of that country's many male choirs, was established in 1921 being supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth

and Physical Training. Apart from travelling within the old Eastern bloc countries, the choir has made several visits to the West, entering the male voice choir classes on several occasions at the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen. Over the years since its inception in 1947, choirs representing a vast majority of European countries have also competed in this tiny Welsh village. Bulgarian, Rumanian, Turkish and Greek male choirs have all demonstrated their distinctive tonal qualities as well as original repertoire at Llangollen, underlining the fact that, across the world and despite many cultural divergencies, male voice choirs remain active. For example, although not having appeared at Llangollen, a forty-strong choir from the Tokyo University of Agriculture, formed in 1967, regularly visits Australia and New Zealand presenting its Bach-to-Beatles repertoire. In Hong Kong, adjudicators at the mammoth Schools Music Festival can be faced with classes of seven or eight competing TTBB choirs from the secondary schools, most of which provide the maximum sixty voices allowed.

Student male choirs like these provide a very strong, direct sound, clean lines and secure chording and tuning. Sadly, there are few such in the United Kingdom, the student choir of the Imperial College of Science and Technology in South Kensington, London, being a rare example. In the USA, however, university male choirs (usually retaining the name "Glee Club") are legion. Since these are, more often than not, made up of students and staff, their presence has not stimulated a tradition of post-student choirs. Nonetheless, unlike in post-war Britain, some elements of the American academic press have taken notice of the existence of male groups. *The Music Journal*, *The American Choral Review* and (in the 1980's) *The Choral Journal* have produced

articles with titles such as "The American Male Chorus", "Businessmen who sing for fun", "The Male Glee Club" and "The male chorus: one view in retrospect." The prospect of *The Musical Times*, *Tempo* or *Music and Letters* publishing an article entitled "The Male Chorus as an instrument of Cultural Initiation and Integration"¹⁵ would seem remote. The fact that all three compendia of male voice repertoire referred to in Chapter 6 come from the USA also reflects American interest in the field.

* * * * *

Turning to any lasting contribution which British male voice choral work has made to Western music, the cynic would possibly point, as the one enduring provision, to the fact that John Stafford Smith's glee *Anacreon in Heaven* was adapted and adopted by Uncle Sam in 1914 to become *The Star-Spangled Banner*.¹⁶ This hopefully does not overshadow the fact that the glee, and before it, the catch, were both peculiarly English inventions. That they remained within these shores, the genre not being taken up by continental cousins, makes them even more precious. After the Elizabethan madrigalists and until the present century, Britain was more often than not a mere spectator as compositional techniques were developed on mainland Europe. The country was willing and eager to provide platforms and audiences, anxious to be part of the Grand Tour, but was not actually producing any composers ready to lead the world. Since, in discussing male choral singing, we are dealing with heritage and tradition, it is only fair to offer, with some pride, these miniatures, the catch and the glee, as being in origin uniquely English as well as uniquely male voice.

Welshmen would suggest, of course, that, even though records are scant, the Bardic

tradition from medieval times probably included male singing although how much was *choral* will remain questionable. Anglo-Welsh rivalry in these matters of origin (and later of quality) certainly has been a byproduct of the male choral movement. Even as far back as 1185, Gerald Barry, later Bishop of St. David's, was comparing Welsh singing with that heard in the north of England -

...when a company of singers meets to sing, as is usual in this country, as many different parts are heard as there are singers, who all finally unite in consonance and organic melody... In the Northern parts of Britain, beyond the Humber, and on the borders of Yorkshire, the inhabitants make use of a similar kind of symphonious harmony in singing, but with only two differences or varieties of tone or voice, the one murmuring the under part, the other singing the upper in a manner equally soft and pleasing. This they do, not so much by art, as by a habit peculiar to themselves, which long practice has rendered almost natural, and this method of singing has taken such deep root among this people, that hardly any melody is accustomed to be uttered simply, or otherwise in many parts by the former, and in two parts by the latter. And what is more astonishing, their children, as soon as they begin to sing, adopt the same manner.¹⁷

So the comparison between group singing in Wales and the North of England, has a very long history which developed, in male voice terms, into the fierce rivalry found on the competition field around the turn of the century and which, to a far less extent (and more likely to be tempered with much good humour), still exists today. One result of this enthusiasm for competition was the quest in the Victorian and Edwardian eras for new music from contemporary composers. It is a tribute to the influence of the Association of Musical Competition Festivals (and the later Federation) that it was only the competition choirs who were making this search. Since the competition scene was dominated by the male choirs, this reflects favourably on the conductors of the time. Although, as with Purcell and the catch, works composed by Elgar for male voices may not be ranked among his masterpieces, their production must be seen as reflecting

the composer's interest in the sound and the importance of the male group at the time of their writing.

THE CHANGING FRAMEWORK

Throughout the history of the male choir as we know it in the final years of the twentieth century, there have been distinctive elements from which a firm structure evolved and on which the strength of the movement was mounted. With the early catches for clubs being composed and encouraged by ordained members of the Anglican church, through the influence of the cathedral vocal tradition on the glee (with its alto lead), to the nonconformist chapel and Welsh *gŷmanfu ganŷ* (hymn-singing festival), organized religion can be seen as a strong thread holding the story together. Along with the tide of nonconformity came educational developments and it was these and, in particular, the tonic-sol-fah movement which gave an enormous thrust to male choir growth. All these elements were nurtured by competition, from the catch (and later glee) competitions through to the highly organized and emotionally charged events such as today's National Male Voice Choir Competition. Nationalism, too, played a vital role in terms of repertoire, from Weber and his anti-Napoleonic broadsides to Walford Davies' *Hymn Before Action*. Grieg and Bartok composed male choir pieces based on folksongs and Verdi used the male chorus in heavily nationalistic *Risorgimento* manner in *Attila* and *Il Lombardi*.

The soil in which all of these features were able to mature, was that of comradeship - something which can be detected whenever people meet together to sing but which has special, undefinable qualities, causes and effects in the male group. Historically, the

non-political and non-religious stance of glee club and male choir membership rules contrasts starkly with the attitude of mixed choirs such as the Huddersfield Choral Society which, in the late nineteenth century, refused membership to any singer who frequented the Owenite Halls of Learning, for fear of the Society being tainted with socialism.¹⁸ Whether this camaraderie will effect the survival of the genre is bound to be questioned when circumstances regarding recruitment and repertoire seem to be against it. While class-room singing remains such a low priority in our educational system, private or state, and the habit of church attendance and consequent hymn-singing forced on previous generations continues to dwindle, the situation is made very difficult for the evangelical conductor or committee member. He is perforce trying to interest teenagers and twenty-year-olds in something they may never have experienced before - the physical and emotional pleasure of corporate vocal music-making. With the mixed choir able to offer any aspiring young male singers the company of the opposite sex, male choirs may well have to accept (and learn to survive with) recruitment beginning in the mid-thirties. This is a time when the average male has "settled down" after training, partnership and family. Even this picture is not as promising as it may appear since, given the presence of continued economic depression in the Western world, fewer and fewer of the C1s and C2s from which the male voice choir draws over half of its membership, will actually have employment on which to base a "settled" life-style, still less the financial stability to encompass subscriptions to choral groups. Whilst there has always been, throughout this century, a certain amount of movement of labour, especially in the Depression of

the Thirties, communities in earlier decades generally had more stability than is apparent today. Young men were unlikely to search for work outside their home town or city. Even those who moved away for professional training tended to drift back to their roots to establish themselves as teacher or lawyer. Male voice choir recruitment has undoubtedly been affected by the post-war upsurge in Higher Education, the weakening of family ties through a changing society and the general mobility amongst the young. Traditional choirs would also have felt the presence of so many barbershop choruses whose numbers have grown slowly but surely since the first choruses were formed in the late 1960s. From the time records began in 1974, there has been an average annual increase in individual membership of two hundred and twenty, to the point at which, in 1992, there were fifty-five active clubs throughout Britain with a total membership of over two thousand.¹⁹

If this general scenario is accurate, the lack of new repertoire will be seen as less important, for conservatism in all things, including "taste", has a rich soil in the lives of those past the age of thirty-five just as nostalgia is the weakness of the over-fifties. In 1859, in an article on choral songs for male voices, it was suggested that "compositions ... should not be florid and should contain but few rapid progressions or should... be facilitated by the use of simple progressions. All difficult and troublesome harmonies should be avoided."²⁰ It is not an exaggeration to say that most contemporary composers, on the rare occasion when a male choir piece is commissioned, would probably be forced to adopt these basic compositional procedures, either taking a very light-hearted approach in terms of text or going down

the traditional path of praising and glorifying, (redolent of hymnody), or the well-worn trail of warfaring and bibulation, all of which call for straightforward expression and an avoidance of "troublesome harmonies." Compared with the choirs of Elgar's or Bantock's day, contemporary male choirs have very little knowledge of staff notation let alone expertise in sight-singing - the tonic-sol-fah days when choirs could consider entering sight-singing classes at local competitive festivals have long-since disappeared as have the exponents of the method. Only a very small proportion of individual members have any private tuition in singing and it is doubtful if more than a minimal amount of time at these lessons is taken up with sight-reading or other "academic" matters.²¹ The range of new music being produced is very limited and probably, in the minds of many conductors and choristers, next to non-existent. The average-sized publishing house can be of little assistance as the total market for male voice music is small and with only a few choirs looking for new music of substance, economics dictate an abandonment of anything other than a minimal library of male voice songs. The major publishers have similarly long-since discontinued any substantial involvement although, through their archive photocopying service, many more partsongs are available from the first half of the century than conductors realise. British firms, too, are often willing to provide photocopied sets of male voice extracts from larger works. Anthony Hewitt-Jones's excellent setting for male voices of Charles Dibdin's *The Sailor's Consolation*, taken from a longer cantata for SATB chorus, is a case in point; Vaughan Williams' *John Jayberd* is another. It is more difficult to persuade continental publishers to provide this service. Choirs wishing,

therefore, to sing the male choruses from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, have either to hire or resort to the illegal means of photo-copying. Even if a smaller publisher decided to produce, for example, a (long overdue) edition of Debussy's youthful gem *Invocation*, it is doubtful whether there would be many customers despite the untroublesome harmonies - most choirs have one tenor who could cope with the solo forming the central section of this setting of Lammartine. Conservatism rules the hearts and minds of the male choirs and thus even the smaller companies are cautious choosing to produce unexciting, harmonically conventional compositions (and more often arrangements) in their attempt to keep the market, and the choirs, alive.

Statistics, as Andrew Lang remarked,²² can be used as a drunken man uses a lamppost - for support rather than illumination. In the case of the declining number of male voice choirs, statistics which can be used for either reason are extremely hard to find. The 1988 Survey asked questions of the choirs which exist. The impossible task of tracing the whereabouts of those choirs that have ceased their activities was not attempted. Comparing the membership of various federations of choirs cannot provide an accurate picture because many of these organizations seem to have come into existence over the past twenty years in part to protect the survival of the species - the strength-through-unity syndrome. The male voice choir membership of the National Association of Choirs, for example, is actually showing an increase in the early 1990s but this is more through enthusiastic marketing of the advantages of membership rather than through the existence of new choirs. Perusing the competitive festival programmes from earlier parts of the century gives an indication of just how many

choirs have ceased to exist. The Lytham St. Annes male voice choir classes between 1901 and 1914 contain the names of sixty-five different male choirs now defunct. Doubtless some re-appeared in new guises or formations after the Great War but it is a fair assumption that many/most simply ceased. The same picture appears across the country: the programmes of Buxton and North Derbyshire Festival (a smaller event than Lytham) from 1909 to 1938 contain eighteen choirs which no longer operate; Cornwall 1928-1937, a total of eleven choirs. Assuming that this pattern is repeated at all festivals and considering there have been over two hundred such annual events since the British Federation of Festivals came into being in 1921, the scale of the demise begins to be appreciated. Quite what happened to Mr. Thornburgh's Male Voice Choir (Blackburn), The Linnets (St. Helens), Delabole Cooperative (Cornwall), West Melton Victoria (Huddersfield), Thornton and Wooton (Lincolnshire) or the Michell Bearings Gleemen and Synthonia Recreation Club (Newcastle) is not known but the likelihood is that they were all victims of ageing and the general decline in interest.²³ In listing these now defunct choirs, it is very easy to lapse into the kind of heritage-nostalgia which Michael Flanders conjured in his song *The Slow Train* - a requiem for all the small stations which disappeared under the axe of Dr. Beeching²⁴ in the 1960s. Here, station names like Morteohoe, Kirby Muxloc and Windmill End could be replaced by choir appellatives such as Grimsby Garibaldi, Whitby Bohemians and Boots Choral Union - less beautiful but nonetheless evocative to male choir devotees.

Intimations of the gradual disappearance of male voice choral singing in Britain is neither proved nor disproved by the Survey detailed in Chapter Five. Certainly the

enthusiasm which manifested itself in the response from individuals and choir committees would be a source of encouragement to aficionados and it would be difficult for those involved in large and/or successful choirs to contemplate that there is any threat to the continued existence of their particular musical hobby. Even in Wales, however, the movement is seen by Welsh Federation officers as threatened by falling numbers. Despite traditional claims as to the importance of the cor meibion to the cultural life of the Principality, the gentlemen have never had a great deal of support from the Welsh academic musical establishment, male choirs rarely featuring in books or articles on Welsh musical history, background or attainments.²⁵

The railway analogy suggested above can be extended. Both the male choir as it is known today and the railway industry were sired by the Industrial Revolution although wombs were different. In the case of the choirs it was the glee club whereas the embryonic railways developed because of industrial and market expansion; both depended on a national network, of competitions and stations for servicing and growth; both developed nationally famous elements - the crack, high-powered northern choirs like Nelson Arion and Colne Orpheus and locomotives such as Iron Duke and Lord of the Isles; both had their small, country connections, the village choirs and the branch lines; both survived two World Wars, playing their part as best they could - choirs serving charities and keeping the choral flame of the home fire burning, the trains moving civilians, goods and the machines of war around the country. After the second conflict, both moved into a period of reappraisal and rationalization (Nationalization in the case of the railways). However, when, in the 1960s, Dr. Beeching operated

surgically on the branch lines, there were, by then, very few choral equivalents as the village choirs had faded before and during the war through falling rolls. The strong super-choirs survived as did the main routes between cities. Finally, when technology advanced the railways from their dependence on the questionably efficient steam engine and the way was clear for diesel and electric traction, there was a noticeable absence of musical "technology" to enable male choirs similarly to move forward and develop. There was nothing, for example, to replace the tonic-sol-fah reading which would have enabled the gentlemen to appreciate new styles and idioms, to broaden their horizons and expand their vocal techniques and accomplishments. This enforced rationalization left the British male choir movement leaner by the 1980s but not, as in the case of many commercial organizations, stronger and more competitive. The movement became, in fact, the equivalent of the preserved steam railways which are scattered across the land - historically significant, largely kept alive by devoted amateur volunteers and only in a few cases providing a service since the trains mostly move up and back along the same few miles of track.

Because of their moribundity, the choirs have found it difficult to compete with the multiplicity of attractions now offered to most communities. Vast sports centres, more extensive travel (which widens interests), four television channels and a myriad of radio stations have combined to provide many more alternatives for the use of leisure time than would have been the case only thirty years ago. The choirs' position has been made more difficult with the wider developments in musical education since the 1950s. Many of the confident young instrumentalists who make up the plethora of

excellent youth orchestras throughout Britain would, fifty years ago, have turned to singing as the natural outlet for their musical talent. The peripatetic instrumental service which was developed post-war and which burgeoned in the 1960s can be seen as regrettably and unintentionally responsible for directing young people away from the vocal arts. Similarly, the later incursion of electronic keyboard studios into the state classroom more or less disposed of the already weakened class singing. Today, most of the young men who wish to sing, gravitate towards mixed youth choirs, choral societies, barbershop choruses, musical comedy societies or pop bands. Considering membership of a male voice choir whose members are of their father's or grandfather's generation does not appear to be the most attractive option.

The only hope for male voice choir continuance in any numbers for more than a decade or two of the next century would appear to rest with choir committees. They will have to be prepared to appoint trained conductors in their twenties or thirties who will have catholic tastes so that a balanced repertoire can be maintained. These musical directors will need to attract a new generation of young male singers and the hope is that they will be neither *Beleaguered*⁶⁶ by the forces of reaction, become Martyrs in the Arena of conservatism nor will ever have to face *The Old Soldier* or meet his *Comrades in Arms*. They will explore the riches of the repertoire and not cling solely to the remains of Edwardian jingoism and sobriety and will have the knowledge, interest and communication skills to enthuse about new sounds and textures, at the same time finding the best in contemporary popular culture. Above all, they will need the charisma and personality to build a new audience for the

rejuvenated sound of the twenty first century male choir. Many more choirs than are at present doing so need to accept the challenge of finding such musicians. Some may disappear in the attempt but the most certain fact is that, once the whole movement disappears, the probability of any Phoenix-like rise must be remote. The task is made harder for choirs through present educational philosophy which identifies cultural development as a commodity which, if profitable, is to be encouraged, if not, is allowed to go the way of all commercially weak concepts - the two issues are inter-linked, as a glance at the proportion of Arts Council funding used to encourage amateur music making in the early 1990s will indicate. The disappearance of the male voice choirs would hardly render the musical life of the nation bankrupt. Nonetheless, apart from the guardians of our musical heritage who would mourn the loss of that particular element in the British choral movement, many a musician would be saddened by the denial of opportunity to hear the fine music which forms the best of the male voice choir repertoire.

NOTES ON CHAPTER SEVEN - A FUTURE PERHAPS

- 1 World Choir Event Programme 23 May 1992 - Wynne Lloyd (no pagination)
- 2 ibid. David Wyndham Lewis
- 3 ibid. Cliff Morgan
- 4 Letter to *The Musical Times (MT)* May 1882 p.283 from the Secretary
- 5 "Historical Record", Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society, Vol.7 No.2 November 1976 (National Library of New Zealand)
- 6 *The Triad* December 10 1910 p.17
- 7 Thompson J.M. The Oxford History of New Zealand Music (1991) p.107
- 8 Source: Correspondence with Koninklijk Nederlands Zangersverbond
- 9 Markku K. (trans. Sinisalo S.) "The Story of the Finnish Choir", Finnish Musical Quarterly Vol.2 (1987) p.5
- 10 Source: Correspondence with Finnish Performing Music Promotion Centre
- 11 In addition, their programme at St. John's Smith Square contained all twelve of Sibelius's part-songs for male voices; the tour also included a London (Barbican) performance of the same composer's *Kullervo Op.7*
- 12 Source: Correspondence with the Norwegian Choir Association
- 13 Source: 1991 Yearbook of the Deutscher Sangerband
- 14 Source: Correspondence with Polish Union of Choirs and Orchestras
- 15 Lawton A. Choral Journal 22: 25-7 No.9 (1982)
- 16 *MT* June Supplement 1917 - see also the Report of the Library of Congress, Jan. 1914
- 17 Chappell W. Popular Music of the Olden Time Vol.1 (1859) p.19
- 18 Mackerness E. Social History of English Music (1964) p.148

- 19 Figures supplied in correspondence with British Association of Barbershop Singers
- 20 *MT* August 1859 p.91
- 21 Twelve teachers of singing, from Edinburgh, London, Bristol, Yorkshire and the North East, were contacted. From a total of 69 adult male pupils, 30 sang in mixed choirs, only 4 in male voice choirs.
- 22 Lang A. Penguin Dictionary of Quotations (1960) p.230
- 23 This decline has to be seen, of course, against the background of a gradual lessening of interest in large-scale choral organizations in Britain throughout the century. In the 1920s and 1930s, the heyday of the male choirs, most small towns and many villages had their own "choral society". Many of these have disappeared since World War II, leaving a smaller number of stronger choirs (both numerically and musically). The male voice decline therefore follows a general pattern. The difference is that whereas the SATB societies have stabilized and are frequently rejuvenated with younger members and conductors, the male choir continues to age and wither.
- 24 Dr. Beeching, businessman and scientist, was appointed chairman of the new British Railways Board in 1961. His 1963 report called for the pruning of uneconomic rail routes in order to make BR more profitable and efficient.
- 25 See, for example, Crossley Holland P.(ed.) Music in Wales (1948), where there are over 40 headings on the Contents page but no mention of male choirs. In the chapter entitled *Choral Tradition*, there is this single reference - "Male Voice Choirs are numerous, for instance like those at Dowlais and Morryston." Composer Daniel Jones, broadcasting on the BBC Welsh Home Service in April 1961 on "Music in Wales", made no mention whatsoever of male singing. (Transcript of broadcast in University of Wales, Aberystwyth).
- 26 *The Beleaguered* was a favourite song of choirs in the 1920s and 1930s - a setting by Arthur Sullivan of a poem by Henry Charles, proving almost as popular as the same composer's *The Long Day Closes*.

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LETTERS TO THE AUTHOR:

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- HOLMIN K. Secretary, Norges Korforbund, Toftesft 69, 0552 Oslo 5 (17-11-92)
- MANK W. Secretary, Koninklijk Nederlands Zangersverbond, Pelleaspad 30 3816 RE Amersfoort (25-10-92)
- ROGERS J. Secretary, Ebbw Vale Male Choir (26-6-88)
- STOBIECKI K. President, Polski Zwiasek Chorow i Orkiester, Newy Swiat 30m. Warsaw, Poland (20-11-92)

ALSO CONSULTED: Minutes of Committee and Annual General Meetings of the following male voice choirs -

Bebside and District
Colne Orpheus

Colne Valley
Cooperative Wholesale Manchester
Felling
Greenbank
Nelson Arion Glee Union

