

Swindon Male Voice Choir

- "Still Standing" after 90 Years

Swindon has long been associated with the railway works, now sadly long since gone, but leaving a fine Steam Museum in the old buildings. In 1919 a group of Welsh workers in the running shed decided to form a male voice choir, calling it the "Great Western Running Shed Male Voice Choir".

Its first reported concert was held in the Maxwell Street Schools on 4th August 1919 – interestingly a Bank Holiday – and conducted by a Mr WJ Evans. Songs such as "Come Merry Comrades", "Soldiers Chorus" and "Swanee River" were performed to an appreciative audience. As a sign of the times, a concert on the 28th December 1919 in the Empire Theatre was reported in the Swindon Advertiser, was held "on behalf of the wives and children of local iron moulders who were suffering in consequence of the unfortunate moulders' strike". Swindon Male Voice Choir's tradition of supporting charities was established early in its existence.

The choir has entered in many competitions over the years, with its first notable success in the National Eisteddfod in Newport, South Wales on the 31st October 1924, where they came first. There are too many events to mention, but it is worth saying that the choir performed in over 50 live broadcasts during the Second World War for the BBC Radio West and the Overseas Service. In addition, at some period during the war years the Swindon mayor was the chairman of the choir.

We are "Still Standing", and thriving, after 90 years. We have 55 members and, although times have changed dramatically, I am sure our aims are still basically the same – to sing for the enjoyment of singing and to perform to the public, raising funds for charity. Although a lot of the members are senior in years (but young in spirit), we do have a few younger chaps, including a music teacher from Bulgaria.

We are proud to have the Mayor of Swindon as the Patron of the choir, and that we are a charity in our own right. We still enter competitions and perform in about 16 concerts annually, and take part in a tour every two years, the last being in 2007 to Canada.

We are very fortunate in having an extremely talented music staff, led by the Director of Music, Max Brockman-More, The Deputy Director of Music and accompanist Kate Lock, and accompanist Frances Couldridge.

To celebrate our anniversary year, in addition to our normal concerts, we will have a Burns Night, a Summer Ball, a Garden Party, a joint concert in Bournemouth with three other choirs, a Festival of Brass and Voices with 1500 others in the Royal Albert Hall, and a tour of Ireland – a busy calendar, I'm sure you will agree.

Finally, if any of you are in the Swindon area on a Monday evening during term time, please come and visit us at a rehearsal – you will be made most welcome. If you are moving to the area and would like to join a friendly choir, please don't hesitate to contact us. Details can be found on www.swindonmalevoicechoir.co.uk.

Extract from the Swindon Advertiser
Friday August 8th 1919, Page 5

G.W.R Running Shed Male Voice Choir

G.W.R RUNNING SHED MALE VOICE CHOIR.- A most successful and highly entertaining social and concert was given by the above on Monday last, August 4th (Bank Holiday) at the Maxwell Street Schools, Swindon, being very ably presided over by the President Mr E. G. Ireland. The Choir was under the conductorship of Mr W. J. Evans. After a few appropriate remarks by the President, the following programme was very efficiently rendered:-

Pianoforte Solo "Oberon" Miss Nora Toop;
Chorus "Come, merry comrades" the Choir;
Duet "Somewhere a voice is calling" Messers Legg and Court;
Song "Anchored" Mr H. Mutters;
Song "City glorious" Mr H Alford;
Quartette Mr Sims and friends;
Song "Thora" Mr Mason;
Duet "Friendship" Messrs Watkins and Mutters;
Song "Nancy Lee" Mr Thompson;
Song "When the great red dawn" Mr Tuskett
Chorus "On the ramparts" and encore "Arabella" the Choir;
Song "Neptune" Mr Wilson;
Chorus "Old folks at home" the Choir;
Chorus "Away to the forest" and encore "Genevieve" Mr Wilson and Choir;
Duet Miss W Sims and Mr Sims;
Song "Mate of mine" Mr Court;
Song Mr Thomas;
Chorus "Soldiers Chorus" the Choir;
Duet "Larboard Watch" Mr Evans and Mr Thomas;
Song Mr Ensby;
Song "Mary of Argyle" Mr Watling;
Quartette "The perfect day" Messers Ensby, Alford, Mutters and Price;
Song "Daddy's blue eyed boy" Mr Billett;
Song "Oh, tomorrow night" Mr Millard;
Song "When the sands of the desert" Mr Tegg;
Chorus "Swanee river" the Choir.

During the interval, refreshments were provided by the Ladies Committee, to which all did justice. The President took the opportunity during the evening to thank all who had made the concert so successful, especially the ladies for the admirable way the refreshments had been arranged, also paying a special tribute to the conductor, Mr Evans, for the efficient manner in which the choral parts were rendered, and spoke very highly as to the general ability of the choir.

Swindon Advertiser, Tuesday, December 30th 1919

(Concert on the 26th December 1919)

GWR Male Voice Choir

The Mayor and Local Talent

Among the public entertainments that will be remembered with pleasure this Christmas time, was a concert given by the GWR Male Voice Choir at the Mechanics Institute on Boxing Day night, when the Mayor of Swindon (Mr S E Walters) presided over a large and appreciative audience, who encored every item of an excellently arranged programme. The Choir was assisted by artistes who greatly pleased the audience by the accomplished rendition they gave to their songs. They were:--Miss Betty Bowen, the well known Rhondda Valley soprano. Miss Louise Llewellyn (Welsh Contralto) Mr Ivor Jenkins (Tenor), and Mr G T Llewellyn (Baritone). A feature of this concert was the musicianry skill shown by Miss Ethel Barnett, who accompanied at the piano, and greatly added to the success of the concert. The Choir, under the conductorship of Mr W J Evans, acquitted themselves very well, though handicapped by the absence of members on holiday. "On the Ramparts" was given as an opening chorus by the Choir, followed by a delightful quartet, "In this hour of softened splendour," given by the artistes. Mr Llewellyn sang "She alone charmeth my sadness" and in response to an encore sang "Blow, Blow, thou winter wind." Miss Bowen greatly pleased the audience with her rendition of a pretty work by Costa, "I will extol thee," and as an encore she sang "On the march." Miss L Llewellyn gave a finished rendering of "Friend of mine," and she was also again heard to advantage in her encore song "An old-fashioned town." A duet "Tell me, gentle stranger" was so well sung by Miss Bowen and Mr Llewellyn that an encore was insisted upon, and they sang "Spring-time." Mr Jenkins gave "Nirvana" and for an encore sang "I remember meeting you." The Choir gave a fine rendition of "The Crusaders" and as an encore sang the "Sailors Chorus."

The Mayor, during an interval, congratulated the Choir and the artistes, and thanked the audience for their support of the Choir. He said that it had occurred to him that local musical talent was not recognised and encouraged by the local authority as it so well deserved. Local artistes gave ungrudgingly of their time and talents for the benefit of local charities, and in this the Swindon Male Voice Choir did their share. He should very much like to hear them give a concert in the Town Gardens (applause).

Mr Maberley, on behalf of the Choir, thanked the Mayor at the close of the concert for the support which he had given them. Mr Walters had sacrificed being away with his family that evening to attend. They all very much appreciated the mayor's presence (applause). A vote of thanks to the Mayor was carried by acclamation.

Features of the second part of the programme were the duet "The Misere Scene" ("Il Trovatore"), sung by Miss Bowen and Miss Ivor Jenkins who were encored and sang with equal success "A night in Venice:" "Crossing the Plains," sung by the Choir: "Alone on the raft," given by Miss Llewellyn: a duet "Perfect day," Miss Llewellyn and Mr G Llewellyn: "I am a Roamer," sung by Mr Llewellyn (encored), "The Walt Song" by Miss Bowen and the concluding quartet by the artistes "Good Evening."