

Dear Friends,

This month sees the start of our 86th season. We are delighted that so many of you have chosen to re-join the Society and hope you found the process for renewing your membership this year easy to navigate – we have certainly tried to keep everyone well-informed and as far as we're aware, any teething problems were swiftly resolved. Many thanks to all involved in setting up this project.

There remains considerable uncertainty surrounding rehearsals and performances for the foreseeable future. Be assured that we are keeping a close watch on Government guidelines as well as on local reports about the behaviour of the virus itself. As I write, we are developing an outline plan with risk assessment for a safe return to live rehearsals in readiness for being given a green light, although the latest pronouncements banning 'mingling' between groups of 6 will make it pretty well impossible to rehearse in any meaningful way for the time being.

This issue is very much about celebrating all those who work really hard to support the Society throughout the year, whether as committee members or as helpers engaged in a particular activity. First up is our Treasurer, **Paul Buckley**, who has been busy with annual membership renewals as well as tying up last season's accounts and preparing a budget for 2020/21. Flautist **Keith Champion** is the orchestra's representative on the committee and writes about his long association with wind instruments and the Society's orchestra as a whole. Keith is married to 1st Alto **Dorothy**, which gave me the idea of featuring some of the other husband and wife duos in our midst. This month, we have contributions from our Choir Music Librarians **Sheila & John Malin** and from **Peter & Ann Davis**. Peter is a member of the Concert Management team, with particular expertise in the technical aspects of staging, lighting etc. Look out for more musical pairings in the next issue.

Being a committee member is a great way of getting involved in the many aspects of keeping the Society functioning for the benefit of all members. In a normal year, we would be planning to run an AGM next month, giving everyone a chance to put themselves forward for election as well as voting for others who do. For practical reasons, we have decided to postpone the AGM for the time being and I'm pleased to report that all current committee members have agreed to remain in office until such time as it can be re-scheduled. The photograph below might serve to remind you who we are!

Finally, we are indeed fortunate to have such a large number of loyal members whose support for one another has been very evident over the last few difficult months. In this issue, soprano **Sylvia Bodle** writes of the importance of music in her life and the friendships formed in its pursuit. And isn't that what it's all about?

An die Musik and stay well!

Judy



WPS Committee 2019/2020

Back row, L to R: Paul Buckley, Judy Newton-Davies, Keith Champion, Margaret Burke, Graham Wheeler
Front row, L to R: Nikki Hind, David Pollak, Frances Pyatt, Tim Pettigrew, Pam Allanson, Audrey Adams

Peter Davis, concert staging manager, tells it like it is!

I joined the choir in September 1988, having been talent-spotted at the 1987 Christmas concert! Ann, my wife, had joined in 1984.

First, may I mention that running concerts at a big public venue is complicated. Roughly 40 team members work hard to 'make it happen on the day.' Some are committee members and associates but most are from outside the Society.

I inherited the role of staging manager in September 2007, when Alan Englert retired. We work as a team of 4, led by **Frances Pyatt** [Concert Manager] with **Nikki Hind, John Galloway** and myself splitting the jobs. In my time we've performed at seven venues and also prospected for others, which in the end were not used.

I use Nikki's weekly attendance records and Michael's requirements for voice layout to complete the design. But how many will actually sing on the day? Sometimes this matters a lot, as we may be just on the point of needing another layer of rake, at roughly £200. But having too few seats is very embarrassing! John or I also draw the layout for the orchestra and soloists, with Michael's input, so we know what they require and how they are laid out. The layouts determine what staging the Colosseum can provide and what must be ordered from Impact, our staging contractors. Impact usually appear at 9am on concert day with three staff in a 7.5 ton truck full of bits to build the staging! By about 11am they have built it and, very noisily, tightened all the nuts and bolts so the Colosseum crew can set out the choir chairs on the rake. Nikki labels the chairs and sets out the choir instructions. We check that everything is out of the crypt below the stage before the orchestra and soloist areas are fitted together.

As you'd expect, things don't always go according to plan! For example, missing bolts or legs; no cable for organ; deep snow on the day of the concert etc! We've also had to work round a falling ceiling and the Colosseum refurbishment – sometimes the job is even more complicated!

Occasional low points include tensions arising when singers are asked to fill a space on the stage and respond with 'but I have sat next to 'Flossie' for every concert since the year dot!'



A few of many highlights include our Christmas Concert in 2009 when we performed with **Gareth Malone's** newly-formed **South Oxhey Community Choir** – and with rather vague numbers! The concert was broadcast by the BBC and afterwards I was offered a job as staging manager for upcoming concerts with the BBC!

As singers, Ann and I have participated in many memorable concerts including **Jane Glover** conducting *Messiah* in 1988 at the newly reopened West Hall, Alexandra Palace; several at Symphony Hall Birmingham with the CBSO and one in St Albans Abbey, where we sang Elgar's *The Apostles* and many of us couldn't see the conductor at all, due to the pillars. And of course, many with our own conductors.

The recent Zoom performance of *Messiah* made a lovely evening this summer but we look forward to resuming near-

normal operations and adding to our list of highs and lows – mostly highs! We hope you like our version of Concert Dress!!

Very fetching indeed – just don't tell our Concert Manager! (Ed).



Long serving member, Sylvia Bodle (Soprano)

I was born in East Sussex and raised in the small market town of East Hailsham where I also attended my first school. Aged 10, I moved to the Midlands and progressed to secondary school in Market Bosworth. Always a lover of animals, I began my working life in breeding and boarding kennels, before eventually training and working for many years as a veterinary nurse.

My love of music grew from becoming a parish visitor for the Emmanuel Church which also offered an opportunity to join the choir. I especially enjoyed spiritual music and the big choral works, first experiencing singing *Messiah* in 1981. Although I enjoy most music, choral works remain my first love. Karl Jenkins has become a favourite composer – but the Verdi *Requiem* still tops my list!

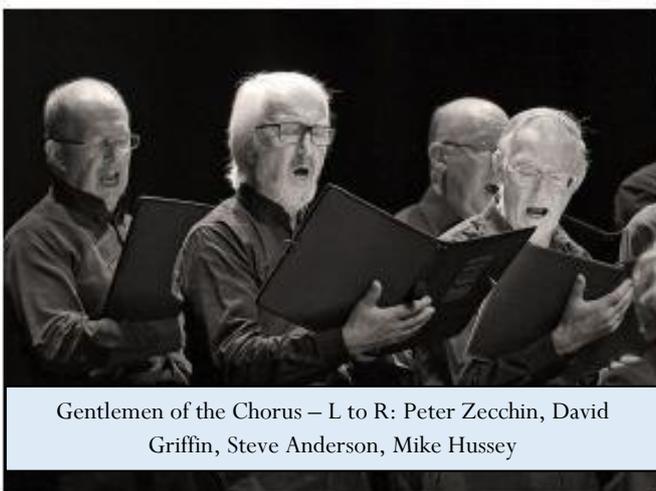
I joined the Watford Philharmonic Society in 1984 and sang Haydn's *Creation* in my first concert. Since then, I have considerably extended my repertoire as well as making many friends. I so much hope that we will be able to sing together again quite soon – Monday evenings would not be the same without our choir! I did take up the piano later in life, achieving Grade 4, but eventually gave it up in favour of singing, which I prefer.

When I first joined the Society, our concert dress was white tops and black skirts or trousers. There have been a few changes since then but I really do like our present uniform, especially with the addition of the blue corsage which I think makes us look very smart!



Sylvia is pictured here with some of her soprano friends, looking smart in a performance of *The Creation* in April last year. When she sang it for the first time with WPS, in November 1984, the conductor was **Graham Garton** and soloists were Ann Mackay (soprano), Alistair Thompson (tenor) and Glyn Davenport (bass). In total, since its inception in 1935, the Society has performed *The Creation* nine times – under **James Kelleher** in 1995; **Graham Garton** in 1984, 1980 and 1971 and under **Leslie Regan** in 1961, 1960, 1955 and 1954. Soloists have included the immensely popular baritone **Owen Brannigan** and the celebrated soprano **Isobel Baillie**, who our Concert Programme manager Graham Wheeler will recall in our next issue.

Programme details extracted from the database on our website.



Gentlemen of the Chorus – L to R: Peter Zecchin, David Griffin, Steve Anderson, Mike Hussey



Our Music Librarians (Choir), John & Sheila Malin

John

Born in 1946, I lived at the family home, a small cottage at the far end of Bushey Heath, for the first 29 years.

My interest in classical music began at about the age of 14 when watching the “Sky at Night” TV programme and being curious about the introductory music- I can therefore thank Sibelius for this initial spark; a little later a superb music master at Harrow High School continued the good work.

My working life has been with Local Government and early on I was very fortunate to meet David Berry – Dave proved to be a lifetime friend and we shared the twin passions of music and Watford Football Club. Music included many visits to the Proms every summer and at other times to the Festival Hall and Covent Garden Opera (prices were reasonable in those days and we could park in any street nearby). Whilst with the Football Club we built up a great knowledge of the geography of England via numerous away games – few motorways in those days!

Dave was a member of the Watford Phil and persuaded me to join, which I did in 1964 and have been a member ever since. I was therefore lucky to have been there at the start of the **Graham Garton** era when he introduced many amazingly adventurous programmes. My favourites include *The Dream of Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, *The Hymn of Jesus*, *Symphony of Psalms* and Dvorak’s *Stabat Mater*.

Over the last ten years or so there has been so much to enjoy, first from Terry and then Michael, but two works are particularly special, *Sea Drift* back in November 2009 and *The Sea Symphony* in 2015.

The Phil is also responsible for me meeting Sheila, my wife..... *How nice! (Ed.)*



Sheila



I grew up in Croxley Green in close proximity to Croxley Woods and the Grand Union canal where with friends most of my school holidays were spent.

I attended Rickmansworth Grammar School in the 1960’s meeting interesting people including a lifelong friend with whom I shared an interest in the ballet and hence ballet music. A particular favourite was Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* (partly because we both adored Nureyev of course!). Being desperate to see Fonteyn and Nureyev dance we joined Student Friends of Covent Garden which was amazing. Not only was it incredibly cheap but it also introduced us to opera.

After 3 years at Weymouth College of Education I returned to Hertfordshire to take up my first teaching post at Woodhall J.M.I. in South Oxhey. It was here that I had a student who was a member of Watford Phil (Morag Christie) who encouraged me to join the choir. This was in 1973 and the first work I participated in was *Carmina Burana*. Several years later I was fortunate when a new member arrived and sat next to me. I learnt so much from her and we sat together for many years until we were separated – Rosemary to sit at the piano and me to cross the floor and join the Sopranos.

Highlights of these years include several performances at the RAH, two trips to Bermuda and works such as *Morning Heroes*, Britten’s *War Requiem* and *The Kingdom* and of course meeting my husband!

More recent highlights still include *Morning Heroes* and *The War Requiem* but this time singing the soprano part instead of alto. Also, controversially, I enjoyed the Jonathan Dove *There was a Child* and sadly one of the casualties of lockdown is that we missed a trip to Macclesfield to hear the whole work performed there.

Last year’s trip to Bratislava was also memorable including the encouragement of certain members of the alto section to jump on the tram without any ticket! *Goodness me – sounds just like a school trip! (Ed.)*

Having retired from Sarratt School in July in 2009, people thought I needed to be kept busy and hence I ended up as your choir librarian!

So what does the job involve?

The first priority is to establish a good working relationship with the **Central Resources Library** currently based in Welwyn, together with the local neighbourhood library, in our case Kings Langley, for collection of the music. Fortunately, I already had a connection with them through doing a similar job for another choir. When the programme has been decided, the first port of call is to Central Resources as they, apart from being very helpful, are by far the most economic option. If they have insufficient copies, they can make up numbers via other county libraries throughout England.

When this course is unable to provide scores we then have to approach other outlets such as **Gerontius** – an online website which can put you in touch with other choirs that hold copies; **Making Music** offer a similar service. Failing that (and if you can't get the copies free on Choralwiki, CPDL or from our own stock) you have to hire from the publishers who again are very helpful but rather expensive!! In this last case, it can also be a shock when you come to return 3 large boxes of music and realise they have to go to Germany!

Moving on to the practicalities, once music is received you're all familiar with the way we issue it. We then come to the question of marking the copies.

DO always **use a soft pencil**, mark lightly and only that which is necessary e.g. breath marks, dynamics and counting. Writing anything in **ink is a disaster!**

DON'T add comments. They may be amusing but are not highly regarded by the county librarians. **Crossing out** whole sections isn't appreciated either!

DON'T leave post-it notes in the returned music. **Sticky labels** are a no-no and **paper clips** can tear the paper.

If we sometimes appear to be inconsistent in respect of rubbing out, that's largely due either to regulations which vary from different libraries and/or the state of the scores issued to us.

Having said all that, most of you are well behaved – PARTICULARLY when you return your music on time!

Some of the best things about being your librarians are having the opportunity to get to know more members of the choir; receiving interesting emails from other choirs when hiring or lending music; giving something back to the choir for the many years of pleasure that it has given us.

Our music library and some local military history

Sheila and John are also custodians of the **Society's music library**, consisting of a collection of scores and sheet music featuring many staple works in the choral repertoire. The collection is housed in a mysterious underground location known affectionately as **The Bunker** at the rear of The Park veterinary practice in Cassiobury Drive. Formerly a Royal Observer Corps observation post, it was set up in 1943 to accommodate ROC Group 17 (Watford) formerly housed in the GPO buildings in Market Street. These Royal Observer Corps groups started in the south of England in 1925, gradually spreading throughout mainland Britain. There was an Observation Post every 5 miles, manned by volunteers from the immediate neighbourhood, recruited by the Police as Special Constables prior to WW2 and by the Air Ministry thereafter. Their task was to track and report all aircraft flying over the UK as well as coastal shipping movements so that the Home Defences could be warned of any threat of attack. From the late 1950's the ROC changed its aircraft observation role for one of reporting any nuclear attack and any subsequent radioactive fallout. The Watford Group was disbanded in 1968, though the building was retained as a training centre prior to being sold to its present owners in 1974.

Currently, various groups such as the local scouts use parts of the building for storage and the vets themselves house a variety of alarming looking chemicals and surgical equipment there too. Together with peeling plaster work, dark staircases and corridors, it's certainly not a great place for anyone suffering from claustrophobia but it's a very convenient – and free – space in which to store our archives and music collection and we've become quite fond of it in the last few years!

Until fairly recently, the collection was a complete jumble and quite difficult for John & Sheila to access. So a few of us decided to do a major sort out, clearing out a load of junk, installing new shelving, boxing up the scores and filing past programmes which could then be catalogued for easy retrieval. Here are a few 'before and after' images.



The Bunker working party consists of John & Sheila Malin; Gill & Geoff Williams; Kate Wilkins; Tim Pettigrew; Margaret Burke and Judy & John Newton-Davies. Heroes, all!!

For local historians – or just out of curiosity – you might like to check out these 3 websites for more information about the ROC Observation Point, Group 17 (Watford). Some of the pictures are a tad scary! Here's a couple of the Bunker, from the outside.

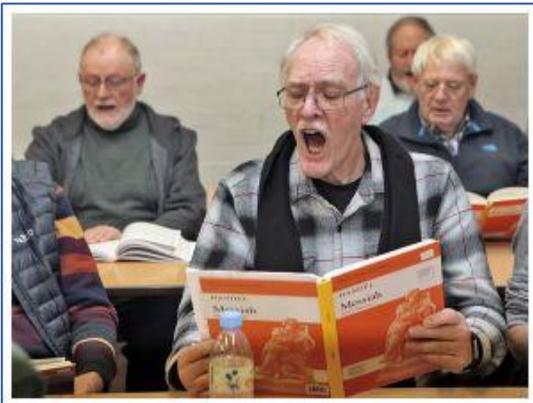


<https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/watford-roc-group-hq/>

<https://www.derelictplaces.co.uk/main/roc-posts/19252-watford-roc-hq-5-june-2011-a.html>

<http://www.forever-changes.com/watford%20roc%20hq/watford%20roc%20hq.htm>

Keeping us all in check is our Treasurer, Paul Buckley



I was spotted at the age of seven by a teacher at my junior school in a mining village in South Yorkshire. He recommended me to the church choir master who persuaded my parents and me that I should join the choir. I stayed there boy and man until I left for college in London at the age of eighteen. I went on a few RSCM (Royal College of Church Music) choral courses at Darley Dale, Rossall near Blackpool, and Taunton. They were great weeks of adventures for a ten, eleven, and twelve year old, and after my voice broke and settled, as a sixteen and seventeen year old. Lots of singing was mixed with social get-togethers and adventures in the local town. These occasions led to two week RSCM Cathedral Courses in Chelmsford, Westminster Abbey, and York Minster where we replaced the Cathedral choir, singing all the services while the real choir took a two week break, with an evensong broadcast on BBC radio each time. I still have the recordings in the loft!!

I went to The King's School Pontefract and there I joined the choir and performed in the annual school concerts. As a baritone/bass soloist, I sang two *Messiah* Recitative/Arias in one and Vaughan Williams' *Vagabond* and Schubert's *The Trout* in the other.

Like so many young people at the time, I was also listening to Radio Luxembourg, folk music and to rock and roll and enjoyed going to the Folk Club in Pontefract as well as in Scarborough when I did summer holiday work in café's and bars there. Of course, I often managed to elbow my way onto the stage to do a couple of unaccompanied "finger in ear" numbers!

At college I teamed up with another Yorkshireman and we formed a duo called "*Yorkshire Relish*". We toured the London Folk scene from 1973/74 to about 1982 with a residency of about nine months at Bounds Green Folk Club. When we decided to call time on that, I simply annoyed my family and friends for the next 30 or so years by bursting into song at every opportunity. *Anyone else thinking that it might be time for 'Yorkshire Relish' to make a comeback appearance? (Ed.)*

I was playing squash on Mondays at West Herts and a member of Watford Phil told me about the choir and enthused about it. Encouraged by family and friends who thought that if I joined I'd stop annoying them with my impromptu outbursts, I joined five years ago. I have thoroughly enjoyed being a member and have met some lovely people and had fun performing at concerts. I am slowly reviving lost skills but still fall prey to the occasional mispitching and mistiming.

Here's to the next Zoom rehearsal and looking forward to the time we can sing together again! *Amen to that! (Ed.)*

Keith Champion finally gets to play the flute (and sometimes, the piccolo!)

My first encounter with music started with piano lessons when aged about eight. I enjoyed learning some of the livelier pieces but they were just ticked off and I had to continue with others which gave no thrill and arduous supervised practise. After nearly two years that was given up as a bad job.

The good thing my piano teacher did was to mention the recorder. I had seen another pupil who played the flute and I was fascinated with the row of buttons on his instrument – probably something which arose from an interest in anything mechanical and which led to my future career as a mechanical engineer. However having heard about recorders, which were not too expensive, I was able to get one and, having forgiven its lack of buttons, was happy to learn to play it and practise on my own whenever there was a chance.

Then came secondary education and progress to a grammar school. I was pleased to find that they had just initiated a recorder class for any interested first year pupils. About ten of us learned simple tunes and the rudiments of music notation. I think we performed in a school concert – desperately out of tune, but good experience. Throughout this time I knew I still wanted to play the flute, so eventually after a term trying on a hired instrument from the teacher, my parents agreed to purchase my first flute although it seemed quite expensive, (£40 pounds was a lot of money in those days!).

So flute lessons started at school with the visiting bandmaster from Clifton College. I pressed on with practise whenever time permitted and soon graduated to the school orchestra. Unfortunately, I didn't know that my teacher, being essentially a brass instrument player, taught me the embouchure (lip position) used by a brass player – totally different from that for a flautist. I only realised that years later and it took many years to overcome it.

Ever since schooldays I have enjoyed playing in amateur orchestras including Glasgow Orchestral Society, Hendon Symphony Orchestra, Dacorum Philharmonic and Dacorum Symphony Orchestras. I have also taken part in music courses playing with other wind players in quintets (the standard wind group, comparable with the quartet for string players) and with bigger wind groups up to thirteen – e.g. the Strauss *Serenade for Wind*. **Benslow Music Trust** (*see link below*) at Hitchin is a brilliant organisation running a huge variety of courses throughout the year. I have enjoyed going there many times and gained from excellent tuition.

Soon after moving to Rickmansworth I heard about the Watford Philharmonic Society and was able to join as second flute in the orchestra. **Graham Garton** was conductor at that time and I enjoyed regular concerts, especially in works with choir. When my colleague flautist left the orchestra, I became first player and have been a member of the Society ever since. I have served on the committee several times and was chairman for a period in the 1980's until my Company assigned me to work in Norway for about 18 months. During that time I played with a local amateur group in Stavanger; but the major experience was to sing with a choir of similar size to Watford Phil, consisting of about 50% local people and 50% mainly British expats. We performed the Verdi *Requiem* with a visiting British conductor and the professional Stavanger Symphony Orchestra.

The flute player is generally expected to double on Piccolo when required. This has been the case for me with various orchestras and I find it very thrilling. Despite being the smallest instrument in the orchestra, when everyone is playing like mad and producing a huge sound the little piccolo can be heard above everything – very exciting (but don't play a wrong note !!). A few composers realise that the piccolo makes a different sound from the flute when in the same register, so occasionally it has a quiet solo for a few bars – also very enjoyable.

Another of my hobbies, apart from singing in the local Church choir, has been a passing interest in vintage cars. This led to taking on a retirement project in the form of the rebuilding of a rare 1924 car (make – Cluley) which had been discarded in a ditch in deepest Wales for many years, but had enough remaining, including all the mechanical items, to justify a complete rebuild. The car is now complete and roadworthy, but only ventures out occasionally into the furious modern traffic.

So here we are, with a situation preventing music-making for the time being, I'm sure every member is frustrated, as I am, in being unable to join in with others to play or sing. Zoom can help a bit for the choir, but is very difficult to arrange for the orchestra. Let's hope that a solution will come before much longer so that we can get together again at least to rehearse, even if concerts are not possible. If anyone is interested in getting together with six or less for ad hoc playing, even possibly in the garden, do let me know! *Sounds like a good offer, Keith! (Ed)*

Benslow Music inspires lifelong learning for all ages through residential, day and online music courses and a series of chamber concerts at its beautiful purpose-built campus in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Activities continue in a Covid19 safe environment. Take a look at their website.

<https://benslowmusic.org/>