

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

January 2022 Newsletter No 52

Happy New Year or *Blwyddyn Newydd Dda* to all.

We hope that most of 2022 will be free of any new COVID dramas and that we will all be able to enjoy a year's uninterrupted concert program of music and song together.

With COVID Omicron now the major pandemic threat, the choir has elected to delay the concert in celebration of St David's Day until late March, hopefully well after the peak of this current infection wave.

A Celebration of St David's Day with the Melbourne Welsh

Saturday 29th March 2022 at 2:00 p.m.

Be entertained as the choir performs a wide array of songs that it sings best, particularly the Welsh standards, so important on this day in particular. The James Tatoulis Auditorium at MLC's Kew campus will once again resound to the wonderful sounds and harmonies of the famed Melbourne Welsh Male Choir as we pay our tribute in song to the anniversary of the Patron Saint of Wales *Dewi Sant* or Saint David.

Our guest artist, Samantha Hargreaves, is the winner of the Choir's Singer of the Year (SOTY) competition in 2021.

Based on that performance (which can be seen by accessing the Choir's website) and her subsequent success with recent operatic roles, our audience at the St. David's Day concert are in for a treat.



Our MD David Ashton-Smith at an earlier concert at MLC with the choir in their Welsh tartan waistcoats



Samantha Hargreaves

Tickets for the afternoon concert commencing at 2:00 p.m. are available via TryBooking or via the choir's website:

www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets

or from any member of the choir.

The auditorium is quite intimate, with a maximum of 350 seats, so be sure to book early to avoid disappointment.

The choir is in good voice and we look forward to presenting some of the new material we have developed since we last performed at this venue, together with some of our traditional Welsh anthems which with 50+ voices on stage is likely to raise the roof!

More about the Symbols of Wales - dragons, flags, leeks and daffodils

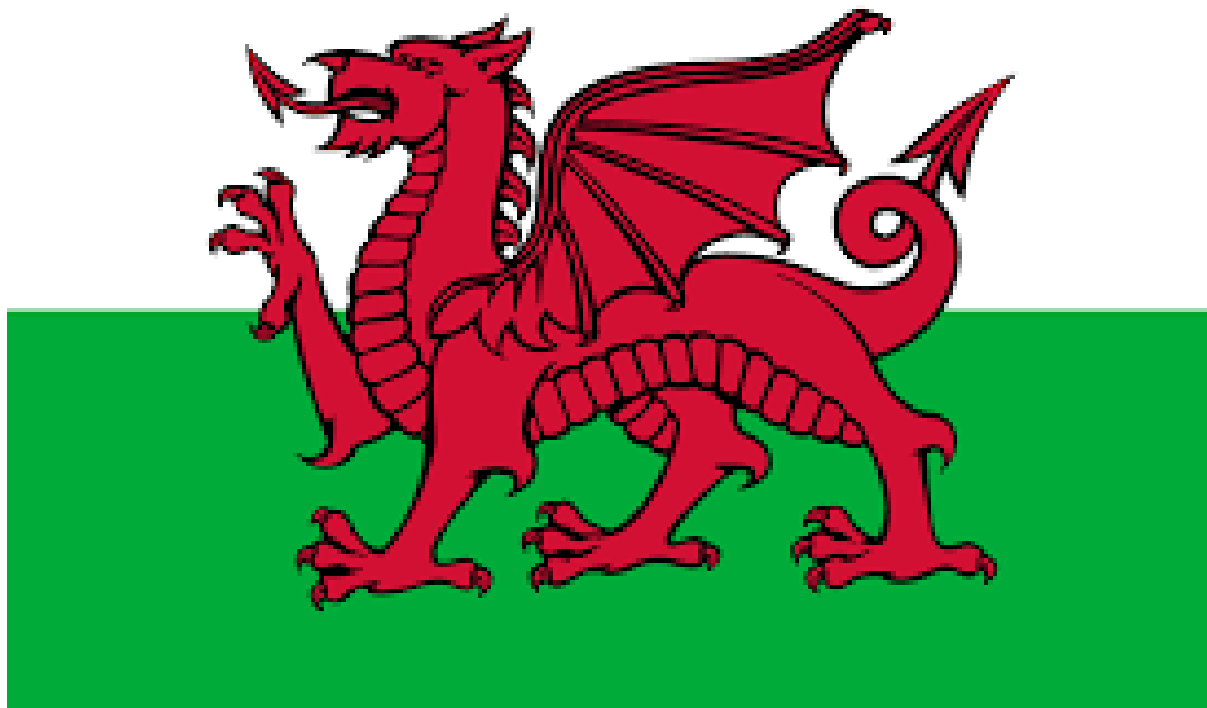
In the lead up to our traditional concert on the Saturday closest to St David's Day (1st March), we would like to give you some background to some of the symbols which are uniquely Welsh and the history and legends that relate to them.

At the end of November 2021, the Choir was happy to help a lady who wanted to fulfil her father's wish to have the Welsh flag draped over the coffin at his funeral service.

Here is some background to that flag and other Welsh symbols.

The Welsh Flag

What is the oldest symbol of Wales? Perhaps the best known as well as the oldest of the Welsh symbols, the red dragon, features on the country's flag which has been around, unofficially, since the 1400s, which, some believe, makes it the oldest national flag in use today. It was a common symbol used in Welsh rebellions against the English.



The proud and ancient battle standard of the Welsh is the Red Dragon (*Y Ddraig Goch*) and consists of a red dragon, passant (i.e., standing with one foot raised), on a green and white background. As with any ancient symbol, the appearance of the dragon has been adapted and changed over the years, and hence several different variations exist.

It wasn't until 1959 that the current Welsh flag became recognised as the country's national flag after Queen Elizabeth declared that '*only the Red Dragon on a green and white flag should be flown on Government buildings in Wales and in London where appropriate*'.

The Welsh Dragon

Why is the Welsh flag a dragon? While the official Welsh flag is actually less than a hundred years old, this doesn't mean the symbol itself doesn't have a long history.

In the 4th century AD, Romano-British soldiers carried a red dragon standard when going to battle.

The oldest record of the red dragon symbolising Wales comes from the *Historia Brittonum* that was written around 820 AD.

In 1129 AD, Geoffrey of Monmouth linked the creature with the legendary King Arthur by naming his father a warrior called Uther Pendragon, the surname translating to “dragon head.”



The Flag flown at the battle of Crecy

There was also the prophecy of Merlin. This told of a battle between two dragons, one a red dragon, representing Wales, and the other a white dragon, representing England. King Vortigern kept trying to build a castle on a hill, but it would always collapse. A young boy, who some believe was Merlin, told the king that this was happening because two dragons were fighting each other under the hill.

The red dragon was even said to have been used as the British standard at the Battle of Crecy in 1346, when the Welsh archers, dressed in their beloved green and white, played such a crucial role in defeating the French.

In 1400 Owain Glyndwr started a rebellion against the English crown’s rule over Wales, using the red dragon standard as a symbol of his revolt.

The first use of a flag that is similar to the Welsh flag we see today was in 1485 when Henry Tudor used it as his standard in the Battle of Bosworth, which he won.

The Welsh symbol of the dragon has officially been the country’s flag since 1959 and is based on an old royal badge that was used by Henry Tudor, a Welsh man who was able to take the English crown after he won a battle with help from Welsh soldiers.

St. David’s Day flag

Another newer Welsh symbol and flag is the St David’s Day flag which features a black background and a golden yellow cross.

The people of Wales use this as their symbol of the patron saint and their national identity, and it is meant to fly alongside the national flag, similar to how the English use the St George’s Cross flag. The flag of Saint David was mostly unknown in Wales until 1994.

There was a large one along the roof in St David’s Cathedral with the cinquefoils (Five flowers) thereon but hardly any others in use.

The Welsh Tartan Company of Cardiff were looking around for a “brand” to complete the *Brithwe Dewi Sant* (St David’s Tartan). One of their staff

- J. Wake set out to see if the flag could be used commercially or indeed patriotically across Wales. The feeling at the time was that the Union flag did not contain any Welshness, with the **St George’s Cross** representing Wales as a principality of **England**.



Coat of Arms of the Diocese of St David’s.



St. David’s flag alongside the Welsh National flag

The Dean of St David’s said that the cinquefoil and the cross were their property and advised Wake to seek help from the official Heraldry office in London. The WTC was then told the Prince of Wales probably owned the rights to the flag and might not give permission. There was neither outright animosity to the flag being produced and used, nor any enthusiasm. It was decided, after a lawyer was consulted, that the flag could be used as long as there were no cinquefoils on it. A thousand flags were produced without the cinquefoils; they were distributed around Wales and a PR campaign took place to increase knowledge of the St David’s flag.

The flags were hung prominently in the Welsh shop in the centre of Cardiff and at other locations. Within 10 years, the St David's Flag was known and flown across Wales in patriotic use. It was never a flag to usurp the Red Dragon but to complement it, and perhaps to get Wales's own Patron Saint's emblem to proudly fly alongside the emblems of the other nations, St George, St Andrew and St Patrick.

Why is Wales not shown on the British flag? This is because when the Union Jack flag for Britain was made in 1606, Wales was seen as belonging to England and not as its own country, as a result there is no Welsh flag representation on the British flag.

The Leek - National Emblem of the Welsh

Proudly sported every St. David's Day on 1st March and at every international rugby match, the leek is now widely recognised as the national symbol of Wales.



But why is it that patriotic Welshmen and women across the world attach this strong-smelling member of the onion family to their clothing?

The true origins are now perhaps lost in myth and legend; however, the history can certainly be traced back at least seven hundred years.

This humble root vegetable is cited as a symbol of Wales in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. During Elizabethan times, Shakespeare refers to the custom of wearing a leek as an "ancient tradition", and his character *Henry V* tells

Fluellen that he is wearing a leek "for I am Welsh, you know, good countryman."

Historical evidence also exists that the Tudor dynasty issued leeks to be worn by their guards on March 1st, known as St David's Day, in honour of the Patron Saint of Wales.

There is also plenty of entertaining folklore and guesswork relating to why the Welsh are inextricably linked with the leek.

According to Dr Juliette Wood, history lecturer at Cardiff University with a special interest in Welsh folklore, there are many legends purporting to explain the origin of the leek's connection with Wales.

According to one, the soldiers of the 7th century king of Gwynedd, Cadwaladr were encouraged to wear leeks in their helmets in order to recognise fellow countrymen during a battle with the Saxons.

This tale has also been attributed to St. David himself. But there are a number of legends about St. David and this particular one doesn't appear until the 17th century. Earlier than this however, myth and legend begin to intertwine. According to one legend recorded by the English poet Michael Drayton in the early 1600's, the leek was associated with St. David the Patron Saint of Wales who died in 589 AD. It is possible that the poet made up the story; however it tells how St. David ordered his soldiers to wear the leek on their helmets in a battle against the hated pagan Saxon invaders of Britain. The battle itself is also said to have taken place in a field full of leeks.

It is indeed likely that the Welsh association with the leek predates St. David by hundreds and possibly thousands of years, to an age when people worshipped trees, plants and other such aspects of Mother Nature. To an age before Christianity, and perhaps to the last stronghold of the Druids on the Island of Anglesey. The Druids were not only the priests, doctors, poets and minstrels of ancient Celtia, they were also the teachers who retained the sacred knowledge of ancient times.

It is in such times that the leek's reputation, as a medicine to cure a variety of illnesses, would have been most appreciated and perhaps even revered. It was highly regarded as a cure for the common cold, alleviating the pains of childbirth and was a tasty, healthy ingredient in *cawl*, the traditional Welsh broth. It could seemingly offer protection against wounds in battle or against being struck by lightning and was also a means of foretelling the future and for keeping away evil spirits.

It is also claimed that by placing a leek under a pillow at night, young maidens could see the features of their future husbands. Another story is set in the year 1346 when the then Prince of Wales, Edward the Black Prince, defeated the French at the Battle of Crécy. Welsh archers are said to have fought bravely in a field of leeks and as a reminder began to wear a leek in their caps every St David's Day.

Leeks were a popular food for many centuries and were used for medicinal purposes, but their association with St David's Day is thought to be linked to the Tudors who had strong Welsh roots.

Tudor royal household accounts list several payments for leeks in connection with St David's Day and Henry VIII is said to have presented his daughter with a leek for the festival.

St. David had been a popular saint in Wales since the 12th century, and his feast day became a national festival during the 18th century.

And so today each year on St. David's Day the leek is worn in the cap badges of every soldier in every Welsh regiment. Outside the army however, many other Welsh folk have substituted the daffodil for the leek, perhaps because it looks more attractive and certainly smells a lot better. Interesting to note however, that one of the many Welsh names for a daffodil is Cenhinen Bedr, or Peter's leek.



As to the relative merits of the leek and the daffodil, it is purely a matter of personal choice as to which to wear on St. David's Day.

However, the authorities decided in 1984 that the British £1 coin representing the Welsh part of the United Kingdom would feature the leek on the reverse.

By that time the leek had become a bit of a caricature and this may explain why daffodils became a popular alternative.

The Daffodil

Daffodils are the national flower of Wales.



They can be identified, most commonly, by their bright yellow trumpets and pale-yellow petals sitting atop a long green stem not too dissimilar from a leek.

The daffodil is also less commonly known as the Lent Lily, the Bell Rose and the 'Daffadowndilly' by some. The flower is native to Western Europe, but it is unclear whether it was introduced to Britain or if it is true to it.

Daffodils that grow wild in South Wales are often referred to as the true St. David's Day daffodil or

the Tenby daffodil. These flowers are slightly different from the common daffodil as they have an all-yellow flower, rather than paler yellow petals.

Why are daffodils the symbol of Wales?

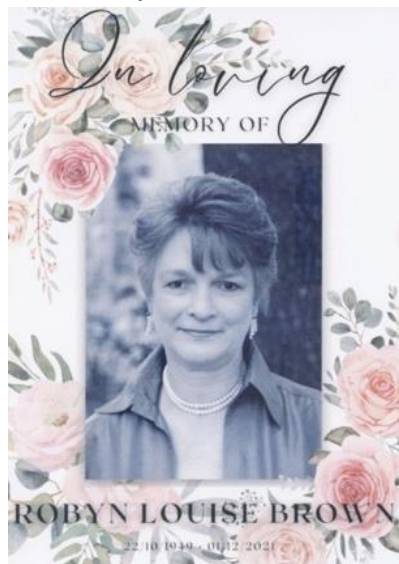
One of the more recent Welsh symbols, the daffodil, became associated with Wales in the 19th century when it started gaining popularity. By the 20th century, Prime Minister - David Lloyd George, who was himself a Welshman, chose to wear one on St David's Day. He also made sure the flower was used in the investiture ceremony of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle.

Nowadays, the daffodil is considered the national flower of Wales and is traditionally worn by those who celebrate St. David's Day. Daffodils are an appropriately chosen symbol as the flowers bloom early

in the year and just in time for St. David's Day, an important occasion in Wales. Plus, as lovely and symbolic as leeks are, they can be pretty smelly, so you can understand why people would rather pin a beautiful daffodil to their clothes!

It's also thought that the daffodil may have become a symbol, as the Welsh words for the leek "cenhinen" and the daffodil "cenhinen pedr" are very similar. As a result, people have confused the two over time. Now, people in Wales tend to celebrate the leek and the daffodil in equal measure.

Vale Robyn Louise Brown



Robyn, the wife of second tenor and committee member - Colin Brown (both of them Kiwis) died on 1 December 2021.

A testament to her popularity was that the chapel at Lilydale Crematorium on Monday afternoon 20th December, was filled to overflowing with family and friends (the choir members were relegated to the foyer, where we were still able to witness the service).

The choir was well represented with more than 20 members in attendance.

We performed two of her favourite songs, *You raise me up* and *Gwahoddiad* to help to sing her spirit home.

Communicating with the Choir

Please feel free to copy or circulate this newsletter to any of your friends and relatives or if you would like us to add them to our distribution list, so they get their copy direct, simply let us know their email address.

Alternatively, they can subscribe directly to the newsletter via our website:

www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au or via our Facebook page.

We treat all information provided as confidential and our subscribers can opt out at any time.

Email is our preferred way of communication with supporters, so please email us and we'll respond promptly to whatever queries you may have.

Your feedback is important to us, so please write and let us know what you think about the choir, our newsletters, or our recent performances (whether video or live).

Introduce us to your friends and let us know what you would like to see us perform in our future live concerts.

Would you like to join the choir?

The choir is always keen to attract new members.

Singing is good for the mind and body and rehearsing the choir's songs during lockdown has been therapeutic. Ask any of our choristers!

The choir's online tools for learning the repertoire are excellent and our secretary and other Welsh speaking members provide special lessons at our rehearsal venue (and continued them via Zoom during lockdown), to assist with the knowledge and pronunciation of our Welsh songs

While our heritage is Welsh and around 25% of our concert programs are Welsh songs (not necessarily all in the Welsh language), we are fundamentally a multicultural choir with probably only half of us

having a links with Wales. The choir is open to people of any nationality and our current and past members have included people with Scots, English, Irish, New Zealand, Dutch, French, German, Egyptian, South African, Tongan, Samoan and Australian backgrounds! We even have a Kiwi as the current president!

Whether you've been involved in music all your life, or only sing in the shower, you are welcome to come along to any of our rehearsals at Maroondah Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood to see how the choir operates.

You will be made most welcome, whether you wish to sit within the body of the choir and sing with us, or simply listen and observe, alongside our other guests, until you are happy with the music and the environment.

During the times when our rehearsal rooms were closed because of COVID constraints, we had Zoom rehearsals, which allowed us to practice our repertoire (albeit without hearing our fellow choristers), which has kept us up to date with the choir's concert program and enabled us to interact with each other.

Our rehearsal facility at Federation Estate is excellent, with comfortable seats, good acoustics and we have the best music director and accompanist combination in Melbourne.

The choir benefits from our Music Director, David Ashton-Smith's background as an opera singer and adjudicator, in coaching our voice development and projection, as well as his role in teaching us new songs. He is ably assisted by our accompanist, Simon Walters, himself a music director and arranger of some note, whose keen ear picks up any problems with pitch or timing.

Established section mentors look after all new and prospective members, to ensure they are properly introduced to other members of their section and are equipped with the relevant music scores. They will act as mentors for the duration of the probationary period and will answer any questions you might have.

There is a break for tea or coffee during rehearsals, which gives everyone the opportunity to chat to other choir members. On the first Wednesday in the month, one of the sections provides the choir and visitors with (a sometimes sumptuous) supper.

Car parking is plentiful and free, while Ringwood railway station is only a 5-minute walk away.

If you contact us on the phone numbers or email addresses shown in this newsletter, we will respond and arrange to meet you personally. Otherwise, just come along on a Wednesday evening, introduce yourself and you will be made very welcome.

Once you decide to join the choir, we will provide you with access to our web-based aids which assist us in learning and practising the individual parts at home. This makes the process of getting up to speed with the Choir's repertoire so much easier. We also have Welsh language sessions, as mentioned above given by some of the Welsh speaking members of the choir, to assist choristers with the pronunciation and understanding of the Welsh songs in our repertoire.

Following a number of rehearsal sessions and a formal audition, you could be singing in one of our concerts within weeks and possibly joining us on our next tour.

It has been a while since the Choir's last tour (which was to Cornwall and Wales) and we are currently planning our next tour, which, bearing in mind the continuing impact of COVID outside of Australia, is likely to be within Australia.

Would you like to hire the choir?

Anyone who has attended our concerts at major venues such as the Melbourne Recital Centre, Ulumbarra Theatre Bendigo, Hamer Hall and the Melbourne Town Hall, will be aware that the choir has the skills, capability and contacts to produce and run high quality major events.

The choir is available for community, corporate and sporting events, dinners, anniversaries, weddings etc., at most times in the year, so if you are, or know of, an organization which might require anything from a short rousing opening to a conference (say) to a full two-hour concert, together with quality guest artists and an orchestra or band (if required), please contact **Gwyn Harper (0419 562 353)** or any committee member and we will be pleased to work with you to produce an outstanding event.

Please bear in mind that we're talking about a choir of up to 50 voices plus a professional music director and accompanist. We have an eclectic repertoire, a great sound and provide excellent entertainment and value for the money.

Would you like to donate to or sponsor the choir in 2022?

As is the case with almost all other performing arts organisations, the choir's financial position over the past two years has been adversely impacted by the COVID19 pandemic. As a result, we need donors and sponsors more than ever. If you would simply like to donate to the choir, please contact any member of the committee. We are a registered charitable body and all donations will be acknowledged and are tax deductible.

Alternatively, if you have a product or service which you believe might appeal to our audiences, then please contact us and we will be delighted to promote your product in our concerts, marketing material and promotions.

Our audience ranges from the baby boomers to later generations in their 30's, 40's and 50's, so for those organisations which have this demographic as a target market, sponsoring the choir provides a unique and cost-effective way of getting your message across.

The choir is seeking donors and sponsors for the funding of the prizes for our prestigious *Singer of the Year (SOTY)* concert which, hopefully, we will be able to hold before a live audience, in 2022. This event, which has been running for 29 years and is open to singers under the age of 35, draws competitors from all parts of the state and indeed interstate. Many of the winners and runners-up of this competition have gone on to make careers on concert and opera stages worldwide, which is testament to the quality and significance of the event.

As a result of COVID19 restrictions the last two SOTY competitions had to be adjudicated based on video performances and as mentioned above, the winners' interviews and examples of their performances are available via the choir's website or our Facebook page.

In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the finalists, the choir gives the finalists an opportunity to perform as guest artists in our concerts during the year.

All sponsors are acknowledged in our programs and publicity material and are given the opportunity to be involved in the SOTY presentation ceremonies on the night and in the elimination heats. One of our videos produced and released during the COVID19 period was viewed by over 30,000 viewers and for the 2020 SOTY event, the videos of the final three competitors on YouTube had both local and international exposure. We expect the videos of 2021 SOTY event to have a similar impact.

The choir is able to perform at a sponsor's nominated site if required, as we have done in the past (e.g. the opening of a legal conference in the city, the Eureka Stockade anniversary in Ballarat, the opening of the State Library or even at a vehicle dealer's showroom in the suburbs).

If you would like to be associated with this wonderful event or indeed any of our other prestigious concerts, please contact any member of the choir's committee and we will be delighted to work with you to get the best value out of your sponsorship.

In times like these, laughter is still the best medicine

Out of the mouths of babes...

Teacher: "Anyone who thinks he's stupid may stand up!"

Nobody stands up.

Teacher: "I'm sure there are some stupid students over here!"

Little Johnny stands up

Teacher: "OH, Johnny you think you're stupid?"

Little Johnny: "No... I just feel bad that you're standing alone..."

Pizza abroad

An Italian businessman goes to Indonesia for a business trip. He hates Indonesian food, so he asked the concierge in his hotel, "Is there any restaurant where I can find Italian food here?"

The concierge says, "You're lucky sir, a new pizza restaurant just opened and they deliver."

The businessman asks for the restaurant's number, goes back to his room, and orders the pizza.

30 minutes later, the delivery person shows up with the pizza. He takes the pizza and eats it. Suddenly he's sneezing uncontrollably and shouting to the delivery person, "What did you put on this pizza?!"

The delivery man bows deeply and says, "We put exactly what you ordered on the phone, sir. It's pepper only"

A university student writes a letter to her parents, hoping that it can convince them to give her money.

Dear Mom and Dad,

College i\$ going well. \$o far, my cla\$\$e\$ have not been too \$tre\$\$ful and I've been learning a lot.

My profe\$\$or\$ are for the mo\$t part very nice, with the exception of my economic\$ profe\$\$or.

I've al\$o been making so many new friend\$ and have been joining \$o many new club\$.

I ju\$t wanted you to know that I am doing great and I don't need anything.

Lot\$ of Love,

\$arah.

A few days later she receives a letter in her mailbox and hastily opens it, hoping her parents picked up on her not-so-subtle hints.

It read:

Dear Sarah,

We were so delighted to receive your letter yesterday afterNOon.

We want you to kNOW that we think you are doing an amazing job in your first few days.

Even if we don't always ackNOWLEDge all of your hard work, we still want you to kNOW that we NOtice all of the hard work and we're proud NO matter what.

It's an hoNOR being your parents. And, ecoNOMics is a hard one, try getting a tutor!

Keep up the hard work! If you need anything, let us kNOW.

Lots of Love,

Mom and Dad

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