

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 55 April 2022



Only a couple of weeks now before our first concert of 2022 and it's going to be a great occasion for choir and audience alike. With COVID hopefully behind us, we are locking in dates for concerts later in the year, so watch this space.

While, like all other artistic and sporting groups, we have had our share of members who have contracted Omicron we are pleased to say that all have recovered and we should have a good choir turnout for the concert

The audience at MLC is in for a treat, with a number of surprise items as well as some old favourites like *Myfanwy* and *Shelter*, together with some of the songs which are new to our repertoire.

Our soloist, Samantha Hargreaves, is so excited about performing with us that she has created her own promo on her's and the choir's Facebook pages just look at -

[www.facebook.com/MelbourneWelshChoir](http://www.facebook.com/MelbourneWelshChoir).

The venue only holds 350 patrons (and there is not a bad seat in the house) so be quick and book your tickets. Free parking is available onsite and MLC is well served by public transport.

Invite your friends and family - we guarantee they won't be disappointed and the bigger the audience the better the choir performs!

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](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets) or from any member of the choir.



*Samantha performing with the Victorian Chorale at St Paul's*

**Melbourne Welsh Male Choir**  
**A Celebration of St David's Day**  
featuring special guest soloist  
**Samantha Hargreaves**  
2021 Singer of the Year Winner  
Music-Director David Ashton-Smith OAM  
Accompanist Simon Walters  
2pm Saturday 23rd April at The James Tatoulis Auditorium  
Methodist Ladies College 207 Barkers Road, Kew  
Tickets \$40 Concession \$35 Group of Six \$32 Children \$15  
Available [www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/) or phone 0408 280 953

## The Choir's recording session at Wesley Church, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

After a long period of inactivity for the choir caused by COVID lockdowns, the committee decided to invest in a promotional video to showcase the choir's capabilities.



*Setting up*

The recently refurbished Wesley church in Lonsdale Street was chosen because of its excellent acoustics and its accessibility by public transport.

The altar platform provided ample space to house the number of choristers but was too narrow for our usual T1, T2, B1, B2, configuration and, without the choir's risers, some ingenious methods were employed to raise the height of the baritones and basses.

The video was taken from high in the Gallery to catch the whole choir.

It was a fairly exhausting session, where we sang the same item a number of times and it was interesting to hear the critical comments, within the choir, about the quality of the performance of the song we had just sung! More information on the songs and where they can be heard, will be available once the editing process is complete.



*The tenors in full voice*



*Mission accomplished*

## The background to another song from the Choir's repertoire –

### *“Soon may the Wellerman come”*

“Soon may the Wellerman come”, also known as “Wellerman” or “The Wellerman” [c. 1860–70] is a sea shanty from New Zealand.

The song refers to the “Wellermen”, pointing to supply ships owned by the [Weller brothers](#) who were settlers from England.

The “Soon may the Wellerman come” chorus goes as follows:

*Soon may the Wellerman come  
To bring us sugar and tea and rum  
One day, when the tonguing is done  
We'll take our leave and go*

The song's lyrics describe a [whaling ship](#) called the “*Billy o' Tea*” and its hunt for a [right whale](#). The song describes how the ship's crew hope for a “Wellerman” to arrive and bring them supplies of luxuries. According to the song's listing on the website *New Zealand Folk Song*, “the workers at these bay-whaling stations (shore whalers) were not paid wages, they were paid in slops (ready-made clothing), spirits and tobacco.” The chorus continues with the crew singing of their confidence that the “tonguing” will be the last step of their plight. Unlike whaling in the Atlantic and northern Pacific, whalers in New Zealand practised shore-based whaling which required them to process the whale carcasses on land. Tonguing in this context refers to the practice of cutting strips of whale [blubber](#) to render into oil.



*Tonguing the whale once it had been landed on the beach*

Subsequent verses detail the captain's determination to bring in the whale in question, even as time passes and the quadruple of whaling boats is lost in the fight. In the last verse, the narrator conveys how the “*Billy o' Tea*” is still considered locked in an ongoing struggle with the whale, with the Wellerman making “his regular call” to strengthen the captain and crew.

### **Historical background**

The history of [whaling in New Zealand](#) stretches from the late eighteenth century to 1965.

In 1831, the UK-born Weller Brothers Edward, George and Joseph, who had immigrated to [Sydney](#) in 1829, founded a whaling station at [Otakou](#) near modern [Dunedin](#) in the [South Island](#) of New Zealand, some seventeen years before the first British settlement of Dunedin.

Speaking at centennial celebrations in 1931, New Zealand's Governor General - Lord Bledisloe recalled how the Weller brothers had on their voyage to New Zealand “brought, in the ‘*Lucy Ann*’ (the Weller brothers’ [barque](#)), a good deal of rum and a good deal of gunpowder...and some at least were rum characters”.

From 1833, the Weller brothers sold provisions to whalers in New Zealand from their base at Otakou, which they had named “Otago” in approximation of the local Maori pronunciation. Their employees became known as “Wellermen”.

The industry drew whalers to New Zealand from a diverse range of backgrounds encompassing not just the British Isles but also Native Americans, Pacific Islanders and Indigenous Australians.

The whalers depended on good relations with the local Maori people and the whaling industry integrated the Maori into the global economy and produced hundreds of intermarriages between whalers and local Maori, including Edward Weller himself, who was twice married to Maori women, thus linking the Wellers to one of the most prominent local Māori families, the Ellisons.

In its heyday in 1834, the Otakou station was producing 310 tons of whale oil a year and became the centre of a network of seven stations that formed a highly profitable enterprise for the Wellers, employing as many as 85 people at Otago alone.

From the Otakou base the Wellers branched out into industries as diverse as “timber, spars, flax, potatoes, dried fish, Maori artefacts, and even tattooed Maori heads which were in keen demand in Sydney”. However, given that the Colony of New Zealand would not be declared until 1840, the Wellers were treated as foreign traders and were affected by protectionist British import tariffs on whale oil.

By 1835, the year that Joseph Weller died in Otago, the brothers became convinced of the need to abandon the station even as they branched out into massive land purchases in New Zealand, which amounted to nearly 3 million acres by 1840.

The Weller brothers’ success in the whaling industry was fleeting, and they were declared bankrupt in 1840 after failed attempts at large-scale land purchase in New South Wales. The Otakou station closed in 1841. In 1841, the Court of Claims in New South Wales ruled that the Weller brothers’ purchases of land in New Zealand were legally invalid, after which the Wellers “slipped unobtrusively out of the pages of New Zealand history”. Nonetheless, whaling in New Zealand continued up until the 1960s.

### ***Soon may the Wellerman come***

*There once was a ship that put to sea,  
And the name of the ship was the Billy o’ Tea  
The winds blew up, her bow dipped down,  
Oh blow, my bully boys, blow.*

*Chorus: Soon may the Wellerman come  
And bring us sugar and tea and rum.  
One day, when the tonguing is done,  
I’ll take my leave and go.*

*She had not been two weeks from shore  
When down on her a right whale bore.  
The captain called all hands and swore  
He’d take that whale in tow.*

*Before the boat had hit the water  
The whale’s tail came up and caught her.  
All hands to the side harpooned and fought her  
When she dived down below.*

*No line was cut, no whale was freed.  
The Captain’s mind was not of greed,*

*But he belonged to the whaleman's creed.  
She took the ship in tow.*

*For forty days, or even more,  
The line went slack, then tight once more.  
All boats were lost (there were only four)  
But still the whale did go.*

*As far as I've heard, the fight's still on.  
The line's not cut and the whale's not gone.  
The Wellerman makes his regular call  
To encourage the Captain, crew, and all.*

### **Choir Member Profile - Brian Heywood - Baritone**

I am a proud Mancunian (from Manchester), and the second eldest of six children.



In my early teens I joined the ATC (Air Training Corps) and over time reached the rank of Flight Sergeant, qualified as a Glider pilot, gained many air experience hours in various RAF training and operational aircraft.

After achieving all of the tasks required for presentation of the 'Gold' standard of the *Duke of Edinburgh Award*, I was invited to Buckingham palace and personally presented with my badge and certificate by HRH Prince Philip.

I also helped to train the squadron drill team and instructed other cadets in the pursuit of their various promotional badges and, of course, towards their own *Duke of Edinburgh Award*. When I left the ATC (due to age - 21), I maintained my contact with the squadron as a civilian instructor teaching mainly Aeronautical studies.

In 1970, I was lucky enough to be accepted for Australian migration as a

skilled migrant. I was mainly looking for adventure, but also to reconnect with earlier pioneers from my family, who had migrated to Victoria in the 1950s and had settled in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Accordingly, my family's first Aussie home was in the then leafy suburb of Ferntree Gully (and it cost a lot less than the present price of the cheapest car).

Soon after arriving, I joined the local APEX Club to set roots, contribute, and get to know my community. The bonus was that it gave us a great social life and enduring friendships.

When our children came along, we also became active locally with 'Safety House', then the Kinder committee etc.,

When the children started primary school in the mid to late 1970s, I joined the very progressive local primary school council, which was under the very capable leadership of fellow choir member - Bob Williams (Bass 2), who was the school principal.

Career wise, in the UK I had studied, been trained, and then worked mainly underground, for the National Coal Board as a Supervisory Electrician, at several of their collieries around Manchester. Consequently, in Melbourne, my qualifications and experience allowed me to secure a position as a Leading Hand Electrician in a large industrial complex in Huntingdale. This was followed several years later by a role as an 'Electronics Technician', working on power tool design with Black & Decker in Croydon.

Still looking for a challenge, I applied to the Victorian Education Department for a teaching position in Electrical Trades and Electronics. I was lucky enough to be awarded an excellent teacher training course that qualified me as a registered teacher at Secondary schools and TAFE. I then taught mainly Electrotechnology related subjects at various Secondary schools, Colleges, and TAFE Institutes, for a total of 33 years, whilst continuing to further my own technical qualifications. I completed a *Graduate Diploma of Teaching* and a *Bachelor of Education Degree* at Melbourne University.

During the period of my teaching career, I also owned and ran an Electrical Contracting business.

Following my retirement (from paid employment), I have attended and taught, several technology related classes at U3A, been a volunteer driver for my local council, and have recently resigned after 15 years in a volunteer role as a Head Conductor for the Puffing Billy Railway.

I have always had a love of hiking and am currently an active member of two Melbourne-based Bushwalking Clubs. I have completed many local and long-distance walks over the years, mainly in the UK and Australia, that include the UK's *Coast to Coast Walk*, Victoria's *Great Ocean Walk* and Western Australia's *Cape to Cape Track*.

I am also an active member of 'Probus' and the 'Melbourne PC User group'.

I have always enjoyed choral music and particularly the unique sound of Welsh Male Choirs. My earliest choral experience was in my school's choir, but other commitments got in the way and put my singing interests on hold until 1998, when I decided to find the time to add a choir membership to my list of hobbies and was lucky enough to be accepted into the Baritone section of the Melbourne Welsh. Membership of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir has given me the opportunity to not only visit, but to perform in some of the world's most iconic venues and to enjoy the enduring camaraderie of some fine fellow members (past and present) and their partners.

Bernadette and I are blessed to share four children and seven grandchildren, whom we love dearly and catch up with as often as possible.

## **Joining the choir**

The choir is always keen to attract new members.

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 any Welsh heritage. 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.

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.

Our Music Director, David Ashton-Smith's background as an opera singer and adjudicator, shows 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.

Mentors for each section look after all new and prospective members, to ensure they are introduced to other members of their section and are properly 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 a 5-minute walk away.

If you contact us on the phone numbers or email addresses shown in this newsletter, we will respond promptly 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 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 understanding and pronunciation 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.

## Hiring 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. 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 money.

## Sponsoring the choir

If you would simply like to donate to the choir, please contact any member of the committee. The choir is a registered charitable body and all donations are 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.

The choir is actively seeking donors and sponsors for the support of our prestigious *Singer of the Year (SOTY)* concert which, in 2022, we expect to be able to hold before a live audience.

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. A testament to its success and drawing power is the number of winners and runners-up of this competition who have gone on to make careers

on concert and opera stages worldwide.

In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the finalists, the choir gives them 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 finals' night and in the elimination heats.

Some of our videos produced and released during the COVID19 period were viewed by over 30,000 viewers and for the 2020 and 2021 SOTY events, the videos of the final three competitors on YouTube had both local and international exposure. We expect the videos of 2022 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.

If you would like to be associated with any of our 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.

## **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.melbournewelshchoir.com.au](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.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 our supporters, so please send us an email and we'll respond promptly to whatever queries you may have. Alternately if you want to speak with the newsletter author about any of the content, please contact me on 0419 562 353.

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

Please introduce us to your friends and be sure to let us know what you would like to see us perform in our future concerts.

## **In times like these, laughter is still the best medicine.**

### **Understanding golfer**

A married couple were golfing when all of a sudden, the wife asks,

Wife: "Babe, if I die will you marry again?"

Husband: "Of course not."

Wife: "I think you would."

Husband: "Fine, I probably will"

Wife: "Will you let her sleep in our bed?"

Husband: "Yeah, probably I guess."

Wife: "Would you even let her use my golf clubs?"

Husband: "No way, she is left-handed."

### **Understanding Engineers 1**

To the optimist, the glass is half full. To the pessimist the glass is half empty. To the engineer the glass is twice the size it needs to be.



## Understanding Engineers 2

Two engineering students were standing at the base of a flagpole, looking at the top. A woman walked by and asked what they were doing.

“We’re supposed to find the height of this flagpole” one said, “but we don’t have a ladder”.

The woman takes out a wrench from her bag, loosens two bolts, lays the flagpole down on the ground, takes out a tape measure and says - “Easy - 6.55 metres!”.

The second engineer laughs and says - “A lot of good that does us. We ask for the height and she gives us the length!”

Both students have since quit engineering and are now serving in the Federal Government.

## Understanding Engineers 3

What is the difference between mechanical and civil engineers?

Mechanical engineers build weapons.

Civil engineers build targets.

*Contributions welcomed from supporters. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the choir. The MWMC Newsletter articles may be reproduced, but we do insist on acknowledgement as the source. All articles, sketches, photographs etc., that are included in the publication are published on this condition. The choir will endeavour at all times to seek permission to reproduce material from other sources and/or acknowledge the source as appropriate. Some of the information about “Soon May the Wellerman Come” was taken from Wikipedia.*

## CHOIR DIRECTORY

President :	Kevin Seerup	<a href="mailto:president@melbournwelshchoir.com.au">president@melbournwelshchoir.com.au</a>
Vice-president :	David Field	<a href="mailto:vicepresident@melbournwelshchoir.com.au">vicepresident@melbournwelshchoir.com.au</a>
Secretary :	Ieuan Thomas	<a href="mailto:secretary@melbournwelshchoir.com.au">secretary@melbournwelshchoir.com.au</a>
Treasurer :	Phil Tomlinson	<a href="mailto:treasurer@melbournwelshchoir.com.au">treasurer@melbournwelshchoir.com.au</a>
Music Director :	David Ashton-Smith OAM	
Committee :	Colin Brown, Geoff Cooke, Gwyn Harper, Michael Kenny, Robert Mits, Bill Spawton.	