

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 81 June 2024



Celtic festivals and Welsh welcomes

The choir has been beavering away under our new music director - Mitch to prepare for a busy Winter program.

Camperdown Concert Sunday 23rd June 2014

It is many moons since the choir last visited western Victoria and we are looking forward to performing at the wonderful Theatre Royal as part of the Camperdown Robert Burns festival.

We were intrigued to find out why there was a Burns festival in a **regional** Australian town?

Camperdown was named in honour of the Scottish naval hero; Admiral Adam Duncan, Earl of Camperdown (1731–1804). The naming apparently came about this way - in 1854, Governor Charles Latrobe was out kangaroo shooting with prominent Scottish settlers Neil Black of “Glenormiston” and Duncan McNicol. As they rode through the country occupied by the fledgling town, Black asked the Governor to suggest a name for it. The Governor replied, “I keep hearing you saying, “Duncan this and Duncan the other’ (referring to McNicol), so you had better name it after him.”

Black objected that Duncan was hardly a suitable name for a town. “Well,” replied the Governor, “there was an Admiral Duncan, Earl of Camperdown - why not call it Camperdown?”

Camperdown’s Robert Burns Statue

This statue is believed to be the oldest surviving statue of Burns in the world. So how did this wonderful old statue, crafted in Scotland, end up in Camperdown, Australia?

In 1786, the earliest known portrait of Robert Burns was painted from life by his good friend Peter Taylor. In 1829 the portrait was willed to William Taylor of Queensferry, a distant relative of the artist. In 1830, William Taylor commissioned the eminent Scottish sculptor, John Greenshields, to carve a statue of Burns based on the painting.

When William Taylor died in 1866, he left the statue to his son, William Andrew Taylor.

William Andrew Taylor migrated to Victoria in 1876 and settled in Camperdown. He married a local girl - Isabella Dawson and they farmed a property overlooking Lake Bullen Merri, which they named “Renny Hill”.

During a family visit to Scotland in 1882, William Andrew Taylor arranged for the statue to be shipped to Camperdown. Soon after it arrived in March 1883, Taylor gifted the statue to the people of Camperdown and it was erected in the Camperdown Botanic Gardens later that year.

The statue was mounted on a plinth designed by Scottish born architect, Alexander Hamilton. It stood there, facing east, for over 125 years.

Vandalism & Restoration

The statue was already in need of restoration when one night in mid 2009, it was badly damaged by vandals. Staff from the Corangamite Shire Council immediately removed the statue from the plinth and moved it to a secure location.

In the ensuing months, the Council worked closely with the National Trust of Australia to determine how best to restore the statue and to raise the necessary funds. In the meantime, publicity about the



Robert Burns Statue on display at the Corangamite Shire Office

significance of the statue and its plight attracted national and international attention. It was suggested by one commentator, that the statue should be returned to Scotland. This idea was swiftly rejected by the Council.

After extensive research, stone that closely matched the original was sourced from the Drumhead Quarry nearby Denny, Scotland. The owners of the Drumhead Quarry were so enthusiastic about the restoration that they generously donated the stone. The large block of stone arrived on the docks at Port Melbourne with a tartan ribbon tied around it in honour of its intended use.

Local businessman, Trevor Lee, made space available in his Manifold Street premises for restoration work on the statue, Through the shop front window, passers-by were able to watch the work slowly progress. Sculptor, Smiley Williams and skilled stonemasons from Cathedral Stone in Melbourne worked throughout 2011 to meticulously restore the statue to its original appearance.

Local residents and Burns lovers the world over, urged Corangamite Shire Council to display the statue at a safe indoor location. On the 27th of January 2012 the restored statue of Robert Burns was unveiled at its new home in the foyer of the Corangamite shire Civic Centre, Camperdown by the Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Ted Baillieu MP.

The ceremony was attended by Burns admirers from all over Australia as well overseas. Special guests included Belinda Treseeder, an eighth-generation direct descendant of Robert Burns, a family member of the owners of the Drumhead Quarry, and descendants of the sculptor, John Greenshields. Also present were several local descendants of William Andrew Taylor.

Awakening & Celebration

Ironically, the vandalism of the Robert Burns statue in 2009 has had some very positive outcomes.

The extensive publicity about the statue has drawn international attention to this treasure that has quietly resided at Camperdown for over 125 years. Importantly, the publicity has awakened local community interest in the life and works of Robert Burns, and awareness of the immense contribution of Scots to the settlement and progress of Camperdown and district.

We look forward to entertaining the festival audience on Sunday 23rd of June and possibly making this a regular event.

Welcoming the Welsh Rugby team to Melbourne



The choir has quite a history of welcoming Welsh representative teams to Melbourne, having performed for a similar event at the RACV Club in the past.

In addition, we have performed at the MCG with our good friend Mike Brady at an ANZAC day AFL match, but we have never performed in the Olympic Room.

As this a welcome lunch we plan to have a more relaxed format.

In addition, since both the Welsh (Warren Gatland) and Australian (Joe Schmidt) team coaches have a New Zealand background we have included one song just for them!

The Rugby Club of Victoria is proud to present

**WALLABIES
V
WALES**

TEST MATCH PREVIEW DINNER
WITH SPECIAL GUESTS WARREN GATLAND & JOE SCHMIDT

WEDNESDAY 10TH JULY
At the iconic MCG - Olympic Room
3 Course Dinner & 4 Hour Drinks Package from 6.30-10.30pm
Early Bird Pricing: \$185 (RCV Members) | \$195 (Non-Members)

With Special appearance
from the Melbourne Welsh
Male Choir

Scan this QR code for tickets

Event partnership opportunities available, please contact president@rugbyclubvic.com

Upcoming Events

Robert Burns Celtic Festival

Sunday 23rd June 2024 2:30 p.m.
Camperdown Theatre Royal,
2 Bath Street, Camperdown, Victoria 3260

The organisers of the above festival have invited us to perform at a full two-hour concert for this festival.

As a result, we have added some new Scottish, Irish and Cornish songs to our repertoire, including *Avenging and Bright* whose background is given in this newsletter, (see below). There will, of course, be many of our Welsh standards and old favourites to whet our new audience's palate.

Tickets will be available soon on.

www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1056482.



Choir performance at the MCG

Wednesday 10th July 2024

We are pleased to be providing the entertainment for this welcoming dinner for the Welsh Rugby team who will be here for a two match test series against Australia. Tickets are available through Rugby Club Victoria.

Mooroolbark Concert

Saturday 27th July 2024 2:30 p.m.

Mooroolbark Community Centre
125 Brice Avenue, Mooroolbark, 3138

One of the choir's favourite venues - this intimate theatre, with its limited seating, fills quickly so book early to avoid disappointment.

For tickets, which will be available shortly, book via: www.trybooking.com/eventlist/melbournewelsh

Australia Club Concert

Friday 23rd August

Australia Club
98 - 110 William Street,
Melbourne 3000

Following the choir's well received performance last year at Royal Melbourne Golf Club, the choir has been invited to perform in the wonderful dining room of the Australia Club (with its impressive cupola), in William Street, Melbourne.

All the Melbourne clubs now seem to have their own male voice choirs so we may be facing a very discerning audience!

One of our new songs - Avenging and bright

In response to our invitation to the Celtic festival at Camperdown next month, the choir is rehearsing several Celtic songs of which *Avenging and bright* is the most bloodthirsty!

Based on the poem by the Irish poet - *Thomas Moore*, this is a powerful and moving call to avenge the deaths of three brave warriors, the sons of Usna. The speaker vows that no joy will be tasted, the harp will be silent, and the maiden will be unwed until vengeance is wreaked on the murderer's head.

The poem compares favourably with the author's other works in its use of vivid imagery and strong emotions. It also reflects the time period in which it was written when revenge was considered a noble and necessary act.

Today Thomas Moore is remembered either for his Irish Melodies (typically "*The Minstrel Boy*" and "*The Last Rose of Summer*") or, less generously, for the role he is thought to have played in the loss of the memoirs of his friend Lord Byron.



Avenging and bright

Avenging and bright fall the swift sword of Erin
On him who the brave sons of Usna betray'd!
For every fond eye he hath waken'd a tear in
A drop from his heart-wounds shall weep o'er her blade.

We swear to avenge them! - no joy shall be tasted,
The harp shall be silent, the maiden unwed,
Our halls shall be mute, and our fields shall lie wasted,
Till vengeance is wreak'd on the murderer's head.

Yes, monarch! though sweet are our home recollections,
Though sweet are the tears that from tenderness fall;
Though sweet are our friendships, our hopes, our affections,
Revenge on a tyrant is sweetest of all!

The words of this song were suggested by the very ancient Irish story called "*Deirdri, or the Lamentable Fate of the Sons of Usnach*," which has been translated literally from the Gaelic, and upon which it appears that the "*Darthula of Macpherson*" is founded.

The treachery of Conor, King of Ulster, in putting to death the three sons of Usna, was the cause of a desolating war against Ulster, which terminated in the destruction of his kingdom.

The version of the song which our choir sings omits the second verse of Moore's poem

Recommended viewing.

Friends of the choir who have access to Netflix might be interested in this 2019 comedy-drama movie which is based on a (mostly) true story about a Cornish folk group *Fisherman's Friends*.

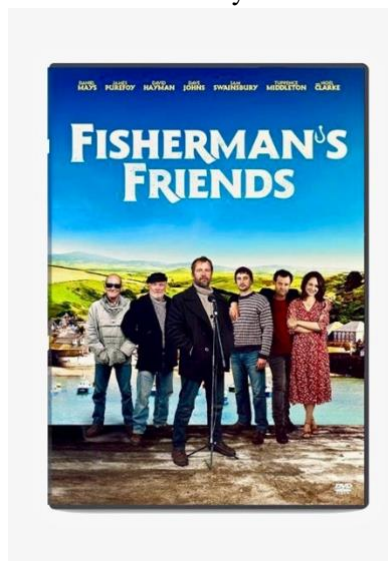
In the original line-up, all the members of the group grew up within half a mile of the Port Isaac harbour except for John McDonnell who is a Yorkshireman. Three were fishermen, and the others were linked to the sea through service as coast guards or lifeboatmen, hence the group's name.

Port Isaac, which has featured in some BBC TV shows such as *Poldark*, *Doc Martin* etc., is where many choir members visited during our Cornwall concert tour several years ago.

The folk group were signed by Universal Records and achieved a top 10 hit with their debut album of traditional Sea Shanties. They still perform but have needed to stop concerts in Port Isaac due to crowd sizes.

It's a good-feeling family film that includes the group's performance of items from our own current repertoire such as "*John Kanaka*" and one of our newer songs - "*Trelawney*".

The "Tamar", (which is also mentioned in *Trelawney*), also gets a mention as being the Cornish border, so it is topical for our upcoming Camperdown gig.



New Chorister Profile: Tony Lyon, Second Tenor

Our newest recruit to the tenor section – Tony, hails from the land of the long white cloud (NZ).



He lives in Croydon with his wife of 56 years – Catriona. They have 2 married daughters and 5 grandchildren ranging in age from 17-29.

Tony has retired from paid work, but he is still involved in his local church as part of the teaching team who organise the Sunday services.

He has been in pastoral ministry in various churches for most of his adult life.

Until late last year he was a Board Secretary of *World Team Australia*, a mission group with missionaries worldwide. He also worked with a colleague providing leadership training and funding for both church and social projects in South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana and Zambia.

He travelled to South Africa, Rwanda and Tanzania as part of this work earlier this year.

From 1988-1997 he worked for *Hoechst Australia Limited* - a company that manufactured industrial chemicals, plastics and pharmaceuticals; he was part of the Materials Management Team and concluded his time there as Corporate Materials Manager.

His musical background is very impressive and extensive. Music was part of his early family life. His mother was a pianist and a composer and her brothers were involved in all kinds of music. As part of the church, Tony was involved as a teenager in singing and playing guitar.

Since migrating to Australia, he has been involved in a variety of musical activities from the early 1970's in choirs, quartets and trios. In addition, he played guitar in some musical productions that were staged by the church.

In 1979 he was part of a 55-member musical group that toured Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia giving concerts. Later, he toured on a number of occasions as part of a seven-part music group to these same places.

He was invited to Indonesia several times from 2000 - 2014 to be involved in their music program as well as teaching.

In 1988 Tony sang in the *Vision One Choir and Orchestra* at the Concert Hall of the Brisbane Performing Arts Complex; he sang with the choir and performed two of the duets in the oratorio. This performance was repeated at the Melbourne Concert Hall and the Adelaide Festival Theatre.

In 1994 he sang in the *Melbourne Prom Praise Choir* at the Melbourne Concert Hall.

He was also a member of the *Waverley Combined Choir* where he sang in the tenor section.

Tony would love to improve his sight reading. He has spent most of his musical life performing by ear.

Besides his interest in music, Tony plays Senior's competition golf.

He is also the longest serving editor of the *Australian Journal of Philately*, publishing articles involving postal history. His main field of interest is in New Zealand WWII mail to and from the troops. He has displayed his exhibits internationally, achieving medal status.

Tony also has many recordings of Irish, Scottish and Welsh music. He also loves classical music.

Why join the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir?

Well, his wife, who was born in Ayr, Scotland (her family migrated to New Zealand in 1952) responded to an advert, concerning the need for choir members, because she felt that he was missing his singing and he has Celtic blood in his veins. (Tony has Scottish ancestry through his father, whose parents emigrated to New Zealand in 1926. They came from Aberdeen and Dundee. On his mother's side, her grandfather hailed from Glen Arm, County Antrim).

Want to join our choir

As can be seen above, life is never dull for members of the Melbourne Welsh choir so why not join us.

Whether you've been involved in music all your life, sing in another choir, or only sing in the shower, just come along to our rehearsals at Maroondah Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood and join in the fun and the stimulating learning process, that being a part of the *Melbourne Welsh Male Choir* is all about.

The choir is open to people of all ages from 18 to 88 of any nationality, age, colour or ethnicity.

Our current and past members include people with Scots, English, Irish, New Zealand, Dutch, French, German, Egyptian, Latvian, South African, Tongan, Samoan, American and Australian ancestry.

So, provided you pass a relatively simple audition, you will be made most welcome.

While our musical heritage is Welsh and we aim to have Welsh songs as roughly a quarter of our concert programs (not necessarily all in the Welsh language), we are fundamentally a multicultural choir with less than half of us having direct Welsh ancestry.

We have an excellent rehearsal facility at Maroondah Federation Estate, with a grand piano, comfortable seats, good acoustics and facilities for tea and coffee at the interval.

In addition, we have possibly the best music director and accompanist combination in Melbourne.

Mitch Meyer, our new Music Director, has a background in music and management. An accomplished soloist as well as a respected conductor of several choirs, he was most recently the music director of the Buderim Male Choir in Queensland.

He is ably assisted by our talented accompanist, **Simon Walters**, himself a music director and arranger of some note.

We have mentors for each vocal section, who look after all new members, to ensure they are introduced to other choristers and are properly equipped with the relevant music scores. They oversee new members for the duration of their probationary period, help with pitch or pronunciation where appropriate and answer any questions, a new member might have.

There is a break for tea or coffee during rehearsals, which gives everyone the opportunity to mingle.

On the first Wednesday in the month, one of the sections provides the choir and our visitors with a light 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 for your introduction to the choir.

Otherwise, just come along on a Wednesday evening at 7:00 p.m., introduce yourself and you will be made most welcome.

Once you decide to join, we will provide you with access to our web-based member facilities, which will allow you to learn and practice the individual vocal parts at home.

This makes the process of getting up to speed with the Choir's repertoire very much easier.

We also have Welsh language sessions, given by some of the Welsh speaking members of the choir, to help new and existing choristers in the pronunciation and translation of the words of the beautiful Welsh songs in our repertoire.

Following a few rehearsals and a formal audition, you could be wearing a choir uniform and singing in one of our concerts within weeks and possibly joining us on our next tour.

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, or at smaller venues such as our venue for St David's Day Concert (the James Tatoulis Auditorium at MLC), will be aware that the choir has the skills and ability to produce and run high quality major events.

So, if you are an organization or an individual requiring anything from a short rousing opening to a conference or entertainment at a formal dinner (say), to a full two-hour concert, together with quality guest artists and an orchestra or band (if required), then please call **David Field (0418 175 584)** or any committee member to discuss how we can tailor a performance to meet your unique needs.

The choir is available for community, corporate and sporting events, dinners, anniversaries, weddings etc., at most times in the year.

Bear in mind that we're talking about a choir of 40 to 50 voices plus a professional music director and accompanist (with a portable electric piano, where required).

We have an eclectic repertoire, a wonderful sound and provide great value for money.

Sponsorship opportunities

The choir is a not-for-profit organisation and we rely solely on revenue from concerts, membership fees, sponsorship and donations for our continuing operation.

Our audiences are predominantly middle-aged citizens. Hence potential sponsors with products to market to this demographic e.g., those providing services in retail, hospitality, investment, insurance, real estate, retirement homes etc., might find sponsoring the choir worthwhile.

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 company, product or service through our concerts and marketing materials.

If you would like to support the choir via a donation, please contact any member of the committee. The choir is a registered charitable body and all donations are acknowledged and are tax deductible.

Newsletter Feedback

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

In particular, we welcome your feedback on our recent *YouTube* videos.

We are always seeking to increase our patronage and hence we are happy for you copy or circulate this newsletter to any of your friends and relatives.

If you would like us to add them to our distribution list, so they get their copy by email from the choir, 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 subscribers can opt out at any time.

Email is our preferred way of communication with our friends and 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 (Gwyn) about any of the content, feel free to contact him on 0419 562 353.

Laughter is the best medicine

Words of Wisdom

A 98-year-old Mother Superior from Ireland was dying.

The nuns gathered around her bed trying to make her last journey comfortable.

They tried giving her some warm milk to drink but she refused it.

One of the nuns took the glass back to the kitchen and remembering a bottle of Irish whiskey received as a gift the previous Christmas...

She opened it and poured a generous amount into the warm milk.

Back at Mother Superior's bed, the nun held the glass to her lips.

Mother drank a little....

Then a little more.

Before they knew it, she had drunk the whole glass down to the last drop.

"Mother," the nuns asked with earnest,

"Please give us some wisdom before you die."

She raised herself up in bed and whispered, "Don't sell that cow".

When a burly rich man was about to beat this old man

In America, an old man with hearing problems crashed his car into a very expensive automobile.

The burly owner of the expensive automobile jumps out and confronts the old man and says, "Give me \$10,000 cash or I will beat you to a pulp!"

The old man replies, "Whoa wait buddy, I don't have that much money but let me call my son, he trains dolphins."

The old man dials his son and as he is about to speak the owner of the expensive car yanks the phone out of his hand and says "So you train dolphins, well your old man just hit and damaged my car, you'd better bring me \$10,000 or I'm gonna beat the heck outta him!"

The son answers "Okay, give me 15 minutes and I'll be there."

In exactly 15 minutes the son pulls up in a Jeep, four men jump out and beat the hell out of the burly expensive car owner.

Meanwhile the son walks over to his father and says "Dad, I train Navy Seals not dolphins".

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