

Flint Male Voice Choir

How it all began.

It was the summer of 1975. Tom had been living in Flint for only a few months. One afternoon while on his way to work, he had boarded the bus and was taking his seat, when a young lady cleaning the windows of her house took his eye. He was certain he recognised her as a friend from his younger days when he lived in Cefn Mawr and some days later decided to find out for sure by calling at the house. He was quite taken aback when the door was opened by a tall dark young man, but quickly gaining his composure, enquired if the lady of the house was named Eirlys and then explained the reason for his visit. His assumption had proved right and Tom was able to renew his friendship with Eirlys, who became Mrs. Turvey and married to Rob.

Tom became a regular visitor and during one of their conversations they got round to the subject of music in general and singing in particular. Being a native of Penycu, this was a subject very close to Tom's heart, who had for many years been a keen supporter of Eisteddfodau especially the International at Llangollen. He expressed great surprise that there were no choirs in the immediate area. His friends said that there didn't seem to be any great interest in choral singing. Tom felt that there must be a number of people in a town the size of Flint and the surrounding district who were keen on singing; enough at least to form a choir of some kind. His friends then challenged him to do something about it.

Without further ado, Tom Williams began the task of seeking out the singing talent that he believed existed in the area, although it had long been considered by many people as the "land of Philistines" as far as music was concerned. In August, and with the help of the Mayor, Councillor Neville Meese and Town Clerk Len Baker, the local press announced that a public meeting would be held at the Town Hall, inviting anyone interested in the forming of a choir either mixed, female or male voice.

The Mayor of Flint presided at that meeting and he invited Tom to outline his plan for the formation of a choir to the twenty or so people who had arrived and after much discussion it was decided that the numbers were a suitable basis with which to start the ball rolling. Of those present almost one third were ladies and in order to spread the net as wide as possible, it was agreed that a mixed choir would offer the best opportunity. It was then necessary to call a general meeting to draw up a constitution and launch the choir properly. This was arranged for one month later, and on the evening of 24th September 1975, at Flint Town Hall, a constitution was agreed and the choir came into being under the title "Flint & District Choral Society", a mixed choir. It was agreed that each year, the newly elected Mayor of Flint be invited to be President of the Society during his term of office. Councillor Neville Meese was pleased to accept this, the first invitation. Officers elected at that meeting were, Dai Williams (Chairman), Mrs. D. Thomas (Vice Chair), Tom Williams (Secretary) and Len Baker (Treasurer). Mrs. Eirlys Turvey agreed to act as accompanist initially, although she hoped to be a singing member of the Society when a permanent accompanist could be found. There only remained the matter of finding a Conductor, someone who would be available and willing to take on this group of mainly inexperienced singers and mould them into a Choral Society worthy of the name. There were many doubters; some gave it 6 months, others twelve. "Nothing ever sticks in Flint". Many others have forecast that this Choral Society would fail from lack of support by the local community. They have all been proved wrong many times over.

To continue the story. It was fortunate that at that time, Len Baker was involved with the County Music Department at Shire Hall, Mold when through the "Quality of Life Experiment", he came into contact, with a Mr. Eifion Tudno Jones. Mr. Jones, a native of South Wales, was a music teacher employed by the Education Authority, an excellent organist and of course a trained musician, and when approached by Tom Williams agreed to accept the invitation to become conductor.

So to the first rehearsal and it was not without apprehension that some 30 would be choristers assembled at Flint High School (by permission of the County Education Committee), on 8th October 1975, to meet Mr. Jones, later known more affectionately as 'Eifion', for the first time. At that time there were still ladies involved, but for some reason not as many as had attended the inaugural meeting, however Eifion persisted and began by rehearsing Beethoven's "Creation Hymn", all in unison and designed to suit all voices. Over the next few weeks it became apparent there were not enough ladies, more men were attending and it became a 'fait accompli'. Flint Choral Society became Flint Male Voice Choir and has remained so ever since.

The first public performance was given for the Mayor that same year and for the next few years it was a question of consolidation and recruitment. Gradually the numbers and the standards crept up until there was a solid nucleus of some 30 singers while others came and went around them. Now the choir is over 30 years of age and it has certainly "come of age" in that time. Ask the founder members, some of whom are still in the ranks. They will recall the worrying times particularly when the musical director or accompanist had to leave. But they will also tell you that out of each crisis emerged a stronger choir. When the first conductor had to leave, chorister John Stone stepped into the breach as a temporary solution, his new ideas improved the choir's standards and 10 years later he was still there. The choir began competing and won the Butlins Challenge Cup, a very prestigious competition in those days. In the big competitions such as the National

Eisteddfod and the International at Llangollen the men came up against the super stars of the "Male Voice World", which taught humility and a desire to match their sound.

When John Stone had to leave the area through his work as a teacher, a new leader had to be found and Rodney T. Jones came from the choir ranks to take up the challenge. Rodney was achieving a life's ambition of directing a choir and with his fresh ideas, the choir blossomed. In his first year he won the Ellesmere Port Music Festival. However it was in 1989 that the choir demonstrated its real progress by winning at the National Eisteddfod at Llanrwst and confirmed themselves as a force to be reckoned with by regaining the title at Mold in 1991. That same year the choir achieved what many consider their greatest accolade by coming third at Llangollen. Since then there have been many successes and although the swings and roundabouts are as evident in singing as in other parts of life, be assured there will be many more in the future.

The choir made its first trip abroad in 1985 when the town of Flint was twinned with Menden in Germany and were invited to sing with the Menden Police Choir. Since then both choirs have exchanged visits and long lasting friendships formed with individual members. Now the group organise foreign trips every 2 years and have visited Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany and Malta. In 1997 they were the Welsh representatives at the Interceltic Festival in Lorient where they took part in the first performance of the Celtic Epic by Eddie McGuire and were there for the second at the Glasgow Celtic Festival in 1999. In 2001 they returned to Lorient and had a resounding success, it seemed the audiences had been waiting for just such a return and their enthusiasm knew no bounds as the choir sang to huge and appreciative audiences. To be asked again to represent Wales at Lorient was another great honour, but to be invited to Paris to repeat those performances was truly amazing. In 2002 the Interceltic Festival reproduced two of their "Nuits Magique" in the Stade De France when the choir sang to capacity audiences of 45,000 and were received with standing ovations on both nights. All who took part will never forget the experience of being there to uphold the good name of the Welsh Choral tradition and be assured they did not let it down. Since then these French expeditions have continued both in Lorient, Paris and Nantes. 2007 is once again "Welsh Year" at the Interceltic Festival in Lorient, when the emphasis will be on all things Welsh and Flint Male Voice Choir will be there and leading the parade. Some of the pictures included here will give you a taste of the atmosphere at this wonderful Festival.

These Celtic gatherings are fantastic, but on a different scale was the Millennium experience. The choir were delighted and excited to be among the singers selected to perform at the Millennium Dome Opening Celebrations on New Years Eve 1999. The audience of 10,000 included the Queen and Prince Phillip, the Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair among many celebrities, as well as people from all walks of life.

The Dome may have suffered since it's opening and may not be the best advert for government planning, but at the time it was an icon and to have been chosen for this auspicious occasion from all the male choirs in the U.K. is a tribute to an organisation committed to excellence, enjoyment and public service. We believe it is because we honour our commitments, never give anything less than 100% and always know our work..

Today the choir is as strong as ever and once again moving forward. During 2006 Rodney Jones retired as Musical Director and the choir committee appointed Huw Dunley as successor. While Rodney had in 20 years, taken the choir to new heights the time for change had come and new pastures beckoned for both. Now together with Aled Wyn Edwards as Deputy Conductor and Concert Accompanist, plus the ever faithful Eirlys as Rehearsal Accompanist the choir is pushing forward holding on to some of the traditional work, but looking to modernise where necessary.