



# BUCKINGHAM CHORAL SOCIETY – A SHORT HISTORY

In 1859, the *Advertiser* carried the advance notice that “Members of the Buckingham Amateur Philharmonic Society beg to announce their First Concert will be given in the Town Hall on Tuesday 20th December. Conductor J Platt, Leader A Nelson”. This concert also had the MP’s Sir H Verney and J G Hubbard as Patrons.

The comprehensive report of this concert by the *Advertiser* clearly wished to stress that the evening had been based upon local talent. “There has not been an entertainment of this kind in the town for many years where the whole of the performers were living in the place, and it is very evident that the Philharmonic Society possess all the elements for rendering it a thorough good Society”. The members of the Society, numbering upwards of forty, performed glees, duets, songs and choruses, supported by a band which played overtures and similar pieces.

One of the major influences in the development of the choral culture in Buckingham, though by no means the only one, was the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul. Four conductors of the emerging choral society between 1871 and 1896 were curates there.

On 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1866 the Buckingham Advertiser reported on a concert performed in Buckingham Town Hall which was in fact given in aid of adapting and re-constructing the Parish Church organ for its new position in the chancel aisle. The Parish Church choir did not take part in this notable choral event; the performers, professional and non-professional were from London, having been assembled for the occasion by the conductor, Dr. W. H Monk.

Dr. Monk, who had been Organist and Choirmaster of King’s College, London since 1849, is considered to be of considerable influence in establishing English music taste in Victorian times. He was the musical editor of the first edition of “Hymns Ancient and Modern”, published in 1861, a hymnal so successful that by 1869 it was used by one in four of London Churches. Later versions of the hymnal contain nearly sixty of Monk’s tunes, the most well-known being “All things Bright and Beautiful” and his Eventide setting to “Abide with Me”.

On 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1868 there was again a gathering of choirs in Buckingham Parish Church, numbering about 180 voices, taking part in a Choral Festival. The organist for this event was the Rev Louis Borissow, a curate at the Parish Church who was also closely involved with the National School. It was in March 1870 year that he organised “An Amateur Concert, involving the Parish Church Choir and several ladies and gentlemen of distinguished musical talent”. By November 1870 Louis Borissow had brought together the group which was called the Buckingham Amateur Musical Society.

However, it would appear that amateur choral singing in Buckingham inspired by Louis Borissow was not sustained, since no further activities of the Buckingham Amateur Musical Society are to be found in the *Advertiser* after 18 January 1873 and it was it was to take another 13 years before there was such a resuscitation.

The background to the actual revival is not recorded, but the *Advertiser* for 13 February, 1886 carried a rather flat announcement giving the “Terms of Membership of the Buckingham Musical Society (note the change of title). Patrons Subscription One Guinea, for which 4 tickets for reserved seats will be given for one concert. Singing Members Subscription, 2s - 6d per quarter. Applications to Hon. Sec Mr H Waters, Buckingham”.

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, the lack of activity by the Buckingham Musical Society was clearly of concern to some of its members and the search to find a new conductor finally ended in 1910. On 3<sup>rd</sup> November, a public meeting was held with the Vicar, the Rev P P Goldingham in the chair. One of the main speakers was Capt. J H Hooker, who stated his delight at learning the Rev J Lyon Bowley, Vicar of Hillesden, had consented to become the conductor. Comments were made on the existence of the Free Church Choral Union, and it was agreed that no opposition was intended for that choral group.

As might be expected, in the years of the First World War there were almost no choral concerts given but with the coming of peace in 1918 there was a great national resurgence of interest in music societies. In 1919 it was Charles Cantell who again took the initiative in Buckingham by suggesting the formation of a Peace Choir and with the co-operation of Rev. W H Saville, Vicar of Buckingham, a choir and orchestra of over 80 members was established. Concerts were given in the Market Square and the Town Hall, leading in November 1919 to the start of a series of five Town Hall concerts where the name of the Buckingham Musical Society was once again used, having incorporated the Peace Choir.

It was in 1926 that the first direct connection was made between the Stowe music staff and the Society. Charles Cantell, who had been leading the Society for seven years, felt obliged to resign due to severe eye trouble. Sidney Watson, a young assistant music master who had joined Stowe in 1925 was elected to replace Charles Cantell as conductor. In doing so he became the first of a considerable number of Stowe musicians during the next seven decades to lead the Society.

William Snowdon who was a young member of Stowe School Music staff and was conductor of the Society from 1932 to 1945, led the Society at the Buckingham & District Musical Festival in March 1933 to a resounding success, taking first place in all five contests. There can be little doubt that the Society at this time decided that it would give a high level of commitment towards performing well at the annual Musical Festival. Indeed in the nine years between 1930 - when the large choirs Festival Trophy was first introduced - and 1938, the Buckingham Musical Society was to win it six times. With the onset of war in 1945, it was inevitable that musical activities, as in the 1914-1918 period, would be somewhat curtailed. With Leslie Huggins away on military service, William Snowdon continued at Stowe, where there were still a small number of musical events during the war years 1939-45.

In October 1945 the Buckingham Advertiser carried an article headed "A Revival AGM of the Buckingham Musical Society". Charles Cantell presided at a meeting held at the Royal Latin School and Mr Garrett, Hon. Sec. referred to wartime conditions that prevented, in spite of efforts at revival, the continuance of the Society's activities.

The year 1946 clearly demonstrated that the Society was well and truly restored. In December 1947 a concert of Christmas Music was given in the Town Hall, which was to set a pattern for the next five years, with a programme of choruses and solos from "Messiah" and carols. The conductor was Leslie Huggins and the soloists were Lorna Pollard (soprano) and Gladys Caton (contralto), both members of the Society and Kenneth Tudor (bass) from the Westminster Abbey Choir. The Society began 1948 with Leslie Huggins conducting a concert version of "Merrie England". As with the previous performance of this work ten years earlier, the Society provided a number of the soloists.

The year of 1951 began sadly with the death on January 31<sup>st</sup> of Charles Cantell in his 79th year. His passing was front-page news in the Advertiser and the report was given the headlines "A Man of Many Parts - Musician, Alderman, Sportsman, Free Churchman". In a detailed obituary, reference was made to Charles Cantell being a self-taught musician, whose talents and initiative had made major contributions to both the Society and the District Musical Festival.

The Buckingham & District Music Festival was to be the last appearance of Teasdale Burke as conductor of the Society. His resignation due to pressure of work at Stowe brought to an end the longest fully active period of any of the Society's conductors thus far – from 1949 to 1958.

The next eight years – 1958 to 1966 -were to see four conductors all drawn from the music staff at Stowe who were to be, after Teasdale Burke's long tenure, relatively rapid replacements of each other.

Another surprising first was to occur in March 1965, namely a performance in Buckingham Parish Church of Mendelssohn's "Elijah". Though selected items from this work had over the years appeared in concerts, this was the first time that the Society had presented the complete oratorio.

The appointment of Terence James, who was due to join the musical staff at Stowe in September 1966, as the new conductor of the Society was confirmed at the AGM in June. Another notable event at the AGM was the retirement of Lily Moslin from the Society after nearly 40 years of service as deputy conductor and accompanist. Certainly the debut of Terry James, as he was often known, with the Society on 15 December 1966 in the Town Hall was something of an innovation, choosing as he did a concert performance of "Oklahoma", one of the most successful of musical shows by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

At the Society's AGM in June 1968 a number of significant decisions were taken including adopting a proposal by Arthur Cornish that the name of the Society be changed to the Buckingham and District Music Society.

*The Society continued performing as the Buckingham and District Music Society under a number of different conductors until 1995.*

On 31 May 1994, Geoffrey Allan Taylor became the Society's Répétiteur and over the next 15 years worked with the choir without missing a single rehearsal, sometimes taking rehearsals and conducting when the musical director was unable to be there. Geoffrey resigned his post in June 2009.

The arrival of John Davies as the new conductor in September 1995 brought to an end a very unsettled period for the Society and on 26 November 1995, John conducted the first concert of the re-named Buckingham Choral Society performing Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*.

Sadly in late August 1999, the Society's members were shocked to learn the news of his death as the result of an accident. Earlier in the same year, there was also sad news that Bruce Kershaw, also a conductor of the Society, had died of throat cancer.

The Society's "Millenium Concert" given on 4 December 1999 was the first to be conducted by Michael Ridley, who took on the post of Musical Director after John's death and who held the post until December 2008.

In January 2009, Julian Mann was appointed as the Society's 30<sup>th</sup> Musical Director. In November 2009, Craig Green, who is currently studying music at Oxford, was appointed as the Society's Répétiteur.

The Buckingham Choral Society - it has had several different names through the years – with its 30 Musical Directors during 150 years has been fortunate to have been led by dedicated and enthusiastic musicians. They have provided the local community of Buckingham, music lovers and singers over this time with a tremendously wide range of choral music and have continued to develop and achieve the highest musical standards of the Society during this time.

The Society looks forward to celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

The Society wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Aylesbury Vale Arts Council, the Aylesbury Vale Community Chest, Direct Legal and Collections, the Josephine Baker Trust.

The Society also wishes to acknowledge the continuing support of the University of Buckingham, The Rector and Churchwardens of Buckingham Parish Church, The Duke's Music, Buckingham Tourist Information Centre, Black Dog Design, Philips Print and all those who help and support the Society in the staging of concerts....

....And last, but not least, THANK YOU to all the members of the Society and your families, past and present, for all your hard work and commitment to "making music together".



## **MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS!**

### ***Lorna Pollard ne Lorna Small***

Lorna, aged 89 at the time of recording in 2009, was a member of the Society at the age of about 17 which means she has memories going back some 72 years.

Her father and sister were also members as was Gilbert Cantell and his father (they owned and ran a very high class grocers in West Street, Buckingham).

Lorna recalls:

"Four members (as Lorna Small - she still has the programme) represented Buckingham Choral Society to sing before the late King George V and Queen Mary for Royal Command performance to celebrate Empire Day at the Albert Hall in 1938.

No uniform was worn but smart dresses and men in dark suits. If you were singing solo, you would wear a white dress.

In 1948 they sang Merry England which was performed with Stowe Musical Society in the gym at Stowe. In 1939 they sang Bach's Peasant Cantata at Stowe and in her own words had a great time with all those boys!!

Handel's Messiah was performed in the gym at Stowe - this was sung most years - and they would rehearse in the Royal Latin School, Chandos Road, Buckingham.

Past musical directors were Dr. Huggins, Mr. Snowdon and Mr. Burke."

Laura sang for many years with the choir but then family commitments intervened.

Just out of interest, in the late '40's/early 50's, Laura and a small group sang "Linden Way" when BBC Radio's "Down Your Way" came to Buckingham (The White Hart Hotel) and later went to London to Broadcasting House to take part in Alivana Dell's programme and again sang "Linden Way".

Lorna's friend, Mabel Taylor was also a member of the choir. Mabel is the mother of Chris James, one of the Society's current members.