



Newsletter

January 2021

## Introduction

Kevin Ilsley

Another year! Where have the last twelve months gone to? This time last year we were getting reports of a viral illness that had broken out in China, which was worrying the authorities there so much that they were taking draconian measures to contain it. It all seemed so far away. Little did we suspect then that it would have such a profound effect on our lives.

One of the effects that the pandemic and the lockdowns has had on me is to distort my perception of time - a common phenomenon I gather. One season seems to merge with the next but occasionally there's a sudden change, a reminder that the year is rolling on. I woke up yesterday morning to find the scene outside the bedroom window reduced to monochrome. Snow had fallen in the night, carpeting the garden and lacing the boughs of the trees. The air was crisp and still. Nothing moved on our lane, which becomes impassable after the most modest snowfall. The virgin snow looked inviting, so Loo and I decided we'd set off for an early walk.

We live close to a section of the old Worcester to Leominster railway, which was completed in 1897 and closed in the 1950s. A local landowner was a shareholder, which might explain why there's a little station up the lane, which served the needs of his estate. As we passed, I found myself musing about the passage of time and wondering about the people who had set off from it. Did those estate workers whose names are on the war memorial at Bredenbury set off from here to fight in the Great War? How many of their comrades arrived back at the station on their way home? What sort of life did they return to? And then I remembered. They returned to a country gripped by a flu pandemic.

The “Spanish Flu” of 1918 didn’t start in Spain, but because of newspaper censorship, it was in neutral Spain that the outbreak was first reported. It caused the deaths of between 50 and 100 million people worldwide and about a quarter of a million deaths in Britain. Searching the internet, I came across a very interesting booklet written by Laura Mainwaring of the George Marshall Medical Museum in Worcester, “Worcestershire and the Spanish Flu”. Reading it, I was struck by many parallels with the current COVID-19 pandemic. The first wave of the Flu pandemic in the Spring of 1918 was relatively mild but the second wave in the Autumn was much more virulent. Doctors at the time did not know that the disease was caused by a virus, but the measures taken to try to contain it have a familiar ring. The Medical Officer of Health for Pershore advised anyone with a fever to stay at home and that people should avoid crowding together. Public gatherings were discouraged. If they did take place, the room should be left empty for half an hour to ensure full ventilation. Schools were closed. Local papers reported that nurses and doctors were overworked and many of them fell victim to the disease themselves, often with fatal results. Unlike the current pandemic, the Spanish flu was particularly dangerous for young adults. The public health measures at the time did not have much impact on the spread of the disease – perhaps because they were not generally followed? It was only after another two waves of the pandemic that the flu died out, probably as a result of the development of herd immunity.

What has any of this got to do with Malvern Festival Chorus? It was in 1919 that a group of friends got together in Malvern to form The Malvern Choral Society, the forerunner of our choir. They had survived a dreadful war. They were in the middle of a terrifying pandemic and must have been uncertain about their future. And yet they had the courage and the vision to lay the foundations of a choir that has thrived for a hundred years. As we face our own uncertain future, let us draw inspiration and hope from their resolve.

Kevin Ilsley, Chairman

January 26<sup>th</sup> 2021

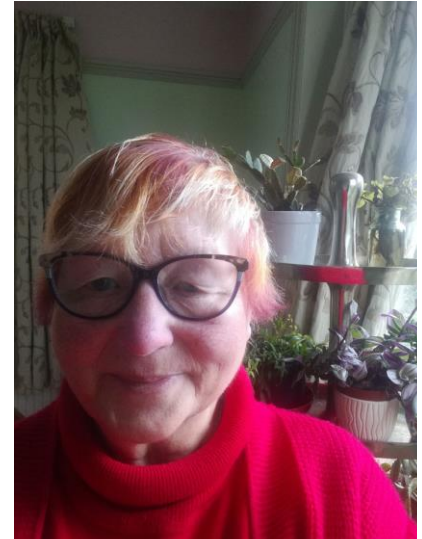
Malvern Festival Chorus has a dedicated Committee who each have different strengths and experiences. We work well together as a team. We are intending to run a series of articles in the newsletters, giving you a little more insight into the backgrounds of those of us who make up your committee, beginning with the person most new members meet first, our Membership Secretary, Joy.

Joy Black, Membership Secretary

### A totally unplanned career.

Mum and Dad were in rooms, so home alternated between Grandparents. Liverpool, was a cacophony of cousins [Mum was youngest of 13], the 'Ozonee' was considered good for my weak chest and Nana raised me as she had her own brood. Woolly knickers up to your chin and down to your knees, because 'kidneys run in the family'; chest wrapped in grease, with the chance of Vick thrown in winter; liberty bodices; knitted stockings held up by twisting a button in the tops; flannel petticoats; weekly DeWitt's liver pills that turned your wee bright blue; daily tablespoons of rose hip syrup; cod liver oil, Virol and flowers of sulphur in cabbage water in the spring to cleanse the blood; sticky lice and tiger nuts from Marie's on the corner and 3d left for Saturday cinema. No telly of course. Bathed once a week in the copper after the Monday wash, at night you used the gazunder and slid down the nearly vertical, highly polished lino covered stairs to the outside shared loo with next doors, next to the chickens, an electric light bulb on a wire strung across the yard from the kitchen, and furnished with Izal. Just half a mile from the Everton ground and the docks, we backed onto the railway sidings and mainline railway, with a back alley, a cobbled street and played on the bombed out remains of the rest of the road. No school, but church in the 'low welsh' tin chapel on the railway bridge three times on Sunday, which rattled when the Southport express roared under it, and long, long bouts of illness.

Joining my parents and younger sister in their brand new Brummie council flat I was a scrawny, illiterate 8 year old, playing with totally unsuitable objects, like kitchen knives for games of 'splits', hand-made spinning fire boxes, digging for 'treasure', climbing anything and able to dollytub and mangle clothes, blacklead stoves and holystone front steps. My appalled Mum sent me to school, where I was bullied for my Scouse accent and 'stupidity' and was permanently in fights or escaping over the school railings or back



gate. Managing to learn my clock, recite tables but not write/read, I was forcibly converted from being left-handed. Yet, thanks to a remarkable headteacher acting as my reader/ amanuensis, I gained a place at one of the newly erected Grammar schools, whose equally amazing head took me on. I finally learned to read and write when staring at a page, the word 'Pneumonia' literally stood up, glowing red, and I understood it. I have no way of explaining this - it just happened. I had an enjoyable but undistinguished secondary career, learnt to play rugby from two England internationals [Colin McFadyen and Sam Doble] for charity, sang, loved dance/ drama and was made Head girl, so that my Head could announce "Gels, if Joy can make it, any of you can".

Tertiary education started at the London West End Speech Therapy School, and was a disaster. I refused to conform to either dress code, or use of received pronunciation, and infuriated my principal by passing exams. I enjoyed practical dissection sessions with the medics, managed to strand myself on the street clutching a head when I went through the wrong door, lectures at Guy's but loathed going past the stuffed, preserved Jeremy Bentham in UCL. I enjoyed every minute of the student scene, especially the Opera and Gilbert and Sullivan society, learnt karate, was arrested on a protest march, convicted of public affray, resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer, after smacking him with my placard for hitting me with a truncheon, and biting the hand of one who was trying to wrestle me into a paddywagon. This conviction only took until I was 60 to be declared null! Dad a firm socialist was delighted, Mum mortified. Offered a place at Guildhall and RADA, thanks to a lecturer at the School, Dad wasn't having any daughter of his on the stage, so after my Principal and I came to an agreement about my degree [ passed, but not registered] I found myself in the Civil Service assigned to the Fraud section of the Ministry for Works and Pensions. An interesting and varied job, it included being mistaken for a rival hooker on a 'stakeout', and worked over by her pimp; dragged across desks by VERY large gentlemen for daring to suggest that the signature on the 'lost but cashed' Giro could be theirs, finding my window cleaner was a guy I was prosecuting for fraudulent 'disabled' claims, and trying to sort out which Singh belonged to which 3p stamp from the Smethwick foundries during the 3day week. As trades union rep for Birmingham, eventually Midlands trainer for branch reps, I declined a place to read Trades Union studies, and after a lot of soul searching, surprised everyone, including me, by loving life as an auxiliary on a psycho-

geriatric ward, introducing me to amazing people, with phenomenal stories behind them. After my SRN, I became senior sister on the same ward, got married, started lecturing in the school of nursing on care of the elderly and eventually gave up after having child number 3. We moved to Malvern with our 4 small children on the recommendation of eldest son's asthma specialist 32 years ago. Here I returned to the faith I had left, disillusioned, in my early 20s. This also reintroduced me to singing, and I eventually joined MFC thanks to the persistence of John Price. Prompted by hubby, desperate for me not to go back into nursing, I eventually took a second degree at Worcester [BSc, Hons] and moved into science secondary teaching at what was then a rough, failing school on the outskirts of Hereford where every other school sent their undesirables. Here my background was a definite plus, though I admit that having a pistol fired into my lab by a tanked-up kid was a first, as were kids who insisted on being known as Maggot or Fat B\*\*\*\*\*d, parents threatening to reverse their 10 wheeled truck into my lab for setting homework and finding kids were late because they'd spent the night searching the streets for their addict mum. I loved teaching this bunch of very needy, vulnerable kids, and am still in touch with about 20 of them. You felt you could sometimes make a real difference. I later moved on to John Masefield High School in Ledbury - a very different school - to be Head of Year, but still teaching and a place I became very fond of, making good friends and retiring 5 years ago. Like all of us, I am still on my life adventure, and looking forward to seeing what the future brings.

Joy Black

January 2021

### **The Parable of the Lost Tenor**

And it came to pass in those days that the time of the choir concert drew nigh.

Wherefore, the master of the choristers took thought, saying, "Where is he that was called my principal tenor? For verily, there have been many Sabbaths, yea, and many new moons, yet we have seen him not."

But the next day, lo, there came the tenor and stood in their midst.

And when the master of the choristers beheld him, he ran and fell on his neck and all but kissed him, saying. "Mine eyes have beheld our salvation. These many days have

we sorrowing sought thee, and knew not what might have befallen thee. Now, I beseech thee, lift up thine eyes and behold the calendar; for verily, the time is at hand that our concert be delivered; do thou, therefore, come up to my dwelling this very night, and thy hand-maiden with thee, and ye shall sup with me and we shall gather round our stringed instrument and dwell upon some of the more exalted passages in the music.”

And it came to pass as he foretold.

But when the sopranos heard it, they murmured, saying, “These many years have we served thee and thy precious concerts and thou didst never bruise for us the juice of the coffee bean nor offer us the salvation of an acid drop. But when thy principal tenor, so called, is come, who has wasted his substance at bridge clubs, dog-tracks and riotous living, thou hast brought forth the potted meat and the schhplashing syphon; and the noise of feasting and screeching hath kept awake the whole land.”

And the master of the choristers spake unto one of the number, the principal soprano, being the damsel that was wont to sing the topmost notes; “Daughter, thou art ever with me, and the front seat is forever thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: There is more joy over one tenor that showeth up occasionally than over ninety and nine just sopranos which dwell in the temple. Rejoice with me; for I have found the part which I had lost.”

Thank you to **Marion Couston** for sharing this article from the  
Glasgow Society of Organists, 1939.

### **Dates for your diary**

Tuesday evenings 7.15 for 7.30pm

Zoom rehearsals

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> February

Half Term, Zoom Social Evening, details to follow.

**Bridget Corlett, Music Librarian**

I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year.

Our family's plans changed late in December and I am sure a lot of you had similar experiences. We had a pleasant and quieter Christmas than normal, with only one daughter home instead of two.

The Committee have held their first Committee meeting of the New Year, we continue to keep ourselves updated on how medical advice, the vaccination programme, and the rules and regulations effect our programming for the future.

We have heard that a few of the membership have already had their first vaccinations, which is good news.

We have begun rehearsing Brahms' Liebeslieder Love Song Waltzes opus 52 via Zoom with Jonathan and Penny. The music is lovely. Some people have printed their own copies from the link Barbara sent out on 4<sup>th</sup> January and some people have their own scores. If you would like to join in, and are having difficulty obtaining a score, please get in touch.

Please could you look after your Armed Man and Nelson Mass scores until we are able to arrange a safe handover.

The Committee would like to wish all of you a very Happy, Healthy and Safe New Year.

Take care,

Bridget

January 2021

### **Editor's note**

Thank you once again to all the contributors.

We are intending that future newsletters will follow. I would be most grateful for any articles or links to information you think other members would be interested in.

I hope you enjoy the Film emoji quiz.

Bridget

[bridget.corlett@btinternet.com](mailto:bridget.corlett@btinternet.com)

# Film Emoji Quiz

