



The choir's beginning stemmed from a number of Club members sitting round the piano and harmonising. This was in the winter months November and December of 1945. Some of the favourite tunes and songs were the Psalm tune Crimmond, Lily of Laguna and Moonlight Bay.

Early in 1946 enthusiasm was high and it was thought that a choir could be formed. Harry Reid an ex head master agreed to control the group. The pianist

Guy Brownlie was a very able musician and could sit and play a large selection of songs. Jimmy Wilson was the first president of the choir and worked unstintingly for many years to keep the choir going. Some of the names of the first choir members were John McClements, Jimmy Colquhoun, Jimmy Francey, Jimmy King, Nicky Collins, James C Sweet, Willie Black, Jim Anderson, Bob Smellie, Davie Syme and Harry Walker. John McClements a past president of the Bowling Club provided accommodation for the choir's first few meetings as the club house was busy and not suitable for a Choir Practice. This new accommodation was the Hamilton Co-op Bakery where John was a foreman baker.

The choir then moved to a room in Townhead Street School (Barncluith) and then later on to Beckford Street School where they had the use of a piano. (What had they used up until now). After alterations to the club house the Choir were eventually allowed back there and have been practising there for many years.

Recently when alterations were being carried out to the club house and when the choir needed extra rehearsal time due to our commitment to the Scottish Massed Male Voice Choir Engagements, another venue had to be found and the Choir are much indebted to Hamilton North Church for providing the use of their halls.

The aims of the choir were to entertain local groups and help others raise funds. Even today these aims are still the same. Harry Reid the first conductor handed over to Wm. Shields in 1955. Willie gave great service to the Choir until 1980 when he gave up after the passing away of his wife. The next conductor was a young man Duncan McKay who brought a new dimension to the choir. Duncan had to give up the choir due to his studies and a new conductor was sought. Sam McIntyre from Stonehouse took over the baton in 1981 and kept the choir going until due to his wife's illness Sam had to give up in 1986. Our present conductor is William Barr one member of a very talented musical family. More of William later.

The choir have been served well by a number of pianists who have worked well and loyally. Each have displayed remarkable talents in their own right. As stated earlier Guy Brownlie was the first pianist. Others who come to mind are Harry Reid's daughter, Miss Sheena Todd, Mrs Anne Welsh, Miss McKay, Mrs Cathy Donaldson, Miss Marian Marshall and now Mrs Irene Hamilton.

Only two presidents have been in charge of the choir, firstly Jimmy Wilson and at present Bob Campbell. Timmy Wilson eventually became the first Honorary President and when he died the members decided not to appoint another one, until just recently. Harry Walker was honoured by becoming the Second Hon. President to mark his long association. Bob Campbell became President in 1979 and like his predecessor has worked unstintingly for the choir. Bob very rarely misses a practice or concert, and looks on the choir as his boys.

The choir's secretaries (important members of choir) over the years have been James Anderson, George Bennet, Hugh Connor, Ebby Clark and Jack McCulloch. Dedication from each of these gentlemen has assured that the choir has always been where and when they should have been. They also record minutes of many meetings, they are worth their weight in gold and the choir past and present owe much of our success to these gentlemen.

Over the years another group of dedicated men have kept the financial affairs of the choir in order. Men like Nicky Collins, John Walker and now William Reid are due a special thanks for their good work.

Over the years the choir have attempted to entertain and many organisations have benefited from the fund raising efforts which the choir have voluntarily given. Many local churches, Old People's organisations, Hospitals and other charitable organisations have been visited. In addition to the local venues the choir have travelled to Largs, City Halls Glasgow, Pennicuik, Tullyallan, Crieff and recently visited the New Glasgow Concert Hall.

Never at any time has the choir set out to make a profit, quite the reverse, they always help others to raise funds. It says a lot for the members of the choir as they dig deep into their own pockets on many occasions in order to help worthy causes.

Guest artists have added to the entertainment of the concert party and over the years the choir have been very fortunate with the calibre of singers and musicians who have willingly entertained. Some of these artists are Mrs J Baird, Mrs Mary McDowal, The Double E's, Elspeth Alan and Elizabeth McCauley and Mrs McGuinness. Accordionists David Cormack, Kenneth Muirhead, Colin Menzies, Gary Woods, David Martin, Cameron Barr and Peter Jardine. Cellist Alan Barr has also thrilled audiences and choir alike. Possibly the most famous guest artist the choir have had the privilege of singing with was Miss Helen McArthur at a concert in Larkhall. The choir concert party over the years have had some elocutionists and humorous readers a few who come to mind are Mrs Addie Johnstone the wife of one of our early choir members, Mr Alan Dobbie and Mr James Allan both of these gentlemen were enthusiastic choir members.

The choir itself have had many fine solo singers, Alec Currie, John McClements, James Sweet, Walter McKenzie, Tom Blackwood, Bob Nelson, Mark Alan, Findlay Symington, John French, Harry Webster, Tom Dobson, John Cannon and our present Conductor has also sung solo and duets with his brother Campbell, who is deputy conductor and pianist, John Young, Robert Smith, Armour Morrow, George Steven, Billy Leggate have sung duets and in quartets and George Currie has also sung solo on a few occasions.

The Choir concert party for years now has included Mr Magic himself George Piggot. George has added to the entertainment value of our outings and no words can ever show our appreciation to George. The choir are deeply indebted to George for his sterling service over the years.

The choir have been enthusiastic members of the Lanarkshire Male Voice Festival and have taken part in the Annual Festival held in Hamilton Town Hall for over Forty Years.

The Choirs who take part in the Festival have started a new venture last year (1994) this is a Service of Praise which will be held in churches throughout Lanarkshire on rotation. The first event was held in Park Church Uddingston and the Second will be held in Broomknoll Church Airdrie. It is hoped that this new venture will become a popular event.

Recently in 1993 the Choir were invited to join the Scottish Massed Male Voice Choir to sing in concert in the New Concert Hall in Glasgow. This was an exciting experience and the choir are indebted to our present conductor William Barr for the painstaking way he has moulded the choir, which in turn has improved the quality of singing of the choir, so much so that we have now become a regular part of the Scottish Massed Male Voice Choir. In February 1996 we have once again been invited to join the Scottish Massed Choir for a Concert which will celebrate the Bi Centenary of Robert Burns.

The Choir over its 50 years have also helped the Bowling club itself raise funds and in the early years when alterations to the club were suggested the choir were asked and willingly gave concerts to raise funds for the work which was being undertaken. Prior to the Bowling Club's Centenary year the Choir gave a concert in Cadzow Parish Church after which a Cheque for £700 was presented to the Club. The Choir and Club's thanks go to Jim Spreckley for his mammoth effort in raising such a large sum.

The ladies section of the Bowling Club also on many occasions benefited by the Choir's annual Concerts for their cancer appeal. These concerts helped the ladies raise much needed funds for this very worthwhile cause.

The Hamilton Caledonian Bowling Club which we are proud to be part of celebrated their Centenary in 1991 and the Choir were delighted to be asked to lead the praise in a dedication service in Hamilton Old Parish Church. The Ladies Section celebrated their 50th Anniversary this year 1995 and the choir once again led the praise in the same church.

A tape recording was produced by the Choir in 1988 and was sold by choir members. Copies of this tape travelled to far off destinations such as Australia, Canada and South Africa. It is hoped that in the not too distant future another tape will be produced.

To raise funds for our 50th Anniversary the members have held Christmas Draws where a Hamper of groceries and goodies all donated by the members themselves is the first prize and various other prizes all donated by Members and friends.

A number of Quiz nights have also brought in a considerable amount of money, and a concert given by Choir member John Cannon and his friends has added to our fund.

With the help of our Conductor Wm. Barr, Tom McKinney and The Bank of Scotland the Choir have instigated a competition for students of the Royal College of Music and Drama to write suitable pieces for Male Voice Choirs. The outcome will be known later in 1995 and the Choir will be asked to perform the winning piece.

It is hoped that a number of events will be held to celebrate our 50 years. Possibly a party where as many current choir members and past members will be able to attend and a dinner to finish off our celebrations will take place.

A number of people have worked hard to plan and raise funds for our special year and are due the thanks of all members past and present. People like Wm. Barr, Tom McKinney, Jim Spreckley, Tom Steed, John Cannon and Gavin Lawson and to all others who have helped, many thanks.

There are many other stories which may be recorded in the history of the choir when we celebrate our 100th year.

Hon. President Harry Walker the only living original choir member has been a tremendous help in the research of the History of the Choir as was the late Andrew Jackson who was deputy conductor and a staunch choir member for many years, and our grateful thanks are given to them.

The choir over the past 50 years have travelled many miles, brought happiness to many people and have gained many friends on their musical sojourn, we the members of the present hope that the members of the future can be as happy and successful as those of the past.

INTERESTING SNIPPETS AND ANECDOTES

Conductor William Barr since he joined the Choir has been introduced to audiences by concert organisers as William Park, William Orr, Ben Hall, and I don't know his name but it is a 4 lettered word etc. but always takes it in good part and sees the funny side of the mistakes.

At a concert in Bellshill for a Group of O.A.P.'s (sorry Senior Citizens) on a cold snowy winter's evening about 29 in the concert party entertained about 14 or 15 of an audience.

A Church Concert in Tollcross created a headache for the Conductor and Choir, when because of illness the choir pianist called off.

Conductor William Barr after many unsuccessful phone calls, phoned the church to see if anyone there could help, was informed that there may be someone coming to the concert who may be able to accompany the choir. A young lady bravely took up the challenge and performed very well indeed, much to all our relief especially the conductor.

More recently the choir were invited to join the Glasgow Mayfest Choir to perform in the Sheds in Govan. The occasion was to welcome home Donny Burns (a Hamilton Lad) and his Latin American Dancing partner Gayner Fairweather after another successful World Latin American Championship. The Choir bravely practised (in Latin) the chosen piece of music, only to find that the total length of time they would be singing was no more than 2 minutes. On the brighter side, the choir can always boast that they sang with the Andy Ross Dance Band.

A concert in Kirklands Hospital Bothwell created problems for the Choir. The evening in question the Choir members congregated at the club house and left in convoy for Bothwell, unfortunately a very thick fog caused problems for the drivers and the concert had to be delayed for about 45 minutes until all the choir arrived. Search parties had to be sent out to find a few of the cars.

Normally after the choir have performed a concert they are treated to a cup of tea or coffee and many scrumptious goodies and our President Bob Campbell in his thank you remarks to the organisers and providers, says, that if you look at the empty tables you will realise that the choir can do more than sing. How true these remarks are.

Conductor William Barr is renowned for telling funny stories (well he thinks they are) some are. One of William's quips is that the choir have been practising now for 50 years and they are going to keep on practising until they get something right (I think we are not far away from that time now. ed.)