

INTRODUCING THE BROCKENHURST CHOIR

The choir's roots go back to 1963 when a group of singers and Sunday School children from the Methodist and Parish Churches collaborated on a Christmas mime and carol concert devised by Davena Hinton. It was a great success and enthusiasm grew to create a more permanent mixed choir. Ivy Bradley, the organist for the concert, agreed to be the founding conductor, and it was agreed to call the group of singers THE BROCKENHURST VILLAGE CHOIR.

1964: Inaugural concert Haydn's 'Creation' in the Brockenhurst Methodist Hall. In the ten years until Ivy Bradley retired, the choir's repertoire expanded to include major choral works and very popular Christmas concerts, several in collaboration with Marchwood Brass. The choir also gave concert performances of The Pirates of Penzance, The Mikado and The Gondoliers.

1973: Jane Fish appointed conductor. Under her baton, the choir consolidated its reputation for excellent concerts most notably the collaboration with Miriam Newton of Brockenhurst College in presenting the complex Leonard Bernstein Mass with well over a hundred performers. Other collaborations included concerts at Wimborne Minster, St. John's Church, Boscombe and All Saints Church, Mudeford.

1989: 25th anniversary performance of Haydn's 'Creation'

1994: On Jane's retirement, Glyn Evans acted as interim conductor pending the appointment of Geraldine McDonnell. Under her wing the choir had three outings with Carl Orff's 'Carmina Burana' - at the Winter Gardens in Bournemouth as well as Brockenhurst College and on a later occasion with Southampton Choral Union at the Guildhall in Southampton. Even more challenging was the massive Beethoven Choral Symphony with two performances in Christchurch Priory and St. Mary's Church Dorchester.

1999: Ian Harrison succeeded Geraldine McDonnell for a short period to take the choir into

2000, the Spring concert of which featured a young man by the name of Gareth Malone singing tenor solos in works by Handel and Haydn. The choir's programme for the turn of the century included a concert for the Brockenhurst Millennium celebrations and the special Millennium Christmas concert featuring 'A Christmas Cantata' by Geoffrey Bush.

2001: Geraldine McDonnell returned and presented the choir with the challenge of Benjamin Britten's 'St. Nicolas'. Her final concert that year was a special summer concert of folk songs including several from her Irish homeland. Trevor Selby (who, like Ian Harrison, often accompanied the choir for concerts on the organ) was the conductor for the Christmas concert that year.

2002: The choir welcomed Paul Colman as music director and his first concert was celebratory music for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Year. The year was also notable as members voted to change the name from Brockenhurst Village Choir to THE BROCKENHURST CHOIR.

2004: The choir celebrated its 40th anniversary with a performance of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' - a special guest for the evening was Jane Fish the choir's director 1973-1994. The following year the choir performed Karl Jenkins' 'The Armed Man' to much acclaim.

2007: In December, the choir held its 100th concert and over the next few years the choir's repertoire was further enhanced under Paul's baton with performances of 'Hiawatha's Wedding Feast' by Coleridge Taylor, Lambert's 'Rio Grande' and a performance of the Missa Luba African mass.

2010: On Paul's departure, Miriam Newton was appointed director of music continuing the tradition of expert musicianship which the choir had enjoyed since its inception. Her debut concert with us was Handel's 'Messiah' followed by programmes of challenging and exciting works from Bach's 'Mass in B Minor' to opera choruses.

2014: The complex 'Israel in Egypt' by Handel was chosen to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the choir in preparation for which Miriam organised a master workshop with renowned authority Will Dawes. This was the first of several workshops – 2015 Neil Ferris covered Rossini's 'Petite Mess Solenne', 2018 Joanna Tomlinson gave a masterclass on Vaughan Williams' 'Sea Symphony' which the choir performed in conjunction with Total Voice Chamber Choir and Westbourne Orchestra at St. Ambrose Church, Westbourne. In 2019 for the Brahms' 'German Requiem' a workshop was held with Max Barley, and for the performance Ian Farrington's excellent Chamber Orchestra enabled a mainstream 19th century work to be tackled with orchestral accompaniment.

2019: For Miriam's farewell concert on November 30th she selected a mixed programme of music for Advent including Rutter's 'Gloria' and Parry's 'Blessed Pair of Sirens'. The Kneller Brass Ensemble added to an evening of fanfare, quality singing and audience enjoyment befitting the end of her tenure and undoubted contribution to the success of the Brockenhurst Choir.

2020: The choir welcomed Craig Lawton as their new music director. Rehearsals had just begun for the Spring concert and then came the disruption of the pandemic, Covid-19, with all choir activities throughout the country prohibited. The choir did not resume rehearsals until late 2021. Craig's first concert as our new music director was therefore not until 4th December with a concert of Music for Christmas.

Details of all concerts performed by the Brockenhurst Choir are available on the website.