

## Snowdown Colliery Welfare Male Voice Choir

Snowdown Colliery Welfare MVC was founded in 1929 by mineworkers coming to Kent from Wales and elsewhere. As the sole surviving Kent colliery choir, our history recognises the dedication of members over decades. The colliery closed in 1987 but the Choir flourishes still, with members coming from varied backgrounds and a wide area. We are proud of our Welsh tradition, staging a biennial St David's Day concert, and participating regularly in the massed choir concerts at the Royal Albert Hall organised by the Welsh Association of Male Choirs including this year's event.

We also retain strong links to mining. In 2012, we partnered with the local Snowdown and Betteshanger Colliery Brass Bands to stage a major concert to mark the centenary of coal being mined in Kent, while the following year we sang at the Folkestone screening of the film "The Miners Hymns". Also, as one of our more unusual ventures, in 2010 we accepted a commission for "The Sounds Beneath", an audiovisual work set in a disused colliery under direction of the internationally recognised Mikhail Karikis. In this work, which 8 years on is still being screened all over the world (including Paris, Warsaw and Melbourne), the Choir recreated with voice the subterranean sounds of a mine.

Most concerts are local but we also regularly tour the UK. Our 2017 tour under the banner "*Snowdown in Snowdonia*" took us to North Wales where we sang joint events with Côt Meibion Colwyn and Hogia'r Ddwylan MVC, and also performed at Electric Mountain and (500ft underground!) at Llechwedd Slate Caverns. In addition, we have frequently sung in France (including Bruay-les-Mines, Reims, Moutiers, Eurodisney and most recently Air Sur La Lys) and the Netherlands (with Winterswijk, Deja Vue and Baarns Mannenkoor Choirs). We have also participated in many special events, including a massed concert in Croydon to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of H.M. Queen Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>, a special concert in Reims to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reims-Canterbury Twinning Association, participation in Songs Of Praise from Canterbury Cathedral and - last but not least - singing in front of nearly 20,000 people to support the Olympic Torch relay through Dover before the 2012 Olympic Games! In 2015, we appeared in the Cornwall International MVC Festival (the largest in Europe) and also at a Gala Concert at The Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury, as Special Guests of the Morryston Orpheus, one of the most famous MVCs in the world.

We have a busy programme this year. In addition to the Welsh Association concert at the Royal Albert Hall (May), we will be taking part in the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate, Ypres (November), as well as fulfilling a large programme of local events. In 2019, we will sing again with Morryston Orpheus, this time in South Wales, as part of our 90th anniversary celebrations.

Overall, we present about 20 concerts each year and also volunteer monthly in a Silver Song Club to promote social inclusion. Finally, we run schools workshops aimed at sharing with children how a choir works, helping to maintain an awareness of MVC tradition and maybe - who knows - "growing" new members!

### **Musical Director - Michael Lewis M.Mus, FRCO (CHM)**

Michael is a 'Man of Kent', born at Tenterden and brought up near Ashford. His love of music - particularly of choral and organ music - developed as a boy singing in his local church choir. This eventually led to a thirty-year career as a school music teacher. In 1975, whilst also Organist and Choirmaster at Ashford Parish Church, Michael gained the F.R.C.O., and the same year was the prizewinner in the Royal College of Organists' Choir Training Diploma. In 2007, he completed a Masters degree, working with the composer Paul Patterson. Michael is a widely experienced choral director, having worked with various school and church choirs as well as with Kent Youth Choir, Kent Youth Singers and several local choral societies. In 1997, following his retirement from teaching, Michael took over the musical directorship of Snowdown Colliery Welfare MVC and has now directed the Choir in more than 350 concerts, including in 1999 to runners-up position at the Miners' Eisteddfod in Porthcawl. From 2005 until 2012, Michael was also Musical Director of the Dover Choral Society. In addition to conducting commitments, he is a freelance organist and prolific

composer. Snowdown Colliery Welfare MVC performs several of Michael's compositions and arrangements.

**Accompanist - Aileen Dickson B.Ed (Hons), LTCL (pianoforte), LTCL (Music Ed)**

Aileen has been an accompanist for Snowdown Colliery Welfare MVC since 1994. Throughout her career in education, she has been involved in a wide range of musical activities. Currently her interests include studying contemporary piano pieces in order to expand her repertoire of music by modern and post modern composers, accompanying adult choirs, leading social singing groups for elderly people and performing in a local folk band.

**Accompanist - Gerard Ahern BA (Hons)**

Gerard studied piano, organ and violin while at school in Canterbury, before taking a degree in Music at Oxford University. He has subsequently performed in orchestras and string ensembles, worked for many years as a church organist, given organ recitals and arranged music for theatre and dance schools and accompanied soloists, numerous singing groups and choirs, mainly in the Canterbury area. He joined Snowdown Colliery Welfare MVC in 2016.

David Rance  
Concert Secretary, Snowdown Colliery Welfare MVC