

# TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



## TOUR OF BERLIN 2012

By Dean Powell, Publicity Officer  
& Honorary Archivist

# **TOUR OF BERLIN, GERMANY**

## **February 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> 2012**

Willkommen! Over the years many of the Treorchy Male Choir members have been employed by the Royal Mint, based at neighbouring Llantrisant since 1968 following more than a thousand years of coin making at the Tower of London. In 2011 a small group of choristers, who generally attend weddings, funerals and minor events as a representation of the Treorchy Male Choir, were invited to visit the Mint's first Open Day for families and friends of employees. At that particular event a Guinness World Record took place for the largest coin toss and the choristers, known as "The Minstrels" provided the afternoon entertainment for the many thousands of visitors. Officials from the Mint were so impressed with the Choir's contribution to the success of the day that they promised to employ their services again in the future.

In the latter months of 2011 the Choir's Publicity Officer & Honorary Archivist Dean Powell who organises events for "The Minstrels" was approached by Royal Mint Events Organiser Rochelle Evans with the proposal of transporting a section of the Choir to Berlin, Germany for a performance at the prestigious 41<sup>st</sup> Annual World Money Fair. Each year, about 15,000 visitors indulge in the special atmosphere of this renowned numismatic show. Here, everyone finds what they are looking for: professional exchange with mints, national banks, technical suppliers or coin dealers. An unrivalled assortment from classical through modern numismatics, including medals, tokens, historic bank notes, and stocks and bonds are all on show.

Unfortunately the Royal Mint was not in a position to transport the entire Choir to this event. However, it was felt that a small contingency could undertake the weekend visit to the German capital in the hope of making such an outstanding impression that future events and possible tours could be forthcoming for the entire Choir. It was with this in mind that it was agreed to invite all regular members of "The Minstrels" along with any current Royal Mint employees who are also members of the Choir. It was on this basis that thirty choristers were invited to undertake the all-expenses paid trip, along with both the Conductor Janice Ball and Accompanist Helen Roberts of the Choir. With many months of planning taking place between the Royal Mint and Dean the unforgettable weekend visit was finally upon them!

### **Thursday February 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Following the twice-weekly rehearsal at Treorchy Primary School, many choristers ventured home to pack their last minute belongings and head to Treherbert RFC Clubhouse on Wyndham Street for pre-tour refreshments. The greater majority of the travellers gathered there laden with luggage, cameras and passport in hand. Several drinks were consumed as the excited choristers prepared to embark on the Choir's first ever visit to Germany. Daryl Stacey also resumed his position as Captain of the "Clec" Committee to make note of those who made the biggest 'gaffs' on tour! All uncertain as to what to

expect, and how a thirty-chorister group would sound to the international audience that awaited them, the choristers were eager and slightly apprehensive about what lie ahead.

### **Friday February 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Shortly after midnight choristers boarded the Edwards Coach outside Treherbert RFC and headed down the frosty Rhondda Fawr to pick up the remaining members of the tour. On reaching the Royal Mint, Conductor Janice Ball and Accompanist Helen Roberts, greeted them and boarded the coach headed for Luton Airport. A lengthy journey was before them as they travelled through the night, making a short stop at Reading Service Station before reaching Luton. The party of thirty-two, led by Dean, deposited their luggage at the Easyjet desk and enjoyed an hour's relaxation in the airport's departure lounge before boarding the Easyjet Airbus A319 bound for Berlin's Schoenefeld International Airport a total of 591 miles away. A 1hour 30minute flight ensued before the group landed for the first time on German soil. A VIP International Coach awaited their arrival and the party of singers began their journey through the snow-covered landscape into the city of Berlin.

Surrounded by lakes, rivers and forests, Berlin is largely a modern-looking city as the greater majority of the buildings were destroyed by Allied forces during World War II. With few remnants of pre-1939 structures to be seen, the city has a contemporary look about it, although the impact of the Berlin Wall creating the east / west divide is still clear for all to see. While Communist influences are visible with the largely grey concrete structures on the east, the west has a modern appeal as exemplified by the 365-metre tall Fernsehturm television tower, built by the German Democratic Republic which soars above the city. This was the first sight of Berlin witnessed by the Treorchy party as they entered the city. It was on the approach to the hotel that they were reminded of the consequences of World War II and the Cold War with the largest section of Berlin Wall that still exists, now an outdoor art gallery.

At 11.30am (German time) the group arrived at the Hotel Ibis Berlin Mitte on Prezlauer Allee and were soon booked into their twin rooms. Many of the choristers took the opportunity relax in the hotel, sleep for a few hours, or possibly venture out into the cold, icy and snow-filled conditions of that section of the city for food and refreshments. At 4.30pm the group reunited in the hotel restaurant for an hour-long rehearsal with Jan and Helen, armed with the mini electric keyboard! Following rehearsals it was time to board the VIP International Coach with a new member of the group, a Beefeater – or Yeoman Warder as they are properly known - from the Tower of London who was also participating in the evening's festivities.

A short journey led the group further into the former East Berlin as heavy snow continued to fall all around and the sub-zero temperatures reached a staggering -12 degrees. Eventually they reached Kosmos Conference Centre, once the largest cinema in Germany which could seat 1,001 people for any one showing! Now a state-of-the-art conference facility with a large main hall,

the choristers were welcomed by Jamie Newton of the Royal Mint who showed the choristers to their rather chilly dressing rooms.

The group then entered the magnificent main hall, converted into a dining facility for the evening. The elegantly decorated ballroom-effect, complete with tables and chairs for three-hundred guests, also included a low stage with a white upright piano and music stand. Choristers took their places for a short rehearsal and were officially welcomed to Berlin by Jamie and the team. As the guests of honour of the evening, the Choir was planned to appear as a total surprise for the international audience and therefore were hidden back stage for several hours where they enjoyed refreshments, dinner and plenty of typical fun and banter between them. It was there that they were also greeted by Adam Lawrence, the Chief Executive of the Royal Mint and Mike Davies, Chairman of the Royal Mint who thanked them for agreeing to undertake the visit to Germany as ambassadors of song.

At 9.40pm prompt the Choir lined up and marched onto the stage to rapturous applause. What faced them was 293 dinner guests representing more than 20 countries, all VIPs of the Royal Mint who were this year's Guests of Honour of the World Money Fair Berlin Gala Dinner. The audience largely consisted of Ambassadors for individual countries, Chief Executives of various Mints from around the world along with leading financiers and influential business people. Such a multi-cultural audience, many of whom had probably never heard a Welsh Choir before, were clearly in for an evening to remember. They had already enjoyed a "taste" of Great Britain with the performance of a Scottish bagpipe player and the majestic appearance of the Beefeater himself. What they weren't prepared for was the outstanding performance of members of the Treorchy Male Choir.

Dean Powell performed his duties as Compere to the international crowd before him. The thirty choristers gave of their very best, performing to the highest possible standard worthy of the name Treorchy. Conducted by Janice Ball and Accompanied by Helen Roberts, the evening was set! What few realised was the surprise in store! As Dean opened the evening with a mixture of Welsh and English introductions, he then invited "Herr" Daryl Stacey to walk forward and address the audience in German! Daryl served in Germany in the Royal Air Force and was last in Berlin fifty years ago that month. He certainly received a very warm applause from the impressed audience and Choir alike!

For the first section of the concert the Choir performed:

Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau

Calon Lan (The Rose)  
Llef

Adiemus  
Delilah

The President of the World Money Fair Hans-Henning Gohrum then came on stage to thank the members for their contribution that received such tremendous applause from a clearly enthralled audience. A short interval followed where choristers changed into their black shirts and suits. During the intervening period they were congratulated in the strongest of terms by Andrew Noble, Minister and Deputy Head of Mission and Consul General at the British Embassy in Berlin was ecstatic by the performance and hoped the Choir would one day join him as his guests of honour at the British Embassy.

Shortly the second half of the concert began and included:

You Raise Me Up  
What Would I Do Without My Music

Let It Be Me  
This is The Moment

Muss I Denn  
My Way  
Nessun Dorma

At this point the Choir received a tumultuous applause and standing ovation from the international audience who were absolutely thrilled by the standard of musicality from the small group of singers. Impressed by the reaction from the audience, the Choir continued with two more items:

Senzenina (soloist Dean Powell)  
Men of Harlech

Again thunderous applause followed their performance and the President of the World Money Fair again came on stage to congratulate the singers. He also introduced the Chief Executive of the French Mint who will be Guests of Honour for the 2013 Fair. As a special request, the Choir then sang "Divine Brahma" from Bizet's "Pearlfishers" before leaving the stage with the sound of applause ringing in the ears.

Back stage the choristers were surrounded by the leading staff of the Royal Mint, including Events Organiser Rochelle Evans who was instrumental in making the entire event possible. The choristers found themselves showered with compliments at their contribution to the evening had been truly outstanding and resulted in the first standing ovation witnessed at this celebrated occasion. Dean was also invited back into the dining hall to be introduced to the Managing Director of the World Money Fair Barbara Balz and Director of the German Mint Dr Peter Huber who both expressed their admiration for the performance of the Choir and their gratitude to every member for making their evening so unforgettable.

It was with great pride and deep satisfaction that the choristers returned to the coach following the performance and returned to the Hotel Ibis. They had certainly made a great impression on each and every guest, many from USA,

Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Japan, China and South America. On arriving at the Hotel the celebrations continued until the early hours with free drinks all around. Chorister Nick Jenkins gave an extended speech to the group to thank Dean for his excellent skills as organiser and presented him with a bottle of champagne. The evening proved another success and a memorable time was had by all.

### **Saturday February 4<sup>th</sup>**

Choristers gradually appeared at the hotel restaurant for breakfast, all slightly bleary-eyed from what had been a very long, yet hugely successful day. Heavy snow and ice continued to cover the landscape around them as they boarded the coach at 11am for another short journey to the Estrel Convention Centre, the base of the World Money Fair Berlin. What greeted them was astonishing. Literally thousands of visitors – some say as many as 15,000 - packed the centre as stalls from almost every country in the world were in place displaying their various coins and medals. Covering 7,000 square feet, the exhibition of coins is the largest of its kind and is the home for internationally active mints and the world-wide coin trade.

The group of singers were led through a maze of stalls, rooms and hallways before reaching the Royal Mint section which was manned by staff from the Llantrisant plant. With an impressive display of British coins and medals on show, the staff welcomed the Treorchy men to their stall, complimenting them once more on the performance of the previous evening. With a growing audience of spectators the choristers sang five songs, concluding with “Nessun Dorma” to yet another enthusiastic crowd who surrounded the choristers. Official photographs were taken by journalists and organisers before the choristers were shown through to the convention centre’s main foyer which was dominated by a large staircase. It was here that the Choir performed their second selection of songs again to an enthusiastic crowd of visitors.

The choristers were rewarded with a glass of beer before returning to the coach and travelling back into the centre of Berlin where they made a short stop at the impressive Brandenburg Gate. An official tour photograph was taken in front of the most well-known landmark of Germany. A short distance from the surviving Reichstag building, the gates lead to the renowned boulevard of linden trees towards the former palace of the Prussian monarchs. The setting provided a perfect opportunity for choristers to take various photographs before once again boarding the coach and returning to Hotel Ibis Berlin by 2.45pm.

With the remainder of the day free for the choristers, many returned to the centre of the city with a visit to Checkpoint Charlie, the name given by the Western Allies to the best-known Berlin Wall crossing point between East and West. However, it was shortly becoming apparent that the sub-zero temperatures would prove too much for the choristers as thermometers showed a frightening -19 as evening approached. Chorister Norman Cox had already contacted the landlord of a local Irish Pub which was at 112

Friedrichstrasse who eagerly awaited the arrival of the choristers. By 5pm the entire group arrived at the "Oscar Wilde" and settled nicely into their surroundings by having lunch, watching the England vs Scotland rugby game and partaking of the free drinks organised by Dean. A party atmosphere ensued as choristers celebrated what was a memorable and very enjoyable visit to Berlin. Before long the typical repertoire of songs were tackled with aplomb, much to the overwhelming joy of the packed pub of various nationalities! As the drinks flowed and the songs erupted, the afternoon was another unforgettable occasion for all who were present. Probably the most hilarious moment was the impromptu performance of Islwyn Morgan, now aged 85 and a chorister for 65 years, who walked onto the stage, interrupting the Irish Band, took a microphone and sang "Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl"! Superb! Following many hours at the pub a convoy of taxis took the inebriated party of singers back to the Hotel Ibis where the celebrations continued in the bar.

### **Sunday February 5<sup>th</sup>**

Once again a group of very bleary-eyed choristers gathered in the Breakfast Room of the Hotel for their final morning in Berlin. With the rooms emptied and luggage placed on the coach, the choristers were treated to a two-hour tour of Berlin courtesy of the World Money Fair organisers. With driver Christoff and tour guide Manfred, the Choir enjoyed a fascinating visit through the city where they learnt more of the impact of World War II, the Berlin Wall and Cold War followed by the reunification of Berlin. Some of the places visited included the various universities, museums, embassies and Berlin Zoo. They also saw Carinhall, the base of Hermann Goering which survived the Allied bombing and also sections of the Berlin Wall and exhibition centre to the Third Reich. Another short visit was paid to Checkpoint Charlie before the journey continued.

On arrival at Schoenefeld Airport at 2.15pm the choristers again checked in their luggage, went through passport and security control to departure where many of them gathered in an Irish Pub. It was there that they learned two pieces of news, good and bad. On the negative side the plane was delayed due to the adverse weather conditions in the UK by two hours. On the positive side, they were able to enjoy plenty of drinks and entertain the other delayed passengers as news filtered through of Wales's outstanding international rugby triumph over Ireland.

At 5.55pm the choristers boarded the Easyjet Airbus A319 which took off at 6.20pm. Another 1hour 30minute flight followed before they reached Luton Airport where the Captain of the plane received a tumultuous applause as he announced that Wales had indeed beat Ireland! Choristers collected their luggage and were surprised by the wintry scene of drifting snow and ice all around them. On reaching the Edwards Coach they began their journey back to Wales, stopping at Membury Services and reaching the Royal Mint by 11pm.

This had been a very successful weekend visit to Berlin as the choristers fulfilled engagements to such a standard that totally exceeded the expectations of the Royal Mint. They made an incredible impression on the leading UK coin manufacturers and hopefully this would lead to further engagements for the Treorchy Male Choir as a whole. For many of the travellers it was their first taste of a weekend away with their fellow choristers, again strengthening the bonds of friendship between them. Over all it showcased the immense talent and musicality of the Treorchy Male Choir as the ambassadors gave performances worthy of their reputation and fame. Wunderbahr!

# BERLIN 2012

## “BING BONG” CLEC

### COMMITTEE AWARDS

#### **Mention In Dispatches**

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Chairman Bebb | Left his passport on the plane. Returned to fetch it and set off all the alarms in the terminal   |
| Dean Powell   | Brought two electric adaptors with him – they were both for America or Australia and wouldn't work  |
| Alan Bowen    | In the Money Fair he was told there was underfloor heating. “Oh”, he said, “I thought it was because I'm wearing two pairs of socks”.   |
| Dean Powell   | Announced “Divine Brahma” was from “Carmen”. Its actually from the “Pearlfishers”   |
| Alan Bowen    | In the Irish pub he was in the toilet cubicle talking to Alan Iles who was using the trough. Alan left, Keith Newman walked in and Alan was talking to himself  |
| Roger Watkins | His middle name “Michael” is miss-spelt on his passport. Dai Stanton advised he always spelt it wrong from now on   |
| Daryl Stacey  | Lost his suit trousers. Went into “Victor Meldrew” mode in the hotel room desperately trying to find them, shouting and swearing and throwing items around. Roger was stood in front of him holding them up all the time. |
| Alun Davies   | Explained a number of gay men had been in the Choir but hadn't “come out of the wardrobe”.  |
| Roger Watkins | Security told him to drink his bottle or throw it in the bin. He enquired, “Do you have a bottle opener?”   |

#### **Awards**

##### **Bronze**

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| Dai Bebb | Wanted to see the soccer scores for Saturday but he bought Friday's paper |
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##### **Silver**

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|-------------|---|
| Alun Davies | Said to a German, “Dydw I ddim yn sprechen sie deutsch” |
|-------------|---|

##### **Gold**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Alan Bowen | In the toilet in the Irish pub he washed his hands and realised there was no towel or dryer, so he wiped his hands in a dog. |
|------------|--|