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an extract from "In Tune"

The Quarterly Newsletter from the Oxford Welsh Male Voice Choir

Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau

The Welsh national anthem is regarded as one of the world's most inspired anthems. 2006 celebrates the 150th anniversary of this memorable composition.

By 1856, the Welsh language was starting to lose ground in Pontypridd, with an influx of people eager to work in the coal mines. But in the town and surrounding area, there was a handful of passionate Welshmen who were determined to keep the flame of alive. Amongst them were father and son Evan and James James, the composers of the words and melody of Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau (Land of My Fathers). Within a short time, this song had been adopted by the Welsh as their national anthem. Though Evan James wrote three verses, the last two are rarely sung.

The pop world is full of one-hit wonders. And that's what Evan and James James were too. But not everyone succeeds in getting such an unforgettable hit as Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau. The anthem was performed for the first time in the vestry of Capel Tabor in Maesteg in 1856, by Elizabeth John from Pontypridd. It was recorded in 1899 in London by Madge Breese for the Gramophone Company. This was the first Welsh song to be recorded. The recording, pressed on a seven-inch single sided disc, lasts for a minute and 17 seconds.

A memorial to Evan and James James was erected at Ynys Angharad Park in Pontypridd in 1930. The memorial was designed by Sir Williams Goscombe John.

In 1897 a Breton version of Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau was published - Bro Goz ma Zadou. It was adopted as Brittany's national anthem in 1902.