



March 2006

an extract from "In Tune"

The Quarterly Newsletter from the **Oxford Welsh Male Voice Choir**

The March Ended Here.

The following is a transcript submitted by Eileen Hayes - our longest serving accompanist (over 60 years). I assume this interview was broadcast in the late 1970s. Here John Simpson of Radio Oxford, is interviewing Arthur Hayes - Eileen's late husband - who was both conductor and accompanist at various times.

Announcer:

Many of us remember quite clearly the recession of the late twenties and early thirties, and it is due to that depression that we have many Welshmen living in Oxford. Indeed, many of the older Welshmen arrived in Oxford in the late twenties in search of work. One such person was Arthur Hayes, who explained to John Simpson why he moved here.

Arthur:

I was an apprentice in the Government Dockyard at Pembroke for five years and, after that, the depression set in and quite a lot of people were made redundant, and I was one of those.

John:

What were your thoughts when you actually got your cards?

Arthur:

Well, there were so many people unemployed at that time that my thoughts were "How long will it be before I can start work again?"

John:

Did you look around for work? You must have done.

Arthur:

Yes, definitely looked around but nothing whatsoever for anyone.

John:

How long were you without a job?

Arthur:

I should say about eighteen months. Then, after that time, there were several people who went up to Oxford looking for work at the Pressed Steel, and I decided that I would go up to Oxford to try my luck.

John:

I take it that money was very hard to come by?

Arthur:

Oh yes. All we had was the dole for a certain time. That was a matter of eighteen shillings a week.

John:

So you obviously made a decision as you had heard of people getting work in Oxford. Did you know anybody here?

Arthur:

I didn't know anybody, but after being out of work so long, I was willing to try anything.

John:

So you set out for Oxford. How did you travel?

Arthur:

By train, subsidised by my mother for the train fare, but very little left over for anything till I got a job. (We left) On a Friday evening, and it was about two o'clock in the morning when we arrived at Didcot. That meant waiting for the train to Oxford till half past seven. I went with the others who came at the same time, and we went straight to the Pressed Steel, and within an hour we were given a job to start on the Monday.

John:

How many of you were travelling together?

Arthur:

About half a dozen, and they are still scattered around Oxford.

John:

So you got your job, but not only did you want work, but you had to live somewhere as well. Did you find a bed?

Arthur:

I found a house on the Cowley Road, and we had left our bags at the station, so I had to go and fetch my bags. Then I couldn't find the house! Well, not for some time. It took about an hour, just wandering about Cowley Road.

John:

So you got your job, and you worked at the Pressed Steel for forty-one years before you retired?

Arthur:

That's quite correct, yes. In those early days, many of the Welshmen used to meet at the Temple Cowley Congregational Church, and the Rev Whatley White*, who was the minister there, did a great deal to help everybody. He even took some into his house until they found digs.

John:

You obviously went to church services, but there was more to that, wasn't there?

Arthur:

That's quite so. At the back of the Church there was a building we called the Institute. We used to gather there nearly every night in the week. It wasn't long before we started singing, and a male voice choir was formed, the Oxford Welsh Glee Singers.

John:

And they are still going strong?

Arthur:

Yes, they are still going strong, and with them I have had many happy times.

John:

When you came to Oxford, were the people around you worried that you were coming from Wales to pinch all the jobs?

Arthur:

Well, one or two were a bit like that but the majority of people just treated you as friends

John:

So you are obviously settled in now, and looking back on that time, it must be fifty years ago since you came here. Do you look at your home as in Oxford, or is it still in Wales?

Arthur:

Well, about twenty years in Wales, and fifty in Oxford, I still consider myself a Welshman, but I wouldn't want to live anywhere else but Oxford. I think it is the most beautiful city, and I'm quite happy here.

John:

So, although these times were pretty hard, it all came out alright in the end?

Arthur:

In the end it did yes, definitely.

Announcer:

Arthur Hayes, Founder Member of the Oxford Welsh Glee Singers, and their conductor for the last five years, talking to John Simpson.

Broadcast closes with a rendering of "Ar Hyd y Nos", sung by the choir.

(I believe I'm right in saying that Rev Whatley White was an uncle to Alfred Munday - a long serving Chairman of the Choir in the '80s & '90s - Ed.)*