

## A Short History of the Choir

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Biographies of our choir always include a description of the very beginning. There were four men who met in the front room of a small terraced house to sing songs around the piano. They weren't very good but they wanted to be better. So three of the four were picked to cross the river by ferry to visit Cecil Fletcher a man they thought would help them. They set out on a journey, a new adventure and what an adventure it has turned out to be. What we don't know is how they made the truly inspired decision to invite Cecil Fletcher to be their leader. He was, without doubt, the perfect choice and even 90 years later we still feed from the legacy of those early years. Described by one of the early choristers as being a 'genial man who knew how to handle men and music' Cecil shaped and nurtured a choir which by 1939 had become one of the most significant male voice choirs in the region. Success in competition and concerts was enhanced by the culture of the choir shown in its commitment to serve both its members and the wider community.

The sudden death of Cecil Fletcher in 1946 was a real survival challenge to a choir already weakened by the war.

Archie Sargent nurtured the 'phil' from 1950 till 1962. He was the best known York Conductor of the day having made 22 BBC broadcasts of Sunday Half Hour with the Monkgate Methodist Choir. He brought the 'phil' back to life and was able, in 1962, to hand over a healthy, confident choir ready for new challenges. Archie passed on musical leadership to a new generation - 31 year old Richard Brian Lister - and there followed 18 years of innovation and success at an international level. Second place in an international radio competition, Carols in Kirkgate on Yorkshire TV, and a number of LP recordings saw the choir embrace the technology of the day.

Berenice Lewis became Musical Director in September 2000. Since then the choir has worked hard performing more concerts a year than at any previous period raising more than £16000 per year for charities, and has travelled more than before. Since 2000 the choir has visited France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Recent years have seen two significant celebrations as in 2009 we celebrated 40 Years of twinning with Münster, with a joint concert in York Minster; and in 2011 we reached 50 Years of Carols in Kirkgate giving 7 performances the largest ever number.

Since 1925 the choir has been encouraged and supported by family, friends and Vice Presidents and by a long term link with the office of Lord Mayor. We have also benefited by the long term commitment and support of Choir Presidents none more so than the Hon. Alderman Keith Wood who has served for more than 35 years.

The choir has been at its most creative and innovative when enjoying the long term commitment of talented and passionate Musical Directors. We look to the future with confidence as we are fortunate to be in that position in 2015 having strength in depth with Berry as Musical Director; Graham and Richard Kay as Deputy and Assistant and Eileen Grey as accompanist, soirée director and vocal coach.

## **Musical Directors:**

2000-date Berenice Lewis (née Hopkins)

1994-2000 Jill Wild

1993-1994 Ian Colling

1992-1993 Ralph Bateman

1990 -1992 Margaret Martin

1985-1990 Richard Bowman

1984-1985 Paul Dyson

1980-1984 David Keefe

1962- 1980 Richard Brian Lister

1950-1962 Archie W Sargent

1946- 1950 (choir member) Sefton Fearné jnr.

1946-46 (interim all choir members)

Harold Fletcher (son of Cecil)

Harold Shipman

Fred Rogers

Sefton Cotton

1925 - 1946 Cecil H Fletcher (sudden death)

## **Recordings**

The Choir is proud of the following recordings:-

CD - Carols in Kirkgate - 50 years, 2011

CD - Let All Men Sing, 2009

CD - In Harmony, 2002

LP - Dukes of York, 1978

LP - Carols in Kirkgate, 1974