

Dear Roy,

Thank you for your kind message; indeed our recent holiday to Swansea was a huge success, and Chrissie, my wife, need no longer wonder why I am so passionate about the place in which I was brought up.

Though my time as a member of "The Orpheus" was so regrettably short, and took place nearly 50 years ago, I will try to recall some of my more outstanding memories. I left Bishop Gore Grammar School, at the age of 18, in July 1960 already with a deep love of all the best things Welsh - viz. rugby and singing. I then worked in the Fuel Technology Dept. of RT & B at the Duffryn Steel Works in Murryston. Within a month or so, I was doing an inspection tour of the furnaces with my boss, who knew of my admiration for the Orpheus, and he introduced me to one of the furnace men who was an established member of the choir. He was a lovely man called Pal Thomas, and after a chat, he invited me to the rehearsal that evening - I think it was in the Tabernacle Murryston. I will never forget the couple of hours I spent that evening with the great Murryston Orpheus. I sat on my own at the back of the room whilst it filled up with a seemingly huge number of men - many still in working clothes, and many speaking in Welsh - it was very noisy. Then, a small elderly man with a shock of silvery hair appeared at the front. He tapped his conductor's baton once against the lectern in front of him, said "ready boys", and instantly there was total silence. The very first delicate but rich sound that came from those 100 or so voices turned my knees to jelly, and I stayed that way for the rest of the evening. At the end of the rehearsal Ivor Sims asked the committee to stay behind, and it appeared that my friend Pal was one of the committee. I sat patiently and still swooning from the singing I had heard, when suddenly, Ivor Sims called me to the front and said " *Mr Thomas, I understand you would like to join the Murryston Orpheus, so let's see what you can do* ". Though totally unexpected, I managed to sing along with the accompanist, and later Mr Sims said "*Congratulations Mr Thomas, welcome to the choir as a second tenor, perhaps we will make a top tenor of you later*". Needless to say I was on cloud nine.

During the year or so I was with the choir, I'm fairly sure I did not miss a single rehearsal nor concert, and have fond memories of the National Eisteddfod at Rhosllanerchrugog held in August 1961. We sang one of my all time favourites - "Nidaros" by Daniel Protheroe, and also "Y Refali" by Elgar. We were beaten into second place by Treorchy - but that wasn't the first or last time that adjudicators have got it wrong. Later that year, there was the Miners' Eisteddfod at Porthcawl, which we won. The final singing event, which sticks in my memory, took place at Murryston Cemetery when the choir sang at the grave of Ivor Sims; we sang the negro spiritual "Steal Away" - probably the most moving rendition ever made. For the final part of my membership of the choir, a very likable man, Eufryn John, was the conductor.

In October 1961, having passed through the aircrew selection procedure, I reported to RAF South Cerney to start my pilot training, and flew as a pilot in the RAF for the following 18 years. I later completed a further 22 years as an airline pilot with Britannia Airways -- I'm sure you will have travelled with them, they are now called Thomsonfly. I retired, aged 60, some 9 years ago, and came to Spain, where Chrissie and I are extremely happy. I'm proud to say that I have always endeavoured to maintain our best Welsh traditions, having been known as "Taffy" from the very first day in the RAF (and by my wife now). I also played rugby for the RAF team, and for the North Wales Rugby XV whilst flying Vampires out of RAF Valley in Anglesey. I have also sang with several choirs (including Spanish) and various amateur operatic societies - thankfully, apart from in Wales, there appears to be a world shortage of tenors!

Regarding our visit to your rehearsal, I couldn't possibly tell you how much it meant to us both. My knees turned to jelly all over again, and even Chrissie - who is English - had a tear in her eye. Though we have been toppled from the highest pinnacle of the rugby world, nobody will even approach the excellence of the Welsh Male Voice Choir - of course, to me that means Morryston Orpheus. It's people like your members, and that wonderful musical director of yours who enrichen the world with something unique. Chrissie has asked me to mention also the numerous members, including Joy, the Musical Director, who so warmly welcomed us to the meeting; it made it feel so extra special.

Finally, Roy, thank you personally for the warmth of your welcome, and please pass on my best wishes to my two dear old friends from the past - Hugh and Dudley - in many ways, I am so envious of them.

Very best wishes,

Ian Thomas.