

# Ayr Choral Union:

## 140 years

## 1876-2016



Troon Concert Hall, Beethoven Missa Solemnis, March 1985

## A Short History of ACU





## Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are due firstly to past recorders of ACU - the careful writers of revealing minutes of meetings, the "Keepers of the Box", the hoarders of programmes, letters, news clips and minutiae, and previous Archivists. Tony Kerrigan gave enormous assistance with photographs. Staff at the Ayrshire Archive and Carnegie Library in Ayr have also been most helpful. David Cassels, who produced a 1976 History of ACU, largely based on a 1905 Bazaar programme, provided an excellent starting point. Above all thanks must go to the late Ronnie Brash, historian, enthusiast, tenor, and ACU archivist until 2012, to whom this book is dedicated.

Much of the content in this version is taken verbatim from Minutes, reflecting the voices of ACU, and may not always be strictly accurate or objective.



October 15<sup>th</sup> 1976 Ayr Choral Union Centenary Dinner

Back row left to right: Colonel Bryce Knox (Hon Vice-President), Angus Rae (Vice-President), David Cassels (President), Professor Robin Orr CBE\* (Speaker), Provost Paton, Ex-Provost Lineham (Hon Vice-President), Victor McLeonard (Secretary)

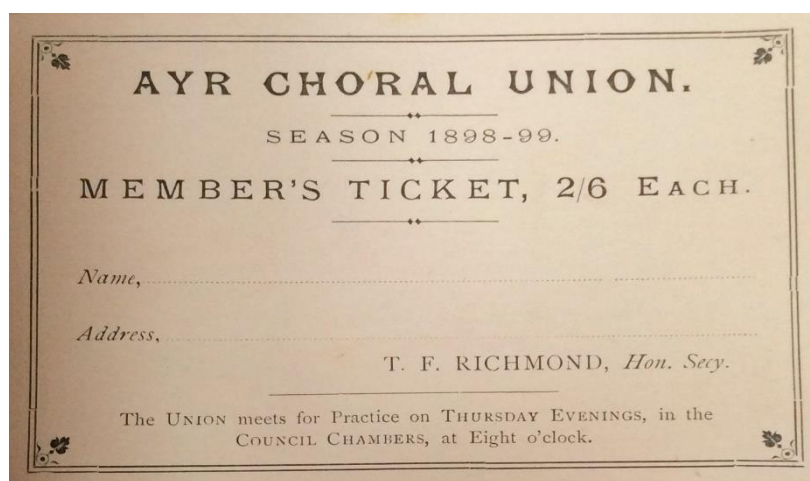
Front row left to right: Mrs Rae, Mrs Bryce Knox, Mrs Paton, Mrs Lanham, and Mrs Cassels.

*\*Robin Orr was a noted first Chairman of Scottish Opera, and Professor of Music first at Glasgow, then Cambridge Universities, as well as a being a composer and active supporter of a wide range of musical activities. He died in 2006.*

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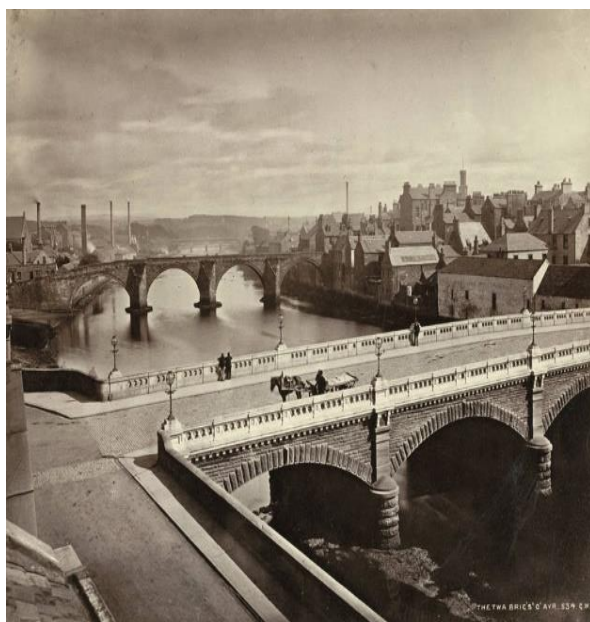
## 1. Introduction

In 2015, when two new co-archivists inherited the Ayr Choral Official Archive, it became clear what a treasure trove it was. The choir clearly had an almost unique history which deserved to be more widely known and celebrated. The idea of a 140<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, with an updated history was born, and *Scotland Sings* kindly awarded us a Milestone Award to mark the event. Ease of web access to old newspapers gave rich added sources, as did local history archives, although there are still mysteries to be uncovered.

In 1876 Queen Victoria was over half way through her reign, and Disraeli was Prime Minister. On the other side of the Atlantic, Alexander Graham Bell was patenting the telephone. Partick Thistle and Falkirk Football Clubs were formed, sardines first canned, and the first performance of Wagner's Ring Cycle took place.

In 1876, Ayr was a rapidly growing and quietly prosperous county town with a range of industries, including iron foundries and shipbuilding, and a busy port. The railway had arrived in 1840 and was being extended to Stranraer. In June 1876 there was a horrendous fire in Templeton's Carpet Factory in Ayr on the corner of Fort Street and Charlotte Street and 28 girls aged 13-21 and their foreman died. Also in 1876, Ayr Academicals - forerunners of Ayr United - were founded by the merger of Ayr Academy FC and Ayr Eglinton FC and played at Mr Dewar's cattle field. Thomas Steele was Provost.

The "New Bridge" - Robert Burns' *"Conceited gowk! puff'd up wi' windy pride!"* - was about to be washed away in 1877 and replaced in 1878-79. In October, a choir called **Ayr Choral Union** was established with the objective "*to cultivate and diffuse the knowledge and a taste for classical music*", and continued uninterrupted as an organisation, until the present day.



1879 Bridge circa 1888 with Auld Brig behind

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**AYR CHORAL UNION.**

**T**HE OPENING MEETING of the above SOCIETY will be held in the ASSEMBLY ROOMS on the evening of MONDAY the 16th inst., at 8 o'clock. W. M'ALLISTER, Conductor. The Secretary will be in attendance at Quarter before Eight on MONDAY NIGHT to receive the names of those wishing to join (either Vocal or Instrumental).

**JAS. SMITH, Secy.**

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## 2. Beginnings

Ayr Choral Union derived from a complex of emerging choral groups from 1840 onwards - before which, according to the 1905 Bazaar programme, "the only persons who were able to read any form of notation were some half a dozen leaders of psalmody... the general mass of the people could only pick up tunes by ear". In 1840 *Ayr Musical Association* for the practice of orchestral music gave concerts in the Council Chambers, and latterly a small vocal section was formed to vary the programme with glees and part-songs until around 1855. About the same time, a strong body of singers taking the name *Harmonic Society* was formed by Robert Andrew, leader of psalmody in Wallace Street UP Church, to practice oratorio, choruses, anthems and part-songs - but he died in 1851. John Brown, a native of Ayr, then brought a new system of sight singing from Glasgow - he conducted several classes and formed a small society called the *Choral Society*. Mr Brown left Ayr in 1854 and his society amalgamated with the *Harmonic Society*.

These early developments were very typical of the "choral century" in Britain, with strong links to self-improvement, increased leisure time, evening classes and Mechanics' Institutes. New printing methods using moveable type had led to vastly increased publication of cheap and easy to read choral parts. The new sight singing movement came to Edinburgh in 1842 with the arrival of Mainzer, though Glasgow preferred the competing Wilhem system. Choral singing had arrived, though mainly confined to the newly empowered middle class.

Glasgow Choral Union (predecessor of the RSNO chorus) was founded in 1843, Selkirk in 1847. In 1857 Stirling Choral Society was formed by Mr Graham who had opened a music salon and library in the town; in 1858 Edinburgh Royal Choral Union began when Mr Charles J Hargitt, organist of St Mary's Church, thought the capital city ought to have "a choir of far bigger dimensions than the average church choir for the study and performance of the great classics in choral music."<sup>1</sup> In 1858 Dundee Amateur Choral Union was founded with 18 ladies and 9 gentlemen "to practise and execute mainly sacred music" and by 1869 were giving the first Scottish performance of the Mozart Requiem.<sup>2</sup> In 1861 Perth Choral Union was started by David Bayne from Glasgow, and in 1870 Greenock Choral Society - with weekly *practisings* and member subs for men of 10/6d and ladies 5/-. In 1845 Kilmarnock Philharmonic Society was founded "to perform choral concerts especially Handel's oratorios". In September 1863, Kilmarnock Philharmonic performed *Judas Maccabeus* (twice) at the opening of the grand Corn Exchange (now the Palace Theatre). The Corn Exchange, Kilmarnock's principal place of business for farmers, was set up to "supply healthy and innocent amusement for the people as a shelter from the snares of vicious indulgence".<sup>3</sup>

The Tonic Sol-Fa system of teaching and printing, with letters representing pitch, arrived in Ayr in 1859 - the self-taught teacher was Hugh L Allan who had learned from John Curwen's newly published *Sol-Fa Grammar* (1855). "The results were eminently satisfactory. These Sol-Fa ists, endowed with a new power of reading and enjoying music, were not content to continue practising similar kinds of composition, but attacked some of the oratorio choruses"<sup>4</sup>. Yet another society with around 80 members was formed about the year 1862 and lasted 2-3 years, under the leadership of George Sayers, this was the short-lived Ayr Choral Union<sup>5</sup>. The first major work produced was *Messiah* and there followed *Dettingen Te Deum*, and portions of *Creation*. In the 1870s a Glee Club was set up by J Butler Cowap, with about 40 members who sang glees, madrigals and part-songs. In 1871 the New Church acquired a harmonium, and in 1874 a pipe organ and J Butler Cowap to play it. Eventually, in 1876 a new group was set up in Ayr largely made up from enthusiasts like Hugh Allan and J Butler Cowap, from previous groups. This was the "time honoured" Ayr Choral Union founded on 16<sup>th</sup> October in the Assembly Rooms. At the same time in London a new Bach Choir was performing the Bach B Minor mass for the first time in Britain.

Celia Applegate, the American musicologist, has described this manic energy poured into choral societies as "a cultural phenomenon, that is an expression of values and needs that were not merely, or only musical" but also educational and social. In Scotland there were no particular political or nationalistic reasons for this growth (unlike Scandinavia), although Scottish songs and works by Scottish composers always had their place. Choral singers tended to be respectful and unassuming, often with church connections. Applegate also suggests:

"the key to the whole phenomenal success of choral singing in the nineteenth century was ... the humble vehicle of the weekly rehearsal ... rehearsing is work done together; rehearsing is the struggle to reach a common goal together; rehearsing is the synchronization of individual bodies: ears, minds, eyes, lungs, arms holding music, legs standing and sitting. With the warm-ups, the repetitions, the tea breaks with sweet cakes, the talking and exchanging of musical (and

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<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh Royal Choral Union website

<sup>2</sup> Dundee Choral Union website

<sup>3</sup> Ayrshire Archive

<sup>4</sup> 1976 History of ACU

<sup>5</sup> Possibly a translation of the German *Chorverein*. This earlier promising version of ACU has been discounted as discontinuous with the 1876 version

other) opinions and experiences, the coming together and leaving only to return again the next week, the choral rehearsal became a central experience of everyday life for hundreds of thousands throughout Europe and the Americas, made all the more memorable by the unconscious effects, so hard to measure, of the music itself”<sup>6</sup>

Ayr and Kilmarnock were not the only oases of choral singing in Ayrshire - far from it. The following is a list of Ayrshire choirs which feature in newspaper reports between 1870 and 1914 - dates are indicators of when they were known to be active rather than start dates:

1873 Mauchline Choral Union  
 1878 Monkton and Prestwick Choral Union  
 1879 Kilbirnie Tonic Sol-Fa Choral Association  
 1883 Ayr Tonic Sol-Fa Association  
 1883 Whitletts Choral Union  
 1885 Cumnock Choral Society  
 1885 Muirkirk Choral Union

1885 Irvine Choral Union  
 1888 Galston Choral Society  
 1889 Loudoun Tonic Sol-Fa Choral Society  
 1889 Largs Choral Society  
 1889 Darvel Choral Society  
 1891 Maybole Choral Union (proposed)  
 1905 Girvan Choral Society

Precursor ACU 24<sup>th</sup> January 1863 Ayrshire Express

**AYR CHORAL UNION.**

**T**HE AYR CHORAL UNION (numbering 60 Vocal Members and 11 Instrumentalists) will give their first **PUBLIC REHEARSAL**, consisting of copious and connected Selections from Handel's Oratorio, "THE MESSIAH," in **CATHCART STREET CHURCH**, on the evening of **FRIDAY the 6th of February next.**

Honorary Members can be enrolled on application to the Secretary, at the *Advertiser* Office. A subscription of 5s entitles each Honorary Member to three Tickets at Two Public Rehearsals, to be given during the season.

**HUGH L. ALLAN, Secy.**

**AYR CHORAL UNION.**—The 'Baillie' of yesterday has the following:—As far as the West of Scotland is concerned, Mendelssohn's "Elijah" has hitherto been monopolised by the Glasgow Choral Union. One regards, therefore, with considerable interest, the production of that oratorio in Ayr on the 13th of next month. The performance of Handel's "Messiah" last year showed that the Ayr Choral Union (under the able guidance of Mr H. M'Nabb) were capable of great things, and this year a still further stride has been made, in respect at least of difficulty. The courage displayed in tackling a work which makes such demands on the chorus as Mendelssohn's "Elijah," will no doubt be justified by the performance, and we can trust the good folks of Ayr to prove their appreciation of good music this year as last, without the rather vulgar attraction of great names for the solo parts.

16 Jan 1879 Ayr Advertiser<sup>7</sup>

**The Ayr Ornithological Society's**

**FIFTEENTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION**

OF  
**FANCY POULTRY, PIGEONS, CANARY, AND FOREIGN BIRDS,**

Will take place in the  
**CORN EXCHANGE HALL,**  
 On **SATURDAY, 11th November next.**  
 In addition to Prize Money, several Silver Medals and other Special Prizes will be awarded.  
 Entries Close 6th November.  
**DAVID CRAWFORD, Sec.**  
 48 Newmarket Street, Ayr, 4th Oct., 1876.

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**THE COLONY OF QUEENSLAND.**  
**M**R GEO. WIGHT, by appointment of the Queensland Government, will deliver **LECTURES** on that promising Colony, at

IRVINE.....—Wednesday, 11th October.  
 NEWMILNS.....—Friday, 13th October.  
 ARDROSSAN.....—Monday, 16th October.  
 STEVENSTON...—Wednesday, 18th October.  
 SALTCOATS.....—Thursday, 19th October.  
 KILWINNING...—Friday, 20th October.  
 DALRY.....—Monday, 23rd October.  
 KILBIRNIE.....—Tuesday, 24th October.  
 BEITH .....—Thursday, 26th October.

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**JAS. SMITH, Secy.**

Ayr Advertiser 12<sup>th</sup> October 1876

<sup>6</sup> Applegate, Celia *The Building of Community through Choral Singing in Nineteenth Century Choral Music* ed. Grazia (2013)

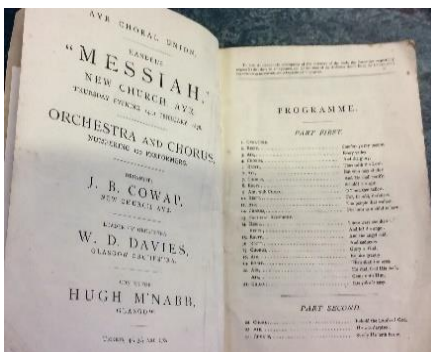
<sup>7</sup> The Baillie was a Glasgow magazine



### 3. 1876-1914 Beginnings to World War 1

Exactly what happened on October 16<sup>th</sup> 1876 is not clear, but the new Ayr Choral Union quickly picked up speed. Mr W. McAllister, a Prestwick Sol-Fa teacher was appointed interim Conductor and weekly rehearsals began, with the first concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1877. James Smith, a watchmaker who had been a member of Glasgow Choral Union and knew what was what as well as being “energetic and enthusiastic”, was appointed Secretary. William Hamilton, known for his “local knowledge and indefatigable spirit” was the new Treasurer. There was briefly an orchestral section but joint rehearsals proved difficult. Movers and shakers from whom the “Directors” were probably drawn included Hugh Allan, J H Paterson, Gavin Girdwood, William Peden, Walter Beaton, and David and James McCreath. Cuthbert Cowan was appointed Honorary President in 1877. This was an astute choice as he was an Ayr Banker (joint agent of the Union Bank) and Philanthropist - well known and held in high esteem. When he retired after 6 years in the post, the Choir gave grateful thanks to him “for the interest he has taken in its efforts to cultivate a taste for good music and for the generous support and encouragement he has extended to it on carrying on its work”.

Hugh Allan became President in 1877. As well as being at the forefront of both the sight singing and Sol-Fa movement in Ayr from the age of 19, he was Editor of the local Liberal newspaper, the Ayr Advertiser, and clearly had good contacts with the Glasgow Herald. He was “held in the highest respect for his uprightness and integrity of character”. Hugh Allan was instrumental in tracking down one of the best conductors around, who lived in Glasgow but was from Ayr, and had attended his Sol-Fa classes in the Loudoun Hall. Hugh McNabb became the main reason why ACU flourished over the next 33 years. “He had great natural musical gifts”<sup>8</sup> and was considered quite a catch by ACU. When he took up the ACU baton in 1877, he had only one free evening in the week left as he conducted several choirs! About 1883 he published a “*New Singing Tutor*” (W Morley and Co) which was “favourably received”. Hugh did voice training at 20 Cathcart Street, although his home was in Glasgow. He was “patient, painstaking and stimulating” and “helped members overcome their difficulties”. From 1867 Hugh was musical director at UP Church, St Vincent Street, Glasgow and for some years conducted a male voice choir in connection with the 1<sup>st</sup> Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers. He also conducted Bothwell Musical Association, Dunfermline Choral Society and the St Cecilia Society.



The first “proper” concert was the 1878 Messiah. It was critically reviewed in the Glasgow Herald (16<sup>th</sup> February 1878) - a performance so good it was “worthy of free criticism”. While the infant ACU deserved “great praise for the pluck displayed in producing so creditably a master work”, there were quite a few caustic points. The tenors showed “a disposition to be all powerful” and while “a goodly portion of the choir never once looked at the Conductor”, some of the tenors “cooly (sic) and deliberately turned their backs on Mr McNabb”. Sopranos “must learn to take their high notes without fishing for them” and “sometimes when a high G is attempted, some of the young ladies insisted on singing an f sharp”.

The strong local accent “at times made some havoc with the interpretation of the sacred words”. Regarding Mr McNabb - despite being an excellent conductor, he should “avoid as much as possible audibly thrashing on his score when he desires to pull together his wandering forces”. The soloists were given similar treatment, as was young Mr Cowap, whose organ playing was “drowning out the choir”. Despite this, “our Ayr friends have every reason to be proud of their Choral Union, - in Glasgow it has been our fate to hear less satisfying interpretations of the great work.”

ACU members were not discouraged by the Glasgow Herald. At the following AGM, Mr McNabb was very positive. “He knew no society anywhere that had a better lot of soprano and alto voices”. By the start of the following season, an impressive list of Patrons was acquired and Honorary Members (Subscribers) were asked for a minimum subscription of 10/6d entitling them to two best seat tickets for the two concerts planned. By 1878-79 the accounts were carefully presented, with a balance in hand of £1.6s.10d. Despite healthy ticket sales, both from those paying a subscription for a season’s concerts, and from tickets sold by members, as well as members’ annual subs, some of the issues which were to dog ACU in the future were already being raised - the costs of orchestra and soloists, staging, music, rent of rooms and advertising were considerable, and Mr McNabb was already pointing up the need for a big orchestra for performing oratorios. “...in most oratorios the orchestra had quite as important a part to play as the voices. He hoped that this would always be kept steadily in view”. The stage was set for an uncertain financial future.

<sup>8</sup> From a short Biography of Hugh McNabb in the 1905 Bazaar Programme



In 1883, Hugh Allan and Cuthbert Cowan both resigned at the AGM - Hugh due to "the engrossing nature of his other duties" (presumably as Editor of the Ayr Advertiser), and Cuthbert "from advancing years". Hugh remained on the Committee, with Bailie James Paterson, a Radical Shopkeeper, and one of the early Sol-fa ists, as President. The new Honorary President was Richard Alexander Oswald of Auchincruive. J. Moore was Secretary and D. White was Treasurer. Tribute was paid to Mr Cowap, accompanist, for his role at practisings and "the great pleasure in associating with him as a gentleman".

At the 1883 AGM, Councillor J H Paterson read out the Committee's report:

*"...your committee were mainly guided by two considerations - these being the necessity of making both ends meet, and at the same time maintaining the character of the Union as an institution for the study and cultivation of high class music. The close of the last season as you are aware, left us with a balance on the wrong side, and while there was reason to hope that this matter would be satisfactorily adjusted, a hope since realised through the kind exertions of Dean of Guild Hunter, (9) it was yet felt that a continually recurring deficit must prove fatal to the permanence of our association, and that therefore an effort must be made to prevent its recurrence. It was also felt that the object of the Association must not be lost sight of, or its standard of attainment lowered. The object of the Association... must be pursued in an artistic spirit - the association doing its work for the love of it and for the pleasure that good and true art work affords.... the musical programme ...has been carried out successfully...and has afforded much pleasant and profitable work to the members of the Union"*

**AYR CHORAL UNION.**  
**SECOND CONCERT OF THE SEASON.**  
**TOWN HALL, AYR,**  
**THURSDAY EVENING, 5th APRIL,**  
**HAYDN'S "SPRING,"**  
 AND  
**SELECTIONS.**  
**CHORUS OF 130 VOICES.**

PRINCIPAL VOCALISTS—  
 MISS RAY, Glasgow, Soprano.  
 MR E. DUNKERTON, Principal Tenor Lincoln Cathedral.  
 MR ROSS, Glasgow, Baritone.  
 SOLO PIANIST—FRAULEIN HETTA LIPPMANN,  
 (From the Berlin Conservatoire.)  
 ORGANIST—MR J. B. COWAP.  
 CONDUCTOR—MR HUGH MACNABB.

Doors open at 7.30. Concert at 8.  
 ADMISSION—6s, 5s, 4s, 2s, and 1s.  
 Tickets and Plan of Hall at Messrs PATERSON, SONS, & CO.,  
 Newmarket Street, after TUESDAY 1st.

Haydn Spring 1883 (Ayr Advertiser)

The choruses were very finely rendered: indeed, in quality of tone and delicacy of expression, the singing was, in some cases, perhaps the best the Union has yet given. The sopranos and altos particularly were in capital voice, and rendered their parts exceedingly well. The solo music was sung by Miss Ray, Glasgow, soprano; and Messrs Dunkerton, Lincoln, and Ross, Glasgow. The lady was unfortunately suffering from cold, so that her voice lacked some of its natural clearness and brightness; but she gave an intelligent interpretation of her part. Mr Dunkerton is one of the best tenors we have heard in Ayr, or indeed anywhere, for many a day. His voice is mellow in quality, with a satisfactory body of tone from top to bottom, and he sings with admirable expression. Mr Ross has a telling bass voice, and sang his principal air, "With joy the impatient husbandman," in fine style. The

Haydn Spring April 1883 (Ayr Advertiser)

Another issue did seem to be resolved by 1883 - that of venue. In 1876 there was no large concert venue in Ayr. ACU initially used the New Church, but objections were raised by a member of the Kirk Session "who expressed conscientious convictions against such 'exhibitions' in churches". Fortunately Mr William Gairdner's skating rink in Dalblair Road was more supportive. This held an audience of 900 at the 1879 Mozart *Mass in C*, and Mr Gairdner helpfully filled it up with potted plants, but the acoustic was considered defective with no reverberation, and the audience at the back couldn't

**AYR CHORAL UNION.**  
**MOZART'S FIRST MASS;**  
**HANDEL'S CORONATION ANTHEM, and SELECTIONS.**  
**SKATING RINK, AYR,**  
**MONDAY EVENING, 14th APRIL, 1879.**  
**ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS NUMBER ABOUT 150.**  
 Tickets, 4s; 2s 6d; and 1s 6d.  
 By special desire a few (Numbered) Seats will be reserved for  
 Ladies and Gentlemen in Evening Dress—  
 Price 6s each.  
 To be had of Messrs PATERSON, SONS, & CO.  
 Doors open at 7 P.M.: to commence at 7.45 prompt.  
 The Train from Ayr at 10.25 P.M. will stop at Prestwick.

see. The skating rink was no longer available after Christmas 1879 as it was knocked down for new buildings. Old Cathcart Street Church and the Queen's' Rooms in Fort Street (which became the Baptist Church in 1887) were used until at last the splendid New Town Hall, designed by James Sellars and incorporating a large Concert Hall as well as accommodation for the Magistrates' Court and the Burgh Police, opened in 1881. ACU performed *Messiah* creditably with 230 voices (this was to become a habit in the Town Hall) at the grand inaugural concert on 18<sup>th</sup> September. The splendour of the new concert hall may have gone to the committee's head<sup>10</sup> as increasingly soloists were recruited from afar, and orchestras grew larger e.g. the London Orchestra, conducted by August Manns, was used at a cost of £78.15s in 1883, and despite concerns at the AGM, the December concert of *Samson* had "all rising young London singers" as soloists.

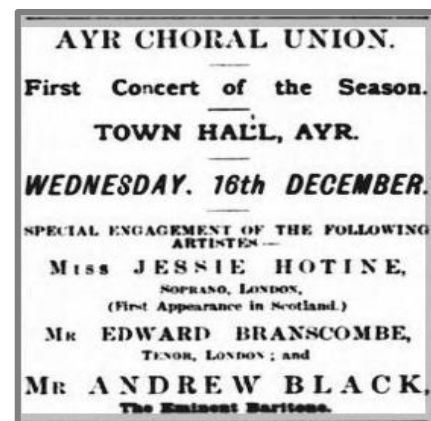
<sup>9</sup> Dean of Guild Hunter donated the massive sum of £35 to get ACU out of a financial hole

<sup>10</sup> Programme covers bore the legend "carriages to be ordered for 10pm"

Purse strings were being tightened at the AGM in 1888 by the astute treasurer Mr Wilson who managed a surplus of 2/1d and wiped out the last two years' deficit. This was not unrelated to a Burns Concert which cost only £13.14s.6d but filled the Town Hall to standing room only - Area, Balcony and Gallery were all crammed. The Ayr Advertiser review commented that "there is no more worthy institution in the town and there is scarcely one so badly off in the way of funds" as ACU. Popular, well selected part-songs were sung and Hugh Allan received a hearty encore for his rendering of *A Man's a Man*. However by December 1891, the big names were back again - including the remarkable Miss Jessie Hotine on her first appearance in Scotland, Edward Branscombe, London tenor, and Andrew Black, the eminent Baritone.



The December 1891 concert was a "Miscellaneous" one - a showcase for the soloists rather than the choir. Miss Hotine appears to have favoured concert party to oratorio, and had appeared with illusionists and banjo players - though she did once perform excerpts from *Messiah* on Hastings Pier. She had also shared a bill with Marie Lloyd. Born in Bow, her father was a fishmonger, and by the age of 22 she was a crowd-puller. The Town Hall was packed - possibly the largest crowd ACU had ever had, despite Buffalo Bill performing in Glasgow.

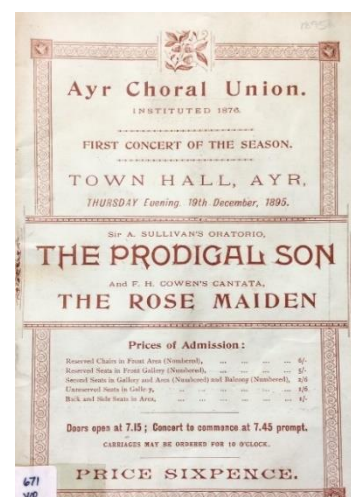


The Ayr Advertiser was not wholly impressed - "Miss Hotine has a fine Soprano voice, but her intonation is occasionally obscured by a tendency to use the tremolo." Mr Black was the favourite - particularly his rendering of "*O Ruddier than the Cherry*" and the Toreador's song. The choir were also under fire - "The Union sang its pieces well but we have heard it do better" - possibly as some of the best tenors had influenza.

After 1890, press coverage of ACU concerts are less easy to track down, possibly as other musical activities in Ayrshire blossomed. Programmes suggest a strong focus on the standard choral repertoire - *Creation*, *Samson*, *Messiah*, Mozart 12<sup>th</sup> Mass, and Mendelssohn's *Lauda Zion*, although more innovative works were also sung - Sullivan's *The Prodigal Son*, Gade's *The Erl King's Daughter*, MacFarren's *Lady of the Lake* and Cowen's *St John's Eve*. The "semi-jubilee" of year of 1901-1902 was celebrated with yet another *Messiah* with G H Ely on the organ.



Dr Frederic H Cowen (later Sir Frederic), composer of "The Rose Maiden" performed by ACU in 1895, was also conductor of the "Scottish Orchestra" from 1900 to 1910 - predecessor of the RSNO. Cowen was a child prodigy as composer and pianist and conducted the Liverpool Philharmonic and the Hallé, prior to the Scottish. ACU clearly had a clear preference for using the Scottish Orchestra (or "Mr Cowen's band" as it was sometimes referred to), but it was expensive.

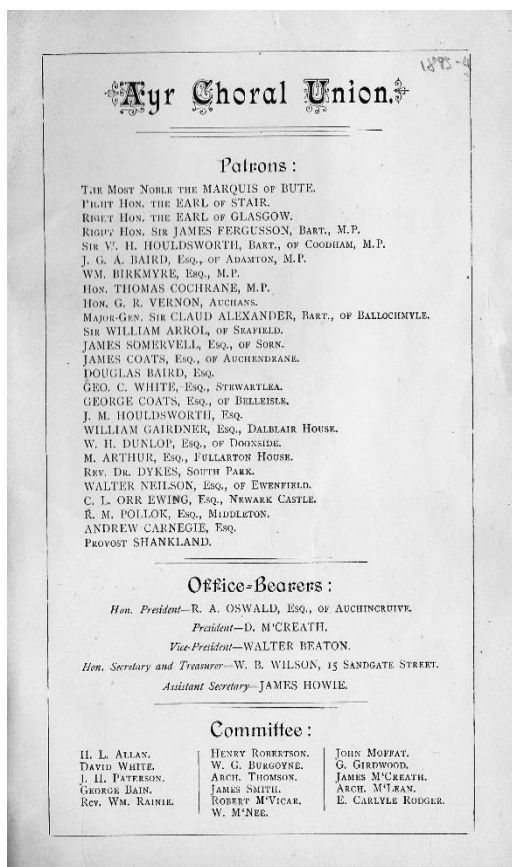


The Scottish Orchestra posing in 1901 at the Glasgow International Exhibition.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Gustav Holst, who played trombone is on the back row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the left. Image courtesy of RSNO.

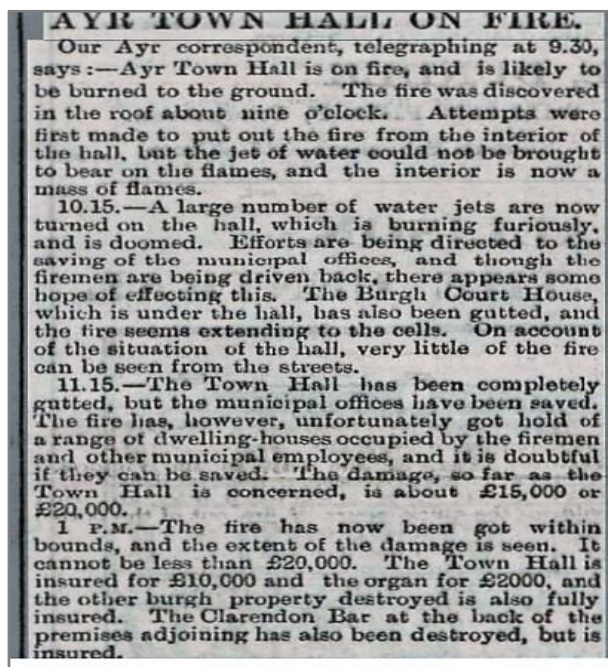




The "Directors"<sup>12</sup> tried to keep a firmer hand, and astutely contrived to have a splendid selection of the great and good as Patrons. Initial Patrons in 1878 included the Marquis of Bute; Sir Wm Cunninghame, Bart MP; Col. Alexander of Ballochmyle; R F Campbell Esq of Craigie; Sir Peter Coats of Auchendrane; J M Houldsworth, Esq, Carrick House; R A Oswald. Esq, of Auchincruive; William Gairdner Esq, Dalblair House; Hon G R Vernon, Auchans; Sir A B Walker, ex-Mayor, Liverpool; W S Dixon Esq, Belleisle ; Rev Dr Dykes, South Park; and Provost Steele. This list was extended by 1893-94, including Andrew Carnegie. It appears to be in order of importance from the aristocracy, through local landowners and representatives of the great industrial families such as Coats, Baird and Houldsworth, down to the Provost of Ayr. It is not clear what the duties of Patrons were - but presumably they contributed occasionally, and gave a sense of financial solidity and social prestige

ACU did have links with the wider community, though not as much as they might have done - for example taking part in lectures e.g. in February 1883 they gave musical illustrations to support Mr Laing's Lecture on Handel in the Public Library. ACU also participated in a grand demonstration in 1896, organised by Ayr Burns Club - a grand open air procession at Ballochmyle with Trade Unions and Friendly Societies. Interestingly at this time Dundee Choral, having received a personal offer to underwrite any losses incurred, undertook the innovation of populist concerts with greatly reduced ticket prices for the benefit of the working classes. Unfortunately, this worthwhile venture had to be abandoned after two performances because of a poor response from the targeted audience.

By 1900, ACU had capital of £131.4s.6d in the bank, and by 1902-03 £167.1s.4d. While this was partly due to an improvement in balancing aspiration with pleasing audiences and balancing the books, it was also due to having to scale back considerably when disaster overtook on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1897:



Evening Telegraph 1<sup>st</sup> July 1897



Edinburgh Evening News 1<sup>st</sup> July 1897

<sup>12</sup> It is unclear who the Directors were - possibly key members of the Committee. Only a few Directors' reports for AGMs survive but provide a valuable resource

The Advertiser also carried the disastrous news in its afternoon edition on 1<sup>st</sup> July:

*"Everything was in ruins, the platform, the galleries, the organ - in short, everything where an hour or two ago had been beauty and splendour was utter ruin and wreckage. The iron beams which had supported the gallery were twisted and shrivelled up with the intense heat, the remains of the roof lay in a smouldering mass along with the seats and chairs which had all been in the hall, and through the dense mist of smoke and steam the sky and clouds could be dimly discerned."*

It took nearly seven years for a grand new Town Hall to be built in the same location as the last, designed by James Kennedy Hunter, a native of Ayr and prominent architect who also designed the 1911 Pavilion. Meanwhile ACU was homeless. The first concert after the fire was in December 1897 held in the Artillery Hall, South Quay, "the only available building for the purpose" though "the want of an organ was a serious defect". The choir reverted to a miscellaneous programme, with two short cantatas followed by a number of choruses and glees, with local soloists. Sandgate Free Church was used in 1900, but at the May 1900 AGM, the Directors seriously considered suspending their work altogether - compromising by having concerts for subscribers and friends only until the new Town Hall was completed. Attendance at the AGM had been "discouragingly small". The President was Rev William Rainie and the competent D H Tait was Secretary and Treasurer (1897-1906). There was a small debit balance for the year of £9.9s.7d.

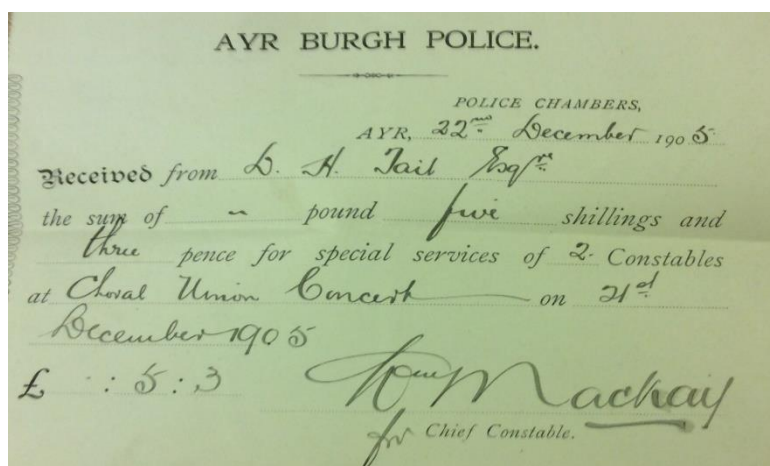
On the evening of Thursday 31 March 1904, the first concert in the new Town Hall took place, with another *Messiah*, under the patronage of the Provost, Magistrates and Town Council. The Advertiser excitedly pointed out that the new hall:

*"...has accommodation for fully 1000 persons and has cost about £10,000. The gallery is in the form of a balcony at one end and the seating arrangements are such that an uninterrupted view of the whole platform is obtained from every point of view. The panelling and decorations are very effective as are the novel and very graceful designs of the electric fittings. The anterooms and vestibules are also very complete and well finished. The hall is provided with a magnificent organ which has been erected by Messrs Lewis and company of Brixton. It is a three manual instrument and has especially good diatonic tone and also some very fine solo stops. The Ayr Choral union were entrusted with the opening concert and the Messiah was chosen as suitable to the occasion. Provost Allan and the members of Town Council attended in their official capacity. The Choral union numbering 160 voices and the Ayr Philharmonic Society a band of musicians numbering about 30 under the conductorship of Mr Hugh McNabb gave a creditable rendering of the Messiah. The well-known solos were rendered in a sympathetic way and were evidently highly appreciated by the large audience."*

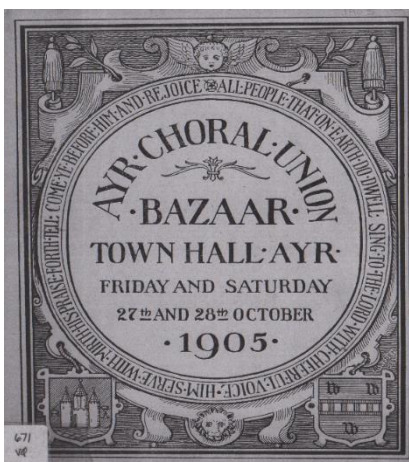
Health and Safety however became an issue for the grand new hall:

*"For this concert our archive has an interesting item: A Request for Payment from Ayr Burgh Police "for the services of three constables at 9d per hour per constable" at a total cost of 7/10½d. This might suggest a fear of possible disorder among the audience (such as attended the premiere of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" in Paris nine years later). In fact it was a required precaution to have officials on hand in the event of any emergency such as fire when the hall might have to be cleared!"*

Extract from Ronald Brash paper *Messiah - the Immortal Oratorio*, ACU Archive







In 1903-04 the Directors were again concerned about finances despite a membership of 140 and "efficiency and musical strength". At the 1905 AGM, James Clark, chairing the meeting, claimed that 'staging major concerts has resulted in a deficit of £35.19s.2d'. On 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> October 1905 a grand two day Bazaar was held, the objects being to clear existing liabilities, and to provide a reserve fund. The Bazaar was opened on the first day by Mr R A Oswald of Auchincruive, Honorary President of ACU. On the Saturday, the proceedings were opened by Sir William Arrol Liberal MP, whose company built the Forth Railway Bridge. There was a wide range of stalls including Fruit and Flower, Parcels, Refreshments, Provisions, Soprano and Tenor Stall, Alto and Bass Stall, a Town Stall, a Patrons' Stall (run by Mrs Oswald), Palmistry and Entertainment by James McKissock's orchestra, Ayrshire Philharmonic Society, and the Misses Hourston. The Bazaar raised £975.6s.3d in total, with £750 after costs were deducted, though some of this had to pay off the existing deficit.

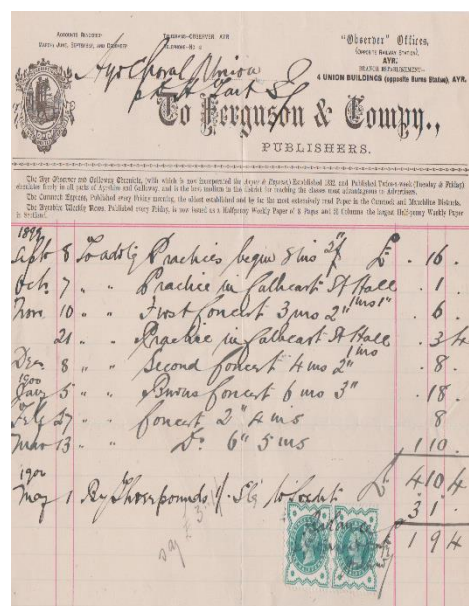
Annual costs of concerts were considerable and not just for soloists and orchestras - Practice Hall £11.17s, Hire of Town Hall, Bill posting (£2.16s), and Printing (£6.10s) from Ferguson's. Hire of orchestral and choral parts was from Edward Senior and son, London and Continental Pianoforte and Organ Saloons, who had a shop in Ayr - even with a discount of 2d per 1/- this cost £5.2s.4d including 2/6d for a lost 1<sup>st</sup> violin part for *St John's Eve*.



Herbert Brewer

As the pre-World War I years drew to a close, ACU continued to be occasionally innovative - 1909's programme included Herbert Brewer's *Sir Patrick Spens* (published by Novello in 1907) - a Scottish premiere.<sup>13</sup> ACU were fond of promoting "Scottish" music, although this version was composed by Brewer who lived in Gloucester all his life, and was a teacher of Herbert Howells, who also composed a *Sir Patrick Spens* Cantata.

Season 1910-11 was Hugh McNabb's last with ACU, after 33 years of sterling service, as he decided to retire. His post was advertised, and a members' ballot held for the two main contenders:



MR. WILFRID E. SENIOR

Wilfrid Senior (30) was the son of Edward Senior who had pianoforte and music saloon at 41 and 43 High Street, Ayr and had been an organist in Stirling. Wilfrid was born in Tillicoultry in 1880 and at age 13 he went to Dresden to study piano at the Conservatoire, where he gained a double diploma in piano and conducting, and was also coach to the Dresden Opera House. He returned home in 1904 as a pianist and teacher, living in Glasgow. In 1910 he was conducting the Ayr Philharmonic Society. The other contender was Henry Graves LRAM Mus Bac (46) of Park Circus, organist and music teacher, who conducted the Ayr Presbytery Choir Union and was experienced with working with very large choirs at various venues e.g. in July 1906 he conducted at a Grand Open Air concert organised by the Burns Choral Association.

The result of the ballot was fairly close, but ACU appointed Wilfrid Senior as their next Conductor from August 2011. A Finance and Concert Arrangement Committee was set up to consult with Mr Senior re terms of appointment etc. and there were changes afoot. Rolls were to be kept. Anyone absent for 2 nights was to be reminded by post card, then reported to committee. The Conductor was to have power to test all singers and reject the unsuitable. The Conductor should also classify voices. The full Scottish Orchestra and Conductor were to be booked for *Hymn of Praise* and other works, with an agreed fee of £65, and 35 voices were to go to Glasgow to take part in the Bardochet Cup competition.

<sup>13</sup> *Herbert Brewer also conducted the massed choirs at the 1914 Ayrshire Music Festival!*

However the music scene in Ayrshire had also moved on. As well as established choirs like ACU, there was a healthy choir scene in Ayrshire with Works choirs at Saxone, Glenfield Male Voice Choir, Glasgow and SW Railway Choir, and Newton Carpet Works Choir. The Pavilion had opened for business in 1911 seating 1500 for Variety shows; the Picture Palace and Green's Picturedrome were drawing the crowds; and the Town Hall featured well attended Vaudeville shows, in 1913 featuring James Hamilton, "the celebrated Scotch Tenor".<sup>14</sup>

In 1904 Frederic Ely, Professor of Music, had established Ayr Burgh and County Choir which claimed to focus on "unaccompanied singing - inaugurated for the study of high class music in the district" with William Houldsworth (one of ACU's grandest Patrons) as President. Born in Westminster in 1878, Ely was appointed organist and choir master at Ayr's Holy Trinity Church in 1903 having held similar posts at St Catherine's, Leytonstone from 1897-1901, and Holy Trinity, Sunningdale, Berkshire. He taught music at Ayr Academy, his pupils including Victor Edward Galway. Born in Westminster of fairly humble origins, he attended the Royal College of Music. In 1906, at a large gathering in the Town Hall attended by Lord Roseberry and his entourage, to launch a "Save the Auld Brig" campaign, it was the Burgh Choir who entertained the great and good. By 1912, Ely had co-founded the Ayrshire Music Festival with the daughter of William Houldsworth and beaten the Glasgow Orpheus at the Glasgow Choral Competition Festival in 1911. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1912 a concert by Ayr Burgh and County Choir was advertised as "both choral and instrumental with Soloists from Royal Choral, and Royal Opera Covent Garden. Conductor Mr Frederick Ely Mus Bac (London)" with unaccompanied part-songs by Mozart, Brahms, Sterndale, Bennett, Rossini and Gounod. In May 1912 Ely took a group from the Ayr Burgh Choir to the International Festival of Choirs in Paris - there were 500 choirs with 66 from UK - 3 from Scotland: Glasgow Choral, Glasgow Orpheus, and Ayr Burgh and County Choir.

What the ACU committee made of all this is not recorded. Things were not going well. There had been another financial crisis in December 1911, despite the large sum raised in 1905, with a bond for £300 "called up" and another bond for £100 paid out. The loss of £52.4s.7d was blamed on the Town Hall being too small and "special circumstances in Ayr at present". In May 1912 the Directors had decided that an expensive professional band, 4 soloists and the Town Hall meant "you can't make a profit".

In 1912<sup>15</sup> the Directors were again downhearted. Audiences were poor - the "Picture Palaces and Pavilion" blamed as they "affect chances of securing an audience for classical concerts". The Choir "was not so numerous" so there was a need to recruit. In May 1913 another loss of over £50 looked bad. In November 1913 the committee's response was to raise ticket prices. New prices were introduced: - "Balcony 6/-, Back Gallery (front) and Behind Area 2/6d and 5/-, the rest of the Back Gallery and Front Area 3/6d, a limited number of 1/- tickets for front 2 rows and any free seats at back of area." Holders of 1/- tickets were to enter by the police court entrance. In 1913-14 there was only one concert, Coleridge-Taylor's "A Tale of Old Japan", which had a huge audience and "a sum that had never before been exceeded at the Town Hall". Immediately there were ambitious suggestions of an *Elijah* and a Scottish Orchestra concert next season.

At the March 1914 AGM, a profit of £5.6s.8d was reported for the concert. Mr Senior was requesting a fee increase, and an early finish time to get the 9.35 train home to Glasgow, possibly looking for a way to extricate himself. In June the accounts were again depressing despite having one very successful concert. The attitude of the public was blamed: "the outside public did not take advantage of the 2<sup>nd</sup> concert ... income was disappointing". There was some discussion as to whether they should suspend ACU or not. They decided not to make any recommendations. Eight weeks later events overtook them - the First World War had begun.



*Ayr Pavilion*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Strawhorn, *The History of Ayr* p. 215

<sup>15</sup> 1912 Directors' Report Ayrshire Archive

<sup>16</sup> Courtesy of South Ayrshire Libraries

## 4. 1914-39 World War 1 to World War 2

When Britain became involved in a European war as Schlieffen's plan rolled German troops into Belgium in September 1914, the members of ACU, like most people, had no idea of the impact or length of what was to come. Their President was Robert Brown, a school teacher, the faithful solicitor W H McCosh was Secretary, and R A Oswald of Auchincruive continued his lengthy spell as Hon President. There was still a capital sum of over £200 in the bank (residue of the 1905 Bazaar). The number of women on the Committee had increased to 5 (compared to 11 men). Wilfrid Senior was still Conductor, though he had turned down the Committee's offer of an additional 5 guineas fee as inadequate. The concerts planned were Stanford's *Revenge* and Brahms' *Death of Tannhäuser*. Meanwhile the Burgh Choir had a Grand Patriotic Concert organised by 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1914 with Robert Burnett as soloist.

A poorly attended AGM was held in June 1915 and the Directors reported a loss of £16 on first concert and £8 on the second. Mrs Hay-Boyd had generously donated £8 to help. The second concert was not well patronised and they confirmed that that the Scottish Orchestra were now too expensive.

Three options were outlined:

- To continue as before with a lower salary for conductor
- To appoint an amateur/ honorary conductor
- To suspend operations for a year or until the end of the war

The 1915 AGM was then adjourned but was continued on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1915. The Town Council was unable to guarantee availability of the Town Hall for war reasons, but were happy for ACU to continue to use the Council Chambers for rehearsals. Mr Senior "was disposed to reduce his terms for the ensuing season" (£25). The generous spirit evinced by Mr Senior was emphasised and it called for the unanimous thanks of members. The Committee recommended that they proceed with one concert at least, however an amendment was passed:

1. The practice of the Union be proceeded with so that the continuity of the Union and its history would not be interrupted
2. A salaried conductor be not appointed
3. The services of an honorary conductor be provided who would be paid out of pocket expenses.

Mr Markham-Lee, Mr Newsome and Mr Mackie were then interviewed and Mr Markham-Lee was offered the post of honorary conductor. William Henry Markham-Lee was born in Cambridge in 1876. His brother was the composer Ernest Markham-Lee. William was living in Weymouth in 1911 but why he ended up in Ayr is not clear though he was probably organist at the New Church. He commenced rehearsals and *Elijah* music was to be brought until a decision was made as to music - the choir then studied Mendelssohn's *Lauda Zion* and sang with New Church choir at Christmas.

Wilfrid Senior went on to have a stellar career in music. In 1914 Wilfrid was solo pianist with the Glasgow Choral and Orchestral Union in the St Andrew's Hall in Glasgow, and became pianist in several emerging Picture Palaces in Glasgow including The Picture Salon and the Palace ("unsurpassed for comfort and beauty")<sup>17</sup>. During the First World War, Wilfrid conducted major fund raising concerts in Glasgow. After the war he became one of Scotland's foremost musicians - pianist, orchestral conductor, choral conductor, adjudicator, examiner, lecturer and broadcaster. He was conductor of Glasgow Choral Union for 25 years, conducted both the Scottish Orchestra and the New Light Orchestra, and became Assistant Director of RSAM in 1947, then Vice Principal in 1952.



*The Ayrshire Yeomanry setting off for Gallipoli from their training base at Annsmuir near Cupar,<sup>18</sup>*

<sup>17</sup> Advert in the Glasgow Herald 1912

<sup>18</sup> Courtesy of South Ayrshire Council <https://southayrshirehistory.wordpress.com/tag/ayrshire-yeomanry/>

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1916 a concert was held by ACU for the Provost's fund to provide comforts for local regiments. Sterndale Bennett's *May Queen* was sung with the choir up to pre-war strength - assisted by several members of New Church choir. Miss Abernethy was accompanist. £26 was raised for the Provost's fund. Income was £94.1s.6d and expenses £68.4s.6d (including Programme boys 6/- and Ushers 16/-). It was agreed at the April AGM (adjourned from September 1915) that Mr Markham-Lee received an honorarium of £6.6s and the pianist £1.1s. The Directors commented on war conditions and absence of members on military service. There had been no subscription concerts and no appeal to patrons - but they felt that ACU, with an unbroken record, should not give up having weekly practices as normal. 1915-16 was a good year financially with the capital sum standing at £211.5s.7d. The AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> April was then adjourned. It was clear that these were not good times to make long term plans.



The ongoing adjourned AGM was reconstituted on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1916. It was agreed to resume rehearsals. Mrs Hay-Boyd was elected President and chaired the meeting - ACU's first female President. Mrs Mary Elizabeth Roberts<sup>19</sup> Hay-Boyd of Townend, Symington was the only daughter of Colonel James George Hay-Boyd. She was married to a vicar, Rev Humphrey Gordon Roberts Hay-Boyd, who had adopted her name on marriage, and both were staunch supporters of ACU. Mr Markham-Lee was re-appointed and Miss Abernethy was to be pianist. There were now 6 women and 7 men on the Committee. It was proposed that *St Cecilia's Day* by Van Bree, *The Life of the Czar* by Glinka, and Somervell's *Charge of the Light Brigade*<sup>20</sup> be studied and concerts considered later. The Secretary was to advertise amongst residential soldiers locally.

The next Season 1916-17 also held together and was a good year financially - the first time for 12 years that there had been a balance "on the right side". Mr Markham-Lee continued as Honorary Conductor - he was paid £22, the pianist £2.2s and the Secretary, Mr McCosh, was given £4 for telephone expenses. Income from choir's subs (perhaps 1/3d per head) was £2.10s (Sopranos), 12/6d (Altos), 12/6d (Tenors) and 12/6d (Basses) which suggests that male numbers were holding up at least as well as the altos. A new minute book was purchased costing 5/- but unfortunately it has not survived. Rehearsals were held in the YMCA room. Again there were no subscription concerts, but there was a highly successful Burns Concert on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1917 featuring the Bass-Baritone Robert Burnett who had performed regularly at the BBC Proms before the war. This raised £10.3s for the Red Cross.

A big concert was planned for March 1917 with a programme of *St Cecilia's Day* (J B Van Bree), *Life of the Czar* (Glinka) and *Charge of the Light Brigade* (Somervell). A famous soprano Miss Carrie Tubb was hired but Ayr Town Hall was then commandeered by the military so the concert had to be abandoned. Fortunately Miss Tubb's contract had included this possibility, so no cost was incurred. Carrie Tubb (1876-1976) was an Opera and Oratorio soloist of great distinction. She came from a poor family of eight children in London, and paid her own fees at the Guildhall School of Music by dressmaking. She featured on Desert Island Discs with Roy Plomley in 1970 - her favourite track was Delius *A Walk to the Paradise Garden*.

The planned Carrie Tubb concert was reinstated for 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918 in the Town Hall. Arrangements were complicated. In November 1917 a letter from Richard Daeblitz (orchestra fixer and leader) to Markham-Lee, 12 Bellevue Road, Ayr, stated "I will have some difficulty getting the orchestra together....there is an awful dearth of good wind and brass players..." He could get "8 strings, 4 woodwind and 4 brass for £25.10s fee plus rail but you would have to provide bed and food". Richard Daeblitz, an immigrant from Germany, led the second violins of the Scottish Orchestra under conductors of the stature of Nikisch, Richter and Richard Strauss. His grandson was the Scottish composer Buxton Daeblitz Orr.



<sup>19</sup> Some sources use Robarts rather than Roberts

<sup>20</sup> Somervell was a pupil of Stanford, born in Windermere and son of the founder of K shoes. He studied at King's College, Cambridge and the RCM.





A further letter on 18<sup>th</sup> December made arrangements for Markham-Lee and Daebnitz to meet under the clock at Glasgow Central Station. The orchestral part of the programme was agreed as: *Overture to William Tell*; *the Little Fairy Tale*; *Coeur Brise*; and *Praelidium* by Jarnefelt. The choral part of the concert (Stanford *Song of Freedom*, *Lord is My Shepherd*, *St Cecilia*, and Somervell's *Charge of the Light Brigade*) would require 3 violins, 1 viola, 1 cello, 1 bass, 1 flute, 1 clarinet, 1 oboe, 1 bassoon, 2 trumpets, and 3 trombones. However Daebnitz was concerned as: "*I shall have the not very pleasant task to ask 2 young ladies now to play 2nd violin instead of first, however I have faced greater dangers in my time*".

The Concert made £147.16s.6d and £50 was donated to the War Fund - a huge success. The Directors' Report for 1917-18 again remitted to the membership the question of whether to continue or not, given the ongoing war situation, and reported that the Capital fund was now £190.9s.7d.

An AGM was held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1918 with Mrs Hay-Boyd in the chair. It was agreed that the cost of any orchestra was not to exceed £10, and the question of accompanist at rehearsals was remitted. Works were to be selected by Committee. Overall ACU had a good war, managing continuity, supporting the war effort, and hopefully raising morale for the people of Ayr. The precious Capital fund had diminished - but not by much.

During the immediate post-war period ACU appears to have returned to pre-war problems. Deficits were incurred for 1918-19 and 1919-20. Mr Markham-Lee was paid £18.7s.6d, Alex Ferguson (Printers) cost £14.8s.6d and Miss E Bennie (soloist) £12.12s. A present for Mrs McGill (retiring accompanist) was £1.18s.6d. By the AGM in September 1922 there were 100 members, but the Capital fund had dropped to £80.14s.4d - largely due to having yet another expensive star attraction, Madame Agnes Nicolls, who was awarded a CBE by King George as "leading soprano in both oratorio and opera". The atmosphere appeared to be somewhat strained at the AGM as a discussion on entering the Music Festival had to be dropped as "there was so much trouble experienced in dealing with questions". Hopefully the payment of £1.15s to Constable Mackie of Tarbolton was not to quell member disputes.



Madame Agnes Nicolls

The following year saw a curtailed programme - one subscription concert in February 1923 and an Ayr Hospital Fund Concert consisting of old pieces. The February concert included *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, and "*The Battle of the Baltic*", and was well received by the Ayrshire Post which commented that Mr Markham-Lee was a tower of strength and hoped that he "*would long wield the baton and maintain the prestige of the oldest musical society in our midst*". At the 1925 AGM however, there were complaints that the work chosen (by the Conductor), *The May Queen*, had received only moderate support, whereas the committee and members had wanted *Judas Maccabeas* with organ and tenor.

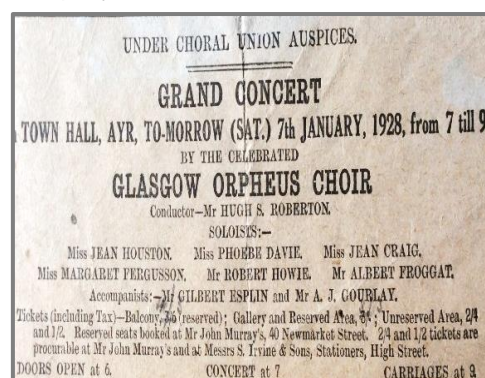
R A Oswald of Auchincruive died in April 1921, having been ACU's Honorary President since 1883. He was the elder son of George Oswald, and was a JP and Depute Lieutenant of the County, a racehorse owner and chairman of the Auld Brig of Ayr Preservation Committee. Mrs Oswald, a soprano, sang in ACU "sitting with the ordinary people" and often gave donations so the Accounts looked better. She was an Honorary Vice-President.



Andrew McIlwraith

His successor as Hon President was Andrew McIlwraith who had attended the first 1876 meeting. Born in 1844 in Ayr and educated at Ayr Academy, and brother of Sir Thomas McIlwraith, he established the London based shipping and mercantile Company McIlwraith, McEachran and Co in 1875 which linked mainly with Australia. He was a close friend of Andrew Fisher (born in Crosshouse and PM of Australia), Joseph Paxton, and Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Andrew was large, handsome and red bearded - he "was abstemious but never refused a large draught of medicinal brandy or scrumpy".

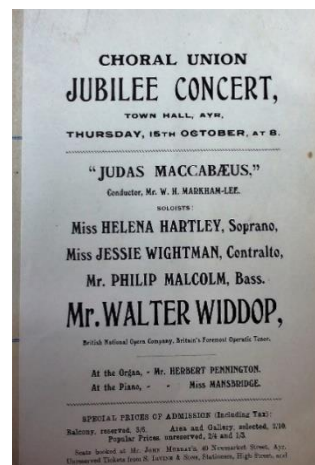
In the early 1920's, ACU at last discovered a money spinner. They acted as agents for the Glasgow Orpheus Choir who performed in Ayr Town Hall and split the proceeds - in 1923-24 this amounted to over £31 for ACU. This became a popular annual event well into the 1930's.





Walter Widdop

With the Capital sum down to £80, fortunately ACU's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary came along for Season 1925-26, "with the largest and most successful fund raising event in ACU's long history".<sup>21</sup> The celebrations began with a 15<sup>th</sup> October Celebration Concert: *Judas Maccabaeus* with Mr Walter Widdop, one of the finest tenors of his day, with organ accompaniment by Herbert Pennington. Widdop (1892-1949), a Yorkshireman, was acknowledged as the foremost Wagnerian tenor of his time, who made many fine recordings for HMV. Reserved seats were specially reduced to 3/6d and 2/10d on 12<sup>th</sup> October to ensure a full house.



There were two further jubilee concerts - a New Year's Eve concert by the Scottish Orchestra, and also a *Messiah* in March 1926 in which all church choirs in the Burgh were invited to sing, as part of the Anniversary, and which had yet more star-studded soloists, Ida Cooper, Lucy Nuttall, Frank Webster and Kenneth Ellis.

On 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November a Bazaar was held in the Town Hall *"to place the society in an assured position for continuance of their good work in the cause of music in Ayr, after an uninterrupted period of 50 years... the study of music exercises such a refining influence upon human character and by doing some good will result in the giving of pleasure to others"*<sup>22</sup>.

A Bazaar committee was set up chaired by Mrs Hay-Boyd, and supported by the Provost, Magistrates and Councillors of Ayr. The Bazaar secretary was the highly competent W H McCosh and the Treasurer was R J Hastings, Accountant, the Clydesdale Bank, Ayr. The Bazaar opened each day at 2.30 pm and closed at 9.30 pm. The charges for admission were from 2 pm - 4 pm one shilling, and from 4 pm to closing, sixpence, with children half price. On Friday the opening ceremony was performed by the Marchioness of Ailsa, and the Chairman was Provost Gould. On Saturday, Sir Thomas C R Moore, MP for Ayr Burghs, performed the opening ceremony, chaired by Andrew Mitchell. In addition to the stalls there were Side Shows and a Fun Fair, including clock golf, palmistry and fortune telling. An orchestra played on both days, with fox trots and "one steps" as special items, and there were sketches in the committee rooms. A letter was sent by Mrs Hay-Boyd to all the rich patrons, suggesting that they might like to make a monetary donation rather than goods for the Bazaar and enclosing a reply envelope.



The main stalls were:

Town Stall	£114.3s.7d
Soprano and Tenor Stall	£100.8s.2d
Alto and Bass Stall	£111.6s.11d
Cake and Candy	£65.1s.9d
Produce	£51.15s.0d
Refreshments	£60.3s.3d
Extract from <i>Scotsman</i> 16.11.25	
Dance	£42.7s.0d

**AYR CHORAL UNION.**—Lieut.-Col. Moore, M.P. for Ayr Burghs, on Saturday opened the second day's proceedings of the bazaar at Ayr, held on behalf of Ayr Choral Union, which has just celebrated its jubilee. In a racy speech, the Colonel referred to the connection of Ayrshire with golf and music, but confessed that he could not speak with authority on either. He had been a guest of the Scottish Law Agents' Society at Turnberry recently, and when he came to drive off before such a distinguished company he missed the ball. (Laughter.) As regarded music, he must plead an abysmal ignorance of that greatest of all the arts, although that did not prevent him getting the greatest pleasure out of music. He had often thought what a difference it would have made both to the world and himself had he been brought up in Ayr, and been privileged to have had his musical education under the Ayr Choral Union. (Laughter and applause.) The bazaar was most successful, a sum of £850 being drawn over the two days, which goes to the funds of the Union.

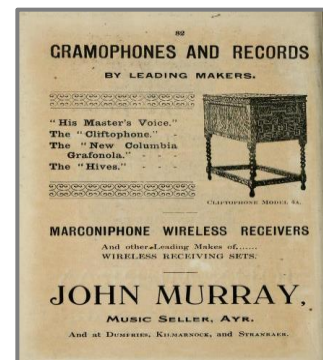
The overall total raised was £870.16s.8d, reflecting a remarkable commitment from the organising committee, members and supporters of ACU.

<sup>21</sup> 1976 History of ACU

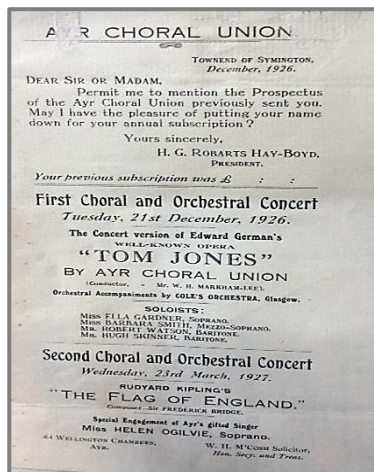
<sup>22</sup> ACU :50 year anniversary: a retrospective 1925



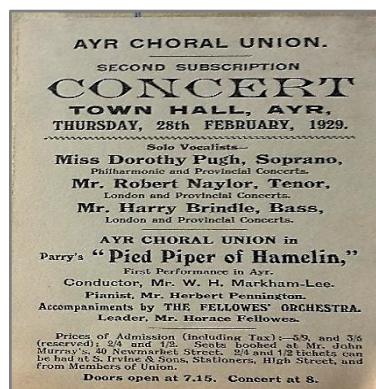
The years after 1925 were difficult for ACU leading to an *annus horribilis* in 1928-29. How far this was due to factors within ACU, and how far to more general social and economic factors, is hard to determine. Ayr had lost 817 men in the war, and several local industries, including shipbuilding, suffered in the post-war slump and the General Strike of 1926. Meanwhile a wide range of leisure opportunities emerged, supporting Ayr's growth as a holiday destination. Ben Popplewell and Sons were running the Pavilion (dancing and roller skating) and the Gaiety Theatre, as well as converting the Palace Cinema into a *Palais de Dance*; Green's Playhouse showed silent films with orchestra, while the Picture House in the High Street had an organ. All the pre-war musical societies were re-established, and music was also available on radio after 1922, with the first HMV shop opening in London in 1921.



Advertisement in ACU Programme 1924



In 1926-27, both ACU concerts, Edward German's *Tom Jones* for the first, and selection of short works by Bridge, Gade and Arnett for the second, incurred significant deficits, despite effective advertising by A. Lindsay delivering handbills and a tramway employee hanging cards in cars (this cost 3/6d). The following year only one concert, *Samson*, was held - a good test as it was usually popular with everyone. At a committee meeting in May 1927, now chaired by Mr Roberts Hay-Boyd, his wife having relinquished the Presidency in 1926 after her splendid Bazaar, concern was expressed over falling off in membership, want of enthusiasm among members, complaints about method of rehearsal, a lack of concord between members and Conductor, and increased competition in musical circles. A deputation was arranged to meet with the Conductor, in a friendly way, to discuss these issues, and assurances were given by Mr Markham-Lee that he would work for a restoration of enthusiasm.



At the AGM in May 1928, a letter of resignation was received from Miss Mansbridge, accompanist. A pupil of Mr Markham-Lee, James Thomson, was subsequently appointed for the 1928-29 season, rehearsing Mr Markham-Lee's choices of *Pied Piper of Hamelin* and *Hero and Leander* for February, and part-songs for November. The first concert's deficit was £27.2s.9d, and the second's was £52.14s.11d. with a total deficit of over £95, despite neither being expensive concerts. The Capital fund was already down to £500. Subscribers were falling off, the public unsupportive, chosen music was unpopular, and there was too much competition. After the first concert, members received tickets to sell and a postcard from W H McCosh saying "you are urged for the honour of the union to make a desperate effort to dispose of the enclosed tickets".

At this juncture overtures were made by the Ayr Burgh Choir to discuss amalgamation, but ACU Committee "at this time do not consider it advisable to meet the Ayr Burgh Choir Committee to discuss the question of amalgamation". The Committee meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1929 had some hard decisions to make, and it was agreed that the Conductor's post should be thrown open to public application and the Accompanist post decided by Committee. An AGM was called for the following week, and all members were sent postcards. There was unanimous support for the Committee's view - perhaps there were reservations about scapegoating but they were not recorded in W H McCosh's immaculate minutes.

There was an excellent response (10 applicants) to the advertised Conductor's post, including Matthew Morton LRAM, Conductor of Loudoun UF Church in Newmilns; James Duncan, Musical Director, Philharmonic Opera Society, Glasgow; Hubert Cresswell, organist at St Leonard's Church in Ayr; plus other applicants from Ayr, Greenock, Edinburgh, Newmilns, Lanark and Glasgow. Views were sought from Wilfrid Senior and Horace Fellowes (Violinist and Leader of the Scottish Orchestra who toured with the Horace Fellowes String Quartet) as to suitability of candidates, and Mr Morton was offered the post with a salary of £30.



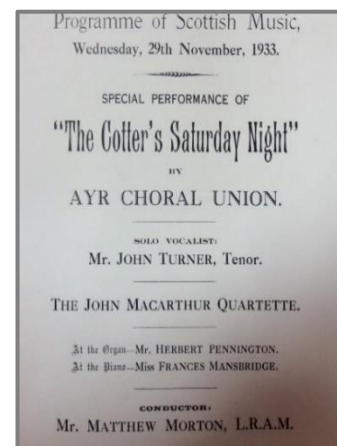
Frances Mansbridge

Frances Mansbridge was restored to her post as Accompanist - and mainstay of the choir - until 1972. Frances - organist at St Andrew's Church, Ayr for 50 years, and highly competent Accompanist and pianist, had joined ACU as a singer, then taken over at the piano at a rehearsal when Mrs McGill became ill in 1923.



Isobel Baillie

Matthew Morton started in a purposeful manner, stating his intention "to devote a portion of the time at each practice to the correct production and management of the voice, especially of the tenor voice". Programmes continued to be fairly unambitious, though they reverted to Oratorio with a *Messiah* in December 1931 and 1932, and a *Creation* (with Isobel Baillie as soloist) in 1933. In February 1933 there were 44 Sopranos, 25 Altos, 17 Tenors and 23 Basses, though numbers fluctuated. There was a fund-raising concert in Green's Playhouse on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1933 with 200 tickets at 2/-, 200 at 1/6d, 300 at 1/- and 300 at 4/6d.



The new regime managed to reduce the level of annual deficit to £18.4s.6d in 1930 and the membership had increased "in numbers and enthusiasm". More innovative was Sir Compton Mackenzie's *The Cotter's Saturday Night* - a work that had not been performed "outside the cities". MacKenzie, according to the Ayr Advertiser, "had grasped, as only a Scotsman could, the spirit and the beauty of Burns...."

There did appear to be a wind of change in the 1930's. In 1931 there was an attempt to increase members' subs from 2/6d (which was resisted by the members). It was also agreed that members could not sing at a concert unless they had attended two thirds of rehearsals. There appeared to be more open discussion and negotiation about costs of soloists and orchestras. The committee was reduced and remodelled with key sub-committees for Concerts, Publicity and Social Events. There was increased pressure on members to sell tickets, as Subscribers were a dying breed. An annual social event was introduced e.g. a Whist Drive with informal dancing organised by ladies. By 1931 W H McCosh was keen to retire after 25 years - "as the ship was sailing in smooth waters", but he was hard to replace. However in 1931-32 Robert A Paterson, an Ayr Solicitor, was prepared to be joint secretary for a year, while Mr McCosh remained as Treasurer until the next AGM, when he finally escaped.

Unfortunately, the Rev Humphrey Gordon Roberts Hay-Boyd, late Vicar of Spratton, Northants, of Townend, Symington, husband of Mary Elizabeth Hay-Boyd, died on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1931 in a Prestwick Nursing home. ACU needed a new President, and the Rev William Frederick Vernon, graduate of Aberdeen and Edinburgh Universities, and Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Ayr, was appointed to this onerous task, though his attendance at Committee meetings was often overtaken by pressing clerical duties. The Honorary President (and first Vice-President) Andrew McIlwraith also died on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1932 at his home at Woodcot, Salcombe, South Devon, leaving £107,200. His place was taken by Andrew Mitchell in 1932, another survivor of the 1876 meeting - a "keen and energetic singer" and head of the firm Walter Mitchell and Sons, Provision Merchant and Bacon Curers.

The financial demons had not disappeared with a change of Conductor - by 1932 it was pointed out the invested funds were disappearing at an alarming rate - the Capital account was down to £376. There had been a slump in audiences generally, which had been "experienced in double measure" by ACU. The Orpheus concerts were no longer making ACU money, and though they didn't cost anything, there may have been unintended effects of impact on audience preference for particular styles or standards of choral singing. The usual commitments to reducing costs, small local orchestras, each member to sell two tickets (on an ethical rather than contractual basis), more whist drives, 5/- subs etc. were made by the Committee.



Despite reservations, ACU decided to go for a Scottish Orchestra concert on 22 November 1934. For their money they did get John Barbirolli who was Conductor of the orchestra from 1933-36 when he went off to the New York Philharmonic. They also got David McCallum, from Kilsyth, who was leader of the SO from 1932-36, as well as father to another David McCallum (Illya Kuryakin in the television series *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*). Helen Ogilvie was from Ayr and a high profile Soprano with the Carl Rosa Opera Company. What more could any choir want?

However the ACU advert in the Ayrshire Post had another one directly above it: which suggests that all was not well in choral networking in Ayrshire in 1934. The Ayr Burgh Choir with Frederic Ely was going from strength to strength, winning at Festivals and regularly broadcast by BBC Scotland. While they specialised in unaccompanied choral music, the Burgh choir did venture in December 1934 into what ACU thought was their territory.





The ACU Scottish Orchestra concert in November 1934 was a great success, but by May 1935 AGM, the accounts predictably showed a loss of £85.9s.10d, and the Capital sum under £200. Notwithstanding, ACU booked the Scottish Orchestra with Barbirolli again for November 1935 and a performance of Brewer's *Sir Patrick Spens*. This was their Diamond Jubilee year and they asked the BBC to broadcast their concert - with the proviso that if they agreed then they would get a top class London Baritone, and if not then some lesser being. Mr Vernon had called on the Scottish Regional Director of the BBC in Edinburgh who promised to help, but there is no record of the concert being broadcast. However, the London Baritone, John Morel, who had sung at the BBC Last Night of the Proms, and given concerts on the radio, was the soloist.

## The Diamond Jubilee Season 1935-36


**AYR CHORAL UNION**  
**Diamond Jubilee Attained This Year**

Ayr Choral Union attains its diamond jubilee during the coming season. It was inaugurated in 1876, and has had a continuous existence since then. Under the direction of the late Hugh McNabb, Mr. Wilfrid Senior, Mr. W. H. Markham-Lee and Mr. Matthew Morton, the present conductor, a number of important works have been performed, including many well-known oratorios and cantatas. In view of this notable anniversary a special appeal has been made to past and present members to assist in making the season a successful one, and to the public of Ayr there is an appeal for support of the Union.

At the annual meeting it was agreed to invite the Scottish Orchestra for a concert to be given in November, and it was decided that the choir should render Brewer's "Sir Patrick Spens", the remainder of the programme to be devoted to orchestral works. Cowen's "Rose Maiden" was selected for the second concert to be given at the end of the season.

The following office-bearers were appointed: Hon. president, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Alloway Park, Ayr; hon. vice-presidents, Mrs. R. A. Oswald, Mount Charles; Mrs. Roberts Hay-Boyd, Townend of Symington; Colonel C. L. C. Hamilton, C.M.G., D.S.O., Rozelle, and Provost Thomas Galloway, Ayr. President, the Rev. W. F. Vernon, M.A., B.D.; vice-president, Mr. William Walker; hon. secretary and treasurer, Mr. Robert A. Paterson, 21 Wellington Square, Ayr; assistant secretary, Mr. W. H. N. Fergusson, 18 Whitellets Road, Ayr; joint librarians, Mrs. and Mrs. C. McInnes; conductor, Mr. Matthew Morton, L.R.A.M., Ayr; accompanist, Miss Frances


**TOWN HALL, AYR, Thursday, 21st Nov., 1935.**



**THE SCOTTISH ORCHESTRA**  
 CONDUCTOR:  
**JOHN BARBIROLLI**

**"SIR PATRICK SPENS,"**  
 AND  
**"BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS,"**  
 BY  
**AYR CHORAL UNION.**

**Solo Vocalist:**  
**JOHN MOREL, BARITONE.**  
 ONE OF LONDON'S RISING STARS.



Price of Tickets: 5s., 3s. (reserved), 2s. and 1s.  
 Seats booked with Messrs. Paterson, Sons & Co., Ltd., 40 Newmarket Street.  
 DOORS OPEN AT 7.30. CONCERT AT 8.

**AYR CHORAL UNION.**  
**DIAMOND JUBILEE YEAR.**

Conductor: Mr. MATTHEW MORTON, L.R.A.M., Braemore, Ayr.

PRACTICES will be resumed for Season 1935-36 in **MISSION CHURCH, CARRICK STREET HALLS, AYR**, on *Thursday, 12th September*, at 8 p.m. There are vacancies in all the Sections. If you know of any likely new members bring them along on Thursday evening.

Work for First Concert "Sir Patrick Spens." The Music can be had prior to resumption from Messrs. S. Irvine & Sons, High Street.

**ROBERT A. PATERSON,**  
*Hon. Secretary.*

N.B.—(1) As the First Concert will be held in November it is hoped that there will be a full turn-out at this Practice.  
 (2) New members are required, and the existing members are urged to make a special recruiting effort for the **DIAMOND JUBILEE YEAR**.  
 (3) A special appeal is made to past members to rally round and make the 60th Season an outstanding success.


**AYR CHORAL UNION.—Session 1935-1936.**  
**DIAMOND JUBILEE YEAR.**  
**MEMBER'S TICKET,**  
 2s. 6d. EACH.

(Members are respectfully requested to make payment to Section Leader at commencement of Season.)

Name.....  
 Address.....

**ROBERT A. PATERSON, Hon. Secy. and Treas.**  
**W. H. N. FERGUSSON, Hon. Assist. Secy.**

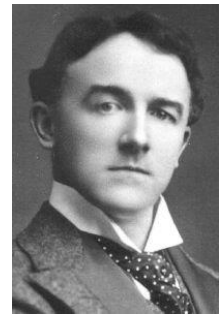
The Union meets for Practice on Thursday Evenings, at Eight o'clock.



WHERE THERE ARE CHILDREN  
 THERE SHOULD BE A PIANO.

UNHURRY YOURS TO-DAY AS  
**PATERSON'S,**  
 SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL MUSIC HOUSE,  
 40 Newmarket Street, AYR.

At the 1935-36 AGM, Mr William Walker, Vice-President was in the Chair (again Mr Vernon had sent his Apologies about being unable to give sufficient time to ACU, and expressing his willingness to resign). The minute of the meeting is succinct. The financial report showed a loss of £101.2s.1d, with the Capital sum now at £96.5s.8d. All office bearers and Committee were re-appointed other than the Librarian, and Lady Glen-Coats of Crosbie Tower, Troon, was made a Hon Vice-President to take the place of Mrs Oswald, who had died. No discussion regarding finances is minuted. *The Mystic Trumpeter* was planned for 1936-37, but on Mr Morton's advice this was changed to Edward German's *Merrie England* performed on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1937 with Miss Mansbridge on the piano. *Merrie England* was, perhaps surprisingly, very popular in 1937, though neither England, nor Ayr Choral Union, were particularly merry.



Sir Edward German

At the 1937 AGM, Members' subs which were still 2/6d, came to £7.8s suggesting a membership of under 60. Ticket sales came to £75.8s (not including subscribers). Conductors and artistes came to £168.8s.6d. The West of Scotland Billing Company cost 2/6d and Ayr Brigade boys were used as programme sellers to save money. There was a loss of £53.19s.1d. The Practice night was changed from Thursday to Tuesday. A major appeal for help was made to the Andrew Carnegie Trust - "there has been increasing competition in this town from amateur societies of various descriptions with the result it has become more and more difficult to carry on..." The Carnegie Trust came up with a "one off" £100 in lieu of the usual annual £5 award.

At the AGM there was confusion as to whether the President Rev Vernon had resigned as no one had heard from him, - "no reply whatsoever!" so it was assumed that he had. Provost Wills became President but does not appear at any minuted meetings and died in 1940. Vice-President William Walker was left in charge but unfortunately he died in 1938, and Charles McInnes as Vice-President then took over. Mr Paterson, Secretary and Treasurer resigned at the 1939 AGM, when at last the members agreed to pay a 5/- sub. The good news was that Mr Morton took a Ladies' Choir to the Ayrshire Music Festival in March 1938. Again as war became imminent, Ayr Choral Union was overtaken by events, though it is difficult to work out how far commitment to singing Oratorios and part-songs was adversely affected by the crumbling of European peace, or simply intrinsic issues within the organisation.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany, and World War 2 commenced for real. While Ayr Choral Union was at no time wound up during World War 2, activities were much more curtailed and tentative than during World War 1.



King George VI Broadcasting to the Nation

## 5. 1939-1976 World War 2 to the Centenary

Two weeks after World War 2 started, ACU held a meeting and decided that “the Union should suspend activities and cancel practices”. An advertisement was put into the Ayrshire Post to advise members. No suitable secretary had been found according to a minute of this meeting (signed off by Mr McInnes at a committee meeting in June 1940), which suggested that the President and Mr Morton should decide what to do next. By June 1940, Provost Wills, still President, had died. Mr McInnes chaired a committee meeting which decided not to appoint a new President, or have rehearsals “due to the dearth of male voices”. All activities continued to be suspended, though it was hoped to have a social meeting in due course. Mr R A Jones was appointed Secretary, though he then resigned in 1942 due to his removal of business to Maybole. Mr Downie agreed to act as Secretary and Treasurer on a temporary basis. Also in 1942, all the music which had been stored at Mr Morton’s house had to be moved to the premises of Messrs Stewart in the High Street to meet with ARP (Air Raid Precautions) requirements.

The next meeting appears to have taken place in September 1945 when the war ended, although there are references to a *Messiah* conducted by Hubert Cresswell in 1944. William Downie, George Horn and Charles McInnes set up an informal meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1945 - supported by Miss Mansbridge, Mrs Bannatyne, Miss Young, Miss Steele, Mr Morton, and Mr Turnbull. A Special General Meeting (attended by 21 ladies and 12 men) was then called in the Grammar School. G F Horn offered to be interim conductor as Mr Morton’s eyesight was failing and he had resigned. The SGM decided that ACU should continue, appoint a new conductor and investigate rehearsal rooms. Miss Mansbridge would continue as accompanist. The Conductor would be paid £25 and the accompanist £15.15s. Mr Downie commented that “most of the old members are back” and “it is a good thing to get the lively choruses going once again”. With £59.2s.8d in funds, the Masonic Hall was too dear at 30/- for the lower room, so the Grammar School at 4/6d a night in Tuesdays seemed a good option. By 25<sup>th</sup> September’s meeting, there were two applications for Conductor - Hubert Cresswell and James Liddell, and the Committee remitted the choice to the members who chose the latter. James Liddell was a local organist described as “young and enthusiastic”. He thought there should be more young members - “the average age of the choir is still rather high”. In regard to music - “we should not get ourselves into a rut - *Messiah*, *Creation*, *Elijah*, ad infinitum”. Mr Liddell also pointed out the desirability of performing works chosen as near as possible to “*what was laid down by the composer - after all he knows best!*”

Charles McInnes took the lead as Vice-President, but initial attempts to get a new President were not fruitful, until William Downie, interim Secretary and Treasurer since 1942, who had paid the NFMS subs out of his own pocket during the war, was talked round. Mr George F Horn became Secretary, and the first female Treasurer was Miss J Steele. James Boyd Director of the Education Committee became Honorary Vice-President “to help efforts of resuscitation” as did Mr T Limond, Town Chamberlain. A Social Committee was set up, and a *Messiah* planned for December 1945. Mr R L Angus of Ladykirk accepted the invitation to be Honorary President. The Constitution appeared to have been lost, as was the music stand, but these were not seen as obstacles to forging ahead - things were in order and the stage was set for ACU’s next phase.

Season 1945-46 was a lively one with a December *Messiah* featuring choir soloists and the Ayr Amateur Orchestral Society, followed by another *Messiah* in Maybole. An invitation by NALGO to sing in County Buildings in March was accepted, with proceeds to NALGO’s benevolent funds, and then a part-songs concert in River Street Hall in April for River Street Mission funds. Choir membership was 82 (38 Sopranos, 18 Altos, 12 tenors and 14 basses) for the *Messiahs*, but fell to 56 for the part-songs programme. What was particularly important, other than the establishment of links within the community and fundraising for good causes, was that the season made a profit, with a balance of £88.18s.11d. Programmes contained advertisements to cover printing costs. A new constitution was agreed in September 1946, continuing the aim of “the study and public performance of choral music”.

Attendance at rehearsals was to be regular and punctual with members struck off if they were missing for four consecutive rehearsals without adequate explanation. Attendance at concerts would depend on good rehearsal attendance - an issue which has continued to be a thorny one wrestled over by many committees. The annual subscription was 5/- , with members paying for their own music, and the price of tickets 5/-, 3/6d and 2/6d. Mrs Linton (mother of Stewart Linton) collected a penny a week from choir members, increased to 3d in 1950. Any “extras” singing in *Messiah* concerts were to pay the full subscription





There was continuing care over expenditure, planning unambitious concerts, with organ or local orchestras, although adverts were placed in the Scotsman and Glasgow Herald for soloists to sing *Elijah* in 1947:

**PRINCIPAL SOLOISTS required for performance**  
**"Elijah" by Ayr Choral Union on Sunday, 14th**  
**December 1947. Replies to Honorary Secretary, 9 Carrick**  
**Park, Ayr, by 11th October 1947.**

Post-war ACU's social committee was enthusiastic - there was dancing and whist, and an annual summer outing. In 1947 50 members journeyed to Colmonell for a cheery meal at the Boar's Head, and a visit to the church to view the stained glass and sing a few psalm tunes from the organ and choir loft. Another visit to Straiton had also ended up in the Church there *"although others might have preferred the Black Bull"*. The summer trip to Culzean in 1949 was *"a regular mystery tour"*. There were outings to the Panto or the Civic Theatre (converted from the Robertson Memorial church in 1951) often including an evening meal at Young's Restaurant. Informal musical programmes were also introduced at AGMs, and trips organised to hear other choirs singing - eg a trip to hear *Dream of Gerontius* in Glasgow. In March 1949 there was a trip to Kilmarnock to hear Kilmarnock and District Choral Society sing *Elijah* with the Scottish Orchestra, and a further one in 1951 to hear *Brahms Requiem* and *Songs of the Sea* with the SNO.



*Boar's Head, Colmonell*

At the 1948 AGM Mr Liddell complained of poor attendance - especially for part-song concerts - resulting in lack of discipline and unanimity. He also warned against "those who say they can sing Messiah backwards" and urged every choir member "to rope in enthusiasts who will help no matter what is being prepared". An innovation in 1949 was the performance of *"Our Daily Bread"* by "a young Ayrshire composer John Wilson", conducted by the composer. However Mr Liddell was less than pleased with an underprepared choir and heads buried in copies. In Season 1949-50 there was a break away from austerity and a professional orchestra was engaged - albeit relatively cheaply - the John McArthur Orchestra. However, predictably, the following season the members of the Committee were less keen on an orchestra, despite their Conductor pointing out that an Arts Council guarantee could be available in 1951. On being turned down in October 1950, Mr Liddell resigned a week later and his resignation was accepted, though the Committee regretted that he considered it necessary to take this step. In 1951 Mr Liddell was organist at a BBC broadcast by Sunday School children in Ayr, and moved to Castlehill Church as organist. Hubert Cresswell was invited to take the rehearsals for ACU's December concert, and agreed. His appointment was then confirmed at a Committee meeting in December 1950.

Hubert Cresswell was a teacher of music and "a lively person who attracted new members to the society". According to William Downie in 1945 "...he has a long connection with the town and (had) a good turnout for the Messiah last year - he is popular with most of the old singers". Hubert Cresswell came originally from Cheltenham where his father was a builder. He studied at Cheltenham School of Music and gained qualifications from Trinity College of Music (best in his class) in 1913. He held the post of organist and choir master of Cheltenham Festival Society, before moving to Scotland in 1912 to take the post of organist at St Andrew's Church, Kilmarnock. He served in France in World War 1, was wounded in 1916, then was an invalid inmate in New Court Hospital for around a year, entertaining his comrades with music. In 1919 he applied for the organist's post at St Leonard's Church in Ayr. There were 54 applicants, and three were selected to compete. Hubert got the job and continued in St Leonard's for 50 years. He was Burgh Organist in 1933, and conducted Ayr Amateur Opera Society from 1927 to 1933. He was eventually honoured for services to music in Ayrshire in 1970.

In 1949 another regular cause for discussion arose - choir uniform. There is very little evidence of what ACU wore in the early days, but in 1951 it was very clear: for ladies a black skirt, ankle length, and a "legal" white blouse with long sleeves; and for men, a dinner suit. In 1959 this was clarified further: "long sleeved high necked white blouse and ankle length black skirt. Shorter skirts are not allowed in the front row - a white stole may be worn when seated". This dress code with some changes to the "legal white blouse" survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with occasional use of "sparkles" and red bow ties at Christmas, although there was regular reinforcement and complaints about blouses with frills or disputable sleeve or skirt lengths. By 1962 these charming sopranos are already wearing their "legal" blouses differently, some buttoned with tasteful brooches, some not.





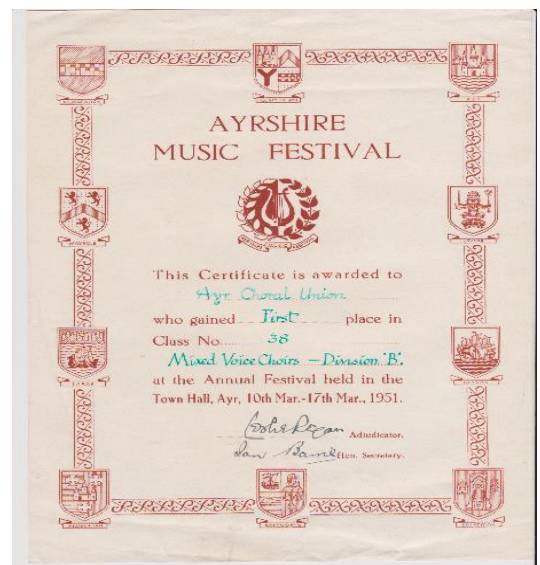
In 1949 there was another change of Honorary President when Mr Angus of Ladykirk died. Robert Lawrence Angus was a native of Lugar. He had been Chairman of William Baird and Co., Depute Chair of the Clydesdale Bank and Director of the Midland Bank, as well as Depute Lieutenant for Ayrshire. He was succeeded as Honorary President of ACU by his wife Penelope, who then became Lady Moore when she married Sir Thomas Cecil Russell Moore, 1st Bt and Conservative MP for Ayr in September 1950. She was ACU Honorary President until 1967, and took a lively interest in ACU, though latterly was apologetic about missing concerts when she was living mainly in London. She was generous in supplying Christmas trees for Christmas concerts.

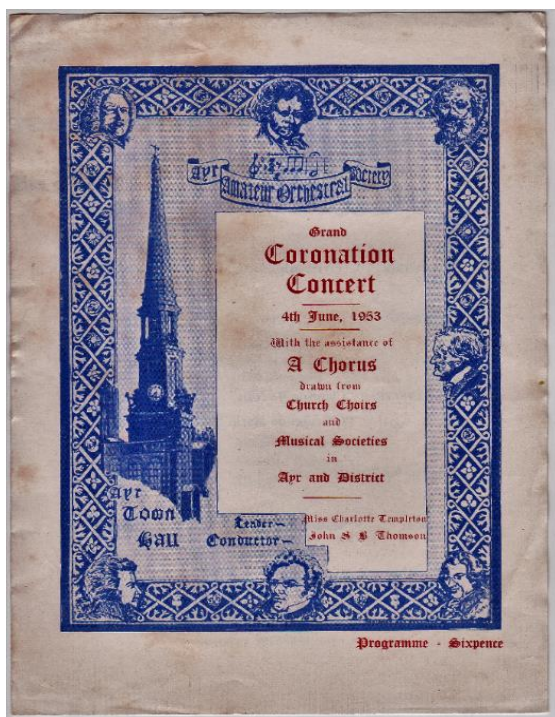
William Downie and Charles McInnes, whose remarkable and heroic joint leadership and commitment had ensured the survival of ACU, swapped President and Vice-President roles at the 1949 AGM, with Charles becoming President until 1953, when Leslie Walton took over for a lengthy period until 1972. William resigned as Vice-President in 1951 due to illness, after 25 years in the choir, and died in March 1953, "leaving a space in our ranks which will not be easily filled."



*Ayr High Street in the 1950s*

ACU entered the Ayrshire Music Festival in 1951 and 1952 and performed creditably. In 1951, they were awarded First Place with 169 marks singing Stanford's *When Mary Through the Garden Went*, and an arrangement by Moeran of *The Sailor and Young Nancy Went*. The Adjudicator was Leslie Regan who remarked on "admirable restraint at beginning", the "pitch nearly always pure" and "some good chording and diction". In 1952 they received 175 marks and gained 2<sup>nd</sup> place with Parry's *My soul there is a country* and Scott's *There grows an elm tree*. The Adjudicator, Albert C Tysoe mentioned "Time changes managed deftly" though "the pitch went a little" and "some speciality was shown by the tenors" - which may or may not have been a good thing. In 1955 a reel to reel tape recording was made by the choir, which still exists.





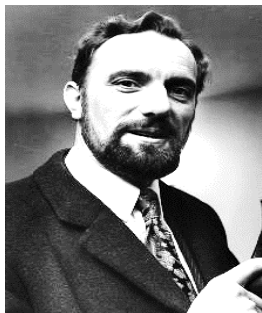
A Grand Coronation Concert organised by the Ayr Amateur Orchestral Society, was held in Ayr Town Hall on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1953 with ACU, Ayr Burgh Choir, Troon Male Voice Choir, Ayr Philharmonic Orchestra and church choirs from Ayr, Troon and Prestwick. This unusual assembly performed parts of *Messiah*, *Land of Hope and Glory*, a finale of Roger Quilter's *Non Nobis Domine* and, of course, *God Save the Queen*.

Other stars were also celebrated in Ayr in 1953:

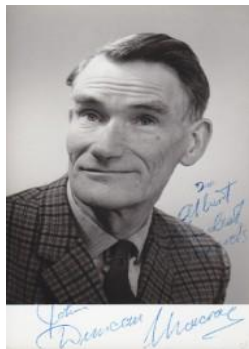


In January 1955, Mr Cresswell became ill, and was replaced by William Bowie, at very short notice, to conduct Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*. The success of that performance led to his official appointment as Conductor and a tenure of close to twenty years' service, to date the second longest in the choir's history. A native of Ayr, William was involved in the family laundry business, whose Greenan Laundry at Doonfoot was, for many years, a familiar landmark. Music was his great leisure activity from an early age and he studied the organ with Hubert Cresswell, was organist at Darlington Church and conductor of Troon Male Voice Choir.

Frances Mansbridge, whose sustained commitment to the choir amounted to much more than being accompanist, suggested a Christmas concert in 1955 with a narrator. Tom Fleming, Bryden Murdoch, Howard Lockhart, and Duncan McCrae were suggested, in that order, and Howard Lockhart was booked. Holly was also requisitioned to make the stage look festive. This proved to be a major success at low cost, with the church crammed full, and Christmas concerts became the order of the day. Carols included Parry's *Welcome Yule*, Malcolm Sargent's *To a Baby*, Berlioz's *Thou must leave thy lowly dwelling* (from *L'Enfance du Christ*), and the traditional *Christmas is Coming*. Margaret Gibson contributed solos.



Tom Fleming



Duncan MacRae



Howard Lockhart



Finance remained a headache. Despite the austerity regime of the Committee, more expensive soloists were being sought, (costing 40 guineas each) as were members of the Scottish National Orchestra rather than local musicians. There was a financial deficit in 1953-54 despite capacity audiences. It could not have been easy for ACU to notice a much bigger choir in Kilmarnock who could afford the SNO, and Ayr Town Council was accused of being less generous than their more enlightened Kilmarnock Town Council counterparts. Concert programmes were curtailed, members had to sell 4 tickets each and ticket prices increased, as were member subs to 7/6d. There was to be a preferential ballot for concert seats with Mrs Linden and David Cassels allocating seats in order of choice "drawn from one hat only". The instructions to members about selling tickets had a large warning inscribed: "this form must not be treated as waste paper".

Fund raising included Whist drives, Bingo, a Confectionery stall, (sugar rationing stopped in 1953), an open air concert, and weekly contributions in the later 1950s. Additional subscribers were sought. Increasingly from the 1930's choral societies had external sources of funding available to help solve the "quality versus finance" conundrum. A grant of £20 was made available from the Ayrshire Educational Trust in respect of the 1953-54 deficit. This route had been advised by the Town Clerk of Ayr. The Ayrshire Educational Trust was established in 1936 under the Educational Endowments (Scotland) Acts 1928 to 1935 "for the future government and management of a number of educational endowments in the County of Ayr", and still exists. The Trust's purpose was to promote formal education, such as that provided through schools and universities, and less formal education which might take place in the community. The Governors of AET had advised that Ayr Town Council would be expected to make a contribution in future similar to that given by Kilmarnock Town Council for Kilmarnock Choral Union.

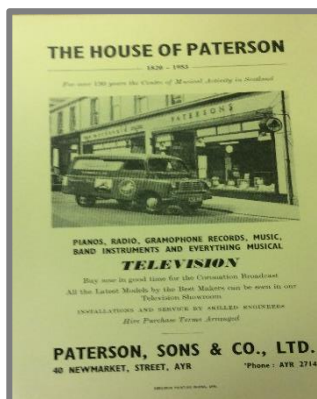
ACU were active members of the National Federation of Music Societies founded in 1935 - later to become Making Music Scotland - but at first they acted as partial guarantors (up to £15 loss initially) rather than fund providers. The Carnegie Trust awarded small amounts annually, but could be approached in time of major financial trouble.

It is not clear from records how much financial benefit ACU had over the years from its rich patrons and Honorary Presidents and



Vice-Presidents, as their contributions were listed under the general heading of subscribers but there was no upper limit to subscriptions. As many were also Patrons of numerous other local organisations, there were probably limits on their generosity. Mrs Oswald and Mrs Hay-Boyd are the two active ACU members who were mentioned

as regularly searching their pockets to help out. By 1955 the Honorary Vice-Presidents were mostly valued choir former members rather than local landowners. They were not always sure of their role. Hugh Campbell commented: "I cannot see that I do anything useful for you but I appreciate the honour and will not refuse it. I am honoured to be identified with such a progressive and useful organisation"



Many subscribers were related to ACU members or Conductors (Mrs Bowie and Mrs Cresswell), or indeed were ACU Members themselves. Music shops in Ayr feature - Cuthbertson's and Paterson's.

The National Federation of Music Societies, to which this Society is affiliated, supports this Concert with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain.

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ACU in the later 1950's was a power house of ideas (many of them from Frances Mansbridge). Members were to bring one new member each, all church choirs were to be contacted, all members to receive a start of season letter rather than an advertisement, all members to sell 6 tickets, a circular letter seeking members from other choirs, (verging on poaching!), a children's concert, and a concert party. However problems continued to challenge them. There were complaints about press coverage - very different from the days of Hugh Allan at the Advertiser. There was a fall-out with the Ayrshire Post who complained they didn't get the best seats for their complimentary tickets - the feeling of the committee was that subscribers must get the best seats, and if there was only poor or adverse coverage of concerts in the Press, then complimentary tickets should be discontinued. Printing costs were high, without today's access to cheap desktop publishing. There were problems over availability of sol-fa scores which were no longer being widely published. Choir members seemed to pick and choose concerts. In 1957-58 17 members sold no tickets and there were 110 unsold tickets. Clearly it was time for another Bazaar - which was held on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1959 and opened by Lady Moore. Admission was 6d; children 3d - but the Bazaar only raised £158, unlike the grand event of 1925. A "watch competition" organised by Miss Mansbridge made over half the total profit.

ACU's experience was mirrored by other choral societies - Dundee Choral Union's excellent history points out:

*Post-War Britain was to prove for amateur musical societies like the Choral a much tougher climate in which to survive. New technologies, in the form of mass media, were drastically changing the patterns of social life; the cinema was a thriving industry, and with the development of television and of ever more sophisticated methods of domestic sound and visual production, societies like the Choral had to make more intense efforts to secure live audiences. At the same time, increases in personal leisure time and the growth of alternative recreational and adult-educational facilities meant that fewer people were willing to devote their spare time to singing (active membership in the last twenty years has been about two-thirds of that in the 1930s). The net result was that the financing of concerts by the time-honoured means of subscriptions and ticket sales was becoming more difficult, and alternative schemes had to be pursued*

Geoffrey Creamer, 1989<sup>23</sup>

The Season 1958-59 was "a musical success but a financial disappointment" though Frances Mansbridge continued with her popular Christmas concert, "now a popular attraction in the town", making up the programme and arranging soloists. A Glasgow Police Male Voice Choir Concert was arranged by ACU in October 1958, on the same lines as their pre-war Orpheus Choir concerts. *Elijah* was a success although the soprano soloist from the Danish State Opera was "disappointing" and her fee was reduced.<sup>24</sup> The next year saw the choir move from Carrick House to Ayr Academy music room for rehearsals. ACU had many changes of rehearsal venue over the years. These included the Assembly Rooms, Old Town Council Committee Rooms, Council Chambers, YMCA Hall in High Street, Newnham House School, the Mission Church Carrick Street Halls, the Masonic Hall in Fullarton Street, Ayr Grammar, Boswell Park Hall, Holmston School and Carrick House, where they had to provide a piano, seats and heating appliances. These were sold off when the move to Ayr Academy took place. Gas fires were disposed of at £2.10s each, chairs 17/6d each and the piano for £8. 1959-60 saw an alarming drop in membership with 20 fewer singers in March than at Christmas. The President warned gloomily that "the frightening figure of disbandment must begin to loom on our horizon".

At the 1959 AGM a young Mr Stewart Linton (left) proposed that all new members should have auditions immediately, and existing members early in the session. Also at the AGM, Moira Anderson (who had appeared at the Gaiety Theatre in her teens) was suggested as a soloist though this didn't come to pass. As ACU moved into the 1960's there continued to be a sense of being adrift, but the ship was kept afloat by Leslie Walton, David Maitland, Edward Leck and David Cassels, and of course Frances Mansbridge, with the amenable and generally positive Mr Bowie willing to adapt musical aims to the needs of ACU. Most members seemed to commit to the Christmas concert plus one other - usually an oratorio or similar, with small orchestral forces and imported soloists. There were more informal commitments. *Messiahs* could be performed on demand for church fund raising, for a joint project in Cumnock, for leprosy fund raising in Prestwick etc... There were concerts at Ailsa Hospital at Christmas. At the AGM in 1962 Mr Walton suggested that the term "subscription concert" be dropped - "as a choir we depend on members selling tickets and must realise that ticket buyers no longer come to us - so we must go to them". "Quite a number" of members sold no tickets - "they could buy a ticket and give it to an OAP" claimed Mr Walton. The large committee of 21 office bearers, including the "Keeper of the Box", was restructured with sub committees for Tickets, Programme and Publishing, Social, and Membership. More rigour was introduced - all members were to bring pencils, and all bars were to be numbered; the interval was to be 10 minutes only; Miss Mansbridge was to carry out voice tests; and all seats at rehearsals were to be numbered and allocated. Concert dress raised its head again: "it was agreed that the controversial and much criticised dress of ACU be discussed once more" - and another committee was set up to sort it.



The "Box" containing the Archive

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.dundeechoralunion.co.uk/dundee-choral-union-history.cfm>

<sup>24</sup> Information from minutes - corroborated by Mr Archie Thom who attended the concert at a very young age.

At the 1964 AGM the President spoke of “apathy and lack of interest”. He felt that Choir discipline was not good, despite the appointment of a choir manager in 1960 (Stewart Linton). Mr Bowie had to repeat instructions as not enough attention was paid, and members should do their homework, not just rely on Tuesday evenings to learn the notes. At the 1965 AGM Mr Walton was even more despondent. “I have never had the same concern for the future as I have tonight and I have never seen the warning light so clearly as during last season...Falling off in membership and attendance means we need a powerful shot in the arm. The audience for *Samson* was poor, the sopranos are the poorest attenders, and 23 members sold no tickets for the first concert and 25 for the second.” There were ongoing complaints about the Town Hall organ, and electric organs were considered.

However things had been worse in the past. In 1964 the cash account had £82.6s.6d, and there was £200 invested elsewhere. One member had sold 22 tickets, and programme sales were making a profit. A Prize Draw was arranged for Christmas 1964 with grand prizes reminiscent of Michael Miles on *Take Your Pick* (a popular television show of the time): a weekend case, an Electric Blanket, a Tablecloth and Napkins, a Pair of Sheets and Boxes of Cigarettes. In 1964 Ayr Town Council gave a grant of £25, and NFMS had increased their guarantee to £95. Members were asked to contribute 6d a week and in 1966 member subs were raised to £1.1s.

In 1964, after a run of 8 successful carol concerts, the choir reverted to *Messiahs* in December, to allow more time to prepare for the “big” concert in the spring. This seemed to work well. By 1967, the financial doldrums seemed to have receded. A new Honorary President, Mrs E R Boyd, was appointed after an apologetic Lady Moore gave up the post. Mrs Boyd lived at Poundland House, Pinwherry, and was “a cheerful and encouraging presence”. The Programme committee were well informed, and excellent soloists of the calibre of William McAlpine and Duncan Robertson were procured for concerts, although John Shirley Quirk wasn’t available when approached. The attraction of London soloists reduced - not least because there were “first rate” soloists in Scotland. One review noted: “*The 4 London soloists forming the Kensington Consort, sang with varying degrees of success. They left the impression that the gap between singers engaged from south of the Border and the best native ones available was narrower than is usual on such occasions...*”

There were generally good reviews for concerts:

- “Although the CU is apparently suffering from diminished numbers at the present time their performance in the choruses was in no way impaired - a special word of commendation must go to the Bass section for being few in number, but large in volume without any roughness of tone”
- “The Sopranos sustained their top note with remarkably little sign of strain”
- “The chorus was outstanding during the performance in its discipline, firmness and security with their precision of attack being in doubt on only one occasion”
- “Although the concert was a musical success the size of the audience did nothing like justice to the enthusiasm and competence of the performance”
- “There were a few ragged entries but a surprising amount of light and shade broke through, and the music especially in the final Libera Me was deeply fraught with feeling” (Verdi Requiem 1971)<sup>25</sup>



Mr Bowie with soloists 1969

In 1966, ACU were invited to sing at St Giles’ Cathedral in Edinburgh by Dr Herrick Bunney, Master of Music at St Giles’ and Organist to the University of Edinburgh, who would provide light refreshments. Seventy singers, including some from Belmont Ladies’ choir, travelled by coach, paid for by members and accompanying friends, to perform Vaughan Williams’ *Pilgrim’s Journey* which they had performed successfully in the Spring. A successful Jumble Sale was held in 1968 - members were asked not to donate “items of doubtful worth”. Unrelated to the Jumble Sale, Mrs Linton had been given the task of sorting out choir dress and appeared to be successful. The attendance at the 1969 AGM was 70, and there were 91 members in 1970. In 1967 a new category of Associate Member was set up, which kept former members and/or supporters in the fold. Despite the advent of the Beatles, the 1960s showed a revival of ACU - things were happening - places to go, people to meet, reinforcing the theory that people join choirs for social and “feel-good” reasons - not just to sing. Performing *Pilgrim’s Journey* in St Giles Cathedral may have been less important than going on the coach and having tea out.

<sup>25</sup> Typed unsigned reviews in ACU Archive



Dec 1962 (Mr Bowie in middle of the front row; Miss Mansbridge at piano; Mr Linton tallest in back row)

Programmes were becoming more innovative, with a joint secular programme of Coleridge-Taylor *Hiawatha* and Borodin *Polotsvian Dances*, though *Hiawatha* had to be checked out with the Magistrates to see it was suitable. Kenneth McKellar was thought to be a good *Hiawatha* but he was too expensive. Even more exciting was a Mozart *Requiem* in 1966, Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony* in 1969, a Verdi *Requiem* in 1971,<sup>26</sup> and Britten *St Nicholas* in 1972. The *Sea Symphony* was suggested by Dr Inglis, a knowledgeable choir member and archivist, and was a huge success with a large increase of audience at the door and from the booking agent.

Mr Bowie “showed great enthusiasm and was an inspiration to all”. Meanwhile Dr Inglis addressed a health issue as well as a programming one, as she objected strongly to members of the orchestra smoking in the hall at the afternoon rehearsal, “causing distress to the singers”. In 1969 336 tickets were sold for the Christmas concert and in 1970-71 1000 tickets were sold over the year, 589 for the Verdi *Requiem* - a great achievement financially as well as musically.

The AGM of 1972 was held at Beach Court Restaurant, Queen’s Terrace to encourage members to attend, and cost 25p a head for refreshments. The President’s report was positive. Both concerts were exceptionally well attended (by the audience) and a relatively light loss financially. Choir members were still not selling enough tickets, but sales “at the door” were good. *Messiah* continued to be a money spinner “although in our case unfortunately it does not spin far enough”!

This was a time of transition for ACU. Leslie Walton retired as President, replaced by the Vice-President David Cassels. Miss Mansbridge retired through illness having been both accompanist and rock for almost 50 years, and was awarded the honour of Honorary Vice-President. She had also been Organist at St Andrews Church, Ayr for over 50 years, and died in 1981 remembered as ACU’s “veritable tower of strength”. Mr Leck retired, and Victor McLeonard, who had only just joined the choir, took over as Secretary, a job which he performed conscientiously and with great charm until 1998. The Treasurer (Mr Pryce) left, and Miss Morton took over. Mr Graham Girdwood also took over as auditor, a post he held and enjoyed for many years. Mr Leck became Choir Manager, as Stewart Linton took over from Frances Mansbridge as Accompanist.

In November 1972 there was a repeat *Pilgrims’ Journey* to St Giles and again in 1973 to perform the Haydn *Theresa Mass*. ACU members joined a BBC recorded open air *Songs of Praise* from Butlins’ Camp, conducted by Stewart Linton. Despite the rain, this seems to have been an enjoyable experience. Also in 1972, the NFMS Conference was held in Ayr Town Hall. Unfortunately there was a fire at the Caledonian Hotel three weeks before, where all the important guests including Sir Charles Groves were to stay, and they had to travel from Glasgow instead. Also unfortunately, at least in ACU’s view, Kilmarnock Choral were invited to provide the musical entertainment at the Conference! During Season 1973-74, ACU’s first concert was affected by power cuts as a consequence of the Miners’ Strikes and resulting so called “three day week”. The Town Hall couldn’t be used so the concert was moved to St Leonard’s Church. The second concert was a challenging Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*. More than four years in the writing, *Missa Solemnis* has been variously described as ‘Beethoven’s least approachable score’, and ‘displaying Beethoven’s characteristic disregard for the performer’<sup>27</sup>. Unsurprisingly, it is a work seldom attempted by amateur performers. This proved too big a challenge for many of the choir, and there was a high degree of absenteeism, but attempting it at all gives a flavour of the confidence of the choir, financially, socially and musically at this time. In August 1974, Mr Bowie resigned due to pressure of work. He remained a strong supporter of the choir and “left a choir which was in good heart, a going concern, with a solid core of enthusiasts”<sup>28</sup>. He died in January 1997. The Committee agreed unanimously that Stewart Linton - already well known as musician, singer, Committee Member, Choir Manager, and Accompanist,<sup>29</sup> should be asked to “receive the conductorship”. William Godfrey, an excellent bass, who had stood in for Frances Mansbridge when she was ill, was to be Accompanist. This was agreed by members on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 197

<sup>26</sup> with support from augmenters T Black, J Mair, H Graham and P Jones from Kilmarnock and District Choral Union acknowledged

<sup>27</sup> <http://thecroydoncitizen.com/culture/event-review-croydon-bach-choir-sings-beethovens-missa-solemn timer-saturday-19th-march/>

<sup>28</sup> Stewart Linton at 1975 AGM

<sup>29</sup> Mr Linton was also noted for regular suggestions that ACU should charter a Clyde steamer for the summer trip



## 6. 1976-2016 Centenary to 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

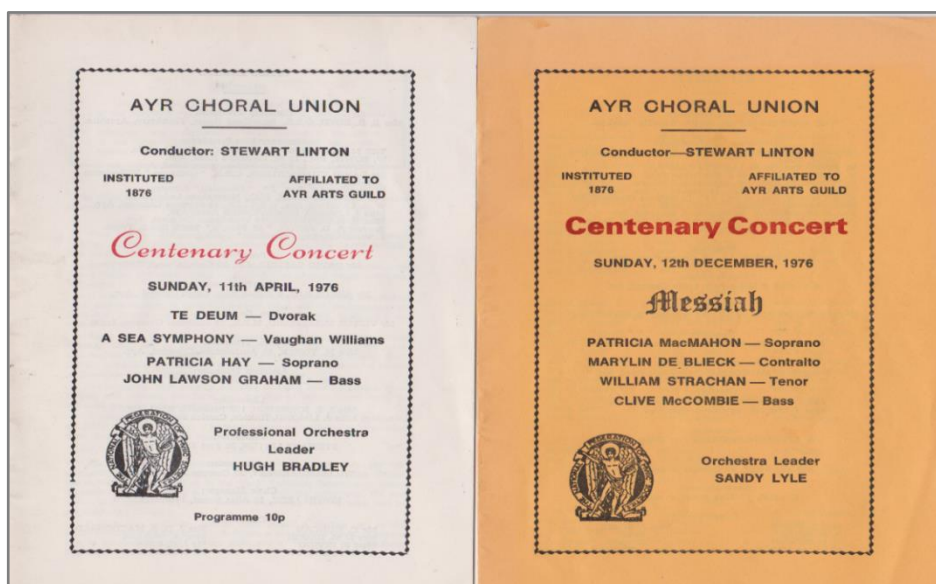
Stewart Linton's period of conductorship was built on much more positive financial ground from 1976 on. Angus Rae, Vice-President, was noted for his capacity to negotiate good awards from NFMS, Ayr Arts Guild, and the new Kyle and Carrick and Strathclyde Councils. The choral music scene in Scotland was healthy, and there was now limited competition in Ayr. The choir reached the grand aim of 100 members for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert in October 1976 - all of which gave Stewart the capacity to explore most "big" works in the choral repertoire, as well as Poulenc, Kodaly, Orff and Britten - and at last ACU discovered Bach - singing the *Magnificat* in 1978 and the *B Minor Mass* in 1989. Large professional orchestras were now financially acceptable for some concerts at least. Stewart was a long term and dedicated member of ACU, joining as a teenager. At the 1976 centenary dinner comment was made that "enthusiasm drips out of him", which summed up his committed approach. Stewart taught music at Prestwick Academy for 29 years, and was organist and choir master at Newton on Ayr Church for over 30 years. He was also Chairman of the Music Festival Committee and accompanist of Strathaven Choral Society, the choir conducted by his friend David Knox, for 16 years. His wife Margaret sang soprano in ACU, and also made a very major contribution to choir life, not least by keeping the Register of Attendance.

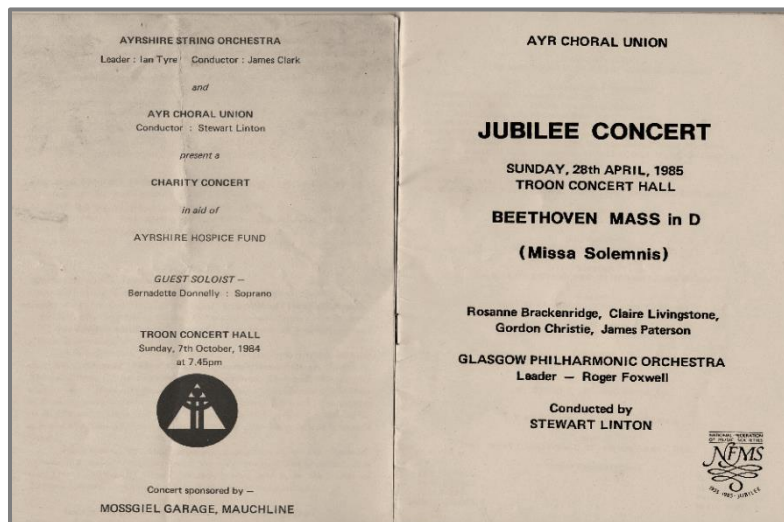
The Centenary celebrations were on a large scale. *A Centenary History of ACU* was put together by David Cassels and published - 200 copies - with a grant from the Community Development Trust. Much of this history was supposedly based on a "Memoire" of unknown authorship written in 1925. A grand centenary dinner was held in Western House on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1976, with guest speaker Professor Robin Orr CBE. Orr was the first Chair of Scottish Opera, and Professor of Music at Glasgow then Cambridge universities. Guests were invited from Kilmarnock and Strathaven choral societies and the main musical organisations in Ayr. Also invited were Mr James Clark and Mr Wallace Berry from Ayrshire's Education Department, George Younger MP (a tenor and President of Stirling Choral in the 1960s), James H. Liddell, Lady Moore, and representatives of NFMS and the Community Education Trust. The menu consisted of Prawn Cocktail or Fruit Juice; Cream of Mushroom or Vegetable Soup; Roast Rib of Angus Beef or Cold Turkey and Ham Salad; and Sherry Trifle and Fruit Salad to finish. Leonora Pieri entertained the assembled company with solos, and there was dancing.



Professor Robin Orr CBE

The main Centenary concerts were firstly, in April 1976, the Dvorak *Te Deum* and Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra; and secondly, *Messiah* (what else?) in December. There was also a Haydn *Teresa Mass* in Castlehill church on 31<sup>st</sup> October. All this was expensive, but Mrs Margaret Toner, Treasurer, assured members that the Strathclyde Regional Grant and a generous bequest would cover the additional spending. Sadly the Honorary President Mrs E R Boyd, "who had enjoyed every minute of every concert" died before the celebrations began in 1976. She was replaced by the Marchioness of Ailsa who was just as appreciative. In 1977, Angus Rae became President, replacing David Cassels, and in 1979 Isobel Crawford, an NFMS activist and enthusiast, and another ACU legend, became Treasurer. At the 1977-78 AGM it was suggested that ACU was outdated - it was passed to the committee to create a new image.





The 1980's saw a range of positive developments and opportunities. In 1980, ACU joined in a Benefit Concert in Glasgow's City Halls for the Musicians' Union, whose members were on strike to support the BBC orchestras threatened with closure. Orff's *Carmina Burana* with ACU, Opus Consort, BBC Scottish Singers, and Glasgow Youth Choir was conducted by Bryden Thomson, who came originally from Ayr. In March 1984 ACU recorded a BBC broadcast in Troon Concert Hall for a programme called *Glory Be* for which a fee of £250 was received. There were other special concerts - in October 1984 for the Ayr Hospice, and in 1985 to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee of NFMS.



In 1988 and 1989 ACU was invited to take part in the Ayrshire Arts Festivals held in June in the Dam Park Hall - in 1988 singing Borodin's *Polotskian Dances* from *Prince Igor*, Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* and Parry's *Jerusalem* with the BBC SSO conducted by Neil Mantle. Raymond Bramwell's children's choir sang excerpts from Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. The Dam Park Hall was not quite the Albert Hall but the intention was honourable. In 1989 it was Haydn's *Te Deum* and the *Marseillaise*, conducted by Christopher Bell.

While the financial and choral forces were much lesser worries for ACU, others emerged to take their place as a challenge for ACU in the 1980's. One of these was, perhaps surprisingly, Ayr Town Hall as a concert venue. Stewart Linton thought that the Town Hall was acoustically inadequate, and not large enough. Mr Rae also thought that a Verdi *Requiem* would not be suitable for the Town Hall. Stewart was keen to try out the Pavilion, and it was used for several concerts between 1980 and 1984. It did have several down sides. A makeshift staircase collapsed and an ACU member suffered cracked ribs. In another separate incident an alto fell off the stage. There was a "poor atmosphere" because of the bar; it cost twice as much as the Town Hall; the Choir was criticised in the Ayrshire Post as being too big and too loud. In 1984 it was pointed out in a review that "the interior has the appearance of a sleazy bingo hall. Acoustics are too dry.....the concert was spoiled for many people because of the noise of crockery rattling, taps running, money being counted etc. The tone of the electric organ was totally unsuited to the Haydn Harmonimesse...."<sup>30</sup> "Too deplorable for acceptance" was the opinion expressed at the 1984 AGM, so the next move was to Troon Concert Hall - which had pleasant surroundings, reasonable acoustics, and a nice view - but there were problems over the size of the stage and sight lines, and Troon's population also had their own musical preferences. Ayr Town Hall was looking like a reasonable option after all.

In October 1984, as part of the growth of town twinning across Europe and beyond, Saint Germain-en-Laye became twinned with Ayr - "to reinforce the historic ties between Scotland and Saint-Germain, the town that became home to James II Stuart, his family and the Jacobites".<sup>31</sup> In 1985, ACU received a letter from a choir called Le Pincerais, in St Germain-en-Laye, who were interested in contact and possible exchanges with ACU. In 1987 a coach set off from Ayr to make the long journey to Paris to discover the magic of the A Coeur Joie movement (to which Le Pincerais was affiliated) founded in 1940 on Cesar Geoffray's principle that "When voices join together in song, hearts are able to understand each other". ACU members were somewhat dumbfounded that Le Pincerais members sang all the time without weighty scores or formality, conducted by the inspirational Pierre Gasser, and usually accompanied by much enthusiasm, and splendid food and wine. Bonds were forged, a concert took place and Versailles was visited. *Three Crows Sat upon a Wa'* was sung. A return visit was made to Ayr in October 1988, setting a pattern which has lasted since then, with some breaks, but revived recently with both Le Pincerais and Myriade. Highlights have included Fontainebleau, Amiens Cathedral, shopping in Galleries Lafayette, and Son et Lumiere in Les Invalides, while our French friends crossed wild and stormy seas to Arran, bought tartan scarves to keep warm, and experienced haggis, and a Ceilidh in Ayr Town Hall.



Amiens Cathedral

<sup>30</sup> Ayrshire Post November 1984

<sup>31</sup> Saint Germain-en-Laye website



VILLE DE SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE

**JOURNÉE CHORALE**  
LE DIMANCHE 6 MAI 1990

avec les Chorales  
**d'AYR - de SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE**

Messe dominicale chantée en l'église paroissiale de Saint-Germain-en-Laye  
avec CHORAL FINAL CANTATE 140. J. S. BACH

**GRAND CONCERT**

THÉÂTRE  
**ALEXANDRE-DUMAS**  
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avec  
**AYR CHORAL UNION**  
Direction Stewart LINTON

**ENSEMBLE VOCAL ET INSTRUMENTAL DU PINCERAI**  
Direction Pierre GASSER  
200 exécutants

AU PROGRAMME  
J. HAYDN - C. F. HANDEL - W. A. MOZART - F. SCHUBERT

SOLISTES : Frédérique BRODARD, soprano, Marie-Loup MICHAUD, mezzo  
Michel CHALLOIT, ténor, Lionel PEINTRE, baryton

ORQUE : William GODFREY - Gérard IGNASSE

PRIX des PLACES : 100 F - Réductions : 80 F (A.C.J.) et Carte Vermeil

RESERVATIONS : THÉÂTRE ALEXANDRE-DUMAS - Place André-Malraux - Tél. 30.87.07.00



SAMEDI 23 MAI 1987 à 21H

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**CONCERT CHORAL DE MUSIQUE SACRÉE**

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HAYDN LA CREATION (EXTRAITS)  
FAURE REQUIEM (EXTRAITS)

**AYR CHORAL UNION**  
DIRECTION STEWART LINTON

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CHOEURS DE LA LITURGIE ORTHODOXE RUSSE  
MESSIE BREVE DE GOUNOD

**ENSEMBLE VOCAL DU PINCERAI**  
DIRECTION PIERRE GASSER

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Prix des places: 50 frs  
Prix Réduit: 30frs ( acj-jmf-carte vermeil)

RESERVATIONS: M.A.S 3 AV de la République  
Saint Germain - Tél : 39 73 73 73  
Association du Pincerais Tél : 39 58 45 70

## A few words about Le Pincerais . . .

**L** E PINCERAI was created in 1979 and its 113 members all come from the Saint Germain-en-Lay area \*.

For the last 15 years, thanks to our Choir Master Mr Pierre GASSER we have discovered a wide range of different choral singing styles:

**Classical** (Bach, Mozart, Buxtehude, Gluck, Haydn, Handel, Vivaldi, Rossini, Beethoven)

**Renaissance**

**Romantic** (Mendelssohn, Schubert, Franck)

**Russian Orthodox religious music**

**Contemporary** (Fauré, Gounod)

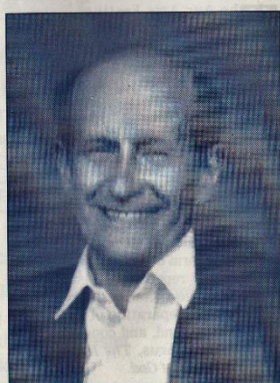
Popular songs from France, Scotland, Italy, Brittany, America, etc. . .

We are all particularly sensitive to the music for all the joy and friendship it brings us. And this is the reason why we enjoy so much to sing together and with all our friends from Scotland, Germany, the United States, France, Switzerland, Holland . . .

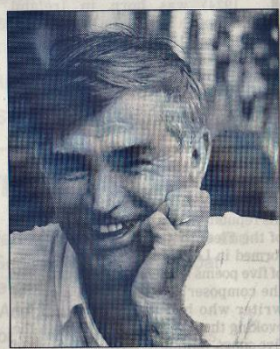
We are part of the "A Coeur Joie" Association ("Sing for Pleasure" in the UK) and we often take part in festivals and meetings which give us opportunities to make more friends with whom we speak the same language, music!

Although no particular music skills are required to join our choir, we have developed a class to learn and improve our vocal techniques and every year, we subsidise a few members who wish to take part in a training for conducting. In fact one main idea conducts our life as a choir: singing is not only a question of work and skills, it is mainly a question of heart and feelings for those we sing with and for those we sing for!

\* Le Pincerais is a geographical area west of Paris. It was called Pincerais in the Gallo-Roman times under Emperor Augustus.



Pierre Gasser - Conductor



Louis Moign - Choir President





The 1980's continued to see ACU flourish, though there were the usual niggles. At the 1986 AGM the Conductor pointed out that *"Ayr, compared with other choirs, has a very friendly atmosphere with much mutual loyalty and this helps to make it such a good choir - but we need 4 tenors, 4 basses and 6 sopranos, preferably young..."* and in 1988 the President stated that *"more young singers must be recruited for the Soprano section"* and in 1990 *"musically we are on the crest of a wave"* but *"The concert platform was no place for sight reading - rehearsal attitude must be good"*. Irregular attendance was tackled in range of ways. Weekly registers were carefully recorded by section representatives, then entered in Margaret Linton's big Attendance Register. By 1979 rehearsal attendance was 88.5%, 10% up on the previous year and choir attendance at concerts was a consistent 104, 108 and 102. The Conductor also praised instances of exceptional attendance *"with some members experiencing severe handicap"*. The vexed issue of Choir uniform was raised again. In 1983 standardisation of blouses was raised at committee, and again in 1989 Mrs Martin suggested that different styles of blouses were appearing, and excessive jewellery being displayed. The (male) Choir Manager was asked to deal with jewellery, but blouses remained an issue in February 1990. Kate McVeigh was asked to formulate a description of the type of blouse preferred, and sourced a Damart model for the lady members to consider, however in 1996 blouse conformity was still being emphasised. In 2000, men were able to remove their dinner jackets for the first time, partly due to the heat of the Town Hall, but also to achieve a more modern image. This was followed by black open necked shirts for tenors and basses.

Finances were scrutinised carefully. In 1977 a weekly collection was reinstated. Large Spring concerts were making a loss of £1800 in 1983, and £1500 in 1982, but there was usually a safe margin left over at the end of the year. There was a successful sponsorship drive in 1986, and interval wine sales were introduced by Bill Duthie in the Council Chamber in 1987, initially making only £12, until the price of wine was raised to £1. By 1988 Christmas wine sales made £75. There were regular fund raising coffee mornings, (and one tea afternoon which was less successful), book sales, a recipe book, snowdrop sales (from Marjory and Stanley Robertson's garden), marmalade (Sheila Stewart), interval drinks (Margaret McFarlane and Kate McVeigh), raffles, "guess the name of the doll" (Ray Wilson's "Music Man"), Christmas cards (many left unsold), Webb Ivory catalogue orders (Joy McLeonard), and in 1990 a baking stall at Ayr's Holy Fair raised £350. In season 1988-89 the new venture of the 100 club was set up, which had raised £10,000 by 2015.

In the inflationary 1980's costs were rising. In 1987-88 the Conductor was paid £800 and the Accompanist £400. Annual Subscriptions were increased to £12. Ticket prices were raised in 1988-89 to £3.50/£3.00/£2.50. There was a shock in 1989-90 when the capital left was £120 after a particularly exciting Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, compared to a £2735.71 surplus the year before. The Auditor was not happy, warning that club members would have to bear responsibility for an overdraft and demanded that there should be a pot of at least £1200. A levy of £120 per member was suggested but not implemented, though members had to pay for their own programmes again.

In February 1991, after a short illness, Stewart Linton died, leaving the choir in grief and shock. Stewart had been a choir member for over 30 years, and was deeply committed to its success. His best friend David Knox of Strathaven Choral Society offered his services to keep the choir going, and took several rehearsals before, almost unbelievably, he died very suddenly aged 48, in March 1991. The Spring concert of Opera Choruses was cancelled, as was a visit from Le Pincerais, and arrangements were made to advertise the Conductor's post, and arrange a suitable memorial concert for Stewart. John Currie, composer and choral conductor at various times of the SNO chorus, Edinburgh Festival Chorus and the Los Angeles Chorale, was asked to write a piece of music, which became the moving *"Then o Then"*, first performed at Christmas 1992. In October 1991 the choir sang a Voices for Hospices version of *Creation* conducted by William Godfrey, while Morag Walton took over as temporary accompanist. This concert raised £1250 for the Hospice. On 24<sup>th</sup> November Christopher Bell conducted the *Brahms Requiem* at the Memorial Concert for Stewart. Meanwhile Hamish Good, Director



of Music at Holy Trinity Church, Ayr, and Senior Librarian at Strathclyde University, was appointed to the vacancy and conducted the Christmas Concert. To take over after a traumatic period in the choir's life was challenging, but Hamish, with his gentle enthusiasm, was prepared to take it on. Hamish was interested in the scholarship of music and was fond of saying that certain composers *'deserved to be better known'*. During his time the choir was introduced to a new repertoire: he was particularly fond of English composers such as Hadley, Stanford, Parry and Finzi.

*1993-94 Hamish Good (centre) with the Marchioness of Ailsa, Bill Duthie (President) the Executive Committee and Section Reps*

However he was happy to tackle the "big works" which ACU were always aspiring to: Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (in place of a Carol Concert), the *B Minor Mass* and *St John Passion* were all tackled successfully, as were the Mozart and Brahms *Requiems*, Elgar's *Kingdom*, Haydn's *Creation* (with Le Pinceris in 1999), and Poulenc and Vivaldi *Glorias*. Christmas concerts continued to be highly successful and in 1992 there were two - one in the afternoon. In 1995 Willie Godfrey retired as Accompanist and was replaced by Morag



Walton, who had sung Alto in the choir for 20 years.



1992 Tuesday Evening Rehearsal in Ayr Academy Memorial Library

In October 1996, the 120<sup>th</sup> season of the choir and the Robert Burns Bi-centennial festival were celebrated with a Burns concert featuring *A Burns Sequence* by John Gardner and a selection of Burns songs by soloist Bernadette Donnelly. The concert was generously sponsored by the Post Office Board. At the same time a major appeal was launched to refurbish and modernise the Town Hall organ, and collecting buckets were available at the end of the concert. In 1996 the 120<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated on 17<sup>th</sup> December at the Savoy Park.

In 1997 there was another Voices for Hospices event, featuring Handel's *Hallelujah* chorus and other works. 1998 saw ACU on tour - this time to Dumbarton where John Rutter's *Sprig o' Thyme* was performed at St Augustine's Church. In 1999 the Marchioness of Ailsa retired as Hon President, and was replaced by Sir Claude Hagart-Alexander, a courteous and kindly gentleman, who died in 2005, after which no further Honorary Presidents were appointed.

During the 1990s, there were many lively social events, largely thanks to Dan Dawson and Sally McCandless, respectively chairs of the Social Committee. Cheese and Wines, Quizzes, a Treasure Hunt, a Beetle Drive and Burns Suppers were well attended and helped to cement choir affiliation.



1998 Burns Supper at the Savoy Park Hotel

In October 1999, rehearsals moved from Ayr Academy to the Auld Kirk Halls. Since World War 2 the choir had rehearsed in a variety of venues: Ayr Grammar, Boswell Park Hall, Holmston School, back to Ayr Grammar, Carrick House, in 1960 the Music room at Ayr Academy, then in 1969 the Library at Ayr Academy, in 1975 the Assembly Hall at Belmont Academy, then a return to Academy with Newton Church Halls used when necessary, Holy Trinity Church briefly in 1992, then back to Ayr Academy. The Auld Kirk Halls gave the option for sectional rehearsals, when the men were sent downstairs to learn their parts and although, like Ayr Academy the Hall was upstairs, in this case there was a lift. In 2013, the choir moved to the newly restored Community Church in John Street.

The singing of the National Anthem was part of ACU concerts for a long time. There was no mention of this in the early days, but it seems to have become customary after World War 1. In 1992 the committee took a bold step by saying that it would be sung only once per season. This provoked protest from some members and also the Honorary President, and it was raised to two performances as a compromise. In 1995-96 it was back to one performance with a "decent" arrangement e.g. Britten's, and eventually phased out altogether. BBC 1 stopped playing the anthem (other than performances at the Last Night of the Proms etc.) in 1997, while ITV had stopped by 1990.



Another feature of Hamish's reign were his "interviews". He was keen initially to "interview" every member of the choir to replace the auditions of Stewart Linton's era, which were not intended to be alarming but had that effect on some more tentative singers. Interviewing a large choir took much longer than expected, and the Committee made a demand that new members had to be interviewed immediately. On the whole the quality of the choir's voices remained high, conductors have always been sensitive to the social and supportive function of the choir, with the occasional advice to "sing down" to maintain adequate performance overall.

**THE PERFORMANCE OF Elgar's The Kingdom by Ayr Choral Union and the City of Glasgow Symphony Orchestra under Hamish Good's baton took place in Ayr Town Hall last month.**

There was a team of four soloists to sing one of Elgar's less known oratorios, The Kingdom being the second (and sadly the last) of his proposed Apostles trilogy.

The Kingdom is a wonderful example of spirituality and deep feeling which was so much a part of his character.

The overwhelming impression was one of total commitment by the

orchestra and chorus and an intensity of feeling for the work which one does not always find.

The chorus sang excellently although they were at times overshadowed by the orchestra which was slightly too full at times, but there were many lovely moments from the chorus, especially The Voice of Joy is in the Dwelling of the Righteous and the sensitive Lord's Prayer in the Finale of the work.

Of the soloists, Jonathan Hawkins, bass, was outstanding and he sang with great sensitivity, poise, eloquence and with a fine vocal line.

All of those in attendance clearly thoroughly enjoyed a magnificent work sung and played with energy,

**Choral Union captured the spirit of Elgar**

beauty and feeling by singers and musicians who performed as if they had the spirit of Edward Elgar within them.

All in all a lovely performance, and I look forward to Ayr Choral Union's next Elgar work. How about The Music Makers—a challenge!

**PAUL BASSETT, Scottish Branch of the Elgar Society**

In 1997, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the link with Le Pincerais saw ACU travelling to Paris (by plane), and receiving specially labelled bottles of champagne. An excellent concert was given, with the highlight being Morag Walton's arrangement of "The Deil's awa". However links with choirs nearer home were less popular - an approach from the Kevock choir to do a joint concert was turned down. An invitation for ACU to attend an event in Glasgow University singing gospel music was also turned down in 1997, suggesting a level of splendid isolation. Links with other choirs however were being considered in 1997, largely on the initiative of Isobel Crawford and Margo Reader, with a meeting for members from other Ayrshire choirs in the Savoy Park Hotel - two members of each choir had been invited - but there was no reply from 7 choirs, and 8 said they would not be attending. Only one choir responded in the affirmative.



In June 1998 Vic McLeonard retired as Secretary after 26 years, and Sue Gregson took over.<sup>32</sup> This was a remarkable length of service, second in longevity only to W H McCosh, and with similar levels of commitment and courtesy.

In 2001, when Hamish moved to Dundee with his wife, Miriam, and discovered that "the road and the miles" from Dundee were a step too far to travel to Ayr, he resigned his post as Conductor. His last Concert was a splendid Gala Evening with Opera Choruses. Hamish was very helpful in supporting the choir to find a new conductor and ensure a smooth transition.

**MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA**

.....

**GALA CONCERT**

.....

**AYR TOWN HALL**

**SUNDAY 29th APRIL, 2001**

**7.45pm**

**The City of Glasgow**

**Symphony Orchestra**

**Conductor - Hamish Good**

Well known choral music and opera choruses by Verdi, Wagner, Strauss and others

**AYR CHORAL UNION**

Tickets from **MACKAY MUSIC**  
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Ayr. Tel. (01292) 289562

■ Balcony & Gallery £8  
■ Stalls (unreserved) £5

Again the post was advertised, attracting a range of interested applications, and interviewed, with the candidates leading a rehearsal and members' views taken into consideration. The successful candidate was Gerard Doherty, a violinist with the RSNO, who was keen to extend his experience of choral conducting. Gerry was born and educated in Glasgow and studied conducting and violin at RSAMD. He had worked as a violinist with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestra of Scottish Opera, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and for 15 years, with the RSNO. Gerry had also studied conducting with Martin Brabbins, and in the USA at the American Academy of Choral Conducting in Aspen, Colorado. He quickly tuned in to how the choir operated and what its aspirations and potential were.

In 2002, for the Queen's Golden Jubilee, ACU presented "Music for a Royal Occasion", featuring *A Burns Quartet* by John Maxwell Geddes, specially commissioned by ACU and financed by the Scottish Arts Council, as well as works by Parry, Byrd, Handel and William Walton. The score of the Geddes was presented to the Deputy Lord Lieutenant for presentation to the Queen.

<sup>32</sup> Photograph courtesy of the Ayrshire Post



Other memorable millennial concerts were the fundraising 'Come and Sing' *Messiah* on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2005, in Ayr Town Hall, for the victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami which killed 250,000 people and left huge destruction in its wake. Gerry conducted over 300 singers, with a professional orchestra and soloists Wilma MacDougall, Marilyn de Blieck, William Strachan and George Gordon, all of whom generously gave their services free. Over £5000 was raised.



*Tsunami Messiah 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2005 - Photograph courtesy of the Ayrshire Post*

Also in 2005, ACU, in a concert with Ayrshire Voices and the Ayrshire Symphony Orchestra, took part in a performance of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* for Ayr 800 - a celebration of 800 years since the founding of Ayr as a Royal Burgh. In 2006 there was a splendid *Dream of Gerontius* - a dramatic work which demands considerable choral and orchestral forces. The season 2006-07 saw a £1million refit of Ayr Town Hall, which left ACU temporarily homeless - fortunately they were able to use St Leonard's Church. In October 2007 there was yet another celebratory *Messiah* in the newly restored magnificent Town Hall, with the similarly restored Lewis organ back in action. In 2009 there was a special Burns Concert with guests Ayrshire Voices, to celebrate 250 years since the birth of Robert Burns. John Gardner's *A Burns Sequence* was revived, as was the Geddes Quartet. Ayrshire Voices sang *Tam o' Shanter* by Michael Norris, and the two choirs sang arrangements of *A Man's a Man* and *Auld Lang Syne*. Christmas concerts have also featured young singers from Heathfield and Forehill Primary Schools, as well as South Ayrshire's splendid Jazz Orchestra in 2015. Bach has been given due homage, with a *B Minor Mass* and a *St Matthew Passion*, and more modern composers given their due with Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*, Ken Johnston's *I Landed with Seven Men*, and Howard Goodall's *Eternal Light*, all of which were popular with choir and audience.

In 2012, largely on Sam Craig's initiative, ACU were delighted to welcome Myriade, an offshoot from the original Pincerais following the death of Pierre Gasser, and most enjoyable visits followed to both choirs. Most recently, Le Pincerais and ACU sang in St Giles' Cathedral in 2016, to a most enthusiastic audience, with the sun's rays filtering through the Burns window behind them.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century started with Freda Henderson continuing as President, and Sue Gregson as Secretary. John Lewis took over from Isobel Crawford as Treasurer in 2000. Mary MacKenzie acted as Treasurer from 2003 until 2009, when Helen Wilkinson took over until the AGM in 2016. Marjorie MacKay and Nan Newall took over as President and Secretary respectively from 2005-2009, succeeded by Dr Sam Craig as President, and Sue Gregson who bravely stepped in again when no Secretary could be found. Colin Duncan became President in 2013, and Catriona Haston Secretary in 2015. Helen Doran became Treasurer in June 2016. Socially, the choir had regular end of year quizzes, and some "pot luck suppers". Charity links were established with "Oxjam" rehearsals and Carol Singing for Oxfam at Christmas, while concert interval drinks were taken over by the Kiama Trust, a local Breast Cancer Charity. Workshops led by Mandy Miller, and then Edward Caswell, were well supported. In 2014 an Ayr Choral Song Book was put together by Shona Mitchell for informal singing or "warm ups", in true A Coeur Joie style. An ACU website was set up, also by Shona, in 2000, bringing ACU into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Now a recently updated website, joined by a Facebook page, are increasingly well used - particularly in networking with other choirs. Concert tickets are available both online, and from the local revived community theatre, the Gaiety. Data on choir numbers can be misleading as totals may apply to paid membership, or programme numbers, but they seem to have recovered from a dip to 70 members in 2006, to around 90 in 2015-16, although still below the 100 of 1976, 111 of 1986, and 114 of 1996.

Although the choir no longer had Honorary Vice-Presidents or Presidents, the tradition continued of a close association with South Ayrshire Council, whose current Provost, Helen Moonie, has been very supportive of ACU, as were her predecessors. The Choir also gained a rather special Patron in 2015 - Sir James MacMillan CBE - leading Scottish Composer and Conductor, who attended Cumnock Academy with some of ACU's members, and is raising the profile of music in Ayrshire, including establishing a new Festival chorus, through the innovative Cumnock Festival Tryst Music Festival. Sir James contributed a remarkable and exciting new work - *Quas ego non terras* - for ACU's 140<sup>th</sup> Birthday in 2016. ACU also sang MacMillan's *Magnificat* in October 2015.



Sir James MacMillan<sup>33</sup>

The 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration included a special concert, reception and exhibition on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2016, featuring "greatest hits" culled from an archive poll, with three favourite soloists - Marie Claire Breen, Cheryl Forbes and Andrew McTaggart - and Gordon Cree playing the Town Hall organ. Former members joined the choir to sing in the whole concert, or just ACU's favourite signature music - Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine*. Plans are in place for a Brahms *Requiem* in the spring of 2017. ACU appears to be in good heart.

## 2016 Anniversary Messages

On behalf of South Ayrshire Council I would like to acknowledge the contribution Ayr Choral Union has made in South Ayrshire inspiring local musicians, young and old, over the last 140 years. Music has always been important to the people of South Ayrshire and Ayr Choral Union has played a large role in developing local musical talent. Congratulations on reaching this magnificent milestone.

Provost of South Ayrshire

"It is a great delight to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Ayr Choral Union as their Patron. The chorus have an impressive history and have been a major presence in the cultural life of Ayr. I'm glad this will continue, and that the organisation is going from strength to strength. Ever since I was a boy in Ayrshire I have been aware of the high standards and endeavour associated with ACU and it has been lovely getting to know the present crop of singers under their inspirational music director Gerry Doherty. I am proud and pleased that many of them have shown such interest in my new project at The Cumnock Tryst, and I can foresee ongoing collaborations and new ideas in the years ahead. I have enjoyed every recent concert of theirs I have attended. Many happy returns to the ACU!"

James MacMillan July 2016

Greetings from Daniel Lackner, President of Le Choeur du Pincerais For more than 20 years our choir, Le Pincerais, and Ayr Choral Union have forged solid bonds of friendship. Created and directed until 2008 by Pierre Gasser, our choir originated in Saint Germain en Laye. It became with time able to sing some of the great works of the repertoire, like Mozart's or Faure's Requiems or Haydn's Creation (sung with ACU). We are now directed by professional chefs, Maria Belen Martinez being the present one. Among the exchanges with European choirs, the one we have with ACU is particularly dear to us. Alternately in Scotland and in France, the two choirs have met many times to share our common passion of music and enjoy privileged moments of singing, rejoicing and exchanging. We all know that singing is not just a matter of technique and motivation, but also a question of heart and the pleasure of singing together

Daniel Lackner

<sup>33</sup> Photo courtesy of Philip Gatward

## 8. Reflection

This short history reflects the rather random contents of the Ayr Choral archive, which is located largely in the “box” handed down through the ages, with separate collections maintained at Carnegie Library and the Ayrshire Archive. There are Committee Minutes for most of 1925-2016, and a scattering of programmes, accounts and Directors’ Reports before then. The 1976 history, which claims to be based on a 1925 memoir, is in fact largely based on the informative Programme for the 1905 Bazaar. Nineteenth century newspapers are an excellent resource, both local and the Glasgow Herald, and the Ayrshire Post and Ayr Advertiser give some coverage of more recent events. <sup>34</sup> John Strawhorn’s excellent 1989 “The History of Ayr” provides context.

Time and space have meant several areas have been neglected, particularly the orchestras and soloists who get scant mention and deserve much more, especially the loyal local orchestras and “round ups” of local musicians. The Ayrshire Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ayr Amateur Orchestral Society always appeared to be available when the Scottish Orchestra was regularly beyond the means of ACU, as did post 1960 musicians well known in the community – for example Joe Meek, Sandy Lyle, Wallace Galbraith, Tom and Sheila Hay, John Leitch and Laurie Gargan. The partnership with the City of Glasgow Symphony Orchestra has been a long and successful one, organised by Bryan Free. The early fascination with London soloists has been largely discarded in favour of the many excellent solo singers emerging from the Conservatoire, many with local connections.

Choral singing in 2016 has probably never been more popular, and its benefits never more publicised in terms of mental and physical health. The breadth of involvement, and the range of choral opportunities is impressive. In Ayrshire alone there are small choirs, large choirs, gospel choirs, rock choirs, community choirs, single issue choirs, and workplace choirs singing a wide range of music, with the added short term opportunities of “Come and Sings”, and the remarkable Cumnock Tryst Festival Chorus and Ayrshire Choral Experience. The impact and success of the National Youth Choir of Scotland (NYCOS) has raised the profile of choral singing amongst young people in Scotland, and academic opportunities to study both choral composition, and conducting are vastly improved. 21<sup>st</sup> century choral repertoire from exciting new composers is instantly accessible on YouTube, and opportunities on the internet to sing in virtual choirs, or to learn parts - avoiding learning notes at rehearsals.

Ayr Choral has so far embraced change and managed to balance its repertoire – including music by Whitacre, Dubra, Gjeilo, Jenkins, Chilcott, Johnston, Todd, Goodall, Tavener, and, of course, MacMillan, as well as Bach, Brahms, Mozart and Verdi. The choir offers challenging choral opportunities for those who wish to be challenged, as well as maintaining at least one concert annually with a full professional orchestra and high quality professional soloists. Increasingly, however, singers may ally themselves with several choirs, and may “dip in” for choral opportunities, which needs to be seen as opportunity, not threat. Also there is some evidence that singers want to sing, not listen, and audiences have to be wooed and valued in this environment – as they always did.

The theme of Ayr Choral’s history has undoubtedly been the challenge of balancing aspiration with means, and committee preferences with both choir and audience tolerance. In 1888 H L Allan said that *“we need to give a really good musical bill of fare and maintain a financial equilibrium”* which summed it up nicely. In 2000, *“a lighter programme should in no way compromise musical integrity and quality of standards”* was saying much the same thing. Despite financial crises, wars, fires, resignations, deaths, and fall-outs, Ayr Choral managed to survive by rabbits being pulled out of hats by individuals who cared enough to give the time, energy, commitment and innovative thinking to sort it and keep going. It has been remarkably fortunate in “cometh the hour, cometh the man”- or frequently woman – to maintain momentum.

This history - while certainly not exhaustive – hopefully has paid tribute to many of the people of the past. The indicators for the future are good, in that numbers and finance are reasonably sound in comparison with some of the “down” periods of the past. Ayr Choral has reached a remarkable milestone in its 140<sup>th</sup> year. Hopefully it will reach a grand 150<sup>th</sup>.

Margaret Crankshaw

*(Initially graduated in history, sociology and social history, taught in Kilmarnock for almost 10 years before becoming an Educational Psychologist in Ayrshire. First joined ACU as an Alto in 1979)*

Nan Newall

*(Spent ten years as primary teacher and depute head, and another ten as stay-at-home parent before becoming a health educator, among other things. Now happily a granny and a back-row Alto, having joined ACU in 1986)*

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<sup>34</sup> Several choirs have produced histories, for example Edinburgh Royal Choral Union, and Dundee Choral Union. Kilmarnock and District Choral Union have published an interesting short history since 1948 (AANHS)<sup>34</sup> although the illustrious history of choral singing in Kilmarnock goes back much further. The story of choral singing in Scotland is a fascinating and rewarding journey into social as well as musical history and deserves more attention.



## ACU people

The following is a somewhat random selection of people who have contributed exceptionally to ACU, but is clearly not an exhaustive list. It includes all Conductors, Presidents and Honorary Presidents - all of whom are more fully described elsewhere. Most Secretaries, Treasurers, Choir Managers, Librarians and Accompanists are listed, but earlier than 1960 evidence is patchy. There are many important names missing from the ACU story - Committee members, Bazaar organisers, Keepers of the Box, Convenors of sub-committees, Vice-Presidents, Hon Vice-Presidents, Soloists, orchestral leaders and players, programme planners, fund raisers, flower arrangers, sponsorship organisers, coffee makers, cake bakers, poster designers, newsletter writers, marketers etc. who have all made their unique contribution - there is not room to mention all and many are lost in the mists of the last 140 years. Apologies to anyone who feels neglected. Dates given are as accurate as the archive allows. Apologies for any errors.

Ailsa	Mary, Marchioness of	Hon President (1976-October 1999) and Hon Vice-President in 1975. She died in 2007.
Allan	Hugh Logie	President (1877-83) Editor of Ayr Advertiser. He died in 1908.
Anderson	John	Vice-President (1909-11)
Angus	Robert Lawrence	Hon President (1945-Feb 1949). Chair of William Baird and Co., Depute Chair of the Clydesdale Bank, and a Director of the Midland Bank. Depute Lieutenant for Ayrshire. He lived at Ladykirk, Monkton and died in Feb 1949.
Angus	Mrs RL (Penelope)	Hon. President (1949-67). Wife of R L Angus and took over as Hon President when he died in February 1949. She became Lady Moore when she married Sir Thomas Cecil Russell Moore, 1st Bt. on 26 September 1950.
Beaton	Walter	President (1895-98) Vice-President (1885-95). Headmaster of Prestwick Public School.
Boyd OBE	Mrs Edwin R	Hon President (1968-76). Mrs Boyd lived at Poundland House, Pinwherry, formerly of Thinacre, Ayr. She died in April 1976.
Boyd	James	A native of Stewarton and maths teacher. Director of Education for Ayrshire 1944. Hon Vice-President of ACU in 1945. He died in 1946.
Bowie	William	Conductor (1955 -74)
Bramwell	Raymond	Founder and Conductor of Ayrshire Voices - youth choirs who shared several concert programmes with ACU.
Brash	Ronnie	Archivist (1991-2012) and historian. Ronnie sang Tenor for many years and was a great supporter of ACU. He died in 2016.
Brown	Robert	President (1913-16)
Campbell	Hugh H JP	Hon Vice-President (1945-47). He died in 1947.
Cassels	David	President (1973-78) Vice-President (1953-73). Produced 1976 Centenary History of ACU. Outstanding tenor and a talented and devoted member of ACU. He died in 1999
Coats	Mrs Glen	Hon Vice-President (1936)
Clark	James	President (1904-6) Lived in Troon. Vice-President (1903-4)
Cochrane	David	Bass and long term supporter and member of the choir. Hon Vice-President 1992
Cowan	Cuthbert	Hon President (1877-1883)
Cowap	John Butler	Professor of music, 2 Dalblair Terrace. He formed a Glee Club in early 1870s and was Organist of New Church. In 1879 was organist with ACU and regularly after that. He was also accompanist at rehearsals in 1879 and 1882-3. He gave lessons in piano, harmonium and organ - 12 lessons for 1 and a half guineas
Craig	Clare	Librarian (2001-2004) Clare died in 2005
Craig	Sam	President (2009-2013) Joined ACU in 1986.
Crankshaw	Margaret	Joined choir as Alto in 1979. Making Music Rep 2000-14; Vice-President 2008-13. Marketing 2012-present. Archivist (Joint) 2014-present) Jointly responsible for 2016 <i>History of ACU</i> and Souvenir Booklet.
Cresswell	Hubert	Conductor (1950-55). He died in March 1973.
Crawford	Isobel	Isobel joined ACU in 1976. Legendary Treasurer (1979-2000). NFMS activist. Died in 2006
Dawson	Dan	Choir Manager (1996-2002). Social Convener in 1990s.
Doherty	Gerard	Conductor (Oct 2001 - present)
Downie	William	Chairman (1945-49). He was also Interim Secretary and Treasurer (1942-45) and Vice-President (1949-51). He died in March 1953.
Duncan	A Craig	Choir Manager (1977-81)
Duncan	Colin	President (2013-present) Vice-President (2006-08)
Duthie	Bill	President (1986-1994)
Free	Bryan	Orchestra "fixer" for the choir from 1980s - City of Glasgow Symphony Orchestra
Gairdner	Dr Eric D	President (1908-11)
Girdwood	Gavin	Vice-President (1933-35). Long term member and supporter of the choir
Girdwood	Graham	Auditor 1976-2004 and member of the Bass section. Died 2008 aged 82.

Godfrey	William	Accompanist (1974-1995). Organist and choirmaster at Prestwick North Church
Good	Hamish	Conductor (1991-2001)
Gordon	D P	Vice-President (1906-09)
Gregson	Sue	Sue joined ACU as a Soprano in 1985. She had two spells as Secretary (1998-2004) and (October 2009-2015).
Guterman	Miss	Accompanist - a German lady, governess to Henry Houldsworth*
Hagart-Alexander	Sir Claude	Hon President (June 2000-2005)
Hamilton	Veronica	Hon Vice-President (1954-62) of Rozelle, Ayr
Hamilton	William	First Treasurer in 1876 who "had local knowledge and indefatigable spirit"
Harrison	Fred	Treasurer (1959-1969)
Haston	Catriona	Secretary (2015-)
Hay-Boyd	Rev Humphrey Gordon Roberts	President (1926-1931). Northants vicar who married Mary Elizabeth Hay-Boyd and took her name. He died in October 1931
Hay-Boyd	Miss Mary Elizabeth Hay-Boyd/ Mrs Roberts Hay-Boyd	Only child of Lieut-Colonel James George Hay-Boyd. Married to Rev Humphrey Gordon Roberts Hay-Boyd who died Oct 1931. Committee member from 1912. President (1916-1926) taking the lead role with the 1925 Bazaar and 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Honorary Vice-President (1926-1941). She died on Feb 26 <sup>th</sup> 1941.
Henderson	Freda	President (1994-2004)
Horn	George	Secretary (1945-54) Hon Vice-President (1956-59) when he moved to Greenock.
Hunter-Blair	James	Hon Vice-President (1966-68) Blairquhan, Straiton
Inglis	Dr	Committee member. Archivist until 1991.
Jones	R A	Secretary (1939-42)
Johnstone	Miss	Accompanist Helped train the chorus in 1877
Kerrigan	Tony	ACU Photographer and member of the Bass section; responsible for raising profile of sponsorship in early 2000s; Choir Manager (2011-14)
Lamb	Malcolm	Choir Manager (2014-16)
Leck	Edwin	Secretary (1965-72) Became Choir Manager 1972
Lewis	John	Treasurer (2000-2003) and member of the Bass Section.
Liddel/ Liddell	James	Conductor (1945-50)
Limond	Janey	Librarian (1965-83) Latterly jointly with Joy McLeonard and Margaret Toner
Limond	Thomas	Hon Vice-President (1947-70) Town Chamberlain of Ayr.
Linden	Mrs	Treasurer (1952-55) and committee member for many years
Linton	Margaret	Soprano in ACU for 30 years and married to Stewart Linton. Kept the Attendance Register in 1980's with a positive impact on attendance. Became Hon Vice-President in 1992. Died in 2016.
Linton	Stewart	Conductor (1974-1991) Accompanist (1972-74). Was also Choir Manager and Committee member prior to 1974. Died February 1991
McAlister	Mr	Conductor in 1876 prior to Hugh McNabb's appointment
McCosh	W H	Secretary (1906-32) He was a Solicitor at 64 Wellington Chambers. Born 1873 in Tarbolton. In 1891 he was an apprentice clerk with a law firm. He turned down the President's post in 1907 but was clearly a strong guiding hand to the Committee. He tried to resign in 1931 but continued as Joint Secretary with Mr Paterson to show him the ropes. He was a key person in ACU history - a safe pair of hands.
McCreath	David	President (1890-95) Vice-President (1882-85)
Mrs McGill		Accompanist 1923
McHarg	Mike	Choir Manager (1985-94)
McIlwraith	Andrew	Attended 1876 meeting. Hon President (1921-32)
McInnes	Charles	Vice-President 1938 (on death of William Walker) but in reality acted as President. President (1949-1953). Hon Vice-President (1953-1970).
McIntosh	Margaret	Librarian (2007-11) and member of the Alto section
MacKay	Marjorie	President (2004-2009)
MacKenzie	Mary	Treasurer (2003-2009) and member of the Alto section
McLeonard	Joy	Librarian (1979-1996) initially shared with Janey Limond and Margaret Toner
McLeonard	Victor	Joined choir in 1971 and was an outstanding Secretary (1972-1998)
MacMillan	Sir James	Patron 2015-present. Foremost Scottish Classical Composer and Conductor, and founder of the Cumnock Festival Tryst.
McMillan	Allan	Concert Manager (2016-present) Vice-President (2004-2006)
McMillan	Mhairi	Librarian (2004-2007)
McNabb	Hugh	Conductor (1877-1911)
McRobert	Mrs	Treasurer (1956-59)
MacVicar	Mrs	Accompanist 1905; 1906
Maitland	David B	Secretary (1955-65) when he retired

Mansbridge	Frances	Accompanist (1923-72) Joined ACU as a chorister and after a few weeks took over at a rehearsal when accompanist (Mrs McGill) was ill. She was Organist at St Andrews Church, Ayr for over 50 years. Frances was Secretary to the Physician Superintendent and Board of Hospital Management at Glengall/Ailsa Hospital <sup>35</sup> for at least 20 years. She died in 1981 "a veritable tower of strength". Frances was a very active committee and music committee member, and exceptional accompanist, pianist and organist. She was made an Honorary Vice-President in 1972.
Marchioness of Ailsa	Mary	Hon President (1976-99). Born in 1916, Mary was the wife of 7 <sup>th</sup> Marquis Archibald David Kennedy
Markham-Lee	William Henry	Conductor (1915-1929)
Millar	Rosalie	Librarian (2012-16)
Miller	George	Treasurer (1910-1918)
Miller	Zara	Accompanist 1888 Committee member
Mitchell	Andrew	Hon President (1932-44). Vice-President (1921-1932). Died 7 <sup>th</sup> August 1944 aged 91.
Mitchell	Shona	Shona joined ACU in 1995 as an alto and has contributed in dynamic style since then: as Choir Manager (2002-2008), Concert Administrator (20011-16), Member of the Music Committee, stand in Rehearsal Conductor, leader of sectional rehearsals, and creator of the ACU Song book. Shona has also taken the lead with the 2016 140 <sup>th</sup> Celebrations.
Moore (Lady)	of Ladybank	Honorary President (1950- March 1967) See Penelope Angus
Morrison	Miss	Accompanist Played harmonium at ordinary practisings in 1877-8*
Morton	Matthew	Conductor (1929-45). Retired due to poor eyesight
Morton	Stella	Treasurer (1972-74)
Newall	Nan	Secretary (2004-2009) Concert Admin (2009-11) Joint Archivist 2014-present. Responsible jointly for 2016 Souvenir Booklet and <i>History of ACU</i>
Oswald	Mrs	Active choir member and supporter. Hon Vice-President (1921-1936). Wife of RA Oswald of Auchincruive. She died in 1936.
Oswald	Richard Alexander	Hon President 1883 -1921. JP and Depute Lieutenant. Member of County Council. Died in 1921 aged 80.
Paterson	Baillie	President (1883-90) Vice-President (1899-03); (1911-12) President ; Secretary (1877-82)
Paterson	Robert A	Secretary (1932-39) Initially reluctant but was attached to W H McCosh for a year to learn the ropes.
Pryce	Leslie	Treasurer (1971-1972)
Rae	Angus	President (1978-1985)
Rae	William	Vice-President (1928-33)
Rainie	Rev William	President (1898-1904). Minister at Newton on Ayr. Died in 1928.
Reddick	Roberton	Dec 1962 sold tickets for concerts from his shop in Cathcart St. Conducted Burgh Choir for a while.
Richmond	Thomas	Secretary - Treasurer (1898-1900)
Senior	Edward	Vice-President (1904-6) Father of Wilfrid.
Senior	James	Organist. Brother of Wilfrid
Senior	Wilfred	Committee member 1903. ACU Conductor (1911-15). High profile conductor of Glasgow Choral Union, Pianist, Adjudicator and Vice-Principal of RSAM in 1952.
Senior	Miss	Accompanist
Smith	Charles	Treasurer (1906-1910)
Smith	James	First Secretary 1876 - was previously in Glasgow Choral Union and full of energy and enthusiasm
Stevenson	Liz	Librarian (1996-2001) with Jan Dawson
Sutcliffe	Joe	Choir Manager (2008-11)
Tait	DH	Secretary (1897-1906) President (1906-8)
Thomson	Archibald	First Librarian and "no more enthusiastic official". Still librarian in 1905.
Thomson	James	Accompanist in 1928
Toner	Margaret	Treasurer (1974-1979). Also Joint Librarian.
Topp	A J	Choir Manager (1994-96)
Turnbull J P	James	Vice-President (1915-1924) Sandrigg, Prestwick. Resigned 1926 "entitled to his release"
Vernon	Rev W F	President (1931-37) Rector at Holy Trinity Church, Ayr
Walker	William	Vice-President (1937-38). 1 Eglinton Terrace Ayr. Shopkeeper. He died in July 1938.
Wallace	Baillie David A	President (1912-13)* Vice-President 1911-12. Lived at 8 Park Circus
Wallis	Mrs	Accompanist
Walton	Leslie	President (1953-72). He retired in 1972. Vice-President (1951-53)

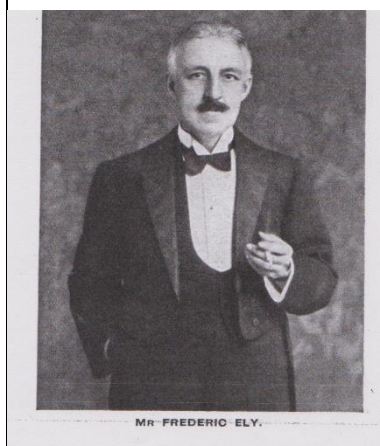
<sup>35</sup> Ailsa Hospital was originally built in 1869 as Glengall asylum



Walton	Morag	Accompanist 1995-present and briefly in 1991. Morag joined ACU as an Alto in 1971 and continues to sing with the altos at concerts, arrange music, take rehearsals when necessary, and contribute helpfully to the Music Committee. A skilled and patient accompanist with great mind reading skills where conductors are concerned.
Wands	Alex	Sang tenor in ACU and also as a soloist. Alex made many radio and TV appearances and recorded with SNO.
White	David	Treasurer (1882-85)
Wills	Baillie James	President (1937-May 1940 when he died). Provost of Ayr.
Wilkinson	Helen	Treasurer (2009-2016) ACU has been very fortunate in all its Treasurers, but Helen took the role to new heights of proficiency.
Wilson	John P	President (1985-1986) when he resigned through illness and died soon afterwards). John was also a very effective and popular Choir Manager (Dec 1981-April 1985)
Wilson	W B	Secretary/Treasurer (1886-98) * Address was 15 Sandgate, Ayr Vice-President (1898-99)

## Significant Others

### Frederic A Ely



Although Frederic Ely's only contact with ACU seems to have been as organist at one concert, his ambitions and success with the Burgh Choir clearly had a significant, if unacknowledged impact on ACU, hence his inclusion here as part of the ACU story.

Frederic was born in 1878, brought up in London, attended the Royal College of Music and gained a degree B Mus Bac from London University in 1900. He was organist and choir master in Leytonstone from 1897-1901, and Sunningdale, from 1901-1903, and was subsequently appointed to Holy Trinity Church, Ayr in 1903.

Ely taught music (the first singing master) at Ayr Academy for 33 years. He founded Ayr Burgh and County Choir in 1904, inaugurated "for the study of high class music in the district with the focus on unaccompanied singing", and with William Houldsworth of Coodham Estate as President. This new venture initially "received scant support" and considerable opposition from the "musical public". Ely also conducted Troon Portland Church Choir, Newton Carpet works choir, and Ayr Academy choir - taking all choirs to a high level and many awards at Music Festivals. In 1911, they swept the Boards at the Glasgow Choral Competition Festival

gaining first is Scottish music, ahead of the Glasgow Orpheus. Ely co-founded the Ayrshire Music Festival in 1912. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1912 a Concert of Ayr Burgh and County Choir with Soloists from Royal Choral, and Royal Opera Covent Garden, took place, with an orchestra in Ayr.

In May 1912 at the International Festival of choirs in Paris, 500 choirs with 66 from UK took part. Three choirs went to Paris from Scotland: Glasgow Choral, Glasgow Orpheus, and Ayr Burgh and County Choir which gave some idea of the choir's remarkable status. In 1932 new members were "examined as to voice and reading ability" and increasingly were singing cantatas with orchestras, including the Scottish Orchestra, and in December 1934 gave a concert conducted by Sir John Barbirolli. This was broadcast live by the BBC from Ayr Town Hall. Ely adjudicated at Music Festivals and the Ayr Burgh Choir regularly broadcast in the 1930s with the Scottish Orchestra. After the war, Belle Cunningham took over the Burgh Choir, and in 1963 Robertson Reddick. Ely died in 1955.

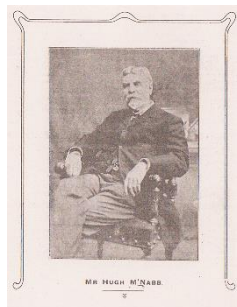
## Conductors of Ayr Choral Union

### George Sayers (1862-

1862 Conducted Messiah, Dettingen Te Deum and part of Creation

**Mr McAlister (1876)** A teacher of the sol-fa system within the District. Conducted first concert after 1876 resurrection of ACU

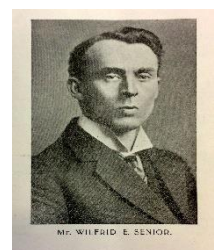
### Hugh McNabb (1877-1910)



Hugh was born in Ayr in 1842 and as a young man he attended HL Allan's Sol-fa classes in the Loudoun Hall in the 1860s. Described as "a tenor vocalist, conductor, choir trainer and didactic writer" by 1862 he was conducting Bridgeton Choral Society, and from 1867 he was musical director at the UP Church, St Vincent Street, Glasgow. He also sang with Glasgow Choral Union as a tenor, learning a great deal from Henry Lambeth who was Conductor at that time. Hugh became Conductor of ACU from 1877, and for some years also had a male voice choir in connection with one of the local volunteer regiments (1<sup>st</sup> Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers) where he gained the rank of Major. He founded the St Cecilia Society, conducted Bothwell Musical Association (1886) and Girvan Musical Association (1889), and also Dunfermline Choral Union from 1888. "He had great natural musical gifts" and was considered quite a catch by ACU. When he took up the ACU baton he had only one free evening in the week left! About 1883 he published a "*New Singing Tutor*" published by W Morley and Co. which was "favourably received".

Hugh also did voice training at 20 Cathcart Street, Ayr, although his home was in Glasgow. He was "patient, painstaking and stimulating" and "helped members overcome their difficulties".<sup>36</sup> Hugh was conductor of ACU for 33 years and increased the membership to over 100.

### Wilfrid E. Senior (1911-1915)



Wilfrid Senior was the son of Edward Senior who had a pianoforte and music saloon at 41 and 43 High Street, Ayr, and had been an organist in Stirling. Wilfrid was born in Tillicoultry in 1880 and at age 13 went to Dresden to study piano at the Conservatoire, where he gained a double diploma in piano and conducting, and was also coach to the Dresden Opera House. He returned home in 1904 as a pianist and teacher, living in Glasgow. He also conducted Ayr Philharmonic Society for a while and in 1911 was appointed by ballot to be Conductor of Ayr Choral Union. In 1914 Wilfrid was solo pianist with the Glasgow Choral and Orchestral Union in the St Andrews Hall in Glasgow. He became pianist in several emerging Picture Palaces in Glasgow including The Picture Salon and the Palace ("unsurpassed for comfort and beauty"). Wilfrid parted company from ACU on good terms with the committee in

1915, as they decided to scale down to a local honorary conductor for the duration of the war. Wilfrid was Conductor of Stirling Choral Society in 1916. During the First World War, he conducted at fund raising concerts in Glasgow including at least one for the Scottish Hospital for Limbless Sailors and Soldiers - where a captured German admiralty flag and helmet were auctioned.

Wilfrid became one of Scotland's foremost musicians - pianist, orchestral conductor, choral conductor, adjudicator, examiner, lecturer and broadcaster. In 1917 he was conducting the Glasgow Grand Opera Society. He was conductor of Glasgow Choral Union for 25 years, and in 1929 was conducting the Scottish Orchestra. He conducted the New Light Orchestra in 1935. Wilfrid's son Submariner Lieutenant Senior was captured in 1940, and German radio broadcast this information. Wilfrid was used as an adviser by ACU when they appointed a new conductor in 1929. Wilfrid was one of the busiest members of staff at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music, and resigned from Glasgow Choral Union in 1947 because of his work commitments. He became Assistant Director in 1947, and Vice Principal in 1952. He died in June 1955.

### WH Markham-Lee (1915-1929)

William Henry Markham-Lee was born in Cambridge in 1876 - the brother of composer Ernest Markham-Lee. He was living in Weymouth in 1911. Why he came to Ayr is not clear but he may have been organist at the New Church. He took over as ACU conductor from Wilfrid Senior in 1915 when ACU decided to appoint an honorary local conductor as activity was much reduced during the war. In 1923 William was described as "a tower of strength" in the Ayrshire Post, which hoped that he "*would long wield the baton and maintain the prestige of the oldest musical society in our midst*". However after a difficult period financially and musically, William was replaced when the committee decided to open the post of conductor to public application during the harsh financial climate of 1929. He was also Conductor of Ayr Presbytery choir and organist in Dailly in 1943. He died in Newark in 1968.

### **Matthew Morton LRAM (1929-45)**

Aged 19, Matthew was precentor at Loudoun UF Church and lived at Braemore, Newmilns. He established early on a reputation in the Irvine Valley as a choral conductor and music leader and took a leading part at various festivals with his church choir, and the Newmilns Burgh Choir, as well as with individual pupils whom he trained. Matthew was also singing master at Ardrossan Academy for a time. He was appointed to ACU from an impressive leet of applicants in July 1929. He believed in spending rehearsal time on the correct production and management of the voice - especially the tenor voice. He was latterly organist and choirmaster at the Auld Kirk in Ayr from 1931 to 1944, and lived in Blackburn Drive, and 2 Curtecan Place (1937) in Ayr. He resigned from ACU in 1945 - due to poor eyesight - when ACU was resurrected after World War 2, and became an Honorary Vice-President. He had a Festival Choir entered in the Ayrshire Music Festival in 1939, and also had a female voice Ayr Choral entry in March 1939. In his resignation letter of 17<sup>th</sup> September 1945 he wrote that the greatest thrill in all his experience was conducting Parry's Blest Pair of Sirens with ACU and the Scottish Orchestra. He died in December 1952 aged 78.

### **James R Liddell (1946-50)**

James, an organist in Ayr, was appointed in 1945 - and was apparently "young and enthusiastic". He thought there should be more young members - "the average age of the choir is still rather high". Re music - "we should not get ourselves into a rut - Messiah, Creation, Elijah, ad infinitum". He appears to have had high standards. Due to poor attendance in 1949, the choir were underprepared - "heads were buried in copies and an indifferent performance was given". He also tackled some sacred cows - "Let's beware of those 'who can sing Messiah backwards'" and insisted that "the composer knows best". James resigned quite suddenly on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1950 - "it was regretted that Mr Liddell considered it necessary to take this step however the committee were of the opinion that his resignation should be accepted". A committee meeting had been held on 24<sup>th</sup> October where Mr Liddell had advocated a small orchestra for Messiah as financial circumstances were improving, due to the Carnegie Trust scheme continuing to 1951, and the Arts Council guarantee started in the same year. However Mr Liddell's suggestion was turned down by the committee who were committed to austerity. In 1951 Mr Liddell was organist at a BBC broadcast of all Sunday school children in Ayr and he moved to Castlehill Church as organist.

### **Hubert Frank Cresswell (LRAM ARCM ATCL) (1950-55)**

Hubert came from Cheltenham where his father was a builder. He studied at Cheltenham School of Music and gained qualifications from Trinity College of Music (best in his class) in 1913. He held a post in 1912 as organist and choir master of Cheltenham Festival Society, then moved to Scotland in 1912 to take the post as organist at St Andrews Church, Kilmarnock. Hubert served in France in WW1 and was wounded in 1916, then an invalid inmate in New Court Hospital for around a year, entertaining his comrades with music. In 1919 he applied for a job at St Leonard's Church in Ayr. There were 54 applicants and three were selected to compete - Hubert got the job and continued in St Leonards for 50 years. He was Burgh Organist in 1933 and conducted Ayr Amateur Opera Society from 1927-33. He expressed interest in the ACU post in 1945, when James Liddell was chosen, but was appointed in 1950, after being asked to step in to take rehearsals when Mr Liddell resigned.

Hubert Cresswell was "a lively person who attracted new members to the society" and "inspired with his usual cheerful character". In 1945, William Downie pointed out that "He has a long connection with the town and a good turnout for the Messiah last year - popular with most of the old singers". He was unable to continue with ACU due to ill health in 1955, and was replaced by William Bowie, who initially stepped in on a temporary basis. He died on 17th March 1973. In 1970 Hubert got an MBE for services to music in Ayrshire, having done much to encourage young musicians and singers.

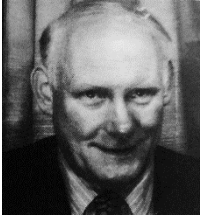
### **William Bowie (1955-74)**



Born in 1914, William Bowie was organist and choir master at Darlington New Church in Ayr. A native of Ayr, he was involved in the family laundry business, whose Greenan Laundry at Doonfoot was, for many years, a familiar landmark. Music was his great leisure activity from an early age and he studied the organ with Hubert Cresswell, the long serving organist at St. Leonard's Church. His family had a long association with the choir, his uncle having been one of the founder members, and his parents members too. In 1955 while serving as organist at Darlington Church and as conductor of Troon Male Voice Choir, William Bowie was asked at very short notice to conduct Ayr Choral Union's performance of Handel's "Judas Maccabaeus" when Mr. Cresswell was suddenly taken ill and unable to continue as the Choral Union's conductor. The success of that performance led to his official appointment as conductor and a tenure of close to twenty years' service, to date, the second longest in the choir's history. As was to be expected, the new conductor played himself in carefully with well-tryed resources, but later introduced works of a scale hitherto unknown to most local audiences, at least as live performances: Vaughan William's "Sea Symphony", Verdi's "Requiem", Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis", were performed initially under his direction. On this courageous and far-seeing policy his successors were to extend the horizon of the choir so successfully. According to Stewart Linton in 1974, "Mr Bowie left a choir which was in good heart, a going concern, with a solid core of enthusiasts." William Bowie died after a short illness on 16th January 1997.



### Stewart Linton (1974-1991)



Born in London in 1935, Stewart was a long term and dedicated member of ACU, joining as a teenager, singing bass and acting as accompanist before being made Conductor in September 1974. His first concert as Conductor was a Christmas concert in January 1975. At the 1976 centenary dinner, comment was made that “enthusiasm drips out of him”. Stewart was Principal Teacher of music at Prestwick Academy for 29 years, and organist and choir master at Newton on Ayr Church for over 30 years. As a teenager he was organist at Stair church. Stewart was Chairman of the Music Festival Committee and was also accompanist of Strathaven Choral Society, the choir conducted by his friend David Knox, for 16 years. His wife Margaret sang soprano in ACU, and also made a major contribution to choir life, having made a good recovery from serious illness. At times the members of the professional orchestras who came from Glasgow to ACU concerts could be less than respectful to the “country folk”, but two orchestral players were overheard leaving the rehearsal paying an unsolicited compliment, “at least you know what Stewart Linton wants when he conducts - better than Alex!” (Sir Alexander Gibson). Stewart’s last major concert, before his death at a relatively young age on 9th February 1991, was Dvorak’s Requiem on 4th November 1990. Stewart is remembered with great affection by current older members of ACU - although at times he could cause some trepidation amongst more timid sopranos in the interests of musical perfection!

### David Knox (1991)

David was Conductor of Strathaven Choral Society, which had a close association with ACU due to the friendship between the two conductors. When his great friend Stewart Linton died in February 1991, David stepped in informally to take rehearsals and support the choir, until, tragically, he also died on 14th March 1991 aged only 48. At the ACU Carol Concert in December 1991, there was a donation programme in memory of David which raised £385 for the Fund for Children with Heart Disease.

### Hamish Good (1991-2001)



Hamish was born in Glasgow in 1942. He was educated at Glasgow University 1960-65 studying music when Robin Orr was Professor of Music and gained an MA (Honours) in Music and Natural Philosophy. Hamish studied conducting with George Hurst, and won a travelling scholarship to the Music Academy in Detmold in Germany. From his student days he was involved in the direction of a varied range of musical groups which explored unfamiliar parts of the repertoire. Hamish was Senior Librarian at Strathclyde University.

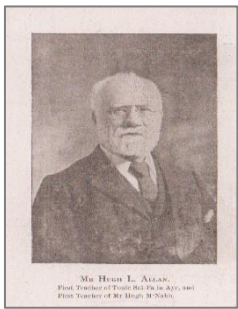
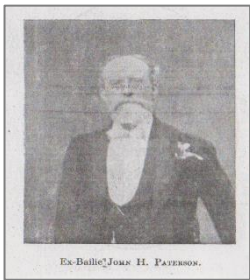


His association with Ayr began in 1990 when he was appointed Director of Music at Ayr’s Holy Trinity Church and was living in Glasgow. He was then appointed to ACU in 1991 after the post was advertised and interviewed, and his first concert was at Christmas 1991. With ACU, Hamish expanded the repertoire particularly in the field of English composers such as Hadley, Britten, Stanford, Parry, Finzi and John Gardner - some of whom were more popular than others! When Hamish moved to Dundee with his wife, Miriam, continuing with ACU was a step too far. Hamish took over the choir at a very difficult time after Stewart Linton’s death, and calmly and gently steered it back to health - despite sometimes unusual programme choices such as Hadley’s *The Hills*! Hamish was very helpful in supporting the choir to find a new conductor and ensure a smooth transition.



### Gerard Doherty (2001 (Oct) - present)








Gerry came to ACU to extend his considerable musical qualifications and background. When Hamish Good gave notice of his retirement, the post was widely advertised and subsequently several candidates were interviewed. Gerry was already an experienced orchestral conductor and on his appointment said that he intended ‘to explore the traditional choral repertoire’. Since then the choir has sung works from Bach to Chilcott, and from Charpentier to Jenkins and MacMillan. As Principal conductor of Glasgow Sinfonia; Edinburgh Symphony Orchestra and Strathclyde University Symphony Orchestra, and previously violinist with the RSNO, Gerry brought with him a very wide range of both knowledge and experience of musicianship, while exploring a new direction. His great strengths have been in his confident handling of the orchestra on concert days, and his flexibility in meeting the choir’s varied interests in programming. As well as that, he has shown that a smaller section of the choir - a chamber choir - can perform to a high standard, for example in St Giles Cathedral, when his genial and supportive approach is felt at its best. At present Gerry works for East Renfrewshire Council as an instrumental teacher, and conducts their Symphony Orchestra and Junior and Senior String Ensembles.

## Ayr Choral Union Presidents




Name	Presidency	Details available
<p>Hugh Logie Allan</p> 	1877-1883	<p>Hugh was Editor of the Ayr Advertiser. He was born at St Quivox and lived at Ballantine Drive, Ayr. He worked for the Ayr Advertiser for 59 years from office boy to compositor to Editor. After a period of failing sight he became completely blind in 1896, but still continued his editorial duties "through the medium of the typewriter" which he learned to use after losing his sight. He was a Director of the Ayr Wooden Kirk Mission and an office bearer in the Cathcart Street United Free Church.</p> <p>Before he was 21 Hugh was conducting a sol-fa class - attended by Hugh McNabb, "<i>his most distinguished scholar</i>", and was the main originator, and a Director, of Ayr Choral Union as well as a very "hands on" President. He was "<i>held in the highest respect for his uprightness and integrity of character</i>". There were amazing reviews of concerts in the Advertiser – and he must have had good contacts in the Glasgow Herald which also gave Ayr Choral Union excellent publicity. He was a "<i>well known and respected musical townsman</i>". Hugh stood down as President in 1883 due to pressure of work but continued to sing and support the choir. He died in 1908 aged 73.</p>
<p>Baillie J H Paterson</p> 	1883-1890 1911-1912	<p>Mr Paterson was a Radical supporter, shopkeeper and Councillor. He took over from H L Allan as President in 1883, after acting as Secretary. He was Vice-President 1899-1903, but stayed on the Committee most of the time before World War 1, with a further year as President. He died in 1920 at age 84.</p>
David McCreath	1890-1895	Vice President 1882-85
Walter Beaton	1895-1898	Vice President 1885-1895 and a Director of Ayr Choral Union. He was Headmaster of Prestwick Public School for 40 years, retiring in 1906. He was Chair of Ayr Parish Council and a member of the Ayr Educational Trust. He was also Secretary/Treasurer of St Nicholas Golf Club, and was the oldest golf correspondent in Scotland when he died in the 1920s
Rev William Rainie	1898-1904	Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Ayr. He was Vice-President from 1895-99. He was later President of Ayr Burgh Choir 1914-20 and died in 1928.
<p>James Clark</p> 	1904-1906	Lived in Troon. Vice-President 1903-04
<p>David H Tait</p> 	1906-1908	He was Secretary from 1897 -1906. Head of Rankin and Tait, Solicitors, of 6 Park Terrace, Ayr.
Dr Eric D Gairdner	1908-1911	Dr Gairdner was a son of the famous Glasgow professor, Sir William Tennant Gairdner, KCB, MD, FRS and a member of an illustrious Ayr family. He served as resident physician and resident surgeon at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary in 1902-3. In 1905 he took up practice in Ayr, and in 1907 was appointed surgeon to the Ayr County Hospital, a post he held until

		1919, when he became Deputy Commissioner of Medical Services under the Ministry of Pensions in Glasgow. During World War 1 he was awarded the D.S.O., and the French Government also conferred upon him the Croix de Guerre. He died in 1933.
Baillie David A Wallace	1912-1913	Member of Ayr Town Council and Senior Magistrate. A member of the Parish Council for 25 years. President of Ayr Burns Club and also of Ayr Bowling Club. He died in 1927. He was Vice-President from 1911-12.
Robert Brown	1913-1916	A School master who became Head at Coylton School. He was President at a very challenging time, keeping Ayr Choral Union alive during three war years before handing over to Mrs Hay-Boyd.
Mrs Mary Elizabeth Roberts Hay-Boyd	1916 -1926	First female President, from Townend, Symington. Mrs Hay-Boyd was the only child of Lieutenant-Colonel James George Hay Boyd. She was married to Rev Humphrey Gordon Roberts Hay-Boyd. Mrs Hay-Boyd was a very hands-on and generous President, and presided efficiently over the successful 1925 Bazaar. She was an Honorary Vice-President from 1926 to 1941 and died on 26th Feb 1941. Committee member from 1912.
Rev Humphrey Gordon Roberts Hay-Boyd MA (sometimes spelled Robarts)	1926-1931	Humphrey was the husband of Mary Elizabeth Hay-Boyd of Townend, Symington, and took her name. He was originally vicar of Spratton, Northants and took over the President's role from his wife in 1926. He was also on the Committee of the Burgh choir in 1914. He was unwell during the latter part of his presidency and died on 26 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1931.
Rev W F Vernon	1931-1937	Mr Vernon regularly apologised for his clerical duties at Holy Trinity Church taking him away from Ayr Choral Union business. He fought ACU's corner with the BBC. There was some confusion at the 1937 AGM when he did not appear and had not given apologies.
Provost James Wills	1937-1940	Provost Wills does not appear to have been able to be present at many minuted Ayr Choral Union meetings – Charles McInnes seemed to take charge of business very competently as Vice President from 1938. He was elected to the Council in 1931 and was a Senior Magistrate. Provost Wills was Head of Afflecks Auctioneers and Furniture Store. James Wills died in 1940. His only son was killed in action 1944 aged 31.
William Downie	1945-1949	Interim Secretary and Treasurer from 1942 to 1945. Paid National Federation of Musical Societies subscriptions out of his own pocket through WW2. With Charles McInnes he kept Ayr Choral Union on standby through WW2 and quickly revived it immediately after the war. Vice President 1949-51. Reported to be very ill in Dec 1950 and he died in 1953.
Charles McInnes	1949-1953	Vice-President from 1938 (on death of William Walker) to 1949). Hon Vice-President 1953-1970. Ayr Choral Union's survival immediately before, during and after WW2 was largely due to Charles McInnes and William Downie
Leslie Walton	1953-1972	He served for a period of 20 years through difficult times, dwindling membership and financial resources at a low ebb. Leslie was unfailing in his confidence in Ayr Choral Union, launching a new recruitment drive and setting up sub committees to fund raise. Vice-President 1951-53.
David B Cassels 	1972-1978	Responsible for 1976 Centennial History and celebrations. David was a long term member and supporter of the choir – noted to be courteous and reliable. He was a Partner in Grant and Watson, Outfitting firm, Director and President of Chamber of Commerce and Session Clerk of Wallacetown Church. He was an outstanding tenor and a talented and devoted member of Ayr Choral Union. He died in 1999. Vice-President 1953-72.
Angus Rae 	1978-1985	A long term member of Ayr Choral Union, previously Vice-President, and one of the Speakers at the 1976 Centennial Dinner. Angus was very effective at securing grants for the choir from various bodies. He led the choir at a time of increasing financial security, effective administration and musical success.



John Wilson	1985-1986	John died in September 1986 so had a very brief time as President. He was remembered very fondly as an enthusiastic, kindly and cheery choir manager, who managed his members astutely.
Dr Bill Duthie 	Nov 1986-1994	Bill supported the choir capably through the traumatic year of 1991 when both Stewart Linton and David Knox died. Bill's genial good humour and his ability to absorb crises calmly did him great credit. His addresses to Le Pincerais (in fluent French) were notable. Bill was also in the front line as President in encouraging a business-like approach to fundraising, sponsorship and management issues.
Freda Campbell Henderson 	1994-2004	Freda steered the choir graciously and capably, and generously made available her Savoy Park Hotel facilities for committee meetings and social functions. Freda's time was marked by social events which engaged the choir as a community, and involvement in a wider range of musical activities. She was one of our most Presidential Presidents and well known and influential in the wider business and musical community. Freda was also President in the 1980s of the Ayrshire Philharmonic Opera Society, where she played major roles. Freda died in 2013.
Marjorie MacKay 	2004-2009	Marjorie joined the choir in 1975, and was from then on a reliable source of musical knowledge, support and common sense. She did a great deal to bring Ayr Choral Union into the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century in a calm, positive and cheerful way. One great achievement was the fundraising <i>Come and Sing Messiah</i> for those affected by the devastating 2004 Tsunami. Marjorie and her husband David ran Mackay's Music in Cathcart Street for many years, at the core of the musical community in Ayrshire, and were very supportive with ticket sales, score orders, and a great deal more. Marjorie died in 2013.
Dr James A. Craig (Sam) 	2009-2013	Sam joined Ayr Choral Union in 1986 as a Bass. He is an enthusiastic Francophile and took the lead with our French alliance in its early stages, as well as during his Presidential period. Sam was pleased that during his tenure we reinstituted a visit from a French choir, albeit a new choir, Myriade. Once the link with the two choirs had been re-established, other visits followed. Sam is much loved by our French friends, especially for his occasional musical performances in a <i>See you Jimmy</i> hat. Sam, a Consultant Dermatologist, was a thoughtful, capable and reliable President, maintaining a high profile for Ayr Choral Union in the community, and overseeing a varied and interesting choral programme, including works by Ken Johnston and Bob Chilcott, despite his more traditional musical preferences.
Colin Duncan 	2013 - present	Colin has brought his managerial experience and purposeful approach to Ayr Choral Union, and his presidency has seen considerable innovation. A period of several exchanges with our two French links - Le Pincerais and Myriade (and associated social activities) have brought our own members closer together. Members are met and greeted every Tuesday by choir members on a rota basis. A new image, and upmarket website are established. Sir James MacMillan is Patron, and an association with the remarkable Cumnock Festival Tryst has been established. We have a new ACU song book and have sung in St Giles Cathedral again.

## Ayr Choral Union Honorary Presidents

Name	Presidency	Details
<b>Cuthbert Cowan</b> 	1877-1883	<p>Cuthbert Cowan was an Ayr Banker (joint agent of the Union Bank) and Philanthropist - well known and held in high esteem. He was a member of the Industrial School Board, and also on the School Board of Ayr Parish.</p> <p>He filled the honorary position for 6 years, then retired because of advancing years. The Choir gave <i>"grateful thanks to him for the interest he has taken in its efforts to cultivate a taste for good music and for the generous support and encouragement he has extended to it on carrying on its work"</i>. He died in 1885 at his home, Hartley House, aged 77.</p>
<b>Richard Alexander Oswald of Auchincruive</b>	1883-1921	<p>R A Oswald was the elder son of George Oswald. He was a JP and Depute Lieutenant of the County with extensive estates in Kircudbrightshire. He was Chairman of the Auld Brig of Ayr Preservation Committee and a keen racehorse owner. Mrs Oswald sang for many years in ACU <i>"with the ordinary people"</i> and often gave donations to make the Accounts look better. Richard died in April 1921.</p>
<b>Andrew McIlwraith</b> 	1921-1932	<p>Andrew attended the original 1876 meeting. He was Honorary President from 1921-32 although seldom in Ayr. He was the first Vice-President. Andrew was born in 1844 in Ayr and educated at Ayr Academy. His brother was Sir Thomas McIlwraith, Premier of Queensland. Andrew established the London-based shipping and mercantile Company McIlwraith, McEachran and Co. in 1875 which linked mainly with Australia. He was a close friend of Andrew Fisher (born Crosshouse and PM of Australia), Joseph Paxton and Brunel. He also reorganised the Tokyo tramway system. Andrew was large, handsome and red bearded – he was <i>"abstemious but never refused a large draught of medicinal brandy or scrumpy"</i>. He died on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1932 at his home at Woodcot, Salcombe, South Devon, leaving £107,200.</p>
<b>Andrew Mitchell</b>	1932-1944	<p>Honorary Vice-President in 1921 he lived at 1 Alloway Park, Ayr. He attended the 1876 meeting and was <i>"a keen and energetic singer"</i>. Andrew was Head of the firm Walter Mitchell and Sons, Provision Merchant and Bacon Curers. He died on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1944 aged 91.</p>
<b>Robert Laurence Angus</b>	1945-1949	<p>R L Angus was a native of Lugar. He was Chair of William Baird and Co, Depute Chair of the Clydesdale Bank, a Director of the Midland Bank and Depute Lieutenant for Ayrshire. He lived at Ladykirk, Monkton and died in February 1949.</p>
<b>Mrs R L (Penelope) Angus who became Lady Moore</b>	1949-1967	<p>Penelope was the wife of R L Angus. She was born in 1908 as Kathleen Penelope Sheppard. In 1949 she took over as Honorary President when her husband died, and held the post until 1967. She became Lady Moore when she married Sir Thomas Cecil Russell Moore, 1st Bt. and Conservative MP for Ayr on 26 September 1950. Penelope donated Christmas trees for the Town Hall stage at Christmas concerts. Latterly she lived in London and was very apologetic about not getting to concerts.</p>
<b>Mrs Edwin Boyd</b>	1968-1976	<p>Mrs Boyd lived at Poundland House, Pinwherry, and was formerly of Thinacre, Ayr. She was noted for her <i>"cheerful presence and encouragement"</i> and died in April 1976.</p>
<b>Marchioness of Ailsa</b> 	1976-1999 (October)	<p>Born 1916, Mary was the wife of 7<sup>th</sup> Marquis Archibald David Kennedy. She was born Mary Burn and educated in Alnwick. A gifted musician and an accomplished pianist she was invited to be President in 1968, she was unable to accept, as she was living in the Isle of Man and would be unable to take a keen interest. When asked again in 1976 she accepted. Mary was a great choral enthusiast and supporter of ACU. There was regular correspondence after concerts or when she had a view to express such as on the withdrawal of the National Anthem. She died in 2007.</p>
<b>Sir Claud Hagart-Alexander</b>	1999(October)–2006(February)	<p>Honorary Vice President until 1999, then Honorary President. Sir Claude was born in Peking. He had a degree in Physics from Cambridge University and worked for both Ferranti and ICI. Kingendleuch House in Ballochmyle Estate was home, where, as a DIY buff, he installed central heating. He was Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Honorary Sheriff of Strathclyde, and a JP. Sir Claude was very kindly, and supportive of Ayr Choral Union. He died in February 2006 aged 79.</p>

The post of Honorary President was discontinued in 2006. A new (or revised) post of Patron was established in 2015, with the first Patron being Sir James Loy MacMillan CBE, composer.

# Ayr Choral Union Programmes 1876-2016 <sup>37</sup>

Season	Concert date	Composer/ Work	Comments
Season 1876-77	April 2 1877	Miscellaneous concert	Conducted by M McAlister
Season 1877-78	Feb 14 1878	Handel <i>Messiah</i>	Conductor Hugh McNabb
Season 1878-79	Feb 13 1879	Mendelssohn <i>Elijah</i> **	**100 voices + 40 in orch *In Skating Rink Dalblair Rd
	April 14 1879	Mozart <i>1<sup>st</sup> Mass</i> and <i>Handel Coronation Anthems</i> *	
Season 1879-80	Dec 24 1879	Haydn <i>Creation</i>	
Season 1880-81	Dec 1880	Miscellaneous	In Queen's Rooms
	April 1881	Miscellaneous	
Season 1881-82	Sept 1881	<i>Messiah</i>	Opening of Ayr Town Hall New Town Hall
	April 1882	Popular concert	
Season 1882-83	Dec 1882	Mendelssohn - <i>Lobgesang</i>	
	April 1883	Haydn Spring - <i>The Seasons</i>	
Season 1883-84	Dec 19 1883	Handel - <i>Samson</i>	
	Spring 1884	Gade - <i>The Crusader</i>	
Season 1884-85	Jan 7 1885	London orchestra**	**Orchestral concert. Seats 10/6d to 2/- *London soloists.
	Feb 1885	Haydn - <i>Creation</i> *	
	April 1885	Handel - <i>Ode on St Cecilia Day</i>	
Season 1885-86	Dec 1885	Handel - <i>Judas Maccabaeus</i>	
	April 1886	Gounod - <i>Here by Babylon's wave</i>	
Season 1886-87	Dec 23 1886	Mendelssohn - <i>St Paul</i>	
	April 1887	Mendelssohn - <i>Loreley</i>	
Season 1887-88	1887	Spohr - <i>Last Judgement</i> ; McFarren - <i>Lady of the Lake</i>	*Signor Villa & Mr Coles' orchestra
	Dec 1887	<i>Messiah</i>	
	Jan 1888	Burns and Scots Songs	
	Mar 1888	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i> *	
Season 1888-89	Dec 1888	Spohr - <i>Last Judgement</i>	
	Jan 1889	Burns and Scots songs	
	March 1889	McFarren - <i>Lady of the Lake</i>	
Season 1889-90	Dec 18 1889	Gounod - <i>Gallia</i>	*Mr Coles' Band
	Jan 23 1890	Burns and Scots Songs	
	Mar 27 1890	Haydn - <i>Creation</i> *	
Season 1890-91	Dec 17 1890	Mendelssohn - <i>Hear my Prayer</i> and Selection	160 voices
	Jan 23 1891	Burns and Scots songs *	
	April 2 1891	Handel - <i>Judas Maccabaeus</i>	
Season 1891-92	Dec 16 1891	Selection*	*Mr Cole's orchestra. Soloists: Jessie Hotine, Edward Branscombe & Andrew Black
	Jan 1892	Burns and Scots songs	
	March 1892	Handel - <i>Acis and Galatea</i> ; Cowen - <i>St John's Eve</i>	
Season 1892-93	Dec 22 1892	McFarren - <i>Lady of the Lake</i> *	* Mr Berry-organ
	Jan 1893	Burns and Scots songs	
	March 1893	Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	
Season 1893-94	Dec 1893 March 1894	Smieton, J. More - <i>King Arthur</i> - a dramatic cantata <i>Elijah</i>	
Season 1894-95	Dec 1894	Sullivan - <i>The Golden Legend</i>	
	March 1895	Handel - <i>Samson</i>	
Season 1895-96	Dec 19 1895 March 1896	Sullivan - <i>The Prodigal Son</i> and <i>Rose Maiden</i> Haydn - <i>Creation</i>	
Season 1896-97	Dec 1896	Mendelssohn - <i>Lauda Zion</i> ; Mendelssohn - <i>Hear My Prayer</i>	*Mr Cole's orchestra
	March 1897	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> *	
Season 1897-98	Dec 23 1897	Gade - <i>The Earl King's Daughter</i> * ; Buck - Hymn to Music	*New Artillery Hall **Tickets 1/- and 6d. Reserved chairs 2/-
	Jan 1888	Burns Concert**	
	Mar 1898	Sterndale Bennet - <i>The May Queen</i>	
Season 1898-99	Dec 1898	Mendelssohn - <i>Lorely</i> *	*New Artillery Hall
	Mar 23 1899	Zingarelli - <i>Laudate et Pueri Dominum</i> Handel - <i>Dettingen Te Deum</i> *	
Season 1899-00	Dec 1899	Mozart - 12 <sup>th</sup> Mass*	*New Artillery Hall
	Jan 1900	Burns concert*	
	March 1900	Haydn - <i>Creation</i> *	
Season 1900-01	Dec 1900	Mendelssohn - <i>Athalie</i> ; <i>Psalm 23</i> ; <i>Hear My Prayer</i> *	*Ayr United Free Church
	March 1901	Handel - <i>Samson</i> *	

<sup>37</sup> This list of Concerts has been compiled from Programmes, Minutes and Newspaper reports. It is not exhaustive, nor complete, and many less "important" concerts have been omitted e.g. Christmas Concerts. Column 4 is intended to give a flavour of the context only, and is not intended to be a list of orchestras or soloists.



<b>Season 1901-02</b>	Dec 1901 March 1902	Schubert - <i>Song of Miriam</i> ; Gade – <i>Zion</i> Handel – <i>Messiah</i> *	Semi-Jubilee GH Ely - organ
<b>Season 1902-03</b>	Dec 1902 March 1903	Handel - <i>The King Shall Rejoice</i> , Buck-Ode to Peace; Sullivan - <i>Te Deum- E flat</i> Handel - <i>Acis and Galatea</i> ; Cowen - <i>St John's Eve</i> *	Semi-Jubilee *Mr GH Ely on organ
<b>Season 1903-04</b>	Dec 1903  Mar 31 1904 Sept 30 1904	Sullivan - <i>On Shore and Sea</i> ; Mendelssohn - <i>Athalie</i> ; Zingarelli - <i>Laudate Pueri Dominum</i> Handel - <i>Messiah</i> * Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	*Opening of town hall after fire *Ayrshire Philharmonic Orch
<b>Season 1904-05</b>	Dec 22 1904 April 13 1905	Stephens - <i>Abbot's Bell</i> * Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	*Organist was composer - David Stephens
<b>Season 1905-06</b>	March 2 1906	Handel - <i>Judas Maccabeas</i> *	*Organ - Wilfrid Senior *Ayr Philharmonic Orchestra
<b>Season 1906-07</b>	Sept 1906 Dec 1906 Mar 21 1907	Burns Concert * Sullivan - <i>On Shore and Sea</i> MacFarren - <i>Lady of the Lake</i>	* for Auld Brig fund
<b>Season 1907-08</b>	Dec 1907 March 1908	Smart - <i>Bride of Dunkerron</i> Haydn - <i>Creation</i>	
<b>Season 1908-09</b>	Dec 10 1908 Mar 18 1909	Gade - <i>Erl King's Daughter</i> ;Brewer - <i>Sir Patrick Spens</i> * Handel - <i>Samson</i>	*first Scottish performance Dr Gairdner on piano
<b>Season 1909-10</b>	Dec 23 1909 March 1910	Songs and Ballads Sullivan - <i>Golden Legend</i> ; MacCunn - <i>Lord Ullin's Daughter</i> *	Late trams to Prestwick *Mr Cole's orchestra
<b>Season 1910-11</b>	Dec 1910 Jan 26 1911 Mar 1911	Vocal and instrumental concert Burns Concert Mendelssohn - <i>First Walpurgis Night</i> ; Gade - <i>Spring's Message</i>	
<b>Season 1911-12</b>	Dec 21 1911 March 1912	Mendelssohn - <i>Hymn of Praise, Nutcracker, Overture Egmont</i> <i>Messiah</i> *	Wilfrid Senior Conductor *James Senior - organ
<b>Season 1912-13</b>	Dec 19 1912  Mar 27 1913	Parry - <i>Blest Pair of Sirens</i> ; Elgar - <i>Banner of St George</i> Stanford - <i>Revenge</i> ; Grieg - <i>Peer Gynt</i> Stanford - <i>Blest Pair of Sirens</i> ; Elgar - <i>Banner of St George</i> ; Bruch - <i>Ave Maria</i>	Scottish Orchestra  Organist: W Markham-Lee
<b>Season 1913-14</b>	Jan 29 1914	Coleridge-Taylor - <i>A Tale of Old Japan</i>	Scottish Orchestra
<b>Season 1914-15</b>	Dec 1914	<i>Finlandia</i> ; Russian, French and British National Anthems;* Stanford's <i>Revenge</i> and Brahms' <i>Death of Tennyson</i>	*Scottish orch(82 musicians) conducted by Emil Mlynarski
<b>Season 1915-16</b>	Dec 1915 March 1915	Mendelssohn - <i>Lauda Zion</i> ** Sterndale Bennett - <i>May Queen</i> - for Provost's war fund* National Anthem and French National Anthem	**With New Church choir *Markham-Lee organist Conductor Wilfrid Senior
<b>Season 1916-17</b>	Jan 25 1917	Burns Concert - fundraiser for war fund	
<b>Season 1917-18</b>	March 1917	<i>Van Bree - St Cecilia's day; Charge of the Light Brigade</i> *	*Concert cancelled - Ayr Town Hall commandeered by the army
<b>Season 1918-18</b>	Feb 14 1918	As above plus Stanford - <i>Songs of Freedom</i>	Carrie Tubb -soloist
<b>Season 1922-23</b>	Feb 1923	McCunn - <i>Wreck of the Hesperus</i> ; Stanford - <i>Battle of the Baltic</i>	
<b>Season 1924-25</b>	Feb 1925	Edward German - <i>Merrie England</i>	
<b>Season 1925-26</b>	Oct 1925 March 1926	Handel - <i>Judas Maccabeus</i> Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	Jubilee Year
<b>Season 1926-27</b>	Dec 1926 Mar 1927	German - <i>Tom Jones</i> * Bridge - <i>The Flag of England</i> ; Gade - <i>Spring's Message</i> ; Arnott - <i>Young Lochinvar</i>	*decided after a concert version of HMS Pinafore could not be found
<b>Season 1927-28</b>	Jan 1928 Feb 19 1928	Orpheus Choir (arranged by ACU)* Conductor Hugh Robertson Handel - <i>Samson</i>	*Ladies are respectfully asked to remove hats
<b>Season 1928-29</b>	Nov 1928 Jan 1929 Feb 1929	Miscellaneous Orpheus Choir Parry - <i>Pied Piper of Hamelin</i> *	*Matthew Morton Conductor
<b>Season 1929-30</b>	Jan 1930 Feb 1930	Orpheus Choir Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i> *	* With Mr Horace Stevens - "greatest Elijah since Santley"
<b>Season 1930-31</b>	Dec 1930 March 1931	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Elgar - <i>Music Makers</i>	
<b>Season 1931-32</b>	Dec 1931 Jan 1932 March 1932	Handel <i>Messiah</i> Orpheus Choir Buck - <i>Hymn to Music</i> ; Parry - <i>Blest Pair of Sirens</i> ;	
<b>Season 1932-33</b>	Dec 1932 Feb 1933	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Haydn - <i>Creation</i>	
<b>Season 1933-34</b>	Nov 1933 Dec 1933 March 1934	Compton MacKenzie - <i>Cotters's Saturday Night</i> <i>Messiah</i> * Handel - <i>Solomon</i>	*In aid of Ayr County Hospital
<b>Season 1934-35</b>	Nov 1934 March 1935	Haydn - <i>Spring from The Seasons</i> * Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	*Scottish Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli

<b>Season 1935-36</b>	Nov March	1935 1936	Parry - <i>Blest Pair of Sirens</i> ; Howells - <i>Sir Patrick Spens</i> * ** Cowen - <i>The Rose Maiden</i>	*Scottish Orchestra- Sir John Barbirolli **Diamond Jubilee
<b>Season 1936-37</b>	Jan	1937	German - <i>Merrie England</i>	
<b>Season 1937-38</b>	April	1938	Gounod - <i>Faust</i>	
<b>Season 1938-39</b>	Dec	1938	Selection from oratorios	
	Spring	1939	Operatic choruses	
<b>Season 1946-47</b>			Gems from the Oratorios	Conductor: James Liddell
	Dec April 23	1946 1947	Haydn - <i>The Creation</i> German - <i>Merrie England</i>	Ayr Amateur Orchestra Soc.
<b>Season 1947-48</b>	Dec March	1947 1948	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i> * Music for chorus and soloists: Coleridge-Taylor - <i>Hiawatha's Wedding</i> **	*Ayr Amateur Orchestra Soc. **Joint concert in aid of Earl Haig Fund - Redvers Llewellyn
<b>Season 1948-49</b>	Dec Mar	1948 1949	Handel –Messiah Parry – <i>Jerusalem</i> ; Bizet - <i>Carmen</i> ; Ganz; Wood; Mozart; John Wilson - <i>Our Daily Bread</i> *	*Ayr Amateur Orchestra Soc. Soloists - Winifred Busfield and Joan Alexander.
<b>Season 1949-50</b>	Dec	1949	Mendelssohn - <i>Come Let Us Sing</i> Mendelssohn - <i>Hymn of Praise</i>	
<b>Season 1950-51</b>	Dec	1950	Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	Hubert Cresswell Conductor
<b>Season 1951-52</b>	Nov April	1951 1952	Coleridge-Taylor - <i>Hiawatha</i> ; Borodin - <i>Polotsvian Dances</i> Haydn - <i>Creation</i> *	*Leader of orchestra - Nan Caldwell
<b>Season 1952-53</b>	Dec April June 4	1952 1953 1953	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> ** Evening of Grand Opera - Gounod, Mozart, Wagner, Bizet ** Various	**Members of BBC Scottish
<b>Season 1953-54</b>	Dec Mar	1953 1954	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i> Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	
<b>Season 1954-55</b>	Feb	1955	Handel - <i>Judas Maccabeus</i>	Leader of orch - Ian Tyre
<b>Season 1955-56</b>	Dec Feb	1955 1956	Christmas music Handel - <i>Samson</i>	Conductor - William Bowie
<b>Season 1956-57</b>	Dec Mar	1956 1957	Christmas Music Haydn - <i>Creation</i>	
<b>Season 1957-58</b>	Dec Mar 9 Mar 16 Mar 23	1957 1958 1958 1958	Christmas Music Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Handel - <i>Messiah</i> - Mauchline Old Church Handel - <i>Messiah</i> - St Andrew's Church, Ayr	
<b>Season 1958-59</b>	Oct Dec Mar	1958 1958 1959	Glasgow Police Choir concert (under auspices of ACU) Christmas Music <i>Elijah</i> *	*Orchestra leader - Ian Tyre
<b>Season 1959-60</b>	Dec Mar	1959 1960	Christmas Music* Mendelssohn - <i>Hymn of Praise</i> Mozart - <i>Requiem</i> **	*soloists from Ayr Junior Gaelic choir **Wm McCue - soloist
<b>Season 1960-61</b>	Oct Dec Mar	1960 1960 1961	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Carols* Handel - <i>Judas Maccabeus</i> **	*Alex Wands - Baritone and Sandy Lyle - viola **Soloist Wm McCue (Bass)
<b>Season 1961-62</b>	Mar	1962	Handel - <i>Creation</i>	
<b>Season 1962-63</b>	Dec Mar	1962 1963	Misc. - (opening of Mission for Deep Sea Fishermen) Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	Ann Holm and David Souter John Dethick - Bass soloist
<b>Season 1963-64</b>	Dec Mar April	1963 1964 1964	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Handel - <i>King Shall Rejoice</i> , Mendelssohn - <i>Hear My Prayer</i> , Sacred Cantatas at St Nicholas Church, Prestwick*	*for Leprosy relief
<b>Season 1964-65</b>	April	1965	Handel - <i>Samson</i>	Orch - Ian Tyre
<b>Season 1965-66</b>	Dec Mar	1965 1966	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Mozart - <i>Requiem</i> ; Vaughn Williams - <i>Pilgrim's Journey</i> *	*Semi-chorus - Belmont Ladies Choir
<b>Season 1966-67</b>	Dec Mar	1966 1967	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> * Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i> *	90 <sup>th</sup> anniversary
<b>Season 1967-68</b>	Dec Mar	1967 1968	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Borodin - <i>Polotsvian Dances</i> ; Coleridge-Taylor - <i>Hiawatha</i>	
<b>Season 1968-69</b>	Dec Mar	1968 1969	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> * Vivaldi - <i>Gloria</i> ; Vaughn Williams - <i>A Sea Symphony</i>	*Leader of orch. - Stuart Robertson
<b>Season 1969-70</b>	Mar	1970	Haydn - <i>Creation</i>	
<b>Season 1970-71</b>	Dec Mar	1970 1971	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Verdi - <i>Requiem</i>	
<b>Season 1971-72</b>	Jan Mar	1972 1972	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Britten - <i>St Nicholas</i> ; Vaughn Williams - <i>Pilgrims Journey</i>	
<b>Season 1972-73</b>	Jan April	1973 1973	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> Coleridge-Taylor - <i>Hiawatha</i> ; Haydn - <i>Theresa Mass</i>	
<b>Season 1973-74</b>	Dec	1973	Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	

	Mar	1974	Beethoven - <i>Missa Solemnis</i>	Wm Bowie
Season 1974-75	Jan	1975	Britten - <i>St Nicholas</i> ; Vaughn Williams - <i>Carol Fantasia</i> ; Bush - <i>Christmas Cantata</i>	Stewart Linton Conductor
	Spring	1975	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	
Season 1975-76	Dec	1975	Charpentier - <i>Midnight Mass</i> ; Britten - <i>Ceremony of Carols</i>	*Centenary concert
	April	1976	Vaughan Williams - <i>A Sea Symphony</i> * Dvorak - <i>Te Deum</i>	
Season 1976-77	Oct	1976	Haydn - <i>Mass</i> *	*Centenary concert
	Dec	1976	Handel - <i>Messiah</i> *	
	April	1977	Beethoven - <i>Mass in C</i> ; Rossini - <i>Stabat Mater</i>	
Season 1977-78	April	1978	Bach - <i>Magnificat</i> ; Mozart - <i>Requiem</i>	
Season 1978-79	Feb	1979	Haydn - <i>Creation</i> *	* Leader: Wallace Galbraith
	April	1979	Verdi - <i>Requiem</i> **	**Prof Orch leader- Hugh Bradley
Season 1979- 80	Nov	1979	Haydn - <i>Harmoniesse</i> ; Faure - <i>Requiem</i>	*soloist Leonora Pieri
	Dec	1979	Christmas Music *	
	Mar	1980	Bruckner - <i>Te Deum</i> ; Orff - <i>Carmina Burana</i>	
Season 1980-81	Dec	1980	Christmas Music	*Orch leader - Joe Meek
	Feb	1981	Handel - <i>Samson</i> *	**at Pavilion
	April	1981	Schubert - <i>Mass in A Flat</i> ** ; Coleridge-Taylor - <i>Hiawatha</i>	** orch leader Leslie Childs
Season 1981-82	Dec	1981	Christmas Music	*Ayr Pavilion
	Mar	1982	Dvorak - <i>Te Deum</i> * ; Brahms - <i>German Requiem</i>	
Season 1982-83	Dec	1982	Christmas Music - <i>Border Widow's Lament</i> (Shena Fraser)**	**Soloists Michael Chad and Ribert Dibden *Orch Glasgow Philharmonic
	Feb	1983	Handel - <i>Messiah</i>	
	April	1983	Handel - <i>Zadok the Priest</i> ; Poulenc - <i>Gloria</i> ; Puccini - <i>Messa di Gloria</i> *	
Season 1983-84	Dec	1983	Christmas Music	
	Mar	1984	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	
Season 1984-85	Nov	1984	Haydn - <i>Harmoniesse</i>	*Soloist - Laurie Gargan **NFMS Jubilee concert. Troon Concert Hall
	Dec	1984	Christmas Music*	
	April	1985	Beethoven - <i>Mass in D (Missa Solemnis)</i> **	
Season 1985-86	Nov	1985	Faure <i>Requiem</i> ; Haydn <i>Paukenmesse</i>	Soloists James Nicol and Abigail Hopkins
	Dec	1985	Christmas Music*	
	April	1986	Massenet - <i>Meditation</i> ; Poulenc - <i>Stabat Mater</i> ; Gounod - <i>Messe Solennelle</i>	
Season 1986-87	Nov	1986	Handel - <i>Utrecht Te Deum</i> ; Corelli - <i>Concerto</i> for Oboe and Strings;	*soloist Sheila Hay(oboe) ** soloists Laurie Gargan and Leonora Pieri *** Guest orch led by Geoffrey Trabichoff
	Dec	1986	Schubert - <i>Mass in G Major</i>	
	April	1987	Christmas Music** Verdi – <i>Requiem</i>	

Season 1987-88	Nov	1987	Misc - concert at St James Church, Ayr	* Arts Festival Finale
	Dec	1987	Christmas Music	
	Feb	1988	Kodaly <i>Te Deum</i> ; Bruckner - <i>Mass in G Minor</i>	
	April	1988	Haydn - <i>Creation</i>	
	June	1988	Borodin - <i>Polotsvian Dances</i> *	
Season 1988-89	Oct	1988	<i>Laudate Dominum</i> ; <i>Beatus Vir</i> ; <i>Missa Brevis in B Flat</i>	*With L'Ensemble Vocale du Pincerais ** Orch leader - Janice Damaso ***Glasgow City Orch led by Roger Foxwell
	Dec	1988	Christmas Music**	
	April	1989	Bach - <i>B Minor Mass</i> ***	
	June	1989	Festival Finale: Haydn - <i>Te Deum</i> ; Borodin; Wood, <i>Marseillaise</i> *	
Season 1989-90	Nov	1989	Borodin - <i>Dance Polovtsienne</i> ; Kodaly - <i>Te Deum</i> ; Orff - <i>Carmina Burana</i>	*Donation to Ayrshire Hospice
	Dec	1989	Christmas music *	
	April	1990	Elgar - <i>Dream of Gerontius</i>	
Season 1990-91	Nov	1990	Dvorak - <i>Requiem</i>	*Stewart Linton's last concert
	Dec	1991	Christmas music*	
Season 1991-92	Oct	1991	Voices for Hospices***	*Stewart Linton Memorial concert *Donation to Cancer Research Fund £1000. ** First concert with Hamish Good
	Nov	1991	Brahms - <i>Requiem</i> *	
	Dec	1991	Christmas Music**	
	Mar	1992	Britten - <i>Cantata Misericordia</i> ; Schubert - <i>Mass in E flat</i>	
Season 1992-93	Nov	1992	Brahms, Schubert, Parry - <i>Songs of Farewell</i> ; Fauré - <i>Requiem</i> **	*included "Then o Then" by John Currie written in memory of Stewart Linton
	Dec	1992	Christmas Music*	
	Mar	1993	Hadley - <i>The Hills</i> ; Haydn - <i>Spring (The Seasons)</i>	
Season 1993-94	Dec	1993	Bach - <i>Christmas Oratorio</i>	*With Le Pincerais
	April	1994	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	
	June	1994	Ayr Arts Festival - Stanford - <i>Songs of the Fleet</i> ; <i>Creation Part 1</i> *	
Season 1994-95	Oct	1994	<i>Messiah</i> *	*Voices for Hospices
	Dec	1994	Christmas Music	



Season 1995-96	Apr	1995	Finzi - <i>Magnificat</i> ; Mozart - <i>Litaniae</i> ;	
	Oct	1995	Purcell - <i>Jubilate Deo</i> ; Poulenc - <i>Gloria</i> ; Haydn – <i>Winter (The Seasons)</i>	
	Dec	1995	Christmas Music*; Finzi - <i>Magnificat</i>	*Ian Ogg - organ
	Mar	1996	Vivaldi - <i>Gloria</i> ; Brahms - <i>Alto Rhapsody, Song of Destiny, Nanie</i>	
Season 1996-97	Oct	1996	Handel - <i>Zadok the Priest</i> ; Vaughn Williams - <i>In Windsor Forest</i>	**Burns Bi-centenary
			Gardner - <i>a Burns Sequence</i> ; Robert Burns - 8 songs**	**120 <sup>th</sup> Season of the choir
	Dec	1996	Christmas Music*	*Stuart Muir - organ
Season 1997-98	April	1997	Verdi - <i>Requiem</i>	Simon Bird - trumpet
	Dec	1997	Christmas Music ; Respighi - <i>Laud to the Nativity*</i>	*Wind ensemble
	Mar	1998	Bach - <i>St John Passion</i>	
Season 1998-99	Oct	1998	Mozart - <i>Solemn Vespers</i> ; Haydn - <i>Maria Theresa Mass</i>	*Graham Mark Scott - organ
	Dec	1998	Christmas Music*	*Grant Golding - trumpet
	April	1999	Elgar - <i>The Kingdom</i>	
Season 1999-00	Oct	1999	Haydn - <i>Creation*</i>	*Concert with Le Pincerais
	April	2000	Bach - <i>Mass in B Minor</i>	
Season 2000-01	Oct	2000	Brahms <i>Requiem</i> ; Ireland - <i>These things shall be</i>	
	Dec	2000	Christmas music	*Gala Concert – last Hamish
	April	2001	Borodin - <i>Prince Igor</i> ; Parry - <i>Blest Pair of Sirens*</i>	Good concert
Season 2001-02	Oct	2001	Handel - <i>Messiah*</i>	*Gerard Doherty first concert
	Dec	2001	Christmas music**	**With RSNO Brass
	April	2002	Mozart <i>Requiem</i> ; Mozart - <i>Missa Solemnis</i>	
Season 2002-03	Nov	2002	Music for a Royal Occasion - Britten, Parry, Byrd, Handel, Walton	*Queen's Golden Jubilee
			Premiere of Geddes - <i>A Burns Quartet</i> (new commission)*	**City of Glasgow Symphony
	Dec	2002	Music for Christmas	Orchestra
Season 2003-04	Mar	2003	Verdi - <i>Requiem**</i>	
	Oct	2003	Orff - <i>Carmina Burana</i> ; Kodaly - <i>Te Deum</i>	
	Dec	2003	Music for Christmas	
	Mar	2004	Bach - <i>St Matthew Passion</i>	*Joint concert with Le Pincerais
Season 2004-05	June	2003	Fauré <i>Requiem*</i> ;Geddes - <i>Burns Quartet</i>	
	Oct	2004	Autumn with Mozart - <i>Mass in C Minor</i>	
	Dec	2004	Carols at Christmas*	*RSNO Brass
	Mar	2005	Monteverdi - <i>Beatus Vir</i> ; Charpentier - <i>Te Deum</i> ; Haydn -- <i>Mass in D Minor</i>	
Season 2005-06	Oct	2005	Kodaly - <i>Te Deum</i> ; Jenkins - <i>The Armed Man</i>	
	Mar	2006	Elgar - <i>Dream of Gerontius</i>	
Season 2006-07	Oct	2006	Rossini - <i>Petit Messe Solonelle</i> ; Vivaldi <i>Gloria</i>	
	Dec	2006	Carols at Christmas *	*Leitch String Quartet
	April	2007	Bach - <i>St John Passion</i>	
Season 2007-08	Oct	2007	Handel - <i>Messiah*</i>	*reopening of refurbished Town
	Dec	2007	Bach - <i>Christmas Oratorio 1-3</i>	Hall
	Mar	2008	Brahms <i>Requiem</i> ; <i>Nanie</i>	
Season 2008-09	Oct	2008	Durufle - <i>Requiem</i> and Fauré - <i>Requiem</i>	
	Dec	2008	Vaughn Williams - <i>Fantasia</i> and Carols*	*Thistle Brass
	April	2009	Music Inspired by Robert Burns**Gardner - <i>A Burns Sequence</i>	** with Ayrshire Voices
Season 2009-10	Oct	2009	Rutter - <i>Magnificat</i> and Dvorak - <i>Mass in D</i>	
	Dec	2009	Bach - <i>Christmas Oratorio</i>	
	April	2010	Mendelssohn - <i>Elijah</i>	
Season 2010-11	Oct	2010	Vivaldi - <i>Gloria</i> and Faure - <i>Pavane*</i>	*joint concert with Ayr Camerata
	Dec	2010	Carols at Christmas**	**with Scots Brass
	April	2011	Mozart - <i>Requiem</i> ; Chilcott - <i>Requiem</i>	
Season 2011-12	Oct	2011	A Grand Musical Tour of Europe**	*Soloist - Emily Mitchell
	Dec	2011	Music for Christmas	*Soloists from Dunedin consort
	April	2012	Bach - <i>B Minor Mass*</i>	
Season 2012-13	Nov	2012	Rossini - <i>Stabat Mater</i> and Johnston - <i>I Landed with 7 men</i>	
	Dec	2012	Christmas Concert*	*With choirs from Heathfield
	March	2013	Verdi - <i>Requiem</i>	Primary
Season 2013-14	Oct	2013	Goodall - <i>Eternal Light</i> and Faure - <i>Requiem</i>	
	Dec	2013	Rutter Gloria and Christmas Music*	
	Mar	2014	Jenkins - <i>The Armed Man</i>	*With Brass Quintet
Season 2014-15	Nov	2014	Mozart - <i>Coronation Mass</i> and Gounod - <i>St Cecilia Mass</i>	
	Dec	2014	Christmas music*	*with Forehill Primary choirs
	Mar	2015	Bach - <i>St Matthew Passion</i>	
Season 2015-16	Oct	2015	Pergolesi - <i>Magnificat</i> and MacMillan - <i>Magnificat</i>	
	Dec	2015	Concert of Christmas Music*	
	April	2016	Dvorak - <i>Requiem</i>	*With SAC Jazz Band
Season 2016-17	Oct	2016	140 <sup>th</sup> Celebration Concert	

## ACU Timeline

- 1863 *Messiah* and *Dettingen Te Deum* performed by early version of Ayr Choral Union in Old Cathcart Street Church, led by George Sayers. This group lasted for "a few years" then disbanded.
- 1864 (April) Performed sections of *Messiah* with Mr Sayers conducting. Reviewed in Glasgow Herald.
- 1870s Glee Club formed by Mr Cowap with about 40 members who sang part songs and madrigals.
- 1876 (Oct 12) Re-start of Ayr Choral Union "The opening meeting of [the above Society] will be held in the Assembly Rooms on Monday evening 16th inst at 8 o'clock ... James Smith, Secy".
- 1878 Mr McNabb's first *Messiah* in New Church (Fort St) - the only church in Ayr with an organ.
- 1879 Ice Rink in Dalblair Road no longer available as a venue - ground used for building purposes.
- 1879 (25 Dec) Haydn's *Creation* "before a large and brilliant audience".
- 1881 (September) Ayr Town Hall opened with a performance by ACU of *Messiah* sung by 230 voices.
- 1897 Ayr Town Hall destroyed by fire on 1<sup>st</sup> July.
- 1904 New Town Hall completed. 31<sup>st</sup> March saw the formal reopening with Ayr Choral Union singing *Messiah*.
- 1904 Founding of Ayr Burgh and County Choir by Frederick Ely, Mus. Bac.
- 1905 (October) 2 day Bazaar in Ayr Town Hall raised £750 after costs.
- 1912 (May) Ayr Burgh and County choir go to international festival in Paris - 66 choirs from UK, only three from Scotland - Ayr Burgh and County, Glasgow Choral and Glasgow Orpheus.
- 1912 Ayrshire Music Festival established.
- 1914 Major concert with 82 Musicians (Scottish Orchestra). British, French and Russian National Anthems.
- 1915 (March) Concert for Provost's War Fund.
- 1918 (Feb) Large fund raising concert for the war effort.
- 1924 (New Year's Eve). Jubilee concert with Scottish Orchestra costing £110.
- 1925 (13/14 November) Jubilee Bazaar. Admission one shilling from 2-4pm and 6d till closing at 9.30pm. Stalls included a Soprano and Tenor stall, Fruit and Flower, Fortune Telling, Palmistry, and Clock Golf. £870 raised.
- 1932 ACU Whist Drive.
- 1933 Benefit Concert for Ayr County Hospital.
- 1933 51 copies of *Creation* (27 staff and 24 sol-fa) purchased from S Irvine and Sons, Booksellers, Stationers and Printers, 75 High Street, Ayr.
- 1935 Ayr Choral Union "negotiating for a broadcast" of *Sir Patrick Spens* by Herbert Brewer.
- 1935 (21 November) Performance of *Sir Patrick Spens* with Scottish Orchestra and Sir John Barbirolli.
- 1944 Informal *Messiah* with Mr Cresswell - good turnout.
- 1945 (Sept) George Horn, Wm Downie and Charles McInnes get things going. "Most of the old members are back"
- 1951 Entry at the Ayrshire Music Festival: "Some good chording and diction.....try for more unanimity"
- 1951 BBC Burns Night recording. The choir sang "Ye Banks and Braes, received a fee of £5.5s and a photograph in the newspaper
- 1952 Entry at Ayrshire Music Festival: "Time changes managed deftly..... some speciality shown by the tenors".
- 1953 (4 June) Grand Coronation Concert with Ayr Choral Union, Ayr Burgh Choir, Troon Male Voice Choir, Ayr Philharmonic Orchestra and church choirs, performing parts of *Messiah*, and Quilter's *Non Nobis Domine*.
- 1954 Each member of the choir to be responsible for selling four tickets.
- 1955 William Bowie took over as Conductor when Hubert Cresswell became ill.
- 1955 Social outing to the Pantomime (a meal and 2<sup>nd</sup> House at Theatre).
- 1958 *Messiah* in Mauchline Old Church for Church Restoration Fund. Donation Programme 2/6d.
- 1958 October. Glasgow Police Male Voice Choir concert - under auspices of Ayr Choral Union.
- 1959 (4 July) Bazaar in Ayr Town Hall which raised £158.
- 1960 (23 October) Darlington New Church Centenary Concert. Ayr Choral Union sings *Messiah*.
- 1964 (April) Concert in St Nicolas Church in Prestwick in aid of Leprosy Relief.
- 1966 Visit to St Giles Cathedral to sing *The Pilgrims' Journey*.
- 1968 Mrs Edmund Boyd becomes Honorary President
- 1971 Performance of Verdi *Requiem*. Support from augmenters T Black, J Mair, H Graham and P Jones from KDCU acknowledged
- 1972 NFMS Conference in Ayr Town Hall. Reception given by Sir Charles Groves and concert by K.D.C.U
- 1973 Visit to St Giles to sing the Haydn *Theresa Mass*.
- 1974 (Jan) Miners' Strike and power cuts. Restrictions on use of electricity and *Messiah* concert switched from Town Hall to St Leonards. The Town Council offered the Pavilion "but the choir felt it was unsuitable".
- 1974 (August) Resignation of William Bowie. Stewart Linton became Conductor with Bill Godfrey Accompanist.
- 1975 AGM agreed that a 1976 Centenary History would be published. 200 copies with grant from Community Development Trust
- 1975 Concert for Troon Arts Guild in the Concert Hall, Troon.
- 1975 (December) Arran Girls' Choir guests at Christmas Concert.
- 1976 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Grand Dinner in Western House with Robin Orr as Principal Guest speaker.
- 1976 Death of Honorary President Mrs Boyd in April. Marchioness of Ailsa is appointed next Honorary President.

1978	AGM proposed that Ayr Choral Union is outdated. Matter passed to the committee to create new image
1978-9	Performance at Gaiety as well as three concerts.
1979	Isobel Crawford appointed Treasurer.
1980	(8 June) Ayr Choral Union sings at concert in Glasgow City Halls in aid of the Musicians' Union strike over threatened disbandment of BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. ACU sang <i>Carmina Burana</i> with Opus Consort, BBC Scottish Singers and Glasgow Youth Choir, conducted by Bryden Thomson.
1984	(4/5 March) Ayr Choral Union took part in a BBC recording in Troon Concert Hall for programme <i>Glory Be</i> . Choir sang <i>Blessed are the Men</i> from Elijah and a £250 fee was paid by the BBC.
1984	(October) Concert for Ayrshire Hospice in Troon Concert Hall.
1985	Concert to celebrate jubilee of NFMS 1935-85.
1987	(23-25 May) The first visit to Le Choeur du Pincerais in St Germain en Laye. Travel by coach overnight.
1988	(June) Ayrshire Arts Festival Concert in Dam Park Hall with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Neil Mantle. Ayr Choral Union sang Borodin's <i>Polovtsian Dances</i> and assorted Sea Songs.
1988	(29 October -1 Nov) First Visit of Le Choeur du Pincerais to Ayr. Joint concert in Town Hall conducted by Stewart Linton and Pierre Gasser, and lively reception at Craigie College.
1989	100 club began and by 2015 had raised £10,000.
1989	(June) Ayrshire Arts Festival Concert conducted by Christopher Bell. Ayr Choral Union sang Haydn's <i>Te Deum</i> and <i>Marseillaise</i>
1991	(February) Death of ACU Conductor Stewart Linton.
1991	(March) Death of David Knox (Strathaven Choral Society and temporary Ayr Choral Union Conductor)...
1991	Spring Concert of Opera and Operetta choruses cancelled.
1991	(5 October) Voices for Hospices concert with Haydn's <i>Creation</i> conducted by William Godfrey.
1991	(24 November) Memorial Concert for Stewart Linton with Brahms <i>Requiem</i> , conducted by Christopher Bell.
1991	Hamish Good appointed as Conductor with his first Concert in December.
1992	(John Currie's <i>Then o Then</i> , written in memory of Stewart Linton, was first performed at Christmas Concert.
1994	(June) Visit of Le Choeur du Pincerais including a trip to Edinburgh and a Ceilidh.
1994	(8 October) "Voices for Hospices" <i>Messiah</i> concert with Stevenston Choral Society.
1995	Ayr Choral Union spearhead the campaign to restore Ayr Town Hall Organ.
1996	AGM - decision to sing the National Anthem once only per season.
1996	(Oct) ACUs 120 <sup>th</sup> and the Robert Burns Bi-centennial - Burns Concert with John Gardner " <i>A Burns Sequence</i> "
1996	(May) Ayr Choral Union visit to St Germain en Laye included a trip to Fontainebleau.
1996	120 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of Ayr Choral Union. 17 <sup>th</sup> December Celebration at Savoy Park Hotel.
1997	(18 October) BT Voices for Hospices Concert included the <i>Hallelujah Chorus</i> .
1998	Ayr Choral Union on tour to St Augustine's, Dumbarton with a Concert including Rutter's <i>Sprig o' Thyme</i> .
1999	Marchioness of Ailsa retired as Honorary President.
1999	(October) Rehearsals moved to Auld Kirk Halls.
1999	(September) Choral Workshop held, facilitated by Vivien Pike.
1999	(31 October) Joint concert with Le Choeur du Pincerais, including Haydn <i>Creation</i> and two National Anthems. Stormy visit to Arran
1999	(October) Sir Claude Hagart Alexander becomes Honorary President
2000	(May) Visit to St Germain-en-Laye.
2000	(October) Ayr Choral Union Website set up by Shona Mitchell.
2001	(April) Millennium Gala Concert programme and departure of Hamish Good.
2002	(October) Music for a Royal Occasion - <i>A Burns Quartet</i> by John Maxwell Geddes commissioned by ACU for Queen's Golden Jubilee
2003	(June) Visit from Le Choeur du Pincerais with a joint concert in St Leonard's Church, Ayr.
2005	(22 Jan) ACU held a ' <i>Come and Sing Messiah</i> ' in Ayr Town Hall to raise funds for those affected by the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004. £5416.45 was raised by soloists, musicians and nearly 300 choral singers
2005	(14 May) Ayr 800 Celebration Concert with Ayr Choral Union performing Beethoven 9 <sup>th</sup> at the Ayr Citadel
2007	(7 October) Refurbished Town Hall reopened with the rebuilt Lewis organ. ACU again performed <i>Messiah</i> .
2009	<i>Come and Try</i> Workshop with Mandy Miller, President of the Association of British Choral Directors.
2012	ACU Facebook page opened.
2012	Visit from French choir Myriade from Poissy.
2013	ACU rehearsals moved from the Auld Kirk to the newly restored Community Church in John Street, Ayr.
2014	Concert tickets now on sale at Gaiety Theatre.
2014	(June) Visit to Le Choeur du Pincerais and joint concert in St Germaine en Laye.
2014	(February) Launch of Ayr Choral Song Book, compiled by Shona Mitchell.
2015	(February) Workshop -- <i>From Renaissance to Jazz</i> - facilitated by Edward Caswell.
2015	(May) Visit to French choir Myriade in Poissy.
2015	Sir James Macmillan becomes Honorary Patron of Ayr Choral Union.
2016	(May) Visit of Twin Choir Le Choeur du Pincerais with a joint concert in St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh.
2016	(Oct) 140 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert featuring 140 years of "Greatest Hits" and a new work gifted by Sir James MacMillan





Ayr Choral Union.



POPULAR

# BURNS CONCERT.

TOWN HALL,  
AYR.



FRIDAY,  
22nd JAN., 1892.

Special Engagement of the following Soloists:

MISS KATE MIDDLETON,  
SOPRANO, GLASGOW;

MISS MAGGIE KENNEDY,  
CONTRALTO, EDINBURGH  
(Daughter of DAVID KENNEDY, the great Scottish Vocalist);

MR. J. A. Y. STRONACH,  
TENOR, EDINBURGH; and

MR. P. GLENCORSE,  
BASS, EDINBURGH.

Chorus, - - - AYR CHORAL UNION.

Accompanist,.....Miss MILLER.

Conductor, - - - MR. HUGH M'NABB.

POPULAR PRICES:

Area and Gallery, **1s.**; Back Seats in Area, **6d.**;  
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Doors open at 7.15; Concert at 8 prompt.

ALEX. FERGOUSON, PRINTER, AYR.