



TYNDALE BEGINNINGS

**By Mollie Neale
Founder and President**

This article arose out of a Tyndale committee meeting last year at which the view was expressed that the majority of the our members know little or nothing about the history of the Society and the way it had come into being so Mollie agreed to write a short account of the early days as she remembers

Tyndale Choral Society

In 1959, I was living in North Nibley and training the church choir. It was a promising little choir for a small village and it occurred to me that the members would be enthused and encouraged if we could get together a few more singers from round about and attempt to sing something a bit more ambitious than our usual fare. So we let it be known in the area that on a certain evening in April, just after Easter, we were going to start weekly rehearsals of the Messiah in the church with a view to a possible performance later in the year. At that time I was doing quite a lot of singing and broadcasting so a few people knew of me.

To our astonishment, on the appointed day 82 people walked in! We started work with enthusiasm, but it wasn't easy. There were many who had never attempted anything like this before, and many who had very little skill in reading music. We depended heavily on the few experienced singers and this has always been so in the Society. I have always felt gratitude to the really experienced singers we had who were willing to go at a slow pace to help the beginners.

I have always kept a diary and I have been reading some of the entries during those first weeks. "First

rehearsal was smashing. Felt simply thrilled". But after a week or two it wasn't quite so euphoric. "Rehearsal not so good. 'For unto us' pretty hopeless". I well remember the struggle over those runs and it decided me to cut 'All we like sheep' altogether. (You can do a cunning jump from the end of 'Surely he hath borne our griefs' straight to 'And the Lord hath laid on him' and most of the audience don't know you have done it). Entries in the diary continue to vary alarmingly. "Appallingly out of tune and everything that was bad. I wonder if I've bitten off more than I can chew". But soon after: "They did the best bit of singing yet" and "Choir was encouraging and thrilling".

We replaced one practice with an auction to raise money for our performance. I remember that one of our members won a live pig in the raffle but was able to take its value in cash, to her relief. We raised £20 which in those days was quite a substantial sum.

We were unbelievably fortunate in that Dr Sumsion, organist of Gloucester Cathedral, agreed to come and play the little Nibley organ for our performance and, in fact, he played for every subsequent autumn concert for the next 19 years until I retired as

conductor. We owe a great deal of gratitude to that fine musician for the immeasurable help he gave us.

The performance was a great success. The choir excelled itself and the professional soloists were first-rate. The church was packed to the doors - in fact we had to turn many away.

The following week we had a party for the choir and a discussion about our future. They were unanimous in wanting to carry on and voted to form a proper Choral Society. After much discussion, the name Tyndale Choral Society was decided upon, mainly because it was pointed out that so many members came from the area dominated by the Tyndale monument. We agreed to detach the Society from the church choir by meeting on a different night in the North Nibley village hall, but most of the senior church choir members stayed with us. We would continue meeting through the summer months with a performance in the autumn. We had started that way because of the difficulty of heating the church for winter practices, and we have continued ever since, thus making ourselves unlike almost every other choral society in the country.

We performed the "Creation" in

Nibley church the following year, and the next year the Brahms Requiem. In 1962, it was decided to move the venue to the Wotton-under-Edge Parish Church for our performance where there would be so much more room for choir and audience and we would also have the use of the magnificent organ. The following year we did another performance of the 'Messiah' and made a big step forward in having an orchestra for the first time - strings and a trumpet.

From 1964 onwards, we began doing a summer concert as well as our main concert in the autumn in Wotton. Over the following years we visited Dursley and Berkeley several times, as well as Slimbridge, Amberley and Woodchester, and made an unforgettable expedition to the remote little church of Awre on the other side of the Severn where a large and enthusiastic audience turned up, apparently from nowhere.

In 1967, we moved our rehearsals to Stinchcombe Village Hall which seemed very spacious compared with Nibley. Our numbers rose steadily and had reached 115 by 1974. My diary informs me that 85 people attended the AGM one year. Perhaps present-day Tyndale members should take note of that!

In 1975, we bought our own piano to be kept at the Stinchcombe hall and this was of great benefit to us all, but especially to our accompanist. Almost from the start we had the great privilege of a splendid accompanist, Diana Woodward, who eventually married one of our tenors and became Mrs Diana Collins. She was our accompanist for 25 years - until comparatively recently. I can never be too thankful to her for all the help and support she gave to me and all of us.

Money-raising activities of course had to go on, as now. We had all the usual raffles, cake stalls, jumble sales etc. One rather unusual activity, however, was a series of voice-production classes which I held in different houses for groups of three or four people at a time, each paying a small fee. Whether or not the tone improved as a result I can't say!

Further comments from my diary. On one occasion when I had called in all their copies to make an alteration, I wrote "Am shaken at the things they write in their copies. They can't listen to a word I say". And "They all behave as if they've never seen the music before, especially the men". And "Their sight reading ability is NIL! However, the boot was sometimes on the other foot - "They sang well, but I was rotten and

inept!". And after the final practice I conducted with them: "They sound super, they really do".

Perhaps the outstanding thing about the Tyndale is expressed in one comment I made. "The choir has something special in their singing, even though they're not always very good". It is a fact there *is* something special about the Tyndale. The atmosphere of friendliness and enjoyment and togetherness in their singing and their socializing has always been remarkable, and in spite of the great advances they have made since those early days, it still is. It is a cause of great satisfaction and pride to me to see how the Society has advanced and flourished since I left, but has still retained that "something special". Long may it continue.

Mollie Neale