



The Choir at Central Hall in the 1970's

The Choir was founded originally in October 1916 by Mr. W. H. Batey as Ashington Male Voice Choir.

The Choir has entertained audiences across the region and overseas and performs a varied selection of songs. It is appropriate that several numbers are about coal mining as Ashington was once famous as 'the largest coal mining village in the world'.

It was during Arthur Johnson's time as musical director in the 1950's that Ashington & District Male Voice started to gain success in Competitive Musical Festivals. He took the Choir to Blackpool Musical Festival and the Choir were winners at musical contests each year from 1953 to 1960 while he was Conductor.

In 1960, Steve Howard was appointed Conductor and Ella Hughes was appointed accompanist. Steve Howard continued the success at contests.

When Ella Hughes took over as conductor in 1968, the Choir competed at Blackpool Musical Festival. They were winners at competitive musical festivals each year from 1970 to 1980, except in 1973 and 1979.

This information sheet reviews the success between 1969 and 1980.

Regional Success in Competition

1969 Stanley	83 points - 'Art Thou Troubled' (3 rd Prize)
	87 points - 'Feasting I Watch' (£3 Award)
1970 Wansbeck	The Fond Lovers (1 st Prize)
Stanley	85 points - 'The Gentle Maiden' (2 nd Prize)
	83 points - 'Tiger, Tiger (£5 Award)
1971 Wansbeck	86 points - 'The Song of the Kings Men'
	85 points - 'The Gentle Maiden' (2 nd)
1972 Tynedale	85 points - 'The Vagabond' (2 nd Prize)
	89 points - 'Feasting I Watch' (Gilhespy)
Stanley	87 points - 'Marching Along' (1 st Prize)
	88 points - 'The Bonnie Earl' (Rotary)
	86 points - 'Feasting I Watch' (3 rd Prize)
	87 points - 'Isle of Mull' (Top £3 Award)
Stockton	84 points - 'Tranquillity' (3 rd Prize)
	85 points - 'Feasting I Watch'
1974 Stockton	85 points - 'Pretty Polly Oliver' (1 st Prize)
	87 points - 'Close Thine Eyes' (Jameson)
1975 Tynedale	85 points - 'Feasting I Watch' (3 rd Prize)
	86 points - 'Close Thine Eyes'
Stockton	86 points - 'She Walks in Beauty' (2 nd)
	88 points - 'Feasting I Watch'
1976 Ryton	82 points - 'Heart's Music' (2 nd Prize)
	83 points - 'Feasting I Watch'
Wansbeck	40 points - 'Heart's Music' (1 st Prize)
	45 points - 'Feasting I Watch' (2 Trophy)
Stockton	86 points - 'A Young Man's Song' (2 nd)
1977 Stockton	85 points - 'Lark in the Clear Air' (1 st)
	86 points - 'In the Trades' (Jameson)
1980 Wansbeck	86 points - 'Close Thine Eyes' (1 st Prize)
	91 points - 'In the Trades' (2 Trophies)

Festival Adjudicators' Comments

1969 – Opened with beautiful restful feeling, lovely tone. I would prefer a lighter touch for contrast in the middle section, nevertheless the choir delivered a lot of really, beautiful sound and maintained pitch and true chording throughout.

A very testing choice and much of its challenge has met with a considerable degree of success and the varied quality and quantity of tone that the composer demands was unfailingly supplied. The chording was very impressive. No course tone from this choir even in 'fff'.

1971 – Good precision. Accents without stiffness. Watch attacks after rests, centre the notes. Excellent, dynamic in performance.

Beautifully sensitive and good tuning.

1972 – Good intonation. There was excellent rhythm to this and a good feeling for ensemble. Tenors had a little difficulty with some intervals. Good firm bass line.

Bravo. Good chording here and good attention to detail.

Give us a bit more polish on the final 'crown'.

Stirring rhythm. A lovely 'p'. Well knit performance and your words clear. Keep an eye on long notes and hold them.

Nicely shaped phrases. Lovely, blended tone. Words clear and firm and good vowels. What a beautiful cadence – echoed with perfection.

A good attack. Lovely tone. Nice middle section and good legato. Perhaps tenors could have given more. A well unified and satisfying piece of work.

Good blend. Pleasant bass resonance and nice bouche ferme. A little taper at phrase ends would have added beauty, but I liked your respect for words which added colour and helped heighten the tone. A good balanced choir.

Good sense of phrasing and synchronisation. Chording was most creditable.

Singing well together. Chording needed at times a more secure foundation. A lively quality emerged.

1974 – Good words, clear and precise. A fine unison. I enjoyed the tenderness of this interpretation. In general, a lively, well-gripped performance. Fluent and acceptable. Gained slightly in pitch.

Vibrant soft tone with a purposeful message. Well phrased and sung with a musical intensity well suited to the serious nature of the song.

Sensitive group who make music when they sing.

1975 – Good. Tenors a Little light in louder passages. Some admirable things. Tone can be more focussed in louder singing.

A good contrast. Make the semitone movement really clear in lower parts. A real feeling for the style of music.

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Ashington & District Male Voice Choir

Web: <https://www.ashingtonmalevoicechoir.org.uk>

Also on Facebook and YouTube.

Constructive Feedback was good for performance

1975 continued – An expressive and rich sound. Shape of phrases obviously important. There was a lovely easy movement. A little thin at the top of the choir for a Tenor 1 lead but climaxes were very colourful.

Great attack & unanimity. Rich, good sound.

1976 – You have a sensitive feeling for the words and the quiet sections are well done. Good attack and fine rhythm. You need more top tenors to achieve a good balance. There was a great variety and attention to detail.

A well-balanced choir with some fine lower voices and some delightful upper tenor singers. The ensemble was good. The openings were very well projected.

The words were beautifully portrayed. Some of the inner parts were a little indistinct, but the final crescendo was very well judged and shaped. Direction, sensitive and imaginative.

Vital words. Good detail. A good blend of sound. Excellent precision, but watch 'dots'.

Vital words again and a good onward flow of tone. Crisp detail in the Allegro Marziale and the brightness of tone lifted the singing.

1977 – A lovely warm tone quality. First tenors and second bass gave us a lovely sound. Can they aim for a closer focus of pitch?

Needs more bite in the tone. The 'swarm of bees' very effective. The performance ended with the mezza voce at which you are specialists.

1980 – An attractive mezza voce tone marked the opening. The softer moments fared very well. Be sure to produce a sustained rich sound when appropriate.

A good sturdy opening. The live quality of the choir was shown to good effect. Some words could perhaps have more special treatment. The difficult harmonic lifts were handled with ease. The ensemble was excellent and the control at the soft ending was one of the most memorable moments of the Festival.

Ashington & District Male Voice Choir Information Sheets

Ashington & District Male Voice Choir is producing a range of information sheets on various topics, including on the heritage of the Choir. They will be published within the Choir website.