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# Amici news

The newsletter of The Amici Singers  
The Amici Singers is a Registered Charity No.277766



Dear Amicis,

We now seem to have settled in our new 'home' at Trinity and after a few rehearsals I am feeling much more comfortable in surroundings, which from a musical aspect, are so much better than Brook House. Oh I know that it is not the same as cramped seating conditions, poor lighting, at times incredible heat, problems of holding music when everyone stood, long queues for the toilet, some acoustic problems, difficulty for some at that first step at the back door – ah, those were the days ! For new

members who never experienced the 'Amici Room' as Carole and I still refer to it, they may wonder how the choir survived for 31 years. Well it certainly did and I know many of you will retain many memories and will have a 'soft spot' for the old rehearsal room. The room has undergone an amazing transformation and is now totally unrecognisable as it is now a working office for Lindsay Music with all the usual office equipment necessary for a publishing house as well as shelves full of publications. At present there is an amazing amount of sorting out to do as well putting all the music in the right storage place. The passage way is full of boxes, from the old Amici room right round to the front door. Carole is doing a fantastic job of work in getting it 'ship shape and Bristol fashion.' It will take time, especially as the everyday work has to continue. But when it is finished it will be terrific, of that I have no doubt.

It was marvellous to have an intake of new members and I hope that you were all made very welcome, and in the short time, feel a real part of the choir. When a choir receives nearly 20% increase of membership there is always a problem of making sure that everyone gels socially and musically. Only you can give a true answer with the first point, but if there is anything you feel is not quite right or you think could be improved, please talk to your section leader who in turn will make sure it is fully aired in committee. Yes, points raised are always discussed fully and very frankly which I know has been one of the firm foundations of the success of the Amicis. Regarding the musical aspect I am thrilled, as I have told you, at the way everything has blended together, with the result that the Amici sound is still there. It means that everyone is listening and working hard to make music. Now this has nothing to do with knowing the notes. I know from talking to you, that many found it hard at the beginning – some may still do – but you are not alone. Many of the long standing members will tell you that in the first few weeks they were completely lost and wondered if they

should carry on. But they will also tell you of the rewards of perseverance and how the Amicis are a vital part of their life.

Now that we have a larger membership I hope that some of you will not feel that it means you will not matter if you miss a rehearsal. As I hope you all realise, we cover a lot of ground in a rehearsal and if you are away you will hold the choir back and so lower the standard we have achieved. To me everyone matters. Oh I know that there are meetings of other organisations, work, even holidays, family events which crop up from time to time and that is understandable, but apart from that I hope everyone will always reserve Thursday nights and concert dates. I know that for new members they may have already been committed for something which may cause them to miss an event but I do try to give notice some way into the future because of my own professional life, so I hope that you will put dates in diaries as soon as you have them. The diary dates column lists the dates and if some are not included they are announced at rehearsal, often many times. In 2010 probably in May, there will be another conducting day. That is a day's course when a number of conductors will rehearse a couple of pieces with the choir and then in the evening conduct the choir in concert conditions. Believe me, it is a fascinating experience. Then in the Autumn we will record our 3<sup>rd</sup> CD. The main item will be *Blow away the morning dew*, a suite of 10 Somerset folk songs. This recording will be in readiness for the choir's 10<sup>th</sup> Easter visit to the USA which is scheduled for Thursday 21 April – Sunday 1 May 2011. If any of you think that this tour is rather late, it is because Easter is very late in 2011. Good Friday is 22 April with Easter Sunday on 24 April. Already we have lined up some interesting visits – more later.

In the meantime enjoy the singing, rehearsals and each other's company.

Douglas



The way we were

## DIARY DATES

2009

### Thursdays, 3 September – 17 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church,  
Biggleswade

### Saturday, 21 November– 7.30pm

Social evening for Choir and partners at St  
Mary's Church Hall, Potton

### Saturday, 5 December

Christmas Concert at Dunton Parish Church

1.30 – 4.30pm Rehearsal

7.00pm Concert

N.B. Please note times

### Sunday, 20 December

Carols at Simply Oak – this will be in the  
afternoon - time to be confirmed

Carols for this event will be rehearsed on  
Thursdays, 10 & 17 December

2010

### Thursdays, 7 January – 25 March

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church,  
Biggleswade

### Thursdays, 8 April – Thursday 1 July

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church,  
Biggleswade

### Thursday, 20 May

AGM then rehearsal at Trinity – Start time  
will be 7.30pm

N.B Summer concert will be either Saturday  
26 June or Sunday afternoon 4 July

### Thursdays, 2 September – 2 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church,  
Biggleswade

### Saturday, 4 December

Christmas concert Venue tba.

2011

### Thursdays, 6 January – 14 April

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church,  
Biggleswade

### Thursday 21 April – Sunday 1 May

10<sup>th</sup> tour of USA

### Thursdays, 5 May – 30 June

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church,  
Biggleswade

### Thursday, 19 May

AGM then rehearsal at Trinity Methodist  
Church, Biggleswade. Start time will be 7.30pm

### Thursdays, 1 September – 1 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church

### Saturday, 3 December

Christmas concert Venue tba.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH

This short history of the church, which is now our  
new rehearsal room, is taken from the church's web-site.

"Methodism came to Biggleswade in 1794 when  
a man named Freeman moved to the town. He asked Miss  
Elizabeth Harvey of Hinxworth (a friend of John Wesley) to  
send a preacher to Biggleswade. She did so and a Society was  
formed which met first in a room over a shop in the High  
Street and then in a large barn.

In November 1795 the first chapel was in use  
at Cowfairlands (now Fairlands) but was outgrown by the  
congregation and in 1834 a new chapel and schoolroom was  
built on the present site with a Minister's house behind. The  
school-room was extended in 1878. 1874 saw the opening of  
a Primitive Methodist chapel just a few yards along Shortmead  
St. (now a Motor Factor). In 1902, the Minister's house at  
the rear of the Wesleyan chapel was replaced by a second  
schoolroom with rooms above.

When Methodism was reunited into one  
denomination in 1932, the congregation of the Primitive  
chapel was united with that of the Wesleyan chapel and Trinity  
Methodist Church was born.

In 1997 the worship area was completely  
refurbished and we are now starting work to renovate the rest  
of the premises to make it more useable for the community of  
Biggleswade."



## OTHER DATES OF INTEREST

### Friday 11 December and Saturday 12 December

St. Mary's Singers Christmas Concerts at  
Gamlingay Village College with  
Gamlingay Village College Choir  
Both concerts start at 7.30pm

### Wednesday 16 December

The St. Swithun's Singers Christmas Concert,  
7.30pm at St. Swithun's Parish Church, Sandy.  
A cheerful evening of Christmas Music and readings.  
Tickets £4.00 (£3.00 concessions)  
See Elizabeth Gammell for tickets



## Our President – PAM RHODES

When Pam Rhodes was approached to be the President of the Amici Singers, we were not only delighted that she accepted but also said that she would love to sing with us whenever possible. Now Pam is a very busy lady so we were equally delighted that she has made a couple of rehearsals already. At the time of writing this, Pam is in the middle of a stint

of five SONGS OF PRAISE programmes which takes time; but she says that she will come to rehearsal when she is back home. Pam is the first president who has actually sung in the choir and as far as I am concerned she is welcome to join in at any time. After the early rehearsals Pam wrote: "I was relieved that my sight reading kept up nicely, so hopefully I won't sing too many bum notes or unintentional solos when everyone knows to stop singing but I don't!!"

Anyway, I thought that you would like to know more about Pam, so here is a short 'bio' she has sent in

Pam Rhodes has been the familiar face of BBC Television's SONGS OF PRAISE programme for more than twenty years. In that time she has interviewed people ranging from The Pope to Dolly Parton! Her travels for SONGS OF PRAISE have taken her to South Africa, Hong Kong, Australia, Zimbabwe, France, Austria and the States – and she has presented television recordings from such concert halls as The

Golden Hall in Vienna, the Sydney Opera House and The Royal Albert Hall in London.

Pam cut her teeth in news journalism, being the anchor for Anglia Television's daily evening news programme, ABOUT ANGLIA, for seven years in addition to presenting network holiday and travel programmes, her own daily interview series on Lifestyle Television, Radio 2 and other long-term programmes for London Weekend, Thames, BFBS Television and Premier Radio for whom she has presented her own weekly programme WITH HEARTS AND HYMNS for seven years. She is well-known as an After Dinner speaker and event host, and often comperes large orchestral or musical events at symphony halls and other venues around the country. Pam has also established herself as a mainstream author in recent years, with five novels and nine factual books under her belt.

She is married to Richard Crow, and they live in an old farm house at which they also run a large cattery, the Biggleswade Cat Lodge. Many moons ago, she was a singer/dancer with George Mitchell's BLACK AND WHITE MINSTRELS, and as a qualified youth worker volunteered to teach dancing and drama in youth clubs around London for ten years. She still loves dancing. In fact, she met her husband at a jiving class where he threw her into a 'seducer' - and she's been there ever since! She's happiest in her wellies pottering about in the garden, loves and knows the words to hundreds of hymns, plays the piano very badly when she thinks no-one's listening – and can turn her hand to a mean party piece on the concert xylophone when really pressed!

Having introduced so many different choirs over two decades of presenting SONGS OF PRAISE (through whom she first met Douglas), she has always fancied joining the Altos of a really good choir – and now she's done it!

## WOMEN AND HATS

I have been reading some essays by Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904). He was born in Prague and has been called 'the first great professional music critic' who came to prominence with the increasing popularity of newspapers in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Hanslick's career as a music critic and pioneering lecturer in musical appreciation lasted for fifty years and as a result became one of the most influential musical figures, arguably of all time. You may be interested in a part of a letter he wrote in London in 1886:

"The humane custom of forbidding women to wear hats in the theatre – only recently introduced in Vienna – was in force in London a hundred years ago. As Pohl\* relates in his *Mozart and Haydn in London*, a book rich in musical curiosities, women in hats were not admitted even to Westminster Abbey for the Handel Festivals. They were expected, furthermore, to dispense with feathers and to content themselves with hoopskirts of very modest dimensions. Particularly in the announcements of benefit concerts, the ladies were admonished 'not to prejudice the beneficence by extravagant hoops.' Since there were, in those days, no numbered seats, ladies with enormous hoops, took up three times as much room as was normally their due. Not until 1830 were numbered seats introduced in the London theatres, and even then they were regarded as a presumptuous innovation and received with hostility."



\*Carl Ferdinand Pohl (1819-1887) was a German music historian, organist and composer. From 1863-1866 he lived in London occupied in research mainly at the British museum on Haydn and Mozart.

## Singing is good for you: IT'S OFFICIAL

### SINGING AND IRRITABLE BOWEL DISEASE

I am grateful to Maureen Wilson for bringing this to my attention through a newspaper report. So I followed this up with some quick research.

Irritable bowel syndrome (ibs) affects 10-15% of the population, causing symptoms such as abdominal pain and cramping and diarrhoea. ibs is three times more common in women; there is no cure and treatment includes dietary changes, medication to treat spasms, and even antidepressants. Although its causes are unknown, there is evidence that psychological factors, such as stress, play an important role in ibs. The researchers believe that singing increases oxytocin, the feel-good hormone, which may have a painkilling effect.

### SINGING AND HEALTH

The previous article makes mention of a study undertaken in Sweden. Dr. Maria Sandgren, a registered psychologist from the University of Stockholm gives a number of lectures on the effects of singing on one's health and notes: 'Choral singing has a long tradition in Sweden and one out of five people sing in a choir. I have found that, although choristers participate in the same rehearsal, their level of well-being might differ depending on gender, health status and choir level. Results indicate that choral singing had strong effects on the well being in that positive emotions increased significantly and, in turn, negative emotions radically subsided. I found that choral singers – (now get this Amicis) – *particularly women*, are happier, more alert and relaxed after a rehearsal.'

## THE UK'S DEADLIEST BISCUIT

### (You have been warned!)

A research company has calculated the biscuit most likely to cause someone an injury during a tea or coffee break.

The custard cream was found to be the UK's most dangerous snack, on the basis of something called the *Biscuit Injury Threat Evaluation*.

According to the Daily Telegraph, the research was carried out by *Mindlab International* at the request of the chocolate biscuit bar *Rocky*. Mike Driver, Marketing Director for *Rocky* said: "We commissioned this study after learning how many biscuit related injuries are treated by doctors each year."

Accidents have included people poking themselves in the eye with a biscuit, falling off a chair while reaching for the tin, sustaining burns after dunking a biscuit in scalding tea, and being hit by fragments flying through the air.

Other people have reported choking on crumbs and damaging a tooth or filling on a particularly hard biscuit. One unlucky person ended up stuck in wet concrete after wading in to pick up a stray biscuit.

*Mindlab International* director Dr David Lewis explained the background to the research.

"We tested the physical properties of 15 popular types of biscuits," he said, "along with aspects of their consumption such as 'dunkability' and crumb dispersal."

According to *Mindlab*'s calculations, here is the full list of the UK's riskiest biscuits, together with their 'danger' rating:

|                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Custard Cream 5.64         | Ginger Nut 2.99                |
| Cookie 4.34                | Shortbread 2.90                |
| Chocolate Biscuit Bar 4.12 | Caramel Shortcake 2.76         |
| Wafer 3.74                 | Nice Biscuit 2.27              |
| Rich Tea 3.45              | Iced Biscuits/Party Rings 2.16 |
| Bourbon 3.44               | Chocolate Finger 1.38          |
| Oat Biscuit 3.31           | Jaffa Cakes 1.16               |
| Digestive 3.14             | Sent in by Elizabeth Gammell   |

The old rehearsal room as it is now – still a work in progress

