



History of the Society 1903 - 2009

The history of Taunton Choral Society is long and varied. The choir was formed in 1903 as the Taunton Madrigal and Choral Society and its first recorded performance was Mendelssohn's 'St Paul' "rendered with chorus and orchestra". This was followed by Coleridge-Taylor's 'Hiawatha's Wedding Feast' and Mendelssohn's 'Elijah'. The choir sang Handel's 'Messiah' on two occasions before the onset of the Great War, in 1906 and again in 1913. From the choir's inception it created a tradition of performing large choral works interspersed with instrumental and smaller scale works; this has continued ever since.

After the First World War both Vaughan Williams and Elgar proved popular with several performances of the 'Fantasia on Christmas Carols', but it was not until 1926 that the choir first sang the 'Dream of Gerontius'. The Madrigal and Choral Society concerts continued up to the outbreak of the Second World War when the last concert was Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' sung in March 1939.

After the war either the records are incomplete or the choir took some time to reform, as the first recorded concert was not until 1955 when the choir performed a programme of Christmas music. In 1975 the choir was renamed Taunton Choral Society under its conductor Ronald Tickner and, after a concert of Christmas music, sang a programme of Rossini, Purcell and Britten in March 1976. The choir sang under Ron Tickner's leadership for over 15 years, performing a very varied list of choral works and finished with Haydn's 'Creation' in November 1988.

In 1989 John Cole became Music Director of the choir and in 1991 he conducted Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' with Bryn Terfel in the title role. During the next 16 years the choir performed many of the well known large choral works, including Brahms' 'Requiem', Verdi's 'Requiem', Britten's 'War Requiem', Handel's 'Messiah' and Bach's 'B Minor Mass'. In 2004 John Cole retired with a sell-out performance of Verdi's 'Requiem' in King's College Chapel. Later that year Duncan Emerson took his place with Mozart's 'Requiem' in the autumn and Vaughan Williams' 'Sea Symphony' the following March. In 2007 after a performance of Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' in Wells Cathedral, Duncan Emerson moved to Dorset.

Following a period of short-term conductors, Stephen Bell gave his first concert with the choir in March 2009, and this fruitful relationship lasted until his retirement in April 2016