



GRAPEVINE NEWSLETTER

of the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir



ISSUE 10:
June 2022

From the President

WAYNE NEWTON

Welcome to the first issue of the *Grapevine Newsletter* for 2022 and my first message to you as President of the choir.

Last year was a very difficult one for the choir due to Covid restrictions and rehearsals via Zoom—and only one performance. We managed to squeeze that performance between Covid lockdowns. This is certainly not the ideal outcome for a performing choir!

Paul Whiting tells us that we have had sixty-one (yes, *sixty-one*) Zoom rehearsals. We all know that Zoom is a very difficult medium for choir rehearsals, as we must mute our audio and switch off our video, so that we can hear the backing music and sing to ourselves. But at least we could *see* each other, even though we all appeared the size of a postage stamp, and maintain our friendships with each other during some brief chats during each rehearsal.

Importantly, what the Zoom rehearsals did was to keep in our minds that ‘Tuesday night is rehearsal night’, making it easier to finally meet face-to-face when we were released from lockdown. We all knew that the first face-to-face rehearsal would be ‘interesting’ (as in the Chinese curse, ‘May you live in interesting times’). I think that we were all quite surprised that we sang better than expected. That is a credit to you all. *Well done!*

The saddest aspect about the lockdowns is that we have lost some valuable members and our numbers are suffering. To that end, we are actively searching for new members to

ensure that we have a well-balanced choir once more. If you know of anyone who could be convinced to sing with us, please let a committee member know and we will follow him up. Welcome to our new members!

As I write this, the choir has already had three performances in this year:

- Lourdes Retirement Village
- Thornleigh Hillcrest Uniting Church and
- the Alan Walker Village in Carlingford.

I must give a special 'thank you' to David Foster for organising venues for our performances. David, you have done a sterling job as always. THANK YOU from all of us!

Sadly, I could not perform at Lourdes Retirement Village as I was recovering from Covid, but I understand that the performance was well-received and ran well. Congratulations to all. The other performances were also very well-received and, from where I was sitting, the choir sounded very good indeed. A big THANK YOU to Paul and you all for putting in the required hard work to make us 'performance ready'. Please keep up the hard work.

A final note:

We are a performing choir. Therefore, we must attend and participate in as many performances as possible. Paul cannot get a well-balanced sound from us if half of us do not show up. Earlier this year, you were emailed a rehearsal and performance timetable. Please write all these dates into your diaries to commit yourselves to these events then, when someone asks you if you are free on any of these dates, you can say: 'Sorry, No. I have a choir event on that day.'

Several weeks before each performance, our marshal distributes a roster to log you as coming to an upcoming performance. This is a vital step. Paul cannot balance the choir when he does not know who is singing on the day—or if there are not enough of us for the choir to sound its best.

If the roster does not come to you, please seek it out and add your name. It is understood that there can be some extenuating circumstances for not performing on a specific date, but these should be minimal. We are, after all, a performing choir.

Until the next issue... *Happy singing!*



From the Music Director

DR PAUL WHITING OAM

We have now performed three times in our new series of concerts and I have been heartened by our performances. I had expected that we might be struggling with reduced numbers and a long period without singing together. But in front of an audience, we (you, actually!) have risen to the occasion. On each successive occasion, the performance has been better, until at Alan Walker Village we were asked for an encore.

Doesn't happen often! Well done.

Because of illness and travel, we must unfortunately anticipate that our numbers will continue to be small for performances. By my reckoning, we currently have thirty-three performing members. Of those, three are currently ill, two have so far not returned after Covid, and four are on leave. In addition, there are a couple in uncertain health. That leaves a pool of twenty-four for our next concert. (Of course some will be well by then, I hope!) So you see why we need all hands on deck—and of course, new members. It is most encouraging that we have new members attending and learning each week.

One last thing. For the whole of any performance, every member must *be still* and have their full attention on either the conductor or the soloist. Not on... arranging music, commenting to others or interjecting. Just thought I'd mention it! Keep up the good work.

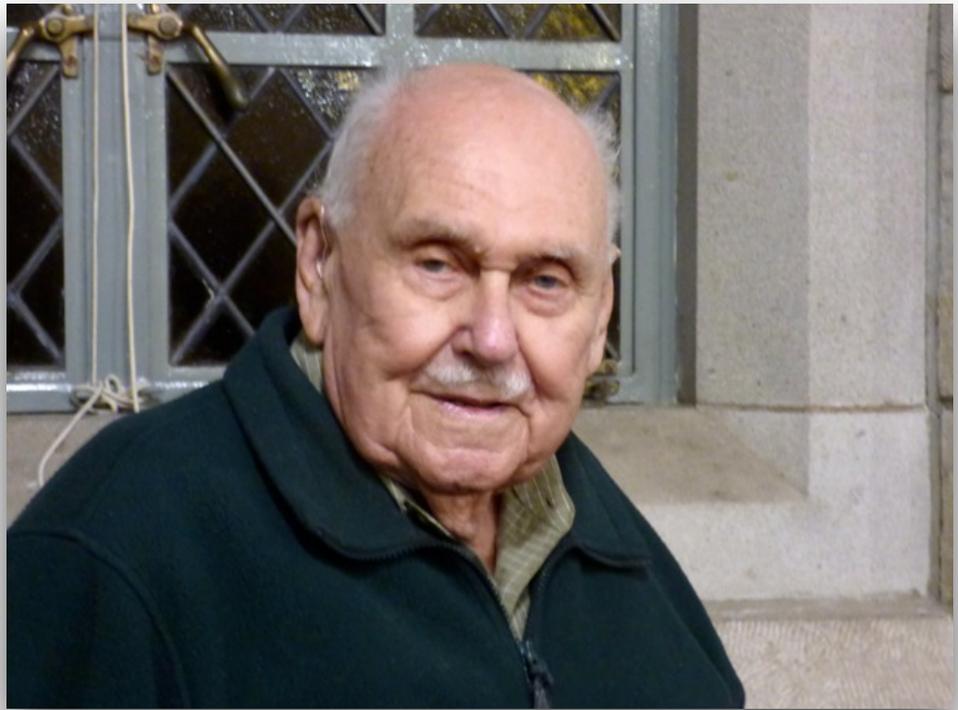
EDITOR'S NOTE:

This is the second version of our new format *Grapevine Newsletter*. Inadvertently, I left off the President's message. Put it down to operating two computers at the same time whilst I transfer files from an old 2010 Apple desktop computer to a u-beaut, MacBook Pro. I am still learning!

I hope you enjoy the new layout and, more importantly, the material contained in it. The next issue will come out in eight weeks' time: in mid-August. If members have some item to add, please simply send it to me—my email address below. Closing date for all copy: **Saturday 30 July 2022**. I am away from Saturday 20 August for five weeks.

JOHN WATERHOUSE

Email: jmwaterhouse@bigpond.com



Getting to know... Barry Alsop

'PARTY-ANIMAL' AND 'DEALER IN DEATH AND DESTRUCTION'

I first got to meet Barry after our performance at Alan Walker Village, Carlingford (17 May 2022). He got me intrigued when he said as a throw-away comment, 'I thought of resigning... at ninety'. *Ninety?* This interview was conducted Friday 20 May, 2022.

Grapevine: 'How old are you then?'

Barry: 'I have just turned *ninety-two!*' (born 28 May 1930).

Grapevine: 'And Barry, you've one of the oldest choir members. For how long have you been a member?'

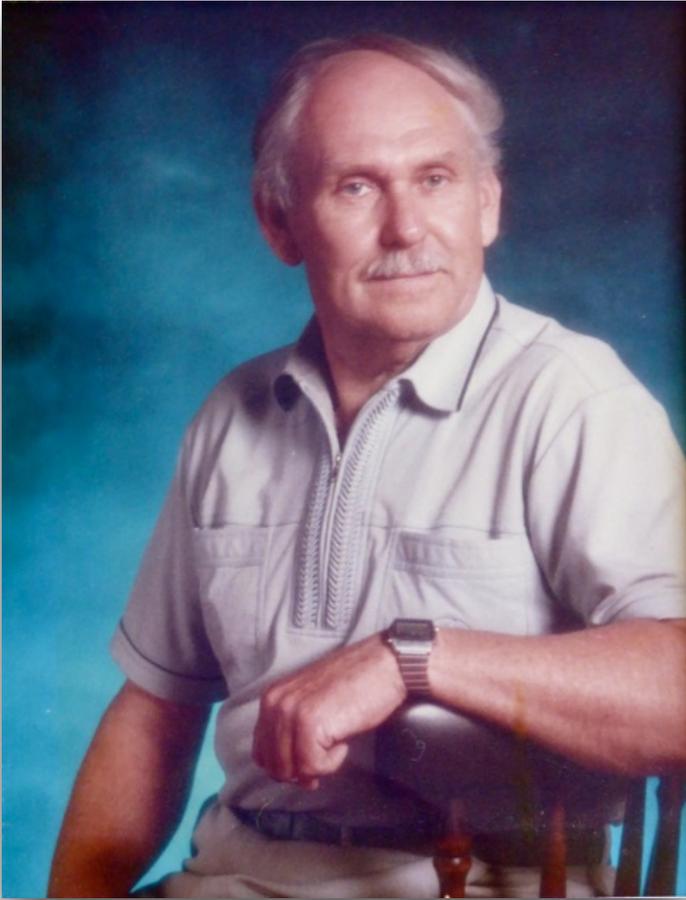
Barry: 'Thirty-three years.'

I don't know everyone's ages, but I would hazard a guess that Barry is both our oldest *and* longest-serving member. As such, he eminently qualifies to be our first interviewee. Barry's wife Elizabeth died in 1990. (They married in 1961 in Sydney.) Until recently, he was in the family home in Castle Hill. He moved to Mowll Village, the Anglican retirement village in Castle Hill, in 2016.

CHOIR INVOLVEMENT:

Grapevine: 'And what do you most value about the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir?'

Barry: 'After my wife died, the the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir kept me busy. I've never had time to sit back and worry about things. I also was a member for years of the Sydney Welsh Choir (mixed) and a church choir. I dropped out of both with Covid. I'm in the KMC and the St Paul's Castle Hill church choir now.'



WORK OR PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT:

Grapevine: ‘And what did you do exactly?’

Barry: ‘I was a dealer in death and destruction!’

Grapevine: ‘Meaning?’

Barry: ‘I was manufacturing explosives and ammunitions for the Australian government military forces.’

Grapevine: ‘And how did you get into that?’

Barry: ‘I graduated from Melbourne University as a chemist. Upon graduation, I worked in a government munitions factory in Maribyrnong, Melbourne, as a chemist.’

From 1957 to 1987, Barry worked in the Munitions Filling Factory, St Marys, Sydney. When it was closed in 1987, he was second-in-charge. Barry and his wife bought a travel agency called Century Plaza Travel in Epping. It operated until Elizabeth’s death in 1990.

‘The agency had just one employee, Belinda—now a grandmother herself!’

Grapevine: ‘Any professional highlights?’

Barry: ‘In 1969, the Department of Supply had representatives in Washington DC. I worked there for three years out of the Australian Embassy—without doubt the best three years of our life. Elizabeth was not allowed to work in the USA, but I had a permit through the Embassy.

‘Working in Washington DC, we got a few spin-offs of Embassy life—lots of parties. My wife *loved* parties!’

‘When in Washington, I joined a Presbyterian Church in Maryland with a big pipe-organ and a choir (Elizabeth went to the Catholic Church). After our return to Australia, we made several return trips to the church—always on a Sunday. They always had a lunch for us!’

Grapevine: ‘What happened then?’

Barry: ‘On our return to Sydney, I joined the Castle Hill Presbyterian Church. When the minister got a doctorate in theology—and went “happy-clappy”—I gravitated to St Paul’s

Anglican, Castle Hill. I joined the choir there. When visiting St Matthew's Anglican, Manly, with a group from St Paul's, I was asked to sing a solo. It was there I was told about KMC.'

SINGING CAREER:

Grapevine: 'Tell us about how you got into singing then.'

Barry: 'I was at Geelong College from 1935 onwards. The boys' school used to put on a Gilbert & Sullivan musical each year. Those who couldn't sing painted the scenery or printed programs. I decided to sing. Initially, I was a little girl in *The Mikado!*'

[Barry went on to perform in a long line of amateur roles in musical theatre.](#)

'My big thing was G&S. I've performed in most of the well-known shows. For quite some time, I was the lead tenor, performing with Dundas Methodist and the Hornsby Musical Society amongst others. I was Frederic in *Pirates of Penzance*. More recently in the Dural Musical Society, I was sixteen-year-old Marco in *The Gondoliers*.

'At the time, I said "I can't do Marco in my early sixties. He's meant to be *sixteen!*" I managed to pull it off. I still have a VHS of the show.'

FAMILY HISTORY:

Grapevine: 'Tell us about your family.'

Barry: 'My father Ernest was born in Framlingham [population 158 in 2016], near Colac, Victoria, the youngest of thirteen children. (In 1823, Queen Victoria gave "assisted passages" to Tasmania to potential migrants. My grandfather was one of them.) My Uncle Bill, my father's brother, had *eighteen* children. He was a butcher in Colac.

'My mother's family was originally from Stawell, central Victoria.'

Grapevine: 'Other memories?'

Barry: 'My father was inexplicably nicknamed *Son*, so in the family and business in Geelong he was known as *Son Alsop* or [more disconcertingly] *Uncle Son!*'

[Barry's father was involved in the landing at Gallipoli. Though wounded there, he was then sent to the Western Front, where he was wounded again. Ernest became a captain in the Australian Army in World War II, but stayed in Australia.](#)

'In 1928, my parents went to the UK to sell shares in Australian forestry. They lived in London. They went by ship—as was normal in those days. He worked as a licensed dealer in stocks and shares, but only lasted six months. They returned home to Australia the same year, 1928.

'My father loved London and loved travel—that's where I think I got my travel bug from. I had my fifth birthday on a ship in the Suez Canal! My father died aged fifty-seven in 1957 in Balwyn, Melbourne.'

Grapevine: 'And your mother?'

Barry: ‘After my father’s death, my mother Audrey bought an apartment in Toorak, Melbourne. She never remarried, but had two boy-friends. One used to own the Lorne Hotel and Erskine House, where we went for Christmas. The other worked at Colgate Palmolive. She died in 1968 of a brain tumour.’

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Grapevine: ‘And how does your own story link up here?’

Barry lived in Geelong for his first twenty-one years. This included the time he spent at Ormond College, Parkville, as an undergraduate. In 1957, Barry moved permanently to St Marys, Sydney, where his employers gave him a factory-owned house. He then bought a house in Baulkham Hills and later, Castle Hill.



Barry: ‘At college, I owned a 1930 Austin 7. It was covered with facetious slogans on the outside like *No laughter, Madam—your daughter might be inside*. I would cart three big blokes from college around in it. My mother would ask , “You haven’t parked that thing outside, have you?” when I visited her at the Lorne Hotel (very posh). Every second weekend, I would have to fix up the engine at home in Geelong.

‘I completed a BSc. In those days at university, there was no Chemical Engineering course. But I had already done a two-year course in Industrial Chemistry after school in Geelong. That proved to be a lot more help in my life than my university degree. My university career taught me a lot about theory, but nothing about practice. I was able to persuade the

Department of Supply that my earlier experience meant I should be upgraded to being a chemical engineer. This had a higher salary than being a mere chemist!

Barry's son David (now sixty years) followed in his father's footsteps as a scientist in Geelong. He worked overseas much of his working life. He spent three, six-year terms with Shell in Holland, Oman and Brunei. David now lives in Maribyrnong, Melbourne. (He bought a house right opposite where Barry first worked.)

David has two sons: Mark (about to marry in July) and John (in media production).

'Both have interesting jobs.'

CURRENT LIFE AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS:

Grapevine: 'Tell us about life today.'

Barry: 'I'm currently living in Mowll Village, Castle Hill. We've had two years where nothing much has happened. Our *Happy Hour* was only rejuvenated this last month (19 May). I'm a member of Probus in Castle Hill but, with Covid, we've done no trips for two years.'

'I first met Wayne Newton in a combined churches concert in the Sydney Town Hall. I invited him to the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir! I am still in the choir at St Paul's Castle Hill, where we sing at the 8.00 am Communion Service.'

Grapevine: 'Lastly, Barry, what gives you hope for the future?'

Barry: 'Well, the thing that gives me hope is that I've lasted this long! With my father dying at fifty-seven, my ambition was to outlive Dad and make it to sixty. Other members of my family have all been short-livers, though my sister still lives in Melbourne, aged eighty-nine.'

'My hope now is to make it to ninety-three. My ambition is not to do anything too exciting!'



Getting to know... Kim Rennick

'INDUSTRY POLICY NERD' AND 'INVETERATE TRAVELLER'

Like Barry Alsop, I only met Kim Rennick recently. I was keen to interview Kim before his imminent departure for the US and the UK. (He and his wife, Mary Jo, left on Friday 27 May).

CHOIR INVOLVEMENT:

Grapevine: 'How long have you been in the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir?'

Kim: 'Since 2009—thirteen years. I became Treasurer in 2013.'

Grapevine: 'And what do you most value about the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir?'

Kim: 'Two things. Exposure to wonderful music and the serious instruction we receive from Paul Whiting on how to deliver that music.'

'Also the camaraderie, but in particular the enjoyment of music. It is wonderful to experience this in this community. I have been astonished at the depth of skill of the other choir members.'

WORK OR PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT:

Grapevine: 'What did you study exactly?'

Kim: ‘I did a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering at the University of NSW. I was particularly interested in software design, operating systems design and systems analysis.’

Grapevine: ‘And what was your first job?’

Kim: ‘I was the Automation Team Leader with John Lysaght at the hot-strip steel rolling mill in Hastings, Victoria.’

Grapevine: ‘And what then?’

Kim: ‘I worked with Honeywell, the US company for twenty years. I was based in Australia, but also I worked in the USA, Canada, the UK, Singapore and Malaysia.’

Grapevine: ‘Where else did that take you?’

Kim: ‘Well, I travelled widely in those countries. In the US, I lived and worked in Arizona, Minnesota, Texas and Virginia – and visited many other states. In Canada, I visited Toronto and Montreal. I particularly enjoyed Montreal!’

Grapevine: ‘Anything to do with French culture?’

Kim: ‘Of course. And in the UK, I was based in Bracknell, Berkshire, but would visit Frankfurt.’

Kim: ‘At Honeywell, I designed systems for industrial and building control (oil and gas, mining, building management), working with all the big industrial companies: Woodside, BHP, Alcoa, Western Mining and so on. Through generalisation, the same systems could be used across industries. Our Australian system proved more powerful and effective than the one developed by head office [in the US]!’

Grapevine: ‘What was your key impression of a US corporate?’

Kim: ‘The original US companies were incredibly clever and innovative. At base, they had a core belief in innovation and technology to produce a killer product that would take over the world. Today [since the 1980s under Jack Welch and other much-lauded American CEOs], companies have switched their focus from manufacture to running financial lending schemes. More money was to be made in lending money to the purchaser than in the manufacture of the core product itself. Hence the outsourcing of manufacturing to overseas.’

Kim: ‘In 1984–1985, I worked on an oil and gas platform in the South China Sea, off the coast of West Malaysia (east of Kerteh, Terengganu). My team’s job was to install a telemetry system, sending and receiving production information back to the on-shore plant and Kuala Lumpur.’



Grapevine: ‘And how was life on an oil rig?’

Kim: ‘My team and I worked on the platform for several months—working there weeks at a time. An interesting story: when we first landed by helicopter on the rig, we were immediately provided with firearms training—to protect the rig and ourselves against pirates in the South China Sea!’

[*Editor’s Note:* Unlike Kim, I didn’t learn how to use firearms, but I did encounter similar unwanted visitors in 1968—Suluk pirates operating from the southern Philippines in Tawau, Sabah, East Malaysia (on the map above). I got as close as 1 m from four of them at 4.00 am one morning, all with *parangs*—long knives. Fortunately, a wooden wall stood between me and them!]

Grapevine: ‘What has been your most recent job?’

Kim: ‘I am now semi-retired, but still consult to small businesses in the areas of governance, finance, sales and marketing, and operations. I have also worked with major companies, manufacturers, government and industry authorities, particularly in the automotive sector.

‘I recently co-authored a book on the Australian car industry for industry policy nerds. It was a mammoth undertaking.’

Grapevine: ‘Come on—more detail, please!’

Kim: ‘It’s called *National Policy, Global Giants: How Australia Built and Lost its Automotive Industry*¹ and it covers the industry from prior to World War I to 2017, in the areas of structure, markets, technology and industry policy.’

¹ John Wormald & Kim Rennick, *National Policy, Global Giants: How Australia Built and Lost its Automotive Industry* (Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Grapevine: ‘Now I am actually interested in that topic with a great-grandfather who first worked for Holden in Adelaide, doing the detailing on carriages, then road-bikes. Tell us some of your discoveries.’

Kim: ‘Well, Holden began as a saddlery manufacturer, but was soon doing car upholstery, car interiors and motor trimming for imported American cars. By the 1920s, Holden was manufacturing General Motors bodies and assembling GM cars here in Australia. (To be effective in such a small market, it had to develop some innovative techniques of assembly.)’

Grapevine: ‘And what then?’

Kim: ‘In 1931 as a result of the Great Depression, Holden was bought out by GM, forming General Motors-Holden. Also assembled in Australia were Chrysler, Dodge, Ford and the British Motor Corporation vehicles. It is a remarkable story of a remarkable industry.’

‘In 1948, when the first Holden (the 48/215) rolled off the assembly line, Australia had a population of a mere seven million people. Yet even then, Holden cars had fully 68 percent local content, which later rose to the mid-90 percents.’

Kim is now working with individual companies in recruitment, people management, accountancy, sales and marketing: lawyers, architects, electricians, builders, car-mechanics. Part of his role is coaching such companies/corporates and organisations/government in handling business in an increasingly complex, bureaucratic regime.

PERSONAL FAMILY HISTORY

Grapevine: ‘Tell us about your family of origin.’

Kim: ‘I was born in Linden Park, Adelaide. My mother Patricia’s family established “Auldana”, one of the first wine-making operations in the Adelaide Hills. We have records of gold medals from the 1872 wineshows in both London and Calcutta! (Today, the Penfolds *St Henri* label still references the Auldana winery.)

‘Patricia wrote and lectured on wine appreciation. When younger, she was a trained (if amateur) opera singer—without doubt, contributing to my musical input from an early age.’

‘My father Richard was a mathematician, a linguist (fluent in Hindi, Urdu and Bahasa Malay) and a lover of literature—a veritable polymath. He could recite Milton till the cows came home! After WWII, he was for a period a District Officer in Kuching, Sarawak, with the British Colonial Service. Later, he worked with the Weapons Research Establishment in South Australia on the design of the Woomera rocket program. He went on to design the mathematical architecture for the original Commonwealth Government Superannuation Scheme in Canberra.’



CURRENT LIFE AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS:

Grapevine: ‘Tell us about life today.’

Kim: ‘As I explained earlier, I went to the US to work with General Electric in Virginia, which is where and when I met Mary Jo.

‘We have three children: a daughter who lives today in Brooklyn, New York City; a son in Lower Clapton , London, with an Austrian partner; and a son here in Annandale, married to a Spanish girl! We have three grand-children, two (five-years-old and two-years-old) in Annandale and one (four-years-old) in London.

‘My second son has been member of a pop group called *Dappled Cities* and has toured the US, the UK, Europe, Dubai and Australia (the Sydney Town Hall and the Opera House) with them.’

Grapevine: ‘That explains the travel?’

Kim: ‘Yes, we’re off to the US and the UK next week—our first trip overseas since 2020. We would normally go to the US twice a year.’

Grapevine: ‘And what gives you hope for the future?’

Kim: ‘Getting to know my three grand-children. This includes seeing them as they grow up and become young people. I want to be able to say to them: “We’re safe. You’re on the right track. I’m happy to trust the country to you.”

‘Personally, I’m blown away by their eloquence, insight, knowledge and evident capability. You know they’re going places.’

We all wish Kim and Mary Jo safe travel and a happy time with family overseas.
Enjoy the moment!
