

History of Music Service from 1942 to present day

The County Music Service was formed in 1942 when the Rural Community Council appointed Miss Connie Pilkington as the first Music Organiser to foster and develop musical opportunities within Oxfordshire.

Miss Pilkington, affectionately known as 'Pilk' or 'Pilkie', was one of the last of the 'Victorian Ladies' and a formidable character, who established the very beginnings of our beloved Music Service with a steely will, unwavering integrity and sheer hard work. This she did whilst terrifying many as 'the' authority.

Many opportunities were organised by Miss Pilkington during her 32 years in post. During the war, she would cycle all over the county to establish choirs and music groups. Instrumental lessons in schools were introduced after the war. There were over 200 primary schools at the time, many of which had only one teacher. Miss Pilkington had a challenge on her hands as very few of them were musicians.

In 1958, Miss Pilkington established the first Saturday Music School which opened in New Inn Hall Street in central Oxford. Places were offered to students who had reached grade 6 and above and who showed promise, giving many their first chance to play in an ensemble. Felicity Fletcher-Campbell, a pupil in those early days, recalls:

At 11 years old, I was taken along by my mother to Constance Pilkington to be 'inspected' to see if I could join the Saturday Music School. I and the younger pupils were petrified of her – but I got in, and enjoyed many happy years of music-making.

In 1962, Martin Sheldon, (who, in time, would be the next Head of the Music Service), joined as part of a team of primary advisors who ran training sessions to introduce new skills and teaching ideas to non-specialist music teachers. Tuned percussion instruments were introduced to Oxfordshire classrooms at this time and Mr Sheldon asked for four sets of chime bars and toured Oxfordshire primary schools showing teachers and children what sounds they could make. He also ran Music Workshops including elementary composition with instruments.

Gradually, through various funding opportunities, more and more children were able to access a wider range of instruments and the Music Service continued to expand.

Regular Music Festivals saw a move away from traditional songs which had been taught in the past towards more modern styles of music. There were various resources available to schools including the BBC Schools Music Broadcasts, Singing Together and Time and Tune. Along with the music workshops and festivals, this gave the schools a good foundation to build on. The key Teachers Manual at this time, published by Oxford School Music Books, said that:

Grants were given to ensure every school had a gramophone and records to play, with the Music Service providing a recommended listening list. In Mr Sheldon's words *"the schools then had quite a bit to build on"*.

In 1965 the Music Service was transferred to the Local Education Authority - Oxfordshire Education Committee (Music Section) and following the success with

primary schools, the Music Service began focussing on secondary schools. Mary Warnock, Headmistress of Oxford High School for Girls, chaired a sub-committee to lead on this work.

Choral work was also developed. Felicity Fletcher-Campbell remembers:

Pilk used to preside over what was known as 'County Choirs' - an annual event, under the aegis of the County Music Service, to bring together all the small local choral societies on the premise that in the one-car-one-family days, these singers (mostly ladies) did not get out and about much and thus welcomed the opportunity to sing the large choral works en masse. The then Oxford Orchestral Society (now Oxford Symphony Orchestra) used to accompany and the legendary Sydney Watson conducted - a wonderful character such as they don't make nowadays - like Pilk!

In 1968 Oxfordshire County Youth Orchestra (OCYO) was founded by John Mathieson and from 1969 was conducted by his brother Muir, an Academy Award-nominated composer of film scores and a staff conductor for the Rank Organisation. As you will see in this evening's concert, OCYO has gone from strength to strength in the last 49 years.

In 1970 Miss Pilkington approached parents and staff to form a committee to help the Oxfordshire Music Centre. There had been a tremendous increase in children playing instruments and led by Miss Pilkington, the "Friends" set about raising money. They wrote to industry, commerce and others and by 1970 other Music Centres had been set up: in Henley, Banbury, Kidlington and Oxford. The following year Witney Music Centre was established which served as a junior section to the Oxford Centre (up to Grade 5).

A Central Music School Parent Teacher Association was formed to support the work of the Central Music School. In particular, parents arranged and served refreshments during rehearsals, and organised and supported the annual Muir Mathieson Competition.

In 1971 Miss Pilkington introduced charges for concerts, programmes and sheet music replacement, whilst continuing to approach Universities and businesses for covenants and donations. Other fundraising initiatives included raffles, wine & cheese evenings and subscriptions. 1973 saw the introduction of scholarships, a three day residential course and prize giving.

Although the Central Music School met at Peers School on Saturday mornings throughout the 70s, the Music Service had no formal base for both musical and administrative operations at this time.

Felicity Fletcher-Campbell recalls that Miss Pilkington worked from "*a grim place at Park End Street - not a pleasant office, just like a garage reception, really*". Instruments were stored in a downstairs basement in County Hall.

Miss Pilkington retired in 1974 and Martin Sheldon succeeded her as Head of the Music Service. He became Senior County Music Adviser and was responsible for running music across Oxfordshire and, at this time, North Berkshire too. At this time

the Oxfordshire County Big Band was formed by Peter Jeeves bringing a swing and sway to the Music Service.

Following Muir's death in 1975, the Muir Mathieson Memorial Fund and Competition were introduced. The competition, for Year 13 students in Oxfordshire who attend Oxfordshire County Music Service activities, continues to this day and is sponsored by the Friends of the Young Musicians Association (FYMA), who also present the runner up with the 'FYMA Prize'.

Fundraising expanded to include carol singing, jumble sales (1979) and barn dances (from 1980). From 1982 the Central Music School developed merchandising with maroon sweatshirts with white logos. The following year saw the introduction of stickers and pencils, an auction evening and a student disco.

In 1983 the County Youth Orchestra (OCYO), due to their growing national reputation, was asked to play at the Schools Prom in the Royal Albert Hall for the first time. They played music from West Side Story, Finlandia and Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance Marches under the baton of conductor Anthony Hopkins. This was the first of many appearances by Oxfordshire orchestras, massed choirs and ensembles at what has now become the Music for Youth Proms. 1983 was also the year Philomena Solomon, our longest-serving member of staff, joined the Music Service. Philomena introduced new instruments to the Music Service including the guitar, steel pans in addition to ethnic instruments.

During the 1980s Martin Sheldon introduced the Schools' Concerts where children, many for the first time, would thoroughly enjoy the spectacle of a full, live orchestra. This innovation continues today with OCYO presenting annual concerts at The Sheldonian Theatre for over 1,500 children. He also introduced groups of peripatetic teachers into schools for small ensemble concerts to promote instrumental teaching.

The ratios of boys to girls in the orchestra had remained fairly even until about 1980, at which time it was reported to be about 2/3 girls, a trend that continues to this day. By 1984 OCYO had grown to 170 members, as illustrated by a quote from Friends Committee minutes that "*wind players are so numerous they must play in the wind band at first and only later may audition for the orchestra*". By 1987 members had reached 190 and the wind band began to function independently, not just as a stepping stone to the full orchestra. It was named the County Wind Band. A Glen Miller style course was run too, which led to auditions for the second Big Band 'The Oxfordshire Schools Big Band' founded by Patrick White, Mike Skitt and Jan Morter.

To promote the service, market its opportunities and celebrate its successes, The Piper, a publication about Oxfordshire's young musicians, was first published by Ian Meyrick in 1987. Three issues were produced each academic year, with the aim of keeping the County's young musicians in the public eye.

Also in 1987 Richard Hallam took over as Head of Service and Director of Music from Michael Evans, who had held the reigns between from 1981 and was widely acknowledged as an exceptional conductor of OCYO.

The first OCYO overseas tour was to Austria in 1988, including a performance in the International Festival in Vienna. Tours became an annual event for several OCMS ensembles, which over the years have visited numerous countries in Europe and

further afield (see page 20). In 1988 the Oxfordshire Senior Schools Orchestra (OSSO) was formed to replace the training orchestras that had previously taken place on an irregular basis. They met for holiday courses and in 1988 toured to Cork, Ireland. At home in Oxfordshire the County Youth Orchestra was now spoken of as the 'jewel in the crown' of the County, a standing that ensured the Music Service had (and continues to have) strong support from the County Council. In the early 1990s the Oxfordshire Schools Orchestra was formed for younger students, grades 3 – 5, to experience good orchestral playing as a training ground for OSSO. This provided a solid progression for orchestral playing.

From the beginnings of the Music Service right up to 1991, the service had no central base where both musical and administrative activities took place. By 1991, a move to Oxford School on Glanville Road saw the office and Music Centre activities come together for the first time. Although computers had been introduced in the 1980s, the office soon looked forward to the arrival of its first answerphone! Due to building works at Oxford School, the office then moved to Milham Ford School and the instruments could only be stored in large containers in the ground!

As late as 1989, pupils taking instrumental lessons paid only a nominal fee, but during the late 1980s and early 1990s substantial cuts in both local and national funding meant the Music Service needed to raise thousands of extra pounds each year to survive. Some counties had completely axed their Music Services but Oxfordshire met this challenge by offering group lessons, and increasing charges for Music Service activities, alongside remission policies for pupils in need.

The Friends of the Young Musicians' Association (FYMA) was formed in 1995 to support young people in Oxfordshire and neighbouring counties in pursuing their musical activities. It continues today, providing support and musical opportunity for young people (see page 23).

Other developments at this time included the establishment of more Area Music Centres, for example in Abingdon and the Music Service began to offer Music Therapy sessions. The Education Department's first job share saw the appointment of two primary music advisory teachers who supported teachers delivering the new National Curriculum (which now included music) by providing training, workshops and performance opportunities.

Primary schools were encouraged to work together to provide opportunities for massed choir performances in their area and on three occasions between 2001 and 2007 the County Music Service was invited to take massed choirs to perform in the Music for Youth Prom at the Royal Albert Hall. More than 1,800 children took part across these three events.

These are among the many high profile events organised by the Service for Oxfordshire young people both in the County and beyond. For example, in 2012, in celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, OCMS took over the Symphony Hall in Birmingham to showcase Oxfordshire's musical talent and ensembles played at a Royal Garden party in Henley attended by Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Oxfordshire has been awarded numerous national awards. The Local Authority Music Awards, that became the National Music Council Awards, presented diplomas

to Oxfordshire for several years with the major trophy being awarded in 2012. The Will Michael Jazz Award has also been won eight times by Oxfordshire since 2007.

In the first few years of the new millennium, a House Committee was established with a scrutinising and consultative role, recommending to the County Council overall policy for the service and working with the Director of Music to ensure its efficient management. The committee consisted of representatives from across the spectrum: parents, Music Service teachers, councillors, and headteachers. It also included two students, recognising the important voice of young people.

Due to the success of the Music Service and the strength of its Council support, a new home was established at the current site on Bayswater Road in 2003, paid for with a grant from the Arts Council which was matched by Oxfordshire County Council.

Some Oxfordshire primary schools took part in the national pilots for the Wider Opportunities scheme (which changed its name to First Access, then Whole Class Ensemble Tuition). The work undertaken by the County Music Service and other organisations nationally at this time led to a seismic change in music education. In 2011 the Government's National Plan for Music Education sought to address inequalities in music provision across the country and to ensure that every child should experience a rounded cultural education, including the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and to sing.

To provide the best possible music education across the country, Music Education Hubs were formed with lead organisations (often the county Music Service) responsible for ensuring that Government funding met the requirements of the new National Plan. The music education hub for Oxfordshire was formed in 2012 under the name Oxfordshire Education Music Partnership (OMEP). It brought even closer together a wide range of organisations with Oxfordshire County Music Service as lead partner.

For 75 years the Music Service has developed to accommodate changes in music, education, arts and technology and continues to offer opportunities equal to the best in the Country. The Service now employs 70 full time and part time instrumental and vocal teachers who visit nearly all the 265 Oxfordshire schools and teach in excess of 8,000 pupils each week in lessons, ensembles and other musical opportunities.

The range of instruments taught by Music Service teachers in whole class, group or individual lessons has expanded substantially over the past 75 years - from the early days of xylophones in the 1950s to a wider range of percussion, world music instruments, plastic instruments like the pbone, electronic keyboard, electric and classical guitars, bass guitar, fife, ukulele, saxophone and music technology - all alongside traditional orchestral instruments and singing.

OCMS now offers 34 after-school and Saturday morning musical activities, orchestras, groups, bands and choirs around the whole of Oxfordshire. The Centre for Music at Bayswater Road resounds with music six days a week. Long may it continue!