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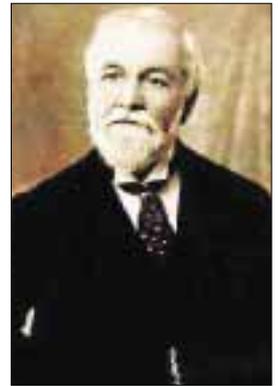


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RICH HISTORY: Bedford Musical Society Book of Words, November 27, 1906, (with permission of Bedford Choral Society) and left, Philip Henry Diemer - choir founder and conductor 1867-1900 (Blake and Edgar)

Celebrating 150 years of music

BY NICK SMITH
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LAST Sunday a staple of the town's musical history marked a milestone.

Bedford Choral Society held a concert at the Corn Exchange marking 150 years since their foundation to the day. The Higgins has now opened an exhibition to

mark the anniversary, celebrating the history of the society.

The exhibition highlights some of the key members of the society, from its founder, Philip Diemer, to current conductor Ian Smith, who is one year off becoming the longest serving conductor in the society's history.

The museum's keeper of

social history, Lydia Saul, is a long-standing member of the society and, along with Mr Smith, she has been instrumental in getting the exhibition together.

Ms Saul told *Bos*: "Ian spotted on our family tree in the Higgins House part of the gallery that Cecil Higgins' stepmother, Mary, was actually a member of the Bedford

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ON SONG: (L-R) Paula Grayson, choir volunteers, Lydia Saul of the Higgins, Mike Benson, choir historian, and Ian Smith, director of music and conductor



Musical Society, as it was then known.

"Cecil himself was a soloist at one of the early concerts, which was a nice connection.

"In our Bedfordians gallery we like to have a changing display of people who have had an impact on Bedford over the years and we really wanted to celebrate the people who were key in the society."

Featured exhibits include the music book from the first ever performance in 1867.

Most of the research was there in a handy package, thanks to the 25 years of hard work by member Michael Benson, who chronicled the history of the first

125 years of the society, titled Bedford's Musical Society: A History of Bedford Choral Society.

Mr Smith, who has been conducting for the society since 1985, said: "Most of the information we got came from Mike's book and the idea for the exhibition came from him writing it.

"We were originally going to hold the concert on April 1, but after noticing that April 30 was the anniversary of the society's founding, the members voted to change it to April 30."

Mr Benson said: "The biggest change since it was founded has been the people. In terms of how it is run, it is similar to how it was

when it was first founded."

On the research, which became the basis for the exhibit, Mr Benson said: "It took an extraordinary amount of research but the archives service were very helpful in letting me find the information.

"I started researching it after our 125th anniversary concert and I discovered then that we had celebrated a year early.

"A number of people said that the society was founded in 1866, when in reality it was 1887 and that was what really got me interested in the history."

The exhibition is expected to run until September and is free to view.

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