The following article appeared in *The Herald* newspaper on Friday, March 21, 1980

Waverley Singers celebrate 25 years

Farnham's Waverley Singers celebrate their silver jubilee this year and, as a highlight of the season, give a performance of Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" at the Princess Hall, Aldershot, on Saturday, March 29, at 7:30 pm.

Since their formation, the singers have performed most of the major choral compositions, but have kept Beethoven's glorious work for this jubilee occasion. It presents a challenge which they gladly take up and which will demonstrate they have come a long way from simple beginnings in 1955. As usual, they will be conducted by John Cotterill, one of their founders.

As the jubilee concert is something of a reunion occasion, the singers have engaged four soloists who have all appeared with them on previous occasions. Elizabeth Lane (soprano) and Henry Howell (tenor) both last sang with the choir in 1978, and Jean Temperley (contralto) only a year ago. Christopher Keyte (bass-baritone) is making a very welcome return for his fifth appearance with the Singers, having last sung with them in their performance of Bach's B Minor Mass in 1976.

The accompaniment will be by the Waverley Orchestra, who, on this occasion, will be led by Frances Mason. A well-known professional violinist, local audiences will remember her playing a year ago Bruch's' Violin Concerto No. 1 with the RAE Symphony Orchestra.

The beginning

Early in 1955, a group of members of the Old Girls Association of Farnham Girls Grammar School, all keen on singing, decided it would be pleasant if they had some singing at a forthcoming reunion. There were twelve of them, and they asked an old boy of Farnham Grammar School, John Cotterill, then a law student but who had organised musical events at the Castle Theatre for the theatre's Social Club, to conduct them. They enjoyed the experience so much that they decided to continue to meet — and the Waverley Singers were born.

But not immediately. However, as more girls joined, but who were not FGGS, they had to think of a name. At the time, they were having rehearsals at the home of one of their members, Rosemary Walker, in Waverley Lane - and Waverley seemed an apt title.

The group started to give concerts, but none of the singers realised that what they had begun would, 25 years later, have developed into a mixed choir of well over a hundred members with an impressive record of choral performances behind them.

At the end of 1955, they performed "Acis and Galatea" (Handel), augmenting their numbers with men, and in 1956 showed an adventurous spirit by presenting a new work by David Cox, "The Summer's Nightingale."

Difficult two years

In 1958, the choir went mixed, but the next two years were difficult. John Cotterill was still their conductor, but was called up for national service. He went into the RAF and, apart from 6 months at the Air Ministry, was away most of the time, and in 1959 was drafted to Germany for a year. Fortunately, during this trying time, Derek Bowtell, another old boy of the FGS and a close friend of John Cotterill, who sang with the choir, took over, otherwise the Waverley Singers would not have survived.

But they did, and in 1960 they gave their first major concert of a four-part choral work, Fauré's “Requiem", in Farnham Parish Church, once more under the baton of John Cotterill.

The choir now settled down to a programme of two concerts a year; today it is more likely to be three or four. From those early days, it has always been the policy to intersperse the standard choral repertoire with more modern works, such as Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" (1970), Walton's "Belshazzar’s Feast" (1975), and Stravinsky's "Symphony of Psalms" (1979). Of the more traditional works, their first performance of "The Messiah" was in Farnham Parish Church in November 1963 before a congregation of 900 people. In December 1969, they sang Bach's Christmas Oratorio in Guildford Cathedral.

The Waverley Singers prefer not to confine their concerts to any one hall or venue. They have sung at St Thomas-on-The Bourne, the Royal Garrison Church, Aldershot, Farnham Girls Grammar School, Farnham College, Salesian College, to name a few, and in later years have been performing at the Princes Hall, Aldershot. They first went there in October 1973 for a concert performance of Verdi's "Nabucco" In this, they were joined by the RAE Symphony Orchestra, another of the musical interests of John Cotterill.

Apart from the early days, when piano accompaniment was used, the singers have been accompanied by an orchestra composed of musicians known to John Cotterill. Today this has become the Waverley Orchestra with Sally Breeze as leader. In the past, leaders have been Kenneth Anderson and Patsy Cassidy.

So now, with a membership of 130, their orchestra, and the knowledge that they have performed most of the major choral works, the singers can justifiably feel that they have established themselves and they are now affiliated to the National Federation of Music Societies. The singers look to the future and more musical excitements. In the early days it was fun; it still is, combined with a dedication and a determination to give of their best in the performances of the works decided upon.

Jubilee reception

After the Jubilee concert there will be a reception in the Princes Hall where, naturally, a cake will be cut. Some of the founder members will be there. Mrs Molly Goddard (formerly Medhurst) will come from Bedford. As secretary of the FGGS Old Girls Association 25 years ago, she was mainly responsible for forming the choir with John Cotterill. The only founder member of the choir still singing is his wife Joan, whom he married in 1960.

Also at the reunion will be Mrs Goddard's successor as secretary, Mrs Pat Jenner, now living in Bournemouth. She is also going to sing with the choir on the Jubilee concert. The present secretary is Mrs Josephine Reader.

Earlier accompanists included Jill Vincent and Diana Beeken, but for 17 years now the Singers have been accompanied by Margery Wakefield.

The Singers have always been fortunate in engaging first-class soloists, and it gives them pleasure to recall that many well-established singers sang for them at the start of their professional careers.

The Silver Jubilee celebration would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of Hoar, Sanderson and Spooner, the local estate agents.

Like all voluntary musical societies, the Singers have to face financial problems, but a valuable way of meeting the challenge has been the introduction of patrons. Most organisations have a tie these days — so have the Singers. It was introduced for their

Jubilee season and incorporates their new logo design, for which a competition was held among members last year.

This lengthy article was accompanied by a number of photographs of the choir.

The first, from 8 November 1958, can be seen under the entry for the concert of that date. The second was an image of John Cotterill conducting the choir at an unknown concert. The third was a picture taken at the Princes Hall for a performance of Dyson's "Canterbury Pilgrims" in November 1978. The final one was the photograph taken in the foyer of the Castle Theatre for a Christmas concert in December 1955, which can be seen on the concert page for that event.

The review of the Jubilee concert on 29 March 1980 appeared in the *Farnham Herald* on 4 April. That edition also featured an account of the reception that took place after the concert. It went as follows:

"Singers" were first Waverley

The audience was welcomed to the concert by John Cotterill, the conductor, a position he has held from the inception of the Singers.

In expressing the choir's appreciation of the tremendous support they have received for their jubilee, he said there had been many, many messages of congratulation. They were especially indebted to Hoar, Sanderson and Spooner, the estate agents, who had sponsored the jubilee, and without whose assistance it would not have been possible to have had such a splendid celebration. Their thanks, too, were extended to the audience for their support and encouragement over the years; he knew that some of them that night had been with them from the start.

At the reception after the concert, it was appropriate that the toast of "The Waverley Singers" should be given by Mr George Baxter. It was while Mr Baxter was headmaster of the Farnham Grammar School that the choir came into being as the result of an idea from the Girls' Grammar School, with Molly Medhurst (now Mrs Goddard) as the prime mover, and in finding John Cotterill, at the Grammar School, someone who would conduct them.

Mr Baxter was introduced by one of his old boys, Mr Brian Daniels, an early male member of the Waverley Singers. "The girls always make the going," commented Mr Baxter, referring to the fact that it was from the FGGS that the idea of having a choir emanated. It was in 1955 that a group of them gave a concert, and what followed was local musical history. Mr Baxter did reveal, however, that at John Cotterill's instigation, the girls did, at their initial concert, whistle "The Happy Wanderer".

He was sure that at that time the choir did not realise how fortunate they had been in their choice of John Cotterill as conductor. He had brought them on through the years, first as a choir and then with an orchestra. He thought their performance of "The Messiah" in Farnham Parish Church was the watershed; they had had some wonderful performances since then, of which the finest example had been what they had heard that night.

Choice of Waverley

Waverley was a time-honoured name, continued Mr Baxter, and he would like to think that Berlioz would have been pleased and proud to know that his overture with that name had been chosen for the opening of the Silver Jubilee Concert. When the choir decided on the name, because they were practising in Rosemary Walker's house in Waverley Lane, they could not have realised that in 1973-74, with the change in local government, District II

would be given the name "Waverley". "This must be the only choir after which a district council has been named," quipped Mr Baxter.

He said they were terribly proud of the Singers and the orchestra and their record of 25 years; he thanked them for the pleasure and satisfaction their music had given over the years. "And thank you for tonight. It was a most stupendous work, and you did more than justice to it," said Mr Baxter, who, in proposing the toast to the Waverley Singers, wished them continued success in the next 25 years.

In thanking Mr Baxter for his encouragement, Mr John Cotterill said they also owed thanks to Beethoven, that they were privileged to do his work and had enjoyed doing it. He thanked again their sponsors, Hoar, Sanderson and Spooner; their soloists, who were also their friends - their performance that evening had inspired them all. He also thanked their orchestra and their leader, Frances Mason.

Mr Cotterill recalled that Molly Medhurst started the choir with him and also referred to the wonderful record of Margery Wakefield, who had been their accompanist for 17 years. He thanked the press for their support over the years, especially the Farnham Herald; their patrons, their audiences, his wife Joan, and their two sons for their forbearance.

Cake cut

There was a special celebration cake, iced by Julia Beadle, of Longlands, Frensham, and this was cut by Molly Goddard. She said that it was a very nostalgic occasion for her and, as a record of the event, she hoped they would accept a challenge cup, which she suggested should be awarded to a singer in a local music festival. There was also a surprise presentation to John Cotterill - a silver baton handed to him by choir member Pat Beer.