

Arthur Duggan MBE (1894 — 1970)



Musical Director 1924 — 1960

Arthur Duggan was born in Swansea, he studied the piano and violin from the age of eight. Within five years he was running an adult choir in Ferndale, and said, his spark for conducting was kindled by watching Frank Temple Evans of the Maritime Choir, Pontypridd, whom he idolized. Duggan conducted the Ferndale Philharmonic Mixed Choir, but took his path to fame as the founder conductor of Pendyrus Male Choir from 1924 until his resignation in 1960. Under his direction they carved an enviable reputation which included two wins at the Royal National Eisteddfod in 1935 and 1953. A man who defended political, cultural, and religious traditions, he was a natural leader who, despite the lack of formal education in high school or university, attained greatness. Distinctive in appearance, he was even more striking in personality, with qualities and virtues of a great actor, and the power to galvanize lethargy into life. Under his baton, Pendyrus thrived on competition-attaining first prize in each of its four attempts between 1924 and 1928. He took the choir to its first National Eisteddfod in 1928 and to 16 more between 1930 and 1959. Their first win came at Caernarfon in 1935 when the Eisteddfod President, David Lloyd George, remarked that “Arthur Duggan was the first Irishman to win the National”, and their second in Rhyl in 1953. In their other attempts they created something of a record in 2nd Prizes! Under his direction Pendyrus became a household name-synonymous with his. He was in great demand throughout Wales as a conductor of Cymanfaoedd Ganu, and toward the end of his career, travelled to Canada, to conduct a festival in Toronto. He was publicly embraced by the great Russian Bass, Chaliapin, at a concert in Cardiff in 1929, and Madam Clara Novello Davies presented him with a volume inscribed, “I do not wish to hear better singing this side of Heaven”. Through the long grey years of depression he led his people to find consolation in the allurements of perfection — forgetting their troubles, to form Pendyrus and become one of the World’s Greatest Choir’s. His contemporary, John Haydn Davies of Treorchy, called him “the doyen of Welsh conductors”. He retired as Director of Pendyrus in May 1960. He made his final home in Penderyn, a small village on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, just north of Aberdare, and died there on July 23rd 1970.

Arthur Duggan was awarded the MBE in 1954 for his services to Welsh Music