

## Northumberland County Council Community Chest Award to Werca's Folk

### Report on Choirs Meet Sedbergh, Cumbria 11-13 June 2010

"Dear Sandra (Kerr) & Werca's Folk,

What a wonderful weekend – and what wonderful singing – your praises continue to be sung by the good people of Sedbergh and beyond and your harmonies still ring out around the hills. You are all such wonderful people – real ambassadors for both Northumberland and for community choirs!"

*Quote from David Burbidge of Lakeland Voice who organised the Choirs Meet weekend and who is co-ordinating Werca's Folk visit to Slovenia.*



*Werca's Folk (left of group wearing purple and black) with the other Choirs.*

*Photograph by Teresa McQuillan*

The Choir had been invited to this weekend to meet up with Slovenian choirs who are to host them during their October visit to Slovenia. Unfortunately one of the Slovenian choirs and some choirs of other nationalities were unable to attend due to the economic crisis and disruption of flights caused of late by the "Ash Cloud".

The setting for our weekend of exchange of song and musical culture was the pretty village of Sedbergh set in the beautiful National Park of the Yorkshire Dales. Werca's Folk stayed in Howgills Bunk Barn which offered excellent hostel type accommodation about a quarter of a mile from the centre of the village.

Zrece, in Slovenia is twinned with Sedbergh, and their choir Pevke iz Brinjeve Gore stayed for the weekend, along with 30 members of Sounding It Out from Wiltshire led by Candy Verney and ourselves – Werca's Folk - led by the renowned singer-songwriter Sandra Kerr. On Friday evening all choirs gathered in the village People's Hall set alongside local playing fields and children's park surrounded by the picturesque meadows and dales. This was an initial

opportunity to get to know each other, share a meal, sing and hear of the format for the weekend. There was mutual admiration and praise for Lucia Marquart, David Burbidge's wife, who prepared and presented the excellent evening meals and lunches for between 60 and 100 participants for the duration of the weekend.

Pevke iz Brinjeve Gore, is a group of three sisters, a daughter and niece and, on this occasion, were joined by the latter's respective husbands who were also musicians. They entertained us with traditional songs of their country in the wonderfully haunting harmonies synonymous with Eastern European song. Their repertoire included songs of heritage, love, sorrow and in lighter mode, jovial drinking songs.



*Pevke iz Brinjeve  
Gore perform in the  
People's Hall,  
Sedbergh  
Photograph by  
Chrissie Buckley*

On Saturday we were joined for the day by Hum, Holler and Sing, a Lancastrian choir led by Jude Glendinning. It was a full and busy day during which choir leaders led all participants in an exchange of song and harmonies. Pevke iz Brinjeve, with the aid of Maja, their translator, undaunted, duly took their turn in teaching us some traditional songs. Diminutive in number they more than compensated for with their excellence, expertise, charm and patience in teaching 90 plus non-speaking Slovenians their harmonies and language.

En route to Howgills Bunk Barn, for lunch, all choirs walked through the village and gathered in the centre where each group performed a song of their choice for the wider community. During communal buffet lunch we were entertained with an impromptu demonstration of "One Man and his Dog" by a local farmer and his faithful collie shepherding their herd in adjoining farm land to another location! Not part of the pre-planned programme but another strand of heritage enjoyed not least by one of the Slovenians who, herself, was a farmer.

There was little evidence left of the abundance of excellent food consumed by many hungry singers and clearing up the aftermath left little time to change for a public concert in which all choirs were performing in the People's Hall later in the afternoon.

We were joined by two smaller local groups Kinderley and Cautly Carollers for the concert. It is evident that oral tradition continues in strength as songs of heritage from Cumbria, Lancashire, Slovenia, Northumberland, Wiltshire and further afield telling tales of mining, the sea, love, loss, war, hunting, nature and the environment rang out in harmonies both bold and gentle.



Hum, Holler and Sing perform  
Photograph by Chrissie Buckley

Following Saturday evening meal members of all choirs waded their way through piles of washing and wiping up while others reorganised the hall and swept tables and chairs aside to make way for a mixture of song and dance. British Ceilidh dances and song were intermingled with Slovenian song and dance. One such Slovenian dance required all participants, in pairs, to wend their way through continuous circles and arches. The dance was accompanied by song but as the dance progressed in to more complex patterns the melody remained, but our new found language skill failed. However, undaunted, the dance continued with much mirth proving, yet again, that music presents no language barrier and is a great aid in promoting the joining of ethnicities and cultures. Later in the evening resident choirs said goodbye to Hum, Holler & Sing before their return journey to Lancaster and all participants came together in a variety of farewell songs, taught to us by our leaders during the course of the day.



Werca's Folk perform at the People's Hall, Sedbergh  
Photograph by Graham Stacey

Sunday morning resident choirs came together for a final singing session in the People's Hall. We revisited songs learned the day before and with the aid of our able leaders and the Slovenian group, learned three new pieces. The rafters of the People's Hall rang out with the sound of farewell songs once more and standing in a large circle with participants holding hands prompted a variety of thoughts and emotion. It is a well known fact that music and song promotes both psychological and physical well being. Werca's Folk (and their leader) whole heartedly agree how fortunate the group is in having had this opportunity of being able to come together with others in a multicultural setting to share and bond in the pleasure of learning the universal language of music and song. We came away inspired and uplifted having formed new links and laid the foundation for our much anticipated visit to Slovenia later in the year.

Report by Penny Ruddick, Choir Member