History repeats itself

For many years we’ve sung for Christmas, some may well recall
Within our fine Cathedral or in nearby church or hall
(Though once or twice, it’s true to say, we didn’t sing at all).
But thanks to Medway Council, we’re in the Corn Exchange
Which, if you trace our history is very far from strange
We started in the Corn Exchange, in 1873
And we’re here again, for Dickens, in his bicentenary.

So history repeats itself; it’s quite like coming home
And that’s the theme I’ve chosen to inspire this little ‘pome’.

We’ve sung the works of living bards since we were first created
A lot of them were British and all highly celebrated
Sterndale-Bennett, Brahms and Verdi, Gounod, Bridge and Parry
Are among the earliest but, you know, we needn’t worry
For even in the last two years we’ve still maintained the cause
With Wilhelm, Dove and Rutter, Whitacre and Hawes.

So history repeats itself and that’s because we strive
To do the very best we can to keep sung music live

Our name at first was hardly brief; it took a while to say
“Rochester, Strood, Chatham and Gillingham”;
        add Rainham, and it’s Medway of today.
We sang in almost every hall before we settled down
To sing in our Cathedral, after other parts of town:
Chatham Town Hall, Corn Exchange and Gillingham Parish Hall
With rehearsals in the Guildhall: oh yes, we’ve seen them all.
Thus history repeats itself and it’s a funny thing
Although our name’s now Rochester, it’s for Medway that we sing.

We’ve celebrated Dickens’ birth in his 200th year
And his love of Rochester; and places he held dear
His heritage has great appeal, to laymen and to purists
And with “Dickens Experience”, for international tourists

Yes, history repeats itself, in customs we hold dear
And so it’s right and proper that we celebrate them here.

But let us not be solemn, as Christmas is awaited;
The season of goodwill to all will soon be celebrated.
And, as we think of presents, that we’ll place around a tree,
Let’s spare a thought for those who are less fortunate than we;
For those who lack material things, or the love of someone dear;
May the miracle of Bethlehem help bring them comfort, here.

Yes, may history repeat itself; what started in a manger
Inspire us all to charity, to friend and kin and stranger.

For charity means more than giving presents or big meals
A word of kindness, in distress, may be the thing that heals
And music, good for every soul, is what we know appeals.
So we singers of the RCS, who’ve come to entertain
All thank you for your company and hope you’ll come again.
Good friends may every heart be glad, your Christmas full of laughter
A Merry Christmas from us all, and many more hereafter!

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**Dickens:** born 7 Feb. 1812 in Portsmouth; died 8 June 1870 at Gad’s Hill

**RCS:** The Rev. Canon W H Nutter, Precentor of Rochester Cathedral, founded the "Rochester, Strood, Chatham and Gillingham Choral Society” on 29 July 1873. First concert: Mon 8 December 1873 in the Corn Exchange, to a “packed audiences”; other details unknown. Source: A History of Rochester Choral Society 1873-1973 by Vera L Black, who joined in 1923 and was Treasurer from 1940.