

Hyfrydol



No. 114

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

October 2023

The month ahead

Our only planned extra-curricular event for October will be Margaret Swan's funeral service on Friday 6 October at 2 pm. We are singing John Rutter's setting of *God be in my head*; the words date back to 1514.

Our rehearsal focus will be the Evensong service scheduled for the first Saturday evening in November. We shall be singing Thomas Atwood Walmisley's *Evening Canticles in D*, Psalm 22¹ and, probably, John Ireland's *Greater love hath no man*.

Eastern Summer Time begins at 2 am on Sunday 1 October. That signals that the men of the Swiz choir should leave their jackets and ties at home when the designated dress is "shirts."

September

The official opening of ARV's new Gordon Quarter, or Rodent Cutler village as we once knew it, was to have been held on Wednesday 6 September. An outbreak of Covid in the facility meant immediate deferral. A new date has yet to be announced.

Our 2023 Psalm Festival was presented on Saturday evening, 23 September. The church was packed! There was lots of congregational participation with spoken responsorial psalms, hymns based firmly on psalms, and Joseph Gelineau's setting of Psalm 23. Peter Hamilton descended from the organ console to coach the congregation in singing Gelineau's antiphon to wonderful effect. It seems almost inevitable that the festival will become an annual event.

We welcomed Arien He², the newest addition to our growing band of fine organists. We must offer thanks to Philip Swanton, principal organ teacher at Sydney Conservatorium of Music for steering Arien in our direction. One of the highlights of the Psalm Festival was Paul Green's presentation of Frances Allitsen's setting of Psalm 27, with both piano and organ accompaniment; Peter Hamilton on piano and Arien He on organ. Peter was so pleased with the result that he will find opportunities to use the combination again.

Teach me, O Lord

This motet is on our program for Sunday 1 October. It is by the Renaissance composer William Byrd.

Little is known of Byrd's origins and early life in London. He was a pupil and protégé of the organist and composer Thomas Tallis, and his first authenticated appointment was as organist at Lincoln Cathedral (1563) where the Swiz choir sang for a week in 2004. In 1572 Byrd returned to London to take up his post as a gentleman of the Chapel Royal, where he shared the duties of organist with Tallis.



The close personal and professional relationship between the two men had important musical consequences. In 1575, Queen Elizabeth granted them a joint monopoly for the importing, printing, publishing, and sale of music and the printing of music paper. The first work under their imprint appeared in that year; a collection of sacred chants dedicated to the queen; of the 34 motets, Tallis contributed 16 and Byrd 18.

In 1577, the same year that recusancy laws (the refusal to attend Anglican services) began to be enforced, Byrd and his family moved away from London to Harlington, which is very close to Heathrow, but was then a long way from the city. As a devout lifelong Roman Catholic, he probably preferred the greater privacy of living outside London. Yet, in spite of his close social contact with

¹ See last month's *Hyfrydol*.

² Say "a'Ryen Hay".

many other Catholics, some of whom were certainly implicated in treasonable activities, his own loyalty to the government was never questioned.

The death of Tallis in 1585 may have prompted Byrd to set his musical house in order, for in the next three years he published four collections of his own music: *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs of Sadnes and Pietie* (1588), *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (1589), and two further books of sacred chants (1589 and 1591).

The original publication date for *Teach me, O Lord* is not known. The text is taken from Psalm 119:

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm by far. Charles Spurgeon writes:

“It equals in bulk twenty-two psalms of the average length of the Songs of Degrees³. Nor is it long only; for it equally excels in breadth of thought, depth of meaning, and height of fervour. It is like the celestial city which lieth four square, and the height and the breadth of it are equal. Many superficial readers have imagined that it harps upon one string, and abounds in pious repetitions and redundancies; but this arises from the shallowness of the reader's own mind: those who have studied this divine hymn, and carefully noted each line of it, are amazed at the variety and profundity of the thought. Using only a few words, the writer has produced permutations and combinations of meaning which display his holy familiarity with his subject, and the sanctified ingenuity of his mind. He never repeats himself; for if the same sentiment recurs it is placed in a fresh connection, and so exhibits another interesting shade of meaning. The more one studies it the fresher it becomes. As those who drink the Nile water like it better every time they take a draught, so does this Psalm become the more full and fascinating the oftener you turn to it.”

It is said that Martin Luther prized this Psalm so highly, that “he would not take the whole world in exchange for one leaf of it.” Some great people have memorized the whole psalm and found great blessing in doing so:

- John Ruskin (19th century British writer);
- William Wilberforce (19th century British politician who led the movement to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire);
- Henry Martyn (19th century pioneer missionary to India);
- David Livingstone (19th century pioneer missionary to Africa);
- George Wishart was the Bishop of Edinburgh in the 17th century. Wishart was condemned to death for his faith. But when he was on the scaffold, he made use of a custom that allowed the condemned person to choose one psalm to be sung, and he chose Psalm 119. Before two-thirds of the psalm had been sung, his pardon arrived and his life was spared.

Psalm 119 is one of the acrostic psalms. They are not unusual; other psalms that exhibit an acrostic pattern are 25, 34, 37, 111, 112 and 145. There are other acrostic organisations within the Hebrew Bible, such as the description of the “wife of noble character” in Proverbs 31:10-31, and the entire book of Lamentations.

In most of the acrostic psalms, each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 119 is different. Rather than being considered a single psalm, it might be regarded as a collection of 22 small songs, one for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the eight lines of the first song begins with Aleph. Each of the eight lines of the second song begins with Bet, and so on.

Each line of the fifth song begins with the Hebrew letter He. Byrd took only six of its eight lines for his motet:

- ³³ Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes: and I shall keep it unto the end.
- ³⁴ Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law: yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart.
- ³⁵ Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein is my desire.
- ³⁶ Incline my heart unto thy testimonies: and not to covetousness.
- ³⁷ O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity: and quicken thou me in thy way.
- ³⁸ O stablish thy word in thy servant: that I may fear thee.

And then he added the Gloria.

Donald Flemming comments on this specific text: “For the psalmist, life is built around devotion to God’s word. He does not want to be sidetracked by trying to gain wealth or prestige”.

³ Or Songs of Ascents; the fifteen Psalms from 120 to 134.

We are fortunate that Byrd's original manuscript has been edited for us and bar lines have been added. Try to sing the song here shown in his own hand.

The editor was Edmund Fellowes, a Church of England clergyman and musical scholar who became well known for his work in promoting the revival of sixteenth and seventeenth century English music.

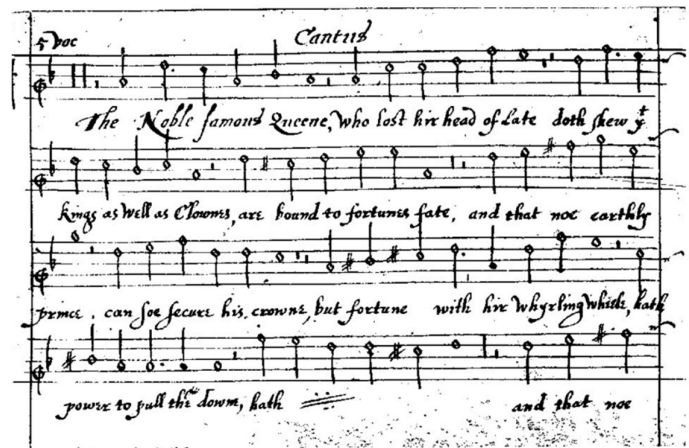


PLATE II
BRITISH MUSEUM ADD. MS 29401, FOL. 28v, SHOWING HANDS OF GROUP II

From a Salisbury traveler's diary

Monday 10 July



"Stuart spoke about Psalm 54 at the morning devotion which seems to work well in the small bar area. Breakfast, then coach to Old Sarum and the original cathedral, then Wilton House. Fine morning. Interesting getting the large coach around tight corners and roundabouts. After the house inspection – mostly the art works – we had a light lunch in the café, and an ice



cream. Back to the hotel in the bus, a short break, then a walk up to the Cathedral, rehearse and straight into the first Evensong, which was good, but not quite up to yesterday's standard set at St Thomas's Church. A complimentary drink at the hotel bar and an early night."

And some amplifications:

- Stuart Holman led morning devotions while the choir was in Salisbury. Each morning, a dozen or more of us met in the small bar area immediately before breakfast and Stuart discussed the psalm that we sang at Evensong that evening.
- Old Sarum is the site of the original settlement. The foundations of the first cathedral are visible in the lower right section of the illustration, within the walls of the Norman fortification.
- The inside of Wilton House was featured extensively as Clyvedon Castle, the home of the Duke of Hastings in the TV series *Bridgerton*. The portrait hall, hallway, and entrance hall all make appearances on screen. The drawing room and grand hall, meanwhile, stood in for chambers in the residence of another character, Lady Danbury, and the grounds were shot as a substitute for London's Hyde Park. Wilton House is also featured in nearly every episode of another Netflix series, *The Crown*, posing as Buckingham Palace. Wilton's Double Cube Room served as part of Her Majesty's family living quarters.
- The first Evensong service featured Peter Hamilton's *preces and responses*, Psalms 53 and 54 sung to chants by W Bayley and J Nares, and Thomas Walmisley's *Canticles in D*. The anthem was *Grant us Thy Peace* sung to music composed by Felix Mendelssohn.

Calendar for 2023

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Friday	6 October	2 pm	Swiz	Margaret Swan's funeral
Saturday	4 November	5 pm	Swiz	Evensong for All Saints
Saturday	2 December	5 pm	Swiz	Advent carols
Monday	11 December	Noon	RNSH	Carols
Sunday	17 December	9 am	Swiz	Lessons and carols
Sunday	24 December	9 am	Swiz	Morning Prayer
Sunday	24 December	10 pm	Swiz	Choral Communion
Monday	25 December	8 am	Swiz	Christmas Day Communion