

Hyfrydol



No. 117

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

February 2024

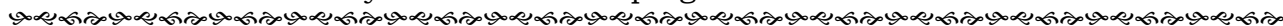
The year ahead

After a very pleasant break during which many choir members enjoyed augmenting the singing in the nave, the choir is back in harness from February. And quickly into rehearsals for our first Evensong service of the year; only just over a fortnight into the month.



December 2023

- Our annual gig at Royal North Shore Hospital went very well.
- We were strongly represented at the official opening of the new Gordon Quarter retirement village in Gordon.
- Many of us sang Messiah choruses in either Sydney Town Hall or Hornsby Catholic Cathedral (one or perhaps sang in both places!)
- The Lessons and carols service, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services at Swiz rounded out the busy December choir program.



O for a closer walk with God

The anthem Phil has selected for the Sunday after our Lenten Evensong is a sacred part song arranged by Charles V. Stanford, set to words written in the 18th century by William Cowper.

Cowper, pronounced “Cooper”, was one of the most widely read English poets of his day. He wrote mainly of the joys and sorrows of everyday life. He was a parishioner at the church in Olney, Buckinghamshire, where John Newton was the curate-in-chief; the two were great friends.

O for a closer walk was written on 9 December, 1769, during the illness of Cowper’s long-time friend and housekeeper, Mrs. Unwin. In a letter written the next day Cowper voiced his anxieties about her condition and about what might happen to him if she died:

Her illness has been a sharp trial to me. Oh, that it may have a sanctifying effect! . . . I began to compose the verses yesterday morning before daybreak, but fell asleep at the end of the first two lines; when I awoke again, the third and fourth were whispered to my heart in a way which I have often experienced.

The text was published in 1772 in a collection of psalms and hymns. It was revised and republished in 1779 in the *Olney Hymns*. There it had the heading “Walk with God” and included a reference to Enoch in Genesis 5:24.

Olney Hymns was the combined work of John Newton and Cowper. The collection was written for use in Newton’s rural parish, which was made up of relatively poor and uneducated followers. Newton’s *Amazing Grace* was also first published in that same 1779 edition.

During the 19th century, a tune by John Bacchus Dykes named *Beatitudo* seems to have been commonly used with Cowper’s words. It is printed in *Hymns for Today’s Church* (HTC No. 240), but not with Cowper’s text. Another popular tune was the one named *Caithness*, from the old 1635 *Scottish Psalter*. This the setting used in HTC (No. 368)¹.

Caithness is the tune on which Stanford based his arrangement of the hymn. Although well known as a free-standing anthem, *O for a closer walk with God* was originally designed to accompany (as an optional concluding statement) the last of Stanford’s *Six Bible Songs*, Op. 113, *A Song of Wisdom*.

¹ The text used in HTC No. 368 bears little resemblance to Cowper’s original poem. It has been loosely paraphrased and carries the ominous warning “© in this version Jubilate Hymns.”

The text for *A Song of Wisdom* comes from the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach), chapter 24:

- 3 I came forth from the mouth of the Most High,
and covered the earth like a mist.
 - 4 I dwelt in high places,
and my throne is in a pillar of cloud.
 - 5 Alone I compassed the circuit of heaven
and walked the depths of the abyss.
 - 6 In the waves of the sea and in all the earth,
and over every people and nation I got a possession.
 - 7 With all these I sought rest.
- Etc.

Using three verses from Cowper's original hymn, Stanford shaped a choral fantasia around the melody in which the intricacies of harmony, counterpoint, phrase length and organ accompaniment are manipulated with increasing dexterity.

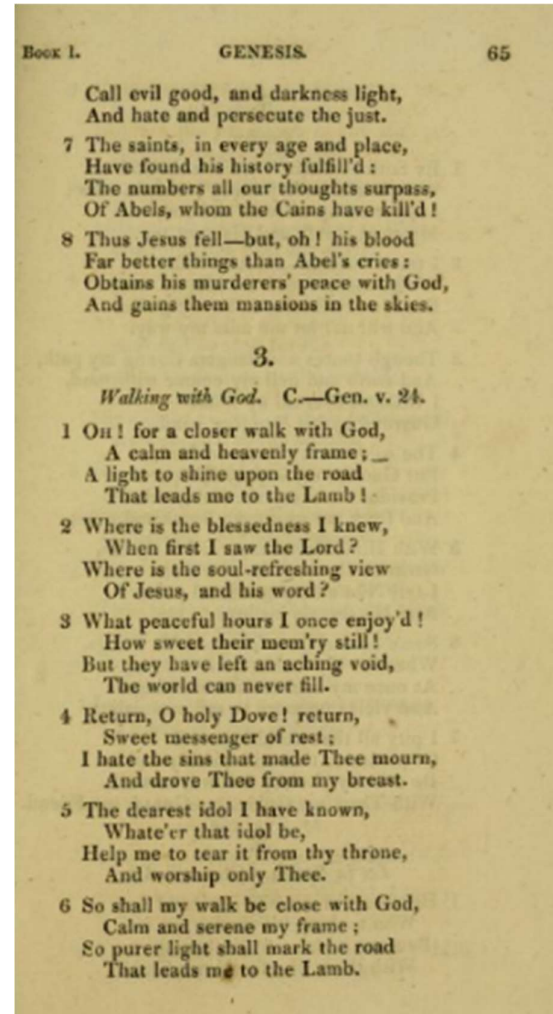
**St Peter and St Paul
Anglican Church, Olney²,
Buckinghamshire**



He chose verses 1, 4 and 6:

O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heav'nly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!
Return, O holy Dove, return!
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn
And drove thee from my breast.
So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So pure a light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.

Cowper's full text, as it appears in *Olney Hymns*



Psalm 6

This is the psalm chosen for our Lenten Evensong.

- 1 O Lord rebuke me not in thine indignation: neither chasten me in thy displeasure.
- 2 Have mercy upon me O Lord for I am weak: O Lord heal me for my bones are vexed.
- 3 My soul also is sore troubled: but Lord how long wilt thou punish me?
- 4 Turn thee O Lord and deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercy's sake.
- 5 For in death no man remembereth thee: and who will give thee thanks in the pit?
- 6 I am weary of my groaning, every night wash I my bed: and water my couch with my tears.
- 7 My beauty is gone for very trouble: and worn away because of all mine enemies.
- 8 Away from me all ye that work vanity: for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.
- 9 The Lord hath heard my petition: the Lord will receive my prayer.
- 10 All mine enemies shall be confounded and sore vexed: they shall be turned back and put to shame suddenly.

² Only in England! – “Olney” has a silent “l”. Say “Oh-nee.”

Charles Spurgeon, the noted Victorian era preacher tells us that:

“This Psalm is commonly known as the first of the Penitential Psalms, (the other six are Psalm 32; Psalm 38; Psalm 51; Psalm 102; Psalm 130; Psalm 143) and certainly its language well suits the voice of a penitent, for it expresses at once the sorrow, (verses 3, 6 & 7), the humiliation (verses 2 & 4), and the hatred of sin (verse 8), which are the unfailing marks of the contrite spirit when it turns to God. The title of this Psalm is “To the chief Musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith (*1 Chronicles 15:21*), A Psalm of David,” that is, to the chief musician with stringed instruments. Some think it refers to the bass or tenor key, which would certainly be well adapted to this mournful ode. But we are not able to understand these old musical terms, and even the term “Selah” still remains untranslated. We probably lose very little by our ignorance, and it may serve to confirm our faith. It is a proof of the high antiquity of these Psalms that they contain words, the meaning of which is lost even to the best scholars of the Hebrew language. Surely these are but incidental (accidental I might almost say, if I did not believe them to be designed by God), proofs of their being, what they profess to be, the ancient writings of King David of olden times.

“You will see that the Psalm is readily divided into two parts. First, there is the Psalmist's plea in his great distress, reaching from the first to the end of the seventh verse. Then you have, from the eighth to the end, quite a different theme. He tunes his note to the high key of confidence, and declares that God has heard his prayer, and has delivered him out of all his troubles.”

We sing the psalm to an Anglican Chant composed by “M Camidge.”

M Camidge



Three generations of the Camidge family supplied York Minster with organists for 103 years. The first, John Camidge (1734–1803) was a composer and organist at York Minster from 1756. He gave Matthew, his sixth son, his early musical training.

Matthew Camidge (1764 – 1844) succeeded his father as organist at York Minster. He was a well-known local musician in Northern England, famous for his organ playing and conducting oratorios. He is said to have been the first to teach the cathedral choristers to sing from notes; previously all the services had been learnt by ear. It is to one of Matthew’s compositions that we shall be singing Psalm 6.

Matthew’s son, another John (1790 – 1859), was also organist of York Minster (1842–1848). He suffered a paralytic stroke while playing the organ in 1848 and never played again. Like his father and his grandfather, he is best known as a composer of chants.



Calendar for 2024

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Thursday	1 February	8 pm	Swiz	First choir rehearsal
Saturday	17 February	5 pm	Swiz	Lenten Evensong
Thursday	22 February	7:30 pm	Swiz	Messiah rehearsals begin
Saturday	23 March	6:30 pm	Swiz	Messiah presentation
Sunday	31 March	9 am	Swiz	Easter Day Communion

A request from the Chief Librarian

Please, may we have all of the Christmas, and any older, music back. A stock-take is in progress and it will be meaningless if choristers hold onto copies of music. The returns box is always available, and it actually likes being quite full after a Sunday service, or other choral event.

The only music you need to keep in your black folders are:

- Peter Hamilton's *Communion Service*
- Peter Hamilton's *Evensong responses*
- John Rutter's *A Clare Benediction*
- John Rutter's *The Lord Bless you and keep you*

All other sheet music is returnable.

Please hold onto copies of any, or all, of the following that may have been issued to you:

- Church Anthem Book*
- Hymns for Today's Church*
- Flexible Anthems*
- Descants* (sopranos only)
- Pasticcio*
- Blue folder holding contemporary songs

Many of us paid for our own copies of collections, such as the *Flexible Anthems* book, *Messiah* and *Opera Choruses*. Very occasionally, someone retires, or otherwise stops singing with us. We are most grateful when such people donate their copies of these collections to the choir library. And so too are our newer members who then have quick access to those resources.

