

Hyfrydol



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St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

May 2025

May

This month we work towards the presentation of Evensong on the final Saturday. The anthem will be Croft's *God is gone up with a merry noise*. Phillip has signalled an expansion of our canticle repertoire; we shall be singing *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* in D by George Dyson. It will be the 23rd setting of the Evening Canticles in our quite extensive choir library.

Copies of the principal work for our Foundation concert in August have also been distributed – *Trial by Jury*. That will really be a change of style for the St Swithun's Choir!

Last month

The Easter program was as busy as always, just a little later than usual this year. We sang a very healthy slice of Handel's *Messiah* to a comfortably full church, and everyone stayed on for refreshments afterwards. Thanks to organist Peter, director Phil, to the home-grown soloists, Eleanor Gilkes, Louise Kearns, Suzanne Linquist, Amanda Drake, Belinda Robinson, Don Mayes, Peter Gilkes, Paul Green and Phillip Linquist; to the two trumpet players, Raphael Harvey and Matthew Hyam, and to all those friends and family members who augmented the choir bringing the final number of singers up to 40. And thanks also to the regular members of the choir who sang their hearts out on the night. Eleven annual performances of the work definitely make it a tradition.

The Good Friday service also warrants a special mention for the quality of its music. A special mention also for the reprise of *Worthy is the Lamb* on Easter Day.

We all needed a break after the Easter work. Phillip and Suzanne took theirs over the Anzac long weekend. Peter Gilkes directed us for the Anzac Service on Sunday 27 April which included the singing of Malcolm Archer's *For the fallen*. Raphael Harvey returned to play the *Last Post* and *Reveille (Rouse)*.



George Dyson

Phil has programmed Dyson's *Evening Canticles* for the Evensong Service at the end of this month – an addition to our already rather impressive repertoire.

The following are edited extracts from a biographical sketch by Lewis Foreman, a musicologist and author of books specialising in British music:

George Dyson came from a working-class background in Halifax, West Yorkshire, the son of a blacksmith. Although from a poor family in the industrial north, Dyson's parents were musical and encouraged him as an organist in the local church.

The young Dyson became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists at the age of sixteen, and he won an open scholarship to the Royal College of Music (RCM) in 1900. Despite his

background, Dyson was to become the voice of public-school music and later Director of the RCM, the first College-trained musician to do so (a fact of which he was very proud). At the RCM, Dyson became a pupil of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford then at the height of his influence as a composition teacher.

Little of Dyson's early music had been thought to have survived, but in 2001 the discovery of an engaging and romantic *Cello Sonata* has reminded us that he was an avid composer from the outset. In 1904, he won the Mendelssohn Scholarship, the award intended to help promising young composers travel abroad, and at the instigation of Stanford he went to Italy, later journeying on to Vienna and Berlin where he met many of the leading musicians of the day, including Strauss.

It was thanks to the influence of Sir Hubert Parry, Director of the RCM, that on returning to England, and needing to find a job, Dyson became Director of Music at the Royal Naval College, Osborne. Dyson soon used this experience to move on to Marlborough College, but on the outbreak of war in 1914 he enlisted, his war experiences being an interlude rather



than a major turning point in his musical development. During the war he became celebrated for his training pamphlet on grenade warfare, which he produced as brigade grenadier officer of the 99th Infantry Brigade, and which was widely disseminated.

Dyson saw action in the trenches. In a letter dated 5 December 1915 he vividly describes the life he was living at this time. 'We are continually under shellfire . . . and at this moment he has unfortunately caught a squad of men in the open outside with appalling results. Our own guns are blazing away like mad, so that you can't hear yourself think . . . The trenches are simply vile in this weather. Between knee-deep and thigh-deep in mud, in addition to the havoc wrought by the Bosch.' Inevitably, in due course he was invalided out, and in his diary Parry writes in shocked terms when he saw Dyson back in College, a shadow of his former self. Later, Dyson worked in the newly-founded Air Ministry where he realised the march *RAF March Past* that Henry

Walford Davies had sketched in short score. Dyson's wartime experiences surely meant that when over 20 years later he started work on his major choral work *Quo Vadis*, he wrote from a powerful inner vision: he had seen hell first hand.

In 1920 Dyson became more widely known as a composer when his *Three Rhapsodies* for string quartet, revised from earlier works written before the War soon after his return from the continent, were chosen for publication under the Carnegie UK Trust's publication scheme. He took up the threads of his earlier working life when he was appointed to Wellington College, and he also became a professor at the Royal College of Music. It was at this time that he produced his book *The New Music*, widely admired in its day for its learning and apparently commonsense view.

Around the end of the war Dyson wrote many short choral pieces and in 1920 he completed a children's suite for small orchestra after poems by Walter de la Mare called *Won't You Look Out of Your Window* (later renamed *Suite after Walter de la Mare*) which had a notable success at the 1925 season of Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts when Dyson himself conducted.

In 1924 Dyson moved to Winchester College where he enjoyed possibly the most productive part of his life as a composer. At Winchester, as Director of Music he was organist and had a choir and an orchestra and also an adult choral society. It was for these forces that he started writing music, and for them he developed choral music of a tuneful vigorous cast. (It was at this time that his *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* in D were composed – Ed.)

He was commissioned by the Three Choirs Festivals to compose pieces, and for Hereford in 1933 he produced *St Paul's Voyage to Melita*. Other Festivals soon followed, and *The Blacksmiths* was written for Leeds in 1934, and then *Nebuchadnezzar* for Worcester in 1935.

Dyson was not only a choral composer - there were also orchestral works. These included a suite for cello and orchestra in 1936 and a symphony in 1938, a symphony full of glorious pageantry.

For the 1939 Three Choirs Festival Dyson had been commissioned to write what we know as the first part of *Quo Vadis*, though the festival was cancelled on the outbreak of war in September 1939. In the event it would not be heard until near the end of the war, and was first performed in London's Royal Albert Hall and then at Hereford in September 1946, and as part of the complete work in 1949. This is by a long way Dyson's most ambitious score.

During that war Dyson, as Director of the Royal College of Music, kept the college open and functioning, even sleeping at the office, and he remained there until 1952. After his retirement he enjoyed a remarkable Indian summer of composition, though by this time his music was beginning to sound 'old hat' to some and although it all achieved publication and performance at the time, it did not have quite the immediate following of his earlier scores.

Dyson died in his home in Winchester in 1964, aged 81 years.

God is gone up with a merry noise

This is the anthem for Evensong. The words are from

Psalm 47, vv. 5-7.

God is gone up with a merry noise,
And the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.
O sing praises, sing praises unto our God,
O sing praises, sing praises unto our King.
For God is the King of all the earth,
Sing ye praises with understanding.

William Croft, the composer of the music to which we sing Miles Coverdale's version of Psalm 47 above, lived 300 years ago, during the reign of the first King George. From very early in his life he was a chorister at the Chapel Royal under John Blow, who exerted a very strong influence over all composers of this period from Purcell forwards.

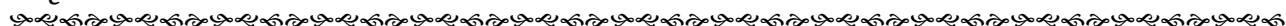
At the age of twenty-two Croft became Organist of St. Anne's, Soho, and in the same year became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal.

A year later he became joint Organist of the Chapel Royal with Jeremiah Clarke, assuming sole responsibility in 1707 on the death



of Clarke. In 1708 he succeeded his master, John Blow, as Organist of Westminster Abbey and Master of the Children and Composer to the Chapel Royal, retaining these positions until his death in 1727, aged 46. He was buried in Westminster Abbey in the north aisle, where his monument can still be seen.

Croft is perhaps best remembered today for his church music, perhaps most noticeably for his hymn tune *St Anne* to which the world now sings *O God, our help in ages past*. Another of his most outstanding contributions is his *Funeral Sentences*. The seven sentences themselves are from the Book of Common Prayer and are verses from various books of the Bible, intended to be said or sung during an Anglican funeral. The Sentences were sung at George Frederic Handel's funeral in 1759, and have been included in every British state funeral since their publication. They were used at the funerals of Winston Churchill, Diana Princess of Wales, Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, Baroness Thatcher, Prince Philip, and Queen Elizabeth II in 2022.



Choir Calendar for 2025

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Sat	31 May	5 pm	Swiz	Ascension Evensong
Sat	14 Jun		All Saints, Bathurst	Celebrating Psalms
Sun	15 Jun		All Saints, Bathurst	Two services
Sun	22 Jun		Swiz	Huguenot annual service
Fri	1 Aug			RSCM Midwinter Dinner
Sat	23 Aug		Swiz	Foundation concert
Sat	13 Sept	5 pm	Swiz	Evensong
Wed	24 Sep	6:15 pm	St James, King Street	Evensong
Sat	18 Oct		Swiz	Celebrating Psalms
Sun	26 Oct		St Albans, Leura	Celebrating Psalms
Sat	29 Nov	5 pm	Swiz	Advent Evensong
Sun	21 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Lessons & carols
Wed	24 Dec	10 pm	Swiz	Christmas Eve service
Thu	25 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Christmas Day service

Some of the fixtures (those away from home) in the above table are still to be confirmed.

