

This month

Advent is nearly upon us. We shall be reprising a couple of carols from Benjamin Britten's "Ceremony" – *This little babe*, and *Balulalow*, so choristers hold onto the books please.

We have an Advent Evensong on the Saturday immediately before Advent Sunday. Phil has programmed Stanford's *Evening Canticles in Bb* and the anthem from Felix Mendelssohn's unfinished work *Christus: Then Shall a Star from Jacob Come Forth*.

The list of carols on the rehearsal schedule for the Christmas season is quite long, but there will only be the odd cob-web to dust off.

Last month – October

The Foundation concert for 2022 – Britten and Britain

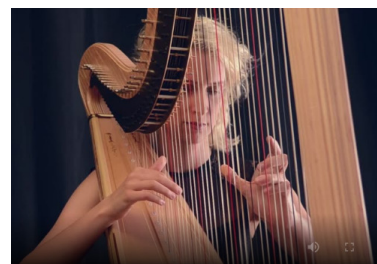


We entered the arena sedately, to the steadily building strains of Mr Handel's great Coronation anthem *Zadoc the priest*. Dressed head to toe in black with a flash of red around our necks, only the gauchest onlooker would have likened us to a geriatric New Zealand national rugby team. Very pleasingly, the church was full. In the first half we sang a program from our repertoire of the big numbers by English composers. After a brief interval during which Georgia Lowe moved her harp into position, the ladies returned to the

field, processing and singing *Hodie Christus natus est*, the Gregorian antiphon to the Christmas *Magnificat* and the opening chorus in the *Ceremony of Carols* by Benjamin Britten.

The language of the remaining movements is the English of the so-called late Middle Ages. It is unfamiliar to twenty-first century ears. Richard Kaan provided full text of all the movements for the audience.

The harp accompaniment was played by Georgia Lowe. Georgia's CV may be read on <https://georgialowe.com>. We note that she hasn't included Britten in her extensive repertoire, but we can say that, after this concert, she has very good reason to add his name to the list.



Our conductor, Peter Gilkes, seemed very pleased with the overall result, and so was the audience.

We must acknowledge and thank our two directors, Phillip Linqvist and Peter Gilkes, our accompanist, Peter Hamilton, trumpeters Ben Short and Andrew del Riccio, and Andrew Bell on timpani. Also those who catered for the post-concert supper. And Stuart Holman who provided the running commentary for the audience and, importantly, gave the choir some brief gasping space between items.

We understand that the parish Cultural Foundation was also happy with the result. A full church meant that it benefitted financially from the evening.

And so to some comments on two of the *Ceremony* pieces.

Wolcum Yole

Was this the earliest carol to feature the Twelve Days of Christmas? Benjamin Britten took the text from *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, edited by Gerald Bullett, published in 1933.

Searching for an earlier source of this fifteenth century carol, we have found the earliest extant reference is a manuscript held by the British Library in London. The words were written by Thomas Ashwell, an English composer of the Renaissance period (born circa 1478 – died after 1513 (possibly as late as 1527)).

There are no leaping lords, swimming swans or partridges in the piece, but there are very direct references to the Christian feast days that occur in those twelve days between 25 December and 6 January.

“Yole” (Yule) is the old Anglo-Saxon word for Christmas; the whole of the first verse deals with the birth of Christ.

Verse two is packed with references: first, the tenors welcome St Stephen the martyr and St John the Apostle, whose feast days are 26 December and 27 December respectively. Then the altos welcome “Innocents every one” – the children murdered at the command of Herod when he learnt of the birth of Jesus. Their feast day is 28 December. Then follows closely a reference to the Twelfth Day – Epiphany, 6 February, the day on which Jesus was revealed to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi from the East. Sopranos follow with a welcome to Thomas à Becket, murdered in 1170 at the invitation of King Henry II. His feast day is 29 December. And then comes the welcome to the New Year on 1 January.

Verse three commences with “Candlemas” and “Queen of Bliss”, the blessing of the candles, the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on 2 February. Candlemas commemorates the ritual purification of Mary, 40 days after the birth of her son Jesus. This day also marks the ritual presentation of the baby Jesus to God in the Temple at Jerusalem.

The carol concludes with a rousing welcome to all the aforementioned saints and to “all who are here” to another year!



Adam lay ybounden

No-one knows who wrote the text of *Adam lay ybounden*. The only existing copy is held by the British Library in London. The manuscript has been dated by the Library to around 1400; library researchers believe it to be the work of a wandering minstrel. It retells the story of the fall of man according to Genesis chapter 3.



Single surviving manuscript, source of *Adam lay ybounden* held by the British Library.

While it was believed to be a song text, no musical setting from the 15th century survives. But there are multiple modern choral settings. Our *Carols for Choirs* collection has one composed by Peter Warlock in 1922 which we have sung in the distant past. There is evidence that another, by Boris Ord, was once in our library, but it seems to have vanished.

And there is the version by Benjamin Britten that we have just sung in his *Ceremony of Carols*.

According to mediæval theologians, Adam was supposed to have been held with other patriarchs in ‘limbus patrum’ (the afterlife condition of those who died in sin without being immediately assigned to Hell) until the time of Christ’s crucifixion (the ‘4000 winter’).

The second verse tells of the Fall of Man following Adam’s temptation by Eve and the serpent. John Speirs¹ suggests that there is a tone of astonishment, almost incredulity in the phrase ‘and all was for an apple’, noting ‘an apple, such as a boy might steal from an orchard, seems such a little thing to produce such overwhelming consequences. Yet so it must be because clerks say so. It is in their book (probably referring to the Vulgate Bible itself)’.

The third verse suggests the subsequent redemption of man through the birth of Jesus Christ; his mother Mary was to become the ‘Queen of Heaven’ as a result, and thus the song concludes on a positive note.

¹ *Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957, pp.65–66)

Some may baulk at the song's suggestion that man's fall was a reason to praise God, but must agree that if the apple had not been taken, then there would have been no reason for God to send us His Son. God is the maker of everything and he bestowed on mankind the ability to choose between good and evil. It is up to us, with His help, to choose the right path.

There are other texts on the same manuscript on which *Adam lay ybounden* was recorded. We note one in particular: *I syng of a mayden*. Britten used this one also in his *Ceremony of Carols*; the one headed *No. 5 As dew in Aprille*.

Salisbury 2023

The travelling party has been expanded again with news that the Director of music at Goulburn Cathedral, Barbara Griffin, will be joining us in Salisbury. And we welcome her to readership of *Hyfrydol*.

Louise asks that travellers who wish to be met at Heathrow on the morning of Thursday, 6 July 2023 let her know details of their flight and expected arrival time at Heathrow. We need this information because our chartered coach can only enter the terminal to pick people up when the last of our flights has actually arrived.

Have you checked the expiry date on your passport lately? Remember that it will need to have 6 months currency remaining when you return to Australia.

Please check your choir music library and locate the little booklet compiled for our aborted previous trip to Salisbury. The title of the booklet is **Pasticcio**. We shall be resurrecting it for the 2023 trip. There are a few spares in the library for newer choir members, but not enough to re-issue to those who already should have a copy but might have lost it!

The 'specials' calendar for 2022

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Saturday	26 November	5:30 pm	Swiz	Advent Evensong
Sunday	18 December	9 am	Swiz	Lessons and carols
Saturday	24 December	10 pm	Swiz	Christmas Eve
Sunday	25 December	8 am	Swiz	Christmas Choral Communion

Add to this schedule possible carols on Bannockburn Oval, lessons and carols at local nursing homes and a lunchtime concert at RNS Hospital at dates and times still to be fixed.

2023

Mon -Sun	10 - 17 Jul 2023		Salisbury	Choir in residence
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Correspondence

Remember when Louise used to disappear for a weekend occasionally, then re-appear with a winner's medal for some extreme sport, a fifteen hundred metres run or a dragon boat race somewhere in the world? She was missing again one weekend in October when she attended the 2022 Corporate Games meet at Olympic Park. It was a particularly wet weekend. She reports that "I was entered in the athletics but that event was cancelled and so I entered the women's open table tennis singles and won the silver medal." Is there no stopping this girl?!

And we had this message from another of our choristers:

One day God was looking down at Earth and saw all of the wicked behaviour going on. He sent one of his angels to earth to look into it. When the angel returned, he told God, "Yes, it is bad on earth; 95% are misbehaving and only 5% are not."

God was not pleased so he decided to e-mail the 5% that were good because he wanted to encourage them and give them a little something to help keep them going.

The chorister asked us: "Do you know what the e-mail said?"

Sure that it was a trick question, we had to reply, NO.

Her response: "Okay, I was just wondering because I didn't get one either."