

Hyfrydol



No. 132

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

June 2025

June

This month's extracurricular service will be the annual Huguenot service on Sunday 27 June. We have been contributing to this event since at least 2013, when it was held in Scots Presbyterian Church, and possibly even before that. The service moved to St Swithun's in 2016 and has been held here ever since. Once a year, the Huguenot Society puts on the afternoon tea, and we appreciate it greatly.

Last month

The afternoon of Saturday 31 May was rather chilly which seemed to keep many of our regular Evensong followers away. We had a good balanced choir for the Ascension service, but only about 30 in the congregation. The introit was composed by Thomas Tallis – *If ye love me, keep my commandments*. anthem was Croft's *God is gone up with a merry noise*. The canticles were composed by Orlando Gibbons, not by George Dyson as we indicated in last month's *Hyfrydol*. Phillip chose a more familiar set, rather than attempt to teach a new *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* in the short time available. The single chant to Psalm 110 was the work of J Blow. The only modern work in the service was the sung vesper which was Sir John Rutter's *Clare Benediction*.

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Evensong music

I was interested to note that most of the composers of the music we sang at the Ascension Evensong were from the same era, or so I imagined. Before getting too excited, I thought I should check. Just as well I did, because I was wrong. The chart shows just how wrong.

	MONARCHS			COMPOSERS					
AD	Tudor								
1500									
1510	Henry VIII	(1509-47)		Tallis					
1520				(1505-85)					
1530					Byrd				
1540	Edward VI	(1547-53)			(1543-1623)				
1550	Mary	(1553-58)							
1560	Elizabeth	(1558-1603)							
1570									
1580						Gibbons			
1590						(1583-1625			
1600		Stuart							
1610		James	(1603-25)						
1620									
1630		Charles	(1625-49)						
1640							Blow		
1650	(Commonwealt	h)				(1649-1708)		
1660		Charles II	(1660-85)					Purcell	
1670								(1659-95)	Croft
1680		James II	(1685-88)						(1679-1727)
1690		William III	(1688-1702)						
1700		Anne	(1702-14)						
1710			Hanover						
1720			George	(1714-27)					
1730									

The introit was *If Ye love me* by Thomas Tallis. It dates from about 1550 when Edward VI was on the throne of England.

The canticles were by Orlando Gibbons. They were first published in 1641, some years after his death. Tallis and Gibbons might be said to have been Tudor composers. Gibbons would have known of Tallis, but Tallis wouldn't have known of Gibbons – Gibbons was still a baby when Tallis died.

The single psalm chant was composed by "J Blow" – John, not Joe. John Blow was an English composer and organist and is known as the most significant English composer of his time. Blow's dramatic masque, *Venus and Adonis*, was one of the finest stage works written to a text in English and this work became an example for Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Blow was a master composer for commemorative events as well as all genres of English sacred and secular vocal music. His pupils included Henry Purcell and William Croft.

In 1669, at the age of twenty, he became the organist of Westminster Abbey, a prestigious position that gives testament to his skills as keyboardist. A short while later he began performing on the virginal at the royal court. Around this time, he took on a young Henry Purcell as his student. William Croft was another of his students. Blow was replaced at Westminster Abbey in 1679 by his student Purcell, but resumed his post there in 1695 after the untimely death of Purcell.

Dr John Blow died in October 1708, at the age of 60, and is buried under the north aisle in Westminster Abbey.

I wrote at length of Croft, who composed the anthem, in last month's Hyfrydol.

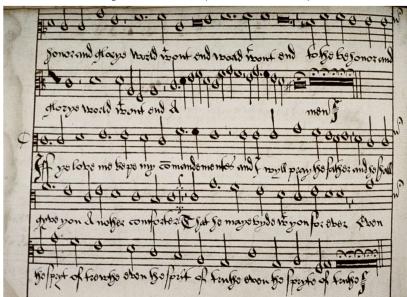
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Blow and Croft were not, therefore, contemporaries of either Tallis or Gibbons, so my original impression was totally misplaced.

BPW

If ye love me, Thomas Tallis (1505-1585)

If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may 'bide with you forever, e'en the sp'rit of truth. (John 14:15-17)



If Ye Love Me in the Wanley Partbooks of c. 1548-1550 (staves 3-5, what is now the soprano part)

How difficult would it have been to sing from the partbooks of old; no bar lines and without any indication of what the other voice parts were singing?

A biography of Tallis published by the magazine *Gramophone* (www.gramophone.co.uk) reads:

Thomas Tallis can fairly be said to be the first important English composer, though little is known of his life. He held a succession of posts as organist, most notably at Waltham Abbey in Essex (until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540) before joining the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal from about 1543. He remained there for the rest of his life, serving under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I. In 1572 William Byrd (40 years his junior) joined Tallis in the Chapel Royal, forming

Thomas

one of music's earliest great partnerships: they became joint organists of the Chapel and, in 1575, were granted the sole right by Queen Elizabeth to print music in England. Their first publication was a joint venture – a volume of *Cantiones sacrae* to which each contributed 17 motets. Tallis spent the last years of his life in Greenwich, described in 1577 as 'verie aged'. His epitaph reads: 'As he did live, so also did he die, in mild and happy sort (O! happy man)'.

Plaque in Waltham Abbey

Most of Tallis's music is, not surprisingly, for the church and his historic importance is in being one of the first composers to write for the Anglican service, the composer who bridged the transition from the Roman Rite. Why important? Because the English church-music tradition is among the richest in music history. Though most of the texts Tallis chose to set are in Latin, as a Catholic one may guess that after Queen Mary's reign pragmatism took precedence over belief as he adapted to Thomas Cranmer's English and his requirement of a 'playn and distincte note for every sillable'.

Tallis composed in the whole range of styles and forms then in use. We can marvel at his handling of choral sonority and his technical assurance of grand polyphonic textures, as well as in the simplicity of four-part hymn tunes. 'Tallis in D' is still in use today (No 78 in *Hymns Ancient & Modern Revised*¹). This first appeared in Archbishop Parker's Psalter of 1567 in which can also be found the tune on which Vaughan Williams based his *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*.

Choir Calendar for 2025

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Sat	31 May	5 pm	Swiz	Ascension Evensong
Sun	22 June	2 pm	Swiz	Huguenot annual service
Sat	28 June	1-5 pm	Swiz	Trial by Jury rehearsal
Sat	5 July	1-5 pm	Swiz	Trial by Jury rehearsal
Thu	17 July	5:15 pm	St Andrew's Cathedral	Evensong
Sat	19 July	1-5 pm	Swiz	Trial by Jury rehearsal
Fri	1 Aug	6 pm	St Andrew's Cathedral	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

 $^{^1}$ HTC has only one of Tallis's tunes, Tallis' Canon to which we sing Glory to you, my God, this night, No. 274, and Praise God from whom all blessings flow, No. 585.