

Hyfrydol



No. 125

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

October 2024

This month

With the change to Summer Time on Sunday 6 October, the choir uniform for men changes to dark trousers, blue shirts, no ties or jackets. We hope that the weather might be amenable on the day!

The big event for October will be the Foundation Concert featuring Joseph Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass, followed by highlights from Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. A "Dress Rehearsal" will be held on the Sunday preceding the concert – Sunday 20 October from 1 to 4 pm.



September

We sang Evensong twice in September; once at home with a generous congregation, and once at St James' King Street, Sydney. We haven't been to St James' for a few years, but it is always good to sing there, if only because of the generous acoustic. Our visit this time was especially good; we had a more numerous congregation than previously, we were offered very generous refreshments afterwards, and given a firm invitation to make a visit to the Wednesday evening service at least an annual item in the Swiz Choir diary.



Inside St James' Church



To be a pilgrim

The program for the 9 am service on Sunday 6 October includes a congregational hymn with a history going back to the seventeenth century. The words of the hymn, in the version we shall be singing, were written by Percy Dearmer, an influential Anglican liturgist of the early twentieth century. Dearmer was the person who removed the hobgoblins and foul fiends from John Bunyan's very well-known poem, *Who would true valour see*. The hymn now goes by the title *He who would valiant be*.

John Bunyan lived during the reigns of the Stuart Kings Charles 1 and 2 and James, and importantly, through the period of Cromwell's Commonwealth. His father was a travelling tinker in the English midlands and young John would have learned his father's trade. He learned to read and write but really had little schooling apart from that. It seems that he was an enthusiastic reader who absorbed the popular tales of adventure that appeared in books sold at local fairs.

His family belonged to the Anglican church, so he became familiar with the easily accessed literature of the English Puritans: plain-speaking sermons, homely moral dialogues, books of melodramatic judgments and acts of divine guidance. Above all, he steeped himself in the English Bible; the Authorized King James Version was only 30 years old when he was a boy of 12.

In 1644 a series of misfortunes separated the country boy from his family and drove him into the world. His mother died in June, his younger sister in July; in August his father married a third wife. The English Civil Wars had broken out, and in November, aged just 16, he was drafted into Oliver Cromwell's army. Bunyan remained in the Newport barracks until mid-1647 and probably saw little fighting.

His military service, even if uneventful, brought him in touch with the seething religious life of the left-wing sects within Cromwell's army, the preaching captains, and those Quakers, Seekers, and Ranters who were beginning to question all religious authority except that of the individual conscience. In this atmosphere Bunyan became acquainted with the leading ideas of the Puritans, who believed that striving for religious truth meant an obstinate personal search, relying on free grace revealed to the individual, and condemning all forms of public organization.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Bunyan's conversion to Puritanism was a gradual process. After an initial period of Anglican conformity in which he went regularly to church, he gave up, slowly and grudgingly, his favourite recreations of dancing and bell ringing and sports on the village green and began to concentrate on his inner life. Then came agonizing temptations to spiritual despair lasting for several years. The "storms" of temptation, as he calls them, buffeted him with almost physical violence; voices urged him to blaspheme; the texts of Scriptures, which seemed to him to threaten damnation, took on personal shape and "did pinch him very sore." Finally, one morning he believed that he had surrendered to these voices of Satan and had betrayed Christ: "Down I fell as a bird that is shot from the tree."



Bunyan eventually emerged from this period of spiritual darkness, gradually beginning to feel that his sin was "not unto death" and that there were texts to comfort as well as to terrify. He was aided in his recovery by his association with the Bedford Separatist church.

The Bedford community was an open-communion church, admitting all who professed "faith in Christ and holiness of life." Bunyan soon proved his talents as a lay preacher. Bunyan quite quickly became recognized as a leader among the sectarian congregations.

The Restoration of Charles II brought to an end the 20 years in which the separated churches had enjoyed freedom of worship and exercised some influence on government policy. On Nov. 12, 1660, Bunyan was brought before a local magistrate and, under an old Elizabethan act, charged with holding a service not in conformity with those of the Church of England. He refused to give an assurance that he would not repeat the offense, and was imprisoned in the county jail. He remained in prison for 12 years. It was during this time, he started writing *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Bunyan was eventually released from prison under Charles II's *Declaration of Indulgence to the Nonconformists*. He received a license to preach together with 25 other Nonconformist ministers in Bedfordshire and the surrounding counties. His nickname "Bishop Bunyan" suggests that he became the organizing genius in the area. He was later sent back to gaol, again for illegal preaching, but that sentence appears to have lasted only about six months.

Moving on to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, this great allegorical story was published in 1678. It covers, in symbolic form, Bunyan's own conversion to Christianity.

The hobgoblins and the foul fiends don't appear until Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* which was published six years after the first part. It tells the story of the pilgrimage of Christian's wife, Christiana, and her children to the Celestial City. This book gives a more social and humorous picture of the Christian life than the First Part and shows Bunyan lapsing from high drama into comedy. It has been suggested that the great concluding passage on the summoning of the pilgrims to cross the River of Death is perhaps the finest single thing Bunyan ever wrote.

We now sing Bunyan's poem to a tune that is accredited to Ralph Vaughan Williams. Towards the end of the 1890s Vaughan Williams was becoming increasingly interested in folk songs. He was conscious that most of these had not been written down but had been passed on from one generation of singers to another and would, in time, probably disappear. Over the decade from around 1903 Vaughan Williams collected over 800 folksongs from all parts of the UK.

In 1904 he arrived in Monks Gate, near Nuthurst in West Sussex. This was where Harriett Verrall lived. Harriett clearly had a fine voice. One of the songs she sang to Vaughan Williams was *Our Captain calls all hands to sail*:

*Our Captain calls all hands to sail tomorrow
 Leaving my dear to mourn in grief and sorrow
 Dry up those briny tears and leave off weeping
 So happy may we live at our next meeting*



Monks Gate village, West Sussex, now.

Vaughan Williams took this song and adapted the tune to fit the words of John Bunyan's poem. He named the tune *Monk's Gate*.

Mrs Verrall was also the source of a widely used tune for the carol *On Christmas night all Christians sing*, with her version thereafter being called the *Sussex Carol*.

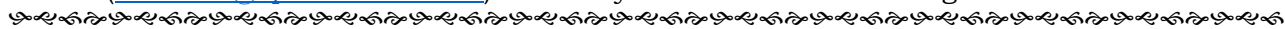
(Ed. As a sort of PS, many years ago the Swiz choir sang a service at the Anglican Church at Chester Hill where a direct descendant of John Bunyan was then the Rector. He has since retired and lives in a retirement home over Botany Bay way. I have a book of the religious poems he, John Bunyan junior, has written. None of them have found their way into a modern hymn book. I used to meet him at RSCM functions around Sydney. He was once an occasional writer of letters to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, but I have not seen any recent evidence of him and I suspect that he may have passed on to be with Jesus and his famous forebear.)



Our next overseas visit, New Zealand, September 2025

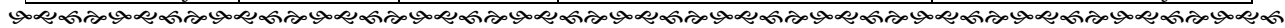
Our call for expressions of interest has yielded, so far, the names of 45 people who are interested in going to New Zealand, including 20 friends. We do not yet have enough names of men choristers to make up a 'balanced' choir and without that balance, the trip will not go ahead. Therefore, men, please let us know about your potential interest. We are not yet calling for commitment, only your interest, so that we can start planning a suitable trip.

The call extends to men (and boys, girls, women, anyone and everyone) to join the choir now and come with us to NZ as choristers in a year's time. Talk to Phil Linquist about joining as a chorister. Let Brian (chideock@optusnet.com.au) know of your interest in travelling across the ditch.



Choir Calendar for 2024

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Sunday	20 Oct	1-4 pm	Swiz	Concert rehearsal
Saturday	26 Oct	7 pm	Swiz	Foundation Gala Concert
Saturday	30 Nov	5 pm	Swiz	Advent Evensong
Monday	9 Dec?	12:30 pm?	RNSH?	Carols
Sunday	22 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Lessons & carols
Tuesday	24 Dec	10 pm	Swiz	Christmas Eve
Wednesday	25 Dec	8:30 am	Swiz	Christmas Day



THE SWIZ CULTURAL FOUNDATION
An outreach of St Swithun's Anglican Church Pymble

Gala Concert

7PM

SATURDAY 26TH OCTOBER 2024

Haydn - Nelson Mass & Mendelssohn - Elijah (Excerpts)

Featuring

**St Swithun's Choir | Willoughby Singers
with Special Soloists & Instrumentalists**

Tickets \$45.50 (all inclusive) with light supper after the concert
St Swithun's Church Cnr Telegraph & Merrivale Rd, Pymble



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