



# Hyfrydol



No. 121

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

June 2024

## This month

On Sunday afternoon, 16 June, we will be offering our services at the annual Huguenot Heritage Church Service. We shall all be singing the Huguenot national anthem, *La Cévenole*. The anthem will be Ralph Vaughan Williams' version of *Psalm 100*, sung to a tune that came originally from the Genevan Psalter of 1561 where it was joined to *Psalm 134*. The few of us who are actually fluent in French will be contributing more deeply to the service by singing some verses of *Psalm 134* in French to its original tune.

Rehearsals for our Haydn Mass presentation will continue, with extra meetings on consecutive Saturday afternoons early in the month. The Foundation concert in October will also feature sections of Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, so we might expect to see some of this music on our weekly rehearsal lists very soon.



## May

- Rehearsals for Haydn's Mass began this month with a couple of extra rehearsals on Saturdays, led by Peter Gilkes.
- A cohort of choristers (12 of us including Phil Linquist & Peter Hamilton) attended the funeral of Jan Ralston (Dr Haskins) at the Macquarie Crematorium on a Friday morning.
- The following day, we sang Evensong for Ascension with a full choir: *Lift thine eyes* by Mendelssohn, Psalm 47, Peter Hamilton's responses, Herbert Murrill's canticles, *God is gone up* by Croft, and we sang Rutter's *Aaronic Blessing* again after quite a long break. Despite the inclement weather, there was a good-sized congregation. Choristers provided the usual high quality high tea afterwards.



## Haydn's Mass in G minor

Last month we described how Joseph Haydn composed his *Missa Solemnis* for the 1798 name day<sup>1</sup> of Princess Maria, wife of Nikolaus II, Prince Esterházy of Austria.

We mentioned that Haydn had only recently finished his *Creation*, and was suffering from extreme exhaustion.

At the same time, the situation in Europe was alarming, to say the least. Napoleon had embarked on his campaign to bring Europe under French rule in 1796 and by 1798 had been threatening the Habsburg monarchy (present-day Austria) for the best part of two years. It is not surprising that Haydn named his new Mass "Missa in angustiis", suggesting difficult or troubled times.



By mid-1798 Napoleon had turned his attention towards Egypt. As Bonaparte's invasion force crossed the Mediterranean, it was shadowed by a British fleet under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson. On the night of 2 July, 1798, a 7,000-strong French army landed at Aboukir Bay, near Alexandria. On 1 August, Nelson's ships attacked the French fleet and destroyed thirteen of the seventeen ships in the fleet, cutting Napoleon's supply line and resulting in his abandoning his Egyptian ambitions.

Lord Nelson on the deck of HMS Vanguard during the Battle of the Nile

<sup>1</sup>8 September – the day celebrated as the birthday of Mary, mother of Jesus. Princess Maria's birthday was different – that fell on 13 April.

News of Nelson’s victory in the bay where the Nile discharges into the Mediterranean Sea (hence the “Battle of the Nile”) reached Vienna around the middle of September, about the same time as Haydn’s new Mass was being premiered.

In 1800, Lord Nelson himself visited the Palais Esterházy, accompanied by his British mistress, Lady Hamilton. It is very probable that the Mass was performed to honour Nelson during his visit, along with a brief cantata, *Lines from the Battle of the Nile*, which Haydn composed for Lady Hamilton. Nelson and Haydn reportedly became friends; some accounts say that the heroic Admiral gave Haydn a gold watch in exchange for the pen that he had used to compose Lady Hamilton's cantata.

Haydn’s Mass acquired the nickname “Nelson Mass” around this time, and the name has stuck.



**They came to look for wisdom**

Phillip chose this hymn, No. 100 in *Hymns for Today’s Church*, for the Sunday in May when the sermon was focussing on wisdom. It was new to most of us and to the congregation, but had a catchy tune that wasn’t hard to pick up. The words were by Christopher Idle, inspired by the story of the Magi in Matthew 2:1-11.

Christopher Martin Idle (b. 1938) is an English hymnodist. He was ordained as an Anglican minister in 1965 and has served in various parishes in the UK. He has written more than three hundred hymns. Not surprisingly, because he was a member of the words sub-committee of the editorial team, no less than 40 of his early hymns appear in *Hymns for Today’s Church*.



Hymn No. 100 is set to a tune named *Neumark*, after its composer, Georg Neumark, who was born in the German Duchy of Thuringia in 1621. He lived during the time of the Thirty Years’ War, when social and economic conditions were deplorable. He had personal trials as well. On his way to Königsberg in 1641 to study at the university and traveling in the comparative safety of a group of merchants, he was robbed of all his possessions, except for his prayer book and some money sewn into his clothes. During the next two years he spent much of his time looking for employment. In the beginning of December 1643, he went to Kiel, where he found a friend in Nicolaus Becker, a fellow Thuringian and then chief pastor at Kiel. Day after day passed without an opening, till about the end of the month the tutor in the family of judge Stephan Henning fell into disgrace and fled from Kiel. On Becker’s recommendation, Neumark got the job, and this sudden end of his anxieties was the occasion of the writing of his hymn *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten*. When he had saved enough money, he returned to the University of Königsberg and studied there for five years. In Königsberg he again lost all his belongings, this time in a fire. Despite his personal suffering Neumark wrote many more hymns in which he expressed his absolute trust in God.

In 1651 he returned to Thuringia, where he became court poet and archivist to Duke Johann Ernst and librarian and registrar of the city. Neumark wrote thirty-four hymns, of which his first, *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten* (*If you but trust in God to guide you*), has become a classic.

And it is this tune, renamed *Neumark* after the composer, to which we sang Hymn no. 100. Neumark’s melody line has been augmented with SATB harmony by prominent hymn composer Erik Routley.



**Choir Calendar for 2024**

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Saturday	1 Jun	1-5 pm	Swiz	Nelson Mass rehearsal
Saturday	8 Jun	1-5 pm	Swiz	Nelson Mass rehearsal
Sunday	16 Jun	2 pm	Swiz	Huguenot Service
Saturday	17 Aug	5 pm	Swiz	Celebrating Psalms
Saturday	14 Sep	5 pm	Swiz	Evensong
Wednesday	25 Sep	6 pm	St James, King Street	Evensong
Saturday	26 Oct	7:30 pm	Swiz	Foundation 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

### **Choir members' welfare collection**

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the welfare fund. We now have enough to keep our heads above water for a while. If any choir member still wishes to make a donation, the fund secretary is very happy to receive it.



### **Stop Press**

The following link will take you to a very fresh article in the British on-line press concerning the current state of music at Winchester Cathedral. Those of us who went on the very first choir excursion in 2001 will be particularly interested. At that time, David Hill was the Director of music. Shortly afterwards, Dr Andrew Lumsdaine became Director and has occupied the position for more than 20 years.

<https://thecritic.co.uk/what-future-for-winchester-cathedral-choir/>?