

Hyfrydol



No. 127

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

December 2024

This month

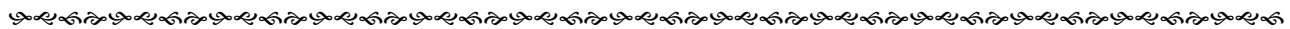
December always means *Messiah*. We don't present the oratorio in the parish at this time of year, but many choristers participate in the Radio Community Chest presentation in the Sydney Town Hall (Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 December this year). Others follow Phillip Linquist and sing under his direction in the ecumenical choir presentation at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Waitara (this year on Thursday 12 December).



We have two Advent Lessons and Carol services, the first at the Gordon Quarter, the old Sir Roden Cutler Lodge, and the second at Swiz on the Sunday before Christmas.

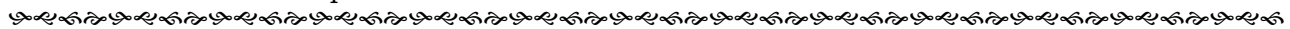
Our annual appearance in the atrium at Royal North Shore Hospital will not take place this year; there was a difficulty with the scheduling.

On Christmas Eve, in the very late evening, we shall sing two of Sir John Rutter's carols during the Communion service, then at 9 am on Christmas Day we shall sing June Nixon's arrangement of *The Holly and the Ivy*, as well as Handel's *Alleluia Chorus* in another Communion service.



November

Our annual Advent Evensong service was made up of an introit (three verses of the traditional carol, *The Truth from Above* – see below), Psalm 111 sung to a double chant composed by organist Edward Hopkins, canticles composed by Herbert Brewer, and the anthem *There shall a Star come out of Jacob* – from Felix Mendelssohn's unfinished oratorio *Christus*. The words are from Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 2, followed by a chorale written by Lutheran hymnist Philipp Nicolai. We sang Peter Hamilton's *Preces and Responses* and concluded with Sir John Rutter's *Clare Benediction*.



The truth from above

The introit at our Advent Evensong service took words from an old English carol, collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams from a village in Herefordshire and published in his *Oxford Book of Carols* in 1928. There is an unfortunate juxtaposition of verses in this version, continued in the version published in *100 Carols for Choirs*:

The second verse ends with
Woman was made with man to dwell.
The third verse begins with
Thus we were heirs to endless woes.

As one commentator has said: "All joking aside, the woman was not the cause of the endless woes of mankind, rather, both sinned by disobeying the law set down by God in the Garden, and it was from that sin that our 'endless woes' resulted."

An older version of the carol, published in 1847, contained 8 eight-lined verses which have since been republished as 16 four-lined verses. Here is that contentious part of the carol including the missing text between verses 2 and 3 above:

2. *The first thing that I will relate,
That God at first did man create
The next thing which to you I tell,
Woman was made with man to dwell.*

3. Then after that, 'twas God's own choice
To place them both in Paradise,
There to remain from evil free
Except they ate of such a tree.

4. But they did eat, which was a sin,
And then their ruin did begin —
Ruin'd themselves, both you and me,
And all of our posterity.

5. Thus we were heirs to endless woes,
Till God the Lord did interpose
For so a promise soon did run
That he'd redeem us with a Son.

Shows how careful and sensitive you should be when choosing verses to omit.

Philip avoided the controversy by omitting both verses 2 and 3 (or 5 as printed above) in *100 Carols* from the introt.



The Holly and the Ivy

This Christmas carol seems to have its origins far back in history. *100 Carols for Choirs* indicates that it is an “English traditional carol.” *The Oxford Book of Carols* is rather more forthcoming, with a potted history which reads, in part:

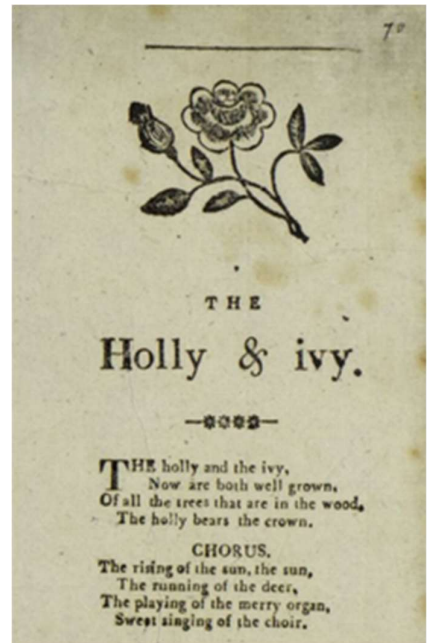
“Words and melody taken from Mrs Clayton at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire
Joshua Sylvester, in his *Christmas Carols*, 1861, was the first to publish the text in a collection;
he took it from an old broadside, ‘printed a century and a half since’, i.e. c. 1710.”

The reference to ‘broadside’ above was to an alternative meaning of the word from the 16th century – broadsheet, a sheet of cheap paper printed on one side, containing a proclamation, a ballad or other popular matter.

The subject of the text is probably of pagan origin and symbolised masculine (holly) and feminine (ivy) elements as a tribal chorus, all such songs being sung as a dance involving lads and lasses. Chaucer referenced the ‘merry organ’ in his *Nonne Prestes Tale* (14th century). Since medieval times, the song has developed a Christian character with the holly representing Jesus and the ivy his mother Mary.

The early nineteenth-century sources do not provide music for the carol. Cecil Sharp recorded the aforementioned Mrs Clayton singing the carol to an old English folk tune. He published it in his *English Folk Carols* collection (1911). That tune, in 3/4 time, is the one published in both *The Oxford Book of Carols* (arranged by Martin Shaw) and *100 Carols for Choirs* (arranged by Henry Walford Davies). Both arrangers suggest that the carol be sung a cappella.

Several late nineteenth-century collections set the words to an “old French carol”. This is the tune, in 6/8 time, arranged by June Nixon, that we shall be singing this Advent season. June Nixon was for 40 years the organist and Director of Music at St Paul’s Anglican Cathedral, Melbourne. Her arrangement of *The Holly and the Ivy* has been included in the Nine Lessons and Carols services from King’s College, Cambridge, several times since 2010.



New Zealand, September 2025

The organizing committee met after Church on the first day of this month to discuss next steps in our planning for the New Zealand excursion. After much debate and soul-searching, a decision has been reached. The 2025 trip will not now take place.

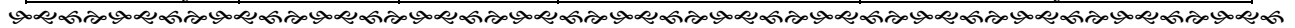
We have listened to those who thought the trip was too long, and looked at reducing its duration to only two of the three cathedrals. We have had quotes on costs, including accommodation, travel between venues and visits to interesting destinations along the way. Our reasons for pulling the plug on the 2025 trip come down to two main points: we do not have confidence in our ability to take a properly balanced choir to New Zealand, and the per person cost is way over our initial estimate of \$5,000, not including Australia-New Zealand return airfares.

Notwithstanding the cancellation of this trip, Phil has plans for a full program for 2025. We shall be investigating opportunities to visit a cathedral or cathedrals nearer to home, and you can expect to be learning challenging music for a Foundation Concert later in the year. The Swiz Choir is alive and well, and expects to continue growing through 2025 and beyond, bringing the ministry of music to Christians wherever we may find them.



Choir Calendar for the last days of 2024

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Friday	20 Dec	11 am	The Gordon Quarter	Lessons & carols
Thursday	19 Dec	9 pm	Swiz	Celebration after choir practice
Sunday	22 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Lessons & carols
Tuesday	24 Dec	10 pm	Swiz	Christmas Eve Communion
Wednesday	25 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Christmas Day Communion



A reminder: many copies of the Haydn *Nelson Mass* have already been returned. The librarian is keen to have all 40 copies returned before our Christmas break, please.

And after the conclusion of the 9 am service on Christmas Day, we have a complete break until the choir practice on Thursday evening, 30 January 2025 to prepare for our first 9 am service for 2025 on Sunday 2 February. Happy Christmas to all, and please enjoy your holiday.