

# ROMANTICISM IN RETROSPECT

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE MUSIC OF HERBERT HOWELLS AND ITS RECENT FORTUNES

*An Address given by the Honorary Secretary at the Society's  
Annual General Meeting in Cambridge on Saturday 14th July 2001*

Almost twenty years ago, the distinguished organist and composer Richard Lloyd addressed the 1982 Annual General Meeting of this Society on *The Church Music of Herbert Howells* in the year of the composer's ninetieth birthday. His assessment combined comprehensive consideration of the context of Howells' music as at that time readily available with a clear and warm affection for the man.

Mr Lloyd's memorable lecture began by placing Howells into the historical context of English musical history, declaring him, definitively, as the last of the great English Romantic composers. Published just four years after the publication of Christopher Palmer's trail-blazing study in 1978, the 1982 CMS Address by Richard Lloyd remains essential reading for aspiring students of Howells' liturgical output. The distinction of having produced the first published monograph on Howells had accrued to his pupil Robert Spearing, whose tribute appeared in time for the composer's 80th birthday in 1972. The English simply love anniversaries, and the Howells centenary in 1992 did much to restore the fortunes of some of the composer's less often-heard pieces. During that year occurred the second performance of the evocative *Sine Nomine* - seventy years on from its politely-received, but not universally acclaimed, première.

Christopher Palmer's more substantial second book: *Herbert Howells - A Celebration* comprised a magnificent, lasting, and tangible centenary tribute to one of the most famous of Gloucestershire's many musical sons. This substantial study has now run into a second edition, with updates to 1996, and has become a standard work of reference on the composer.

By no means least of such additional information in the 1996 edition is the background to the establishment of the Herbert Howells Society and significant updates to the Howells discography - a recorded anthology that today encompasses substantial numbers of the composer's chamber music and orchestral output. On a personal note, speaking as one brought up in a generation when the only recordings of Howells' music were those of anthems, settings, carols and organ music with an occasional vocal recital including the matchless *King David*, it is a joy that the current catalogues of compact discs bespeak a burgeoning of interest by performers and listeners alike in the music of a remarkable figure.

There is evidence to suggest that, like Holst, Howells perhaps regarded composition as something of a spare-time occupation undertaken in the academic vacations free of the cares of tutorials, lectures, examining and adjudicating. Palmer, and more recently Paul Spicer (in his informative 1998 portrait in the *Border Lines* series) provides a vast amount of personal reminiscence and background. Both authors acknowledge their great indebtedness to Herbert Howells' beloved daughter, the distinguished actress Ursula Howells. Few composers in musical history can have been so richly blessed with so splendid a standard-bearer for a parent's artistic endeavour. The rightful and substantial debt owed by all lovers of Howells's music to his daughter is profound. Her selflessly generous assistance to so many seeking enlightenment on matters of detailed study, and her total commitment to those who have assumed the mantle of apostles for the promulgation of Howells's creative output is well known. It had been our hope to have Miss Howells as the Society's principal guest at the 2001 Annual Meeting, but a fortnight's radio acting has intervened to prevent her being

with us. Admirers of her artistry as an actress, and their name is legion, will have noticed her in the recent television serialisation of *The Cazelets*.

Not least among many signal services of Ursula Howells has been her constant encouragement of the publishing and promotion of issues in the Church Music Society's *Howells Series* - a series brought recently to a resounding conclusion with the publication of the 1974 West Riding Cathedrals Festival *Te Deum* - a project which has also enjoyed the unstinting and generous support of the commissioner of that neglected work, Mr Graham Matthews.

For church musicians, of course, the principal development since 1982 has been the opportunity to perform and evaluate a good deal of Howells' sacred output from his young adulthood and early middle years. Previously unpublished, Graham Matthews's West Riding Cathedrals Festival *Te Deum* is a rare exception from its composer's compositional "Indian Summer" and there is great delight that this vintage essay is now readily available and is shortly to be recorded. Unlike the Washington Cathedral *Te Deum* completed recently from the composer's sketches by John Buttrey, the Sheffield setting survives complete in Howells' hand. The autograph copy has now been deposited by Mr Matthews in the library of the Royal College of Music alongside many other Howells manuscripts.

There is no doubt that Howells' rare capacity for friendship - with places as well as people - sustained a profound influence upon his compositional output. Notwithstanding an all-consuming fascination with buildings, art, craft, history and tradition, the trouble that he himself took over his personal appearance bespeaks an individual as much concerned with the visual as the aural. The composer's own programme notes for the trail-blazing King's College Choir recording on the famous Argo LP declares as much:

In all my music for the Church, people and places have been a dual influence. The Cathedral in Gloucester, St Paul's and Westminster Abbey in London, Christ Church and New College in Oxford, St John's and King's College Chapels in Cambridge - these and their recent Directors of Music have been a paramount shaping force. Men, choir, ecclesiastical buildings have become inseparably a part of that force. So too have exemplars and - acoustics.

At the time he wrote this note, of course, he was only at the beginning of what we might refer to as his "canticle pilgrimage" - a remarkable peroration which by the time of his death had, to quote Newman in his centenary year, brought within its "ample palm" venues including the Cathedrals of Canterbury, Coventry (like Christ Church, Oxford, the work for Coventry was a Mass), Worcester and Hereford (as well as Gloucester), Chichester, Winchester, Salisbury - referred to by Howells as the *Sarum* Magnificat and *Nunc Dimittis* - and York. Among collegiate chapels and greater churches visited in this sonic travelogue are Magdalen, Oxford, Bristol (St Mary Redcliffe), Her Majesty's Chapel Royal at the Tower of London (St Peter ad Vincula), St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, Edgbaston St Augustine in Birmingham and - rather farther afield - foundations ecclesiastical and educational: Dallas, Columbia, Washington and New York (St John the Divine).

Howells's own remarks quoted earlier are interesting in failing to make any mention of some of the Cathedrals listed, the works for which had been in his work list for some years before he penned the note for the Argo recording. Maybe space was a concern, or possibly it was the named settings of which he was particularly proud.

Many choirs, not least those of the two principal Cambridge chapels, have made anthology recordings of Howells settings since the Argo release, but speculation over the composer's note in this once ubiquitous recording does not end with a survey of what we might refer to (hopefully not in a partisan, but merely a demographic sense) as his Anglican output. There

that experience which focused Howells' attention on providing his inherently useful war-time setting for Sir Ernest Bullock at Westminster Abbey who had suffered the same fate in losing his home.

Further neglect in matters of repertoire attaches itself to the *Coventry Mass* of 1968, a work heard, memorably, under the direction of John Bertalot in the Cathedral during a 1972 summer course of the Royal School of Church Music. The length of the piece, especially of the sections around the Canon of the Mass, is certainly in some arenas an impediment to the more streamlined utterance demanded by modern liturgical practice which envisages the whole of the *Thanksgiving* as one continuous whole. The *Dorian Mass* of 1912 has, after decades of neglect, established its place not merely liturgically but also as a recital work for a *cappella* performance. The quality of the music of the *Coventry Mass* makes for a similar duality of opportunity. Maybe someone, somewhere, will respond to that challenge - and to assisting in the rehabilitation of the *English Mass* of 1956 composed for the Jubilee of Dr Harold Darke's appointment to St Michael's Cornhill in 1916.

More greatly to be deplored even than these cases is the lack of good fortune enjoyed by the brilliant *cento* textual compilation and musical setting known as *Exultate Deo* commissioned in 1975 by Lincoln Minster for the enthronement of the new diocesan bishop, The Right Reverend Simon Phipps. Howells' vivid correspondence and burgeoning friendship between himself and Dr Philip Marshall (cathedral organist at Lincoln from 1966 to retirement twenty years later) makes for splendid reading. Not least of the interest in this superb, yet concise setting - the words of the eponymous psalm begin *Sing we merrily* - is the extraordinary, and economical, series of musical panels of word-painting each so marvellously depictive of the chosen stanzas. In just a few dozen bars and some sixteen pages of music, Howells turns in fanfares, solemnity, awesome invocation, dance, tenderness, compassionate love, *requiem* for the departed who "praise not Thee, O Lord" before the music of the opening is reprised prior to a briefly exultant coda with which the work concludes. Philip Marshall's superb penmanship of the piece for choir usage was of such quality that the publishers merely reproduced his script lithographically on the printed copy.

With the active promulgation in sound, and other proselytising of his muse by the *Herbert Howells Society*, HH perhaps needs no other apologist today, yet the neglect of some his finest (and by no means most technically challenging) works - music readily available in print - seems surprising.

In terms of those items from the more famous evening canticles, which would fall all too easily into Dr Judith Blezzard's category of *music's untrodden paths* - the *Westminster* service of 1957 - issued just months after the CMS setting of the year previous, but almost certainly written several years earlier - is probably the most surprising. Concise of length, vocally mostly homophonic and with a thrilling *Gloria Patri* (the same setting for each of the two canticles) - it has everything going for it. A fabulous French impressionist close to *Magnificat* is followed by an arresting beginning to *Gloria* certainly the equal of *Coll Reg* or Gloucester settings earlier. The choral entries in the *Westminster* service follow a brief girding of loins on the organ, and a favourite Howells direction which has sent generations of musicians and singers to their dictionary of musical terms - *risvegliato* - awaking as though from sleep. Maybe this was a direction inserted as a result of direct experience of sluggish children to an erstwhile choral director striving to keep alert his own choristers at Salisbury, where he briefly assisted the great Sir Walter Alcock, or at Cambridge's St John's College where Howells acted for Robin Orr during his war service.

What Dame Janet Baker did in rehabilitating Howells's finest song in an EMI recital - and what a rehabilitation it was - the collegiate choirs of Cambridge and a number of similarly

superb ensembles including choruses of mixed rather than male voices have continued to do - and to do magnificently - for Howells' church music. But, at the outset of a new century, this is, very happily, not the whole of the story - though it was very much as the whole truth and nothing but the truth back in 1982. Three Choirs' Festival and other public revivals have heightened attention on Howells' orchestral and chamber output as well as focussing, more understandably, on some of the neglected choral masterworks. The current recording catalogues contain two superlative performances of *Hymnus Paradisi* and, rather more surprisingly, CDs of the complex *Missa Sabriensis* and the glorious *Stabat Mater* - both these latter works under the direction of a Russian maestro, no less.

Choral pieces - liturgical and non liturgical alike - have received wonderful attention from cathedral choirs and from the Cambridge Singers, the Collegiate Singers, the Corydon Singers, the Finzi Singers and the Donald Hunt Singers - to name but a few such groups.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that so much of his musical output is cast in a realms mystical, spiritual or even fantastic Howells's sheer artistic common-sense, pragmatism and practical knowledge of what "will work" well can come as something of a surprise to the aspiring student of Howells's muse. One of his most instantly recognisable choral miniatures, the central panel of the triptych of *Carol-Anthems* entitled *A Spotless Rose* seems to the hearer to have been if not composed in a religious trance then certainly the work of a believer. The origins of the piece cannot in any respect be described as "other-worldly". Its genesis at the desk of a bedroom window overlooking a railway line is recalled by the creator of this glorious enhancement of Advent and the Nativity the world over. It is of *A Spotless Rose* that the composer wrote

This I sat down and wrote after idly watching some shunting from the window of a cottage in Gloucester...which overlooked the Midland Railway. In an upstairs room I looked out on iron railings and the main Bristol-Gloucester railway line, with shunting trucks bumping and banging. I wrote it for and dedicated it to my mother... Still more significant, as a clue to some small part of Howells's very complex personality, he concludes the piece that:

it always moves me when I hear it, just as if it were written by someone else. Such revelations are a very small part of an immense debt that all lovers of Howells and his music owe to the late Christopher Palmer, and more recently to Paul Spicer, for it was in their conversations with the composer and his intimates that such insights came into play which otherwise might for ever have been lost.

Howells's own musical loves encompassed a great range of individuals and artists - first in Gloucester, later in London, Cambridge and throughout the world. Many of the personal friendships he sustained with such tenacity brought their own reward to the fortunate recipient in compositional terms. Others proved merely catalysts or enablers. Promise, commitment, fulfilment - emotional as well as creative - were important to Howells. Whether he was, as Lloyd suggests, the **last** of the great English Romantic composers remains to be seen. But he **was** a great Romantic imbued with a strong dose of sentiment for good measure. A fabulous memory (which his students, colleagues and friends recount as being not without its selective elements) would recall anniversaries in a way far more reliable than most of us charged with just a few familiar family birthdays find in all conscience challenging enough with which to deal.

Not until a creative artist is taken from us does society, artistically and in general terms, come to value that artist's contribution the more fully. In Howells's case, unlike that of Elgar, his re-assessment by posterity has been rapid, urgent and compelling. To take one comparable instance at random, only now, nearly seventy years after the composer's death, are violinists beginning fully to appreciate the riches of Elgar's early output for that instrument.

is no mention whatever of a substantial and very formative London influence on Howells's early writing. Richard Runciman Terry, founder choirmaster of Westminster Cathedral, was at the height of his powers during Howells's student days at the Royal College of Music and it was for Terry's choir that Howells seems to have been inspired to produce a considerable corpus of early liturgical compositions which have only achieved widespread circulation during the course of the past two decades.

Musicians of the Catholic tradition would have had something of an inkling of this important connection by virtue of the inclusion of a fa-burden setting intended for *alternatim* use at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and included in Sir Richard's *Complete Benediction Book for Choirs* of 1933. A setting of *Salve Regina*, one of the early Howells pieces and the fourth of *Four Anthems to/of the Blessed Virgin Mary* which comprise their creator's Opus 9, had been recorded in the 1930s sung by Westminster Cathedral Choir on an HMV disc.

Earliest of the works of what might be described as the Westminster Cathedral Connection is the *Mass in the Dorian Mode* (designated perhaps more correctly, since the composer referred to it thus, as *Missa Sine Nomine*) of 1912. Despite being its composer's first work to receive professional performance - it was written just a few months after Howells took up his composition scholarship at the Royal College - this notable early Mass had to wait almost eighty years for publication. Since being issued by the Society in 1990, the Mass has been followed by another CMS issue from this early period - *Haec Dies*.

The vast kaleidoscope of vocal challenges which Howells's music presents, especially to the amateur singer, encompasses a remarkable, chameleon-like ability to discern what will "go well" as he himself might very well have said. Richard Lloyd's substantial survey took in the neglected, but complete, service in E flat dedicated to Herbert Brewer, the Gloucester organist to whom the young Howells had been articulated as a boy. Besides the E major canticles for men's voices (originally featuring only tenors and basses, but now available for all three male voices in a clever re-casting by John Buttrey, which had the composer's blessing), there are the more recent (CMS) issues including the ingenious evening service for men's voices and organ designed for war-time conditions at Westminster Abbey. Known as Howells in D (modally rather than tonally), this setting - now also in the CMS *Howells Series* - is just as singable by equal upper voices as an alternative to the ensemble of lower sonorities intended originally. Patrick Russell's edition includes a version for four trebles of the close harmony section (the only four part music in an otherwise unison or occasionally two part setting) at the words *He, remembering his mercy*. By such a means has the appeal and inherent usefulness of this music been the more widely available to choral foundations.

The popular myth that all Howells's music is "difficult" is belied particularly by his fine hymn tunes of which there are over a dozen additional to the stupendous, and universally used, *Michael* to Robert Bridges' *All my hope on God is founded*. Despite its appearance in the 1936 *Clarendon Hymn Book*, not until its inclusion in *Hymns for Church and School* (the 1964 version of *The Public School Hymn Book* of previous generations) and, most importantly, *100 Hymns for Today of 1969* (a supplement to *Hymns Ancient and Modern*) did this superb tune begin to "take off" in public esteem. The composer's descant (whose first appearance in an anthology was in *English Praise* of 1975) was devised for an RSCM Albert Hall Festival Service in response to the acclaim that followed the hymn's appearance in *Hymns for Church and School*. One other of the composer's four tunes contributed especially for the 1964 book (which, with *Michael*, including five Howells melodies in all) has fared particularly well - the brooding, expansive melody to Timothy Rees' *Holy Spirit, ever dwelling*. *Michael* and *Salisbury* (for *Holy Spirit, ever dwelling*) demand more of singers than most of their companions, which, though clearly from their creator's stable, are by no means what we might refer to as thoroughbreds in quite the same way. Another tune which had been intended for the 1964

book, but which did not find its way there, is a very fine setting of a melody designed for Wesley's *Love Divine* which is the eponymous item in the Society's issue of *Four Extended Hymns*.

There survives, too, a small number of Anglican chants by Howells, most of which are known to date from the years of his maturity. The inclusion of two in the Royal School of Church Music Chant book has done much to popularise the chant in B flat major, with its soaring lines calling to mind nothing so much as walking along a cathedral aisle, with one arch giving place to the next with the same inevitability of the glorious melodic line or underpinning harmonies. The harmonies are all entirely diatonic - no chromatics here, or certain. Dr John Birch obtained from Howells a set of chants for a complete calendar evening in the Chichester Cathedral collection.

It is perhaps inevitable that the present survey should properly pay due consideration to those items from Howells's pen with which the Society has been privileged to be associated. Most significant of all is the challenging set of evening canticles in B minor produced by a greatly-loved Vice President for the Golden Jubilee of the formation of the Church Music Society in 1906 and first heard at Evensong in Westminster Abbey on 17th May 1956.

Perhaps neglected for some time on account of an association with a society rather than a particular building (though the piece of course belongs to Herbert Howells's Westminster collection, Collegiate rather than Cathedral in this case), Howells in B minor has achieved very widespread performance since its re-issue by the Church Music Society in 1992 in honour of the centenary of the composer's birth. Like the earlier F sharp minor setting for the *Collegiate Church of St Peter in Westminster* the 1956 setting is less expansive than some. Though rhapsodic in the best Howells sense, the momentum is continuing. The CMS setting unfolds from a section for full trebles, who are also deployed for a brief passage at *He hath filled the hungry with good things*. Apart from those two places, the vocal scoring is full throughout. The organ is used sparingly, especially in *Nunc dimittis* - but always tellingly; at the close of *Magnificat* the organ quits the final chord prior to the singers. The close of *Gloria* after *Nunc dimittis* (a setting almost identical to that with which *Magnificat* closes) the organ sustains to the end. Though the smallest of adjustments, the contrast achieved is electrifying.

What we might refer to as the "war-time economy" setting in D mentioned earlier, also first heard in Westminster Abbey, was completed in the same Holy Week, 1941, as the last of its composer's *Four Anthems* dedicated to Thomas Armstrong. Scoring of these is, in like manner, reasonably economical. One of their number has become one of the great classics of sacred music of any period. *Like as the hart* - a slow blues with a broad two, rather than four, beats to the bar - is one of very few standard repertoire works capable of being tackled by a novice choral group as equally by the finest choirs in the land. The *tessitura* of the tenor part, for instance, is readily practicable for the adolescent voices of a four-part school choir and the sustained soprano descant towards the end (doubled by the organ part), though devastatingly beautiful in its impact, can without undue loss be omitted and is, in any event, marked as *ad lib* by the composer in the score.

The comparative neglect of *O pray for the peace of Jerusalem*, the first of the set, and arguably even more straightforward than *Like as the hart*, is hard to understand and the virile vividness of *Let God arise* and, particularly, the extraordinarily powerful *We have heard with our ears, O God* argue for far greater prominence for the remaining duo of the quartet. The passion Howells engenders in *We have heard with our ears* gives emphasis to his deeply-felt deploring of war and violence. We know from his writings the deep and sometimes overriding sense of anxiety experienced by Howells during and after the Second World War. It will be remembered that his family were bombed out of their home in September of 1940. It may well have been

As church musicians, we have in our turn experienced leadership within the Howells revival in terms of the enthusiasm and commitment of scholars such as Brompton Oratory's Patrick Russill and the Church Music Society's discerningly indefatigable Honorary General Editor, Richard Lyne. There is, indeed, much for which we do well to give thanks. The West Riding Cathedrals Festival *Te Deum* is the last of a line of important issues. With that publication - at least, for the present - the Howells series concludes.

The adjective *romantic* defines a period as well as an attitude and, of course, that vastly abused designation *classical* even more so!

It was Mendelssohn who counselled regarding the subject matter of music as of greater moment than its outward form, and Liszt who declared that Romanticism to exact only that

the form should be adequate to the expression of the sentiment

At the same time, this *sentiment* must - if it is the essence of romance - be able, as Beethoven said

to strike fire from the souls of men

to show the aspiration after the ideal.

Indeed, it must (as Herbert Westerby in his *Complete Organ Recitalist* memorably reminds us) be a veritable pouring out of new wine into old bottles, a surging of the emotions over the confines of form

We know and love Howells as a romantic through and through - in matters of the language of words as much as that of music. His quintessential turn of a verbal phrase or sentence could be as florid as his effortlessly and seemingly entirely natural *melismata*. Details of his spoken adjudications at competitive music festivals linger long in the memory of those fortunate enough to have experienced them, while his penmanship in words and music is, again, very particularly characteristic - florid, yet disciplined in shape.

The decorative expansion of so many of his musical motifs and themes combine to make a Howells sonority as instantly recognisable in aural terms as the embellishment of a column in a Grinling Gibbons carving. Nor is a Gibbons metaphor lost on the lover of Howells's music, for more than one authority has suggested that, in many ways, Howells's artistic muse comprised a kind of re-incarnation of an Elizabethan clavichordist. Certainly the debt Howells owed to his English inheritance was amply repaid.

His use of arch forms - in dynamic terracing particularly - is nowhere more impressive than in his *Gloucester* service to be heard later this afternoon. The febrile interweaving of the two treble parts during the course of the sonic balm that abounds in the second page of the score is very special. A sense of *bravura* and rhetoric spring out from every page of Howells's music. Before him, only S S Wesley had the nerve to begin a canticle *Gloria* in a distant key. Howells does so particularly spectacularly in both the *Gloucester* service and the earlier setting in G.

Like Holst, Ireland, Percy Fletcher and Vaughan Williams, Howells found himself drawn to the composition of music for brass band. So stirring is the first movement of his evocative *Pageantry* that a version for orchestra and organ, entitled *King's Herald* was included in the 1937 Coronation. This is ceremonial music *par excellence* and conjures in the mind very much the image of swords and uniforms in just the same way that the openings of *Coll: Reg:* and *Gloucester* canticles speak of candlelight and starched surplices.

It is always interesting to see Howells's music from a non-British perspective. Continentals often assume works of his to be the work of a Frenchman - the output of what musicians of that country touchingly refers to as a *petit maître*. Certainly there is at times in Howells an

affinity with the music of Maurice Duruflé - especially with regard to both men's instinctive handling of rhythmic inflexion as an aid to melodic progress.

As a broadcaster and writer on matters musical, Howells was a natural heir to great communicators of a previous generation - notably Shropshire born Sir Walford Davies - Organist of The Temple Church and the RCM professor in charge of the choir-training class during Howells' student days. It is, perhaps, very considerably to Sir Walford that we may well owe the Howells *Requiem* and, in consequence, something of the visionary *Hymnus Paradisi* also. Walford Davies's *Short Requiem* of 1917 almost certainly, whether consciously or unconsciously, provided the textual prototype for Howells's two deeply felt choral elegies that are the *Requiem* and *Hymnus*.

The *Requiem* of 1932, intended originally for Boris Ord and the Choir of King's College Cambridge but apparently never sent to Ord and his singers, was not made readily available until publication almost half a century later. Many authorities have suggested that the *Requiem* had been composed by Howells as an outpouring of grief following upon the grievous loss of his own greatly-beloved son, Michael. It now appears that the work actually pre-dates Michael's death by two years and could well be a late tribute to the dead of World War One, known and unknown. Still more arresting could be the thought that perhaps Howells' reluctance to release the *Requiem* earlier than he did arose from the terrible thought that, in composing it at all, he had in some way tempted fate. Who knows? It has to be almost certain that Michael's death again played a part as a driving force behind the expansive *Stabat Mater* of his later years. Howells related emotionally and extraordinarily to the deeply felt anguish of the Mother of God for her dying Son.

Maybe Howells just wrote the *Requiem* because he felt compelled to do so. His much-quoted comment in a radio interview springs to mind:

I love music as a man can love a woman.... I have composed out of sheer love of trying to make nice sounds. I have written really, to put it simply, the music I would like to write and for no other reason.

At least this touching sincerity is not imbued with the arrogance shown by other composers when making similar remarks. Not entirely lacking in self-confidence, Saint-Saëns is alleged to have declared that he composed music as an apple tree produces apples.

Despite his large-scale choral and orchestral canvases, Howells' legacy is not to be seen merely in the substantial things he left to us. Consummate craftsman and visionary artist at one and the same time, Howells - like his celebrated RCM tutors Stanford and Wood before him - scorned not the efforts of singers and players of modest resources, as something of the present overview will, hopefully, have shown. At the same time, it is arguable that at least *part* of the neglect that has affected the artistic fortunes of two out of three of his choral masterworks attaches to the not inconsiderable complexity and technical difficulty facing any chorus wishing with success to tackle them. *Hymnus Paradisi* is not, of course, easy. But its unique combination of personal testament and tapestry-like macaronic verbal texts provides an added stimulus to the vocal challenges inherent in the vast majority of Howells' scores.

The traditions of the world of painting frequently involve what gallery staff would refer to as *retrospectives*. To some extent, Howells enjoys a daily retrospective in choral foundations all over the English-speaking world and beyond it. But to increasing numbers of folk beyond the boundaries of sacred choral repertoire, Howells has begun, at last, to take his rightful place in the affections of music lovers of a great diversity of enthusiasms and affinities. Importantly, too his name is more and more on the lips and in the planning lists of orchestra managers, chamber ensemble players, concert promoters and recording companies as well as organists and those in *quires and places where they sing*.