Members and their Guests were then present for a short talk by the Honorary Secretary on **"Victoriana re-visited"** – a theme to be taken up by Dr Barry Rose OBE in July 2019 during the course of a lecture sponsored by the Society at the Southern Cathedrals Festival in Chichester entitled *Stainer, Steggall and Me.*

Victoriana re-visited

The roll of honour of those who rowed against the tide of indifference or even downright opposition to the rehabilitation of the once discarded and sometimes despised corpus of high Victorian music for the Anglican liturgy in particular and the sacred repertoire in general is a distinguished one.

Much impetus to this cultural regeneration was provided by, and to an extent congruent with, the development of the medium of long playing recording and its successors – the cassette tape and, particularly, the compact disc and DVD.

For instance, within the lifetime of many of us today has emerged a renewed appreciation of Elgar's church music – not only that for the Roman Rite provisions at his local Catholic church in Worcester, St George's, but particularly the large-scale *Te Deum* and *Benedictus* for the Hereford 1897 Three Choirs' Festival and its director, George Robertson Sinclair as well as the two large-scale psalm settings from the early years of the last century – Nos 48 and 29 [*Great is the Lord and Give unto the Lord*].

It is almost inconceivable to recall that in the early 1960s, very little early Elgar was ever presented *in quires and places where they sing* and, when it was sung, it was normally given in English translations of the original Latin. Even such a staple simple anthem as *Ave, verum corpus* was out of print, as were the Psalm Settings mentioned earlier.

Enter Messrs Robinson and Bramma stage left, along with the acclaimed Worcester Cathedral Choir of the early to mid 1960s and a magical EMI LP. How quickly things altered in terms of the public perception of 19th century music!

Returning to less positive aspects, a further spur in the battle against all things Victorian in terms of church music found potential scholars, would-be academics and *real* academics ranged under their respective literary banners.

In terms of individuals for the cause of the 19th century, there were a number of seminal writers, led by those who contributed to a remarkable series of books published by Herbert Jenkins – most notably major studies by the redoubtable duo of Professor Arthur Hutchings and The Reverend Dr Erik Routley, whose book *The Musical Wesleys* broke much new ground, ground still tilled within much more recently as regards S S Wesley, by our very own Dr Peter Horton, and, with regard to the correspondence of Samuel Wesley senior by Philip Olleson.

The most significant *written* influence *against* all things Victorian was probably that of Kenneth Long, one-time organist of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney and latterly of Wigan Parish Church. His sweeping statements are, sadly, too often quoted by post-graduate students undertaking dissertations.

To some extent, it has to be admitted that the prevailing wind of taste emerging for a decade or two before and after the Second World War from the management of, and policy-makers within, national institutions such as the Royal College of Organists and the Royal School of Church Music also exercised a less than happy influence in terms of the fortunes of Victoriana in terms of music, though the so-called "Edwardian" period did not seem to suffer quite so much to some extent.

The emergence of Lionel Dakers as RSCM director in 1973 and, particularly, his inclusion of Elgar's Psalm 29 in the 1977 Royal Albert Hall RSCM Festival – *Let all the world* – certainly made choirs and musicians nationally sit up and take yet more notice of Elgar in the slipstream of changing taste arising from the Robinson/Bramma recording from Worcester.

More or less coterminous with this endeavour were the recording projects of three great lovers of Victorian music [though only as part of a very "catholic" general choice of repertoire].

Stanley Vann, Barry Rose and George Guest each produced "signature" renditions of *The Crucifixion* from Peterborough [where the *table d'hôte* musical menu was just as likely to include intimate madrigal like works such as those of Martin Peerson], Guildford [where the repertoire was even more diverse, taking in verse anthems from the 18th century requiring first rate solo singers] and, perhaps most unusually of all, from St John's College, Cambridge in the form of one of the one of the very earliest LP's of 19th century music, with the inimitable and greatly missed Brian Runnett as accompanist during his tenure as organ scholar. Barry Rose and Guildford also recorded London organist J H Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary* with conviction.

Nor was George Guest alone in the hallowed portals of academia in his promotion of 19th century repertoire; the music of John Stainer was equally featured at Oxford's Magdalen College where Stainer in B flat and *I saw the Lord* were the staple fare at Trinity Sunday Evensong for many years under the stewardship of Dr Bernard Rose, a man of impeccable musical taste combined at times almost with the inner passion of a true zealot; like George Guest and BWGR's own name-sake, Barry, the strong *belief* in the music they presented, of whatever period, was, in the words of Plumptre's great hymn "full clear on every page". His namesake, Bernard Rose's trail-blazing recordings of Stanford and Wood with his Magdalen Choir stand out as stylistic as well as scholarly. Doubtless as a Salisbury boy, under Walter Alcock, he had early learnt how such things should "go".

One of my own RCM tutors remarked to me in the 1960s that the "music-making of these interpretative giants simply reeks of conviction and inner force of purpose".

The revival of the fortunes of major figures such as Edward Cuthbert Bairstow of Wigan, Leeds and York fame also enjoyed – one should say enjoys – the long advocacy of his pupil, biographer and successor, Francis Jackson and of other opinion formers of the calibre of the late and great John Scott, who cut his creative teeth in London at Southwark and St Paul's Cathedrals following tenure of the organ scholarship of St John's Cambridge and proved so effectual a leader at St Paul's here in London, and – all too briefly – at Saint Thomas, Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Stepping back in time for now, popular legend long had it that the revival of independent organ accompaniments for choral settings, rather than deploying the keyboard merely "doubling" the singing of the voices, was invariably attributed to Thomas Attwood Walmisley, son of a London organist, who held a multitude of appointments, including that of Professor of Music within the University of Cambridge, whose Evening Canticles in D minor [settings that borrowed or deployed bleeding chunks from Baroque compositions emanating from the pen of Henri Dumont [1610-1684].

It is now widely acknowledged that Walmisley's setting was written in 1855, only a year preceding his tragically early death. Yet Samuel Sebastian Wesley's setting of the same material in the key of E dates from over a whole decade earlier when it was written for the Choir of Leeds Parish Church following a commission by Martin Cawood, a Leeds "iron-master", industrialist and benefactor. It remains a mystery that numerous books *still* credit Walmisley with the innovatory in this matter with scarcely ever a mention of S S Wesley.

The remarkable Bernarr Rainbow wrote compellingly in *English Church Music*, the RSCM's annual "journal" in a style now surpassed by Andrew McCrea's very scholarly RCO journal, about external non-musical influences on the Walmisley D minor *Magnificat* – under the title "A psychedelic *Magnificat*" suggesting the recall under the influence of drugs deployed by the composer, whose upper voice *alternatim* treatments were evidently re-call of the *falso-bordone* psalm style of the Sistine Chapel.....

This Society issued land-mark editions of Walmisley in D [major] and S S Wesley in E years ago edited by the legendary Harold Watkins Shaw; of rather more recent provenance have come Wesley's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* in E edited by Dr Peter Horton who has also brought out a similarly scholarly edition of Walmisley's fine double choir setting in B flat and, with long-serving Honorary General Editor, Richard Lyne, Henry Smart's inventive setting in G for five voices. The Smart G major setting has languished too long beneath the coat-tails of his effervescent B flat service written for St Paul's Cathedral and the London Church Choirs' Festival; only a few discerning foundations seem to have kept Smart in G alive while "live" aural experience suggests that too many choirs and organists of insufficient technique think nothing of giving his B flat essay a regular and, sadly, sometimes none too polished an airing.

Lest anyone think that the matter is merely an Anglican one, CMS editions include a deal of very early 20th century repertoire composed specifically for foundations within the Roman rite, such as the choirs of Westminster Cathedral and the London Oratory among which are a number of very early works by Herbert Howells.

Criticism of the "doubled" organ part so despised by musical critics, yet very prominent between the time of Henry Purcell and S S Wesley, is hard to account for. Many of the settings are very serviceable and most are of reasonable length.

And yet, there survive fine, straightforward examples from the early years of Queen Victoria's long reign though they are, of course, less "heady" and dramatic than the output of the so-called "High" Victorians.

Like many of the Victorians, and even later composers of the Edwardian period at the outset of the 20th century, the tyranny of truncated rhythms within a mainly homophonic discipline invariably led to numerous examples of verbal repetition to the point of the music becoming "hum-drum". Genuine through-composed settings devoid of such repetition are rare as hen's teeth.

Composers such as Charles Villiers Stanford and Charles Wood were not beyond using verbal repetition to underpin melodic supremacy and its inevitable consequence, over-use of sequential passages, but their maturity and even purity of style and certainly Stanford's almost "symphonic" approach to liturgical composition carried all before it.

Like Walmisley before him, Wood drew inspiration from other sources, such as French psalm melodies, and did so with stunning effect. Edward Woodall Naylor, in his *Collegium Regale* setting, did the same by his use of the ancient *Tonus Peregrinus*. More stuck into the Victorian groove was Gloucestershire's Basil Harwood who seemed to make a virtue out of repeated verbal texts at the beck and call of melodic underpinning, though the *Benedictus* from the A flat Communion service was so very long that a colleague asked for it be re-cast and shortened in the process in 1912, since when it has appeared as an alternative substitute for the lengthier original.

Much of the success of the grander, late-Victorian and early twentieth century, came to light from consideration of the special, sometimes unique, acoustic of the buildings for which such output was intended. The massive choral outpourings at the heart of pieces from the pen of Yorkshire's Edward Woodall Naylor are an early example. And yet, the rhetoric is not confined to one or two lone figures. The easeful rhetoric of Parry and Stanford was, effectively, perfected as an art form by Elgar – "you have to come to Worcester Cathedral to hear my music", he said, "the building "does" it".

The extraordinary rhetoric of that celebrated "out of time" musician, Herbert Howells, gives perhaps the greatest such example nearer to our own day. Commentators refer to him in terms of reverence as a kind of re-incarnation of a figure from the reign of the first, rather than the second, Queen Elizabeth.

A fascinating study of the life and times of John Varley Roberts appeared in a very recent edition of the *RCO Journal* from Professor David Baker. Here was the bluffest of Yorkshiremen, "not exactly lacking in self-confidence" as my Sheffield-born grandmother would have said – the latter 19th century's leading expert on the training of boys' voices and the well-known author of a best-selling tome on the subject, closely examined in terms of his life and music. And his best-known piece, never knowingly out of print, is a typical "parlour solo" type anthem with an initial tenor solo taken up by the choir; the short yet telling setting from the prophecy of Isaiah: *Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found,* inscribed to the wife of the Vicar of Halifax during JVR's tenure there prior to his appointment to Magdalen College in succession to Sir Walter Parratt in 1882.

Architectural historians advise us that the "last straw" in changing cultural tastes was the uprooting of the Doric Arch at the start of "swinging sixties" fifty-six years ago; the demolition of Philip Hardwick's 1837 structure seemed to be the last body blow against all things Victorian. Its removal marked a gradual sea-change in public opinion generally, and not merely the then expanding "heritage lobby".

No such water-mark is discernible in terms of Victorian church music, but the glories of melody and harmony that are so very redolent of both yester-year and the truly spiritual rhetoric that often accompanies such music was subject to a more gradual, and, to some extent a more pernicious, erosion. Shorter, more direct, contemporary church music relied more on compelling rhythms than sheer beauty of sound and expressive utterance.

Thank goodness that the faithful few leading musicians and liturgists did not throw every baby out with each bath time!

Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral was sung by the Vicars Choral at the close of the afternoon.