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CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY*

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# CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY

## *PAST and PRESENT*

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### PAST and PRESENT

THE CHURCH MUSIC SOCIETY was founded in March 1906 at a meeting held at the Deanery, St. Paul's Cathedral, when the chair was taken by Cosmo Gordon Lang, Bishop of Stepney, afterwards Archbishop successively of York and of Canterbury. At that time the class of music available to church choirs of all kinds was in urgent need of improvement, and to this task the new Society immediately addressed itself.

With Cosmo Lang as President, and (Sir) Henry Hadow as influential and active Chairman, the Society attracted eager support. Miss Eleanor Gregory (daughter of the then Dean of St. Paul's), Lady Mary Trefusis (friend of Elgar), and Miss Sausmarez were Honorary Secretaries, the Hon. Spencer Lyttelton was Honorary Treasurer, and among other prominent members were Dr. T. B. Strong (Dean of Christ Church, and afterwards Bishop, first of Ripon, then of Oxford), Sir Walter Parratt, the Right Hon. J. G. Talbot, Mr. J. A. Fuller Maitland, and Mr. Barclay Squire.

From its inception the aim of the Society has been clear and unchanged, namely, *to facilitate the selection and performance of the music which is most suitable for different occasions of divine worship, and for choirs of varying powers.* Today, over fifty years later, it is striking to recall how, in its efforts to revive church music in the pure classical style, whether easy or difficult to sing, the Society found it necessary to publish cheap octavo editions of works such as Farrant's *Morning and Evening Service in A minor*, Tye's simple *O Lord God of hosts*, Byrd's *Prevent us, O Lord*, and Victoria's *Jesu, the very thought*. (The first two of these are no longer published by the Society.) In the search for what is both simple and beautiful, the now well-loved *Jesu, joy of man's desiring* by Bach was published for the first time in England, with a translation of the words made specially for the Society by Dr. Robert Bridges.

A series of 'Occasional' and 'Shorter' papers was also inaugurated, the first 'Occasional' paper (significantly entitled *The Need for Reform in Church Music*) being written by Fuller Maitland, who was Music Critic of the 'Times' and Editor of *Grove's Dictionary*. Some of these papers, such as Hamilton Thompson's *Song Schools in the Middle Ages*, have been historical; some have been philosophical, such as Sir Thomas Armstrong's *Church Music Today*; some have covered a chapter of historical criticism, like that on *Eighteenth-Century Church Music*. Another useful group (Nos. 11, 12, 13, 22) has presented the factual results of important investigations. Yet others have been essentially practical, such as *Music in Village Churches*, or Major Daly's *Congregational Hymn Practices*. Dr. J. H. Arnold's *Music of the Holy Communion* shows the practical fruits of both musical and liturgical knowledge. A compilation of the repertory of cathedral music in actual use in 1898, revised in 1938, and issued as an Occasional Paper entitled *Forty Years of Cathedral Music* is now in process of revision as *Sixty Years of Cathedral Music*. Those 'Occasional' and 'Shorter' papers which have been mentioned by name

are only a selection from a series which can claim to make a distinguished contribution to the literature on church music.

Following Archbishop Lord Lang, who held office until his death in 1945, the Presidents of the Society have been the Rev. Dr. E. H. Fellowes, C.H., M.V.O., the Very Rev. A. S. Duncan-Jones (Dean of Chichester), and the present holder of the office, the Very Rev. Noël Hopkins, Provost of Wakefield. The Council of the Society, under its present Chairman, Dr. W. Greenhouse Allt, includes members, both clerical and lay, with a very wide range of knowledge, experience, and authority, representative of many aspects of church music and of both parish and cathedral churches. All of this assists the Society's publication policy and provides a reserve of advice to members.

An important development of the Society's work took place in 1927, when Dr. (afterwards Sir Sydney) Nicholson, then the Society's Chairman, established, with its support and approval, the School of English Church Music, now the Royal School of Church Music. This meant that some of the earlier efforts of the Society (for example, the publication of Choir Books, the organising of festivals, lectures, and the formation of a demonstration choir) were no longer necessary, since the new School was especially designed to develop them. At the same time, the parent Society's early work, begun in its Choir Book (not now obtainable) is extended and continued by its issue in convenient form of such liturgical items as the *Sarum Responses*, a simple harmonized form of the *Ferial Responses*, the *Sarum Litany*, the *Benedicite* on a melody in Sternhold and Hopkins. Today the Church Music Society continues to serve the cause of church music chiefly as an advisory and publishing society, and by helping to create and focus an informed public opinion. Recently it assisted with a substantial grant the publication of the Archbishops' Report, *Music in Church* (1951), a copy of which was presented to all members on publication. In its selection of music, it continues its original policy of helping to make available the best church music for any choir at any season. But as a publishing society its work has taken on a new importance by its own publication of certain items in the cathedral repertory which have gone out of print in other editions. In thus helping to maintain the truly classical repertory of cathedral music the Society has a vital task to fulfil, as witness its recent issue of Humfrey's *Rejoice in the Lord*, and Weldon's *Hear my crying*, in scholarly and critical, yet at the same time practical form. But in so doing it does not lose sight of the needs of parish church choirs also.

The work of such a Society, chiefly carried on through its 'Occasional' and 'Shorter' papers and its musical publications, is necessarily quiet and unspectacular. But its members can certainly feel that for no more than a modest subscription they are promoting an extremely important work for church music which is not exactly covered in any other way.

In 1956 the Society celebrated its Golden Jubilee. A service was held in Westminster Abbey at which the Evening Canticles were sung to a setting by Dr. Herbert Howells, specially written for the occasion.