

#### **4. Exploring the English Anthem c.1600-1800, tutored by Sally Drage**

Sally Drage is one of the country's leading expert in English church music of this period and has the distinction of being the only woman to edit a section of *Musica Britannica*. She had produced her own editions of all the music which we sang on 6<sup>th</sup> March. All of the music was very approachable, having been written for use by amateurs in parish churches rather than in cathedrals, and enjoyable to sing.

The venue (Our Lady and St Nicholas, Liverpool Parish Church) was new to NWEMF and had much to recommend it, being well-appointed, inexpensive, easy to find, accessible by public transport

and close to a reasonably-priced car park. However, the acoustics were 'difficult' and as an alto, although I enjoyed the singing of the basses, I heard very little of the sopranos and tenors.

For the first two pieces (Gibbons' *Almighty and everlasting God* and an *Agnus Dei* by Morley) we felt we were on familiar territory. Sally suggested that the Morley, which was published in his *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, would have been used as a role model by later country choir masters learning to write their own church music.

Our third piece, *Thou God of might*, was composed by John Milton, father of the poet and a contributor to *The Triumphs of Oriana*. The facsimile included a part for lute/cittern/bandora, but it was too small to read and had not been included in Burney's published edition so Sally had omitted it. Our performance was accompanied by viols and recorders (the viols also accompanied the first two pieces).

Then we began to enter unknown territory: the fourth piece, a trisagion, was written by William East of Waltham, who died in 1758 and who published a collection of church music in which pieces by Tallis and Gibbons were mixed with psalmody. At this point Sally explained that one of the earliest church choirs after the Commonwealth was that formed by the newly-appointed organist at Prestbury Parish Church in Cheshire. At that time (1679) the choir consisted of 7 boys, but by 1700 there were women singing in church choirs. A lot started in Cheshire. Gentry did not sing in church choirs, as they considered it beneath them.

The next composer, John Chetham of Skipton, had adapted a setting by Purcell of Psalm 117, adding an Allelujah at the end. The piece began with a tenor/bass duet, continued with a 4-part chorus and ended in 5 parts. Our accompaniment to this piece included violins, recorders and viols.

Extending our acquaintance with unfamiliar composers we then tackled a setting of Psalm 136 by Andrew Roner (fl. 1721), a German who came to this country during Handel's reign. The style of the music we were studying had been gradually changing and this, accompanied by organ, violins, bass viol and recorders, was typically Baroque and could have benefited from ornamentation. Different sections of this music were instrumental, vocal tenor solo, duets between sopranos and altos and then between tenors and basses, all interspersed with 3-part choruses in which altos and tenors shared a line. Quite a variety for only three pages of music!

Yet another composer who was unknown to us, although he may have been well-known in his day, was John Broderip (1719-1770). Organist of Wells Cathedral, he supplemented his income by writing music for parish choirs. *Awake up my glory*, in which we were accompanied by the organ, was the first of several pieces which Sally described as 'mini-oratorios'.

Uriah Davenport (c.1690-1784) spent his life in Rushton Spencer, where he taught psalmody. Apparently it was unusual for a teacher to remain in one place – the normal practice was to move on after a few weeks; for this reason, up to 1750 psalmody books included instructions for reading music. The village of Rushton Spencer was, in Davenport's day, centred around the church, but the opening of a turnpike road lower down the hill caused the village to move down and the old buildings have disappeared. *O praise God in his holiness* (taken from Psalm 150) was another mini-oratorio, including a 4-bar trumpet solo for the tenor voices (one of the few times during the day when I could hear the tenors). At first the normal practice was for choirs to sing unaccompanied, but by Davenport's time the bassoon or cello (then called bass viol) was a normal accompaniment; we had a viol accompaniment.

Our next piece, *Birmingham*, was composed by a non-conformist called Greatrix or Anthony Greatorex (1730-1814) who was

minister at the Unitarian Chapel to which Elizabeth Gaskell went. It was a fugeing tune in which we were accompanied on the organ.

The Methodists tended to take popular operatic tunes and turn them into hymn tunes. Edward Harwood, a weaver and alto singer of Darwen and Liverpool (1756-1787) gave us a very operatic setting of *The Dying Christian to his Soul*, otherwise known by its opening words *Vital spark*. This was a popular funeral piece which remained well known until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *The Oxford Companion to Music* Percy Scholes tells us that in 1787 in Bolton John Wesley “desired forty or fifty children to come in and sing *Vital spark of heavenly flame*. Although some of them were silent, not being able to sing for tears, yet the harmony was such as I believe could not be equalled in the King’s Chapel”.

*Tell us, O women*, a dialogue hymn set by Charles Burney (1726-1814), was even more operatic than *Vital spark*. Our final piece of the day, *The Promis’d Land* set by John Fawcett of Bolton (1789-1867) was a mini-oratorio complete with Hallelujah chorus – a stirring ending, with its accompaniment of violins, clarinet, bass viol and organ. Fawcett, a shoemaker, wrote political songs and played the organ and various wind instruments.

Sally introduced us to a lot of enjoyable and unfamiliar music, enlivened with anecdotes about the composers and the practices of the time, and we are grateful to her for her hard work.

Janet Evans