

**‘LET THE PEOPLE SING!’: ASPECTS OF CHOIR CULTURE  
FROM TYNE TO TWEED, 1852-1989**

**WILLIAM ROY LARGE**

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## **Abstract**

This study traces the history of choral singing in Newcastle and its environs from 1852 to 1989. Following the Music Festival of 1842 there was a lull in the musical life of Newcastle until the arrival of William Rea, appointed as organist to the town corporation. Galvanizing musical activity, Rea was at the centre of a vigorous, if sometimes turbulent, choral scene in the last decades of the century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Armstrong College, then part of Durham University, afforded the scholarly environment for the establishment of the Newcastle Bach Choir, espousing the music of Bach and contemporary British composers. Traditional ‘oratorio’ choirs also flourished until waning interest in their basic repertory saw their demise in the 1970s and 1980s.

The two World Wars had meanwhile caused some choirs to cease their activities, either temporarily or permanently, while others strengthened their presence, ensuring the continuity of choral music performance.

The second half of the century saw the founding of new choirs, including the Cappella Novocastriensis, strongly linked to the University, and two choirs formed to support orchestras wishing to perform choral works. Alongside this mainstream choral activity, male-voice choirs developed, a number rooted in their works communities or nonconformist and temperance environments. Their repertory, aims and organisation contrasted strongly with the established mixed-voice choirs.

The choral life of Northumberland centred on one or two regional ‘clusters’; the comparative isolation of Berwick upon Tweed, the most northerly Northumbrian town, encouraged strong indigenous musical activity.

A survey of the venues used for concerts and rehearsals underlines the want of suitable halls in the area, while an account of the orchestras used shows the challenges imposed by the lack of an accommodating local professional orchestra and the increasing use of period instruments for performances of baroque music.

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## Abbreviations

### (a) publications

<i>AM</i>	<i>Alnwick Mercury</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Berwick Advertiser</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Berwickshire News and General Advertiser</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Evening Chronicle</i>
Foster	Foster, Joseph, <i>Alumni Oxonienses</i>
<i>Grove IV</i>	<i>Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , 4 <sup>th</sup> edn, 1940
<i>MGG</i>	<i>Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Morpeth Herald</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Musical Times</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Newcastle Chronicle</i>
<i>NCour</i>	<i>Newcastle Courant</i>
<i>NDC</i>	<i>Newcastle Daily Chronicle</i>
<i>New Grove 1980</i>	<i>New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , 1980
<i>New Grove 2</i>	<i>New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn, 2001
<i>NG</i>	<i>Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury</i>
<i>NJ</i>	<i>Newcastle Journal</i>
<i>NMNC</i>	<i>North Mail and Newcastle (Daily) Chronicle</i>
<i>NSSG</i>	<i>North and South Shields Gazette and Northumberland and Durham Advertiser</i>
<i>OCM 9</i>	<i>The Oxford Companion to Music</i> , 9 <sup>th</sup> edn
<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Council of the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne; Proceedings of the Council of the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne</i>
<i>SDG</i>	<i>Shields Daily Gazette</i>
Venn	Venn, John, <i>Alumni Cantabrigienses</i>

### (b) archive holdings

GCL	Gateshead Central Library
NCL	Newcastle City Library
NUSC	Newcastle University Special Collections
TWAS	Tyne and Wear Archives Service
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum Archives

### (c) organisations

AAAC	Mr T. Albion Anderson's Amateur Choir
ACCS	Armstrong College Choral Society
BCO	Bach Choir Orchestra
BCSO	Bach Choir Society Orchestra
BCU	Berwick Choral Union
BTSA	Berwick Tonic Sol-fa Association



CAMDIN	Council for the Arts, Music and Drama in Northumberland
Cappella	Cappella Novocastriensis
CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
CS	Choral Society
Lit and Phil	Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society
MRC1	Mr Rea's Choir 1
MRC2	Mr Rea's Choir 2
MVC	Male-Voice Choir
NAVS	Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society
NEMT	North of England Musical Tournament
NFMS	National Federation of Music Societies
NGCU	Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union
NHarmSoc 1891	Newcastle Harmonic Society 1891
NHarmSoc 1895	Newcastle Harmonic Society 1895
NNTVS	[Newcastle] National Telephone Vocal Society
NOS	Northumberland Orchestral Society
NPO	Northern Philharmonic Orchestra
NPTCS	Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society
NSHCS	Newcastle Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society
NSO	Newcastle Symphony Orchestra
TWG	Townswomen's Guild
WI	Women's Institute
YMCACS	YMCA Choral Society

## Preface

This study may almost be said to have its origins in the late 1940s and 1950s when the Newcastle Bach Choir featured prominently in my family; my mother and paternal grandfather sang in the choir, my grandmother was among the violins in the Bach Choir Orchestra and my father was treasurer and later auditor.<sup>1</sup> My grandmother, Alice Large, was also a member of the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra and often spoke of playing under such conductors as Hamilton Harty, Malcolm Sargent and Vaughan Williams. Bach Choir concerts were never missed, though in those youthful days the chorales and choruses of the *St Matthew* and *St John Passions* were more appealing than the seemingly endless *da capo* arias. The soloists were always of particular interest. In time these were to include the countertenor Alfred Deller as well as Carl and Nathalie Dolmetsch and Joseph Saxby who introduced the then unfamiliar viola da gamba, a range of recorders, the virginals and harpsichord, thus familiarising not only me, but Newcastle audiences more widely with baroque sounds. The programmes of these concerts, many bearing the autographs of these visiting musicians, form the basis of my considerable personal archive of Bach Choir memorabilia.

A music degree from Durham University, pursued at King's College, Newcastle, now Newcastle University, introduced me to Dr Frederick Hudson, who was to found the Cappella Novocastriensis, inviting me to become the Cappella's accompanist and organist, thus giving first-hand experience of working alongside a specialist choir. Even more significantly, Hudson gave me opportunity and a taste for musical research by inviting me to assist with the preparation of the William Child

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<sup>1</sup> Locally, it was always simply 'the Bach Choir', despite London's having made prior claim to the title.

entry for the supplement to the first edition of *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*,<sup>2</sup> an introduction to research techniques and the world of archives and archivists.

Such were among the influences that, many years later and with the available time that retirement brings, led to a decision to return to academic work and to draw upon these early experiences which suggested possible areas of research and gave some idea as to how to go about it. The rather more complex process by which the theme of the present study was arrived at is outlined in greater detail in the Introduction.

Several challenges faced me. Prime among them was the sheer quantity of material. This came from deposited archives of several choirs and orchestras and from newspaper and other reports of their activities. Altogether about 40 large files of information were compiled. Handling this amount of material benefitted from advice given by Dr Roz Southey, of Newcastle University,<sup>3</sup> to compile an ongoing index of the relevant references, especially from the various newspaper and *Musical Times* reports. Although a time-consuming process, and not wholly completed, this made it comparatively easy to identify the sources of all references to, say, a specific conductor, choir or organist. I also decided at an early stage of the research to write up regular 'reports' of the choirs and one or two other organisations investigated. These proved invaluable when it came to writing the thesis itself as much of the material was already assembled, albeit in an unedited form.

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<sup>2</sup> This was subsequently published in an expanded version: Frederick Hudson and W. Roy Large, 'William Child (1606/7-1697) – a new investigation of sources' in *The Music Review*, 31/4 (1970), 265-284. Hudson and I subsequently contributed the Child article to the *New Grove* and to the second edition of *MGG*. I also contributed the entry on John Geeres (?-1642) to *MGG*.

<sup>3</sup> Dr Southey had undertaken extensive research on the musical life of the north-east for her thesis, *Commercial Music-making in Eighteenth Century North-East England: a Pale Reflection of London?* (PhD thesis, Newcastle University, 2001).

On the negative side was the absence of information on choirs whose archives were lost; something of their activities could be reconstructed from newspaper accounts, but these tended in the main to cover public performances and did not offer the background detail which would have illuminated the ebb and flow of the choirs' fortunes. Moreover, discovering these reports was not a straightforward task, though it was assisted by access to those newspapers which were available online. Also, during the last twenty or thirty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reviews of concerts gradually disappeared from local papers so that source of information eventually dried up.

I am aware of how much is not covered in this thesis, and some of the more obvious areas are referred to in Chapter 8. These include the local orchestras, choirs for ladies' voices and the impact of the Tonic Sol-fa and competitive festival movements. To have developed these and other areas more thoroughly, even had sufficient information been available, would have extended the thesis beyond reasonable length.

It was not easy to decide on start and end dates for the thesis. 'Begin at the beginning [...] and go on till you come to the end; then stop', was the advice of the White King.<sup>4</sup> It has, however, its limitations. The starting point of the thesis shifted backwards as the choral activity of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became important in itself rather than as a background or introduction to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the other end of the time-scale, the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards would have called for a different approach, including interviews with conductors, choir members and audiences, rather than the essentially archival approach of the rest of the thesis. This suggested a mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century starting point and some time in the 1980s as a concluding date. 1852 saw the establishment of the first choir to offer the promise of a

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, Chapter XII.

degree of permanence and stability to the choral life of Newcastle, so that year provides the most satisfactory starting date for the substance of the thesis. The *terminus ad quem* was less easy to arrive at. The Bach Choir and some choirs that were launched in the 1950s and 1960s have continued into the present century, so a closing date in the 1980s means that accounts of them are rather left in the air. However, three of the major choirs saw their demise in the 1970s and '80s; the last of them, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, founded in 1888 and therefore the last of the Victorian choirs, was disbanded in 1989. This date was therefore chosen as the closing date for the thesis.

As will be explained in the Introduction, a thematic rather than chronological approach has been the preferred way of presenting the material. Allied with the use of a number of case studies, this allows for a sharper focus on some of the key elements: the impact of the two World Wars, for instance, and the venues and orchestras used by the choirs. Inevitably, though, not least to keep the study within manageable bounds, much is omitted, and the concluding chapter identifies some of the areas that have been given only passing attention or would repay further investigation.

Following Chapter 8 are summary biographies of the main figures appearing in the body of the thesis. They are gathered here to allow easy reference to them and to prevent too much interruption of the flow of the main narrative. There has been no exhaustive attempt to produce complete biographies; indeed, in many cases this would have been impossible because of the lack of surviving information. Largely unknown local figures, whose names do not appear in published accounts, have been treated as fully as possible. In the case of musicians and others who achieved national significance and whose careers are well documented, their local contribution has been the focus, with only a very summary account of their wider activities. Appropriate

references are given to the published sources. A few whose contribution to the organisations with which they were involved was minor are referred to only cursorily.

Three items appear as appendices, rather than in the main body of the text, as they amplify the narrative without being essential to it. The letter of William Rea about the Town Hall organ and the comments of Nicholas Thistlethwaite would be of value to those interested in the organ-building firm of Gray and Davison. The Armstrong College song is now little more than of historical significance, but words and music are reproduced for those unaware of them. A list of the Northumberland village and small town choirs known to have existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is included, though it cannot be taken as definitive because of the lack of sufficient information.

As may be inferred from the start of the Preface, this has been in some measure the completion of a personal journey:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time.<sup>5</sup>

To have witnessed at first hand some of the events and to have known personally some of the people now presented in a more clinical and detached way has been at times a curiously disconcerting experience. But it has allowed some judgments to be made which would have been difficult and possibly inappropriate at the time. It has also put into a wider context the activities of choirs and those associated with them which were once encountered with the freshness of a new experience but are now seen as part of an unfolding and continuous narrative.

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<sup>5</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', Section V of *Four Quartets*.

## **Introduction**

This study is based on a wealth of archive material relating to the range of choirs active on Tyneside and to a lesser extent across Northumberland during the last 170 years. This information makes a significant contribution to local and wider history and provides a basis for future research. It is recognised, however, that much material has been lost and the process of reconstructing the histories of the choirs considered was often dependent on secondary sources, especially newspaper reports, whose accuracy and impartiality could not necessarily be relied on.

The over-riding aim of this thesis, therefore, is to present the original archival sources and the essential secondary literature available in a form that will offer a coherent narrative and serve as a resource for those undertaking further research into the musical, social and cultural life of the region and beyond. It is hoped it will contribute to our knowledge of the past, and in so doing help us to understand how we have arrived at where we are. It finds its counterpart in family history, whose practitioners might act out of curiosity, but who seek to illuminate a family through several generations and to locate it in its wider social context. Indeed, in some aspects this study contributes to family history, for not only does it include a series of mini-biographies of several local musicians, it also offers a resource for those who may be pursuing the history of family members who sang in local choirs. The author's own family, for instance, were closely involved with the Bach Choir throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A choir has roots, and knowing about those roots helps us to understand better the aims and purposes of the choir as it is found today. It may also help to understand why so many people have devoted time and energy to sustain a choral society and the complex organisation associated with it. It was something of this instinct that led the

Newcastle Bach Choir to investigate its history and to lay it before its members and the wider public in the book published to mark the choir's centenary. The resulting book contains detailed biographies of those associated with the choir during the years immediately following its foundation in 1915.<sup>22</sup>

The title of the thesis serves two functions. First, 'Let the people sing!', a challenge enunciated by Sir John Barbirolli in 1945, suggests that singing was an imperative that called for a response.<sup>23</sup> This was usually spear-headed by conductors who held music appointments - often, though not always, as organists - and founded choirs in the towns and villages discussed. These conductors generally had some music qualification, either a university music degree or a diploma from one of the colleges of music. In this, they were typical of conductors elsewhere in the United Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> Conductors, both those who established choirs and those who succeeded them, were decisive figures in the success, and in some cases failure, of their choirs. Examples, however, will show that members were not merely passive participants in their choir's activities but engaged in a partnership with their conductors, usually through a committee. Though at times relations with conductors could be strained and complacent attitudes could inhibit innovation, demands of concerts and the pleasure of singing generally ensured at least a competent, and with the best choirs a high, standard of performance.

Second, the term 'choir culture' is used to encapsulate the history and development of the choirs discussed. The more historical aspect aims at providing an underlying factual narrative related in some instances to such external circumstances

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<sup>22</sup> Christine Borthwick, Eric Cross, Roy Large and Philip Owen, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir: Celebrating a Century of Singing, 1915-2015* (Hersham: Line Clear Editions, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 6, p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Finnegan, in *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 28, refers to conductors in Milton Keynes as being 'usually male and with formal classical training'.



as, for instance, the First and Second World Wars, while the closely-related term ‘development’ is concerned more with the internal functioning of the choirs, their ambitions and aims, their challenges and achievements, and their growth and, in some instances, their decline and demise. At times, however, this mapping of the history and development can also be set within a wider social and cultural context. While a major focus on this aspect has to remain the task of a future study, the findings of this thesis and of similar studies of choirs across other geographical areas will allow later research to present a fuller account of the contribution choral organisations have made to the social and cultural life of the nation.

Throughout the period covered by this study choral societies were not only the main organisations affording amateur singers the opportunity to enjoy singing, they were almost the only means by which audiences could, through live performances, become acquainted with the extensive repertory of choral music. For many choirs this repertory embraced the more familiar works of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially oratorio, with Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn at its core. The more specialised or adventurous choirs included significant repertory from the renaissance and the lesser-known works of the baroque era; they were also the main agents by which contemporary choral music could be performed.

Contemporary composers, along with those of the past, were therefore often reliant on these amateur societies for the performance of their choral music. This had a two-way dynamic: the best amateur choirs, of which examples are found in Newcastle as elsewhere, could meet the most challenging of choral music and composers were not restricted in the demands they could make on such choirs. In some instances, strong links were established with contemporary composers, who on occasion came to conduct performances of their work. Notable among these were the

links forged between the Bach Choir and its founder, W. G. Whittaker, and Gustav Holst. Any account, therefore, of the history of choral music and its composers is incomplete without an understanding of the choral forces which were available to the composer.

The main professional choirs were those found in cathedrals, large churches, university colleges and similar institutions, while the advent of the BBC and the development of recording also encouraged the establishment of a few professional secular choirs. But the burden of choral performance has been and remains with amateur choirs. To take but one example, over fifty amateur Bach Choirs have been established in the United Kingdom – not all of them surviving – of which the Newcastle Bach Choir is one.<sup>25</sup>

Given the recognition of amateur choral societies as an essential element in the transmission of music from composer to audience, with the attendant opportunity the process gives to those with a desire to sing, this study examines in detail how this interaction operated in a specific area of the north of England. It sets out the geographical extent of choral activity (Map 1 shows how widespread this was in Northumberland), gives examples of the numbers of participants, and demonstrates the extensive repertory of music from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

This study originated in a proposal to investigate the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century choral culture in Newcastle, focusing especially on two choirs, the Bach Choir,<sup>26</sup> founded in 1915, and the Cappella Novocastriensis (hereinafter Cappella), founded in 1960. Two factors in particular led to a change of plan. First, a scrutiny of Newcastle's choral history of the period 1850 to 1900, undertaken as a basis for the

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<sup>25</sup> William Roy Large, *The History and Development of the Bach Choirs of the United Kingdom* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all references to the Bach Choir throughout this thesis are to the Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir.

20<sup>th</sup>-century study, revealed much more information than had been anticipated, showing something of the complexity of the choral life of the city during that half-century; this complexity is revealed in Timeline 1 (see p. 55) which shows the inter-relationship of the choirs discussed. It was therefore decided that this period warranted a fuller account than had originally been planned. Second, to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Bach Choir, a centenary book was proposed, and the present author was invited to contribute the chapter covering the period 1930 to 1971.<sup>27</sup> The publication of the book had therefore pre-empted the need for a further detailed study of the choir.

With the removal of the Bach Choir as a major focus, the decision was taken to extend the scope of the thesis beyond Newcastle into Northumberland and the towns and villages along the south bank of the River Tyne and it is that region which now establishes the geographical boundaries of the study. Also, it was decided to limit the study chronologically to the period from the 1850s to the 1980s, the earlier years allowing for the coverage of the building of a new Town Hall for Newcastle and the establishment of several choirs and the later years permitting the inclusion of the first two decades of the Cappella and the disbanding of three of the city's major choral societies. The succession of Newcastle's choirs is shown diagrammatically in Timelines 2 and 3 (pp. 72, 141). These latter timelines (1900 to 2000), when compared with Timeline 1 (1852 to 1900, p. 55) show the relative stability of choirs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when compared with the fluctuating fortunes of those in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Christine Borthwick, Eric Cross, Roy Large and Philip Owen, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir: Celebrating a Century of Singing, 1915-2015* (Hersham: Line Clear Editions, 2016). Dr Borthwick contributed the chapter on the period 1915 to 1930, Professor Cross on the period from 1970 to 2015 and Dr Owen chapters on personnel associated with the choir.

As a useful basis for the present work, and leading to an MLitt, the author undertook an archive survey of records of the Bach Choir, the Cappella and the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, and studies of the Newcastle musical festivals, including that of 1909, and the Bach Choirs of the United Kingdom.<sup>28</sup> The archive-based approach characterises the present study and draws mainly on archives held by Newcastle University,<sup>29</sup> Gateshead Central and Newcastle City Libraries, Tyne and Wear Archives, the Royal College of Music and the Victoria and Albert Museum, the latter for information about the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. In addition, local newspapers were widely used, at least until the 1980s when reporting of concerts largely ceased, as were issues of *Musical Times* and its predecessor *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, especially because of their extensive coverage of music in the provinces.

A stimulus for the work was an awareness of the neglect of the musical life of the city in recent histories of Newcastle. S. Middlebrook, writing in 1950, makes a few passing references to music,<sup>30</sup> but two of the main 21st-century publications ignore the subject altogether.<sup>31</sup> As to works dealing in whole or in part with music locally during the period in question, Christine Borthwick's thesis on W. G. Whittaker gives an account of the foundation of the Bach Choir and its activities until 1929 when Whittaker left to assume the Gardiner Chair of Music and become the Principal

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<sup>28</sup> William Roy Large, *Towards the establishment of an archive of the major choirs of Newcastle upon Tyne* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2014); William Roy Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne with particular reference to the Festival of 1909* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015); William Roy Large, *The History and Development of the Bach Choirs of the United Kingdom* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Most of the Bach Choir archives used are housed in the International Centre for Music Studies, formerly the Music Department. They are in the process of being transferred to the Special Collections of the Philip Robinson Library, Newcastle University.

<sup>30</sup> S. Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne: Its Growth and Achievement* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Kemsley Chronicle & Journal, 1950).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster, eds, *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001) and A. W. Purdue, *Newcastle: The Biography* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011).

of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music in Glasgow.<sup>32</sup> Christopher Wiltshire, who for a time was conductor of the Felling Male Voice Choir, provides a detailed study of male voice choirs in general, but uses the Bebside and District Male Voice Choir, of Northumberland, as exemplifying the male voice choir tradition during the 1920s and 1930s which he characterises as ‘the golden era of British male voice choral work’.<sup>33</sup> A volume published to commemorate the bicentenary of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society in 1993 includes an essay by Percy Lovell, sometime senior lecturer in music at Newcastle University, on some of the city’s leading musicians, of whom three are relevant to this study: Edgar Bainton, Arthur Milner and W. G. Whittaker.<sup>34</sup> In a recent publication, Eric Cross gives a brief account of music in Newcastle University, including the Armstrong College Choral Society.<sup>35</sup> The one work which essays an overview of music in the city is Joseph Pegg’s online history, covering the period from the time of Bede to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a highly personal, non-academic account, but it attempts to supply the need implicit in his bald statement: ‘Newcastle has no musical history’.<sup>36</sup>

Very little has been published about choral societies in general. Dave Russell, indeed, comments that it is ‘remarkable that while much has been written on the subject of choral music, almost nothing has appeared on the thousands of societies which have performed that music’. His book on the social history of popular music in England includes a chapter on the subject, acknowledging that whilst it is ‘in no way

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Christine Borthwick, *‘In the Swim’: The life and musical achievements of William Gillies Whittaker 1876-1944* (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Christopher R. Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir: A History and Contemporary Assessment* (PhD thesis, University of London, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Percy Lovell, ‘The musicians’ in *The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne: Bicentenary Lectures 1993* (Newcastle upon Tyne: The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1994), 124-45.

<sup>35</sup> In Norman McCord, advisory ed., *Newcastle University: Past, Present and Future* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2006), 85-88.

<sup>36</sup> J. W. Pegg, *Newcastle’s Musical Heritage: An Introduction* [2003/08], <[www.newcastle.gov.uk/wwwfileroot/legacy/educationlibraries/tbp/historyofmusic](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/wwwfileroot/legacy/educationlibraries/tbp/historyofmusic)>.

definitive [it] suggests areas and arguments for debate'.<sup>37</sup> Curiously, however, he appears to have overlooked one of the most valuable, though more broadly-based, contributions, Brian Pritchard's *The Musical Festival and the Choral Society in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social History*.<sup>38</sup> Although in such a wide-ranging account Newcastle necessarily features only to a limited extent, Pritchard nonetheless identifies some of the key elements of the choral culture in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular he notices the decline of interest in choral performance towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the demise of weaker choirs hastened by the effect of World War I.<sup>39</sup>

Pritchard's chapter for the period 1860-1900 begins with the daunting words, 'The historian of choral activity in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century faces a formidable task,' a task that includes the appearance of 'choral society upon choral society in a seemingly endless stream'.<sup>40</sup> The research of the present author, extending his investigation to c.1980, tends to confirm this challenging observation. In a period of about 130 years there is evidence of the existence of at least 300 choirs of various kinds, including male voice choirs and a handful of operatic societies, in the Newcastle and Northumberland area alone. It is impossible to produce anything like an accurate figure because the identification of choirs can sometimes be problematic or rest on slender evidence – a single report in a newspaper, for instance. One of the difficulties, indeed, has been the disentangling of webs of choirs with similar names that are found over a wide time span. Where original records are lost, and newspaper and other reporting is patchy, it can be almost

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<sup>37</sup> Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914: A Social History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1997), 248. For the use of the term 'choral society' see p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Brian W. Pritchard, *The Music Festival and the Choral Society in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social History* (PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1968).

<sup>39</sup> Pritchard, *The Music Festival and the Choral Society*, 723.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 721.

impossible to decide whether a named choir in one report is the same choir bearing the same name in a report a few years later. This is illustrated in Chapter 6 where an account is given of a group of choirs in Tynemouth and the surrounding area.

Russell identifies three basic forms of choral society in existence by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: mixed-voice medium-sized choirs, larger mixed-voice oratorio choirs and smaller male-voice choirs. To these he adds cantata choirs and competitive choirs.<sup>41</sup> This is not wholly satisfactory, not least because male voice choirs were almost invariably competitive choirs and their repertory was markedly different from that of the mixed-voice choirs. The present study makes no attempt at a water-tight classification, as to do so raises more problems than it solves. Obvious terms such as male-voice choir or ladies' choir are accepted descriptions of these choirs and so are generally used. A minor challenge was to find a satisfactory collective term by which to distinguish one of the main types of choir, of which the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union is an example, from other choirs. To bracket some of the smaller choirs and the specialist choirs such as the Bach Choir and the Cappella with choral societies in general is not helpful. To refer to 'large-scale choirs' is unsatisfactory, especially when they dwindled in size. In the end Russell's term 'oratorio choirs' was decided upon. Despite its limitations, in as much as it relates to the core repertory of many of the choirs it must serve.

A related term appearing in this study is 'standard oratorio'. A reference in the *Newcastle Journal* to *Elijah* as 'the other standard'<sup>42</sup> – *Messiah* undoubtedly being the first – suggests that some idea of a 'standard' oratorio was to be found. It seems to have been established by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when George Putnam Upton published

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<sup>41</sup> Russell, *Popular Music in England*, 248, 255-56.

<sup>42</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, 14 March 1942.

a popular volume entitled *The Standard Oratorios*.<sup>43</sup> Much more recently, Howard E. Smither refers to *Elijah* as ‘a standard work among both English and German speaking choral societies’.<sup>44</sup> If we may conclude that the term ‘standard oratorio’ has some validity, it would best be limited to a few works with *Messiah*, *Elijah* and *The Creation* at their core.

Given the quantity of information that was discovered, the basic approach to the thesis has been to maintain a broadly chronological thread while presenting most of the material thematically, narrowing the focus in two or three instances by offering case studies of specific choirs as representative of a wider trend or movement. The first two chapters cover the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing the development of choral activity in Newcastle especially against the background of the concert hall in the new Town Hall and under the influence of William Rea, the corporation organist. Particular attention is given to the organ in the concert hall, not only because it attracted Rea to the city, but because without it many concerts would not have taken place.<sup>45</sup> Chapter 3 continues some of the themes of the previous chapter, but points to a shift of focus towards what was to become Armstrong College, a constituent college of Durham University, with its incipient music department headed by W. G. Whittaker, the founder of the Bach Choir. This chapter also considers the growing emphasis on British music.

The fourth chapter is devoted entirely to the two World Wars. At the outset there is a summary of the conflicting views as to how musicians and their audiences

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<sup>43</sup> George Putnam Upton, *The Standard Oratorios: Their Stories, their Music, and their Composers: A Handbook* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008; a reprint of the 1886 edn).

<sup>44</sup> Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, Vol. 4: ‘The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’ (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 184.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Musgrove, referring to Manchester, comments that ‘organs were as important as Hallé’, especially in attracting notable musicians to the city; he also points out that organs ‘were orchestra-substitutes’ (Frank Musgrove, ‘The rise of a northern musical elite’, in *Northern History: A Review of the History of the North of England and the Borders*, xxxv (Leeds: The School of History, The University of Leeds, 1999), 50-76 (67, 62)).



should respond, especially to the performance of German music. The chapter then attempts to show the impact the wars had on choral activity, indicating something of the contrasting responses made by the choirs to the limitations imposed by the wars. Finally, some account is given of the way in which peace and victory were celebrated by the city's choirs. Chapter 5 covers the main 20<sup>th</sup> century choirs up to the 1980s. It briefly charts the progress of the middle years of the Bach Choir and shows the growth and decline of three of the oratorio choirs. As illustrative of the influences that led to the disbanding of these choirs, a case study of the YMCA Choral Society is presented. The chapter concludes with an account of choirs established during the 1950s and 1960s, in particular the founding and early development of the Cappella, a choir that, not unlike the Bach Choir, was to break fresh choral ground.

Chapter 6 covers two aspects of choral activity: the choral life of Northumberland and male voice choirs, both of which go beyond the confines of the city. At the centre of the account of Northumberland choirs is a case study of the choral life of Berwick upon Tweed up to the 1920s, chosen because of its remoteness from Newcastle and therefore displaying a marked sense of self-sufficiency and independence. The account of male voice choirs draws attention to the characteristics that distinguish them from mixed-voice choirs, especially the approach to concert planning, the relationship between choir and conductor and the wider issue of discipline. In Chapter 7 the twin issues of venues and orchestras are examined. Both areas reveal the difficulties created on the one hand by the lack of suitable performance venues and on the other by the want of a permanent local orchestra capable of and willing to be engaged by local choirs. The discussion of orchestras also looks at some of the compromises that were made when the cost of engaging one became prohibitive.

As we have seen, the main purpose of this thesis is to present an account of the choral activity on Tyneside and in Northumberland from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century, based in the main on hitherto neglected archival sources. Arising out of this are four major themes. As was implied above, the first, and most significant for the choral life of the region, is the importance of the conductors of the choirs discussed. Several were the founders of choirs, most notably James M. Preston, who founded the Gateshead Choral Society (which became the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union), W. G. Whittaker, the founder of the Bach Choir and Frederick Hudson, who established the Cappella. Other conductors built on firmly-based foundations, maintained high standards and developed innovative programmes, often extending the range of a choir's basic repertory.

Second is the importance of what is now Newcastle University. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Armstrong College Choral Society was formed, to the present, the University and especially the music department, now the International Centre for Music Studies, has provided staff who have founded two, and have conducted three of the city's choirs.

The third of these themes is that of venues. Although Chapter 7 presents a comprehensive account of the venues used for rehearsals and performances, the challenge of the lack of suitable accommodation, especially in the city, is encountered as an *idée fixe* throughout the study. The concert hall in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Town Hall, and then the City Hall, although both offering the promise of an ideal venue for choral concerts, proved to be less than satisfactory. Sage Gateshead, built to exacting standards for concert performances, has not been as accessible to amateur choral societies as might have been hoped.

The last theme has been that of orchestras. With no permanent professional orchestra in the city for most of the period covered by the study choirs drew on a kaleidoscopic range of ensembles to accompany them. In particular we note the compromises that were often made when a sufficient orchestra could not be engaged and the organ, or sometimes the piano or harmonium, was used with in place of an orchestra or as a substitute for wind or brass parts.

This study has been one in which a mass of archive material has gradually yielded a complex narrative of success and failure, of achievement and disappointment, of courage and complacency. Overall one can only respect the achievements of singers, conductors and instrumentalists whose commitment to so many choirs has ultimately ensured the maintenance of a choral tradition in Newcastle and Northumberland to the present day.

# Chapter 1

## Newcastle: Setting the Scene

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the cultural environment from which the choral movement in Newcastle grew in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It indicates the impermanence of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century choirs, and the transitory choral life represented by the music festivals, which drew heavily on external resources. Of great importance in the second half of the century was the building of the Town Hall, with its integral Concert Hall and organ, and the appointment of a corporation organist. Both hall and organist were to have a significant influence on the development of Newcastle's musical life for the rest of the century and beyond.

### 1.2 Newcastle in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

The early years of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Newcastle, culminating in the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837, ended what has been referred to as the 'long eighteenth century',<sup>1</sup> a period of comparative social and economic stability that provided a secure basis for the changes and developments that the Victorian era would bring. The end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had seen the start of the development of the town that reflected Newcastle's growth 'more as a service and commercial centre for the surrounding industrial region, as Oliver Lendrum observed,' than as a leading industrial town in itself.<sup>2</sup> A

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, by Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Lendrum, 'An integrated elite: Newcastle's economic development 1840-1914', in Colls and Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 27.

major feature of this development was the reconstruction of the town centre, leaving its basic structure much as it is today.<sup>3</sup>

This period saw the construction of the railway line between Carlisle and Gateshead, later extended to Newcastle necessitating the building of the High Level Bridge, opened by Queen Victoria in 1849, and the Central Station, opened by the Queen the following year.<sup>4</sup> Further developments saw a network of lines linking Newcastle with coastal areas to the east and towns and villages to the west and north.<sup>5</sup> This extensive rail network was to make attendance at rehearsals and concerts easier for those living at some distance from the town.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.3 Newcastle and the Municipal Corporations Act 1835**

Grey's Reform Act of 1832 signalled the start of a process of reform in local government that was to occupy much of the rest of the century. The first major step was the Municipal Corporations Act 1835. Prior to that, Newcastle, in common with other towns throughout the country, had been governed by a Common Council, an undemocratic body with the character of a self-perpetuating oligarchy. The effect of the 1835 Act was to transform the Council into a body elected by the town's residents who had the necessary electoral qualifications. At the outset the electorate, amounting to only 3.5% of the population, gradually increased as the franchise was widened by successive acts of Parliament throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The new Council was composed substantially of businessmen, who would have included those

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<sup>3</sup> Accounts of this period of Newcastle's development are found in Lynn F. Pearson, *Northern City: An Architectural History of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: City of Newcastle upon Tyne Community and Leisure Services Department, Newcastle City Libraries, 1966), Purdue, *Newcastle* and Grace McCombie, *Newcastle and Gateshead* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Purdue, *Newcastle*, 191.

<sup>5</sup> See J. A. Wells, *The Railways of Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne 1828-1998*, (Newcastle: Powdene Publicity, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Wells, *The Railways*, 214; also, McCombie, *Newcastle and Gateshead*, 122.

described by Lendrum as the ‘entrepreneurial elite’,<sup>7</sup> with only a handful representing the legal and medical professions. As the Council met in the afternoon, it effectively excluded those who were employed; indeed, it was not until 1883 that the first working man, James Cuthbert Laird, a tailor, was elected.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Council took on a more democratic character, it was not stimulated by any vision or enthusiasm for change. Acts of Parliament that were intended to promote improvements in public health, the provision of libraries or education met with dilatoriness in making or implementing decisions, or in some cases outright opposition. Proposals for Council ownership of the developing tramways in the 1870s were opposed because of hostility to the perceived municipalisation of local services. This latter opposition was led by Joseph Cowen, an MP and radical reformer who believed that the Council ‘did not do things sufficiently well to engage in that sort of undertaking’.<sup>9</sup>

#### **1.4 The cultural environment**

In step with the physical changes spanning the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were signs of a town that was nourishing a strong intellectual and cultural life. In the wake of what is generally characterised as the Age of Enlightenment it is not surprising that intellectual curiosity was often led by those from outside the religious establishment.<sup>10</sup> Notable among these was the Revd William Turner, minister of Hanover Square Unitarian Chapel, who had a major

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver Lendrum, ‘An integrated elite’, in Colls and Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 27-46 (27).

<sup>8</sup> Maureen Callcott, ‘The Governance of the Victorian City’, in Colls and Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 71-94 (73).

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the town’s government during the 19<sup>th</sup> century see Maureen Callcott, ‘The governance of the Victorian city’ in Colls and Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 71-92.

<sup>10</sup> It is significant to note that, as against four established churches (All Saints’, St Nicholas’s, St John’s and St Andrew’s), Mackenzie lists some 22 nonconformist chapels or meeting houses, embracing Unitarians, the Society of Friends, Scotch Presbyterians, Scotch Relief; Wesleyan, Independent, Primitive and New Connexion Methodists; Swedenborgians, Particular Baptists, Glassites, United Secession and Independents (Mackenzie, 367-408).

responsibility for the establishment of the Literary and Philosophical Society (the Lit and Phil) in 1793,<sup>11</sup> and later, with Eneas Mackenzie, the Mechanics' Institute, an organisation that included literary as well as scientific interests. The latter, one of a number of similar institutions developing throughout the country, was supported by Mackenzie as a counterbalance to what he saw as the increasingly exclusive character of the Lit and Phil.<sup>12</sup> An awakening concern for the preservation of historic Newcastle saw the establishment of The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1813,<sup>13</sup> whilst the fine arts were served by the Northern Academy of Arts (1828).<sup>14</sup> Reflecting the importance of coal and engineering to Tyneside and Wearside, the first Institution devoted to these interests was founded in 1852 as the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers.<sup>15</sup>

## **1.5 Choirs and concerts of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century**

During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century several musical organisations were in existence. As a background to the occasional performances by individual societies there were the subscription concerts that had been established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were to continue throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>16</sup> These had a dynamic of their own, and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were governed by stringent regulations. Admission to performances, given in the Concert Room in Bigg Market, was strictly controlled, and only members of the committee 'and the Gentlemen engaged in the Orchestra' were to

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<sup>11</sup> Purdue suggests that religion and politics were excluded as topics of discussion because of concern about the revolutionary events in France (Purdue, *Newcastle*, 146).

<sup>12</sup> S. Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne: Its Growth and Achievement* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Kemsley Chronicle & Journal, 1950), 228.

<sup>13</sup> Though in this matter the Society's voice 'was neither strong nor confident for many years' (Purdue, *Newcastle*, 161).

<sup>14</sup> Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, 308.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed account of subscription concerts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century see Roz Southey, *Music-making in North-East England during the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot/Burlington VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), especially Chapter 9, 'Concert Opportunities', the section 'Concert Promotion', 172-77.

be admitted to rehearsals. A president was appointed for each performance to choose the music, and another to 'keep Order in the Room during the Evening'.<sup>17</sup>

Newcastle was not unique in its 19<sup>th</sup>-century musical organisations. Similar organisations are found at least in the main towns and cities throughout the country. Bradford, for instance, in addition to hosting the Yorkshire Musical Festivals, also had a choral society, a group called the Classical Harmonists, a Gentlemen's Glee Club, a Church Choral Society and a male-voice Choral Union.<sup>18</sup>

Among the various musical organisations was an Harmonic Society, in existence during the 1810s and comprising some nine or ten members, one of whom was a Thomas Thompson, referred to by Southey as a leading member who promoted a local subscription series.<sup>19</sup> The writer of a letter of 1821 is critical of the increasingly exclusive nature of this society and suggests the establishment of 'a new society upon a more liberal footing', which would foster vocal music apparently eschewed by the existing society. Another correspondent indicates that non-members were excluded because the society 'suffered from their being often visited by amateurs who joined in pieces of music which they had not practised'.<sup>20</sup> With no further surviving evidence it is difficult to know exactly what the society's motive may have been, but a more exclusive approach to attendance at its meetings is a plausible explanation. Mackenzie refers to an Amateur Harmonic Society of 1824 and it is possible that this was formed in response to the views expressed by the two correspondents.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> NCL: L042 Local Tracts, Vol. 2: Concert and Music Festivals [1785-1883], 26.

<sup>18</sup> Percy M. Young, 'Bradford' in Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove*, 2, vol. 4 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2001), 175-78.

<sup>19</sup> Southey, *Music-making in North-East England*, 226.

<sup>20</sup> *Tyne Mercury*, 18, 25 December 1821.

<sup>21</sup> Eneas Mackenzie, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle Upon Tyne: Including the Borough of Gateshead* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Mackenzie and Dent, 1827; reprint), 591.



A Newcastle Choral Society is mentioned in 1811,<sup>22</sup> and another, the Newcastle and Gateshead Amateur Choral Society, met for the first time in 1827. Mackenzie, who gives a bird's eye view of some of the main features of musical life in Newcastle in 1827, mentions a Philharmonic Society that was founded in 1826. He also cites the recent establishment of a Choral Society of some fifty members which included 'most of the best vocal and instrumental performers in this place'. It was anticipated that they would perform 'Sacred Oratorios in public on a grand scale'.<sup>23</sup> A report in the *Newcastle Journal* in August 1834 refers to a 'new institution', the Professional Philharmonic Society, which held its first meeting in the Joiners' Hall.<sup>24</sup> Three months later the 'Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts' announced the expansion of its activities to include the promotion of music and formed 'an Harmonic Society, consisting of the principal Musical Professors of the Town and Neighbourhood, joined by Amateur Performers of high Respectability'. This society was to be run on a subscription basis, and tickets admitted members to both art exhibitions and concerts.<sup>25</sup> A year later, December 1835, the *Newcastle Journal* reviewed the first concert of The Philharmonic Society given in the Music Hall, Blackett Street. It stated that the 'sole intention of the Society [is] the cultivation of the science of music, and to encourage the rising musical talent of the town'. The reviewer, however, found 'a want of precision' in the performance of an (unnamed) overture and complained that the violins 'were too weak for the heavy brass instruments' which included a 'particularly noisy' serpent player. No evidence has

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<sup>22</sup> NCL: L042 Local Tracts, vol. 2, Concert and Musical Festivals [1785-1883], 25.

<sup>23</sup> Mackenzie, *Newcastle*, 590-91.

<sup>24</sup> *NJ*, 16 August 1834.

<sup>25</sup> *NJ*, 15 November 1834; the announcement shows that the Newcastle Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts was located at 52 Blackett Street.

been found of a serpent being used at other choral concerts in Newcastle. However, eight serpents were used at the 1859 Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace.<sup>26</sup>

It is evident that there were a number of harmonic and other choral societies at this period, though similarities of name and varying use of titles in newspaper reports makes disentangling them difficult. Mackenzie, referring to concerts by the 1824 Amateur Harmonic Society, observes that their performances ‘are very respectable, and have certainly contributed to prevent a decline of the musical taste of the town’,<sup>27</sup> implying that the musical taste was in danger of decline. Whether or not any decline was arrested, the surviving evidence suggests a somewhat fragmentary and piecemeal approach to the musical, and especially choral, life in the town. None of the musical societies that were in existence appears to have survived for any length of time. In this the town’s musical organisations were more ephemeral in character than the literary and scientific societies that were established and continued to the present day. It was not until 1888 that the first choir to survive for nearly a century, the Gateshead Choral Society, later the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, was founded.

Three festivals had been held during the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and three more were to follow – in 1814, 1824 and 1842. These were all organised substantially from outside the town, in the case of the last two by Sir George Smart though with a local management committee. It was suggested, however, that the inspiration for the 1842 festival came from the conductor, Thomas Ions, and members of the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Society. With no strong local roots, the festivals came to an end in 1842 until a solitary endeavour in 1909.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *NJ*, 5 December 1835. Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>27</sup> Mackenzie, 591.

<sup>28</sup> For an account of these festivals see William Roy Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne with particular reference to the Festival of 1909* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015); *NJ*, 3 October 1857.

## 1.6 The new Town Hall

As we have seen, there had been significant development of the town in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The area in the vicinity of St Nicholas's Church, however, had remained largely unchanged, but in October 1852 the Town Council approved a report from the Town Improvement Committee about the redevelopment of St Nicholas Square, an area to the north-west of the church, 'as a site for buildings of public utility'.<sup>29</sup> Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, among other towns, had already erected impressive civic or similar buildings and Leeds and Bradford were in the process of doing so, though it does not appear that these towns provided any particular inspiration for Newcastle. Moreover, with no other major town in the north east, except, perhaps, Sunderland, Newcastle was not moved by any competitive spirit which, it has been suggested, may have been the case at Leeds whose town hall followed in the wake of Bradford.<sup>30</sup> Leeds Council had solicited public opinion in support of their new town hall, and there is a suggestion that local musicians had had some influence in encouraging the council to press ahead with the building.<sup>31</sup> Neither of these circumstances appears to have contributed to support for the Newcastle building.

In February 1854 the Town Improvement Committee presented a report setting out the plans for a building between the Cloth Market and the Groat Market, falling east and west respectively from the Bigg Market, which was ultimately to be known as the Town Hall. Although the proposals provoked considerable controversy,

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<sup>29</sup> *Proceedings of the Council of the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne for 1851-2*, 136.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel E. Milestone, 'A New Impetus to the Love of Music': *The Role of the Town Hall in Nineteenth-Century English Musical Culture* (PhD thesis, Leeds University, 2009), 151; see also Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Penguin Books, 1968, reprinted 1990), 153. For a detailed account of the development of town halls see Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London, Boston, USA, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> Milestone, 'A New Impetus to the Love of Music', 151-53.

and indeed even opposition to the necessity for the building when other improvements in the town claimed more urgent attention, they were approved in May 1854.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas Leeds Council had sought the advice of Joseph Paxton, who had designed the Crystal Palace, about the design of their building, and subsequently invited Sir Charles Barry, responsible for the Houses of Parliament, to advise on the appointment of an architect,<sup>33</sup> it is not obvious that the Newcastle Council sought any similar advice, though, as in the case of Leeds, they put the contract for the design of the building to competitive tender. The first prize, of £100, was awarded to Messrs Lawford and Henneker, though the architect ultimately responsible for the building was John Johnstone.<sup>34</sup>

The foundation stone of the Town Hall was laid in August 1855, ‘with great and appropriate ceremony, by the Mayor, in the presence of the Corporation of this and the neighbouring towns, and about six or eight thousand persons, consisting chiefly of the most respectable inhabitants of the borough’. Alderman Headlam, the chairman of the Building Committee, gave a résumé of the process leading to the decision to build the Town Hall, then called upon the Mayor to perform the ceremony, adding that he trusted ‘that the importance of the day [would] crown your mayoralty with additional honour’. Following a prayer by the Vicar of Newcastle invoking a ‘Divine Blessing on the undertaking, which was listened to with deep attention’, the Mayor, with some further ceremony, laid the foundation stone. The ‘Choral Society’, which should be identified with the Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society, performed

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<sup>32</sup> *Proceedings, 1853-4*, 134-35. In 1852 a new choral society had been established to give concerts to raise funds for the building of a hall equipped with an organ (see Chapter 2).

<sup>33</sup> Milestone, ‘*A New Impetus to the Love of Music*’, 154, 158-59.

<sup>34</sup> See *Proceedings, 1857-8*, 51; also, McCombie, *Newcastle and Gateshead*, 20.

Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus', conducted by Dr Ions, the organist of St Nicholas's Church, and the proceedings concluded with the National Anthem.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the divine blessing and the pomp and circumstance surrounding this ceremony, the building of the Town Hall was to be the first significant miscalculation in the town's development. The site was ill-suited to such an edifice and, as we shall see, later caused major problems in its use. It had been opposed by both Richard Grainger and John Dobson, the latter going so far as to say that:

the new town hall would not only be undistinguished and inconvenient but would dwarf the tower of St Nicholas' and ruin the character of what might have been one of the finest streets in the kingdom.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the limitations of the site, the building, in the Italian Renaissance style,<sup>37</sup> was a strange shape, and has been likened, with some stretch of the imagination, to a grand piano.<sup>38</sup> More prosaically Cunningham describes it as 'a block of offices on a wedge-shaped site'.<sup>39</sup> As well as obscuring the view of St. Nicholas's Church, later to be the cathedral (see Plates 1 and 2, pp. 24 and 25), it was so located as to offer no satisfactory view of itself. It lacked the space surrounding, for instance, St George's Hall, Liverpool, and Leeds Town Hall.

Unlike Birmingham, where the Town Hall was essentially a concert hall, the Newcastle Town Hall followed the pattern of St George's, Liverpool, Leeds Town Hall and others in being multi-purpose. It offered cellarage, an hotel, shops, offices, a council chamber with related rooms, as well as a concert room or hall and

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<sup>35</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

<sup>36</sup> Middlebrook, *Newcastle*, 208.

<sup>37</sup> McCombie, *Newcastle and Gateshead*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Purdue, *Newcastle*, 236, quoting Cadwallader Bates.

<sup>39</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, 130.

incorporated the Corn Exchange.<sup>40</sup> It was estimated that the total cost of the building would be £17,000, though this would eventually rise to over £38,000.<sup>41</sup> To offset the cost, rental income had been expected to raise £1,1210 annually.<sup>42</sup>



**Plate 1 The New Town Hall, c.1911**

Reproduced by kind permission of Newcastle City Library, Local Studies and Family History Centre

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<sup>40</sup> *Proceedings, 1853-4*, 56-58. St George's Hall, Liverpool (1854), in addition to the Great Hall, included Law Courts, male and female prison cells and a small concert room (Loraine Knowles, *St George's Hall: Liverpool* (Liverpool: National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside, 1988), 16-25. The building of town halls incorporating organs is discussed in Rachel E. Milestone, "A Melodious Phenomenon": The institutional influence on town-hall music-making' in Paul Rodmell, ed., *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Farnham & Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 55-77.

<sup>41</sup> *Proceedings, 1858-9*, 211.

<sup>42</sup> *Proceedings, 1853-4*, 57.



**Plate 2 The Town Hall with St Nicholas's Cathedral behind, 1920**

Newcastle City Library, Local studies and Family History Centre



## 1.7 The Concert Hall

The new building was to incorporate a ‘large concert-room’ at first-floor level above the Corn Exchange, to which access was to be obtained by three staircases – one leading from the Cloth Market and two from the Groat Market; this question of access was to prove a major problem towards the end of the century. The exterior of the concert room is to be seen as the first floor of the central section of the building at the left side of Plate 1 (p. 24). This part of the building was variously referred to as a concert room, a music hall or a concert hall; for the sake of clarity this latter term will generally be used. From the outside the hall was seen to be ‘very plain, with round headed windows of the “dissenting chapel” order of architecture’, though it was acknowledged that this character was lost when seen in the context of the building as a whole.<sup>43</sup> A report in *The Illustrated London News*, quoting from the *Builder*, describes the interior of the concert hall as being 147 feet long by 60 feet wide (excluding the organ chamber) and just over 46 feet high. Much of the construction was of wrought iron and the panelled ceiling was ‘enriched with plaster-work’. The sides of the hall incorporated ten Venetian windows, while for illumination at night ten gas ‘sun-burners’ hung from the ceiling. There were galleries at the north end and at the sides,<sup>44</sup> while at the south end there was ‘a large orchestra’<sup>45</sup> and space for an organ, below which were ‘three retiring rooms for the performers, and an entrance room or saloon for those attending the principal seats’.<sup>46</sup> Plate 3 (p. 27) shows the interior of the concert hall in which most of the features described can be identified.<sup>47</sup> A notable feature of the hall is that the organ and platform are situated at gallery level,

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<sup>43</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

<sup>44</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 25 September 1858.

<sup>45</sup> That is, a platform.

<sup>46</sup> *Proceedings*, 1853-4, 56-57.

<sup>47</sup> *NJ*, 2 September 1858; the drawing was made at one of the concerts held in connection with the inauguration of the building.



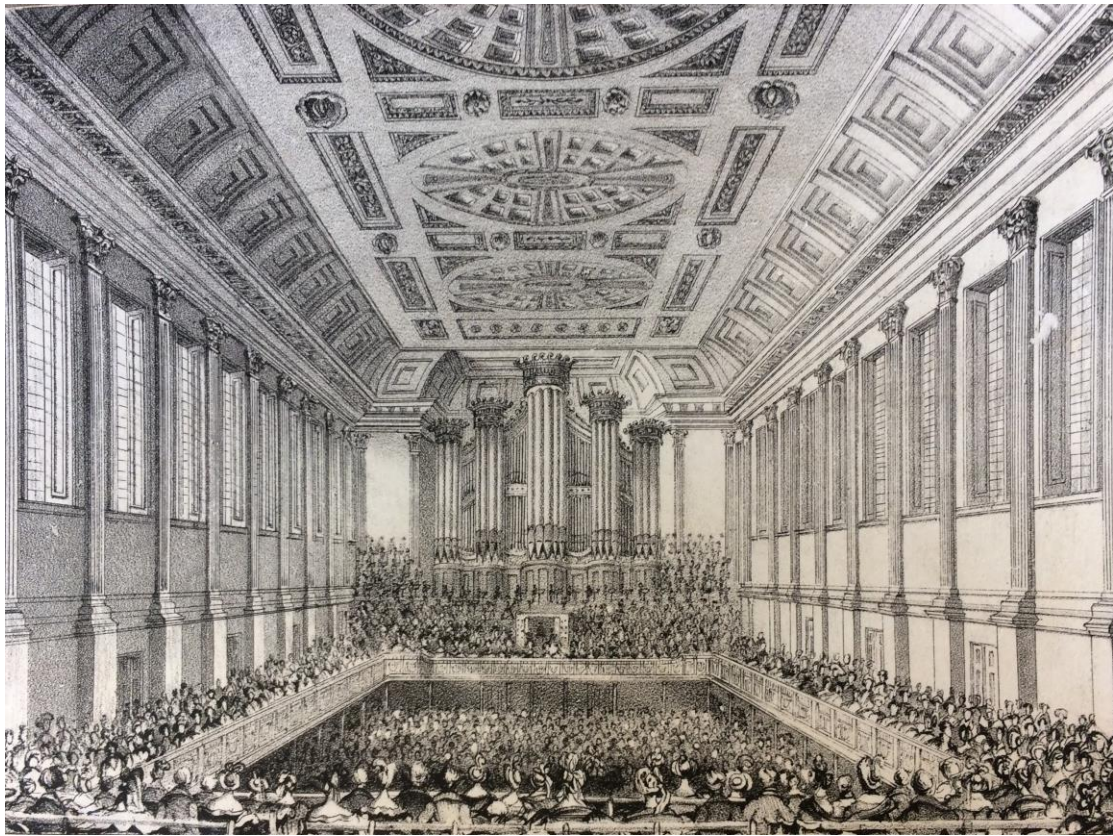
with most of the choir well above the level of the audience. This is very similar to the arrangement at Birmingham Town Hall (see Plate 4, p. 28).



**Plate 3 The Concert Hall, 1858**

Reproduced from the *Illustrated London News* of 25 September 1858





**Plate 4 Birmingham Town Hall, c.1840**

Reproduced with the kind permission of the Library of Birmingham (Town Hall 52)

It was envisaged that the hall would provide accommodation for about 3,000, including performers. ‘Probable receipts’ from a single night’s performance were estimated at £78 from ‘reserved seats and boxes along the sides, at 2s each’; £50 from 1,000 seats in the body of the hall at 1s each, and £20 from the 800 seats at 6d each in the galleries.<sup>48</sup> This somewhat optimistic estimate assumed that all the seats in the hall would be filled, a situation that could hardly be guaranteed; on the other hand, the seats were often sold at a higher price than the estimate. This pricing, moreover, could

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<sup>48</sup> *Proceedings*, 1853-4, 57.

be achieved only for performances arranged by the Council; other organisations fixed their own price structure.

Most of the building was completed by May 1858, when the Council turned to the question of a suitable inauguration of what was now referred to as the 'New Music Hall'. It is here that we detect a diminution of interest on the part of the Council, for the opening focused on the concert hall rather than the building as a whole and was largely delegated to the Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society. Only Councillor Gregson, observing that the Corporation 'had built that magnificent building and that noble hall', thought the Corporation itself should 'inaugurate the building'.<sup>49</sup> In the attitude of the Council we find the most striking contrast with Leeds, where the opening of the Town Hall was performed by Queen Victoria, attended by the Prince Consort and a number of the royal princesses, the whole ceremony organised on the grandest scale.<sup>50</sup>

The previous year the 'Sacred Harmonic Society', that is, the Newcastle Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society, had been advised by the Town Hall Building Committee that they would be 'expected to take part in the opening of the Corporate Buildings and Music Hall about Christmas' and had made six proposals for the inauguration, of which the first three may be summarised as follows:

- 1 To invite HRH the Prince Consort (Prince Albert), and to be responsible for his entertainment;
- 2 To put on a music festival to comprise 'a morning oratoria [sic], say the Messiah', with the Prince Consort present, 'a promiscuous concert in the evening' and 'a grand oratoria, say Elijah' the following evening';

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<sup>49</sup> *Proceedings*, 1857-8, 211.

<sup>50</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 25 September 1858.

3 to erect an organ for the festival.

The ensuing debate on the proposals, while it revealed the undercurrents of opposition to the whole Town Hall project, showed a concern that the music hall should have a high moral purpose and offer accommodation for regular cheap concerts for the benefit of the working classes and as an antidote to the influence of ‘all that shameful trash at the low beer-houses that exist in the town’. A. W. Purdue refers to Newcastle ‘as a not very sober town’ with ‘425 public houses and 76 beer shops in the early 1850s’. He also refers to Brian Bennison who gives the figure of 691 licensed premises in the town in 1899 indicating that ‘there was one for every 43 dwellings and every 307 of the population’.<sup>51</sup> Councillor Hamond, who had particularly espoused the moral case, urged the Committee to ‘to do their best to elevate and improve the moral and social condition of the working classes [saying that] it would be a real gain to improve the morality of the town’. Nicholas Thistlethwaite quotes John Spencer Curwen in the *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter* (May 1857) as suggesting that ‘music might keep the lower classes off the streets: away from the “dangers of the theatre, the snares of the drinking saloons, and the dissipations of the drinking shops”’.<sup>52</sup>

The most extraordinary feature of the Town Hall Buildings Committee’s proposal for the inauguration was the intention to charge the Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society for the use of the concert hall, although the society were to make all the arrangements, including the provision of a temporary organ, at their own expense. The principle behind this, as reported in the *Daily Chronicle*, was that the concert hall should be self-supporting, thus the inauguration became ‘the work of a private

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<sup>51</sup> Purdue, *Newcastle*, 225; Brian Bennison, ‘Drink in Newcastle’ in Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001), 167-92 (172).

<sup>52</sup> *Proceedings*, 1857-8, 210-11. Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 271.

society, who took the work in hand as a private speculation'.<sup>53</sup> The Council saw no opportunity for a large-scale celebratory event which the opening of the Town Hall could have provided had it followed the Leeds example; even the inauguration itself had been opposed. The Council were preoccupied with the question of charging the Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society for their participation and whether the Council should retain control of the hall, at least for a year.

### **1.8 The inaugural music festival**

The proposal to allow the Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society to arrange the inauguration events was approved and a 'Grand Musical Festival' was planned. Under the patronage of the Marchioness of Londonderry, the Earl of Durham and other dignitaries, this offered three concerts over two days. The programme comprised Mendelssohn's *Elijah* to be performed in the early afternoon of 1 September, with a 'Grand Miscellaneous Concert' in the evening, and Handel's *Messiah* the following evening. The band was to be 'Full and Complete', while the chorus would be nearly 200 strong. *Messiah* was by this date well established in the repertory of choirs, while *Elijah*, composed only twelve years earlier than the date of the festival, represented modernity and innovation. Tickets were priced from 1s to 7s 6d, which would have made the performances accessible to the upper and middle classes, though excluded some of the working classes.<sup>54</sup> Despite the importance of the occasion and the range of ticket prices, the hall was not full.<sup>55</sup> Arrangements were made for access to different parts of the building and there were instructions for the carriages setting down and collecting the concert-goers. A special train for Tynemouth was to leave at

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<sup>53</sup> NDC, 2 September 1858.

<sup>54</sup> See a letter signed 'A working man and a lover of music', NJ, 4 September 1858.

<sup>55</sup> NDC, 2 September 1858.

the end of the evening performances.<sup>56</sup> A rehearsal of some of the choruses had been held in August before an invited audience. It was also reported that a temporary organ was provided by James Nicholson, a member of the Nicholson family of organ builders, who had established an organ-building business in Newcastle in 1843.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from the ringing of bells and the waving of flags by the crowd which had gathered, there was no formal opening ceremony as such. At 1 p.m. the Mayor, with other civic dignitaries and Council members (though not all) entered the concert hall, 'and very shortly after the Oratorio commenced'.<sup>58</sup> The idea of 'inviting the presence of royalty [appeared] to have been given up'.<sup>59</sup>

The performance was preceded by the first and last verses of the 100<sup>th</sup> Psalm, which was probably the metrical version, 'All people that on earth do dwell', perhaps to impart a devotional character to the occasion as the reviewer found *Elijah* to be 'operatic' in contrast to the 'devotional spirit of the music of Handel'. As to *Elijah*, a 'slight flatness' had sometimes been noticed, which was 'probably owing more to the fatigue induced by the length of the Oratorio, both in the singer and the audience than anything else'. Special praise was given to Webbe, the conductor:

the long and arduous labour required to drill those choruses into such perfect order, the constant study and work which must have been given to render the large orchestra perfectly at home in keeping time, can only be known to those who have watched the progress of such a Choral Society as this town possesses.

The writer expresses the hope that the concert hall would:

develop our musical talent more and more, and we may hope, from the present steadiness and effective performance of the Harmonic Society, that we shall by and by obtain a wide-spread musical reputation for Newcastle.

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<sup>56</sup> Details of the concert arrangements were published in the *NJ* on 7 and 14 August 1858.

<sup>57</sup> *NJ*, 21 August 1858; Laurence Elvin, *Family Enterprise: The Story of some North Country Organ-Builders* (Lincoln: Laurence Elvin, 1986), 153.

<sup>58</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

<sup>59</sup> *NJ*, 4 September 1858.

The involvement of local instrumentalists in the performance was noted with approval. Of all the points made in the review, what was striking was the wish, following the quartet ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord’, ‘that the system of encores had only begun early enough to include this one’. This apparent deficiency was remedied in the second half, when there were several encores, including ‘O rest in the Lord’.<sup>60</sup>

We also learn something of those attending. The galleries (at the rear):

were crowded by an audience, of which a vast proportion were ordinary working people; the body of the hall, the side galleries and the reserved seats, were filled by a highly respectable and fashionable assemblage, and, when thus filled with the beauty and fashion of the neighbourhood, the hall, beautiful before, now had a most gorgeous appearance.<sup>61</sup>

From this one suspects the writer considered the ‘ordinary working people’ somewhat less than respectable, fashionable and beautiful, evidence, perhaps, of a prejudice against the very stratum of society which some hoped the hall would attract. A further sign of this attitude emerges from a report of the Miscellaneous Concert in the evening when several of the audience ‘with the true spirit of a Newcastle gallery’, hissed a performance of Beethoven’s ‘Grand Trio in D minor’.<sup>62</sup> The explanation was that the work was ‘much too good for anything but a correct and approved musical taste, and too long for the patience of non-musicians’.<sup>63</sup> This condescending observation implies that those in the gallery were not worthy of music of this quality, reflecting an underlying social distinction which was to prevail in the town throughout the rest of the century. It may have been the case that those in other parts of the hall were equally bored by the performance though more reluctant to express their feelings quite so publicly. It is not stated, but it is possible that the Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society played a small part in this concert, for in the Finale from Verdi’s *Il*

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<sup>60</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

<sup>61</sup> *NJ*, 4 September 1858.

<sup>62</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858. It is not clear to which work this refers; the title is probably inaccurate.

<sup>63</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

*Trovatore* the chorus was in the room behind the organ, the effect of which was ‘exceedingly dramatic’.<sup>64</sup>

Of the performance of *Messiah* the following evening, the reviewer wrote that it ‘far eclipsed the opening oratorio of Elijah’; in little short of a eulogy to *Messiah* the critic concluded that it was ‘incomparably the grandest work ever composed’. The Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society ‘was quite perfect in the details of the choruses, and a more finished performance has rarely been heard either in or out of the metropolis’. The only hint of reservation appears to have been with the chorus ‘For unto us a child is born’, which was performed with ‘almost correct expression’, though with ‘beautiful feeling’. Encores again were given, though were refused for the ‘exquisite air, “He was despised”’, even though ‘nothing could have given greater pleasure to that crowded hall’. The preponderance of encores caused the omission of the items between ‘The trumpet shall sound’ and the final chorus. It is difficult to reconcile the reviewer’s approval of, indeed enthusiasm for, encores with his view of *Messiah* as ‘the purest and grandest expression of sacred feeling’ through which ‘the subject is sustained with unwavering dignity’. In conclusion, and with a somewhat strained allusion to Nelson, the reviewer praised the Society and its officers in the ‘general encomium, that “Every man did his duty”’, adding that this ‘of course [included] the ladies’.<sup>65</sup>

## **1.9 The Concert Hall organ**

A temporary organ by Nicholson was installed, as we have seen, for the inaugural festival, but a suggestion that the Council should buy this instrument triggered a controversy initiated by the chairman of the Building Committee who thought the

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<sup>64</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

<sup>65</sup> *NDC*, 3 September 1858.



Council should have an instrument entirely their own. There seems to have been a fear, hinted at a later meeting of the Council, that control of the concert hall and organ might pass out of the Council's hands:

When once the opening was over they would be done with the Sacred Harmonic Society, and it would be for the Council to direct how the hall should be used.<sup>66</sup>

Rachel Milestone, in her survey of town halls and their organs, suggests that the provision of a large organ in the newly-built town halls as well as being 'as much a symbol of progress and status as the building itself' could also provide music that, it was intended, would 'educate and "improve" the masses'.<sup>67</sup> Something of this latter point emerged in the discussion about the Newcastle organ, though it appears not to have been an over-riding view.

The Council had not seen its Town Hall in terms of progress and status, neither did its members reveal any serious interest in the musical life of the town, let alone an understanding of the role an organ might play in it. Views were sometimes trivial or ill-informed: one member sought to advance an argument in favour of a large instrument by asking whether 'they were going to damage their otherwise handsome hall by a tinkling organ', suggesting that musical performances 'depended almost entirely upon the organ', and, more sensibly, pointing out the experience of Liverpool and other large towns in presenting 'cheap concerts of a purely organ character to the people'. A variation on this theme was that, lacking a large organ, the hall 'would not be profitable for the general amusement of the working classes'. A contrary view was expressed by another councillor who opined that as a 'large band always accompanied a concert [it was] unnecessary to have an organ'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Proceedings, 1857-8*, 251.

<sup>67</sup> Rachel Milestone, "'A Melodious Phenomenon'", in Rodmell, ed., *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 55.

<sup>68</sup> *Proceedings, 1857-8*, 248-51.

The escalating cost of the Town Hall itself had provoked criticism and now there was concern about the cost of the organ, how it would be paid for, and who would benefit from it. The council was clearly ambivalent about the provision of an organ. One councillor expressed these issues succinctly by suggesting that if it could be shown:

that the public was to have the benefit of this hall, he was willing to have the organ erected with the public money, but otherwise it was wrong, both morally and in principle, to spend a penny for an organ.

With the evident lack of clarity about the purpose of the organ it became difficult to reach an agreement. Councillor Hamond, who had been one of the leading opponents of the organ scheme, went so far as to suggest that ‘a crane would be of more benefit to the commercial community of this town than an organ’. There may have been some justification for the reservations about paying for an organ for, as Purdue points out, ‘Newcastle at mid-century was facing major [economic] problems. To many it seemed that its economic fortunes were faltering’. On the other hand, he detected ‘more than a whiff of philistinism about the new [that is, the post-1835] council with its narrow emphasis upon economy’.<sup>69</sup>

However varied the arguments, the Council agreed that an organ should be bought. The New Town Hall Building Committee had already been in touch with a number of organ builders to provide an organ on three years’ credit, at a cost of between £1,000 and £1,500 for an instrument of about 50 stops. The estimate for the Gray and Davidson organ in the Victoria Hall, Leeds, in 1857, was £4,000, excluding the case and blowing equipment. The final cost was £6,500.<sup>70</sup> This organ was considerably larger than the one proposed for Newcastle Town Hall, having some 94

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<sup>69</sup> *Proceedings, 1858-9*, 194. Purdue, *Newcastle*, 186, 181.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth I. Johnstone, ‘Leeds Town Hall organ, 1852-1972’ in *The Organ*, 53/209, 19.

speaking stops. By contrast the 44-stop organ for Glasgow Cathedral of 1853 cost £1,050.<sup>71</sup> The cost of the Newcastle organ by 1859 had risen to £2,000.<sup>72</sup>

Whether the Committee took any advice on the matter is not apparent, but they had approached Gray and Davison of London, perhaps on the reputation of the Crystal Palace organ which the firm had built, who had offered to build an organ for the proposed price, though another London organ builder had suggested the possibility of buying the organ in the Panopticon. It is possible that Henry Smart, who was later to be involved with the appointment of an organist, had been consulted. The previous year a specification submitted by Smart and William Spark of Leeds had won the competition for the Leeds Town Hall organ, built by Gray and Davison. Smart had also worked with Gray and Davison over the organ for Glasgow City Hall.<sup>73</sup>

Although one or two council members favoured the purchase of the Panopticon organ, one suggesting that there was advantage in buying a known and tested instrument rather than a new one whose quality could not be determined, the recommendation to appoint Gray and Davison to build the organ was approved.<sup>74</sup> Thistlethwaite states that the organ was ‘essentially a smaller version of the Crystal Palace instrument, but using conventional composition pedals rather than ventils’. A *sforzando* pedal operated a great-to-swell [sic] coupler.<sup>75</sup> The instrument was caseless, characteristic of other organs during the 1850s and 1860s, but the display pipes were surmounted by ornamental caps.<sup>76</sup> A rather indistinct photograph of this organ, c.1928, shows an arrangement of two flats and three towers, above which the caps can

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<sup>71</sup> <[www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D05241](http://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D05241)>.

<sup>72</sup> *Proceedings* 1858-59, 193; 1859-60, 39.

<sup>73</sup> Kenneth I. Johnstone, ‘Leeds Town Hall Organ 1858-1972’ in *The Organ*, vol. 53, no.209, 18-29; Stephen Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, paperback edn 1998), 248. The ‘Panopticon’ refers to the four manual organ (William Hill, 1853) in the Royal Panopticon of Science and Art, Leicester Square, London (Thistlethwaite, *Victorian Organ*, 205-08).

<sup>74</sup> *Proceedings*, 1857-58, 248-51.

<sup>75</sup> Thistlethwaite, *Victorian Organ*, 283-84.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 333-35.

just be discerned.<sup>77</sup> That the organ was to prove as inadequate as the building itself will emerge later.

### **1.10 The appointment of William Rea as organist**

The lack of a coherent plan for the use of the organ is shown by the decision, as late as November 1859, and therefore after the organ was built, to consider the appointment of ‘an eminent professional gentleman’ as organist to the Corporation.<sup>78</sup> After enquiries in other major towns, including Liverpool and Glasgow, the Town Hall Building Committee had agreed an annual salary of £150. Milestone shows that Liverpool paid £300 p.a. for the organist at St George’s Hall, Leeds £200 for the Town Hall organist and Glasgow £150 for the City Hall organist. Bradford, St George’s Hall, had no regular organist; at Birmingham Town Hall the organist paid £70 a year for sole use of the organ, but could charge fees set by the trustees for rehearsals and performances<sup>79</sup> The members of the Newcastle Town Hall Building Committee had learnt that the Glasgow organist had to give 100 recitals a year, and concluded that if a similar requirement was followed in Newcastle with an organist of sufficient ability his performances would generate more income than the cost of his salary, a view that was not corroborated by the Glasgow experience where it had been found that organ recitals alone ‘did not pay’ and had to be enhanced by ‘a chorus both of instrumentalists and vocalists’. There would, however, be further income from the use of the organ, with the organist, by other bodies. No ‘unskilful hand [would be allowed] to touch the organ’.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> EC, 11 November 1968.

<sup>78</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the references to the appointment of an organist are taken from *Proceedings, 1859-60*, 17, 39-40 and 108-11.

<sup>79</sup> Table 3.1 in Milestone ‘A Melodious Phenomenon’, 70-71.

<sup>80</sup> *Proceedings 1859-60*, 39.

The occasionally facetious tone of the debate suggests a lack of serious interest in the employment of an organist, one councillor suggesting that the opposing arguments appeared to be ‘arguments in favour of selling the organ,’ whilst another, referring to two members of the council who had participated in the debate, observed that they:

were not competent to manage the musicians. The Council little knew what a hornet’s nest they were bringing about their ears in dealing with musical men. He knew something of these characters, and if they got connected with them they would repent it every day of their natural lives.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the objections there was a substantial majority in favour of making an appointment.

It had been proposed that the post be advertised in *The Times* and the musical press, though there had been some concern that it ‘would set the whole musical profession of the town and their friends also against the Council if a monopoly were given to a stranger’. The matter was left in the hands of the Town Hall Buildings Committee, who had appointed Henry Smart, W. T. Best and John Williamson as ‘umpires’ in the selection of the organist. Their report shows that of the 22 applicants, nine had been ‘examined’ (only identified by a number), and the three best were presented to the Council in order of merit. They added that the ‘superiority of No. 3 [the number by which the first was identified], however, being very remarkable, we feel bound specially to recommend him for the appointment’. In fairness, they added that the other two were ‘performers of distinguished merit’.<sup>82</sup>

The umpires’ recommendation came before the Council in February 1860 and provoked considerable controversy. To satisfy those who felt the appointment was being made in the dark and of someone of ‘whom they had never heard until now’ the

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<sup>81</sup> *Proceedings 1859-60*, 40.

<sup>82</sup> *Proceedings 1859-60*, 109.

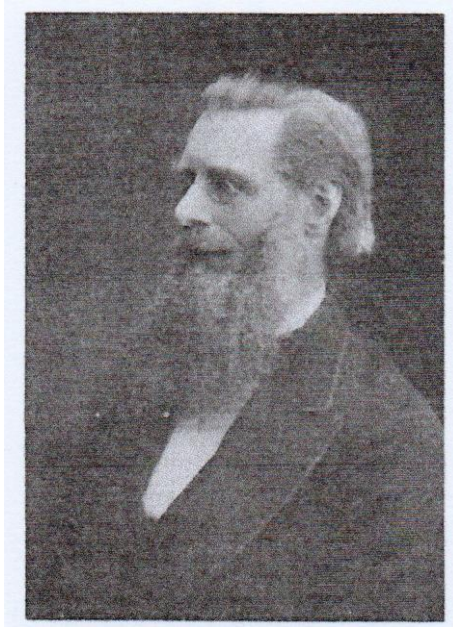
names of the three best applicants were now revealed as William Rea of London (No. 3), William Spark of Leeds (No. 9) and William Parrot of London (No. 12). It seems inconceivable that Henry Smart was unaware that William Spark was one of the applicants; he subsequently became the organist of Leeds Town Hall.<sup>83</sup> None of these organists, it will be noted, was a Newcastle musician, which may suggest that the Newcastle organists had insufficient ability. At this point members of the Council raised objections claiming they had no background information about the proposed organist and reiterated the view that the appointment 'ought to be made among their own townsmen'. It was also argued that the Committee should set out the duties of the organist and his conditions of appointment, and whether or not he was to live in the town. Although these arguments reflected the continuing opposition to the building of the organ and appointment of an organist, it is apparent that the matter had not been thought through in a logical and coherent manner.

A proposal to delay the appointment of William Rea until further information had been presented to the Council was lost by a single vote, after which the appointment was approved. The Mayor now told the Council that 'he happened to know his father-in-law [...] and believed him to be a very respectable young man' (see Plate 5, p. 41). William Rea had a good pedigree. He had studied in Leipzig under Ignaz Moscheles, in Prague and London; in the latter he had held organist's posts and founded a choir and an orchestra. Thomas Ions, organist of St Nicholas's Church, had also studied under Moscheles.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> George Grove and Frank Kidson, 'William Spark', *Grove IV*, vol. V, 88.

<sup>84</sup> For further information about both these musicians see the Biographical index.



**Plate 5 William Rea**

Reproduced from *Musical Times* of April 1903, 44/722 (1903), 238

### **1.11 William Rea and the organ**

After Rea was appointed he included in the early concerts he gave with his choir (Mr Rea's Choir) a number of organ pieces. He also gave regular Saturday afternoon organ recitals, presumably as part of his duties, though no information about Rea's duties has yet been discovered. An advertisement of October 1861 shows that these had been well established, for it refers to a 'Grand Organ Performance' by 'Mr. Rea', adding that 'In consequence of numerous Applications the Saturday Afternoon Performances will commence at Three o'clock instead of Two'.<sup>85</sup> There were two admission prices - 6d and 3d - which should have put these performances within the reach of the working classes, for whose moral improvement the Council had expressed concern. In Leeds, however, the same prices were judged to be excessive, and arrangements were made for groups of workmen from the larger institutions to be admitted for 7s per 100 men.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *NJ*, 19 October 1861.

But all was not well with the organ, for the following year Rea sent a letter to the Town Hall Building Committee complaining that the organ was ‘in such a condition that I can with difficulty perform upon it’. He then set out a comprehensive and devastating critique of the state of the organ, drawing attention in particular to the inadequacy of the soundboards and wind system, the inferior quality of the pipes (in particular the excessive use of lead), the use of incomplete stops and the unmusical tone of the instrument (with the exception of the reed stops).<sup>87</sup>

A newspaper report of 1900, referring to a proposal for the repair of the organ, observes that:

as there are few large towns in England with such a shabby town hall, so there are few town halls with such a miserable organ. The instrument is so bad that nobody cares to play upon it if anything in the nature of a substitute can be found.<sup>88</sup>

The sense of this had been expressed earlier in a verse by a local poet:

A fine new Toon Hall there’s lately been built,  
Te sewt mountybank dansors an’ singors;  
It’s a sheym the way the munny’s been spilt,  
An wor Cooncil hez sair brunt their fingers;  
For the room’s dull an cawd, tee, an’ ghostly an’ lang,  
An thor fine organ’s not worth a scuddick;  
An’ if frae the gallery ye want to heer a fine sang,  
Wey, ye might as weel be in a keel’s huddick.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Thistlethwaite, *Victorian Organ*, 272, quoting from Leeds: City Libraries, Archive Department, Leeds Corporation Archive, Sub Town Hall (Organ) Committee Minutes, 20 June 1862.

<sup>87</sup> *Proceedings*, 1862-3, 18-19. Rea’s letter is reproduced in full as Appendix 1(a); see also Appendix 1(b). The *Morning Post*, refers to John Gray as ‘the best reed-voicer in the country’ (quoted by Thistlethwaite, *Victorian Organ*, 262). Nicholas Thistlethwaite, who is currently preparing a book about Gray and Davison, suggests that other organs of the period by the firm ‘left something to be desired’ (email to the author, 27 October 2018). Bicknell comments that ‘from the mid 1860s the firm falls out of the picture somewhat, gradually taking a position in the second rank’ (Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ*, 254).

<sup>88</sup> *EC*, 6 July 1900.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Frank Graham, *Historic Newcastle* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Frank Graham, 1970), n.p. Graham does not give the source of the verse. ‘cawd’ = cold; ‘tee’ = too; ‘huddick’ = covered part of a boat. For ‘huddick’ see ‘huddock’ in Bill Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005), 89. Griffiths does not list ‘scuddick’, but it probably derives from ‘scudo’, which *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1965) defines as ‘A silver coin and money of account [...] worth about four shillings’.



The author of the *Evening Chronicle* report concludes by arguing that unless the present instrument can be repaired satisfactorily it would better, and cheaper, to provide a new organ. The organ was rebuilt by Vincent of Sunderland in 1901 when it was enlarged from three manuals to four.<sup>90</sup>

## **1.12 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen the transition from a somewhat rootless choral scene in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to one which promised to be more securely grounded. The music festival of 1842 marked the end of an era in which choral activity was spasmodic and impermanent. A change in the situation was marked by the building of the Town Hall and Concert Hall which offered a permanent and spacious venue for a range of musical activities, and especially for large-scale performances of choral music. This visible sign of permanence, allied with the appointment of a corporation organist, offered the promise of a more settled and stable choral life for the town.

The Town Council's attitude to the building of the Town Hall and the appointment of an organist had been ambivalent and from this we may reasonably deduce that, certainly at this period, if choral music were to flourish in Newcastle it would do so independently of any substantial civic investment.

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<sup>90</sup> The National Pipe Organ Register, Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne  
<[www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=V00040](http://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=V00040)> accessed 8 November 2015.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Turbulence and Development**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The last chapter ended with an account of the building of the Town Hall and its Concert Hall, the decision to install an organ, and the appointment of a corporation organist. Despite problems with the organ, it was apparent that these elements boded well for the building of a more stable choral life for the town. In the present chapter we see, however, how the process of establishing and consolidating a choral tradition was more fraught than could have been foreseen. At its core was the charismatic but controversial William Rea, the organist. His impact, with both its positive and negative aspects, was decisive for Newcastle's developing choral movement.

#### **2.2 The fortunes of the Newcastle upon Tyne Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society 1852-1861**

After the 1842 Musical Festival there had been something of a dip in the choral life of the town. There was no choir comparable to that assembled for the Festival, and there was no building, other than churches, equipped with an organ and large enough to accommodate a big choir and orchestra. This much we deduce from a report of a meeting in January 1852 called for 'the formation of a musical society for the production of the works of the great masters'.<sup>1</sup> The report makes it clear that the lack of such an organisation had 'for some time been increasingly felt in Newcastle'. A prospectus setting out the proposed society's objects had been circulated and gained some 80 supporters, including 'the leading amateurs of Newcastle and Gateshead,

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<sup>1</sup> Details are taken from a report in the *NG*, 17 January 1852.

several of whom were members of the old Choral Society'. This presumably refers to the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Society as the obituary of Thomas Ions, who conducted it, suggests that it was the parent of the proposed new organisation.<sup>2</sup> The new choir was to be called the Newcastle and Gateshead Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society, though the reference to Gateshead seems to have been dropped shortly afterwards.<sup>3</sup> Among the objects of the proposed musical society was:

the building of a hall and organ out of a fund arising from the proceeds of concerts, subscriptions, and donations, which may be obtained for the purpose – a hall and organ commensurate with the growing wants of this large and populous town, and on a scale similar to those of other large towns, [...] a hall which would admit within its walls the masses of our working population, that they might be benefitted by the performance of those works which cannot be listened to but with heartfelt emotion.<sup>4</sup>

The proposal to provide a large hall and organ, although an almost impossibly ambitious project, became redundant when, as we have seen, the council itself embarked on the building of the Town Hall. It is possible, however, that the suggestion of providing music for the working population may have influenced the thinking of some of the town councillors. The rules drawn up for the choir provided for weekly practices and two concerts each year. A committee was appointed, with J. G. Penman, who had been the inspiration behind the establishment of the society, as secretary.<sup>5</sup>

The choir rehearsed for the first time at the end of January with J. F. Harrison as conductor and Ions playing the organ. There were 100 singers, 'exclusive of trebles, who will number about 50'. They first sang the 'Hallelujah' chorus, and 'so great was the enthusiasm of the members, that they sang the whole of the choruses in

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<sup>2</sup> *NJ*, 3 October 1857.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *NJ*, 6 March 1852.

<sup>4</sup> The meeting may have had in mind Birmingham Town Hall, built in the 1830s, and possibly St George's Hall, Liverpool, which was under construction and St George's Hall, Bradford, whose foundation stone was laid in 1851.

<sup>5</sup> *NG*, 17 January 1852.

that great work of Handel before they separated'.<sup>6</sup> A month later, for the fifth rehearsal, Ions had become conductor (see Plate 6, p. ) and [Middleton] Redshaw organist.<sup>7</sup>

The first public appearance of the new choir was in April, with a performance of *Messiah* given in the Nelson Street Music Hall (see Plate 22, p. 47).<sup>8</sup> This performance 'electrified a large audience' and showed that the Society, 'although of recent origin is making wonderful progress, indeed, its achievements are almost incredible'.<sup>9</sup> As so many people had been unable to obtain seats, the performance was repeated in June, when the work was performed with Mozart's additional accompaniments. Michael Musgrave points out that the 'provision of additions to orchestral parts was commonplace, inspired, not least in the choral field, by Mozart's to *Messiah*'.<sup>10</sup> The choir numbered 200 voices and there were 40 or 50 in the orchestra. Referring to the choruses as 'the gems of the evening', a report observed that the opening chorus, 'And the glory of the Lord', 'came with such thunder upon the ear, as one might say in vulgar phrase, "To shake your nerves"'. This was matched only by all the forces and the 'powerful organ' performing 'Wonderful! Counsellor! The mighty God!' 'with one determined crash'.<sup>11</sup> These details show that this was probably the first large Newcastle choir, with a local conductor, capable of performing major choral works. It was a quite different organisation from the *ad hoc* choir assembled from a number of places throughout the country for the *Messiah* performance at the 1842

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<sup>6</sup> *NJ*, 31 January 1852. The number of 50 trebles suggests they were drawing on the choristers of the Newcastle and Gateshead churches.

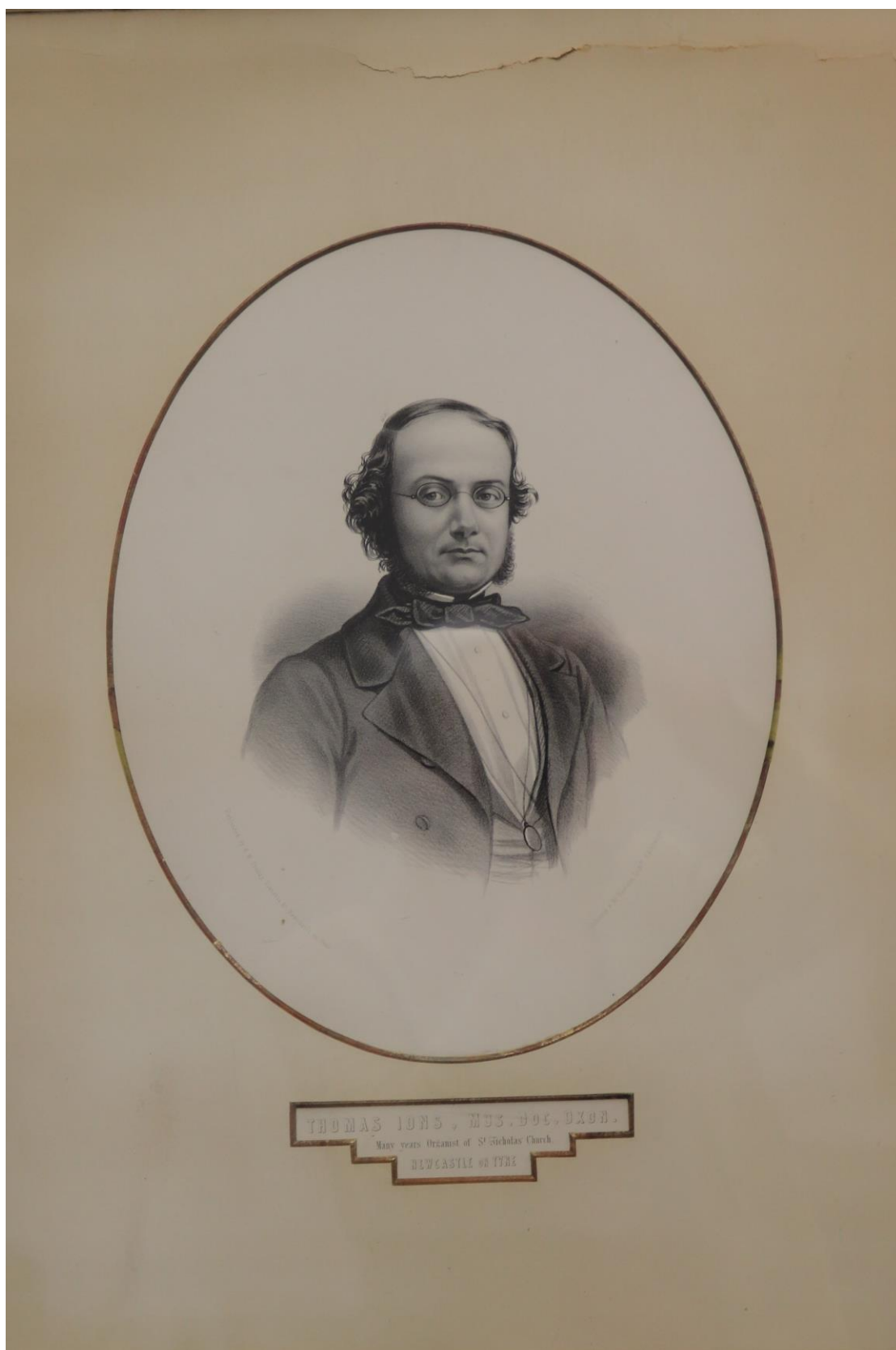
<sup>7</sup> *NCour*, 27 February 1852.

<sup>8</sup> *NG*, 3 April 1852.

<sup>9</sup> *NSSG*, 28 May 1852.

<sup>10</sup> Large, in *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 13, shows that this version had been used at the 1842 Festival. Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 48.

<sup>11</sup> *NJ*, 5 June 1852.



**Plate 6 Thomas Ions**

Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of St Nicholas's Cathedral, Newcastle

Festival.<sup>12</sup> It may be added that the audience was drawn from a wide area, as a special train from the Central Station was to leave for Tynemouth and Sunderland after the performance.<sup>13</sup>

In its early years the Newcastle Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society (NSHCS) presented a demanding programme of oratorios, performing *Messiah*, *Creation* and *Israel in Egypt* in its first year and adding *Samson* to the repertory in its second. In 1854 it performed both *Samson* and *Elijah* within a week.<sup>14</sup> The *Elijah* performance, given in the Music Hall, had been eagerly awaited as it was to be the first in Newcastle and ‘crowds of well dressed persons’ were unable to obtain seats, while those who did gain admission formed ‘the most brilliant and densest assembly ever brought together in the town for the hearing of a musical entertainment’. By now the *Newcastle Guardian* felt able to observe that the days of the festivals were ‘entirely gone by’ as with the establishment of a strong local choir there could no longer ‘be any further need for such expensive and exclusive celebrations’.<sup>15</sup> In October 1854 the choir gave *Messiah* in aid of a relief fund ‘for the sufferers from the late fire and explosion’.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, the choir performed at the laying of the foundation stone of the new Town Hall in 1855. In September 1857 it took part in a two-day Musical Festival in Durham, ‘attended by the nobility, gentry, and clergy of the city and county’, performing *Messiah* on the first night and giving the first performance of *Elijah* in the city on the second. Ions died four days before the first of the concerts and

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<sup>12</sup> Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 10. Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 48.

<sup>13</sup> NSSG, 28 May 1852. The development of the railway had made attendance at concerts and other events more accessible to a wider audience. Advertisements for concerts often referred to special trains to convey those attending to outlying districts at the end of the performance.

<sup>14</sup> NJ, 25 March 1854.

<sup>15</sup> NG, 1 April 1854.

<sup>16</sup> NJ, 28 October 1854. This referred to the major fire which began in Gateshead and spread to the parts of Newcastle along the Quayside, destroying the homes of 800 families (Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 200).

so Penman took over at very short notice. As he ‘waved the silver baton, draped in crape, which was presented in 1855 to the late doctor, many were visibly affected’.<sup>17</sup>

Ions had brought musical vigour to the town, notably with his new and ambitious choir, and had he not died suddenly at the age of 39 in 1857, he might have presented a challenge to William Rea and possibly secured the fortunes of the NSHCS more firmly.

The May concert of 1858 in Gateshead was conducted by Ainsworth,<sup>18</sup> who had become the leader of the orchestra that accompanied the choir, but by September a Mr Webbe ‘an able and accomplished successor to [Ions]’ had been appointed.<sup>19</sup> In October of 1858, following the opening of the new Town Hall, the NSHCS participated in the first of what was later to become a series of ‘People’s Concerts’ established under the patronage of the mayors of Newcastle and Gateshead and other dignitaries.<sup>20</sup>

At the annual meeting the following January a report showed that a performance of *Messiah* at Blyth produced a profit of £8, while the *Messiah* in Newcastle resulted in a loss of £35. A reduction in the weekly subscriptions from 1½d to 1d ‘had proved beneficial to the funds of the society’ evidently by increasing the membership. The report concluded on an ambitious and optimistic note. Referring to the ‘large and capacious hall’ (that is, the concert hall in the Town Hall), the hope was expressed that the society would:

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<sup>17</sup> *NJ*, 3 October 1857. Thomas Ions died suddenly aged 39, of ‘natural causes’, in a cab returning from Gateshead (ibid.); death certificate (17 March 2016). The presentation was made by the Mayor of Gateshead in the Nelson Street Music Hall on 28 February 1855. The gifts comprised ‘a brilliant baton, manufactured by Reid and Sons, the materials being mother-of-pearl and silver, with a sparkling rock crystal at the summit, a silver sugar-bowl, and a copy of Mendelssohn’s oratorio *Elijah*, bound in red morocco’ (*NJ*, 17 February 1855). Crape, usually made of black silk or artificial silk, was worn as a sign of mourning.

<sup>18</sup> *NDC*, 12 May 1858. For further information about the orchestra see Chapter 7.

<sup>19</sup> *NJ*, 15 January 1859.

<sup>20</sup> *NDC*, 28 September 1858.

persevere in its endeavours to create and propagate a taste for that class of music which is its particular study; and that as during the past year many names have been added to its list of members, so it will continue to increase in numbers until the whole of the musical talent, both professional and amateur, of the neighbourhood will be united in rendering effectively the glorious compositions of Handel, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Haydn.<sup>21</sup>

For a while it seemed that this ambition might be fulfilled, but within two or three years problems emerged. In the meantime, the choir continued to give performances of the major oratorios. Of *Judas Maccabeus* in December 1859, the reviewer, while acknowledging the high esteem in which *Messiah* was held, reported that the former oratorio ‘excited the greatest attention’ and ‘displayed the high pitch of musical discipline to which the Sacred Harmonic Society has attained’.<sup>22</sup>

Since the NSHCS was founded the organist had been Michael Redshaw and recently the orchestra had been led by Ainsworth. However, coinciding with the arrival of William Rea, this was to change, and in this change we note the first signs of the influences that were to lead to the disintegration of the choir. For the two concerts in January 1861 although Webbe conducted, the orchestra was led by Monsieur Sainton, the leader of the orchestra for the Crystal Palace and Handel Festivals and other events, and William Rea was the organist.<sup>23</sup>

The report of the first concert referred to the ‘large and highly respectable audience’ including ‘a number of the leading merchants and tradesmen of the town’, suggesting that the music appealed to a rather wider section of the public, though not, it would seem, to the working classes.<sup>24</sup> The second concert, which included the first performance in Newcastle of Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang*, produced a ‘tolerably large audience’ of about a thousand, but the music ‘did not meet with the same enthusiasm’

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<sup>21</sup> *NJ*, 15 January 1859. In the report, the Society is referred to as the ‘Sacred Harmonic Society of Newcastle and Gateshead’.

<sup>22</sup> *NJ*, 17 December 1859.

<sup>23</sup> *NJ*, 17 and 18 January 1861.

<sup>24</sup> *NJ*, 18 January 1861.



as the *Judas Maccabeus* performance. Reflecting more generally on the NHSCS's concerts, the report identified a lack of public support, with a loss on the present concert of some £100.<sup>25</sup> In the lack of audience support and consequent financial loss we see two of the most basic challenges to affect choirs throughout the period under consideration.

On behalf of the NSHCS a public plea was made for financial support and a subscription list, headed by the Vicar of Newcastle, was opened.<sup>26</sup> A letter to the *Newcastle Daily Journal*, from 'A Lover of Music', refers to the bad attendance at the last concert, and its impact on the Society's finances. The writer considers that it would be:

an indelible stain upon the musical reputation of this flourishing town if this society is allowed to sink under its present difficulties. Should this large and populous town, with its commerce, its intelligence, and its love of art, permit the extinction of such a devoted and disinterested society? – a society whose noble object is to popularise the sublime and majestic works of Handel and other gifted composers, in order that they may refine, elevate, and purify the mind, and afford a legitimate opportunity for the gratification of a faculty which may otherwise seek its food amidst the demoralising, soul-destroying influences of the tavern and saloon.<sup>27</sup>

The NHSCS, in their endeavour to improve the financial position, planned a performance of *Messiah* for the end of January 1861 under the sponsorship of the Mayor, the Sheriff and the Vicar of Newcastle which attracted 'an overflowing audience' and considerably reduced the debt. Other performances were promised, 'supported entirely as [*Messiah*] had been, by local talent', including Haydn's *The Creation*. The price of tickets, from 2s for reserved seats to 6d in the gallery, was clearly calculated to attract a wide audience.<sup>28</sup> A report published the week before the Haydn concert states that the choruses had been 'well rehearsed' and that the

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<sup>25</sup> *NJ*, 19 January 1861.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *NJ*, 25 January 1861.

<sup>28</sup> In 1860 a Newcastle craftsman could expect to be paid 5½d an hour. See E. H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain 1850-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 69.

orchestra had ‘undergone a thorough drilling under the able direction of Mr W. Rea’.<sup>29</sup>

This report, coupled with the published details of the performers, is instructive. In the first place the conductor was to be Penman, not Webbe. We also see the reappearance of Ainsworth as leader (‘Principal Violin’) indicating the use of a local musician, presumably, in this instance, to reduce costs as much as possible. In particular we note the drilling of the orchestra, suggesting that the local musicians were not up to the standard Rea had experienced among their London counterparts. Possibly Rea had determined to take this matter into his own hands, a sign of the dominance he was to wield over the town’s music for the next three decades. It was evidently expected that the concert would attract an audience from a wide area, as ‘a special train [would] leave the Central Station for Sunderland immediately after the performance’.<sup>30</sup> It seemed to come as a surprise to the reviewer that the work was ‘performed with a proficiency that was not to be expected, considering that, with the exception of Miss Green, the artistes engaged were from the immediate district alone’. Although this appears to refer to the solo singers, it tends to add weight to the view that the standard of local performers was not high. Rea should have played the organ, but, because of a child’s death, he was replaced by John S. Liddell, the organist of St Peter’s Church.<sup>31</sup> Despite initial success the attempt to reduce the debt through popular concerts proved unsuccessful and the financial difficulties continued.<sup>32</sup>

At some point earlier in the year Webbe resigned as conductor, an office which he had ‘so long and so ably filled, and with so much satisfaction to the

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<sup>29</sup> *NJ*, 28, 31 January, 1, 28 February, 5 March 1861. In the advertisement for 28 February the gallery price is 6s, but this is clearly a misprint for 6d.

<sup>30</sup> *NJ*, 11 March 1861.

<sup>31</sup> *NJ*, 12 March 1861. St Peter’s Church was on Oxford Street, replaced in 1940 by the Church of the Divine Unity. See Map 3, p. 237.

<sup>32</sup> See letter, *NJ*, 25 May 1861.

public'.<sup>33</sup> One can only speculate on the reason for this. Possibly he felt a responsibility for the financial losses of the NSHCS, possibly there were too many demands on his time,<sup>34</sup> or possibly he had resented what may be seen as Rea's interference in the affairs of the choir. Webbe had an unfortunate accident in October 1861, when he injured his left hand 'most severely' making it unlikely that he would be able to use it, and thus continue his musical career.<sup>35</sup> As a result a 'testimonial' fund was set up, and a benefit performance of *Messiah* by the NSHCS with the assistance of Mr Rea's Choir and members of the Newcastle Amateur Musical Society was arranged.<sup>36</sup>

Following the testimonial concert, the activities of the NSHCS came to a standstill, prompting letters to the *Newcastle Journal* in an attempt to discover the reason.<sup>37</sup> While no official response was forthcoming, a letter signed 'Two old members' was published showing a sorry state of affairs and indicating that the decline began after the death of Ions. Redshaw, the organist, had been insulted and resigned; following this the 'band' leader was lost, and then gradually the entire band so that 'for some months' no members of the band had attended the rehearsals. About twenty or thirty of the Society continued to meet weekly, though sometimes without a conductor and usually with no accompanist. The pathetic letter continues:

[we] try a few choruses of "Judas", the "Te Deum", or Mozart's "12<sup>th</sup> Mass". We wasted all last year over [these pieces]; and just when we could about do them, we changed to "Elijah", which we attempted last night without any accompaniment.

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<sup>33</sup> *NJ*, 5 April 1861.

<sup>34</sup> He was pianist to the Duchess of Richmond and maintained premises in London as well as Newcastle. He was also a professor at the Ladies' College, Northumberland Terrace, Tynemouth (*NJ*, 18 August 1860, 7 October 1861).

<sup>35</sup> *NJ*, 15 October 1861.

<sup>36</sup> *NJ*, 22 April 1862; details of the preparations for and the performance of *Messiah* may be found in the *NJ*, 13 and 29 May 1862.

<sup>37</sup> *NJ*, 6 and 16 January 1863.

The letter argues for a ‘change in the management altogether, or the society might as well shut up at once’; they needed a committed organist ‘who can play’, a band, and a guarantee of access to the practice room so that they ‘need not wait about the doors [...] till nine o’clock before we get started’, a situation which discouraged members.<sup>38</sup> The situation was resolved only when NSHCS merged with Mr Rea’s Choir, as we shall see below.

### 2.3 The dominance of William Rea

The account of Rea’s activities with Newcastle’s choirs must be seen in the context of his wider involvement in the musical life of the town. As the corporation organist he gave regular organ recitals at the Town Hall, usually on Saturday afternoons. For a few years from 1867 he was responsible for a weekly series of ‘Grand Classical and Promenade Concerts’ in November and December each year promoted by a ‘Committee of Gentlemen’.<sup>39</sup> Later, from 1881, he promoted a further series of ‘People’s Concerts’ which were continued for a few years after his death in 1903.<sup>40</sup>

In 1860, in his first year in his new post, Rea established Mr Rea’s Choir (MRC1)<sup>41</sup> and some fifteen years later he founded the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society (NAVS; see Timeline 1, p. 55). The rules for MRC1 state, by way of preamble, that the choir:

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<sup>38</sup> *NJ*, 19 January 1863.

<sup>39</sup> NCL: L780.73 Rea, William, Grand Classical and Promenade Concerts, Programmes 1867-69, 1871-73 (76).

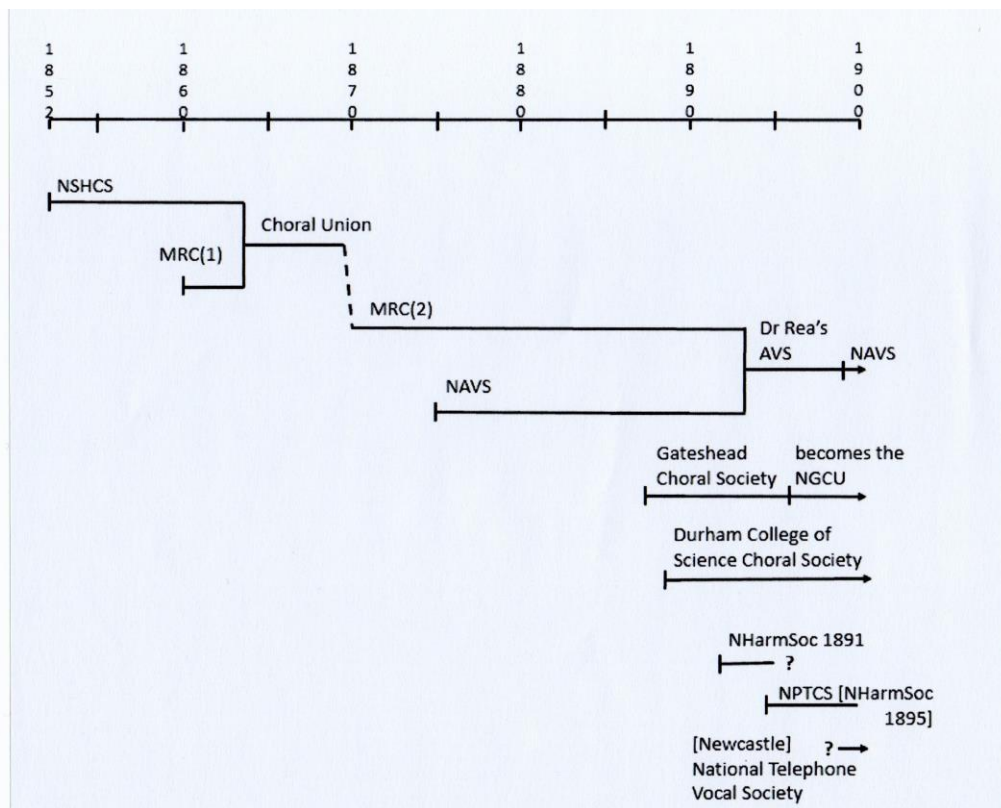
<sup>40</sup> NCL: 780.73 People’s Concerts, Town Hall, Newcastle, Programmes 1881-96, 1898-1909; L780.73 Werner (Hildegard), Concert Programmes 1872-85, Concert and Operatic Programmes 1885-90.

<sup>41</sup> As will be shown, there were two versions of this choir. Apart from newspaper reports, most of the information about the choir is to be found in the programmes (and a few other items) in two bound volumes in NCL catalogued as 780.73 Newcastle Town Hall Concert Programmes 1860-98 and Newcastle Town Hall Concert Programmes 1875-1913, hereinafter referred to as Concert Programmes 1860-98 and Concert Programmes 1875-1913. A report in the *NDC* of 7 November 1860 refers to MRC1 as ‘the class for part singing’, while the *NDJ* of 24 March 1863 writes of the ‘chorus formed from Mr Rea’s pupils’. The practice of naming a choir after its founder or conductor could be observed elsewhere. In London, for instance, there was ‘Mr Henry Leslie’s Choir’, and in Edinburgh ‘Mr Waddell’s Choir’ and ‘Mr Moonie’s Choir’ (*Express*, 9 October 1860; *MT*, 34/605 (1893), 420 and 42/698 (1901), 259).

is established for the purpose of developing the talent and capabilities of Musical Amateurs both as regards executive improvements, and the cultivation of a correct taste; - by a well directed and properly-disciplined weekly practice of Vocal Music, which shall embrace Madrigals, Glees, Part Songs, Motettes, Choruses, &c', by the best Masters'.<sup>42</sup>

It is noticeable that the music to be performed was of small scale and did not include oratorios, other than the possibility of 'choruses'. The most striking feature of this aim is that the choir was set up for the benefit of its members. It had no apparent interest, therefore, in moral improvement or in the promotion of the music itself.

Rule I states that members 'shall be qualified Musical Amateurs, by which is meant, that they shall not only have a taste for, and knowledge of, Music, but must



## Timeline 1 The main Newcastle choirs 1852-1900

<sup>42</sup> Two sets of rules exist for MRC1, both undated and one marked 'Proof Copy'. There are variations in the wording of the two versions, and both display hand-written alterations, but internal evidence suggests that the 'Proof Copy' was the later version. As no final version appears to have survived, this study relies on the 'Proof Copy'.

possess an ear to appreciate it, and a voice to execute it', suggesting that their existing taste required some cultivation so as to be 'correct'. In showing that the choir was to draw on those already musically competent, it is evident that Rea was intending to set a high standard of performance. According to Rule V, 'the entire management of the Musical Department shall be under the absolute control of the Musical Director', though an element of democracy creeps in as Rule VI provides for 'a trial of proficiency' followed by attendance at four rehearsals after which the candidate required 'the suffrages of three-fourths of the members' to be elected. This rule is presumably framed as a safeguard against the admission of anyone who, though possessed of the right musical qualifications, may for whatever reason not 'fit' the character of the choir, implying a certain social exclusivity. Other rules deal with attendance, rehearsal times, the committee, subscriptions and the procedure for dissolving the Society. A curious paragraph follows the final rule:

It will be observed that all Fines are excluded from the above Rules; the Director being desirous to govern this Society by evoking the honourable rivalry of each member to a diligent and careful observation of them without those pecuniary inflictions, at all times unpleasant, and often impossible to enforce; for which purpose he insists upon the signature of every member to the following declaration, relying upon their honour for their strict adhesion thereto.

The terms of the declaration are also worth recording in full:

We the undersigned members of the above-named Choir, hereby voluntarily agree to be governed by all the above fundamental Rules, and that we will aid [sic], as far as lies in our power, to carry out the intention of its founder for the formation of a Choir that shall supersede any hitherto established in this town.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Another version of this declaration is simpler, as follows: I do hereby declare that I will, as far as lies in my power, aid and assist the said Musical Director in carrying out his intention with respect to the above-named Choir, and that I shall at all times faithfully and willingly abide by, and be governed by, the above rules (NCL: 780.73 Concert Programmes 1860-98).

The overall impression left by these rules is that Rea demanded unquestioned loyalty from his choir members and that he expected the choir to be the best in Newcastle. This suggests both an authoritarian streak in Rea's character and a strong sense of ambition. Rea had studied in London, and it is likely that his London experience offered him a standard which he was determined to replicate in Newcastle, and which he may not have found with the NSHCS or, indeed, as has been suggested, among the town's instrumentalists. This view is confirmed by a review of the first performance by the choir, given in the Town Hall in October 1860, for which 'a large and fashionable audience assembled by invitation'. It refers to similar choirs in London and to the 'famed Yorkshire and Lancashire societies' and claims that Rea hoped to establish a choir in Newcastle that would be 'no unworthy companion' to these other choirs. The reviewer writes that the 'degree of finish, light and shade, and precision already acquired is astonishing', attributing such qualities to 'the strong bond of union and sympathy between the conductor and the forces under his direction'.<sup>44</sup> The presence of an invited, fashionable audience is very much at odds with the expectations of at least some members of the Town Council who looked to the concert hall to be accessible to members of the working classes as a means of improving their morals by providing inexpensive alternatives to the offerings of the ale houses.<sup>45</sup>

MRC1 was established for only about three years before it amalgamated with the NSHCS to form a new choir, the Choral Union, perhaps presaged by the joint

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<sup>44</sup> A cutting from the *Express*, 9 October 1860 in NCL: 780.73 Concert Programmes 1860-98. References to audiences as 'large and fashionable' may be found throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Variations on this theme included, for instance, 'large and respectable' (*MH*, 6 December 1879) and 'crowded, fashionable and intelligent' (*NJ*, 8 November 1861). Audiences were by no means always large and perhaps not even always respectable.

<sup>45</sup> Dave Russell discusses the issue of music and morals in two chapters 'Music and morals, 1840-1880' and 'Music and morals, 1880-1914' in *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1997), 23-70. This issue is also discussed by Charles Edward McGuire in *Music and Victorian Philanthropy* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially Chapter 2, 'Temperance and tonic sol-fa', 68-112.

performance for the Webbe testimonial.<sup>46</sup> In the absence of any evidence, it is difficult to understand why Rea should so soon have amalgamated his new choir with the troubled NSHCS, though it is possible that with an enlarged choir he saw an opportunity for performing the major works of the choral repertory. By taking over the NHSCS he was, of course, eliminating competition. At the outset it was hoped that the Choral Union, performing with a larger orchestra and on less ‘niggardly principles’, would be a better vehicle for oratorio performances. In particular it was argued that to perform with an inadequate orchestra was to do ‘a great injustice to the composer’,<sup>47</sup> an argument which sits uncomfortably with the later practice of performing oratorios accompanied only by the organ.

There was some hope that the Choral Union would attract the audiences that had latterly been absent from the NHSCS and that:

the reproach of being a non-musical population might be wiped away, and the love of music, with elevating influences, be spread abroad more freely amongst the people.<sup>48</sup>

The announcement in September 1864 that the Choral Union would present a series of concerts priced at only 1s and 6d suggests that an attempt was being made to attract larger audiences from a wider social background, thus casting off the exclusive character of MRC1.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, to save costs, an orchestra was usually dispensed with and the oratorios accompanied solely by the organ.<sup>50</sup> Rea had conducted *Messiah* with the NHSCS in May 1862, and he conducted the first two concerts of the Choral Union in March, 1863<sup>51</sup>. After this, until at least March 1866, the choir was conducted

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<sup>46</sup> This Choral Union should not be confused with the later Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union.

<sup>47</sup> *NJ*, 26 March 1863.

<sup>48</sup> *NJ*, 24 March 1864. Briggs, in *Victorian Cities*, 45, refers to the Victorians as taking ‘immense pains to educate people in taste or to use one of their favourite verbs, to “elevate” taste’.

<sup>49</sup> One shilling is about £3 in today’s terms; <[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter)>.

<sup>50</sup> *NJ*, 19 December 1864.

<sup>51</sup> *NJ*, 17 March 1863.



by Penman, with Rea retaining overall control as well as playing the organ.<sup>52</sup> There was also a greater use of local soloists which was seen as reflecting better on the local talent.<sup>53</sup>

Following a performance of *Messiah* in March 1866 in aid of the Ragged and Industrial Schools, a report concluded that:

there has of late grown up in this town a great love of good music; and undoubtedly this satisfactory feature in the moral and social aspect of the town is due in a great measure to the instruction it has received in classical music from the public performances of Mr Rea.<sup>54</sup>

This observation tells only part of the story, for the NSHCS contributed significantly in bringing choral music to Newcastle on a large scale before the advent of Rea. It was through that choir, as the forerunner of the Choral Union, that oratorio performances became a regular feature of the concert season. One suspects that Rea's increasing dominance over the musical life of the town was beginning to obscure the contributions of his predecessors and contemporaries. Reviewers for the local papers also seem to have been mesmerised by him to the point that he was beyond criticism.

Having emerged in 1863, the Choral Union was still flourishing at the beginning of 1868 when it took part in a series of four subscription concerts, organised by Rea, that were to lead to its virtual demise. The prices for these concerts ranged from 6d to 2s 6d so should have been accessible to a wide range of the local population. For the last of them, when *Messiah* was performed, the choir was augmented by members from Tyne Docks, North and South Shields and Sunderland, many from church choirs, to form a chorus of 300. The volume of sound produced by the chorus was 'tremendous'. At all of these Penman conducted and Rea played the

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<sup>52</sup> A review in the *NJ*, 25 May 1865, refers to Rea as being the Choral Union's head. For the December 1864 performance of *Messiah* with orchestra, however, Rea conducted, John Nicholson was the organist and Penman referred to as 'chorus master' (*NJ*, 22 December 1864).

<sup>53</sup> *NJ*, 22 March 1865.

<sup>54</sup> *NJ*, 30 March 1866.

organ.<sup>55</sup> There were reports of fluctuating audiences, with an observation on one occasion that ‘there were not many ladies in evening dress’.<sup>56</sup> It had been reported that *Messiah* would be the ‘means of attracting a large audience’, which seemed to have been its purpose on a number of occasions. The only major criticism of the Choral Union’s performance was after the first concert, when there were ‘faults of indecision and unsteadiness’ in *Oberon*, the result of ‘a deficiency of attention at rehearsals’ – rather, we may note, than any fault on Rea’s part.

Whatever the successes or failures of these concerts, the choir itself was in ‘a failing and disorganised state’. There were evidently two factions within the Choral Union: those who broadly supported Rea’s recent approach to performance, especially in using local choirs to supplement the Choral Union, and those opposed to it. Some were chafing against ‘the absolute power which the rules of the society conferred upon the conductor’, and although these rules don’t appear to have survived it is possible they were similar to those drawn up for MRC1. There had also been inadequate control of the choir’s finances.<sup>57</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Rea had effectively destabilised the NSHCS and his autocratic control of its successor seems to lie at the root of the turbulence within the Choral Union.

Inevitably the Choral Union split and Rea resigned, though taking with him some of the Choral Union members. The remainder continued for a few months as the Choral Union, but by December 1868 it had resumed its former name as the NHSCS,<sup>58</sup> with a new committee which had improved its ‘general working order and discipline’. Rules were remodelled to allow for the admission of instrumentalists, a new rehearsal room was found, and its collection of music was reorganised. New

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<sup>55</sup> *NJ*, 7 April, 2 and 5 May 1868.

<sup>56</sup> *NJ*, 5 May 1868.

<sup>57</sup> *NJ*, 11 May 1869.

<sup>58</sup> *NJ*, 14 December 1868.

members, including boys from local churches, had joined and attendance at rehearsals and concerts had improved.<sup>59</sup> Frederick Helmore was appointed to replace Rea, saying that he wanted ‘to work amicably with the amateur and professional musicians of the town’;<sup>60</sup> he only accepted the conductorship after Rea had assured him it would not interfere with his (Rea’s) ‘position in connection with the society’.<sup>61</sup> This latter point confirms that Rea maintained a remnant of the Choral Union, receiving offers of assistance from ‘many of the leading choralists of the town’.<sup>62</sup>

A planned performance by the NSHCS of *Messiah* for December 1868 was pre-empted by a performance in October by Rea’s Choral Union augmented to 200 with voices ‘gathered from the principal church choirs and amateur musical societies of the North of England’ described as ‘in the highest degree excellent’.<sup>63</sup> The work was repeated the following October when the choir had increased to 250. A review described it as ‘the grandest performance of this magnificent work that has ever been heard in this town’. Observing that the organ was ‘not much used, owing to the enormous volume of tone produced by the powerful choir and band’, it went on to say the ‘force of the choir in fact was sometimes even startling’. The hall was almost entirely full, ‘being crammed to suffocation’.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, we may note Reginald Nettel’s observation, referring to a performance of *Messiah* in Hanley, that the Victoria Hall was packed ‘almost to suffocation’.<sup>65</sup> Whether or not Rea was attempting to out-do any choir or orchestra assembled for the NSHCS’s Christmas concerts, the report shows that *Messiah* performances in Newcastle were in danger of becoming opportunities for vulgar, noisy and unmusical display where size and

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<sup>59</sup> *NJ*, 11 May 1869.

<sup>60</sup> *NJ*, 11 May 1869.

<sup>61</sup> This alludes to Rea’s retaining some of the Choral Union members.

<sup>62</sup> *NJ*, 6 April 1870.

<sup>63</sup> *NJ*, 30 October 1868.

<sup>64</sup> *NJ*, 8 October 1869.

<sup>65</sup> Reginald Nettel, *Music in the Five Towns: 1840-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 26.

volume were the criteria by which success or failure was judged. Nettel, in his account of oratorio performances in the Potteries, makes the point that the public ‘liked a big noise’ and that ‘anything on a grand scale [was] sure of public interest’.<sup>66</sup> Performances of this character invite questions as to the ‘taste’ which their conductors were encouraging.

Under its new constitution and conductor, the NSHCS embarked on an ambitious, but short-lived, programme of oratorio performances, beginning with *Judas Maccabeus* in aid of the Prudhoe Memorial Home (which was a financial failure, contributing nothing to the Home’s funds) and ending with *Elijah* in April 1870.<sup>67</sup> After this, apart from two minor appearances at musical festivals featuring band contests in the grounds of Jesmond Dene,<sup>68</sup> nothing further has come to light about the Society.<sup>69</sup>

After Rea’s large-scale *Messiah* concerts, the Choral Union yields to a second version of Mr Rea’s Choir (MRC2), making its first appearance at a private performance in the Town Hall in April 1870 before an audience of about 500. The programme was similar to programmes of MRC1, with Mendelssohn’s *Lauda Sion* followed by a second half comprising mainly madrigals and part-songs.<sup>70</sup> With the second appearance of this choir, in October, the character of programmes changed, offering, over the next 20 years, mainly oratorios, including 13 performances of *Messiah*.

Having established MRC2, Rea, in 1875, set up another choir, the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society (NAVS). The new organisation had evidently been planned

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<sup>66</sup> Nettel, *Music in the Five Towns*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> *NJ*, 6 March 1869, 11 May 1869, 15 September 1869.

<sup>68</sup> *NJ*, 4, 30 July, 1 August 1870. Jesmond Dene was the home of Sir William (later Lord) Armstrong.

<sup>69</sup> In April 1870, a presentation was made to Helmore ‘in token of the great measure of esteem and respect’ he had gained by his character, teaching ability and composer of church music. (*NG*, 16 April 1870).

<sup>70</sup> *NJ*, 6 April 1870.

for some time, as a committee of twelve members was in place, including Rea as conductor.<sup>71</sup> The rules are much briefer than those drawn up for MRC1 and may perhaps reflect experience gained through the operation of the earlier ones. There is no preliminary statement as to aims, though a programme of 1881 gives the objects of the Society as ‘the study [that is, rehearsal] and performance of Choral and other Music’.<sup>72</sup> The music was now to be chosen by the conductor and committee jointly, though the conductor was to ‘have full power in the appointing of all Soloists, and [...] his decision on such matters shall be final’. The rules say nothing about the vocal requirements of the members; perhaps there was some optimistic expectation that potential members would not apply if they lacked vocal competence. However, a notice in a programme for December 1879 indicated that active members had to be ‘approved, as to Musical fitness, by the Conductor’, so presumably experience showed that some musical test was necessary.<sup>73</sup> There were 165 members in 1879, 97 women and 68 men though unfortunately not listed according to their voices; by 1883 the number of women had risen to 114, with 67 men.<sup>74</sup>

The report of the committee to the Annual General Meeting of 1879 indicates that ‘Private Invitation Concerts’ were the only ones authorised by the Rules, lending the Society ‘an independent position, which enables it to take up works of musical merit, seldom ventured on by Societies incurring the chances of public patronage’.<sup>75</sup> There is justification for the distinctive repertoires offered by the two choirs, MRC2

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<sup>71</sup> Leaflet, n.d., in NCL: 780.73 NAVS, Programmes etc. 1875-1905, *NJ*, 6 April 1876.

<sup>72</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS, Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 11 April 1881.

<sup>73</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS, *ibid.*, programme 22 December 1879.

<sup>74</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS, *ibid.*, programmes 1 September 1879 and 20 December 1883.

<sup>75</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS, *ibid.*, programme 10 September 1879, ‘Report of the Committee, to the Annual General Meeting of the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society, to be held on 10<sup>th</sup> day of September 1879’. The Rules must have been amended between the founding of the Society and 1879 as the early version does not refer to Private Invitation Concerts. A notice in the programme for 20 December 1886 states emphatically that performances ‘are restricted to PRIVATE INVITATION CONCERTS given by Members to their friends’ (NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 20 December 1886).

and NAVS, indeed there would have been little point in their offering the same kind of programme, but one may legitimately question the exclusiveness implied by the NAVS rules, which suggest a lack of confidence in the general public's capacity to appreciate music outside the more popular and established repertory. As programmes from 1879 to 1876 included Gade's *Crusaders* and *Comola*, Goetz's *Nänie*, Schumann's cantata *Song for the New Year*, Spohr's cantata *God, Thou art great*, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* and Brahms's *Song of Destiny*, it is reasonable to assume that these were among the works the NAVS felt they could perform only under private patronage. Certainly, during the same period, none of them was performed by Mr Rea's Choir, whose programmes included Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation* and Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise* and *Elijah*, all more familiar works to the general audience of the time. If the public were not to be exposed to the more specialised repertory they could hardly be blamed if they failed to appreciate it.

The NAVS was run in parallel with MRC2 until 1893 when, for a Christmas performance of *Messiah*, the two choirs amalgamated.<sup>76</sup> After this date the NAVS, reflecting the amalgamation, became Dr Rea's Amateur Vocal Society, a title it retained until taken over by J. E. Jeffries in 1899 (see Plate 7, p. 65).<sup>77</sup> By now Rea's ascendancy over the musical life of the Town was coming to an end. In 1888, having heard of a proposal to abolish the position of city organist, he resigned.<sup>78</sup> He continued his conducting responsibilities for a few years longer, but in 1896 a newspaper report had referred to its being 'quite a pleasure to see Dr William Rea once more' as the conductor, observing that it is:

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<sup>76</sup> *NJ*, 14, 20 December 1893.

<sup>77</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 21 February 1899. Rea had been awarded an Honorary DMus by Durham University in 1886 (NUSC: 1/1/1 Durham University Calendar 1897, 277, University Archives, Newcastle University Library). John Edward Jeffries was the organist of Newcastle Cathedral.

<sup>78</sup> *Proceedings*, 1887-88, 549-51.

impossible to see Dr Rea occupying the rostrum in the Town Hall, with baton in hand, without recalling a host of successful performances of great works which he was the means of introducing to this locality, and recording our sense of the great service he has rendered to the art of music in this locality.

It would seem that he had missed only the December 1895 concert with the NAVS, when the conductor was G. F. Huntley, but by this time he was suffering from the illness from which he died in 1903.<sup>79</sup>



**Plate 7 John Edward Jeffries**

J. Bacon & Sons, reproduced from the *Form of Service to be used at the Dedication of the Reconstructed and Enlarged Organ in the Cathedral Church of S. Nicholas Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, November 1911

## **2.4 New Directions**

With the early death of Thomas Ions in 1857, there had been a vacuum in the choral leadership of Newcastle until the arrival of William Rea who, as we have seen,

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<sup>79</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, unidentified newspaper report, 26 March 1896. Rea died in March 1903 and his death certificate shows that he had been suffering from 'prostatic adenoma' (a benign form of cancer) for 15 years and it is possible that this may have limited his conducting activities. George Frederick Huntley was Jeffries' predecessor as organist at the cathedral.

emerged as the dominant, if divisive, figure in the town's musical life. For a period of nearly 30 years the town's major choirs had fallen under his direction. No other figure offered any challenge to his position and authority. John Webbe's brief tenure with the NSHCS ended in his resignation and Frederick Helmore with the same choir in its later manifestation saw it survive for only three or four years.

A new choir, Mr T. Albion Alderson's Amateur Choir (AAAC), had been founded in the late 1870s, giving mainly private, evening dress performances; this seems to have been short-lived, though in 1887 it formed the basis of a newly established Northumberland College of Music in premises in Northumberland Street with Alderson as Principal. The College, which probably took its name from the street, was founded in 1887 'for the purpose of providing a thorough High-Class Musical Education on moderate terms'. It claimed to have the advantages which had led to the successful promotion of music in continental conservatoires and the London and other music colleges. Teaching was offered on a range of instruments, as well as in singing, harmony, counterpoint and composition. It awarded its own certificates but also entered pupils for the examinations of the RAM, RCM and Trinity College of Music, and the local school examinations. From time to time it gave concerts by its pupils. No further information about the college after 1897 has come to light.<sup>80</sup>

Another organisation, the Newcastle Harmonic Society (NHarmSoc 1891), embracing both a choir and an orchestra, made a brief appearance from 1891, its 'sole object being the advancement of musical art in the district'.<sup>81</sup> It was specially to attempt 'to introduce to the public local aspirants for musical honours who give promise of exceptional ability'. Its distinguished patrons included the Duke of Northumberland and the Earl of Durham as well as two MPs and Charles Mitchell, a

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<sup>80</sup> NCL: L780.7 Northumberland College of Music. Miscellaneous Prospectuses and Programmes [1894-97]; 780.73 Alderson's Choir Programmes, 1879-1889.

<sup>81</sup> This was the first of two late 19<sup>th</sup>-century choirs bearing the same name.



local shipbuilder. The conductor was Charles Chambers, a Cambridge DMus and FRCO, a 'professor of music' and organist of several local churches.<sup>82</sup> The choir was of some size, numbering, in 1892, 67 sopranos, 40 altos (of whom eight were men), 32 tenors and 38 basses, a total of 177 and therefore about the same size as the NAVS.<sup>83</sup> After only two years, Chambers resigned his conductorship of it on becoming organist of St. George's Church, Cullercoats, though he conducted a concert in January of the following year.<sup>84</sup> It is likely that his resignation brought about the demise of the choir.

A comparison of the names of members of the three choirs (NAVS in 1883, AAAC in 1884 and the NHarmSoc 1891 in 1892) shows hardly any evidence of an overlapping membership. Although this seems surprising, it is evidence that from a comparatively early date Newcastle had sufficient singers to form distinctively different choral bodies suggesting the underlying support of the local community. F. W. D. Manders, referring to Gateshead, makes the point that 'there was virtually no duplication of membership' among the three choral organisations in existence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Dave Russell has argued that choral societies 'would never have attained their eventual size or influence without the support of large communities'.<sup>85</sup>

One can only speculate as to the motivation behind the establishment of AAAC and NHarmSoc 1891. Alderson had played the organ for concerts given by Rea with MRC2 and the NAVS and Chambers with NAVS, but they may have preferred the independence of conducting their own choirs. MRC2 had performed mainly

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<sup>82</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912; it would appear that those who assembled this collection were unaware that it covered two separate organisations.

<sup>83</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912.

<sup>84</sup> *NJ*, 18 April 1983; NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912.

<sup>85</sup> F. W. D. Manders, *A History of Gateshead* (Gateshead: Gateshead Corporation, 1973), 265; Russell, *Popular Music in England*, 14. *MT* suggests that the National Telephone Vocal Society was probably inspired 'by the success of the Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society' (*MT*, 42/695 (1901), 48).

standard oratorios, and it is possible that both Alderson and Chambers wanted to develop a more innovative repertory. AAAC introduced music by a number of contemporary and unfamiliar composers, such as Emanuel Aguilar, F. H. Cowen, A. Goring Thomas, Edwin Hecht and others, and later Chambers followed a similar approach. Clearly Alderson, in founding his Music College, had an ambition beyond the choir. Ultimately, neither of the two choirs was to survive to make any significant contribution to the choral life of the town.<sup>86</sup>

About 1899 a new choir, the [Newcastle] National Telephone Vocal Society was formed under the conductorship of George Dodds,<sup>87</sup> becoming, in 1902, the Newcastle Philharmonic Society.<sup>88</sup> Three years later *Musical Times* reported on the good progress of the choir, observing that it was ‘coming well to the fore in the march of local societies’, though its performances were ‘sadly marred by strangely noisy and inattentive audiences’.<sup>89</sup> The following year Dodds offered his resignation as conductor, though he was persuaded to stay on.<sup>90</sup> Whatever the reason for his wishing to resign, he did not remain as conductor for much longer as in March 1907 he gave his last concert with the choir, after which it amalgamated with the NAVS to become the Newcastle Vocal Society.<sup>91</sup> Jeffries, the conductor of the NAVS, continued in that position with the reformed and renamed choir until at least 1909.<sup>92</sup>

The lull in the musical life of Newcastle following the 1842 festival has been noted, and now towards the end of the century choral life again appeared to be sagging. Pritchard has drawn attention to the ‘phenomenal growth of choral activity

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<sup>86</sup> As will be apparent from the account below, the NHarmSoc1891 must have become defunct between 1895 and c.1911.

<sup>87</sup> A report of a concert in March 1902 refers to the choir’s ‘third season’ (*NJ*, 6 March 1902).

<sup>88</sup> *MT*, 44/719 (1903), 46.

<sup>89</sup> *MT*, 44/746 (1905), 267.

<sup>90</sup> *MT*, 47/760 (1906), 415; at about the same time J. M. Preston resigned as conductor of the NGCU (*ibid*).

<sup>91</sup> *MT*, 48/770 (1907), 260.

<sup>92</sup> *MT*, 50/791 (1909), 44.

after 1860' in England generally and has noted a lack of vigour from the mid-1880s with the collapse of many societies until World War I 'brought a merciful end to those that had struggled on for longer than they should'.<sup>93</sup> In Newcastle a diminishing interest in choral music was noted during most of the 1890s. The *Newcastle Journal* and *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* both noted a decline in the performance of oratorios and cantatas.<sup>94</sup> A bleak summary of the state of affairs was recorded in *Musical Times*. Commenting on Northumberland and Durham generally, the journal observed that there was 'absolutely nothing of any interest to record in connection with music in the locality during the past month – not even a Christmas performance of "The Messiah"'. 'It is quite a rare thing now', the report continued, 'to hear a work of any pretension for voices and orchestra in Newcastle, and such performances as may be given can only rank as of second-rate importance'.<sup>95</sup> The following year, however, there was a suggestion that 'the masses' would appreciate choral works 'if they [could] be brought within their reach pecuniarily'.<sup>96</sup>

Two important changes were to be observed, first in standard of performance and second in repertory. Signs of renewed energy came first with a new choir from across the Tyne in Gateshead. Founded in 1888 as the Gateshead Choral Society, later to become the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, this choir was for some years to be the leading choir north of Yorkshire. Then second, another choir started life in 1895 as the Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society. The history of both these choirs, however, belongs mainly to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and will be considered in the next chapter.

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<sup>93</sup> Brian W. Pritchard, *The Music Festival and the Choral Society in England*, 721 fn. 1, 723.

<sup>94</sup> *NJ*, 5 October 1893, 18 November 1893; *NDC*, 11 October 1895.

<sup>95</sup> *MT*, 36/624 (1895), 113.

<sup>96</sup> *MT*, 37/637 (1896), 186.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This review of the main characteristics of the choral life of Newcastle during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has established a key theme of this study, namely that the main contribution to the choral movement's momentum came from the conductors of the choirs discussed. The choirs, however, were not yet firmly established as quasi-independent bodies able to withstand the vicissitudes of changes of conductor, amalgamations with other choirs, and occasional mismanagement. Their base was not yet secure and was easily shaken. If these early choirs lacked the aims and independence that could have made them greater than their conductors, nonetheless it is possible to assert confidently that they were the foundation stones of the choral edifice as we have inherited it today.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Town and Gown: from Town Hall to Armstrong College**

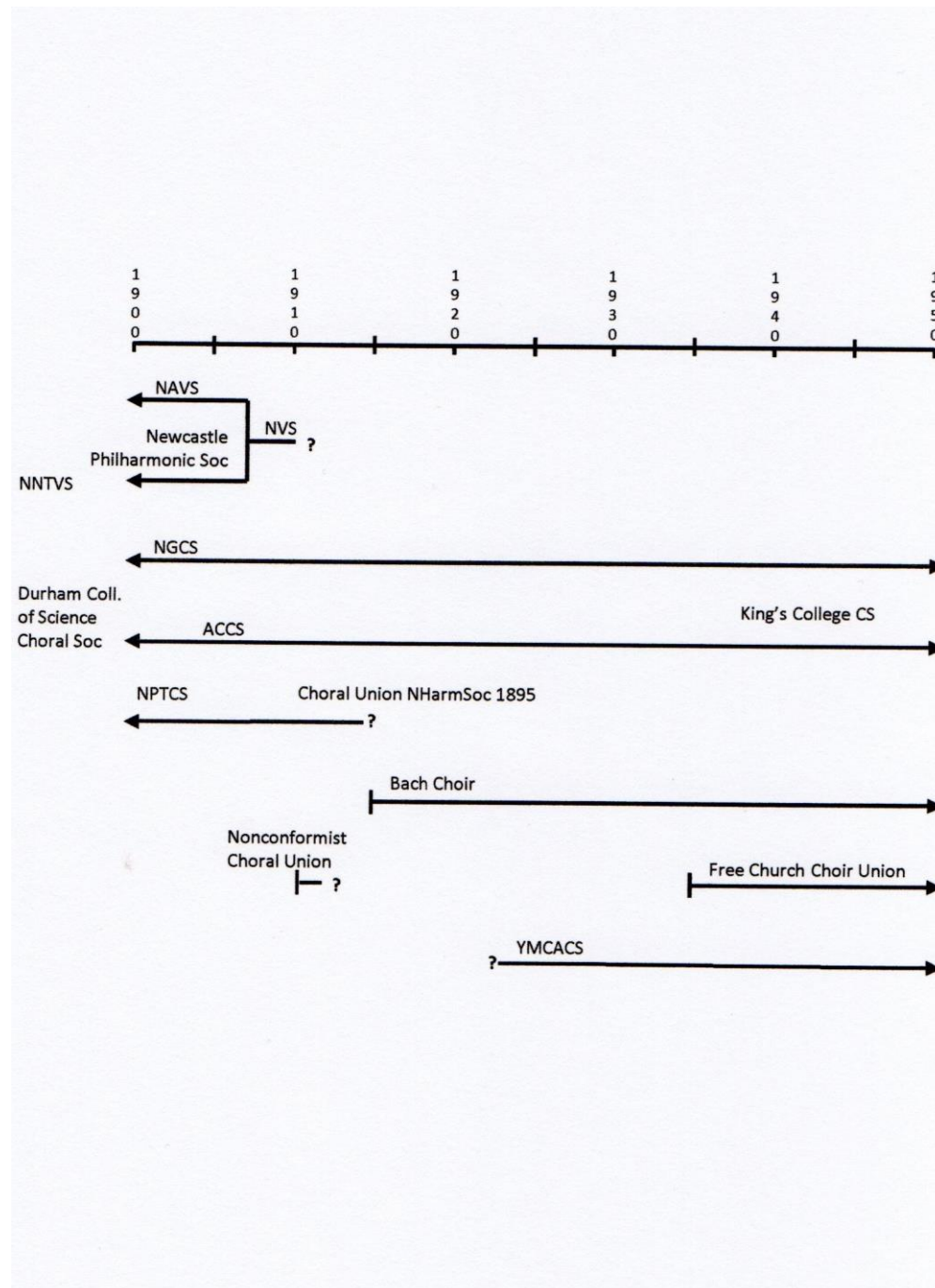
#### **3.1 Introduction**

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the centre of choral gravity began to move from the Town Hall, representative of Rea and the choirs associated with him, towards what became Armstrong College, representative especially of W. G. Whittaker and the choirs he conducted. The original hope, at least in the minds of some of the town councillors, that the music performed in the Town Hall would have an improving effect on the morals of the working classes had largely disappeared as a motive for the performance of choral music and was gradually being replaced by a tacit recognition that choral singing was a worthwhile activity in itself. This was followed by an awareness of the educational value of music and the development of ‘good taste’ and then, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the performance of music for its own sake, epitomised in the aims of the Newcastle Bach Choir showing the influence of a scholarly approach to the selection and performance of choral music. This chapter looks at the early years of some of the choirs which established a degree of permanence, with an organisation which made them less dependent on their conductors for their existence. At the same time, it reasserts the importance of the conductors in encouraging innovative repertory and high standards of performance.

#### **3.2 Into the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

At the turn of the century there were four major choirs in Newcastle: the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, Durham College of Science Choral Society and the Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society, which became the Newcastle Harmonic Society 1895 (see Timeline 2, p. 72). Basic details

of these choirs, which underwent various name changes, are set out in Table 1 on page 73. Each of these choirs had its distinctive repertory, which will be described below.



**Timeline 2 The main Newcastle choirs 1900-1950**

**Table 1 Major Newcastle choirs at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

<b>Choir</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society (NAVS)	1875	Founded as Mr (later Dr) Rea's Amateur Vocal Society; became the Newcastle Vocal Society in 1907 after amalgamating with the Philharmonic Society.
Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union (NGCU)	1888	Founded as the Gateshead Choral Society in 1888; became the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union in 1896
Durham College of Science Choral Society	1889	Became Armstrong College Choral Society (ACCS) in 1904. In 1932-33 it amalgamated with the Armstrong College Orchestral Society.
Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society (NPTCS)	1895	Briefly known as the Newcastle Choral Union in 1911; had become the Newcastle Harmonic Society (NHarmSoc1895) by 1912 with its name back-dated to 1895.

Beyond the city there were several other choirs, such as the Gateshead Vocal Society south of the river and numerous choirs in Northumberland; some of these will be considered in Chapter 6. The history and development of the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society were described in the previous chapter and so we may turn to an account of the origins of the three other choirs.

### **3.3 The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union**

The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union (NGCU) was inaugurated in October 1888<sup>2</sup> as the Gateshead Choral Society by James M. Preston, described by Sir Henry Coward, who succeeded him, as 'an accomplished and able conductor and a brilliant organist'.<sup>3</sup> It was founded, apparently, so as 'to include some of the disbanded vocal forces previously existing'.<sup>4</sup> Gade's *Erl King's Daughter* and miscellaneous items

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<sup>2</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union Programmes and Prospectuses 1889-1982 (hereinafter NGCU Programmes 1889-1982), programme 11 December 1889.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Coward, *Reminiscences of Henry Coward* (London: J. Curwen & Sons Ltd, 1919, reproduced by Forgotten Books, 2015), 201.

<sup>4</sup> NDC, 18 December 1895.

were performed at the choir's first concert in February 1889.<sup>5</sup> The programme for December 1889 shows that Earl Ravensworth and two MPs were the patrons. The choir was supported by a large number of honorary members, headed by the mayor of Gateshead, who paid an annual subscription of 10s 6d.<sup>6</sup> An appeal had been sent out at the beginning of the 1894-95 season which resulted in a significant increase in the number of honorary members, thus allowing the choir to perform Sullivan's *The Golden Legend* and so 'remove from Tyneside the stigma of being so long behind other musical centres in the first performance of this beautiful work'.<sup>7</sup> When it came to be repeated the following year, *The Golden Legend* was preceded by the National Anthem in 'commemoration of the long reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria', anticipating the Diamond Jubilee of 1897 but also suggesting that it was unusual, at least for this choir, for the National Anthem to be sung at a concert.<sup>8</sup>

The choir gave its concerts in Gateshead Town Hall until March 1893, when it transferred to the Newcastle Town Hall in order to accommodate an orchestra. The choir was now increasing in size and in 1895 moved its rehearsal venue to the Lit and Phil in Newcastle, which, having a large lecture room, offered better accommodation. The membership now increased even further, bringing the choir to over 400, making it, in the view of the committee, 'the strongest choral organisation which has ever existed in the counties of Durham and Northumberland'.<sup>9</sup> The choir now became the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, the order of names implying that Newcastle had become the major partner. In 1897, it was reported that the NGCU was composed

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<sup>5</sup> Niels Gade, 1817-1890, a Danish composer supported by Mendelssohn and Schumann. He was head of the Royal Danish Music Conservatory; in addition to choral works, his compositions include eight symphonies, chamber and other instrumental music (*OCM* 9).

<sup>6</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1982, programmes 11 December 1889 and 18 March 1890.

<sup>7</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1982, programme 26 February 1895. Sullivan's cantata, *The Golden Legend*, had been first performed at the Leeds Festival of 1886 (*Grove IV*, Supplementary Volume, 1945, 614). The NAVS had performed Sullivan's music, but only partsongs.

<sup>8</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1982, programme 17 November 1896.

<sup>9</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1982, programme 17 December 1895.



of ‘the best chorus singers to be found in this city and the immediate neighbourhood, a large number of whom have had considerable experience of oratorio work’.<sup>10</sup>

An analysis of the numbers in the choir from December 1892, the earliest date at which members are listed in the programmes, to March 1896 is set out in Table 2 below. This shows that the main increase in numbers was among the contraltos,

**Table 2 Membership of the Gateshead Choral Society and Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union December 1892 to March 1896<sup>11</sup>**

Date	S	A(F)	A(M)	T	B	Total	S		A	
							Miss	Mrs	Miss	Mrs
19 Dec. 1892	83	24	0	26	32	<b>165</b>	76	7	20	4
21 March 1893	101	29	0	40	48	<b>218</b>	89	12	25	4
12 Dec. 1893	97	26	0	33	38	<b>194</b>	90	7	22	4
13 March 1894	110	29	0	41	43	<b>223</b>	101	9	26	3
26 Nov. 1894	108	36	0	34	54	<b>232</b>	100	9	26	3
26 Feb. 1895	112	41	0	36	57	<b>246</b>	103	9	38	3
17 Dec. 1895	128	85	5	76	112	<b>406</b>	114	14	76	9 <sup>12</sup>
20 March 1896 <sup>13</sup>	133	88	6	76	113	<b>416</b>	116	17	79	9 <sup>14</sup>

tenors and basses with male altos appearing for the first time. Throughout this period only very few of the women were described as ‘Mrs’;<sup>15</sup> why there were so few married women is a subject for investigation, though it may be tentatively suggested that their domestic roles were more demanding than those of unmarried women. It may also be the case that singing in choirs offered single women the possibility of engaging in mixed-sex activity without compromising their respectability. The appearance of male altos follows the rehearsal move from Gateshead to Newcastle. From December 1895 there were also eight male superintendents, two for each

<sup>10</sup> *NJ*, 16 December 1897.

<sup>11</sup> A(F) refers to female altos; A(M) to male altos.

<sup>12</sup> Including one referred to as ‘Madame’.

<sup>13</sup> Now the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union.

<sup>14</sup> Including one referred to as ‘Madame’.

<sup>15</sup> One other was referred to as ‘Madame’ (NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1982, programmes 17 December 1895 and 20 March 1896).

division, all drawn from the choir.<sup>16</sup> Their role is not specified, though if they had similar responsibilities to the chorus stewards appointed by both the Royal Choral Society and the London Bach Choir they would have checked attendance and punctuality and dealt with queries raised by the members.<sup>17</sup>

By 1909, the year of the Newcastle Musical Festival, the choir membership had risen to 473, of whom 147 were sopranos, 127 contraltos, 2 male altos, 90 tenors and 107 basses. By way of comparison, it may be noted that the London Bach Choir, established in 1876 under the directorship of Otto Goldschmidt, initially had a membership restricted to 250 (largely composed of ‘amateurs of high social standing’), though in the 1894-95 season there were only 180 members and by 1899-1900 numbers had fallen to 153.<sup>18</sup> In Newcastle the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union formed significantly the larger part of the choir for the 1909 Festival, of which Coward was the main conductor.<sup>19</sup> Table 3 below compares the membership of the NGCU in 1895 with that of 1909.

**Table 3 Membership of the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union in 1895 and 1909**

<b>Year</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>A(F)</b>	<b>A(M)</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Total</b>
1895	128	85	5	76	112	406
	32%	21%	1%	19%	28%	(100%)
1909	147	127	2	90	107	473
	31%	27%	0.4%	19%	23%	(100%)

The objects of the NGCU, were ‘to cultivate and diffuse the knowledge of and taste for high-class music’; in this we may notice an echo of the objects of the NSHCS, ‘to create and propagate a taste for that class of music which is its particular

<sup>16</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1892, programme 17 December 1895.

<sup>17</sup> Basil Keen, *The Bach Choir: The First Hundred Years* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Keen, *The Bach Choir*, 64. A full account of the choir is given in this book.

<sup>19</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1982, programme 1909. The Festival Chorus comprised 361 singers, of whom 262 were from the NGCU. See Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 20.

study', that is, classical music. Choir members were to be 'nominated in writing and elected by the Committee, after being approved as to musical fitness by the Conductor',<sup>20</sup> a rule which was replicated in other choirs. The NGCU were fortunate in having associated with it two men, neither primarily musicians, who exerted a powerful influence on the music of the area: James B. Clark, a coal exporter, and Charles Francis Lloyd, a banker, described by Henry Coward as 'probably the most potent musical force in Newcastle'.<sup>21</sup> In addition, one of the choir's patrons was W. H. Hadow, principal of Armstrong College from 1909.

Under Preston the choir 'became one of the most important societies of its kind in the country'.<sup>22</sup> In April 1901, *Musical Times* refers to it as 'undoubtedly the finest combination of voices in this locality' and adds that the concerts given by the NGCU with the Hallé 'have surpassed anything previously heard in Newcastle'.<sup>23</sup> In 1906 Preston, owing to ill health, resigned as conductor, an event that *Musical Times* reported with a fulsome tribute:

A musician of great ability, of enormous personal popularity, of a retiring and self-denying disposition, of unflinching high ideals, and a chorus-master of power and skill, he has raised the Society to a pitch of efficiency which, according to experienced critics of repute, ranks it among the three or four leading choral bodies in the kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

He was succeeded by Dr (later Sir) Henry Coward, probably the foremost choral conductor of his generation. Coward became conductor of the Huddersfield Festival Choral Society in 1901, having previously been chorus master of the Sheffield Musical Festival, then conductor of the Sheffield Musical Union and, in

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<sup>20</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-1892, programme 20 March 1896.

<sup>21</sup> Coward, *Reminiscences*, 201.

<sup>22</sup> NGCU, Souvenir Programme, 1938. Coward refers to it as 'the most important choral society north of Leeds' (*Reminiscences*, 201).

<sup>23</sup> *MT*, 42/698 (1901), 261.

<sup>24</sup> *MT*, 47/759 (1906), 340.

Sing in a state of frenzy.

Chorus—BAAL! HEAR AND ANSWER.

*Presto.*

SOPLANO  
ALTO  
TENOR  
BASS  
ACCOMP.

*Presto*

*f* *Presto* (♩. = 120).

Hear and an - swer, Baal!..... Hear and an - swer Baal!.....  
Hear and an - swer, Baal!..... Hear and an - swer, Baal!.....  
Hear and an - swer, Baal!..... Hear and an - swer, Baal!.....  
Hear and an - swer, Baal!..... Hear and an - swer, Baal!.....

Mark! how the scorn - er de - rid - eth us! Mark! how the scorn - er de -  
Mark! how the scorn - er de - rid - eth us! Mark! how the  
Mark! how the scorn - er de - rid - eth, de -  
Baal!..... Mark! how the scorn - er de - rid - eth us!

0-4.] 57

**Plate 8 Instructions for the chorus 'Baal! Hear and answer', from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.**

Reproduced from a copy of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in the possession of the author

1905, the Leeds Choral Union, as well as other choirs.<sup>25</sup> He remained with the NGCU until 1919, when he was succeeded by W. G. Whittaker, who had been sub-conductor.<sup>26</sup>

Something of Coward's approach to choral performance may be gleaned from a report of his conducting of the Festival Chorus at the 1909 Newcastle Festival. *The Times* reviewer wrote of the choir's 'snapping off the last note of every phrase, as if the lid of a box were suddenly shut up', though no doubt it was 'a proof of excellent choral discipline'.<sup>27</sup> A copy of *Elijah*, which Coward conducted with the NGCU in 1907, is marked with what are almost certainly his instructions to the choir. These include, 'Sing in a despairing tone' at the words, 'Yet doth the Lord see it not: He mocketh at us' and 'Sing in a state of frenzy' for 'Baal! Hear and answer Baal!' (see Plate 8, p. 78).<sup>28</sup>

### **3.4 The Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society; the Newcastle Harmonic Society 1895**

With its base in a work place, the Newcastle Postal Telegraph Society (NPTCS), founded in 1895, had a potentially more limited constituency than the other Newcastle mixed-voice choirs.<sup>29</sup> The Newcastle postmaster, T. Stevenson, was one of its patrons

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<sup>25</sup> Herbert Anteliff, 'Coward, Sir Henry' in *Grove IV*, vol. 1, 750-51; J. A. Rodgers, *Dr Henry Coward, the Pioneer Chorus-Master* (London: John Lane, 1911, reprinted Memphis, Tennessee: General Books, 2010), 14-15.

<sup>26</sup> *MT*, 56/873 (1915), 684; 60/922 (1919), 710.

<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, 22 October 1909. See also Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 28-29.

<sup>28</sup> This copy is in the author's collection. It is published by F. Pitman Hart & Co. but bears no publication date. On the inside front cover the hand-written information appears, 'W. Jennens Hackett. 1907. No 339. Second Bass Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union'.

<sup>29</sup> Pritchard refers to the 'industrial choral societies of the last decades of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century', though the only examples he cites are the two Newcastle societies, the NPTCS and the National Telephone Vocal Society (Pritchard, *The Musical Festival and the Choral Society*, 722). A Post Office Choir in London, comprising Post Office employees, gave a performance at the Guildhall in 1890 to celebrate the Jubilee of the Penny Post (*MT*, 31/568 (1860), 350). Other work-based London choirs included the Baltic Exchange Choir, the Railway Clearing House Musical Society, the Civil Service Vocal Union among many others (Percy A. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944*, Vol. I (London: Novello and Oxford University Press, 1947), 36. Work-based male-voice choirs are discussed in Chapter 6.

in the 1895-96 season; the following season they are headed by W. D. Cruddas, MP, followed by five postal telegraph officials. The conductor, J. R. Andrews, and the accompanist, F. J. Shadforth, both worked in postal telegraphy, then part of the civil service.<sup>30</sup> Andrews was organist and choirmaster at St Stephen's Church, Newcastle,<sup>31</sup> and had been accompanist to the NHarmSoc1891. A programme of December 1896 shows that there were 104 members in the choir, including 9 male altos; by December 1897 the numbers had increased to 224, but had fallen to 174 by December 1898. Each of the voice sections had a male superintendent, an arrangement that was also found in the NGCU.<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence as to why the superintendents were male, but it seems likely that at that date such a role would tend to fall to a man.

To discover how many members of the NPTCS worked in postal telegraphy would require an exhaustive study. But a very small sample taken from the choir membership in December 1897 and April 1900, and based on the 1891, 1901 and 1911 censuses, shows that of nine women none appears to have worked in postal telegraphy; three were school teachers, one a music teacher, one was employed in an electrical light works and one was a railway material machinist; the rest had no recorded occupation. Of 18 men, seven definitely were post office employees; of the others, four were electrical engineers or draughtsmen, who may have worked for the post office, the remaining occupations were a publisher's clerk, solicitor's clerks (two), a timber traveller, a joiner, a schoolmaster and a railway bookkeeper. Even this limited survey suggests that only a minority were employed in some branch of postal telegraphy, making the eventual change from a works-based choir to a more general choir easier and perhaps more logical.

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<sup>30</sup> Censuses 1891, 1901 and 1911.

<sup>31</sup> Census 1901.

<sup>32</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society Programmes 1896-1900, programmes 23 March and 19 December 1898.

Two other features may be noted. First, members of the same family were found in the choir; for instance, three of the basses in 1900 were brothers. Second, as was noted with the NGCU, there were apparently very few married women - only six out of 98 in 1900, five of whom were wives of choir men. So far as the NPTCS was concerned, a contributory factor may have been that when women employed by the Post Office married they were obliged to leave the service, and presumably this would lead to their leaving the choir. This particular instance does not, however, account for the lack of married women in other choirs.<sup>33</sup>

As to the choir as a whole, in December 1896 there were 40 sopranos, 11 contraltos, 9 male altos, 19 tenors and 25 basses, 104 in all. Comparing the membership with the NGCU of December 1895, and given in some instances the absence of initials, it appears that at the very most only ten members of the NGCU were also in the NPTCS, and four of these are doubtful. Two each of the male altos, tenors and basses appear to have been in both choirs. This result is similar to that described in the previous chapter when the membership of the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society, AAAC and the NHarmSoc1891 was compared. Not only does it suggest the availability of very many singers, it also suggests that choirs tended to be self-contained organisations attracting a loyalty not readily divided. There was also, of course, the possibility that to have been in more than one choir (and perhaps in some cases also a church choir) would have placed too many demands on a singer's time.

Only ten of the NPTCS members in 1900 can be identified with any certainty as still in the choir in 1912, but what is significant is the changing relationship between numbers of men and women. Details are set out in Table 4 on page 82.

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<sup>33</sup> Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Book, The Shoe String Press, 1973), 178.

**Table 4 Membership of NPTCS/NHarmSoc 1895 in 1900 and 1912**

<b>Year</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>A(F)</b>	<b>A(M)</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Total</b>
1900	72	26	5	31	57	191
	38%	14%	3%	16%	30%	100%
1912	72	35	3	18	24	152
	47%	23%	2%	12%	16%	100%

As will be seen, the fall in numbers was entirely among the men, a more dramatic drop than might have been expected when compared with the NGCU. During this period the conductorship had been taken over by Edgar Bainton and it is possible that his approach, especially as to repertory (see below), may have been less attractive to the men than to the women. Possibly, also, there had been a greater sense of male camaraderie in the earlier NPTCS days.

In April 1896, the NPTCS gave its first invitation concert in the Town Hall, Gateshead, though subsequently the choir performed in the Newcastle Town Hall or the recently opened Newcastle Olympia, a corrugated iron, general purpose hall.<sup>34</sup> The first concerts were given with organ and piano accompaniment, but an orchestra was used for the first time in December 1897. In March 1899, we find J. E. Hutchinson playing in a piano duet with J. T. Andrews.

In 1902 Hutchinson became conductor. Why Andrews had given up the conductorship is not apparent; possibly increasing responsibilities for the GPO gave him less time to devote to it.<sup>35</sup> A review of the March concert, when Gade's *Psyche* was performed, found that the chorus parts 'were sung in a manner which reflected great credit both on the singers and their energetic conductor, Mr. J. E. Hutchinson', the only reservation being that more male voices would have produced 'a better

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<sup>34</sup> See for example NCL: 780.73 NPTCS Programmes 1896-1900, programmes 9 December 1896 and 23 March 1898. For further details of the Olympia see Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> In the 1891 census Andrews was recorded as a telegraphist; by 1901 he had become a telegraph sub-engineer and may possibly at times have been 'on call' to respond to emergencies.



effect'.<sup>36</sup> Two years later *Musical Times* reviewer thought the choir had 'much to achieve yet in the direction of soft singing'.<sup>37</sup> In 1906, the reviewer observed that the choir 'exhibited improved expressive qualities' in a performance of Cowen's *St John's Eve*. Subsequently it was reported that Hutchinson had resigned the conductorship to be succeeded by Edgar Bainton.<sup>38</sup> Bainton had joined the staff of the Newcastle Conservatoire of Music in 1901<sup>39</sup> and was to prove an important influence on the choral life of Newcastle up to the First World War, when he was interned in Ruhleben. A *Musical Times* report of 1909 observed that the choir under its 'talented and earnest conductor, showed considerable advance upon former achievements'.<sup>40</sup>

Some time in 1911, the NPTCS, having reorganised its constitution, changed its name to the Musical Union, perhaps suggesting that the link with the postal telegraph organisation was weakening.<sup>41</sup> Although the *Newcastle Journal* thought it a 'far better title',<sup>42</sup> it was short-lived as there was a likelihood of its being confused with the Choral Union, by which the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union was popularly known. Shortly afterwards, it was suggested that the name be changed to

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<sup>36</sup> *NJ*, 22 March 1902.

<sup>37</sup> *MT*, 46/743 (1905), 48.

<sup>38</sup> *MT*, 47/760 (1906), 415; 47/764 (1906), 692.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Bainton, *Remembered on Waking: A Memoir of Edgar Bainton*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Hersham: Line Clear Editions, 2013; first published Sydney: Currawong Publishing Company, 1960), 6. D. H. Thomas implies that the Conservatoire had been founded in 1894 (D. H. Thomas, 'The Newcastle Conservatoire of Music (and other music schools in the city): an aspect of musical education 1894-1938' in *British Music*, vol. 14, 1992, 60-67. Thomas states that by 1898 W. McConnell Wood and 'Miss Maud, a pianist, had joined forces in premises in Claremont Building in Barras Bridge and called themselves The Conservatoire of Music'. He does not give a precise source for his information, but an undated Prospectus of the Conservatoire makes no reference to McConnell Wood, showing the principal as Miss Maud May. Moreover Thomas, in listing some of the patrons, inaccurately refers to Charles, instead of George, Grove and James, instead of John, Stainer. As Wood had formed a Select Choir in 1893 (*NJ*, 14 December 1893) it is possible that this formed the nucleus of the Conservatoire. If so, it would have followed the pattern of the Northumberland College of Music formed in 1887 and based on Mr Alderson's Amateur Choir (NCL: L780.7 Prospectuses and Programmes, Northumberland College of Music). In 1887, the National Society of Professional Musicians had encouraged the establishing of music colleges 'in some of the larger towns' (C. E. Whiting, *The University of Durham 1832-1932* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1932), 151).

<sup>40</sup> *MT*, 50/791 (1909), 44.

<sup>41</sup> *MT*, 52/824 (1911), 672.

<sup>42</sup> *NJ*, 7 December 1911.

the Harmonic Society,<sup>43</sup> resurrecting a name that had been used several times in the previous century, and programmes from 1912 show that its title had become the Newcastle upon Tyne Harmonic Society (NHarmSoc 1895) with an explanatory sub-heading ‘Founded in the Year 1895 as the Postal Telegraph Choral Society.’<sup>44</sup>

As applied to a choir, the term ‘harmonic’ may have emerged as a contraction of ‘philharmonic’, defined in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1959, as ‘loving harmony’ or ‘devoted to music’, first recorded in 1813.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that such choirs were established by those who enjoyed the opportunity to participate in singing. Harmonic Societies, or sometimes Sacred Harmonic Societies, became well established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; they were found, for instance, in Bradford, Nottingham, Sheffield and elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that impetus was given to the name by the success of the Sacred Harmonic Society of London.<sup>47</sup> The word ‘sacred’ tended to be dropped from the name of those societies that included it. In 1875, for example, the *Nottingham Journal* suggested that ‘sacred’ in the name of the Nottingham Sacred Harmonic Society was inappropriate when concert versions of opera were given. The Society, however, did not change its name until c. 1830.<sup>48</sup>

By 1912 few traces of the NPTCS’s origins remained. A Superintending Engineer, NE (N) District remained on the list of patrons and three of the former officials, the accompanist, secretary and librarian, were now honorary life members of the committee. C. F. Lloyd was the president and W. H. Hadow was also a committee member.

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<sup>43</sup> *NJ*, 8 December 1911.

<sup>44</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912, programme 20 March 1812.

<sup>45</sup> However, a Philharmonic Society was found in London in 1812 (P. A. Scholes, *Mirror of Music*, vol. 1), 23-24.

<sup>46</sup> Percy M. Young, ‘Bradford’, in *New Grove*, vol. 4, 175-76 (176); G. C. A. Austin, *Harmonic Century: The History of Nottingham Harmonic Society 1856-1955* ([Nottingham: no publisher, [1955]]); E. D. Mackerness, ‘Sheffield’ in *New Grove*, vol. 23, 246-47 (246).

<sup>47</sup> P. A. Scholes, *Mirror of Music*, vol. 1, 24.

<sup>48</sup> G. C. A. Austin, *Harmonic Century*, 18, 49.

### 3.5 Armstrong College Choral Society<sup>49</sup>

The third of these choirs began life as the Durham College of Science Music Society, a title which needs a little explanation.<sup>50</sup> A College of Physical Science had been founded in Newcastle in 1871 as part of the University of Durham, established in 1832. Although applied science was ‘the main reason for its existence’, the College also offered a limited amount of teaching in arts subjects. In 1883 it became the Durham College of Science, Newcastle upon Tyne, changing its name again in 1904 to Armstrong College (named after William, Lord Armstrong) and then, joining with the College of Medicine, to King’s College in 1937.<sup>51</sup> In 1963 it separated from Durham to become the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.<sup>52</sup> A Day-Training Department for Teachers had been established in 1890, and subsequently provision was made for the study of Education alongside their degree subjects.<sup>53</sup>

Armstrong College Choral Society was founded in 1889, the first concert being given in 1890.<sup>54</sup> No concerts were given in 1891-93, but in 1894 the choir performed Mendelssohn’s 42<sup>nd</sup> Psalm.<sup>55</sup> In June 1895 *Musical Times* refers to the third annual concert of the College Choral Society, given the previous month in the College of Science. The conductor was C. Sanford Terry; J. M. Preston, the conductor of the NGCU, played the piano and W.G. Whittaker the organ in a programme comprising Cowen’s *Rose Maiden* and Mendelssohn’s 95<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Sir John Stainer

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<sup>49</sup> This title was not adopted until 1908 but is used here as it is the name by which the choir, in its earlier days, was most generally known.

<sup>50</sup> NUSC: 11/9/1 Music Society Minute Book etc., University Archives, Newcastle University Library.

<sup>51</sup> E. M. Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne: A Historical Introduction: 1834-1971* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1972), 21-23, 55.

<sup>52</sup> Norman McCord, ‘Transition and evolution’ in Norman McCord, advisory ed., *Newcastle University: Past, Present and Future* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2000, 142-144), 142.

<sup>53</sup> Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> NUSC: 11/9/1 Music Society Minute Book etc., University Archives, Newcastle University Library; Borthwick implies that the choir was established in 1891, but this is not the case (Borthwick, ‘*In the Swim*’, 2).

<sup>55</sup> NCL: 780.73 Durham University, King’s College, Newcastle, Choral Society Programmes 1908-30.

was in the audience.<sup>56</sup> It is possible that this concert was given in the Grand Assembly Rooms, which were on the same site as the College and may have had an organ. The concert included a student song, *Salve Boreale Lumen*, newly composed by Terry to words by Professor J. W. Duff, professor of literature and classics,<sup>57</sup> which was sung at ACCS concerts for several years. C. S. Terry had been appointed lecturer in history in 1890, becoming a lecturer in history at Aberdeen University in 1898. He is now known mainly for his research into J. S. Bach.<sup>58</sup> Terry was succeeded as conductor by Whittaker, who also became an ‘Instructor in Music’ at the College.<sup>59</sup> Appearing under different names, following the changing name of the institution in which it was established, this choir may have some claim to be the longest surviving of all the choirs under discussion. This view, however, needs some qualification as it has not so far been possible to establish an unbroken connection between the Durham College of Science Choral Society and the present University Choral Society. More significantly, it was the first choir to be established in Newcastle within an academic institution and directed by musicians, most of whom gained a reputation as musicologists. The College, as part of Durham University, and more especially its music department, was the seedbed not only for its eponymous Choral Society, but also for the Bach Choir, founded by Whittaker in 1915, and the Cappella Novocastriensis, founded in 1960 by Dr Frederick Hudson.

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<sup>56</sup> *MT*, 36/628 (1895), 399. Borthwick, ‘*In the swim*’, 2, refers to the choir’s ‘first public concert in March 1895’ when Elgar’s *The Banner of St George* was performed in the Grand Assembly Rooms; but this work was not performed until 1898, having been composed the year before (NCL: ACCS Programmes 1908-30).

<sup>57</sup> Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 87. See Appendix 2.

<sup>58</sup> NUSC: 11/9/1 Music Society Minute Book etc., University Archives, Newcastle University Library. H. C. Colles, ‘Terry, Charles Sanford’ in *Grove IV*, vol. V, 307.

<sup>59</sup> NUSC: 1/1/1 Durham University Calendar 1900-1901, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. See Borthwick, ‘*In the swim*’, 4. Dr Borthwick’s thesis gives a detailed account of Whittaker’s time in Newcastle. See also Eric Cross, ‘Music’ in McCord, *Newcastle University*, 85-57 (85).

### 3.6 The emergence of British music

In what follows, particular attention will be paid to British composers, whose music began to feature more regularly in the programmes of local choirs during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The prospectus published in 1874 for Sir George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* has been described as a 'manifesto' of the English Musical Renaissance.<sup>60</sup> Interest in the movement had been aroused by the London International Exhibition in Kensington in 1873 when 'prominence was given to the works of English composers'.<sup>61</sup> It was to find institutional support in the Royal College of Music, developed from the National School of Music, which opened in 1883.<sup>62</sup> An English 'school' of new composers had been identified in 1884, comprising Frederic Cowen, Arthur Goring Thomas, Alexander Mackenzie and Charles Villiers Stanford.<sup>63</sup> Other British composers of the period included Sir Joseph Barnby, John Francis Barnett, Sir William Sterndale Bennett, Alfred Robert Gaul, Sir George Macfarren, Ebenezer Prout, Henry Smart, Sir John Stainer and Sir Arthur Sullivan. Much of this music had been stimulated by the festival movement; had Newcastle's own festival tradition not petered out in the 1840s, the town might well have been the first to perform some of the works which fell to Leeds, Norwich, Birmingham, the Three Choirs and others.

The 1842 Festival had been financially unsuccessful, and this may have been a deterrent to organising another. There had also been hostility from local evangelicals opposed to the performance of even sacred music in church. However, as Brian

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<sup>60</sup> Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, 'Renaissance and reformation (1840-94)' in *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a national music* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 2001), 3-51 (24).

<sup>61</sup> George Grove, *A Short History of Cheap Music As Exemplified in the Records of the House of Novello, Ewer & Co., with Special Reference to the First Fifty Years of the Reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria* (London & New York: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1887, reprinted by Cambridge University Press, 2009), 108-09.

<sup>62</sup> Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, 38, quoting Joseph Bennett of *The Daily Telegraph*; C. H. H. Parry subsequently joined this group.

Pritchard points out, musical festivals were by now declining in popularity and Newcastle may have reflected this decline.<sup>64</sup>

Percy Young, writing of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, headed his chapter ‘mediocrity in spate’.<sup>65</sup> Though what followed was not confined to British music, it undoubtedly referred to some of the composers named above, whom he saw as ‘obedient to “academic” rectitude on the one hand and the principle that the customer is always right on the other’.<sup>66</sup> Young’s judgment, implying the ephemeral and utilitarian character of much of this music, was anticipated in a *Musical Times* article of 1894 in which the author wrote of such music as ‘the commonplace of the age, and of little value to the world’.<sup>67</sup> In 2013, James Garnett, on the same theme, referred to ‘a picture of ephemeral mediocrity’. He, however, was seeking to put the music in the context of its function in music festivals and other similar activities when he wrote that ‘it was the activity of singing rather than the presentation of musical works that was the predominant concern of such events’.<sup>68</sup>

Although music may have been written to order, it does not follow that the demands of ‘collective singing’ should necessarily result in the composition of inferior music, though there is a lurking implication to this effect. As we shall see, choral works written by a later generation of British composers show that the demands of amateur choirs could be met without sacrifice of musical quality. It is also the case, and certainly with the Newcastle Bach Choir, that ‘collective singing’ as the

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<sup>64</sup> Brian W. Pritchard, *The Musical Festival and the Choral Society*, 211. For an account of the Newcastle festivals see William Roy Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*.

<sup>65</sup> Percy M. Young, *The Choral Tradition* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, rev. edn 1981), 236.

<sup>66</sup> Young, *The Choral Tradition*, 237.

<sup>67</sup> E. D. R., ‘English music’ in *MT*, 35/619 (1894), 592-596 (592), quoted by James Garnett, in ‘Britain and Ireland’ in Donna M. Di Grazia, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music* (New York, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 335-67 (335).

<sup>68</sup> Garnett in Di Grazia, *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, 335.

*raison d'être* of the establishment of a choir yielded to a specific commitment to the music to be performed.

### 3.7 Repertory

#### 3.7.1 *The Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society*

Given the shape of most of their concerts, a cantata or similar work followed by miscellaneous items, including a number of vocal solos, the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society (NAVS) performed mainly partsongs or excerpts from larger works.<sup>69</sup> This led to a rather curious programme for a Handel bicentenary concert of 1885. The first half was devoted to Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*; the second half began with the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of Handel's second organ concerto (played as an organ solo by J. M. Preston) followed by a miscellaneous selection of recitatives and arias, choruses and other items from *Acis and Galatea* and Handel's lesser known works – *L'Allegro*, *Rinaldo*, *Solomon* and *Hercules*.

The larger scale works they performed, invariably during the first half of a programme, were mainly by European composers – Cherubini, Niels Gade, Schumann, Mendelssohn and others. British music of any substance included two works by John Francis Barnett, his cantata *The Ancient Mariner* performed in 1880, which had appeared at the Birmingham Festival in 1867, and *The Building of the Ship* in 1882, heard in Leeds two years earlier,<sup>70</sup> and Alexander Mackenzie's *The Bride*, also in 1882, performed at the Worcester Festival the previous year.<sup>71</sup> By now the policy of performing modern British works, often shortly after their first performance at a festival, was established. Frederic Cowen's *Sleeping Beauty* appeared in 1886,

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<sup>69</sup> Unless stated otherwise, references are from NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc., 1875-1905.

<sup>70</sup> Edward F. Rimbault, 'Barnett, John Francis' in *Grove IV*, vol. I, 228.

<sup>71</sup> H. C. Colles, 'Mackenzie, Sir Alexander Campbell' in *Grove IV*, vol. III, 270-73 (272).

following its first performance in Birmingham the year before,<sup>72</sup> and Alfred Gaul's historical cantata, *Joan of Arc*, in 1887, the same year as it appeared at the Birmingham Festival.<sup>73</sup> An exception to the festival origin was Prout's cantata, *Alfred*, given in 1883 and repeated in 1889; it had been first performed in Shoreditch Town Hall in 1882 by the Borough of Hackney Choral Association, of which Prout was conductor.<sup>74</sup>

The first sign of a move away from Young's mediocre composers came with a performance in 1886 of Stanford's *The Revenge* (composed for the Leeds Festival of the same year), repeated two years later. The first work by Parry, his *Ode on St Cecilia's Day* (Leeds Festival 1889), was performed in 1891 and Stanford's *The Battle of the Baltic* in 1892 (Hereford Festival 1891).<sup>75</sup> One work from a concert in 1889 which possibly calls for special mention is the *Ode to the North-East Wind* for chorus and orchestra by one of the few 19<sup>th</sup>-century female composers, Alice Mary Smith.<sup>76</sup> A song by her, *The Devout Lover*, had been performed by the NAVS in 1885. In 1881 the choir sang a madrigal, Thomas Morley's *Fire! Fire! My heart*, but apart from John Bennet's *All creatures now are merry-minded* in 1892, no other work of the period was performed, suggesting that neither Rea nor his successor was interested in this early music.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> J. A. Fuller-Maitland, 'Cowen, Sir Frederic Hymen' in *Grove IV*, vol. I, 751-52 (752).

<sup>73</sup> 'Gaul, Alfred Robert' in *Grove IV*, vol. II, 355, taken from *British Musical Biography*.

<sup>74</sup> 'Ebenezer Prout' in *MT*, 40/674 (1899), 225-230 (228).

<sup>75</sup> F. Hudson, 'A revised and extended catalogue of the works of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)' in *The Music Review*, vol. 37, May 1976, 106-129 (109); Emily Daymond's catalogue of Parry's works in J. A. Fuller-Maitland, 'Sir Charles Hubert Hastings' in *Grove IV*, vol. IV, 55-63 (60).

<sup>76</sup> Alice Mary Smith (1839-84) composed chamber, orchestral and choral music. The *Ode to the North-East Wind* was performed by the Hackney Choral Association in 1880 (Sir George Grove, 'Smith, Alice Mary (Mrs Meadows White)' in *Grove IV*, vol. IV, 790).

<sup>77</sup> The London Bach Choir performed its first Elizabethan work, Gibbons' *Hosanna* (presumably *Hosanna to the Son of David*), in 1877 with Wilbye's *Draw on sweet night* the following year and gave occasional performances of other music of the period during the rest of the century (Keen, *The Bach Choir*, 205-25).



J. E. Jeffries succeeded Rea as conductor of the NAVS in 1899. His programmes, so far as British music was concerned, show little development but rather a return to Rea's earlier choices, revisiting Smart, Prout, Barnett and Bartlett and adding Sterndale Bennett with *The May Queen*. Of the choral works, only Frederick Bridge's cantata *Callirhoë* (Birmingham Festival 1888)<sup>78</sup> shows any acknowledgment of the newer generation of composers apart from a chorus, *Spanish Serenade*, by Elgar, in 1902, who was otherwise represented only by two vocal solos. Neither Parry nor Stanford appears other than in an aria from the former's *Judith*.

Before leaving the NAVS, mention should be made of two works composed by their conductors, and one by another local composer. The first was Rea's chorus, *To Spring*, composed for a concert in April 1889, repeated in December and again in 1896. A more substantial work was Jeffries' cantata *The Annunciation*, dedicated to 'John G. Benson, Esq., and the members of the Newcastle on Tyne Amateur Vocal Society'.<sup>79</sup> This formed part of an oratorio, *The Life and Death of Christ*, of which two parts, *The Annunciation* and *The Redemption*, had been performed in Newcastle Cathedral in 1896.<sup>80</sup> The third of these works was a partsong by Charles Francis Lloyd, *Maid of Marliverle*.

The NAVS, though continuing for a few years into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, represented both in its repertory and style of programme a 19th-century tradition that had become dated. On the other hand, whatever view may be taken now of much of its repertory, the British music it performed, often hot from the press or at any rate from the most recent festival, must have seemed adventurous and innovative at this time.

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<sup>78</sup> F. G. Edwards and H. C. Colles, 'Bridge, Sir John Frederick' in *Grove IV*, vol. I, 468-69 (469).

<sup>79</sup> John G. Benson was the secretary of the NAVS; he had previously been the treasurer.

<sup>80</sup> James D. Brown and Stephen S. Stratton, *British Musical Biography: A Dictionary of Musical Artists, Authors and Composers (1897)* (Birmingham: S. S. Stratton, 1897; Kessinger Legacy Reprints), 220.

### 3.7.2 *The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union*

At the outset, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union drew on the established repertory of music by continental composers for its main repertory, performing works by Gade, Schubert, Mozart, Mendelssohn and Handel, among others. As to the British repertory, most of the mediocre Victorian composers were dropped, only Smart, Mackenzie and Cowen retaining a toehold for a while. The choir differed from the NAVS in offering no solo or similar vocal works, but only choral music, usually, in the earlier years, focusing on one or two medium-sized works. In March 1892, for example, the choir performed Mozart's *Requiem* followed by two partsongs and concluding with Mozart's motet, *Glory, honour, praise and power*. (Though referred to as a motet, this latter work is in fact a chorus taken from *King Thamos*.<sup>81</sup>) This concert pattern lasted until 1895, when Handel's *Israel in Egypt* was performed, from then on establishing the NGCU as an oratorio choir. The performance immediately precedes the choir's change of name the following year, suggesting that there may already have been an influx of Newcastle singers to provide the size of choir which at that date would have been considered appropriate for a major Handel choral work. From this point onwards, and at least until World War I, the NGCU performed oratorios or similar works of the major composers – Handel, Mendelssohn, Brahms (*A German Requiem* was performed for the first time in Newcastle in December 1896). From the 1899-1900 season, and for the next two or three years, Hans Richter with the Hallé Orchestra conducted Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, Brahms's *Song of Destiny*, Berlioz's *Faust* and Liszt's *Legend of St Elizabeth*. Though it is not certain when the Hallé Orchestra first performed with the NGCU, a link with Manchester had been established at least as early as 1896, when the Manchester Orchestral Association, a

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<sup>81</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 2921 (1883), 504. Novello refer to it as a 'Third Motet' in a list of Original Octavo Editions printed at the end of their 1899 edition of S. Coleridge-Taylor's *The Death of Minnehaha*.

body associated with the Hallé, was engaged by the choir. As by this time the choir's reputation was well established, it is perhaps not surprising that Richter came with the Hallé to conduct three concerts. From this time onwards, until 1912, the Hallé was the orchestra most regularly engaged by the choir.<sup>82</sup>

From 1904 the tradition developed, which was to survive for many years, of performing *Messiah* in December; the Christmas *Messiah* tradition was widespread. The work was performed in almost unbroken sequence by, for example, the Nottingham Harmonic Society from 1857 to 1954.<sup>84</sup> The first performance of music by Bach, his *Mass in B minor*, was given by the NGCU with Coward in 1908.

In 1904, *Musical Times* reported that the NGCU's prospectus for the coming season showed 'a continuation of their two-fold policy of progressiveness and support of British composers'.<sup>85</sup> We have seen some of the results of this 'progressiveness' with non-British composers and we now turn to the British composers. In 1890 the choir performed a madrigal by Thomas Morley, *My bonny lass she smileth*, followed in 1892 by John Wilbye's *Sweet honey-sucking bees* and two years later Bateson's partsong *Two cupids*. Although this large choir was not the most suitable vehicle for the music of these early composers, they remained in the repertory. In 1914, under Henry Coward, a concert that began with Bach's *Singet dem Herren*, BWV 225 (sung in English), and concluded with three partsongs by Cui offered a mini anthology of British music devoted to works by Byrd, Wilbye, Weelkes, Bennet, Morley and Gibbons, followed by Samuel Wesley (*In exitu Israel*), Pearsall (*Sir Patrick Spens*) and concluding with Delius, Bantock, Parry and Elgar.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> See further information in Chapter 7.

<sup>84</sup> G. C. A. Austin, *Harmonic Century*, 77-105.

<sup>85</sup> *MT*, 45/740 (1904), 663.

<sup>86</sup> It is possible that the madrigal performances were encouraged by the first publications of Stainer and Bell's *The English Madrigal School* (1913-1924).

A performance in 1892 of Parry's *Blest pair of sirens* indicated a move away from the familiar 19<sup>th</sup>-century repertory. During the next three years the British music performed included Pearsall's *Sir Patrick Spens*, Erskine Allon's choral ballad, *May Margaret*, Eduard Hecht's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*,<sup>87</sup> and Sullivan's *Festival Te Deum*, works unfamiliar to a local audience. This move was affirmed in the next two years by a performance of Stanford's *The Revenge*, followed by Parry's *Job*. Though with roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Stanford and Parry may be seen as transitional composers, rising above the level of much of the work of their contemporaries and establishing the foundations of a new British 'school' of music.

There was a return to Sullivan in 1900 and Cowen in March 1902, but the most significant assertion of contemporary British music came with Elgar's *Caractacus* in December of the same year, followed by *The Dream of Gerontius* in 1903 and *The Apostles* in 1904, all of which had previously been performed at festivals. *Gerontius*, for instance, had been given its premiere in Birmingham with Richter in 1900, followed (after a performance in Düsseldorf) by Worcester and Sheffield in 1902, then going 'the round of the provincial festivals'.<sup>88</sup> Walford Davies' *Everyman* was given in Leeds in 1904, then by 'almost every choral society of the first rank in the British Isles and occasionally elsewhere',<sup>89</sup> including Newcastle in 1905; his *Song of St Francis* was performed in 1913, the year after its appearance in Birmingham.

Performances of music by the newer generation continued in 1907 with Edgar Bainton's *The Blessed Damsel*, conducted by the composer, followed a year later by Rutland Boughton's *Choral Variations on Folk Songs*. These works formed almost a

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<sup>87</sup> Although born in Dürkheim, Hecht was British by adoption, living most of his life in Manchester; see 'Hecht, Eduard' in *Grove IV*, vol. II, 599-600.

<sup>88</sup> H. C. Colles, 'Elgar, Sir Edward (William)' in *Grove IV*, vol. II, 149-57 (150-52).

<sup>89</sup> H. C. Colles, 'Davies, Sir Henry Walford' in *Grove IV*, vol. II, 21-24 (21-23).

prelude to the British music performed at the 1909 Newcastle Festival. As we have seen, the Festival Choir was based largely on the NGCU and was therefore well-versed in British music. In addition to music by Elgar, whose Symphony No. 1 and *Sea Pictures* were performed, and the local composer Adam Carse (Symphony in G minor), the Festival offered Rutland Boughton's 1901 Symphonic Poem for chorus and orchestra, *The Invincible Armada*, the 1909 Overture Phantasy *Prometheus* by Bainton, and Part I of Granville Bantock's cantata, *Omar Khayyám* (Birmingham 1906).<sup>90</sup> The NGCU performed parts II and III of *Omar Khayyám* (Cardiff 1907, Birmingham 1909) the year after the festival and a further work by Bantock, Ode III from *Atalanta in Calydon* in 1912, the year of its performance in Manchester.<sup>91</sup> In the same year the third part of *Omar Khayyám* was given. This work, along with Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha*, seems to have had a particular appeal to choral societies. Parts of it were performed at the Birmingham Festival in 1906 and the Cardiff Festival in 1907; in 1909 all or part of it was performed by the North Staffordshire District Choral Union, Manchester Hallé, Liverpool Welsh Choral Union and the Sheffield Musical Union.<sup>92</sup>

This survey of the British music performed by the NGCU shows the continued influence of the festival movement, already noted in the repertory of the later years of the NAVS, and its espousal, albeit to a limited extent, of the music of the Elizabethan period.

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<sup>90</sup> See Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 27; H. C. Colles, 'Granville Bantock' in *Grove IV*, vol. I, 217-19 (218).

<sup>91</sup> H. C. Colles, 'Granville Bantock', in *Grove IV*, 217-19.

<sup>92</sup> H. C. Colles, 'Bantock, Granville', in *Grove IV*, 218; *MT* 50/791 (1909), 44; 50/793 (1909), 189; 50/795 (1909), 331; 50/800 (1909), 660.

### 3.7.3 *The Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society; the Newcastle Harmonic Society 1895*

In its early years, the Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society (NPTCS), in contrast to the NGCU, tended to offer a miscellaneous type of programme, reminiscent of that of the NAVS. It eschewed the major choral works and introduced a range of smaller-scale works from madrigals to music by contemporary composers such as Dudley Buck, Hecht, Frederic Lohr and Eaton Faning. Among the madrigals were Thomas Bateson's *Love's inconstancy* (sung by a quartet) and Thomas Morley's *My bonny lass she smileth*. Dudley Buck (1839-79), an organist, conductor and composer, was represented by a part-song, *Hymn to Music*. Edward Hecht (1832-87) was born in Dürkheim but moved to England where he became Charles Hallé's chorus-master and conducted a number of other choirs. His chorus, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, was twice performed by the choir. Frederic Lohr's *A Slumber Song* was performed in 1896, but information about the composer is elusive. Eaton Faning (1850-1927) had taught at the Guildhall School of Music before becoming director of music at Harrow School. He also taught at the RCM. His part-songs, *The Miller's Wooing* and *Song of the Vikings*, were both in the choir's repertory.<sup>93</sup> In choosing to perform music of the Elizabethan period and works by contemporary composers, the choir showed a concern to introduce less well-known music to its audiences.

Although Bateson's *Two cupids* and *Love's inconstancy* and Morley's *My bonny lass she smileth* were performed during Andrews's conductorship, this did not represent any firm commitment to early English music. The one modern British composer whom the choir especially espoused was Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. The

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<sup>93</sup> F. H. Jenks and W. H. Hadow, 'Buck, Dudley', in *Grove 2*, vol. I, 413; William H. Cummings, 'Hecht, Eduard', in *Grove 2*, vol. II, 373. The entry for Hermann (Frederic) Löhr (1871-1943) by Andrew Lamb (*New Grove*, 2001, vol. 15, 81) states that he was the son of the composer Frederic Nicholls Löhr, but no other reference to him has been found. W. Barclay Squire, 'Faning, Eaton', in *Grove 2*, vol. II, 6. See also 'Eaton Faning', *MT*, 42/702 (1901), 513-26.

competence of the choir is suggested by his coming to conduct *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* (Part 1 of the *Hiawatha* trilogy) in 1899.<sup>94</sup> A review in the January 1901 issue of *Musical Times* of Coleridge-Taylor's, *Death of Minnehaha*, performed the previous month, shows that the composer was the Society's president. Of the performance, the reviewer praised the choral singing 'as being perhaps the most meritorious feature' and complimented the Society on being the first to perform the work in Newcastle.<sup>95</sup> In March 1901, the Society performed the third part of the *Hiawatha* trilogy, *Hiawatha's Departure*.<sup>96</sup> The same programme included a partsong, *The Defeat* by the former conductor of the NHarmSoc 1891, Charles Chambers.<sup>97</sup>

In his first two years, apart from a performance of Barnby's *Rebekah*, Hutchinson continued the 'miscellaneous' tradition. From December 1903, however, the choir took on a more 'oratorio' character, performing in succession Gaul's *Joan of Arc*, Elgar's *King Olaf*, Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*, Barnett's *Building of the Ship* (coupled with a partsong by Arthur Docksey<sup>98</sup>) and Cowen's *St John's Eve*. Hutchinson remained with the choir for barely three years, to be succeeded in 1906 by Bainton, who transformed its repertory, which took on a fresher, forward-looking character.

There were a few oratorios - Handel's *Samson* and *Judas Maccabaeus*, Elgar's *King Olaf* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* - and several smaller-scale choral works by Dvořák, J. C. Bach, Max Reger, Brahms, Cornelius and Schubert. In the two seasons

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<sup>94</sup> NCL: 780.73 NPTCS Programmes 1896-1900, programme 11 December 1899. This work had been performed only the year before at the Royal College of Music (J. A. Fuller-Maitland and H. C. Colles, 'Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel' in *Grove IV*, vol. I, 680).

<sup>95</sup> *MT*, 42/695 (1901), 48.

<sup>96</sup> For further information on the composer see Geoffrey Self, *The Hiawatha Man: The Life and Works of Samuel Taylor-Coleridge* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995).

<sup>97</sup> *MT*, 42/699 (1901), 334. *The Death of Minnehaha* had been performed at the North Staffordshire Festival in autumn 1899 and *Hiawatha's Departure* by the Royal Choral Society in March 1900 (*Grove IV*, vol. I, 680).

<sup>98</sup> Although born in Staffordshire, Arthur Docksey, DMus, FRCO, had moved to South Shields by 1901 and could therefore be regarded as a local composer (census 1901; Frederick W. Thornsby, *Dictionary of Organs and Organists* (Bournemouth: H. Logan & Company, 1912), 269).

1908-09 and 1909-10 two of J. S. Bach's cantatas were performed, *O ewiges Feuer*, BWV 34 and *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21, the motet *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*, BWV 230 and a first Newcastle performance of *Magnificat*, BWV 243, sung in a 'very spirited and enthusiastic manner'.<sup>99</sup> These performances foreshadow the 'Bach and British' repertory of the Newcastle Bach Choir, which W. G. Whittaker, persuaded by Bainton, established in 1915.

A scrutiny of the reports in *Musical Times* for 1909 of music in the provinces shows that several choirs performed two or three of the works of Bach, notably the *St Matthew Passion* and the *B minor Mass*. Several of the choirs occasionally performed music by the younger generation of British composers. The most popular work was part or all of Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha*, performed by choirs in Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Middlesbrough and elsewhere. Performances of parts of Granville Bantock's *Omar Khayyám* were given by the North Staffordshire District Choral Society, which also performed Delius's *Sea Drift*, and choirs in Sheffield and Manchester. Two choirs performed Vaughan Williams's *Toward the Unknown Region* – the Oxford Bach Choir and Bristol New Philharmonic Society. The Oxton Harmonic Society offered works by Walford Davies, Arthur Somervell and Rutland Boughton in one of its concerts, but the only provincial choir shown to have performed both Bach and contemporary British Music at one concert was the Birmingham New Choral Society with Bach's motet *Lobet den Herrn*, BWV 230, and works by Walford Davies, Granville Bantock, Edgar Bainton and H. Osmond Anderton. Elgar received several performances, mainly of *The Dream of Gerontius*, but also of *King Olaf* and *The Black Knight*. Most of the other British works

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<sup>99</sup> *MT*, 51/806 (1910), 254.



performed were by composers of the previous generation, among them Stanford, Parry, Macfarren, Gaul and Sullivan.<sup>100</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief and selective survey is that, with one or two exceptions, the choirs of this date remained firmly rooted in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century tradition. Newcastle's Postal Telegraph Choral Society was therefore showing a marked departure from tradition. The major commitment was to modern British music, though madrigals, by Morley, Gibbons, Wilbye and Weelkes, and possibly others were also sung.<sup>101</sup> It is likely that the interest in madrigals was encouraged, at least in part, by the publication from 1913-24 of the 36 volumes of *The English Madrigal School*, transcribed and edited by E. H. Fellowes.

The modern composers were represented by two groups: those whose works had already appeared in the NPTCS repertory and those who were introduced for the first time. Of the former, Parry, Stanford and Elgar retained a place, as did Rutland Boughton, Bantock, with *The Tyger* and a partsong, *Spring Enchantment*, and Coleridge-Taylor. A concert in December 1910 found Boughton conducting his symphonic poem, *Midnight*, in which the choir 'grappled manfully with the great difficulty of the vocal parts'.<sup>102</sup> The latter group included a clutch of the composers whose music survives, to a varying extent, in the present-day repertory. Among them are Roger Quilter, Frederick Delius, Balfour Gardiner, Gustav Holst, Bainton himself and, above all, Charles Wood.<sup>103</sup> A few composers who are little known today

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<sup>100</sup> The examples are drawn from *MT* 50 (1909).

<sup>101</sup> A report in the *MT* refers to 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century madrigals to be performed in the 1908-09 season (*MT*, 49/788 (1908), 661).

<sup>102</sup> *MT*, 52/815 (1911), 44.

<sup>103</sup> Bainton's memory is sustained through the activities of The Edgar Bainton (UK) Society (information supplied to the author, 2 May 2014).

include Lee Williams,<sup>104</sup> Hubert Bath (1883-1945) and Howard Osmond Anderton (1861-1934).

### 3.7.4 *Armstrong College Choral Society*

The repertory of the Durham College of Science Choral Society (later the ACCS) under C.S. Terry (1890-1901) included some of the established works of the period, such as Gade's *Erl King's Daughter*, Schubert's *Song of Miriam*, and Mendelssohn's 42<sup>nd</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> Psalms, but introduced Hiller's *Song of Victory* and Gounod's *Gallia*. Of British composers there are Cowen, Sterndale Bennett and Mackenzie of the earlier period, and then Parry, his *Ode on St Cecilia's Day*, Stanford, *Phaudrig Crohoore* and the finale from *Eumenides* and Elgar, *The Banner of St George*.

When Whittaker succeeded Terry in 1902 there was a gradual change. Although for a time he drew on the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century repertory, the works he chose were largely unfamiliar to a local audience. At his first, 1902, concert he introduced Goring Thomas's *Sun Worshippers* (Norwich Festival, 1881) and Eaton Faning's *The Miller's Wooing*, a partsong which had been sung once previously by the NGCU,<sup>105</sup> along with part of *Hiawatha*. The following year he performed Thomas's *The Swan and the Skylark*, a posthumous cantata orchestrated by Stanford for the 1894 Birmingham Festival,<sup>106</sup> and a work by Sullivan, *On Sea and Shore*. Still drawing on late 19<sup>th</sup>-century compositions, he performed Archibald Davidson Arnott's *Young*

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<sup>104</sup> Probably to be identified with Charles Lee Williams (1853-1935) whose music was performed at the Three Choirs Festival from 1889-1904 and who contributed to three histories of the Festivals (J. A. Fuller-Maitland, 'Williams, Charles Lee' in *Grove IV*, vol. V, 725; Watkins Shaw, *The Three Choirs Festival: The Official History of the Meetings of the Three Choirs of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, c. 1713-1953* (Worcester and London: Ebenezer Baylis & Son, 1954), x, xi, 148.

<sup>105</sup> Eaton Faning (1850-1927); see William Barclay Squire, 'Faning, Eaton' in *Grove IV*, vol. II, 196, drawing on 'Eaton Faning' in *MT*, 42/702 (1901), 513-526.

<sup>106</sup> Arthur Goring Thomas (1850-92); see William Barclay Squire, 'Thomas, Arthur Goring' in *Grove IV*, vol. V, 317-18 (318).

*Lochinvar* (Crystal Palace 1897)<sup>107</sup> and Hamish MacCunn's *Bonny Kilmeney* (Edinburgh 1888, Crystal Palace 1889),<sup>108</sup> neither of which had been performed locally.

Over the next ten years the repertory began to take on some of the characteristics that were to be identified with the Bach Choir. As well as music by Bach and Purcell, Whittaker began to introduce Elizabethan madrigals and works by the younger generation of British composers and, from 1910, his own arrangements of Northumbrian folk songs. Among the first of the modern British works to be performed were Granville Bantock's *The Silken Thread* and Joseph Holbrooke's *Spring is Cheery*.<sup>109</sup> In 1909 he gave the first performance in Newcastle of Vaughan Williams's *Toward the Unknown Region*, a work which had been given its premiere at the Leeds Festival two years earlier, prompting Fuller Maitland to refer to the composer as "foremost of the younger generation" of British composers'.<sup>110</sup> Vaughan Williams and Holst, whose *The Cloud Messenger* was performed in 1914, were two major composers later to be closely associated with the Bach Choir. Although this may not be surprising, what give it added significance was the friendship between Whittaker and the two composers. That between Whittaker and Holst was particularly

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<sup>107</sup> Archibald Davidson Arnott (1870-1910) was the first Durham graduate to obtain the BMus by examination (in 1891); in 1901 he graduated DMus (James D. Brown and Stephen S. Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, 15. See also Maggie Humphreys and Robert Evans, *Dictionary of Composers for the Church*, 11). His date of death is from the registers of the parish of Cathcart in the county of Renfrew (<[www.scotlandscotlandpeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs\\_stat\\_deaths/6311926?return\\_row=0](http://www.scotlandscotlandpeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs_stat_deaths/6311926?return_row=0)> accessed 3 May 2018).

<sup>108</sup> Hamish MacCunn (1868-1916). See J. Fuller-Maitland, 'MacCunn, Hamish' in *Grove IV*, vol. III, 262-63.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Holbrooke (1878-1958); Anne-Marie Forbes and Rob Barnett, 'Holbrooke, Joseph [Josef] (Charles)' in *New Grove 2*, vol. 11, 615-16, record that he 'was a great publicist for the cause of British music'.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Aidan J. Thompson, 'Becoming a national composer: critical reception to c. 1925' in Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thompson, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56-78 (57).

strong, and a volume of the composer's letters to Whittaker, and with a few from Whittaker himself to Holst, was published in 1974.<sup>111</sup>

### **3.8 The founding of the Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir**

The Bach Choir owed its foundation principally to two men: Whittaker and Bainton. Borthwick records that Whittaker (see Plate 9, p. 103) had begun an exploration of Bach's choral music, having been inspired especially by Schweitzer's *J. S. Bach*. In 1913, he determined to gather an informal group of competent sight-readers to sing through the choral works that were available in English in numerical order.<sup>112</sup> Bainton encouraged Whittaker to turn these informal performances into something more public; although initially reluctant, he was eventually persuaded to do so, at least partly to ensure that music continued to be performed locally during World War I when several musical organisations closed.

A Bach Society had been founded in London in 1849, primarily to collect as much as possible of Bach's music, both published editions and manuscripts, and relevant biographical writings. The Society formed a choir and performed a few of Bach's works, including the *St Matthew Passion*. This was rehearsed during 1853 and performed twice at the Hanover Square Rooms, London, in April and November of the following year.<sup>113</sup> No further concerts were given after 1862 and the organisation closed in 1870.<sup>114</sup> The London Bach Choir, despite its name, was not primarily committed to the performance of Bach's music. The Oxford Bach Choir followed ten

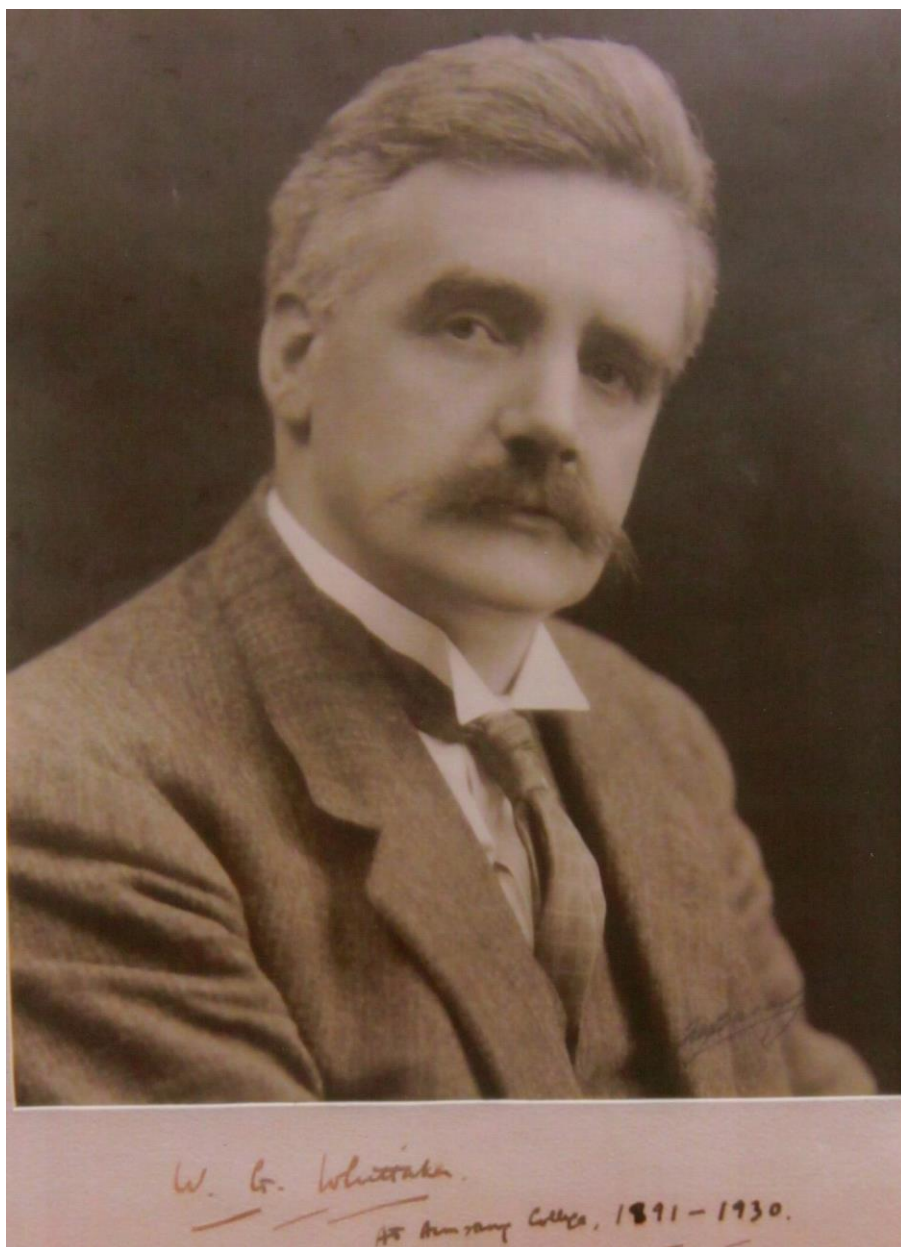
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<sup>111</sup> Michael Short, ed., *Gustav Holst: Letters to W. G. Whittaker* ([Glasgow]: University of Glasgow Press, 1974).

<sup>112</sup> Borthwick, 'In the swim', 187, quoting from Whittaker's private diaries. For a further account of the origins of the choir see Christine Borthwick, 'Whittaker's Bach Choir' in Christine Borthwick, Eric Cross, Roy Large and Philip Owen, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir: Celebrating a Century of Singing, 1915-2015* (Hersham: Line Clear Editions, 2016), 23-79.

<sup>113</sup> RCM: MS 4992. See also William Roy Large, *The History and Development of the Bach Choirs of the United Kingdom*, 15.

<sup>114</sup> Archives of the Bach Society are at the Royal College of Music, MS 4992.



**Plate 9 W. G. Whittaker**

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ten years later, growing, as with Newcastle, out of an informal group singing cantatas together; their repertory, however, as with London, embraced a wide range of composers and tended to include only the large-scale Bach works. Following Oxford, and before Newcastle, Bach societies or choirs were founded in Edinburgh, Glasgow

and Aberdeen, the Edinburgh Bach Society showing the strongest commitment to Bach until 1922 when the repertory widened.<sup>115</sup>

The Bach Choir gave its first public performance in November 1915, including three church cantatas *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein*, BWV 2, *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt*, BWV 68 and *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140. These were not the first cantatas to be heard in Newcastle; perhaps the earliest was *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (Actus Tragicus)*, BWV 106, performed by the NGCU under Preston during the 1893-94 season. In 1906 Bainton had conducted *O ewiges Feuer*, BWV 34, with the NPTCS and with the same choir *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, BWV 21 in 1911. While conductor of the ACCS, Whittaker had performed three cantatas up to 1915. The first, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*,<sup>116</sup> was performed in 1908 (ten years after he had become conductor of the choir); the second was the Ascension Day cantata, *Lobet Gott in Seinen Reichen*, BWV 11;<sup>117</sup> the third was *Du Hirte, Israel, höre*, BWV 104.

Whittaker's primary commitment was to the music of Bach, and especially the cantatas. But in addition, he also explored three aspects of British music: the madrigals and church music of the Elizabethan period, the music of contemporary British composers, and folk song, especially that of Northumberland. 'Bach and British' became Whittaker's slogan for the choir.<sup>118</sup> However, as we have seen, by the time the Bach Choir was founded a few of the Bach cantatas had been heard locally

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<sup>115</sup> For a comprehensive account of these Bach organisations prior to the founding of the Newcastle Bach Choir see William Roy Large, 'The origins of the Bach revival' and 'Bach choirs 1876 to 1918: laying the foundations' in *The History and Development of the Bach Choirs of the United Kingdom*, 22-34 (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015).

<sup>116</sup> Titles of the cantatas and motets have been standardised in German throughout this work, though English or German may have been used in the original source. It is probable that in the early part of the century the cantatas were usually sung in English.

<sup>117</sup> Also known as the *Ascension Oratorio*; see John Butt, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 269, note 16.

<sup>118</sup> W. Gillies Whittaker, 'A pilgrimage through the church cantatas of J. S. Bach' in *Collected Essays* (London, New York etc.: Oxford University Press, 1940), 117-150 (127).

and there had been a gradual increase in the performance of British music, especially of modern British music as that term must be understood in its historical context.

Whittaker's contribution was to focus those two elements – Bach and British – in one choir, the only choir Newcastle had spawned to have such a specialised, largely composer-based repertory.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the promise of greater choral stability which was evident towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was closer to being realised. Though one or two survivors from the previous century had fallen away, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union under its first two conductors was now firmly established and had already achieved a standard of performance that was to make it the leading oratorio choir in the region. This was tacitly endorsed when the choir formed the major part of an ad hoc body of singers assembled for the Newcastle music festival of 1909.<sup>119</sup> The founding of the Bach Choir, with its roots in Armstrong College, was of the greatest significance in offering an alternative view of what a choir should be. With its commitment to the music of J. S. Bach it eschewed size in favour of a small ensemble and offered an early experience of what came to be known as historically informed performance.

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<sup>119</sup> See Chapter 3, 69.

## Chapter 4

### The two World Wars: Challenge and Opportunity

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact of the two World Wars on the choral life of the city, setting it in the context of the national and local debate about the proper response musicians should make in the face of German aggression especially during World War I. The study proceeds largely by a series of contrasts showing how the individual choirs responded to the wars and the ensuing victory celebrations. It seeks to show that although there was some retrenchment of choral activity during both conflicts, some innovative responses ensured that choirs survived and choral concerts continued to be given.

#### 4.2 Two world wars: the broader impact

Britain's declaration of war against Germany in August 1914 brought a mixed reaction amongst those involved in the country's musical life. Ernest Newman, if he did not welcome the war, saw it as an opportunity to revitalise music by shaking it out of its chauvinistic insularity,<sup>1</sup> while H. C. Colles thought the war could have a purifying effect on attitudes to musical performance by sweeping away 'the luxuries of past years, and with them the foolish dalliance with music as an expensive toy'.<sup>2</sup>

The war generated some soul-searching as to what the appropriate response should be. 'Counterpoint' in the *Newcastle Journal* devoted a column to the question: 'What is Newcastle's attitude?' and reflected on the fear that the over-riding impact of war would make 'the ordinary concerns of domestic life [...] jejune and

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<sup>1</sup> 'The war and the future of music', *MT*, 55/859 (1914), 572.

<sup>2</sup> In a paper 'Music in war-time' for the Musical Association reported in *MT*, 55/862 (1914), 707.



insignificant'.<sup>3</sup> The views of performers and concert-goers were divided. Some thought that concerts should not be held during the period of 'international unrest', one local person demanding, perhaps rather glibly, 'Should Nero fiddle while Rome burns?'<sup>4</sup> *Musical Times* referred to those:

who may not unnaturally have qualms of conscience as to whether musical recreation should be sought during a time when there is so much around us that is stern and grim.<sup>5</sup>

Such sentiments prevailed where music was seen as offering pleasure and entertainment and found an echo in the early years of World War II (WWII).

Vaughan Williams, however, in an article in *The Listener*, acknowledging that composers would have different responses to the war, urged them to serve the community by thinking of the 'needs of the modest amateur' and asked them:

Would it not be a worthy object of the composer's skill to provide for these modest executants music worthy of their artistic imagination, but not beyond their technical skill.<sup>6</sup>

In this he envisaged a degree of flexibility in adapting a composer's score to the resources available.<sup>7</sup> A. E. F. Dickinson, developing this theme, suggested that musicians – composers as well as performers – could encourage music performance by engaging more closely with the world of the amateur musician. Performers and teachers, he thought, 'might also help by their choice and exposition of music to explode the popular notion that music is an escape from present realities'.<sup>8</sup>

When it came to the performance of German music, both wars revealed extreme hostility contrasted with more moderate opinion. Rather unsatisfactory attempts were made to identify the composers whose works were considered

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<sup>3</sup> *NJ*, 4 September 1914.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *MT*, 55/861 (1914), 645.

<sup>6</sup> *MT*, 81/1174 (1940), 479-81.

<sup>7</sup> *The Listener*, 592 (16 May 1940), 989 (also referred to by A. E. F. Dickinson).

<sup>8</sup> *MT*, 81/1174 (1940), 479-81.

acceptable and those whose works were not. Henry Coward, the conductor of the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, defended the performance of Handel on the grounds that he was substantially English and had arrived in England ‘as a cosmopolitan rather than a German, and at once, to all intents and purposes, became an Englishman’. Coward, perhaps recognising the weakness of this argument, conceded that even if he was to be regarded as German, ‘he was far removed from the Prussian in race and spirit’. Coward continued:

although we have every reason and duty to combat and despise the essencized [sic] brigandage and piracy of the modern Huns, we must not include the high-souled Handel, Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Mendelssohn in our remorseless condemnation.<sup>9</sup>

Later in the year *Musical Times* reported that Coward had set 1870, from which point Germans, he claimed, had been preparing for the war, as the date after which ‘not a bar of German music [...] should be performed in this country’.<sup>10</sup> For some, not even Bach was acceptable. A letter in the *North Mail* as late as February 1918 called upon Whittaker, the conductor of the Bach Choir, to cease his Bach performances, the writer considering it ‘an insult to the citizens of Newcastle that such performances should be allowed’, a view that was firmly rejected by Whittaker.<sup>11</sup> An extreme form of this view was expressed in a poem by one M. C. Urch ‘Lay them aside’, headed by an unidentified quotation, ‘All German music must be excluded’. The first verse will suffice to show the character of the poem:

Lay them aside,  
The gracious harmonies of long ago:  
Marred for us now, in that a shameless foe  
Has sullied all which bears his hated name,  
Has dimmed the glory, slurred the wondrous fame  
E’en of those harmonies of long ago.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *NJ*, 26 March 1915.

<sup>10</sup> *MT*, 56/874 (1915), 713.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Borthwick, ‘*In the Swim*’, 203.

<sup>12</sup> *MT*, 56/869 (1915), 399.

Jeremy Dibble, in a chapter in *Oh, my Horses!: Elgar and the Great War*, shows how pervasive German musical culture was in Britain from c.1840 to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a situation which he expresses succinctly when he writes that the ‘pro-Teutonic mindset of the British musical establishment continued unabated until the First World War.’<sup>13</sup>

In 1940, one writer, Allanson Brown, would have ousted almost all German music, commenting that with the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71), ‘ended the first period of German vandalism. All German art since then might easily be ignored or forgotten’. He conceded that some of Bach’s music might be preserved, but nothing of that composed in Frederick the Great’s service. More positively, he saw the possibility of encouraging the music of the ‘liberty-loving peoples’, including Scandinavia and the Americas.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, *Sound Wave and Wireless Times* saw the war as an opportunity to encourage English music, but also music by composers from ‘friendly countries’.<sup>15</sup> The BBC also came in for censure, another writer, E. Manning, complaining that the war had apparently ‘made little or no difference to the attitude of the [Corporation] towards music from enemy countries’.<sup>16</sup>

In 1914, the immediate reaction to the declaration of war had been to cancel or postpone festivals and concerts throughout the country, as *Musical Times* for October and November 1914 records. Of Yorkshire, for instance, we read that it was ‘already apparent that the number of concerts will be severely cut down, and that the programmes will follow the lines of least resistance’. The over-reactive pessimism was not, however, sustained and *Musical Times* continued to publish reports of

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<sup>13</sup> Jeremy Dibble, ‘The death of a culture: Germany and British music before 1914’ in Lewis Foreman, ed., *Oh, my Horses!: Elgar and the Great War* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001), 73-87. For further on the reaction of the musical fraternity to the outbreak of war see, in the same volume, Lewis Foreman, ‘The winnowing-fan: British music in wartime’, 89-131.

<sup>14</sup> *MT*, 81/1172 (1940), 422-23.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *MT*, 81/1172 (1940), 421.

<sup>16</sup> *MT*, 81/1172 (1940), 423.

concerts during the following months. The report of a concert by the Leeds Symphony Orchestra concluded by referring to the very large audience, ‘whose enthusiasm indicated that there is a place for such concerts, even in these times’, a view which probably represented a widespread feeling.<sup>17</sup>

To examine the repertory of the musical organisations that continued to perform during the war would require an exhaustive study in itself. But a brief survey of concert programmes in London and the provinces during the first months of World War I (WWI) shows that works by the established German composers continued to be performed. A report of the proposed programme of the Bournemouth Winter Gardens Committee went so far as to say that:

no stupid boycott of the music written by the great German masters of former days has been instituted, although it is understood that no living Teuton or Austrian composers will find representation.<sup>18</sup>

More striking is the appearance of concerts specifically designated ‘patriotic’ and concerts emphatically devoted to British music. In October 1914, for instance, there were patriotic concerts in Torquay and Sheffield, two others in Birmingham in November and one planned for December in Exmouth. There was a report of an all-British programme in Liverpool in September and a concert devoted to British music by living composers in Bournemouth in November.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence for the first few months of WWII shows that *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Elijah* and other similar choral works remained in the repertory. There was a marked increase, however, in the performance of both modern and early British music. In addition to Elgar, Parry, Vaughan Williams and Holst we find Rutland Boughton, Benjamin Dale, John Ireland and others as well as earlier composers

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<sup>17</sup> *MT*, 55/860 (1914), 626-27; 55/861 (1914), 666-67.

<sup>18</sup> *MT*, 55/861 (1914), 667.

<sup>19</sup> *MT*, 55/860 (1914), 626-27; 55/861 (1914), 667.

including Purcell and William Boyce. This may be due more to a generally wider interest in British music since WWI rather than for any patriotic reason.<sup>20</sup>

The competitive festival movement also suffered during WWI through the cancellation of festivals already arranged. Although festivals were not free from their critics on the grounds of their ‘joyfulness’ at a time of war, the movement took the view that the festival was ‘a synonym of an educational stimulus and a refining occupation’ and so could be freely advocated. Persuasive support for this view came from the experience of soldiers on service who derived ‘moral advantage from a musical competition’. In time, a more balanced response was achieved and by the following April it was reported that the festival was ‘by no means killed, although [...] maimed for a while’. Ultimately the general wish to continue festivals as far as possible prevailed, and by November 1915 the Association of Competition Festivals was offering financial assistance to some centres. Although all competitive festivals experienced difficulties, and many curtailed their activities, the published lists of festivals show that very many of them were continued.<sup>21</sup>

A major concern was the impact of the war on the livelihood of professional musicians if concerts and festivals were cancelled. ‘Counterpoint’, quoting from *Musical Times*, referred to the disastrous effect of the war on ‘all who depend for subsistence upon musical doings in all their manifold ramifications’.<sup>22</sup> This concern had been raised by Colles in the paper referred to above. Commenting on the cancelling of musical events, he lamented the impact on professional musicians

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<sup>20</sup> *MT*, 80/1161 (1939), 775; 80/1162 (1939), 823-25; 81/1163 (1940), 37-38; 81/1164 (1940), 84; 81/1167 (1940), 230-31, etc. See also Kate Guthrie, ‘Propaganda music in Second World War Britain: John Ireland’s Epic March’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 139/1 (2014), 137-75.

<sup>21</sup> Accounts of the competitive festivals were published in a series of extra supplements in *Musical Times* entitled ‘The Competition Festival Record’. This section draws on the supplements to be found in *MT*, 55/860 (1914), 62; 56/866 (1915), 68, 70, 73-74; 57/876 (1916), n.p.

<sup>22</sup> *NJ*, 4 September 1914.

observing that ‘the public felt no responsibility towards the artist’. He argued that the war had:

only brought into glaring prominence the economic weakness of one which had been created years ago by our shiftless, haphazard way of supposing that artistic employment would make itself.<sup>23</sup>

Despite his earlier pessimism, ‘Counterpoint’, thinking especially of performers, also recognised that the war could have a ‘beneficial influence’, seeing the current spirit of patriotism as providing ‘a golden opportunity for our native musicians to force home the justness of their claims ‘.<sup>24</sup>

At the outset of WWII there appeared to be no immediate reduction in the number of concerts given. In November 1939 the *MT* reported that concerts in London were continuing, albeit with some changes. There were positive benefits, in that additional series of concerts were promoted, among them the National Gallery concerts, organised by Myra Hess,<sup>25</sup> and to which Denis Matthews, later professor of music at Newcastle University, contributed.<sup>26</sup> In December, the *MT* published the results of a survey which showed that choral and orchestral societies nationally were endeavouring to maintain their activities, though not always with public performances. In Nottingham, for instance, the Ebenezer Choir was only holding rehearsals ‘to keep the choir together’.<sup>27</sup>

As an immediate response to the concern for musicians’ livelihoods various organisations were formed to protect their interests. In particular there were the Committee for Music in Wartime<sup>28</sup> and the National Association for the Protection of British Interests in Music, both established towards the end of 1914. The former

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<sup>23</sup> *MT*, 55/862 (1914), 707.

<sup>24</sup> *NJ*, 23 October 1914.

<sup>25</sup> *MT*, 80/1161 (1939), 775.

<sup>26</sup> Obituary, *The Times*, 27 December 1988.

<sup>27</sup> *MT*, 80/1162 (1939), 824.

<sup>28</sup> After amalgamation with the Professional Classes War Relief Council it became a committee of the Council (*MT*, 56/869 (1915), 393).

acknowledged that the situation was not as bleak as had first appeared, though it recognised the need ‘to create or find engagements for the native performers and to encourage performances’, while being careful not to ‘embarrass its missionary efforts by a direct campaign against the foreigner’.<sup>29</sup>

Those who met to form the National Association on the whole adopted a more hostile approach to alien musicians, encouraged by Joseph Williams, the general-secretary of the Amalgamated Musicians’ Union. Landon Ronald, the composer, took the view that during the war ‘they should be patriots before being artists’ and should ‘absolutely forbid the enemy from earning a living in this country’. In agreeing to support the formation of a National Association, those present tacitly endorsed its aim as ‘the protection of British interests in music’. Another issue was the sensitive one of the engagement of refugees, especially Belgians, whose employment might thereby exclude a British performer. It was, however, recognised, that there would be strong support for the Belgians and attempts to prevent their performing would be detrimental to the wider cause.<sup>30</sup>

During WWI, as we have seen, support for the livelihood of musicians, and therefore the maintenance of musical performances, had mainly fallen to private initiative, though representative of the musical profession at the highest level. Significantly, though, this was support largely through encouragement rather than in any financial way. During WWII, however, music and the arts generally were supported by grant-awarding agencies and, crucially, by the government through its ‘Grant in Aid of Music’. Dr (later Sir) George Dyson, in an address to the Royal College of Music, outlined the various funding schemes that were in operation. The

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<sup>29</sup> *MT*, 55/861 (1914), 645-46, 657-59.

<sup>30</sup> *MT*, 55/861 (1914), 645-46, 657-59. For a discussion of the role of the AMU at this time, see John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, *Players’ Work Time* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 56-58.

main ones were the Carnegie Trust and the Pilgrim Trust, each pledged to donate £25,000. The government matched these amounts by giving £50,000, in all a total of £100,000. 'Never before', Dyson said, 'has our Government subsidized so substantially the active artistic life of the nation'.<sup>31</sup>

The fund set up was to be administered by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA).<sup>32</sup> In establishing CEMA there was a concern 'to show publicly and unmistakably that the Government cares about the cultural life of the country'.<sup>33</sup> CEMA, in turn, were concerned for the 'preservation in wartime of the highest standards in the arts of music, drama and painting'.<sup>34</sup> Three basic schemes were to be fostered: the provision of lunch time, and some evening, concerts in factories and munition works; to invite major orchestras to give concerts in towns where they would otherwise be unable to afford to perform, and to provide cheap seats; to employ qualified people to encourage music in rural areas. Support of choral and orchestral societies, the major amateur constituency of the country's music, would remain with the Carnegie Trust.<sup>35</sup>

*The Times* subsequently reported that the first government-aided concerts were to be given in Newcastle. A report in the local press suggested that if the venture were successful it would be extended to five other parts of the country,<sup>36</sup> though there is evidence of an intention to spread this more widely.<sup>37</sup> In addition to Newcastle, a

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<sup>31</sup> *MT*, 81/1167 (1940), 225-26.

<sup>32</sup> The CEMA minutes and papers are with the Victoria and Albert Museum Archives at Blythe House, London, W14 0QX. They are prefaced by the letters EL.

<sup>33</sup> V&A: EL1/2, CEMA, Section 3, Policy.

<sup>34</sup> V&A: EL1/4, Report of progress and outline of case to be made to the Treasury, 1940.

<sup>35</sup> *MT*, 81/1167 (1940), 225-26. According to the catalogue of the Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997, the CEMA was set up in December 1939 by the Pilgrim Trust <<http://media.vam.ac.uk>>.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 22 July 1940; *EC*, 19 July, 2 August 1940.

<sup>37</sup> V&A: EL1/8, Paper C [that is, 100], People's Concerts: Memorandum, 4 June 1941.



concert was given in Leicester and there are newspaper reports of People's Concerts in Liverpool, Colne and the Nottingham area.<sup>38</sup>

CEMA did not, however, see the People's Concerts as of high importance. In a list of different types of concert proposed by CEMA, arranged in order of importance, they appear last out of six.<sup>39</sup> The concerts were overseen by the National Federation of Music Societies (NFMS), which received a grant for the purpose from CEMA. In time, however, 'misunderstandings' arose between the two organisations, particularly over the charging policy for tickets. CEMA wanted ticket prices to be kept very low, whereas the NFMS thought such a policy would undermine the future concert economies of music societies.<sup>40</sup> Because of the conditions CEMA were imposing, NFMS ultimately decided not to apply for funds for the People's Concerts and so no further grants were made.<sup>41</sup>

### **4.3 The impact of the wars on choirs and choral concerts in Newcastle**

#### **4.3.1 *World War I: 'Bach and British'***

Newcastle, with the rest of the country, had no experience of war that was to extend from the seas and battlefields to the towns and villages and the very homes of its citizens. In January 1915 the Lord Mayor published a notice, 'to forewarn residents of impending danger and reassurance that the authorities had put plans and measures in place to protect the population'. A set of instructions attempted to reassure the local population by explaining that although there were 'no special grounds for apprehension' at present arrangements had been made to respond to any emergency.

Townpeople were advised to dim their lights, and, in the event of an air raid, to

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<sup>38</sup> V&A: EL1/8, Paper C; *Liverpool Evening Express*, 30 June 1941; *The Nelson Barrowford Brierfield Leader*, 8 August 1941; and *The Nottingham Evening Post*, 21 September 1942.

<sup>39</sup> V&A: EL1/6, CEMA Minutes, 3 December 1940.

<sup>40</sup> V&A: EL1/8, Paper C.

<sup>41</sup> V&A: EL1/15, Paper CXXIX, NFMS Memorandum; EL1/6, CEMA Minutes, 17 February 1942.

extinguish them completely and to remain indoors. Advice was also given on what to do in the case of an invasion. The instructions concluded:

It is hoped that in any emergency the people of Newcastle upon Tyne will preserve a calm demeanour, and will follow the instructions given to them by police, special constables or others in authority.

Zeppelin raids occurred during 1915 and 1916 and caused some destruction in the town, though nothing on the scale of the bombing to be experienced during WWII. Indeed Zeppelins, terrifying at first, led to feelings ‘of intense curiosity’.<sup>42</sup> The major impact of the war, however, came not from the air raids but from the endless reports of the deaths of servicemen with ‘each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds’.<sup>43</sup>

It was against this background that those responsible for the choirs and choral societies of the town made their decisions as to whether to continue or cease their activities, and if to continue how to respond to the unpredictable circumstances which they faced.

We described in the previous chapter the founding of the Newcastle Bach Choir. Whittaker had coined the motto ‘Bach and British’ to describe its repertory, but, whether Whittaker intended it or not, the slogan had a much wider resonance. In one sense it encapsulated the tension between the anti-German and the pro-British feeling that had characterised much of the musical life of Britain since the start of the war. In his slogan, Whittaker was asserting, whether consciously or not, that to be pro-British was not to deny the value of Bach and, by association, German music as a whole. The slogan also captured the increasing interest in British music, developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and now given further impetus in the cause of patriotism.

At the outset, in addition to performing the choral music of Bach, and especially the cantatas, the Bach Choir had the subsidiary aims of offering concerts at

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<sup>42</sup> Vanessa Histon, *Tyneside's Great War* (Newcastle: City of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle Libraries, Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2015), 25-32.

<sup>43</sup> From ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ by Wilfred Owen.

a time when many were being cancelled and of supporting the Lord Mayor's War Relief Fund.<sup>44</sup> Except for its promotion of Bach, the choir was not unique in its aims; nor was it alone in giving concerts during the war. It came, however, to represent several of the issues that were around at the time. If the Bach Choir now rose in public esteem, the NGCU, as we shall see, declined.

The first few months of the war showed considerable variation in response from local choirs and other musical organisations. Without giving any reasons, the Newcastle Glee and Madrigal Society suspended its public activities, including a planned concert and participation in a competitive festival, though it continued to meet for rehearsals. At the meeting at which this was decided the members 'sang the National Anthem with great fervour, and hearty and vigorous cheers were given for the King, Queen, Queen Mother, and the Royal Family',<sup>45</sup> evidence of the strong patriotic spirit which the war engendered, and which was to find musical expression in many of the concerts given in the area and elsewhere.

At this date the NGCU was the leading choir in Newcastle, indeed in the whole of England north of Yorkshire. The reaction of the NGCU to the war, therefore, set a kind of norm against which all other choral activity in the area might be judged. Its first response to war was to cancel its subscription concerts and suspend its subscription list.<sup>46</sup> In their place it planned a series of four popular concerts, to be given at reduced prices, in aid of the Lord Mayor's War Relief Fund. These opened with a concert of patriotic music in November, which was to set the tone for other patriotic concerts. In addition to the British National Anthem, the anthems of Russia, France, Serbia and Belgium were all sung. The main choral work was Stanford's *The*

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<sup>44</sup> Borthwick, *'In the Swim'*, 191.

<sup>45</sup> *NJ*, 14 August 1914.

<sup>46</sup> It would appear that although the subscription list was suspended for these concerts, subscribers were still sought, as a report later in September refers to a 'slight increase' in their number, though less than hoped for (*NJ*, 11 September 1914).

*Revenge*. In addition, there was a miscellaneous assortment of choruses including *Rule Britannia*, *Hearts of Oak*, in which the audience joined, and *Land of Hope and Glory*. Among solo items was Stanford's song cycle *Songs of the Sea*. This concert was followed by *Messiah* in December and *Elijah* the following February, these two oratorios being referred to as the 'sheet anchors of choral societies'; in March *Judas Maccabaeus* was performed. The three oratorios were accompanied solely by the organ, as was often the case with 'popular' performances. In this, though, they were inadvertently contributing to the reduction in opportunities for professional musicians to obtain employment.<sup>47</sup>

Concerts in aid of various war-related charities became a significant aspect of the musical life of the area. The Lord Mayor's, or in Northumberland the Lord Lieutenant's, War Relief Fund were the major charities. At the beginning of the war, as well as the NGCU, several other choral societies arranged concerts in aid of the Funds. These included the Tynemouth, Whitley and District Choral Union (if suitable accommodation was available) and the Newcastle and District Catholic Choral Society, founded in 1905.<sup>48</sup> The Central Hall Choral Society, though it abandoned two planned subscription concerts, decided to support the Fund with a concert to include selections from Gounod's *Faust* and Stanford's *Songs of the Sea* and, 'to provide an attractive concert for the evening of Christmas Day for the troops', a performance of *Messiah* on Christmas night in the Town Hall, thus almost duplicating the NGCU's programme. Soldiers and sailors were to be admitted free of charge, and the general public at only 6d. *Messiah* was accompanied by the organ, the organist being Lance-Corporal R. H. Bruce, FRCO, of the 5<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers. Newcastle Operatic Society, with members of Gateshead Operatic Society, performed selections

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<sup>47</sup> *NJ*, 5, 11, 16 September 1914; *MT*, 55/861 (1914), 669; GCL: NGCU, Programme of concerts 1911-1914, programme 25 November 1914.

<sup>48</sup> *MT*, 46/748 (1905), 406.

from Gilbert and Sullivan on Boxing Night.<sup>49</sup> A concert in the Town Hall in aid of the Fund, given by the combined choirs of Birtley Choral Society, McConnell Wood's Northumbrian Select Choir and the Consett and District Chorus with a string orchestra, was brought to an abrupt end when the military authorities 'requested the promoters to extinguish all lights'.<sup>50</sup>

As the war progressed, other choirs gave or participated in concerts or other events in support of an increasing range of war charities. Belgians and Belgian Refugees in particular were supported by several organisations including the Nonconformist Choir Union, the Felton Choral Society, Haydon Bridge Choral Society, and the orchestra of the Amalgamated Musicians' Union.<sup>51</sup> In December 1915 the Haydon Bridge Choral Society gave a concert in aid of the Serbian Relief Fund.<sup>52</sup> Allendale Choral Society was particularly active in supporting war charities. In February 1915 they gave a concert in aid of the Lord Lieutenant's Fund, at which a group of Belgian refugees sang the national anthems of the allies. In addition, their efforts included contributing to a concert in aid of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps, promoting a concert for the YWCA War Funds and organising a whist drive for the Ladies' Working Party to provide 'clothing comforts for local soldiers serving in the war'.<sup>53</sup>

These concerts arranged for charitable purposes were not free from anti-German feeling. As we have seen, Coward had had to defend the performance of music by Handel, and Whittaker that of Bach. The issue rose to the surface in October 1915, when the NGCU proposed to perform *Messiah* and the *St Matthew Passion* in

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<sup>49</sup> *NJ*, 22, 26 September, 23, 29 October, 18, 26 December 1914. The 1901 census shows Bruce as a traveller, but in 1911 he was described as an organist; he lived in Yorkshire.

<sup>50</sup> *NJ*, 15 April 1915.

<sup>51</sup> *NJ*, 23 November 1914, 18, 22 January, 9 April, 7 May 1915.

<sup>52</sup> *NJ*, 31 December 1915.

<sup>53</sup> *NJ*, 13 February 1915, 22 January, 7 March 1916, 24 November 1917.

aid of the War Relief Fund. Having referred to the ‘incongruous and distasteful’ decision to perform Brahms’s *Requiem* in London in memory of British soldiers killed ‘in repelling the attacks of the modern Huns’, ‘Counterpoint’ now announces that:

a British Choral Society is to give a season of two concerts of German music, the proceeds of which are to be devoted to British War Relief Funds. That British Choral Society is the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union.

The NGCU had reached ‘a crisis of its fortunes’ and sought financial support, which the two works were intended to give, as well as contributing to the Relief Fund.

‘Counterpoint’ points out that in the previous season, the concert that produced the greatest profit was the patriotic one, *Judas Maccabaeus* actually resulting in a loss.<sup>54</sup>

There had been no public criticism of the earlier choice of two Handel works and it is possible that the present reaction was owing to the increased hostility to all things German, especially after the German submarine campaign in February and the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May. Dr Hadow, principal of Armstrong College and the NGCU’s president, sought to defend the NGCU’s decision, pointing out that ‘Bach and Handel were born near the year 1685, and they had nothing more to do with the war than had Martin Luther’. He added that Shakespeare was being performed in Berlin and Beethoven in Paris and he did not think that we should be ‘less broad-minded than the capitals of those great countries’.<sup>55</sup>

In returning to the argument, ‘Counterpoint’ concluded that, in supporting the decision to perform the Handel and Bach works, the NGCU had ‘no sympathy – at least practical sympathy - with the modern movement which seeks to advance the cause of British music at the present time’. The aim of the NGCU, however, was to increase its income, and though the earlier patriotic concert had been successful a concert of contemporary British music, which did not necessarily equate with patriotic

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<sup>54</sup> *NJ*, 22 October 1915.

<sup>55</sup> *NJ*, 3 November 1915.

music, may have been judged to be less successful financially. When it came to publicising the *Messiah* concert, however, 'Counterpoint' was magnanimous, observing that this year's performance 'promises to be quite as good as any of its predecessors', though he commented, somewhat tartly, that the audience for *Messiah* 'is more or less the same every year; one meets people here who are never seen at any other concert. This is not as it should be'.<sup>56</sup>

The NGCU had continued with its programme of concerts, albeit in a modified form, until the *St Matthew Passion* performance in April 1916. But by August the committee had decided that because of war conditions the choir should cease its rehearsals 'until further notice'.<sup>57</sup> In a report prepared for the annual meeting, the committee confirmed that they had agreed 'to suspend operations and give no concerts during the ensuing season'. They gave as the reasons 'the loss incurred on last season's workings, the failure of so many subscribers to maintain their support, and the recent necessity that every effort shall be concentrated on the war'. It is difficult to see what further effort in the cause of the war might have been achieved by the suspension of the NGCU's activities, and it is clear that at the core of the decision was the resignation of so many subscribers, which the secretary had previously referred to as 'not very creditable to a prosperous city like Newcastle'.<sup>58</sup>

It had been suggested that people were reluctant to turn out in war-time conditions, even though concerts had been timed to start earlier to allow audience members to catch trains and tramcars.<sup>59</sup> Darkened streets and the early stopping of tramcars had had their effect upon normal concert arrangements;<sup>60</sup> in the case of the NGCU it is possible, though evidence is lacking, that many had been persuaded by

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<sup>56</sup> *NJ*, 17 December 1915.

<sup>57</sup> *NJ*, 25 August 1916.

<sup>58</sup> *NJ*, 25 August, 30 September 1916.

<sup>59</sup> *NJ*, 30 September 1916.

<sup>60</sup> *NJ*, 8, 15 October, 5 November 1915.

‘Counterpoint’s’ view of the inappropriateness of the *Messiah* and *St Matthew Passion* performances in support of the War Relief Fund (a point which ‘Counterpoint’ was quick to seize upon) and so put prejudice before patriotism.<sup>61</sup> Some may also have been affronted by ‘Counterpoint’s’ remarks about *Messiah* audiences. As an ironic footnote to this, we may note that in November 1917 Coward, the NGCU’s conductor, brought the Leeds Choral Union, which he also conducted, to Newcastle to give a concert in the Town Hall, the usual venue for the NGCU’s concerts.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear that the NGCU had fallen in public esteem, and when Counterpoint, writing near the end of the war about local choirs in general, advanced the popular view that lack of men lay behind the reduction in musical activities, W. Reay-Smith, the NGCU secretary, made a clumsy attempt to defend the NGCU’s decision to suspend the choir’s concerts, reiterating the argument about the decline in support from the subscribers. He made matters worse, however, by suggesting that members ‘would prefer to devote their time and energy to “helping on the war” rather than in amusing themselves or others’.<sup>63</sup> Gerald Veitch, from the Newcastle Amateur Operatic Society, which had continued to give performances and had raised some £900 in aid of charities, observed that ‘difficulties are only there to be overcome’, and in a clear rebuke to Reay-Smith added that members of the Operatic Society were ‘doing work of national importance as well’. He went on to say he hoped Reay-Smith was ‘not serious when he states that the members of the NGCU do not attend excepting as an amusement’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *NJ*, 6 October 1916.

<sup>62</sup> *NJ*, 19 November 1917.

<sup>63</sup> *NJ*, 20, 27 September 1918

<sup>64</sup> *NJ*, 4 October 1918.



By this time, choirs were suffering from the loss of younger male members.<sup>65</sup> Among other choirs, the NGCU had lost some men, as had the Glee and Madrigal Society, Central Hall Choral Society, and the ACCS. This latter was particularly vulnerable, for, formed largely of students, most of its male members volunteered for service. As a result, it functioned for a time as a choir for women's voices only.<sup>66</sup> The ACCS also suffered from the loss of its premises, as Armstrong College, in which the choir rehearsed and performed, had been taken over by the War Office as an emergency military hospital and so its concerts were given in the Town Hall and various other locations.<sup>67</sup>

Although several choral societies and other musical organisations ceased their activities during the war, many others continued. There is also evidence of the founding of new choirs. The Bach Choir itself, of course, was a war-time foundation, but a male-voice choir of some 70 voices was established late in 1917 at the Armstrong Naval Yard with W. Howe, organist of College Road Presbyterian Church, as conductor.<sup>68</sup>

#### **4.3.2 *World War II: Concerts for the people***

With the experience of WWI in recent memory, and under the Civil Defence Acts of 1937 and 1939, the city council set up an Emergency Committee (Civil Defence) 'to act on behalf of the Council in matters of civil defence'. Their responsibilities included air raid procedures, provision of shelters, emergency fire brigade

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<sup>65</sup> Lord Kitchener's appeal for volunteers in the autumn of 1914 had attracted about 2.6 million recruits (Stephen Pope and Elizabeth-Anne Wheal, *Dictionary of the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2003; first published by Macmillan Reference Books, 1995), 206).

<sup>66</sup> *NJ*, 12 March, 17, 24 December 1915; NCL: Armstrong College Choral Society Programmes 1908-30, programmes 28 March 1916 etc.

<sup>67</sup> NUSC: 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendar 1915-16, between pp. 2 and 3, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; McCord, advisory ed., *Newcastle University*, 31; see also *NJ*, 19 February 1915.

<sup>68</sup> *NJ*, 16 November 1917.

organisation, a decontamination service, evacuation: everything necessary to safeguard the local population in the event of an air raid or invasion. The vast majority of those engaged in the various civil defence services that were established were part-time – 67,235 as against 3,281 full-time, though 58,000 of the part-timers were engaged in fire guard at street and business premises level. The greatest contribution, especially amongst those in ARP, was during the years 1939-41 when air attacks were at their most severe. Altogether, the city suffered 24 bombing incidents and the dropping of thousands of incendiaries resulting in the deaths of 142 of its inhabitants, serious injuries to many more and the demolition of or damage to nearly 8,000 houses.<sup>69</sup> When compared with WWI, Newcastle during WWII was more severely affected, with a greater disruption of family and social life, to which the evacuation of many of the town's children made its own ambivalent contribution.

We noted that the outbreak of WWI saw a haphazard response in Newcastle on the part of the various musical organisations, with cancellation of planned activities as an immediate reaction. This experience may have lain behind the establishment in November 1939 of the Newcastle Concert Society with the intention of 'providing music to replace, to some extent, the cancellation of the concerts usually held by the several local musical organisations'. The new group had been formed with the cooperation of the Chamber Music Society, the British Musical Society and the Bach Choir Society and the intention was to organize concerts mainly of chamber and vocal music.<sup>70</sup>

For choral music in Newcastle, however, the most important contribution came from the Government-sponsored scheme initiated in mid-1940 to support what came to be known as the National People's Concerts. The concerts were advertised as

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<sup>69</sup> This information is taken from *Proceedings*, 1944-1945, 805-07, 919-20.

<sup>70</sup> *NJ*, 14 November 1939.

promoted jointly by the Government, the CEMA, the NFMS and the City Council.<sup>71</sup>

The scheme was reported in the local press in July, from which it appeared that the concerts would be given by a choir with the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra (NSO) and an established soloist. The City Council would make the City Hall and organ available free of charge.<sup>72</sup> The first of these concerts, given in the City Hall in August, shows some of the elements that were to appear throughout the war; these included three items for audience participation, the first two a national song or something similar and the third a hymn. The programme of the first concert is set out in Table 5 below. Unlike the experience during WWI, however, no evidence has come to light of any view that Handel was a representative of the enemy. Indeed, music by German composers was regularly performed during the war, apparently without any protest.

**Table 5 Programme of the first concert in the National People's Concerts series in Newcastle, 15 August 1940<sup>73</sup>**

<b>Work</b>	<b>Composer</b>
Overture to the <i>Occasional Oratorio</i>	Handel
Chorus, 'And the glory of the Lord' ( <i>Messiah</i> )	Handel
Aria, 'Why do the nations' ( <i>Messiah</i> )	Handel
Chorus, 'Lift up your heads' ( <i>Messiah</i> )	Handel
'Pastoral Symphony' ( <i>Messiah</i> )	Handel
Chorus, 'Hallelujah' ( <i>Messiah</i> )	Handel
Short address by the Right Hon. The Lord Mayor of Newcastle	
Orchestral selection from <i>Merrie England</i>	Edward German
Songs: (a) <i>The Lute Player</i> (b) <i>Yarmouth Fair</i> (c) <i>Rise with the sun and take to the road</i>	Allitsen Warlock Worring
Choir and audience: <i>Rule, Britannia</i> <i>Here's a health</i> <i>O God our help</i>	
God save the King	

<sup>71</sup> GCL: Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, Programmes of Concerts 1940-1959.

<sup>72</sup> *NJ*, 19 July 1940. The City Hall had been opened in 1928.

<sup>73</sup> GCL: NGCU Programmes of Concerts 1940-59, programme 15 August 1940.

After the first ‘experimental concerts’ in Newcastle the secretary of NFMS, in a letter to CEMA, wrote:

We felt that the artisan population is far too familiar with this type of programme and quite ready to be led further on to appreciate a high class orchestral concert, and therefore we propose in each centre to endeavour to organise three concerts – two orchestral and one choral with orchestral accompaniment, the choral concert taking longer to rehearse and produce than the orchestral concert.<sup>74</sup>

The organisers of the Newcastle concerts clearly responded to these observations as surviving details of the choral concerts show some modification of the earliest programmes offered. Until August 1942 an oratorio would be performed in two parts over two weeks. For instance, on Wednesdays of August 1941 the first part of *Elijah* was performed one week, the second part the next. From February 1943, however, complete works were performed, beginning with a concert version of Bizet’s *Carmen*. subsequent concerts included Elgar’s *King Olaf*, Edward German’s *Tom Jones* and a concert version of Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The commercial possibilities of these performances were not lost on town businesses. ‘Have tea at Fenwick’s before going to the People’s Concerts ... OPEN ALL DAY WEDNESDAYS’ proclaimed an advertisement in the local paper.<sup>75</sup>

The NGCU had resumed its activities after the end of WWI, and at the outset of WWII, no doubt with an eye to public relations, decided to continue concerts, though in a modified form. The normal entry requirements, an audition and approval by the committee,<sup>76</sup> were suspended and the choir was open to members ‘of any similar musical society’ who wished to join, though presumably paying the usual fee. In particular they welcomed soldiers with choral experience, whose membership fee

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<sup>74</sup> V&A: EL1/8, Paper C [that is, 100].

<sup>75</sup> *NJ*, 9 August 1941.

<sup>76</sup> 1938 Jubilee Programme in possession of the author.

would be waived.<sup>77</sup> A programme of a Christmas concert in December 1939 carries the information: ‘Air Road Shelters: Barras Bridge, Northumberland Street, Saville Row’, locations all in reach of the City Hall. In 1940 the extended NGCU became the nucleus of the People’s Concerts Choir. During the war, this hybrid choir participated in 47 National People’s Concerts conducted by George Dodds, the Choral conductor.<sup>78</sup> Although not functioning under its own name, the NGCU therefore continued to perform throughout the war, thus avoiding the criticism it provoked during WWI.

One consequence of the NGCU’s ceasing to offer its own concerts was the emergence of the YMCA Choral Society (YMCACS) as the leading large-scale choir in the city, a position it held for the duration of the war. At the outset of the war, it had cancelled its planned winter concerts, suggesting that mid-day community singing might be arranged,<sup>79</sup> though nothing further of this has so far emerged, and the community singing element of the People’s Concerts may have satisfied any such need there may have been. The YMCACS resumed its activities the following September when there was an appeal for extra male voices, ‘including members of the Forces who have choral experience’.<sup>80</sup>

In December the choir gave a ‘big-scale’ *Messiah* in the City Hall at 2.30 p.m., thus avoiding the lighting restrictions the war imposed. The choir numbered some 200, and among the soloists was Kathleen Ferrier. A string orchestra with drums was ‘skilfully amplified at the organ’ by George Sutcliffe. The hall was full, and many were turned away.<sup>81</sup> A week later the choir gave a free Christmas Carol Service, again

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<sup>77</sup> *EC*, 26 October 1939.

<sup>78</sup> In a handwritten note, signed ‘N. Humphrey’, who was the secretary of the NGCU (GCL: L784.96 NGCU Programmes of Concerts 1940-1959).

<sup>79</sup> *NJ*, 11 October 1939.

<sup>80</sup> *NJ*, 26 August 1940.

<sup>81</sup> *NJ*, 23 November, 18 December 1940.

in the City Hall at 2.30, with ‘some hearty singing’ by the audience. The event included an address by the Archdeacon of Northumberland, who spoke of ‘the added significance of the old exhortation, “Goodwill to Men”’.<sup>82</sup>

The pattern of a December performance of *Messiah* and a programme of Christmas carols continued throughout the war, though from 1942 an additional work was performed in March, beginning with *Elijah*, referred to as the ‘other standard’,<sup>83</sup> and followed by Berlioz’s *The Damnation of Faust*, *The Dream of Gerontius* and, in 1945, *Elijah* again. This choir was now in the ascendant, so that by December 1943 it could be observed that since the NGCU ‘had discontinued their annual presentation responsibility for the big-scale performance, which has become a tradition on Tyneside, has fallen worthily upon the shoulders of the YMCA Choral Society’.<sup>84</sup>

One other ‘oratorio’ choir was the Newcastle and District Free Church Choir Union, which had been re-established in 1936, formed from the Free Church choirs in the area. In May 1940, it was reported that the choir had decided to continue, ‘provided adequate choral support was forthcoming’, and planned to perform *The Creation* later in the year.<sup>85</sup> Male-voice choirs will be considered in Chapter 6, but for the present it should be noted that Newcastle Glee and Madrigal Society, which had been founded in 1901 and had not given any performances during WWI, continued to give concerts during WWII and, following the example of other choirs, extended an invitation to others who could sing ‘especially troops billeted in the area’.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *NJ*, 21, 23 December 1940.

<sup>83</sup> *NJ*, 14 March 1942.

<sup>84</sup> *NJ*, 4 December 1943. The subsequent development of the YMCACS and other Newcastle choirs will be described in Chapter 5.

<sup>85</sup> *NJ*, 10 May 1940. For further details of this choir see Chapter 5.

<sup>86</sup> *NJ*, 28 August 1941.

In contrast to the People's Concerts Choir and the YMCACS were King's (formerly Armstrong) College Choral and Orchestral Society and the Bach Choir.<sup>87</sup> The former was a 1931 amalgamation of the Choral Society and the Orchestral Society, founded c. 1921. Whereas during WWI the Choral Society had functioned as a ladies' choir, it now continued as a mixed-voice choir; this was possible owing to the increased size of the choir, following the increased size of the college, and to its wider membership, now extended to include former students and members of staff. It was distinctive by virtue of its being established in an academic institution and combined with an orchestra, but with its larger size it had something in common with the 'oratorio' choirs.

There may have been a cessation of concerts at the outset of the war, for in December 1941 it was reported that the choir was 'resuming public performances' with a concert in St Thomas's Church that included Parts 1 and 2 of *The Creation*. Its repertory during the war included patriotic elements, notably Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet*, performed in 1942,<sup>88</sup> but it tended to explore lesser known works, including Handel's *Saul*, which appears to have been performed in Newcastle only once before, by the NGCU in their 1933-34 season, *Travellers* by Patrick Hadley, who had succeeded Whittaker for a brief period in 1930 as lecturer in music, and Parry's *Pied Piper of Hamelin*.<sup>89</sup> In November 1944 a concert was given in memory of Whittaker, who had died earlier in the year, but also as 'a tribute to the City of London for its inhabitants' endurance under present trials'. The music included three of Whittaker's arrangements of north-country folksongs, George Dyson's Fantasia for chorus and orchestra *In Honour of the City* and Haydn's 'London' Symphony. *In Honour of the*

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<sup>87</sup> Armstrong College had become King's College in 1937.

<sup>88</sup> *NJ*, 26 November 1942.

<sup>89</sup> NGCU 1938 Jubilee Programme; *NJ*, 29 November 1943; NUSC: King's College *Calendar* 1931-32, 359; *NJ*, 10 March 1944.

*City* had been composed in 1927, a setting of a poem ‘To the City of London’ attributed to the Scottish poet William Dunbar.<sup>90</sup>

The Bach Choir continued its programmes at the beginning of the war with a recital of Christmas carols in the cathedral which ‘served to impart the true Christmastide aspect amidst these troublous days’.<sup>91</sup> The following February, 1940, the choir was able to maintain its commitment to Bach and British, implicitly responding to the patriotic temper of the time, with a programme that included Parry’s *Songs of Farewell* and Arthur Warrell’s *The Winging Souls*.<sup>92</sup> This was followed by the *St Matthew Passion* in March. The programme for this latter concert, in King’s Hall, gives detailed instructions for the evacuation of the hall in the event of an air raid warning. Possibly not very welcome for the choir, the instructions required them to wait until the audience in the main body of the hall and the members of the orchestra ‘with their instruments’ had left before leaving themselves. All were instructed: ‘WALK QUICKLY BUT DO NOT RUN’. These instructions were repeated in subsequent programmes during the war. Greta Large said that it was never necessary to implement them.<sup>93</sup>

In June 1940 the choir sang at the wedding in St Nicholas’s Cathedral of Sidney Newman, who had been the choir’s conductor since 1930. Later the same year Newman (see Plate 10, p. 131) was appointed to the Reid chair of music at Edinburgh

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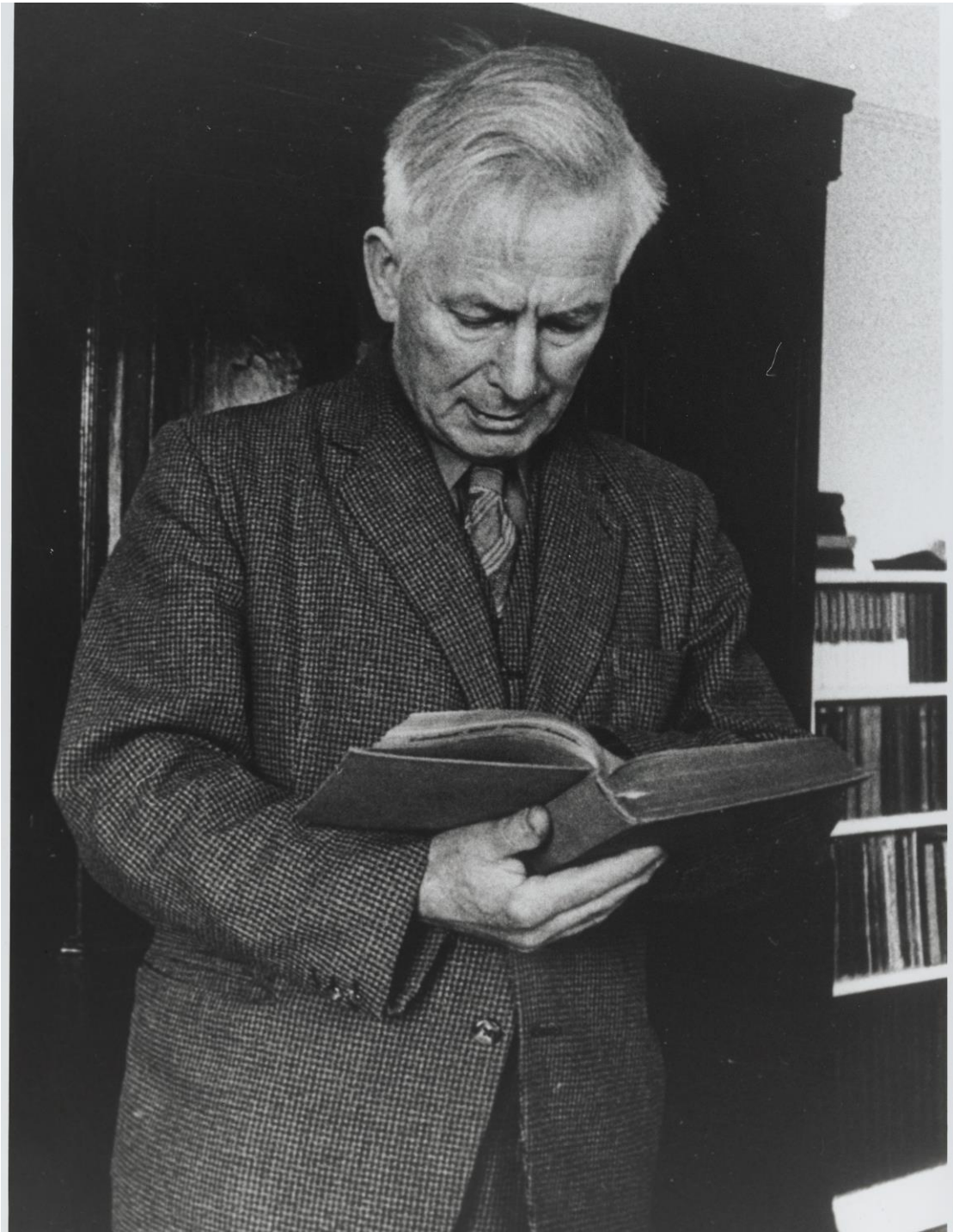
<sup>90</sup> *NJ*, 25 November 1944; Paul Spicer, *Sir George Dyson: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), 405; W. Mackay MacKenzie, ed., *The Poems of William Dunbar* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), 177-78. London had suffered especially from the 1940-41 Blitz, and the ‘Baby Blitz’ of 1944 (Stephen Pope and Elizabeth-Anne Wheal, *Dictionary of the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2003; first published by Macmillan Reference Books, 1989), 195).

<sup>91</sup> *NJ*, 20 December 1939.

<sup>92</sup> *NJ*, 12 February 1940. Arthur Warrell, 1882-1939, is now best known for his arrangement of ‘I wish you a merry Christmas’ to be found in Reginald Jacques and David Willcocks, *Carols for Choirs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 60. See also Maggie Humphreys and Robert Evans, *Dictionary of Composers for the Church in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1997), 351 and Frederick W. Thornsby, *Dictionary of Organs and Organists* (Bournemouth: H. Logan & Company, 1912), 344.

<sup>93</sup> Bach Choir programme 9 March 1940 in possession of the author. See also Roy Large, ‘Building on the heritage (1930-1984)’ in Borthwick and others, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 307-48, (315).





**Plate 10 Sidney Newman**

Reproduced courtesy of the Library of the University of Edinburgh

University, to be succeeded in Newcastle by J. A. Westrup as a ‘temporary’ lecturer (see Plate 11, p. 133).<sup>94</sup> No evidence has come to light of any performance by the choir after Newman’s wedding until March 1942 when, though ‘[d]iminished in numbers’, the choir ‘concluded the series of Tuesday informal recitals by various contributors, at King’s College’. The report of this recital states that the choir would resume ‘formal public appearance’ at a concert the following month with a recital in the Church of the Divine Unity. The recital was in aid of a building fund for the church, which had been opened in 1940.<sup>95</sup> The choir was reported as ‘functioning vigorously again’ in November when it resumed its concerts in King’s Hall.<sup>96</sup> In the same month it gave a lunch-time concert in the Laing Art Gallery at which the audience was ‘invited to bring sandwiches’; tea was provided by the WVS.<sup>97</sup> This was one of a series of such concerts at the Gallery promoted by CEMA which in 1941 were said to have been ‘extremely successful’.<sup>98</sup>

In 1937, Newman had introduced a ‘Christmas carol party’ given in King’s Hall. A less formal event than the carol concerts or services given in the City Hall by the YMCACS, it had lapsed during the early years of the war, but was now resumed, though held in the Durant Hall (part of the premises associated with the Church of the Divine Unity), and continued for two years until Chalmers Burns, who had succeeded Westrup as conductor in 1944, replaced it with a carol concert given in St Thomas’s Church.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> NUSC: 1/5/1, King’s College Handbook 1941-42, A/11, University Archives, Newcastle University Library.

<sup>95</sup> *NJ*, 18 March 1942. See also *NJ*, 24 April 1942 and TWAS: C.NC66/77/89, 91, [Calendar] Church of the Divine Unity April and June 1942.

<sup>96</sup> *NJ*, 24 October 1942.

<sup>97</sup> *NJ*, 24 November 1942. WVS refers to the Women’s Voluntary Service.

<sup>98</sup> V&A: EL1/14: CEMA Paper CXV, October 1941.

<sup>99</sup> Bach Choir archives, programmes 19 December 1942, 16 December 1943, 16 December 1944..



**Plate 11 J. A. Westrup**

© National Portrait Gallery, London

The choir made a particular contribution to the war in 1944, with a concert forming part of a ‘special music course for Canadian Service men’. A whole Canadian Army ‘of 300,000+/- was based in the UK fully trained and ready for the invasion of Europe’.<sup>100</sup> Thirty of these troops attended a five-day music course at King’s College arranged by the Registrar, the British Council and the Canadian Legion Educational Services. The programme included ‘music room lectures, physics theatre lecture-demonstration (music and electricity), and Union discussions’. Other events included a visit to Durham Cathedral, with Evensong, a trip down the River Tyne and an official welcome by Lord Eustace Percy, the Rector of King’s College. The programme of the concert comprised English madrigals and part-songs by Rubbra and Stanford, Westrup’s own *Weathers*, an arrangement by Vaughan Williams of ‘The spring-time of the year’ and one instrumental work, Elgar’s Sonata for violin and piano in E minor.<sup>101</sup>

A significant feature of choral concerts during WWI in Newcastle had been the number arranged in support of various war charities. By contrast, hardly any are reported for the town during WWII, though a handful are noted in Northumberland, Gateshead and Felling.<sup>102</sup> Two major funds were established. The more official fund, similar to that of WWI, was the Lord Mayor’s War Needs Fund especially concerned with entertainment for troops and clothing for evacuees.<sup>103</sup> The second was the *Journal and North Mail* and *Evening Chronicle* War Fund, to which the Queen made a contribution, and which was particularly aimed at providing ‘comforts to the

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<sup>100</sup> The late Lt. Col. Richard Cross, OBE, in a letter to the author, 22 October 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Bach Choir archives, programme 4 July 1944; *EC*, 3 July 1944.

<sup>102</sup> *NJ*, 24 November 1939, 6 February, 12 March 1940, 29 January, 16 May, 6 September 1945.

<sup>103</sup> *NJ*, 27 September, 22 November, 15 December and subsequently.

troops'. A preliminary list of local donors to this fund shows that most were private individuals.<sup>104</sup>

No reports of choral concerts supporting either of these funds have yet come to light. There may have been a failure to report such activities, though this seems unlikely, especially as the local papers were eager to promote their own fund. The YMCACS, operating under the auspices of the YMCA itself, had a tradition of supporting YMCA funds, particularly in aid of the Association's work among boys, and this continued. It is possible that choirs made donations from their funds to war charities, but records that might have shown this appear no longer to exist. The People's Concerts might have offered an occasion for supporting war charities, but there is nothing to show that they did. The concerts given by the King's College Choral and Orchestral Society and Bach Choir were probably not popular enough to attract audiences for fund-raising purposes.

A major charitable event of 1944 was Newcastle and Gosforth Merchant Navy Week, planned to raise £25,000 in aid of various organisations concerned with seamen's welfare. There was a Gift Shop and a series of events including dances, an auction, various sports events, a flag day and a number of concerts. Among the latter were four choral concerts beginning, appropriately, with a performance of Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet* in a programme given by the YMCACS, which also concluded the week with *Hiawatha*. The second and third concerts were by the choir of the Convent de la Sagesse, in a miscellaneous programme, and the People's National Chorus, performing Edward German's *Merrie England*.<sup>105</sup> Despite all the efforts, the week netted less than half the target.

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<sup>104</sup> *NJ*, 13, 18, 19, 25 October, 3, 25, 27 November, 12 March 1940 and subsequently.

<sup>105</sup> *NJ*, 16, 17, 22 June 1944; GCL: L784.96 NGCU Programmes of Concerts 1940-59, Souvenir Programmes, 17, 21, 24 June 1944. The week also included two non-choral concerts and six dances.

Perhaps one may conclude that as a fund-raising activity public concerts had lost the appeal they had during the previous war. If this were the case, it would tend to suggest that those attending concerts did so primarily to enjoy the music and were not to be persuaded to attend for any other motive, however worthy.

#### **4.4 Victory and Peace**

The contrast between the response to the end of WWI and the end of WWII shows clearly how the position of music, and especially choral music, had changed in the life of the city. In 1918, in aid of the Lord Mayor's War Relief Fund, a 'Grand Sacred "Open Air" Concert', in the form of a 'War Relief Musical Festival' was given in St James's Football Ground (St James's Park). It had been initiated by the AMU and embraced church and chapel choirs, choral societies and glee parties of the district, as well as a large orchestra. In addition, 'Lady Nurses, Q. M. A. A. C.'s and others, and Soldiers and Sailors temporarily stationed here and who are attached to Choirs outside the Locality' had been invited to take part.<sup>106</sup> The chorus comprised 1,000 voices, two-fifths of which were male, and came to be known as the 'War Relief Musical Festival Choir'. The concert included familiar choruses from *Messiah* and *Elijah*, 'Land of Hope and Glory' and *Jerusalem* and attracted an audience of nearly 16,500. The inclusion of Holst's *A Marching Song* suggests the influence of Whittaker, who conducted the performance, pointing to the pre-eminent position he now held in the area. Bainton, absent as an internee in Ruhleben, Germany, was the President. 'The choir', it was reported, 'gave some fine massive effects, and if, naturally, they did not provide the thrill which indoor singing imparts, it was all magnificent.' With a nod

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<sup>106</sup> Formed in 1917, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps was renamed Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps the following year (William Spencer, *Army Service Records of the First World War* (Kew: Public Record Office, 2001), 28-30).



towards the venue, Handel was referred to as ‘easily the best “scorer”’.<sup>107</sup> The choir was later established as the Newcastle-on-Tyne and District Festival Choir.<sup>108</sup>

The following year, the end of the war was celebrated by a great ‘Peace Pageant’ in which the Newcastle and District Festival Choir was to perform. The patriotic choral music was to include ‘Holst’s choral song, *O England, my Country* (again suggesting Whittaker’s influence) and Elgar’s ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ as well as the choruses ‘And the glory of the Lord’ and ‘Hallelujah’ from *Messiah*.<sup>109</sup> The Pageant ultimately took place in the middle of industrial unrest, including a train strike. The main event was held on the Town Moor with a ‘Victory march of the troops, the music and dancing in all parts of the city’.<sup>110</sup> A report of the Festival Choir’s performance, given at St James’s Park, refers to ‘a splendidly responsive body of vocalists under [Whittaker’s] control; the enthusiasm was always noteworthy and many of the climaxes electrifying’. The hope was expressed that the choir’s ‘real festival days’ were to come, and that it would ‘prove a reinforcement of our musical forces such as we shall feel it both a privilege and a pleasure to support’.<sup>111</sup>

Compared with this outburst of massed patriotic sentiment, the celebrations following the WWII victory seem positively subdued. On three successive nights in November in the City Hall there was a British Legion Victory Tattoo and Festival of Remembrance. Each night focused on one of the services: Saturday the Navy (including the Merchant Navy), Sunday the Army and Monday the RAF. In addition to the band of the Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and the pipes, drums and

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<sup>107</sup> *NJ*, 3 August, 20 September, 4, 5 October 1918; NCL: L042 Local Historical Tracts, vol. 32, 195. The published programme refers, inaccurately, to Bainton as a ‘Prisoner of War in Holland’.

<sup>108</sup> *NJ*, 4 October 1918

<sup>109</sup> *NJ*, 18 July 1919. Holst’s unison song, *O England, my Country*, was composed for a Stepney Children’s Pageant in 1909. Children from a number of local schools took part (Michael Short, *Gustav Holst: The Man and his Music* (Hastings: Circaidy Gregory Press, 2014), 92, 126, LIX).

<sup>110</sup> *NJ*, 19, 21 July 1919.

<sup>111</sup> *NJ*, 25 July 1919.

dancers of the Eyemouth Juvenile Band, there were parades by the various services. 'Massed choirs' were provided by St Nicholas's Cathedral and Jesmond Parish Church as well as Whitley Bay Choral Society (the producer of the events was the society's secretary) and 'a group of male voices' from the NGCU. The whole was intended to be an occasion of 'Pageantry: Spectacle: Reverence'.<sup>112</sup> 'Fine taste and careful organisation have gone to the making of a production that impressively reflects public feeling at this time and does credit to all concerned', was the verdict of the *Newcastle Journal* on these performances.<sup>113</sup> The only reference to what was sung appears in *The Berwickshire News*, which reports the 'Newcastle Choral Society' as singing the Hallelujah Chorus.<sup>114</sup> As there is no other reference to such a choral society at this time, it may perhaps be assumed that this comprehensive name was given to the massed choir by the Berwick reporter.<sup>115</sup> What is surprising is that the NGCU, which had been the backbone of the People's Chorus, was represented by only a group of the men and that there was no participation by the YMCACS, the Bach Choir or the King's College choir, all of which had made an important contribution to the musical life of the town during the war.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that by the end of World War II the main choirs in Newcastle had become sufficiently secure and grounded to have survived any disruption caused by the wars. Indeed the conflicts had to some extent contributed to that stability, achieved after nearly 100 years, by strengthening the resolve to maintain a firm choral presence in the city. If the 1940s did not quite mark the peak of achievement of two of

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<sup>112</sup> *EC*, 5 November 1945; *NJ*, 6 November 1945.

<sup>113</sup> *NJ*, 12 November 1945.

<sup>114</sup> *BN*, 20 November 1945.

<sup>115</sup> The present Newcastle Choral Society was not founded until 1954.



the choirs, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union and the YMCA Choral Society, the years brought perhaps greater public acclaim than they were to achieve subsequently. The Bach Choir benefited especially from the First World War by including in its repertory modern British music which appealed to the patriotic sentiments of the time. The prominence this newly-founded choir then gained consolidated its position as a major contributor to the musical life of the city and beyond.

## **Chapter 5: Decline and new growth**

### **5.1 Introduction**

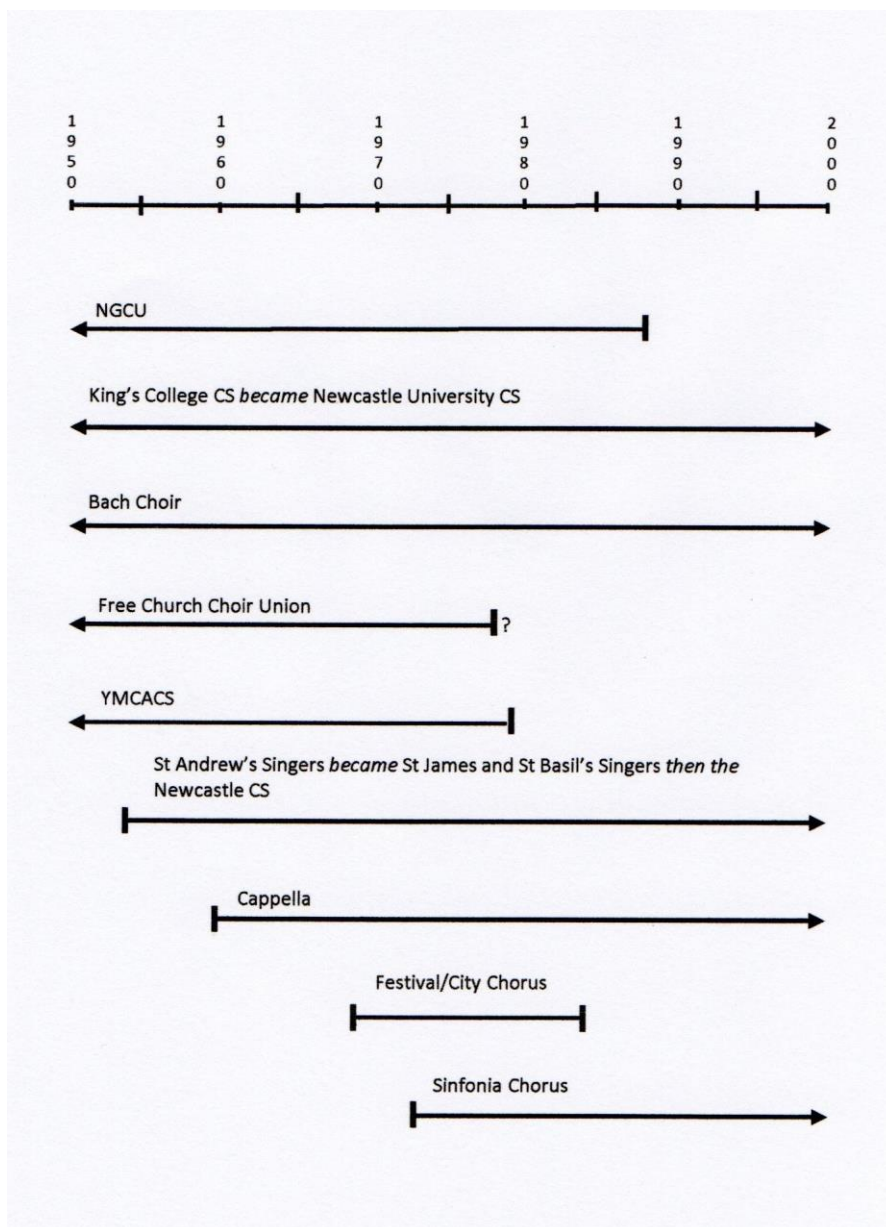
The previous chapter saw the main city choirs emerging from World War II with a sense of renewed confidence. The present chapter shows that this led to a period of stability among the choral societies that would prove to be short-lived, for signs of weakness appear in the 1960s leading to the demise of three of them. Overlapping this is the establishment of new choirs with innovative aims and a fresh sense of purpose. During the transition period in the late 1960s and 1970s Newcastle City Council took an active part in the promotion of classical music and founded a choir to perform with visiting orchestras.

### **5.2 Choral life after World War II**

WWII ended with the Bach Choir, King's College Choral Society and the YMCACS occupying a central position in Newcastle's choral life, having maintained for most of the war their regular programme of concerts. The Free Church Choir Union resumed its activities, and the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union emerged from its position at the hub of Newcastle National People's Choir, reporting 'an influx of members' from the People's Choir,<sup>1</sup> and re-establishing itself as an important oratorio choir in the town. The next 40 years or so were to see the demise of three of these choirs, the establishment of at least three new ones and the continuation of the others (see Timeline 3, p. 141) There were also the Cathedral Choral Society, the male-voice Glee and Madrigal Society and several suburban choirs. The LNER Choral Society, founded in 1937 as the LNER Male Voice Choir of Newcastle and suspended during

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<sup>1</sup> *NJ*, 4 October 1945.



**Timeline 3    The main Newcastle choirs 1950-2000**

the war, had been reconstituted and resumed its activities as a mixed-voice choir,<sup>2</sup> but nothing has so far come to light about it beyond 1945.

An important element during the 1960s was the commitment of Newcastle City Council to the cultural life of the city, perhaps its greatest commitment to the arts in the Council's history. Through a Committee for the Encouragement of Cultural Activities, led by Alderman Mrs Gladys Robson, the Council established the first of a series of Arts Festivals drawing on local organisations including local choirs. The choirs that accepted an invitation to participate in the 1961 Festival were the YMCA Choral Society, the Free Church Choir Union, the Newcastle Glee and Madrigal Society, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, the Newcastle Ladies Choir, the Newcastle Cathedral Choral Society and the St James and St Basil's Singers. It was made clear that this 'was a modest effort, and must not be confused with the Edinburgh Festival'. The striking omission from this list is the Bach Choir; this came about because the Council was unable to give the choir an absolute guarantee against loss on a proposed performance of the *St Matthew Passion*. The Council also founded an international series of concerts by visiting professional orchestras to be given in the City Hall. A choir, the Festival (later the City) Chorus, was established to sing with these orchestras when a work requiring choral forces was performed.<sup>3</sup>

### **5.3 The Free Church Choir Union and The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union**

In 1888 a Nonconformist Choir Union was established in London, holding its first festival at the City Temple, with almost 1,400 singers, in June. Although there were

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<sup>2</sup> *NJ*, 31 August 1945.

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings* 1960-61, 221-22; 1961-62, 377-78, 436-42; 1962-63, 522-29; 1964-65, 534-35; 1967-68, 1020-22; Bach Choir archives, minutes, 16 May, 29 June 1960. See also NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 1, 1942-69, programme 5 October 1969.

other similar unions in the provinces, that in London seems to have acted as a catalyst for them and in some measure to represent them. It was thought that such an organisation ‘could assist congregations in many ways’, presumably by encouraging their singing. A second festival was held the following year at the Crystal Palace, with some two thousand participants drawn from about a hundred choirs throughout the country. James Lightwood states that in 1890 those organising the festivals ‘were doing a splendid work in advancing the position and influence of music in the Free Churches’. The music for each of the festivals was published in a book distributed to the participating choirs. If the pattern established by the earliest festivals was maintained, the music would mainly comprise anthems and part songs, possibly with a Handel or Mendelssohn chorus. Over the next few years, further Unions were founded throughout the country.<sup>4</sup>

A Nonconformist Choral Union was founded in Newcastle in 1911, performing Handel’s *Samson* in February 1912.<sup>5</sup> The following year the choir, which had been re-named the Free Church Choir Union, gave Haydn’s *The Creation*. James Lightwood states that the ‘parent’ Nonconformist Union in London adopted the name Free Church Choir Union in 1926.<sup>6</sup> In performing oratorios rather than offering festivals the Newcastle choir departed from the tradition established by the parent body. Nothing further has been found about this choir, which suggests it did not survive WWI. A new version of the choir was established in 1936.<sup>7</sup> In February 1940, with about 250 singers, it was referred to as ‘Newcastle’s recent addition to its big mixed voice choral groups’. It gave a ‘festival service of praise in St James’s

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<sup>4</sup> James T. Lightwood, Chapter One in James T. Lightwood, Alan Crisp and Ron Clarke, *Hark the Sound: A History of the Free Church Choir Union* (The Free Church Choir Union, rev. edn 1995), n.p. The wider influence of churches is considered in Chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> *MT*, 52/824 (1911), 672.

<sup>6</sup> *MT*, 54/842 (1913), 263; Lightwood, *Hark the Sound*.

<sup>7</sup> YMCACS archives, programme, 9 April 1975.

Congregational Church' following the tradition of the [London] Nonconformist Union Choir.<sup>8</sup> As was mentioned in the previous chapter, it continued during most of WWII, by which time it was apparent that it had become an oratorio choir. Three membership cards have survived for the seasons from 1948 to 1951. They include a 'Rehearsal Attendance Record', which indicates that two concerts were given each year, one always being *Messiah* and the second another of the standard oratorios. In a letter to the author, the member whose cards they were recalls that what she remembered most were 'the folks [she] met along the way, the rehearsals at the Congregational Church Hall in Newcastle'; travelling to Whitley Bay on the train for a concert was 'an event at that time'. She also wrote of the need to have the attendance record marked, as 'if you hadn't put the rehearsals in you couldn't get a place on the night'.<sup>9</sup>

From the comments of another former member, writing of her experiences in the 1960s and '70s, it appears that in addition to an annual 'oratorio' concert in Newcastle there was often another in a local village hall or church. By now there was also an annual carol concert in the City Hall, attended by many children, at which 'Father Christmas' distributed presents.<sup>10</sup> The oratorio repertory was limited. In 1963 they performed *Israel in Egypt* with the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra. From 1965 to 1974, with about 80-90 members in well-balanced sections, they performed *Messiah*, *The Creation* and *Elijah* solely with organ accompaniment and the other works, including Mendelssohn's *Saint Paul* and Elgar's *The Kingdom*, with an ad hoc orchestra.<sup>11</sup> The choir was to survive for only a few more years and evidently suffered its demise some time after 1978, a time when two other of the long-established oratorio choirs, the NGCU and the YMCACS, also ceased their activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; *NJ*, 20 February 1940.

<sup>9</sup> Attendance cards, 1948-49, 1949-50, 1950-51, kindly given to the author by Mary Robson, who in her letter (10 February 2105) described her experiences with the choir.

<sup>10</sup> Eva Laverick in a letter to the author, 10 February 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Information from Gordon Grant, conductor, in emails to the author, 6 April, 17 May 2015.

The NGCU re-established itself after WWII and over the next thirty years regained some of the prominence it had previously enjoyed. Unfortunately, other than an almost complete set of programmes until the early 1980s, records of the choir do not appear to have survived. Hutchinson had become conductor after the war, remaining until 1964, when he was succeeded by Chalmers Burns, the conductor of the Bach Choir, until 1971. After this, and until 1977, there was a succession of conductors, each staying for no more than three years. It is evident that by this time the choir was becoming unstable. Gordon Grant, the conductor from 1976-77 writes that ‘work was hard because the numbers were much reduced, and there was not a good balance of voices’. He and Peter Downey, the accompanist he had appointed, resigned as they ‘felt unable to continue’.<sup>12</sup> Ernest Young was conductor from 1981-82, by which time membership had shrunk to about 40. He found the choir living too much on the ‘glory days’, being resistant to change and unwelcoming to new members.<sup>13</sup> The choir folded in late 1989, when £500 from its assets was donated to the Bach Choir.<sup>14</sup>

#### **5.4 The YMCA Choral Society: a case study of success to failure**

The YMCA Choral Society had been formed shortly after the end of WWI<sup>15</sup> and was conducted by Arthur Lambert, who was to become Sheriff and Lord Mayor of Newcastle.<sup>16</sup> The choir was unusual in that it functioned in part as an activity of the YMCA itself, although it appears to have operated fairly independently, at least in its

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<sup>12</sup> Information from Gordon Grant in an email to the author, 17 May 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Information from Ernest Young in emails to the author, 3, 6 August 2018; NGCU programme, 24 March 1982.

<sup>14</sup> Bach Choir archives, minutes, 29 January 1990.

<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise stated references are from an uncatalogued collection of programmes, minute books and other papers, formerly in the possession of the late Miss Sybil Durno, sometime secretary of the YMCACS, and currently in the care of the author. References to ‘Minutes’ are to Committee Minutes except where a different body is indicated. The exact date of the founding of the choir is uncertain.

<sup>16</sup> *NMNC*, 18 September 1924.

early years, only the appointment of the conductor needing the approval of the General Committee of the parent body. From at least the 1940s, the YMCA General Secretary was a member of the Choral Society Committee and for many years its chairman. As we shall see, the YMCA, through the General Secretary, took a more interventionist position when the choir was suffering financial problems.

The choir's early programmes included such works as Gounod's *The Redemption* and Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise*, though in 1924 it was reported as preparing an 'all-British' programme.<sup>17</sup> There was a new venture later the same year, 'a novelty for Nov. 11 in the shape of an Armistice Day concert', suggesting that such an event had not taken place before. Becoming a Remembrance Day concert, the event included community singing.<sup>18</sup> Although innumerable performances of *Messiah*, or parts of it, were heard over the Christmas season, 'Timbre', of the *North Mail*, thought there should be 'at least one large-scale one, the "Messiah" being a big work which demands big forces for its full realisation', a view which had determined the character of *Messiah* performances from at least the time of the Crystal Palace commemorations. As the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, which had frequently given Christmas performances of the work, was not to do so this year, *Messiah* was performed by the YMCACS instead, in the Town Hall with a chorus of 250 accompanied by the organ.<sup>19</sup>

Records for the next twenty years are patchy, but those that survive show that the choir's repertory included Brahms's *Requiem*, Elgar's *The Banner of St George* and *Caractacus*. By 1934 Arthur Lambert had been replaced as conductor by J. E Hutchinson, who remained with the choir until 1949. It was during these years that the

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<sup>17</sup> *NMNC*, 13 March, 18 September 1923.

<sup>18</sup> *NMNC*, 16 September 1924. See also Rachel Cowgill, 'Canonizing remembrance: music for Armistice Day at the BBC, 1922-7' in *First World War Studies*, 2/1 (2011), 75-107.

<sup>19</sup> *NMNC*, 16 December 1924.



choir evidently built up the reputation which allowed it to emerge, as we have seen, as the leading oratorio choir in Newcastle, supplanting, for a time, the position of the NGCU.

A crisis occurred in 1949 when, after a substantial loss on the performance of Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise* and Fauré's *Requiem* at the March concert, Hutchinson felt:

he had not received the backing and support of the members in this engagement and, in view of this and the fact that the Society would be obliged to reconsider its policy and to work to a greatly reduced budget in the future, he did not feel able to allow his name to go forward for re-election to the post of Conductor next season. It was evident that members did not approve his policy and he thought it better that he should retire.

An attempt to persuade Hutchinson to continue as conductor failed and the question of a successor was left in abeyance. A list of four possible successors was subsequently drawn up: Dr Chalmers Burns, T. H. Mearis, George Kellett and F. McIntyre. None of these was approached at the time, as there emerged the possibility of appointing Frank Wade, who was employed by the BBC. Such an appointment was favoured by the General Committee of the YMCA and, with the choir committee's approval, the invitation to take on the conductorship was made and accepted. It is apparent from the minutes that the appointment of the conductor had largely been in the hands of W. H. Drake, the YMCA General Secretary.<sup>20</sup>

It was clear that with Wade as conductor there were to be changes. At his suggestion a concert manager and deputy were appointed. Because of his work commitments he expected to be unavailable for all the rehearsals in early 1950 and had invited George Sutcliffe, the accompanist and deputy conductor, to take rehearsals in his absence. In December 1949, the programme for *Messiah* advertised 'Vacancies for young voices in all sections' with auditions to be held in January. It

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<sup>20</sup> Minutes, 14, 25 July 1949; 25 September 1950.

also said the Society wanted to form a ‘Special Madrigal Choir of Good Readers’, evidence that Wade was showing an imaginative approach to the development of the choir. Whether there was any response to the appeal for new members cannot now be known, but nothing more was heard of the Madrigal Choir.

It had been decided to perform Rutland Boughton’s *Immortal Hour* in the spring of 1951, but a fall in membership, particularly among tenors and basses, put this in jeopardy. Only six tenors had been at rehearsals and Wade indicated that this number should be trebled. Shortly after, he advised the choir that the numerical strength was inadequate for the proposed programme and it was agreed that instead Handel’s *Acis and Galatea* and a short modern work should be performed.<sup>21</sup> His tenure as conductor, however, was short-lived, as in January he was appointed to a post with the BBC in London and therefore resigned from the choir, while agreeing to come to the March concert as a visiting conductor.<sup>22</sup>

When Hutchinson resigned, a short list of potential successors had been drawn up. On this occasion, there was no such shortlist and George Sutcliffe, who had been deputising, was appointed apparently without any wider search.<sup>23</sup> This may have been the first instance of the Society’s preferring what was familiar and safe to what may have been more adventurous and challenging.

Financial anxieties were to beset the YMCACS for the rest of its existence and reports of meetings regularly recorded details of fund-raising activities, in which members loyally participated. In addition to such events as jumble sales and whist drives, collection boxes were available at rehearsals for donations. There were also problems of declining membership and lower audiences. If the financial problems

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<sup>21</sup> Minutes, 16 October 1950. The programme for 7 March 1951 shows that Purcell’s *Ode on St Cecilia’s Day* [1692] was performed instead of a modern work.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes, 8 January 1951.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

were perhaps a symptom rather than a cause of the Society's difficulties, they contributed to a process of slow decline. Economies in soloists' fees were called for, the Committee taking the view that this 'need not in any way detract from the standard of performance',<sup>24</sup> though the fact that the idea was voiced suggests the opposite was in some minds.

In 1955 even *Messiah* had failed to make a profit, indicative of the weakening grip this work had on choir members and audiences. A transfer of funds from the Society's General Fund along with a substantial grant from the Cultural Committee of the City Council and members' special efforts reduced, though did not eliminate, the loss on the season.<sup>25</sup> In 1958 a special meeting was held to consider 'how the society could be made more attractive'. Although 'many suggestions were put forward', little more than tinkering with the planned programme was the outcome, everyone being 'urged to do whatever possible to bring new members'.<sup>26</sup> One detects an inertia in the affairs of the choir and a lack of any imaginative or creative thinking.

Sutcliffe's report to the 1958 AGM spoke of the 'high water mark' of a performance of Brahms's *Requiem* and Bach's *Ein feste Burg*, BWV 80, the previous December. At the same meeting he said he intended in future to engage members of the orchestra individually, rather than use the City Orchestra, thus, he hoped, 'raising the standard of performance'.<sup>27</sup> From this we may reasonably conclude that the standard of orchestral playing had been inadequate, which can hardly have been an encouragement to audiences. The choir, however, must still have maintained a reasonable reputation as it was invited to participate in the Newcastle Arts Festivals of both 1961 and 1962.

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<sup>24</sup> Minutes, 27 April 1953. It is likely that some at least of the soloists were London based.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes, 28 March 1955.

<sup>26</sup> Special Meeting minutes, 6 January 1958.

<sup>27</sup> AGM minutes, 15 September 1958. A programme of 1949 refers to the Newcastle City String Orchestra; subsequent programmes refer to the Newcastle City Orchestra.

Financial problems were mitigated to some extent by contributions from the Arts Festival Committee and the Cultural Committee of the City Council as well as by proceeds from fund-raising efforts organised by members, though continuing deficit balances caused the Society to draw on its General Fund.<sup>28</sup>

As we shall see from the account of reviews below, there was increasing concern about the standard of the choir's performances. The General Secretary of the Newcastle YMCA<sup>29</sup> made three suggestions to improve the quality and character of the Society's work. These were (a) to perform 'two entirely different works from those performed this year',<sup>30</sup> (b) to give only one concert in the City Hall with another in the Connaught Hall offering shorter works without either soloists or orchestra and (c) to change the pattern of the rehearsals to offer from 7 to 8.15 p.m. a rehearsal of the music to be performed and from 8.15 to 8.45 sight-singing lessons. This third suggestion implies that not all members were competent sight-singers. It is not surprising, perhaps, that the Society's reluctance to make any radical changes caused all three suggestions to be rejected; they were felt to be neither 'practical, or acceptable', though no evidence for these conclusions is given.<sup>31</sup>

It was at this point, 1964, that the YMCA itself began to take a more active role in the affairs of the Choral Society owing to its worsening financial circumstances. Members of the YMCA Board of Management and representatives of the Society had considered the financial loss over the last five years, diminishing audiences and rising costs and raised the question of how future concerts were to be subsidised. With the prospect of 'a deficit of between £300 and £400 on a season' the YMCA had to act as a guarantor to the Society, though a proposal that the YMCACS

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the AGM minutes, 31 July 1961.

<sup>29</sup> Now W. R. Haggard, who had succeeded W.H. Drake, the previous General Secretary.

<sup>30</sup> In 1963 *Hiawatha* and *Messiah* had been performed.

<sup>31</sup> AGM minutes, 13 January 1964.

become ‘an integral part of the YMCA’ was not acceptable to the Society. It was therefore agreed that if the Choral Society was ‘to remain an auxiliary of the YMCA and not within its membership’, the Board of Management would ‘only guarantee in any one year an amount of money equal to the total membership subscriptions paid.’ It should also have proper representation on any Society committee and have ‘some control over future concerts and programmes’. The Board warned:

Public support for artistic endeavours such as the Choral Society provides has been and still is dwindling, and it is not advisable to dwell upon past glories when facing future uncertainties.

The YMCA was willing to give ‘moral and financial’ support but could not give the Society carte blanche either for programmes or financial subsidies.<sup>32</sup>

It was apparent that possible solutions to the financial problems had attendant drawbacks. The major approach was seen to be through cost-cutting: the City Hall was expensive to hire, but other venues, such as King’s Hall, were unsatisfactory;<sup>33</sup> there was the possibility of reducing the size of the orchestra – thereby reducing fees – but if the orchestra was not large enough, grants would be ‘greatly reduced’. Sutcliffe suggested that the coming Christmas concert might be given in Jesmond Parish Church, perhaps joining with the church choir, and therefore presumably at much reduced cost. Over-riding the financial concerns was the need to maintain the choir’s reputation, particularly regarding the quality of the music. For the time being the committee decided ‘to accept responsibility for the financial deficit, and carry on with the intention of giving performances of music in an endeavour to wipe out the debt’.<sup>34</sup>

In 1967, addressing the financial issue, Arthur Milner, the Society’s president, said that ‘it was impossible for concerts to make money today, in view of increased costs’ and suggested that if every member raised £5 it would eliminate the past

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from the YMCA secretary to the members of the Society, 20 November 1964.

<sup>33</sup> The King’s Hall, for example, had been found to be too small (Minutes, 22 April 1968).

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, 1 April 1968.

season's deficit.<sup>35</sup> Milner's comments were intended to be reassuring, and they accurately reflect the situation many choirs faced, but they may have given the members a false sense of security as it was becoming clear that the choir's problems were deeply rooted.

In 1965 the question of joining the National Federation of Music Societies (NFMS) had been considered. Perhaps in anticipation of this, or on the initiative of the YMCA itself, a new Constitution had been drawn up. This was approved at the AGM in July.<sup>36</sup> It established the object of the Society as to 'promote active interest in and appreciation of all forms of choral music' and stated that the conductor and/or the deputy conductor were to be 'responsible for all rehearsals, all matters relating to orchestral and musical arrangements either in public or private performances of the Society, and all matters of discipline in such rehearsals or performances. They shall also make recommendations to the Executive Committee of suitable works to be performed and soloists engaged'. It also formalised the relationship between the Choral Society and the YMCA by stipulating that three members of the YMCA Board of Management and the General Secretary should be members of the Executive Committee.<sup>37</sup> The proposal to join the NFMS may have been motivated, at least in part, by the possibility of obtaining guarantees against some of the losses incurred, which proved to be the case.<sup>38</sup>

To ease the financial difficulties, the YMCA made a loan to the Society of £300, repayable over five years, 'to enable the Society to meet its initial financial

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<sup>35</sup> AGM minutes, 26 July 1967.

<sup>36</sup> AGM minutes, 12 July 1965.

<sup>37</sup> Constitution: Newcastle upon Tyne YMCA Choral Society. The Choral Society Committee now became the Executive Committee.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes, 16 July 1965. There is a list of NFMS Guarantees from the 1966/67 to the 1977/78 season, giving the amounts, which ranged from £30 to £120.

obligations'.<sup>39</sup> It was also decided to invite 'various industrial concerns' to become patrons. Because audiences had been declining it was decided not to use the balcony of the City Hall for concerts, thereby concentrating the audience in one area.<sup>40</sup> The question of finance was now increasingly influencing programme planning. In February 1966, for instance, it was decided to perform the *Christmas Oratorio* instead of the *Messiah*, which would have the advantage that grant aid was more likely to be forthcoming.<sup>41</sup>

There had been some discussion with the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra over the possibility of giving a concert that included Fauré's *Requiem*. Having agreed that the Sinfonia's conductor should conduct, the Society appears to have taken fright, for when it was suggested that the choir 'was not ready to perform a work with only two rehearsals with a strange conductor' a decision to withdraw from the project was unanimously agreed.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps in this we again see something of that inertia, a reluctance to take risks, which was sapping the energy of the choir; or possibly there was a realistic understanding that the choir was simply not capable of meeting the challenge which the proposed performance would have brought. The *Requiem* was subsequently performed by the choir with an ad hoc orchestra.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the problems the choir faced it continued to command the loyalty of its members and to retain a strong sense of fellowship. This was particularly evident in the constant fund-raising efforts members of the choir arranged. At the 1968 AGM, Sutcliffe spoke of 'the general atmosphere of pleasantness which always prevailed in

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<sup>39</sup> Minutes, 17 September 1965.

<sup>40</sup> Minutes, 11 October 1965.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes, 9 February 1966.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes, 28 February 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Programme, 12 April 1967.

the Society, and made rehearsals so enjoyable'. This view was endorsed by Milner, who found the atmosphere 'more of a family than a choral society'.<sup>44</sup>

At this point it would be instructive to look at the reviews in the local press of the choir's concerts from 1960 to 1969. Verdi's *Nabucco* was reviewed by John Healy in March 1960, when he found the chorus performing 'at a much higher standard than that of most recent performances by this choir'.<sup>45</sup> The following year 'R. McC.', reviewing a second performance of the same work, thought the chorus of 80 singers 'not really large enough for an epic work such as this'. It 'lacked the vigour and quality it [had] so often shown in previous oratorios and some of their entries betrayed a lack of confidence'.<sup>46</sup> The *Messiah* performance in December won some praise from reviewers in the local papers, though one thought the 'Hallelujah' chorus lacked robustness.<sup>47</sup>

A review of George Dyson's *The Canterbury Pilgrims* referred to a choir 'of 56 white-robed women and ten men', showing that the proportion of men to women was becoming very unbalanced.<sup>48</sup> The following year T. L. Little, the music critic for the Northern Echo, reviewing Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha*, found Sutcliffe's beat inflexible, making 'a truly expressive performance out of the question'. The 'small choir for the most part sang agreeably but the sopranos tended to shrillness in their upper register'. The orchestra 'did not quite have the measure of the score' but 'offered some very pleasant playing'. Little refers to Gordon Grant as the organist, suggesting that he supplied some of the parts not covered by the orchestra.<sup>49</sup> In March 1964 a performance of *The Creation* prompted Healy to refer to falling off both of

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<sup>44</sup> Minutes, 17 June 1968.

<sup>45</sup> *NJ*, 24 March 1960.

<sup>46</sup> *NJ*, 14 April 1961.

<sup>47</sup> *EC* and *NJ*, 7 December 1961.

<sup>48</sup> *NJ*, 12 April 1962.

<sup>49</sup> In an unidentified newspaper cutting.



public support for the choir and of its membership. He observed that the ‘16 men and 49 women looked very forlorn on the platform, and it was inevitable that the tenors and basses would have to shout their way through the performance’. Sutcliffe, however, ‘directed the work with his usual alertness and skill, leaving nothing to chance’. Healy found the orchestra’s playing ‘variable – sometimes efficient, but often out of tune and ragged in ensemble’.<sup>50</sup>

The review produced some indignant responses, one correspondent broadly taking the view that an amateur group should not be judged as if it were professional. He or she argued that ‘with the help of people like Mr Healy [the Society] could perhaps have enlisted new members instead of frightening potential recruits and future audiences away’.<sup>51</sup> Another correspondent, noting that there was a decline of interest in choral music, thought the Press ‘could do a power of good by trying to rekindle the lost interest in this art of music making by the people in the North-East’.<sup>52</sup> Roy Dickinson, in support of Healy, defended the right of a critic of his calibre to offer ‘an honest and objective critique’. He went on:

Of course the men are outnumbered in the YMCA Choral Society, and of course the tenors are straining to make themselves heard. That has been painfully obvious for a season or two - particularly in Handel’s “Messiah”. The YMCA choir is far too small for the City Hall, and indeed for works of any magnitude.

He concluded by suggesting the amalgamation of the Society with the NGCU, with Healy ‘as a wonderful successor’ to Dr J. E. Hutchinson who had retired from the latter choir.<sup>53</sup>

Milner who, as the YMCACS’s president, could hardly take a detached view, reviewed three of the Society’s performances in 1965 and 1966. The reviews were

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<sup>50</sup> *NJ*, 5 March 1964.

<sup>51</sup> Letter, ‘Surprised and disappointed’, *NJ*, 12 March 1964.

<sup>52</sup> Letter, Robert Tindall, in an unidentified newspaper cutting.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, Roy Dickinson, in an unidentified newspaper cutting.

largely encouraging and supportive, but even he, in a review of the *Christmas Oratorio*, found the ‘big choruses occasionally lacked confidence and bite, especially from the sopranos, whose high notes sounded timid’. On the other hand, the chorales, especially those that were unaccompanied, displayed ‘firm rhythm, euphonious tone and excellent intonation’.<sup>54</sup>

Healy, reviewing the choir’s performance of Fauré’s *Requiem* and Mendelssohn’s *Hymn of Praise* in April 1967, described the playing of the ad hoc orchestra as ‘fair to bad’ and wrote that the choir in the *Requiem* sang with ‘rough and poorly blended tone’ and ‘was not equal to the demands of the refined music’. ‘Verve and enthusiasm’ he wrote, ‘helped to cover up the rough edges of the singing’ in the Mendelssohn.<sup>55</sup>

The Society’s situation was summed up in the opening sentences of Healy’s review of the *Christmas Oratorio* in December 1968 when he wrote that it had ‘fought a hard but losing battle during the last few years to keep up its past high standards’. The ‘seriously depleted ranks, particularly among the men’ meant that ‘it seemed no longer possible to fill the vast spaces of the City Hall’. Because of this, it was wise to move to Jesmond Parish Church, where Sutcliffe was the organist and where the church choir could augment the YMCACS. This was not the first time the choir had been supplemented by other singers; in July 1965 Sutcliffe expressed ‘his appreciation of the help given by choristers from other choirs’.<sup>56</sup> The orchestra lacked some of the instruments ‘that are essential to the work’s proper effect’. He drew attention to the absence of timpani, pointing out that the organ was no substitute for their sounding out ‘of the jubilant theme of the opening chorus’. However, the choral singing ‘was better than anything they have done for a long time, though the sopranos

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<sup>54</sup> *NJ*, 16 December 1965, 10 March, 15 December 1966.

<sup>55</sup> *NJ*, 13 April 1967.

<sup>56</sup> AGM minutes, 12 July 1965.

were often severely strained in the upper regions'. The use of the organ in place of timpani and other instruments is confirmed by Gordon Grant, the organist, who told the present author that he 'had to add flute, trumpet and timpani parts on the organ'.<sup>57</sup> Reviews by Paul Abbott and Healy of concerts in 1969 drew attention to the choir's shortcomings and the inadequacies of the orchestral playing.<sup>58</sup>

With the 1970s we arrive at the twilight of the choir; by now its decline was as irreversible as its demise was inevitable. Its hand-to-mouth existence unfolds painfully season by season.

First there were the continuing and increasing financial problems. Meeting after meeting referred to losses on concerts and the need to raise funds. By 1967 the Society had become dependent on loans in addition to grants to remain solvent; £300 had already been lent by the YMCA and an interest-free loan of £150 had been received from a friend of the choir.<sup>59</sup> Grants from the NFMS, Northern Arts Association and Newcastle Corporation Arts Working Group offset some of the losses on the 1970-71 season<sup>60</sup> and the Society continued to rely on grants in subsequent years. A scheme for the selling of ball-point pens inscribed with the Society's name came to nothing when the ball-point pen company closed, and though the scheme was later revived it proved not to be economically viable.<sup>61</sup> In 1973 Sutcliffe said the situation 'had become very serious' and pointed out that 'if the Society were to continue, much more thought would have to be put into money-raising efforts'. The following year it emerged that Sutcliffe had waived some of his outstanding fees.<sup>62</sup> There was occasional easing of the financial position, allowing for repayment of

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<sup>57</sup> Gordon Grant in an email to the author, 17 May 2015; *NJ*, 19 December 1968.

<sup>58</sup> *NJ*, 17 April, 18 December 1969.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes, 16 October 1967.

<sup>60</sup> AGM minutes, 14 June 1971.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes, 29 January 1973.

<sup>62</sup> AGM minutes, 8 July 1974.

loans, though the YMCA agreed that £200 of its loan should be regarded as 'commuted payment'.<sup>63</sup>

The financial problems were having a serious effect on repertory and performances. In January 1975, for instance, funds were insufficient to engage a full orchestra for the planned performance of Brahms's *Requiem* and Sutcliffe agreed 'to engage the minimum number of players consonant with an acceptable performance of the work'.<sup>64</sup> A decision to perform Vaughan Williams's *Hugh the Drover* (referred to as 'The Cotswold Romance') was abandoned because of the cost of hiring copies and the difficulty of obtaining orchestral parts; instead, Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise* was substituted.<sup>65</sup>

Alongside the financial difficulties had been the continuing loss of members and the generally unsuccessful attempts to recruit new ones. As early as 1961 attempts to increase membership had included offering reduced subscriptions for those at school and inviting local church choirmasters to encourage male singers to join the choir.<sup>66</sup> At the AGM of 1966 Milner had referred to membership, observing that 'every choir in the country had the same problem' and had urged members 'to bring along their friends' in the expectation that they would enjoy singing and so join the choir.<sup>67</sup> Now, in 1971, it was again suggested that a further approach might be made to schools and churches, and to the University where there was 'a large untapped source of choristers'.<sup>68</sup> Three years later the idea of contacting schools was raised once more, now with the additional suggestion of approaching the College of

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<sup>63</sup> Minutes, 5 April 1976.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes, 27 January 1975.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes, 13 October 1975.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, 31 July 1961.

<sup>67</sup> AGM minutes, 13 June 1966.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes, 26 April 1971.

Education, referring probably to the Newcastle College of Education, though there were others in the area.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the various attempts at recruitment there was no arrest in the continual decline in membership. With a marked shortage of tenors, the question had been raised in the spring of 1972 as to whether the Society could continue. The Society's problems were now exacerbated owing to the demolition of the YMCA building, where the choir rehearsed. Because of this, an invitation to contribute to the 1972 Newcastle Festival was declined. As arrangements had been made to rehearse in Jesmond Parish Church hall, it is difficult to see why it was not possible to participate in the Festival.<sup>70</sup>

The choir continued to give concerts during the rest of the 1970s, though it became increasingly reliant on Jesmond Parish Church Choir and there was a constant need to compromise over its choice of repertory owing to the limitations of vocal and orchestral resources. To save on costs greater use of local soloists was made, as was evident in 1973 when the lowest fees proposed by Ibbs and Tillet for London singers were beyond the Society's means.<sup>71</sup>

In his report to the 1974 AGM, Sutcliffe suggested that instead of the *Christmas Oratorio*, 'which did not appear to be a box-office draw', Haydn's *The Creation* might be performed in November in Jesmond Parish Church with organ, instead of orchestral accompaniment, to save costs.<sup>72</sup> The determination to continue remained, despite an increasing sense of unreality about the choir's competence as demonstrated when it was proposed to increase ticket prices as low prices 'did not give a good impression to the public of the quality of the performance to be given'. A

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<sup>69</sup> Minutes, 22 July 1974.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes, 8 May 1972.

<sup>71</sup> Minutes, 21 May 1973.

<sup>72</sup> AGM minutes, 8 July 1974.

suggestion that for the 1975-76 season a programme that ‘might have more audience appeal’ was considered but there is no evidence of what such a programme might be, and the works performed for the rest of the choir’s existence, including further performances of *Messiah* and *Elijah*, showed no change from previous repertory. A bizarre decision was made relating to a performance of Mendelssohn’s *Hymn of Praise*. No copies of the orchestral parts for the opening Sinfonia were available and so instead it was agreed to perform the *Hebrides* overture as Sutcliffe thought ‘this would make a suitable introduction’.<sup>73</sup>

The end of the choir was now imminent. In February 1978, it was reported that there had been a loss of £210 on the December *Messiah* concert, showing once again that the work could not be relied upon as a source of revenue. As a result, there was a need to economise on the cost of the orchestra for the coming spring concert. This was to be a concert version of Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* given in Trinity Hall, a former Presbyterian Church, where the charge was only £17, the seating capacity was over 300 and the acoustics were good.<sup>74</sup> Sutcliffe ‘reluctantly agreed’ to engage an orchestra solely of strings and woodwind and without brass.<sup>75</sup> The performance was a disaster, first because no full vocal scores were available for the choir, leaving them to sing from chorus only parts, which had caused difficulty. Then the organ had broken down and a piano had had to be substituted to join the already scaled-down orchestra.<sup>76</sup> This concert, if no other, showed the parlous state into which the Society had fallen.

In December the choir gave its last concert, the *Christmas Oratorio*. The following February, Sutcliffe reported on the ‘marked falling-off in membership,

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<sup>73</sup> Minutes, 5 April 1976.

<sup>74</sup> Minutes, 14 March, 10 May, 1977. Trinity Hall was owned by Newcastle Polytechnic, now Northumbria University.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes, 10 February 1978.

<sup>76</sup> AGM minutes, 19 June 1978.

particularly in the tenor line [and] the consequent difficulty of giving an adequate performance of the works being rehearsed' for the coming April concert. He had decided that it would be 'wisest to cancel the concert', a decision that was endorsed by the committee. After considering other consequences of this decision it was agreed 'that an Extraordinary General Meeting of the members be convened for the winding-up of the Society'.<sup>77</sup> At this meeting it was revealed that there were only four contraltos and two tenors in the choir, and that, as Sutcliffe had left Jesmond Parish Church, there was no longer support from the church choir.

Decisions were made about the disposal of the remaining funds, among which was an agreement to donate any residual amount to the Bach Choir. Following expressions of thanks to various officers of the Society, Sutcliffe was presented with a book and a cheque as 'a token of [the members'] appreciation of his work for the Society'. The meeting closed, 'followed by refreshments and a very pleasant social hour'.<sup>78</sup> So ended what had been one of the major choral societies of the area.

Although the primary explanation for the closing of the Society was the decreasing membership, so that it was 'impossible to give balanced performances of major choral works', compounded by the loss of support from Jesmond Parish Church choir, it is clear from the reviews that for some years the standard of the choir's performances had been inadequate. A full orchestra was often not available, and an organ was used to supply the missing parts, a practice that was no longer acceptable to a potential audience able to hear works performed by better choirs, either live or through the medium of the radio or gramophone. There was too much compromise, and an over-reliance on works, especially *Messiah*, that were losing their appeal and ceasing to be a reliable source of income. There was little interest in exploring new

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<sup>77</sup> Minutes, 19 February 1979.

<sup>78</sup> Extraordinary General Meeting minutes, 26 March 1979.

repertory and a failure to respond to new trends, such as the developing interest in historically informed performance. The choir was a strongly loyal social organisation but there had been a complacency about it that allowed a considerable amount of self-delusion as to its competence. It may be that the root of the problem went back as far as Hutchinson's time, when he resigned at least partly because his policy was not supported by the members. Ultimately the choir outlived its ability and it might have been wiser had it decided to close some ten years earlier than it did.

There is one further element which may have had its effect not only on the YMCACS but also on the Free Church Choir Union and the NGCU and that was the establishment of new choirs with potentially higher standards, more innovative programmes and greater professionalism. These will be considered later.

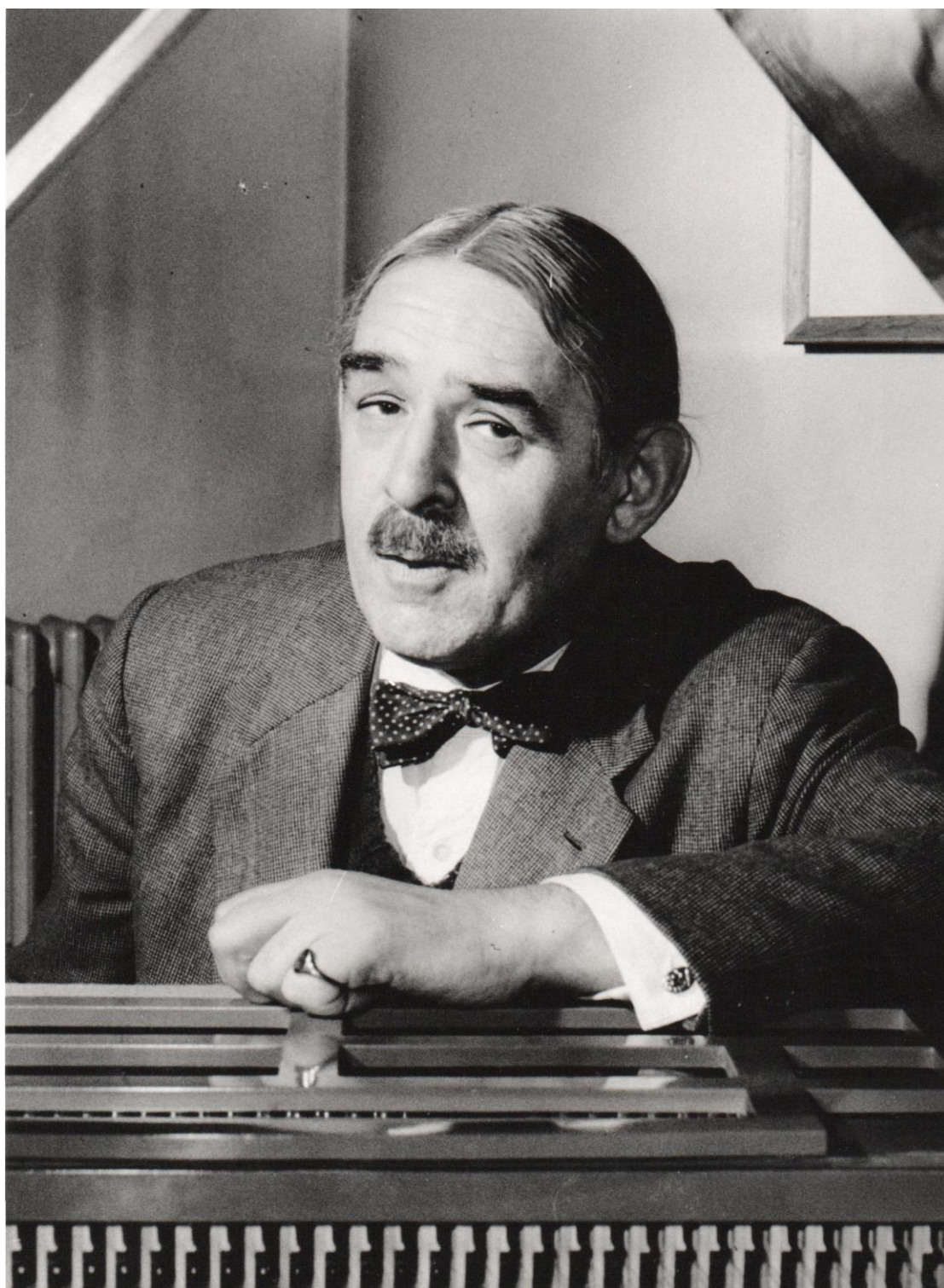
### **5.5 The Bach Choir: the middle years**

The decline of what had been three of Newcastle's major choirs stands in stark contrast with the activities of the Bach Choir (see Plate 14, p. 169) which substantially maintained the 'Bach and British' tradition established by Whittaker.<sup>79</sup> Chalmers Burns (see Plate 12, p. 163), who had succeeded Westrup in 1944, increased the size of the choir in order to perform the music of a wider range of composers and introduced the choir and its audiences to music from John Taverner and Heinrich Schütz to Stravinsky, Kodály, Poulenc and others. Holst and Vaughan Williams, who became the choir's president, remained in the repertory to be joined by Edmund Rubbra, Vaughan Williams's successor as president, Arnold Bax, Delius and other contemporary British composers. To complement the music of Bach, Burns gave several performances of the lesser known cantatas, oratorios and other choral works

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<sup>79</sup> For a full account of the Bach Choir at this time see Large, 'Building on the heritage (1930-1984)' in Borthwick and others, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 307-348. A number of quotations in this section are also to be found in that chapter.





**Plate 12 Dr Chalmers Burns**

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by Handel. Some of these, such as *Semele*, were performed semi-dramatically, though with rather mixed reviews.

Burns drew on another tradition established by Whittaker by re-introducing non-choral concerts, an aspect of the function of the organisation as a society and not solely a choir. He established a series of chamber music recitals by the Aeolian String Quartet which continued until it was taken over by the University in the late 1960s. Perhaps Burns's most important contribution was to introduce concerts reflecting historically informed performance by featuring early instruments and the countertenor. Based on performances by members of the Dolmetsch family and Joseph Saxby, with appearances of the countertenor Alfred Deller, these brought a new musical experience to Newcastle audiences. As some of the instruments were likely to have been unfamiliar, early concerts featured demonstrations of how they were played.

The most challenging period for the choir was during the early 1960s when an element of complacency had crept in, choir members were ageing, and good standards of performance were not always maintained. In addition, the choir, like many other choirs, was facing financial difficulties, though in this case compounded by the engagement of the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra which almost brought the choir to bankruptcy. Founded in 1958, the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra (now the Royal Northern Sinfonia Orchestra) became a leading chamber orchestra in the United Kingdom, though it proved less of an asset to local amateur choirs than might have been hoped.<sup>80</sup>

With an influx of fresh blood, a tighter discipline and a change of orchestra, the choir survived this period, celebrating its golden jubilee in 1965, and regained its

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<sup>80</sup> For further details about the orchestra's contribution to the work of local choirs see Chapter 7. The orchestra's archives may be found at TWA: S.RNS.

reputation. This was illustrated by a review of a concert in February 1968 which stated that:

[t]he singers had obviously been well drilled and the performances generally showed the benefits which are flowing from Dr Burns's efforts at choral renewal in the last two or three years. His sopranos and altos are nearly all young and the dividends in fresh, bright choral tone are there for all to hear.<sup>81</sup>

During Burns's time, the choir had given occasional concerts jointly with other choirs, including the Blyth Oriana Choir (whose conductor was William James, the Bach Choir's assistant conductor), the Free Church Choir Union and the Cathedral Choral Society. Burns's valedictory concert with the Bach Choir was a large-scale performance of the *St Matthew Passion* jointly with the NGCU and the University Choral Society, both of which he also conducted, the Blyth Oriana Choir and children from local schools.

At a time when the choir was experiencing some fall in audience attendance, the question had been raised as to whether the repertory was sufficiently attractive. Burns vigorously defended the choir's approach, arguing that 'the choir had never tried to play safe', and demanding: 'who would take our place, especially with new and unfamiliar music' if the Bach Choir ceased to perform it?<sup>82</sup> When seen against the increasingly tired repertory of the three leading 'oratorio' choirs this was a wholly justified attitude. Indeed, the failure to be more adventurous was undoubtedly one of the factors leading to the demise of the YMCACS and probably the other choirs.

In 1971 Denis Matthews was appointed to the University's first chair in music. It was expected that he would succeed Burns as conductor of the Bach Choir, but correspondence between him and W. R. James, the choir's secretary, shows his reluctance to commit himself to the appointment in his first year. He offered to

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<sup>81</sup> T. Little in an undated newspaper cutting.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted by Large in 'Building on the heritage (1930-1984)', 330.

conduct one of the concerts but vacillated over the choice of music. Ultimately, he chose not to be nominated for the conductorship and instead Percy Lovell (Plate 13, p. 166), senior lecturer in music, was appointed.<sup>83</sup> On his appointment Lovell was able to assert that the choir had ‘a great chance at the moment to be a leading exponent of choral music in the City’.<sup>84</sup>



**Plate 13 Percy Lovell**

Reproduced with the kind permission of Jonathan Lovell

During twelve years as conductor Lovell followed the approach of his predecessors in extending the range of music to be performed while not neglecting the core repertory. Burns had introduced the choral works of Handel, and now Lovell was to offer Italian music, beginning, in 1972, with a programme that included several works by Italian composers of the early baroque. In 1977, the choir gave its first

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<sup>83</sup> For a full discussion of Professor Matthews and the Bach Choir see Large, ‘Building on the heritage (1930-1984)’, 337-39. The correspondence between Matthews and James is to be found in the archives of the Bach Choir.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted by Large in ‘Building on the heritage (1930-1984)’, 339.

performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin*. In his review, Tom Little wrote of Lovell as 'a devoted Monteverdian' who met the daunting challenge of [the *Vespers*'] virtuoso writing' with a choir which 'sang with assurance, security and resilient rhythm'.<sup>85</sup> The following year Lovell devoted an entire programme to Italian choral music, performing, in addition to works by Monteverdi, Vivaldi's 8-part *Beatus Vir*, RV 597, and Cimarosa's *Requiem*.<sup>86</sup>

In 1958 Watkins Shaw's new edition of Handel's *Messiah* had been published<sup>87</sup> and Lovell used it for a performance in March 1978, inviting Shaw to give a lecture on the work 'as it was in the composer's time'.<sup>88</sup> In a programme note Lovell wrote that the choir's aim had been 'to get as close as we can to the style of the first performance under the composer's direction'.<sup>89</sup> This was similar to Westrup's aim in 1943 when he sought to present the same work in a performance 'that may be different from what most listeners are accustomed to, but [...] much nearer to what Handel intended'.<sup>90</sup> It was also the approach adopted by Eric Cross in February 2018 with an edition based on the London performance of 1743, 'an early version of the score which contains some fine music not often heard nowadays'.<sup>91</sup>

In 1980, departing from the choir's usual repertory, Lovell performed Mendelssohn's *Elijah* followed two years later by *St Paul*.<sup>92</sup> *Elijah* had been part of the staple repertory of the local oratorio choirs, notably the YMCACS, which had closed the previous year, and the NGCU which was in the process of decline. Increasingly inadequate performances of the work by the YMCACS with an

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<sup>85</sup> Bach Choir archives, undated cutting from the *Northern Echo* re concert of 5 March 1977.

<sup>86</sup> Programme, 25 November 1978.

<sup>87</sup> Watkins Shaw, ed., *Messiah*, Handel Edition (Sevenoaks: Novello, [1958]). This edition was revised in 1981.

<sup>88</sup> Bach Choir archives, minutes, 3 October 1977.

<sup>89</sup> Programme, 4 March 1978

<sup>90</sup> Programme, 27 February 1943.

<sup>91</sup> Programme, 24 February 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Programmes, 11 June 1980, 18 June 1983.

unbalanced choir and incomplete orchestra had probably contributed to the choir's falling audiences and a loss of interest in the work. The Bach Choir was able to present an authoritative performance with a full orchestra thus in some measure returning the work to public favour.

The choir in the early 1970s was increasing in size and, with a greater flow of applicants and membership reaching over 90, the choir committee thought it was large enough. Lovell defended the increase as he saw it giving 'valuable experience' to students of the music department who were applying to join. In addition, he thought the choir 'owed some return to the University for the generous facilities put at the Choir's disposal'.<sup>93</sup> A few years later the choir was to contribute to the rescue of the music department when, in 1981, the university senate 'on instructions from the Universities Grants Committee' decided to close the department.<sup>94</sup> With support from within the university and beyond, the department was saved. This episode tends to underline the strong relationship which remained - and remains - between the university, the music department (now the International Centre for Music Studies) and the choir. Further evidence of this is shown by the choir's engaging the University Orchestra, and at times student choirs, when it performs certain large-scale works, and offering music and other students the opportunity to join the choir and, on occasion, to perform as soloists.

Lovell retired from the university and conductorship of the choir in 1984, when for his final concert he chose a programme of English music for voices and strings under the title 'Byrd to Britten'.<sup>95</sup> During his conductorship he had further extended the choir's repertory whilst not losing sight of its Bach and British tradition,

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<sup>93</sup> Bach Choir archives, minutes, 14 October 1974. Quoted by Large in 'Building on the heritage (1930-1984)', 342-43.

<sup>94</sup> Bach Choir archives, minutes, 5 October 1981. Quoted by Large in 'Building on the heritage (1930-1984)', 346.

<sup>95</sup> Programme, 23 June 1984.



and maintained its position as he had claimed at the outset, ‘as a leading exponent of choral music in the City’.<sup>96</sup>



**Plate 14 The Bach Choir**

Reproduced with the kind permission of Professor Eric Cross

## **5.6 A changing choral scene: Newcastle Choral Society, the Newcastle Festival/City Chorus and the Sinfonia Chorus**

The third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a distinctive change in the choir life of Newcastle, during which only the Bach Choir offered continuity and stability, though, as we have seen, even it experienced some insecurity during the 1960s. King’s College Choral Society, now the University Choral Society, though it continued for a few years, had ceased to be a significant choir in the city. Alongside the Bach Choir the choral high ground had been held by the three ‘oratorio’ choirs - the Free Church

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<sup>96</sup> Bach Choir archives, letter P. Lovell to W. R. James, 24 March 1972.

Choir Union, the YMCACS and, the longest established of them, the NGCU. By the end of the 1980s these choirs had all ceased to function. Their place was taken by two new choirs, the Newcastle Choral Society and the Cappella Novocastriensis, the former having some of the characteristics of an ‘oratorio’ choir and the latter more in the tradition of the Bach Choir. In addition, there were the Newcastle Festival/City Chorus and the Sinfonia Chorus.

The Newcastle Choral Society began modestly in 1954 as The St Andrew’s Singers attached to St Andrew’s Church, one of the city’s four ancient churches.<sup>97</sup> Numbering about thirty, it was founded by John Healy, then organist and choirmaster of the church and a local music teacher and critic. His aim was stated as being ‘to create a choir of young singers who had no experience of singing together to perform church music of the highest quality’.<sup>98</sup> The earliest programmes show that their repertory included music by Palestrina, Purcell, Bach and Mozart. The choir moved with Healy when he became organist and choirmaster at the church of St James and St Basil, Fenham, to the west of the city, and changed its name to reflect the name of the church, where the choir now rehearsed and performed. Possibly with additional resources from the church choir, the St James and St Basil’s Singers began to take on the character of an ‘oratorio’ choir, performing, among other works, *Messiah*, *The Creation*, Verdi’s *Requiem*, the *St Matthew Passion* and the *Christmas Oratorio*. Reviews of the choir’s performances during the 1960s and 1970s show that this more youthful choir was achieving enviable standards. It is evident from the repertory and the reviews that the choir was presenting a serious challenge to the YMCACS at a time when the latter was in decline.

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<sup>97</sup> Information about this choir is largely gleaned from *Newcastle Choral Society 1954-2004: Making Music for Fifty Years* ([Newcastle]: Newcastle Choral Society, 2005).

<sup>98</sup> *Newcastle Choral Society 1954-2005*, 2.



Healy resigned as conductor (and from his church appointment) in November 1975. His successor, Len Young, saw the choir enlarged when it was joined by several singers from the Newcastle City Chorus, 'enabling the performance of works requiring greater forces and substantial financial investment'. Concerts were now mainly given in St Nicholas's Cathedral and other churches. In 1986, by which time the choir had outgrown its parochial origins, it changed its name to Newcastle Choral Society.

The City Chorus, though short-lived, had been formed to perform with visiting orchestras. In 1969, prompted by the offer of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra to perform Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, it was decided to form a 'Newcastle Festival Chorus' to participate in the performance. Paul Abbott, who was a lecturer at the School of Music (part of the College of Art and Industrial Design), was to become chorus master.<sup>99</sup> After the first concert, it was intended that the Festival Chorus, which later became the City Chorus, would 'present a large choral work in each City Hall season'.<sup>100</sup> Paul Abbott died in 1979 at the age of 43, and a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, previously arranged as part of the city corporation's concert programme, became a memorial concert.<sup>101</sup>

Abbott was succeeded by Len Young and David Murray acting jointly as chorus masters.<sup>102</sup> In 1983 Alan Fearon became chorus master but lasted for barely a

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<sup>99</sup> According to *Newcastle Choral Society 1954-2004*, 1, 5, the School of Music was founded by John Healy. Paul Abbott was deputy to Healy, becoming principal in 1973. The School later became part of the College of Arts and Technology in Rye Hill. See also NCL: 780.73 Newcastle City Council City Hall Programmes, Vol. 4, 1970-79, programme 19 April 1979.

<sup>100</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 1, 1942-69.

<sup>101</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 4, 1970-79.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

year as the City Chorus was disbanded in 1984.<sup>103</sup> It would appear that this was a result of the cessation of the City Council's series of orchestral concerts.

The Northern Sinfonia Orchestra had been founded in 1958. During the early 1960s it performed with two or three local choirs, including the Free Church Choir Union and the Bach Choir, with which it played regularly from 1963-65. As we saw, the YMCACS withdrew from a performance of Fauré's *Requiem* proposed for 1966. The orchestra, however, became reluctant to perform with amateur choirs and amateur conductors as it considered it detracted from the orchestra's professional reputation.<sup>104</sup>

In 1967 a scheme for 'a small hand-picked choir of about 24 voices to perform with the orchestra at regular intervals, doing vocal works in the orchestra's chamber repertoire' was proposed but shelved owing to the difficulty of assembling such a choir.<sup>105</sup> Five years later the proposal was revived and approved and auditions of potential members began in January 1973; it was later reported that the response had been 'excellent in quality and quantity'.<sup>106</sup> The Sinfonia Chorus, as it became, stood in much the same relation to the Northern Sinfonia as the City Chorus had done to visiting orchestras; it had therefore no independent existence, unlike the other local choirs.

## **5.7 Cappella Novocastriensis**

The Cappella was founded in April 1960 by Dr Frederick Hudson, senior lecturer and later reader in music at King's College, Durham University (subsequently Newcastle University). The choir was founded primarily for the performance of music for

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<sup>103</sup> *Newcastle Choral Society 1954-2004*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> TWAS: S.RNS/1/2/1, Minutes of committee meeting 3 December 1963.

<sup>105</sup> TWAS: S.RNS/1/2/2, Minutes of committee meeting 24 April [1967].

<sup>106</sup> TWAS: S.RNS/1/2/3, Minutes of committee meetings 6 July, 8 September, 15 November 1972, 23 March 1973.

worship especially during the period 1400-1800. It was in part based on similar organisations in Switzerland, the Cappella Basiliensis, and Germany, the Cappella Coloniensis. Hudson (Plate 15, p. 173) had expressed the ambitious hope that it would make visits abroad and so 'be responsible for making the name of Newcastle internationally known as the home of scholarly musicians and scholarly music'.<sup>107</sup> In this it was echoing something of the achievement of the Bach Choir, also founded by a musical



**Plate 15 Dr Frederick Hudson**

Reproduced from *The Journal* of 16 November 1960

scholar, though the Bach Choir under Whittaker was more successful in this aim, notably in its performances in London and later in Germany. Through his work as a scholar, especially in editing works for both the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe* and the

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<sup>107</sup> *NJ*, 12 September 1960.

*Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, Hudson had established an international reputation, and this was reflected in the list of European scholars he invited to be the Cappella's vice-presidents. As well as the usual other officers, the Cappella included a precentor, the Revd John Chalmers (succeeded in 1962 by the Revd W. T. Hinkley), whose responsibility was mainly to sing the versicles when the choir was performing at evensong.

The choir initially comprised some 30 trained singers, later increased to 48; the nucleus of a chamber orchestra was also established. The intention was to perform music 'in conditions as close to the original as possible'.<sup>108</sup> To underline the scholarly nature of the Cappella and perhaps also to emulate robed church choirs, the members wore academic gowns, though later they came to be worn only for church services and eventually were abandoned entirely.<sup>109</sup> As a quasi-liturgical choir, it was quite unlike any other in the area, and to find any kind of comparison one may need to look at a body like the Chapel Royal, not attached to any specific religious establishment, but moving around as occasion demanded.

During its first year the Cappella sang evensong in several churches, including St George's Church, Jesmond. The pattern adopted for these services, always formally conducted, was to end evensong with the Blessing and follow it with motets and other works, the service concluding with the versicle: 'Let us go forth in peace' and response: 'In the name of the Lord'. At evensong for the eve of Advent Sunday, the service was preceded by the performance of 'Turmmusik' (tower music) atop the campanile of St George's by a brass group of two trumpets and four trombones following a German tradition of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The choral music performed during this opening year in addition to Anglican chants, included works by

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<sup>108</sup> *NJ*, 12 September 1960; *Northern Echo*, 12 September 1960.

<sup>109</sup> Recollection of the author. See also Archives of the Cappella Novocastriensis, minutes, 6 February 1980.

16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century English and German composers, as well as Edward Bairstow, former organist of York Minster, the latter chosen, perhaps, because Bairstow had been Hudson's organ tutor and had prepared him for his Durham BMus and DMus degrees.<sup>110</sup>

In 1961 the Cappella began to develop the scholarly aspect of its repertory with a performance in St. George's of Dr Hans Redlich's latest edition of Monteverdi's *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin and Magnificat* (1610). It was preceded by a lecture on the *Vespers* by Redlich, illustrated by the Cappella, given in King's Hall. Redlich, of Edinburgh University, had produced a new critical and practical edition of the *Vespers* in 1955, following his earlier edition of 1934. Differences in the 1955 edition lay mainly in the realisation of the continuo part, though possibly also in the scoring. Christopher Grier referred to 'a penny-plain treatment which, given Dr Redlich's authority, is much more likely to be genuine than the two-pence coloured flamboyance of, for instance, the late Walter Goehr'.<sup>111</sup> A further edition was published by Denis Stevens in 1961.

The performance attracted a report in *The Scotsman*, no doubt because of Redlich's connection with Edinburgh University. Although it judged the performance 'not quite up to fully professional standards' it had 'major merits' even though the complex polyphony 'put a strain on the resources of the choir, as did some details of notation and time keeping'. Overall the choir did 'pretty well', especially in the 'old style' polyphony of, for example, the Ave Maris Stella.<sup>112</sup> John Healy, reviewing the St George's performance for the *Journal*, wrote of it as 'an ambitious undertaking for a choir only recently formed, but the chorus work [...] was generally well done'. He

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<sup>110</sup> Archives of the Cappella Novocastriensis, Orders of Service, 22 October, 26 November, 21 December 1960; *NJ*, 16 November 1960.

<sup>111</sup> *The Scotsman*, 27 March 1961.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

concluded by congratulating all involved ‘for one of the most enterprising musical events in Newcastle in recent years’.<sup>113</sup>

Hudson had edited Bach’s Wedding Cantatas for the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* and the Handel Concerti Grossi, Op. 3 for the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe*; two of the cantatas, *Herr Gott, Beherrscher aller Dinge*, BWV120a, and *O ewiges Feuer*, BWV32a, and two of the Concerti Grossi were performed in St George’s in December. In February 1962, the Cappella sang evensong and gave a short motet recital at St Andrew’s Church in the Leam Lane Estate, ‘with the object of introducing good music to a very new housing estate’; for this performance, owing to the director’s illness, rehearsals had been taken by the present author. In May the Monteverdi *Vespers* were performed in the McEwan Hall, Edinburgh, on the invitation of Professor Sidney Newman, formerly conductor of the Newcastle Bach Choir, and now Reid Professor of Music at Edinburgh. Perhaps out of sensitivity to Scottish Protestantism, the performance was referred to as ‘*Vespers & Magnificat*’ rather than as ‘*Vespers of the Blessed Virgin & Magnificat*’. A review in *The Scotsman* found the performance ‘a little bit pale’, and with a ‘small amount of intonation trouble’ but thought the choir ‘well-trained and responsive’ and that ‘the whole affair ran with practised ease’.<sup>114</sup> The *Glasgow Herald* reviewer was encouragingly positive, observing that the choir sang ‘with warmth and conviction, maintaining an equable balance of tone and volume whether treated as a single six-part or divided into a 10-part double-choir’.<sup>115</sup>

In November 1962, the Cappella was presented with a harpsichord by Kurt Wittmayer of Bavaria, a gift from the Federal Republic of Germany in response to an appeal by Hudson to the German Embassy. The presentation was made by Dr Brigitte

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<sup>113</sup> *NJ*, 27 March 1961.

<sup>114</sup> *The Scotsman*, 7 May 1962.

<sup>115</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 7 May 1962.

Lohmeyer, cultural attaché at the Embassy, at an evening party in the Hatton Gallery of the School of Fine Art at King's College.

The following month the choir performed Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* at St George's. This was another instance of a choice of music being suggested by the appearance of a new scholarly edition, in this case that of the 1960 *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*. It was described as a 'forceful performance', with criticism only of some insecurity of the trumpets.<sup>116</sup>

The pattern was now established of singing evensong on a regular basis with concerts of new or recent editions or of less familiar works of the Cappella's specialist period. With its performance in Edinburgh and one planned for Manchester in 1963, the choir's reputation was beginning to grow. The Manchester performance, given in the University's Whitworth Hall, was entitled 'Music of the High Renaissance and Early Baroque'. Two new editions by Redlich, both dedicated to the Cappella, were given their first performance: Nicolaus Gombert's motet, *In illo tempore loquente Jesus* and Monteverdi's *Missa* of the same title.<sup>117</sup> In addition, Hudson's new edition of Giovanni Gabrieli's motet *In ecclesiis benedicite Domino*, dedicated to Redlich, was performed. The rest of the programme comprised other choral and organ works of the period. The concert was introduced by Redlich with a short lecture, 'Monteverdi's only Parody Mass', showing the relationship between the Gombert motet and the Monteverdi *Missa*.

In reviewing this concert J. H. Elliott, of *The Guardian*, wrote that it 'could not be said that the performances of the Novocastriensis ensembles, choral or instrumental, were [...] distinguished by great vitality of tone or delivery', though by

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<sup>116</sup> 'A. M.' [Arthur Milner] in the *EC*, 15 December 1962.

<sup>117</sup> Nicolaus Gombert (c. 1500-c. 1556). Redlich had recently been appointed to the Manchester chair of music.

way of compensation he commended the ‘evidences of scholarship and devotion’.<sup>118</sup>

For the *Daily Telegraph*, Michael Kennedy commented that it:

is possible that much more would be revealed by a more convincing performance. Dr Hudson’s Capella [sic] Novocastriensis gave a sketchy and tentative account of the music, seeming to have the notes in their heads (but only just) and not at all in their hearts. Intonation was uncertain and balance far from good, with several individual voices (and they were not the best) predominating.<sup>119</sup>

The reviews following a performance of the same programme in St George’s were rather more generous. Although ‘A. M. H.’ in *The Journal* found the Monteverdi *Missa* disappointing, with some ‘uncomfortably bad intonation, for which the tenors seemed almost entirely to blame’, he was much more positive about the rest of the programme, commenting on the ‘breathhtakingly spun tone, flexible as silk’ in Lechner’s *Magnificat Primi Toni*.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, Little in the *Northern Echo* thought the choir ‘was not at its best’, the inner parts being insecure and pitch tending to flatten; he thought the performance ‘would have been better with more intensive rehearsal’.<sup>121</sup> A second performance of the *Christmas Oratorio* was given in December, when Little thought the choir ‘in much better form [...] and sang with confidence, very pleasant tone and accurate intonation’.<sup>122</sup> Healy in the *Journal* also thought the choir had improved, but noted ‘still some lack of warmth in the tonal blend and still no vigour or attack in the fugal entries - especially in the tenors and basses’. He was even more critical of the orchestra, which was ‘often excellent and as often disappointing’. He singled out the ‘continual plodding of the bass section and the absence of any subtle phrase-shaping or light and shade [which] caused a good

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<sup>118</sup> *The Guardian*, 13 May 1963.

<sup>119</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1963.

<sup>120</sup> *NJ*, 18 May 1963.

<sup>121</sup> *Northern Echo*, 18 May 1963.

<sup>122</sup> *Northern Echo*, 16 December 1963.



deal of tedium throughout the performance'. Fault was also found with the brass and timpani and other aspects of the orchestral playing.<sup>123</sup>

In 1964, the choir performed Byrd's *Great Service* (which had been first performed since Byrd's time by the Bach Choir in 1924), omitting the Benedictus and Creed, in a programme that also included Byrd's *Mass for Four Voices*.<sup>124</sup> The printed programme gives no explanation for the omission of the two *Great Service* items; it was probably done to reduce the length of the concert. This programme was given in St George's in May, repeated in the chapel of Auckland Castle a week later (see Plate 16, p. 180). This performance, as it turned out, was Hudson's final concert with the Cappella for he resigned shortly after. The ostensible reason, as reported in the *Evening Chronicle*, was pressure of work, though he may have been demoralised by the lukewarm reviews of some of the Cappella's performances. He had also, as early as 1961, lost the support of Dr Hutchinson, then the choir's patron, who had been critical of Hudson's work with the choir. Greta Large, an occasional member of the choir, reported that Hutchinson had severely rebuked Hudson, though the details of the disagreement are not known. Hudson had drawn on many of Hutchinson's singing pupils for the choir.<sup>125</sup>

Contrasting the founding and early years of the Cappella with those of the Bach Choir reveals something of the strength of the latter when compared with the former. In the first place there are the obvious similarities. Whittaker and Hudson were both lecturers in music at King's College or its predecessor. Both obtained the BMus and then DMus by examination from Durham University. Each brought

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<sup>123</sup> *NJ*, 16 December 1963.

<sup>124</sup> Hudson's edition of the *Mass* for Eulenburg was not published until 1966.

<sup>125</sup> Recollection of the author.



**Plate 16 Cappella Novocastriensis in The Throne Room,  
Auckland Castle, 1964**

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considerable musical scholarship to the choirs they founded, producing editions of some of the works they performed. But Whittaker had a much wider range of musical interests. He espoused not only modern British music, making friends with several composers including Holst and Vaughan Williams, but also promoted the work of French composers. He became nationally known as a choral conductor, composer and examiner, spending a year in Australia examining for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. Hudson, though with a high reputation as a musical scholar, especially in East and West Germany, was much narrower in outlook. For Whittaker, the aim of his scholarship was performance; Hudson's aim was the accurate text and the reputation that went with it. Of the two, Whittaker was the more instinctive

musician and choral conductor, whereas Hudson's fundamental capacity was for the detailed work of the scholar.

The two choirs had distinctive aims, which set them apart from the other choirs of their time. The Bach Choir was the first, and only, local choir, to focus on the work of one composer; the Cappella was the first to put music for worship of a specific historical period as its over-riding aim. As has been shown, the Bach Choir emerged gradually from Whittaker's private exploration of the cantatas of Bach; it was only with some reluctance that he was persuaded to present them publicly, and then in the difficult circumstances of WWI. The growth of the choir was therefore essentially organic. Whittaker had to find editions of the cantatas and to prepare them for performance, often having to make corrections to the instrumental parts. By the time a public performance was arrived at, his singers were already steeped in the Bach idiom and familiar, through informal performance, with many of the works.

Hudson, on the other hand, made detailed plans for the establishment of the Cappella in advance, including the invitations to distinguished scholars to become vice-presidents. The structure was in place, with implications of an international reputation, before the choir had proved itself as a body capable of achieving its ambition. It is possible that it attempted to make an impact beyond Newcastle too soon; it had not laid a sufficiently secure foundation.

Hudson was succeeded by Jack Wolstenholme (see Plate 17, p.182), director of music at Newcastle Royal Grammar School, but with his appointment the immediate connection with what was now Newcastle University was severed. Wolstenholme remained with the choir until 1976.<sup>126</sup> He was meticulous in attending

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<sup>126</sup> It was in this year that he retired from the Royal Grammar School.



**Plate 17 Jack Wolstenholme**

Reproduced with the kind permission of David Goldwater

to detail and, as one member of the choir observed, ‘made no concessions, apparently unaware of individual singers’ limitations’. Although he offered little vocal training, he concentrated on blend and the need for members to listen to each other, improving the ensemble singing and bringing to the choir a greater degree of refinement.<sup>127</sup>

Challenged by the demands he placed on the choir, he explained that they were necessary for improvement, adding that they ‘may be unpopular but [they] are my standards’.<sup>128</sup>

Two other conductors followed Wolstenholme in quick succession. First, Martyn Lane, who had also succeeded Wolstenholme at the Royal Grammar School.

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<sup>127</sup> Archives of the Cappella Novocastriensis, AGM minutes, 6 July 1966; private communications to the author, February 2014.

<sup>128</sup> AGM minutes, 29 May 1968.

Lane's period with the choir was brief and controversial. His plan to audition all the members and to dismiss those whose voices he thought unsuitable met with opposition from the committee, leading to his own resignation. Howard Layfield then followed, staying for only two years, but bringing a period of stability after the turbulent directorship of Lane. In 1979, on Hudson's recommendation, Eric Cross (see Plate 18, p. 183), who had succeeded Hudson as a member of the University music department, was appointed.<sup>129</sup> With Cross's arrival the Cappella regained



**Plate 18 Professor Eric Cross**

Reproduced with the kind permission of Professor Eric Cross

something of its original character, for although Cross was an authority on the operas of Vivaldi, and therefore outside the scope of the Cappella's repertory, he brought with him a scholarly understanding of the music and its performance.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The post-war period up to the 1980s brought a marked, if somewhat complex, change in the choral life of the city. With the demise of the three 'oratorio' choirs, whose

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<sup>129</sup> Archives of the Cappella Novocastriensis, AGM minutes, 16 May 1979.

roots and repertory went back to an earlier tradition of choral performance, the Bach Choir held the choral high ground, maintaining its hold on its members and audiences by adhering to its Bach and British tradition while widening its repertory and embracing a more historically informed approach, especially to music composed prior to *c.*1750. To some extent the Newcastle Choral Society came to replace the position held by the 'oratorio' choirs, but with a fresher approach to performance and an increasingly adventurous repertory. The City Chorus and the Sinfonia Chorus were innovative in being specifically established to allow orchestras to include choral works, or orchestral works with a choral element, in their repertory. The initiative shown by the City Council in promoting concerts of classical music and founding the City Chorus unfortunately proved to be short-lived. The most potentially distinctive choir, the Cappella Novocastriensis, though it did not achieve the ambitious aim proposed by its founder as a quasi-liturgical choir of international repute, established itself as a chamber choir retaining an emphasis on music for the church. By the end of the 1980s, the city's choirs had recovered from the weaknesses of the 1960s and 1970s and now offered a more extensive and often challenging repertory with higher standards of performance.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Aspects of Choral Life beyond the City**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

So far the focus of this study has been on the choral life of Newcastle and to a lesser extent Gateshead. The present chapter shows that choirs flourished beyond the city in the villages and towns of Northumberland and identifies some of the influences that gave rise to them. By way of illustration it offers a case study of the choral life of Berwick-upon-Tweed. An account is also given of the activities of male-voice choirs, mainly encountered beyond the city, and shows how they contrasted markedly with the mixed-voice choral societies.

#### **6.2 The growth of choirs in Northumberland**

John Barbirolli, speaking in Newcastle in 1945, emphasised the importance of providing opportunities for music-making away from city halls. Using a cricket analogy, he argued that the cricketing health of the country should not be judged by test matches, but by the evidence ‘on the village greens and small-town grounds’. Music should be encouraged in schools and then opportunities provided locally for playing and singing. ‘There is room for choral, orchestral, operatic and chamber music societies [...] let the churches lift up their musical hearts. Let the people sing!’<sup>1</sup> Barbirolli could not have been suggesting that such music societies did not exist, though he may have feared many would have suffered through the impact of WWII. He was speaking in the context of the increasing performance of music on radio and in recordings and his emphasis was on the need to stimulate live performance.

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<sup>1</sup> *NJ*, 22 February 1945.



There is clear evidence that local choral societies were widespread and had been from at least the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pritchard, commenting on a remark by an earlier writer,<sup>2</sup> suggests that by 1880 ‘in every village, let alone town and city, every place of worship of almost every religious sect, had its choral society’.<sup>3</sup> Without detailed evidence, which may be lacking, it is difficult to substantiate that claim in its entirety, but newspaper reports show that up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century nearly fifty villages or small towns in Northumberland had choirs of some sort, and if Women’s Institute and Townswomen’s Guild choirs are added this number is considerably increased.

A few of these can be traced back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but at that date it was possible to comment, at a concert by what was evidently the Cresswell Choral Society, ‘[w]ould that the time had come when every village should have its choral society, and the clergyman of the parish for its patron’.<sup>4</sup> Among the earliest choirs that have been identified, in addition to Cresswell, are the first Alnwick (and District) Choral Society, Blyth Sacred Harmonic Society, North and South Shields Choral Society and the first Tynemouth Choral Society.<sup>5</sup> During the 1860s and 1870s information about others emerges. Appendix 3 lists the village and small-town choirs known to have existed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though it should be noted that several of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century choirs may have been of 19<sup>th</sup>-century foundation.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a significant growth in the establishment of choirs throughout Northumberland. Apart from church choirs themselves - Anglican, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic - there were other kinds: church-based, independent, male-voice, female-voice and tonic sol-fa. There were also increasing

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<sup>2</sup> Identified only as ‘Hogarth’.

<sup>3</sup> Pritchard, *The Musical Festival and the Choral Society*, 721.

<sup>4</sup> *NJ*, 3 October 1857.

<sup>5</sup> *MH*, 11 August 1888; *BN*, 11 January 1910; *NSSG*, 16 April 1852, 11 October 1855.



numbers of operatic societies, in one case at least combined with a choral society, the Ashington Co-operative Choral and Operatic Society.<sup>6</sup> The larger towns boasted several choirs. For instance, Berwick, which will be examined in more detail, Alnwick, Hexham, Morpeth, Tynemouth and Whitley Bay among others all had two or more choirs at various times. Some choirs were of a 'district' character, for example Bedlington and District Choral Society and Earsdon and District Choral Society (though it is not always clear whether 'district' was part of a choir's official title), and one or two embraced two or more adjacent villages - Choppington and Guide Post Choral Society is an example. In these cases, the larger town or village either offered the better resources or was the first to establish a choir.

### **6.3 The influence of the churches**

There is evidence to suggest that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century encouragement of church singing, both congregational and choral, and the performance of sacred music in church may have influenced the widespread growth of choirs. In the Church of England, the Oxford Movement led to the appearance of surpliced choirs and the development of music for the liturgy. The Durham Diocesan Association for the Promotion of Church Music in the Diocese of Durham was proposed in 1854<sup>7</sup> and from c.1861 an annual Festival of Parochial Choirs was held. This was at least partly the inspiration of Thomas Rees Evans of Berwick, who had previously been the organist and choirmaster to the Cheadle Association for the improvement of congregational singing. The festival continued after the establishment of the diocese of Newcastle in

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<sup>6</sup> *MH*, 5 May 1950.

<sup>7</sup> *NJ*, 9 December 1854. Newcastle and Northumberland were then in the Durham diocese.

1882 and drew on choirs from throughout Northumberland and beyond, showing how widely church choirs were established.<sup>8</sup>

A performance of the ‘Passion’ (presumably the *St Matthew Passion*) in an unnamed cathedral led to the suggestion of harnessing oratorios for evangelical purposes:

not as a concert – no ticketed seats, no fussy stewards, no smartly-dressed Sopranos, no babblings about pretty music, no sayings of soft things to lady listeners, and all in the house of God – but as a solemn message to souls.

There was, not surprisingly, the fear that ‘the mass of listeners [would] only go for the music, as music, without one thought of spiritual improvement’, as suggested by J. Powell Metcalfe in an article in *Musical Times*, ‘Oratorio – its place in the Church of England’,<sup>9</sup> echoing Pope, perhaps, ‘some to church repair/Not for the doctrine but the music there’.<sup>10</sup> Concerts of oratorio and sacred music generally had, of course, been given in England in churches and cathedrals since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though not always without opposition. For instance, a sermon preached at St Thomas’s Chapel, Newcastle, at the time of the 1842 Festival was entitled, ‘Oratorios unsuited to the house of prayer, and inconsistent with a Christian profession’.<sup>11</sup> The oratorio movement gave an impetus to these performances, when the doubts of those opposed to such activities might be assuaged by their spiritual or missionary aim. In St Andrew’s Church in Newcastle on Good Friday 1881, the precentor of Durham Cathedral spoke in favour of the ‘re-introduction of the oratorio or sacred cantata into the church’.<sup>12</sup> Later the same year, the Church Congress was held in Newcastle and

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<sup>8</sup> *BA*, 28 August 1885; *NDJ*, 1 September 1869.

<sup>9</sup> *MT*, 15/340 (1871), 105-06.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*.

<sup>11</sup> NCL: L042 Local Tracts D12 Sermons, quoted in Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *MT*, 22/459 (1881), 266.

‘was deemed a fitting opportunity for the furthering of the Church oratorio movement’.<sup>13</sup>

A report of a soirée and concert in the Town Hall in 1869 included comments by the Revd Berkeley Addison of Jesmond Parish Church in which he spoke of a society such as the NSHCS, which had performed at the concert, as ‘the nursery of the choirs throughout a town’. Needing a choir for his church, he had asked Helmore, the conductor, to select one from members of the NSHCS which was giving ‘universal satisfaction’. He added that the Society was ‘a school for congregational singing, and calculated to promote that desirable acquirement’.<sup>14</sup>

The free churches showed increasing interest in the performance of sacred music. In 1855 the Newcastle Association for the Promotion of Congregational Psalmody was founded, with classes, using the tonic sol-fa system, taught by a James Pyburn. Pyburn spoke of the:

necessity of improving congregational singing, not simply by choir singing, but by so extending musical education that congregations would read their music as they read their hymns.<sup>15</sup>

Wesleyan ‘Services of Song’ had been held in Newcastle since at least 1869.<sup>16</sup> A report of the 1892 Service referred to the ‘improvement in the singing of Methodist choirs’.<sup>17</sup> In 1876 a ‘Grand Choral Festival’, encompassing local Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist choirs, had been arranged by the Netherton Colliery Wesleyan Society ‘to be held in a field’.<sup>18</sup> The Durham and Northumberland Congregational Psalmody Association Service of Song was reported in 1870, the third to be held, with over 900 voices, a large number from Congregational choirs in Newcastle and

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<sup>13</sup> *MT*, 22/464 (1881), 530; 22/465 (1881), 591.

<sup>14</sup> *NJ*, 5 February 1869.

<sup>15</sup> *NSSG*, 6 March 1856.

<sup>16</sup> *NJ*, 14 September 1869.

<sup>17</sup> *NC*, 15 October 1892.

<sup>18</sup> *MH*, 2 August 1879.

Northumberland. Among the singers were a number of boys.<sup>19</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, the Nonconformist Choir Union was formed in 1888, referred to in *Musical Times* as ‘the youngest of the great amateur choral associations designed for the development and improvement in religious services’.<sup>20</sup> The North of England Psalmody Association connected with the Methodist Free Church had arranged massed choral services since c. 1891 with a choir of some 1,000 voices at the 1896 service.<sup>21</sup>

In a kind of cyclical pattern, the growth of interest in church music would often stimulate musical performance in the wider community, which in turn encouraged music in worship. At the same time, as Russell points out, church and chapel choirs ‘were viewed not as mere aids to religious observance, but as a source of entertainment to the local community’.<sup>22</sup>

#### **6.4 Organists**

The role of the organist is important in the establishment and development of choirs generally. In Newcastle the conductors of many of the choirs were also organists, including Ions, Rea, Preston, Jefferies, Chambers, Whittaker, Hutchinson, Sutcliffe and Hudson. In villages and small towns, the organists were often the leading musicians of the area, playing not only for their churches but also conducting the local choirs. Among them may be noted C. T. Gauntlett, organist of Berwick Parish Church and conductor of Berwick Choral Union and Berwick Oratorio Choir, Frederick Hudson and T. Hallford, both organists of Alnwick Parish Church and conductors of Alnwick Choral Society and J. F. Brewis, organist of St James’s Church, Morpeth and

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<sup>19</sup> *NJ*, 27 April 1870; *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 30 April 1870.

<sup>20</sup> *MT*, 33/593 (1892), 411.

<sup>21</sup> *NC*, 21 March 1896.

<sup>22</sup> Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England*, 17.

conductor of Morpeth Choral Union. A number of the conductors and organists, especially in the towns, held BMus or DMus degrees and qualifications of the Royal College of Organists. The presence of able musicians at a distance from Newcastle meant that good standards could be achieved locally and that it was not always necessary (even if it were possible) to travel to the city to hear competent performances of choral music.

### **6.5 Competitive festivals**

A notable element in the life of town and village choirs was the competitive festival movement. This had developed under the influence of J. S. Curwen and leadership of Mary Wakefield, who had established a festival in Kendal in 1885. The movement spread rapidly and led to the foundation in 1905 of the Association of Musical Competition Festivals, in 1921 becoming the British Federation of Musical Competition Festivals.<sup>23</sup> Although festivals were curtailed during WWI, *Musical Times*, which published a supplement 'The Competition Festival Record' for several years, listed 46 in August 1915.<sup>24</sup> In 1922 the North of England (or the North-Eastern) Association of Competitive Choirs was established, though its membership the following year was reported to be strongest in Durham and Yorkshire, with only six choirs on Tyneside. In 1924 it included Haltwhistle to the west and Ashington to the north-east and its objects included 'the elevation of musical taste' and, in co-operation with other festival promoters, 'securing the highest possible standard of contest, and conditions which will attract competitive choirs'.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the major northern competitive festival was the North of England Musical Tournament (NEMT),

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<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Comyn Gatty, 'Competition festivals' in *Grove IV*, Vol. I, 689-90; H. C. Colles, 'British Federation of Music Festivals' in *Grove IV*, Supplementary Vol., 1945, 76.

<sup>24</sup> *MT*, 56/870 (1915) n.p.

<sup>25</sup> *NMNC*, 1 May 1923, 11 November 1924.

established in Newcastle in 1919 by a group of local musicians including Edgar L. Bainton and W. G. Whittaker (see Plate 19, p. 193).<sup>26</sup> One of the values of such competitions, it was claimed, was that they attracted ‘many who would never come under the spell of good music’.<sup>27</sup> Two other important competitive festivals had been established in Hexham and Morpeth by at least 1907. In 1923 the Hexham Festival included a ‘novice’ section for ‘choral societies in small villages and hamlets which have not competed before’.<sup>28</sup> The Morpeth Festival started as ‘Wansbeck Musical Competitions’ in 1906 and was subsequently known as the Wansbeck Music Festival, named after the river Wansbeck which flowed through Morpeth and the outskirts of Choppington and Ashington before reaching the North Sea.<sup>29</sup> During WWII this festival was suspended, and from 1942 a war-time festival in Morpeth, under the auspices of the Council for the Arts, Music and Drama in Northumberland (CAMDIN), replaced it. CAMDIN was formed in 1941 ‘with the object of assisting and co-ordinating existing organisations, co-operating in securing grants, and generally encouraging activity in the directions indicated’. It set up committees to run CEMA concerts. The network of committees is complex and appears to reflect how local towns, particularly Ashington, Morpeth and Bedlington, felt they related to each other.<sup>30</sup> The Wansbeck Festival resumed in 1946 and continues to the present day, becoming one of the largest festivals of its kind in the north of England.<sup>31</sup> A similar festival is reported in Alnwick, also under CAMDIN’s auspices. It started very modestly but by 1950, along with Wansbeck, it had become a major competitive

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<sup>26</sup> NCL: North of England Musical Tournament Programmes 1919-23; 1925-26, programme for 1919.

<sup>27</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes 1919-23, 1925-26, programme 1919.

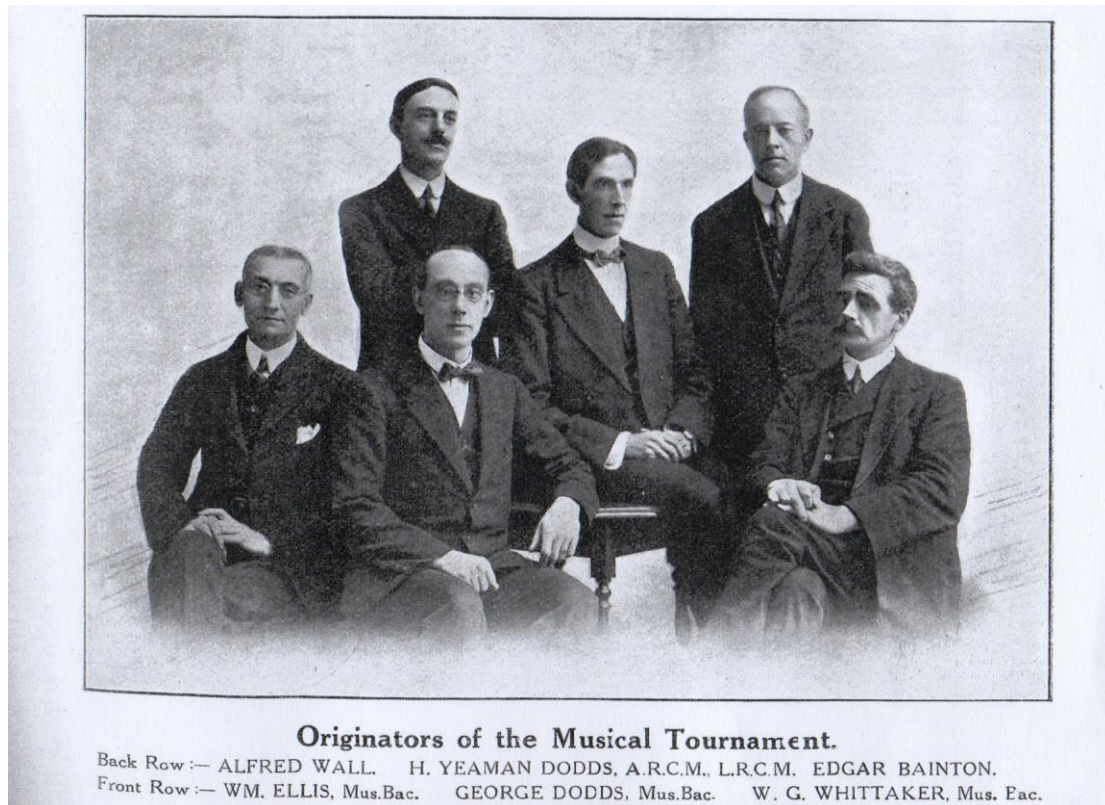
<sup>28</sup> *NMNC*, 20 February 1923.

<sup>29</sup> <[www.wansbeckmusicfestival.co.uk](http://www.wansbeckmusicfestival.co.uk)> accessed 19 January 2018.

<sup>30</sup> *MH*, 12 June 1942; *NJ*, 3 July 1941; *MH*, 16, 23 October and 11 December 1942.

<sup>31</sup> <[www.wansbeckmusicfestival.co.uk](http://www.wansbeckmusicfestival.co.uk)> accessed 19 January 2018.

festival for the northern part of the county.<sup>32</sup> At some stage between 1950 and the 1970s Alnwick's competitive festival came to an end, for in 1976 a new, non-competitive festival was established, continuing to the present.



### **Plate 19 Founders of the North of England Musical Tournament**

Reproduced from the programme of the North of England Musical Tournament, 1920

These competitive festivals, which offered classes for a wide range of musical activities, were a stimulus to music-making throughout Northumberland and there were entries from schools, Women's Institutes (WIs), Townswomen's Guilds (TWGs), male-voice choirs and choral societies as well as individuals. Reports of the festivals invariably showed that adjudicators were concerned to offer encouragement and advice as well as to make the inevitable decisions about marks. The festivals gave

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<sup>32</sup> *Northumberland Gazette*, 31 March 1950.

WIs and TWGs, especially, an incentive for rehearsal and performance which might not otherwise have been offered. In 1943 it was noted that at the Ashington Festival they ‘provide almost all the choir contestants’. In 1950 there were 165 WIs in Northumberland, and a Music, Drama and Dancing Sub-Committee of the County Federation arranged choral competitions locally. There was also a National Singing Festival in which local WI choirs competed.<sup>33</sup>

## **6.6 Geographical location**

In addition to these influences, a significant factor in the growth and development of Northumbrian choirs was their geographical location. As the east side of the county, extending as far as Berwick to the north, was the most populated, that is where most of the choirs are to be found. Two main clusters may be observed. First is the coastal group comprising Tynemouth, Whitley Bay, Monkseaton, North Shields and, just over the river, South Shields. Second is the group further to the north focused on Morpeth and Ashington but with links to Bedlington and the more northerly Alnwick. At the extreme north of the county, and close to the border with Scotland, is Berwick, whose music life, as will be shown, was much more self-contained than in the rest of Northumberland. The few choirs to the west of the county are to be found along what is now the A69 in Corbridge, Hexham and Haltwhistle. The location of the east-Northumberland towns and villages with choirs can be seen in Map 1, page 195.

## **6.7 Tynemouth and its neighbours**

The Tynemouth Choral Society advertised its Golden Jubilee in 2017, the choir’s officials being unaware that there had been several choirs in Tynemouth from the

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<sup>33</sup> *MH*, 2 April 1943; *Northumberland Gazette*, 5 May 1950.





**Map 1 East Northumberland showing location of main towns and villages with choirs**

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1850s to at least the 1910s. The earliest reference was in a report of April 1852 of the annual ‘tea party and ball of the working men of North Shields’ at which a performance of ‘sacred music, glees, and melodies [...] did the highest credit to the borough of the Tynemouth Choral Society.’<sup>34</sup> Four years later, in 1856, there is a report of a Tynemouth Sacred Harmonic Society singing at the laying of the foundation stone of a new Presbyterian Church in North Shields; the following year, 1857, some members of the Society assisted St Bede’s Church Choir at a ‘Catholic Tea Party and Concert’ for the benefit ‘of the poor of South Shields’.<sup>35</sup> Nothing further has so far come to light about these choirs, but about 1882 or 1883 another choir, the Tynemouth Choral Union, emerged. A report of May 1887, referring to its fifth annual concert, described the hall where it took place as:

artistically decorated, the windows being draped with lace curtains, and the walls embellished by the arms of the various composers. Over the platform was the arms of the union, and on the gallery another device which had been painted for the society. Mirrors and ornaments were also judiciously arranged, giving the hall the appearance of a drawing room.<sup>36</sup>

The programme, which included Weber’s *Mass in E flat*, was of a miscellaneous character and though much of the report of the concert was taken up with the contribution of the soloists, ‘a word of commendation [was] due the choruses, which were admirably rendered’. To commemorate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee the concert opened with the National Anthem ‘with additional accompaniment’, though what this amounted to is not specified.<sup>37</sup>

This choir seems to have had a comparatively short life as a further Tynemouth choir emerged a few years later. In 1893, under the headline ‘Tynemouth Choral Society’, the *Shields Daily Gazette* refers to the ‘newly-formed Amateur Vocal

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<sup>34</sup> *NSSG*, 16 April 1852.

<sup>35</sup> *NSSG*, 23 October 1856, 12 February 1857.

<sup>36</sup> *SDG*, 6 May 1887.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Society at Tynemouth' which was making its debut in St Oswin's Hall. This attracted 'a crowded and fashionable audience' and the report prophesied 'a prosperous career before this young society'.<sup>38</sup> The choir's programmes were typical of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and included *Erl King's Daughter* by Gade, *Now tramp o'er moss and fell* by Bishop and Barnby's *Skylark*.<sup>39</sup> In 1896 the Society performed Mendelssohn's 13<sup>th</sup> Psalm and a rare work by a female composer, Alice Mary Smith, *Ode to the North-East Wind*, suggesting an interest in extending the repertory beyond familiar boundaries.<sup>40</sup>

By 1900 the choir numbered some eighty voices and, under its recently appointed conductor, Michael Fairs, a music teacher, began to develop more innovative programmes. These were to include a choral ode, *The Sun Worshippers*, by A Goring Thomas and a cantata, *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, by T. Anderton.<sup>41</sup> In December 1911 the choir performed Elgar's *King Olaf*.<sup>42</sup>

A combined North and South Shields Choir had been in existence in 1850, when it performed at a three-day bazaar in aid of North Shields Wesleyan Church organ. A report of the opening of the organ in August refers to the participation of St Nicholas's Choir (from Newcastle) 'supported by the South Shields and Westoe Choral Societies'.<sup>43</sup> Despite some ambiguity about the history of the choirs at North and South Shields, it is clear that a separate South Shields Choral Society was founded c.1884 by C. F. Lloyd, who remained as conductor until 1891 when William Rea of Newcastle took over for just a year, to be followed by Michael Fairs, who had

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<sup>38</sup> *SDG*, 8 April 1893.

<sup>39</sup> *NJ*, 14 December 1893.

<sup>40</sup> *MT*, 37/636 (1896), 135.

<sup>41</sup> *SDG*, 15 December 1900. Newcastle Harmonic Society (1895) performed Anderton's *Flower(s)- de-Luce* in 1911.

<sup>42</sup> *NJ*, 8 December 1911; *MT*, 53/828 (1912), 120.

<sup>43</sup> *NSSG*, 5 April 1850; *NSSG*, 30 August 1850.

been the choir's accompanist.<sup>44</sup> The aim of the choir was that of 'educating the people in high-class music' but in his report to the annual meeting in 1893 the secretary regretted that the society had not been better supported by the public, suggesting that the local population were reluctant to be educated musically.<sup>45</sup>

In August of the following year, 1908, *Musical Times* reported that the choral societies at Tynemouth and Whitley Bay were to amalgamate to produce a choir of about 250. W. G. Whittaker became conductor of the combined choir. Borthwick suggests that the amalgamation came about because of a particularly successful performance of Walford Davies' *Everyman*.<sup>46</sup> For their first concert they performed Holst's *Hymns from the Rig Veda* and Elgar's *Black Knight* as well as Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* for orchestra.<sup>47</sup> Programmes now included works by J. S. Bach, Palestrina, Cornelius, Balfour Gardiner as well as part-songs, madrigals and folk songs.<sup>48</sup> The 1911-12 season included music by Bach, Parry, Rutland Boughton, Coleridge Taylor and Palestrina.<sup>49</sup> These programmes reflect Whittaker's influence and afford a further instance of a choir anticipating the 'Bach and British' theme associated with the Bach Choir. They also suggest a choir of considerable competence. In September 1914 the choir hoped to give a concert in aid of War Relief, but after that date nothing further has been discovered and it seems that the choir 'petered out'.<sup>50</sup> During the current Tynemouth Choral Society's Golden Anniversary year, 2017, the present author was invited to give a short talk on the early

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<sup>44</sup> NC, 11 July 1891.

<sup>45</sup> NC, 2 April 1892; NDJ, 27 September 1893.

<sup>46</sup> Borthwick, *In the Swim*, 14-15. As in the case of other towns, there are reports of earlier Whitley [Bay] Choral Societies – notably in 1865 and 1892 (MH, 5 August 1865, NCour, 2 April 1892).

<sup>47</sup> MT, 53/835 (1912), 535.

<sup>48</sup> MT, 54/848 (1913), 678.

<sup>49</sup> Borthwick, *In the swim*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Borthwick, *In the swim*, 26.

Tynemouth choirs at a summer concert. The programme included three works (by Joseph Barnby and Henry Bishop) performed by the earlier choirs.

Whatever may have happened to the Tynemouth and Whitley Bay Choral Society, choirs continued to flourish in Whitley Bay itself and the adjacent Monkseaton with a new Monkseaton Musical Society established by 1921 conducted by Arthur Milner.<sup>51</sup> The Whitley Bay, Monkseaton and District Operatic Society had been founded in 1911, though its activities were suspended during the ensuing war, and for a while functioned as the Whitley Bay (War Relief) Operatic Society. A victory performance of Edward German's *Merrie England* was postponed until 1921 owing to a lack of suitable stage facilities. By 1938 it had become simply the Whitley Bay Operatic Society, the name by which it is still known. Suspended for the duration of WWII it resumed in 1945, the victory celebrated again with a performance of *Merrie England*.<sup>52</sup>

As has been shown, the period from the mid-19th century to the end of WWII presents a very fluid situation in the choral life of these seaside towns and information about the surviving choirs, apart from the Whitley Bay Operatic Society, following the end of the war is sparse. By 1967, however, there was a perceived 'gap in the local music scene' which led to the founding in that year of the present Tynemouth Choral Society.<sup>53</sup>

## **6.8 The choirs of Berwick-upon-Tweed**

Berwick is one of the most exciting towns in England, a real town, with the strongest sense of enclosure, a town of red roofs on grey houses [...] In addition there are, of course, the better-known points of interest about Berwick, the sombre fascination of its history between England and Scotland,

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<sup>51</sup> *MT*, 62/938 (1921), 289.

<sup>52</sup> <[www.whitleybayoperaticsociety.com](http://www.whitleybayoperaticsociety.com)> accessed 26 January 2018.

<sup>53</sup> <<https://tynemouthchoral.wordpress.com>> accessed 18 November 2016.

its prolonged existence as a free town not belonging to either country, or any county but being a county of its own.<sup>54</sup>

Thus Pevsner identifies Berwick-upon-Tweed, a town 'entire of it self',<sup>55</sup> self-centred, and midway between Newcastle and Edinburgh. As we examine the town's choral groups we shall see how this comparative isolation was both a strength and a weakness; a strength in that it encouraged the town to be musically self-reliant, and a weakness in that it left its musical life vulnerable when interest in its activities ebbed.

The two institutions, with which this section is first concerned, are the Berwick Choral Union (BCU) and the Berwick Tonic Sol-fa Association (BTSA).<sup>56</sup> The BCU was founded at a meeting of the town's precentors in December 1869,<sup>57</sup> though it is likely that it already existed in embryo as the *Berwick News* refers to a concert given the previous year.<sup>58</sup> The stimulus for the establishment of a permanent choir was the arrival in the town of the precentor and conductor of psalmody at Wallace Green Church, William Anderson, a conductor with 'a passion for good music and an unbounded enthusiasm', who became the BCU's conductor.<sup>59</sup> The choir was seen as providing an opportunity to improve the competence of amateur singers and as a sort of 'feeder or nursery for [the] church choirs.'<sup>60</sup>

The origins of the BTSA are not as straightforward as those of the BCU, as there appears to have been more than one local organisation with the same name.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Northumberland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), 88. For this study, Berwick is taken to include Tweedmouth and Spittal on the south side of the river Tweed.

<sup>55</sup> John Donne, *Devotions*.

<sup>56</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of this study, we should also note the growth of amateur operatic societies in the 1920s.

<sup>57</sup> *BN*, 22 September 1925.

<sup>58</sup> *BN*, 11 April 1922.

<sup>59</sup> *BN*, 22 September 1925. In the Presbyterian churches of both England and Scotland the precentor would lead the unaccompanied singing of metrical psalms, organs not usually appearing until late in the century (see Alison Latham, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002). An organ was provided for Wallace Green Presbyterian Church by Harrison and Harrison in 1892 <[www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N04142](http://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N04142)> accessed 29 December 2016).

<sup>60</sup> *BN*, 14 May 1889.

<sup>61</sup> Several similar organisations were to be found in Newcastle and Northumberland.

From a newspaper report we learn that an association of this name held its 7<sup>th</sup> annual concert in 1873, therefore giving a starting year of c.1867,<sup>62</sup> two years before the BCU. This BTSA evidently foundered, perhaps because of the lack of sufficient members, a situation hinted at by a report which observed, following recent concerts, that both the BCU and BTSA were ‘weakened by the defection of several members’.<sup>63</sup> There seems to have been a general vocal malaise about this time for, noting that the BCU was the only group ‘for the practice of singing’, the *Berwick Advertiser* writes of singing as having ‘undergone unfortunate vicissitudes in Berwick’ and suggests that greater membership ‘would lead to the attempt again to form a Tonic Sol-fa Society’.<sup>64</sup> Although the view of the organist of the Parish Church, T. Rees Evans, who opposed tonic sol-fa notation whilst recognising its value as a means of teaching sight-singing, may not have been helpful, nonetheless a new version of the BTSA was established in 1887.<sup>65</sup>

The system we now know as Tonic Sol-fa had its origins in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the work of Sarah Glover. Her basic approach was taken up and developed in the 1840s by John Curwen, who founded the Tonic Sol-fa Association in 1851. Although a system of teaching sight-singing, it had strong moral and religious aims, especially in promoting temperance and encouraging a Protestant form of evangelism and missionary activity. In 1863 Curwen founded the Tonic Sol-fa College, described by his son, Spencer Curwen, as ‘a College from which a new Musical profession shall go forth, a profession of music teachers ‘for the people’.<sup>66</sup> Whilst temperance and

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<sup>62</sup> *BA*, 18 April 1873.

<sup>63</sup> *BA*, 9 April 1875.

<sup>64</sup> *BA*, 25 June 1880.

<sup>65</sup> *BA*, 7 May 1880; *BA*, 3 May 1892. T. Rees Evans was blind, owing to cataracts (census, 1871); he died in 1885.

<sup>66</sup> J. S. Curwen, *Memorials of John Curwen*, quoted in Charles Edward McGuire, *Music and Victorian Philanthropy: The Tonic Sol-fa Movement* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 481. McGuire’s book gives a detailed account of the establishment and growth of the Tonic Sol-fa movement.

other aims continued to be important in the Sol-fa movement, Spence Curwen widened its appeal, locating it more in the mainstream of music-making and teaching.

Tonic Sol-fa singers became widespread, often developing their skills through classes which in time evolved into choirs. E. D. Mackerness reports the growth of Tonic Sol-fa choirs throughout the country, Reginald Nettel drawing particular attention to their strength in the Potteries during the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>67</sup> At a local level we find a newspaper report of a singing class in Newcastle run by a James Pybus who ‘trains his pupils on the Curwins [sic], or Miss Glover’s, “sol fa” system’. The class had some 120 members, showing that at this early date interest in Sol-fa was becoming well established.<sup>68</sup> In 1874 we find an advertisement for a concert in Bedlington by members of the Blyth Tonic Sol-fa Choral society with ‘40 certificated Voices’, a reference to the certificates awarded by the Tonic Sol-fa College.<sup>69</sup> A few years later the *Morpeth Herald*, reporting on a concert by the Ashington Philharmonic Society, points out that the society were to be instructed ‘in the Sol Fa system’ with ‘a view [...] to cultivate a taste for music[...] to provide a little social recreation of a refreshing nature, and [...] when need required, to play the part of the good Samaritan’.<sup>70</sup>

It is apparent that in the 1870s neither the BCU nor the BTSA was very secure, though the BCU proved the more resilient perhaps because at this stage it had a more settled membership and was able to achieve better performances. The BTSA was based on a singing class run by a Mr Smith with what was described as a ‘peculiar constitution’, the result of which was that there was a constantly fluctuating

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<sup>67</sup> Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music*, 161; Nettel, *Music in the Five Towns*, 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> *NSSG*, 1 November 1850.

<sup>69</sup> *MH*, 21 March 1874.

<sup>70</sup> *MH*, 28 December 1878.



membership.<sup>71</sup> A review of the concert in 1873 refers to a less powerful chorus than before ‘on account of the presence of so many young people, and the absence [...] of old members’; it is likely that the young people had undeveloped voices and lacked the power of the older members.

It seems, both from the review of the above concert and a later review of a BCU concert, that neither choir had achieved a satisfactory standard of performance. Reporting on the BTSA concert the reviewer wrote of a quartet that in addition to the ‘flatness of the tenors [...] the confusion and discord of the parts was very perceptible’ and the voices of the quartet ‘did not blend well, the soprano’s voice being very tremulous and the tenor very flat’. Despite this, the applause ‘was hearty, if not always judicious’.<sup>72</sup> A review of a concert given by the BCU two years later, though it began with the observation that the town’s singers had now ‘attained a degree of excellence which in former years was never dreamt of’, immediately contradicted this encouraging assessment in a vicious report stating that:

the voices did not blend nicely, and there was much harshness in the choruses, a result no doubt due to the excessive exertions made by the vocalists who sometimes were very noisy and unmusical, while the coarse tone of the harmonium must have been excruciating to people with sensitive ears. There was little gradation of shading in the singing and in the sudden transition from soft to loud many of the trebles and tenors screeched like wild Indians, thereby drowning the basses and altos, both of whom were weak and sometimes inaudible.<sup>73</sup>

Much of the rest of this review was in a similar vein, and it is with astonishing insouciance that the reviewer concludes by congratulating P[eter] Richardson ‘upon his successful *debut* as conductor, in which position he discharged his duties with dignity and good taste’. It is hard to believe that reviews of this kind were justifiable in the context of a small town; they can only have been hurtful and discouraging.

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<sup>71</sup> BA, 18 April 1873. No information about this constitution has come to light.

<sup>72</sup> BA, 18 April 1873.

<sup>73</sup> BA, 9 April 1875.

However successful Richardson's debut as a conductor may have been, he did not continue in that position, for the following year William Anderson appears as conductor followed, in 1877, by Benjamin Barker.<sup>74</sup>

During the period when the BCU and BTSA existed side-by-side, we can see something of the contrast between the two organisations, especially in relation to the size of the choirs and the employment of local or imported soloists. The BCU had some 120 voices for a performance of *Messiah* in 1876, but this number soon fell to about 60, where it seems to have remained. The *Messiah* performance was given in the Corn Exchange on a sloping platform 'ornamented with red drapery, bordered with a golden fringe'.<sup>75</sup> As with many choirs, female voices preponderated and markedly so with the BTSA which in 1892 had a choir of 146, of whom 91 were sopranos, 22 altos (10 of whom were boys), 14 tenors and 19 basses. Of the women, only one, Mrs Redpath, was shown to be married.<sup>76</sup> Numbers fluctuated markedly and by 1906 they had sunk to 50, of whom only 13 were men.<sup>77</sup> Although the BTSA performed parts of the *Messiah* in 1907, after 1908 there were no further reports of the choir; possibly a decline in interest in tonic sol-fa classes and falling audiences led to its closure.

Choir members were drawn from Berwick and the surrounding area, but whereas the BTSA, as far as the evidence goes, used local soloists almost entirely, the BCU drew more widely. In 1902 there is a solitary report of the BTSA engaging a soloist from Edinburgh, but by 1904 the BCU's engagement of soloists beyond the region had become established practice, and we find them from Wakefield and the

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<sup>74</sup> *BA*, 31 March 1876, 24 April 1877.

<sup>75</sup> *BN*, 31 March 1876.

<sup>76</sup> *BN*, 3 May 1892.

<sup>77</sup> *BN*, 17 April 1906.

‘Yorkshire Concerts’, York Minster, Newcastle, Durham, Glasgow, Westminster Abbey, Edinburgh, Leeds and Carlisle.<sup>78</sup>

Though different in character, the repertory of the two choirs was typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That of the BTSA usually had a cantata, such as T. Mee Pattison’s *The Song of the Bell*, or selections from one of the standard oratorios such as *Messiah* or *The Creation* in the first half, followed by a miscellaneous selection of pieces in the second half.<sup>79</sup> The programme for 1906 offered a variation on this pattern for it began with selections from Mendelssohn’s *St Paul* and ended with a Chorale Fantasia from Wallace’s opera *Maritana* with a group of miscellaneous pieces sandwiched between.<sup>80</sup>

After the first few years, the BCU were more ambitious in their repertory, tending to perform an oratorio, most frequently by Handel, Haydn or Mendelssohn, or sometimes two works, such as Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* coupled with Mendelssohn’s *Hear my Prayer* as in 1897. It was not until 1890 that a major work by any other composer was performed – Balfe’s *Bohemian Girl*. After this the repertory was extended to offer music by the largely forgotten composers William Wallace, Gaul (*Joan of Arc*, *Holy City* and *The Ten Virgins*), Cowen, Vambery, Spohr and Smart. Of the others, the only major composer is Dvořák (*At the Foot of the Cross*), though Coleridge-Taylor, Sterndale Bennett and MacCunn remain in the repertory.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the preponderance of oratorios, the BCU from 1886 also differed from the BTSA in offering fewer concerts with miscellaneous items, though some reappeared

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<sup>78</sup> BN, 29 April 1902; BN, 5 January 1904; BA, 1 March 1878; BN, 14 May 1889; BN, 5 January 1904; BN, 26 April 1910; BN, 3 October 1911; BN, 11 June 1912, 11 March 1913.

<sup>79</sup> BN, 3 May 1892.

<sup>80</sup> BN, 17 April 1906.

<sup>81</sup> William Wallace (1860-1940) and Hamish MacCunn (1868-1916) were both born in Greenock. Wallace qualified as an ophthalmic surgeon, a profession he later abandoned for music. MacCunn studied at the RCM, becoming a composer and conductor. H. C. Colles and J. A. Fuller Maitland, ‘Wallace, William’, in *Grove IV*, vol. V, 615; Fuller Maitland with additions, ‘MacCunn, Hamish’, in *Grove IV*, vol. III, 262-63.

after 1897. This repertory is similar to that of, for instance, the NAVS and the earlier years of the NPTCS, though in performing the major Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn oratorios it has more in common with the NGCU.

As we move into the 20<sup>th</sup> century some of the insularity of Berwick is apparent. There is no music by Bach, for instance, or any of the more modern British composers that we find in the repertory of the Newcastle choirs or those in Tynemouth and Whitley Bay. If the BCU lacked the resources to perform some of the repertory of these choirs, it may also be the case that they would have had less appeal either to the members or to potential audiences. As early as 1889 a newspaper report, noting diminishing support for the concerts, speculates that ‘either classical music is not in favour or that sacred works are losing in popularity’, a situation the author deplored.<sup>82</sup> A report of 1904, observing that Berwick people ‘are slow to change’, suggests that ‘success is for us the only excuse for innovation’.<sup>83</sup> There seems no doubt that at this period classical music was not enjoying the support it had previously received. Reports in both 1910 and 1911 show that audiences were dwindling and becoming apathetic and attempts to engage interest by introducing more varied programmes ‘in place of lengthy sacred oratorios’ were proving unsuccessful.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the problem with audiences, the BCU continued to perform oratorios – *Messiah* in 1912, *The Creation* in 1913 and *Samson* in 1914. But the onset of the Great War had an immediate effect upon the choir. An attempt had been made to keep the choir together, but by 1915 many of the men were on active service and the lighting restrictions made it hazardous to be out after dark and so the decision was taken to suspend the choir’s activities during the war.<sup>85</sup> Although the BCU resumed

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<sup>82</sup> *BN*, 14 May 1889.

<sup>83</sup> *BN*, 5 January 1904.

<sup>84</sup> *BN*, 26 April 1910, 7 March 1911.

<sup>85</sup> *BN*, 26 October 1915.

when the war was over, it was not to survive much longer, for in 1925 it was decided not to meet for a year, ‘in view of the recent formation of a Musical Association in the town’, thus effectively ending the life of the choir.<sup>86</sup> Writing in 1927 about local music societies, T. W. G. Borthwick, a Berwick violinist and headmaster, thought the ‘musical appreciation of the present generation’ could be traced to the [BCU’s] influence.<sup>87</sup>

For most of the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the only regular organisation, apart from church choirs, to sustain the musical life of the town was the BCU, for the BTSA had long since ceased. The town’s enthusiasm for classical music, and oratorio in particular, had waned and interest was transferred to operatic societies. By 1921 the Berwick Operatic Society (BOS) had been established, with a repertory based on the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan and with George Ballantyne as its conductor.<sup>88</sup> This was followed in 1925 by the Berwick (and District) Musical Association, a name chosen in preference to Berwick Grand Opera Society,<sup>89</sup> although the latter would more clearly have indicated its ambitions. Gauntlett was the musical director and its first production was Balfe’s *The Bohemian Girl*, previously performed by the BCU in 1890.<sup>90</sup> This organisation appears to have ceased by 1938, when a report referred to ‘the former Musical Association’.<sup>91</sup>

There was still a perceived need in the town ‘for the study of oratorio’ and in 1928, under the leadership of Gauntlett, the Berwick Oratorio Choir was established, ‘not inaugurated as a rival to existing musical associations in the town’, rather

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<sup>86</sup> *BN*, 22 September 1925.

<sup>87</sup> *BN*, 2 August 1927.

<sup>88</sup> *BN*, 31 January 1922; *BA*, 24 March 1949.

<sup>89</sup> *BN*, 18 August 1931.

<sup>90</sup> *BN*, 18 August 1931.

<sup>91</sup> *BN*, 28 June 1928.

suggesting that suspicions of rivalry had been voiced.<sup>92</sup> This choir was launched with a performance of Spohr's *Last Judgment*, not in Berwick but in the small town of Ayton, a few miles north of the Scottish border. The choir maintained a link with Scotland, giving a combined performance of *The Creation* with the Eyemouth Choral Society in Berwick Parish Church to commemorate the bi-centenary of Haydn's birth in 1732.<sup>93</sup> Gauntlett died unexpectedly in 1936 and this seems to have brought about the demise of the Oratorio Choir, for no reports of any subsequent performance have so far been found. If, indeed, the Oratorio Choir did close in that year it may account for the expressed aim of a new choir, the Berwick and District Musical Society, formed 'to preserve and strengthen the spirit of music in this town'. It was planned to present secular works at the outset, though the conductor, Denis R. Cocks, hoped in time to perform oratorio.<sup>94</sup> Only a year later, however, there was a suggestion that the Society should close for want of men, Berwick's male singers being apostrophised by one member as 'useless' and 'absolute punk'.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, the choir survived, at least for a time, as it performed a concert version of Edward German's *Merrie England* in 1938.

At the start of WWII only the Berwick and District Musical Society and the Berwick Operatic Society were still flourishing, though most of their activities were suspended for the duration of the war. The Musical Society appears to have ceased altogether during these years, whereas the Operatic Society continued to hold its annual meetings and engage in some charitable activities. In 1940, for instance, it was reported that the latter Society had provided concerts 'for the entertainment of

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<sup>92</sup> *BN*, 18 October 1928.

<sup>93</sup> *BN*, 12 April 1932.

<sup>94</sup> *BA*, 8 October 1936.

<sup>95</sup> *BN*, 28 September 1937

soldiers',<sup>96</sup> though eventually even these appear to have been given up. At a meeting of the Operatic Society in 1941, it was observed that they 'had lost most of their men, and were now liable to lose a lot of ladies'.<sup>97</sup> With the end of the war, both organisations were able to resume their activities and to plan their programmes of music.

What is striking about the organisations that have been discussed is that they were closely integrated into the life of the town. Their membership, as well as drawing on several members of the same family, also drew on those who had businesses in the locality, were local aldermen or councillors and attended the local churches. The local businesses represented included an ironmongery, a confectioner's, a draper's and milliner's, a clothing store, a printer's, and a grocery establishment; among those in the professions were a solicitor (who became under-sheriff), a banker and a headmaster. A stationmaster at Tweedmouth had been President of the BTSA for 17 years.<sup>98</sup> For many years to go about one's business in the town, to attend church on Sunday, would be to meet choir members.

By the 1920s the BTSA had long ceased and the BCU, founded with the support of the local churches and seen as encouraging their musical life, had lost their interest. In 1912 the *Berwick News* commented on the lack of support of the town's ministers 'and people to whom such an institution should appeal because of its social value, if for no other reason'. A report in the same newspaper three years later notes that out of 18 ministers in the town, only three or four now attended the concerts<sup>99</sup> For a time the town's enthusiasm for classical music waned, though there was a resurgence of interest in the 1920s with the establishment of four new organisations.

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<sup>96</sup> *BA*, 11 January 1940.

<sup>97</sup> *BA*, 11 September 1941.

<sup>98</sup> *BN*, 29 September 1903.

<sup>99</sup> *BN*, 26 October 1915.

With the death of one of the conductors and then the impact of WWII only two of these survived to continue Berwick's musical tradition towards the second half of the century.

## 6.9 Male-voice choirs

There is not any Musicke of instruments whatsoever, comparable to that which is made of the voices of men, where the voices are good, and the same well sorted and ordered.<sup>100</sup>

Although this chapter focuses particularly on choirs beyond Newcastle, it would be incomplete if no reference was made to male-voice choirs in the city, and so they are included. The history of the British male-voice choir has been described by Christopher Wiltshire, a former conductor of the Felling Male Voice Choir.<sup>101</sup> He traces the origins of the male-voice choir to glee clubs, which were in decline by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>102</sup> It is evident from extant records that very few glee clubs were still in existence in Northumberland and its immediate vicinity at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the character of most of these seems impossible to determine. A Berwick Cycling Glee Club Party and a Berwick Glee Club are found in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but no further information about them has come to light.<sup>103</sup> It may, perhaps, be assumed that they were male-voice organisations. However, an account in 1926 of a ceremony in Berwick refers to musical items performed by a Junior Glee Party and a Senior Glee Party and shows that the Glee Parties comprised both men and women.<sup>104</sup> There had been a Glee Class in Blyth, but this had ceased by 1910.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> William Byrd, *Psalms, Sonnets and Songs of Sadness and Piety*, 1588, quoted in an online history of Felling Male Voice Choir (<[www.fmvc.org/?page\\_id=534](http://www.fmvc.org/?page_id=534)> accessed 19 November 2016).

<sup>101</sup> Christopher Robin Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir: A History and Contemporary Assessment* (PhD thesis, Goldsmith's College, London University, 1993).

<sup>102</sup> Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir*, 70.

<sup>103</sup> *BN*, 5 September 1911 and 25 May 1915 (referring to 1913).

<sup>104</sup> *BN*, 2 June 1926.

<sup>105</sup> *BN*, 11 January 1910.



In 1900 a Tyne Male Voice Glee Party participated in a sacred concert in aid of the Musicians' Union Benevolent Fund.<sup>106</sup> One other organisation was the Hexham Gentlemen's Glee Club, which offered a programme of music in 1920 including works by Webbe and Bantock.<sup>107</sup> The name of this group identifies it as deriving from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century noblemen's and gentlemen's catch clubs, which led to the establishment of glee clubs. Wiltshire refers to a quartet called the Meister Glee Singers as 'clearly the leading party of its kind by the end of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century' (ibid., 55); they visited Newcastle on a few occasions.<sup>108</sup> In the Newcastle Glee and Madrigal Society, founded in 1901,<sup>109</sup> we find something of a hybrid as the choir in its repertory and concert arrangements revealed something of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century tradition and in its participation in competitive festivals elements of the newer male-voice choirs. Although 'glee' was found in the name of a few later choirs, including the Newcastle Co-operative Gleemen, the West End Glee Club, the Annfield Plain Gleemen and the Prudhoe Gleemen, it had become an archaism in the male-voice choir category.

The Newcastle YMCA Male Voice Choir, in existence by 1893,<sup>110</sup> was one of the earliest male-voice choirs to be established in the Northumberland and Newcastle area. The Annfield Plain Gleemen Male Voice Choir was founded in 1903,<sup>111</sup> but the significant growth of such choirs was during WWI. 'Counterpoint', writing in 1917, implies that the war encouraged the establishment of factory choirs where 'a good

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<sup>106</sup> *NJ*, 13 October 1900.

<sup>107</sup> *MT*, 61/927 (1920), 337. Webbe was almost certainly Samuel Webbe (1740-1815), a composer of glees.

<sup>108</sup> Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir*, 54-55; *NDC*, 17 September and 25 November 1895; *NJ*, 15 October 1900.

<sup>109</sup> *NMNC*, 10 March 1925.

<sup>110</sup> *NJ*, 18 November 1893. Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir*, 79, identified the 1880s as 'the beginnings of the male voice choir'.

<sup>111</sup> Information from Bob Rix in an email, 1 June 2018.

sing' could be 'an antidote to the war strain'.<sup>112</sup> It is impossible to give exact figures, but up to the start of the war, and excluding the few glee clubs, there were only three or four male-voice choirs; by the mid-1930s there were nearly thirty. WWII appears to have had less influence on the founding of male-voice choirs, only four having been discovered, two in Gateshead and two in Wallsend, but it is perhaps surprising that any were founded at all. In 1951, Backworth Male Voice Choir, made up of miners from the colliery, was founded; the conductor was the colliery manager.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to male-voice choirs in areas associated especially with mining and shipbuilding, in Newcastle and Gateshead and the immediate region a number of 'works', or works related, choirs were found (see Table 6, pp. 213-14). One company, Clarke Chapman, may have been wary of the establishment of a choir because of 'unhappy experiences with other works musical enterprizes [sic]'. George Maddison, a former member of the choir, told the author that a band had previously used the company's name but had been unsuccessful and Clarke Chapman did not want to be 'associated with another possible failure'.<sup>114</sup> It was because of this that the directors would not allow the company's name to be used – hence the choir became the Victoria male-voice choir, named after the company's Victoria Works in Gateshead. The inspiration for this choir came from the 'singing and enthusiasm' engendered by a BBC radio 'Workers' Playtime' recorded in the Gateshead Works.<sup>115</sup>

The influence of the Nonconformist churches and the temperance movement can be found in many of the male-voice choirs. For example, the Felling Male Voice Choir was originally the Felling Wesleyan Male Voice Party, attached to Holly Hill

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<sup>112</sup> *NJ*, 16 November 1917.

<sup>113</sup> <[www.backworthchoir.co.uk](http://www.backworthchoir.co.uk)> accessed 19 November 2016.

<sup>114</sup> TWAS: SX134/1/1, VMC, minutes 23 October 1942.

<sup>115</sup> George Maddison in an email to the author 1 May 2017. An earlier MVC had been attached to this company (see Table 6, p. 213).

Methodist Church, Felling.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, the West End Gleemen began life as the Wyclif Male Voice Choir after the Baptist Church with which it was connected.<sup>117</sup> This choir was also committed to temperance, as late as 1954 refusing to put on a concert for Gateshead AFC as it ‘would be held on licensed premises’.<sup>118</sup> Addison Male Voice Choir, however, does not appear to have been troubled by temperance as

**Table 6 Works choirs**

<b>Name of choir</b>	<b>Nature of company</b>	<b>Date</b>
A. Reyrolle and Co. (Ashington) <sup>119</sup>	Electrical engineering	by 1946
Armstrong Naval Yard MVC <sup>120</sup>	Shipbuilding and armaments	proposed 1917
Clarke, Chapman and Company MVC <sup>121</sup>	Heavy engineering, especially cranes	by 1921
Felling Mechanics MVC <sup>122</sup>	Mechanical engineering	by 1972
Greenside Colliery <sup>123</sup>	Coalmining	by 1951
Hawthorn Leslie’s MVC <sup>124</sup>	Heavy engineering and shipbuilding	by 1925
Michell Bearings Gleemen <sup>125</sup>	Bearings for industrial and marine use	by 1948
Newcastle Co-operative Gleemen <sup>126</sup>	Retail	by 1930
Newcastle CWS MVC <sup>127</sup>	Merchandise	founded 1924/25
Newcastle Corporation Transport Department’s MVC <sup>128</sup>	Transport	by 1930

<sup>116</sup> Norman Williams, *Men o’ Felling: The History of Felling Male Voice Choir 1920-1970* ([Felling: Felling Male Voice Choir, 1969]), 4.

<sup>117</sup> TWAS: SX57, West End Gleemen, Administrative History.

<sup>118</sup> TWAS: SX57/2, West End Gleemen, AGM minutes 5 March 1954.

<sup>119</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, 1939, 1946-49, programme 1946, 26. A. Reyrolle and Co. is based on Hebburn-on-Tyne (<[www.gracesguide.co.uk](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk)> accessed 12 September 2018).

<sup>120</sup> *NJ* of 16 November 1917 refers to the nucleus ‘of what promises to be a flourishing organisation’.

<sup>121</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, 1919-23, 1925-26. See also Victoria MVC.

<sup>122</sup> Referred to in a letter, c.1972, in TWAS: SX134/9, Victoria MVC.

<sup>123</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, programme 1951, 116.

<sup>124</sup> *NMNC*, 6 February 1923; *Daily Chronicle*, 28 April 1925. Hawthorn, Leslie and Co. was an amalgamation of an engineering and a shipbuilding company (Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 242, 245-47).

<sup>125</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, programme 1948, 39. Michell Bearings was established in Newcastle in 1920 (<[www.michellbearings.com](http://www.michellbearings.com)> accessed 12 September 2018).

<sup>126</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, programme 1930, 63.

<sup>127</sup> *NJ*, 22 March 1923 (the first public concert); *NMNC*, 17 March 1925.

<sup>128</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, programme 1930, 63; TWAS: SX104/1, Whitley Bay MVC, minutes 18 December 1932, where it is referred to as ‘Newcastle Corporation Tramways etc. Male Voice Choir’; *NJ*, 30 January 1933.

**Table 6 Works choirs (*continued*)**

<b>Name of choir</b>	<b>Nature of company</b>	<b>Date</b>
Newcastle Corporation MVC <sup>129</sup>	Civic administration	by 1946
Newcastle LNER MVC <sup>130</sup>	Railways	founded 1937
[Newcastle] LNER Temperance Institute <sup>131</sup>	Railways	by 1932
Newcastle Post Office MVC <sup>132</sup>	Postal telegraphy	founded 1923
Parsons' MVC <sup>133</sup>	Steam turbines	by 1933
Victoria MVC <sup>134</sup>	Heavy engineering, especially cranes	founded 1942
Walker Gate LNER MVC <sup>135</sup>	Railways	by 1925
Wallsend Shipyard MVC <sup>136</sup>	Shipbuilding	by 1945
Wallsend Slipway MVC <sup>137</sup>	Heavy engineering	by 1944

a member was to be brought before the committee for 'carrying a bottle of beer into a recent concert'.<sup>138</sup> Even where choirs had no direct church association, many of their members would have sung in church choirs, and conductors also were sometimes organists and/or choirmasters of local churches. George Maddison confirms that several members of the Victoria MVC were also members of local church choirs and two of the choir's conductors were church organists. Norman Williams sees the decline of religious observance and therefore of church choirs in the 1950s as contributing to the decline of MVCs.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Referred to in TWAS: SX23/1/1, Wallsend MVC, minutes 6 September 1946.

<sup>130</sup> Founded in 1937, and interrupted by WWII, the choir was revived in 1945. Later, as women wished to join, it became the Newcastle LNER Choral Society (*NJ*, 31 August 1945).

<sup>131</sup> NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, programme 1932, 72.

<sup>132</sup> *NMNC*, 13 February 1923.

<sup>133</sup> *NJ*, 30 January 1933. Parsons Marine Steam Turbine Co. was formed in 1898 (Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*), 245).

<sup>134</sup> TWAS: SX134, Victoria MVC established in Clarke-Chapman's engineering company. See also R. N. Openshaw, *The Cranemakers: A History of Clarke Chapman Ltd* (1999). See also Clarke, Chapman and Company MVC.

<sup>135</sup> *NDC*, 28 April 1925.

<sup>136</sup> *NJ*, 27 October 1945.

<sup>137</sup> *NJ*, 3 April 1944. Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Co., situated near the Wallsend Shipyard, made engines and boilers for ships including the original *Mauretania* (Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*), 241, 247).

<sup>138</sup> TWAS: SX106/1/1, Addison MVC, minutes 2 March 1950.

<sup>139</sup> George Maddison in an email 1 May 2017; Williams, *Men o' Felling*, 4.

The character of the male-voice choirs may be distinguished from most of the mixed-voice choirs by their repertory, the nature of their concerts, their commitment to charities and their participation in competitive festivals. The repertory of most male-voice choirs was based on popular part songs (which were usually catalogued by the title or the first words of the music rather than the composer). A complete list of the part songs in the repertory of the Victoria Male Voice Choir shows there were about 200, including hymns, songs from musicals, spirituals, one or two choruses from Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, folk songs, Christmas carols and ‘parlour’ music such as *The Lost Chord*, *The Holy City*, *I’ll Walk Beside You*, and *Bless this House*.<sup>140</sup> The Whitley Bay Male Voice Choir had fewer part songs – 92 – in their collection in 1932.<sup>141</sup> The practice among the choirs was to maintain a core repertory in rehearsal that could be drawn upon throughout a season. New works were added from time to time, and among these were test pieces for competitions. These were not always liked, may only have been performed once and were usually regarded, and referred to, as ‘heavy’ music. Lighter pieces on the whole characterised most of the programmes, with ‘heavier pieces’ for performance in church.<sup>142</sup> Choirs sometimes had what might be considered a ‘signature tune’. For the Victoria Male Voice Choir it was *Stout-hearted Men*,<sup>143</sup> and for the West End Gleemen *We are the Gleemen* (see Plate 20, p.216).<sup>144</sup>

Concerts were usually given by invitation, though a few choirs, for example the Addison Male Voice Choir, gave an annual concert under their own auspices.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Victoria MVC music list, 1978, supplied to the author by George Maddison.

<sup>141</sup> TWAS: SX104/1, Whitley Bay MVC, AGM minutes 21 September 1932.

<sup>142</sup> TWAS: SX134/1/1, Victoria MVC, AGM minutes 23 June 1978.

<sup>143</sup> *Gateshead Post*, 8 September 1999.

<sup>144</sup> TWAS: SX57/2, West End Gleemen, with AGM minutes.

<sup>145</sup> TWAS: SX106/1/1, Addison MVC, minutes 13 January 1949.

**MENDON L.M.**  
Old German Melody

We are the Glee-men come to cheer, with songs of  
As we now end we beg to leave our grac-ious

joy we hold so dear. We hope you find them  
thanks this pleas-ant eve. We wish you all a

to your taste and will not want to part in haste.  
peace-ful rest and length of days with health be blest.

**Plate 20 *We are the Gleemen***

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Whitley Bay Male Voice Choir was distinctive in offering two concerts a year on a subscription basis.<sup>146</sup> The invitation concerts were usually to offer a church or other organisation an evening of entertainment or in aid of a charity. A 'Programme of subscription basis.<sup>147</sup> The invitation concerts were usually to offer a church or other organisation an evening of entertainment or in aid of a charity. A 'Programme of Events' for the Victoria Male Voice Choir in 1972 and 1973 includes concerts at churches, an 'old peoples' home', for 'handicapped people' in Jarrow, over 60s and pensioners, a Rheumatics and Arthritics Association and an Aged Miners' Home.<sup>148</sup> For some concerts a comedian or other entertainer was provided, though when Addison Male Voice Choir invited the Tyneside comedian Bobby Thompson to join them in a concert he was noted as being unreliable and ultimately did not appear.<sup>149</sup>

Male-voice choirs rallied to support local disaster funds, especially when their own communities were affected. For instance, the Newcastle West End Gleemen contributed to the Scotswood Relief Fund following the Montagu Colliery Disaster in 1925 when 38 men and boys were drowned or suffocated by black damp when water flooded a Scotswood pit on 30 March 1925.<sup>150</sup> The Victoria Male Voice Choir supported the Davy Roll Tragedy Fund in aid of the dependents of three men killed at the Davy Roll Foundry in 1978, an accident which occurred when molten metal spilled on to the three men.<sup>151</sup> Male-voice choirs also showed concern during the depression and at other times for those who were unemployed. In 1932, for example, Whitley Bay Male Voice Choir agreed to participate in a performance of *Messiah* by

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<sup>146</sup> TWAS: SX104/1, Whitley Bay MVC, AGM minutes 13 September 1933.

<sup>147</sup> TWAS: SX104/1, Whitley Bay MVC, AGM minutes 13 September 1933.

<sup>148</sup> TWAS: SX134/1/1, Victoria MVC, 'Programme of Events' for 1972, 1973.

<sup>149</sup> TWAS: SX106/1/1, Addison MVC, minutes 5, 12 March 1953.

<sup>150</sup> *NJ*, 31 March, 1 April 1925. See also A. Desmond Walton with West Newcastle Local Studies, compilers, *The Archive Photographs Series: Old Scotswood Road* (Stroud: The Chalford Publishing Company, 1997), 87-90.

<sup>151</sup> *NJ*, 15 September 1978.

combined Whitley Bay choirs to ‘assist the unemployed of the district’.<sup>152</sup> Small individual offers of help could be such as paying for an out-of-work member to attend an annual outing or exempting unemployed members from the cost of a rule book.<sup>153</sup>

Preparation for and participation in competitive festivals formed a substantial part of male-voice choirs’ activities and was beneficial in helping to maintain standards,<sup>154</sup> but could make extra demands on rehearsal time and reduce concert performances.<sup>155</sup> Festivals were found throughout the area, though choirs also travelled further afield – to Stockton and Darlington in Yorkshire, for instance. The better and more ambitious choirs entered the NEMT and the prestigious Blackpool Festival, at which to come first was a special accolade. Addison Male Voice Choir achieved this in 1965.<sup>156</sup> The most successful choir at Blackpool was the Felling Male Voice Choir, a choir which had ‘unrivalled success at Festivals’. This choir’s greatest achievement was winning the Festival of Britain Trophy for Male Voice Choirs, presented by Princess Elizabeth, at the National Competitive Festival held in the Royal Festival Hall in 1951.<sup>157</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of male-voice choirs was found in the ambivalent relationship between choir and conductor, especially as observed in practices. Although a few conductors were organists and choirmasters at local churches, most were not musically trained and appear not to have understood fully the role of a choral conductor especially in exercising the necessary discipline over a choir. They were often work mates of the choir members, or came from the same

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<sup>152</sup> TWAS: SX104/1, Whitley Bay MVC, minutes 18 December 1932.

<sup>153</sup> TWAS: SX23/1/1, Wallsend MVC, minutes 23 August 1946; TWAS: SX57/1/1, West End Gleemen, minutes 4 September 1925.

<sup>154</sup> TWAS: SX106/1/2, Addison MVC, AGM minutes 7 January 1960.

<sup>155</sup> TWAS: SX57/1/1, West End Gleemen, minutes 27 February 1931.

<sup>156</sup> TWAS: SX106/6/1, Addison MVC, Silver Jubilee Brochure, 1972.

<sup>157</sup> Williams, *Men o’ Felling*, 12, 19-21. A detailed account of the Felling MVC is given in Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir*.



community, and this may have made it more difficult to establish an appropriate relationship between conductor and choir. Discipline was a recurring issue: for most of the choirs examined meeting after meeting referred to late starts, absenteeism, smoking at rehearsals and even poor behaviour on the concert platform. One regular issue was the tendency of choir members to talk while individual lines were being practised, and as much time was given to these line practices, especially necessary for those who were not sight readers, there was inevitably much talking.<sup>158</sup>

What is curious in this question of discipline is that it was frequently members of the choir themselves who raised it. One example out of very many must suffice. At an annual meeting of the Wallsend Male Voice Choir one of the members ‘spoke about the lack of discipline in the Choir and remarked very forcibly on what he termed regular half timers’. This was followed by comments from others about discipline ‘and smoking between items at practices’, of which the conductor himself was guilty. It is instructive to note the response of the conductor (J. T. Branley, a master grocer) who, having apologised for breaching any smoking rules, went on to say that he ‘was not a School-master conducting a class of children, the use of a [sic] Iron Hand should not be necessary if the real spirit prevailed in the Choir’.<sup>159</sup> Though it is not clear what he meant by ‘real spirit’, it is apparent that he did not see matters of discipline as his responsibility.

The matter of where responsibility lay – and indeed the overall direction of many male-voice choirs - was complex. Repeated absenteeism could be dealt with by the committee through suspension, having voting rights withdrawn or, in extreme

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<sup>158</sup> See for example TWAS: SX134/1/1, Victoria MVC, AGM minutes 6 May 1949, 30 May 1958; TWAS: SX23/1/1, Wallsend MVC, AGM minutes 31 January 1947, 3 February 1950, 17 February 1967; TWAS: SX104/1, Whitley Bay MVC, AGM minutes 11 September 1935.

<sup>159</sup> TWAS: SX23/1/1, Wallsend MVC, AGM minutes 31 January 1947. J. T. Branley, death certificate, 23 February 2018.

cases by expulsion from the choir.<sup>160</sup> A member could also be asked to leave the choir if his singing was not ‘in the musical interests of the Choir’.<sup>161</sup> When it came to more general issues, including discipline, authority was more diffuse and therefore often ineffective. It was at AGMs that very many of the issues were raised and often the chairman or one of the members seemed to take the initiative, not infrequently appearing to instruct the conductor on what should be done. Over the question of line practices, for instance, where it would have seemed that this matter was the prerogative of the conductor, we find that in the Addison Male Voice Choir it was decided:

that the Chairman put before the Choir with as much tact as possible, that when the Conductor is busy trying over any individual line, would the lines that are not engaged at the moment please give the best of order, to enable the lines that are been [sic] tried to concentrate.<sup>162</sup>

This may have had some effect, as this disciplinary matter disappeared from the minutes of this choir. In the Wallsend Male Voice Choir there are examples of the chairman suggesting that if members gave more thought ‘to the words of the music they were singing, it would certainly better their performance’, and on another occasion a proposal ‘that the choir should sit during practice’ was agreed for a trial period.<sup>163</sup>

The paradox is that disciplinary and other issues conductors seemed unable to solve did not prevent success in contests. In one or two cases, and notably with the Felling Male Voice Choir, trained and experienced conductors overcame any problems there may have been, but in other cases the conclusion seems to be that the sheer determination to succeed at contests ultimately imposed a discipline, even if

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<sup>160</sup> TWAS: SX57, West End Gleemen, minutes 24 February 1928, 31 March 1933; Whitley Bay MVC, minutes 22 March 1946.

<sup>161</sup> TWAS: SX104, Whitley Bay MVC, minutes 28 March 1934.

<sup>162</sup> TWAS: SX106/1/1, Addison MVC, minutes 11 January 1951.

<sup>163</sup> TWAS: SX23/1/1, AGM minutes 3 March 1972, 13 July 1973.

erratic, that might not otherwise have been achieved. George Maddison, a member of the Victoria Male Voice Choir, also suggests that the ‘joy of singing’ and the lack of other distractions such as television were a factor, and in times of unemployment, especially during the depression, singing was a hobby that could be pursued relatively cheaply.<sup>164</sup>

Wiltshire identified the 1920s and 1930s as ‘the golden era of British male-voice choral work’<sup>165</sup> and this is borne out by evidence locally. During the following decades competition work and, though to a decreasing extent, concert work ensured a platform for the choirs. The decline began in the 1970s and its elements included those seen among the oratorio choirs: declining membership, a lack of young singers and a tired repertory. In addition, however, and reflecting one of the main differences between male-voice choirs and oratorio choirs, was the decline in demand for the choirs’ services. As early as 1954 the Victoria Male Voice Choir noted a lack of concerts, concluding that ‘more organisations were forming their own entertainment parties’.<sup>166</sup> By 1967, the West End Gleemen reported the near absence of church concerts,<sup>167</sup> suggesting that churches were ceasing to look for the sort of entertainment provided by these choirs. The Wallsend Male Voice Choir in 1975 reported a lack of concerts, commenting that this ‘seemed to be depriving the choir of its sense of purpose’, - an observation that might have been reflected elsewhere. The following year, the same theme was noted: regular concert work was ‘sadly missed’.<sup>168</sup> The choir, which at this date operated within the Wallsend Adult Association, soldiered on

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<sup>164</sup> George Maddison in an email to the author, 24 February 2018.

<sup>165</sup> Wiltshire, *The British Male Voice Choir*, 125.

<sup>166</sup> TWAS: SX134/1/1 Victoria MVC, AGM minutes 23 April 1954.

<sup>167</sup> TWAS: SX57/2 West End Gleemen, minutes 1 May 1967.

<sup>168</sup> TWAS: SX23/1/1 Wallsend MVC, AGM minutes 28 February 1975, 28 February 1976.

until 1980 when its membership had dropped to about ten, making it ineligible to continue as the Association required a minimum membership of sixteen. With some concert possibilities and the continuance of competitive festivals a few of the local male-voice choirs, including the Victoria Male Voice Choir (see Plate 21, p. 222), continued until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but after that only the strongest, and notably the Prudhoe Gleemen and Felling Male Voice Choir, survived.



**Plate 21 The Victoria Male Voice Choir, 1983**

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## **6.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to give some account of the range of choral singing outside Newcastle itself. It has identified the role of the churches, both Anglican and nonconformist, in fostering church music during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which

ultimately contributed to the growth of secular choirs in Northumberland. This flourishing choral tradition permeated the county, though it was especially strong in the coastal area round Tynemouth and Whitley Bay and in the cluster of towns further north, focused on Alnwick and Morpeth. Berwick-upon-Tweed, being well out of reach of Newcastle, was therefore necessarily more self-reliant. Under the influence especially of its churches it developed a varied choral life closely integrated with the local community.

In contrast with the mixed-voice choir culture was that of the male-voice choir movement. These choirs developed a distinctive character of their own, differing in almost every respect from the mixed-voice choir tradition which they grew up alongside. After a hesitant beginning in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they gained in popularity especially during and after WWI, many of them associated with local factories and businesses. They were heavily involved with the competitive festival movement, one or two gaining a national reputation, something which the mixed-voice choirs rarely achieved. They reached their zenith in the years following WWII and most had declined and closed by the 1980s.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Halls and Orchestras**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Choirs could not exist in a vacuum: they needed somewhere to rehearse and perform and most needed instrumental accompaniment. Whilst reports and programmes of concerts almost invariably named the hall, church or other venue in which the concert was to take place, references to rehearsal venues are infrequently encountered. This chapter shows the challenges choirs faced in their search for suitable venues especially in Newcastle. More widely in Northumberland the problems were limited as villages and towns had generally fewer possible buildings to choose from; moreover, most choirs were comparatively small so large concert halls were not needed.

The orchestral life of the region, in so far as it impinged on choral activity, was complex, revealing a mix of ad hoc groups, imported professional orchestras and local amateur orchestras. In the absence of an orchestra, either from necessity or choice, an organ was generally the preferred instrument, though a piano, and occasionally a harmonium, were also used. In many cases, usually for financial reasons, an organ replaced woodwind and brass instruments.

#### **7.2 Newcastle: halls, churches and other venues**

Newcastle, as was recounted in Chapter 1, acquired a Town Hall, incorporating a concert hall, in 1858. Prior to this, various venues had been in use for concerts, including the 'Large Assembly Room' in Westgate Street, the Turk's Head Long Room, a Music Hall in Blackett Street and the Theatres Royal in Mosley Street and Grey Street. The Blackett Street Music Hall had been built by Grainger in 1830 and

was later replaced by his Nelson Street Music Hall.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes for sacred music performances, St Nicholas's Church, as the largest church in the town, was used. The Assembly Rooms, both Theatres Royal and St Nicholas's had been used as venues for the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century festivals.<sup>2</sup> The NSHCS, founded in 1852, gave most of its early concerts in the Music Hall in Nelson Street, transferring to the new Town Hall when it opened. (Map 2, page 226 shows the main venues in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.) The Music Hall had been built in 1838 (the name and date are above the door) as part of Grainger and Dobson's development of the town centre. Although having a large two- or three-manual organ by Nicholson, the Music Hall (see Plate 22, page 227) was small and the need to accommodate about 250 performers and an audience meant that concerts were sometimes repeated to allow more people to attend. Referring to performances of *Messiah* and *Samson* in 1853, the *North and South shields Gazette* commented that 'a larger room was required to allow [the choruses] to be heard with proper effect.'<sup>3</sup>

The Town Hall was to be the main performance venue in the town for many choirs until the City Hall was opened in 1928. The former concert hall, though apparently offering excellent facilities, was soon found to be inadequate and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the subject of constant complaints from performers and audiences alike. As early as 1863, when the council were considering adding an upper gallery to extend the accommodation in the hall, a council member thought no alteration could make any improvement, adding that '[t]he whole building was a blunder'.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the century safety issues, and notably 'dangerous conditions of egress', especially

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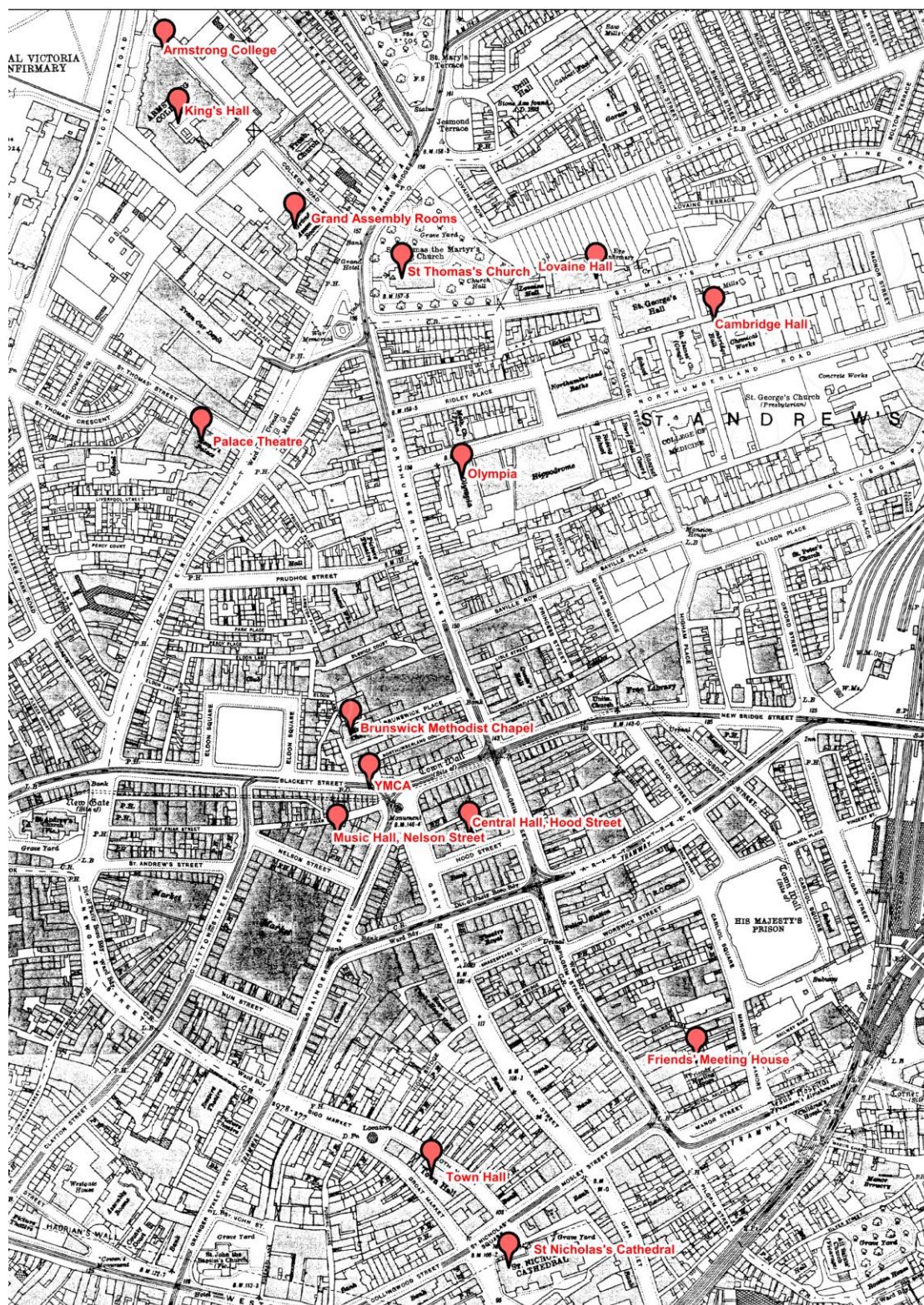
<sup>1</sup> See Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 228.

<sup>2</sup> NCL: L042 Local Tracts, Vol. 2, Concerts and Musical Festivals [1785-1883], items 34a (1837), 44 (1825) and 46 (1824); *NJ*, 5 December 1835. For an account of these festivals see Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*.

<sup>3</sup> *NG*, 17 January 1852; *NSSG*, 28 May 1852 etc, 9 April 1853; Elvin, *Family Enterprise*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Proceedings* 1862-63, 261.

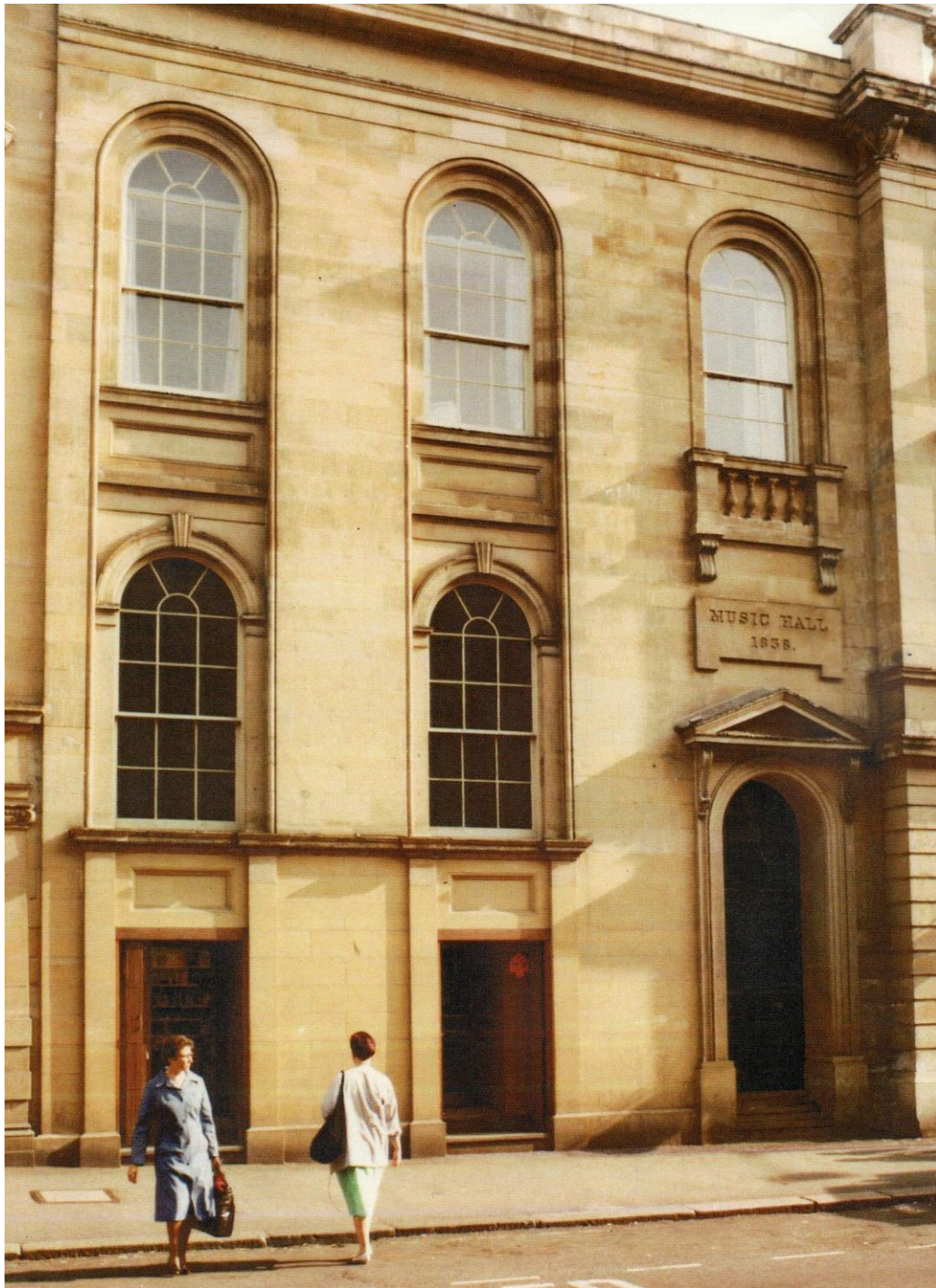




Map 2 Newcastle c.1900 showing late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century venues

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**Plate 22 The Music Hall, Nelson Street, 1983**

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especially in case of fire, had caused the council to reduce the seating capacity of the concert hall by some 800. An Act of 1890 required all places in which music, singing

and dancing took place to be licensed by the local magistrates, taking account of public safety. The city engineer had certified that the Town Hall offered safe exit for only 1,700.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the safety issues, the hall was unwelcoming, for a report of a *Messiah* performance by the NHS 1891 in December 1893 referred to the impossibility of enjoying a concert:

on a cold, damp night in so draughty and cheerless a building. It is indeed a sacrifice that lovers of music make at the shrine of Apollo to sit out a concert there at all.<sup>6</sup>

The following year the state of the concert hall was said to have been ‘positively disgraceful’ for a long time, causing a reduction in the number of bookings.<sup>7</sup> No improvement seems to have been made by 1898, for in a review of the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society’s concert the observation was made that ‘concert-goers may be pardoned for wondering if the hall is really to be re-decorated as promised months ago’, and, as an interesting comment on the kind of audience expected, ‘made moderately fit for people in evening dress to frequent’. ‘Surely’ the review ended, the hall ‘is at its lowest depth of dinginess now’.<sup>8</sup>

In 1909 the issue of a suitable venue for concerts came to a head when a musical festival was planned for the town. Because of the issues with the Town Hall the festival organisers settled on the Palace Theatre. This venue required major adaptation, including the installation of an organ, but turned out also to be

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<sup>5</sup> An Act to amend the Public Health Acts, 53 & 54 Vict., 1890, pt. 3, sect. 6; *NC*, 14, 21, 24 November 1891. See also Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 19-20.

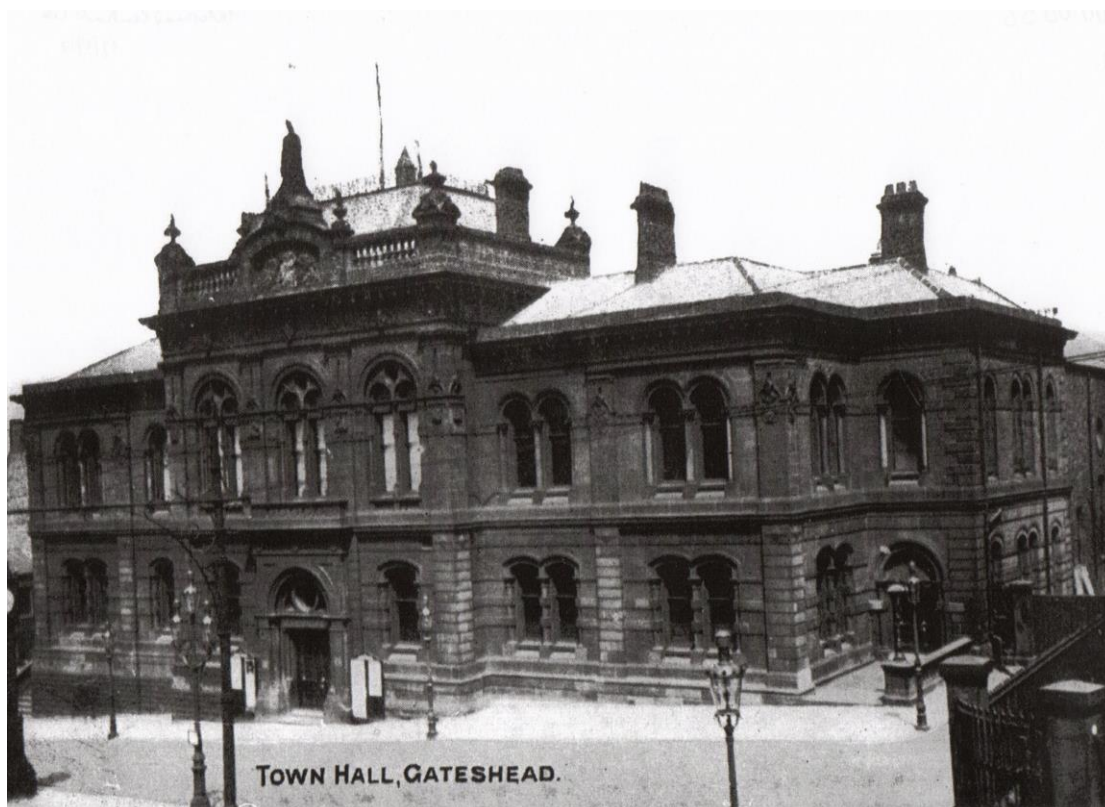
<sup>6</sup> *NDC*, 24 December 1895.

<sup>7</sup> *NC*, 21 March 1896. The question of a new Town Hall was raised again in 1901 (*NDJ*, 4 March 1901) and for some years to come.

<sup>8</sup> *NDJ*, 2 February 1898.

unsatisfactory, mainly because the theatre's acoustics were wholly unsuited to choral and orchestral performances.<sup>9</sup>

The Gateshead Choral Society (later the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union) held its concerts in Gateshead Town Hall until 1893 when, because of the increasing size of the choir and the need to accommodate an orchestra, the Gateshead premises proved inadequate (see Plate 23, p. 229). Concerts were then given in



**Plate 23 Gateshead Town Hall**

Gateshead Central Library

Newcastle Town Hall.<sup>10</sup> At the turn of the century, however, the choir gave at least three concerts in Olympia on Northumberland Road. This building, opened in 1893, was a 'general purpose hall', seating 3,500 (see Plates 24 and 25, pp. 231, 232). Frank Manders describes it as 'of corrugated sheeting on a cast iron framework, with an

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<sup>9</sup> The arrangements for the performances in the Palace Theatre for the 1909 festival are described in Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 19-21.

<sup>10</sup> NCL: L784.96 NGCU Programmes 1889-98, programmes 21 March 1893 etc.

ornate plaster frontage'. It was equipped with an organ by Blackett and Howden, inaugurated in February 1896. The organ may have been a temporary instrument, for the programme of a concert by the NGCU at Olympia in November 1900 states that the organ had been 'supplied by Messrs Nicholson & Newbegin, Organ Builders, Newcastle-on-Tyne'<sup>11</sup> Although a report in a local paper had reservations about the name, suggesting it implied a 'menagerie, circus, or a place where acrobatic performances may be seen', there was gratitude that Newcastle now had 'a comfortable and commodious concert hall'. Opinion on the acoustics of the hall, however, was reserved until a concert could be given, though no opinion on the acoustics has come to light.<sup>12</sup> Having been a venue for variety, concerts, 'moving pictures' and other events, it burnt down in 1907.<sup>13</sup> The NGCU, however, had returned to the Town Hall as their usual venue before this unfortunate event, though sometimes they performed in St Nicholas's Cathedral, as in April 1920.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in January of that year the *Musical Times* reported that '[o]ne of the results of the lack of suitable concert halls in the city has been to open the doors of the Cathedral to sacred choral performances',<sup>15</sup> though in fact the Cathedral was no stranger to choral concerts.

For other late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Newcastle choirs, including the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society, the Town Hall usually remained the default venue for their concerts, though with occasional excursions elsewhere. The NHarmSoc 1891 gave a performance at Olympia in February 1894<sup>16</sup> and similarly the NPTCS (later the

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<sup>11</sup> *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 19 February 1896; Frank Manders, *Cinemas of Newcastle* (Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing, rev. edn 2005), 12, 14-15; GCL: L784.96, NGCU Programmes of Concerts, programme 28 November 1900.

<sup>12</sup> *NDJ*, 6 December 1893.

<sup>13</sup> Manders, *Cinemas of Newcastle*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *MT*, 61/928 (1920), 421.

<sup>15</sup> *MT*, 61/923 (1920), 60

<sup>16</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society, Programmes 1892-1912, programme 26 January 1894.



NHarmSoc 1895) were at Olympia in March 1898,<sup>17</sup> though they had also performed once in the Gateshead Town Hall.<sup>18</sup> The main venue for the rather select T. Albion Alderson's Amateur Choir was the Town Hall, the programme of a private 'Evening Dress' concert in 1883 offering the advice that because of 'inadequate Cloak Room accommodation, Ladies and Gentlemen are advised to take their wraps and hats with them into the Hall', another instance of the limitations of the building.<sup>19</sup> The ladies of the choir on at least one occasion performed in the Grand Salon of the elegant Assembly Rooms. The programme included Henry Smart's cantata for ladies' voices,



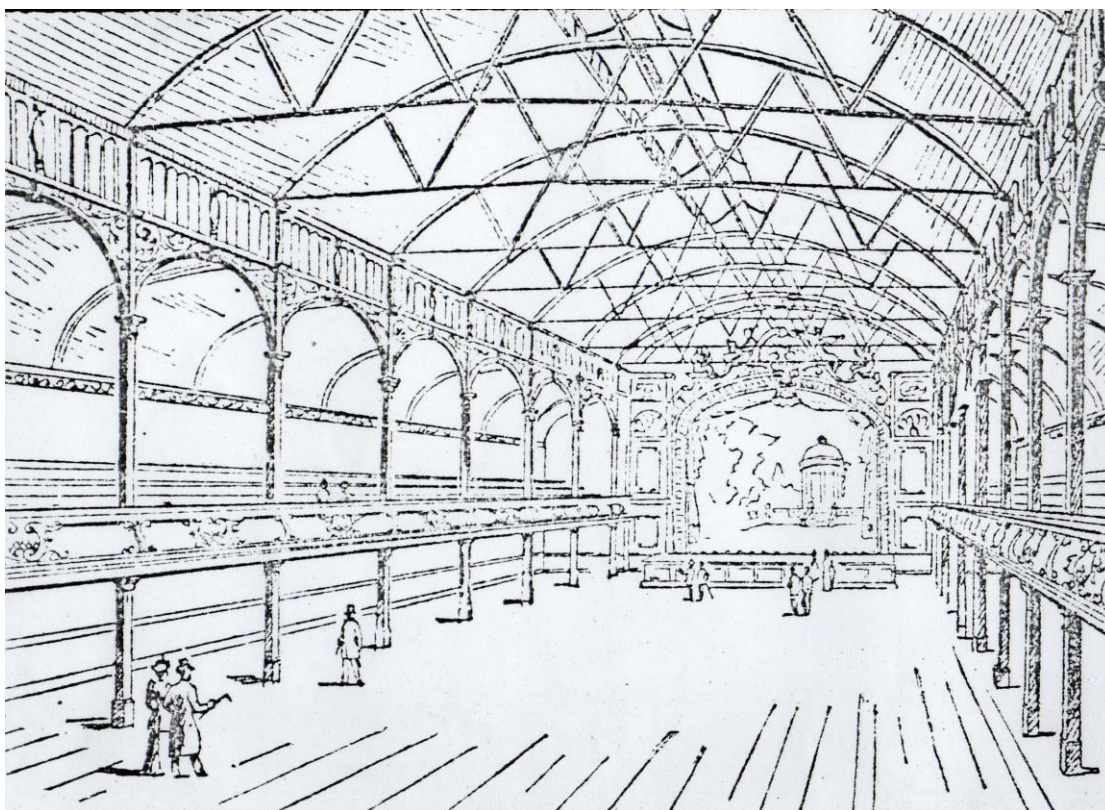
**Plate 24 Olympia, exterior, 1905**

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<sup>17</sup> NCL: 780.73 NPTCS, Programmes 1896-1900, programme 23 March 1898.

<sup>18</sup> NCL: 780.73 *ibid.*, programme 8 April 1896.

<sup>19</sup> NCL: 780.73 Alderson's Choir, Programmes 1879-1889, programme 18 December 1883.



**Plate 25 Olympia interior, 1893**

Reproduced by kind permission of Newcastle City Library, Local Studies and Family History Centre

*The Fishermidens*. The Assembly Rooms were those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Fenkle Street; the later Grand Assembly Rooms in King's Walk were not built until 1889.<sup>20</sup>

If we have some idea of where these choirs performed, where, then, did they rehearse? Initially, the NSHCS rehearsed in the Music Hall, where there was an organ;<sup>21</sup> later they were to use St John's Church School Room, in Rosemary Lane, referred to in 1862 as 'the society's usual place of meeting',<sup>22</sup> suggesting that the school room had been their rehearsal venue for some time. In 1862, for a performance of *Messiah*, a rehearsal of the NSHCS with the assistance of Mr Rea's Choir and St Nicholas's Church choir was held in the 'Great-room' of the new Town Hall. Another

<sup>20</sup> *MT*, 21/446 (1880), 187. See McCombie, *Newcastle and Gateshead*, 206.

<sup>21</sup> *NJ*, 31 January 1852; *NCour*, 27 February 1852.

<sup>22</sup> *NDJ*, 27 March 1861; 5, 13 May 1862. Rosemary Lane ran along the east end of St John's Church.

rehearsal was held in ‘the room usually occupied by Mr Rea’s Choir’, a full rehearsal with the band and choir took place ‘in the orchestra [that is, on the platform] of the great hall’ and a further choral rehearsal ‘in Mr Rea’s practice room’.<sup>23</sup>

The next few years cover the mixed fortunes of the NSHCS described in Chapter 2. The Choral Union (the amalgamation of the NSHCS and Mr Rea’s Choir), under Rea’s direction, had met in the practice room in the Town Hall,<sup>24</sup> though for some unexplained reason in April 1868 they rehearsed in St Nicholas’s National School.<sup>25</sup> By September Helmore had become conductor and the choir met in St Nicholas’s School Room, presumably to be identified with the National School.<sup>26</sup> The following month, however, when it was ‘at present contemplated to hold rehearsals on the first Monday of every month’, we find the choir rehearsing in a school room in Blackett Street. This could have been either the school room attached to the Blackett Street Presbyterian Church, which opened in 1858, or a similar room in the same street associated with St James’s Independent or Presbyterian Church which in 1884 became the premises of the YMCA.<sup>27</sup> In preparation for a performance of *Messiah* in December, a ‘general rehearsal’, presumably to include the orchestra, was to be held in the Town Hall.<sup>28</sup>

That part of the Choral Union that continued under Rea and was to become the second version of Mr Rea’s Choir, performed *Messiah* in October 1868, and one might have assumed that the choir rehearsed in the practice room at the Town Hall. However, the following year a rehearsal of the ‘vocal amateurs’, by whom we must

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<sup>23</sup> *NDJ*, 16, 20 May 1862.

<sup>24</sup> *NDJ*, 25 July 1867.

<sup>25</sup> *NDJ*, 15 April 1868.

<sup>26</sup> *NDJ*, 8 September 1868.

<sup>27</sup> *NDJ*, 6 October 1868. See Frank Manders, *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Selection of the Earliest Photographs* (Newcastle: Newcastle City Libraries and Arts, 1995), 31. See also <[www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/NBL/Newcastle/nonconf](http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/NBL/Newcastle/nonconf)> accessed 13 February 2018.

<sup>28</sup> *NDJ*, 14 December 1868.

assume the members of his reconstituted choir, were to rehearse in the Conversation Room of the Mechanics' Institution in New Bridge Street. The Mechanics' Institute, by which the institution is more accurately known, opened premises originally in Blackett Street, moving to New Bridge Street in 1866.<sup>29</sup> This may well have become the regular rehearsal venue, or one of the venues, for this choir as in 1872 there is a further reference to the choir's rehearsing there.<sup>30</sup>

Rea's main choir, the NAVS, founded in 1875, '[met] for Private Practice in the Central Hall, Hood Street, every Monday evening, from September to April', from at least 1879, though by 1885 it had moved to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Blackett Street which had opened the year before. This Central Hall (there were others of the same name) was built in 1835 as part of the Dobson and Grainger town development. It was originally the Salem Chapel, belonging to the Methodist New Connexion but by 1877-78 had become the Central Hall and an important venue for 'Gospel Temperance work'. Later it was taken over by the Church of England Institute. A Survey Drawing of 1893 shows that it preserved the shape of the original chapel and was therefore suitable as a concert hall, for which it was used well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1954 it was bought by the Grainger Building Society, demolished and replaced by a modern building.<sup>31</sup>

Mr Albion Anderson's Choir rehearsed on Tuesday evenings in the Church Institute with additional practices for the ladies on Saturday afternoons at 125 Northumberland Street (the Alderson and Brentnall premises). As the ladies

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<sup>29</sup> *NDJ*, 24 July 1869; Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 229, 309.

<sup>30</sup> *NDJ*, 14 October 1872.

<sup>31</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society Programmes, 1875-1905, programmes 22 December 1879 etc. The main sources of information about the hall and its use are found in: William Whellan, *History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland* ([London: 1855]), 185; Deeds, etc., relating to Grainger Chambers held by Beachcrofts, Solicitors, Newcastle; NCL: L912.2 Insurance Plans of Newcastle (Revised to 1930), Sheet 9; TWAS: T186/15592, Plan 477/3A, 26 November 1954; *NJ*, 24 October 1893 and *NDC*, 31 March 1925.



sometimes performed music for female voices only this may explain the need for separate Saturday rehearsals.<sup>32</sup>

The Gateshead Choral Society initially rehearsed in the lecture hall of the United Methodist Free Church in Gateshead,<sup>33</sup> but in 1895, because of the increasing size of the choir, it moved its rehearsal venue to the lecture theatre of the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle, a move that led to a further increase of 160 members, bringing the choir to over 400.<sup>34</sup>

During first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the condition of the Town Hall and the need for a new one, especially for a new concert hall, form a rumbling *basso ostinato* to the activities of the City's choral societies. The choirs that had been well established by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued to use the Town Hall, and occasionally Olympia, as their usual performance venues. The [Newcastle] National Telephone Vocal Society gave one of its concerts in Gateshead Town Hall, and the NPTCS gave a concert in St John's Church,<sup>35</sup> both choirs normally performing in Newcastle Town Hall. It is when we come to examine the Durham College of Science Choral Society and its successors, the Bach Choir, founded in 1915, and other newly established choirs, that we find a widening range of venues. (For 20<sup>th</sup>-century venues see Map 3, page 237.)

The Durham College of Science, when its choir was founded in 1889, was situated on the site that was later to become Armstrong College.<sup>36</sup> Until the opening of the hall subsequently known as King's Hall, the choir, with no permanent home of its

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<sup>32</sup> NCL: 780.73 Mr Alderson's Choir Programmes 1879-1889, programme 15 December 1884.

<sup>33</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-98, programme 19 December 1892. There were two churches of this name in Gateshead at this time; it is not certain to which this one refers.

<sup>34</sup> NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes 1889-98, programme 17 December 1895.

<sup>35</sup> *MT*, 42/699 (1901), 334 and 43/709 (1902), 191.

<sup>36</sup> For details of the establishment of Armstrong College see Norman McCord, advisory ed., *Newcastle University: Past, Present and Future* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2006), 14, 155 and E. M. Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne: A Historical Introduction: 1834-1971* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1972), 28.

own, followed a rather nomadic existence, performing at various places. In December 1890 it performed in the Physical Theatre and in 1898 in the Cambridge Hall, Northumberland Road.<sup>37</sup> In 1899 and 1900 concerts were given in the Chemical Lecture Theatre, and the following year permission was sought to hold a concert in the Engineering Drawing Office.<sup>38</sup> In 1902 the Lovaine Hall was used and then the Connaught Hall until 1906. The Lovaine Hall was in St Mary's Place, a short distance from the College. The Connaught Hall was in the new YMCA building on Blakett Street, opened in 1900 by Arthur, Duke of Connaught (Queen Victoria's son); it accommodated some 700 people.<sup>39</sup> With the opening of the Durham College of Science buildings by King Edward VII in 1906,<sup>40</sup> it seemed that a permanent home had been found and for the next few years the ACCS gave its annual concert in the new hall, which was called the Great Hall until 1910, when it appears as King's Hall (Plate 26, page 238).<sup>41</sup> As for rehearsals, the earliest information we have relates to the 1905-06, 1906-07 seasons when they were held on Tuesday evenings from 6-7 pm in the Chemical Lecture Room. Subsequently King's Hall was used for practices as well as for concerts.<sup>42</sup>

For the duration of WWI, the Armstrong Building was requisitioned for war purposes and was therefore inaccessible both for concerts and rehearsals. For its first

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<sup>37</sup> NUSC: 11/9/1 Music Society Minute Book etc., University Archives, Newcastle University Library.

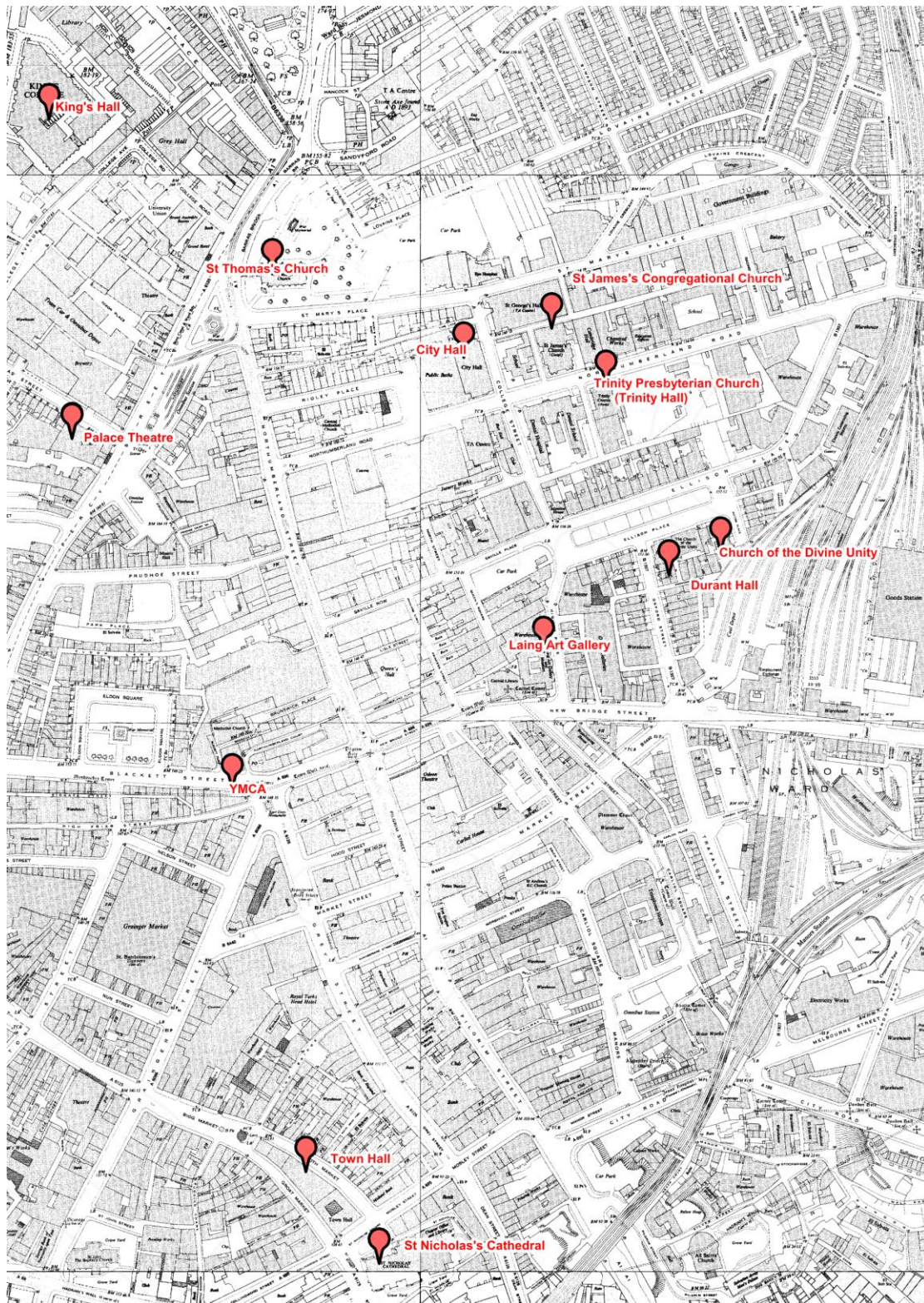
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> MT, 43/710 (1902), 263; 44/722 (1903), 263; NDJ, 13, 19 March 1902. See <[www.twsitelines.info/smr/7104](http://www.twsitelines.info/smr/7104)> accessed 15 March 2108.

<sup>40</sup> For the opening ceremonies, including a photograph of what was referred to as the Lecture Hall, see *Visit of His Majesty King Edward VII and Her Majesty Queen Alexandra to Newcastle-upon-Tyne 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1906* (Newcastle: 1906).

<sup>41</sup> See NUSC: 11/9/1 Durham College of Science Music Society Minute Book etc., programmes 17 March 1908, 10 March 1910, University Archives, Newcastle University Library.

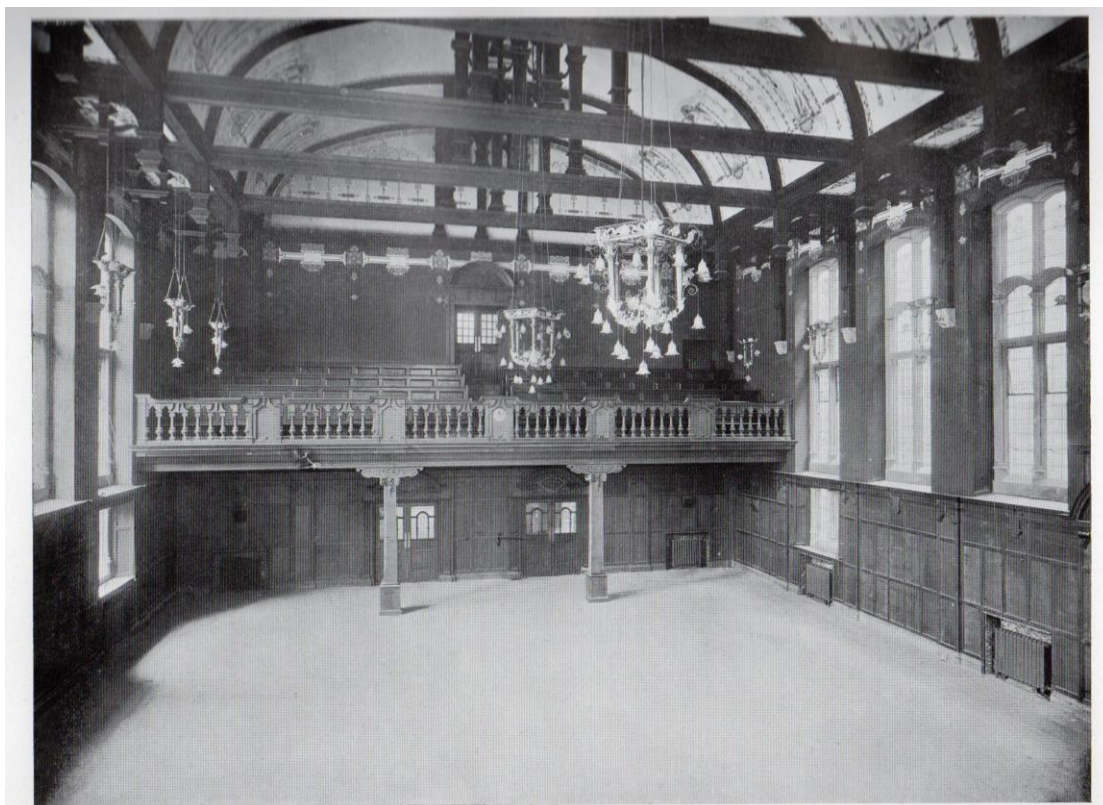
<sup>42</sup> NUSC: 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendars 1905-06, 1906-07, 1907-08 etc., University Archives, Newcastle University Library.



**Map 3 Newcastle c.1950 showing 20<sup>th</sup>-century venues**

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**Plate 26 The Lecture Hall (later King's Hall), Armstrong College**

James Bacon & Sons, reproduced from *Visit of His Majesty King Edward VII and Her Majesty Queen Alexandra to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1906*

concert of the war the ACCS performed in the Town Hall. This was probably found unsatisfactory as for the rest of the war it used the Central Hall on Westgate Road.<sup>43</sup> Rehearsals, however, were held in the Friends' Meeting House in Pilgrim Street.<sup>44</sup> The Bach Choir, founded in 1915, faced the same venue problems. Its earliest concerts were given in the Newcastle Central High School for Girls in Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond, where W. G. Whittaker, the conductor, taught music.<sup>45</sup> In 1917, however, the choir performed in the Westgate Road Central Hall. It may have proved more convenient for Whittaker to have both his choirs performing at the same venue,

<sup>43</sup> NCL: 780.73 Armstrong College Choral Society Programmes 1908-30, programmes 17 March 1915, 28 March 1916 etc. Westgate Hall, as it was also known, was a Methodist Chapel.

<sup>44</sup> NUSC: 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendar 1916-17, University Archives, Newcastle University Library.

<sup>45</sup> References to the Bach Choir's venues are taken from the programme collections in Newcastle City Library, Newcastle University's International Centre for Music Studies and in the author's possession.

or possibly the availability of an organ was an attraction, or audiences may have outgrown the school. Whatever the reason the choir remained there until 1919, apart from two concerts given in St Nicholas's Cathedral in that year.

After the war, and during the rest of Whittaker's time, both the ACCS and the Bach Choir returned to King's Hall for their regular concerts, the latter choir occasionally also performing in the Cathedral though with a visit to Alnwick Parish Church in 1925 and to the unusual venue of the Miners' Theatre, Ashington, in 1927 and 1928. The 1927 visit was to perform at a Workers' Educational Association Concert arranged in aid of the choir, and the visit the following year may have been intended as a thank you for the WEA's support.

The evidence for rehearsal venues for the ACCS is incomplete, but in the 1921-22 season they used King's Hall, rehearsing on Tuesdays from 6 to 7.15 p.m. By 1924-25, however, they were using the Physics Lecture Theatre, a room across a corridor from King's Hall. The recently founded Armstrong College Orchestra rehearsed in the Library of the Art School in 1925-26, and then in either the Student Union, opened in 1925, on Mondays or the Physics Lecture Theatre on Tuesdays.<sup>46</sup> There is no evidence as to where the Bach Choir rehearsed during these years, but a letter of September 1931, accepting the author's mother, then Miss Capel, as a member of the choir, shows that at that date the choir were rehearsing in the Physics Lecture Theatre on Mondays from 7 to 8.30 p.m., which may have been the arrangement during Whittaker's time.<sup>47</sup> The College Orchestra rehearsed in King's Hall on the same evening from 5.15 to 7 p.m.,<sup>48</sup> thus, as the conductor of the orchestra

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<sup>46</sup> NUSC: 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendar 1924-25 etc., University Archives, Newcastle University Library. McCord, advisory ed., *Newcastle University*, 182.

<sup>47</sup> Letter in the possession of the author.

<sup>48</sup> NUSC: 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendar 1931-32, 1933-34, University Archives, Newcastle University Library.

also conducted the Bach Choir, he was required to cross swiftly from King's Hall to the Physics Theatre.

In 1928, the long-awaited new concert hall, the City Hall attached to the City Baths, was opened (see Plate 27, p. 241). Dismissed in a sentence by Pevsner as 'a dull-neo-Georgian design in which the colonnaded entrance to the City Hall itself is balanced by that to the Baths',<sup>49</sup> the hall nonetheless fulfilled the desire of choirs and conductors for a suitable building in which to give their concerts. It was provided with an organ by Harrison and Harrison and, with galleries round three sides of the auditorium, could accommodate an audience of over 2,000<sup>50</sup> (see Plate 28, p. 242). Its acoustics, though, were not ideal; audience members commented on problems of balance, especially in the area under the balcony. The author remembers that noises from the adjoining baths occasionally penetrated the hall. The City Hall, however, now became the main venue for the NGCU and the YMCACS<sup>51</sup> until their decline as described in Chapter 5. There appears to be no surviving evidence for early concerts of the Free Church Choir Union, but in April 1945 they performed in Brunswick Methodist Chapel and then (although there are gaps in the programmes) in the City Hall until their eventual demise.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, the Bach Choir continued to use the King's Hall as its main concert venue, though with the arrival of Sidney Newman as conductor in 1930, and under all subsequent conductors, the choir gradually extended the range of venues in

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<sup>49</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Northumberland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), 235.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Donaghy and John Laidler, *Discovering NewcastleGateshead: A walking guide to NewcastleGateshead plus parkland strolls and visits to coastal attractions* (Ammanford, Carmarthenshire: Sigma Press, 2012), 55. For details of the organ see [www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N04108](http://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N04108).

<sup>51</sup> GCL: L784.96 NGCU Programmes; NCL: 780.73 City Hall Programmes 1929-1944 and programmes formerly in the possession of Miss S. Durno.

<sup>52</sup> Programme formerly in the possession of Miss S. Durno; NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 1, 1942-1969, Vol. 2, 1968-1970.



**Plate 27 The City Hall, exterior, 1930**

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which it performed. Under Newman Jesmond Parish Church, Durham Cathedral and Hexham Abbey were all visited by the choir and, as we have seen, the Durant Hall for Carol Parties. In 1940 the choir returned to St Nicholas's Cathedral, though its 'difficult acoustics' were noted by a reviewer.<sup>53</sup> John Healy some years later noted that the 'cathedral acoustics are not kind to music-making'.<sup>54</sup> The choir's first appearance in the City Hall was to contribute to a concert in 1936 given by the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra in which the choir participated in Constant Lambert's *The Rio Grande*. It was over ten years before the choir returned there, for a performance of the *St Matthew Passion* with Chalmers Burns, followed by another

<sup>53</sup> 'T. M. B.' in *NJ*, 12 February 1940.

<sup>54</sup> *NJ*, 13 May 1974.





**Plate 28 The City Hall, interior, 1977**

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performance of the same work and a choral and orchestral concert the following year. There were occasional later appearances in the City Hall. In Burns's time these were for the *St Matthew* or *St John Passion*. Under Eric Cross the hall was used especially when concerts were given jointly with another choir, notably with the Durham Choral Society for Verdi's *Requiem* in 1988 and 2000 and Britten's *War Requiem* in 1992 and, in 1995, for a concert shared with Newcastle Choral Society. In all these cases the City Hall was needed for the larger musical forces used and also to accommodate the expected larger audiences.

After the arrival of Burns in 1944, the Christmas carol parties became concerts and were given in St Thomas's Church for a few years, but in 1948 two such concerts



were given, the second in Whitley Bay Presbyterian Church. This was the signal for a new policy of giving two Christmas concerts annually and offering them to a wider range of churches. In 1950 the choir sang in St Margaret's Presbyterian Church, Whitley Bay, and Trinity Presbyterian Church, Newcastle. The author recollects that Burns, although born in London, claimed a Scottish Presbyterian ancestry and this probably accounts for these concerts in Presbyterian churches.<sup>55</sup> Burns's successors continued the Christmas concert pattern but further extended the scope of its venues. Similarly, while maintaining King's Hall as its 'home', the choir from time to time performed elsewhere. Under the present conductor, Eric Cross, it returned to the City Hall and also visited Durham Cathedral (for joint performances of Verdi's *Requiem* with Durham Choral Society) and gave a series of concerts in St George's Church, Jesmond. Most recently it has used Sage Gateshead as a venue either for large scale works, such as Britten's *War Requiem*, or, as in the earlier City Hall days, when larger audiences were anticipated. Eric Cross draws attention to the difficulty of filling the City Hall, which had a seating capacity of over 2,000. He also comments on the 'very dry, revealing acoustic [which] does amateur performers no favours'.<sup>56</sup>

The Bach Choir has continued to rehearse in King's Hall to the present, only vacating it when some other event was held there or, as recently, when the hall was being refurbished. On these occasions the choir rehearsed in the nearby Robert Boyle Lecture Theatre in the Armstrong Building or the Lindisfarne Room in the King's Road Centre.

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<sup>55</sup> Chalmers Burns, birth certificate, 5 January 1918. Several Scots bearing the surname Chalmers appear in Magnus Magnusson, ed., *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 5<sup>th</sup> edn 1990). See also Bach Choir archives, 'North-East People No. 18: Dr Chalmers Burns', in cutting from *Northern Echo*, July (?) 1954.

<sup>56</sup> Eric Cross, 'After 1984: a personal reflection', in Borthwick and others, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 349-75 (355).

### 7.3 Northumberland: halls, churches and other venues

As we leave the city and look at the choirs throughout Northumberland we find a wide range of venues. In what follows, attention has been drawn mainly to only the most interesting or unusual venues. The most regularly used buildings, as may be expected, were churches. These had the advantage of being often the largest building in the town or village and, possibly their best asset for a choir, they invariably had an organ. Several choirs performed in their parish church, among them both the Alnwick Choral Union and Choral Society and the Haltwhistle St Cecilia Choral Society. Churches of other denominations were also used, but although anything like complete evidence is lacking, what there is shows that these were often Methodist churches: Wesleyan, as for Killingworth Colliery Choral and Harmonic Society, or Primitive, for Choppington and Guide Post Choral Society; Forest Hall Choral Society, however, performed in Forest Hall Presbyterian Church.

One drawback to using churches for concerts was that until comparatively recently it restricted the repertory to music of a sacred character, which may have been one of the reasons why choirs wanting to perform secular works turned to secular buildings. During the years 1948 to 1953, for instance, Alnwick and District Choral Society performed regularly in St Paul's Church, Alnwick, with a repertory of sacred works including Brahms's *Requiem*, *Messiah* and the *Christmas Oratorio*. However, for a concert that included Handel's *Acis and Galatea* they transferred to Alnwick Duchess's School gymnasium.<sup>57</sup> Some years earlier they had performed Dyson's *The Canterbury Pilgrims* in the Northumberland Hall, a large, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century building also known as Assembly Rooms.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *MH*, 9 April 1948; *MH*, 8 April 1949; *MH*, 30 January 1953; *MH*, 11 April 1952.

<sup>58</sup> *Alnwick and County Gazette and Guardian*, 21 January 1939. See Nikolaus Pevsner and Ian Richmond rev. John Grundy, Grace McCombie, Peter Ryder and Humphrey Welfare, *Northumberland*

At least three choirs performed in their town's Corn Exchange: Alnwick Choral Union,<sup>59</sup> Berwick Choral Union<sup>60</sup> and the first Berwick Tonic Sol-Fa Association.<sup>61</sup> Such buildings were found in towns throughout the country (that in Newcastle was incorporated into the 1858 Town Hall) and were built for trading in cereals, though by the 20<sup>th</sup> century many had been converted to other uses.<sup>62</sup> Morpeth Choral Union performed in Morpeth Masonic Hall (Plate 29, p. 246), whether for a concert devoted entirely to sacred music, such as Haydn's *The Creation* in 1882, or a mixed programme such as that in February 1885 which included Haydn's *First Mass* and Locke's *Music to Macbeth*, 'a lighter class of work which seemed to be enjoyed'.<sup>63</sup> They also performed in the Court House of the former Morpeth Prison, which in 1881 had been 'kindly granted for the occasion by the county magistrates'. The concert included Mozart's so-called *Twelfth Mass* as well as secular works, among them glees and solos, and orchestral and instrumental items. The choir 'were posted at one side of the building facing the reserved seats', though the report does not say where the orchestra sat.<sup>64</sup> In 1883 the Court House was the venue for Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*.<sup>65</sup> Designed by Dobson, the Court House was an 'overpoweringly

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(New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 140 and

<<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1041460>> accessed 23 March 2018.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, *NDJ*, 6 May 1882; *MH*, 7 May 1887; *MT*, 37/636 (1896), 115.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, *AM*, 11 May 1889; *MT*, 43/711 (1902), 335; *NCour*, 27 April 1895.

<sup>61</sup> *NC*, 28 March 1896.

<sup>62</sup> <[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corn\\_exchange](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corn_exchange)> accessed 23 March 2018.

<sup>63</sup> *MH*, 22 April 1882, 14 February 1885.

<sup>64</sup> *MH*, 24 December 1881.

<sup>65</sup> *MH*, 28 April 1883.



**Plate 29 Morpeth Masonic Hall, pre 1979**

Reproduced with the kind permission of Morpeth Antiquarian Society

heavy gateway to the former gaol.’ Inside, an ‘imposing stone Gothic imperial stair’ led to the semi-circular court room itself.<sup>66</sup>

In 1895 Blyth Philharmonic Society gave their twelfth Christmas concert in Blyth Theatre Royal, which was probably their regular venue.<sup>67</sup> In 1900 a new Theatre Royal was opened, on a different site, and possibly the old theatre was no longer maintained as a report of 1903 shows the choir performing Jensen’s *Feast of Adonis* in the Alexandra Hall.<sup>68</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, in 1893 the newly established Tynemouth (Amateur) Vocal Society gave its first performance in St

<sup>66</sup> Pevsner and Richmond, *Northumberland*, 398.

<sup>67</sup> *NDC*, 27 December 1895; *MH*, 28 December 1895.

<sup>68</sup> *MT*, 44/723 (1903), 334. *Feast of Adonis*, or *Adonisfeier*, was by Adolph Jensen (1837-1879), one of a family of East Prussian musicians (Walter Ford, ‘Jensen’ in *Grove IV*, vol. II, 772-73).

Oswin's Hall, Tynemouth,<sup>69</sup> a building converted from two houses adjacent to a former Congregational Church.<sup>70</sup> Other venues used by the choir were the Tynemouth Palace and the Albion Assembly Rooms in the adjacent North Shields.<sup>71</sup> The Palace, built on the sea front, was intended as a Crystal Palace, the centrepiece for a 'Brighton of the North'. Beneath a glass dome there was a Winter Garden, which was subsequently converted to a theatre. It is probable that it was in the theatre that the choir gave its concerts. The Albion Assembly Rooms, some 84 feet in length, were located above a row of shops forming an addition to the Albion Hotel. The 'orchestra', in a gallery, could accommodate over 100 people.<sup>72</sup> Another venue that deserves mention is the Rotunda of Whitley Bay's Spanish City, where the Whitley and Monkseaton YMCA Choral Society performed in 1923.<sup>73</sup> The Spanish City, originally built for a dancing troupe, the Toreadors, took its name from the Spanish scenes which decorated the performance area.<sup>74</sup>

#### **7.4 Orchestras, organists and other instrumentalists**

Following this survey of some of the places where local choirs performed and rehearsed, we now turn to the other requirement, that of the orchestra, or its substitute, used to accompany the choirs. At one extreme we find a full professional orchestra being engaged, and at the other an organ or even simply a harmonium employed. This section looks first at the orchestras or instruments used by the main choirs in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then at similar forces used by three of the major

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<sup>69</sup> *SDG*, 8 April 1893.

<sup>70</sup> The hall is now The Buddha Lounge and the church The Land of Green Ginger. Information about the buildings used by the Tynemouth choirs was kindly supplied by members of Tynemouth Choral Society.

<sup>71</sup> *NDJ*, 10 April 1902, 8 December 1911, 2 December 1902; *MT*, 37/639 (1896), 331; 42/695 (1901), 48; 44/719 (1903), 47.

<sup>72</sup> <[www.stevebulman.f9.co.uk/northumberland/tynemouth.html](http://www.stevebulman.f9.co.uk/northumberland/tynemouth.html)> accessed 24 March 2018.

<sup>73</sup> *NDJ*, 15 March 1923.

<sup>74</sup> <[www.spanishcity.co.uk](http://www.spanishcity.co.uk)> accessed 24 March 2018.

choirs, the NGCU, the Bach Choir and the Cappella mainly during the succeeding century.

## **7.5 Instrumental forces c.1850-c.1900**

As we have seen, the pattern of choral life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was complex, and the instrumental forces used shadow that complexity. There is a particular difficulty in that often neither the orchestras nor the players, except sometimes the leader and one or two instrumentalists, were named. There were a few local orchestras, only one of which survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A Phil-Harmonic Society had been founded in 1826 consisting ‘mostly of amateurs, who perform gratis’,<sup>75</sup> but there is no evidence of it by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. A Newcastle Philharmonic Society existed for four years but had broken up some time before 1867. Another Newcastle Philharmonic Society was established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>76</sup> The one orchestra to survive was the Northumberland Orchestral Society (NOS), founded in 1877.<sup>77</sup> As will be apparent, choirs often looked beyond the immediate area to find orchestras and players.

The earliest of the choirs we have considered, the Newcastle Sacred Harmonic and Choral Society, performed *Messiah* in 1852 ‘with Mozart’s additional Accompaniments’, but although W. F. Jay is named as the ‘band leader’, no band is named.<sup>78</sup> Jay appears as leader for one or two other concerts, but in 1854 the leader is Mr Aldridge ‘of the London Sacred Harmonic Societies, Exeter Hall’ and of the

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<sup>75</sup> Eneas Mackenzie, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne including the Borough of Gateshead* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Mackenzie and Dent, 1827 (Nabu Public Domain Reprint)), 591.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from ‘Amateur’ in the *NDJ*, 9 March 1867.

<sup>77</sup> TWAS: S.NOS/955/12, Programmes 1885-1978, programme 6 February 1957.

<sup>78</sup> *NJ*, 22 May 1852; *NSSG*, 17 December 1852; *NJ*, 9 April 1853.

Theatre Royal, Newcastle.<sup>79</sup> For performances of *Messiah* and *Elijah* in 1857 in the New Market, Durham, part of a Durham Musical Festival, a Mr Ainsworth led the orchestra, ‘supported by Mr Bowling, of Leeds’. The band ‘acquitted themselves remarkably well, notwithstanding the coarseness of the brass instruments, and the slips of the oboe’. Ainsworth was evidently the R. R. Ainsworth, the leader of the band for a vocal and instrumental concert given by the NSHCS in April 1860.<sup>80</sup> A performance of *The Creation* in Bethesda Chapel, Gateshead, the following year, for which the NSHCS comprised most of the choir, was conducted by Ainsworth, and although there was an orchestra, no member is named; however, a report thought that ‘the clarionet accompaniment should be mentioned as something worthy of the vocal performance’ of the aria ‘With verdure clad’. A report of a concert by the Killingworth Choral and Harmonic Society in 1861 states that it was ‘conducted by Mr Ainsworth, who presided at the harmonium’.<sup>81</sup>

At the opening performances at the new Town Hall, the instrumentalists ‘were nearly all native’.<sup>82</sup> The following year *Messiah* and *Judas Maccabaeus* were performed by the choir, with an orchestra led by Ainsworth of about 40. Among them were a Mr Harper, trumpeter, and Herr Hausmann, cello.<sup>83</sup> Although most of the members of the orchestras assembled to perform with the NSHCS may have been local, it is evident that some were imported. Harper and Hausmann were, as were a few others – notably ‘Mons[ieur] Sainton (Leader of the Crystal Palace and Handel Festivals, Sacred Harmonic Society of London, &c, &c.)’ who was to lead the orchestra, thereby displacing Ainsworth who was referred to as ‘Principal Violin’.

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<sup>79</sup> *NJ*, 25 March 1854; *Newcastle Guardian*, 1 April 1854.

<sup>80</sup> *NJ*, 3 October 1857, 14 April 1860. Censuses from 1861-1901 show Ainsworth as a ‘Professor of Music’.

<sup>81</sup> *NDC*, 12 May 1858.; *MH*, 9 March 1861.

<sup>82</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1858.

<sup>83</sup> *NJ*, 17 December 1859.

Prosper Philippe Catherine Sainton (1813-1890) was an eminent violinist who, after holding various posts in France, settled in England, becoming a professor of violin at the RAM and leader of several orchestras in London and at provincial centres. For some years he was ‘conductor of the State band and violin solo to the Queen. He composed works for violin and orchestra.’<sup>84</sup> For the Webbe testimonial performance of *Messiah* in 1862, in which the NSHCS and Mr Rea’s Choir both took part, the orchestra included ‘several of our celebrated musical professors’, among them Ainsworth, Mr Clinton, Mr Watson (who was probably the T. S. Watson who played the trumpet in ‘The trumpet shall sound’) and Robert Liddle. The report said that ‘the orchestra was extremely effective, particularly in the accompaniments to the songs’ and praised the talent of John S. Liddle, the organist, who ‘not only performed in the choruses, but did service in all those passages where even Mozart had left Handel’s figured bass untouched’. Liddle had played the piano for the NSHCS, with Michael Redshaw as organist, in 1858 and appeared as organist for the first time in April 1861.<sup>85</sup>

These recent performances evidently reflect an improvement in the standard of orchestras in Newcastle for a report of 1863 expresses the hope ‘that the period of producing large and important [choral works] with an orchestra miserably weak in numbers and deficient in some of the most important elements, has passed away’.<sup>86</sup> During the short period when the NSHCS functioned as the Choral Union the choir performed *The Creation* with an unidentified orchestra that was nevertheless ‘complete and efficient’, the report adding the pertinent comment that ‘it is very

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<sup>84</sup> *NDJ*, 18 January 1861; George Grove, ‘Sainton, Prosper Philippe Catherine’ in *Grove IV*, Vol. IV, 502-03.

<sup>85</sup> *NJ*, 24 May 1862; *NDC*, 28 September 1858, 27 March 1861.

<sup>86</sup> *NJ*, 26 March 1863.



seldom a complete orchestra is obtained in the provinces’,<sup>87</sup> an observation that was to have some validity in Newcastle and Northumberland throughout the period covered by this study. At the other extreme, and similarly typical of many subsequent oratorio performances, the choir gave several concerts during 1864 and 1865 with only the organ for accompaniment. These were *Samson*, *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Elijah*, *Messiah* and even *Acis and Galatea*. After a performance of *Judas Maccabaeus*, a report observed that ‘the want of a band was not felt so much, as it undoubtedly would have been had there not been such a master hand [William Rea’s] at the instrument’.<sup>88</sup>

In time for the 1865 *Samson* performance, the Town Hall organ ‘had been put into a thorough State of Repair, Revoiced, and Tuned’ which would ‘add to the Enjoyment’ of those attending the performance.<sup>89</sup> A letter from the treasurer of the Choral Union showed that the use only of the organ was on grounds of cost, Rea performing ‘gratuitously’ and therefore saving the expense of engaging an orchestra.<sup>90</sup> An orchestra was used for the December 1864 *Messiah*, however, and ‘played extremely well, and, considering that they were nearly all professional performers of some standing in the locality, is not to be wondered at’. Ainsworth was the leader, but no other players are mentioned.<sup>91</sup>

The following year’s *Messiah* introduced an innovation: in addition to the organ there were ‘Mr Penman’s kettle drums’. These ‘were very vigorously used in the chorus “For unto us a child is born”’. This performance, as was noted in Chapter 2, was given by a combined choir of some 300 voices, which produced such a

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<sup>87</sup> *NJ*, 24 March 1863.

<sup>88</sup> 13 October 1864.

<sup>89</sup> *NJ*, 18 November 1865.

<sup>90</sup> *NJ*, 19 December 1864.

<sup>91</sup> *NJ*, 22 December 1864.

prodigious noise – the word is hardly inappropriate – that ‘powerful as is the grand organ, it was sometimes hardly a match for the choir’.<sup>92</sup>

Although the report above suggested that Rea’s competence as an organist compensated for the lack of an orchestra, a report of February 1867, stating that there was ‘at present no orchestra in Newcastle’, referred to it as ‘a great defect’. The report further said that there was ‘skill enough and talent enough in this town to supply a good band’, and that a K. Greener and others had formed the nucleus of one. This band, described as ‘very strong’, joined the Choral Union for a further *Messiah* performance and the sound produced by choir and orchestra was ‘enormous’.<sup>93</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing account that there had been an orchestra of about 40 performers in the 1850s. This is confirmed in a letter from ‘Allegro Vivo’ to the *Newcastle Daily Journal* in March 1867 which refers to the lack of a band for oratorio performances, stating that ‘[a] few years ago, the society [NSHCS] had a band of its own, or at least a great portion of a band’. The letter went on to suggest that the policy of performing oratorios without an orchestra had been unfortunate: ‘It has, by dispersing a band, checked the growth of amateur instrumentalists, and put a stop to the study of classical orchestral music’.<sup>94</sup> Another correspondent, signed ‘Amateur’, proposed the setting up of a meeting ‘for the purpose of establishing an amateur musical band; if needful, in connection with the Choral Union’.<sup>95</sup> Whatever ideas these two correspondents had about forming an amateur orchestra to join in the performance of oratorios nothing seems to have come of them. By this time, as we have seen, the Choral Union was entering a period of turbulence leading to its split.

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<sup>92</sup> *NJ*, 21 December 1865. J. G. Penman was the conductor. We noted in Chapter 2 that the public ‘liked a big noise’.

<sup>93</sup> *NJ*, 15 February 1867.

<sup>94</sup> *NJ*, 7 March 1867. The exclusion of local amateurs was referred to in Chapter 2.

<sup>95</sup> *NJ*, 9 March 1867. The letter refers to side drums, music, music stands and cello stools which had belonged to the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra.

An advertisement for Rea's 'Classical and Popular Concerts' referred to the 'last week of the celebrated band of forty performers'. There were to be performances of *Elijah* and *The Creation*, the latter to be the '[l]ast Performance of the Orchestra under Mr Rea's management.'<sup>96</sup> A report of the *Elijah* performance refers to 'the able orchestra now in Newcastle under the auspices of Mr William Rea'.<sup>97</sup> This was not, however, the last performance of 'Mr Rea's orchestra', for it appears 'assisted by the Choral Union of this town, and the Sunderland Philharmonic Society' in a performance of Mendelssohn's *St Paul* later in the year.<sup>98</sup> It seems evident that Rea's 'able orchestra' was an impermanent body of professional players, gathered together for specific performances directed by Rea. It was not, therefore, either an independent body or one associated permanently with the Choral Union.

The final performances of the Choral Union, all in 1868, were given with organ only, not the best accompaniment for such works as Sterndale Bennett's *The May Queen* and Weber's *Oberon*.<sup>99</sup> An eccentric argument in favour of the organ accompaniment was advanced for a performance of *Messiah*:

when Mr Rea presides at the organ, and there was so magnificent a chorus as was collected together last night, we may well be content without a full band in addition; and indeed, for very many of a miscellaneous audience, the addition of an orchestra giving the accompaniments for all the various instruments for which Handel provided parts, would perhaps have distracted attention, and been, in fact, an *embarras de richesse*.<sup>100</sup>

The orchestras or players we have been considering were only those engaged to perform with one or other of the local choirs, and it is beyond the scope of this study to look at other orchestras. We may note, however, that for the purely orchestral concerts Rea gave he engaged players from London. An advertisement for a series of

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<sup>96</sup> *NJ*, 28 February 1867.

<sup>97</sup> *NJ*, 1 March 1867.

<sup>98</sup> *NJ*, 8 November 1867.

<sup>99</sup> *NJ*, 24 March, 7, 18, 28 April 1868.

<sup>100</sup> *NJ*, 5 May 1868.

concerts in November 1868, for instance, refers to players ‘from Her Majesty’s Theatre, Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden, the London Philharmonic Societies, &c, &c.’.<sup>101</sup> Given his preference for local professional players for oratorio performances, one may conclude either that Rea preferred to work with professionals, or that he considered local amateurs of insufficient standard.

After the folding of the Choral Union, Rea’s second choir emerged, to be followed shortly by the Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society which he also conducted. Although evidence is fragmentary, it is apparent that Rea on occasion engaged the Northern Orchestral Union sometimes with some of ‘the principal instrumentalists of the district’ as well as players from Bradford, Liverpool or Manchester.<sup>102</sup> A programme of a concert by the NAVS in April 1881 lists the 33 members of an unnamed orchestra, which included some local players.<sup>103</sup> The leader was a Mr Lax, and one of the viola players was Percy Lax. Though originally from Yorkshire, they were members of a local family of musicians that included a William Lax, a professional musician, and Percy, a professor of music.<sup>104</sup> One of the bass players was Simon Hubertus Beers, a local music teacher. Beers was one of a family of musicians and teachers; he played the double bass regularly with the Gateshead Choral Society/Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union.<sup>105</sup> The appearance of a horn player, Reynolds, from ‘Her Majesty’s Chapel’, suggests that the orchestra also included musicians from London and probably elsewhere. In 1888 another orchestra appears,

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<sup>101</sup> *NJ*, 28 September 1868.

<sup>102</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Town Hall Concert Programmes 1860-98, programmes 16 December 1879, 15 March 1870 etc.; 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 11 April 1881. This orchestra has not been identified.

<sup>103</sup> NCL:780.73 NAVS Programmes etc., 1875-1908, programme 11 April 1881.

<sup>104</sup> Censuses 1871, 1881, 1891.

<sup>105</sup> Censuses 1891- 1911.

Mr Manns' London Orchestra, to accompany Mr Rea's Choir in a performance of Berlioz's *Faust*.<sup>106</sup>

The Northumberland Orchestral Society was engaged by Rea to perform with the NAVS in 1886, remaining with the choir until at least 1900. Given Rea's apparently exacting standards, it may be assumed that this orchestra was of professional calibre. A note in a programme for December identifies the conductor as J. H. Beers and states that the orchestra exists 'to draw together the Instrumentalists of the district for the practice of Classical and other Music'.<sup>107</sup> A programme for an NAVS concert in 1900, with Jefferies as conductor, shows Beers as first violin. The orchestra, which comprised 47 members, is not named, though an examination of the names of the players shows that many of them were members of the NOS. In 1894 the NOS numbered 91 members, of whom 25 were women, all, except for a harpist, violinists; Earl Percy was the president and Professor Ebenezer Prout and Dr William Rea vice-presidents.<sup>108</sup>

It may be briefly observed that the only local organisation at this time to establish a combined choral and orchestral group was the short-lived NHarmSoc 1891. It was formed 'for the practice and performance of Vocal and Instrumental music, its sole object being the advancement of musical art in the district'. Instrumentalists were 'earnestly invited to join', though their fitness was to be 'approved by the Conductor'.<sup>109</sup> The censuses for 1891 and 1901 identify several of the instrumentalists as musicians; the leader, J. H. Hill, is specifically referred to as a

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<sup>106</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Town Hall Concert Programmes 1860-98, programme 27 January 1888.

<sup>107</sup> NCL:780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 20 December 1886.

<sup>108</sup> NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 29 March 1900; NCL: 780.73 Northumberland Orchestra Society Programmes 1894-1926, programme 11 April 1894.

<sup>109</sup> NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes, 1892-1912, programme 29 February 1892.

‘professional musician’. There were at least two music teachers, and one player described in the census as ‘Solicitor’s Clerk. Violinist’.<sup>110</sup>

## 7.6 Into the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society, which became the Newcastle Harmonic Society 1895, engaged an unnamed orchestra for a concert at the end of 1897. This is interesting on two counts: first, of 45 players, 20 were in the orchestra for the NAVS’s concert of 29 March 1900, including four out of the five cellists; and second, twelve of the 20 violinists and four of the cellists were women. The last programme of the NHarmSoc 1895, including Hubert Bath’s *The Wedding of Shon Maclean* and Balfour Gardiner’s Choral Ballad *News from Whydah*, again shows the orchestra as unnamed, but with an obvious continuity from its previous orchestras. Women are found only among the strings, but they represent half of the total number of 30; one is now a bass player. This shows that not only was there an established core of competent orchestral players in the locality but also that many of the string players were women, a fact that is in evidence when we come to consider the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra (NSO) later.<sup>111</sup>

## 7.7 The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union

The earliest information we have about the orchestra used by the Gateshead Choral Society/NGCU under J. M. Preston is from a concert of March 1890, when a string

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<sup>110</sup> Censuses 1891, 1901.

<sup>111</sup> For a discussion of women as violinists see Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England: ‘Encroaching on All Man’s Privileges’* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 2000), especially Chapter 5, ‘The new woman and her violin’, 109-40. There was a ‘Ladies’ Violin Class’ in Newcastle led by J. H. Beers (*MT*, 36/627 (1895), 328).

orchestra was engaged.<sup>112</sup> For the rest of the century, however, a fuller range of players was used, though with one exception they appear to have comprised an ad hoc orchestra. As the players are invariably named, comparison with the members of the NOS and the members of orchestras engaged by the NAVS, the NHarmSoc 1891, the NPTCS and its successor the NHarmSoc 1895 is possible. This shows that the NGCU was using many of the players employed by the other orchestras. What is striking, though, is that except for Ethel May Amers, a harpist and music teacher, no women were engaged.<sup>113</sup> When so many women players were available this can only have been a matter of policy or preference.

It is fortunate that for three concerts in 1894-96 not only were the players named, but also where they came from. Table 7 on page 258 offers an analysis of these locations. It is apparent from this that whereas in 1894 Newcastle and Gateshead together produced the highest number of players, in 1895 and 1896 the majority came from elsewhere. In drawing on players from Manchester, Bradford and Liverpool, the conductor, Preston, may have been using contacts established by Rea with the NAVS. The high number of Manchester players engaged in 1895 will be noticed. Of the 18, 15 played with either the orchestra assembled for one of Sir Charles Hallé's Manchester concerts in March 1896 or the Manchester Orchestra Association when it performed with the NGCU in March 1896.<sup>114</sup> Of the other three instrumentalists, one, Charles Fawcett, violin, was a member of an extended family of musicians several of

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<sup>112</sup> Unless otherwise stated, information about the orchestras engaged by the Gateshead Choral Society and the NGCU are taken from the programme collections in Gateshead Central Library and Newcastle City Library.

<sup>113</sup> The 1901 census shows that Ethel May Amers was the sister of Henry Gallon Amers, a bandmaster who also played timpani. H. G. Amers served with the Northumberland Hussars Yeomanry, 1902-28, achieving the rank of captain (British Army Service Records Transcription, <<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=gbm%2fwo374%2f0224951>> accessed 26 August 2017).

<sup>114</sup> Information kindly supplied by Ros Edwards of Libraries, Galleries and Culture, Manchester City Council. Censuses 1851-1911.

**Table 7 Locations of players engaged by the Gateshead Choral**

**Society/Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union 1894-96**

<b>Town etc.</b>	<b>13 March 1894</b>	<b>26 February 1895</b>	<b>17 November 1896</b>
Newcastle	28	21	20
Gateshead	4	6	4
Jarrow	2	1	
Ryton	1		2
Durham	1		
Sunderland	3	2	2
Cullercoats	1		
North Shields			1
South Shields	1	1	
Middlesbrough	1		
Leeds	1	2	6
Hull	1		1
Bradford		6	5
Manchester		18	6
Liverpool	1		2
Edinburgh	1		
<b>Total in orchestra</b>	46	57	49

whom were named after composers – Handel, Mendelssohn, Verdi and Weber. The second, T. Jarvis, horn, has not been identified. The third, Andrew Stamp, trombone, was a musician and professor of music. It appears that the Manchester Orchestra Association was constituted from members of the Hallé Orchestra, and that Sir Charles Hallé was president. It comprised some 40 or 50 members (reports vary on the numbers) and performed under several different conductors, including Hallé himself.<sup>115</sup> For its single Newcastle appearance there were 50 players.

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<sup>115</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 11 March 1893. Information about the orchestra is scant. It is briefly referred to by Robert Beale in his book *Charles Hallé: A Musical Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 187-88, but Coward does not mention it in his *Reminiscences* (Henry Coward, *Reminiscences of Henry Coward* (London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1919, reprinted by Forgotten Books, 2015)). Newspaper reports of it are found in the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 24 March 1897, the *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 March 1897 and elsewhere.



From 1900 the NGCU regularly engaged the Hallé Orchestra, on a few occasions conducted by Hans Richter who apparently had an aversion to oratorio,<sup>116</sup> a circumstance which possibly contributes to Henry Coward's view that 'as a choral conductor [Richter] was quite ordinary'.<sup>117</sup> Following Richter's performance of Liszt's *Legend of St Elizabeth*, a writer to the *Newcastle Journal* complained that the choir was capable of performing a 'much greater choral work' and argued that in arranging programmes 'the chorus should have chief consideration'. The writer queried why the NGCU should not perform 'some of the magnificent works of Bach' for which a Hallé orchestra 'would still be needed to do them justice'. The first major work of Bach to be performed by the choir was the *Mass in B minor* with the Hallé in April 1908. When Coward became conductor in 1906, he continued to use the Hallé, but gradually engaged the Leeds Symphony Orchestra more often and on two occasions the Scottish Orchestra. In his *Reminiscences* Coward attributes the ability to engage these orchestras to the 'very substantial reserve fund' the society had built up.<sup>118</sup> In 1901 the practice was established of giving a Christmas performance of *Messiah*, initially accompanied only by the organ, thus allowing these concerts to be given 'at popular prices'.<sup>119</sup> From 1907, however, an unnamed but probably local orchestra was engaged.<sup>120</sup>

*Musical Times* had commented that '[o]ne of the great necessities of the district is a permanent local orchestra', noting that 'for serious concert work' the only orchestras engaged were either visiting orchestras, such as the Hallé or Scottish, or 'a "scratch" combination of local players whose ordinary work at theatres, dances and

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<sup>116</sup> Michael Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition: A Century of Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 106.

<sup>117</sup> Coward, *Reminiscences*, 237; *NJ*, 12 December 1901.

<sup>118</sup> Coward, *Reminiscences*, 201.

<sup>119</sup> NGCU 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 1901-02; see also programmes.

<sup>120</sup> *NJ*, 21 December 1911.

skating-rinks does not tend to improve their powers of playing the best music'. A new group of players had been formed which, it was hoped, 'might develop into a reliable permanent local orchestra'. This was the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra, founded (and conducted for the first year) by E. J. Rogers of the Tyne Theatre.<sup>121</sup>

When the NGCU resumed its activities after the war with W. G. Whittaker as conductor, it was this orchestra that was most regularly engaged until March 1927. For the December concert, the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra was employed. The orchestra had been established about the same time as the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra and was distinctive in that the string players were nearly all women. It achieved sufficient competence to attract conductors such as Hamilton Harty, Henry Wood, Malcolm Sargent and Vaughan Williams. On occasions it also provided the basic orchestra for the concluding concert of the North of England Musical Tournament.<sup>122</sup> The assistant conductor was George Dodds who, in 1934, became the permanent conductor, the others appearing as guests.<sup>123</sup> He succeeded Whittaker as the conductor of the NGCU and not unnaturally preferred to use his own orchestra rather than the Newcastle Philharmonic. This arrangement continued until 1945, except for a concert as part of the North East Coast Exhibition in 1929 when the Eastbourne Municipal Orchestra was engaged. During WWII the orchestra 'functioned as a rather scratch affair, playing for the Peoples Concerts';<sup>124</sup> the NGCU, as has been shown, formed the core of the choir used for these concerts.

By the time the choir resumed its normal activities after the war, and J. E. Hutchinson became conductor, the NSO had disbanded. During the ensuing years, some orchestras were unnamed; others included the NPO on at least three occasions

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<sup>121</sup> *MT*, 51/808 (1910), 392; 52/818 (1911), 263; NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra, Programmes 1910-34.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, NCL: 780.79 NEMT Programmes, programme 1929.

<sup>123</sup> TWAS: SX9/1 NSO, minutes 18 September 1934.

<sup>124</sup> TWAS: SX9/2 NSO, letter to Mary Glasgow, secretary of the CEMA.

(using the trumpeters from Harton Colliery Band for a concert in March 1949) and for a time during the 1960s the Newcastle City Orchestra. During the late 1960s and 1970s the Lemare Orchestra was engaged several times;<sup>125</sup> the Edinburgh Players were used once, as was the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra, playing with a second, unnamed orchestra for Burns's farewell performance of the *St Matthew Passion*. There were two appearances of the Vrayne Orchestra, in 1971 and 1972, after which the orchestras were unnamed except for the Tyneside Baroque Ensemble in 1982.

## 7.8 The Newcastle Bach Choir

The Bach Choir was the first of the local choirs to demonstrate in its concerts something of what came to be known as historically informed performance, and this is reflected in the orchestras or players it engaged. From the foundation of the choir until 1948, no orchestra was named, though the players were usually listed. For the *St Matthew Passion* in 1920 with 26 players divided into two orchestras, 4 of the first orchestra and 10 of the second were at some stage members of the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra (NSO). In 1929, for the *B minor Mass*, 13 (or 14) out of 25 members of the orchestra were with the NSO.<sup>126</sup> Whittaker, with a small choir of 24, later increased to 40, attempted to recreate the forces he understood Bach to have used. Initially there was some inevitable compromise with the instruments used, either because no suitable instruments were available or there was no one to play them. For the 1920 *St Matthew Passion* performance, for instance, cors anglais were used as a substitute for oboes da caccia. By 1925, however, the orchestra included oboes, cors anglais and two oboes d'amore, one of which had been presented to the Bach Choir

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<sup>125</sup> The Lemare Orchestra was founded by Iris Lemare during WWII (obituary in *The Independent*, 13 May 1997). For the role of Lemare as conductor and promoter of women composers see Sophie Fuller, 'Putting the BBC and T. Beecham to shame': the Macnaghten-Lemare concerts, 1831-7', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 138/2 (2013), 377-414.

<sup>126</sup> The discrepancy concerns the reading of one of the names.

Society by Arnold Dolmetsch who had also donated a spinet to be used as a continuo instrument in place of the piano which had been used previously.

In 1939, under Sidney Newman, the choir, which had now increased in size to about 60, gave a further performance of the *St Matthew Passion* with a divided orchestra comprising 41 players in total. Of these 18 players were with the NSO, a smaller but still substantial proportion of the whole. Newman, who appears to have been less interested in historically informed performance, did not use oboes d'amore, and although he refers to the viola da gamba in a programme note the instrument is not listed with the orchestra.

No doubt owing to paper shortage during the war, the choir's programmes were slimmer, and the members of the orchestra were not named. However, a list of the names of the double orchestra for the *St Matthew Passion* in 1947 shows little more than a vestige of the NSO – 13 players out of 49. In May of the following year the choir engaged a section of the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra for a choral and orchestral concert comprising Mozart's *Symphonie Concertante*, K364, and *Grand Mass in C minor*, K427, and Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* and *Flos Campi*. The programme shows that the strings were entirely from the NPO; in addition to a pianist, who was the choir's regular accompanist, nine local players were found among the woodwind, brass and percussion sections. A note in the programme explains:

Owing to the varying nature of the small orchestral forces required by the works in this programme, it has not been necessary to engage more than a section of the Northern Philharmonic Orchestra. For certain parts in one or other of the works it would not have been reasonable to bring players from a distance and local players have been engaged. The Committee are grateful to the Managers of the N.P.O. for allowing these adjustments.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Programme, 12 May 1948.

This was the only occasion on which this orchestra was used. By 1950 a Bach Choir Society Orchestra (BCSO) had been established; it later came to be known simply as the Bach Choir Orchestra. This does not appear to have been a permanent body of players but was gathered as required from a pool of local musicians. Of the 49 players who were in the unnamed orchestra of 1947, 14 appeared in the 1950 orchestra, thus maintaining a small element of continuity.

On the occasions when a double orchestra was required, invariably for performances of the *St Matthew Passion*, a separate orchestra was engaged to perform with the BCSO. In 1953, for instance, the two orchestras were based on the strings of the Lemare Orchestra and the BCSO. The two wind groups, oboe and oboe d'amore, and oboe and cor anglais, included Leon Goossens, while Desmond Dupré played the viola da gamba as part of the continuo section. The inclusion of the oboe d'amore and viola da gamba (and Alfred Deller, countertenor) showed that under Burns the Bach Choir was committed, with certain limitations, to historically informed performance, the only local choir to make this commitment at this date. The strings of the Goldsbrough Orchestra in 1958 and the Manchester Mozart Orchestra in 1965 similarly joined with the Bach Choir Orchestra (BCO), again with Leon Goossens, oboe and oboe d'amore, and Desmond Dupré, viola da gamba.

For a few years during the 1960s, as was mentioned in Chapter 5, the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra was engaged. In addition to being expensive to hire, the orchestra had an uneasy relationship with the choir. Burns, who was a member of the committee of the Northern Sinfonia, had complained to the committee that 'the discipline of the orchestra to outside conductors was very bad and that they should be more tolerant and polite'.<sup>128</sup> These remarks are confirmed by the late Greta Large, a member of the

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<sup>128</sup> TWAS: S.RNS/1/2/1, minute 10 March 1964.

Bach Choir, who found the attitude of some members of the orchestra to the choir discourteous and disrespectful.<sup>129</sup> Percy Lovell states that it was after this period that a 'Bach Choir Orchestra' was formed, 'from the best non-Sinfonia local players' and usually with Pamela Wilson as the leader. However, as was observed above, there had been such an orchestra from the 1950s.<sup>130</sup>

In 1965 the Manchester Mozart Orchestra was engaged for the *B minor Mass* and the following year the Lemare Orchestra for Handel's *Samson*. The BCO continued to appear intermittently with the choir until 1979. Following Burns's departure in 1971 Percy Lovell, his successor, as well as using the BCO also engaged the Edinburgh Wind Players and the Durham Sinfonia, both in 1973, but from 1975 almost invariably used the Tyneside Chamber Orchestra, founded in 1956, which he had taken over as conductor from Dr Arthur Milner.<sup>131</sup>

Lovell's successor, Eric Cross, continued to use the Tyneside Chamber Orchestra for some years, but from 1994-98 he engaged the Avison Baroque Ensemble, which used mainly players from outside the region, and from then onwards the Newcastle Baroque, based more on local players, especially for the strings and brass. Both orchestras used 'period' instruments thus contributing to an historically informed performance of works of the baroque era. More recently, notably for Mahler's Symphony No. 8 in 2008, Britten's *War Requiem* in 2014, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* in 2016 and Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem* in 2017, Cross has also engaged Newcastle University Symphony Orchestra.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Observations made to the present author.

<sup>130</sup> See 'Chalmers Burns and the Bach Choir', a typescript account by Percy Lovell in the care of Alex Murchie and on loan to the author.

<sup>131</sup> <[www.tynesidechamberorchestra.org.uk](http://www.tynesidechamberorchestra.org.uk)> accessed 14 April 2018.

<sup>132</sup> For fuller information about the orchestras engaged during Professor Cross's conductorship see the section 'Orchestras' in 'After 1984: a personal reflection' in Borthwick et al, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 359-363.

## 7.9 Cappella Novocastriensis

In outlining his plans for the Cappella, Dr Hudson said that in addition to the choir there would be ‘a small chamber orchestra of about 24 players’,<sup>133</sup> thus making the choir only the second to be formed - after the NHarmSoc1891 – in harness with its own orchestra. The Constitution specifies that:

The chamber orchestra shall be composed of (a) full members and (b) honorary members. Full orchestral members shall be of equal standing with the vocal members and shall be subject to all terms and conditions set out in the present Constitution and Rules, except that orchestral rehearsals shall be held at such times as they may be called by the Hon. Director in consultation with the members of the chamber orchestra. Honorary members, who may receive such fees for professional services as may be due to them from time to time, shall not have any voting powers within the Constitution and Rules, nor shall they have any part in the conduct of the affairs of the Cappella.<sup>134</sup>

Provision was made for the election of an orchestral secretary and an orchestral representative who would be members of the committee. The first orchestral secretary was Dr Donald E. Wright, of the University Medical School.<sup>135</sup>

The first occasion on which the chamber orchestra appeared was for a concert at St George’s Church, Jesmond, that included two Bach Wedding Cantatas (BWV 120a and BWV 34a) and numbers 1 and 3 of Handel’s Concerti Grossi, Op. 3. The orchestra comprised thirty members, including a continuo group of cello, organ and harpsichord. The organ was an electronic instrument, lent for the occasion, as the pitch of the church organ was slightly above  $a' = 440$ .<sup>136</sup> Modern versions of oboes d’amore and corni di caccia were employed for the first time in 1963 for the *Christmas Oratorio*, though cors anglais were used as substitutes for oboes da caccia.<sup>137</sup>

During Wolstenholme’s period as director, very few works requiring an orchestra were performed. However, for a further performance of the *Christmas*

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<sup>133</sup> Archives of the Cappella, minutes of inaugural meeting, 11 May 1960.

<sup>134</sup> Archives of the Cappella, Constitution.

<sup>135</sup> Archives of the Cappella, AGM minutes, 14 September 1960.

<sup>136</sup> Album of the Cappella, programme, 9 December 1961..

<sup>137</sup> Album of the Cappella, programme, 14 December 1963.

*Oratorio* in 1965, members of the Northern Sinfonia ‘strengthened the orchestra’.<sup>138</sup>

Two years later, for the *St John Passion*, it was reported that the Sinfonia ‘could not provide a quartet’. Professional players were therefore sought from elsewhere, and the suggestion was made that students from the Manchester School of Music might be engaged.<sup>139</sup> In 1970 an approach had been made to the Northern Sinfonia about a possible performance of Monteverdi’s *Vespers of 1610*. This proved abortive when it was found that the cost of engaging the orchestra would be prohibitive; also, the orchestra’s conditions, including a conductor of their own choice, were clearly unacceptable to the choir. Tom Little in the *Northern Echo* commented of the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra that it had ‘priced itself out of the market it was created to serve’.<sup>140</sup>

By this time, with so few demands for an orchestra, the post of orchestral secretary had become something of a sinecure, and in 1971 it was decided not to elect one.<sup>141</sup> There are only one or two further references to an orchestra during this period, notably for a performance of the *Vespers* at St Nicholas’s Cathedral when Wolstenholme expressed his disappointment with it. He referred only to the trombone player and organist as excellent, the brass being ‘uncertain in pitch’ while the harpsichordist played ‘some notes he should and some he should not have’.<sup>142</sup>

Hudson had introduced oboes d’amore and corni di caccia to his instrumental ensemble, but it was not until Eric Cross became director that period instruments were regularly used. The first complete expression of this approach was for a performance of Monteverdi’s *Vespers* in 1987 when period strings were used along with cornetti,

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<sup>138</sup> Archives of the Cappella, AGM minutes, 30 June 1965. Programmes of this performance appear not to have survived.

<sup>139</sup> Archives of the Cappella, minutes, 8 February 1967.

<sup>140</sup> Archives of the Cappella, minutes, 22 November 1970, 28 February and 9 June 1971. *Northern Echo*, 26 November 1973.

<sup>141</sup> Archives of the Cappella, AGM minutes, 19 May 1971.

<sup>142</sup> Archives of the Cappella, AGM minutes, 17 May 1972.



sackbuts and a theorbo.<sup>143</sup> The following year, for *Messiah*, the Handel Consort, comprising players from all over the country, used period instruments and in 1989 for a performance of Handel's *Jephtha* The Orchestra of the Golden Age (based in Manchester) was engaged, described in the programme as, 'a group of fifteen to twenty players, whose use of period instruments and performance styles has been acclaimed as a new and exciting addition to the musical scene outside London'.<sup>144</sup> Performances such as these were now to characterise Cross's approach throughout his time with the choir, as it also was with the Bach Choir, and represented in some measure the culmination of the endeavour of their founders, Whittaker and Hudson, to offer historically informed accounts of the works, especially of the baroque period, in which the choirs specialised.

## 7.10 Conclusion

This chapter might well have been headed 'For want of a hall, for want of an orchestra', for it reveals the constant challenge offered by Newcastle's lack of a satisfactory concert hall and of a permanent professional orchestra comparable to that of Manchester's Hallé. Even when it seemed that these deficiencies were to be made up, the outcome proved to be less satisfactory than expected.

The 1928 City Hall, though an improvement on the Town Hall's concert hall, had problems with its acoustics and was also too large for the size of audiences that choral societies could expect. Hall One of Sage Gateshead, opened in 2004, offers a venue with good acoustics, but as with the City Hall it is too big for most choral society audiences. Moreover, because of its commitment to the Royal Northern Sinfonia and other professional orchestras, it can be difficult for local societies such

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<sup>143</sup> Album of the Cappella, programme, 21 March 1987.

<sup>144</sup> Album of the Cappella, programme, 19 March 1988, 18 March 1989.

as the Bach Choir, to make a booking at a time to suit their needs. It is also expensive to hire.

Rather different circumstances prevailed in Northumberland, for none of the towns or villages provided a concert hall and their choirs had to perform in whatever accommodation was available. In most cases this was a local church, which was often where the choir was based and probably rehearsed and had the added advantage of having an organ.

The Cappella was distinctive over the matter of venues as part of its aim was to visit churches throughout the region, usually to sing Evensong. Similarly, the Bach Choir had developed the practice of giving annual Christmas carol concerts in a range of local churches as a matter of policy.

The lack of a professional orchestra for Newcastle was to some extent compensated for by the engagement of local amateur or imported professional orchestras, or more frequently by the assembling of an ad hoc orchestra drawing on professional and amateur players, both local and from further away. When the Northern Sinfonia was founded in the late 1950s it was hoped that part of its function would be to perform with local choirs. However, as has been shown, this did not work out as expected, both because the orchestra thought some choirs were not up to its professional standards and because it had become too expensive for amateur choirs to hire.<sup>146</sup> To meet the need for historically informed performances of baroque music, the Bach Choir and Cappella have more recently engaged players and ensembles using period instruments.

Although, as we have seen, some of the choirs discussed in this study suffered through tired and unimaginative programming, the lack of a suitable and

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<sup>146</sup> On this point see Cross, 'Orchestras' in 'After 1984: a personal reflection' in Borthwick and others, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 359-363 (359).

accommodating orchestra almost certainly contributed to their demise and thus diminished the musical life of the region.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

It was pointed out in the Introduction that the musical life of Newcastle has scarcely featured in the various published histories of the city. This study, although focusing primarily on the choral life of the area, has attempted to go some way towards remedying that omission. It goes further, however, by reaching out to Northumberland, and the towns and villages to the south in the immediate vicinity of the River Tyne. In pursuit of this aim extensive use has been made of local archives maintained by Tyne and Wear Archives, Gateshead Central Library, Newcastle City Library and Newcastle University as well as local papers and the *Musical Times*, which for many years reported regularly on music in the provinces. As archives survive for very few of the choirs, often the only information to be gleaned is from the local papers which at one time reported not only details of concerts but often also annual and other meetings.

A background to choral activity in the city has been the attitude at certain times of the town (later city) council towards music generally. There were two major points when the council may be said to have made a particularly significant impact. The first was in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century associated with the building of the Town Hall, which included a concert hall. Although the council was distinctly cautious in supporting musical activities, and some of its members were distrustful of musicians, it ultimately agreed to the provision of an organ for the concert hall followed by the employment of a corporation organist. This was achieved largely on the understanding that the hall and the organist would provide musical entertainments which would be morally uplifting for the working classes. Having appointed the organist, the council appear to have taken only limited interest in the music he was

promoting. But however ambivalent the council's attitude may have been, one should acknowledge the commitment of those who supported his appointment, as he was to have a decisive influence on the music of the town during the later decades of the century. Although hardly anticipating the thinking about the cultural life of the country displayed by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts during World War II, we may detect here a latent awareness that music was of value to the community at large and therefore worth supporting.

The second decisive intervention was some hundred years later through the Committee for the Encouragement of Cultural Activities, chaired by Alderman Mrs Gladys Robson. Under Robson's inspirational leadership the council promoted a series of music and arts festivals, of an amateur character, and then established a regular programme of concerts by professional orchestras, founding a choir to sing with the orchestras when they wished to include a choral work in their programme. During the same period, it took a lead in setting up the North Eastern Association for the Arts (NEAA). In this initiative council members showed a much greater awareness of the value of music than their nineteenth-century predecessors, whose support for music in the then-new concert hall had been so tentative. By establishing the NEAA they were offering a local version of the Arts Council and its predecessor the CEMA and therefore asserting their concern for the cultural life of the north-east.

Although outside the parameters of this study, Sage Gateshead has recently made a major contribution to the musical life of the region, though it has perhaps been less of an asset to local choirs than might have been hoped for, partly because of the expense of hiring it and partly because of the priority given to the Royal Northern Sinfonia and other professional musicians over amateur groups. Similarly, the Sinfonia, though occasionally performing with local amateur choirs, rapidly became

too expensive for them to engage. Moreover, even from its early years it was reluctant to perform with amateur choirs whose standards it judged not to be up to its own. The exception was the Bach Choir which it accompanied for a few years until the cost of hiring it became prohibitive. The orchestra therefore failed to be a comprehensive asset to the city which had nurtured and supported it. It should be noted, however, that Sage Gateshead has made an important contribution to musical education in the region by organising classes and workshops for instrumentalists and singers, both beginners and those with more experience and covering an age range from infants to older people within their 'Silver Programme'.<sup>4</sup>

Wider political movements in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century appear to have had no noticeable effect on the choirs that have been discussed, though they themselves were often less stable than the late Victorian period in which they were active. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand, brought the challenge of two world wars, each war having its own impact on the city's choral life.

World War I saw the end of certain choirs that had survived from the previous century and caused some retrenchment of the activities of other choirs and musical organisations, but it also saw the founding of the Newcastle Bach Choir offering, with its emphasis on Bach cantatas and British music of the Elizabethan and modern periods, a fresh approach to repertory. In addition, it was one of the first attempts to construct a choir of the size thought to be used by its eponymous composer. It is perhaps surprising that a new, innovative choir founded at such an apparently unpropitious time should have achieved the success it did, but possibly the more limited opportunities for musical performance gave it an audience which at any other time might have been harder to attract.

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<sup>4</sup> Programmes of these classes and workshops are published regularly by Sage Gateshead; see <[www.sagegateshead.com](http://www.sagegateshead.com)>.

The other organisations that appear to have benefitted from the Great War were male-voice choirs for, although the evidence is limited, it seems that the male-voice choir movement was given some impetus by the war, members seeking, perhaps, relief from the trials the war brought. In the inter-war years, and against the background of the Depression, male-voice choirs flourished, providing an inexpensive activity with the possibility, especially through competitive festivals, of giving their members a sense of purpose and achievement and having value within their community.

World War II showed some of the features of the Great War in as much as some organisations, including the Bach Choir for a year or two, suspended their activities while others continued. The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union relaxed its membership requirements to admit members of other choirs and servicemen with choral experience to form a People's Choir giving a regular annual series of concerts inspired by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. This organisation, which became the Arts Council of Great Britain, was possibly the greatest musical legacy of the war not just locally, but nationally. Ultimately, none of the Newcastle choirs suffered permanently from the effects of the war, all continuing, or returning to, their pre-war status after 1945.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a gradual change in the choral climate may be observed. This had none of the turbulence found during the comparable period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but its consequences for three choirs were more devastating. A study of the YMCA Choral Society, the only one of the three choirs whose records have survived in large enough quantities to permit detailed analysis, gives a clear account of the process of decline that may be traced back to the 1950s, but gathered momentum in the 1970s. Several factors were at play and it is difficult to

identify any one as having a greater impact than any other. The things that are identified in the choir's records are falling membership and audiences, financial problems and unhappy compromises over repertory. From newspaper reports we discover a marked collapse in the standard of performance and inadequate and unsatisfactory orchestral support. From all of this we may detect a reluctance to make any changes that might have improved the fortunes of the choir, and it is likely that complacent and timid management were as much to blame as any other factors.

Of the Free Church Choir Union there is insufficient evidence to come to any conclusions about its demise, but it is likely that it faced some of the same issues as the YMCA Choral Society. The Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union survived the closure of both the other choirs, benefitting from some able conductors in its latter years. It is clear, however, that from the late 1970s the choir was struggling to maintain its reputation and it eventually disbanded before falling into the YMCA Choral Society's pattern of decline.

With two or three new choirs emerging in the 1950s and 1960s interest in choral singing remained, and there were audiences to support performances that were fresh and innovative. The Cappella Novocastriensis, whose archives are largely intact, offered a choir concept as original as that displayed by the Bach Choir half a century earlier and if in its early years it was less successful than its 1915 predecessor it has retained its place in what is now a much more varied pattern of choral life in the city.

As we move from Newcastle itself to Northumberland, we find an abundance of choral activity throughout the county. Some of the inspiration for this appears to have come from the promotion of church music, both choral and congregational, that was encouraged in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A church choir often formed the nucleus of a village or town choir and a local organist may also have been the



conductor. Two clusters of choral activity were noted, one along the coastal region of Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and North Shields and the other further to the north and encompassing Morpeth and Alnwick. It emerged that the distant history of the choirs near the coast was unfamiliar to those currently involved with a Tynemouth choir, and it is at least possible that other areas of the county may be similarly unaware of their choral past.

The Tynemouth group of choirs, especially, benefitted in some measure from its proximity to Newcastle, as it was possible for musicians in the city to contribute to their activities, as W. G. Whittaker did when he became conductor of the Whitley Bay and District Choral Society. As a contrast, a study was made of the choirs of Berwick-upon-Tweed, located at the northern extremity of the county and therefore necessarily much more self-reliant. This offered an example of a tightly-knit community providing choirs, operatic societies and at least one orchestra with local organists and other musicians acting as conductors and often as soloists. It is apparent from the surviving evidence that the choirs and orchestra were supported by well-known people in the town's church and civic life and its commercial and professional activities.

It is fortunate that the records of several of the male-voice choirs of the area have been deposited with the Tyne and Wear Archives. This has allowed a close examination especially of the lesser known ones, enabling an instructive comparison to be made between the functioning of male-voice choirs and that of mixed-voice choirs. Male-voice choirs were seen to differ from their mixed-voice choir counterparts in several ways. Two of the most striking were their function as a service to the local community, frequently in support of local charities, and the role of the conductor. As to the latter, it was observed that discipline and approach to rehearsals

seemed to reside less with the conductors than with the committee, and especially the chairman, though even when the need for discipline was recognised it was not always easy to enforce. Only one or two male-voice choirs attracted conductors with both the musicianship and the confidence to exert their own authority and so obtain the standard of discipline which was more generally associated with mixed-voice choirs.

One of the key themes to be seen throughout this study has been the influence of conductors, especially those who founded choirs. William Rea, J. R. Andrews, James M. Preston and probably Thomas Ions were the founders of some of the main choirs in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their initiative laid the foundations of the local choral tradition that has survived to the present. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century W. G. Whittaker and Frederick Hudson established innovative and ground-breaking choirs, the Bach Choir and the Cappella Novocastriensis respectively. Most of the city choirs benefitted from the conductorship of professional musicians who were unwilling to compromise their standards and were prepared to resign if their policies were not adequately supported, as was the case with Dr J. E. Hutchinson and the YMCA Choral Society in 1949. One conductor of unusual interest was Sir Arthur Lambert, an amateur musician notable for being the first conductor, and probably founder, of the YMCA Choral Society. He was closely involved with civic affairs, becoming in time both Sheriff and Lord Mayor of Newcastle.

The benefit of institutional support in the furthering of choral activity is important, especially so in the case of the Bach Choir and, for some years, the Cappella, both of which were established within the University. The significance of Newcastle University (formerly a college of Durham University) should not be underestimated and is another important strand in this study. The Bach Choir and the Cappella were both founded by music scholars who made important contributions to

scholarship within their particular fields of baroque music and so gave their choirs a scholarly basis. In particular they explored unfamiliar areas of repertory and brought to their choirs a sharper sense of historical authenticity in their performance of early music. All the conductors of the Bach Choir and two of the Cappella have been head of the music department (now the International Centre for Music Studies) or members of the department staff. Throughout its history the Bach Choir has had the practical support of the University in offering rehearsal and performance venues and accommodation for its music library and archives. Recently the University library's archive department, the Special Collections, has accepted the choir archives as part of its collection, a tacit recognition of the importance of the choir to the University. In its turn, the Bach Choir has offered suitably qualified music students and staff the opportunity to join the choir, and on occasions to perform as soloists, and thus gain first-hand experience of public performance of the choir's distinctive repertory.

Other institutional support came from the churches, notably in Northumberland, which often provided not only accommodation for rehearsals and performances, but an environment which was supportive of the choral ambitions of the choirs, a number of which had their roots in the churches. Some works environments also provided a guaranteed home in which their male-voice choirs could rehearse.

Two other major themes of this study were the lack of suitable rehearsal and performance venues for many of the choirs and of a permanent local professional orchestra available to accompany local choirs. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until 1928, when the City Hall was opened, the concert hall in the Town hall was the main venue, despite its deficiencies. The City Hall seemed at first to offer an ideal

venue, but its acoustics proved to be inadequate, it was expensive to hire, and was too big for choirs which were dwindling in size and losing their audiences.

The situation regarding orchestras was more complex. An overview shows that a wide range of orchestras was engaged, from fully professional bodies such as the Hallé via local amateur groups like the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra, to ad hoc orchestras drawing on local and more distant amateur and professional players and, more recently, specialist period instrument ensembles. Very often the cost of hiring suitable instrumentalists has been a determining factor in making a choice. In some instances, especially for more popular performances when tickets were cheaper, the organ was the only accompanying instrument. In the hands of a competent organist this was a reasonably satisfactory solution. The least satisfactory arrangement was the use of the organ as a substitute for wind and brass instruments; when carried to excess, an inadequate performance was the outcome.

The different repertory offered by the mixed-voice choirs meant that they could attract a wide range of members, from those singers who enjoyed the standard oratorios, with only occasional excursions into less familiar works, to those who preferred the challenge of more specific works, such as those of Bach and the baroque era generally, contemporary music or music performed in a liturgical setting. Male-voice choirs offered yet another repertory but gave men the opportunity to enjoy singing in a familiar social environment and provide entertainment for a range of local and charitable organisations. The challenge of competitive festivals was an important element in their activities, and often the means by which discipline could be maintained. Although female-voice choirs have featured only in passing in this study, because of the lack of sufficient archive sources, many of them, not unlike their male-

voice counterparts, grew within existing, though voluntary, organisations, notably Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds.

This study makes no claim to offer any detailed analysis of the gender or class issues that membership of choirs may raise. But it may be observed that the existence of male-voice, female-voice and mixed-voice choirs gave opportunities for men and women to participate in whatever choral organisation they felt most comfortable. It may be noted, however, that married women, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were very much in a minority in the mixed-voice choirs, the imbalance gradually disappearing during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For most of the larger mixed-voice choirs, women invariably outnumbered the men throughout the period of this study, and with the decline of male-voice choirs the number of men engaging in choral activity continues to shrink.

The diminishing interest of men in choral singing is widely noted. As has been shown, surviving male-voice choirs have reduced in size, the others having closed. Larger mixed-voice choirs are especially affected, as achieving a satisfactory balance between men and women can present problems for conductors. Both the 1824 and 1842 musical festivals showed men in the majority, but the situation was reversed by the time of the 1909 festival. At the same date the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, which formed the basis of the festival choir, showed a marked imbalance with 276 women and 197 men. The Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society in 1894 had a slight preponderance of men, perhaps because it was then a male-based works choir, but by 1912 there were only 45 men as against 107 women, though by this time, as the Newcastle Harmonic Society, it had only a residual connection with postal telegraphy. The Bach Choir, from the time when it expanded beyond the initial membership of about 40, has also shown an imbalance between men and women, but

the numbers of men have stabilised so there has not been a major problem in maintaining sufficient voices in the tenor and bass lines.

One factor which may have contributed to the decline of numbers of men in choirs is the dwindling of church choirs, especially those of the Anglican parish church which at one time provided useful training in singing for boy choristers who would then often join the male ranks and possibly continue their singing in secular choirs. These sources, with only a few exceptions, have almost entirely dried up. The impact of World War I may also have had its effect, with choir members who joined the services being killed or, at the end of the war, not returning to their choirs and thus tending to undermine a tradition of choral singing among men.

Apart from the lack of an agreed definition of class, a basic difficulty in determining the social spectrum of choir membership is that of identifying members with certainty in census returns, local directories and other sources. Particular problems are raised with the social position of women as that can often only be inferred from the occupation of a father or husband.<sup>5</sup> The situation is compounded by the varying attempts to arrive at any generally accepted system of social classification. To refer, for instance, to 'the working classes', as town councillors did in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, is seen to be patronising and condescending as well as being an imprecise term of reference.

Such evidence as has been discovered in the preparation of this study suggests that choir members were largely drawn from what is generally understood as the middle classes, when that term is extended to include skilled workers at one end of the scale and, at the other, those in professional employment, as well as employers. Male-voice choirs drew in the main on skilled workers, with some members at managerial

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<sup>5</sup> This is the method used by Russell, *Popular Music in England*, 251-52, in comparing the social structure of the Leeds Philharmonic Choral Society with Huddersfield Choral Society in 1894-95.

level, but also included those who were temporarily unemployed. Mixed-voice choirs drew more on the upper ranges of the middle class for their membership. The Bach Choir and the Cappella, with roots in the University, probably included a higher proportion of academics and students than others.

Within the social range of each choir it is possible to detect a degree of social cohesion in terms of class, age and gender not easily replicated in other organisations except, perhaps, the churches. This may sometimes have been more apparent than real, especially with regard to age when new, young members may not always have been warmly welcomed by older, established members.

The over-riding conclusion to be drawn from this is that classical singing has a wide, though predominantly middle class appeal and that a range of organisations has existed - and continues to exist - to offer people from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to participate in this most accessible form of music-making. In a group, whether large or small, of like-minded singers the opportunity for creative self-expression is available, while participating in company with others offers a degree of social protection and security which can encourage self-confidence.

More recently various studies have investigated the value of choral singing in promoting well-being. Although the results need to be approached with caution, researchers have identified benefits of choral singing among older people, or those who experience loneliness or have health issues or disabilities which tend to isolate them from other forms of social activity. It has been noted, however, that more women than men have reported positive results.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive summary of this research see Stephen Clift, 'Singing, wellbeing, and health', Chapter 9 in Raymond MacDonald, Gunter Kreutz and Laura Mitchell, *Music, Health, and Wellbeing* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012). For the benefits of musical activity among older people see Susan Hallam, 'Music, cognition and well-being in the ageing', Chapter 21 in Penelope Gouk, James Kennaway, Jaconien Prins and Wiebke Thormählen, eds, *The Routledge Companion to Music, Mind and Well-being* (New York and London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2019), 291-302.

As to the place of choral activity within the community at large, evidence points to a diminished role and impact. The laying of the foundation stone of the Town Hall in 1855 was accompanied by the Newcastle Sacred and Harmonic Society singing the Hallelujah Chorus, and the opening of the building three years later was almost entirely in the hands of the Society. Despite the reservations some council members had about musicians, this suggests an instinct for choral performance as the focus of a major civic event. Something of the same attitude is evident at the conclusion of World War I when those responsible for a 'War Relief Festival' in 1918 and a victory event the following year chose large-scale choral and orchestral concerts for audiences of several thousand in St James's Park. Although 'People's Concerts' were regularly given in the City Hall during World War II, the involvement of a choir in the victory celebrations was a minor one, suggesting that a large-scale choral event would no longer have the appeal it once had. The subsequent situation tends to confirm this view, the audiences for choral concerts now being largely restricted to those with an identifiable interest in the music to be performed or who have some personal connection with the choir performing.

It was noted above that Berwick-upon-Tweed displayed a sense of self-sufficiency in that it was comparatively remote from Newcastle, the hub of musical activity in the region. To a certain extent Newcastle itself, especially in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the post-war period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has displayed something of the same insularity. During what might be called the 'Festival years' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Newcastle was part of a loosely formed circuit, variously including Birmingham, Liverpool, Derby and York, in which festivals were



promoted. Those in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially, were arranged from outside the town.<sup>7</sup>

With the ending of the festivals in 1842 Newcastle showed the first signs of its insularity as far as choral performances were concerned. Not until the establishment of the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union did it have any choirs to match, for instance, the Yorkshire choirs of Sheffield, Bradford, Leeds and Huddersfield. But unlike the Choral Union, these other choirs performed in various cities throughout the United Kingdom and abroad. Although conducted for some years by Henry Coward, who at various times also conducted the Sheffield Musical Union, the Leeds Choral Union and the Huddersfield Choral Society, the local choir never ventured beyond Newcastle, though Coward brought the Leeds Choral Union to Newcastle in 1917.

The only Newcastle choir to have a significantly wider impact was the Bach Choir, which gave a three-day programme of Bach cantatas in London in 1922, returning two years later to give the first London performance of Byrd's Great Service. The choir subsequently visited Dumfries and then, in 1927, took part in the Fünftes Fest der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Musik in Germany, performing Whittaker's *Psalm CXXXIX*. The following year the choir made a further visit to London, incorporating a performance in New College, Oxford. In its early years the Bach Choir was influential in the establishment of the Leicester Bach Choir and possibly also the Bach Choirs of Nottingham and Liverpool.<sup>8</sup> After this, Newcastle choirs made little, if any, impact beyond the city, until the early 1960s when the Cappella sang both in Edinburgh and Manchester.

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<sup>7</sup> See Catherine Dale, 'The provincial musical festival in nineteenth-century England: a case study of Brighton' in Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman, eds, *Music in the British Provinces, 1690-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 325-348 (325) and William Roy Large, *The Musical Festivals of Newcastle upon Tyne with particular reference to the Festival of 1909* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> William Roy Large, *The History and Development of the Bach Choirs of the United Kingdom* (submitted as part of the degree of MLitt, Newcastle University, 2015), 38-39.

The introduction to this study referred to the change in focus as the research proceeded. In particular it drew attention to the decision to publish a history of the Bach Choir, to which the present author made a significant contribution. Then, greater quantities of archive material than expected were discovered relating to the choral activity of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The amount of information amassed led to a fuller account of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century choirs and a generally more selective, thematic presentation of the material as a whole. As a result, much information has gone unreported. On the other hand, several areas have hardly been examined at all, or only to a limited extent, and would repay further investigation.

Four areas have been identified which could be the focus of study by future researchers. First, there is the possibility of a thorough investigation into the region's amateur orchestras and the instrumentalists who comprised them. Research could reveal how many players were employed as teachers, either institutionally or privately, or were engaged on a free-lance basis by professional orchestras, sometimes in local theatres, and how many were wholly amateur and not earning a living through playing or teaching. Such research could also look into the relationship between professional orchestral players and amateurs and how far professionals were used to strengthen an amateur orchestra. A number of orchestras have deposited their records in local archives, and these could form the basis of any study.

A second area of study, only touched on in this thesis, could be the contribution the Tonic Sol-fa movement made in developing vocal skills in the region. Two Tonic Sol-fa choirs were identified in Berwick and evidence exists of the promotion of the movement in Newcastle. The extent to which this reached more widely could be investigated, for which newspaper reports would be a useful resource.

School records may also reveal how far Tonic Sol-fa was taught and this in turn may suggest something of the musical literacy of a town or village.

Competitive festivals would be another important area of investigation and could be set in the context of such festivals outside the region. The North of England Musical Tournament, which existed from 1919 to 1963 and has a current legacy in the NEMT Trust, became the major tournament in the northern counties and it could provide the focus of a detailed study of the movement. Surviving programmes, covering most of the years in which the tournament existed, would be a rich source of information especially about local singers and instrumentalists and the extent to which musicians, both amateur and professional, experienced their early performance challenges through participation in the tournament.

Finally, the activities of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, established at the outset of World War II, would be a valuable subject for investigation. A considerable archive relating to CEMA and the Arts Council of Great Britain, which in 1945 developed from it, is maintained as part of the Victoria and Albert Museum's archive collection.<sup>9</sup> This archive appears to have been little used (an error was found in the listing of one of the items) and would be an indispensable basic resource for anyone wishing to investigate thoroughly the role of CEMA and the Arts Council in British cultural life.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study has benefitted in particular from the work of three authors. Brian Pritchard has written extensively and authoritatively about musical festivals and choral societies in England, though his research is almost entirely limited to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and he inevitably has focused less sharply on the complexities of choral life in later 19<sup>th</sup>-century Newcastle. Christopher

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<sup>9</sup> Located at Blythe House, London, W14 0QX.

Wiltshire's thorough and detailed research into British male-voice choirs covers one or two local choirs and identifies the significant periods in the history of the male-voice choir. A non-academic study, Joseph Pegg's brave and breezy online survey of Newcastle's musical heritage, offers a sweeping overview of his topic, including accounts of William Rea, the Newcastle Conservatoire of Music and the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra.

This thesis is indebted to the contribution made especially by these writers, but it has taken the investigation beyond the boundaries of their research, shedding light not only on musical activity in the northern region but on the area's wider cultural and social life: important for those seeking to write more comprehensively of the history of the region, and especially of Newcastle, than has been done hitherto. Although numerous publications address choral music itself in its many forms, and although a few studies of individual choirs and choral activity have been published, there appears to be no fully comprehensive account of the choirs that performed the music. As has been shown, without the choirs, most of which were – and still are – amateur, much of this choral music would not have been written.

During the course of this research the author has become aware of how much information about choirs has been lost. It may be surmised that upon the disbanding of a choir, whether formally or through a process of gradual attrition, there was little interest in retaining the archives or placing them in some archive repository. The author has been fortunate in having been given access to records of a few choirs, some still surviving, whose archives remain in private hands. The historic archives of the Bach Choir have been transferred to the Special Collections of the Philip Robinson Library of Newcastle University and will be available to scholars and others for study purposes. It is to be hoped that a way may be found of encouraging those responsible

for other choirs to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the deposit of their records so that they may be available to future music historians.

As this study set 1989 as its concluding date, it has not been concerned with more recent developments. We may note, however, the survival of some of the choirs whose origins fell within the period examined. Among them are the Bach Choir, the Cappella and the Newcastle Choral Society in Newcastle and Alnwick Choral Society and Tynemouth Choral Society in Northumberland. There has been a growth of ‘community’ choirs, often with open admission – that is, with no audition – and specialised choirs such as the Northern Doctors’ Chorus, the Signing Choir and Northern Proud Voices (mainly LGBT). The gradual collapse of church choirs means that a once important source of experienced singers, able to read music, is disappearing. At the same time, while school choirs and class singing may survive, the music is usually learnt by ear, based often on an essentially popular modern repertory. There is little experience of the traditional British folk song or of the classical vocal repertory. Children therefore leave school lacking the ability to read music and unfamiliar with the repertory or the composers likely to be performed by the major adult choirs.

The detailed and comprehensive research that has gone into this study, unearthing much more information than it has been possible to use, has shown something of the richness and diversity of choral life in one region of north-east England and it is offered as a contribution to a greater understanding of this largely neglected area of musical performance.

## Biographies

These summary biographies include the more significant musicians referred to in the text. Dates are given as far as they are known. In local directories music teachers were at one time listed as ‘professors of music’; the same term is often used in census returns and marriage and death certificates. It is here replaced by ‘music teacher’. Unless otherwise stated streets, churches, buildings and other places referred to are in Newcastle. St Nicholas’s Church became St Nicholas’s Cathedral on the formation of the Diocese of Newcastle in 1882.

### **Abbott, Paul (James)**

(*b* 1936, Kettering; *d* 1979, Newcastle)

Bedford School; Cambridge University.

Concerts manager to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Joined staff of Northern Sinfonia Orchestra.

From 1963 lecturer, School of Music in the College of Arts and Technology; deputy to the principal; principal.

1969-79 chorus master, Newcastle Festival (later City) Chorus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (3 May 2018); death certificate (4 May 2018); NCL: 780.73 Newcastle City Council, City Hall Programmes, vol. 4, 1970-79, programme 19 April 1979.

### **Ainsworth, Robert Reay**

(*bapt* 1829, Newcastle; *d* 1902, Newcastle)

*c.*1858-1900, violinist and music teacher in Newcastle.

1858 conducted the NSHCS; sometime leader of the orchestra that accompanied the NSHCS from 1859.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)>; death certificate (6 April 2018); censuses 1861-1901. *Ward's Directory; NDC*, 12 May 1858; *Post Office Directory of Northumberland; with Map Engraved Expressly for the work, and Corrected to the Time of Publication* (London: Kelly and Co., 1858). *NJ*, 17 December 1859 etc.

## **Alderson, Thomas Albion**

(*b* 1843, Newcastle; *d* 1902, Newcastle)

Music teacher and organist. Partner with Robert B. Brentnall in the music business

Alderson & Brentnall at 125 Northumberland Street.

1867-1902 organist, St Andrew's Church; 1872-76 organist in concerts for Mr Rea's Choir; 1876 organist and 1877 pianist in concerts for the NAVS; 1894 organist for a harvest festival service with orchestra at St Nicholas's Cathedral.

By 1879 he had formed his own choir, Mr T. Albion Alderson's Amateur Choir. In

1887 the Northumberland College of Music was formed, based on the choir.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (10 February 2016); censuses 1891, 1901. *Kelly's Directory; Ward's Directory; NCL*: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 4 April 1876; *NCL*: L780.7 Prospectuses and Programmes, Northumberland College of Music. Watson, Geoffrey, *A Historical Study of the Organs in the four Ancient Parishes of Newcastle upon Tyne* (submitted as part of the degree of MMus, Newcastle University, 1988), 153; *MT*, 35/621 (1894), 764.

## **Aldridge, ---**

1854 leader of the orchestra accompanying the NSHCS; said to be 'of the London

Sacred Harmonic Societies, Exeter Hall' and of the Theatre Royal, Newcastle. 1854,

lectured on instrumental music at the Victoria Hall, Grey Street, Newcastle.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *NJ*, 25 March 1854; *NG*, 1 April 1854.

## **Anderson, William**

(*b* c.1849; *d* 1922, Edinburgh)

Seedsman, precentor and conductor.

1871 music teacher.

By 1869-? precentor, Wallace Green Church, Berwick-upon-Tweed.

1869-74, 1875-c.1876 conductor, Berwick Choral Union.

Manager, Messrs Carter and Son, Seedsmen; established Wm. Anderson and Son, Seedsmen.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs\\_stat\\_deaths/7583479?return\\_row=14](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs_stat_deaths/7583479?return_row=14)> accessed 24 August 2018); censuses 1871-1911; *BN*, 14 March 1922, 22 September 1925; *BA*, 17 July 1874.

## **Andrews, John Robert**

(*b* 1869, Gateshead; *d* ?1959)

1891 telegraphist; 1901 telegraph sub-engineer; 1911 engineer 1<sup>st</sup> class, postal telegraphy.

1901 organist and choirmaster, St Stephen's Church.

1892-93 accompanist, NHarmSoc 1891; 1895-1901 conductor, NPTCS.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)>, censuses 1881-1911. NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912; NCL: L780.73 Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society Programmes 1896-1900. *MT*, 42/699 (1901), 334.

## **Bainton, Edgar (Leslie)**

(*b* 1880, London; *d* 1956, Sydney, Australia)

Studied at the RCM. 1933, FRCM; 1934 Hon. DMus Durham.

Composer, pianist and teacher.

1901 professor of piano and composition, Newcastle Conservatoire of Music; 1912, principal. After internment in Ruhleben during WWI he returned to the Conservatoire.

1933 appointed Director of the State Conservatorium of Music at Sydney.

1906-14 conductor of the NPTCS (later the NHarmSoc 1895); 1909-34 accompanist and writer of programme notes for the Newcastle Chamber Music Society; from 1911



conductor of the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra; 1923-24 conducted the Bach Choir and the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union during W. G. Whittaker's absence in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NUSC: 1/1/1 Calendars 1934-35, 307, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; *NMNC*, 25 September, 2 October 1923. David Tunley and Michael Jones, 'Bainton, Edgar (Leslie)' in *New Grove* 2, vol. 2, 496-97; M. Jones, 'Edgar Bainton (1880-1956): musical and spiritual traveller' in *Journal of the British Musical Society*, xii (1990), 19-40. For a personal account see Helen Bainton, *Remembered on Waking: A Memoir of Edgar Bainton*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Sydney: Currawong Publishing Co., 2013).

## **Beers, Joseph Henry**

(*b* c.1848, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; *d* 1908, Newcastle) Naturalised British subject.

Violinist and music teacher.

1890-1902 member, and usually leader, of the orchestras that accompanied the Gateshead Choral Society/NGCU, the Tynemouth Amateur Vocal Society, the South Shields Choral Society, the Chester-le-Street and District Choral Society, the NAVS, and the NPTCS.

1883-1905 conductor, the NOS.

c.1895 presented concerts of chamber music.

c.1895 ran a ladies' violin class.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)>; censuses 1871-1901. NCL: 780.73 NGCU Programmes and Prospectuses 1889-1982; NCL: 780.73, NOS Programmes 1894-1926; TWAS: S.NOS/955/12 Programmes 1885-1978, programme 6 February 1957. *NJ*, 23 November 1893, 30 March, 1 December 1900, 17 December 1901, 21, 22 March, 5, 17 December 1902, 27 March, 3 April 1903. *NCour*, 28 March 1896. *MT*, 35/615 (1894), 345-46; 36/626 (1895), 253; 36/627 (1895), 327-28; 37/635 (1896), 42; 37/639 (1896), 330; 43/711 (1902), 335. He was the younger brother of Simon Hubertus Beers, a cello and double bass player.

## **Burns, (William) Chalmers**

(*b*. 1906, Kensington Town; *d*. 1994)

Organ scholar, Peterhouse, Cambridge. MA, MusB Cambridge; 1947 DMus.

Edinburgh; ARAM, ARCM; 1951 FRAM.

Studied conducting under Sir Henry Wood.

Assistant to the principal of the Royal Academy of Music. 1940 assistant to W. G.

Whittaker, Glasgow. Organist of St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow. 1944-1971 lecturer, then senior lecturer, and director of the music department, King's College, Durham University, from 1963 Newcastle University.

1944-71 conductor, Newcastle Bach Choir; conductor, King's College (later Newcastle University) Choral and Orchestral Society; 1964-71 conductor, NGCU; conductor, Newcastle Cathedral Choral Society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (5 January 2018). NUSC: 1/1/1 Armstrong College Calendars, 1944-45, 37; 1961-62, 99, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; Edinburgh University Library, Centre for Research Collections, Da 46.29, *Graduates in Music 1898-1980*; Bach Choir archives, *Dr Chalmers Burns*, notes by Percy Lovell; Bach Choir archives, 'North-East People No. 18: Dr Chalmers Burns', in cutting from *Northern Echo*, July (?) 1954. M. C. Borthwick, 'In the Swim', 147.

## **Chambers, Charles.**

(*b* 1842, Thornbury, Gloucestershire; *d* 1907, Newcastle)

1877 FRCO; 1880 MusBac, 1887 MusDoc Cambridge.

Wells Cathedral.

1869-1907 music teacher in Newcastle.

1868-82 organist St Peter's Church; 1882-90 organist Clayton Memorial (Jesmond Parish) Church; 1890-93 organist All Saints' Church; 1893-? organist St George's Church, Cullercoats.

1891-93 conductor, NHarmSoc 1891.

Composed a partsong, *The Defeat*, performed by the NPTCS in 1901, and other works.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (8 June 2018); death certificate (4 February 2016); censuses 1851, 1871, 1881, 1901; *Ward's Directory*. NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc. 1875-1905, programme 22 December 1879; *NJ*, 18 April 1893, 9 November 1868; *MT*, 42/699 (1901, 334. Venn, Pt 2, Vol. 2, 3; Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, 84.

## **Clark, James Bowness**

(*b* 1859, Newcastle; *d* 1934, Newcastle)

Coal exporter and organist.

Consul for the Netherlands. Member of Newcastle upon Tyne Masonic Lodge, No. 94 and other Lodges. Treasurer of Newcastle Pen and Palette Club.

1876-81 assistant organist, Christ Church, Gateshead; 1881-89 organist St James's Church, Benwell; 1889-95 assistant organist, St George's Church, Jesmond; 1895-1820 organist and choirmaster, Westmorland Road Presbyterian Church.

From 1876 member of Dr Rea's Choir; from 1889 member of Gateshead Choral Society, later NGCU; 1899-1909 honorary secretary NGCU, subsequently vice-president and president. Joint honorary secretary, with C. Francis Lloyd (q. v.), of the Newcastle Musical Festival, 1909. President of Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra, Newcastle Amateur Operatic Society and the Organists' and Free Church Musicians' Association. Member of the committee of the British Music Society and the Bach Choir. Chairman of the Newcastle Committee of the Imperial League of Opera. He gave a set of woodwind and brass instruments to the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra and donated his music collection, including programmes of local music organisations, to Newcastle City Library. In his will he left £300 to the NGCU, £50 to St George's Church, Jesmond, for music for the choir and £50 to St Nicholas's Cathedral for the purchase of music.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Will, proved 20 September 1934; censuses 1881, 1901, 1911. Obituary, *NJ*, 21 June 1934.

## **Coward, (Sir) Henry**

(b 1849, Liverpool; d 1944, Sheffield)

1888 BMus, 1894 DMus, Oxford; Hon. MA, DMus, Sheffield; FTSC; 1926 knighted.

Cutler, school teacher and choral conductor.

1906-c.1916 conductor, NGCU; 1909 chorus master and one of the conductors for the Newcastle Musical Festival. Author of *Choral Technique and Interpretation* (London: Novello and Company, n.d.), *Reminiscences of Henry Coward* (London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1919) and *Round the World in Wings of Song (Reciprocity)* (Sheffield: J. W. Northend, 1933).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obituary, *The Times*, 12 June 1944; *MT*, 85/1217 (1944), 217-18; *NJ*, 19 October 1909. 'Coward, Henry' in *OCM* 9, 261; Herbert Antcliffe, 'Coward, Sir Henry' in *New Grove* 1980, vol.5, 7. For further details see J. A. Rodgers, *Dr Henry Coward, the Pioneer Chorus-Master* (London: John Lane, 1911, reprinted Memphis, Tennessee: General Books, 2010).

## **Cross, Eric (Grahame Nicol)**

(b 1953, Norwich)

1974 BMus, 1978 PGCE, 1980 PhD, Birmingham.

Musicologist, university lecturer and dean, conductor.

1978-2018 lecturer in music, then senior lecturer and professor, Newcastle University; 1986-98 head of department; 1994-2002 Dean of the Faculty of Arts; 2002-2018 Dean of Cultural Affairs (and initially also Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences); 2008 Professor of Music and Culture.

2013-15 Director of the Newcastle University Institute for Creative Arts; 2016-18

Principal Investigator for Creative Fuse NorthEast and other research projects.

1979-2010 conductor, Cappella; 1984-the present, conductor, Bach Choir.

Co-Director of the Newcastle Early Music Festival.

Main research interest the Italian baroque, especially the operas of Vivaldi.

Publications include: *The Late Operas of Antonio Vivaldi (1727-38)*, 2 vols (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981) and numerous articles, largely on Vivaldi's operas, and performing editions; Roz Southey and Eric Cross (eds), *Charles Avison in context: National and International Musical Links in Eighteenth-century North-East England* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Information sheet with papers relating to the Bach Choir on loan to the author; <[www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/staff/profile/ericcross](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/staff/profile/ericcross)> accessed 2 August 2018; information supplied by Eric Cross. Cappella AGM minutes, 16 May 1979; Cappella programme, 28 March 2009; Bach Choir programme, 26 November 2016.

**Dodds.** Family of musicians from Gateshead and Newcastle.

(1) **George Dodds**

(b 1847, Gateshead; d 1901, Newcastle)

Father of George Robert and Herbert Yeaman Dodds.

Tea dealer, music teacher and lecturer.

By 1889, LMusLCM.

By 1894-1901 organist, Elswick Road Wesleyan Church.

1894-? conductor, Clayton Orchestral Society

He and his sons advertised a music studio in Elswick Road.

[Local organiser] Newcastle Centre of the London College of Music.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Censuses 1851, 1871-1901. *MT*, 35/614 (1894), 271; *NDC*, 25 October 1895; *EC*, 3 January 1896; *NJ*, 27 August 1898, etc.

(2) **George (Robert) Dodds**

(b 1876, Newcastle; d 1946, Penarth, Glamorganshire)

1898 BMus Durham; LRAM, ARCM

Conductor, organist, lecturer and adjudicator.

1892-94 organist, St Andrew's Church, Corbridge; 1894-1901 organist, St Paul's Church, Elswick; 1901-14 organist, Elswick Road Methodist Church.

By 1901-07 conductor, NNTVS retiring upon the Society's amalgamating with the Newcastle Vocal Society; by 1927-at least 1945 conductor, NGCU; 1940-45 conducted the Newcastle National People's Concerts; 1924-34 assistant conductor, 1934-45 conductor, NSO.

1904-at least 1926 conductor, Jarrow Philharmonic Society; 1910-? conductor, the Nonconformist Choir Union.

Compositions included a Kyrie in B flat for St Paul's Church and a chorus, *For God and the Right*, composed for a Band of Hope concert.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NUSC: 1/1/1 Calendars 1899-1900, 206, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; TWAS: NSO, SX9/1, minutes, 18 September 1934; NCL: 780.73, NSO Programmes 1917-35, programmes 3 April 1924 etc. *NJ*, 19 November, 23 November 1898, 6 December 1902, 14 December 1911, 31 October 1940; *Daily Chronicle*, 24 March 1925; *EC*, 3 October 1946; *MT*, 48/770 (1907), 260; 52/824 (1911), 672; 62/938 (1921), 289; 67/995 (1926), 64; 87/1246 (1946), 351; 88/1247 (1947), 32-33.

### (3) (Herbert) Yeaman Dodds

(b 1878, Newcastle; d 1941, Newcastle)

Silver medallist, LCM; 1899 ARCM; 1905 LRAM.

Conductor, organist, lecturer and adjudicator.

A founder of the NEMT and the Newcastle Organists' and Church Musicians' Association.

1898-1914 organist, North Shields Memorial Methodist Church; 1914-1920 organist, Elswick Road Methodist Church.

1910-? conductor, Monkseaton Choral Society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Censuses 1901-11; *NDC*, 25 October 1895. NCL: 780.79 North of England Musical Tournament Programmes 1919-23, 1925-26; *EC*, 3 April 1939, 20 December 1941; *NJ*, 22 December 1941; *MT*, 51/813 (1910), 738, 62/940 ((1921), 441. For a detailed account of the Dodds family see Philip Owen,

‘Accompanists, organists and other performers’ in C. M. Borthwick and others, *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 233-50 (233-39).

## **Evans, Thomas Rees**

(*b* 1826, Chester; *d* 1885, Berwick)

Chorister, Chester Cathedral.

Music teacher and organist (blind from the 1860s).

Assistant to Joseph Mainzer, founder of *Mainzer's Musical Times*, the forerunner of *Musical Times*.

Teacher of piano, harmonium and singing in Berwick, Dunse (sic) and neighbourhood.

Supplier of pianos and Berwickshire agent for harmoniums by Alexandre of Paris.

Organist and choirmaster to the Cheadle Association for the improvement of congregational singing; 1860-1885 organist, Berwick Parish Church.

1861 or 1863 founded an annual Festival of Church Choirs.

Secretary of the Berwick Centre for examinations of Trinity College of Music, London.

Compositions included songs, anthems, hymn tunes and chants.

Publications include *Time and Tune*, concerned with elementary singing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate, 5 January 1917; censuses 1861-1881. *BA*, 19 September 1884, 15 May, 25 August 1885; *BN*, 6 April, 13 July 1875, 18 January 1876. Sir George Grove, ‘Mainzer, Joseph, LL.D’ in *Grove IV*, vol. III, 295. Mrs T. Rees Evans was Lady Principal of the Ladies’ School, Berwick, at which a Mr Evans taught the piano; it is possible that this was T. Rees Evans’s son, Rees à Beckett Evans, who was also an organist and music teacher (*BA*, 21, 28 August 1885); *BN*, 8, 22 March 1927.

## **Fairs, Michael.**

(*b* 1857, Gateshead; *d* 1926, South Shields)

ACO.

Music teacher, conductor and organist.

Organist, Holy Trinity Church, South Shields; 1884-93 organist, South Shields Choral Society; 1890, organist for the NAVS.

1884-93 assistant conductor, 1893-1911 conductor, South Shields Choral Society; 1900-1911 conductor, Tynemouth (Amateur) Vocal Society.

1895 presentation from South Shields Choral Society of a full score of Dvorak's *Spectre's Bride* 'as a memento of the recent successful performance of that work by the Society'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Birth certificate, 22 August 2018; death certificate, 22 December 2015; censuses 1881-1911. NCL: 780.73 NAVS Programmes etc., 1875-1905, programme 15 December 1890. *NDJ*, 23 November 1893; *SSG*, 20 September 1893; *MT*, 36/628 (1895), 399; *MT*, 41/692 (1900), 682.

## **Gauntlett, Charles Trevor**

(*b* 1869, Swansea; *d* 1935, Berwick upon Tweed)

Swansea Grammar School and Brighton Grammar School; London University. A student of Dr Armes, professor of music at Durham, and Sir Joseph Barnby.

DMus.

Schoolmaster, organist and conductor.

1897-99 music master, Oswestry Ladies' College; 1899-1909, 1918-[33] music master, Berwick Grammar School; 1933-35 music master, Eyemouth High Public School.

Organist, St Luke's Church, Newcastle, and assistant organist at the cathedral; organist, Oswestry Parish Church; 1899-1936 organist, Berwick Parish Church.

1905-[1914], 1920 conductor, BCU; ?-1935 conductor, Berwick Oratorio Choir; 1926-27 conductor, Berwick Musical Association; pre-1914 trained Berwick men's glee party; 1930-31 conductor, Berwick Amateur Operatic Society.



Warden of the Northern Provinces of the Incorporated Guild of Musicians; secretary of the Berwick Centre for Trinity College of Music examinations.

Acted with the Berwick 'A.B.C.' dramatic society. Leader of a Berwick Esperanto group. Member and organist of Berwick St George Masonic Lodge, a Royal Arch Mason and Knight Templar. A founder member of the Berwick Rotary Club.

1910 served on the Grand Jury at Berwick Quarter Sessions.

1932 became a shareholder, by inheritance, in the Great Western Railway.

He was related to the family of Dr H. J. Gauntlett, the composer of hymn tunes including *Irby*, sung to 'Once in royal David's city'.

Composed church music and other works.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (28 December 2016); death certificate (29 December 2016); censuses 1881, 1901, 1911; Teachers' Registration Council Registers 1914-48, Great Western Railway Shareholders 1835-1932 ; <[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)> accessed 18 August 2018. *BN*, 18 January, 26 April 1910, 2 January 1912, 11 March 1913, 13 August 1918. Obituaries, *BN*, 7 January 1936; *BA*, 2 January 1936. Frederick W. Thornsby, *Dictionary of Organs and Organists* (Bournemouth: H. Logan & Company, 1912), 278.

## **Hadow, (Sir) William Henry**

(*b* 1859, Ebrington, Gloucestershire; *d* 1937, London)

Worcester College, Oxford.

1882 BA, 1885 MA, 1890 BMus Oxford; Hon. DMus, Durham, Oxford and Wales;

Hon. LLD and DLitt of other universities. 1918 knighted; 1920 CBE.

Educationalist, university administrator, musicologist and composer.

1885 lecturer, Worcester College; 1889 dean, 1909 Hon. fellow. 1909-19 principal,

Armstrong College, Newcastle, where he encouraged the development of music;

1916-18 vice-chancellor Durham University; 1919-30 vice-chancellor, Sheffield University.

1910-? A vice-president of the NOS.

1914-? Justice of the Peace.

From 1896 General Editor, *Oxford History of Music* and author of other works on music.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NUSC: 1/1/1 Calendars, 1916-17, 125; 1917-18 Supplement, 81, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; Foster, 583. NCL: 780.73 NOS Programmes 1894-1926. Obituary, *The Times*, 10 April 1937. Whiting, C. E., *The University of Durham 1832-1932* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1932), 249-50; E. M. Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1971), 37, 41; Eric Cross, 'Music', in McCord, *Newcastle University*, 85-86; 'Hadow, William Henry', in *OCM* 9 436. For fuller details see J. A. Fuller-Maitland and H. C. Colles, 'Hadow, Sir William Henry', in *Grove IV*, vol. IV, 491-92 and Supplementary Volume, 262; Nigel Fortune, 'Hadow, W(illiam) H(enry)' in *New Grove* 2, vol. 10, 650-51.

## **Healy, John (Proctor)**

(*b* 1913, Newcastle; *d* 1999, Newcastle)

1956 BMus, Durham; LRAM, ARCM, FRCO.

Teacher, organist, conductor and music critic.

During WWII formed choirs in North Africa and Italy; *c.*1944 military organist, St Peter's, Vatican.

*c.*1948-51 music teacher, Rutherford and Heaton Grammar Schools.

?1951-73 founded, and became principal of, the School of Music as part of the College of Art and Industrial Design, later the College of Arts and Technology, Newcastle.

1946-56 organist and choirmaster, St Andrew's Church, Newcastle; 1956-75, organist and choirmaster St James and St Basil's Church, Fenham. 1954 founded the St Andrew's Singers, later the St James and St. Basil's Singers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (5 September 2018). NUSC: 1/1/2 List of Graduates 1960, 59, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. *Newcastle Choral Society 1954-2004: Making Music for Fifty Years*, 1-5; William Maw, *The Story of Rutherford Grammar School formerly Rutherford College Newcastle upon Tyne* (Gateshead: Rutherford History Publication Committee, 1964), 132, 202.

## **Helmore, Frederick**

(*b c.*1820, Kidderminster, Worcestershire; *d* 1903, Helensburgh, Scotland)

Music teacher and teacher of singing.

Choirmaster to the Prince Consort, Prince Albert, died 1861.

By 1870 choirmaster, St Peter's Church, Oxford Street, Newcastle (Charles Chambers, q. v., was organist).

1868 succeeded William Rea as conductor of the CU (formerly the NSHCS).

1870 presented with an 'address and a purse of gold' in appreciation of his services to church music

By 1881 singing and elocution teacher, Stoke Newington; by 1891 singing and elocution teacher, Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire.

Publications include: *Memoir of the Rev. Thomas Helmore, M.A., Late Priest in Ordinary and Master of the Children of Her Majesty's Chapel Royal; Precentor of S. Mark's College, Chelsea; Hon. Precentor of the Motet Choir, and of the London Gregorian Association* (London: Joseph Masters and Co., 1891; reprinted, Forgotten Books); *Speakers, Singers, and Stammerers* (London: Joseph Masters and Co., 1874; reprinted, Leopold Classic Library).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs\\_stat\\_deaths/5581790?return\\_row=0](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs_stat_deaths/5581790?return_row=0)> accessed 2 June 2018; censuses 1841-1861, 1881-1901. *NDJ*, 4 March 1869; *NG*, 16 April 1870; *NDJ*, 23 December 1868. Frederick Helmore was the brother of Thomas Helmore, who is familiar today through his arrangement of *Veni Emmanuel* ('O come, O come, Emmanuel') and *Regnator orbis* ('O what their joy and their glory must be').

## **Hudson, Frederick**

(*b* 1913, Gateshead; *d* 1994, Newcastle)

Student of Sir Edward Bairstow, organist of York Minster.

1941 BMus, 1950 DMus Durham; 1949, FRCO.

Musicologist, university lecturer and organist.

1941-48 organist and master of the choristers, Alnwick Parish Church; 1948-49 director of Music, Hexham Abbey; by 1950-64, organist to the Bach Choir.

Music master at the Duke's School, Alnwick; 1949 lecturer in music, King's College, Durham University, later Newcastle University, 1970-78 reader; 1967-68 visiting professor, University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

c.1947 conductor, Alnwick Ladies Choir; pre-1948-49 chairman and conductor Alnwick Choral Society. 1960 founded the Cappella Novocastriensis, 1960-1964 director, 1964-89 president.

Member of the Händel Gesellschaft Council and the International Panel of the Halle Handel Edition. Edited works for the Neue Bach-Ausgabe and the original Hallische-Händel-Ausgabe. Other published editions include the Byrd masses and works by Giovanni Gabrieli. Author of 'A revised and extended catalogue of the works of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)' in *The Music Review*, vol. 37, May 1976, 106-129.

Composed a few motets, most for St George's Church, Jesmond.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NUSC: 1/1/2 List of Graduates 1948, 124; 1954, 167, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. Information sheet for University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Music, Special Lecture, 4 March 1977 (with Bach Choir papers on loan to the author); letter, Frederick Hudson to the secretary of the Cappella, 3 April 1989 (with Cappella papers on loan to the author). Programme of concert by the Cappella 'in memoriam Frederick Hudson', 10 July 1994. *NJ*, 13 April 1994; *MH*, 23 April 1947, 9 April 1948, 8 April 1949; *NJ*, 12 September 1960; *Northumberland Gazette*, 4 May 1962. David Scott, 'Hudson, Frederick' in *New Grove* 1980, vol. 8, 761-62

## **Huntley, George Frederick (William)**

(*b* 1859, Datchet, Berkshire; *d* 1913, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire)

Trinity College, Cambridge, 1887 MusB, 1894 MusD. ARCM, LRAM, FRCO.

Held organist's posts in London.

1894-95, organist St Nicholas's Cathedral. Used an orchestra at the cathedral for a harvest festival service at which his *Te Deum* in E flat was performed. 1895-?

organist, St Peter's Church, Eaton Square, London.

Composed an oratorio, church music, operettas, etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (29 June 2018). Venn, Pt 2, Vol. 3, 495. *MT*, 35/621 (1894), 764; 36/634 (1895), 830. Maggie Humphreys and Robert Evans, *Dictionary of Composers for the Church in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1997); H. C. L. Stocks, compiler, *British Cathedral Organists* (London: Hinrichsen Edition, 1949), 10.

## **Hutchinson, John Ernest**

(*b* 1876, Middlesbrough; *d* 1969, Falmouth)

FRCO; 1908 BMus, 1916 DMus Durham; Hon. RAM.

1891, solicitor's clerk; organist and singing teacher.

1903-47 organist and choirmaster, Jesmond Parish Church.

1901-06 conductor, NPTCS; 1903 conductor, Benwell Choral Society (Union);

*c.*1914/19 conductor, Allendale Choral Society; by 1934-49 conductor, YMCACS;

1948-64 conductor, NGCU; 1960-61 patron, Cappella.

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (23 February 2016); death certificate (24 February 2016); censuses 1881-1911; NUSC: 1/1/1 Calendars 1909-10, 185, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. NCL: YMCACS Programmes 1950-70; NCL: NGCU Programmes 1889-1982; GCL: NGCU Programmes 1920-29, 1930-39, 1940-1959; NCL: 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912; NCL: NPTCS Programmes 1896-1900; *MT*, 43/709 (1902), 191; 44/723 (1903), 334; *NJ*, 19 June 1914, 19 December 1919.

## **Ions, Thomas**

(*b* 1817, Gateshead; *d* 1857, Newcastle)

Newcastle Royal Grammar School. A pupil first of Monro, organist of St Andrew's Church, Newcastle, then of John Wesley Marr of Brunswick Place Chapel and later, in London, of Moscheles; 1833, pupil of Thomas Thompson, organist of St Nicholas's Church, Newcastle.

1848 BMus, 1854 DMus Oxford.

Organist and conductor.

For a short while a clerk to a local solicitor, George Tallentine Gibson, subsequently becoming apprenticed to Edward Bilton, a merchant.

1833 appointed organist at St. Mary's, Gateshead, having previously been the assistant; 1834 deputy organist St Nicholas's, Newcastle succeeding Thompson later the same year. 1850, organist at the opening of the organ by Nicholson and Son (Bradford) at Howard Street Chapel, North Shields.

c.1834 formed, with others, a glee club, of which he was pianist.

Conductor, Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Society; assistant conductor to Sir George Smart at the 1842 Newcastle Musical Festival. 1852-1857 conductor, NSHCS.

1855 presented with a silver baton and other gifts.

His compositions include services, anthems and motets.

1849 published *Cantica Ecclesiastica*, a collection of psalm and hymn tunes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Ions, England, Select Births and Christenings, 1838-1975 (<<https://search.ancestry.co.uk>> accessed 17 August 2018); death certificate (17 March 2016). Foster, 730. Obituary, *NJ*, 3 October 1857; *NJ*, 20 August 1917; *NJ*, 5 January 1850; *NSSG*, 30 August 1850. Geoffrey Watson, *A Historical Study of the Organs and Organists of the four Ancient Parish Churches of Newcastle upon Tyne* (submitted as part of the degree of MMus, Newcastle University, 1988); Brown, and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, 215-16. A lithograph of Ions is in the Song School of St Nicholas's Cathedral and reproduced in Chapter 2. This may have been a copy of one by an Edinburgh artist, advertised for sale in October 1857 (*NJ*, 24 October 1857). An oil painting known to have existed in 1911 is missing.

## **Jay, William Felicité.**

(*b* c.1815, Fulham; *d* 1882, Fulham)

1853, 1855 violinist and music teacher, Newcastle.

1881 retired music teacher, Fulham. His death certificate describes him as 'gentleman'.

1852, 1852 leader of the orchestra accompanying the NSHCS.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (16 August 2018); census 1881; *Ward's North of England Directory*, 1853; William Whellan, *History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland* (London: 1855). *NG*, 3 April, 15 May 1852; *NJ*, 9 April 1853. A notice in the *NJ* of 2 October 1852 lists Peter Jay as the principal cellist; the census for 1851 and the above directories show he was a music teacher.

## **Jeffries, John Edward.**

(*b* 1863, Walsall, Staffordshire; *d* 1918, Walsall)

Studied at the RCM; FRCO.

Music teacher and organist.

Chorister, then, *c.*1880-*c.*1890, organist, St Paul's Church, Walsall; in 1881 he was a 'musical student'; 1895-1918 organist, St Nicholas's Cathedral.

1899-at least 1909 conductor, NAVS (from 1907 the Newcastle Vocal Society); pre-1901–1904 conductor, Jarrow Philharmonic Society; 1909 organist to the Newcastle Musical Festival.

Composed church works including the oratorio, *The Life and Death of Christ*, of which sections were performed at St Nicholas's Cathedral and by the Jarrow Philharmonic Society and the NAVS.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (22 December 2015); censuses 1871-81, 1901-11. NCL: 780.93 NAVS Programmes etc., 1875-1905; *NJ*, 6 December 1893; *MT*, 43/707 (1902), 45; 45/741 (1904), 738; 48/770 (1907), 260; *NJ*, 13, 16 May 1918. Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, 220; H. C. L. Stocks, compiler, *British Cathedral Organists* (London: Hinrichsen Edition, 1949), 10.

## **Lambert, Sir Arthur (William)**

(*b* 1876, Newcastle; *d* 1948, Newcastle)

1930 knighted.

With the Tyneside Scottish Regiment in WWI; awarded the MC. President of Newcastle Central Branch of the British Legion.

1910 elected to Newcastle City Council; 1923-24 sheriff; 1925-26, 1928-29 lord mayor; 1930 elected alderman. 1929 an organiser of the North-East Exhibition. By 1912-21 conductor, Central Hall Choral Society; by 1923-29 conductor, YMCACS.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (19 June 2018); censuses 1851 to 1881. Obituary, *NJ*, 30 October 1948. *Proceedings 1923-24*, 6-9; 1926-27, 2-7; 1928-29, 2-5; 1929-30, 662-65, 905. NCL: 780.73 NAVS

Programmes etc, 1875-1905, programme 20 December 1880. *NJ*, 12 March 1861; *MT*, 53/836 (1912), 670; 53/838 (1912), 812; *The Times*, 3 June 1930.

## **Liddle, John Shepherd**

(*b* c. 1824, Newcastle; *d* 1884, St Neots)

BMus, Cambridge.

Organist and music teacher.

By 1850 organist, St Andrew's Church, Newcastle; *c.*1861 organist, St Peter's Church.

Between 1861 and 1871 he moved to St Neots in Huntingdonshire.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (19 June 2018); censuses 1851 to 1881. *Ward's Directory*, 1850-62. NCL: 780.73  
NAVS Programmes etc, 1875-1905, programme 20 December 1880. *NJ*, 12 March 1861.

## **Lloyd, Charles Francis**

(*b* 1852, Hoole, Cheshire; *d* 1917, Newcastle)

Bank official, conductor and composer.

1878 BMus Oxford.

*c.*1868 joined the National Provincial Bank at Beaumaris; *c.*1872 moved to North Shields, becoming manager successively of the Gateshead and Sunderland branches; 1903, manager of the Mosley Street, Newcastle, branch.

*c.*1868 organist, Beaumaris Parish Church; *c.*1872-*c.*1887 organist, Tynemouth Parish Church.

1883/4-91 conductor, South Shields Choral Society; conductor, Tynemouth Philharmonic Society (disbanded by 1895).



Associated with the Newcastle Chamber Music Society and the NGCU, of which he was a vice-president. An initiator of the Newcastle Musical Festival, 1909, of which he was honorary treasurer and one of the joint honorary secretaries.

Wrote for the *Newcastle Journal* under the pseudonym Staccato.

A governor of the Royal Grammar School, a life governor of the Royal Victoria

Infirmery and a churchwarden of St Nicholas's Cathedral.

Composed church music, a Festival Overture and other works.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (16 June 2017); censuses 1861, 1881-1911. Obituaries in *NJ*, 13 and 16 October 1917; Foster, 860. *NC*, 28 March 1896; *SDG*, 19 September 1891, 21 October 1909; *MT*, 36/627 (1895), 328. Humphreys and Evans, *Dictionary of Composers for the Church*, 210.

## **Lovell, Percy (Albert)**

(*b* 1919, Warmley; *d* 2004, Newcastle)

MA, BMus Cambridge; LRAM.

Schoolmaster, college and university lecturer.

1944-64 director of music, Bootham School, York; 1964-66 lecturer, Northumberland

College of Education; 1966-84 lecturer then senior lecturer in music, Newcastle

University.

1954-97 conductor, later director, of the National Operatic and Dramatic Association

Operatic Summer School.

*c.*1958 director, York Opera Players; 1963 director, York Cantata Singers and

Players; 1965-71 conductor, Riding Mill Choral Society; director, Northern Chamber Opera;

*c.*1966-2004 founder and conductor, Camerata Singers; 1972-84 conductor, Bach

Choir; 1972-91 conductor, Tyneside Chamber Orchestra; 1981 conductor, Newcastle University Madrigal Choir.

1995-2004 conductor, Tynedale Orchestra.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NUSC: Uncatalogued, Lovell (Percy) Archive, Newcastle University Archive; 1/6/1 Calendars 1966-67, 110, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. Bach Choir programmes. Information supplied by Jonathan Lovell, email 3 November 2018; information about the Tyneside Chamber Orchestra supplied by Dr Lisa Shaw, email 3 September 2018. <[ridingmillchoralsociety.org.uk](http://ridingmillchoralsociety.org.uk)> accessed 4 September 2018.

## **Matthews, (James) Denis**

(*b* 1919, Coventry; *d* 1988, Birmingham)

1935-40, RAM.

*c.*1972 MA Newcastle, *c.*1973 Hon. DMus St Andrew's, Honorary doctorates from Hull and Warwick Universities; FRAM, Hon. FTCL.

1975 CBE.

Served in the RAF during WWII.

Pianist, university lecturer, professor and composer.

1971-84 first professor of music, Newcastle University.

1971-88 president of Newcastle Bach Choir (1971-86 jointly with Dr Edmund Rubbra, CBE).

Author of autobiography, *In Pursuit of Music*, 1966.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obituaries, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 1988; *The Times*, 14 June 1975. Biography among papers relating to the Bach Choir on loan to the author; Bach Choir programmes. Joan Chissell and Stanley Sadie, 'Matthews, Denis (James)', *New Grove* 2, vol. 16, 146-47.

## **McConnell-Wood, William James**

See Wood, William James McConnell

## **Milner, Arthur (Frederick)**

(*b* 1884, Manchester; *d* 1972, Newcastle)

Educated at Dame Allan's School, Newcastle.

1913 ARCO; 1915 ARCM; 1951 BMus, 1956 DMus Durham; FTCL.

Teacher, conductor, music critic and composer.

Taught at Dame Allan's Girls' School; lecturer in music, Armstrong College, Lemington Adult School and the Newcastle Conservatoire. 1927-48 music master, later director of music, Newcastle Royal Grammar School. Lecturer in the extra-mural department of King's College, Durham University, later Newcastle University.

1932-35 organist, St George's Church, Jesmond.

1950-70 senior music critic, *NJ*; music reviewer, *MT*.

1923 founder and conductor, Oriana Singers (or Newcastle Oriana Choir).

1932-47 conductor, NOS; sometime conductor, West Hartlepool Orchestra and the Tyneside Chamber Orchestra.

1948-72 member of the Pen and Palette Club.

Composer of chamber, orchestral and organ music.

Published articles include 'Charles Avison I' and 'Charles Avison II' in *MT*, 95/1331 (1954), 16-18 and 95/1332 (1954), 73-75; wrote *James Preston: An Appreciation* (unpublished).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth and death certificates (5 March 2018). Obituaries in *NJ*, 12 September 1972 and *MT*, 113/1557 (1972), 1116; NUSC: 1/1/2 List of Graduates 1954, 223; 1960, 86, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; TWAS: S.NOS/955/12 Programmes 1885-1978, programme 6 February 1957; NCL: L706 *Pen and Palette Club Papers* 1971-75 (1972-73), 27-28; *NMNC*, 13, 20 February 1923, 21 October, 16 December 1924; *NDC*, 31 March 1925. *Old Novocastrians Association Magazine*, Issue 98, Autumn 2016, 11; Percy Lovell, 'The musicians', in *The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne: Bicentenary Lectures 1993* (Newcastle: The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1994), 124-45, (136-138); Brian Mains and Anthony Tuck, *Royal Grammar School Newcastle upon Tyne: A History of the School in its Community* (Stocksfield, Northumberland, etc: Oriel Press, 1986), 199, 229, 276. Information supplied by Barbara Peacock.

## **Murray, David**

(b 1951)

Lecturer, teacher, conductor and pianist.

Head of music, Whitley bay High School; senior lecturer, Newcastle College.

2002 head of keyboard studies, Newcastle University.

2004-13 head of keyboard studies, Weekend school, Sage Gateshead.

1971-73 conductor, Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union.

1992 – the present conductor, Bishopwearmouth Choral Society.

2001-17 conductor, Ryton Choral Society.

Conductor, Hexham Abbey Festival Chorus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <<http://davidmurraypianist.com>>; <[www.bishopwearmouth.co.uk/history-of-the-society](http://www.bishopwearmouth.co.uk/history-of-the-society)>; <[www.hexhamabbeyfestival.org.uk](http://www.hexhamabbeyfestival.org.uk)>; <[www.rytonchoralsociety.org.uk](http://www.rytonchoralsociety.org.uk)>. NGCU programmes, 1889-1982. Information supplied by David Murray.

## **Newman, Sidney (Thomas Mayow)**

(*b* 1906, London; *d* 1971, Stroud)

University lecturer, professor, organist and conductor.

1925-28 Oxford University; 1929-30 RCM.

MA Oxford; 1946 Hon. DMus Durham; Hon. RAM; FRCO, FTCL; 1962 CBE.

1930-1941 lecturer in music, King's College, Durham University; 1941-1970 Reid

Professor of Music, Edinburgh University.

1930-1940 conductor Bach Choir; conductor, the Newcastle String Players.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obituaries, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 1971; *NJ*, 5 June 1941; *The Times*, 2 June 1962. *Sidney Newman Remembered 1906-1971: A centenary collection of personal reminiscences by Edinburgh colleagues* ((Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Collection of Historical Musical Instruments, 2006). For an account of Newman's time as conductor of the Bach Choir see Large, 'Building on the heritage (1930-1984)' in Borthwick and others *The Newcastle upon Tyne Bach Choir*, 307-48 (307-15).

## **Penman, Joseph Grey**

(*bapt* 1820, Newcastle; *d* 1886, Killingworth, Northumberland)

1851 printer; 1871 photographer; 1881-86 assistant overseer.

1852-? Secretary, NSHCS; 1852-? chorus master, NSHCS; 1857 conducted the choir at a Musical Festival in Durham on the death of Dr Thomas Ions; 1858 conducted the choir in *Messiah* in connection with the opening of the Blyth and Cowpen Central Hall; 1861-1868 alternated with William Rea as conductor of the choir.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (20 April 2017); <[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)> accessed 17 August 2018; censuses 1851, 1871, 1881. Reports in *NJ*, 3 October 1857 to 29 April 18.

## **Preston, James Moody**

(*b* 1860, Gateshead; *d* 1932, Gateshead)

Studied the violin and piano with his father, Stephen E. Preston, and then the piano in London, c. 1873, with Lindsay Sloper; 1881, attended the Guildhall School of Music, studying the organ with Dr John (later Sir John) Stainer, who referred to Preston's 'remarkable abilities as an organist'.

1875 organist St Joseph's Church, Gateshead; 1883 organist (for three months), Brunswick Place Methodist Chapel; 1883-88 organist, St Thomas's Church; 1888-1931 organist and choirmaster St George's Church, Jesmond; a series of evening organ recitals he gave from 1891-94 included 'works by almost every known composer for the organ'. 1883 local examiner for the Royal College of Music. 1911 contributed to a series of recitals to celebrate the dedication of the rebuilt organ at St Nicholas's Cathedral; his programmes included works by William Rea and Charles Avison. 1928 broadcast organ recital for the BBC from St Mary-le-Bow, London; 1929 gave the opening recital of the Harrison and Harrison organ in the new City Hall. 1931 BBC broadcast of an organ and choral concert from the City Hall. He gave opening recitals of many other organs in Northumberland and Durham. Among them

were the Harrison and Harrison at Alnwick Parish Church in 1892, the Binns at John Knox Presbyterian Church, Elswick Road, Newcastle, in 1901 the Blackett and Howden at St Mary's, Gateshead in 1895 and 1925 and the Binns at Christ Church, Gateshead in 1912. 1921 gave a recital on the new 'orchestral' (cinema) organ in Shipcote Hall, Gateshead. In addition, he gave many recitals throughout the country. 1888 founded, and was first conductor of, the Gateshead Choral Society/NGCU; resigned 1906, though occasionally acted as organist. 1890, conductor, Jarrow Philharmonic Society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (1 July 2009); death certificate (29 June 2009). Obituary, *NJ*, 27 February 1933. NCL: L029.3 Local Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 6, 1883, unidentified newspaper item, 19 May [1883]; NCL: L780 Newspaper Cuttings, 1899-1904, undated extract from *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, c.1899-1900; *NJ*, 6 December 1893, 13, 19 December 1901, 9 December 1902, 31 March 1903, 9 December 1912, 20 March, 30 October 1915, 15 September 1921; *MT*, 33/592 (1892), 367; 35/621 (1894), 764; 36/626 (1895), 253; 43/707 (1902), 26; 44/723 (1903), 334; 56/864 (1915), 112; 56/865 (1915), 175; 70/1041 (1929), 1016. *Radio Times*, 240, 6 May – 12 May 1928 (<<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk>> accessed 31 July 2018). Programmes published in the *Form of Service to be used at the Dedication of the Re-constructed and Enlarged Organ in the Cathedral Church of St. Nicholas Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, November 1911. Arthur Milner, *James Preston: An Appreciation* (Typescript, compiled for the Reference Section of the Gateshead Public Library, 1955); Anthony Shedden, 'The organ in the church of St Mary, Gateshead' in *The Organ*, 50 (1971-72), 167-73 ((171).

## Rea, William

(b 1827, London; d 1903, Newcastle)

Organist and conductor.

Studied in London, Leipzig and Prague.

Hon. FCO; 1886 Hon. DMus Durham.

Prior to coming to Newcastle was conductor of the London Polyhymnian Choir and organist of St Andrew Undershaft and other churches.

1860-88 organist to Newcastle corporation; organist, St Hilda's Church, North Shields.

1891-93 conductor, South Shields Choral Society; 1860-63 conductor, MRChoir1;  
1863-69 conductor, NSHCS/CU; 1870-93 conductor MRChoir2; 1875-93 conductor,  
NAVS; 1893-99 Dr Rea's Amateur Vocal Society (an amalgamation of MRC2 and  
the NAVS).

1897-80 conductor, NOS.

Composed anthems and other music.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (23 February 2016). Obituaries in *NDJ*, *SDG* and *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 9 March 1903; NUSC: 1/1/1 Calendars 1887, 145, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. *SSG*, 2 October 1891; TWAS: S.NOS/955/12, programme 6 February 1957. *London Evening Standard*, 25 May, 24 June 1858; *London City Press*, 4 June 1859; *MT*, 44/722 (1903), 238-39. For fuller details see William Barclay Squire and Frank Kidson, 'Rea, William' in *Grove IV*, Vol. IV, 333. J. W. Pegg also includes an account of him in *Newcastle's Musical Heritage: An Introduction* [2003/08], <[www.newcastle.gov.uk/wwwfileroot/legacy/educationlibraries/tbp/historyofmusic](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/wwwfileroot/legacy/educationlibraries/tbp/historyofmusic)>, 41-47. Some of his anthems were in the repertory of the choir of St George's Church, Jesmond.

## **Redshaw, Middleton**

(*b* 1819, Rowley, Co. Durham; *d* 1864, Newcastle)

Music teacher (from at least 1841), organist (from at least 1844), organ and singing teacher.

1852-c.1860 organist, NSHCS; 1858 organist, St Mary's Cathedral. He is reported as playing the organ for other societies in Newcastle and South Shields.

1853 presented with a score of Handel's *Samson* by members of the NSHCS 'as a token of their gratitude for the highly valuable services he has rendered to their society during the past year'.

It is possible that he is the same Redshaw who conducted from the piano for a concert of the Gateshead Amateur Harmonic Society in 1839; he may also be the Redshaw who established a singing class at the Windy Nook Mechanics' Institute and performed there in 1864.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975 (<[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)> accessed 17 August 2018); death certificate (9 February 2017); Grant of Letters of Administration, 5 August 1864; censuses 1841-61. *Williams's Commercial Directory of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North and South Shields, Sunderland, &c* (Newcastle: J. Williams, 1844), Gateshead Section 25; Whellan, *History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland*; *Ward's Directory*, 1859-60; *Post Office Directory of Northumberland*. *NJ*, 7 December 1839, 15 January 1853, 30 January 1858; *NSSG*, 28 May 1852, 2 February 1855; *NJ*, 13, 14 May 1862, 19 January 1863; *NG*, 4 June 1864; *NC*, 7 May 1864 In 1852 he announced that he had at his residence 'a powerful fine toned organ, specially erected to facilitate the progress of his pupils' (*NJ*, 22 May 1852). There is firm evidence of his birth in 1819, confirmed by his death aged 45 in 1864. However, the census of 1841, when ages were usually rounded down to the nearest 5, gives his age as 15 (when he was described as 'musical professor') implying a birth year 1822-29. The censuses of 1851 and 1861 give his age as 25 and 37 respectively, pointing to a birth year c.1824-26. It is evident that the ages given in the censuses are incorrect.

## **Richardson, Peter**

(*b* c.1840, Berwick; *d* 1922, Berwick)

Tailor and clothier.

Member of Berwick town council.

Member of BCU; 1875 conductor.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Censuses 1841-1911. Obituary, *BN*, 31 October 1922.

## **Shadforth, Frederick John**

(*b* 1877, Gateshead; *d* 1939, Gateshead)

1901 a postal clerk; 1911 a clerk in the engineering department of the GPO.

1895 to at least 1901 accompanist, Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society; it is possible that he relinquished this post when J. R. Andrews, conductor, resigned in 1901.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)>; censuses 1891-1911.

## **Sutcliffe, George (Henry)**

(*b* 1911, Gateshead; *d* 1993, Newcastle)



Pupil of J. E. Hutchinson.

FRCO.

Company secretary, conductor and organist.

1936-47 organist, St George's Church, Jesmond; 1947-1978 organist, Jesmond Parish Church; 1978 organist, St Gabriel's Church, Heaton.

By 1945-51 deputy conductor and accompanist, 1951-79 conductor, YMCACS.

1945-? accompanist, NGCU; 1961-64 harpsichordist, 1963-65 deputy director, Cappella; mid-1970s formed the Jesmond Singers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)>. YMCACS AGM minutes, 9 July 1945, committee meeting minutes, 8 January 1951, 2 April 1979; Cappella programmes 1961-65. *NJ*, 4 October 1945. Alan Munden, *A Light in a Dark Place; Jesmond Parish Church Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: Clayton Publications, 2006), 186, 222. Information supplied by Eleanor Kenyon in an email, 19 January 2015, and by Barbara Peacock in an email, 27 August 2018.

## **Terry, Charles Sanford**

(*b* 1864, Newport Pagnell; *d* 1936, Westerton of Pitfodels, nr Aberdeen)

1883-86 Clare College, Cambridge; 1929 hon. fellow.

1891 MA, 1918 LittD Cambridge; 1892 MA *ad eundem*, 1924 Hon. DLitt Durham;

1935 Hon. PhD Leipzig; Hon. LLD Aberdeen, LLD Glasgow, DMus Edinburgh,

DMus Oxford; Hon. FRCM.

Historian, university lecturer, professor and musicologist.

1890-98 lecturer in history in the Day Training Department for Teachers, Durham

College of Science, Newcastle; 1898-1903 lecturer in history, 1903-30, Burnett-

Fletcher professor of history, University of Aberdeen.

1890 founded and conducted Durham College of Science Choral Society.

Composed the music for *Salve Boreale Lumen!* for the Choral Society (see Appendix 2).

Author of *Bach: A Biography* (London: 1928) and other works on Bach and the Bach family.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obituaries, *The Times*, 6 November 1936. NUSC: 1/1/1/ Calendars 1899-1900, 326; 1/4/1, Armstrong College Calendars 1921-22, 400; 1924-25, 313, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; Venn, Pt 2, Vol. 6, 143. *MT*, 77/1126 (1936), 1137-38. Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 26, 28; Eric Cross, 'Music', in McCord, advisory ed., *Newcastle University*, 85. For fuller details see Walter Emery, 'Terry, Charles Sanford' in *New Grove* 2, vol. 25, 303-04. An *ad eundem* degree was one awarded by one university on the basis of the same degree in another university.

## **Wade, Frank**

1946 joined the BBC as music assistant in Leeds; 1949 appointed to a similar post in Newcastle; 1950, returned to Leeds; 1951 music programme organiser in London, later becoming head of music for the Light Programme. He retired in 1965.

1949 conductor, YMCACS, retaining this post while working in Leeds; 1951 resigned as conductor on his appointment to the BBC in London.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information about his association with the BBC supplied by Jeff Walden, Archivist, BBC Written Archives Centre (email, 12 July 2018). YMCACS Minutes, 14, 25 July 1949; 25 September 1950; 8 January 1951.

## **Webbe, John**

(*b* c.1822, Canterbury; *d* 1875, Ruswarp, Whitby).

Pianist, conductor and teacher of piano and singing; taught in London and Newcastle.

Pianist to the Duchess of Richmond; teacher of music, harp and piano at the Ladies' College, Tynemouth.

1858-61 conductor, NSHCS.

1861 an injury to his left hand curtailed his musical career.

A connection with Samuel Webbe, composer, has not yet been established.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Death certificate (14 October 2016); Calendar of Wills <[probatesearch.service.gov.uk](http://probatesearch.service.gov.uk)> accessed 16 October 2016; census 1871. *NJ*, 15 January 1859, 18 August 1860, 5 April 1861, 7, 15, 21 October 1861.

## **Westrup, Sir Jack (Allan)**

(*b* 1904, London; *d* 1975, Headley, Hampshire)

1922-25 Balliol College, Oxford.

1926 BA, BMus; 1944 Hon. DMus, Oxford; 1942, FRCO.

1961 knighted.

Schoolmaster, musicologist, university lecturer, professor and organist.

1928-34 taught classics, Dulwich College; 1938-40 taught at the RAM; 1941-44

lecturer (temporary), King's College, Newcastle; 1944-46 Peyton and Barber

Professor of Music, Birmingham; 1947-71 Heather Professor of Music, Oxford.

1941-44 conductor, Bach Choir.

1942-[44] organist, St Thomas's Church.

His major publications were *Purcell* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons; New York: E. P.

Dutton and Co., 1937) and his contributions to the *New Oxford History of Music*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obituaries, *The Times*, 23 April 1975, *MT*, 116/1588 (1975), 563-6. NUSC: 1/5/1, 1941-42, 1942-43, 1943-44, A/11, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. *NJ*, 13 August, 14 October 1941. For full details see *New Grove* 2.

## **Whittaker, William Gillies**

(*b* 1876, Newcastle; *d* 1944, Orkney Isles)

1892, Armstrong College.

1898 ARCO, 1901 FRCO; 1902 BMus, 1921 DMus Durham; 1928 Hon. DMus

Edinburgh; 1941 Hon. LLD Glasgow.

Musicologist, university lecturer, professor, composer and conductor.

1898-29 instructor, lecturer and reader, Armstrong College; sometime member of

staff of the Newcastle Conservatoire of Music; 1929-38 first Gardiner professor of

Music, Glasgow University; 1929-41 principal of the Scottish National Academy of Music.

1895-1908 organist, St Paul's Presbyterian Church, South Shields.

1902-29 conductor, ACCS (initially the Durham College of Science Choral Society);

1920 founded the Armstrong College Orchestra, conductor 1920-29; 1908 conductor,

Whitley Bay and District Choral Society; 1915 founded the Bach Choir, 1915-29

conductor; 1919-27 conductor, NGCU.

1919 one of the founder members of the NEMT.

1920 Officier d'Académie.

Published works include songs, choral, piano and instrumental music, arrangements of folksongs, school songbooks and editions of Bach cantatas and other works.

Contributed articles to *Music & Letters*, *Musical Times* and other journals.

Author of *Collected Essays* (Oxford etc: Oxford University Press, 1940) and *The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach: Sacred and Secular* in two vols, published posthumously (Oxford, etc: Oxford University Press, 1959).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NUSC: 1/1/1 Calendars 1903-04, 157; 1921-22, 410; 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendars 1905-1930, 1921-22, 410; 1/4/1 Armstrong College Calendars 1905-1930, University Archives, Newcastle University Library. For a major account of Whittaker see Borthwick, 'In the Swim', from which some of the details above are taken. See also, J. Philip Owen, 'A Northumbrian musician: William Gillies Whittaker DMus, FRCO' in *Northumberland & Durham Family History Society Journal*, 35/4 (2010), 126-131.

## **Wolstenholme, Jack**

(b 1909, Rishton, Lancashire; d 1988, Newcastle)

1946 BMus (Durham), LRAM, ARCM, ARCO.

1934 solicitor's clerk; 1939 inspector, Air Raid Precautions, Blackburn; 1944

temporary assistant, Ministry of Home Security, Oxford.

Head of music, Tynemouth High School; 1948-75 director of music, Newcastle Royal Grammar School.

Organist, St Andrew's Church, Newcastle; organist, Holy Saviour's Church, Tynemouth.

1947-54 conductor, NOS; 1964-76 conductor, Cappella.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate (29 December 2017); marriage certificate (8 January 2018); birth certificate of daughter (8 January 2018), and of son (18 January 2018); order of funeral service, 28 January 1988. NUSC: 1/1/2 List of Graduates 1948, 250, University Archives, Newcastle University Library; TWAS: S.NOS/955/12, Programmes 1885-1978, programme 6 February 1957. *NJ*, 26 January 1988. *Old Novocastrians Association Magazine*, 88, Autumn 2016, 11. *Royal Grammar School Newcastle upon Tyne: Speech Day 6 November 1958*, 3.

## **Wood, William James McConnell (later McConnell-Wood)**

(*b* 1859, Jedburgh; *d* 1929, Newcastle)

Music teacher, singing teacher, conductor and composer.

1893 founded the Northumbrian Select Choir (Mr McConnell-Wood's Choir), conductor 1893 to at least 1925.

His compositions include *The Doomed Temple* with words by Dr Hemy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs\\_stat\\_births/39115339?return\\_row=0](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/view-image/nrs_stat_births/39115339?return_row=0) accessed 5 June 2018; death certificate (12 June 2018); censuses 1861-71, 1901-11. *Ward's Directory* 1903-10. *NJ*, 14 December 1893; *NMNC*, 17 March 1925; *MT*, 54/843 (1913), 334.

## Appendices

### **Appendix 1 (a) William Rea to the Town Hall Building Committee, August 1862**

5, St. Mary's Place, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Aug. 30, 1862.

Gentlemen. – I beg respectfully to state that the Organ in the new Town Hall is in such condition that I can with difficulty perform upon it, many of the large pipes are so bent that there is danger of their breaking off at the foot, and falling amongst the smaller pipes of the Organ. The Organ is altogether a very ill-made, incomplete, and unsatisfactory instrument.

The soundboards are much too small, being only 7 feet 6 inches wide by 5 feet 4 inches deep; the pipes have not, therefore, sufficient room to speak properly, and they are with difficulty tuned. The sound-boards of a large Organ in Germany measure 15, 16, and 17 feet. Besides this, the present sound-boards, miserably scanty as they are, are leaky, and as much wind escapes as would supply the entire Organ. It is impossible to perform upon more than a small portion of the great Organ, and the bellows have great difficulty in keeping up the necessary supply of air for the consumption of even these few pipes.

The Hydraulic Engine employed to work the bellows is, from the excessive demands made upon it (in consequence of the great and radical defects just named), frequently put out of repair, and there is always, I find, great danger of the Organ stopping suddenly whenever used: such a catastrophe happened not long since at a public performance.

The trunks which convey the wind from the bellows to the sound-boards are too small.

The metal of which the pipes are made is of a very inferior kind, consisting for the most part of lead, with a very small proportion of tin; good pipe metal is composed of at least one-third tin and two-thirds lead, the best metal being pure tin.

The use of lead to such an extent as is employed in your Organ, is highly objectionable; - 1<sup>st</sup>. It produces a dull and unmusical tone. 2<sup>nd</sup>. The pipes being soft, easily bend, readily decay, and are soon rendered useless.

Some of the largest metal pipes in your Organ are made of a still cheaper material than that just alluded to, viz. - Zinc. Whenever it is intended to introduce zinc pipes, it is customary, I am informed, to state the fact in the specification. When the pipes are to be made of good metal, the proportions of lead and tin are explicitly stated.

The employment of incomplete stops is another extremely objectionable feature in the Town Hall Organ. In one department of the Organ, containing nine stops, four, or nearly one-half of them, which should contain fifty-six pipes each, have but forty-four pipes each, forty-eight of the largest, most important, and most expensive pipes have been omitted. This system of introducing incomplete and imperfect stops is deprecated by all organists and organ-builders, and is only resorted to in extreme cases, where the organ manufacturer is restricted either in price or space.

The tone of the instrument (excepting the reed pipes, which are good), is most unmusical, and I think positively offensive.

The Organ has been very carefully examined by Mr. Schultz, the eminent German Organ Builder; Mr. Rogers, the organist of Doncaster; and Mr. Forster, of the firm of Forster and Andrews, Organ Builders, Hull. I have had, in addition, the opinions of many organists and organ manufacturers, and I find that to make the present Organ a complete, sound, and beautiful instrument, one that should retain its value and beauty of tone, as the old Organs have done for centuries, an outlay of £500 would be required.

I have the honour to remain,

Your obedient Servant,

William Rea, Organist.

To the Gentlemen of the Town Hall Building Committee.

Having studied the work of Gray & Davison (G&D) for many years now, I have come to the conclusion that they never quite mastered the technology needed to construct instruments on the scale attempted in the 1850s and 1860s. The firm won a series of contracts in the earlier decade for innovative concert organs: Glasgow City Hall (1852-3), Birmingham Music Hall (1855-6), the Handel Festival Organ for the Crystal Palace, Sydenham (1856-7), St James's Hall, Piccadilly, London (1857-8), Leeds Town Hall (1857-9) and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Town Hall (1858-9). It is clear from some contemporary comments that some were more successful than others, both tonally and mechanically, and that one or two of the firm's large organs had serious deficiencies. At the same time, the tonal developments adopted by Frederick Davison (mainly from Cavaillé-Coll, met with approval from critics and players, among whom Henry Smart was prominent. Smart wrote a number of reviews of G&D (and other) organs in the *Musical World* during this period; his comments are generally very positive, though in a couple of instances he expresses concern about the crowded interior of the organ in question (Magdalen College, Oxford, for example) and the implications for future maintenance. This is borne out by surviving cross-sections in the G&D archive. St Pancras Parish Church (essentially the transplanted Birmingham Music Hall organ), the Oxford instrument, and (especially) St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle are crammed into their casework.

It raises the question of who was responsible for the layout and technical design of G&D's organs. Nothing I have seen provides any evidence that Frederick Davison (sole proprietor throughout this period) was a practical organ-builder. He seems to have been a player, at least in his earlier years (he had lessons with Samuel Wesley), and was then recruited by William Hill to be his business partner (1837-8) with responsibility for overseeing the office during Hill's absences working on site. (That, at least, is my interpretation of what was going on.) I get the impression he soon became capable of issuing quotations, and presumably keeping a general eye on the workshop in Hill's absence, but there was probably a drawing office and a workshop foreman who was responsible for the technical decisions. In 1838, Davison married John Gray's daughter, and, no doubt to Hill's fury, left to become his father-in-law's employee and (soon) business partner. I think he must have assumed a similar role in Gray's business to the one he had enjoyed alongside Hill, though he



undoubtedly began to influence ‘artistic’ decisions of the firm as they began to adopt features of the ‘German System’ (C-compasses, pedal organs, sub-unison stops and more mixtures, novelty flutes and strings), but I strongly suspect he was an ideas man, not a practical workman on the bench.

There is no reason to think, either, that Davison was an engineer. Following John Gray’s death in 1849, Davison was free to be more innovative, and he soon began to introduce ideas from Cavaillé-Coll’s practice including variable wind pressures, octave couplers, vents, harmonic stops and the pneumatic lever. There is clear evidence that Henry Smart became a regular (if largely anonymous) collaborator, and Smart, as well as being one of the finest organists of his generation, had a solid background in engineering. It was he and his friend William Spark who prepared not only the stop-list, but the technical drawings for the huge Leeds Town Hall organ; it is said that Cavaillé-Coll inspected the drawings and described them as being the best he had seen. They survive, and are undoubtedly accomplished.

But did Davison have the resources (including experienced workmen) to bring off these ambitious instruments? I rather suspect not. The Leeds organ was dogged by problems after its completion, and the Council brought in E.J. Hopkins and George Cooper to report on what was wrong; within a few years, G&D’s services had been dispensed with. Later (in the 1890s) the instrument was comprehensively rebuilt with the replacement of all the fluework and the provision of larger soundboards. The Newcastle Town Hall organ was widely criticised for its small soundboards, inadequate winding, and unattractive tonal quality. A few years later, the new G&D organ in Hereford Cathedral proved less than satisfactory owing to problems with the pneumatic levers, and, again, G&D were displaced and Nicholson of Worcester was brought in to install a new pneumatic action.

It is important not to lose a sense of perspective. The G&D organs in Leeds and the Crystal Palace both sustained demanding recital and concert programmes for many years: they can’t have been that bad. We should also remember that organ-building was going through a period of unprecedented change during which English organ-builders, used to making comparatively modest instruments, had to learn how to build on a radically different scale; William Hill, for example, undoubtedly the best of the older generation of builder, changed his style in the late-1850s under the influence of the larger soundboards, more generous winding, and bolder voicing of Edmund Schulze (it was a transition Frederick Davison seems not to have made).

And at the same time, Henry Willis was coming up fast behind him, having mastered pneumatic technology and developed his own successful and distinctive voicing techniques. Both were practical organ-builders in a way that I believe Frederick Davison was not. So G&D got left behind. They continued to turn out sound and musical church organs for another twenty years or more, but they had been overtaken, and by the mid-1860s, the great days of the firm were in the past.

Nicholas Thistlethwaite

December 2018<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Comments made in an email to the author, 27 December 2018.

# SALVE BOREALE LUMEN !

CARMEN NOVOCASTRENSE

CONDIDIT

JOANNES WIGHT DUFF, A.M.

MUSICISQUE MODIS ACCOMMODAVIT

CAROLUS SANFORD TERRY, A.M.

HOC CANTICUM

VIRO ADMODUM REVERENDO GEORGIO GULIELMO KITCHIN, S.T.P.  
PERMISSU DEDICATUM EST.

MDCCCXOV.

(To be conducted by the Composer. Verses  
III., IV., V. will not be sung).

## I.

*Unisoni*] Salve boreale lumen  
Resplendentis Angliae !  
Salve venerandum numen  
Veteris Dunelmiae !  
Alma Mater, ave ! salve !  
Floreas in secula !

## II.

*Divisi*] Binos amnes, Vedram, Tynam,  
Una voce canite :  
Litterarum disciplinam  
Nunc paullisper sistite.  
Alma Mater, etc.

## III.

*Viri*] Tomos tineis tradentes  
Jubilare cantico :  
*Feminae*] Togam nigram exuentes  
Indulgete gaudio.  
*Omnes*] Alma Mater, etc.

## IV.

*Unisoni*] Jam concentu gaudeamus  
Dunelmenses filii !  
Almam Matrem salutamus :  
Floreat Pons Ælii !  
Alma Mater, etc.

## V.

*Divisi*] Fervet et nescit domari  
Fodinarum suboles :  
Ardeat fervore pari  
Et nostrorum indoles !  
Alma Mater, etc.

## VI.

*Feminae*] Academicæ sorores  
Concinentes floreant !  
*Viri*] Floreant et professores  
Et qui illos audiant !  
*Omnes*] Alma Mater, etc.

## VII.

*Divisi*] Vivat quaelibet doctrina—  
Sancta theologia,  
Artes, Musæ, medicina,  
Cum juris peritia.  
Alma Mater, etc.

## VIII.

*Unisoni*] Vivat studiosa proles  
Pia reverentia  
'Mente moveatur moles' ;  
Floreat scientia !  
Alma Mater, etc.

*Salve Boreale Lumen!*

*Allacriter.*

The image displays a handwritten musical score for the piece "Salve Boreale Lumen!". The score is written on four systems of two staves each, using a treble and bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. A forte dynamic marking (*f*) is present in the third system. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the fourth system.



### Appendix 3 Northumberland choirs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

*Unless stated otherwise, the years given are those in which the first reference to the choir has been found.*

Place	Name	Dates	Comment
Alnwick	Alnwick (Amateur) Choral Society	c.1857	NSSG, 23 July 1857. A later choir, the Alnwick and District Choral Society, was founded in 1933. Further research is needed to establish the relationship, if any, between this choir and the Alnwick Choral Union. <sup>1</sup>
Alnwick	Alnwick Choral Union	1879 <sup>2</sup>	The choir was founded in this year.
Alnwick	Alnwick Church Choral Association	1873 <sup>3</sup>	
Ashington	Ashington Philharmonic Society	1878 <sup>4</sup>	
Ashington	Ashington Tonic Sol-fa Society	1879 <sup>5</sup>	
Berwick	Berwick Choral Union	1868 <sup>6</sup>	‘Berwick Choral Union’s 1 <sup>st</sup> concert’.
Berwick	Berwick Cycling Club Glee Party	1811 <sup>7</sup>	
Berwick	Berwick Tonic Sol-fa Association [1]	1867 <sup>8</sup>	This is the probable year of the choir’s foundation.
Berwick	Berwick Tonic Sol-fa Association [2]	1887 <sup>9</sup>	This choir was founded after the failure of the first one.

<sup>1</sup> <[www.facebook.com/pg/AlnwickChoral/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/AlnwickChoral/about/?ref=page_internal)> accessed 3 February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *AM*, 11 September 1909.

<sup>3</sup> *AM*, 27 September 1873.

<sup>4</sup> *MH*, 28 December 1878.

<sup>5</sup> *MH*, 2 August 1879.

<sup>6</sup> *BN*, 31 October 1922.

<sup>7</sup> *BN*, 5 September 1811.

<sup>8</sup> *BA*, 18 April 1873.

<sup>9</sup> *BN*, 3 May 1892.

### Appendix 3 Northumberland choirs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*continued*)

Place	Name	Dates	Comment
Blyth	Blyth Philharmonic Society	c.1883 <sup>10</sup>	The newspaper report implies that the Society was founded about this time.
Blyth	Blyth Sacred Harmonic Society	1855 <sup>11</sup>	The choir was founded in this year.
Blyth	Blyth Star Choral Society	1867 <sup>12</sup>	
Broomhill	(Broomhill) United Choral Society	1878 <sup>13</sup>	This may have been a new choir.
Choppington	Choppington (and Guide Post) Choral Society	1879 <sup>14</sup>	
Cramlington	Cramlington Choral Society	1888 <sup>15</sup>	
Cresswell	(Cresswell) Choral Society	1857 <sup>16</sup>	
Felton	Felton Choral Union	1870 <sup>17</sup>	
Hexham	Hexham Choral Society	1896 <sup>18</sup>	The newspaper report refers to the choir as having 'been revived'.
Killingworth	Killingworth Colliery Choral and Harmonic Society	1861 <sup>19</sup>	The first concert of the choir.

<sup>10</sup> *NDC*, 27 December 1895.

<sup>11</sup> *BN*, 11 January 1910.

<sup>12</sup> *MH*, 18 May 1867.

<sup>13</sup> *MH*, 28 December 1878.

<sup>14</sup> *MH*, 2 August 1879.

<sup>15</sup> *MH*, 25 February 1888.

<sup>16</sup> *NJ*, 3 October 1857.

<sup>17</sup> *MH*, 22 January 1870.

<sup>18</sup> *MT*, 37/640 (1896), 403.

<sup>19</sup> *MH*, 9 March 1861.

### Appendix 3 Northumberland choirs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*continued*)

Place	Name	Dates	Comment
Morpeth	Morpeth Choral Society	1861 <sup>20</sup>	The choir was founded at this date.
Morpeth	Morpeth Choral Union	1879 <sup>21</sup>	The choir was founded at this date.
Morpeth	Mr Graham's Class	1869 <sup>22</sup>	
Newbiggin	Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Choral Society	1870 <sup>23</sup>	
North and South Shields	North and South Shields Choral Society	1850 <sup>24</sup>	
Riding Mill	Riding Mill Choral Society	1893 <sup>25</sup>	The choir was founded at this date. A similar choir had existed some years earlier but had disbanded.
Tynemouth	Tynemouth (Amateur) Vocal Society	1892 <sup>26</sup>	The newspaper report refers to the choir's founding the previous year.
Tynemouth	Tynemouth Choral Society	1852 <sup>27</sup>	
Tynemouth	Tynemouth Philharmonic Society	1895 <sup>28</sup>	Defunct by this date.
Warkworth	Warkworth Tonic Sol-fa Singing Class	1869 <sup>29</sup>	

<sup>20</sup> *MH*, 14 September 1861.

<sup>21</sup> *MH*, 27 September 1879.

<sup>22</sup> *AM*, 30 October 1869.

<sup>23</sup> *MH*, 2 July 1870.

<sup>24</sup> *NSSG*, 5 April 1850.

<sup>25</sup> *NJ*, 4 November 1893.

<sup>26</sup> *NJ*, 20 December 1893.

<sup>27</sup> *NSSG*, 16 April 1852.

<sup>28</sup> *MT*, 36/627 (1895), 328.

<sup>29</sup> *AM*, 1 February 1862.

**Appendix 3 Northumberland choirs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*continued*)**

<b>Place</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Whitley	Whitley Choral Society	1865 <sup>30</sup>	
Wooler	Wooler Choral Society	1895 <sup>31</sup>	The choir was founded at this date.
Unspecified	Northumbrian Select Choir (Mr McConnell-Wood's Choir)	1893 <sup>32</sup>	The choir was founded at this date.
Unspecified	The Radcliffe (Terrace) Tonic Sol-fa Class	1869 <sup>33</sup>	

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<sup>30</sup> *MH*, 5 August 1865.

<sup>31</sup> *NCour*, 28 September 1895.

<sup>32</sup> *NJ*, 14 December 1893.

<sup>33</sup> *AM*, 10 July 1869.



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## **Archives**

### **Gateshead**

#### ***Gateshead Central Library***

L784.96 Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union, Programmes of Concerts  
1889-1959

### **London**

#### ***Royal College of Music***

MS 4992      A folder, 'Notes on the History of the Bach Society (1849-1870) compiled by J. R. Sterndale Bennett for the book on the life of his father Sir William Sterndale Bennett (CUP, 1907)'.

***Victoria and Albert Museum Archives***

EL1/2      CEMA, Section 3, Policy  
EL1/4      Report of progress and outline of case to be made to the Treasury, 1940  
EL1/6      CEMA Minutes  
EL1/8      Paper C, People's Concerts: Memorandum, 4 June 1941  
EL1/14      CEMA Paper CXV  
EL1/15      Paper CXXIX, NFMS Memorandum

**Newcastle upon Tyne**

***Beechcrofts, Solicitors, Newcastle***

Deeds, etc., relating to Grainger Chambers

***Newcastle City Library Local Studies Department***

The cataloguing of the music section (mainly (L)780.73) is erratic. The collection is based on a donation made by J. B. Clark, which was listed in a printed *Local Catalogue of Material Concerning Newcastle and Northumberland represented in the Central Public Library Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: Newcastle upon Tyne Public Libraries Committee, 1932). Subsequently the Clark material was incorporated into the rest of the library's archive music holding and re-catalogued in a card index; more recently, most of the card index has been computerised, though the original card index remains. The re-cataloguing has led to inconsistencies, and the card or computer entries do not always exactly correspond with the naming of the items themselves. The 'L' in the following list signifies 'Local' and is not found in the computerised index.

L029.3      Local Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 6, 1883  
L042      Local Tracts, Vol. 2, Concerts and Music Festivals [1785-1883]  
L042      Local Tracts D12 Sermons  
L042      Local Historical Tracts, vol. 32  
L706      Pen and Palette Club Papers, 1971-75



- L780.7 Prospectuses and Programmes, Northumberland College of Music
- 780.73 Alderson's Choir Programmes 1879-89
- L780.73 Armstrong College Choral Society Programmes 1908-30 (also catalogued as 780.73 Durham University, King's College, Newcastle Choral Society Programmes 1908-30)
- 780.73 Newcastle Amateur Vocal Society Programmes etc. 1875-1905
- 780.73 Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union Programmes and Prospectuses 1889-1982 [includes Gateshead Choral Society Programmes 1889-98]
- L780.73 Newcastle City Hall Posters 1967-83
- 780.73 Newcastle City Hall Programmes 1929-44
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- 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 2 1968-70
- 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 4 1970-79
- 780.73 Newcastle Corporation City Hall Programmes, Vol. 5 1980-93
- 780.73 Newcastle Harmonic Society Programmes 1892-1912
- 780.73 Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra Programmes 1910-34
- 780.73 Newcastle Postal Telegraph Choral Society Programmes 1896-1900
- 780.73 Newcastle Symphony Orchestra Programmes 1917-35
- 780.73 Newcastle Town Hall Concert Programmes 1860-98
- 780.73 Newcastle Town Hall Concert Programmes 1875-1913
- 780.73 Northumberland Orchestral Society Programmes 1894-1926
- 780.73 People's Concerts, Town Hall, Newcastle, Programmes 1881-1909
- 780.73 Rea, William, Grand Classical and Promenade Concerts, Programmes 1867-69, 1871-73
- L780.73 Werner (Hildegard), Concert Programmes 1872-85
- L780.73 Werner (Hildegard), Concert and Operatic programmes 1885-90
- 780.73 YMCA Choral Society 1950-70
- 780.79 North of England Musical Tournament Programmes 1919-23, 1925-26, 1930-37, 1939, 1946-49, 1951-63
- 783.2 Cappella Novocastriensis Programmes 1960-65
- 784 Newcastle Bach Choir Programmes 1916-2003
- L912.2 Insurance Plans of Newcastle
- L920 Northern Worthies, vol. 2

***Newcastle University International Centre for Music Studies***

Archives of the Newcastle Bach Choir

Programmes of the Cappella Novocastriensis

Programmes of the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union

***Newcastle University Library Special Collections***

University Archives

- |    |                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1  | Calendars                            |
| 2  | Gazettes                             |
| 3  | Annual Reports                       |
| 11 | Publications of University Societies |

***Tyne and Wear Archives Service***

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| C.NC66     | Church of the Divine Unity                |
| S.RNS      | Royal Northern Sinfonia Orchestra Minutes |
| SX9        | Newcastle Symphony Orchestra              |
| SX23       | Wallsend Male Voice Choir                 |
| SX57       | West End Gleemen                          |
| SX104      | Whitley Bay Male Voice Choir              |
| SX106      | Addison Male Voice Choir                  |
| SX106      | Addison Male Voice Choir                  |
| SX134      | Victoria Male Voice Choir                 |
| T186/15592 | Plan 477/3A                               |

***Uncatalogued sources in private possession***

Archives of the Cappella Novocastriensis in the care of Dr Philip Thicknes and on loan to the author.

Archives of the Newcastle Bach Choir in the care of Alex Murchie and on loan to the author.

Archives of the North of England Musical Tournament in the care of John Treherne and on loan to the author.

Archives of the YMCA Choral Society and other items, formerly the property of the late Sybil Durno and on loan to the author.

Attendance cards of the Free Church Choir Union given to the author by Mary Robson.

Programmes and other archives relating to the Newcastle Bach Choir, the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union and other organisations, the property of the author.