

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATION  
*Archivist: James Strike, chorister 1950-52.*

### **ANGLICAN CHANTS FROM ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL**

Hearing the Psalms of David sung to an Anglican Chant is part of our Christian experience; part of our Liturgy and Worship.

This article looks at the number of Anglican Chants which derive from the Choir of Rochester Cathedral. Chants which were composed by Rochester Cathedral Organists and have, over a period of time, and through the publication of Chant Books, become established in Cathedrals, Greater Churches, Chapels and Royal Foundations in England and around the world.

Singing Myles Coverdale's English wording of the psalms, to what we now know as the Anglican Chant, was first introduced in the early seventeenth century. The origin of the Anglican Chant has been widely debated, but there are two strong recognized beginnings: early Gregorian plainsong for the Latin Rite, and simple 'hymn tunes' used for the Protestant Metrical Psalters of the Reformation. (1)

Chanting the Psalms can be traced back to St. Gregory (Pope, 590–604) who fostered the liturgical music of Plainsong; chanting which was model, vocal and unaccompanied. The English monk, scholar and historian, Venerable Bede, writing in the early eighth century, records: *'When Theodore arrived in England in 664, sacred music was only known in Kent. And when Putta was consecrated Bishop of Rochester in 669, he was extraordinarily skilful in the Roman Style of music which had been learned from the disciples of the Holy Pope Gregory'*. (2)

The Period of Restoration (from 1543) caused considerable disruption to church music. Eventually, after a turbulent time, the Protestant Service in the English language became accepted.

Plainsong and Latin, associated as they were with the Roman Church, were replaced with simple tunes sung to vernacular metered wording of the psalms. (3) Fortunately, Elizabeth I's love of music allowed ardent Puritan control to be relaxed. Musicians in the Royal Court were encouraged to return to Pre-Reformation polyphonic music. Professional choirs in Cathedrals followed, and new Psalters were introduced with harmonized chants for all four voices. An early example (1592) is the chant by the Court Musician Richard Allison, who named the chant 'Rochester Tune'. It is interesting to speculate why this was named 'Rochester Tune'. No doubt, Rochester had a professional choir worthy of endorsement; and, also, Allison would have known Edmund Guest, Bishop of Rochester who was, at that time, also at the Royal Court as Almoner and close adviser to the Queen.

Fifty-one Organists and Assistant Organists are named for Rochester Cathedral since records began in 1560 (4). Of these, nine are known to have composed Anglican Chants which remain in use today through the publication of Old and New Chant Books and through Registered Collections of Chants. Of particular interest is the Register set up by *The Anglican Chant Appreciation Society* which has been invaluable for information and verification for this article.

The earliest of the composer of Anglican Chants was **Ralph Banks** (Organist 1791-1841). Ten chants are recorded which have survived in seven Chant Books. Notable are the Chant Books used at Wells Cathedral, Durham Cathedral and The Temple Church, London.

An influential composer of Anglican Chants was **Dr. John Larkin Hopkins** (Organist 1841-1856). (5) His ten chants appear in over thirty Chant Books used throughout the Anglican Church from Westminster Abbey to Country Parish Churches. His Chant in 'D' is included in 22 Chant Books.

**Philip Armes** was a chorister at Rochester (1849-1851) and Assistant Organist (1851-1861). He moved from Rochester to spend the major part of his career as Organist at Durham Cathedral. Armes composed 30 chants which survive in a range of Chant Books used widely from the Scottish Psalter to the Irish

Psalter. One chant is in the unusual key of B flat minor with the same note sustained throughout the first four bars to recall the intonement of Gregorian chant. (6)

(24198) Philip Armes (1836-1908)

**John Frederick Bridge** was a chorister at Rochester (1852-1858) then, after a period as Apprentice Organist under John Larkin Hopkins, he moved through several posts to be appointed in 1875 as Organist at Westminster Abbey. His 30 Chants are included in 29 Chant Books.

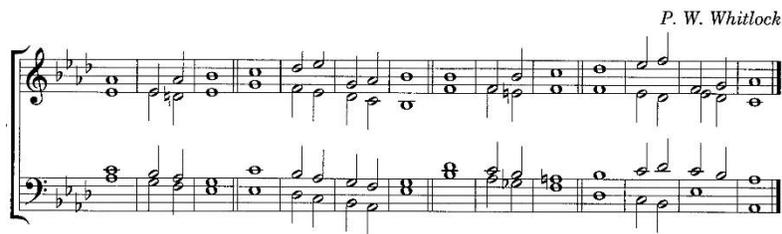
**Dr. Bertram Luard-Selby** (Organist 1900-1916). His 15 Chants are in 11 Chant Books. Luard-Selby produced a *Rochester Chant Book* (1911) leather bound and featuring all of his chants ( ). His chant in 'F' is titled *from Robert Schumann*. (6) (7)

(29746) Luard-Selby, Bertram (1853-1919)

**Charles Hylton-Stewart** (Organist 1916-1930). 36 Chants in 30 Chant Books. Towards the end of his time at Rochester, Hylton-Stewart compiled the impressive *Collection of Chants* which has become a well-used and referenced Chant Book. In 1950, H. A. Bennett (Organist 1930- 1956) revised and republished this Chant Book under the title *The Rochester Chant Book*. Hylton-Stewart's simple, yet dignified chant in 'C' is a poignant setting for psalm 23. (8)

(\*) C. Hylton Stewart

**Percy Whitlock**, Chorister (1911-1918) and Assistant Organist (1920 to 1930). Whitlock is known for his music compositions, especially for the church organ. Whilst he wrote only nine Anglican Chants these have proved an enduring quality for selection by eminent musicians for inclusion into: *The Coverdale Chant Book* by David Wulstrum, *Chants New and Old* by Anthony Crossland and *The Psalms of David* by George Guest. Whitlock's Chant in 'Ab' is regularly used for psalm 118. (9)



**Dr. Robert James Ashfield**, 17 Chants in 8 Chant Books (Rector Chori, Southwell Minster 1946-1956) and Organist at Rochester (1956-1977). During his ten years as Rector Chori, Ashfield compiled the *Southwell Psalter*. In 1956 he brought this with him to Rochester where, during his twenty years with the Choir he carefully reviewed the selection of chants to best express the wording of the psalm. In the Obituary by Paul Hale (Southwell 1956-2016): *His choice of chants was truly memorable; whenever he was struck for an appropriate chant he wrote one himself and these have turned out to be priceless gems. He produced a version of the psalter and chantbook which has not been equaled.* (10)

**Barry Ferguson** (Organist 1977 to 1994). 14 Chants in 5 Chant Books. Copyright protection naturally delays new compositions being added to Chant Books. Ferguson's recording with the Cathedral Choir (CD. Priory, Psalms of David, Volume 9) sets a high standard of control and sensitivity for singing the psalms. His Chant in 'G minor', for psalm 64, exploits deep harmony to express the penitential wording '*Hear My Voice, O God.*' (11) Ferguson left Rochester in 1994 to devote his career to composing music.

Over one hundred and fifty Chants, composed by musicians from Rochester Cathedral have, over the years, become part of the body of music in general use for singing the psalms. However, the way newly composed chants are now taken up by other churches is less straightforward. Choir Leaders use instant digital printing to prepare music, which, although allows for easy choice of chant and pointing, has led to fewer Chant Books being published. Fortunately, we still have CD recordings and we are blessed with the continued broadcast of *Choral Evensong* to strengthen our knowledge of Anglican Chants. And finally, a small change could improve our involvement and appreciation by adding the 'key' of the chant to all music lists. Is it Hopkins in 'C' or 'D'; yet alone, which Hopkins !

Other Cathedrals, Abbeys and Chapels will, no doubt, have a similar record to Rochester. Some for the number of Chants composed by the one Organist; James Turle, from Westminster Abbey, for example, credited with one hundred and twenty Chants. What is notable for Rochester is that there have been so many composers, whom over the years have formed a continuous stream of commitment to the singing of the psalms. An ongoing commitment continued with the New Chants composed by the present Director of Music, **Francesca Massey**.

**Psalm 95: *O come, let us sing unto the Lord.* E.J. Hopkins in 'C**

(1) Powell Metcalfe, *Origin of the Anglican Chant*, in *The Musical Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1874, p.574.

(2) Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, Book iv.

(3) An early and influential Metrical Psalter, see Sternhold and Hopkins, 1549.

(4) See RCOCA website : Archives / Organists. The term 'Organist' is used in this article to include the twentieth century terminology 'Master of the Choristers', Director of Music', etc.

(5) Not to be confused with his cousin Dr. Edward John Hopkins.

(6) Chants for Armes and Luard-Selby kindly reproduced from the *Anglican Chant Appreciation Society*.

(7) Luard-Selby studied the organ at the Leipzig Conservatoire.

(8) Recording: CD. *The Splendour of 'the Psalms of David'*. Priory 5006, track 3.

(9) David Wulstan, St. Peter's College Oxford; Anthony Crossland, Wells Cathedral; Gorge Guest, St. John's College Cambridge.

(10) *Kent County Organists' Association*, 2006.

(11) Recording: CD. *Hear my Voice, O God*. Priory PRCD 461, track13.