

## The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

### Music Notes ~ April 2024

This month we perform several favourites from the Anglican choral tradition, including S. S. Wesley's Easter anthem *Blessed be the God and Father*, classic early 20th-century settings of the Evening Canticles by Hugh Blair (in B minor) and George Dyson (in F), and Patrick Hadley's wedding anthem *My beloved spake*, always suitable for the season of spring due to the words from the Song of Songs. We also continue to bear in mind the anniversaries this year of Charles Stanford (d. 1924) with an organ voluntary on Sunday 21st, and Anton Bruckner (b. 1824) with one of his settings of *Tantum ergo sacramentum* on Sunday 14th.

For the final two Evensongs of the month we sing Introits in the form of Easter carols: *Now the green blade riseth*, based on an old French tune, and *Christ the Lord is risen!*, based on an old German melody. The former is in an arrangement by the composer and hymnologist Martin Shaw and the latter in a version by Martin's brother Geoffrey, a prominent figure in British music education. The brothers were brought up in Hampstead, where their father James Fallas Shaw (1842–1907), was Organist here at the Parish Church. Martin began his career as Organist at Emmanuel Church, West Hampstead, from 1895 to 1903. Geoffrey was Organ Scholar of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, under Charles Wood. Wikipedia describes their father James as a "Bohemian and eccentric". Can anyone tell me more? There's a published anthem by him from 1901 for baritone solo and choir - shall we revive it?

The *Marche Héroïque* by Gloucester Cathedral Organist Herbert Brewer forms the final voluntary on Sunday 14th. It is composed in the mould of the 'Pomp and Circumstance' Marches of Edward Elgar (one of whose 'Vesper Voluntaries' – deriving from his time as Organist at St George's RC Church in Worcester – we hear before the service), and was made popular by organist Christopher Herrick who performed it at the funeral service for Earl Mountbatten of Burma at Westminster Abbey in 1979. A more recent performance by him can be easily found on YouTube.

Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901) was a prolific Bavarian composer of choral music who set both Latin and German texts. Some of his pieces, including his *Osterhymnus* Op. 134, were designed to be sung in either language, and we will be singing the Latin version at Evensong on Sunday 21st. The text combines verses from the Easter Day texts 'Victimae paschali laudes' and the 'Terra tremuit'. Musically the work is in his sumptuous double-choir style, most familiar from his *Cantus Missae* in E flat Op. 109.

For a less grandiose interpretation of the Easter message we sing a typically restrained verse anthem by Orlando Gibbons on Sunday 28th, *If ye be risen again with Christ*. This setting of words from the Epistle for Easter Day has three 'verse' sections for soloists set to organ accompaniment (or viols), the first and last for two sopranos and the middle for the same plus an alto voice. Gibbons set the text in the solo sections with great clarity in a mainly syllabic style, often with a short phrase sung by one voice and then repeated by the other. The choruses are settings of the whole or last part of the text sung in the preceding verse section, and the anthem is rounded off with a polyphonic Amen.

Geoffrey Webber