

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music Notes ~ June 2025

At Evensong on 1st June we are delighted to welcome members of the 'Finzi Friends' who will have been on a walking tour of Hampstead before having tea and a talk with the Friends of the Music. The music will include Finzi's rarely heard *Magnificat*, a setting for choir and orchestra or organ which lacks a Gloria so wasn't intended for liturgical use. However, the lovely final Amen will be heard after a chanting of the doxology, and the Amen will form our Final Amen at Evensong for the rest of the month. Finzi is also the source of our anthem for the service, his splendid Ascensiontide anthem *God is gone up*, which gives plenty of opportunity for using the organ's powerful reed stops. A member of the Finzi Friends, pianist and conductor Gavin Roberts, until recently Director of Music at Marylebone Parish Church, will conduct the *Magnificat*.

The Introit at Evensong for Pentecost on 8th June is Attwood's *Come, Holy Ghost*, one of his most well-known pieces. I recently learnt about its origins by reading an article in *The Musical Times* from 1898, which I share with you here: "THOMAS ATTWOOD's devotional anthem...is so known that anything concerning its history is naturally interesting. The following incident was related by the late Mr J. G. Boardman... In the year 1833 Mr Boardman was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral... At that time the St Paul's boys like the ten children of the Chapel Royal resided under the roof of the cane-loving Mr William Hawes, but they were allowed to sleep at their own homes on Saturday nights. Attwood lived at a villa on Beulah Hill, Upper Norwood. An ordination was to be held at St Paul's on Trinity Sunday 1833. On the preceding day the Bishop of London (Blomfield) requested Attwood to set the "Veni Creator" to music specially for the solemn occasion, which he did. It was Attwood's custom on Sunday mornings to drive from Norwood to St Paul's in a gig drawn by Peggy, a steady-going pony. His route included the Brixton Road where at Union Cottage, Cranmer Road, North Brixton, resided Master J. G. Boardman. Attwood was kindness itself, and it was the custom for young Boardman to be on the look out for a lift in the old organist's gig. On this particular occasion (Trinity Sunday 1833) the gig appeared in sight with its occupant busily engaged in writing, the reins being thrown over the back of Peggy, who knew her way to St Paul's quite as well as her master. It turned out that Attwood was putting the finishing touches to the vocal parts of his anthem "Come Holy Ghost", for it was his invariable custom to write these parts out with his own hand whenever his compositions were sung at St Paul's or at the Chapel Royal. Placing the completed treble solo in Johnny Boardman's hands Attwood said that he wished him to sing it at that very morning's service. The young chorister duly obeyed and without previous rehearsal sang the solo to the complete satisfaction of both the composer and the Bishop. Shortly after, the anthem [was] published by J. Alfred Novello."

A frequent visitor at Attwood's residence in Upper Norwood was Felix Mendelssohn, and on 29th June for the Feast of St Peter and St Paul, our anthem comes from his oratorio *St Paul*, featuring a recitative, duet for tenor and bass, and chorus 'How lovely are the messengers'. Mendelssohn's setting of the Nunc dimittis in English will also be sung (possible in its original version with organ accompaniment if I can locate it in time). New repertoire this month includes a Mass by Rheinberger celebrating the Holy Trinity, and a Communion Service by Scottish composer William Cruickshank (1854-1934) who held several music posts either side of the border, including being Director of Music at Loretto School in Musselburgh and Organist of Burnley Parish Church.

Geoffrey Webber