

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

### **Music Notes ~ January 2026**

Sharp-eyed readers of our service sheets will notice one small but highly significant change as we begin 2026. The hymn numbers will now be given an 'REH' number rather than an 'NEH' number. (The details are given partly for the benefit of the choir members who need to find the music to sing the harmony parts.) Thus we welcome the Revised English Hymnal into our liturgy (as approved by the PCC), the successor to the New English Hymnal that was first published in 1986. There will be no drastic change in our hymn repertoire, as all the commonly used hymns in the NEH remain in the REH, but it will be much easier for us to introduce some of the newer hymn repertoire that has emerged over recent decades, which will mean either new words, new music, or both at the same time. The Foreword to the REH, written by Bishop Rowan Williams, talks in particular about two areas of hymn-writing that have become more important in recent times: "...the last half-century or so has generated a significant number of hymns that articulate something of the Church's social vision, its calling to be an agent of God's justice; and increasingly, the pressure of environmental concern has produced some fresh writing about the material world to which we belong and which we are called to nurture and respect." (I remember sitting directly in front of the former Archbishop of Canterbury when he came to preach at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, and was most impressed by his confident singing of the bass line of the hymns!) The content of the new books was drawn up by a panel of seven clergy and musicians, notably Rev. Dr Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral and an expert on hymnology, and the late Dr Simon Lindley, for many years organist of Leeds Parish Church and Secretary of the Church Music Society. Like the NEH, the REH contains a substantial liturgical section of music for the liturgy beyond hymns, including Taizé chants and eight congregational settings of the Mass, including the Thorne setting that we currently use at Hampstead when the choir is absent. The approach to the altering of older texts remains generally conservative, but the editors say that "we have been sensitive to the concerns of some worshippers about the non-inclusive natures of nouns such as 'men' and masculine pronouns and possessive adjectives such as 'he' and 'his'. We have not amended classic or well-known texts, but in the case of translations, and of hymns written during the last hundred years or so, small changes have sometimes been made where this does not affect the integrity of the text." My choice of hymns from the new book, as always subject to the Vicar's approval, will continue to be based on the recommended 'suggested hymns' list, Sunday by Sunday, so that our communal singing matches well with the liturgy of the day. As with the NEH, the REH has no section of hymns designed specifically for younger children, so we will continue to look elsewhere with respect to All-Age services.

2026 marks the centenary of the death of one of the most widely-sung composers of Anglican church music, Charles Wood. I have long had an interest in his music, having worked at the same Cambridge College that Wood served for around 35 years till his death in 1926. In recent months I have been planning to celebrate this anniversary by developing a collaborative scheme that will see the performance of all of his church music in the three places where Wood lived and worked, in Armagh, Cambridge and London. Several 'new' works will be performed from new or first editions, and naturally our own choir will be singing its share of music by Wood spread out through the calendar year. To kick things off, we will sing his unpublished Communion setting in C minor on Epiphany Sunday, and a major highlight will be the performance of his wonderful St Mark Passion in March. The full list of choirs taking part in this collaboration is as follows: in Armagh, the choir of St Patrick's CoI Cathedral and the Charles Wood Summer School (directed by David Hill); in Cambridge the choirs of Selwyn, Gonville & Caius and King's Colleges; and in London the choirs of Hampstead Parish Church, the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Holy Trinity Prince Consort Rd, and Westminster Cathedral. More on this during the year!

Geoffrey Webber