

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

### Music Notes ~ October 2026

The first two Sundays of October feature our Dedication Festival and the celebration of Harvest. On the 4th the organ postlude by Buxtehude is based on Luther's famous Reformation battle-cry chorale *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*, the most common translation being 'A safe stronghold is our God'. The anthem at Communion is a setting of the BCP collect for St John the Evangelist by the Organist of Ely Cathedral at the turn of the 18th century, James Hawkins. He probably composed it for St John's College in Cambridge, where he had strong links, looking after the choir there for a time. The celebratory anthem at Evensong, *O give thanks unto the Lord*, is by the Master of the King's Music in the middle of the 18th century, William Boyce. The anthem is composed for 8-part choir, a feature that is normally associated with later repertoire, though our Introit by Henry Purcell, *Hear my prayer, O Lord*, is another early example of this scoring. Boyce decides to use his 8 parts, SSAATTBB, in various ways, but principally featuring either the same two voice parts together on their own, or by adopting the double-choir pattern of SATB/SATB. There is a verse section for four voices, and after a joyful Hallelujah to conclude. I've not heard the piece performed before, so am particularly looking forward to it.

For Harvest we will enjoy singing the traditional harvest hymns in the morning at the All-Age service, and at Evensong we continue our exploration of the music of Charles Wood (d. 1926) this year with his anthem *Summer ended, harvest o'er*. Wood took great care in selecting the texts for his anthems, often choosing words not previously set by composers. The poem is by Greville Phillimore (1821-84), a priest and hymn enthusiast who served his ministry mainly at Down Ampney in Gloucestershire and Henley-on-Thames. Phillimore links the traditional harvest concept to the last judgement, as in the fourth verse:

When the reaping angels bring,  
Tares and wheat before the King,  
Jesus! may we gathered be  
In the heavenly barn to Thee.

Wood composed the anthem in 1917 for a once significant preparatory school, now closed, called Heatherdown School in Berkshire which had close ties to Eton College. In charge of the music there was Martin Akerman, the main editor of the Year Book Press, which published several works by Wood. Akerman notes on the published copy (1919) that only a handful of boys, 1 tenor and 2 basses were available to perform it; Wood wrote for the standard SATB choir nevertheless, though his textures mainly alternate between boys only and men only. Phillimore's emphasis on the last judgement allows for a shift to the minor for the central episode with some turbulent organ writing before the triumphant conclusion.

At Evensong on Sunday 18th we sing another early example of writing for SSAATTBB, the anthem *O God the proud are risen against me* by Thomas Tomkins, composed some time before 1617. I've long admired this anthem (though have not performed it at Hampstead) with its wonderful text from Psalm 86 which faces the troubles of life, featuring an 'assembly of violent men', by calling on our pitiful and merciful God who is 'slow to anger' and 'great in goodness and truth'. Tomkins captures this dichotomy brilliantly, all within single movement in duple time, using a wonderful series of passing-note dissonances for 'slow to anger' where the harmony slows down. The anthem on the 25th accompanies the reading from Ecclesiastes on the subject of vanity: *Omnia vanitas* by Samuel Wesley. This was one of two anthems that his son Samuel Sebastian Wesley published as examples of how good church music could be. It's a mighty essay in C sharp minor full of double sharps, probably inspired by Samuel's love of Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues that had recently become known in England at the start of the 19th century.

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