



Singing together—at last!

by David Furber



After far too many months of having to be satisfied with singing together over Zoom without being able to hear each other, about fifteen of us (including a few visitors) finally came together in Antonina's garden for a Saturday afternoon sing. North London is quite a journey for those from south of the river, but it was a good-sized turn-out even though one or two more instrumentalists would have been ideal.

The songs were all from our yellow book, *Your Voices Raise*, so most of us knew them pretty well, but it was all change from the usual conductor and band roles. Phil was fresh from a conducting course and led the first half, with Nicholas taking over for the second.



Francis, meanwhile, was on Viola. We had none of our usual instruments either: Catherine swapped her treble recorder for a cello, our hostess played the descant on a few of the pieces and visitor Steve used his harmonica as a pitch-pipe for the introductory chords before singing bass.

Half-time was different too: not only the usual biscuits but an excellent lemon drizzle cake and some naan bread for those who wanted something savoury. We could get used to that!

We were sitting in a crescent close to the house in a walled garden which made for remarkably good acoustics and a very enjoyable sing. We got through a good number of the pieces in the book including *The Holly and the Ivy* in honour of the holly bush in the garden and finishing, of course, with *Praise ye the Lord*.

In this issue: Francis on keeping busy **2** Alan on poems and plagues **3** Book review by Phil **5** Ken Baddley on bass viols **7** Dissenters and Non-conformists **11** Claire on singing together again **12**



When lockdown was announced, I resolved to make the most of it, and to catch up on some lengthy tasks for which I never seemed to have time with commitments and deadlines. I have revised and updated my 1135 West Gallery files. That took the best part of six weeks. They are now in a state where they could all easily be handed on, when and if I am called to sing in the Great West Gallery Quire in the Sky, where everyone turns up promptly for rehearsals with their music ready sorted, and watches the Great Conductor.

Next task was to update my website, which now bears nearly 500 freely downloadable scores in a variety of formats. And most recently I have prepared a brief catalogue of my 56 WG compositions. I intend to issue this in hard copy if we ever get out of this lockdown; meanwhile, if any member would like to receive the PDF version, you have but to ask.

And the third big task was to prepare my intended second self-published edition, to follow *The Divine Companion*, of which some of you have copies. It is to be entitled *The Parish Church Music of John Bishop*, and includes all 13 of his West Gallery anthems, (including one by Vaughan Richardson, his predecessor at Winchester Cathedral), and a selection of 16 of his 51 psalm tunes, with a foreword by Mike Bailey. As you have surely gathered, Bishop is one of my favourite composers. I don't intend to go ahead with the printing of this until there are better opportunities for sales.

I really thought that the end of the first wave was going to be that time when we would soon be back to normal. Not with this "government" in charge! When the second wave came, I decided to embark on an even more ambitious project than the Bishop book. I have now prepared a complete performing edition of William Knapp's music. There is a total of 91 pieces in his three publications, which are *A Set of New Psalm Tunes and Anthems* (1738), *Anthems for Christmas Day* (1744), and *New Church Melody* (1752). At least a dozen of them are not by Knapp; some acknowledged, others not. This, like the Bishop book, is finished, with a foreword kindly supplied by Dave Townsend, and ready for publication, but this also will have to wait until WG activity starts up properly.

In the course of doing this, I have, as you may imagine, learnt much about not only the music, but about Knapp the man. He seems to have been a somewhat crotchety individual, and definitely old fashioned for his time, in insisting that his music be tenor-led and performed unaccompanied. Fortunately WG music is ours to perform as we wish, except for those who insist on being "authentic". The collection is full of curiosities, some of which I have written about in the WGMA Newsletter. Sadly, Knapp died in 1768 predeceased by both his daughters, and intestate. The final edition of *New Church Melody* was published posthumously, in 1770.

Since the LGQ fortnightly Zoom meetings were established, it has fallen to my lot to select the programme for each one. As I mentioned in my Spring Doctor's Notes, I am limited by which of our 630 pieces has been recorded by Brian, LGQ's resident recording engineer. I decided to theme them by composer. So the first was for works by Knapp and Clark; easy enough to find. Then it was Key and Fawcett's turn; then Bishop, Broderip, Leach and Stephenson. I had run out of named composers with more than just one or two recorded pieces now, so the next Zoom was for the greatest and most prolific of WG composers, Anon. More of Anon.'s works followed for our next scheduled Zoom, but now with luck we *should* be able to follow our most enjoyable face-to-face sing in Antonina's garden on 30th June with an actual rehearsal in St Michaels. Provided, that is, there is not yet another U-turn from the head donkey.

I am profoundly grateful to Jill, Phil and the redoubtable Stella who have overseen these Zooms and made them possible.



Poems and Plagues

by Alan Franks

Around this time last year, just when The Virus was working its way towards pandemic status, certain books started to raise their public profile quite dramatically. None more so than Albert Camus's *La Peste* and Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. Their covers were strikingly unblemished, and all the more visible across the ever less crowded train carriages. Their readers were devouring them as if they were nothing less than survival manuals.

Though Defoe's account was only published fifty-seven years after the Great Plague of 1665, it was consequently better researched and informed than Samuel Pepys's *Diary* entries at the time of the outbreak. Camus's 1947 novel may be technically fictitious, but much of its source material derives from the plague which had swept through the French Algerian town of Oran a century before. Being, famously, one of a body of twentieth century authors labelled existentialist, Camus's main preoccupation was that of the individual's power, or lack of it, in the face of such epidemic *forces majeures*.

In this respect it spoke directly and urgently to the reading public of 2020. So too did the poetry borne of pestilence over the past millennium and more, and if there was less public evidence of this, one reason was that relevant pieces were generally to be found in volumes that did not wear the word Plague on their sleeves. Yet there's a profusion of the stuff, and its coming to light these past twelve months has been a double revelation, showing not only the quality of some lesser known authors' work but also, more prosaically, the sheer frequency of public health catastrophes.

Take Shakespeare. In 1564, the year of his birth in Stratford-upon-Avon, about a quarter of the town's population died from the plague. Twenty-eight years later, when he was living and working in London, an outbreak closed the city's theatres for months on end. Turning the lockdown to advantage, he wrote his poem *Venus and Adonis*, which did wonders for his career.

For most of the seventeenth century's first decade, and into the second, the Globe and other theatres in the capital were closed for a total of almost eighty months. Looking for plague-free locations, Shakespeare's company started to forge links with such provincial towns as Coventry, Shrewsbury and Bath.

Just as sickness and sudden death became commonplace, so, inevitably, did the imagery of pestilence littering the author's lines. Hence the dying Mercutio's willing "a plague on both your houses" to the feuding Capulets and Montagues in *Romeo and Juliet* would have carried a hideously visceral charge. Likewise King Lear's declaring to his daughter Goneril, "Thou art a boil"; or Coriolanus's graphic cursing of the plebeians: "Boils and plagues/Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorred/Farther than seen, and one infect another/Against the wind a mile!"

Go back a further two centuries and we find an England reeling first from the effects of the Great Famine brought about by a chronic grain shortage, and later by The Black Death, which is reckoned to have carried off about half of the country's population. Death truly became a way of life. It brought in massive demographic shifts; a falling-away of once great monastic houses; land clearances which the weakened rural communities were unable to oppose. Later commentators note the prehistory of enclosure, Reformation and the end of English society's three-way division of nobility, clergy and peasantry.

There was no way that poets as astute as Geoffrey Chaucer, his friend John Gower, and William Langland, author of the politically observant *Vision of Piers Plowman*, could let the time's upheavals pass unscrutinised. Through his presentation of death as a protagonist in his *Pardoner's Tale*, Chaucer springs the bold,

controversial trick of suggesting that the plague is only interested in taking the lives of those whose ways have fallen into the abyss of immorality.

Whether or not he believed that to be the case, he was recognising a tradition of scapegoating which stretched from Pharoah's enslavement of the Hebrews and which was to continue unabated into our own times with the blaming of HIV-AIDS on the gay community.

Plague imagery gets everywhere. Thanks to a famous nursery rhyme it is even embedded in the sounds of our own infancy. *Ring a Ring o' Roses*, referring to the illness's blotchy red sores, didn't appear in print until 1881, but it had been hanging around for centuries in oral form, with its innocent chime harbouring the dark reality of pocketfuls of posies that masked the stink of the sickness from which all fell down.

Let's not forget Eyam, and let's be grateful to Simon Armitage for doing as Laureates are meant to at such times by reminding us, in verse, of that Derbyshire village's extraordinary story. It was to this small rural community that a bale of cloth had arrived from the plague-stricken capital in 1665. When the damp fabric was dried at the hearth by a tailor's assistant called George Viccars, out swarmed the infection-laden fleas. With social distancing being a concept of the far future, whole families were succumbing to the lethal *Yersinia pestis* bacterium within days.

The newly installed rector William Mompesson, enlightened but controversial, persuaded the population to quarantine itself so that the infection could not spread beyond the confines of the village. It was nothing if not an act of self-sacrifice, and in the course of just over a year one third of the village's population of eight hundred were dead. Those who survived were aided by deliveries of food from outlying neighbours, including The Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth House. Goods were paid for with coins left at the village boundaries in troughs of vinegar, thought to be disinfectant.

I only became aware of Eyam's self-sacrifice a few years ago while walking in the Peak District. Now, during lockdown, I wondered whether the events had been memorialised in poetry. Armitage, who lives and writes in Marsden, up at the northern end of the Peak, had indeed gone into verse. The result is an apparently plain-dealing piece called *Lockdown*, which turns out to be a subtle pairing of dreamt reflections on love and boundaries with, at its heart, the real and tragic instance of a local couple, Emmott Sydall and Rowland Torre, thwarted by the quarantine line.

Not that Eyam escaped the determined embrace of Victorian sentiment. This is how the tragedy was revisited in Mary Howitt's robust measures: "Oh! Piteous was it then that place to tread,/ Where children played and mothers had looked on...O'er each bright cottage hearth death's darkness stole;/Tears fell, pangs racked, where happiness had shone."

What of AIDS? Does it count as a plague? Perhaps only purists would deny it such status on technical grounds. Its treatment and survival rates have improved vastly since the onset of the pandemic in 1981, and yet in 2017 data produced by the US-based Foundation for AIDS Research showed that nearly 37 million people worldwide were living with HIV.

What cannot be questioned is that the ubiquity of the illness produced an enormous outpouring of poetic response. Some of this was marked by an understandable defiance in the face of homophobia, but the predicaments it produced also gave rise to work of sublime candour and tenderness by authors who felt, well, plagued. Among the finest of these was Thom Gunn, British-born but resident in the US for almost all his adult life. He is best known for his 1992 poem, *The Man With Night Sweats* (and collection of the same name). It focuses unsparingly on a man who has developed AIDS symptoms, and it is one of seventeen elegies he wrote in response to the loss of close friends.

So where are the Covid poems? The answer is: where are they not? The web is groaning beneath their weight. Surely you've noticed. Not just poems brought on by the crisis, but poems to help you through it. Poems of hope, poems of endurance, poems of encouragement, poems of consolation.

You catch me fresh from the National Poetry Library's website. It is bursting and bountiful with matter as fresh as the spring. It's almost, but not quite, enough to make you reckon that where there's death, there's hope. There's ruminative and rueful, passionate and pacifist. Here is Christina Rossetti saying "Hurt no living thing," and Pascale Petit saying "I have cleaned the window of my self until I gleam." There's also a poem called *At The Beginning of Covid-19*, which concludes with the line: "Nothing's touching me anymore, and the spring rain is peace." I get it.

I've been at it myself, and maybe you have too. Do switch off now if you want, I shan't be offended. Here it is anyway. I hope it speaks for itself, and if doesn't, there's something wrong with it. I wrote it an eternity ago—like, six or even seven weeks, when we were being told to not talk in case we infected someone; or to not breathe in case we took in some dodgy air. Something like that. (Bleaklow, by the way, is the highest bit of ground in the Dark Peak in Derbyshire, not all that far from Eyam as it happens.)

VALLEY OF BREATH

In a time of consonants kept caged,
And sentries put on point to stop and fine
Abusers of the new Percussive Quotas,
Ps and Qs for short;
When even vowels are agents of contagion,
Words huddle in the attic of the mind
And in this close confinement come to court
The liberty of thought.

The outside opens up. The terraced tiers
Are all of limestone pavement, and the towers
Are Kinder and its kindred in the Peak.
The built valleys of death
Evaporate, and in their place appear
The moorland gradients and the wind's old choirs;
The ways across the swallowing bog, then Bleaklow's
Gathering point of breath.

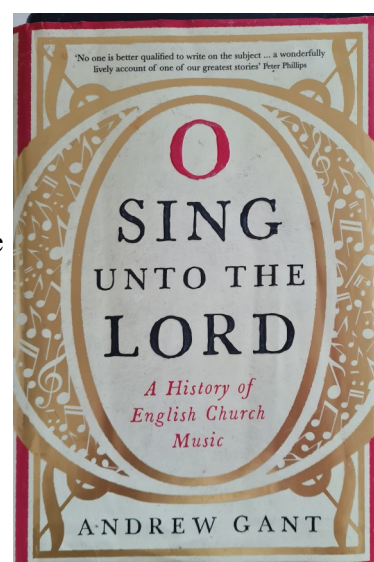
This item first appeared on the website of Riversmeet Publishing



O Sing unto the Lord by Andrew Gant

Reviewed by Phil Price

This very readable and often entertaining book takes us over 370 pages (1½ inches in book-width terms) through the history of singing in church primarily in England, with some coverage of related geographies. It starts with brief descriptions of the earliest known references to music in worship, going back to the book of Psalms. Soon we are into the emergence of some uncharted music in early Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and the development of early formal church music and the role of Gregorian plainsong. It then takes us into the exciting, very creative world of Tudor and Protestant (and then Catholic, and then Protestant again) England, and the emergence of truly outstanding composers such as Tallis, Gibbons and Byrd. About this time seems to emerge the sound of English church music that we still know today.



The next section is particularly gripping for us—the emergence of the hymn, a story that approximately begins with Isaac Watts, moves quickly onto Charles Wesley, and never looks back. Hymns emerged as more personal expressions of faith and piety, and found their way into church as ways to allow a congregation to completely participate, with body and soul, in the liturgy, and I found this a compelling story. Of Isaac Watts, Gant writes that he “...was part of a long and noble line of English devotional writers who knew that the ideal is seriousness of thought combined with directness of expression.” Is not that one of the things we love about West Gallery hymns?

This eventually leads to a whole chapter on “West Galleries and Wesleys, Methodists and Mendelssohn 1760 to 1850”, with much quoting from Thomas Hardy and Nicholas Temperley, and a sympathetic account of our favourite period, with a lot of interesting context. By the time the account comes to the 20th century, it begins, in my view, to spend a bit too much time on Anglican “art” liturgical music by the likes of Benjamin Britten and other composers of that period, which even Gant admits are sometimes a bit of a challenging listen. It does cover, briefly, the emergence of “worship bands” in recent decades, but has only one passing reference to Sankey, and none at all to Billy Graham, both of whom brought the still traditional but livelier “gospel” hymn from their campaign rallies into widespread use in nonconformist churches, which lasted until their gradual replacement by modern worship songs over the last 30 years.

Lots of little interesting details come along the way. Descants emerged in hymns apparently during and after World War I, when there was a shortage of male voices.

A constant theme in English church music is “old” music being replaced by “new”—this has been going on for hundreds of years, invariably accompanied by similar grumbles.

At one point he captures what for me is the essence of hymn singing. Some people found the unpolished singing of a congregation unattractive: “an Horrid medley of confused and disorderly noise” as Gant quotes Thomas Walter saying in 1721. But Gant captures it, describing the slow congregational singing of an old-style hymn: “Time does not seem to matter, or even to be happening. It is ecstatic, corporate, incomprehensible and compelling.”

Although erudite and academically robust, the book is very readable, and is like a long and interesting conversation with a friendly individual who knows and loves his subject, and communicates it in an engaging way to an interested listener. A great way to listen to it is with Spotify, the music streaming service, to hand. Gant often mentions less well-known names such as Attwood or Blow alongside Gibbons and Byrd, and I found it really interesting to tap their name in as soon as they came up, and to read about them while listening to their actual music floating around me.

Buy London Gallery Quire CDs as Christmas and birthday presents for your friends. Buy this book as a present for yourself.

Contents	
<i>Preface</i>	vii
1 In the Beginning	1
2 Music for a New Millennium	15
3 The Fifteenth Century: Possibilities and Promise	37
4 Keeping your Head: The Approach of the Reformation, 1509–1547	57
5 The Children of Henry VIII: Reformation and Counter-Reformation, 1547–1558	77
6 Church Music and Society in Elizabeth's England, 1558–1603	105
7 Plots, Scots, Politics and the Beauty of Holiness, 1603–1645	151
8 Interregnum, 1644–1660	180
9 Restoration, 1660–1714	188
10 The Enlightenment, 1712–1760	223
11 West Galleries and Wesleys, Methodists and Mendelssohn, 1760–1850	249
12 Renewal, 1837–1901	285
13 Composers from S. S. Wesley to Elgar, 1830–1934	311
14 The Splintering of the Tradition, 1914–2015	332
Epilogue	373
<i>Notes</i>	378
<i>Further investigations</i>	404
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	412
<i>Illustration credits</i>	413
<i>Index</i>	415

'O Sing unto the Lord' by Andrew Gant, published 2015 by Profile Books

A Bass Violin for a West Gallery Band

by Ken Baddley, Bedford Gallery Quire



I am prompted to write on the subject of the bass violin not only by Jannette Stewart's interesting LGQ Upbeat articles on the bass viol (1), and specifically her references to Abraham Prescott's American 'church basses', but also because I had—at more or less the point at which lockdowns intervened—completed the conversion of an appropriately sized donor instrument into a bass *violin*, rather than a bass viol, in order to provide a bass stringed instrument to meet a particular need. I hope not to re-ignite the debate as to what specific term denotes which instrument in West Gallery manuscripts or printed sources (a 'bass viol' may indeed be an instrument of the viol family, but does the abbreviatory full stop in 'bass viol.' actually mean a bass violin? etc.) because my interest is a purely practical one, namely to provide an instrument to be played by a less experienced player, to replace the one owned by a cellist who has gone off to university. I have therefore been looking again at research that I first undertook many years ago, including:

- The historical evidence for the bass violin in England
- The size of some low-pitched bowed stringed instruments played in English church bands in the eighteenth / nineteenth centuries
- The relationships between body size and tuning of instruments of the violin family
- The effect of tuning on the ease of transfer from higher to low-pitched instruments
- The effects of differences in volume between viols or violins of comparable sizes

I should stress that I very much want to avoid stepping more than absolutely necessary into what Peter Holman called 'the quagmires of history and terminology (2)' in this context, or into the area of detailed measurements. It is clear that bass stringed instruments which varied in size, style, nomenclature, pitch, and tuning were in use at the same time for many years, and in various contexts, and that both bass violins and cellos were available to those church bands with funds to buy them, though I will suggest that some instruments of lower volume and projection were/are inherently unsuitable for use with groups of singers. This does not mean that no historical attempts were made to employ inappropriate instruments; Canon K H Macdermott (3) offers an extreme example, where a banjo was put into use in the parish church band in Brightling, East Sussex, in the mid-nineteenth century, but my focus here is on:

- the specific utility of a largely forgotten bass instrument of the violin family,
- the reasons it may have been present in the church bands of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and
- a reason or two for encouraging its return.

The term 'bass violin' was in routine use in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The English luthier Robert Thompson was trading 'at the sign of the Bass Violin' in St. Paul's churchyard in 1746, where he was succeeded by his sons between 1770 and 1780. The respected gambist and contributor to early editions of George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* Edward John Payne wrote of the work of Salisbury luthier Benjamin Banks (1750–1795) as follows:

'He followed Daniel Parker (1740–1785) in breaking the spell of Stainer, and seriously imitating the style of Nicholas Amati. Banks copied that maker with great fidelity. Though his violins are less in request, his tenors and basses, of which he made large numbers, are excellent instruments, and produce good prices.' (4)

The terms tenor and bass (used adjectivally in the quotation above) are of course indicators of relative pitch, but are also components of body size, and are part of a taxonomy of bowed stringed instruments which is confusingly irregular. In English, the prefix 'bass' plus 'violin' works well enough (and in French, with the *Basse de Violon*) but the perfectly logical term 'alto violin' is almost unknown (5). This is of course because we apply to the instrument considered (incorrectly) the nominal alto (6) of the violin family a term with roots in the romance group of languages, namely 'Viola'. The otherwise logical German language applies a simple nounal suffix 'Geige' (violin/fiddle), as in 'Bassegeige' or 'Tenorgeige' but fails in the same way as the English language when it comes (again) to the poor viola, which bears the name 'Bratsche' (7) in German, a homophonic germanisation of the Italian word 'braccia', a component of the name 'Viola da Braccia'; which distinguishes that (earlier) instrument as being played on the arm, rather than viol i.e. 'Viola da Gamba' style, in the lap / resting on the calves (depending on the relative size) of the player.

Different understandings of the relative sizes of the instruments of the violin family have generated more heat than light in some research circles over the years, which point I make because it touches on an almost notorious paper by the late Ephraim Segerman (8), which (with a characteristically robust response to an earlier article by the eminent cellist and musicologist Agnes Kory (9)) was intended to clarify our understanding of the different sizes of the instruments described as tenor or bass violins. What Segerman's article did, however, was to provide me with a reminder of some low-pitched bowed instruments, namely the variably-sized bass violins made and played in seventeenth century Italy and France. There are others, too, that I took into account:

- The early nineteenth century church basses of the New England maker Abraham Prescott and others, also found in a range of sizes, and
- The often quite small vernacular wooden or metal 'cellos' which survive in museums and (rarely) in churches in England.

Segerman provided dimensions (in terms of scale-length, or 'sounding length' from which most other dimensions can be calculated) for large French bass violins, and their smaller Italian cousins, the dimensions of these Italian instruments being almost the same as those of a modern three-quarter size cello, an instrument which is (because it is destined to be of only temporary use, by students who will progress to a full-sized cello as they grow in reach and height) easily and cheaply acquired as a donor instrument. Though I have said I would attempt to stay away from technical information and dimensions, it may help the reader to know that this instrument is not related to the separate category of the smaller violoncello piccolo, also known as the violoncello da spalla (10) and (possibly, as some musicological / organological juries are still 'out' on the issue) the viola pomposa, but is an instrument of a scale-length of 62 cm, or just over 24 inches, which many violinists (etc.) would not recognise at sight as being much smaller than a full-size cello. I found a perfectly serviceable three-quarter cello without difficulty, available locally for £100.

I was surprised and pleased to read Jannette's references to the instruments of the New England 'church bass' maker Abraham Prescott, some of whose instruments I was able (courtesy of a research and travel grant) to photograph and measure in the 1980s, in museums and churches in New England and in the largest private collection of Abraham Prescott instruments, then in Fremont, New Hampshire. Without at all disparaging the quality of Prescott's work, no researcher today would consider him to have been a formally trained maker of bowed stringed instruments, but he did what others of his time also did; he constructed—in backwoods rural New England—instruments which existed otherwise only as imported European items, seen and heard only in the restricted art music circles of Boston, rather than in his native Deerfield, New Hampshire, and which (contemporary evidence suggests (11)) he may never have seen 'in the flesh', working from nothing more than two-dimensional images. The requirement for these 'church basses' may have been what drove the otherwise inexperienced Prescott to make (in around 1809 (12)) his first church bass; the need to support the singing in the small town Congregational church of which he was a deacon, and—later—the increasing demand for such instruments in the emerging singing-school tradition of that period in New England.

Prescott's early instruments had flat backs; not the 'bent' shoulders of the instruments of the viol family, nor yet the carved-out back of the violins, but centre-jointed or single plates which were flat from top to bottom, which is just what someone who had seen only a two-dimensional image might make. Nineteenth century New England provides supporting evidence for other such enterprising efforts, of course; James Gibbs based the Willcox and Gibbs sewing machine on only the parts of the Singer sewing machines which were visible to him in the trade catalogues of the period, thus having invented the chain-stitch sewing machine, rather than the more efficient lock-stitch system of Isaac Singer's machines. Was it the same with Abraham Prescott, and his designs for his church basses? There are parallels, too, with the low-pitch stringed instruments which we find in some museums and parish (and other) churches in England; the late Professor Edward Wall (13) wrote:

'The New England school of cello and double bass makers was not based upon any system of training or apprenticeship. Some beginners did learn from experienced masters, but in the majority of cases a cabinet maker or carpenter got into the business by building a copy of an instrument he had seen. [...] In addition, others ventured into the trade whose imaginations ran wild, or whose woodworking skill was not up to the standards required of a luthier. In the woods and valleys of New England hinterland some strange creations were produced, [...] in brass or tin, and others shaped like banjos, and other aberrations.' (14)

This trade catalogue illustration shows a variety of instruments which could be used in WG bands, including the serpent, and the keyed bugle, as well as two free reed instruments, on the left the flutina, which would develop into today's melodeon, and on the right the harmonium which would become the main element of Prescott's instrument business. The larger of the two 'church basses' can be clearly seen to be a 'Trinitarian' or three-stringed church bass, which is the same as the example in 'Old North' church, in Boston.



There are echoes here, of course, of instruments still extant in England, with examples in Norfolk, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, in a variety of materials, from hardwood, softwood, brass and tin, to welded steel plate. Prescott is not known to have made metal bowed instruments (though the company that he started later expanded to be makers of and dealers in a wide range of instruments) but he made his wooden instruments in a range of sizes. In addition to church basses both larger and smaller than cellos, he added cellos, and much bigger violone-sized basses, one of which was used—and was still in use there, on my last visit 24 years ago—at Christ Church (‘Old North’ Church) in Boston, Massachusetts. Many of the instruments of Prescott’s manufacture have sadly since been converted; the larger and smaller church basses to cellos, and the violones to double- and contra-basses.

Very recent developments in string technology have resulted in internet offers of sets of strings which claim to make a violin sound like a viola / a viola sound like a cello, and so on. Having not tried any of these new varieties of strings myself, I cannot comment on how they work or sound, but—using ‘traditional’ stringing, and taking into account other critical elements (15)—the tonal range of a bowed instrument has a direct relationship with its body volume and string dimensions. Though there are tuning tolerances, fitting standard strings of a pitch too low for a bowed instrument will not make a violin (for instance) sound like a cello. I have already referred to the fact that the body size of the modern viola is ‘incorrect’ for its scale length of around 37cm / 14.5 inches; put simply, it is far too small for its pitch.

We have plenty of historical evidence for the tuning of bowed stringed instruments of the violin family, with the earliest of these achieved by means of extending the 5ths of the violin downwards systematically, which (16) [...] did not prove ideal for ensemble playing, and so the practise that had already been found successful with the viol family was adopted; the strict sequence of intervals was replaced by tuning two members of the family an octave apart. The bass instrument thus acquired its modern tuning (17) of C-G-d-a.

Michael Praetorius (18) provides tunings of both C-D-g-a and F-C-g-d’, and Marx, Boyd, and Monosoff (op.cit.) point to the latter tuning being in use in England by 1725. For the smaller bodied of the church basses (such as the 62cm / 24 in scale instrument which I have used) the F-C-g-d’ works well, and such an instrument can also be strung to G-D-a-e’, or, if the correct stringing is specified, be tuned down from that pitch to the F-C-g-d’ tuning if required. The stringing which I have used to provide this low G-D-a-e’ tuning is as follows:

e’	Low twist gut, 32 thousandths of an inch.
a	Low twist gut 43 thou.
D	High twist gut 60 thou.
G	Copper wound 95 thou.

From a reliable supplier of well-made and historically accurate strings (who are sadly few in number, now) such a set will cost little more than a set of good quality modern cello strings.

I mentioned at the beginning of this article that I had in mind for this instrument a perhaps inexperienced player, and while I have no specific such person in mind, I have elected to use the tuning set out above with the following in mind; that a violinist already playing g - d’ - a’ - e’ might find the prospect of playing a bass instrument less daunting if the instrument in question is in a tuning with which they are already familiar.

Another significant factor in the tuning I have chosen is that much of the music of the church bands and quires was written within a range appropriate for non-professional singers. The practical significance of this is that—in the bass clef—more or less all of the expected range of the music can be played from first position, and what is more important, without having to leave it. Though I no longer have the detailed measurements of the English church instruments mentioned above, I would speculate that the shortness of the necks of these instruments was perhaps a function of the fact that ‘everything’ could be played from first position. With this inexperienced player in mind (19) I have set aside the idea of scordatura tuning of the lowest string, in favour of using stringing (as above) flexible enough to allow the whole instrument to be tuned to the lower ‘F’ tuning, though this is not something which could be easily done during a service or concert performance. Modern music notation software could, of course, be used to provided transposed parts, but at the risk of making the fingering too complicated for the inexperienced player.

Why not a bass viol, then? The question is a logical one, and we see bass viols (and at least one large violone, unless there are others of which I am unaware) and the odd treble viol in use in amateur West Gallery church bands today, but—with the notable exception of that one violone—we must acknowledge that the contest between largish groups of singers (rather than solo voices) and the quieter, lower-tensioned and lightly strung bass viol can be won only by the singers; the viol is—in most instances—not loud enough to provide a lead. Taking into account the problem of abbreviated names for instruments (20) mentioned in my first paragraph (above) might it be that the (few) surviving church basses in England are indeed—carefully avoiding terminology issues—relics of the ‘violins tuned in fifths including cellos’ family rather than the ‘bass viols’ suggested by the manuscript / print abbreviations? It is also necessary to bear in mind the following points:

- The lightly-built nature of the division viol (21) has meant that historical examples of the bass and other viols have survived less well than the more robust instruments of the violin family.
- The viols were solo, ensemble, and consort instruments, which (along with the lute) were those of what we would now call ‘art music’, not of vernacular psalmody or hymnody.

Though a number of sixteenth and seventeenth century books of psalm-settings (22) were provided with figured bass parts for viols and theorbos (as well as lute and sometimes cittern tablature) these were intended for domestic music-making. I know of no surviving examples of viols as such, in English parish churches.

Jannette Stewart has demonstrated that the transfer from an instrument tuned in fifths (such as her cello) to one tuned in fourths with a third in the middle (her bass viol) is achievable, but has left us in no doubt as to the requirement for assiduous practise to achieve it. Though it is clear that the louder and more brilliant-sounding instruments of the violin family did not actually replace the viols, both Jannette and Peter Holman (op.cit.) point to the cessation of composition for viols by the 1690s; no more than a change of fashion, perhaps, but was it one that meant that bass violins of whatever kind—rather than bass viols as such—were the instruments which would lead and support the bass part of vernacular parish church psalmody?

Footnotes

1. Also known as Viola da Gamba; ‘Ital: ‘Leg Viol’. I shall use the term bass viol throughout.
2. Holman, Peter (1993) ‘Four and Twenty Fiddlers: The Violin at the English Court 1540–1690. Oxford 1993
3. Macdermott, K H (1923) Sussex Church Music in the Past. London 1923
4. Grove, George (1874) A Dictionary of Music and Musicians. London 1874 and later eds.
5. This article refers to bowed stringed instruments in an historical context, and I have therefore ignored the more recent development of a Violin Octet made up of eight instruments, which includes a dimensionally accurate alto violin.
6. For a logically sized alto instrument, the body length would be that of a one-eighth cello, around 50 cm.
7. Feminine noun; ‘Die Bratsche’.
8. Segerman, Ephraim (1995) ‘The Name Tenor Violin’ Galpin Society Journal No. 48, March 1995.
9. Kory, Agnes (1994) ‘A Wider Role for the Tenor Violin’ Galpin Society Journal No. 47, March 1994.
10. ‘Da Spalla’ meaning ‘at the shoulder’, the instrument being held across the player’s chest by a shoulder strap.
11. Prescott, William Jr. (1870) The Prescott Memorial. H W Dutton & Son. Boston, Mass. 1870
12. Prescott’s instrument No. 1 is dated 1809.
13. Wall, Edward. (1987) ‘Abraham Prescott: Bass Viol Maker of Deerfield and Concord’. Historical New Hampshire Vol. 42, No. 2 Summer 1987
14. Wall, Edward (Ibid.)
15. Such as an accurate middle-frequency value between the highest and lowest pitch of the instrument.
16. According to Marx, Boyd, and Monosoff, in the New Grove edition ‘The Violin’. Chapter 6. London 1989
17. I have used Helmholtz pitch notation throughout.
18. Michael Praetorius (1618) Syntagma—De Organographia Vol. 2. Wolfenbüttel 1618
19. And the instrument *is* playable by someone with no cello experience. My own (limited) school second-orchestra violin-playing experience was enough to permit me to play a couple of ‘West Gallery Favourites’ straight off the page, albeit slowly.
20. Surely a paleographical issue about the definition of the abbreviation, rather than an organological one of instrument identification?
21. Division viol: a variably smaller bass viol intended for consort playing.
22. Those of Richard Allison, and John Playford.

“Good Singing Still...”

7. Dissent and Non-conformity

Reproduced with kind permission from ‘Good Singing Still’ by Rollo Woods

I am against eyes-down worship, where no-one can take their eyes off the book in their lap, in case they miss a cue. If once we begin to sing by note, the next thing will be to pray by rule, and then comes Popery!

Most Free Church people would say Amen to the first proposition, if not now to the second. Most use no printed liturgy and, ideally, prayer and preaching should be extempore, depending on inspiration from the Holy Spirit. (In practice, all Free Churches issue guides and suggested forms of worship. Sermons, Prayers, Children’s Addresses, etc. are carefully prepared.) They also reject any form of parish organisation, hold-

ing that the only true church is a community of believers, united by a public profession of faith, renewed at regular intervals. Free Churches are largely independent, self-governing, and democratic, and provided opportunities for people from the working class to become elders and pastors. Such people also became Trades Union leaders, Chartists, and eventually MPs. The leaders of the ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs’ were Methodist preachers, and the first working class MPs were Primitive Methodists, Thomas Burt (elected 1874) and John Wilson (elected 1885). Strictly speaking, Dissenters reject the concept of a state church, while nonconformists acknowledge it, but are unable to conform to all its requirements.

However, the word Non-conformist was seldom used before 1800. The separate organisation of the churches dates from the Restoration, when the government imposed a Penal Code on dissent, some of which outlived the WG period. The Toleration Act (1689) allowed dissenters to build their own Meeting Houses, but they could not be used for weddings between 1753 and 1836, or for funerals, and even baptisms by a dissenting minister might not be recognised. The Penal Code barred dissenters from public office, Parliament, municipal government, and the universities. They had to set up their own schools and colleges, some of which were good enough to attract Anglican students. Some Dissenting Academies were absorbed into the first provincial universities. Their disabilities forced them into close and often closed communities, with the Meeting House or Chapel as the centre of business and social, as well as religious life. A marriage between a church and a chapel family might have overtones of Romeo and Juliet. The Pastor of Swanage Independent Chapel was described (1850) as ‘a zealous and godly man, very strict... During his ministry ... 4 members were excommunicated, one for drunkenness, another for fornication, and two for marrying unbelievers’ (i.e. Anglicans or Methodists).

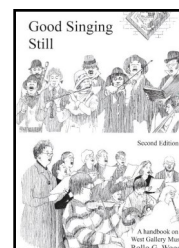
Each church could also develop its own forms of music. In some ways hymns can replace a liturgy, because prayers of penitence, thanksgiving or intercession might be replaced by hymns with a similar theme. Most of the great hymn writers of the WG period were Dissenters, and strong musical traditions developed, even without access to the main centres of musical education, the cathedrals and universities, and without endowments. Most musicmaking was voluntary and unpaid (as was much Anglican music in country churches). Some Free Church quires surpassed the performances in the Church of England. They also went on longer, into the twentieth century in some cases (§58). Thankfully, even when the bias against dissent was strong, there were people in all churches who were prepared to collaborate, and this included the quires. The band of Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire, in the 1870s played in the parish church in the morning, and the Methodist chapel in the afternoon [TEMPERLEY7, p.240]. Others lent a hand for special services, exchanged music, and co-operated generally.

This tolerance was not universal; one vicar sacked some of his band for playing at a Methodist function [OCM]. Voltaire, the French satirist, after a visit to England, wrote that the English had a hundred religions (but only one sauce). Certainly there were dozens of small breakaway sects in the WG period, some quite small towns having up to seven little chapels, a number to be augmented by the various branches into which the Methodist Church split after John Wesley’s death. Many produced their own hymnbooks, though copies are now rare. Most have now died out, though the last member of the Muggletonians, a small unorthodox sect, founded in 1651, did not die until 1979. Muggletonians were egalitarian, apolitical, and pacifist, and though they had no form of worship or preaching, did have a collection of hymns, sung to standard tunes. The Society of Friends (Quakers) was also formed in the 17th century, and is still flourishing, but does not use music regularly in its services. §7–13 deal with the main non-conformist churches which used music in worship, and with the Roman Catholics, who were subject to more restrictions, but often produced better music than the rest.

© Rollo G Woods, 1995, 2017

Reproduced with permission from ‘Good Singing Still’ by Rollo G Woods,
published by The West Gallery Music Association in 2017 (2nd Edition)

‘Good Singing Still’ 242pp is available for £5 + £2 p+p
from Mike Bailey at mike.c.bailey@btinternet.com



THIS WEEKEND'S ADVENTURE

by Claire Wilson

FRIDAY JULY 2ND

(ON THE BRINK!)

Tomorrow afternoon at two
Our bold, resourceful quire is due
To meet at last! It's been so long
Since our blest ministry of song
Has found expression in a place
Where we can gather face to face.
Kind Antonina, (LGQ!)
Will open up her garden to
A group of us. That is the plan.
We'll meet in person where we can
Greet one another, breathe fresh air
And sing for joy! But, hold on, Claire:
This all depends, of course, on what
The weather has in store. It's not
Impossible that rain will fall.
(We live in England, after all!)
Let's see what comes about. Meanwhile,
Since optimism is our style,
We'll hope for blue skies, warmth and sun.
I'll keep you posted, everyone!

SATURDAY JULY 3RD

WE MADE IT!

It worked! We met, fifteen or so,
And sang our hearts out. As we know,
"The Lord looks down from heaven's tower".
He kept us safe. No heavy shower
Descended on us. We stayed dry,
Chose what to sing each time. And I
Am moved to share with our "hostess"
The gratitude we feel. God bless
Dear Antonina and our quire.
Let's set our next goal even higher!



Rehearsals resume in person at St Michael's Paternoster:

September 8th & 22nd, October 6th & 20th, November 3rd & 17th, December 1st

Sunday Evening Service, Highgate URC, Pond Square, Highgate October 10th

Christmas Concert Alie Street December 8th



LGQ Upbeat—The Newsletter of the London Gallery Quire

Edited by Phil Price Copy Editor Nicholas Maxwell

If you have news, a viewpoint, or an interesting musical activity or story,
your contribution is very welcome.

contactphilprice@yahoo.co.uk. Non-electronic submissions welcome on paper at any rehearsal.