

RESEARCH REPORT

The Early Twentieth-century Revival of Tudor Church Music

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For the past four years I have had the privilege of devoting the bulk of my time to researching the early twentieth-century revival of ‘Tudor’ church music as an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow. This project, as is anticipated with these kinds of fellowships, grew out of my doctoral research into nineteenth-century attitudes towards Thomas Tallis and his music.¹ My work on Tallis focussed predominantly on the Victorian era, a period of ‘peak’ reception for Tallis, when he was venerated as ‘The Father of English Church Music.’ I became increasingly aware, however, of a radical shift in attitudes towards not only Tallis’s music, but towards early English music more generally in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The pioneering work of (Sir) Richard Runciman Terry in reviving early English choral music at Westminster Cathedral from 1901 to 1924 has been widely recognised,² but the existing studies have tended to portray Terry (at least partly because that was how he liked to portray himself) as a lone wolf, a radical working in isolation. My work on Tallis suggested that this was not completely true, that Terry was just one manifestation, albeit the most prominent, of a renewed interest in pre-Reformation English music that began in the early 1880s. William Smyth Rockstro, for example, in the many articles on early music that he wrote for George Grove’s first *Dictionary*

¹ See Suzanne Cole, *Thomas Tallis and his Music in Victorian England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008).

² See, for example, Timothy Day, ‘Sir Richard Terry and 16th-century Polyphony,’ *Early Music* 22 (1994): 297–307 and Elizabeth Roche, ‘“Great Learning, Fine Scholarship, Impeccable Taste”: A Fiftieth Anniversary Tribute to Sir Richard Terry (1865–1938),’ *Early Music* 16 (1988): 231–36, and perhaps most importantly, Hilda Andrews, *Westminster Retrospect: A Memoir of Sir Richard Terry* (Oxford: Geoffrey Cumberlege; OUP, 1948), a source that is still widely, and unquestioningly quoted in articles on Terry and English Catholic church music.

of *Music and Musicians*, questioned the prevailing view that the Reformation had ushered in the Golden Age of English church music, and that very little earlier music, to quote John Barnard from 1641, was ‘usefull, or pleasing to the eares.’ Others, including H.B. Collins, H. Orsmond Anderton, Godfrey Arkwright, and perhaps most importantly William Barclay Squire, all wrote about, edited, and/or performed long-neglected early English music around the turn of the twentieth century. I was also struck by the prominence of Catholic musicians (Collins and Rockstro, like Terry, were converts from Anglicanism) in this revival, even though Roman Catholics still made up a relatively small portion of the English population. This suggested a possible connection between the changing social and legal position of Catholics in late nineteenth-century England and the emerging scholarly interest in pre-Reformation English choral music.

In my fellowship, therefore, I set out to explore the changing reception of early English sacred music (later known as ‘Tudor Church Music’) between 1880 and 1930, a period of dramatic change in attitudes to this repertoire, paying particular attention to the intersection of scholarly studies of this music and the more utilitarian requirements of practicing church musicians. The methodological approach in this study is essentially the same as that used in my PhD. Whereas most discussions of this music have tended to deal in high level generalisations—phrases such as ‘composers like Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons’ are common—I have been careful to distinguish between the reception not just of individual composers, but of individual works. In the early twentieth century, for example, there was a vast gulf between attitudes towards Byrd (whose sacred music was seen as almost exclusively the preserve of the Roman Catholic Church) and Gibbons (who, despite Terry’s best efforts to suggest—wrongly—that Gibbons was the ‘last flicker in the socket’ of English Catholicism,³ continued to be viewed as a bastion of Anglicanism). Earlier composers, such as Taverner and Faryfax, were largely unknown.⁴ And even within the output of a single composer, individual works were received very differently. All three of Byrd’s masses remained unsung until the 1890s, while his *Bow Thine Ear* (an English adaptation of *Civitas sancti tui*) was prized as one of the musical treasures of the Church of England. Gibbons’s Short Service, invariably known as ‘Gibbons in F’ in the nineteenth century, was perhaps the most highly regarded of all the early Anglican service settings, yet his now-popular Second Service was almost completely neglected until it was published by the obscure and eccentric S. Royle Shore in 1920.⁵ Focussing on these subtle yet important differences in reception reveals a far more complex web of motivations, allegiances and agendas behind the revival of early English church music than has previously been identified.

The underlying questions that drive this study are, therefore, all to do with the music. What music by sixteenth and early seventeenth-century composers was known in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Which pieces were performed, edited, discussed in the scholarly literature? Where and by whom was the music performed? And, perhaps most

³ See, for example, R.R. Terry, ‘Anglican Church Music,’ *The Chord* (Dec. 1899): 21.

⁴ There were, of course, a few scholars and enthusiasts who were familiar with these composers. James Hobson has recently shown that Edward Taylor toured England in the 1830s giving historical lectures that included performances of illustrations of works by Fayrfax; see James Hobson, ‘Three Madrigal Societies in Early Nineteenth-century England,’ *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-century Britain*, ed. Paul Rodmell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 33–53.

⁵ Orlando Gibbons, *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis*, ed. S. Royle Shore, Cathedral Series of Church Service Music 7 (London: Novello, 1920).

importantly, what motivated scholars, editors and musicians finally to turn their attention to particular pieces of music at a given time?

The attempt to answer these questions has, somewhat paradoxically, led to a lengthy and in-depth study of several key individuals, of which Richard Runciman Terry is the most important. I had originally thought that as Terry has already been the subject of scholarly attention, little more would need to be said. It soon became apparent, however, that almost all the existing work on Terry has been heavily influenced by Hilda Andrews' *Westminster Retrospect: A Memoir of Sir Richard Terry*,⁶ and that, in addition to its obvious bias, this work is less than reliable in matters of fact. A considerable amount of time has, therefore, been devoted to a reconsideration of Terry's work in reviving the early English choral repertoire, both as editor and performer, during his time as master of music at Downside Abbey (1896–1901) and as first organist and choirmaster at the newly built Westminster Cathedral (1901–1924). Nevertheless, despite the prominent part played by Terry in this study, he is not the primary focus. I make no attempt to clarify the circumstances surrounding his precipitous departure from Westminster Cathedral (which still seem to arouse a great deal of interest), nor do I look at his other musical activities, such as his work on sea shanties, his own compositions, or his revivals of continental polyphony. There continues to be a need for more scholarly work on this important figure.

This work-centred approach also led to a lengthy discussion of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust's edition of the music of Taverner, Byrd and others that was published in the 1920s, much of it for the first time, under the title 'Tudor Church Music' (TCM).⁷ This edition, of which Terry was the first editor and which grew directly out of his pioneering work at Westminster, consisted of ten volumes in folio, intended primarily for libraries and wealthy collectors, alongside fifty items published in cheap octavo editions, suitable for performance by choirs. These publications played a pivotal role in the revival of this repertoire: the volume devoted to Tallis's Latin music is, for example, still the only available scholarly edition, while the cheap performing editions were largely responsible for 'wak[ing] the sleeping public' to the beauty of this previously neglected music.⁸ The music published in this edition forms the foundation of the repertoire of church choirs and secular choral societies around the world, and I believe that it continues to shape our perceptions of what constitutes English church music, and indeed early English music more generally to this day.

The progress of the edition was, however, fraught with difficulty. In 1916 Terry estimated that he could produce twenty folio volumes over five years, for which the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust agreed to guarantee a sum of 'not more than £3000.' This estimate was wildly

⁶ Hilda Andrews, *Westminster Retrospect: A Memoir of Sir Richard Terry* (Oxford: Geoffrey Cumberlege; OUP, 1948).

⁷ The work on this important edition has, furthermore, been hugely facilitated by the existence of the unusually rich collection of archives of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, now held in the National Archives of Scotland, first brought to scholarly attention by Richard Turbet in 'An Affair of Honour: "Tudor Church Music," the Ousting of Richard Terry, and a Trust Vindicated,' *Music & Letters* 76 (1995): 593–600. The holdings include almost all correspondence between the members of the editorial committee, the Carnegie Trustees, who funded the edition, and the publishers, Oxford University Press, and provide a unique window not only into the background to this particular edition, but to attitudes towards early music more generally.

⁸ Letter, R.W. Chapman to Richard Runciman Terry, 24 June 1919, quoted in Richard Turbet, "'A Monument of Enthusiastic Industry": Further Light on "Tudor Church Music,"' *Music & Letters* 81 (2000): 433.

optimistic: in the end, even though the number of volumes was halved, the cost blew out by a factor of five, and it took nearly fifteen years to reach completion. It quickly became clear that Terry had neither the administrative nor the editorial skills to manage a project of such magnitude, and that he would require editorial assistance. An editorial committee was therefore appointed comprising Rev. Edmund H. Fellowes, who was working on a complete edition of English madrigals for Stainer & Bell; Percy Buck, the music master at Harrow; his mistress Sylvia Townsend Warner, who had started studying early music notation with Terry as a form of occupational therapy after the death of her father; and Rev. Alexander Ramsbotham, an Anglican clergyman with an interest in the music of Tomkins. The composer Herbert Howells also worked on the edition for a time. Relations between Terry and the committee rapidly soured, however; from late 1919 he was effectively sidelined, and in mid-1922 he was removed from the committee altogether.

The edition occupied a rather uneasy space, attempting as it did to stand both as a scholarly work of reference, and as the source of accessible performance parts for church and community choirs. It also sat uncomfortably with the broader goals the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust ('the improvement of the well-being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland⁹'), and the committee members, although experts in their fields, were essentially self-taught amateurs. Yet in early twentieth-century Britain it is hard to see how else such a project could have got off the ground. It was never going to be commercially viable, and despite the example set by the state-funded German Denkmäler, government funding was unavailable. And Terry is not entirely to blame for his inability to estimate accurately the scope of the project. Before the committee began their work, nobody had any real sense of the quantity of early music that lay hidden in cathedral and universities libraries and in the British Museum, nor of the difficulties thrown up by editing this largely unexplored repertory.¹⁰ In a real sense, the committee had not only to edit and publish this repertoire, but first to discover and define it.

My fellowship has now officially drawn to a close, and although there is still a lot of work to be done, the shape of my findings are clear. Much of what I discovered confirmed my original expectations. As anticipated, sectarianism played a significant role in the revival of this repertoire, although the way in which it played out is rather more complicated than I had originally envisaged. Catholic musicians, fuelled by a desire to reclaim the English Catholic music of the past, were certainly key players in reviving early Latin polyphony, and several Anglican musicians, most notably Fellowes and Shore, had their own cultural and religious agendas. Several other key players, however, of whom Squire is perhaps the most important, appear to have been motivated by an impartial intellectual curiosity independent of any sectarian agendas. Furthermore class (which, in late nineteenth-century England, was inextricably tied up with religion) played a more important role than I had originally anticipated, particularly, I suspect, in the unfortunate breakdown in the relationship between Terry and his fellow committee members. In the end, however, I believe that it was the personalities of the individuals involved—their strengths and weakness, petty vanities, vices, illnesses and

⁹ *Trust Deed Creating the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust* (Dunfermline: A. Romanes & Sons, 1913), 6.

¹⁰ Edmund H. Fellowes's edition of the 'English Madrigal School,' which he had begun in 1913 is probably the closest comparison, but this was a considerably less difficult undertaking. The madrigal repertory is later and less complicated than much of the music in the TCM edition, Fellowes editions were all based on print sources.

personal allegiances—that had the most significant impact upon the success or failure of their various endeavours, and their advocacy of different types of music. The story of the revival of early English church music is also the story of a group of passionate and eccentric individuals, complete with mental illness, suicide, adultery, alcoholism and fraud.