

# National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian  
and Free Christian Churches  
Established 1945

# Viewpoint



## Psalms in Newcastle

by

Alice Nunn & Chris Gardner

Issue 219



Oct 2011

Registered Charity 1040294

## **Introduction**

This *ViewPoint* comes from Newcastle and I am grateful to the contributors allowing me to reproduce articles they first had published in a *West Gallery Music Association Newsletter*. Both are members of the Association.

The West Gallery Music Association is an informal group of singers, instrumentalists and scholars. We share an interest in the sacred music, psalmody and hymnody, and the secular music and dance of the men and women who performed from the west galleries of parish churches, in chapels, and around the towns and villages of England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Alice Nunn is an Anglican Vicar who has a parish at Winterton in Lincolnshire. She writes about a workshop and concert held at the Unitarian Church in Newcastle which has the wonderful name of 'The Church of the Divine Unity'.

Chris Gardner is the organist at the Church of the Divine Unity and has researched the Unitarian connection with psalmody and hymns that go back to the first Unitarian congregation in Newcastle.

## **Harmony with the Divine by Alice Nunn**

**Workshop and Concert to celebrate the 70th anniversary of  
the Church of the Divine Unity, Newcastle Upon Tyne,  
23rd January 2010.**

I suppose proof of a good day spent singing and playing music is that you go off home with some of that music replaying itself in your head, and that four days later you still find yourself singing, or humming odd snatches of music. . . most off putting to those around you who haven't shared the experience. And for this to have survived a terminal breakdown on the A1 near Durham on the way home is even more remarkable. As I waited for *Green*

*Flag* to rescue me I found ‘*Greenwich New*’ and ‘*Darley*’ sustaining me for the dark half hour on the hard shoulder, during which I was conscious that my fiddle in the boot of the car was worth considerably more than the poor wreck that was now my car.

Thus ended my excursion to Newcastle, a less than glorious end to a really good day of West Gallery and related music, drawn mainly from the Unitarian tradition. There’s some very fine music there, much of which many quires could sing and play with real enjoyment and enthusiasm. The workshop was led by Chris Gardener and Paul Gailiunas and hosted by ‘*Joyful Noise*’. Beverages and biscuits were provided by the church community. Perhaps before I write of the music and, in particular, the concert, it would be helpful to consider who the Unitarians are.

They have a long and interesting history in the liberal dissenting tradition going back to the late 1600s, and boldly claim to worship God without the shackles of dogma. They reject the notion of the Trinity and stand in the tradition of God fearing folk who have been persecuted for their ‘heresy’ over the years. Their message is one of inclusion and tolerance, so an unrepentant Trinitarian like myself (well, I am an Anglican vicar!) is accepted even if they disagree with me. God is a unity and calls all people to work towards unity themselves and to seek the truth in their lives. Like the Quakers they are sometime pacifist, and have often spoken out against human rights abuses such as slavery at the time when it was not the done thing. Jesus is seen as a significant, but not divine, teacher in the rabbinic and prophetic tradition. His central message was a call to love. Unitarians value spiritual insights from all religious traditions. They have a long tradition of hymnody and other music, much of which feels familiar. This frequently draws on the psalms and other Old Testament sources and perhaps one of the most notable things is that they never end with a Doxology. Much is in praise of the sustaining and creative God, hence the interest in and predominance of Psalms.

The Church of the Divine Unity in Ellison Place, near the Univer-

sity, is the fourth home of the Unitarians in Newcastle, built in 1939 and opened in 1940, hence the anniversary. It is an impressive brick building with some Modernist tendencies. As far as I was concerned, its crowning glory is the simplicity of the subtly tinted windows, with the constantly changing displays of light.

But what of the day? We assembled a good sized quire and a strong band of fiddles of various sizes and pitch; violin, viola, octave fiddle and cello - a joy for me as a fiddler - together with an oboe and a tenor recorder. We soon got into our stride, and singers and instruments were making a good sound a lot of the time. Chris and Paul steered us through it all with great enthusiasm and skill.

We started with *York or the Silt Tune*, Ps 27 OV, lined out in the old style and unaccompanied, with Chris acting as Cantor and encouraging us to put in small embellishments. Next came *Fairfield*, this time with words from Ps 116, metricated by Isaac Watts, and taken from S Webbe Jnr's Psalmody of 1816. The music, an adaption from Handel, gave us a certain amount of consternation during rehearsal because a gremlin had caused a few notes in the top line to come out a tone high. Once sorted, it went fine.

It was then our turn to listen to the organ, and Terry Mason, a local WGMA member, who was also the oboe player, played the *Voluntary in C* by John Stanley (1713 - 87), the famous blind organist of London's Temple Church.

*Greenwich New*, one of the tunes that sustained me during my hard shoulder experience, came next. This is a rather magnificent setting, using Ps 148 NV. The music was composed by the Rev Ralph Harrison, who died 200 years ago. He was a Unitarian minister who trained at the Warrington Academy, later becoming minister at Cross Street Chapel in Manchester. This setting comes from the *Sacred Harmony* of 1784.

We then listened to an interesting reading from a member of the congregation - a short account of the Unitarian music in Hanover Square Meeting House, a previous home of the Newcastle Unitarians, from the time of Rev William Turner, a great Unitarian divine and one time minister to the Newcastle congregation.

Four tunes followed, starting with *Worksop*, a setting of Isaac Watt's metrical version of Ps 146 to music by Rev Harrison, a fine example of a fuguing tune and great fun to play and sing. Next came *Felton*, an adaption of a duet movement in canon by Roger Boyce (b 1710) to Watt's Ps 46, followed by a four part chorus added by Hodgkinson about whom nothing is known. The tune *Melcombe* by Samuel Webbe Snr will be well known to many, as it is contained in just about every hymn book going. However the words were not the familiar ones, but a setting of Ps 106NV. The last tune of this section was *Steephill* by Samuel Webbe Jnr to words by the Unitarian poetess, Mrs Laetitia Barbauld. This was a fine, cheerful tune, and my regret was that there was only one verse printed, due to the fact that the others didn't really fit with the music. It very firmly speaks of Jehovah reigning 'unbounded and alone'.

Staying with Mrs Barbauld, we listened to a poem condemning the evils of the slave trade, and the negative attitude of the then government towards William Wilberforce's Anti Slavery Bill. I don't know what it is about gloomy pieces, but I've often noticed that West Gallery gatherings really go for them, and *Darley* was an excellent example - a setting of Ps 137 (lament of the Israelites in slavery/exile in Babylon), a highly suitable piece to follow the poem. The air was adapted by Webbe Jnr from a Movement in Haydn's String Quartet in G Major, op 76, a beautiful poignant piece, and appropriately, we were invited to hang up our fiddles etc, if not harps, for the duration. For an instrumentalist who enjoys a sing, it was great. Mrs Barbauld also wrote the words to the next tune, *Birkenhead* by Webbe Jnr. perhaps this shows a Unitarian determination in the face of bigotry and opposition be-

fore the Test and Corporation Acts of 1828.

Next came more organ music from Terry Mason, this time a Sonata *Spirituali in E flat* composed by Matthias Hawden, organist at St Nicholas Church, Newcastle until 1787. It comprised several movements and is very much in the style of CPE Bach and Haydn. Next came the *Camberwell New*, an enjoyable setting by Thomas Lamport of hymn words by Isaac Watts. Here the Unitarian connection is that Thomas moved with his son from Poole to Lancaster, where Lamport Jnr became a Unitarian minister. The tune was taken from Lamport's *24 Original Psalm Tunes* of 1824.

Our last reading, again read by a member of the congregation, described how the Rev William Turner vigorously revised the psalmody at Hanover Square Chapel, publishing a new collection in 1806.

The final piece was a fine *Anthem for four voices*, Ps 84 by Vaughn Richardson, sometime organist at Winchester Cathedral. It was included in Thomas Page's collection of 1800, *Harmonia Sacrae*. It is just one example of music set for cathedral type choirs. Interestingly, the three volume set was purchased in 1820 for the Hanover Square choir, suggesting a high standard of performance and resources - this choir was obviously a competent group. It was a fitting piece with which to finish our performance. An interesting aside for me is that the Unitarians were happy to sing music from Anglican (and presumably other) sources. I wonder if other sects would have ventured into trying out some of the fine Unitarian music out there.

The whole event was thoroughly enjoyable, and I was impressed by the variety and interest of the music, as well as the welcome by the Newcastle Unitarians. I know they enjoyed our visit, as can be seen by this comment received by Norman Johnson, part of 'Joyful Noise' (as well as *Worlds Apart*).

'It was an utter delight for us to be treated to such a varied and

comprehensive programme of music, anecdote and history sourced from our tradition. We felt highly honoured that you had taken the time to research, rehearse and present this to us.'

And from me, and others who came for the day, a very big Thank You to *Joyful Noise*, Chris Gardner, Paul Gailunas and, of course, the Newcastle Unitarians.

Alice Nunn

## **Dissenting, but not Necessarily Dissonant**

### **Unitarianism and psalmody in early 19th century Newcastle-upon-Tyne by Chris Gardner**

The Church of the Divine Unity (i.e. Unitarian) may claim to be the oldest of the nonconformist congregations in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Although the exact date of formation is unknown, the Rev William Durant held meetings in his house in Pilgrim Street after 1662, following his ejection from All Souls Church. A later successor was the Rev Benjamin Bennett who in 1703 established the congregation on Unitarian lines in his chapel in the Close Gate. Later he founded the Hanover Square Chapel, which opened in 1727 and lasted until 1853.

It is this building with which we are concerned in terms of psalmody and other church music. From its foundation in 1727, Hanover Square Chapel played host to many distinguished clerics and lay people, none more so than the illustrious Rev William Turner, minister from 1782 to 1841.

Turner enjoyed respect and fame in Newcastle, and beyond, for his achievements and abilities, especially in theological, scientific and humanitarian activities. He founded a Sunday School - the first in the city - in 1785, in the wake of Robert Raikes of Gloucester.

ter. Following this, he founded a Charity School, church library and the Newcastle Unitarian Tract Society. Chiefly he is still remembered locally as the establisher of the Literary and Philosophical Society in 1793, where he lectured on many topics, and which institution flourishes today. Like so many dissenters of his time, he was involved in a number of charitable and philanthropic activities. As an Abolitionist he helped epitomise the Age of Enlightenment, playing his part actively in condemning social injustices.

Although more associated with scientific and related issue than with the arts, Turner obviously approved of the values of psalmody and other music in the life of Hanover Square Chapel, inso-much as he published a corrected edition of Watt's Psalms (1806); this had additions 'offered' by himself. A subscription was raised for 100 copies, the latter for the use of those 'for whom it may be inconvenient to purchase'. (Unfortunately no copy of this volume remains extant locally, although an edition of 1814 is lodged in the British Library.)

There is no direct reference otherwise to psalmody or music used until 1820; nor is there any indication of instruments employed until the installation of a new organ in the gallery in 1810, the chapel being enlarged that year partly for that purpose. Strangely the church archives do not seem to record this important event, which is mentioned by Eneas McKenzie in his 'History of Newcastle' (1827), who states that the organ costs were raised by public subscription. Elsewhere in the region, Unitarian chapels had sprung up, though many have now gone. Notably, the Stockton Chapel (founded 1688) had a string band until the beginning of the 19th century, followed by a barrel organ with two rolls, each containing twelve tunes. A finger organ was installed in 1825, which seems to have been supplemented by a band comprising of 3 violins, 2 flutes and a French Horn.

Paul Gailiunas possesses a 3rd edition of Samuel Webbe Junior's *A Collection of Psalm Tunes... 1816*. A faint inscription



found on a front piece recently came to light during rebinding, possibly reading as 'Hanover Square Chapel'. Because the book was purchased in Hexham, it is feasible that there is a local connection. Furthermore it is known that Webbe was organist at the Unitarian Chapel in Paradise Street, Liverpool, from 1798 despite being himself a Roman Catholic. Some years later after working as organist to the Spanish Embassy Chapel in London, he returned to Liverpool to be organist successively in an Anglican and a Roman Catholic church. Perhaps this situation illustrates how effectively ecumenism can work via the medium of church music, penetrating any barriers otherwise existing between sects in Webbe's time, especially.

Due to restrictions which existed prior to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 and the earlier repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (1828) Webbe may have found kindred spirits in the liberal and intellectual tenets of Unitarianism, rather than merely making money as a musician of quality. Indeed, both Webbe and his composer father had been known to be members of the radical *London Corresponding Society* in the 1790s which doubtless had some Unitarian sympathisers in its ranks. It is possible that the officials and musicians of Hanover Square Chapel up in Newcastle would have approved of buying Webbe's excellent publication for more than one reason, if this was the case.

Our story grows more interesting from 1820 when we find several references to music and related payments on a regular basis. In that year, the psalmody subscription amounted to £7.16s.3d from 22 persons including Rev Turner himself, though again no specific publications are mentioned.

By 1825 it is evident that an ambitious choral foundation has been formulated, as in the following entries:

Nov	1825	Paid Finlay for Kent's Anthems £1.17s.0d
-----	------	---

March	1826	Paid Mr Mullen for music books 16s.6d
		“ Paid Mr Finlay for anthem ‘Hear my Prayer’ 2s.0d
May	1828	Paid Mr Marshall for music books £1. 2s.0d
Feb	1829	Paid Mr Marshall for copying music 10s.0d
		“ Paid Mr Marshall for binding Kent’s Anthems 5s.0d

Undoubtedly, Kent’s Anthems and ‘*Hear my Prayer*’ are the works of James Kent (1700- 1776) organist at Winchester Cathedral and the College there. These had a widespread vogue until the late 19th century, suggesting that the Hanover Square choir had high aspirations on a parallel with nearby St Nicholas’ Church and St Mary’s Gateshead (somewhat different from the psalmody performed in many rural churches on both sides of the Tyne). Additionally from 1829 onward these aspects were accelerated by the hiring of local professional musicians to provide services in various capacities, viz:

Feb	1829	Paid Mr Marshall for copying music and binding books £1.13s. 0d
Apr	1829	G Stewart, qtr year, Organist £3.15s. 0d
Feb	1830	Mr Nixon for teaching £3. 0s. 0d
May	1830	Mr Munro for Page’s Anthems, 3 vols £3. 3s. 0d

Jul	1831	Mr Liddale, Teaching Boys £2. 5s. 0d
Oct	1837	Paid Miss Watson £4. 4s. 0d
	"	Bagnall, as per bill 12s.0d
Apr	1838	Mr Stodhart £1. 6s.3d

*Page's Anthems*, edited by John Page, were published in 1800 in three volumes as *Harmonia Sacra* covering a vast range of cathedral anthems, settings etc from the 16th century onwards (Page was also a lay clerk at St George's Windsor, then at the Chapel Royal and St Paul's). The substantial content of these tomes and the resources available again indicate that Hanover Square's choir had the means to perform such music on a long term basis. Also, the personnel listed above were all professional musicians, some of whom ran 'music academies' locally and were involved in a number of city churches at various times. An advantage was certainly gained by employing the copyist services of Mr Marshall, a bookseller/binder by trade, who very well might also have been a choir member.

As Hanover Square had a charity school, it would be easy to draft boys into the choir. We have already seen a professional teacher being hired for that purpose, although it was unclear whether it was an all male or mixed choir on a regular footing. Seemingly, professional sopranos such as Miss Watson were recruited on special occasions. In an 1810 ground plan of the chapel, a gallery is indicated but no organ or choir area. However a space for the charity scholars is marked in a corner below the gallery. Also on this plan an intriguing reference by Rev Turner himself states that the 'New Singers were removed upstairs,' with no further explanation. An earlier plan of 1782 shows neither organ or singers'

seats anywhere. (What has hindered research is that a fire in the 'Lit and Phil' building destroyed some of Rev Turner's own papers from this period).

The choir in Hanover Square seems to have reached a zenith over his epoch. One finds them giving services and concerts to raise cash for church funds, including for the choir. Their organist was the aforementioned Mr Stewart and their choirmaster Mr George W Auckland, (a hairdresser and perfumier by trade) one such fund raising service in March 1840 included:

100th psalm (p144) - *Denmark* - M Madden

*Anthem from 150th psalm* - Dr Clarke

The latter piece would be a tour-de-force at that time, having florid verse sections and an exacting organ part, again implying that the standards of the choir were high. (£16.17 6d was raised).

Alas! Nothing is new, in that the balmy days of the choir were soon to be threatened. In accounts of music payments made in 1843 to 'The conductor, counter tenor, bass and treble' there was found to be a £6 deficit from the annual allowance which Mr Auckland still had to pay out. In 1844, he wrote to the authorities,

*the statement will give you an idea how far I hold a sinecure position in the choir department. Since 1839 I have continued to pay the additional salaries out of my own. Leaving me anything but a remuneration for my exertions yet I would not complain if things went on smoothly.*

Before this time, Rev Turner had gone, leaving an ineffectual successor whose tenure lasted only about two years. A more progressive, energetic person, Rev George Harris was appointed in 1845, soon after refurbishment and enlargement of the chapel. One of his innovations was to introduce an extra collection of hymns - the Exeter Collection - on the reopening. So far, a copy

of this has been unobtainable, but the move suggests that more congregational singing was to be encouraged.

Perhaps, not unexpectedly, we find a letter of 1845 from Committee member Robert Wallace expressing the general feeling that 'both Mr Stuart and Mr Auckland should be discharged'. He continues, 'I cannot see the necessity for a leader of the Psalmody, because any person who has an ear and a voice would be as capable of following the organ as a leader, and we would then avoid that miserably bad taste which at present induces the introduction of singing, which from the great range of notes compels the children to strain their voices, hence the continual screaming out of tune, which we are obliged to listen to every Sunday.'

Mr Auckland replied, stating that he and Mr Stuart the organist had met, deciding that they could not do without the salary in order to pay the singers' expenses. He proposed that extra monies should be raised to pay Mr Stuart for at least one year (5th May 1845). This proposal was accepted, but ultimately the plaintiffs were dismissed in September 1846. Such politicking still rings familiar today in church music circles, does it not?

Our story needs to end here with a Mr J.T.Harrison being appointed organist soon afterwards at £15 per annum, having previously been organist at Winlaton Chapel (Anglican) since 1828. Obviously he was considered to be more modernistic and politically correct than his predecessors, with whom one cannot help but sympathise.

Undoubtedly, a choir continued in accordance with subsequent contemporary tastes and styles from then onwards, even up to the 1970s in the present Unitarian building, though of course such details are out of the scope of this article.

To summarise, from what has so far been discovered, urban Unitarian church music in the North East appears to have leaned towards the high art benchmark in both standard and performance,

a reflection of the intellectual and educational ethos found in Unitarianism at that time rather than a conscious attempt on the part of the Hanover Square choir to emulate their peers in the local Anglican city churches.

Current local research is still only scratching the surface and further findings from other parts of the country may create a clearer picture. This will be a welcome contribution to the wider canvas of hitherto little researched psalmody.

Chris Gardner

*(reference notes for this article have been omitted)*

**Comments -**

*We welcome your comments on this issue. With your permission your comments might also be included in the NUF Newsletter.*

*Please send your comments to the editor,*

*Tony McNeile,  
102 Turton Rd,  
BOLTON.  
BL2 3DY*

*or E-mail to [nuf@nufonline.org.uk](mailto:nuf@nufonline.org.uk)*

# National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches  
Essex Hall, London

## Application for Membership

Name (Mr/Mrs/Miss) \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Post Code \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Are you already a member of a Unitarian Church or Fellowship? YES/NO

Do you wish to know of your nearest:-

Unitarian Church      Minister      (please tick)

Full subscription £12.00 (£9.00 if retired or unwaged. Students £5.00)

Additional Membership (with full voting and nominational rights) for a spouse/partner living at the same address £0.50

Additional Member:.....

Overseas applicants please pay in sterling and add £18 airmail or £8.50 surface mail

Please make your cheque payable to the **National Unitarian Fellowship**

Send your completed form and cheque to:-

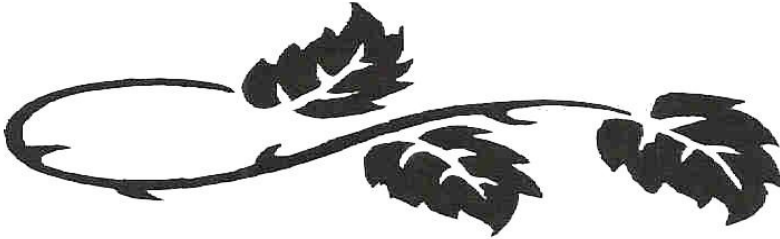
Mrs. Elizabeth Barlow  
67 Wychall Park  
SEATON  
Devon  
EX12 2EL  
UK

Registered Charity No. 1040294

vp219

# National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian  
and Free Christian Churches  
Established 1945



Articles for the Viewpoint to:

Rev. Tony McNeile  
102 Turton Road  
BOLTON  
BL2 3DY

or

Seeking information about the  
National Unitarian Fellowship?

Web site: [www.nufonline.org.uk](http://www.nufonline.org.uk)

or

E-mail: [nuf@nufonline.org.uk](mailto:nuf@nufonline.org.uk)