

## The end of an era

For over 160 years, Diocesan Choral Festivals have been run in Salisbury Cathedral and other churches in the Diocese by the Salisbury Diocesan Choral Festival Group (SDCFG), an organisation that has recently ceased.

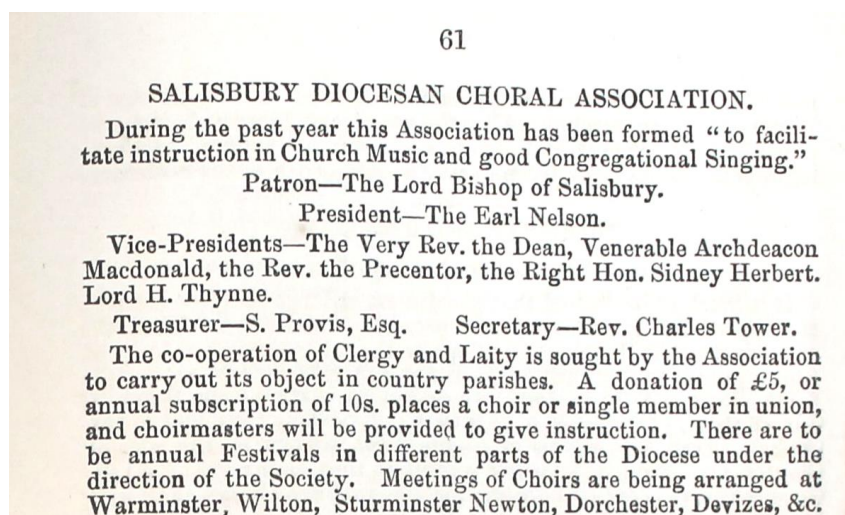
With the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 Festivals due to Covid-19, the last to take place was in September 2019. The baton is being handed to the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM), which has restructured and is now in a position to take this work on.

The SDCFG was one of the last such diocesan organisations in the Church of England.

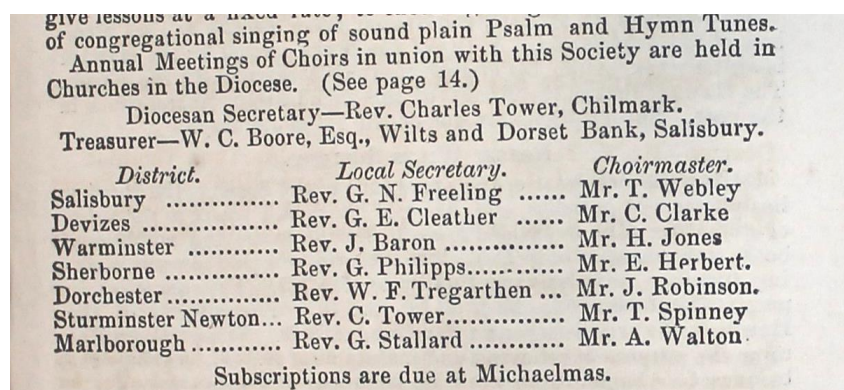
Hon Treasurer David King takes us through the years...

The 'Sarum Almanack and Diocesan Kalendar' for 1859 records the existence of the 'Salisbury Choral Society' based around the musical resources of the Cathedral which had a secondary aim of 'training persons to sing whether in the Congregation or Choir of the Church'.

However, the 1860 'Kalendar' records:

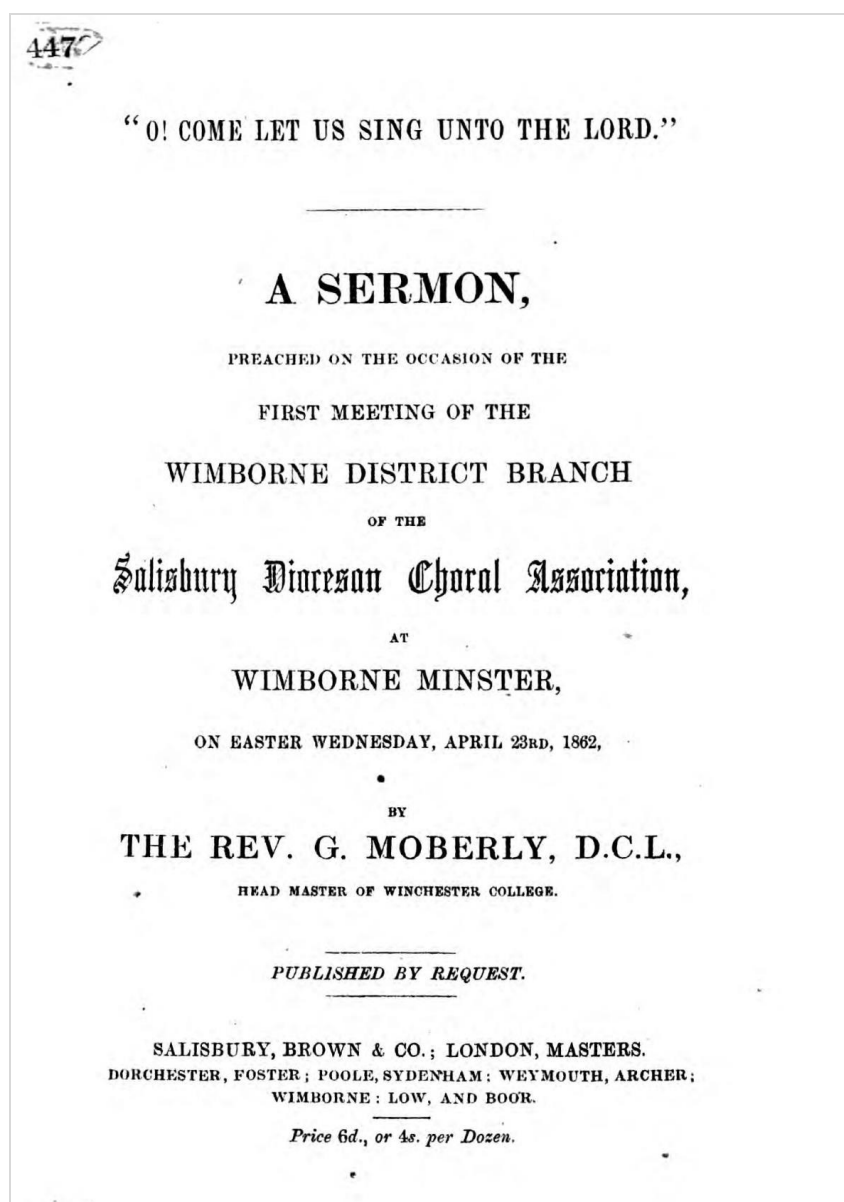


Matters obviously developed quickly, as the next year the 'Kalendar' reports an area structure:



Wimborne must have felt left out!

However, the British Library holds the full text of the sermon preached at the foundation of the Wimborne branch in 1862:



There has to be a slight question over the exact foundation date, as the 1865 'Kalendar' reports the foundation date as 1858 rather than 1859.

Festivals continued at the Cathedral and other churches in the Diocese, though some notable occasions could be marked by a service only at the Cathedral as in 1902 for the coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.

There are a couple of interesting notes to this service: only Division 'A' choirs were allowed to sing the opening psalm and process, and Division 'B' choirs had to wait in their places for the following hymn. The National Anthem is interesting in that it was preceded by a two-bar drum roll and sung in the key of B flat – far higher than the key it's sung in in 2021.

Salisbury Diocesan Choral Association.

AN

ORDER OF SERVICE

FOR A

Diocesan Choral Festival

TO BE HELD IN

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

ON

WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 1902

TO COMMEMORATE THE CORONATION OF

KING EDWARD VII. AND QUEEN ALEXANDRA.

No. 100.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF MUSIC.

PRINTED BY NOVELLO AND CO., LIMITED,  
1, BERNERS STREET, LONDON (W.)  
And Sold by Messrs. BROWN AND CO., Canal, Salisbury.

The holding of festivals at the Cathedral and other churches continued, though by the 1980s the number of festivals had reduced and by the 1990s it was down to the Cathedral and one church in each of the north and south of the Diocese.

At some point in the early 20th Century, the Association became the Salisbury Diocesan Church Music Committee, and their ledger inherited by the Hon Treasurer in 1996 contained the note that:

*'The audit of the books was suspended in 1941 as a war time economy measure.'*

The suspension continued until 1996!

In 1997 the Committee was split in two, into the Diocesan Church Music Network and the Salisbury Diocesan Choral Festival Group, both under the direction of the Board of Parish Development.

The Salisbury Diocesan Choral Festival Group continued to organise the Festivals which had, probably in the late 1970s or early 1980s, been joined by the organisation of the 'Bishop's Award to Choristers' examinations.

This was supplemented later by the 'Dean's Award to Choristers', both of which continued until 2020. For many years the Dean's and Bishop's awards had been recognised as equivalent to the Royal School of Church Music Bronze and Silver Awards.

Candidates successful in the awards could wear a Diocesan medallion, the Bishop's with its distinctive green ribbon, and the Dean's with a burgundy ribbon, the only difference between the medallions being the bar.



*Photo by David King*

Over the years, many composers have written works commissioned for the Festivals. The list includes CHH Parry in the late 19th century, Sir John Tavener for the 2000 Festival, Bryan Kelly, Barry Ferguson, David Halls, Simon Lole, Grayston Ives and many others.





*Composers Bryan Kelly and Barry Ferguson at the 2003 Festival. Photo by David King*

From 2001 onwards, the books for use at Festivals were typeset using specialised computer software which enabled the easier provision of note learning materials for the choirs taking part and improved the legibility of the copies greatly.

From 2015 until 2020, the Festival books were produced as a joint venture with the Bath and Wells Diocesan Choral Association.

Future festivals will be organised by the local area of the Royal School of Church Music. RSCM will also organise chorister awards.

*Pictures from the last few festivals are below: the original photos are by Ash Mills*













*Thanks to Salisbury Cathedral Archivist Emily Naish and David Plant of the Diocesan Archive at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre for their assistance in sourcing material for this article.*