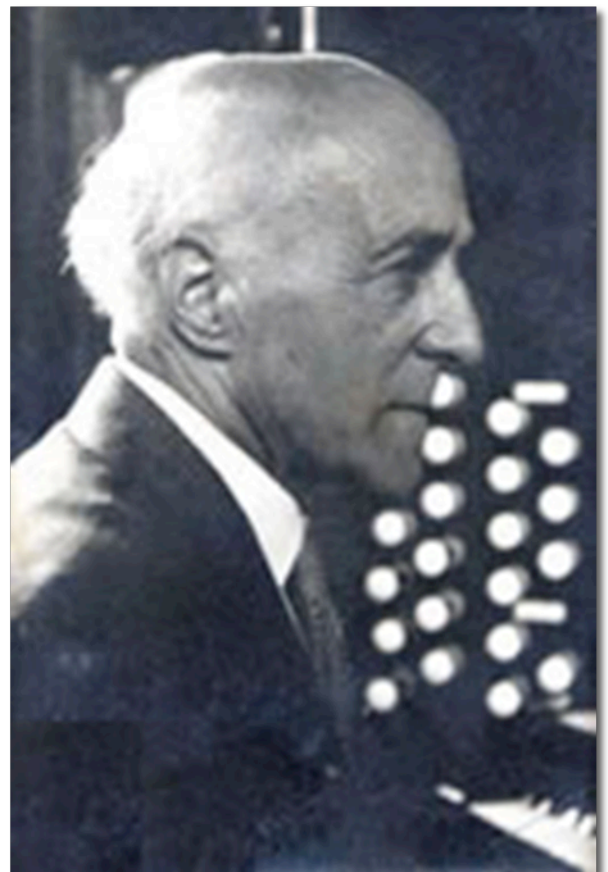

WHAT WE SING

at St Bartholomew's

No. 2 Communion Service in E

by Harold Darke (1888-1976)

sung on Sunday 21 September 2008 by the boys and men



WHAT WE SING is a scheme that is designed to enhance and complement the music sung by the church choirs throughout the year. We hope that it will help the whole church community to achieve a greater understanding and appreciation of the music that is heard each Sunday. It will also form an integral part of the education and training of the boy and girl choristers, helping them to understand what they are singing about and to discover the lives and stories behind the music itself.

The hope is that **contributions** will be forthcoming from many different people within the church community. We'll always be delighted to hear from those who wish to write an article for the series. Please contact Fraser Wilson or Fr Andrew McCroskery if you would like to know more.

You can find current music lists and details of future issues on the table at the back of church and also on the internet at **www.stbartholomews.ie**. In the fullness of time we will also begin to archive the issues there too.

Forthcoming issues

Sunday 5 October: *Herbert Howells* 'Collegium Regale'

Sunday 19 October: *William Byrd* Mass for five voices & Ave verum corpus

Communion Service in E

by Harold Darke (1888-1976)

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by Fr Andrew McCroskery

Harold Darke was born in London on 29 October 1888. He received his formal training at the Royal College of Music, where he studied organ composition under Charles Stanford and was deeply influenced by Charles Wood, Herbert Parry and George Dyson. In 1906 he became organist of Emmanuel Church, and in 1916 was appointed organist of St Michael's Cornhill where he remained until 1966, leaving only briefly in 1941 to deputise as organist of King's College, Cambridge.

Harold Darke became something of an institution in the city during his time at St Michael's Cornhill. He became widely known as an accomplished organist and enjoyed giving weekday recitals, at one stage performing the entire organ works of Bach. In total, Darke managed to perform over 1,800 recitals during his time in St Michael's. He was also keen to promote the little-known organ works of contemporary composers including Ralph Vaughan Williams and Hubert Parry. Although his favoured instrument was the organ, he also composed a few works for the piano; however, he is probably best known for his contribution to Anglican choral music. He composed settings of the canticles for both Matins and Evensong and he also composed settings for the Eucharist. He is probably best known for his setting of *In the bleak mid-winter* (to a text by Christina Rossetti) which is still a feature of many Christmas carol services to this day.

St Michael's in London is a church with a long and illustrious musical history. The list of organists at the church goes back as far as 1473, and Henry Purcell and John Blow are included among lists of recitalists. World premieres of works by Vaughan Williams, Herbert Howells and Benjamin Britten have been taken place there, and the Monday lunch-time organ recital series thought to be the longest-running such series in the world.

The Communion Service in E ('Collegium Regale'), which is sung this morning, was written for the choir of King's College, Cambridge. 'Collegium Regale' is the Latin for King's College. Many composers down the years have written music especially for the college chapel and its choir. The acoustic quality of the building and the musical quality of its choir are renowned the world over. The Communion Service in E begins with a gentle, warm Kyrie and continues in this vein of moderation, reflecting something of the composer's serious nature.

Harold Darke was known to be a rather serious character, who lamented the Church's "pandering to what is foolishly supposed to be the popular

taste by the use of trivial and vulgar music.” He was also outspoken on a number of occasions about the “miserable salaries offered to the organists of parish churches.” He had a deep love for the Church, which may account for some of his more caustic criticisms, and he was often at pains to point out just how many of the great composers, both past and present, had their early musical training in a church setting. Some of Darke’s biting criticisms may seem slightly angry to us today, but it must be remembered that he spoke at a time when London and many of its great concert halls had been badly damaged during the Second World War and when finding the necessary finances to maintain musical excellence was becoming increasingly difficult.

His musical taste was conservative, and he was often openly critical of the BBC. He found their musical broadcasting loathsome and detestable, grossly underestimating their listeners’ tastes. But for all his caustic wit, which some viewed as an extreme musical snobbery, Darke’s words and works reveal the meditations of a serious mind. His music is sensitive and colourful, often revealing depth of emotion tempered by a spiritual calm.

Probably the most impressive thing about Harold Darke for us today is his unflinching insistence that the Church’s liturgical music must be of a high and serious quality. No doubt he would will us to appreciate more fully what a special gift we have here in St Bartholomew’s, with a choir able to bring us to the heights of God’s glory and so many people who sacrifice so much of their time and talent.

“There is no short-cut to success in music. We find budding musicians who are graceful stick-waggers, but unless they have the ability to hear an inner part, unless they can read a score, unless they can visualise sounds, and unless, above all, they have the power of holding their players and singers, of moulding them to their will, and of imparting something of themselves to them and to their hearers, then all else is of no avail.”

Harold Darke