

CHAPTER 18.

60 YEARS OF MUSIC, SERVICES AND CEREMONIAL

(Recalled by Mr. Don Pitchford

who has served as organist and choirmaster for 55 of those 60 years)

My first recollection of Essington dates back to about 1931 when as a member of the Choir of St. Mary's Church, Bushbury we visited the "Tin Church" each year during Holy Week to sing one of the Cantatas based on "The Passion". On these visits the thing which impressed me most was the intense heat given off by the solid fuel stoves and the oil lamps.

I was present at the outdoor service for the laying of the foundation stone and for the dedication of the Church but I cannot remember details of the services. Prior to the dedication of the Church the only other regular exchange of visits between Essington and Bushbury was the annual visit by the Sunday School children for the Children's Festival at Bushbury.

When I took up my appointment as Organist in July 1937 the regular Sunday Services included Holy Communion at 8am, Matins at 11am and Evensong at 6.30pm. Matins was a difficult service for the Choir as it included the singing of the Venite, a Psalm, the Te Deum and the Benedictus. The books used were the 1662 Prayer Book, Hymns Ancient and Modern and the Cathedral Psalter. At that time the Choir included men and boys only. Ladies joined the Choir for special occasions and became regular members in the late 40's but were not robed until about 1960. The wearing of vestments by the Celebrant was also started about the same time.

I was absent on active service from 1940 to 1947 and during this period Mrs. Spencer, the Vicar's wife, played the organ and was responsible for the music.

In addition to the usual Festivals of the Church, the Children's Festival or Anniversary was a great event. This included practising for seven or eight weeks, often twice weekly, for 70 or 80 children and a procession and full Church for three services on the day. Snow-white dresses were the order of the day.

Rogation-tide was also a special occasion when the Choir processed round the Church and facing South, West, North and East in turn, the names of the farms in each direction were read and prayers said for the blessing of the crops.

It is interesting to recall that veils were worn by all female Confirmation Candidates at this time. The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols was introduced in the late 40's.

For the first 17 years we had a small two-manual reed organ. It was a brute to play. The Organ Blower sat at the side of me and had far more control over the volume of the music than I had. I was very unhappy with this

instrument and was considering seeking another appointment when the present instrument came on the market. It was in the Parish Church at Repton. The Repton PCC wished to dispose of it because it obstructed the entrance to the Crypt and they wished to open the Crypt for regular use. It was advertised at £800, we offered £600 and the final agreed price was £650. The task of removing it and installing it at Essington was entrusted to Henry Willis and Sons for the sum of £2,000. It was dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Lichfield (The Rt. Rev. Edward S. Woods, DD) on Sunday the 23rd April 1950 at 3pm and the Opening Recital was given by T.W. North, Esq., Borough Organist of Walsall, Organist and Master of the Music at St. Augustine's Church, Edgbaston and Organist of the B.B.C.



Mr. D. Pitchford
Rev. J.H. Spencer

The Bishop of Lichfield (Dr. Woods)
Mr. T.W. North

Before the installation of the organ the Organ Loft was used for Choir Practice and other meetings and in the beginning to accommodate the lady members of the Choir as there was no room for them in the Chancel.

The first change in the services was the introduction of a sung Communion Service (1662) in place of Matins, the musical setting being either by Merbecke (1550) or Adlam. This was in 1948.

The next change was the introduction of the Series 3 Service, the musical setting being "The Salisbury Setting" which we still use. In this Service the words of the Lord's Prayer were slightly different from the ASB Setting and when the ASB Setting was published it was necessary to alter the music slightly to accommodate the new words. This is why there appears to be a slight loss of rhythm in the Lord's Prayer in the present "Salisbury" Setting.

During the 70's we used New Testament Psalms which came from St. Albans. These were never published except in manuscript and now appear to have been abandoned.

The present services were started in the 1980's when we changed to the ASB Prayer Book, the ASB Psalter and Hymns Ancient and Modern (New Standard Edition). Over the years we have used settings for the Eucharist by Appleford, The Salisbury Setting and latterly the Normanton Setting which was composed and published in manuscript in the village of Normanton in West Yorkshire in 1982. At one time we attempted to use a setting by Rutter but this was not popular in the congregation. Maybe we should have a further look at this.

Over the years we have compiled a library of about one hundred anthems both old and new and during the last decade we have brought into use selected hymns from both of the Mission Praise books. The following modern compositions were performed in the 80's

'Saints Alive'	by Roger Jones
"While Shepherds Watched"	" " "

At various times Choirs, Bands and Orchestras have visited Essington Church.

These include :-

The Chase Orpheus Male Voice Choir	Essington School Choir
The Youth Orchestra	Penn Choral Society
Allen's Rough Choir	A Gospel Choir
Lichfield Cathedral Choir	Shirley Silver Band
The Marston Singers	Sheffield Male Voice Choir
Tettenhall College Junior and Senior Choir	

If I were asked to state the major differences in Essington Church over the last 60 years I would include:-

- (a) A great increase in regular attendances at both morning and evening services.
- (b) The need for a higher standard of performance in all parts of the services to compare with the standards on the radio and television.
- (c) A change in attitudes, in that during the 30's hardly a whisper was heard in Church before a Service and no-one would enter the Chancel or Sanctuary before a Service without being properly robed.
- (d) A great increase in mid-week activities.
- (e) A major increase in the participation of lay leaders in the Services.
- (f) Difficulties at present in recruiting men and boys for the Choir.

SAINT JOHN'S PARISH CHURCH, ESSINGTON.

Dedication of War Memorial Organ

by

The Lord Bishop of Lichfield

(Rt. Rev. EDWARD S. WOODS, D.D.)

on SUNDAY, 23rd APRIL 1950, at 3 p.m.



Organ Recital

at 6.30 p.m. by

T. W. North, Esq.

(Borough Organist Walsall, Organist and Master of the Music,
St. Augustine's, Edgbaston, Organist to the B.B.C.)

Vicar :

Rev. J. H. Spencer, B.A., Lowerfield House, Essington.

Vicar's Warden : Mr. C. Tudor.

People's Warden : Mr. F. V. Beer.

Organist and Choirmaster : Mr. W. D. Pitchford.

Vergor : Mr. J. Matthews.

Parochial Church Council : Mesdames Tudor, Pemberton, Millman, Knight, Spencer, Lowbridge, Matthews, Hannam, Richards, Mason, Stibbs, Miss K. Mason ; Messrs. Beer, Tudor, Griffiths, Pitchford, Thwaites, Purcell, Howard.

Vice-Chairman of the P.C.C. : Mr. P. Griffiths.

Secretary of the P.C.C. : Mrs. Millman.

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