

INSTRUMENTS IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

This is the second of two articles by The Reverend Peter Moger in which he examines some of the history of the use of musical instruments in Christian worship.

England after the Reformation

The situation in many English parish churches until the mid-19th century was that there would be a 'Parish Band' of instrumentalists, playing from a gallery - often at the west end of the church. However, they played not during the service, but after it. The reason for this was a liturgical one.

The *BCP* contains very few references to music. The well-known instruction 'in quires and places where they sing, here followeth the anthem' refers not to parish churches but to cathedrals and college chapels. Sunday worship included no hymns as we know them, and psalms, on the whole, were said. (Anglican chants in parishes came much later.) So the congregations sang after the official service had ended. The diet was almost exclusively one of metrical psalms - accompanied by the parish band. The cynics talk about the clergy disappearing at the end of the service, the musicians appearing (from the pub!), and the singing starting! Parish bands were important social groups within the church and parish. One of the best-known descriptions is that in Thomas Hardy's novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

Metrical psalms were available principally in 2 important printed collections: Sternhold & Hopkins (which became known as the 'Old Version') and Tate and Brady (the 'New Version'). These - and other locally produced collections - presented the entire psalter in verse. The composition of the bands varied greatly from place to place, as did the style of playing - but we do know that it would often have been highly ornamented.

19th Century

The changes that came about in the latter half of the 19th century were considerable. In short, parish bands in west galleries disappeared and were replaced by robed choirs and organs in the chancel. This was the result of a theological shift within the Church of England. The Oxford Movement (and subsequent Anglo-Catholic revival) sought to recall the Church of England to what it believed to have been the practice of the ancient Church. Its emphasis was strongly sacramental - as opposed to the word-dominated worship of the late 17th and 18th centuries - and it aimed through worship to make known something of the holiness and mystery of God.

Liturgically, it meant a new emphasis on the Eucharist within Anglican worship - though weekly Communion did not become standard until well into the 20th century. Nevertheless many parishes acquired a 'Catholic' ambience and many of the newly-built city churches started out with a 'High Church' tradition. Musically, there was a strong emphasis on plainsong - the 'pure' music of the ancient church (as it was supposed) and on choral singing accompanied by the organ. There was a re-discovery of ancient hymnody (especially through

the work of John Mason Neale). Taken together, these developments made for a transfer of what had previously been a cathedral culture into many parish churches. The musical effects of the Oxford Movement affected even those parishes without a sacramental tradition, so although the main Sunday service might have remained Matins (often until after 1945), it was sung by a surpliced choir in the chancel, and enhanced by canticle settings and anthems - even if the tradition of the church was central or 'low'. As the architecture of church buildings changed, so box pews and galleries were ripped out - and, with the galleries went the instrumentalists.

20th Century

The legacy of the Oxford Movement persisted well into the 20th century and, through the development of the Parish Communion, reached churches of all traditions (including evangelical parishes) by the 1960s. But at the same time there came a new stream of renewal within the Church - in a similar way that the 18th century had seen the Evangelical revival and the 19th century the Oxford Movement - the influence of the charismatic movement within the historic denominations. This brought with it many important changes. The influence of popular styles of music was felt. This required new instrumentation - with the organ in many places giving way to the guitar as the preferred foundation instrument. In many places worship became less formal and with this there was often no perceived need for musicians to be robed. The renewal movement influenced church architecture too: choir stalls were sometimes no longer thought important. But perhaps most significantly, there was a theological shift towards an emphasis on the worshipping people as the Body of Christ, with an understanding that ministry was the task of all members of that body. All these factors worked together to enable the return of instruments other than the organ in worship. Churches with 'music groups' or 'worship groups' became very much part of the scene. The composition of these groups varied immensely from place to place: in some there would be a predominance of acoustic instruments; in others, electronic and electric instruments would be the norm.

Today

The current picture at the beginning of the 21st century is of a 'mixed economy'. There are churches which have the resources to maintain choral and organ tradition, and do it well. Some churches' music is led entirely by less formal groups. Other churches - perhaps following the Anglican 'middle way' - have both organ and instrumental groups. The emerging pattern of the Church at the beginning of the century is of a diverse Church, in which differing traditions, theologies and styles co-exist more than ever before. It is perhaps natural, therefore, to see this diversity reflected in church music - and encouraging that the best of the old and the new can exist side-by-side, if not always together.