

# Salisbury Choral Society

## NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2021

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

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### Composer of the Week



Our featured composer this week is one that, in my opinion, deserves greater recognition! The English composer and organist **Sir Edward Bairstow** is well-known among people involved with the church music tradition, but to choirs such as ours, Bairstow is probably a new name to many. So my aim this week is to encourage you to listen to some of his music!

Edward Bairstow was born in Huddersfield on **22<sup>nd</sup> August 1874** and showed an interest in music from an early age. After some disjointed music lessons, he studied formally with the English composer, organist and teacher John Farmer (1835 - 1901; not to be confused with the other English composer called John Farmer (1570 - 1601) who wrote "*Fair Phyllis*") and later by Sir Frederick Bridge (1844 - 1924; pictured right) who was

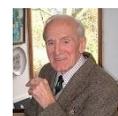
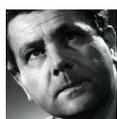


 organist of Westminster Abbey. Bairstow also acknowledged a debt to Sir Walter Alcock (1861 - 1947; pictured left) who was sub-organist at Westminster Abbey at the time. The "Abbey experience" was to stand Bairstow in good stead later on in life.

In 1899, Bairstow was appointed organist and choirmaster at Wigan Parish Church. In addition, he became chorus master of several choral societies in the North West. In 1906, he moved to Leeds Parish Church, securing the post from 320 applicants! In July 1913, he succeeded the English composer and organist Thomas Tertius Noble (1867 - 1953; pictured right) as organist and Master of the Music at York Minster, where he remained until his death on **1<sup>st</sup> May 1946**.



In 1929, Bairstow became professor of music at Durham University, a post that he was able to combine with his duties at York. He was a highly respected teacher, with several of his students making their names in the musical world, including the composer Gerald Finzi (1901 - 1956; pictured left) and the composer and organist Dr. Francis Jackson (b.1917 and still going strong at 103; pictured right), who succeeded him at the Minster. Bairstow's direct manner and passion for truth weren't universally admired, but to those who could take his direct honesty he was an inspiration.



To my eternal shame, I had forgotten how much I love the music of Edward Bairstow and it has been wonderful this week to remind myself how great his music is! I hope you enjoy the music selections that I'm going to recommend.

I sat down under his shadow first appeared in 1925 and was one of the earliest publications of the then newly-established music department of the Oxford University Press. The writing of this anthem isn't a million miles away from the sound world of Gustav Holst (1874 - 1934; pictured left). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6JfInyQI9Q>



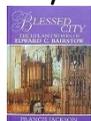
Let all mortal flesh keep silence dates from 1906; and although not composed for York Minster, could certainly have been composed for the vast space of the Minster in mind. It is the only work dating from this time in Bairstow's output that is for unaccompanied choir. The music captures the words perfectly (Bairstow had a passion for words). Listen out for the sombre opening for lower voices, followed by upper voices lifting the mind "above all earthly thought". Listen too, for the massive build up through the "choirs of angels" to the Alleluias.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COI3YgMHiI>

Blessed city, heavenly Salem was composed shortly after Bairstow moved to York. It was written for the churches in Heaton, Bradford and sets words from the hymn *Urbs beata Hierusalem* which dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century; and Bairstow bases the text on the plainsong melody that is normally associated to them. The music is in effect a series of variations in which the melody appears in a wide variety of guises. Close your eyes while listening and imagine it being sung in York Minster or Winchester Cathedral, then listen again and sing along! My recommended recording is a particularly fine one by The Sixteen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBmtEVaNfXg>

My final recommendation is The Lamentation, which dates from very late in Bairstow's life. In a letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> August 1942, Bairstow wrote to Francis Jackson: "*I have just done a "Lamentation", the words from the Lamentations of Jeremiah selected by the Dean [of York, the Very Reverend E M Milner-White (1884 - 1963; pictured right)]. It is just a few chants of irregular pattern, and a refrain; but it is effective*". I particularly love the moment in this piece about two thirds of the way in, when the music and text shift from sorrow to hope. This is a work which is beautiful in its simplicity and I would go as far as saying that **this piece is one of my top ten favourite choral works!** If you like Anglican psalm chants, this is definitely one for you! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jq6d-Ozm6Y>



If you've enjoyed the music of Bairstow and would like to know more about his life and work, you might be interested in getting the book! Dr. Francis Jackson's book (*Blessed City, York*, 1996; pictured left) on his predecessor at York Minster contains the five chapters of Bairstow's incomplete autobiography, together with letters to Jackson during World War II. If you're interested, then [click here](#) for details of how to obtain a copy!

That's all for this week folks, except to quickly remind you about the online zoom session on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February. See the members section of the choir website plus previous newsletters for more information, which has been updated to include some extracts from Haydn's *Creation*.

Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham