

[From the notes accompanying the 5-CD set *The Lost Music of Canterbury*.]

The Peterhouse partbooks: history and repertoire

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The Peterhouse Henrician partbooks and their context

All of the music included in this collection comes from a set of mid-sixteenth-century manuscript partbooks belonging to Peterhouse, Cambridge (Peterhouse, Perne Library, MSS 31, 32, 40 and 41). These books are known as the ‘Henrician set’ to distinguish them from two sets of seventeenth-century partbooks, the ‘former Caroline’ and ‘latter Caroline’ sets, also belonging to the college. There is a certain irony in the fact that Peterhouse, one of the oldest and smallest of the colleges comprising the University of Cambridge, should today own not just one but three very important sets of partbooks, for the college had no early choral tradition and did not even possess its own chapel until the 1630s. The building of the chapel, the formation of a choir, and the provision of music for it to sing, gave practical expression to the High-Church ideals of two successive masters of the college, Matthew Wren (1625–34) and John Cosin (1635–43), whose belief in ‘the beauty of holiness’—the intensification of the experience of worship by aesthetic means—reflected the ecclesiastical policy of Charles I and William Laud, archbishop of Canterbury. Cosin enthusiastically promoted the development of the college choir and its repertoire, and the music in the Caroline partbooks seems to have been composed or acquired on his initiative. Some of the music came from Durham Cathedral, where Cosin had been a prebendary since 1625, and it was from Durham that he brought Thomas Wilson to be organist at Peterhouse. It seems likely that Cosin was also responsible for the acquisition of the Henrician partbooks, and that his interest in them was musical rather than antiquarian. In other words, he saw them as a potential source of music for performance, not just as a vestige of a vanished religious culture with which he had some sympathy. This raises the tantalising possibility that at the time of its arrival at Peterhouse the Henrician set of partbooks was complete, not incomplete as it is now. Mid-seventeenth-century Cambridge was a town with a long and strong tradition of radical Protestantism, and many of its inhabitants would have found the singing of pre-Reformation Latin church music highly provocative; as other events were soon to

show, however, neither Cosin nor the king nor the archbishop were inclined towards compromise.

Partbooks are so called because each contains a single vocal part of the music copied into them, just as an orchestral part contains a single instrument's contribution to an orchestral piece. Peterhouse's Henrician partbooks are the most important source of English church music to survive from the reign of Henry VIII (1509–47); it is tempting to write 'from the eve of the Reformation', but that would invoke hindsight, an intellectual weakness that has bedevilled interpretations of the period and is best avoided as much as possible. The repertoire of five-part polyphony contained in the books is uniquely large and uniquely varied, consisting of seventy-two compositions in the standard forms of the day—Mass, Magnificat, votive antiphon, ritual antiphon, and one or two mysterious pieces whose function is debatable—and more than half of these works do not survive in other sources. The composers represented (twenty-nine, plus one anonymous) range from those widely admired both at the time and also today, such as Robert Fayrfax, John Taverner and Thomas Tallis, whose careers are relatively well documented and whose music is ubiquitous in sources of the period, to obscure figures whose careers have yet to be traced and whose music survives nowhere else. The musical quality of the works in the collection is mainly very high, and many pieces—by no means exclusively those by well-known composers—show not only excellent craftsmanship but also imagination and individuality. The music also offers much more evidence of innovation than the received view of English church music of this period would lead one to predict, and one or two compositions of surprisingly distant provenance hint at unexpected sources of influence.

The repertoire of the partbooks is very varied, intermingling compositions in a conservative style (expansive, melismatic, ornate, and structurally rather opaque to the listener) with others in a more modern idiom (concise, syllabic, plain, and structurally more transparent), and placing settings of well-worn Marian texts in medieval Latin alongside settings of new texts honouring Jesus in humanistic Latin. This diversity is not surprising, because around 1540, when these partbooks were being compiled, the English church was in a state of flux to which natural evolutionary processes as well as political and religious controversy all contributed. What would happen in the future must have been much less predictable to contemporaries than, with the dubious benefit of wisdom after the event, it may seem to us.

The idea that in order to accomplish his repudiation of papal authority Henry VIII was obliged to give free rein to Protestant opinion, and that this unleashed forces that brought about the abandonment of traditional forms and styles of church music nearly a decade before the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549, stems from a partial reading of history. Henry himself remained conservative in religious belief to the end of his days: his will, signed on 30 December 1546 ‘in the Name of god, the Blessed Vyrgyn oure Lady saynte Mary and all the holie cumpany of heaven’, is fundamentally Catholic. He acknowledges the salutary effects of good and charitable works upon the performer’s soul and enjoins the Virgin and all the company of heaven to pray continually for him during his earthly life and departure from it, so that he may the sooner attain life everlasting. He also requires daily masses to be said for him ‘perpetually while the world shall endure’, directs his burial at Windsor to be marked by the traditional services of ‘placebo and dirige with a sermon and masse on the morowe’, and bequeaths alms to the poor of the neighbourhood in order to elicit their prayers for the remission of his sins and the welfare of his soul.

For some years after 1534, when the Act of Supremacy established the king’s headship of the English church, Henry’s religious policy wavered. During the next two years, probably in preparation for the assault on the monasteries, considerable licence was allowed to opponents of Catholic practices and doctrine such as the cult of saints, pilgrimage, pardons and purgatory, but the Ten Articles issued by convocation in July 1536 restated a moderated form of traditional belief. In September 1538 the king’s radical first minister Thomas Cromwell issued a set of Injunctions markedly Protestant in content, but two months later a royal proclamation reaffirmed the Ten Articles. In June 1539 the Act of Six Articles, which continued in force for the rest of the reign, confirmed the official position, which was essentially Catholic but not Roman, and the laws against heresy. A year later the conservative faction headed by the Duke of Norfolk was allowed to bring about Cromwell’s downfall. During 1543 the reforming Archbishop Cranmer found himself endangered by a conspiracy in which the canons of his own cathedral had a leading role. In the same year, while Cranmer was drafting vernacular versions of parts of the Latin liturgy, Bishop Nicholas Heath of Rochester issued a set of liturgical injunctions thoroughly traditional in their cast, requiring the attendance of the full choir to sing polyphony at matins, conventual Mass, vespers and the evening devotion on major feast days, and the attendance of the boys to sing polyphony at the Lady Mass on ordinary days. The repertoire of the Henrician partbooks reflects the

unstable and unpredictable context in which the books were copied. While much of the music in the collection is so traditional in function, form, content and style that it would not have astonished Henry VII or even his Yorkist predecessors, some of the more recent compositions show features which can be interpreted as responses to changing conditions.

Provenance and destination of the partbooks

A great deal can be deduced about these partbooks: who copied them, and when; how he did it; where he found his exemplars; for whose benefit the work was done; and why the enterprise was necessary. If a musical source contains music by composers not represented elsewhere, discovering where they worked may reveal the source's provenance. In the case of the Henrician partbooks the presence of music by front-rank composers such as Fayrfax, Taverner, Nicholas Ludford, Hugh Aston and Richard Pygott tells us little, because their work was widely distributed. On the other hand, the presence of music by otherwise unknown composers such as William Alen, John Catcott or Cobcot, Arthur Chamberlayne, 'Edwarde' (probably Edward Hedley) and Edward Martyn, who do not figure in other extant sources, is strongly suggestive of a connection with Magdalen College, Oxford, because the names of all of these men occur in a musical context—mostly as lay-clerks (professional choral singers)—in college records dating from the later 1480s to the early 1540s. What is known about some of the other composers in the books also implies links with Oxford: John Mason, Hugh Aston, John Darke and James Northbroke held the degree of B.Mus. from the university; John Taverner was choirmaster of Cardinal College between 1526 and 1530; and William Whytbroke was a chaplain of that college in 1529/30. In addition, John Mason had briefly been choirmaster at Magdalen, and he and Richard Pygott had served in the household chapel of an alumnus of Magdalen College who made some headway in the world: Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey.

It therefore seems likely that most of the music in the partbooks was available for copying in Oxford, and that some of it was only to be found at Magdalen College, where polyphonic church music was something of a speciality. But where was the collection intended for, and why should such a large copying project have been necessary? A possible explanation is offered by a cataclysmic event in recent English history: Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. This sordid episode, in which cupidity masqueraded as reforming zeal, began in

1536 with the suppression of the lesser houses and reached its climax in 1539–40 with the closure of the wealthiest foundations, including all eleven of the cathedrals which were staffed by monks or canons regular rather than by secular clergy: Bath, Canterbury, Carlisle, Coventry, Durham, Ely, Norwich, Rochester, Winchester, Worcester and Christ Church, Dublin. All of these were Benedictine priories except Carlisle and Dublin, which were Augustinian. All of them except Bath and Coventry were immediately reconstituted as secular cathedrals with a dean, a chapter of prebendary canons, a choir of singing men and boys, and the necessary ancillary staff. Three other dissolved monasteries, Chester, Gloucester, and Peterborough, were also refounded as the cathedral churches of new dioceses. A great deal of preparation for as seamless as possible a transition must have been undertaken beforehand. When it came, the transition seems to have been smooth enough: some monks became prebendaries of the new cathedral chapters; others became parish priests; and others retired with pensions. With new constitutions, new members and a secular liturgy these cathedrals of the New Foundation could in many respects take over from their predecessors without serious discontinuity.

The major obstacle concerned their musical activity, where substantial initiative and organization must often have been needed. Until the early 1400s polyphony had been very largely a medium for solo singers, and any monastery with a handful of musically competent brethren could cultivate it and remain more or less up-to-date. Thereafter secular foundations such as collegiate churches, academic colleges and household chapels kept by royal and aristocratic patrons promoted musical developments aimed at strengthening the impact of worship, affirming the values of the established church and enhancing the prestige of the ruling class. In pursuit of these aims new contexts were found for the performance of polyphonic sacred music; compositions became more massive in scale, more ornate in style and more elaborate in texture and scoring; and small ensembles singing sacred polyphony expanded into choirs. Only a few monasteries could keep pace with these changes of fashion: their role in society was increasingly questioned; membership was falling; resources were under pressure; and the exclusive nature of the conventual liturgy prevented the employment of professional lay singers except as a discrete ensemble performing not in the monastic quire but elsewhere in the church, usually in the Lady Chapel. In most if not all cases the refoundation of a monastic cathedral as a secular cathedral would necessarily entail the recruitment of a professional choir and the accumulation of a repertoire for it to sing.

Typically consisting of about eight to twelve boys and around a dozen men, such a choir would be expected to perform, to a high standard fitting the cathedral's status, an impressive and liturgically comprehensive repertoire largely consisting of widely-circulated works by eminent composers but perhaps also including music produced locally. Members of a monastic Lady Chapel choir might sometimes be drafted into the choir of a refounded cathedral; at Canterbury, for example, Thomas Wood, master of the Lady Chapel choir at the time of the dissolution, became a lay-clerk of the new cathedral choir. Perhaps music sung in the previous monastery may sometimes have been adopted too.

Thus, within a period of less than two years, there appeared on the scene several important choral foundations urgently in need of skilled singers and music suitable for them to perform. Could the Peterhouse Henrician partbooks have been intended for use in one of these cathedrals of the New Foundation? One of the compositions in the partbooks has a direct bearing upon this question. Hugh Sturmy's *Exultet in hac die*, honouring St Augustine of Canterbury, the missionary sent by Pope Gregory the Great to bring Roman Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons, could have been relevant only to Canterbury, capital of the Saxon kingdom of Kent, where Augustine established himself and sited the cathedral church that he founded soon after his arrival in 597. Perhaps *Exultet* was taken over from the repertoire of the monastic cathedral, or from that of St Augustine's abbey close by, which had been dissolved in 1538. No other work in these partbooks celebrates a saint having a particular connection with any of the refounded cathedrals, but none of them could lay claim to a saint with comparable national credentials.

The hypothesis that the partbooks were intended for Canterbury is reinforced by the existence of a highly relevant human link between the refounded cathedral and Magdalen College, Oxford, in the person of a professional singer and copyist named Thomas Bull. The first known reference to Bull occurs in 1525 in the record of an episcopal visitation of the collegiate church of St Mary Newarke, Leicester, where Hugh Aston was then choirmaster. Between Michaelmas 1528 and Michaelmas 1539 Bull was a lay-clerk in the choir of Magdalen College. When he next appears, in the summer of 1540, it is as a lay-clerk at Canterbury, where the priory had been surrendered to the king's commissioners on 4 April and was currently undergoing reorganization into a secular cathedral. Bull was to serve the cathedral for more than twenty years, and is called *magister choristarum* or choirmaster in a

staff list dating from 1560. He married in 1546 and lived in St George's parish in the city, and the Thomas Bull named first among the boy choristers in the same list may have been his son.

During his time at Magdalen Bull had often received extra payments from the college for copying a wide variety of documents both musical and non-musical. When he moved to Canterbury the cathedral acquired not only an experienced choral singer but also a professional copyist who had until recently had access to the resources of one of the musically most active and ambitious colleges of the university. It seems probable that he spent his final months at Magdalen selecting and copying music to bring with him to Canterbury, perhaps working to a brief supplied by his new employers. When he arrived at the cathedral his draft copies would have been neatly recopied, carefully checked and corrected, and bound up into partbooks—the partbooks that we now have—to provide the choir with a repertoire of five-part music which would cater for the chief liturgical occasions of the year. Bull may have acquired additional music during his journey from Oxford to Canterbury (which in all likelihood would have taken him through London), more could have been waiting for him at Canterbury, and still more could have been added during the following few months. This could explain why the partbooks contain two copies, made from different exemplars, of the votive antiphon *Salve intemerata* by Thomas Tallis, one of the other lay-clerks in the cathedral's newly formed choir. *Salve intemerata* probably dates from the late 1520s and was certainly circulating shortly afterward; Bull may have made one copy from an exemplar at Oxford and a second copy at Canterbury from another exemplar provided by the composer himself.

The historical significance of the Henrician partbooks

If we accept that the Henrician partbooks were copied for and used at Canterbury Cathedral, they become even more significant. Canterbury was regarded as the cradle of Roman Christianity in England; it was a cathedral city of unrivalled antiquity; and its archbishop was the senior primate of the English church, with a mandate descending directly from Pope Gregory. Such considerations may have had even greater resonance in a country which had recently repudiated papal authority: Canterbury was England's Rome, and the cathedral was her St Peter's. It would be immoderate to suggest that the Archbishop of Canterbury was

England's Pope; Thomas Cranmer would have been appalled by such an analogy. Cranmer's authority and powers of initiative were immeasurably less than papal, but he had more sustained influence on religious policy than anyone else excepting the king himself. His cautiously-expressed but tenaciously-held reformist beliefs may seem to weaken the possibility that such a liturgically conservative collection of music could have been designed for performance at Canterbury, but like all English bishops Cranmer's authority over his own cathedral church was limited, because the Dean and Chapter were responsible for the institution's direction and administration and had considerable autonomy. In the early 1540s the chapter of Canterbury Cathedral was a markedly conservative body; in 1543 some of the canons even abetted an attempt—the 'prebendaries' plot'—to destroy the archbishop himself. This collection of polyphonic Masses, Magnificats and votive antiphons celebrating saints and the Blessed Virgin is precisely what one would expect such men to have set out to procure. It thus appears that around 1540 there was still room, at the very heart of the Church of England, for music that was fundamentally traditional.

Such music, however, was not impervious to change, and the content of the Henrician partbooks confirms this. For at least a decade before 1540 English church music had been showing signs of stylistic evolution in ways which arguably reflected changing aesthetic values as much as or more than they reflected religious ideas. The music was becoming somewhat more concise, more lean, more obviously designed as a patently coherent discourse, and more communicative of the words that it set. Music in the older style was still valued, as the Peterhouse repertoire amply demonstrates, but in these partbooks it is intermingled with music more akin to that of composers active in the 1550s and 60s. Thus an old-fashioned piece such as Pygott's *Salve regina* coexists with markedly innovative works such as Taverner's *Mean Mass*, which influenced William Byrd in the composition of his four-part Mass about half a century later. Clearly many different influences were at work. One of the most surprising features of the partbooks is the presence of two continental compositions, the first to appear in an English collection of sacred polyphony since the early fifteenth century. How did the Mass *Surrexit pastor bonus* by Lupus Hellinck and the motet *Aspice domine* by Jacquet of Mantua find their way into the collection, and what did English musicians and ecclesiastics make of them?

If the music in these partbooks is as important as I am suggesting, one may ask why it is so

much less celebrated than, for example, the music of the Eton choirbook (a very large collection of votive antiphons and Magnificats assembled for Eton College some forty years earlier), and why does the music unique to it remain almost unknown? The main reason is that the set is no longer complete. Originally it consisted of five books, each containing one of the voices—usually treble, mean, contratenor (a rather high tenor), tenor (a slightly lower tenor, or sometimes a baritone), and bass—of this repertoire in the five-part texture that had over the previous six or seven decades become standard for English sacred polyphony. However, the book containing the tenor parts is missing, and some pages have been lost from the beginning and end of the treble book. Although some of the missing voices can be supplied from other musical sources, no fewer than fifty of the seventy-two works in the collection lack their tenor parts, and nineteen also lack their treble. In its surviving state more than two thirds of the repertoire cannot be performed.

Restoring the incomplete compositions

One of the tasks that I set myself when I began working on the Henrician partbooks more than forty years ago was to restore the incomplete pieces to a performable state by recomposing the missing voices. I included completed versions of all but two of them in the doctoral dissertation that was accepted in 1983, completed the others later, and published them all between 1992 and 2015. I am still revising them and publishing the revisions: it would of course have been preferable for my original versions to be immaculate, but it is in the nature of such work that one's insight and skill improve over time. The editions have been kindly received, but few of the compositions gained much exposure through live performance or recording until the vocal ensemble Blue Heron and its director Scott Metcalfe began a sustained and very successful campaign to stimulate interest in the repertoire. Their technical skill and musical intelligence have produced revelatory performances.

In the 1970s and 80s attempts to restore incomplete compositions to a performable state tended to arouse suspicion and even disdain on such grounds as the following: they were akin to forgery; they might misrepresent the original; they forsook objectivity for subjectivity; they smacked of the musical 'general practitioner', the organist-cum-antiquarian and untrained dabbler in scholarship, whose ghost one coterie of British musicology was for

a variety of reasons anxious to lay. It is certainly true that not all the restoration carried out around that time carried conviction. I thought, however, that the potential gains outweighed the risks: competent restoration might help to foster awareness of an important musical collection, improve the understanding of musical developments in England during the crucial years immediately before the Reformation, and make some exceptionally fine music available for the enjoyment of listeners and performers. Today things have changed: we seem to have recovered from the insecurity and ideological angst of half a century ago, and the restoration of music of all periods is widely practiced and acknowledged to be capable of producing highly convincing and illuminating results.

The restorer's task is to complete what remains of the original in the most congruous way possible, not to improve and still less to distort it. Restoration demands some technical training, an observant eye, an acute ear (particularly the ability to hear in one's head what one sees with one's eyes), time, concentration, patience and (my wife asks me to add) surpassing tolerance from one's partner. In this context the term 'restoration' is perhaps slightly misleading in that it implies that one should be able to work out precisely what is missing from an incomplete piece and supply it with total fidelity. This, however, is rarely the case, even though one may aspire to it. Wholly accurate restoration can be guaranteed only when a missing vocal part is proved to have been based exclusively and literally on material which still exists somewhere else, and to have used that material in a detectable fashion. For example, a missing voice may quote a plainchant melody without ornamentation and in equal note values (as in Hugh Sturmy's *Exultet in hac die*), or reiterate a motto theme, or sing in canon with one of the surviving voices (William Alen's *Gaude virgo*—not on these discs—does both of these).

Several of the Peterhouse Mass settings and some other pieces do indeed incorporate a plainchant or another pre-existing melody as a structural backbone or *cantus firmus*, and in most cases the *cantus firmus* is given to the tenor part, which is helpful when it is the tenor that is missing. The implicit presence of a missing *cantus firmus* still has to be noticed, of course, and it then has to be identified and located, but in Masses which bear a title this will usually lead one to it, as in the Masses *Regnum mundi*, *Inclina cor meum* and *Spes nostra* included in these recordings. Often the surviving texture shows that the *cantus firmus* must have been decorated melodically or laid out in varied rhythmic configurations, so subjective

decisions still have to be made. In addition, a composer will usually quote a *cantus firmus* only in a fully-scored section and freely invent the verses or passages in reduced scoring, so subjective invention based on close observation is needed in completing them.

Another technique whose presence can be enormously helpful to the restorer is that of imitation, the statement of a musical idea by several voices in succession, which composers exploited more and more as the sixteenth century progressed. It was especially useful at the beginning of a new group of words, because it clarified the verbal sense by signalling the start of a syntactic unit, imparted a sense of coherence, and helped to create momentum; the effect is rather like several participants entering a conversation one after another by uttering the same opening words. Conventional wisdom used to hold that English composers lagged behind their continental contemporaries in cultivating imitation of this text-based type, but the Peterhouse music suggests that this view needs some adjustment. Another sort of imitation, in which tiny motifs pass from voice to voice during the subsequent course of a section rather than at its beginning, had interested English composers since the fifteenth century and continued to do so; the strongly harmonic character of English music rather encouraged it, and composers probably regarded it as a refinement of their contrapuntal technique. If the extant voices of a composition exploit either of these kinds of imitation it is highly likely that any missing voices did so too; examination will often show where motifs can be fitted in, and their incorporation will not only bind the texture together but also assist the generation of the remainder of the missing lines. In this repertoire a search for possible points of entry for imitation is one of the first steps that a restorer will take; once the entries have been located, the continuation of each phrase is planned to fit the context of the surviving voices.

The security of a composer's technique and the strength of his musical personality have a marked influence on the restoration of his music. The greater his skill, the more assured will be his handling of counterpoint (the leading of one voice against another) and the stronger will be the character of his lines, so that sometimes a missing line will virtually write itself. A more limited composer may, by contrast, leave the restorer with a plethora of alternatives, none of which seems more convincing than the others. The more distinctive a composer's style, even if it involves less desirable features such as melodic awkwardness, harmonic eccentricity or idiosyncratic handling of dissonance, the more there is for the restorer to

assimilate and emulate. The music most difficult to complete with conviction is that which is incoherent, inconsistent and characterless, because it offers so few hints on how to proceed; happily the Henrician partbooks contain no music as depressingly feeble as this.

It is also considerably more difficult to complete a piece lacking two voices than it is to complete one lacking a single voice; the increase in the number of variables might appear to be an advantage in that it gives the restorer more freedom of choice, but precisely because of this it greatly diminishes the likelihood of coming close to the composer's original. When both treble and tenor (two of the three pre-eminent voices in the texture, the other being the bass) are missing, the restorer may be severely tested. It is perhaps inevitable that one should feel more often disappointed than satisfied by one's efforts, and that it should be difficult to resist the temptation to revisit pieces time and again afterwards. Reward comes on the very rare occasions when one believes that one has come as close as one can to restoring a work to the state in which its composer left it, and that there is nothing more that one can do. I am emphatically not a spiritualist—it puzzles me that dead composers should strive to communicate inept or jejune music to their amanuenses—but once or twice I have felt that I was experiencing something very close to the composer's original thought process. At such moments the passage of time seems to create no distance at all.

Volume 1

Four of the five compositions recorded on the first disc—Hugh Aston's *Ave Maria dive matris*, *Gaude virgo mater Christi* and *Ave Maria ancilla trinitatis*, and John Mason's *Quales sumus O miseri*, are votive antiphons representing the genre of polyphonic church music surviving most abundantly from late-fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England; the other work is a setting by Robert Jones of the vespers canticle *Magnificat anima mea dominum*. Votive antiphons were not strictly liturgical, in that they did not form part either of Mass or of the Divine Office; instead they were sung as a separate act of devotion to Mary, Jesus or a saint, usually after Compline, the final office of the day, before an image of or in the chapel dedicated to their recipient. By singing votive antiphons religious communities sought to enlist intercession for the souls of their founders and patrons and also (as the texts sometimes make explicit) on behalf of themselves: a more powerful expression of belief in the doctrine of purgatory and the beneficial intervention of those already in paradise could

scarcely be imagined. Private individuals could seek the same ends by reading or reciting the texts of the appropriate antiphons and prayers, many of which were standard constituents of the books of hours that were being printed in large quantities from the 1480s onwards. Some of the texts, such as *Salve regina*, were centuries old and survive in numerous musical settings, but early Tudor England also saw the production of many new texts, not a few of which exist in a single musical setting, as if they were created especially for a particular occasion.

The literary style and intellectual level of these antiphon texts are astonishingly varied, ranging from pedestrian poetry to closely-argued Ciceronian prose, and from banal eulogies and bald narratives to exhortations that are eloquent and compelling. A significant number of them are elaborations of the *Ave Maria*, the Angelic Salutation combining elements of Gabriel's annunciation to the Blessed Virgin and Elizabeth's prophetic words to her during the Visitation: 'Ave Maria, gratia plena, dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus'. It is easy to dismiss the more old-fashioned type of antiphon text, exemplified on this disc in Aston's settings of *Ave Maria dive matris*, *Gaude virgo mater Christi* and *Ave Maria ancilla trinitatis*, for being nugatory as literature, but in their intended context repetitive and predictable texts of this kind can be extremely effective as mantras aiding meditation: singing or hearing the music becomes akin to contemplating a religious image. It is interesting that in all three of these compositions by Aston a closing prayer in prose urgently seeking Mary's intercession has been added to the main poetic text, and that in each case the intensity of the music and the clarity of the word-setting increases during the prayer; in the first two the request is made on behalf of the college or religious community performing the piece, while in the last it becomes a personal plea.

Hugh Aston spent most of his working life at the wealthy collegiate church of St Mary Newarke in Leicester, where he was choirmaster at least from 1525 until the college's dissolution in 1548; he took the Oxford B.Mus. in 1510, which implies a birth-date in the mid-1480s. Details of his career between 1510 and 1525 are scanty, but he may have worked in Coventry, perhaps in the cathedral's Lady Chapel. It is clear that he was highly thought of: he was the first choice to be choirmaster of Thomas Wolsey's newly founded Cardinal College, but he declined the post, and only then was it offered to John Taverner. There is evidence that over several decades he played a responsible role in the civic life of Leicester,

and that after his retirement he represented the city in parliament. His music is strongly reliant upon imitative writing, a technique that he used imaginatively and with great effect. He was also unusually fond of reiterating short motives in slightly altered forms to create the feeling of a cumulative *ostinato*, well demonstrated in the concluding 'Amen' sections of *Ave Maria dive matris* and *Gaude virgo mater Christi*.

Robert Jones's Magnificat observes many of the conventions that had grown up in English settings of this canticle during the previous hundred years. Jones sets only the even-numbered verses of the canticle and its doxology, leaving the others to be sung to their usual plainchant formula; he sets some of the verses for the full complement of five parts and the others for a smaller number; and he bases many of the polyphonic sections (sometimes so loosely that it is almost imperceptible) on a rather unusual type of *cantus firmus* called a *faburden*, which had originally been the lowest voice of an improvised harmonisation of a plainchant. Very little is known about Jones's career except that he was a singer in Henry VIII's household chapel in 1520 and still a member of it in about 1534. Whether he was related to Edward Johns or Jones, a slightly earlier member of the royal household chapel, or to the later lutenist and song composer Robert Jones, has yet to be established. This Magnificat and his Mass *Spes nostra* (recorded on the fourth of these discs) are the work of a talented composer with a fine sense of line and phrasing. An interesting detail occurs in the 'Sicut locutus' verse of the Magnificat, where at 'ad patres nostros' Jones writes a very striking cadence straight out of the fourteenth century; the cadence is inevitable because his chosen scoring for treble, mean and contratenor, with the *faburden*-based contratenor cadencing from B natural onto A, means that the only possible progressions in the two higher voices are from G sharp to A in the treble and from D sharp to E in the mean (which cannot descend low enough below the contratenor to take the more usual step from E to A). The resulting 'doubled leading-note cadence' is reminiscent of Machaut and his contemporaries; the D is even signed sharp to ensure that no mistake is made. Jones's choice of this archaic cadence for the phrase 'As it was spoken to our forefathers' shows a nice sense of fitness and also an awareness of historical style that may surprise us.

John Mason can probably be identified with a singer of the same name in the household chapel of Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, whose studies for the priesthood she financed in 1504 and 1505. Mason said his first Mass in 1507, and if he had then attained

the minimum age for ordination he can have been born no later than 1483. Almost certainly he is the Dominus John Mason ('Dominus' or 'Sir' being the title usually accorded to a priest) who in January 1509 was admitted to the degree of Mus.B. at Oxford on the grounds of a year's residence; he must surely have been the 'Dominus Maason' (*sic*) who served as joint instructor of the choristers at Magdalen College for a year from Michaelmas 1508 and then as sole instructor until June 1510. After this he disappears for more than a decade, to reappear in 1521 as a chaplain in Thomas Wolsey's household; it seems likely that he had been in the employment of Wolsey, a Magdalen man like himself, for some or all of the intervening period, and that his duties included singing in the choir and producing music for it. It would have been through Wolsey's patronage that during the 1520s Mason secured several lucrative benefices including the rectory of Pewsey, Wiltshire (1521), a very well-paid chantry at Chichester Cathedral (1523), and cathedral canonries at Salisbury (1523) and Hereford (1525). He appears to have chosen to live upon his prebend at Hereford, where in 1526 he was granted one of the dwellings reserved for canons-resident. In 1545 he became treasurer of the cathedral; the collation of a new treasurer in February 1548 and the admission of a successor at Pewsey in May of the same year suggest that he died during the winter of 1547–8. In the indexes to the Henrician partbooks Mason's name always has the qualification 'Cicerstensis' ('of Chichester'); this rather muddies the biographical waters because the 'John Mason, B.Mus.' admitted to the Chichester chantry in 1523 resigned it in 1527, and a namesake for whom no degree is specified held it between 1539 and 1540. Was there one composer called John Mason or were there two?

The Peterhouse partbooks are the only source to include any complete compositions by Mason (two Mary-antiphons *Ave fuit prima salus* and *Quales sumus O miseri*, a Jesus-antiphon *Ve nobis miseris*, and a ritual antiphon *O rex gloriose*), although two extracts from *Quales sumus* are to be found in a musical commonplace-book compiled between about 1581 and 1606 by John Baldwin, a singer in St George's Chapel, Windsor and later in the Royal Household Chapel. All but *Ave fuit* are annotated in the indexes to the Henrician partbooks as being for male voices; perhaps they date from a period before Wolsey's household chapel choir had been enlarged to include boy singers. The text of *Quales sumus* is stuffed with biblical allusion and written in rather elegant and resourceful Latin. As with most votive antiphons we do not know its author, but it could have been the composer himself showing the results of the schooling that Margaret Beaufort had paid for. One of the literary

references in the text of *Quales sumus* is accompanied by a matching allusion in the music: when the words 'Sicut cervus aquarum fontes' are quoted from Psalm 41:2, the bass voice sings the plainchant melody to which they are sung in the tract from the Mass for the dead.

Listeners will notice that although these five compositions share many characteristics, such as a rather ornate style, a tendency to create variety and contrast by juxtaposing large blocks of music in different scorings and metres, a slightly ambiguous attitude to imitative writing which is sometimes decorative and sometimes structural, their composers also have unmistakably individual traits. Aston is the most showy, delighting in elaborate figuration and striking effects, tolerant of stronger-than-average dissonances, and fond of playing with short motifs in a rather dogged way; he is also the most innovative of these composers in experimenting here and there with a more syllabic style of writing allied to exact musical repetition and rapid changes of scoring. Jones's music is more relaxed and lyrical, and he has a talent for telling touches of detail such as a felicitously placed dissonance or a slightly surprising harmony. Mason perhaps gives an impression of reserve and remoteness (possibly because the interweaving of five ornate vocal lines in a space of only two octaves creates special difficulties for the listener) but his very well-crafted music has an unmistakeable dignity and poise.

Gaude virgo mater Christi is the only one of these works not to need editorial completion; it survives in its entirety in another manuscript where it is given an alternative text addressed to St Anne beginning *Gaude mater matris Christi*; the version recorded here attempts to marry the version of the music in the complete copy to the Marian text of the incomplete copy in Peterhouse. *Ave Maria dive matris*, the Magnificat and *Quales sumus O miseri* lack their tenor part; *Ave Maria ancilla trinitatis*, which lacks both its tenor and its treble, was the first Peterhouse piece that I tried to restore, more years ago than I can believe; some vestiges of that first attempt still survive in the version sung here.

Volume 2

The second disc includes a Mass *Regnum mundi* by Nicholas Ludford preceded by a plainchant Kyrie and followed by Richard Pygott's setting of the votive antiphon *Salve regina*. English polyphonic Masses of this period consisted of settings of the four chorally

sung texts that did not change according to the occasion: the Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus. In this performance the other choral items of Mass are sung in plainchant. Ludford spent most of his career in the collegiate chapel of St Stephen in the royal palace of Westminster, one of the most prestigious choral foundations in the kingdom. He was appointed verger and organist of the chapel on 30 September 1527 and remained in place until the college was dissolved in 1547; there is no known record of him holding another musical appointment before his death in 1557. The deed appointing him mentions the ‘manifold services in the skill of singing and organ-playing’ that he had hitherto provided, probably referring to a previous period of employment as a lay-clerk or as a probationer for the position in which he was now confirmed; this suggests a birth-date somewhere in the 1490s. The combination of the offices of organist and verger was less odd than it may appear, because at St Stephen’s, as at the royal chapel of St George in Windsor Castle, one of the statutory vergerships had been converted into a post for a choirmaster: an easy way of providing (without altering the statutes) a specialist in polyphonic music to direct the choir now that polyphony had become a choral medium. Ludford’s music is of the highest quality, comparable with that of any of his contemporaries, but unlike that of Taverner it did not continue to be copied into later-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century musical collections. One reason for this could be that since none of his surviving music has quite the directness and economy of scale that some of Taverner’s has, it did not appeal to Elizabethan and Jacobean taste; another reason might be that because no story about repenting his Catholic past and accepting Protestantism became attached to him as it did to Taverner, he was not regarded as ‘one of us’ but became a symbol of a vanished order.

The modern revival of interest in Ludford began with the exploration of his earlier works, such as the Mass *Lapidaverunt Stephanum*, dating from the 1520s at the latest. The two Masses and three antiphons by him preserved only in the Henrician partbooks show every sign of being works of his full maturity and add considerably to his stature: he was not just an efficient composer in the older style but an exceptionally skilful, imaginative, innovative and eloquent exponent of it. His music sounds supple and approachable but is extremely carefully planned: the shaping of melodies, the control of pace and texture, the variations of scoring and the marriage of text and line are handled with unsurpassed finesse, and his exploration of harmony and dissonance as sensuous devices are exceptional for the time: he manages to rejuvenate an essentially conservative style from within.

All the features just mentioned appear in the Mass *Regnum mundi*, which has as its plainchant *cantus firmus* the ninth responsory at Matins from the Common of virgin martyrs (that is, the material sung on feasts for saints in this category not having their own proper chants). The Sarum calendar includes only two nine-lesson feasts of virgin martyrs with Matins responsories taken from the Common: those of St Margaret (20 July) and St Winifred (3 November). In view of Ludford's known associations with the parish church of St Margaret, Westminster, where he several times witnessed the churchwardens' accounts and acted as churchwarden himself between 1552 and 1554, it seems probable that he composed this Mass for performance in the parish church on the patronal festival; perhaps it was among the contents of the book of polyphonic music that the churchwardens of St Margaret's bought from him in the year 1533–4. The tenor part of the Mass is entirely lost, and the treble part is missing from 'de lumine' in the Credo to the end because the final pages of the treble partbook are missing. Fortunately, since the plainchant *cantus firmus* on which the Mass is based was given to the tenor in (as far as one can tell) an unadorned form, the melodic line of the tenor can be restored with reasonable certainty wherever it was quoting the *cantus firmus*, which essentially means in the fully-scored sections, and the line can be given a plausible rhythmic profile based on the rhythm of the words that it must have been singing. Where the tenor was freely composed, in the verse sections for fewer than five voices, it has to be invented with reference to the other voices, as does the treble throughout wherever it is singing.

English polyphonic Masses of this period did not include a setting of the Kyrie because on a feast day, the most likely occasion for the performance of a polyphonic Mass, the Kyrie would be sung in chant with a lengthy added text called a prosula; in effect it was treated as one of the changeable Proper texts of the Mass rather than as part of the unchanging Ordinary. In this recording the Kyrie *Conditor* and the other sung items proper to the day are performed to the plainchant sung on the feast of St Margaret, which allows Ludford's polyphony to stand out in magnificent relief against them. In music of such consistently high quality highlights are hard to choose: on a small scale listeners may relish a miraculous piece of writing in the second 'Qui tollis' of the Gloria, where at 'peccata' the treble has an audaciously prolonged dissonance against the contratenor, the contratenor then repeats the dissonance against the bass and extends the phrase through an interrupted cadence into a

rising sequence whose culmination at ‘deprecationem’ is heightened by a felicitous melodic surprise; on a larger scale they may be transported by the rapturous closing invocation of the Agnus.

Probably a few years older than Ludford, Richard Pygott was successively a member of two elite choral foundations, the household chapels of Thomas Wolsey and Henry VIII. The first secure reference to him dates from January 1517 when, in a pardon for unauthorised possession of a crossbow and handgun, he was described as a servant of the cardinal of York; a later inventory of Wolsey’s household goods mentions ‘a fedderbedde bought for Pygoote maister of the children’ in December of the same year. In the spring of 1518 Pygott was praised by William Cornysh, master of the choristers in the royal household chapel, for his excellent training of a boy singer commandeered from the cardinal’s chapel by the king for his own on the grounds that Wolsey’s choir was better than his. Pygott apparently continued to serve Wolsey until the latter’s loss of the king’s favour led to his fall from power in 1529 and subsequent death in November 1530. It was probably soon after this last event that a place was found for him as a singer or gentleman of the royal household chapel, although the earliest evidence of this new employment dates from October 1532. Pygott dated his will in August 1549, added a codicil six weeks later, and the will was proved on 12 November.

Very few of Pygott’s compositions remain. The earliest, and the only one to survive complete, is *Quid petis o fili*, a devotional song in a mixture of Latin and English included in a collection of courtly music copied during the second decade of the century. Another song by him, *By by lullaby*, was included in *XX Songes* (1530), the earliest collection of polyphonic music printed in England, but only the bass part is extant. The bass is also the only voice to survive of a votive antiphon *Gaude pastore* honouring St Thomas of Canterbury, which must have been composed while Pygott was still in Wolsey’s service; apart from its obvious purpose it may have intended an oblique compliment to his employer, another Thomas who became an archbishop, albeit of York rather than Canterbury. A scrap of a setting of the responsory *Domine secundum actum* may be a late work because polyphonic responsories do not seem to have been much cultivated before the later 1530s. The only two works by him that can be fully restored are the votive antiphon *Salve regina* recorded here and a very fine Mass *Veni sancte spiritus* for Pentecost; both are in the Henrician partbooks, but the bass part of the Mass is also in the same source as *Gaude pastore*, dating from about 1530. Both

compositions are on a huge scale and enormously elaborate; they must represent the kind of music that Wolsey expected his singers to perform: imposing in scale, grand in manner and requiring a level of choral virtuosity that would throw lustre upon himself as a connoisseur and patron of musicians as well as of music.

In the fourteenth century *Salve regina* had been one of the earliest Marian texts antiphon to be set in polyphony, and in the fifteenth it became a favourite with English composers, as the number of settings in the Eton choirbook witnesses. It seems to have fallen out of favour early in the sixteenth century, and Pygott's setting of it is one of the latest to have survived. It is rather traditional in structure, being divided into principal sections in triple and duple metre alternately, and each principal section being split into subsections scored for different combinations of solo voices or for tutti; in the second half the soloists sing the music with verse texts and the full choir sings the acclamations 'O clemens', 'O pia' and so on. Both the treble and tenor voice parts are missing, and since neither seems to have held a *cantus firmus* both have to be invented. Pygott's habit of beginning phrases of prose and lines of verse imitatively helps in the restoration of the missing parts, and his tendency to make incidental and unobtrusive melodic cross-references between voices elsewhere during their course sometimes helps to make the counterpoint more purposeful than it might otherwise have been. Notwithstanding the assistance offered by the surviving voices, much of this restoration depends on guess-work; in this context the line between intuition and insight is blurred. The occasional passages in dotted rhythms are rather unusual but are found also in Pygott's Mass *Veni sancte spiritus*; here their occurrence at 'clamantium' and 'vulnerato' might lead one to see in them a response to the text, an evocation of savagery or pain, were it not that they happen also in fairly neutral contexts such as 'Eve' and 'nobis'.

The juxtaposition of works by Ludford and Pygott allows some interesting comparisons. Listeners will perhaps find the *Regnum mundi* Mass more approachable and communicative than *Salve regina* because the individual movements are on a somewhat smaller scale and the music is clearer in its local articulation, more obviously lucid in its train of thought and more exploitive of contrast. The vast scale of Pygott's *Salve regina*, on the contrary, is rather intimidating in itself, and the extremely melismatic word-setting, the unremitting intricacy, the steady pace, the lack of strong local contrast and the heavy reliance upon imitation to produce continuity can create an impression of reserve, dispassionateness and even

monotony. It may be that to some extent such perceptions simply reflect real differences between the two composers: both were masters of their craft, but on the evidence of their surviving music Ludford was more imaginative and inventive. There may also be an aesthetic and cultural difference: Pygott creates a musical icon whose abstract beauty aims to ravish the listener into a deeper spiritual empathy with the divine, whereas Ludford constructs a musical discourse designed to help the listener achieve a better intellectual comprehension of the verbal message; one approach derives from the past, while the other points to the future.

Volume 3

The third disc includes a votive antiphon *Ave fuit prima salus* by John Mason and a Mass *Inclina cor meum* by Nicholas Ludford, preceded by the plainchant Kyrie *Cunctipotens genitor*.

Unlike his other compositions, John Mason's votive antiphon *Ave fuit prima salus* is not annotated 'men' in the indexes to the Peterhouse partbooks, and is much more convincing if the two missing voices are reconstructed to create a three-octave work for full choir rather a two-octave piece for men. The text was quite widely circulated in devotional literature, and other musical settings of it exist; like many such texts it is a trope or expansion of the angelic salutation *Ave Maria*, in which each word of the original is given a stanza of comment in rather feeble Latin verse. The texts of *Quales sumus* and *Ve nobis* are considerably more interesting and could be by Mason himself.

There are limitations to what can be said about a composition 40% of which consists of restoration. *Ave fuit* seems to have been fairly conservative in style, with a first half in triple metre and a second half in duple, each metrical half being subdivided into verses in contrasting reduced scorings which culminate in a tutti. Mason is fond of using imitation to set the music in motion again after a rest, and he rather likes passing longer musical ideas very obviously from one voice to another during the course of a tutti rather like a banner transferred from the hand of one bearer to that of another, as he does at 'Pre cunctis celi civibus' and 'Tecum letantur angeli', but he shows little interest in other devices, such as musical sequence or repetition, which would be helpful to the listener. Whereas in Ludford's music counterpoint and harmony seem to be in perfect accord, Mason's music sometimes

gives the impression that one or other of these parameters is taking precedence of the other. This does not mean that Mason is an inept composer, but that he is not quite in the highest class.

The Mass *Inclina cor meum* seems to inhabit a darker and more introspective world than Ludford's radiant *Regnum mundi* Mass on the second disc. It takes its name from the opening words of the plainchant that forms its *cantus firmus*, 'Inclina cor meum deus in testimonia tua', a short responsory sung daily at the morning service of terce. Three of Ludford's surviving works are based on this *cantus firmus*: the present Mass, a votive antiphon *Ave Maria ancilla trinitatis* unique to the Henrician partbooks, and a setting of *Salve regina* in the same collection, one voice of which also survives in a manuscript copied about a decade earlier. While it was quite common for a composer to base a Mass and a single votive antiphon—or even a Mass, a Magnificat and a votive antiphon—on the same material, perhaps to create recurrent referential points across a festal day, there is no other known instance of a composer using the same *cantus firmus* in two votive antiphons. The words of the responsory, from verse 36 of Psalm 118 in the Vulgate, appear to have had special significance for Ludford, or for St Stephen's chapel, or some high personage associated with it. The idea of asking God to bend one's heart to bear witness to him has obvious relevance to Stephen, the first Christian to suffer martyrdom for giving public testimony of his faith; the introit and gradual of Mass on St Stephen's day, *Etenim sederunt principes* and *Sederunt principes*, quote verse 23 of the same psalm.

The melody of the *Inclina cor meum* plainchant responsory is rudimentary, consisting essentially of a recitation oscillating between two notes a tone apart, twice rising a third above the upper note and once descending a third below the lower note; it will be heard particularly clearly in the treble part of the Gloria at the words 'Domine deus, rex celestis, deus pater omnipotens'. Ludford's treatment of this unpromising material is ingenious and extraordinarily skilful: rather than confining it to a single voice he quotes it in every voice except the mean, incorporates it into several verse sections as well as into the fully-scored sections, makes additional passing allusions to it from time to time, and sometimes decorates it melodically instead of quoting it literally. The music sounds as shapely and inventive as any by Ludford, betraying no hint of the constraints imposed by the *cantus firmus*. The missing tenor part can be restored with some confidence wherever it held the chant melody,

but one cannot always be sure of having restored its original rhythmic profile; where another voice has the *cantus firmus* the tenor seems to have behaved much like the contratenor, albeit (as in most of Ludford's music) with a slightly lower tessitura.

Volume 4

The fourth disc begins with a return to Nicholas Ludford for his setting of *Ave cujus conceptio* and ends by introducing a new composer, Robert Hunt, through his *Stabat mater dolorosa*; between these two Marian antiphons it revisits Robert Jones in his Mass *Spes nostra* preceded by a plainchant Kyrie.

Ave cujus conceptio presents a widely-circulated devotional poem recollecting five joyful events in the life of the Virgin—her Conception, Nativity, Annunciation, Purification and Assumption—which were commemorated in the five main Marian feasts observed by the medieval Western church. The form of the poem—five four-line stanzas, one for each event—could hardly be simpler, the thought is uncomplicated and the style direct, and the tone is positive throughout. Ludford's music matches the text perfectly: changes of scoring occur at the beginning or mid-point of stanzas; each joy is announced with conspicuous clarity, often by allowing every voice in turn to deliver the crucial words while the other voices make room for it by singing melismatically ('Cujus annuntiatio', 'Cujus purificatio', 'Cujus fuit assumptio'); and the almost constant sense of animation emphasizes the celebratory mood. Here and there Ludford slackens the pace and uses harmonic colour to gloss the text: in the first stanza the move onto an unexpected chord at 'celestia' underlines the ineffability of heaven, and the turn to the minor form of the same chord for 'terrestria' contrasts man's earthly condition with what is promised to him in paradise; in the third, another harmonic surprise on 'humilitas' highlights the Virgin's meekness, a quality then much admired; in the last stanza one might even interpret the flourishes and emphatic cadence on 'purgatio' as a casting-off of and shutting-of-the-door on sin. It would be very misleading to portray Ludford as a madrigalist, but his responsiveness to words and ideas seems unique among his English contemporaries. Only the tenor part of *Ave cujus conceptio* is missing, so restoration is relatively straightforward. It was tempting to introduce the tenor into one of the two duets between the treble and another voice ('Ave cujus nativitas ...' and 'Ave vera virginitas ...') because it is unusual to encounter two duets in a work of this size

and still more unusual for both of them to involve the treble, but the surviving voices are self-sufficient and attempts to add a third voice were not convincing.

Robert Jones's Mass *Spes nostra* has as its *cantus firmus* a plainchant antiphon sung at matins on Trinity Sunday; presumably it was composed for performance on this important feast day, but perhaps this would not have precluded it being sung subsequently on other occasions too. As usual, only the Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus are set in polyphony; in this recording the plainchant Kyrie *Deus creator omnium* directly precedes the Gloria, as it would in a fully liturgical performance. Only the tenor voice of the Mass is missing; it carried the *cantus firmus* in every fully-scored section and also in the 'qui venit' verse of the Sanctus. The musical context usually shows where the tenor must move from chant pitch to the next, but subjective decisions have to be made about note division and rhythmic layout in order to carry the words of the text. At the beginning of each movement the treble voice anticipates the beginning of the *cantus firmus*, moving up through the notes of a triad and then continuing by step to arrive a seventh above where it started; this is not unusual in Masses based on chant. Jones's music is less ornate and less obviously imposing than that of some contemporaries—Pygott for example—and he tends to treat dissonance rather more freely and to think in shorter phrases; but his craftsmanship is first-rate and his ear for a touch of colour, whether of harmony, dissonance, or contrapuntal finesse, is extremely acute. He can also pursue a motive as tenaciously as anybody, as at the end of the Sanctus, and show an impressive amount of sinew, as in the very well sustained tutti extending from 'Et resurrexit' to the end of the Credo: the moment at 'Et iterum venturus est' where, so to speak, the music takes a deep breath in order to drive itself through to the final cadence, is particularly striking.

Robert Hunt has yet to be identified with certainty. He may have been the Hunt, alias Stacionar, recorded without a first name as a chorister of Magdalen College between 1486 and 1493. If this boy were born in the late 1470s he could have embarked upon a career as an adult church musician just before 1500 and continued in it at least into the 1530s. In 1535 a Robert Hunt was chaplain of a chantry in Chichester Cathedral, where John Mason held a chantry between 1523 and 1527 and again (unless this second chantry-priest was a namesake) between 1539 and 1540; involving no other duty than singing Masses for the soul

of the founder, chantries were quite often awarded to clergy who could be useful to an institution in other ways, such as singing in the choir.

There could scarcely be greater contrast between Jones's genial Mass and Hunt's sombre *Stabat mater dolorosa*. It is interesting that although the Eton choirbook, copied just after 1500, contained five settings of the poem by composers of Fayrfax's generation including Fayrfax himself, Hunt's is the only extant subsequent composition of the text by an Englishman. It is not immediately clear why it fell out of favour: other texts of even greater length and indigestibility were set by composers of the Peterhouse generation, and its invocation of Mary as an intercessor whose efficacy was increased by her witness to her Son's suffering would surely have remained meaningful to traditional Catholics. Perhaps the developing fashion for devotional texts in rhetorical and strenuously classical prose made this plain-spoken thirteenth-century poem seem prohibitively old-fashioned. Whatever the case, the words of *Stabat mater* elicited from Hunt music of remarkable eloquence and evocative power. Although both the tenor and treble parts are missing and 40% of the piece therefore consists of restoration, I do not think it excessive to claim that no other music in the Henrician partbooks approaches so closely that of the mature Fayrfax in its combination of reticence and eloquence, its close matching of text and music, its subtle variations of scoring, its overall homogeneity and its eschewal of inessential ornament. Although Hunt cannot match the Fayrfax of *Maria plena virtute* and the Mass *Tecum principium* in contrapuntal resource or sure-footedness, he succeeds admirably in arousing compassion for the Saviour, which was the aim of literary evocations of the Passion and of the visual symbols traditionally associated with it. The short duet to the words 'Cujus animam gementem' is the one place in the entire repertoire of the partbooks where the missing treble and tenor were the only voices singing and the music heard in this performance is entirely editorial.

Volume 5

The final disc begins with three antiphons, Hugh Sturmy's *Exultet in hac die*, Robert Hunt's *Ave Maria mater dei* and John Mason's *Ve nobis miseris*, and ends with an anonymous and untitled Mass preceded by the plainchant Kyrie *Orbis factor*.

Of all the composers named in the partbooks, none is more obscure than Hugh Sturmy. The

name is Kentish, a derivative of the place-name Stourmouth borne by two villages a few miles east of Canterbury, near where the River Stour used to empty into the now silted-up River Wantsum, which separated the Isle of Thanet from the mainland and provided a short cut between the English Channel and the Thames Estuary. Bearers of the surname were certainly living in this area in the sixteenth century. The only known documentary reference that implicitly could apply to the composer is a license issued by the Stationer's Company in 1557–8 for the printing of a 'ballett of the a. b. c. of a preste called Heugh Stourmy'; here 'ballett' probably denotes a musical setting.

Exultet in hac die suggests very strongly that Sturmy had fairly recently been a member either of Canterbury Cathedral priory (where no such name occurs in the dissolution list) or of St Augustine's abbey in the city, because it is a polyphonic setting of the plainchant antiphon sung with the Magnificat at vespers either on 26 May, the day of the saint's death *circa* 604, or on 13 September, the feast of the translation or transfer of his relics in 1091. As usual in polyphonic settings of chant items which were ritual rather than votive in function, the chant melody is laid out in equal notes in the tenor part; the missing tenor can thus be restored with virtually complete confidence. The other voices weave themselves around the chant in a loosely imitative and fluent conversation, reminding us that in a vigorous and deeply-rooted musical culture even an inconspicuous composer may show a remarkably high level of skill. There is some irony in the fact that this unassuming piece has today become a minor hit; Hugh Sturmy would surely be astonished that after five hundred years *Exultet* is still being sung and admired in parts of the world that in his day had not even discovered by Europeans. Its inclusion in the Henrician partbooks may have been for votive rather than ritual use.

Having already made the acquaintance of Robert Hunt as a composer on a very large scale in the *Stabat mater* on the fourth disc, we meet him again as an exponent of the shorter votive antiphon in *Ave Maria mater dei*, which lacks its tenor part. Succinct antiphons of this kind already existed around 1500, when William Cornysh's setting of the same text was copied into the Eton choirbook, and they appear to have become more numerous in the later 1520s and 30s; the Henrician partbooks contain several more examples by Taverner and lesser-known composers. Hunt sets the brief prose text in a rather more modern manner than Cornysh, relying more on imitation and rapid changes of scoring; the style is also more

sober, but the lines still tend to open out into melisma at the end of every text phrase. The unusually extended treatment of the musical idea introduced at 'Amen' helps to stabilise the music after the fluctuations and tensions of the previous few bars.

John Mason's *Ve nobis miseris* demonstrates very well the characteristics of the new style of votive antiphon text—self-consciously 'literary', rhetorical, and (at 'Venite benedicti patris mei...' towards the end) quoting Scripture—that came into vogue in the early sixteenth century and to some extent displaced previously popular texts such as *Salve regina* and *Gaude virgo*, at least in institutions whose members had some pretension to humanistic scholarship. It also bears witness to the rise of the Jesus-antiphon, less vulnerable than the Mary-antiphon to reformist criticism. Like Mason's *Quales sumus* on the first disc, it is written for five male voices inhabiting an overall range of some two octaves, suggesting that the choir for which it was intended did not include boys. As one would expect, the music exhibits older and newer features: it is divided into extended sections contrasting in metre and scoring, and the writing is predominantly ornate and busy; but imitative entries clarify the syntax of the text, and crucial words and picturesque phrases attract an apt musical gesture (the thunderous 'Non!' that answers the rhetorical questions beginning with 'Quid ergo?'; the figure scurrying after itself at 'Currimus et festinamus', the tremendous assurance of the proclamation 'Venite benedicti ...'). The spine-tingling cadence at 'floreamus' on a first-inversion chord—so much less stable than a root-position chord—is surely meant to signal the continuation of the verbal sense into the following section. For the trio beginning at 'Obsecramus te igitur' Mason divides the second tenor part into two and makes them sing in canon over the bass: fine craftsmanship because the artifice is almost unnoticeable. The motivic conversation of the extant voices aids the restoration of the missing voice, which seems to have had a similar tessitura to the two highest parts.

The Mass with which this disc ends raises questions whose investigation may throw further light on the partbooks, their context and their significance. It is one of only two anonymous compositions in the collection, and one of only two Masses in it based on a *cantus firmus* or a polyphonic model that do not carry a title indicating the source of the borrowed material (Ludford's Mass *Christi virgo* is the other). There can be no doubt that it is based on a plainchant melody, a D-mode chant which, as in John Taverner's Mass *Gloria tibi trinitas* in the same mode, is almost always placed in the mean part rather than in the tenor. The closest

match so far found in the Sarum chant repertoire sung all over southern England is *Confessor domini*, the antiphon to the Magnificat at first vespers of a confessor-bishop. Of all the saints in this category the one whose commemoration would have been most relevant to Canterbury is St Augustine, who brought Roman Christianity to England and became the city's first bishop. For more than three hundred years Canterbury's chief saint had been Thomas Becket, but during Henry VIII's imposition of himself as head of the English church the cult of Thomas had been proscribed and he had been declared to be no saint but 'a traitor to his prince'; this would have made celebration of him, public or private, not only illegal but probably suicidal.

In St Augustine the cathedral authorities possessed an acknowledged saint for whom they could claim not only strong local connections but also a decisive contribution to the development of the English church and nation. His authenticity and stature were irrefragable; his relations with the secular power had been uncontroversial; he had died a natural death; and he was not the subject of a thriving cult associated with miracles. A strong case could have been made for promoting him as the father-figure of a national church which now lacked one; some of the king's subjects must have felt that the repudiation of papal authority had dealt the church a wound so grievous that a mere king could not heal it. Perhaps such thoughts led to the inclusion in the Henrician partbooks of a Mass commemorating St Augustine. Given the king's pathological insecurity and ruthlessness, however, reticence about the purpose of the Mass and the identity of its composer may have been considered wise. Another reason for caution could have been that both of St Augustine's feasts fell within the scope of the Act 'for the abrogation of certain holydays' passed by Convocation in July 1536, and should not have been observed; hence the absence of a title and ascription. The hypothesis is far from proved—why do the partbooks give Fayrfax's Mass *Albanus*, for a saint whose feast day was revoked by the same Act, its usual ascription and title?—but it may deserve further consideration.

The identity of the composer has yet to be established. There is an astonishingly close similarity between the end of the Sanctus of this Mass and the end of the Gloria of Taverner's Mass *Gloria tibi trinitas*, but this could imply no more than that the composer of the Peterhouse Mass was aware of Taverner's setting. *Gloria tibi trinitas* is usually dated to the mid-1520s, whereas some features of this anonymous Mass, such as its thorough

exploitation of close imitation and motivic extension, its sometimes angular and wide-spanned melodic lines, and its use of *tripla* (three-in-the-time-of-one) time signatures in the final sections of the Gloria, Credo and Agnus imply a date a decade or so later. Whoever composed the music, it is characterful if sometimes a little idiosyncratic in its vocal figuration, with some very challenging florid writing ('visibilium omnium et invisibilium' in the Credo and 'gloria tua' in the Sanctus), a ravishing setting of the first 'Qui tollis' in the Gloria for divided trebles and mean, a meltingly tender treatment of 'Et incarnatus' in the Credo, and the skilfully-handled fleet-of-foot endings to the Gloria, Credo and Agnus. The *cantus firmus* is occasionally transferred to a voice other than the mean: to the tenor for 'in nomine domini' in the Sanctus and to the bass for the second 'qui tollis ...' of the Agnus. Only the tenor voice is missing, but since the *cantus firmus* is usually in the mean nearly all of the tenor has to be freely invented; it seems to have behaved like the contratenor but is not always easy to integrate.

These notes cannot end without a declaration of gratitude to Scott Metcalfe and Blue Heron for the immense contribution that they have made to the dissemination of this music. To hear it sung with such skill and with unmatched insight is profoundly rewarding. Not the least piquant of the ironies associated with the Henrician partbooks is that it should have fallen chiefly to a choir in Boston, a New England city founded by settlers unable to tolerate the nostalgic religious policy of those who ruled in their homeland, to reveal to the world at large the beauty and richness of this repertoire.