



# JOHN BLOW

## Symphony Anthems

*Room of The Orgian  
Vestry. Blower.*

*Two Sackbuts, and a double  
Courtal.*

*Gentlemen of the Chap*

Choir of New College Oxford  
St James' Baroque  
Robert Quinney



## Acknowledgements

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New College Choir gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the New College Ludwig Humanities Research Fund and Mrs Anne Kriken Mann in the production of this recording.

Photographs: © Nick Rutter

### Cover image

Engraving from Francis Sandford, *The history of the coronation of the most high, most mighty, and most excellent monarch, James II.* London, 1687.

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*‘The history of the coronation of the most high, most mighty, and most excellent monarch, James II: by the grace of God, king of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c. and of his royal consort Queen Mary: solemnized in the Collegiate church of St. Peter in the city of Westminster; on Thursday the 23 of April, being the festival of St. George, in the year of Our Lord 1685. With an exact account of the several preparations in order thereunto, Their Majesties most splendid processions, and their royal and magnificent feast in Westminster-Hall: the whole work illustrated with sculptures: by His Majesties especial command.’*

Almost contemporary with Sandford’s engraving is Loggan’s 1675 view of New College (CD case), showing the chapel and formal gardens round the Mound.

JOHN BLOW  
*Symphony Anthems*

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St James' Baroque  
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## Symphony Anthems

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1	God spake sometime in visions	12.51
2	Hear my voice, O God	10.35
3	O sing unto the Lord	16.30
4	When the Son of Man	6.28
5	When Israel came out of Egypt	11.19
6	I was glad	15.22
Total duration		73.05

Editions: tracks 2, 3, 5 & 6, edited by Bruce Wood in *Musica Britannica*, volumes 50 and 69; track 1, edited by Peter McCarthy and Robert Quinney; track 4, edited and reconstructed by Robert Quinney.

Producer: Jeremy Summerly

Engineer: Adrian Hunter

Post-production: Adrian Hunter & Robert Quinney

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**NCR 1389**

## Out from the shadows: the individuality and inventiveness of John Blow

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In spite of various attempts to bring his music to greater prominence, John Blow (*bap.* 1649, *d.* 1708) remains a peripheral figure. He stands in the shadow of the only composer of his time and place to have gained full acceptance into the Canon: his friend and ‘pupil’, Henry Purcell. Blow’s relinquishing in 1679 of the post of Organist at Westminster Abbey in favour of Purcell only serves to perpetuate the idea of Blow as a good, but not great musician: good enough, at any rate, to recognise both Purcell’s superiority and the comparative modesty of his own talents. Having made this sacrifice, Blow then resumes the post when – in a turn of events conveniently consonant with ideas of Genius as both a blessing and a fatal affliction – Purcell died in 1695. Blow’s musical reputation is thus degraded not only by his alleged selflessness, but also by his longevity – only the truly great die young.

On closer examination, there is evidence that belies this romantic interpretation of events. For a start, Blow did not have a reputation for self-effacing modesty, if Hawkins’ description is to be believed: ‘a man of blameless morals and of a benevolent temper, but ... not so insensible of his own worth, as to be totally free from the imputation of pride’. No sooner had Blow begun work at Westminster Abbey than he began to accrue roles in the royal household: in 1669, the year following his appointment to the Abbey, he became ‘royal musician for the virginals’; he was sworn in as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1674, becoming Master of the Children of the Chapel later that year, and Organist in 1676. For the increasingly busy Blow to relinquish his Abbey post in Purcell’s favour was perhaps less an act of self-effacement, more a convenient round of musical chairs. The collaborative nature of the creative process in the world of Blow and Purcell has been firmly established, and we might readily imagine two musicians, whose relationship encompassed the copying, completion and even revision of each other’s music, exchanging professional appointments with an informality that subsequent generations have found difficult to comprehend.

Blow's reputation was further assaulted by the dismissive judgment of Charles Burney, writing in the third volume of *A General History of Music* (1789): 'Some of his choral productions are doubtless in a very bold and grand style; however, he is unequal, and frequently unhappy, in his attempts at harmony and modulation...'. Burney goes on to 'point out a few instances of [Blow's] great, and, to my conceptions, unwarrantable licentiousness, as a contrapuntist', 'confused and inaccurate' harmony, and 'confusion and crudities in the counterpoint'. This critique should not be taken at face value, but rather as the product of its time: clearly in play here, post-Enlightenment, are the opposing categories 'natural' and 'artificial'. Burney's idea of 'lawful' harmony does not admit the dissonant, voice-led counterpoint of Blow's music, which owed much to pre-Commonwealth models. This attitude, which insists that all music conform to supposedly universal norms, persists somewhat today in our reception of late seventeenth-century music. At any rate, the extraordinary fertility of Blow's imagination has not yet been celebrated as fully as it deserves. Blow was the quintessential Church musician of the Restoration; unlike Purcell, he showed very little interest in the theatre. Recruited – or, more accurately, impressed – from Newark as a Chapel Royal chorister in 1661, he spent the remainder of his life associated with the court, and was continuously employed by one or more ecclesiastical foundation. He witnessed the generous restocking of the court's musical resources under Charles II, and their subsequent dwindling under James II (who established a separate, Roman Catholic, Chapel, with its own musicians) and William and Mary. As Almoner and Master of the Choristers at St Paul's from 1687, he watched the rebuilding of the Cathedral by Wren.

*God spake sometime in visions* was by far the grandest of three anthems composed by Blow for the coronation of James II and Mary of Modena on 23 April 1685. It is lavishly scored for choir in eight parts, with instruments playing both independently and *colla parte*. A number of sections are sung by smaller groupings, perhaps reflecting the layout of the performers in galleries above the sacristy of Westminster Abbey; Purcell's companion-piece, *My heart is inditing*, shares these features, though its symphonies are more discrete. The opening quasi-symphony of *God spake* immediately announces the work's scale and affect, its broad phrases and bold voice-led dissonances evoking a particular majesty, distinctively of the English

tradition, and (unlike Purcell's anthem) leading directly to the choir's first entry without an intervening instrumental *tripla*. Blow introduces triple time for the first reduced section ('I have found David my servant'), returning to a duple metre as the texture again becomes full. This procedure he repeats for the transition into 'and in my name shall his horn be exalted', and again at 'higher than the kings of the earth'; Blow then tellingly recapitulates the opening symphony, before once again employing triple-to-duple metric modulation in the final verse and closing Amen-Alleluia. There are several excursions away from the overall G major tonality, perhaps most grandly in the peroration, where the music swings decisively flatward, only to be returned to the home key moments before the final cadence by a triumphant F sharp.

The majority of Blow's symphony anthems were composed between his swearing-in as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1674 and the death of Charles II eleven years later. This was the busiest period of Blow's career – indeed, the first three years appear to have seen the most intense activity. In addition to the composition of liturgical music and secular court Odes (at least one per year from 1678), he was responsible for the domestic arrangements of the children of the Chapel, and from 1682 shared with Nicholas Staggins a role as 'musician in ordinary for the composition and practice for the [24] violins'. It was a considerable workload, though one possibly ameliorated somewhat by the court musicians' freely collaborative, even promiscuous attitude to the production of music.

Not all of the thirty or so anthems of this period can be dated with total accuracy, but, like many of the anthems on this disc, *Hear my voice, O God* is an exception. It was performed on 18 July 1683, between the conviction and sentencing on the 12th, and execution at Tyburn on the 20th and 21st, of three of the anti-Catholic 'Rye House' conspirators, who had plotted to assassinate both Charles and his heir, James, Duke of York. Blow's anthem, which must have been composed at some speed, sets nine consecutive verses of Psalm 64 – a stern rebuke to those who doubted the legitimacy of the crown and succession, and a fierce depiction of the violent reward for treason. The opening of the anthem, by contrast, evokes an intimate scene; a lone supplicant, praying for preservation from 'the enemy'. The bass voice denotes authority;

we might imagine the King himself, kneeling in his chamber. The same voice – which must originally have been ‘that stupendious Base’, as John Evelyn described John Gostling – returns later with a catalogue of the various misdeeds of ‘the froward’, reaching from a low D to the E two octaves above; then the three remaining verse singers join him to relate the sudden vengeance visited on ‘wicked doers’, God’s ‘swift arrow’ vividly depicted by string ricochets in the subsequent ritornello.

*O sing unto the Lord* was composed many years later, for a charitable concert on 31 January 1701 at Stationers’ Hall. It is a work of impressive scale, featuring three virtuosic verse sections (two for countertenor, one for bass), and choral writing that ranges from the brilliant virtuosity of the opening (which has been reconstructed by Bruce Wood) to the gentle expressivity of ‘O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’. The expansive, multi-sectional structure is saved from incoherence by a strong tonal plan, centred on D major but with significant weight placed on areas reached by flattening the leading note – the G major of ‘O worship the Lord’ and A minor of ‘Tell it out among the heathen’. This flatward tendency, articulated even in the plagal preparation of the final cadence, is balanced by the effusive central chorus ‘Let the heavens rejoice’, which travels away from D in a mostly sharpward direction; and the whole is unified by the ‘Alleluia’ refrain, which occurs three times.

In addition to his large-scale concerted music, a large quantity of Blow’s ‘Full’, ‘Verse’ and ‘Full with verse’ anthems survive. *When the Son of Man* is one of many that have never been published, perhaps because some reconstruction is necessary; the Contratenor Decani part, one of three solo voices, is extant in neither of the two sources. This verse anthem most likely postdates the majority of Blow’s symphony anthems; the more modest scoring would have been appropriate to the reign of James II or later, when string instruments were rarely heard in the Chapel Royal. Nevertheless, significant demands are made of the three soloists – notably, the rapid *coloratura* on the word ‘glory’ in the opening verse – while the chorus is called upon only for a brief closing paragraph.



The earliest anthem in the present selection, *When Israel came out of Egypt*, has been dated to 5 April 1674, just a few weeks after Blow's swearing-in as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal on 16 March. No doubt anxious to impress on his debut as a Gentleman (though since 1661 he had never really been away from the Chapel), Blow's music does full justice to the mysterious supernatural events surrounding Israel's escape from captivity. The opening is pregnant with anticipation; despite a move to triple time, it is only in bar 98 ('the sea saw that and fled') that the music really begins to move forward. Most striking is the sudden halt – rhythmically and harmonically – at 'tremble, thou earth'; a mystical tremor rather than an ear-splitting earthquake.

The official opening of the chancel of St Paul's Cathedral took place on 2 December 1697. The occasion was also a thanksgiving for the Peace of Ryswick, so Blow's anthem *I was glad* may have been conceived to do double duty, notwithstanding the presence of a second anthem, *Praise the Lord, O my soul*, explicitly linked to the Peace; this would explain the portmanteau text, which lurches from the dedication theme to verses extolling the King and damning his enemies. Two trumpets are added to the usual string band; the instrumentation is the same as Purcell's *Tè Deum and Jubilate*, which were also performed, two years after the composer's death. In writing for what must have been an incomparably generous (and therefore potentially problematic) acoustical environment, Blow wisely keeps the harmonic tempo relatively slow, and makes use of silence to grand rhetorical effect. But this most public and stately work also includes the most ravishingly intimate music in all Blow's symphony anthems, the countertenor duet 'One thing have I desired of the Lord'.

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*A fuller version of these notes, fully referenced, may be found on [www.newcollegechoir.com](http://www.newcollegechoir.com)*

## A note on the instruments and pitch

Modern stringing, especially on the violin, prioritises the higher registers by giving higher tension to the E string, reflecting the modern aesthetic preference for brilliance and virtuosity; before around 1750, however, musicians recommended spreading the tension evenly across the four strings, resulting in a richer tone quality, especially in the lower registers, and a more blended ensemble sound. This is the way all the instruments were strung for this project. Furthermore, only plain uncovered gut strings were used.

Shorter bows (two made especially for the recording) with fixed length hair and clip-in frogs were employed, rather than longer style bows that developed as the eighteenth century progressed. Of the three tenors (violas in modern parlance), two were copied from particularly large originals; the increased cubic capacity of the body giving greater resonance to the lower notes. The three bass violins were a large seventeenth-century English original, a faithful copy of the same instrument, and a reproduction of the largest surviving bass violin (part of the collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).

Pitch standards changed significantly during Blow's long career, from the high 'Chapel Royal' pitch of the 1670s ( $A \approx 473\text{cps}$ ) to a much lower standard in the first decade of the eighteenth century ( $A \approx 400$ ); at no point in Blow's lifetime was the current scale of standard pitches (based on  $A=440$ ) in use in England. Nevertheless, we decided that the most pragmatic solution to the problem posed by a survey of anthems that were originally heard at a wide variety of pitches was to adopt a single pitch, roughly in the centre of the range. All the music on this recording is thus presented at  $A=440$ ; voices were allotted to verse parts on the basis of their individual range and tone quality.

Peter McCarthy and Robert Quinney 2016



## Texts

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### 1. **God spake sometime in visions**

Composed for the coronation of James II in 1685

*Jacob Clayden, Hugo Payton & Edward Beswick* TREBLE • *Tom Hammond-Davies & Stephen Taylor* COUNTERTENOR • *Tom Kelly* TENOR • *George Roberts, Brian McAlea & Thomas Lowen* BASS

God spake sometime in visions and said:  
I have laid help upon one that is mighty.

I have found David my servant,  
with my holy oil have I anointed him.  
My hand shall hold him fast and my arm shall  
strengthen him.

The enemy shall not be able to do him violence:  
the son of wickedness shall not hurt him.

I will smite down his foes before his face  
and plague them that hate him.

But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him,  
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

I will set his dominion also in the sea,  
and his right hand in the floods.  
He shall cry unto me: thou art my father,  
my God, and my strong salvation.  
And I will make him my first born,  
higher than the kings of the earth.  
My mercy will I keep for him for evermore,  
and my covenant shall stand fast with him.  
His seed also will I make to endure for ever,  
and his throne as the days of heaven.  
Amen. Alleluia.

Psalms 89: 20–30

### 2. **Hear my voice, O God**

*Alexander Chance* COUNTERTENOR • *Tom Kelly* TENOR • *Brian McAlea & Thomas Lowen* BASS

*Verse*

Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my  
life from fear of the enemy.

*Symphony*

*Verse*

Hide me from the gathering together of the  
froward; and from the insurrection of the wicked  
doers; who have whet their tongues like a sword:  
and shoot out their arrows, even bitter words;  
That they may privily shoot at him, at him that is  
perfect: suddenly do they hit him and fear not.

*Ritornello*

*Verse*

They encourage themselves in mischief, and  
commune among themselves how they may lay  
snares, and say that no man shall see them. They  
imagine wickedness; that they keep secret among  
themselves, every man in the deep of his heart.  
But God shall suddenly shoot at them with a swift  
arrow: that they shall be wounded.

*Ritornello*

*Chorus & verse*

Yea, their own tongues shall make them fall:  
insomuch that whoso seeth them shall laugh them  
to scorn.

And all men that see it shall say,  
This hath God done:  
For they shall perceive that it is his work.

Psalms 64: 1–6a, 7–9

### 3. O sing unto the Lord

*Alexander Chance COUNTERTENOR • Tom Kelly TENOR • Brian McAlea BASS*

*Chorus*

O sing unto the Lord a new song:  
sing unto the Lord, all the whole earth. Alleluia.  
Sing unto the Lord and praise his Name:  
be telling of his salvation from day to day.

*Verse: countertenor, tenor & bass*

Declare his honour unto the heathen,  
and his wonders unto all people.  
For the Lord is great, and cannot worthily be  
praised: he is more to be feared than all gods.

*Chorus*

Glory and worship are before him,  
power and honour are in his sanctuary.  
Alleluia.

*Verse: countertenor*

Ascribe unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people:  
ascribe unto the Lord worship and power.  
Ascribe unto the Lord the honour due unto his  
Name; bring presents, and come into his courts.

*Chorus*

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness:  
let the whole earth stand in awe of him.  
Alleluia.

*Verse: countertenor*

Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is king;  
and that it is he who hath made the round world  
so fast that it cannot be moved; and how that he  
shall judge the people righteously.

*Chorus*

Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad:  
let the sea make a noise and all that therein is.  
Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it: then shall  
all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord.

*Verse: bass*

For he cometh to judge the earth, and with  
righteousness to judge the world, and the  
people with his truth.

*Chorus*

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness:  
let the whole earth stand in awe of him. Alleluia.

Psalms 96

#### 4. **When the Son of Man**

*Alexander Chance & Tom Hammond-Davies COUNTERTENOR • Brian McAlea BASS*

*Verse*

When the Son of Man shall come in his glory  
and all the holy angels with him:  
Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.  
And before him shall be gathered all nations;  
and he shall separate them one from another,  
as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.  
Then shall the king say unto them on his right  
hand, come ye blessed of my Father;  
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the  
beginning of the world.

For I was an hungred and ye gave me meat,  
I was thirsty and ye gave me drink,  
I was a stranger and ye took me in,  
naked, and ye clothed me,  
I was sick and ye visited me.  
Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of  
these my brethren ye have done it unto me: and  
the righteous shall go into life eternal.

*Chorus*

Hosanna, Alleluia.

Matthew 25: 31–36, 46b

#### 5. **When Israel came out of Egypt**

*Alexander Chance COUNTERTENOR • Guy Cutting TENOR • George Robarts & Thomas Lowen BASS*

*Prelude*

*Verse*

When Israel came out of Egypt: and the house of  
Jacob from among the strange people.

*Symphony*

*Verse*

Judah was his sanctuary: and Israel his dominion.  
The sea saw that, and fled: Jordan was driven back.

*Verse & Chorus*

The mountains skipped like rams: and the little hills  
like young sheep.

*Symphony*

*Verse*

What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?  
and thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?

*Symphony*

*Verse*

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord:  
at the presence of the God of Jacob.

*Chorus*

Alleluia.

Psalms 114: 1–7

## 6. I was glad

*Tom Hammond-Davies & Alexander Chance COUNTERTENOR • Guy Cutting COUNTERTENOR & TENOR • Sasha Ockenden TENOR • Brian McAlea BASS*

### *Verse & Chorus*

I was glad when they said unto me,  
we will go into the house of the Lord our God.  
We will go into his tabernacle,  
and fall low on our knees before his footstool.  
Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place,  
thou and the ark of thy strength.  
Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness,  
and let thy saints sing with joyfulness.

### *Verse: two countertenors*

One thing have I desired of the Lord,  
which I will require, even that I may dwell  
in the house of the Lord all the days of my life:  
to behold the fair beauty of the Lord,  
and to visit his holy temple.

### *Verse & Chorus*

O pray for the peace of Jerusalem.  
They shall prosper that love thee.  
Peace be within thy walls,  
and plenteousness within thy palaces.  
Because of the house of the Lord our God,  
I will seek to do thee good.

### *Verse: countertenor*

The king shall rejoice in thy strength, O Lord.  
Exceeding glad shall he be of thy salvation.  
Thou hast given him his heart's desire,  
and hast not denied him the request of his lips.

### *Verse & Chorus*

As for his enemies, thou shalt clothe them with  
shame, but upon himself shall his crown flourish.  
Amen.

Psalm 122: 1; 132: 7–9; 27: 4; 21: 1–2; 132: 19

*New College Choir and St James' Baroque during the recording sessions*





## The Performers

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**NEW COLLEGE CHOIR** is one of the most celebrated and acclaimed choral groups of the UK. When William of Wykeham founded his 'New' College in 1379, a choral foundation was at its heart, and daily chapel services have been a central part of college life ever since. The pattern set by New College Choir in the 1380s was later adopted by other foundations, and may be seen as the prototype for all choirs of its kind. The Choir comprises sixteen boy choristers and fourteen adult clerks; the latter a mixture of professional singers and undergraduate members of the College. The boy choristers benefit not only from the matchless education provided by daily contact with superb music, or the satisfaction of performing at a professional level, but also from generous bursaries at New College School.

Beyond Oxford, New College Choir is often to be heard in concert around the world, and on broadcasts and recordings. A wide range of music is represented in its discography; it was the first choral foundation to establish its own recording label, Novum, and has also recorded for CRD, Decca, Erato and Hyperion. Choral services are webcast regularly, reaching a global audience. Those fortunate enough to be able to hear it 'at home' may do so every evening except Wednesday during University term.

**Trebles** Tom Barry, Edward Bennett, Oscar Bennett, Edward Beswick, Christopher Brain, Lyndon Chen, Jacob Clayden, Samuel Jarvis, George Maddison, Reuben McLusky, Hugo Payton, Hal Phillips, James Robson, Oscar Ross, Ryan Seneviratne, Thomas Simpson, Ardhan Subramaniam

**Altos** Alexander Chance, Tom Hammond-Davies, Hugo Morrell-Roberts, Henry Seabright, Stephen Taylor

**Tenors** James Brown, Timothy Coleman, Guy Cutting, Nicholas Hampson, Tom Kelly, Peter Leigh, Sasha Ockenden

**Basses** Thomas Lowen, Brian McAlea, George Roberts, Duncan Saunderson, Harrison Short

**ST JAMES' BAROQUE** is one of the UK's leading period instrument ensembles, founded by Ivor Bolton in 1984. It was for many years the resident ensemble at the Lufthansa Festivals of Baroque Music and its successor, the London Festival of Baroque Music 2015. St James' Baroque regularly appears at festivals at home and abroad, including four appearances at the BBC Proms. Under Ivor Bolton's direction, the ensemble made a series of recordings, including Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Charpentier's *Tè Deum*.

St James' Baroque is a regular partner of the BBC Singers and in 2013 performed the opening and closing concerts in BBC Radio 3's 'Baroque Spring'. The ensemble pays very close attention to recent historical research, particularly the stringing and set-up of period instruments (or detailed copies of originals).

**Violin 1** Hannah Tibell (*leader*), Ellen O'Dell, Ellen Bundy

**Violin 2** Ben Sansom, Hazel Brooks, Hailey Willington

**Tenor violins** Joanne Miller, Aliye Cornish, Geoff Irwin

**Bass violins** Mark Caudle, Katherine Sharman, Peter McCarthy

**Theorbo** Eligio Quinteiro

**Trumpets** Simon Munday, John Hutchins

**Organ** Timothy Wakerell, Robert Quinney

**ROBERT QUINNEY** is Organist of New College, Oxford. In addition to the daily direction of New College's world-famous choir, his work comprises teaching, lecturing and examining, as a Tutorial Fellow of the college and an Associate Professor at the University Faculty of Music. He also maintains a parallel career as a solo organist, and he is a prolific recording artist: his discs of organ music by J.S. Bach, Elgar, Dupré, Wagner and Brahms – and several CDs with the Choir of Westminster Abbey and The Sixteen – have been widely acclaimed.



Robert Quinney read music at King's College, Cambridge, where he was Organ Scholar. After four years as Assistant Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, he became Sub-Organist of Westminster Abbey in 2004. While at the Abbey he performed on concert tours to the United States, Australia and Russia, at several televised services – including the Marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge – and on the BBC TV documentary

*Westminster Abbey*. In April 2013 he moved to Peterborough Cathedral, where he was Director of Music for sixteen months. Between 2009 and 2014 he was Director of Oundle for Organists, whose residential courses continue to attract young organists from all over the world.

*Children of y<sup>e</sup> Choir of  
Westm.<sup>t</sup> in number 16.*

*The Groom of The Organ Two  
the Vestry. Blower.*

