



EVENSONG

AT NEW COLLEGE



“ In order that the Divine Office be celebrated each and every day in our College Chapel and that a full, complete and truly devout service of praise be made to God, we will, ordain, and state that in addition to the Warden, thirteen of the seventy Scholars and Fellows abovementioned, (being sufficiently educated, moral, and of good conversation), shall act as acolytes and serve in the Chapel at these Offices each every day as is their due. We further will and ordain that in addition to the Warden, the scholars and Fellows, ten Priests and three clerks of this College and Chapel, a further sixteen poor and needy boys of around twelve years of age, who, being sufficiently competent in the arts of reading and singing, honest, and of decent speech and conversation, shall be suffered to assist with the serving, reading, and singing in Chapel; and shall assist the Priests and Fellows in Holy Orders who are to celebrate each day in Chapel...”

From the Founder's Statutes of the College of St Mary of Winchester in Oxford, commonly called New College

EVENSONG

at NEW COLLEGE OXFORD

Founder William of Wykeham 1324-1404

1	Introit: William Harris, <i>Faire is the heaven</i>	5'30
2	Opening Versicles and Responses (William Smith)	1'09
3	Psalm 84 (chant: J. Coward)	3'15
4	Psalm 85 (chant: G. Martin)	4'02
5	First Lesson: Ecclesiasticus 44.1-15	2'14
6	Office Hymn: Thomas Tallis, <i>Te lucis ante terminum</i>	2'19
7	Magnificat: setting in G major by Charles Villiers Stanford <i>Treble soloist: Joseph Littlewood</i>	4'06
8	Second Lesson: I Corinthians 12.27 & 13.1-13	2'54
9	Nunc dimittis: setting in G major by Charles Villiers Stanford <i>Bass soloist: Gregory Sanderson</i>	4'15
10	Creed and Lesser Litany (William Smith)	2'22
11	Lord's Prayer (John Farmer)	1'31
12	Versicles, Responses and Collects (William Smith)	4'11
13	First Anthem: Gerald Finzi, <i>Lo, the full final sacrifice</i>	14'51
14	Second Anthem: Charles Wood, <i>Hail, gladdening light</i>	3'10
15	Prayers and Blessing	2'50
16	Hymn: <i>Glory to thee my God this night</i> (tune by Thomas Tallis)	2'25
17	Organ Voluntary: Charles Villiers Stanford, Postlude in D minor	5'24
	Total	66'31

ORGAN SCHOLAR (TRACKS 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16): NICHOLAS WEARNE
ASSISTING ORGANIST (TRACK 17): ROBERT PATTERSON

OFFICIATING PRIEST: THE REVD DR JANE SHAW,
CHAPLAIN AND DEAN OF DIVINITY OF NEW COLLEGE OXFORD

THE CHOIR OF NEW COLLEGE OXFORD
DIRECTED BY EDWARD HIGGINBOTTOM



New College Chapel and its Music

From the outset, Wykeham's Oxford foundation was marked out for musical things. His provision for chaplains, clerks and sixteen choristers was more ambitious than for other such chantries and places of learning, and it became a model for a succession of later foundations, (including Magdalen, Eton, King's Cambridge and Wolsey's Cardinal College). According to Wykeham's statutes, fellows and scholars were obliged to attend daily Mass, and the rituals of the chapel were the dominant feature of the life of the College. (To this day, the statutes refer to the privileged place of the chapel and its liturgy.) There is evidence of a rich vein of polyphony attached to New College during its pre-Reformation years, some of it with concordances in the Eton Choir Book, though the College organists were not among the most celebrated of 15th- and early 16th-century composers.

All this was to change dramatically at the Reformation, a process of change which convulsed the College during some thirty years, until the Elizabethan Act of Settlement. Under the stipulations of the Book of Common Prayer, the offices were reduced to a morning and an evening service (Matins and Evensong) with the frequency of Holy Communion drastically curtailed. This 'Anglican' liturgy has run all the way down to our own time, with only the expulsion of the fellows during the Commonwealth breaking the tradition. In the 18th century, the College subscribed to most of the significant publications of sacred music by the likes of William Croft, Maurice Greene and William Boyce. Manuscript materials in the possession of the College show that choruses from Handel's oratorios became a part of the repertory, and we know that the College organists, notably Philip Hayes, were in touch with the leading musical figures of the day.

If the 19th century was a quiet moment in the chapel's history, the publication of a New College hymnal in 1900 marked an upturn in the ambition of the chapel and its music, underpinned by the inspired appointment in 1901 of Sir Hugh Allen as Organist. The subsequent list of organists is impressive but it is perhaps appropriate to single out H.K.Andrews. His regular broadcasts of evensong from New College during the Second World War brought the choir into a wider sphere; and his considerable accomplishments as a writer on music (Palestrina, Byrd, the Oxford Harmony Course) provided an invaluable contribution to University studies. The succession of talented and committed organists have maintained the standing of the Choir as one of the leading ensembles of its kind in the country, bringing to its work a vigour and polish of which Wykeham would have surely approved, but for the regrettable business of parting with Rome.

Even though New College sustains a centuries-old tradition, the daily routine brings with it very contemporary challenges. Each year a new set of singers must be recruited and trained, and grafted onto the stock remaining. Each day something needs to be added to the Choir's accomplishment; which will always be measured against wholly professional standards. The training required is seen as a proper reflection of the educational purpose of the University as a whole, and much has been achieved in recent years to integrate the work and achievement of the Choir into the warp and woof of the University's academic life. In a similar, altogether contemporary way, the Choir widens its reputation through its recordings and tours, and its regular webcast of services from the chapel. To be sure, it sings its services in a medieval Oxford chapel according to a traditional liturgy, but its music continues to serve a contemporary need for spiritual reflection with the context of artistic endeavour.



Evensong at New College

The office of Evensong is the principal liturgy sung by today's chapel choir. The service still observes the form of the Book of Common Prayer. In this recording it begins with an Introit by Sir William Harris (1883-1973), who was Organist of New College from 1919 to 1929: a setting of Spenser's poem *Faire is the heaven*, first performed in the chapel in 1926, and dedicated to Sir Hugh Allen. It displays considerable craft (in writing for eight voices), but above all an inspirational response to the text, articulated not only by an ear for vocal sonority but also by striking and original harmonic devices.

The opening versicles and responses follow immediately, these in a well-known setting by William Smith (1603-1645). Psalms 84 and 85 are sung to chants by J. Coward and G. Martin respectively, in an antiphonal arrangement at the half verse. Each of the two lessons is followed by its canticle, Magnificat and Nunc dimittis, here in settings by Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924). Stanford was no stranger to Oxford and New College, visiting the college several times during Sir Hugh Allen's day. His setting of the evening canticles in G major appeared in 1904. It is characterised not only by its solos (treble in the Magnificat and bass in the Nunc dimittis) but its generally reserved tone, grandiloquent only in the Gloria of the Magnificat.

Preceding the Magnificat is the evening office hymn, *Te lucis ante terminum*, sung to a plainchant setting with a simple harmonisation of verse 2 by Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585). Smith's music appears again for the responses after the Creed, with John Farmer's (d. c.1603) Lord's Prayer interleaved (in an edition by Sir David Lumsden, Organist 1959-1976).

The two anthems represent contrasting aspects of the British choral tradition. The large-scale setting by Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) of Richard Crashaw's poem *Lo, the full final sacrifice* is the most ambitious of his anthems, characterised by his unmistakable sinuous lyricism, and held together by recurring motives. It was written in 1946 for St Matthew's Northampton, a commission that recognised his increasing stature in the sphere of sacred music in England. *Hail, gladdening light* by Charles Wood (1866-1926) is closer in date to Stanford's G major canticles. It rounds off the fully choral material by returning to Harris's double choir idiom, contrasting the blaze of A major light of the opening with the hushed C sharp minor shades of evening.

The said prayers use the formulas proper to a Gaude evensong, with a prayer for the Founder and other benefactors. The words of the final hymn *Glory to thee my God this night* are by Bishop Thomas Ken (1637-1711), fellow of New College during the Commonwealth and at the Restoration, and Bishop of Bath and Wells. These words are inextricably linked to the melody of Tallis, whose canonic working is revealed in the last verse.

The music of this recording is not intended to represent a particular epoch in the chapel's long history. It is freely eclectic, and evokes most clearly the experience that someone might have when walking into Evensong at New College during University Term. To be sure, there is an accent on the Founder and celebration, but what you hear is typical of the daily round of liturgical choral music, an activity which must count as our closest connection with the Founder.

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William of Wykeham and New College

William of Wykeham (1324–1404), one of the most spectacular careerists of the Middle Ages, rose from provincial Hampshire obscurity to become surveyor of building work at Windsor Castle (1356–61), chief surveyor of the King's Works (1359), Edward III's private secretary (1361), keeper of the Privy Seal (1363–7), twice Chancellor (1367–71 and 1389–91), and bishop of Winchester (1367–1404), the richest see in England. An active bishop, though lacking any higher education, he amassed great wealth through high office and ecclesiastical preferment. For forty years, Wykeham operated at the centre of politics and government, earning a reputation for thoroughness, opportunism, acquisitiveness and a certain flexibility of principle.

Wykeham's public career coincided with a period of economic crisis, military defeat, political violence and social unrest. Successive returns of the Black Death plague savagely reduced the population, disrupting patterns of material life, stimulating an enhanced sense of inescapable mortality. The Hundred Years War with France turned expensively and decisively against the English, while government repeatedly descended into vicious factional bloodletting, culminating in 1399 with the deposition of Richard II and usurpation of Henry IV. In 1381, a combination of restrictive landlords, failed political leadership and inequitable poll taxes provoked the Peasants' Revolt, the most concerted and dangerous popular rebellion of the Middle Ages.

Wykeham's reaction revolved around the urgency of personal salvation and the restoration of the numbers and quality of the English clergy which had suffered greatly from these upheavals. Within an earnest if conventional spiritual life, with a special devotion since schooldays to the cult of the Virgin Mary, Wykeham's concerns for his and his benefactors' souls and the health of the church found

concrete expression in his elaborate chantry chapel in the nave he built at Winchester cathedral and in the colleges he founded.

Wykeham began buying property for a college in Oxford in 1369. His embryonic community of scholars established by 1371 became in 1379 'the College of St Mary of Winchester in Oxford', known as early as 1392 as New College. Between 1380 and 1403 the main buildings, designed by William Wynford (d.1404), were erected: the main quadrangle, chapel and hall (by 1386); cloisters, for processions and burials (1400), bell tower (1403). Wykeham founded New College to honour God and the Virgin Mary; to commemorate his soul and those of his benefactors; and to increase the supply of educated clergy. Intended to be as much a chantry as a clerical seminary, the college was to contain a Warden, seventy fellows, including undergraduates as well as graduates. All were to come from the school Wykeham began at Winchester (1382) to equip his scholars with basic Latin. To fulfil Wykeham's central purpose of commemoration, ten chaplains and three chapel clerks were to maintain the round of requiem masses even if lack of funds prevented there being enough money to support any fellows. Integral to the scheme was a resident choir of sixteen 'poor boys' under twelve, 'competent at reading and singing', who paid their way by serving the fellows in hall. Wykeham's statutes laid great emphasis on the details of how services, including daily antiphons to the Virgin Mary, were to be conducted. Wykeham's plan translated monastic idealism, coherence and discipline to a secular college. In size, thoroughness of design and magnificence of provision, nothing in Oxford or Cambridge at the time matched New College. The survival of the choir for six hundred years despite changing religious dogma, fashion, allegiance and law, is not the least of New College's continued debt to its founder.

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The Choir of New College Oxford

Trebles

Robert Brooks, Corin Cole, Guy Cutting, Jacob Dennison, Andrew Doll, Samuel Ellison, Jack Frith-Powell, Luke Frith-Powell, Felix Higginbottom, Otta Jones, Joseph Littlewood, Caspian Mitchard, Sasha Ockenden, Matthew Thorns, Harry Vance-Law

Altos

Owain John, Dana Marsh, Stephen Taylor, Matthew Venner

Tenors

Benedict Linton, Alastair Putt, William Rolls, Will Unwin

Basses

Simon Beston, Laurence Cramp, Tom Edwards, Thomas Rogers, Gregory Sanderson, Stefan Schrijnen

Organ Scholar: Nicholas Wearne

Assisting Organist: Robert Patterson

Director: Edward Higginbottom

Recorded in the Chapel of New College, Oxford 14 July 2003

Produced and engineered by Adrian Hunter

In common with other cds on the novum label the images used to present this recording all have close associations with New College. The front cover shows William of Wykeham's magnificent gold crozier, richly ornamented with enamelled portraits of musicians and their instruments. The portrait of William of Wykeham is a copy of the portrait by Samson Strong which hangs in the College chapel and shows William in front of the college he founded. Both are reproduced with the permission of the Warden and Scholars of New College.

