
The decline of the gallery tradition

Christopher Turner

In this brief exploratory paper Christopher Turner questions the accepted view that the demise of the bands was directly as a result of the Oxford Movement. While acknowledging that the movement did have an enormous effect on the life of the Anglican Church during the 19th century, he attempts to show that many other factors need to be considered in understanding this complex period of change, and that the simplistic view adopted by many writers should be challenged.

Towards the end of his life the Rev. Richard Hiley, who had been appointed to the living of All Saints' Church, Wighill, Yorkshire in 1863, wrote:

In the somnolent days of the Church the clerk was often the only responder, the rest of the congregation being totally silent. When it came to singing, the vicar would try to enlist some music, and any performer on any instrument, violin, cello, flute, clarinet, bassoon, cornopean, and any man who fancied he had a voice, would find his way to the choir and endeavour to swell the tide of song. When the organ or harmonium became more general, the orchestral accompaniment disappeared, and the choir became more under the control of the organist.

(Hiley, 1899, p. 360)

This passage raises two important issues. The first relates to the 'control' exercised by organists over church choirs following the demise of the gallery bands¹ and, by implication, the leadership of the bands themselves during the preceding Georgian period. This is potentially an educational issue and will not concern us here. The second is the seemingly simple transition of musical resources from west gallery (or singing pew) to the chancel. Although this is described by the writer, he neglects to furnish any reason for the change. The aim of the writer of this paper is to examine this transition and the various changes which led to it in the belief that such understanding is essential to our cognisance of the musical provision in church and chapel during the 18th and 19th centuries.

¹ The term 'gallery band' is used throughout to mean a voluntary group of singers and instrumentalists who, often positioned in a specially erected western gallery, provided the musical parts of public worship during the Georgian period.

Musical ineptitude and conduct of the psalm singers

It is commonly held that one of the underlying causes for the demise of gallery bands was their musical ineptitude and conduct. There are certainly numerous contemporary references which point to the incompetence of many of the bands, the perceived paucity of much of their material by their social superiors² and, above all, their often bizarre behaviour.³ John Skinner, the unpopular and unfortunate vicar of Camerton in Somerset, appears from his diary to have been embroiled in a continuing dispute with his band throughout the greater part of his incumbency. On Sunday 3 June 1821 he recorded that:

White and some of the Singers assembled at the Camerton Inn were so riotous and contentious in their cups on Saturday night, that some were disqualified from appearing at Church on account of black eyes received in the affray; as the School sung in their stead, I shall employ them again next Sunday, and if the disorder be repeated, dissolve the band altogether.

(Coombs, 1984, p. 162)

Notwithstanding, the band continued and were still in evidence in the parish church a year later. However, according to Skinner, they were unreformed in their habits and, on Sunday 14 July 1822, he recorded that:

During the evening service the Church was crowded; and the singers who have been in a state of intoxication since yesterday, being offended because I would not suffer them to chaunt the service after the First Lesson, put on their hats and left the Church. This is the most open breach of all religious decorum I have ever witnessed ... There could not have been less than twelve or fourteen who quitted the Church at the same instant, thinking I should miss their aid when the Psalm was to be sung before the sermon. But I was fully prepared to go through the whole service, even without the assistance of the girls, whom I ordered to sing the hundredth psalm: O serve the Lord with

² J. A. La Trobe, a 19th-century writer on church music, suggests that 'the execrable composition may be rejected, and one in better taste substituted' (La Trobe, 1831, p. 342).

³ See, for example, the paper in this volume, 'Trouble in the gallery' by Ken Baddley

gladness, and come before His presence with a song. The sermon followed ... The people were very attentive, and I found no difficulty in delivering myself with sufficient energy – the greater part of the discourse being extempore – excited by the hardened conduct of the people who had thus openly shewn disregard to religion. Their only excuse, if any can be offered in such a case, is that they were acting under the influence of liquor, which I verily believe was the case.

(Coombs, 1984, pp. 200–1)

Skinner was obviously upset by the behaviour of the singers, especially when he discovered that they had withdrawn from the church to the Red Post Public House. On the following morning he wrote a poem about the occurrence, which was printed anonymously in the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, in order to chasten his unworthy musicians. On the following Sunday the gallery was unoccupied and the girls from the school sang at both services – a solution which Skinner found preferable to:

the great Bulls of Basan in the gallery ... who, though never in tune or time, were so highly conceited of their own abilities they thought of nothing else the whole time of the service. If they chuse to withdraw themselves, we shall do better without them.

(Coombs, 1984, p. 207)

The following week the girls were on holiday and not available to sing in church, but two members of the band returned for the evening service having first offered their apologies to Skinner!

Contemporary writers often commented on the pride and arrogance exhibited by gallery band members. Such qualities could, and often did, become a cause of conflict between clergy and musicians. The Rev. William Holland, vicar of Overstowey, Somerset, recorded that on Sunday 12 July 1807 there were:

Very few at Church, I never remember so few. The singers, except a few, were gone to Lydiard to Sing and have a dinner given to them and I fear carried many of the congregation with them. Our singers are become famous in the Country, which makes them vain and fond of Exhibiting themselves and I think they think more of their own Praise than the Praise of God. As we of our own Parish subscribed for the instruments I observed that they should not forsake us in the time of our own Service, for we did not buy the instruments for the Amusement of other Churches ... However, we had tolerable singing notwithstanding.

(Ayres, 1984, p. 151)

The invitation for a group of singers to visit another church and be accompanied by a following of members of their congregation suggests

that they were held in high regard. This seems to have been the case at Overstowey and, apart from a few minor grumbles, Holland is generally complimentary about the standard of singing in the church:

Sunday 13th March, 1803: [I] must observe that in Church there was [the] best singing I ever heard. The Trumpet shall sound and the Dead be raised was quite sublime ...

Sunday 17th April, 1803: The Church here was very crowded indeed and very good singing ...

Sunday 3rd November, 1805: The Singers begin to shine as Musicians and the two Hunts blow the flute capitally.

(Ayres, 1984, pp. 76–7, 81, 120)

There are a few occasions when Holland registers his displeasure at the efforts of his musicians as, for example, the entry for Sunday 28 December 1806 where he noted that there was ‘Terrible work with the Instruments in the Singing Gallery’ (Ayres, 1984, p. 134). However, it would seem that the gallery musicians at Holland’s church, and presumably those of many of his contemporaries,¹ seem to have fulfilled their musical function adequately and, if Holland’s experience was in any way typical, it seems unlikely that the behaviour of the gallery musicians *per se* was central to their demise.

The Georgian period

The sixty-year reign of George III from 1760 to 1820 had witnessed vast changes in the country’s infrastructure, including the modernisation of agriculture through enclosure and mechanisation; the exploitation of coal, iron and steam; and improvements in transport which included the building of canals and ‘Macadam’ roads. It was a period of economic upheaval accompanied by social unrest as a predominantly agricultural nation moved steadily towards industrialisation. The period included the rise and suppression of the London Corresponding Society, founded in 1792 by artisans in London for the circulation of radical literature, and ended with the ‘massacre of Peterloo’ at Manchester in 1819.

Despite such unrest the Church of England did not alter materially during George III’s reign. The 18th-century evangelical awakening pioneered by John and Charles Wesley had proved ineffectual in its ability to influence change within the established church. Even the newly created hymns of Watts and Wesley were rejected because they were

¹ For notable exceptions see the diaries of John Skinner (Coombs, 1984) and Francis Kilvert (Wait, 1977).

of 'human composure' and therefore unconnected with the Psalter or Book of Common Prayer.¹ It was probably the Methodists' failure to reform the Church of England from within which led to the final break in 1795 when they established themselves as an independent body.² This was possibly the greatest blow inflicted upon the Church of England since its formation in the 16th century and one which, together with the eventual social and economic emancipation of Roman Catholics, led to a period of attempted regeneration in the face of increasing secularisation.

With the egress of the Methodists came the inevitable split in family allegiances between church and chapel. The membership of many gallery bands must have been similarly affected. Indeed, it seems that some bands transferred, or at least considered transferring, their allegiance *en masse* from the Anglican church to the Methodists. On Monday 15 July 1822 Skinner reported that, following the incident referred to above:

[I] visited Cottle and West ... Whilst at Cottle's, the son ... – speaking of the conduct of the singers – said he had understood they had gone from Church immediately to the Red Post Public House, and had determined to sing in future at the Meeting-House, where the gallery was to be enlarged for their accommodation. I had heard that Mrs Jarrett had been applied to by Isaac Green – a staunch Methodist – to contribute to this enlargement, but had not yet done so.

(Coombs, 1984, p. 203)

Despite the establishment of the Methodist Church, a small number of evangelicals, including those of the 'Clapham Sect', remained faithful to the Anglican Communion. Although few in number, their influence grew steadily throughout the early 19th century and when Keble preached his sermon at Oxford the evangelical movement was at its zenith. They managed to permeate the moral and religious thinking of many of the clergy and laity, and were noted for their philanthropic activity. However, there were those who accused the evangelicals of belonging to a hypocritical cult

of respectability; one in which the privileged classes (including the clergy) were the benevolent benefactors of the poor while continuing to maintain the status quo within the prevailing social structure.

The social structure of the early 19th century included the continued alliance between the state and the Church of England. The Tory party, who were in government in the early years of the 19th century, had since their formation in 1679 consisted mainly of the aristocracy and ruling classes who supported the church and the monarchy, dominated both Houses of Parliament and attempted to repress the growing tide of radicalism. Politically the Tory party favoured the preservation of the status quo and would only tolerate the most gradual of constitutional and social reform commensurate with avoiding the terrifying violence which had erupted in France. Their opposition to radical reform led to a sharp decline in their fortunes and consequently to those of the Church of England. The established church, which was frequently referred to as 'the Tory Party at prayer' – the Tories described themselves as the 'Church Party' (Morgan, 1984, p. 361) – was subjected to the indifference and even the open hostility of the working classes. With west galleries occupied mainly by labourers and artisans,³ the political alliance between church and state must have accounted for some of the friction between the clergy and their singers that was noted in contemporary writing. MacDermott (1922, pp. 8–9) describes the gallery musicians as:

burning, and well-nigh bursting with zeal in musical matters. They practised singing several nights a week at home or church ... devoting most of their time to this one and only hobby ... Their true mission in life was to excel in the minstrels' gallery in the parish church of their native village.

Even with such dedication, few church musicians would have been immune to the prevailing atmosphere within the Church of England. This must eventually have led to a decline in morale within the bands and of their role within the local community. Recruitment of new members would have become increasingly difficult, leading to a gradual decline in membership of the bands, most of whom had disappeared from the Anglican Church by about 1860.

¹ Number 14 of the *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical of the Church of England* states that: 'The Common Prayer shall be said or sung distinctly and reverently ... without ... adding any thing in the Matter or Form thereof'.

² John Wesley established the annual conference of Methodists as a corporate body in 1784, although it was still an official body within the Anglican Church. It did not finally break away until 1795 when the sacraments were administered in Methodist chapels (Kenyon, 1981, p. 240).

³ For example, there were two farm hands at Fingringhoe, Essex (Turner, 1995), a farm hand and a shepherd at Winterbourne Abbas, Dorset (Boston and Langwill, 1967, p. 112), and two labourers, a weaver and a woolcomber at Swalcliffe in Oxfordshire (Temperley, 1979, p. 198).

Despite the problems facing the Church of England it continued its close alliance with the state. This relationship was increasingly threatened by changes in the law, including the repeal of the Corporation Act in 1828, the Test Act in 1829, and the introduction of the Reform Bill of 1832, which between them liberated Roman Catholics and placed political power in the hands of the middle classes who formed the backbone of dissent. The church seemed impotent and unable to shield itself from the growing crisis. John Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School, called for the formation of a national church informed by Erastian utilitarianism based on the ideas of the Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus (1524–1583), who upheld the supremacy of the state in ecclesiastical matters.

The Oxford Movement

Arnold's ideas, however, were deemed unacceptable and change in the church came from the small group of intellectuals who founded the Oxford Movement:¹ Keble, Newman, Froude and Pusey. They claimed that the authority of the church was guaranteed by apostolic descent, that it was a divine and autonomous body existing separately from the state, and that the rule of faith was through the Book of Common Prayer (1662). One of the concerns of the movement was to improve the standard of public worship and this, together with other of their ideas, was disseminated through the publication of a series of short *Tracts for the Times*, introduced by Newman in 1833. These slowly bore fruit during the following twenty-year period, and gradually a substantial number of Anglican clergy (and even nonconformist ministers) were influenced by them.

Nevertheless, change was slow, and many of the gallery bands were at the height of their activity and influence during the period 1820–50. This can be seen, for example, in the detailed accounts kept at Easton on the Hill, Northants:

- 1822 Paid for Bassoon Reeds 5/-
- 1825 Paid Drakard for Bassoon Reeds &c. 8/6d
- 1831 Reeds & Bass-vile strings 10/-
- 1832 Bass-vile strings £1-5s 6d
- 1836 for Bassoon Reeds 3/-
- 1838 Clarrent & Basshon Reeds 3/-
- 1839 Paide for Reads 6/-
- 1842 Clarnet Repairing 6/-
- 1843 Paid for Claronet Reeds 3/-
- 1847 Mr Sharps Bill for Reeds & [manuscript] Paper 10/-

In addition to such running costs, a new clarinet was purchased as late as 1845 'for the singers in the hands of F. Tyler'. A lack of systematic research into the use of band instruments in churches and chapels means that such evidence as exists is both uneven and incomplete.² However, the Cornish Instrument List compiled by Woodhouse (1993, pp. 54–7), although containing only a fraction of the instruments which must have existed, does show that band instruments were in regular use post 1833, many surviving in use in the Church of England until the 1860s and a few beyond. The examples given in Panel 1 help to illustrate this point, the dates shown being that of the last recorded use.

The purchase and maintenance of band instruments by church authorities post 1833 provide a clear indication of a continuing commitment by congregations in support of the gallery musicians, and show that, even though the religious and intellectual debate generated by members of the Oxford Movement did contribute to their eventual decline, consideration must be given to other factors – in particular the economic, social and cultural changes of the time.

The industrial revolution

Most of the changes resulted from the industrial revolution which encouraged vast movements of the population who sought employment in the developing towns and industrial areas. The census of 1801 showed that only 20 per cent of the population lived in cities or urban areas. By 1851 this figure had increased to over 50 per cent and by 1901 it had grown to nearly 80 per cent, an almost exact reversal of the situation of a hundred years before.

The gradual break-up of the rural communities, and the social stability they offered, had a devastating effect on various social traditions and customs. This trend was further exacerbated by the greater mobility of the population brought about by the development of the railways and a fundamental change in the way in which people used their leisure time. Improved transport also led to the easy dissemination of new ideas and fashions through letters, newspapers, magazines and trade catalogues, which tended to remove village communities from the virtual isolation of earlier times. Thus the various regions of the country gradually became socially and culturally more uniform, a shift encouraged by increased government intervention and limited local autonomy.

¹ According to John Newman the Oxford Movement began with a sermon preached by John Keble on the theme of 'national apostasy' at Oxford in 1833.

² Some work has been published by Boston and Langwill (1967), MacDermott (1922; 1948), and Woodhouse (1993).

Panel 1 Date of last recorded use of band instruments

Altarnum	Strings	1858
Breage	Serpent	1860
Davidstowe	Violin and Cello	1869
Forrabury	B. Viol	1858
Hellesvear	Cornet, Clarinet and Ophicleide	1874
Jacobstowe	Violin and Cello	1865
Ladlock	Cello	1862
Lanlivery	Flute	1857
	Cello	1863
Lanteglos-by-Fowey	Cello	1858
Little Petherick	2 Flutes and Cello	1858
Ludgvan	Violin, B. Horn and Cello	1856
Morwenstowe	Strings	1863
Mousehole	Flute, Violin and Cello	1860
Newquay (St Michael)	Flute	1858
North Tamerton	Flutes and Cello	1884
Poughill	Cello	1855
Poundstock	Violin	1860
St Genny's	Violin and Cello	1855
St Martin by Looe	Strings	1854
St Mawgan in Pydar	2 Flutes, 2 Clarinets and 2 Cello's	1860
St Michael Penkivel	Cello	1865
Week St Mary	Cello	1862
Whitstone	Flute, Violins and Cello	1864

The effect on gallery bands was inevitable. Many of the young men and women who left the villages for the towns transferred their allegiance to a nonconformist chapel ('free church') or relinquished the practice of their faith altogether. This is clearly shown in the census of total church and chapel attendance taken on Sunday 30 March 1851. Out of a population of eighteen million, some seven million, or 39 per cent, attended a place of worship. However, it was estimated that a further 30 per cent were unable to attend worship, including very young children, invalids, the aged and infirm, servants and other workers. It was therefore estimated that approximately 60 per cent of those who could attend a place of worship that Sunday did so. Significantly the attendance in rural areas was noticeably higher than in the larger towns with populations in excess of 10,000, with the lowest numbers being recorded in the industrial areas. Interestingly, in both towns and industrial areas, those who did attend a place of worship were more likely to do so in a nonconformist chapel, of which the Methodists were the most popular. In Yorkshire the statistics show that

983,423 attendances were made. Of these some 600,000 were in dissenting chapels of which 431,000 were Methodists. This means that only 35 per cent of the church-going population of Yorkshire visited their parish church for public worship, fewer than those who attended a Methodist chapel.

Given this scenario, it can be seen that the membership of rural gallery bands in the Anglican church was bound to decline as village populations (and therefore the congregations) dwindled. However, the decline would have been protracted, with the established members of the gallery remaining faithfully at their post. These were men who were skilled artisans – for example, a cobbler and blacksmith in Sussex (MacDermott, 1948, p. 5); a thatcher at Winterbourne Abbas (Galpin, 1893); and the foreman of the local mill at Fingringhoe in Essex (Turner, 1995, p. 382). It was the young people who were more likely to move away, thus irrevocably breaking the dissemination of learning skills which were passed from one generation to another and often within the same family. The bands needed the

continuity of a close-knit social framework to exist and prosper.

The new town churches

Towns and cities continued to grow in size and number throughout the 19th century. In 1801 only London had a population in excess of 100,000; by 1851 there were 10 towns or cities of this size, and the number had increased to 33 by 1901. To meet this growth new church buildings were erected and the state grants of 1818 and 1824 were later supplemented through the fund-raising of Charles Bloomfield. Many of the churches built were influenced by the theological and liturgical demands of the Oxford Movement and the architectural theory of Pugin. Even the simplest of his church buildings erected from 1839 onwards focused on the high altar and emphasised the importance of sacramental worship. They also provided for a surpliced choir in the chancel accompanied by an organ: a monastic custom continued in an unbroken tradition in the cathedrals.

Following years of decline and neglect, the image of the cathedral chorister had been greatly improved by 'the chorister's friend' Maria Hackett, who wrote *A Brief Account of Cathedral and Collegiate Schools with an Abstract of their Statutes and Endowments* in 1827. S. S. Wesley was also to raise public awareness in *A Few Words on Cathedral Music and a Musical System of the Church with a Plan of Reform* in 1849. It is interesting to note that, although the concept of a surpliced choir is often associated with the Oxford Movement, the first church to introduce such a choir seems to have been St Mary Magdalene, Newark-on-Trent, in 1814 – nineteen years before Keble preached his seminal sermon and four years before the introduction of a similar choir at Leeds parish church.

A new breed of predominantly young clergy influenced by the Oxford Movement were drawn to the new churches in industrial parishes. Branded as 'slum parsons', the Christian belief of such clergy was inseparable from their socialist principles and they became champions of reform, working alongside the Chartists and other political radicals. Unlike many of their predecessors, this new breed of Anglo-Catholic clergy took ownership of the liturgy, which included control of the music. In many instances this included supplementing metrical psalms with translations of Greek and Latin hymns by Edward Caswall (1814–1878) and John Mason Neale (1818–1866), the provision of music for the communion service and, in many parishes, the introduction of plainsong. The musical input was led and supported by a choir and organ.

Hymns Ancient and Modern

One of the first significant outcomes of the Oxford Movement, and one which influenced the whole of the Anglican church, was the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1861. So enormous was the impact of this hymnal¹ that it is often cited as marking the end of the west gallery tradition. Rollo Woods has expressed it thus:

The end, or rather, the deliberate destruction, of W[est] G[allery] music I usually credited to the Oxford Movement, with the coup de grâce delivered by *Hymns Ancient & Modern*.

(Woods, 1995, p. 132)

Certainly the editors aimed to produce a book which reflected a broader approach in the selection of music for congregational singing than had been available during the period dominated by the gallery bands. They were also concerned with questions of taste and set out to:

resist firmly any incursion of the florid style associated with everything in eighteenth century English piety that the Oxford Movement found offensive. For the hearty music of Methodism the hymnal editors substituted the serenity of plainsong.

(Routley, 1957, p. 116)

This passage draws attention to the change in musical taste which was effected during the early 19th century. Such changes in taste almost invariably lead to a condemnation of the earlier style by the proponents of the newer as being of inferior quality. Sutcliffe Smith makes quotation from an unacknowledged writer which supports this view:

Many of the tunes which are even now sung in the churches might with great advantage be handed over to the 'Ranters!'

(quoted by Smith, 1928, p. 107)

Despite such views, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was not always welcome. Watson, the parish clerk of Reepham-cum-Kerdiston, recorded in his diary, account and commonplace book his disapproval of the new book which replaced the familiar metrical psalmody (Linnell, 1961, pp. 180–7).

The new style of hymn tune, which was closely related to the Victorian part song, is said to have originated with a group of thirteen tunes which Dykes supplied for Grey's *Manual* in 1857 (Clarke, 1962, p. 1). The adoption of this new style led many contemporary musicians to retrospectively denounce the music of the gallery bands as being at best mediocre or rustic and at worst crude or vulgar. However, this denouement has been

¹ 'Well over 150 million copies were sold in the first hundred years of the book's existence' (Baker and Welsby, 1993, p. 88).

contorted and used to argue a further cause for the decline in the popularity of the bands by suggesting that the style changed because the music was so impoverished. It also underlines the subjective nature of musical taste and of the constantly changing aesthetic values within society. Inevitably, there was poorly crafted music unsuited to its purpose within the gallery tradition, just as there is in any period. However, not all of the music performed by the gallery bands can be condemned for reasons of artistic incompetence and, although it did become unfashionable towards the middle of the 19th century, many of the psalm tunes, which had formed the staple diet of music-making in both church and chapel, survived and continued to appear in the new hymn-books which proliferated during the Victorian period. It is interesting to note that, of the 205 tunes contained in the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*,¹ 36 (that is 17.56 per cent) were originally set to metrical psalms and had been published in earlier collections which date from the Georgian period. It is true that anthems and settings of the canticles composed for use within the gallery tradition were almost totally superseded due largely to the enormous influence of composers such as Spohr, Mendelssohn and Gounod. Each of these visited England and brought with them examples of sacred music which crossed the denominational boundaries and underpinned:

[the] basic principles of Christian morality [which] were so generally accepted that they numbered among the current truths, side by side with the necessity of thrift, freedom of enterprise and the virtues of self-reliance and manliness.

(Bédarida, 1976, p. 87)

The move to the east

Of course, not all clergy identified themselves with the Oxford Movement, although, by the second half of the 19th century, such was its impact that very few parishes were unaffected. Medieval churches were refurbished and clergy more aware of their pastoral responsibilities. With the decline in their morale it seems that many of the gallery bands, unable to sustain themselves for the reasons already given, bowed to the pressures of change and relinquished their role in the gallery – often without complaint. Indeed, many of the ex-gallery members donned cassock and surplice and moved into the chancel. For example, two years after the Rev. William Dickson arrived at

Goostrey in 1854, he disbanded the gallery musicians and installed a surpliced choir which included most of the old singers:

The choir, established in 1850, is now very satisfactory and efficient. It consists of 8 first trebles, 4 second trebles or altos, 2 tenors and 3 basses. The canticles are chanted antiphonally; the responses, &c, monotoned; an anthem is sung after the Third Collect at Evensong (when there is no baptism). They practise twice a week: - on Saturday secular music [and] on Sunday sacred.

(Dickson, 1895)

However, the logistics of the move from gallery to chancel were not always easily accomplished. At Aldeburgh in Suffolk the Rev. Henry Thompson:

put the choir into cassocks and surplices [and] called upon the people who were in the habit of sitting in the Chancel pews asking them to let him allot them seats elsewhere. When he met with blank refusal, he did not insist, but waited patiently. One old lady continued to sit with the surpliced choir-boys for several years. Always the first person in church on Sunday mornings, she marched up the centre aisle, followed by a meek but embarrassed husband, whom she motioned to precede her into the pew.

(Thompson, 1969, p. 62)

Many of the instrumentalists probably attached themselves to the growing number of non-conformist bands who seem to have survived longer than their Anglican counterparts. Panel 2 (overleaf) shows a photograph taken around the turn of the century shows the Methodist band of Crockleford Heath, Essex, whose successors survived until the late 1980s. The other photograph, taken in the 1880s of General Booth with a Salvation Army band at Penzance in Cornwall, shows Charles Fry with his brother, two violinists who transferred from a local gallery band. In some cases the church offered their instruments for sale as the brief entry in the churchwardens' accounts at Easton on the Hill, Northants, show: in 1852 they 'Recd of Tyler for a clarionet 7s, 0d'. As Samuel Butler expressed it in his novel *The Way of All Flesh*:

Gone now are the clarinet, the violincello, and the trombone ... Gone is that scarebabe Stentor, that bellowing bull of Bashan, the village blacksmith, gone is the melodious carpenter, gone brawny shepherd with the red hair who roared more lustily than all ...

(Butler, 1903, p. 57)

It was not only the musicians who disappeared; many of the galleries were deemed to be unsightly and of no aesthetic value and followed their former occupants into oblivion during extensive renovation programmes.

¹ A total of 312 tunes were printed to be used with the 273 hymns. Of these, 107 were repeated – two tunes occurring three times.

Panel 2 Nonconformist bands of the late 19th century

The Methodist band of Crockleford Heath, Essex (around 1900)



The Salvation Army band of Penzance, Cornwall (1880s)



The surpliced choir, harmonium and organ

The surpliced choir provided a model of alternative musical provision in even the smallest church. The gallery band at Fingringhoe disappeared without apparent comment in 1861 when a small harmonium was purchased and on which the vicar's wife accompanied the newly formed choir. David Ward (1994) has stated that 'the Oxford Movement, accompanied by the organ and harmonium, did for the west gallery choirs'. This view is reflected in the writing of Thomas Hardy, where the discontented gallery musicians are forced to disband in favour of the schoolmistress Fancy Day presiding at the vicar's cabinet-organ (Hardy, 1872). However, the gallery bands apart, the introduction of an organ or harmonium was not always greeted with enthusiasm by members of the congregation. Watson, the parish clerk of

Reepham-cum-Kerdiston, recorded in his diary, account and commonplace book the disquiet felt within the congregation when 'Mrs Suckling [wife of the curate] played two hymns and two chants' on the newly introduced harmonium which replaced the gallery musicians (Linnell, 1961, pp. 180–7). This would point to a congregation content with the existing musical provision and not calling for the radical changes which seem to have been instigated by a member of the clergy supported by his wife.

Nevertheless, the industrial revolution enabled churches with limited financial resources to acquire cheap mass-produced mechanical and keyboard instruments in the form of barrel organs, dummy-organists, harmoniums, American organs and, of course, pipe organs. It would be wrong to assume that the introduction of such instruments was as a direct result of the Oxford Movement. William Stafford, writing three years before Keble preached his sermon, said that:

in many of our churches and chapels, the most vile method of singing prevails. The use of the organ, however, which is now becoming very general, even in dissenting chapels, is gradually introducing a better taste in this important point of divine worship.

(Stafford, 1830, p. 375)

Williams and Owen (1988, p. 230) give the period of the barrel organ in parish churches as from around 1760 to 1840, showing that they existed during the height of the gallery band period and long before the influence of the Oxford Movement. The installation of pipe organs in town churches had continued without a break since the Restoration period, and a large number of metrical psalm books and anthems designed for parish use contain a figured bass for organ as well as instrumental parts.¹ Most gallery bands in Anglican churches ceased functioning in the decade following the Great Exhibition of 1851, where a large number of keyboard instruments were displayed, including harmoniums, which had not been developed until the first decade of the 19th century.²

¹ *The Psalms of David for the Use of Parish Churches*, Edward Miller, 1790, was produced for use with organ accompaniment, although three-part versions of the tunes without figured bass were included in an appendix where they were transposed into suitable keys for band instruments.

² The Boston pipe-organ firm of Ebenezer Goodrich (1782–1841) made a reed organ as early as 1809 (Ord-Hume, 1986, p. 50).

Cheap music and the sight-singing movement

Industrialisation also brought about the advent of cheap music printing which enabled the dissemination of continental music on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Cheap music publishing resulted largely from the business acumen of Alfred Novello, whose firm held a dominant position in the field from 1829 onward. Novello attracted and promoted new generations of composers throughout the Victorian period, many of whom emulated the styles of Mendelssohn and Gounod,¹ although their writing was scaled to meet the needs and limited resources of the majority of chapel and parish church choirs at the time (see Bennett, 1887). Always quick to exploit the commercial possibilities, Novello exerted an enormous influence from 1844 with the decision to include music supplements in the monthly publication, *Musical Times*. This led to the dissemination of a far wider range of material than had been commonly available to the gallery musicians. It is interesting to note that the repertoire list of the surpliced choir at Goostey, Cheshire, in 1854 was built entirely from pieces included in the *Musical Times* (Dickson, 1895).

The industrial revolution also provided an alternative form of musical involvement which detracted from the activities of the west gallery and eventually resulted in benefits for both nonconformist and Anglican choirs. Although Joseph Alleine opened the first Sunday School in the 17th century, the movement really began in 1780 with

the work of Robert Raikes, who was appalled by the unruly behaviour of children engaged in the fur industry. The sol-fa sight-singing movement grew out of the Sunday Schools through the work of Sarah Glover in Norwich, which was successfully emulated and extended by John Curwen, a young Congregationalist minister, who was introduced to the method in 1840. However, the sight-singing movement was soon adopted for use with working-class adults by John Hullah, and taught in the Mechanics Institutes. Hullah stressed that his system was both Christian and socially integrated. In *The Duty and Advantage of Learning to Sing* of 1846 he wrote:

Our meetings include many a family circle entire – husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children; and these, in many instances, taught by one another.

(quoted by Pearsall, 1973, p. 113)

Christian in concept such singing classes may have been, but they were secular in both foundation and function, and had the effect of drawing more people away from the galleries. The sight-singing movement was also adopted in the elementary school system and, although there is little evidence to suggest that tonic sol-fa was widely used in the Anglican church, the National Schools set up in 1811 by the Church of England were an obvious source of supply for the treble line of the surpliced choirs. However, provision for the instrumental tuition which had been an essential part of gallery tradition was not made.

¹ For an indication of the anthems published by Novello and used in parish churches from 1844, see Scholes, 1947, pp. 555–9.

