



**Ninety years of music
at
St Ninian's Episcopal Church
Comely Bank, Edinburgh**



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Organist and Director of Music

2009
**Organists of St Ninian's Episcopal Church,
Comely Bank, Edinburgh**

St Ninian's Episcopal Church, Comely Bank, dedicated in 1921

1921	Alexander McGill
1945	A. Marshall P Bridges D Gwilt
1945 - 1950	Daniel Gunn
1950 - c. 1955	Mr Thomson

New church building opened in 1952

c. 1955 – c. 1968	Daniel Gunn
c. 1968 – 1970	Mr Pringle
1970 – 1974	Keith Foulds
1974 – 1979	Michael Richards
1980 - 1984	Duncan Spiers
1984 - 1990	William Haig
1990 – 1993	Violet Wallace
1993 - 1998	Alberto Massismo
1998 - 2000	Gill MacKenzie
2000 – 2006	Andrew Morley
2007 - 2009	Tom Edwards

St Ninian's Episcopal Church had its origins in a mission church established in St Bernard's Row, Stockbridge by Holy Trinity Church, Dean Bridge in the mid-nineteenth century. The small church occupied premises on the first floor above Trinity Episcopal School which opened in 1864.



Holy Trinity, Dean Bridge, Edinburgh

Throughout the later nineteenth, and early twentieth Edinburgh continued to expand and as the Comely Bank area was growing in population, it was decided to move the congregation from their rather cramped quarters and build a new church on the edge of the city beyond Comely Bank Terrace. The site chosen was then on the edge of the city. The Flora Stevenson School, Fettes College, the old Poor House and a few houses in Craigleith Road, were virtually the only other buildings.

The architect was John Peddie, who also designed St Kentigern's, Gilmore Place and Holy Cross, Davidson's Mains, and carried out significant work on the interiors of St John's, Princes Street, St Paul's and St George's, and Palmerston Place Church. The foundation stone of the church was laid in 1920 and in the following year the Church was dedicated by George Walpole, the Primus of Edinburgh, in honour of St Ninian of Whithorn. The first incumbent of the new church was Revd Augustus Clark-Barnacle.

At the opening of St Ninian's Alexander McGill was appointed organist and the choir, composed of men, women and children, was led by Mr. A. Sharp. In turn Mr Sharp was replaced as choir leader by Thomas B Smith, who is commemorated on a bench in the church garden. By 1936 the organist, probably still Alexander McGill, was paid £2 a month, and in 1943 the organist was paid the grand total of £17.10s, whilst choir and organ expenses came to £3.3s.9d! Throughout its history St Ninian's has always been fortunate to be served by a team of dedicated organists and in 1945 three organists were paid for their services at the church, possibly during an interregnum between organists: viz - A Marshall £8.2s.6d. P Bridge £5.12s.6d. D. Gwily £1.5s.0d.



St Ninian's Picture Archive

St Ninian's Episcopal Church, Comely Bank, 1939

Shortly after 1945 Daniel Gunn was appointed as organist of St Ninian's and served until 1950 when the vestry reported, *'As a result of his recent operation and upon the advice of his doctor, Mr Gunn unfortunately had to resign from the post of organist. He much regretted having to take the decision but, naturally, his health must come first. It was with regret that the Church Committee received his resignation. They recorded in their minutes their deep appreciation of his services to St Ninian's Church in his capacity as Organist. We are sure that the congregation would like their appreciation recorded here as well. It is always a sad thing when a faithful servant of the church has to give up through health reasons. However when he has fully recovered from the results of his operation in about a year he has offered to fill any gaps during holiday periods and so on. Thank you Mr. Gunn for your faithful service and we hope and pray that you may soon be restored to full health. The parish priest with the concurrence of the Church Committee has appointed Mr. Thomson, as organist, Mr. Thomson has for the past three or four months been acting organist during Mr. Gunn's absence and we are most grateful to him for stepping into the gap, and we bid him welcome to his new post.'*

In the same year as Mr. Gunn's resignation and Mr. Thomson's appointment concern was expressed about the quality of the congregational singing, and a more regular congregational hymn practice was suggested: *'Further thought has been given to the suggestion that a practice should be held on weekday nights. This, it would seem, is not very feasible... we must therefore stick to our present arrangement [Sunday evenings] When we have a congregational singing practice please do you best to come.'*

It had always been intended that the church built in 1920 should be replaced by a larger and more permanent one and throughout the 1940s this aim had given impetus to the fundraising activities of the congregation. A new church, at right



St Ninian's Picture Archive

The Interior of the new church, 1952

angles to the old one and running parallel to Comely Bank Road, was designed by Mr. R B Taylor of Edinburgh and dedicated on the Eve of Whitsunday 1952, by Rt Revd Kenneth Warner, Bishop of Edinburgh. The former church building was adapted as the church hall, congregation members having to pass outside between the two buildings.

It appears that either at the removal to the new church, or shortly before, the choir had ceased to function and that not long after the opening of the new building Dan Gunn resumed the position of organist which he held until the 1960s, when he resigned and was succeeded by Mr. Pringle.

In 1970 Keith Foulds was appointed organist and following encouragement from the Rector, Fr David Jowitt, began steps to re-constitute the choir. In 1972 Fr. Jowitt wrote, *'Once again, I raise the question of a choir at St Ninian's! It would be a great help in our worship if there were a body of singers in our church who could give a real lead to our singing in the congregation. This is specially the case now we are singing the psalms, but it would also make it more possible to use less familiar tunes, even sometimes to introduce an unfamiliar one, instead of always sticking to those we know already. Anyone, who is interested, and I hope there will be several who are... should have a word with Mr. Foulds.'* In 1974 Keith Foulds resigned and relocated to Suffolk in England, the vestry commenting upon his departure that he was a *'marvellous organist and has always given us maximum co-operation'*. The next organist Michael Richards continued with the development of the choir and in 1975 an anonymous gift of a number of musical editions of the hymn book was given to the church. Fr. Jowitt commented *'These are intended to help the recently formed informal choir, and we are grateful to the kind donor. I should like to say at the same time how much the contribution of Mr. Richard's choir is appreciated. In recent weeks we have all felt that the singing has a new clarity and verve'*.

Michael Richards resigned in 1979 and was replaced by Duncan Spiers who expanded the work and range of the choir, and wrote in the February 1980 edition of the St Ninian's magazine *'I think the sixteen or so young people who have come*

together to sing have rather surprised themselves with the splendid noise they make. Andrew Campling [student attachment to the church from Coates Hall] has produced some delightful canons from Taize: we are learning the Kyrie and Agnus Dei from Darkes Mass in F and I hope we shall sing the Passion of St Matthew again on Palm Sunday. Above all it is great fun, and there is now a regular practice on Tuesday evenings'. The following month a retiring collection was taken in aid of the choir fund and Spiers wrote 'The choir is establishing itself in an informal way with some considerable ability. An evening was spent recently in the Cathedral. Singing in a large building with a good acoustic was as useful as it was enjoyable. Now there is a need. Full music editions of the Hymn Book cost £3.25 each [!], also to facilitate better Psalm singing, we should like to have copies of the parish psalter for the congregation. They are less expensive but we need lots of them. So we plan to raise some money by having a musical evening in the hall'.

Following Spiers' departure in 1984 and the appointment of William Haig as organist the choir disbanded. A survey of the back of the church in the same year revealed it to be crowded with the organ, two harmoniums and a piano, all of which, save the organ were removed.

In 1987 the then Rector Revd George Spencer begged the congregation to '*reduce the amount of talking before the 10.30 Eucharist...and [echoing the thoughts of every organist before and since] remember the voluntaries on the organ are meant to instil devotion not cover up conversations*'. Revd Spencer also arranged for Choral Evensong to be sung in June of that year by the lay clerks from St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral and students from St Mary's Music School. In the following year an electronic organ was trialled following the demise of the previous instrument and the vestry decided to move the organ to the front to enable the organist to accompany the singing more easily.

In 1989 the vestry entered into discussion about the finding a permanent replacement for the organ and a small group visited a pipe organ in St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Paisley, and following advice from Dr. Dennis Townhill, organist of St Mary's Cathedral, rejected the possibility of installing it in St Ninian's. It was resolved to continue the trial of the electronic instrument installed in the church by Edinburgh Organ Studio.

In March 1990 William Haig resigned as Organist and was replaced by Violet Wallace who travelled a considerable distance to play every Sunday. It was Violet Wallace who resurrected the idea of a choir singing throughout Advent and the Christmas period. In 1993 Alberto Massimo was appointed organist at a fee of £500 per annum. The church was also used as a rehearsal venue by the Edinburgh Chamber Orchestra conducted by Massimo.

In 1994 the vestry again considered '*The possibility of replacing the present electronic organ with a pipe organ now surplus to requirements of a neighbouring church*'. The vestry had identified an instrument currently in Saughton Congregational Church which could have been installed in the church. This instrument was rejected when it became apparent that it was '*necessary to alter the ceiling line [of the church] to install it*' satisfactorily in the building. Further discussion about a new instrument in 1997 was negated by work being done to the fabric and grounds of the church. The vestry agreed a deal with a property developer to develop the land currently occupied by the original church, now in a poor state of repair, in return for the building of a new entrance to the church, kitchen, amenities, and hall. The Hazel Hall named after Arthur Hazel the Hon. Treasurer and prime mover behind the development of the church grounds was officially opened in January 2000.

Having completed the building works, the vestry again turned to replacing the organ. In 2002 a two manual electronic instrument by Copeman Hart was installed in the same year as the church celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the 'new' church building. The speakers were placed at the west end of the church upon the two new offices which framed the new entrance to the church. As part of the anniversary celebrations recitals were given by Matthew Owen, Master of the Music at St Mary's Cathedral, Palmerston Place, Simon Nieminski, assistant organist at the Cathedral, and Andrew Morley, organist of St Ninian's.

Following the retirement of Revd. Peter Allen in 2006 the Revd. Andrew Bain was installed as Priest-in-Charge of St Ninian's and quickly identified music as an area worthy of growth and mission within the congregation and surrounding community. One of his innovations was to ask for volunteers to form a small choir to contribute to the worship of the church. Several brave volunteers began rehearsing monthly under the direction of the various organists who had played in rotation since the resignation of Andrew Morley as organist in 2006.

In July 2007 Tom Edwards, organ scholar at Morningside Parish Church, Cluny Gardens, was appointed Organist and Director of Music and in consultation with the Priest-in-Charge established the choral scholarship scheme, financed by the generous legacy left to the church by Molly Main.



The Choir augmented by members of the choir of Morningside Parish Church, Cluny Gardens

23 August 2007 – Festival Mass for the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary

John Lyon, George Marshall, Geoff Newton, Peter Knight, Alan Dobson, Revd. Andrew Bain, Audrey Dobson, Joyce Brown, Libby Morton, Pat Treherne, Cleodie McKinnon, Tom Edwards, Hazel Knight, Kathy Rankin, Linda Robertson, Sheila Donaldson, Audrey Marshall, Jeanette Stevenson

Tom Edwards began the rigorous training of the (sometimes reluctant!) volunteers, who quickly, however, rose to the challenge. Only six weeks after his appointment the choir joined with members of the choir from Morningside Parish Church to celebrate a mass for the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin. At that first choral service the music

included George Oldroyd's *Mass for the Quiet Hour* (which quickly became a choir and congregational favourite) and Colin Mawby's *Ave Maria*.

The first group of choral scholars were appointed in October 2007 and included Catriona Hewitson, soprano, Lissa Robertson, alto, and Alan Rowland, bass, all drawn from the music unit at the neighbouring Broughton High School.



The Choir - The Feast of All Saints – November 2007

Tom Edwards, Alan Rowland, Andrew Gillies, George Marshall, Campbell Thomson
Christina Bain, Lissa Robertson, Libby Morton, Pat Treherne, Catriona Hewitson
Sheila Donaldson, Audrey Marshall, Janette Myles, Barbara Thomson, Jeanette Stevenson

In 2008 the choir began a series of Choral Evensongs on Feast Days, the first being held on the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemass) on Sunday 3rd February, when the music included Stanford *Evening Canticles in G*, with Catriona Hewitson, soprano solo, and Alan Rowland, bass solo, and *When to the Temple Mary went* by Johannes Eccard. The organ was played by Simon Walker, organ scholar at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, whose voluntary on that occasion was Flor Peeters *Aria*.

On Good Friday 2008 an augmented choir performed Stainer's *Crucifixion* with Alan Rowland, bass solo, and Mike Towers, tenor solo, Tom Edwards directed from the organ. On Easter Morning the choir sang Harold Darke *Communion service in F* (also sung by the choir formed in the 1980s!) and *Now the green blade riseth* arranged by T. H. Edwards. *Darke* in F was repeated on the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul on the last Sunday in June, on which day the choir also sang choral evensong before standing down for a months holiday. On this occasion the music included Stanford *Evening Canticles in B flat* and Balfour-Gardiner *Evening Hymn*. After Easter the choir had been augmented by Stuart Irvine who took up the position of tenor choral scholar in April 2008.

The choir became robed and gained new choir stalls in the cathedral style, in August 2008 and continued to expand their repertoire with new and challenging pieces, specialising in the performance of polyphony and modern music. In August alone the choir performed music by Joubert, Howells, Leighton, de Severac, Victoria and Tallis.

In the same month the church successfully staged a short Saturday lunch time recital series during the Edinburgh International Festival: which included an organ recital given by Tom Edwards, a recital of Tudor choral music performed by St Ninian's Chamber Choir, and a lute and baroque guitar recital given by Rob MacKillop.

Other notable successes of 2008 included the 'Tudor' evensong sung in September for St Ninian's Patronal Festival which included Batten *Deliver us O Lord, O Sing Joyfully* and *Fourth Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis: Victoria Gaudent in Coelis* sung on Michaelmass and *Victoria O Quam Gloriosa* and *Casciolini Missa Brevis* in a minor sung on the Feast of All Saints.



Picture David Treherne

The Choir of St Ninian's Episcopal Church August 2008

Lissa Robertson, Stuart Irvine, Alan Rowland, Tom Edwards, George Marshall, Arthur Bruce, Pat Treherne, Jeanette Stevenson, Janette Myles, Emma Rainey, Jessica Conway, Audrey Marshall, Catriona Hewitson.

The choir was further augmented in September 2008 by the addition of Jessica Conway from St Mary's Music School, as a fifth choral scholar. The Feast of Christ the King in November 2008 proved to be a fitting end to the liturgical year with a performance of Andrea Gabrielli's *Missa Brevis* at mass in the morning, and Stanford *Canticles in G*, Bairstow *Let all mortal flesh keep silence*, Vilette *O Salutaris Hostia* and de Severac *Tantum Ergo* at the first Choral Evensong and Benediction ever to be sung at the church. A week later the choir performed at the first Advent Carol service to be held in the church for a considerable time.

Throughout the city of Edinburgh the choir quickly gained a reputation for their ambitious and enterprising repertoire and for their excellent standards of performance. The *opus dei* of the choir remains, however, the leading and enrichment of worship, at St Ninian's Episcopal Church.



Picture Eric Bower

The Choir following Choral Evensong for the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin
29th March 2009

Back row L to R: Pat Treherne, Sheila Payne, Arthur Bruce, George Marshall, Dan Ross, Simon Walker, Tom Edwards, Joe Doody, Stuart Irvine, Andrew Gillies, Libby Morton, Lissa Robertson
Front row L to R: Emma Rainey, Ruby Dayan, Catriona Hewitson, Audrey Marshall, Jessica Conway, Jeanette Stevenson

EPILOGUE

The services sung by the choir during Holy Week, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday (12 April) were, in Tom's own estimation, 'very fine indeed'. The service for Maundy Thursday was very moving and concluded with the choir singing *Tantum Ergo : Deodat de Severac*. On the evening of Good Friday the choir gave a devotional performance of *Stainer's Crucifixion*. Easter Sunday, with its wonderful depth and spread of music, and heartfelt singing, provided a fitting end to our time together as organist and choir. This was Tom's last Sunday. Our Priest in Charge, the Revd Andrew Bain, led the tributes to Tom, praising his energy and commitment, and his 'sheer panache and love of music.'

From the end of April until the end of June we were incredibly lucky to obtain the services of Simon Walker, Organ Scholar at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral. Simon played the organ for us on Sunday mornings as other duties permitted, and organised choir practices to complete our music schedule for the year. Of particular note was his preparation for Choral Evensong for the *Feast of St Peter and St Paul* for which Simon introduced an addition to our repertoire: the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* from *Herbert Howell's Collegium Regale*. The organist for this service was Morely Whitehead.

We are immensely grateful to Simon and also to those who have played for us on other Sundays this year: Les Shankland, Colin Tipple, Denise Argiolas, and our own Jane Ruuskanen and Sheila Payne.

Following the choir holiday in July we welcomed our newly appointed Organist and Director of Music, Wayne Weaver, a former organ scholar at St Giles' Cathedral, for his first Sunday Service on the 9 August, 2009. His story is waiting to be written.

Pat Treherne August 2009