THE BRISTOL MADRIGAL SOCIETY

HERBERT BYARD

ISSUED BY THE BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION,
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BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

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The Bristol Madrigal Society is the fifteenth in a series of pamphlets issued by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association through its Standing Committee on Local History. It's author, Mr. Herbert Byard, is a Lecturer in Music in the University of Bristol and Musical Director of the Bristol Madrigal Society. Mr. Byard wishes to express his thanks to Mr. E. Stuart Guy, the President of the Society, who made available his collection of memoranda, programmes and newspaper cuttings; to Miss Enid Hunt, daughter of Dr. Hubert Hunt and a Vice-President and Honorary Librarian of the Society, who gave him access to the Minute Books and other materials; to Mr. W. B. Laurence, a singing member as boy and man for over seventy years, now an Honorary Life Member, who provided much valuable information; and to Mr. J. G. Crauford, Honorary Secretary of the (London) Madrigal Society, who helped him with details relating to that ancient and famous body. Mr. Reece Winstone kindly provided the photograph of the Montague Hotel, and *The Bristol Evening Post* gave permission to reproduce the picture of the English Folk Dance and Song Society dancing at the 1938 Ladies' Night. Mr. Kevin Tindall provided the illustrations of the Minutes Book and of the interior of the Victoria Rooms.

The next pamphlet in the series will be *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians* by Professor Peter T. Marcy of California State College.

Other titles under consideration include; Bristol Castle; the Blue Maids' Orphanage; the Anti-Slavery Movement in Bristol; the early history of the Quakers in Bristol; Captain Thomas James and the North-West passage; the street names of Bristol; Bristol railways; the industrial monuments of Bristol. There will also be further pamphlets in the special series on the Port of Bristol.

The pamphlets have enjoyed a wide circulation. *The Bristol Hotwell* is now out of print, and *The Theatre Royal: the First Seventy Years* has gone into a second edition. The price has been kept as low as possible so that the pamphlets may be available to a wide circle of readers. Unfortunately, rising costs of printing and increased postal charges have now made it necessary to raise the price of this pamphlet to three shillings.

The pamphlets can be obtained from most Bristol booksellers or direct from Mr. Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol 9. Details of earlier publications are given at the back of this pamphlet. It will be of great help if as many people as possible will place standing orders for future productions.

. . . there is not any music of instruments whatsoever, comparable to that which is made by the voices of men, where the voices are good, and the same well sorted and ordered.

Since singing is so good a thing,
I wish all men would learn to sing.

William Byrd, 1588

The reputation of the music of the 'Golden Age' of Elizabeth I, like that of its literature, has always stood high, even if the music was for long not properly understood. We need not doubt that England was a nest of singing birds in Elizabeth's time; what is absolutely certain is that most of the birds did not sing madrigals. Madrigal singing has always been a highly specialised art, one to be practised by the man of musical culture and education; and in the time of the great madrigal writers — who flourished in the later years of Elizabeth's reign and in that of James I — that meant the nobility and gentry and their professional music providers. Luckily most of the English composers writing between, say, 1580 and 1630 were equally adept at sacred and secular composition; their services and anthems, if not printed, were copied into the part-books of cathedrals and collegiate chapels, so that the repertory of sacred English polyphonic music was at any rate kept alive, and when its secular counterpart, largely written in the same style, was made available there were singers who could perform it. Therefore it is not surprising that many of the madrigal and glee clubs which sprang up in the nineteenth century were guided by cathedral and church organists. Italian and especially English madrigals were brought to public attention mainly through the writings of Sir John Hawkins and Dr Charles Burney in the 1770s; they achieved sporadic publication throughout the following century, notably, so far as the English ones were concerned, in the volumes of the Musical Antiquarian Society between 1840 and 1847.

It is possible that private performance of the best secular vocal music by composers like Byrd, Weelkes, Morley and Orlando Gibbons never quite died out, even in the musically repressive days of the Commonwealth — when secular music suffered far less than sacred — or the gay ones of the Restoration, when the cry was for the latest musical fashion from France and Italy. But English madrigal singing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must have been intended to give pleasure to the performers, and perhaps a handful of listening friends, rather than an audience of any size. The first half of the eighteenth century saw private music-making on the wane, while public concerts, and above all the Italian opera

in London, with Handel's masterpieces as its crowning glory, steadily attracted more and more attention. This public emphasis on the performance of contemporary works had its parallel in a number of more or less private efforts to revive interest in 'ancient' music, the term being used of any music written before about 1600. The most important of the organisations concerned with this type of activity was the Academy of Ancient Music, founded in 1710, with its headquarters at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. It was a body of practising musicians, amateur and professional, maintaining its own orchestra, and serious enough in aim to attract financial support from such men as Handel and Geminiani. Regular performances of vocal and instrumental music were given, and doubtless some of the English songs of the sixteenth century found a place in the programmes, though exact information on what was played and sung is unfortunately lacking. The Academy lasted until 1792, but its really influential period had ended in 1752 with the death of its most noted Musical Director, Dr Johann Christoph Pepusch, a Berlin violinist and composer, who is now remembered chiefly for his overtures and arrangements of the tunes in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*.

Whatever may have been sung at the Academy, there could have been very few Englishmen with any detailed knowledge of the secular music of the Tudor composers when the (London) Madrigal Society was founded in 1741. Among its early members was Sir John Hawkins, author of *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, published in 1776, the same year as the first volume of the *General History of Music* by his more famous rival, Burney. The formation of the Madrigal Society is best told in Hawkins's own words :

> Mr. John Immyns, an attorney by profession, was a member of the Academy (of Ancient Music) but, meeting with misfortune, he was occasionally a copyist to the Society, and amanuensis to Dr Pepusch: he had a strong counter-tenor voice, which not being very flexible, served well enough for the performance of madrigals. Of this species of music he in a short time became so fond, that in the year 1741 he formed the plan of a little club, called the Madrigal Society; and got together a few persons who had spent their lives in the practice of psalmody; and who, with a little pains, and the help of the ordinary solmization,[1] which many of them were very

1 ***Solmization.*** The system of identifying the notes of the scale by syllables (Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La) derived from the Hexachord system of Guido d'Arezzo in the eleventh century. Additional syllables and other modifications resulted in the ***Tonic Sol-fa*** of the nineteenth century.

> expert in, became soon able to sing, almost at sight, a part in an English, or even an Italian madrigal.
>
> They were mostly mechanics; some, weavers from Spitalfields, others of various trades and occupations; they met at first at the Twelve Bells, an alehouse in Bride Lane, Fleet Street, and Immyns was both their president and instructor; their subscription was five shillings and sixpence a quarter, which defrayed their expenses in books and music paper, and afforded them the refreshments of porter and tobacco . . . their performance consisted of Italian and English madrigals in three, four and five parts; and being assisted by three or four boys from the choir of St. Paul's, they sang compositions of this kind, as also catches, rounds and canons, though not elegantly, with a degree of correctness that did justice to the harmony . . . .

The Madrigal Society now meets six times a year and its programmes are confined to genuine madrigals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though an exception is made in favour of the compositions of R. L. Pearsall, whom we shall meet shortly as a founder-member of the Bristol Madrigal Society. The choirboys who, until the last war, were responsible for the treble parts have now been replaced by women sopranos. Although public concerts have never been given, guests are welcomed at the meetings (which are held at the Tallow Chandlers' Hall, Dowgate Hill), but they are expected to sing and not merely be passive listeners. The Society's activities have always laid stress on social intercourse and since 1821 a full dinner has preceded the singing. Apart from music in current use, the Society's library, which includes some valuable manuscripts and rare part-books of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is housed in the British Museum.

Except for festivals, like those of the Three Choirs at Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford, and the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy at St. Paul's Cathedral, the oldest British musical society performing regularly in public is the Bristol Madrigal Society, clearly stemming from the London Society and consequently owing something, through Immyns and Pepusch, to the Academy of Ancient Music and the upsurge of dilettante interest in music of an earlier age in the opening years of the eighteenth century. On January 5, 9, 12 and 16 of the year 1837, Edward Taylor, a Norwich ironmonger whose marriage to a wealthy heiress enabled him to devote himself exclusively to music (he eventually became Gresham Professor of Music), delivered a series of lectures under the title 'English Vocal Harmony' at the Bristol Institution in Park Street. Each lecture was given in the afternoon and repeated

in the evening of the following day. Taylor ranged widely, from the pre-Reformation state of English music to the foundation of the Madrigal Society in 1741, and illustrations were provided by an *ad hoc* sextet of male and female vocalists. A number of musical societies had been founded in Bristol during the previous half-century or so, notably the Bristol Catch[1] Club, one of whose members, Dr Alfred Bleeck, a local surgeon, attended Taylor's lectures and was the moving spirit in founding a new society to explore the vastly superior repertory of genuine madrigals. The Bristol Madrigal Society, with Bleeck as its first President, was actually established before Taylor had given his final lecture, its first minute, dated 14 January 1837, recording the wish of the members "to promote Madrigal singing in this City"; and on Wednesday, 1 March, the first singing meeting was held at the Montague Inn, destroyed by bombing in 1940, which stood at the junction of the steep Montague Hill and Kingsdown Parade and was then almost in open country. The Montague continued to be used for the regular meetings until after the First World War, when a move was made to the Bristol Music Club in Clifton. Despite the fact that women had participated in the illustrations for Taylor's lectures, the treble parts were entrusted to boy choristers from the Cathedral, while the six male altos, eight tenors and seven basses included four Cathedral lay clerks. Not surprisingly, J. D. Corfe, the Cathedral Organist, was Musical Director.[2] Boy trebles were to reign unchallenged in the Bristol Madrigal Society for over a century.

The Society's meetings were conducted with considerable formality, the procedure to be followed being set out in the printed book of rules issued to each member. The President took the chair

1 The glee and the catch — the latter a kind of round but with the words so arranged that the successive entries of the voices made either a nonsensical or a vulgar effect — were genuine if debased descendants of the madrigal. An amusing catch by J. W. Calcott (1766—1821) may serve as an example. The words are in the form of a dialogue on the respective merits of the musical histories of Hawkins and Burney, but the music manipulates the words "Burney's History" so that the effect in performance is:

Sir John Hawkins —
Burn 'is History !
How d'ye like him ?
Burn 'is History !

2 As with the London society, the comparatively modern term 'Conductor' was not used. Conducting a piece throughout, using a stick or hand, did not become usual till later in the century. At the time the Bristol Madrigal Society was founded, Mendelssohn, the most sought-after conductor in Britain, was content at performances to beat time for the first few bars of a movement and then sit down and applaud with the audience. Corfe's job would have been to select the music to be sung, teach it to the choir, and then set the speed at the beginning of each piece.

at 7.30 p.m. precisely and requested the Secretary to call over the names of the members. They sat round a large table, with the Musical Director in the middle of one long side; he had to await a signal from the President before starting any piece of music. Each member paid an annual subscription of two guineas, but a rather puzzling rule entitled him to a refund of two shillings — four shillings if he belonged to the "musical profession" — for each meeting at which he was present when the roll was called. There were twenty-two ordinary meetings in the first season, so a member who attended them all could have claimed the return of more than his subscription. The explanation of this curious provision is apparently that from the start the desirability of having the help of the musically competent Cathedral lay clerks was recognised; they, as professionals, could not be expected to pay to join a choir, so a method of refunding their subscription — or even paying them a very modest fee — was invented which did not involve the invidiousness of letting some people in free; the 'gentlemen' members being expected not to claim their refunds. The annual subscription remained at two guineas for many years; it was reduced to one guinea in 1946, when fee-paying women sopranos replaced fee-earning boy trebles, and now (1966) stands at thirty shillings. The Honorary Members, who do not sing but have for many years supported the Society, pay one guinea a year and receive complimentary tickets for concerts; there are about three dozen of them. The Society has always provided singing members with their music (and in consequence has an unusually comprehensive library) but since 1958 members have occasionally assisted its finances by buying their own music and presenting it to the Society.

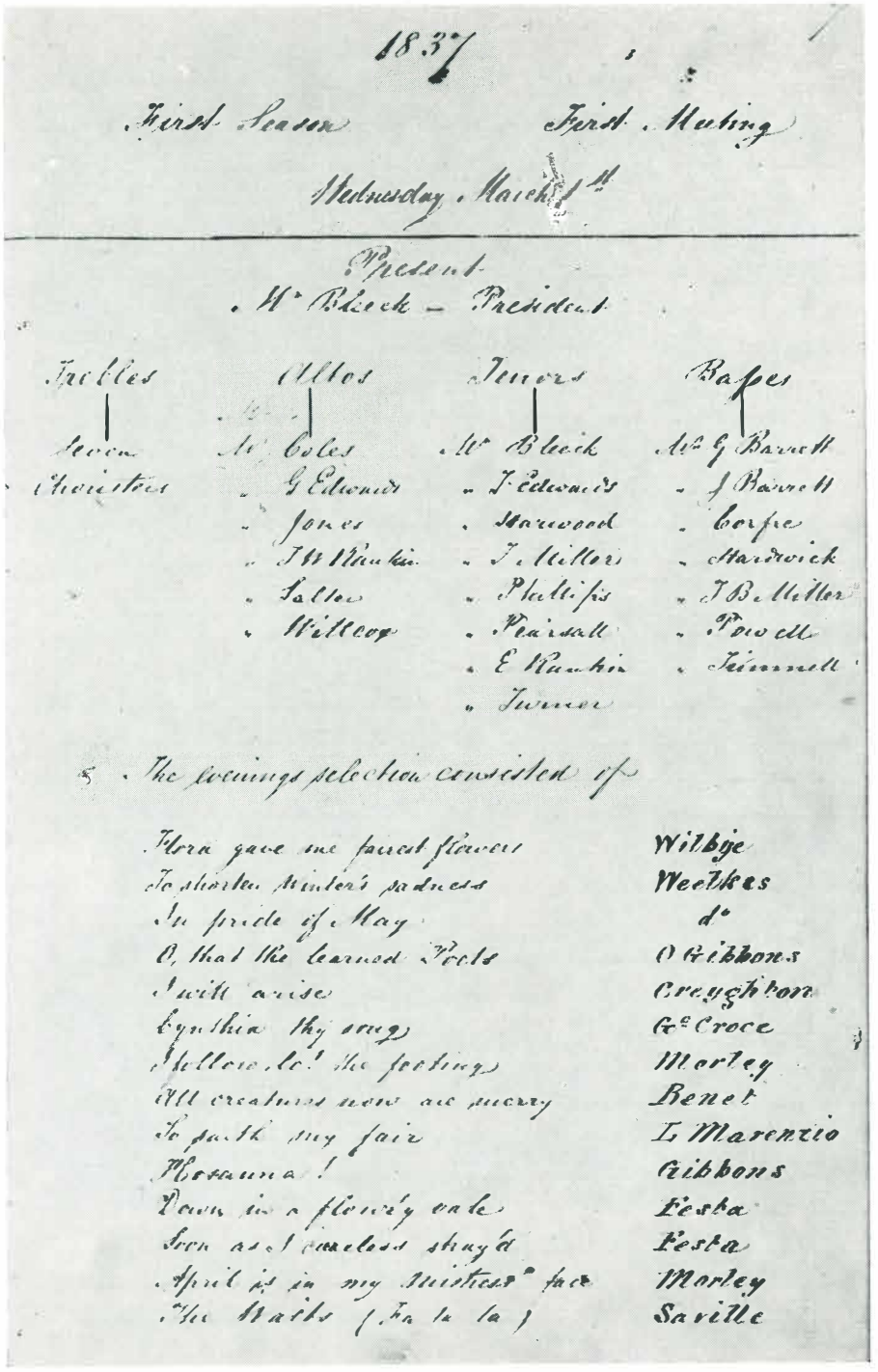
We have already noticed that the London society allows the music of Robert Lucas Pearsall to be sung alongside the true madrigals of the Golden Age. He was a remarkable character who demands more than passing mention. Born at Clifton in 1795, the son of an officer in the Bristol Light Horse Volunteers who was also a talented amateur string player and singer, R. L. Pearsall was intended for the army, but indifferent health diverted him to the law. He was called to the bar in 1821 and practised on the Western Circuit till 1825, when on medical advice he decided to live abroad. The Pearsall family was wealthy, largely as a result of a successful hoop-iron rolling mill established by an ancestor at Willsbridge, between Warmley and Bitton, in 1712. Willsbridge House was built in the later years of the eighteenth century and our Pearsall had occupied it for a time, mixing desultory musical and antiquarian studies with his law work. His travels in 1825 brought him to Mainz, where he took composition lessons with Joseph Panny, an Austrian violinist and composer. He made at

least three brief returns to England, the second of them, in 1836-37, enabling him to take part in the inauguration of the Bristol Madrigal Society, in which he sang tenor. Some years previously he had settled with his family in Carlsruhe, but he travelled widely in Europe and steadily developed his musical bent by work in libraries in Paris, Munich, Nuremberg and other places. He was constantly composing and often sent works to the Madrigal Society and especially the Bristol Madrigal Society. In 1842 he moved from Carlsruhe to Schloss Wartensee, on the Swiss shore of Lake Constance, where he died in 1856.

Pearsall's published compositions include a string quartet and many part-songs and 'madrigals', the latter often written in fair imitation of the Tudor masters, particularly Morley, but much of his music remains in manuscript. It is a pity that he is better known by choirs for his jolly but rather pedestrian "O who will o'er the downs so free" than for more imaginative works like the 8-part "Lay a garland" and "Great God of Love"; although in recent years his beautiful arrangement of the fourteenth-century Latin-German macaronic Christmas song *In dulci jubilo,* made for a choir at Carlsruhe, has become very popular. His contrapuntal and harmonic idiom naturally recalls Spohr and Mendelssohn, rather than Byrd or Gibbons, but within it he wrote some miniatures of real distinction. There is no doubt that he had a beneficial influence on the selection of music by the Bristol Madrigal Society. At least one composition by him has been sung at every secular concert save one (in 1844) given by the Society.

The music performed at the Bristol Madrigal Society's first singing meeting (see page 16) shews that the members took their work seriously; apart from the two anthems — one of which was by a great master of the English madrigal school — not a single item is outside the true English and Italian madrigal repertory, and that standard was maintained until 1850, when, despite pressure to the contrary from Pearsall, the early Victorian sentimental part-song gained a place. At the second singing meeting two of the very greatest pieces from the English school were added, Weelkes's "As Vesta was from Latmos hill descending" and Wilbye's "Sweet honey-sucking bees".

The choice of the Montague Inn (later Montague Hotel) enabled refreshments to be provided, following the example of the London society and many of the glee and catch clubs. This custom continued for many years; even today a fifteen-minute coffee break is religiously observed at every rehearsal, as the meetings now tend to be called — though the members still like to think of them as



1837

First Season — First Meeting

Wednesday, March 1st

Present

Mr Black — President

Trebles	Altos	Tenors	Basses
Seven Ditto	Mr Coles	Mr Black	Mr G Barrett
	G Edwards	J Edwards	J Barrett
	Jones	Sherwood	Corfe
	J W Rankin	J Miller	Hardwick
	Sallow	Platts	J Bellotti
	Wellcop	Pearsall	Powell
		E Rankin	Tennant
		Turner	

The evenings selection consisted of

Flora gave me fairest flowers	Wilbye
To shorten Winter's sadness	Weelkes
In pride of May	do
O that the learned Poets	O Gibbons
Swift arise	Creyghton
Cynthia thy song	Ge Croce
Hellowe, lo! the footing	Morley
All creatures now are merry	Benet
To pastk my fair	L Marenzio
Mercuma!	Gibbons
Down in a flowery vale	Festa
Soon as I awoke	Festa
April is in my Mistress' face	Morley
The Maids (Fa la la)	Saville

Minute of the first singing meeting of the Bristol Madrigal Society

Photography by Kevin Tindall

The Montague Hotel, Kingsdown, Bristol, built 1737, destroyed in World War II.

Photograph by Reece Winstone

occasions for communal music making and pleasant social intercourse, rather than merely as choir practices for concerts. The social aspect has in fact always loomed large. The first birthday, in January 1838, gave the excuse for an anniversary dinner, followed by music, which was attended by a number of guests. This had an unexpected result, in that wives and female friends of the participants in this all-male gathering expressed a wish to listen to the music of which they had heard such glowing accounts. In the following October, therefore, a 'Ladies Night' was held and thus began the long series of Ladies' Nights which, at first intermittently, but annually from 1844, did more than anything else to bring the Society to the notice of the Bristol public. After two Ladies' Nights at the Montague Inn a move was made to the more spacious accommodation of the Gloucester Hotel, Hotwells, for the next four; but in 1842 the newly-completed hall at the Victoria Rooms was booked; it housed the Ladies' Nights for over eighty years. These became great social occasions, with the line of waiting carriages stretching for a quarter of a mile from the Victoria Rooms to Victoria Square; while for weeks beforehand the Bristol dress shops vied with one another in displaying the gowns ordered for the Madrigal Society's Ladies' Night. The use of the Victoria Rooms enabled a much larger audience to be invited; it grew from about 100 in 1838 to over 1,300 in 1845. With the substitution, since 1946, of women sopranos and contraltos for boy trebles and male altos, the yearly public secular performance has become the 'Annual Concert'. Previously to 1946, only one woman had ever attended an ordinary singing meeting. Ellen Terry, a devotee of madrigals, was once visiting Bristol and expressed a wish to hear the Society, so the rule forbidding the admission of ladies to the room during a meeting was specially relaxed on this one occasion by the unanimous vote of the members.

By 1845 the demand for tickets for the Ladies' Nights caused special regulations for their conduct to be added to the rules. Public advertisement of these concerts was forbidden, nor might any ticket be "exposed for sale". Instead, each member was allowed to buy twenty tickets at five shillings each for his family and friends and was given an extra one free. The rest of the tickets were distributed by the Committee — doubtless to persons who made suitable financial acknowledgement. As a precaution against gate-crashing, each ticket was endorsed with the names of its user and the person responsible for distributing it. An amusing rule added in 1858 provided that there should be a half-hour interval for refreshments, tea and coffee to be offered to the vistors, while "porter, bitter ale and sandwiches shall be provided for the Mem-

bers." At the same time it was decided that "the galleries shall be reserved for the Mayor, the Dean and Chapter, the Members of Parliament, and other distinguished visitors." The Society nowadays no longer offers its audiences refreshments, but it has never charged more than six shillings for admission to any performance it has given.

At its inception the Society decided to meet fortnightly on Wednesdays, without even a holiday break in August, and fortnightly meetings on Wednesdays continued to be the rule for 120 years. Since 1958, however, members have felt that the nature of the programmes has demanded more intensive rehearsal and meetings now take place weekly on Wednesdays from October to June, with breaks over Christmas and Easter.

The number of singing members was always ample, which makes it strange that boys and lay clerks from various cathedrals were thought necessary for strengthening the choir at concerts; but this custom was observed from the first Ladies' Night until 1890, in which year no 'outside' boys were employed, though visiting lay clerks were still used well into this century. In the 1850s and 1860s these vistors used to arrive early in the day and join their Bristol brethren in singing Matins and Evensong in the Cathedral.

Some time in the 1850s the maximum number of singing members was fixed at 60, but this figure was exceeded when the extra singers were brought in for the Ladies' Nights. The singing membership remained at or near 60 until the Second World War. That is still the maximum and the Society has exactly that number now (1966). The original members included two doctors and two solicitors, and what might be termed the professional and business world of Bristol seems to have supplied the membership for many years.

Meanwhile the programmes were changing, not always for the better. By 1850 the Society had over two hundred items, nearly all from the English and Italian Golden Age, in its repertory. Even though many of them were in unscholarly editions — often copied by hand into the manuscript single-part books then used — this is remarkable when one remembers the comparative unfamiliarity of the madrigal school and the scarcity of copies before the cheap octavo editions of E. H. Fellowes and others in this century. And even though 1850 saw the inclusion of the kind of part-song against which Pearsall had advised, it saw also the introduction of a number of sacred motets, including the eight-part "Sing ye to the Lord" of J. S. Bach. Presumably it was enthusiasm for the new and easier type of part-song which caused the Society to offer prizes for new

'madrigals' in 1864. The winners, whose works were performed at the 1866 Ladies' Night, were Henry Leslie, Henry Lahee and J. W. Westbrook. Few people would want to listen to works in such a faded idiom today, but for their date they are well-written songs and the Society preserves the copies — on the shelves of the library if not in the hands of the members.

In 1865 Corfe resigned as Musical Director. On hearing this, the famous Dr Samuel Sebastian Wesley, then Organist of Gloucester Cathedral, offered his services but was informed that the appointment had already been made of Daniel W. Rootham, a Bristol Cathedral lay clerk, who became a notable figure in local musical circles and guided the Society for fifty years. He was an organist, trained the chorus for the triennial Bristol Musical Festivals, taught singing (Clara Butt was one of his pupils) and was the father of Cyril B. Rootham, Organist and Director of Music at St. John's College, Cambridge, from 1901 till his death in 1938. Dan Rootham soon had to grapple with a problem in his treble line, for the demands the Cathedral made on its choristers' time meant that they were no longer available to the Madrigal Society. He solved it by recruiting boys from various Bristol church choirs, though only at a heavy expense which soon put the accounts in the red. Somehow the Society managed to keep its head above water, principally through the profit which was always made on the Ladies' Nights, and under Rootham the singing reached a high level. In July 1885 an invitation from the Council of the International Inventions Exhibition led to a concert of madrigals being given in the Royal Albert Hall, London, and on 8 July 1908 the Society gave its one and only 'Command' performance, singing madrigals and part-songs to King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra on board the Royal Yacht 'Victoria and Albert' at Avonmouth. Dan Rootham conducted his fiftieth and last Ladies' Night in 1915 and then retired. The occasion was notable for the performance of works specially written for the Society in his honour by Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Charles Stanford.

All these events were duly chronicled in the Bristol newspapers, though their flattering notices should not necessarily be taken as much more than expressions of local patriotism. As early as January 1838 the *Bristol Mirror* declared that the Society had "attained in its youth the perfection of age." Still, compliments from trustworthy sources were not lacking. In 1868 Joseph Barnby, now remembered as the composer of "Sweet and low" and much church music typical of its period, but a notable choral conductor — he founded the Royal Choral Society — wrote of that year's Ladies' Night: "Altogether we freely confess to having experienced

greater pleasure in the singing of this choir than in that of any other, native or foreign." Of a similar occasion in 1879 John Hullah, composer, pioneer of class singing instruction, and joint conductor of the (London) Madrigal Society, was quoted by the *Clifton Chronicle* as saying: "We are 100 years older than you are in Bristol, but you are 100 years in front of us." The national press sometimes noted the Society's activities in approving terms, chiefly on such occasions as the Centenary celebrations in 1937. In 1962 *The Times*, in a notice of a concert in Bristol Cathedral, said that after 125 years the Bristol Madrigal Society had shewn that it could still venture boldly into new and fruitful territory.

It was during Rootham's reign that a musical parson joined the Society for a brief period. The Reverend E. H. Fellowes was Precentor of Bristol Cathedral from 1897 to 1900, having recently taken his M.A. and B.Mus. at Oxford. He recorded his early musical experiences in a charming autobiography, *Memoirs of an Amateur Musician*, and it is clear that his association with the Society turned the thoughts of a man with conventional late-Victorian musical tastes in a new direction. He soon realised that the famous Bristol Madrigal Society had access to only a fraction of the wonderful music of the English madrigalists and therefore began his long searches for the surviving original part-books and manuscripts. His thirty-six volumes of *The English Madrigal School* appeared in the years 1913-24, and the collection of all the madrigal poetry he could find, *English Madrigal Verse*, in 1920. The Society proudly claims to have been, at least in part, the inspiration behind this labour of love, though in honesty Fellowes's own comment in his autobiography should be recorded: "It was at these meetings" (of the Bristol Madrigal Society) "that I first perceived how the rhythmic and other characteristic features of Tudor music were misunderstood." Modern scholarship has made some revision of Fellowes's work desirable, but it is fair to say that without his carefully edited, cheap, performing editions madrigal singing in Britain would not have made the astonishing progress it has in the last forty years. The Society began eagerly to make use of these editions as they were published. Fellowes went on with his musical labours till the end of his life, producing the books *William Byrd* and *Orlando Gibbons* for the tercentenary celebrations of those composers, a parallel to his madrigal publications in *The English School of Lutenist Songwriters*, many editions of church music, and the monumental Complete Edition of Byrd's works, besides being an active member of the Editorial Board of the Carnegie Trust's *Tudor Church Music* volumes.

Despite the popularity of the Madrigal Society, the Bristol Catch

Club and some other similar societies remained in being during the earlier part of Victoria's reign. In 1844 T. H. Crook, a Bristol organist and vocal trainer, gathered together a few of his adult male friends and pupils to sing glees and songs of a lighter nature than those in the Madrigal Society's repertory, and in December 1846 gave a concert with his Amater Glee Society, as it was called. This soon grew in numbers and became the Bristol Orpheus Glee Society, which followed the Madrigal Society's example of holding Ladies' Nights. There was at one time much friendly rivalry between the two societies, though Crook and several members of the BOGS were also in the BMS. The BOGS has always been a completely adult band of singers with a male alto top line. In 1878 George Riseley, the ebullient conductor of the Bristol Festivals and Organist of the Cathedral, became its Musical Director and under his leadership the BOGS sang to Queen Victoria at Windsor in 1895 and was then permitted to add the word 'Royal' to its name.

The war of 1914-18 had already broken out when Dan Rootham resigned as Musical Director of the BMS and the inevitable reduction in the numbers of the adult members made new problems for his successor, Hubert Hunt, Organist of the Cathedral and an alto singer in the Society since his arrival in Bristol in 1901. Many years earlier, as a boy chorister at St George's Chapel, Windsor, he had sung at a Ladies' Night with other visitors in the days when outside help was considered necessary. The Victoria Rooms having been requisitioned by the military authorities and there being no other suitable hall in Bristol, he conceived the idea of taking the choir to sing at Pearsall's old home in Willsbridge, and at Bitton Vicarage, where the aged Vicar, Canon Ellacombe, had known Pearsall well in the 1840s. This was the first practical result of Hunt's interest in Pearsall and his music, an interest which never left him. His other innovations infused new life into the old Society. The Cathedral choirboys once again became associated with it, the sentimental part-songs which had begun to creep into the programmes as long ago as 1850 were banished, concerts were given in hospitals, anthem recitals were instituted in the Cathedral, and performances were organised in St Mary Redcliffe and Bath Abbey. The new Fellowes editions of madrigals formed the basis of an improved repertory which included such rarities as the nineteen-part motet *O Bone Jesu* by Robert Carver, a shadowy figure of the late fifteenth century who was a monk at Scone Abbey, and works by Marenzio and Gesualdo. The tercentenaries of Byrd and Weelkes in 1923, and that of Gibbons in 1925, were suitably celebrated, while instrumental items added new interest to the Ladies' Nights. Besides being a distinguished organist and violinist

Hunt was greatly attracted by such instruments as the virginals, harpsichord, lute, viola d'amore and viola da gamba — in those days virtually unknown to provincial English audiences — and all of these made appearances at concerts directed by him.

And so the greatly invigorated Bristol Madrigal Society approached its centenary. The Ladies' Nights were still the principal public feature of its work, though they were given in several different halls. After a post-war return to the Victoria Rooms, the Great Hall of Bristol University was the venue from 1926 to 1933. Then there was another return to the Victoria Rooms, except in 1935 and 1936, when fire damage to that building caused the Society to try out the too-small Queen's Hall in Berkeley Square and the Pavilion at Clifton Zoo respectively. The Victoria Rooms were restored in time for the Centenary Ladies' Night in 1937. The programme is given on page 16. William Horsley's arrangement of the National Anthem, with its unusual harmony, seemingly owing something to Arne's version, had been introduced many years earlier; it is still used at all public concerts. *The Waits,* by the seventeenth-century Jeremy Savile, had been adopted as the closing song at all meetings, following the practice of the (London) Madrigal Society. Originally only a "Fa-la-la" song, in imitation of the refrains of the English balletts, its first-verse words "Let us all sing, merrily sing" were added by a President of that Society, Thomas Oliphant. It has been sung at every singing meeting and every secular concert of the Bristol Society. This centenary programme shews that a number of distinguished composers had dedicated works to the Society over the years; two of them had served it further in the office of President, and several of them attended the concert.

Dr Hunt, as he now was, having received the Lambeth D.Mus. degree in 1929, was naturally the central figure in the centenary celebrations. His services were recognised by a presentation at a complimentary dinner a few weeks after the Centenary Ladies' Night. A year later his next experiment was to invite members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society to dance the refrains of the balletts of Morley and others while the choir sang them; this was the first intimation many people had that these songs were intended for dancing as well as singing. In 1939 the tercentenary of Wilbye's death was commemorated by singing four of his madrigals and the opportunity was taken of performing music by Dr Cyril Rootham, son of the former Musical Director, who had died in the previous year.

War had come again by the time of the next Ladies' Night in 1940. Despite the disappearance of some of the members, enough

of a choir was mustered to give a programme on traditional lines, but it was clear that activities would have to be suspended until hostilities were over. In July 1945 Dr Hunt celebrated his eightieth birthday and was already making plans to revive the Society, but in the following October he died before any action could be taken. In 1965 the hundredth anniversary of his birth was made the occasion for performing some of his favourite madrigals at the Annual Concert, while his son, Edgar Hunt, directed the Holborne Ensemble in music for virginals, recorders and viols.

It fell to the new Cathedral Organist, Alwyn Surplice, who was elected Musical Director in 1946, to take the first step in reforming the Society and putting into effect the most revolutionary change in its long history. Black-out difficulties had already interfered with the attendance of the Cathedral boys before the last Ladies' Night in 1940, and at the Annual General Meeting in that year the Committee informed members that post-war educational pressures would make their further collaboration very unlikely. It was then decided that, when the time came, the Society would be reconstituted with women sopranos and contraltos. In 1946 the remaining nucleus of male singers was augmented by new members and Surplice soon gathered a fair number of women for the upper parts. Rehearsals were resumed at the Bristol Music Club, but before Surplice could arrange a public concert he moved to Winchester Cathedral and was succeeded by Clifford Harker as Cathedral Organist and Musical Director of the Madrigal Society. The first public appearance of the reconstituted choir under his direction was in Bristol Cathedral in March 1950, when two of Bach's motets were sung, together with chorales relating to Bach preludes played on the organ by Harker, as part of the Bristol Bach Festival arranged to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the composer's death. Thereafter annual concerts in a hall (generally the Victoria Rooms) and the Cathedral were given, and the Society became once more a regular participant in Bristol's musical life.

After six years Harker resigned, owing to pressure of other work. Four of the five Musical Directors had been organists of the Cathedral, and Rootham had been a Cathedral lay clerk, so the appointment of the present writer, a lecturer in music at Bristol University, was a break with tradition. However, a closer link with the University, where the Society had given many concerts and whose former Vice-Chancellor, Dr Thomas Loveday, had been its President, was felt to be appropriate.

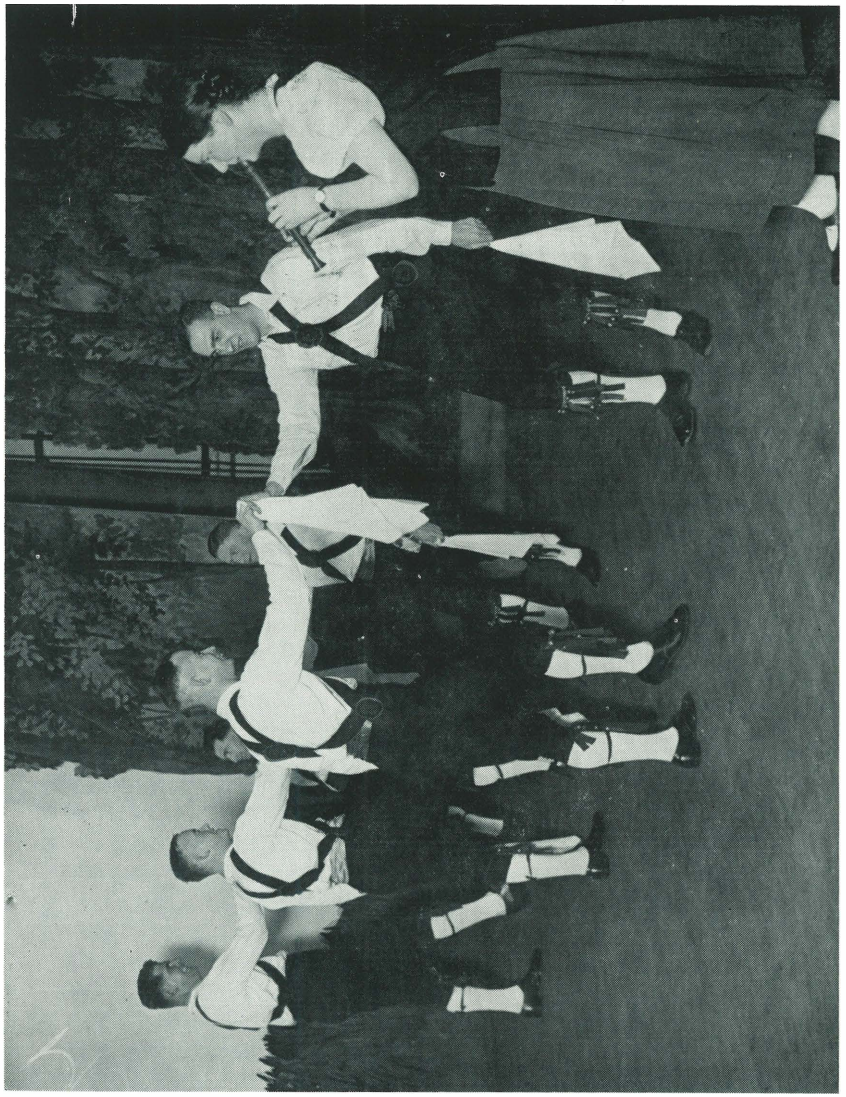
In recent years there have been changes in the character of the

programmes. The Cathedral concerts have tended to concentrate on performances of larger works, though the major motets of such composers as Byrd have also been given. The *Musikalische Exequien* of Schütz (in German), Robert White's *Lamentations,* Buxtehude's *Missa Brevis,* Palestrina's *Aeterna Christi Munera* and *Papae Marcelli* Masses, Allegri's *Miserere* (with the traditional embellishments of the Papal Choir), Kodály's *Jesus and the Traders,* Eyrd's *Mass for Four Voices,* Taverner's *"Western Wind" Mass* and Richard Davy's Passion Music of about 1492 from the Eton Choir Book may be instanced in this connexion, many of these being first performances in Bristol. Instrumental music at these concerts has included string and brass consorts and works for organ. The secular concerts have shewn less change, though extended works like Britten's *Hymn to St. Cecilia and "Gloriana" Dances* and Kodály's *Mátra Pictures,* have made their appearance, while the madrigal repertory has been extended in both the English and Italian schools, the latter sung in Italian. Informal Christmas concerts have included Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on Christmas Carols.* The choir has made a few forays outside Bristol, including giving a concert at the 1964 Ramsbury Festival.

The 125th birthday, in 1962, was made the occasion for repeating some of the works written for the Society, including Bernard Naylor's *Vain Wits and Eyes,* first sung in 1959. There has always been some kind of instrumental music on these occasions, the most interesting being, in 1963, Beethoven's two trios for two oboes and cor anglais, probably the only performance anyone present had ever heard of the only two known works for this strange combination.

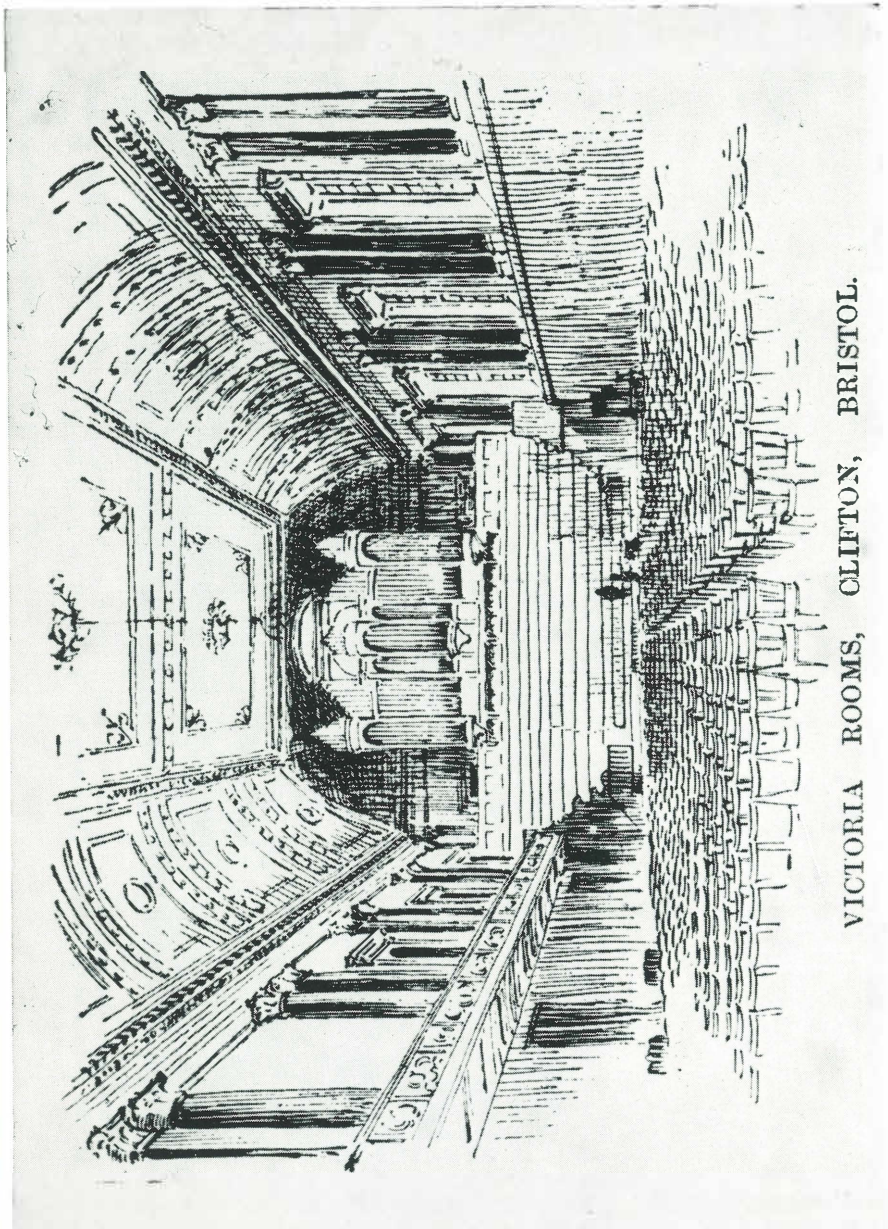
In 1956 the centenary of Pearsall's death was commemorated with a public lecture by Edgar Hunt, who was able to make much use of his father's extensive researches into Pearsall's life and music. The Society provided musical illustrations and discovered in some items a hitherto unsuspected playful side to this composer's muse.

A particularly attractive concert was given in 1957, when some of the Ayres and Dialogues — part madrigal, part solo song with instrumental accompaniment — of Martin Peerson, the Jacobean and Caroline organist of St Paul's Cathedral, were performed. Peerson, though not to be considered as a true madrigalist, very neatly combined the style of the Tudor polyphonists with that of the new Italian aria. On this occasion some of his keyboard pieces from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book were played by Raymond Leppard on the Kirkman harpsichord of about 1740 from the Georgian House, Bristol.



Members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society dancing the refrains of English ballets at the 1938 Ladies' Night. The recorder is played by Enid Hunt.

By Courtesy of the Bristol Evening Post



The interior of the Victoria Rooms as it was before the fire in 1935
Photograph supplied by Kevin Tindall

These secular activities after the war took place in the Victoria Rooms, the galleries of the Royal West of England Academy, the Museum Lecture Theatre and the Reception Room and Great Hall of Bristol University. The latter proved easily the pleasantest place but in 1963, after the final repair of war damage to the Great Hall, the University authorities felt unable any longer to offer their premises for concerts and the Museum Lecture Theatre, acoustically good but with inadequate stage and green room, has been chosen as the best hall for secular concerts until Bristol can provide a concert room with seating for an audience of, say, 700 to 800 and a good stage.

When the boy trebles and male altos were replaced with women, some people thought that a retrograde if inevitable step had been taken and that future performances of madrigals would be less authentic than previously. How the idea gained currency that boys' voices were 'correct' for madrigals is difficult to understand; perhaps there was an association in people's minds with the later Tudor church music, mostly written by men who were also madrigalists, and sung by men and boys in cathedrals. It will be remembered that the small group of singers who illustrated Edward Taylor's lectures in 1837 included women, yet there seems never to have been any question of having other than boy trebles in the Bristol Madrigal Society until 1940. Many European paintings of musical performances in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are plain proof that the madrigalists wrote for women sopranos. More problematical are their *Altus, Quintus, Medius* and *Contra Tenor* parts, often so wide in range as to be difficult or impossible for contraltos, so that modern editors and conductors have to interchange tenor and alto lines, hoping to do as little damage as possible to the texture. But even if we get our sexes right, there remains the fact that the madrigal repertory was clearly intended to be sung with one voice to a part; how far are we justified, then, in performing it with a small choral society? And how far are we justified in dispensing with instruments? — for while hundreds of English and Italian paintings of the Golden Age shew small groups of secular singers and players performing together, not one, so far as this writer's knowledge goes, suggests any conception of unaccompanied concerted secular song. The justification lies partly in the extreme freedom implied by at any rate the English madrigalists when they described their collections in some such phrase as "apt for voices or viols", doubtless being prepared for any performance which ensured that each line was sung or played by somebody, but it lies also in the aesthetic pleasure members of a small choir derive from the communal practice of some of the most beautiful vocal music ever written.

PROGRAMME OF MUSIC SUNG AT THE FIRST SINGING MEETING OF THE BRISTOL MADRIGAL SOCIETY,

1 MARCH 1837

All creatures now are merry minded	*John Bennet* (16th-17th century)
Cynthia, thy song and chanting	*Giovanni Croce* (*c.* 1557-1609)
April is in my mistress' face	*Thomas Morley* (1557-1603)
So saith my fair and beautiful Lycoris	*Luca Marenzio* (1553-1599)
To shorten winter's sadness	*Thomas Weelkes* (*c.* 1575-1623)
Flora gave me fairest flowers	*John Wilbye* (1574-1638)
Down in a flow'ry valley	*Costanzo Festa* (1490-1545)
O that the learned poets	*Orlando Gibbons* (1583-1625)
I follow, lo, the footing	*Thomas Morley*
In pride of May	*Thomas Weelkes*
I will arise (Anthem)	*Robert Creyghton* (*c.* 1639-1734)
Hosanna to the Son of David (Anthem)	*Orlando Gibbons*

PROGRAMME OF THE CENTENARY LADIES' NIGHT

14 JANUARY 1937

PART I

The National Anthem	arr. *William Horsley* (1774-1858)
All creatures now are merry minded	*John Bennet*
Cynthia, thy song and chanting	*Giovanni Croce*
April is in my mistress' face	*Thomas Morley*

So saith my fair and beautiful Lycoris	*Luca Marenzio*
To shorten winter's sadness	*Thomas Weelkes*
Sweet honey-sucking bees	*John Wilbye*
Flora gave me fairest flowers	*John Wilbye*
Down in a flow'ry valley	*Costanzo Festa*
O that the learned poets	*Orlando Gibbons*
I follow, lo, the footing	*Thomas Morley*
In pride of May	*Thomas Weelkes*
As Vesta was from Latmos hill descending	*Thomas Weelkes*

The above repeated the programme of the first singing meeting in 1837, except that "Sweet honey-sucking bees" and "As Vesta was from Latmos hill descending", both of which were in the programme of the second singing meeting, were inserted in place of anthems by Creyghton and Gibbons.

PART II

Works dedicated to the Bristol Madrigal Society

Ode on Time	*C. Villiers Stanford* (1852-1924)
Hark, where Poseidon's white racing horses (written for the Centenary)	*Cyril B. Rootham* (1875-1938)
When at Corinna's eyes I gaze	*C. Harford Lloyd* (1849-1919)
In the Belfry	*P. Napier Miles* (1865-1935)
Charm me asleep	*Basil Harwood* (1859-1949)
La belle dame sans merci	*C. Hubert H. Parry* (1848-1918)
Tune thy music to the heart	*Walford Davies* (1869-1941)
Chorus of Echoes	*Frank Merrick* (b. 1886)
Great God of Love	*R. L. Pearsall* (1795-1856)
Who shall have my lady fair?	*R. L. Pearsall*
The Waits	*Jeremy Savile* (17th century)

The Parry and Stanford works had been written for Daniel Rootham's 50th Ladies' Night in 1915.

BRISTOL MADRIGAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENTS

Dr Alfred Bleeck	1837-1867
John Hare	1867-1882
Sir George Edwards	1882-1899
Edward Harvey	1899-1910
Dr P. Napier Miles	1910-1914
Dr Basil Harwood	1914-1920
Hugo Mallet	1920-1927
Dr Thomas Loveday	1927-1931
A. Cecil Powell	1931-1949
E. Stuart Guy	1950-

MUSICAL DIRECTORS

J. D. Corfe	1837-1865
Daniel W. Rootham	1865-1915
Dr Hubert W. Hunt	1915-1945
Alwyn Surplice	1946-1949
Clifford Harker	1949-1955
Herbert Byard	1956-

RECORDS OF THE SOCIETY

The Society's activities from the preliminary meeting on 14 January 1837 are recorded without a break in eleven Minute Books. For nearly fifty years these minutes included particulars of every item sung at the fortnightly meetings, and this practice was revived during the musical directorship of Dr Hubert Hunt. It has not been followed since the reconstitution of the Society in 1946. Very few printed programmes of the Ladies' Nights before 1915 have been traced, but the music sung on these occasions is usually noted in the Minute Books. Printed programmes of every public performance since 1915 are in the keeping of the Honorary Librarian and the Honorary Secretary.

The extensive library of music is housed at the Bristol Music Club, where the Madrigal Society has held most of its meetings since 1922. The old manuscript Part Books, started in 1837 and painstakingly added to over the years, mainly in the flowing script of the first Musical Director, were disposed of in 1952, but one complete set was retained in the library, as was a very large collection of printed music, mostly Victorian part songs not now normally used.

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