



From Gold to Diamond

Spode 60th

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*a digest of the members' recollections
of Spode Music Week from 2003 to 2012*



The decade which began with the Golden Jubilee of Spode Music Week, the 50th since its foundation by Fr Conrad Pepler OP at Spode House, Staffordshire in 1954, has been one of great change for the course. The sudden closure of our 17-years' home at Hengrave Hall set us off on the search for a new venue which would fit our rather particular bill. A brief stay at Stonyhurst College helped to clarify just what our needs are, and when we alighted at Beechwood School, after a few teething troubles it did seem we had found our new base for the foreseeable future. But once again a change in circumstances catapulted us out on to the road, and another brief stay (this time at St Edmund's Canterbury) further refined our ideas

about what could and could not provide a place where Music Week could put down its roots.

And so we find ourselves at Abberley Hall for a second year, the year of our glorious Diamond Jubilee, the 60th consecutive gathering of the unique human organism that is 'Spode'. It is greatly to be hoped that our 70th Anniversary will see us celebrating still in these almost ideal surroundings.

PLACES

Many of the membership find that picturing themselves in their room at these various venues provokes a rich seam of memories, which is surprising since until they reach a certain age and stage of decrepitude, very few spend much time in their rooms, certainly in sleeping (as opposed to passing out) and least of all at night. The beautiful and quietly grand surroundings of Hengrave of course lend themselves to many a romantic recollection, and simply the names of the rooms are enough to cause a pang of nostalgia for Spode's Age of Elegance there – the Oriel Chamber, the Queen Elizabeth Room, the Wilbye Chamber, the Long Gallery..... In truth the whole thing was rather above our station; but we even managed to convince the nervous guardians of the place that a happy marriage was possible between our cheerfully chaotic ways and the pristine Tudor orderliness and dignity of the Hall. We swept through like a whirlwind for one week a year, living for all the world as if we owned the place, but barring a few mishaps with garden ornaments and on one occasion with a leaded window (ball games *indoors* – tut!) we generally left it as we found it and glad no doubt to return to its Quiet Days and retreats (though surely invigorated by its temporary contact with the down-and-dirty side of life). One of our last offices there was to plant a small tree in memory of Will White

who'd died just after the 50th Anniversary the year before and who had been so very happy at Hengrave; Rachael and her helpers rang him a valedictory peal on handbells.



In the second week of April 2005, Ian received a letter from Hengrave informing us of their closure the following month and the fact that they could not accommodate us that August. At that point we had all the lecturers and recitalists booked and over 60 people had already booked on to the week. Ian took the following day off work and started phoning venues all over the UK. Each conversation started thus:

"Hello. I'm phoning on behalf of a residential music week. We were wondering if you would be able to accommodate us from 22nd-29th August this year. Yes, I did say this year. We're roughly 70 in number and all ages from babies to

pensioners. We need access to a chapel, at least one good baby grand piano or bigger and some other pianos for practice”.

You can imagine how many could meet those requirements. In fact, after over hundred phone calls, only three venues could. Two were very expensive (one of those was in Northumberland and the other in Cornwall). The only sensibly priced one was the Jesuit School at Stonyhurst in Lancashire.

“Yes, we can accommodate you on those dates. We have 5 chapels and one church. We have 3 Steinway grands and 32 upright pianos in practice rooms”.



The round-the-clock freedom we were allowed at Hengrave was rather thrown into relief at Stonyhurst, where, for all its good points, all sorts of security issues rather cramped our style. It wasn't just that most doors had to be kept locked after dark; we were also instructed to make the young people wear shoes – imagine it! No bare feet at Spode?! – and rather too frequently collided with parties of prospective parents being shown around by the rather crisp and starchy volunteer guides, who lost no time in disowning us lest the punters should wonder what on earth they were sending their children to. Then there was the rather difficult situation that unless you were in the bowels of the building there always seemed to be someone trying to sleep in unwelcome earshot of activities later at night, in particular one old resident Jesuit. In many other ways the place was in the same bracket as Hengrave, with many very grand parts, a Hall complete with stags' heads and marble floor, two or three chapels and a church, very much in its own extensive grounds. Again the names of rooms carry one back; Logic, the Do Room, Philosophers, the Sodality Chapel, the Ambulacrum..... But it was just too big (reputedly the largest floor area under one continuous roof in Europe); to tour the whole site would take at least a day, and one had to set out from one's room in the morning with everything necessary for the day, since there would be no time, let alone energy, to make the trek back for a forgotten pencil or change of underwear. And it was all too easy for small children to disappear from view, and our older members to get worn out just getting *to* a rehearsal.

So it was that after a diligent search by Ian and Griselda we decided to give Beechwood School (already known to Rick Bolton and Mark Armstrong from its annual Jazz courses) a whirl. On first arrival one felt a slight pang, for its IN-OUT drive was on an urban main road, albeit quite a leafy one, and its scale, at least of the core house, was of quite a different order. But once through the porch, you found



yourself in a very elegant entrance hall, all polished mahogany and tasteful 19th-century furniture, with a number of rooms in similar style opening off it. We didn't use this part of the house much, but it was nice to pass through and know it was there, and for a late-night string quartet the entrance hall was a very appropriate setting, with a good acoustic and out of earshot of sleepers for once. The house was of mid-19th century date, though belonging to that aspect of the style that was on the lighter side (unlike the rather endearingly lumpish Abberley) and one of its more delightful features was the Conservatory, a permanent sitting room for some members and a very pleasant place to sit and read in easy chairs by day, to chat and drink wine by night. It was something of a thoroughfare being en route from the entrance and chapel to what was, from our point of view, the working part of the building. For more than one member the memory of its creaky floor and

resonant acoustic brings back the whole Beechwood experience. Once one penetrated as far as Mater Square, the nerve-centre and crossroads of the place adjoining the dining-room, one suddenly caught sight of the great hidden advantage of Beechwood. The grounds to the rear were completely out of sight and sound of the road, comprising a very nicely laid out terrace and lawn, woodland and vistas to agricultural uplands beyond; you could really have been in the heart of the countryside. Towards the bottom of the gardens was the music block, which, once we'd learnt to leave as much gear as possible down there, was a very useful additional space in which to make music, especially the noisier kind after hours. Eventually we tamed the place very satisfactorily, finding a way round various drawbacks including late night locking and the dreaded health-and-safety, which always seems to be more of a concern for those who impose it than for those who are meant to be its beneficiaries, and by the end of the Week in 2007 were all set to bed-in for a good long stay.

It was therefore with something of a sinking feeling that we found out at the end of Music Week 2010 that we might have to hit the road again, a possibility which quickly came true. This time we had a pretty full consultation on dossiers which Ian and Griselda had very diligently prepared on half a dozen new venues. The front runner was St Edmund's School, Canterbury, with which the Williams family already had an intimate connection. It all looked very promising-atmospheric Victorian Gothic with an excellent chapel and organ, very nice and extensive self-contained grounds, quiet detached location.....And in truth we were quite happy there for a year, but there were drawbacks. Not only was it the most expensive venue we had yet used, but at St Edmund's, security nuisances became really inhibiting, the place lacked a central focal point or crossroads which turned out to be quite a radical lack, and all our actual activities apart from sleeping, meals and chapel were rather crammed into

the Music Block, well-appointed but really too small and a bit low on atmosphere in comparison to what we were used to. We also had to share some of the facilities with another group, a choir deputising at the Cathedral, which in the event was almost entirely unproblematic, but another year we might not have been so lucky. This was clearly not going to stick, although at a vote most Members said they were content to stay if nothing better turned up. However, they could not accommodate us in 2012, being already booked for a number of people using it as a base for the Olympics.



Once again Ian hit the phones and having done a lot of homework, gathered Gris and Jeremy and together we went to look at the two front runners: Radley College and Abberley Hall. It was clear at once which of the two would make a natural home for Music Week. Radley, although having superb music facilities, was a huge and crammed site, the whole run rather tightly like a business, and we'd have been sharing the space with any number of other groups who, to say nothing of the rather brisk management team, might have found our little ways rather trying. Our reception at Abberley could not have been more different. The headmaster, John Walker, was new to the business of lets to summer courses and was laid back about it all to an almost Californian degree, seeming as keen that we should sample the wine from his French vineyard as on any

practical concerns. A tour round the facilities clinched the matter, especially as it was clear the pupils loved the venue and the whole school was just a very happy place (and you can check the suitability for yourself in this Anniversary year); and this was even before we'd registered the fact that at Abberley Ian would be able to *lower* the cost of the week to Members by some £30 on the peak charge that had had to be levied at St Edmund's. [À propos which, a glance at the cost over the decade in question – one of all sorts of financial ups and downs - shows what a miraculous feat Ian has pulled off in keeping the fees not only all within a margin of £70 either way, but actually finishing up lower than they were in 2003. From a slightly over-optimistic £320 in 2007 to a high of £390 in 2011, he has steered a very even course for us: another of those people Music Week can't really thank enough for all the effort they've put in to its success through thick and thin].



PEOPLE

Which brings us neatly to people. Many or most members' names have come up in the reminiscences which form the meat of this



booklet, but here are a few who have played a very particular part in the continued life of Music Week since it first left Spode House in 1987 to try its luck standing on its own feet in the big wide world. One thinks first of the Committee and all who have served on it, particularly since Robert Sherlaw Johnson (who had sustained the Week with a sure hand over the initial transition)

gave up the Directorship in the mid-90s and the Committee as a whole became responsible for the nature of the thing. Chief among those people are Ian Saxton whose work as bursar for the last 27 years is acknowledged above and Griselda Sherlaw Johnson, who for 23 years was a model of energy, efficiency and tireless loving commitment as Secretary.

That little word does no justice whatever to the sheer amount of work and time that goes in to making this one week out of 52 run smoothly. Most of us turn up at the Week, put in and take out, then return to our normal lives without further thought until it is time to pack our bags and instruments this time next year for a happy reunion, wherever it might be. The Committee, as we all reluctantly set off home, have already laid the foundations for what they know

is going to be a pretty relentless and sometimes maddening year's slog of organising, liaising, corresponding (mostly with people who don't reply even at the third approach!). And the Secretary, together with the Bursar, is the one who gets the main brunt of all this, the one who has to hold the ring at the centre. You simply wouldn't contemplate doing it unless you loved the thing, and I think we can say that Griselda, together with Ian and Jeremy, as Chair for much of that time, has shown her love in handsome measure. It was the poignant end of an era when Griselda decided to begin her richly-earned retirement from both Secretariat and Committee last year, but we hope the start of a new one in which she'll enjoy without cares the fruits of what are very much her labours.



Jeremy took over as Chair a couple of years after Robert stood down as Director and has been just as important as the other officers in keeping the week going. Unlike the office of Bursar and Secretary, the Chair is elected as an ordinary member from the committee membership each year. Every year Jeremy has polled the highest number of votes to be re-elected to the committee by the AGM and at the subsequent committee meeting each year has been



re-elected as chair unopposed. His great musical skills combined with his love of the week has been a major factor in the weeks continuing success.

The other side to all that, literally, is the people on the ground, into whose premises we sweep annually for all the world as if we owned the place

and with the feeling, as our patron John Sloboda once said, that the whole place had been being kept ticking over for the last 51 weeks just so that we could foregather again to pick up where we left off. Our last two years at Hengrave were presided over by James Crowe as Administrator, who was doing a heroic job trying to keep afloat what would turn out to be a sinking ship. He was a great ally in a situation where some of the Hengrave community never became convinced that we were the right sort of course for the Hall. Yet many of the Sisters over the years, especially Sr Angeles, who loved the children so much and sold cards made of pressed flowers, Sr Katie, Sr Jill and Sr Aquinas looked forward to our arrival. Sr Jill once said that although they were always much more tired after Spode had been, they felt a sense of achievement and satisfaction that they didn't with any other course. James's wife Fiona also became involved with us, and his son Matthew continued to attend into the Beechwood years.

At Beechwood, though I think we scared the life out of her at first, Sandra Newman quickly became a staunch friend, and very much went the extra mile to accommodate our wants and needs. As administrator of the summer lets she had a very stressful job

keeping things running smoothly, and once she'd seen that our bark was worse than our bite in terms of the chaos we seemed to bring, she vouchsafed that we were much easier to handle than the language schools for children which filled most of the rest of her summer. During each Music week, she would be up and working by 5:30am and was seldom in bed before midnight. After her sad and unexpected death, we very much felt her absence in our last two years at Beechwood, when her successor seemed to feel rather less warm towards us. Our stays at Stonyhurst and St Edmund's were too brief for us really to get to know anybody, but the cheerful kitchen staff, who in almost every place seem to delight in us eating as much as we can, are always recalled, most especially our chef (and caretaker) and his family from last year at Abberley, Andrew, the resident school chef, who seemed to 'get' Music Week and was always unfailingly helpful and cheerful. We will have a new cook this year and we can only hope that the food and the friendship are as good as that shown us by Andrew and his family.

FACILITIES

All our venues have had some additional features which have enhanced their amenity. As already pointed out, we have been very lucky with houses and grounds which have always been at least characterful if not stunningly beautiful. Hengrave was simply like living, albeit like gypsies, in a Tudor palace of a kind one would only normally experience as a tourist on the roped walk of a guided tour. The big gardens with their formal and informal parts, the mere and the pond, the topiary, the terrace, the summer house (crèche) and secluded corners were a delight to spend time in when one could get it. There was one particularly warm summer when nobody really wanted to do much except lie on the grass and pant. For the more active there was table tennis down in the basement and even the rather decayed tennis courts, though I'm not sure how much they

were used. Looking back we were a bit short of rooms with pianos in there, but we managed, and the rehearsing and performing spaces were elegant and ideal. The bedrooms, though very few were en-suite, were truly luxurious by comparison with what we were later to experience, some positively regal in their dimensions. And on occasion there was the court where we could have an outdoor Mass while still having an ideal acoustic for polyphony, or once memorably a harp recital on a balmy summer evening with bats flitting about as the shadows lengthened. 'Security' was never really a problem at Hengrave, and though we were meant to lock up after Compline, with a key-code for the back door and a bit of propping open one could come in and out as at home. Under the heading of 'facilities' should come the strangely prominent recollection that there was an elegant piece of furniture on one of the upstairs corridors round the courtyard which turned out to be a commode, to the general fascination of the children. One trusts it was never used as such.

Stonyhurst was much more obviously what Hengrave had once been, a school, with perfectly serviceable but Spartan bedrooms and a lot of 'working' spaces as against the homogeneous elegance of Hengrave. But there were elegant parts, a fine hall (whose acoustic however was too boomy) for recitals, display cases of genuinely fascinating Jesuit and school memorabilia and portraiture, busts and stuffed heads lining the corridors which many found rather too Gothic and spooky for their taste. What lingers most in the mind about the musical facilities (though there were plenty of indifferent pianos) is the dark and dank subterranean Music Room, the air laden with the scent of mildew, where much of our activity took place. The orchestra wasn't too overpowering in there though. Apart from the far-flung nature of the facilities, what the place lacked most was a space for late-night music making where we wouldn't wake sleeping Jesuits. The grounds were lovely

and well-kept, not least the sweeping approach, but like the buildings, too vast to take in properly. Here security was a bit intrusive, though we managed to tame the caretaker and reassure him that though there were many comings and goings through the one permissible door to the outside world (mostly to smoke), we would always see it secure when nobody was around.

At first that threatened to be a nuisance at Beechwood too, as Sandra seemed to have expected us all to be in bed by 11 (as if!) when she could lock up and retire herself; but we eventually extracted keys to the back door and the Music Block to look after ourselves, so that our nocturnal juices were allowed to flow. The only problem with this arrangement was that, unless some one key-holder was willing to stay up – it could be till 5am – and be the last to bed after locking up every night, the key had to be handed on in a sort of relay. By the time it got to 4 or 5am whoever ended up with the key might well forget they had it; might in fact forget who they were or what they were! Still we lurched through that little problem with few hiccups. Beechwood had a very quaint old school hall, which after a time, as the orchestra got bigger and louder, proved to have too oppressive an acoustic for our forces so we took to doing all the big things in the auditorium (which was in fact the gym, with an altar at one end so it could double as a church, and a big black curtain which could be drawn across to divide it). This room at first suffered from a total atmosphere bypass, but after a year or two it became imbued with memories and associations so that at least the orchestral end began to feel quite homely. We were quite well supplied with a well-used row of little practice rooms, each with at least an electric keyboard in, and the Music Block itself had one or two useful bits of percussion, music stands and a double bass. The bedrooms (and the beds) were by and large frankly some of the most Spartan ever, and most single young people under the age of 25 had to sleep in what were simply cubicle rooms with

paper-thin walls separating them from the next room. However as that age group are the ones who sleep least, and mostly pass out when they do, it was not too difficult for them. Others were distributed around a veritable rabbit warren of little corridors, attics and strange stairs that seemed to be a collection of cardboard boxes inserted into what had once been larger proper rooms. There was surely a plan and logic to it all, but one doubts if anyone except perhaps Ian ever divined what it was. Two big features stood out. Firstly (and if you were a hard pressed Mum this was almost too good to be true), if you left your dirty washing in a certain place by the kitchen, it would come back next day washed, dried, ironed and folded; this *every day*, and no matter how much you left. Even now it seems hard to believe, but there must have been a colony of laundry fairies in permanent attendance somewhere in the maze that was the domestic part of the house. Secondly, and it took us a couple of years to avail ourselves of the boon owing to our lack initially of a resident lifeguard, there was an outdoor *swimming pool*. We had at least one really hot Week at Beechwood when this truly came into its own. Conductors' fears that musicians would never be got out of it to come and rehearse were obviated by the institution of opening times (2-4) and for many it was a great enhancement to the week.

The move to St Edmund's was in the first place occasioned by Beechwood's need to refurbish during the summer of 2011. However the outcome of that work was that there were significantly fewer bedrooms when the work was complete. A quick calculation showed us that we would only be able to accommodate a maximum of 55 people in the new layout and that we would have to look around for another venue after 2011 in Canterbury.

St Edmund's had many good points. The rooms were a distinct advance on what Beechwood had to offer, the buildings and

grounds were generally spacious and attractive. To the delight of some Members there was a golf course on site, and the location on the outskirts of Canterbury made access, whether by car or train, very easy. In the area of 'security', however, matters reached a new pitch of nuisance. There were keypads to be negotiated and one felt a bit corralled (or 'kettled' as the saying now is) in certain parts of the site; to compound matters we had to disrupt the schedule to do a fire drill (elsewhere a talk on the subject had sufficed) one morning, which we *failed* owing to some Members not hearing the alarm from where they were in the shower, and turning up after the expiry of the time envelope with towels on their heads. This gave rise to tut-tutting from the gentleman who was responsible for the drill such as some of us had not heard since were naughty schoolchildren. To cap it all the smoking policy required smokers to trek to the end of the drive (5 mins walk) so as to be right off site, even in the open air, before lighting up. Ian managed to convince the powers that, without any open disobedience, this rule simply wouldn't be observed, especially late at night, and so a smoking area was nominated (which seemed to expand its identity as the week went on), out of sight of the main buildings and half way to the music block. As to two particular plusses at St Edmund's, these will be covered under another heading.

Which brings us to Abberley, where what one might call 'the state rooms' make an effect not unlike Beechwood's, though on a larger and less delicate scale, and turn out again to be a good place for chamber music. Here the bedrooms are really quite comfortable (depending on whether and with whom you share your space!) and the scale of the residential part of the house almost cosy, pleasantly and unthreateningly shabby down at the school end. The estate is located in a very peaceful and spacious tract of the Worcestershire countryside and is itself spacious (more spacious than we have really yet had time to explore) with both very pleasant formal

gardens and rolling lawns, rough ground and wooded areas as well as playing fields....it is not yet clear if the swimming pool will ever become available. The musical set-up is very good, the main hall acoustically helpful without its size making it featureless, and there are ample facilities for private practice down in the bowels of the complex provided one doesn't mind feeling a bit troglodytic. We were half-told that the chamber half-way up the clock tower is a wonderful place for music, and half-expected to find ourselves there most evenings cashing in on the legendary acoustic. Practicalities and safety concerns meant that this wasn't possible, but it is hoped that we will be able to organise an accompanied visit during this year.

CHURCHES AND CHAPELS

Probably the most distinguished church we've had at our disposal for our all-important Masses and Complines was the little one in the grounds at Hengrave (which must originally have been the village church) with its round Saxon tower and mediaeval graffiti. Unfortunately, after it became part of the estate it was progressively filled up with big Jacobean tombs with reclining effigies rendering it rather unsuitable for the liturgy. When we first arrived at Hengrave there were four or five rows of miniature pews either side of an aisle in the main body, facing an altar which was just about useable though very cramped, leaving the 'side aisle' (in reality virtually the same floor area again) a space for chairs as necessary. A few years in, the Community decided to turn the whole thing round, so that a temporary altar was placed in front of the 19th-century stained glass windows (happy memories of softened sunlight streaming in behind the celebrant) and the priest faced liturgical north towards a congregation disposed on semicircles of benches and chairs stretching back into the side aisle. This was not quite right, but we got used to it, and though small, the church had a warm if not generous acoustic which suited most of our musical purposes well.

The charming, tiny choir loft with its little organ in a faux-mediaeval painted case was built into the round tower at first floor level, approached by an equally minuscule stone spiral stair. Delightful. There was also the chapel in the house with its famous 16th-century painted glass, but we never really used it, leaving it in peace for the Community.

At Stonyhurst we had a positive *embarras de richesse* with a Church and five other chapels. The large Collegiate Chapel was where we performed most of the liturgy, using the magnificent church only for the course mass. The only other chapel used during the week was the small, long and narrow Sodality Chapel, filled with facing stalls in collegiate style, which we used once or twice. The problem here was that there was no organ, and it was the locus of one of our periodic disgraceful outbursts of corpsing in mid-Compline when David Bevan, playing a portable electronic keyboard, inadvertently hit the Bossa Nova button and was unable to locate it to turn it off. The exotic and suggestive beat went on just too long for people to keep their dignity, and Julia remembers even Fr Philip giving way to heaving shoulders eventually.

The Beechwood chapel (originally the ballroom) aroused the gravest apprehensions at first. Small-scale and with a carpeted floor on two levels (you went down some steps in the middle of the room), it had at least been a chapel for nearly a century (it was converted in Edwardian times) and had had stained glass windows put in. The altar in its tiny sanctuary was small but dignified and there were pews we could turn round to make a collegiate arrangement nearest the altar. The organ (which had to be brought in from the only alternative liturgical space, the church end of the gym) was one of those pretty dire antiquated electric ones which emitted a sort of subconscious buzz all the time and playing which was a bit like sitting atop an electric toaster. Needless to say the

'stops' all sounded pretty much the same – like a melotone crossed with a mouth-organ. But one mustn't carp. All in all Beechwood chapel became a very blessed space in which to celebrate the liturgy and, most surprising of all, its acoustic was really rather good.



At St Edmund's we at last, if briefly, enjoyed a glorious and ideal space for our liturgy unexampled since we left Spode with its perfectly formed Puginesque (but in a slightly ascetic tone of voice) chapel, generous in scale and acoustic. How fortunate that this was the year that Ludford's *Missa Videte Miraculum* had been selected for study – it would have lacked something anywhere else except perhaps Stonyhurst. The organ too was a very good instrument and it was curiously relaxing and right to be back in proper stalls for Compline.

Our arrangements at Abberley are rather reminiscent of those at Beechwood, except that here the chapel, again a conversion (from stabling) with stained glass, pews and stalls of some century ago, has a very serviceable two manual pipe-organ, a rather charming reredos of the Invention in the Temple and an acoustic quite unexpectedly good in view of the lowness of the ceiling. It will do nicely. At first sight it looks very low-church (which it mostly is), but lends itself very successfully to a move up the candle.

We have been fortunate indeed throughout this decade to have Fr. Philip Whitmore (now Monsignor and just appointed Rector of the English College in Rome) as our settled Chaplain, and not once to have lost him to holiday arrangements in Rome which was always a possibility. His sermons and his calm presence, to say nothing of his musicianship, for many will always rank among the best memories



of Music Week. He has become Spode's parish priest and a much-loved one at that, officiating at weddings and funerals for course members outside the week as well. We have also had the joy of having Fr Michael Durand, (possibly the last surviving Member of the very first Music Week) assisting every year, and latterly of re-forging of our links with the Dominican Order, who, in the person of Fr Conrad Pepler OP, were ultimately responsible

for our existence. This came about initially with a visit from Fr Austin Milner (brother of the composer of our 'theme-tune', the Form of Compline by Anthony Milner), who was delighted with what he found after an absence of 40 years, and declared the 'spirit of

Spode' alive and well. We now also have Fr Robert, (trumpet legend) and Br Matthew, renowned for his cricketing prowess, among the family too and hope that the reunion of the Week with its Dominican roots will always flourish.

Another great good fortune enjoyed by the Week has been our Liturgical Directors, Philip Duffy and David Bevan who have generally alternated from year to year in the time-consuming role of organising and conducting our daily liturgy, and whose credentials in the field of Catholic liturgical music could scarcely be more glittering. Their arrival over the last two decades has coincided with the quality of the choir reaching truly professional peaks in both performance and technical competence.

FOOD AND DRINK

It is surprising (or perhaps it isn't) how many memories revolve around the meals and the bar. The social life that ebbs and flows over meals and beers or wines is much of the life-blood of Music Week, and for self-imposedly busy people the whole question of sustenance becomes important, especially as they get more and more tired and their digestions more and more delicate as the Week wears on.

It must be admitted that the dietary regime at Hengrave didn't give universal satisfaction. Many memories are of sparse amounts of salad served with absolutely no dressing (the less feckless learnt to bring their own), a low salt regime, lovely-looking sponge puddings that turned out to be full of unsuitable nuts, and some rather strange dishes made by student volunteers, culminating "Hungarian Cauliflower", a cauliflower, apple and tomato bake (cooked to a congealed mess with a skin of tomato purée on top) which went back to the kitchen almost untouched. On the other hand are

appreciative musings on the excellent homemade plaited bread and the often very good soups. It was a pity that those who staffed the kitchen there never realised how content we were with sausages and chicken pieces baked on trays (always done to perfection) and other such simple offerings. Another recurring problem everywhere has been that our chefs like to serve the main meal at midday and only a light (and rather early) supper so that they can keep as sociable hours as possible. This is not a very good scheme for people who often miss breakfast or have it too soon before lunch or get up just in time for lunch, and then stay up till 4am, perhaps 10 hours after their last, frugal repast. At Hengrave this last was sometimes very frugal indeed; but once again, the wise took steps and got in siege rations for the long watches of the night, or squirreled away bits of meals to re-visit out of hours.

The meals were brought to us at table in the Dining Room, whose acoustic was pretty deafening when all the clinking of cutlery and glasses got going, to say nothing of general conversation and the squeals of dissatisfied tots. Accordingly, when our numbers necessitated a seating overflow in the Pantry (the dear Pantry where so much friendship was exchanged over teas and coffees) there was usually an unseemly dash to get a seat there in relative quiet. It was at Hengrave that the last of the Spode tradition of helping with the washing-up (another great social institution as Fr Conrad saw) fizzled out. We originally had a volunteer rota, but fewer and fewer volunteered and eventually it became clear that the staff (themselves mostly volunteers) found it easier to get on alone, so we were finally reduced just to clearing and washing up the numerous glass tea mugs and bar glasses in the Pantry. Some of the more helpful souls still chip in with these duties.

From the start at Hengrave, the bar was managed by Ian but by the 50th Anniversary it was manned and the glasses washed, by a team

of volunteers. It was housed in what the Hall called The Greengage Room. Both its position outside the main house and the Hall's curiously strict attitude to opening times took a little getting used to after the arrangement at Spode House, where the bar was a cubby hole under the stairs right in the heart of the house, and it closed more or less when nobody wanted any more to drink. But by 2003 we had come to terms with it and it seemed very much a home from home. It was a nice roomy place with plenty of windows, big enough to hold some seated course events like the quiz and well-arranged with a proper bar and optics etc, so that it remained quite orderly and tidy. Everywhere we've been the sheer amount of good beer we get through and the number of empty bottles each morning play no small part in the locals' apprehension that we are at any moment going to run amok and wreck the joint, but they are usually pacified when they hear us singing Palestrina and Gregorian chant like the very angel choir itself (well, something like that) soon after breakfast.



Our stay at Stonyhurst saw a return to a good Northern approach to diet, with a cooked breakfast every day and excellent, plain working-class food in copious quantities at every generous meal; and you could go back for more as often as you wanted till it was all gone. The bar was another matter, being basically a trolley in a kitchenette in the corner of a common room that had an almost total atmosphere-bypass. The ambiance of the bar seems to play a large part in whether our recollections of a venue are happy or not!

At Beechwood the food was by and large very good and sometimes excellent, with some sort of warm breakfast every day and a salad bar at every meal in addition to the hot food. Fish and chips on Friday was particularly eagerly anticipated and a couple of very pleasant chefs were always ready with a cheery word and there were usually as many seconds as one could want. Only on one occasion, a Sunday evening when a student stepped in on relief, was there a bit of a disaster which reduced poor Sandra to tears. He'd made a 'spaghetti bolognese' of which there was nowhere near enough, and for which the pasta seemed to have been kept on a low light since lunchtime so it was reduced to a solid, sodden and tasteless mass – he seemed to have eschewed the salt too. Memories of the bar are variable. The local beer (Shepherd Neame) was good, delivered in a cask which we spiled ourselves, and once Sandra had got over her shock that we got through at least 3 barrels instead of the 1 she thought might be too much, and had allowed us to take over much of the running of the bar, it could be enjoyed as much as any pint drunk uncooled from a plastic glass could be. There are also memories of warm gin and tonic with no ice served in a plastic cup (health and safety frowning on glasses of any kind) and providing a visiting lecturer with his pre-prandial sherry in similarly graceless style. The bar was usually a table across the doorway of a small lockable practice room with only one inadequate fridge in it, though one year it was located at the back of the featureless

Auditorium (gym/chapel) – an experiment that was *not* repeated. In its usual location, it was at least near to the centre of things, in the corridor outside the refectory where we queued at length for our meals and just by the Hall where we gave most of our recitals.

St Edmunds had really nicely presented and good food (seconds not quite so copiously available) with something warm and plenty of choice at breakfast and a spacious and atmospheric collegiate-style Hall to eat it in. It also had a proper bar with pub-style seating as well as easy chairs, and this became the focus which the venue otherwise seemed to lack from our point of view. By this time Lawrence White was our resident bar manager, running an extremely efficient ship with a proper understanding of our needs, and it was nice for him to have proper facilities in which to carry out his mission of mercy to the parched.

Here at Abberley we were positively regaled last year by the delightful Andrew with literally as much, and more, excellent food as we could possibly eat. Breakfasts with unlimited bacon and sausages, salads to all tastes and cakes at teatime (these have always been an important feature since the days of Spode's legendary currant bread and the Club biscuits at Hengrave, especially for the little ones) kept us almost too contentedly full to function. The bar in the cricket pavilion was absolutely perfect in every way except its location – when it is such a distance from the centres of impromptu musical activity it is very much the latter that suffers. We will see if this year's arrangements prove more suitable.

SPORTS AND PASTIMES

In addition to the tennis (Alison's chic tennis outfit and Martyn's tiny white shorts left their mark), table tennis, golf and swimming which have occasionally been on offer, there was a thriving croquet

culture for some years at Hengrave, as well as all the usual lawn games. Football doesn't seem to figure much, but cricket, in one form or another, has loomed large, not least because of the injuries sustained. Peter Whitaker's dislocated shoulder necessitated an ambulance, and since it kept him off work for some weeks, there was a nervous moment for the committee while we waited to see if Public Liability Insurance (which at that time we didn't have) would be invoked. It wasn't. Last year at Abberley there was both the arrival of Brother Cricket, which upped the skills of the home team at a stroke, but also John Lees's dislocated finger, which was quickly, if painfully, put right by our resident nurses Alice and Julia without need to trouble the emergency services.



One hesitates to allude to the late-night session of naked cricket (with topless cheerleaders) at Beechwood, with several ladies of a certain age peering out of the conservatory windows, 'Good Heavens'-ing and trying not to appear too interested; those who

were there would probably rather forget, and those who weren't won't want their minds filled with disturbing images. Such wanton and drink-fuelled goings on are in fact quite innocent and mercifully rare. There has always been a bit of a culture of harmless transgression among the younger members, and in such interesting buildings this often took the form of exploring places that were out of bounds, such as the battlements or the cellars at Hengrave, the swimming pool (in the wee hours) or the Headmaster's garden at Beechwood.



Of course, many prefer when not making music just to lie on the grass or sit reading while the more insatiable fill their free time with chamber music, card games (how we miss the bridge school now it is no more) and physical activity. Smoking ranks as a pastime now that we have to go somewhere special to do it, and there has evolved a very close-knit little community-within-a-community of

such outcasts hanging around the outside doors in all weathers whenever they can get a moment. The row of grottoes at Beechwood was quite a gift for this purpose when the weather was inclement. There is an anonymous corps of cigarette-butt fairies who have to clear up the debris daily, and particularly at the end of the week, who would like their offices over ten years acknowledged, bless them.

In view of the nocturnal nature of much of the music-making, some have opted to get their beauty sleep in *during* course activities, either by absenting themselves or by actually turning up but then falling visibly and noisily asleep right under the nose of a lecturer or recitalist, or even of a conductor. This is always taken in good part. Among outstanding memories of extra-mural music over the last decade have been singing Allegri's Miserere at one end of the



Ambulacrum at Stonyhurst while basketball was playing at the other, Mark Armstrong and Rick Bolton's hugely popular jazz jams (how lucky we are to have such important musicians as one of the gang), the Guitar Group with Rick and latterly Francis, Andy Lamb's Ukulele Class when virtually everyone picked up the basics on instruments acquired at a discount by Griselda (this has provided a semi-permanent thread in our activities owing to Ian's enthusiasm) and finally having enough string players to do Vaughan Williams's Tallis Fantasia. The general level of instrumental accomplishment has shot up out of all recognition, and we have been fortunate indeed to have professional conductors of the calibre of Eli Corp to make the most of that, as well as our pro string leaders Steve and Angelica Galea, all of whom have mucked in out of hours in true Spode style to lift the quality.

THE LAST NIGHT

Not surprisingly, since planning and preparation for items occupies much of members' creative energies during the week, the Last Night (officially Members') Concert generates a great deal of reminiscence. In fact, the preparation, and particularly the backstage flap before going on, seems to provoke some of the most clear memories. We brought some fancy dress from Spode with us, and when we left Hengrave the Sisters were happy for us to carry off quite a lot of their fantastical collection of weird garments, false beards, goblets and headgear too. This is occasionally added to by ladies updating their wardrobes, and it seems to travel with us up and down the country. Julia and Janet have both done service, and Rachael is currently the wardrobe mistress in that she stores the collection in her attic. Any member will unlock a whole cache of memory just by picturing some of these strange frocks and scarves etc.

Many serious or witty items are recalled, but chief among the memories have been Macbeth (unabridged) and its sequel Six of the Best, in which Howard was liturgically punished by Austin (dressed as the most bizarre bishop you've ever seen) for the offence he'd given with the former. Our own Beverley Sisters, Sophie, Mary and Ellie, are recalled for some exquisite and hilarious close harmony numbers such as Close To You and Haree Harro, as is Debbie for an astonishing dance routine in Showboat (Scratch rather than Last Night). Among many charming items from the Junior Choir directed by Heidi or Ellie, from Junior Orchestra and from individuals among the children, a sketch by Charlie and George about guinea-pig soup elicited from young Henry the comment 'They're so silly' – a critic in the making.



Some of the 'spectaculars' involving a full cast, incidental music, set and props, have lingered longest in the mind: Abberley Radio and Fashique last year, and further back Hengrave TV and Blind Date, graced by arrangements of authentic TV tunes by Francis or Felix. And talking of TV, we cannot overlook the huge contribution of transvestism to the Last Night. In a tradition that stretches back to 'Every Baby needs a Da-da-Daddy' at Spode, we have seen Fearghus as the lovely Fionnuala in Blind Date at Hengrave, Log and Neil as two seriously glamorous gals in Phelix and the Philanderers at Beechwood, Will as Tranny Garth in the immortal Sherriff George & Hotshot Richie series or as the weird Bearded Woman of Pesuvius in

just about anything, and Julia doing Jeremy, Helen doing David, Austin doing Julia and Log doing Sophie (voices as well as *travesti*). Most recently Rod has added Ms Truly Scrumptious to this gallery of grotesques.

And when all the hilarity and excitement is done, our gargantuan midnight feasts after the show, to which everyone contributes some delicacies and alcoholic cheer, have imparted a warm glow to the recollection of the whole event.

IN CLOSING

Among other random memories are many which defy categorisation: Howard falling off his motorbike or riding off with Alana as pillion (to Debbie's great anxiety), a whole case of wine falling disastrously out of the back of someone's car, Njal Buick's completely paralytic attempt to accompany Compline, all the headless dollies in the Quiet Room at Hengrave, the time a mad rumour got about that when Philip Duffy failed to appear at a morning rehearsal it was because he'd died in the night, Neil's stovepipe hat in 'Oliver', Jimbo peering perilously through a high balustrade at Stonyhurst.....other members reading this will be able to fill pages with memories of their own. It is to be hoped that when, God willing, we come to compile a booklet of 70th Anniversary memoirs, the next decade will be as heartwarming and as satisfying to look back on as the last.















SPODEWORKS 2003-2012

2003

Course Mass:	Stravinsky	<i>Jeremy White</i>
Course Works	Stanford: Magnificat, Bach: Der Geist hilft	<i>David Bevan</i>
Scratch Work:	Mozart: The Magic Flute	<i>Jeremy White</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue Rodgers: South Pacific Selection	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	Haiku Competition	

2004

Course Mass:	Frank Martin	<i>Philip Duffy</i>
Course Works	Bach: Cantata 131 Aus der Tiefen	<i>David Bevan</i>
Scratch Work:	Gilbert & Sullivan: Patience	<i>Felix McGonigal</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Copland: Hoedown Vaughan Williams: Wasps Overture	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	Margaret Knight Harp Recital	

2005

Course Mass:	Alonso Lobo: Missa Maria Magdalena	<i>Tony Bevan</i>
Course Works	Runswick: Folksongs Vaughan Williams: Shakespeare Songs	<i>Dominic McGonigal</i>
Scratch Work:	Bart: Oliver	<i>Felix McGonigal</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade, Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	Playford dancing	

2006

Course Mass:	Poulenc Villette: Hymne à la Vierge Gorecki: Totus Tuus	<i>Dominic McGonigal</i>
Course Works	Finzi: In Terra Pax and 7 Songs of Robert Bridges	<i>Tony Bevan</i>
Scratch Work:	Beethoven: Fidelio	<i>Jeremy White</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Borodin: Polovtsian Dances Copland: Buckaroo Holiday	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	RSJ Sanctus Competition	

2007

Course Mass:	Tallis: Missa Puer Natus Davy: Salve Regina	<i>Dominic McGonigal</i>
Course Works	Brahms: Fest und Gedenksprüche Britten: Hymn to St Cecilia	<i>Debbie Miles Johnson</i>
Scratch Work:	Kern: Showboat	<i>Felix McGonigal</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake, Rimsky: Scheherazade	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	Ukuleles begin	

2008

Course Mass:	Vaughan Williams in G minor	<i>Jeremy White</i>
Course Works	Matthias: May Magnificat and Shakespeare Songs	<i>Felix McGonigal</i>
Scratch Work:	Smetana: The Bartered Bride	<i>Jeremy White</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Bernstein: Candide Overture, Beethoven: Triple Concerto, Thunderbirds	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	Sponsored Grade I	

2009

Course Mass:	Rheinberger in Eb	<i>Susie Stranders</i>
Course Works	Jonathan Dove: The Passing of the Year	<i>Debbie Miles Johnson</i>
Scratch Work:	Alexander's Feast	<i>Tony Bevan</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez Rimsky: Scheherazade	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	The Honda Choir	

2010

Course Mass:	Roxanna Panufnik	<i>Philip Duffy</i>
Course Works	Monteverdi Vespers	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Scratch Work:	Country Dancing	<i>led by Jane Johnson</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Elgar: Enigma Variations Vaughan Williams: Folksong Suite	<i>Tony Bevan</i>
Other:	Final Fantasy 7 Overture arr. Francis Bevan	

2011

Course Mass:	Ludford Missa Videte Miraculum	<i>Dominic McGonigal</i>
Course Works	Michael Haydn: Requiem	<i>Philip Duffy</i>
Scratch Work:	Cole Porter: Kiss me Kate	<i>Felix McGonigal</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Weber: Clarinet Concertino Saint-Saëns: Danse Bacchanale Smetana: Ma Vlast	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Other:	Susie and Alison's Duet recital	

2012

Course Mass:	Bruckner in E minor	<i>Debbie Miles Johnson</i>
Course Works	Daniel-Lesur: Le Cantique des Cantiques	<i>Jeremy White</i>
Scratch Work:	Gilbert & Sullivan: The Pirates of Penzance	<i>Eli Corp</i>
Orchestral highlights:	Dvořák: Symphony 8 Rossini: Barber of Seville Overture Radio Favourites arr. F. Bevan: Vivan Ellis: Coronation Scot (Paul Temple) Jack Strachey: In Party Mood (Housewives' Choice) Eric Coates: Calling All Workers (Music While You Work) By the Sleepy Lagoon (Desert Island Discs)	<i>Tony Bevan</i>
Other:	Vaughan Williams: Tallis Fantasia	

RECITALS AND LECTURES 2003-2012

2003 Jazz Evening in the bar (Greengage Room) with **Rick Bolton**

(full course fee £375) **Alison Wells** and **Martyn Parry** – Schoenberg: The Book of the Hanging Gardens and songs by RSJ, Colin Matthews and Britten

Jo Peach – piano recital including works by Liszt, Grieg, Debussy, Rachmaninov and RSJ

Mary Remnant – Pilgrim Music on the Road to Walsingham

Hélène La Rue – Simon Beale's Trumpet

John Sloboda – Why Music Education in Schools is failing

Mary Berry – A Renaissance in Gregorian Chant

2004 **Margaret Knight** – harp recital including works by Dussek and

(full course fee £365) self-accompanied songs

Mark Armstrong – trumpet recital accompanied by organ and piano

Sophie Bevan and **Sebastian Wybrew** – cancelled through illness

Folk Night in the bar with **Judith Henderson**

Fr Philip Whitmore – The Ordinary of the Mass

Margaret Knight – The Harp

Rick Bolton – Jazz Workshop

2005 **John Human** – piano recital

(full course fee £360) **Desmond Turner** and **Neil Mackenzie** – works by Bach and Handel with ensemble, and songs including Finzi 'Let Us Garlands Bring'

Jonny Ireson and **Alison Wells** with **Edmund White** – bassoon recital including works by Pierné, Shostakhovitch and Hindemith

Hélène La Rue and **Mark Armstrong** – 'And the trumpet shall sound'

Helen Abbott – Discordant Harmonies: French poetry and music

Emma Hornby – From Nativity to Resurrection: Musical and exegetical resonances in the Good Friday second-mode Tracts

Andy Lamb – Playford Dance Workshop

2006 **Mary Bevan** and **Eleanor White** with **Alison Wells** – vocal recital including duets

(full course fee £360) by Tchaikovsky, Bizet and Rossini

Dickie Halliday and **Matthew Hough** – tuba and piano recital

John Human – piano recital including works by Bach, Beethoven and Chopin

Steve Abbott – Acoustics for the Practical Musician

Christopher Purvis – Who paid for your seat?: unseen Arts subsidies

Rachel Baldock – Like Father, like Son: oboe and voice in JS and CPE Bach

Mary Remnant – St Francis and the musical road to Santiago de Compostela

2007 **Steve Galea** and **Alison Wells** – violin and piano recital

(full course fee £320) **Vernon Kirk** and **Neil Mackenzie** – tenor and piano, including Britten 'WinterWords'

Robin Whitehouse and **Peter McMullin** – horn and piano, including Beethoven's Sonata

Anthony Hyne – David Jones and Ditchling

Caroline Rae – Alejo Carpentier and new music in pre-Revolutionary Cuba

Fr Philip Whitmore – Singing proper in Church: an introduction to the Propers of the Mass

Mark Armstrong – Jazz Workshop

Andy Lamb – Ukulele Workshop

2008 **Alison Wells** and **David Knotts** – Messiaen 'Harawi'

(full course fee £330)

Andy Fryer with **Dominic McGonigal**, **Austin Sherlaw Johnson** and **Ann Sloboda** - cello and piano including works by Bach, Beethoven, Poulenc and ASJ
Sophie Bevan and **Sebastian Wybrew** – a recital of German and French song
Judith Bingham – Composing for the Church
David Bevan – Beethoven String Quartets
Fr Austin Milner OP – The earlier life of Conrad Pepler OP
Fr Philip Whitmore (chair) – Parish Music 40 years on: open discussion

2009 **Lawrence White** and **Katie Playfair** – baritone and piano including Beethoven 'An die Ferne Geliebte' and a song by William White

(full course fee £335)

Edmund White, **Angelica Galea** and **Alison Wells** – clarinet, cello and piano including the trios by Beethoven and Brahms
Sophie Bevan and **Susie Stranders** – What happens at a professional coaching session (replacing a recital lost through illness)
Tony Bevan – Catholic Hymns and their Origins
Mary Remnant – Music on the Pilgrim routes to the Shrines of St Winifred
Ann Sloboda – Music Therapy and Trauma
Cherry Forbes – On and Off the Stage: the educational work of the OAE

2010 **Rick Bolton** with **Ann Sloboda** and **Pete Cooper** – music for cello and piano including Bach and Schumann, followed by folk and original music with violin

(full course fee £340)

Steve Galea and **Fr Philip Whitmore** – viola and piano
Sebastian Wybrew – piano recital
David Bevan – Harmonisation (Bach Chorales)
Ian Saxton – Pretty Pastel Pigeons: the life of Lord Berners
Emma Hornby – Studying the Untranscribable: adventures in Old Hispanic chant
Fr Austin Milner OP – Fr Conrad Pepler: the latter part of the life of Spode's founder

2011 **Jeremy White** and **Sebastian Wybrew** – bass and piano, including works by Schubert, Debussy and Rachmaninov

(full course fee £390)

Alison Wells and **Susie Stranders** – piano duets including Mozart, Fauré and Poulenc
Agnes Bevan and **Michael Bevan** – flute and piano including works by Prokofiev, Chaminade, Bevan and Poulenc
Terry Curran – Performing to the Red Light: the psychology of recording
Mary Remnant – Music, minstrels and instruments in the lifetime of St Anselm
Matthew Martin – The role of Chant in the modern Mass
Pete Cooper – John Clare, Thomas Hardy and English Fiddle Music

2012 **Rod Morris** and **Sebastian Wybrew** – countertenor and piano

(full course fee £360)

Rosie Cow and **Katie Playfair** – bassoon and piano including works by Saint Saëns, Gounod and Elgar
Michaela Kaaser and **Ann Sloboda** – violin and piano including works by Mozart, Schumann and Bartók
Richard Vendome – Vivaldi's Women
Philip Duffy – The Mersey Sound: Liverpool in the 60s (new cathedral, new music, new liturgy?)
Laura Roberts – Clara Schumann's Theme
James Kenelm Clarke – Library Music

