



*'Parish Soundscapes'. Twelfth Warwick Symposium on Parish Research. Warwick Network for Parish Research; Humanities Research Centre, University of Warwick, 10.05.2014.*

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## **'Parish Soundscapes'. Twelfth Warwick Symposium on Parish Research**

The theme for the Twelfth Warwick Symposium on Parish Research was 'Parish Soundscapes'. The day began with an introduction by BEAT KÄMIN (Warwick), who welcomed the participants and highlighted the benefits of closer collaboration between historians and musicologists. The scope of the proceedings spanned both pre- and post-Reformation times, the British Isles and Continental areas as well as different disciplinary perspectives. It became clear throughout the day that the study of parish soundscapes had a truly 'Global Appeal'.

The first keynote by MAGNUS WILLIAMSON (Newcastle) investigated continuities and alterations in the musical soundscape of churches in pre- and post-Reformation England and France. In the wake of substantial work on documentary evidence of the presence of music in churches, Williamson strove to move towards broader questions of overall trends, comparative analysis, parish decision-making, uses of space and Reformation changes. A key difference between the case studies was the greater degree of decentralisation in England, where late medieval polyphony spread well beyond metropolitan environments. In France, however, there was little devolvement from cathedrals or collegiates to parish churches until the seventeenth century. It was suggested that this could have been due to factors like geographical size and parochial autonomy. Another important issue was the role of congregations in the light of recent research on 'musicking': was there really a change from 'passive' to 'active' involvement during the sixteenth century or should the parishioners' role in the late

medieval liturgy be considered as a different, yet just as important, form of participation as the singing of psalms? Finally, the loss of lectern singing (conveying a sense of 'togetherness' in a demarcated sacred space) and growing use of individual part books was raised as an important aspect of Reformation change. Williamson's paper concluded with a call to move beyond the 'mapping' of parish soundscapes towards a more 'experimental mode of enquiry'. The subsequent discussion touched on the role of religious nonconformity, the instrumentalising of psalms as a form of resistance, the dissemination of professional expertise from centre to periphery and the domestic use of 'table books' allowing members of a household to sing together. To assess religious soundscapes, scholarly analysis thus needs to consider activities both within and outside the parish church.

A new feature of the symposium involved a stall and display put together by one of the Network's partner communities. Using specially-commissioned photographs and exhibits, ALASTAIR DYMOND and STEVEN TIBBETS (Berkswell Church) informed participants about the parish bells. Their presentation featured a historical overview of purchases and functions from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century, a recording of the full peal, excerpts from churchwardens' accounts, interviews with current bell ringers and the display of a fascinating remnant of the pre-Reformation soundscape. The Sanctus bell, which would have been rung at the elevation during the Late Middle Ages, was hidden in the Norman tower of the church to avoid its confiscation by

Edward VI's officials. The ensuing discussion touched on the 'subversive' side of bell-ringing, secular uses and the enduring social aspect of the activity.

The inclusion of four shorter project reports formed another new element of this year's proceedings. In the first, KRISTI BAIN (Northwestern) continued the theme of bells in her case study of Wymondham Abbey. Here, a pre-Reformation conflict occurred when the monks stripped local parishioners of access to the bell tower and thus a key focus of communal identity. This prompted a long campaign of complaints, petitions and fundraising by the laity, eventually resulting in the construction of a second tower complete with their own bells. During questions, it was noted that neighbouring parishes could feel very competitive about their respective peals and that bell ringers were not necessarily ardent 'churchgoers'.

The blending of secular and religious aspects was further explored in the second short paper by BART MINNEN (independent scholar) dedicated to the rural pilgrimage church of Wezemaal in Belgium. Focusing particularly on the feast day of St Job (10 May), he provided a broad panorama of the parish soundscape ranging from the 'sound of the crowd' (jostling for indulgences and enjoying entertainments provided by pipers) to 'angelic chants' (associated with worship and liturgical practices). Historians thus need to cover all these aspects, acknowledging that church bells could also be rung for protection against evil spirits. Discussion topics included the seasonal variety in the soundscape and the complex overlaps between religious and economic dimensions.

The third research presentation by EMILIE K. M. MURPHY (York/London) investigated the soundscape of Catholic recusants at Little Crosby from 1580 until 1640. Supported by the patronage of the wealthy Blundell family, a rich musical repertory helped Catholics to forge a distinct identity. Often set to popular tunes and using accessible lyrics, repetition and simple rhyming schemes, ballads in particular helped to express allegiance to the 'old faith'. Some had an aggressively anti-Protestant stance, others were more devotional in character, echoing well-known love songs as a symbol of attachment to one's religion. The ensuing discussion reflected the peculiar nature of Little Crosby as a homogenous community of Catholics and the significance of religious ballads during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries more generally.

ANDREW THOMSON (Winchester) completed this

section with a report on his ongoing work on the consistory court records of Worcester and Winchester dioceses. The paper outlined numerous instances where the sacred space of the church was violated or subverted. A number of these offences were based around the lack of church music, for example the prosecution of churchwardens for damage done to an organ or the failure to repair it, others concerned failures to ring church bells upon a bishop's arrival. Disorderly conduct included quarrelling in the church over one's seats, verbal / physical abuse of ministers or 'rough music'. Public drunkenness and lewdness were also documented, as when three drunken men chased a dog around a church before washing it in the baptismal font or in a case of indecent exposure in the church yard, where the offender allegedly 'made water' in front of female parishioners. The Q&A session centred on difficulties such as fragmentary record survival and lack of full case details in many entries.

JONATHAN WILLIS (Birmingham) then delivered the second keynote on post-Reformation music in a sample of ten London parishes. He challenged the traditional argument of decline due to Protestant hostility towards organ music and the parallel rise of inflation prompting churches to 'downgrade' more lavish musical accompaniments to the liturgy. Much rather, there was greater fluidity in practice and remarkable support for singers in a number of parishes well into the Elizabethan period. St James Garlickhithe was considered evangelical in its beliefs yet regularly paid for the maintenance of their organ and the services of an organist to play at services. Similarly, St Dunstan in the West - where William Tyndale is known to have preached - invested in a pair of new organs in 1569 and paid 4 shillings to repair one in 1574. Purchases of psalters, furthermore, highlight the rise of a Protestant musical culture. The ensuing discussion reinforced the impression of transformation rather than collapse, pointing to the survival of some parochial choirs and the possibility of continued involvement of former chantry priests.

JOHN HARPER (Bangor) opened his final contribution with case studies of the visual, sensory and emotional 'Experience of Worship' as studied in a major AHRC project. By using enactments and specially commissioned artefacts the participants gained entirely new insights into the late medieval liturgy (e.g. its spatial dimensions) and a sharper understanding of Reformation changes (e.g. the much greater audibility/accessibility of Prayer Book services). Close study of records like inventories and visitation records, furthermore, reveals the remarkable extent and spread of musical literature in En-

English parishes. Once more, attention turned to bells and their evolving functions: from traditional uses associated with the start of mass, the Elevation of the Host, the marking of the hours and death knells to more secular occasions like the anniversary of Elizabeth I's Accession and the Triumph Day in 1589 to mark the defeat of the Armada. By way of a comment, Harper then reviewed some of the main themes of the day such as: Soundscapes within and outside the church; Uses of bells, organs and other instruments in both pre- and post-Reformation times; The literacy levels of musicians / singers and their parish connections; The relationship of liturgical, civic and domestic musical landscapes; Uses of space within / outside the church and the role of music in the demarcation of sacred space; The need to go beyond texts/documents and the methodical challenges of reconstructing the sensory experience of pre-modern services; Music, performance and parish identities.

The general discussion concluded that a comprehensive overview of parish soundscapes was now of utmost importance. Data, records and methods need to be shared within an interdisciplinary context; a task which the Network might help to facilitate through its interactive My Parish platform. For abstracts, pictures, podcasts and videos from the Symposium see (25.6.2014)

Looking ahead, the thirteenth meeting in 2015 will mark the coincidence of 50-year anniversaries of both the University of Warwick and the Warwickshire Local History Society with a programme focused on the parishes

of the county.

#### Conference Overview:

Beat Kämin (Warwick), Welcome and Introduction

Magnus Williamson (Newcastle), Here and there, before and after: some thoughts on parish music in England and France, 1400-1700

Alastair Dymond / Steven Tibbets: Berkswell Bells: Stall/Presentation

#### Current research projects:

Kristi Bain (Northwestern), Battles in the belfry: The late medieval bell dispute at Wymondham Abbey

Bart Minnen (Belgium), The remarkable soundscape of the pilgrimage church of Wezemaal (Brabant, Belgium) in the 15th and 16th centuries

Emilie K. M. Murphy (York), English Catholic soundscapes: The case of Little Crosby, 1580-1640

Andrew Thomson (Winchester), Consistory court capophony: What their records can contribute to our knowledge of the 17th-century soundscape

Jonathan Willis (Birmingham), Music in the post-reformation English parish church: a theme and variations

John Harper (Bangor), Context, comment and outlook

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

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