

SAMUEL SEBASTIAN WESLEY (1810-1876)



The 14th August this year marks the bi-centenary of the birth of S. S. Wesley, widely regarded as the greatest composer of English church music between Purcell and Stanford. As a young man he was concurrently organist of three London churches (including St Giles Camberwell, where Mendelssohn had preceded him) and was in great demand as an organist and as an improviser. Subsequently he became organist of Hereford Cathedral, Leeds PC, Exeter, Winchester and Gloucester Cathedrals. He had the gift of writing beautiful melodies and rich harmonies in a noble style. This was highly innovative, and became delightfully and unmistakably English.

He was an enthusiast about cathedral music - which was at this time at a very low ebb - and he wrote articles on the reforms he thought necessary to raise the standard and reform the whole system. He had a somewhat chequered career in the closes and many arguments with the authorities over this. However, he was known on occasion to absent himself from a service to go fishing!

So, at St Augustine's we are paying homage to this great man by including in our music lists anthems, canticle settings and even (hopefully) his Communion Service in E. If you are interested, watch our music lists. All this culminates later in the year with a celebratory Evensong with his Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in E, 'I am thine' as an Introit, and his large scale anthem 'Ascribe Unto The Lord'. This date has been set as **Saturday 6th November at 5.00 pm**, so do please come along and see for yourself.

Mention should be made of his hymn tunes; many generations have sung and loved the following, but probably never knew who the composer was: 'The Church's One Foundation'; 'Christ Is Our Corner-stone' and 'O Thou Who Comest From Above'. For those who don't know it, look at his tune ***Cornwall*** - perhaps his best?

Listen to the tune here: [O Love Divine, How Sweet Thou Art](#)

Samuel Sebastian Wesley's legacy to the Anglican church is irreplaceable; not only his music, but also his perception and perseverance, which, in no small way, contributed towards the standards with which cathedral music is now synonymous.

He died in Gloucester at age of 66 and is buried in the family vault in Exeter. At his death, tributes poured in thick and fast. A memorable one, from the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, says it all: "He will be greater still in the eyes of them that come after".

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