

HANDEL & JOHN BEARD

(Paper given to the 2005 Handel Symposium)

JOHN BEARD: THE TENOR VOICE THAT INSPIRED HANDEL, ARNE AND BOYCE

1. 1732-1742

The only singer who took part in performances of every single one of Handel's English Oratorios was the tenor John Beard. Having first heard him as a talented chorister in the Chapel Royal choir when Bernard Gates mounted a performance of "Esther"¹ to celebrate his 47th birthday,² Handel remembered his potential, and nurtured the young protégé when his treble voice turned to a useful tenor.

Beard's 'broken' voice must have matured remarkably quickly.³ There is a letter of 1734 which describes him as having 'left the Chappel at Easter'.⁴ This may well have been partially correct, even though his discharge papers from the choir are dated October.⁵ As Burrows suggests, Beard may have stayed on and sung as a tenor for the next six months "on account of his general usefulness to the choir"⁶. At this early stage the possibility of obtaining a permanent position in the back row of the choir may have seemed his most likely career-prospect.

And yet, on November 8th, a mere ten days after being honourably dismissed from Royal service, he appeared at Covent Garden Theatre as *Silvio* in Handel's "*Il Pastor Fido*". It was the beginning of a relationship that would last throughout the remaining twenty-five years of Handel's life. Henceforward Beard would always be his tenor of choice.

The first oratorio that had a part specifically written for his voice was *Alexander's Feast*. The premiere was on February 19th 1736, and it gave Beard his first success. As Sir John Hawkins said: "Instead of airs that required the delicacy of Cuzzoni, or the volubility of Faustina, ...he (Handel) hoped to please by songs, the beauties whereof were within the

¹ He sang the part of 'Israelite Priest' according to Burney *An account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey...* 1785, p.100. The information had been supplied by John Randall, a fellow chorister. It was repeated at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 1st & 3rd March 1732. Also: Earl of Egmont Diary, 1, p. 225

² on February 23rd 1732

³ In 1733 he was a treble soloist in performances at the Whitehall Banqueting House in aid of the Chapel Royal Fund; and in 1734 his name ('Bird') is pencilled against the tenor Aria "Strength and Honour" in Handel's Wedding Anthem "This is the day which the Lord has made" HWV 262 (see Burrows *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* pp. 336-8)

⁴ Lady Elizabeth Compton, 21st November 1734. Deutsch *Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 375

⁵ 29th October 1734: issued by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. He also received a present of clothing from the Crown worth 10 guineas on 29th October 1734. PRO LC5/73/122

⁶ Burrows *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* p. 336

comprehension of less fastidious hearers than frequent the opera, namely, such as were adapted to a tenor voice, from the natural firmness ...whereof little more is expected than an articulate utterance of the words, and a just expression of the melody; and he was happy in the assistance of a singer possessed of these and many other valuable qualities.”⁷

When the 1739 season was presented at the Haymarket Theatre Handel had composed two new oratorios with major roles for Beard: *Saul*, and *Israel in Egypt*. There was a dress rehearsal for *Saul* on January 8th. On the 9th of January Lord Wentworth wrote to the Earl of Strafford: “Mr Handel rehearsed yesterday a new Oratorio call’d Saul.” But John Beard, rehearsing for the role of *Jonathan*, had other important matters to attend to on that day.

It has been generally agreed, without hard evidence, that he married Lady Henrietta Herbert of Powis (née Waldegrave) on that day⁸. In addition, he was in the middle of a 3-year contract at Drury Lane, and was required to be on stage every evening in some comic afterpiece or other. On the 8th he was performing the role of *The Spaniard* in *Columbine Courtesan*. With no proof of the ceremony in church records, some had begun to wonder if it had taken place at all.⁹ Because Henrietta was a Catholic, and Beard an Anglican, they had great difficulty in obtaining the services of a priest. It was common knowledge that they were scouring London for one. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote - two months before the eventual wedding: “Lady Harriet Herbert furnished the tea-tables here with fresh tattle... Lady Gage ...was told by a priest that she had desired him to marry her the next day to Beard, who sings in the farces at Drury-Lane. He refused her that ...office... She is since returned to London, and some people believe her married; others, that [s]he is too much intimidated by Mr Waldegrave’s threats to dare to go through [with] the ceremony...”¹⁰

I can now state that, after considerable research, I have discovered that John Beard married Henrietta in the Fleet Prison, on 8th January. The marriage is recorded in the notebooks of John Burnford, clerk and register keeper: “*John Beard of St Pauls Covent Garden Gent and Henaritta [sic] Herbert of St James Westminster. Ash.*”¹¹

The last part of this entry is a reference to Edward Ashwell, a catholic priest imprisoned there, who, through a quirk of English law, had been granted ‘The Liberties of the Fleet’. This allowed him to perform clandestine marriages for a small fee without the need for banns or licence.¹² Further research has also shown that, unknown to Londoners, he was not

⁷ Hawkins A General History of the Science and Practice of Music, 1776, Vol. 2 p. 889

⁸ “This week the Lady Henrietta Powis, a young widow of 22 years old, married Birde [sic] the singing man”. Earl of Egmont’s Diary, quoted in Deutsch *Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 472

Jan. 11. “Mr Beard, a celebrated Comedian, and Singer at Drury Lane Theatre – to Lady Henrietta Herbert, Relict of Lord Edward Herbert...” *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. IX, p. 46

⁹ “After these Nuptials, concerning which, curiously enough, no mention is found in Peerages of authority, Beard retired a while from the stage”. DNB. This entry can now be updated: the Wedding did take place, and Beard continued working until 8th May 1740. It was only then that he ‘retired a while’.

¹⁰ November 1738. *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague* ed. Robert Halsband, Oxford 1966, p. 127-8

¹¹ RG7/434/30 (Nat Arch). Over 500,000 Fleet marriages were performed, the records largely unindexed.

¹² “Some few, like the Rev. Alexander Keith, were respectable clergymen who presided over elegant establishments where they performed ‘Fleet Marriages’ at a wholesale rate in a legal but debased system. Keith estimated that he married an average of 6,000 couples a year. Another Fleet parson claimed to have married 173 couples in a day”. William Edward Hartpole Lecky *A History of England in the 18th Century*, London 1892, vol. 2 pp. 116-7

actually a priest at all: “He is a most notorious rogue and impostor. I now have certificates on my hand of his having two wives alive at the present time... I can assure you he is in no orders.”¹³ So goes a letter from someone who knew of Ashwell’s earlier activities in Warwickshire.

And so, on the 8th January 1739 Beard sang the role of *Jonathan* in the morning rehearsal of Handel’s *Saul*; went through a form of marriage with Henrietta in the Fleet Prison in the afternoon; and took his customary role in *Columbine Courtesan* at Drury Lane in the evening.

There was no time for a honeymoon. Besides appearing with Handel thirteen times in four months¹⁴ he also appeared at Drury Lane on virtually every other day of the week. As we can see, from TABLE A, he sometimes had to rush from one venue straight to the other. In this he was helped by the fact that *Jonathan* dies before Act 3 in *Saul*, allowing him to make an early exit.

TABLE A

<u>Jan / Feb 1739</u>	<u>Drury Lane</u>	<u>Haymarket</u>
Mon 15 th Jan	The Mock Doctor (a/p)	
Tues 16 th Jan <i>attend</i>	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) +	<i>Saul</i> 6pm <i>King & Princesses</i>
Wed 17 th Jan	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Thurs 18 th Jan	The Lottery (a/p)	<i>Prince & Princesses of Wales attend</i>
Fri 19 th Jan	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Sat 20 th Jan	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Mon 22 nd Jan	The Devil to pay (a/p)	
Tues 23 rd Jan	The Virgin unmasked (a/p) +	<i>Saul</i> 6pm
Wed 24 th Jan	The Provok’d Wife (m/p) + The Lottery (a/p)	
Thurs 25 th Jan	The Intriguing Chambermaid (a/p)	
Fri 26 th Jan	The Virgin unmasked (a/p)	<i>Prince & Princesses of Wales attend</i>
Sat 27 th Jan	Damon and Phillida (a/p)	
Mon 29 th Jan	The Devil to pay (a/p)	
Tues 30 th Jan	---- [presumably expecting to sing for Handel, who moved to Saturdays]	
Wed 31 st Jan	The Mock Doctor (a/p)	
Thurs 1 st Feb	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Fri 2 nd Feb	The Intriguing Chambermaid (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Sat 3 rd Feb	Damon and Phillida (a/p) +	<i>Saul</i> 6pm

It was not until April, when his involvement in all 3 parts of *Israel in Egypt* would have made an early dash for the exit impossible, that he obtained complete clearance from the Drury Lane management. Thus his April diary, shown in TABLE B, whilst appearing slightly more merciful, still required a fit and healthy singer.

¹³ He is a most notorious rogue and impostor. I now have certificates on my hand of his having two wives alive at the present time... I can assure you he is in no orders.” Excerpt from a letter of W. Hodgson in John Southernden Burn *The History of the Fleet Marriages*, 1833, p. 52

¹⁴ *Saul* Jan 16, 23, Feb 3, 7, March 27, April 19; *Alexander’s Feast* Feb 17, 24, March 20; *Il Trionfo del Tempo* March 3; *Israel in Egypt* April 4, 11, 17

TABLE B

<u>April 1739</u>	<u>Drury Lane</u>	<u>Haymarket</u>
Mon 2 nd April	--	
Tues 3 rd	The Devil to pay (a/p) + interval songs: Beard's 'Benefit'	
Wed 4 th	--	<i>Israel in Egypt</i>
Thurs 5 th	The Beggar's Opera (m/p) + The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Fri 6 th	--	
Sat 7 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Mon 9 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Tues 10 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Wed 11 th	--	<i>Israel in Egypt</i>
Thurs 12 th	The Lottery (a/p) + singing between the acts	

In 1740 Beard somehow contrived to get Charles Fleetwood, the Drury Lane manager, to give him leave of absence in order to sing in two parallel concert series: Handel's, and one at Hickford's Rooms. Beard was playing a dangerous game by asking for so much time off. But, as he was coming to the end of his 3-year contract, he may have decided to leave the theatre at the end of the season. This was certainly bound up with his marital affairs. Whether he thought that marriage into the aristocracy would lead to a comfortable life - living off his wife's dowry - or whether he foresaw that his wealthy father-in-law, the Earl of Waldegrave, was terminally ill, he certainly made a decision not to return for the 1740-41 season.

One can see the attraction of these two concert series. After several years of working for Handel under trying circumstances, Beard knew that he could now make ends meet, at least temporarily, without the need for his Drury Lane salary. The repertoire was of a highly exciting nature. At Hickford's Rooms he performed works by J. C. Smith: the opera *Rosalinda*¹⁵ and the oratorio *David's Lamentation over Saul and Jonathan*.¹⁶ The lyrics for both were by John Lockman,

Coincidentally Lockman was also the librettist for Thomas Arne's opera *Rosamond* which was now mounted as an after-piece at Drury Lane. Somehow Beard was available for it, too. How he did it is almost impossible to work out! A study of the entries in contemporary newspapers often suggests that he was in two places at the same time. However, on the days when he should have been singing for both Handel and the Hickford's Rooms, it appears that he put in a 'deputy' at the latter.¹⁷

His diary was complicated by returning to his duties at Drury Lane between March and early May. TABLE C shows what he undertook in these months.

¹⁵ January 4, 11, 18, 25, February 1, 8. February 15th was probably cancelled due to a performer's ill-health.

¹⁶ February 22, 29, March 7, [14], [21], [27], April 2, 11

¹⁷ On 14th and 21st March 'Mr Salway' was advertised as his late replacement. Thomas Salway, c.1706-1743, was a singer on contract to Rich at Covent Garden Theatre. He had sung occasionally for Handel in the 1730s.

TABLE C

<i>Jan / May 1740</i>	<i>Drury Lane</i>	<i>Hickford's Rooms</i>	<i>Lincoln's Inn Theatre</i>
Fri Jan 4 th		Rosalinda (1)	"to continue for 20 consecutive Fridays"
Tues Jan 8 th	[Berry deputises]		
Thurs Jan 10 th	Comus (m/p)		
Fri Jan 11 th	[Berry deputises]	Rosalinda (2)	
Fri Jan 18 th		Rosalinda (3)	
Fri Jan 25 th		Rosalinda (4)	
Tues Jan 29 th	Beggar's Opera (m/p)		
Fri Feb 1 st		Rosalinda (5)	
Mon Feb 4 th			[Acis – cancelled: cold weather]
Wed Feb 6 th	[Raftor deputises]		
Thurs Feb 7 th			[Acis – cancelled: cold weather]
Fri Feb 8 th		Rosalinda (6)	
Thurs Feb 14 th			[Acis – cancelled: two singers ill]
Friday Feb 15 th		[Rosalinda (7) cancelled: singers ill]	
Tues Feb 19 th	[Cashell deputises]		
Thurs Feb 21 st			Acis & Galatea + St Cecilia Ode
Fri Feb 22 nd		David's Lamentation over Saul and Jonathan (8)	
Wed Feb 27 th			L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Fri Feb 29 th		David's Lamentation... + songs (9)	
Mon March 3 rd		<i>Benefit for Brown. Vocal by Beard</i>	
Thurs March 6 th			L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Fri March 7 th		David's Lamentation... + songs (10)	
Sat March 8 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Mon March 10 th	Rosamond (a/p)	+	L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Tues March 11 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Fri March 14 th		[Salway deputises (11)]	L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Sat March 15 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Mon March 17 th	[Stoppelaer deputises]		
Tuesday March 18 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Wed March 19 th		<i>Benefit for Valentine Snow. Vocal by Beard & Mountier</i>	
Fri March 21 st		[Salway deputises (12)]	Saul
Sat March 22 nd	The Mock Doctor (a/p) + interval songs		
Mon March 24 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Tues March 25 th	interval songs		
Wed March 26 th			Esther
Thurs March 27 th	The Devil to Pay (a/p) + David's Lamentation (13)	to begin at 6 & end at 8	
Fri March 28 th		<i>Beard doesn't do Hickford's Rooms</i>	Acis + St Cecilia Ode
Sat March 29 th	interval songs		
Tues April 1 st			Israel in Egypt
Wed April 2 nd		David's Lamentation... (14)	
Mon April 7 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Tues April 8 th	Comus (m/p)		
Wed April 9 th	The Devil to Pay (a/p) + interval songs: Beard's 'Benefit'		
Thurs April 10 th	The Virgin unmasked (a/p) + interval songs		
Fri April 11 th	Rosamond (a/p) + David's Lamentation... (15)		
Sat April 12 th	Beggar's Opera (m/p)		
Mon April 14 th	The Provok'd Wife (m/p) + The Mock Doctor (a/p) + interval songs		
Tues April 15 th	Lethe (a/p)		
Wed April 16 th	interval songs		
Thurs April 17 th	interval songs		
Fri April 18 th	Columbine Courtesan (a/p) + interval songs + Rosalinda (16)	at 7pm	
Sat April 19 th	interval songs		

Monday April 21 st	interval songs	
Tuesday April 22 nd	The Devil to Pay (a/p) + interval songs	
Wed April 23 rd		L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Thurs April 24 th	interval songs	
Fri April 25 th	interval songs + + David's Lamentation... (17)	
Sat April 26 th	interval songs	
Mon April 28 th	interval songs	
Thurs May 1 st	Comus (m/p)	
Fri May 2 nd		<i>Beard doesn't do Hickford's Rooms</i>
Thurs May 8 th		Handel Wedding Anthem [at the Chapel Royal]
Fri May 9 th	"Beard is gone off together with his lady, who I believe had contracted debts before her marriage" -	(Letter of Thomas Harris, May 10 th 1740)

I have included Beard's engagements up to May 8th, as that was the last occasion on which he sang prior to taking a rest from the stage. It was not that he was tired – although after that daunting schedule he deserved to be.

As events turned out his departure was delayed by the wedding of Princess Mary (George II's fourth daughter) on the 8th May.¹⁸ He was required to sing in an anthem made up from bits of two previous wedding anthems. He probably sang the aria 'Strength and Honour' against which his name¹⁹ had been pencilled in the manuscript of the 1734 Anthem [HWV 262].²⁰ He would also have been required for the virtuoso *Amen* from the 1736 Anthem [HWV 263] with which Handel concluded the pasticcio.²¹ A newspaper reported the names of some of the soloists: "Yesterday ... was a practice of a fine new Anthem compos'd by Mr. Handel, for ... Princess Mary's Marriage; the vocal parts by Mess. Abbott, Chelsum, Beard, Church..., Gates, Lloyd, and the Boys of the Chapel Royal..."²²

On the 10th of May, after the Wedding, Thomas Harris wrote to his brother: "I hear that Beard is gone off together with his lady, who I believe had contracted debts before her marriage."²³

Beard had indeed gone abroad at the earliest possible moment. He went to France with Henrietta to take her five-year-old daughter Barbara to a Convent in Bruges. From there the couple must have planned to journey on to Paris. There is an extant letter from Lille in which Henrietta tried to effect a reconciliation with her father, the British Ambassador there²⁴. When the ailing Earl returned to England to die in late 1740,²⁵ there was to be no inheritance: Beard had wasted the whole London season supporting his wife's endeavours. They were in greater financial difficulties than ever, as the jointure promised at the time of her first marriage was still not being paid. Their only recourse was to the law. That lengthy process was to occupy the remaining twelve years of their marriage. Beard looked for work,²⁶ but didn't sing in Handel's Oratorio season.²⁷ It is a mystery why he didn't go cap

¹⁸ The nuptials had been announced in the Daily Advertiser on Friday 7th March 1740

¹⁹ 'Bird'

²⁰ Burrows *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* p. 358

²¹ a reworking of a castrato aria in *Parnasso in Festa*

²² Daily Advertiser, Tuesday 6th May 1740

²³ Burrows & Dunhill *Music and Theatre in Handel's World*, p. 97

²⁴ Waldegrave Family Papers, Chewton House, Chewton Mendip, Somerset

²⁵ he died on 11th April 1741

²⁶ He sang at Goodman's Fields Theatre in April 1741, the same month that his father-in-law died at Navestock

in hand to him. Perhaps he felt that he had ‘queered his pitch’ with him, or knew that alternative arrangements had been made. Some works for example - such as *Deidamia* – now no longer required a tenor.

With his wife’s debts unresolved Beard must have been desperate to get back to work. It is strange, therefore to find him turning down the opportunity to accompany Handel to Dublin in the Autumn of 1741. Jennens, writing to James Harris, states that: “Beard is come home again, and should have gone with Handel into Ireland, but Fleetwood said he should want him to sing in an English opera...”²⁸

Had he gone he would have sung in the world-premiere of *Messiah*, and would have had the title role in *Imeneo*. Burrows explains in the Preface to his edition how the loss of Beard forced Handel to rethink the composition: “In the previous drafts of the score ...*Imeneo* had been written for the tenor voice, probably with the expectation that John Beard would take the part...”²⁹

Happily, Fleetwood did take him back at Drury Lane, despite having Lowe on the roster. What the ‘English Opera’ might have been, for which he was said to have wanted him, is not clear. Beard and Lowe simply alternated in the role of *Macheath*; but otherwise there was nothing new. It appears that Fleetwood just took pity on the unfortunate singer, and gave him his job back, without any real thought for how he could employ him.

2. 1742-1750

Handel spent October 1742 finishing the oratorio³⁰ that he had begun before he went to Dublin. John Beard’s was the voice that he had in mind for the hero *Samson*. The twenty-seven-year-old singer was about to get some of the best roles of his career.

In these years he not only created *Samson*, but also *Belshazzar* and *Judas Maccabaeus*.³¹ As all of them are virile roles, with a mixture of lyrical and martial vocal writing, it is significant that Handel chose a tenor, rather than a baritone or castrato, for the principal role. An added strength must have come into Beard’s voice. In *Samson* Handel gave Beard the challenge of singing both florid music (*Why does the God of Israel sleep*) and lyrical airs (*Thus when the Sun, Total eclipse*³²). In addition, he was able to utilise his undoubted dramatic talents in the more operatic encounters, such as those with Delilah and Harapha. In Winton Dean’s words “It was probably the growing success of Beard, who had been singing Handel’s tenor parts since 1734, that suggested the revolutionary notion of a tenor *Samson*. It was a tribute to Beard himself ...and of some historical importance. *Samson* was Handel’s first great tenor part, and one of the earliest in dramatic music outside France”.³³

²⁷ January 10th until April 8th

²⁸ letter of December 5th 1741: Burrows & Dunhill *Music and Theatre in Handel’s World*, p. 129

²⁹ ‘Preface’ *Imeneo* ed. D. Burrows, Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, Bärenreiter 2002

³⁰ “Whether I shall do something in the Oratorio way (as several of my friends desire) I can not determine as yet”. Handel to Jennens, September 9th 1742, quoted in Deutsch *Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 554

³¹ on February 18th 1743, March 27th 1745, and April 1st 1747 respectively

³² All of these subsequently entered his repertoire for performance at miscellaneous concerts.

³³ Winton Dean *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 333

1743 was also the year that Beard first sang in *Messiah*.³⁴ There is evidence in the score that he may have been unwell for one of the performances. Signora Avolio's name is pencilled on top of his in various places in Handel's score³⁵, suggesting that last minute changes had taken place. Burrows draws attention to this,³⁶ deducing that illness resulted in him disappearing from the concert advertisements for a month. Actually, that is not quite what 'The London Stage' reveals³⁷. The most compelling evidence that Beard had been ill is an entry in the Winston m/s³⁸ that he did not sing the arduous role of *Macheath* on April 5th. Thereafter he resumed his activities on the 6th and is found singing on every subsequent day. His illness was most likely confined to the period 29th March to 5th April. He would have missed two performances with Handel. TABLE D gives the relevant timetable.

TABLE D

<u>March / April 1743</u>	<u>Drury Lane</u>	<u>Covent Garden Theatre</u>
Mon 21 st March	interval songs	
Tues 22 nd March	The Beggar's Opera: Beard's 'Benefit' <i>Prince & Princes of Wales attend</i>	
Wed 23 rd March		Messiah [<i>1st London performance</i>]
Thurs 24 th March	interval songs	
Fri 25 th March		Messiah
Sat 26 th March	interval songs	
Mon 28 th March	--	
Tues 29 th March		Messiah [<i>Beard ill?</i>]
Wed 30 th March	--	
Thurs 31 st March		Samson [<i>Beard ill?</i>]
Fri 1 st April	--	
Sat 2 nd April	--	
Mon 4 th April	'Song by Beard' [<i>Did he sing this or cancel?</i>]	
Tues 5 th April	The Beggar's Opera: " <i>Beard ill and did not act</i> " ³⁹	
Wed 6 th April	"Stella and Flavia", 'a Ballad by Beard'	

Handel's response to the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites in 1746 was an oratorio, *Judas Maccabaeus*, composed only 3 month's after the Duke of Cumberland's victory at Culloden. A strong, thrilling voice was required for the military hero *Judas*. This was to be another of Beard's triumphs: a role that he sang throughout the country, and at the emerging Music Festivals, throughout the next two decades.⁴⁰

³⁴ March 23rd, 25th and possibly 29th

³⁵ see: the facsimile *Messiah Conducting Score 1742–53*, introduced by Watkins Shaw, Scholar Press, 1974

³⁶ Burrows *Handel's performances of 'Messiah': the evidence of the conducting score* ML 56 (1975) p.326

³⁷ see: *The London Stage Part 3 [1729 – 1747]*, ed. Arthur H. Scouten, pp. 826 ff

³⁸ at the Folger Shakespeare Library

³⁹ Winston m/s from Dyer m/s

⁴⁰ Worcester 1752, 1758, Gloucester 1754, 1757, Oxford 1754, Birmingham 1760

Handel's 1748 season appears to have been planned in the belief that Beard would still be one of the soloists. A new heroic title role – *Joshua* – was surely conceived with his voice in mind. As things transpired, Beard was not available to him in 1748.⁴¹ I have tried to find reasons for this.

As he was on contract to John Rich at Covent Garden, where the oratorios took place, it would have been easy for him to take part. Both Jens Peter Larsen and C.E. Pearce wonder whether there had been a falling out: "There may perhaps have been a difference between them".⁴² But there is no record of Beard having an awkward nature: quite the reverse. All of the comments by his friends and contemporaries refer to his elegant manners and 'clubbable' nature. Tobias Smollett, for example, writes of "the generous Johnny B[ear]d, respected and beloved by all the world".⁴³

If Beard was originally planning to sing, then the reason for a change of mind is much more likely to be associated with his private life. Henrietta's financial affairs were still not settled. She was accruing huge debts; and the disputed jointure was now mortgaged up to the hilt.⁴⁴ Beard's earnings⁴⁵ must have been the couple's only real income. In 1747 Henrietta applied for a Grant of Administration against the Powis estate for her first husband's 'goods, chattels and credits'.⁴⁶

In March 1748, when Handel was reviving *Judas Maccabaeus*, Beard had much to preoccupy him. The Marquis of Powis suddenly died, leaving instructions in his will: "not to pay the [demand made on me] without first having the directions of the Court of Chancery." A distant cousin inherited the title.⁴⁷ The Beards immediately issued a Bill of Revivor⁴⁸ against him. The new Earl replied that, not knowing of any earlier financial disputes, they were no concern of his. All of this was happening during Handel's season. At the same time Henrietta's daughter, Barbara – who was still being educated in Bruges – became a party to the legal wrangling. Although she was only 13 the new Earl could see that, by marrying her, the financial situation could be resolved without him having to part with any money at all. Henrietta must have been distraught to see her daughter used as a pawn like this.

It is evident that her health began to suffer.⁴⁹ The Earl began to use a mixture of threats and coercion in order to get Barbara's legal guardians changed. He involved both parents in

⁴¹ "Lowe probably replaced Beard in 1748 – 51". Dean *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 472
"Beard, for a time, had been replaced by Lowe". Jens Peter Larsen *Handel's Messiah: Origins – Composition – Sources* London 1957, New York 1972 p. 190

⁴² Jens Peter Larsen *Handel's Messiah: Origins – Composition – Sources* London 1957, New York 1972 p. 198, who includes in a footnote a quote from C. E. Pearce, *Polly Peachum* p.213: "When Handel quarrelled with Beard, he intended to engage Lowe for the oratorios, but finding him deficient in the requisite training, was obliged to make peace with Beard, who had both voice and talent".

⁴³ Tobias Smollett, 'Sir Launcelot Greaves', London 1762, chapter 4

⁴⁴ see Powis Castle Papers, endorsed on reverse of D3/9/11, 2/6/1746 (NLW)

⁴⁵ he made £197 from his 1747 'benefit' and this rose to £275 in 1749

⁴⁶ PROB6/122 – Nat. Arch.

⁴⁷ Henry Arthur Herbert of Chirbury

⁴⁸ Records of Court of Chancery: C12/281/8 (Nat. Arch.)

⁴⁹ She did not feel well enough to meet her daughter when Barbara was brought back from Bruges: "...I fear I shall not be in a condition to stir out today – I intreat you to ...see my girl at Lord Seaford's, and give her instructions to her behaviour." Letter to Mrs Carryl: 'Family of Caryll, vol. 5, 1748-1755'; British Library m/s Collection – Add. 28231 f. 76

this, and “...promised great rewards and Preferments ...to induce them to such Guardianship. And the Respondent ...declared ...that he would procure Mr Beard a commission in the Army, or other Preferment, if [Henrietta] would consent to the appointment of ...[a new Guardian for] ...her Daughter”⁵⁰ It is intriguing to see how embarrassing Beard’s profession was to his wife’s aristocratic relations. Another part of the same document states that the Earl “endeavoured to procure some Employment for Mr Beard with the Government, whereby he might be enabled to relinquish the theatre.”⁵¹

The legal wrangling came to an unsatisfactory end when the 15 year-old Barbara was finally married to the 48-year-old Earl of Powis.⁵² Money that should have devolved to Henrietta went to her daughter instead, and thus remained in the Powis estate. To add insult to injury, Barbara had been made to forswear her Catholic religion.⁵³ This was a devastating blow to her mother. During this unsettling period it would not be unrealistic to find Beard dropping out of *ad hoc* engagements from time to time. And that is what we must assume that Handel’s concerts were to him, despite their musical importance.

A close scrutiny of his diary reveals that Beard could, actually, have sung for Handel during these seasons: he was certainly free on the relevant days. If further research should ever suggest that he, and not Lowe, did sing some oratorios between 1748 and 1750 it would be consistent with his availability, [as revealed in the pages of ‘The London Stage’]. In TABLE E we can see that Beard could have at least commenced the 1748 season, with his role of *Judas*, before domestic events caught up with him. Perhaps it was the death of the Marquis of Powis on March 8th that required him to curtail his activities.

TABLE E

<u>1748</u>	<u>HANDEL</u>	<u>BEARD</u>
Feb 24	<i>Ash Wednesday</i>	<i>LENT starts</i>
25		Damon & Phillida
26	Judas Maccabaeus (<i>could this have been originally given to Beard?</i>)	
March 2	Judas Maccabaeus (<i>Beard?</i>)	
3		Apollo & Daphne
4	Judas Maccabaeus (<i>Beard?</i>)	
5		Apollo & Daphne
7		Apollo & Daphne
8	<u><i>Marquis of Powis dies</i></u>	Singing: 4 th Cantata of John Stanley
9	Joshua (<i>Lowe from now on</i>)	
10		Apollo & Daphne
11	Joshua	
12		Apollo & Daphne
14		The Muses’ Looking Glass

⁵⁰ The Hardwicke Papers, British Library, Add. 36171 ff. 1 - 47

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² on 30th March 1751

⁵³ Appeal to Court of Chancery 1766 - The Hardwicke Papers, British Library, Add. 36171 ff. 1 - 47

15		Apollo & Daphne
17		Apollo & Daphne
18	Joshua	
19		Apollo & Daphne
21		Venus & Adonis. <u>Beard's 'Benefit'</u>
22		Apollo & Daphne
23	Alexander Balus	
24		Damon & Phillida
25	Alexander Balus	
26		Apollo & Daphne
28		Singing: 'Go lovely rose'
30	Alexander Balus	

3. 1751

In 1751 Beard returned as one of Handel's soloists – see TABLE F. Winton Dean is not sure which tenor sang in the opening performances of *Belshazzar*⁵⁴ or *Alexander's Feast*⁵⁵. Beard was free on these nights as he was for the whole of Handel's short season. There is a possibility that he rejoined halfway through for *Esther* and *Judas*.

TABLE F

<u>February 1751</u>	<u>HANDEL</u>	<u>BEARD</u>
Wed 20 th	<i>Ash Wednesday</i>	<i>LENT starts</i>
Fri 22 nd	Belshazzar [Winton Dean suggests "probably Lowe"]	
Sat 23 rd		Alfred [Arne] (m/p)
Mon 25 th		Alfred (m/p)
Tues 26 th		Alfred (m/p)
Wed 27 th	Belshazzar	
Thurs 28 th		Alfred (m/p)
Fri Mar 1 st	Alexander's Feast + Hercules [Winton Dean & Deutsch suggest Lowe]	
Sat 2 nd		Alfred (m/p)
Mon 4 th		Alfred (m/p)
Tues 5 th		Alfred (m/p)
Wed 6 th	Alexander's Feast + Hercules	
Thurs 7 th	---	
Fri 8 th	Alexander's Feast + Hercules	
Sat 9 th		Alfred (m/p)
Mon 11 th		The Chaplet (a/p)
Tues 12 th		The Rehearsal (a/p)
Wed 13 th	Alexander's Feast + Hercules	
Thurs 14 th		Lethe (a/p)

⁵⁴ February 22nd and 27th

⁵⁵ March 1st, 6th, 8th and 13th

Fri 15 th	Esther [<i>Winton Dean can't decide between Beard & Lowe</i>] ⁵⁶
Sat 16 th	Romeo & Juliet (m/p)
Mon 18 th	The Chaplet (a/p)
Tues 19 th	The Rehearsal (a/p)
Wed 20 th	Judas Maccabaeus [<i>No evidence - Winton Dean can't decide</i>] ⁵⁷
Thurs 21 st	<i>Death of the Prince of Wales. Theatres closed until April 8th</i>

When Handel repeated *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital⁵⁸ Beard was definitely one of the soloists. This was the year that the secretary reported that "... Mr Smith had returned, ...for the Benefit of the Charity, two guineas returned by Beard".⁵⁹ A similar thing happened next year, when, "...Mr Beard agreeing to perform gratis, no distribution was set against his name".⁶⁰ Thereafter he always declined a fee. Why?

Well, the day-to-day functioning of the Hospital involved a regular Admission Day, when wealthy and respectable ladies were invited to assist at the ballot for admission.⁶¹ [In Samuel Wale's painting *Admission of Children to the Hospital by Ballot* of this exact period (1749)⁶² we can see ladies of Henrietta's age and class supervising such an occasion.] With little to occupy her, apart from her legal battles, Henrietta would have had time on her hands to be one of these unnamed ladies. The Hospital was only a short stroll away from her home in Red Lion Street. On May 31st 1753 she died a few days after her husband had sung *Messiah* there for the third year running.⁶³ William Havard's *Epitaph for Lady Henrietta Beard* ascribes her death to a broken heart: broken by the unfeeling treatment she had received from her aristocratic family.

...Kindred Unkindness threw a fatal Dart;
It miss'd her Virtues – but it pierced her Heart.⁶⁴

Thereafter Beard's annual performances at the Foundling Hospital must have been donated to the charity as a personal act of remembrance. If Henrietta had valued and assisted Thomas Coram's noble cause when she was a neighbour, then Beard's generosity would make perfect sense.

His participation in the Foundling Hospital performances now became an annual fixture. But it opens up a thorny problem regarding the question of whether the soloists sang along

⁵⁶ "The new part was adapted for Lowe, but there is some doubt whether he sang it: one of the airs ('Tune your harps') was sung by Beard in public a month later, and another ('Jehovah crowned') was attributed to Beard in Walsh's contemporary edition of the songs." Dean *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 213

⁵⁷ "It is not possible to distinguish all the casts..." Dean *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 472

⁵⁸ on April 18th and May 16th

⁵⁹ General Committee Minutes, no. 3, 1st May 1751, pp. 210-211

⁶⁰ Wed. April 15th, 1752, from Nichols and Wray, 'A History of the Foundling Hospital', London 1935

⁶¹ 'The Foundling Museum', London 2004, pp.26-7

⁶² Engraving by N. Parr, published 9th May 1749, see: 'The Foundling Museum', London 2004, p.26

⁶³ Newspaper report, Friday June 1st 1753. "... A Lady endowed with eminent Accomplishments and every female Virtue; lamented by all who had the Honour of her Friendship; to whom she has left the Example of a well-spent Life, the last Moments of which were attended with a Fortitude, which always accompanies a spotless Conscience and an upright Heart".

⁶⁴ William Havard, 'Jeu d'esprit', N.a.2. Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington

in the choruses. This has been exercising the minds of Handel scholars for some years now. Smither for example stated in 1977 that “the soloists may have joined the chorus ...when not occupied with their own parts”.⁶⁵ Burrows followed in his footsteps when he propounded a similar theory: “It seems virtually certain that Handel’s soloists sang through the chorus movements: indeed, the ‘chorus singers’ may have been primarily regarded as supporters for soloists in these movements”.⁶⁶

But Handel always appears satisfied with his choir singers and makes clear the disparity between the jobs of soloists and choir singers: “I have a good set of Singers ...and a good number of Choir Singers for the Chorus’s.”⁶⁷ One can see in the few extant prints of concerts that the soloists were right down at the front, well away from the body of the choir. Burney describes the layout thus: “The principal singers were ranged in front of the orchestra, as at Oratorios”.⁶⁸ The chorus part shown in Beard’s Foundling Hospital copy of *Messiah* must simply have been a courteous way of indicating to him where his arias came in the work: not a confirmation that he, and therefore the other soloists, joined in with the choruses.

When we consider the impressive list of *Messiah* performances that Beard gave during his career we must remember to see the whole picture. How did the Foundling Hospital performances fit into his busy schedule? His diary was always full in April and May. He went directly from theatre work to being principal singer at Ranelagh Gardens in these months. The performances at the Foundling Hospital were just one strand in his life. Here are two typical weeks when he performed *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital. TABLE G gives his commitments in 1751.

TABLE G

April 1751

Monday 15 th	D.L. Afterpiece <i>Lethe</i> (Mercury)
Tuesday 16 th	D.L. Mainpiece <i>The Provok’d Wife</i> (Colonel Bully, with songs); + the Benefit concert for <i>The Society of Musicians</i> (King’s Theatre, Haymarket): ‘Why does the God of Israel sleep’ & ‘Tune your harps’.
Wednesday 17 th	D.L. Mainpiece <i>The Beggar’s Opera</i> (Macheath)
Thursday 18 th	Noon F.H. <i>Messiah</i>
Friday 19 th	D.L. Mainpiece <i>Alfred</i> (Bard, singing ‘Rule Britannia’ & other Arne music); Afterpiece <i>The Chaplet</i> (Damon)
Saturday 20 th	free

⁶⁵ Smither, ‘The Oratorio in the Baroque Era’ vol. 2, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1977, p. 357. Also: “The soloists also sang in the choruses (and could be commended for their excellence in this department)”. Richard Lockett, ‘Handel’s *Messiah*, a celebration’, London 1992, p. 172

⁶⁶ Belshazzar ed. Burrows *Preface* New Novello Choral Edition 1993 p. xv

⁶⁷ Handel to Jennens, 9th June & 2nd Oct 1744, *Deutsch Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 591 & p. 596

⁶⁸ Charles Burney, ‘An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in Commemoration of Handel’, 1785

In this period he had five days of performances in a row, and on two occasions had to perform twice on the same evening. He also had to perform his most arduous role on the evening before he sang *Messiah*. TABLE H gives the picture in 1754.

TABLE H

May 1754

Monday 13 th	D.L. Afterpiece <i>The King and the Miller of Mansfield</i> (Joe)
Tuesday 14 th	D.L. Afterpiece <i>The London Prentice</i> (title role)
Wednesday 15 th	Noon F.H. <i>Messiah</i> ; D.L. Mainpiece <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (Lorenzo); Afterpiece <i>The King and the Miller of Mansfield</i> (Joe)
Thursday 16 th	D.L. Afterpiece <i>The King and the Miller of Mansfield</i> (Joe)
Friday 17 th	D.L. singing between the Acts: 'A Ballad – by Desire'
Saturday 18 th	D.L. Afterpiece <i>The King and the Miller of Mansfield</i> (Joe)
Monday 20 th	D.L. Mainpiece <i>The Beggar's Opera</i> (Macheath);
.	Afterpiece <i>The King and the Miller of Mansfield</i> (Joe)

In this period he performed 6 days in a row: the *Messiah* day was particularly arduous as it was a 3-show day, and he would have been anxious to keep some voice in reserve for the Drury Lane shows. In the context of this workload it is remarkable that Beard was prepared to do *Messiah* at all. It also sorts out, for once and all - in my mind - the question of whether Handel's soloists would have wanted to assist able choir singers by singing along with them.

4. 1752 – 1759

Beard's diary thereafter reveals his devotion to Handel. He sang in every future oratorio season between 1752 and Handel's death. Handel himself must have been pleased to have Beard's voice to write for once again. He set to work, despite increasing blindness, on a new oratorio, *Jephtha*, in which he knew that he could utilise the maturity of musicianship that the 36-year-old singer now brought to his singing. The title role is required to sing with great expressiveness and drama, but also with great tenderness and compassion. The various recitatives and arias cover a wider range of emotions than any yet written for Beard.

The oratorios that had been performed without him, when Lowe was tenor between 1748 & 1751, now came back into the repertoire, sometimes significantly altered for his voice.⁶⁹ Another choral work that underwent revision was the 'Foundling Hospital Anthem', first performed (with Lowe as a soloist) in 1749. Happily Beard's own vocal part for the 1753 revival exists at the Royal College of Music.⁷⁰ It shows that the opening Chorus 'Blessed are they that considereth the poor' was transformed into a tenor aria, and that the text was likewise altered to the more grammatical "Blessed is he that considereth the poor".⁷¹ The

⁶⁹ Winton Dean, 'Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques', OUP Oxford 1959, pp. 527-34, 547, 575

⁷⁰ RCM 2254

⁷¹ Burrows describes the alteration to the text: "The tenor part, written by copyist S6 in the 'original' form, has been amended and added to by Smith senior to give the later version of the anthem: over the added tenor aria No. 1 only Mr Beard's name appears, while above No. 2 the headings '3d Part' and 'Mr Lowe' have

manuscript contains small corrections in a different hand to the copyist, possibly the singer's own, and has evidently been sung from.⁷²

One famous anecdote about Beard's singing dates to this period:

"When Smith played the organ at the theatre, during the first year of Handel's blindness, *Samson* was performed, and Beard sung with great feeling

*Total eclipse – no sun, no moon,
All dark amid the blaze of noon.*

The recollection that Handel had set this air to music, with a view of the blind composer then sitting by the organ, affected the audience so forcibly, that many persons present were moved [even] to tears."⁷³

In the years after Handel's death,⁷⁴ Beard became Manager at Covent Garden. Thus he was well placed to assist in the continuation of the Oratorio season. Despite new additions to the repertoire it is not surprising to find that the most popular works were those closely associated with his own voice: *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Samson* and *Messiah*. The annual Foundling Hospital performances also continued with Beard as tenor until 1767. It seems likely that he was planning to return that year too,⁷⁵ because in the event his solos were hurriedly divided up, and principally given to the castrato Guarducci. It is likely, therefore, that the last occasion on which he sang a Handel oratorio would have been April 10th 1767, when *Messiah* was given at Covent Garden.

In 1764 Beard was appointed Vocal Performer in Extraordinary to his Majesty the King.⁷⁶ He seems to have been the first singer to be so honoured. It was the nearest thing to the present day honour of a knighthood. Only during later reigns would musicians begin to receive knighthoods.⁷⁷ George III had enjoyed Beard's performances over a long period. He had been hearing him since he was six, and he lent his patronage to Beard's benefit night on more than one occasion. His accession coincided with Beard taking over the reins at Covent Garden. He remained a frequent visitor and heard Beard several more times in the new repertoire of English Opera that Beard was developing there, such as *The Maid of the Mill*, *Love in a Village*, and *Artaxerxes*.⁷⁸ The King's appointment was a gracious one, to a favourite singer who had been singing the annual Court Odes from the year of his royal birth (1738) up until 1768. The accompanying Pension of £100 a year for life was surely

been crossed out and Mr Beard's name added..." Burrows *Handel and the Foundling Hospital* ML58 (1977) p. 278

⁷² There is a pencilled slur in bar 13 showing how the syllables should be fitted to the notes. A different hand to the copyist (possibly the performer's) has added a missing rest in a later bar. The duet "The charitable shall be had in everlasting remembrance" contains corrections to obvious scribal errors.

⁷³ William Coxe *Anecdotes of G.F. Handel and J.C. Smith*, 1799

⁷⁴ April 14th 1759

⁷⁵ April 29th

⁷⁶ "I have sworn and admitted Mr John Beard into the Place and Quality of Vocal Performer in Extraordinary to His Majesty to have hold and exercise and enjoy the said place together with all rights Profits Privileges and advantages these unto Belonging" 1st March 1764. PRO LC3/58/353

⁷⁷ Sir George Smart was knighted in Dublin by the Lord Lieutenant in 1811. Queen Victoria knighted Sir Henry Bishop on 1st June 1842

⁷⁸ Harry William Pedicord *By their Majesties' Command* London 199, p. 31-2

welcome to a singer who had weathered the rebuffs of his first wife's haughty family with dignity.

It was increasing deafness that finally obliged Beard to stop singing at the age of 51. During the twenty-four years of his retirement he still kept in touch with the London music scene. There are reports of him attending theatrical performances, and private concerts at the homes of the Sharp family, and the Wesley family [he presented his copy of the lavish 1739 edition of Scarlatti's '30 Essercizi' to the precocious young Charles Wesley in 1763⁷⁹]. He also attended the 1784 Handel *Commemoration* in Westminster Abbey, at the invitation of his protégés Samuel Arnold and Thomas Dupuis, who were both Directors. Burney fondly mentions him in the '*Account of the Musical Performances...in Commemoration of Handel*'⁸⁰ as one of the few musicians still alive who had worked with Handel. Beard was particularly keen to hear the rising generation of tenors, too. Michael Kelly – the singer who had sung in the premiere of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* – wrote in his '*Reminiscences*': "This season [1789] I received a most flattering mark of attention from Mr John Beard, the celebrated English tenor singer. He did me the honour to come from his house at Hampton ...to hear me sing. ...He sat in the Drury Lane orchestra box, with his trumpet to his ear, for he was very deaf; and after the opera was over came upon the stage ...to express himself in terms of high approbation."⁸¹

At about the same period, when Beard heard Samuel Harrison sing 'Oft on a plat of rising ground' from *L'Allegro*⁸² he remarked "*I never sung it half so well.*"⁸³ A long friendship with Samuel Arnold, whose early career Beard had nurtured by getting him to compose the music for *The Maid of the Mill* [at Covent Garden], led to a regular exchange of correspondence. Several extant letters reveal the frequency of Arnold's visits to Hampton.⁸⁴ It is a distinct possibility that Arnold consulted Beard's library when he was producing his Handel edition. It may help to explain one final mystery surrounding Beard's relationship with Handel's music.

1791

John Beard is buried in the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Hampton, in Middlesex. I went there in search of his memorial tablet. Since the Church Guide⁸⁵ contained a reference to it being in the "North Aisle, north wall" I expected to find it easily. I was curious to see if there would be any music sculpted on it, much in the manner of Handel's in Westminster Abbey. At some stage, however, an organ had been placed at the end of the aisle, completely hiding the Memorial. In order to reach it I had to climb through the organ pipes. It was dark and dirty back there, and I could only dimly make out the inscription.

⁷⁹ now in the Sibley Library, Rochester, N.Y. See: article by Jane Clark in '*18th Century Music*', C.U.P. 2005

⁸⁰ Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances... in Commemoration of Handel* London 1785

⁸¹ Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences* ed. Roger Fiske, O.U.P. London 1975, p. 169

⁸² I have traced performances from newspaper advertisements to May 8th and 22nd 1789, and March 3rd 1790.

⁸³ Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Anecdotes of Sir John Hawkins*, 1822, vol. 1 p.13

⁸⁴ Letter to Dr Samuel Arnold, dated 9th March 1786, in: '*Treasure Trove in Gloucester*', p. 49; see also a letter in the Harvard Theatre Library, TS 990 1F, from Beard to Arnold dated 1st December 1785

⁸⁵ F.C.E Atkins *A short guide to the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Hampton*, Hampton, reprinted 1996

This curiously inapposite verse⁸⁶ has not seen the light of day for more than a hundred years.⁸⁷ There is a much more appropriate ‘Epitaph’ in the ‘Gentleman’s Magazine’ for 1791, for you to compare with it. Both are shown in TABLE J.

TABLE J

BEARD’S MEMORIAL IN HAMPTON PARISH CHURCH

How vain the monumental praise
Our partial friends devise!
While trophies o’er our dust they raise
Poetic fictions rise.
Say, what avails, if good or bad
I now am represented:
If happily the faults I had
Sincerely were repented.
A friend, a wife, or both in one,
By Love, by Time endear’d,
Shall banish falsehood from the Stone
That covers her John Beard.

He died the 4th of February 1791
Aged 74 years

“When thou tookest upon thee to deliver Man : thou didst not abhor the Virgin’s womb”.

[Handel: Dettingen Te Deum, no. 8, bars 15-35]

BEARD’S EPITAPH IN THE GENTLEMAN’S MAGAZINE

Satire be dumb! Nor dream the scenic art
Must spoil the morals and corrupt the heart.
Here lies JOHN BEARD: confess, with pensive pause,
His modesty was great as our applause.
Whence had that voice such magic to control?
‘Twas but the echo of a well tun’d soul:
Thro’ life, his morals and his music ran
In symphony and spoke the virtuous man.
Go, gentle harmonist, our hopes approve,
To meet, and hear thy sacred songs above:
When taught by thee, the stage of life well trod,
We rise to raptures round the throne of God.

Ob. Feb. 5th 1791, Aetatis suae, 75

⁸⁶ A more appropriate one appeared in the Gentleman’s Magazine, 1791, commencing “Satire be dumb!”

⁸⁷ The guidebook says that the organ was “reconstructed in 1901”. It is not known whether that was the point at which the memorial was hidden.

Yes! – I am happy to report that I did discover an open music book sculpted there as well. This portion of the marble was so dark and filthy that I had to take a kind of ‘brass-rubbing’ of it. When I studied the results I was surprised to see that the music was a setting of a verse from the ‘Te Deum’:

“When thou tookest upon thee to deliver Man : thou didst not abhor the Virgin’s womb”.

The music looked Handelian, and did, indeed, prove to be 20 bars of a Bass aria in the *Dettingen Te Deum*⁸⁸ [HWV 283]. Mr Abbot, according to pencillings in Handel’s m/s score, was the original singer. So it is an aria that Beard can never have sung. Nor can the text have had any particular significance: Beard had married twice – and there were no surviving children. The only explanation that I can come up with is a fanciful one as follows:

Beard’s second wife Charlotte would have known how intimately his career was bound up with Handel’s. This would have led, very logically, to her choosing some ‘Handel’ to put on the memorial. There were many arias to choose from. But none of the obvious ones can have sounded entirely appropriate or relevant. So Charlotte must have fallen back on another plan. She must have chosen something that was particularly special to her husband.

Handel set the *Te Deum* five times. The best known one was the *Utrecht Te Deum*, [HWV 278] composed back in 1713, which, as one of Handel’s most frequently performed sacred works, would have been sung several times during Beard’s time in the Chapel Royal choir.⁸⁹ There were other versions,⁹⁰ and all had Alto solos for this text.⁹¹ But the one in the *Utrecht Te Deum* could also have been sung by a high tenor. That suggestion is even made in Watkins Shaw’s 1968 edition.⁹² Perhaps this is the setting that meant so much to Beard. Perhaps Handel had heard him sing it during his final years in the choir, during the period that he had remained there as a tenor deputy.⁹³

If this theory is right, then Charlotte simply put the wrong musical text on the memorial. Perhaps she chose the only *Te Deum* left on the bookshelf and gave it to the sculptor, with instructions to use this text, little knowing that there were other versions. Perhaps Samuel Arnold had borrowed the others earlier, when he was preparing his Handel edition, and they had remained in his possession.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Movement No. 8, composed in July 1743

⁸⁹ c.1727 – 1734

⁹⁰ the ‘Caroline’ *Te Deum* [HWV 280] 1714 revised 1722, and the ‘A major’ *Te Deum* [HWV 282] c. 1726 – a partial reworking of the ‘Cannons’ *Te Deum* [HWV 281] of 1717.

⁹¹ normally given to the alto soloist. Handel was particularly careful to write these for the individual voices of Richard Elford and, later, Francis Hughes.

⁹² shown as “Alto solo [or Tenor]” in Watkins Shaw’s edition for Novello Handel Edition, 1968

⁹³ Easter to October 1734

⁹⁴ Beard was one of its 381 subscribers, and the first volume appeared in May 1787. Thus all of Arnold’s recorded visits to the Beard household fall within this period of his activity. The *Te Deums* were issued early in the series, following the 3 oratorios: *Athaliah*, *Theodora* and *Messiah*. The publication order was: *Athaliah*, *Theodora*, *Messiah*, ‘Caroline’ *Te Deum*, ‘Cannons’ *Te Deum*, ‘Utrecht’ *Te Deum*, ‘Dettingen’ *Te Deum*, Jubilate, ‘A major’ *Te Deum*, *Sosarme...* etc. J.M. Coopersmith *The first Gesamtausgabe: Dr Arnold’s Edition of Handel’s Works* Notes, 1947 p. 285 ff. See also: Paul Hirsch *Dr Arnold’s Handel Edition*, *The Music Review*, vol. VIII, 1947, p. 112

But it is good to know that Handel and Beard are united on the hidden memorial. Now could be the time to try and get it repositioned where it can be seen once again, as a tribute to the remarkable singer who did so much, in Georgian England, to establish the lyric tenor voice.

Neil Jenkins
2005