

BYRD IN MANCHESTER

RICHARD TURBET

Browsing in The National Archives' Discovery Catalogue, the indefatigable John Harley spotted, and alerted me to, the Order of Service for the "William Byrd (1543-1623) Tercentenary Commemoration Service" which took place in Manchester Cathedral on Tuesday 30 October, 1923. Michael Breaks, a volunteer at Manchester Cathedral Archives, kindly sent me a photocopy of the printed order of service. Presumably the music was sung by the Cathedral Choir. If so, it must have been more than capable, as the selection of pieces from Byrd's oeuvre was varied and impressive. (The Organist at this date was Archibald Wilson, who had taken over in 1919 from the more famous Sydney Nicholson.) The service began with a Processional Hymn and The Lord's Prayer. Following his Responses, the choir sang his setting of Psalm CXIV, "When Israel came out of Egypt", one of only a handful of such settings composed by Byrd. After the Lesson came the Nunc dimittis from the *Second Service*, followed by the Collects, the anthem *Sing joyfully*, then what the order of service described as "Fantasia for String Sextet (From "Psalms, Songs and Sonnets, 1611.")" and the Lullaby. There followed the "Address by Sir W. H. Hadow, M.A., Mus. Doc. (Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University.)" Next came another hymn, and the Commemoration concluded with the motet *O quam gloriosum* sung in Latin (unusually for a service in an Anglican church at that time, wherein tortured English translations tended to be the norm), "Fantasia for String Sextet (From Brit. Mus. Add. MSS., 17786-91)", and last of all "In Piam Memoriam" the motet *Iustorum animae*, followed by the Blessing.

Viewed from the following century, the proceedings are both interesting and impressive, though in using these adjectives there is a danger of being patronizing. But both apply to the presumed capability of the presumed Cathedral Choir (if the performers were not an imported rent-a-choir of the day) to sing a variety of challenging repertory still relatively early in the revival of Tudor music; and in the availability of a string sextet – albeit at that date playing members of the violin family – presumably capable of performing Byrd's two mature surviving fantasias a6. And it would have been a coup to have the sound and reliable Byrd scholar Henry Hadow to give the Address. None of this is to patronize a provincial event – in any case, I live in rural Norfolk – rather, it is to rejoice that in this major northern city there was a commemoration of Byrd's tercentenary that, if replicated today, would still gain plaudits for the breadth, substance and quantity of its content.