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FOUR HANDEL ORATORIO
LIBRETTI PUBLISHED BY
JOHN GREGORY OF LEICESTER,
1759–1774

Patrick J. Boylan

George Frederic Handel had links with Leicestershire through the very wealthy writer and patron of music and literature Charles Jennens of Gopsall Hall, who, amongst other things wrote and prepared the texts for *Messiah* and several other important Handel works, and created the most comprehensive library of Handel scores and manuscripts. Between 1759 and 1774 the Leicester printer John Gregory, the founder and publisher of the *Leicester Journal*, printed and sold full texts of the libretti of four Handel oratorios: *Messiah* (ca. 1759), *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Esther* (both 1761) and *Jephtha* (1774). All were produced for specific Leicestershire performances of the works. The first three were part of the Church Langton ‘Music Meetings’ of William Hanbury, which included the first known church performance of *Messiah* in 1759. The fourth was printed for the 1774 Anniversary festival of the Leicester Infirmary, organised and funded by Joseph Cradock, one of Gregory’s fellow Governors of the Infirmary, and brought together many of the leading interpreters and scholars of Handel, creating what was widely regarded as the most important musical event ever held in Leicester.

In the late 1990s my predecessor at City University London, John Pick, Professor Emeritus of Arts Policy and Management, was researching for a major study comparing recent government-led British developments in the arts and leisure with the historical record of the emergence and development of the arts and cultural industries through private enterprise and patronage in a number of British provincial towns in the 18th and 19th centuries,¹ and asked me to help by looking for relevant early examples relating to the arts and publishing in Leicester.

In the course of this work I found that the British Library collection includes a small thin quarto volume in an old, presumably 18th century, full calf binding comprising the texts of three Handel oratorios, all printed and published by John Gregory in Leicester: *Messiah, an oratorio, as perform’d at Church-Langton...* (undated, but probably 1759), *Judas Maccabaeus. A Sacred Drama, as performed at Church-Langton...* (1761), and *Esther, an oratorio, as performed at Church-Langton...* (1761).² This was bought by the Library in April 1981 along with four

¹ Later published as John Pick & Malcolm Anderton, *Building Jerusalem: art, industry and the British millennium* (London: Routledge, 1999).

² British Library: Shelfmark 1578/4793 (1-3): the volume has more recently been microfilmed by Research Publications, Woodbridge, Conn., *The Eighteenth Century*, reel 10812, no. 10 (*Messiah*), no. 11 (*Judas Maccabaeus*) and no. 12 (*Esther*).

other 18th century volumes from C.R. Johnson Rare Books Collections, then based in Altrincham, Cheshire. The company does not have any record relating to acquisitions and sales so far back,³ so there is no other information about its origins. Although apparently in its original calf covers, the volume has been rebound at some time and now has new conservation-type endpapers; the pages have also apparently been trimmed back almost to the edge of the printed area, so that the page size is now only 18cm by 15cm. The volume has no identifying marks or inscriptions within it other than the small British Library accessioning stamps dated 30 April 1981.

More recently I found a fourth example of a Handel oratorio libretto published by John Gregory in one of the British Library's very large series of early 19th century bound quarto volumes of mixed 18th century unbound pamphlets, music scores etc. known as 18th century Tracts. This is *Jephtha, an oratorio or, sacred drama... performed at St Martin's Church, Leicester, at... the anniversary meeting of... the Infirmary* (1774).⁴ (I had missed this previously because it had been mis-catalogued in the old British Library catalogue sometime in the past as a duplicate of a Worcester edition of *Jephtha*, presumably for an 18th century Three Choirs Festival performance. However, it has now been properly identified during the cataloguing of the 18th century and earlier printed works around the world for the *English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC)* bibliographic database.⁵)

It seems almost certain that all four oratorio libretti were produced in quite substantial numbers for sale at the well-attended performances to which each relate. However, searches across the more than 400,000 pre-1801 English language publications in more than 1,600 libraries, archives and collections so far catalogued for the *ESTC* suggest that three of the Gregory libretti are unique survivals and only one other copy of the fourth is listed in the *ESTC*. It therefore seems worth describing these and their context in some detail.

HANDEL AND LEICESTERSHIRE

Georg Friederich Händel, born in Halle, Germany, in 1685, soon established himself as an accomplished performer on the organ, violin, and harpsichord as well as a composer, his first opera *Almira* being performed in Hamburg in 1705.⁶ After studying, performing and writing prolifically in the latest musical style in Italy for the next five years he became Kappelmeister to the Elector of Hanover

³ I am grateful to Steve Cork, Curator, Music Collections at the British Library, and Chris Forster of C.R. Johnson Rare Book Collections Ltd., London NW3, who kindly checked their respective records for me.

⁴ British Library: Tracts 1749–1800 Shelfmark 11771.h.1 (7).

⁵ Started in 1977 (then called the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue) as a partnership between the British Library and the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research of University of California – Riverside, the English Short Title Catalogue (*ESTC*) aims to create an electronic catalogue of all known copies of everything published in England and its territories and dependencies between 1473 and 1800. See <http://www.bl.uk/collections/early/holdingenglish.html>

⁶ Many authors have written biographies and critical studies of Handel. Unless otherwise indicated, I have mainly relied on Donald Burrows, George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) Oxford Dictionary of

in 1710. Following an initial visit to London for a production of his opera *Rinaldo* in 1711, he returned in 1712 and settled in England for the rest of his life, though with visits back to Germany from time to time.

The Hanoverian succession to the British Crown in 1715 brought George I to England, and no doubt this made Handel's position in London more secure through Royal patronage and commissions, such as the 1716 *Water Music*. Another important patron of his early years in England was the Earl of Caernarvon (later Duke of Chandos) for whom he wrote the eleven well-known *Chandos Anthems* and his first two oratorios. These were *Acis and Galatea* and the first version of *Esther* (to a text by John Arbuthnot and Alexander Pope), which was to be much revised by Handel later with additional texts by Samuel Humphries. (This is the version that is represented in the Leicester libretto).

From 1720 Handel was intimately involved with the development of regular performances of the newly introduced Italian opera in London, with Royal patronage through the Royal Academy of Music of which Handel was the musical director although this venture collapsed in 1728. However, by this time his reputation was well established both in England and on the Continent, and as the newly appointed Composer to the Chapel Royal he wrote four anthems for the Coronation of George II in 1727, including *Zadok the Priest*, which has been an indispensable part of the music of every coronation since then. In the same year he was naturalised as a British subject, and by this time (if not earlier) he had anglicised his name to George Frideric Handel.

Although opera remained his main passion, changing fashion led Handel to write more and more in other forms, particularly oratorios, which were at the time always performed in theatres or assembly rooms (but never in churches), most of Handel's being premiered in the new Covent Garden opera house. Only concert performances were permitted for works based on the Scriptures: a 1732 proposal to present a fully staged version of *Esther* was blocked by the Bishop of London.

Certainly by the late 1730s, and probably earlier, Handel had become acquainted with Charles Jennens, the already very wealthy heir to the Gopsall Hall estate in west Leicestershire (between Twycross and Shackerstone). Jennens⁷ was born in 1700 or 1701, probably at Gopsall, but little of known of his early life. He matriculated at Balliol, Oxford, in 1716 but as a non-conformist he was unable to

National Biography, vol. 25, pp. 25–41 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 – subsequently cited as Oxford DNB) and Winton Dean, George Frideric Handel, in Stanley Sadie (editor), *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 8, pp. 83–140, (London: Macmillan, 1980, 2nd edition 2001 – subsequently cited as *New Grove*). Other recent definitive works on various aspects consulted have included Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1995); Donald Burrows (editor), *The Cambridge Companion to Handel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David Hurley, *Handel's muse: patterns of creations in his oratorios and music dramas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (Oxford, 2005).

⁷ Winton Dean, Charles Jennens, *New Grove*, vol. 9, p. 599; R. Smith, *The achievements of Charles Jennens. Music and Letters*, 1989, pp. 161–190; Ruth Smith, *Handel's English Librettists*, pp. 92–108 in Burrows 1997 (see n. 6 above); Ruth Smith, *Charles Jennens (1700/01–1773)*, Oxford DNB, vol. 29, pp. 998–1000. John Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* 4 vols., (London, 1795–1815 – subsequently cited as Nichols), vol 4, pp. 856–859.

graduate. After Oxford he appears to have split his time between London and Gopsall. At least until he finally inherited the Gopsall estate from his grandfather in 1747 Jennens seems to have devoted most of his time and much of his income to cultural pursuits, especially music and literature.

He was reputed to have built up the largest music library of his day following his purchase in its entirety of the library of the Venetian Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (1667–1740)⁸ after Ottoboni's death. During his first long stay in Italy between 1705 and 1710 the young Handel had been introduced to Ottoboni by the veteran composer and founder of modern violin playing and writing, Arcangelo Corelli (1633–1717). Corelli and Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) served as official Musicians to Ottoboni's household, and Corelli bequeathed all his estate to Ottoboni, including his art and library collections. Among many other things, Ottoboni was the patron of several of the most important Italian composers of the 18th century: in addition to Corelli and Scarlatti already mentioned these included Antonio Caldara (1670–1736) and Antonio Vivaldi (1686–1741). He had also kept opera alive in Rome when it was banned for a number of years by maintaining a programme of 'private' performances in his Palazzo della Cancelleria, almost bankrupting himself in the process because of the enormous cost of mounting such performances.

No doubt both Jennens' patronage of music generally and the richness of his library would have drawn Handel, himself a noted musical scholar, to him. They also shared strongly protestant views although the Anglo-German Handel would have differed when Jennens voiced his support for the Stuart cause politically, to the extent that he remained a 'non-juror' through his refusal to swear allegiance to the Hanoverian succession.

Jennens was a well-respected writer, particularly of verse, and he also produced a series of editions of Shakespeare's tragedies the last four of which were published by the publisher and antiquarian John Nichols (1785–1826): *Hamlet* (1772), *Othello* (1773), *Macbeth* (1773) and *Julius Caesar*, published posthumously in 1774. Nichols is remembered as the proprietor and editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the author of the monumental *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*: Jennens was without doubt Handel's most important and accomplished librettist, beginning with the 1738–9 oratorio *Saul*. He also adapted Milton's texts for Handel's 1740 '*L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed Il Moderato*' and in the Autumn of 1744 he wrote the text for Handel's oratorio *Belshazzar* as well. However, by far his most famous and important collaboration with Handel began in 1739 when Handel and Jennens first discussed the idea of jointly creating an oratorio far more ambitious than any written to date, covering the whole of the life of Christ from the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament through to the Resurrection. By 1741 it had been agreed that Jennens would create a libretto for this using the words of sacred scripture throughout, selected by Jennens from the King James Bible's translations of the Old and New Testaments and the Psalms.

⁸ Hans Joachim Marx, *Pietro Ottoboni*, New Grove, vol. 14, p. 28.

On receiving Jennens' text Handel quickly set this to music and orchestrated it as *Messiah*. It is widely reported that Handel composed this in just 24 days between 22nd August and 14th September 1741. It seems most likely that he wrote *Messiah* mainly if not entirely at his house at 25 Brook Street, London (now the Handel House Museum). Though Leicestershire tradition has it that *Messiah* was actually composed in the 'Handel Temple' – a folly built by Jennens in Gopsall Park – this seems very unlikely, since the most likely earliest date for the Temple is probably some years after *Messiah* was written (see below).

As his financial situation in London was not at all good, Handel decided to spend the winter of 1741–1742 performing in Dublin. Leaving London on or very soon after 2nd November, accompanied by his Secretary/Amanuensis John Christopher Smith (born Johann Christoph Schmidt – 1712–1795), and a second copyist. Handel is known to have arrived in Dublin on 18th November, having travelled via Chester where it is recorded that he tried out at least some of the movements of *Messiah* with musicians from its Cathedral choir.

On his journey from London to Chester Handel would almost certainly have travelled along the route of the Roman Watling Street (the present-day A5), taking him through Atherstone, only six or seven miles from Gopsall. The journey would probably not have taken more than three or four days' actual travelling, so it seems likely that Handel would have called to see his friend and collaborator en route to Ireland. It is known that Handel accepted at least some of Jennens' criticisms of the early drafts, and made a number of significant changes to *Messiah* in response to these suggestions, (though Jennens remained convinced that the work would have been improved even further if more of his suggested changes had been incorporated!) Perhaps the legend of Handel working on *Messiah* at Gopsall relates to such a visit. (The presence of the two accompanying copyists on his journey to Dublin suggests strongly that work was still in progress, at least at the level of fully orchestrating the work and of preparing the individual band and vocal parts for performance, even if more substantial revisions were not in fact made.)

In Dublin, Handel was asked to mount a major charity concert and decided to use this to premiere *Messiah*, but he quickly faced strong objections to the whole idea of an oratorio about the life of Christ from Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, who initially banned all the Cathedral musicians from taking part. However, Swift was persuaded to withdraw his objections, and the first performance of *Messiah* took place in the City's New Musick Theatre on 13th April 1742, with a company of just 26 boys and five men plus a small group of instrumentalists.

Messiah was an immediate success both artistically and financially (even though all the proceeds of this first performance went to an Irish charity for the welfare of prisoners), and Handel stayed in Ireland for several more months, apparently earning substantial amounts towards re-building his depleted finances. He directed the first English performance of *Messiah* at Covent Garden on 23rd March 1743,⁹ and it was during this that the King leaped to his feet and stood

⁹ *Messiah* [Workbook – i.e. libretto, for first London performance. Price: One Shilling] (London: Thomas Good and at the Theatre, March 1743).

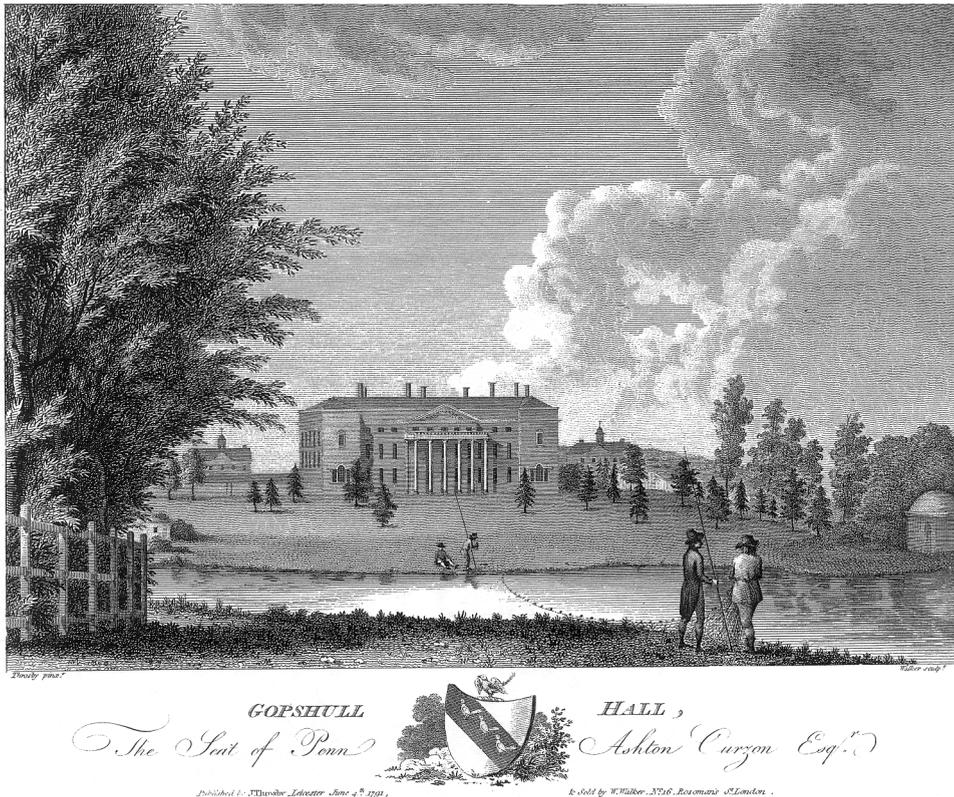


Fig. 1. Throsby's view of Gopsall from 'Handel's Temple', 1792.
ROLLR

throughout the *Hallelujah Chorus* which closes Part II of the oratorio. He was joined by the rest of the audience, beginning a tradition that has continued down to the present day.

Of the other oratorios published by Gregory in Leicester, *Judas Maccabaeus*, with a text by Thomas Morrell, was commissioned in 1846 by the Prince of Wales to celebrate the return of the Duke of Cumberland after defeating Charles Stuart and the Scots at Culloden, and was first performed on 1st April 1747 at Covent Garden. It is not surprising that the staunchly Jacobite Charles Jennens did not write the libretto for this, and Morrell also wrote the text for Handel's last oratorio, *Jephtha* in 1752 (the subject of Gregory's 1774 Leicester Infirmary performance text).

However, with advancing age, blindness and increasing frailty, Handel seems to have grown even closer to Jennens and spent longer periods at Gopsall, especially after Jennens inherited the estate in 1747, and started to undertake a major rebuilding and extension of the original Jacobean Gopsall Hall, creating what was probably Leicestershire's largest and most expensive Georgian country house in the Classical style. He furnishing the new house with what was rated as

one of Britain's top ten art collections of the time, and also housed there the best musical library and collection of music manuscripts in northern Europe. He also carried out further landscaping of the extensive grounds of Gopsall.¹⁰

What was originally known as the Garden Temple is located on a prominent point on a wooded slope across the artificial lake (now drained and returned to agriculture) directly south of the main house. The re-building of the Hall and the landscaping of the Park almost certainly did not begin until after Jennens inherited the estate from his grandfather in 1747, and it is known that the various works were on such a large scale that they continued into at least the mid-1750s. It seems almost certain that the Classical Temple, later known as 'Handel's Temple', was part of this re-building and landscaping, which in addition to the creating the lake also included contrasting Chinese and Gothick landscape elements.

The octagonal domed temple with eight substantial columns was located within a circular ha-ha, and the dome was surmounted by the major white marble statue of *Religion or Fides Christiana* by Roubilliac, the leading French sculptor of the period. (It is probably very significant that the splendid 9ft high statue of Handel that forms his memorial in Westminster Abbey is also by Roubilliac. No doubt Jennens would have been a major donor to the Handel Memorial and was therefore likely to have a say over the design and its execution.)¹¹ As the centrepiece of the Temple, underneath the dome, Jennens commissioned a substantial stone cenotaph in memory of his friend, fellow Jacobite, and regular correspondent, the classical scholar Edward Holdsworth who died in 1746. It therefore seems most unlikely that the Temple was built earlier than this date, and it could well have been built several years later. (John Nichols, who knew Jennens well, makes it clear that he understood that it was the Temple itself, (Not just the cenotaph) that was Jennens' memorial to Holdsworth.)

However, though it can almost certainly be ruled out as the place where Handel composed *Messiah*, the legend of the great composer's affection for the Temple as a retreat where he could reflect and compose in peace could well relate to some of Handel's later visits to Gopsall. For example, it is known that during one stay in 1750 Handel wrote one of his best known hymn tunes, known as *Gopsall* (or *Gopsal* in some editions). This was a setting of Charles Wesley's then recently written 1744 adaptation of the Gradual *Rejoice in the Lord Always* for

¹⁰ John Nichols, (vol.4, pp.856-859), records that in addition to the Gopsall Hall estate of 736 acres Jennens inherited twenty-four other mostly substantial properties in six counties. *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* 4 vols., (London, 1795-1815 – subsequently cited as Nichols), vol. 4, pp. 856-859. Nichols also reports that on his death a quarter of a century later in addition to the same twenty-five properties Jennens had highly valuable library and art collections. With £28,350 in cash and investments which alone were the equivalent of around £2.5 million at present-day prices, Jennens' total wealth must have been equivalent to at least £10 million at current values, probably much more. (For this and subsequent conversions to present-day equivalent (Retail Price Index) prices I have used Lawrence H. Officer, *Comparing the Purchasing Power of Money in Great Britain from 1264 to 2005*, Economic History Services, 2004 on Economic History Net: <http://eh.net/hmit/ppowerbp/>); Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, *The Garden Temple at Gopsall Hall*, 2004 (Hinckley: published by the Council).

¹¹ Burrows, *Oxford DNB*, vol. 25, pp. 25-44.

Gaudete Sunday (3rd Sunday in Advent). As *Rejoice the Lord is King!* Handel's tune *Gopsall* is still in most standard English hymnals more than two and a half centuries later.

Local tradition also has it that at least some of Handel's writing of his last oratorio *Jephtha* was also at Gopsall and this seems much more probable than those relating to the composing of *Messiah*. It is known that Handel started work on *Jephtha* in September 1751 using a text by Thomas Morrell.¹² However, he was interrupted several times by periods of ill-health, and for three eye operations to try to improve his rapidly deteriorating sight. Stays with Jennens at Gopsall could well have included periods of convalescence after these illnesses. Either way, *Jephtha* was finished by early 1752 when it was first performed at Covent Garden.

By this time Handel's advancing age and worsening eyesight meant that he concentrated on performing *Messiah* and on his duties as a Governor of the Foundling Hospital. This had been established in London in 1739 by Captain Thomas Coram, and Handel organised and conducted some particularly important charity performances of *Messiah* to raise funds for the Hospital. For the first decade or so the organisation and form of performances of the work had varied considerable in terms of the selection of movements to be performed, the allocation of parts to different voices or instruments, and even the sequence followed.

Through his Foundling Hospital performances in the early 1750s Handel established a standard format for *Messiah* and recorded this in his own manuscript full score of the oratorio. He bequeathed this to the Foundling Hospital on his death, and it is still held by the Thomas Coram Foundation, now in its recently established Foundling Museum in Brunswick Square, London WC1.¹³ This was the basis of both Gregory's Leicester libretto of ca. 1759 and of the first printed music score of the 1767.¹⁴ It remains one of the most important, not to say evocative, of all Handel manuscripts, as well as one of the greatest treasures of the Foundling Museum.

In Handel's final years Jennens commissioned a life-size portrait of Handel with the score of *Messiah* from the prominent court portrait painter, Thomas Hudson (1685–1759), who was among other things the teacher of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Displayed in one of the finest French-style Rococo frames of the period, the 'Gopsall' portrait of Handel was a centrepiece of Jennens' new Gopsall Hall, complementing the magnificent musical and general library.

Handel died in 1759, and Jennens in 1773. Sadly, Jennens' great house itself deteriorated seriously and eventually, terminally, over the years. As with so many great country houses the final blows seem to have been a combination of successive owners' financial and tax problems, structural deterioration through aging and lack of maintenance, and finally the damage suffered under the military

¹² Burrows, Oxford DNB, vol. 25, pp. 25–44.

¹³ <http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk> Interestingly, despite his long association with Handel and having a London house nearby, Jennens does not seem to have been involved with the Foundling Hospital in any way. (I am grateful to Colin Coleman, Assistant Librarian at the Foundling Museum, for checking this out for me.)

¹⁴ *Messiah*. Full Score with Historical Additions. (London: Randell & Abel, successors to J. Walsh, 1767).

occupation while requisitioned during World War II until the house was demolished in 1952.¹⁵ Much earlier, in the first half of the 19th century, ‘Handel’s Temple’ had suffered a partial collapse, and in 1857 the then owner of Gopsall, the Earl Howe, donated the Roubilliac statue of *Religion* to the Leicester Museum. During the 1951–52 demolition some important architectural elements from the Temple, particularly the Cenotaph to Edward Holdsworth, were rescued by the Leicester Museums, and both these and the Roubilliac statue were moved to the gardens of Belgrave Hall.

Most recently, the remaining elements of the Temple were excavated and consolidated in 2002–2003 in a restoration programme funded by the Crown Estate, East Midlands Development Agency, Leicestershire County Council and the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council. At the same time the County Council negotiated a quarter of a mile or so ‘permissive’ footpath access to the ruins from the Twycross to Shackerstone public footpath which crosses the former Gopsall Park and passes close to ‘Handel’s Temple’, thus allowing public access to it from 2004, probably for the first time in its history.¹⁶

Over the centuries all of Jennens remarkable art collection was dispersed. However, the famous ‘Gopsall’ portrait of Handel by Thomas Hudson came on the market in the 1960s when it was provisionally sold to an overseas buyer. In 1967, after the refusal of an export licence, the portrait was saved for the nation by the National Portrait Gallery thanks to the money raised in a national Handel Appeal and a special Government Grant.¹⁷

By the time of Jennens’ death his Music Library included not only English, Italian and other Continental printed books and music scores, but also very many very important manuscripts. For example, there were many Vivaldi manuscripts from the Ottoboni collection, including a full score of all four movements of the *Four Seasons*, and other highly important scores by other continental Renaissance and Baroque masters. Jennens had also brought together a unique collection of Handel manuscripts, which today occupy no less than 338 bound volumes. He is thought to have been assisted in this by Handel’s Secretary/Amanuensis, John Christopher Smith, after the composer’s death, possibly with a view to producing a complete edition of Handel’s compositions. Jennens bequeathed his music library to a cousin, Heanage Finch, the third Earl of Aylesford, and the collection remained more or less intact within the family as the Aylesford Collection until it

¹⁵ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Leicestershire and Rutland* (Harmondsworth, 1960, p. 110); J.D. Bennett, *Vanished Houses of Leicestershire*, (Leicester: Leicester Museums, 1971).

¹⁶ The Temple is at National Grid Ref. SK344608 on the northern edge of what is now called Racecourse Wood. From the unclassified Twycross to Shackerstone road turn north in Bilstone for around half a mile to the drive to Gopsall Hall Farm, where there is the first footpath signpost to Handel’s Temple. This points up the Gopsall Hall Farm drive (to the left), which is a permissive footpath. In about 0.4 miles the drive is crossed by a Twycross to Shackerstone public footpath across cultivated fields, with stiles on each side of the drive. Here there is a left-pointing sign for Handel’s Temple and Twycross: after crossing the stile, follow the path along the side of the field for about a quarter of a mile to Racecourse Wood. The Temple is a further quarter of a mile along a permissive footpath trending towards the right (north-west) through the Wood, and has an information panel provided by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

¹⁷ Purchased by the National Portrait Gallery in 1968, catalogue no. NPG 3970.



Fig. 2. The recently restored ruins of 'Handel's Temple'.
(Photo. Patrick Boylan, 2006)

was sold at Sotheby's in 1918. Most of the lots were bought by Sir Newman Flower, whose library including most of the Jennens–Aylesford collection was in turn was acquired by the Manchester City Library in 1965.¹⁸

JOHN GREGORY (1727 – 1795)

Gregory, the printer of the four Handel libretti, was born in Overton, Derbyshire, and was registered as a Freeman of Leicester on 26th May 1751, being recorded as 'a stranger' (i.e. he was not able to claim the Freedom by birth and patrimony or by apprenticeship in the borough).¹⁹ The admission of 'strangers' to the Freedom was relatively unusual, so presumably he was by then already well established in his Market Place printing business and had the support of influential men in the town and particularly the Corporation.

¹⁸ See *Manuscripts and Rarities, Henry Watson Music Library, Manchester City Council*: <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/libraries/central/hwml/early.htm>, also Smith, *New DNB*, vol. 29, pp. 998–1000.

¹⁹ Henry Hartopp, *Register of the Freeman of Leicester, 1196–1770* (Leicester: Edward Backus, 1927), p. 287; Henry Hartopp, *Roll of the Mayors of the Borough of Leicester 1209–1935* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1935), pp. 167–168.

On 12th May 1753 Gregory launched the town's first regular newspaper, the twopenny weekly *Leicester and Nottingham Journal* (Nottingham being dropped from the title in 1787, by which time the price had increased).²⁰ In his 19th century *History of Leicester* Thompson describes this as:

*4 pages filled with news taken from the London papers with very meagre paragraphs concerning local affairs... it was an average sample of an early provincial newspaper. It helped, however, to bring to light some of the smaller happenings in the town and its neighbourhood which would be considered beneath what is called "the dignity of history".*²¹

Gregory was elected a Councillor in 1760 and Chamberlain in 1765, the Freeman's Register records the binding of apprentices to Gregory in 1762 and 1768. He also became both an Alderman and a Justice of the Peace, and Mayor in 1779–1780. By 1774 he was clearly established as a man of some substance, since in that year he was elected Treasurer of the Leicester Infirmary which had been founded in 1766 and opened in 1771; he held the position for fourteen years. (As Leicester had no proper banking system in place until almost the end of the century, for the first twenty or so years of the Infirmary's history the Treasurers had to provide the equivalent of a banking service to the hospital, including making available often substantial sums of their own cash in the form of *ad hoc* loans, possibly for up to a year at a time.²²) Gregory died on a visit to London on Corporation business in 1789. He was buried in St Martin's, Leicester, now Leicester Cathedral. (A younger son, Joseph, was Vicar of All Saint's and St. Martin's for around twenty years). The fine engraved grave slab survives in the Choir of the Cathedral and records:

*Near this place are deposited the remains of
John Gregory
Late Alderman and Mayor of this Borough.
He passed through life with integrity and honour
Respected by all who knew him
And died at the Adelphi Hotel London
March 22 1789
In the prosecution of a public good
The navigation and commerce of the town
Of Leicester aetat 62
Also of Frances, relict of John Gregory
Who died 11 April 1795 aged 71 years*

It seems that much of Gregory's printing, or at least publishing, trade concentrated on his Tory-orientated *Leicester and Nottingham Journal* although this must have served to draw in other work. For example, while the Rev. Dr.

²⁰ A Temple Patterson, *Radical Leicester. A History of Leicester 1780–1850* (Leicester: University College, 1954), p. 21.

²¹ James Thompson, *The History of Leicester in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Crossley & Clarke, 1871), p. 82–83.

²² E. R. Frizelle, *The Life and Times of the Royal Infirmary at Leicester. The Making of a Teaching Hospital 1766–1980*. (Leicester: Leicester Medical Society, 1988), (subsequently cited as *Frizelle 1988*) pp. 467–472, and notes on pp. 586–587. It was 1788 before the Leicester Infirmary was formally constituted as a Trust and began to use professional bankers, reducing markedly the financial burden on the (honorary) Treasurers.

William Watts first proposed the establishment of a Leicester Infirmary in a notice in the 22nd February 1766 issue of the *Journal* and several subsequent letters to the paper, he also paid Gregory to print a supporting pamphlet, which Watts himself then distributed. This was followed by others including a supporting *Ode inscribed to the Rev. D. Watts upon his promoting a plan for a County Infirmary at Leicester by the Rev. Mr. Morton of Northamptonshire* which seems to survive only as a full transcript by John Nichols. Very soon Gregory was being described in its official papers as *Printer to the Infirmary* and he retained that role for many years.²³

In addition to the four Handel libretti described in this paper, Gregory printed and published some more conventional pamphlets and shorter books. For example, his three Parliamentary Election *Poll Books* for 1754, 1768 and 1775 are well known local history and genealogy sources.²⁴ He was also a bookseller and was listed as co-publisher or official distributor for some works printed in London.²⁵

THE 1759 MESSIAH AT CHURCH LANGTON, LEICESTERSHIRE

As trimmed and bound, the Gregory libretto of Handel's *Messiah* comprises 16 pages of 18cm high by 15cm wide – apparently in a small quarto format (although the original printing and make-up is not completely clear due to the re-binding and trimming of the original margins). A line-by-line comparison of Gregory's text with Chrysander's definitive German Handel Society full score edition of 1902²⁶ shows that this faithfully reproduced the complete text of the oratorio. (There are just minor changes in the capitalisation and in one or two spellings and there are two or three small typesetting errors. Amusingly, there is evidence that the punctuation error that has become notorious over the past few years as the 'greengrocer's apostrophe' was alive and well in the Leicester Market Place over 240 years ago. In the movement *Why do the Nations so Furiously Rage* in Part Two of *Messiah* Gregory's edition renders the line: *The Kings of the Earth shall rise up* as *The King's of the Earth shall rise up...!*)

²³ Frizelle 1988, pp. 11–18; Nichols, vol. 1, 1795, pp. 515–527.

²⁴ *Leicester Poll Book. Parliamentary Election of 19th – 23rd April 1754* (Leicester: J. Gregory, Bookseller); *Leicester Poll Book. Parliamentary Election of 22nd March – 6th April 1768* (Leicester: printed and sold by J. Gregory); *Poll Book for Knight of the Shire to Represent the County of Leicester 12th – 26th January 1775* (Leicester: printed by J. Gregory), all in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office, Wigston, though the available 1754 edition is an old typed copy.

²⁵ For example, the British Library has: George Cardale, *Peace, Good-will, and Forgiveness of Injuries Recommended, in an Assize Sermon Preached at St. Martin's in Leicester...Second Edition with additions*, 20 pp., (London: S. Crowder and H. Woodgate; Leicester: John Gregory, 1755); Petrus von Sarn, *The Various Kinds of Heart or rather Stomach-pain...* 15 pp. (Cluer Dicey, sold by J. Lacey, Northampton, John Gregory, Leicester, 1760). (Cluer Dicey was well-known London publisher, though the place of publication is not stated.) The British Library also has *Church Langton. A Poem*, published in Leicester in 1767: though the publisher is not named this is also likely to be by Gregory. It is also possible that Gregory printed the six volumes of John Throsby's *1777 Memoirs of the Town and County of Leicester...* which is merely recorded as 'Printed for the Author, Leicester'.

²⁶ Friedrich Chrysander (editor). *G.F. Händel's Werke für die Deutsche Händelgesellschaft*, (Leipzig, 1902), vol. XIV.

The title page of the Church Langton libretti reads:

MESSIAH
 AN
ORATORIO,
 As Perform'd at
 CHURCH-LANGTON
 IN THE
COUNTY OF LEICESTER.

SET TO MUSICK BY Mr. HANDEL.

*And without Controversy, Great is the Mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the Flesh,
 justified by the Spirit, seen Of Angels, preached among the Gentiles,
 believed on in the World, Received up into Glory.
 In whom are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*

LEICESTER:

Printed by JOHN GREGORY, in the *Market-Place*.

[PRICE ONE-SHILLING]

As indicated above, while the oratorio form was becoming established in England in the first half of the 18th century, most widely and significantly through the Sacred works of Handel, there was continuing suspicion, especially within the Church, about this innovation. The florid Italian style of the music and the fact that many of the singers best equipped to perform the new works were from the decidedly ungodly and increasingly cosmopolitan opera houses raised serious concern in the mainly strongly protestant English Church. Consequently oratorio performances were invariably in either theatres or concert rooms, or in large private houses, not in churches.

What is generally accepted to have been the first performance in an English parish church of *Messiah*, indeed probably the first church performance of any major operatic-style oratorio, took place on 27th September 1759 in a very unlikely location: the remote and relatively small parish church in Church Langton, east Leicestershire, about four miles from Market Harborough and fifteen miles from Leicester. This was brought about by the single-minded initiative of the remarkable and eccentric Rev. William Hanbury (1725–1778), who repeated his annual ‘Music-Meetings’ in each of the following four years: twice more at Church Langton, then in Leicester and finally in Nottingham in 1763.

Born at Bedworth, Warwickshire, Hanbury matriculated at Oxford (Magdalen Hall) in 1745, graduated BA from St Edmund Hall Oxford in 1748 and was ordained Deacon in 1748. In 1749 his father bought the living of Church Langton – a rectory covering three prosperous and well-endowed parishes. The same year he was instituted Rector (on his own petition), and served in that position to his death in the village in 1778. Among many other things Hanbury was a noted horticulturalist: in November 1769 he was awarded an MA by St Andrews for his undoubted horticultural and forestry achievements

Much has been written about Hanbury's life, works, and foibles. A major, though not necessarily always reliable, source is his autobiographical *History of the Rise and Progress of the Charitable Foundations at Church-Langton* of 1767 which runs to an astonishing 469 pages (some would say 469 astonishing pages!).²⁷ Its publication provoked an angry published response the following year from Hanbury's musical director for all five music festivals, Professor William Hayes of Oxford, which shows Hanbury in a very different light,²⁸ while John Nichols collected and reproduced much material, including many extended quotations from Hanbury's *History* and other contemporary sources.²⁹

Among modern studies, there is a 1978 bicentenary assessment by Jonathan Wilshere, and Canon John Prophet published a substantial book on Church Langton and Hanbury in 1982, while Max Wade-Edwards refers to Hanbury's musical promotions in his 1998 examination of the musical history of Leicester. Most recently, a new assessment has been included in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.³⁰ The *Oxford DNB* entry makes it clear that Hanbury has been included primarily because of his very considerable importance as a pioneer horticulturalist. His popular so-called Gardener's New Calendar of 1758 was followed by a major two volume folio-size reference work in 1770, which the *Oxford DNB* describes as one of the earliest encyclopaedias on forestry and gardening: a distillation of his life's work and learning, showing his familiarity with the Linnean System of botanical classification.³¹

²⁷ Rev. Mr. Wm Hanbury. *The History of the Rise and Progress of the Charitable Foundations at Church-Langton*. (London: J. Dodsley et al., 1767). (Subsequently cited as *Hanbury*, 1767).

²⁸ William Hayes, Mus. Doc. *Anecdotes of the Five Music-Meetings on account of the Charitable Foundations at Church Langton: in which many misrepresentations... contained in a book [i.e. Hanbury's of 1767], intitled, the History of the above foundations, are fully detected, and confuted etc.* (Oxford: W. Jackson, 1768). (Subsequently cited as *Hayes 1768*).

²⁹ *Nichols*, vol. 2, part 2, 1798, *Gartre* [sic] *Hundred*, pp. 659–696.

³⁰ Jonathan E O Wilshere, *The Rev. William Hanbury (1725-1778) of Church Langton, Leicestershire, a bicentenary assessment*. (Leicester: Chamberlain Music and Books, 1978); John Prophet, *Church Langton and William Hanbury*, (Wymondham, Leics.: Sycamore Press, 1982); Jonathan Keats, *Handel. The Man and his Music* London: Gollancz; Max Wade-Matthews, *Musical Leicester*, (Wymeswold, Leics.: Heart of Albion Press); Nigel Aston, *William Hanbury 1725-78, Oxford DNB* 2004, vol. 25, pp. 8-9. There is also a very substantial unpublished manuscript *Life of William Hanbury* by Harold St. George Cramp deposited in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office, Wigston.

³¹ W. Hanbury, *An Essay on Planting, and a scheme for making it conducive to the glory of God, etc.* [popularly known as *The Gardener's New Calendar*] (London, 1758); W. Hanbury, *A complete body of planting and gardening. The whole forming a complete history of timber trees... as well as a general system of the present practice of the flower, fruit, and kitchen gardens.* (2 vols.) (London, 1770).

However, Hanbury's horticultural ventures were intimately linked to his musical (and other cultural and educational) ambitions. Soon after he began commercial nursery planting in 1751 the very substantial profits that quickly began to flow from tree and plant sales and other horticultural initiatives were used to finance his other interests, and by 1758 he had raised enough money to establish a Trust to manage and use the income from the sales of plants and nursery trees. He quickly built up substantial supplies of seeds of many exotic and other unusual shrubs and trees from around the world, particularly from North America.

This was a time when there was a rapidly growing market in lowland England in particular for more informal 'naturalistic' gardens, for large-scale landscape gardening including the total re-modelling of landscapes under the influence of the emerging Picturesque movement (as was already in progress at Gopsall, for example), and for the planting and re-planting of commercial woodlands. The same year that Hanbury established his nurseries, 1751, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716–1783)³² had ended his nine year engagement working under the direction of William Kent in creating England's first major and highly innovative new style of landscaping at Stowe, Buckinghamshire. Brown then set up as a freelance landscape gardener on his own account, undertaking at least 170 major landscaping schemes over the next thirty years. At the same time there was a growing demand for high quality, professionally raised, nursery trees for commercial woodland and forest planting and re-planting, particularly of non-traditional fast growing species such as non-native conifers.

Nichols reports that by 1753, just two years after starting the venture, *the seed-beds smiled with their numerous progeny*. Hanbury attempted to expand the nursery areas on to parish glebe land and local commons without seeking any necessary permissions, arguing that it was a patriotic duty to allow him to produce ever more nursery trees, but he had to pull back from this in the face of strong opposition to such obvious illegalities. Hanbury was thereafter forced to concentrate production on his own land at Tur Langton and Gumley.³³ Hanbury's plants rapidly gained a high reputation, so much so that he could not keep up with the demand. For example, he noted, with obvious regret, that in 1761 he had only been able to supply 30,000 Scotch Firs for that year's planting programme on the Woburn Estate, compared with an order for 50,000 young trees received late in the season from the Duke of Bedford.³⁴

By 1758 the profits from the horticultural operations were such that Hanbury vested the enterprise in twenty-three Trustees including the well-known Alderman Gabriel Newton of Leicester and Sir Thomas Cave of Stanford Hall, Leicestershire. The Trust Deed provided that the Trustees were to develop an increasingly ambitious and complex series of initiatives and services as the value of the trust fund rose. For example, when the capital fund reached £1,500 (today's equivalent would be around £175,000) the annual income was to be used to decorate the

³² John Phibbs, Lancelot Brown 1716–1789, *Oxford DNB*, vol. 8, pp. 86–89.

³³ *Nichols*, vol. 2 (2) 1798 p. 686.

³⁴ *Hanbury*, 1767, p. 127.

church, build an organ, employ an organist and build a school. When more than £2,000 had been raised Hanbury was to be reimbursed the (obviously very considerable) personal funds that he had applied to the enterprise from 1751 onwards. With a £4,000 capital fund a hospital was to be added to the local services provided by the Trust, and when the fund stood at £10,000 schools were to be built in the other two parishes (i.e. Thorpe Langton and Tur Langton). Other ambitious provisions were for the establishment of a Library³⁵ (which was achieved, though on a more modest scale than Hanbury had hoped for), and the appointment of an increasingly large number of (university-level) Professors in Antiquity, Mathematics, Botany, Music, Grammar and Poetry, who would be based on the library and academy to be established.³⁶

However, Hanbury soon found that even among the Trustees (who he had himself selected and invited to serve) there was great scepticism about his grandiose ideas, reporting in 1767 *that swarms of enemies by this time* [i.e. around 1758] *started up from every quarter*.³⁷ Nothing came of Hanbury's wilder ambitions as the profits and hence the trust fund never approached the higher ranges that he was hoping for. (£10,000 at mid-18th century prices would be equivalent to more than £1 million today.) Nevertheless, the Hanbury Charity has contributed a great deal to the village over more than two centuries, among other things building and maintaining a school until this responsibility passed to the County Education Authority. The Charity still exists, with a 2004–2005 investment income of £18,709, which is nowadays applied to the relief of poverty and sickness in the parishes, and the payment of organists at Church Langton, Thorpe Langton and Tur Langton.³⁸

An advertisement in the 11th July 1759 edition of the *Leicester and Nottingham Journal* (also reproduced in Hanbury's 1767 account of the events) announced Hanbury's plans for a major musical event at Church Langton, with a performance of *Messiah* in the church as its highlight, to mark the first full meeting of the Trustees of the new charity:

On Wednesday the 26th September, being the day of the grand meeting of the trustees of the Rev. Mr. Hanbury's charity, will be performed Handel's Te Deum and Jubilate, with two other anthems suitable to the occasion and the celebrated Coronation Anthem

[No doubt this would be *Zadok the Priest*].

And on Thursday the 27th, the Sacred Oratorio of the MESSIAH The principal instrumental performers will be Mr. Pinto, Mr. Deane, Mr. Miller, Mr. Paxton, Mr. Vincent senior and junior, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Adcock, Mr. Jenkins, etc. The principal vocal parts will be by Miss Thomas, Mr. Hudson, Mr. Wass, Mr. Matthews, Mr. Price, Mr. Broome, Mr. Chew., etc. The whole to be conducted by Doctor Hayes, Professor of Music at Oxford.

³⁵ William Hanbury, *A Plan for a Public Library, at Church Langton, in Leicestershire* (London: J. Sandby, 1760).

³⁶ *Hanbury, 1767*, pp. 370, 383, 396, 409, 420 & 430.

³⁷ *Hanbury, 1767*, pp. 10–18.

³⁸ Charity Commission Central Register of Charities: Hanbury Charity, Reg. No. 1015641. Details are on-line at <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/registeredcharities/>

[The advertisement then explained that two large galleries were to be built in the church to accommodate the expected audience, that the doors would open at 10.30 and the performance would begin at 11, and then continued:]

Tickets [which were in fact priced at five shillings for the performance of *Messiah*] *may be had of any of the Trustees, and of Mr. Gregory, bookseller in Leicester, Mr. Ratten, of Harborough, and Mr. Dicey at Northampton.*

Te Deum gratis – collection at the door.

*Several booths, particularly two large ones, will be erected for the reception of the company after church, one for gentlemen the other for ladies, each with a cold collation.*³⁹

Hanbury's chosen musical director was William Hayes (1708–1777), who was Professor of Music at Oxford from 1742 to his death. He must have known Hayes, at least by reputation, from his student days in Oxford in the 1740s. His model was clearly the already well-established Three Choirs Festival annual 'Music Meetings' rotating between Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford, and it was perhaps significant that Hayes originated from Gloucester and had been closely involved with the Three Choirs over many years, directing the whole Festival during its visits to Gloucester in 1757, 1760, and 1763.⁴⁰ As well as being a scholar, composer, conductor and a noted tenor soloist, Hayes had worked closely with Handel over many years and was a leading supporter and champion of his work. He had organised and directed the first known performance of *Messiah* in Oxford, on 14th April 1749 during the opening of the Radcliffe Library, part of the ceremony being a degree ceremony at which Hayes received his Mus. D. (Doctor of Music) degree.

Little or none of the music Hanbury planned to offer at Church Langton was fully published at the time. (As previously noted the first full score of *Messiah* – largely based on Handel's Foundling Hospital score – was not published until 1767). Consequently Hanbury had to rely on Hayes to provide manuscript instrumental and vocal parts for all of the music in the planned programme, but then he omitted to pay Hayes for this absolutely vital service.⁴¹

Even with a claimed temporary capacity of a thousand in Church Langton parish church, and with tickets for *Messiah* priced at five shillings each (equivalent to around £31 at present-day prices), offset by the considerable expenses for the musicians and the temporary buildings apart from any other costs, it is not clear how Hanbury's confident forecast of a net profit of at least £500 for the benefit of his new charity could have been achieved. Even if every seat was sold, with no

³⁹ This is the version of the 11th June 1759 advertisement recorded in Hanbury, 1767, pp. 54–55; note that Gregory, proprietor of the *Journal* and publisher of the *Messiah* libretto, was involved with the project at this early stage, at least as the Leicester seller of tickets for the event.

⁴⁰ D. Lysons, *History of the Origin and Progress of the Meeting of the Three Choirs of Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford*. (Gloucester, 1812); Peter Ward-Jones, William Hayes 1708–1771. *New Grove* vol. 8, p. 413; R F Sharp, William Hayes (1708–1771), *Oxford DNB*, vol. 26, pp. 39–40.

⁴¹ Hanbury's failure to pay Hayes for providing the music for the performers – a significant expense to Hayes in terms of copying charges etc. – was one of the factors in the breakdown of relations between the two men. Hayes 1768, pp. 7–11, sets out in detail twenty unpaid hire fees for the use of the score and parts over Hanbury's five festivals from 1759 to 1763 totalling £72–10s (equivalent to well over £9,000 at present day prices).

complimentaries for Trustees and other VIPs, a complete sell-out of *Messiah* would only have yielded £250, and it is hard to see how the door collections for the other performances could have come anywhere near doubling that sum. Though Sir Thomas Cave's forecast that nobody would buy tickets was proved wrong, his overall assessment of the doubtful viability of the 'Music Meeting' as a fund-raising event proved entirely correct.

However, Hanbury's greatest strength, other than his 'green fingers', was his skill in publicity (many would say self-publicity). With few possibilities for wide-spread advertising and promotion through the press, still very limited in terms of circulation at that time, one can only assume that apart from advertisements and news items in John Gregory's *Leicester and Nottingham Journal*, he must have relied mainly on personal correspondence, using what must have been by then the already very impressive and influential client list for his plant and forest nursery business. No doubt, too, his customers among the nobility and gentry would have been intrigued by the young scientifically-inclined clergyman from a highly respectable family background who had gone into commerce in this way, particularly when he told them that he was making all the profits over to his newly established charity. Such personal and social links were probably at least as important as musical interests in his promotion of the September 1759 events.

Hanbury constantly stressed, with some justification, that he intended to gather *the very best performers of the kingdom to be at the head of each instrument, together with the very best singers from the different Choirs*, while following the death of Handel himself a few months earlier in April 1759, William Hayes was indisputably the leading interpreter of his sacred compositions, probably of all of Handel's music. Hanbury also made it known that he had commissioned an organ to be installed in the church in time for the performances. He apparently intended that this would be paid for by the Charity out of the profits from the *Messiah* performance. However, it was ordered and installed without the agreement of the Trustees or the Churchwardens, provoking strong protests from the parish authorities already weary of Hanbury's long record of high-handed behaviour. The Charity Trustees refused to pay for it: when the organ builder, Adock, pressed the Trustees for payment two years later Sir Thomas Cave told him to have Hanbury arrested for debt – as they regarded the cost of the unauthorised organ to be his personal responsibility.⁴²

There was further local alarm at the sight of the organ pipes as these were being delivered. According to Canon Prophet some of the local population, who were already very suspicious of Hanbury's known Jacobite sympathies (and, no doubt, his controversial 'Romish' plans to install an organ and, even worse, to present operatic-style music inside a church), thought that the organ pipes were guns!⁴³ Sir Thomas Cave, who Hanbury had nominated as Chairman of the Trustees, quickly moved from serious scepticism to outright opposition, claiming

⁴² *Hanbury, 1767*, p. 127.

⁴³ John Prophet, *Church Langton and William Hanbury* (Wymondham: Sycamore Press, 1982), pp. 23–26.

he could not sell a single ticket and that this demonstrated the madness of the scheme and the folly of encouraging it. Hanbury stated that *Sir Thomas appears to have been very uneasy, and from that time became our open and avowed enemy of the Grand Meeting, as it is called.*⁴⁴

Despite such opposition Hanbury's publicity seems to have been extraordinarily successful, and news came of large numbers of ticket sales and notices of intention to attend. The promised temporary galleries were built inside the church (again without any proper consultation let alone approval), creating the estimated capacity of an almost unbelievable one thousand, bearing in mind the size of the church. The promised temporary dining and retiring rooms were also built.

The practical consequences of attracting such a large number of people to such a relatively remote location with nowhere near sufficient inns or other lodgings to house the numbers needing at least one night's accommodation do not seem to have troubled Hanbury. In the end the most modest homes of local people in and around Market Harborough, and as far away as Leicester and Melton, had to be pressed into service, with even Dukes and Earls lodging many miles away from Church Langton, and then perhaps having to make do with a bed in a simple ale-house, or if they were lucky a room in the home of a local blacksmith. There were even serious traffic jams as such a large number tried to get to Church Langton! Feeding such a large influx of travellers coming from long distances was also a major problem. As Hanbury recorded:

*Some days before the meeting the whole county began to feel the effects of the approaching celebrity. Stable-rooms, beds, and lodgings, were bespoke at Harborough... the price of butter, fowls etc. were nearly tripled. The inns, and even the ale-houses all around were soon full. The Duke of Devonshire was obliged to lodge at a tradesman's... More than two hundred coaches, chariots, landaus and post-chaises were counted at Church Langton.*⁴⁵

Though it does not bear a publication date, it seems most likely that *Messiah*, the first of the three Handel complete texts in the British Library volume of Gregory libretti,⁴⁶ was published for sale to the audience at the 1759 Church Langton 'Music Meeting'. Such libretti seem to have been produced very widely for sale to the audiences of opera performances, and increasingly through the 18th century, to audiences at performances of oratorios as well, rather as a present-day audience would expect to buy a substantial souvenir theatre programme. However, as essentially ephemeral publications only a very tiny percentage of those that must have been printed have survived. The one shilling cover price of Gregory's *Messiah* was just one fifth of the ticket price of five shillings but was still not cheap – the equivalent of over £6 a copy at today's prices: more than the price of most opera or concert programmes, but not out of line with the cost of simple printed libretti or text translations offered by some opera houses and theatres.

⁴⁴ Hanbury, 1767, p. 57.

⁴⁵ Hanbury, 1767, p. 66.

⁴⁶ British Library Shelfmark 1578/4793 (1), 16 pp.

THE 1761 JUDAS MACCABAEUS AND ESTHER
PERFORMANCES AT CHURCH LANGTON AND LEICESTER

Hanbury organised a ‘Second Grand Meeting’ at Church Langton the following year, on 30th and 31st July 1760, with Hayes again in charge and to a large extent much the same programme as in 1759, but with Handel’s ‘new’ *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* on Wednesday 30th, and *Messiah* on Thursday 31st July, so there is a possibility that Gregory’s undated *Messiah* libretto could date from the oratorio’s revival at the 1760 festival rather than the first performance in 1759.

Though Hanbury apparently tried to pass 1760 off as just as grand an event as the first one, Hayes reports that there had been some significant changes in the performers. In 1759 both vocal and instrumental principals had all been well-established national figures, the majority of whom Hayes had brought with him from either Oxford or London. It seems clear from the surviving records and Hayes’ account that after the first year Hanbury was trying to reduce costs, and in particular some less expensive performers were substituted. Hayes himself had to sing some of the solo parts in addition to directing the performance and playing the organ, and at least two Lincoln Cathedral boy choristers were brought in and specially trained by Hayes as soloists in place of the leading woman professional of the 1759 *Messiah*, ‘Miss Thomas’.

The second and third of the three Handel complete texts in the British Library bound volume of Gregory libretti, *Judas Maccabaeus*⁴⁷ and *Esther, an Oratorio*,⁴⁸ are both dated 1761, so they were certainly printed for the third ‘Music Meeting’ at Church Langton held from Wednesday to Friday 8th to 10th July 1761, when *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Messiah*, and *Esther* were performed on successive days.

The original advertisement in the 16th June issue of Gregory’s *Leicester and Nottingham Journal* had in fact announced that the Friday performance would be of Handel’s *Sampson*, and this was no doubt intended to be the highlight of the programme. However, Hayes pointed out that this would require almost double the number of singers and instrumentalists that Hanbury was willing to pay for and that no singer for the key role of the Prophet Micah *could be found within a reasonable distance or on the very moderate terms he* [Hanbury] *required*. In fact it was well known that *Sampson* was (and is) notoriously difficult to cast and perform. On at least one occasion Handel himself had to substitute *Esther* for an announced performance of *Sampson* because even Covent Garden was not able to bring together the musical forces needed to perform it on the dates advertised. Hayes therefore did what Handel himself had been forced to do some years earlier, and substituted the 1730s rewritten version of Handel’s *Esther*, but this only attracted an audience of 120.

In his 1767 autobiographical *History* Hanbury blamed Hayes for the failure to present *Sampson*, claiming that the score and musical parts brought by Hayes were incomplete. This was one of the several libels included in Hanbury’s *History*

⁴⁷ British Library Shelfmark 1578/4793 (2), 21 pp.

⁴⁸ British Library Shelfmark 1578/4793 (3), 20 pp.

which provoked Hayes to produce his book-length refutation of Hanbury's claims under the innocuous title of *Anecdotes of the Five Music-Meetings ... at Church Langton* the following year.⁴⁹

The title page of Gregory's 1761 *Judas Maccabaeus* of 21 pages reads:

JUDAS MACCABÆUS:
A
SACRED DRAMA.
AS PERFORMED
AT CHURCH-LANGTON in *Leicestershire*
LEICESTER:
Printed by JOHN GREGORY, MDCCLXI
Price ONE SHILLING

The title page layout and wording of Gregory's *Esther* libretto of 20 pages matches almost exactly that of *Judas Maccabaeus*: the only difference is that the three lines *ESTHER:/AN/ORATORIO* has been substituted for the lines *JUDAS MACCABÆUS:/A/SACRED DRAMA*. Both have clearly been printed from exactly the same typesetting within the same printer's forme apart from the change of title of the work. Handel's own printer, John Walsh of London, is known to have done exactly the same and used the 1747 type set-up from an edition of *Judas Maccabaeus* for an *Esther* libretto of 1751.⁵⁰

However, the two 1761 libretti represent the end of the road for Hanbury's ambitious plans, at least as far as performances in Church Langton were concerned. Hanbury did organise two further Music Meetings on the same lines, also led by Hayes, but not at Church Langton. The 1762 performances were in Leicester, mainly at Ross's new Assembly Rooms at the Haymarket, Leicester, when the programme comprised *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Messiah*, *Sampson*, *Alexander's Feast* and an *Ode to the Memory of Mr Handel*. The most ambitious festival of all was Hanbury's 'Music Meeting' of May 1763 in Nottingham. He claimed that he had received 'petitions' from both Derby and Nottingham, each arguing that they would be better prospect than Leicester. There was even some talk about the possibility of rotating the festival programme around the three towns in successive years, as with the Three Choirs Festival. Hanbury's decision to move the festival once again in 1763, this time to Nottingham, suggests that the move from Church Langton to Leicester the previous year had still not solved the financial problems.

⁴⁹ Hanbury, 1767, p. 121; Hayes, 1768, p. 3–5.

⁵⁰ W.G. Smith, *Handel: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Early Editions* (First edition, London: Cassell & Co., 1960; second edition: Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1970).

Initially, Hanbury was hoping to use what he termed the ‘Great Church’ (presumably the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin by the Lace Market) for the main oratorio performances in Nottingham, but this proved impossible. He found that the organ was $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone above concert pitch and therefore could not be used with an orchestra, and he also decided that it was too large a building. Accordingly he switched the whole programme to a theatre. Still at least nominally a fund-raising programme organised by Hanbury’s Church Langton Charity, the three day Nottingham festival seems to have been the most ambitious of all, though this was tempered with a number of presumably much more profitable entertainments and two grand balls.

The festival opened on Monday 31st May with a daytime performance of *Messiah*, and an evening concert which included Handel’s 1736 setting of *Alexander’s Feast or The Power of Musick*, with a text by Newburgh Hamilton based on the well-known *Ode* of the same title written in honour of St Cecilia’s Day by John Dryden (1631–1700). On Tuesday 1st June the daytime performance was *Judas Maccabeus*, but the evening consisted of what Hanbury described as concerto entertainments (presumably a concert) followed by a Ball, and on the third day, Wednesday 2nd June a daytime performance of *Sampson* was similarly followed by evening entertainments including a Ball.⁵¹

The novelty of presenting such a venture in Nottingham no doubt helped to sell tickets compared with the apparently disappointing Leicester response the previous year, but Nottingham clearly did not raise enough money either, so no further festivals were attempted by William Hanbury. In any case, it is clear that William Hayes, the mainstay of the whole venture, would have nothing more to do with the ‘strange’ (and by any measure high-handed and less than fair or even honest) promoter of the Church Langton charity’s festivals and concerts.

Nottingham was the final straw so far as Hayes and his nationally renowned musicians were concerned. For example, Hanbury had publicly announced an opening date and time for the first Nottingham performance which he had known well in advance was impossible for Hayes due to his official University duties in Oxford. However, when as a consequence Hayes arrived several hours after Hanbury’s announced starting time for the opening performance of *Messiah* Hanbury publicly accused Hayes and his musicians of not honouring their ‘commitments’. He then published this untruth (and many others) in his 1767 book, provoking Hayes to write his own account of his dealings with Hanbury already referred to.

Also, by this time Hanbury was notorious among musical circles for never meeting his commitments in full or often even in part. Like the unfortunate builder of the Church Langton organ, many of the nationally known musicians who made the five ‘Music Meetings’ possible were never paid, or at best received only part of their agreed fees from Hanbury. Hayes had felt obliged to pay the fees and often quite considerable travelling etc. expenses of several of the less well-off performers out of his own pocket. In his 1768 *Anecdotes* Hayes states that as well as the unpaid fees for providing the musical scores and parts which he sets out in

⁵¹ *Hanbury, 1767*, pp. 149–151.

considerable detail (already outlined), he had never received more than a portion of any of his own performance fees over the five years. Even after the third annual festival in 1761 he had still received not a penny of his own fees for the 1759 and 1760 Church Langton ‘Music Meetings’, let alone that year’s fees, despite the evident great success of at least the first *Messiah* performance, nor was he ever reimbursed for the payments he had felt obliged to make to the unpaid singers and instrumentalists.⁵²

Having apparently maintained a dignified silence, at least in public, for several years Hayes finally exploded when he read what he (and many others) saw as the self-promoting account of the music festivals in Hanbury’s 1767 *History and Progress of the Charitable Foundations at Church-Langton*, replete with what Hayes regarded as many untruths and personal insults. Hayes broke his silence the following year, when he published his often very understated and ironic *Anecdotes of the Five Music-Meetings...*, reporting publicly on all the disputes with Hanbury and all the unpaid bills, describing Hanbury as *this strange, absurd, man*.⁵³ Hayes was far from unique in having problems with Hanbury, reporting in his book that when someone else consulted an Oxford lawyer about the possibility of prosecuting Hanbury for an unstated (but presumably unrelated) libel (which was a criminal offence in those days): ‘the lawyer replied – *Madam! He is out of reach of the law, being not in his sober senses!*’ [i.e. any Court would rule that Hanbury is not of sound mind!].⁵⁴

THE 1774 INFIRMARY ANNIVERSARY PERFORMANCE OF JEPHTHA AT ST MARTIN’S, LEICESTER

The musical programme of Tuesday and Wednesday 21st and 22nd September 1774, arranged to mark the fourth anniversary of the Leicester Infirmary (and no doubt to promote further interest and encourage donations), was certainly the most spectacular and prestigious seen in the town, certainly in the 18th century, and probably at any time before or since. It was also well documented at the time, with a long anonymous ‘letter to a friend’ describing it in John Gregory’s *Leicester and Nottingham Journal* of 24th September (which could well be by Gregory himself).⁵⁵ There was also extensive coverage in most of the standard 18th and 19th century histories of Leicester, such as Nichols and Thompson, the autobiography of Joseph Cradock of Gumley Hall (1742–1826)⁵⁶ and, most remarkably, in the vivid recollection written more than 60 years later by the noted internationally-known, though Leicester-born and -based, musician and critic William Gardiner

⁵² Hayes, 1768, p. 7.

⁵³ Hayes, 1768, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Hayes, 1768, p. 53.

⁵⁵ Anonymous, Letter to a Friend... *Leicester & Nottingham Journal* 24th September 1774. Nichols vol. 1 pt. 2 (1815), pp. 515–527; James Thompson, *History of Leicester*, 1871, pp. 127–151.

⁵⁶ Leslie Stevens, Joseph Cradock 1742–1826, *Oxford DNB*, vol. 13, p. 917; Nichols, vol. 1, pt. 2 (1815), pp. 515–527; Joseph Cradock, *Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs* (4 Vols.) (Printed for the Author, 1826), particularly pp. xxv–xxvi & 122–129.

(1771–1853), who had attended one of the concerts as a four year old.⁵⁷ Also, Ernest Frizelle's 1988 definitive history of the Leicester Infirmary puts the 4th Anniversary events in their context in relation to the newly opened Infirmary.⁵⁸

The two day programme was organised by two of the leading Governors of the Infirmary, Anthony James Keck (or Kecke – both spellings being used), who mainly organised the practical arrangements and social programme, while Cradock, a literary figure who had organised the musical programme for the official opening of the Infirmary in 1771 and its two previous anniversary festivals, was again responsible for the music. Cradock had wide literary and theatrical connections, particularly in London. He had been one of the leading assistants and supporters of his friend David Garrick's first Shakespeare festival at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, and Garrick had in turn helped Cradock with the musical and theatrical programme for the opening of the Leicester Infirmary in 1771. The Infirmary Minutes record that in June 1774 the Governors had agreed that Keck and Cradock should organise the forthcoming 4th Anniversary, and they were allowed an advance of £150 towards the expenses (plus a further £22 if it was necessary to adapt the great hall of the Castle for the event). In addition to this they accepted an offer by Cradock to include an oratorio performance, following Cradock's offer of a personal guarantee against any loss on this in excess of £100.⁵⁹

The Fourth Anniversary musical programme opened at 10am on the morning of Wednesday 21st September 1774, with a large gathering in the New Assembly Rooms at the Haymarket, from where there was a grand procession to St Martin's Church. This had been furnished with a temporary gallery or galleries to increase the capacity at Cradock's expense, and more than a hundred musicians had been assembled to greet the procession with 'a grand fanfare'. Handel's music was very much the order of the day. His massive scale Dettingen *Te Deum* for four soloists and four-part choir, dating from 1743 and very similar in style to his *Messiah* of the previous year, opened the Service. Handel's *Jubilate Deo* preceded the Psalms of the Day, the prayers and a Sermon by the former Vicar of St Margaret's, the Rev. Mr Burnaby of Greenwich. The Dismissal was to 'the Coronation Anthem' – no doubt Handel's *Zadok the Priest*.

Along with the musical programme itself there was great interest in the newly installed organ in St Martin's, which had been without an organ for over 200 years. This had been commissioned at a cost of over £600 from John (Johann) Snetzler (1710–1785). He was Swiss-born and had worked as an organ-builder on the Continent before establishing himself in London in the 1740s, and building England's first modern-style organ at King's Lynn. Following the great success of his new organ for Beverley Minster (completed in 1767) St Martin's Leicester commissioned a three manual organ from Snetzler, and this was finally completed and commissioned just in time for the September 1774 Infirmary event.⁶⁰ (The Infirmary's more modest Third Anniversary programme the previous year had

⁵⁷ William Gardiner, *Music and Friends; or, Pleasant Recollections of a Dilettante* (London: Longman, 1838, 2 vols.), vol. 1 pp. 3–8; Jonathan Wilshire, William Gardiner, *New Grove*, Vol. 7, p. 164; L.M. Middleton, William Gardiner 1770–1853, *Oxford DNB*, vol. 21, pp. 47–48.

⁵⁸ *Frizelle 1988*, particularly pp. 41–48.

⁵⁹ *Frizelle 1988*, pp.44–46.

⁶⁰ Michael Gillingham, Johann Snetzler (1710–1785), *New Grove* (see n. xx), vol. 17, p. 427.

been centred on St Margaret's since this already had a good new organ.) Though re-built five times since 1873, most recently by Harrison & Harrison during 2003–2005, the main organ retains many of Snetzler's original organ pipes.⁶¹

After the morning Choral Service, what were described as the 'principal persons' attending then went next door to the Town Hall (now known as the Guildhall) for a meal, described as an 'ordinary', and featuring among other things venison and pineapples 'donated by the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood'. It is clear from the various detailed accounts that the event attracted a large and highly influential audience, and many individuals from the local, and indeed national, nobility and gentry were recorded as attending.

In the evening there was a concert in the Great Hall of Leicester Castle (still undivided at that time). The programme opened with an *Ode* in honour of the occasion written by Joseph Cradock himself and set to music by the noted English composer and Master of the King's Musick Dr William Boyce (1711–1779), probably best remembered today for his important editions of church anthems by leading composers of the English Renaissance and Baroque, and for his rousing setting of David Garrick's patriotic verse *Heart of Oak*.

The next morning, Thursday 25th September, the large company of musicians gathered together for the festival performed Handel's last oratorio, *Jephtha*, again in St Martin's. It was for this performance that John Gregory, one of the original supporters of the Infirmary project, and who became its Treasurer during that Fourth Anniversary meeting of the Governors, published his fourth Handel libretto. The 23 page publication is also a small quarto in size, and the title page similarly resembles the earlier ones, reading:

JEPHTHA,
AN
ORATORIO:
OR,
SACRED DRAMA.

set to Music by Mr. HANDEL

To be performed on THURSDAY the 22nd of September

At St. MARTIN'S CHURCH, LEICESTER;
AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Of the GOVERNORS and SUBSCRIBERS to the INFIRMARY

ANTHONY JAMES KECKE Esq. }
JOSEPH CRADOCK Esq. } Stewards

LEICESTER

Printed by JOHN GREGORY

M.DCC.LXXIV

⁶¹ Leicester Cathedral. The West End Harrison Organ: <http://www.cathedral.leicester.anglican.org/organ.html>

It is interesting to note that this time there is an explicit reference to the performance as being in the future: Gregory (or Cradock if he commissioned it as part of his overall responsibility for the musical events) presumably had this text ready for sale in advance of the day of the performance, presumably as part of the publicity.

In this copy the reverse of the title page, listing the *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*, has pencil additions with the names of the singers at the Leicester performance, as follows:

JEPHTHA	(pencil addition: <i>Mr Norris</i>)
ZEBUL, his Brother	(pencil addition: <i>Mr Champness</i>)
STORCE, his Wife	(pencil addition: <i>Mrs Scott</i>)
IPHIS, his Daughter	(pencil addition: <i>Miss Davies</i>)
HAMOR, in love with Iphis	(pencil addition: <i>Mr [?] [or Dyne]</i>)

Underneath: further pencil addition: *The Angel Miss [?] Jessop*

It is not too fanciful to see clear reflections of Handel's own continuing pain and suffering of the autumn and winter of 1751 in the dark music and the dramatic structure of *Jephtha*. It is also probably significant that in 1771 the grand celebration to mark the opening of Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary has Handel's *Jephtha* as its centrepiece, so perhaps the work was seen as especially appropriate to the Leicester Infirmary Anniversary as well because of its recognition of human suffering.⁶² It is also interesting to note that though it is one of the less frequently performed of Handel's oratorios, *Jephtha* has recently been proved very successful in an opera-style full dramatic staging by the Welsh National Opera in 2003, (with the English National Opera reviving the WNO production equally successfully in 2005).

The 23rd September 1774 Leicester performance was clearly very remarkable in terms of both the number of musicians and performers and their reputation and quality. The overall musical director was Samuel Howard (1710–1782)⁶³ who worked with William Boyce on his highly important three volume historical anthology of English cathedral music of the 16th to 18th century.

'Commissioner' Joah Bates⁶⁴ was the guest organist for both the St Martin's services and performances, no doubt also showing off all the possibilities of Snetzler's splendid new organ which ranked, with his new Beverley Minster instrument, as one of the finest and most advanced in the country. Bates was a noted concert organiser, one of the leading organists of the period and a very important champion of Baroque music, especially that of Handel. Following the failure of a business venture his friends in government found him a succession of (no doubt well-remunerated and sinecure) Civil Service positions: at this time he seems to have been Commissioner of Victualling Office for the Navy, hence the title by which he was known at the time. His most important patron was the then First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl of Sandwich, who was present at the Leicester event (see below).

⁶² *Frizelle 1988*, p. 19.

⁶³ Roger Fiske, Samuel Howard, *New Grove*, Vol. 7, pp. 350–351.

⁶⁴ Owain Edwards, Joah Bates, *New Grove*, Vol. 2, p. 284.

Bates and Sandwich went on to co-found in 1776 the Concert of Antient Music dedicated to maintaining the Baroque tradition in the face of the new styles of music being introduced from the continent by a new generation of composers, and Bates became its Director of Music. He also organised the 1784 Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey which firmly established Handel as the leading British composer of the 18th century. Bates directing the Westminster Abbey performances himself from the harpsichord while at the same time playing the Great Organ by means of some sort of Heath Robinson temporary system involving, according to contemporary accounts, nineteen feet long extensions to all the organ keys connecting these to the harpsichord, so that Bates was able to play the organ during the movements that required it from the harpsichord keyboard!

The leader of the orchestra was the celebrated Italian virtuoso violinist, conductor and singer, Felice de Giardini (1716–1796)⁶⁵ who since 1754 had directed the Italian Opera at the King's Theatre, London (Covent Garden's only rival in Britain), and who directed the Three Choirs Festival between 1770 and 1776. He was less successful as a composer. However, his 1769 hymn tune *Moscow*, originally written for the words *Come Thou Almighty King* – seriously proposed at the time for adoption as the National Anthem rather than *God Save the King* – remains in the standard English hymnody as *Thou Whose Almighty Word* – using an 1813 re-writing of the original words by John Marriott (1780–1825).

The formidable tenor title role of Jephtha was taken by Thomas Norris (1741–1790),⁶⁶ who was also a noted organist (from 1766 he was organist of St John's College, Oxford, and he added the post of organist of Christ Church, Oxford, in 1776, holding both positions at the same time). He was a celebrated singer of Handel and the leading tenor of the Three Choirs Festival for 23 years from 1766 to 1788. In addition to singing in the Foundling Hospital performances of *Messiah* in 1774 and 1775, he was the Principal Tenor for the 1784 Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey which firmly established Handel's reputation as much the most important British composer of the century. 'Mrs. Scott', who sang Jephtha's wife, Storce, was the leading Covent Garden mezzo-soprano, the former Isabella Young (d. 1791),⁶⁷ one of a family of leading singers of the period, who adopted the name of Mrs Scott after her marriage in around 1758. She was acknowledged to be one of the leading (not to say most expensive) singers of Handel of her day. She was Handel's own choice for what proved to be his last Foundling Hospital *Messiah* in 1758, and when necessary was well able to sing the formidable castrato parts in the Italian operas of Handel and others of his period, in addition to a wide range of female roles in opera and oratorio.

The four-and-a-half year old William Gardiner still had a vivid memory of this remarkable performance 64 years later when he wrote his *Music and Friends*, reporting that the Infirmary Fourth Anniversary *was the largest assemblage of musicians that had ever taken place in the country* [*sic* – though presumably this

⁶⁵ Christopher Hogwood, Felice de Giardini, *New Grove*, Vol. 7, pp. 350–351.

⁶⁶ Robert J. Bruce, Thomas Norris, *New Grove*, vol. 13, p. 285.

⁶⁷ Mollie Sands, The Young Family, *New Grove*, vol. 20, pp. 577–578.

was a misprint for county]. Like many others present at this grand occasion Gardiner was very impressed by the many famous personalities present. These included the Fourth Earl of Sandwich (Commissioner Bates' patron, but nowadays remembered only as the notorious gambler who is believed to have given his name to the serving of meat between slices of bread at the gaming table so that the gambling did not need to be interrupted for meals). Gardiner and others present marvelled at the fact that Lord Sandwich left the assembled nobility and gentry to join the orchestra, where he played the kettle drums throughout the festival. Two other special guests were also remembered vividly by Gardiner and others: Joseph Banks, botanist on Captain Cook's circumnavigation (later Sir Joseph Banks, long-serving President of the Royal Society), and Omai from Tahiti, the first Polynesian to visit Europe, who came back on Cook's second voyage, and stayed in England with Banks in London from July 1774 to June 1776, when he returned home on Cook's third voyage.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

John Gregory ran his printing business in Leicester for at least 37 years, from his admission as a Freeman in May 1751 to his death in March 1787, and over that period he must surely have undertaken many hundreds of printing jobs in addition to publishing his weekly *Leicester and Nottingham Journal*. However, only a very small proportion of what must have been a considerable output has survived. While much of the work was probably of a small-scale and perhaps ephemeral nature, he could and did produce more substantial publications.

The four Handel oratorio libretti produced between 1759 and 1774 are perhaps intermediate in size in terms of what we know of Gregory's publishing, but if as seems very clear each was produced for sale to the audience of performances attended by several hundreds at a time, the print runs must have been substantial – presumably counted in hundreds in each of the four cases. Also, if Gregory printed libretti for sale for these four performances, perhaps in association with William Hanbury in the case of the three Church Langton performances and Joseph Cradock in the case of the 1774 Infirmary *Jephtha*, it seems very probable that similar texts would have been published for other performances of major works at Church Langton and at Hanbury's Leicester and Nottingham Music Meetings of 1762 and 1763, particularly *Sampson* and *Alexander's Feast*, and indeed for the repeated performances of *Messiah*.

As noted above, the electronic *English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC)* has now surveyed and catalogued all the 18th century and earlier holdings of all publications produced in England or its territories and dependencies in over 1,600 libraries, archives and collections around the world (including for example those of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office and Local Studies Collection, and of Leicester University Library). Out of an estimated eventual total of half a million, 400,000 individual items are already in the searchable *ESTC* database, so it is therefore possible to carry out an almost unlimited range of types of search.

In fact a considerable number of both opera and oratorio libretti of this type are known from the period, the majority relating to London performances, though other were for provincial performances including some at Oxford, Salisbury and Three Choirs Festival. However, these were by their very nature essentially ephemeral publications that were probably mostly discarded very soon after the performance (as with most theatre programmes today), so in most cases it is only single examples or very small numbers that have survived. For example, even for the 1742 Dublin first performance of *Messiah* only three copies survive: one each in the British Library, Dublin City Libraries and the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

In the *ESTC* no other Gregory libretto titles have so far been listed. Further, of the four described in this paper it appears that three are unique: the Church Langton *Messiah* and *Esther* and the Leicester Infirmary *Jephtha*, while the only other recorded example of John Gregory's Church Langton *Judas Maccabaeus* is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

This survival rate does not seem to be out of line with the general pattern that has emerged from the *ESTC* project: all the evidence is that only a very small proportion of the books, pamphlets and other printed items produced in the 18th century or earlier have survived in any significant numbers, and there must be a strong assumption that very many titles, both important and ephemeral, have completely vanished without trace.

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Note added in proof

I have learned that John Hinks has been researching early printing and publishing in Leicester and has thrown much additional light on Gregory and his period. Therefore in addition to the general references about John Gregory in footnotes 19–22 above, see: *The History of the Book Trade in Leicester to c1850*, by John Hinks (PhD thesis, Loughborough University, 2002); John Gregory and the Leicester Journal, pp. 85–94 in B. McKay, J. Hinks & M. Bell, *Light on the Book Trade: Essays in Honour of Peter Isaac* (British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 2004); and John Hinks, The Coming of Printing to Leicester, *Leicestershire Historian* no. 46, 2006, pp. 2–6.

