Last year the world of Handel scholarship and performance lost a large number of important figures, including the harpsichordist and conductor Alan Curtis, the scholar, stage director and Handel Institute chairman Brian Trowell, and the conductor and organist David Willcocks. Much of this Newsletter is devoted to articles commemorating and appreciating the achievements of these individuals and of others who made valuable contributions in their own particular ways. Handelian research is represented by an article from John Greencombe that addresses the unanswered — and maybe hitherto unasked — question: where exactly in Green Park did the 1749 fireworks display take place?

Colin Timms

PROFESSOR BRIAN TROWELL (1931–2015)

Brian’s initial research area concerned the music of fifteenth-century England, but the later genre of opera became a major preoccupation in his subsequent life and career. Although his interests and sympathies ranged over four and a half centuries of music for the stage, he took up a particular brief for the operas of Handel. In the 1950s Handel’s operas were still considered too undramatic for the modern theatre and revival was inhibited by the castrato ‘problem’ that was believed to render the music too difficult for performance. Brave experiments were however undertaken by the convinced and the committed: the 1959 anniversary in particular gave an impetus to the Handel Opera Society in London and Unicorn Opera in Abingdon.

It was fortunate that Brian’s first lectureship was at the University of Birmingham, where under Anthony Lewis’s musical leadership a programme of staged Handel operas was undertaken at the Barber Institute: Serse (1959), Imeneo (1961), Tamerlano (1962), Ariodante (1964), Orlando (1966) and Admeto (1968). Brian was the producer for all but the last of these (returning in the years after he had moved on to posts elsewhere) and the translator for three of the productions that were sung in English. His practical experience of stagecraft, and of working with singers of the calibre of Janet Baker, Heather Harper and Alexander Young, led to a paper on the subject of ‘Handel as a Man of the Theatre’ for the Royal Musical Association (published in the Proceedings of the RMA for 1961–2) – and this at a time when Winton Dean’s recent book on Handel’s oratorios (1959) had been dismissive of the operas.

Brian returned to the Barber as translator for another historically significant revival (Giulio Cesare in Egitto) in 1977, and over the following decade his English versions of Handel operas travelled the world in other people’s performances; their paths can be followed through Manfred Rätzer’s Szenische Aufführungen von Werken Georg Friedrich Händels (2000). Brian’s practical experience in directing (musically and dramatically) a production of Acis and Galatea for the English Bach Festival in 1980 seems similarly to have stimulated his important essay for the volume in honour of Winton Dean – ‘Acis, Galatea and Polyphemus: a ‘serenata a tre voci’?, in Nigel Fortune (ed.), Music and Theatre (1987).

After Birmingham, Brian held a number of posts (including head of radio opera at the BBC) before settling at King’s College, London, first as Reader in Music and then, from 1974, as King Edward VII Professor of Music. The 1980s saw developments that led to the foundation of the Handel Institute, as part of an international process initiated by meetings at the University of Maryland (USA) in 1982 and a diplomatic visit to Halle in 1983. The initial Provisional Council for a Handel Institute was headed by Gerald Hendrie, working towards the formal establishment of the Institute as a registered charity in 1987, when Brian became its chairman.

Brian was well placed at King’s. His colleagues
Where precisely was the fireworks machine in 1749?

Donald Buttons

Donald Buttons

December 22, 1992

In December 1749, the fireworks machine was invented by the Chinese. The invention was made by a Chinese named Fahrenheit, who was living in London at the time. The machine was a revolutionary invention that allowed for the creation of large-scale fireworks displays. It was a significant advancement in the field of fireworks technology and had a lasting impact on the art form. The machine was used at the annual celebration of the Chinese New Year, which was held in London at the time. The celebration was a popular event and drew a large crowd. The fireworks display created by the machine was a highlight of the celebration and was eagerly anticipated by the audience. The machine was a true innovation and demonstrated the ingenuity of the Chinese inventors. Its development was a milestone in the history of fireworks technology and paved the way for future advancements in the field.
House was built, its site, in present-day terms, was immediately to the south of Warwick House in Cleveland Row, but it projected further west into the park itself over Queen’s Walk.

The only known exterior view of the library is the sketchy vignette included in the engraving of the Machine entitled Perspective View of the Building for the Fireworks [...] taken from the Reservoir — that is, looking from the north-east corner of the park near to the reservoir belonging to the Chelsea Water Works. Engraved by Paul Angier after P. Brookes, this image was published by Robert Sayer on 2 March 1749. A second version, advertised as ‘An Exact Perspective View’, which includes the fireworks themselves and other details not in the first version, was published on 27 May (see Fig. 1).

To ensure that the royal party had the best view of the fireworks, Servandoni sited the Machine directly in front of the Library (at a distance of 500 feet). This explains why it was located towards the south-east corner of the park and its principal façade faced east. (The out-of-favour Prince of Wales and his family, who were excluded from the King’s party, watched the fireworks from a house in nearby Arlington Street, where they could have had only an oblique view of the proceedings.) On 1 April 1749, four weeks before the event took place, another image of the Machine was published. This one is entitled An Horizontal View of the Public Fireworks ordered to be exhibited on occasion of the General Peace (see Fig. 2), a caption beneath claiming that ‘This Prospect is taken from the Library at St. James’s Palace’. The image appears to confirm that the central pavilion of the Machine was
The document appears to be a historical or architectural description, possibly related to the location of a library. The text is not entirely legible due to the quality of the image, but it seems to discuss the planning and construction of a building, possibly a library, with references to dimensions and positions of various features.

The diagram shows a plan of the area, with annotations in the text. The text includes references to specific locations and distances, indicating a detailed layout plan.

For a more precise transcription and understanding of the content, a clearer or higher-resolution image would be necessary.
ALAN CURTIS (1934–2015)

Long before he became known as the conductor of the operas recorded during his productive Indian summer, Alan Curtis established his credentials as a pioneer of the early music revival. His inquisitiveness about repertoire, interest in musical philology and willingness to experiment with period instruments (before this became fashionable) placed him at the forefront of many more fields of endeavour than are represented in the distinguished discography of his later years. His eagerness to visit libraries, look at microfilms and consult academic colleagues was a trait that fed his enthusiasm for whichever project he wanted to tackle next.

Such attributes emerged when he was an undergraduate at Michigan State University, where he stumbled across Chrysander’s nineteenth-century edition of Handel’s works and marvelled at how much great music was unknown. His interest in Baroque music led him to study harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt in Amsterdam during the late 1950s and to become the first player in modern times to grapple with the problem of interpreting Louis Couperin’s unmeasured preludes (which he recorded for Vox in 1969). Most of his recordings as a solo harpsichordonist have scarcely been available since the heyday of the LP, but for a few years he was prolific: intelligence and tastefulness informed his seminal interpretations of, for example, Bach’s Goldberg Variations (EMI, 1977) and French and English Suites (Teldec, 1980) and of Rameau’s Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi [DHM], 1981).

Curtis’s performing career was combined with a distinguished academic career at the University of California in Berkeley, and it was in the Bay area that his career as an opera conductor took off. The launch-pad was a production of Monteverdi’s L’incoronazione di Poppea with Carole Bogard in the title-role, which yielded a four-LP set (Cambridge, 1966) featuring the Oakland Symphony Orchestra – a far cry from the evangelical zeal of his period-instrument friends in Europe. In 1977 he assembled a group of predominantly Dutch-trained specialists at Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw for a trail-blazing performance of Handel’s Admeto that was then recorded in the studio for EMI. This performance by Il Complesso Barocco was the first in which Handel’s orchestra at the King’s Theatre had been reconstructed in accordance with eyewitness reports – on approximately the correct scale and with period instruments, including theorbo and two harpsichords in the continuo group. Moreover, a complete scholarly text of the opera was presented without cuts and all the roles were sung in their original range, without octave transposition – features then rare in Handel opera performance on stage and in the studio.

Meanwhile, Curtis’s fusion of scholarly research at Berkeley and guest conducting in European opera houses led him naturally to the preparation of ground-breaking editions of Monteverdi’s late Venetian operas (published by Novello). Live recordings were issued of L’incoronazione di Poppea (Fonti, 1982) and Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria (Nuova Era, 1992), but the inevitably patchy results failed to satisfy Curtis, who felt frustrated that his labels and sponsors could not be persuaded to let him tackle Monteverdi’s operas properly in the studio with the new generation of specialist Italian singers and players.

The 1980s and early 90s represent a holl in Curtis’s recording career. In an interview in 2004 he explained to me: “I was then in a period when I really didn’t like recording. I wanted everything to be live performance. Now I’m in a period when it’s nice to culminate our work in a live performance, but I want to have a recording made. So now my projects tend to be aimed at recording. Which I suppose you could say is the result of old age, but my viewpoint has changed: I want to leave a record but don’t want to do long exhausting tours. I would much rather do a brief exhausting recording, then sit back in my armchair and listen to it.”

In 1992 Curtis relocated to Italy (with homes in Venice and Florence). There he soon reinvented Il Complesso Barocco as an Italian ensemble devoted to Renaissance and Baroque vocal chamber music – an expertise manifested in their music for Werner Herzog’s film Gesualdo: Death for Five Voices (1995). From 1997 Il Complesso Barocco recorded regularly for Virgin’s early music imprint Veritas. Supremely accomplished collections of madrigals by Michelangelo Rossi and Antonio Lotti (both issued in 1997) were followed a year later by two outstanding volumes of Monteverdi’s chamber duets and concertato madrigals: in all these recordings young Italian singers were nurtured by Curtis’s sage direction, often from the keyboard.

The tide turned again when he went back to Handel’s operas with an obsessive passion. In 1984 he had directed the first modern performances of Handel’s Florentine opera Rodrigo, of which the eventual recording (Virgin, 1998) revealed a striking interpretation, proving that an Italian-based ensemble could contribute in a field.
WILDCOCKS AND HANDEL

Sir David Willicocks (1919–2015)

David Willicocks

searched for new and different ways of performing the music of the 18th century, particularly with the music of Handel. His work was a significant contribution to the field of early music performance, and he was a prominent figure in the revival of interest in Handel's music. Willicocks was known for his detailed and thorough approach to music performance, and his recordings and publications have had a lasting impact on the study and performance of Handel's music. His influence on the field of early music performance is evident in the many concerts, recordings, and publications he produced throughout his career. Willicocks' dedication to the study and performance of Handel's music has left a lasting legacy in the field of early music performance.
impose his distinctive approach – precise, clipped and light – on performers so steeped in the Elgarian tradition can only be guessed at: the inclusion in the 1954 festival of Elgar’s arrangement for full symphony orchestra of the Overture to ‘In the Lord put I my trust’ (HWV 247) suggests that a nineteenth-century performance aesthetic still prevailed at this time.

Willcocks’s earliest Handel recording, L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato from 1961, perhaps gives a glimpse of his approach to Handel in the 1950s: it mixes intense legato lines and slow tempi with a crisp jauntiness. His 1973 recording of Messiah was made at the very end of his seventeen years as Director of Music at King’s College, Cambridge, and epitomises his approach to choral sound, the sound that brought the choir international acclaim. The recording is also remarkable for its all-male line-up of soloists, with trebles taking the soprano solos, Willcocks eschewing the talents of female soloists such as April Cantelo, who features on his recordings of the Chandos Anthems and the St Cecilia Ode.

However, for Handel at its most ‘Willcocks’ I would choose his 1963 recording of the Coronation Anthems, a disc that has proved enduringly popular, for all its period charm (such as the continuo playing of Thurston Dart). Even his one foray into the use of historic instruments – the 1996 recording of the same anthems with the Dutch Baroque Orchestra – appears to be emulating the sound of his earlier version. Although Handel’s music formed only a small part of Willcocks’s performance repertoire, the place of Handel’s music appears to have been an important one, a constant companion in a career that spanned more than six decades.

Donald Burrows

TWO FRIENDS FROM HALLE

Elfriede Baselt and Frieder Zschoch

The origins of the Handel Institute were closely bound up with the establishment in the 1980s of a new international system for the management of the Händische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA). In circumstances that are now difficult to imagine, this required at least annual visits to Halle, then in the German Democratic Republic, involving arcane visa arrangements. The timetable for travellers from Britain and America usually meant that we arrived after the Conference Office had closed, without access to the identity of the hotel to which we had been allocated and at which our passports would be collected. The problem was solved by a meal on arrival with Bernd and Elfriede Baselt at their successive apartments in the Marx-Engels Platz and the Reilstrasse, during which Bernd imparted the necessary information. It was on those occasions also that important foundations of collaboration were established between British, American and German colleagues. Elfriede died earlier this year, having outlived Bernd by more than twenty years, but she had remained a firm friend and a faithful member of the Händelgesellschaft (German Handel Society).

Frieder Zschoch was a founder member of the Leipzig editorial staff for the Deutscher Verlag für Musik, and subsequently for Bärenreiter when the ‘east’ and ‘west’ halves of the publishing house were united, with responsibilities for the HHA. He came to London with colleagues from the Handel edition in the 1950s, one of the last opportunities before political constraints made such travel to the West impossible. He told us about his stay at the Bonnington Hotel (in Southampton Row), then still awaiting repairs from wartime bomb damage. When the situation changed and he attended the Handel Institute conference in 1993, he was delighted that we had managed to book him into the same hotel. He laboured strongly for the edition in difficult circumstances and worked for many years as prospective editor of the volume for Giulio Cesare, continuing to do so after his retirement, but he was not able to bring this to conclusion. He died a month before his 84th birthday.

Donald Burrows

MERLIN CHANNON (1924–2015)

Merlin Channon combined a career in music education with practical leadership of community music-making: in the course of his lifetime he held posts as conductor of twelve amateur orchestral and choral societies. During the 1950s, as music teacher at Woolverstone Hall in Suffolk, he provided some of the performers for the première of Britten’s Noyes Fludde and took a leading role in the musical life of Ipswich. Subsequent posts took him to Cheltenham and Birmingham, but he returned to Suffolk in the 1970s, resuming his relationship with the Ipswich Bach Choir and establishing a choral society in the town of Eye. In 1976 he conducted the choir for Britten’s funeral service in Aldeburgh, which was attended by a daunting array of internationally famous musicians. The combined forces of the choirs from Ipswich and Eye, with soloists and orchestra, performed Handel’s Occasional Oratorio in 1981, and this indicated the direction of Merlin’s later musical interests. His edition of the Occasional Oratorio for the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe was published in 2009, and it had been preceded by an edition of Judas Maccabaeus for the Novello Handel Edition in 1998 (the latter was used for the performance at the University of Iowa during the American Handel Society conference in 2015). To the end of his life Merlin remained fascinated by British history in the mid-1740s and by Handel’s music of that period.

Silas Wollston
apparent that printed using them.

because the property of the Handel Institute when the

applicants will be contacted as soon as possible

University, Wiltshire, MK2 6AA, UK;

e-mail

Applications and references may be sent by email to

post of Helen Coffee, Department of Music, Open

September, The deadline is 30 November 2016.

reduced to one month (prior to receipt in the

project) applied for each of the successful applicants.

An outline of their research project, a description of their research

Appendix 4. Applications for Handel Institute Awards

Research Awards

Every success in the field.

English in a key for Handel to act as a secretary and wish her

Collected Documents. The Trustees and Council are

wrote on the monumental works that Handel

years and contrasted a number of the earliest

she has been on the council of the Institute for many

the University of Oxford and is a Lecturer in Music at the

Helen was a doctoral student under Richardson's guidance at

periods and will continue as editor of the manuscript.

had a hand in most of the Institute’s activities during those

for three years, and finally by Helen Richardson, who secured

handwritten to all the Handel's music, having been and

has been called to hand in the absence of the council for Handel


On 1 January the Handel Institute acquired a new

ANNUCIEMENTS

HANDEL INSTITUTE