

THE LUCIAN SINGERS

An historical perspective (2006)

by

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The western suburbs lineage

It would be nice to be able to claim that the enviable musical heritage that the parishioners of Christ Church now enjoy can be traced back to the very distinguished Brisbane organist and choral conductor Dr Robert Boughen, appointed by the first Vicar of St Lucia (The Revd John Rouse) as ‘organist for Evensong and choirmaster’ in 1956. His ‘brilliant manoeuvres’ on the antiquated harmonium greatly impressed both Vicar and congregation alike, but it appears that even he was unable to do much with the small group that had recently been recruited by Rouse to form a choir for the emergent parish.

Ever since the Anglican Church began to consolidate its ministry in the western suburbs of Brisbane in the middle of the 19th century, choral music has suffered ups and downs. When St Thomas’ Toowong (the parish that is the ‘grandmother’ of Christ Church, St Lucia) achieved independence from its progenitor, All Saints’ Wickham Terrace, in 1870, the parishioners were fortunate to have as their organist - in their recently enlarged wooden building - the renowned Brisbane musician William Arthy. He paved the way for W H Wilson, who was a choral composer of some note. The festivities accompanying the opening and consecration of the present brick St Thomas’ Church in 1877 included a performance of one of Wilson’s latest works, well sung by his choir, one which was also highly skilled in the chanting of psalms. Nevertheless, soon after this a vociferous dispute developed in the parish over the practice of intoning some parts of the Office of Evensong.

By 1884 full choral services were a regular feature of the worship at St Thomas’ Church, but within a few years (and especially after a pipe organ was installed in 1887) the parish was again experiencing dissent from certain quarters, and the efficacy of choral services in general became a matter for debate. The argument in favour of the importance of choral music to the life of the church eventually prevailed, as can be seen by the fact that when, in 1899, the Toowong parish

began to hold regular services at Taringa, it was not long before this new congregation also took steps to establish a choir. In 1906 St Thomas' choir could boast a membership of 21, sufficient for them to be able to give public recitals of cantatas, and other concert works, in aid of church funds. The emphasis placed on music at the mother church certainly had a lasting effect on Taringa, where a decade or so later its Childrens' Festival saw the Childrens' Choir providing the music for all services. In turn, St Thomas' then included the children in its augmented choir for the 1921 Dedication Festival.

St Lucia begins to stir

In the areas surrounding the long-established hub in Toowong, housing development was taking place, though much more rapidly in Taringa than in St Lucia. When it came to showing some interest on the part of residents in supporting the Anglican cause, the contrast between the two localities was (at least initially) even more marked. By the mid-1920's the Toowong parish was persuaded by its Rector to support the efforts of a small but enthusiastic group of St Lucia people, residing on the eastern extremity of the parish, to erect a small church hall at the corner of Macquarie Street and St Lucia Road (now Sir Fred Schonell Drive). Then when Taringa became an independent parochial district in 1927, Toowong shed its responsibility for the fledgling St Lucia congregation. Thus it was that the (second) Vicar of Taringa was able to witness the opening of a new and larger church hall in Macquarie Street, dedicated as Christ Church, in June 1930. It was recognized at the time that a harmonium had to be an essential piece of furniture for this new building. So, at least congregational singing was to be encouraged at St Lucia.

Slowly the musical aspirations of the St Lucia congregation must have expanded, for in 1935 a choir was started by J H Hearle. Unfortunately, it had no sooner begun to function than it appears to have folded. There is no record of any further attempt to form a choir at Christ Church during the next 21 years, even after the move to the corner of Central and Ninth.

St Lucia became a separate ecclesiastical entity on 1 March 1956, with its proclamation as a parochial district. Its first Vicar, John Rouse, was a man of considerable musical ability. He immediately set about the task of recruiting some choir members, and then to his great delight he produced a coup de grâce in the shape of enlistment of Robert Boughen. What, in retrospect, would have been expected to be the seeds of a great choral tradition, just failed to germinate. Robert Boughen took the post of organist and choirmaster at St John's Cathedral in 1960, and it was there that his talents led to a long and distinguished career in church music, covering the next 44 years.

The Revd (later Bishop) Adrian Charles succeeded John Rouse as Vicar of the Parochial District of St Lucia in February 1959, and then in October 1960 he was inducted as Rector of the now fully-fledged Parish. By the time that plans for the present church building were well under way in 1961, one of the three parish organists, John Hodge, had formed a Boys' Choir. The choristers wore royal blue cassocks (plus surplices), signifying the affiliation of their choir with the Royal School of Church Music. The musical sights of the parish were at last beginning to be raised – but they still had a long way to go.

A permanent church – and a permanent problem

After a frantic last minute effort by a large team of parishioners to complete the interior of the new church, install the furnishings, and landscape the grounds, everything was ready just in time for the Dedication by Bishop Ian Shevill on the evening of 29 September 1962 (Michaelmas Day). The building was indeed visually resplendent, but those with serious musical inclinations were in for a rude shock. They, and the choirboys, felt decidedly uneasy as they made valiant efforts to sing in this otherwise absolutely delightful environment. That their initial frustration was not just due to the presence of a very large congregation at the Dedication - giving rise to massive absorption of the sound - became painfully obvious over the next few weeks.

Scarcely a thought had been given to music when the acoustic requirements for the building had been under discussion. Intelligibility of speech was the dominant theme, and “no echo” was the demand. Unfortunately for singers and organist, while the design certainly eliminated “echo” it also led to an exceedingly short - and thus highly undesirable for the performance of traditional church music - reverberation time. To a physicist, though not to the architect and his advisers, some of the reasons for this sorry state of affairs were apparent: the magnificent Thai silk curtains constituting the dossal behind the High Altar, the large expanse of acoustic absorbent material below the West Window, and the absorbent panels in the raked roof bays. Nevertheless, calculations indicated that even if the effect of these undesirable features were to be reduced considerably, there would still remain a much larger underlying acoustical problem. It was clear that the lower the pitch of the note being sounded, the more pronounced would be the problem. The primary source of this effect was, however, rather obscure....

Back in 1962 the attenuation rate (from ‘back of church’ to ‘front’ along the aisle) for sound emanating from the large loudspeaker box on the West Wall, driven by the Hammond organ, was so large as to be almost incredible. For good practical reasons, the choirboys occupied the back pews, close to the organ console and to their conductor John Hodge. The sound they produced was therefore subject to essentially the same basic attenuation as for the organ, although in addition they had to battle the extra absorption due to the heads and hats of the congregation. When the other rostered organists (Marjory Walters and Sheila McDonnell) played for the services, the choir would not then be present. With the benefit of hindsight, we now realize it was rather unfortunate that when the choirboys did sing they tended to be criticized for their lack of vocal power. They were simply victims of the cruel acoustic environment.

A challenge and its acceptance

On the evening of 13 February 1964 John Mainstone addressed the Canterbury Club at Christ Church on one of his favourite topics, not physics this time but “Church Music”. This particular parish group was working hard to sustain enthusiasm and to raise funds for sending the Rector (The Revd Adrian Charles) on a Study Leave programme to St Augustine’s College in Canterbury, situated in the grounds of Canterbury Cathedral. On that night an idea seized the minds of some of the Christ Church parishioners, presumably in response to the speaker’s challenge to think beyond the present Boys’ Choir to an Adult Choir for the parish.

At the Annual Meeting of the parish in April, some five months before the Rector left for England, the various groups and societies at Christ Church were challenged to diversify their activities and to undertake new tasks. The C.E.M.S. (Church of England Men’s Society) took the challenge seriously. At the C.E.M.S. meeting on 30 June there was an announcement that a number of sub-groups were to be launched immediately. The report covering one of these reads: “Brother John Mainstone undertook the formidable task of forming a Choral Group which will satisfy a real need at our Services”.

The Choral Group

There were some skilled male singers on hand, such as Harry Mills and David Swaney, so the C.E.M.S.-sponsored Choral Group began as an all-male ensemble, initially to lead the singing at Evensong. It first did this on Sunday 12 July 1964. The parish was busy trying to pay off the new church over about 10 years, as well as send the Rector to Canterbury. An investment in choral music specially arranged for an all-male adult choir was not a realistic option, so the decision was taken very quickly to enrol some women in the Choral Group.

Fortunately, experienced singers in the congregation like Dottie Cochrane, Sue Hamilton, and other Queensland University Musical Society members, were willing to assist. The Psalm at Evensong

had previously been said; now we were able for the first time to introduce Anglican Chant, and to use it for the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis as well. The Anthem had to be drawn from the very meagre Mainstone collection. For instance, at the Harvest Thanksgiving Evensong on 9 August (during Brisbane Exhibition week), it is recorded that “Round Me Falls The Night” was sung. There were no photocopiers in those days, but the present strict rules about making copies were not in place - or at least not enforced - so a laborious task of creating legible copies via a Fordigraph or similar device had to be undertaken.

The Choir, not to be confused with the Choral Group, sang periodically at the 9 am Service only when John Hodge was the rostered organist. The fame of the new Choral Group must have spread quickly through the congregation, for on the day when Archbishop Strong came to Christ Church to farewell the Rector and his family, Sunday 23 August, it was the new Choral Group which led the singing at the special valedictory Sung Eucharist at 9.30 am. This was thus the first appearance of an adult choir at a morning liturgy in the new parish church.

The Annual Report of the parish in April 1965 testifies that “The Choral Group has sung at a number of Services, and we are most grateful for the assistance given by the ladies who joined us”. The singers were bold enough to tackle a service of ‘Lessons & Carols’ just before Christmas 1964. John Mainstone wrote at the time: “To the trained ear the music at this Carol Service was very far from perfect, but it did represent the best that a devoted group of parishioners could offer to God in worship at that time. The same group is eager to start again in 1965, and is prepared to work very hard to reach a higher musical standard as the year progresses”.

The tide begins to turn

Hope springs eternal – by late 1966, when the parish fell vacant, development of the music profile of the parish had become recognized as a high priority. One of the Parish Nominators, Stanley Dalgliesh, consulted John Mainstone about a ‘very musical priest’ he had discovered at St James’ Church King Street, in Sydney. The rest is history... that priest, The Revd (later Bishop) Phillip Newell, brought with him to Christ Church a musical gift that was beyond our wildest dreams.

Early in December 1966 John Mainstone, then on his way to England, managed to have a short conversation with the Rector-designate in the crypt of St James’ Church. He was able to report that in October the Choral Group had made a very worthwhile contribution to an ABC telecast from Christ Church, and that there was a small group of good singers (mostly members of QUMS) who might form the nucleus of a very good adult choir at Christ Church, if directed by a person with real musical talent. In the latter part of 1967, that group was skilfully moulded by Phillip Newell and his newly appointed organist, Ian Bridge FRCO, into a first-class choral ensemble. The Christmas Carol Service held at the end of 1967 was superbly presented.

A label is attached

The national broadcaster, ABC/Radio Australia, soon became aware of the choir’s existence, and its high standard of performance. Recording sessions ensued, and thus the sound went out to the four corners of the earth, more or less, but not before a minor identity crisis had been resolved. “The Adult Choir of the Anglican Parish of Christ Church, St Lucia in the Diocese of Brisbane” was much too big a mouthful for a radio announcer in the late 1960’s. Just prior to recording, a challenge was issued to come up with a catchy name for the choir, to rival ‘The Beatles’. Someone jokingly suggested ‘The Lucians’. By the time the radio programme went to air, the slightly more refined label ‘The Lucian Singers’ (of Brisbane) was firmly attached! Nearly 40 years later the present choir members still proudly wear that label.

In the early days the appellation “The Lucian Singers” was applied only when the choir was performing outside the parish, or for ABC/Radio Australia broadcasts. Thus the recital which was

given in the church on the occasion of the dedication of the pipe organ in November 1969 simply featured “The Choir of Christ Church”. This distinction was eventually abandoned.

A pipe dream becomes a reality

Phillip Newell quickly recognized the inherent difficulties in having the choir at one end, and the officiating priest at the other, of an almost totally unresponsive building. Two pews at the front of the Nave were turned through 90° to form choir stalls. Then, as the numbers in both the Boy’s Choir (which Ian Bridge had revived so that it could lead the singing at the 9 am Sung Eucharist) and the Adult Choir (which sang only at Evensong) increased rapidly, several more pews were pressed into service as choir stalls in the quasi-Chancel area. The problem of the sound that emanated from the Hammond organ remained, but it was not long before the Newell & Bridge duo began working on plans for a pipe organ.

The firm of Hill, Norman & Beard was keen to secure the contract for the major rebuilding of the organ in St John’s Cathedral, and came up with a specification for an ‘extension’ organ – heavily reliant, for the production of a full range of notes from a limited-compass rank of pipes, on the technique of ‘borrowing’ from another rank. The completed organ, funded from a bequest and a generous donation, was dedicated in November 1969. In hindsight, it was most unfortunate that, after acting on advice from the church architect, the organ builder constructed the three departments of the electric-action organ across the West Wall of the church; the console, however, was located conveniently close to the choir stalls. The irregular facade of the West Wall with the organ in place served to exacerbate the acoustical problems already encountered in the building. Some relief ensued from the decay and subsequent removal of the Thai silk dossal curtains. In 1993-4 the organ was enlarged quite significantly, and relocated to the Sanctuary-Chancel area, under the direction of the Brisbane organ builder Simon Pierce.

The baton is passed on

Ian Bridge resigned in 1970. His place was taken by a very youthful Ralph Morton (now the highly respected Dr Ralph Morton, Organist and Director of Music at St Stephen’s Roman Catholic Cathedral in Brisbane). He departed for California in 1977 to undertake a doctoral programme in choral conducting under the famous Rodney Eichenberger. His replacement was yet another rising star on the Brisbane church music scene, Christopher Wrench. In 1982 he in turn set off for Vienna on a Robert Stolz scholarship, and then began his rapid rise in status to become an internationally recognized organ virtuoso. Phillip Newell, the mentor for these outstanding young musicians, left St Lucia in July 1982 to become Bishop of Tasmania.

There was a brief interlude when Duncan Frewin was organist at Christ Church, and then in 1983 Ralph Morton’s younger brother Graeme took up the post, which with the concurrence of the new Rector, The Revd (later Dean) David Richardson, became designated as Director of Music. Under the direction of Phillip Newell, the numbers in the Boys’ Choir had risen to more than 25, but now with a significant population change there began a serious decline. Sunday evening television was fighting an unequal battle with Evensong, too. The time had come to consider having the Lucians singing at the 9 am Sung Eucharist, and to form a Girls’ Choir. The Boys’ Choir as such finally disappeared in 1987. The Girls’ Choir, which had been growing steadily in strength and musical ability since its foundation by Dr Anne-Marie Forbes in 1984, became the Treble Choir and forthwith welcomed both girls and boys into its membership. It has continued to be both vibrant and viable into the 21st century, and is currently directed by Helen Carrington, one of the sopranos in the Lucians.

In the 1980’s Christ Church was quite fortunate to have as assistant organists some young people who went on to distinguish themselves in the musical world, including Eduarda van Klinken and Gregory Williams. Both of them, as had Graeme Morton previously, served terms as assistant

organist under Robert Boughen at St John's Cathedral. Over the years a number of other notable organists have served for short periods at Christ Church, among them John Nickson, Michael Fulcher, and more recently Peter Krenske.

And so to the more recent past.....

Graeme Morton resigned in 1988. His place was taken by the noted Brisbane composer Ian McKinley. Now by then the Hill, Norman & Beard organ was beginning to show signs of imminent collapse, so the Director of Music began to investigate possible options for its replacement or refurbishment. He worked closely with Simon Pierce and the (by then) ailing Rector (Archdeacon James Warner), plus a team of parishioners, to carry through to fruition a major task. Although Ian McKinley suffered a serious heart attack in June 1993, he was able to return to his post by September of that year and oversee some of the organ relocation process. He retired in January 1994, but was back for the Dedication of the new organ by Bishop Newell in the middle of that year.

Meanwhile Graeme Morton had been appointed as Director of Music at Christ Church once more, and The Revd (now Bishop) Jonathan Holland had arrived from Perth to be Rector. For the second time in its history the parish now had as Rector a priest who had served for some years on the staff of the famous St James' King Street in Sydney. It also possessed a Director of Music who had gained enormous prestige in Australia and whose fame was beginning to spread far and wide, especially in North America.

Under Graeme Morton the (still unauditioned) choir has experienced a phenomenal growth in numbers, finally enabling it to combat to some extent the acoustical problems inherent in the church building. It has worked diligently to reach a very high standard of performance Sunday by Sunday, has received numerous requests to be the guest choir for major liturgical occasions at St John's Cathedral (and one to sing High Mass at St Stephen's Cathedral). For the 25th anniversary celebrations of the new church building in 1987, Christ Church was able to commission a major work ("The St Lucia Mass") from Robert Boughen. The CD Joyful Day was widely acclaimed in 2003. But perhaps the ability to present ground-breaking public recitals with confidence is the area where the Lucians, having had so much to learn, have really been able to appreciate the professional approach of Graeme Morton: they will forever be grateful to him for his dedication to this task.

A strange way to initiate a tradition

It would be hard to cite a more unusual venue for a recital than the one where the "proto-Lucians" first performed in public, i.e. beyond the confines of the church building. On the afternoon of 23 August 1964, the Choral Group from Christ Church 'performed' (to the astonishment of a large crowd of onlookers) on the platform of the South Brisbane Interstate Railway Station in a fitting farewell to the Rector and his family, who were setting off that day on their journey to Canterbury. Three years later, with some more church services and an ABC telecast under their belt, the principal members of that Choral Group fulfilled their destiny by becoming the core of the original Lucian Singers. But by then St John's Cathedral was very definitely a more enticing venue than a railway station for a recital.....

The start of the real thing

The first recital by The Lucian Singers was preceded by an intensive rehearsal weekend at Toowoomba. It was incongruous that, although they had hardly begun their trek down the recital track, Ian Bridge was most insistent that one work be absolutely right by the end of the camp - it was none other than Maurice Greene's Lord, let me know mine end! Did he have some premonition that the Lucians might not actually have a future ahead of them? As it happened, the recital was most impressive, and in fact genuinely ground-breaking. Many in the audience in St John's Cathedral found it hard to believe that they were listening to a choir from a parish church in

Brisbane. Thanks to the inspired efforts of Ian Bridge and Phillip Newell the Lucians were up, up and away!

Combining with the choir of Holy Trinity Fortitude Valley, the Lucians presented Charles Wood's St Mark Passion, and then as the membership grew, 20 Lucians provided two of the eight 5-part choirs needed to perform the Tallis 40-part motet *Spem in alium*, under the baton of Hugh Brandon. As a matter of historical interest, Hugh Brandon had been organist at St Thomas' Toowong in the 1930's. The original intention was for the epic performance of the Tallis work to take place inside St Andrew's Church Creek Street, but at the last moment the choristers and the audience had to be transferred to the crypt, in order to avoid impossibly cramped conditions in the choir gallery. The complete score being almost a metre from top to bottom, each singer was provided with just the score for the choir that entered immediately before, the choir in question, and the one which entered next. Some furious counting of bars kept everyone on their toes! Something else from Christ Church had a brief moment of glory that night - the tiny portable harmonium which today lies dormant in its oak case on one of the shelves in the refurbished choir room was given the honour of providing the continuo.

Youthful vigour

Ralph Morton was 18 years of age when he first took up his post. Christopher Wrench was about the same age when he started. There is no doubt about it; Phillip Newell definitely had a great gift of discernment of real talent! These same teenagers were able to open up new vistas for the Lucians. Benjamin Britten's *Saint Nicolas*, with the choir supported by the St Lucia Philharmonic Society Orchestra, was a highlight of 1974. An intensive rehearsal camp at Caloundra in mid-1975 prepared the Lucians for a performance of *The Two Seasons*, a very substantial work which they had been bold enough to commission from Dr Colin Brumby. It was given its première in St John's Cathedral. The finale of that work includes a delightful chorale which deserves recognition as the first hymn composed for Christ Church. 1976 saw The Lucian Singers collaborating with The Ignatians, and once again with the St Lucia Philharmonic Society Orchestra, in a recital given at both St Paul's Church Spring Hill and St Ignatius' Church Toowong. The major choral work on the programme was Dietrich Buxtehude's *Rejoice, Beloved Christians*.

Maturity

The recitals given over the next two decades were far too numerous to list in detail. A few occasions stand out, for one reason or another. Towards the end of Phillip Newell's time as Rector there was a recital of Christmas Music at the Brisbane Club, spread over a number of segments, between each of which the management provided the choir members with successive dinner courses in a spacious room behind the main function area. Steadily lengthening breaks as the evening progressed led to certain idle Lucians exploring what lay in the cupboards around the walls of the room. It is highly unlikely that 'Christmas cheer' of such a magnitude will ever come the Lucians' way again! Generally, however, the pleasant experiences came in other ways.

In 1985, through the initiative of Chris Andrews, the composer Derek Bourgeois provided a copy of his manuscript score for some of the music that he had written for the BBC TV production of *The Barchester Chronicles*. This made an exciting start to a recital by the Lucians which then featured as the major item a spectacular Vivaldi *Magnificat*. At the time the Assistant Priest at Christ Church was The Revd (now Bishop) Ross Davies, a very capable tenor soloist.

In early 1987, after enduring a very humid summer of rehearsals, the Lucians joined forces with the Quodlibet Singers and an ensemble of percussionists to sing John Rutter's *Gloria*. Later that same year it was time to take an appreciative audience in St John's Cathedral on a virtual musical pilgrimage to St Mark's Venice, St Thomas' Leipzig, and St Paul's London ("A Tale of Three Cities", as it was entitled in the programme notes). Real 'live' local tours have since taken the

Lucians to a number of towns and cities for recitals, including Boonah, Bundaberg, Buderim, Grafton and Stanthorpe.

Of the relatively recent recitals, one which will always remain in the minds of those who were in the audience was given in August 1999, when the principal work was Morten Lauridsen's mesmerizing *Lux Aeterna*. Some might claim - with some justification - that the Lucians' 2002 Cathedrals' Week recital in St George's Greek Orthodox Church at South Brisbane was the most 'atmospheric' to that date. Returning to that same venue in September 2004, the Lucians gave an absolutely stunning non-stop performance of thirteen a capella works arising from or inspired by the Byzantine tradition, before a capacity audience. This engagement formed part of the Energex Brisbane Festival concert programme. The chosen title for the Lucians' concert was *As One Who Has Slept*, in deference to the very moving work by John Tavener which was one of the items included in the performance.

One enormous advantage of having Graeme Morton as Director of Music is that since he also holds the post of Director of Music at nearby St Peter's Lutheran College at Indooroopilly, and at that school directs his renowned Chorale, recitals which require larger forces than the Lucians alone could muster present no real problem. Again, having as Director the man who is also the founder and conductor of the select Brisbane Chamber Choir gives additional scope for combining forces. In fact, since 1998 various combinations of the choirs have performed as The Glorious Company. The first performance in Australia of the Benjamin Britten cantata *The World of the Spirit* was given by The Glorious Company in July 1998 at the Concert Hall of the Queensland Performing Arts Complex in Brisbane. The haunting Martin Lauridsen work *Lux Aeterna*, composed in 1997, was given a memorable airing at St John's Cathedral in August 1999. Then in August 2005 Handel's *The Ways of Zion do Mourn* was introduced to a very receptive Brisbane audience in a concert which also included such works as the Mozart *Te Deum*, Schubert's *Mass in G*, and Monteverdi's *Beatus Vir*.

And on to the future...

Spectacular as these achievements have been, there are those who still remember fondly the recital given many years ago by the original Lucians in Mundoolun Church. Then, too, there was that rendition of Purcell's *Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts* in Tamrookum Church...and surely no-one could ever forget singing (liturgically) Vierne's *Messe solennelle* in St John's Cathedral on that tearful Sunday following the events of 11 September 2001. Such memories are indeed indelible, but it is to the future that The Lucian Singers must always be looking. Successive Directors - and especially Graeme Morton - have enriched the repertoire with their own compositions, but they have also encouraged the creative efforts of talented young Lucians, from Anne-Marie Forbes, Jacqueline Atherton, Damien Barbeler and Anika Mittendorf to Paul-Antoni Bonetti.

This historical perspective on The Lucian Singers ends here. As the old Victorian hymn put it,

*Forward! be our watchword,
Steps and voices joined;
See the things before us,
Not a look behind.*

J S Mainstone
(February 2006)