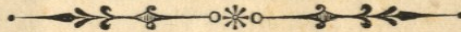


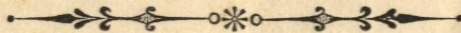
1880 Took time 10.5 to 11.15 p.m.



» Nine + Lessons, + with «
» Carols. «



Festal Service for Christmas Eve.



All the Congregation are requested to stand during the reading of the Lesson from the *Gospel of S. John*, the Hymns, the Chorus, *Glory to God*, the Hallelujah Chorus, and Magnificat.

Nine Lessons with Carols

Introduction

It is very good to be able to offer to a wider public this little piece of liturgical and social history that several of us have taken such pleasure in unearthing. For years it has been our boast that the now famous 'Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols' began not with King's College Cambridge but at Benson's Truro, and now the opportunity of presenting a reconstruction of the first such service has given us a chance to dig a little more deeply into its social and cultural history, and beyond that into its theological purpose. The Chapter is grateful to my co-authors for their work in helping us to discover more, and above all to our Director of Music Christopher Gray, whose enthusiasm led us to contemplate such a reconstruction and who worked so hard both to bring it about and to encourage this piece of research.

Canon Perran Gay
Head of Worship

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Cover image: *The cover page of the first ever Nine Lessons with Carols (Cornwall Record Office)*

Bishop Benson and his *Nine Lessons with Carols*

– Michael G Swift

Edward White Benson was consecrated Bishop of Truro on 25th April, 1877, the first bishop of Cornwall for over nine hundred years. His constituted cathedral was the parish church of St Mary the Virgin in Truro, dating mainly in the 16th century. This building was manifestly unsuitable for such an elevated function, being both far too small and in great need of a major restoration. Benson's vision was to take the church down, and on the land of the old church and its churchyard, to build the first cathedral on a new site for over four hundred years. In August 1878, the Gothic Revival architect John Loughborough Pearson was appointed to design Benson's vision, and exactly one year later he submitted his final plans for the new cathedral. After sufficient funds had been raised to start the project, the Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall laid the foundation stones on 20th May 1880. One stone was placed at the east end where building was to commence with the quire. Benson, knowing that funds were hopelessly insufficient to build the entire cathedral, insisted that a second foundation stone be placed where eventually the final part of the cathedral would be built. This half pillar, known as the 'Prince of Wales' pillar', remained in the open air of the old churchyard until the nave was finally completed in 1903.

During the five months after the foundation stones ceremony, preparatory ground work had progressed to the point when, on 11th October 1880, the old St Mary's church was finally closed and pulled down (all but the south aisle, which Pearson had designed to be incorporated into his new cathedral). With the prospect of several years of construction ahead, a temporary wooden building was erected to the north of the site of the new cathedral and the masons' yard. This became popularly known as the 'wooden cathedral', and it was in this building, Truro's second cathedral, that all of the services were to be held for the next seven years.

Benson was keenly aware of the sense of loss that the people of Truro felt at the pulling down of their parish church. Many contemporary letters to the local press voiced these concerns. This helps to explain why he felt the need to mark the first Christmas without the old St Mary's church with something different and significant. With less than ten weeks to plan such an event, the concept of a festival of nine lessons and music was formed, the details put in place, and 'Benson's service' first took place on 24th December 1880. Besides marking the commencement of the Christmas services (so instituting a tradition that has persisted to this day in Truro and around the world) the new service played an important part in helping the cathedral and diocesan communities to come to terms with the loss of their old Truro church and to prepare them for the exciting prospect of a new Cornish cathedral.

The wooden cathedral was the venue for six more Christmas Eve Nine Lessons services, before Pearson's new cathedral (Truro's third in ten years) was consecrated on 3rd November 1887. The wooden cathedral was dismantled, and eight weeks later the Festival of nine lessons and carols was performed in the new quire of Pearson's Gothic masterpiece, where it has been the major feature of Christmas Eves in Truro to the present day.

The origin of *Nine Lessons with Carols*

– Richard Longman

Benson started life with neither advantages of good birth, nor of inherited riches, and his life story is a glorious one of social mobility in Victorian Britain. From near-penniless beginnings in Birmingham, he became arguably the most important priest of his generation. Widely-known for his creative energy, he arrived in Cornwall in 1877, having been called to establish the Bishopric of Truro. Benson, as the first Headmaster of Wellington College, established it as a leading independent school, before setting up the Cancellarii Scholae of Lincoln, as Canon Chancellor of the Cathedral there. His friends, colleagues, and associates included the most noteworthy academics, scholars, and churchmen, but yet Benson never forgot the charity and teaching that had played such a part in his personal transformation.

In 1878, the West Briton announced, “The choir of the Cathedral will sing a number of carols in the Cathedral tomorrow evening [Christmas Eve]”. This was not the first time that the Cathedral Choir had led the Christmas worship of the people of Truro. The Choir had, for some time, sung carols from house to house, but Rev’d Walpole (newly installed as Succentor) was keen to translate this practice into a service. In consultation with Benson, it was planned for a Carol Service to be held at 10 o’clock in the temporary wooden structure that was serving as the Cathedral, partly to keep people from spending too much time in the public houses of Truro.

The success of this led Benson, two years later, to seize the opportunity to teach (as was his first love) the true story of Christmas to his parishioners. The West Briton (1880) reported, “the usual festal service is to be held, but this time a pamphlet with the order of service is to be issued”. This order of service (the original copy residing in Cornwall Record Office, and with annotations in Benson’s own handwriting) was the first ever *Nine Lessons with Carols* (the famous carol service later adopted by King’s College, Cambridge).

At the heart of the service is the Christmas story, told through a series of lessons, taken from the biblical books of Genesis, Numbers, Isaiah, Micah, St Luke, St John, and Galatians. Benson’s clear instructions are that these are to be read by members of the Cathedral, starting with a Senior Chorister and rising to the Bishop himself. Carols were conducted by Rev’d Walpole, and the organ (which, in part, remains in St Mary’s Aisle in the Cathedral today) was played by William Mitchell. The music included three movements from *Messiah* (G. F. Handel) and four carols from a new carol anthology, *Christmas Carols Old and New*, edited by Bramley and Stainer.

The congregation was expected to join in the singing of the hymns: *O come, all ye faithful* and *Bethlehem! of noblest cities* (the latter a Latin hymn in a translation favoured by Benson not appearing in contemporary hymn books); and in the choruses of two carols led by the Cathedral Choir (one of which was the popular *The first Nowell*). Following the famous *Hallelujah Chorus*, a metrical version of *Magnificat* was

chanted and Benson, satisfied that the Christmas story had been faithfully recounted, blessed the congregation (who numbered in excess of 400 people) and they returned to their homes.

Christmas celebrations begin, for many around the world, with the broadcast of Nine Lessons and Carols from the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge. Lovers of this modern service may be shocked to learn that the solo chorister singing the first verse of *Once in Royal David's City* is a later addition. Although the format of the service remains largely the same, I would be surprised if the modern version met with Benson's complete approval: it seems clear that, rather than the indulgent feast of music it may be seen to have become, Benson's intentions would have been much more humble. Benson simply wanted to teach one-and-all about the love of God that resides at the heart of the Christmas story; to focus the love of this story upon his local community and to help create some sense of stability at a time of many changes, not least the loss of their beloved parish church; and to ignite in his own people the non-conformist passion for singing, embracing the Christmas Carol whose revival had begun in Cornwall at the start of the century.

The structure and theology of *Benson's Nine Lessons with Carols*

– Canon Perran Gay

For the last fourteen years or so, I have been responsible for the liturgical arrangements for our *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*, and so I know from personal experience how such services evolve over the years. The most significant of those evolutions was due to the adaptation of the Truro pattern by King's College Cambridge, and the genius of its then Dean, Eric Milner-White, who wrote the famous Bidding Prayer, and came up with a series of lessons that has remained a definitive order ever since. It has been very interesting to go back beyond Milner-White to Benson's original, not only to judge whether the Dean of King's' improvements are truly improvements, but also to see the theological and liturgical principles under which Benson was operating.

Benson, like Milner-White, is keen to tell the story of redemption at the heart of the Christmas mystery, but he relies far less on the traditional Gospel narratives to do so. A modern 'Nine Lessons' based on King's has three, or at most four, Old Testament passages traditionally held to be fulfilled in the coming of the Christchild, followed by four or five passages from the Synoptic Gospels (normally one or more of the Annunciation stories from Luke and Matthew, the Birth and the Shepherds from Luke, and the Wise Men from Matthew), before reaching the liturgical climax with the reading of the great Prologue from John ("In the beginning was the Word..."). Benson's original is quite different, with its five Old Testament prophecies, its single Gospel narrative (the Shepherds), the sonorous Johannine prologue as the Seventh rather than the Ninth Lesson, and then the surprise of two passages from the Epistles offering their own theological comments on Christmas – from Paul's letter to the Galatians and then from the First Letter of John.

One can only speculate at the reason for this emphasis on theological commentary – either indirectly through the use of Old Testament prophecy (Lessons 1-5), or more directly from the New Testament (Lessons 7-9). It may be that Benson expected the familiar Christmas narratives to be used at other services over the season, although not at the principal eucharists where the Book of Common Prayer would again feature the Johannine Prologue. Or perhaps he was unhappy to feature narratives such as the Annunciation or the Wise Men which properly belonged to other times in the Church's Year (25th March and 6th January). Or perhaps his choice of readings was due, at least in part, to the carols he wanted to include, rather than the other way around?

Certainly the carols all contain strong verbal and thematic links to the readings which they follow. Some are obvious – such as the Genesis 3 passage that leads into a carol which paraphrases it, or the passage from Numbers that refers to the a star which is picked up in 'The first Nowell', or in the reference to Bethlehem in Micah

that leads naturally into 'Bethlehem! of noblest cities', or, most significantly, in the first two pieces from Handel's 'Messiah' which are simple repetitions of the words of the lesson which has just been read. The other pairings of lesson and carol are more subtle and theologically suggestive:

- the narrative of Genesis 22 at the end of the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac contains a promise that Abraham will be blessed because he was not going to spare his only son. This is a theme picked up in the second verse of the following carol, 'Good Christian men, rejoice', which tells us that 'man is blessed for evermore' through the coming of God's only Son
- the Prologue of John's Gospel with its themes of light shining in the darkness and the Word becoming flesh leads into *Adeste Fideles*, and in particular its theological second verse 'God of God, Light of Light....'

the passage from Galatians which assures us that because God has sent his Son we too are his children and joint heirs with Christ leads into the final carol 'Once again, O blessed time' and especially its third and fourth verses. These receive dramatic emphasis through the instruction that they should be sung kneeling, and contain the following image linking together the swaddling bands of Luke 2 with the altar linen of the Eucharist:

*Thou that once, 'mid stable cold,
Wast, in babe clothes lying,
Thou whose Altar-veils enfold
Power and Life undying...'*

Perhaps Benson is pointing towards the sacrament of the eucharist as the place where our identity as children of God is most fully realised, and suggesting too that all good Christians should make sure that they attend the eucharist at some point over the Christmas season!

the final reading from I John which speaks of how the word of life has been revealed and how it offers the promise that our joy will be made complete, leads into the burst of joy that is the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from 'Messiah'. Perhaps Benson intended us to see the new born child as King of kings and Lord of lords. Or did he select this final anthem simply because it represented for him the spirit of Christmas joy? We can only speculate.

Wider context of the 1880 *Nine Lessons with Carols*: the Carol Revival

– Jeremy Summerly

The seeds of the Victorian Christmas carol revival were sown in Cornwall in the reign of George IV. In the eighteenth century, the carol had fallen on hard times in towns and cities, and was eking out a lonely and decadent existence in the countryside. But in 1822, the MP for Bodmin published a collection of carols, the importance of which can hardly be over-emphasized. The seriousness with which Davies Gilbert's 1822 publication, *Some Ancient Christmas Carols*, was viewed by the mid-nineteenth century reformers is out of all proportion to its size. *Some Ancient Christmas Carols, with the Tunes to which they were formerly sung in the West of England* contains eight carols; that's a mere eight tunes spread out over sixty-nine verses. With the exception of the ubiquitous 'While shepherds watched', none of the other seven carols have made it into today's congregational canon. But 'The Lord at first did Adam make' (which opens the collection) and 'A Virgin most pure' survive as part of today's choral repertoire. Davies Gilbert MP did an extraordinary thing when he assembled his carol book. He revived the carols of his youth and preserved a unique corner of eighteenth-century folk history. At first glance, the rhythms and harmonies of Gilbert's transcriptions look awkward. There are some irregular metrical moments and some distinctly non-textbook Bass lines. But Gilbert captured the folk essence of these pieces. The repertory is, quite literally, homespun. And Gilbert was only interested in preserving this music as he remembered it of old, and not through the filter of musical academe or urban propriety. Gilbert's work is refreshingly rustic.

William Sandys worked as a London solicitor for a dozen years but his passion was music. And in 1833 Sandys published *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern*. Sandys was a more accomplished musician than Gilbert, but ironically this creates problems for the modern performer. Gilbert had relied on transcriptions from pre-existent written sources, whereas Sandys engaged in some on-the-hoof transcription from oral sources as well. A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, and Sandys dabbled in some musical practices that would best have been left to someone else. But Sandys must at least be congratulated for providing us with the earliest known examples of the tunes of 'The first Nowell', 'I saw three ships', and 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day' – poor though their Bass lines are in these versions.

In 1823, as Davies Gilbert's enlarged edition of *Some Ancient Christmas Carols* was being printed, William Hone published *Ancient Mysteries Described*. Hone was a writer and publisher with a colourful history of money troubles; he was also a campaigner for social justice and a prototype investigative journalist who believed passionately in the freedom of the press. Hone recognised that carols were no longer the province of the higher echelons of society but were practised only by 'the industrious servant-maid and the humble labourer'. Hone vowed to rectify this situation. Between

them, Davies Gilbert, William Sandys, and William Hone did much to raise awareness of the plight of the carol. Their influence on the history of the Christmas carol was significant. Yet none of them was a professional musician. It was perhaps inevitable that the next stage in the carol revival would be led by highly-trained Victorians rather than gifted Georgian amateurs.

Truro Cathedral's Reconstruction of its 1880 'Festival of Nine Lessons with Carols'

by *Christopher Gray*

On Tuesday 17th December 2013, Truro Cathedral attempted to reconstruct its original Nine Lessons service from Christmas Eve 1880 as faithfully as possible, with certain significant caveats. "Authenticity" is a minefield, throwing up many complex questions, and it is impossible to recreate exactly what took place in 1880. The following are just three of the reasons:

1. In 1880, Truro Cathedral was a temporary wooden structure where services took place as Pearson's Gothic Revival masterpiece was in its earliest stages of construction on the same site. This wooden building was eventually moved to Redruth and burnt down in 1981, so we didn't have an authentic building for the reconstruction.
2. Whilst a copy of the 1880 order of service survives today, none of the music the choir sang from can be found.
3. Our congregation was very different to the 1880 one. They had a different repertoire of hymns and carols back in 1880, and those which we still have today nearly all survive in different versions. On top of that, society has changed and people's sensibilities have evolved; people today come into church with a different mindset, conditioned by 133 years of additional musical and human development. To paraphrase a lecturer from my time at university: "the first thing you need for an authentic performance is an authentic audience".

In the face of such challenges, our approach was a pragmatic one which has aimed to recreate the 1880 service as accurately as possible, but has taken into account that the end result for us is a service people will attend, not an essay in a musicological journal. We have also considered the resources we have at our disposal today and attempted to integrate the 1880 service as seamlessly as possible with them. Important amongst these is our cathedral choir which still exists in its original form of boys and men. In that context, what follows is a summary of the practical decisions we have taken.

The surviving order of service tells us that the music required for the 1880 *Nine Lessons with Carols* consisted of:

Four items entitled "Carol": *The Lord at first had Adam made; Good Christian men, rejoice; The first Nowell; Once again, O blessed time.*

Three items entitled "Anthem", all from Handel's *Messiah*: *For unto us a child is born; There were shepherds abiding in the field; Hallelujah.*

Two items entitled "Hymn": *Bethlehem! of noblest cities; O come, all ye faithful.*

One item entitled "Canticle": *Magnificat.*

The following is mostly the result of Richard Longman's work.

Carols

We were confident that all of the items entitled “Carol” in the 1880 order of service were sung to music from Bramley and Stainer’s *Christmas Carols Old and New*. Copies of this carol book are to be found alongside the 1880 order of service in Cornwall Record Office, stamped with “Truro Cathedral Choir”, and the collection contains all four of the carols used in 1880.

Anthems

The three sections from Handel’s *Messiah* present few difficulties. For our reconstruction, the choir didn’t sing from a 19th century edition of *Messiah* as we have better editions nowadays. It is for much the same reason that the choir didn’t set out to emulate the standard of singing back in 1880.

Hymns

Our first assumption was that the two items entitled “Hymn” would be found in the cathedral’s hymnal, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. *O come, all ye faithful* is indeed there, to the tune *Adeste Fidelis* in a slightly different form to that in which we sing it today (a tone higher, in A major, and with small differences in the melody and harmony). We will sing this earlier, more plain version in our reconstruction.

The other “Hymn” was more problematic. *Bethlehem! of noblest cities* does appear in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* but in a different translation of the original fourth century Latin text, *Earth has many a noble city*. This different translation is set to the tune *Stuttgart* which is associated with both translations and is still widely used today. In our reconstruction, we will sing the *Hymns Ancient and Modern* version of *Stuttgart* which was probably used in 1880 and has the same melody as the *New English Hymnal* version we use today (it is in the same key, but has a simpler harmonisation).

Canticle

There is a missing piece of the jigsaw here. Towards the end of the service, the canticle “Magnificat” is listed. The absence of any text or pointing in the order of service suggests that it was sung by the choir alone. With no further information to go on, we have decided to sing the Magnificat to Anglican Chant, as set in the 1890 Truro Diocesan Choral Union (TDCU) Festival Book, to a single chant by JL Hopkins. We know that there was a strong tradition of singing the Magnificat to Anglican Chant at that time in Cornwall and this version is the earliest one we know was used at Truro Cathedral. If this is not the correct chant, it will certainly have been something very similar indeed.

The Organ

The cathedral’s celebrated Willis organ dates from about seven years after the 1880 Nine Lessons service, so is roughly from the same period. That said, it is profoundly different to the organ which had been relocated from the old St Mary’s Parish Church into the wooden cathedral. The Willis organ cannot reproduce the original instrument’s precise tone, but for our reconstruction we will avoid using the most **incongruous stops which would transport the congregation into a more romantic**

sound world.

Non-musical considerations

The service was originally at 10.00 pm on Christmas Eve 1880. Our reconstruction will take place on 17th December at 7.00 pm, for practical reasons.

There will be a congregational rehearsal before the service begins to familiarise those attending with the slightly different versions of the hymns, and to draw their attention to directions such as dynamic markings in Benson's order of service.

We plan to give the congregation reproductions of the 1880 order of service and to use these for the reconstruction.

We will preserve Benson's hierarchy amongst the readers of the lessons. This presents a problem for the ninth lesson, which is assigned to the Bishop. Until 1960, the positions of Bishop of Truro and Dean of Truro were combined, so Benson served in both roles. Our feeling was that the first eight lessons were read by people representing primarily the cathedral, not the wider diocese, and that it was therefore more appropriate that the Dean, as head of the cathedral foundation, read the ninth lesson, rather than the Bishop.

It has been stated, in a television documentary and also in national publications, that the cathedral choir used to sing at local pubs in Truro, to encourage people to come to the service of *Nine Lessons with Carols* and therefore ensure sobriety at Midnight Mass. Very sadly, we cannot find any evidence to support this. Canon Perran Gay confirms that our cathedral records indicate the first Midnight Mass took place in 1952. FWB Bullock's book, "A history of the parish church of St Mary, Truro", makes mention of the new Christmas Eve service which was needed "both as a counteraction to the public houses and as a right prelude to Christmas", but this clearly does not imply that the choir sang at pubs, nor that Midnight Mass took place. We would be pleased to hear from anyone with further evidence on this issue.

Milner-White and the Bidding Prayer for King's

As Dean of King's College, Cambridge, Eric Milner-White translated Benson's service of *Nine Lessons with Carols* to King's College Chapel in 1918. He made significant changes, many of which Truro has "borrowed" back, important among them the addition of his great Bidding Prayer. Canon Perran Gay points out that Milner-White re-worked some of Benson's Benedictions (short blessings that precede each lesson) into the Blessing at the end of this now-famous introduction to *Nine Lessons*: "The Almighty God bless us with his grace: Christ give us the joys of everlasting life: and unto the fellowship of the citizens above may the King of Angels bring us all".

It is important to emphasise that Benson did not invent the carol service. As Jeremy Summerly's article makes clear, the revival of interest in carols was well established by 1880 and carol services had taken place at Truro Cathedral in 1878 and 1879, as they did at many other cathedrals around the same time. Benson's contribution was in devising the format of the specific *Nine Lessons with Carols* carol service, which uses nine Biblical passages with various carols and anthems to convey the Christmas story or, as Milner-White puts it in his Bidding Prayer, "the tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience unto the glorious Redemption

brought us by this Holy Child”.

Benson’s theatrical touches

Benson included in his *Nine Lessons with Carols* a number of touches that can almost be described as theatrical. Jeremy Summerly points out that the use of dynamics for the congregation in the 1880 order of service is not simply a reproduction of *Bramley and Stainer* and *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, but some markings represent Benson’s own additions.

There is an instruction for the congregation to kneel at verse 3 of “Once again, O blessed time”, no doubt in preparation for the line “on our knees confessing”. There is an instruction for the congregation to stand at four points in the service: at the words “Glory to God in the highest” in one of the anthems from Handel’s *Messiah*; for the Gospel reading from St John; for the Hallelujah Chorus; and for the Magnificat. The service begins with everyone kneeling for the Lord’s Prayer.

There are three comments, handwritten by Benson, added to the typeset 1880 order of service in Cornwall Record Office:

A collection was to be taken during *O come, all ye faithful*, as is clear from his note in the margin beside that hymn: “Offertory collected and placed on altar during this hymn”.

Beside the anthem “There were shepherds abiding in the field” he writes: “Three boys sing the Recitatives standing in the midst of the Choir looking East – (Should they stand at Choir door looking West; & [?] East for Chorus)

On the inside front cover, he writes: “During the Benedictions each Reader stands in Choir door looking East then goes to lectern – ”

Much of the spirit of the 1880 service may lie in these small touches, theatrical or not. We will endeavour to observe them all on 17th December. In the face of the kind of pressures that surely come with building a new cathedral in a new diocese, it is clear that Benson nonetheless took great care over this innovative service. That he had the vision and creative energy to do this in such circumstances can only be marvelled at.

A reflection on the special re-enactment of the first ever service of nine lessons and carols.

The Very Revd Roger Bush, Dean of Truro

Carols at King's. The title evokes any number of associations; candlelit processions, solo high voice singing the first verse of *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, scriptural readings pointing to and describing the birth of Jesus, all emanating from the traditional service of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge, broadcast every year by the BBC on Christmas Eve. However, as many of us now know, the notion of a nine lessons and carols didn't begin at King's after the First World War, but here in Truro in 1880, when the first Bishop of Truro, Edward Benson, devised such a service, not only as a celebration of Christmas, but as a way of deepening the worshipper's response to and understanding of the meaning of Christmas. It was this very first Nine Lessons and Carols that, after careful research by the Canon Precentor of Truro Cathedral, Canon Perran Gay, and the Director of Music, Christopher Gray, was re-constructed and offered as an act of worship in Truro Cathedral on 17th December.

That this was more than a piece of liturgical archaeology was conclusively shown in the interest that putting on the original Nine Lessons and Carols generated, both locally and nationally. I, for one, in going around Truro, have never heard more interest expressed in a service at the Cathedral than was shown for the Benson Nine Lessons and Carols. And the BBC, no doubt in showing fairness to Truro whilst acknowledging the pre-eminence of the King's offering, carried radio and television features about the service throughout the day of the 17th. And what equally struck me as the service proceeded was that the recovery of the Benson service was no mere antiquarian exercise. The service, radically different from the King's service (devised by Canon Eric Milner-White after the First World War) in many ways, was more theological, more reflective and more intimate than its more famous younger sister, and whilst some of the readings and music may sit a little oddly today (only one short reading about the birth of Jesus – the story of the shepherds – and some rather sweet-toothed Victorian hymnody that hasn't survived the test of time), there was a real unity of purpose behind the service. It wasn't a cobbled together carol sandwich, but a fully thought-through liturgical offering that had meaning and significance.

This was more than attested to afterwards when many people said how moving they found the service. In fact, there were hushed tones from the 800 or so members of the congregation, who listened to the readings intently, and followed the musical instructions of Canon Perran to the letter in the singing of *O Come all ye Faithful* (singing *Lo he abhors not the virgin's womb* very quietly before triumphantly singing out loud *Very God!*). As the person standing in for Benson, who was both bishop and dean at the time, and therefore leading the service, I found the whole occasion very

reflective and moving, and any suspicion I had at the outset that this might have been a bit of a quirky undertaking was dispelled by its sincerity and reflectiveness. There is one more thing to add. The interest shown in the Benson Nine Lessons and Carols by the media, as well as by the ordinary public, attest to the power of the Christmas story to break through the occasional cynicism and materialism we may display at this particular time of year. For the good of all humanity, Christ came at Christmas to show the love of God for all people in every situation, and I am sure that occasions like the Benson re-construction remind us all of the real significance of what we are doing at this time of year, and what we are actually preparing for.

What other people said:

I was surprised by their choice of hymns and carols since so many of the ones we sing now were in existence in 1880.

It was a most impressive event, as I am sure you realised. Congratulations to all involved, mostly you, I expect. You must have been pleased to have so many there for the talk as well as the service itself.

Just a quick line to say thank you and huge congratulations to ALL concerned for giving us such an inspiring evening with the reconstruction service last night - we thoroughly enjoyed the whole thing, and the way you and Perran Gay wove in your talks and 'training' was brilliant! The choir as always did you proud and we shall look forward to watching the webcast when I have worked out how to access it! We have enjoyed all the various services and concerts in the run up to Christmas, and this reflection on how it all used to be was the icing on the cake.

Splendid do last night I thought, as did all the Methodists I encountered on my way out. Super introductions filled in the background beautifully. I loved that last carol which seemed so essentially Victorian if not Moody & Sankey or mild Thomas Merritt. Interesting use of the first person in those super blessings before each reading - pity EMW dropped those. Interesting choice of readings too - I don't think I've ever heard Num 24 read aloud before. Very much appreciated. Many thanks.

Thank you very much. My wife and I have listened to it with rapt attention. You should be receiving the order of service for yesterday's event at St Peter's, Edensor. You will see that your influence is spread widely.

