

Thomas Morley, Organist 1863-70

St. Alban's first Organist was Thomas Morley, who joined the staff in 1863, aged 18. Until a few days ago I had no biographical information about him at all, but I have now been given some by Tom Edwards, Organist of St Barnabas, Oxford, who is writing a history of its music, where Morley was Organist from 1882-86.

Thomas Morley was born on 1 January 1845, the son of Thomas Morley, bookbinder of Longwall St, Oxon. He was a chorister at Queen's College, Oxford. He was appointed organist of Bradfield, Essex, in 1861. He left St Alban's Holborn in 1870 to take up the post of Organist at St Ninian's Cathedral, Perth, Scotland. In 1871 he became private organist to the Earl of Kinnoull, but returned to England in 1876 to become Organist of St James' Tunbridge Wells. From there he moved to Harmondsworth in 1880, then to St Peter's, Vauxhall in 1881, and to St Barnabas, Oxford (1882-6).

On 15 October 1885 Morley married Elizabeth (Bessie) Tipton at SS Philip and James, Oxford. Bessie Tipton was the younger sister of James Benton Tipton, the first Organist of St Barnabas, Oxford.

The following year, 1886, he resigned from St Barnabas, probably for financial reasons, & was briefly unemployed, advertising in the Musical Times for a position. (Until 1885 Dr Edward King had contributed £100 pa towards the Organist's salary at St Barnabas, but this stopped when he became Bishop of Lincoln.) Morley and his wife decided to emigrate to Canada in 1887 and he took up the position of City Organist of St John's, Brunswick, and Organist of the Mission Church of St John the Baptist. At St John the Baptist he had a choir of boys and men.

In 1888, following the departure of Edwin E. Gubb, Morley succeeded to his position of Conductor of the Oratorio Society, and the Conductor of the Rothesay Choral Club.

On the night of 9/10 November 1891 Thomas Morley died suddenly, aged only 46. He was buried in New Brunswick.

In his book *S. Barnabas, Oxford: a record of fifty years*, published in 1919, Arthur Tilney Basset writes:

Mr Morley wrote many exquisite hymn tunes, a Communion Service, Canticles and other compositions of the Church... It is pleasure to... acknowledge merit so uncommon and of such value to the cause of the Church Music as is shown in Mr Morley's hymn-tunes, to say nothing of his other many and varied compositions. For variety of style, and for harmony of a most chaste type, for much inventive power and refined taste, these tunes easily take a first rank. Their author was a thorough harmonist and richly endowed with the gift of melody. His freedom from conventional trammels is as original as it is praiseworthy. He was an exceptionally good organist and displayed admirable style and skill in accompanying a Choral, and especially a Gregorian, service.

The copy of the second edition of *The Tune Book as used at St. Alban's Holborn* that we have in our archives has a hand-written date of May 1876, ie after Thomas Morley's departure from St Alban's, but it contains some 15 hymn tunes newly-composed by Thomas Morley especially for the reprint. This allows us to date the second edition as 1874 or earlier.

CCP
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