

CHAPTER EIGHT - THE NINETEEN NINETIES

It was becoming harder for Gordon to do shopping and carry it home as walking was becoming a problem. However, he remained fiercely independent and refused many kind offers of help, as he did not want people to see the flat, except his closest friends. One of these was Maurice whom he used to see every Thursday evening and Maurice would bring him back by car.

The heating in the flat was oil stoves. The oil was delivered in cans. Being a garden flat in a terrace, it kept reasonably warm, but with the approach of autumn, and thoughts of winter, he was persuaded by a mature student to purchase an electric heater with a thermostat, which could be safely left on. His private student, John, bought a good one and at an agreed time took it round to the flat to demonstrate. The heater proved a good investment, but the student (for whom Gordon had previously written a Trumpet Tune) was shocked at the state of the flat and arranged with me that in the October Half Term holiday we would clean it, to make it more comfortable. John also did shopping for Gordon, but this always had to be left at All Hallows so that Gordon could take it home by Taxi. No more visits to the flat were permitted.



Gordon with Maurice Merrell

Gordon never retired from organ playing or teaching. In the last weeks of his life he was teaching Arthur Cross, Philip Quevâtre, Mr. Dorling, W. H. Lewis, Mrs Dunworth, Brian Forward, David King, as well as John Turner and Mr. Purves.

Although Gordon did not particularly like choirs or soloists, on at least one occasion there was a trumpet player at a service, for whom Gordon wrote effective descants to the hymns. The three hymns were "O Worship the King v.1-6", "Praise to the Lord the Almighty, the King of Creation" and "Now thank we all our God", the descant being the first and last verses.

His last recital away from London was on Saturday 28 September 1991 at St Giles, Lincoln. The programme he played was:-

Concert Overture No.1	Hollins
Simple Aveu	Thomé
Gavotte Moderne	Lemare
Toccatà and Fugue in D minor	J S Bach
Voluntary in G major (Largo staccato – Vivace)	John Stanley
Barcarolle	W. Sterndale Bennett
The Bees' Wedding	Mendelssohn (Concert transcription by Gordon Phillips)
Marche Pontificale	F. de la Tombelle

This sounds an impressive performance for a gentleman in failing health almost on the eve of his eighty-third birthday. Surprisingly, the recital is not mentioned in his diary, but on Friday evening there was a Harvest Supper at All Hallows and on Sunday 29th it was the Harvest Festival service, so he only went to Lincoln for the day on the Saturday.

The last music writing he did was on, or after, his 83rd birthday, Sunday 13 October 1991. He played for the service that day, and Simon Oglesby asked if Gordon would write the harmonisation of the hymn tune, "Stella" a tune which is familiar to various denominations. Gordon wrote it in his legible manuscript hand and left it on the piano in his flat together with the melody edition of "The Parish Hymn Book" open at No.139 which was the tune "Stella". Some of his friends at all Hallows noticed that he had a bad cough that day, and remarked that he could hardly play the organ.

Every day I spoke to him on the telephone, and usually he would ask where I was ringing from, then tell me to put the receiver down, and he would ring back. He kept a list of the numbers by his telephone, and most frequently I would ring from the call-box at our nearest road junction. However, on Monday 14th he was coughing so much he had to stop talking.

On Tuesday October 15th I 'phoned again, from the call-box about, 10.30 p.m. He answered straight away, because the telephone was by his bed. When asked about the day's teaching and travelling, he just replied "I managed". However, he was not coughing as much as on the previous evening, and he sounded cheerful. Being Tuesday, he had had the Tuesday Break service and then taught D. The curate Revd. Ian C. Thurston helped him into the Taxi when he was ready to go home. No further birthday cards arrived that day, but he had received nine. He said he would cook the Manx Kippers tomorrow and joked about the number of drugs coming into the country. He was looking forward to the Half Term holiday in a fortnight's time when I was going to stay for a few days.

Stella

All Hallows by De Tower.
For Simon Oglesby, who asked for a
harmonisation on Oct. 13th 1991.

SCHOTT

That was the last conversation. I knew he would be staying in bed on the Wednesday but although I rang several times both afternoon and evening, there was no reply. Thursday was the day for the recitals, 3,269 and 3,270. According to his pocket diary, he had been preparing –

P in d	Chaminade
Bell Vol.	V Roberts
Clair de Lune	Vierne
Allegro in E	Handel
Air and Gavotte	Tower Hill
Caliph of Baghdad	
In a Monastery Garden	
Pavane	Elmer
Fountain Melody	
Moment Musical	
March in G	Smart

It is not clear if these would have been divided between the two recitals, or if he would still do the customary Bach recital.

When he did not arrive at All Hallows there was great concern and the Parochus and Simon, the Assistant Verger, went round to the flat. The police were called, gaining access by a back window. Gordon was discovered lying peacefully in bed. Death was from natural causes, probably early Wednesday morning, but as the body was not discovered until Thursday the official date of death is Thursday, October 17th 1991.

Gordon did not often speak about God, but when he got into the Taxi on Tuesday, Revd. Ian put his arm round him, saying, "See you on Sunday", to which Gordon replied, "God Willing".

I heard about his death at 5.00p.m. on the Thursday when the Administrator, Pam, telephoned. Later that day the Castletown policeman came to the house, after a Telex message had arrived from Hammersmith. About 8.00p.m. Maurice Merrell telephoned, and then there was a 'phone call from Irene Stephens.

At 6.15 p.m. Requiem Mass was said for Gordon at All Hallows and on Sunday 20th October 1991 prayers were said for Gordon at St. Paul, Covent Garden, St. Paul, Marylebone, St. Mary's, Somerstown, St. George's, Bloomsbury and St. Thomas's, Douglas Isle of Man.

- The causes of death were :-
- a. Myocardial Infarction
 - b. Ischaemic heart disease

D. Cert.
S.R.R.B.D.

CERTIFIED COPY
Pursuant to the Births and

OF AN ENTRY
Deaths Registration Act 1953

CAUTION—In an effort to fulfil a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate or a copy of a false certificate intended to be accepted as genuine is an offence under section 47 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967 and may be punished accordingly.

DEATH		Entry No. 12
Registration district Hammersmith		Administrative area London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Sub-district Hammersmith		
1. Date and place of death Seventeenth October 1991		
2a. Name and surname Gordon PHILLIPS		2. Sex male
3. Date and place of birth 13th October 1908 Slough Berkshire		4. Maiden surname of women who have married
5. Occupation and usual address 2a, Souldern Road, W11 musician		
7(a) Name and surname of informant Hilary Muriel Sewell		(b) Qualification causing the body to be cremated
8. Cause of death 1a myocardial infarction b ischaemic heart disease		
Certified by E. Shaoul FRCGP.		
9. I certify that the particulars given by the above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief Hilary M. Sewell Registrar		Signature of informant
10. Date of registration Twenty First October 1991		11. Signature of Registrar SJS Registrar

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

21 OCT 1991
Date IAC 554142

His last recital on October 10th had gone well because there was a letter in his jacket pocket from William Lewis who had attended it, and wrote:-

"My sincere good wishes to the most extraordinary and one of the most brilliant organists I have ever met and heard".

There was a general feeling among his students when they heard of his death, expressed in the first words of Mr. Dorling, **"I wish I'd worked harder"**.

The funeral service took place on Monday 28th October 1991 at 2.00pm, the three hymns being "Through all the changing scenes of life", "O Strength and stay upholding all creation" and "O praise ye the Lord". The organist was Professor Jonathan Melling, who played "Nimrod (Variations Opus 36)" by Elgar before the service and Delibes "Naila Waltz" (as requested by Gordon) as an Organ Meditation following the reading from Bertrand Russell and after the Blessing, "Trumpet Tune" from Tower Hill Suite.

In the Revd. Canon Peter Delaney's address he said that Gordon was the rock on which that church was built.

The first lesson, John 14 v 1-6 was read by Di Robertshaw and the second reading from Bertrand Russell was read by Malcolm Johnson (Verger and Parish Clerk).

There was a large congregation (extra hymn sheets had to be hurriedly prepared), and fifty-seven people signed their names, many representing groups and societies, but there were more than that present, as several people did not sign. The final part of the Funeral Service took place with a smaller attendance at Golders Green Crematorium. We came away trying to consider the best way to continue his work, perpetuate his memory and give him due recognition.

The flowers from the funeral were taken back to All Hallows, with loving messages – "With deepest sympathy from a grateful pupil", "In Memory of a loyal friend", "With love and prayers to the best of all Musicians. From the congregation of All Hallows by-the-Tower".

A Service of Thanksgiving for the Life and Work of

CHARLES GORDON PHILLIPS
DMus, FRCO, FRSA, FLCM, FCCM, ARCM
1908 – 1991

was held on Thursday 12 December 1991 at 12 noon.

The organist was Professor Jonathan Melling who played "Fugue à la Gigue" BWV 577 Bach and "Partita on a Plainsong Hymn" Gordon Phillips, before the service.

The hymns were:- "Praise the Lord! Ye heavens adore Him" : "Dear Lord and Father of mankind" : "O praise ye the Lord! Praise Him in the height".

Victoria Simmonds sang Elgar's "Ave Verum".

The Address was given by Kenneth Shenton, Director of Music, Arnold School, Blackpool a former pupil and page turner.

The first reading, Isaiah Chapter 35 was by friend Maurice Merrell and the Lesson, part of the Lecture given by Gordon in 1982 was read by myself. After the service Percy Fletcher's "Festival Toccata" was played. A procession of close friends went down to the Undercroft for the Deposition of Ashes, where the Casket rests in peace.

His memory remains in the hearts and minds of those who knew him.

Countless other people, who never knew him in his lifetime now play his music, which has been published by ANIMUS. His Organ Tutor has now been made available for all.

Jenny Phillips, his surviving relative, who represented the other relations, and who was not discovered until months after his death, has proved a tower of strength and support.

Gordon's words,

"I feel that to be a really good organist, one works ten hours a day and thinks music for the other fourteen"

and his example of untiring work, have been an inspiration to all of us.

Little remains to be said.



The Casket in the Undercroft

"Oh, though oft depressed and lonely
All my fears are laid aside,
If I but remember only
Such as these have lived and died!"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
"Footsteps of Angels"

The Bees Wedding

Felix Mendelssohn
Concert Transcription for Organ
by Gordon Phillips

Sw ①
Ch. ② on Gt.
Ped. + Sw

Sw ①
Gt. Ch. + Dulc.
Ped. + Gt.
+ Sw.

Handwritten musical score for the first system. It consists of three staves: a top staff with a treble clef and a common time signature, a middle staff with a treble clef and a common time signature, and a bottom staff with a bass clef and a common time signature. The music features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. Handwritten annotations include 'Ch' above the top staff, 'LH 5' and '1 2' below the middle staff, and '5 2' below the bottom staff.

Handwritten musical score for the second system, continuing from the first. It consists of three staves with the same clefs and time signature. The notation is dense with sixteenth-note patterns. A handwritten annotation '5 2' is visible below the middle staff.

Handwritten musical score for the third system. It consists of three staves. The middle staff has a handwritten annotation '5 3' below it, and the top staff has '1 2 1' and '2 1' written above it.

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system. It consists of three staves. The middle staff has a handwritten annotation '5 3' below it.

SCHOTT