

CHAPTER SEVEN - THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES

As Gordon's Thursday recitals always contained one whole programme devoted to the music of J. S. Bach, he became very knowledgeable, and prepared eventually to do a Bach Marathon. This finally took place in November 1983 and was very successful, the date was Saturday, 26 November 1983. All that he wrote in his pocket diary for that day was **Marathon**.

By that year his Thursday concert programmes were including the number of minutes for each piece, so his Marathon was carefully planned.

He wrote about it as follows:-

A BACH MARATHON

Some fifty years ago the city church, All Hallows-by-the-Tower was the venue for an historic series of Bach recordings made by Dr. Albert Schweitzer. Although the organ on which these records were made was destroyed by bombs in the last war, the present instrument, which I designed, on becoming organist and director of music at All Hallows twenty-seven years ago, is ideally suitable for the performance of the Bach organ works. Consequently when the Vicar, Reverend Peter Delaney suggested to me that I should do a sponsored Bach marathon, I welcomed the idea. A programme was prepared, to last eight hours and to include all the major works written by Bach for the organ. Our senior curate, Reverend Michael Beech, handled the publicity and sent out the sponsorship forms. The event was planned to take place on the last Saturday in November and by then it was obvious that all I had to do was play for eight hours to make it a resounding success. The Evening Standard had given me a good write-up the previous day under the heading "Pulling out all the stops", the City Post also published a very informed account of the programme and LBC broadcast an interview with me, on the morning of the marathon.

I arrived at the church on the Saturday morning having had a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast, checked the running of the blower, and at ten o'clock after the curate had made a little speech, and in the presence of a large audience I commenced my task. I should mention, in passing, that I am one of the few organists who have their vicar's permission to smoke in the organ-loft and I provided myself with a supply of cigars to help me on my way. How did I feel during the day? Well, I was playing on my favourite organ; I was playing the works of a composer I revere and I could sense the enormous support I was getting from my audience. This showed itself unmistakably in the spontaneous applause which broke out at the end of each hour. So that instead of becoming more and more fatigued I felt constantly revitalised and exhilarated and found myself looking forward to the big works still to come and enjoying the relaxation of some exquisite composition on the chorale. It was a marvellous experience and I was far too lost in the whole thing to bother with food or drink for the whole eight hours. However members of the audience were not expected to endure such spartan-like conditions and the church restaurant kept open all day serving refreshments, and, as the heating is constantly at full strength throughout the winter months, nobody could complain that they felt cold or hungry.

The last bars of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor resounded through the church at twenty minutes past six and the marathon was completed to much applause and congratulation. Among the many who helped to make this event such a success, I single out for a special tribute the friend who journeyed all the way from Scarborough to undertake the nerve-racking task of turning the pages. She was probably much more exhausted than I was!

The whole performance was recorded by one of our assistant priests, the Reverend Philip Blewett, with the co-operation of a BBC recording engineer and selected items will be on cassette very shortly. So far the amount raised totals £1000, and I do not think that is a bad return for my eight hours of most enjoyable activity.

GORDON PHILLIPS

At the time of the Marathon (a great achievement for an organist at any stage of life) Gordon was already seventy-five years of age. Some years before someone had written about him:-

**"There was an old man of Tower Hill
Who would pedal away with a will,
While his fingers and thumbs
Pulled our musical plums
which delighted the folk of Tower Hill".**

Sometimes he would sit at the organ console playing the treble recorder, accompanying himself with his feet playing the organ pedals. He had learnt the recorder very quickly, taking the Trinity College examinations on his short breaks in Scarborough. He passed Grade IV with Merit in December 1979, Grades V and VI both with Merit in May 1980 and Grade VIII in December 1980. He wrote several duets for Treble and Tenor recorders which he enjoyed playing with a friend, also some music for Treble Recorder and Organ and he wrote studies to teach himself the recorder. Although none of this music was ever published there is a manuscript book available which contains the duets. Gordon's manuscript writing is so clear that they are perfectly easy to follow.

During his holidays in Scarborough he gave some recitals on the "Father" Willis organ in St.Martin's Church and one at Bridlington Priory where the organist was a former student. He was always willing to give recitals when asked. Although not greatly favouring electronic organs he did give one recital at South Cliff Methodist Church in Scarborough on an electronic instrument, during a Flower Festival in August 1980.

He had one student for lessons at Filey Parish Church, for whom he wrote 'A Quiet Processional'. She had the occasional lesson during his visits to Scarborough. In the summer it made a pleasant outing to Filey, but during the winter months the hour's lesson, which not infrequently extended to one and a half hours in an unheated church with a north east wind howling round was less bearable. Gordon never complained about the cold, he was more interested in the music. One winter's day, although the main roads were clear, there was frozen snow on the side roads and round the church (I was the car driver on these occasions). I was so relieved when the lesson was over and he came back to the car where we ate hot fish and chips.

Gordon was one of the Vice Presidents of the West of England Organ Festival, which took place every year during the 1980's and included concerts in Bristol and Bath. He helped in drawing up the syllabus and was often an adjudicator. One award for the winner of the organ solo class was that he or she played a recital at All Hallows during the City of London Festival.

As Gordon had taught so many students during the years, frequently writing exercises and studies to further their progress, the West of England Organ Festival committee decided to ask him to write an organ tutor which they would sponsor and produce. He agreed, and worked tirelessly on its compilation. The book was produced in 1983 with a distinctive blue cover, foreword by Dr Michael Foster and introduction by Gordon. He called it "A Basic Organ Tutor" and the book was an immediate success with many copies being sold. It helped to publicise the West of England Festival.

When all the copies were sold, a second edition was brought out which included a complete list of pedal scales (very useful for examination purposes, though Gordon did not think they were particularly important because composers did not usually write pedal scale passages in their compositions).

Gordon wrote the following letter to Michael Foster after he sent him the preface/introduction to the first Organ Tutor.

01-603-7669

2^A Souldern Road,
Brook Green,
London, W.14.

9th June, 1983.

My dear Michael,

Thank you very much for your letter and enclosures. The Foreword is splendid; I had no idea my book was so good! I am delighted however, that you approve and there is nothing you have written that I would wish to alter. The music by other composers has been transcribed and edited in all cases by me, so copyright problems do not arise, fortunately, and my own compositions were written specially for the work itself. As you rightly suggest, the exercises are graded, many of them founded on the pedal studies used as basses. Indeed, two of my own compositions at the end of the Tutor are similar, based on two of the advanced pedal exercises.

I have enjoyed reading your book about Salisbury, immensely. I have a very happy memory of attending Sir Walter Alcock's opening recital on the rebuilt organ in 1934, in company with Bernard Rose & Herrick Bunney. We had been sneaked in to the Cathedral during the afternoon and played the organ while the great man was having his afternoon

Siesta and we finished a memorable day at midnight looking at Stonehenge in the moonlight.

I am very interested in your work on Morley. Some years ago I studied his *Plaine & Easie Introduction*, and used his method of composition by interval, rather than harmonic progression, with my composition class at the London City Literary Institute. It certainly worked well. Although I used the Shakespeare Association facsimile, I was very grateful later for Alec Harman's 'translation'. I do hope you get your work published - you will certainly have one customer!

Again, many thanks for saying such nice things about the Tutor, and my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Gordon.

The exercises and musical examples in the book were excellent. As the years passed it was felt that the tutor had some defects, one being that so much was crammed into a short space, making it difficult to read if the light was poor. The preliminary pages, containing vital information were so long and unrelieved by pictures or musical examples, that they appeared boring. Students tended not to read them at all. Now that the whole tutor has been published by Adrian Self of Animus Music in three separate volumes, it has become a much more popular book and far more manageable for students of any age. It is one of the great assets to organ playing for which Gordon will long be remembered.

It is probable that Gordon finished teaching at the London College of Music at the end of 1983, having reached the age of seventy-five as that year his pocket diary mentioned "Term starts" and "Half Term" and in 1985 those items are not recorded. He did continue as an Examiner up to 1986. However, references to events at All Hallows are far more numerous than information about the London College, and it is with All Hallows that his name will always be associated.

Although he had many acquaintances and numerous friends, he was a very private sort of person, far more willing and interested in talking about music than in discussing his health or relatives (whom he claimed to be non-existent!).

There was some talk, about the time of his 2000th recital in 1977, about his getting married, but this was unfounded rumour as at the time his legal wife, Brenda, was still alive and in contact as the recipient of an allowance from Gordon. She died in 1978 by which time his other good friend was living and working in the North of England.

The year 1986 was difficult as the church could not make sure that the parish secretary would have time to type out his Thursday recital programmes, so sometimes he had to write and duplicate his own. This happened on the 4th. September, and is beautifully written for the two recitals.

Thursday, 4th September, 1986

12.15 - 1.00 p.m.

1. Polonaise in A major - Frederic CHOPIN
2. La Fête-Dieu - Théodore DUBOIS
3. Moderato assai (Sonata No 4) - Gustav MERKEL
4. Automne - Cécile CHAMINADE
- 5 (a) Fountain Reverie
(b) Festal Offertorium } Percy E. FLETCHER

1.15 - 2.00 p.m.

Johann Sebastian BACH.

George Frederic HANDEL.

1. Fantasia in A minor - J. S. BACH
2. Trio-Sonata No 3 in D minor - J. S. BACH
(Andante - Adagio e dolce - Vivace)
- 3 (a) Where'er you walk
(b) Arrival of the Queen of Sheba } G. F. HANDEL
4. Fugue in E flat major - J. S. BACH
5. Sinfonia (Scipione) - G. F. HANDEL

The next day he had to visit the doctor.

That year he began organ playing in the evening at Newington Green Unitarian Church, where he was very popular. This he did fortnightly, so that his friend Hilary from Scarborough could be the official organist, and she only came alternate weekends to London.

He continued his recorder playing and they played the duets that he wrote. The next year he was so far advanced that on 14th. July 1987 he gave a recorder recital, with Reverend Peter Kefford accompanist on the organ, during the Festival of London!

Their programme was:-

Sonata in F major	Daniel Purcell (1660-1717)
Greensleeves to a Ground	Anonymous
Dance of the Blessed Spirits	C W von Gluck (1714-1787)
Ye Banks and Braes	Folksong - arr. Gordon Phillips
Sonata in G minor	G F Handel (1685-1759)

It must have been a lovely concert.

A programme which has just come to light shows that Gordon's 3,000th recital at All Hallows took place on October 13th. 1988.

In the 1969 edition of "Who's Who in Music", Gordon gives as his only recreation, Chess. He had at least two pocket Chess sets and worked out Chess problems that were set in newspapers. His best Chess set had beautiful ivory pieces, and he was a very good player. I only played occasional games with him but he could beat me a few minutes into the game.

He was also interested in Philosophy and an admirer of Bertrand Russell. He enjoyed poetry. He had books on these subjects and for bookmarks, he used the pictures on Christmas cards if they were works of art.

In addition to his work at All Hallows he was President of the London Organists' Guild and a member of the Corporation of the London College of Music. He smoked cigars and had a large collection of cigar holders. At the church he had permission to smoke in the organ loft (possibly the only organist who was permitted this privilege).

When the first fifty pence coins were made with the pattern of clasped hands around the circumference, he collected these and kept a tall jar in his flat for them, and more jars became full.

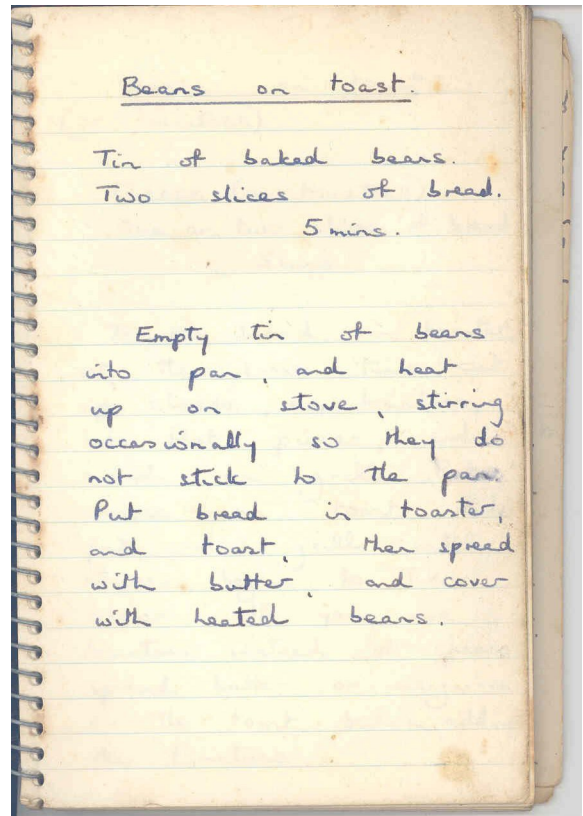
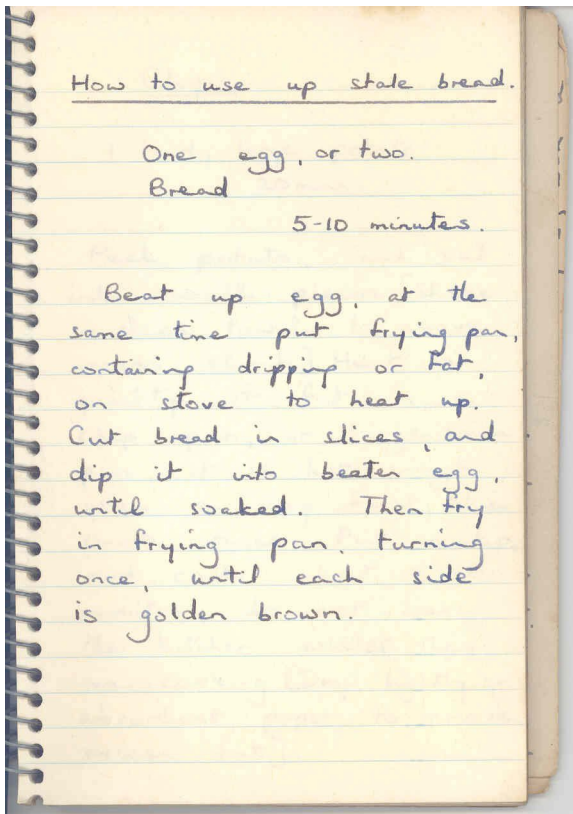
The week after he died these were extremely useful when it was necessary to pay advance rent on the flat from October to December to allow time for clearing it.

There was sufficient money in coins to pay the entire amount.

Received £352.00p
in cash being rent
for 2a Souldern Road
up to and including
31st December 1991.
Received with thanks
Alexander Waugh
(2 Souldern Road)

During his years from 1980 of living alone in the flat, he felt it necessary to learn how to cook and accordingly a recipe book was prepared, which makes interesting reading, and begins with **Beans on Toast** :-

After various other recipes we get - "**How to use up stale bread**".

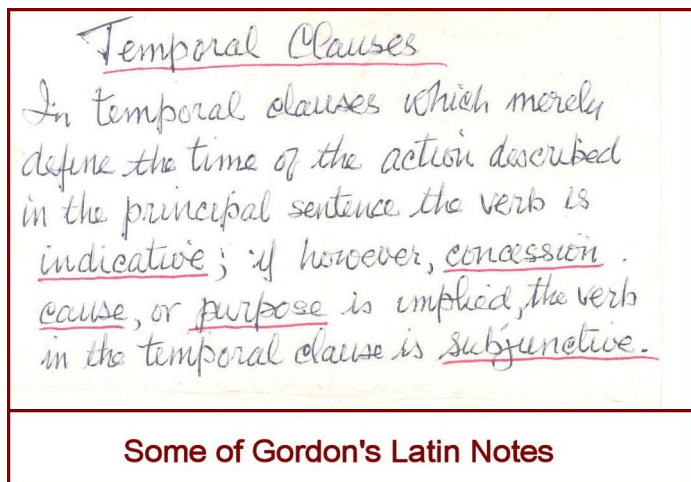


One two line recipe is very simple - "**Fish and Chips**".

"Buy these ready cooked and eat at once."

Altogether there are twenty-five handwritten recipes in the book and the last three pages have suggested menus for Breakfasts, Lunches or High Teas and Dinners.

In the late 1980s Gordon spent a lot of time on teaching himself Latin, from Hugo's book "Latin in Three Months". He kept the book in his coat pocket so he could study it and learn the vocabulary, on his daily London Underground rides. He has added notes in red biro on several pages. The book has been so well used that it is falling apart, but kept secure with a double elastic band. He progressed quickly through the first thirty lessons of the book (there are thirty-two lessons in all). For each lesson there was a Key to the Exercises at the back of the book, so it was possible to mark one's own work, and he gained considerable pleasure from doing this.



Some of Gordon's Latin Notes

bāca f. berry.

Bacchus - m. god of wine

bacūlumⁿ - staff, walking stick

bācūlus^m - porter

bālinēumⁿ bathroom
or balnēum

baltus - m. belt.

Bandusia f fountain

barba f beard.

barbārus - rough, savage

bardus stupid, dull, slow

barrus - m elephant

bascauda f basket

basare. to kiss.

bāsis f pedestal, base

basium n kiss.

battēre - to beat.

bēātītās f happiness

bēātītūdo

bellicōsus warlike

bellum n war.

bēnē well.

bēnēficentia f kindness

bēnēficiūm a favour

bēnēvolentia f good will

bībliōthēca f library

bibere to drink

bībulus fond of drinking

bīlis f gall, anger

bonus good

bos c. ox

brācchium n. arm

breviarium n report.

brevis short

brevitas f shortness

Britannia f Britain

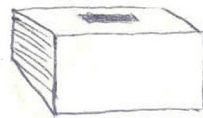
Britannicus British

brutus heavy

būbo - m owl

būfo m toad

bulbus m. onion



Some of Gordon's Latin Notes

He did not travel much during his lifetime, except to give recitals, though he did visit Paris once as a young man, and travelled by air (it would be in the early days of air travel). He was so put off by the journey that he never went again by 'plane and attempted to discourage everyone else from flying.

In 1986 he did visit the Isle of Man to give a recital in June for the Mananan Festival and to play for a service for Gardeners, which was broadcast live on the B.B.C. For this journey he travelled by rail and boat. The recital and service were both very well attended and there were amazed comments from the audience, after the recital, that they had never heard the organ played like that before, with every note clear.

He was beginning to find problems living alone, in keeping the house clean and getting good meals. He would not tolerate anyone coming in to help with cleaning unless it was a very close friend. He asked for written help on the cleaning, and kept the resulting pages of suggestions folded up in his Cook Book.

1. Look at the contents of each room carefully, and see if there is anything which is never used, and could be disposed of. Put small things in the dustbin, and large things (if any) into the back garden, temporarily.
2. Tie a duster round the brush end of a long handled sweeping brush, and brush the entire surface of all ceilings and walls.
3. Shake the curtains fairly vigorously (not so vigorously as to tear them).
4. AFTER 2) and 3) dust will have fallen on the floor, so vacuum clean all carpets, and sweep floor surfaces where there are no carpets, with a brush and dustpan.
5. Take a bucket of warm water, to which has been added something like Flash or Ajax liquid, or even just washing up liquid or soap, and a cloth. Wring the cloth out in the warm water, and proceed to wipe over all wooden surfaces, eg. window frames, doors, skirting boards - but do not do this on polished furniture. Wring the cloth out each time it gets dirty.
6. Use clean warm water, and a clean cloth, or leather, to wipe over all glass, mirrors, doors, picture frames, and windows. The windows may also be done outside.
7. If there are any holes in walls consult with landlord as to whether these should be filled, as a temporary measure they can be covered with a picture, or piece of furniture.
8. Remove sundry articles from the surface of the spare single bed, and put a hot water bottle in this bed to air it.
9. If it were possible to move the cutlery drawer, and the bedroom cabinet, to a lower level, this would be appreciated.
10. If it were possible to paint any walls with Vinyl Silk Emulsion, this would be very much appreciated, also any woodwork with gloss paint, but don't worry about this if it can't be done.
11. Empty pedal bin and defrost fridge.
12. Use a clean soft cloth and furniture polish, and rub over furniture, using a small amount of polish, and then rub over again with another cloth. This will make the room smell nice, and need only be done once a year.
13. Dust any surfaces, eg organ pipes, which have not hitherto received attention, and rub piano keys with a damp cloth.
14. Light bulbs and shades may require dusting, but not when they are switched on.
15. Look at coats on hall stand by front door, and suits in bedroom wardrobe, and see if they could fit into any smaller space (this may be impossible).
16. Wash all dusters and cloths, and make a mug of coffee or soup.