

## **GORDON PHILLIPS**

**1908 - 1991**



**20th Century Organist, Teacher and Friend**

**by Hilary M. Sewell**

**with an Introduction by Jenny Phillips**

**and Memories Contributed by Friends**

"We are the music-makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams....  
Yet we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems."

Arthur O'Shaughnessy

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## Introduction by Jenny Phillips



In January 1993 I received a mysterious letter from a firm of probate researchers who claimed that they had knowledge of a sum of unclaimed money a share of which they considered could be claimed by me.

I subsequently learned that I was a cousin once removed of the late Charles Gordon Phillips who had died on the 17th October 1991 without leaving a will.

I had no knowledge of Gordon's existence, but my mother who was then in her late eighties, could remember my father talking about going to visit 'Cousin Gordon'.

I discovered that Gordon's father was Alfred Enoch Phillips who married Martha Jackson on 4th July 1900. Enoch died on 6th July

1940 and Martha on 15th April 1959.

My paternal grandfather, Hubert, was one of Enoch's brothers. Their parents were Henry Phillips and Emma Hook, who married on 14th February 1852. Henry died on 19th November 1877 and Emma was remarried to William Willstead on 9th October 1881. She died on 9th April 1899.

Hubert was born in 1872 and married Florence Maud May Smith on 17th December 1894. He died on 24th May 1958.

My father, Alexander Bernard Phillips was born on 28th June 1901 and married my mother, Ethel May Harris in 1929. I was an only child, born in 1946. My father died in 1966 and my mother in 2003 at the age of 97.

I was fascinated to find that there had been a distinguished musician in the Phillips family and impressed when I learned that he was a quite prolific composer.

I was persuaded by the probate researchers to become the administratrix of the estate only to find that there were over a hundred beneficiaries. It took almost a further three years for the estate to be settled primarily because of the unusually large number of people involved.

It seemed sad that, in order to distribute the proceeds of the estate, treasured belongings such as an unusual cabinet of Japanese netsukes as well as music that had been collected over the years had to be sold.

The solicitors who were handling the estate told me of the planned Gordon Phillips Society and I would have liked to hand the proceeds of the estate over to the Society so that it could perhaps be used to help young musicians. Unfortunately the other beneficiaries did not agree, although most of them stood to inherit extremely small

amounts. We did at least manage to arrange, in spite of some opposition, for the royalties from Gordon's music to be given to the Society.

I met Hilary Sewell and other of Gordon's friends in 1996. Hilary wrote to me in the August, inviting me to the Gordon Phillips Memorial Recital at All Hallows on 12th October and explaining that the Gordon Phillips Society was to be officially launched on that day. I was subsequently invited to be Patron of the Society and accepted with pleasure.

In the years that followed I attended several Memorial Recitals and helped Hilary to produce the Society Newsletters.

When the Centenary of Gordon's birth was approaching Hilary asked if I would assist her in the production of a book on Gordon's life to commemorate the occasion. I imagined that this would be a fairly short task and readily agreed.

I think that Hilary surprised herself as well as me when she handed over the first sixty pages of handwritten script.

From then on the project grew and grew, but finally, with some help from friends, the book is now complete.

I would like to thank Peter Hunter and his friend Margaret for their help with the word processing and also the friends and former students who contributed their memories of Gordon.

Finally I would like to thank Hilary for allowing me to persuade her to write the personal story of her friendship with Gordon.