

## The Smithson Manuscript

The Smithson Manuscript is a handwritten book of West Gallery music. It was found in the perris (a small cupboard above the porch) of St Mary the Virgin church, East Bergholt, Suffolk, from where it narrowly escaped being thrown away, as so many valuable West Gallery manuscripts seem to have been. It now is in the possession of Martin Huggett, who is a professional archivist, and I have been permitted to photograph all its pages. Martin understandably did not feel willing to lend me this rare manuscript for close examination, but I have been able to research it fairly well from some somewhat hastily made copies.

The front cover, shown as Example 1, bears the details "Ex libris Kath. Smithson vicesimo quinto die Martii anno domini 1727" (from the books of Kath[erine] Smithson 25<sup>th</sup> March 1727 AD). Following two pages specifying which pieces are appropriate for the various church festivals, there are 70 pages of neat and accurate copies of the tunes and anthems in the second edition (London 1722) of *A Sett of New Psalm Tunes*, issued by John Bishop of Winchester (1665-1737). Example 2 shows a typical page. Bishop's order is followed with two exceptions: two tunes, *Southampton* and *Bristol* are transposed, and Bishop's setting of the Matins canticle *Te Deum (O God, we praise thee and we own)* in the metrical version of John Patrick (1632-95) is omitted. There is no obvious reason for these alterations. These pieces occupy pages 1-68, as paginated by Katherine, with pages 31-38 omitted. An index of all the Bishop pieces is added (Example 3).

There follow 72 plain tunes written in a different hand on 37 unnumbered pages. Example 4 shows a page in the anonymous hand. The handwriting is less neat than Katherine's, but is perfectly legible. Spot checks on a number of the tunes shows that probably all are copied from *The Harmonious Companion, or the Psalm Singer's Magazine* (London 1732) issued by Benjamin Smith (dates unknown) and Peter Prelleur (1705-41). This compilation seems to have been associated with Methodism<sup>1</sup>. No such association exists with Bishop's publications.

Katherine appears to have been an educated woman, judging from her handwriting and use of Latin on her title page. It is perhaps surprising then that she did not simply purchase a printed copy of Bishop's book, issued just five years previously. There is no indication to what use her book was put. The pages are clean, and do not seem to have had heavy use. There are no figures or any other indication that Katherine played these pieces on a keyboard instrument. The tunes added anonymously later likewise raise the question why the scribe did not simply purchase a copy of *The Harmonious Companion*.

This is the earliest manuscript on which I have ever laid hands. It is in good condition, considering that it is nearly three centuries old. I hope that it will eventually be conserved in a library or record office.

Reference: <sup>1</sup> See Martin Vaughan Clark *John Wesley and Methodist Music in the Eighteenth Century Principles and Practice* P. 354 (PhD Thesis, University of Durham 2008).

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