Sacred polyphony in England from the Eton Choirbook to Byrd’s *Gradualia*

Lecture 3: State, Church, and Music from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I

*Cardinal Wolsey* (1519, statutes for reform of Augustinian canons):
‘Plainsong chanted with modest gravity and in a sweet and tranquil style, which draws the souls of listeners to spiritual delight and a longing for the music of heaven, is more to be approved for all ecclesiastics than wanton melodies which please the senses of the listener or elaborate rhythms which excite his admiration for the performers.’

*Erasmus* (letter of early 16th century): ‘They chant nowadays in our churches in what is an unknown tongue and nothing else, while you will not hear a sermon once in six months telling people to amend their lives. Modern church music is so constructed that the congregation cannot hear one distinct word. In College or monastery it is still the same: music, nothing but music.’

*The Rationale of Ceremonial*, c. 1540–43:
‘The sober, discreet and devout singing, [of] music and playing with the organ used in the church, for the service of God, are ordained to move and stir the people to the sweetness of God’s word the which is there sung and not understood, and by that sweet harmony both to excite them to prayers and devotion and also to put them in remembrance, of the heavenly triumphant church, where is everlasting joy and continual laud and praise to God.’

*Cranmer*’s letter to Henry regarding adapting Latin chant for translated texts:
‘The song that shall be made thereunto would not be full of notes, but, as near as may be, for every syllable a note.’

*Edwardine Injunctions* to Lincoln Cathedral, 1548:
‘The choir shall from henceforth sing or say no anthems of our Lady or other Saints, but only of our Lord, and them not in Latin; but choosing out the best and most sounding to Christian religion they shall turn the same into English, setting thereunto a plain and distinct note for every syllable one.’

*Elizabethan Injunctions*, 1559:
‘That there be a modest distinct song, so used in all parts of the common prayers in the Church, that the same may be as plainly understood, as if it were read without singing, and yet nevertheless, for the comforting of such that delight in music, it may be permitted that in the beginning, or in the end of common prayer…there may be sung an Hymn, or such like song…in the best sort of melody and music that may be conveniently devised, having respect that the sentence of the Hymn may be understood and perceived.’
Reading

The history of the English Reformation


Writing on music

Begin with


Further general surveys


On more specific aspects of sacred music and its context

Jonathan Willis, *Church music and Protestantism in post-Reformation England: Discourses, Sites and Identities* (Ashgate, 2010), ch. 2 & 4
Fiona Kisby, ‘“When the King Goeth a Procession”: Chapel Ceremonies and Services, the Ritual Year, and Religious Reforms at the Early Tudor Court, 1485–1547’, *Journal of British Studies* 40 (January 2000), 44–75
Editions of Music

Anthologies


*Other editions*

The contents of both the Wanley part-books (ed. James Wrightson, in three volumes) and the Lumley part-books (ed. Judith Blezzard) are published in the series *Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance*, vols 99–101 and 65 respectively. These are both in the MFL.


### THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

**HENRY VIII**

1534  
Act of Supremacy

1536–40  
Dissolution of the monasteries

1539  
Great Bible

1544  
Cranmer’s English Litany

**EDWARD VI**

1547–8  
Restrictions of florid polyphony

1548  
Chantries Act

1549  
Book of Common Prayer

1552  
Second Book of Common Prayer

**MARY I**

1553  
Latin liturgy restored

**ELIZABETH I**

1559  
Second Book of Common Prayer restored

Career of Thomas Tallis

1530–1: Dover Priory

1537–8: St Mary-at-Hill, London

1538–40: Waltham Abbey

1541–2: Canterbury Cathedral

By 1544: Chapel Royal