

SECRETARY'S NEWSLETTER: No.105: Summer 2025

From the Officers, c/o:
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The Hymn Society Website: www.hymnsocietygbi.org.uk

Congratulations are in order ...

Two of our members have been honoured this year by the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM):

- The Rev'd Canon Dr Gordon Giles becomes a Fellow of the RSCM, awarded for 'achievements in church music ... of internationally recognised significance, or for exceptional musical ... work within the RSCM which has had an impact at a national level.'
- And for 'achievements in church music ... of nationally recognised significance, or for important musical ... work within the RSCM which has had an impact regionally' John Crothers becomes an Associate of the RSCM.

See <https://www.rscm.org.uk/rscm-honorary-awards-2025/> for the details of other people who have been honoured similarly.

Subscription Renewals 2025 and 2026

As noted in the previous Newsletter (No.104: Spring 2025), most Hymn Society subscriptions are renewable each January. From the start of 2026 new rates will apply, as follows: UK and Ireland, Single Membership: £30.00; UK and Ireland, Couples: £35.00; UK and Ireland, Student Membership: £15.00. Joint memberships of our sister societies can be added: for HSUSC, add £20.00; and for IAH, £10.00.

Many members now pay by Standing Order for which we are very grateful. If you are among these, please make the necessary updates to your Order now, ahead of the end-of-year rush. If, also, you have not yet paid your 2025 subscription, please do so.

Please raise any questions on your subscription status with our Treasurer, Michael Garland (michaelgarland368@btinternet.com).

Canterbury Dictionary

Remember that one of the benefits of belonging to the Society is access to over 6,000 articles on the online Canterbury Dictionary (<https://hymnology.hymnsam.co.uk/>). A separate annual subscription would probably cost more than your Hymn Society membership, and there is always something fascinating to read there. For access details see the Members' Resources section of our own website.

John Newton at 300: Day Conference, City Church, York, Saturday 1st November

A celebration of John Newton's life and work will be held at City Church, York on 1st November. Speakers will include:

- Dr Graham Beynon (Head of FIEC Local Ministries), giving a biographical overview of Newton's life
- Dr Daniel Johnson (London School of Theology), on Newton as a hymn writer (Daniel spoke at our 2024 Conference on Isaac Watts)
- Professor Ian Shaw (York), on the friendships Newton sustained with many other key eighteenth-century Christians

There will be a parallel children's track throughout the Saturday.

There is no charge for the event but registration is required by 20th October. For more details including registration and directions, visit <https://www.churchhistoryconference.org.uk/conference>.

Dr Graham Beynon will also speak at the Sunday morning service at York Evangelical Church (<https://yec.org.uk>) the following day, on the theme of 'Amazing Grace.'

90th Anniversary

The Society was founded in 1936, which makes next year our ninetieth birthday. We intend to celebrate in various ways, including a hymn competition, as well as during our 2026 Conference. Watch for further announcements. If you have images or reminiscences, please send these to Gillian Warson (gillian@prattgreentrust.org.uk).

Annual Conferences

Along with thanks for all who contributed to our Conference in July this year, please note the headline details for our 2026 Conference. This will be held at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire from Tuesday 21 to Friday 24 July 2026. Details of the programme will follow nearer the time, but for now, please note the dates – and remember that for anyone who would find the costs prohibitive, applications to the conference bursary fund are welcome.

We welcome new members who recently joined the Society:

Michael Afugu (Ghana)
Iona Bennion Roberts (Edinburgh)

We regret having to report the deaths of members:

The Rev'd Paul Bigmore (Cardiff)
Mrs Gwen Hall (Stowmarket)
The Rev'd Ambrose Wright (Plymouth)

Robert Canham writes: Paul Bigmore (d. 21st October 2024) was a Church of Wales priest who served in Ynyshir in the Rhondda Valley. He joined the Society in 2016, the same year publishing his book of hymns, *Songs Of Praise The Valleys Sing* with new words set to once very well-known Welsh tunes. It was part of his life-long passion to rekindle the culture of hymn singing and give such tunes a new lease of life using words people could understand and remember. Having been seriously ill for several weeks during the Covid pandemic, Paul described his fourth collection, *Reflecting on a Journey*, as 'my way of thanking people for their kindness to me and offering them hope, love and light as they too face difficult days.'

Mrs Gwen Hall died aged 99 on 12th July. She was a pioneering lay leader in the Congregational Church of England and Wales (CCEW) and subsequently, after involvement in its formation, in the United Reformed Church. She was the first woman chair of the Council of the CCEW and first Chairman of the URC's Church Life Committee.

Our previous Newsletter (No.104: Spring 2025) reported the death of **Mr James Ransome** (Colchester). Jim, as he was latterly known, joined the Society in 2005 and, until ill-health prevented him, was a regular conference attendee. With his banking background, Jim had an assiduous eye for detail and contributed invaluable as copyright editor for *Praise!* (2000). He was also cousin to our members Bishop Clive Young (d. 2015) and our former Secretary Robert A. Canham.

We also note the deaths of three people who, while not among our membership, will be known by name to many of us:

Hal H. Hopson, a prolific composer, arranger and church musician in the United States, died on 20th July 2025 aged 92. His work included the cantata *God with Us* which was chosen during the American Bicentennial celebrations (1976) for inclusion in a time capsule to be opened in 2076. The cantata, judged representative of the choral music of its age, may then be performed.

Bishop Jeffery Rowthorn was born in Wales in 1934 and studied at Cambridge and subsequently at Union Theological Seminary, New York; he later taught at Union and at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. Among his hymns are 'Creating God, your fingers trace' and 'Lord, you give the great commission' which is found in at least half a dozen current hymnals. Jeffrey Rowthorn died on 23rd July, aged 91.

The Rev'd Kathy Galloway, from 2001 the first woman to lead the Iona Community, has been described as a compassionate and radical voice for justice and a wise and powerful leader; but in describing herself, 'poet' came first, before preacher, theologian and activist. Among her most widely-published texts are 'Oh the life of the world is a joy and a treasure' and 'Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation'. Kathy Galloway was born in 1952; she died in August 2025 after a short illness.

Charles Wesley's house in Bristol: open to the public

The house where Charles Wesley lived in Bristol from 1766 to 1771 has been restored and is open for pre-booked visits, either as part of a public tour or as a group booking. Tickets can be booked for the house alone or combined with a visit to John Wesley's New Room. See <https://www.newroombristol.org.uk/charles-wesleys-house/>.

From Chris Idle (August 2025)

'At the time of writing I am in King's College Hospital with various infections.

'I tuned into a Sunday Service and wondered why, compared with the quality of the preaching, prayers and communion liturgy, the accompanying hymns and songs were so poor. So, it being Sunday, I did my best to remedy this by singing a couple of Easter hymns on the ward!

'I hope that by the time this reaches you, I will be much better.

'One consolation is that the hymn which Sue Gilmurray composed and I wrote for Christian CND, 'Let us raise our voice for the sake of the planet' has been widely used in worship marking the eightieth Anniversaries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.'

Our prayers are with you, Chris, for a full recovery!