

We are very grateful to Sue Acland and the fine ladies of Bloxworth for their refreshments.

Please do join us afterwards at the village club and raise a glass to our illustrious past and to a bright future.

Donations after the service are much appreciated and needed to cover the service sheet printing and to support the extensive repairs needed to the church this year.

A list B faculty has now been granted and we are working hard to try and save this Grade 1 listed building.

We have a new email address for administering our work which is to Robert Heaton at:

dorsetcarols@protonmail.com

A COLLECTION OF DORSET CAROLS



BY

W.A. PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE

1926 TO 2026 CENTENARY SERVICE

Welcome to the Dorset Carols Centenary

Welcome to the 100th ‘Dorset Carols’ service, here with the singers and orchestra in the glorious acoustics of St Andrew’s Church, Bloxworth. This centenary service paper contains the story of how the carols were collected, performed and finally published in 1926. In this special year, there is much to tell you about what we are doing for the future, and how we are building upon this unique Dorset heritage.

The first two carols will be conducted by Richard Hall, who completes his remarkable 50 years of leading and conducting these precious ancient tunes. It is hard to state just what an important act of dedication and service to music Richard has bestowed upon us. It all started as soon as he came back to Dorset on his motorbike, fresh from Durham University. He has now safely delivered these carols into the hands of his successor, musician and cartoonist, Lyndon Wall, who has worked with Richard at the Rural Music School for many years. We are delighted to welcome Lyndon, who has long played in the Dorset Carols orchestra and we know will maintain the traditions of the past.

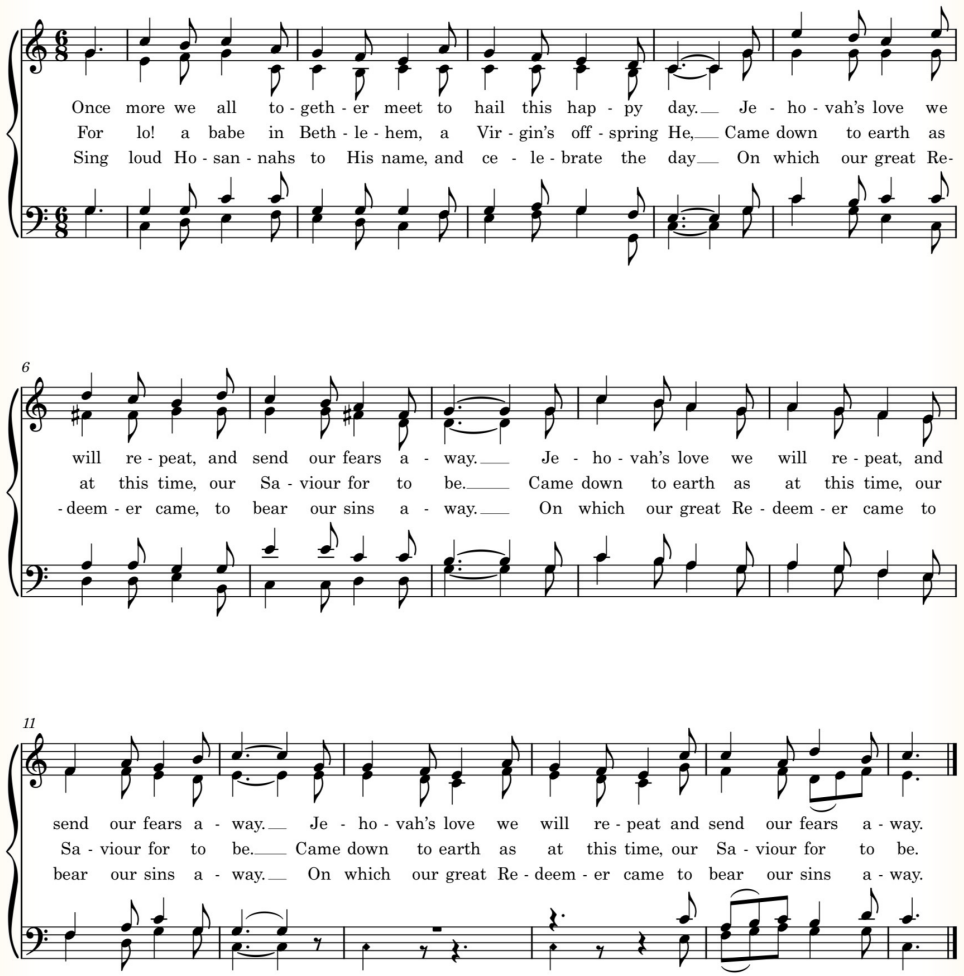
This year, the entire carol book has been transcribed to make it easier to read and perform for the singers by Kerry Fryer. It’s an enormous task for which we are all most grateful. But it means we are moving with the times, as fewer singers grow up in church choirs, but singing is as popular as ever, and with the orchestra, we are attracting new members to our benches.

Thomas Hardy’s poems remain a key feature of the service, and he was an enthusiastic player and singer of these carols, along with his father and grandfather. We are planning a major event with the Thomas Hardy Society to mark the centenary of Thomas Hardy’s death early in January 2028. This will include a book, which is the publication of all the carols and far more about the intrepid gentlemen of the time who left their mark on the world.

Carol 37

Once more we all together meet

Whilst the whole carol book will be published next year,
here is the first carol that we always open the service with.



The Noisy Band

When Willie Pickard-Cambridge published his ‘Dorset Carols’ volume in 1926, his hope (expressed in the preface to the book) was to “preserve, in a manner that may … commend them to educated choirs, some of the best [carols] which for at least a century and a quarter have been sung in Dorset villages…” He goes on to explain that the core of the collection was a group that he knew had been sung in Bloxworth since at least the early 19th century, and that to extend his book he had chosen examples from other collections that had come into his possession from elsewhere in Dorset.

Like others of his family, William had keen antiquarian interests and so saw his task as preserving something which he felt to be in danger of disappearing. But he clearly hoped that he would also be injecting new life into the carols by presenting them in a form which he hoped would “commend them to educated choirs”; to do this, he admits to “feeling compelled to rewrite [the music] rather freely”. Comparing the versions in his book to the ‘unimproved’ versions to be found in surviving manuscripts found elsewhere (sadly the bulk of his collection, which amounted to “some hundreds” of carols, was destroyed in the Second World War), one understands his using the term “rather freely”. While he leaves the melodies largely untouched, his harmonisations and the textural layout clearly conform strictly to the conventions of academic musical syntax current at the turn of the 20th century. However questionable this practice may seem to 21st century musicologists, he can hardly be blamed for approaching his task as he did; authenticity in the performance of earlier music was in its infancy in 1926. The carols presented in their rough native dress would have stood little chance of being taken seriously at that time and would surely have remained unperformed and unappreciated. And sad to say, there is little evidence that “educated choirs” outside mid-Dorset took much interest in the carols, even after they had had their faces washed and their hair combed.

But at Bloxworth, William’s efforts were most certainly successful. The village musicians who had taken care of the musical aspects of worship in rural churches, for whom these carols were part of a living tradition, had largely died out by the end of the 19th century. So to ensure that the carols would still be performed each Christmas, he would bring parties of male students from Oxford down to join ladies from local Dorset choirs; and thus annual performances were given each Christmas in the Rectory, the church or the Parish Hall. After his death in 1957, the direction of the performances passed to other hands and the link with Oxford disappeared. But the tradition lived on and still does. Other groups specialising in the performance of music of this type have sprung up of late in Dorset and further afield. But none of these can boast, as Bloxworth can, an unbroken tradition of performance stretching back for well over two centuries. This is a record surely unequalled elsewhere in Southern England if not further afield and something of which Bloxworth should surely be proud. One detects a less than enthusiastic tone in the entry his grandmother made in her diary on Christmas Day 1828 – “the singers have come again with their noisy band”. We hope and trust that our efforts 198 years later meet with a more positive reception and that the carols may continue to make their unique contribution to Bloxworth’s Christmas celebrations for many years to come.

Short history by Richard Hall

Dorset Carol Service

St Andrew’s Church, Bloxworth

Sunday 13 December 2026 3pm

Carol 37	Once more we all together meet
Welcome	by the Rev. Jane Williams
Hymn	On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry
Handing on the baton	Dr. Richard Hall hands over Dorset Carols to Lyndon Wall after 50 years of service
Carol 21	Behold! the day is come
First Lesson	St Matthew tells of the birth of Jesus
Carol 27	How beauteous are their feet
Carol 10	What joyful news to us is told
Second Lesson	St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus
Congregational Carol 42	A Virgin, most pure (verses 3 & 5 choir only)
Reading	Thomas Hardy’s views on the power of Christmas music
Carol 29	Behold what news we bring
Carol 9	Shepherds keeping watch by night
Third Lesson	The shepherds go to the manger
Carol 28	Hark, shepherds, how the angels sing
Fourth Lesson	The Wise Men are led by the star to Jesus
Carol 40	Jesus, my bright morning star
Prayers	
Hymn	O come, all ye faithful (without descant)

The congregation is invited to join in the singing of the two hymns and Carol 42, the words of which are included overleaf.

Congregational Hymns and Carol

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

1 On Jordan's bank the
Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is
nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he
brings
Glad tidings of the King of
kings!

2 Then cleansed be every breast
from sin;
Make straight the way for God
within;
Prepare we in our hearts a home
Where such a mighty guest may
come.

3 For thou art our salvation,
Lord,
Our refuge and our great
reward;
Without thy grace we waste
away,
Like flowers that wither and
decay.

4 To heal the sick stretch out
thine hand,
And bid the fallen sinner stand;
Shine forth, and let thy light
restore
Earth's own true loveliness
once more.

5 All praise, eternal Son, to
thee,
Whose advent sets thy people
free,
Whom with the Father we
adore,
And Holy Ghost for evermore.

Charles Coffin, translated by John Chandler

Carol 42
A Virgin most pure

Verses 3 & 5: choir only

1 A Virgin most pure as the prophets did tell
Hath brought forth a baby as it hath befell
To be our Redeemer from death, hell and sin
Which Adam's transgression had wrapped us in.

Refrain after each verse
Rejoice and be merry, set sorrow aside,
Christ Jesus our Saviour was born on this tide.

2 In Bethlehem, a city in Jewry, it was,
Where Joseph and Mary together did pass,
And there to be taxed with many one mo,
For Cæsar commanded the same should be so.

3 But when they had entered the city so fair,
The number of people so mighty was there
That Joseph and Mary, whose substance was small,
Could get in the city no lodging at all.

4 Then they were constrained in a stable to lie,
Where oxen and asses they used to tie;
Their lodging so simple, they held it no scorn:
But against the next morning our Saviour was born.

5 The King of all glory to the world being brought,
Small store of fine linen to wrap Him was sought;
When Mary had swaddled her young Son so sweet,
In an ox's manger she laid Him to sleep.

6 Then God sent an Angel from heaven so high,
To certain poor shepherds in fields where they lie,
And bid them no longer in sorrow to stay,
Because that our Saviour was born on this day.

7 Then presently after the shepherds did spy
A number of Angels appear in the sky,
Who joyfully talked, and sweetly did sing
"To God be all glory, our Heavenly King."

O come, all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to
Bethlehem;
Come and behold him,
Born the King of angels.

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

2 God of God, Light of Light,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's
womb;
Very God, begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

3 Sing, choirs of angels, sing in
exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven
above;
Glory to God in the highest.

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Translated by Frederick Oakeley and others

The Pickard-Cambridges and Dorset Carols

In 1926, William Adair Pickard-Cambridge, classicist, composer and don at Worcester College, Oxford, gathered together, edited and published *A Collection of Dorset Carols*. Each year in mid-December, the choir and instrumentalists at Bloxworth Church perform a selection of these carols with much gusto, interspersed with dramatic readings from Thomas Hardy and William Barnes. Generations of Dorset families, including Thomas Hardy's own family, grew up with the 'West Gallery' tradition and these wonderful, lively local carols.

William ('Willie') Pickard-Cambridge

William ('Willie') Pickard-Cambridge was born in Bloxworth, Dorset, on 14 December 1879. In addition to *Dorset Carols*, he composed and published many hymns and is also remembered for his translations of Aristotle. He died on 4 March 1957 in Poole.





The Revd Octavius Pickard-Cambridge

Willie's father, Octavius, was born in 1828 in Bloxworth rectory and was tutored at home by William Barnes. He studied at Durham and was ordained in 1858. He became an eminent Victorian naturalist, Rector of Bloxworth, a Fellow of the Royal Society and a world-renowned arachnologist. His many published works include *The Spiders of Dorset*. He died in 1917.

British Arachnological Society

We are working with the 'British Arachnological Society' to further understand how Reverend Octavius, working from his Rectory in Bloxworth, made it an international centre for the study and identification of spiders. In 1885, he was the first naturalist to record the rare Bloxworth Blue butterfly in Britain, following the discovery of two specimens by his sons on Bloxworth Heath.