

The Psalms in metre

Preface

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Table of Contents

What this site is about	5
How to find what you are looking for	5
Copyright IP etc	6
UK copyright	9
How to use this collection	10
1. Liturgical Rules	10
The Lectionary:-	11
Service of the Word:-	11
Morning and Evening Prayer:-	11
Compline:-	11
Holy Communion:-	11
Daily Prayer:-	11
Book of Common Prayer:-	11
2. A Plea for more Imaginative Arrangements	12
3. Metre	12
The Three Standard Metres	12
Other metres	15
4. Table of Abbreviations	16
5. Some useful links	16
The Words	17
1. The problem with Psalms	18
2. The three solutions to the Problem	18
The first option	18
The second option	18
The third option	19
3. The translation tension	19
4. Why Common Metre	21
5. The traditional versions	22
A. Sternhold and Hopkins (SH) – the Old Version	22
B. Tate and Brady (TB) – the New Version	23
C. Rous (R) – the Scottish Version	23
D. Isaac Watts (W) – the Dissenters' Version	25
E. Other versions	26
6. Doxologies in various metres	26
CM	26
Milton's version	26
LM	26
SM	26
10,10,10,10	26
10,10,11,11 – (Ps 104 metre)	27
8,7,8,7	27
888 888	27
866888 – Ps 121 metre	27
Ps 122 metre	27
668668	28
888866 – Ps 125 metre	28
6666 4444 – Ps 148 metre	28
7676D	28

7,7,7,7 7,7	28
The Tunes	28
1. Fuguing Tunes	29
2. Sources for additional tunes	30
Playford	30
Praise and Glory	31
hymnary.org	31
The West Gallery sites referred to on the Links page	31
About me	31

What this site is about

“The service should normally include a psalm or psalms”.

Common Worship (CW) page 27 note 6.

Every clergy-person on being appointed to any post declares before the congregation committed to their charge that he or she “*will only use the forms of services which are authorised or allowed by Canon*”. Yet how widely are most parishes following the instruction above?

There is a very good reason why they are not. For about 110 years, 1860-1970, it was normal for congregations to chant the psalms in prose. There are still plenty of people living, elderly or in late middle age, who experienced this. Alas, although it may sound beautiful sung by a trained cathedral choir on Radio 3 on a Wednesday afternoon, for ordinary people prose sung that way is as good as unsingable.

Yet the canonical command is not just an inconvenient relic from the past. It is saying something important. Hymns are one of the treasures of British worship. Many are profoundly inspired by scripture. Even so,

singing scripture itself is different and is special.

It is not the same as singing Charles Wesley’s, Graham Kendrick’s or even Keith Getty’s spiritual thoughts inspired by scripture.

This site provides a downloadable psalter in metre, with at least one suggested tune for each psalm, designed so that ordinary people can sing them.

How to find what you are looking for

Before you copy or download anything, you must first read the section on copyright.

By doing anything with any material on this site, you do so on the basis that that you have read and that you accept that section and all licences in it EVEN IF you have not read that section. If you do not agree with those terms, you must not copy or download anything.

To make the downloads manageable, the Psalter is batched in its five books. Because of the length of Psalm 119, Book 5 is divided into two. All are in pdf format. They are set out as A4 but the formatting should mean they can be printed as booklets in A5 if your printer can do this.

In addition, there are:-

Book 6 which contains the more used Canticles and some of the less familiar ones.

A tunebook (this is a bulky download), containing all the tunes grouped by metre.

A Preface containing the permanent material on this site. The doxologies are in this document and duplicated at the end of Book 5B.

A table setting out what tune goes with which Psalm and suggesting uses for particular Psalms and Canticles.

I have aspirations

- To use the Blog page to give news and share other ideas on the use of this material, and
- To make the tunes available in a format so that they can be imported into music writing software.
- To add further Canticles.

I would like to express my appreciation for Mrs Jackie Stephenson of Bristol without whose assistance, this website would not exist, and MuseScore (see Links page) which is the software I have used for typesetting music.

Copyright IP etc

One of the main reasons for producing this collection is to provide a resource which people can freely use to worship God, without requiring permission or payment.

I disapprove very strongly indeed of people who assert copyright in religious works so as to take a rent off other peoples' worship. I know that there are musicians and hymn writers who will disagree on this, who take the line that it is part of the labourer being worthy of his hire, but I have my view, I believe it to be the only right one and I am sticking to it.

I disapprove even more strongly of people who make small alterations to words or music that are out of copyright and then seek to assert copyright in their alterations so as to claim copyright fees on their use. That is an abomination. Those that do that should consider seriously the implications this might have for the destiny of their immortal souls.

I have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that everything in the whole of this collection is out of copyright, appears by permission (where this is the case it is referred to in the collection) or is my own work, licensable by me as below.

The copyright position of this collection is as follows:-

I. Words:-

- 1.1 Any words that come directly from Sternhold and Hopkins (SH), Tate and Brady (TB), The Scottish Psalter (Roux – R) or Isaac Watts (W) are long out of copyright.
- 1.2 I assert copyright and moral right in everything I have written or altered, i.e. marked DBT, SHa, TBa etc. The 'a' indicates that I have altered it. I am doing this primarily so as to stop anyone else who might want to make money out of them from doing so.
- 1.3 Until further notice you are free to use all such material in worship free of charge subject to the following conditions only,
 - If you try different tunes for them you must tell me about it and whether the tunes worked or not, and
 - You can change the words to make them flow better, provided your improved words are either as accurate or more accurate as translations as mine And provided you make your altered version available to me on the basis that if I wish I can publish it on this site and for general use on at least as free terms as I make my versions available.

Otherwise, you may not alter them at all,

2. Music:-

- 2.1 I assert copyright and moral right in everything I have written or altered e.g. by the addition of an additional part. This is primarily to stop anyone else who might want to make money out of them from doing so.
- 2.2 You are free to alter, re-arrange or write a new setting or instrumentation of any music in this collection and until further notice to use it in worship free of charge provided you make your version available to me on the basis that if I wish I can publish it on this site and for general use on at least as free terms as I make the music in this collection available.
- 2.3 Otherwise, you may not alter such music at all,

3. Both Words and Music:-

- 3.1 This is published in England and Wales under the law of England and Wales.
- 3.2 You may use in worship any words in this collection with any tune whether in this collection or not, and may use in worship any tune in this collection with any words whether in this collection or not, but it is up to you to ensure that whatever words or tune you use is,
 - out of copyright where you are, or
 - used in accordance with the terms of this licence, or

- used in accordance with whatever licence you may have to use it.

4. Additional:-

- 4.1 If you wish to publish any of the material in which I claim copyright or to issue works using them as recordings or similar of any sort, or to make any other use of them outside the scope of clauses 1.2 and/or 2.2 above, you may only do so with my permission. This though is likely to be acceptable without a fee if the work as a whole (and not just the contribution from this collection) is made available for use on terms broadly comparable to 1.3 and/or 2.4 above.
- 4.2 You may not use any of the material in which I claim copyright in any way that involves people paying either for the material or anything with the material in it, without my permission which, if given at all, is likely involve your paying a fee. Nor, irrespective of payment, may you make, sell or distribute printed versions either of the whole or any selection from this collection without such permission.
- 4.3 You may print off copies or project them for use in worship. That includes rehearsal for worship and the provision of service books for permanent use in any congregation provide you do not sell them or charge for them in any way.
- 4.4 For the purposes of all these clauses
 - ‘permission’ only includes permission in writing from me or from a person authorised by me to give it,
 - ‘worship’ includes weddings, funerals and any other religious service.

5. Miscellaneous:-

- 5.1 It is particularly up to you to satisfy yourself as to the intellectual property position of any words or music you use if you are using any of the material in this collection in some jurisdiction other than England and Wales.
- 5.2 I also assert copyright and moral right in the text of this site.
- 5.3 As far as I have been able to ascertain, everything in this collection is out of copyright in England and Wales or covered by the licence here, but I do not warrant that. Use is at your own risk. If you wish to claim that you or anyone else does have any rights in any item, you must contact me, with a full and persuasive justification in writing for that claim. For reference, though, the only items on which I am aware of any possible doubt, since in both cases I do not know the date of death of the original author, are

- the words to one of the versions of Psalm 46,
- the words to the CM version of Psalm 124, and
- One of the versions of Old 81st, which is by permission of Rollo Woods of Praise and Glory.
- The version of St Stephen the tune to Psalm 90 in this collection which comes from P&G and other West Gallery sources.

UK copyright

Copyright law can be very complicated, but the principles are fairly straightforward. This is a summary. It may not be relied on. If you have any queries, you will need to take proper legal advice. The governing law currently is in Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

A writer or composer has copyright in their creative production throughout their life and for seventy years after their death. This is so whether or not they put a © notice on it. Copyright expires, though, not on the seventieth anniversary of one's death but at midnight on December 31st of that year. So, irrespective of their dates of death, from 1st January 2015, the works of everyone who died in 1944 came out of copyright and into the public domain.

There are three exceptions to this, the first of which, in this context, is the most relevant and important. This is that the Crown has perpetual copyright by Royal Prerogative, administered by Cambridge University Press, in the Authorised Version and the Book of Common Prayer.

The second, which is in practice less critical, is that if a work is of unknown authorship, the seventy years is measured from when it was made, unless it was published during that period, in which case the seventy years runs from publication. What this means, is that anything anonymous or classed as 'trad' which was published more than seventy years ago, is now safely in the public domain. Besides, an anonymous person can hardly do very much to claim rights are theirs unless they can demonstrate who they are and how they claim to be the author. So the main situation where this is likely to apply is probably where 'the author' is a company.

The third is that until 1st January 1996, the period was fifty years. The transitional provisions were controversial and complicated. They had the effect that most, but not all, works affected by the change of date that were out of copyright, went back into it again. It is therefore possible that there may be some works of those who died in 1945 which appear to be in copyright but are not. This will cease to be an issue at the end of 2015.

More than one copyright can exist in the same work. So, where I have added an alto line to a work by Playford, I have copyright in my setting. However, that does not give me copyright in the original. It is not possible that way to acquire a possessory title in somebody else's work or to anything that is in the public domain. Nor, contrary to some peoples' belief, does one acquire copyright by finding an old manuscript, doing research on it or even owning it.

There is also a quite separate copyright in the layout/typesetting of published works. For them the copyright period is twenty-five years from publication. There is copyright in the reproduction of a recording for seventy years from first publication.

In addition to copyright, there is also 'moral right', which is the right to be identified as author and to restrain distortion or modification of a work that would be prejudicial to his or her 'honour or reputation'. In the UK, moral right must be expressly asserted but in many jurisdictions it is automatic.

The copyright regime for most countries in the world follows fairly similar principles, the main difference being the various periods. The main exception is the United States whose copyright law is unpredictable and bears little resemblance to that anywhere else.

With very few exceptions now, most countries have signed up to a convention which has the effect that if a work is recognised as under copyright in the country of first publication, it is also protected elsewhere, but under the copyright principles there, not in the place of first publication. In the UK, if a work's place of first publication was in a country with a shorter period, that period will also apply in the UK in stead of the UK's period.

If it was first published in a country with a longer period, it will enter the public domain in the UK on the same day as it would have become public domain if first published here.

How to use this collection

This is a group of pages with ideas on how to use this collection.

I. Liturgical Rules

The full version of the quotation from Common Worship on the front page is,

“The service should normally include a psalm or psalms. These might be said or sung in the traditional way, but it is also possible to use a metrical version, a responsive form or a paraphrase such as can be found in many current hymn books. The psalm may occasionally be replaced by a song or

canticle the words of which are taken directly from Scripture: a 'scriptural song'.

A scriptural song is not a song inspired by scripture. It is a text of scripture like the *Benedictus*, *Magnificat* or *Nunc Dimittis*, which people sing but which comes from elsewhere in the Bible. They are often referred to as Canticles and this is the convention in this collection. There is a tacit convention that some other very ancient hymns come within this parameter. The most well known of these are the *Te Deum* and *Phos Hilaron*.

The Lectionary:-

The lectionary provides psalms daily for Morning and Evening Prayer/Services of the Word and for Holy Communion.

Service of the Word:-

From the grammar of the rubrics in Common Worship, it appears that on a Sunday there must be at least one psalm or canticle in a Service of the Word.

Morning and Evening Prayer:-

For full Morning Prayer, the appointed psalmody for the day must be used together with an Old Testament Canticle and the *Benedictus*. For Evening Prayer it is the appointed psalmody, a New Testament Canticle and the *Magnificat*. In both cases an additional opening Canticle is optional.

Compline:-

For Compline, the *Nunc Dimittis* must be used. The other psalms are optional.

Holy Communion:-

It is ambiguous whether the appointed psalm is obligatory in Holy Communion Order One, although it seems generally to be assumed it is not. It is optional in Order Two.

Daily Prayer:-

For Daily Prayer, the position is broadly similar, except that there are permitted alternatives to the *Benedictus* and *Magnificat*. Whether it is strictly permissible or not, if one is not going to be saying Compline, at Evening Prayer having the *Magnificat* as the middle canticle and the *Nunc Dimittis* where the *Magnificat* is in the book, rather in the style of 1662, works well.

Book of Common Prayer:-

The psalms and canticles are compulsory in 1662 Morning and Evening Prayer. It seems to have been unclear since at least the C17 whether a metrical version may replace the prose version or not.

2. A Plea for more Imaginative Arrangements

For each psalm there is at least one version in metre, with a tune in that metre. Almost all of the tunes are of the type of traditional hymn tunes. They do not, though, have to be sung that way.

We are all familiar now with the Common Metre hymn, *Amazing Grace*. Most people may be surprised to be told that until the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards produced their pipe version of it in the 1970s, this tune, *New Britain*, was almost unknown in the UK. If known at all, it would have been sung in a regular four part harmony version to organ or piano, with no gracing and no rhythmical fluidity. As such, that makes a depressingly dull tune. If one listens to the typical British congregation singing what is now a well known hymn, they instinctively and unwittingly still add grace notes where a piper puts them.

There is every good reason to do similar things with any tune. No arrangement that is out of copyright is sacrosanct. Any tune that dates from before about 1850 will originally neither to have been sung nor played in the style of a typical robed choir accompanied by the organ.

Most people will be aware that the original English Hymnal introduced a number of tunes that were arrangements in hymn style of traditional folk melodies that had been collected by folkloric enthusiasts of the time. There is no reason why one should not reverse engineer them.

There are few examples in this collection of tunes presented in 'folk' style rather than conventional hymn style, with a melodic line with suggested guitar chords.

3. Metre

Fundamental to using this collection is a simple understanding of metre. Most singable English verse is written in metre. It is the fact that it is not translated into metrical form which renders prose psalters unsingable by ordinary people.

Rhythm is dependent on the sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables. It can be quite a complicated subject, but is best learnt by becoming familiar with hearing it. In the most widely used English rhythm, the stressed syllable follows the unstressed one. This pattern is called iambic. It is important to realise that not all stresses or 'unstresses' are equal. Combinations of syllables that ought not to work, do and combinations that ought to work, do not.

The Three Standard Metres

The majority of psalms and tunes in this collection are written in what is called **Common Metre (CM)** or ballad metre e.g. *'While shepherds watched their*

flocks by night and *there is a house in New Orleans*. Set out as poetry, this pattern is:-

~ - ~ - ~ - ~ -
~ - ~ - ~ -
~ - ~ - ~ - ~ -
~ - ~ - ~ -

The first two syllables often both carry a stress, known as a spondee.

For hymn tunes, the convention is to count the number of syllables in each line, for classification purposes ignoring the stress pattern. So Common Metre is 8 6 8 6.

If there are eight syllables in each line, that is 8 8 8 8 and known as **Long Metre (LM)** e.g. *The Old Hundredth* and *Waly Waly*.,

The pattern 6 6 8 6 is known as **Short Metre (SM)** e.g. *Blest are the pure in heart*. It is thought originally to have been a dance metre.

An eight line tune which repeats one of those patterns twice is described as **Double Common Metre (DCM), (DLM) or (DSM)** respectively. A typical double metre tune is *Kingsfold*, *I heard the voice of Jesus say*. This collection has tried to source more of these than there are in most hymn books. Indeed tunes in DLM are fairly rare. In some DCM tunes, the tune changes flavour between first and second part. *Vox Dilecti* is an attractive example.

As a further example, a psalm with four lines of ten syllables, or tune to fit that pattern, will be described as 10 10 10 10.

To work as a hymn tune, the rhythm in the music must be a workable fit to the rhythm of the words. Curiously, though, too regular, too correct, a correspondence between the theory and practice of both metre and rhythm can be a bit dull to sing.

This will all be familiar to most church musicians. There are though other features of this that are less familiar, and less widely appreciated.

First, one surprising thing about fitting words to music is that what works as poetry does not always work set to music. Likewise, hymns and metrical psalms are written to be sung. What does not read well on the page as poetry, indeed, something at which accomplished poets may sneer, may work well when set to music. In addition, verse that is only intended to be read, and is not written to be sung, can handle much more flexibility as to the actual number of syllables than verse that is to be sung. Secular folk soloists can also handle this in a way that church musicians are not free to do. Their role is not a performance. It is to enable the congregation to sing.

Second, different metres work differently. LM has four lines of equal length. CM does not. The first and third line in each verse are a foot longer than the

second and third. The usual convention with LM is that the last syllable of each line rhymes. In CM, usually only the second and fourth line need to rhyme.

A feature of CM that results from the length of the lines is there is a much more definite break between the second and third line than between first and second, or third and fourth. This is because notionally the ear hears and needs to experience the fourth empty foot at the end of the middle line in the verse. So Common Metre works better played and sung so that there is just a caesura, i.e. hardly any break, between the first and second line or between the third and fourth. The first two lines should be linked, but the relationship between them and the third or the third and the fourth is more fluid. To some extent this is also true of SM even though the two halves of the verse are not the same length.

Thoughts can comfortably run over between those lines. This is known as enjambment. Indeed, it adds variety and stimulus to singing them if the caesura in thought does not always coincide with the caesura on the page. However, with CM enjambment does not work at the break at the end of the six syllable line, i.e. between the second and third line. The various writers of SH and TB seem consciously or instinctively to have known this. The Roux (R) version breaks this principle fairly frequently. The examples invariably demonstrate why this does not work.

This collection has adopted the convention of setting out CM psalms that way, with a ~ between the 8 and 6 syllable lines. When, as often the case, that break comes before the penultimate note of the bar, it is likewise usually marked in the music as a " rather than by the insertion of a bar line. That is how CM tunes are best played. Treating a CM verse as four equally end-stopped lines with a full breathing space between each one is a bad practice, to be thoroughly deprecated. Most musicians already instinctively know this.

LM works quite differently. As each line is the same length, whether sung to a stately or a lively tune, though enjambment does work better between the first and second pair of lines than between the second and third, the lines are best treated musically as four distinct statements,

Third, and related to this, although there are many good tunes with 7 syllable lines, there are relatively few psalms or canticles in this collection written to them. Once one becomes used to writing six or eight syllable lines, it becomes surprisingly difficult to write seven syllable lines or to feel how to handle the spare syllable.

Fourth, modern fashion for verse dislikes unusual or distorted word order. So far as possible, the syntax of verse should be the same as conversational prose. This collection contains many altered versions of work written under different conventions. Furthermore, just as those who use buildings designed by architects of past ages say one should live with, rather than fight against,

their architecture, so one has to live with, rather than fight against, the rhythm of the metre in which one writes. One characteristic of most of these metres, is that they naturally place an emphasis on the words that rhyme. If that means the object of a verb has to be placed before a verb instead of after it, then so be it.

Furthermore, it is hard enough being faithful both to the meaning and the metaphor of the original text, and then rendering poetry in one language into singable verse in another. Measured against those demands, trying simultaneously to meet a preference for syntactical order that is often out of sympathy with the way the metre works, is well down the list of priorities of aspiration.

Other metres

148th metre. Not all the psalms in the collection are in the three standard metres. Psalm 148, for example, is in 6 6 6 6 4 4 4 4, often referred to as 148th metre. The best known tune in that metre is the one now sung to Baxter's 'Ye holy angels bright', but originally written for this psalm and known as Darwell's 148th.

Six line metres. There are some psalms written to six line metres. With those it is important to recognise that not all six line tunes fit the sense of six line verses. It depends how the verse is constructed. Most six line tunes in modern hymn books are written on the assumption that the verse consists of three pairs of lines. However, there are several traditional psalms which are written in six line verses with the lines grouped as two batches of three lines each. Psalm 37 is an example. The text is set out so as to show this. The two preceding lines build up to the third line and the sixth line respectively. Since form follows function, it is not appropriate to sing six line psalms to a tune which has the right number of lines but does not fit the way the sense is constructed in the verse.

Chant. Should you really wish to do so, it is possible to chant many of these psalms to CofE style chants. Since each verse is the same length, this would be monotonous for more than a few verses.

4. Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning	Notes
a	Altered by DBT	
ASB	Alternative Service Book	Interim modern CofE prayer book superseded by CW
BCP	Book of Common Prayer	Traditional CofE prayer book, dating from 1662.
CofE	Church of England	
CW	Common Worship	Current CofE prayer book
CWDP	Common Worship Daily Prayer	Has more Canticles than the basic CW
DBT	Dru Brooke-Taylor	(i.e. me, the author of this collection)
n.i.t.	not in tunebook	
P&G	Praise and Glory	Collection of psalms with music by Rollo Woods
Playford	Playford, the Whole Book of Psalms with the usual Hymns and Spiritual Songs	
R	Rous	i.e Scottish psalter
Ra	Rous altered as above	
SH	Sternhold & Hopkins	The Old Version
SHa	Sternhold & Hopkins altered as above	
TB	Tate & Brady	The New Version
TBa	Tate & Brady altered as above	
W	Watts Psalter Psalms and Spiritual Songs	
Wa	Watts altered as above	
WGMA	West Gallery Music Association	

5. Some useful links

Christian Copyright Licensing International - Important site but it is also important to realise that this organisation exists to represent the interests of writers and musicians, not users. <http://churches.ccli.co.uk>

Common Worship - downloadable in pdf and some other formats. Anybody who needs to draft services or choose music for them needs to know his or her way round either this or the printed versions of the texts.
<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts.aspx>

Copyright information from the UK government - <https://www.gov.uk/copyright/overview>

Francis Road's website - a West Gallery enthusiast and expert with a lot useful tunes etc (at the last count over 350), especially fuguing ones - <http://www.rodningmusic.co.uk>

hymnary.org (see above) – <http://www.hymnary.org>

MuseScore - free open source software for writing music. Virtually all the music in this collection has been typeset using this programme and I would like to express my appreciation of it - <http://musescore.org>

Music for the Church of God – A webarchive of this site with several complete metrical psalters, and suggestions for tunes. Sadly in autumn 2009 the organisation that hosted it seems to have killed of the original site. I do not know how long the archive will remain. The tune-links on the site no longer work. http://web.archive.org/web/20080120085853/www.cgmusic.com/workshop/psametre_frame.htm

Oremus – A large resource of hymn tunes etc. and liturgical material <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/>

Small Church - a website based in Australia, with a large stock of useful downloadable tunes in pdf, midi or mp3 format. <http://www.smallchurchmusic2.com>

Sue Glover's website - with some useful resources, including another article by me. <http://www.psalmody.co.uk/>

The West Gallery Music Association – essential for anyone interested in finding interesting ways of singing psalms and canticles. <http://www.wgma.org.uk/>

Village Carols - the website of Ian Russell's organisation based in Sheffield committed to all matters related to that area's remarkable tradition of Christmas Carols. - <http://www.villagecarols.org.uk/index.htm>

The Words

This section of the site is about the words for rendering psalms and canticles into metrical English. It contains the following sections.

1. The problem with Psalms

If there is a problem with the psalms, it's usually assumed to be that some are bloodthirsty, pre-christian and inappropriate for modern use. This only applies to a few of them, and even the presence in the book of Psalm 109 is a valuable warning against sanitised religion.

The more serious difficulty is that they were written in Hebrew. As scripture, as the hymnbook of the Bible, there is a feeling, which I endorse, that there is nothing quite compares with the psalms as being suitable for worship. However, Article 24 says that *'it is a thing plainly repugnant ... to have publick prayer ... in a tongue not understood of the people'*. We do not sing them in Hebrew but nor do the psalms translate directly into a form in which people can easily sing them in English.

2. The three solutions to the Problem

There have been three solutions.

The first option

is to translate them as prose and read them, either singly or together. Often the clergy and congregation read alternate verses.

For centuries the 'reading psalms' in the 1662 prayer book have been used this way as can, and are, the modern versions in CW. Extracts appear in various CW services set out with the leader's part and the congregation's part in a different type face so they can be used like this.

Hebrew metre and poesy do not survive translation. This method does, though, reproduce in English a striking feature of Hebrew poetry, the practice of splitting lines into two halves, very often with a repetition or a contrast in the second half; thus Psalm 119:105

Thy word is a lantern unto my feet : and a light unto my paths.

That is how it appears in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, but it is set out in a similar way in most Bibles and is known as parallelism. However, it falls short in one basic and fundamental way. The psalms were originally written to be sung. Furthermore, throughout Christian history, Christians have preferred to sing them if they could.

The second option

is to chant them as prose. Anyone familiar with the Church of England Morning and Evening Prayer as it was from the middle of the nineteenth century until about 40 years ago will know this is excellent if it works. It can be peculiarly satisfying to do it successfully. To misquote St Paul, 'I would that you all could'. But it is difficult for congregations and can be horrible.

There are other ways of doing this, that associated with Gelineau, for example, but they all give rise to the same problem.

Curiously, there has recently been a trend in some charismatic circles towards a more formless, unstructured, wafty way of singing, often with lines of irregular length and pattern. It has to be said, though, that many congregations find it very difficult to sing to music played in this style. It often seems to be played on the assumption that a praise band with a soloist does the actual work and the congregation just listens or moves vaguely in time to it.

Music versions of the 1662 psalter have 'pointing', vertical lines and other markings, to try and make this easier but even then, most churchgoers' knowledge of this was sketchy. Furthermore, musical geeks disagreed as to the best way to do it. The Alternative Service Book contained a pointed version of the psalter, but the one issued with CW is not pointed – which at least makes it easier to read.

What most people do not realise is that chanting prose badly is not the way of singing psalms that has the best claim to be Anglican tradition. Away from cathedrals, it was a mid nineteenth century innovation. From the Reformation until about 1860, if people sang psalms, rather than read them aloud, the normal way of doing so was to sing metrical versions of them, to what we now regard as hymn tunes. Something that English churchgoers now associate with the Church of Scotland, the Scots largely acquired from England. They may have got the idea from Geneva, but what they sing comes originally from Eton. This leads us naturally to ...

The third option

which is to render the psalms into a form of metre that fits singing in English – in practice this means some sort of regular scansion pattern and rhymes.

For three centuries (four in Scotland) congregations were accustomed to, and expected to, sing a metrical version of the psalter. A number of people tried to produce metrical versions of all or some psalms. This includes Milton. Only four versions are important. Some phrases from these versions would have been as familiar to our ancestors as the cadences of the Authorised Version or the Book of Common Prayer then, or Hymns Ancient and Modern to us now. Sung every week, they would have been part of every poet's childhood memories. They are unfamiliar to people now. One wonders what residue they have left, unrecognised, in our literary heritage.

3. The translation tension

Putting psalms into metre produces an immediate difficulty. It inhibits the translator's freedom to translate the words accurately or reproduce those features of Hebrew poetry that can be replicated in another language.

Chanting psalms as prose resolves that tension at the expense of adopting a solution that is so incompatible with the musical idioms of the target language that it has not proved capable of taking root in it. It also can only be done by people who have been specially trained.

A number of popular choruses have been built round individual verses, but it is probably beyond the work of a lifetime to produce a set of compositions in this mode to cover the entire psalter. They also tend to be fairly repetitive, which makes a whole psalm very long. Furthermore, as this is a recent style, most examples are likely to be governed by restrictive and expensive copyrights. This is not a suitable vehicle from which to produce a complete psalter as a key resource for liturgical use.

It would be great if God would raise up someone with the talent to do this in a more exciting way, but so far this has not happened. I suspect I was born thirty years too soon to be able to do this. There is a lot of scope for someone who,

- Can write modern music well,
- Can write singable words well (which is not the same as being a poet) AND
- Is willing to submit themselves to the text.

Of these three points, the third is particularly important. Much of what people think might cover the ground is seriously insufficient. For example,

- “*I lift my eyes to the quiet hills*” might be a nice evening hymn. It is undoubtedly inspired by Psalm 121, but it is a travesty of what Psalm 121 is actually about.
- “*As a deer pants for the water*” is inspired by Psalm 42, but it only renders two verses of it. After its first verse it goes off on a digression of its own. It is a worthy digression. It makes a good hymn. But it is not Psalm 42. It does not even address the sort of issues found in the next three verses,

3. *My tears have been my bread day and night:
while all day long they say to me, ‘Where is now your God?’*
4. *Now when I think on these things, I pour out my soul:
how I went with the multitude and led the procession to the house of
God,*
5. *With the voice of praise and thanksgiving:
among those who kept holy day. (CW).*

People do not usually write hymns about this sort of thing. Perhaps that is why so many of us like ‘*Abide with me*’. Songwriters don’t want to bare their souls that way. If they did, the festival circuit probably would not accept the results.

The psalms include things we probably do not want to sing (e.g. Ps 109), but because they are objectively 'just there', they provide us with a way of meeting some of the less comfortable areas of the Christian life or the human psyche.

The intention of this collection has to be to produce a singable version of each psalm that is as near as one can get to the scripture behind it as possible while being compatible with the metre one is using. As said earlier, singability is not the same thing as a good poem as poetry. Good poetry does not always fit a singable metre.

Inevitably, there have to be compromises. Where possible though, I have tried to retain as much as I can not just of the underlying thoughts of the original but its metaphors and idiom, even if sometimes this makes the translation less fluent. It is unsatisfactory to interpose one's own thoughts, spiritual responses or perceptions between the original and the worshipper. However worthy the motive, once one does that, one has failed.

4. Why Common Metre

Or for that matter, Long or Short Metre?

Many of the psalms in this collection are in one of these three metres. That is 'the tradition'. It would have been nice to have produced a psalter with a wider range of tunes, as used by French, Dutch or Hungarian Protestants. There are some in this collection which use different metres. As it happens, though, for all their faults, the traditional metres do have their advantages. Hymnologists criticise them for this, but I believe the original writers in the C16 who put the psalms into metrical English were instinctively right when they chose the metres they did.

First there are a lot of available tunes in these metres. They were already standard for English songs. Singing the same psalm to a different tune can change its flavour and make it suitable for a quite different context. Common Metre is sometimes known as ballad metre because of the number of ballads written in it.

Second, it is difficult fitting verses from a language where lines appear to be irregular in length into a language where the musical convention is that lines and phrases should be consistent in length. Nevertheless, the average psalm groups its thoughts in lengths that often seem to be about right for the line lengths of the three conventional metres.

This cannot be a coincidence, since this turns out not always to be the case when one is trying to versify canticles which are taken from other parts of the Bible or from other sources.

Third, the metres are fairly flexible and not too difficult to write in. The French and Dutch tunes are not familiar to English speakers, and their metres

do not necessarily fit English. The original is scripture. Fidelity to it means one should be cautious of inserting linguistic or poetical flourishes of one's own that are not in the text, or trimming sections that do not fit the metre. It would be much harder to make a psalm fit, say, a sonnet, without either having to omit elements or pad it out. One already begins to meet this issue when one chooses to put a psalm into a double 8 line form rather than a simpler 4 line form.

5. The traditional versions

There are a number of metrical versions of the psalms. Where a suitable traditional version is available, I have usually retained it, either as it stands or with some adaptation to try and make it better fit modern English.

I do not personally like mangling familiar hymns in the interests of theological disagreement, political correctness or a feeling that their phraseology is antiquated. I have not normally done this with a version which might still be familiar. I have felt less inhibited about doing so where the version chosen is unlikely to be familiar to a modern congregation in my own country (England), and particularly if the original translation seems to have been wrong.

A. Sternhold and Hopkins (SH) – the Old Version

The Old Version was produced at the time of the Reformation. It seems to have been (at least in part) a direct translation from Hebrew. The individual psalms were not a joint effort. Some versions indicate who translated which ones. It appeared in stages but was complete by some time in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. It was the standard version in England for some two centuries. It is simple, robust and earthy in style. It frequently verges on the doggerel, and contains many examples of uncouth phraseology to make words fit the metre. It has nevertheless been seriously argued in the past that it is a better translation than most others, including the prose versions. In the C17 and early C18 it was bound into most peoples' copies of the Bible or the Prayer Book.

Hebrew is a language very economical in words, and the Old Version is shorter than any other metrical version. In some respects it is individual. For example, most modern scriptural translations are reticent at Psalm 78:67 – The Good News Bible (1976) reads:

He [i.e. God] drove his enemies back in lasting and shameful defeat.

This is a reference to an episode in I Samuel 5 when the Ark of the Covenant fell into the hands of the Philistines. Among the consequences was that the Philistines were afflicted with what are in some versions described as tumours,

and others more specifically. The 1662 version catches what appears to be an intentional ambiguity in the Hebrew:-

He smote his enemies in the hinder parts : and put them to perpetual shame.

Hopkins is more explicit.

With em'rods in the hinder parts ~ his enemies he smote:

And put them unto such a shame ~ as should not be forgot.

The quality of the Old Version varies, but so does the quality of some of the Hebrew originals. Changes in language since the C16 mean that some psalms perhaps need alteration to scan in modern speech. Nevertheless, several people have commented how as one compares the various versions, and becomes familiar with them, gradually it is the Old Version that inspires the greatest affection. Many find a sturdy simplicity that later texts have lost.

Sadly, very few Old Version psalms have survived into modern hymn books, apart from the Old Hundredth, '*All people that on earth do dwell*'. It is a pity. A number of the psalms in this collection are sourced from it.

B. Tate and Brady (TB) – the New Version

At the end of the seventeenth century, Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady produced the New Version. Tate was Poet Laureate. The style is more elegant, but less vigorous. It has to be said that it has less of the flavour of the original Hebrew. By the time metrical psalms died out of use in England in the mid C19, the New Version seems to have been the one in general use, but it took a long time, something like a hundred years, to gain widespread acceptance. For much of the eighteenth century, the Old Version seems to have been the usual, familiar, 'what's good enough for King David's good enough for me' version.

The New Version continued to be bound into prayer books well up until the middle of the C19. I have a prayer book from as late as the 1840s with both versions bound into it.

Apart from *While Shepherds Watched*, which is the New Version paraphrase of part of St Luke, '*Through all the changing scenes of life*' is part of NV Psalm 34 and '*As pants the hart for cooling streams*' is part of NV Psalm 42. There are plenty of others whose eclipse one mourns. Particularly attractive are Psalm 139 in Long Metre and Psalm 148 in the metre customary for that psalm, both of which are in this collection.

C. Rous (R) – the Scottish Version

Most people these days if they think about them at all, assume metrical psalms are a Scottish phenomenon. The Scots have remained faithful to metrical

psalmody much longer than anyone else. Until the latest editions, the Church of Scotland Church Hymnary was produced bound with a metrical psalter. Music versions were printed in stable-door format. The pages in the psalter section are cut in half, with words on the bottom section and tunes on the top, so that one can easily turn up whichever tune is chosen for any particular psalm.

The version the Scots use, though, was not originally Scottish. It was produced by Francis Rous, Puritan MP and Provost of Eton at the time of the Civil War. It was adopted by the Church of Scotland to replace the Old Version, possibly because its author had Presbyterian sympathies, rather in the way that many modern evangelicals assume that the NIV is their translation.

This may upset some Scots, but this version is usually the least verbally successful. Both the Old Version and the Rous version share with Shakespeare, the feature that English pronunciation has changed over the centuries. Verse from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often does not scan because the 'ed' on the end of words was pronounced as a separate syllable instead of being run into the previous one as it usually is now. Despite that, though, the Rous version contains more examples than the other versions of grammar that has been twisted and inverted uncomfortably to fit the metre.

For a long time the Scots did not admit hymns or even accept the use of musical instruments in church. In Gaelic areas particularly this is often still the case. Until well into the nineteenth century there were only twelve approved tunes.

SH and TB have metrical versions of the Church of England canticles, but the Scottish psalter has a much fuller paraphrase section, containing other extracts of scripture, and largely added in the late C18.

By the 1929 edition of the Church Hymnary, which was produced at the time of the reunion, some psalms are recommended as 'most suitable for public worship'. Reading this, it is difficult to avoid inferring that the others are not. The modern edition of the Church Hymnary goes much further than the 1929 version. Like many hymn books, it groups hymns by topic. It has omitted the separate metrical psalter altogether, but included various favoured selected extracts from it with the other hymns in each of the topic sections. It has also added some modern versions.

The familiar version of the 23rd psalm, '*The Lord's my shepherd*' seems to be the only psalm widely known outside Scotland that comes from the Rous psalter. 'Crimond' is the name of the familiar tune, not the words. Nor is it the only tune associated with that psalm in Scotland.

D. Isaac Watts (W) – the Dissenters’ Version

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was dissenting minister, writing a generation after Tate and Brady. He put most of the psalms into metre, providing several versions of some of them. He also wrote a large number of paraphrases of other extracts of scripture and hymns. From childhood he seems to have had a remarkable ability to versify almost spontaneously.

Watts was much more relaxed than the others about fidelity to the original. His style is also more fluid. Many of his psalms are more like paraphrases, or even hymns inspired by a psalm. Other psalters very occasionally ‘christianise’ the Old Testament text. For example, the OV Psalm 2, for ‘*against the Lord, and against his Anointed*’, has ‘*Against the Lord and Christ his Son whom he among us sent*’. This, though, is unusual. Watts was far readier to do this or even to include thoughts which he felt suitable for christians even though they could hardly be in the original.

Thus several hundred years later at Ephesians 4:8, St Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 on Jesus’ ascension, ‘*Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive ...*’. Inspired by this, Watt’s expands Psalm 68:17-18 into four verses, headed ‘*Christ’s Ascension, and the Gift of the Spirit*’, and includes a stanza:

*Rais’d by his Father to the throne,
he sent the promis’d Spirit down,
With gifts and grace for rebel men,
that God might dwell on earth again.*

For Psalm 67 Watts renders ‘*O be joyful in God all ye lands : sing praises unto the honour of his Name, make his praise to be glorious*’ as:

*Shine, mighty God, on Britain shine
with beams of heavenly grace:
Reveal thy pow’r thro’ all our coasts,
and shew thy smiling face.*

This flexibility is a difference of approach that one either accepts or does not. I would imagine that most people would not regard the last example as acceptable.

Sometimes it works very well. Watts’ Psalm 90 ‘*O God our help in ages past*’ is still in every hymn book, though shortened, and altered. The original starts, ‘*Our God, our help in ages past*’. ‘*Joy to the world; the Lord is come*’ is Watts’ version of part of Psalm 98. The hymn (very popular in west gallery circles as New Jerusalem) ‘*Lo, what a glorious sight appears*’ is his version of Revelation 21:1-4. The excellent hymn ‘*Jesus shall reign, where’er the sun*’ is actually Watts’ version of part of Psalm 72. Excellent it may be as a hymn, but it would really be wrong to describe it as a metrical version of that psalm, or to sing it in lieu of a psalm.

It should only be described as a hymn inspired by the psalm rather than a metrical version of the psalm itself.

E. Other versions

There are a few psalms in this collection that come from other sources. This is indicated in their headnotes.

There are also some I have written myself. Usually these are where I have felt that none of the examples from traditional metrical psalters quite fulfilled what was required. Some are alternatives for where there is a traditional version which has a tune that might be unfamiliar or difficult to match. This is particularly the case with some of the Songs of Ascent, Pss 120-34, where SH's version is sometimes in an unusual metre, with an interesting and potentially attractive tune but of which many modern congregations might find difficult to get the measure.

6. Doxologies in various metres

CM

All Glory to the Father, Son, ~ and Spirit, One and Three:
As was, and is, and shall be so ~ through all eternity.

Milton's version

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost, ~ immortal glory be;
As was, is now, and shall be still ~ to all eternity.

LM

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost, ~ the God whom earth and heav'n adore,
Be glory as it was of old, is now, ~ and so shall be for evermore.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
praise him all creatures here below.
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

SM

To God, the Father, Son ~ and Spirit, glory be
As was, and is and shall be so, ~ to all eternity.

10,10,10,10

To God, our Father, and to God the Son
And God the Spirit let all glory be.
We worship ever three and ever one

As was, and is till all eternity.

All glory to the Father and the Son,
And to the Spirit, ever three in one:
As was and is, and ever more shall be
World without end for all eternity.

10,10,11,11 – (Ps 104 metre)

By angels in heav'n of ev'ry degree,
And saints upon earth, all praise be addressed:
To God in three persons, one God ever blest
As it has been, now is and always shall be.

8,7,8,7

And glory to the Father raise, ~ to Son and Holy Spirit,
Alpha and Omega we praise, ~ may we His life inherit.

88 88 88

Glory to Father and to Son ~ and Holy Spirit three in one.
As was when ages first begun ~ continues as time yet may run
Such as today might ever be ~ from now until eternity.

888 888

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
the God whom heav'n's triumphant host
And suffering saints on earth adore;
Be glory as in ages past,
as now it is, and so shall last,
When time itself shall be no more.

866888 – Ps 121 metre

Great glories to the Father pay
Which to the Son are due,
And Holy Spirit too.
As was from first creation's day,
Is and so shall for ever be,
Without end through eternity.

Ps 122 metre

All glory to the Fäther
Äll glory to the Son
Änd to the Holÿ Spirit

For ever three and one.
As it was in the beginning
Is now and evermore
To endless ages stands firm
The God whom we adore.

668668

To God, the Father, Son ~ and Spirit three in one
All glory give now and again:
As was from utmost yore ~ be now and evermore
World without end, Amen, Amen.

888866 – Ps 125 metre

Glory to Father and to Son ~ and Holy Spirit three in one.
As was when ages first begun ~ continues as time yet may run
Such as today might be ~ until eternity.

6666 4444 – Ps 148 metre

To God, the Father, Son ~ and Spirit, ever blest,
Eternal three in one ~ all worship be addressed.
As heretofore ~ it was, is now,
And shall be so ~ for ever-more.

7676D

All glory to the Father ~ all glory to the Son,
All glory to the Spirit, ~ for ever three and one.
As once it was and is now ~ and shall for ever more,
To endless ages stands firm, ~ the God whom we adore.

7,7,7,7 7,7

Bless the Father and the Son ~ and the Spirit, three in One.
Bless him now and as of yore ~ and shall be for ever more.
Bless the Lord and sing his praise. ~ Exalt him, ever, always.

The Tunes

To get the best out of this collection it is important to get away from two disastrous conventions. Both derive ultimately from the 1st edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern.

The first is the notion that there is a right tune for each psalm. With a few examples which are mentioned in the headnotes in the collection, there is not. The traditional approach was always much more fluid as to which psalm went with which tune. It is the role of the organist or the band to choose one. The same psalm can have a quite different feel, suitable for a different occasion,

simply by being sung to a different tune. is why the Scottish Psalter used to be produced in stable door format. It was designed to enable one to mix and match psalms with tunes in the right metre and mode.

So although each psalm has a tune, you are free and encouraged to use any tune that fits, or even to write new ones. I would like to hear what tunes people might have tried and whether they fitted well or badly.

The second is that traditional (i.e. pre 1850) hymn tunes are more flexible than we realise. The first compilers of Ancient and Modern had very particular ideas about the sorts of music they did not like. They forced a lot of tunes into a very plodding style, because they thought it was more dignified and so more holy. Before that, they were more likely to be sung with the addition of passing notes and other forms of ornamentation. The tune to Amazing Grace would never have taken wing as a popular tune if it had been kept corsetted in the plonking style of the average late C19 hymn book. Many other tunes have much more to offer if they too were liberated from those constraints.

The one thing musicians do need to bear in mind, is that tunes for these traditional metres tend to be built round melody rather than rhythm. That though also applies to much popular music prior to the change in the scope for electronic amplification in the late 1960s. So these tunes offer more scope for a scratch band which includes melodic instruments, flutes, fiddles, clarinets, saxophone, etc rather than an exclusively beat band built solely round guitars and percussion.

For those that can manage it, they often work particularly well to harmonic arrangements. Many of these tunes derive from a time when a different instrument played each line, and the congregation followed the instrument that went with their voice.

I. Fuguing Tunes

When churches last used metrical psalms, there were two different sorts of tunes to which they sang them. Although most of the time congregations sang them to the sort of four line tunes we still know in CM, LM or SM, there was also a lively tradition of singing them to what are often referred to as 'fuguing tunes', with multiple repeats. We still sing a few of these. Lyngham, "O for a thousand tongues" is one. Cranbrook, "On Ilkley Moor Baht 'at" is another.

There are some wonderful examples in Praise and Glory and on the Francis Roads and Sue Glover Websites on the link page.

The compilers of the first edition of Ancient and Modern really hated these sort of tunes, and the bands that played them. So they have tended only to survive for certain special examples, and some Christmas music. There are a few in this collection. For those that can get access to them (see below) there are many more that are well worth trying.

2. Sources for additional tunes

Most hymn books contain a selection of tunes in the more familiar metres, and any decent hymn book will include an index of tunes grouped by metre. In addition to the tunes here, if you have a printed hymn book with tunes the CCLI seems to accept that that licenses you to use the tunes in it that are still in copyright for your worship.

Second hand semi-antique hymn books can often be picked up very cheaply in jumble sales.

Although some are in this collection, there are undoubtedly plenty more good hymns out there that have fallen into disuse either because they have been linked to hymns that no one wants to sing any more, or have been numbed by poor arrangements. Most of them will be long out of copyright. There is nothing sacrosanct about how previous generations may have used or misused them.

There are also quite a number of suitable ballad and other tunes that can be plundered. If Vaughan Williams could do it, why not anyone else?

There are, though, four particular sources that are referred to in the headnotes.

Playford

John Playford published a well known collection of dance tunes in the C17. He also published a version of Sternhold and Hopkins with tunes. His version is in three part harmony. There is an earlier version in four part harmony by Ravenscroft himself. The three part version was reissued by the late Gordon Ashman and the WGMA a few years ago. A scanned version of the four part version is available on the web, but is unfortunately not all that easy to read.

Many of the tunes in these we still use today. So it is interesting to see how a familiar tune such as St Mary's was seen in that era. Many others though have fallen into desuetude. They are a fascinating resource, though not as user friendly as they might be as they require the ability to transcribe some parts from obsolete clefs.

For those interested in history, there is an interesting possibility about the 'proper tune' Playford gives for Old 68th. This is a DCM tune that is both dignified and slightly menacing. It is not in many modern hymn books, though it is in the stable-door Scottish psalter. What is intriguing is that this is the psalm, and the version of it, that both armies sang before the battles of the Civil War. We cannot know whether this was the tune that they sang it to, but it is exciting to imagine that it might have been. If so, they would have sung it unaccompanied, slowly and probably with some element of improvised

harmony. The nearest modern sound equivalent would be the Gaelic psalmody of the Western Isles.

Praise and Glory

Praise and Glory is a book by Rollo Woods published under the auspices of the WGMA with a selection of psalms with tunes mainly from early C19 sources and assembled with the idea that they would be a resource to provide modern rural congregations with versions of the psalms that they could sing. Some of the tunes are simple four part versions, and others are more ebullient fuguing examples. Often even the simple four part versions are more interesting versions of tunes than the settings we use today.

hymnary.org

This is a website that is part of the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<http://www.ccel.org>). It has on it a vast number of hymns and hymnals in various formats, with searchable indices. It is based in the United States. So it is slanted towards their hymn repertoire rather than ours. However, it includes many British hymns, and provides access to useful tunes that are much less familiar. It is also important to appreciate that US copyright law is completely different to ours. Among other fundamental differences, it is based on the date of publication, not on the date of death of the writer or composer.

The West Gallery sites referred to on the Links page

Such as the society's own site, the Francis Roads site and the Sue Glover site.

About me

I am Dru Brooke-Taylor and am an Ordained Local Minister (OLM) at Holy Trinity Church, Hotwells, and St Stephen's Church, Bristol. Their websites are

<http://www.holytrinityhotwells.org> and

<http://www.saint-stephens.com>

More fully, that is Holy Trinity with St Andrew the Less and St Peter Clifton, Bristol and St Stephen with St James and St John the Baptist with St Michael Bristol and St George Bristol, but two of these physically no longer exist and one of the others is now a concert venue.

I am a retired solicitor from local government and have only trained to be ordained since I retired. I was, though, before that a Reader, now called a Licensed Lay Minister.

As you can probably guess by the existence of this site, I love psalms.

As a piece of testimony, a few years ago, it was my task to prepare and lead several of the half hour sections in a full three hour Good Friday. At that time I was only beginning to assemble the material in this collection. However, I

arranged for the congregation at different stages of the service to sing blocks of verses from Psalm 22, to the tune St Anne, now used for *O God our help in ages past*. I had not realised how the simple words sung to such a spare tune would send shivers up my spine and make my hair stand on end.

If you want to email me about anything to do with this site, please write to me at psalmsandpsimilar@gmail.com . If you need to contact me about something more formal, please write to me at,

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