

# SPOHR IN DONCASTER, 1925

by Philip L. Scowcroft

LAST year I recalled a number of Spohr performances in the period immediately prior to the Great War and made the comment that at that time they were the exception rather than the rule<sup>1</sup>. However, it is probable that Spohr performances in Britain never quite died out and as an illustration of that assertion it is worth recalling two complete performances of *The Last Judgment* in Doncaster more than a decade further on, in December 1925.

These were collaborative efforts by two Doncaster church choirs, St Mary's and St Jude's, two churches established in late Victorian times, St Jude's being the "railway" church, situated as it was in the suburb of Hexthorpe, adjacent to the railway "Plant" Works and, when it was built in the 1890s, supplanting the more central St James's as the railwaymen's place of worship.

The report in the *Doncaster Chronicle*<sup>2</sup> of the first of the two performances of Spohr's oratorio, on Sunday afternoon, December 6th, does not give the total strength of the combined choirs, though it made the point that such a collaboration made it possible to tackle a work like *The Last Judgment*. This first performance, at St Jude's, was described as "most encouraging" and "for a beginning was very promising" though "unequal". The opening chorus was apparently excellently sung but the others were less good; much of the singing was short on expressiveness and the quartets sounded weak. However, an unnamed lady soloist sang "All Glory to the Lamb" well and the bass delivered "Thus Saith the Lord" very sympathetically. The accompaniment was supplied entirely by the organ, played by J. W. Morehouse, organist of St Mary's, who was to have a long tenure of that position. The organist of St Jude's, G. H. Adams, was the conductor.

Morehouse and Adams were again accompanist and conductor respectively for the second performance, at St Mary's on Friday evening, December 11th. We do not have a full report of this but a brief note in the *Chronicle*<sup>3</sup> did this time print the names of the soloists: Miss Wilcox (soprano), Miss Steel (contralto), H. A. Graves and R. Dacre (tenors) and J. Williamson and Mr Pilcher (basses). They were different from those who had officiated as such the previous Sunday and as a brief note in the *Doncaster Gazette*<sup>4</sup> suggests, were drawn from the St Mary's half of the operation. One admires their courage. It seems probable that Adams was the prime mover in these admittedly fairly homespun performances, for all that they show a degree of commitment from all taking part (the churches are two miles apart). Two years previously, at the St Jude's Choir Festival on Sunday November 18th, 1923, Spohr's *God Thou Art Great* was performed, complete, in the afternoon (with an extract therefrom reappearing as the anthem that evening), along with organ music "selected from Spohr". It is a pity we do not know what the latter was.

Adams, born in Skellow, north of Doncaster, a cobbler, then an insurance agent, was organist of St Jude's from 1911 until 1951, just before his death in October of that year aged 90. Before 1911 he was organist at various local churches and during his life directed many choirs. He composed, too: anthems, hymn tunes and other church music, plus two cantatas *Service and Reward* (1922) and *The Word of Life* (1938). Not having heard any of Adams's music, I am unable to say whether this was influenced by Spohr, though such may well have been the case.

## Notes

1. Spohr Journal 26 (Winter 1999), pp. 21-22
2. December 11th 1925
3. December 18th 1925
4. *Ibid*