

# HERBERT LESLIE SMITH

(1909–1973)



*An edited transcript of a talk given at Windsor Parish Church  
of St John the Baptist at a meeting there of the  
Friends of Windsor Parish Church on 10 February 2024*

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I was pleased when John Halsey<sup>1</sup> invited me to share with you some thoughts about Dr Smith and my days at Windsor Grammar School (as it then was). But gathering those thoughts has been slightly disconcerting, for I feel rather old when I reflect that my school music master was born in 1909, in the reign of Edward VII; that he died just over half a century ago, on 23 October 1973;<sup>2</sup> and that at the date of his death he was younger by a clear margin than I am now. And it was in September 1959, well over sixty years ago, that he came to this town and took up the post of music master at the school.<sup>3</sup> I believe that he was initially only the assistant organist here,<sup>4</sup> but he occupied the full post from a date in 1962. When I myself entered the school, on 6 September 1966, Dr Smith was therefore well established both in his schoolmaster role and as Organist and Choirmaster here at the Parish Church.<sup>5</sup> In those days, the school came up every summer term, for a Speech Day service, and every December, for a carol service, and my first school service was therefore the one that took place in December 1966, when Dr Smith conducted the choir and Harry Macey, an Old Windsorian, played the organ. Harry had entered the school in 1958 and left it in 1965 in order to study at Trinity College of Music, London. He made a further return to Windsor in March 1967, when the school gave a performance of Parts II and III of Handel's *Messiah*,<sup>6</sup> and for the next few years that was the annual pattern: a concert here in Lent; a Speech Day service in the summer term; and a carol service at the end of the autumn term.<sup>7</sup> Dr Smith played at Speech Day.<sup>8</sup> Harry played for the Lent concert and accompanied the carols.

In 1969 came a change in personnel. The school's new German master, Brian Henry, a former organ scholar at Exeter University, stepped into the shoes of Harry Macey, and his first carol service, the one in December 1969, featured a startling innovation in the form of a middle voluntary by Messiaen.<sup>9</sup> I well recall the look of displeasure on the



*The school staff, July 1966 (HLS fifth from left, middle row)*

Headmaster's face when Brian played its first chord (I hasten to say that this was not because Brian was playing wrong notes but, on the contrary, because he was playing the right ones). Understandably, his repertoire was more up to date than that of Dr Smith, and it was through him that I first came to know not only the Messiaen works that he played here<sup>10</sup> but also certain works by Howells,<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Leighton<sup>12</sup> and Reger;<sup>13</sup> and it was at about this time that I decided to aim for an organ award at Oxford, a step that caused the Headmaster to adopt a rather more friendly attitude towards me. Gerald Parker was not musical, but he was shrewd, and it was at his suggestion that my parents explored the possibility of my having tuition with Dr Sidney Campbell (1909–1974), the Organist and Master of the Choristers at St George's Chapel.<sup>14</sup> The outcome of a brief exchange of letters between my mother and Dr Campbell was a series of lessons at St George's commencing on 11 May 1970 (at a fee of two guineas an hour) and lasting until about January 1973. I hope that Dr Smith did not feel snubbed by my decision to go to Sidney Campbell, but it was the right one in the circumstances. Dr Campbell was a professional organist in the sense that he played the instrument every day; he was a noted recitalist; he had been a cathedral organist three times (Ely, Southwark, Canterbury); and as a member of the council of the Royal College of Organists he was in a better position to prepare me for the RCO examinations. Naturally, though, my tuition with Dr Smith continued. I studied with him for my 'O' and 'A' level music exams, and he gave encouragement by getting me to play for the

school services here at the Parish Church; and just as Brian Henry had stepped into the shoes of Harry Macey, so I stepped into Brian's shoes and played for at least two Speech Day services and at least two carol services. And in 1971 there was further encouragement in the form of an invitation to accompany another performance of Handel's *Messiah*, one that took place here and involved both the school choir and that of the Parish Church. I admire my teenage self for coping with Handel's orchestral part, which is something I would not under any circumstances attempt to play nowadays. The school magazine reported the matter as follows:

[I] congratulate Clarke [sic] of Va on his commendable performance at the organ. He stole the limelight when the choir performed the "Messiah" in Windsor Parish Church in conjunction with their Choir. It has become obvious to me that the public has noticed him on other occasions, such as speech day.<sup>15</sup>

In December 1972 came the news that Worcester College, Oxford had elected me to an open exhibition, and I left Windsor Grammar School at the end of the summer term of 1973 and 'went up' in October that year. Aged 64, Dr Smith retired at the end of the same summer term: his health had been failing for a few years, and it was clear that he was not well.<sup>16</sup> He continued to play here at the Parish Church, but his retirement lasted only a few months, and he died at 151 Clarence Road during the autumn term of 1973.<sup>17</sup> When the news reached the school, its announcement at assembly was followed by the slow movement of

By the Hundred and Twenty-six		By the Hundred and Twenty-six	
1973	Eric Branigan	Bass	1973 William James Tubb Organist
1973	Herbert Bennett	Organist	1973 Walter William Collins Organist
1973	David Gee	Soprano	1973 Astra Desmond Contralto
1972	Helen Anderson	Singer	1973 Charles Langdale-Brown Teacher
1972	Peter Walters	Musician	1973 Helen Henshel Singer
1973	Harry Brindle	Bass	1973 William Henry Harris Organist
1973	Edward L. Wills	Organist	1973 Lina Mason Violinist
1973	Frederick G. Powell	Double Bass	1973 Muriel Bussey Musical Advisor
1973	Ernest MacMillan	Conductor	1973 Lucy Alice Sheriff Singer
1975	Gladys Gorlett	Celloist	1973 Herbert Leslie Smith Organist

Dr Smith's  
year of death  
recorded in  
the Memorial  
Book held at  
St Sepulchre's,  
Holborn  
(page 127,  
last line).



*Dr Smith in a school photograph taken in the early 1960s. The stern expression belied a kindly disposition and was a shield against the school's rougher element. With thanks to H.C. Macey (OW) and R.N. Ludlam (OW).*

J.S. Bach's *Italian Concerto*, BWV 971, performed by Brian Midgley on the school hall's piano, the Bechstein on which Dr Smith had so often played numbers from *Das Wohltemperirte Klavier*.<sup>18</sup> A thanksgiving service took place here on 21 November 1973,<sup>19</sup> and it was appropriate that Harry Macey played the organ: the music included chorale preludes by J.S. Bach, Karg-Elert's *Nun danket alle Gott*, Op.65, No.59, and the Rheinberger sonata whose first movement I played just now.<sup>20</sup> On 20 July 1974, the Berkshire Organists' Association held its annual general meeting, and members stood in silence in memory of Dr Smith, Dr Campbell and Sir William Harris, three 'Windsor' organists all of whom had died since the last such meeting.<sup>21</sup>

Dr Smith was a modest, unassuming man. He never spoke about himself, and he tended to defer to those colleagues of his who also possessed musical knowledge, even though his own was necessarily of a higher order. Modesty is not a bad thing, but it makes life hard for biographers, who like their subjects to be gabbling egocentrists; and what I know about Dr Smith is a combination of what little I gathered whilst at school, what I subsequently stumbled upon, and what emerged from the official and other sources consulted for the purposes of this talk.

I have said that he was born in 1909: his place of birth was Staplehurst, Kent, and his father is described by the certificate as a ‘Joiner / Journeyman’.<sup>22</sup> I have often wondered whether Dr Smith’s diffidence was a product of his coming from an apparently non-academic family and being surrounded by colleagues with Oxbridge and other university degrees.<sup>23</sup> He did of course possess a degree himself (his doctorate was from London University) but he had not attended a university. In those days, universities did not offer music courses:<sup>24</sup> candidates for the BMus and DMus examinations had to prepare themselves by private tuition, and there was no residence requirement.<sup>25</sup> Dr Smith went from school not to a university but to the august institution that produced such remarkable musicians as Britten, Holst and Vaughan Williams, i.e., the Royal College of Music, which he entered in September 1925 at the age of 16. He left in July 1929, at the age of 20, having obtained the RCM’s Associateship diploma in organ teaching.<sup>26</sup> During the course of his RCM years, he strolled from Prince Consort Road to Kensington Gore and took the Associateship examination of the Royal College of Organists, which he passed in July 1927, a creditable achievement for someone aged only 18.<sup>27</sup> From the RCO yearbook for 1931–2 we learn that Dr Smith’s first teaching post was at the Royal Orphanage, Wolverhampton.<sup>28</sup> In 1932 he obtained from London University the degree of Bachelor of Music, and at around this time he emigrated to St John’s, Newfoundland, where he was Organist of St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church and, from 1937, music master at United Church College, which I gather was a large comprehensive school.<sup>29</sup> At what point he returned to the UK is not entirely clear. He must have re-crossed the Atlantic in 1938, for in July of that year he passed the Fellowship examination of the RCO and won a prize for the second highest marks in the performance section (characteristically, he never mentioned this impressive achievement).<sup>30</sup> But he was still in St John’s in 1942, for that year’s Christmas edition of *The Collegian*, the magazine of United Church College, includes him in its list of staff, which shows him as the head of a department comprising four teachers; and he is referred to by this time as ‘Dr Smith’, the degree of Doctor of Music having been awarded in January the previous year.<sup>31</sup> He now had qualifications identical to those of many cathedral and collegiate organists, and other prominent musicians, and one can only speculate as to what prevented him from occupying a cathedral organ-loft or comparable location in the musical establishment. Perhaps he was not very ambitious. Perhaps his apparent diffidence, which I referred to just now, played a part. Perhaps he felt that by being a ‘town’ musician he could help people from a

range of backgrounds wider than that available to those inhabiting a cathedral cloister or a metropolitan academy. At any rate, he had certainly returned from Newfoundland by September 1943, because in that month he joined the staff of Giggleswick School, Settle, where he remained until July 1958.<sup>32</sup>

In 1958, at the age of 49, Dr Smith made a late venture into matrimony<sup>33</sup> and fatherhood: there were five children of the family, the youngest the twin boys born in 1965, when he was 56.<sup>34</sup> Dr Smith once told me that if I became a professional musician, I would have to work all the time in order to keep a roof over my head. This I think reflected his personal circumstances: the bus that took me home from school<sup>35</sup> passed 151 Clarence Road, and if I looked down from the upper deck as we went by, more often than not I would see him in his front room,



*Dr Smith standing outside 151 Clarence Road, the semi-detached house where he and his family lived throughout his years in Windsor. The photograph was taken by Mrs Smith in the early 1960s at a time when 147 and 149 Clarence Road were still standing (they were demolished in connection with the construction of the relief road). With thanks to H.C. Macey (OW) and R.N. Ludlam (OW).*

giving a piano lesson. I imagined him leaving school at 15.50, walking home, having a cup of tea, and starting all over again with his private pupils. He had his duties as the head of a family; he had his duties here at the Parish Church; he had his many commitments at school, which included being a housemaster and teaching Divinity;<sup>36</sup> he was for a time chairman of the Windsor branch of the Berkshire Organists' Association;<sup>37</sup> he had his private pupils; and he had his organ and piano technique to maintain. Like J.S. Bach at Leipzig, he was working incessantly, and it is perhaps no wonder that his health suffered.

Nowadays, memories of Dr Smith are necessarily fading a little. His wife died in 2016.<sup>38</sup> The family home, 151 Clarence Road, was demolished a few years ago, in order to make way for a new development: if you want to know what 151 looked like, google 'Relief Road & Goslar Way' and you will find a sequence of photographs (some of them by Mrs Smith) showing, amongst other things, how the junction of Imperial Road and Clarence Road has changed over the years; and one of the photographs shows Dr Smith outside 151 Clarence Road at a time when 147 and 149 were still standing (he was a ringer for Samuel Beckett). What remains in the tangible world to remind us of 'Doc' is this 'great engine',<sup>39</sup> at which he presided for the last dozen or so years of his life. I offer my congratulations to John Halsey and Michael Harding<sup>40</sup> on the truly remarkable achievement of raising the funds for the organ's restoration and on seeing the lengthy and complex project to its happy conclusion.<sup>41</sup> It has been a pleasure, and a moving experience, to play the instrument again.

*Relf Clark*

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#### Notes

- 1 Director of Music at Windsor Parish Church.
- 2 Information obtained from the Office for National Statistics ('ONS').
- 3 The authority for giving September 1959 as the month of Dr Smith's arrival is page 5 of the December 1960 edition of *Windsorian*, the school magazine. I am grateful to Jo Bell, the Alumni Facilitator at The Windsor Boys' School, for her kindness in providing me with a copy of it on the occasion of my visit to the school on 22 October 2024.
- 4 In those days, the Organist and Choirmaster was Robin Sheldon.
- 5 Dr Smith's arrival at the school is obliquely referred to by the poet Julian Ennis: 'the music / Master, lately appointed, maturing fast, / Smiles, so soon has he mellowed the boys to song.' See *Assembly in Autumn*, in Ennis, J., *Cold Storage* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970), 59. The poet was W.G. Bebbington (1915–2007), the Head of English: 'Julian Ennis' was his literary pseudonym.
- 6 *Windsorian*, November 1967, 41. The report states that between the two parts of the oratorio, Harry Macey played a Prelude and Fugue by Bruhns. The date of the concert was 15 March 1967.

7 The programme of the Lent concert in 1968 included Brahms's *Schicksalslied*, Op.54, a setting by Mozart of *Regina coeli*, and Taverner's *Dum transisset Sabatum*, the last of these performed by a small choir founded and conducted by Roger Bowers (now Emeritus Reader in Music at Cambridge): *Windsorian*, December 1968, 50. The Lent concert in 1969 was a performance of part of J.S. Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

8 I recall two of his voluntaries: J.S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C major, BWV 545 and John Ireland's *Alla Marcia*. I recall also *In dulci jubilo*, BWV 729, but this was the voluntary at the end of one of the carol services.

9 The last section of *Dieu parmi nous*.

10 *Les Anges, Dieu parmi nous*. There may have been others, but I do not recall them.

11 *Psalm-Prelude*, Op.32, No.1.

12 *Paean*, a work that enjoyed a high profile at that time, having been premiered at the Royal Festival Hall, by Simon Preston, as recently as 25 January 1967.

13 *Toccata*, Op.59, No.5, *Fugue*, Op.59, No.6. There was a certain amount of Bach, too. I recall in particular *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, BWV 625 and the Prelude and Fugue in G major, BWV 541.

14 Parker was a short, somewhat intimidating man. His posthumous reputation has not been enhanced by the fact that he bore a slight resemblance to Captain Mainwaring in the TV comedy series *Dad's Army*. He fulfilled his role admirably, however, and I am grateful to him for some good advice. His chief fault was a penchant for making discouraging remarks to one's face, which seems to have created lasting resentment in the minds of certain Old Windsoriens.

15 *Windsorian*, December 1971, 28. The author did not append his initials.

16 In 1968 he was I believe off sick for the whole of the autumn term. The music for the carol service in December 1968 was 'under the direction' of Brian Midgley (1938–2024), the Head of Mathematics: *Windsorian*, December 1969, 39. A good pianist and singer, Brian held the ARCM and LGSM diplomas and played a prominent role in music in the school and in the area generally.

17 The causes of death were carcinomatosis and cancer of the prostate (ONS).

18 Information from Brian himself.

19 I am indebted to Malcolm Stowell for sending me a copy of the order of service (my own having been mislaid). The service was taken by The Revd David Price, Vicar of Winkfield. His address is given on pages 14–16 of the 1974 edition of *The Berkshire Organist*, the publication of the Berkshire Organists' Association ('BOA'). I sang bass in the choir assembled for the occasion. Mrs Smith and the children sat at the front of the nave, on the north side. Gerald Parker read one of the lessons, and the lone figure of E.J. Hechinger (1915–1982), the Head of French, and *éminence grise*, was seated in the western section of the gallery, inscrutable as ever.

20 My programme consisted of the first movement of Rheinberger's Sonata in E flat minor, Op.119; Mozart's *Andante*, K.616; and the Fugue in E flat major, BWV 552 (ii) of J.S. Bach (a very 'HLS' selection).

21 *The Berkshire Organist* 28 (1975), 9.

22 His date of birth was 9 May 1909 (ONS). The records at the RCM describe Dr Smith's father, Alfred J. Smith, as a carpenter and joiner.

23 He once told me that when he heard E.J. Hechinger and W.G. Bebbington talking about music, he understood little of what they were saying. Although devoted to classical music, they necessarily discussed it in non-technical terms. I feel sure that his colleagues respected him and were not themselves conscious of any social or other barrier. I certainly regarded him as a consummate musician, and his fine intellectual grasp of the subject is amply demonstrated by his contributions to *The Berkshire Organist*.

24 The Honour School of Music at Oxford was created in 1950, the Music Tripos at Cambridge in 1947.

25 Sidney Campbell told me that he obtained his BMus and DMus degrees from Durham University after studying by means of correspondence courses. It is likely that Dr Smith did the same. There came a point however at which the older universities decided that the

BMus degree could only be taken after a period of residence sufficient for the purposes of obtaining a first degree.

26 For this information I am indebted to the staff of the RCM. The records of the College show that his first study was composition, his second the violoncello (it is possible that he studied composition with Vaughan Williams).

27 I am indebted to Andrew McCrea of the RCO for this information.

28 See note 27.

29 Again, see note 27. The Easter 1937 edition of *The Collegian*, the magazine of United Church College, states that 'Mr. H. Smith ... has now taken over the musical department of the College in such a manner as to inspire every confidence.'

30 This is information I stumbled across whilst searching the RCO yearbooks for something else. It was the Turpin Prize that Dr Smith won. He was indeed a fine player. I recall a recital he gave at Slough Parish Church in about 1969: it included Elgar's Sonata in G major, Op.28, a notoriously tough nut to crack. He followed it with Vierne's *Cortège*, Op.31, No.2, with which the recital ended. In his introductory remarks, Dr Smith referred to this work humorously, saying that the title meant 'funeral march' (which is not entirely accurate) and that such a thing would be appropriate after his rendering of the Elgar work. This seems typical of his self-deprecating approach. Around this time, he acquired the FTCL diploma: see the 1969 edition of *The Berkshire Organist*, 7 and 9. From editions of the same publication it is evident that he was entitled in addition to put 'FTSC' and 'MRST' after his name ('FTSC' = Fellow, Tonic Sol-Fa College, 'MRST' = Member of the Royal Society of Teachers).

31 See note 27.

32 Information obtained from Giggleswick School, to whose staff I am most grateful. It was in 1947, during his Giggleswick years, that Stainer & Bell Limited published Dr Smith's *Evening Service in C*. It is for unison voices, choir and organ and was no doubt intended for use at schools. 'Giggleswick, 1946' appears at the end of the *Magnificat*. In 1946, Stainer & Bell had published his setting of the *Venite*, and in 1949 they published his setting of the *Jubilate Deo*. According to *The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980*, these three works by Dr Smith are the only ones published. That he never mentioned them (at least, not to me) is another illustration of his modesty. I am not aware of any unpublished works in addition to the exercises he submitted in connection with his BMus and DMus degrees (details of which I do not have).

33 The ceremony took place at Staplehurst Parish Church on 9 August 1958 (ONS). The groom was 49, the bride 30. Here as elsewhere in these reflections I am indebted to David R. Young.

34 The five children are Frank (b.1959), Lucy (b.1960), Bridget (b.1963), Alan (b.1965) and Gordon (b.1965) (ONS). Gordon was born ten minutes after Alan. All but Frank were born at 151 Clarence Road.

35 The 20 or 20A from Windsor to High Wycombe via Maidenhead.

36 He was housemaster of Warwick, having been appointed at the beginning of 1961: *Windsorian*, December 1961, 21.

37 I was Dr Smith's guest at a number of BOA meetings, but they tended to clash with my arrangements for organ practice, and my involvement with the association was never more than peripheral. He served as Chairman of its Windsor branch from 1968 to 1971, and branch events at 151 Clarence Road are referred to from time to time in *The Berkshire Organist*.

38 The grant of probate recites a date of death of 27 February 2016. It gives Mrs Smith's address as 64 York Road, Windsor SL4 3NY, which is the property she bought with the proceeds of sale of 151 Clarence Road, which had been purchased by developers. Mrs Smith was a widow for 43 years.

39 W.H. Auden, *Anthem for St Cecilia's Day*.

40 Churchwarden (and Old Windsorian).

41 The stop-list is given in the appendix.

## APPENDIX

### *The organ at the Parish Church of St John the Baptist, Windsor*

A. Hunter & Son, 1906  
Rushworth & Dreaper, 1936  
Bishop & Son, 2023

#### **PEDAL ORGAN** C-f<sup>1</sup>, 30 notes

1.	Open Diapason	16	(wood)
2.	Bourdon	16	
3.	Lieblich Bourdon	16	(from 33)
4.	Violon [sic]	16	
5.	Octave Diapason	8	(extension of 1)
6.	Bass Flute	8	(extension of 2)
7.	Violoncello	8	(30 pipes)
8.	Trombone	16	
9.	Trumpet	8	(extension of 8)
(i)	<i>Choir to Pedals</i>		
(ii)	<i>Great to Pedals</i>		
(iii)	<i>Swell to Pedals</i>		

#### **CHOIR ORGAN** C-a<sup>3</sup>, 58 notes (enclosed)

10.	Open Diapason	8	
11.	Stopped Diapason	8	
12.	Orchestral Flute	8	
13.	Viole d'Orchestre	8	
14.	Voix Celestes	8	(13–58)
15.	Dulciana	8	(1936)
16.	Harmonic Flute	4	
17.	Salicet	2	(1936)
18.	Clarionet	8	
19.	Orchestral Oboe	8	
(iv)	<i>Swell to Choir</i>		
(v)	<i>Sub Octave</i>		
(vi)	<i>Tremulant</i>		

#### **GREAT ORGAN** C-a<sup>3</sup>, 58 notes

20.	Double Open Diap[ason]	16	
21.	Open Diap[ason] No.1	8	(1936)
22.	Open Diap[ason] No.2	8	
23.	Open Diap[ason] No.3	8	
24.	Claribel Flute	8	
25.	Octave	4	
26.	Wald Flöte	4	
27.	Twelfth	2 <sup>2/3</sup>	
28.	Super Octave	2	
29.	Mixture	3 rks	
	17-19-22 (01-25)	12-15-17 (26-43)	08-15-15 (44-58)

30.	Double Trumpet	16
31.	Tromba	8
32.	Clarion	4
(vii)	<i>Swell to Great</i>	
(viii)	<i>Choir to Great</i>	
(ix)	<i>Great Reeds on Choir</i>	(2023)
(x)	<i>Gt &amp; Ped Combs Coupled</i>	(2023)

**SWELL ORGAN C-a<sup>3</sup>, 58 notes (enclosed)**

33.	Bourdon	16
34.	Open Diapason	8
35.	Lieblich Gedacht [sic]	8
36.	Viola da Gamba	8
37.	Salicional	8
38.	Vox Angelica	8 (13-58)
39.	Principal	4
40.	Suabe Flute	4
41.	Fifteenth	2
42.	Mixture	3 rks
	17-19-22 (01-43)	08-15-15 (44-58)
43.	Contra Fagotto	16
44.	Cornopean	8
45.	Oboe	8
46.	Clarion	4
(xi)	<i>Swell Octave</i>	
(xii)	<i>Swell Sub Octave</i>	
(xiii)	<i>Tremulant</i>	

**ACCESSORIES**

8	general thumb pistons (4 in Swell key-slip, 4 in Great key-slip)
	Gens on Pedal Toe [sic] by drawstop
8	thumb pistons to Swell
	Reversible thumb pistons for Swell to Pedals and Swell Octave
8	thumb pistons to Great
	Reversible thumb pistons for Choir to Great, Swell to Great (duplicated by a toe piston) and Great to Pedals
8	thumb pistons to Choir
	Reversible thumb pistons for Swell to Choir and Choir to Pedals
	Reversible thumb piston for Trombone (below Choir keys)
8	toe pistons to Pedals
8	toe pistons to Swell
	General cancel
	Setter piston
	Sequencer

**WIND-PRESSES**

1-7	4 inches w.g.	30-32	8 inches w.g.
8-9	9 inches w.g.	33-42	4 inches w.g.
10-29	4 inches w.g.	43-46	7 inches w.g.