

Alan Bullard

A Song of Heath and History

A Blackheath Cantata
for choir, soprano solo and strings

Commissioned by The Ascension Choir



Vocal Score

BRITISH MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE,
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A Song of Heath and History was commissioned by the Ascension Choir, conductor Patricia Williams, and was written during the first half of 1996. It is a celebration of Blackheath past and present, and is in six movements, all of which are based on the melody of the anonymous fifteenth-century *Agincourt Song*.

I grew up in Blackheath and lived for over twenty years in my parents' home overlooking the Heath. I walked across it to school, and later, to work: I played on it, got lost on it, and explored every corner of it: and although I haven't lived there for more than twenty years, writing this piece brought back many memories.

The work is dedicated to the memory of my father Paul Bullard, artist and former lecturer at Camberwell School of Art, who died during its composition. Many of his paintings were inspired by the Blackheath landscape, and I hope he would have recognised something of our common heritage in this memorial.

Alan Bullard, Colchester 1996

1. Prologue

A tour of Blackheath as depicted in a short section from Thomas Noble's lengthy poem Blackheath (1808), together with some text of my own. One of the many celebrations on Blackheath was the welcoming of Henry V on his return from Agincourt, and the movement ends with the music and text of the Agincourt Song (c. 1425) whose musical ideas form a basis for the whole cantata.

O rove around the extensive plain,
Then rove this heath with me!
Yon mills, high placed and restless in the wind:
This moated mound, surrounded with dark fir,
Where it is said the bones of rebels sleep;
The objects of the busy road;
The rapid horse, the dust-enveloped stage-coach,
The motley-peopled carriage.
The herd that heavily move on,
With hollow sounds of feeble lowing, and of bleating faint,
So rove around and animate this song with me,
A song of heath and history!

The slaying of Alphege,
The preaching of Whitfield,
The uprising of Wat Tyler,

The capturing of the Duke of York,
The rebellion of Jack Cade,
The match-making of Henry the Eighth,
The golfing of James the First,
The kites, the fairs, the London Marathon...
The return of Henry the Fifth from Agincourt!

Our king went forth to Normandy
With grace and might of chivalry.
There God for him wrought marvellously
Wherefore England may call and cry:

Deo gracias.

Almighty God he keep our king
His people and all his weal willing
And give him grace without ending
Then may we call and safely sing:

Deo gracias.

2. Rainbow over Greenwich

Part of James Thomson's poem To the memory of Sir Isaac Newton (1727) in which he describes the view of a rainbow seen from Greenwich Park.

The setting sun and shifting clouds,
Seen, Greenwich, from thy lovely heights, declare
How just, how beauteous the refractive Law.
First the flaming Red
Sprung vivid forth, the tawny Orange next;
And next, delicious Yellow, by whose side
Fell the kind beams of all-refreshing Green,
Then the pure Blue, that swells autumnal skies
Ethereal played, and then of sadder hue
Emerged the deepened Indigo, as when
The heavy-skirted evening droops with frost.
While the last gleamings of refracted light
Died in the fainting Violet away.
These, when the clouds distil the rosy shower,
Shine out distinct adown the wat'ry bow;
While o'er our heads the dewy vision bends
Delightful, melting on the fields beneath.
Myriads of mingling dyes from these result,
And myriads still remain- Infinite source
Of beauty, ever-changing, ever-new!
Did ever poet imagine things so fair,
Dreaming in whisp'ring groves, to whose rapture
heaven descends!
E'en now the setting sun and shifting clouds,
Seen, Greenwich, from thy lovely heights, declare
How just, how beauteous the refractive Law.

3. Black Bess on Blackheath

Legend has it that Dick Turpin rode through Blackheath on his final, fatal, journey to York. Even allowing for the lack of an A to Z in those days, this seems a pretty unlikely story: however Robert Louis Stevenson's poem Windy Nights (1885) brings to mind the ghost of Dick Turpin and Black Bess, and I have combined some of it with part of an anonymous nineteenth-century street ballad, My Bonny Black Bess.

Whenever the moon and stars are set,
Whenever the wind is high,
All night long in the dark and wet,
A man goes riding by,
Late in the night when the fires are out,
Why does he gallop and gallop about?

Dick Turpin hi!
Three officers mounted, led on the chase,
Resolving my crimes to redress;
But I, Dick Turpin, laughed in their face,
As I urged on my bonny Black Bess.
Dick Turpin hi!
(Why does he gallop and gallop about?)
Hark away! Still onward they press
As we saw by the glimmer of morn,
Many a mile on the back of Black Bess
That night I was gallantly borne;
(Why does he gallop and gallop about?)
Hi over, my pet, the strain I must bear,
Not stopping one moment for breath,
Push on, my girl, my bonny black mare,
As we speed it for life or for death.
Dick Turpin hi!
(Why does he gallop and gallop about?)
The city spires now burst on my view,
But the chimes were ringing her knell.
Halt! My brave mare they no longer pursue
As she faltered, and staggered, and fell!
(Ah...)

Her breathing was o'er, all was hushed as the grave,
Alas! Poor Black Bess, my pride,
Her heart she had burst, her rider to save,
For Dick Turpin she lived, and she died.
Dick Turpin hi!
Whenever the trees are crying aloud,
Whenever the ships are tossed at sea,
By, on the highway, low and loud,
A man goes riding by.
Late in the night when the fires are out,
Why does he gallop and gallop about?

4. Lament

In the 1440s the Duchess of Gloucester, wife of Duke Humphrey and Henry V's sister-in-law, was accused of witchcraft and banished from Greenwich Palace. A poem written at the time showed sympathy for her plight: I have set this for solo soprano. Byron's description, from Canto 10 of Don Juan, of the view from Shooter's Hill suggests another lament, for those days not long gone when St. Paul's Cathedral was the centrepiece of that vista. This description of the view of St. Paul's is sung by the choir.

(Soprano)
In worldly joy and worthiness,
I was beset on every side;
Of Gloucester I was duchess,
Among all women magnified.
As Lucifer fell down from pride,
I fell from all felicity:
I had no grace myself to guide;
All women now beware by me.

(Choir)
A mighty mass of brick and smoke and shipping,
Dirty and dusky, but as wide as eye
Could reach, with here and there a sail just skipping
In sight, then lost amidst the forestry
Of masts, a wilderness of steeples peeping
On tiptoe through their sea-coal canopy,
A huge dun cupola, like a foolscap crown
On a fool's head- and there is London Town!

(Soprano)
Farewell, dear London, good day,
To thee I take my leave this tide.
Farewell, dear Greenwich, for aye,
Farewell, fair places on Thames-side:
Farewell, all wealth, and the world so wide.
I am assigned where I shall be
Under men's keeping I must abide;
All women may beware by me.
(All women may beware.)

5. In praise of Golfing

King James 1st played golf (or gowf) on Blackheath in 1608 and its Golf Club is the oldest in the world. Andrew Duncan wrote this poem for the Blackheath club in 1813.

O rural diversions, too long has the chase
All honours usurped, and assumed the chief place;
But truth bids the Muse from henceforward proclaim,
That Golf, first of sports, shall stand foremost in fame.

At Golf we contend, without rancour or spleen,
And bloodless the laurels we reap on the green;
From vigorous exertion our pleasures arise,
And to crown our delights no poor fugitive dies.

O'er the heath see our heroes in uniform clad,
In parties well-matched, how they gracefully spread;
While with long strokes and short strokes they tend to
the goal,
And with put well-directed plump into the hole.

From exercise strong, strength active and bold,
We'll traverse the green, and forget to grow old.
Blue devils, diseases, dull sorrow and care,
Knocked down by our balls as they whizz through the
air.

Health, happiness, harmony, friendship, and fame,
Are the fruits and rewards of our favourite game;
A sport so distinguished, the fair must approve-
Then to Golf give the day, and the evening to love.

6. Heath and Holiday

*Of course Golf is no longer seriously played on
Blackheath; but for many years the Heath has been a
place for recreation of all sorts. A description of a
fairground by the eighteenth-century poet G. A.
Stevens led me to add some text of my own about the
Fair today: following which the choir, starting on
Blackheath, embark on the London Marathon.*

Holiday, Bank holiday Fair!

This is how it was:

Crowds against other crowds driving
Like wind and tide meeting, contrary striving;
Shrill fiddling, sharp fighting, and shouting and
shrieking,
Fifes, trumpets, drums, bagpipes, and barrel-organs
squeaking!

Here were drolls, hornpipe-dancing, and showing of
postures,

Frying black puddings, and opening of oysters,
Salt-boxes, solos, and galley-folks squalling,
Tap-house guests roaring, mouth-pieces bawling.

This is how it is now:

Hot dogs, doughnuts, candy-floss and hamburgers
(cheeseburgers, beefburgers),

Roundabouts, big wheels, roller-coasters,
Generators humming, illuminations flashing,

Crowds surging, pin-balls crashing,
Bouncy castle, helter-skelter, balloons galore!

Fortune tellers, arcades, dodgems, ghost trains, and
more!

Music blaring, computer games zapping,

Air-guns popping, coconuts smashing,

Boats sailing on the lake,

Balls flying in the air,

Kites gusting in the sky-

Bank holiday Fair!

Marathon, the London marathon,
Running the London marathon:

Charlton Way, St. John's Park, Shooter's Hill Road,
Charlton Road, Charlton Park Lane (Three miles!)
Artillery Place, Woolwich Church Street, Woolwich
road, Cutty Sark (Six miles!)

Creek Road, Evelyn Street, (Nine miles!)

Jamaica Road, Tower Bridge (Twelve miles!)

Commercial road, Poplar High Street, The Isle of
Dogs (Sixteen miles!)

Prestons Road, Manchester Road, West Ferry Road,
The Highway (Twenty-two miles!)

Tower Hill, The Embankment, Birdcage Walk, St
James's Park, The Mall!

Twenty six miles: the London marathon!

We've run our race, we've sung our song:

We'll be back home before too long.

Remembering as we tread the heath,

The history that lies beneath:

A song of heath and history!

A meeting place, a trading place

For London's busy populace.

Blackheath- its life, its strength, its joy;

Our cares and troubles it can destroy.

A song of heath and history,

A song of heath and holiday!

A song of holiday and history!

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Total duration: approx. 33 minutes

A song of Heath and History

A Blackheath cantata

Alan Bullard

Commissioned by the Ascension Choir

text: Thomas Noble, anon., and A.B.

1. Prologue

Andante espressivo ♩ = c.88

Piano reduction

1 mp

8 mf mp

14 mf f 1

O rove a-round the ex-ten - - - sive plain,
p
O rove a-round the ex-ten - - - sive plain,
p
O rove a-round the ex-ten - - - sive plain,
p
O rove a-round the ex-ten - - - sive plain,

20 p

subito più mosso ♩ = c. 132

mf
Then rove this heath, this heath with me!

mf
Then rove this heath, this heath with me!

mf
Then rove this heath, this heath with me!

mf
Then rove this heath, this heath with me!

26 *f* *con forza*

32

2

pp *mf*
Yon mills, yon mills, high

mp *mf*
Yon mills, yon mills, high

p *mf*
Yon mills, yon mills, high

mp *mf*
Yon mills, yon mills, high

36 *pp*

placed, - high placed - and rest - - - less, rest - - -

placed, - high placed - and rest - - - less, rest - - -

placed, - high placed - and rest - - - less, rest - - -

placed, - high placed - and rest - - - less, rest - - -

44

less - in the wind.

less - in the wind:

less - in the wind:

less - in the wind:

49

3

p
This moat - ed mound, —
This moat - ed mound, —

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are vocal staves in treble clef, with lyrics underneath. The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment staves, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The vocal lines begin with a rest for four measures, followed by the lyrics. The piano accompaniment starts with a rest for four measures, then enters with a series of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

54 *p sub.*

The piano accompaniment for the first system is shown in two staves. It begins with a rest for four measures, then enters with a series of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The dynamics are marked *p* and *sub.* (sustained). The music is in a key with one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

p
sur - round - ed with dark —
p
sur - round - ed with dark —

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are vocal staves in treble clef, with lyrics underneath. The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment staves, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. The music is in a key with one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The vocal lines begin with a rest for four measures, followed by the lyrics. The piano accompaniment starts with a rest for four measures, then enters with a series of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

60 *p sub.*

The piano accompaniment for the second system is shown in two staves. It begins with a rest for four measures, then enters with a series of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The dynamics are marked *p* and *sub.* (sustained). The music is in a key with one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

4

mp

Where it is said the bones of re - bels

mp

Where it is said the bones of re - bels

mp

fir, Where it is said the bones of re - bels

mp

fir, Where it is said the bones of

66 *mp*

pp sub.

sleep;

pp sub.

sleep;

pp sub.

sleep;

pp sub.

re - bels sleep;

pp sub.

pp

meno mosso = c.120

71

poco a poco animando e cresc.

The ob-jects of the bu - sy road;

The ob-jects of the bu - sy road;

The ob-jects of the bu - sy road;

The ob-jects of the bu - sy road;

77

Preview File Only

The rap-id horse, the dust - en - vel - oped, the

The rap-id horse, the dust - en - vel - oped, the

The rap-id horse, the dust - y,

The rap-id horse, the dust - y,

83 *poco a poco cresc.*

Preview File Only

5

ff

dust - en - vel - oped stage - coach, The mot - ley - peop - led, mot - ley

dust - en - vel - oped stage - coach, The mot - ley - peop - led, mot - ley

dust - en - vel - oped stage - coach, The mot - ley - peop - led, mot - ley

dust - en - vel - oped stage - coach, The mot - ley - peop - led, mot - ley

86

poco rit.

peop - led, mot - ley - peop - led car - riage.

peop - led, mot - ley - peop - led car - riage.

peop - led, mot - ley - peop - led car - riage.

peop - led, mot - ley - peop - led car - riage.

88

ff

meno mosso

♩ = c.104

The herd that hea-vi-ly move on, — low - ing, low - ing,
The herd that hea-vi-ly move on, — low - ing, low - ing,
with hol-low sounds of fee-ble
with hol-low sounds of fec-ble

92

low - ing, low - ing and of bleat-ing faint, —
low - ing, low - ing and of bleat-ing faint, —
low - ing, low - ing, and of bleat-ing faint, —
low - ing, low - ing, and of bleat-ing faint, —

97

poco rit.

heath and his - - - to-ry!

heath and his - - - to-ry!

heath and his - - - to-ry!

heath and his - - - to-ry!

Solo (ad. lib.)
mp

The slay-ing of

111 *mf*

Solo (ad. lib.)
mp

The preach-ing of Whit - field,

Solo (ad. lib.)
mf

The up - ris - ing of Wat Ty - ler,

Al - phege,

115 *p* *mp*

Solo (ad. lib.) *mf* **Tutti** *mf*

The cap-tur-ing— of the Duke of York, The match-mak-ing—

Tutti *mf*

The re-bel-ion of Jack Cade,

118 *mf* *f*

Tutti *f*

of Hen-ry the Eighth, The kites, the fairs, the Lon-don

The kites, the fairs, the Lon-don

Tutti *f*

The golf-ing of James the First,—

The golf-ing of James the First,—

122

Ma-rathon... The re-turn of Hen-ry the Fifth from A-gin-court!

Ma-rathon... The re-turn of Hen-ry the Fifth from A-gin-court!

The re-turn of Hen-ry the Fifth from A-gin-court!

The re-turn of Hen-ry the Fifth from A-gin-court!

accel.

molto più mosso ♩ = c.152

Our king went forth to Nor-man-dy With

Our king went forth to Nor-man-dy With

Our king went forth to Nor-man-dy With

Our king went forth to Nor-man-dy With

grace_ and might_ of_ chi - val - ry. _____ There God_ for
 grace_ and might_ of_ chi - val - ry. _____ There God_ for
 grace_ and might_ of_ chi - val - ry. _____ There God_ for
 grace_ and might_ of_ chi - val - ry. _____ There God_ for

136

mf

The first system of the musical score consists of four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal staves are arranged in a four-part setting (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The lyrics are: "grace_ and might_ of_ chi - val - ry. _____ There God_ for". The piano accompaniment begins at measure 136 and features a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present above the piano part.

him_ wrought mar - v'lous - ly Where - fore_ Eng - land_ may call and
 him_ wrought mar - v'lous - ly Where - fore_ Eng - land_ may call and
 him_ wrought mar - v'lous - ly Where - fore_ Eng - land_ may call and
 him_ wrought mar - v'lous - ly Where - fore_ Eng - land_ may call and

142

The second system of the musical score consists of four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal staves are arranged in a four-part setting (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The lyrics are: "him_ wrought mar - v'lous - ly Where - fore_ Eng - land_ may call and". The piano accompaniment begins at measure 142 and features a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand.

f
cry: De - o - - - gra - - - - ti - - - as.

f
cry: De - o - - - gra - - - - ti - - - as.

f
cry: De - o - - - gra - - - - ti - - - as.

f
cry: De - o - - - gra - - - - ti - - - as.

148 *f*

Al - might - y God, — he keep our king His

Al - might - y God, he keep our king His

Al - might - y God, — he keep our king His

Al - might - y God, he keep our king His

154

peo - ple and all — his weal — wil - ling And give — him grace — with -

peo - ple and all — his weal wil - ling And give him grace — with -

peo - ple and all — his weal — wil - ling And give — him grace — with -

peo - ple and all — his weal wil - ling And give him grace — with -

160

mf

-out — end - ing Then may — we call — and safe - ly sing: De -

-out end - ing Then may we call and safe - ly sing: De -

-out — end - ing Then may — we call — and safe - ly sing: De -

-out end - ing Then may we call and safe - ly sing: De -

166

ff

-o— gra - - - ti - as!

-o— gra - - - ti - as!

-o— gra - - - ti - as!

-o— gra - - - ti - as!

172

ff

This system contains four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are in unison, with lyrics '-o— gra - - - ti - as!' written below each staff. The piano accompaniment starts at measure 172 and features a forte (*ff*) dynamic. A large blue watermark 'Preview File Only' is oriented diagonally across the page.

poco a poco rit. e dim.

p

179

This system shows the piano accompaniment from measure 179 to 186. The music is marked 'poco a poco rit. e dim.' (poco a poco ritardando e diminuendo) and includes a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The large blue watermark 'Preview File Only' continues across this section.

187

This system shows the piano accompaniment from measure 187 to 194. The music concludes with a fermata over the final notes. The large blue watermark 'Preview File Only' is still visible.

2. Rainbow over Greenwich

text: James Thomson

Andante tranquillo ♩ = c.104

All voices in unison *p*

Choir

The set - ting



mp

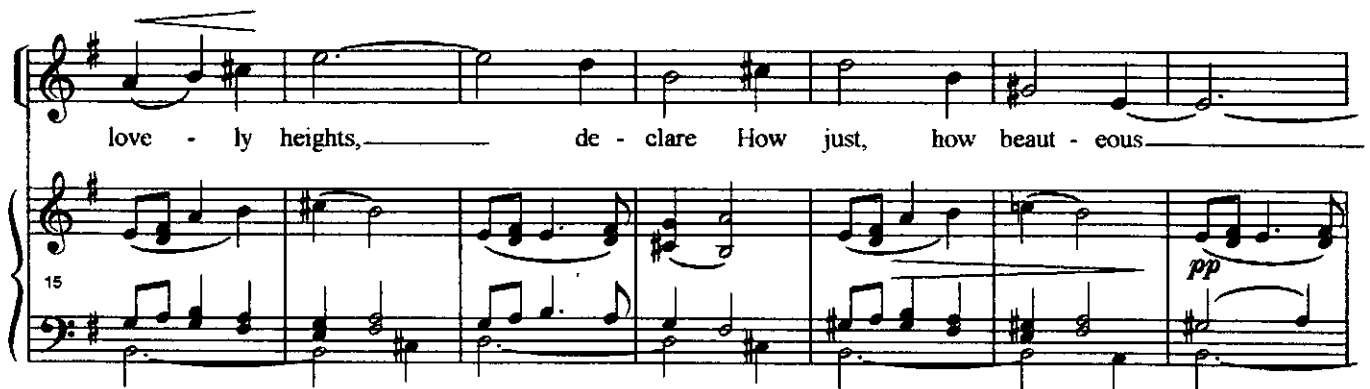
sun and shift - ing clouds, Seen, Green - wick, from thy

mp



love - ly heights, de - clare How just, how beaut - eous

pp



S. the re - frac - tive Law. *f dim.*

A. the re - frac - tive Law. *f dim.*

T. the re - frac - tive Law. *f dim.*

B. the re - frac - tive Law. *f dim.*

22

Con brio ♩ = c.116

First the *f*

First the *f*

First the *f*

First the *f*

28 *p*