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Harold Copeman (1918–2003)

Harold Copeman died in Oxford on 27 November 2003 at the age of 85. He was throughout his life a keen amateur musician, as a singer, conductor, cellist and viol player. Although he enjoyed the classical chamber repertory, his main passion was for early music. Passion may seem a strong word to characterize a man whose outward manner was measured and undemonstrative, but music was for him a primary expression of all that his controlled verbal utterances left unsaid, and he will be much missed by those with whom he shared this gift.

Educated at Manchester Grammar School and Queen's College, Oxford, he graduated in 1939 with a First in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. During the war he served in the army, and sang in the International Choir where he met his blind musician wife, Kay, subsequently incapacitated by a stroke, who died in 1992. He served in HM Treasury, rising to the position of Under Secretary, 1972–6. After early retirement he continued to travel widely and be professionally active, and held a visiting fellowship at Warwick University. In 1947 he founded the Treasury Singers, helping to create the well-founded reputation that the Treasury had for a time of being the most musical of government departments. The Singers are still in action today; the original 34 members rose at one stage to more than 90. They rehearsed at lunchtime and performed in central London venues, including Westminster Hall, allegedly sanctioned in a parliamentary debate. In the 1960s he attended the annual Downe House summer school, as a singer and director of a madrigal group. He took part in performances of early music drama at Morley College and sang with the Chelsea Opera Group.

He gathered together his own informal madrigal group, first in Hampstead and then at his Wimbledon house. 19 The Grange was always filled with musicians, as lodgers, tenants and friends, including students from the London colleges who practised on the two Steinways. From these home-based madrigal groups he went on to organize much larger annual gatherings, directing Tallis's *Spem in alium*, the Monteverdi Vespers, Bach's 'Ascension' Cantata, *Messiah*, the Taverner Western Wynde Mass, the Byrd Great Service and many other works. Forty years ago he envisaged and brought into being a group of singers

who celebrated the Easter season on Holy Island. After ten years he passed this enterprise on to other conductors, including his son Andrew, who continues to co-direct it, although the venue has changed. Following his retirement he moved first to Avon Dassett, and every Good Friday organized performances of the plainsong St John Passion in Warwickshire and Oxfordshire village churches. He also arranged special occasion performances in stately homes; I took part in a memorable one at Harvington Hall.

After his final move to Oxford he continued to play in string quartets and viol consorts, sang in the Oxford Bach Choir, and regularly entertained a group of singers at home, although he was increasingly troubled by deafness. He was a regular attendee at Oxford concerts, particularly of early music groups, and of seminars and lectures. He was active in the University of the Third Age, and gave talks on philosophy and on historical figures associated with music, such as Margaret of Austria. He also served for a while on the Council of the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society under the presidency of John Stevens, with whom in earlier years he enjoyed a close friendship.

To most musicians and singers outside his own circle, amateur and professional, he will be best remembered for his self-published books *Singing in Latin* and *The pocket 'Singing in Latin'* (both 1990), which arose out of a real need to know how to pronounce the words of the repertoires he loved. Typical of the thorough way he delved into any topic he took on, *Singing in Latin* was meticulously researched over a wider range than most scholars would feel bold enough to take on, but above all the results are clearly communicated. It has proved a useful companion for many, and has succeeded in stimulating the kinds of debate he intended. He subsequently published *Singing the meaning* (1996), which is a more personal statement, and provocatively asks 'what we are doing when we sing this music, in concert or in the liturgy? are we believing, pretending to believe, or skating over the surface?'

If hardly 'the man on the Clapham omnibus' to whom *Early music* was—famously—originally addressed, he nevertheless, as a keen subscriber, represented that constituency of high-level amateurs who are devoted to knowing about early music and its issues as well as playing and listening to it. It was for such people that *Early music* was founded, and it is what continues to differentiate this journal's distinctive mission and presentation from more overtly academic publications.