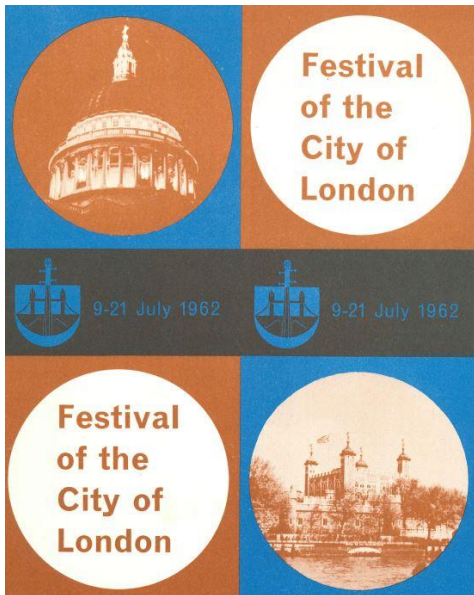


## Manuscript of the Month July 2014

### Festival of the City of London, programme of events, July 1962



This month, the streets and buildings of the Square Mile will be filled with an eclectic mix of music, art and theatre as the annual City of London Festival gets underway. The first Festival, held over fifty years ago in 1962, was a smaller but no less ambitious affair. And among those driving it forward was bank partner and Lord Mayor of London, Sir Frederick (Derick) Hoare.

The Festival of the City of London was the brainchild of impresario and former Artistic Director of the prestigious Edinburgh Festival, Ian Hunter. Early in 1961, Hunter approached Derick Hoare, then Alderman of Farringdon Without, with his vision for an arts festival within the Square Mile, one that would make full use of the City's stunning but somewhat under-appreciated churches and livery halls, as well as Corporation owned buildings including the Guildhall and Mansion House, to stage a series of high-quality recitals and chamber concerts. Additionally, Hunter proposed the City's streets and landmarks form the backdrop for a variety of fringe events that would appeal to a broader audience.

Derick was quick to see the advantages such a festival would bring to the City, but others were less keen. The venues would be too small to make the concerts financially viable, they argued, London too sated with cultural events and too overflowing with overseas visitors to make yet another addition to the cultural landscape desirable, particularly in July, the month Hunter suggested the festival take place. Derick, however, persisted. July would be an ideal time to hold such a festival, he countered, since it would bridge the gap between the end of the Southbank's ballet season and the start of the Proms. Moreover, the festival would remind people of the City's rich history in arts patronage, stretching back hundreds of years, while enabling it to support contemporary musicians. Finally, the festival offered the Corporation a unique opportunity to garner support for its proposed Barbican concert hall and theatre complex.

By the time Derick became Lord Mayor in November 1961 the cynics had been won over. Soon afterwards, it was announced that the first Festival would take place between 9th and 21st July 1962. Ian Hunter was appointed Artistic Director, while Derick agreed to serve as president of the City Arts Trust Limited, a non-profit making company established to promote the Festival and ensure it was put on a solid footing financially. Finance of course would be critical to the Festival's success. The Corporation of London made the first move, promising £7,500 on condition that a further £6,500 be raised elsewhere. Donations from the Arts Council, the Bank of England, Lloyd's of London, the Stock Exchange and an assortment of joint stock and merchant banks soon followed. Indeed, so many donations poured in that, by May 1962 the fund had exceeded its initial target by £9,000.

Because this was the first time the City had attempted such a venture, and conscious of the time constraints they faced, the Festival's organisers decided against an overly-ambitious programme. At the same time, though, they were determined to fulfil the principle idea behind the Festival, that

of mixing old and new. Six new pieces were therefore commissioned from leading British composers. An anonymous donation of £1,000 paid for four of these: a Te Deum by Edmund Rubbra, performed during the opening service at St Paul's Cathedral; a London Pastoral for Tenor and Chamber Orchestra by Richard Rodney Bennett; a Quintet for Clarinet and Strings by Arnold Cooke and a Concertino for Trumpet, Bassoon and Small Orchestra by Phyllis Tate. Alan Rawsthorne, meanwhile, accepted an invitation from The Musicians' Company to pen a Trio for Yehudi Menuhin, Gaspar Cassado and Louis Kentner, which premiered at the Grocers' Hall on 12th July. Perhaps the most eye-catching commission, however, was a song cycle composed by William Walton for renowned soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. At Derick's suggestion, this was paid for by the Goldsmiths' Company: *It occurred to me that if the Goldsmiths' Company were willing to make some form of donation towards the Festival of the City of London this would be a particularly attractive way of doing so, rather than merely making a direct grant to the funds.* 'A Song for the Lord Mayor's Table' blended poetry by the likes of Wordsworth and Blake with traditional rhymes such as 'Oranges and Lemons' to evoke the sights and sounds of London through the ages. One of the Festival's highlights, it was performed at Goldsmiths' Hall on 18th July by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Gerald Moore.

Alongside these new works sat some long-established ones. Arthur Rubenstein played Schumann, Chopin and Debussy. Julian Bream's programme included Byrd and Dowland, while Jacqueline du Pré joined forces with the Guildhall School of Music to perform Boccherini's Cello Concerto in B Flat. Nor did the Festival consist entirely of concerts. Benjamin Britten's new interpretation of Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas' was staged at the Guildhall, a 13th century miracle play, 'The Raising of Lazarus', was recreated at St Paul's Cathedral and Gilbert & Sullivan's 'The Yeomen of the Guard' was performed at the Tower of London: *there is no doubt that The Yeomen of the Guard is perfect material for the City of London Festival, commented The Times, presented as the operetta is against the very walls of the Tower which is its setting...Mr Anthony Besch deployed his crowds attractively on the lawns of the moat or on the wooden platforms with staircases...designed unobtrusively as foreground to the Tower walls. Mr Lawrence Leonard, as conductor, made effective use of trumpeters on the battlements, and was able to call on St Peter's bell for the tolling which the libretto assigns to it – a lucky theatrical stroke.* (The Times, 10th July 1962) Not that everyone was impressed, particularly as the weather refused to play fair. *The descent of the Tower officials from the actual battlements on to the stage gave the production a lifelike air and made a handsome spectacle of the pageant kind, admitted the Daily Telegraph, although: Gilbert's Colonel Fairfax observed cheerfully that "He might have had to die perchance in June." But many of the audience at last night's open air performance...were gloomily forecasting their own deaths in July – of pneumonia. The Tower moat served as a most efficient wind-gully, dispersing the singers' voices and giving the Tudor crowd an excellent reason for their realistic hurrying on to the stage.* (The Daily Telegraph, 19th July 1962)

As promised, the Festival also included a wide range of fringe events, some aimed specifically at City workers, others at a more general audience. Over 14,000 people seized an opportunity to step onto the Stock Exchange trading floor, while 50,000 visited the Writing Room at Lloyd's to view an exhibition of photographs, maps, underwriters' slips, Nelson relics and the Casualty Book, open at the entry for the Titanic, before making their way up to the gallery to watch the market in action. Other attractions included a fashion show for 400 female City workers, courtesy of Peter Robinson's department store, lunchtime talks and organ recitals, an exhilarating Tideway Race from Putney to Tower Bridge and back, which saw nearly 300 dinghies compete for a gold-plated trophy supplied by the Evening Standard, and a fair on Lime Street. This last, a nod to the medieval fairs of Old London, featured a sheaf-pitching contest, an itinerant magician, dancing to Humphrey Lyttelton's Band and myriad stalls and sideshows. *[T]hose who were "something in the City"*

*seemed to like the change, noted the Guardian. Bowlers were tilted at rakish angles as pennies were rolled, hoops pitched, and darts hurled, to impress the office girls. That mark of respectability, the umbrella, after an early shower became the anchor for floating balloons.* (The Guardian, 12th July 1962) Not to be outdone, Beaver House on Great Trinity Lane, home of the Hudson's Bay Company, promised: *Visitors will be able to see not only furs of all kinds, but also an exhibition of the company's archives, which date from 1670;* the Guildhall Mechanisation Department demonstrated its newly installed automatic data processing system, *in which records for the various finance departments are kept on punched cards, thus greatly speeding up data retrieval and other operations,* between 4pm and 6pm each weekday, while the Mermaid Theatre mounted an exhibition of models and plans for the Blackfriars Underpass Development.

Ironically, one of the most popular fringe events nearly did not happen at all. Festival planners dreamed of spit-roasting a half-ton ox at Old Change – a 17 hour process – before offering 1,000 slices to the public at 2/6d per portion, including bread and mustard. But their plans were thrown into disarray when it was pointed out that the City had been a smokeless zone since the mid 1950s. Appeals to Derick proved fruitless: *I'm sympathetic of course, but helpless. A Lord Mayor can't start breaking his own laws.* Following some frantic negotiation, however, a compromise was reached and roasting finally got underway at the stroke of midnight on 20th July over a coke-fired barbecue, tended by the Guild of Turning Spit Roasters (est. 1248), supervised by George Short, proprietor of the Dog & Fox at Wimbledon, and watched by a bemused trickle of City night workers. Late the following afternoon, the press was able to feast on the sight of the first slices being served up to Derick and Lucette Aldous, Prima Ballerina at the Ballet Rambert.

After months of planning, the Festival of the City of London officially got underway on 9th July. The inaugural event, held immediately after the service at St Paul's, was a Masque, staged in the Mansion House and attended by the Queen. On arrival, the Queen, shimmering in pale blue and silver, was greeted by Derick and a pair of actors dressed as Gog and Magog, who escorted her through serried ranks of Pikemen to the Egyptian Room. There, she and an audience of about 450 were treated to an hour-long canter through the City's history, devised by John Betjeman and featuring the vocal talents of actor John Gielgud, singer Tommy Steele and veteran music hall performer Billy Danvers, who persuaded the predominantly mink and diamond clad audience to join him in a rousing chorus of an old cockney favourite, 'Rhubarb and Custard'. Like the ox roast, though, the Masque too nearly failed to materialise. Betjeman's imagination had been fired by the idea when it was first put to him. But he had one condition, which, he warned Derick, was non-negotiable: *I did make it clear...I would only do the job if the Coal Exchange will [be] used for some function at the Festival. I did not feel I could with a clear conscience write something in honour of a City which was prepared to destroy one of its finest buildings for financial gain & without letting the public see what it was intending to destroy...It is so sad as I long to try my hand at this entertainment which is now simmering in my head & which your letter has temporarily (I hope), set off the boil.* The proposed demolition of the Victorian Coal Exchange, one of the earliest cast iron buildings in the country, to facilitate the widening of Lower Thames Street, had been fiercely opposed by preservation societies and architectural historians alike. Once again, however, a compromise was found. The Coal Exchange, organisers announced, would stage an exhibition of photographs and engravings from Betjeman's latest television series, 'Steam and Stained Glass', for the duration of the Festival.

For Derick, the City Festival was an exhausting but ultimately rewarding experience. The endless committee and sub-committee meetings, to-ings and fro-ings, negotiations and compromises that went into its creation gobbled up large chunks of his already beleaguered diary. And during the Festival itself, Derick had to juggle attendance at events with his other mayoral duties. On

15th July, for example, he watched King Hussein of Jordan lay a foundation stone for a boys' club at Camberwell before going on to the Crypt at St Paul's to hear Sir Ralph Richardson read extracts from John Donne's sermons – reputedly the first time they had been heard at St Paul's since Donne had preached there in the early 17th century. *Sir Ralph Richardson did the readings magnificently but was trembling all over*, noted Derick in his diary, *They say he has to take a good deal of Dutch courage to keep up*. Three days later, his schedule was busier still: *The Mayor of Dar es Salaam called to see me. Then Mary and I went to St Swithin's Lane to a Spanish Patio...for the Festival. We watched Spanish dancing & drank sherry. In the afternoon Mary & I & Sheriffs & wives went down to Ashted for the Freeman's School prize giving...On our return I went to a cocktail party...for the opening of the new [Legal & General] building...Afterwards Mary & I went to Goldsmiths' Hall for a recital by the famous Elizabeth Schwarzkopff [sic].* But by the Festival's end, Derick was able to regard the new venture as a success. Nor had he any doubts as to its merit. For as he wrote in his foreword to the official Festival programme: *Amidst a period of the worship of Mammon, this Festival is trying to show many things that are beautiful and inspired in the arts – music by the masters, played by the masters, the song, the play, the opera, verse, tragedy and comedy – in the setting of this our most historic capital, and perhaps by doing so release man for a while and remind him that there are other things than those entirely material.*