

Doddington 100 Years Ago : April 1926

On the 6th April 1926 the British Broadcasting Company, came to Doddington to broadcast a 15-minute excerpt of Handel's Messiah performed by the Doddington Choral Society led by the rector of Doddington, Rev Richard Ridge, in St Mary's church.

The BBC was only formed in 1922, so how the Rev Ridge persuaded the BBC to come to Doddington at this early date will probably remain a mystery as it was a full month before the first broadcast from King's College chapel and appears to be the first outside broadcast by the BBC in Cambridgeshire and probably only the second in East Anglia. However, the Rev Ridge moved in high circles as he secured an Army general to perform a dedication of a stained-glass window in the church and got the Duchess of Bedford to open a fete in the village. Then, in 1938 he even advertised in the Times newspaper appealing for a new church organ and he got one that is still used in the church today.

The performance was broadcast live at 9pm throughout the country and culminated with the famous Hallelujah Chorus and was advertised in the Radio Times (opposite).

BBC engineers placed three microphones inside the church, and the vestry was converted into the control room, two telephone lines connected the church to the main transmitter in London.



The Doddington singers were supplemented by two professional singers, Miss Maud Bostock and Mrs George Chapman and Harry Hartley and Stanley Hill from Peterborough Cathedral. Musicians Mr JW Stallebrass and Mr AT Nottingham, both of March, also assisted.

Rev Richard Ridge; conductor. Tom Franklin; organist.

Soprano chorus

Misses Lucy Beard, Driver, Kingham, Margery Ridge, A Shaw, Stokeley, Yorke
Mesdames Rose Kilby, Morton, R Stimpson,

Contralto

Misses Bowyer, Barker, Begg, Edgeley, Franklin, Harding, Eleanor Ridge, M Stimpson, Welcher, E Yorke
Mesdames Clarke, A Green, Nightingale, Pratt, Annie Ridge, Rowe, G Stimpson, Master J Peet

Tenor

Messrs Fenn, Hart, Palmer, Mitchell, Smeath, JW Stallebrass[of March], Weedon, AC Yorke

Bass

Messrs Billups, Bird, Blott, Dunham, Ellen, Gamblin, Green, Jones, Nightingale, Sandall, Smith, L Stokeley, Whiting, Wilson, W Yorke



Local residents in 2026 were able to identify some of the singers!

1926 performers:

Lucy Beard, (front row, 4th from left, light coloured outfit)

Rev Richard Ridge (centre front)

Mrs Annie Morton (white hat)

Mrs Kate Green (Annie's sister in the white blouse)

Mr Algy Green (behind Kate, her husband, had a Nursery business in St Peter's Road, March)

Mr Thomas Weedon (?) (4th from left, grandson Andrew sang in 2026)

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To commemorate the event there was a rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus at the Easter Sunday service on 5th April 2026, in St Mary's Church and the BBC returned to report on this historic event.

BBC Radio Cambridgeshire sent reporter Kerry Devine to interview David Edwards, our local historian who shared the original information and pictures from the event in 1922.



The event made the 10 o'clock news on Easter Sunday, the BBC website (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgij0g6zl1xvo>) and on Easter Monday, two lengthy interviews were played during the morning show. I

David spoke about his family connection to the original event, but it was only when he was preparing his column for the Diary, that he found this article in the Cambs Times.

DODDINGTON BROADCAST.

Highly Successful Rendering of "The Messiah."

MANY CONGRATULATIONS FROM LISTENERS-IN.

Numerous wireless enthusiasts in the Isle and thousands of listeners-in throughout Great Britain, Ireland, America, and Germany listened to the excellent rendering of three choruses from the "Messiah," which were broadcast from Doddington Parish Church, on Tuesday evening, when a choir, composed chiefly of vocalists from the village, with the assistance of several of the principal vocalists of the district, gave a wonderful interpretation of Handel's masterpiece.

The organising of the effort was in the capable hands of the Rector of the Parish Church, the Rev. R. Ridge, B.A., who has worked unceasingly since his arrival in the village for the uplifting and brightening of the social life of his parishioners. In 1922 the rev. gentleman arranged and directed a children's play, "Alice in Wonderland," which was attended by such great success on its presentation in the village that it was performed all through the neighbourhood. Two years later, in 1924, a grand Dickens' carnival was held under the Rev. R. Ridge's supervision and direction, and, as on the former occasion, the event was an unqualified success. Then, in October last, he was instrumental in the formation of the Doddington Choral Society, and no sooner had this organisation had its inauguration, than the Rector, in his customary enthusiastic manner, decided that the Society should attempt that difficult yet beautiful composition of Handel's, the "Messiah." This naturally was a very daring experiment for a village choral society to undertake as first enterprise. The rev. gentleman and his fellow music-lovers, however, were not to be deterred and commenced practices with zeal. As many as five a week have been held during the past winter months, and this, incidentally, has meant the sacrificing of much time on the part of the organiser, the organist, and the choir, but all efforts were amply rewarded by the great success that attended the rendering of the oratorio on Tuesday evening. Long before the advertised time for the commencement of the programme people began to stream into the Church, and by the time the first overture was played, the edifice was filled.

THE B.B.C. GIVE THEIR SUPPORT.

Learning of the optimism and enthusiasm of the village vocalists in their great task, the British Broadcasting Company decided to broadcast portions of the "Messiah" from the Church. Two of the Company's most efficient and most competent men, Messrs. H. H. Thompson and R. H. Wood, of the outside broadcasting department of the B.B.C., were sent down, and fitted up the apparatus for the receiving and transmitting of the choruses to London. Three microphones were installed inside the Church, one on the screen, one near the pulpit and one slung between the central pillars, this being done to make everything as natural to the listeners-in as possible. From the microphones cables were run to the Vestry, which was temporarily transformed into a control room. Here, whatever was picked up by the microphones was amplified before passing on to one of the two trunk lines which were reserved for the purpose of the broadcasting, one for the music to pass along, the other being entirely for control purposes, so that the operators could keep in touch with headquarters as to how things were going.

A remarkable fact of the broadcasting is that listeners in on the wireless actually hear the music one quarter of a second before those in the body of the Church would hear it, as a wireless wave travels with far greater velocity than does an ordinary sound wave.

THE CONTRIBUTORS.

Four outside soloists were engaged for the solo parts, viz.: Miss Maud Bostock, of London and Nottingham, a soprano, who last week won a gold and a silver medal for singing at the Queen's Hall, London; Mrs. Geo. Chapman, Nottingham, contralto; Mr. Harry Hartley, principal tenor, and medalist, of Peterborough Cathedral, tenor; and Mr. Stanley Hill, bass soloist of Peterborough Cathedral.

The Chorus of over 50 voices was composed as follows:

Sopranos—Misses Beard, Driver, Kingham, M. Ridge, Shaw, Stokeley, and Yorke; Mesdames Kilby, Morton, and R. Stimpson.

Contraltos—Misses Bowyer, Barker, Begg, Edgeley, Franklin, Harding, E. Ridge, M. Stimpson, Welcher, and E. Yorke; Mesdames Clark, A. Green, Nightingale, Pratt, Ridge, Rowe, G. Stimson, and Master J. Post.

Tenors—Messrs. Fenn, Hart, Palmer, Mitchell, Emeath, Stallebrass, Weedon, and A. C. Yorke.

Basses—Messrs. Billups, Bird, Blott, Dunham, Ellen, Gambin, Green, Jones, Nightingale, Sandall, Smith, L. Stokeley, Whitting, Wilson, and W. Yorke.

The Rev. R. Ridge wielded the baton for the choruses, the Society making a splendid response to his appeal. The conducting in the overtures and the solos was admirably carried out by Mr. J. W. Stallebrass, of March. A special tribute must be paid to the organist, Mr. T. D. Franklin, whose rendering of "The Messiah" contributed largely to the success of the oratorio. The orchestral effects were splendidly supplied by an orchestra under the direction of Mr. A. T. Nottingham, of March.

Conductors, singers, organist, and orchestra certainly gave of their very best, and no amount of praise could be a flattery to their efforts.

THE PROGRAMME DESCRIBED.

There were three parts to the programme, which took three hours to carry through. The opening overture was very well played by the orchestra — who later in the programme gave the "Pastoral Symphony" with good effect. Mr. Harry Hartley then gave a fine interpretation of the tenor part, the opening recit "Comfort Ye," and the air "Every valley shall be exalted" being admirably sung, as also was the air "All they that see Him," but he excelled in his rendering of the recit "Thy rebuke hath broken His heart" and the air "Behold and see." He was equally successful when he sang the recit "He that dwelleth in Heaven," and the solo "Thou shalt break them." As a bass soloist, Mr. Stanley Hill used his fine voice to perfection, when he sang the solo "Thus said the Lord of Hosts," the solo "But who may abide," the recit "For behold, darkness," and the solo "The people that walked in darkness," while he also created a great impression with his rendering of "Why do the Nations," the recit "Behold I tell you a mystery," and the solo "The trumpet shall sound." Mrs. G. Chapman's contralto solos were a feature of the evening, her rich, full voice being heard to great advantage in "Behold a Virgin shall conceive," "O Thou that tellest," and "He was despised and rejected." Miss M. Bostock was in excellent voice, giving a highly finished interpretation of the soprano pieces, bringing out all the beauties of the music with an appropriate and sympathetic expressiveness. Her contributions were: "There were shepherds," "And the Angel said unto them," "And suddenly," "Rejoice greatly," "Thou shalt feed the eyes of the blind," "He shall feed His flock," "He was cut off out of the land," "But Thou didst not leave His soul."

DODDINGTON BROADCAST.
(Continued from previous Columns.)

"He trusted in God," "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," "The Lord gave the word," "Hallelujah," "By man came also the Resurrection," "Even so in Christ," "Worthy is the Lamb," and finally the "Amen" chorus. The three items broadcast were "All we like sheep," "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," and the "Hallelujah" Chorus.

The choruses were remarkably well rendered, but the Society excelled in the singing of the items that were broadcast, as was evident by the countless congratulatory telegrams and letters that have since been received by the Rector from all parts of the country. Listeners-in were most enthusiastic in their congratulation, many lamenting the fact that more was not broadcast, declaring the three choruses to be "by far the best thing in that evening's wireless programme."

Some of the opinions received by wire or letter are: "Bravo, Doddington! It was splendid. The sopranos were in fine form (Swansea)"; "Heartiest congratulations on a very successful fifteen minutes. Absolutely perfect (G. T. Butcher, Birmingham)"; "Congratulations on excellent chorus on wireless (Col. Harding, Madingley)"; "Perfectly sung and really quite a treat to listen to (Glasgow)"; "Your selections on 'The Messiah' were by far the best thing of the programme (Morriston, South Wales)"; "A really magnificent performance (Wembley)"; etc., etc., while a famous Cathedral organist and Doctor of Music remarked "What an example you set us town people!" A letter from the B.B.C. said that "The singing reflected the greatest credit on those responsible for their training" and thanked all for the splendid show they gave and for the admirable object lesson they gave other villages.

The proceeds of the effort went for the Church Heating Apparatus Fund.



They also spoke at length to Canon Mark Collinson, the current Rector at Doddington and the Six Fen Churches. Canon Mark explained that the Hallelujah Chorus was all about the hope that comes at Easter with the resurrection of Jesus, and that this is just as relevant today as it was in 1926.

Once it was decided that it would be nice to mark this historic event, it was mentioned to a few members of the congregation known for their singing abilities, and the idea was hatched.

With only a few weeks to prepare and the complexity of the music, this proved to be quite a challenge, but it all came together on Easter Sunday, 5th April 2026.



Alison, the resident organist suggested they sang to a recorded backing track, and it all worked very well.

Alison Bird, Rosie Warburton, Elizabeth Dunkley, Andrew Weedon (his grandfather had sung in the original choir in 1926), Susan Harlock and Sarah Edwards were the singers.