

Sam Newgarth took over in 1979, and the next year the orchestra celebrated its golden jubilee with an anniversary concert which included the world premiere of the specially commissioned 'Golden Symphony' by Dorset composer Lionel Simpson - himself the timpanist of the Westbourne Orchestra.

The wheel turned full circle in 1994, as the Day Centre was to be rebuilt in such a way as to preclude rehearsals. The orchestra's new base eventually turned out to be none other than St Ambrose Church, where the story began in 1930 some seventy-six years ago. I went along to this venerable building one Friday evening in April 2000 to see and hear the Westbourne Orchestra in action.

I wasn't sure what to expect: I've heard amateur orchestras which make everything sound like one of those graphic scores of the 'sixties - thick black splotches and wavy lines. I needn't have worried. The musicians tackled some startlingly difficult music (including Tchaikovsky's 'Capriccio italien', one of the hardest pieces in the repertoire) with the minimum of fuss and the maximum effect. Sam Newgarth, the conductor, took it all in his stride, stopping the players only a couple of times to sort out a really tricky passage - and this was two months before the concert!

David Portsmouth was appointed Chairman in 1999 on the retirement after 25 years of Richard Davis, and Rebekah Reeve was appointed leader in the same year followed by June Bultz in 2005. Dave Brooks was appointed Deputy Conductor in 2002.

A concert version of "The Merry Widow" took place in 2002 in collaboration with the South West Operatic Company. This was followed by children's concerts with the New Forest Junior Chamber Orchestra and orchestras from local schools. A special "Last Night of the Proms" type concert was arranged to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2003. As part of the WOS education programme, evening workshops open to all musicians were initiated in 2003 and have continued annually ever since.

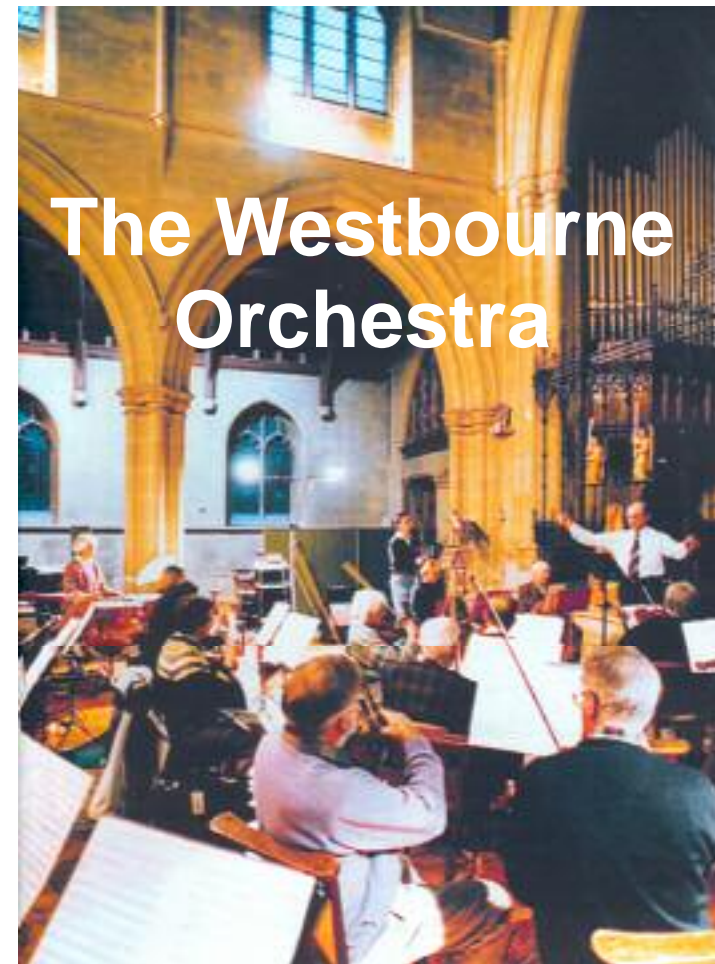
The Orchestra has been very much encouraged by the concert attendance of local MP Sir John Butterfill and various Mayors of Bournemouth and Ferndown.

In September 2005 it was announced that Sir Patrick Moore astronomer and xylophonist had graciously agreed to become Vice President of the Westbourne Orchestral Society. All members are highly delighted at this great honour.

The Westbourne Orchestra has not only raised thousands of pounds for charities over the years, it has given orchestral experience to a large number of amateur musicians - and much pleasure to audiences in Dorset.



Percussionist Tricia Davis



The Westbourne Orchestra

Tony Burton-Page celebrates the 76th anniversary of a musical institution

(revised and updated from an article by Tony Burton-Page originally published in Dorset Life June 2000 with kind permission of the author and editor)



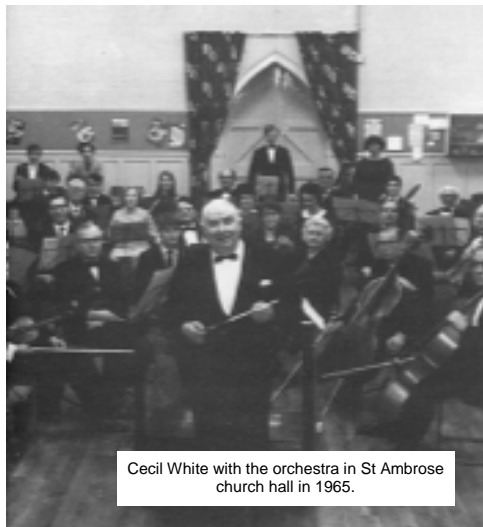
St Ambrose church

A long, long time ago, in a country not so very far away, it was said that Britain was 'das Land ohne Musik' – the land without music. That though, was in the bad old days when Germany ruled the musical waves: Bach, Beethoven and Brahms were the kings, and the only famous British composer since Purcell was Handel – and he was a German who had come to live in England! Heinrich Heine wrote in the 19th century that 'there is nothing on earth more terrible than English music, except for English painting'.

Since that far-off era however, this country has not only produced composers acknowledged to be world-class, but has also developed an honourable tradition of amateur music-making, exemplified at its best by two of these composers, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, both of who gave enormous support to musical amateurs by writing works for (and conducting) non-professional choirs, orchestras and ensembles. Michael Tippett continued the good work and since then, Benjamin Britten and - bringing us right up to the present day - John Tavener have both written works for amateur forces.

But it was the years between the wars which were the golden days for amateur music-making and it was in 1930 that two violinists living in Westbourne, Stan Webber and Mary Appleyard, got together to play duets. They were joined shortly afterwards by Mr Minns, a pianist who happened to have his own music shop - a handy source of repertoire then and subsequently patronised by generations of Dorset musicians. The word got around and others asked to join in. A drawing-room was not large enough now. Somewhere more spacious was needed, but where?

Stan Webber belonged to St Ambrose Church in West Cliff Road and he asked if the expanded ensemble could play in the church hall in Alumhurst Road. Yes, said the authorities, and free of charge as long as they would play for the occasional service. The ensemble thus found its first home - and its first name: the St Ambrose Orchestra. The first conductor was Carden Buckley soon to be followed by Hiram Lear, principal clarinet of what was then the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra (now the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra) .



Cecil White with the orchestra in St Ambrose church hall in 1965.



The horn section

Sir Dan Godfrey, Hiram Lear's conductor in the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra, became the first president. Thanks to the rent-free accommodation, the orchestra's only expense was the purchase of music; to cover this, players paid a shilling every time they came to a rehearsal, and in this way they began to build up their own library.

During the war, the orchestra gave 248 concerts to the troops stationed in Bournemouth and raised much money for charities, something it has continued to do up to the present day.

After Hiram Lear stood down in 1947, Mary Appleyard, who had been in at the band's birth, became the third conductor, only resigning for health reasons in 1954 after 24 years' service. Such dedication is a feature of this remarkable band: the present conductor, Sam Newgarth, has occupied the position since 1979. President for 30 years, Arthur Shaft, who sadly died in 2004, thus missing the 75th anniversary by just a few months, had been with the orchestra since 1950. There is at least one instance of a couple meeting through the orchestra and continuing to play in it after they were married.

Cecil White, who succeeded Mary Appleyard, was the conductor for the next 17 years, a period which saw much change. In 1961, the new vicar of St Ambrose decided to charge rent for the use of the church hall, so the orchestra's finances took on a new importance. As a result, a committee was formed, officers were appointed, a constitution was drawn up and the Westbourne Orchestral Society received its official baptism.

There was more change in 1968 when the Bournemouth Corporation bought the church hall for conversion into a day centre for the elderly and the orchestra had to move. After several temporary venues, they eventually returned to a much improved hall, now the Alumhurst Day Centre, in 1969. It was time for the shilling collection to go and in its place came annual subscriptions for members: professionals get paid for playing, but amateurs pay to play!

George Freeth became the society's fifth conductor when Cecil White retired and the orchestra continued to expand and improve, taking part in the Southampton Music Festival of 1977.



The leader, Rebekah Reeve