



The Madding Crowd is one of the largest and longest established of the revival groups specialising in West Gallery music, meeting each week, just as the old gallery bands and choirs did. The group was

founded in 1975 to lead a village evensong, and we have given carol concerts every year since 1977, summer concerts since 1979, harvest concerts since 1989, and have led the singing at many church services, baptisms, weddings and harvest festivals. We have broadcast on radio and television



several times, including the Songs of Praise programme shown in 1990, and in "Going the Rounds" on BBC Radio 4 in December 2003. We also provided music for a television programme about Isaac Watts, shown on the PAX channel in North America. In the 1990s we created an early 19th century village wedding and celebration for English Heritage Special Events at various locations in the South of

England. Besides the wedding celebration, our current programmes include

- Village Celebrations
- Thomas Hardy
- A Village Harvest
- At Sea and at War
- William Cobbett
- Isaac Watts
- The Wesleys
- Nelson
- Wellington



Concerts last two hours including an interval, and consist of church and secular music, linked and illustrated with narrative, poems, dramatised readings and dances. A shorter concert can be followed by country dancing.

Services follow the Book of Common Prayer, but use village settings of all the music. We enjoy teaching some of the lesser-known village tunes to congregations.

We travel many miles to perform and are always received with enthusiasm. Our pleasure in performing is obvious, so our audiences have fun too, making a concert by The Madding Crowd an unforgettable experience for everyone.

[www.maddingcrowd.org](http://www.maddingcrowd.org)



Musical Director:  
Mike Bailey  
4 Grove Road, Shawford,  
Winchester, Hampshire.  
SO21 2DD  
01962 713392

[mike@maddingcrowd.org](mailto:mike@maddingcrowd.org)

Secretary:  
Brenda Bennett  
20 Trafalgar Way,  
Stockbridge, Hampshire  
SO20 6ET  
01264 810578

[brenda@maddingcrowd.org](mailto:brenda@maddingcrowd.org)



*Music from the Village Bands & Quires of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries; Hymns & Psalms, Carols & Anthems, Songs, Dances & Marches; collected from old Manuscripts and Books "printed for the Use of country Choirs"; illustrated with contemporary readings, performed in costume of about 1820*





A workshop in Abbey URC, Romsey. ©2011 R D Arnold

**Workshops** are an opportunity for everyone to join in with the singing and playing. We usually prepare a booklet of music for 3 or 4 voice parts, and suitable parts where they are needed for clarinets, brass, viola and any other instruments we know about in advance. We teach the music, line by line if there are non-readers, and take as long as needed to ensure that everyone can give a suitably rousing performance to their own satisfaction. Sometimes the workshop will lead to a mini-concert for friends and relations, or it may be preparing a church service. Most often, we just have a jolly good sing.

Much of the music is in 4 parts, Treble, Alto, Tenor and Bass, but sometimes there are just three parts, omitting one of the middle parts. Our music covers a long period and many styles, from Henry VIII to Victoria, but the heyday was the Georgians, from early 18<sup>th</sup> century to early 19<sup>th</sup>. A great deal of music was written to support to services in village churches, much of it setting words from the Psalms in various paraphrases, especially those of Southampton-born Isaac Watts, together with the Old and New Versions, and Hymns by various non-conformist writers including the Wesleys, Cowper, Newton, and Doddridge. Carols tell the Christmas story, and anthems had a place in services, especially at Easter, Harvest and Christmas.

We may also include secular songs, glees and folk songs from the same period.

We are happy to talk about the history and social context which we have uncovered over the years. There are many entertaining stories and anecdotes, most of them true!



Mock wedding ceremonies have been used as a form of celebration for many years: at Maying, during a Coronation, at Harvest and at other times. Local customs are often incorporated. In the Isle of Man the young men are plied with drink and then made to dance along a line on the ground or even on a table top.

The Groom meets the Bride at her parents' house, and they walk to the church with the band in procession. Our country



wedding keeps to the Book of Common Prayer in outline. Psalm 128 or Psalm 67 are appointed to be sung, and we sing both, the latter in an Anthem setting by Henry Tolhurst of Chart Sutton, Kent. During the service, one or two interruptions occur - working country people didn't mind saying what they thought, no matter what the occasion. After a few tense moments, all ends well, and the happy couple leave the church arm in arm to join in the festivities - dances, singing and games.

Many games are documented. We encourage children to join in "jumping in sacks" and "tug of war". In "Jingles", all the girls are blindfolded, and try to catch the one boy wearing bells. The successful girl steals a kiss, then wears the bells for the next round, in which all the boys are blindfolded and try to catch her, and so on.



The usual **Harvest** celebration, before the Victorians invented Harvest Festivals, was hosted by the yeoman Farmer, who was the landowner and major employer. He laid on a feast

to thank the workers for the long hours they had worked in the fields, and so shared with them a small part of the produce. Besides eating and drinking, entertainment was provided by the revellers' own party pieces. Often the same person would sing the same song year upon year. The village band, which also played for church services on Sundays, played late into the night for dancing.

**Thomas Hardy** was born in 1840 in the cottage a short walk from the Kingston Maurward House. The family provided the village band for Stinsford Church, on the edge of the park. When Hardy describes events in the life



of the village band, in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and other stories, he draws on family experience. Our programme quotes from his works as we follow the band and choir through a typical year. Most of the pieces that he mentions by name, Psalm tunes, songs, and dance tunes, are in our repertoire.



At **Christmas**, the band and choir had the responsibility of "going the rounds" on Christmas Eve, visiting every household in the village and outlying farms, to sing carols bringing the good news of the birth of Jesus. Hundreds of these

carols, little known today, survive in manuscript books, and our programme includes many; also an anthem and Psalm for the Christmas Day service, and a Mummings Play. Here King George despatches the Turkish Knight, but don't worry - the Doctor will cure him in a trice! Related Pace-egging Plays are also performed at **Easter**.