

Thomas Tomkins 1572 – 1656

1668, Contratenor and Bass parts of Musica Deo Sacra

Thomas Tomkins was born in 1572 in St Davids. As a child and teenager he lived in the Cathedral Close and sung in this Cathedral as a chorister. His father, Thomas Farington Tomkins, was organist and Vicar Choral of the Cathedral. Thomas left St Davids with his family in his early 20s and became Organist of Worcester Cathedral in 1596, aged 24. He later became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal.

Along with William Byrd, Thomas Tallis, Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Weelkes and Thomas Morley, he was one of the six most revered of Tudor composers and his music is still widely performed across the world today.

The two books here are a good example of how early church music was laid out for the singers of the day. Each part had their own line in an independent book. This can be seen as being very different from the layout of the modern editions, displayed here alongside the originals, which include all the parts. As you can see, the difference in the notation style between early and modern editions made the music considerably harder to read for the Tudor Vicar Chorals.