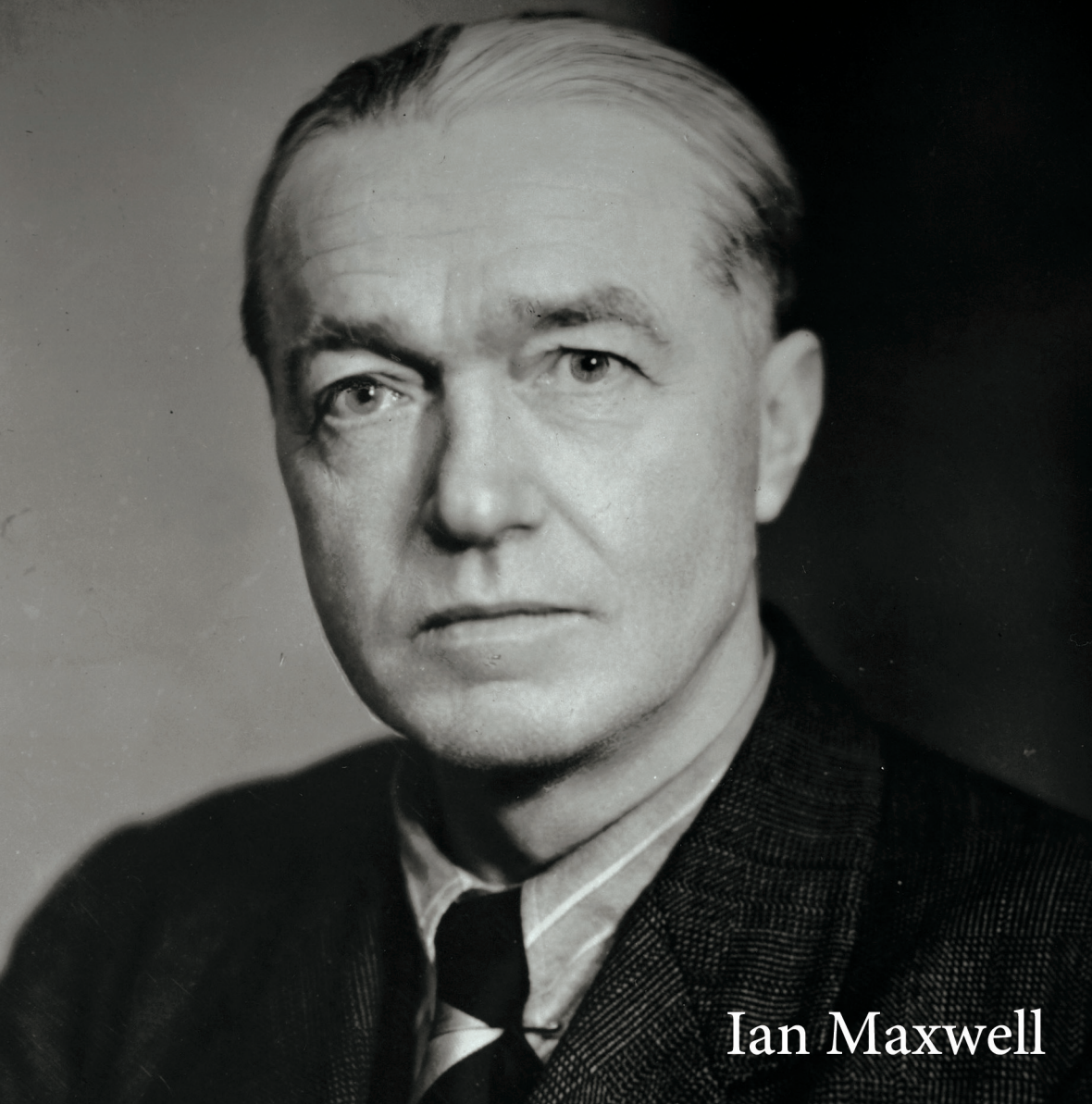


Ernest John MOERAN

His Life and Music



Ian Maxwell

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THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Preface

I have been examining and researching the life and work of composer E. J. Moeran for more than fifteen years. During this time, my view of him as a person has transitioned through many stages. At the outset, although I had a liking for a couple of piano pieces that I had played, and I was familiar with the Symphony in G minor and the cello concerto, I knew little about the other music and almost nothing about the man himself. While Lionel Hill's *Lonely Waters* and Geoffrey Self's *The Music of E.J. Moeran* were on my bookshelf, I confess that I had not read them. Investigating Moeran's life and work had been the suggestion of Professor Jeremy Dibble, to whom I had originally proposed an entirely different subject for research. After reading Hill and Self and listening to much more of the music, a natural sympathy for Moeran was immediately established. He had suffered dreadfully, but was, nonetheless, a very personable chap, and, despite his appalling experiences, he had composed such wonderful music. However, and most significantly, there appeared to be unanswered questions about his life: how did he support himself? Who were his family? What was the truth about his wartime injury? What happened to his uncompleted second symphony? It was a visit to the National Archives at Kew to examine the composer's military record that unlocked the chest of discovery. The information I found there did not correspond with the biographical material that I had read, and it was apparent that Moeran was not who I had been led to believe he was.

As I unearthed more data, Moeran the man became more complex and, as I eventually realised, more human and more real. He was not just a composer of music. He was a person, with everything that entails for every one of us. He made decisions: some wise and some less wise. He experienced emotion: some of which we all may experience and some of a kind that most of us could not imagine. He succeeded and he failed. He dissembled and he was truthful, and he could be either pleasant and personable or thoroughly objectionable. While all this may seem self-evident, it is often the case with composers that, in the minds of enthusiastic admirers, their realities are obscured by an imagined personality that accords better with the splendour of their creation. Images of Moeran as an agreeable chap have abounded since his reinstatement as a 'scandalously neglected composer' by British music aficionados in the 1970s. However, this is an oblique perspective, informed by the beauty of the creation having been conflated with the creator, and Moeran was so much more than that. Whether what emerges, as readers progress through the book, is to be admired, pitied, loathed, adored, empathised with, or simply accepted, is ultimately the decision of each reader. My own conclusions will gradually become apparent.

The form I have employed for the book is that of a biographical narrative, beginning with Moeran's ancestors and ending with his residual family. The narrative is interspersed with writings about the compositions presented chronologically, as far as can be determined. While I have endeavoured to at least mention everything that Moeran is known to have composed, the depth of examination necessarily varies, from a brief comment to a more extended assessment. Had I devoted equal attention to every work, with thorough-going technical analyses of each major composition, the book would have been three to four times its present length and would have run the risk of the reader drowning in detail. So, perhaps counter-intuitively, I have chosen to focus more attention on what some might consider to be minor compositions, and I have emphasised works that have either received less consideration in past writings or have acquired a previously unrealised importance through the biography. Since Moeran composed relatively smaller works throughout his career, a more detailed study of these enables better granularity in the tracking of his stylistic evolution. Moreover, some of what I believe to have been Moeran's most significant creations have hitherto been dismissed as inconsequential, and it has been my intention to illuminate their importance. If readers familiar with Moeran's music feel that their favourite work or works has or have been given less attention than they would wish, I can only apologise, and express the hope that the discovery of equally compelling other music will be sufficient compensation. Most of Moeran's major works have previously received detailed analytical examination and comment in several pieces of writing, including Geoffrey Self, *The Music of E.J. Moeran*, Rhoderick McNeill, *A Critical Study of the Life and Works of E. J. Moeran*, Fabian Gregor Huss, *Inspiration, Influence and Stylistic Development in the Symphonies and Concertos of E.J. Moeran*, Bruce Polay, *Selected Orchestral Compositions by Ernest John Moeran* and Christopher Pidcock, *An Exploration of the Compositional Idiom of E. J. Moeran with Specific Focus on his Cello Concerto*. The interested reader is referred to these.

Whatever additional purposes may be asserted for music, it is surely for listening to and enjoying, and Moeran's music is indeed enjoyable. Whether or not one is interested in the circumstances of its composition, or the technical aspects of its construction, it is something that may be experienced for itself alone. Nonetheless, I hope that this book will enhance that experience – after all, there is little point in reading the book and not listening to the music – both for those who believe they already understand Moeran, and for those for whom he remains to be discovered.

Dr Ian Maxwell
Wigton, Cumbria
November 2020

Notes on Archival Sources and Citations

To avoid proliferation of footnotes, citing of sources throughout this book has been restricted. Much of Moeran's life is represented in the contents of several hundred letters that he wrote and that were written to him, and in third party correspondence. Many of these letters are in private collections, or, in some cases, have been lost, but over the years copies were made for the Barry Marsh Collection and are now available for examination. The author expresses his thanks to Rachel Marsh for providing access to the items in her late father's collection. This correspondence includes many letters between Moeran and Douglas Gibson of J. & W. Chester music publishers.

Rhoderick McNeill transcribed hundreds of letters from and to Moeran in Appendix I of his 1982 doctoral thesis.¹ In particular, he transcribed the 175 extant letters that Moeran wrote to Peers Coetmore between October 1943 and March 1950 and which now form part of the *Coetmore, Knott, Moeran Family Collection* at the library of the Melbourne Arts Centre, having been bequeathed by Coetmore's fourth husband and widower Maurice Walter Knott on his death in 2004. Correspondence between Moeran and Lionel Hill was transcribed in Hill's 1985 book *Lonely Waters*.²

Quotations from letter copies in the Barry Marsh Collection are not individually cited except for clarification, and neither are quotations from McNeill's transcriptions of letters from Moeran to Coetmore. Quotations from letters transcribed by Hill and letters to recipients other than Coetmore transcribed by McNeill are cited with page number only. Quotations from letters in all other sources are fully cited.

The research for this book has drawn extensively on the archives of the Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club. Again, these references will not be cited individually. The sources for quotations and references have been: *Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club Archives*, Oxford University Library Dep.c.958, Dep.c.961, Dep.c.962, Dep.c.966, Dep.c.967, Dep.e.487, Additional Deposits Dep.2.3, Additional Deposits Dep.3.2, Additional Deposits Dep.4.1, Additional Deposits Dep.5.1.

Information pertaining to Moeran's military service between 1914 and 1919 and his army medical record has been derived from documents in the National Archives: WO 374/48245 C457620: Lieutenant Ernest John Smeed MOERAN, The Norfolk Regiment and AIR 86/352/471: E. J. Moeran RAF Record. Individual citations will not be included except where clarification is necessary.

¹ Rhoderick McNeill, *A Critical Study of the Life and Works of E. J. Moeran*, (University of Melbourne, PhD Thesis, 1982), available on open access at the University of Melbourne Institutional Repository (<https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/35509> accessed 31 August 2020)

² Lionel Hill, *Lonely Waters: the diary of a friendship with EJ Moeran*, (Thames Publishing, London, 1985)

War diary information has been extracted from National Archives: WO 95/3082/3: 2/8 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment: War Diary. Again, individual citations are given only for the more significant entries.

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A research project of this nature that has spanned sixteen years and several countries and even continents can only be completed with the generous assistance of many people and on many levels. If I have missed anybody in this list of acknowledgements, I apologise for the oversight.

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I would also like to give thanks to the following individuals who have made their time generously available to answering my questions and enquiries: Helen Allinson (Sittingbourne Museum), Robert Atholl (Clare College, Cambridge), Sarah Batchelor (Royal College of Music Library), Dr Ita Beausang, Barry Sterndale Bennett, Georgina Binns, Mark Bostridge, Stephanie Browne, Mariarosaria Canzonieri (Royal College of Music Library), Dr Nicholas Clark (Britten-Pears Foundation Librarian), Patricia Convery (The Performing Arts Centre, Melbourne), Dr Michael Crowe (Oxford & Cambridge Musical Club), the late Gordon Cumming, Michael Dixey, Dr Ruth Fleischmann, Hugh Forrester (Curator, Police Service of Northern Ireland), Ann Francis (Clare College, Cambridge), Claudia Funder (Research Service Coordinator, Arts Centre Melbourne), Chris Garrod, Caoimhe Ni Ghormain (Trinity College Dublin Library), Dr Rosemary Golding (The Open University), Helen Hawes (Parish Assistant, St. Mary's, Spring Grove), Merlin Holland, Anna Hollis, Dr Peter Horton (Royal College of Music Library), Dr Ronan P. Kelly (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Library), Dr Axel Klein,

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My personal thanks go to my three daughters, Catherine, Clare and Nicola, for putting up with my Moeran enthusiasm for so long, and to my wife, Jane, who has supported and helped me over the years of this project in more ways than I can count.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my mother and late father. My love of English music was awakened at an early age through hearing my mother play and sing the songs of Finzi, Quilter, Ireland, Michael Head and many others, and that characteristic sound has been a part of my identity for as long as I can remember.

Thank you all.

Barry Marsh

This book could not have been completed without the benefit of access to the comprehensive archive of information collected over many years by the British Music enthusiast Barry Marsh. I would like to express my appreciation to Mr Marsh's family for their generous decision to make this archive available to me during the latter stages of the writing of this book. The following is their tribute to their father:

In loving memory and in honour of our late father Barry Marsh; a true inspiration to us as children. Barry was a man who had an endless passion and enthusiasm for all classical music but with a particular interest in English music. As a choral singer and writer originally based in Norwich, he discovered and fell in love with the music and life of Ernest John Moeran and eventually dedicated himself to a

lifetime of research into this lesser-known English composer. Moeran was part of our family when we were growing up, and he continued to be so as we both took our careers and studies further into the music world, where Dad encouraged us to include songs by Moeran in our public performances. Although it was Barry's intention to complete a biography of Moeran, this, sadly, did not come to pass—due to his sudden and tragic death in March 2016. While it is disappointing that his version of the book was never finished, we are both delighted to know that much of his hard work and research has been used to bring the story of this remarkable composer to life.

Rachel Marsh
Simon Marsh
November 2020

Introduction

Ernest John Moeran has been one of the least written about composers that were active in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century, and who worked in the folksong-influenced pastoral style that has come to be associated with the conveniently but misleadingly labelled English Musical Renaissance. Of attempts made during the seventy years since his death to produce an authoritative and comprehensive biography, only Geoffrey Self's study *The Music of E.J. Moeran* was completed and published. Although some academic research has been undertaken, with some of Moeran's life and work being the subject of detailed scholarship, none resulted in a full biography. The seemingly intractable problem that prospective biographers have encountered has been an apparent shortage of credible primary source material about the composer's early life, in particular his childhood and years of education. This has led to an unsatisfactorily incomplete evidence-based picture of the adult composer, and it seems that there has been insufficient information to make an extended biography worth writing. Moreover, Moeran destroyed much of his work – including everything that he composed as a child or schoolboy – and his lifelong peripatetic existence ensured that many of his possessions, including manuscripts, were scattered and lost. Few family papers have survived, and the passage of time has meant that there are no longer witnesses to verify or contradict what has previously been claimed or stated. Perhaps inevitably, the place of evidence has been taken by a perceptual framework that has been constructed over the years, based on the compounding of rumour, unsupported assertion, exaggeration, and invention, some of which undoubtedly originated with the composer himself. Facts have been supplemented or superseded by a detailed and ostensibly credible mythology. The understanding of Moeran's personality and the reception of his music has become so rooted in this mythology that the task of separating fact from sometimes sensational fiction is now extremely difficult.

The most powerful and enduring aspect of the mythology has been the story of Moeran's experiences during the First World War. The life-changing head injury he is said to have suffered in France in May 1917 and its treatment by the insertion of a metal plate into his skull, residual fragments of shrapnel embedded too close to his brain for safe removal, and a physical legacy of both the injury and its treatment, are all presumed to have plagued Moeran throughout his life, eventually contributing to his early death at the age of fifty-five. It has also been assumed that he lived through several years of the horrors of the trenches of the Western Front, that what he witnessed there damaged him psychologically, and that all these experiences together defined his character and fundamentally informed the music that he composed. It may be reasonably asserted that the narrative of the injury with its supposedly life-long effects has been one of the key factors driving the late twentieth-century revival

of interest in Moeran's music. One is naturally inclined to a sympathetic response to somebody that has apparently suffered so badly yet who achieved so much. The character that emerges, if the litany of wartime dreadfulness is taken at face value, is one that sits comfortably beside those of other First World War composer victims, such as Ivor Gurney, George Butterworth, William Baines and Frederick Septimus Kelly.

The above being the case, the reader may be forgiven for wondering why the author has embarked on such a seemingly futile project as writing a biography of Moeran. Indeed, the author began his research into the composer's life with the mythology preconceptions intact, and with no notion that they might be susceptible to challenge. However, inconsistencies in the narrative, relating both to Moeran's early life and to his apparent wartime experiences, initiated a process by which much of the hitherto accepted biography was scrutinised, discredited, and discarded. It was the need to find alternatives that enabled the author to discover significant biographical evidence that had previously lain unexamined. Since Moeran's life had been regarded as understood – through the uncritical acceptance of the mythological framework – seeking such material had not been considered as either necessary or even possible. It was at this point in the author's original research project that it was decided to unearth as much information about Moeran's life as possible, confronting every aspect of the accepted wisdom since, in the light of the author's discoveries, it could no longer be regarded as reliable. Thus, the author began an investigation of the life of Ernest John Moeran with a clean sheet, and, over the course of more than fifteen years, has assembled a body of primary evidence and reasonable supposition that has dispersed the Moeran mythology and replaced it with a thorough-going and verifiable biography of the man. This has naturally also required a re-assessment of the music, now illuminated by an understanding of its composer that is underpinned by a foundation of supportable facts.

Moeran's music is straightforward to categorise. Almost every work has a recognisable tonal base and employs conventional harmony, although he occasionally tested its boundaries. He worked with established formal structures – such as sonata form – although the interpretation of these frequently exhibits inventive modification. Nonetheless, Moeran cannot be presented as having been a musical innovator. At first sight, none of his music may be considered progressive in its chronological context. Perhaps more than most of his contemporaries, Moeran was content with the relatively limited stylistic framework that his inherited musical philosophy imposed. At a time when tonality was being challenged both elsewhere in Europe and by many of his compatriots, Moeran had no time for what he called 'a new branch of academism', and the extremes of dissonance that were being explored in the music of his younger contemporaries, such as Elizabeth Lutyens and Humphrey Searle, held no fascination for him. Neither did he embrace influences from popular music genres – such as jazz – in the way that some composers – William Walton, for example – did.

Opinion has been divided as to what extent Moeran created a distinctive voice in his music, with writers being reluctant to credit him with freshness of idea or style. Indeed, discussion of Moeran has almost always taken place within the context of seemingly obvious influences from other composers, such as Ireland, Delius,

Warlock or Sibelius, and the higher profile enjoyed by these composers has ensured that when apparent similarities are identified, it is always Moeran's music that is presumed to be the derivative. The notion that he exhibited a unique style that may even have inspired other composers has never been considered seriously, and his compositional skill has been relegated to an expertise in the re-working of influences. The existence of creative individuality is difficult to establish effectively, as it ultimately requires the identification of the nebulous quality of originality. Nevertheless, if it may be reasonably asserted that Moeran's music could not have been composed by anybody else, then it is equally reasonable to assert that Moeran did have a distinct voice.

While Moeran's music, as with that of many of his contemporaries, must now find an alternative relevance in a world that can no longer remember the traumas experienced and witnessed by its creator, its appreciation can surely only be enhanced if it is accompanied by a clear understanding of its composer's life. Moeran's achievement is available for all to experience in the 120 or so musical compositions that posterity possesses, and which technology has now ensured most of which may be listened to by almost anybody at almost any time. It is the enduring legacy of a life that, as this book will show, was filled variously with promise, achievement, disappointment and despair. While bearing in mind Igor Stravinsky's admonishment that if music appears to express anything beyond itself, this can only be an illusion, it is nonetheless suggested that the sensations and emotions that much of Moeran's music still has the capacity to arouse in attentive listeners may, in themselves, be regarded as evidence that he successfully expressed himself. It is the nature of music that each response to it is an individual one, informed by the unique experiences of each listener, and it is the lasting power of Moeran's creation that it still resonates so vividly. This book presents a definitive and candid study both of Moeran (the man) and of Moeran (the composer), each finally revealed after decades of opaqueness and misunderstanding. The journey of discovery is both challenging and fascinating.

PART 1

ANCESTRY, CHILDHOOD AND
EDUCATION

Irish and Victorian Origins

Hitherto, it has been problematic to determine with any confidence the source of the apparently Irish surname Moeran. Exhaustive searches of archives in Ireland¹ and elsewhere have located just one spurious reference that may be dated to any point earlier than the first decade of the nineteenth century.² A speculative legend promulgated by the present day Moeran family that the name was brought to Ireland as a corruption of the Huguenot *de Meuran* (or *de Meuron*) by exiles from Cardinal Richelieu during the seventeenth century lacks any supporting evidence.³ Similarly, an account that the name came from Brittany during the late eighteenth century as the result of the travels of an itinerant (and possibly Dutch) musician and swordsman named Moeran is also unsupported.⁴ Furthermore, transliteration of the German or Swedish surname *Möran* seems to be very unlikely. The first mention of anybody named Moeran in any source in the British Isles located thus far is dated March 1808, and it may reasonably be supposed that the name appeared at about that date.

A newspaper report of the death of one Edward Moeran at the age of eighty-four on 17 February 1865 in Cork suggests that a Moeran family may have been living in the city for some time, and it would seem reasonable to believe that this was also the case when Edward was born in about 1780.⁵ However, as suggested above, Edward Moeran can be traced back only to March 1808: 'MARRIED: Last Saturday, Mr Edward Moeran, to Miss Busteed.'⁶ While Edward Moeran is mentioned in an

¹ The convention adopted for convenience throughout this book is to refer to the Republic of Ireland, the Irish Free State, Eire or *Éire* as 'Ireland'. Exceptions to this occur where the name 'Eire' is included in quotations from Moeran's letters.

² References in late nineteenth and early twentieth century sources to Thomas Moeran, who as dean of Cork was executed in 1578, derive from a mis-transcription of the account of martyr Thomas Moran in John Mullan ('Molanus'), *Idea Togatae Constantiae, cui adjungitur Epitome Tripartita Martyrum fere omnium qui in Britannicis insulis nostra patrumque memoria de heresi gloriose triumpharunt*, (Paris, 1629), 66. The text mentions that Moran was buried in a marble tomb bearing his name near the choir of St Peter's Church, Cork. The tomb was removed when the church was deconsecrated in 1949.

³ The author is indebted to Moeran's first cousin-once-removed Professor Brian Moeran for this information.

⁴ This information was provided to the author by Moeran family researcher Brian Bornemann.

⁵ 'Deaths', *Cork Examiner*, (18 February 1865), 2.

⁶ 'MARRIED', *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, (21 March 1808), 3.

abundance of newspaper reports from that date until the report of his death in 1865, there is no reference to his birth or childhood. A clue to resolving the mystery of Edward's identity is provided by an earlier marriage announcement in November 1802: 'MARRIED – Last Tuesday morning, at St Finn Barre's by the Rev. Henry Sandiford, Mr EDWARD MORAN, Professor of Music, to Miss NESBITT.'⁷ While this may at first sight be coincidence, the many newspaper references between 1808 and 1865 to Edward Moeran as a musician, and the lack of any further mention of Edward Moran, suggest compellingly that Moran and Moeran were one and the same, his marriage to Margaret Busteed having been made possible by the death of Helena Nesbitt. The history of Edward Moeran's musical life in Cork begins with an advertisement placed in the *Cork Mercantile Chronicle* a year after his marriage to Miss Busteed: 'Grand Pianoforte Warehouse, Rutland Street. Edward Moeran has for sale and [indecipherable] all the most fashionable, newly constructed, and best patent pianofortes.'⁸ Similar advertisements and reports testifying to Edward Moeran's musical talents and activities appeared in Cork newspapers during the next five decades, and he is listed in William West's 1810 *Directory of Cork* as a 'music-master'. It seems, therefore, that the name 'Moeran' was adopted by Edward Moran, at some time between his first marriage in 1802 and his second in 1808.⁹

Edward Moeran's long career as a musician is documented principally in the pages of local Cork newspapers, and these reports indicate a devoted contribution to the musical life of the city over a period of nearly sixty years. Edward was a member of the Masonic order, and he formed a glee-singing quartet that performed regularly, especially at official celebrations and Masonic events. On 10 September 1818, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland attended dinner at the Cork Mansion House, and Edward and his colleagues provided the after-dinner diversions:

The Lord Lieutenant – Yesterday his Excellency was splendidly entertained at the Mansion-House ... Between the toasts, Messrs Magrath, Shaw, Gillespie and Moeran, assisted by some amateurs amongst the guests, gave several Glees and

⁷ 'MARRIED', *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, (8 November 1802), 3. The news was also carried in 'Marriages', *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, (December 1802), 764. In 1802 there was no institute of higher education in Cork that would employ professors, so Edward Moran's identification as a professor of music necessarily denotes something other than the academic position now associated with the title. It is likely to have meant that Moran was a teacher of music. A scan of contemporary Cork newspapers reveals that several professors of music were active in Cork during the early 1800s.

⁸ *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, (10 April 1809), 1.

⁹ The suggestion that Moeran is an alternative to Moran was originally made by Aloys Fleischmann shortly after Ernest John Moeran's death: 'The name Moeran is a variant of Moran or Morehan,' Aloys Fleischmann, 'The Music of E. J. Moeran', *Envoy*, Vol. 4, No. 16 (1951), 60). At the time, Fleischmann could not have known about Edward Moran's change of name, and his assertion originated in a book on Irish surnames (Robert E. Matheson, *Varieties and Synonyms of Surnames and Christian Names in Ireland*, (His Majesty's Stationery Office, Dublin, 1901), 56), which groups Moeran together with Moarn, Moren, Morin and Morrin, all as variants of Moran.

Songs with their accustomed talent. No entertainment could be conducted in a style of greater elegance or pass off with more harmony and conviviality.¹⁰

Moeran and his fellow glee-singers did not limit themselves to official engagements. The concert-promoting enthusiasm that had developed in London and provincial cities during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was also evident in Cork, and on 28 January 1823, Mr Forde presented a Grand Concert in the Cork Assembly Rooms, during which a wide range of repertoire was presented in a three-part musical extravaganza.¹¹ Messrs Magrath, Brettridge, Moeran and Keays sang several four-part Glees, including *Faithless Emma* by Banks and *By Celia's Arbour all the Night* by Horsley, and Edward Moeran accompanied himself on the piano in the *Spirit Song* from Dr John Clarke's setting of *Lalla Rookh*. Evidence of Edward Moeran's expertise on the organ abounds, from his participation in a charity event held in January 1827 to raise funds for the Cork Fever Hospital, to his description as 'the old and respected organist of the Cathedral' who 'presided with his usual ability at the organ' in a report of a special church service in August 1847.¹² Edward also regularly provided his services as a choral conductor: 'Edward Moeran Esq, is entitled to our best thanks for having, with his usual kindness and efficiency, conducted the Choir.'¹³ He also occupied himself with teaching, periodically advertising his services as a pianoforte and singing instructor. The following announcement was placed in November 1836:

Piano-forte and Singing – Mr Moeran takes leave to inform his friends and the Public that having recently studied under the celebrated Mons. Herz, he is induced to set apart two days in each week, for his professional avocations in Town. Any commands left for him at the office of Samuel Merrick Esq. Solicitor, South Mall; or at his residence, Wood View, Blackrock, will be attended to.¹⁴

Edward's claim to have been instructed by the internationally renowned Herz would have significantly enhanced his reputation.¹⁵

¹⁰ 'The Lord Lieutenant', *Saunders's Newsletter*, (14 September 1818), 2.

¹¹ 'Grand Concert', *Southern Reporter & Cork Commercial Courier*, (25 January 1823), 3. As if an extended three-part concert beginning at half past eight in the evening was not enough, the concert was followed by a grand ball.

¹² *Cork Examiner*, (16 August 1847), 4. While there are several newspaper reports mentioning that Edward Moeran was organist at the cathedral, it must be noted that the main antiquarian reference work to Cork Cathedral, Richard Caulfield's *Annals of St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork* (Purcell & Co., Cork, 1871), which was compiled from manuscript and printed sources in such archives as the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, the London Public Record Office and the Chapter Books of Cork Cathedral, contains no mention of anybody called Moeran or Moran, either in a musical or any other capacity. Neither do the records of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Mary and St Anne mention Edward Moran/Moeran, and the author is grateful to Bernard Spillane of the Parish Records Office for this information.

¹³ 'Peacock Lane & Sullivan's Quay Schools', *Cork Examiner*, (21 March 1842), 4.

¹⁴ 'Pianoforte and Singing', *Cork Southern Reporter*, (1 November 1836), 2.

¹⁵ Henri Herz (1803–1888), Austrian-French composer, pianist, teacher, and inventor. It is not known where Edward Moeran's instruction took place and over what period. During

Following the founding of the Anacreontic Society in London in 1766, similar gentlemen's clubs dedicated to the companionable celebration of music and singing were established in cities around the country, and Cork was no exception. The first mention in the newspapers of the Cork Anacreontic Society comes from March 1828, and, over the years, Edward Moeran's name appears frequently as a professional member of the society. In February 1844, the *Cork Examiner* reported:

The Cork Anacreontic Society held their Third Meeting for the present season on Thursday last. The selection of music made for this occasion presented, if possible, more attractions than the programme of any former evening. The professional members, Messrs Orr, Keays, A.D. Roche, Moeran, McCarthy and Wheeler, were all in excellent voice.¹⁶

While much of Edward Moeran's life in Cork between 1808 and 1865 is recorded in local newspaper reports and advertisements, his life as Edward Moran up to 1802 seems to be a mystery. While no records of a Moran family living in Cork during the last decades of the eighteenth century have been found, the name was and remains quite widespread in Ireland, and numerous Morans are mentioned in newspaper records from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. It is interesting to discover that two musically talented Morans were active in Dublin during that period. These were Peter K. Moran, born 1767 (probably in Dublin), who was a pianist and composer and a pupil of the Dublin-based teacher Philip Dwyer, and 'Master Moran', who was promoted as a nine-year-old child prodigy pianist in newspaper advertisements between mid-May 1799 and June 1800, and who was also a student of Dwyer. Peter K. Moran emigrated with his family to the United States of America in 1817 and established a career for himself as a New York-based pianist, composer and music publisher until his death in February 1831.¹⁷ Master Moran enjoyed a brief period in the limelight which ceased abruptly in June 1800, and the inquisitive and imaginative biographer cannot help but speculate about what happened to him. His last appearance before the public seems to have been at a benefit concert on 12 June 1800, which was advertised as taking place in the Exhibition House, William Street, Dublin.

In common with the publicity for each of Master Moran's concerts, this event was patronised by 'Ladies of Distinction'. Many child prodigies were active in Europe during the eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries – often aggressively promoted by ambitious fathers or (sometimes) unscrupulous agents – and they generally held a strong appeal for wealthy society ladies. Press notices for Master Moran include references to his female admirers, many of whom sponsored his performances. The issue of *Saunders's Newsletter* dated 13 May 1799 carries the notice: 'Master Moran most respectfully begs leave to inform those Ladies who have honoured him with their kind and generous patronage that Friday the 24th inst. May is

the 1830s, Herz was living in Paris and was the proprietor of a piano factory there. Since Edward Moeran was also a retailer of pianos, it is quite possible that he travelled to Paris to meet Herz and perhaps to negotiate an agency in Cork for Herz's pianofortes.

¹⁶ 'The Cork Anacreontic Society', *Cork Examiner*, (12 February 1844), 1.

¹⁷ J. B. Clark & E. R. Meyer, 'Peter K. Moran: Amerigrove Expanded', *Sonneck Society Bulletin*, 15 (1989), 106.

Under the Patronage of several Ladies of Distinction.

MASTER MORAN's CONCERT

EXHIBITION-HOUSE, WILLIAM-STREET.

ON Thursday, 12th June, 1800, will be a CONCERT of VOCAL and INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC. The Band composed of the first Amateurs in Dublin, will be led by Mr. Bianchi;

Mr. Giordani will preside at the Piano Forte.

A C T I.

Overture,	-	-	Playel.
Song, Love Sounds the Alarm,			Mr. Caldwell.
Quartetto,	-	-	Playel.
Duet, Harp and Grand Piano Forte, Mr. O'Hagerty and Master Moran.			

A C T II.

Overture,	-	-	Hayden.
Song, The Wolf,			Mr. Weyman.
Concerto, Piano Forte,		Master Moran—Giornovich.	Glee.
Concerto Violin,	-		Mr. Bianchi.

After the Concert will be a Ball, Conducted by Mr. Kelly.

The Room will be illuminated with Wax.

Single Tickets, Half-a-Guinea—Tickets admitting three, one Guinea, to be had at No. 3, Chatham-street, and at all the Music-shops.

Figure 1. Freeman's Journal, 10 June 1800, 'Master Moran's Concert'

appointed for his benefit,¹⁸ and in the issue dated 18 June 1799, the notice mentions: 'by particular desire of several Ladies of Distinction, Master Moran, Pupil of Mr Dwyer, will perform on the Pianoforte, Madame Krompholtz's favourite Concerto.'¹⁹ Single tickets for the 12 June concert were half a guinea – the present-day equivalent of at least £50 – and it is probable that substantial funds would have been taken both

¹⁸ 'THEATRE ROYAL', *Saunders's Newsletter*, (13 May 1799), 2.

¹⁹ 'THEATRE ROYAL', *Saunders's Newsletter*, (18 June 1799), 2.

in advance (including the patronage payments) and at the door. While the claim in several of the publicity notices that Master Moran was nine years old may have been genuine, it is also possible that this was a subterfuge inspired by his having the appearance of a younger boy than he really was.²⁰ Exaggerating the youth of a child prodigy was an occasional practice where proof of age was difficult to establish. Although Master Moran's talent for the piano could not have been in any doubt, it would have been far more marketable as a nine-year-old than as an immature fourteen- or fifteen-year-old. His boyish looks could have enabled Moran and his agents to hoodwink the ladies of distinction and the respectable concert-going society of Dublin and Belfast, up to the point when it became physically impossible to maintain the deception any further. Master Moran's disappearance in mid-1800 would be consistent with this. Moreover, if this suggestion is true, the amount of money inveigled from the pianist's admirers would have led at the very least to some uncomfortable questions being asked.

It is entirely possible that Master Moran simply stopped playing the piano in public for some reason and disappeared from history. However, if the supposition presented above has any basis, then it also needs to account for what Master Moran may have done after the deception was realised. It is possible that he left Dublin in order to escape those that demanded he should repay the money that had been extracted from them. Under these circumstances, relocating himself to Cork and establishing a new identity would be readily understandable. In which case, could the child prodigy Master Moran of Dublin and music-master and piano warehouse proprietor Edward Moran/Moeran of Cork be one and the same person? Directories and chronicles of life in Cork during the late eighteenth century include no references to a family called Moran, and although not everybody that lived in Cork was mentioned in newspapers, directories or other chronicles, the fact that Edward Moeran and members of his family frequently appear throughout the nineteenth century strongly supports the notion that their involvement in Cork life began after Master Moran's speculated arrival in 1800. Thus, Edward Moran changing his name to Moeran may have been the result of his endeavouring to obscure his origins. The only evidence that supports these suggestions is circumstantial. Nonetheless, Edward Moran/Moeran must have been born and spent his childhood somewhere, and the sparse evidence is fully accommodated by the compelling story that he led an earlier life as a fake child prodigy, who accumulated a substantial fortune by swindling society ladies in Dublin and Belfast, and who fled to Cork and changed his name when the fraud was exposed. Whatever the truth, after his change of name to Moeran and his second marriage to Margaret Busted in 1808, his life in Cork as a piano-dealer, music teacher, glee-singer, pianist, organist, choirmaster and member of the Masonic order appears to have been thoroughly respectable, notwithstanding the possibility that it may have been established through ill-gotten gains.

²⁰ 'EXCHANGE-ROOMS, BELFAST. Grand Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music. They have engaged the Musical Phenomenon, Master Moran, (a Child only nine years of age), whose performance has been the admiration of all the Musical World', *Belfast Newsletter*, (16 July 1799), 3.

Edward Moeran had twelve children with his second wife Margaret Busteed, two of whom were Edward Busteed Moeran, born 1809, and Thomas Warner Moeran, born 1819. Both these sons attended Trinity College Dublin and were ordained as ministers of the Church of Ireland. While no evidence of musical talent or ability has been found in the lives of either Edward Busteed or Thomas Warner, or, indeed, any of Edward Moeran's other children, intellectual drive is apparent through the achievements of members of the next generations of the Edward Moeran dynasty. After taking a Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity College in 1845 and then being ordained, Thomas Warner Moeran served as curate of Westport, County Mayo (1845–1847) and curate of Youghal, County Cork (1847–1849).²¹ In 1849, he was appointed curate at St Mark's Church, Liverpool, and in 1853 he married Frances Byrne of Dublin.²² Although the Moeran family lived in Liverpool, their children were all born in Dublin: Edward Joseph in 1857, Joseph William Wright in 1859 and daughter Frances Anna Swift in 1861.²³ In 1857, Thomas Warner Moeran was appointed vicar at St Matthew's Church, Toxteth Park, and the family lived there until 1873 when Thomas was appointed to the living of Bacton in Norfolk.²⁴ The Reverend Thomas was to remain incumbent at Bacton for the next forty years.

Instead of following his father and uncle to Trinity College Dublin, Joseph William Wright Moeran established a new family university tradition by entering St Catharine's College, Cambridge, in 1879, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology in 1882.²⁵ He was ordained and, for his first clerical appointment, took up a curacy at Pocklington, a village some ten miles to the east of York. He remained in this position until 1885, when he was appointed curate at the parish church of St Paul's, Upper Norwood, where the vicar was the Reverend William Graham. It may reasonably be supposed that soon after his arrival Joseph began a courtship of the vicar's nineteen-year-old niece and ward Ada Esther Smeed Whall, because three years later, on 10 April 1888, in a ceremony co-celebrated by the bride's uncle and the groom's father, the couple were married. While the wedding was briefly announced in several national newspapers, it received a detailed report in the local Norwood magazine *The Norwood Review*, which was reprinted in the issue of *The Norfolk Chronicle & Norwich Gazette*, dated 21 April 1888. The report began:

From the number of people travelling in the direction of St Paul's Church, Hamlet Road, on Tuesday, it was evident that something of an unusually interesting character was on the *tapis*, and on entering the sacred edifice this was at once confirmed. Need we mention to any of our readers connected with the above

²¹ *Register of the Alumni of Trinity College Dublin*, 9th edition, (Trinity College, Dublin, 1970), and W. M. Brady, *Clerical and Parish Records of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross*, Vol 3, (Alexander Thom, Dublin, 1864), 224 and *Crockford's Clerical Directory for 1915*, (Horace Cox, London, 1915), 1060.

²² *Cork Examiner*, (9 May 1849), 3, and Ireland, Civil Registration Marriages Index, 1845–1958, Vol. 5, Page 372, FHL Film Number 101244.

²³ 1 England Census, Class: RG 9; Piece: 2687; Folio: 49; Page: 35; GSU roll: 543013.

²⁴ *Crockford's Clerical Directory for 1908*, (Horace Cox, London, 1908), 995.

²⁵ John A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1974). Joseph William added his Master of Arts in 1892.

church that the occasion was the marriage of the Rev. J. W. W. Moeran, the senior curate, to Miss Whall. When we consider the popularity of the Rev. gentleman, we are not surprised that the members of the congregation should wish, by their presence, to express their good wishes to the bride and bridegroom. The bride, as mentioned, was Miss Ada Esther Smeed Whall, daughter of Mr. B. J. Whall of Glasgow, the bridegroom being the son of the Rev. T. W. Moeran, vicar of Bacton, Norfolk.²⁶

The report of the wedding continued for a broadsheet half-column and provided details of the participants' outfits, the bridesmaids, the co-celebrants, the service itself, which was described as 'fully choral', the flowers, the wedding gifts and an extended commendation of Joseph himself as a very popular and hard-working curate in the parish. Evidence of the bride's position in society was underlined by one of her bridesmaids being Miss Chetham-Strode – a member of the prominent late-Victorian family – and the fact that the flowers were supplied by Lady Wodehouse.²⁷

Who was Ada Esther Smeed Whall, whose wedding to Joseph Moeran attracted such society and press interest? The beginnings of the answer to this lie on the southern edge of the town of Sittingbourne in Kent, where there is a public park that has been known since the 1930s as the King George's Playing Fields. In the north-east corner of the park is a converted stable block, near to which may be found the base of a row of pillars and the remnants of foundations, which together provide a clue to the former use of the land. The park is the site of Gore Court, a country estate and mansion built during the 1790s. The estate was bought in 1853 by local industrialist George Smeed, both to befit his prominent social position and to provide an appropriate home for his growing family. Smeed was a proficient entrepreneur who had created a large personal fortune through the businesses of brick making and barge building that flourished in the Milton Creek area of Sittingbourne during the nineteenth century. He was a combination of fellow of the people, ruthless businessman and, in later life, philanthropist.²⁸

Smeed and his wife Eliza had a family of seven daughters, ranging in age from Mary Ann, who was twenty, down to the newly born Emily Ruth. There was also a household staff comprising a groom, a cook, a governess, three maids and two gardeners.²⁹ The estate included several cottages, and these were occupied by estate

²⁶ 'Marriage of the Rev. J. W. W. Moeran', *The Norfolk Chronicle & Norwich Gazette*, (21 April 1888), 8.

²⁷ Probably Isabella Stracey, wife of Lord John Wodehouse. The living of Thomas Warner Moeran's Bacton parish was in the gift of the Earl of Kimberley (previously Baron Wodehouse), whose seat was Kimberley Hall, Wymondham, Norfolk.

²⁸ See Richard-Hugh Perks, *George Bargebrick Esquire: The Story of the George Smeed – the Brick and Cement King* (Meresborough Books, Rainham, 1981) and 'Urban Rus', *Old Faces in Odd Places* (Wyman & Sons, London, 1882). 'Urban Rus' was the pen name of George Smeed's stepson Harry Greensted.

²⁹ 1861 England Census, Class: RG 10; Piece: 529; Folio: 201; Page: 2; GSU roll: 542656.

workers.³⁰ The railway arrived at Sittingbourne in 1858, and Gore Court was just a short carriage and train journey from the metropolis. Smeed travelled regularly to London and it is also likely that his older daughters enjoyed the social life available to affluent young ladies in the mid-Victorian era. Over the years, the Smeed girls made appropriate marriages. The eldest daughter Mary Ann married Smeed's business manager George Hambrook Dean, Sarah Ann married the Reverend William Henry Graham in 1861 and third daughter Esther married King's Lynn banker's clerk Benjamin John Whall.

How Esther Smeed of Gore Court, Kent and Benjamin John Whall of King's Lynn, Norfolk met and effected a relationship that eventually resulted in their marriage at Tunstall Church on 21 December 1864 can only be speculated. Benjamin John was an employee at the King's Lynn office of the Norwich-based Gurney's Bank, and it is possible that Smeed held an account there to facilitate his business interests in Norfolk. King's Lynn was a busy port during the nineteenth century. Many of Smeed's barges arrived and departed discharging and loading a variety of cargoes. Benjamin John Whall may on occasion have been required to travel to Gore Court, perhaps to obtain a signature from Smeed on a business document, and while there he could have met Smeed's daughter and a relationship began. It is probable that conducting a courtship at a distance presented some difficulties for Benjamin John, but his persistence paid off as the wedding was reported in the issue of the *Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser* dated 26 December 1864:

Marriage Festivities at Gore Court – On Wednesday last the monotony of the parish was interrupted by the marriage of Miss Esther Smeed, third daughter of George Smeed Esq, of Gore Court, to Benjamin John Whall, Esq, of King's Lynn, Norfolk. The ceremony was impressively performed by the Rev. G. B. Moore, after which Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* was efficiently played on the organ, and the bells of the church sent forth a merry peal. The wedding breakfast was given in the large dining-room at Gore Court. Among those who took part in the festivities were Mr and Mrs Smeed and the Misses Smeed, Mr and Mrs G. H. Dean and family, Mr and Mrs W. B. Whall, &c. ... In the afternoon, the happy bride and bridegroom took their departure for Hastings.³¹

Sadly, the happiness of the bride and bridegroom ended abruptly just over one year later when, on 2 February 1866, Esther died, shortly after giving birth to her daughter Ada Esther. Benjamin John Whall had previously been widowed when his first wife, Julia Anne, died two years earlier, and he had a six-year-old daughter, Emily Whall, from that marriage. Thus, he was thrust into the position of having to care for two young children. For a time, Benjamin had the support of his large family that was living near him in King's Lynn. However, when he took his third wife, Caroline Dennis, the following year, baby Ada Esther was made a ward in chancery, and she was placed in the care of her maternal grandfather George Smeed. The reasons for this decision are not known, but it is possible that Whall's new wife found the pres-

³⁰ See Helen Allinson, *The Story of Gore Court House and Estate, Tunstall* (Sittingbourne Heritage Museum, 2006).

³¹ 'Tunstall', *Maidstone Journal & Kentish Advertiser*, (26 December 1864), 6.

ence of two children from previous marriages to be unacceptable – especially when she became pregnant herself – and she required their removal. Whatever the reasons might have been, at the age of just a few months, Ada Esther Smeed Whall was taken to live at Gore Court to be brought up in the care of her maternal grandparents.

Further tragedy was to strike a year or so after Ada Esther's arrival. In a period of a few weeks, both Smeed's wife Eliza and his eldest daughter Mary Ann died from fever. It seems though that Smeed was not consumed by grief for long, for within a year, he had married Martha Greensted, a local widow with three children from her previous marriage. The 1871 census entry for Gore Court reveals the presence in the house of two governesses, and it may be supposed that the education of the five-year-old Ada Esther, together with that of her fifteen-year-old aunt Emily Ruth, step-brothers Harry and Frank Greensted and step-sister Ann Greensted, was being done privately.³² In 1877, at the age of eleven, Ada Esther was sent to Vanbrugh Castle Ladies' College at Maze Hill in Greenwich, an exclusive boarding school for the daughters of gentlemen. Although poorly educated himself as a child, it is evident that Smeed provided Ada Esther with the best education that his fortune could buy. Vanbrugh Castle had been acquired in 1846 by Mrs Mary Hart and her four daughters for the establishment of a school for young ladies. The building tenancy record shows that the Hart school was taken over by the Misses Henrietta, Martha and Ellen Nicholson in 1868 and re-named Vanbrugh Castle Ladies' College.

In 1881, there were several governesses teaching alongside the three Misses Nicholson, including a French governess from Bordeaux and a German governess from Minden.³³ While no archives of the college during the time of Ada Esther's residence have been located, anecdotal evidence about school life can be gleaned from items and advertisements in various local and national newspapers and occasional references in contemporary periodicals. This advertisement provides some details of the subjects offered:

Education – Vanbrugh Castle, Blackheath, London – The Misses Nicholson have a few vacancies in their High-Class School for the Daughters of Gentlemen. A Comfortable Home, with careful Religious Training, combined with all the advantages of an English and Continental Education. Resident English and Foreign Governesses. Professors attend for the Accomplishments. Lectures are given on the Higher Branches of Literature. Terms (to fill vacancies), 50 Guineas per Annum, to include English, French, Italian, German, Music, Drawing, Singing, Dancing, Calisthenics, &c. Term commences January 25th.³⁴

The curriculum would probably have followed the general pattern of Victorian schools for young ladies, so it is possible to gain some understanding of what the young Ada Esther would have been taught. In addition to the subjects mentioned in the advertisement would have been mathematics, the sciences, needlework, deportment, manners and all the social skills appropriate for a young lady of the time. An

³² 1871 England Census, Class: RG 10; Piece: 984; Folio: 110; Page: 9; GSU roll: 838720.

³³ 1881 England Census, Class: RG 11; Piece: 726; Folio: 112; Page: 50; GSU roll: 1341169.

³⁴ 'England', *The Scotsman*, (7 January 1875), 8.

advertisement placed in *The Times* suggests that one of the music teachers was also a composer:

Music and Singing – A lady (composer), in the neighbourhood of Blackheath, wishing to increase her connexion, will be happy to give Lessons at her own or pupils' residence. Understands harmony. For terms address E. K., Vanbrugh Castle, Blackheath.³⁵

While it is not known to what extent Ada Esther's father, Benjamin John Whall, had any part in her upbringing after she was adopted by George Smeed, the facts that Whall attended Smeed's funeral in 1881, was a beneficiary of Smeed's will and attended his daughter's wedding clearly suggest that his connection with the Smeed family remained close.³⁶ Whall was an amateur musician of exceptional talent, and his musical career as an organist, pianist, conductor and composer from the mid-1850s to 1885 can be followed in some detail through dozens of reports of musical events in local newspapers and numerous items in the pages of *The Musical Times*. He was associated with the Lynn Musical Union for many years. In 1853 he was appointed librarian, and by 1856 he was the regular organist:

Lynn Musical Union. The first *soirée* for the season was given by this society, at the Music Hall of the Athenaeum, on the 31st October. The music comprised various pieces from the oratorio of *St Paul*, and a selection of songs and glees; all of which were very creditably performed. The band and chorus consisted of 70 performers, under the direction of Mr J Thomson, R.A.M. The leader was Mr J. Bray; and Mr B. J. Whall presided at the organ.³⁷

Whall was not only an organist, as this item from the Lynn News section of the *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette* dated Saturday, 13 December 1856 suggests:

Conversazione Society – On Friday evening last, Mr B. J. Whall read before this society a highly interesting paper, entitled 'Music in England', with vocal illustrations by members of the Musical Union. The historical and critical statements of the lecturer were well received and deservedly applauded.³⁸

This was the first of many such reports that recorded Whall's close involvement with the King's Lynn *Conversazione Society* during the next thirty years. His organ and keyboard playing continued to be highly commended, and he assisted choral societies in neighbouring towns:

Wells Choral Society – The second Concert of the season given by this Society took place on Friday at the British School-room ... Mr Bray, of Lynn, most ably

³⁵ 'Classified Advertising', *The Times*, issue 28984, (3 July 1877), 3. The identity of E.K. is not known.

³⁶ See 'Death of George Smeed, Esq. – The Funeral', *East Kent Gazette*, (7 May 1881), 5 and 'The Will of the Late Mr. Smeed', *East Kent Gazette*, (23 July 1881), 5.

³⁷ 'Brief Chronicle of the last Month', *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 7, No. 166 (1 December 1856), 355.

³⁸ 'Lynn', *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, Vol. 8, No. 170 (1 April 1857), 24.