



ALBERT VALLIS, 1862-1932

Albert Vallis was the organist and choirmaster at St Joseph's Cathedral for over forty years. The son of Samuel and Eliza Vallis, he was christened at Thatcham, Berkshire, on 13 August 1862. Little is known of his education and early career in England, but he lived in Oxford for a time and was a pupil of the famous organist and composer Sir John Stainer.

Vallis arrived in New Zealand in 1887, taking the position of organist and choirmaster at the Congregational Church in Moray Place. In 1890 he took up a similar post at St Matthew's Church in Stafford Street. He was also the official pianist and organist to the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, held in Dunedin from 1889 to 1890.

Though he was not a Catholic, Vallis became organist and choirmaster at St Joseph's Cathedral in 1891. According to a member at the time, "St Joseph's was very popular amongst vocalists and instrumentalists outside the Church, and as [Bishop Moran] and Father [Patrick] Lynch approved of and were fond of such incidental music, it was often availed of for offertory or evening devotions. Frequently masses were sung with full orchestral accompaniment; this was always the case at Christmas and Easter, and no opera company was allowed to pass through Dunedin without being laid under contribution."

Vallis went to great pains to get correct timing from the organ loft, some 23 metres from the altar. Signor Squarise and others assisted him by taking the role of conductor. Vallis arranged many choral works himself, and his own compositions included the *Sacred Heart Benediction Service* (1893) and *St Joseph's Vesperal* (1894).

Vallis married Elizabeth Gertrude Crawford in Dunedin in 1900, and they had three sons and three daughters. The family lived at 4 Smith Street, near the cathedral, for many years.

As a teacher of organ, piano, singing, and harmony, Vallis was both talented and successful. The Plunket Medal, awarded annually to the best candidate in New Zealand in Trinity College of Music examinations, went to three of his pupils in succession (1906 to 1908). These pupils were Lucy Fernie, Dorothy Cowie, and Gladys Stoneham.

Vallis was musical director of the St Cecilia Society, and briefly conductor of the Dunedin Liedertafel (later the Royal Dunedin Male Choir). He was also a foundation member of the Otago Society of Musicians, which he served as vice-president. He performed in many local concerts, and was particularly highly regarded an accompanist. In 1908 he gave the first recital on the new organ in the Kaikorai Presbyterian Church.

Albert Vallis died at the age of 70, on 13 November 1932, two weeks after his final work with the St Joseph's Cathedral Choir (Beethoven's Mass in C). Choir member Tom Hussey eulogised Vallis as a most able and lovable man, a musician down to the fingertips who could inspire any body of singers and get the last ounce out of them. According to Hussey, "one of the most touching tributes that could be paid to one not of the Faith" was made when choir members gathered round Vallis's grave and recited the Rosary, and sang his favourite hymn, "The Sacred Heart". The hymn contains the fitting lines: "While ages course along, blessed be with loudest song".

Albert Vallis is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery.

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Compiled from newspaper and other sources by David Murray of Dunedin for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz).

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