

A Handel relative in Britain?

This essay offers a scholarly meditation on a biographical oddity first reported in my doctoral thesis 'Early reception of Handel's oratorios, 1732-1784: narrative-studies-documents' (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2004). It also forms a case study of applying surgical focus on a minimal documentary surface. The result is organic scholarship of open ends, wide implications and joyful inquisitiveness; qualities presently undervalued in academia yet indispensable for genuine humanistic research. I am thankful to Ellen T. Harris for her encouragement and support, and to Karol Berger and Thomas S. Grey for easing my transition to postdoctoral life.

1. The following are the only studies in English I know that address Handel's image: Ellen T. Harris: 'Handel's ghost: the composer's posthumous reputation in the eighteenth century', in *Companion to contemporary musical thought*, edd. John Paynter et al. (London & New York, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 208-25; Robert James Merrett: 'England's Orpheus: praise of Handel in eighteenth-century poetry', in *Mosaic* 20/2 (Spring 1987), pp. 97-110; Suzanne Aspden: "'Fam'd Handel Breathing, tho' Transformed to Stone": the composer as monument', in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55 (2002), pp. 39-90.

2. Deteriorating sight forced Handel to interrupt the

INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS have more than a single life to endure. The first one is biological, so often expended in securing physical survival and well-being. Their creative life is, naturally, of real concern to us, as it spawns artworks of exceptional cultural strength. Based on the latter, a third and independent life emerges: the artist's image and reputation. Documentary biography, textual criticism and reception history, respectively, are the scholarly activities associated with them.

However pedantic this scheme may appear, it has relevance for Handel studies, as in scholarly literature the first two lives of the composer tend to obscure his third one.¹ Handel died in 1759, but for all practical reasons the clock of his creative life had stopped in the early 1750s.² Up to that point, he had been able to adjust his image through artistic means. In 1736, for instance, he confirmed his long-standing Orphean reputation with the celebrated setting of *Alexander's feast*. And by developing English oratorio, he managed to shift cultural polarity from agent of Italian taste to hero who 'withstood the repeated Efforts of *Italian Forces*'.³ The creative disarmament of Handel in 1752-53,⁴ however, meant that his image was assuming a life of its own. Let me offer an illustration. While English oratorio was gaining roots in an ever-expanding network of venues, Handel was physically declining.⁵ His appearance as a demobilised artist in oratorio performances

composition of *Jephtha* on 13 February 1751. A month later Sir Edward Turner recorded that 'Noble Handel hath lost an eye': Sir Edward Turner to Sanderson Miller, 14 March 1751[1], in *An eighteenth-century correspondence: being the letters of [...] to Sanderson Miller, Esq., of Radway*, edd. Lilian Dickins & Mary Stanton (London, 1910), p. 165. The beginning of the 1752 season found Handelians in despair: 'I am sorry to say that I believe this Lent will be the last that he will ever be able to preside at an oratorio; for he breaks very much, & is I think quite blind on one eye': Thomas Harris to James Harris, 9

January 1752, in Donald Burrows & Rosemary Dunhill, edd.: *Music and theatre in Handel's world: the family papers of James Harris, 1732-1780* (Oxford & New York, 2002), p. 281. Temporary improvement from eye surgery did little to reverse his plunge into darkness, and in January 1753 the press reported, 'Mr. Handel has at length, unhappily, quite lost his sight': [unidentified London newspaper], 27 January 1753, in Otto Erich Deutsch: *Handel: a documentary biography* (London, 1955), p. 731.

3. [William Hayes]: *Remarks on Mr. Avison's Essay on*

Musical Expression (London, 1753), p. 129.

4. The popular view that Handel was still composing in the late 1750s is exaggerated, to say the least: Anthony Hicks: 'The late additions to Handel's oratorios and the role of the younger Smith', in Christopher Hogwood & Richard Luckett, edd.: *Music in eighteenth-century England: essays in memory of Charles Cudworth* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 147-69.

5. In 1755 Thomas Harris found him 'now almost worn out with age and loss of sight': Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel's world*, p. 302.

6. Her impressions are confirmed by C. Gilbert in a letter to Elizabeth Harris from 21 May [1753]: 'I paid my devoir to him at the oratorio, and cou'd have cry'd at the sight of him[.] He is fallen away, pale, feeble, old, blind, in short every thing that cou'd most affect one, & his playing is the monument of a great genius, not at all a living one. There is not in the man soul or spirit enough left to make it so. I was told, at the Total Eclipse in Samson, he cry'd like an infant. Thank God I did not see it', in Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel's world*, p.291.

7. The tension was powerful enough for Burney to recall it decades later in his 'Handel' article for Rees's *Cyclopaedia*: 'To see him, however, led to the organ, after this calamity [i.e. blindness], at upwards of seventy years of age, and then conducted towards the audience to make his accustomed obeisance, was a sight so truly afflicting and deplorable to persons of sensibility, as greatly diminished their pleasure in hearing him perform', in Abraham Rees: *The Cyclopaedia; Or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature* (London, 1819), vol.17, 'HANDEL', col.9.

8. For a modern diagnosis of Handel's blindness, see Donald L. Blanchard: 'George Handel and his blindness', in *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 99 (1999), pp.247–58, especially pp.255–57. It seems that Handel's mother, too, had been blind by the end of her life: Deutsch: *Handel*, p.858.

9. Deutsch: *Handel*, p.742; Burrows & Dunhill, edd.:

caused a perceptual fissure like the one recorded by the Countess of Shaftesbury on 13 March 1753:

I went last Friday to Alexander's Feast, but it was such a melancholy pleasure as drew tears of sorrow to see the great th'unhappy Handel dejected, wan and dark [original word choice: 'pale'] sitting by, not playing on the harpsichord, and to think how his light has been spent by being overply'd in musicks cause.⁶

Not unlike ruins that force the mind to reconstruct what is physically absent, the juxtaposition of energetic music and its debilitating creator produced tension ('melancholy pleasure').⁷ To resolve it, the Countess invoked a mental construction: the image of Handel sacrificing his sight 'in musicks cause'. Although various factors could have caused Handel's blindness,⁸ she chose one that portrays the composer as an artistic hero. For other devotees, this affliction allowed the transfer of his image from the domain of mythology (Handel as Orpheus, Amphion, etc.) to that of history (Handel comparable to Milton and Homer).⁹ The point is that a biological defect, not an artistic achievement, was now the launching platform for Handel's image, which was gradually overshadowing physical and artistic life. We should be aware, then, that contemporary references to Handel, from the Avison-Hayes debate to Langhorne's *Tears of Music*, were addressing more often a representation than an actual person.¹⁰

Accepting the autonomy of Handel's image has significant consequences. The traditional orientation of Handel studies to biography and textual criticism turns Handel's death into their undisputable *terminus ante quem* and confines reception history to an auxiliary function. Yet Handel's image not only survived the composer but it also continued to evolve well after 1759, bearing significant responsibility for the 1784 Commemoration Festival. Without this understanding documents and incidents from the years following his death will remain obscure or unappreciated. As a minimal effort to challenge the 1759 *terminus*, let us consider this hitherto unknown documentary evidence:

Died.] A few Days ago, at Brenchley in Kent, Charles Handell, Esq. a Relation of the great Musician Handell.¹¹

DIED.] [...] A few days since ['Friday last'], at Brenchley, in Kent, Charles Handell, Esq. a relation of the great Musician Handell.¹²

Handel's world, p.339; and [William Coxe]: *Anecdotes of George Frederick Handel, And John Christopher Smith* (London, 1799), p.25.

10. The entire corpus of this debate is available in Charles Avison's Essay on Musical Expression with related

writings by William Hayes and Charles Avison, ed. Pierre Dubois (Aldershot & Burlington, 2004); J[ohn]. Langhorne: *The Tears of Music. A Poem, To the Memory of Mr. Handel. With an Ode to the River Eden* (London, 1760).

11. *The St. James's Chronicle or, British Evening-Post*, no. 2348, Saturday 2–Tuesday 5 March 1776, p.[3].

12. *The Middlesex Journal, and Evening Advertiser*, no.1083, Saturday 2–Tuesday 5 March 1776, p.[3].

13. *The Public Advertiser*, no.14484, Tuesday 5 March 1776, p.[3].

14. *The Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, no.1049, Wednesday 6 March 1776, p.[2].

15. *The London Evening-Post*, no. 8419, Tuesday 5–Thursday 7 March 1776, p.[1].

16. Donald Burrows: *Handel* (New York, 1994), pp.4–5.

17. A significant number of German intellectuals and artists resided in Britain during this period: Garold N. Davis: *German thought and culture in England, 1700–1770* (Chapel Hill, 1969), pp.64–80. With regard to musicians, one recalls the extraordinary Herschel family and its contribution to Bath's musical life.

18. See Deutsch: *Handel*, p.833; Ellen T. Harris: 'Handel the investor', in *Music & Letters* 85 (2004), pp.553, 555–56. Contemporary reports estimate his fortune at £20,000; see Deutsch: *Handel*, p.819; Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel's world*, p.339.

19. At least some of Handel's relatives were fully aware of his achievements in England: Wolf Hobohm: 'Eine Geburtstagsode von Händels "Vetter" Christian August Roth', in *Händel-Jahrbuch* 38 (1992), pp.132–33.

20. Deutsch: *Handel*, p.854.

21. Deutsch: *Handel*, pp.691, 776, 788–89.

22. F. G. E.: 'among the "tokens" still preserved at the Hospital, of former children, is a large coin-like piece of metal bearing the inscription, "Maria Augusta Handel,

A few Days since ['Sunday last'] died at Brenchley in Kent, Charles Handell, Esq; a Relation of the great Musician Handell.¹³

DIED] A few days since [no previous date is given] at Brenchley, in Kent, Charles Handell, Esq; a relation of the great musician Handell.¹⁴

[Died] A few days ago, at Brenchley, Kent, Charles Handel, Esq; related to the great Mr. Handel.¹⁵

The death notices appeared on 5–7 March 1776, in five London newspapers: *The St. James's Chronicle*, *The Middlesex Journal*, *The Public Advertiser*, *The Morning Post*, and *The London Evening-Post*. There is no information about their source but, evidently, a lot of copying is involved here. For a 'life and work' approach they are curiosities barely deserving footnote recognition. Nothing scholarly useful about the composer and his music seems to come out of them. A reception angle, however, can lead us to interesting possibilities. Given how little we know about Handel's personal life, even a possibility should be welcome.

WE MAY START with the identity of the deceased. To my knowledge, Charles Handel[!] is a new entry in Handel scholarship. His name does not appear in the composer's genealogical tree.¹⁶ He could have been a previously unknown relative of George Frideric who moved to Britain, especially after 1759.¹⁷ Handel left a great fortune to his niece and considerable sums to other relatives in Germany.¹⁸ It may well be that one of them decided to seek financial advancement in the country that made his famous ancestor rich.¹⁹ We certainly know of one 'Händel' who tried, in 1772, to get a share of the composer's estate in Germany.²⁰ Charles might have been a descendant of 'Cousin Christian Gottlieb Handel, of Copenhagen', a grandchild of Karl Händel, the composer's half-brother.²¹ Another possibility is that his relation to Handel originated in England. At least one foundling at the eponymous London hospital was named after the composer,²² whose *Messiah* performances had generated many thousands of pounds for the institution.²³ Charles might have been another such case. Moreover, since Handel's sexuality is now an acceptable academic topic,²⁴ it

born April 15, 1758," the explanation being that it was often the custom in former years to name a poor deserted wee bairnie after one of the Governors', in *The Musical Times* vol.43 no.711 (May 1902), p.310.

23. By 1761 Handel was ranked the third 'greatest

benefactor' of the Foundling Hospital: Frederick Kielmansegg: *Diary of a journey to England in the years 1761–1762*, trans. Countess Kielmansegg (London, New York & Bombay, 1902), p.87.

24. In the most recent biographical account of

Handel, Donald Burrows acknowledges this topic but cautions that 'convincing evidence on the subject is lacking': Donald Burrows: 'Handel, George Frideric', in HCG Matthew & Brian Harrison, edd.: *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (New York, 2004), vol.25, p.38.

25. See [Coxe]: *Anecdotes*, pp.28–29; Donald Burrows: 'Handel and Hanover', in Peter Williams, ed.: *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti tercentenary essays* (Cambridge, 1985), p.39.

26. The name 'Handel[!]' is extremely rare in Britain at this period (an evident publicity advantage for the composer). My examination of up to a couple of hundred thousand pages in print has yielded only two Handels other than George Frideric. The first one, from May 1737, is a marriage notice: 'Married yesterday, at Oxford Chapel, Dan. Handell, Esq; to Miss Fane, a near relation to the Earl of Westmoreland': *The Grub-street Journal* no.385, Thursday 12 May 1737, p.[2]; elsewhere, the names are given as 'Daniel Handell, Esq' and 'Miss Lane': in *The Gentleman's Magazine: And Monthly Oracle* (1737), p.326. The second concerns 'Elizabeth Handell aged 55', who 'in June [1757] was recommended as an out-patient to *St. George's Hospital*': William Bromfeild: *An Account of the English Nightshades, and their Effects* (London, 1757), p.19. Bromfeild had operated on Handel's eyes in November 1752. Since he lived only blocks away from the blind composer (the dedication of his book is signed 'Conduit-Street, Hanover-Square, Nov. 29, 1757'), one wonders if he continued seeing Handel, and if so, whether he would

should not be wild to imagine that a theatrical legend with known or reputed affairs²⁵ could have fathered an illegitimate child by the name Charles. A final possibility is that there was no actual relation between the two, and so Mr Charles might have exploited the spelling inconsistencies of the period or just his actual, though uncommon in Britain, surname to partake of Handelian glory.²⁶

The above speculations are not as fruitless as they appear. Charles Handel[!] died in Brenchley, Kent, which is only six miles east from Tunbridge Wells,²⁷ the renowned spa that Handel often visited during summer.²⁸ Discovered early in the 17th century by Lord North, the wells gained popularity following royal visits there by Queen Henrietta Maria in 1630 and Charles II and his Court in 1662. By the end of the century, some called them '*Aquae Vitae*, or *Waters of Life*, because they restore men to Life, and make them live twice'.²⁹ The 1700s saw a tremendous growth of Tunbridge Wells,³⁰ which attracted people of all classes and many foreigners as well.³¹ Its transformation into a fashionable summer resort was largely due to Richard 'Beau' Nash (1674–1761), who after a legendary tenure as Master of Ceremonies in Bath took over a similar post here in 1735.³² This was also the year of Handel's first recorded visit to Tunbridge Wells,³³ a coincidence previously unnoticed in Handel literature.

have inquired about Mrs Elizabeth.

27. *A Description of Tunbridge-Wells, in Its Present State; and the Amusements of the Company, in the Time of the Season; and of the Ancient and Present State of the most Remarkable Places, in the Environs: Comprehending a Circuit of about Sixteen Miles round the Place* (Tunbridge-Wells, 1780), pp.112–13. Brenchley was part of the same Deanry and even 'has the same kind of waters' as Tunbridge Wells: [Stephen Whatley]: *England's Gazetteer. Vol. III. Being a New Index Villaris, or, Alphabetical Register of the less noted Villages* (London, 1751), no pagination.

28. According to the first published account of the wells, 'The water commonly knowne here amongst vs by

the name of *Tunbridge water*, are two small Springs contiguous together, about some foure miles Southward from the towne of *Tunbridge in Kent*, from which they haue their name, as being the nearest Towne in *Kent* to them. They are seated in a valley compassed about with stony hills, so barren, that there groweth nothing but heath vpon the same. Iust there doe *Kent* and *Sussex* meete, and one may with lesse than halfe a breath runne from those Springs into *Sussex*', in Lodwick Rowzee: *The Queenes Welles. That is, a treatise of the nature and vertues of Tunbridge Water* (London, 1632), pp.34–35.

29. Pat. Madan: *A Phylosophical and Medicinal Essay of the Waters of Tunbridge* (London, 1687), p.3.

30. The earliest published eulogy of Tunbridge Wells appears in Peter Causton: *Tunbridgialia: or, the Pleasures of Tunbridge* (Tunbridge Wells, 1705).

31. In 1749, Elizabeth Montagu wrote to her friend Anne Donellan, 'Tunbridge seems the parliament of the world, where every country and every rank has its representative', in Lewis Melville: *Society at Royal Tunbridge Wells in the eighteenth century and after* (London, 1912), p.194.

32. Philip Carter: 'Nash, Richard', in *Oxford dictionary...*, vol.40, p.228.

33. Handel's letter from August 1734 does not establish that he visited Tunbridge Wells, as Deutsch suggests (*Handel*, p.369); see also Burrows: *Handel*, p.182, n.45.

34. John Hawkins: *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London, 1776), vol. 5, p. 326.

35. 'The nerves or sinewes, and the originall of them, the braine, are strengthened by the vse of this water, and consequently it is good against the palsie, inclination to an apoplexy, lethargie, and such like diseases of the head', in Rowzee: *Welles...*, p. 45.

36. For descriptions of his health crisis, identified as 'rhumatick palsie' by the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury, see Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p. 26.

37. In the 1740s, Handel visited Scarborough, in Yorkshire: Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, pp. 119, 216. In early June 1751, he and Smith [?Sr] arrived at Bath (*The Bath Journal*, Monday 3 June 1751, p. 44); and on the 13th of the same month he is reported back in London 'from Cheltenham Wells; where he had been to make use of the Waters' (*The General Advertiser*, Saturday 15 June 1751, p. [1]). Immediately after the end of the 1759 oratorio season Handel 'proposed setting out for Bath, to try the Benefit of the Waters, having been for some Time past in a bad State of Health': *The Whitehall Evening-Post; Or, London Intelligencer*, Thursday 5–Saturday 7 April 1759, p. [3]. Although Tunbridge Wells was a summer health resort, Handel could still have benefited from its waters throughout the year, especially because of its proximity to London.

38. Dated 27 August 1734: Erich H. Müller, ed.: *The*

Beginning with John Hawkins, scholars have assumed that health problems led the composer to Tunbridge.³⁴ Its waters were highly recommended for palsy and nervous disorders, from which Handel supposedly suffered.³⁵ Yet his 1735 visit there predates the health crisis of April 1737 that caused the temporal paralysis of his right hand;³⁶ and his subsequent use of other health resorts questions the benefits he received at Tunbridge.³⁷ An examination of Handel's links with the spa indicates a strong social component in these visitations.

Several known Handelians had ties to Tunbridge Wells and its surrounding area. Sir Wyndham Knatchbull, whose invitation to Handel in summer 1734 elicited the composer's first surviving letter in English,³⁸ had his country seat outside Ashford, about 30 miles east from Tunbridge Wells (and on the same axis as Brenchley). Coincidence or not, Handel's earliest reference to Tunbridge, in 1735, appears in a letter to Charles Jennens, a fellow student of Knatchbull at Balliol, Oxford.³⁹ Among visitors of the Wells in summer 1734 was Bernard Granville, who had met Handel at his sister's music party a few months ago,⁴⁰ and would become one of the composer's closest friends.⁴¹ John Upton, who first became acquainted with Handel in the Wells,⁴² had ecclesiastical appointments in Rochester, Wateringbury and Aylesford,⁴³ the last two being 12 and 18 miles away from Tunbridge, respectively (at least one of his music-related letters was written in Tunbridge Wells⁴⁴). Aylesford was also the seat of Henneage Finch, 3rd Earl of Aylesford, Baron of Guernsey and MP for Maidstone, Kent.⁴⁵ An amateur violinist and distant relative of Charles Jennens, Guernsey would inherit the latter's extensive music collection.⁴⁶ Another Handelian, the barrister John Baker, visited the composer there in August–September 1758 ('I walked up by Handel's lodging about 2 miles').⁴⁷ And Sir George Amyand, a beneficiary

letters and writings of George Frideric Handel (London, 1935), p. 33; Deutsch: *Handel*, p. 369.

39. Ruth Smith: 'The achievements of Charles Jennens (1700–1773)', in *Music & Letters* 70 (1989), p. 164.

40. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 12 April 1734, in Lady Llanover, ed.: *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (London, 1861), vol. 1, pp. 457–58.

41. Hugh McLean: 'Bernard Granville, Handel and the Rembrandts', in *The Musical Times* vol. 126 no. 1712 (October 1985), pp. 593–94.

42. John Upton to James Harris, 1 September 1737, in Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p. 36.

43. Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p. 1117.

44. Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, pp. 292–93.

45. Frederic Barlow: *The Complete English Peerage*

(London, 2/1775), vol. 1, p. 467.

46. Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p. 1100. For the history and content of this major collection, see John H. Roberts: 'The Aylesford Collection', in Terence Best, ed.: *Handel collections and their history* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 39–85 (detailed list at pp. 66–85).

47. John Baker's Diary, 26 August, and 2 September 1758, in Philip C. Yorke, ed.: *The diary of John Baker* (London, 1931), pp. 114, 116.

48. *A New Baronetage of England* (London, 1769), vol. 1, p. 20.

49. William C. Smith: 'More Handelian', in *Music & Letters* 34 (1953), p. 17.

50. An inscription to his memory survives in the local church: Daniel Lysons: *The Environs of London* (London, 1796), vol. 1, p. 127.

51. Charles Burney: *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey and the Pantheon [...] in Commemoration of Handel* (London, 1785), p. 34.

52. Alan Savidge: *Royal Tunbridge Wells* (Tunbridge Wells, 1975), pp. 44–48; *Description...*, pp. 35–36.

53. See Savidge: *Tunbridge...*, p. 80.

54. 'Smith senior left Handel in an abrupt manner, which so enraged him, that he declared he would never see him again': [Coxe]: *Anecdotes*, p. 48.

55. See Rosemary Dunhill: *Handel and the Harris Circle* ([Winchester], 1995), pp. 1–2.

56. 'I have shown my respect for him [i.e. Handel] lately[,] meeting a very ingenious man that cuts heads in ivory for 2 guineas & he has done Handels very well for me[.] He sat for it at my request[,] which is what he is very shy off & I esteem a favour': Katherine Knatchbull to James Harris, 29 [May 1740], in Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p. 99.

57. Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, pp. xxi, 1101; see also their family trees at pp. 1124, 1126; and Smith: 'More Handelian', p. 17.

and co-executor of Handel's will, died on 9 August 1766, in Tunbridge.⁴⁸ Possibly conflating the city with its namesake Wells, William C. Smith asked in 1953, 'Did [Amyand] have a house there where Handel was accustomed to stay?'⁴⁹ (He did have a seat in Carshalton, Surrey, 25 miles northwest from the Wells.⁵⁰) The question makes sense in light of Burney's assurance that 'during the last years of his life, [Handel] constantly attended public prayers, twice a day, winter and summer, both in London and Tunbridge.'⁵¹ The Wells did have a sizeable chapel, used since 1678,⁵² that offered daily services, and Handel's name appears in its subscription list for 1755.⁵³ This matches William Coxe's report of an episodic visit of the composer and John Christopher Smith, Sr. to Tunbridge Wells 'about four years before Handel's death.'⁵⁴ A remarkable thread running through the biographies of the above persons is James Harris.⁵⁵ His half-sister Katherine was the wife of Knatchbull (in 1740 Handel sat for an ivory portrait at her request⁵⁶), and his son James, Jr. married Amyand's daughter;⁵⁷ Upton, Jennens and Guernsey were friends and correspondents of his. In addition, he collaborated with Jennens on Handel's setting of the Miltonian *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*.⁵⁸

Handel's visits to Tunbridge were presumably much more than a medical imperative. A network of friends and acquaintances in the area promised companionship, moral support and probably musical activity.⁵⁹ A contemporary guide confirms that 'The coming to the *Wells* to drink the Waters is a meer [*sic*] Custom; [...] but Company and Diversion [...] is the main Business of the Place.'⁶⁰ Dining, for example, features in Upton's letter from 1737 ('we dind together every day in the week')⁶¹ and in an amusing story about Thomas Morell, whom 'Handel used to carry [...] down with him to — [almost certainly Tunbridge Wells, approximately 35 miles southeast from London], where he entertained him.'⁶² That 'Handel had always a good

58. See their correspondence in Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, pp. 82–89.

59. It appears that Handel's music was regularly performed there as early as 1722: Walter Eisen & Margret Eisen, ed.: *Händel Handbuch, Band 4: Dokumente zu Leben und Schaffen* (Kassel, Basel & London, 1985), p. 108.

60. *The Foreigner's Guide* (London, 1730), p. 200.

61. John Upton to James Harris, 1 September 1737, in

Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p. 36.

62. 'Morell could not live without his wife. So he had her conveyed down and lodged in a garret, the window of which looked into the room where Handel and he dined. Handel had always a good dinner; and as he was blind, Morell used to make signs to his wife most significantly, pointing to a fowl or veal or whatever dishes were upon the table, that she might choose what she liked, which she did by a nod; and Morell, having a

waiter in his confidence, had it carried to her': Irma S. Lustig & Frederick A. Pottle, ed.: *Boswell: The applause of the jury: 1782–1785* (New York et al., 1981), pp. 71–72; also in Geoffrey Scott & Frederick A. Pottle, ed.: *The journal of James Boswell, 1781–1783*, Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle, vol. 15 ([USA], 1932), p. 171; and Ruth Smith: 'Thomas Morell and his letter about Handel', in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127 (2002), p. 222.

63. Rowzee: *Tunbridge*, pp.44–45.

64. Deutsch: *Handel*, p.846.

65. See Deutsch: *Handel*, p.390; Judith Milhous: 'Opera finances in London, 1674–1738', in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 37 (1984), p.590. In March 1737, John Rich would write of 'Severe Losses by the Opera's etc. carry'd by Mr Handel and my Self at Covt. Garden Theatre for these three years last past': Andrew Saint: 'The three Covent Gardens', in *The Musical Times* vol.123 no.1678 (December 1982), p.827. Robert D. Hume doubts that Handel's losses in 1734–35 could have been £9000, as Deutsch reports (*Handel*, p.390): 'Handel and opera management in London in the 1730s', in *Music & Letters* 67 (1986), p.356. The amount probably describes the season's expenses, for it is identical with the one reported in the *Ipswich Gazette* of 9 November 1734: Deutsch: *Handel*, p.374.

66. *The Old Whig: Or, The Consistent Protestant*, Thursday 20 March 1735, p.[2].

67. Carole Taylor: 'Handel and Frederick, Prince of Wales', in *The Musical Times* vol.125 no.1692 (February 1984), p.91; Thomas McGeary: 'Handel, Prince Frederick, and the opera of the nobility reconsidered', in *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 7 (1998), p.177.

68. 'On l'admire: mais c'est de loin, car il est souvent seul', in *Le Pour et Contre* 6 no. 80 ([? May] 1735), pp.103–04; English translation in Deutsch: *Handel*, p.390; Richard G. King: 'Handel's travels in the Netherlands in

dinner' even at Tunbridge indicates that diet was not an issue during his visits to the spa. A side effect of the waters, hitherto unknown to Handel scholars, throws further light on this point. Lodwick Rowzee, author of the first Tunbridge guide, reports that taking the waters may result in

appetite provoked, yea in some but too much, as in my selfe for one; [*sic*] For whensoever I dranke either at the *Spa* or at *Tunbridge*, I was never able to fast with patience vntill noon, but must needs *offam latranti stomacho offerre*, cast a bit to my barking stomach, before the rest of my company went to dinner. For this cause when I was at the *Spa*, a *Spanish* Physition, who was come thither with the yong Prince *Doria* (who was then but a youth) would not let him take the water about two or three dayes, when he saw such an effect in him, fearing that he would receiue mere hurt by the excesse of his appetite, than benefit by the water.⁶³

This might explain why Handel found little improvement in Tunbridge in 1737 (he had to move to Aix-la-Chapelle, where he stayed for several weeks)⁶⁴ and would visit other British spas in later years.

The social resources of Tunbridge must have been especially attractive to Handel in summer 1735. His first season at Covent Garden theatre ended in considerable financial loss,⁶⁵ as Farinelli had brought crowds to the rival opera company of Senesino. Furthermore, the 'strong [...] Disgust taken against him' by members of the Nobility did not subside,⁶⁶ and both the king and the Prince of Wales withdrew their annual bounty from his enterprise (a total of £1250).⁶⁷ Finding himself isolated in London ('he is often alone'; 'he is rarely seen'),⁶⁸ Handel welcomed an oratorio libretto by Charles Jennens, explaining that he had no fixed plans for the following season and that he would study the manuscript in Tunbridge. The outstanding invitation from Knatchbull together with Nash's appointment as Master of Ceremonies there could illuminate Handel's motivation for visiting the spa. Music was a priority in the agenda of Nash,⁶⁹ and the arrival of the 'King of Bath' galvanised social life in Tunbridge,⁷⁰ which included many private concerts.⁷¹ It is possible that Handel was seeking to replenish his social capital (Royal

1750', in *Music & Letters* 72 (1991), p.384.

69. 'His first care when made master of the ceremonies, or king of *Bath*, as it is called, was to promote a music subscription, of one guinea each, for a band which was to consist of six performers, who were to receive a guinea a week each for their trouble. He allowed also two guineas a week for lighting and sweeping the rooms, for which he accounted to the

subscribers by receipt': [Oliver Goldsmith]: *The Life of Richard Nash, of Bath, Esq* (London/Bath, 1762), p.29.

70. 'From 1735 until his death he spent Bath's close season (July and August) as master at Tunbridge Wells where, as before, he introduced regulations on conduct, improved the facilities, and brought in new entertainments. Nash's presence had a rapid effect, and his second season, which

attracted 900 visitors, was the best for six years': Carter: 'Nash', p.228.

71. [25 August 1762] 'the best musical performers of the age, often come down hither from London, and form elegant concerts, for which they are generally well paid': Samuel Derrick: *Letters written from Liverpoole [sic], Chester, Corke, The Lake of Killarney Dublin, Tunbridge-Wells, and Bath* (London, 2/1769), vol.2, pp.55–56.

72. King: 'Netherlands', p.384; King speculates that Knatchbull could have been Handel's new friend (p.385).

73. 'Mr Handel is suprizingly [sic] mended[;] he has been on horseback twice': 4th Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, 30 April 1737, in Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.27.

74. In 1718, Claudius is listed as surgeon in the royal household under the jurisdiction of Lord Chamberlain, Thomas, Duke of Newcastle, who would serve as the first Governor of the Royal Academy of Music: [Guy Miège]: *The Present State of Great-Britain and Ireland* (London, 4/1718), p.349. A pioneer in treating the smallpox, Claudius had inoculated 62 people in London in 1721–23 alone: James Jurin: *An Account of the Success of Inoculating the Small Pox in Great Britain* (London, 1724), p.9. His salary as King's Surgeon was £200: *The True State of England* (London, 1726), p.49. He would retain the position under George II (*The State of the Court of Great Britain, under his most Sacred Majesty King George II. And his Illustrious Consort Queen Caroline* (London, 1728), p.38), with a salary of £396 by 1738: [Guy Miège]: *The Present State of Great Britain, and Ireland* (London, 8/1738), p.204.

75. *A List of the Royal Society* ([London], 1728); *A List of the Governors and Contributors to the Hospital, near Hyde-Park-Corner, The Third of April, 1734*. William Bromfield, who operated on Handel in 1752 (*The General Advertiser*, Saturday 4 November 1752, p.[1]), had been a Governor of the same institution since 1743:

correspondence from this season indicates that he was receiving advice from a new friend⁷²).

TUNBRIDGE WELLS is, therefore, a point where the biographies of George Frideric and Charles Handel intersect. The composer might well have visited Brenchley: excursions in the surrounding area were a common pastime and Handel did ride on horseback.⁷³ If Charles was indeed a German relative of his, then another link between the two might have been Sir George Amyand, whose hitherto unexplored biography includes some interesting details. George was the son of Claudius Amyand, surgeon to George I and George II,⁷⁴ a Fellow of the Royal Society, and a Governor of St George's Hospital.⁷⁵ Handel could have known Claudius at the St James's Court or through his mentor Dr John Arbuthnot, whose name appears together with Amyand's in at least one member list of the Royal Society.⁷⁶ (Amyand's published report on a man who had swallowed iron articles might have intrigued Handel, whose father Georg had treated a similar case in 1696.⁷⁷) Sir George Amyand, Claudius's eldest son, became a successful merchant who 'traded very largely to different parts, particularly to Hamburg' and married the daughter of 'John-Abraham Kerten, an eminent Hamburg merchant.'⁷⁸ His contacts with northern Germany qualified him as executor of Handel's will, which designated substantial amounts for relatives of the composer.⁷⁹ Amyand certainly interacted with the children of Georg Taust, Handel's deceased cousin.⁸⁰ (A document from 10 October 1759, disputing the exact amount of their bequest, includes the name of a 'Charles Auguste Tritze', described as 'curateur' of Christiane Dorothea Taust.⁸¹) As a posthumous representative of the composer, Amyand could have been a focal point for other Handel relatives in Germany.

Once we realise the extent and depth of Handel's ties to Tunbridge Wells, it will become easier to understand why Charles Handel[!] would have settled in the area. The presence of several eminent Handelians and the considerable musical activity at Tunbridge Wells promised an auspicious environment to a relative of the composer. The vibrant sexual life at Tunbridge, celebrated

Michael Bevan: 'Bromfield, William', in *Oxford dictionary...*, vol.7, p.816.

76. John Chamberlayne: *Magna Britannia Notitia: Or, The Present State of Great Britain* (London, 1726), Part II, p.186.

77. Benj[amin]. Motte: *The Philosophical Transactions*

from the Year MDCC [...] to the Year MDCCXX. Abridg'd, and dispos'd under General Heads (London, 1721), vol.1: II, pp.96–97; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.5.

78. E. Kimber & R. Johnson: *The Baronetage of England* (London, 1771), vol.3, p.203.

79. For the strong affinities

between London and Hamburg see Davis: *German thought and culture*, pp.81–92.

80. Harris: 'Investor...', p.556.

81. Smith: 'More Handeliana', p.18.

82. Savidge: *Tunbridge...*, p.80.

in dozens of printed poems as much as disapproved by moralists like Samuel Richardson,⁸² might also accommodate the possibility of a first-degree relation between the two Handels. (Tunbridge curiosities included an illegitimate son of Sir Robert Walpole.⁸³) Even if Charles were an opportunist cashing on an actual or assumed relation to Handel, Tunbridge would have suited him particularly well. During summer, the spa attracted nobility and gentry, Britons and Continentals,⁸⁴ people already rich or willing to taste wealth through gambling.

WHETHER Charles Handel[[]], Esq. might have been, neither the death notices nor the discussion above establish any facts about him. This is hardly surprising. The London press transmitted astonishing amounts of information to the public, and newspaper content typically included unsolicited reports, letters, and announcements, let alone paid insertions.⁸⁵ It was impossible for editors and publishers to check the accuracy of everything they printed (disclaimers like 'we hear', 'we have received advice', 'it is said' etc. abound in news stories at this time). Just days after the announcement of Charles Handel[[]]'s death, the *London Chronicle* had to retract a similar notice for a 'Mr. Atkinson'.⁸⁶ Thus, the newspaper reports above are not sufficient to prove Charles's demise. This ambivalence naturally produces tension in fact-oriented research (a Handel biographer or editor needs to know if certain data are true or not). Peer-pressure and professional decorum in published scholarship often yield large wastebaskets of data. Hundreds of references to Handel remain confined to academic cellars often because they do not fit narratives, or they cannot stand as verifiable facts, or because editors consider them irrelevant/excessive to an argument.

Students of Handel's biological and artistic life may have little interest in the notices I have reproduced in this essay. The case is not the same, however, for scholars exploring Handel's image. A reception angle embraces the full spectrum of responses to the composer, positive and negative, actual and metaphoric, true and false. The wide scope and flexible methodology of this perspective welcomes potentialities as much as facts. Data ignored or rejected in other scholarly contexts may help establish a field of plausibility and shades of causality. The skilful and patient researcher can sift through such random configurations of data to locate moments and events otherwise undetected by 'focus scholarship'. This type of peripheral scholarly vision allowed me to fish out the death notices of Charles Handel[[]], which, in turn, led me to reexamine the composer's links with Tunbridge Wells and to recover new information that may enrich biographical accounts of Handel.

Disregarding the *terminus* of 1759 was critical for this enterprise. While the biological and legal entity of George Frideric Handel ceased to exist in

83. *Description...*, pp.5–6 [multiple paginations]; Savidge: *Tunbridge...*, p.81.

84. In 1762, Samuel Derrick wrote: 'You are here with the most elegant company in Europe, on the easiest terms; and you need be at no loss for a party of Whist or Quadrille with respectable personages, at any price, from a shilling to a guinea a corner': Derrick: *Letters*, vol.2, pp.56–57.

85. For a general discussion of London newspaper's content in early Georgian Britain, see Michael Harris: *London newspapers in the age of Walpole: a study of the origins of the modern English press* (London & Toronto, 1987), pp.155–88.

86. 'The article in Monday's papers of the death of Mr. Atkinson, Warehouseman, in Bishopsgate-street, is not true, he being in good health', in *The London Chronicle* 39 [no. 3003, Thursday 7–Saturday 9 March] (1776), p.239.

87. See Chrissochoidis: 'Early reception', vol.1, pp.316–449; and Eva Zöllner: *English oratorio after Handel: the London oratorio series and its repertory, 1760–1800* (Marburg, 2002), pp.41–82.

88. See Robert Manson Myers: *Handel's Messiah: a touchstone of taste* (New York, 1948), pp.161–68.

89. Handel's printed music before 1800 amounts to over 1500 items: George J. Buelow: *A history of baroque music* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2004), p.622, n.32. According to Hawkins, 'The long residence of Handel in this country, the great number of his compositions, and the frequent performance of them, enable us to form a competent judgment of his abilities': Hawkins: *History...*, vol.5, p.282. See also my 'Handel's reception and the rise of music historiography in Britain', in Zdravko Blazekovic, ed.: *Music's intellectual history: founders, followers & fads* (New York, 2007) [forthcoming].

90. William Weber: *The rise of musical classics in eighteenth-century England: a study in canon, ritual, and ideology* (Oxford, 1992), pp.173–177, 205, 248.

91. *The Gentleman's Magazine* 47 (1777), p.274.

92. For a comprehensive account of Linley, Jr, and his family, see Gwilym Beechey: 'Thomas Linley, Junior. 1756–78', in *The Musical Quarterly* 54 (1968), pp.74–82.

93. See *The Public Advertiser* for the respective dates. During the same period, the rival oratorio company at Covent Garden Theatre

that year, the mental image of the artist continued to evolve. Annual oratorio seasons in London,⁸⁷ charitable performances of *Messiah* throughout the kingdom,⁸⁸ a wide circulation of Handelian repertory in print, and the rise of music criticism kept it alive.⁸⁹ The year 1776, in particular, saw the launching of the 'Concert of Antient Music' (a hothouse of Handelian cult),⁹⁰ and the publication of two *General Histories* of music, by Burney (only the first volume) and Hawkins (for a contemporary reviewer, Handel was 'justly the hero of this [latter] work'⁹¹). Music lovers, furthermore, anticipated the debut of the Linley family in Drury-Lane Theatre's oratorio season.⁹² Chronologically, the reported death of Charles Handel[l] falls in the period between their performances of *Acis and Galatea* (23 February and 8 March) and *Alexander's feast* (1 and 15 March), Handel's most popular works.⁹³

Without the composer's image hovering in the air, Charles Handel[l]'s death would surely have passed unnoticed. Accepting this image in its continuous and evolving presence helps us cut a hole through the biographical fence of 1759 and bring into alignment Handel's life and post-humous reputation. In so doing, we deepen our understanding of the Handel phenomenon in 18th-century Britain and begin to grasp the fairness of its claim on modernity.⁹⁴

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offered performances of *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Samson*, and *Messiah*. For a calendar of the 1776 oratorio season see Zöllner: *English oratorio...*, p.224.

94. Handel's visit to Tunbridge in summer 1737 remains poorly documented. The only contemporary source is a letter by John Upton to James Harris dated 1 September (Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.36). Since the completion of this essay, I was able to recover two reports from the *Daily Advertiser*, which throw light on Handel's movements in August of that

year: '["FRIDAY, Aug.5."] / Yesterday Mr. Handell set out for the Bath for the recovery of his health, he having been struck with a dead palsy on one side. *DA* [i.e. *The Daily Advertiser*]', in *The Grub-street Journal* no.398, Thursday 11 August 1737, p.[2]; '["MONDAY, Aug.15."] / 'Tis with the greatest pleasure we can assure the publick, that the report which was spread concerning Mr. Handel's being seiz'd with a dead palsy on one side, is altogether groundless, that gentleman being now at Tunbridge in good health. *DA*.—*It was the DA. that first spread this*

report, on Aug.5', in *The Grub-street Journal* no.399, Thursday 18 August 1737, p.[2]. July and August being close season at Bath (if that city is meant by 'the Bath'), it is most likely that Handel's destination was Tunbridge Wells from the outset. The conflicting reports indicate either genuine public concern for his health or perhaps a desire to spoil his forthcoming collaboration with the Opera of the Nobility (two new operas for £1000; Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.31). Both possibilities deserve further consideration.

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