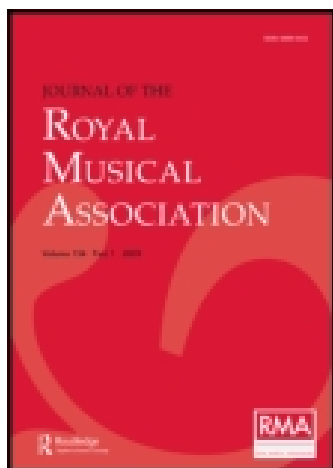


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A FEW WORDS ABOUT HANDEL.

By WILLIAM H. CUMMINGS, Esq.

My "few words about Handel" will chiefly bear on the question of the spelling of his name.

When some 300 years ago our national dramatist wrote the query, "What's in a name?" he little dreamt of the amount of disputation which would arise in after-times respecting the rightful spelling of his own. Probably many of you have seen the capital little essays on the spelling of Shakespeare's name which have been recently published by Mr. Halliwell-Phillips. Curiously, in the case of Shakespeare the momentous question is about the two letters *e* and *a*—and in respect to our great composer it is whether he shall be called Handel or Hendel. Some persons will be disposed to say, What does it matter how you spell the name, so long as there be no misunderstanding about the identity of the individual? but I would remind such of the serious case put by Byron in "Don Juan":—

Thrice happy he whose name has been well spelt
In the despatch: I knew a man whose loss
Was printed *Grove*, although his name was *Grose*.

Now in many cases there has been great difficulty in deciding how to spell a man's name, and for this reason—that the owner would seem to have had no settled way of spelling it himself. Of course one is not surprised at this when the man happens to be an illiterate individual like our old friend Sam Weller, who was content to have it spelt "With a V, my lord." But when educated people trouble themselves little about the spelling of their names, I think there *is* matter for wonder. However, that such was the case until quite recent times is certain. The great Earl of Dudley spelt his name Duddleley—his wife Duddley. Edward Allen, the actor and founder of Dulwich College, signed his own name Alleyn, Aleyn, Allin, Allen—his wife spelt hers Alleyne. Sir Walter Raleigh spelt his Rauley and Ralegh. Purcell spelt his own name sometimes with a *c* and sometimes with an *s*. Creighton spelt his name in two or three different ways.

Now let us come to Handel. There can be no doubt that at his baptism he received the surname as spelt by his father—that is to say, with the *e* over the *a*, or the equivalent in dots. I may here say that the actual day of his birth has been sometimes disputed, although of course the books of the Church of Notre Dame de St. Laurent, at Halle, show that he was baptised on February 24, 1685, and as it was the usual custom at

that time to baptise a child the day after birth, it was reasonably argued that Handel must have been born on the 23rd.

Here, however, is distinct proof of the fact; this document which I have brought for your inspection is the only existing direct evidence on the point. It is a funeral sermon which was printed for the Handel family on the death of Handel's mother in 1730, and on page 23 the date of the birth of George Frederick is given; this, the only copy, was preserved by the family, and is therefore very precious.

We find that when Handel went to Italy he spelt his name *Handel*; but when he came to England he seems immediately to have substituted the *a* for *e*, and wrote himself down as *Handel*. His friend and amanuensis Schmidt in like manner anglicised his name to *Smith*; and in these forms they subscribed to the first bond of union of the Society of Musicians, now known as the Royal Society of Musicians. That Handel adopted this mode of spelling with intention is further shown by his petition to the House of Lords, dated February 13, 1726, in which he twice spells his name *Handel*; on the next day, the 14th, he attended the House of Lords, and took the necessary oaths in that name; and the private Act of Parliament naturalising him passed the house with the name so spelt, and it received the royal assent on February 20, 1726. In his oratorios he frequently subscribed his name and the date of composition: in these instances he always spelt it *Handel*; and to come to the last act of his life—the making his will—here again he spelt the name *Handel*. I have brought Handel's original will in his own autograph with me, as I am sure you will be interested to look at this touching memorial and his several signatures.

If Handel was so anxious to make himself an Englishman, surely we ought not to be anxious to denationalise him; but you may have noticed what a common thing it is for writers nowadays, perhaps with a desire to be thought learned or to show that they have an intimate knowledge of the German language, to put two dots over the *a*. I hope you will agree with me that the practice should be abandoned, and that we ought to be content to spell the name as the great master himself preferred it.

I should add that Handel, in writing to his own family from England, and writing in German (even to his mother), spelt his name *Handel*. This I know, because several of these interesting letters have quite recently been in my possession.

Further, the German Handel Society, under the able editorship of Dr. Chrysander, issue their volumes with a special title-page (I presume for England) in which the name is spelt, as of right it should be, *Handel*.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN having invited discussion—

Mr. SOUTHGATE.—Perhaps Mr. Cummings will kindly tell us how it is that the will is not in Doctors' Commons, and how he came possessed of it—

Mr. CUMMINGS.—In the first place, there are no wills in Doctors' Commons—fortunately they have all been removed to Somerset House. I took this will down to Somerset House one day, and saw a kind gentleman there, the superintendent, who was most anxious to appropriate it. The truth is that it was not at all uncommon in Handel's day for people to make a will in duplicate. They have a copy at Somerset House, but it has been so repeatedly thumbed, and tied up with tape, that the signature is almost obliterated. They were very anxious that I should make an exchange, but you can well understand that I preferred not to do so. How I became possessed of it was very simple. This will was bought from the executor of Handel, Mr. Amyand, by Mr. Snoxell; and when Mr. Snoxell died all his things were sold at Puttick and Simpson's some short time since, and I then bought the will at public auction.

Major CRAWFORD.—I would only remark that the question with regard to the adoption of one particular spelling of any man's name arises chiefly in the case of dictionaries or catalogues, and such other occasions when you have to enter everything you have to say about him or his works under one particular heading. With regard to speaking of Handel, or writing about him in the ordinary way, I quite agree with what Mr. Cummings says; but on the other hand the question arises, what rule are you to follow, if you have to make a heading in a dictionary, for example? In that case, as I have had something to do with such matters, I have found that the simplest rule is always to follow the spelling to which your man was entitled by birth, and which you find in his baptismal register as being the spelling of his family, not the spelling which he may employ afterwards for one reason or another. There is no question whatever that Handel, as Mr. Cummings has remarked, did adopt what I may call the English form of the name, but it must be remembered too that the change thus made was extremely slight. It was not, as in the case of his secretary, a change from the German form of the name from Schmidt to Smith, but it was simply dropping the two dots over the letter *a*, retaining the spelling—retaining every letter exactly as before, and simply dropping the dots, the meaning of which very few people in England then understood. It left the apparent spelling of the name precisely as it stood before. Those dots, representing the letter *e*, would to the eye of a German change the pronuncia-

tion, but that was all ; therefore, the change was a very slight one indeed. No doubt in England he was always called Mr. Handel ; sometimes his name was spelt with two *l*'s and sometimes *dle*, I believe. For certain purposes, such as I have mentioned, it appears to me that the best rule is to follow the baptismal name, but this does not interfere with your calling your man by any name you choose afterwards, or by any name he chooses to adopt himself.

Mr. VICTOR DE PONTIGNY.—With regard to the variety in the spelling of proper names, I may say that I know two brothers in France, in the province of Auvergne, who spell their names differently.

Dr. POLE.—How Handel's name was sometimes pronounced would be seen in Byron's lines :—

Others say that he to Handel
Is not fit to hold a candle.

The CHAIRMAN.—He chose to be naturalised under the name of Handel.

Mr. CUMMINGS.—May I say, in answer to Major Crawford, that I think his argument is plausible, but that it would not always apply. Take a well-known man, as, for instance, the Rev. Mr. Bellew, well-known as a public reader, what would be the use of putting in a biographical dictionary Higgin ? but that was his name. How would you discover that Higgin was Mr. Bellew ? Again, take the case of the late Mr. Compton, the actor—his name was Mackenzie, but he adopted the name of Compton. As we have a distinguished member of the legal profession now present, I should like to take counsel's opinion upon it. Handel had actually an Act of Parliament authorising him to take a particular name, and I would like to ask the question whether that was not the proper name by which he should be recognised in England ; whether, the name having been granted him by Act of Parliament, as has been shown, he was not actually bound to be known in England under the name as it was spelt in that Act of Parliament. If Mr. White would give us the information I should be glad.

Mr. MEADOWS WHITE.—I do not think legal considerations have much weight in this matter. Handel wrote his name "Handel," and when he came for an Act of Parliament which naturalised him, having spelt it in that way, it would naturally be so spelt in the Act of Parliament. I do not think there would be anything illegal or contrary to legal authority if he had chosen afterwards to go back and spell his name with the modified *ä*. Therefore, as a legal proposition, I should think it was immaterial whether it be spelt Handel or Händel. I should go all the way with Mr. Cummings in his

suggestion that, for Englishmen familiar with the name in the form of "Handel," which he adopted himself, it would be better and more appropriate so to spell it. If I had to spell the word myself, I should certainly do so; but I should not be very much influenced in my choice of spelling by the legal considerations referred to by Mr. Cummings.

Dr. GROVE.—Major Crawford's rule is a very good one, but like many other good rules is not always applicable. For instance, take Hugh Pearson, his name was originally Pearson, and his Christian name Hugh; he went to Germany and adopted the German method of spelling it, and called himself Hugo Pierson. It would be absurd to put his name in the dictionary Pearson, because nobody would find it. Under the heading Pierson, you could state that his name was originally in the other form, and that he had changed it. In all these rules, when you come to work with them, you find occasions occur in which you must drop the strict rule, and let common sense step in.

Mr. SALAMAN.—There was Schudy, the famous harpsichord-player; he changed it from Tschudi to Schudy. Handel signed his name "Handel" in the celebrated "Harpsichord Lessons," published in 1720. Surely a man ought to know how to spell his own name.

Mr. COLERIDGE.—Does it not complicate it farther by saying he has signed it *Hondel*?

Mr. CUMMINGS.—There is a curious sermon printed in Germany, in which the letter *e* is put over the letter *a*. Mr. Schölcher makes a sad muddle of the name. Schölcher gives a number of names—he has taken the genitive case as the nominative. The fact remains that Handel, when he wrote his name in England, even in writing a German letter to his mother in Germany, signed his name Handel without the dots. I think that is a very strong point indeed. In England he never wrote it in any other way. So I think as Englishmen we ought to be content with that form and keep to it. It saves a great deal of trouble.

The CHAIRMAN.—I think you will all cordially join in thanking Mr. Cummings for his papers, which have given us great pleasure, and also for the very interesting documents with which he has accompanied them. I think it will be a great treat for those interested in the matter to look over such papers as these.