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Sequencer

The newsletter of the Nottingham & District Society of Organists

2013-14, Issue 3

This edition of Sequencer was compiled and edited by David Gabe, produced by Peter Siepmann, and printed by Temple Printing Ltd. Please address any correspondence to editor@nottsorganists.co.uk

FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Education, Education, Education” was how Tony Blair famously set out his priorities for office. This should be a watch word for all musicians too, but particularly organists, as ours is a profession which needs a concerted effort to sustain. I was keen, as I said at last year's AGM, to see Education as the theme to most if not all of our events this year. It



has been really excellent therefore to have had renowned organist Robert Gower (who will become a more familiar face come September – see the 'News' section) lead an



interesting and rewarding masterclass and repertoire event in January (above right) and to have had the benefit of John Keys' expertise on the interpretation of Baroque organ music in April (to be reported on in the next issue of *Sequencer*); most particularly it was wonderful to witness the enthusiasm of local children and their parents at the 'Pull out the Stops'

event in February (above left). I believe this latter venture is the sort of thing that all organist societies should be doing, and I remain most grateful to our friends in the Derbyshire Society for facilitating this wonderful and inspiring event. Although turn out at events has been somewhat disappointing, I'm sure members will need little encouragement to come to St Peter's Church on Saturday 7th June to hear one of the country's foremost organists, Robert Quinney give a recital, and then to hear him speak at the Society Luncheon – please return your bookings as soon as possible!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 17th May

Society Visit: Goetze & Gwynn and Worksop Priory
for details see the Events sheet sent with this edition of Sequencer

Sunday 1st June, 2.45pm

Albert Hall, Nottingham
David Butterworth (Albert Hall, Nottingham)

Saturday 7th June, 11am

St Peter's Church, Nottingham
Celebrity Recital: Robert Quinney
followed by 12.30pm for 1pm
The Society Luncheon (Mercure Hotel)
for booking, see the Events sheet sent with this edition of Sequencer

Saturday 14th June, 7.30pm

St Osmond's Church, London Road, Derby
Opening Recital: David Butterworth

Sunday 22nd June, 2.45pm

Albert Hall, Nottingham
Simon Hogan (Southwell Minster)

Sunday 10th August, 2:45pm

Albert Hall, Nottingham
Henry Websdale (Winchester College)

Tuesday 29th July, 7.30pm

St Leonard's Church Hall, Wollaton
The Society Annual General Meeting

A Day to be confirmed in August

Albert Hall, Nottingham
Masterclass: French Romantic Organ Music
David Butterworth MA MusB FRCO(CHM)

Bank Holiday Monday 31st August 2015, 3.30pm

Southwell Minster (Nave)
Daniel Cook (Westminster Abbey)

Sunday 7th September, 2.45pm

Albert Hall, Nottingham
Donald MacKenzie (Odeon Cinema, Leicester Square)

RECENT EVENTS

Visit to Southwell Minster: Paul Hale on ‘New Organs’

The December meeting was an invitation to Southwell Minster on Sunday 15th December for Evensong, a talk by Paul Hale on some recent work of his in the organ building consultation field, and a performance by Simon Hogan of Messiaen’s *La Nativité du Seigneur*.

Evensong demonstrated yet again the virtues of the cathedral choir in standard repertoire with an excellent organ voluntary consisting of the overture to Mendelssohn’s oratorio *St Paul* (later it was discovered that this was to be the concluding voluntary for the BBC broadcast of Evensong a few days later).

The talk by Paul was supposed to be about his two recent projects – Newcastle RC Cathedral and Merton College Oxford – but in the event time precluded more than one presentation. In fact the presentation was based on a remarkable set of slides showing, in greater detail than most of us had ever seen, the planning and production of an organ. The whole process had to be fit for a Pugin building taking account of style and existing structure: thus the construction of a platform over the west door without blocking the existing west window was fundamental to the project.



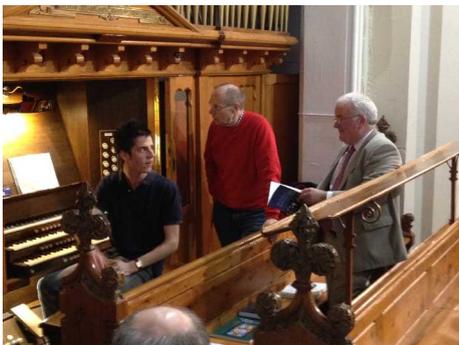
The organ was built as new by Kenneth Tickell at his Northamptonshire workshops using state-of-the-art CFC machining facilities and the slides demonstrated the care and expertise involved in great detail. Assembly and case design were fascinating and the positioning of the copper-based *en chamade* trumpet pipes in a case of tin-rich display pipes was of especial interest to some of us. The quality of the wood for pipes was absolutely top-class.

Time ran out so Merton College and its new Dobson organ were left for another occasion. We look forward to that treat with considerable anticipation.

David Gabe

Robert Gower ‘teach-in’

On Saturday 18th January we received a warm welcome at the Church of St Mary and All Souls Bulwell where, after coffee, we settled into the chancel for a masterclass on hymn playing. Robert Gower had the necessary experience for the task: having played hymns in non-conformist churches during his teens he then regularly accompanied large congregations in college chapel during his career as a music teacher. By getting us to look at a number of hymns in the New English Hymnal and inviting volunteers to play some of them, he brought out many aspects of good hymn playing. These included choosing an appropriate volume (depending on the building and whether the congregation needs to be accompanied or led), tempo and key (it is kinder if the top note is not higher than D5). He discussed the importance of keeping a constant predictable rhythm, appropriate introductions, registration and phrasing. He suggested a number of ways of decorating the hymn, including playing the alto or tenor line an octave higher, above the tune, and playing at the double octave (the right hand an octave higher with the left hand filling in the harmony) for climactic moments. On the subject of hymn-based improvisation he suggested that we find some motif within the tune that can be pressed into service. He sees improvisation as an opportunity to explore the delicate stops within the organ, and demonstrated playing the tune in parallel thirds, fifths and sixths. We were encouraged not be afraid of dissonance, and he showed how beautiful a chain of sevenths can be. He also illustrated how pivot notes in the pedal can allow some impressive modulations. The session was over all too soon.



Phill Ridley, John Catling & Robert Gower discuss accompaniment of plainsong hymns

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Michael Leuty

[Robert Gower has since been appointed as Organist at St Barnabas RC Cathedral, Nottingham – see 'News']



After an excellent lunch with jacket potatoes, fillings, a dessert and coffee we had a second session based on the new OUP publication *Lent and Easter Organ Music* which Robert had edited. On paper it looked to be a 'hard sell' but in practice it was not. We heard about the experiences of an editor who after collating organ works by Finzi, Ireland, Walton and others set about assembling music for seasonal use. The volume was available for discounted purchase (many members did) and consists of 34 pieces mainly based on hymn or chorale tunes by classical composers and many from whom the pieces had been specially commissioned. After talking about the problems of editing such a collation with good humour (eg. should we play a toccata in Lent, or would a composition by Naji Hakim be beyond the average organist, or how Christopher Tambling approached *Shine Jesus Shine* for its 25th anniversary) he also explained how he chose the music by raiding the RCO archives in Birmingham finding Parry and W.H.Harris pieces as well as inviting present day organists including David Bednall and David Briggs, Richard Popplewell and of course the doyen Francis Jackson.

By playing a selection Robert showed the variety of musical styles he had chosen and convinced several that they should buy the volume after all. The volume also provides a fascinating study for would-be composers of how hymn tunes can be used as the basis for compositions ideal for voluntary use and in several cases offers a mischievous challenge to identify the inspiration (eg *Sheep may safely graze* for Popplewell).

The disappointment was that so few members attended a quite excellent day led by a first class organist who can teach and encourage.

David Gabe

Discovering the Pipe Organ for Youngsters

For some time the NDSO committee have been discussing how they could best encourage youngsters to take up the organ. A number of ideas have been considered – sponsored organ lessons, an organ scholarship, open days at churches etc – but when they heard of the Derby Society's initiative it seemed too good to ignore.



The event took place at St Peter's Church on Saturday 15th February hosted by the President and was based on members nominations of young musicians who were ambitious to try the organ or were curious to see what was involved. In the event eleven such people came, in age from approximately 7 to 15 years of age. They were supported by parents and sponsors, about 15 members and a few curious visitors to the church.

All gathered at the front around the console to have demonstrations of playing a piece (by Peter Siepmann) to demonstrations of the manuals, the stops and the pedals, not to mention the hands in playing and turning over! The most unusual part was a demonstration of the pipes themselves, the different materials and design or shape by an organ builder (Ed Stow) using his 'spares'.



The Derby Society also brought their demonstration instrument of three ranks of one octave built by Ed Stow which placed on a tabletop was an item of particular attraction to several old hands. The members who presented included James Muckle, Laurence Rogers, John Maxwell Jones, John Forster and Chris Darrall.

When the young organists tried the organ it was the combination pistons which caused greatest fascination and the session continued well beyond the finishing time. The success was of course due to the leaders from Derby amongst whom Anne and Stephen Johns must be thanked in particular for arranging the programme of presentations. A very worthwhile event which now needs to be followed up because the enthusiasm of the young organists was so very obvious.

David Gabe

photos by David Cowlshaw

Members' Recital

The annual members recital was held on 22nd March on a Saturday afternoon at 3pm. Not only was this unusual in recent practice but it was also a dedicated recital meeting with a pre-arranged programme. The local arrangements were made by Shaun Hooper who provided welcome coffee at the conclusion. Five members played to an appreciative audience of about 30 people. Peter Siepmann (President), Michael Leuty, John Catling, Shaun Hooper and David Butterworth. We heard good performances of known and not so well-known items. Peter commenced with Mendelssohn's fourth sonata and Michael followed with the Adagio from Vierne's third symphony and *Placare Christe Servulis* by Marcel Dupré. John played two pieces by Couperin from *Messe pour les Couvents* and Vaughan Williams' Prelude on Rhosymedre. Following which Shaun played an Festal Postlude Alleluia on 'Lasst uns erfreuen' by William Faulkes. The recital ended with David playing Bach's *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* chorale prelude and Dupre's Prelude and Fugue in B major, a very uplifting ending. The new arrangements worked well and at 75 mins, the length was just right.



*David Gabe
photo by David Conlshaw*



THE REGISTER

Ken Jennings, former Assistant Organist at St Mary's, Nottingham, died in October. Ken played at St Mary's from 1957-1970 first under Russell Missin and then David Butterworth. Later he was organist of St Peter's Church, East Bridgford. His funeral was on 23rd October in East Bridgford; David Butterworth played the organ.



NDSO BURSARY SCHEME

The committee has resolved to introduce a scheme of financial assistance to young organists in full-time education.

We wish to encourage their learning to play the pipe organ under the guidance of a recognised tutor in the Nottinghamshire area.

The scheme is open to all those resident – or in the case of away-students, based – in the county of Nottinghamshire.

Application is made through a letter addressed to the Honorary Secretary. The committee will consider any such approach at their regular meetings:

Mrs Joan Orton
1 Haslemere Gardens
Ravenshead
NG15 9FW
j.orton@dj001.demon.co.uk



NEWS

Llandaff Cathedral Choir

For some time it has been known that most Cathedrals have seen a marked increase in attendance at Choral Evensong, generally attributed to the music and formality, but Llandaff is an exception. Llandaff Cathedral is the Anglican cathedral in Cardiff, is of course part of the disestablished Church in Wales, is the only cathedral in Wales with a choir school but is otherwise a normal part of the Anglican communion. The cathedral is showing considerable financial deficit and, after much pruning of expense, the music and choir are the most expensive activity (one-sixth of the total spend). Being in the capital and only a short distance from BBC broadcasting house it has good media exposure and the standard of music is good.

Some months ago the threat of closure came and various protests were made by relevant organizations. Reconsideration took place but a week before Christmas a number of the choir men and the Assistant Organist were given redundancy notices. As 'The Times' put it, goodwill to all men was in short supply at last Christmas. In the future adult choristers will be put on contracts of a flexible occasional basis.

David Gabe

Lincoln Cathedral

Lincoln Cathedral Music Department were overwhelmed by the response to a composition competition they recently staged for a new setting of the Advent Responsory. There were 49 entries from as far away as the United States, Canada and Australia. In the event, first prize went to British composer John Eady who is a freelance organist and cellist. Second place went to our "own" George Richford. Congratulations to George, who is the erstwhile and deeply missed Master of the Song School at St Mary Magdalene, Newark. Not to be done down that easily, George has now been appointed to Holy Trinity, Dartford, where he is already making a tremendous difference to the choral foundation, just as one would expect after his wonderful pioneering work at Newark.

David Butternorth

Organ Day in Sheffield

The Sheffield Society (SADOCA) are organizing an organ day on Saturday 10 May. Visits will be made in the city centre to Upper Chapel, Norfolk Street (recital by Simon Lindley at 11.45am), St Matthews Church, Carver Street and the City Hall (master class by John Scott Whitely at 15.00).

Register on mail@jdroch.co.uk

Fee is £10 to IAO members.

Organ Day in Liverpool.

The annual Bank Holiday organ day in Liverpool is on 5 May. It commences at 11.15am in the Anglican Cathedral with a recital by Daniel Bishop, the associate organist.

Is Organ Playing good for you?

Many organists have felt it necessary to justify organ playing and many hours of practice on the grounds of keeping fit, and the understanding of the many gadgets on electronic organs as good for the mind (when you have found out how they work!).

David Cowlshaw has drawn our attention to some academic research at the University of St. Andrews by Dr Ines Jentzsch who has been testing the cognitive abilities of musicians and non-musicians and finds that learning to play a musical instrument 'could slow or even prevent the mental decline associated with aging'. Furthermore, identifying errors and correcting mistakes are valuable assets found in both amateur and professional musicians.

The research has been published in the journal *Neuropsychologia* and points out that musicians playing in public must demonstrate heightened awareness of their actions through continually monitoring their playing through auditory feedback and rapidly adjust their movements to anticipate possible mistakes. Thus musicians have been found to have improved reaction times for information processing, and increased capacity to inhibit task irrelevancies and stay focused. Dr Jentzsch claims that the study is notable in that it has focused on amateur musicians.

There is of course a political dimension to this work apart from the usual academic curiosity and justification. The study draws attention to the diminishing support in schools for children to learn to play instruments because in times of economic hardship music education is often amongst the first activity to be cut.

Appointments

Andrew Gant has left the Chapel Royal, replaced by Huw Williams. Robert Quinney, currently Director of Music at Peterborough Cathedral moves to New College, Oxford in September to take the reins from Edward Higginbottom after his extraordinary 37 year tenure. Jonathan Hope, formerly Organ Scholar of Winchester Cathedral, has recently taken up residence in Gloucester where he is Assistant Director of Music. Claire Innes-Hopkins moves from Lincoln to Rochester as Assistant Director of Music and James Luxton from Worcester to Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. Closer to home, Neil Page is to retire from his work at St Barnabas RC Cathedral; the music department will be led by Alex Patterson as Director of Music, and Robert Gower as Organist.

Marcussen in Aalborg

The large new Marcussen organ in the new Musikhus in Aalborg is structurally complete and 'all there,' and some voicing has been done.

However, Claudia Zachariassen commented on 27th March: "The hall itself will be inaugurated on Saturday. Everyone is rushing around making a lot of noise, so we have had to stop work for now. It's always the same! We shall resume voicing after Easter, and think that most of the organ will be ready for John Scott's opening recital on 5th June."



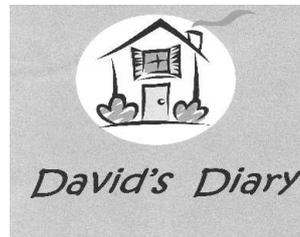
The voicers are Jens Christensen, Stefan Poulsen and Halfdan Oussoren. It was Halfdan's mother and father who voiced the Marcussens in St Mary's, Nottingham and St Mary's, Clifton. I hope you will enjoy the two videos linked here. Sorry about the Danish; but we can't all be perfect!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKcadlpWVdc>
http://www.tv2nord.dk/arkiv/2013/04/09?video_id=40489

David Butternorth

From the President's Garden

A close inspection of the photograph below will reveal three bunches of daffodils planted in the feet of the old pedal Bourdon from St Peter's Church Nottingham. Do members have any other examples of organ parts used in unusual ways? Send them on to editor@nottsorganists.co.uk



Aldous Huxley once said "Most human beings have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted." Those of us who are organists would probably be among the first to subscribe to such a point of view. How many of us have had to go through – at least once – the ignominy of being told off for playing 'the wrong tune' with no regard for all of the remainder of one's (possibly excellent) input into the rest of the occasion; indeed how many of us regularly play carefully selected and rehearsed voluntaries through a mesh of variegated conversation on almost any topic under the sun (apart from God)?

Incidentally, my own experience of the latter would indicate that it is sometimes musicians who are the worst offenders! I learnt my lesson at a relatively early age, thank goodness, when I was at Cambridge. I had popped into King's Chapel towards the end of an Evensong to do some practice, and spotted my own Head Chorister's father (an organist) listening intently to the closing voluntary. Upon trying to strike up a conversation with him, I was roundly told off and made to wait, rather red-faced and hopefully a little bit the wiser for it. Good!

Anyway, that's all by way of a prelude to a small but rather refreshing experience I had last year, highlighting the role that our long-suffering organ builder friends play in making our chosen instrument the joy and source of fascination it can be. For a while, I had been looking for a suitable basis for making a voicing machine, not with a view to entering into competition with others (!) but simply as an aid to a greater understanding of how organ pipes behave, and how to stop them misbehaving. I had already decided that to make anything from scratch would be impossibly time-consuming, with no guarantee that the end result would be much good. So, such a basis would probably be an existing, unwanted, one-manual organ; it had to be sound yet importantly of little or no musical merit and certainly of no historic interest.

Bingo! Such an opportunity came my way by sheer chance – a one-manual and pedal by a small, honest, jobbing builder, clearly created on a budget for a small chapel. The 'operating' spec was 8', 8', 8', 4' plus a Pedal Bourdon. The sound, as presented, was dull and lifeless. Through lack of any storage space, I was obliged to part with all the pipes, which is a shame because they did have potential, both Principals for example with virtually ¼: ¼ mouths. The rest of the organ was a cobbler's delight. The Pedal pneumatics (plastic tubing) worked only partially; there was a pneumatic 'melodic bass' of the

Casson type perfectly made and clearly bought in from the 'trade' but also not fully operable; and the Swell box was an old front completed in a combination of fibreboard and hardboard. None of these things I wanted anyway. There was a disproportionately large and filthy reservoir at the back, patched up with duck tape, which I left. And the blower box was riddled with what must have been mega-woodworm; I have never seen such impressive piles of beetle dust on the lid, reminding me of small ant hills! That got left, too.

The whole organ had suffered extreme damp, and it was impossible to remove quite a few screws on site. Back at base, the only way I could shift the final screw on one of the upperboards was by removing the bass pipe veneer to get more purchase. It was at this point that it really came home to me just how much work goes into the simplest of tasks.



The picture I have included here is an unusual sight of the sort of thing a builder has to do to achieve the simplest end – certainly one we would all take for granted. Here, we are looking at the planting off of a Stopped Bass, a typical bottom octave of an 8' flute register. The channels in the soundboard are only an inch or two apart, so the pipes are far too large to stand directly over them. They must be planted where they will physically fit and have room to speak. To get the air from the respective channels to the tips of the twelve 'shuffled' pipes requires grooving or tunnelling. The veneer is at the receiving end and has the toe-holes on which the planted pipes can comfortably stand. To the right, we see the upperboard minus its veneer, with the grooving

exposed. The way in which this has been done, I believe entirely by brace and bit, is superb. Some of the grooves come perilously close to each other, yet there is no sign of breaking through. This process alone can be seen to have involved 141 skilful applications of the brace and bit. (Incidentally, I ought to mention at this point that the soundboard, too, is clearly a re-used one, beautifully made, complete with an additional slider for a 2' register, and possibly from a seriously good organ which I would not have broken up.) To the left of the picture is an equally unusual view – of the underside of the veneer, lined in sheepskin leather. It graphically reflects the grooves, their paths being demonstrated by the pattern of dirt lines developed over the years.

So, it's all about holes, holes and more holes. Virtually everything that goes into organs – nay, just one extra stop in a rebuild – involves lots of holes. Let's look at a three-rank Mixture on a 61-note slider soundboard. We are dealing with the table (the lowest, fixed, element of the top of the soundboard); then the slider; then the upperboard which is likely to be in 'sandwich' form – a top and bottom and a middle of a softer material for grooving); and the rackboard. First, everything is clamped together and pin holes are drilled (almost) throughout (8 x 61); then graded holes for the table (61); slider (61); bottom layer of upperboard and 'filling' (61); top layer of upperboard and filling (183); rackboard (183). In addition, where plywood is used, holes will need drilling from both sides; horizontal drilling might be required for the upperboard 'filling' (depending on builder's methods); 61 grooves will have to be routed out of the filling; all holes must be checked and smoothed or burned out to get rid of burrs and sharp edges; all rackboard holes will need to be rasped or burned out, or infilled with pieces of felt, at the pipe-fitting stage; all upperboard pipe holes will have to be countersunk and then burned out to neutralize any acids in the timber. Oh, and then of course there are the holes for the rackboard pillars and all the screws that keep the upperboard in place. That's all for one stop!

So, after all that, if an organ builder isn't busy performing circus tricks scrambling around a filthy old organ looking for leaks or coaxing reluctant Cornopeans back onto speech, he is probably drilling holes. Organ building is indeed a worthy profession which demands not only great skill to achieve even modest results, but also an unlimited store of superhuman patience. Look no further than our own two member organ builders, David and Jonathan, and you will know what I mean. And take pity, too. They enjoy, at once, a calling most fascinating, yet at the same time decidedly boring...

David Butterworth



The Peter Collins organ at Worksop Priory (NDSO Visit on 17th May)



Robert Quinney gives a Celebrity Recital at St Peter's Nottingham at 11am on 7th June before speaking at the NDSO Luncheon

The newly refurbished organ at St Leonard's Wollaton:
A chance to explore will follow the AGM on Tuesday 29th July

