

# *Derby & District Organists'*

Registered Charity No. 510567

## *Association*



**Roger Fisher with the seven organists who played during the Organ Study Day**

From the left: Martyn Davies, Gillian Chatto, Tom Corfield, Dennis Littleton, Roger Fisher, Ron Sherwood, John Catling and Christine Williams.

**Spring sunshine**, St Oswald's daffodils in full bloom, a welcome cup of coffee, a colourful, informative display in the church about the organ renovation, smiles from Siann . . . this was going to be a 'good day'. And it was; to the power of 10 !

I had read some of Roger Fisher's articles in *Organists' Review* and had warmed to his blend of good humour, common sense and interesting teaching ideas. We were treated to all this in abundance. As a teacher he was endlessly patient and sensitive to the anxieties of the seven performers, who had put their heads on the block, and delightfully self deprecating. Any silly mistake they might have made, Roger had done it too - probably in some Cathedral or other - and that was very re-assuring. He also managed to maintain a good balance between the needs of the person who was being taught and the interest of the rest of the group - not an easy thing to do.

The teaching materials were excellent. We all had copies of the pieces, which included a lot of delightful music, ranging from Grade 2 to Grade 8 standard, so that varied levels of experience were dealt with. This, of course, reflects the clientele of our

Association.

There were so many things to take in, but, reflecting on it all on the way home, there were two main areas that were of vital importance. The first of these was **UNDERSTANDING** - a continual stress on the need to 'get inside' the music you play. Blindingly obvious? . . . but so often ignored. Organists, in my experience, (self included) are amongst the least successful in this aspect. It is so easy just to learn the notes in a superficial way and fail to ask the right questions about a piece or to take in the details.

Roger laid great stress on playing individual lines so that one really took in what was going on in the music eg he advocated playing pedal parts with one finger, or at least with the hand, so that the *musical sound* became central, rather than the finger movement. Likewise we were encouraged to play RH parts with the LH and vice versa and he demonstrated the effectiveness of this with more than one player. Huge stress was laid on the need to analyse the music in terms of scale and finger patterns, hand positions and chord shapes as a means of embedding the music in the brain.

## *Forthcoming Events*

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May 8.00am**  
**Annual Outing – Liverpool**

See details of this event on the supplementary sheet.

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm**  
**Members' Recital, St James, Riddings**

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 7.30pm**  
**Evening Visit to Tibshelf and Somercotes**

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2.30pm**  
**Chairman's Event – Repton**

**N.B. The Mendelssohn Event at St Mary, Ilkeston will now be on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October.**

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**  
**Annual General Meeting – St Werburgh, Spondon.**

Secondly we were offered a wealth of **TECHNICAL ADVICE**. To mention just a little of it: the value of playing very small units and building up a piece like bricks rather than the constant temptation to play from the beginning until it goes wrong and then just start again (we have all done it, have we not?); the useful practice of arpeggiating difficult chords slowly to take in shapes, forgetting about the rhythmical flow until certainty is established.

Linked to this was the need to pause before awkward moments to gain certainty; and this was also helpful in maintaining a relaxed feel in one's playing. Tension and self blame (!) are the enemies of good performance. Roger's overall approach to ornamentation and pedal work was pragmatic. Heels in Bach ? . . . ok if it gets the phrasing. Trills starting on the upper note? . . . depends on musical sense and context. Jumping about with the left foot in the manner of Cinema Organists . . . fine, *if* you can keep it pretty smooth and use the swell pedal more effectively. It often avoids awkward posture. (He is a fan of cinema organists . . . and I'm with him on that !)

(Continued on page 4, column two.)



## Andrew Moyes of Nicholson Organs

pictured here with one of the structural frames of the new organ for Llandaff Cathedral. To Andrew's left is one of the blower boxes which will supply the wind to the north cases; on top of the blower box can be seen the primary reservoirs and the associated trunking to convey the wind to the Great, Solo and Pedal divisions.

The immense frames of the organ are largely built of Poplar, which is stable and easily obtained from renewable sources. In some places (see top left of picture) steel is used where chests are cantilevered to bring them out from behind the arches which form the chancel bays, thus helping to bring the sound out into the building.

Nicholson is a name which has been familiar to organists and ecclesiastical establishments since John Nicholson founded the firm in 1841 and whilst the founder would recognise the 'craftsman's art and music's measure' which are so much a part of the instruments that Nicholson build he would not recognise many of the techniques and devices used in modern organ construction.

The background of the current Managing Director, Andrew Moyes, is not what one might expect for a firm rooted in the solid construction techniques of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though any modern practitioner of business would see the advantages of his background very clearly.

Andrew took organ lessons at school and later became an organist and choirmaster, thus providing the musical background necessary for the post. Reading electrical engineering at university led him to employment with GEC at Trafford Park designing control systems for electric trains and from there to Hong Kong where he worked for the underground railway for seven years: the business experience gained there led to a proposition he had not expected.

'When I came back I was wondering what to do next when I was approached by someone in the organ building trade who asked if I would be interested in coming to Nicholson as Managing Director. At the time I thought that it sounded a very interesting job but I couldn't possibly do it, not having come up through the trade. I looked at the firm and could see exactly what the

the person meant; Nicholson had some really good craftsmen but could do with some design input, someone with a business background and perhaps some engineering background.

I agonised for six months and in the end decided to take the gamble. I thought I would give myself a couple of years and see if I could make some progress with the firm; if not I'd go back to engineering before I was out of date with all the things that were going on. It took about five years before I was able to make the impression on the firm that I wanted and I've never looked back since.'

One of those 'really good craftsmen' is Guy Russell, Nicholson's Tonal Director. As a chorister at Wimborne Minster, Guy watched Walker rebuild the organ there, which seems to have sparked an interest in organ building as he went to work for Walker straight from school and later moved to Nicholson. When Andrew joined the firm in 1994, Guy was an experienced member of the Nicholson team.

'Our backgrounds complement each other: Guy has the knowledge learned in the trade and I have the engineering background. It works very well. I'm engaged at the front end of a job – the marketing and raising awareness of the firm is one aspect of it. I also visit churches and inspect the organs, agreeing with the customer what needs to be done, helping them to decide whether it will be a new organ or making a silk purse out of a sow's ear! It might be historical restoration if it is a good organ and is just worn out.

'I prepare the reports and by the time it becomes an order, we have a clear

idea of what it is the firm will do. Once the planning of the work starts I have an input into the electrical and mechanical side because of my background, so I tend to the aspects of the job that require calculations – working out the size of the blowers, the reservoirs, the size of the pallet valves so that the organ has a nice touch, circuit diagrams and wind schematics.'

The entirely new organ being built for Llandaff Cathedral is the largest new cathedral organ in over forty years - since Harrison & Harrison built the organ for Coventry Cathedral in 1962 and Walker built the organ in the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral in 1967. This is a significant instrument both for Nicholson and the cathedral – it is also a very expensive project and therefore one which will invite close scrutiny from critics and musicians alike. I asked Andrew how one starts to design an organ of 76 stops.

'I work with Guy, whom I rely on to draw up the tonal specification because of his expertise in that area. He will discuss specifications with the organist whilst I will discuss the layout of the organ. It's very much a case of thinking how you're going to get the sound into the church: is the purpose to accompany the choir or to lead the congregation?

'The Llandaff organ was not that difficult whereas in some churches working out where to place the organ can be very difficult - on some occasions, impossible! You have to have a vision of how much space the organ is going to take up and how it's going to function – recitals, teaching, accompanying.



'The next stage is to create a rough drawing of the organ on the computer. When I started with the firm it was done with pencil and paper, now it's done on the CAD (Computer Aided Design) system. We have to have an idea of what the case will look like, an aspect of organ building in itself, trying to match it to the furnishings of the church. In this instance the case was designed by an architect, Michael Platt. Our draftsman, Michael Lane, converts it into manufacturing drawings and designs the interior; he not only knows the organ trade but has the technical expertise to make the CAD system work for us and save a lot of time.'

The scale of the Llandaff instrument is huge and will take up four bays in the choir – two on the north and two on the south sides. I was able to see part of the organ in one of the assembly areas and felt dwarfed by the three storey structure.

I was curious about the ease with which experienced staff and the materials used in modern organ construction could be found.

'It's not easy! It's no good advertising for organ builders round here because they all work for us. Occasionally you get someone knocking on the door, someone who wants to move here, though that's very rare. We've offered apprenticeships mainly to young men: the difficulty is finding young men for whom there is a passion for building organs – it's not just a woodworking job, and there's always the temptation for them to leave and earn more money installing MDF kitchens.

'We have had some success getting people in who have worked in the furniture trade and who have the woodworking skills already. We've benefited as firms have gone out of business as more furniture is made overseas; those men are keen to come and join us. We have to teach them the skills peculiar to organ building like leathering bellows. If you take on board someone like that they can do useful work from day one.

'We use as much material from old organs as we can, especially in places where we don't want the timber to twist out of shape; for example, pallet valves are all best made from hundred year old swell shutters which are very stable. For building frames we use different materials from those used by our predecessors – for instance we use a lot more poplar; it's a very stable wood and isn't an endangered species. Up to ten years ago we used a lot of Mahogany but not only is it very expensive it's also an endangered species; also, when you machine it there are problems with the carcinogenic dust.



The simple yet elegant design of the West Great Organ case can be discerned (top left) the facade of which will incorporate some of the West Great 8' Principal. The north choir cases will contain the Great, Solo and Pedal divisions; the south choir cases will contain the Choir and Swell divisions and the console.

'We're always looking for new materials but most of them are traditional. We still use sheep skin for the components that bend – pallet valves, bellows etc. In the 1960s people were adventurous, using plastics and rubber: usually within ten or twenty years they failed, though there were problems with different tanning processes at that time and after only twenty years the leather deteriorated.

'The recession is affecting us but in a different way from most other industries. We've got a long lead time and a good order book at the moment – it hasn't always been like that, it just happens that at the moment we have enough to tide us through the recession which I'm hoping will allow us to get new work in. Organs are very long term projects and the organs that we're working on now have been in the planning and fundraising stage for many years so the recession hasn't affected their going ahead. But the recession is affecting us in other ways.

'We import a lot of materials - the large wooden pipes and the metals we use. The exchange rate is working against us and has increased our costs considerably. Lead, tin and timbers used in the organs we build are all more expensive – largely driven by the Chinese economy; in the last two years lead tripled and tin doubled in price. Because of the recession the price of those materials is coming down gradually though it has put up the price of our work a lot.'

The quiet reserve with which Andrew approaches his work almost hides the passion for organ building and the pride

he feels for what Nicholson have achieved in recent years. Does that passion extend to the intangible, that element of organ sound which draws us as organists to the instrument and thrills us?

'I don't have a favourite organ to listen to – it changes. Of the ones we've worked on recently the Bridlington Priory organ is the one I'm most pleased with. It has pretty well everything you could want in a big organ. I do like smaller organs: I get a lot of pleasure out of organs that are not very good to start with and which we make into something good. You often find that those customers are most appreciative – they can remember what it was like before, whereas if you're building a brand new organ some people like what you've done and others don't. There was perhaps an element of that with the rebuilt Bridlington organ – it needed making sense of.

'Preferences change. I remember going to the opening of the new Blackburn Cathedral organ in the 1960s and was thrilled by the sound of it – the sort of organ we all wanted to have: going back thirty years later I thought, 'Good grief, did I like that?' Fashions change and something that sounds exciting can be tiring on a later occasion. I haven't been back since David Wood rebuilt it and, to be fair, the second time I heard it it was getting rather tired and probably needed a good tuning.

'I remember as a teenager going to a service in Salisbury cathedral and hearing the organ play as the choir processed in. I had one of those

moments when the hair on the back of the neck stands up – that magic quality you get with the organ. For me that thrill comes from the more romantic instruments playing with a choir, whereas with a classical organ the effect is different – more the brain than the heart. We're hoping that the instrument at Llandaff is going to capture that effect; it's a big romantic instrument in a reasonable acoustic.'

The striking concrete pulpitum built after WWII is perhaps the most well-known feature of Llandaff cathedral; its purpose was to house the Positive division of the old organ and to display Epstein's striking figure of Christ. The mediaeval appearance of the figure provided a sharp counterpoint to the twentieth century design of the structure and the materials used. The Nicholson organ case will complement the choir stalls and the coffered roof of the cathedral; the pulpitum will not be used for any of the new organ.

In the next issue there will be an article about the Nicholson factory with more pictures of the Llandaff organ. Other work in progress at the factory is on the pneumatic action organ of Rye Parish Church.

TW

#### Pedal Organ

Double Open Wood	32
Open Wood	16
Violone	16
Open Diapason (Gt)	16
Gamba (Solo)	16
Bourdon	16
Echo Bourdon (Ch)	16
Octave	8
Principal	8
Bass Flute	8
Fifteenth	4
Mixture 15.19.22	
Contra Trombone	32
Bombarde	16
Trombone	16
Double Trumpet (Sw)	16
Bombarde Clarion	8
Trumpet	8

#### Great Organ

Double Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason I	8
Open Diapason II	8
Harmonic Flute	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Gamba	8
Principal	4
Wald Flute	4
Twelfth	2 <sup>2/3</sup>
Fifteenth	2
Seventeenth	1 <sup>3/5</sup>
Furniture 15.19.22.26	
Sharp Mixture 26.29.33	
Contra Posaune	16
Posaune	8
Clarion	4

#### West Great

Principal	8
Octave	4
Superoctave	2
Mixture 15.19.22.26.29	

#### Swell Organ (enclosed)

Contra Salicional	16
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Flute	8
Salicional	8
Voix Celestes T.C.	8
Principal	4
Nason Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Mixture 15.19.22	
Plein Jeu 19.22.26.29	
Double Trumpet	16
Cornopean	8
Oboe	8
Clarion	4
<i>Tremulant</i>	

#### Choir Organ

Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Bourdon	8
Principal	4
Chimney Flute	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2/3</sup>
Fifteenth	2
Blockflute	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3/5</sup>
Larigot	1 <sup>1/3</sup>
Mixture 19.22.26	
Cremona	8

#### Solo Organ (enclosed)

Contra Gamba	16
Viol d'Orchestre	8
Viole Céleste T.C.	8
Hohl Flute	8
Octave Viol	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Harmonic Piccolo	2
Vox Humana	8
Cor Anglais	8
Corno di Bassetto	8
<i>Tremulant</i>	
Orchestral Trumpet	8
Tuba (unenclosed)	8

Continued from page 1:

I could go on, but if you want more *do not* miss the next opportunity to hear him.

A big 'thank you' to Siann, who yet again made sure it all worked smoothly; her Mum Valerie Holland and daughter Charlotte who kept us going with coffee, tea and biscuits; David Shooter, Michael Halls, and of course to the seven organists: John Catling, Martyn Davies, Christine Williams, Gillian Chatto, Tom Corfield, Ron Sherwood and Dennis Littleton, without whose courage it would all have been impossible and finally, Roger Fisher himself for a truly inspiring day.

Stephen Johns

#### Europe's Oldest Organs

Research, unfortunately, never stands still. Further to my talk this year on Europe's Oldest Organs, in which I was able to correct the understood date of the Sion organ, I have two further amendments to offer to those who kindly attended my presentation.

The Sion organ, having been moved from (in my opinion the slightly improbable date of) c1380, now, with a more likely date of c1430, finds itself in contention with a recently discovered north German instrument, apparently of that same date, in the village of Ostoennen, Westphalia. I have no further information yet but am trying to track down a CD which I have identified on the internet.

The other amendment is to say that I have now discovered the specification of the 1457 Rysum instrument which was rebuilt in 1513. After various modifications it was restored in 1959 to original 1513 condition. It has one manual (CDEFGA – g<sub>2</sub>, a<sub>2</sub> and the following stops: Praestant 8, Gedackt 8, Octave 4, Sesquialtera II, Mixtur III-IV, Trompete 8. The 8,8,4,2 ranks are original; the other three stops are modern reconstructions.

Rodney Tomkins

#### David Johnson Anniversary Celebration

In 2010 I will have notched up fifty years in the Derby area as an organist and also as a general musical factotum - teacher, lecturer, conductor, singer, accompanist, animateur and composer. Whilst in the sixth form at Bemrose Grammar School I was appointed as organist at Kirk Langley in 1960. Other posts I have held are: St Peter's; St Werburgh's, firstly as Assistant to the late, lamented Dr Arthur Pope and later as *Titular*; St John's, and subsequently helping out at the cathedral.

I intend returning to Kirk Langley for a concert in celebration of all these years. If any other church, of whatever denomination, would also like me to take part in a concert or give a recital I would be delighted to be invited. Venues for recitals in the last few years have included: Florence, Lucca, Montreal, Waterloo (not the Terminus!) Stornaway, Folkestone, and, more recently, Liverpool Anglican Cathedral.

I can be contacted on:  
01332 549070

## Derby Cathedral Organ Recitals

Ben Bloor 1.00pm 12<sup>th</sup> June

The summer series of recitals will be on Wednesdays at 7.45pm and will feature the music of Mendelssohn. Admission will be £10 for the Thomas Trotter recital and £5 for the others. Season tickets are £35 and are available in advance

Thomas Trotter	1 <sup>st</sup> July
Matthew Owens	8 <sup>th</sup> July
Peter Williams	15 <sup>th</sup> July
Robert Sharpe	22 <sup>nd</sup> July
Ian Tracey	29 <sup>th</sup> July
Peter Gould	5 <sup>th</sup> August
Tom Corfield	12 <sup>th</sup> August
Paul Hale	19 <sup>th</sup> August

## Lectures – Derby Cathedral

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July

*The Two Lives of Henry Purcell*  
Robert Manning – Royal College of Music

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> September

*Handel's Messiah: the Work of the Editor*  
Professor Donald Burrows – OU

## Chester Cathedral Recitals Thursdays 1.10pm

Geoffrey Woollatt	2 <sup>nd</sup> April
Philip Rushforth	9 <sup>th</sup> April
Roger Fisher	16 <sup>th</sup> April
Graham Eccles	23 <sup>rd</sup> April
Steven Callow	30 <sup>th</sup> April

## Victoria Hall Hanley Saturdays 12 noon

Darius Battiwalla	25 <sup>th</sup> April
Jonathan & Tom Scott	23 <sup>rd</sup> May
Ian Tracey	20 <sup>th</sup> June
Michael Rhodes	11 <sup>th</sup> July
Clive Driskill-Smith	22 <sup>nd</sup> August
Cameron Carpenter	12 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Paul Prieto Ramirez	17 <sup>th</sup> October
Donald Mackenzie	21 <sup>st</sup> Nov.

## Southwell Minster Mondays 3.30pm

Stephen Binnington	13 <sup>th</sup> April
James Davey	4 <sup>th</sup> May
Paul Or Eni	25 <sup>th</sup> May

## Wednesdays 7.30pm

Robert Sharpe	17 <sup>th</sup> June
Gabriel Dessauer	15 <sup>th</sup> July
Johann Hermanns	12 <sup>th</sup> August

## Annual Visit – Liverpool Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2009

St George's Hall first opened in 1854 and is one of the most imposing buildings in Liverpool – a place where one could hold a concert, be sentenced to death, or simply be placed in the cells. Much of the building fell into a poor state of repair and was unused for some time; the organ also was in a poor state and was unusable due to wind leakage. When the hall re-opened after a £23m restoration in 2007 much work had been done to restore the building to its Victorian grandeur and to make its several halls function for twenty-first century events whilst still retaining their original character. A new Heritage Centre was opened which members may wish to visit; alternatively you may wish to visit the cells or take tea in the Tea Rooms.

The four manual 1855 Father Willis organ dominates one end of the Great Hall and has been the subject of a partial restoration by Nicholson Organs who re-leathered the 18 reservoirs and 25 concussion units during the Hall's closure; the Pedal soundboards were also restored. The action was originally Barker lever and there were 7,737 pipes. In 1931 the organ was enlarged to 120 stops and the action was changed to electro-pneumatic. There is still much work to do on the organ though it is now possible to glimpse more than a little of its former glory.

The 1967 Walker organ in the Metropolitan Cathedral has 88 stops over four manuals and pedal and, like the Willis organ, is very much a child of its time. There is a full complement of couplers and playing aids; the console is at ground level, close to the choir. Specifications of both instruments will be provided on the day

There will be two pick-up points for the Liverpool visit: outside the Council House at 8.00am and at the lay-by on the A6 at the Palm Court roundabout (junction with the A38) at 8.10am. Please indicate on the booking form where you would like to join the coach. Upon our return to Derby the drop-off points will be the same.

The day is structured in such a way that members of the group will be able either to stay with the party visiting the venues, or leave on their own shopping/gallery visit, rejoining the coach outside the Metropolitan Cathedral at 6.00pm for our return to Derby. Please be prompt. Members will need to make their own arrangements for lunch.

The cost of the coach is £15 per person. We need to fill the coach to cover the costs of this day. Members of other associations have been invited, so please book your place(s) early, and do encourage friends to make use of the coach.

08:00 Coach leaves Derby

11:30 Arrive at St George's Hall, Liverpool – members will be able to play the organ.

15:00 Evensong at the Anglican Cathedral – short walk to the Metropolitan Cathedral after Evensong

16:30 Visit to the Metropolitan Cathedral – members will be able to play the organ

18:00 Coach leaves for Derby

Please send your booking form and cheque to: Mrs Siann Hurt, Somercotes House, Leabrooks Road, Somercotes, Alfreton, Derbyshire, DE55 4HB by **9<sup>th</sup> May**.

### Liverpool Visit – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May

I would like to book \_\_\_\_ place(s) and enclose a cheque for £ \_\_\_\_ . I/We shall join the coach at: The Council House ☐ ;  
the A6 lay-by ☐.

Please give the names and contact number of the people travelling:

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