

Derby & District Organists'

Registered Charity No. 510567

Association

Welcome to the 2010 programme of events prepared for members by the committee, the first of which takes place on Monday 25th January, 7.30pm at the St John Heritage Centre in Belper, and will feature CD and DVD extracts chosen by members. Terry Bennett and Peter Williams are preparing the programme for the evening and will be pleased to receive information from members about the recordings they would like to bring; David Shooter has kindly agreed to provide the means of playing extracts. Members may be reassured to know that the Heritage Centre has a licence for the public performance of recorded music.

The Heritage Centre proved to be a comfortable venue for the talk given last year by Rodney Tomkins. Parking is available off the market place and at the top of High Street. On-road parking on The Butts and Nottingham Road is not easy; members are therefore advised to allow time for the short walk to the Centre.

In order to prepare adequately for the evening, Terry and Peter will require some prior information from members wishing to present a recording: the number of extracts; the overall playing time, and some information about each extract that the member will present to the audience. This last need not be a long academic exposition but should contain sufficient information for the audience to understand the reason for your choice. Details of the CD/DVD catalogue number will be of assistance to members who may wish to purchase their own copy.

It would also be of help if the CD/DVD had a slip of paper in the case detailing the track number.

Terry and Peter can be contacted via phone numbers from the membership list.

Many members will be recovering from the annual excess of Christmas carols, carol services, and Christmas concerts which dominate our musical lives during the final weeks of the year. I suspect that I'm not the only organist to breathe a sigh of relief after the last verse of the final carol of the season and look forward to a different selection of music.

For me, the Christmas period of 2009 saw the arrival an eagerly-awaited collection of organ memorabilia, the study of which has occupied quite a few of my spare hours, providing a welcome break from yet another verse of *Hark the Herald*.

Ray Watmore has collected information on organs and recital programmes for many years and has loaned his collection to me, some of which details concerts and organ specifications from the WWI period, though the main body of material deals with the inter-war years and the immediate post WWII period when many instruments were being rebuilt following war damage.

All of the major English builders are represented in some way as well as several smaller, local firms. Browsing through the papers, the typical 'house style' which Paul Hale referred to in his interview, can be read almost as a signature in the specifications of organs by the large firms. Later in the year I hope to interview Ray to explore his memories of the post WWII organ world in London and the home counties and, most particularly, his work with Priory Records.

In this rather short edition of the *Newsletter* I have chosen a small selection of items, some of which have a connection (albeit tenuous) with items from the 2009 editions of our own *Newsletter*; others simply find a resonance with the current state of church music. TW

Article from the Manchester Guardian, reprinted in the *Journal of the Organ Club* 1957
Manchester Cathedral – The Battle of the Organ Lofts

One of the most savage musical controversies of the last decade or so has been fought out in the hallowed peace of certain cathedral organ lofts, where the merest whisper of the word 'baroque' can provoke the most unmusical noise. In the last ditches of musical conservatism the idea that music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be played as far as possible in the way in which the composer and his contemporaries would have played it, and on the same sort of instrument, has been poorly received. The 'progressive' base their interpretation of Bach and his near contemporaries on their knowledge of the thin, clear tone of the stops on the organs of

Forthcoming Events 2010

Monday 25th January

Members' CD/DVD Evening
Heritage Centre, Belper 7.30pm

Saturday 20th February

St Andrew's, Swanick – Organ
Recital & Buffet Lunch 12.00 noon
Shean Bowers

Tuesday 23rd February

Danish Organ Music – presentation
by David Butterworth, St Werburg,
Spondon

Wednesday 24th March

Visit to St John's, Bridge Street to
hear and play the rebuilt Willis/
Adkins/Johnson organ

Saturday 24th April

St George's Tide Brass Band &
Organ Concert – Riddings Band and
David Redfern, organ

Saturday 15th May

Visit to Malvern (Nicholson Organs,
the Priory) and Worcester Cathedral

Wednesday 16th June

Annual Dinner – Alison House,
Matlock

Monday 19th July

Visit to Swarkestone and Stanton-by-
Bridge

Saturday 18th September

English organ music of the 18th
century – presentation by Rodney
Tomkins, St Peter's, Belper

Wednesday 6th October

Chairman's Event – St, James,
Riddings

Tuesday 23rd November

AGM, Duffield Methodist Church

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Sunday 3rd January

Jonathan Scott – Saint-Saëns 'Organ'
Symphony

Articles for the February edition of the *Newsletter* should reach me by Monday 18th January, either via e-mail: twes@fsmail.net or by post: Tony Westerman, 44 Beeley Close, Allestree, Derby, DE22 2PX. The Secretary, Mrs Siann Hurt can be reached via: mail@derbyorganists.co.uk

the period which have survived in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, and the 'reactionaries' find the sort of playing which results 'acidulated' and squeaky. The progressives on the other hand have very malicious ways of describing the sonorous roar which the conservative English organist revels in.

Perhaps the new instrument in Manchester Cathedral will help to heal the breach. Basically, this is the scheme which was devised by the late Mr. Norman Cocker, using much of the material from the old organ which was badly damaged during the Christmas blitz of 1941. It has been modified in collaboration with the builders, Messrs. Harrison & Harrison of Durham, by the present organist Mr Wicks, and the result is an instrument which embodies many of the good things of both traditions. Mr Wicks is no extremist, but points out that 'so many organists forget that David danced before the altar' and sides with the progressives in so far as their sort of registration makes for clarity and liveliness. He notes, too, the sad irony of the fact that the exquisite seventeenth century organ built by the German master whom English organists know as 'Father' Smith, which was incorporated in the old organ, was the one section which was completely shattered by the bomb.

Manchester Guardian 28,2,57

From the Organ Club Library Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool.

Although it may be some years before the organ is actually in use at the new Metropolitan Cathedral, plans for its reception have been under consideration for some time past. The suggestion of the cathedral architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, to place the organ underground is somewhat novel . . .

The principle of a sunken organ has already been accepted by the cathedral authorities, and the organ well is now taking shape. This is a huge circular cavity some 40ft. deep and 30ft. across. Clearly the project raises many points that will require constant expert consideration. All who are interested in organ building will follow the development and results of this project with wide interest. (Editorial in 'The Organ' No. 58, October 1935)

(It is understood that the question of placing organs underground, to speak through floor grills, is being considered yet again! We trust that all flue pipes will be stopped, and all reeds hooded so that the usual run of floor sweepings and fag ends will not put the organ out of action in its first fortnight of existence.)

Ed. OCJ)

From Organ Club Journal 1957

'Struggled to Marble Arch last Sunday (Cinema Organ Society' Meeting) after taking light refreshment of bovril and dry toast in the organ loft during the sermon . . .

From April 1957 Organ Club Journal

Laurence Firth reports that only a moderate attendance is recorded at the Lancaster Organists' Association meetings, due to the difficulty of infusing any enthusiasm and an increasing shortage of church organists. He says that we must be a dying race, the reason being the tying duties and the beggardly pittance as a reward.

And finally, from the *Organ Institute Quarterly*, an American publication dating from 1953 in which 'Busman', a seasoned and acerbic critic, unleashes his bile:

' . . . in a full year of visiting church services of all kinds, from the smallest rural parishes with the most meagre resources, to the plushiest metropolitan worship palaces in which mellifluous oratory salves well-to-do consciences, there was precious little that could be called good music, let alone good church music.

'In the first place, many of the organs were indescribably ugly. When played loud they seemed to be more or less forcibly extruding an unbearably heavy weight of sound. In a large dance band, the front row of moaning saxophones erect a wall of thick tone that is impenetrable to all but percussion instruments; its sound always seems reminiscent of fetid flesh. The heavy organ Diapasons sounded like that, but being unyieldingly leaden, they seemed to suggest tremendous globs of solid concrete. Sometimes the addition of hard, coarse-grained Gambas and strings would impart an abrasive quality to the mix, as though the outer layer of cement had cracked off, exposing a rough, pebble-studded surface. Such sounds seem unsuitable material from which to make music. And frequently the only alternative to them was the lushly romantic Voix Celeste or Vox Humana with tremolo. Apparently coming from some distance, these wavy, tremulous sounds were turned on at intervals, and certainly provided some relief from the stark ugliness of fat Diapasons and Tubas, but failed to bring any life to the music.'

'Recently, we read in a magazine that 'radical' influences in the organ world are on the wane. We concur, but earnestly wish that this development could be accelerated, as that most radical of all departures from tradition, the 8' organ, is still quite prominent, and continues to alienate public interest in organ music.

'The organists themselves played as though they considered themselves mere operators of machines. They seemed to be completely preoccupied with manipulating controls, giving little attention to the resulting sounds which were devoid of rhythmic energy and any sense of phrase. The continuously lumpy, solid consistency of this music made it

abundantly clear why other musicians (and most of the public) look upon organists as being not quite full-fledged musicians.

'We are disinclined to criticize the choirs too severely, as their singing was often such a *personal* matter, and it is possible that no one ever told them not to flutter, swoop, and shout in that distressing manner that is prevalent among singers. Flabby sopranos, heaving altos, tenors of the bleeding-to-death type (Mario Lanzas), or the happy-as-a-lark type (Dennis Days) and 'sympathetic' baritones, seemed to predominate. Intentionally or otherwise, these puffed-up pouter pigeons inevitably took, and held the center of the stage. The *sound* of their singing pre-empted all attention and set text and music far into the background.'

'Further, the composition and tunes chosen to suffer this abuse were no less striking in their deviation from the level of secular musical standards. The most obvious platitudes, that could not earn a nickel in a honky-tonk juke box, but apparently sanctified by long association with religious exercises, induced sentimental orgies, crimes against good taste. Curiously, one of the best choirs we heard sang four anthems, three hymns and multi-fold Amens, of which every measure was *pure corn*. In the same service a competent organist played a transcription of a Mendelssohn piece as an Offertory, *with the melody played on chimes throughout*.

'In the more refined churches, with deep, soft cushions in the pews, the music often sounded like Victor Herbert's operettas. We have no objection to them, nor to those of Arthur Sullivan, Irving Berlin . . . but the implication of such music, especially when heard in conjunction with sermons that are obviously intended to fall gratefully upon all ears, is that Christian churches have become a sort of minor subsidiary of the entertainment industry.'

Busman

Solution to Ed Stow's Christmas Crossword.

Across

1 The Last Judgment. 9 Practics.
10 Norman. 11 Bonnet. 12 Presides.
13 Adrenal. 14 Pallets. 16 Chapels.
19 Promise. 23 Grantham.
25 Casing. 26 Ferial. 27 Lilliput.
28 Stanley Marchant.

Down

2 Harwood. 3 Licence. 4 Saint Paul.
5 Joseph. 6 Dante. 7 See 17Dn.
8 Neatest. 15 Auricular. 17, 7Dn.
Herbert Murrill. 18 Pension.
20 Messiah. 21 Sunburn.
22 Emblem. 24 Halle.