

# *Derby & District Organists'*

*Registered Charity No. 510567*

## *Association*



### *DDOA Events 2010*

#### **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February**

Danish Organ Music – presentation by David Butterworth, St Werburg, Spondon. 7.30pm

#### **Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March**

Visit to St John's, Bridge Street, to hear and play the rebuilt Willis/Adkins/Johnson organ. 7.30pm

#### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May**

Visit to Malvern: Nicholson Organs and Worcester Cathedral 8.00am

#### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> June**

Annual Dinner – Alison House, Intake Lane, Cromford, Matlock

#### **Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July**

Visit to Swarkestone and Stanton-by-Bridge 7.30pm

#### **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September**

English organ music of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – presentation by Rodney Tomkins, St Peter's, Belper. 7.30pm

#### **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October**

Chairman's Event – St. James, Riddings. 7.30pm

#### **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November**

AGM, Duffield Methodist Church

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### *Concerts & Recitals*

#### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February**

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

#### **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April**

St George's Tide Brass Band & Organ Concert – Blidford Welfare Band and David Redfern organ. 7.30pm. St Andrew's, Swanick. £6 inc. Refreshments. 01773 605291

*The stunning case of the  
1992 Klais organ in the  
Hallsgrimskirkja,  
Reykjavik, Iceland*

*Photographs and article*

*Prof. James Muckle*



*The floodlit tower of the Hallgrímskirkja in which the Klais organ takes pride of place.*

I was able to observe the congregation, the pastor, the liturgy just as it presumably always is, allowing for the special nature of the festival. Readers may be interested in this before I go on briefly to the music and the organ.

The huge congregation was soberly dressed, the men mainly in suits, the sixteen-year-old next to me in a dark suit with white bow tie: none of your sloppy informality. The procession, except for the pastor, was not robed or surpliced, but smart in suits and white dresses for the women. It included a young man and woman with a babe in arms, and indeed the service began with a baptism. True to its Lutheran identity, the liturgy was extremely orderly; it was not intruded upon or delayed by informal announcements or pally chit-chat. The order of service was on a leaflet with the words of the carols. I am totally ignorant of Icelandic, but it was fun to try to identify familiar parts of the liturgy and the words of the carols before they were sung. After all, this is the language of the Vikings, and it has changed little since the dark ages.

Old Norse contributed to our own language, and it was possible to work out 'Barn er oss fætt, sonur er oss gefinn' (unto us a child is born...) and 'Syngið Drottni nýjan söng!' (sing unto the Lord a new song). But would you have guessed that a choir number beginning 'Opin standa himins hlið' was 'Ding dong merrily on high'?

## Christmas in Iceland

What possessed me to spend Christmas in Reykjavik? The hope of seeing the northern lights (which I did). But there are other things to see and hear there, not least the Hallgrímskirkja, the stupendous church which dominates the city, designed by Guðjon Samuelson, named after the Icelandic Isaac Watts, the hymn writer Hallgrímur Petursson, and completed and consecrated as recently as 1986.

The acoustic, as Baedeker says, is 'extraordinary' for such a huge building: the steeple is 73 metres high, 'a fitting theatre [I am still quoting] for the 5,275 pipes of the 72-stop organ', four manuals by Klais, 1992. On entering as a tourist on Christmas Eve, I was told there would be a service in English the next afternoon, and I determined to return then.

Christmas Eve on Icelandic Television was not quite what a Briton might expect. Early on there seemed to be a sound broadcast of a service with carols, readings and a Christmas message. But we saw no choir, congregation nor preacher; the sound was backed by a continuous montage of 'images' of Iceland: raging torrents, fauna, mountains, geysers, trolls and the like. Later a carol service was televised, but the camera work was so unimaginative as to be tedious; the sermon very long - I watched a lengthy stretch of Sky news on another channel while the preacher was at it.

Wondering if the Icelanders' fondness for alcohol was partly due to the frustration at such long sermons, I returned to the church on Christmas Day, not knowing what to expect. To my dismay the service was exclusively in Icelandic, not English as promised, but this turned out to be a bonus.

Have a go at these, which all caught me out: 'Guds kristni í heimi, krjúp við jötu laga' - you won't get it, but perhaps the first line of the second verse might be easier: 'Hann ljós er af ljósi, Guð af sönnum Guði'.<sup>1</sup> Vote yourself an Oscar if you can get 'Heims um bol helg eru jol'.<sup>2</sup>

The congregation sang in a very disciplined manner, though somewhat short of heartily. But then the organist did not give the accompaniment much 'wellie'. Maybe that is not the Icelandic way of doing things. The Motet Choir sang excellently. It is a semi-chorus of the full church choir (there is also a *Schola Cantorum*).

The organist in this service had three opportunities. There were no full chorale preludes to the hymns such as you get in a German Lutheran service. Here, the prelude as the procession entered was 'Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich' BWV 604; as

an interlude after the (short) sermon we had 'In Bethlehem geboren', by Buxtehude, as well as a choral setting of it by Praetorius. I like this idea of an instrumental interlude within the service - the brief oompahs allowed during the collection in Methodism are the nearest we have to it, but scarcely compare. During the postlude, a thrilling performance of the finale of Widor's *Symphonie* in D, op. 13 no. 2, the congregation followed the procession out of the church, peeling off row by row from the front.

I barged up to the young organist, Björn Steinar Solbergsson afterwards to compliment him on his playing. (The senior organist is Hórrður Askelsson - here pictured playing after the Anglican service a couple of days later - who has recorded a CD on the Klais, serial number HALL 001. Christopher Herrick has also recorded on this organ in his *Organ Fireworks VII.*) Björn Steinar kindly gave me a beautifully printed booklet on the Klais organ (the Church also has a two-manual and pedal ten-stop Frobenius - which I heard played two days later at the English-language Anglican communion service).<sup>3</sup>

My photos show both organs. If any member of DDOA reads Icelandic, I shall be happy to let him/her have the booklet. For the specification of the organ, go to the Klais website, [www.orgelbau-klais.com/](http://www.orgelbau-klais.com/) and click 'Dispositionen' (specifications), then Reykjavik Hallgrímskirkja.

<sup>1</sup> O come, all ye faithful; God of God, Light of Light (but translated backwards!)

<sup>2</sup> Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht. The clue, I suppose, is 'helg' - *heilig*.

<sup>3</sup> The minister who officiated astounded me by saying he had served for three years in Scunthorpe on a Lutheran-Anglican exchange, and loved Scunthorpe - 'the people', he added quickly, as my jaw threatened to drop off. . .

James Muckle

Our thanks to James for his entertaining and informative article, and the splendid photographs.

TW



*Hórrður Askelsson at the terraced console of the Klais*



*Left: The ten stop, two manual Frobenius*

## *A Glimpse into the Past*

During the snowy weather I started cataloguing the papers loaned to me by Ray Watmore and began to appreciate fully just what a treasure-trove of information he has collected. The earliest brochures date back to the last quarter of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century and trace the increasing use of tubular pneumatic, electric and electro-pneumatic actions.

The only brochures in the collection showing significant tracker organs date from 1963, when Noel Mander rebuilt the organ in St Vedast, London, and 1969 when Walcker built an instrument for Ulm Cathedral. One or two small house organs were built using tracker, but the major firms did not seem to be interested in them for eighty or ninety years. Noel Mander's comments on tracker action in his detailed brochure on the St Vedast organ tell us why: 'From a musical point of view, the merits of tracker action are now fully appreciated by leading organists. Under suitable conditions, no other action can produce so great a feeling of intimacy between player and instrument, or so faithfully convey the individuality of touch of the player. All this is reflected in the musical result. Nevertheless, in my opinion, tracker action is quite unsuitable for use in the majority of British church organs.'

'For the full benefits of tracker action to be obtained it is necessary for the departments to be disposed vertically, thereby making the fullest use of the force of gravity. On the continent of Europe and particularly in Holland where there is plenty of height, large "work-principle" instruments with light and efficient tracker action are frequently found. Here in Britain, we seldom have enough height, and rarely does the organ enjoy a lofty western position. Moreover, the Victorian practice of cramming organs into unsuitable chancel or side chapel positions hardly makes for a logical lay-out. Where simple tracker action might be employed, British organs usually stand on a low building frame with Great, Swell and Choir all on the same level, an arrangement which certainly does not make for light tracker touch. While these conditions

remain, and while British organists continue to insist upon a full set of couplers, electro-pneumatic action provides the only workable solution.'

A feature of several of the large instruments from the early twentieth century was the mixture of actions used in both new and rebuilt instruments. The 'house styles' are easily spotted: Bishop & Son, in its many incarnations<sup>1</sup>, and Hele & Co. favoured pneumatic instruments, whilst Harrison & Harrison built/rebuilt instruments in the cathedrals of Carlisle, Ely, Glasgow, Wells, Gloucester and Oxford with actions which, to us, with the benefit of that indispensable aid to superior knowledge, 'hind-sight', appear to be an improbable and inconsistent 'mishmash' of pneumatic, electro-pneumatic and tracker.

The use of tracker for pedal to manual couplers also seems to have been common in pneumatic instruments during that period. Indeed, even as late as 1949 H&H used electric, electro-pneumatic and tracker couplers for the manuals to pedals in their rebuild of the organ in Leeds Parish Church. Conversely, Willis & Sons in their instruments for

Westminster and Liverpool cathedrals, Eton College and the Victoria Hall, Handley, had turned, very successfully, to electric action.

The English love affair with pneumatic action (first used in 1832) appears to have been at its height during the last years of the nineteenth century. However, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century electricity was becoming a serious contender, though not without teething problems. The following extract is taken from a Bishop & Son brochure which seems to date from circa 1900:<sup>2</sup>

'The use of electric current for the purpose of organ action is not new, and was the natural outcome of the invention of pneumatic apparatus. But the right way to apply so subtle a power has only been learned slowly, and by a process of "trial and error". So long ago as 1852 Dr Gauntlett patented a quite impractical electric action; impracticable simply because he failed to grasp the conditions under which the electro-magnet could be economically used. [Good old hindsight!] The current he required would have been enormous, for he proposed to open the 'pallet' by the



Instrument by Frederick Rothwell in Dundee Cathedral, 1937.

This is one of a number built by the firm using the same patented system. The position of the stops means that the distance between manuals is somewhat greater than is usual.

The balanced swell pedals for the Choir and Swell are mounted to the right of the footboard – not an unusual arrangement at that time.

direct pull of a large magnet, the armature being attached to the pallet itself. His key action was also faulty in principle, for it had merely touching contacts, and carrying so heavy a current there would have been violent sparking each time the circuit was broken, and consequently rapid destruction of the acting surface.

'Later on, other attempts were made, always, however, without a sound knowledge of the principle on which the attractive power of the electro magnet can be applied. The first really workable invention was that of Barker, the designer of the well-known "pneumatic lever".'

In same article, the unknown author comments: 'A heavy current was found necessary and violent sparking could always be seen at the contacts when the organ was played upon.' And later still: 'The battery was always a great source of trouble, as there were then no accumulators or storage batteries available.'

Finally, the sales pitch: 'The application of electricity to organ building is certainly no monopoly now as some would have us think [H&H? Willis?]. We have, ourselves, worked at the problem for many years, but it is only comparatively recently that we have been able to offer what may be regarded as a satisfactory solution.'

The brochure closes with a tempting selection of instruments available from the company; a four manual church or cathedral organ of 43 stops and an array of couplers and registration aids cost £1,780 0s 0d plus 'carriage and the cost of erection'. A plain organ stool could be supplied for the princely sum of £1 11s 6d. There was no Purchase Tax (later to become VAT) at that time – would that it were so now.

There are, inevitably, several instruments that capture one's attention purely from the perspective of novelty and one such is the Frederick Rothwell instrument built for Dundee cathedral in 1937. The substantial three manual organ is enclosed in one case with console attached; action is pneumatic, with the usual complement of couplers and a perfectly standard specification, with, perhaps, the lack of a Swell mixture being the only unusual omission. However, the console has no thumb pistons but appears to rely instead upon a duplication of stops above

each keyboard, and a host of foot pistons which appear to be perilously close to the sharps. Quite how this arrangement worked I cannot guess as the number of stop tabs (very similar in style to those used by Walker) does not tally with the specification. Perhaps there is a member who has encountered one of the Rothwell instruments and could explain the system? TW

<sup>1</sup> The original firm of JCBishop has traded under several different names since 1807: Bishop & Sons 1848-1854; Bishop & Starr 1854-1857; Bishop, Starr & Richardson 1857-1861; Bishop & Starr 1861-1873; Bishop & Son 1873-1950+. The firm is still in business, based in London and now trading as Bishop & Co.

<sup>2</sup> The address on the brochure is Ipswich, a new premises for the firm which they moved into around the turn of the century. The firm maintained small premises in London; the workforce was, apparently, allowed to choose whether to stay in London or move to Ipswich – a remarkably generous arrangement for that time.

## Progress at St John's

Members who have played the Willis/Adkins/Johnson organ in St John's have been following the progress of the restoration with keen interest as it is one of the finest organs in the city. Ed Stow has been working on the organ for some time and is now in the process of reinstating the pipework, revoicing and tuning.

Some construction of new framework has been necessary to allow the installation of the Pedal Open Diapason from St Ann's, which is of a substantial scale, and the redistribution of the Pedal organ. The photograph below shows the Bourdon rank, now mounted in an elevated position behind the Swell box; the treble chest of the Open Diapason is mounted above and to the left of the Bourdon, with the bass chest of the Trombone in position to the left of that. The treble chests for the Bourdon and Trombone





## St John's Heritage Centre, Belper

Members who were able to attend the CD/DVD evening at the Heritage Centre, enjoyed an eclectic and entertaining presentation by Peter Williams, with recordings of fifteen different instruments.

The introduction of DVD to these evenings allowed us to observe the pedal and fingering techniques of some of the great players of the twentieth century, as well as allowing a glimpse into the often hidden world of the organ gallery console.

Our journey began in St Sulpice, with Dame Gillian Wier at the console of the large Cavallé-Coll organ. The sound was, as one might expect, truly magnificent. Other instruments heard were those in St-Michele-en-Thierache; St Ouen; Panna Maria Sněžná, Olomouc, Moravia; St Wenzel, Naumburg; Saint-Louis-en-l'Île, Paris; the Thomaskirche, Leipzig; the Klais organ in the Dom, Trier; Abarca de Campos, Castile (three manual harpsichord); York Minster; Wells Cathedral; Hedvig Eleonora, Stockholm, and the Ulster Hall. The presentation was completed with two extracts played by Sidney Torch from the 1930s.

The presentation was linked with anecdotes and those little pieces of information that can only come from personal experience.

Our thanks go to: Peter for devising such an interesting and varied programme; the ladies who provided the refreshments, and a particular thank you to David Shooter who looked after the technical presentation of the audio and visual extracts, having brought a considerable amount of equipment with him.

Laurence Rogers brought recordings of two beautiful Dutch organs from Delft and Zutphen.

Finally, providing an appropriate link to the December issue, David Shooter had brought a recording of the Wannamaker organ in Philadelphia – a very grand sound with which to complete the evening.

Specifications were provided for eleven of the instruments, copies of which are still available. TW

are mounted on the floor beneath the raised chests. The new framework for these chests has been constructed from well-seasoned sections of discarded shutters to ensure that there will be no movement in the new structure.

The Pedal Shawm is not yet in place but will be mounted in the northeast corner of the gallery adjacent to the new solid-state panel that will control the Pedal action. The Pedal Principal will be installed between the Open Diapason and the main organ frame. A manual Bourdon, playable from the Great, has been added on two clamps, one at the back of the Great chest, the other at the east side of the chest, fed by conveyancing.

The Swell pipework (above) is taking shape once more. The photograph shows Ed working on the Swell Diapason, opening the foot of the pipe to allow sufficient wind for prompt speech. (The hole at the foot of the pipe, which admits the wind, can close up after many years, especially if the pipe metal is soft or thin, causing poor speech and an inconsistent tone throughout the rank.) The pipes have all been thoroughly cleaned as the build up of dirt and residues from soot,

candles, gas lights etc. can all affect the way the pipe speaks.

Andy Storer, the resident organist, has been busy restoring the casework; panels have been cleaned and freshly coated and, most stiking of all, the gilding on the fretwork that supports the facade pipes has been renewed.

Members will have the opportunity to hear and play the organ on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March. TW

### Wallace Ross

After a life full of enthusiastic participation in a wide range of interests, Wallace Ross has died, following a period of increasing frailty.

Many members of the Association will have fond memories of Wallace, and so I have asked David Johnson to write an obituary for him. David's thoughts were that there was so much that one could write about such a colourful musician that to do justice to Wallace he needed more time; therefore, the obituary will appear in the next edition of the *Newsletter*.

The funeral will take place at St John's, Bridge Street on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February at 12.00 noon.

Articles for the March edition of the *Newsletter* should reach me by Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, either via e-mail: [twes@fsmail.net](mailto: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](mailto:mail@derbyorganists.co.uk)