

# *Derby & District Organists'* *Registered Charity No. 510567* *Association*



## *The Chairman's Event* *Six of the Best with Peter Williams*

This year's Chairman's Event was held in the chapel of Repton School, courtesy of the school authorities, and it proved to be a most interesting occasion.

Repton School Chapel was built in the nineteenth century by headmaster Edward Pears, who made a significant contribution to the school by raising standards and, consequently, increasing the number of pupils. The behaviour of the Repton boarders during the nineteenth century was no better or worse than at any other similar institution; Pears was particularly concerned about their behaviour in the parish church during services and solved the problem by building a school chapel where, presumably, the boarders could be more easily disciplined or were at least out of sight of the public.

This last, and other interesting pieces of the school's history, was presented during the welcome given by Adam Watkinson, the Repton Chaplain. The chapel was one of many of Pears' successes, and in those days the chapel was more than sufficient to hold the entire school. The 640 boarders

presently studying at Repton still fit into the chapel, though it must now be a cosy affair on the two occasions each week when the whole school gathers there.

The chapel is an elegant building. The double hammer-beam roof hides modern lighting which, despite the warmth of the red sandstone walls, leaves one with a first impression of a somewhat gloomy interior. However, the lighting is focussed at reading height, leaving one's attention drawn to the written word and the apsidal chancel, where brighter lighting is more generally focussed, creating an appropriately Victorian spiritual metaphor. The darker space between the pupils and the architectural features of the roof creates a surprising sense of space and quiet dignity.

As one might expect in a building of soft sandstone, the acoustic is quite dry, with the wooden floor and the roof serving to highlight mid-range frequencies. The 1929 Harrison & Harrison organ is placed in the surprisingly large west gallery, allowing it to speak clearly into the building. The

## *Forthcoming Events*

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October**  
**7.30pm**

Mendelssohn Event at St Mary, Ilkeston.

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm**

Annual General Meeting –  
St Werburgh, Spondon.

---

**Victoria Hall Hanley**

**Saturdays 12 noon**

Paul Prieto Ramirez 17<sup>th</sup> October  
Donald MacKenzie 21<sup>st</sup> Nov.

**Southwell Minster**

**Wednesdays 7.30pm**

Graham Barber 14<sup>th</sup> October

**Lichfield Cathedral 7.30pm**

Carlo Curley 13<sup>th</sup> October

Philip Scriven }

Martyn Rawles }

Cathy Lamb } 10<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Albert Hall – Nottingham**

**Sundays 2.45pm**

John Scott 25<sup>th</sup> October

**Birmingham Town Hall 7.30pm**

Thomas Trotter 5<sup>th</sup> October

**1.00pm**

Thomas Trotter 12<sup>th</sup> October

**Symphony Hall 1.00pm**

Thomas Trotter 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov.

---

## **Congratulations**

Members will be delighted to hear that Ben Bloor (see article in August edition) has been awarded an organ scholarship at New College, Oxford; Ben will be working with Edward Higginbottom and accompanying the New College choir. Members who have heard recordings of the New College choir will understand that this is a much sought after scholarship, bearing considerable prestige.

News of the scholarship follows upon Ben's success in the ARCO exam this summer. With typical understatement, Ben commented that it was, 'quite revealing to see what some of the leading organists in the country thought of your playing and paperwork'.



The H&H console in Repton School showing left and right stop jambs and the piston layout.



Organ is heard at its best in the chancel choir stalls; when seated at the console (the east end of south aisle) one hears everything one needs to, with only a minor reduction in the brightness of the upper work, one is also in touch with the balance between choir and organ.

Following the warm welcome by Adam Watkinson, the Chairman gave the first of his 'Six of the Best' pieces, all of which were chosen to demonstrate the organ's strengths. *Gaudeamus*, by Sidney Campbell, contrasted the Great and Swell choruses to good effect, the Trombas and Pedal Ophicleide providing a dramatic counterpoint to their homogeneity. Campbell, Peter's mentor and guide at the RCM and then at St George's, Windsor, appears to have been a formidable character - both personally and as an organist and choirmaster.

*Voluntary VI* by John Stanley served to demonstrate the echo effects which are available between the Great and Swell Diapason choruses - thanks to the very efficient Swell box - whilst Norman Cocker's *Tuba Tune* displayed the new, more rounded tone of the Tromba and the nobility of the Great Diapason chorus. The Pedal Open Wood on this organ is a delight: it has that visceral quality, of which British organists are so fond, and yet has good definition, moving promptly with harmonic progressions on the manuals.

Peter interspersed his playing with anecdotes about both the music and the organists with whom he studied and worked, providing the sort of insight that only personal acquaintance can bring. His first organ teacher, Arthur Stacey, a bank manager, FRCO and ADCM, was fond of the music of William Wolstenholme (1865 - 1931) and played it frequently, clearly leaving a lasting impression upon Peter. The music is very much of its period and is not heard often, but is most certainly appropriate to the Repton organ.

The Wolstenholme requires a secure technique and a considerable number of registration changes, which must have been very difficult to manage on instruments during the first part of the twentieth century. However, on the rebuilt Repton organ there are all of the registration aids one a might wish for - very important on an instrument used for teaching and preparing pupils for organ scholarships, though one hopes that hand registration still forms an important part of that teaching.

Francis Jackson, to whom Peter was Assistant at York, featured in several of Peter's anecdotes. Jackson is, without doubt, one of the great organists of the twentieth century and so it was interesting to hear of him, first-hand, from someone who had worked with him during his tenure at York Minster.

Jackson succeeded Bairstow at York, having been his assistant there, and so it is not surprising that a lot of Bairstow's music featured in Jackson's repertoire and is, consequently, familiar to Peter. *Elegy for Organ* used many of the solo colours of the organ, and showed-off the Swell strings, which, to my ear, had a delightful citrus edge to their sound - quite refreshing after the rather bland, characterless string tone one so often encounters on instruments of that period.

The term 'Choir Organ', used for the third manual, is, perhaps, something of a misnomer: the stops suggest a small Solo division rather than a traditional Choir organ, as members will see from a glance at the stop list. Fortunately, the division escaped 'baroquification' during the 60's and 70's leaving the tonal quality of the original H&H work intact.

*Alleluys* by Simon Preston is a vibrant piece and, despite the somewhat dry acoustic, sounded well in the chapel. The full organ sound of the Repton organ is very English - a full, rich, Swell complementing a firm, Great Diapason

chorus, and upper work which blends with the choruses rather than dominates them. (H&H are to be congratulated on maintaining the traditional English sound.)

The Great Tierce was shown to good effect in one of the quieter *Alleluys* passages, as was the Swell Tremulant. Tremulants are often a source of contention amongst organists: some like them heavy and fast whilst others prefer a lighter touch which enhances the colour of a stop, a subtle adjunct rather than something that shakes the organ bench. I feel that H&H have the balance right with this one - though others may disagree with me.

Like the Tremulant, any rebuild will have supporters and detractors, and this instrument will be no exception. As a teaching instrument it is very good: there is a plethora of registration aids with multiple channels (essential if there are many different organists playing the instrument); the console is well-sited with a clear view of the choir and conductor; it is a comfortable console with everything in reach, and, largely, one hears exactly what one plays. The bench has a very wide range of adjustment with a gauge showing the setting.

Conversely, the shutter pedals are very stiff and there is a lot of thumping from both the stop and slider action when a piston is pressed; the Great Reeds to Choir stop still leaves the Great reeds susceptible to piston changes on the Great - why not duplicate the stops on the Choir?

The Great Trombas have been tamed and no longer have the brilliance of tone they had before; the new sound is much more rounded and tuba-like. These ranks were never conceived as chorus reeds and, in the relatively confined space of the chapel, should never be used as such. As small-scale Tubas, they are still effective but have lost some of the excitement that the judicious use of such a stop can add to a performance. Similarly, the Pedal





### *Inside the Case*

Left: The Great organ revealing the newly-restored pipework. The Tromba unit is on a separate chest.  
 Right: The high-pressure reeds at the front of the Swell box – Clarion, Trumpet and Double Trumpet (with half length resonators). To the right, the Oboe can be seen. All of the Swell reeds are supported with refurbished racking and ties.

Ophicleide now blends seamlessly with the full organ sound although it has lost the 'bite' which previously created an exciting, but typically English sound of the early twentieth century.

My views on the changes to the organ will, quite possibly, not reflect those of the twenty eight members and guests present. After all, one's perception of what makes an organ sound exciting or thrilling is a very personal thing and is not easy to quantify or justify. I shall be pleased to hear the views of other members on the changes made to the Repton organ.

H&H have agreed a tuning contract with Mike Thompson, who was kind enough to show Andy Storer and me what had been done inside the case. The chests essentially remain the same, though of course there is no longer the massive wind leakage that was so intrusive before the rebuild: access has been improved and the lighting inside the case is now excellent; all of the electro-pneumatic action is new, as is the transmission system from the console.

Andy left Mike and I in the case whilst he and Frankie took away our youngest associate member to feed her. Whilst Mike and I were inside the Swell box, a member enjoyed the fine sound of the full Swell. . . with the shutters closed: fortunately, the palpitations Mike and I experienced and the twitch I consequently developed are no longer noticeable, though my nerves are still recovering.

Our thanks go to Peter for providing an interesting and entertaining recital, to the Headmaster, John Bowley the Director of Music, James Drinkwater the current Chapel Organist who gave much unstinting assistance and Adam Watkinson, the Chaplain of Repton, who made the chapel available to us and organised the refreshments.

TW

### **Progress at St John's, Bridge Street**

The Willis organ in St John's is steadily taking shape again. Ed Stow now has the trunking and chests in place and has been able to make initial tests on the winding which is now secure. Also in place are the Great and Swell roller boards and trackers (see photographs below). The trackers have all been fitted with new bronze wires which Ed has threaded himself; new leather buttons are to be fitted throughout, and the rollers have also been completely refurbished;

The big pedal chests brought from St Anne's have been opened and found to be in a poor state; the chests will be cleaned, re-leathered and rewired.

The clamp fitted to the Great chest for the Sesquialtera is now complete and in place.

TW



Above: The Great roller board showing the new bronze wires and the very neat whipping holding them secure.

Right: The clamp manufactured by Ed for the new Sesquialtera on the Great. The tables of both the Swell and Great chests are covered to protect them.



## Felix - *Walking the Damascus Road*

Members will be only too well aware of the numerous composers' anniversaries which have fallen this year – Purcell, Handel, Mendelssohn, and several lesser names. (Incidentally, has *anyone* celebrated Spohr, 1784-1859?) Amongst them, Mendelssohn's bicentenary seems most directly relevant to our Association's activities.

Our evening will focus particularly on Mendelssohn's place (by adoption, as it were) in the music of Lutheran Germany. Tom Corfield will speak on the composer's life and the influences which shaped his career; Peter Williams will discuss and play examples of the organ works. Finally, Edmund Stow will present extracts from the larger scale choral works, to be sung by a choir of members and friends, conducted by Stephen Johns, after which refreshments will be available.

St Mary's church is in Ilkeston Market Place, a pedestrianised area. A limited amount of parking is available on Wharncliffe Road, otherwise, members are advised to use the public car park off Pimlico (see map). N.B. The one-way system does not allow private cars access from South Street to the Market Place and beyond.

As always, we urge members both to make every effort to attend themselves and to give the event as much publicity as they can to the wider musical public. St Mary's is a big church!

ERS

The website edition of the *Newsletter* cannot have pictures taken from Google Earth. However, the map printed below should suffice, or, reference to Ilkeston Market Place on Google Earth will show the usual satellite image.

TW



Articles for the November edition of the *Newsletter* should reach me by Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October, 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) TW