

Derby & District Organists'

Registered Charity No. 510567

Association



Musical Life in a Royal Castle Organ Scholar Ben Bloor at Windsor

Observers of the Derby organ scene will instantly recognise the organist in our cover picture this month. Ben Bloor has been a rising star since his days as a chorister and Organ Scholar at Derby Cathedral and during the past year has been living in Windsor Castle where he has been Organ Scholar at St George's Chapel. Ben kindly invited my wife and me to visit him earlier this year and we spent a delightful morning with a young man who was clearly living his dream. Living within the castle itself was very near the top of Ben's list of things that he really loved about his appointment and we appreciated very much his guided tour of the State Rooms which he conducted with relish.

To the main business of making music, Ben soaked up most of his daylight hours either practising, rehearsing or performing. Satisfying his appetite for learning new music, whether accompaniments for choral works or free organ works, was a daily preoccupation. On the day that we visited, he was putting the finishing touches to a Rheinberger sonata and Stanford in G Mag. and Nunc ready for Evensong later that afternoon. Ben lived in one of the cluster of apartments known as the 'Horseshoe Cloisters' within the western wall of the castle. Essential equipment in his three-room flat was of course a piano, half buried under several piles of music. His neighbours were mostly lay clerks of the choir and Ben spoke warmly of the friendly

DDOA Events 2011

24th September Outing to Oakham churches and Peterborough Cathedral.

24th October Composers' workshop with Paul Fisher

22nd November Chairman's Event and AGM

Concerts & Recitals

Saturday 3rd September, 7.30 pm
St. John the Evangelist, Derby
Chris Johns (Director of Music at Leicester Cathedral)

Friday & Saturday 9-10th September, 1-5 pm
English Heritage Open Day at St Andrew's PC, Barrow Hill, Chesterfield
Displays, talks, tours and demonstration of the historic Holt organ recently restored by Ed Stow

Wednesday 21st September 7:30pm
Organ Recital by Malcolm Archer (Winchester College)
on the 1867 Holdich Organ.
Hinckley United Reformed Church, The Borough, Hinckley, Leics. LE10 1NL
Admission £8:00 Under 18s Free

Thursday 29th September, 12.15pm
Chesterfield Parish Church
Organ recital by Peter Williams
Works by Bach, Travers, Alain, Gigout, Vienne & Mathias

Saturday 8th October, 7.30 pm.
Harvest Concert presented by David Wells. Radbourne Church

Weekend 29-30th October
Festival at St Oswald's, Ashbourne, celebrating the newly restored organ.
Saturday 2-5: Exhibitions & activities.
7.30 pm Choral concert with Peter Harrison (Clare College, Cambridge)
Sunday 2.30 pm Opening Recital by Paul Hale (Southwell Minster).

Recitals at the Albert Hall, Nottingham
Sundays at 2.45pm. Free admission
4th September – Nigel Ogden (BBC)
2nd October – Daniel Moulton (London)
30th October – Carlo Curley [Anniversary Recital – Admission £8]

tight-knit community there, indeed, he offered the opinion that the strong bonds within the community created teamwork which so benefitted the quality of music making.

The weekly round of services at the Chapel was very similar to that of a typical cathedral; three services on Sunday, four full choral evensongs on weekdays and a lay clerks' evensong on Saturday. Ben shared about 50% of the playing with the Assistant Organist, Richard Pinel. He declared that he had learnt so much about his art from Richard and described his playing of Bach as "sublime". The Director of Music, Timothy Byram-Wigfield, played occasionally, but in the main was 'directing', as his title dictates. These were key people in mentoring Ben and their trust and confidence in him was demonstrated by the numerous opportunities he was given to take responsibility. At the time of our meeting he had already conducted the lay clerks on several occasions and was shortly to conduct the full choir at an evensong. Each morning he was on regular duty at 6.30 am in St George's School, supervising the instrumental practice of junior choristers before breakfast. He related how valuable this experience was in establishing a rapport with the boys in the choir context and recognised its value in the subtle art of communication which any choir trainer must acquire.

He was very keen to dispel the myth once propagated by a local newspaper headline that he "plays for the Queen every day". In truth he had played for the Duke of Edinburgh, but the visits of the Queen and Duke to the chapel were occasional rather than regular occurrences.



A basement for Ben, but rooms with a view



Ben at home in Windsor Castle

This has been a fruitful year for Ben expanding his repertoire. His previous experience at Derby Cathedral had given him a grounding with a whole range of service settings which stood him in good stead at Windsor, so much so that he has been able to devote more time to learning free organ works. He greatly appreciated the amount of spare time he had for practice – much more than when he was still at school and, in all probability, more than when he will begin university studies in the coming Autumn. He described the Harrison organ as a wonderful instrument and briefly demonstrated this to us with the opening bars of the Bach G minor Fantasia. Although the instrument bristles with modern electronic registration aids, Ben prefers to meet the challenge of manual stop changes so that he can more easily handle registration on less sophisticated organs. Fortunately he has a good memory for registrations. He has made a point of developing this manual skill especially in accompanying psalms, aiming to play every verse with a different registration.

Originally it was Peter Gould's suggestion that, having already secured an organ scholarship to study at New College, Oxford, Ben should take a 'gap' year to gain a broader musical experience before taking up academic study. Ben was very grateful for this advice and feels that the experience has made him a better all-round musician. Ironically, 'gap' seems the complete opposite of what Ben has experienced this year – a life brimming full of music-making with a wonderful choir, congenial colleagues, one of the country's

finest Harrison organs and, of course, living in a royal castle!

My wife and I are very grateful to Ben for sparing a morning with us amidst a hectic schedule, just a few days before the Royal Garter service, when the Queen would definitely be present.

Laurence Rogers

Recent Events

Visit to organs at Newton Solney and Willington

Parishioners at St Mary's, Newton Solney turned out in strength to welcome members to their church on a June evening. Although rather tucked away in the north aisle, the organ was a delight to the eye and ear. For its apparent small size, the two-manual Bevington had a lovely range of resources, including two reeds and a mixture on the Swell. Playing members demonstrated its versatility with a variety of baroque and romantic pieces.

Another warm welcome awaited us at St Michael's, Willington. Here the instrument spoke boldly into the small church with a power that easily matched the needs of a rather dry acoustic. In particular we enjoyed the sweet tones of the flutes, but David Shooter's rendering of 'How great thou art', with octave couplers blazing, stirred unanimous approval. As at our first venue, there was a very friendly atmosphere with much comradely banter. We are grateful to our member Dorothy Cope for helping with the arrangements.

Laurence Rogers



Beautifully decorated facade at Newton Solney

IAO Congress 2011

Since the first IAO Congress in 1920, this was the first year the annual event has been held in Northern Ireland. For many of us attending it provided an exciting opportunity to explore a land of organs where tourism has been inhibited by politics for too many years. What we found was a vibrant organ scene; amazing instruments in beautiful cathedrals and churches and a community of organists justly proud of their heritage and achievements.

An action-packed programme took us to no less than eight cathedrals in five days, treated us to twelve recitals, a masterclass, civic receptions at Stormont Castle, Belfast City Hall and Palace Desmesne in Armagh, a visit to the Giant's Causeway on the north coast, and a whole Sunday south of the border in Dublin. Everywhere we travelled we were welcomed extremely warmly by local priests, organists and church folk. As if conscious that mainland Britain only seems to receive bad news from Northern Ireland, locals enthusiastically demonstrated that normal life there is full of cultural riches. We came to admire more and more the spirit of people who had rebuilt churches and organs damaged during the Troubles and

perhaps envied a little their community pride in cultural achievements. One such example was the St. Peter's Cathedral Schola Cantorum Boys Choir whose sublime singing, directed by Nigel McClintock, echoed around the dome of the Belfast City Hall.

Each venue offered an experience of unique personality in terms of players, instruments and programmes. The mighty William Hill organ at the glorious Ulster Hall was the perfect instrument for a performance of a transcription of Beethoven's Egmont Overture by Colm Carey a brilliant player who later gave an inspiring masterclass on another Hill organ in St. Thomas' Church where we heard the Elgar Sonata. These organs were in complete contrast with the Snetzler gallery organ and the chamber organ (1795) in Hillsborough Parish Church, a fascinating building containing high box pews which were tiered in the transepts. Here we were given an equally fascinating lecture recital on early English keyboard music by Professor Desmond Hunter.

In Armagh we were treated to two cathedrals facing each other on adjacent hill tops. Again the contrast was impressive: the lofty gothic edifice of the RC cathedral (St. Patrick's) with a western

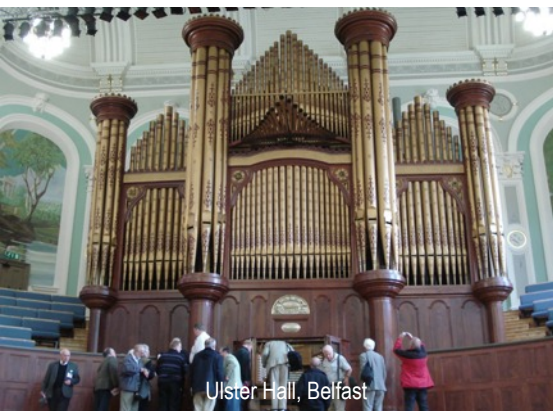
gallery organ speaking boldly into a cavernous acoustic; on the other hill, a squat medieval cathedral (St. Patrick's again, but this time Church of Ireland), with a superbly refined organ in two sections facing each other across the chancel. The recital in the former cathedral was given by three young men aged 21, 15 and 12 who gave accomplished performances of works by Bach, Franck, Howells, Boëllman and d'Atanlffy. In the latter cathedral David Adams gave us beautifully crafted performances of less frequently heard works by Liszt, Stanford, Alain, Litaize and Duruflé.

On following days visits to Londonderry and Dublin each included memorable recitals by world-class players, Desmond Hunter, Gerard Gillen and Peter Barley. Space prevents us from printing more details, but the accompanying photographs give a taste of the splendid organs on offer. Overall we enjoyed a rich variety of organs, music and players, framed within a meticulously organised schedule, and it was a special pleasure to meet local organists who were unanimous in welcoming visitors to their homeland.

Denis Littleton & Laurence Rogers



St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast



Ulster Hall, Belfast



St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh



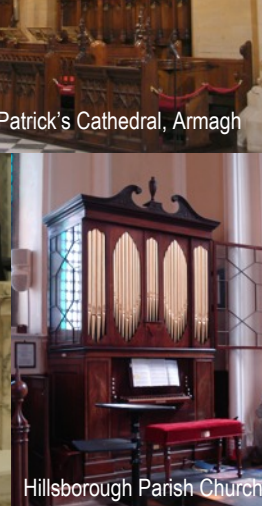
St Columba's Cathedral, Londonderry



Christ Church, Londonderry



Schola Cantorum in Belfast City Hall



Hillsborough Parish Church

The Gradians - Belper's Organ Building Family - Rodney Tomkins

Prologue

It is well known that Joseph Gratian, an organ builder (perhaps "organ installer and maintainer" might be a better way of describing him) flourished in Belper and Derby during the first half of the 19th century. Instruments with which he is known to have been involved include St. John's, St. Peter's, the Congregational chapel and the Wesleyan chapel, all in Belper, together with the parish churches of Eastwood and Sandiacre. The only known survivor of any of these is a 1-manual instrument by Alexander Buckingham, dated 1825, which formerly stood in Derby St. Alkmund's. It was removed (probably by Gratian) in 1844, prior to demolition of the original mediaeval St. Alkmund's church, and acquired by Belper Wesleyan, where a new chamber was provided for it. According to the records Gratian continued to service it during the 1850s. This organ was later moved on to Kilburn Wesleyan and, later still, it ended up at Awsworth Methodist, where it survives to this day, having been carefully restored by Peter Bumstead (of Ipswich) in the early 1990s.

With help from Mrs. Siann Hurt I had carried out a certain amount of research on Joseph Gratian for my little 2003 book, "Belper Parish Church and its Organs", but there the matter had stopped. Imagine my surprise and excitement when, towards the end of 2009, a direct descendant of our organ builder turned up here in Belper. Geoffrey Gratian (note modern spelling of name), resident in Littleover, had, with the help of Ms. Pat Haldenby, been carrying out his own family research and had discovered the link with Joseph Gratian of Belper. He had come to Belper to see if any traces of his ancestor's work were to be found. Through the offices of various good friends he and I eventually made mutual contact and we have been able to share information and visit the organ at Awsworth where Geoff was overjoyed to find his ancestor's name scratched on some internal panelling. All this has spurred me once more to motivate my typing fingers and continue the story from where I left off.



Geoffrey Gratian (of Littleover, Derby) at the Awsworth Methodist organ, an instrument bearing the initials of his great-great grandfather, the Belper organ builder, Joseph Gratian

The Belper Scene and the Gratian Family Background

In 1724 Daniel Defoe could write that Derbyshire was "perhaps the most desolate, wild and abandoned county in all England", while yet another writer, The Revd. D. P. Davies, claimed that "prior to the year 1776, Belper was as low in population as it was backward in civility". What is beyond doubt is that 1776 was a turning point in Belper's history, for it was in that year that Jedediah Strutt built his first great mill by the river Derwent, and thereafter Belper never looked back.

Belper, in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, had been no more than a hamlet within the large mediaeval parish of Duffield. Its religious needs were served by the small chapel of St. John-the-Baptist; from 1721 there was also an Independent meeting house (a



St John-the-Baptist Chapel, Belper

dissenting congregation having been founded in 1672 by the ejected vicar of Mickleover). Following the construction of Strutt's mill the community entered a period of seminal growth, its population of little over 500 rising to about 4,500 by 1801, making it, within the County, second only in size to Derby.

During the remaining years of the eighteenth century Belper witnessed a building construction boom. The Wesleyans built their first chapel in 1777 (to be replaced by the present, larger one in 1807). In 1788 Jedediah Strutt built the Unitarian chapel (still in existence, albeit enlarged) and the Independents (Congregationalists) replaced their old meeting house with a new one in 1790. New housing, the best surviving examples of which are the three-storeyed terraced houses of Long Row, was provided by Strutt in 1792 for his workers, while the Chapel Street end of the town saw the construction of Brettles hosiery mill in 1797 on a site adjacent to the Wesleyan chapel.



Wesleyan Chapel, Belper

It was in the midst of all this entrepreneurial excitement that Joseph Gratian was born, the second child of Richard Gratian, a joiner, and Hannah Tonks, who were married at St. Peter's, Derby, in 1777. Joseph's baptism was recorded on 5 May 1786 as having been at All Saints, Turnditch (at that time, like St. John's, a chapelry within Duffield parish). He lived nigh on eighty years and married twice, both of his wives (confusingly) being called Sarah.

Duffield parish records from the early 17th century onwards show numerous references to the name of Gratian, or its more commonly adopted later spelling of Gratian. What is more, a glance at the current Derby and District Phone

Book still shows over twenty entries bearing the name (all with the later spelling).

Much research into the family, who appear to have been owners of a considerable amount of land during the 17th century in the area between Chesterfield Road and the present A6, has been carried out by local historians for the Belper Research Website. The earliest identifiable ancestor was a Richard Gratian who died some time before 1634. He was followed by George (born before 1624). Next came Richard, Joseph's great-grandfather who, having had five children with baptism dates from 1697 to 1710, must himself have probably been born c1670s. He married Elizabeth (who must have died) and then Hannah.

The last of these five children (baptised 1710) was another Richard, grandfather of Joseph. He was described by the later American organ-building branch of the family as being "eminent in the musical world of England from 1740 to 1760". We can, however, find nothing yet to substantiate this seemingly wild claim!

In 1751 Richard married Mary Yates at St. Alkmund, Derby. They had six children of whom the second, baptised in 1754, was yet another Richard. He, as we have seen above, married Hannah Tonks in 1777 at St. Peter's, Derby and



St Alkmund's, Derby. c.1750

they in their turn had seven children of whom the second, born in 1784, was Joseph, the main subject of our interest.

Joseph Gratian (1784-1863), Organ Builder of Belper

Joseph's first marriage, to Sarah Riley, was recorded in Duffield parish register on 31 May 1807. A daughter, Charlot (sic!), was born in July 1808 who, as we shall see later, was something of a musical performer. There followed up to 1830 a further seven children. In the earlier baptismal records he is described as a "nailer" (the cottage industry of nail-making being common in Belper at the time) though in the case of the last two he is referred to as "musician". His address was variously given as Chapel Street or Gratian's Lane (the latter, though no longer existing, apparently being off Chapel Street, adjacent to the Wesleyan Chapel).

By 1835 Pigot's trade directory entered him as "organ builder . . . Chapel Street, Belper". It was no doubt through the example of his father's skill in woodwork coupled with his own in ironwork (as a nailer) plus his musical interest that he was led into the rapidly booming market for church and chapel organs – though, with his no doubt amateur training, this work is hardly likely (in spite of press reports) to have involved anything as complex as building a new instrument from scratch.

Gratian's first known appearance on the Belper organ scene is in a news item from "Derby Mercury" on 8 October 1818 which reads:

"On Sunday last, at the Established Church, Belper (i.e. St John's Chapel, at that date), a new Organ (built by J. Gratian, musician of that place) was opened and played by his daughter, 10

years of age, and both the instrument and the Performance gave great satisfaction to a crowded congregation".

In local press parlance then (as now) a "new" organ could imply anything from a second-hand transfer or rebuild to a totally new creation. In this instance a transfer would seem the most plausible interpretation. There are no clues as to the provenance of this instrument, but a reasonable hypothesis is that it may have been the reputed 7-stop Snetzler (noted by Sperl) that found its way into St. Peter's following completion of that building in 1824 and the appointment of Thomas Mawkes as its first organist in 1831. We can only guess that it may have been Gratian who carried out this transfer.

A further instrument dating from Joseph Gratian's Belper period was another "new" organ (according to "Derby Mercury"), this time in Eastwood Church, in 1828.

Of the children from this first marriage, we hear nothing more about their first child, the prodigious "Charlot" (as the Belper Wesleyan register spells her) who, at the age of ten, had performed to such remarkable acclaim in 1818. The last two offspring, however, were Thomas (baptised 1827), whose descent we can now trace down to the present day in the person of Geoffrey Gratian (Derby), and Joseph (born 1829) who, as we shall see later, emigrated to America where he founded a large organ-building company.

To be continued.

Editor's note:

This is the first of three instalments of Rodney's history of the Gratians of Belper. The complete story will be available to members in 2012 as a 12-page booklet.

Your newsletter

I am grateful to Rodney Tomkins for his authoritative contribution on local heroes in the organ world. Please help me maintain a good local focus in future issues by sending local news or stories, or by suggesting personalities whom I might interview. As the holiday season draws to a close, please send stories or just snippets of your encounters with organs or organists which would make interesting reading for members.

Grand Choeur at Derby Cathedral

The sight of five organists playing Guilman's 'Grand Choeur alla Handel' was the climax of a spectacular home talent recital in the Summer recital series at the cathedral this year. In our next newsletter Tony Westerman will offer an overview of the series which has become a landmark in the local organ calendar and happily continues to attract excellent audiences.

Editor



Forthcoming DDOA Meetings

Annual Outing 24th September

Visit organs At Oakham School Chapel, Oakham Parish Church and Peterborough Cathedral

Three splendid organs are on offer this year: New instruments built by Peter Collins and Kenneth Tickell at Oakham, and the restored Hill organ at Peterborough. Local organists will introduce the instruments and then allow members to play.

As well as booking a place for yourself, please give publicity amongst friends in your locality who would enjoy visiting a beautiful market town and one of our finest cathedrals. In recent years the outing has successfully attracted additional guests who not only add to the social mix, but also help to share the transport costs. Cost: £15 per person.

8.30: Coach Departs from Derby Council House
8.40: Pick up passengers at Church Lane, Darley Abbey
10.00: Arrive at Oakham School Chapel
11.15: Walk to Oakham Parish Church
12.30: Lunch in Oakham town centre. (Good choice of eating places for members' own arrangements)
2.00: Coach departs from Oakham
3.15: Arrive at Peterborough Cathedral
3.30: Evensong
5.00: Meet Cathedral Organist, Andrew Reid
6.30: Depart from Peterborough
8.30: Arrive in Derby

To book places, please return the booking form accompanying this newsletter.

Members' News

We are delighted to welcome a new member, Dr Martin Firth, who has recently moved from the Bristol area to Matlock.

DDOA - Your Association

Children and the Organ NEWS

Members who take the *Organist's Review* will have been delighted to see the inclusion of Laurence's article about our work, alongside reports of other educational ventures by local Associations. A big 'thank you' to Laurence. Also to John Hobbs who is making approaches on our behalf to some Primary schools. This is extremely helpful. Please consider doing the same yourselves. Personal contacts are without doubt much more effective than emails and phone calls to busy headteachers. Cof E schools are particularly good bets of course because of connections to a church. If you get a promising response, let me know. Outline information about what we do is, of course, on the website which David Shooter keeps up to date.

Stephen Johns

Composers' Workshop presented by Paul Fisher

**24th October 7.3.0 pm
at Duffield Methodist Church**

It is some years since we last had a composers' event, so we are pleased to welcome Paul Fisher, a composer of organ and choral music who will be talking about and playing some of his works. In the second part of the meeting Paul welcomes the participation of members who would like to present one of their own compositions. Composing can be a fairly solitary activity and Paul is happy to discuss members' work in the spirit of mutual support. If you would be prepared to play the organ or bring a recording on CD for discussion, please let Stephen Johns know.

Paul is a native of North Worcestershire who worked for 30 years as an ordained minister in the Church of England before taking early 'retirement' to live in the Yorkshire Dales and concentrate on music, art, climbing and hill-walking. A piano diploma holder from the (then) Birmingham School of Music and Royal College of Music, Paul began serious organ studies and composition about 8 years ago, studying performance with Stephen Layton, Anne Marsden Thomas, Gerard Brooks and currently with Kevin Bowyer. Paul composes mainly for the organ, but has also written some other instrumental works and choral music. His music is inspired by encounters with people, and by events and celebrations, the natural world and spirituality. Humour and passion in music is very important to him. A list of his works can be seen on www.paulfishermusic.co.uk



Items of news or articles for the November/December edition of the *Newsletter* should reach the Editor by **Monday 17th October**, either via e-mail: DDOAnews@gmail.com or by post: Dr Laurence Rogers, 24 St. David's Crescent, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 4SS. The Secretary, Stephen Johns, may be reached via mail@derbyorganists.co.uk. Please visit the DDOA Website www.derbyorganists.co.uk for information about Association activities, past editions of the newsletter, photo gallery and many special features of local interest.