

Derby & District Organists' Association

Registered Charity No. 510567

Newsletter



A Skrabl on the Jurassic Coast - Laurence Rogers

Think of Dorset and you probably think of a county of outstanding natural beauty and a wonderful coastline of limestone coves and cliffs. Tourist literature describes the western part as the Jurassic Coast, and at its centre lies the "Pearl of Dorset", Lyme Regis, nestling around the mouth of the River Lym. In recent years the town has acquired a cultural pearl whose fame has been steadily spreading throughout the organ world. The Parish Church of St Michael is the proud host to a wonderful three-manual mechanical action organ built by the Slovenian firm of Anton Skrabl. Ideally situated in a western gallery, not only is it a feast to the

eyes, its 41 speaking stops offer a palette of tonal colours which is exciting for both listener and player.

My encounter with the instrument was at the Winter Course for Organists in mid-February of this year, not the most popular time of year for a seaside visit, but a warm church and an even warmer welcome by the organising team secured the 'wish you were here' feeling. This was the third such winter course held since the dedication of the new organ in January 2010 and the theme on this occasion was the Organ Music of the British Isles. For an instrument from a continental builder, an exclusively British

DDOA Events 2013

20th May (See page 6)

David Cowan: 'Improvisation'
Derby Cathedral. 7.30pm

10th June (See page 6)

Annual dinner at Willersley Castle

9th July

Family Recital at Christ Church, Belper:
Follow-up to CATO visits.

14th September

Annual full day outing to Oxford,
including Keble College.

12th October

Daytime visit to Ashbourne, including St
Oswald's PC

13th November

Chairman's Event and AGM

Concerts & Recitals

Saturday 22nd June, 7.30pm

St Andrew's Church, Swanwick.
Last Night of the Proms – organ and brass
band concert with David Redfern and the
Blidworth Welfare Band. Tickets £6
including refreshments available at the
door or in advance by calling 01773
605291 or 541458

Saturday 22nd June 7.30pm

Derby Cathedral. Monteverdi Vespers.
Derwent Singers and Sitwell Singers.
Tickets £18, £16 & £12.

Albert Hall, Nottingham

Sundays at 2.45pm Free admission

5th May David Butterworth
23rd June John Keys

Derby Cathedral Summer Recital Series Wednesdays at 7.45pm

July 3	Peter Gould / Tom Corfield / Christopher Johns / Sachin Gunga / Ben Bloor
July 10	David Pipe
July 17	Andrew Kirk
July 24	John Kitchen
July 31	Ben Bloor
August 7	Gough Duo
August 14	Tom Corfield
August 21	Peter Gould

Photo: The Skrabl organ at St Michael's Parish
Church, Lyme Regis



Tim Hone explains Victorian innovations at Tatworth



Robert Fielding on the big screen at Lyme Regis

agenda was perhaps the ultimate test of its credentials, a test which it passed with flying colours.

The three-day course included a celebrity recital by the lead tutor, Philip Scriven, Organist in Residence at Cranleigh School and formerly Director of Music at Lichfield Cathedral, who presented a programme spanning five centuries of English composers from Byrd to Farrington. This was a most inspiring event and a complete antidote to the sadly all too common esoteric programmes in churches and cathedrals that are guaranteed to repel music lovers from organ recitals. Not only did Philip demonstrate the rich heritage of English organ composers, he showed that the Skrabl was an amazingly versatile instrument completely assimilated to the repertoire. Needless to say, Philip's playing was immaculate, which could have been daunting for participants in the master-classes, but not so; his affable manner readily put people at ease and brought out the best in their playing.

Philip Scriven led a winning team of tutors which included Robert Fielding, David Bruce Payne and Tim Hone. Each were excellent communicators with great gifts of empathy with participants. We were a mixed bunch of amateurs and semi-professionals, but we felt that all our contributions were valued and useful learning experiences. The programme of sessions was nicely varied consisting sometimes of whole group lectures-demonstrations and at other times small study groups huddling round an organ console. Local musician Richard Godfrey opened the programme with a

context-setting presentation on Post-Restoration London which he described as awash with brilliant organ improvisers. Such was the demand for organists then that John Stanley, probably the most famous improviser of the period, was persuaded to publish sets of voluntaries that were playable by lower grade musicians who lacked the skill of improvisation. We are fortunate inheritors of this publishing initiative!

Tim Hone presented a fascinating survey of landmark British organs from 1841 to 1954 together with recorded examples. The dates span was chosen with care; 1841 being the date of the first organ built by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll whose career set new design standards not only in France, but in Britain also; 1954 saw the inauguration of the Royal Festival Hall organ which signalled a radical turning point in British organ design. The course included a visit to a well-preserved early Victorian



Philip Scriven plays Purcell at Forde Abbey

organ in the nearby village of Tatworth. Here Tim explained the revolutionary influence of Mendelssohn on organ composition and design in Britain in the early 19th Century. Still out and about, the whole group also visited Forde Abbey to hear the 18th century chamber organ in the medieval chapel. Here, tutors performed music by Tallis, Byrd and Purcell.

One of the favourite sessions for me was the talk by Andrew Nicholson, Chairman of the organising team. His topic was Temperaments and Tuning systems. Andrew did not attempt to blind us with science, but instead explained the historical context of the different systems and demonstrated them aurally with musical extracts played on a keyboard connected to the *Hauptwerk* digital software system. The howling of the 'wolf' and the purity of the major thirds were well evident in the meantone examples.

The course was rounded off with a recital by participants, taking turns on the Skrabl organ. This made a satisfying conclusion to our three-day celebration of British organ music with contributions from all periods of the repertoire. Plans are afoot for another Winter Course in 2014. Although the theme has yet to be announced, I am sure it will be a rewarding experience for participants both for the professional advice and the convivial atmosphere, so I strongly commend DDOA members to look out for notices of the event. Information about events, the organ and a sample audio recording may be found at <http://www.lymeregisorganschool.org/skrabl-organ.html>

Laurence Rogers

The London Organ Day 2013 at the Royal Festival Hall

For some of us this annual event has become a 'must' in the organ diary. In recent years the quality of topical interest and presentation has gone from strength to strength, and the numbers of people attending has reflected this trend. This year the focus was on the organ in the Royal Festival Hall, a landmark instrument in the UK which has never been far away from controversy since its inauguration in 1954. The brainchild of Ralph Downes, it was the product of meticulous scientific research into design techniques, an approach which fitted uncomfortably into the organ building culture of its time.

The venue of the Royal Festival Hall has itself been at the centre of controversy during the whole of its lifetime. As an architectural icon, expressing much needed optimism after the Second World War, it still succeeds to thrill, nearly sixty years on with its decor, vistas and spaciousness. However, the concert hall has long been bedevilled by the reputation of its appalling acoustics. Of course, for an organ, acoustics are paramount, and I for one was anxious to discover what improvements have been achieved since the recently completed refurbishment of the hall.

All the answers came in the first excellent presentation by William McVicker, the Organ Curator, in which he traced the history of the construction of the building and its acoustic tribulations. After WWII, the availability of materials specified by the architect Leslie Martin was severely limited and, contrary to plans, many substitutions were made, often to the detriment of the acoustics. Such was the absorption of sound energy by the walls and ceiling that the sound of famous orchestras was reduced to that of a second rate school orchestra, and Sir Simon Rattle is famously quoted as saying "Playing in the RFH saps the will to live!". The effect of the

acoustics on the sound of the organ was equally devastating, but I am not aware of such famous quotes about this. Now in 2013 William McVicker demonstrated to us how much the recent changes to the structure and fabric of the hall have improved the reverberation time. He did this first with a wolf-whistle and then with full organ chords from the *Paeon* by Langlais. (Since the rebuilding is still incomplete, 'full' organ is really only 'two thirds' organ.) Both demonstrations showed that the acoustics have come a long way since 1954. A mini recital then followed given by Artistic Director Tom Bell and two young students, playing pieces that had been premiered at the RFH in years past; *Prelude, Toccata and Chaconne* by Brian Brockless, *Paeon* by Kenneth Leighton and *Organ Symphony* (extracts) by Malcolm Williamson.



Andrew Scott demonstrates 'open tip' voicing.

After lunch, Andrew Scott, Head Voicer of the builder, Harrisons, gave a demonstration of pipe voicing which illustrated one of the revolutionary aspects of Downes' scheme for the organ. Downes specified 'open tip' voicing, which basically involved making a larger hole in the foot of the pipe, but the consequent adjustments to the languid and mouth required much greater precision than the traditional method. In the space of 40 minutes Andrew voiced two raw pipes, one by the traditional narrow tip method, and the other by the 'open tip' method, and we could



Mark Venning, William McVicker and Ian Bell discuss the RFH organ and its impact.

compare the tone of each, the former being 'smooth and rounded' and the latter having more 'chiff' and a generally 'brighter' sound. Readers can hear the difference for themselves in this video clip which I have posted on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/qVp5hLApJQs>

The day concluded with a recital by Kevin Bowyer, but before that, during the tea break there was a bizarre scene of organists crawling all over the stage and around the console eager to take close-up photographs and inspect stop knobs in the time-honoured manner. As for the recital, this was memorable only for its paucity of tunes. The 'classic' pieces were two Hindemith sonatas, the others by Pallesco and Farrington. It was a shame that the programme squandered the talents of such a fine player on such a wonderful instrument. This was a disappointing end to a brilliant day, but it won't prevent me from signing up again next year: 1st March 2014 at St George's, Hannover Square on the new American instrument by Richards, Fowkes and Co.

Laurence Rogers



Tea-time - Time for a close inspection



The ruler of Ralph Downes, specifying the minimum diameters for pipe footholes

Letters to the Editor

The article on Christmas carols published in the March Newsletter has prompted a few comments to me personally, but sadly only one substantive letter which I am glad to publish here. Should I take the general silence of members to signify assent or disgust of the sentiments expressed in the article? It is not too late to send your letter for the next issue. Our correspondent here is pessimistic about public debate of the topic. Let's prove him wrong!

Editor

Members' News

Derby Diocesan Organ Pilgrimage 2013/2014

During the next two years I am attempting to do something in the Diocese of Derby that to my knowledge has never been done before. I intend to play every church pipe organ in all of the Anglican churches in Derbyshire. Partly it is to raise awareness of the pipe organ and its potential and also to raise money for local projects of the Rural Dean's choosing, sharing the collection from the end of each concert 50/50 along with Derby Cathedral's music programme.

My aim is to take each Deanery at a time, starting this year in the Chesterfield Archdeaconry then concentrating on the South of the Diocese in 2014. During May I shall visit the Bakewell Deanery. Details of my itinerary will be announced at <http://www.derbycathedral.org>

At each venue I play a short concert consisting of two or three pieces lasting about 15 minutes, the first will always be some music by Bach, other pieces will be chosen according to what will sound best on that particular organ. It is hoped to get maximum publicity in the locality with congregations, local musicians and schools invited to be present and I am presently looking for sponsorship to cover my travel costs by public transport.

I hope that you will support this innovative scheme and help me to promote good music making through Derbyshire during the next two years.

Canon Peter Gould

The Editor,
Newsletter
Derbyshire Organists' Association

Sir,

Hopefully you have had a generous response to the article about Christmas music by *lachimo*. In my view he merits having his name on a plaque in Derby Cathedral in gratitude for his attempt to shake us up. Not since I read on the Mander message board, years ago, the sentence: "Here we are stuck with *Hymns Old and New* which in my view contains 183 'songs' that should never have seen the light of day" have I come upon such a perceptive attack such as he offered; it was a breath of air. The three major organ journals of this country have more or less dropped their Letters to the Editor columns; and the RSCM magazine plays safe and is never controversial. It seems that church musicians have stopped arguing. I thought I was alone in thinking ill of what I call 'the weak Weather Forecast carol' that is so unworthy of Darke's tune; (and I have never understood the line 'Witch a door'). Truly Justin Welby hath need of someone like your contributor for we are 'a fen of stagnant water'. There is much for him to do: shortening the Psalter by a third could be a start. Beaumont and Kendrick *et al* can now be dismissed as failed experiments; and what we need is someone with understanding to tackle the texts of the vast body of hymnody, some, though not all, of which is our proud heritage. Why has no one taken notice of a BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship survey carried out as far back as 2004 aimed to identify the most disliked hymns (a 1000 members of the public contributed). Interestingly, they condemned one good, one tolerable and one deserving tune. But what emerged from the exercise was the obvious dislike of refrains and irrelevant, untrue texts. Truly a revision is needed. But will that happen? No. *Ancient and Modern* is just about to be re-launched. Will there be changes? Undoubtedly a few but probably not enough. I overheard a comment uttered by the son of Timothy Dudley-Smith recently who said: "There are about 300 of his father's hymns still unpublished", yet in six months' time congregations will sing such nonsense as 'hither page and stand by me, if thou know'st it, telling'. One wishes your contributor well in his campaign but as a senior BBC man once reminded producers: "Don't ever underestimate the low level of public taste".

Rauschpfeife

St Francis, Mackworth

Members may recall reading in our Obituary to Peter Haslam last year that, at the time of his unexpected death, he was promoting (and funding) a scheme to replace the inadequate and ailing 1912 Norman & Beard organ at St Francis. Fortunately his family agreed to continue to support the project, which has now been completed.

The 'new' organ has a somewhat chequered history, which has still not been completely unravelled. Available evidence indicates that it is by Nicholson & Lord (Walsall), and that it started in 1884 as a one-manual, though enlarged to its present format at an early date. It was moved in 1971 from Darlaston Green Methodist Church (near Walsall) to Monyash Methodist Church, from where it was transferred to storage at St Francis' in 2011.

Great: Open Diapason 8, Clarabella 8, Principal 4, Stopped Flute 4, Flageolet 2, Mixture III

Swell: Viol d'Amour 8, Gedact 8, Geigen Principal 4, Fifteenth 2, Hautboy 8

Pedal: Bourdon 16

The old organ has found an unexpected new home – in a museum in Norway!

Ed Stow



Recent Events

Visit to organs in Nottingham

This February afternoon visit was rather poorly attended, which was a great shame in view of the generous provision of refreshments at Lenton Methodist Church followed by a superb demonstration of the organ at St Peter's by Peter Siepmann, the Director of Music. The Lenton organ, originally by Lloyd has been much altered. The detached console seemed to have a non-standard feel about it, and most members agreed that it was not easy to get the best out of the instrument.



Lenton Methodist Church

After a short bus ride into the city centre we arrived at St Peter's where we were welcomed by Peter Siepmann. He began by explaining the chequered history of less than satisfactory rebuilds of the organ during the 20th Century, each attempting to improve the egress of sound into the nave. Despite its beautiful Georgian case, by the beginning of this century, the inner workings of the two hundred year old instrument had deteriorated below the point of reliability. Coupled with the cramped organ chamber and remote acoustic, the prospect of an expensive rebuild with no greater promise of success over previous rebuilds, a radical



Peter Siepmann explains the blending of digital and pipe technologies.



St Peter's: North aisle case c.1770

solution was considered and implemented; much of the pipework would be discarded and a hybrid instrument constructed combining the use of pipework with digitally sampled sound. The new three-manual instrument was formally dedicated in February 2011. It has two facades; the Georgian case facing the north aisle and a second case facing the choir in the chancel.

Peter demonstrated many of the subtle sounds by playing several of the 'Sei gegrüßet' variations by Bach. The effect was entirely captivating as we admired beautiful flute tones, gentle solo reeds, piquant mutations as well as the plenum chorus. Certainly, the egress of sound into the nave was very successful, being full-bodied yet bright and capable of subtle soft sounds. The Choir organ also appeared to fulfil adequately the demands of accompanying the choir; released from the need to project sound into the nave, its dynamic scale was well proportioned to the chancel space.

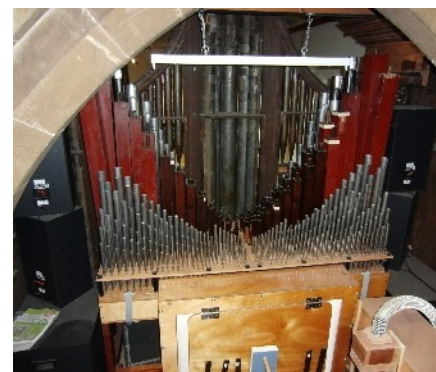
The detached console was conveniently located in the nave and our party gathered around, eager to discover secrets about the blend of the two technologies. Peter gave us a grand tour of the palette of sounds without declaring which technology produced each sound. To conclude he played a game of sound detective with us, spotting pipe ranks as opposed to digital ranks. I think our success rate was only about 60% which went a good way to support the claim that the instrument should be considered as a coherent whole.

A tour of the organ chamber followed and here some of the secrets unravelled. To begin, each division of the organ had dedicated speakers, aimed in the same direction as the pipework. In the case of the Great and Choir, a pair of speakers flanked the pipe ranks. In the case of the Swell, the speakers pointed into the centre of the chamber. Needless to say the speakers for the Pedal division were enormous and there was no doubting their ability to underpin the other divisions with ample 16 foot, and even 32 foot tone. Overall, the acoustic layout of the chamber made a major contribution to the successful blend and propagation of sound into the building.

The design of this organ was fascinating and possibly signals a pathway for instruments in the future, not only as a response to constrained budgets, but as an effective solution to the age-old problem of remote and cramped organ chambers. We are very grateful to Peter for his skilful demonstrations and spirited and full answers to our barrage of questions.

Our thanks go to our welcoming hosts at both churches and to James Muckle for making the arrangements.

Laurence Rogers



St Peter's: Interior view of the Great organ behind the Georgian facade and showing the pipe ranks flanked by loudspeakers.



St Peter's: Interior view of the Choir organ

Service with a Smile

On Monday 15th April about twenty members converged on Saint Wystan's church Repton to hear Mr Peter Williams deliver a well thought out paper entitled "Service with a smile". He drew on his wide experience as a musician in both cathedral and parish churches, culminating in various teaching appointments, finally at Repton School.

His paper was broadly based on the musical needs of a Sunday Eucharist, and Peter opened the evening with a suitable introductory voluntary "Schmucke dich, O liebe

seele" BVW654. Beautifully played, the piece was determinedly interrupted by Denis, masquerading as a member of the Clergy wishing to get a quick word with the "congo" before the service proper, to the amusement of all concerned!

Most of the service playing challenges which we all face were covered in a light hearted and well informed style. Special attention was given to hymn play-overs, and the importance of strict time-keeping in hymns even to the extent of the number of beats *between* verses. Both Anglican chant and responsorial psalm accompaniments

were covered, and members were encouraged to sing along in the examples. Improvisatory "fill ins" between verses or at the end of hymns was demonstrated, as well as embellished "last verses".

The evening concluded with a spirited performance of Clerambault's *Caprice sur le grands jeux*, music which sounds quite authentic on the Repton organ.

We are very grateful to Peter for his thoughtful yet entertaining presentation.

Terry Bennett

Forthcoming DDOA Meetings

DAVID COWEN on Improvisation,

Derby Cathedral Monday 20th May 7.30pm

David is an Improviser of international reputation and we really are lucky to have him, plus the chance to visit the Cathedral – thanks to Peter Gould's good offices.

He has some excellent suggestions for starting to improvise which are not at all daunting and are easily accessible whatever your standard of competence. He makes the point that many people find the art difficult because they try to start on a very demanding level – playing in 'hymn tune style' with a very fast rate of chord change and in four-part harmony. The result can sometimes lack shape and direction and easily becomes a musical equivalent of a 'politician's waffle'!

He lays stress on clarity and simplicity and uses scales and modes as a starting points as well as more traditional harmony. My recent session with him was a mixture of teaching and discussion and it was very stimulating. Needless to say he can do the French Toccata stuff with the best of them (he has studied in France with top teachers) and he will happily share some of the tricks of the trade. I asked him how he came to develop such expertise. His reply was typically modest and rather surprising – 'it was because I absolutely was no good at it – so I went and bought some books and just got on with it' Now that is good news for us all. So please do come along. Play if you wish, but there is no compulsion. I have had 'offers of help' on the night from several members already.

Stephen Johns

Annual Dinner 10th June 2013

Willersley Castle Hotel, Cromford

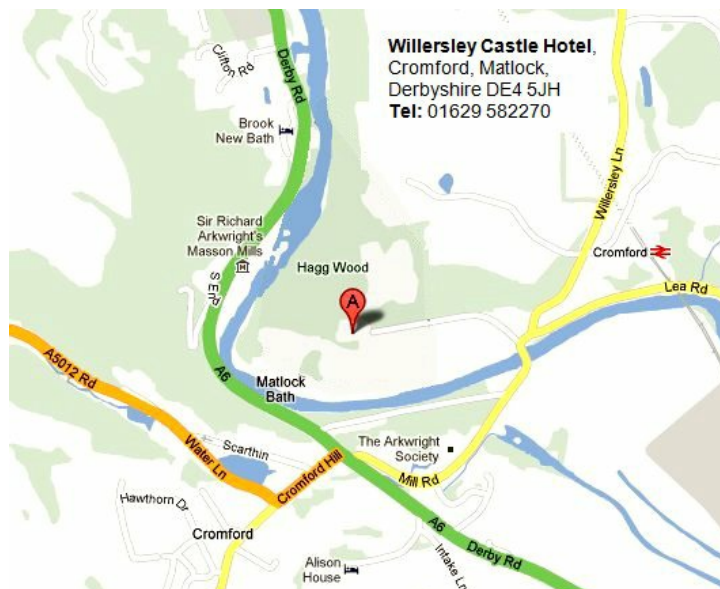
7.00 for 7.30pm

Guest of Honour: **Dr Alan Thurlow** President of the Incorporated Association of Organists.

Booking your place:

A three course meal will be served. Price per person: £19.50 excluding wine. Details of the menu are shown on the booking slip accompanying this newsletter. Please indicate your choices on the booking slip and return it with a cheque (payable to the Derby and District Organists' Association) to the Secretary, Mr Stephen Johns, 24 Oaklands Avenue, Littleover, Derby DE23 7QG (01332 764792)

AS SOON AS POSSIBLE BUT NO LATER THAN TUESDAY 24th MAY



Willersley Castle Hotel,
Cromford, Matlock,
Derbyshire DE4 5JH
Tel: 01629 582270

Items of news or articles for the May/June edition of the *Newsletter* should reach the Editor by **Monday 17th June**, 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.