

Derby & District Organists' Association

Registered Charity No. 510567

Newsletter



DIY Organs in the West Midlands

For our October meeting members visited and played two outstanding examples of personal entrepreneurship in organ building. The first, in Broadway United Reformed Church, Walsall, a pipe organ of cathedral proportions, and the second, in complete contrast, a *Hauptwerk* computer installation at the house of David and Sharon Pitches in Sparkhill, Birmingham.

After tortuous rainy journey beset by road spray on the motorways, we received a warm welcome by our genial host at Broadway URC, Dr Alan Taylor, Organist at the church

for over forty years. After giving us a potted history of the building of the instrument, Alan delighted us with his performance of two pieces in contrasting genres; *Voluntary Op.6 No.6* by John Stanley and *Theme and Variations* by Hendrik Andriessen.

Before the 1990s, the church had used a succession of pre-digital electronic organs and by 1989 it was becoming difficult to obtain replacements for failing components of the ageing Rodgers electronic. At much the same time, several redundant organs in nearby Methodist churches became available and Alan seized the opportunity, "armed with his chequebook", to acquire instruments originally by Nicholson & Co and the Walsall-based firm of Nicholson & Lord. In all, six instruments contributed to the final five-division organ with 51 stops and detached console, adapted from the Rodgers console. The majority of the pipework came from the instruments of the two Nicholson firms, an aspect which helped to give tonal coherence. The stop list is impressive, with minimal borrowing between the ranks. The use of much local volunteer labour, overseen by local organ builder John Lloyd,



DDOA Events 2016

16th November (Wednesday) 7.15pm

AGM and 'Ten Pieces' Presentation (see page 6)

AGM Elections

The following are offering themselves for election:

Officers:

Chairman: John Maxwell-Jones
Vice Chairman: Margaret Eades
Secretary: Andrew Storer
Treasurer: Chris Darrall
Newsletter Editor: Laurence Rogers
Gift Aid Secretary: Gillian Chatto

Committee:

David Shooter Terry Bennett
Hugh Morris Geoff Howell
[4 places to be filled]

Further nominations may be emailed to Secretary, Stephen Johns
annestephen.johns@talktalk.net
in advance of the meeting (preferably) or made on the night.

Concerts & Recitals

Derby Cathedral

Sat 19th November, 7.30pm
Derby Bach Choir - Dvorak's Stabat Mater

Friday 11th November, 7.30pm
Derby Cathedral Voluntary Choir
Music and Readings for Armistice Day

Saturday 12th November, 7:30pm
Derby Choral Union - Mozart's Requiem

St John's, Bridge Street, Derby

Saturday 10th December, 7.30pm
Derby Bach Choir- Voices & Brass

Monday 12th December, 7.30pm
Sitwell Singers - Christmas music & readings

St Osmund's, London Road, Derby

Saturday 3rd December, 7:30pm
Derwent Singers - Music for Advent and Christmas

Derby Cathedral

Saturday 10th December, 7.00pm
Derby Cathedral Choir - Handel's Messiah

Saturday 17th December, 7.30pm
Derby Choral Union - Christmas music

Photos:

Organ at Broadway URC, Walsall.
Dr Alan Taylor.

Specification

Swell		Great		Choir (unenclosed)		Solo		Pedal	
Open diapason	8	Lieblich Bourdon	16	Dulciana	8	Vienna Flute	8	Harmonic bass	32
Lieblich Gedact	8	Open Diapason	8	Rohr Flute	8	Viola	8	Open Wood	16
Viole d'amour	8	Violin Diapason	8	Geigen Principal	4	Orchestral Oboe	8	Violone	16
Viole celeste	4	Stopped Diapason	8	Lieblich Flute	4	Cornet	V	Bourdon	16
Principal	4	Principal	4	Nazard	2.2/3	Tromba	8	Lieblich Bourdon	16
Gemshorn	2	Wald Flute	4	Piccolo	2	Tuba	8	Octave	8
Mixture	III	Twelfth	2.2/3	Tierce	1.3/5			Bass Flute	8
Vox humana	8	Fifteenth	2	Larigot	1.1/3	Couplers Full range		Quint	5.1/3
Oboe	8	Fourniture	III	Clarinet	8			Flute	4
Cornopean	8	Contra Fagotto	16	<i>Tremulant</i>				Mixture	III
Clarion	4	Trumpet	8					Trombone	16
<i>Tremulant</i>								Bassoon	16
								Fagotto	8
								Fagot	4

The organ of Broadway URC, Walsall

secured an instrument of great versatility at a fraction of the cost of a commensurate new organ. After Alan's mini recital, in the usual fashion, members brought scores in a variety styles which explored the range of tonal colours to reveal lots of solo possibilities as well as meaty choruses.

The second leg of our visit was 30 minutes drive away in Sparkhill, a suburb to the south of Birmingham City centre. We were guests of Dr David Pitches, a medical practitioner with considerable skills as an organist. Our arrival at tea time was greeted with tea and sumptuous cakes baked by David's wife, Sharon.

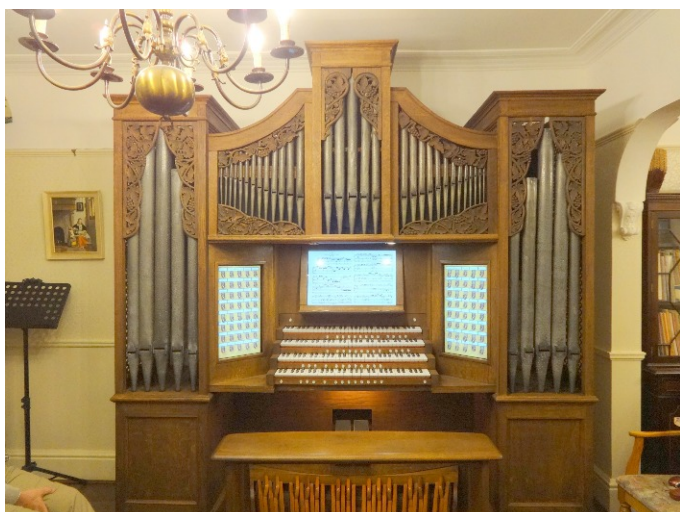
David has built a sophisticated house organ based on the *Hauptwerk* digital electronic system. To walk into his lounge is to be confronted with what appears to be a substantial pipe organ befitting a village church, but possessing a four-manuals and pedals console that would not look out of place in a cathedral. The pipes of course are all silent but their presence makes an imposing

and beautiful piece of furniture. A full technical description of the instrument was given by Alan Dronsfield in his article appearing in the DDOA Newsletter number 48, May 2015.

The salient features of the console are three computer monitor touch screens, one for the music desk and two for the stop jambs on either side of the manuals. In David's customisation of the software, the stops appear as photographic images of the stops on the original organ. All are controlled by a computer secreted inside the organ case. More visibly, alongside the traditional console accessories of Polo mints and pencils, a computer mouse takes its place. This is used to configure the system to an organ of choice. David has digital sample sets for a dozen or so organs stored on the hard drive; when one is chosen it takes a couple of minutes for the data to load into RAM memory, making the console ready for playing. When the loading operation is complete, the right and left screens display the stop jambs for

the chosen organ. In the first instance we were 'transported' to Salisbury Cathedral for the 1877 Father Willis organ residing there. David demonstrated the full tonal range of the instrument with a performance of *Abendstimmung* by the High Romantic composer Hugo Kaun (1863-1932); beginning with soft strings, this piece took us on a tour of the organ from *ppp* to *fff*.

In the lounge space of comparatively modest proportions, the aural illusion of standing in a cathedral varies according to where you stand in the room and is affected by the number of people present, in our case a dozen. Having said that, for me, closing ones eyes made the illusion complete; I was transported in sound to a vast cathedral space. As well as speakers and a sub-woofer unit (for bass frequencies) built into the organ case, there were speakers in all corners of the room at ceiling level. David explained that the plurality of speakers is greater than our normal expectations of speakers in a



Hauptwerk installation by David Pitches



David choosing stops on the simulated jamb.

typical hi fi system; a speaker enclosure would in fact contain several speakers, each devoted to a different frequency band in the audio spectrum. Thus the complete surround-sound system is achieved with multiple channels, collectively reproducing a complementary multi-channel recording in the original location. Sample sets employing this method of recording and reproduction are referred to as 'wet' versions and are suitable for small-scale domestic environments where the natural acoustic properties are far from 'spacious'. In contrast 'dry' versions are available for use in churches and halls which possess natural reverberation. Such data sets feature recording in closer proximity to pipework and exclude the ambience needed to reproduce 'surround sound'.

After his demonstration, David invited members to take turns in playing organs in a choice of locations. As well as playing at Salisbury, in the space of two hours we played organs from all over Europe, most notably organs by:

- Arp Schnitger (1721) in Church of St Michael, Zwolle, Netherlands
- Marcusson (1973) in Laurenskerk, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1882-85) in Church of St. Étienne, Caen, France
- Jean-Esprit Isnard (1775) in : Basilica of St Maximin, Provence, France

Such an experience provided a rare opportunity to appreciate at first hand the contrasting aural



characteristics of North German Baroque, French Symphonic and Classical French traditions.

The evening was one of those occasions when time happily rolled on and on, fuelled by our questions and David's inexhaustible knowledge and enthusiasm. However, a line had to be drawn, and after profuse thanks to David and his wife for their generous hospitality, we eventually departed. Our thanks are due to Alan Dronsfield for facilitating the visit and to John Maxwell-Jones for finalising the arrangements.

Laurence Rogers

Recent Events

A Controversial Recital?

I attended the last organ recital of the summer series at Derby Cathedral given by Jonathan Scott on Wednesday, 31st August. Jonathan agreed to take the place of Carleton Etherington of Tewkesbury Abbey at short notice, who was indisposed.

Having been to a few of the other recitals in the series and enjoyed the excellent demonstration of technique, musicianship and variety of music chosen by the different organists, I was interested to hear Jonathan play, as I had not heard him before, and did not know what to expect of his performance.

He represents a new generation of concert organists and is enjoying a distinguished career, having won various coveted awards, including the Countess of Munster & Worshipful Company of Musicians Scholarships. He also attracts large audiences at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester where he plays regularly, and also plays as a piano and organ soloist with various professional

orchestras and has produced many recordings, some of which were available for sale after the performance.

From the onset, it was evident that his great talent lay in his ability to present orchestral works on the organ as a compelling and imaginative alternative to the original orchestral versions. His choice of registration and sensitivity was amazing in the transcriptions he played, and those of us familiar with the original versions of the *Overture to The Barber of Seville*, (Rossini), the *Bacchanale* from *Samson and Dalilah*, (Saint-Saens) and the *Finale* from the *Organ Symphony* (Saint-Saens) arranged by Jonathan, could not fail to be impressed by his skill as an arranger and performer. His lively introductory remarks matched the vibrant, youthful sense of excitement which he conveyed in his playing, and he made his case as a very convincing promoter of the organ to a wider audience.

When it came to the original organ works, he was less convincing, and this is where a potential controversy arises. We were offered a very dramatic,

romanticised rendering of the Bach *Fantasy and Fugue in C minor*, with much use of the swell pedal crescendos and diminuendos and, sometimes creating rather a turgid sounding texture and with frequent changes of contrasting registration - in fact this could have belonged to a 1930's performance! I am just old enough to remember this style of playing dying out of fashion in the 1950s and 60s and its replacement with the neo-baroque - back to the composer's original intentions and style of playing.

Speaking to some of the audience afterwards, including some of our members, this observation provoked some strong reactions! Some people loved and enjoyed the performance as a whole, while others had the opposite views! My opinion was one of admiration of his technique, but some surprise and disappointment with the dramatic romanticisation of the Bach (which I happen to be practising at the moment).

I couldn't help wondering - is this the way to promote organ

performances of the future, or should we be sticking to the 'purist' view of presenting only performances which research has shown is what the composer intended? Perhaps we should recognise and accept both as valid interpretations from the listener's point of view? It would seem that the listener's background or personal taste has a strong influence here.

Is there a change of fashion in the performance of Bach, a reaction against a purist approach, or is this example a personal interpretation by one performer? It would be interesting to hear the opinions of other members!

A special word of thanks to Hugh Morris, Cathedral Director of Music and DDOA member for reviving the tradition started by his predecessor, Peter Gould in organising an enjoyable and inspiring set of summer recitals.

Margaret Eades

Visit to St Luke's, Derby

The September meeting at St Luke's, Derby was well supported by members and proved to be most enjoyable. Tony Westerman, as former organist and with an intimate knowledge of the Abbott instrument, introduced the recent renovations and demonstrated the organ with a performance of his own *Toccata on Noel nouvelet*. From soft beginnings on the Swell strings, this piece was a measured crescendo, working through all the ranks up to the final exposition of the theme in the pedals with glittering accompaniment from full organ. This was not only a fine demonstration of the tonal scope of the organ but an impressive reminder of how well it is served by the church acoustic. Organists never fail to stop talking about acoustics, but it is true that they make a huge contribution to the success of an organ! In my opinion, it is not just the thrill of the reverberation, that's the 'icing on the cake', it is the clarity, blend and balance of sound in the nave that is so important. It is not uncommon for mixtures to 'disappear', for reeds to 'lose their edge', and for flues to lose their sonority as one walks away from the instrument. This was certainly not the case at St Luke's with its good height, chancel apse and



Look - no page turns! Our Chairman shows how it is done.

wide nave it provided a worthy acoustic space.

An extensive article in our August 2011 *Newsletter* by Tony on the then state of the organ was entitled 'An Abbott in Adversity' and painted a sad picture of a fine organ that has suffered repeatedly from storm damage, water, collapsing masonry and layers of dust from the friable sandstone fabric of the church. For years Tony nursed the disabled instrument alongside dedicated attention from organ builders John Poyser and Ed Stow. More recently, funds have been raised to commission renovations by M.J. Spinks of Leeds. Spinks trained under Abbott and Smith and with many other similar instruments in the firm's care, this choice generated confidence in a sympathetic restoration. Tony spoke in an upbeat manner about the result and members' experience during the evening confirmed his satisfaction. As well as desperately needed cleaning, the main issues attended to were:

1. Electrification of the pedal action, restoring promptness and reliability.
2. Refurbishment of the Great Trumpet and Large Open Diapason sliders previously suffering from distortion and splits.
3. Replacement of the tarpaulin over the Great with two wooden canopies to minimise the ingress of fallen grit.
4. Refurbishment of the Swell and Great keyboards to eliminate rattle and the effects of wear.
5. Comprehensive cleaning of the Choir pipework to improve the speech of this division.

As is customary, several members demonstrated a range of repertoire, from Bach to Copland with many 'stations' in between. Margaret Eades intrigued us with a *Voluntary* by Samuel Wesley, Geoff Howell tested the organ's Baroque credentials, whilst our chairman caressed a romantic sound from softer stops. Tony has often passed comment on a heavy tendency in the action, but in my opinion it was not excessive and certainly not an obstacle to fluent semiquavers.

As well as the attendance of members, the additional support of parishioners and volunteers serving tea and coffee succeeded in creating an enjoyable and congenial evening. Our thanks go to Ray Whatmore for making the arrangements and for providing background notes.

Laurence Rogers



The Abbott at St Luke's

Paul Hale's last recital as Rector Chori, Southwell Minster

On 29th August 2016 we journeyed to Southwell, with Jumble the dog, to enjoy the bank-holiday afternoon organ recital – Paul Hale's last recital as Rector Chori.

We arrived over an hour early and many visitors were basking in the glorious sunshine on the grass around the minster. It was the last day of the Southwell Music Festival and, peering in through the wide open great west door, we were faced with a large choir on raked seating with a full nave of audience in between. A 'Come and Sing' event was in full swing with Stanford's *Magnificat in G*. At the south door, we were greeted by a friendly welcomer, who explained how dog-friendly they were – Kenneth Beard had often brought his dog in (as had Dr Sinclair at Hereford, much to Elgar's approval). We spent some time wandering around the transept (behind the raked seating) and quire, and admiring Caröe's fine case containing the 1996 Nicholson screen organ. The *Nunc Dimittis* allowed time for the soprano soloist to make friends with Jumble.

No sooner had the minster emptied, than it began to fill again for the free organ recital. As before, the welcomers could not have been more helpful. With twenty minutes to go, the nave, side aisles and raked seating were packed, and Jumble had settled down to sleep for the next ninety minutes or more. The recital was on the nave organ, which occupies the first four bays of the south triforium, and the mobile console was in the central aisle in front of the nave audience.

At 3.30, Paul launched into Percy Whitlock's *Fanfare* – a rousing start, introducing us to the reeds of his beloved 1905 Binns organ, rebuilt at Southwell by Wood in 1992. After that, he spoke eloquently and amusingly about each item. Whitlock had always been a particular favourite of his, he told us, even before he had stepped into Whitlock's shoes at Rochester. Paul is a trustee of the Percy Whitlock Trust, which has done so much to ensure the publication of Whitlock's music.



Paul Hale poses for a photo (but where is Jumble?)

Paul said that, as Whitlock's music would come out of copyright at the end of 2016, the trust would be wound up, with its balance going to the Royal College of Organists for educational projects.

In contrast, he followed that with Bach's chorale prelude on *Schmücke dich*. He had us all repeating the name of Swell stop featured – the Sesquialtera: every organ should have one!

We then heard the *Prelude and Fugue in C* (BWV 545), which Paul had played in his first BBC broadcast, from Birmingham.

Moving on to Albinoni's *Adagio* (arranged by Giazotto), Paul told anecdotes of organ trips with Roy Massey (then Birmingham Cathedral organist) around Denmark, where he had bought this music. He described some of the soft stops he would use and of course we were enthralled by his beautiful interpretation of the well known tune.

The longest piece in the recital (he referred to it as the 'roast beef') was Healey Willan's *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue*. 'Let's go on a musical journey together', he said – and indeed we did!

After that, we needed a sorbet, in the form of Schumann's *Sketch for pedal-piano in D flat*, charmingly played. Having mentioned his three hip operations, Paul then proceeded

to stand precariously on the organ bench, swivelling around to take pictures of the audience in all directions (which he said would appear on Facebook). He then finished to a standing ovation with Mulet's *Carillon-Sortie*, which had been his last voluntary at Rochester in 1989.

For an encore, he chose to go back to Whitlock and his *Fidelis*. He said that Whitlock had been an unassuming man and had liked to finish with a quiet piece and slide off the bench and disappear. No such luck for Paul!

Well, it was a lesson in how to present an entertaining and interesting programme for a bank-holiday afternoon. And Southwell Minster is to be congratulated on how well it welcomes visitors. Paul still had two days to go before retiring across the Trent to Bingham, and we wish him all the best after 27 years of such distinguished service at Southwell. Jumble, having survived the Solo tuba, the Great reeds and the thunderous applause, stood up, shook herself, and was ready to inspect the console and try to appear in the photograph with Paul.

Geoff Howell

How is your Organ Polish? - Laurence Rogers

At the end of August I had the enormous pleasure of playing the wonderful 3-manuals and pedals mechanical instrument in the Church of St Stanisław Kostka, Dębniaki, Kraków, Poland. The huge church, built in the 1930s in the *Art Deco* style, possessed acoustics superbly suited to organ music; with a reverberation time of 3 seconds, climactic chords could be thrilling indeed. The design of the handsome case and layout of the divisions in *werkprinzip* style endowed the instrument with a sound of effortless clarity as it spoke from the western gallery into the cavernous nave. The specification may be found through the link shown at the end of this article, but beware that most of the names are in Polish, naturally! Translating these was part of my preparation for the visit, but, as you will see, there were many recognisable names. What I was not prepared for, however, was the discovery that the Swell expression pedal operated in reverse to all those I have ever known, at home

and abroad; the box was fully open when one pressed one's heel down, and gradually closed as one pushed the toe forward! That was a shock, and I am not sure that I completely conquered it within two days of practice and a recital.

The context of my visit was to entertain a conference of physics educators at Krakow University. You may like to read more about the specification and perhaps a spot of some physics [here](#).

Laurence Rogers



Forthcoming DDOA Meeting

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 16th November 7.15 pm at St Werburgh's Church, Spondon.

Please note the starting time for the AGM. An illustrated talk follows immediately at 8.00pm:

16th November 8.00 pm at St Werburgh's Church, Spondon.

'Ten Organ Pieces'

Laurence Rogers will be joined by Margaret Eades, John Forster, John Maxwell-Jones and James Muckle for a panel session in which each of the 'ten' pieces will be presented and discussed.

The aim of the project is to identify and promote 'Ten Organ Pieces' which we might use to inspire the interest of young people in the organ and its music. Earlier this year a working group sifted through about 30 candidates and the successful 'ten' (it turned out to be twelve in the end!) were published in the May 2016 Newsletter. The process of choosing required careful thought about the criteria by which the qualities of pieces might be judged, to create a balanced selection and, above all, attempting to predict what would pique the interest of today's youngsters, the majority of whom might never have been exposed to live or recorded organ music.

It is proposed to commend the selection using *YouTube* video clips and many of these will be presented at the meeting. We also wish to garner stories about the music, composers and contexts to provide links which might be useful to teachers and help them embed the ideas into the curriculum. We look forward to hearing members' ideas which will help expand the selection of stories.

Items of news or articles for the January/February edition of the *Newsletter* should reach the Editor by **Monday 19th December**, 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.