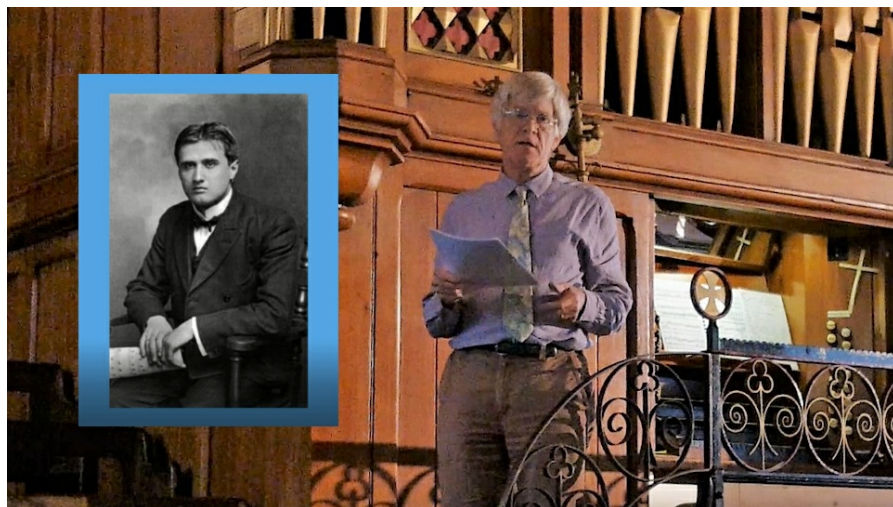


# Derby & District Organists' Association

Registered Charity No. 510567

## Newsletter



### René Becker - Organ Composer Rediscovered

After the release from lockdown restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July, live music has exploded into action, perhaps exhaustingly so, with local organ recitals scheduled every week in August and beyond. Our own first live meeting of this year at St Peter's, Belper, provided a long missed opportunity to meet other members and to swap notes on recently permitted live events, but the main focus of the evening was a talk by Richard Brice about the life and music of René Louis Becker. This name will certainly be absent from the repertoire lists of most members; the composer belongs to that legion of accomplished musicians who, although famous during their lifetime, have become forgotten by subsequent generations as fashions and tastes have changed.

René Becker is usually regarded as an American composer, having spent most of his professional life in America, but he was born in 1882 into a musical family in the Alsace region of France. His father, Edouard, was once organist at Chartres Cathedral and later at Strasbourg Cathedral. Along with three of his four siblings who became professional musicians, René received tuition from several notable musicians at the Strasbourg Conservatory of Music. There he was recognised as a scholar of distinction, famously being asked to

turn pages in a recital given by the great Johannes Brahms.

After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, Alsace passed into the jurisdiction of the newly formed German Empire, and the consequent suppression of the French language made those uncomfortable times for French-speaking inhabitants. By 1900 the lure of America tempted the Becker family, and two of René's brothers, Lucian and Camille, made their way to St Louis, Missouri. After completing his studies in 1904, René joined them and formed the Becker Conservatory of Music, where he taught piano, organ and composition. A flourishing career followed as an organist, teacher, pedagogue and composer. He held several cathedral posts in the states of Illinois and Michigan and gave lectures and concerts. Becker wrote over 500 compositions for piano, chorus, violin, viola and organ, of which more than 150 were pieces for organ.

Richard conveyed Becker's life story, interspersed between the five movements of the *First Organ Sonata, Op. 40* on the St Peter's organ; 1. Praeludium festum, 2. Dialogue, 3. Scherzo, 4. Prayer, 5. Toccata. The organ was in good voice and we were left in no doubt that this was a substantial work worthy of study and modern performance. Of several recordings

## DDOA Events 2021

### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September

Visit to Lincoln Cathedral and St Peter & St Paul Church, Lincoln. (See page 8)

### Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> October

Association Annual Lunch (See page 8)

### Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> November

AGM

## Concerts & Recitals

### Wednesday Lunchtime Recitals

12.30 - 1.10pm

at St Modwen's, Burton-upon-Trent

1<sup>st</sup> Sept. Alexander Binns (Derby)

8<sup>th</sup> Sept. Cathy Lamb (Lichfield)

15<sup>th</sup> Sept. Mary Cobbold (Sheffield)

22<sup>nd</sup> Sept. John Keys (Nottingham)

29<sup>th</sup> Sept. Martyn Rawles (Lichfield)

### Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September 10am - 1pm

at Strutts Centre, Belper DE56 1UU.

### Sitwell Singers Come and Sing

Join the Sitwell Singers for a fun morning singing arrangements from Sullivan to the Swingle Singers. Booking £10.

[Sitwellsingers.org.uk](http://Sitwellsingers.org.uk)

### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September from 11am, performance 3.30pm

at St George's Church, Ticknall DE73 3JU.

Derby Bach Choir Come and Sing

Fauré *Requiem* and choruses from Vivaldi *Gloria*. Participants £12, Audience £5.

[Derbybachchoir.com](http://Derbybachchoir.com)

## Your Newsletter



Thank you to members who have expressed their views on covering the costs of producing and distributing the paper copy of the Newsletter. The committee will consider views when it meets later in September. It is not too late to send your view to the Editor.

## Notice

A large collection of the late Brian Bonsall's music (vocal scores and piano music), CDs and DVDs is available to anyone interested, free of charge on Saturday, 4th September between 10am - 1pm at: 47 Wirksworth Road, Duffield.

Photo: Richard Brice at St Peter's Belper, presenting the first live DDOA meeting since lockdown.



available on *YouTube*, you will find a fairly straight performance by [Gabriel Isenberg](#) or an entertaining 'high octane' one by [Minne Veldman](#) (complete with stamping and thumping).

Richard provided us with a list of fifty titles of Becker's published organ music, of which twenty, including all three sonatas, are still available from [IMSLP](#), [Delatour](#) and [Michael's Music Service](#). He also told us a cautionary tale of exorbitant import duties from Michael's Music.

At the conclusion of Richard's talk, John Maxwell-Jones initiated a vote of thanks which was immediately endorsed by our Chairman, Tony Westerman. Having been postponed three times, the meeting and its expectation were a long time coming, but we are grateful for Richard's research and energy in bringing it to fruition.

We then enjoyed a social intermission with refreshments kindly provided by Sue Brice and Gillian Chatto whose delicious cakes are becoming famous!



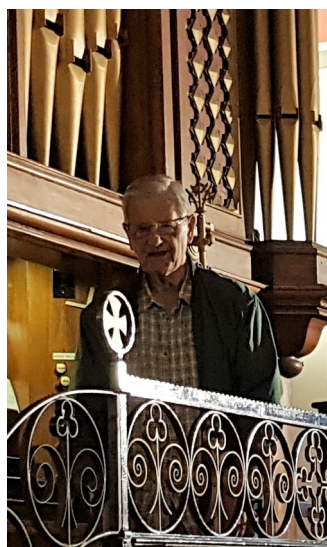
Time for a natter - just like old times!

In the second part of the evening a few members presented some fruits of their lockdown learning adventures:

- Rodney Tomkins gave us some of his own *Variations on 'Deep Harmony'*, a tune much loved by brass bands and one which he learnt to play by ear at the age of ten.
- Gillian Chatto and Richard Brice played a duet: *Prelude and Fugue in C* by Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736-1809).
- Gillian Chatto gave a sparkling performance by of the great *C minor Prelude BWV 546* ; The St Peter's organ well justified its credentials for making Bach sound brilliant.
- Margaret Eades played *Intermezzo* from *Sonata No.8* by Rheinberger and *Folk Tune* by Percy Whitlock.
- In conclusion Laurence Rogers played *Chanty* from the *Plymouth Suite* by Whitlock.



Richard and Gillian



Rodney



Gillian



Margaret

## Postscript and Invitation

Richard has described how, by chance, he first came across a *Toccata* by Becker and how that whetted his appetite to search out more music by the composer. I am sure Richard is not alone in making a chance discovery of a piece by a hitherto unknown composer. Such is the dominant power of standard repertoire favourites to crowd out awareness of hundreds of 'minor' composers whose fame and accomplishments were anything but minor in their lifetime. Recital programmes seeking audience

appeal are frequently at risk of perpetuating the standard repertoire to the exclusion of major but unfamiliar talent and beauty. Perusing the alphabetic index of composers on the IMSLP website, one can see dozens if not hundreds of unfamiliar names. So here is an invitation to all our members and readers: **Please send the Editor names of other forgotten composers and examples of their music that you may have discovered.** Perhaps like me you have heard an unfamiliar piece in a recital, on the radio or on a CD that

you felt compelled to seek out and acquire a copy of the score. It would be great to be able to publish members' ideas in a future Newsletter. Here are some starters from my own collection:

Oreste Ravanello, Organist of St Marks Venice, c.1914.

Jean-Baptiste Maillochaud, organist at Niort, France, c.1920

William Ralph Driffill, organist at Barnet, Herts. C.1900

*Laurence Rogers*



## Father Willis at the Royal Albert Hall - Laurence Rogers

### BBC Proms 2021

Out of the 52 concerts in this year's Proms season, there are two complete organ recitals and three further concerts featuring the organ. Both the Royal Albert Hall and the Father Willis organ celebrate their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and presumably the inclusion of Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* in the opening concert was intended to highlight this double anniversary. Daniel Hyde was the soloist for this piece which seems to be one of the few modern organ concertos known to concert planners. I happen to love the piece, having learnt the solo part for a concert many years ago, but it is a shame that the repertoire of organ music in mainstream concert programmes seems to be so limited. I enjoyed Daniel Hyde's performance, but I am not sure it was wise to watch it on [television](#) with its grotesque preoccupation with giddy imagery; a different camera shot every three seconds, invariably panning or zooming or flying through the air, completely unnecessary distractions from music itself. Perhaps the worst example of visual bad taste was to position a camera on the console, by the manuals just below the Great to Pedal stop, giving a grandstand view of Daniel's nose!

On the following Sunday, through the more discreet medium of [Radio 3](#), we could hear the first organ recital, originally billed with Olivier Latry, but due to Covid restrictions fulfilled admirably by Martin Baker. The programme included three giants of the Bach repertoire; *Prelude*

and *Fugue in E flat*, *Fantasia in G* and *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor*. Baker's playing was immaculate and the Willis sounded brilliant. Perhaps the *Fantasia*, the so-called '*Pièce d'orgue*', is not everyone's favourite, but the middle 5-part harmony *organo pleno* section always thrills me and Baker did not disappoint, indeed it was refreshing to hear the flanking sections in a completely contrasting style entirely on flutes. The moderated tempi of these outer sections allowed every individual note to be heard, unlike the blur of some performances I have heard. As one of the country's leading improvisors, Baker demonstrated his art after each piece; for the first two improvisations he took themes from the preceding piece and the final one used English themes very reminiscent of the Last Night of the Proms.

Sadly, the remainder of August concerts were organ-free, but like waiting for a bus, three are coming along in a cluster in September with a recital by Thomas Trotter on the 4<sup>th</sup>, a contemporary programme with James McVinnie on the 6<sup>th</sup> and the inevitable *Symphony No.3* by Saint-Saëns with Anna Lapwood on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

### A brief history

The seed of the contract for the Willis organ was sown at the Great Exhibition of 1851 when, amongst demonstration organs of eleven builders, the grand 70-stop organ by Henry Willis laid the foundation of his momentous career. The chief administrator of the exhibition, Henry Cole, became a driving force for the subsequent 'Albertopolis' project in South Kensington which included the grand concert hall and a vision of a very special instrument, surpassing in size and resources anything that had previously been attempted; this was to become the largest organ in the world with four manuals and 111 stops. Curiously there was no competition or tendering process; so impressed with the Great Exhibition instrument, Cole wanted Willis to build the new organ. During its construction Cole and the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, visited Willis's works in Camden Town and commented on its brilliant tone. In the frenzy to complete the building and furnishings of the hall in time for the opening ceremony by Queen Victoria in 1871, Willis was only able to install part of the organ for use. Installation was completed four months later and the inaugural recital was given on 18<sup>th</sup> July by the most celebrated organist of the day, W.T.Best. That summer, organ recitals were given daily by a succession of famous recitalists including Anton Bruckner and Camille Saint-Saëns. Since then many notable composers and organists have performed on the organ including Widor, Dupré, Thalben-Ball and Gillian Weir.



Daniel Hyde, soloist in the Poulenc *Concerto*. Note television cameras everywhere: top left, bottom right - next to the manuals. (Mandatory pedal board camera out of view.)

The astonishing power of the organ soon became apparent, largely due to the vast number of high pressure reeds. In truth the reeds rather overshadowed the rest of the organ, nevertheless it gave good service and delighted audiences for over fifty years. By the 1920s it had lost its status as the largest in the world and the need for renovation was due. In particular, the pitch at which orchestras played had dropped towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulting in the pipework being nearly a semitone sharp compared with other musicians. The successful tender for a modernisation programme was submitted by Harrison and Harrison and executed in two stages in 1924 and 1933. To improve the balance between reeds and flues, the number of stops was increased to 146, adding a further 2,000 pipes. Electro-pneumatic key action was installed, the original two steam engines for generating wind were replaced by seven electric blowers and a new console was provided incorporating all the latest registration aids. By this stage the organ had effectively become a hybrid of two major organ builders.

Moving on to the 1970s, the final 30 years of the century became the saddest in the organ's history. Numerous leaks from the failing bellows and splits in the wind trunking resulted in wind noise sufficient to render soft stops inaudible. Harrisons made valiant efforts to keep the instrument working, reducing the high wind pressures and refurbishing electrical systems, however, it became impossible to use the full power of the organ and the number of stopheads marked with a red spot as unusable increased.

Salvation came in 2002 when Manders were awarded a two-year restoration project as part of the Hall's redevelopment. Initially it was necessary to remove a whole skipload of rubbish from the inside, including dozens of tennis balls that had become lodged in the pipes during tournaments in the arena! A conscious decision was made to retain the character of the tonal scheme with only modest tweaking such as offering separately playable Harrison and Willis Great choruses, the latter acquiring an additional Fourniture stop bringing the pipe count to 9999 (the largest in the UK until Liverpool Cathedral increased their organ to 10,268 pipes in 2007).

## Organist's story

Paul Hale wrote in *Organists' Review* in 2004:

"As we explored the musical qualities of the RAH organ at *piano* to *mezzo-forte* levels, we discovered a fabulous Aladdin's cave of tonal colours, blending in myriad ways and offering a truly inexhaustible palette for the imaginative player. We slowly realised that to approach the organ from this end was to do it the best service – to appreciate it as a truly musical and subtle instrument before revelling in its more heroic ensembles."

The most significant innovations were new soundboards throughout, an extensively remodelled winding system, restoration of 1924 wind pressures (25 inches for Tubas and Trumpets), refurbishment of the console with new key and stop actions and an up-to-date capture system.

View the specification [here](#).

Laurence Rogers

## Whodunnit? - Musical Sleuth Tony Westerman is on the trail

Earlier this year Alan Dronsfield discovered this attractive but unsigned piece of music and challenged Tony Westerman to identify the composer. Tony's analysis is on the facing page. Can you guess the composer?

**Elegy**

Swell - Soft 8'  
Great - Soft 8' flute  
Choir - Soft  
Pedal - Soft 16'  
Swell to Great  
Swell to Pedal

**Adagio Solenne** ♩ = 40

**Poco Stringendo** *rit.*

Reproduced by permission.



This is an interesting and well-crafted little piece which, if one devotes a little patience to appreciate the subtlety that underpins it, will be an excellent addition to the repertoire of many organists. The piece does not rely upon a slow-moving, dignified melody like Thalben-Ball's *Elegy*, or as in *Solemn Melody* by Walford-Davis, though it is of that era and spirit. As with all good artistic creations it is essentially simple, though hidden within that simplicity are the marks of a skilled craftsman.

The F major opening, with its triple anacrusis leading to a V<sup>7</sup>c chord, creates an understated sense of expectation - *quo vadis?* The light touch of drama created by the fermata over the semiquaver rest further increases the sense of expectation, and the repeat of the opening phrase serves only to increase the lack of a harmonic direction. The addition of another dominant to the chord in bar 3 enhances the sense of suspense and yet offers a constant in the midst of uncertainty. The reward for the suspenseful listener is a simple falling phrase (almost an inversion of the pedal in the opening bars) that is supported by a rising line in the bass; there is a clear sense of direction at last, though the composer avoids an F major chord in root position.

The main body of the piece is constructed on a series of relatively short phrases that are sometimes repeated in sequence or allowed to evolve as we see in bars 7-9 whilst the composer is effecting a key change. An increase in quaver movement in these bars and the introduction of more complex chords sees a sudden move from what might be described as introspection, to a much bolder, unashamedly romantic passage that brings one to rest on the dominant, C major.

At bar 11 we have a return to the opening material (now in C major) though with a new idea in bar 12 that moves immediately to resolution. The technique of 'thumbing down' (playing on a lower manual whilst holding notes on a higher one) is a technique often used by cinema organists, and possibly Borough Organists - is this a clue to the authorship?

The passage from bar 15 to 19 is based upon the material from bar 3, though its evolution is suddenly more chromatic. Gone is the sudden soaring romanticism of bars 7-9, the tonality here moves steadily to the more subdued key of G minor.

Bars 19 - 23 see the opening figure struggling to rise and evolve once more, which is finally achieved on the first beat of bar 23 in F major with chord V<sup>7</sup>c. Here we have a

dominant pedal point providing the sustaining comfort first heard in the opening bars. Over the pedal point we move back to the falling figure from bar 3, now played in octaves, and showing more confidence and purpose, driving towards the climax of the piece on the first beat of bar 28. The descent from this climactic point leads us to rest on the tonic chord of F major for the first time at bar 32, after which an echo of the opening bar leads to a calm and final rest.

Time to offer a thought as to the composer - and then find my tin hat. The writing suggests that it is written by an organist, or at least one who understands the mechanics of managing the instrument: there are plenty of opportunities for the player to manage registration changes and achieve graduated dynamic changes; the thumbing down; manual changes are marked sensibly, and the writing plays to the strengths of the instrument.

My initial thought is Percy Whitlock, but I suspect it might be a work by a pupil or colleague in Whitlock's style, possibly an *in memoriam* piece.

*Tony Westerman*

*Do you agree with Tony? Turn to the next page to read the full story from Alan.*

## Recent Events

### Recital by Ben Mills 14<sup>th</sup> July

The Spring series of Wednesday lunchtime organ recitals at St Modwen's, Burton upon Trent, concluded in grand style with a triumphant performance by Ben Mills.

Opening with Reger's *Toccata and fugue in D*, he took its heavy chromaticism comfortably in his stride and gave us a performance full of fire, virtuosity and excitement. The Toccata in the minor key called for many changes of registration for which Ben showed a masterly command, especially in the final crescendo. In the major key, there was a much longer crescendo and stringendo towards the conclusion of the fugue which Ben measured superbly and I found myself gripping the edge of my seat as the final chord approached!

Ben's second piece, *Variations on a theme of Clement Jannequin* by Jehan Alain, once again showed his skilful ear for registration. Alain's works often have tricky registration demands but Ben found exactly what was needed from the St Mods organ. Alain's

wonderful harmonies beautifully elevated Jannequin's lovely theme and Ben's sensitive playing, especially with the intricate ornamentations of the variations, made a very satisfying performance.

Then we had two chorale-based pieces by Bach; The choral prelude *Schmucke dich, o liebe Seele*, set with solo *cantus firmus* with accompaniment, was described in our programme note as a piece which "speaks to the soul", and Ben's unhurried performance had all the feeling to allow it to do just that. The following *Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend* is one of those miracles of counterpoint and ingenuity. Ben's interpretation was quite different from the flowing dance-like quality that I look forward to in this piece. Its 'matter-of-fact' phrasing didn't work for me and the very bright registration for the manual parts spoilt the clarity of the voices.

The recital concluded with Franck's *Choral in A minor*, a massive work, full of drama and

emotional intensity. I felt that some of this intensity was lost as a result of a slow tempo better suited to a much bigger acoustic space; the rests in the early section became pauses rather than dramatic semi-colons. In the middle section the slowish tempo once again impaired the flow of one of Franck's most beautiful melodies. However, Ben's gift for registration again gave us some fresh insights to this powerful piece. Moving towards the conclusion, the momentum of the piece really picked up in dramatic fashion and, as new layers of sound were added, the valedictory of the final elaboration of the chorale theme was triumphantly assured.

Thus ended a characterful recital and the first half of the recital series which deservedly has been well supported. The second half will resume in September with another line up of star performers in view. Check out page one for details of dates, and promise yourself at least one lunchtime trip to St Modwen's.

*Laurence Rogers*

## Member's notes

### Alan Dronsfield's 'Elegy' story

I was attending a weekday Evensong in Liverpool Cathedral about 15 years ago and, as is usual for a weekday, the recessional music is on the quiet side and Ian Tracey played this piece, quietly and reflectively, well suited to the acoustics of the place. It impressed me but I couldn't place it, so I enquired and Ian answered:

"It's called 'Elegy', unpublished, and by a composer you'll have never heard of. He was called *Walter West* and lived in Cleveleys, near Blackpool"

I replied "Well he briefly taught me music as a 14 year old at Baines Grammar School, Poulton-le-Fylde (a village about 3 miles from Cleveleys)"

My recollections of him are few, as he arrived late on in my school career. But with his speech day concerts, he moved the school music up a notch having hitherto fallen away rather.

Now, thanks to the lockdowns, there's a group of about eight of my classmates who meet up by *Zoom* every six weeks or so, for trips down memory lane. One is the organ scholar of the time and on recounting the story he expressed a mild interest. So I contacted Ian for a photocopy of the hard-to-read manuscript score and passed it on to Martyn Noble to put it through *Sibelius*, generating the full-size copy which you can download [here](#).

West's dates are 1910-1995, and as the piece is dated 1940, he could have been pupil of Whitlock. When I first heard it, 'John Ireland' went through my mind. Yes, Walter West was an organist, of course, and a locally respected one. Michael Rhodes of Stoke has played it and detects several influences from Whitlock's contemporaries. He asked me "Was he a choir trainer?" as he felt there were aspects that showed this skill. Indeed he was, both with school choirs and with local ladies' choirs.

I know nothing more about Walter West, alas, but it would have been nice to track down further compositions. There's nothing in the British Library by him and he doesn't get an entry in Henderson's *Directory of Composers for Organ*.

Alan Dronsfield

## Recent Events

### Derby Cathedral Recitals 2021

The return of organ recitals to Derby Cathedral after the enforced restrictions caused by Covid-19 has been a most welcome move towards 'normal'. Each of the recitals has featured an Organ Symphony by Louis Vierne (1870-1937), repertoire prepared for the 2020 series to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Vierne's birth, but delayed for reasons all too familiar. Many lovers of the organ repertoire know single movements of the six symphonies; this recital series has provided a unique opportunity to hear a complete performance of each of the Symphonies.

Vierne's musical ability as performer and composer are well known, as are the details of his unhappy private life, his blindness, the suicide of his eldest son and his death at the console of Notre Dame during a recital; the six Organ Symphonies provide an intimate glimpse into the mind of a man beset by challenges that would have finished a weaker spirit. Many of the movements are introspective and, whilst built upon sound formal structures, are challenging to the modern listener, speaking of great sadness and depression. In contrast, there are movements that are vivacious, full of life and energy, whilst others are whimsical and mischievous.

**Edward Turner** opened the series in fine fashion with a well-balanced programme, giving expressive performances of Bach, Reuchsel and Brewer. Mr Turner's familiarity with the Compton organ showed clearly in his registrations and the judicious degree of articulation employed; there was also great sensitivity shown in phrasing melodies and an ability to communicate the music to an audience - witness the *Scherzo* from *Symphony No. 6 in B minor* which describes grinning gargoyles scampering around Notre Dame at night.

**Peter Wright** offered pieces by Preston, Bach, Karg-Elert and Vierne's *Symphony No. 4 in G minor*. Preston's *Alleluyas* came across particularly well and provided a fine opening to the recital. The fourth symphony, once thought to have been written in 1914 is now believed to date from the period of Vierne's divorce in 1909. It is a dark work, the final movement of which depicts the torment that he was clearly experiencing at that time.

The third recital was offered by **Simon Hogan**, who made a considerable impression on his first visit to Derby some years ago; Mr Hogan did not disappoint on this visit either. From the crisp opening of Bach's *Sinfonia from Cantata 29*, through pieces by Alcock, Pott, Dove and Bairstow, Mr Hogan displayed a fine sense for appropriate registration and a superb technique. *Symphony No. 3 in F# minor* was written in 1911 during a holiday with Dupré's family; Dupré premiered the work the following year and it is perhaps one of the most balanced of the Vierne symphonies - Mr Hogan was more than equal to the challenges it offered.

**Jeremy Lloyd** offered Bach's *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C major*, *Pastorale* by Franck, *March on a theme of Handel* by Guilment and Vierne's *Symphony No. 1 in D minor* (1898/9) which was dedicated to Guilment. This was perhaps one of the happier times of Vierne's life, though one still can sense a darkness hiding in some of the movements. The *Final* is perhaps the most well-known movement of the symphonies with its bold Pedal theme and sparkling manual semiquavers.

The works of Petr Eben are challenging to both listener and performer, but **Francesca Massey's** performance of *Sunday Music* was stunning in every respect and, from the first notes, had the audience's rapt attention. Ms Massey clearly has a fine understanding of the importance of communicating a composer's intentions and that playing the notes without communication is never enough. Phrasing, articulation, expression and registration were all superb, and the perfection continued in Bach's trio super *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr* in which Ms Massey allowed both melody and accompaniment to sing to the audience in siren fashion. The opening *Allegro* in *Vierne's 2nd Symphony* was a tour de force with the succeeding movements successfully exploring many of the colours on the Compton.

**Alexander Binns** performed Vierne's *5th Symphony*, perhaps his darkest and most challenging. Mr Binns captured Vierne's inner torment very well in the opening bars of the *Grave*, creating a suitably sombre atmosphere. The warmer, gentle *Larghetto* was sensitively phrased and reflected the happier facet of Vierne's disposition. In the *Final* we were treated to virtuoso pedalling in a fine end to the recital and the series.

Tony Westerman



## *A Singing Holiday in Ludlow - Margaret Eades*

In August my husband, Martin, and I were given the chance to join the Derby Choristers to visit and sing at St Laurence's, Ludlow for a week. The idea of doing some challenging singing after such a long time of inactivity during lockdown, and also of perhaps having the chance of trying the historic Snetzler organ, was an opportunity not to be missed. We shared accommodation in a group of historic cottages with friends having the same enthusiasm for singing. This was an annual event in the choir's history, but this was our first time!

Tom Corfield was the official organist for the week, but he and the church authorities had kindly agreed to allow me to try the organ and play the opening voluntary at the beginning of one of the choral evensongs.

The St Laurence's organ has a long history - an organ was in the church as early as the 15th century and survived until the Commonwealth period. A new organ was installed in 1764 by Snetzler, the Swiss organ builder then working in London. It had three manuals but no pedals and was contained within a handsome case which survives today. Apart from the addition of a pedal board in 1837, the organ remained



The Snetzler case at St Laurence, Ludlow

intact until 1860 when the Snetzler console was replaced with a new one in a more spacious position. This allowed some new stops to be added by Gray and Davidson, including a tuba en chamade. Further additions were made in 1883 and again in 1891 when it became a fine four-manual instrument. The succeeding centuries have seen two further restorations by Walker in 1950 and Nicholson in 2007.

The present organ is a wonderful instrument, not only for choir and congregation accompaniment, but as a recital instrument. We enjoyed Tom's voluntaries at the four

Evensongs and a Sunday Eucharist, notably the *Final* from the *1st Symphony* by Vierne, *Postlude in D minor* by Stanford, *Toccata* by Whitlock and *Bach's "Giant" Fugue*, BWV 680 and *Prelude in E minor*, BWV 580.

The choir also sang Choral Evensong at the nearby St Peter's Church, Diddlebury. The canticles were composed by Richard Francis, a former Director of Music and Organist at St Laurence's. Tom also played the *Diddlebury Pieces* by Richard who, unknown to us, was in the congregation. He had no idea his settings of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* were going to be performed, so when he introduced himself afterwards we were all delighted to meet him!

The Diddlebury organ was a 1925 Nicholson of Worcester build, an effective two-manual organ of ten speaking stops. It served Tom and the choir well in accompanying the singing and playing the service music.

We were all indebted to Helen and Patrick Nash for organising the week, and especially to Helen who directed the choir. It was a thoroughly enjoyable time of music making in worship in these two beautiful churches in such stunning locations!

*Margaret Eades*

## *Obituary*

### **Ian Imlay MBE (1937-2021)**

The music community in neighbouring Leicester is mourning the loss of Ian Imlay MBE who died on 16<sup>th</sup> August from Covid. Ian was Organist at the city's oldest church, St Nicholas (next to the Roman Wall in the city centre) for over 60 years. For many of those years the church hosted the Anglican Chaplaincy of the University of Leicester and as such Ian was choirmaster to many generations of students who sang in the choir there. Under his direction the choir reached the highest standards with a wonderful repertoire and would annually become a visiting choir to many cathedrals, including Derby. He also served as organist in the chapel of Leicester Royal Infirmary. As Organist to the University of Leicester he played annually at graduation ceremonies in the De Montfort Hall and thrilled audiences

with his mastery of the great Taylor organ there. The university conferred on him the honorary degree of M.Mus and in 2013 elected him as a Distinguished Honorary Fellow. In 2017 he was awarded MBE in honour of his outstanding contribution to musical life in Leicester.

After leaving school he qualified as an electrician but was also blessed with a prodigious natural talent as a pianist and organist with a very sure touch. He could improvise on any tune you might suggest, and if he came anywhere near a piano in a pub, he would delight an informal audience with appropriate repertoire. In his youth he took organ lessons with Dr George Gray at Leicester Cathedral but never aspired to formal qualifications, yet he gave numerous recitals in and around the city. A humble man, he made many many friends, he was that sort of person; he would never fail to greet you and would always have a story to tell,



Ian celebrates his 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2010

often recounted with his impish sense of humour. His life was devoted to the church and music at St Nicholas, playing right to the end. In June of this year he manned a sponsored 'Hymnathon' on his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday playing 84 hymns to raise money for local charities. For many musicians in Leicester his passing marks the end of an era. He was a lovable man who will be greatly missed.

*Laurence Rogers*

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**Visit to organs in Lincoln**

**PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY**

**3.00 pm.** St Peter and St Paul RC Church  
(organ by Nigel Church)

Skellingthorpe Road, Lincoln **LN6 7RB**

**5.30 pm.** Choral Evensong at Lincoln Cathedral  
(organ by Father Willis, 1898) **LN2 1PL**

**6.15 - 7.15 pm** Members play Cathedral organ

**PARTICIPATION and TRANSPORT**

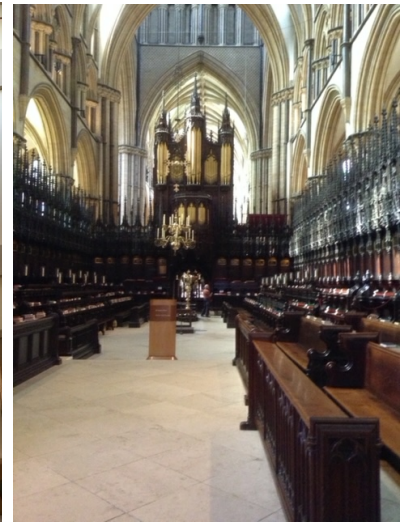
Members are asked to travel independently by car. There is ample parking at St Peter and St Paul Church. If you need a lift or have spare places to offer other members, please contact Tony Westerman. In any event, **please let Tony know that you wish to attend**; this will be helpful in notifying members if it is necessary to make last minute changes.

Please ring Tony at 01332 552850 or email

[DDOChairman@gmail.com](mailto:DDOChairman@gmail.com)



St Peter & St Paul



Lincoln Cathedral

We are grateful to Margaret Eades for arranging these visits. Here are some details:

**St Peter and St Paul RC Church** The 2-manual Nigel Church organ was installed in May 2016 to mark the 50th anniversary of the church's opening. It was originally in Hucknall Parish Church, then Sedburgh School. David Butterworth recommended the purchase of this instrument and was one of several celebrity organists to give recitals that year. The organ has a rich variety of tone and a magnificent *Pleno*.

Travel directions: From the A46 western by-pass, the roundabout intersection with B1378 is Skellingthorpe Road. Keep going for nearly 2 miles. When you meet a roundabout, the church is on the left.

**Lincoln Cathedral** After attending Evensong, members will have an opportunity to play the cathedral organ. Originally Colin Walsh, Cathedral Organist, said he would be present to demonstrate the organ, but as he has recently retired, another organist will be there instead. Colin was our guest speaker at our annual dinner two years ago and he described this famous instrument as "The mighty Willis" This very fine organ was "Father" Henry Willis's last instrument and was built in 1898. It has since been restored by Harrison and Harrison in 1998.

**Annual Lunch Saturday 23rd October 2021**

**Horsley Lodge, Smalley Mill Rd, DE21 5BL**

**12.30 for 1.00pm**

Please note that this annual event will be held at **lunchtime** this year. It is hoped that many members will find favour and convenience with this different time.

Our Guest of Honour will be **Alexander Binns**, Director of Music at Derby Cathedral. Since his arrival in Derby two years ago Alex has injected energy and enthusiasm into organising and performing in musical events at the Cathedral and beyond. We are particularly pleased that he promptly volunteered to join the DDOA and to become a committee member. He has rapidly gained respect as a fine player and inspiring teacher. In parallel with his Cathedral duties he has earned distinction as a performer in numerous venues in Britain and Europe.



**Booking:** A booking form accompanies this newsletter.

Please make your booking by **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September at the latest**.

Items of news or articles for the November / December edition of the *Newsletter* should reach the Editor by **Monday 25<sup>th</sup> October**, either via e-mail: [DDOAnews@gmail.com](mailto:DDOAnews@gmail.com) or by post: Dr Laurence Rogers, 24 St.David's Crescent, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 4SS. The Secretary, Andy Storer, may be reached via [mail@derbyorganists.co.uk](mailto:mail@derbyorganists.co.uk) Please visit the DDOA Website [www.derbyorganists.co.uk](http://www.derbyorganists.co.uk) for information about Association activities, past editions of the newsletter, photo gallery and many special features of local interest.