

# BOA NEWSLETTER

## *BRADFORD ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION*

Founded 1910

Reg. Charity 700225

February 2014

### President's letter

Half a century of organ development and improvement

Dear Friends

We had a very interesting talk last Saturday by Dr Keith Harrington, the Managing Director of Church Organ World, followed by a number of interesting questions and observations by members present.

Church Organ World is an amalgamation of Makin, Johannus and Copeman Hart, and yes, they make electronic church organs. Most or probably all of us in the BOA grieve when a genuine pipe organ becomes redundant and does not find a new home, or becomes realistically unrepairable, or is replaced by an electronic if the particular electronic is not up to the job. I am personally very aggrieved when a pipe organ is replaced with an inadequate and poorly performing electronic organ with inadequate speakers (or worse, driven through an existing public address sound system to save money). There is no excuse for this. Yes, money is in short supply, and needs must, but a well chosen well voiced electronic organ of good design and quality and with a fully adequate speaker system need not cost all that much more than a poor one. It will give much more satisfactory service and be a worthy alternative to the real thing.

The origins of Makin Organs goes back to the early 1970s. The famous John Compton Organ Company unfortunately went into liquidation and the receivers put it up for sale. It was bought jointly by Mr John Makin Pilling (who owned a thriving paper mill and was a keen church organist) and myself (I owned a company designing and manufacturing electronic and scientific instrumentation and with a keen interest in the organ, wanted to add a range of top quality electronic church organs to our programme).

We split the acquisition into two halves. Mr Pilling took over the rights to the very large custom-built 3- and 4-manual top quality organs which sold in comparatively small quantities for high prices, and I took over the smaller 1- and 2-manual organs (also top quality) which sold for lower prices but in larger quantities to a wider audience.

In those days, the Compton Electrones as they were then called by the original Compton company generated their tones by rotating electrostatic generators driven by electric motors, belts and pulleys. Very bulky and cumbersome ! The resulting sound however, was very good by the standards of the time, particularly when used with the special Rotofon speakers which produced a gentle chorus effect to offset the otherwise very sterile (too pure) sound generated by the electrostatic generators.

The system though had its limitations, the number of harmonics available to synthesise the voices was limited and the generators, being very high precision mechanical devices were expensive to produce. Compton-Makin continued with these generators for a few years as the company was not at that time versed in electronic techniques. Compton-Edwards

though, immediately commenced a comprehensive programme to development fully electronic designs. Electronic generators are smaller, longer lasting, more reliable, cheaper to produce and much more versatile in voicing, including essential side-effects like starting and finishing transients, wind noise, random variations and chorus effect.

The early electronic designs were analogue, as digital techniques were in their infancy and the only people experimenting with such techniques were organisation such as Nasa in the USA, who reputedly had spent some fifty million dollars developing digital techniques for space research. Somewhat out of our range! We found though that our analogue designs could produce some very satisfactory results, although not every manufacturer was as good (which worked to our benefit!). Later on of course digital techniques become more developed and became used extensively in all manner of products from CDs, pocket calculators (which we also made), computers, motor cars, microwave cookers and almost everything else it seems nowadays.

Our research and development team (which I headed) made it an absolute priority and spent considerable time and effort to produce tones and voices which were not just acceptable but were as close as possible to the real thing, resulting in good sales levels and customer satisfaction, and indeed some very good reviews.

On Saturday, we saw and heard the results of these changes of technique over time, including digitally sampled sound now used by Makin and others, but not Copeman Hart. Copeman Hart and others use digitally synthesised sound ie the Bradford system invented and developed by our members Dr Peter and Dr Lucy Comerford. There are merits and demerits to both systems and I have heard both good and not so good examples of each. In practice the matter of overriding importance comes down to the skill of the voicer both in the factory and particularly on site when the final and most important voicing is carried out in the building in which the organ is being installed. Final voicing on site, as with pipe organs is a very desirable and necessary activity to achieve maximum fidelity and authenticity.

Both systems have their merits. My own organ uses Dr Comerford's Bradford system. The organ installed in the residence of our member Edward Scott uses the sampled sound system. I consider both of those organs to be extremely good albeit slightly different. One pays one's money and takes one's choice!

The importance of voicing in situ was inadvertently demonstrated on Saturday. There had not been time for this to be done, the pedal was much too dominant for the acoustic of the hall, and I was not too happy about some of the other voices either. However I have heard a similar Makin organ installed in a Dales church expertly demonstrated by our member Ron Fletcher and it sounded very good indeed, no doubt because it had been properly voiced in situ as a permanent installation.

So it can be seen that much has been achieved in the last half century. A good well designed and voiced electronic church organ with a fully adequate speaker system (very important indeed) and equipped with the essential nuances of attack and decay transients, wind noise,

random variations and chorus effect, can produce a sound so convincing that most people would find the sound produced virtually indistinguishable from genuine wind-blown pipes. Go to one of the “Battle of the Organs” events at Leeds Minster and decide for yourself.

The next meeting is on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm at St John’s Church, Bierley. It is to be given by our long-standing member Philip Tordoff FRCO on *The Evolution of the Hymn Tune*. Do come if you can. It should prove very interesting particularly to members with church appointments.

With best wishes for the New Year.

**Tony Edwards**

### **Reports**

#### **Dr Keith Harrington 18<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

An afternoon billed as “Hybrid Organs” turned into an experience much more than that! We entered the Haworth Road Methodist Church Hall to find it already equipped with an organ, rows of speakers (plus one other, rather large – obviously what used to be known as a woofer!)

Each, neatly rowed, chair had an eco-friendly, curiosity piquing, textile bag hanging from its back (Ooh! Party Bags!) – and the back of the hall were 10 or so double-tables groaning with organ music. Even so long after the event, it really was an organists’ CHRISTMAS!!

Our President, Tony Edwards, highly respected by the backroom boys and girls of digital sound production (some of us have played Compton Edwards organs), introduced Keith as a friend and colleague, touching on the shared respect both for John Pilling and the work of our Drs Comerford and the “Bradford” System they developed at Bradford University.

Keith began by complimenting the venue! Never had it been so easy to unload an organ and wheel it through a pair of double doors from car park to hall. He amused us with one or two stories of occasions when the ingress of equipment was more hazardous – the North face of the Eiger was mentioned!

He endeared himself by calling himself an ordinary Parish Church organist – that he knew about the technology of digital sound, but was more concerned with the result than how it was achieved – that he loved the sound of real pipes, but saw a place for digital organs particularly at a time when rebuilding or replacing real pipe organs – as well as normal upkeep – was becoming beyond the resources of many parish churches, chapels and schools, and was at a genuine advantage in providing home practice instruments.

He described the contents of our Party Bags – a range of digital organs by Johannus, a detailed description of the Thirlmere Organ which he was demonstrating, plus the Westmorland range and the Custom Built organs; and the last three editions of Church Organ News, Makin’s own publication, which had interesting technical articles comparing real pipes with digital equivalents, and comparative studies of sampled v computer-generated sound – this meant that those who were interested could read it later, leaving him to make some noises rather than talk about them!

We learned about the close links with Johannus in Holland, and Makin's purchase of the Copeman Hart company, which gave the Group, now known as Church Organ World, the ability to fulfil most buyers' needs in terms of price, quality and digital technology, particularly when taking into account Copeman Hart's computer generated sound, hand built drawstop consoles, generous numbers of amplifiers and speaker provision, particularly for the pedals; as against Johannus' and Makin's use of sampled sound, the latest in computer designed and then computerised carpentered produced consoles. Keith explained that sampling a range of pipes from a rank and then having the rest of the notes created by a software program is acceptable, but that in Makin organs every note of each rank is sampled.

He played a descending scale on the Corno di Bassetto to let us hear the slight irregularities which 'real' ranks of pipes reveal.

As he played various pieces to display the qualities of this, their standard instrument, he gave us little anecdotes about the composers and other musicians he had met over the years – one significant person being Miss Banks of Banks Music, Stonegate, York, to whom, like the writer of this opus, he was formerly introduced before being allowed the privilege of ascending the rickety stairs to the 'Holy of Holies', a room full of organ music that one could browse at one's leisure – a facility one can rarely find today! This is why Church Organ World has become a Church Organ Music Shop with a huge amount of organ music to open and peruse. They are also publishing original compositions – the first two of these being Ian Tracy's *Trinity Fanfare* which he improvised at the inauguration of the Westmorland Custom organ in Holy Trinity Church, Southport [where John Pilling formerly presided at the huge 4 manual & pedal Forster & Andrews, Willis consoled organ] and Daniel Bishop's [one of the organists at Liverpool Cathedral] *Trumpet Tune*. Church organ World can also fit one with Organ Meister Shoes – as worn by many recitalists, including our own Jonathan Eyre [although not Alex Woodrow, who prefers stocking feet!]

Hybrid Organs were eventually mentioned in terms of the addition of one or two ranks, of the addition of an extra manual once 'prepared for' but never completed [like Christ Church, Skipton!] or even adding an extra octave above and below a particular rank. But all too often the disadvantages outweighed the advantages – although the obvious one of keeping the digital section in tune with the rest of the pipes seems to have been solved by technology which senses the temperature and humidity around the pipes and adjusts the digital tuning to fit!

The final remark from Keith, about the importance of speakers, typifies the attitude of Church Organ World. He has been told more than once that "Our church has a state of the art Sound System. Can you use that instead of your speakers? It would cut the costs for us." To which he replied: "Do your speakers go down to 16Hz? . . . . If you don't want to use our speakers, I don't want this job. Our reputation rests on people saying, 'Wow! Another fantastic organ, Keith!' The speakers are the final link in a chain which began with samples of real pipes in a real church, and it is the speakers that convert the digital into the sounds we sampled. If you want to use your Sound System to do that, then get another firm to do it, not Makin!"

A warm vote of thanks was given by our President – followed by a rush to the console, not the least being Jonathan Eyre who explored the specification of the Thirlmere with an

improvisation on “Dear Lord and Father” followed by the Widor Toccata [the Eyre edition, PDF version available] from memory – while the rest of us, like ravens after manna, hit the Shop, staffed by Keith’s wife and daughter. They were also selling craftsman engineered Organist’s Key Rings made from stop knobs [mine is a *Furniture III* !]  
RF.

### **‘It was Marvellous’ by Margaret D. Stott**

Charlie Stott was born in 1871 in Cleckheaton and he was organist at All Saints, Horton Green from 1897 to 1953. He had been trained at Royal Conservatorium in Leipzig, where he played for Brahms. Later he regularly played for the Queen Mother at Dunecht House in Scotland during her summer retreat.

My interest in Charlie Stott was aroused after visiting the organ at All Saints for the DAC. The organ was built by William Martin Hedgeland in 1865 and heavily rebuilt by JJ Binns in 1895. It is now in urgent need of TLC to the tune of £155,000 – a daunting task for a congregation of twenty-five.

I have discovered a most fascinating book about Charlie Stott, written by his granddaughter. Once I started reading I couldn’t put it down!

I have a limited number of copies of this book to sell at £6 and the money will go to the All Saints Organ Fund, but as the supermarkets say, ‘When they’re gone they’re gone’ so don’t procrastinate -----

**ES**

### **Tour de France – Le Grande Depart**

July sees the start of the Tour de France, but already we are seeing lots of hardy cyclists on our roads. Whether we like it or not we will inevitably be caught up in the excitement as the months go by.

Cyclists are not the only people who pedal – organists pedal too. I propose to use this opportunity to promote organists and their role.

There is going to be a Pedal Power Tour of Churches – or more than one. All pedalling will take place at the organ!!

This event will get a lot of publicity and churches are being asked to provide access, welcome and refreshments. The organists will play for up to, but no more than 30 minutes at each church on the tour.

Transport will be arranged between churches so that there is an almost continuous recital and players do not have to transport themselves.

I have some players signed up already and I am waiting for YOU to add YOUR name to my list.

Join in and show the world that organists can have fun.

Our Tours will not take place at the beginning of July; we are not in competition with the cyclists.

As soon as I have more information you will hear from me.

Start preparing your offering and note that you will be able to play the same pieces at each church. You should be expert by the end of the event –

**SS**

### **Secretary's notes**

Please amend your Directory.

Rev. G. Atherton, 113a, Stocks Bank Road, Mirfield WF14 0EU tele:01924 650225

Email grahamatherton1@aol.co.uk

Mr. P. Spivey tele: 01274 413289

New member

Mr. R. West, 45, Thorpe Road, Thornton BD13 3AT tele: 01274 818098

e-mail: rwst1@blueyonder.co.uk

Junior Member

Garreth Romain, 199, Rhodesway, Bradford BD8 0DA tele: 01274 481649

e-mail: garrethromain@hotmail.co.uk

### **Website**

Lucy is very busy at the moment and is not able to look after the website. We thank her for all her work in the past.

Please note that the web address has changed slightly, but this should not prove to be a problem. Lucy has put a link to the new address which is [www.bradfordorganists.org.uk](http://www.bradfordorganists.org.uk)

### **Mini outings**

At the council meeting in January it was decided to arrange a series of outings between the meetings already in the syllabus.

It was realised that there are members who find that Saturday meetings are not always compatible with family arrangements, but would be happy to join a weekday morning, afternoon or evening event.

The first trial meeting will be on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February from 3.30pm to 9.30pm and will be a visit to 5, Brackenley Grove, Embsay to see hear and play Edward Scott's home organ. There will be refreshments and an opportunity to discuss and decide on future meetings. Please let me know if you intend to join this event as transport will be by car sharing.

### **Yorkshire Organ Day**

The Yorkshire Organ Day is on Saturday May 10<sup>th</sup> at Sheffield – 11am to 4.30pm. The cost is £10 and tickets will be available by post from March 1<sup>st</sup>.

YOD 39, Pine Croft, Chapeltown, Sheffield S35 1EB Cheques payable to SADOCA.

Sessions at Upper Chapel, Norfolk Street, St Matthew's, Carver Street and City Hall.

## Recital list

### Bradford Cathedral

Wednesdays at 1.05pm – Buffet lunch 12.30pm

### February

5 <sup>th</sup>	Robert Sharpe	York Minster
12 <sup>th</sup>	Peter Morris	St. Peter's, Wolverhampton
19 <sup>th</sup>	Alexander Woodrow	Bradford Cathedral
26 <sup>th</sup>	Stephen Cleobury	King's College, Cambridge

### March

5 <sup>th</sup>	Christopher Rathbone	St Margaret's, Ilkley
12 <sup>th</sup>	Anne Page	Concert organist, Cambridge
19 <sup>th</sup>	Ian Thompson	Kirkby Lonsdale
26 <sup>th</sup>	Claire Innes-Hopkins	Lincoln Cathedral

### April

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Peter and the Wolf (Jonathan P. Eyre) Schools Recital	
9 <sup>th</sup>	Thomas Leech	Leeds Cathedral
16 <sup>th</sup>	Jonathan P. Eyre	Bradford Cathedral
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Dawn Bowen (clarinet) and friends	
30 <sup>th</sup>	Alexander Woodrow	Bradford Cathedral

### May

7 <sup>th</sup>	Dr. Tom Corfield	Derby Cathedral
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### St Margaret's Ilkley

Fridays at 12.30pm by Christopher Rathbone

February 7 <sup>th</sup>	Bach, Ligeti and Rathbone	
March 7 <sup>th</sup>	Rathbone (Stations of the Cross)	
April 4 <sup>th</sup>	Passiontide music – Buxtehude, Bach etc.	
May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Durufle	

### Christ Church, Skipton

Easter Monday 21 <sup>st</sup> April	Mark Williams	Jesus College Cambridge
May Bank Holiday 5 <sup>th</sup> May	Leonard Sanderman	Chichester Cathedral

Coffee from 10.30am - Recital 11am

### St. Bartholomew's Armley

Spring Bank Holiday		
Monday 26 <sup>th</sup> May at 11am		Graham Barber