

BRADFORD ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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May 2014

President's letter

Dear Friends,

Isn't Spring a lovely time of the year! Magnificent displays of daffodils and narcissi followed by colourful blossoms of apple, pear and cherry and to crown them all, the gorgeous magnolia. They all lift the spirit after the dull winter days.

Music lifts the spirit too, and in this connection I really must make mention of an event of importance to all organists and lovers of organ music - the grand re-opening (after 8 years of silence) of the magnificent Royal Festival Hall organ.

This was celebrated with a Gala Launch Concert featuring four leading recitalists plus a brass ensemble, solo trumpet and choir. This was followed over the next fortnight by a series of five organ recitals by leading players. There were other organ related concerts, talks and activities over the following fortnight, including an exhibition of archive material and a number of working models of interest to adults and particularly to children, in a successful endeavour to get them interested in the organ. One model had keys in the form of a spiral staircase. Great fun!

Another model was blown by pedalling furiously on a bicycle with a bellows attached whilst another person played this fascinating Heath-Robinson contraption by pressing down on standard chromium plated spring loaded water taps of the kind found on motorway service stations. These were arranged in two rows configured as white notes and black notes on a keyboard and pressing them played the relevant note on a row of pipes nearby. Even more fun! I've not done so much cycling for years, and I have a video taken on my iPhone to prove it!

Reverting to the recitals though, I attended two of them, the Launch Concert and the one by Olivier Latry, and was very pleased to note that the Festival Hall's dead acoustic has at last been addressed and, I think, quite successfully (at last after 60 years!!). The reverberation time seems to be

just right now and allows the organ to ‘come over’ very satisfactorily indeed.

To more local matters, the Junior Members’ recital on 12th April was very successful and the young people who took part are to be heartily congratulated. Having heard them, I am sure we can all take heart that the future of the organ and its music is in safe and extremely capable hands.

The recital was followed (after Sheila’s excellent refreshments of course) by the AGM. This went ahead, I am pleased to say, in peace and harmony with no contentious issues. There was one vacancy on the Council and our long-standing member Ron Fletcher, MA(Music & Liturgy), MEd, ARCM, FGCM, *et al* was elected. Ron is very well known in North Yorkshire and Bradford, being Secretary of the Bradford Area RSCM, Editor of the Upper Wharfedale Link, and formerly Head of Music Department at Grange School as well as formerly Organist and Choirmaster at St. Barnabas, Heaton. We are very pleased indeed to welcome Ron onto the Council and look forward to benefitting from his extensive knowledge and experience.

Our next meeting is at St. John’s Church, Baildon on Saturday 17th May at 7.30pm Attendance at this meeting is a MUST. It will be a talk and demonstration on improvisation by an acknowledged master of the art – our member Jonathan Eyre, assistant organist at Bradford Cathedral.

All organists need to improvise from time to time, whether to ‘fill in’ a perambulation during a service or ceremony, or to introduce a festive item with a spectacular fanfare, or even improvise varied harmonies to the final verse of a stirring hymn.

The real experts of course can then go on and improvise a prelude and fugue on the same theme. This of course may well be beyond the abilities of many of us but it is always good to try to expand one’s knowledge and technique. Aim high! Even getting only part way is much more satisfying than not trying at all. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at this meeting.

With Best Wishes

Tony Edwards

Reports

St John’s Church, Bierley, 15th February 2014

Evolution of the Hymn Tune by Philip Tordoff

This church was the most appropriate location for Philip’s talk because he was for many years its organist and must have played countless hymns, so he was ideally placed to give some insight into their evolution. This is a huge topic and the lightning tour of it, by turns humorous, scholarly,

anecdotal and serious, showed Philip's skill in selecting examples as well as in knowing what, with regret, to leave out. His engagement with his listeners was manifest: the snippets of singing, sometimes in harmony, that sneaked out from the audience made it clear that many might have welcomed the chance to break into sung hymnody.

But that was perhaps for a different occasion, and I was left wondering if an audience three or four decades younger than most of us would have displayed such instant and delighted recognition of what Philip talked about and played. He began by outlining a history of the Bierley church and its successive organs – and their respective hazards for organists. Then followed illustrations – of how plainsong had been adopted and adapted for use as English hymnody, including mention of dilemmas such as whether or not it should be accompanied and/or given bar lines. The origins of many plainsong tunes are identifiable, but one that is not is the tune to 'O come, O come, Emmanuel'. Although in 1854 Thomas Helmore alleged that John Mason Neale had copied it from a French missal in a Lisbon library, that missal has never been traced, and it remains possible that the now well-known Advent tune was composed as a deliberate archaism.

We were reminded how much music of the distant past survives as some of the finest hymnody, for example the 'Quem pastores laudavere' tune to which the congregation of the church I play at has, within the past year, sung at least four different sets of words. Two tunes from the 1582 *Piae Cantiones* volume (to 'Good King Wenceslas' and Holst's adaptation 'Theodoric') demonstrate the value of this source to later hymnal compilers. Composers such as Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons, as well as sixteenth-century psalmody, leave us some fine tunes. Even though Purcell wrote no hymns as such, part of his work has been adapted for hymn purposes, as has music by Handel and J S Bach, whose chorales exist in numerous versions which in themselves illustrate aspects of the evolution of English hymns. Relating to the eighteenth century, Philip showed how some tunes have superseded others in popularity and probably therefore dissemination, for example William Boyce's 'Halton Holgate' to 'Firmly I believe and truly' now largely supplanted by 'Shipston', a Vaughan Williams folksong adaptation. Will that itself give place to Patrick Appleford's 'Alton', now over half a century old and perhaps considered ripe for replacement?

English nineteenth-century hymns could have filled the entire time available, so Philip concentrated on a few examples such as the instantly-recognisable 'Abide with me' (why doesn't this sound right in any key other than E flat?) and Goss's wonderful 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven' with its successive differently-harmonised verses. Faced with two

fine tunes for 'All things bright and beautiful', Philip demonstrated an ingenious combination of them which might take a congregation out of its comfort zone but nevertheless brought smiles to the musicians' faces! Fortunately no Welsh people were present to demur at the slightly wry treatment their hymnody received.

There was so much variety in Philip's choices and he grasped the chance this gave to demonstrate the capabilities and versatility of the Bierley organ. He chose hymns by Sullivan, Dykes and Stainer, and for me the reaction of the audience was particularly interesting. Instead of humming the melody, some of them started to hum the inner parts, which in this period of hymnody are often more eventful than either treble or bass. This was the era of the part-song, certainly an influence on nineteenth-century English hymnody and psalmody too. Love it or loathe it, there is much to interest the social and economic historian as well as the church musician here, and there was time for Philip to mention only a few factors and not many influences ('Come back, Mendelssohn: all is forgiven'). Ralph Vaughan Williams, Martin Shaw, John Ireland, Herbert Howells all played their parts, and Graham Kendrick's 'Shine, Jesus, shine' got a favourable mention. Why? Because it works with a big congregation. Wishful thinking, sometimes.

JHB

Saturday, 15th March – Settle

Members of Holy Ascension Parish Church made our members very welcome. Those who arrived early were given refreshments before going on to the Methodist church next door where we were met by the organist. The Methodist church is going to be demolished and a new church built. Unfortunately there will be no room for the lovely small organ built by J.J.Binns which needs to find a new home. It would be a tragedy if it were to be scrapped. We returned to the Parish Church for the organ recital by Jason Lowe and refreshments (again) before returning home. Everyone felt that it had been an interesting afternoon.

ES

Bradford Organists' Association Junior Recital, Saturday, 12 April 2014

This year the junior recital was held at Christ Church in Skipton on the widely acclaimed Harrison & Harrison organ dedicated in 1906. This instrument is recognised as one of Arthur Harrison's masterpieces and, apart from major restoration in 1962 and again in 1998 it remains in its

original condition, apart from minor changes to wind pressures. The original plan was for an organ on the north side of the chancel as part of a reordering scheme, but this was overruled by the architect and instead the organ was placed on a specially built gallery beneath the tower at the west end, with the console at the east end. Although this solution was accepted reluctantly by Harrisons because of concerns about the reliability of electro-pneumatic action, the outcome was a fine instrument which speaks assertively down the nave with characteristically smooth and rich tones. To compensate for the distance from the choir, comparatively high wind pressures were used. Also, a Solo instead of a Choir division was proposed, to be played in the conventional manner from the keyboard above the Swell. However, it was prepared for but not installed. In both respects this is a trap for the unwary. It should be added that the playing aids on this organ are only rudimentary by modern standards and at the recital the audience was impressed by the team work and sensitivity of the players as they assisted one another with complex changes in registration.

The four recitalists demonstrated the many possibilities of this instrument in a well-balanced programme in which each player offered pieces appropriate to their current training and experience. Gareth Romain performed a *Chaconne* by Pachelbel and followed this with a short *Élégie* by Boellmann using a registration which, in combination with the resonant acoustic of Christ Church, provided a convincing simulation of French string tone. By contrast Joe Barraclough demonstrated the fiery Horn on the Swell in an early eighteenth century *Trumpet Voluntary* by John Travers. He also played *Le Prie-dieu (a meditation)* by George Oldroyd. This composer was relatively unknown to the present reviewer until he joined the Association some years ago, since when he has enjoyed hearing the first of the *Three Liturgical Improvisations* on many occasions, at members' recitals and during summer outings. It was good to hear more of Oldroyd's work but in a more reflective style. Anthony Gray contributed three pieces starting with *Forlana* from *Five Bagatelles* by Gerald Finzi in an arrangement for organ by Robert Gower. This was followed by Kenneth Leighton's *Fantasy on St Columba*, a short piece but one of considerable harmonic complexity, in which the hymn tune can just about be detected from the recurring triplet motif. Anthony's concluding piece was Vaughan Williams' *Prelude on Rhosymedre* which was a very appropriate choice firstly because of its association with Ralph Downes at the opening recital of the RFH organ in 1954 and secondly because it is so well suited to the resources of the Christ Church organ. Finally, Henry Websdale played two items by Elgar starting with the third movement of the G Major *Sonata for Organ*. This is a very

difficult piece with challenging modulations and dynamics. He closed with an arrangement of *Nimrod* and again showed his mastery of the instrument, particularly in the planning and execution of the dynamics in the final section. This was not the end of the recital because, by way of encore, Anthony and Henry played the *Enigma Variations* in an arrangement for organ duet. The coordination and registration were outstanding and the performance brought the recital to a brilliant climax.

These four young organists started playing the organ through the BOA starter lessons. Henry, Anthony and Joe are past or present pupils of Edward Scott and their performances reflected great credit on themselves and on their teacher. Garreth has lessons from Alex Woodrow at the cathedral. They also did justice to the magnificent organ at their disposal.

KCJ

Secretary's notes

Please accept my apologies for not being able to send this Newsletter out earlier.

There has been a problem with arranging the Lancaster outing as the Cathedral had to cancel the arrangements that I made last year.

Other visits have now been added and I hope that you will all support this event.

Mini outings

Two extra meetings have taken place since the last newsletter. One meeting was held at Embsay when members visited Edward Scott's home to see, hear and play his house organ.

The second meeting was to see the new Makin organ at Coniston, and then the organ at Kettlewell.

