

Chester & North-East Wales Organists' & Choirmasters' Association

Affiliated to the Incorporated Association of Organists



Newsletter – September 2018

On line at www.cnewoca.org.uk

Facebook - www.facebook.com/groups/CNEWOCA

This month

At 7.30pm on Monday 24th September we visit St Werburgh's in Chester for an evening on improvisation with James Andrews. Apart from instruction by James on styles of improvisation there will be audience participation (on a voluntary basis) where James will provide individual instruction to assist us **ALL** in basic improvisation as gap fillers before or during a service. So please come along to what will be an educational evening.

Next month and beyond

At 1.30pm on Saturday 20th October we visit the Marble Church, Bodelwyddan which has recently taken delivery of an Allen Digital Organ. NOTE - check your diary in case you have another date - this meeting has had to be rearranged as there is a wedding taking place on the original date.

The Chairman Writes

Sometimes articles are harder to write than others because you feel you need to mention things, but in doing so, you have to be very careful what you write; this is one such article. Before we get to the deeper content of the article, I hope you have all been enjoying the summer. There have been plenty of opportunities to listen to the organ 'live' during August, even though we didn't have a special event ourselves. It was good to meet up with many of you at some of these events to hear the music and have a chat.

August has certainly been a month of mixed emotions, and I am going to mention three that have happened. Firstly, we had the sad and unexpected death of our member Richard Bass. Richard's funeral contained music that he would have been so thrilled with, not least concluding with Widor's wonderful Toccata. The second event was Rachel Mahon moving on from Chester to take up the Assistant Director of Music post at Coventry Cathedral. During her two years in Chester, Rachel has certainly made a positive impact on the music scene. We have enjoyed many exciting recitals by Rachel at the Cathedral, not least her last one in August, which I was fortunate to attend. Some of you will remember that she was also the 'After-Dinner Speaker' at our 2017 AGM and Dinner. We wish Rachel every success with her move to

Coventry and for her forthcoming wedding in October. The third relates to things that are 'happening' at St Asaph Cathedral. Without being in possession of all the facts, it would be wrong of me to say much, however, I'm sure we all want to support the work of the Cathedral and those, particularly Alan and John, who are adversely affected. When there are things in my life that don't seem to make sense, or that seem unfair, I like to remind myself of those wonderful words 'God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform'.

So if you are currently in that sort of position, I hope you will soon be able to look back and see that God was part of those events and that he did indeed have a plan which you can now see evolving.

As musicians, it seems that life can be subject to wide-ranging and rapid mood swings. When the choir sings well, or we play a piece well, we are successful; when it sings badly, or we play the occasional wrong note, we fail - we can have a wonderful service one Sunday and an awful one the next.

We often talk about our vocation or calling. Jesus said to his disciples, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you to bear much fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you all that you ask in my Name. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you."

Life is all about relationships, and for them to grow it must be a two-way process. As a choir/choirmaster we have a two-way relationship; that's what choir practices are all about; the choir responds to the choirmaster, and the choirmaster to the choir. But is our relationship with God a two-way process?

God calls us by name - it is an ongoing call. "You are the body of Christ," says St Paul, "and each of you is an important part." This is as true today as it was when these words were written. God doesn't just call one part of us, such as our musical expertise; he calls all of us, good bits and not so good! It is people that make a Church, and the people who must maintain and prepare it for the challenges of the future that will surely come its way.

When we take on a job - chorister, choirmaster or organist - we want to be

successful, but our vocation calls us to be faithful. This needs constant awareness and judgement on our part to enable us to maintain a balance between the two.

Are we a 'religious' Association? Perhaps not in name, but most of our activities take place in Churches and many of us play or sing at church services. Therefore, we mustn't forget that the foremost reason that we are associated with the Church and its music is to spread the Good News about Jesus, which for most of us is by our musical offerings.

I look forward to seeing you at some of the events that have been organised for the months ahead. In the meantime, if you'd like to discuss anything to do with CNEWOCA, don't hesitate to contact me on 07939 645688 or by e-mail angiejohnevs@uwclub.net.

An unusual place to find an organ

Jim Treloar writes: I recently stayed for two nights in a very large hotel in Crieff, Perthshire. The Crieff Hydro Hotel was built in about 1900, it has three restaurants, a number of public rooms plus the usual shops and spa etc.. On my last morning there I was shown into a very large room which I hadn't entered previously by a fellow organ enthusiast. This room turned out to be the size of a small church in which I was surprised to find an organ which was obviously in good condition and even had a BIOS certificate hanging on the wall beside it, so it is of significance. It was built by the London builder E.

Ingram and was paid for by the wife of the original developer, a Mr Meikle. It is a 2 manual and pedal instrument of 12 stops contained in an oak case. It is well maintained and is used for weddings and I

was disappointed not to have heard it. Organs of this type are often moved around so it is surprising that this is still in its original position 118 years after its installation. It also made me wonder whether there are other hotels which contain an organ, it must be a rarity at least. I would be interested to hear from anyone who has come across such a hotel.



What's On?

Chester Cathedral

Thursdays at 1.10pm

- 13 Sep** Neil Taylor - Macclesfield
- 20 Sep** Philip Rushforth - Chester Cathedral
- 27 Sep** John Wyatt - Ely
- 4 Oct** Friedhelm Flamme - Germany
- 11 Oct** Philip Rushforth Chester Cathedral
- 18 Oct** Graham Eccles St Asaph
- 25 Oct** Erin Cox - Oundle Recital Award Winner

Liverpool Cathedral

3.45pm to 5pm

- Sat 20 Oct** Ian Tracey - Liverpool Cathedral
- The Organ's 92nd Anniversary Recital**
- Admission £5**

St George's Hall, Liverpool

12.45pm to 1.30pm

- Tue 16 Oct** Ian Tracey (Liverpool Cathedral)
- Admission £2.50**

St Chad's, Shrewsbury

12.40pm to 1.20pm

- Fri 21 Sep** David Saint - St Chad's Birmingham
- Fri 19 Oct** Richard Walker - St Chad's, Shrewsbury
- Admission Free - Retiring Collection**

St James, New Brighton

7.30pm

- Fri 14 Sept** Ian Tracey - Liverpool Cathedral
- Admission £12/16-18 years £6/Under 15 Free**

St Peter's, Ruthin

Wednesdays at 1.00pm

- 3 Oct** Andrew J Wyatt (Chester Cathedral)
- 10 Oct** Colin Walsh (Lincoln Cathedral)
- 17 Oct** Dr John Pemberton (Curator of the organ at Hull City Hall)
- 24 Oct** Roger Fisher (Organist Emeritus, Chester Cathedral)

St Giles Wrexham

Mondays at 12.30pm

- 17 Sep** Keith Morgan - Market Rasen
- 24 Sep** Martin Brown - Bangor Cathedral
- 1 Oct** Fay Adamson - St Asaph
- 6 Oct** Stewart Smith - St Oswald's Malpas
- 15 Oct** Christopher Pilsbury - St Giles
- 22 Oct** Philip Rushforth - Chester Cathedral
- 29 Oct** Colin Porter - Mossley Hill
- Admission Free - Retiring Collection**

Ellesmere College

- 20 Oct** Scott Phillips - Ellesmere College
- Both instruments will feature commencing 3.30pm - finish 5.15.

Admission by donation - £6 requested

All Saints with St Michael, Shrewsbury

- Sat 15 Sep 7.30 to 9.30pm
- In aid of the organ restoration fund

Nigel Ogden

Admission £10

Music at Wesley

Tuesdays 12.45 to 1.30

- 18 Sep** Greta Mutlu - Violin, Jessica Zhu - Piano
- 25 Sep** Rachel Johnson - Flute, Emmanuel Vass - Piano
- 2 Oct** - Chethams School of Music Instrumentalists
- 9 Oct** Chester Competitive Music Festival Winners
- 16 Oct** Luke Jones (Piano)
- 23 Oct** Chester Competitive Music Festival Winners

Saturday Organ Recitals

12.45 to 1.35

- 29 Sep** Roger Fisher - Organist Emeritus Chester Cathedral
- 20 Oct** Charles Jones - Holy Trinity Llandudno
- Admission Free - Retiring Collection**

St Andrew's, West Kirby

Sat 13 Oct 7.30pm

Celebrating the Organ's 90th Anniversary

- Ian Tracey - Liverpool Cathedral
- Admission details unknown

Organ Recitals Nationwide

details on www.organrecitals.com

Organ For Sale

Member Alex McMillan has written as follows regarding the Church of the Good Shepherd, Heswall.

This church is to be rebuilt, due to its present situation on a very busy road, therefore no parking etc... and the organ will become available for sale/removal etc.

It is a nice instrument and members visited it recently. Alastair Rushworth was very pleased with it and it has been well maintained by David Wells. It would (I think) be easily transported and re erected in a smaller church or chapel, without taking up a lot of room. If you are aware of any church in need of a recently built instrument, would you like to put the word out. The Rector of Heswall, the Rev. Dr. Martin Cannam is the one to contact. It would be of a size to be fitted in as a domestic installation.

Shortage of organists

Following on from the article in the last newsletter I have two responses - one from member Glyn Mon Hughes and the other from Wyn Turner in Devon. I gave up trying to edit them so I decided to print a follow on page!

Glyn writes:-

I was most interested to read your piece in the latest newsletter.

I agree with all you say. There are problems which are occurring and we need to get over these if live music is to continue and be encouraged in churches.

There are a few points I would add:

1: Safeguarding has become a serious stumbling point for young people wanting to practice. The code of practice which we

have adopted in Oxton is that there needs to be a DBS-checked adult present at all times if the person wanting to play the organ is under 18 - that is if a parent cannot be present. Many parents can help out but with a large number working, that might not be so easy to arrange. Since I work full-time, that adds to my burden of work and I cannot always put aside one or two hours to make myself available to sit in church and make sure no-one is molesting the student. How different it is from my own time in school when we would go to School Chapel or to a local church and play completely oblivious to any dangers. In addition, there are some 17 year old boys who are absolute giants and I am certain they could defend themselves!

2: There is also a culture of instant gratification which has grown up. Few people have the patience to spend hours and hours practicing. So many 10-16 year olds want to be able to do something instantly. Some years ago, we attracted two organ scholars to Oxton. One played a couple of pieces once. One tried one lesson and he gave up. They've not been seen since, despite all the initial enthusiasm. There is also the dangerous teaching practice of "playing to the exam". Each piece for each grade is meticulously learnt - almost parrot-fashion - played in the examination and that particular hurdle is crossed. They never play in public and would not have the confidence to do so, let alone sight-read something. Playing at a service, therefore, is a non-starter. Indeed, I reviewed the final of an organ competition at Aalkmaar some years ago for Choir and Organ magazine. While the performances (solely by Chinese, Japanese and South Korean organists who had made it to the final) were note perfect, they were soul-less, mainly because this seemed to be playing to the exam or to the competition. The names of those finalists have never appeared again in any literature relating to recitals and performances.

3: We are also living in the age of Spotify and i-Tunes and so on. Those people who attend a funeral or wedding who are non churchgoers are astounded that it was me producing the music on the organ. There is a total disconnect between the music that comes out of the pipes and the person producing it. After all, music comes out of a computer, free of charge (in their minds) and nobody actually performs it.

4: As for funerals, they become more and more bizarre. I often dread having to turn up at the crematorium as the behaviour at these events is theatrical if not bizarre, even disrespectful and sometimes downright rude. I've played jazz, Rolling Stones, Duke Ellington and so on. I've played several verses of a hymn totally as a solo as people do not sing and do not even read the order of service, such is their disengagement with that is going on around them. The Wesley system used here in Wirral is a fantastic resource but it does

mean that I have seen the numbers of crematorium funerals for which I play plummet. However, there is anecdotal evidence locally that family of the deceased is being charged for the music: I assume that is the organist fee which is added to the bill, except there was no organist.

Sad times and very worrying indeed.

Glyn Mon Hughes

Director of Muisic St Saviours Oxtou

And Wyn writes:-

Greetings from South Devon. Although I am a Wrexham boy born and bred and have been living here for nearly 40 years now. My father was organist at Salisbury Park Congregational church Wrexham for many years and then was organist at St. Chad's Holt until his death in 2005. I was appointed his sub organist at the age of 11 and have just come up to 31 years as Organist at St. Mary's, Abbotsbury, Newton Abbot. I look forward to reading your monthly newsletter from my old stomping ground.

The reason I am writing is your piece about how organists are diminishing in number and the reasons why. Your comments and examples are exactly the same things that are happening here and I suspect nationwide. We have the same problems and as you rightly suggest, I have seen congregations diminish and age without being replenished by the next generation. Most of my colleagues in my area are now well into their late 70' and 80's and continue to cover their patches. I am the youngest in my area at 62 and am able to do more than them. I am currently involved with 5 churches and usually do 4 services on a Sunday. I must confess Sometimes it is difficult. I am happy to continue as long as I can. One of my churches has been very supportive and want to continue their choral tradition and have moved the time of their service so I am able to more easily get from one place to another on a Sunday morning. Amazingly, there have been no gripes or whinges that I am aware of. The shortage of organists has been a problem for many years and now We are in a critical stage. I believe the downward spiral started when the shops were allowed to open on Sundays. Now everything is geared towards Sundays. The thought of going to church on a Sunday is furthest from the general publics mind. I rarely have a Sunday off, mainly because there is no one to cover.

You are right that organists are a rare breed of people. The organ is a demanding mistress. I spent hours playing and exploring the organ when I was young. Often in sub zero temperatures. The excitement of going to hear and play a different organ is again a part of the make up of organists. Something that maybe the young would not want to do these days. With the technological age we live in they probably think they can learn the organ with a keyboard and YouTube. Families are

not coming to churches much and the young are not exposed to the sounds of the organ and if they do go to a church they are more likely to be exposed to guitars, drums and amplification which to me is like going to a pop concert.

I also concur with your remarks about crematorium use these days. In the last 3 or 4 years the organ has been used less and less. The reasons are exactly as you mentioned. The Wesley system has taken over and I think they should hold their heads in shame and especially the person who recorded all those hymns. Effectively putting many organists out of work across the country. It's poor quality playing anyway, in my opinion. I think the church has a lot of blame at its own doorstep here and on the few occasions I am at the Crematorium there seems to be a different celebrant coming out of the woodwork. Rarely do you see a clergyman/woman taking services now. As you pointed out they are taking religious services as well. Up to now the organ is still used at Torquay, down probably 60%, and Have been told it will not be replaced if it blows up. If it needs repair again it will not be repaired. All too often I have heard the remark "lovely service, shame about the music" or "wish we had booked the organist" sadly it's too late then and these comments are not usually taken up by the companies. The general feeling is that music is not that important when I believe it is very very important.

The funeral "industry" is all about profit these days and Wesley is free to the client. Anything goes and I have been lied to many times about why the organ has not been used. The attitude is, even if the organ is used, to only play the hymns. Wesley in and out. More often than not it is something the organist has played over many years. I see this creeping into weddings too and the clergy don't seem to want to do anything about it. It is a sad state of affairs and I fear when my generation passes there will be nobody to carry on at parish level. There may not be churches open then. Lots of vicars will be out of a job too.

I'm sorry if this ended up as bit of a rant. My intention was to highlight the points you raised were exactly the same here and yours is not an isolated area. I don't know what can be done to attract younger players. There will be some for sure but it will not be enough and to be honest, to attract players you have to have good well maintained instruments and supportive and enthusiastic clergy. I have been lucky to have performed on some of the worlds greatest instruments and also some of the worst. But hey, isn't that what the organ world is. We are a strange breed for sure. Please keep up the good work in the area. I still visit now and again.

Very best wishes

Wyn Turner

St. Mary's Abbotsbury

Organist Emeritus Teigngrace Parish
Choral Director/Organist Stoke Gabriel Parish

Organist Bovey Tracey Parish

Assistant Organist Dartmouth Parish

And Finally

Glyn mentions the bizarre choices of music at the Crematorium - we have all heard of Smoke Gets In Your Eyes, I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire etc which probably reflect the sense of humour of the deceased - but I played for one at Chester Crem where the deceased, who was a biker, came in to an AC/DC track Highway to Hell - and we proceeded to have Christian Hymns and the Poem that God Only Takes the Best!!!!

I am sure you are all aware of the lyrics to Highway to Hell but just in case you aren't:-

Living easy, living free

Season ticket on a one-way ride

Asking nothing, leave me be

Taking everything in my stride

Don't need reason, don't need rhyme

Ain't nothing I would rather do

Going down, party time

My friends are gonna be there too

I'm on the highway to hell

On the highway to hell

Highway to hell

I'm on the highway to hell

No stop signs, speed limit

Nobody's gonna slow me down

Like a wheel, gonna spin it

Nobody's gonna mess me around

Hey Satan, paid my dues

Playing in a rocking band

Hey mama, look at me

I'm on my way to the promised land, whooo!

I'm on the highway to hell

Highway to hell

I'm on...

Ah well - maybe we should all give up!!!!

RJ

Subs are Due

It's that time of the year again.

Newsletter Contributions

Contributions for the October newsletter are required by the third week of September. Please write to Bob Jones at 3 Appleton Road, Chester CH2 1JH or (preferred) e-mail at bob.jones25@btinternet.com or telephone 01244 315089 or 07701 052304.