



**September 2017**

*Reg. Charity No. 274679*

## FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to the September edition of the NDOA Newsletter. Although it has been a strange summer much has been going on in the organ world. For those of you who take *Organists' Review* or *Choir and Organ* you will have read the rave reviews of Tickell's Manchester Cathedral organ. Meanwhile,

Dr John Bertalot, who was organist of St. Matthew's, Northampton from 1958–1962 was appointed Organist Emeritus of St. Matthew's on Sunday 30th July during the morning Eucharist service. Congratulations to John who is also Organist Emeritus of Blackburn Cathedral. Elsewhere, organists and choirs are returning from their summer break and already preparing music for Christmas.

St. Mary's, Finedon holds its annual Flower Festival Choral Evensong on Sunday 17th of December. As usual, visiting singers are welcome (see page 7 for details). The AGM is on Saturday 11th November at Abington Avenue United Reform Church, Northampton. And don't forget, the clocks go back one hour on Sunday 29th of October.

*Barry Wadeson*  
(Editor)

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# NDOA Members' Recital - St Gregory's, Northampton Saturday 24th June

By  
Jonathan Harris

Some of us (well, me at least) remember the days when the performers in our Members' Recital consisted only of myself and Roger Smith. Fortunately, willingness to participate has improved since then and this year we were treated to an interesting variety of pieces and high standard of playing from six performers. For those who were unable to attend, the programme is given below.

The audience kindly donated £42.01 to the David Morgan Education Fund after the recital.

Particular thanks to Fr Andrew Behrens for his incredibly kind and warm hospitality on the day. There was plenty of rehearsal time for all the performers prior to the recital, he gave an interesting introduction to the recital explaining the history of the organ, and laid on refreshments for us all afterwards. Thank you Fr Andrew - we'll come again!



Shanna Hart: *Four Variations on Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig* BWV 768 by J.S.Bach

Alan Cufaunde: *Epilogue* by Norman Gilbert

John Welch: *All' Elevazione e Pastorale in Cma* by Domenico Zipoli

Robert Page: *Sketch in F minor* by Robert Schumann and *Moderato in D major (from Suite for Organ op. 14)* by Edward Elgar

Jonathan Harris: Movements from *Annum per Annum* by Arvo Pärt and *Suite de deuxième ton* by Louis-Nicolas Clérambault

Philip Bricher: *Élévation from Hommage à Frescobaldi* by Jean Langlais and *Modal Prelude & Fugue op. 72:2* by Flor Peeters.

Thank you to all the members and audience who came along to support the recital.

## Dr JOHN BERTALOT

On Sunday July 30th Dr John Bertalot was appointed Organist Emeritus of St. Matthew's Church, Northampton. John was organist and choirmaster at St. Matthews from 1958 to 1964 where he is fondly remembered for his enthusiastic and energetic musicianship with St. Matthew's Choir and the Bach Choir, not to mention his support for smaller choirs attached to St. Matthew's such as the Lawrence Lloyd singers. For those of you with memories long enough to remember, John he was appointed organist of Blackburn Cathedral in 1964 where he is also Organist Emeritus.

John said: "This particular weekend was made the more special for me because the 60-voice choir of Trinity Church, Princeton (where I was Director of Music 1983-1998) was on a tour and joined with St. Matthew's choir to sing the Eucharist (Howells' *Collegium Regale Communion Service*, Bairstow's *Blessed City*, and my setting of *Soul of my Saviour*). One of my former St. Matthew's Choristers (from 55 years ago) drove from Southampton to be with us. So now I am Organist Emeritus not only of Blackburn Cathedral and St. Matthew's, Northampton, but also Director of Music Emeritus of Trinity Church, Princeton, New Jersey."



Dr John Bertalot being presented with the print of John Piper's painting of St. Matthew's from Justin Miller after John's appointment as Organist Emeritus at St. Matthew's by the Revd. Nicholas Setterfield, Vicar of St. Matthew's during the morning Eucharist which was sung by the combined choirs of Trinity Church, Princeton and St. Matthew's. *Picture courtesy of John Bertalot.*

John was presented with a print of the well-known John Piper painting of St. Matthew's by the newly resident organist, Justin Miller, former organ scholar of Blackburn Cathedral who studied in Princeton. Justin conducted most of the service and accompanied on the organ for the anthem *Soul of my Saviour*.

John said that the picture will occupy pride of place in his home in Lancashire and that he was thrilled to meet so many long-time friends that day. He said, "It was an experience I shall remember with the greatest thanksgiving for the rest of my life."

*John is a life member of the Northampton & District Organists' Association who has, on many occasions, told me of his great affection for St. Matthew's and all who are associated with it. Ed.*

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## Reflections of a Fledging Organist, aged 80

*by  
Peter Woodward*

**M**y wife Mary Woodward died 7 years ago. Way back in the early 1990s I had a funeral to take and there was no one to play the organ. I asked Mary to play. She replied "I am a pianist, not an organist" but she did play, and then, wanting to find out more, she attended a day organised by Anne Marsden Thomas of St. Giles, Cripplegate, for those interested in learning to play the organ. Mary was captivated and had lessons with Anne. Over the years since then she attended regularly the Organ Summer School at St. Giles. So in my retirement I had the privilege and pleasure of live music in the house much of every day as she practised pieces by Bach and Buxtehude and then by the French composers Couperin and Rameau. She began to save up money to buy a pipe organ for the house - and she attended NDOA (Northampton & District Organists Association) meetings regularly and served on the committee and was delighted to have been elected president for the year 2009 - but just as the year began she had to resign because of the brain tumour that led to her death in May 2010.

In bereavement I found it very difficult to listen to the organ being played especially the kind of music Mary used to play .... and our fine Welmar piano from Josef's of Rothwell was standing silent at home. It was supposed to go to our daughter Joan but she already had a piano. I asked her what to do about it. She replied: "You have arthritis, Dad, why don't you learn to play? - it will do you good" So to me came a very patient and encouraging teacher and splendid lessons on our lovely piano; and instead of weeping when I heard the piano or organ being played, I began to enjoy the challenge of myself learning to play. I had had some lessons when I was 14, but, at school, music had been for those not good at sport and for me at that time rugby, cricket and table tennis were the consuming interest. Playing piano pieces about little tin soldiers did not appeal. Later as a curate I attempted to learn some pieces on my landlady's piano but I had no lessons, and after that it was

Madagascar for 12 years during which time I had the good fortune to meet and marry Mary. Her ability in French was evident as was her brilliance as a teacher but it was only after moving to Brackley and the children growing up that I began to appreciate her knowledge and understanding of music and her talent in playing the piano and then the organ. I sat back and enjoyed it all. After I retired my contribution was to drive to London at the end of the Organ Summer School and collect Mary plus a dummy pedal board and drive home.

Now after about 18 months of piano playing a notice on the RCO website (Royal College of Organists) told of an old Johannus organ wanting a good home. It was not what Mary had in mind, but it had a pedal board and I leapt at the opportunity, and the organ arrived. During Mary's illness, the late Roger Smith had been a wonderfully kind support and now he was utterly wonderful about getting an organ. "Was I too old to start?" I asked. "You are never too old to start." he replied. "You may have a special talent for it". This second part has not been evident in the 5 years of attempting to play but I have managed to pass Grade 3 after much hard work. It is good to have a go at a new piece of music because there is no time to be depressed - you lose yourself in the music. When you are faced with a particularly tricky phrase and it eventually comes right after playing it over again and again, the sense of achievement elates you beyond all measure. So I have much appreciated the opportunity given me in the NDOA to play the Grade 3 pieces on the days given for members' recitals. I am told that all organists are nervous about playing in public, but as yet I am not able in any way to disguise this fact.

Learning to play the organ as well as the piano has now taken me in the steps of Mary to the RCO Organ Summer Course at St. Giles, Cripplegate - this year was the third I have attended. There is a wide variety of nationality, age and talent - but most are experienced and competent organists. However the course does cater for all abilities from Grade 2/3 to FRCO. I stand out as a novice but everyone is very encouraging. We are given a very full programme from essential skills such as sight reading and music theory and keyboard skills to workshops on improvisation and church services and much else, including lectures especially for diploma students (but not confined to them) for example "The English Musical Renaissance in the late 19th and 20th centuries" There is also the opportunity to play the organs of churches in the City of London and on the Thursday evening we attended a virtuoso recital in St. Paul's Cathedral. On other late afternoons & evenings there is a service led by the Vicar of St. Giles Katharine Rumens or the Methodist Minister Jennifer Potter with a brief but pertinent and uplifting address for us to ponder and then after the evening meal a concert of organ music played by the students. I was very much in awe of Jude a boy about 11 or 12 years old who has been playing the organ for only 2 years but is far away ahead of my plodding play after 5 years.

Anne Marsden Thomas has been in charge of the Summer School since its beginning but after last year she stood aside, and there has been a devolved leadership with Catherine Ennis and Simon Williams and a "student" Christopher Embrey doing the mammoth task of co-ordination . It seems to have worked very

well indeed - and Anne was with us too imparting her expertise.

The Course is not cheap at first sight but it is worth every penny when one considers the talent on offer and the encouragement given.

Anyway I am already putting aside money to enrol on next year's course. This runs from Monday July 30th to Saturday August 4th. I expect details to appear on the RCO website from the 1st of December: [courses@rco.org.uk](mailto:courses@rco.org.uk)

## Flower Festival Choral Evensong at St Mary the Virgin, Finedon Sunday 17th September 2017 at 6pm

As usual, singers are welcome and invited to join us to sing at this service, led by Revd Richard Coles. Please let any other singers know too; all are welcome.

### Rehearsals

For those who can make it, Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September 7.00pm to 8.15pm.  
The rehearsal on the day is at 4.30pm before the Festival Evensong at 6pm.  
The choir will be conducted as usual by Robert Page with myself at the organ.

### Music List

Introit: Javier Busto *Ave Maria*  
Responses: Lee Dunleavy  
Psalm 150 (Stanford)  
Office Hymn: 227 Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days! (Tune: *Paderborn*)  
Canticles: Henry Purcell in G minor  
Anthem: Handel *Let Thy Hand Be Strengthened* (all three movements)  
Final Hymn: 232 For all the saints who from their labours rest (Tune: *Sine Nomine*)  
Organ Voluntary: Cecilia McDowall *Celebration*

### Dress

Choir robes, dark suits or all black.  
Music will be available on the day; hard copies are now in church.  
Please let me know if you are able to sing so we know numbers.

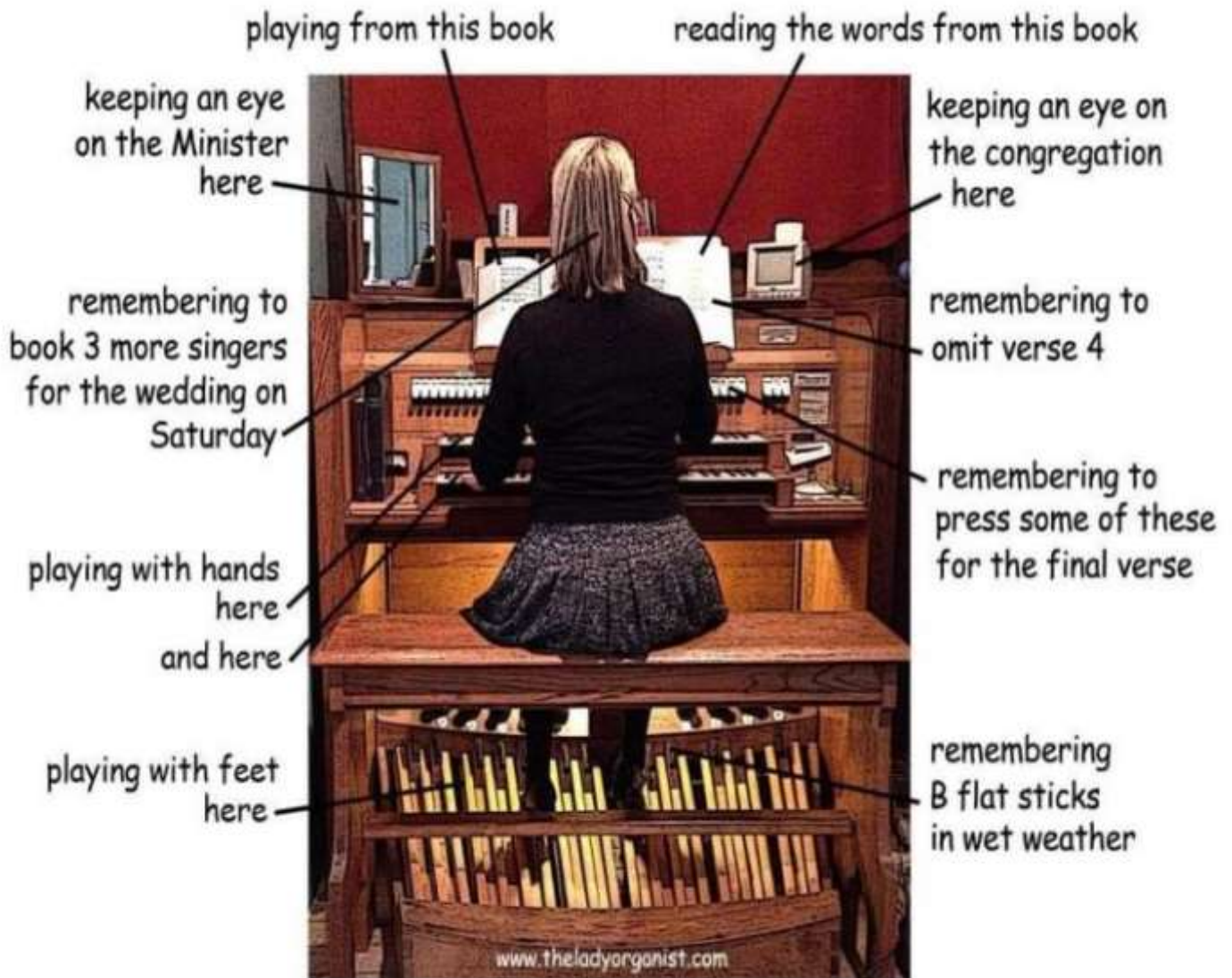
The church will be open for the Flower Festival all day Saturday and Sunday, so feel free to arrive early to visit the refreshments marquee and to look around.

Best wishes,

Jonathan Harris  
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A warm welcome to three new members: Jonathan Kingston, DoM at St Mary & St. Giles, Stony Stratford; and two new student members: Matthew Foster and Michael Henson. We look forward to meeting them at NDOA events.

OK, so this has been doing the rounds for some time but it is worth cutting out and presenting to your church or chapel when you next ask for a pay rise. Or slip it under the vicarage door to remind the vicar that you are cleverer than he or she is.



## THE CHURCH ORGANIST

Keep up to date between Newsletters digitally at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4606513>

<http://www.northamptonorganists.org.uk/>



Clocks go back by one hour at 02:00 on Sunday, October 29th.

An extra hour in bed everybody!



## AN ORGAN BUILDER'S TALE - PART 3

### *The Aeolian Legacy*

by  
The editor

There is, in educational theory, something called vicarious learning whereby you learn by watching and listening instead of doing. And I watched and I listened, accumulating knowledge as well as the experience of doing things the Davies' way. Slowly a picture was emerging of many different styles of organs and organ building. There were pneumatic organs with their wonderful lead piping weaving in and out of strange places in organs with the odd effect of a delay in sound when the console was detached, much more so than electric action; there were tracker organs some beautifully instantaneous with responsive keys others needing several pounds of pressure to push the keys down and, of course, Davies's own direct electric action extension organs. For Davies's this was partly an inheritance from the firm's origins. So I cannot continue without mentioning the firm's Aeolian past.

Alfred Earnest Davies was born c1886 and apprenticed to the firm of Henry Willis. In the 1930s he set up business in the United Kingdom as a franchisee of the Aeolian Organ Company of Massachusetts, USA, later branching out to building his own organs. The Aeolian Company is perhaps best known for the widespread use of the pitman wind chest and its development of player organs and pianos using paper rolls.

In the 1950s Davies moved from West Drayton, Middlesex to Campbell Square, Northampton. It was there that Davies with his son, Jack, began to specialise in small cheap organs built on a slotted metal frame (rather than the more expensive option of wood) with electric action. Davies's were also one of the first organ building firms to experiment with electronic organs. These were analogue not digital and still had to be tuned. Nevertheless, customers looking for a cheap new organ to replace a worn out pipe organ that would have cost twice as much to refurbish, restore or rebuild found the Davies options attractive. It is no surprise either that Davies's had a large number of Aeolian organs on its tuning and maintenance register. And we were regularly refurbishing these instruments since Davies's was regarded as the specialist Aeolian firm.



A pianola with player mechanism behind the music desk. The pedals are for pumping the player mechanism as with a harmonium.

The Aeolian Company, was started in 1887 by William Tremaine as the *Aeolian Organ and Music Co.* producing pneumatic player reed organs and pianos and, later, pipe organs. These were essentially targeted at the rich for home entertainment since profit margins for churches were, of necessity, on the low side. The player mechanism consisted of a paper roll with holes in it which corresponded with holes in what is called a 'trackerboard'. The company cornered a lucrative market and aggressively sued competitors through the courts for infringement of patent. In 1904 they put the *Los Angeles Art Organ Company* out of business in a legal suite.

In 1932 the Aeolian pipe organ division merged with the Skinner Organ Company to become the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company. At the heart of the organ was the pitman wind chest. I should explain at this point that there

never was a person called Pitman who invented a wind chest although the word was capitalised. Pitman comes from pit-man, a reference (albeit obscure) to mining where a pit-man inserts a rod into another part of the mine to operate machinery. It was Earnest Skinner that decided to give his wind chest that name. Wind to the pipes in Aeolian wind chests is facilitated by a complex mechanism involving a magnet, an armature and a rod so that each individual pipe is served separately with no need for sliders. As most organists know (a presumption on my part) a traditional mechanical organ produces sound in a pipe as follows:

- ◆ A stop is pulled so that the holes in the corresponding slider are in line with the pipes on the soundboard above just waiting for the pallet(s) in the wind chest to be pulled down.
- ◆ A key is pressed, opening the corresponding pallet, so that wind enters the key channel.

Beautiful in its simplicity, but the bigger the organ and the further away it is from the console the more difficult it is to produce sound by lever action. Even that magician of the tracker, Ken Tickell, could not design an organ for Worcester Cathedral with tracker action.

For player organs and pianolas (as they were called) electro-pneumatic action was the only option. Unfortunately, I am not much good at drawing and cannot reproduce the pitman mechanism here; suffice to say that removing the bottom board of an Aeolian wind chest revealed hundreds of armature magnets sealed by round leather discs of varying sizes. If it is difficult to draw, it is difficult to explain as well how this all works; however once you have seen the action you will not forget it. Although these leather seals were originally called pouches by the Aeolian company at Davies's they were called purses. Round leather patches with a fibre disk glued in the centre and the purse itself glued onto the wind chest. Each purse varied in size according to how large the hole was for a specified pipe. For apprentices, who usually spent several days per wind chest stamping out the purses and gluing the fibre disc in the centre, this was known as the "curse of the purse." Laborious, time-consuming, repetitious, boring work. And, as an apprentice, I also spent many unhappy hours on my back lying on bellows with the bottom board of the wind chest removed, attempting to adjust Aeolian mechanisms just above my face. No doubt this was where my claustrophobia developed.



A working Aeolian Organ console at the private residence of Mr. Paul Morris, Exeter in Devon. The player roll is inserted above the trackerboard and taken up on a spindle beneath.

The whole point of the player mechanism on Aeolian organs was to recreate the impression of a live orchestra in your music room. The Aeolian organ was truly an orchestra in a box, sometimes with percussion instruments. The almost perfect entertainment instrument was achieved with the Duo-Art system which allowed the paper rolls to operate not only the keyboards but the relevant stops as well. This meant that no human action was needed except to load the paper roll and start it off. For those who have never seen an Aeolian with the mechanism installed it is a strange experience to hear, for example, the *William Tell Overture* at full blast as a ghostly organist presses down the keys and operates the stops. Transcriptions

for these player rolls included some by the foremost musicians and performers of the day. Aeolian Diapasons were on a smaller scale than those in traditional organs since the orchestral effect was the primary aim of the Aeolian. Nevertheless they could be played independently of the player mechanism as with any other organ.

One such organ, in a private house, was at the residence of Sir Aynsley Bridgland, a property developer, who lived along Bishops Avenue (Millionaires Row) in the London Borough of Barnet. Apart from the novelty of being admitted (via the tradesman's entrance) by the butler it still remains as one of my favourite Aeolian organs, for not only was there an organ tucked away behind a grill to the music room but there was also a pianola (player piano) connected to the organ which could play piano concertos with orchestral accompaniment if the right roll was inserted. But, if you preferred Chopin the piano had its own trackerboard mechanism for solos. The piano was a grand piano with a huge flywheel hidden beneath that aided the pumping mechanism to the keys. The young Lloyd-Webber's (Andrew the composer and Julian the cellist) were, apparently, frequent visitors to the Bridgland's house.

Most NDOA members, though, will be acquainted with the Aeolian organ now in Christ Church along Wellingborough Road. Christ Church originally had a Forster and Andrews (of Hull) organ installed in 1925 which was second hand from Hope Park and Martyrs' Parish Church, St. Andrews, Scotland. This organ, a 15 stop IIP, might best be described as unworthy of Matthew Holding's building which, had there been enough money to complete the west end with a tower, would certainly have rivalled St. Matthew's for aestheticism. It was, therefore, probably a surprise as well as a delight to the people of Christ Church when they were offered the Aeolian organ from the house of Mr R. Barrett (owner of Barrett's Shoes) in 1929. The Barrett Organ as it came to be known had been installed in the Barrett's Kingsthorpe residence some years before. It came complete with percussion instruments and a player mechanism. At IIIIP with around 60 stops this was a mighty organ even for a large residence.

In 1936 it was enlarged and revoiced by J. W. Walker & Co. It appears that this was when the percussion stops and player mechanism were removed. It is also highly likely that this was when Walkers, who had a reputation for their fine Diapasons, added Diapasons to the Great. Now with 68 stops it still remains a typical Aeolian organ with Bombardes, Tubas, Bassoons, Oboes, Clarions, Flutes, Violes, Piccolos and other orchestral sounds. I remember being impressed by it during a performance of Britten's Noyes Fludde conducted by Michael Nicholas in the 1960s.

I recall an Aeolian organ of similar size to the Barrett organ in Warwick Road Congregational Church, Coventry. It did not have a player mechanism although a sliding panel behind the music desk on the console suggested that it once had one. It was an exceedingly large organ that took a whole day to tune. Typically of many Aeolian organs it has rocker tabs.

In more recent years, player organs and pianos have become collectors' pieces and specialist companies still reproduce the original paper rolls. The Aeolian Company closed for business as late as 1971. What is little known today is that the company also produced some of the first recordings of famous orchestras and singers on wax rolls and had their own concert hall on Broadway, New York.

Among the many reasons for the decline of the recording side of the Aeolian Company was, of course, the 78 rpm record with its superior sound and later the vinyl record. In the United States, which was the Aeolian Company's home turf, there are many fine Aeolian organs in churches and concert halls still going strong and delighting audiences with paper roll organ transcriptions of well-known music. Of the remaining twenty Aeolian organs listed by the NPOR in the UK today, only four (apart from the Barrett organ) are actually still in existence the rest having been broken up. Two are in private residences where they continue to enchant and fascinate those who see and hear them. There may, however, be some Aeolian organs that have never been registered on the National Pipe Organ Register, most likely in private homes or collections.

Deep in the Davies' cellar in Campbell Square there were shelves of paper rolls for both piano and organ of well-known classical pieces. On inspection they resembled those old fashioned computer cards that had holes punched in them, they were also very fragile and I often wonder

what happened to them. Even after all these years I still have a soft spot for these Aeolian wonders despite the many hours punching out purses and laying on my back covered in dust unscrewing bottom boards.

It was through the aforementioned Sir Aynsley Bridgland that Davies's obtained the contract for Stowe School Chapel where Bridgland's son was a pupil. Stowe is one of the most expensive private schools in the country and the son somehow managed to get himself expelled. But Bridgland had given his word that he would pay for refurbishment of the Rushworth and Dreaper organ and he did. Along with the refurbishing of St. Mary's, Warwick I can safely say that I started my apprenticeship on one and finished it on the other since both seemed to have taken up much of the firm's time during my service, at times overlapping.

Bridgland also bought into the company of A. E. Davies & Son Ltd which at this time was making huge losses. This had tax advantages for Bridgland who could write off any losses by reducing his tax bill and it brought money into the firm which was much needed at that time.

About half-way through my apprenticeship another Londoner joined the firm, John Hardcastle. If one Londoner in the shape of John Bowen could be a disruptive influence think what two of them could do. Needless to say Bowen and Hardcastle took to each other like long lost brothers and delighted in ganging up on the works foreman, Dennis Macready. I do not recall where Hardcastle served his apprenticeship, not Manders, but certainly with a London firm. They were once described by Robert Shaftoe as the "London Branch" of Davies's since to get them out of the way they were often sent to any jobs that Davies's had in the London area. Macready would remark on days that they were absent from the workshop how peaceful it was. Bowen and Hardcastle later left to set up a partnership together when Davies's went into terminal decline, taking some of Davies's jobs with them.

It seems that at some point thereafter Bowen and Hardcastle parted company and in 1978 Bowen was collaborating with Robert Shaftoe, who had returned to his native Bedfordshire to live in the village of Pavenham with a workshop at Milton Ernest. In that year they refurbished organs at St. John the Baptist, Luffenham, Rutland and St Margaret of Antioch, Crick, Northants. Although Hardcastle pops up from time to time in old tuning books his only reference in the NPOR is a minor rebuild at All Saints, West Haddon, Northants in 1972. The entry suggests that he had set up on his own at New Duston. It is likely that he lived off simple tuning and maintenance contracts and assisting other organ builders from time to time. Unfortunately, all three have now died and what has become of their records is unknown.

It is not always safe to let anyone in a church where there is an organ know what you do for a living. Invariably, the expectation is that you will tune and maintain their organ for free. On the odd visits to my home where I occasionally attended morning services with my mother I soon found myself tuning two organs which were part of the same benefice for nothing. It didn't last long; when I politely suggested that perhaps they could make a contribution to my mileage they decided that they didn't need to have the organs tuned at all. One was a cone-tuned chamber organ so they were probably right there, but the other was a nice single manual Bevington that definitely needed it.

And if there is a cypher make yourself scarce. I was in my third year of apprenticeship when one morning at St. Matthew's precisely that occurred. Ron Gates was at the organ and Michael Nicholas was conducting Wood's *Short Communion Service: in the polyphonic style, written for unaccompanied singing, chiefly in the Phrygian Mode*. That, anyway, is the unwieldy title on the cover sheet; to choirs it is simply known as 'Wood in the Fridge'.

At some point during the service it had become apparent that a pipe was sounding when it shouldn't and during the sermon I was summoned by Ron to go and silence it. Suitably decassocked and desurplised I made my way around the inside of an unfamiliar organ (since it

was at that time tuned by Walker's).

To anyone who has not been inside St. Matthew's organ, all I can say is that it is like wandering around a spacious three story house using ladders to get to the floors and strangely proportioned too since much of the pipework faces into the transept crossing but other sections are arranged along the walls of the chamber. Not to put too fine a point on it I discovered by trial and error that one of the Diapason front pipes facing the choir was the culprit. A small amount of wind was entering the pipe making it 'moan'. This had taken quite some time because the cypher occurred whether the stops were in or out and Ron had taken to switching the organ off during prayers and the sermon.

I had decided against lifting the pipe out of its hole in case it came off the supporting hook and with the help of an old piece of rag, supplied by Ron, I managed to stuff it in the mouth of the pipe and silence it. It was a beautiful morning with the sun streaming through the massive east windows straight into my face meaning that by contrast everything was dark inside the organ. Michael Nicholas was standing with his hands out ready to start the Sanctus, the choir was watching attentively (don't they always) and Ron had just played a beautiful E on a string stop for the choir. At this point I stepped back from the front pipes and instead of finding my foot on something secure there was a crack followed shortly by a clatter as part of the arched casework gave way and fell to the floor, and a foot appeared as if hanging from the organ. I always felt that it said a great deal for the professionalism of St. Matthew's choir that it could sing and laugh at the same time. Michael Nicholas appeared completely unfazed and congratulated me afterwards on silencing the cypher. I took this to be irony. I have sung 'Wood in the Fridge' many times over the years but whenever we get to the Sanctus I experience a certain feeling of embarrassment.

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## Front Cover Mystery Organ St. Mary, Lower Gravenhurst, Bedfordshire

*by  
The Editor*

Ten miles south-east of Bedford just off the A6 is a sign to Gravenhurst (actually, Lower Gravenhurst since there is an Upper Gravenhurst as well). This country road takes you to a 14th century ironstone church that sits high up on a hill. The inside of the church is virtually untouched since medieval times and has emerged largely unscathed by Victorian 'restoration'. Like so many rural churches where people now find secular things to occupy their Sundays this delightful grade I listed building is redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust (since 1974). The floors are uneven and the pews are of rough hewn oak, as is the 15th century rood screen. With hardly any traffic from the country road which passes it you can be at peace here. On the north side is a field and on the south a graveyard that I would sell my soul to the Devil to be buried in.



But, of course, as in so many cases it has a tiny organ at the west end that also lies redundant. I recently learned that of its 350 churches the CCT has around 200 with organs in different states of playability. Many NDOA members have the good fortune to play well-maintained organs and some (with delusions of grandeur) have access to exceptionally large organs with which to

browbeat the clergy. However this is a typical organ installed during the Victorian religious revival (sometimes a disputed revival) when parish churches began to emulate cathedrals with robed choirs, choirstalls in the chancel, and installation of organs. Many smaller parish churches made do with a harmonium, but for the majority of churches a real organ was a must have. Such organs were either gifts from local worthies or from gentleman clergy who often came from well-off families and kept servants. These clergymen used their personal wealth to restore chancels and beautify their churches with stained glass windows.



By late Victorian times middle-class families were often musical families thanks to mass produced instruments and cheaply printed music scores. A respectable rector or vicar was also a married man whose wife had similar musical abilities and would act as organist. Organ builders were exceptionally busy during this period and in time the village organist would emerge, usually a local musician or teacher of music who gave up his Sunday mornings and evenings for a small fee. There were not many churches in the land that did not have *Hymns Ancient & Modern* as well as the *Book of Common Prayer*.

And so to Lower Gravenhurst. We may speculate that perhaps St. Mary's Church, Lower Gravenhurst was not a wealthy parish since the organ was second hand and the parish worked hard to raise the final £5.00 towards the organ fund to have it installed. The organ by Bevington was originally installed in All Saints Church, Clifton in Bedfordshire in 1863. Described as a 'Model 2' organ it comprised of 1 manual: Open Diapason 8' (from G), Stpd Diapason Bass 8', Clarabella 8' (from TC), Dulciana 8', Principal 4', and pedals: Bourdon 16' (12 notes). In 1886 the organ was removed to St. Mary's Lower Gravenhurst and placed in the vestry space in the tower area. It was said to have a "handsome oak case" with "richly decorated [front] zinc pipes."

In 1899–1903 during restoration work on the church the organ was moved to the north chancel by J & A Trustam of Bedford which cost the parish £5-9s-6d. By 1935 it seems that something a bit larger was required and the organ was rebuilt by the Positive Organ Co of London and a swell division was added. At the same time, the organ was returned to its original position at the west end. All this moving about raises questions and the only explanations I can come up with are this. The Oxford Movement influenced not only the high church movement but also the more evangelical low church side of the Church of England. It was not just Anglo-Catholic churches that introduced choirs and although we seldom hear it sung these days many of our church composers wrote settings for Sung Matins. We also know that during the 1914-1918 war even cathedral choirs were decimated with so many men killed. Ironically, choirs were only getting up to their full strength again when a second war broke out. Yet, there is no evidence of choir stalls in the chancel at Lower Gravenhurst and we do not really know whether there was a choir or not. Interestingly, close to the chancel screen on the north side is a 300 year old wooden altar which, apparently, served as the main altar at the church for three centuries. Indeed. A nearby piscina suggests that during medieval times there was an altar close to the position of the 17th C. altar as it stands today. So, the chancel may have been just a convenient place to put an organ.

At sometime after 1944 an electric blower was installed and in 1972 the organ had to be repaired after it was vandalised. So extensive was the vandalism (some of the pipes were also stolen that Victor Saville of Carnforth replaced some of the Great Open Diapason pipes with those from St. Peter's Church, Wallingford. A new display front with dummy pipes was added and some of the



original decorated pipes can still be seen behind the dummies (picture left). However, this also meant tonal alterations to the Great Diapason and Principal which had remained unchanged from Bevington's original scheme. The front display of frame and dummy pipes came from St. Martin's, Preston Gubbals in Shropshire. It also appears that the repairs were paid for by the Redundant Churches Fund which later became the Churches Conservation Trust. A Fifteenth was added in place of the Dulciana.

In 1988 Robert Shaftoe of Pavenham carried out emergency repairs and tuning and again in 2006. By now, however, the church was simply a redundant church with occasional visitors. But like all redundant churches in the care of the CCT it is still consecrated and holding occasional services. A service sheet on the console told me the day I visited that at sometime in the recent past a carol service had taken place.

In 1990 or shortly thereafter the blower was removed although the organ can be played with a willing accomplice to hand pump the organ which was described as having a "...pleasant sound, full Great fills the church." After vigorous pumping I managed to get a few chords out of the organ before it wheezed to a halt when I visited. Definitely needs an assistant.



Should you ever find yourself in that area (it is close to Wrest Park a magnificent house in the care of English Heritage) do visit St. Mary's at Lower Gravenhurst and enjoy the tranquillity of a medieval church in the middle of nowhere with views across the Bedfordshire countryside.

### St. Mary, Lower Gravenhurst, Bedfordshire

|              |               |    |   |
|--------------|---------------|----|---|
| <b>Pedal</b> | Bourdon       | 16 | Low C to f1 (30 notes)                        |
| <b>Great</b> | Open Diapason | 8  | Behind dummy pipes.                           |
|              | Clarabella    | 8  |   |
|              | Principal     | 4  |   |
|              | Fifteenth     | 2  | From TC added 1973—stop still marked Dulciana |
| <b>Swell</b> | Viol          | 8  | From TC                                       |
|              | Gedeckt       | 8  |   |
|              | Flute         | 4  |   |

Key compass: Low C to High f3 (54 keys). Couplers: Sw to Gt, Gt to Ped. Radiating concave pedalboard. Swell enclosed with balanced Swell pedal. Tr action.

## **FINEDON FLOWER FESTIVAL CHORAL EVENSONG**

*Sunday 17th September 2017 at 6pm  
St. Mary the Virgin, Finedon, NN9 5NR*

See page 7 for details

## **SING A NEW SONG**

*Saturday 30th September, 2017 at 3.00 pm*

A return of the popular NDOA event where composer members showcase their compositions which are sung by an assembled choir. A rehearsal will be held beforehand. Further information will be sent out nearer the event.

## **NDOA 93rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

*Saturday 11th November, 2017 at 3.30 pm  
Abington Avenue United Reform Church  
Northampton NN1 4QA*

1. In Memoriam: (for those who have passed away this year)
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the 92nd AGM held at St. Mary the Virgin, Finedon
4. Matters Arising
5. Hon. Secretary's Report
6. Hon. Treasurer's Report
7. Nomination of President-Elect for 2018 - 2019
8. Elections of Officers: Hon. Secretary  
Hon. Treasurer  
Hon. Auditor
9. Election of Committee Members
10. Installation of New President, Mark Gibson, for 2017 - 2018
11. Any Other Business