



# NORTH HAMPSHIRE ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION

[www.nhoa.org.uk](http://www.nhoa.org.uk)

Newsletter 207 May 2022



Bill Cartwright on his 100th birthday receiving his present from the NHOA Chairman, Geoff Willis

## PROGRAMME

**21 May** 10 am: Visit to St. Mary the Virgin, The Street, Frensham, GU10 3EA (NPOR: <https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=E01557>) then after lunch to Tilford Rural Life Museum, The Reeds Rd, Tilford, Farnham GU10 2DL.

**Friday 10 June** (*please note unusual day*)

Visit to Culham and Maidenhead.

10.30am: Culham Chapel, Culham Court, The Coach House, Aston, Henley-on-Thames RG9 3DL. (<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=V00405>)

2pm: St. Andrew and St. Mary Magdalene, 14, St. Mary's Walk, High Street, Maidenhead, SL6 1YY (<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=V00532>) 4pm: St. Joseph, 6, Cookham Road, Maidenhead, SL6 7EG. (<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N09086>)

**23 July** (TBC): We hope to be able to visit Our Lady of Victories, Kensington, and the Royal College of Music. Details to follow.

*For further plans see page 2.*

## Programme after July 2022

**Saturday 13th August:** South Downs visit.

10.30am: St. John, Redhearn Green, Old Kiln Lane, Churt, Farnham GU10 2HZ (<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N07807>).

2pm: St. Bartholomew, 8 West St, Rogate, Petersfield GU31 5HQ.

4pm (<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N07807>). St. Peter, East Marden, Chichester, PO18 9JE (<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=E00714>)

**Thursday 1st - Wednesday 8th September: East Yorkshire visit** (at last!) An outline itinerary is given below: further details will be sent by e-mail as soon as they are available. **Please let Jeff Lloyd know (01483 570586/ [jeffreylloyd@talktalk.net](mailto:jeffreylloyd@talktalk.net)) if you would like to come.**

### East Yorkshire visit

Well - this is our third attempt, so fingers firmly crossed, please... So far, Jeff has compiled the following outline itinerary, which he hopes to flesh out very soon:

*Thursday, 1st September: Stowe School*

*Friday, 2nd September: Hessle (tbc), Barton-on-Humber*

*Saturday, 3rd September: North Dalton, Bainton, South Dalton (tbc)*

*Sunday, 4th September: Free*

*Monday, 5th September: York, including the Minster*

*Tuesday, 6th September: Howden (tbc), Selby Abbey*

*Wednesday, 7th September: City Hall, Hull (tbc)*

*Thursday, 8th September: tba*

*Possible accommodation:*

<https://www.bestwestern.co.uk/hotels/hull-humber-view-hotel-bw-signature-collection-84311>

Do please let Jeff know if you are interested in coming. Those who've been on previous visits will know that they are great fun and full of interest.

**Copy Date for next Newsletter** Please send any material for Newsletter 208 to the Secretary not later than **15th July**.

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### North Hampshire Organists' Association

Registered charity, no. 275207

affiliated to the Incorporated Association of Organists

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## News of members and friends

It is with deep sadness that we report the death of Graham Hallett on 12 April. Anne Bennett, Secretary of the East Surrey OA, and a personal friend of Graham's, writes:

*All of you who knew Graham will, I'm sure, be sad to learn that Graham died early on Tuesday morning. As most of you will know, Graham had been ill*

*for some time, but he was wonderfully cared for at home throughout by his wife, Annabel. We shall all miss him enormously – he was a really lovely person with a wonderful sense of humour and he was a prodigious talent on the organ. May he now rest in peace.*

There will be a memoir of Graham in the next newsletter.

Happier news: Bill Cartwright duly celebrated his 100th birthday with a family party on 17th March. Congratulations, Bill! We hope you enjoyed your big day. Bill has been a member of NHOA since 2002, and, until the last couple of years, has taken a remarkably active part in the life of the Association, including participating in our overseas visits. He is well-known for his love of Rheinberger, and I for one can well remember a particularly impressive performance during a visit to Ardingly College, when our host couldn't believe the age, or the amateur status, of the player. NHOA marked '100 not out' with a card and the gift of Daniel Moulton/Fugue State's DVD 'The English Organ', which Bill has been enjoying.

Our sympathies go to Mike and Mary Clift, for whom Mary's very poor health is making life very difficult, and Rikki Willis, Frances and Paul Whewell, and Jonathan and Gwen Gainey-Brown, all of whom have been afflicted with Covid. Les Graddon has been extremely poorly for some time, and is not yet out of the wood; but he is beginning to feel better. We wish you all, and any others struggling with health issues, a steady recovery.

On a happier note, Jozef Gaszka (who has also had Covid - bad luck, Jozef!) is preparing for his end-of-year recital at the RAM, as well as his

technical exam, which involves the last movement of Bach's D minor trio sonata and the pedal solos from his F major Toccata, and a chamber music exam (music for violin and organ by, would you believe - Rheinberger?). Jozef is also playing at Grosvenor Chapel on Easter Day.

We wish you well with all these challenges, Jozef: it's great to hear of your progress.

We congratulate Tim Stewart (email address [timothycharlesstewart@gmail.com](mailto:timothycharlesstewart@gmail.com)) on his 18th birthday on 15th April, and wish both him and Amelia Wilde all the best for their A-levels in June. Emily Nott, now in her second year at Cambridge, recently played for the inaugural Evensong at Guildford Cathedral for this year's Jennifer Bate Organ Academy (see below). Her programme included Walmisley in D minor, Stanford's 'O for a closer walk with God' and Bach's Prelude in C minor BWV 546.

A young American organist, whom I was briefly able to help when his parents were in Guildford for work just before Covid, made a short return visit a few weeks ago, and was able to enjoy some time on the organs at St. James, Sussex Gardens, and St. John, Hyde Park, both of which we had recently visited. The family hope to come to England again before too long, and promise to keep in touch.

*If you have any news, of yourself or others, that you would like to share, please let Gillian know ([nhoa.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:nhoa.secretary@gmail.com))*



## News round-up

The business part of our AGM at Hartley Wintney on 22nd January was, thanks to our well-prepared and efficient Chairman, small but perfectly formed. (Members will have received the **minutes** with this Newsletter along with the latest **Members' List**; please check your entry, and let Gillian know if anything is wrong). The meeting was followed by a delicious and convivial lunch, kindly prepared by Jane Jacobs and Frances and Paul Whewell) and an imaginative afternoon event.



Martin Barnes began by telling us about the history of, and the forthcoming work on, the Hartley Wintney organ. The instrument will be cleaned and overhauled: the Pedal Trombone is to be remade: the keyboard touch, which is currently very light, will be adjusted. We were delighted to hear from Martin that when he cautiously approached his vicar about launching an appeal, he was told that there would be no problem! and indeed, the person heading up the appeal, despite not liking the organ himself, is passionate about getting the work done. Wonderful!

Rob Goldfinch then spoke to us on how he sets about composing a new piece. He begins with improvisation (or what Rob calls 'faffing around'). The example he gave us was a piece which emerged after fifteen minutes or so of such faffing (why can't I do that, I hear you say?); a few months later it was committed to YouTube, then written down - a process which for Rob makes it real.

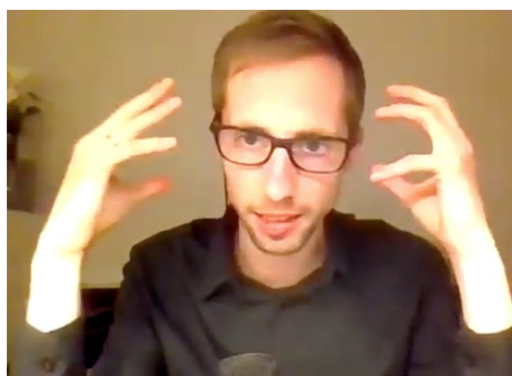
Rob then invited us to join in with his performance of Jonathan Scott's arrangement of Praetorius' Dances from 'Terpsichore', playing various percussion instruments which he had brought along, as well as our own bunches of keys. Great fun!



*Thank you to Geoff Willis for the photographs.*

*Geoff also wrote the following report of the on-line talk given by Gert van Hoef:*

What did we expect from an on-line talk by a 26-year-old Dutch organist who has a large international following?



On the evening of Wednesday 9th March the fresh-faced Gert van Hoef spoke exclusively to

NHOA members and invited friends about how his parents gave him a digital organ when he was 13 years old. He had his first lessons from his grandfather and developed a great interest in exploring the sounds and learning to read music.

In perfect English, Gert told us that his father had been his mentor, encouraging him to go further with each new experience of the instrument.

In 2010, he was invited to play on the Moreau organ of Sint-Jan's Church in Gouda and found that he got real pleasure from playing at live events.

Early on, Gert's father had been making video recordings of Gert playing and posting them on YouTube. They set up a YouTube channel and during the Covid lockdown period, Gert posted weekly concert programmes from his house organ or on pipe instruments when restrictions allowed.

It was very clear that Gert is passionate about organ music and playing the instrument. He told us about some of his students and how he can sense their likely progress at a very early stage.

Toward the end of the session, Gert talked about his views on improvisation. He bases a lot of his work on hymn tunes and it's clear that he plays with his soul.

Our John Riley, a master improviser himself, was most impressed with the event and commented afterwards " ... As well as being a fabulously talented organist, I thought that Gert was someone of uncommon levels of insight into not only the processes of music but music within society, the unique nature of the organ as an instrument, and the challenges of bringing the organ to a wider number of potential players and listeners".

Gert has over 110,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel, and so I am sure we will be seeing and hearing much more from this charming, personable and very talented musician.

G.W.

Three weeks later, on 12th February, we met up with Mike Keays, who, with the help of Geoff Willis, had arranged our London visit to St. James, Sussex Gardens, St. John, Hyde Park, and Christ Church, Spitalfields.

*Frances Whewell writes about the visit to St. James:*

St James' is a beautiful example of the Gothic Revival of the 19th century, approached by a long tree-lined avenue. We came here because in 2021 Mander's Organ Builders completed a major restoration of the church's Walker organ.

Mike Keays, Director of Mander's, and now valued member of NHOA, introduced the organ, first by playing J S Bach's 'Liebster Jesu' to demonstrate a variety of solo stops in this gentle piece. He told us that the organ was built in 1882 by William Hill, and that it has 6 divisions, 4 manuals, and 3 ½ thousand pipes. A solo division was added in 1908. The organ has been rebuilt many times. In recent years water had got into the chipboard soundboard, swell-

ing it to twice its size. A new soundboard was installed, and the huge original main bellows removed and releathered. All the electrics have been modernised, and a Vox Humana added.

The small number of NHOA members on this trip played their pieces, the more experienced of them always ready to help with registration. It feels a holy place. The church website says:

*"Worship at St John's is offered with beauty and nobility in the Catholic tradition of the Church of England, and centred on the Mass."*

In 2020 a Ukrainian-themed stained glass window was installed, its central decoration being a huge sunflower, the national flower of Ukraine and symbol of peace. This window commemorates the UK Canadian troops who were based nearby during the second World War. After the war they set up the Central Ukrainian Relief Bureau, rescuing thousands of people from forcible repatriation to the Soviet Union. We weren't to know, but Russia invaded Ukraine 12 days after our visit. One can imagine that the Ukrainian community around St James' is offering tremendous support.

There is another very striking window at St James' – a modern representation of an angel, with sweeping wing. I could not find any information about it, so I leave you with this wonderful image :



F.W.

After a convivial pub lunch, which Rikki Willis and Frances Whewell had organised for us, we made our way to St. John, Hyde Park, where we were met by Director of Music Robert Green





*James West at the console*

hill, who introduced us to the 1865, 32-stop, Grade 2\* listed William Hill organ, affectionately known as 'Betty'. Built for the (then) substantial sum of £830, 'Betty' originally stood in the now-demolished west gallery of the church, but was moved to her current position at the east end of the building in 1880. By 2013 she was in urgent need of repair, and, thanks to the 'Save Betty!' Campaign and support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, she was taken away for restoration by Nicholson's, returning in 2015 for her re-opening recital by James O'Donnell. The church's acoustic is especially fine, which made playing there all the more enjoyable.

Our final venue for the day was Christ Church, Spitalfields, where David Bird introduced us to the 2015 William Drake organ, which is in fact a rebuild of the 1852 Gray and Davison instrument to the specification of Richard Bridge's 1735 organ. If that were not complicated enough, the church's worship style is quite evidently of the evangelical kind, which begs the question of how this very splendid but rather specific instrument, with its 5th-commandantone tuning, is used in services. Answer: not a lot, which is a shame. However, it does



feature, played by Gerard Brooks, on the Fugestate recording 'A Giant Reborn' from which you can hear clips at <https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=H00969>.

Our next visit, almost a month later, was to Woodford; accessed by some of us by car and others by painfully noisy Central and Jubilee Line tube. It was especially good that Bob and Mary Batchelor were able to join us for this visit, since Bob and his brother John have strong links with Holy Trinity, South Woodford, our third venue. We began at St. Mary's, which had been rebuilt following a disastrous fire in 1969. The organ, a three-manual Grant, Degens and Bradbeer in the German Classical style, was installed in 1971, and, in the American style (and contrary to English canon law!) Is placed behind the altar. Our host, Henry Metcalfe, evidently has mixed feelings about the instrument, particularly the Brustwerk, which is tuned differently from the rest of the organ, and is certainly 'in your face'. Henry commented wryly that the Vox Angelica is one of the loudest stops on the organ! but he did concede, and rightly, that there are some beautiful stops on the Schwellwerk.



Not surprisingly, given its location, it speaks out extremely well into the church (which has a lively and varied musical tradition), although it's a little difficult to judge the effect from the console.



Holly and the Ivy'), and where he had been baptised and confirmed, and his brother



Next up, after a somewhat slow but substantial lunch again arranged by mesdames Willis and Whewell, was Woodford Green URC, a fascinating building from 1910, sadly now destined for closure, which features some windows by the same artist who designed the glass for the new Coventry Cathedral.

Here we once again met David Bird, who demonstrated the 1993 Peter Collins organ, which incorporates a substantial number of ranks from the previous 1906 Brindley and Foster instrument. David put it through its paces with a Buxtehude Ciacona, and was on hand to help us with registration and to tell us more about the organ and the building.

Finally, we made our way to Holy Trinity, South Woodford, where Bob Batchelor had been a choirboy (until his voice broke, on his 15th birthday, just before his solo in 'The



John had been married. (Oh, and someone called Winston Churchill, who was MP for this constituency from 1924 - 1964, made many speeches in the adjacent church hall.) Unfortunately, the substantial 1891 Norman and Beard instrument was not in the best of conditions, but we enjoyed exploring it, at the end of another visit full of variety and interest.



## The Jennifer Bate Organ Academy

For over a decade, Jennifer Bate, whose death in March 2020 left the organ world much the poorer, led a course based at St. Catherine's School, Bramley, inspiring and helping young women aged from 13 - 21, to become not only better organists, but better all-round musicians. This year's course, held from 5th - 9th April, was the first without Jennifer; but it was clear, from the session that I heard at Guildford URC led by Francesca Massey, that Jennifer's spirit was firmly present, and that her mission was in good hands. You may ask, 'Why a course solely for women organists? Why not young men too?' Well, it has only been in comparatively recent times, since the establishment of girls' choirs in cathedrals, that girls have had access to the musical and cultural opportunities provided by

boys' choirs for generations; these, of course, include exposure to, and active encouragement to play, the organ. Initiatives such as JBOA and Society of Women Organists seek to redress the balance: and they are succeeding. JBOA alumni include: Anna Lapwood, Director of Music, Pembroke College, Cambridge: Imogen Morgan, Assistant Master of the Music, St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh: and, of course, our own Emily Nott.

This is very much in line with what we in NHOA are hoping to achieve with our Schools Organ project; I encourage you to read more about JBOA at

<https://www.stcatherines.info/senior-school/extra-curriculum/extra-curricular-music/jboa>.

## Other news

### St. Mary, Portsea

John Mansfield reminds us that St. Mary's has recently completed a major rebuild of its 1889 Walker organ. This has been a massive project with a big community-based element, as well as vital Heritage Lottery Fund sponsorship. Some of you may remember that we visited a similar project in Southall some years ago. It certainly seems to be the way to go; if a community is actively involved in the restoration of the organ, then it becomes 'their' organ, and all sorts of social and educational benefits can flow from the initiative. If you'd like to read about the Portsea venture, here is the link: <https://theorganproject.org/our-project>. The re-opening recital will be given on Saturday, 16th July by Thomas Trotter.

### Organ sampling project at Guildford URC

Recently we had two music students from the University of Surrey come to our church to record the organ. However, instead of recording a piece of music, they booked three long sessions to come and sample the instrument. This process involved recording every single note of every single stop one after the other. This was a lengthy process, but it should enable them to create a 'virtual' Guildford URC Organ that users can play for themselves on a computer and

use in their compositions. The set-up is very similar to the Hauptwerk packages used at locations where they are not fortunate enough to have an organ with real pipes. They now have lots of editing to do over the coming months with over 12 hours of audio to work through. They plan to upload the final product onto the platform Pianobook, which is a global community of musicians that make and share samples with composers across all genres. The samples can be downloaded and then used alongside other sounds to create a piece of music. We are looking forward to seeing their final result!

Meanwhile, here is a 'paraphrase' of the URC console, which is presumably being used as an indexing tag. Rather smart, don't you think?





## Recital news

Rob Goldfinch has been very busy lately, and we have been given accounts of two of his recitals and one ensemble session.

### Energetic, Exciting and Entertaining!

The monthly lunchtime recitals at St Andrew's, Farnham restarted in November with a terrific performance by Rob Goldfinch. He told us that his programme had a theme - he had played all the pieces by request at weddings!

The opening J S Bach *Prelude in Eb, BWV 552* was full of energy and excitement, under firm control and precise articulation. The pedal reeds provided a great foundation in the main theme and some gentler registration gave a lovely contrast in the middle sections.

Rob had thought about bringing a drum to accompany the Praetorius *Three Dances from 'Terpsichore'* but his choice of registrations meant we could almost see the band of Tudor musicians playing in the repeated strict rhythmic phrases.

In the Cavalleria Rusticana *Intermezzo*, we heard the rich diapasons take the romantic theme. By way of contrast, Rob's own composition, rather modestly called *Tune in G*, washed over us with waves of fast repeated runs on the upper Swell flutes (in 'contrary motion' for those of us who did scales in our youth!). The haunting melody came in the pedals. Afterwards, it would have been interesting to ask Rob more about the piece but he had already told us it was an improvisation so quite difficult to recall a specific performance!

The well-known plainsong chant of *Ubi Caritas* was beautifully crafted into three variations by Denis Bedard. The first, with lovely rich harmony, was followed by a little embroidery in the melody and a broken chord accompaniment. The final variation had the melody appearing in the pedals under chords on the string stops. A lovely arrangement, sensitively played.

For the penultimate piece Rob had us all (well, most of the rather bijou audience) humming

along to the chorus of the Hebrew Slaves. This, a curious choice for a wedding but apparently most of the guests at the ceremony sang this at school so they were keen to reprise in robust style!

In this programme, Rob had entertained us on this marvelous instrument with Baroque, Medieval, Romantic, Liturgical and Operatic repertoire ...



... and we needed no reminding who was playing when it came to the finale. There was certainly no 'Largo' about it: Rob took the 'Allegro vivace' marking in Rossini's *Largo al Factotum* as the minimum tempo so we were all breathless by the time we got to much loved, repeated "Fi..ga..ro, Fi..ga..ro ..." but the respite was short-lived. Rob took the final patter section at full pace with *accelerando*! What a crackin' way to end a highly enjoyable performance from our own great entertainer!

Geoff Willis

### Concert at St John's Church, Thursley

At a Rob Recital expect the unexpected. It will have the spark of spontaneity.

On Sunday 30th January at 3.30 pm (a very civilized hour) we entered a nearly full church to find wine being served, creating a relaxed party atmosphere. Rob told us "the more wine you have, the more Rob will enjoy the concert." Revd Hannah Moore, vicar of St John's, welcomed us warmly. We could tell that she appreciates her resident organist very much.

Just recovered from the inertia caused by Covid, Rob said that the concert was 'unprepared, with no written programme', but it was all in his head, and fingers.

In introducing us to the small 'well cared for' organ with its beautiful soft strings and flutes, Rob explained that the sound of a piano note, when pressed, will fade away, but the notes on

an organ, if held down, will last for ever. He told of an organ piece which will take 600 years to complete. Every month a conclave of musicians meets to decide on the next note to add!

Rob opened the programme with the famous *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* by J S Bach. I enjoyed the gentler sound of this piece on a two manual organ, rather than the usual mighty workout it gets on larger instruments.

Next came three operatic selections arranged for organ, starting with the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni. Many of the pieces Rob played that afternoon were requests. The second, Prelude to *La Traviata*, had only been asked for the previous day. Rob managed to find the score online, and of course played it as though he'd known it for ever.

Lastly he treated us to the rousing Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves from *Nabucco* by Verdi – Rob's version.

Another request was for Elgar's *Nimrod*, played very sensitively, and conjuring memories of solemn occasions.

For a fun piece to end the first half of the concert, Rob needed a little help from his friends – Mark Rood and Geoff Willis – who tapped away on Rob's two large djembe drums.\* They performed three dances from Michael Praetorius' *Terpsichore* – one of the nine Muses – the Ancient Greek Goddess of music, song and dance. Mysteriously, strains of *What shall we do with a drunken sailor* wove their way into the music. I don't think I imagined it.

The wine flowed again during the Interval.

Refreshed, we settled down to listen to Gordon Young's joyful and popular *Prelude in a classic style*. Two or three times during the concert Robs laminated sheets of music came cascading down to the floor. The audience was always ready to dive for them. All part of a family feel to the occasion.

Then another request – J S Bach's sacred cantata *'Wachet auf'* (*Sleepers wake*), composed for the Sunday after Trinity when the parable of the Ten Virgins is read – five wise and five foolish.

But you often hear this beautiful piece during Advent.

From the sublime... Rob followed with Noel Rawsthorne's *Hornpipe Humoresque*. There was so much amusement at the quirky pedal notes on the trombone that I don't think many in the audience had heard this piece before. Or else it was Rob adding his own eccentricities!

Bernard Barne's 1920's theatre style *Dainty Miss* came next. Originally for piano, it is light and frothy and great fun.

Then more fun and more opera – Rossini's *Largo al factotum* from the Barber of Seville, arranged for organ by Jonathan Scott. This is one of the most difficult baritone solos in all opera – you'll know the one – he sings 'Figaro, Figaro, Figaro', very fast towards the end. Rob warned us that the organ might catch fire!

As a surprise, Mark Rood and his electric guitar now had the spotlight, and with Rob on organ, played Pink Floyd's *Shine on You Crazy Diamond*, a tribute to Syd Barrett, ex member of the Band. This is the way to promote and popularise the organ – show it can do crazy as well as sublime music.

For the finale Rob played his own latest composition. He'd played it before; he says it always comes out differently; it's all impromptu; it's marvellous.

Hannah thanked Rob again, and we all went merrily on our way.

\* *Djembe* means 'Everyone gather together in peace'.

*Frances Whewell*

Later, on Thursday 24 February, four of us turned up at Rob and Jane's for a long awaited – not a lesson – but a very instructive ARK session. Two years of lock-downs had intervened since the last meet up.

Rob introduced us to his new bit of kit – virtual music on a computer the size of a tablet. It had all 'our' music on it – the three pieces Rob had suggested we look at in the weeks leading to this day. These were :



Dances from *Terpsichore* by Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), arranged for organ by Jonathan Scott (you can hear this on Youtube); Introduction to *Suite Gothique* by Leon Boëllmann (1862-1897); and *Sleepy Lagoon* – the Desert Island Discs theme tune by Eric Coates, (1886-1957), arranged for organ by George Blackmore. You couldn't have three more contrasting pieces.

Against one wall of the living/music room Rob has his splendid two manual Johannus organ, and against the wall at right angles to it, a large computer screen in which we could see, very clearly, his hands and feet playing. And so of course we could all see each other's hands and feet as we each played.

Rob listens to many different recordings of the pieces he is learning to play, and in this case, of the pieces he was guiding us through. And so we heard a version of *Sleepy Lagoon* with seagulls, a very loud version without seagulls, a choral version...there may have been more. The moral is: there are many different interpretations of a piece of music.

But first we started with *Terpsichore*. I played Dance XXXVIII, *Spagnoletta*. This was made a thrilling experience because it was accompanied by Rob's two African djembe drums for bare hands, played by John and Geoff. This old music needs a détaché style, and I had to keep a strict tempo for the drummers to follow, or was it the other way round?!

Ian then took over at the organ with *Terpsichore* Dance XV, *Bransle de la Torche*. This is a simple tune, just asking to be ornamented. Rob demonstrated how this could be done, by adding semi quaver runs in the right hand, and simplifying the pedals by holding down one pedal note per bar, to correspond with the chords in the hands. This is all in the name of improvising.

Rob advised confining, where possible, the pedalling to the left foot, so that the right foot is free to apply the swell pedal. Increasing then diminishing the sound is much easier like this.

Lastly Rob told us to try and learn by heart any piece with a simple structure of just three chords.

Ian then attempted to put into practice all these suggestions, with considerable success, ably supported by the two drummers.

Next John entertained us with *Sleepy Lagoon*, firstly with the tune on the oboe, and then with the tremolo on. We all agreed that 1-2-1-2 is the best fingering for the first four-note motif in the right hand, which comes again and again. All fingering is adaptable. Stevie Wonder never uses his thumbs, and Django Reinhardt lost two fingers in a fire. Yet both played brilliantly.

The directions for *Sleepy Lagoon* are 'Freely, with expression, meaning – bags of rubato. John played the left hand and pedal, while Rob brought out the tune in the right hand, soon changing the registration to Vox Humana, and performing it really slowly to gain the full sleepy dreamy effect.

Lastly, Rob played the Intro to *Suite Gothique* himself, playing it slowly, and very loudly to start with, showing how finger substitution can help with the transition from chord to chord, keeping it legato. The right hand can sometimes be held in the same position as it moves from chord to chord – which he called 'crabbing'. Rob offered us all sorts of hints like this, and suggested lots of sight-reading, building up a repertoire of contrasts.

Rob's philosophy is : make the piece of music your own - "do what you like, stretch it around, add twiddles and decorations" - in all - make it fun.

The discussion turned to the NHOA organ trips. Rob thinks that we should use them to experiment with the different registrations on each organ – to discover how the strings sound like – and the flutes, etc. He suggests playing the openings of our favourite pieces in succession, on the same organ, giving us the opportunity to explore many more of the instrument's colours than is possible by just playing one piece straight through.

Although the organ is an instrument in its own right, of course, it is associated with playing for church services. In choosing music to suit this season of the church's year – Lent – Rob's choice would be Pergolesi's sad, slow, *Stabat Mater*.

So with all these new ideas the session ended. This group has to be quite small, but if you are interested in joining the next one, please let us know.

Frances Whewell



PATRONS: DR DAVID HILL MBE,  
DAME GILLIAN WEIR DBE & PETER ASHWORTH

### Friday lunchtime Concerts at St John's Church, Hartley Wintney

**6 May – Rob Goldfinch** – Organist at Elstead, Thursley, Shackleford & Peper Harrow

**3 June – David Oldfield** – De Facto Assisting Organist at HM Naval Base, Portsmouth, St Anne's Church

**1 July – Stephen Davies** – Organist at St John's, Hook

**5 August – Geoff Willis**, no regular organist post but large four manual organ at home!

**2 September – Martin Barnes** – organist at St John's, Hartley Wintney

And please note that these all start at **11.00am** for about 35 minutes

### Thursday lunchtime Concerts at St Lawrence's Church, Alton

**Thursday 23 June – Will Nisbet** (associated with the Jane Austen / Regency Week)

**Thursday 21 July – Mark Penfold**

**Thursday 18 August – Rob Goldfinch**

**Thursday 15 September – Gerald Marlow**

All concerts take place from 1.10 to 1.50 pm.  
Doors open 12.30



## An interesting wedding

### If things start to go wrong, they usually carry on going wrong

We have all played at weddings where things don't go to plan. Often if things start to go wrong it snowballs with yet more problems.

I had such a wedding before Christmas at St Catherine's church, Bearwood, where I was helping out.

Their organist, Peter Giles, had played there for, I think, 50 years but sadly died last year. They have someone who will play for services but not weddings and funerals, so I was asked to play for the weddings this year, which I did.

St Catherine's is a beautiful church in a joint benefice with Winnersh, between Wokingham and Reading. This wedding was the final one of about six I played for this year.



The organ is not a great organ, but I have played many a worse instrument. Its history is not known but it is thought that the Great is part of a previous instrument where a John Compton extension

Swell and stop tab console have been grafted to the original Great. It has 19 speaking stops.

<https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=A00449>

The entrance to the church is through the tower at the west end and the Great organ hangs out of the tower with the swell in the tower on the north side. It all appears to have been a congregation DIY job. The console is at the back on the

south side so the pipework is up to your left.

So, to the day in question, I arrived early to be greeted by several women of the parish, one the churchwarden that I know well now. She warned me that the organ might be out of tune and by the feel of the somewhat damp cold in there I guessed she was right before I even checked. Sure enough the swell Trumpet was badly out, which is extended to a 16 Double Trumpet and 4 Clarion.

The next problem was one we had experienced in the summer with odd Swell notes just firing off on their own. This had improved after a tuning visit and some wayward notes had been eliminated, but one was still having a go, I think it was Swell top G#. The pattern tends to be it settles down after a while and the note sounding ceases and you can play before the service with virtually no problem. It might fire off once or twice in the service but if all the swell stops are in it is safe, and then you warily start adding them on for the next piece, starting with the quietest.

We had a number of sounds before the service, no note lasting for longer than a second and then it settled down, as predicted.

The next problem was the piece that the bride wanted at the end to come out to, 'Clair de Lune' by Debussy. The bride had been difficult to get any response from and was unable to meet at all so all was done with texting. It was agreed that this piece would be better on a CD or similar through the sound system.

I asked the churchwarden if she had a recording to play, and it was the first she had heard of it.

Eventually a discussion ensued between the Best Man, visiting priest (they are in an inter-regnum), churchwarden and myself. The priest said he could get it on his phone, but the warden did not know how to make it work through the sound system. He then suggested

that he hold his phone near a microphone at the end of the service. I didn't think this boded well and the Best Man asked what plan B was. I said I had Mendelssohn's Wedding March which I could play although it was far removed from the piece that the bride wanted. The Best Man ruled that is what we would do.

Things then improved and I played before the service with only a couple of notes where the organ played itself. At the beginning of the service the Priest came in from greeting the bride and walked to the front of the church. I stopped playing as he greeted everyone and gave out house rules about confetti etc. He then proclaimed in a loud voice 'Please stand for the entrance of the bride'. I started to play the Wagner's Bridal March and after a line or two the door burst open, and the churchwarden who appeared through them waved her hands and told me to stop. She then said 'She's not ready yet, she hasn't come up the steps' which I took to mean that the photographers were holding her up.

So, I stopped, all the congregation did a 180-degree turn, wondering whether the bride had changed her mind. After a short time that seemed like a lifetime the churchwarden came back in and told me to play the Bridal March, which I did.

In came the bride and I hoped that all would be fine now, but often when things start to go wrong, they keep going wrong.

The first hymn was announced, 'Lord of all hopefulness' so I started the introduction. After about three chords the organ went into spasm and any note that I touched seemed to sound all the pipework in a dreadful roar. I moved stops and kept trying and just got this awful roar each time. Suddenly without indication all seemed fine so we managed the hymn satisfactorily.

It surely couldn't get any worse, could it?

The bride's sister then read a poem, 'How do I love thee'. The final line was a dramatic '...I

shall but love thee better after death' and the organ gave a wonderful loud clear single note for about a second, in place of a full stop. It couldn't have been timed better.

I hastily took off all the Swell stops that I had inadvertently left drawn and added them slowly with the quiet ones first when the organ was next needed.

Then we came to the sermon. Halfway through a mobile phone went off loudly. The problem was that it was in a bag that one of the church members present had put down by the console somewhere. So, I am in this surround sound of a mobile phone, which is not mine and gradually more and more of the congregation are looking round at me and I can only gesticulate that it is not my phone. Eventually a lady came over and dealt with it.

It was a great relief when we came to the end of the service, and I was to play the Mendelssohn Wedding March that they didn't want! We built up the introductory runs of notes and as I hit the large chord the organ went into spasm again and just roared if any note was touched. The bride and groom left in silence and eventually the organ seemed ok, so I managed to play the march for the congregation to leave.

We were masked up for the Covid restrictions and I have a lovely mask with organ pipes on it and the word 'Organist' across it. I bought it for a bit of fun and only wear it in church, but I have found that it does not mist up my glasses which is a great help. I was wearing it but quickly changed it for a nondescript mask after all that.

The lady churchwarden then said to me 'I think that perhaps we ought to get the organ looked at'.

If ever there was an understatement!

*Martin Barnes*