

Past Events

- IAO Region 5 Organ Day
- London Organ Day: ‘A Drake’s Progress’

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**IAO Region 5 Organ Day
Chelmsford Cathedral
Saturday 27th May from 10am**



*Chelmsford Cathedral – the nave
Photo: Michaela Cottee*

The Chelmsford Cathedral Day out was a very enjoyable day indeed! We learnt a large amount about the interpretation of French Baroque music and how we might interpret it on modern English style instruments. Absolute authenticity obviously isn't possible, just as piano concertos cannot be played on the organ exactly as written; but they can be arranged, and that is the concept that William Whitehead was explaining to us for the most part. William explained that we can use odd combinations of stops that add colour, for example: to add a bit more 'beef' to a trumpet (i.e French style) you can add the upper portion of a cornet (Sesquialtera). Obviously, we cannot recreate other styles of music on an English organ completely, any more than we can play Bach in a completely authentic way, or even a French symphony, but we can make the music speak more in the style by blending sounds, sometimes in the wonderful inventions that are swell boxes (but with the possible cost of volume).

A large part of the talk was discussing *notes inégales*, and if a dotted rhythm is written once and the figure returns it should probably be played *inégalement* on the repeat. We also listened to recordings of the pieces on authentic instruments, which opened our ears to the way the music was more likely to have sounded! We won't know the complete story with any music from this period from any country or style as not everything is recorded and not many instruments survive untouched. The two Mander instruments the cathedral had on offer were great exemplars for the music being studied that day and of course, though English, they showed what can be done with this French repertoire on English organs.

We were also treated to a masterclass taken by William Whitehead where the practical side of looking at this repertoire was discussed. The participants were: Edward Dodge, Timothy Patient and Gillian Ward Russell. The repertoire was obviously French, and some of it was particularly appropriate for Pentecost. Much of it was based on plainchant. Couperin's *Messe pour les Paroisses* is based on plainchant but the *Messe pour les Couvents* is not. In the composer's day, the ninefold Kyrie would be sung alternatim, the organ being used for the first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth versets and the rest being sung; or in some cases vice versa.

After lunch there was a rehearsal for Vespers for those wishing to sing, or a talk on editing the new Franck edition with Richard Brasier. The service gave us the opportunity to perform the music for the purpose for which it was written. We started with the office hymn *Veni Creator* ('Come, Holy Spirit our souls inspire') with organ interjections from the de Grigny that was founded upon the same hymn. William accompanied the plainchant expertly in the service, on the organ at the east end. The masterclass participants also took part, playing the organ at the west end.

It was a very eventful occasion indeed! Thanks go to the organisers and especially William Whitehead for preparing the talk. Numbers were a bit low which was a shame, so for future events, do come!

Luke Jones

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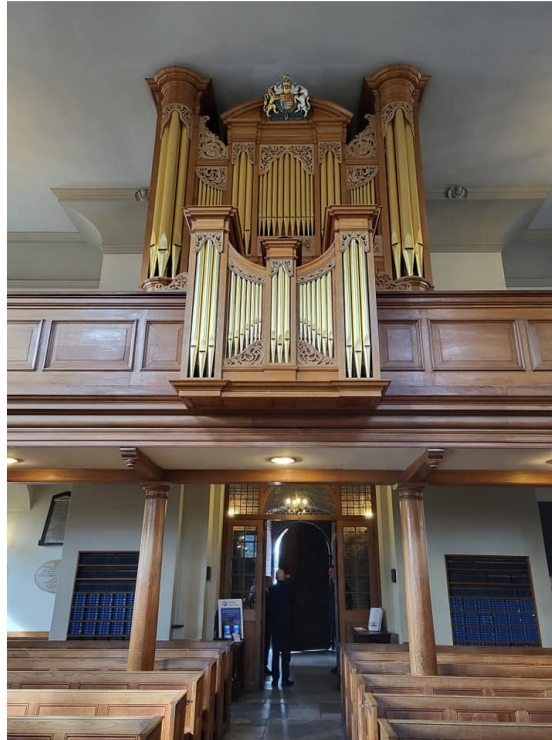
London Organ Day: 'A Drake's Progress'
Saturday 11th March 2023, Chelsea Old Church, SW3 5LT

This report by our member Rosemary Evans has already been published with a few changes in the Organists' Review. It is reprinted here by permission of the author.

Tom Bell, Artistic Director of the London Organ Day for several years, can be relied upon to produce an interesting, informative programme, albeit with unexpected and possibly quirky looking content, which all comes together and makes sense. We were not disappointed.

This was my second visit to hear the new Drake Organ, having been to Nathan Laube's recital in 2020. It is an entirely new instrument with three manuals, pedals and thirty-three stops. The case was inspired by one now in Holsworthy, Devon, thought to have been in Chelsea Old Church in the 18th Century. Unusually, there are turned brass thumb pistons, which were made in the Heritage Steam Railway workshop at South Devon Railway near Buckfastleigh, near where the organ builder William Drake Ltd. is based. The gallery, which is made of concrete

(well disguised), had to be supported with steel girders and beams to take the weight of the new organ. It is a mechanical action instrument although it has solenoids, a departure for Drake, with dual-stop action and stepper. The Chair Case is for the third manual with pallets behind the player at 45°. Joost de Boer, Managing Director, grew up in Holland where there is a John Nicholson English pipe organ, which inspired him when building this instrument.



*The Drake Organ at Chelsea Old Church
Photo: Michaela Cottee*

The church was remarkably rebuilt after severe bombing in World War II caused major destruction. Memorials were carefully reconstructed from the pieces left behind after the bombing, including the Sir Thomas More monument.

The first session, was a folk violin sandwich with the tasty bread provided by Tom playing Adagio in E by Frank Bridge at the beginning and Rhosymedre by Ralph Vaughan Williams at the end. Sarah Hatch was the folk violinist, which is actually a side-line of hers as she is a professional violinist. Her playing produced a rich variety of tone colours, dynamics and expression, admirably accompanied by Tom on the organ.

After tea, coffee and biscuits, we returned to the church for a wonderful demonstration of the Mustel Harmonium by Anne Page, concluding with performances of Franck, Guilmant and two living composers, Lionel Rogg who is Swiss and David Aprahamian Liddle who is British and was present in the church. This instrument was so beautiful to look at and mesmerising watching Anne bring it to life, creating so much expression and colour. In one movement she had to sustain one note so, instead of using a pencil, (the tried and trusted method), she had a 'Stick Fast', especially made for the purpose. She also explained to me afterwards about the 'Double Expression' mechanism, levers operated by the knees to balance the dynamics on the treble and bass sides of the keyboard.

After lunch, in a change to the published programme (due to an unexpected hitch with the delivery of the big screen), Tom played, at very short notice, an unplanned programme superbly. He began with two pieces from *The Orgelbüchlein Project*, curated by William Whitehead, who had the idea to commission 118 composers to complete Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*. Bach had drawn up headings for each of the chorales but had only completed some of them. The first was *Gelobet sei der Herr, der Gott Israel* by Silas Woolston, which featured the Quintadena on the Choir as the solo stop. Unusually, this has two verses and the second one was played Organo Pleno. The second was *Ich weiß ein Blümlein hübsch und fein* by Roderick Williams. This is very short and Tom described this as 'a wonky Tango with Messiaen style harmonies'. He played the chorale on the Great Tierce and Trumpet coupled to the Swell equivalent.



The Mustel Harmonium
Photo: Michaela Cottee

Next was the *Deuxième Fantaisie*, Op.117 of 1937 by Jehan Alain. This featured string stops, the Viola on the Great and the Gamba on the Swell, the pipes of which are very slightly conical. He also used the Twelfth down an octave on the Great and the Cornet combination on the Choir.

This brilliant, impromptu recital ended with *Rhapsody in C# minor*, Op.17, by Herbert Howells, written in one sitting during a Zeppelin raid in the 1st World War, which Tom thought would be very appropriate for this venue, which had been heavily bombarded during the 2nd World War. He called it an 'Easter' piece as it ends with a major chord.

We returned to the published schedule with an interview with Richard McVeigh, whose innovative work creating and sharing organ content came to prominence during the Pandemic. Tom asked him about how this all started. Richard responded by explaining that he had always

had a keen interest in both music and technology. He had been a full-time organist working at various cathedrals in England and giving concerts around the UK and in Europe. This work can be very stressful as perfection in live performance has to be achieved all the time, which made him feel very anxious. Whilst working full-time for the Civil Service, downloading was a hobby, which developed into the work he does today. He began with his own YouTube channel and started using other social media platforms about 16 years ago. In 2017 he set up his current channel, 'Beauty in Sound'. This focuses on organ performance, mostly hymn playing with no singing. Tom asked, why hymns? Richard replied that this was what people, mainly Americans, requested. Live performances online started just before Covid hit us. He does not feel stressed any more, saying that that is the listeners' problem not his now that he has let go of having to give a polished performance every time. Having said that, he does still work as a professional organist - he is Assistant Organist at Arundel Cathedral and Assistant Director of Music at Romsey Abbey – and it goes without saying that his performances are outstanding.

Richard works with other organists, including Martin Baker, Richard Gowers, Anna Lapwood and Colin Walsh, to create workshops. He raised £100,000 online to have his own organ built modelled on the new console at York Minster. It has 137 stops, P&S Organ Supply Co. (UK) Ltd toe pistons and Ulrich Hermann Tastaturbau (UHT) keyboards. He considers himself the custodian of this instrument. He liaises closely with Hauptwerk, for example, to record smaller instruments as well as larger ones. Richard is also working at setting up a 'Beauty in Sound' Scholarship with live performance and tuition. Finally he mentioned that he is a fan of the Recording Engineer, David Hinitt who specialises in mobile classical recording.

Following this question and answer session Tom introduced us to Nicholas Wearne for the closing recital. Nicholas told us that he had chosen a mainly mid-19th century programme as this suits this instrument very well, plus a more modern Norwegian composer whose piece is based on a folk tune, which linked nicely with the opening folk violin and organ recital heard at the start of the day. So, he began with Mendelssohn's *Sonata No. IV*. Then we heard the Norwegian piece, *Variations on a Folk Tune from Telemark – 'Å hvor salig det skal blive'* by Bjarne Sløgedal, written in 1971. This is a very colourful piece that pays homage to the Norwegian national instrument, the langleik, a droned zither. There were certainly spicy stop combinations used here, including the Cremona, the Tierce plus the Tremulant and a very high accompaniment. There was a joyful Tutti to end the piece. Nicholas said that the next piece, *Andante in E minor* by S.S. Wesley would be full of dissonance over a pedal. This was followed by *Fantasia with Choral in G* by Henry Smart. The chorale theme was invented by Smart and is based on Mendelssohn's *Sonata in F minor*. (Graham Barber recorded this piece on the 1882 John Nicholson organ at St. Christoforuskerk, Schagen, Holland, which is an appropriate connection with the Drake instrument at Chelsea Old Church). The next piece, chosen to illustrate how versatile this instrument is, was *Psalms Prelude: De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine (Set 2 No.1)* based on Psalm 130, verse 1 by Herbert Howells. Nicholas also felt it would be appropriate, the church being right beside the River Thames - the translation from the Latin is 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee O Lord'. The recital continued with *Daphne Variations* by an anonymous Dutch composer from the Camphuysen Manuscript of 1652, another link with Drake. This is a soft piece with the theme followed by two variations and Nicholas played solos on the Choir, including the Flute 4 and in another movement the Quintadena 8. The programme concluded magnificently with *Overture (Paulus, Op.36)* by Mendelssohn (arranged by W.T. Best). There was a trend for orchestral transcriptions in the 19th century, made all the better at the end of the century when pedals were introduced to big organs such as St. George's Hall, Liverpool and the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Many thanks go to Tom Bell for inspiring us at the London Organ Day 2023 and to everybody who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the day a success. We can look forward to next year's event scheduled for Saturday 2nd March 2024 with great anticipation.

Rosemary Evans