

The Cornopean

October 2024

Revised November 2024

EXETER & DISTRICT ORGANISTS' ASSOCIATION





EDOA Newsletter

October 2024



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Front page: St Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol, the beautiful vista looking westwards from the choir, past the Harrison & Harrison organ on both sides.

[all photos in this newsletter are by the editor, unless otherwise stated]

Forthcoming events

November, Wednesday 6th, Annual Dinner The Devon Hotel, Exeter, EX2 8XU.

7 for 7.30 pm, speaker the Dean of Exeter, Very Rev Jonathan Greener.

January 2025, organ-playing event, details to be advised

February 2025, Saturday 8th lunchtime, Quiz at The Bridge Inn, Topsham, EX3 0QQ.

Details TBA

March 2025, organ visit, churches around East Devon, details TBA

April 2025, AGM at Broadclyst Church

The EDOA Committee

Andrew Millington (President), Nigel Guthrie (Vice-President),
Paula Taylor (General Secretary), Peter Johnson (Treasurer),
Peter Johnstone (Membership Secretary, corresponding member only),
Tim Noon, Neil Page, Gerald Hird, Penelope Cowman,
Graham Willson (Webmaster, corresponding member only),
Piers Howell (Newsletter Editor)

The EDOA Website:

<http://www.exeterorganists.net>

Administrator Graham Willson. The website includes EDOA events, Find an Organist, Newsletters, Gallery, Links, Opportunities, Contact Us, Committee. Graham is always looking for new content, including text and photos. The post of Deputy Webmaster is also currently vacant, and Graham would be delighted to hear from any potential volunteers.

Stop Press!

Details may change! Follow bulletins closer to the time from our Secretary for more up-to-date information.

Editor's letter

I have a theory, that whilst emailing this newsletter saves the association a lot in postage, receiving it as an attachment to an email means that there might be a tendency to just look at the pictures, skim the contents, or maybe bypass it altogether. I hope this is not the case. It was certainly heartening to see that The Cornopean was high on members' favourites, according the Questionnaire that was sent out earlier this year; more information about this in the next issue.

Bristol trip

In September, members went to Bristol, and sampled organs from the tiny Snetzler in The New Room to the majestic Harrison and Harrison at St Mary Redcliffe. Many thanks to Andrew Millington for organising the outing, and to Iain Morison (an avowed H&H enthusiast) for his account of this outing.

Annual Dinner, 6th November

Always a popular event; members will already have received booking forms, but just in case, the form is attached to this newsletter. Reply, please, to the Treasurer by 28th October.

OrganMaster shoes

Most of my life, I have struggled, as an organist, with footwear. Bare feet do not work for me. Dancing-type shoes have been advocated by some. Amazon provided some tango shoes for £16.99; they looked and felt ridiculous, especially with the high heels. Eventually, I sought the advice of the suppliers of OrganMaster shoes, who, after some detailed correspondence and measurements, provided a pair of shoes that have finally solved all my problems (well most of them, anyway). They are about ½ the weight of normal shoes, made of soft leather, but with some stiffening in the soles that aid accurate playing. The soft leather and laces adjust to peculiar foot shapes. The result is perfect, but, strangely, now all my technical playing deficiencies have been mercilessly revealed!

What do organists dream about?

A frequent dream is that I arrive at some large church or cathedral, the choir is already robed, and there is insufficient time to practice or acquaint myself with the console, the bench is in the wrong position, I cannot find the on-switch, the hymn book is the wrong one, and when I do find it the hymn has already been announced and the choir starts without the organ; the console is high up and out of the way and I cannot see or hear the choirmaster; and then, thankfully, I wake up and realise it didn't really happen. A variation on this theme is that I am supposed to be singing with a choir in a cathedral, I arrive late, do not have the right robes or the sheet music, and either have to join the choir after the beginning of the service by walking in full view of everyone, or somehow sneak around the back.

Am I alone amongst organists, in this respect?

Home organs

Following the arrival of the Hauptwerk home organ, I have been enjoying the sample set of the classic Hereford Cathedral Willis organ. Quite soon, this will be joined by the sample set of the Aristide Cavallé-Coll organ (1882) at St. Etienne, Caen; this will open the door for all the wonderful French organ music that has been gathering dust in my library. As if this is not enough, a sample set is currently in preparation at St Mary Redcliffe! For the clear rendition of JSB, a free sample set of the small organ at Strassburg by Cyriach Werner (1743) is perfect; no reeds, just clear flutes and principals.

Piers Howell, Editor.

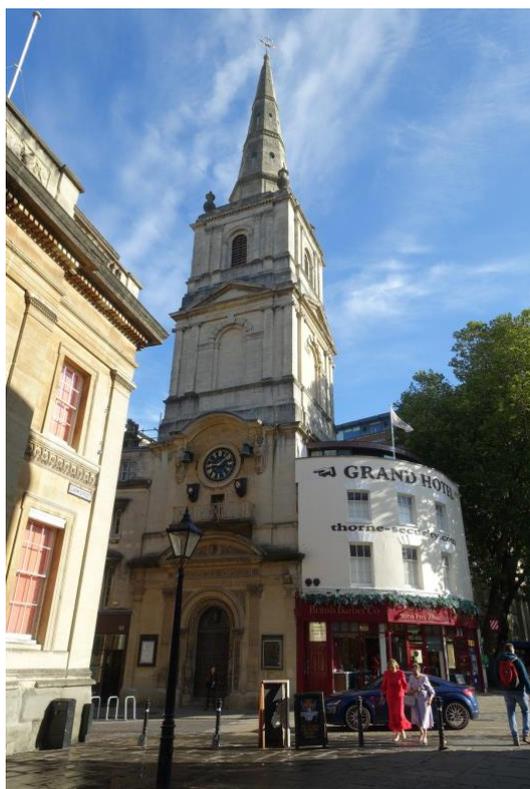
piershowell@msn.com

A Devon Organ Book

From our treasurer, Peter Johnson:

Based on the popularity of our initial print run we commissioned a further 50 copies to be printed and several have been sold already. We can continue to offer these books at a selling price of £12.50 (Postage and envelope, if appropriate, is currently £2.80). Copies of "A Devon Organ Book" are excellent value and can be obtained by contacting me either by telephone or by e-mail: 01297-599086, peteraj@talktalk.net ... Perhaps an idea for a Christmas present for a friend or relative?

BRISTOL OUTING 14TH SEPTEMBER



Christ Church, Bristol

Many thanks to Iain Morison for this account:
Ten playing members attended this event and what a day it was! This perfectly organised visit demonstrated just what enormous variation the organ shows, in this case from a chamber instrument to a large cathedral size, as well as two between these extremes.



Christ Church, Bristol

(Renatus Harris 1708, Thomas Schwarbrook 1744,
John Smith 1826, W.G.Vowles 1869/1889,
J.W.Walker 1925/1973, Roger Taylor 1997/2008)



The day started at Christ Church in the old city. Their organist, Jonathan Price described the organ before playing several pieces ending with Gigout's Toccata. The whole organ sounded very well in the resonant acoustics of this 18th century baroque style church.

It was lovely to play with good mechanical action and it suited the church admirably. Renatus Harris built the original instrument and the fine case in 1708, which survives to this day and is placed in a gallery at the west end. R. G. Vowles of Bristol and J.W. Walker amongst others were involved with the instrument over the years.



Nigel Byott



John Wesley's Chapel, The New Room



One of the pulpits, where John Wesley preached

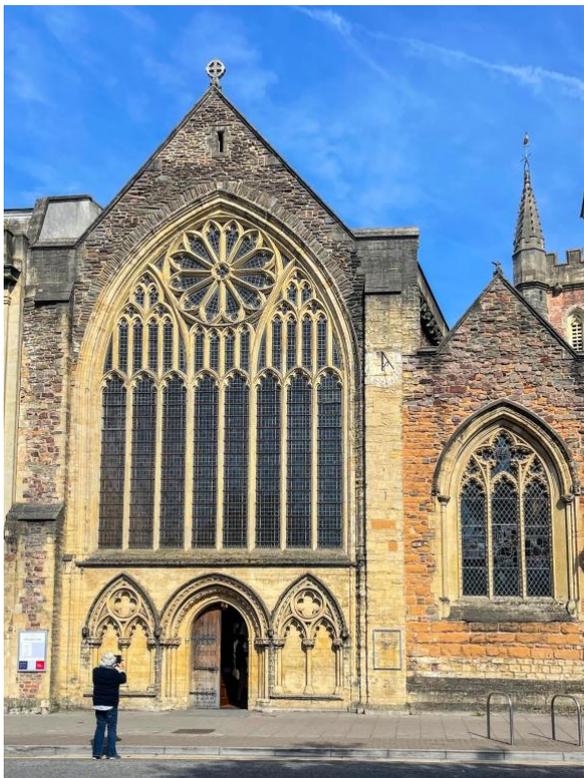
Our next venue was at John Wesley's chapel 'The New Room' built in 1739 and is the oldest Methodist place of worship in the world. Its organ is a chamber instrument of 1761 by the Swiss builder John Snetzler and is in original condition conserved over the years and now in the hands of Roger Taylor of Burlington, and thus is pretty unique.



Peter Johnstone playing the Snetzler organ

With only a single manual and a handful of stops it proved to be surprisingly versatile, aided by the division of some of these stops into treble and bass registers. Jonathan Price ably demonstrated this before handing over to us to try it. A sweet-sounding instrument which really suited the chapel.

After a lunch break we were treated to the organ in the Lord Mayor’s chapel at College Green opposite the cathedral. This chapel is a lovely building with a fine hammer beam roof and the building itself started back in the thirteenth century. The organ is placed in the south transept with a detached console facing it in the opposite transept.



The Lord Mayor’s Chapel, Bristol



Members sitting in front of the console (north transept)
Photo by Paula Taylor

It mostly dates back to 1888 when V G Vowles built it. Various others were involved over the years, notably J W Walker.

In 2014 the organ was restored by Clevedon organ builders



Stephen Domleo playing

moving away from neo-baroque, back to its Victorian heritage, a trend now becoming more prevalent, with the recent H&H rebuild at York being a fine example. William, one of the cathedral organists, talked about it and demonstrated the various stops. It had one unique feature in that there is no cable connection between the console and pipes. It is all done with software utilising WI-FI. Apparently, it is the first of its kind although portable voicing consoles presumably use this technology. This was done in 2014 and is working well to date. It was responsive to play and sounded fine in this lovely building.



St Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol



St Mary Redcliffe, looking eastwards from the nave



The Harrison & Harrison organ, on both sides of the choir stalls, sunken organ console just visible on the left

Our final venue was at St Mary Redcliffe across the river. The church is quite magnificent; built in the perpendicular style and is often confused with the cathedral. It is certainly of cathedral stature. What can I say about its organ! It is a largely unaltered Arthur Harrison instrument dating back to 1912. I can do no better than to quote from an article written in the organist's review, November 2010:

"The quality of voicing, the variety of the tonal pallet, the impeccable finishing, the reliable and comfortable console and the huge volume range from hushed ppp to devastating fff made a tremendous impression in 1912 and they still do today".



The 2 right-hand swell pedals are for the west- and south-facing Swell Organ shutters; both to be used with care!

This was not a Willis or Hill rebuild, but a new instrument in its own right made for this stunning church. Incidentally there is another 4 manual H&H organ up the road at Clifton College built as a new instrument in 1911 thus of similar vintage largely unaltered but about a third smaller than the Redcliffe instrument and has also been under the care of Harrisons all its life and where David Willcocks learnt to play while a pupil at the school.



Gerald Hird

The Redcliffe organ was then put through its paces with a brilliant extemporisation by Andrew starting with a whisper and ending with the full organ which left me shaking! It all seemed to hang so well together, the blend of sound being so good. Perhaps the Great reeds need careful handling and should be used sparingly!



The 32' Double Ophicleide pipes, lurking just behind the choir stalls! Strong constitution, or tranquillisers, needed?

St Mary's organist, Graham Alsop then gave us a demonstration showing us some amazing sounds. He was so welcoming and is clearly passionate about this organ which is very easy to understand. It is surely one of the greatest romantic instruments in the country even if not to everyone's taste. I freely admit to being addicted to H&H organs though, so perhaps I am biased.

Our thanks go to the resident organists who were so interesting and helpful, demonstrating the organs so ably. Special thanks to Andrew Millington for organising the event which went so smoothly, Paula as always for her excellent administration and to Piers for organising the playing rota and to the person who gave us details and specifications of the organs.

What a day; it is certainly one I will always remember.

Iain Morison



Iain Morison, "addicted" to H&H organs

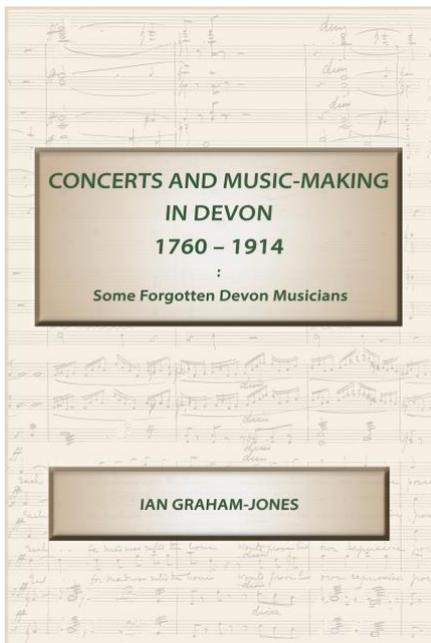
BOOK REVIEW, BY ROBERT MANNING

Ian Graham-Jones

'Concerts and Music-making in Devon 1760-1914: Some Forgotten Devon Musicians' [2024]

ISBN 978-1-3999-6393-0, 203 pages. Copies available from the author: iangrahamjones5@gmail.com
(tel. 01626-891241). Copies £10 plus £3.70 postage and packing

In the author's own words, this book draws attention to 'some of the individuals who made valiant efforts, in some cases at little or no personal financial reward, to bring live music to the citizens of Devon's towns and villages' during what one might call the 'long 19th century'. It deals with such topics as concert promoters; harmonic, choral, madrigal, chamber, orchestral and church music societies; music festivals; and repertoire, taste and performance in Devon considered more generally. The author was the Director of Cornwall's Rural Music School, and conductor of the Cornwall Symphony Orchestra, before moving to work in Chichester for several years. He relocated to Kenton near Exeter in 2016; researching and writing this book has been a principal fruit of his most recent years of active 'retirement' - a task now made much easier than in past days by the digitisation of so many newspaper sources. The author has also drawn on his extensive knowledge of John Marsh (1752-1828) - diarist, violinist, composer and polymath - who left an enormous amount of general information about English musical life outside London. Incidentally, it is notable that the numerous quotations provided here from reviews etc. printed in 19th-century newspapers demonstrate a much higher expectation by these publications of intellectual discrimination, and both musical and general literacy, from its readership than we would expect from a current provincial newspaper.



While this is not a book specifically about organs, organists and the musical lives of churches, it shows that organists were regularly at the forefront of music-making in their wider communities. Unsurprisingly, Exeter's cathedral organists were heavily involved in the wider musical life of that city. Of these, S.S. Wesley (1810-76) was the most musically distinguished. One of his predecessors, William Jackson (1730-1803), had written an autobiography; this was invaluable to Graham-Jones as a source because there is relatively little information available about pre-19th-century Devonian musical life. The study also provides numerous references to the wider activities of other organists in the Anglican churches of Exeter, as well as those in Plymouth, Torquay and the smaller places in Devon. In Barnstaple, for example, substantial local musical leadership was provided for decades by its Parish Church organists John Edwards (1808-94) and his son Henry John Edwards (1854-1933). To give another example: musical life in Exmouth was enriched - again over several decades - by William Vinnicombe (1834-1907), organist first at Withycombe Raleigh for 14 years and then at Holy Trinity Church, Exmouth. We may not be surprised to learn that organists were poorly paid; Cullompton's long-serving Parish Church organist Benjamin Fulford

Underhill (1804-71) had to go from door to door to obtain money for his services (pun unintentional). There are, incidentally, few references to Devon's non-conformist churches and their organists, while Roman Catholic establishments do not come into the narrative at all.

I was astonished to read of so much musical activity taking place in so many different places in a county with such difficult, hilly terrain, in a century during which, in its earlier decades, people could only travel on foot or by horse-drawn transport. The coming of the railways made a huge difference: but trains were (by our standards) slow and relatively infrequent, and railway lines could not penetrate into areas with the most difficult terrain. Also, while most of Devon's rail network was in place by the end of the 19th century, the system was not completed until 1925. Where railway lines existed, however, it appears to have been relatively easy for concert organisers to arrange special trains to take people home from evening events - something which would never happen today after a classical concert!

The organisation and execution of any 19th-century musical event presented huge logistical challenges. Landlines were only emerging around the turn of the 20th century, while the invention of photocopiers, mobile phones, Email and personal computers was way into the future. In view of this, the achievements of 19th-century musicians and entrepreneurs almost seem to be miraculous. But at least the coming of the railway line from London Paddington in the 1840s made it much easier for artists to travel to the west country to perform in concerts than before. Partly through the influence of Exeter-born Kellow John Pye (1812-1901), one of the earliest students at the Royal Academy of Music, London and later a member of the Board of Directors there, numerous students and ex-students from the R.A.M. travelled down to Devon to perform. Famous established musicians regularly travelled down too. These included (in alphabetical order) Bottesini, Clara Butt, Alexandre Guilmant, Charles Halle, Jenny Lind, Liszt and Thalberg. And Paganini presented three concerts in Exeter in December 1831, during pre-railway days. This was thanks to the persuasive powers of Exeter Cathedral organist James Paddon (1768-1835), whom Graham-Jones rates as having been as important as Pye for the development of music in Exeter. Concerts often included 'lollipops' as well as more substantial items; but a remarkably wide variety of music, both English and mid-European, was performed, choral performances being made much easier after Novello the publishers started producing their first, relatively cheap, octavo-sized vocal scores in 1846. However, apart from Handel, relatively little of what we would call 'early music' was performed.

This book contains numerous illustrations; many are portraits of musicians featured in the book, and there are others such as a drawing of the Subscription Rooms and New London Inn, Exeter drawn c.1830, and a photograph of Exeter Cathedral's 'Service of Praise' on 21 April 1909. The study includes an appendix with information about concert organisers, promoters and visiting artists, and another listing the organists of Exeter Cathedral from 1694 to 1919. There is also a selective index of composers and their works, plus a general index. And the content of 44 concert programmes is given, including that of an organ recital which Alexandre Guilmant gave in the Victoria Hall, Exeter on 2 February 1883. (He played music by J.S. Bach, Boely, Chauvet, Krebs, Lemmens, Salome and himself. He liked the Willis organ so much that he gave four recitals on it, on two visits to Exeter.)

The book is clearly written, and mercifully free of jargon! Thoroughly referenced and cross-referenced, with the chapters subdivided into sections which make the content easy to follow, it is the product of an enormous amount of new research. It will appeal not just to musicians, but also to people more generally interested in social history. Though focused on Devon, and likely to be of especial interest to Devonians, it provides a substantial contribution to the broader story of music-making in England.

ROBERT MANNING



MISBEHAVING ORGANS, BY CHRIS COPE

It does not really matter if the organ 'misbehaves' during the course of a Sunday service. But it is a different matter altogether if the organ 'plays up' during a funeral or wedding.

There was a North Devon organ builder who built a number of pipe organs. After he retired about 20 years ago, we faced the problem of finding an organ builder who was prepared to maintain the instrument. As there was no specification or guidance, those organ builders whom we approached did not want to know. The result was that we disposed of our pipe organ and obtained an electronic instrument instead. The Wyvern that we presently have was acquired, second hand, about 15 years ago. The electronic engineers have always made it clear that as the instrument is now 30 years old, sourcing parts is virtually impossible. There is no longer a working swell pedal.

Last year, we had a few problems. This resulted in the sound occasionally surging to a great volume and then disappearing into nothing. However, the engineers fixed the problem and the organ behaved itself.

That is until a wedding in June 2024.

The bride wanted to process into church with Pachelbel's Canon. It never ceases to amaze me how many brides want this particular piece, especially as it is also requested at funerals. Her choice of hymns was 'Give me joy in my heart' (probably better words than the alternative, namely 'Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning' and especially, the words 'keep me burning to the break of day!') and 'The lord of the dance'. Music for the signing of the register was to be 'Jerusalem', but neither to be sung, nor to be played loudly on the organ. The recessional music was 'The arrival of the Queen of Sheba'. I decided to drop into the church early (9.30am) just to check that the organ was behaving itself and run through the registration.

You can imagine my horror when I found that the speakers were making the most ghastly banging noise which was clearly the last thing that the bride would want to hear as she processed into church. As the engineers are a good two-hour drive away, I simply could not leave things as they were. I found an electrician in the village. Although he had no understanding of electronic organs, he suggested that at the beginning of the service, to avoid interference with the speakers, everyone should switch off their mobile phones. He also advised that I should leave the organ switched on until the wedding at 12pm.

I went home and returned to the church at 11.30am. You can imagine my delight that the problem with the speakers had resolved itself. The bride came in to Pachelbel's Canon and there was no foul noise from the speakers. We then proceeded to the first hymn.

A member of the family then addressed the congregation. Although slightly out of my earshot, I got the impression that he was drawing a parallel between items of clothing and the challenges of married life. He became inaudible to me when he arrived at 'undergarments'!

Suddenly, from the vicinity of the speakers, there erupted an almighty alarm which was loud enough to wake the dead. This lasted about 20 seconds. The vicar glared at me, naturally believing that I was the cause of this interruption. Suddenly, the sound stopped and at that point everyone in the congregation (about 140 people mostly from the local farming community) burst into laughter. The minister suggested to the speaker that he was probably coming to the end of his address and he quickly did so. As he had been going on for quite some time, this was clearly a great relief to us all.

The timing of the alarm could not have been better programmed. Imagine it at the exchanging of vows or rings, the declaration of 'husband and wife' or 'does anyone know of any just cause or impediment why this couple should not be joining together'. A ghastly prospect!

The minister then announced the second hymn. Realising that the organ had switched itself off, I turned it on again and found that it was entirely dead. Quickly switching on and off made no difference and at that point I

announced, 'The organ is dead'. The minister suggested that we should sing the second hymn unaccompanied and the congregation gave a fine performance. Fortunately, I, vocally, gave them the right note, a D, to begin.

We then moved to the signing of the register. This was my opportunity to play 'Jerusalem', but having no piano and no organ, I was left with the quandary as to what to do. I switched the organ back on and it worked. The ghastly sound from the speakers did not return. I played 'Jerusalem'. The bride then processed out to Handel's 'Arrival of the Queen of Sheba'. I switched off the organ, breathed a sigh of relief and returned home. The organ builders have condemned the speakers and the amplifier. We have been advised to replace the speakers, the amplifier and all the electronics and simply retain console, stops, pedals and case. The bill for this will be about £12,000, which our little local church simply does not have. The PCC will consider its options in September. I am now playing hymns on a ghastly home keyboard, but that's the extent of it. We have been offered a redundant piano, but our minister will not hear of it. Finally, the cause of the alarm? My theory is that the speakers have a cut-out mechanism when they overheat. The organ had been switched on for three hours when the alarm sounded. But what's the purpose of the alarm? Why not simply switch off? We'll never know.

CHRIS COPE

From the internet – make up your own captions:



Anna Lapwood

28 September at 00:08

AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

photo taken by the wonderful Andy Paradise
Royal Albert Hall



13K

640 comments 124 shares

Like

Comment

Send

Share

Most relevant



Write a comment...



Top fan

Oscar Musowoya

Wait a minute. Is that Tom Cruise?? Is he finally playing the iconic theme song from Mission Impossible 😊

Editor's suggestion: "Your mission, Tom Cruise, should you choose to accept it, is to play the organ at The Royal Albert Hall, with Anna Lapwood registering for you. As always, should you be caught or killed, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions. This tape/disc will self-destruct in ten seconds. Good luck, Tom."