

Newbury & District Organists' Association

Chairman's Report

Annual General Meeting, Saturday 29th March 2014

The Local History articles in the Newbury Weekly News sometimes catch my eye, especially the ones from the early days. In November there was an interesting extract from 'Local chit-chat' in November 1913, which began with a mention of a 'grand performance of *Elijah* in the Corn Exchange'. It went on to highlight reminiscences of the older generation about 'the progress of the musical art in Newbury.....Church music was at a low standard, and the services had little brightness or dignity, although they were nonetheless hearty and sincere. Many of the churches had a small orchestra in the choir gallery, the players of the instruments very much in earnest, even if not as talented as some present-day performers. The Goddings were pioneers in musical progress. James Godding was organist at Speen Church and at one time five members of the family were acting as organists at local churches. There were three sons George, Edmund and James. The latter was a pupil of Moscheles, a tutor of Mendelssohn; and he was appointed organist of Chieveley at the age of 12. In 1865 he succeeded his brother George as organist at Newbury Parish Church, which post he held for nearly 20 years.' The article went on to comment on the Newbury Amateur Orchestral Union in 1879 and then the Newbury Choral Society who had performed *Elijah* mentioned at the beginning of my report.

So, three local churches in one article in the local paper 100 years ago. Nowadays, we might read about an organist in his later years who has faithfully accompanied his congregation for most of his or her life. Or, about a church where there is no regular organist and the priest relies on modern technology to lead the singing from a CD. As I write the instrument at Northbrook Street Methodist Church is being put back together after a major refurbishment of both the church and the organ. Sadly today it is more common for an instrument to need a major overhaul as it has not been regularly maintained and there is no organ fund to fall back on and no one with the know-how to launch an appeal. The congregation and those responsible so often lack a real understanding about why instruments need to be looked after and have money spent on them in order to pass them on to the next generation.

Our recitalists, who play in our monthly lunchtime series at St. Nicolas, have been very understanding about the need to shut down the instrument at the end of 2012 until it can be refurbished. They appreciate that the temporary Makin has all the notes working although they would prefer to play the pipe organ. The series is fully booked for the foreseeable future, and our audience of between 26 and 48 enjoyed a wide range of repertoire in 2013. NDOA members support the recitals when they can and we have also had listeners travelling from Marlborough, Winchester and Abingdon. On average each person puts £2.75 in the retiring collection. One of our Organ Scholar NDOA members, John Clark-Maxwell played in August. He continues to study in Oxford and we wish him well.

Last year's AGM was held at St. Nicolas, which was particularly poignant due to the recent shut-down of the pipe organ. It was preceded by a light-hearted recital by Gill Blythman and Rosemary Evans, which contrasted with the more formal recital by Edward McCall after the AGM. Our organ visit in 2013 was to Windsor Parish Church in July for a special event to launch the appeal for the restoration of the instrument and was well-supported by NDOA. We had two social events, which are always well attended. The first was at our Secretary, Ann Turner's home for a Tea Party in September and this was followed by a regular visit to the Woodpecker at Wash Water in November.

The IAO Congress in Nürnberg in July was well supported by three members and I attended the IAO AGM in London earlier in the same month. I also attended the IAO London Organ Day at the Royal Festival Hall in February. I continue to belong to the IAO Advisory Committee which now meets once on the internet in March and once in London in October. Ann Turner and I attended the IAO Regional Forum in Wantage in June. I read out a report about NDOA and we met representatives from other organists' associations from Berkshire OA, Buckinghamshire OA, North Hampshire OA and Winchester OA.

We had one new member during the year, another Organ Scholar, Christopher Burrows, whom many of us heard play at a recital at Hermitage Church in January 2013.

We have continued to support the Kampala Music School in Uganda and our donation goes specifically to help students with their organ lesson fees.

Now, my thanks to the committee, without whom I could not do my job and to whom I am very grateful. Three members are retiring this year. Firstly, Carolyn Greenwood, who kindly stayed on the committee after stepping down as Secretary. She has been on the committee for some time and was a very conscientious Secretary, always following up every e-mail, letter and telephone call with great diligence. Secondly, Don and Phil Beaver have decided to step down. Again they have served for some time and we have appreciated greatly their role in organising our regular meals and for their wise advice in our meetings. I should also thank Mary Taylor who again served on the committee faithfully for some years, including a stint as Membership Secretary. She decided to leave the committee last May and we are grateful for her contributions.

It was very fortuitous that Ann Turner agreed to replace Carolyn as Secretary, a role that she has held for three years. She has been most zealous about fulfilling this job and supporting me at all events. I am very relieved that she has agreed to stay on the committee and will be of great help to our new Secretary. Ann has offered to be Social Secretary and will take over the organising of our meals.

Robert Willis has been the mainstay of our committee since the foundation of our Association in 1980, fulfilling various roles, including Secretary and Treasurer. It is as Webmaster that he will be most remembered as we were on the internet thanks to him from the very beginning of the web. He has decided to step down from this role but fortunately for me not from the committee. I am sure that any of you who have looked at our website will appreciate how much skill, time and patience Bob has invested in this venture over the years, for which we are extremely grateful. He has continued to print the programmes and posters and I have valued his editorial skills very much, especially when I have run out of patience trying to fit in a photo.

In advance I would like to thank Gill Blythman who has agreed to be our new Secretary and Daphne George who is looking to see if she can help us update the website.

I would also like to thank our Treasurer, Barry Gowers for all that he does to keep the finances in order and dealing with the Charity Commission. Thanks also to John Pynn for the work that he does as Membership Secretary.

To return to my comments at the beginning of this report, I hope that we can all look back on the progress of the 'musical art' in Newbury with reference to the organ, whether we are supporters or players, with positive comments about what we have done to maintain standards so that those who follow after us can continue to spread the 'Good News'!

Rosemary Evans,

Chairman of Newbury & District Organists' Association.

24.2.14