**NEWBURY & DISTRICT ORGANISTS’ ASSOCIATION**

**(NDOA)**

**Chairman’s Annual Report for AGM 25.2.2017**

**2016**

The committee has been working very hard behind the scenes and, as ever, I am very grateful for all the hard work that everyone has put into maintaining and running the organisation. We were very pleased to co-opt a new member, Andrew Cox, onto the committee. Richard Foster has continued to keep the website up-to-date and John Pynn has looked after the membership lists. Barry Gowers has taken care of the accounts and the Charity Commission paperwork. Ann Turner has organised our social events with efficiency and Steve Bowey has ensured that we cover all aspects in our meetings. Gill Blythman has fulfilled her duties admirably as Hon. Secretary, although now that she spends so much time working abroad she has decided to relinquish this role. We are very grateful to her for taking this post on and I am very pleased that she will remain on the committee. Finally, Robert Willis, who has been on the committee continuously since the association was formed in 1980 holding various posts (and prior to that when we were a sub-branch of the Berkshire Organists’ Association) has decided to stand down. We are indebted to him for his numerous contributions over the years, for his dedication, especially as he is not a player, his expertise and persistence. We made him a Life Member a few years ago and we look forward to seeing him at future events with Charmian, whom we should also thank for her support all along.

I have a particular interest in membership numbers and zealously recruit new members and persuade late-payers to part with their subscriptions. Paying on-line has been a popular method, although we are happy to accept cheques or cash. We seem to have survived the subscription increase with only a few members still to chase. In 2016 we had 56 members, which was 3 more than 2015 and included 5 new members. This year already we have had 6 new members. Sadly, one of our members died in November. Dennis Blackwell was a keen supporter of the association, loved listening to organ music and enjoyed our social events with his wife Anne. In 2016 we had 3 student members and 2 Life Members – I have already mentioned Robert Willis; we have also made David Reynolds a Life Member. Please consider giving someone a Gift Membership – you may have an acquaintance that could benefit from membership.

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At the IAO Festival (previously Congress) last July, which was based in Bath, there was an Open Forum compered by David Saint called ‘The Organ under threat’ and the speakers included Mark Venning, the Chairman of the organ builders Harrison & Harrison, the Venerable Andy Piggott, Archdeacon of Bath, Christopher Hilldon, Chairman of the Diocesan Advisory Committee and Tony Cawston, organ tuner at Bath Abbey. All angles were covered in the discussion, including pipe organ or electronic (or CDs or a music group or space for loos!), authentic restoration or one sympathetic to the needs of the church. We were also reminded by a member of the audience that organs are also found in secular buildings such as town halls. Some instruments are of historic significance, some are indifferent and some are in redundant churches. Projects to encourage new people (young or old) to take up the organ were mentioned and the need for education so that organists can actually make a difference. Forging links with Year 6 pupils in schools was mentioned as one way to encourage interest at a young age. Organists also need to be adaptable when playing instruments with different pedal boards and swell pedals. Fund-raising for restoration projects was also mentioned and the challenges of persuading PCCs and congregations to support and cooperate.

An endowment to build a new organ must be a gift from heaven, and today sitting here in this church we do indeed have one such instrument, which we are all being given the opportunity to play today. Today, we are also launching our project to encourage new people to play the organ, young or old. As a committee we have wrangled with the mechanics of such a project and sincerely hope that it will make a difference to the number of organists available in this area. I would like to thank everyone involved, including Gill Blythman, Richard Foster, Andrew Cox and Steve Bowey for their hard work in ensuring that we get it right. NDOA will be sponsoring the project, which will include a group performance meeting at the beginning and end of each session with six individual lessons in between given by a qualified organist who is a member of NDOA. We will need to ensure that we have the finances to support this and would encourage members to contribute in any way that they can. We are grateful to anyone who has already given a donation on top of their subscription. Hopefully, audience members at our lunchtime recitals will be encouraged to put more money in the retiring collection. The average donation in 2016 was £3.64.

My six years as a member of the IAO Advisory Committee was up at the IAO AGM in July. I was asked to nominate a member of NDOA to take my place. I suggested Steve Bowey who agreed. However, the Advisory Committee now seems to be in limbo, although the possibility of holding regional forums (last held between 2009 and 2013) is being discussed. This involves representatives from neighbouring associations and officers from the IAO Council.

Please take out a subscription to ‘Organists’ Review’, which is also available on-line. There is the possibility that this journal will be dis-continued if more subscribers are not found*.* As the President of the IAO, Peter King said, ‘the IAO is the Organists’ Review’!

Rosemary Evans 24.2.17

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