

BGO

Borders
Guild of
Organists

NEWSLETTER

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Presidential letter

Dear All

After the long hard winter of not being able to get about the Borders, with one meeting in October poorly attended and another one in November cancelled because of the poor conditions, it was tremendously encouraging to have an excellent turnout at our February social lunch. Over the past year, although some of our meetings are well-attended, others are attended by those who organise them and maybe one or two others. It has made us, as a committee, wonder whether we are perhaps putting on too many meetings or meetings of the kind that our members are not interested in. Maybe we should be thinking of having only three meetings a year: our social lunch, some kind of big event and our AGM? At present we have five meetings in the year. What do you all think? What would you like to see on the programme? When and where would you like the meetings to be held? Please let your committee know and bring your ideas to our next AGM on Saturday, 9th April.

We now have a full committee with Lynda Jeffrey from Stenton taking over as Secretary. With our AGM coming up, now is the time to think of anyone you would like to propose for next year's committee, or maybe put your own name forward

An exciting innovation which is currently being developed by your committee, with some external input, is to set up our own Guild web-page. Some of the other Scottish Federation of Organists' associations have web-pages. These are often the first place that organists coming into an area will go to, to find out what is happening. It would also be a useful place for our own members to check out dates and details of events, and share photos.

My warmest good wishes to you all for 2011.

Diana

The Profile

An interview with Karen Kitchen

Organ Tuner and Church Musician

Who or what inspired you to take up the organ?

The C major Prelude from Bach's Eight little Preludes and Fugues.



In my hometown I was offered organ lessons from the organist at the church. This Prelude was fun to play, it is so joyous. That was it! Later on as a teenager I became the organist of this church myself.

Where did you first play an organ?

This was in Southern Maine, in a congregational church. I was the organist there for about 10 years and also accompanied an adult and a children's choir.

At the age of forty I took a degree in Organ performance. This was at a Liberal Arts College (Hartwick College in Upstate New York).

Hartwick Collige granted me a scholarship for a month long internship with Harrison & Harrison in Durham. This brought me to the U.K.

What are your favourite hymn and/or piece of music?

My favourite hymn is For the beauty of the earth to the tune of Dix. The favourite organ piece is Bach, Passacaglia in c.

My favourite orchestra piece is Beethoven, 9th Symphony.

What made you choose organ building as a career?

My first career was in legal research. However, I was always intrigued how organs work. I remember that as a teenager the organist was able to tune pipes in his instrument. This made a

lasting impression on me.

I consider myself an organ tuner. I am now self-employed and can provide small overhauls. I do not advertise myself as an organ builder. My current work combines a lot of interests – the work can be very technical and must always be precise. Being a tuner does mean that I have to be able to fix faults that occur with instruments.

Do you still play the organ?

Yes.

I am the organist at Wilton Parish Church in Hawick. There I have now started a choir. We provide choral music once a month with a sung Introit, an Anthem and a Sung Blessing.

The interview was conducted by Brigitte Harris.

Social Lunch – 5 February 2011

Every winter, the BGO organizes a social lunch for its members. This year, 21 members met at The Lodge, in Lauder.

The tradition is to invite a guest speaker. The speech takes place after everyone has dined well, the mood is of contentment. It is quite remarkable how a small organization like the BGO has been able over the years to ‘collect’ a list of excellent speakers.

What does one expect from a guest speaker? To be entertained, amused, enlightened. It helps if the speaker has charisma, a good voice, a rich vocabulary, wit, and confidence.

This year’s guest speaker, The Rev Charles Robertson, chaplain to the Queen, filled all the requirements. Charles presented us ‘a flavour of a parish minister’, narrating his journey from a small country parish in Cothurn, near Dingwall, to Canongate Church, Royal Mile, Edinburgh.

In 1977, this parish was threatened with closure, which would have been a great loss to Scottish history, but above all to the existing congregation. Charles was to become its saviour. He arrived in

Edinburgh on the 6th June 1978, accompanied by his wife, his three children, and the family cat. The duration of the post was for a maximum of 3 years, on a monthly notice.

Charles became totally committed to the parish, he worked hard, and making sure he was serving actively on many committees. After 5 years, the General Assembly appealed to keep the parish going, the appeal was successful, and the parish reconstituted.

In the meantime the Edinburgh High Commissioner reported the matter to HM the Queen, who knew nothing about it. On the day of the appointment for vacancy of the minister, the Queen received a telephone call from the Private Secretary, and let it be known that from now on she wanted to attend Canongate Church instead of St Giles. Thus she became Canongate's most famous parishioner.

Charles stressed the fact that Canongate was a poor parish. Over the years, no investment had ever been done. Charles described how they had to raise money every year, how they managed to keep their nose above water, how they reached their commitments, how they restored the Church, and after that even restored the Manse. They even managed to buy a new organ from the Danish builder Frobenius.

With great humour and yet great tenderness, Charles told us the story of his special parishioners, from the Queen to wee Mrs McInnes who-was- a- bit- soft -in -the-head, to the rich man who donated the missing £40,000 for the organ in exchange for decent music at his funeral, and how to his delight, this parish in the middle of Edinburgh, was in fact very much 'a country parish'.

Maggy Stead

William Boyce 1711-1779

Born in 1711 – making 2011 his tercentenary year, William Boyce was one of the most prolific and celebrated English composers of his time, as well as being an eminent scholar and musicologist. There is something bright and cheerful about his music; I like especially his organ voluntaries, in particular No 8 in C Major, and the Vivace from No 1 in d minor. After a long period of comparative neglect, in which he was chiefly remembered as a church composer, his popularity is once more in the ascendant, due partly to his championing by the composer and critic Constant Lambert, also the recent publication of CDs of some of his work – especially his eight ‘symphonies’. Composed between 1735 and 1759 then published in 1760, these are not symphonies as the term is now understood – as in, say Mozart’s ‘Jupiter’ or Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ symphonies. Rather, they are short suites, somewhat in the manner of the Water Music of Handel, his older contemporary, whose music in general Boyce’s resembles.

As a boy, Boyce was a chorister at St Paul’s Cathedral, then an organ pupil of the great Dr Maurice Greene. His youth and early middle age from 1734 to 1749 was him employed as organist at, successively, the Earl of Oxford’s Chapel in Vere Street, St Michael’s

Cornhill, and Allhallows the Great and Less, Thane Street. During this period he became composer to the Chapel Royal, was appointed conductor of the Three Choirs Festival, and received his Doctorate of Music from Cambridge – besides composing an oratorio, an opera, several masques, a selection of songs, *Lyra Britannica*, twelve trio sonatas, and two odes, one of them written for the installation of the Duke of Newcastle as Chancellor of Cambridge University.

His career as organist and prestigious composer now solidly



established, in 1749 – at the invitation of David Garrick, head of the Drury Lane Theatre Company, Boyce embarked on a new and exciting venture: writing music for various dramatic productions. These included: *The Chaplet* (a musical entertainment), Shakespeare's *Romeo and*

Juliet, *The Shepherd's Lottery* (a masque), besides a number of songs and short operas. This colourful phase in Boyce's life was enlivened in 1750 by the outbreak of a 'war' between Rich's Covent Garden Theatre and Garrick's Drury Lane, culminating in an epic contest – 'The Battle of the Romeos'. This saw the two theatres engaged in a cut-throat competition for the biggest audience. Covent Garden enlisted the musical help of Dr Thomas Arne, whose 'solemn dirge' accompanying Juliet's funeral procession formed the highlight of the production, ensuring full houses. Nothing daunted, Garrick came up with a funeral procession of his own, set to music by Boyce, in his version of the play. Result: standing room only, with victory going to Drury Lane!

In 1752, increasing deafness (an affliction from which Boyce had long suffered) forced him to abandon regular work for the theatre. Despite this physical handicap – surely the saddest to afflict a composer, Boyce's career, during the next sixteen years, continued to flourish. This period – 1752 – 1768, witnessed, among other highlights: the publication of his *Eight Symphonys* (sic), his appointment as Master of the King's Band (for which he produced tow odes each year) and as conductor of the annual festival of

'Sons of the Clergy' at St Paul's Cathedral, and probably his most famous song, '*Heart of Oak*', celebrating 'this wonderful year' of 1759 in which victories by land and sea in the Seven Years War against France resulted in Canada and India being added to the British Empire.

In 1768, his hearing continuing to deteriorate, Boyce resigned his position at St Michael's, Cornhill; shortly after this he withdrew from his duties as organist at the other churches where he played, gave up teaching, and retired to Kensington Gore. Boyce's genius was not confined to composition, as he was now amply to demonstrate. His twilight years were spent compiling *Cathedral Music*, a monumental work in three volumes, begun by his mentor Dr Greene. In regular use until well into the 20th century, Cathedral Music is today an invaluable source for researchers of ecclesiastical choral and organ music from the 16th to 18th century.

Today, Boyce's music – especially his symphonies - is appreciated by an ever-growing audience for its sterling qualities: freshness, originality, robustness combined with elegance and delightful melodiousness. He died in 1779 and was buried with great pomp in St Paul's. As his contemporary Charles Burney said of him, 'There was no professor whom I was ever acquainted with that I loved, honoured and respected more'.

Margaret Laidlaw

The Organ Club's Visit to Cape Town October 2010

From the squalor of the black townships to the beautiful mountains, veld and vineyards, the stark contrasts of South Africa may still

alarm new visitors, but the country cannot fail to create a strong impression.

Apartheid may be long gone, but the divisions between rich and poor are still infinitely greater than anything we know in the UK, even in 2011. The black shanty towns created after 1948 mostly have electricity, but the sanitation is appalling, and the situation is only gradually being improved through private funding, notably from one or two Irish philanthropists.

The organ scene is diverse too, but only one of the organs we heard was built by a South African firm. This was the impressive two manual organ by the organ builders ("orrelbouers") Wattel en Seuns in the Strooidak Kerk in the rural town of Paarl. The instrument was built in 1977 to replace an earlier organ destroyed by an earthquake in 1969. Much rebuilding work has been carried out by South African firms, but the various new instruments constructed since WW2 are mostly by builders from Europe.

Most satisfying of these, I thought, was the 1980 Marcussen (3/44) in the Endler Hall of the Afrikaans-speaking University of Stellenbosch (pictured right). Also impressive was the number of organ students studying there (26), serious music students - i.e. those studying Bach, not Elvis Presley - (250), and a thirty year-old Professor of Organ, Mario Nell, whose position must be the envy of many in the organ playing world.



Other fine 20th century instruments include:

1) Die Grootte Kerk, Cape Town. 1957 Pelz en Zoon, Alkmaar, 4/75.

- 2) Die Moederkerk, Stellenbosch. 1953 Laukuff, Weikersheim, 3/49.
- 3) Lutheran Church, Cape Town. 1937 Rushworth & Dreaper, Liverpool, 3/27.
- 4) Baxter Concert Hall, Rondesbosch. 1977 Von Beckerath, Hamburg, 3/49.
- 5) Welgelegen Kerk, Stellenbosch. 1973 Paul Ott, Göttingen, 3/32.

Of these, the virtually caseless organ of the Groote Kerk - the largest church organ in the Southern Hemisphere - reminded me of the flashy brilliance of the Royal Festival Hall organ, with a bit of Rotterdam's De Doelen thrown in. The performance of the kerk's flamboyant organist, Roucher de Toit ("they don't know how to make organs in Holland any more") helped to make the most of this instrument.



The 1937 Rushworth organ in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cape Town (pictured left) stands in a lovely 18th century case of unknown origin. The 1953 Laukhuff organ in the Moederkerk in Stellenbosch shows that this firm is much more than a supplier of parts for other builders. The Baxter Concert Hall is part of a magnificent arts complex which includes two theatres. The von Beckerath organ has an asymmetrical design resulting in a complex

layout of action and chests.

Older organs survive too, notably the 1904 4/58 Norman & Beard in Cape Town's City Hall where Nelson Mandela made his famous speech in 1990. Unlike the similar Norman & Beard town hall organs in Edinburgh, Wellington and Dunedin, the Cape Town organ has been altered slightly and is not in such good condition as the others. However, the overall sound is just as impressive.

For this writer the most elderly instruments on the tour were the most satisfying to hear and play. One of these was an 1848 house organ by Walker in the suburb of Observatory (one manual and small pedalboard) and another was an 1889 Hill (2/13) in the Anglican church in Simonstown, a former British naval base.

Apart from organs, there was plenty to enjoy on this tour, which was arranged by the London-based Organ Club. The Club tour included visits to the Cape of Good Hope (and its baboons!), the spotless up -market wineries of Franschhoek and the Taalmonument to the Afrikaans language near Paarl. Most participants ascended Table Mountain at some point, and many took the ferry to Robben Island, where Mandela was imprisoned for twenty five years; our guide was an ex-prisoner himself. Much to see; much to ponder on a most memorable trip.

Alan Buchan

A Belated Thank-you

Having missed the deadlines for the last two newsletters I would now like to thank the members for the gift of a beautiful wooden box on my retiral over a year ago(!) as treasurer of the Borders Guild of Organists. This box is from the Workshop of Tim Stead and as a woodworker myself I really appreciate its craftsmanship. It is much admired and everyone who sees it wants to stroke it ; it is so tactile. I have yet to decide what to keep in it!

David Stark

Organ for Sale

When I last visited Margaret Tennant, widow of Willie, long-time member of the BGO, she was looking at disposing of his collection of musical items. I came away with a pile of music which I'll bring to our next meeting so members can choose any items that they wish. She also has a 3 manual and pedal digital electronic organ to sell; it is made by the Dutch company Johannus and has 38 stops. I think it will be less than ten years old. If anyone is interested in this or knows someone who might be they can get in touch with me in the first place at 01573 225567 or e-mail starkorg@btinternet.com

David Stark

Christmas and the New Year for an organ scholar

The New Year always brings the challenge of selecting new music that will enlighten everyone after the brightness of Christmas. This year I investigated how to bring interest to my playing by exploring improvisation techniques that would allow me to develop any theme I wanted.

I first selected a theme by playing several chord progressions and then decided which I thought sounded best. It can take quite a while to settle the chord sequence as it has to sound the way you want but also feel comfortable and natural under the fingers. With the beautiful cornet stop on the Wells Kennedy instrument of St.

Andrew's and St. George's West in mind, I chose to create an improvisation that would evoke a Lake District scene. There is a



slate mining cavern just outside Coniston that has filled with water. As you enter it is a similar feeling to that of when you walk into a vast cathedral. It is a natural cathedral which has wonderful acoustics due to the high ceiling combined with the lake inside. If you stand still and listen to the sounds around you, you hear the

gentle drip of water, a wonderfully rounded droplet sound. To create this on the organ I first put down a canvas of chords that were dissonant with resolutions. This is to symbolize the echo effect that voices make inside the cavern. I then punctuated the chords with single notes, a fifth apart, using the cornet stop. It cut through the chordal sound like a droplet of water hitting the still surface of the lake.

To finish the improvisation, I gradually decreased the number of droplet sounds until they finally ceased. I found this to be very useful for the Offering as it can easily be varied in length.

Katharine Wade

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Borders' Organ School

offers tuition for all stages

Lessons are tailored to individual students and can include repertoire and technique, hymn playing, pedalling and keyboard skills/improvisation. Lessons are taught in St Michael's Kirk in Gordon, near Kelso, and in St Anne's Episcopal Church, Dunbar. For more information please contact Brigitte Harris, Tel 0131 556 1759
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From the Newsletter Editor

Please send articles for the next edition of the BGO Newsletter to katharinewade@yahoo.co.uk by the end of July 2011.

Front cover photographs

View of weathervane on roof of Lammermuir Pipe Organs' work-shop in Oldhamstocks.

Casework on house organ—Neil Richerby

