



BORDERS GUILD OF ORGANISTS AND
CHURCH MUSICIANS

NEWSLETTER NO 37

AUTUMN 2014



President's Letter September 2014

Dear All,

Welcome to our Newsletter No. 37; this is my first letter as your president. It is an honour, and I hope that I will make a worthy contribution. I take over from Brigitte Harris who has served you well as your president for the last three years.

I am glad to say that **The Borders Guild of Organists and Church Musicians** after many years of its existence is still going strong, with an exciting programme of events. Unfortunately we are not gaining many new young members, but we are not losing any. The committee is as enthusiastic as ever. Lynda Jeffrey has resigned as a secretary, we are very grateful for her hard work and commitment. We welcome Mairi Leach as our new secretary.

The weather has turned. We will remember the summer of 2014 as a good one, with lots of sun and heat, and hopefully a lot of music. For me it has been a special summer, my first one as a retired person. It has allowed me to travel through Europe for a month. I visited many churches. Since being a member of the BGO I look at churches in a different way: I go and check if there is an interesting organ. Very often however, even when the churches are open, it is not easy to find the person in charge of the key to 'the loft'. So you strain your neck and look upwards and take a poor photo with your cheap camera.

I was very sorry to miss the BGO outing in March, looking at the organs of the churches in Haddington, Channelkirk and Lauder. Alan Buchan's interesting report is featured in this newsletter, and you'll find more of his photos on our website. These outings are always an enriching experience, discovering instruments, and having a good day out in good company.

Change of season means a new programme of events.

Check our exciting new syllabus: It starts with a Harvest Singing Workshop in Peebles in October. In November we invite you to a musical Afternoon Tea in St Andrew's and St George's West in Edinburgh. This year's social lunch will take place in February, at the MacDonald Hotel in Cardrona. In April we hold our AGM at The Steading in Blainslie. We are very happy to announce that

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Front cover photograph of the Lammermuir Organ in St Mary's Haddington by Peter Backhouse.



Your Committee at work in The Steading in May

we have secured a special performance of the group *VINTAGE 12* for this occasion. In May our outing will take us to Ladykirk and Norham.

As you can see, there is something for everyone, and I hope you'll be able to participate in all our venues.

You can now read our newsletter on line. Forward the link to friends and family: www.bordersorganists.org.uk.

We also look forward to receive your articles, reviews and photos.

I wish you a very good season. Keep the music going!

Maggy Stead

BGO Syllabus 2014/15

Saturday 11th October 2014

Harvest Singing at Peebles Old Parish Church

We will sing a wide variety of music for Harvest and Thanksgiving.

Morning Session: 10.30am – 12.00noon

Lunch: 12.00noon – 1.00pm (please bring a packed lunch)

Afternoon Session: 1.00pm – 2.30pm

ending with Anthems, Hymns and Readings followed by tea and home baking

Saturday 22nd November at 2.30pm

Afternoon Tea and musical entertainment at St Andrew's and St George's West Church, George Street, Edinburgh.

Launch of a new Cookery book to aid fundraising for the choir tour fund.

All BGO members and friends are welcome.

Saturday 7th March 2015, 12.30pm for 1pm

Annual Social Lunch at Cardrona Hotel.

Our Guest Speaker will be James Robertson. James is the head of department for the MA in Music Therapy at Queen Margaret University.

Saturday 25th April 2015, 4pm

AGM at The Steading, Blainslie.

This is followed at **5.00pm for 5.30pm** by Cocktails and a concert of light music given by the young Vocal Ensemble ***Vintage Twelve***.

May 2015

Visit to Ladykirk and Norham Churches.



Vintage Twelve

Schwalbennest Organ in the church of St Marien in Lemgo, Germany.

This organ was built between 1587 and 1595 by the Dutch builder Georg Swegel and is one of the few dating from the Renaissance period. It sits like a swallow's nest on the east wall of the church and is an instrument on which renaissance music can now be authentically performed, as this organ has just been restored. Visiting the church this summer again brought back many happy childhood memories: this is church my parents went to when I was a small child, and where I listened to the organ Sunday after Sunday.

Brigitte Harris



concede he was streets ahead of me!

The weather was exceptional and our days passed revisiting our places of interest, the Cathedral of course, several museums, shops, Neolithic villages, burial chambers and cairns, all of which were accompanied by tales of what Angus' mother and uncles had got up to so many years before. Then, on our last day, we made it to Rousay, not on a wee boat where you had to climb down a ladder to board, but on a proper, large car-ferry. Not nearly so much fun! The island was as beautiful as I remembered – even down to the seals we found when we were investigating a sandy beach - the young one's eagle eye spotted them – and there was the Manse, occupied of course, so we couldn't actually get inside, sadly.

For me, however, the highlight came when we were visiting the ancient burial chamber, Maes Howe. This is right down on the sea-shore, accessed down through a very steep field bordered by a stone wall all the way there. It was on the way back up, at one of the many stops I had to make, that I suddenly went into raptures over a section of the wall. Why, you might indeed ask. Well, somewhere at home there is a photograph of a small brown-haired girl and two smaller blonde-headed boys standing against this very wall. Suddenly it was 1975 and I was Mummy again! What a silly, sloppy soul I am!

That then was our five days of sunshine, good food, fun and memories, enjoyed by us all, though Angus did say, towards the end, "Granny, if I hear 'Nearly forty years ago' again, I'll.....! He loves me, really.

Mary Shields

Vintage Twelve are an a cappella ensemble specialising in a wide range of repertoire from Renaissance to jazz and pop. Having met at Edinburgh Napier University, the group began working together in 2012 and have performed in the George Hotel for the George Street Association, as well as fundraising concerts in St. Andrew's and St. George's West Church, concerts at the Edinburgh Fringe festival and at two schools in Malawi. The main focus of the group is versatility of repertoire in addition to performing new works; the group is host to two composers, which means they are always performing contemporary music.

Hawick Recital

On 26th April we were extremely privileged to be given an organ recital by Michael Harris in the Congregational Church in Hawick.

There was a very good turnout of members and friends, plus a most gratifying number of local folk, all eager to hear Michael play. The Hawick publicity machine had sprung into action and details of the performance had appeared in the local press, thus swelling the ranks of a most appreciative audience. Nor were they, or we, disappointed.

Michael gave each piece a short introduction, a description of the music and the composer, often amusing, always informative, adding to the enjoyment of his listeners. His programme consisted of Grand Choeur in D by William Faulkes, Voluntary in A by William Russell, Handel's Organ Concerto Op 4 No 5 in F, Felix Mendelssohn's Sonata VI in D Minor, A Trumpet Minuet by Alfred Hollins, a piece entitled Allegretto by Henry Smart, a favourite composer of mine, the lovely The Swan by Camille Saint-Saens and William Wolstenholme's Scherzo in B flat, finishing with his Finale also in B flat. Some pieces known to us, some we were hearing for the first time, but all played with verve and with feeling and enjoyed immensely by one and all.

We then moved to the Church hall, where the ladies of the congregation supplied us with tea and delicious home-baking. This provided people with the chance to speak to Michael and to thank him for a truly delightful afternoon.

Mary Shields

BGO Outing - Saturday 29th March 2014

The three organs visited on this outing could not have been more varied in size, tone and provenance. Running in a fairly direct north-south line our journey began at Haddington, continued at Channelkirk and concluded at Lauder; about a dozen members and friends of the BGO attended. Like most well-run organ tours, this one was both instructive and enjoyable for all concerned.

St. Mary's Parish Church in Haddington reminds us that not all large pre-Reformation buildings in Scotland were cathedrals or abbeys. The present cruciform building dates back to at least 1462 and from an architectural angle is much more uniform in style than other pre-Reformation city churches like St. Giles in Edinburgh, or St. Nicholas Kirk in Aberdeen. Most of these large cruciform buildings were much too large for the reformed Church of Scotland and they were usually divided into several sections with galleries. In the case of St. Mary's, only the nave was used by the reformers; the choir and transepts remained ruined until restored in 1971-73. At this stage the splendid 1892 Forster & Andrews organ (3/29, mechanical action) was taken down with a view to re-erection in the enlarged building; it never was, and its parts were later dispersed.

After much debate, a brand new instrument was built by Lammermuir Pipe Organs in 1990. Headed by Neil Richerby, the organ building team included two German ladies from Hamburg, a swimming pool attendant cum piano tuner from Westruther and a rabbit-shooting Dutchman from Oldhamstocks (with Peter Williams as consultant). The result was an uncompromising masterpiece of neo-Baroque splendour (with a hint of Classical *gout francais*), perhaps berated only by those who are overly fond of their Swell boxes. The pedalboard is flat and straight, there are no playing aids and the stops for the Chair case are located behind the player, just like those on the 1978 Ahrend organ in Edinburgh University. The GPO (Post Office) paid for the pedal towers on either side of the main manual cases.

Past Times

We have often visited Orkney over the years, firstly as a family, later just John and myself, but our first ever trip in 1975, nearly 40 years ago, was, I think, the best.

A friend was Minister on the island of Rousay, one of the larger islands, and he suggested that we might like to exchange our Aberdeenshire manse for his Orcadian one for the month of September. Each would conduct the other's Sunday services and I could help out with organ playing if required. This seemed an excellent idea, so Mum, Dad, three little ones aged two, three and five, plus Indra, our Norwegian elkhound, drove north, sailed for Stromness on a large ferry, followed by a trip on a very small boat indeed to reach our destination. On subsequent trips to the Orkney mainland for shopping, sight-seeing etc. we shared said small boats with crates of live crab and lobster, waving their claws enthusiastically in the air, quite scary for wee ones (and their Mum).

Tom's manse was virtually on the shore and you could watch the seals lying on the rocks at the bottom of the garden while doing the washing-up at the kitchen sink – I was always very happy to do that job! It was a marvellous month and we made the most of it, lots of walks, picnics, drives (in Tom's minibus, our own car having been left on the mainland for his use), visits to ancient Neolithic sites, or just sitting on the rocks below the Manse watching the waves.

Thus we decided that perhaps one of the next generation might like to visit these old haunts of ours, and at the beginning of August three intrepid travellers, John, myself and Angus, our thirteen-year-old grandson, sailed for St. Margaret's Hope on the southernmost island of South Ronaldsay, drove across the famous Churchill Barriers and on up to the beautiful little town of Kirkwall where we had the most splendid B and B accommodation, right next to the ruined Bishop's Palace and across the street from St. Magnus Cathedral. The Cathedral was our first port of call the next morning, a magnificent building full of ancient treasures. By good luck, the organ, a very fine three-manual, was being played and I actually recognised the piece as one I play myself, though its actual title eluded me. However, this was just a taster, as the organist went on to play much more intricate music and I had to



not usually a words person but I find this a wonderful poetic translation of the 15thc original. I much prefer this period of writing with its simplicity to the overblown of later times – and the often rank trite of the present day. And Vaughan Williams tune, "Down Ampney": brilliant! A beautiful flowing

tune, easy to sing, but with lots of interest. Especially the fourth line. Ten out of ten!

What piece of music would you take with you to a desert island?

It would have to be Bach. Getting a lot for my money I would go for the B minor Mass. Having sung this a few times with Abbey Consort I really appreciate it. I think I would have to smuggle in a recording of the Orgelbüchlein as well though!

Where do you play the organ now?

I have played the organ in Greenlaw Kirk for almost 35 years now. For about the last 4 years I have shared with my son-in-law who is a music teacher. We do week about which should have given me extra free time. But on my Sundays I now also do St Michael's, Gordon as well as Greenlaw. Then there are the phone calls from other churches.....

The BGO had a fair shot at this instrument, taking it in turns to play music appropriate for the style of the organ, while others perambulated round the building, viewing the various historical and architectural features, listening to the acoustical quirks and hearing how well this unusual organ's bright, clear sounds circulate. For several members this was quite a new experience, and debate on the organ's merits continued over a superb lunch in the Maitlandfield Hotel across the road.



Our next port of call, Channelkirk, could not have been more different: a small country church whose present building dates from 1817, though the ecclesiastical site is much more ancient, located away from the present main road on the line of the Roman road, Dere Street. This church

received its first pipe organ in 1913, a one manual five stop "Norvic" model organ built by Norman & Beard of Norwich. This instrument began life c.1900 in Cadder South Hall near Bishopbriggs, from where it was moved to the former St. Bride's Church, Edinburgh in 1922. When St. Bride's acquired a larger instrument in 1957, the Norvic found its way to the newly constructed St. Martin's Church on the outskirts of Portobello. Like many post-war churches, this one had to be replaced by a smaller building in 2012 and the organ was moved again.

Our member David Stark carried out the work to move and adapt the instrument to Channelkirk, where it nestles to the left of the pulpit, almost (but not quite) under the gallery. Some of the troublesome pneumatics were electrified and other minor modifications made. There is no pedalboard to worry about here and each of our intrepid players was able to concentrate on the fingers without the need to worry about feet, nor indeed much about registration. Such discipline forces attention on musical considerations alone, how to phrase and articulate and make the most of a limited tonal palette and

the individual sounds available.

It was only a ten minute journey to Lauder, our final port of call, another church whose first pipe organ arrived in recent times, in 2003. The organ began life in Aberdeen at John Knox's Church, Mounthooly in 1903, the work of Ernest Lawton of Aberdeen. In 1975 it was removed to Cairns Church in Cowdenbeath and on the closure of that church in 2000, the organ was rescued by David Stark. Lawton appears to have used quite a variety of pipework, including a "Phonon" stop reminiscent of Hope-Jones. David used the Lawton only as a basis for a new instrument here at Lauder. And what a fine result it is! The mechanical action is beautifully crafted and the added upperwork in this instance helps to project a supportive organ sound round the fairly dry acoustics of the galleried 17th century building. The sounds themselves seemed to me to have matured since I last heard this organ in 2008 - do organ sounds mature gradually (with or without attention?)? I am not sure, but the folk of Lauder can be justifiably proud of some fine craftsmanship and musical judgment. Their worship is surely enhanced by this organ.



Tea followed in the church hall at the corner of the kirkyard and brought the convivial atmosphere of the day to a happy close as we departed to our various parts of the Borders and beyond. Thanks are due to Brigitte and the committee for giving much thought and attention to a worthwhile day in the BGO calendar.

Alan Buchan

Interview with David Stark by Brigitte Harris

Who or what inspired you to take up music and specifically the organ?

My parents both sang in the local church choir ; my mother was lead soprano and my father lead tenor. Although a very modest suburban church the choir numbered about 20 and would sing an anthem each Sunday as well as performances of parts of "Messiah" at Christmas and Easter. This would be in the late 1940's and 1950's. So the church and church music was always around. I have a very vivid memory of being taken to church at about the age of 3 or 4, and, as the door into the nave was opened being stunned and mesmerised by this amazing sound : the ORGAN. As with many children church was large chunks of boredom made bearable by the music! Later I sang in the junior choir and subsequently the adult one. It would be at this time as a teenager that I summoned up the courage to ask the organist if I could possibly be allowed to practise on the organ. To my surprise he was delighted! My keyboard skills were (and still are) limited, due to being self-taught, but that did not stop me scouring the music library in George IV Bridge for suitable pieces - and many unsuitable. It would also be at this time that my interest grew in the mechanics of organs and organ-building - but that is another story!

Where did you first play the organ?

The church mentioned above was Lochend Parish Church in the east of Edinburgh. This was quite an impressive building in red brick built around 1930. Sadly it is no more as it was knocked down to make way for housing in fairly recent times. The organ was a 2 manual and pedal Lawton which was acquired in about 1942 from a church in Dundee. It also went the same way as the building except for a few pipes and console which were saved by none other than Alan Buchan. I now have the keyboards in store. Service playing was holiday deputising mainly. There was then a long gap with university, marriage, and a move to the Borders. I only started playing again when the cat got out of the bag that I had played the organ before; then ministers started to knock at the door.

What is your favourite hymn?

After much thought this would have to be "Come down ,O love Divine". I am