

President's letter

Dear Fellow Members,

I hope you are all keeping well in this chilly weather and I wish you a belated "Happy New Year". Some of you will know that, since our last Newsletter, our valued member Peter Comerford has died. Thank you to all those who attended his funeral at Addingham. Please hold Lucy in your thoughts over the coming months.

We may look forward to some interesting events in the coming months. I know that Anthony Gray has some very exciting things planned for the outing to Southwell in June, so please keep that date free and come along.

I offer you a warm welcome to St. Barnabas Church, Heaton for my President's Afternoon.

I dare not do anything directly music related, but I can promise you a good laugh (I hope).

Please note the later starting time of 3 pm. Light refreshments will be served.

I look forward seeing you as often as possible. Remember the Council works very hard and it is most encouraging to have your support.

Valerie Mitchell

Dr PETER COMERFORD

In November members were sad to hear of Peter's death.

I was honoured to be asked by Lucy to play for the funeral service which was held at St Peter's Church Addingham. I played on the "hybrid" organ which Peter had designed and played for many years.

The music before the service had been carefully selected by Lucy and included many of Peter's favourite pieces and significant hymn tunes. "Crossings" the name of their house in Ilkley is the name of a hymn tune by Armstrong Gibbs - a tune he loved.

Peter was for many years Organ Advisor for the Anglican Diocese of Bradford a task that I took over in 2014.

We shall all miss Peter's wise counsel, his encouragement and his gentle patience.

He was a true liturgical organist, his faith shone through his hymn accompaniments.

May he rest in peace.

Edward Scott

Dr Peter Comerford

Sheila has asked me to set down for the newsletter a few facts about Peter's connection with organs.

Fascinated by the instrument from a very early age, Peter wanted to serve God through music and was playing the organ for church services by the age of 14. By 20 he was also training both junior and adult choirs, and was a member of what was then known as the Cardiff Organ Club. He was called upon to play the organ for the daylong succession of communal funeral services for the children of Aberfan.

Peter moved to Yorkshire and met Gilbert Freeman, who invited him to join Bradford Organists' Association. He became organist at the Congregational Church on the Grove in Ilkley (later to become Ilkley URC and eventually Christchurch), and enjoyed playing its 2 manual Harrison. He first played at St Peter's in Addingham as a one-off stand in, but was to be based there for the rest of his playing days. Both at Christchurch and at St. Peter's he worked closely with the choir. He prepared and practiced tirelessly for all services, and felt that sensitive playing of hymns is the core task of a church organist, and was for him an expression of his faith. He felt strongly that church music should be as good as it could be to offer to God and to support worship, rather than be thought of as a performance.

Peter was, reluctantly, Bradford Diocesan Organ Advisor for over 25 years; the refurbishment of the one-manual Harrison at Hebden, masterminded by Colin Maude, was one of his happiest associations with this task.

Peter worked at the University of Bradford and there he first thought to combine his love of the organ with his passion for computer hardware design. The Bradford Computing Organ, and its later version

Bradford Enhanced Synthesis Technology (BEST), were unusual in being based not on recorded samples like most other organ technologies of the time but on additive synthesis, with sophisticated hardware allowing sounds to be defined in great detail by software. The system was designed with an uncompromising approach to excellence, aiming to include every feature which could be incorporated to make it as flexible and powerful as possible. Installations, including at Christchurch and the hybrid organ at St. Peters, provided the opportunity for experimental work which fed back into further designs. He gave to his work the same unrelenting attention as his organ playing, and his motivation the same – his oft-repeated words were “I just want to make beautiful sounds for God”.

Lucy K. Comerford

Visit of Philip Wilby (190119)

A goodly tranche of BOA members foregathered on the afternoon of Saturday 19th January in Holy Trinity, Bingley, to meet an highly respected composer. Fr Andrew and I are thinking of striking a “medal” for those who were lost, but persevered in finding us! They were less embarrassed when Philip admitted that he had gone to All Saints first.

Having tested the ancient (1980s) Johannus, set up his digital version of a “Ghetto Blaster” and introduced his colleague, Canon Richard Cooper – “my words man!” – Philip introduced himself as Professor of Composition for 36 years at Leeds University – now retired.

He spoke of the proud Yorkshire tradition of choral societies and his close connections with Halifax in particular but coupled with his love of Brass Bands and his pride in being Composer for the Black Dyke Mills Band for many years. For the Halifax Choral Society’s Centenary he was asked to write something big! Knowing that “Halifax” is a corruption of “*Holy Faith*” and that the Parish Church (now *Minster*) is dedicated to John the Baptist, led to the idea of a “cantata” based on the life of John the Baptist. Canon Richard Cooper and he selected text which expressed the idea of Holy Faith. Philip used “This is the Lamb of God” as a repeated dramatic point as the segments of St John the Baptist’s story as the Messenger of “He that is to come”. Canon Richard’s text includes the well-known scenarios - and Yes! The Dance of the 7 veils plays its part. Philip played us excerpts of the work which involved 2 Choral Societies, a much enlarged Band and a powerful organ which is now rarely used.

Philip then moved to his setting of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “God’s Grandeur” which he composed for the choir of Ripon Cathedral Grammar School in 2017. He explained that one of his techniques was to make the opening section quite short and the second section longer; he emphasised the contrasts of Hopkins’ verse and regarded the last 4 lines as very important – to the extent that the music for these lines is as long as the rest of the work. We particularly enjoyed a short section where three solo girls sang in canon at a very high tessitura.

Philip’s wife, Wendy, was Vicar of Birstwith (a small village in Nidderdale with less than 800 inhabitants) and it was for her village choir that Philip composed his setting of “When I survey”, which he titled “Wondrous Cross”. The apparent simplicity of the melody is a contrast of rising and falling tessitura, short notes followed by one long note. Verse three has more content, has a change of note length and modality. In verse 4 the original theme is back and stretches out to the word “amazing”. The chordal accompaniment seems simple but, as well as containing the notes of the vocal parts, they actually represent the word “wondrous” and it is the addition of extra notes in verses 2 & 3 which gives them such a different feel.

In complete contrast, Philip now asked us to look at his handouts on Composition Exercises. I think to the relief of most of us, he sat at the mighty Johannus and gave us examples of how we might use some of the techniques of Harmonic Extension, of Chromatic Harmonic Extension, a Structured Modal Exercise and an Octantonic Modal Exercise. (The latter may help some of us to see and hear where Messiaen is coming from – and going!)

We then listened to part of an Organ Concerto Philip had composed for Darius Battawalla where the structure is more akin to the Concerto Grosso than Organ versus Orchestra. Groups of instrumentalists actually come to the front of the concert platform as their “moment” arrives.

The final part of the afternoon had Philip and Canon Richard explaining the genesis of their St Matthew Passion, commissioned by Wells Cathedral.

This began when “It is a thing most wonderful” was developed into a St John Passion by Bob Chilcott in 2013, followed by John Joubert with the St Luke Passion, and Philip Moore who did a St John Passion for them.

It was the tune Kingsfold which provided the inspiration for Richard and Philip as they contemplated a background to the Passion of an English heritage of hymnody, which is in fact the modern equivalent of the Folksong societal underpinning preserved by RVW, Cecil Sharp, et al in the late 19th and early 20th century. The Passion will be heard on Palm Sunday in Wells Cathedral and its final words are the centurian’s “Surely this was the Son of God”.

The meeting closed with a very appreciating and lengthy round of applause.

Ron Fletcher