

# The Journal

## Norfolk Organists' Association



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# Norfolk Organists' Association

## The art of music as related to the organ

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Front cover  
The late Queen at her Maundy service in Norwich Cathedral 1996  
Photo courtesy Archant

Back cover  
Arp Schnitger organ in the Ludgerikirche, Norden.

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## REMEMBERING THE LATE QUEEN ELIZABETH II

First, Ron Watson's memories of how well the late Queen remembered the people she had met and what they talked about.

In 1996, on the strength of the fact that our choir, Sine Nomine was affiliated to the RSCM, Isabel and I were afforded the opportunity to attend a fund raising event in St James' Palace for the RSCM who were in the process of moving from Addington Palace. The main attraction was the opportunity to meet the RSCM Patron, the Queen.



***StJames's Palace North  
Gatehouse Courtesy Wikipedia***

Four rooms were set aside in St James' Palace for the event and in each room

was a choir who would sing to the Queen as she entered the room. In the room to which we were assigned the choir was Robert Prizeman's boys choir Libera who were most impressive. Lined up in four locations within the room were groups of eight people. The Queen approached our group and spoke to the first two couples, then it was our turn.

We explained to the Queen that we ran a choir and that I was an organist and that we came from Norwich. We told HM that we had been stewards at Norwich Cathedral earlier in the year when she distributed the Royal Maundy and she remarked that 'they had given her quite a long walk'. She held a glass in her left hand and shook hands with her right and we noticed that between her chat to us and the next couple the glass had mysteriously disappeared, presumably unnoticeably handed to one of her attendants.

The next couple explained that they were engaged in finding uses for redundant churches. 'Oh' said the Queen, 'you should talk to these people; (gesturing to us); there are plenty of them in Norwich'. We were very impressed at this spontaneous remark from HM.

And that was that. We had met the Queen and felt that we had really engaged with her, albeit very briefly.

Next, a very different memory told to Adrian Richards.

This is a second-hand memory of the queen, first-hand belongs to the late great Simon Preston. Going back to the mid-1980s, my ex-wife worked in the Receiver General's office at Westminster Abbey, was privy to all goings on at the Abbey, and she knew Mr Preston well. When it came to 'Fergie's' wedding (which I attended as a sidesman!) the music was chosen in consultation with her late Majesty. As one can imagine, much was being done in the Abbey during the day, and of course for a week beforehand it was closed to the public and subject to various searches everyday – particularly searches with sniffer dogs.

One evening when the Abbey was quiet it was arranged that Simon Preston (and Harry Bickett) would play various pieces on the organ to the Queen and happy couple so that they might hear how they would sound. After a time of noisy organ and quiet cogitation the music was decided upon. The Queen then asked if she could have a go. She was of course able to play the piano and so it would be an interesting and not too painful experience. Evidently she was quite thrilled with the instrument and was quite keen to see quite how loud she could make it go!

Mr Preston recounted that a splendid evening was had by all.

Jeremy Worth



***The Westminster Abbey organ console. Photo cmuse.org***

# PROPOSED NOA TOUR TO GRONINGEN AND OSTFRIESLAND

Monday 23 - Friday 27 October 2023

We are delighted to announce our intention to return to Groningen (in the north east Netherlands) and Ostfriesland (in north west Germany) for another tour of the extraordinary historic organ treasures that abound there. The remarkable **Sietze de Vries** (<https://www.sietzedevries.nl>) has already been booked to be our Organist Guide once again. Those who went on our previous tours in 2012, 2014, and 2016 will readily testify both to his extraordinary talents as a player and his thoroughly amiable and encouraging personality.

A proposed itinerary has already been submitted and, subject to venue availability and confirmation, the organs we hope to hear and play include the recently restored 1734 Hinsz organ at **Leens** (II/P 27)



*Hinsz organ at Leens*

and the 2017 Schnitger-style organ (II/P 25) by Bernhardt Edskes in **Groningen's Lutherse Kerk** (which also

houses an 1896 organ by Van Oeckelen, II/P 22). Across the Dutch/German border in Ostfriesland we hope to play the small 17th century organs at **Westerhusen** (I/P 7) and **Uttum** (I/ 9), both of which contain fabulous Trumpet stops that are amongst the very oldest surviving such ranks in the world. We also hope to hear and play the 1710 Arp Schnitger/1782 Wenthin organ (II/P 29) at **Weener** and pay a return visit to the wondrous 1686/92 Arp Schnitger organ (III/P 46) in the Ludgerikirche, **Norden**.



*Arp Schnitger organ in the Ludgerikirche, Norden.*

Also in Ostfriesland we hope to hear and play the 1997 copy of the 1734 Clicquot organ at Houdan in Normandy (III/P 24) at **Stapelmoor**, and the truly beautiful 2018 Hendrik Ahrend organ (III/P 48) in the Großen Kirche, **Leer**.

We very much hope the tour, as in previous years, will also include the finest jewel in the Groningen organ crown, the glorious Schnitger/Ahrend organ (III/P 52) in the **Groningen**

**Martinikerk** with its pipework that spans six centuries.

We shall travel by car and leave Harwich on the overnight Stena Line ferry to the Hook of Holland on Sunday 22nd/Monday 23rd October, returning on the overnight ferry back to Harwich on Friday 27th/Saturday 28th. En route from the Hook to Groningen we hope to hear and play two immensely important historic organs: the 1662/63 Barent Smit (later 'Father' Smith) organ (II/P 20) at **Edam**, and the 15th/16th/17th century organ (I/ 7) at nearby **Oosthuizen**, one of the oldest playable organs in the Netherlands. On the return journey to the Hook we hope to play the celebrated 1743 Hinsz organ (IV/P 56) in the Bovenkerk, **Kampen** with its vast acoustic!

We intend to stay, as on our past tours, in the characterful and comfortable Martini Hotel in the centre of Groningen with its excellent restaurant.

The tour will not be cheap but you have a whole year ahead of you to save up for it! The more who come, the cheaper the organ part of the tour will be. On the evidence of our past tours the whole experience will prove to be good value for money and provide a rich fund of fond memories to treasure! The opportunity to hear and play such wonderful organs very different in style, sound, and looks to those we have here in England will be

worth every penny... and surely more rewarding than lying on a beach!

Final details and costs will probably not be issued until the new year but if you think you may be interested or likely to come do please let **Michael Flatman**, our Events Secretary know (events@norfolkorganists.org.uk). You won't be definitely committing yourself at this stage; it would just be helpful to start getting an idea of possible numbers. It would be especially helpful to know if you would be willing to bring your car and be one of our drivers if you do decide to come.

For those wishing to whet their appetites further do take a look at the reports of our previous tours in the following copies of **The Journal** which can all be found online on the Association's website (<https://issuu.com/norfolkorganistsassociation>): Issue **80**, page 13; **81**, page 6; **89**, page 13; **90**, page 13; **98**, page 6; **99** page 7.

Martin Cottam



*Schnitger/Ahrend organ in the Groningen Martinikerk*

## THE ATTLEBOROUGH HYMN MARATHON

At 6pm on Friday 26 August, the Choir and Organists of St Mary's Church Attleborough began a hymn marathon. The aim: to sing, non-stop, all of the verses of all of the hymns in the hymn book 'Ancient and Modern: Hymns and Songs for refreshing worship', planned to last for three days and nights.

This marathon effort was created to raise funds for the Attleborough Music Project (AMP), which aims to create a centre of excellence and bring more music to Attleborough and the wider community. The project includes the provision of a music outreach worker and essential repairs to the 100-year-old church organ, not to mention extension of St Mary's facilities in Attleborough to create more space for community events including concerts and recitals. For this major project the marathon hoped to raise £10,000.

After a blessing given by the Bishop of Thetford, David Dunnnett accompanied the choir of St. Mary's and the congregation for the first hour, starting at verse 1 of hymn 1. From then on a team of 29 organists had been created from St Mary's Church with help from Cathedral and other church organists to play through the entire hymn book, missing nothing, from start to finish – a total of 847 hymns.



### *At the start on Friday 26th*

Jonathan Stamp took over from David Dunnnett; Michael Nicholas, Cathedral Organist Emeritus, and John Keys from Nottingham, who has recorded the entire hymnbook, were also included in the team to play over the weekend.

In addition to St Mary's Choir, many other choirs and members of the public were also invited to come along and participate throughout the event. Clearly the hymnbook, published by Canterbury Press, based in Hellesdon, Norwich, is partly arranged in the seasons of the church year, so the singers sang through an early Advent and Christmas, followed promptly by Lent and Easter to Pentecost and onwards. The mix meant that one minute all were singing plainsong, the next Victorian stalwarts such as "There is a Green Hill Far Away", wedding hymns and modern songs.

St Mary's organ, which dates back to 1913, was built by Norman & Beard with later additions. It is a three manual with pedals and a remote console, and the aim is to replace those parts of the organ beyond their useful life, address an increasing list of faults and make some changes to the

specification to allow the instrument to accompany the choir, a full church when required, and to be an exciting recital instrument.

St Mary's has established an annual concert programme. In this first full year St Mary's generous acoustic has played host to Schubert's *Die Winterreise*, the Norwich Cathedral Choir, and the South Norfolk Youth Symphonic Band. Future concerts include Brass Bands and solo piano.

Before the event, Dr Ben Miller, Director of Music at St Mary's, said: "This hymn marathon will be the biggest concert we have ever attempted and we are really pleased to have so many organists, including from Norwich Cathedral, join us for this incredible challenge alongside our own choir.



***Dr Ben Miller and Nigel Waring duetting***

We hope that choirs and people will also come and support us too on this

journey through the church seasons as we seek to raise funds for our project. We are committed to creating a centre for excellence for music at St Mary's that will enable us to bring music and its many benefits to the community in Attleborough and beyond."

The organisation of the event went off very well, there were stewards in attendance throughout (even in the middle of the night), food and drink was provided, a screen showed the hymn being sung for joining singers and one of the home team was in attendance at all times should a visiting organist be late - or worse!

The 10am Eucharist service went ahead on Sunday morning with the next four hymns to be sung simply slotted into the service!

Throughout the weekend singers came and went, and at no time was the organist playing alone - there was always at least one singer but often times very many more.

The organ tuners spent a lot of time inside the organ the day before the event with particular attention being given to the blower - no one knew the effect of continuous three day playing on an organ blower. In the event, the organ performed very well and in fact the odd note that stuck early in the weekend had cleared itself by the end.



All the organists played their part extremely well with some very good accompaniments being heard throughout the weekend no matter how many or few singers were in the church at the time. Playing slots ranged from one hour to six hour slots in the middle of the night, and hymn singing was continuous apart from when each new organist took over and there was a short break.

In the end, the last verse of the last hymn was sung at 2am on the Bank



### ***At the finish Monday 2.10am***

Holiday Monday morning, at which time there was a break for photographs, champagne and cake. Not surprisingly there were not many people in church at the time so to ensure everyone could be involved at the end who wanted to be, after a short break, we started all over again at hymn one, this time singing only the first and last verse. The church filled up in the morning leading to 10am when we had announced that we would finish, and with a very vigorous singing of *At the Name of Jesus*, more cake and refreshments were brought out to celebrate the end of the event.

In summary, the whole event was joyous and great fun with everyone in the church agreeing it was a great thing to have done. As a result, St Mary's can now sing any hymn in the hymn book because we know them all! All were agreed however that whilst we knew many hymns already and we learnt some fine new ones, there were also hymns in the book we would rather not sing again!

### **The organists who took part**

In the order they played for the first time:

David Dunnett, Jonathan Stamp, Elinor Hanton, Ben Miller, David Barnard, Tim Patient, Jonathan Eyre, Harry Macey, John Witchell, John Keys, David Shippey, Michael Nicolas, Simon Cole, Bob Gee, Daniel Ayers, Mike Webb, Matthew Bond, Nigel Waring, Adam Chillingworth, Matt Wright, Francis Coomber, Peter Lee and Susan Jacques, Gudrun Warren, Reuben Anstey, Ron Watson, Andrew Beaton, Mathew Martin, David Ballard.

Many thanks to all those who took part in the event and who provided sponsorship. When taking all donations into account, the total raised was indeed just in excess of £10,000.

*"O Praise Ye the Lord!"*

Dr Ben Miller & Nigel Waring

*Photos courtesy Rev Matthew Jackson*

## PLAYING THE FRENCH ROMANTIC ORGAN REPERTOIRE Part 3

### Legato, Articulation, and Technique

As the 19th century progressed players such as Mendelssohn, Liszt, and Franck brought a more pianistic keyboard technique to the organ. Alongside this the use of a well developed legato touch became the norm for organ playing in France and beyond as perfected and promulgated by the highly influential Belgian virtuoso organist and teacher, Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (1823-1881). His *École d'Orgue* published in 1862 became the basis for a method of playing that remains foundational to this day, e.g the use of finger substitutions, toe-heel pedalling, etc, to achieve 'absolute legato.' Lemmens (Fig. 1), at the behest of Aristide Cavallé-Coll, taught both the young Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937) and Alexandre Guilmant (1837-1911) who in turn passed on his



**Figure 1 Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens**

methods to subsequent generations of French organists.

Widor succeeded Franck as Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire after the latter's death in 1890. He immediately and rigorously set about rectifying the rather lax approach to organ playing technique his predecessor had allowed to prevail, Franck having favoured a concentration on the art of improvisation. Not all of Franck's devoted and recently bereaved students were happy with this state of affairs, most notably the famously irascible Charles Tournemire (1870-1939). He never had much regard for Widor (later nicknaming him 'Sir Charles-Marie Widor' and 'Charles-Marie von Widor') but even he eventually had to concede his debt to Widor for his improved playing technique.

We are fortunate indeed that Tournemire's exact contemporary and classmate, Louis Vierne (1870-1937) has passed down to us via his autobiography, *Mes Souvenirs*<sup>1</sup> a detailed transcription of Widor's instructions on technique in those Conservatoire classes of the early 1890s. As a practical guide for playing the French Romantic organ repertoire they are invaluable. For example...

**on staccato:** Vierne writes that 'Widor wanted it steady, exactly measured, in contrast to that of the piano. How was it done? "Keep the fingers in contact with the keys as much as possible, tighten the wrist slightly, and articulate from the forearm. When you have mastered it

slowly, velocity will come by itself without further muscular contraction”.’

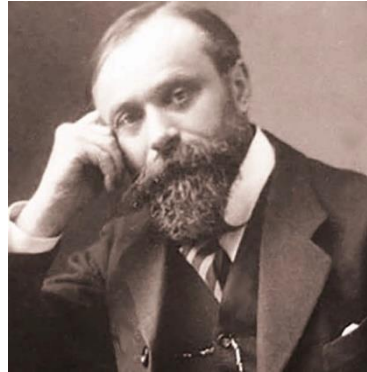
**on detached chords:** Vierne writes that Widor ‘called our attention to the fact that the cerebral process that results in lifting a note is identical with that which commands the attack. We had never thought of that and had been doing it “any old way.” He warned us of the exasperating nervousness of those who lift chords “as if the keys were burning their fingers,” quite as much as he ridiculed those who act as if they were playing “in a glue pot.”’

**on legato:** “Legato is the result of instantaneously carrying over the pressure from one finger to another. An infinitesimal hesitation and it becomes either choppy or muddy. Although you must play legato, you must also play clearly; otherwise you have no real technique.”

In his own Memoirs<sup>2</sup> Tournemire (Fig.2) adds: “For legato suppleness is specially recommended...One last remark (the fruit of more than forty years experience), the legato, scrupulously based on the “linking” of sounds, consists of only passing from one note to the next after leaving the “overlapping” note as if with regret, in order to fill that little gap which would otherwise exist if this important rule is not observed.”

Elsewhere Alexandre Guilmant writes: “When there are neither slurs nor dots above the notes it is understood that the piece should be played in legato

style, which is the true way *véritable manière* of playing the organ... “



**Figure 2 Charles Tournemire**

It’s clear from all this that a properly developed legato technique is absolutely essential for a convincing rendition of the French Romantic organ repertoire. This was vividly brought home to me when NOA members were invited, back in October 2004, to Norwich Cathedral where the then Assistant Organist, Julian Thomas treated us to a fascinating and highly enjoyable lecture-recital on ‘The Franck-Widor Tradition’. If I recall correctly he told us he’d not long returned from a study trip to Paris where the need for a sure legato touch, ‘ultra legato’ indeed, was emphasised as a pre-requisite for the performance of their works. Others who were there may be able to correct me but I think Julian then played part of Franck’s E major Choral I in a typically ‘English’ style before repeating the same passage using an ‘ultra legato’ touch to transformative effect! Suddenly I was in Paris!

## Posture and Unnecessary Movements

On posture at the console Tournemire has this to say in his Memoirs: "We should note, that for the overall performance at the organ, the hands should be held in a slightly low position, the body fairly distant from the manuals (according to the physique of each player), leaning slightly forward like a cyclist on his machine, knees together, and the feet also, insofar as possible." Fig. 3 shows Tournemire towards the end of his life in such a posture at the console of Ste.Clotilde.



**Figure 3** Tournemire at Ste Clotilde

Vierne writes that 'to correct our technical imperfections he [Widor] began by showing us the proper position of the body at the keyboard, forbidding us not only ridiculous gestures, useless as well as unaesthetic, but also all useless

motions, no matter how slight: "All unjustified movement is harmful because it is a waste of time and strength. Before deciding that a movement is inevitable its usefulness must have been ascertained during the period of slow practice. That period should be lengthy. If you have the courage and conscience to make yourself do it, considerable time will be gained, and then you will play every virtuoso piece in its exact tempo without difficulty."

Tournemire, in his own distinctive style(!), has more to say on these matters in his Memoirs: "-Never hit the organ. (A word to the wise...!).

The attack from a height doesn't mean anything; it must be extremely close to the keys and with great precision. The finger therefore has the role of a little hammer, which on striking, makes the note speak." In an organ method he published in 1936 Tournemire adds: "...we insist on affirming here the continuing existence of certain basic principles... They are of an extreme sobriety; they reject such 'eccentricities' dear to a class of virtuosos who imagine that they impress the smug and ignorant crowds by 'attacking' [the keys] from a height, or by withdrawing the hands by raising them ostentatiously, particularly at the end of a difficult passage; who take it upon themselves to bow their heads down to the edge of the keys in particularly 'pathetic moments'! This ridiculous 'staging' is condemnable; and it is necessary to

say that all organ music, that of ancient times as well as the present, can be expressed under cover of small, very precise, very clean movements, localised in the barely visible articulation of the fingers; besides, the immobility of the body is rigorously necessary, as well as elegance in behaviour.”

It’s worth noting that Tournemire did not always follow his own commendable advice! Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986), who in his late teens studied with Tournemire, has left a vivid eye-witness account of his teacher improvising: “Carried away by the music which sprang forth under his fingers, he lost conscious control of his movements. He had embarked for another world. While he was playing upon the Swell manual, he would close his eyes as he closed the Swell box. During a crescendo, he could be seen growing more and more animated, unconsciously emphasising with facial expressions a particularly dissonant harmony. Then, as the Tutti thundered forth, at the re-entrance of the theme in pedal octaves, he suddenly stood on the pedal keyboard for several measures, to the great astonishment of his guests [in the Ste. Clotilde organ loft], all the while improvising.”

### **Pedalling**

I’m guessing most of us in this country, if we had good organ teachers, will have been taught to keep our knees

together as much as possible when pedalling. It’s certainly the orthodoxy espoused in the best organ tutor books (such as those written by Anne Marsden Thomas). Watching videos on YouTube I’ve seen so many continental organists playing with more of a knees apart approach that I’ve come to believe it is we Brits who more closely follow the Lemmens/Widor tradition!

Here’s what Widor had to say on the subject, as recorded by his pupil Vierne: “Begin by placing your bench so that when the tips of your toes touch the extreme edge of the two black keys in the middle of the pedalboard, your knees will form a right angle with your thighs. That way, if you lean slightly forward, your body will take the normal position... Never attack the key with a flat foot, but with the inner face of the sole. Keep the feet in constant contact with the edge of the two black keys, never playing the white notes near the back of the pedal except in substituting feet or crossing. Attack the black notes on the extreme front edge to facilitate, if necessary, sliding onto a white one. Never attack the keys perpendicularly or stomp on them, the way paving men do with their beetles [i.e. heavy implements used for pounding the pavement!], but slide along lightly to avoid unnecessary noise.” Vierne adds that Widor ‘would never permit a momentarily idle foot to rest on the bar attached to the panel

above the pedal board. “Let the free foot hang over the keys, always ready either to play, to operate a ‘pédale de combinaison’, or to open and close the swell box... ..generally the knees, the heels, and the toes must be touching. Then the greatest stretch of the toes (knees and heels together) gives a fifth. The greatest stretch of the legs (knees together) gives an octave. As soon as a foot stops playing it should immediately rejoin the one that is playing, in the normal position, to avoid all imperfect movement. With the pedals, as with the manuals, economy of movement must direct the choice of pedalling.”

Fig. 4 shows the elderly Widor at the console of the mighty Cavaillé-Coll organ in the Trocadero Palace, Paris. Note the typical flat, straight Cavaillé-Coll pedalboard.

### **Rubato**

In her organ masterclass at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in January 2020 Gillian Weir rightly railed against a metronomic way of playing declaring it should be no more metronomic than our heartbeat.

“Metric = arhythmic!” She implored us to remember Messiaen’s words, “metre imprisons us; rhythm sets us free”, and, when playing, suggested we should try and think of our listeners saying, “talk to me!”

It seems to me that an appropriate use of rubato is therefore every bit as essential as legato if we are to

communicate the true heart and feeling of this repertoire. Once again we can be indebted to Vierne for passing on Widor’s wise and practical words on the subject:



**Figure 4** Widor

“Then he explained the delicate difference between rhythm and metre: “You must play in time, certainly, but does that mean that the division of the note-lengths must be rigidly mathematical? Played thus, it would be a triumph of automation, of unintelligent mechanism, of an unleashed force that reduces everything to the same level. In life in general, and in art in particular, nothing is like that. Everywhere there is light and shadow, the important and the incidental, the strong and the weak. Music cannot escape that law. So, having admitted rationally that all melodic and harmonic devices do not have the same value, preference has to be given to the important ones: that is accentuation.

On the organ, the only means we have [of accentuation] is by lengthening a note. Losing a slight amount of time on certain notes, making it up on others, that is the secret of 'rubato', the secret upon which all vital performances depend. Nevertheless, all this should be accomplished in such a way that the beat is respected. The listener must not be aware of the means employed in drawing his attention to what you wish to underline. It is a very delicate matter, for the slightest exaggeration produces a detestable mannerism that all artists of good taste must avoid. The problem lies in not falling either into dry and stupid mechanics or into pretentious bombast, but in prolonging a note or chord slightly 'without due emphasis'. How rare are they who solve this problem satisfactorily." Indeed!

### **Tempi**

We are fortunate that, unlike so much organ music of the Baroque era, this repertoire is well supplied with tempo indications and often metronome speeds too. That said, caution still has to be exercised: for example, some of Vierne's metronome makings are notoriously unreliable, even unplayable (possibly, it's suggested, because his extremely poor eyesight sometimes prevented him from making a correct reading of the metronome scale).

As ever good taste, musicality, and common sense should prevail! To try and play a piece faster than you are securely able to is to court musical disaster. Far better to play more slowly and treat your listeners to something more accurate and musical. If you are blessed with the technical ability of a virtuoso the difficulty may be to prevent the sacrifice of musicality on the altar of speed! Widor has this warning we would do well to heed: "The organ is almost always played too fast. Young people [and many older ones, in my experience!] easily yield to the desire to dazzle the audience by this means. Beware! It is a false virtuosity appropriate to the circus-not the tribune."

My 1901 edition of Widor's Symphonie V has the Toccata marked at crotchet=118 (and I've seen some editions with crotchet =100). I've heard far too many performances taken a good deal faster than that, and invariably at no musical gain whatsoever.

### **Some Final Thoughts**

I do hope these articles have been of interest and help, maybe even enlightening at times. It goes without saying that listening to fine performances on good examples of French symphonic organs can only be beneficial. If you can hear such instruments in situ, so much the better! Small or large there's nothing

quite like them! Even more invaluable is taking the opportunity to play one if you can. Alas, I have yet to experience the privilege of playing music on a Cavaillé-Coll organ (having only held down notes on one for tuning purposes!). I don't know what it feels like to play a tracker action assisted by Barker levers, or how easy or awkward it is to operate the ventil pedals. From what I've been told they can sometimes be very stiff and heavy (especially if neglected or unregulated), but standing by the console watching Didier Matry at St. Augustin in Paris back in 2002 he seemed to make very light work of them with his assured, deft footwork.

I began this short series with César Franck and it seems appropriate to end with him, namely with links to two wonderfully musical performances on YouTube that perfectly illustrate so much of what I've tried to explain and communicate. The first features



Beatrice Piertot playing the Pièce Héroïque on a French symphonic organ not by Cavaillé-Coll but Merklin (utilising a good deal of older pipework). The sound world is very much that of a Cavaillé-Coll and the film contains informative shots of the

ventil pedals and expressive use of the cuillère swell pedal:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu50pcx2vl>



And what better way than to conclude with the great Gillian Weir's performance of Franck's Choral III in A minor on the last organ Cavaillé-Coll personally supervised the building of, that at St. Ouen in Rouen? I think it's the finest (as well as the least altered) of all his instruments, and I've yet to hear a better, more beautifully expressive performance of this glorious piece:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C91pHWJ3qtU>

Martin J. Cottam

## References

- 1 A full English translation of Vierne's *Mes Souvenirs* can be found in Rollin Smith's indispensable biography, *Louis Vierne: Organist of Notre-Dame Cathedral*, Pendragon Press, 1999
- 2 Susan Landale's English translation of *Tournemire's Memoirs* (edited by Marie-Louise Langlais) can be downloaded as a PDF for free from this link: <https://www.agohq.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Charles-Tournemire-Memoirs-ML-Langlais-good-1.pdf>



## HARMONIUM MASTERCLASS WITH ANNE

**PAGE**, St George Colegate, Norwich.  
Saturday 22nd October 2022

St George Colegate is home to a splendidly restored mid-nineteenth century Alexandre et Fils harmonium belonging to Anne Page. Five members of the Association (Martin Cottam, Matthew Bond, Claire MacArthur, Jane van Tilborg and Tim Patient) played two pieces each from the first volume of L'Organiste, a collection of 59 short pieces in various keys composed by Cesar Franck in 1889-90 specifically for the harmonium.

The first pieces made use of the indicated registrations, which unlike those for organ, are set by numbers (1-4) that are printed on the stop knobs. The foot pedals provide wind which fills a sprung reservoir to give a positive pressure, unlike American organs which work on a vacuum. Reeds, which make the sound in harmoniums, have the very useful property of maintaining their pitch as the pressure changes, unlike flue pipes in organs whose pitch rises or falls depending on the wind pressure. This pitch stability in reeds allows for expressive playing by altering the wind pressure.

The basic technique of expressive playing on the French harmonium using the expression stop formed the second part of the masterclass and was based on initial lessons from the

Mustel treatise of 1903 (Alphonse Mustel L' Orgue Expressif ou Harmonium). These emphasise the use of successive single pedal strokes to provide wind directly to the reeds, bypassing the reservoir, the aim being to have no perceptible change in volume when changing pedals. This coordination, not necessarily easily mastered but worth the investment of time, underpins the expressive possibilities of the French harmonium.

Our five brave volunteers made steady progress at their first attempts at this technique under Anne's excellent tuition and gave us all an insight into the expressive potential of an underrated keyboard instrument – the French harmonium.

For further background on, and recordings of, the French harmonium see Anne Page's webpages on the Expressive Organist (<https://harmonium.co.uk/anne-page-the-expressive-organist-1>) and recordings of Vierne's 24 Pièces Libres (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3Lregs3R1g>) David Shuker



**Claire MacArthur takes her turn. Photo Martin Cottam**

## SAMUEL STREET OF GREAT YARMOUTH AND HIS BARREL ORGAN FOR WEST SOMERTON

When my wife and I visit churches we are on the lookout for different things – Linda for signs of the life of the church, and me for the organ (although there are, of course, usually many other features of interest). On our first visit to St Mary's West Somerton several years ago I was delighted to see an interesting small organ case just opposite the door.



Alas, a quick inspection revealed that the case was empty but my interest was piqued. The surviving church

archives at the County Record Office in Norwich do not contain any information on this organ, so it has been a question of piecing together its history from various sources.

*The Norfolk News, Eastern Counties Journal, and Norwich, Yarmouth, and Lynn Commercial Gazette* of 21<sup>st</sup> June 1845 reported the following:

*SOMERTON CHURCH. An organ has lately been built by Mr Street, of King Street, in this town, for Somerton Church, and was opened by him on Sunday last. The church was well attended; divine service was conducted by the Rev. Mr. Morton, of Caister, Rector of the parish. The organ presents a very neat and ecclesiastical appearance – its tone is full without being harsh, and though only a small instrument, its power and compass were found adequate to the size of the church.*

The phrase 'built by Mr Street' is perhaps ambiguous in this context and could just mean 'erected by' or 'installed by' – I will come back to this later. There is no further record of the West Somerton barrel organ until 1932 when a short note in *The Organ* (Vol. 11, No 44, p.246) revealed a few details:

### WEST SOMERTON

*There is a small barrel organ in the church containing open diapason, principal and fifteenth, though quite unplayable. It might conceivably be converted into a one-manual, with the*

*addition of a stopped diapason, for the pipes appear to be quite sound.*

It would appear that something like this proposal might have been carried out as by 1967 Boston and Langwill, in their book *Church and Chamber Barrel Organs*, made the following observation:

*WEST SOMERTON – The case of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century barrel-organ is preserved. Abortive attempts at conversion appear to have destroyed most of the mechanism.*

The case of Street's 1845 barrel organ is still in West Somerton church and is completely empty of any mechanism save for the metal catch on the side of the case that engaged with the slotted axle of the tune barrels to select the tune. However, further enquiries revealed the presence of two barrels in the church which clearly belong to the organ. The barrels have survived



with surprisingly little damage, and with further investigation will reveal the number of pipes and the spacing of the key frame. Decoding the pinning

of the barrels will also give the tunes, all being well.

Some background to the use of barrel organs in Victorian churches puts the West Somerton instrument in perspective. At the beginning of the 19th century very few parish churches had organs and in many instances the singing was led by a band of musicians. In Martham church for example there are records of a singer's gallery from this time. However, where there was no church band the singing of psalms would be led by the parish clerk. This practice fell into disrepute as many clerks had no musical training and congregations often had their own very individual way of singing. Georgian and early Victorian clergymen attempted to introduce a more seemly style of singing by raising funds for an organ, but often found that there was no suitable player available.

The solution was to buy a barrel organ – which was a pipe organ that could mechanically reproduce psalm and hymn tunes simply by turning a handle. The tunes were 'programmed' onto a wooden barrel using a system of metal staples that acted upon small metal levers to open valves that let air into the pipes. The position of the staple on the barrel and its length determined which note was played and for how long. Each barrel was usually 'pinned' for ten different tunes and it was possible have more barrels

made as new tunes were introduced. Compared to the cost of buying a complete church organ, along with the salary of an organist, the purchase of a barrel organ was an economic and practical solution and many thousands of such instruments were installed in churches in the first half of the 19th century.

However, by the 1850s the 'quick fix' afforded by barrel organs was beginning to lose its appeal. Congregations began to find the availability of only 30 or 40 tunes (i.e. three or four barrels) too limiting. More importantly the changes in worship style and church layout favoured by the Oxford Movement raised the standard of church music. Not least, the appearance of the first edition of *Hymns Ancient & Modern* in 1861 encouraged churches to install an organ (referred to originally as 'finger' organs to distinguish them from the mechanical barrel organs) and employ an organist. For small country churches the conversion of their barrel organ into a 'finger' organ was probably the most economic option and by the end of the 19th century only a very few barrel organs had survived in their original state.

Samuel Street owned a music shop in Great Yarmouth which sold a range of musical instruments. From his *'Piano-forte & Music Warehouse'* in King Street we are informed that *'S Street has returned from London with a*

*selection of New and Second-hand Cottage, Cabinet and Square Pianofortes...'* and that *'Pianofortes and organs are tuned and repaired'*. In addition, there are *'several fine-toned finger and barrel organs for sale, adapted for church and chapel'*.<sup>1</sup> We do not know if Samuel Street employed someone to carry out the organ building work but there are some tantalising suggestions from contemporary documents that he did at least some of the work himself.

Information about the organ building activities of Samuel Street is rather sparse. In the newspaper announcement of Street's marriage at the age of 26 to Mary Grigson in 1839 he was described as *'organ builder and tuner'* indicating that he might have served some sort of apprenticeship in the trade<sup>2</sup>. In 1847 the organ installed in All Saints South Lynn is reported to have been both built and installed by Samuel Street. It only had three stops, open and stopped diapasons along with a principal but it also had a diaocton – the octave coupler invented by G M Holdich in 1843 in which an extra octave of pipes was added for each rank *'by which the power is much increased'*.<sup>3</sup> It seems unlikely, although not impossible, that a second-hand organ with such a new mechanism would be available but it is also plausible that Holdich might have supplied the mechanism and pipework to a competent middle man such as Samuel Street, having advertised the

availability of such items as early as 1839.<sup>4</sup> 1847 and 1848 seem to have been busy years for Samuel Street, as noted by Julian Litten, with organs being installed at St Faith Gaywood, Our Lady of the Annunciation Kings Lynn and St Nicholas Chapel-of-Ease Kings Lynn. A newspaper report states that the organ for the Roman Catholic chapel was second-hand but that the other two organs were 'built by Mr Street'.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary newspapers provide some evidence that Samuel Street was indeed an organ builder, albeit in a highly localised and small-scale way. This information may be relevant if surviving instruments are to be restored or reconstructed. It is hoped that the West Somerton barrel organ may once again be brought back to life – perhaps with the addition of a barrel pinned with some more contemporary hymn tunes.

David Shuker



**West Somerton Church. Photo Simon Knott  
Norfolkchurches.co.uk**

*This is a revised and extended version of an article that appeared in the BIOS Reporter, Vol 45 (November 2021), 87-88.*

1. *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1842, p1. Col. 3.
2. *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> January 1839, p3. Col 3. See also Julian Litten's article on Samuel Street, organ builder, in the *BIOS Reporter*, Vol 45 (May 2021), 37-41
3. *The Lynn Advertiser and West Norfolk Herald*, Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April 1847, p2, Col 3
4. *St James Chronicle*, Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> August 1839, p1 Col 1.
5. *The Norfolk News, Eastern Counties Journal, and Norwich, Yarmouth and Lynn Commercial Gazette*, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December 1847, p3. Col 3

## POSTSCRIPT

My time as temporary editor of the Journal comes to an end with this issue. As a chorister rather than an organist I have been well outside my comfort zone.

I would like to thank all those who have written articles for the Journal this year, I hope you have enjoyed reading them.

My grateful thanks too, to David Shuker who takes over as editor in 2023. We are very lucky to have such an expert in charge.

I have been looking back over the many years we have been putting together a Journal, including the duplicated Newsletters of the 1970s and 1980s. I am struck by three things. The first, obvious really, is there is still no shortage of things organ and organist to write about. Our subjects have spanned the world, and at least 400 years of music making. There is, however, a shortage of members to do the writing. I am sure more of you have articles you could write. Why, even your chorister editor managed one.

The second is that in the 1980s the Journal used to print a considerable number of letters from readers. Some were factual about organ matters, some were complimentary about

articles and some, occasionally, (guilty pleasure this) were extremely cross about views expressed by the then editor (who responded robustly to the criticism!)

'Emails to the editor' doesn't have quite the same ring about it, but letter or email, their sending and publication have the effect of making the Journal shared by the membership, not just read. So send your views to David, [info@signofthepipe.com](mailto:info@signofthepipe.com), not forgetting to mark them 'for publication' in true newspaper style.

Finally, not the least of the pleasures in looking back through back numbers of the Journal are the puzzles and jokes, admittedly often used as fillers. I must say the puzzles I have come across are hard and aimed at the musically knowledgeable. The jokes include unfortunate phrasing: eg seen on an organ console "In memory of .... This organ was rebuilt in 1962 by his Wife and Daughters". Unlikely thought the editor at the time Ralph Bootman in 1988. Even more surprising was this entry from 1986. "Seen in a West Country newspaper: "ORGANIST and CHOIRMASTER required as soon as possible. Good three manual organ, salary plus fees, assistant available. Must be able to read music."

Jeremy Worth

## EVENTS



### **Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 7pm sharp**

**Quiz and Chips** St Cuthbert's Church Hall Wroxham Rd, NR7 8TZ

(just north of Brickmakers roundabout on A1151. Bus 11, 11a, 12.)

Orders for food must be made in advance to Mathew Martin on 01263

731075, 07771 620 610 or [mathewmartin2@gmail.com](mailto:mathewmartin2@gmail.com) by the end of

**Saturday December 31<sup>st</sup>**. Cost: £8 per head, payable in **CASH** on the night.

(correct money please) We shall use the excellent Goodfrydays chippy over the road. Please bring your own drinks, cutlery etc. We provide fruit juice, condiments and the NOA pickled onions!

The meal will be followed by the NOA General Knowledge Quiz with Music hosted by our quizmaster, John Hanton.

### **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March at 11.00**

**Annual General Meeting and visit to St. Peter & St. Paul Church Heydon**

11.00 AGM

11:45 Charles Shippam will give a brief talk about the church and Walker's work on the organ.

Break for lunch - bring your own or visit Heydon Tea Rooms or the Earle Armes.

(It is advisable to book individually if you wish to eat at either the Earle Armes or Heydon Tea Rooms for lunch).

After lunch open console on the newly restored organ.

### **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2pm**

Desert Island Discs at Rosebery Road with castaway Canon Adrian Platten, Precentor Norwich Cathedral, interviewed by Ron Watson.

### **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May**

East of England Organ Day at Chelmsford Cathedral

