



# The Journal

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Norfolk Organists' Association

# Norfolk Organists' Association

## The art of music as related to the organ

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Front Cover. Martinikerk, Goningen, organ by Arp Schnitger (1692)  
including earlier pipework, restored by Jurgen Ahrend (1976 and 1983)  
(Photo: Martin Cottam)

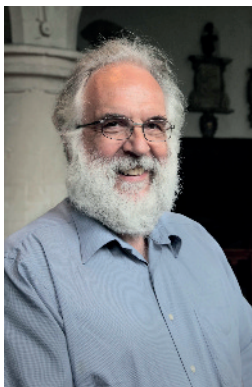
Back Cover. Edam, Nicolaaskerk, organ by Barent Smit (later 'Father'  
Bernard Smith) in 1662-63  
(Photo: Martin Cottam)

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## Notes from the Editor

Images of organ cases on the front and rear covers of this issue are the clue to the main content of this issue. The recent tour of historic and new organs in and around Groningen and the Ostfriesland area of northern Germany was a great success - both for those participants for whom it was a second, third or fourth visit and for those others, such as me, who were making the pilgrimage for the first time. The group comprised players and non-players who provide the different perspectives behind the articles which make up the major part of this (and the next) issue. The Association owes a real debt of gratitude to Martin Cottam and Michael Flatman for organising the details of the tour over the past year or so. The local organiser Bert Veening made sure that visits to the twelve churches were possible. Part of the excellent planning for the tour

was to secure the services of Sietze de Vries as our guide for the week.

I had been aware of the rich history of the organs in the Groningen region of the Netherlands ever since I bought the excellent Fugue State Films boxed set of CDs and a DVD, *Pronkjuwelen in Stad en Ommeland*, (now sadly out of stock) about 10 years ago. However, nothing really prepared me for the visual and aural experience of encountering these organs in the flesh. Moreover, the opportunity to play them, especially under the gentle (and necessary) tutelage of Sietze de Vries in choosing registrations, turned out to be a visceral experience. My limited key- and pedalboard technique was significantly enhanced by the rich and varied sounds that these organs produce.

It will be apparent from the various articles that many of us have taken away somewhat distinct memories of the tour and will be reflecting on the experience for some time to come. Not least for me - an organ that I play from time to time which previously seemed to me something of an oddity (a 1967 Willis rebuild of an earlier Binns organ - see NPOR N06352 ) I now see as an attempt to reproduce a North European organ sound. So I have dusted off my underused Sweelinck and Buxtehude collections to tackle them with renewed vigour.



# **SUCH WONDERS!**

## **The 2023 NOA Tour to Groningen & Ostfriesland**

(Part 1)

It was at the NOA event in September 2021 that one of our newest Association members approached me and asked if there might ever be another tour to Groningen or similar. Imagination fired I couldn't resist putting together a somewhat idealistic itinerary within the week, though with no certain hope it would ever materialise as a reality. But it's good to dream, and sometimes dreams do come true. This one did, and how! Sufficient interest was ascertained, dates agreed, Sietze de Vries (the extraordinary Dutch organist who so enriched our previous tours) booked for a full five days, and the itinerary finalised thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Bert Veening in Groningen who secured all the church bookings. In the meantime, having organised reservations at the characterful Martini Hotel in Groningen, I was able to entrust all further admin responsibilities into the capable hands of our Events Secretary, Michael Flatman and I can't thank him enough for all the work he did.

There were thirteen of us altogether on the tour, only four of

whom had been on any of the previous three. The party included some non-NOA members such as the organ builders Roger Pulham and Eric Shepherd (with his organist wife, Rosemary Evans). The group gelled splendidly and there was much laughter and sharing of kindred spirit enthusiasms throughout the week.

*Monday 23 October*

Thick fog greeted our cars as we rolled off the overnight ferry from Harwich. We couldn't see much of the Dutch landscape as we drove north but felt (and appreciated!) the smoothness of the impeccably maintained Dutch roads that guided us safely to our first destination...

### **Edam, Nicolaaskerk**

Situated on the northern edge of this attractive little town the Nicolaaskerk is an enormous building. Its huge, brick built bulk was half shrouded in chilly fog on our arrival but inside we found a warm welcome, the provision of tea and coffee, and our wonderful organist/guide, Sietze de Vries. So good to reacquaint with him.

Edam may be famous (infamous!?) for its cheese but for the devotee of British organ history there is far more significant treasure to be found within this church. The organ here was erected in 1662/63 by



twenty stops. There are no independent pedal stops, the pedals being permanently coupled to the Hoofdwerk. Protective doors like giant moth wings extend out from each case and the whole ensemble is topped by three enormous knobble encrusted obelisks. Truly bizarre but strangely

Barend Smit. Exhaustive research in recent decades has proved almost conclusively that Smit was the same individual who settled in England in the late 1660s where, as 'Father' Bernard Smith, he established himself as one of the leading organ builders of the Restoration era. Not a single one of his British church organs remains in anything like intact form so the survival of the instrument in the Nicolaaskerk is especially felicitous, as is the fact it has come down to us almost unaltered from Smit's time apart from a slight enlargement in 1716 by one Matthijs Verhofstaad. He seems to have added the 16' Bourdon, the two 8' Trompet stops, and some of the upperwork.

Resplendent in a west gallery with its grey blue Rugpositief casework, red brown Hoofdwerk and gilded pipe shades the organ possesses

loveable. This is an organ Sietze had long wanted to play but amazingly this was his first encounter with it. Having given us a spoken introduction he ascended to the organ loft and captivated us with one of his trademark demonstration tours of all the colour possibilities in a series of improvised variations on a chorale theme. Sietze's ability to maintain improvised counterpoint whilst combining stops seamlessly like one acquainted for years with this particular instrument is a thing of wonder! So too the sheer beauty of sound issuing forth.

Though comparatively small the organ sings into the vast space with unforced ease. It's quite amazing how effectively these historic organs on low wind pressures can project their voices into the building but with no sense of undue strain or aggression. Smit's flute stops at

Edam are especially exquisite; bold yet possessed of an almost melancholic, soaring beauty. In contrast the Trompet stops have a fabulous, beefy, raucous character reminiscent of a Renaissance wind band. Marvellous. The plenum is rich, clear, and complex. Wonderfully powerful four rank Cornet stop.

Those who wished to play took their turns with varying degrees of success: nerves, the high bench, baroque pedalboard, and other assorted unfamiliarities taking their familiar toll on several of us. A highlight for me was Rosemary's deft rendering of Sweelinck's variations on 'Mein junges Leben hat ein End', especially the first two played on the flute stops. So moving, the music fitting this organ like the proverbial hand in glove. Rosemary's face was beaming afterwards as one transported to a whole new experience of organ playing.

A truly magnificent start to a week of such promise. Our allotted two hours at an end we strolled into the historic town centre past quaint, low rise, often gabled delights (and a cheese shop!) still embraced by gentle mists to a justly recommended and cosy restaurant

that provided delicious fare for our lunch. My red bell pepper soup harboured a particularly fine spicy warmth. Just the job.



Rosemary Evans playing the Smit organ at Edam.

## Oosthuizen, Grotekerk

Three miles or so north of Edam lies the village of Oosthuizen whose sizeable cruciform church (almost square in plan) houses another priceless organ treasure. It used to be thought the instrument was installed around 1521 by an unknown builder but recent research seems to suggest a 17th century assembly in an old case. Old the case most certainly is, late Gothic indeed with its flat front and superbly carved panels and pipeshades of writhing, gilded foliage. The three pipe towers are topped by tall Renaissance style pavilions. The pipes themselves are considered

to be amongst the oldest playable in the Netherlands.

The organ looks quite diminutive high in its curious *trompe l'oeil* west gallery and indeed it is not large possessing a single manual of just seven stops which essentially make up a Principal chorus from 16' Bourdon (apparently replacing an earlier 8' Roerfluit) up to Quint, Mixtuur, and a splendidly piquant two rank Sesquialter (treble only). The manual compass is restricted (F, G, A-g", a") and the tuning is Meantone thus further limiting the repertoire that can be played here.

None of this poses problems for an improviser of Sietze de Vries's calibre. Opening with a haunting, medieval sounding flourish over a drone using a single stop he immediately evoked an era some 500 years earlier than our own before embarking on another glorious improvised set of variations on a chorale theme. The range of colour combinations and moods explored with such apparently limited resources was truly remarkable. Each voice possesses great individual character, complexity, and energy, the ancient plenum a dark, tangy brilliance,



Oosthuizen, Grotekerk. Anonymous 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>-century organ in an earlier case.



everything enhanced by the glowing embrace of the resonant acoustic. This organ is quite simply wondrous! The church's custodian had suggested the best place to listen was in the chancel beyond the wooden screen. It is completely devoid of fittings and to stand there while the organ plays one can almost believe the pipes are situated at the east end, not the west. Quite extraordinary.

Those foolhardy enough to brave the horrendously steep steps up to the organ loft were rewarded not only with the chance to play this exceptional historic instrument but to witness just how shallow the case. A particular curiosity is the fact the stop knobs have to be pushed in, not pulled out to engage the various registers. I was the last of our party to leave the loft, Sietze deciding to regale us with another extended improvisation as I carefully picked my way down the vertiginous wooden steps. He clearly loves this organ... as do I! Choosing 'Greensleeves' as his theme he was a man truly inspired, a man in his happy place! How I wish I'd been able to record it. What a treat indeed with which to send us on our way to Groningen and the agreeable



Sietze de Vries at Oosthuizen

hospitality and three courses of culinary delights awaiting us at the Martini Hotel.

*Tuesday 24 October*

We spent the whole of our second day in Groningen itself, thus giving our drivers a well-earned rest. Sadly the day dawned decidedly grey and remained that way but on a more positive note we'd been joined now by the final member of our party, Robin Bell, a trustee of the Friends of the Caird Hall organ in Dundee who David Shuker had got to know



earlier in the year. Delayed by the ravages and aftermath of Storm Babet Robin had arrived very late the previous night but was to prove not only a thoroughly engaging and cheerful addition to our group but an enviably capable player too!

### **Groningen, Lutherse Kerk**

The Lutherse Kerk is situated down a side street close to the Martini Hotel, not that you'd know a church was there as you stroll past. Having initially knocked on the wrong door we were directed though another entrance to a small courtyard that eventually gave us access to our desired destination. The church itself is a barrel-vaulted hall with galleries around three sides. The long ungalleried side has the pulpit as its central focus. Turning your gaze from the pulpit to the left hand gallery the main objective of our visit could be seen; the organ (II/P 25) built by Bernard Edskes in 2017 in scrupulous imitation

of the style of the great Arp Schnitger (1648-1719).

Schnitger himself had provided an organ for the Lutherse Kerk in 1698/99. Originally of just two manuals an independent pedal was added in 1717 but sadly the whole organ was removed in 1896. The 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017 was the spur



Groningen, Lutherse Kerk - a Schnitger reborn!

for reconstructing the Schnitger original as closely as could be ascertained from surviving documents but with some modifications. The design of the casework was modelled on that adorning the 1710/11 Schnitger organ still to be found on the island of Pellworm off the west coast of Schleswig Holstein. The attention to detail and quality of workmanship of the reconstruction is exceptional. A charming bonus is the reinstatement of two of the trumpeting putti that had survived the removal of the original Schnitger instrument. They now grace the summit of two of the pipe towers, joining a newly carved companion who stands on the remaining tower.

Sietze's demonstration began with a fantasia-like introduction, gradually building the Principal chorus to a climax before embarking on another series of chorale variations highlighting first the very fine flutes (some tender and soulful, others bright and perky), then the full-bodied reeds with their prompt speech and well-defined edge. An outing for the Sexquialter and even the two rapidly whirling, jangling cimbelsterns led to the build up towards the conclusion on full organ. Brilliance, clarity, balance, power. Splendid!

We took our own turns and were shown a unique feature of this new

organ; a small continuo console at the front of the organ gallery. Facing the main organ it is connected by trackers to six of that instrument's registers thus allowing the cantor-organist to conduct and accompany choirs and instrumental ensembles gathered on the spacious gallery from this little console. Perfect for the regular performance here of Bach Cantatas. There is a belief Bach himself had a similar type of continuo console installed in the Thomaskirche, Leipzig around 1730.

As if such riches were not enough the Lutherse Kerk still retains the instrument that replaced the original Schnitger; the 1896 Van Oeckelen organ (II/P 22) sited on the opposite gallery at the other end of the church. We persuaded Sietze to demonstrate that too, which he did. It's a wholly different sound; darker, more romantic, a little cloaked at times perhaps, yet with more capacity for definition and brightness than I'd anticipated.

### **Groningen, Martinikerk**

Having enjoyed two and a half hours at the Lutherse Kerk we had ample time to seek out, order, and enjoy lunch before our booked two and a half hours at the majestic Martinikerk, home of Groningen's undoubted star organ treasure. A tour to this part of the world is not complete without experiencing the

wonder that is the main Martinikerk organ with its pipework spanning six centuries and once again resounding as a cohesive whole thanks to the restoration/reconstruction efforts of the genius, Jürgen Ahrend.

But there was another organ treat to be savoured first. In the soaring Gothic choir of the Martinikerk stands something of an oddity; the Positif division of an 18th century French Baroque organ complete with finely carved and embellished casework. Without its Grand Orgue and Récit divisions there is very little in the way of original French Baroque repertoire you can play on it. Once again Sietze's ability to improvise effortlessly in a style appropriate to any given instrument or era came to the fore as he proceeded to deliver a short suite of pieces that could easily have come from a late 17th century/early 18th century Livre d'Orgue. Several of the stops are divided registers so Basse et Dessus effects are possible, especially in the hands of one so assured and skilful as Sietze. Even those of us visiting the Martinikerk for the fourth time had not heard this particular organ before. Bathed in an immense acoustic it sounds utterly glorious. My goodness, those

French reeds! Some of our party couldn't resist trying it out for themselves but we did finally pull away from this exceedingly delicious hors d'oeuvre, moving into the huge nave (nowadays lit by a recently installed array of enormous, glittering brass chandeliers) for the main course, the mighty dark green and gold wonder at the west end.

It's hard to know what more I can add to what I've already written in my reports on our previous tours about the masterpiece of the organ



Groningen, Martinikerk. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century French Positif relocated and restored.

builder's art that is the main organ in the Martinikerk (see front cover). Once again, Sietze's masterly improvised demonstration tour (based on the 'Old Hundredth') revealed to perfection its deserved reputation as one of the very finest organs in the world: the almost incomparable beauty of the flutes; the warmth, depth, and transparency of the foundation stops; the shining plangent beauty of the Sesquialtera; the almost inexhaustible array of colour combinations; the majesty of the sole surviving examples of Arp Schnitger 32' Praestant pipes; the brilliance, gravitas, and clarity of the plenum...

There was plenty of time for all those who wished to play to have a go. Mixed results, as ever, especially for me with my nervous, shaky hands! But what a privilege to have the opportunity!



Robin Bell (playing) and Ian Pykett at the console of the organ at Groningen Martinikerk

*Wednesday 25 October*

We were up, breakfasted, and out early for the drive east across the Dutch/German border into Ostfriesland and specifically the coastal region alongside the Ems estuary known as the Krummhörn. Like Groningen and its province this area is unusually rich in historic organs of international importance. We sampled some of its treasures on our 2016 tour leaving us with a definite appetite for more...

### **Westerhusen, Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche**

There were signs warning us of road closures as we neared Westerhusen. We ignored them and arrived at the church on time. Sietze didn't and arrived half an hour late despite passing and tooting us at speed on the highway earlier! The custodian of the locked church didn't turn up at all until various phone calls were made! Thankfully we were blessed with sunshine to warm our faces at least as we waited and waited to gain entrance.

Westerhusen is a tiny, neat looking village, the church an aisleless Gothic brick structure with a solid looking detached bell tower. It all looked rather lovely in the soft autumnal sunshine. Inside





Westerhusen, Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche.  
Organ (1642-3) by Jost Sieburg.

we found white-washed walls adorned in parts by some vestiges of medieval wall paintings. Clear glass windows in the south wall illuminated a complete set of beautifully maintained painted box pews (a regular occurrence in this region). On a gallery at the east end the dark red and blue painted organ (I/P 7) erected in 1642/43 by Jost Sieburg but incorporating much earlier material. The lower part of the case is from a Gothic organ as is

much of the pipework. The Renaissance 8' Trompete stop is one of the earliest surviving such ranks anywhere.

Our booked slot here may have been shortened but we had time enough for Sietze to give a full demonstration of this organ's delights, the bracingly clear plenum, and the splendidly rasping tones of the ancient Trompete. Thankfully there was time for members of our party to try their hand too. What a marvellous little instrument, both to hear and to look at. But there was even finer fare awaiting us at the next village...

### Uttum, Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche

Uttum is a larger village than Westerhusen centred around the church which is reached by a slightly tortuous maze of narrow alley-like lanes. Thankfully the custodian here was in place to welcome us and he gave a spoken outline of the church's history in German which Sietze helpfully translated for us.

Like Westerhusen the church is aisleless but altogether a much larger structure. It was once larger still. Again the organ is situated on a gallery at the east end. In medieval times the organ would have stood on a rood screen dividing nave and chancel but following the Reformation many churches in Ostfriesland screened off the chancel completely and re-erected the organ in a gallery on what now is effectively an east wall. In several of the churches we visited the chancel is more a store room these days (or in Uttum's case, entrance hall) than holy space.



Uttum, Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche. Anonymous organ c. 1660 restored by Jurgen Ahrend in 1957.

The organ at Uttum (I/ 9) shares many similarities with that at Westerhusen. Erected some time around 1660 and also strikingly painted in blue and dark red it too incorporates pipework from a much earlier time. In fact this instrument is now considered to be "the only organ that has been preserved almost entirely in the original Old Dutch style". There was, as now, a good deal of cross-border organ building activity in the 16th and 17th centuries. A very special feature, and

rare indeed for an organ of this size, is the provision of Quintadena ranks at both 8' and 16' pitch. Dark and breathy (almost 'wheezy!') these ranks were, apparently, an invention of the Dutch organ builders and in combination or alone they add a most distinctive hue to the overall palette. Meanwhile both the Mixtur and Trompet ranks are amongst the oldest of their kind to survive anywhere in the world.



Tim Patient playing Buxtehude at Uttum

The organs at Westerhusen and Uttum, like most in this region, were designed not for playing the repertoire but to provide clear and robust accompaniment and support for the congregational singing that was introduced during the 17th century. The foundation stops and the plenum possess a dark, vocal quality typical of the pre-Baroque era organs, and colour as well as power is there in abundance. Indeed, as revealed by Sietze's improvised demonstration tour, this organ harbours a quite remarkable range of highly distinctive colours for an instrument so small. The ancient Trompet has a tremendous, almost Spanish chamade reed quality about it when played by itself yet almost miraculously sits back to become a chorus reed in the plenum. The addition of the Sesquialtera to the

Trompet provides yet another highly individual timbre, an excitingly spicy one at that! By contrast the 8' Gedact is rather gentler than most of the old flutes we heard during the week, especially when sweetened yet further by the tender wafts of the tremulant.

This truly wonderful little organ has recently been fully and meticulously restored and looks and sounds as good now as it has probably ever done. The nicely spacious acoustic only adds to its delights. A further treat for those venturing up to the organ loft was the opportunity to inspect at close quarters the rather jocular depictions of puff-cheeked angels blowing cornetts and the endearingly dimpled carved angel face hovering and smiling benignly over the console. An exceptional treasure of an organ indeed, and a more than fitting prelude to our next organ, perhaps the greatest organ treasure Ostfriesland has to offer...

To be continued!

Martin J. Cottam

N.B. For those wishing to experience for themselves something of what we enjoyed on tour I filmed most of Sietze's improvisations and have been uploading them onto my YouTube channel. You can find them by following this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/@golgiapp1/videos>

## **AN ARCHITECT AND ORGANBUILDER'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE GRONINGEN AND OSTFRIESLAND TOUR.**

The recent tour of notable organs in North Netherlands and Germany was organized by our events secretary Michael Flatman and the eleven participants met on a misty morning outside the vast town church at Edam. No written word can convey the true excellence of the organs and as so many already feature on the internet either as photos or videos of concerts I will convey a little only of the context. Stoplists are readily available on their respective church websites and need not be repeated here.

As the week progressed, we saw, heard, and played twelve instruments, the earliest having been built in the middle of the sixteenth century, the latest in 2017. Our host for the week was Sietze de Vries a well-known concert organist, consultant, teacher and walking encyclopedia of organology. Although on the map this area of north Europe is tiny the extremely flat terrain has required excavation of miles of ditches, dykes, canals, and sluices, mostly in straight lines so the roads are narrow, and the corners sharp. You might picture the scene: autumnal mist, extensive flat fields, occasional higher ground

where settlements have evolved with the brick village church in the highest part. As stone and timber were unavailable to the builders most of the churches are of brick, that part of Europe unique in medieval brickmaking arts. Huge fortified towers are separate from the churches, those in towns containing carillons which sang usually at midday, but their main purpose was to offer look out positions for piracy as the North Sea is still visible miles inland.

So why these magnificent and expensive organs? It was the custom for each community to be funded by a landowning lordship which provided schools, roads, and community welfare, including the church. To demonstrate their wealth these donors commissioned wonderful organs in the attempt to burnish their images. Organs were the most ingenious and expensive artefacts of the age.

This part of Northern Europe was blessed with the organ building dynasty founded by Arp Schnitger, continued by his son Caspar and his associate Albertus Hinsz. Arp's organs are many and widely known but draw their inspiration from a pre-Bach era, for instance the bass octaves have short compass, omitting C sharp and D sharp, the tuning was sometimes meantone, that is favouring perfect thirds rather than fifths, oak construction,





Westerhusen. A typical brick-built village church enjoying late-autumn dappled sunlight.

the second manual usually a Ruckpostive, and the only way of projecting a full organ chorus was by providing multi rank mixtures and pedals with reeds.

Our host Sietze has specialised in period-specific improvisation and gave us several hours of inspired "new" Buxtehude, Bruhns, Lubeck, and Sweelink. The chorale partita form was wonderfully exploited, showing off every stop especially Sietze's favourite pedal cantus firmus on 4ft reeds.

So, to the organ themselves. They are stand-alone instruments whose

sole job was to lead and support hearty Lutheran congregational singing. Any other uses would have relied on the improvisational expertise of the organist themselves. The main full organ sound therefore is even, bass to treble, with a slight bias to line out the great Geneva psalm tunes, sung very slowly.

We were advised this was probably quite chaotic in practice. It might be queried how congregations worshipping in the strict Protestant tradition allowed organs after the clear-out of church art during the reformation, but after a few years of

silent worship people longed for and missed the song of the church itself, organs.

Organ builders exploited the opportunities to excel in producing a variety of solo effects: Vox Humanas, Dulzians, a plethora of flutes and the all-important signature stops the Quintadena and Sesquialtera. After a hundred years of neglect, pitch changes, pneumatisation, scrapping of mixtures a new dawn rose with the organ builder Jurgen Ahrend, a native of the locality. He has restored the true artistic worth of many of the organs here, putting back tracker action, beautiful keyboards, tin front pipes, lost mixtures, and reeds, re-decorated the casework and generally made each organ a festival of music and art.

Every organ we visited had easy-to-play delightful key touch but although the stop knobs appear quite distant in photos, in practice they are handy to operate because the keyboards compass extends only to C not our usual G56. The consoles are decorated pieces of cabinet work, inlaid marquetry on the music desks and carved scrolls on the keyframes, arcaded fronts to the naturals sometimes with ivory inlaid with ebony dots, hand turned stopknobs of ebony and scripted labels. Polished yellow boxwood keys were common. Like

harpsichords the actual octave dimension was narrower than say a Steinway piano.

Fear of flat pedals was overcome and our members must be congratulated on performances of Bach's A minor fugue, Christmas Oratorio Symphony, Sweelinck's Mein junges Leben, Bach's Dorian toccata and his toccata in F, chorale preludes on Liebster Jesu, Nun komm der heiden Heiland, preludes by Buxtehude and Bruhns and some John Stanley. As a kind gesture to us Sietze concluded one of his chorale fantasias with an English hymn tune followed by the wedding march in honour of the wedding anniversary of our events secretary and his wife.

The organs visited were: Edam by Smidt (Bernard Smith); Oosthuizen, 16th century; Luthersekerk, Groningen, a modern Schnitger copy by Edskes; Martinikerk Groningen, restored from several eras by Ahrends; Reformierte Kirche Westerhusen, containing oldest known trumpet pipes; Reformierte Kirche Uttum, restored by Ahrends; Ludgerikerke Norden, by Schnitger; Stapelmoor, modern copy of Clicquot at Houdan; Georgskirche Weener, Schnitger restored by Ahrends; Grossen Kirche Leer, Hinsz remodelled by Ahrends; Petruskerk Leens, Hinsz restored by Reil; Bolsward, Hinsz.

A description of a single Schnitger organ will suffice to portray the manner of his art, so let us look at Ludgerikirche, Norden. High above on the south wall over the join between the chancel and nave Schnitger had a difficult task to enable the organ to sound well in a large building with two long congregation spaces. The main organ is on its own gallery with the usual ruckpositive but the pedal pipes are in a separate organ case to the west, looking towards the south transept therefore they speak very clearly. The arrival of organists in the previous generation who could play well upon the pedals encouraged the addition of pedal towers which became standard features of Schnitger and his contemporaries. The main organ is slightly angled away from the wall allowing an additional soundboard to project into the chancel, providing an echo effect to the main portion.

As is customary a section of the organ just above the keyboards contains a few small ranks of pipes and one of the famous short reeds stops which can cheerfully snarl its way through renaissance music. The three keyboards are covered with boxwood, with moulded fronts. The plain stopknobs have hand lettered labels above in neat rows. Arp Schnitger produced tailor-made designs for every occasion overcoming challenging acoustic

environments. He could have merely produced a standard design. Instead, he chose the difficult but best route for his clients.

All too soon our tour was over and we dispersed towards ferries, the Channel tunnel and a few stop-overs. All who participated are most grateful to Michael Flatman, supported by Pamela, Martin Cottam, Bert Veening and Sietze de Vries. The excellent hotel meals added to our team spirit with many insightful conversations to keep us going.

Roger Pulham



Oosthuizen: Late Gothic carved panel on the organ case

## **A NON-ORGANIST'S REFLECTIONS ON THE GRONINGEN AND OSTFRIESLAND TOUR.**

Not being an organist I attended this trip, as an appendage to my organ loving wife, with a certain amount of trepidation: would the sea crossing in the wake of Storm Babette be a recreation of the Wreck of the Medusa? Would I be spending hours sitting in uncomfortable draughty pews kept awake only by thunderous organ toccatas? As things turned out, despite difficulties in traversing storm-ravaged Suffolk, the sailing turned out to be very comfortable and we arrived at the Hook of Holland quite refreshed and ready for the drive to Groningen *via* the charming small town of Edam in whose cavernous church we were introduced to our tour leader Sietze de Vries. If I had a small percentage of Sietze's mastery of the organ I am sure I would be an insufferable show-off but Sietze turned out to be both a prodigiously talented organist and most unpretentious guide. Our tour was based in Groningen the main hub of Holland's Westfriesland and a university town where the bicycle reigns supreme. Driving in Groningen may not be of the same order of horror as Rome or Palermo but it is not for the faint hearted, not only do they drive on

the "wrong" side of the road but the hapless driver can find him or herself negotiating swarms of determined cyclists. Fortunately we managed to get to the various fixtures on our tour without any casualties although the occasional voyage down a dedicated cycle lane may have occurred. Our accommodation at the Martini Hotel was well positioned in the centre of town and the food and atmosphere good even if the rooms were a little on the Lilliputian side, one prefers not to be reminded to lose weight when trying to negotiate the bathroom door! As most of our time was spent touring the surrounding country this is perhaps a minor quibble. At each church visited Sietze provided a brief history of the organ and then set the standard with a recital comprising various improvisations in the style of music contemporary with the organ. These improvisations were followed by pieces played by the plucky contingent of organists who seemed initially a bit at the deep end as they grappled with these unfamiliar machines but once they got the hang of things treated us to some excellent playing - the British organists acquitted themselves with élan and national pride was preserved. The organs ranged from the late medieval through the renaissance to the baroque age and seemed to have been constructed during a period of parish one-



upmanship when Calvinistic restrictions left little room for any other church embellishment. One wondered whether the more rural parishes ever had organists capable of fully mastering these tremendous instruments - Sietze thought not. Aside from the organs the churches were places of rare beauty and in the country I suspect would not have otherwise been easily accessible. For me the highlights were Norden in Ostfriesland with its extraordinary collection of old woodwork and the only asymmetric organ case which appeared to have wrapped itself around one of the church columns and the church at Bolsward where the pre-reformation carved choir stalls were so fine that even the iconoclasts could not bring themselves to

destroy them. On the last day Sietze treated us to a viewing of his home where he has amassed a not inconsiderable number of keyboard instruments in a converted former chapel. As someone who sometimes has furtively to bring the odd second hand book home I wondered on the tolerance of Mrs de Vries who must be a remarkable woman. We did not return with the merry band of organists but instead drove back through the Netherlands, Belgium and France, ferried across to Dover to cover family commitments in Kent and eventually back to Norfolk, the only traffic jam we experienced was in Wroxham High Street.

Chris Marshall

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## **Evensong at Norwich Cathedral - and a view of the new organ. Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November**

The November event of the Association was centred on the new Harrison & Harrison organ at Norwich Cathedral.

St Cecilia's Day was a most appropriate date for our visit to the Cathedral with the anthem during Evensong being Peter Philips' 1612 setting of *Cantantibus organis*.



After the service we were invited to see, and try, the recently completed rebuild of the organ. According to Harrison & Harrison *'an important aim of the 2023 rebuild was to improve the cohesion of the screen organ and make it speak effectively to both west and east. A new Great Organ was provided within the case, leaving the Grand Organ (the old Primary Great) as a large supplementary chorus in the triforium. The layout was radically revised, with new slider soundboards and electro-pneumatic actions'*.

From the nave and the choir the elegant proportions of the Stephen Dykes-Bower case fronts belie the great depth of the main case which is only really apparent when you enter the organ loft. The largest part of the organ is the 28-stop pedal division of which, not surprisingly, only two stops are in the main case - the rest being in the triforia.

The regilded case pipes, cymbelstern and crown certainly make a striking view to complement the glorious sound of the rebuilt organ. Only time will tell if this latest manifestation of the Norwich cathedral organ, now in its sixth century, succeeds in satisfying the many demands that are made upon it.



The regilded west front of the rebuilt Norwich Cathedral organ in the quiet of an evening.

For a full description of the organ and new specification see: <https://www.harrisonorgans.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Norwich-Cathedral-Full-Specification-2023.pdf>

David Shuker



# Norfolk Organists' Association

*The art of music as related to the organ*



## Events

### **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

#### **Quiz and Chips**

St Cuthberts Church Hall, Sprowston Rd, NR7 8TZ

7pm

Cost £9 (exact cash on the night, please)

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

01263 731075, 07771 620 610 or mathewrmartin2@gmail.com.

The deadline for food orders is the end of Sunday December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023

### **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2024**

Eye Parish Church, Church Street, Eye, Suffolk IP23 7BD

11:00 am

A chance to listen to and play the Binns Organ (NPOR K01279), hosted by Tim Patient.

### **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

St Mary the Virgin, Happisburgh, NR12 0PP

1100 Annual General Meeting

1145 Short Talk on the history of the church (a member of the church)

1200 Short Talk on the organ and its restoration (2019) by Richard Bower (David Berwick)

1230 LUNCH (packed lunch or Hill House Inn, Happisburgh Rd., NR12 0PW.

1330 Mini-recital : Harry Macey, Matthew Bond & Tim Patient.

1400 Open console

1445-1500 End and depart



