

Choral Workshop Sat September 30

A dozen or so members and friends met at St Mary's, Ponsbourne for this event, led by our President.

Firstly, Andrew took us through his warm-up exercises, tongue twisters and all, so that we were in good voice and breathing well when we started looking at the music - as it said in the previous newsletter "The intention is to look at several pieces in different styles so as to get maximum value out of the time available".

We sang contrasting settings of "Ave Verum" (by Arthur Wills and by Mozart), pieces by Mendelssohn, our own Paul Minchinton, and Purcell's "Thou knowest, Lord". We finished refreshed, not only by the edible offerings most kindly provided but also by Andrew's skilful and knowledgeable leadership making this both an educational and enjoyable event. Our grateful thanks to Andrew Parnell, and also to Paul Minchinton for making the arrangements and providing the accompaniment (including some quite tricky sightreading!).

Mary Coxon



Ponsbourne St. Mary – The Organ Console

Visit to Hemel Hempstead & Redbourn Sat October 7.

Half a dozen members of the EDOA were welcomed to St Mary's, Hemel Hempstead, on a lovely sunny afternoon. The Norman church stands picturesquely close to the heart of the old town with its many historic buildings.

Simon Pusey, the church's organist, started by giving us a stirring rendition of Bach's G minor Fantasia and Fugue. It was good to be able to walk around the building and hear the effect of the organ in different positions. The pipework and console sit on the north

wall and access is via very steep steps! The player does not therefore hear the organ with the same balance as listeners in the body of the church. Clarity and projection are greatest in the chancel area.

Various members then played a range of pieces, showing the instrument to be versatile and having many lovely tone colours, particularly for music of the Romantic Period.



The Hemel Hempstead Walker

The Shepherd brothers and all involved in bringing this lovely Walker instrument from the early twentieth century back into such good playing condition are very much to be congratulated on their vision and efforts.

Roger Carter

Following our rewarding hour in the great Norman church of St. Mary, Hemel Hempstead, ten of us reassembled at the delightful and equally historic but much smaller St. Mary's Redbourn. Both organs are fresh from the organ builders' hands – Hemel thoroughly restored by the Shepherds to its unaltered 1910 Walker state (apart from new electric transmission and coupling, and utilisation of the formerly dumb third keyboard as a coupler manual); and Redbourn's small neo-classical Arnold, Williamson & Hyatt organ of 1961 now rebuilt and enlarged by Vincent Woodstock.

Robin's instructive demonstration of the Redbourn organ comprised: Partita 'Awake my heart' (Flor Peeters), Petit Hommage à Gabriel Fauré (Peter Aston), Fidelis (Percy Whitlock) and Intrada (Grayston Ives). Rosemary employed various solo combinations in her Bach Chorale Preludes and there was plenty of time for others of us to explore the instrument.

What a contrast in sound between the two St. Marys' organs! The Walker, gracious, dignified and colourful, a Romantic instrument from their best period; Redbourn, on the other hand, a bold statement in classical mode, lively and bright, a style not easy to bring off in such a dry and intimate acoustic.

Though all the 1961 stops and the detached console have been retained at Redbourn, Vincent Woodstock's rebuild has been thorough, with new soundboards and electric action, and a rearrangement of pipework and winding in the west gallery. The 1960s character of the old work has been built on to create a positive and comprehensive classical sound, its brilliance considerably enhanced by two new mixtures, and its power and richness by new Great and Pedal reeds. The new Swell octave flute and mutations are very good stops and offer solo and other wide-scale possibilities previously lacking. Another strikingly 'baroque' feature of the organ lies in the voicing of the 8' flutes and bourdon, which are notably chuffy and quinty (a voicing characteristic introduced here I understand by another organ builder some years ago). Charming in many ways, this does inform everything played at a moderate level, Whitlock and Howells as well as Bach and Peeters.



The Vincent Woodstock at Redbourn

If the upperwork seems distinctly on the bright side and the reeds splendidly fiery when heard from the centre of the nave, registration can of course be selective – and in any case we were hearing the organ in a near empty church. Overall the organ is well built and voiced in its own style, which seemed to us to favour liveliness and excitement rather than warmth, breadth and “atmosphere”.

We are extremely grateful to Jonathan Goodchild, the organist and choirmaster, for inviting the Association to his church. This was indeed a fascinating afternoon, in which we were able to enjoy two instruments in tiptop condition, both **real** organs of conviction and integrity, at the same time representing opposite extremes of tonal style.

Eric Pask

Note: Pressure of time to get this Newsletter out to the world meant we have had to “borrow” the Hemel and Redbourn pictures from the web sites for each church. We hope we may be forgiven!

23rd November 2006 – EDOA visit to the home of Ted Sharp

Ted Sharp's debut appearance at an EDOA event minimized the need for him to travel. A small group of members were welcomed to his home where a modest extension on his lounge had been built to accommodate the console and 6 out of 7 of the speakers of his recently acquired 3-manual Allen Renaissance Quantum organ.

The technical language associated with such an instrument introduces new terminology into the organ world. This instrument features Quad Suite voicing, Console Controller, Air Regulator, Piston Sequencer and patented Acoustic Portrait and Real Xpression (sic) technology (all registered trademarks, of course). Among other benefits, these allow the player a choice of instrument styles (American Classic, Neo-Baroque, English Cathedral or French Romantic) and can place your organ in a range of rooms from a drawing room to a cavernous cathedral. The instrument has 58 stops and 232 voices and sports a comprehensive specification.

The stop knobs give the names in the American Classic format. The Swell features mutations, flues from 16' to 4-rank mixture and a 16/8/4 reed chorus as well as Oboe and Vox Humana. The Pedal division has 32' flue and reed with delicate accompanying bourdons as well as solid foundation diapasons. The Choir is more of a Positiv (16' to Zimbel, plus Rankett and Krummhorn) topped off with a Festival Trumpet. To complement the above, the Great seems a little under-resourced with only one Diapason and one reed. However, I suspect one needs understanding neighbours!

The following are examples of the changes you can expect when you go to an alternative specification:

'American' Festival Trumpet becomes Tuba ('English'), Trompette en chamade ('French'), and Trompeta Real ('Baroque'); the Vox Humana 8' becomes a Dulzian 16' in the Baroque selection; the Krummhorn becomes a Clarinet in the English one.

In addition there is a range of MIDI registers which can be added to any division, orchestral voices, chimes, celesta and a Zimbelstern.

We had too little time to explore fully the timbres in one, let alone the four different instruments here, but on first impression, this is an organ which allows the player a luxurious experience of continent-hopping, playing Aeolian Skinner, Harrison & Harrison, Cavaille-Coll and Metzler in a single recital without leaving the living room.

You find pretty authentic specifications for anything from Handel to Hakim, Mendelssohn to Messiaen, Bach to Briggs and Virgil Fox to Vierne. One is bound to be spoilt for choice and, for everyday practice, is likely to settle on the specification that

gives the most satisfaction most of the time.

One can have an awful lot of fun with this model and it's probably the ultimate in practice instruments (the out-of-tune, wheezing, heavy-action organ in the dark, cold church doesn't quite have the same appeal) but one would have to guard against laziness and the potential to lose the skills we all need – making an organ with a limited specification as versatile as possible; experimenting with existing stops to find interesting choices; adapting to the vagaries of specification, console-layout and action in different organs. But, of course, this isn't really what the Allen Renaissance Quantum organ is about.

EDOA is most grateful to Ted and Ruth Sharp for opening their house to us and for the most welcome drinks and nibbles which accompanied our enjoyment of Ted's new toy!

Andrew Parnell