

Eric Kirton MBE
25 April 1912 – 24 January 2013

Eric was born in the Copnor district of Portsmouth just two weeks after the sinking of the *Titanic*. His home was close to Fratton Park, Portsmouth FC's ground – he often saw them play and throughout his life took a keen interest in their fortunes.

In 1919 he became a choirboy at St Cuthbert's, Copnor, taking up piano and theory lessons the following year. In 1923 he went to Portsmouth Northern Secondary School where he excelled at sport, particularly cricket and football, often playing in goal. By 1927 he had become a choir man at St Cuthbert's.

In 1928 he passed the entry exam for the Civil Service Commission starting as a tax clerk at Aldershot, where he was able to have organ lessons for four years at Aldershot Parish Church. His career in taxes took him to Farnham, with spells at offices around Southern England. In 1936 he married Hilda and the following year promotion took him to Harrow as a Senior Tax Officer; there he joined the choir of St Peter's Church.

In 1941, when Eric was recuperating from overwork, he and Hilda spent a week in Bournemouth where he met Percy Whitlock, introduced by a mutual friend. 60 years later he wrote an account of this memorable meeting for the newsletter of the St Albans International Organ Festival. This was printed, by permission, in the September 2001 EDOA newsletter and repeated last year to mark his 100th birthday. It can still be read on www.edoa.org.uk by clicking on 'Newsletter archive' on the left hand side of the home page, then on the resulting page clicking on 'EDOA 2012 06 Whitlock remembered by Eric Kirton'.

In 1943 while living in Harrow, Eric was appointed Assistant Organist of St Peter's, playing for Evensong every Sunday, and in the same year Eric and Hilda's son, Brian, was born. In 1951 Eric became Organist and Choirmaster at St Peter's; promotion at work took him to the London Training Centre. Further promotion in 1955 required moving from Harrow to Cardiff where the family spent four happy years, and Eric soon enjoyed a new Organist and Choirmaster position.

Another transfer in 1959 brought a move to Birmingham, and while there Eric bought his first home organ. Although a possible church position arose, a further promotion was then in the offing, so in 1961 the family moved to the house in Radlett, Eric's home for the rest of his life, and he went as an Inspector to the Revenue's Head Office at Somerset House.

In Eric's goalkeeping days at school there was a match when he made a notable save, and the boy, James Callaghan, whose shot had been saved followed the same career path as Eric, but later switched to politics. Some 40 years later a disgruntled taxpayer wrote to the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who passed the letter to the Chancellor, the same James Callaghan, who sent it to the Inland Revenue Board for a reply to be drafted. This task fell to Eric who, knowing that the letter would have to go back to the Chancellor for his signature, added a note reminding him of that earlier meeting on the football pitch!

In the 1970 New Year Honours List Eric was awarded an MBE for services to the Inland Revenue. The following year he was appointed Organist and Choirmaster at St Michael's, Cricklewood, but in 1972 with Hilda's health declining he took early retirement from the Inland Revenue to have more time with her; sadly she died in 1973. Shortly after this he resigned from the Cricklewood post, and declined an invitation to come out of retirement and return to Somerset House. A happier event in 1973 was the birth of a grandson.

In 1975 Eric was appointed Organist and Choirmaster at St John's Watford, resigning in 1981 prior to an operation. By 1983 he was playing regularly again, deputising at churches in Hertfordshire, playing at some 15 churches over the next 16 years but always available to the first vicar to phone him. After that first home organ in about 1960, Eric upgraded to a new model several times over the years, always from Allen Organs, and Brian remembers a visit with his father to the Allen factory in Pennsylvania. Brian also remembers regular family concerts at Christmas and mid-summer to mark family birthdays with Eric introducing the pieces he played: "when the family was larger than it is today it could be difficult to squeeze in sufficient chairs".

In 2003 Eric became an Assistant Organist at Christ Church Radlett, playing occasionally on Sundays and regularly for the Wednesday morning service until 2010 – the year his first great-grandson was born. When Brian informed us of Eric's death he said that he had been playing his Allen organ at home until the end of November with an active mind until recent days. We give thanks for such a long and fulfilled life and I add my own thanks to Brian for supplying the information for this report.

Robin Coxon