

**President's Message
March 2014**

Any mention of St Michael's, Cornhill will inevitably bring to mind Harold Darke and the lunchtime recital series he established there in 1916, which has become the longest-running of them all. This year it is especially timely to recall that St Michael's was the first home of the Royal College of Organists, which came into being in 1864 largely through the efforts of the then Cornhill organist, Richard Limpus. Jonathan Rennert's recent 421st recital there rightly celebrated the RCO's 150th anniversary by including music by four past Presidents of the College: Ouseley, Parry, Thalben-Ball and Darke himself. The RCO will further be commemorated at Cornhill in June with five celebrity Birthplace Recitals, beginning with the current President, Catherine Ennis. We in the EDOA are proud that Simon Williams continues to be so closely involved with the education and outreach work of the RCO.

Another anniversary this year is the centenary of the birth of William Lloyd Webber (11th March, 1914), brilliantly gifted as organist, composer and teacher and described by Bryan Hesford in 1982 as "One of the finest all-round musicians Britain has produced this century". Lloyd Webber's remarkable talent was certainly evident in his early youth, for he gave a broadcast organ recital when only 14; in 1933 he was the sole RCO candidate to gain both ARCO and FRCO in the same year, when he was also one of the early recipients of the Harding Prize; and a mere five years later he became the country's youngest DMus. There is a splendid article in this month's Organists' Review by Jane Watts on his organ music. It is gratifying that we have been left such a wealth of attractive repertoire to explore, but it is also worth stressing how much wonderful non-organ music Lloyd Webber wrote: piano, chamber, songs, choral and (not least) the gorgeous orchestral tone poem *Aurora*. To find out more, I would strongly urge you to look at Morwenna Brett's superb and informative website www.theladyorganist.com.

Exciting times at the Royal Festival Hall! As this is being written, the Organ Gala Launch Concert is drawing ever near. As promised, the latest *Pull Out ALL The Stops* brochure reveals a vast array of events in addition to the main concerts in celebration of the restored magnificent organ's 60th birthday this month. The festival goes on into the summer and an international recital series will follow in the autumn. Two of the friends joining me at the Gala Launch were at one or other of the two organ opening concerts in 1954, when the organists were Ralph Downes and Andre Marchal and then Downes again with Arnold Richardson, Susi Jeans and George Thalben-Ball. Those Wednesdays at 5.55 became legendary: one could sit anywhere and Felix Aprahamian's programme notes (free!) were absolute classics! My first, dashing up from school in 1962, was to hear Ralph Downes. His Bach (Trio no 2 and the 'Wedge') and a Reger miniature were managed without a page-turner, but for the Elgar Sonata Mrs Downes appeared. At one point she turned over two pages and he turned back two.... If any of you, dear EDOA members, have some memories to share of RFH recitals, contributions to this newsletter are always welcome!!

After enjoying Morwenna's *The Lady Organist* (see above), don't forget our own website, faithfully maintained by Rosemary, who is also your hard-working editor, ensuring that you are kept informed of future EDOA activities and many other worthwhile events.

Terence Atkins