

Past Events

- **AGM Recital given by Peter Smith**
- **Recital at Marlborough Road Methodist Church given by Terence Atkins**

AGM Recital given by Peter Smith February 18th

This year's AGM was held at St Mary's Ware on Saturday 18th February. Following the usual custom, an organ recital concluded the proceedings and on this occasion was given by Peter Smith. Peter is no stranger to us, having been a member of the EDOA from the earliest days of the 1960s.

Organists playing at funerals almost invariably find themselves asked to perform the hymn 'Abide with me'. The second verse expresses the gloomy view of 'change and decay in all around I see'. Certainly during the last twenty years there has been much change in the way of support for church choirs, which have almost universally declined in numbers. Their very existence in many places hangs by a thread and in other churches they have disappeared altogether. Some fine pipe organs have vanished or have become silent owing to the rising costs of maintaining them.



Peter Smith and the console at St Mary's

Photo: Paul Minchinton

However, all is certainly not gloom and decay and the reader would do well to go to St Mary's Ware, where the state of affairs is very different. Peter Smith, a former EDOA Committee member, has, during his relatively short period of office there as Director of Music, revitalised the fortunes of the choir and has created a group of an exceptional musical standard with a wide ranging repertoire. The previous state of the organ deserves mention. The writer of this article has played for numerous services in the past and had become very aware of the fact that the organ was in terminal decline, with failing leatherwork and growing mechanical problems. The tracker action was so heavy that playing had become nothing short of an endurance test. Despite all these shortcomings the organ possessed a fine tone quality, being a marriage of Bishop, Hill, Forster and Andrews, and Rushworth

and Dreaper pipework. The sound quality of the softer registers was beautiful. Given the direction, energy and drive of Peter Smith, the prospect of a gloomy future for the organ became a thing of the past. With the wholehearted support of the Vicar, Derek Peel, the congregation and Ian Bell (the consultant) an appeal was launched and in record time an ailing instrument was transformed into a splendid creation. The Village Workshop, who were the organ builders, did outstanding work and produced an organ of real quality and versatility, playable from a particularly user friendly sumptuous console equipped with all mod cons.

Peter gave us a thoroughly enjoyable recital and it was clearly enjoyed by all those who were there. The full range of tonal colours of the organ was revealed and it was particularly evident when he used a single stop on the choir, the exquisite stopped diapason, for a Bach chorale. The very French sound qualities of the swell reeds were shown off in the Pierre du Mage *Basse de Trompette* and, in contrast, the full power of the fanfare trumpet was revealed in the Walton Spitfire Prelude. I greatly enjoyed the Franck Chorale No. 1 in E which was played with great panache. The programme was wide ranging in musical period and style. *Toccata alla Rumba* by Panyavsky with its delicious syncopated character was especially enjoyable. The programme bristled with virtuosity and authority and was a fitting conclusion to a project superbly managed and fulfilled.

Robert Evans

The spec of St Mary's organ was in the December 2016 issue of the Newsletter. *Ed.*

* * * * *

Recital at Marlborough Road Methodist Church by Terence Atkins
28th March 2017

The Marlborough Road recitals, while not strictly EDOA events, have strong associations with EDOA members, and especially when the recitalist is the EDOA President himself. It seemed a good idea, therefore, having other business in St Albans, to extend the trip to take in the recital by Terence Atkins, introduced in his usual genial way by Robin Coxon.

Apart from forthcoming music, an important topic of conversation on arrival was the change to the venue itself, in that the new chairs (apparently long-expected) had arrived. These, arrayed in curved rows, have cushions of two different colours; it was eventually realised that the cushion colours were chosen to match the principal colours in the stained glass of the windows.

Nice bright registration got us started with Buxtehude's E Minor Ciacona. With his characteristic episodic construction, it was a question of "chase the theme" as it appeared in different registers.

There followed a pair of Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* chorale preludes, 'Christum wir sollen loben schon' (BWV 611) and 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig' (BWV 618). In his introduction, Terence said he felt it appropriate, in a Shrove Tuesday recital, not only to look back to the Mystical Adoration at Christmas but also to look forward to Passiontide and Easter.

Having got us into JSB mode, Terence then came to the "meat" of his recital, the *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue* (BWV 564), which is a good test of an organist's sense of pace. His nicely judged initial passages, followed by what he informed us is Bach's longest pedal solo — here given due allowance for the phrases to "breathe" — led us to the *Adagio*, which was, after a quick check of the crib sheet on the bench, given suitably mellifluous registration despite no change of registration between

phrases, which was unexpected. Then came the amazing passage, always very satisfying to play, which leads into the Fugue. Here the deceptively complex swirls of the passagework were carried through to a triumphant close. (In conversation afterwards, the *Adagio* was mentioned as one of the aural highlights.)



EDOA members Robin Coxon, Terence Atkins and Jonathan Marten

Photo: Rosemary Knight

The next piece, a Verse of 3 Parts, by the Worcester-based organist and composer Thomas Tomkins, gave a change of scale. So also did the Intermezzo by William Lloyd Webber, where a reed-based melody was floated above some very interesting harmonies, and the celestes were allowed their melting moment of glory at the end.

We do not know the composer of the Festival Voluntary that followed, only that it was to be found in "Cutler and Johnson's Anthology" published in the USA in 1856 as a book of music playable on instruments "of limited means". The pleasant piece sounded rather in the style of the Haydn pieces for musical clock.

Staying in transatlantic mode, Edward Macdowell's melody "To a Wild Rose" was given out on a rather nice flute, with suitable accompaniment. This is the well-known flower, but Macdowell wrote several other flower pieces, there to be discovered by the enterprising.

The recital ended with an arrangement by Joseph M. Linger of Sousa's "Washington Post" march, heavy on the reeds and rhythmic pomposity. With an American marching band in mind, perhaps a little more upperwork would have added "sparkle" in the quieter passages, but overall it was a satisfying end to an excellent event.

Due mention must also be made of the person who can single-handedly make or break the event — the person turning the pages! In this case Jonathan Marten performed the role flawlessly, and has the seat at the console as the next week's recitalist.

Paul Minchinton