

NSOS reminiscences

- **Timothy Easter remembers**
- **Rosemary Knight remembers**

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Timothy Easter remembers his time as a student of the NSOS 1995–99

I first became aware of the NSOS in late 1994 when I went to Peter Hurford's inaugural recital on the then newly-restored organ at Marlborough Road Methodist Church in St. Albans.

It was the death of my then organ teacher which prompted me and my parents to hunt around for a new teacher, since my school was unable to find a replacement. This is where the NSOS and indeed Geoff Symon stepped in. The big selling point of the NSOS was that it would take on students without any previous experience of playing the piano, of which I had none. It's rather telling of Geoff's teaching that within a year of having lessons with him, I was able to take my Grade 5 exam, which I indeed passed (with a high Merit).

As my first few years of studies went on, there were various opportunities to perform in short group concerts, which meant I discovered that I had performance anxiety. I'm thankful that Geoff did his level best to put me at ease for most of them, but it was something that plagued me until comparatively recently. During those years, I met various fellow students, both young and old(er) and some have remained friends ever since.

Shortly after I moved on from studying with Geoff, I began giving solo recitals as part of the NSOS series at Marlborough Road, plus also at other churches in the area. After a ten year gap, thanks to a cycling accident in my mid 20s, I returned to playing and now give recitals up and down the UK.

It's probably safe to say that, were it not for the NSOS, I probably wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now and I'm very thankful for what it enabled me to do, which is playing the organ and enjoying it at the same time.

Timothy Easter

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Rosemary Knight remembers her time as a student of the NSOS

In September 1990 a letter came through my letterbox in Tottenham, advertising the New School of Organ Studies in Luton. At the time I was thinking I ought to get some organ lessons, being a church organist with nothing more than a grade 6 by way of qualifications, and moreover I had just started a new job in Luton. This seemed to be more than just coincidence, so I phoned the number to find out what sort of school it was. ‘Oh it’s a lovely school!’ came the reply. I signed up for some organ lessons with Geoff Symon.

The school had started in 1989 at Our Lady Queen of Creation in Hemel Hempstead, where Father Higgins, himself an FRCO, was keen for members of his congregation to make use of the new Vincent Woodstock organ. I attended a pupils’ recital there and was impressed by what I heard. Many of the pupils were primary school age but played confidently and well.

By 1990 the school was expanding to St Albans and Luton. Geoff was full of plans for it to extend further.

The stated aim of the school was to keep fees as low as possible. People who could afford to pay more could make a donation, and there were fundraising events to make up the shortfall. Geoff's mother Jane Symon was a driving force behind the social and fundraising events.



The organ at Bury Park URC

It was Ivy Higgins who initiated the organ recitals at Bury Park. As I remember it, the first one was in the evening, but thereafter they were held on Thursday lunchtimes and were followed by soup, salad and a roll in the adjacent hall. These recitals continue to this day. The lunchtime recitals at Marlborough Road Methodist Church in St Albans started in 1995 and finished in December 2017.

In its heyday the school flourished in several locations, and Geoff was a charismatic and inspirational teacher. It promoted interest in the organ and it provided fellowship. It is sad that numbers have dwindled and it is now being wound up.

Rosemary Knight

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