

President's Message March 2019

We now have our own Facebook page, thanks to our ever-resourceful editor, Rosemary Knight, who encourages us all to help grow the group “by inviting friends who may be interested in discovering a new community”. As within <http://edoa.org.uk/>, the aims of the EDOA are clearly set out and the wider region that we cover beyond Enfield is clarified. As this was being written, Rosemary shared the posting from the St Albans International Organ Festival of the sad news of the death of Peter Hurford, and several moving tributes had already appeared in social media.

Along with the passing of Peter Hurford, we also mourn the recent deaths of Noel Rawsthorne and Jean Guillou. Of almost identical vintage, all three were rightly counted as amongst the very finest organists from the mid-twentieth century onwards, of incalculable brilliance and influence as performers, teachers and recording artists, not to mention other achievements. I recall Peter Hurford playing the Bach trio sonatas at the Queen Elizabeth Hall fifty years ago and actually addressing the audience, unheard of then, but now no longer a surprise. Of his many Bach recordings, my ‘desert island must have’ has to be the (lesser known) Prelude and Fugue in G (BWV 550) from Vol VI of the Decca/Argo 1981 set – stunning!

At Liverpool Cathedral, where he assumed the mantle from the legendary Harry Goss-Custard, the young Noel Rawsthorne made the very first recording in EMI's famous Great Cathedral Organ Series, begun in 1963. Another significant early recording was of the opening of the organ in the neighbouring Metropolitan Cathedral, performing alongside Jeanne Demessieux and Flor Peeters. Perhaps Rawsthorne's best known composition is his (infamous?) Hornpipe Humoresque, guaranteed to bring forth many a chuckle from even the most staid of audiences. Jean Guillou was similarly prolific, performing and recording from a vast repertoire and challenging all with his improvisations and compositions. Look on YouTube for his *La Revolte des Orgues*, showing himself at the main organ in St Eustache along with percussion and eight (!) positive organs, a most remarkable piece displaying how Guillou retained his amazing technique and sheer exuberance as a performer well into his late 80s.

Harry Hoyle's *Wednesdays at 5.55* is a fascinating account of the recitals at the Royal Festival Hall from 1954 until 1989; and I commend the book with enthusiasm. One sees, for example, that Rawsthorne appeared three times, Guillou five and Hurford a remarkable 20 (second only to Downes at 29). Last month's evening recital by Catherine Ennis (who had also appeared twice in the 1980s) was not only a splendid, well-attended performance, but also saw the launch of the Society of Women Organists (SWO) – and not before time! It is, by the way, open to men as well.

It was good to return to St George's, Hanover Square for the AGM and I thank Simon Williams for making it possible. As always, it was a chance to review the past year and to thank all those who work so hard for the EDOA, especially Rosemary Knight (newsletter/website), Robin Coxon (treasurer), Michael Hennin (secretary) and the rest of the committee: Roger Carter, Robert Evans, Ruth Lewis and Peter Smith; and I thank all others who have assisted at and supported events. The highlight of the afternoon was undoubtedly Ashley Wagner's superb recital, bringing out the best of the St George's organ with his spectacular playing. We renew our thanks to Ashley wholeheartedly.

As has been said before, please make your wishes known for possible future events.

Meanwhile, there is still time to prepare something for the Members' Recital in St Peter's, Edmonton on Saturday 6th April at 3:00 pm. You will see from the notice elsewhere that this time we are encouraging not only organ solos, but other instruments and voices too. Don't be shy about sharing some of your many and varied talents!

Terence Atkins