

John Herbert Norman (1932–2025)

The renowned organ builder John Norman was a member of EDOA for many years. In March 2021 during the pandemic he gave an interesting and informative talk in Zoom on his life in organ building. Two of our members, Robert Evans and Stephen Jasper, offer their tributes below:

The EDOA regrets the passing of the Organ Builder John Herbert Norman. He was a member of the Norman family who built numerous fine romantic organs throughout the country. The company later amalgamated with Hill and Beard to become the highly respected firm of Hill, Norman and Beard who had their premises in High Street Hornsey for many years before moving to occupy the vacant premises of Cedric Arnold near Thaxted.

Probably the most notable (and controversial) of their many rebuilds was the instrument in Gloucester Cathedral. Under the direction of Ralph Downes, the Father Henry Willis organ was radically altered to bring it in line with contemporary tastes. This was not to every person's way of thinking and the character of the organ was radically changed. The rebuild included disposing of the 32 foot open wood which was cut up to make flower pots. Nevertheless, the tonal range was greatly extended making it possible to more faithfully perform period music to considerable effect. John Norman also supervised the rebuilding of the Royal College of Organists organ at Kensington Gore.

John was a good friend of Eric Pask and together they spent many happy hours visiting churches and inspecting their instruments. He was a profoundly knowledgeable individual and always good company. He will be much missed. May he rest in peace.

Robert Evans

I knew John slightly and we had a few good conversations, the last of which was at St Andrew's Church in Southgate when EDOA went there on a visit in September 2023. John also came to St Matthias', where I play, to see the organ. He was most friendly and interested in the instrument, and issued a certificate about it soon after his visit.

My only other connection with him was through his many articles in organ journals, particularly Organists' Review. He expressed himself very clearly in these articles, so that even though they could be quite technical, they were still comprehensible even to non-specialists in organ-building.

I attended John's funeral on 28th February at St John's Church, Friern Barnet, which was full for the occasion: his work affected a wide range of people. It was a most moving occasion. William McVicker gave an excellent appreciation of John's contribution to the organ world.

We have all learned a lot from John Norman over the years, and appreciated his down-to-earth and warm-hearted manner.

Stephen Jasper
