

THE INSTITUTE OF IBO Newsletter

BRITISH ORGAN BUILDING No. 113 Spring 2024

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View from the Chair

Andrew Scott writes ...

As I was growing up, my dad repeatedly told me that time goes by much faster the older you get. A year felt like a lifetime during my teenage years, yet today, it hardly seems possible that it is already April and the new year is a distant blur. Nevertheless, there is much that has been happening behind the scenes since our Winter newsletter, and this newsletter is packed full of content and information, including an exciting new YOBS initiative.

Intrigued? Read on ...

IBO Newsletter: Paper versus Digital

Having previously moved the newsletter to a digital format (with the option of paying a supplementary fee to also receive a paper copy), with IBO finances back in the black, we were able to return to providing a paper newsletter at no extra cost.

Some members prefer the digital format, while others prefer the more tactile paper. There are even some members who have said that they do not read the digital newsletter and are therefore completely unaware of the opt-in to have a free paper copy!

We want our publications to reach as many members as possible. So, in addition to those who have already opted to receive paper copies as well as digital copies, this newsletter is being sent by both methods to all IBO members. With it, I invite everyone to:

▶ **OPT-IN NOW TO ALSO RECEIVE A FREE PAPER COPY OF OUR NEWSLETTER!** ◀

New members will get the option of opting to also receive paper copies as part of their joining paperwork. But for existing members, this newsletter will be the last invitation in print for opting to receive printed copies. Doing so is simple...contact the Administrator by whatever means and express your preference before June 1st. You will then be added to the printed mailing list from the Summer issue onward.



A New Editor for our Newsletter

As part of the handover, this edition of the newsletter has been guest edited by myself and Stephen Alliss. I am delighted to welcome long-standing IBO Associate Member, Tim Vellacott, as our new newsletter and commissioning editor. Many of you met Tim at our recent meeting in Portsmouth, and you will find an introduction from him later in this newsletter.

We thank Doug Levey for his previous work as commissioning editor and we look forward to future issues of the newsletter led by our new editor, Tim.

Dominic Gwynn

Each year the Royal College of Organists recognises the achievements of distinguished persons by awarding them its highest honour, the RCO Medal.

Dominic Gwynn was a recent recipient of the RCO Medal in recognition of his distinguished achievement in organ building and scholarship, with particular respect to UK organ heritage.

This accolade is justly deserved, and we congratulate Dominic on his conferment at Southwark Cathedral on Saturday 9th March.



YOBS – Young Organ Builders

Sam Keeler-Walker and Abi Balfour-Rowley have been working on an exciting new initiative that will minister to our young organ builders. It is to be focussed on bringing them together in their own group, training and having fun. It is hoped that by providing their own platform, it will also strengthen the future professional membership of the IBO.

To help get this off the ground, the IBO and the YOBS team need your help! We need professional members to let their apprentices and trainees, and anyone under the age of 40, know about YOBS.

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THE INSTITUTE OF
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and guest edited by
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Opinions expressed by the editor and contributors are their own, and are not necessarily those of the Institute

It is hoped that the YOBS will have their first meeting in early Summer to get this up and running, and they will also join with us in October for our weekend residency.

You will find more information about YOBS later in the newsletter, but please do let your YOBS know how they can be part of this new and exciting venture.

Weekend Residency in Durham: 18th – 20th October

This year we will be having our Autumn weekend residency in Durham. We will be staying in the heart of the city at the County Hotel. We will be canvassing our professional members so that the planned Sunday morning training sessions can be tailored to what members would like to explore.

To whet your appetite, the itinerary is as follows:

Friday	YOBS training session at the Harrison & Harrison workshop 11am–5pm drop-in coffee/tea visit to H&H workshop Early evening organ demonstration at Durham Cathedral Supper at own leisure
Saturday	YOBS will have their own group activity during the day IBO members board coach to St George's Church, Cullercoats (1885 Lewis II/26) Coach to St Dominic's Priory, Newcastle (1883 Father Willis III/30) Coach back to Durham Choral Evensong at Durham Cathedral Dinner with after-dinner speaker, Daniel Cook (Organist & Master of the Choristers)
Sunday	Training sessions for professional members at the H&H workshop

Please be in touch with the administrator to register your attendance in Durham.

IBO Board of Trustees

At our forthcoming AGM and OGM there will be the opportunity for new trustees to come forward and join the IBO board. I appeal to members now to consider serving the IBO with their time and talent. Please do speak to any member of the board for more details.

Forthcoming Meetings

In March we had an excellent meeting in Portsmouth and Portsea. Grateful thanks to Nicholson & Co. for organising this excellent day for us. You can read all about it later in this newsletter. We also joined with BIOS in a meeting in Cambridge on 16th March to explore

the recently completed Flentrop/Klais collaboration in Peterhouse.

Looking at future events in 2024, we are currently in the process of securing a date and venue for our AGM & OGM meeting in London. As soon as we know more details we will circulate them. As with our EGM in Liverpool, we will also be making it possible to attend these two important meetings remotely, though we hope to see as many of you as possible there in person.

Our remaining calendar of events for 2024 is as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Friday 7 th June | Blower/Humidifier training day at Stephen Lemmings' workshop |
| • May/June/July | AGM & OGM in London (date and location t.b.c.) |
| • 18 th –20 th October | Weekend Residency in Durham |
| • Date t.b.c. | Cavaillé-Coll flue voicing workshop with James Atherton at Nicholson & Co. |

Andrew Scott
chair@ibo.co.uk

Administrator's News

Notes from the Administrator for Spring 2024 Newsletter

IBO Trustees / Role of Chair

Two trustees are due to retire this year as they have served their four-year terms: Dominic Gwynn and Andrew Scott. However, Andrew's position has been affected by the decisions voted on at the Extraordinary General Meeting in Liverpool last year (as reported in the write-up within the last Newsletter). Our charitable constitution and IBO Rules have been amended regarding the length of tenure applying to the IBO Chair.

1. When elected as Chair, a trustee's four-year term 'resets' so Andrew Scott started a new four-year term on appointment as Chair. As he took on the role three years ago, he now has a further year in post, so he will look to step down at the 2025 AGM, at the earliest.
2. At the end of a chair's four-year term, they may opt to serve up to two further years: next year Andrew will give an indication whether he wishes to extend his term further.

There is therefore a vacancy on the Board, due to Dominic Gwynn's retirement. The trustees have already received an expression of interest from Sam Keeler-Walker who is leading the IBO Young Organ Builders initiative. If you are also interested in standing, please do contact the administrator or one of the trustees.

IBO Membership

For primarily demographical reasons, the total number of IBO members has reduced over the last few years. The Trustees encourage each professional member to introduce IBO membership to just one other professional organ builder, such as a member of your staff (if you are an employer) or maybe a supplier who is not currently on the IBO Register. The cost of personal (staff) membership is £41.50 and Supplier membership starts at £327. Please access the link at our website:

<https://www.ibo.co.uk/membership/categories.php>

Gift Aid

If you have any type of personal membership and are a tax payer you can easily gift-aid your subscriptions – simply contact the Administrator for a form. This can be back-dated four years and would be a positive way to support the Institute with its plans, especially in relation to training and the Young Organ Builders initiative.

IBO Census

If you have been sent a census for completion the Trustees would urge you to return this as soon as possible please. Do remember that this can be completed online to, at the members' area of the website.

Associate Members' Renewal Invoices

Our Associate Members will be aware that, as with the last couple of years, their renewal invoices have yet to be sent out, once again due to the late-running of the journal. The journal should arrive with you shortly and the renewal invoices will be sent out afterwards.

Business Information Notes

VAT registration and de-registration limits

From 6th April 2024 the VAT registration limit will increase from £85,000 rolling turnover within a 12-month period to £90,000. In line with this, the de-registration limit will also rise from £83,000 to £88,000.

Changes to National insurance Contributions

From 6th April 2024 the primary Class 1A National insurance Contribution percentage reduced from 10% to 8%. For the self-employed, the Class 4 National Insurance Contributions percentage reduced from 9% to 6%. This is alongside the Class 2 National Insurance Contributions being scrapped altogether.

Making Tax Digital for Income Tax Self-Assessment (MTD for ITSA)

HMRC has published guidance on the Making Tax Digital for Income Tax Self-Assessment (MTD for ITSA) requirements for sole traders.

MTD for ITSA will require businesses with qualifying income to maintain digital records and update HMRC each quarter via compatible software.

In the guidance, HMRC stated that MTD for ITSA will be introduced in two phases:

- from April 2026 for those with qualifying income over £50,000
- from April 2027 for those with qualifying income over £30,000.

HMRC said that MTD will exploit 'the opportunities offered by digitalisation to make it easier for everyone to get tax right'.

Trivial benefits in kind: A quick guide for employers

What are trivial benefits in kind?

The term 'trivial benefits in kind' refers to minor token gifts that employers can offer staff as a token of appreciation. Examples include chocolates, wine, gift vouchers, theatre tickets, or team lunches or dinners.

Under UK tax law, trivial benefits provided by an employer are exempt from income tax and National Insurance Contributions.

This means neither the employee nor the employer must pay tax or National Insurance on these benefits, as long as certain conditions are met. You can also reclaim the VAT on trivial benefits if they meet eligibility criteria.

Eligibility criteria

To be considered a trivial benefit, the gift must:

- Cost £50 or less
- Not be given in cash
- Not be a reward for work or performance
- Not be included in the employee's contract

Is there a tax-free gift limit?

Beyond the £50 per employee limit, there is no annual ceiling on trivial gifts for an individual employee throughout the year.

An exception exists for close companies, like family businesses controlled by five or fewer people. If the recipient is a director, office holder, or a family member, the exemption limit is £300 per tax year.

Parties and Events

It is important to note that costs related to staff parties are mostly tax-free if the event is open to all staff.

There is an annual limit of £150 (including VAT) per person

for these events. Spending even slightly over this makes all expenses from the party or event taxable benefits.

Tax Benefits

Trivial benefits are exempt from tax, National Insurance, and HMRC reporting, making them a cost-effective way to show appreciation.

However, trivial benefits provided under salary sacrifice do not receive a tax exemption.

If a gift is made this way, tax and National Insurance must be paid on these expenses, and the difference between the trivial benefit and the salary sacrifice reported via the individual's P11D form.

UK Company Law is Changing

There is a series of impending changes to UK company law as a result of the enactment of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act last year.

These changes, became effective on 4th March 2024 and will significantly impact a company's operation and compliance requirements.

Directors must understand and comply with these changes from the first day of their implementation.

Key changes effective 4th March 2024:

- **New rules for registered office addresses:**
Your company must have an 'appropriate address' as its registered office. This means a location where any documents sent are likely to be noticed by someone acting on the company's behalf and where document delivery can be acknowledged. PO Box addresses will no longer be acceptable. If your company is currently using a PO Box, you must update this by 4th March 2024 using your company's authentication code.
- **Requirement for a registered email address:**
Another critical requirement is for all companies to provide a registered email address to Companies House from 4th March 2024. This email will be used for official communications and will not be publicly disclosed. For new companies, this requirement applies upon incorporation, while existing companies must comply when filing their next confirmation statement after 5th March 2024.
- **Statement of lawful purpose:**
Upon incorporation and in your confirmation statements, you will need to affirm that your company is formed for a lawful purpose and that its intended activities will be lawful. This step is to ensure that all companies operate legally. Non-compliance with this requirement can lead to the rejection of your documents.

Given these changes, you should be prepared to provide evidence of your registered office address and ensure all statements regarding the lawful purpose are accurate and up to date.

Failure to comply with these new regulations, especially regarding registered office and email address, could lead to the committal of corporate offences and, potentially, the striking off of your company from the register.

HMRC Employer Bulletins

Since the last Newsletter HMRC's Employer Bulletins have included guidance on:

- 2024 National Insurance contributions rate changes.
- End of year reporting.
- Basis period reform.
- Simplifying the reporting of Income Tax and National Insurance contributions on benefits in kind.
- Help for Households
- Upcoming changes to Paternity Leave and Pay.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-bulletin-february-2024>

Advisory Fuel Rates for Company Cars

New company car advisory fuel rates have been published which took effect from 1st March 2024. The guidance states: 'You can use the previous rates for up to one month from the date the new rates apply'. The rates only apply to employees using a company car.

Petrol Engine size	Petrol	LPG
1400cc or less	13p	11p
1401cc – 2000cc	15p	13p
Over 2000cc	24p	21p
Diesel		
1600cc or less	12p	
1601cc – 2000cc	14p	
Over 2000cc	19p	

HMRC guidance states that the rates only apply when you either:

- reimburse employees for business travel in their company cars
- require employees to repay the cost of fuel used for private travel

You must not use these rates in any other circumstances.

The Advisory Electricity Rate for fully electric cars is 9p per mile. Electricity is not a fuel for car fuel benefit purposes.

Carol Levey

New Newsletter Editor

Meet Tim Vellacott ...

I've been an organ nut since around age 6, despite growing up as a non-conformist where we only had pianos and harmoniums. But that means that the organs I did hear were on the television – cathedral organs, full to mixtures, so when I eventually experienced average church organs I found them a bit unsatisfying. Fortunately I was lucky enough to learn at school on an instrument that had been rebuilt in 1969 with lots of lovely upperwork. I was hugely disappointed, on reaching University, that the College Chapel organ had nothing over 4ft...



After finishing my undergraduate studies, with a friend who later took up organ building professionally, I moved a two-manual 1880s J.W. Walker organ from Oxfordshire to Essex, and about ten years later, a single-manual French organ in the other direction. By then I had embarked on research in the Atmospheric Physics Department at Oxford, which, in addition to letting me design and build spacecraft instruments (which was a lot of fun), gave me access to an excellent workshop. Coincidentally, at around the same time I gradually transformed the single-manual 5½ stop organ in my village church into a two-manual 17-stop instrument.

The department is also a centre of expertise in Fluid Dynamics, and in 1998 John Mander invited me to speak on the *Physics of Organ Winding* at the IBO's Winding Day, which I did with some trepidation but great enjoyment. Now that I've retired, I hope to get round to studying it further, and finally writing it up, possibly as instalments, in this newsletter!

About a year after giving that presentation, I moved into the software industry, most recently heading up project management and quality assurance teams. Within that, I have spent quite a bit of time in India, where I have played a part in maintaining and improving the only working pipe organ in Hyderabad – a two-manual 10½ stop tracker Indian-made instrument from 1908 – including taking whole ranks of pipes as hold baggage, resulting in several entertaining conversations with airport security. More recently I have had interactions with several more Indian churches about their organs, which are mostly in a terrible state – if they're working at all.

I've been an Associate Member of the IBO for the last ten years. In my view the IBO is tremendously important, because although there will always be competition within British organ building, the real enemy is outside

it. Not just foreign competition, but indifference and the IBO's focus on doing things better – not only by establishing standards, but also through collaborative exchange of ideas – is a crucial part of the response.

On that basis I am happy to take on the role of Newsletter Editor, a publication that I have always enjoyed reading. I look forward to badgering you for material in the future to make it even more interesting.

Tim Vellacott

Young Organ Builders (YOBS)

Sam Keeler-Walker hails a new initiative for younger craftspeople and possibly the future ...

Are you an organ builder under 40, and feel IBO meetings are not quite geared for you? Would you like to meet up with organ builders of your age, and get to know them, while both developing yourself and having fun? (Maybe even at the same time?)

We are starting an exciting new group aimed at people who are under 40 who work in organ building. Similar to the Young Farmers, we will focus on learning, professional development, and helping young people within organ building to meet and get to know each other.

As part of our training plan there will be three different levels to reflect career progression:

- The first level is an apprentice level, aimed at those who have just started their career. This will focus on the basics of organ building and tuning.
- The second level is an area for specialism, where those who have completed their apprenticeship, or have been a professional organ builder for an equivalent time, can deepen their knowledge in a particular area.
- The third level is teaching and management, for experienced organ builders (still under 40) who are then encouraged to train others and develop the skills to take on more senior positions in their company.

Young Organ Builders training sessions would run on a Friday during working hours, followed by a meal and a night out. The Saturday would be reserved for a social activity.

We are hoping to have our first meeting on **Friday 21st and Saturday 22nd June** – details to follow. At this meeting we hope to discuss how the YOBS meetings would best work for their members, and to set up how we will run the meetings so that they meet our needs.

If this is something you, or someone you know, would be interested in joining, or you would like to find out more, then please contact Samuel Keeler-Walker: yobs@ibo.co.uk

Alan Howarth

A Life Well Drawn ... A Life Drawn Out!

My interviewee for this newsletter is one of organ building's well respected figures, Alan Howarth, who started work in the craft immediately after the Second World War. Alan spent almost all of his career with Harrison & Harrison of Durham, starting as a tuner's lad in Manchester and, after a brief interlude, moving to Durham to eventually become head designer and works manager.

Alan was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1932, his parents having both emigrated from Britain. His mother journeyed from Dumbarton to New Zealand with her parents directly after the First World War, and his father, who hailed from Manchester, had travelled to the other side of the world on an assisted passage in 1926. The terms of his father's passage committed him to working in any role chosen by the New Zealand government for the first two years of his residence; after that he would be free to work where he chose. Sadly, he suffered an industrial accident which prevented him from having full mobility, and in 1934 Alan's parents decided to return to Britain. His father then found work in a furniture showroom in Manchester, and eventually became the manager of several shops in a Mancunian family business.

When war broke out in 1939 Alan's father volunteered for service, firstly with the fire brigade and subsequently in the army. Alan, along with his younger sister, was evacuated to Wilmslow two days before war was declared, and were billeted with a local family, a Mr and Mrs Lomas, who he recalls were a very kind couple.

Alan was known to have a good singing voice, and in 1941, when he was nine and still at Wilmslow, he was sent for an audition at Manchester Cathedral. At that time the cathedral organist was Archibald Wilson, and his assistant was Norman Cocker, principally known now for his *Tuba Tune* which was popularised by Francis Jackson in an historic 1960's recording from York Minster. As war commenced, and at quite an advanced age, Cocker had joined the East Lancashire Regiment and was absent when Alan first joined the choir, but he was soon invalided out and came back to Manchester to be appointed to succeed Wilson in 1943¹.

The choir at Manchester Cathedral had gone through testing times; the cathedral itself had been bombed and badly damaged during the blitz in December 1940, and the choirboys had been sent to remote Thornton Cleveleys, about 4 miles north of Blackpool, to ensure their safety. There was no recruiting of new boys, and so the front line of the choir inevitably shrank. In the year that Alan joined, 1941, it was decided that the conditions were safe enough for the boys to return to Manchester, and fresh recruiting began.

Alan recalls singing all of the music which provided the staple fare of English church music at that time, such as Stanford, Stainer and Noble, and meeting (or seeing) several eminent church musicians during his time in the choir. These included Sidney Nicholson, Edward Bairstow and Herbert Sumsion. There was very little of what today we see as an important part of the Cathedral Tradition, music by such composers as Byrd, Tallis, Gibbons and Weelkes.

Alan's voice did not break until he was 16, and we discuss how the very basic diet of those days possibly resulted in boys' voices lasting longer, and also that the resultant smaller physical frames meant that in adulthood there were more tenors than there are today. He was obviously a diligent and valued choirboy, and to prove the point he showed me a prized letter written by Norman Cocker, sent when he left the choir, which is reproduced here.

Telephone :
BLACKFRIARS 7503

THE CATHEDRAL,
MANCHESTER, 3.

Tuesday,
3rd.
May,
1949

My dear Alan,

This is an official letter of thanks to you from the Dean and Canons of the Cathedral for the valuable services you have rendered to the choir during your unusually long period as a chorister.

We are all most grateful for the work you have done these many years and I am particularly grateful for the immense help you have always been to me especially during the early days when we were trying to rebuild the choir during the war, and later when we struggled still harder to keep on our feet during the trying time this last year or two. Your always cheery and willing support, your musical skill and your impeccable behaviour at all times have given me and all of us more help than you know, and it has been a real pleasure to have had you to work with.

Whatever work you decide to undertake in the future you cannot help but make successful, and everyone joins with me in wishing the very happiest and most prosperous career.

Always keep in touch. The Cathedral is a permanent home for you, and anything I can do to help you in any way will be done with delight.

With our united best wishes
and thanks,

Yours ever affectionately

Norman Cocker.
Organist

The letter from Norman Cocker

Photo: Alan Howarth

For the final part of his education Alan moved briefly to a state school in Didsbury; as his time there came to a close, Cocker asked him what he intended to do in adult life. Alan admits that at that time he really did not know. His father wanted him to go into the newspaper printing trade where his uncle already worked, and which in those days of type setting required accuracy, rapidity and skill. But Norman Cocker told Alan that Harold Pearson, the Harrison tuner who looked after the organ in the cathedral, required an assistant, and a meeting was arranged for a Sunday lunchtime. Alan freely admits that he had previously had no interest in the instrument, but the proposed arrangement with Pearson appealed to him, and he started with Harrison & Harrison in September 1948.

For two years Alan travelled all over the northwest, mainly by train and bus, to tune organs large and small. He recalls that Mr Pearson was an excellent tuner but was not especially hot on fault finding - something Alan liked, so it was obviously a good partnership. After that, he went to work in Durham where three years of benchwork and site work awaited, lodging for the first year with another member of staff. The next year was spent, ironically, staying back at his parents' house whilst working at Manchester Cathedral. It was at this time that the organ was supplied with a new console which contained drawstop jambs constructed to a slightly concave design, a first for Harrisons and an ergonomic feature which has been subsequently used by the Durham firm at the Royal Festival Hall and elsewhere. This console has now found a new home, in a re-furnished form, at Selby Abbey. The final year of his apprenticeship was spent back in Durham, where the construction of the organ for the Royal Festival Hall was in full swing.

In 1953 the time came for Alan's period of National Service. Although the normal call up age at that time was 18, for those who were serving apprenticeships it was deferred until the age of 21. Furthermore, the firm which had given the apprenticeship were obliged to 'keep the job open' for their former employees for twelve months, meaning that their position was secure once they were discharged after the two years of conscription. Alan had hoped to

serve with the Royal Air Force, a wish probably held by many, but instead found himself in the Royal Army Service Corps, which was involved in organising the provision of stores and transport. After initial training at Bulford Camp in Wiltshire, where he and his fellow conscripts were issued with their uniforms, Alan was sent to a depot in Yeovil to become part of the No. 2 Training Battalion, where he learned to drive - he is one of many from the time who never had to take an official driving test. Remarkably, Alan was promoted to the rank of corporal just a few weeks into his service!

In early 1954 Alan was posted overseas, to Hamelin in Germany. In Hamelin, a comparatively small place, the after-effects of the war were hardly evident, but in Hannover, the closest large city, Alan remembers seeing whole districts which had been severely damaged, indeed flattened, by allied bombing. But he also recalls the speed and determination with which the authorities were intent on rebuilding their cities. His role in the army included driving everything from motorbikes to 10-tonne trucks.

After two years in the army he was offered a place in officer training², but declined because he wanted to return to Manchester, where he was by this time courting.

Alan's decision to return to his home city meant of course that he would not be returning to Durham, as Harrisons had expected and hoped, and in fact Alan recalls that Mr Cuthbert Harrison 'was not amused'. At first he considered re-training to be a teacher, but his father was keen for him to continue in organ building, and, via a friend who played an organ which had been built by the local firm of Jardine, it was arranged that he should contact them for work, and was subsequently offered a position there.

Jardine's were a long established firm where the large majority of the work was in the local area. Alan recalls being somewhat dismayed by the standards of the workmanship, which he says were below what he had become used to in Durham. The other employees were impressed by the standards of Alan's craftsmanship. As well as benchwork, a considerable amount of his time was spent on the extensive tuning round, which he recalls included every Roman Catholic church for miles around.

In 1957, when Alan was 25, Harold Pearson decided to move to Bristol to take on similar work there. This left a vacancy in the northwest, and, at Harold Pearson's insistence, Alan was offered the opportunity to take over from his former mentor. Of course, he was very well acquainted with the Harrison tuning round, having seen all of the organs beforehand whilst working as a note holder. As Alan was now married and already had his son, it suited him very well indeed in that he had an improved position, which came with a car (of sorts!), and no house move required.

Alan tells me that he would have been very happy to carry on with this arrangement for much longer than he did,



Photo : Alan Howarth

Alan astride his motorbike with No2 Training Battalion

but after four years, he was asked if he would consider a permanent move to Durham to become the assistant to Bob Wood, the long-serving works manager. It was also suggested that Alan would temporarily return to New Zealand to supervise the installation of the new organ which Harrison's were due to build for Auckland Cathedral. After much discussion with his family, Alan agreed to move to Durham, but the Auckland project was delayed by several years and he did not go back to the country of his birth to install the organ after all.

The running of the workshop at that time largely revolved around decisions made by Cuthbert Harrison (who was of course originally an Army Officer), in close consultation with the Howe brothers, William and Fred—company secretary and head voicer respectively—and Bob Wood, workshop manager. Bob Wood retired in 1961, and so Alan's time as his deputy was brief.

Alan took over the running of a workshop which was well served by men who had worked there for all of their lives, many the sons and indeed grandsons of earlier craftsmen. Alan recalls that the drawing office provided only the most rudimentary of sketches for the organ builders to use – they were so used to the 'Harrison way' that they only needed the most basic of dimensions. Indeed, the drawing office was only a very small room with a board leaning up against a couple of chocks! It was appreciated that the drawing office needed improvement, and Alan took the opportunity to have the room enlarged.

He was mentored at first by Fred Hindle, another craftsman who had worked in Durham for all of his career and who was considered the expert on action work. Another memory from his first years in the workshop was the rudimentary machines – just one thicknesser and a circular saw which, although adapted to work electrically, were obviously relics of the age where they were operated by belts connected to the ancient steam boilers. He also recalls the older generation of organ builders gradually leaving as their time at the workshop came to an end. Many were quite elderly when they retired, because in those times there was of course hardly any pension provision and it was difficult to get by on just the state pension.

For the next 36 years an amazing stream of projects, both large and small, passed through the workshop under Alan's eagle eye for detail. Just to name some of the cathedrals where the organ was built, reconstructed or renovated is enlightening: Coventry (1962), Ripon (1963), Exeter (1964) Downpatrick (1966), Durham (1970), Wells (1973), Hereford (1978), Peterborough (1982), Westminster Abbey (1982/1987), Westminster Cathedral (1984), St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne (1990), Southwark (1991) and many other places besides. There were also several new organs built for churches and colleges in America. All of this activity kept the workshop and the drawing office very busy.

In the early 1970s three events occurred which were to alter Alan's work in Durham. Firstly, whilst looking through the extensive library which is held by the firm, he chanced across a book called *The Revival of the Organ*



Alan signwriting detail onto casework components



Alan at the drawing board in Hawthorne Terrace

Case by Joseph E. Blanton, a book published in 1965 and remarkably still available, second hand of course, on Amazon. Whilst looking a bit dated to today's eyes, the illustrations and photographs must at the time have been an eye-opener. Until then, all of the organs built in Durham, unless provided with a case specially designed by an architect, (such as that at St Clement Danes in London) had been provided with simple panelling and 'pipe fronts' to hide the internal parts. Alan recalls being inspired by the book to research casework design more fully, and to try his hand at designing a 'proper' organ case, to the style of the time, if the opportunity arose.

That first opportunity came when the firm was commissioned to build a new organ for St John's Episcopal Church in Perth, Scotland. The case which Alan designed was made in-house, and he considers it to be a landmark for him and for the firm. Despite its appearance, this organ had electropneumatic action and a detached console. It is now in the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, Edinburgh.

Secondly, Mark Venning arrived to join the Harrison team in 1972. Mark had studied in Germany and Holland as well as in England, and brought with him knowledge of continental practice; in particular, he understood the musical virtues of tracker action and was keen to see H&H become once again active in this field. Alan was ready to take up this challenge, but there was much research and experimentation to be done.

Of course, numerous mechanical action organs had been built in the first part of the firm's existence, and indeed many are continuing to give good service to this day, but there had been a lapse in the tradition. During the 1960s other British firms had started to build mechanical action organs with a greater or lesser degree of success. Harrison's had stood rather apart from this trend, but in 1975 they put their toes in the water to build their first organ with mechanical key and pedal action for Selwyn College, Cambridge (now at the University of St Andrews, Scotland), to be followed in 1981 by a new organ for St. Robert's Roman Catholic Church, Fenham, Newcastle, which had two manuals and thirteen stops.

From here onwards the firm slowly gained more experience and confidence in building new mechanical action organs. These included in 1986 All Saints Parish Church, West Ham, (II/21, which I had the pleasure of installing!); in 1989 All Saints Parish Church, Leighton Buzzard, (III/38); and in 1996 St Mary's Parish Church, Twickenham, (II/20). Thus Alan saw the tradition firmly re-established, with more tracker instruments to follow.

Thirdly, the first incarnations of CAD were becoming available, and at Alan's instigation Harrison's became one of the initial users in the northeast of England. He attended a training course at a college in Teeside, and the drawing office at Durham was again enlarged to provide adequate space to house the equipment. This, at a stroke,

revolutionised the design process for the new organs and allowed a much more precise and detailed method of providing drawings for the craftsmen.

During Alan's time, the strict restoration of historic organs became increasingly recognised as important for Britain's heritage, and he played a leading part in developing the discipline as a significant strand in H&H's work. The 1875 Lewis organ at Studley Royal, Yorkshire, is an early example; it was restored in 1980, and Alan produced a full set of drawings of this extraordinary instrument.

Mark Venning remembers: 'When I arrived in Durham in 1972, I had much to learn about the practical aspects of organ building. I could not have had a better or more patient teacher than Alan. Deeply knowledgeable, he had a remarkable gift for explaining the intricacies of actions and wind systems; to join him in inspecting a complex pneumatic organ was an education in itself. He was also a meticulous draughtsman, and it was typical of his enquiring mind that alongside running a busy workshop he also set himself to study the history and architectural principles of organ case design, with outstanding results'.

Alan officially retired from Harrisons on his 65th birthday in 1997, but at Mark's request he continued to go into the workshop for a reduced number of days each week to continue with case design. In fact, he did not fully retire until 2012 when he was 80. Several significant cases were produced during this later period, including two of which he is especially proud. The first of these is at St. David's Cathedral, Wales, completed in 2000, with a graceful double case on the screen facing east and a single case facing west; the second is at Bury St. Edmunds Cathedral in Suffolk (2010). Here there are two completely separate cases, one facing down the north nave aisle and the second facing across the quire. These coloured and gilded cases, complementing the rich internal decoration of the quire, are based on an unofficial sketch by Stephen Dykes Bower, the architect who designed the eastward extension of the cathedral. Other cases were designed for the new organs in Edington Priory (2014), St George's Church, Douglas, Isle of Man (2003) and, an especial favourite of Alan's, Fromond's Chapel at Winchester College (2006). All of these organs have mechanical key action.

Alan had an influential hand in helping to design the layout of the new workshop, to which the firm moved in 1996. The old Hawthorn Terrace workshop, whilst full of history and idiosyncratic charm, was no longer deemed fit for the modern age. Tucked into an area of terraced housing, there was no room for expansion, and alteration would not have been granted planning permission. The new workshop in Meadowfield has plenty of light, space, an extensive storage area, and ample parking for the workforce.

Throughout Alan's time living in Durham he has been an active participant in the local music scene. He joined the

Durham Amateur Dramatic Society as soon as he moved to the area, performing in a wide variety of light operettas such as *Desert Song* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He often sang the solo parts where required. He tells me that he especially enjoys Gilbert and Sullivan operettas; but these were not to everyone in the Society's taste and so a separate G&S sub-group was set up to perform them. The society has the use of a rehearsal space in New College, Durham, and Alan and his wife Cynthia are still stalwart supporters. Even in his free time, instead of resting on well-earned laurels, Alan is finding time to compose a variety of pieces of music for choir, both sacred and secular works.

Alan remains as enthusiastic and agile as he ever was, remaining in touch with the activities of his former employer. Harrisons have always been a firm with a strong 'family' ethos, and former employees, especially ones with such a distinguished career record, are never forgotten. We wish Alan and Cynthia many more years of happiness and contentment.

- 1 *As an aside, Cocker had an interesting career in that he was sent down from Merton College, Oxford, admitting himself that he had not worked hard enough at university, and later in life he also became an amateur magician!*
- 2 *As a further aside, I recall that many organ builders I have met over the years were offered officer training as their periods of National Service came to an end. I like to think that it is the organ builder's combination of practical skills, attention to detail and ability to problem-solve which made them so attractive as officer material for the armed forces.*

Michael Latham

Portsmouth and Portsea Meeting

Held on Staurday 9th March 2024, Michael Blighton was there ...

On the crisp sunny morning of the 9th March, 44 IBO members met at the charming Anglican cathedral in Portsmouth. Although not large, this is a pleasingly light and airy building which has much to commend it. After much needed refreshment and warm welcome, Andrew Moyes kicked things off with a brief history of the organ.

The core of the instrument is the 1861 John Nicholson organ of Manchester Cathedral, from which—after spending some time at Holy Trinity, Bolton—the pipework made its way to Portsmouth in 1994 to be clothed in the restored 1718 Abraham Jordan case.

The contract was signed just before Andrew took over at Nicholson & Co. and he told us the slightly harrowing story of how the project proceeded. When he first arrived on site, the building frame was up with soundboards and some reservoirs in place – all very well, but this was SEVEN

WEEKS before the opening recital being given by Dame Gilliam Weir. I'm sure most of us would be hoping to be well on with the tonal finishing at that stage!

Obviously much work needed to be done; Dennis Thurlow was still the firm's head voicer, so took care of tonal matters, and with help from Kenneth Jones (who had originally been involved with the project when the contract was signed, but was now back in Ireland); the action, layout and console chassis for the mechanical action all being planned out by Andrew. Amazingly the organ was built in time and the opening recital went off without a hitch – quite an achievement! Andrew said it taught him a valuable lesson in time management and vowed never to be in that situation again.

Andrew then discussed the building of the 2001 Nave section of the organ, with its striking case designed by Didier Grassin. The trickiest part seemed to be the design



Andrew Moyes describing the nave case design

Photo : Andrew Scott

of the doors (normally closed for Lent, but opened specially for us on the day) which had to be light enough not to sag from its hinges. The doors were decorated by the late Patrick Caulfield.

Our attention was then drawn to the striking chamade reeds of burnished tin sited at the west end of the cathedral, installed in 2017 and voiced by Guy Russell.

David Price, the Organist and Master of the Choristers then very skilfully demonstrated the organ with some Bruhns, Finzi, an *amuse-bouche* of Praetorius to show off the nightingale (filled with vegetable oil!), and Whitlock. To my ears the organ sounded perfect for the building, with the Trompette de Maris adding an exciting splash of colour – very suitable for high days and holidays!

After an excellent lunch, we then made our way to St Mary's, Portsea (actually known by the locals as St Mary's, Fratton). Decidedly chillier than the cathedral, one can't help but be blown away by the vast scale and splendour of St Mary's church.

William McVicker started off the afternoon with some very interesting background information about "where things were" within British organ building at the time the Portsea organ was built. In some respects the Walker firm must have seemed quite old fashioned in the 1860s and 70s, but William thinks that the International Inventions Exhibition of 1885 may have sparked a great deal of interest in new ideas at Walker, especially in terms of console layout and more manageable key actions. Indeed, it seems that the Walker firm were experimenting with electric action in the 1880s, even though they mostly stuck with pneumatic actions until the 1930s.

Tonally, J.W. Walker were moving towards a massive foundational tone (as demonstrated by James Atherton before William began his talk), incorporating their slightly eccentric scaling of chorus work, resulting in massive scaled basses, pretty much halving in scale from bottom C to tenor c!

Andrew Caskie then presented a talk about the challenges in undertaking this massive restoration project, given the parlous state of the organ by the time of its dismantling. I was amused by the picture of the different coloured gaffer tapes holding the corners of the bellows together for example!

In some respects the organ was a relatively straightforward restoration, although the tricky part was the research into how the new console might look, having replaced the rather typical Walker console of the 1960s. No clues were left as to how the Barker lever might have looked or operated, so it was decided to use a modern three-stage electropneumatic action instead.

James Atherton then outlined some of the challenges restoring the pipework and the tonal architecture of the instrument. Many of the tonal changes of the 1960s had to be reversed, such as the levelling of the relative



David Price addresses the gathering

Photo: Andrew Scott

dynamic from bass to treble, and the enforced livening of the Swell chorus reeds.

Andrew then gave us a superb short recital showing off the tonal range of the organ, playing Schuman, Peeters, and Hopkins.

The organ sounded superb, and is now arguably one of the best organs of its period and type anywhere in the country.

Many congratulations to all of the Nicholson team (past and present) for two inspiring jobs. Many thanks also to David Price, Andrew Moyes and William McVicker for making this day a great success.

Michael Blighton

International Society of Organbuilders Congress 2023

Andrew Fiddes was at the much delayed congress, taking full advantage of the programme on offer ...

Highly anticipated by those who signed up in 2018, the long-awaited ISO Congress in Strasbourg, originally planned for 2020, finally took place in the summer of 2023. The congress served as a testament to the ISO's determination to resume 'normal service'.

I should perhaps refer it as the Alsace Congress, given that it began in Strasbourg and concluded in Colmar. Little did I realise the richness and diversity of the organ building heritage Alsace had to offer; it is as delectable as the culinary delights we were able to sample over the course of the week. While every moment was utilised, a mere week could never truly encapsulate the essence of Strasbourg.

Some of you may be wondering, "What exactly is an ISO Congress?" It is a biennial gathering of craftspeople from around the world coming together as members of the International Society of Organbuilders. It is an important opportunity for networking, sharing of ideas and experiences, and building relationships within the craft and across the world. Lifelong friendships are forged, and new possibilities are sewn. If you're not already a member, do consider joining; the membership is worthwhile for the quarterly journal alone.

Now, on to business.

The Alsace congress was ingeniously scheduled to coincide with the week-long Stras'Orgues Festival, celebrating Alsace's rich organ heritage. Strasbourg boasts some 22 churches, nearly all equipped with one or more organs. The congress began on the Sunday afternoon with a presentation at the Town Hall where Christian Lutz gave



The organ of Strasbourg Cathedral

Photo : Andrew Scott

an overview of the history of Alsatian organ building. This would be vital in understanding many of the organs we would visit, and how organ building in Alsace developed, and proved invaluable as we explored various organs throughout the congress, particularly those attributed to Andreas Silbermann. A recital by Vincent Dubois at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame drew an audience of around 1,000, showcasing the iconic Grand Organ, also attributed to Silbermann. It has of course been rebuilt many times, most recently rebuild in 1981 by Kern, and is a thrilling sound every organ builder should hear at least once.

The congress begins in earnest on Monday morning. With so many organs to visit and so many delegates to visit them, organ builders were split into two groups; yellow bus and red bus. We would all visit many of the same organs, but at different times. We depart for Wissembourg, where we would visit two churches with very contrasting instruments. The church of St Pierre & Paul houses an organ by Dubois of 1766, a relatively small instrument in this large and lofty baroque monastery church. The local organist association are extremely proud of this instrument and gave us a warm welcome.

With its unusual modern case, adorned by strips of Perspex that light up different colours at the organist's command, the 2015 Thomas organ in the very plain Lutheran church of St Jean proved quite the contrast. It was rather loud, though the improvisation on the French national anthem, complete with the case lighting up in blue—white and red at the end of the demonstration—was a nice touch.



Photo : Andrew Scott

The 2015 Thomas organ in St Jean, Wissembourg

Monday's planned offerings continued as we headed for Marmoutier, home to a priceless gem by Andreas Silbermann. Built in 1709 and enlarged by his son in 1746—save for the addition of electric blowing apparatus—it is a remarkable survivor and is rightly revered. Even the façade pipes (many of which were lost from other instruments in the war effort) have survived, making it one of the most important examples of Silbermann anywhere in the world.

Marmoutier is also home to the Museum of Organ Building, providing interactive displays and workshops specifically designed for young people. Part of the complex is a large room in which is housed the *Organum XXI*. This astonishing and somewhat baffling creation is laid out across the room, providing a completely immersive experience. Using electronic technology, every rank of pipes is available at any pitch on any manual, every conceivable gadget available and a vast array of effects can be achieved. Wind pressures can be altered at the touch of a button (or the flick of a swell pedal), and there are bells and whistles galore. It is truly an example of what CAN be done; whether it SHOULD be done is perhaps a debate left for another day!

Discover more at:

www.waldkircher-orgelbau.de/orgelgalerie/marmoutier/the-project.html



Photo : Andrew Scott

A curiosity in the Museum of Organ Building

Tuesday took full advantage of the Stras'Orgues festival, with 16 organs available to hear and some to play. It was also the hottest day of the year, or so it felt. It was impossible to visit every single organ in one day, and so there was a free choice of instruments to visit, taking care to be suitably refreshed by supporting many of the local establishments *en-route*!

The rich organological history of Strasbourg spans from



The 1719 Johann Silbermann organ at Chapelle Saint-Madeline

the 1600s to the present day. The region's most influential organ builder is undoubtedly Andreas Silbermann, and his son Johann Andreas Silbermann. One of his smallest and most exquisite instruments is that in the Chappelle Saint-Madeleine, dating from 1719 and installed here in 2011. Astonishingly, the reservoir leather dates from 1719!

The varied and sometimes turbulent history of Alsace itself is reflected in the organs of Strasbourg. Not every organ is a mechanical action Silbermann, or Silbermann inspired, instrument. In the church of St Paul we stumbled upon an enormous tubular-pneumatic Walcker of 1897, its unapologetically Romantic voice providing a welcome contrast to the world of French Classical sound we had heard so much of in the preceding 48 hours. Bringing contrast to the Walcker, in the Chappelle St-Etienne sits a most striking organ of 1964 by Schwenkedel. In perfect harmony with the brutalist architecture of the chapel itself, the organ seemed to fit both aesthetically and musically; it had in fact been transplanted there only a few years earlier and is a fine example of a well-executed transplant.

Wednesday took us to Saessolsheim, where a charming 1995 Aubertin perches on the west gallery of this beautifully restored baroque church. While Aubertin can be a divisive name here in the UK, there was almost unanimous consent that this was one of the finest examples of his work.



The Andreas Silbermann organ at Marmoutier

Another Silbermann organ from 1747 awaited us in Balbronn, after which the bus would whisk us away to the workshops of Mulheisen and the Organ Building Training College. The two are rather conveniently located adjacent to each other, and not sitting (or sleeping!) on a bus for a few hours were very welcome.

At this point I should thank Patrick Armand, owner of Mulheisen and who headed up the organisational team behind the congress. Of particular interest in the Mulhiesen workshop was the demonstrations of their pneumatic stop mechanisms, designed to use 'off-the-shelf' pneumatic components that operate from an air compressor rather than weighted reservoir wind.

On to the town of Ernstein and the Roman Catholic Church of St Martin. In addition to its vaulted ceiling and extraordinary paintings at clerestory level, it is home to a modest three manual organ by Roethinger built in 1914. Now well acquainted with the sounds synonymous with the wonderful Silbermann organs, this fine example of a German Romantic organ, and vast array of 8ft tones, was something of an aural palate cleanser at the mid-point of the congress.

Of course it's not all about organs. Alsace is rightly famous for its culinary delights as well as its organ building heritage. Alsatian cuisine has both French and German influence, and one of the most iconic examples of this is the *Tarte Flambée* (French) or *Flammkuchen* (German): a

sort of pancake/pizza with a very thin base and cooked in an extremely hot oven for little more than a minute. Savoury and sweet varieties were provided in abundance, all washed down with suitable Alsatian wines!

It is at this point I conclude the first part of the congress. In the next instalment we travel south from Strasbourg to Colmar, where more delights were waiting to be discovered. However, I close this chapter with some words of advice:

1. Go to Strasbourg, it is an absolutely beautiful place.
2. Think about going there during the Stras'Orgues Festival. There are concerts by some of Europe's finest recitalists, and it is a unique chance to get up close and see centuries of Alsatian organ building heritage.
3. Don't buy Alsace wines in England. Go there in mid-summer, sit in a typically French restaurant, order the *Menu du Jour* and a carafe of their house wine, sit back, and enjoy.

You can thank me later.

to be continued ...

Andrew Fiddes



The 1964 Schwenkedel organ in Chapelle St Etienne, Strasbourg

Photo : Andrew Scott

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