

## Church Elliot Organ Review Sub-Committee Year End Report 2010/11

Members:

Nigel Howard (Chairman/Project Manager)  
Alan Leach  
Martin Jackson

### **Background**

The general state of the Elliot organ in the care of St. Margaret's Church had been deteriorating over a number of years before the end of the last century. So in late 2004 a project was prepared for a full restoration of the instrument.

In June 2007 our church was awarded a generous grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to cover the bulk of the cost of a full restoration of the organ.

Goetze & Gwynn were awarded the contract to undertake the restoration, and the organ was finally dismantled and taken away to the factory in July 2008 and returned in time for the (first) inaugural concert in October 2009, an organ recital by Andrew Reid (Peterborough Cathedral organist).

### **Outstanding issues from last year 2009/2010**

These were identified in last year's report and are as follows:-

- Towards the end of 2009, after much deliberation, Alan Leach resigned his role as the resident organist of our church. Alan devoted a lot of his time towards supporting our church and his departure has left a large gap which still remains unfilled.
- The introduction of compulsory CRB checks for all our regular organists has delayed somewhat the setting up a new organ rota and the introduction of our subsidised organ tuition lessons for music students.
- The instrument was tuned to mean-temperament during the restoration and there has been concern expressed as to whether this may need to be re-tuned back to even-temperament later on this year, particularly if used to accompany other instruments.

### **Organ rota and cover**

Nigel and Martin, who have since been CRB checked, have been providing most of the cover for playing the organ in our services during the last year. But there has been, and will be, a need for additional cover from time to time.

### **Music lessons on the organ**

Seven people have applied to take advantage of the subsidised music lessons being offered in our restoration project. Some of these people are local and some from villages as far away as Thornby.

Martin and Alan have auditioned a number of these candidates in order to ascertain their suitability for ongoing tuition. There have been a number of auditions and a small number of lessons given to date. This remains an ongoing activity.

At the moment there are not too many applicants for Martin to be able to audition and tutor single-handedly, so it will not be necessary to sub-contract to other local organ tutors to assist in this work. Nigel has located a local tutor based in Lutterworth, should the need arise at some time in the future.

### **Special services and events over the last year**

Fiori Musicali choir, along with members of our choir, with Martin on the organ, performed a Sung Matins service in our church on the first Sunday in October last year, which was very well attended and much appreciated.

Nigel and Martin arranged for our choir, along with members from local churches and villages, to sing at our traditional Lessons and Carols Service at Christmas time last year. Martin played on the organ and Nigel conducted at this event.

The Alan Shaw Concert was very well received this year and brought in again just under £500 (including tax relief) for putting aside towards future tuning and maintenance costs. Many thanks are offered to those who organised and performed at this annual event.

A number of organ recitals were arranged in Lent for the 16<sup>th</sup> March, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 6<sup>th</sup> April and 13<sup>th</sup> April 2011 after the Holy Communion services on Wednesday mornings. A number of organists were invited to play at these recitals, including Nigel and Martin.

### **Maintenance visit requested before 16<sup>th</sup> March 2011**

Earlier in the year, after the severe winter, there have been a number of problems encountered with the organ (i.e. a number of sticking notes on the Swell and Great along with a cypher on the top E pedal note). Goetze & Gwynn were duly notified about these problems and an extra maintenance/tuning visit was made in time for the Alan Shaw Memorial concert on 18<sup>th</sup> March and the Organ recitals in March/April.

### **Mean-temperament Tuning**

All the committee members have had misgivings about the current tuning of the organ which they considered were due to the fact that the organ has been tuned to Bermondsey mean-temperament during the 2009 restoration.

The committee has been in correspondence with Nicholas Thistlethwaite, David Knight from the Council for the Care of Churches and Dominic Gwynn from Goetze & Gwynn about the matter and our wish to have the organ retuned back to equal-temperament (i.e. as it was before the restoration). Nicholas and Dominic were both of the opinion that, for historical reasons, our instrument should be tuned to mean-temperament as this was the most appropriate for the late nineteenth century.

Nevertheless one of the other aims of this project was to get a practical organ that can be played in modern times for the foreseeable future. Those two aims were clearly seen as being in direct conflict.

Goetze & Gwynn (G&G) suggested to the committee that as there are a number of variations of mean-temperament, they would be prepared to undertake a retune of the instrument to a temperament much closer to equal-temperament, such as Young's temperament. The cost of this retune would be an additional £800 to the project with a similar amount being funded by G&G themselves, as they would incorporate the work into the first year's maintenance service. This was somewhat higher than the previous unconfirmed estimate of £500 given to HLF. We hope this increased amount will still be acceptable to HLF

The organ in St.John's College, Oxford is tuned to Young's temperament; a visit was arranged for Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> February; Nigel and Alan attended and checked out the organ. Time was spent trying out various pieces of music modulating through various keys, including Db and F# in particular. What was noticeable was these two keys in particular were noticeable off tune slightly, but nothing like to the extent of the Bermondsey tuning of the Crick organ (i.e. on a scale of 0-100, about 30).

Using the observations from the visit, the committee looked at all the evidence and explored all three options for moving forward:

1. Leave the organ as it is tuned to Bermondsey temperament and work around or avoid any of the bad sounds that can occur in playing music written for some keys.
2. Continue to argue the case for retuning the instrument back to equal temperament, as it was before the restoration.
3. Agree to proceed with retuning the instrument to Young's temperament.

The committee agreed unanimously to proceed with Option 3. It is hoped that the organ will be retuned to Young's temperament during May 2011, subject to approval.

### **Fiori Musicali concert on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011 with Andrew Reid**

A second inaugural concert, to celebrate the retuning of the instrument, is to be arranged in our church on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011 with the Fiori Musicali choir and Andrew Reid, from Peterborough Cathedral, playing the organ.

### **Organ Restoration Web site**

For those of you with internet access, the St. Margaret's Organ Restoration web-site for up-to-date information can be found at the following link:

<http://www.crick.org.uk/crickorgan>