Chester & North-East Wales
Organists' & Choirmasters' Association
Affiliated to the Incorporated Association of Organists
www.cnewoca.org.uk

Newsletter February 2026

I am sorry for the delaying publishing the February newsletter. It includes details of our future meetings, a report on our visit to the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall and a short obituary for Nigel Ogden, a life-time member of the Association. As well as the usual list of forthcoming live recitals, there is a short note about the Jan Liebermann concert in Liverpool and a note about Ian Tracey's retirement from Liverpool Cathedral in October.
There is always space for your contributions – please end them to me in whatever format you prefer.

Iain Stinson

Our next meeting: Saturday 15th February 2:00pm at West Kirby Methodist Church

We are very pleased to be visiting West Kirby Methodist Church to see, hear and play the fine Henry Willis III (1936) two manual and pedal organ. The organ has 25 speaking stop and a full set of couplers. Details of the specification are on the NPOR (N18328).
On-street parking is usually available near the church. The church's address is 29A Westbourne Road, West Kirby, Wirral, CH48 4DQ and their website is https://westkirbymethodist.org.uk/home



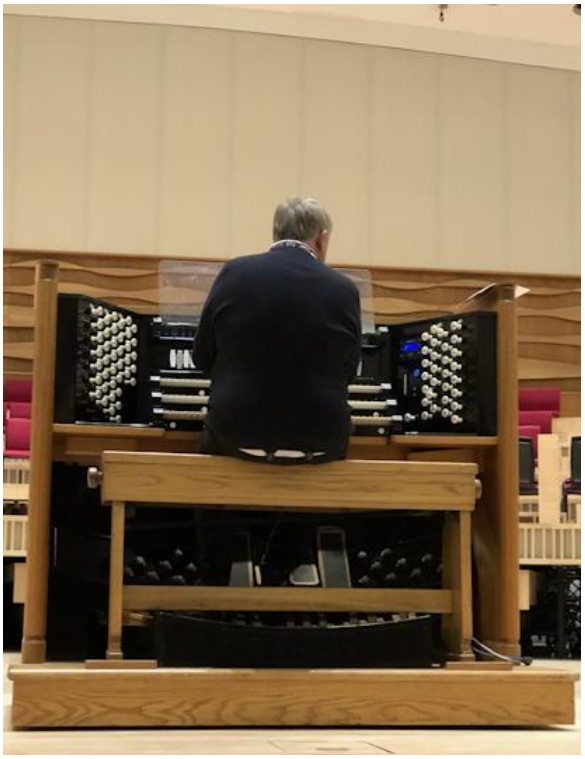
The organ was designed by Samuel Wilkinson Pilling (1856–1939) who was a highly regarded English amateur organist, influential organ designer, and a prominent figure in the organist community in the early 20th century. He is best known for his long tenure as an honorary organist at St. Helen's Church, Welton, and for owning what was considered the largest private chamber organ in England at the time.
His grandson was J.R.M. Pilling: he shared his grandfather's passion for organs and was a significant figure in the 20th-century British organ world. He founded Makin Organs (initially J. & J. Makin and now part of Church Organ World) after acquiring the electronic division of the Compton

company, naming the business in honour of his mother. Following his grandfather's tradition of grand residential instruments, he had a large four-manual organ built for his home in Windermere. J.R.M. Pilling was instrumental in establishing the Pilling Trust which offers grants for Anglican churches for achieving and maintaining a high standard of church music, including major repair or replacement of the church organ.

We are very grateful to Brian Moate for arranging this visit for us.

Our visit to the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

This took place on Monday 19th January 2026 and was a wonderful evening. The evening began with Ian Tracey welcoming us to the Hall and telling us about the organ in the Philharmonic Halls. He then demonstrated the organ to us, showing us the various tone colours on each of the divisions. The organ is a concert organ (not a church or cinema organ) – this is reflected in the specification. Most of the organ is enclosed so that it can perform its role in orchestral and choral works more effectively. The organ can be successfully played in the style of a cinema instrument (though there is not a Tibia in sight). After Ian had demonstrated the organ, our members enjoyed being able to play it themselves.



We ended the evening with a lovely buffet arranged for us by the Philharmonic Hall. We are very grateful to Prof Ian Tracey and his colleagues at the Philharmonic Hall for all the arrangements for this unforgettable evening.





Some notes on the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall Organs

The first Philharmonic Hall was opened in 1849. The first organ in the Hall was a



Bewsher & Fleetwood three manual and pedal instrument (30 stops, C-f3, 54 notes, 30 note pedal organ and a tenor C swell. NPOR K00932) It was moved to the hall from Liverpool Collegiate School on the instructions of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society who seemingly owned the instruments - the Society used the Collegiate Institution hall for concerts prior to the Philharmonic Hall being built. The move was carried out by Richard Jackson of Bolton. Work was carried out on the organ by Gray & Davison in 1880 and in 1899-1900.

In July 1933 the Philharmonic Hall was destroyed by fire, the organ and many artifacts were lost. The current ('new') hall was opened in June 1939 - the work having been delayed by the Liverpool Corporation.



A new organ, built by Rushworth & Dreaper was installed (NPOR 18265.) The organ had a horseshoe console(curved with stop keys, like a cinema organ) and was mounted on a dedicated lift (to allow it to be safely stored below the stage when not in use). It was renovated in 1983 by Rushworth & Dreaper and again in 2010 by David Wells Organ Builders Liverpool. The picture shows Dave Nicholas, the resident organist, in front of the console. There is a great YouTube video of about Dave (including him play the Phil Organ) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyXIm5coVVc.

The organ was extensively renovated in 2022 by Henry Willis & Sons Ltd.



Details of the organ can be found at https://www.liverpoolphil.com/the-orchestra/liverpool-philharmonic-hall-organ-restoration/. The extensive work included the provision of a new console (in the Willis style – with draw stops for the speaking stops and tilting tablets below the music desk for the couplers). The pipework is located in chambers on each side of the platform and speaks into the hall through the grilles. The climate in the chambers is controlled to ensure the stable tuning and wellbeing of the pipes. .

Nigel Ogden (1954 – 2026)

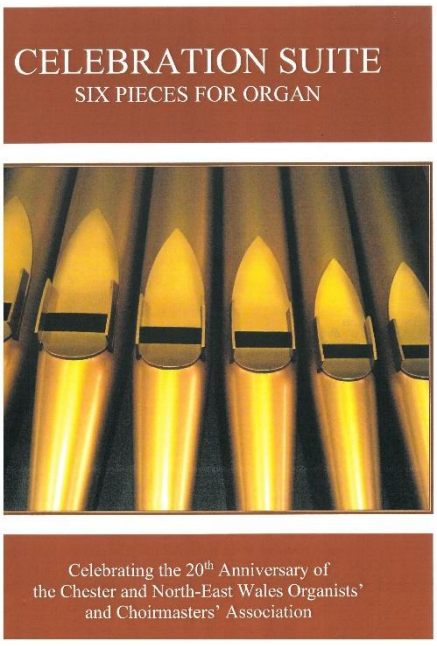


"The British organist and broadcaster **Nigel Ogden**, who hosted the show **The Organist Entertains** on BBC Radio 2, has passed away at the age of 71.

Born in Manchester in 1954, Ogden was the son of a church organist. He was first inspired to play the theatre organ when, as a child, he heard Reginald Dixon playing the Tower Ballroom Wurlitzer organ in Blackpool. He went on to record several CDs on that same instrument.

Ogden first appeared on The Organist Entertains as a player in 1972 and later took over from **Robin Richmond** as a presenter in 1980. He was the face of the program until it was discontinued in 2018, and for another five years, he continued to release episodes of *The Organist Encores* podcast.

A prolific composer, Ogden wrote a number of works for the theatre organ in a light 1930s style, including the Art Deco "Three-piece" Suite, *Afternoon tea with the Duchess*, and *Scherzo for the White Rabbit*. He also wrote patriotic works such as *England's Glory*, *New Era* (to inaugurate a series of lunchtime concerts at Manchester Town Hall), and *Our Squadron Leader*."



Nigel Ogden was a life member of our Association and composed *Reflection* for our book of six pieces for the organ, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Association.

Liverpool Centenary Recital Series: Jan Liebermann



With nearly all available seats taken in the great space of the Cathedral, the first Organ Centenary Celebratory Recital at Liverpool Cathedral was given by Jan Liebermann of Germany.

His programme included: Wagner *Meistersinger* Overture, Bach *Wachet Auf*, Vierne *Pièces de Fantasie*, Mendelssohn *St Paul* Overture, and Bach's monumental Chaconne.

Jan commented on facebook: *"What a pleasure it was to play for Liverpool Cathedral's Organ Centenary yesterday. An astonishing instrument in so many ways and truly an unforgettable evening."*

For those present it was indeed an unforgettable concert. Jan's energy on the organ bench was reflected in his performances. All nine floating divisions were used with rapid changes to meet the needs of the music. On a couple of occasions, Jan raised his left-hand index finger, to indicate "I'll be playing very quietly and don't applause". For a part of one piece, he used the new Echo Organ – it could just be heard from high up in the south triforium.



Jan spent three days practicing and working out his registrations before the concert. He clearly developed a good understanding of the tonal resources of the near 100-year-old Willis Organ, with its 11,000 pipes and of the acoustics of the vast cathedral. The performance was played entirely by memory.

It is very clear from this concert why this 20-year-old is recognised as one of the most promising young artists in the organ world.

Jan Liebermann has set a very high standard for the rest of this world class recital series.

You can hear and see a sample of his playing Prokofiev: *Love for Three Oranges* at Liverpool at https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1226411246129883

(Thanks to Robin Newby for parts of this article.)

Professor Ian Tracey to retire in October

As I was completing this newsletter, I heard that Professor Ian Tracey is to retire from Liverpool Cathedral in October. We wish Ian a very long and happy retirement and are very grateful for his support for the Association over a number of years. Ian is a life-time member of CNEWOCA and contributed *A Trumpet Gavotte* to the Association's Celebration Suite.

Liverpool Cathedral made the following announcement about Ian's retirement.

> We are sorry to announce that our beloved Organist, Professor Ian Tracey, will be retiring from Liverpool Cathedral.
>
> Reflecting on Ian's remarkable legacy and many years of dedicated service to the Cathedral, The Very Revd Dr Sue Jones, Dean of Liverpool, said:
>
> "I am sad to say that our much-loved Organist, Professor Ian Tracey, is retiring, bringing to a close an extraordinary career spanning more than four decades. Ian will play his last service on Saturday 17th October, before concluding his tenure by playing the Centenary Organ Recital that same afternoon. Ian became the youngest cathedral organist in the UK when he was appointed to Liverpool Cathedral in 1980, a role in which he has inspired generations through his musicianship and his profound influence on those who have listened to and worked with him.
>
> "Ian's dedication, talent and generosity as a musician and mentor have left a lasting legacy – he is as much an institution at the Cathedral as the organ over which he has presided for the past 46 years. That said, he has generously agreed to be on the organist deputies list. While Ian's retirement is a moment of real sadness, it is also an opportunity to thank him and wish him every happiness in the next chapter of his life. No longer sat at the organ, Ian can now sit among the congregation and enjoy the music others have been privileged to enjoy for so many years. May God bless Ian in his retirement, and grant him peace and fulfilment in what lies ahead."
>
> We are sure you will join us in wishing Ian a long, happy and richly deserved retirement, filled with rest and blessings for the years ahead.



Future meetings

Saturday 14th February 2:00pm West Kirby Methodist Church		The organ in West Kirby Methodist Church was built by Henry Willis III (1936) and has 25 speaking stop and a full set of couplers. Details of the specification are on the NPOR (N18328)
Saturday 14th March at 2:00pm Christ Church, Port Sunlight	  	The organ in Christ Church Port Sunlight was built by Henry Willis II in 1904 and is thought to be the only unaltered Willis II organ. A major programme of restoration was undertaken by Henry Willis & Sons in 2006. The work carried out included complete re-leathering of all 24 reservoirs, re-leathering of all Willis-lever key actions and piston combination actions. The instrument was cleaned and overhauled and the pipework and console were cleaned and restored. The organ has four manuals and 41 speaking stops. It uses Willis II's floating pneumatic lever action. The organ sounds magnificent in the large church. Details may be found on the NPOR (N04405) and on the Willis website.

Monday 13th April 7:30pm Christ Church, Willaston		The organ in Christ Church is a two manual and pedal instrument. It was built by Nicholson (Worcester) in 1925/6 and rebuilt in 1999 by David Wells (Liverpool). Details may be found on the NPOR (N01136). The church has recently been reordered and the acoustic improved and the organ sounds better than ever.
May		***Details to be agreed.***
Saturday 13th June, 2pm All Saints' Gresford Annual Meeting and organ visit.		The organ in All Saints' is a fine three manual Wm Hill & Son instrument built in 1871, and rebuilt in 1912 by Hill and in 1995 by Roy Billingsley. Details on the NPOR N11754.
Saturday 25th July 2pm. Christchurch Chester		We are going to visit the Brindley & Foster two manual organ in Christchurch, Chester. The specification is given on the NPOR, N04295. The special Brindley & Foster registration aids (noted in the NPOR entry) are still working on this instrument.

Live music!

Chester Cathedral organ recitals

The recitals take place on Thursdays at 1:10pm. The suggested donation is £5.

12th February	Daniel Mathieson (Chester Cathedral)
19th February	Philip Rushforth (Chester Cathedral)
26th February	Daniel Clark (Berlin)
5th March	Graham Eccles (St Asaph)
12th March	Daniel Mathieson (Chester Cathedral)
19th March	Philip Rushforth (Chester Cathedral)
26th March	Alexander Lanigan-Palotai (Chester Cathedral)

Details of other recitals from https://chestercathedral.com/visit/organ-recitals
Details of Chester Cathedral Grand Organ NPOR: E01969

Sponsor a Recitalist

If you would like to sponsor a recitalist, please get in touch with Philip Rushforth at philip.rushforth@chestercathedral.com (01244 500974)

Music at Wesley

Wesley Church Centre, St John Street, Chester

Tuesday Lunchtime Concerts

12.45pm – 1.35 pm

Retiring collection

13th January	Chetham's School of Music Instrumentalists
20th January	Gema Lu Cai (piano)
27th January	Catherine Strachan (cello), David Hammond (piano)
3rd February	Chetham's School of Music Pianists
10th February	Callum McLachlan (piano)
17th February	Juna String Quartet
24th February	Hwan Hee Kim (piano)
3rd March	Ben Holland (violin), John Gough (piano)
10th March	Chetham's School of Music Brass Ensembles
17th March	Yuki Kagajo (piano)
24th March	Jeremy & Brian Heald (piano duets)
31st March	Cristo Harijan (piano)

Sunday February 1st 7:30pm: St John's Festival Orchestra Concert *(Tickets £12)*

Saturday Organ Recitals 12.45pm – 1.35 pm

Retiring Collection

21st February	John Hosking (Blackburn Cathedral)
21st March	Brian Heald (Wesley Chester)

Advance notice: July 2026 marks the centenary of the opening of Wesley, Chester's Binns organ. The opening recital was on 10th July 1926). Philip Rushforth has very kindly agreed to give a one-hour Organ Recital at Wesley at 2pm on *Saturday July 11th 2026* to celebrate this anniversary and will conclude it by playing the whole of Widor's 5th Symphony. It will be a free concert with a retiring collection and tea and cake afterwards for the audience.
Details of the Binns organ in the Wesley Centre are at the NPOR D04853.

Liverpool Cathedral

The 2026 Centenary Recital Series celebrating the centenary of Liverpool Cathedral's magnificent Willis Organ.

~~Saturday 7th February 2026 – Jan Liebermann (Frankfurt, Germany)~~

Saturday 18th April 2026 – Jean-Baptiste Dupont (Bordeaux Cathedral, France)

Saturday 6th June 2026 – Nathan Laube (Rochester, U.S.A.)

Saturday 26th September 2026 – James Orford (St Paul's Cathedral, London)

Saturday 17th October 2026 – Professor Ian Tracey. 100th Anniversary Evensong & Recital.

Saturday 7th November 2026 – Isabelle Demers (Quebec, Canada)

Tickets £15.68 per recital. You can book online here. All recitals begin at 6pm except the recital on 17 October which follows evensong at 3:00pm. Booking is advised and aim to arrive early! More details in the January newsletter.

Details of the Willis Organ in Liverpool Cathedral may be found on the NPOR E00301.
(This does not include the details of the Echo organ.)

Liverpool St George's Hall

Usually Tuesdays from 12:45pm – 1:30pm. Tickets (at the door) £10.75

Professor Ian Tracey, Organist to the City of Liverpool.

10th March, 14th April, 12th May, 2nd June, 5th September, 20th October, 17th November, 8th December.

Please note the 10th March recital will start at 12:30pm.

Details of the Willis Organ in St George's Hall may be found on the NPOR N01921

Music at Blackburn Cathedral

Wednesday Concerts

14th January	Graham Eccles
21st January	Mark Brafield
28th January	Kumi Choi
4th February	Andreana Chan
11th February	Sebastian Johansson
25th February	Charles Spanner
4th March	Joshua Simoes

***The concerts begin at 12:15pm and are free to attend*.** Suggested donation £5. Unless stated, all Wednesday concerts feature the iconic Wood/Walker organ.

Saturday 14th March 7:30pm: David Briggs Live Improvisation Concert - The Phantom of the Opera. More details and ticket from https://blackburncathedral.com/event/david-briggs-live-improvisation-concert-the-phantom-of-the-opera/

World-renowned organist David Briggs improvises a live accompaniment to the 1925 silent film The Phantom of the Opera. There is a pre-concert talk at 6:30pm.

Bank Holiday Monday 6th April 11:00am: Dr Colin Walsh, Organist Emeritus at Lincoln Cathedral (Tickets £10 at the door).

Details of the JW Walker / David Wood organ may be found on the NPOR**: E00533**

Bangor Cathedral

Check the website https://bangorcathedral.churchinwales.org.uk

Details of the Bangor Cathedral organ may be found on the NPOR: R01575

St Asaph Cathedral

Check the website https://stasaphcathedral.wales/en
Details of the cathedral organ may be found at
https://stasaphcathedral.wales/en/music/the-organ

organrecitals.uk lists recitals across the country. You can search for recitals in particular area and register your own recitals, and it's free.

CNEWOCA Committee Members

Chairman: Tony Warren
ndtl3@yahoo.co.uk

Vice-Chairman: John Evans
angiejohnevans@gmail.com

General Secretary: Katriona Moulton
secretary@cnewoca.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Angela Evans
angiejohnevans@gmail.com
11 Lindfields, Chester CH4 8QD

Treasurer: Raymond Moulton
treasurer@cnewoca.org.uk

Member: Nigel James
organo3112@gmail.com

Independent examiner: David Bird

Publications Officer: Iain Stinson
iain@stinson.org.uk.
6 St Stephen's Close, Heswall, Wirral.
CH60 3TA

IAO Update

The new Organists' Review website is a huge improvement and very easy to use. However, it does requires **all** subscribers to resubscribe and open a new account as it proved to be impossible to move the old accounts across to the new system.

This year's London Organ Day, March 14th, will be Tom Bell's last as Artistic Adviser and he intends it the be one of his most spectacular.

The 2026 IAO Festival, July 26th – 30th, is in Bristol and tickets are already selling well. Bristol is a lovely city with many wonderful instruments which we shall be exploring, including St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol Cathedral and Clifton Cathedral.

(see https://iao.org.uk/ for details.)

Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust is to close the Theatre Organ Heritage Centre

The Trust has announced that the Heritage Centre will close at the end of June 2026 because they have been unable to find suitable persons to be trustees to take on responsibility for running the centre and the Trust. The contents of the museum including the Wurlitzer and Compton pipe organs and some Robert Hope Jones artefacts from the museum are being offered for sale. Contact the Trust via their web site.

If you want to visit before the closure, I suggest acting sooner rather than later.



Chester Cathedral



Manchester Cathedral