Chester & North-East Wales Organists' & Choirmasters' Association

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Newsletter – September 2026: 'Back to school and Pedagogy'

Dear Member,

We hope that you had a lovely summer break and are looking forward to an autumn of organ music and CNEWOCA meetings. We also hope that you enjoy this month's newsletter which we've loosely themed as 'Back to school and Pedagogy' for September. It was wonderful to receive a number of articles spotlighting hymns, submitted by Brian Moate. We have chosen his article on 'All my hope on God is founded' for this month, as Herbert Howells composed the famous tune 'Michael' while acting as Director of Music at St Paul's Girls' School in London, at the request of the Director of Music at Charterhouse School.

Thank you also to Katriona Moulton for her contribution to the member's corner. Just a reminder that we are very grateful for submissions of articles on any topic, but also shorter paragraphs on our upcoming themed issues where it would be great to have a selection of CNEWOCA members' contributions and expertise. Please see Emily's details for submissions at the end of the newsletter. Please do also submit upcoming concerts and recitals for inclusion (up to the end of January 2027) and any personal news that you would like included.

Submit by 1st of the month	**Theme**	**Ideas for a paragraph for the members' corner (but we'd love to receive anything, in theme or not!)**
October	Autumn *and* Remembrance	Favourite autumnal anthems and voluntaries (and why) Favourite quiet voluntary suggestions for Remembrance Sunday
November	Advent	Favourite advent preludes (and why)
December	Christmas	Favourite carol or descants or final verses (and why) Tips for surviving the intense festive season of playing/singing
January	New Year	What is your repertoire resolution for 2027?

Upcoming meetings

10th October time TBC: Organ crawl
On 10th October we will visit St John the Baptist, Alford CH3 6JE (NPOR K00425) and then the neighbouring church of St Mary the Virgin, Bruera (NPOR N04354).



November: TBC

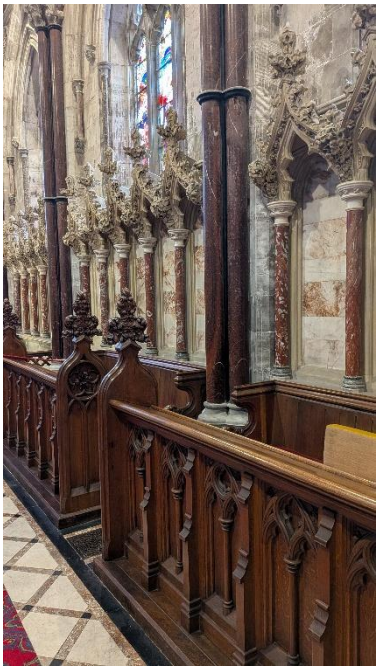
December: No meeting

Previous meeting report: September



We certainly started the new CNEWOCA season back after the summer with a fantastic meeting.

On 5th September we met at St Margaret's Church, Bodelwyddan for the first stop of our organ crawl, kindly hosted by their organist (and organ builder extraordinaire!) John Liddon-Few. Lady Margaret Willoughby de Broke built the church in memory of her husband between 1856-1860. The church is nicknamed the Marble Church as it contains 14 varieties of marble including impressive pillars of Belgian red marble in the nave and choir.



The graveyard includes over 80 Canadian War Graves of soldiers who died at the nearby Kinmel Army Camp during the Spanish 'Flu Pandemic, and the ensuing riots at the poor living conditions and long wait for repatriation home, after World War I.



We started with a fascinating talk by John about his renovation of the Laycock organ (NPOR H01055). The church uses a digital Allen instrument for services, but the very first pipe organ installed in the church was a small single manual instrument, which was positioned in a purpose-built alcove in the west gallery. This was replaced with a Corwin organ in the 1960s but by 2017, significant repairs were needed and the digital organ was acquired. A similar instrument to the original organ was found in a redundant Baptist Chapel at Cowling Hill, Yorkshire and moved into the now freed up gallery in 2020. This historic organ was built in 1851 by John Laycock of Glusburn, Yorkshire, and is one of his earliest known examples. We were joined by members of the Laycock family visiting the UK from Canada who greatly enjoyed seeing the legacy of their great-great-great- grandfather! You can see the organ with the front of the case removed in the photo.

John gave a lovely rendition of John Stanley's Introduction and Allegro followed by a piece from the Village Organist. Most members followed suit and played manuals only music, and we did not use the organ candles for lighting!

We then moved on to St Mary's Church in nearby Rhuddlan where John gave a further talk on his and resident organist Rhys Robert's work restoring the Blackett & Howden pneumatic organ dating from 1915 (NPOR H00082). Refreshments were kindly provided by Rhys and church member Sam Clarke.



The current St Mary's dates back to 1301 when Edward I moved the original church (1080 AD) to free up land for a castle. Later work was completed in the Tudor period before the church suffered

significant damage including a fire during the Glyndŵr rebellion in the early 1400s and in the Civil Wars in the 1600s.



The church still includes some fascinating historic features such as the memorial slab (around 1290) of Archbishop William de Freney including some rather large ears - a popular feature around this time to suggest a listening ear to the congregations he served.



John played for us again, beautifully demonstrating the organ voicing with a Prelude on Aurelia (The Church's One Foundation), a very entertaining version of Ferdinand Hérold's Clog Dance from *La Fille mal Gardée*, including rapping on the organ case to simulate the clogs, and then finishing with Paul Fey's Elegy which nicely demonstrated the dynamic and colour range of the organ.

Our members then took over, and we had a wide selection of music to finish off the afternoon. A very enjoyable meeting indeed and always instructive to have the chance to play on two very contrasting organs.

Members' corner

Introducing a young piano student to the organ
Written by Katriona Moulton, CNEWOCA member

I have a young piano pupil (who we will call Tom) who is always keen to have a go on the organ, so we agreed to try out "Fingers & Feet: A Journey to the Organ Bench" written by Drew Cantrill-Fenwick and Robin Harrison. Progress is slow because we use just 15 minutes out of Tom's weekly piano lesson and he has no other access to an organ. The book is colourful and eye-catching but doesn't seem to know what age range it is aiming for. I find it useful as a resource to dip into but not a book that is suitable for Tom to take home. It works well alongside the piano tutor book.

Tom enjoys experimenting with different stops, which is usually a noisy and tuneless few minutes. I feel that it is important to let him do this, but I try to encourage him to think about his choices rather than just pulling stops randomly. If it gets too noisy, I remind Tom that we live in a semi-detached house and that the neighbours might complain! Some weeks I play a piece while Tom alters the registrations.

Tom really likes the song "This is the day" so we are learning an arrangement with just two notes for the pedals. Tom has realised, however, that he can play the melody on the pedals – so much for a simple introduction to pedalling! Depending on how Tom progresses, we might get him playing something on the organ when the school comes into church for harvest or Easter.

Please do consider contributing to this section of the newsletter – our membership has deep and varied expertise which it would be wonderful to benefit from. We've suggested some ideas for the next few months, but we would love anything!

The origin of hymns: 'All My Hope on God is Founded'

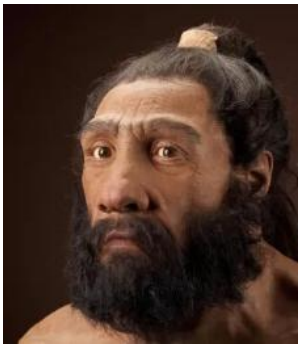
Written by Brian Moate, CNEWOCA member

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

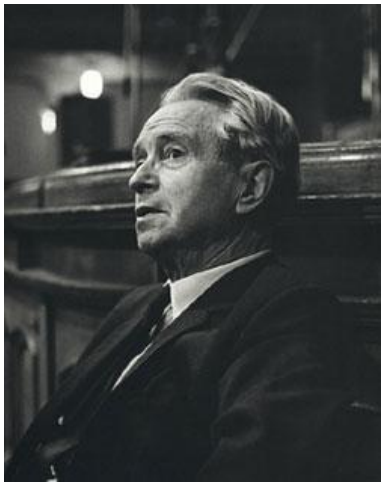


All My Hope on God is founded' has long been one of my favourite hymns. Its origins go back to 17th century Germany, where it was written as 'Meine Hoffnung Stehet Feste' (my Hope stands fast), by Joachim Neander, born in Bremen in 1650. His father was a Latin teacher. The original family name was Neumann but was changed by his grandfather to the Greco-Roman form.

He first studied Theology in Bremen, teaching initially in Heidelberg (1671) and then in Düsseldorf (1674) where the Düssel Valley became an inspiration for his poems and writings. He also held gatherings and delivered sermons in the valley. He was strongly influenced by the work of the German Reformed church. After falling out with his church administrators because of his popularity, he became pastor in St Martin's in Bremen but died of tuberculosis the following year aged only 30. He wrote about 60 hymns, indeed also some of the tunes, including the ever popular 'Lobe den Herren, der Mächtigen König der Ehren' which we know as 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation', later translated by Catherine Winkworth. But 'All my Hope' was translated by the English poet Robert Bridges in 1899 and was published in his own 'Yattendon Hymnal' of that year. The hymn calls us to trust God rather than 'mortal pride' or 'earthly glory'. It calls us to praise one whose 'great goodness aye endureth'.



An interesting note is that two centuries later in 1856, an ancient skeleton was found in the Düssel Valley and later became known as Neanderthal man (German 'thal' means valley). This is one of the key stages in the development of mankind as we know it.



The tune to which we now sing the hymn ('Michael') was written in 1935 by Herbert Howells, born 1872 in Lydney, Gloucestershire, the son of a plumber who was also the organist at the local Baptist church, but who became bankrupt when Herbert was only 12. He had encouraging music lessons at Gloucester Cathedral with Herbert Brewer, where he studied alongside Ivor Novello and Ivor Gurney. He was financed by Charles Bathurst (1st Viscount Bledisloe), and this led him to studying at the Royal College of Music. He was much influenced by Vaughan Williams and Elgar and also encouraged by Herbert Sumsion back in Gloucester.

Later, in 1935 a catastrophic event was the sudden death of his son Michael of polio (some sources say meningitis) at the age of 9. Our hymn tune was written in his memory. Indeed, other works were also attributed to this tragedy, including his 'Requiem', which lay in a desk drawer until 1981, 46 years after Michael's death and only two years before his own in 1983. His output overall consisted of much organ music, anthems (such as 'Take him, earth and cherish') and even a piece for harp. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Centenary spotlight: Remembering Dr Arthur Wills OBE (1926-2020)



This 19th September marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dr Arthur Wills OBE, a giant of cathedral music, famous teacher, and prolific organ composer.



For over 40 years Wills was associated with Ely Cathedral, joining as Assistant Organist in 1949 and appointed Director of Music in 1958. He remained in this post for 32 years until his retirement in 1990. During his time at Ely, he developed the choir who earned international acclaim, and you can see some of his work with them in this 1986 Anglia TV programme "The Guardians" and multiple choral evensong recordings.

Ely Cathedral is famous for its central octagonal tower with a lantern above, built in the 1300s after the collapse of the Norman central crossing tower during the digging of foundations for the Lady Chapel. The 'new' roof and lantern are held up by a complex timber structure which could not be built in this way today, as we have no trees big enough! The lantern includes panels with pictures of musical angels which can be opened to access the roof space of the Octagon so that real choristers (with a head for heights) can sing from the top of the cathedral.



The organ at Ely is a 1908 Harrison and Harrison organ (NPOR N03011 and NPOR A00959) with further rebuilding by the company in 1931, 1975 and 2001. It was the firm's first major cathedral project, acting as a prototype for their symphonic organ style and transforming how English cathedral organs were built in the 20th century. It includes 4 manuals, 80 speaking stops, and over 5,600 pipes. Wills released a number of recordings from the organ many of which are freely available on YouTube.
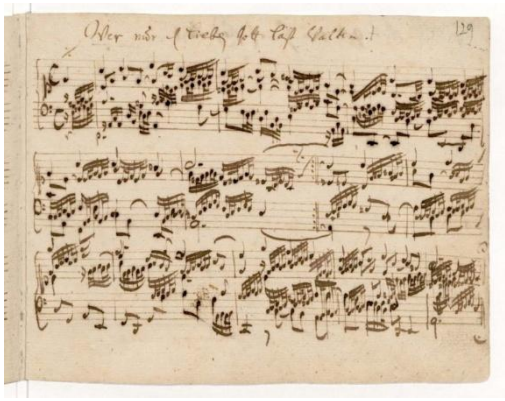
Beyond his work at Ely, Wills was dedicated to education. He was Professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London from 1964-1992 and wrote the organ volume of the Yehudi Menuhin Music Guides series, which is now only available preloved, but is very interesting, covering the history of the organ and its music, and discussing different instruments and repertoires. It finishes with a section on acquiring skills which includes two chapters on improvisation and a suggested (and quite ambitious) three-year programme of pieces for the beginner organist to learn, starting with the Robertsbridge Codex, and ending with Howells' Psalm Prelude, Second Set, No. 3.

As a composer, Wills catalogue includes large scale concert works with perhaps the most striking being his Symphonic Suite: The Fenlands (for organ and brass band), and Toccata for Organ, op. 9. He arranged a number of choral anthems including By the Waters of Babylon in addition to a famous arrangement of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition. More accessible to parish organists is his Lullaby for a Royal Prince written for Prince William with sheet music available here (sadly still in copyright!) which provides a gentle reflective mood ideal for communion. You can read more about Wills through his memoir Full with Wills.
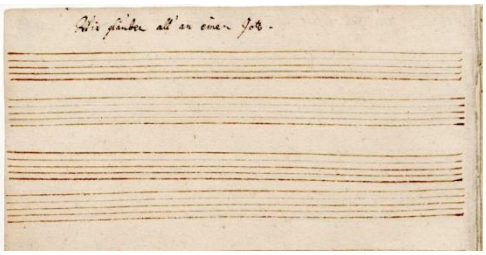
J.S. Bach's Orgelbüchlein (Little Organ Book): A teaching tool for organists

On the title page of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* (Little Organ Book), he wrote (in German):

"Little Organ Book, in which a beginner organist is given clear instruction in developing a chorale in all kinds of ways, and at the same time acquiring facility in the pedal, since in the chorales contained herein the pedal is treated entirely obbligato."



Composed mostly 1708-1717 while Bach was court organist and concertmaster in Weimar, he refined it while under a 4-week house arrest following a dispute with the Duke of Saxe-Weimar over Bach's resignation! Bach conceived the *Orgelbüchlein* as a collection of 164 chorale preludes which would cover the liturgical year. He only completed 45 preludes, but it is still considered the single most influential pedagogical work in the organ repertoire.



The *Orgelbüchlein* was bound before Bach started writing – he therefore had to fit an entire prelude onto a single open page or spread, necessitating some rather crammed writing – thank goodness for modern editions! Sadly, there are over 100 pages where Bach just wrote the title.

In the *Orgelbüchlein*, Bach focuses on three main pillars of teaching:

***Obbligato pedal*:** Before Bach, central and southern European organists frequently used the pedals only for long, sustained drone notes or harmonic doubling at cadences. Bach revolutionised pedal technique, by treating the pedal as an independent active voice which is fully equal to the manuals. This requires the student to develop skills in linear independence of the pedal voice from the manual voices, and rhythmic precision rather than more passive pedalling.



JE Rentsch. Portrait presumed to be JS Bach, 1717-23

***Short preludes with a single motif*:** Each prelude introduces a single, short musical motif in the accompanying voices that persists throughout, and many settings are very short at only 10-20 bars. In the Luteran tradition, hymns are introduced with a short chorale prelude, usually improvised. Bach uses the *Orgelbüchlein* to support organists with learning how to improvise, compose and perform chorale preludes based on specific hymns.

***Textural expression and articulation*:** Bach's chorale preludes are based on hymns which would have been well known to the congregation, such that they would have been able to follow the text of the hymn in their head while listening to the prelude. He demonstrates how to translate the hymn text into expression and articulation at the organ, for example BWV 614 (*Das alte Jahr vergangen ist* – The old year has passed away) is treated as a lament for the passing year. Bach expresses this sorrow through chromatic weeping figures, expressive slur groupings and finger substitution.

Dr Tim Rishton has produced an extensive series of tuition videos on the *Orgelbüchlein* which are available on YouTube. The introduction lecture is an hour long but very interesting indeed, and then there are shorter videos on the various preludes.

Upcoming live music for organ and choir

Chester Cathedral
Organ recitals: Thursdays 1.10pm, suggested donation: £5

3rd September	Julian Kelly (London)
10th September	Alexander Lanigan-Palotai (Chester)
17th September	Philip Rushforth (Chester)
24th September	Daniel Mathieson (Chester)
1st October	Alexander Lanigan-Palotai (Chester)
8th October	Daniel Mathieson (Chester)
15th October	Philip Rushforth (Chester)
22nd October	Friedhelm Flamme (Germany)
29th October	Graham Eccles (St Asaph)

Kelsborrow Choir
70th Anniversary Gala Concert
Jonathan Scott (International Concert Organist)
St John the Baptist's Church, Chester, CH1 1QX
Saturday 12 September 2026, 7.30pm
Tickets are available:

- via the Choir's Ticket Tailor webpage
- via Jonathan Scott's concert webpage
- by contacting John Evans on 07939 645688 or angiejohnevans@gmail.com for paper tickets

9th October, 7pm	St. Mary's Without-the-Walls, Handbridge, Chester
5th December, time TBC	As part of "Together in Song" celebrating the 20th anniversary of The Joshua Tree, Chester Cathedral
13th December, 3pm	Christmas Concert, Tarvin Community Centre
18th December, 7.30pm	Saughall Methodist Church

Wesley Church Centre, St. John Street, Chester, CH1 1DA
Saturday organ recitals, 12.45-1.35pm, retiring collection

19th September	Daniel Mathieson (Chester Cathedral)
17th October	Christopher Enston (St. Asaph Cathedral)
21st November, 10.30am-2.30pm	"Organ Day" Recitals Sequence
19th December	Christmas Music Concert (Claire, Jeremy and Brian Heald)

Hoole Methodist Church, Hamilton Street, Hoole, Chester
Sunday 20th September, 3-3.45pm Eira Lynn Jones (harp)

St. John's Chester
Wednesdays 1pm, refreshments available
2nd September Organ recital, John Evans

Neston Parish Church, CH64 9TZ
Organ recitals 10.45-11.30am, Coffee and homemade cakes from 10am!
All with Daniel Wakefield (Neston Parish Church)
Sunday 18th October Annual organ recital (including Bach, Handel, Shostakovich and Walters)

Liverpool Cathedral

Saturday 26th September, 6pm	2026 Centenary Organ Recitals, £15 James Orford (St Paul's Cathedral)
Saturday 17th October, 3pm	Festival Evensong and 100th Anniversary Recital, £15 Ian Tracey (Organist to the City of Liverpool)
Saturday 7th November, 6pm	2026 Centenary Organ Recitals, £15 Isabelle Demers (Quebec, Canada)

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Tuesday 22nd December, 1pm	A Christmas Organ Treat: £18 Ian Tracey (Organist to the City of Liverpool)

St. George's Hall, Liverpool

Organ recitals with Ian Tracey (Organist to the City of Liverpool), £10, 12.45-1.30pm
Tuesday 29th September
Tuesday 13th October
Tuesday 17th November
Tuesday 8th December

Christ Church, Willaston

Sunday 20th September, 5pm Professor Ian Tracey Centenary Organ Recital
Entrance by programme: £10 available on the door or by email from Davidspeechley@hotmail.co.uk
Organ by Nicholson, opened September 1926
In memory of Henry Garvey Johnson

Your 2026-2027 Committee

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