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

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Newsletter – November 2026: 'Advent'

Dear Member,

As we approach advent and preparations for Christmas services ramp up, we hope you enjoy this newsletter including CNEWOCA committee member Nigel James' recommendations for advent repertoire. One of my favourite aspects of attending CNEWOCA meetings is hearing music that is new to me, so please do follow Nigel's lead and consider writing an article for us on what you enjoy playing. We also continue with Brian Moate's hymn series, this month looking at the origin of 'The day thou gavest Lord, is ended' as we head towards the end of the year.

We are always very grateful for articles from members, but please do also consider writing a shorter paragraph for one of our upcoming issues - we have a few theme ideas below but accept anything. We are particularly keen to see what our members at committing to learning in 2027 for our January newsletter – give us your New Year's repertoire resolution and we'll hold you accountable! 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 March 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!)**
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?
February	Lent	What are your favourite quiet voluntaries for Lent?

Save the date

Please save Saturday 7th August for OrganFest2 at St Michael's in Shotwick. This was a great success in 2025 and very well supported by CNEWOCA members. Still in early planning stages, but time to start thinking about what you could play – they would like a mixture of "heavier" and "lighter" music with a congregational hymn to end each section. And of course there will be cake!

Upcoming meetings

December: No meeting

2027 meetings: TBC

Previous meeting report: November



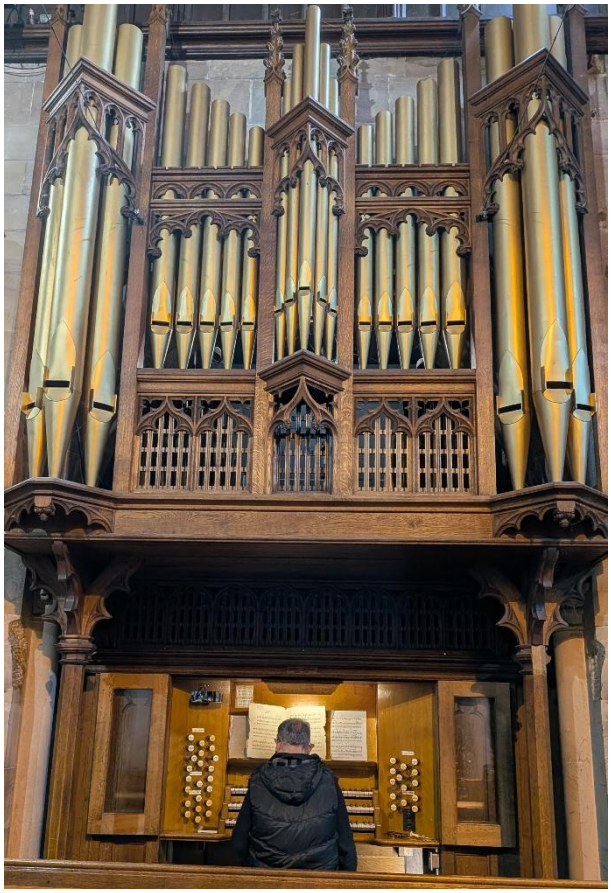
On 7th November we visited St Mary and St Helen Parish Church in Neston, to play on their Forster and Andrews of Hull 1900 three manual pipe organ (NPOR A00056). We were made very welcome by their organist Daniel Wakefield, who gave a mini-recital before and after the open organ session to showcase the organ's range, including one of Bach's Little Preludes and Fugues, several movements from Gordon Young's Cathedral Suite (which is available for free here) and a piece by Dr Caleb Jarvis, former City of Liverpool organist.



The church's joint dedication to Mary, mother of Jesus and Helen, mother of Constantine the first Christian Roman Emperor is unique in the Anglican Church, and the first record of a stone church building dates from around 1170. However, during 19th century renovations, Viking stone grave markers were discovered, some with images of Vikings fighting on horseback, confirming the existence of Christianity in Neston as far back as 930 AD. These can now be viewed inside the church.



Other interesting features include the 16th century font, in which Lady Hamilton, mistress of Lord Nelson, was baptised in 1765. The church also houses the North West of England's Falklands Chapel which includes chapel artifacts from the Type 12 frigate HMS Plymouth. HMS Plymouth was among the first Royal Navy warships to arrive in the South Atlantic, the first to enter San Carlos Water ahead of the main amphibious landing and the first to enter Port Stanley Harbour following the Argentine surrender. The Falklands War armistice was signed in her wardroom.



You can hear Daniel perform at one of his popular Neston Parish Church organ recitals. These support with raising funds for the planned refurbishment of the organ. Please see details in the newsletter live music session - the next on one is Tuesday 29th December, 10.45-11.30am: Coffee, Cakes and Classics for Christmas.

Favourite Advent Organ Music

Written by Nigel James, CNEWOCA member

The following is a selection of Organ Music that I regularly use across Advent.

On the First Sunday in Advent our Church usually will commence the service with the Advent Prose (Rorate Coeli). This prompts my first choice – a sensitive and technically easy paraphase on Rorate Coeli – in English 'Drop down ye heavens from above' by the great French organist and composer Jeanne Demessieux. It is sensitive to the text and suggests the pleading prayer to God to pour down righteousness.

Advent would not feel like 'Advent' for me without the inclusion in the season of J S Bach Watchet Auf BWV 645. It requires that I revisit it every year to ensure I can manage the tricky corners.

Settings I currently use of 'Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland' (Saviour of the nations come) are ones by Buxtehude BuxWV 211, which nicely decorates the melody over a fairly easy accompaniment in G minor and by J S Bach BWV 599 from the Orgelbuchlein. I have an ambition to learn another couple of settings by Bach, but I am not there yet! The Buxtehude version can be found in 'The Progressive Organist Book 2 ed by C H Trevor or on IMSLP.

Bach's Gottes Sohn ist kommen (God's Son is coming) is also seasonally appropriate. It needs an 8' clear pedal solo (which could be coupled down from a free manual).

John the Baptist features in readings on the Second and Third Sundays of Advent and so I sometimes include the Chorale Prelude 'Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam' by Buxtehude BuxWV 180.

The Advent Hymn, 'The people that in darkness sat' prompts me to use C H Parry Prelude on Dundee as a Postlude. It is not easy and appears under the 'Advanced' selection of Organ Music in the RSCM magazine Sunday by Sunday and on IMSLP.

Some suggestions for the Fourth Sunday of Advent. The celebration of the The Virgin Mary as a key figure in the story of salvation suggests the inclusion of J Brahms Chorale Prelude on Es ist ein' Ros. It contrasts two manuals in a gentle way. Also I alternate three different Magnificat Fugues – two settings of Pachelbel and one by Guilmant.

A longer piece, nearly 7 minutes, 'Ave Maria von Arcadelt' by Liszt might be useful before the service.

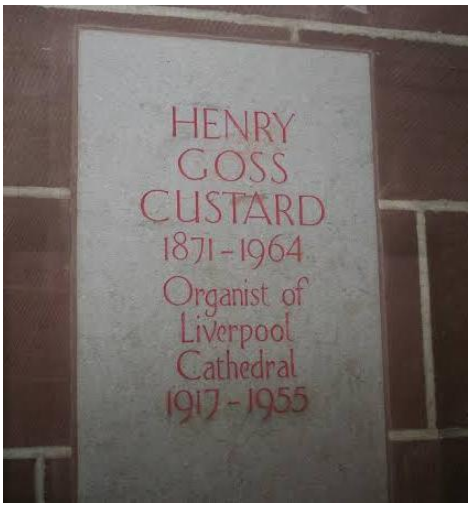
Again, the Advent Season feels if it is missing something if we do not sing O come, O come Emmanuel and hence this suggestion for a Postlude: Fantasia on Veni Emmanuel by Alec Rowley. I think it would come in at Intermediate level.

If I had a suggestion for the season, it would be to pace oneself. With a Carol Service/Nine Lessons and Carols to prepare, plus all the other seasonal preparations, it is necessary to plan in advance if possible.



Organ 100: Celebrating 100 Years of the Grand Organ, Liverpool Cathedral

Liverpool Cathedral celebrated the centenary of its organ with a free exhibition, illustrated talk, new book and sold-out recital by Ian Tracey. Prof Ian Tracey's retirement coincided with the centenary celebrations and he now becomes Organist Emeritus.



Famously, the organ is the largest in the UK but, perhaps most striking, are the very small number of organists, with only four since the Grand Organ was installed.

1910-1916	Dr Frederick William Burstall (of the Lady Chapel)
1917-1955	Dr Walter Henry Goss Custard
1955-1980	Dr Christopher Noel Rawsthorne
1980-2026	Prof Ian Tracey
2026	Martyn Noble

Noel Rawsthorne, Ian Tracey, and Martyn Noble were all tutored by the preceding organist, leading to an ongoing legacy of cathedral organists and perhaps resulting in their long durations of service. The ashes of Dr Goss Custard and Dr Rawsthorne are interned in the wall below the North side of the organ with space left for Prof Tracey's!

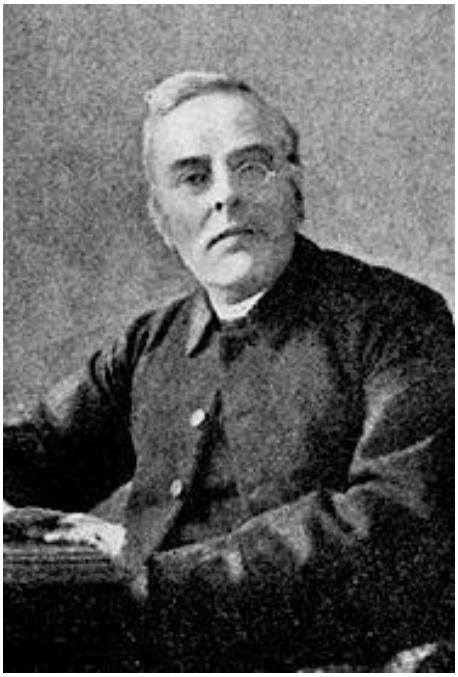


The exhibition included information boards on the organ and the three organists who played it, organ building parts explaining the construction of the organ, and historic recordings from the organ. My favourite part however, were the Russian posters of one of Noel Rawsthorne's organ recital tours in Russia in 1971. He was the first British organist invited to perform in the Soviet Union and, during one tour in Moscow, his musical notation and codes for organ stops were mistaken for spy codes and he was briefly arrested and imprisoned by the KGB! Fortunately, the mistake was realised with sufficient time for him to be released before the start of that evening's concert, with the KGB officer promising to attend.



Origin of hymns: The day thou gavest Lord, is ended

Written by Brian Moate, CNEWOCA member



A very popular hymn, particularly for evening service use, is 'The Day thou gavest Lord, is ended'. It is also often used for funerals. The author was John Ellerton (1826-1893), who was a prolific hymn writer, including such favourites as 'O Perfect Love and Saviour, again to thy dear name we raise'. He was born in Clerkenwell, Middlesex, his father George being the head of an evangelical family. John was educated on the Isle of Man, and later at Trinity College, Cambridge. After taking holy orders in 1850 as a Curate he served in Eastbourne and Brighton (1852) before in 1860 becoming chaplain to Lord Crewe and Vicar of Crewe Green in Cheshire. It was also in 1860 he married (in Brighton) Charlotte Alicia Hart who gave him ten children. In 1872 he became Vicar of Hinstock (Shropshire) then in 1876 at Barnes, West London. After a short spell (1884-5) as a chaplain at Pegli in Italy, he went in 1886 to the small parish of White Roding (Essex) where he ended his ministry. In his last years he was made an Honorary Canon of St Albans Cathedral. He died in Torquay in 1893.

Our hymn was written in 1870 during his time in Crewe Green. It was intended for inclusion in 'A Liturgy for Missionary Meetings', its theme focussing on the worldwide fellowship of the church and its continual offering of prayer and praise to God. It was sung in 1897 at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, at the Hong Kong handover ceremony a century later, and at our late Queen Elizabeth II's funeral in 2022. It came third favourite in a 'Songs of Praise' poll in 2005. Ellerton also contributed to 'Hymns for Schools and Bible Classes'(1859) and 'Notes and Illustrations of Church Hymns' (1881).



It is invariably sung to the tune 'St Clement', and mostly credited to Rev. Clement Cotterill Scholefield. He was born in 1829 at Edgbaston, Birmingham where his father William was the local MP. He was educated at Pocklington Grammar School, Yorkshire, and later spent 3 years at St. John's College, Cambridge. He was ordained deacon in 1867 and priest in 1869. He served at Hove parish church then St. Peter's, Notting Hill, and at St. Luke's Chelsea, eventually in 1880 becoming chaplain at Eton College where he spent 10 years, and finally ending his ministry at Holy Trinity, Knightsbridge before retiring from the clergy in 1885.

During his time at St. Peter's he became close friends with Arthur Sullivan (composer of many hymn tunes and of course the famous operettas with W.S. Gilbert). Sullivan was organist at that church. It has been surmised that Sullivan had a greater hand than was first thought in writing 'St Clement', since Scholefield had had no formal music training (though he was an accomplished pianist). The tune seems to be far superior to anything else Scholefield wrote (which however did amount to 41 hymn tunes). It was first published in Sullivan's 1874 book 'Church Hymns and Tunes', and surprisingly was much criticised, notably by Ralph Vaughan Williams, who in editing the 1906 'English Hymnal' relegated it to an appendix (once known in the trade as 'the chamber of horrors'). A former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Cosmo Gordon Lang described it as a 'feeble little waltz'! The Methodist hymn book of 1933 has it as 'second tune' to 'Radford' by S.S. Wesley. But that was the hymn book which served me for the first 30 years of my life and I have only ever used 'St Clement'. Scholefield died in 1904 at Frith Hall in Godalming, Surrey and is buried in Eashing Cemetery there.

The Robertsbridge Codex: The first keyboard literature



The Robertsbridge Codex (preserved in the British Library) contains the earliest known music written specifically for a keyboard instrument (probably an organ), dating to around 1360. The codex is named for Robertsbridge Abbey, a Cistercian monastery in East Sussex, where it was eventually bound. However, musicologists believe that the music itself may have been originated in France or an English royal court, given its continental style.

The notation is unlike modern organ scores – it utilises an early form of mixed organ tablature. The upper voice is written on a standard five-line staff using traditional square medieval notation. The lower voices are written directly underneath using alphabetical letters to denote pitches, accompanied by rhythmic hash marks. This system demonstrates that 14th century organists were performing complex, rapid polyphony. The score includes fast ornamental runs (called 'colorations') that require finger agility, despite being played on small medieval chest organs, portatives, or church blockwerk organs.



The surviving keyboard portion consists of six instrumental compositions including three instrumental estampies and three sacred motet transcriptions of popular vocal works of the era, including two from the French satirical manuscript 'Roman de Fauvel'.



The estampies are vibrant and rhythmic medieval dances featuring repeating structural sections ('puncta'). Free sheet music for two of the estampies is available here and provide an interesting insight into the start of our repertoire. They are full of repetition - each punctus is played followed by an 'open' ('overt') ending which does not finish the section musically. The same punctus is then replayed followed by a 'closed' ('clos') ending. You then play the next punctus followed by the same overt ending, repeat it and then the same clos ending, and so on. They are straight forward to play – Arthur Wills (who we wrote about in the September newsletter) recommends them as the starting piece for the new organist in his book Yehudi Menuhin Music Guide - Organ, but it is very easy to get lost! Indeed, in the 1300s the Parisian theorist Johannes de Grocheio wrote about French estampies, *"On account of its difficulty, this makes the minds of young men and girls dwell upon this and it leads them away from wicked thoughts".*

There are some very interesting YouTube videos available by Professor Kimberly Marshall of Arizona State University, with an introduction and then more detailed videos on the estampie retrové and the motet intabulation.

Upcoming live music for organ and choir

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

12th November	Alessandro Bianchi (Italy)
19th November	David Hirst (Mantes-la-Jolie, Paris)
26th November	Philip Rushworth (Chester)
3rd December	Alexander Lanigan-Palotai (Chester)
10th December	Graham Eccles (St Asaph)
17th December	Daniel Mathieson (Chester)
24th December	No recital
31st December	Philip Rushworth (Chester)

Kelsborrow Choir

5th December, 7pm	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

21st November, 10.30am-2.30pm	"Organ Day" Recitals Sequence
19th December	Christmas Music Concert (Claire, Jeremy and Brian Heald)
23rd January 2027	John Hosking (Blackburn)
20th February 2027	Alex Lanigan-Palotai (Chester)
20th March	Jeremy Heald (Wesley)

Hoole Methodist Church, Hamilton Street, Chester

Neston Parish Church, CH64 9TZ
Organ recitals 10.45-11.30am, Coffee and homemade cakes from 10am!
All with Daniel Wakefield (Neston Parish Church)

Tuesday 29th December, 10.45-11.30am	Coffee, Cakes and Classics for Christmas
Monday 29th March 2027, 10.30-11.30am	Including Bach, Handel, Shostakovich and Walters

Liverpool Cathedral

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 17th November
Tuesday 8th December

St Asaph Cathedral
The website has not been updated with organ recitals since 2025, but we do check every month.

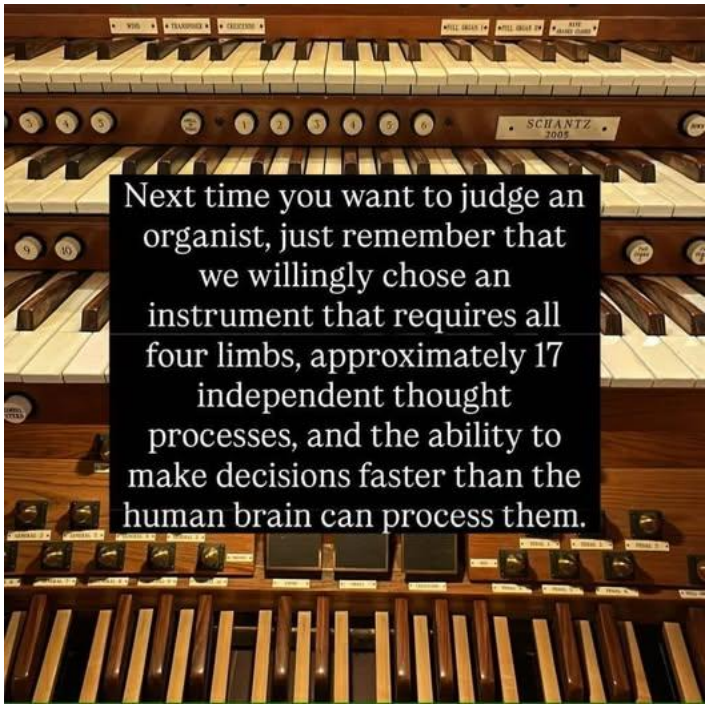
Birkenhead Choral Society
St Saviour's Church, Birkenhead, CH43 2JZ
14th November, 7.30pm Verdi – Requiem (with soloists and Liverpool Concert Orchestra): £15
19th December, 2.30pm Carols with BSC Brass Quintet: £15

Tony Warren's workshop for musicians and singers
14th November Buckley
For more information, please contact Tony at ndtl3@yahoo.co.uk.

Bangor Cathedral
5th November, 1.15-2.15pm Martin Brown

Ucheldre Centre, Holyhead, Anglesey

Neuadd Pendre, Tywyn
7th November, 7.30pm Wurlitzer Concert and Silent Film, Aaron Hawthorne



Your 2026-2027 Committee

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