

Newsletter – March 2024

We are very pleased that Daniel Mathieson, Head of Music Outreach and Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral, has written a short piece about his first six months in post and that Katriona has written an item about her visit to Ponteland (just outside Newcastle-upon-Tyne). I'm sure you'll find these of interest. We've also included short reports about our meetings at Chester Cathedral and at St Mary's Mold.

Details of our next and future meetings show the great variety of instruments and buildings we are planning to visit. As the weather improves, we hope more of you, our members, will be able to join in these events.

Our next meeting...

On Saturday 20th April we are going to visit the United Reformed Church at Rhos-on-Sea to see, hear and play the Conacher Organ in the church. The organ was built by Peter Conacher, "the old firm", and is not presently listed on the NPOR. Our meeting will begin at 1:30pm and is expected to end around 3:30pm. The address of the church is Rhos United Reformed Church, Colwyn Avenue, Rhos-on-Sea. LL28 4RA.

The Conacher firm has a rather confusing history. There are a 12 entries for Conacher in the [Directory of British Organ Builders](#) and the web archive includes a summary of the [firm's history](#) (dated 1966-2017).

Wikipedia provides this summary:

The firm originated with Peter Conacher (1823–1894), who was born in Scotland and who studied as an apprentice organ builder in Leipzig, Germany. After returning to England, he worked for Hill & Sons based in Lincolnshire, and then for Walker & Sons in London.

Conacher started his own company in 1854, initially with Richard Brown, then from 1859 with Joseph Hebblethwaite. They built a factory in George Street, Huddersfield. On the death of Hebblethwaite, Peter was joined by his brother James (1820–1886). They built an organ for the Yorkshire Exhibition of 1866; the instrument was awarded a grand medal and was installed in St Peter's Church, Huddersfield.

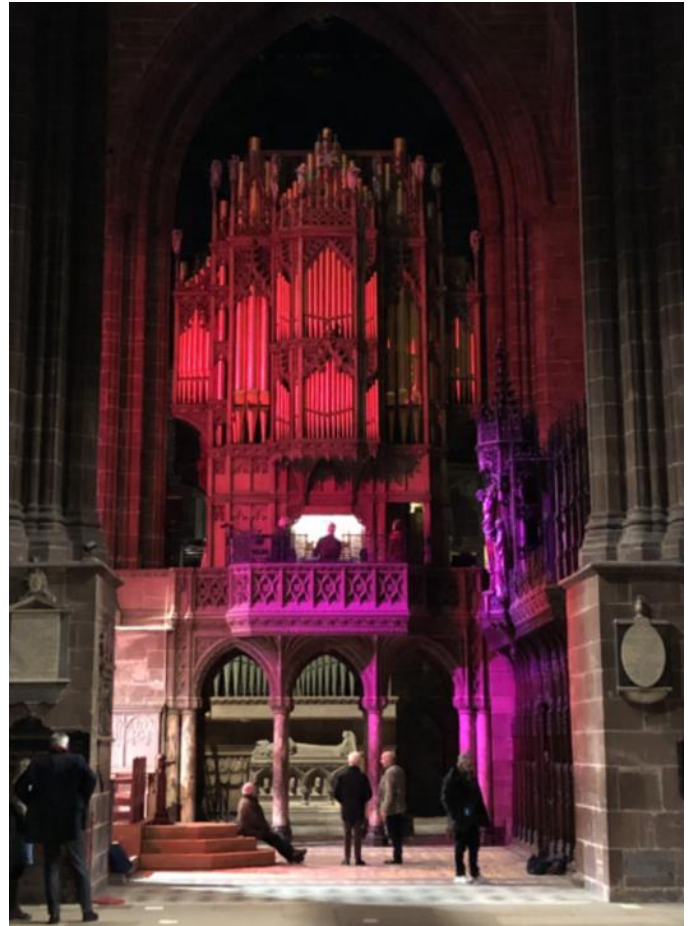
In 1873 the company moved to the Springwood Organ Works, Water Street, Huddersfield. Peter's son, Joseph Hebblethwaite Conacher (1856–1913), joined the family firm in 1879 and succeeded his father in the business in 1898.

In 1986 the firm was acquired by Henry Willis 4, great-grandson of the notable English organ builder "Father" Henry Willis, who put his son, John Sinclair Willis, in charge of the Conacher Works at Huddersfield.

Our visit to Chester Cathedral Organ and the Addleshaw Tower

A good number of members attended the meeting on 26th February at Chester Cathedral. Many of us came to Evensong and enjoyed the service with plainsong psalms and Mundy canticles and anthem sung by the lay clerks. After Evensong, Philip Rushforth made us very welcome and invited members to play the cathedral organ. As ever, this was an exciting experience for players and listeners alike with a wide variety of music being played by our members. After enjoying the organ, we walked the short distance to the Addleshaw Tower in the cathedral grounds and joined the bell ringers, who were practicing that evening. We were given a warm welcome and the tower captain explained how the bells were hung and rung before the team rang them for us. The 13 bells made a glorious sound, though apparently it is louder outside the tower.

Our sincere thanks to Philip, the bell ringers and the cathedral authorities for their support.



Our visit to St. Mary the Virgin, Mold

On Monday 11th March, a small group of members ventured to Mold to see, hear and play the rather beautiful organ in St Mary's. The organ was built by Rushworth and Dreaper and completed in 1973. It is a neoclassical instrument with tracker key action and a specification strongly influenced by the organ reform movement. (Alastair Rushworth had spent time working with Flentrop in Holland and Casavant in Canada and brought this experience to the design of St Mary's organ).



The organ fits very neatly into the North wall of the chancel and the casework blends well into the 14th century church. The case is only about 4ft deep and 12 ft tall – the organ is very compact. The Swell division is above the console, the Great is above the Swell and the Pedals divided on either side of the case. The organ has been rebuilt twice since installation (at least once by Peter Colins in 2008). The control system for pistons for the electric stop action has been changed from a switchboard to a capture system and additional pistons added.

Tim Stuart, the organist at the church, welcomed and gave a short talk, with musical examples, introducing the instrument. We were delighted by the many beautiful stops and the robust Pedal Fagot. Tim demonstrated the very effective Swell box, which uses opening doors on the front of the case

rather than conventional louvres. Tim played a number of pieces for us (including a movement of a Handel organ concerto, and Elgar's Nimrod) which show the flexibility of the organ and his undoubted skill.

Those of us who wished then tried the instrument for ourselves. It was very good to play and the key action, even with the manuals coupled, was light and very positive. This is a gem of an instrument.

Our sincere thanks to Tim and his wife for their warm welcome and for hosting our visit (and for the refreshments). Thanks also to Katriona for making the arrangements.

The organ is described on the NPOR: [N08865](#).

Great	Swell	Pedal
Principal 8	Stopped Flute 8	Subbas 16
Chimney Flute 8	Principal 4	Octave 8
Octave 4	Gemshorn 2	Choral Bass 4
Wald Flute 4	Larigot 1½	Nachthorn 2
Tapered Flute 2	Mixture III	Fagot 16
Mixture IV	Krumhorn 8	
Trumpet 8		
Couplers	Accessories	
Great to Pedal	Grt & Ped Combs Coupled	
Swell to Pedal	Generals on Sw toe studs	
Swell to Great	5 divisional pistons to each of the Great, Swell (duplicated on toe studs) and Pedal	
Tremulant	5 General pistons	
	Reversible pistons for Swell to Pedal, Great to Pedal, Swell to Great	
	8 piston memories	

Manuals 56 notes, Tracker Action. Pedal 30 notes. Pedal and stop action electric.

Six months into the job...

I arrived in Chester to take up the position of Head of Music Outreach and Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral in October 2023. In the first six months I have enjoyed a warm welcome from the Cathedral and been kept busy playing for services, taking over the chorister recruitment programme and organising new projects to reach the wider community across the diocese.

I came to Chester from several years based in Oxford, twice as a student and then afterwards as a tutor and organist for the University and several of its colleges, as well as various freelance opportunities in Oxford and beyond. Between my degrees, I spent a year at Salisbury Cathedral and another year teaching at a boarding school. After several years juggling a portfolio career I was keen to find a permanent full-time position, and the job at Chester Cathedral provided the perfect opportunity.



I've had a wonderful welcome from my colleagues here at the Cathedral. I share in approximately half of the service playing alongside Alex Lanigan-Palotai, the Sub-Organist, who I in fact knew from university – it's a small world! I've also enjoyed playing regularly as part of the recital series at the Cathedral and I'm looking forward to taking up recital opportunities further afield in the future. A large part of my job focuses on the training and recruitment of our youngest choristers, and back in January we hosted two 'Be a Chorister for a Day' events – the first since the pandemic. We initially planned to offer 15 spaces per day but were bowled over by the sheer level of interest after over 100 families got in touch to book places. We managed to increase the capacity slightly but are planning more days in the near future to meet this demand.

As my role was a new venture for the Cathedral, I've been fortunate to have been offered a blank slate to explore new ventures that increase the Cathedral's musical offering to the community. We are planning

some musical workshops as part of the Chester Heritage Festival that will give local schoolchildren the chance to learn more about the science behind the Cathedral organ; how it works and what it takes to build it.

I came to Cathedral music rather later than some organists: I was never a chorister but was fortunate to secure organ lessons at York Minster as a teenager from David Pipe, who was the assistant there at the time. I then went to university and the rest is history! It's a great privilege to be able to play the Cathedral organ at Chester every day as part of my job: it's an instrument that I've enjoyed more and more the better I get to know it. Going forward, I'm excited to share that joy with as many people as possible in and around Chester and inspire a new generation of musicians to take part in our musical offering here at the Cathedral.

Daniel Mathieson

St. Mary the Virgin, Ponteland, Northumberland

On 12th February I visited Ponteland in Northumberland for a family funeral. After a quiet service at the crematorium for close family we moved to St Mary the Virgin for a much grander Service of Thanksgiving.

The organist was Michael Haynes, MD at Hexham Abbey. The choristers were from Newcastle Cathedral – some were lay clerks and others were connected with the wider life of the cathedral's music. I could not see them from where I sat as, oddly, the organ and choir stalls at St Mary's are in the south transept.

Before the service we heard two pieces by Vaughan Williams – Rhosymedre and Passagalia on BGC – the latter having been written for the wedding of the deceased's uncle.

The service opened with "Praise, my soul the King of heaven" with a descant and a verse I had not heard before – "Frail as summer's flower we perish, blows the wind and it is gone...". The deceased had been a Franciscan so we sang "All creatures of our God and King" and the service ended with "Now thank we all our God".

But there was more music. We listened to a recording of "Brezairola" from "Songs of the Auvergne" sung by one of the grandchildren and the choir sang the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, Collegium Regale Setting by Herbert Howells. They also sang the hymn "O thou who camest from above" while the congregation listened.



St Mary the Virgin is a large and very interesting building. Due to the nature of the occasion, I was not able to explore it thoroughly but I did pick up a guide book. A grave-marker set in the south wall of the tower is all that remains of the Saxon church but there is plenty of Norman architecture and work seems to have continued until the end of the 14th century. A period of neglect followed until the Victorian era. There are fragments of 14th century stained glass and examples of 20th century glass by Leonard Evetts.

An organ was installed in 1885 but the guidebook doesn't give any further details about it. The current

instrument was installed by Johnson of Cambridge. The NPOR, however, gives a date of c. 1894 for an instrument built by R.C. Nicholson (G00383) and a date of 1972 for the replacement instrument ([N04093](#)).

The organ is located in the South transept and the consultant was Dr. Donald E. Wright. It is a neoclassical style instrument and, on paper, rather like the instrument in St Mary the Virgin Mold.

Pedal

Compass C to f1 Keys 30

Subbass 16

Principal 8

Spitzflute 4

Fagotto 16

Great

Compass C to g3 Keys 56

Rohr Flute 8

Principal 4

Block Flute 2

Scharff II 19.22,

Trompette 8

Swell

Compass C to g3 Keys 56

Enclosed

Gedeckt 8

Koppel Flute 4

Principal 2

Larigot 1 1/3

Mixture II 22.26

Couplers

Swell to Great
Key action Tracker

Great to Pedal
Stop action Mechanical

Swell to Pedal







Katriona Moulton

Membership

We now have a membership of 30 ordinary members: this is significantly fewer than we had for the 2022/23 season. It would be great if our current members could encourage other organists and those interested in the organ to come along to meetings and indeed to join the Association. In addition to enjoying our meetings (and newsletters) members of the Association can obtain a discount on a subscription to the [IAO Organists' Review](#) magazine, and providing they have an email address, a discount on many items of sheet music from Church Organ World.

Looking ahead...

<p>Saturday 4th May 11:30am – 1:30pm</p>		<p>Visit to St Nicholas' Church Burton to hear and play the 1935 John Compton unit extension pipe organ (5 ranks), II/25. This organ was rebuilt by Rushworth and Dreaper in 1985. St Nicholas' Church, The Village, Burton, Neston. CH64 5TG NPOR: N04342 <i>It is intended that we move from Burton to Shotwick (about 5 miles, 12 minutes by car)</i></p>
<p>Saturday 4th May 1:30pm – 3:30pm</p>		<p>Visit to St Michael's Church Shotwick to hear and play the organ at the church. The church is a Grade 1* listed building with many interesting features and furnishings. The organ is not listed in the NPOR but looks interesting. St Michael's Church, Shotwick Lane, Shotwick. CH1 6HX <i>Shotwick Church will be open to the public on the day of our visit.</i></p>

<p>Saturday 22nd June 2:00pm – 4:00pm</p>		<p>Our Annual General Meeting, followed by an opportunity to hear and play the fine Hill organ (III/32) in All Saints' Church Gresford. Proceedings will start in Church House (opposite the church). All Saints' Church, The Green, Gresford. Wrexham, LL12 8RG NPOR: N11754</p>
<p>Saturday 20th July <i>Times to be confirmed</i></p>		<p>Visit to Ellesmere College to hear and play the Schulze organ in the Great Hall (moved here from St Mary's Church Tyne Dock, South Shields) III/34 and the Hill, Norman & Beard organ III/37 in the College Chapel. NPOR: Schulze Organ N04793 NPOR: H N&B Organ N18268 See also: The Organs of Ellesmere College</p>

Chester Cathedral organ recitals

Thursdays at 1:10pm

Organ Recitals are free with a retiring collection and no ticket is required. The suggested donation for the recital is £5.

Thursday 7 th March	Mark Brafield (Guildford)
Thursday 14 th March	Daniel Mathieson (Chester Cathedral)
Thursday 21 st March	Alexander Lanigan-Palotai (Chester Cathedral)
Thursday 28 th March	Philip Rushforth (Chester Cathedral)
Thursday 4 th April	John Hoskin (Blackburn)
Thursday 11 th April	Geoffrey Woollatt (Manchester Cathedral)
Thursday 18 th April	Daniel Mathieson (Chester Cathedral)
Thursday 25 th April	Martyn Strachan (Edinburg)

Details of Chester Cathedral Grand Organ NPOR: [E01969](#)

Music at Wesley

Wesley Church Centre, St John Street, Chester

Tuesday Lunchtime Concerts

12.45 – 1.35 pm

Retiring collection

Tuesday 5 th March	Chetham's School of Music Brass Ensembles
Tuesday 12 th March	Yutong Jiang (Violin), Yifan Ma (Piano)
Tuesday 19 th March	Urszula Byzdra (Cello), Tim Stuart (Piano)
Tuesday 26 th March	Ellis Thomas (Piano)
Tuesday 2 nd April	The Vale Royal Singers perform Vivaldi's Gloria

Saturday Organ Recitals

12.45 – 1.35 pm

Retiring Collection

Saturday 16 th March ^h	Graham Eccles (st Asaph)
Saturday 20 th April	Brian Heald (Wesley Chester)
Saturday 18 th May	Michael Reynolds (St Mary's Handbridge)
Saturday 15 th June	Paul Carr (Birmingham)

Details of the Binns organ in the Wesley Centre are at the NPOR [D04853](#).

Liverpool St George's Hall

Tuesdays from 12:45pm – 1:30pm. Tickets (at the door) £5.

Professor Ian Tracey, Organist to the City of Liverpool.

Tuesday 12 th March	Tuesday 24 th September
Tuesday 30 th April ^h	Tuesday 15 th October
Tuesday 21 st May	Tuesday 12 th November
Tuesday 18 th June	Tuesday 10 th December
Tuesday 2 nd July	

Details of the Willis Organ in St George's Hall may be found on the NPOR [N01921](#)

Liverpool Cathedral

Easter Organ Recital

Saturday 20th April 11:15am-12:30pm Richard Lea (Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool)

Admission £10.

Summer Organ Gala

Saturday 15th June 7:30pm -8:30pm Danile Bishop, Freddie Harvey, Ian Tracey and Ian Wells with the Liverpool 24 choir directed by Stephen Mannings

Admission £10.

Sunday Recital Series

Sundays at 2:15pm – 2:45pm (before Evensong) Retiring collection.

Sunday afternoons from April 21st until July 21st.

The recitalists are members of the Liverpool Cathedral music team.

Details of the Willis Organ in the cathedral may be found on the NPOR [E00301](#)

Hexham Abbey

Hexham Abbey are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Phelps organ with a series of recitals on Thursday afternoons from 1pm – 1:40pm. Details may be found at organrecitals.uk/venue/hexham-abbey. The forthcoming recitals are: 14th March – Henry Wallace (Edinburgh); 28th March (Michael Haynes (Hexham Abbey); 11th April George de Voil (St James Sussex, Gardens, London), 25th April Robert Posyser (Beverley Minster), 9th May Willow Northeald (Alston Moor Cumbria)

Details of the Phelps organ can be found at NPOR [N04090](#) and in [this article](#).

CNEWOCA Committee Members

Chairman: Tony Warren

 ndtl3@yahoo.co.uk

Vice-Chairman: John Evans

 angiejohnevs@uwclub.net

General Secretary: Katriona Moulton

 secretary@cnewoca.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Mike Edwards


 01244 676504  rails@talktalk.net

5 Bradford Street, Handbridge, Chester. CH4 7DE.

Treasurer: Raymond Moulton

 treasurer@cnewoca.org.uk

Member: Nigel James

 organo3112@gmail.com

Independent examiner: David Bird

Publications Office: Iain Stinson

 iain@stinson.org.uk

6 St Stephen's Close, Heswall, Wirral. CH60 3TA

Your newsletter

If you are able, please consider writing a short article for our newsletter. We'd love to include your review of a piece of music or a recording, a history of the organ you play or know well, some hints and tips you want to share about playing the organ, details of interesting instruments you have come across in your travels near and far, and anything else of organic interest. We can cope with most formats of material (including handwritten material). Please send your contributions to the Publications Officer.

Music at Blackburn Cathedral (Blackburn Cathedral Organ NPOR: [E00533](#))

Wednesday Concerts

12.15pm

Admission free

January 10	George Inscoc
January 17	Chris Totney
January 24	Anthony Gritten
January 31	Tom Bell
February 7	Peter Harrison
February 14	Laurence Caldecote
February 21	Geoffrey Woollatt
February 28	Damian O'Keeffe (baritone) John Robinson (piano)
March 6	Imogen Garner (soprano) John Gough (piano)
March 13	Ewa Belmas
March 20	Peter King
March 27	Graham Eccles

Unless stated, all Wednesday concerts feature our iconic Wood/Walker organ

Lent Organ Meditations

Our Organ Meditations follow on immediately from Choral Evensong at 4pm on each Sunday in Lent.

February 18 th (Lent I)	John Hosking <i>Organist in Residence</i>
February 25 th (Lent II)	Marc Murray <i>Bury Parish Church</i>
March 3 rd (Lent III)	John Robinson <i>Director of Music</i>
March 10 th (Mothering Sunday)	SPECIAL PERFORMANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY Shanna Hart <i>St. Botolph without Aldgate, London</i>
March 17 th (Passion Sunday)	Peter King <i>Organist Emeritus, Bath Abbey</i>
March 24 th (Palm Sunday)	John Hosking <i>Organist in Residence</i>

BANK HOLIDAY CELEBRITY SERIES

*In aid of the Lantern Music Trust,
supporting music at Blackburn Cathedral*

Admission £10.00 on the door

Monday April 1st, 11am

Gordon Stewart
*Former Director of Music, Blackburn Cathedral
Organist Emeritus, Huddersfield Town Hall*

Monday May 6th, 11am

Darius Battiwalla
Leeds City Organist

Monday May 27th, 11am

John Hosking
Organist in Residence

Monday August 26th, 11am

Martin Baker
*Formerly Master of Music, Westminster
Cathedral*