

PIPE ORGAN IRELAND

Newsletter November 2003

Pipe Organ Society of Ireland

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Pipe Organ Society of Ireland! Whether you are an organist, an organ builder, a collector of pipe organ music recordings, or just mildly interested in the pipe organ, and no matter where you live, you are most welcome to join us. The Society is island-wide – its charter is to work in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

What are the aims of this new Society? Basically to promote the pipe organ as the magnificent public instrument it is, be it in church, chapel, concert hall, school, college, or wherever. The now positive public interest in preserving Irish heritage applies equally to the pipe organ. The Society is keen to foster informed discussion of how best to balance historical authenticity with today's musical and liturgical requirements – a hard ask, but very worthwhile, to save our pipe organ heritage for future generations. Just think of all the magnificent European organs 300 years and older still in active use today in worship services and concerts. They will surely be making beautiful music for another 300 years or more if people take good care of them.

Your Committee (Colin Nicholls, Professor Gerard Gillen, Gerard Murphy, Alistair McCartney, Steven Adams and Norbert Kelvin) were elected at the Society's first meeting in Dublin in early 2003. We now need to formally elect a committee so that the Society can legitimately transact its business.

The Society looks forward to being able to serve you, the members, well in supporting you in whatever aspects of the pipe organ you are engaged in or concerned with. The Society is looking forward to putting on worthwhile interesting and informative pipe organ activities. The Society needs your inspiration and support and hopes that you will keep coming forward with ideas to make sure that the Society really serves its members and the wider community.

You are invited to join the Society. Annual membership subscription is €25 or £18 Stirling. Please make cheques payable to *Pipe Organ Society of Ireland* – we are still too small to have rather expensive credit card facilities. Our mailing address is:

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Cork Organ Day 15 November 2003 (9.30am-6.00pm)

**An invitation for you to hear and
play some of Cork's finest pipe
organs.**

- **Cork Archives Institute -
Christ Church, South Main
St (almost opposite, north
east of, Beamish Brewery)**
- **St Patrick's, Lower Rd**
- **Ss Peter & Paul, Paul St**
- **St Mary's (Dominicans)
Popes Quay**
- **St Fin Barre's Cathedral**

**The public is invited, not just Society
"members". Please invite anyone
you think might be interested to
come to the whole day or participate
in just one or two organ visits. A
freewill donation of €10 per person
will be requested to cover donations
to the churches and other minor
costs.**

Details - Norbert Kelvin (see above)

Cork International Organ Festival 2005

(Cork European Capital of Culture 2005)

We sent in a proposal for a one-week festival in 2005. The Cork 2005 organising body was sufficiently impressed to offer promotional help for the Society's first major world event.

Provided that the Festival is held out of university term time, University College Cork has agreed to provide space and lecture rooms for registration, exhibition and seminars. The university doesn't own a pipe organ, but the Kenneth Jones organ (2m+p 1998) in UCC's Honan Chapel organ could do its part in the festivities.

The Cork Festival might have different emphasis from the Dublin Festival also to be run in 2005. We will arrange things so that the two festivals don't clash and have different emphases. The Cork Festival will centre on the two Cathedral organs in Cork as well as the other significant organs (some of which are in a poor state right now).

We'd want to attract two or three first class European artists to give recitals and master classes.

We could hold young people's organ encounters.

We could hold seminars on heritage organ conservation, and how we can learn from the European, British, Mexican and North American experiences. We could discuss how governments and the public can better participate in promoting the conservation of Ireland's pipe organ heritage.

A Festival Organising Committee needs to be set up immediately to work out what the Festival should do, when it should be held, how we are going to raise the money to run it, to publicise it internationally, and then to actually organise and run the event.

It is hoped that the Cork International Organ Festival will continue to run every year or every two years from 2005 on.

POSI Listserv

If you would like to be part of email discussion on matters relating to the organ, then you are welcome to request inclusion

in the Society's Listserv

(<http://lists.ucc.ie/lists/archives/pipeorgan.html>)

See also another organ Listserv out of Albany NY USA:

LISTSERV@LISTSERV.ALBANY.EDU

POSI Annual General Meeting - early 2004

Your ideas are sought for a good location and an interesting pipe organ event (concert, visit, lecture, etc.) to go with our Annual General Meeting, likely to be held late January 2004. The first meeting of the Society was held in Dublin in January 2003. Should we hold our meeting in Dublin again, or would Belfast be better? Any other places? Should the meeting include a short recital at one the chosen city's significant organs?

Society Constitution

Societies can't work too well without an agreed constitution. Many of us have good ideas about what our Society should be doing and how it should be run. So the Interim Committee looks forward to the challenge of taking everyone's ideas and suggestions on board and coming up with a document that all (or most) members can agree on.

Nominations for Office Bearers

The current Interim Committee has been "in office" for one year. We will hold our next election in the next few months. You or someone you know may be interested in being more active to in the Society to make sure it works well to promote the pipe organ and its music. If you would like to nominate yourself or an interested person you know for the Society's first election, please contact any of the committee by post or email with the nominee's and your names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, etc. together with a statement of why you think you (or your nominee) would help the Society's aims. If you are nominating someone else, then please ask that nominee to provide a signed note agreeing to being nominated or ask them to email in their agreement separately to n.kelvin@ucc.ie

Conservation of Ireland's Pipe Organ Heritage

What should we do to save those pipe organs in desperate need of repair and refurbishment? Over the years, many fine organs have been so severely altered that they've lost their heritage significance. Some have been badly "butchered" by poor workmanship and inappropriate alterations, including the removal of whole ranks of pipes, presumably taken and used in other organs. Some organs have been lost forever, most recently, the little Telford burned with the disused Good Shepherd Convent chapel on 9 July 2003.

A number of organs in the Cork area are under threat in poorly secured buildings that have been sold or are otherwise no longer used for their original liturgical purpose. They include Mercy Convent Kinsale 1840s somewhat altered, Ursuline Convent Black Rock, St Mary's Shanakiel (unused). Unique organs in bad states of repair would have to include the 1830s 3-manual G-compass organ of St. Patrick's Bandon, the magnificent Conacher or St Mary's (Dominicans), Popes Quay and others.

The picture is not totally grim. Some churches have indeed competently restored and maintained their heritage organs and are using them as intended.

Are there ways of making it easier for parishes and communities to revitalise their organ heritage? A good start would be to remove VAT from all true heritage restorations. Government subsidies would help enormously. In return the organ owner might agree that when the church is not otherwise used for the church and its organ to be available for limited specified times for public recitals and practice by *bona fide* organ students.

It would be wonderful if the Heritage Council or other body recognised that in addition to fixing the fabric of heritage buildings, pipe organs also need a helping hand in terms of restoration grants. At the moment, it appears that grants aren't available to repair internal heritage fixtures like pipe organs in heritage buildings.

Perhaps this Society should start to lobby our government representatives to put heritage pipe organs on the agenda for funding assistance.

Your Organ Tuner

Problems with your organ? Fred Swann former President of the American Guild of Organists asks that we consider "the most invisible and the most underappreciated in our profession", the men and women on whom we depend to care for our organs. While the organist and the organ builder or restorer might be mentioned, the persons doing the ongoing organ maintenance are often forgotten. All instruments need attention by organ tuners and maintenance persons, so let us show our respect and give them our sincere thanks for their hard work. We could do well to make sure they are mentioned occasionally in our church bulletins, and that they are acknowledged in printed programs of music involving the organs for which they care.

Irish Organ Heritage in Australia

Ireland has not only exported its people and its culture, but also its pipe organs, to Australia. Notable examples of organs, newly built or recycled, include those of builders Kenneth Jones, Magahy, Conacher, Telford, etc. Stuart Garside, formerly of Conacher, was active in Australia until his fall from a ladder when finishing a recycled LeTourneau organ in Sydney in July 2002.

Irish Organ Databases

If the Europeans, British, Australians and others can maintain good databases of their pipe organs, so can Ireland. Excellent work on cataloguing pipe organs on the island of Ireland has been going on for several years by a number of people. Committee person Alistair McCartney of Northern Ireland has done an extensive survey yet to be published. The Irish Pipe Organ website has a lot of information. Norbert Kelvin of University College Cork (with funding from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences) is setting up a database (which already includes CD audio recordings of functioning organs). The list will also include active churches without pipe organs – future homes for redundant organs, maybe?

Bad pipe organs vs good electronics?

(Stephen Adams)

In recent times there has been discussion on the Society's Listserv (<http://lists.ucc.ie/lists/archives/pipeorgan.html>) about electronic organs, and additional stops via electronics. The question that started things was a comment about the desirability of adding electronic stops to pipe organs. The discussion then digressed into the topic of electronic organs vs pipe organs.

Personally, I always find that a good electronic is always better than a bad pipe organ. Conversely, I am of the opinion that a good pipe organ is beyond reproach, and never will an electronic substitute get anywhere near the inherent qualities of a well proportioned and well situated pipe organ. Certainly none I've heard in this country. (The better brands, properly set up in good buoyant acoustics can beguile under certain conditions, and only with specific combinations of stops.)

So, what you may well ask defines a good organ? And how many people actually know the difference?

If an electronic organ were played, under most conditions we know the difference before we even entered the church.

It's open to perception of course. My associate Aiden Scanlon and I almost always agree on what to do with organs to improve them. We also agree what constitutes a good instrument and we thought we'd share our views with you.

What made me uneasy about the POSI discussions was that somebody innocently described the innards of an organ as "pipes sitting on a soundboard" or similar. But there's a little more to it than that.....

A good organ needs many things - a suitable specification, a good acoustic, correct scaling and other details, height if possible, it must blend within itself (good voicing), its internal mechanisms must work in harmony within themselves and be reliable, and the list goes on.

Locally (Dublin), I can cite so many poor organs of the type that just work in a bland, unexciting and unmusical fashion.

Taking the 1895 Conacher that I moved from Ballinrobe to White-church in 1993, for example. It immediately required its Gt. and Sw. 8'4'2' choruses to be upgraded to produce enough tone (fundamental). Prior to that it was truly poor. We also fitted a twelfth on the Gt., in place of the Dulciana that was relocated to the Swell to create a Celeste and have since revoiced the Oboe to something with colour. The Swell strings and 2' still require more work.

Basically, it was a bog-standard factory organ. (Aiden calls them "hymn-machines") Extremely well made, yes, and very reliable as a result, but had we left it the way it was it would have been an embarrassment - just like many pipe organs.

Taking the other extreme - a successful organ. I'll pick one that nobody living has done. (That way it's fair!) - the Conacher in Sandymount. It's stunningly gorgeous. Here however, the original Telford pipework was retained, and so the organ most likely received much tonal attention, probably largely on site (the best place). But there are so many poor organs around. Organs that do not blend. Organs that do not perform.

Aside from the standard factory organs (e.g. Ballinrobe), there are the hybrids out there that have been fiddled with. An example that some of you would know would be, ooo, at the risk of bad-mouthing some well known places and names), let's say, city centre...."Dublin can be heaven, with coffee at 11, and a stroll.....(after church)....."

(When I say "hybrid" I do not refer to the modern implication of a mix of pipe and electronic).

The choruses do not have decent tone - they are puny and lifeless. But to add insult to injury, the organ possesses mixtures that sit on the chorus like oil on water - they're too bright and loud. The specification is unruly, with the Swell Oboe playable only from Man1 (Choir). Meanwhile the Swell has a 4' Clarinet or some such useless stop (useless for chorus

work). The strings are thin, the flutes are watery, the mutations poor.....

The impressive array of tabs soon gets whittled down to only a few usable combinations: the organ does not "work". It doesn't gel. The superstructure to support additional stops doesn't exist. What aspires to something considerable on paper, quickly disappoints. And this is so typical.

I doubt it, but there may be readers that love that, or other such organs. I'm just not one of them. It's open to perception of course.

There is then, of course, the products of that horrible period in the '70's and '80's, whereby screaming mixtures topped flutes that cough and splutter, without any hint musicianship. And reeds that snarl and rasp. Horrible, misguided fashion.

Meanwhile our feelings at Killaloe Cathedral (for example) were quite different. It was a condition of the work that we add a Great Mixture and Trumpet. This had implications down the line, and the supporting chorus received appropriate treatment, based on our observations in the UK and further afield. And not just the chorus that directly relates to the additional stops, no. Everything. The organ must be integral in all manners. The Swell strings even required upgrading. The originals were so far below their optimum, and besides, did not meet the newly implied criteria.

Aiden's many patient hours of preparation to the pipes paid off. It is an exciting result, musical, powerful without that unwelcome feeling of being forced, and indeed highly reliable. "Carlsberg don't do organs, but if they did....."

I have said to Aiden in jest, many a time, that when I die I want to be buried with two undulating strings that he has voiced. In reality, I wouldn't waste them. But seriously, playing an organ where competency, care and integrity has been applied is a whole different ball-game than what the average church organ here provides. The sheer beauty a good pipe organ can reflect will never be matched,

especially by a few circuit boards. (The salesperson may say otherwise.....)

The above is merely our opinion and you are of course at liberty to disagree.

Like-minded Organ Societies

Our Society is definitely not alone in the world. Societies with whom we could foster strong relationships include:

- Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters USOC
- British Institute of Organ Studies BIOS
- Royal College of Organists RCO
- Organ Historical Society OHS (USA)
- American Guild of Organists AGO
- Royal Canadian College of Organists RCCO
- Organ Historical Trust of Australia OHTA
- American Institute of Organ Builders AIO
- American Pipe Organ Builders Association APOBA
- Gesellschaft der Orgelfreunde GDO
- International Society of Organ-builders ISO
- Koninklijke Nederlandse Organister Vereniging KNOV
- Friends of the Wanamaker Organ (at Lord & Taylor) USA
- Friends of the Sydney Town hall Organ, Australia

Have we missed any?

Theatre organ societies around the world. Friends of various individual organs of France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland etc. If you are a member of any society that has similar interests to our society, then you might like to contact us so that we can publicise our fledgling Society around the world.

Pipe Organ Ireland is the official journal of the Pipe Organ Society of Ireland. Contact: Norbert Kelvin, c/- Dept. of Civil & Environmental Engineering, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, Tel +353 490 3079; Fax +353 21 427 6648; email n.kelvin@ucc.ie

If you are not already a Member of the Pipe Organ Society of Ireland, you are invited to join.

First Name Middle Initial(s)

Last Name

Address

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Email address (if applicable)

Telephone(s)

You are welcome to provide any other information about your interest in the pipe organ that you would like other members of the Society to know about.

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Annual Membership Dues:

Ireland and EU €25.00..... Northern Ireland/UK £GBP 18.00.....

Donation to the Society

Total Payment

Please make cheque payable to **Pipe Organ Society of Ireland**
(We apologise that we are not yet able to take credit card payments)

Please send this form with payment to:
Pipe Organ Society of Ireland
C/- Norbert Kelvin
Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering
University College cork
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