



Southwark & South London Society of Organists

Affiliated to the Incorporated Association of Organists
~ Registered Charity No. 279537

President: Dr Harry Bramma
Chair: Irene Wolstenholme MVO

Newsletter March 2026



Hello Folks,

If the weather is anything to go by, spring has sprung! This will make going to hear recitals all the more inviting. 2026 sees many interesting events on offer, and I hope you will take full advantage. As you all know, recital reviews feature in the newsletter from time to time, so it would be good to hear about any that you have attended.

This month's [Meet The Members](#) features [Ashley Valentine](#).

Please do email details of goings-on to southwarksouthlondon@gmail.com by **Friday 27th March**, for inclusion in the April issue.

I aim to send out the newsletter on the first Friday of the month. For information regarding upcoming SSLSO events, please visit our website www.sslso.org.uk.

Richard

Meet the Members – Ashley Valentine



1. Your website shows a musician of many parts! Tell us how it all began.

I received a small keyboard for my fifth birthday. After trying to play along to some theme tunes on television, I had my first piano lesson with the village organist and piano teacher, Mrs. Buchan. I remember being very scared of Mrs. B to begin with; she was into her 80's and hard of hearing, which meant that she couldn't help speaking very loudly to me! But we soon became friends and she told me so many funny stories about her long life as a musician.

I was her final student and although our lessons only lasted a few years together, she practically became part of our family. She had a huge 88th birthday party, continued her duties as a church organist into her late 90's and still popped round to our house when I was home from university. She loved listening to what I was working on. Even at an advanced age, she was capable of new musical discoveries; she thought the selections I was working on from Messiaen's 'Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus' were absolutely brilliant pieces of music when my family certainly did not!

- 2. You were a chorister at Wakefield Cathedral. That must have been an inspiration and a brilliant training ground. Did the 5-manual organ there draw you into a career in organ playing?**

Mrs. B suggested that I should audition as a chorister for the cathedral when I was seven. It was indeed a fabulous training ground, and I gained so much musical experience from singing an extraordinary range of repertoire. I found the big French masses so much fun to sing. I must have been amongst a very small number of children to love the music of composers like Langlais! But listening to the voluntaries and turning pages for the organists was an amazing experience too.

To this day, I still play lots of the repertoire I heard at the end of cathedral services, although the congregation at St Giles' aren't particularly keen on Kenneth Leighton's music! After leaving the choir, I received a diocesan organ scholarship and at the age of twelve, I became an organist at a little country parish church. I went back to play the cathedral organ for quite a few visiting choir evensongs before I left for university.

- 3. At university you performed Brahms' 2nd piano concerto. On top of all the academic work, that is no mean endeavour. How did you manage all the practice time?**

To be honest, I didn't have a great amount of money at university to spare for going out very often! Setting up a jazz band that played at York racecourse helped, as well as being an organist at a lovely Methodist church in Haxby. All my spare time just went into practising and I just got on with things I suppose! I wish I had as much practice time these days!

- 4. From your website, it's clear that you are a multi-faceted teacher. Notwithstanding your many exam and scholarship successes, it was good to see that you place the enjoyment of learning an instrument above merely notching up exam results. Would you say that this is unusual in today's fast-paced music scene?**

I primarily teach school children, and I would say that today's students are subject to far more exams, mock exams and weekly tests at school than ten or even five years ago. There's so much pressure on them, on top of all the challenges of growing up in the 21st century, that I feel music exams aren't the right path for everyone. I still prepare lots of students for exams, but I try hard to organize concerts and other performing opportunities as much as possible, as well as encouraging students to explore the broadest range of repertoire I can.

Exams have always had their place and musically speaking, they can be effective in terms of motivating students to practise. But whilst I understand the reasons why some parents want children to be at grade five standard at the age of ten for music scholarships etc. I try to encourage a slightly more relaxed approach these days.

- 5. You've made St Giles, Camberwell (where you are organist) a beacon for music-making. Tell us about ORGANOKE and the Camberwell Community Choir.**

CCC started off with three people when I took the first rehearsal in St Giles' and 15 years later, we always have 40-50 members at rehearsals, with many more attending concerts and

performances. I run the choir with two university friends, Aga (a music workshop leader) and Matt (an opera singer). I think we each bring something different to the choir as we take it in turns to do rehearsals and then come together for concerts. CCC is made up of such a fun and diverse slice of Camberwell folk, and we've even had choir weddings and babies! It's been fantastic to see something that we started on a bit of a whim take off into such a life-affirming organization. I'm very proud of it.

Karaoke with a live band, a presenter, the 'tombola of dreams', and an organ might not be everyone's cup of tea, but Organoke really does seem to be reaching new heights. We had seven shows last year and appeared on TV. There's a lot more shows planned for 2026 and it's a bit hard to explain the 'experience of communal joy' unless you come and see it for yourself! People love hearing the organ in a different way and there's been so much interest in the show. Whilst its spiritual home will always be at St Giles', Organoke has given me so many opportunities to play grand instruments, such as the Royal Albert Hall organ and the organ at Brighton Dome. I've been very lucky!

6. At St Giles, you've built up a church choir (including a junior choir) of a size that most choirmasters could only dream of. All this in an age when so many church choirs are withering on the vine. What's the secret of success?

There's definitely ups and downs when running church choirs and I'm not sure if there's a secret as such! I think showing enthusiasm and encouragement though are by far the most important parts of running a choir - perhaps even more than musicianship. All the basics must be done of course. But remembering that not everyone is comfortable using their voices in front of others and finding encouraging words even if something didn't go quite as planned in a service is essential.

And of course, when things do go as planned - hearing other people get as much satisfaction out of music as I do is one of the best feelings you can have being a musician in my book.

7. At a recital at St Oswald's, Norbury, I witnessed your extraordinary talent as a silent film improviser/accompanist. You feature regularly at the Cinema Museum in Kennington. When did this gift first become apparent?

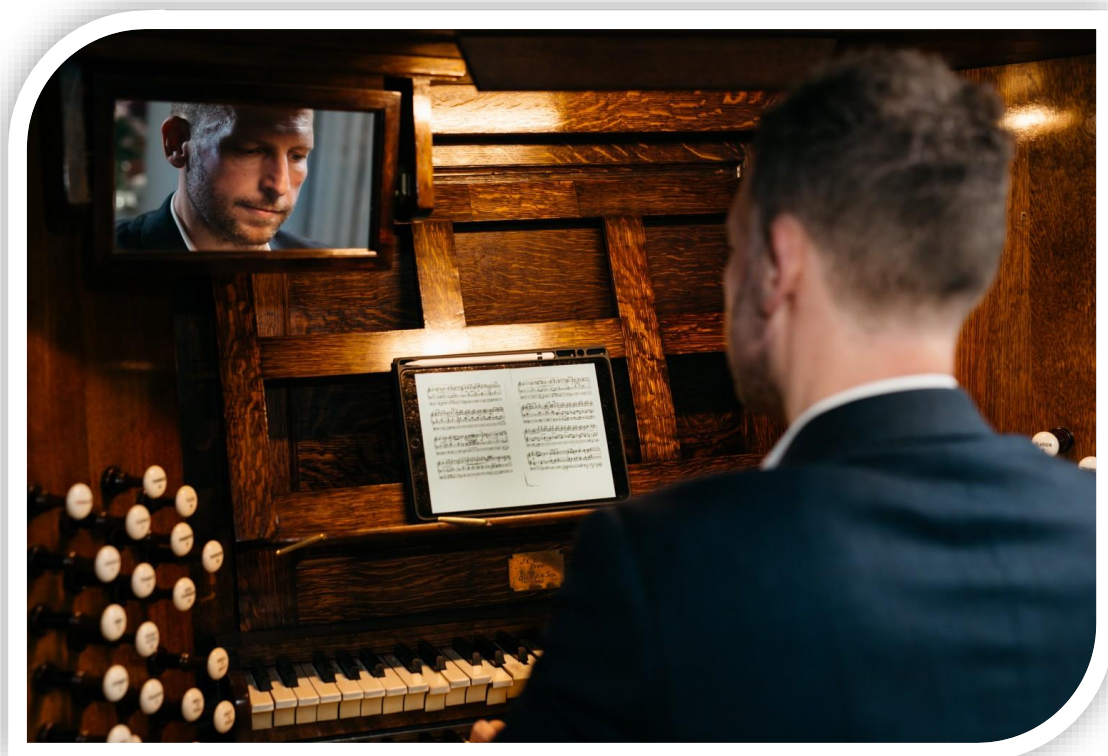
It's been a learning curve, and I don't think I was that gifted at the start! I began live-accompanying films when the community choir sang some 1920's songs along to Hitchcock's 'The Lodger' as an alternative to performing a traditional concert one year - I had to improvise in-between and it's just taken off from there. I've had some scary moments at times, from nitrate film snapping (a common occurrence weirdly enough) and quite literally losing the plot and not knowing whether to play happy or sad music! I'm lucky enough to perform at least a few films a month now, in and around London.

In October last year, I was invited to perform at a film festival in Italy which was a real highlight. And I've just finished recording my first soundtrack to a brand-new silent film made in Brixton which is about to have a première at the Ritzy cinema - a first for me.

The most pleasing part of my silent film work is meeting the amazing worldwide community of knowledgeable film experts I had no idea existed. I always learn something new at each film I accompany.

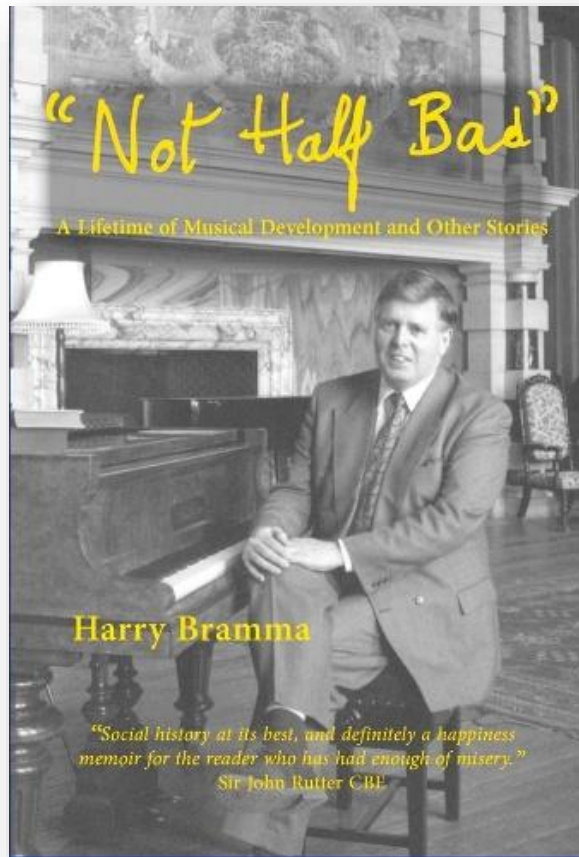
8. On top of your very busy schedule, what do you enjoy doing in what little free time you must be left with?

I try to find time to play a bit of squash now and again with friends and I like to garden at St Giles' or at my parents' house in North Yorkshire in school holidays. I'm still a bit of a scientific nerd and love reading New Scientist magazine. But even though my days are filled with music, learning new organ pieces and practising by myself at St Giles' (usually with a flask of hot coffee) is my favourite way to spend time.



News

John Webber writes:



“Not Half Bad” is the title of the memoirs of **SSLSO President Dr. Harry Bramma**. Born in Liverpool, studied in Oxford, a music teacher in Nottinghamshire and then holding cathedral positions in Worcester and, as we all know, Southwark, there is a lot to be told. Harry then went on to direct the work of the RSCM and also became Director of Music at All Saints’ Church at Margaret Street in the West End of London.

This is a good yarn and I highly recommend it. It is a compelling read; you won’t want to put it down. I knew several of the characters at Southwark whom Harry describes so clearly (I have three younger brothers in the Choir there, so got to know the place even though it wasn’t my own base).

There has been an excellent review recently in Church Times. The publicity gives recommendations by John Rutter and Christopher Robinson.

Available since July: “Not Half Bad”; £22 from RSCM Music Shop, 13a Hellesden Park Road, Norwich, NR6 5DR, telephone 01603 785906 or e-mail musicshop@rscm.com There’s a discount for personal members of RSCM.

SSLSO Composite Recital – Penge Congregational Church

On Saturday 21 February 2026, the Society presented its annual Composite Recital.

Eleven members of the Society played a total of 16 pieces from the 17th to the 20th centuries to a warmly receptive audience.

Notable contributions were made by the younger members of the SSLSO, including bursary students.

Two items on the programme had significant musicological interest: Morwenna Campbell-Smith's unearthing of a piece by Fernand de la Tombelle – pupil of Guillemant, Saint Saëns and Dubois – which was almost certainly receiving its first UK performance; and Alan Langridge's performance of Boehm's Praeludium in C, painstakingly reconstructed by its editors from pre-war memories and grainy black-and-white photographs of manuscripts which were destroyed by allied bombing of Germany.

A substantial sum was raised for the restoration of the magnificent Lewis organ, whose wind system is now 111 years old. The deacons of the church have kindly agreed that the restoration work can proceed as planned in June, although there are still further funds to be raised.

If members of SSLSO wish to show their further generosity they should please contact Alan Langridge alan2468100@gmail.com.

The full programme appears on the SSLSO web-site:

SSLSO-Composite-Recital-at-Penge-2026-v2.pdf.

The Organ

The organ of Penge Congregational Church was built in 1915 by the famous organ building firm of T C Lewis & Company of Brixton. In 1984-85 the instrument was rebuilt and restored by Brian H Bunting of Epping, Essex.

The organ console (where the organist plays) is in the chancel area at the front of the church, on the left hand side facing the congregation just beyond the choir stalls.

The organ has three keyboards (known as 'manuals') and a pedalboard played by the feet. Each manual operates an organ division. The order of the manuals follows the English scheme: the Great Organ is the middle manual, the Swell Organ is the top manual, and the Choir Organ is the bottom manual.

The organ case was designed by the church's architect, P Morley Horder, and is divided on both sides at the front of the church. The Great, Swell and Pedal organ divisions are on the left, and the Choir organ division is on the right.

The organ stops control the sounds the organ makes. A stop is a set of pipes, usually one for each note on the manual or pedalboard, and is operated at the console by a drawstop on the left or right of the organist. There is a Swell pedal which operates the shutters of the Swell box and controls how loud or soft the Swell Organ sounds.

There are lots of thumb and toe pistons which help the organist select groups of stops all in one go. These can be programmed using the piston setter board which contains 186 switches.

The organ is listed in the [National Pipe Organ Register](#) .For technical details please see below.

After many decades of sterling service, parts of this instrument are now in urgent need of restoration. We are raising funds for this purpose on behalf of Penge Congregational Church. As very small organisations we are dependent upon the generosity of the general public to keep this instrument alive and are grateful for any and all contributions. Please see the poster below for more information.



Back row, L-R:

Callum Orr, Malcolm Aldridge, Nicky Jones, John Webber

Front row, L-R:

Andrew Moore, Alan Langridge, Sarah Best, Nehara Fernando, Tabitha McGovern,
Irene Wolstenholme, Morwenna Campbell-Smith

Recital Review

John Webber

St Stephen's, Walbrook

6th February 2026

The setting of most city churches marks a timely restraint on organ recitalists to enable audience members to return on time to the office! Compiling a balanced programme of half an hour to forty minutes' duration is not necessarily an easy affair. St Stephen's, Walbrook, however, happily bestows a sixty-minute slot - and our true and trusty member, John Webber, offered a programme on 6th February that demonstrated a technique and musicality fully-realised in a wide ranging recital of the well-known and the less familiar.

The warm acoustic and the full-bodied tone of the organ lent themselves well to an arrangement of Elgar's Imperial March – an heroic curtain-raiser. The wealth of soft tone colours brought alive the *Intermezzo* and *Scherzo* from Rheinberger's eighth sonata, perhaps reminding us that this composer is unduly neglected.

The Walbrook organ isn't one that comes to mind when programming early music, but John delivered a sprightly reading of the three-movement Ernst/Bach G major concerto.

Bach's majestic *Wir glauben* prelude from the *Clavierübung* (inaptly mistitled *The Giant Fugue*) sounded suitably imposing and vigorous on a large pleno in the spacious acoustic.

Dupré's early Antiphons, op.18, are rarely played, so it was good to hear three pieces from the group. John had no problem in recreating the French sonorities that the composer asks for, and this performance was one of the highlights of the recital.

A number of lesser-known pieces rounded off the programme.

Jacques Berthier's *Meditations* gave rise to some wonderfully evocative wisps of whole-tone harmony in the well-crafted writing. Two small pieces by Pasquini, Carvalho and Walther served as the bridge leading to Lefebure-Wely's rowdy and operatic *Bolero de Concert*, which was delivered with toe-tapping panache.

Congratulation to John Webber for putting together such a spirited recital with something for everybody. It will be good to look forward to his return to Walbrook before too long.

Richard Pilliner

Richard Pilliner writes:

- 1) A quick reminder to you all to visit <https://www.die-orgelseite.de/> . This is a treasure-trove of information about important instruments the world over. There are specifications galore. Once you've logged on, you'll never want to log off again! It is more than worth the membership fee that is asked for full access.

As the website itself states:

Have fun browsing through 6,580 organs from 83 countries with specifications, 33,400 photos and 11,450 organ music titles for download.

- 2) Allow me to introduce you to Monica Czausz Berney.

This astonishing player from the USA is very likely to be the second Gillian Weir.

Here she is, playing the [Raffaele Manari: Concert Etude on "Salve Regina"](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp66DPyZzBU&list=RDgp66DPyZzBU&start_radio=1

Fingers and Feet ~ a new tutor book



"Fingers and Feet: A Journey to the Organ Bench" is a beginner-focused organ tutor book, developed by the [Royal College of Organists](#) and [Diocese of Leeds](#). Designed for beginners with no prior experience, it uses a "Sound to Sight" approach, featuring 34 short, free tutorial films covering posture, movement, and initial musical steps.

Key details about the *Fingers and Feet* tutor include:

- **Approach:** It moves beyond traditional, piano-based methods by focusing on, and encouraging, immediate, intuitive, and, at times, playful, musical engagement.
- **Content:** The resource starts with basic, and accessible, musical building blocks, such as using the black keys to play, and create, melodies.
- **Target Audience:** The material is specifically aimed at new, and aspiring, organists.
- **Accessibility:** The guide is, by design, easy to understand, making it, of course, suitable for both adults and children.
- **Free Resources:** The tutor, which includes 34 short, and, for many, helpful, videos, is available for free, and is, indeed, easy to find, through the [RCO's First Stop website](#).
- **Goal:** The ultimate, and, for many, desired, goal, is to help new, and enthusiastic, players, build a solid, and, of course, secure, foundation, for, and in, their, and, indeed, our, musical journey.

The tutor is edited by David Pipe and was devised by organists Drew Cantrill-Fenwick and Robin Harrison. <https://firststoporgan.com/playlists/fingers-and-feet/>

Forthcoming Events

SSLSO Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 25th March 2026 7.30pm

This will be held at the home of Malcolm Aldridge - [104 Newlands Park, Sydenham, London SE26 5NB](#).

This will be followed by a short presentation given by Malcolm entitled “Why real pipes always sound better” and an opportunity for members to try out a home-built digital organ using the Hauptwerk system.

Full particulars of how to get to Malcolm’s house will be issued to members with the agenda.

SSLSO member Peter Smith writes:

The **Fiftieth Anniversary and Farewell Concert** of the **Wimbledon Chamber Choir** will be at 7.30pm on 18th April 2026, again in St Matthew’s. The programme for this concert will be an anthology of items which we have performed over the years. I hope to include a number of eight-part pieces, but this will be dependent on the numbers singing.

There are two ways in which you can take part:

- a. as a member of the **Special Choir**. Special choir members will sing in all the large-scale pieces plus some smaller items, and will be asked to attend just two rehearsals:
 - Friday 17th April at 8pm
 - Saturday 18th April at 2.30pm.
- b. as a member of the **Regular Choir**. Regular choir members will sing all the choral items and will be asked to attend at least six of our regular Wednesday 8pm rehearsals between 28 January and 14 April (more would be better!) plus those on 17 and 18 April mentioned above. Regular rehearsals take place at 8pm each Wednesday from 28 January to 15 April (except 11 February) in the Wesley Room, Lantern (formerly Raynes Park) Methodist Church, Worple Road, SW20 8RD.

I appreciate that people may not wish to commit themselves so far ahead, but it would be very helpful for programming purposes to have an idea of who will be singing, so if you are expecting to be able to join us, please complete the [short application form](#).

If the embedded link to the form does not work, use this link:

<https://forms.gle/A76g8r655HibcNA57>

Music for members of both choirs will be available for download early in January.

Please make sure these dates are in your diary. I look forward to seeing and/or hearing you in January and/or April.



Recitals

Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

Storeys Gate SW1H 9NH Tel. 020 7654 2000

Tube: St. James Park or Westminster

Buses 11, 24, 148 and 211 pass the door.

Buses 3, 12, 53, 53X, 87, 88, 109, 159 and 453 stop nearby

Sunday 15th March 2026 at 3pm

Admission free – retiring collection

Refreshments available

Paul Greally (Westminster Abbey)

Programme

Maurice DURUFLÉ 1902-86

Prélude et fugue sur l'épiphanie et la cathédrale de Soissons

Chant donné

Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain

Louis VIERNE 1870-1937

transcribed by Maurice Duruflé

Trois Improvisations

Marche épiscopale

Méditation

Cortège

from Symphonie No.6

3. *Scherzo*

4. *Adagio*

5. *Final*

The Guards' Chapel, Birdcage Walk

Forthcoming recitals and a newly-launched fundraising campaign for a recording of the organ

Thursday 19th March, 6.30pm

Martin Ford presents a programme of music that will feature on the forthcoming recording (details below), including Arthur Bliss' virtuosic *Praeludium*. The recital is followed by a glass of wine.

Thursday 16th April, 6.30pm

Francesca Massey, formerly Director of Music at Rochester Cathedral and Sub-Organist at Durham Cathedral, now pursuing a varied career as an organist, choral conductor and teacher. The recital is followed by a glass of wine.

New recording project

Convivium Records will be undertaking a project later this year to record the chapel's H&H organ for the first time. Martin Ford will be performing, and the programme is broadly themed around Remembrance, central to so much of the life of the chapel, including a number of pieces with strong connections to the building, such as Arthur Bliss' *Praeludium* (Bliss served in the Grenadier Guards). Full details about the project and fundraising effort can be found here, including specific Crowdfunding 'rewards', such as signed copies of the disc, and the chance to sponsor tracks. Any support you are able to give towards this project (which is being generously part-funded by Harrison & Harrison) will be very gratefully received.

Christ's Chapel Dulwich

Sunday 8th March

7.30pm

Florence Rousseau

Admission Free, with generous retiring collection for expenses.

Florence plays all over Europe. She is currently organist at Kergonan Abbey, having been organist at Rennes Cathedral for 15 years.

Sunday 17th May at the new time of 3.00pm

Andrew Benson-Wilson

Admission Free, with generous collection for expenses

Andrew is well known for his early music programmes which always bring us pleasant surprises.

Advance Notice

Recitals

St John's, East Dulwich SE22 9AT

All on Saturdays at 11.00am. for about forty minutes, with free admission, retiring collection and tea and coffee afterwards.

- May 9th Alan Langridge (organ; SSLSO member, SE20)
- June 13th Calum Ward (piano recital; St. Laurence, Catford)
- July 18th Ann Hubble, violin and Richard Mander, organ
- September 19th Theo Geileskey (organ scholar of King's College, London and St. Paul's, Knightsbridge)

Church of the Most Precious Blood - O'Meara Street, SE1 1TE

1th April

Dewi Rees (St Alban's Abbey)

2nd May

Herman Jordaan (St John, Sidcup)

The Organ was built for the Church of Saint Mark, Battersea Rise in 1874 by T C Lewis. It was rebuilt and enlarged in 1912 by Lewis & Co., and removed and placed in storage in 2012.

The installation at Most Precious Blood was undertaken by Gary Owens Organ Builders and Renatus Ltd in 2022. It has 3 manuals, 46 speaking stops and 2,122 pipes.

Retiring collection to support the recital series.

For full specification and links to previous recitals please visit:

<https://www.preciousblood.org.uk/>

Those of you on Facebook may be interested to see this reel by Jack Chesher, the man behind the Living London History page, in which the church features!

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1584214435928171>



St Alphage, Burnt Oak HA8 0DN

Saturday 6th June

3pm-4.15pm

Rosemary Evans

Admission £10.00 followed by refreshments £5.00 (cash or cheques only)

Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

- **Time:** Sundays at 15:00 (3:00 PM).
- **Admission:** Free, with a retiring collection.
- **Instrument:** 4-manual Harrison & Harrison organ (originally 1912)

- April 19, 2026: Stephen Banfield (Kent County Organists)
- May 17, 2026: Adrian Gunning (St John the Evangelist RC Church, Islington)
- June 21, 2026: Royal College of Music students
- August 16, 2026: Imogen Morgan (St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh)
- September 20, 2026: Gerard Brooks (MCHW Director of Music)
- November 15, 2026: Andrew Furniss (MCHW)

Other Events

The Guild of Church Musicians

The Guild of Church Musicians' has a forthcoming day in Oxford on **Saturday 7 March**.

Non-members are very welcome (and, in fact, encouraged!) to attend and the programme of sessions is varied.

We begin with an organ recital at Magdalen College followed by lunch hosted by Mark Williams, Informator Choristarum at Magdalen. Moving to Exeter College, we will hear about the work of the Betts Fellowship from Michael Koenig and about vocal health for singers from Julian Debreuil before attending Choral Evensong at Christ Church Oxford which will be sung jointly by the choirs of Christ Church Cathedral, New College and Magdalen College.

It promises to be an excellent day of fellowship and discussion and we warmly invite anyone who is able to join us. Full booking details are available here:

<https://gcm.org.uk/events-archive/guild-of-church-musicians-oxford/>

If you have any questions, please contact Elizabeth Stratford e.stratford@btopenworld.com.

Godalming Festival

Monday March 26th 2026

Godalming Parish Church

I am pleased to inform you that the Organ Section of the 2026 Godalming Performing Arts Festival will be held on Monday 16 March 2026 in Godalming parish church (St Peter & St Paul's church, part of Godalming Minster). Full details of the syllabus can be found on the website: www.godalmingperformingartsfestival.com.

The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland with The Pratt Green Trust

To celebrate the 90th Anniversary of **The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland**, new hymns are invited on the theme of **'Ages Past – Years to Come'** and honouring the legacy of **Elizabeth Cosnett**, with the opportunity to set a Cosnett text to a new tune.

The competition is open to residents of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, also to members of HSGBI who reside overseas and entries should be in English.

One entry per person is permitted. Select from one of the following categories:

- A) Original text to a well-known melody**
- B) Original text to an original melody**
- C) Original melody to an Elizabeth Cosnett text**

The Judging Panel includes acclaimed hymn writers and composers including John Bell, Emma Turl, Anne Harrison, Michael Jaggesar, Victoria Johnson, Ian Sharp, Rosalind Brown and Graham Adams.

We are pleased to offer a £300 prize for the winning entry in each category, which may be taken as cash or used towards the cost of attending the HSGBI Annual Conference at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick in July 2026, at which the winning entries will be sung.

For more information, including how to enter, please visit <https://hymnsocietygbi.org.uk/hymn-competition-2026/>.

Please submit your entry by 12 April 2026 via the [online form on the Pratt Green Trust website](#).

Saturday 18th April 2026

St John's East Dulwich

Education Day



Website

Please do look regularly at sslso.org.uk. Our webmaster updates it frequently and there is much to see.