

BRANCH REPORTS – Autumn 2013

ESSEX

July is always a busy month with our annual visit to Ingatestone Hall. This year, Benjamin Britten centenary year, found Essex inundated in Noye's Fluddes – five performances at least in July throughout the county at venues in Southend, Romford and even Tilbury cruise terminal, with a repeat in London at Southwark Cathedral. The orchestral recorder parts are not technically difficult and are usually played by children. However, some of the entries are a bit tricky and conductors like to have at least one "responsible adult" in each section, and Essex members duly obliged.

Our next big event is our Playing Day on Saturday 2nd November, conducted by Caroline Kershaw (Radcliffe). Caroline brings a wealth of experience as a professional recorder player and baroque oboist, and manages to maintain a parallel career lecturing in drama at Birmingham University. It looks like being an enjoyable and stimulating day.

GLASGOW

In April, the Glasgow branch enjoyed a wonderful Pastoral Visit with Alyson Lewin. Alyson, a native of Belfast, is well known for arrangements of many folk tunes. As well as being a teacher, she also runs Hawthorns Publishing specializing in music for the recorder that we all know and love. It was at last a truly spring day and we were very happy to be joined by guests from Edinburgh, Perth and Dollar.

We started with Josquin's El Grillo, followed by a charming piece that we had not played before, Benjamin Cooke's Epitaph on a Dormouse. Next came two beautiful arrangements of Byrd's Ave Verum Corpus and Handel's Vinto e l'amor.

We then broke for a buffet lunch and a great deal of chatter, catching up with long standing friends and meeting new ones.

The second half of the programme started with a big six-part piece, Schein's Canzona in Six Parts for SSATTB. Lynne Hope joined us in this on the gamba. This made the sound even richer and once we had sight read the music the next play through enabled us to appreciate the wonderful interwoven themes. We finished with Steve Marshall's Northumberland Suite (SATTBGbCb), and played all four movements - Lavender's Blue, Bonny at Morn, Dance to Your Daddy and Bobby Shaftoe. As most of us knew the tunes we thought we had it easy but beware! Steve pops in some interesting changes and variations that can catch one out. It was a good finale to a very happy day. The Glasgow branch would like to thank Alyson and all our guests for making it so successful.

LINCOLNSHIRE

We have enjoyed a good year culminating in a well attended Lunchtime Concert in May when we performed, amongst other pieces Anne Martin's Fantasia 'Surrey Leaves'. We are greatly looking forward to our SRP 75th Anniversary Playing Day in October when we will be conducted by Evelyn Nallen and look forward to welcoming friends from other branches.

MACCLESFIELD

We have now completed five months of meetings and are very encouraged by the response and music we are now beginning to create together.

Our monthly meetings will resume in September, the dates can be found on the website. For our March meeting we are looking forward to hosting our first "play day". In the meantime we shall continue to explore the wealth of Baroque music which is most suitable for Recorder ensembles.

New members are most welcome, please consider picking up your recorders again, you will be pleasantly surprised by how quickly progress can be made in the company of enthusiastic and convivial players.

NORFOLK

When our dear Director of Music, Ron Skins, informed us last autumn that he would be retiring in October this year, we felt a great debt to his 50 years of support directing the group, mixed with the huge question of how we keep the group going. No-one came forward to offer to take his place, so we considered the option of a few of us learning to conduct to take it in turns to lead the group. This way the responsibility wouldn't rest on any one set of shoulders. Moira Usher agreed to travel to Norwich to help. Many of our Branch members attended the day in April - some to learn and some to support by being our players.

Our day began with a few "do's and 'don'ts" of conducting: do conduct cleanly, don't stand in front of a window ... (I had set the chairs out and we couldn't follow Moira's arms with the light behind her!)

We learned to conduct in 2, 3 and 4 time. In the first session we were taught to keep the beat to part of Mozart's Requiem in 3 time. We were spread around the room with a partner to conduct to each other. That seemed to go OK, so we were then split into two playing groups and took turns to conduct in 3 time. After the break it was 4 time. More Mozart Requiem to practise and then back into our playing groups to give it a go. This was slightly more tricky, as you have to remember which way to beat - is it 'down, left, right, up' or 'down, right, left, up'? We got there in the end. The lunch break was welcome after a morning of harder work than I was expecting!

At the beginning of the afternoon session, Moira informed us that 2 time - our next learning curve - is the most difficult of the three. How can that be? Surely it's just 'down, up, down, up'?! No, no. It's 'down (not too far), loop round (not too big) and then up (clearly)'. That took more practice along to *Dies Irae* than I thought it might!

The final session of the day found us in one group together, conducting to the largest group we had ever experienced - and it was fine! Moira is such an inspirational teacher that even the most unsure of us at the beginning of the day were feeling much more confident by the end.

Feedback at the end of the day was all positive: those who were there to learn found the teaching very relaxed and encouraging, allowing us to make mistakes (and we did!) in a supportive atmosphere. Those who were there to play found it informative, too, having an understanding now of what the conductor means by all that arm waving!

We know that this was just the beginning - as the title of the course implies. But we were encouraged. At least 5 or 6 new conductors were 'born' that day for the Norfolk group. We don't know as much as Ron or Moira, but with the patience and support of the rest of our branch we will grow. And as one participant said at the end of the day, it has helped us believe there is a future for Norfolk SRP.

We owe Moira many thanks for her great teaching and support. We didn't get it right all the time - some of the time the group kept playing, even when we lost our place! It was a very supportive and relaxed atmosphere, which has continued into the branch meetings as one by one the new conductors have bravely taken their turn to lead us. When Ron saw what the first conductor was able to do, he remarked that we should have done this years ago. I would encourage any SRP branch to experience this day. It was lots of fun and quite insightful of how much effort goes into conducting. We look forward to the Intermediate Course!

NUNEATON

The pastoral meeting in May was conducted by Graham Danbury and comprised a delightful selection of music ranging from sacred works by composers including Henry Purcell and Samuel Sebastian Wesley and the charming *Six Dances from Bath* arranged by Raymond Harvey. Graham's light and informative commentary provided a perfect backdrop to a most enjoyable afternoon. On 21st June members had the honour of being invited by Mrs. Karen Anderson to take part in a concert in St. Mary's Church, Hinckley, where her daughter, Kirsty, performed several solo operatic arias and well-known show songs. It was heartening that the church was full, and many in the audience said they were intrigued to see such a variety of recorders.

PETERBOROUGH

The main focus of our playing during the late spring and early summer was a joint concert with The Gildenburgh Choir, a fellow member of our local umbrella organisation Peterborough Music Making.

The performance took place in the beautiful and historical surroundings of St Mary's Church Whittlesey, and at last a proper summer evening! We opened with Handel's *Overture for St Cecilia's Day*, and as well as several familiar items from our repertoire we included a nine-part arrangement of Glen Miller's *Moonlight Serenade* which works surprisingly well on recorders. We finished off with one of our favourites, Gaspar Sanz' *Five Spanish Dances*. Our playing was well received and attracted the interest of potential new members.

As a bonus, the Vicar gave an entertaining account of early music in the church.

As always we remain a welcoming mixed ability group and are always happy to see new players at our regular sessions, which take place twice in most months.

WARWICK

We are now settled into our new 'home' at the Village Hall in Stoneleigh. This new venue has excellent facilities and is convenient and easily reached by all members. Our first Pastoral Visit in this new venue took place on 13th April when we were delighted to welcome back Wendy Pettit as guest conductor. A goodly gathering of players from Warwick, Nuneaton and Birmingham branches and some visitors from London enjoyed Wendy's thoughtful choice of music, especially Josquin de Prez's *Absalon fili mi*, a Banchieri *Fantasia* and the hauntingly beautiful *Hereford Suite* by Ian Farquhar. The

afternoon ended with a romp through Lyndon Hilling's *Celebration Rag*. Many thanks to Wendy for a most enjoyable afternoon.

On Friday 28th and Saturday 29th June members of Warwick branch combined with Stratford's Orchestra of the Swan, Shipston-on-Stour Community Groups and Shipston Schools to perform Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* as he intended it to be performed.

Britten requested that amateurs of all ages be allowed to perform amongst professionals and that the audience interact with the performance. This was truly an amazing experience, not only for us, but also for a very new group of hand bell ringers and four talented young buglers. The animals were pupils from Shipston Primary School. The animal masks (built on baseball caps) were made by Year 8 and 9 pupils from Shipston High School. There were sufficient extra masks for all the children and some adults in the audience to be adorned. All three performances were a joy and it was an opportunity not to be missed.

We hope to welcome many of you to our annual Joint Playing Day with Nuneaton branch on 5 October. We have another delightful venue booked for this event - Church Lawford Village Hall near Rugby - where we look forward to playing under the baton of Ann Marshall.