

SRP BRANCH REPORTS – SPRING 2014

CUMBRIA

Our November workshop was led by Alyson Lewin, who skilfully directed us through a delightful selection of music ranging from *Alcaics* by Paul Clark to *Canzon Duodecimi Toni* by Hassler. Alyson impressed us with her clear and interesting explanations about facets of early music. We also enjoyed the chance to browse through the large selection of Hawthorns Press publications that Alyson brought with her.

Our other two tutors were well-known local musicians. Philip Gruar led us through music by Tallis and Cabezón and then, in complete contrast, a session on *Hexachrome* by Alan Davis. Elizabeth Dodd, an expert viol player and tutor, brought along six viols and gave members the opportunity to try a viol. Altogether, a varied and very enjoyable day of music-making.

DURHAM

The Durham branch of the Society of Recorder Players has had another successful year of playing in 2012-13. As in previous years, its meetings have been enhanced by the pleasant and helpful environment of the parish-centre of St Margaret's Church at Antioch House in the heart of Durham City, and above all by the efficient and unobtrusive management and excellent tea-breaks provided by its social secretary, Andy Phipps, with assistance from his wife Julie's delicious baking. Most meetings have been conducted by Mary Tyers, with her demanding and yet sympathetic approach to the branch's playing and her musical insight, especially into the style of early music; but the branch has also benefited from being conducted by one of its members, Briony Watkinson, and also by Joan Reeve, who adds periodic conducting at Durham to her responsibilities as musical director of Newcastle-upon-Tyne branch. Durham branch has also organised another successful playing-day, this time led by Colin Touchin - a demanding, but rewarding, day under the baton of such an influential figure in the recorder world. In the coming months the branch has scheduled a workshop on Baroque style in April directed by Evelyn Nallen. In addition to the activities of the branch as whole, it continues to support the Durham University Affiliated Group, the students of which play in branch meetings and have playing-meetings of their own.

ESSEX

On 2nd November we welcomed Caroline Kershaw to conduct our playing day. We began with Scheidt's *O Nachbar Roland* – challenging, particularly for the basses, who acquitted themselves well in the semiquaver passages. We worked on this piece in considerable detail, which was rewarding. A ten-part double choir piece by Gabrieli was followed by Byrd's *Sermone Blando*, two *Lachrymae pavans* by Dowland and two galliards. Finally, we played Alex Ayre's arrangement of the Pastoral Symphony from Bach's Christmas Oratorio. We are grateful to Caroline for making the long journey to Essex, which included a gridlocked North Circular Road, and thank her for giving us a splendid day's playing.

A couple of days later we heard the sad news of the death of Paul Clark. The programme for our December meeting was hastily re-arranged to include several compositions and arrangements by Paul, including *A New Song* (1752). This tune, by the Dutch composer Willem de Fesch, was discovered some years ago by branch member Karen Mortley in a volume of 18th century magazines she bought at an antiques fair. Marion Panzetta sent the tune to Paul, and he produced a lovely arrangement which he published in his Clark Collection. On the cover of Marion's copy he wrote

“Arranged for recorder quartet AATB by Paul Clark who took great pleasure in arranging it at Marion Panzetta’s behest.”

We were delighted to welcome Bruce Pennick to our December meeting to conduct his new arrangement of *We Three Kings*. This is a treat for bass players, as each King is represented by one bass. The arrangement was originally for a small choir which Bruce directs, but at Marion’s behest it was re-arranged for recorders. Marion is well known for her behests.

GUILDFORD

On Saturday 21st November, Guildford Branch held their autumn playing day. Cleverly constructed around a theme of 'Pavans and Dances', conductor, Anne Martin guided a strong turn out through a chronological history of the Pavan from the 16th to mid 20th centuries.

The programme began with Arbeau’s unadorned but haunting *Belle Qui Tiens Ma Vie* a piece notably described by Arbeau in his *Orchésographie* (1588).

Suitably prepared, we traversed the late 16th and early 17th centuries via the pavans and galliards of Holborne and Dowland to arrive at Schein's *Pavan* for Krumhorns (1617) – an early example of music that was beginning to be written for specific instruments.

Having been taken back to Germany in the early 17th century the Pavan re-emerged in France in the early 20th century. Composers such as Fauré and Ravel used the form deliberately to evoke the Renaissance in pieces such as the *Mother Goose Suite* of 1911. Indeed, the *Sleeping Beauty’s Pavan* from that suite was our next historical port of call.

The intricate melody and much lighter tone of the *Sleeping Beauty’s Pavan* were in distinct contrast to the simple melody of the next piece, Warnock’s Pavan from the Capriol Suite (1926). And thus we had come full circle, as this piece, of course, is a direct quotation of Arbeau’s *Belle Qui Tiens Ma Vie*.

The 20th century was able to offer us the Pavan from Britten’s *Courtly Dances* from *Gloriana* (1953) before requiring us to tackle the more energetic dance types of the 20th century – a joyous Charleston and for contrast, a slow rock arranged by Chris May from Merath's *Tanz Typen*..

An enjoyable day was had by all and proceedings were further enhanced by the recent addition of a great bass, purchased by the branch for use by all its members. Throughout the day there were several opportunities to play the instrument.

IRELAND

It was a smaller than usual group that assembled in the Parish Centre at Booterstown, South Dublin, for a weekend of playing conducted by Helen Hooker. Numbers were reduced by illness, travel (sun seekers in Spain and Australia) and the usual problem of dates clashing. However, as someone remarked hopefully, it was a case of ‘quality not quantity’ and it was amazing that in so small a group (14 on Saturday and 12 on Sunday) there were 2 contras and 3 great basses.

At the beginning of the session we were told of the sad death, only the previous weekend, of Paul Clark, who tutored on the Irish Recorder and Viol course for many years and had visited Dublin several times as a pastoral tutor. Fittingly, we started and finished Saturday’s playing with arrangements by Paul Clark. In between we played the Fitzwilliam Suite, arrangements by Helen of several short items from the Fitzwilliam manuscript. These were nicely varied and every line had their moments of glory. Contrasts were provided by two fantasies, a very new piece by Steve

Marshall, Fantasy No 11 (Canonic) and Gibbons Fantasia no 3 for 6 instruments, so there was plenty of variety in terms of both age and style. Steve Marshall's canon started with a lovely long melodic line followed by a passage of separated repeated notes, there was an interesting change of tempo, surprising in a canon, but it worked! It was highly accessible, sitting well within the range of the instruments and with no major difficulties of timing and rhythms. Bergmann's *Greensleeves* arrangement, was similarly accessible and also, surprisingly, considering its publication date, unknown to a good many of us.

Members of the group provided us with a tasty and substantial buffet lunch, with plenty of tea and coffee to wash it down. Perhaps it was no wonder that our playing was a little sluggish at the start of the afternoon, prompting one of Helen's many imaginative and descriptive metaphors; wanting us to keep up the tempo, she observed that it felt as if she was 'trying to push an elephant up a hill'!

On Sunday we started with a fugue by Popora which was another Paul Clark arrangement, from over 30 years ago, yet one that seemed to be new to most people. It was very tuneful, with some lovely contrasts between the chromatic and the more 'spikey' passages and in typical Paul Clark fashion, using the full range of the recorder. Helen followed this with three Byrd 3 part Fantasias. This version had been re-set by Steve Marshall, so that, unlike the original LPM version the instrumentation and clefs remained the same for all 3 pieces. Being less complex than the Fantasias in 5 and 6 parts and well known to some of the group we played them well enough for Helen to remark that she could tell we were used to this sort of music as 'we slipped into it with such ease'! A complete contrast to both these was provided by another Steve Marshall composition called Hansel and Gretel. Having rehearsed individual sections, we then played through the entire set of 9 short sections, with Helen reading the story; we all felt that we played the whole set far more persuasively with the reminder of the story than our first play through as a result. A fun piece, I can imagine it being a huge success performed in this way in primary schools.

The final session was Lyndon Hilling's Sambura Samba. Having had an elephant, Helen now introduced us to the hippopotamus (say it to yourself) to help get the rhythms sorted out in this lively piece, which provided a fun way to end our weekend and send us all away with a smile.

All the music had its challenges, often requiring some nifty finger work for the basses, plenty of rhythmic complexities and yet it was all accessible to a group with very mixed experience of recorder playing. Helen seemed pleased by our efforts, which was encouraging, but with such an energetic and enthusiastic conductor it was natural to respond. I can thoroughly recommend a visit to the Irish branch of SRP, so why not give it a try some time, you will be given a great welcome.

MACCLESFIELD

Our monthly meetings continue to satisfy and challenge our now established group of fourteen players. The music we have been enjoying over the past few months includes various forms of Dance from both the Renaissance and Baroque periods, interspersed with other favourites by Bach, Handel and Schmelzter amongst others.

We are looking forward with keen anticipation to hosting our first "Playing Day" on 15 March 2014 when we will be welcoming Wendy Pettit as our guest conductor. Further information on how to book a place can be found online at the SRP website.

As a group we look forward to extending the range and standard of music we attempt over the coming months.

NORFOLK

Day of Playing 2013.....or A Fantastic Day of Triple Celebration in Norfolk!

What an amazing excuse for a party! The Society was 75, our Branch was 50 and our Musical Director - Ron Skins - was retiring. So on the day of Sat 12th October 2013 we had decorations up in the hall including balloons and a banner, we had a shared lunch and we had a great Day of Playing. We welcomed friends from near and far - some travelling from as far away as Kent and Scotland to be with us. Past members who are no longer able to play joined us for part of the day which was very special. Amongst our many guests we were delighted to welcome the SRP National Chair, Tessa Rolph. There was a buzz of expectation in the air.

It was a Playing Day with a difference. Ron led us in the two morning sessions, which included music chosen by Walter Bergmann at the inaugural Branch meeting 50 years ago as well as pieces which Ron had conducted at his first meeting.

Lunch was special as everyone had brought food to share, giving a lovely party atmosphere. After lunch we were treated to a special concert by Ron's ensemble which he directs in his home town of Gorleston.

The afternoon was rather different to our normal Day of Playing pattern. We had just one more playing session - conducted by Moira Usher - a one-time member of Norfolk Branch and a very welcome regular visiting conductor. A surprise awaited Ron, as part way through the afternoon Moira passed the baton to David Storey - another a past member - who had written a piece specially for the day, called 'Rondo for Ron', which was thoroughly enjoyed.

We didn't have time for any more playing as we had more celebrating to do. There was a celebration cake to be shared, beautifully made by Branch member Ann Gardner. Our Chair - Charles Levien - presented Ron with a cheque from the Branch and other friends, along with a book which those attending the day were able to sign showing their appreciation for Ron. Tessa Rolph, on behalf of the Society, presented Ron with a certificate on his retirement in recognition of his massive contribution over the last 50 years to the Society and to Norfolk Branch in particular. Many of those I contacted about the celebration remarked that they would not be playing now if it hadn't been for Ron's enthusiasm and support over many years.

We have a lot to be thankful for - from the Society and from Ron. We have a lot to celebrate in Norfolk and we have a lot to look forward to!

NUNEATON

Christmas 2013 was made memorable for us, as we were invited to take part in a well-attended concert which was a fundraiser for the local Mary Ann Evans Hospice, in conjunction with their Choir. The venue was Nuneaton United Reformed Church, and we played a seasonal selection of music, two of the pieces as accompaniment to the Choir. We thank everyone involved for their hard work in helping to organise the event, and particularly our Musical Director James Morris for conducting both the choir and ourselves.

Our next major highlight will be the annual pastoral meeting, with Adam Dopadlik at the helm, on Saturday 17th May at 2.30 pm in the Community Room at Higham Lane School.

PETERBOROUGH

Looking back at the first term of the playing year, while there were no performances to note, there is still much to be pleased about. The atmosphere within the group is excellent and playing standards

continue to improve. For some time we have been talking about how to spread the conducting role more widely around the group, and at last it is beginning to happen more regularly, with one or two members revealing talents that we were previously unaware of!

While numbers have held up well, the need for new blood, particularly younger players, is evident, and potential new members or guests can be assured of a warm welcome at our regular meetings.

SOMERSET - 40th Anniversary Playing Day

It was very good of Andrew to step into the breach at terribly short notice after Somerset branch heard from Chris Burgess that his illness would prevent his being able to conduct the branch for the day. We send our sincere wishes to Chris for a speedy recovery and hope to see him soon.

However, our 40th birthday was going to go ahead as Andrew had saved the day. I had looked back over copious amounts of paperwork from my predecessor in the secretarial position, Sheila Dickens, and discovered that the earliest mention of Somerset being an SRP was 1973. Prior to this it had been the South Somerset Recorder Group, still emblazoned on much of our library music. 2 original members still attend – Mary Green frequently conducts the branch and has been made a life member due to her stalwart work on the committee, and Rosemary Berry declares that she was only a young girl at the time, and the youngest in the group. Rosemary was able to attend the 'birthday party' but sadly Mary was taken ill, so unable to join us. (and I know that she was very much looking forward to the day) .

So with the balloons blown up (thanks Gill and Sue), the tables and chairs out, Diana and Felicity doing a sterling job to get the food organised, we were ready to begin our day. We began with coffee – a great idea! – and reminiscences, and then Andrew called us to order.

He began the day by teaching us a simple 3 part round (no dots!!!) Having mastered it in one key, we then went on to learn it in another – and could have carried on all day changing from key to key, but some people were anxious to have some music to look at. So we began with a fugue from J.S. Bach's '*Art of Fugue*'. It was a good piece to play us in, and after hard work from Andrew we managed to give a credible performance. Staying in 4 parts we then moved back a few years to Obrecht, playing his *le Draghe de Mutse Clutse*. With the absence of Dutch speakers we imagined what the title might mean. There were some tricky sections, and with Andrew's patience we played it rather well – hopefully Obrecht would have enjoyed the performance. A quick coffee break and stretch of legs before moving on to Heinrich Isaac's *A la Bataglia*. During this we were encouraged to play harshly, as if at a battle. The overall effect was quite exciting once we had ironed out the problems with the printed score. Finally for the morning session we moved to the 21st century and Raymond Harvey's *Suite number 5 – in Sherwood Forest*. Sadly we didn't have time to play all of the movements, but did tackle 4 of them, and I feel that it would be good to get a copy for the branch library and have a go at playing the remaining movements. We finished on a sad note with Robin dying, but it didn't null our appetite for the amazing 'bring and share' lunch. Everyone had worked very hard to bring a wonderful dish, but I do think that Diana's summer pudding was excellent! (personal view...)

After an excellent lunch we resumed to play the highlight of the day's music, our especially commissioned piece *A Flourish* by Andrew Challenger himself. There were some very tricky quaver passages in all parts – and although Andrew had taken the precaution to write a few slightly simpler 'alternative parts', everyone attempted the main part. Excellent finger practice! The great bass and contra basses were kept very busy – a good thing in all music. Luckily it is a 2 choir piece, which means that whilst one choir were being challenged by the quavers, the other choir was either resting or playing beautiful, gentle harmonies. We worked on this piece for most of the first part of the afternoon, and the final result was very impressive – obviously a few more weeks practicing quavers

would help the clarity, but the overall effect was superb and very fitting for the occasion. Very exciting, vibrant and happy music.

Now the cake cutting – Vivien had made a wonderful anniversary cake, iced with the SRP logo (good job it hasn't just been changed!), and displayed to excellent effect. We have been told about the cake for some time as Vivien has been adding various amounts of alcohol to the mixture – and it proved to be just as good as she had described. For those who didn't like fruit cake (is there anyone??), which was also well presented. To a fanfare the cake was fittingly cut by Vivien and our chairperson – Miriam. To wash the cake down we had various home-made fruit juices – what a resourceful branch we are!

Then the raffle followed – with lots of prizes won by a number of members and visitors, and the final work of the afternoon was tackled – a *Canzon Prima* by the little known Venetian composer, Priuli.

So down with the balloons, all the washing up and putting away of furniture to restore our hall to its normal state, and Andrew whisked off to catch a train, but we were all still humming bits of the wonderful music we had played all day. So, many, many thanks to all who made the anniversary a success, and particularly to Andrew for both composing the wonderful music (which will be played many times in the future at the branch) and for taking over at very short notice. Now to another 40 years of thriving recorder playing in Somerset!

Warwick and Nuneaton Branches Playing Day

Ann Marshall conducted our annual event on a sunny early autumn day at Church Lawford Village Hall, a delightful venue in a pleasant village setting. After opening with her and Steve's arrangement of Handel's lively Allegro from Concerto Grosso No. 1, Ann continued with the traditional, very moving spiritual *Down in the Valley to Pray*, arranged by Steve. There followed a move to the Elizabethan era with Thomas Morley's *Clorinda False*, and the morning session concluded in more contemporary style with the buoyant *Puttin' On The Ritz*. After lunch, we played two more of Steve's arrangements, this time pieces by Giles Farnaby: *Dreame* and *A Toye*. Ann's arrangement of a Come, Blessed Bird, a madrigal written in honour of Queen Elizabeth I by Edward Johnson, followed, and two widely contrasting works were played before tea: *Greensleeves* and *Give My Regards to Broadway*. We were off to the Caribbean at the start of the last part of the afternoon, with *Hot Sun...and Golden Rum*, part of Ann's *Islands In The Sun* suite. This bright and breezy tune was in sharp contrast to the next two items: *Canzon* and *To Hear Men Sing* by the late 16th/early 17th century composers William Brade and Michael East respectively. To ensure that we left with a memorable tune in our heads, Ann concluded with *Happy Days Are Here Again*. Our grateful thanks to Ann for conducting such a lovely selection of music, also to Helen and all at Warwick branch for organising another successful occasion.

WESSEX

As a new member of the SRP it was with some trepidation that I set out on Sunday 6th October for my first experience of a playing day. But what a way to start! Philip Thorby is well known as one of the country's leading performers and teachers in the field of Renaissance and Baroque music. He exudes knowledge and information, leavening his erudition with a liberal sprinkling of humour. The day began with a piece by Giovanni Gabrieli who was one of the most influential musicians of his time. This was followed, after coffee, by more Gabrieli, this time Giovanni's uncle Andrea. The music was somewhat discouragingly, if appropriately, entitled *Lord Have Mercy On Us*, a beautiful piece for three choirs of instruments.

After lunch came a complete change with music by Hans Ulrich Staeps (1909 – 1988). Born in Dortmund, he was a professor at the Vienna Conservatory where he was in charge of classes for the recorder, harpsichord and modern music theory. We played a piece called *The Unicorn's Grace*, music that would have been relatively straightforward were it not for the precision required by Philip. His comment on one of the movements was that the unicorn sounded pickled! Sadly, time was running out and we did not have time to play the piece through from beginning to end. At least the pickle should keep the unicorn preserved until next time!

Finally it was Philip's arrangement of an *Irish Suite*. Great fun although it did seem to me to be going at about 100 miles an hour!

A big thank you to all those who helped arrange such an inspirational and informative day. What a shame it's only once a year.