

BRANCH REPORTS SUMMER 2016

CAMBRIDGE

February 17th 2016 was the 90th birthday of Anthony Rowland-Jones, the honorary president of our branch, and also a Vice President of the SRP. Vic Morris our Chairman conspired with Christina, Anthony's wife, to arrange a surprise visit to mark the occasion by playing for him. So eight of us arrived at his house to play a Canzona, 'La Padovana', by the Italian composer Ludovico Grossi (1564 - 1645), more usually known by the name of his home town, Viadana. The music was an arrangement, for two recorder choirs (SATB) by Reginald Johnson, part of a considerable collection of Viadana's music donated to the branch library some time ago by Anthony himself. We decided to give added contrast and sonority by playing the second choir parts at eight foot (TBGbCb), which Anthony, as an enthusiast for the lower recorders, appreciated. As expected, once Anthony was over the surprise, he gave some very valuable feedback on our performance, and suggested that as a pavan, it might have sounded better a little slower! He did however tell us later that it was the highlight of his birthday celebrations.

Our band of eight included our current branch chairman, two former branch chairmen and two former secretaries. Anthony was also delighted to meet Tessa Rolph, the chair of the SRP who joined our band for the occasion.

After playing, we presented Anthony with an engraved cut glass bowl and a card which had been bought by branch members to show our appreciation for his many years of support. Michael Sharman, a former chairman of the branch and of the SRP, then said a few words and reminisced with Anthony about the old days!

Over the years, Anthony has made a major contribution to our branch including master classes on performance and much advice and guidance. After the playing and the presentation Christina kindly provided tea and a slice of birthday cake. Anthony chatted with us about incidents and people from his long years of involvement with the SRP. He mentioned an arrangement he had made of the Sonatina from Bach's Cantata BWV 106, which in spite of its brevity he considers the finest of all Baroque works for recorders, and which he had presented to the branch to be played at the funeral of a former Secretary. Anthony noted with pride his many publications, including books on recorder technique and on interpretation in the performance of recorder sonatas which he pointed out are all still in print. He observed that in Renaissance music the top part of a recorder consort was written for the Alto recorder, whereas the Soprano recorder only really 'arrived' as a regular member of the consort after establishing its popularity as a solo instrument for concertos at the Vauxhall Gardens concerts in the early 18th century. As we talked, we were reminded of the enormous scope of his knowledge of the history of the recorder and its music, and what a privilege it is that he continues to act as President of our branch.

Altogether, his energy, dedication and expertise in all matters relating to the recorder are undimmed. Amazing to remember that as well as his dedication to the recorder world, he had been the first Registrar of Essex University, and that his original area of expertise was as a consultant in university administration in developing countries!

Happy Birthday Anthony, and thank you for all you do for the Cambridge branch and the recorder world in general.

BIRMINGHAM

As our Christmas meeting was the recital we gave in Solihull, the traditional Christmas buffet became a New Year celebration instead. It was most enjoyable.

Our music continues to be varied and sometimes challenging. There is Paul Clark's arrangement of *The Pilgrims' March* from Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony, pieces by Byrd, and Roger Tempest's demanding but attractive jazz version of *Tea for Two*.

We were pleased to welcome Jan Dreyer to our March meeting. Jan comes from Berlin and is studying composition and recorder at Coventry University. We hope that he will come and conduct at some of our meetings.

We meet on the first Saturday afternoon of the month usually at the Friends' Meeting House in Cotteridge.

CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER

From July our new venue (*see below) will provide extra space for our growing membership. We benefit from the expertise of visiting conductors as well as our MD Pam Smith. This enriches our access to music from across the centuries. Additionally Pam has encouraged members to try the bass section leading to greater range and flexibility amongst the group. We have looked forward to the popular and now annual Recorders and Strings session and our Playing Day (led this year by Helen Hooker).

Our regular members are always pleased to welcome occasional musicians who come from as far afield as the Falkland Islands. Do visit us on any second Saturday at *St Luke's Church Hall, Cheltenham GL53 7HP.

CLEVELAND

Although we are a very small branch, our members are very loyal and regular attendance has been excellent. Each meeting, Sandra Foxall, our very able Music Director, can always be relied upon to present us with a very wide selection of music to suit our very varied tastes. Knowing that we are extremely fortunate to have such an experienced and competent Music Director, we were delighted to present Sandra with her SRP long service certificate at one of our meetings. This certificate is so well deserved and gave us the opportunity to thank Sandra for her dedication and for her many years of service to our branch.

ESSEX

The 2015/2016 season got off to a good start with a Pastoral Visit from Pam Smith, which was much enjoyed. However, in October things fell apart. A sink hole a few yards from our meeting place closed a main road, with a diversion of 26 miles signed. Of course we all knew the short-cuts through the side streets – but so did all the other inhabitants of Brentwood and beyond! There was nothing for it but to cancel the meeting.

Normal activities resumed in November, and December brought our Christmas party, during which conductor Judith Underwood persuaded members of the committee to don silly hats and do silly things in Haydn's *Toy Symphony*. We finished the day in what has become the

branch's traditional style with Bruce Pennick's arrangement of *Sweet Chiming Christmas Bells*, conducted by Marion Panzetta.

Our playing day was in March, and we welcomed Jean McCreery who treated us to a delightful day's music. Beginning with some easy Handel to warm us up on a cold day, we proceeded to Bach's *Fuga Alla Breve e Staccato* which, as well as needing nimble fingers, required nimble tongues to bring the piece alive. Merula's Canzona *La Lusignata*, with its cascades of descending semiquavers in all parts, including basses, put our new tonguing skills to the test.

A different kind of challenge was presented by *Zaide Gaire* by Tony Lewis. This is an African-inspired piece in which extended ostinato passages required considerable concentration. Trebles faced the greatest challenge – not only playing off the beat for much of the time but being confronted with more tops Fs than most amateur recorder players meet in a lifetime.

The day ended in a calmer mood with a piece which called for a different range of skills, a lovely *Passacaille* by Lully. We were persuaded to try some baroque tonguing and some French ornaments, as well as A major! Our thanks to Jean for a splendid day.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

On 20th February 2016 the Notts branch held a Tudor and Stuart Dance Workshop in Oxton Village Hall. This was one of the workshops offered as an SRP training day. It was of interest to many SRP members from our own branch and others, and also attracted several people from U3A recorder groups, local dancing groups and people from Oxton Village. The turnout was excellent and approximately 60 people turned up to take part. Some only wanted to dance, some only wanted to play their recorders and some wanted to move between the two. These arrangements were well organised by Chris and Jo Saunders who led the workshop. Chris and Jo provided all the music, demonstrated and taught the dances and provided historical information about each dance and the music of the period.

The main objective (other than having a good time) was to provide an opportunity for SRP members to play the dances of the Elizabethan and Stuart periods in the style and at the speeds that would have been used at the time. Playing for dancers, it was explained, is a different activity from playing for a recorder group or in a concert. The tempo has to allow the dancers to move correctly and elegantly.

The musicians started by playing a series of Gavottes whilst the dancers warmed up with a Long Dance, snaking and circling around the room. The dancers were introduced to the basic dance steps, i.e. the single and the double step, forwards, back and sideways. Then followed two French Branles, brawles in English. Firstly *Branle Pinagay* and then *Branle des Sabots*, both from Arbeau's *Orchesography*. These dances are circular social dances and often mimicked what the upper classes thought the lower classes did.

Next the pavan was introduced, played and danced. A pavan is a stately dance which allowed everyone to show off their clothes (although we didn't wear period dress at the workshop) whilst dancing in a column or around the room. It was played faster than usual, to suit the dancers. The galliard, on the other hand, was played somewhat slower than is usual, to allow for the more complicated steps. Dancers and band performed well. Contemporary honours were described and used.

The almain was then played and danced; this dance being particularly liked in England. Two country dances, *Millison's Jig* and *Gathering Peascods* were next using hopped singles and doubles.

After lunch (which was a welcome break for the dancers!) a short talk was given which explained the sources for the dances and their interpretations, and questions from the players and dancers were asked and answered.

Towards the end of the afternoon a presentation was given in which the *Canaries*, *La Volta* and the Minuet were played and demonstrated. However the dancers were not satisfied with just a demonstration and insisted on dancing to the music!

The day ended with the elegant playing and dancing of *The Earl of Essex Measure*, a figured Pavan.

It was all very enjoyable and highly recommended as a day's playing and dancing, as well as a way of widening participation in, and awareness of, the SRP. We'd like to thank Chris and Jo for everything they did on the day and for their happy willingness to be contacted about all the arrangements beforehand. There are some photographs on our website:

www.srp.org.uk/notts

SUFFOLK

Ramblings.....

We were due to have a violin and violaist (is that a word?) come and play the Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* with us in January but a week beforehand Isobel, the violinist, developed serious nerve pains in her hand so couldn't play. Paul Davis (the violaist) kindly came alone and reprieved the pieces he did with us 5 years ago – which we had of course mainly forgotten! He was brilliant, good fun and the rapport between him and Moira made for an enjoyable afternoon for all. With 50 players there we had to mic Paul up as we were drowning him even when playing as loud as he could. Why don't other branches do things like this???

She has booked Isobel and Paul to come and try again in 2018 as we have two sopranos booked for January 2017 already! By the time you read this we will have had our pastoral visit from Caroline Jones, to which we are all looking forward, and Adrienne Cleary from Norfolk branch is kindly coming down to cover Moira while she is off rehearsing EROS in June. You just can't get the staff!

WESSEX

Vernon Baker, our oldest member of the Wessex branch, died in December at the age of 100. Vernon came to live in Winchester in 1975, and he was one of the founder members of our branch. He was an interesting person to talk to; he was a devout Quaker with an interest in Buddhism, and was a conscientious objector during the Second World War. He was a prison visitor in Winchester, and spent time in Africa, in Swaziland and Johannesburg.

Vernon had played the recorder since his youth and he and his late wife Joyce were always willing to teach and encourage new players; Vernon played his bass in the local U3A branch until a few months before his death.

He may be remembered by some of the older players in the Bristol and Guildford Branches, as he was a contemporary of Edgar and Enid Hunt.

In his latter years Vernon played whenever and wherever he could, despite the fact that he gave up driving when he was 80, and gave up cycling when he was 90. He attended branch meetings as long as he was able, and I can remember playing with him with the Dorset branch, in the chapel at the Bishop's palace in Winchester, and at the early music day in Singleton Open Air Museum in Sussex.

In fact the last time I saw Vernon we played together; a group of us went into the nursing home where he spent the last few weeks of his life, and despite the fact that he couldn't see the music very well he still played the right notes at the right time! It is said that playing music keeps you young, and Vernon was proof of this. We'll miss him.

Lorraine Curtis, Chairman, Wessex Branch