



SOA
Suffolk Organists' Association

**SUFFOLK
ORGANISTS'
ASSOCIATION**

in partnership with St
Edmundsbury and Ipswich
Diocesan Church Music Committee

**A SURVEY OF
CHURCH MUSIC**

in the churches of the Anglican Diocese of
St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

2014

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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

Late in 2013 the Council of the Suffolk Organists' Association (President: William Saunders) resolved to carry out an audit of the state of church music in the Anglican churches of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. It was also suggested that a similar survey should be carried out of music within Roman Catholic and non-conformist churches in Suffolk at a later date.

Christopher Moore of Woolpit was commissioned to carry out the survey. It was decided that a questionnaire should be sent to each parish, usually via the incumbent, and 460 four-page questionnaires were posted to the parishes, together with a stamped addressed envelope to encourage as great a response as possible. The questionnaire was designed to be simple and direct, with mainly tick-boxes to complete, together with two sections where correspondents could make their views known.

Of the 460 questionnaires sent, 328 were returned, though some were incompletely answered, with some boxes left blank. One was returned completely blank.

It seemed that a number of parishes were unable to return a response due to the benefice being in interregnum, but others seemed simply unwilling to return the completed questionnaire in spite of follow-up emails requesting a response. However, the large number of responses has allowed a detailed analysis of the statistics and the sample was certainly large enough to be a fairly consistent reflection of the current state of church music in the diocese.

A number of responses were accompanied by helpful letters and notes from correspondents, all of which were gratefully received.

SECTION 2. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

Services:

6 churches (1.8%) have daily services

204 (62%) have weekly services

63 (19.3%) have fortnightly services

50 (15.1%) have monthly services

6 (1.8%) have occasional services

Most churches have a variety of services.

312 have Holy Communion/Eucharist

113 have Matins

75 have Evensong

162 have family/informal services

36 have 'other' services

Choirs:

216 (66%) have no choir

74 (22.5%) have a choir

16 (4.8%) have an occasional choir (e.g. for Festivals only)

22 (6.7%) have a benefice choir

21 choirs include children under 18 (though the number of such in each choir is not noted)

3% of choirs have an average age between 20 and 40

24.7% of choirs have an average age of 41 to 60

72% of choirs have an average age over 60

65 choirs are robed whereas 32 are not

Organs:

97.7% of churches contain an organ of which 83.8% are pipe organs, 12% electronic and 4.2% harmoniums

99% of the organs are playable and 93.2% are regularly tuned and maintained (though this may mean only having a regular – perhaps only annual – tuning, rather than ongoing mechanical maintenance, restoration or overhaul)

Organists:

69.3% of churches have a regular organist

17.7% rely on a rota of organists

13% have no organist

1.5% have an organist aged under 20

2.7% have an organist aged 21-40

27.4% have an organist aged 41-60

55.3% have an organist aged 61-80

12.7% have an organist over 80

133 organists hold a musical qualification (unspecified)

43 do not, with 139 in the 'don't know' category

57 organists also direct the choir

30% of organists are volunteers, while 32% are salaried or paid for every services. 38% are paid only for weddings and funerals.

Music:

Hymns are used in 324 churches; worship songs in 134; choruses in 63; Taizé 52; psalms and canticles in 86; Communion settings in 94; anthems in 68

Hymn books:

111 churches use Hymns Ancient & Modern (in various editions); 28 use English Hymnal (in various editions); 130 use Hymns Old and New; 59 use Mission Praise; 28 Songs of Fellowship; 22 Common Praise; 43 various other hymn books (many churches use more than one hymn book)

41 churches project the words of hymns onto a screen. 22 print the words of hymn in a pew leaflet.

Other instruments:

218 churches use no instruments other than the organ in services

50 use piano; 52 electric keyboard; 50 guitar; 20 drum kit; 36 woodwind instruments (e.g. flute); 19 string instruments (e.g. violin); 9 use other instruments (e.g. trumpet) and 1 uses a barrel organ

Singers (solo cantors or small groups of singers, possibly amplified). 55 churches use singers in this way (not part of a formal choir)

Royal School of Church Music affiliation

9.4% are affiliated to the RSCM (248 answered 'no', with 30 'don't know' with 3 personal members)

SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Of the many interesting observations and statistics which this survey has revealed, some of the results pose difficult questions whereas others show a relatively happy state of affairs. It is the aim of the SOA to try to address some of the more pressing needs and problems, though it is not possible for a small local association with a little over 100 members (some of whom are not able to play a very active part in its activities) to effect developments, training and changes without the co-operation of other organisations, particularly the Diocese itself (largely through the Church Music Committee), the RSCM, local deaneries and parishes themselves. Church music is far from dead in the diocese, though in many (mainly rural) churches it is hanging on by a thread, relying on much goodwill and the efforts of an ageing and often insecure group of organists and other musicians.

There are specific things which the SOA can achieve which cost little and can be put into effect quickly, such as publishing on its website a comprehensive list of organists who may not hold regular church posts and might be available to help out in parishes, perhaps at short notice due to illness of the incumbent organist or for special occasions, weddings and funerals.

In the longer term, and in response to many comments returned with the survey, the shortage of organists must be addressed if organ music is to continue as the main source of instrumental music in our churches. It is suggested that one-day courses could be arranged (perhaps on a deanery basis) to assist less confident organists. Also, tuition might be made available to pianists to convert to the organ, thus giving them a short series of lessons and aiming to overcome the 'fear' which pianists sometimes feel when faced with a more complicated instrument, the organ. It may well be that there are young people who already learn the piano who could be helped, motivated and supported in this way.

These initiatives will not be without cost, and either the Diocese or individual parishes should be prepared to support them financially.

It has been proposed that an organ scholarship scheme might be set up, offering promising young musicians a longer-term series of organ lessons and more support than exists at present. The scholarships would be widely advertised and competed for, and support could be offered to promising runners-up in addition to the winners of the award.

Some dioceses, such as Portsmouth, have a diocesan music co-ordinator and *animateur* whose brief is to support musicians of all kinds at parish level. The diocese funds this post and it is evident that the investment is well worth while. The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich might be wise to consider such an initiative in the longer term.

The SOA is not in a position to assist parishes with funds for overhauling or restoring organs. BIOS (the British Institute of Organ Studies) lists grant-giving bodies on their website to which parishes might be drawn. Financial constraints in many parishes mean that the restoration of a failing organ is probably a low priority, though some parishes have recently raised money to refurbish their organ in spite of being a relatively small church community.

To address the evident tension which exists in some parishes between clergy who wish to change and develop music (and much else) and musicians who are perceived to be conservative and reactionary is more difficult. Maybe members of SOA or DCMC could be called on to act as mediators if the need arises. It is sad to read a number of comments in the survey where this tension is leading to a good deal of unhappiness on both sides.

On the choral front, the main problem is that most choirs consist of elderly singers, with few including children or having a children's choir. Many village choirs simply lead the hymn singing. With singing in primary schools increasingly under threat, churches would do well to encourage children to sing in church. Maybe churches with children in their choirs could do more to 'evangelise' the benefits of including young singers, but the limited and sometimes dull repertoire of music in many churches would not, probably, inspire many, alas.

Advice and support could be given to those who direct small choirs. Many have enthusiasm but might benefit from some assistance in choral directing technique, for example.

Parishes could be encouraged to include more instruments other than the organ to take part in worship. This is a way of encouraging young people to take part, as many learn an orchestral instrument or the guitar or drums, and this could add variety to the music as well as bringing in some younger people. The Evangelical churches in particular seem often to achieve this.

Quite a large number of parishes say they often – or usually – have to use CDs to accompany hymn singing as no organist is available. While this is possibly a useful stop-gap, it is obviously undesirable as a long-term solution. The rigidity of a CD accompaniment and sometimes the unsuitability of the organ tone for a small congregation's efforts mean that this method of accompaniment lacks the

spontaneity of a live 'performance', though it may well be preferable to a very slow, hesitant or inadequate organist.

Small congregations are increasingly getting used to singing unaccompanied and this can be very effective (and is part of an ancient tradition) provided there are one or two stronger singers to lead.

There is no doubt that action on many of these – and other – points should be taken as soon as possible, with adequate funding and imagination, as well as competent personnel. The alternative is that the organ will increasingly cease to sound on a regular basis in the churches and more services will be without music. This would be tragic, as our wonderful churches have resounded to music throughout the centuries and our own century must continue this if at all possible.

SECTION 4: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the Council of the Suffolk Organists' Association (president: William Saunders), to members of the Diocesan Church Music Committee (chairman: The Venerable Ian Morgan, Archdeacon of Suffolk), and in particular to all the correspondents from the 328 parishes who supplied the information upon which this report is based. A number of clergy, churchwardens and musicians also took the trouble to write more fully about their views and experiences, either on the questionnaire or by separate letter. All this additional information and opinion has been very valuable.

SECTION 5: APPENDIX

Parishes which were unable or unwilling to respond to the questionnaire:

Aldeburgh, Bardwell, Barham, Barnby, Barsham, Baylham, Beck Row, Benhall, Blaxhall, Blyford, Boxford, Bramfield, Bramford, Brampton, Brockley, Brome, Bungay, Burgate, Carlton, Cavenham, Chattisham, Chediston, Chillesford, Coddenham, Cowlinge, Cratfield, Crowfield, Culford, Denston, Drinkstone, Edwardstone, Eriswell, Farnham, Felixstowe St Andrew, Felixstowe St Nicholas, Felixstowe SS Peter and Paul, Flempton, Fornham All Saints, Fornham St Martin, Frostenden, Gislingham, Gosbeck, Great Ashfield, Great Blakenham, Great Glemham, Groton, Hadleigh, Halesworth, Hemingstone, Henley, Henstead, Herringswell, Holton St Peter, Honington, Horringer, Icklingham, Iken, Ilkeshall St Andrew, Ipswich St Mary-at-the-Elms, Ipswich St Matthew, Ipswich St Thomas, Kelsale, Lackford, Layham, Leavenheath, Lidgate, Linstead Parva, Little Blakenham, Little Glemham, Little Waldingfield, Mellis, Melton, Mendlesham, Mettingham, Monk Soham, Nayland, Needham Market, Nettlestead, Newton, North Cove, Oakley, Ousden, Palgrave, Polstead, Ringsfield, Saxmundham, Shadingfield, Shelley, Snape, Sotterley, Spexhall, Sproughton, Stansfield, Sternfield, Stoke Ash, Stoke-by-Nayland, Stonham Aspal, Stoven, Stowmarket, Stradishall, Stuston, Sudbourne, Tattlingstone, Thorington, Thorndon, Thornham Magna, Thornham Parva, Thrandeston, Timworth, Trimley St Mary, Troston, Tuddenham St Mary, Ufford, Walpole, Wenhaston, Westhall, Westley, Weston, West Stow, Wetheringsett, Weybread, Whepstead, Whitton, Wickhambrook, Wilby, Wissett, Wissington, Woolpit, Worlingham, Worlingworth, Wortham, Wrentham, Yaxley.

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