

154 There are two solutions to 'balancing the books':

1. Sponsorship from local firms. Grateful thanks to the Dover Harbour Board for their help in this respect. Any other offers???
2. Attendance at our concerts by the good people of Dover. A 'full house' at £6 a head would almost put us 'in the black', leaving a much more manageable deficit to be covered by members' subscriptions and other fund-raising efforts.

So, please note in your diaries, Saturday, 8 April 1995, at 7.30 pm in Dover Town Hall, a performance of J. S. Bach's "St. Matthew Passion". It should be an interesting occasion since it will not be just a 'straight' concert performance. I have asked John Hancorn, a fine bass-baritone, to do a "walkabout Jesus" on the lines of Jonathan Miller's now famous version.

We hope to see all you good Dover Society members there, either in the audience or – if you can sing in tune and read music a little – why not come and sing with us? Rehearsals on Thursday evenings, 7.30–9.30 in River Methodist Church, starting work on the St. Matthew Passion on 5 Jan. If you want any more information give me a ring on 01303-242694.

Michael Foad, *Hon. Conductor, Dover Choral Society*

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## THE ORGAN IN DOVER TOWN HALL

WAY BACK in 1901 the great Dr E. F. Astley, who was the first President of the Dover Choral Union (founded in 1892), gave to the town a magnificent four-manual concert organ to grace the – as then fairly new – Connaught Hall. In the same year H. J. Taylor, the founder-conductor of the Choral Union, was appointed Borough Organist by the Corporation of Dover, and for many years he and his successors, the last one being Reg Adams who resigned the post when he retired from the Duke of York's School and moved to Broadstairs, entertained Dovorians with their organ recitals. I well remember, as one of the Music Scholars at Dover College, turning the pages for John Stainer (grandson of Sir John of "Crucifixion" fame) and Wilfred Holland at their Sunday evening recitals.

It is hard to recall in these days of CD, cassette, Radio 3 and Classic FM that back in 1910 few people would have had the opportunity during their lifetime of hearing what to music lovers nowadays are the well-known symphonies of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Dvorak; and the recitals on the "concert organs" being installed in town and concert halls all over the country gave many people their first experience of such pieces as the slow movement of Dvorak's "New World Symphony".

Built by the famous firm of Hill, Norman & Beard, the organ in the Connaught Hall was indeed a splendid instrument. However time, and the – at times – curiously excessive heat in the Town Hall has taken its toll, and despite the valiant efforts of Colin Jilks, Hill, Norman & Beard's tuner, over the past few years the instrument has become increasingly unusable for concert performance. The nightmare of an organist's life is a "cipher" – a note which continues to sound after you have taken your hands off the keys – and the Town Hall organ was so full of ciphers that even I, as conductor of the Dover Choral Society, refused to use it for our concerts.

Here comes the problem! To put the organ back into reliable playing condition we are looking at some £250,000. It needs nothing less than a complete "rebuild". After consultation with Stephen Yarrow (then organist of St. Mary's Parish Church), John Hurd (Dover Choral Society's accompanist) and Ross Anderson (organist and former conductor of the Choral Society), I prepared a paper for Roger Madge, D.D.C.'s Director of Economic Development, to present to the Charter Trustees and the Dover District Council, the gist of which was:

1. Dover Town Hall needs an organ for ceremonial and concert purposes.
2. The present organ is totally unusable and needs a complete overhaul/rebuild at a cost of some £250,000.
3. It is not realistic (or right) in the present economic climate and with the uncertainties about the impact of the opening of the Channel Tunnel upon the town of Dover, to ask the Council to spend £250,000 on the Town Hall Organ.
4. We suggest that the present pipe organ be put into "cold storage" and, as a *temporary* measure, an electronic organ be installed at a modest price not exceeding £10,000.

I contacted David Woodford of Cathedral Organs in Maidenhead who had supplied the electronic organ for the new Hill Road Baptist Church in Folkestone, and learned that he had just acquired a new demonstration organ, and would be willing to let us have his former demonstration organ, a two-manual Classic 30 Bradford Computing Organ, complete and installed with speakers for £8,500; no tuning costs and a five-year guarantee. (New, the organ would have cost some £12,000 or more.)

Last March, Christine Waterman and Roger Madge arranged for the Charter Trustees and members of the Council to meet David Woodford and myself and to hear the electronic organ played, in situ, in the Town Hall. After many searching questions and considered discussion, they agreed to purchase the electronic organ (it was a bargain not to be missed!) and, as suggested, to put the old pipe organ into "cold storage".

The Bradford Classic 30 was duly installed and, as many of you must have heard, "christened" by the present organist of St. Mary's, Graham Cory, with Lefebure-Wely's "Sortie in E flat" at the two Carnival Prom Concerts last July. As those of you heard who came to our recent Choral Society concert with Ronald Smith, the organ was again in use, in fact it began the concert and – dare one say, for the three big speakers have been installed behind the 'golden' pipes – you might be forgiven for thinking that it was the "real thing", such is the excellent quality of sound from the new instrument and, above all, it stops when you take your hands off the keys!

I would just like to end by expressing my most grateful thanks to Christine Waterman, Roger Madge and the Town Hall staff for their help in ensuring that once again Dover Town Hall has the use of a fine concert organ. Our next Choral Society concert on 26 November does not need an organ part, but we shall certainly be using the organ for the Dover Christian Council's "Come Carolling" on Monday 12 December, so come and hear it for yourselves!

Michael Foad, *Hon. Conductor, Dover Choral Society.*