

# **MEMORIES OF GORDON**

## Memories of Gordon by Michael Bell



I knew of Gordon when I taught music at Stepney Green School in London's East End and through acquaintance with "Articulation in Organ Playing" - which somebody annoyed me intensely by giving a lukewarm review of in the "Musical Times" when the book obviously made such good sense. And the LP, of course (the Henry Smart track quickly worn to a frazzle...and the Wesley...and the Walmisley...). I eventually decided to work for the FRCO diploma alongside the school-teaching and did actually manage the all-important five hours a day practice for several months (approximately - thank you, headmaster). Having learnt my selected pieces I resolved to have a few organ lessons prior to the actual exam. Following a very entertaining pair of recitals at All Hallows by Gordon (most vivid memory: the E flat Fantaisie of Saint-Saens, which I had not previously encountered) I asked him naively if he gave organ lessons...

Lesson One began inauspiciously with having to wait for some ceremony to come to an end in the church - so we pored over the scores in the upper room. How did I envisage registering such and such a passage? asked Gordon. "Oh" I remember replying airily "I thought I'd let the notes speak for themselves." Silly. But a patient and respectful response was nonetheless readily forthcoming. After I had passed my FRCO - not least because Gordon had offered most helpful guidance on the Improvisation question, so that it at least had some musical form to it - it transpired that my pedal technique had progressed little from when it had been memorably diagnosed by Garth Benson at my first lesson at St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol as "pedestrian" some ten years previously. A priceless description (well, about 7/6d a time actually. Gordon used to charge me £2 a time for as long as I felt I wanted). In hindsight he had had the wisdom and judgement not to start re-jigging my pedal 'technique' until after I'd done that RCO exam.

In the next few years I much enjoyed the benefit of his great experience, as I learnt the six Bach Trio Sonatas and made a fair start on the Vierne Symphonies (and a fair amount of Dupré, which had always hitherto caused such aggravation).

Vierne and Gordon impacted again on my life in 1984 when a friend cajoled me into entering for the West of England Organ Festival at Bristol's Colston Hall. That year (my third attempt) Gordon was the adjudicator and I had optimistically picked the finale of Vierne 6 out of the suggested pieces. This meant spending much of the hot summer pedalling away frantically in the organ loft at Dartford in a state of near-Pythonesque *déshabille* trying to master the last three pages. All to little avail as the winner just rattled off the Duruflé *Toccata!* Wow!! Collapse of far-too-stout party...

However, much to my surprise, the good Doctor (as I think he was by then) saw fit to award first prize in the Bach class to the grateful pupil who played it just the way he had

taught him fifteen years earlier. A good friend and organist at a neighbouring church (not to mention former pupil of Gordon's and President of The Organ Club that year to boot) pronounced this "unfair". I ask you, would Gordon be unfair?!

Earlier this year (2007) I was to renew acquaintance with All Hallows for a third Thursday lunchtime recital there, which Jonathan Melling had kindly and generously again invited me to give. This time, instead of including pieces by Gordon, I finished with a GP favourite: William Wolstenholme's (somewhat shameless?) Finale in B flat. I have never heard this played anywhere else than on Tower Hill, nor on any recording. Neither, without Gordon's recitals, would I have encountered the inimitable delights of Hollins so soon. It has taken several decades for the CD world to get round to a disc devoted exclusively to the works of Alfred Hollins. Deft and persuasive as the playing is, it's still not Gordon in his late sixties.

In my twenties I thought almost as ardently as Harvey Grace that Rheinberger was grossly under-rated. I asked Gordon why he didn't include much (any?) Rheinberger in his recitals. The gruff reply was that, *au contraire*, he had played all the Sonatas -indeed, several times over. Of course, he had. He was not, apparently, greatly enamoured of Messiaen or Howells, but this didn't bother me nearly as much. And, in any case, their music would not be at its best in the not-so-resonant acoustic of All Hallows. But the extent of his repertoire was legendarily phenomenal.

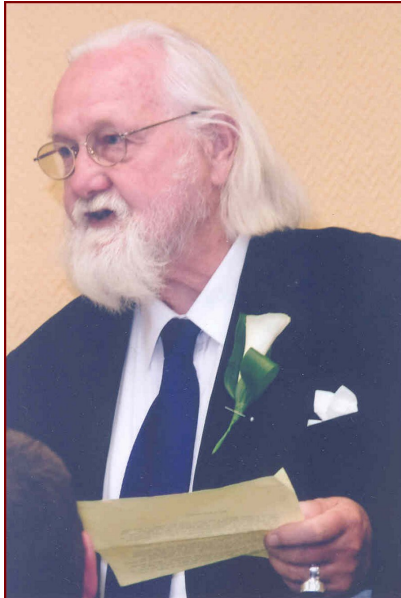
I think a last memory was of Gordon puffing on a fat cigar in the gallery of All Hallows during a break in his tercentenary Bach Marathon in 1985. Something of a pity that that would probably arouse rather more opprobrium now than it did then.

## A Letter from Stanley Burns Fox

Dear Hilary,

Thank you for your letter and CD. I have been living in the past after receiving your parcel.

When I think of the good times with Gordon!



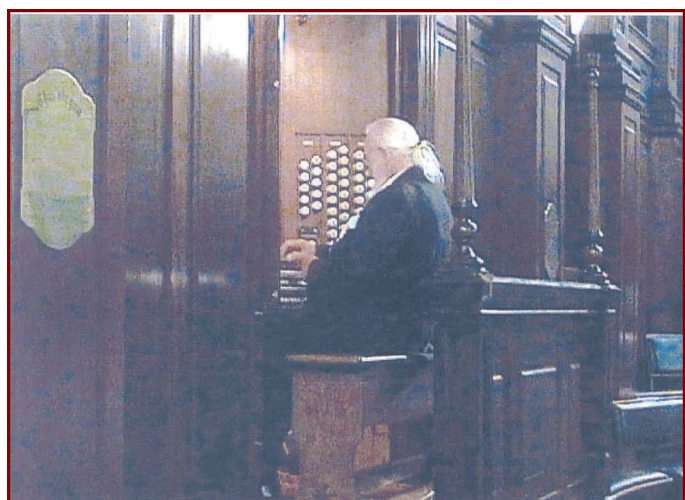
There was an occasion when he was giving me a lesson at the Organ when a man came into All Hallows shouting "**The church is on fire**" and we could see it from the Organ loft on the north isle roof. Aunt Bess, who did the office work, kept everything in boxes, and stored them on the roof under canvas. How it caught fire God knows. So, up the steps Gordon and I go, with the fire extinguisher. Gordon got the window open and put out the fire at that end of the roof. I climbed out and he handed me the extinguisher. He climbed out and finished it off - then back to the organ lesson, as if it was all in a days work.

Another time we travelled all night on a very cold train, with no heating, when he was to give an organ recital at St. Thomas's, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Gordon and Sydney Campbell went to the Royal Festival Hall for an organ recital (Wed 5.55pm) after which they went to a Villiers St. coffee shop and designed the new Organ for Coventry Cathedral - the same builder for the Royal Festival Hall and All Hallows and straight forward.

Gordon was playing a Rheinberger Sonata and I was turning the pages for him and as I enjoyed it so much, I took it away. He said "Did you enjoy this, Stanley?". I said "Very much". He replied "Well give it back to me and I will finish the sonata. There is more than one movement for a sonata." What a laugh!

Stanley Burns Fox - Organist at St. Mary's  
Basilica  
Invercargill  
New Zealand



## Memories of Gordon Phillips by Tony Cooper



Gordon was a very private person, did not talk much about himself and was essentially a loner, although in the best sense of the word. Of course, I never addressed him as Gordon, one just didn't do such things then, and he only once called me Tony.

I had lessons with him between 1963 and 1966, when I was working for my PhD (in Chemistry, actually) at London University, and then from 1968 - 1978 after I had returned to the London area, having been doing post doctoral work in St Andrews and Leiden Universities.

I came to him on the strong recommendation of the Rev Dr. Francis B. Westbrook the eminent Methodist musician, musicologist and composer, whom I knew whilst I was organist at the Methodist Church at East Barnet.

Gordon was a very methodical teacher: he would work through a piece of music virtually note by note on recommending both finger and pedalling. He would leave nothing to chance, but if a composer had written something which was clearly impossible to play, then that was the composer's problem, not the player's and an approximation to what was written had to do.

Of his biography, well, that has yet to be written. All I have ever been able to establish are fragments. I know he attended Nottingham University. I know he was organist at All Saints Ennismore Gardens (now a Russian Orthodox Church), and at St Johns Smith Square. I had always wondered what he did during the war, but now understand (from the Animus editions) that he was in the Civil Defence.

Of what he was doing on the musical scene between the war years and his appointment at All Hallows by the Tower in 1956 I have no idea at all. As a pal of Lloyd Webber Snr I was aware that he worked at the London College of Music.

I knew that he had fallen out with the RCO many years previously, and, like many of us, had an appropriately low opinion of the RSCM.

I know that in his latter years he did become a little eccentric: he took up the recorder and made a big thing about smoking cigars in the organ loft. Having spent a lifetime deploring transcriptions of orchestral works for the organ, he became quite keen on them. He also fell out with his publishers.

But the two things he will always be remembered for are:

1. his skill as a teacher, his meticulous approach to music, and the need for playing on the organ to be artistic and not just a lot of (sometimes not too glorious) noise. However I did feel that in his latter years he has lost some of his precision in this direction and let things go a little.

2. the Tallis to Wesley series. Now, of course, there have been numerous publications of English two-stave music, but when T to W started (in the mid-fifties) this was ground-breaking stuff. At that time it was only possible to publish John Stanley, Boyce, Samuel Wesley etc., as three-stave arrangements, with the left hand confined to playing meaningless chords to give the music some body (as the arrangers thought necessary) and the pedal part playing what was originally intended for the left hand. Attempts to publish the original two-stave editions were only possible in facsimile editions which would appeal to the scholar rather than the ordinary organist. To produce, over a period of twenty years or so about thirty volumes, in a legible, careful (usually, although there were a few misprints) edition, which should still be available fifty years after the inception of this concept was indeed a heroic effect, and for this all organists will be eternally grateful.

Of course he was a composer in his own right, although he kept fairly quiet about this. I "discovered" his delectable "Miniature", his Partita on Urbs beata Jerusalem and the Set of Carol Preludes many years ago, but the rest of his compositions, are still largely a closed book. To last Saturday's recital I brought my son with me, who, like me has a PhD in Chemistry, but unlike me came top in his FRCO examinations (I gave up trying for ARCO many years ago!). He really enjoyed the works of Gordon's which he heard and is now quite keen on adding them to his repertoire. It is partly through what Julian had learnt from me, in terms of repertoire and approach to music, that Gordon's legacy continues.

## Memories of Gordon Phillips by Geoff Davies



As an organ student, I had been brought up on a diet of Stainer and Alcock, both at school and afterwards. Coming to Gordon Phillips was an academic shock and meant having to relearn both manual and pedal technique!

Gordon introduced me to Dohnanyi's essential finger exercises, pieces by Walond, Stanley, etc for manuals, and Fifteen Exercises (based on folk tunes) by Hans Klötz for pedals, and also duets and trios by Hennie Schouten, and slow trio movements by Corelli.

Throughout this difficult period of readjustment, Gordon showed great sensitivity and much encouragement, without appearing too demanding. Each lesson was relaxed, with humour.

My memory recalls that I then embarked on a wider repertoire, playing trios by Rembt, Rinck, and the Art of Part Playing by J.S.Bach (published by Peters). I am sure that I was a pretty poor student, and struggled with major works by Lubeck, Krebs and Böhm, before being encouraged to look at the ARCM syllabus. It had a J.S. Bach Chorale Prelude, which Gordon insisted I wrote out in manuscript, perhaps as an aid to learning.

I also learned César Franck's "Prelude Fugue and Variation" and Peter Hurford's "Dialogue no 1" which I learnt by heart.

I am sure that my lack of discipline and commitment was evident, but Gordon's calm and enthusiastic manner somehow rubbed off on me, and with his patience and understanding I was able to progress.

Gordon spent time sorting out technical problems in Bridge's "Adagio" (piston control and swell box), J.S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A BWV 536 (division of parts in fugue) and Chipp's "Intermezzo" (clear articulation). I enjoyed his considerable help in "Opus 59" and "Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor" by Reger, and also the Second Sonata by Richard Arnell (particularly the Chaconne).

In subsequent years we continued to keep in touch. Married life took me to live in Chelmsford, and on several occasions we attended Morning Eucharist at All Hallows, followed by a glass of sherry and a chat. Moving to Cowplain near Portsmouth, I recall Gordon giving a recital at St. Mary Portsea, and a Master Class on repertoire at All Saints Portsea. About this time I arranged a recital at St. Peter's, Barnstaple, in aid of the organ restoration.

During the 1980s, the West of England Organ Festival (of which I was secretary) was a yearly event, consisting of an organ playing competition and other concerts in the Bristol/Bath area. Gordon was one of the Vice Presidents, and involved in adjudication of the competition, both as panel member and as chairman. His support in drawing up the syllabus, and his expertise in advising was of invaluable help. Each year he generously sponsored a recital award for the winner, at All Hallows, as part of the City of London Festival.

However, his greatest legacy was his writing of the Basic Organ Tutor, which was initially sponsored and produced by the West of England Festival, but has now been delightfully published by Adrian Self of Animus music.

Gordon was quite friendly with Sidney Campbell and they were jointly involved with drawing up the organ specification for Coventry Cathedral, and also the rebuild of the St. George's Chapel, Windsor, organ. A meeting with Cuthbert Harrison was arranged, and so a good relationship was formed, and the organ at the Chapel faithfully restored.

Gordon once said that Max Hinrichsen had a photograph of Max Reger sitting up in bed, dead, with a gin bottle in his hand!



## Memories of Gordon by Michael W. Foster



The noticeboard in the Music School in Cambridge in 1956 announced that organ lessons were to be given in the university by Gordon Phillips, organ tutor at the Royal School of Church Music. Anyone interested should signify this to Peter Tranchell one of the music dons. In due course I had a note from him to say that my first lesson was to be given on the organ in Pembroke College Chapel at 'such and such' time' on 'such and such' date. I duly arrived at the appointed time. I explained to Gordon Phillips that I had been playing the piano from an early age; had achieved a distinction in Grade V piano some years later; but although I continued to learn under various teachers none had prepared me for Grade V Theory. The last of my four different piano teachers was first-rate, so my piano playing had advanced considerably over the years. During my National Service in the Royal Air Force I had had some initial organ lessons from the lady organist at the village Church where I sang in the choir when not on duty and eventually was co-opted to play the hymns for Sunday School services.

The photograph was taken by Wilfred Burley in September 2008 in the collegiate Church of Ottery St Mary

Gordon Phillips decided that it would be best if I started at the beginning, as it were, and I agreed. Accordingly, at his suggestion, I bought *Orne/schute* Volume 1 by Ernst Kaller, published by Schott and Co., and this we worked through during the ensuing months. This book was ideal for me as it used real music from the earliest stages; moreover, in some of the pieces the pedal was liberated from 16 foot pitch. The possibility of 8' or 4' pitch in the feet was a revelation to me and it has remained with me in my organ playing ever since. Two other aspects of Gordon Phillip's tuition have stayed with me over the past fifty years: in every piece I learned he was meticulous over phrasing, and, closely related with it was the subject of articulation in organ playing. His attention to detail was constant but this was always coloured by his skill in encouragement.

Pembroke College Chapel organ was an ideal instrument for Gordon's lessons, for it contained some stops from the 1708 Father Smith organ; and he would suggest a single stop on each manual used. Again I still do this when practising today.

It was during my years of tuition that the organ in All Hallows by the Tower, Barking, was built and Gordon was so thrilled to be its first organist, with no choir to train, but the opportunity to give recitals. I well recall his telling me with great excitement that he was going to have a schalmei 4' reed on the pedals.

In the vacations I continued to have some lessons with Gordon and for these I had to travel from my home to St. Mildred's Church, Addiscombe, where he was allowed to teach, possibly because he had taught the organist of that church. Although it was less impressive than the organ at Pembroke (three manual) it was nevertheless a pleasant sounding two-manual instrument, although I cannot recall its builder.

Thanks to Gordon's encouragement and help I passed Grade V Theory most comfortably in December 1956. I recall asking him in March / April 1956 to recommend a book on the organ and he said without hesitation *The Organ* by W.L. Sumner. I bought this on 30 April 1956 and it has remained in pride of place on my shelves ever since.

I had no lessons with Gordon when I was beset by final degree examinations, though I kept up with him by post at Christmas for many years. However, eventually we drifted apart and I subsequently had lessons from Christopher Dearnley, then the Organist of Salisbury Cathedral and who subsequently became my brother-in-law when his sister and I were wed.

This is not the end of the Gordon Phillips connection, however, for in the 1980's I was asked to be an adjudicator in the West of England Organ Festival in Bath. On one occasion the chief judge was Gordon and we got on so well that the intervening years had seemed not to have existed: he was very thrilled at my career progress which was in so many ways the result of his tuition and encouragement. I cannot praise him sufficiently for my debt to him is so considerable.

### **Some isolated memories, some of which may not be reliable or accurate.**

1. I believe he taught on one whole day in Cambridge and that the usual day was Monday.
2. Re Pedalling: the foot should 'tap' the pedal rather than push it down.
3. He had a very high regard for Ralph Downes (who designed the Festival Hall organ) and who advised Harrisons over tonal aspects of the new instrument at All Hallows.
4. Max Hinrichsen and Gordon were good friends ;and Gordon was the General Editor for the volumes known as *Tallis to Wesley* which Peters and Hinrichsen published at the time when I was his pupil.
5. I have a feeling that Gordon told me that he had once been a student at Nottingham University.
6. When Gordon's *Organ Tutor* first appeared as a private publication in 1983 I was asked to write the foreword to it which I regarded as a great honour.
7. The Incumbent at All Hallows when Gordon was first there was 'Tubby' Clayton of 'Toc H' fame. I recall that he took his little dog into the church when I had one lesson there.
8. Gordon advocated staccato pedalling in hymns as a means of keeping the congregation on the move.
9. When there was a difficult page turn in a piece he advocated learning the end of the page and the start of the next page from memory.

## Memories of Gordon by Peter Hunter



While a student at the London College of Music, I had the great joy and privilege of studying organ with Gordon from 1971 to 1974. I had my lessons at the College for the first year and at All Hallows-by-the Tower for the next two years. I greatly enjoyed playing the wonderful Harrison there, particularly as Gordon had designed the instrument.

Apart from teaching a great deal about technique and interpretation, Gordon helped me to develop my love of English music. While his interest was mainly English organ music, mine lay with choral and instrumental English music. Gordon, of course, basically loathed choirs and singers, finding them a 'nuisance'. We spent many hours discussing English music and the fact that the nation was careless about its great heritage (recording companies such as Chandos and Hyperion were only just starting to truly investigate early twentieth century English music at this point in time). I never could understand how so many men who had devoted their lives to composition and performing could be so readily forgotten. This being the days before 'political correctness', Gordon blamed the BBC for having a German in charge of the Proms and simply referred to the musical establishment as the 'bloody English'!

It was Gordon, therefore, who inspired me to start writing on the neglected 'lesser-known' English composers of the early twentieth century. Such inspiration has taken me into the realms of W. S. Lloyd Webber, W. R. Pasfield, Guy Eldridge, John Creed and larger figures such as Ivor Gurney, Peter Warlock, Gerald Finzi and Robin Milford. It is through the influence of Gordon that I have recently published a book on Milford, revived the Milford Trust and been responsible for a number of Milford CDs and new publications.

My debt to Gordon is enormous because he taught and inspired me so greatly, was a wonderful friend who looked after me when I was worried about life, and constantly encouraged me to think for myself. My affection for him was so great that I shed uncontrollable tears when I was informed that one of my letters was found on his bedside table at the time of his sad death. Gordon will always be alive for me not only through his music but also in the happy memories and influences.

## The House Organ at Cronk y Doonee, Isle of Man by Peter Jones



The Restored House Organ

Few organists understand even the basic workings of the instrument to which they devote years of practice, and I imagine that virtually none have anything but a very vague idea of the work of the organ-builder. Of these very few will realise the amount of record-keeping and general paperwork which besets the hapless practitioner of that noble craft, but it is due to this little-appreciated aspect of the work that I am able to trace 1991 as the year when I first became involved with the house-organ, originally built for Professor Phillips' flat in London, by the firm of John Conyers.

It was on Tuesday, November 5th., when I was in the workshop, cleaning some of the pipe work from the ancient instrument in the Nunnery Chapel (part of a large, private residence just outside the Island's capital, Douglas) that the telephone

rang, and I heard the familiar voice of Hilary Sewell, calling, it seemed, from London. Professor Phillips had recently died, and she was involved in disposing of the contents of his flat. There was a small pipe organ, she said. Would it be possible to renovate it, were it to be brought over to the Isle of Man? I replied that such a thing was possible, of course, but I should have to see it first, before making a final judgment, and there the call ended.

On November 20th. a removal van arrived, and from it came a miscellaneous collection of metal and wooden pipes, a blower, pedal board, keyboards, switchgear and all the other odds and ends of what had once been a pipe organ. Maurice Merrell (from Bishop's) had worked heroic hours to dismantle the instrument in London, in the short time available, and packed it up as best he could. The removal van left, and the highly-trained and experienced staff of the organ works (myself and my teenage tuning assistant) surveyed the components, spread out on the benches. It was not encouraging. The metal pipes (though spotted metal) were a golden brown colour, as were the silver contacts of the stop switches - in fact every part had the same patina (a sticky film of paraffin fumes and cigar smoke may have been to blame.) Much of the metal pipework was damaged. The console, when assembled, wobbled alarmingly, supported as it was on 4 long, thin, screw-in table legs. When the pipes were tried in their rackboards, the larger ones did not fit, and leaned, drunkenly. There was no wind system -the blower being fed directly into the soundboard. The timber from which the pedalboard had been made had warped so badly that one of the pedal keys had been pulled into something more resembling a straight line by the simple expedient of screwing a wooden coat hanger to one of its sides (the bow of the coat hanger

counteracting, to some degree, the curve created by the warping.) These and many other points suggested that Mr. Conyers (not his real name) was less than a perfectionist.

On the bright side, the blower and keyboards were good, and the magnets and console top could also be salvaged. The pipework remained an unknown factor, but was taken on trust. Hilary agreed that the instrument should be saved, as far as possible, and made suitable for installation in the idyllic Manx cottage which was home to herself and her husband, Stanley. In this way the 'voyage into the unknown' (something all too familiar to the organ-builder) began.

The organ consisted of 2 ranks, extended over 2 manuals and pedals, with a direct electric action. It was completely re-designed, but retaining the original specification, based on a Principal made up, mainly, of Gamba pipes, with a few Dulcianas and other odds and ends, and a very old, wooden Stopt Diapason, which looked as if it had come from a chamber organ. The spotted metal pipes were washed and polished, and proved to be very handsome. The wooden pipes were carefully planed to expose a clean surface, and coated in shellac sealer, with the lower ones given chunky, hollowed wooden stoppers (to increase their effective length, as they were too short.)

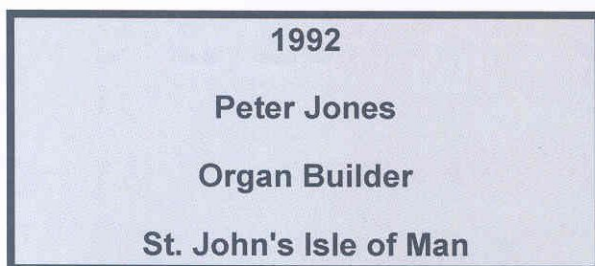
The single windchest had to be replaced, the magnets given new valves and set out in a more sensible pattern, now controlled by new electro-mechanical stop switches, whilst the wind was supplied by the original, excellent, blower, via a new pressure regulator.

The console retains its original top section, and rather fine reverse-colour keys, but the kitchen table legs have been replaced with something more conventional, and there is a new, small-scale, pedal board, provided by a local methodist minister. (Where this came from, I neither knew, nor asked, putting it down to divine intervention. At any rate, it was the perfect size for the job.) A new case, incorporating a new, glass-fronted, swell-box, finished the job, which stands in one corner of the cottage, in a height of under 8'. Switching on causes a discrete fluorescent to light the pipework, rather dramatically, from below.

The finished organ looks and sounds very well, with the Principal being particularly successful. (All pipework is on 1 3/4" pressure.) It was a pleasure to work on this instrument, with its connections to such a well-known figure in the organ world, and it is very pleasing to think that Professor Phillips' organ continues to be used for practice and teaching, in its new home in the beautiful Manx countryside -something of which he would surely have approved.

### **TWO PLAQUES ON THE ORGAN**

#### **Left Side**



#### **Right Side**



## ORGAN SPECIFICATION

<b><u>Swell Organ</u></b>		<b><u>Great Organ</u></b>	
<b>Principal</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Stopped Diapason</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Nason Flute</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Doublette</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Quint</b>	<b>2 2/3</b>
		<b>Octavin</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>Pedal Organ</u></b>		<b><u>Accessory</u></b>	
<b>Harmonic Bass</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Swell Pedal which opens glass-fronted swell box, so affects both manuals and pedals</b>	
<b>Bass Flute</b>	<b>8</b>		
<b>Fifteenth</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Twenty Second</b>	<b>2</b>		



**Peter Jones at Work**

## Memories of Gordon by David King



The invitation to submit some reminiscences of Gordon is irresistible. I was introduced to him in 1964, just after I left school, by his friend Sidney Campbell, who was then organist of St George's Chapel in Windsor. In the early days I had organ lessons at All Hallows and paperwork lessons in Souldern Road, and it was about this time that his pipe organ arrived.

From the paperwork lessons, I have two outstanding memories. One was that he always kindly came to meet me at the bus stop, and the other was the delicious sandwiches made by Poppie Dockrell who also lived there. One year Sidney invited us both to the Knights of the Garter Service in Windsor at which he played Bach's *Fantasia in G*. Over tea, he mischievously asked Gordon 'have you ever put in an extra diddle-

diddle-dee in that?' to which Gordon replied 'oh yes', to which Sidney retorted triumphantly 'well I haven't!' One could sense that the two friends shared the same sense of humour as well as similar interests in music.

In 1970 I became engaged. He was always kind to my wife, but your readers will know that he felt marriage was a distraction from music. I believe that when one pupil became engaged, he gave the happy couple separate presents, just to emphasise the point! In my case, he said 'make quite sure you buy all the organ music you ever want before the wedding, because your wife will have other spending plans afterwards!' So I did buy a lot that year - but I must confess to having bought a lot since too!

From the 1970s, I had just a few lessons each year until his death, trying to play him the main new works that I learned. Having organ lessons over such a long period gives one too many memories to record, and too much scope for misremembering. But my recollection in the 1960s was that he was not overkeen on playing arrangements of orchestral music, and instead explored the complete works of every organ composer he could lay his hands on, at least from the periods that he liked. Later, he played many arrangements, and was disparaging about composers such as Buxtehude whom he considered second rate. I suspect that these changes in interest reflected a constant urge to explore. Having explored the whole of Buxtehude, for example, and not been overwhelmed, it would make sense to explore new territory.

At every lesson he would listen carefully to my amateurish efforts. One very pleasing trait was his way of turning the pages, because he would move the score to keep the page one was actually on, towards the centre of the music desk. He was able to listen to a long movement and then remember at the end exactly which bars needed comment. His comments were invariably helpful and perceptive.

However, I do recollect one lesson when he concentrated a little less than usual: this was the day after the night on which his LP had been recorded, and noise from the passing traffic had meant many takes were needed, so he must have been exhausted.

One ambition I harboured was to play a piece of organ music which he did not know. I managed this only once, towards the end, with Dubois's *Messe de Mariage*, whose opening movement must be one of the finest pieces for the arrival of the bride. At the time I had only learned this movement, and after playing it his comment was 'well get on and learn the other movements!'

On another occasion I played *Menuet Symphonique* by Salomé. Salomé's phrasing marks seemed to contradict all Gordon's principles, so I quipped that this was one piece which I had found hard to learn on account of lessons with him over so many years. 'Rubbish', he said, 'it would sound much better if you phrased it my way rather than Salomé's' and he proceeded to play it very convincingly on that basis.

Like all great teachers, he had many virtues, and I can mention just four here. First, he undoubtedly treated each pupil as a special person with individual needs. Secondly, his enormous repertoire made him an invaluable resource when deciding what to study next. Thirdly, he was so generous. I never had a lesson which did not more than amply fill the allotted time, often more than double, and even on occasions when problems on the Underground resulted in my arriving very late. Fourthly, one stood in awe of the intellect which he applied to problems of interpretation. He once told me that he had picked up a former pupil of George Thalben-Ball, who enjoyed a very high reputation. Gordon said 'why did you switch to me?' to which the pupil replied 'because he tells me what I should do, and you tell me why I should do it.'

On one occasion I had been struggling to work out how to play the ornaments in the *Sarabande* of Bach's G major *Partita* for harpsichord, so I took this along to an organ lesson for advice. I expected him to be as familiar with this as with Bach's organ music, and have an instant reply, but he did not: instead he looked at it intensely for about a minute and then said 'yes these ornaments do seem confusing, but I have no doubt that what Bach wanted was this.' He then played it in a way in which the ornaments suddenly made perfect sense. How apt for someone who, on one occasion, said 'you are the first person I have spoken to today, but Bach has already said a great deal to me.'

Perhaps not many of his pupils ever heard him play badly! Once I asked him 'how is it that some organists can play over a hymn, and one hardly recognises the tune, even though it is well known?' 'You mean like this?' he said, and played two lines of a hymn. 'Yes, what on earth is that?' I asked. 'It's *There is a green hill far away* played badly and unrecognisably!' he replied.

Finally, one cannot omit his skill as a composer. In later years, he told me that he thought he was running -out of ideas. So when someone had asked him to compose a piece, he had declined. 'But if I give you a box of cigars?' came the reply 'what then?' And Gordon said 'do you know, immediately ideas started pouring out of me?' I recalled this at my very last lesson when I myself took him a box of cigars, and asked if he could write out for me some cadenzas in the places in Bach's organ music where he believed there should be cadenzas. Alas, he died before he managed to do so. If anyone has any thoughts from him about these cadenzas, it would be a fitting testimony to add them to future reminiscences.

The music in the photograph is the Stanley voluntaries in Gordon's edition for Peters which he gave me back in 1966!



## Memories of Gordon by Marjie Manley



Our minister saw an advertisement in a musical magazine (I was not told which one), asking for the use of an organ for teaching purposes, Mr. Robbins (the minister at Newington Green) saw this, and offered the use of our organ.

Professor Phillips used to come on a Sunday afternoon with his pupil for a couple of hours. Hilary was one of his pupils, and she would play for us at the evening service sometimes.

Gordon eventually became our organist and stayed until he was ill.

We all missed him, he became a good friend to us, and very often turned up with homemade cakes (which his landlady had baked for him).

I had many an interesting conversation with him over the years. He also had a good sense of humour.

Sometimes other members would ask him questions about music. He would always give generously of his knowledge.

He didn't like to stay too late after the service, but always had a cup of tea and a chat with all of us.

I particularly remember him giving time to Fred Bennison (he was mentally backward) about a particular piece of music (Jerusalem) which Fred liked. He made him feel really special. Fred was more used to people pushing him aside.

Mrs. Eileen Robbins was always there to welcome Gordon when his friend brought him to church.

Gordon was a lovely, kind, and caring gentleman. He will never be forgotten.

## Memories of Gordon by Kathleen Myers



I did not know Gordon at all well, having only met him two or three times, but I had the impression that he was a kindly if rather detached person, very much immersed in his music.

I felt however that he did not suffer fools gladly! When I did some harmony work and made a mistake in one chord he pounced on this although I had corrected it, so I felt that he was letting me know that I was either

very careless or hopeless! He was probably more encouraging to other pupils, and certainly was held in high regard by many.

However, when my young relative went for his first lesson, he looked terribly anxious and we felt sorry for him, but he came out wreathed in smiles - all had gone well with Gordon as teacher.

The photograph is of Kathleen Myers, Hilary Sewell's older sister, with Hilary's husband, Stanley, at Port Erin.

## Memories of Gordon by Godfrey Philcox



This photograph was taken at the great Father Willis, Blenheim Palace, during the summer of 2006.

Those who have met and known Gordon Phillips will surely acknowledge that it has been a wonderful experience.

If you, being a musician and organist, were to be asked - "Have you the Gordon Phillips Experience?" - (apologies to the originator of a well known phrase) - it is one that you will always remember.

He had that pleasant gift of sincere friendliness even at the first meeting. As far as his stature is concerned, in whichever period of his life you would have met him, you would perhaps say that he was an average man in appearance.

In the musical world, in respect of the organ and his organ recitals, his compositions, teaching and editing, he was, without doubt, a Giant among Giants.

I attended many of his recitals in All Hallows church and occasionally had a short conversation with him on the Thursdays. Most times there would be an item in his programme which would be unfamiliar which made his listeners pay more attention to it. For example, it could be one of his own compositions, Pontifical March from the Suite for Organ or S.S. Wesley's Largetto in F sharp minor.

Many years ago, during the 1960's, I was secretary of the Bedford and District Organists Association, when on one occasion Gordon visited Bedford with fellow organists and friends on an "Organ Crawl". I met up with him in St. Peters Church, which is known as the John Bunyan Pilgrim Church, in the centre of the town. The party visited other churches,- the Parish Church and Goldington Parish Church, during that Saturday afternoon. It was a most pleasant summer afternoon with happy conversations.

Some few years later on, the reverse took place. I had arranged for a party of the Bedford and District Organists Association to visit the City of London organs on an "Organ Crawl" to St. Mary at Hill, St. Michaels Cornhill and, of course, All Hallows Berkyngechirche, where we met Gordon on Saturday morning. Everyone was delighted with his music which he played and then, invited anyone who wished, to play the instrument, which many did. Many had conversations with Gordon which they said were most affable and informative. Refreshments were very much appreciated.

During the time when the party arrived and before Gordon played the organ, he spoke about the organ by Harrison and Harrison in some detail and also about the church itself.

The organ was totally destroyed during an air raid in December 1940. He described the small Mirfield organ in the south aisle which did its duty in the Porch Room after the bombing. He described how the church came to be known as the Toc H church. These were letters in the morse army signalling code after the name of Gilbert Talbot who was then Vicar of the church and also a chaplain in the forces. He died in 1915. The spirit of Toc H was kindled by another chaplain, "Tubby" Clayton so named by his figure. He found an empty mansion at Poperinghe, prepared with comforting facilities, as a rest house for troops on the way to and from Ypres during the First World War. Thousands used this house known as Talbot House. There are now many Toc H organisations throughout the world.

On another particular occasion, the Bedford and District Organists Association invited Gordon back to give a recital on the unaltered Hill organ in Turvey Parish Church which was put into the church during the middle of the 19th century. It is a four manual instrument with a bold Tuba on the top keyboard. One of the interesting features is that the Great and Swell stops are on the opposite sides of that which would be seen on the organs of today.

Before the music, I had a conversation with Gordon. We talked about the need for the organists of today to study the words of the hymns, and read the psalms carefully, so that registrations could be properly used to convey their meanings. We discussed the great need for organists to practise hymns and psalms before the Sunday services, well in advance, so that the music was well known. We could have continued the discussion, but it was stopped short by Gordon saying that he must now "Get to work", meaning that he needed plenty of time to practise the music and to get the "feeling" of the organ for his recital in the evening. That was the way he always was, very particular with his music.

It was sometime in the late 1980's when I attended another of his lunchtime recitals. When he had finished, I went upstairs for some refreshments. He came up to me and gave me a copy of his Basic Organ Tutor which he had produced for the Festival Committee of the West of England Festival and which I had previously heard about. I offered to pay for the copy but he would not hear of it, saying that I was a friend and that he hoped that I would find it useful, which I certainly did. I treasure it even now, with its light blue cover. I said that I had found his series of Anthology of Organ Music Volumes excellent practice music, some rather difficult, and his Little School of Pedal Playing which had a photograph of him on the right hand top of the edition published by his friend Max Hinrichsen was good to have. I mentioned that I had an old copy of his Sonata for Organ in three movements, Sonata, Minuet and Rondo, which was published by Oxford University Press for 3'6d. He was pleased and delighted.

Things can happen to you in your life that you could never expect at all. In the copy of the Organists Review for February 2001, I read that the Principal Pipe Organs had just undertaken the complete restoration of the September 1890 'Father' Willis three manual and pedal instrument for St. Martin's Church in Scarborough. As I had arranged to have a holiday in the Autumn, my interest was immediately aroused. I contacted the Vicar of the church, who referred me to the organist of the church, a Mr. Alan Dance by name. He was quite agreeable for me to use the instrument and I contacted him later on with an actual date and time, which was approved.

My holiday was with a coach party of some fifty well known friends. I let it be known at the hotel about the visit to the organ in St. Martin's, which was close by, fortunately. I thought that some of the friends and others might be interested in organ music.

I met the Verger at the church, opened the console doors and prepared myself to play a piece. I had almost finished it when I heard many footsteps and soft conversations. When I looked there were well over fifty people getting into the pews. This was a Thursday morning, and the only day of that week that it rained, preventing the people from walking out somewhere, so they came to hear the music. (Many said afterwards, in the hotel, how remarkable the sound was and I hastened to tell them the virtues of the famous Father Willis organ sound and his wide reputation as a very fine organ builder of renown.) I hurried to put together various music to play, including Bach, Whitlock, Buxtehude, Yes, GP's Gavotte, Hollins and others which I most gratefully enjoyed. I said to myself 'If only I had lived in this Town'.

Then something occurred which surprised me greatly. In a letter after this event sent to Mrs. Hilary Sewell, I described the great pleasure that I had experienced. In her reply she told me that she once lived in Scalby, near to Scarborough, then at West Ayton in the same area, from 1979. Gordon would stay there each year at the family house and gave an annual recital in St. Martin's until 1986. To think that I had given an impromptu recital on the same instrument that Gordon had given recitals over the years, pleased me no end. I do hope that he would have approved of my musical effort.



Photograph taken in Holy Trinity Church, Southport in September 2008. A copy of Novello's J.S.Bach's Organ Works is on the organ bench.

## Memories of Gordon by Geoff Purves



As an amateur musician, my early strengths were as a string player and as such I did not feel the need to study very hard, except to pass the Associated Board theory and practical examinations on the 'cello. It was not until I had completed my National Service in the Royal Air Force that my thoughts turned to really learning the organ. I suppose one incentive was that I did not have a cumbersome, fragile wooden 'cello to carry around - always difficult to do without a motor car!

You will appreciate that in the absence of a good tutor, progress can be slow, and it was not until Dr. Westbrook recommended that I contact Gordon Phillips that things began to look up.

Mr. Phillips seemed to understand my difficulties and so began the long slow journey towards the understanding of music theory and an appreciation of keyboard harmony. Only after many trials and tribulations, did my feeble mind start to grasp the elements of proper structured improvisation.

I had a daytime job in teaching mathematics, at a time when there was (and still is) considerable government interference in teaching. This has been my greatest regret, that those pressures prevented me from making the most of Mr. Phillips' tuition.

I still keep referring to 'The Master's' notes and only wish he was still around to help me - there seem to be few real intuitive tutors around these days - perhaps in the next life?

## **Memories of Gordon Phillips by Mrs. Eileen Robbins**

Gordon played for many services at Newington Green Unitarian Church from 1985 onwards. We had an evening service, so it did not interfere with his morning services. Our service included an organ meditation. The organ was kept in good condition by Mander.

My husband was the Minister, and we lived at Muswell Hill, but he died shortly after Gordon joined us. During 1986 Hilary played every fortnight, but Gordon usually helped her with the music.

I felt that Gordon did not always have enough to eat on a Sunday, so I frequently made tea for him when he arrived from All Hallows. He was easy to cater for, and was happy to be supplied with a boiled egg and bread and butter.

Sometimes I had unpleasant experiences waiting for buses on dark evenings, but whenever possible, Gordon would accompany me.

Most people who were at Newington Green when Gordon was there have died, except me and Marjie Manley, but I remember him very well.

Horace was organist after Gordon, and now it is Mary. Gordon was a wonderful Organist.

Mrs. Eileen Robbins was formerly the Minister's wife at Newington Green Unitarian Church

## Kenneth Shenton's Address at the Memorial Service 12 December 1991



It isn't easy to move from your midst into this pulpit, to become your voice in giving thanks to a musician recently gone from, us. I am sure that at this moment, each and everyone of you will find priority for a phrase or memory most appropriate to the friend we now recall. Over the years I knew Gordon, I moved from pupil to page turner, to occasional deputy, to friend and in recent years to biographer. As I raise my eyes to the organ loft it seems rather unbelievable that neither his familiar features will be seen peering over the edge, nor will the occasional puff of cigar smoke be seen emanating from the organ stool.

Charles Gordon Phillips was born on October 13th .1908 at Slough, the son of a Baptist Minister. When a very young boy the family moved to West Bridgford at Nottingham. He had piano lessons as a young boy but the turning point for him came when he heard the distinguished French Organist Louis Vierne give a recital at the Albert Hall, Nottingham. He played among other pieces the Widor Toccata and this so fired Gordon Phillips imagination that he began to take organ lessons with the Nottingham City Organist, Bernard Johnson.

Gordon's enthusiasm for a musical career was not shared by his family for he was expected to follow his father into the church. The compromise was that he should train as a teacher and with this in mind he entered Nottingham University. The force of St. Cecilia however was too strong and eventually in 1934 he entered the Royal College of Music.

This, he found less than inspiring for he was always a person who knew his own mind. While at the college, he became Assistant Organist at St John's, Smith Square, then for three years Organist and Director of Music at All Saints Church, Knightsbridge. When war broke out in 1939, he became a Training Officer in the Civil Defence. After the war he became a Copyist, saving enough money to enable him to devote his time to giving organ recitals when and wherever he could. For a time he was Tutor at the Royal School of Church Music with his good friend Dr Sydney Campbell but in 1956 came the invitation to become Organist here at All Hallows. The job offered three main attractions - no choir, weekly organ recitals plus the opportunity to design and rebuild the organ.

The new organ stands in the West Gallery in a similar position to that of the old organ destroyed by enemy bombing in 1940. Built by Harrison and Harrison and completed in 1957 it has three manuals, 44 speaking stops and was designed with a view to doing justice to the whole of the organ repertoire something it has done with great panache.

The Autumn of 1957 saw the beginning of the Thursday lunch-time organ recitals. At the time of his death in October Gordon Phillips had given three thousand two hundred and sixty-eight recitals since the series began. In 1983 he played the organ works of J. S. Bach in an eight hour marathon to raise money for this beautiful church. A



prodigious feat of intellect as well as endurance.

Throughout the world, the name of Gordon Phillips is synonymous with editions of early English organ music. For this rebirth of music tastefully edited, we owe him a great deal for he set a standard all later editions had to follow. For many years he visited music publisher after publisher before Max Hinrichsen eventually gave in and agreed to publish the Tallis To Wesley Series. So successful has this and other anthologies been that they have somewhat obscured his merits as one of the most original composers of his generation.

Beginning in 1935 with 'Lullaby' for organ his compositions reach a high point with the sadly neglected Organ Sonata of 1939. Encompassed in these four years were some highly original works, all now sadly neglected. After the second world war the compositions diminished as he sought to re-establish his solo career but in recent years the wheel of creativity had come full circle with a wide range of compositions flowing from his pen.

In 1962, Gordon joined the London College of Music renewing his friendship with his friend from student days at the R.C.M. Dr. W. S. Lloyd Webber. For over 20 years he was Professor of Organ and Harpsichord at the college, examined for the external examinations and was a member of the Corporation. In recent years he was much in demand as a private teacher. His achievements are legend but for me, one aspect of his skills has never been given the credit it deserves. This is his erudition, his skill with the pen.

If you buy any of his musical editions, you also get a masterly preface, so much information contained in so few words. In later years he contributed reviews to music magazines including Musical Opinion. A man of strong opinions, plus a great sense of humour. When the two are combined, the results are devastating as many modern composers have found to their cost. He once ended one review by saying that 'if only the composer had taken a cup of hot milk before going to bed this new apology for an organ composition might never have happened'.

How are we to sum up this most delightful character an outstanding musician, a mass of intellect, a generous man, a connoisseur of cigars, a scholar, a composer, editor, a man of sound common sense, a man of strong views and yet a man with a delightful sense of humour and a zest for life.

His life was music and perhaps his words should end this address. When interviewed some years ago for a music magazine, the questioner asked him 'You in fact live music' to which Gordon replied 'I feel that to be a really good organist, one works ten hours a day and thinks music for the other fourteen'. The organ is the hardest of all instruments. It requires sheer hard work and intellect.

Sheer hard work and intellect - that phrase sums up the dear friend whose passing leaves a gap in not only our personal lives but in the musical world as well. Gordon has gone from us, but I feel sure that his work and example will remain forever part of our musical heritage.

## MEMORIES OF GORDON PHILLIPS - by Gerald Taylor



My earliest memories go back to 1958 when I was a student at the Royal College of Music. The fine Harrison organ at All Hallows by the Tower had been installed just the year before, designed by Gordon Phillips in collaboration with Cuthbert Harrison. Some of us from college would dash over to Tower Hill immediately after Richard Latham's Choir Training for Organists weekly session on Thursdays.

Gordon presented two different recital programmes, one at 12:15 followed by another at 1:15. He had the knack of unearthing long-forgotten gems well worthy of revival. His enthusiasm for the instrument and its repertoire was infectious and instructive.

My own organ professor was Ralph Downes (1904 - 1993), very much a contemporary of Gordon. It is notable that Gordon was one of the select, chosen few invited to give a R. F. H. organ recital in the inaugural series along with George Thalben-Ball,

Harold Darke and Susi Jeans.

Many years later I was in charge of music at Cottesmore School in West Sussex. I discovered that Gordon was acquainted with the Reverend Terry Fuller, Vicar of St. Mary's, Southgate in Crawley New Town. There was a Toc H connection here with All Hallows.

St Mary's is a spacious, lofty, modern building with a remarkable acoustic. The organ is a superb Father Willis dating from 1880 and originally installed in a nursing home in Bognor Regis. It has survived without any major alteration to playing action or to pipework. It has a superlative tone. Alan Thurlow regards it as one of the most important organs in the diocese.

Gordon loved this organ, especially the Clarinet stop, and he came down to give an annual recital. I always took along a large party of children from the school. Without exception these were happy, memorable occasions. Being able to sit around the console added further to our enjoyment. The playing was superb.



Gerald Taylor at South Norwood Methodist Church in 1966 where he sometimes practised when at the R.C.M.

Photograph courtesy of Kenneth F. Day



Gerald Taylor at Westminster Abbey in 1968.

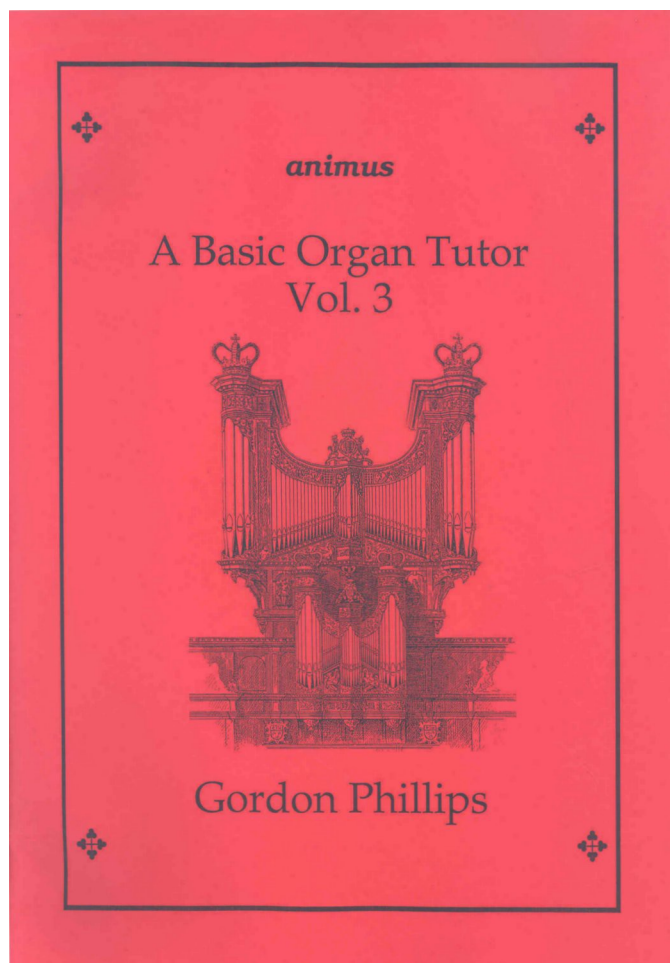
Photograph courtesy of Kenneth F. Day

### Reference to Publications

The **Tallis to Wesley** series (Hinrichsen/Peters edition) of around 1956 to 1962 did so much to promote early English organ music from the original sources, mostly on two staves, at a time when it had been more fashionable to amplify these works on to three staves with much L.H. filling in and thickening of the texture. Gordon was senior editor of this fine series.

**Articulation in Organ Playing** (Hinrichsen/Peters 1961) reinforced Gordon's own superlative technique. He paid such attention to detail. His playing had such integrity, clarity and personality.

How good that Animus Music Publishing have issued Gordon's **A Basic Organ Tutor**. It is packed full with common sense.



## Memories of Gordon Phillips by John Turner



I first came across the name, Gordon Phillips, the day I took my 'A' Level music exam, in the middle of last century. After the exam, I went to a music shop in Birmingham, which stocked oceans of organ music. There I came across a slim book in the green cover of Peters edition entitled "Tallis to Wesley. Voluntaries by Maurice Greene". It was a revelation on how to play Eighteenth Century English organ music, with pertinent notes of organs of the period, and suggestions of how to register the pieces, all laid out in a concise and logical manner.

One of the churches in my home-town of Wolverhampton contains a Renatus-Harris organ, therefore I could put Gordon's helpful notes to a practical test. What a change it was to play these Voluntaries as the composer wrote them, rather than arrangements with fanciful titles!

When I went to London to study at Trinity College of Music, organ students were able (as they are today) to hear fine organists. On Monday Harold Darke, Wednesday Margaret Cobb, Thursday Gordon Phillips, but Gordon's recitals were special for two reasons:

- a) The great variety and very large repertoire that he commanded and played. This was the period when all Romantic organ music tended to be regarded as "stodge". However, one heard Rheinberger, Reger, Guilmant, and Merkel in his recitals.
- b) The fine organ at All Hallows which he designed could cope with all periods of organ music. Felix Aprahamian said it was the finest concert organ in the City. "Bubble and Squeak" Vaughan Williams is reputed to have said!

Personally, and as teacher, Gordon had a kindly disposition and gave freely of his time to help pupils, not only verbally but practically. He was always demonstrating at the keyboard how to play this or that.

I became a pupil of his, and with advancing years (though he always wanted to emulate Widor, and live to a great old age) I often played recitals for him at All Hallows. He would comment on the programme, and make helpful suggestions, and once he came to the recital himself.

He continued to compose organ music, which is now published by Animus, showing a composer who understood how to write effectively for the organ. His Organ Tutor shows how well he understood the problems of organ playing for both beginners and those of riper years.

From his organ loft at All Hallows Gordon shone a great light. His "Tallis to Wesley" series still flourishes. He set a new standard in music editing, taken for granted these days, but fifty years ago it was different.

As Organist, Musician and friend, I am proud to say that I was one of his pupils. I remember him with respect and much affection.

## Memories of Gordon Phillips by Peter Williams



It was Friday morning, the end of the first week of term in the autumn of 1970. I arrived at the London College of Music Concert Hall in Great Marlborough Street for my first organ lesson. On the dot of 10.00 am the door opened and Professor Phillips welcomed me into the hall. Not a particularly tall gentleman, I thought, but immaculately dressed like an Edwardian gentleman in a tweed suit with waistcoat, tie to match and his pocket watch!

As we walked across the hall I was greeted with the comment – ‘You’re the fifth Peter Williams I have taught!’ From that day on every Friday during term time for three years, was my organ lesson with the ‘master’.

Looking back nearly 40 years I have vivid memories of my association with Gordon. We got on very well. He was always interested in what we were doing as students and above all he encouraged hard work and never accepted second best. We quite often did very little playing during the half-hour lesson because there seemed so much to talk about. His wealth of experience, his knowledge and his opinions on many musical topics have remained with me every since. I have referred to him on many occasions in lesson times with private pupils, school pupils in class and adults in rehearsals.

Anyone who got to know him knew that he had definite opinions about music. He would not follow the crowd and he was prepared to make a stand for what he believed in. He knew what was going on in the world but it was his wholehearted commitment to the organ, it’s repertoire and performance that has stood him apart from so many others. He certainly helped to mould my musical thinking and I am sure that would apply to so many others.

I entered College with barely Grade 6 organ – it was my second study. During my time with Gordon I achieved a good mark at Grade 8 and the Associate Diploma.

In preparation for organ examinations he would complain about the number of pedal scales being unnecessary because there were few incidences where these crop up in actual music. He altered the title of the Bach Fugue as in his opinion it was published incorrectly on my music. He had an opinion about examiners and how they should not use the sustaining pedal on the piano when giving aural tests. He was not happy that Bach’s Preludes and Fugues (and any other baroque music come to that) were included in the piano syllabus, as Bach did not write for that instrument.

Gordon was a true perfectionist and a purist. He did not entertain playing on the organ transcriptions of music written for other instruments and voices. I well remember him saying to a prospective bride and groom, that he wouldn’t play ‘Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring’ as he did not have a choir and he couldn’t sing all the vocal parts of the chorale at the same time as playing the organ part! Playing transcriptions on the organ of music written for other instruments or voices is so much more in fashion today.

Those whose responsibility it is to provide music at weddings and funerals will appreciate how difficult it is to do a good job with some of the requests. There are other examples of transcriptions, for instance, of keyboard compositions transcribed for full

orchestra e.g. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor. I am sure there are quite a number of us that are somewhat dubious about their success in performance. Perhaps Gordon was right to stick to his guns and say 'no' when transcriptions could possibly be on the cards.

Gordon was very amenable with his students when annotating the music for fingering, pedalling and the like. He always asked what colour I would like him to write in.

Gordon always had interesting comments to make about choirs, singers in general and conductors in particular. He had very little time for the vocal instrument and was quite musically critical of the way singers, in general, had being trained. He did not like the human voice and I always felt that Gordon thought that God had let the side down when He 'made' vocal chords. He had no choir at his church and declined church appointments, which involved the training of choirs.

I look back with a smile when I think of the comments he made about pianists playing the organ. He much preferred starting a student from scratch on the organ and did not agree with the grade 5 piano rule, some teachers upheld, before they would teach a pupil. He also had little time for conductors and choirmasters whom he considered were quite often on their own ego trip wielding power over others. I fall into the category of piano to organist and being a fairly successful conductor.

Gordon did not believe in wasting time. He seemed to have the power to restrict his nightly sleep to a few hours. When he was on his own, he would work on a score or undertake research while eating and he had the use of a clavichord at home so he could practise late at night without disturbing others. As far as I am aware he did not drive. He would use public transport and again would study a score working out fingering etc. while travelling.

As a composer for the organ, Gordon wrote compositions that showed an in depth understanding of the instrument and what was possible and not possible to play. He never wrote or performed music that was 'showy' and that would detract the listener from the 'real' music. His research, editing of early music, his organ tutor book and other writings have added considerably to the organ and the organist world for which we will always be indebted.

## HILARY'S STORY (written solely at Jenny's request)



Photograph of Hilary Sewell  
courtesy of Morrison Photos Ltd, Isle of Man

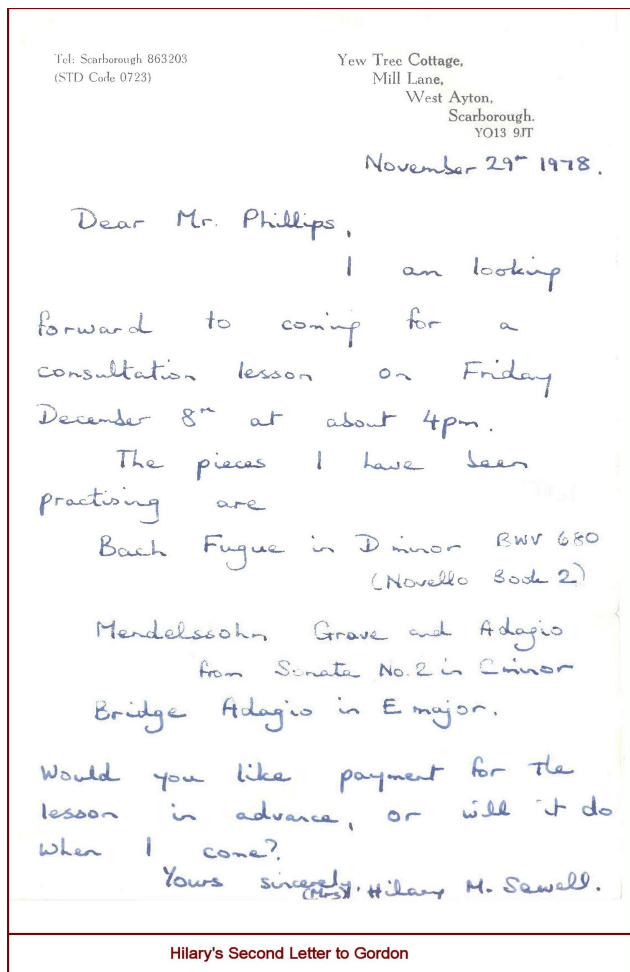
### 1978

My first meeting with Gordon Phillips was on December 8th 1978. I was living near Scarborough and having organ lessons with Mr. Arthur Costain at Scarborough Parish Church. Having successfully taken Grade 8, and less successfully the R.C.O. exam, I was advised to take a London College diploma, ALCM. As this necessitated going to London and playing set pieces on the organ at the college, Mr Costain advised that I should take a lesson on that organ. He knew of Gordon Phillips, who was the Organ Professor and, although I had not heard the name before, I wrote to him. In due course I received a reply. The lesson was to be on Friday, December 8th at 4pm, a fortnight before the exam. I booked a day return ticket for London.

An older violinist friend, hearing that I was going to London, begged me to do her the favour of collecting her violin bow from an instrument repairer in the same area of London. She insisted that I take her wooden violin case to protect the bow and so I found myself, with much embarrassment, struggling through the London crowds carrying a violin case, my music case and a handbag.

I arrived at the LCM almost paralysed with nervousness. I was ushered into the large hall where I was greeted by a gentleman in a smart grey suit with a watch chain and several pens in his waistcoat pocket. Gordon looked slightly older than I had imagined. He suggested that I put the violin case on a stack of chairs, take off my coat, get out my music and sit on the organ bench.

In spite of lots of practice back home and Gordon pulling out the stops beforehand I could hardly play a note right. I struggled through a page and a half and then stopped in despair. Seeing that I was nearly in tears, Gordon held my hand, talked to me kindly and suggested that I start again. I was determined to do better and with much help from Gordon we got the first piece into reasonable shape and went on to the others. By the end of the lesson I knew how I should be playing



all the pieces and Gordon reassured me that I had plenty of time to practise in the two weeks before the exam.



The Organ at the LCM 1978

The rush hour was now in full swing and I was not sure how to get back to Kings Cross. I was Gordon's last student for the day and, realising my nervousness, he offered to accompany me to the station. I was glad, because he walked purposefully and there was no need to keep stopping to look at the street map. The Underground trains were packed and I would have been scared on my own, but it seemed quite natural to Gordon. When we reached Kings Cross it was too early for my York train so we went into the station buffet for cups of tea and tomato sandwiches.

The exam was on the 21st and I went down to London the night before and stayed at a Methodist hostel in Camberwell. The hostel had its own chapel

with an electronic organ so I was able to practise. I took the exam without undue anxiety. Gordon called in at the college on his way back from Thursday recitals at All Hallows to see how I got on and took my phone number so that we could discuss the result.

A few days later Gordon telephoned me with the result before it arrived in the post. I had achieved such a high mark with the aid of just one lesson from him that I decided to stop having tuition from Mr. Costain and instead have occasional lessons from Gordon.

## 1979

My next lesson in London was at All Hallows during the February half term. It was a different organ, there were visitors looking round the church, I had a new and eminent teacher and my nervousness returned. The lesson went badly. Although Gordon was very patient and explained what I could do to improve the pieces, the simple instructions did not get through to my fingers and I felt terrible.

After enquiring the time of my train to York, Gordon said that we had better go to his home for tea as there was a direct tube line from All Hallows to his nearest station and then from his station to Kings Cross. I was not expecting this, but let myself be guided by a superior mind. Once away from the church and the teacher student relationship, we could talk more easily and I found the journey interesting.

When we arrived at Gordon's flat I was introduced to the friend who acted as his housekeeper and Gordon requested tea and sandwiches. I was ushered into a large ground floor front room which contained a grand piano, a pipe organ and a clavichord, a large settee and bookshelves which reached the ceiling. This room was used for some of Gordon's teaching. An elderly lady, Miss Matthews, came for piano lessons and he had other students for composition, harmony, counterpoint – any branch of music that they needed help with. I was rather surprised when he said that he rarely used the



organ. Months later I realised that this was because it was in such a poor state of repair and very few notes would play. The kind lady soon brought in the tea and then it was time for me to depart on the Piccadilly Line to Kings Cross.

After that I went to London for organ lessons about every six weeks and practised as much as I could and I made significant improvement. The nervousness vanished as my musical ability increased. Gordon was becoming more of a friend than a teacher, but always encouraging me to work harder, which I was inspired to do.

In June 1979 my niece in Kent was getting married and my husband Stanley and I were invited to the wedding on Saturday 9th. I wanted Stanley to see All Hallows and to meet Gordon, so it was arranged that we should attend the Sunday morning service. Gordon took us out for lunch at the Tower Hotel which was a totally new and enjoyable experience for both of us.



Hilary and Stanley's Home 1973 - 1988

That week, on Saturday 16th, I was taking a Grade 8 treble recorder exam in Scarborough and Gordon agreed to accompany me on the piano. This also gave him the opportunity to pay us a short visit and see our home.

The next month Gordon visited us again because he was booked to give an organ recital on the Father Willis organ at St. Martin's Church in Scarborough. By this time the friendship between the three of us was progressing really well. We seemed to have so much in common, so many

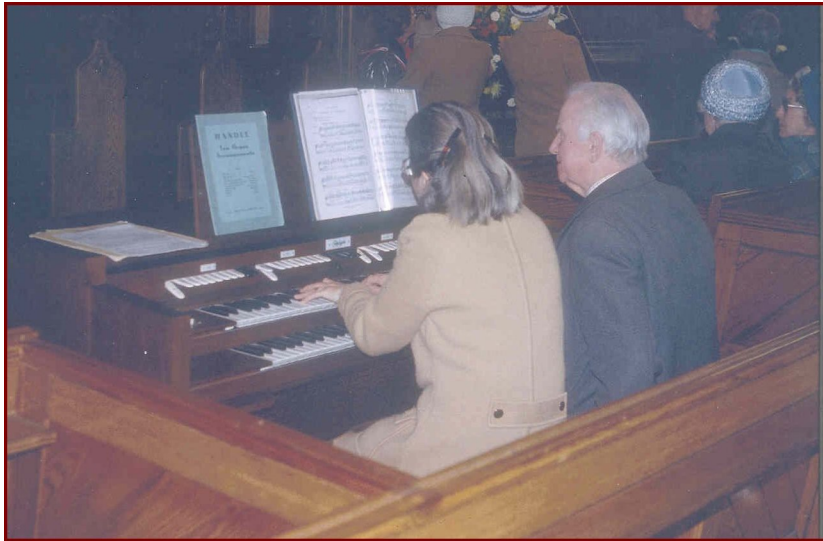
topics of conversation, that Stanley and I decided to visit London again on the way back from seeing my step-son in Bedford. We went to the Thursday recital where I had progressed to being turner-over.

## 1980

By 1980 I was needing to practise even more assiduously, to continue my progress as an organist. Gordon had a spare pedal board stored at a friend's house in Tooting and said that I could use it. Stanley thought that it would fit into the back of our hatch back Lada car so on February 20th we set out for Tooting. We managed to find the house and Gordon was waiting to help manoeuvre the pedal board into the back of the car.

Before making our way back to Scarborough we had to go to Essex to pick up Florence, an old friend of Stanley's, who was coming to stay with us for a short holiday. After a good night, the three of us prepared to begin the long journey from Essex to Yorkshire. Florence sat in the passenger seat, Stanley drove, and I shared the back of the car with the pedal board. It was not at all comfortable and I ended up lying across the pedals, comforting myself with the thought of the advantages of being able to practise pedalling. Eventually the long journey ended and we were safely home. I would never wish to do

another journey trying to sleep on a wooden pedal board. Fortunately, it has not been necessary!



A Lesson with Gordon at South Cliff Methodist Church Scarborough in 1980

In June of 1980 Gordon gave a recital at All Souls, Langham Place, and asked me to turn over the music. We also arranged for him to give a recital at St. Martin's in Scarborough in July and another, in August, at South Cliff Methodist, where I was organist. This was an electronic organ and Gordon would not normally agree to do recitals on electronic instruments. However, I was rather favoured by this time and he agreed. I had publicised the St. Martin's recital as

well as I could and it was very well attended. The organist was surprised to see the people flocking in. On these occasions Gordon stayed with us and I have memories of the three of us sitting on the Parker-Knoll settee doing the Daily Telegraph crossword after our midday meal. I always had to sit in the middle.

It amazed me how hard Gordon worked with his organ playing at Christmas and I noticed that he usually spent most of the festive season alone, so we invited him to spend Christmas with us in Scarborough. He could not miss the Christmas morning service at All Hallows and there were no trains or buses on Christmas Day so Stanley, who always enjoyed driving, arranged to collect him. Gordon had no central heating in his flat, only oil heaters which frequently needed refilling and cleaning so it was going to be a big change for him to be looked after for nine days in a warm house. Stanley set off with rugs and blankets in the car so that he could rest when necessary and on the morning of Christmas Day, parked near All Hallows, attended the service and then set out for the journey north with Gordon.

The two gentlemen arrived late afternoon in good health and spirits. I was beginning to be concerned that I had two men in my life, but the holiday passed off well, perhaps helped by the fact that my widowed mother was also with us for part of the time. She and Gordon got on well together.

The last entry in Gordon's diary of 1980 was "Tuesday 23rd. Mr.Purves 10.00" which was a lesson given to a gentleman from Luton, but looking back to December 8th. the diary notes "Anniversary" which was two years since I had gone for my first lesson with him at the L.C.M. At the back of his diary he had the numbers of two public telephones near our house, and if I rang him from either of them he would straight away ring me back, which meant that the calls could be more frequent than if I rang from home.

## 1981

Gordon's 1981 diary records "In event of illness please notify Mrs. Hilary Sewell 0723-863203" and his first music entry was January 4th. (Sunday) "Meditation d'Evry " Canzona Wolstenholme and Monday 5th. "L.C.M. commences".

During 1981 our friendship deepened. I went to stay with Gordon at his flat so that I could help him with a recital that he was to give in February at Christ's Hospital. Then, in order to spend more time with Stanley, I went with him, in May, to Lundy Island where we could not be contacted by phone. Then, to make it right with Gordon, I arranged a holiday, in August, for the three of us at Clubland, Walworth, for one week.

An unfortunate incident happened at my Scarborough church in July 1981, when some of the choir fell out with me. This gave Gordon the necessary encouragement to persuade me to apply for a post as organist in or near London so that I could stay with him every weekend and improve my organ playing and importance as church organist. It was agreed that if it worked well, Stanley would consider selling our Scarborough house and buying one wherever I was organist.



Tibbetts, Lundy Island

However, neither of us really liked London but preferred the country.

*Mrs. Hilary M. Sewell has studied with me during the last three years. She is a very well-equipped <sup>all round</sup> musician. Apart from being an excellent organist, pianist & singer she has the additional skills of guitar & recorder playing. She is an experienced accompanist & teacher, with a wide knowledge of music Church music.*

*Mrs. Sewell has a pleasant & cooperative personality together with a most conscientious approach to her work. I recommend her to you in <sup>the</sup> full confidence that she would carry out her required duties to your complete satisfaction.*

*I remain,*

*Yrs. faithfully,*

Draft of Testimonial Written for me by Gordon

I decided to continue as organist at the Scarborough church until I had another post to go to. There were a number of vacancies in the Church Times and I looked for a church with a three manual pipe organ so that I could improve my playing and practise for future diplomas. In October I went for interviews in Caterham and Yiewsley, Middlesex. The latter had the requisite three manual organ and a sympathetic vicar. I was to take up duties there in January 1982. The services were Sunday morning Eucharist at 11am, preceded by choir practice at about 10am, and

Evensong at 6.30pm. This meant that I could spend the whole afternoon practising. Stanley would take me to the station on a Friday night, or sometimes Saturday morning, and collect me from an early morning train on Monday. During the weekend we would keep in touch by telephone.

That Christmas, Gordon and my mother were going to stay with us, but my mother decided that two nights would be sufficient, so she came on the 25th and stayed until the 27th and Gordon came on the 27th and returned on January 2nd. He never liked returning to London and the lonely life, but this year was going to be better for him as I should be with him most weekends.

## 1982

I started early in the year as official organist at St. Matthews, Yiewsley, and altogether did forty five weekends. The salary was £20 per month which soon rose to £30 and then £35. Gordon contributed to my train and underground fares and paid for all our food so I was not losing money on the venture. I was also teaching music at home, Monday to Thursday, with twenty seven pupils, so I was quite well off.

In April, Stanley came with me to Yiewsley and we stayed with a church lady, so that we could look for a property in the area. This did not particularly suit Gordon, as it would remove the necessity of me staying with him at weekends. Neither did it suit Stanley, when he discovered how much more expensive the property was compared to rural Yorkshire, and unless we could have moved miles from Yiewsley, the surrounding country was not particularly attractive.

That weekend we replaced the threadbare carpet in Gordon's flat with a good second hand one and discussed accommodation for the following week, when Gordon was booked to give another recital and a lecture at St. Martin's in Scarborough. Of course it was agreed willingly that he would stay with us, as he had done the previous year when he was on an examining tour for the London College of Music and had to spend days in York and Hull.

We gave up the idea of moving to Yiewsley and I did not mind the train journeys as I could read, work or sleep. The trains were very comfortable, if not always on time. That unfortunately changed in July, as there was a rail strike, and in order to fulfil my organ playing commitments at St. Matthews, I had to travel by coach, which meant a much longer journey, and it was impossible to write. At that time I was working through exam papers which Gordon would mark for me, so needed to write the answers.

Gordon came up to Scarborough again in July to give an organ recital at Bridlington Priory and again in August to give a recital at St. Martins. This time I travelled back with him on the coach ready for my Sunday at Yiewsley.

Feeling that I needed more fresh air, and time alone with Stanley, we went for an enjoyable camping holiday to a friend's field at Pickles Hill in the Bronte country and arranged a further holiday on Lundy Island from October 11th to the 27th. Gordon expected us to be back at home on the 27th, and as it was L.C.M.'s half term, arranged to give an organ lesson in Filey, where normally I would have taken him. The student was the lady for whom he wrote "A Quiet Processional". We could not get back from Lundy in time and, rather than cancel the lesson, he went by train. This cost him far more than the fee he received for the lesson



Our Holiday Home  
in Lundy Island

and he was displeased. This was the first bit of friction between us, but understandable, and that year he did not come to stay with us in Scarborough at Christmas, as Christmas Day was on a Saturday and he had services on December 24th., 25th. and 26th. However, Stanley came down by car to Yiewsley and after the Christmas services were over we all thee travelled to Scarborough.

That autumn my mother was becoming unwell due to severe arthritis and, as I lived nearer to her than my sisters and brother, I started going to her house on a Monday and staying overnight. Stanley began to find our changed lifestyle difficult. He left South Cliff Church Choir, possibly because he was frequently being questioned as to my whereabouts.

## 1983

The constant travelling was getting wearisome, so I stopped going to Yiewsley every week. I went almost every fortnight, sometimes more frequently, so during 1983 I stayed with Gordon and played at St. Matthews on twenty nine weekends. During the days in Scarborough I now had to fit in thirty two pupils, which was tiring in itself and I hardly had a day off. Then in May, Stanley, my mother and I had a week's holiday in the Isle of Man in an area with the delightful name of Fairy Cottage, near Laxey. We discovered that the Manx Music Festival was taking place in Douglas and that there was one class for organists. I made a mental note to return the following year and enter the competition.



Hilary Outside Gordon's Flat

In August Gordon was booked to give another recital in Scarborough and he stayed with us for almost a week. He and I returned to London together on the Friday. Gordon was playing for a wedding at All Hallows on the Saturday, so I went to Yiewsley to practise ready for the Sunday. The church was close to the main road, but surrounded by a garden with trees and shrubs and the Vicarage was at the top of the garden. I do not recall if the Vicar and his family were away on holiday at the time, but I do remember that there was a rough looking teenage boy hanging about in the garden. I felt a little uneasy going up to the church by myself. I had a key and once inside the church could lock myself in, but the church, being old, had no toilets and one had to use the public ones in the town. Not far away was a park and bowling green with seats around it and bushes for shelter, planted behind the seats, so sometimes on a Sunday, if I had not taken sandwiches, and wanted some warm food, I would purchase a box of Kentucky fried chicken and French fries and eat my lunch in the park.

In the summer I was sitting eating my food and some boys hiding in the bushes started throwing stones at me. Although inwardly scared, I moved away unhurriedly. It did put me off spending time in Yiewsley.

Then there was another incident when I was practising the organ with the outer door unlocked because it was nearly time for Evensong. A man entered, and with tales of a Nun who said prayers for him while he knelt at her feet, wanted me to do the same. Fortunately the bell ringer arrived and the man made a speedy exit, but this was enough

to make me decide to leave my post at Yiewsley and for Gordon to agree. Then the Vicar told me he had accepted a new appointment at Hayes, and when he went there would be no-one in the Vicarage. He and his wife had been very kind, and every few weeks invited me for Sunday dinner.

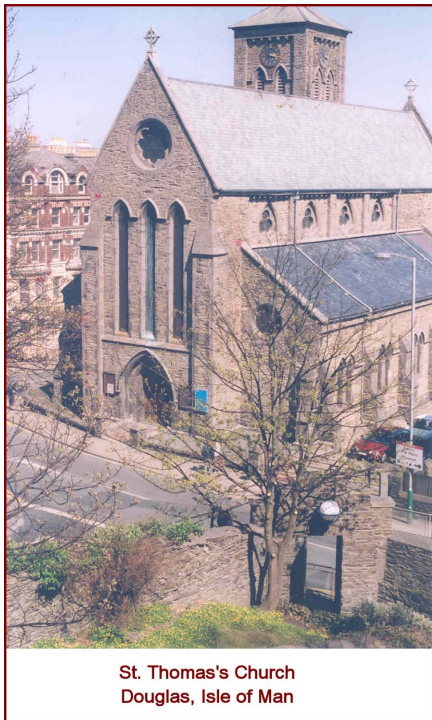
The year had been a good one for Gordon and I had the privileged but onerous task of turning over the music for him at the Bach Marathon that he did on November 26th.

The month before, I had been over to the Isle of Man, as the organ post at St Thomas's was being advertised and I was distinctly interested. The organ was better than at Yiewsley and the surrounding area much more congenial. I needed to practise more and Stanley and I bought a Viscount electronic organ.

That year, Gordon's Basic Organ Tutor, the work of a lifetime's experience, was brought out by the West of England Organ Festival committee. It was the last year that Gordon came to stay at Christmas time.

## 1984

1984 saw no improvement in the relationship for any of us. I spent nineteen weekends in London, the journeys were tiring, and I started to suffer from a stress related illness that lasted for years. I kept wondering where I could live that would combine the countryside and a good organ. At the same time I did not want to upset Gordon, who wanted me with him as often as possible. Although there was no longer the post at Yiewsley, he found me other churches where I could go as relief organist and be paid for playing at services, St. Mary's Cable Street, Holy Trinity Rotherhithe, St. Silas Pentonville, and once St. Mary's Kensington.



St. Thomas's Church  
Douglas, Isle of Man

Then my mother, at the age of eighty six, had a hip operation and needed my help with bathing.

The weekends that I spent at home, I became a fairly regular organist at East Ayton Anglican Church. The people were friendly and it was within walking distance of home, but the organ there was one manual and no pedals, so it was uninspiring musically.

Not having seen Gordon much, I went to London for the New Year weekend and on the Sunday went with him to All Hallows and sat in the organ loft during the service.

Going to live in the Isle of Man was still at the forefront of my mind and the Vicar of St. Thomas's was keen for me to go, so in January, Stanley and I went to Douglas for a fortnight and stayed in a bedsitter. I was temporary organist, which meant that I had the keys and could go into the church at any time to practise on the wonderful three manual Hill organ. We returned in

May for the Manx Music Festival. Gordon had helped me with the pieces for the organ solo class and I had practised really hard. The less friendly relationship between us was totally forgotten during the lessons. He was happy to have a dedicated student and my

chief interest was learning to play the organ. I won the Organ Solo Class without difficulty, to the surprise of the local organists. The trophy was unique, being a wooden console with silver pipes and I was also awarded the Brittain Cup for sight reading. We came back from our holiday in better health and spirits and Gordon was pleased too, with the success of his student.

Gordon was strongly opposed to me going to live in the Isle of Man, so for a while I continued the weekends in London, playing at St. Mary's Cable Street on Sundays. We would travel together by Underground to Tower Hill then I would walk to St. Mary's and then come back to All Hallows in the afternoon to report on progress.

He had stayed with us in Scarborough in April when he was examining for the L.C.M. in Hull, East Yorkshire. We had frequent conversations about the Isle of Man, where he thought I would be completely cut off, so on July 15th he ordered a period of 'No Communication' so that I should know what it felt like. He was due to come to Scarborough for a recital at St. Martin's on July 31st, but would stay with my mother. and the previous weekend of the 22nd. when I should have been at Cable Street, I was going to stay with



Hilary's Mother's House

a church person instead of with him. Unexpectedly on July 21st. my dear mother died and although Gordon stayed in her house rather than with us the 'No Communication' did not last.

By this time Stanley could not stand any more and wanted to see no more of Gordon. I was told that I must choose between them. I could not break my marriage vows, nor disregard the previous eleven years of commitment, and the most sensible thing seemed to be, to go off on my own to the Isle of Man for a trial period as an organist. So I spent September in the Isle of Man, finding the organ playing very therapeutic and enjoyable.

When I got back, Stanley was happier. When I told him that I felt the need to keep in touch with the teacher who had taught me so much, he did not oppose the prospect of my going on occasional visits to London. So I did go to visit Gordon and to play the organ at Cable Street four more times and I also stayed with him on the weekend that he was doing his Call a Tune programme at All Hallows.

It was settled that Stanley and I would spend a week in the Isle of Man at Christmas, so that I could play for the Christmas services at St.Thomas's. I was glad to get away from Scarborough and mother's empty house. So 1984 ended.

## 1985

Gordon was very reluctant to take a holiday from organ playing, but he did have an enforced rest in January 1985 when he developed heart trouble. I cancelled my music pupils and went to look after him, staying over a fortnight until he was much better. He let it be known that I was his deputy at All Hallows and I played on three Sundays and, much to my delight, the two Thursday recitals. By the end of January Gordon was teaching again, Timothy Hawkins at 3pm and Carolyn Riddick at 4pm, but he must have been worried about his illness because in his diary on the page "In case of accident please inform", in his most beautiful writing, he had put my name, address and phone number.

Between January and November I was with him in London more than twenty times, still playing at St. Mary's, Cable Street, but also at St. Saviour's, Warwick Avenue, and Holy Trinity, Rotherhithe, but in December I was ill with back trouble, and had to rest for a week. I also started at evening services at Newington Green Unitarian Church. Gordon often went there with me, and on Sundays when I was in Scarborough he would play at Newington Green. The services always included an organ meditation. I was glad of his company, especially on dark winter evenings, as we had to wait at a draughty bus stop, in an area of few English people.

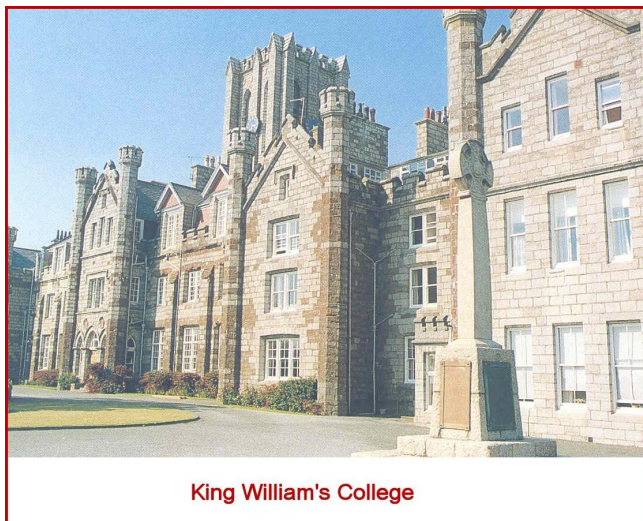
Although the whole year was unsettling, with no official post as organist, and so much travelling, friendship was restored between Gordon and myself to such an extent that I thought I could persuade him to leave London and come to live in the Isle of Man if I moved there. He stayed with us in August, when he came for the St Martin's recital on the 27th, the first time for a year, but did not come for Christmas, though I was in London the weekend of December 22nd, playing for services at Rotherhithe and Newington Green.

That summer I had attended an Organ Course at Leeds University, where I became friendly with a Chinese organist, Tin-Shi Tam, and we invited her to come and stay at Christmas.

## 1986

In 1986, still thinking of the benefits that living in the Isle of Man would bring, especially an excellent organ to play, I made a determined effort to make Gordon visit the island, using the contacts I had made while I was there for short periods. The Mananan Music Festival director invited Gordon to be the visiting organist for the festival. This involved playing for one recital, and playing for a Sunday morning Festival service which would be broadcast on the BBC. His expenses and a fee would be paid and three nights hotel accommodation. He would not fly,

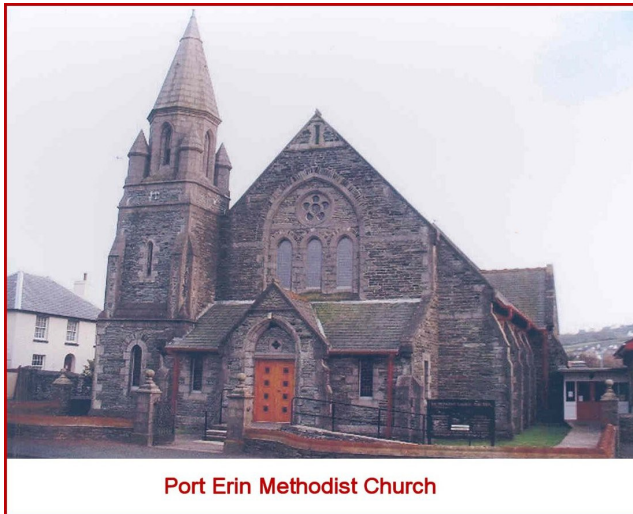
having had a bad experience years before when he flew to France, but agreed to go by boat if I accompanied him. It all worked very well. I met him in Lancaster on the Friday, where we could take the boat train to Heysham and cross to Douglas. A very nice



King William's College



gentleman with a luxurious car met us to take us to Port Erin where Gordon stayed in a hotel (since closed) on the corner of Bay View Road and the Promenade.



Port Erin Methodist Church

I stayed in B and B accommodation on the Church Road, quite near. There was a large audience for his recital at King William's College on the Saturday afternoon, and at the service on Sunday morning at Port Erin Methodist Church, which was broadcast live. That evening, the St Thomas' Vicar met us to show Gordon the church and the organ. Gordon played beautiful extemporisations while the Vicar questioned me about how soon I could go to be their organist. We returned to England on the Monday and said goodbye at Lancaster railway station.

The weekend was successful in that he had liked the Isle of Man, and the organs, but was adamant that he did not want me to go to live there.

He came up again in September for the St Martin's recital, which was becoming an annual event, but not at Christmas, because Stanley and I went to the Isle of Man so that I could play for the Christmas services. We had also been there in September, when we began looking at property.

That year I spent twenty-three weekends with Gordon in London, as evening organist at Newington Green Unitarian, and on Sunday mornings at Rotherhithe. The weekends I stayed at home. I used to play at East Ayton where it was the one manual organ. It was unsettling because of my ambition to become St Thomas's organist.

## 1987

The next year became even worse. I only went fourteen times, and sometimes he would hardly speak to me, although I attempted to find a more satisfactory church to play at in Scarborough. When the Unitarian church had a vacancy I applied, and was accepted to begin in May, but they needed someone every Sunday. This meant that I had to stop the weekend visits to London and go Tuesday to Thursday instead. This was not so easy, because it interrupted Gordon's teaching commitments. By then, Manx house agents were sending us details of properties, so we needed to get a valuation on our own and put it on the market. This annoyed Gordon more than ever, but he still came in July for the St Martin's recital. Soon after we saw a small notice in a Manx newspaper of an ideal property in the country with 'panoramic views', which I liked at first sight, though Stanley was less keen. However, it was considerably less than the asking price of our Scarborough cottage, and we agreed to purchase it in August. Not having sold our Scarborough house, we had no furniture, but there were carpets and curtains, and the vendors left us their electric cooker and some crockery, so we came and camped with our sleeping bags and then went back to Scarborough.



Sunnyside, Cronk y Doonee

The dissension with Gordon was making both him and me physically ill. To show the superiority of London over the Isle of Man, he arranged for me to give a recital at All Hallows in November, and I asked the Scarborough Unitarian to ask him to give a recital there, which took place in December. (We could always converse when there was music to discuss). However, in October, Stanley had spent three weeks alone in his new property in the Isle of Man, and had got really attached to it and the surroundings. He had worked hard tidying up the garden and the garage (which

had been a thatched cottage) and had got to know people. He was looking forward to living there permanently once we had sold the Scarborough property. We both went to the Isle of Man for Christmas to play for the services and the St Thomas's Vicar brought us a bed, a chest of drawers, a clothes drier and some other things. As there was no outside light then, Stanley put a lighted candle in the porch which looked very homely and welcoming. So 1987 ended.

## 1988

In March 1988, Gordon was ill with a virus infection, so I came to London to help (no-one else was allowed in the house as a rule) and found him in bed. However, he insisted on getting up to attend the Easter Vestry meeting at All Hallows, but the next day he stayed in bed while I tidied up and shopped, and did washing and filled paraffin heaters, so that he could keep going. As long as I went once a fortnight, he thought he could manage, and we avoided much conversation about going to live in the Isle of Man.

Gordon came to Scarborough to stay with us on Easter Sunday until the following Wednesday, as he was giving a recital at the Unitarian Church on Easter Monday. This was successful and well attended, and on the Tuesday and Wednesday mornings he taught two of my adult music pupils. The rest of the time, apart from walks, we played duets and did ear tests.

My visits to London were further reduced to one night (Wednesday) only, returning to Scarborough on Thursday afternoon, after turning the pages at the All Hallows recital. Gordon had a long standing engagement to go to his friend Maurice's on Thursday evenings.

We had a terrible upset when our Scarborough house was sold and I could start with definite arrangements for leaving. Gordon told me not to go to the Isle of Man and that, if I did, I was no longer a friend, just an acquaintance, as he would never go there to see me. After all the teaching that I had benefited from because of his kindness, I was sad. I knew what a lonely life it was for him, in poor surroundings, but understood that he did not want to uproot himself after sixty years of London.

However, Stanley and I moved, and I told Gordon that I would keep in touch by telephone. I 'phoned All Hallows to speak to him on our last day in England. He did not sound very pleased, but did not forbid future calls. The next day I rang again in the evening when he was at home, and we had an improved conversation. I told him that I could go once a fortnight, Wednesday to Friday.

On the first Wednesday I wondered whether he would even unlock the door when I arrived, but he did, saying without any enthusiasm 'Come in'. After he'd given me a lecture, we were able to start making a meal. We then played recorder duets, and harmony was restored. The next night he went to his friend Maurice's alone, although I had been at All Hallows for the day helping with his recital. At least the evening alone in the flat meant that I could defrost the refrigerator. That week I made a concession to stay until Saturday morning, because he had an organ adult student on the Friday daytime. This meant that we had more time for the duets, and the Latin (he had bought two books so we could learn it together and confer). On the Saturday morning I left early, with relief that there had been no frightful arguments. I was pleased to be going home to a better place and a more peaceful existence.

The next visit was July 11th to 14th. His pocket diary for that day is blank except for one letter 'H'. On that occasion he met me off the train at Euston, and on the Thursday when I left he came with me to Euston.

Unfortunately the next fortnightly visit had to be put off because I had to play for a concert in St. Thomas's. Gordon was most annoyed and said that I was not to come for a month and that there was to be no contact till then.

Stanley suggested that Gordon should come and live in the Isle of Man, which gave me the reason to break the latest 'no contact' rule and write a letter. I followed this up with a telephone call, when surprisingly he broke his own 'no contact' rule and said that he was going to fight to keep me.



My Cousin Beryl

The next awkwardness came in August when Gordon had been booked to do the St Martin's recital on the 16th. Previously, he would have stayed with us, so rather than let him cancel the recital, I asked a cousin who lived near Scarborough and who had already met Gordon, if he and I could stay at her house for two nights. The property was two cottages made into one, which meant that she had four bedrooms and a box room. Although she reluctantly agreed, she made it abundantly clear that she disapproved of the whole relationship. However, she was kind and allowed me to drive her van, so that I could transport Gordon to St Martin's for practice and recital and also for an organ lesson for the Filey lady.

After that I was able to go to London almost every fortnight, as promised, and by the end of August instead of just writing 'H' on the day, he extended it to 'Hilary'. In between we kept in touch by 'phone'. The week of Thursday, October 13th was his 80th Birthday and the 3000th recital which was recorded by Revd. Philip Blewitt. The evening was celebrated first at Maurice's flat, and then at a restaurant on Edgware Road.

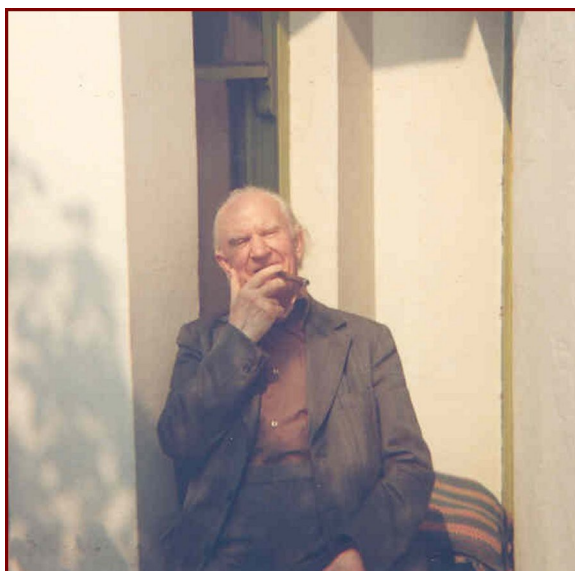
The fortnightly visits continued until the end of that year, but Gordon still refused to visit the Isle of Man.

## 1989

1989 began similarly to the previous year. Gordon wrote recorder duets for us to play when I visited him, and we continued with the Latin. As I was getting more work in the Isle of Man I could not always drop things and go to London. Altogether that year there were fifteen visits. He still played at a summer recital in Scarborough, but stayed three nights with the organist of the church, and he also gave a recital at Filey, going there and back in the day, and at Lincoln.

I continued to telephone frequently, but he was often tired and sometimes bad tempered, usually because he wasn't feeling well. In October when I would have gone to see him, he said he did not want me to, as he was practising for recitals in Cornwall. He began to talk about dying, making me feel if I did not go to see him it would be too late. We spoke on the 'phone on October 28th when again he said he didn't want me to visit him. He said that it would not matter if we never saw each other again, and that I had never done what he wanted me to. I knew from past experience and intuition that he did not really mean all this, so I decided to go at Half Term and see for myself. Stanley was reasonably happy in his Manx home, finding plenty to do and his eyesight and finger dexterity were excellent for his age, so he could enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles, and making meals and driving. I had no worries about leaving him alone in the house for a few days, and so on Monday 30th October he drove me down to the bus stop, and I set off, in some trepidation, for London.

Later that day I telephoned from Hammersmith station and heard that Gordon had visited the doctor, who said that his heart was out of control and that he needed different tablets. When I said where I was and asked if I might come, he sounded absolutely delighted, so I raced along to the flat, to make him meals and do the washing, and see to the paraffin heaters and go to the Bank. He got me to play for the Tuesday



Gordon Outside his Flat

Break service so that he could stay in bed. There was so much in the flat that needed doing, though he repeatedly said that he wanted me there for company, not housework, but I tried to do both. By the end of Thursday he was a lot better, so I could leave in a happier state of mind, and we looked forward to the next meeting in a fortnight, which worked well again. This time he met me at Barons Court station (much nearer for him than going up to Euston), and though he looked thinner, he was better than when I last saw him. There were two more visits in December, and although Gordon was cross at times, it did not reach total disagreement. In addition to the recorder duets, we sometimes played Chess, which he always won easily, although he gave me five preliminary moves. At the Christmas visit he showed me his cards, and told me whom they were from. So that year ended in relative calm.

Some people might be wondering if there would have been other friends calling to see him if I had stayed away. I think not. He was a very private person and extremely independent and would not tolerate any interference. If on rare occasions he accepted a lift home, he would make sure that the driver stopped at the end of the road, so that he could walk alone the short distance to his flat. Even when his close friend Maurice

brought him home after late suppers, it was usually to the front gate, and not into the flat, which was down some steps from the gate. Inside it was rather gloomy. The dining room had no window, and the years of cigar smoke and paraffin heaters had darkened the walls. No decorating had been done for years. Also, it was so full of books and music that it was remarkable that he knew where everything was.

## 1990

One of the main drawbacks to me being in the Isle of Man, in Gordon's opinion, was that there would be storms in the winter and I should not be able to travel. In 1990 these gloomy prophecies were fulfilled, when I went to London in January and found Gordon in bed exhausted. He had walked home from the tube station and got soaked. On the Thursday I was due to travel home by boat, but on reaching Lancaster found that the boat was cancelled, so I returned to London for that night and, in spite of a rough crossing, got home safely on Friday.

On February 26th I was due to go again, but the boat was cancelled because of severe storms, so I bought a 'plane ticket. Gordon had an irrational fear of air travel, so when I let him know how I intended travelling, he was terribly worried for my safety. He said 'Don't fly' so vehemently, that I cancelled the ticket. I was a bit afraid too, although I knew that he was not well and needed someone. The next day was Ash Wednesday, so I 'phoned again. He was lying in bed, with no milk and no bread. I went to play for the evening service and got there early. When the Vicar arrived and asked politely 'How are you?' he realised my distress when I said 'He's got no bread'. The kind Vicar sent me downstairs to use the church telephone and speak to Gordon, and again after the service. Stanley was agreeable to my going, so, with no more communication with Gordon, on the Thursday morning I telephoned the airport to book a 2.30pm flight to Heathrow. This was a quick journey compared with boat and train. I rang Gordon from Hammersmith to say that I was there, and would bring the milk, and do other shopping when I arrived. It was the turning point in the relationship. He was so pleased and relieved that I had come, and amazed that I had dared to make the journey by plane, just to see him, when he'd been so antagonistic. For the rest of his life we never fell out. The earlier relationship was resumed with deeper respect and mutual consideration. It was like sunshine after the rain. He even began to ponder how he could get to the Isle of Man, but his health had deteriorated and the journey was so off putting that it never worked out. Also in July and August I was incapacitated with arthritis in my shoulder and neck and had to attend physiotherapy sessions three days a week.

On my next visit March 20th to 23rd Gordon had a concert on Wednesday 21st, so he said that I could do the Thursday recitals at All Hallows and John Turner turned over the pages of music. Gordon was not so well that year, but he had a good doctor in Hammersmith and began going to the surgery. Previously he had never admitted that he did not feel well. Stanley was also becoming less active, which resulted in my feeling anxiety for each of them, and being ill, though not seriously, myself. Gordon was a little better in the summer months and played recitals at Filey, Lincoln and Hull, but not St Martin's, Scarborough, but my work in the Isle of Man prevented me from going.

Some days Gordon's feelings of illness were brought on by his not having sufficient to eat. During half term week in October I was due to visit him while Stanley visited his son and daughter-in-law in Bedford. When I arrived in the afternoon Gordon seemed ill and cross, but he had had no breakfast.

Gordon was still a brilliant teacher, and two of the married ladies in the Isle of Man, who came to me for lessons, were persuaded to have lessons with him when they visited London, which they thoroughly appreciated.

During the week beginning Sunday December 2nd I was going again midweek. John Turner, who knew and sympathised with my plan to get Gordon to leave London, and come to the Isle of Man, but was aware of his objections, rang up in some excitement. Gordon had asked him 'How can I get to the Isle of Man?' but it never materialised.

## 1991

Very severe gales and snow disrupted travel between the island and England in 1991 so I never got over to London until early in February, when I went by plane. My diary records, 'Nothing has changed, except the carpet and floors look even worse'. It was extremely cold there and Gordon stayed in bed, to rest and keep warm, and although I lighted all the oil stoves it was only just warm enough. But hot meals were always welcome and I was usually able to prepare some food for the next few days. Gordon had become accustomed to cooking frozen meals.

There was snow in London so we travelled to All Hallows by taxi for the recitals on February 7th. Gordon was getting used to using taxis to save the walk to Barons Court or Hammersmith underground stations. The staff at All Hallows looked after him, especially Norman Sutton, which relieved my mind a little when I had to return to the Isle of Man. I was 'phoning practically every day to find out how he was.

The next visit was Easter week when Gordon seemed exhausted with everything. On the Saturday he stayed in bed until 6pm, then got up and taught me improvisation in a minor key. We both went to All Hallows on Sunday by Underground, and had lunch in the office room. Gordon's playing at the service was marvellous.

In the afternoon he left me to practise, and Canon Peter Delaney (Vicar) walked in, thinking it was Gordon playing. We had a very useful conversation about Gordon's health.

That day we took a taxi back to the flat. On the Monday I was really sorry to be leaving as there were several things we should have talked about. There was also a good deal more cleaning and tidying that I could have done, had there been more time.

The next visit was May for the Thursday recitals, and then again June 4th to 6th. Gordon was very breathless, but still carrying on with his two recitals. That month for the first time for quite a while he had written 'Hilary' in his diary for the 4th.

During the summer I was receiving treatment for a stress-related illness, which prevented me going at all in July, but on August 6th I went by plane, a much easier but more expensive journey than by boat and train. I found Gordon slightly better, and using the new secondhand spin dryer which I had acquired in June from a shop in Shepherds Bush. It had been delivered by the man pushing it along Blythe Road, but it worked well.

Being summer weather, the moths had been active, and I had to mend a hole in Gordon's trousers. His organ shoes had a broken shoelace and I had the job of threading a fresh lace into the shoe, which was made more difficult because the lace

had no metal tags at the ends. However, I got it done, and he was able to wear the shoes again and fasten them.

I was returning by plane from Heathrow on that Thursday afternoon, when he had an organ student, but it had been a good visit. I had been to the Building Society for him, and done shopping, and prepared some food for the next day. Little did I think that was the last time I was to see him alive.

As the autumn approached his health deteriorated. He became breathless much of the time and a cough developed. I telephoned every day. Although I was not well myself, I arranged that I would go at October half-term for several days. His student John Turner would come once or twice, so that we could give the flat a thorough cleaning to make it more comfortable for Gordon.

He had a good doctor in Hammersmith whom he saw at the surgery on October 8th. The doctor prescribed a spray for his cough.

At the same time Stanley was not well with a stiff and painful shoulder.

Sunday, October 13th was Gordon's 83rd birthday and he went to All Hallows to play for the service. That night he sounded pretty exhausted, but he told me that he had managed to get to church. On Monday evening he was coughing so much that we just had a short conversation, but on Tuesday he could talk a little more. He had been by taxi to All Hallows for the Tuesday Break and back home by taxi.

On Wednesday there was no reply when I rang so I was not altogether surprised when I had a call from the church. He had not arrived for recitals on the Thursday, and so the Curate and Simon had gone to the flat. The police were called and a lady police officer broke in. Gordon was found lying comfortably in bed, presumably having died in his sleep, peacefully.

That evening the Manx police called at our house, having had a message from Hammersmith Police. As Gordon's body had been taken to the mortuary there was no need for me to go to London until the Monday. My sister travelled with me and we called first at Hammersmith Police Station before going on to the flat. Once the Undertaker had brought Gordon's body to the Chapel of Rest which was within walking distance, I could go to see him. He looked beautiful, younger than when I last saw him, and peaceful.

Maurice Merrell was particularly helpful and we went together to the Town Hall to collect the Death Certificate, and kept in close contact until after the funeral on October 28th. My sister had returned home on the previous Friday, having done excellent work cleaning and making the flat habitable again.

Gordon had fulfilled his ambition to keep working and playing the organ until his death, and the number of people who attended his funeral and later his Memorial Service on December 12th at 12 noon showed in what great respect he was held. Many sent in



Maurice Merrell with Hilary

written tributes to the Vicar, Canon Peter Delaney, and I had many 'phone calls and letters expressing their appreciation.

I have never had such a good music teacher, not only in music alone, but in giving me confidence when playing for other people. Also he helped me to earn a living with music, and to become almost as dedicated to the church organ as he was. When that is done to the glory of God and to lead a congregation in worship, it gives one a feeling of humility, but also profound satisfaction, and one works with God to achieve that result. Gordon showed me how to practise to get the music as perfect as possible technically, before being ready to play for a service. I shall never forget his tireless singing of whatever Anglican chants I had to play the next day.

He gave me more independence than I had before, although that led me to go against his wishes when I moved to the Isle of Man. That has proved to be the best move of my life, which he would agree with, if he is able to look down and see me now.

I am so glad that the disappointment that he felt when he could not get all his compositions published, is now ended, and the music has been published by Animus.

One must admire all the work that Gordon did without help. He had no separate office to work in, he wrote everything out by hand, he had no secretary, he had no days off, no-one to make his meals, and yet he was the greatest musician of his day, and his name is a household word among organists. His teaching lives on among those of us who were privileged to have lessons from him.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Hilary M. Sewell.



Photographs of Hilary and Stanley with Gordon taken at their home, Yew Tree Cottage, in West Ayton