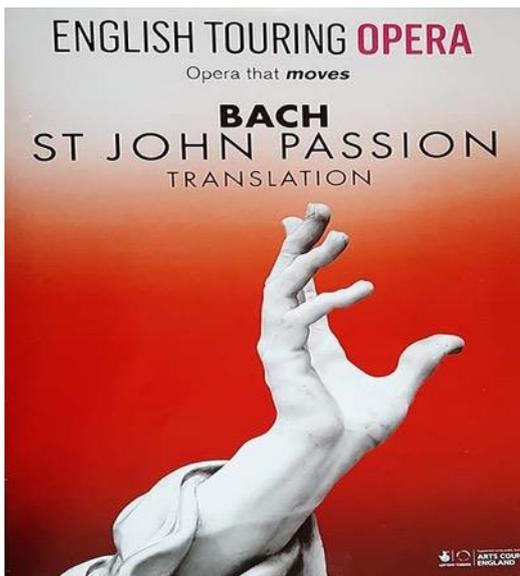




J. S. Bach St. John Passion

by **Graham Moon** (who sang bass in the massed choir)

with photos by **Terry Givens**



On the evening of Tuesday 12th April, [Blackburn Chamber Choir](#), [Blackburn Cathedral Choristers](#) and [Blackburn Music Society](#) together with [English Touring Opera](#), gave **J.S. Bach's 'St John Passion'**, in the Cathedral. The work was performed in German, without an interval and in the most seamless manner, bringing an especially dramatic urgency to the Passion narrative.

All three choirs had been prepared by Blackburn Cathedral Director of Music, **John Robinson**, and (I feel sure that this applies to the Choristers and BMS as well), we in the Blackburn Chamber Choir had been most thoroughly prepared for our performance by John to whom we are greatly indebted.

We were accompanied by ETO's orchestra: *The Old Street Band*, playing on string instruments with gut strings and shorter Baroque bows and at a pitch of A=415 – a semitone below modern pitch and thought to be the pitch standard used in Bach's time.



The orchestra included: violins; viola d'amore; cello; bass; chamber organ and **theorbo** (a bass lute with many extra very long strings). Baroque wood flutes, and oboes doubling oboes d'amore and oboes da caccia (literally: 'oboes of the hunt,' curved like hunting horns), and Baroque bassoon completed the ensemble, and what a magnificent and beautifully warm sound they all made

The solo singers were: **Luci Briginshaw; Martha Jones; Richard Dowling; Thomas Elwin; Jerome Knox and Bradley Travis** and we were conducted by **Jonathan Peter Kenny**.

Director, James Conway addressed us all before the afternoon's rehearsal, exhorting us to watch the other performers at all times when we were not singing, thus demonstrating our total involvement in the Passion narrative.



There were other innovations in the performance. **The Evangelist's narration was shared between all six solo singers who performed the solo arias which act as meditations and reflections upon the Passion story. They moved around the Cathedral during their performance** and also when not singing and there were some dramatic interactions between them. In addition **the players, save for practical reasons, cello, bass, theorbo and organ, stood to play at times** or they left their places to listen to a particular aria from another position in the building when not playing.

The most dramatic and moving instance of this came during the final Chorale when, as the singing became louder and louder, more and more of the players stood while playing their instruments. Mr Kenny, the conductor, also moved around the nave, at times, even leaving some arias uncondacted, to be coordinated between the obligato instruments and singer.



The Chorales – the Lutheran hymns in the '*St John Passion*', which would have been sung by the **congregation** in Bach's time, and which are the voices of the people singing their responses to the Passion narrative, were translated from German into English by various translators, including: Dr John Sentamu; Canon Giles Fraser; John McCarthy and Dr Rowan Williams.





Photo showing **TV screens** which displayed helpful English translations of the sung German narration.

Soloists and orchestra were magnificent, and the **Cathedral Choristers**, in particular, were most moving in the Chorale they sang alone: *'In His last hour wondering, Christ recalls His mother'*. The opening and closing choruses, sung by **Blackburn Chamber Choir** and **Blackburn Music Society** combined, were equally affecting, in particular the latter: *'Ruht wohl'* – 'Rest well', with the six soloists singing the two episodes, beginning: *'Das Grab'* – 'The grave... ..no further suffering encloses.' A near-capacity audience were rapt in their attention throughout and, judging by their applause at the conclusion of the evening, were most appreciative of and moved by all that they had experienced in this performance of one of J.S. Bach's greatest works. **Graham Moon**

Bach's handwritten orchestral introduction to the opening chorus of the St. John Passion

To hear part of this opening chorus, with the Monteverdi Choir & Baroque Orchestra, from Oxford, Good Friday 2021 (including, towards the end, our own **Angela Hicks, R.**) conducted by **Sir John Eliot Gardiner**, [click the score below](#). You will notice that all the singers sing **from memory**, and that they are standing **'Covid-distanced'**.



Terry Givens, our photographer at Blackburn Cathedral, added

It was actually quite tricky positioning myself unobtrusively outside the path of the half dozen soloists at Blackburn Cathedral as they mingled with the audience during the performance, though I really had only one close call when I was poised to shoot and I almost tripped over the Evangelist when he suddenly appeared from nowhere and accelerated past me on my blind-side in the outside lane of the south aisle!

But what an absolutely triumphant production it was both musically and dramatically, ETO truly are something that we should all treasure, and long may they continue to return to Blackburn with their unique interpretations in order to enhance all our lives and our understanding of these miraculous masterpieces.



From **Bishop Alan Chesters** in Chichester

Dear John,

Thank you for the latest edition of M&M and not least for the kind comments and photographs. M & M is such a splendid publication on which you are to be congratulated.

I had the good news yesterday that **Grace**, the middle one of my 3 granddaughters, after an audition with David Price, the Director of Music, has been accepted to join Cantate, the **Portsmouth Cathedral Girls' Choir**. We are all delighted that she is to have this opportunity.

With my prayers and all good wishes
+Alan

Dear Bishop Alan,

Thank you so much for your generous comments about the April M&M. How could it not be noteworthy with a whole page devoted to two favourite Bishops?

Heartiest congratulations on your granddaughter Grace being accepted for Portsmouth Cathedral choir. I'd love a photograph of her, please, perhaps with her Grandfather, if you have one.

Most warmly

John B

YES, THERE ARE FINE CHURCH CHOIRS IN OUR DIOCESE

Hi John

I've just enjoyed your latest M&M - thank you for all the work you put into it.

You ask which diocesan choirs would still be up to singing at the cathedral so I thought I'd let you know that **St Cuthbert's, Darwen**, is still going strong. As you know former Cathedral chorister and chairman **Anthony Tattersall** was in charge for many years and during his reign you took a few rehearsals yourself!

A few years ago we also enjoyed sharing the services of the cathedral musicians **Stephen Crookes** and **Chris Jones** but we're now ably lead by **Matthew Thomas** (another former cathedral chairman).



We sing a **full Eucharist every week** and a **Choral Evensong every month** as well as other key services, when we welcome some regular additional friends who sing with us. I doubt there are many choirs in the diocese with the repertoire and expertise on which we still pride ourselves, with the support of our extremely musical vicar, **Fr Nicholas Davies**.

Regards

Jenny Tomlin

From our Director of Music,
JOHN ROBINSON

We were so delighted to promote a number of boy choristers who have served so faithfully over the pandemic.

An unusual number of prefects reflects an unusual situation with an old set of boys, thanks to the Pandemic.

We will also be promoting at least two probationers to Chorister before the end of the year.

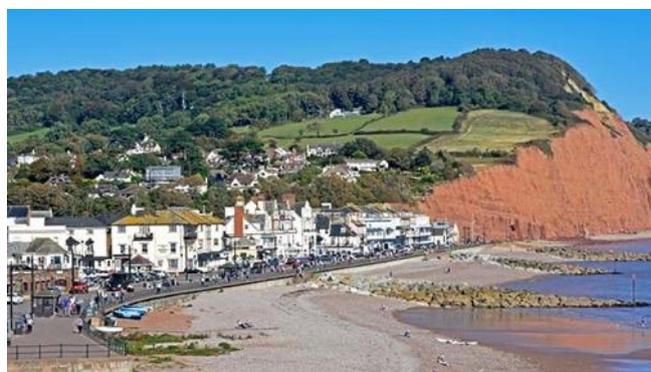
Congratulations to **Zachary, Toby, James** and **Joseph** on becoming Prefects, and to **Joseph** on becoming the Deputy Head Chorister.



From our former Dean,
DAVID FRAYNE



Thank you, John, for your 61st wedding anniversary greetings, as ever. We are celebrating with a five-night stay at a very nice hotel in Sidmouth. Love from us both, David



From **SAM HUDSON** (former Blackburn Cathedral DoM, now DoM at Worcester Cathedral):

Many thanks, John, for your 38th birthday greetings! Louise and I have taken advantage of our pre-holy week holiday and have escaped to Malta for the week. Lovely weather, amazing scenery and history, and far too much local food, of course! We fly back tomorrow, EasyJet permitting! I hope you are well, and look forward to catching up soon.



WHY ISN'T MY NEWS IN M&M?
Because you haven't sent it to
john.bertalot@gmail.com

SO... **SEND !!** 



'PALM SATURDAY' CONCERT at RIBCHESTER

with many Cathedral musicians, and more!

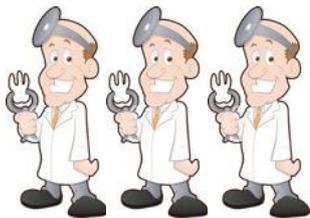
Conductor **EDWARD HAYTHORNWHITE** wrote:



Ribchester Music Makers is a small mixed choir of around 25 voices, meeting regularly in **St Wilfrid's parish church, Ribchester**. We are not a church choir, but help with services from time to time when invited to do so. We welcome anyone who wants to sing, no auditions, and we encourage members to learn to read music. We have a wide range of ages and musical abilities –



photo: Bruce Kitchin



our members include **3 dentists**, with a fourth now interested in joining us! I insist they try to read music and they have evolved from mainly unison to full four part singing - greatly helped by the use of Tonic sol-fa, but with hand signs a la Kodaly, not letter names!

We had planned to perform Faure's Requiem 2 years ago, but had to cancel at 3 days' notice due to the lock-down. Having had a pre-Christmas carol party, (including a riotous "Trial by Jury"), we decided to return to the Requiem in the

New Year with a performance planned for the day before Palm Sunday and a suitable preparation for Holy Week.

We also decided to include **Faure's "Cantique de Jean Racine"**, **Mozart's "Ave Verum Corpus"** and the shortest possible motet by Byrd, his "**Deo Gratias**" from "Gradualia" 1605. The **organ** at St Wilfrid's (affectionately known as "**Gladys**") has some lovely sounds, but is not only very limited in scope but also on the west gallery, so we decided to get together an ensemble very similar to that which Faure originally used: **solo violin, 2 violas, 2 cellos, bass, organ and harp**.



Rehearsal

By the time we got to performance day, 9th April, our numbers had grown to around 40. We were joined by the talented local organist, **Rachel Okpoti**, and several of her choir members from **St Paul's, Longridge**. It was also wonderful to have with us several singers whom I have known for so many years: **Alison Givens and Alizon Elliott**, both just out of Covid's clutches, **Niki Zohdi**, ex chorister and ex piano pupil of mine, now studying for his PhD at Leeds, and 3 other former cathedral choristers: **John Marr, Paul Fielding** (on double bass) and soloist **Derek Crompton**, whom I first met when he joined the cathedral choir exactly 57 years ago when I was JB's assistant !



Alison & Alizon

John Marr & Niki Zohdi

Photos by
Bruce Kitchin



Our star soloists were **Emma Jenkins**, a former Renaissance Singer, and **Derek Crompton**. Jim Prowse had also planned to join us, but had to drop out at the last moment due to illness. The accompaniment was provided by talented members of the **Blackburn Symphony Orchestra** - including cellist **Janet Goodship**, another former Renaissance Singer - and we were very fortunate to be able to engage the professional harpist, **Eira Lynne Jones**, thanks to the kind recommendation of Lowrie Cope.

April 9th was a very busy day. We began with instrumental rehearsal at 2.00pm joined after an hour by our soloists, then the full choir. We broke for tea in the village hall at 5.30, then, after a brief warm up, moved to the church where we found an audience of almost 200 assembled. Our programme seemed appropriate for the time of year, beginning with the cheerful "*Deo Gratias*" of Byrd, suggesting the optimism of Palm Sunday, followed by Mozart's reflective "*Ave Verum*" - a privilege to sing this with string accompaniment - and the "*Cantique*". (The key of D flat may be good news for the harpist, but is not comfortable for string players, and seemed to present challenges to our singers!)



Our performance of the "*Requiem*" was well received. The angelic voice of Emma in the "*Pie Jesu*" was a great joy and Derek's splendid singing of the 2 baritone solos (yes, we have all heard his glorious tenor for several decades!) but here he showed his versatility by easily seeing off those low D's! The choir, finally numbering around 40, gave it their all, the instrumental ensemble were brilliant and the harp added just that touch of magic, especially in the final "*In Paradisum*".

I could not claim that this was a perfect performance, but the great joy to me was that singers, players and audience felt moved and uplifted. Throughout we were mindful of the horrific events in Ukraine and we were able to make a donation to the Ukraine appeal, run by St Wilfrid's, of £220.



Blackburn Cathedral's Youth Choir



We are mighty proud of our Youth Choir – which flourishes under the musical care of **HELEN DAVIES** (above far right 2nd row) and pastoral care of **BISHOP PHILIP NORTH**.

Here they are after singing the Chrism Mass for **Bishop Philip** on Palm Sunday at **St. Catherine's Church in Burnley**. 'A totally GORGEOUS service' with 40 priests who came to renew their vows. **John Robinson** played the organ. The music Included Ireland in C and Gjeilo *Ubi Caritas*. They felt very much appreciated and loved singing in such a lovely Diocesan church on such an occasion. Afterwards they enjoyed a pie and peas supper!



As a result of this visit at least seven invitations came for them to sing Choral Evensongs in other Diocesan churches.

On Good Friday - 'Pilgrimage in Prayer in Blackburn Cathedral'. **Canon Pailing** invited the **Youth Choir** to lead the worship round the 14 stations of the Cross. 'A beautiful service they were stunning throughout' and sang:

David Goodenough: *I will Sing with the Spirit*

Ola Gjeilo: *Ubi Caritas*

Elgar: *Ave Verum Corpus* (Soprano Solo Darcy Tayler)

Stainer: *God So Loved the World* *When I survey the Wondrous Cross* arr. Dan Forrest

Ave Verum Corpus: Nicholas White.

The congregation was moved to tears at times for that Good Friday service with lovely feedback about it being a very worshipful and moving occasion.



We also sang for the **Easter Vigil** the next evening.

On **Easter Sunday Morning** we sang for the 9am Parish Eucharist:

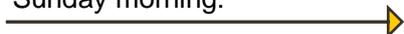


Ireland in C and *He is Risen*: Percy Whitlock.

Photo by Dr Beate von Bremen, one of our stalwart bell ringers.



Here's a Close-up of us singing on Easter Sunday morning:



But it's not all singing for the Youth Choir – it's party time and **FUN** as well:



On Saturday 16th April the Choristers had an **Easter Egg Hunt at Bishop's House** through a kind invitation of **Bishop Julian** and **Mrs Henderson**. We are so indebted to the Hendersons for letting us invade and run wild in their garden. It was a LOT warmer than last year.



The morning started with a rehearsal for Easter then we all piled into two minibuses driven by **Helen Davies** and **Bishop Philip** and headed off to Salesbury with **Canon Pailing** and Canon Gary's wife, **Samantha**. **John Robinson** came along too, as well as **Mrs Robinson** and very young **Ursula**. A lot of raucous singing came from Bishop Philip's minibus throughout!

Bishop Philip had prepared an amazing treasure hunt to find over 600 mini eggs He outsourced the clue-making to his Mum, **Christine**, who came up with a total of 20 incredible clues this included the choristers having to find the eggs and the names of 24 composers hidden within. The clues were placed in various places round the garden (we won't talk about the one which nearly ended up on the Bee Hive!!!) and the choristers had to work out how to get to the next clue every time. They raced around the garden gathering eggs and working out the clues and composers. The first team to finish was headed up by **Giwan Feng** and the winners of the composer competition were **Lucy McCullough** and her team.



After the egg hunt the choristers had a picnic lunch of sandwiches, cakes, juice and fruit and then **Bishop Philip** tried to teach them to play **croquet**! Followed by games, **rolling down the hill** and a bit of cricket!

The choristers went home with a huge Easter Egg - well deserved after all their efforts this Lent and Easter.



OUR STALWART BELL RINGERS – EASTER SUNDAY MORNING



L-R: Ray Hutchings (Ringing Master), Andrea Robinson, Peter Booth, Gary Wignall (long-time former Cathedral Chorister), Andrew Rawlinson, Carrie Hyde, Andy Cope, Laura Robinson and Beate von Bremen.



IT WAS DELIGHTFUL to hear again from **Mildred Sleight** – founder member of the **Blackburn Bach Choir (1965)** who has made much music in **Scunthorpe**:

Memories came flooding back when I saw, in a recent M&M, the reproduced music leaflet from 1969-70, for, I too, have an original leaflet:



I had ticked off the events in which I was **directly involved** – the two Bach Choir concerts and *Noye's Fludde*. Also the **events which I attended** – the Inauguration of the new organ, the recital given by **Dr. Harold Darke**, some of your 'Bach's organ music explained' during Lent and one of the Sunday evening recitals in June.

I think that was the Sunday immediately following the **Blackburn Bach Choir** concert we'd given the previous day at St. Matthew's Northampton. I know that fellow **BBC** singer, **Kathleen Morley** was with me, for we had travelled back together on Sunday morning.

I will always be grateful for how Blackburn Cathedral's music has enhanced my life.

You have enhanced our lives, too, dear Millie. JB

[Editor's note: Kathleen currently attends many of our Wednesday lunchtime recitals!]

More news

We've also heard from our former Organ Scholar, **JUSTIN MILLER**, who has recently taken up his **double appointment** as Director of



Music of CROYDON MINSTER and Choral Director of WHITGIFT SCHOOL.



During a telephone conversation, Justin shared:

He has five choral services a week at Croydon Minster where the choir is enormous: there are no treble vacancies at present for either boys or girls; he has 15 male teens (i.e. ex trebles) and 6 paid men. "I receive excellent support from the Vicar."

He is gradually working out his responsibilities for choral music at Whitgift School.

"The school has many gardens which are home to a number of

exotic birds. There are **a dozen peacocks** which, during this season, fly high into the trees!"

What an interesting and challenging life Justin leads!



Many of us will remember **James Kealey**, who was organ scholar here ten years ago (with choral scholars **Daisy-Belle Dumsday**, **James Giddings** and **Philip Almond**).

Well **James Kealey** is in the news again – but this time across The Pond, where he is a semi-finalist in the **American Guild of Organists' Young Artists' Organ playing competition** along with 8 other talented candidates.

He's Associate Director of Music and Organist at the **Third Presbyterian Church,**

Rochester, NY, and is studying for his doctorate at the Eastman School of Music. In his spare time he's Dean of the Rochester Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

We'll let you know what happens with James' organ playing competition.





Blackburn Cathedral Ramblers

by *Jeremy Duerden*

On the Saturday before Easter, before the busiest time of the year (for some of us anyway), the Ramblers set off for **Stainforth** to see, amongst other things, the **waterfalls** there. It involved crossing the border into North Yorkshire, but it was worth it for the scenery.

The route took us close to the Three Peaks, Pen-y-Ghent being the nearest, although the other two were visible in the distance, and near to the River Ribble in its juvenile state.



Pen-y-Ghent is off to the right of the picture with one of the others just visible to the left. As can be seen, once again we were blessed with good weather.

The route was advertised as 'moderate' with just a short steep climb at the start. That was slightly misleading, although 'not intentionally' obviously, but by the time we finished the six and a half miles we had made 431 metres of ascent, not all at once, of course.



I don't think that climbing the 17 or so stiles on the way added much to the ascent total, but what did, was the walk down to view **one of the spectacular waterfalls**, on a one-way track that had to be climbed up to get back to the route. **It was an ideal spot to stop for coffee.**

Click the photo to enjoy a powerful video of the raging Falls



(Left) One of the many stiles to cross, but on the other side of the wall was a ewe with her **new-born lamb**, still with umbilical cord attached. One of the joys of the rambles is coming close to nature in all its moods and seasons, as well as the great variety in the countryside so near to home.



Near journey's end and, no surprise, *a pub lunch!*
JOIN US FOR NEXT TIME!



As always, **the group is open to all** who like to get out and about in the countryside; just ask me for further details at jeremy.duerden@virginmedia.com

WEDNESDAY LUNCHTIME RECITALS IN MAY – 12.15pm

4th **Thomas Hawkes - organ**

Former Organ Scholar: St. Edmundsbury Cathedral
 As a recitalist he has performed in Germany, France and the UK, and accompanied choirs on tour in Portugal, Italy and France.

11th **Jeffrey Makinson - organ**

Jeffrey Makinson is Assistant Director of Music and Sub-Organist of Lincoln Cathedral. He is also a tutor for the Royal College of Organists' Academy, and Music Director of Beverley Chamber Choir. Previously he was Sub-Organist at Manchester Cathedral and was Tutor in Organ Studies at the RNCM and at Manchester University.

18th **Chris Why (Tenor)**

Chris was a chorister in the choir of Lincoln Cathedral. Studied at the University of Sheffield where he graduated with first class honours for his BMus degree. Currently he's a Lay Clerk in the choir of Manchester Cathedral.

25th **Dr Malcolm Sim - organ**

Dr Sim is Organist of Glasgow Cathedral.
 He has played organs all over the world including Salt Lake City, Utah, and St Sulpice in Paris.





The LIVE STREAMING of some services from BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL in recent months is proving to be an outstanding SUCCESS!

Why is it a success?

1. **Viewers can hear every word** – thanks to speakers' clear delivery, and the skilful handling of the technical equipment which is now housed in our former Cathedral Shop in the South Transept.

NB: *'Hearing every word'* for those sitting in the congregation has been a long-term problem in our cathedral due, in part, to the cathedral's generous acoustics.

But also because some speakers are not aware that, in order for them to be heard and understood by the congregation, speaking in one's 'normal' voice, even when using a microphone, is not sufficient. Some who speak in our cathedral fully understand that they must 'project' their voices even when using a live microphone.

And so it will be interesting to hear from members of the congregation if 'hearing every word' in the cathedral is still a problem, *for it is not a problem now for those viewing services online.*



2. **Viewers can see the worship leaders clearly** – thanks, again, to the producers whose task of handling the many cameras, long distance, via the technical equipment in the former cathedral shop, is to focus on the right person at the right time.

This also applies to seeing the choir and organist close-up which, by definition, the cathedral congregation cannot as they are seated so far away.



3. **It is so helpful to have full orders of service available** for those sitting at home. *Via the cathedral's website:*

www.blackburncathedral.com

This website also gives clear information when the next *Live Streamed Service* will be.



So, **our congratulations are due** not only to the Cathedral clergy, musicians, servers, readers, ushers and virgers, for their own careful preparation and knowing what they should do and when, but especially to **Canon Gary O'Neil** who took upon himself the task of learning *'how to produce a live service for TV'* and for training others to follow in his footsteps.

A few of the outstanding moments live-streamed during Holy Week and Easter:

Palm Sunday: See [the previous page](#) for the three clergy reading the St. Luke Passion, with **Canon Rowena** reading the narrative, **Canon Gary** reading the words of Jesus, and **the Dean** reading the words of other speakers.

It was gripping in its simple clarity.

The Dean washing the feet of members of the congregation during the **Maunder Thursday** service.



The Cathedral Men and Boys' choir singing at the Three Hours' service on **Good Friday**.

The **music** was exquisite especially the Reproaches by **James Walsh** led by a superb tenor soloist: 'My people, what wrong have I done to you...' with congregational sung refrain. And the **timing** was 99% – 3 hours & one minute. Canon Rowena said that the credit for this must go to **Canon Gary** and **John Robinson**.

The Cathedral congregation holding lighted candles for the **Easter Eve** service; *'The Light of Christ'*



In his powerful **Easter Day** sermon (his last before his retirement as Bishop of Blackburn) **Bishop Julian** illustrated that our world today is being torn apart by lies which are so prevalent, and which distort the truth – especially about Ukraine. Then he proclaimed **the truth of the Christian faith**, that Christ **did** die on the cross to save us all, and **did** rise from the dead, that we might live in Him. He quoted his favourite C. S. Lewis saying: *"Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, if true, is of infinite importance, but one thing it cannot be is moderately important."*

John Robinson playing the Postlude after Easter Day Choral Evensong: **Marcel Dupré's Prelude and Fugue in B major**. When it was composed at the beginning of the 20th Century, it was regarded by many organists as impossibly difficult. It still is difficult – but John's skilful playing makes it seem fairly accessible ... for a few organists!

John always seems to have the correct finger over the correct note a fraction of a second before he needs to play it! And he make it seem so easy!! **That's the secret of assured playing.**

Click the photograph to hear and see John's amazing performance. (NB. You can **see John playing** after 1 minute 12 seconds!)

