

The Friends of the Moot Hall Organ  
Chair's Annual Report 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

An interesting year! Sadly, we were only able to hold eleven of the twelve recitals planned, as the ceiling, under the Moot Hall gallery, collapsed and we had to cancel the January recital. Then, in March, we had to cram the audience into the front half of the Hall as a bulge had been discovered in the main ceiling that morning; an issue that had serious consequences subsequently. We had, in fact, returned to normality and audience numbers were almost back to pre-covid levels; we still retained wider spacing between chairs, which is appreciated by the audiences. Our recitalists were James Davy, David Poulter, William Saunders, Timothy Parsons, Gillian Ward Russell, Stefan Donner, from Vienna, Weston Jennings, now residing in Texas, and four from our own Ian Ray, plus vocal support from local ensemble the Marenzio Singers at Christmas. A truly international line-up of the very highest quality.

The traditional Heritage Day 'Meet & Play' event took place in September and it was a treat to hear the organ on top form for the Civic events; Mayor Making, the Oyster Feast and for the unique ceremony that conferred City status on Colchester. Thank you so much Ian!

Our Annual Meeting in July adopted the new Constitution, which enabled us to register as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the Charity Commission. This was registered in November and will be effective from 1st April 2023. This was a requirement of our prospective new banker, and in due course an account was opened with the Co-op Bank.

We had a new website created this year, which I hope those of you who use it agree, is certainly better than its predecessor. Interestingly we have received a number of enquiries for information through it; something that did not previously happen.

The Committee did not meet this year as it was very much a case of steady progress, as we moved forward from the restrictions of the previous few months; Members were kept informed as appropriate.

The realistic decision to increase the remuneration offered to visiting recitalists from the start of this year seems to have inspired generous sponsorship for several recitals, and retiring collections continue to be reasonable. I would remind Members that these excellent Recitals are free of charge as a result of the commitment made to the Heritage Lottery Fund, when the grant was received for the organ's restoration, that the free recitals that had been offered since the Town Hall opened in 1902 would continue. The North Colchester Men's Shed made us a sturdy wooden collection box free of charge, which unfortunately has only had one outing!

We have made plans for a repeat of the Silent Film Show in November and I am pleased to say that Colchester Arts Centre will be involved in organising that this year.

Finally, I must offer my grateful thanks to Ian Ray, who books all the organists and plays for four of the recitals each year as part of his commitment as Honorary Borough Organist. I am equally indebted to Alison Smith, our Treasurer, who did so much work on our Charitable status application and setting up the new bank account. Thanks too, of course, to the Committee and to Alex Blustin, our retiring webmaster, for their fulsome support in all we do. I must also thank all the Town Hall staff for all their assistance.

Nigel Chapman

Chair