



HLF OH-12-12352
St Mary & St Giles Stony Stratford
Willis Pipe Organ Restoration and Reach-out project

Final evaluation report for Q11 Oct 2016-Feb 2017

Project overview

Date/ Project element	Oct- Dec 2016	Jan- Feb 2017
1. Restore organ& trial	Done	
2. Research & record organ history	Done	
3. Produce learning resources incl DVD		Done
4. Train volunteer guides		Done
5. Community Music Programme + organ		
6. Education/Visits Programme		
PLUS Fundraising for non-heritage items		

Below we report against each of the active strands of the project on the amended schedule reported last quarter (approved timescale extensions shown in blue).

Element 1. Restore organ

Feedback from organists, performers and audience continues to be very positive.

“The organ has a much brighter, more positive sound than when I played it last” (James Wharton, Come & Sing Day, November 2016)

“I am really pleased that this beautiful organ has been restored, as my grandmother used to play the organ here on occasions when I was a child [Mrs Florence Waine, also the organist at St Mary’s in Stony for many years] and as such, her unwitting gift to me was my ongoing love of organ music. I used to be fascinated by watching her legs and feet dancing over the pedals, under the organ seat!” (Come & Sing attender, November 2016)

“The children who came to hear the organ lunchtime concert were excited, surprised, calmed, amazed and completely engaged by its variety of sound - all emotions were covered!” (TT@TT, December 2016)

“The highlight for me was hearing the organ play with the handbells...a completely new and delightful experience!” (MK50 Gala Concert, January 2017)

“Splendid organ - Exceptional instrument - Such an interesting visit - Excellent banners - The best refreshments - Thank you for making us so welcome - We would like to come back to play” (Comments from Bucks Organists Association visit 18 February 2017)

Element 2. Research & record organ history/Element 3. Produce learning resources

Work has continued on finalising outputs so that these are all complete by the end of the project.

A website feedback survey has been launched to gather data for the HLF Evaluation report.

Element 4: Volunteers

Seven new volunteers joined us in this period, bringing the current total to 96. Over the three-year life of the project we have lost only 13 volunteers (half to other interests, half due to moves, illness, death) which represents high commitment and low turnover.

Coffee morning Saturday 18 Feb 2017 was our fourth get-together in the project for volunteers. 40 (42%) came, 14 sent apologies, 2 said 'maybe', 33 did not reply. It was a great event with a real buzz about the new resources on display, particularly the photobooks, a sense of pride in achieving all the HLF project goals, and enthusiasm for continuing what we do.

A volunteer survey was launched, for returns by mid-March so that we can provide data in the HLF Evaluation report.

Project management

Project management The team met quarterly in November and February, with a final wash-up meeting in March prior to final submission to the HLF.

Risk register Potential volunteer fatigue was noted at the end of the project, and we will assess this through the survey and conversations. [Post report note: encouragingly the survey showed no-one who wanted to stop, a few wanting to do less but more wanting to do more.]

Quarterly account Spending has been as plan. Final invoices are urgently required.

Fundraising this period £3,875 net was raised from all sources in the these five months.

Lessons learnt Key lessons learnt this period are:

- We've had so many positive comments and thanks for our 'Thank you Volunteer Coffee Morning' in February - it is a good thing to do (despite my initial reservations)
- Our records show that when people have got involved, however large or small their contribution, they stay involved and this helps enormously to encourage others to join us.
- The 'Thank you Coffee Mornings' have helped the volunteers to see who else is involved.
- We have taken our first booking for 2020 already - the organ restoration has had a far reaching effect.
- The restoration of the organ has gained us the services of a highly regarded and exceptional organist and choirmaster from September 2017 - dreams do come true!
- Communicating well and building up good relationships with individuals and groups is so vital - this has always been the case, but these last few months have highlighted this particularly.
- My perception of the last five months events is that we now seem to have developed a momentum that means people are aware of what we about and as a result we see regular supporters who come to our events.
- For ticketed events the moving of the tables further into church has eased congestion.

- We are beginning to turn chairs to face the west door for 'organ only' performances. it is nice to see the performers when they are introducing a piece, and to face the source of the sound, also to see the organist in action a bit
- Although we haven't formally assessed the effectiveness of the various types of advertising our event, I like to chat with people whom I don't recognise in the audience and I get the feeling that word of mouth is a very common response.

Element 4: Visits and Players programmes

We hosted four Visits - from two community group and two primary schools in October/November. We have closed the Visit programme for the winter months as the building can be so cold and travel difficult in poor weather.

Feedback continues to be highly positive:

"An absolutely super trip. The children are still talking about it. Thanks so much. All the staff said that your staff were so good with the children and the timings were just right. Thanks again and invite us to any other events please." (Greenleys Infants School visit 18 Nov 2016)

We now have five regular participants in our Players Programme, who enjoy being able to learn and practice on the restored organ. One of these, Bryan Moseley, has kindly provided a detailed case study for the final evaluation report.

Element 6: Community Music Programme (with organ)

The programme overall continues to attract much positive feedback and some useful practical suggestions for improving events still further:

"I really do appreciate your rich SMSG musical programme" (Email from mailing list member)

"Many thanks for putting all these opportunities our way!" (Come & Sing attender)

"Really good to have each piece introduced - needs to be louder, though, please" (TT@TT Jacob Collins at the organ, December 2016)

Strand 1: SMSG Programme

Nine musical events were put on this period: five monthly Third Thursdays at Twelve Thirty, which now routinely attract participation on average of 50 people; two big annual events - the SMSG Autumn Concert and Come & Sing (this year Choral Classics finally with the organ!), each involving over two hundred people - plus two organ recitals.

"Relaxed, entertaining, informative, challenging" (TT@TT Joe Laredo Entertains at the piano, November 2016)

James Wharton's third and final Come & Sing day gained universal praise: 80% of those filling in feedback cards rated it very enjoyable, and 20% said enjoyable; there were almost no downsides except for the ones we can't fix (sightlines). Comments, as usual rated not just the music but the performers, the camaraderie, and the cake! Typical comments from participants on 12 November were:

"Excellent conductor & accompanist & trumpets etc & organ"

"Meeting new people & singing new songs"

"Excellent choice of music and excellent cakes"

Five very successful fundraising events were also held (Golden Spot tombola, and four coffee mornings, which between them raised over £880), demonstrating what will be a key part of our ongoing fundraising for organ maintenance in future.

Strand 2: Use of venue by others

Four other organisations used the venue in this period (MK Youth Choir, MK Chorale, Arco Strings, and the Bucks Organists Association). Arco Strings were playing here for the first time and both players and audience enjoyed it enormously:

“Just to say how much we enjoyed the concert last night. The programme was fascinatingly varied and the performances were uniformly excellent. A concert worthy of the South Bank or Wigmore Hall. We were particularly impressed by the young trumpeter, who drew our attention every time he put the instrument to his lips.” (Email after Arco strings concert, 1 October 2016)

“It was a very good day on Saturday and everyone really enjoyed it so many thanks for all your and Anna’s efforts and for the refreshments. It was interesting going to Haversham too - although a very good late 19th century instrument, by no means ‘special’ in the way yours is.” (Bucks Organists Association visit Feb 2017)

MK Sinfonia belatedly followed up their concert in July saying: *“We have finalised our accounts for the concert. The music hire was seriously expensive for this concert, leading to an overall loss of £750. However, we do have money in the account, and because we really appreciate the welcome you give us, we would like to make a donation of £200. Thank you for being so welcoming and we look forward to our next concert in St Mary and Giles Church!”*

Strand 4: Community Gala

The Community Gala concert as part of MK50 was a great success, involving 7 community groups (2 choirs, Band, Handbell Team and 2 school choirs and Handbell Team.) The organ was very much a feature in this concert, especially when accompanying the final sing with performers and audience raising the roof - everyone pulled out all the stops!

“I’m so pleased to have the words to the Anniversary song - I’m going to sing it with my group now.”

“I loved all the music, but the best thing was the great community feel to the whole event.”

Strand 5: Outreach

In December the Church Band & Singers performed much-enjoyed carols in the Market Square at the invitation of the Deputy Town Clerk:

“We really appreciate you all coming to bring some Christmas spirit to the farmers’ Market”

The Church Band has also been involved in supporting services at Calverton.

In January 2017 a new programme of singing and ringing with Fegans Court was planned and started.

A planning meeting took place between Ad Parnassum, SMSG School and Music for All @ SMSG to negotiate the putting on of Opera in May 2017 at School and Church, involving children in the performance.

Events and Visits programmes - data for HLF report

Events results	Oct 2016-Feb 2017	Total in HLF project
Total Music for all @ SMSG events	21	167
Performers involved	508	3,297
(of which were school age - since October 2014)	118	609
Audience attendance	1191	9,568
(of which were school age)	117	873
Helper attendance at events	131	844
Total participation	1,830	13,709
Footfall (info for Stony businesses): monthly ave	366	366
New email mailing list addresses (194 pre-project)	187	577
Net funds raised for non-heritage work	£3,875	£55,367
Net funds raised for church restoration/other gps £	£649	£5,453
Volunteers recruited in addition to pre-existing 40 (32 remain); of 69 recruited, 64 remain	7	69
Social media: @SMSG_Organ: Twitter followers/Tweets sent to date	49 tweets, 58 new followers	2537 following, 548 tweets, 705 followers
School Visits this period	4	20
School pupils and teachers involved	102	488

Case studies and event comments

October 2016 - 1st Stony Stratford Girl Guides visit

The local Girl Guides used their regular Monday evening meeting in the Parish Hall to find out about the pipe organ, the church bells, the piano and the belleplates one evening in October. They treated it as a fun musical evening rather than a 'learning' event. They enjoyed blowing pipes, going inside the organ, going up the bell tower to see how the church bells are rung and playing the belleplates. The Guide leaders joined in with playing the belleplates too and the girls asked some good questions about the organ and the bells. One of the Guide leaders said, "I've been coming to this church all my life and I've learnt so much this evening that I never knew!" We used their visit to start training up another volunteer organ explainer.

November 2016 - Come & Sing Choral Classics with Organ

150 singers, 1 conductor, 1 organ and piano accompanist, 3 brass players, 1 percussionist, mountains of hired sheet music, a large group of volunteers, plate loads of cake, months of organisation behind the scenes and a very friendly welcome equals one very successful and memorable Come & Sing Day. James Wharton guided the singers through a day of learning a variety of pieces to sing with the organ, which was played by Richard Heyes. The programme included classical as well as popular songs, with some more challenging to sing than others. At 4:30 pm the huge scratch choir gave a concert to the audience who mostly sat in the gallery to listen. Feedback comments included "excellent organisation very friendly atmosphere", "Singing. James's wonderful relaxed and humorous approach", "The opportunity to sing with many like-minded people", "so good, conductor brilliant, organist brilliant, exhilarating!!" and "The banter! And the organ!"

December 2016 - MK Youth Choir

The church was filled with 16 youthful voices singing for the afternoon of 10th December when Milton Keynes Youth Choir gave their annual Christmas concert, conducted by Craig McLeish with Penny Miller at the piano. The programme included solos and duets from some of the singers as well as visiting guest duo 'Watling Street' (Joe Allen and Emily Rogers who sang, played oboe, piano and violin in their various pieces). The choir sang all their pieces really well with clear diction and enthusiasm. The choir used the piano for the concert, however after the concert Penny played the Willis organ as they hope to use it in a future concert.

January 2017 - MK 50 Gala concert

What better way to celebrate 50 years since Milton Keynes was founded and 50 years since the Willis organ came to Stony Stratford than a Community Gala Concert on 28 January 2017. We involved performers of all ages, school children and adults and gave each group 10 minutes to share their talent with the large audience. We invited the south and north choirs of the newly combined St Mary and St Giles Primary School as well as their handbell ringers, the church band and handbell ringers, the Parish Singers and The Orphean Singers, who have a long track record of singing concerts in the church, for this double Golden celebration. We also invited Jacob Collins to play the organ and Joe Laredo, Dave King and Jacob to play a special piece the piano. We sang the specially written words to the Golden Anniversary Song - MaKing 50 (to the tune of Cwm Rhondda, words by FMK) (conducted by Lesley Salter). It was a very happy concert with a large, appreciative audience and plenty of tea, coffee and cupcakes during the interval served by a willing group of volunteers.

February 2017 - Volunteers Coffee morning

We invited the many volunteers who help with Music for All @ SMSG events. We wanted to share and reflect on the successes of the project and consider the future. A big group of people gathered in the Parish Hall for tea, coffee and cake and discussion on 18th February. Lesley, Jane and Anna shared the highlight data about the project with everyone, we also showed off the 2 new pull up banners about how the organ works and the newly compiled photobooks - one of the history of organs in St Mary & St Giles church building (there were 2 previous organs before the Willis) and the other many photos of the restoration work. In addition, an article was written by Michael Keays (one of the FH Browne & Sons Ltd organ builders) with the assistance of Anna Page, John Neale and Jonathan Kingston for The Organ Building magazine 2016 was on display. We asked everyone present to contribute their suggestions for a '20 questions we often get asked about the organ and the church by visitors' document which volunteers will have available when they are helping at events in the church so they can answer these questions. The suggestions came thick and fast as David compiled their comments on the laptop projected onto the big screen.

The period in pictures



October 2016 - 1st Stony Stratford Girl Guides visit - the Guides looking up at the bell ropes in the bell chamber



November 2016 - Come & Sing Choral Classics with Organ - the view from the organ console of the huge crowd of singers during the concert.



December 2016 - MK Youth Choir sing their Christmas concert music to a large audience.



January 2017 - MK 50 Gala concert - Jacob Collins plays music by Vierne on the organ to a fascinated audience



February 2017 - Volunteers Coffee morning - Lesley tells the volunteers how essential they are, with the new pull up banners behind her.