

Friends of the Moot Hall Organ

Chairman's Report 31st March 2024

Sadly, I cannot report on any organ recitals this year. As you no doubt are aware the ceiling/roof of the Moot Hall was found to have structural issues early in 2023 and the Moot Hall was totally shut up in March of that year and virtually all access forbidden.

I considered whether we could arrange recitals elsewhere, on other organs in the city or hiring in an electronic organ and going to another venue. However, as our *raison d'être* is the organ in the Moot Hall, it seemed an unnecessary gamble to move away from our roots. I did discuss these ideas with my fellow trustees and sought advice from Anthony Roberts from Colchester Arts Centre.

The repairs and the necessary preliminary work to the Moot Hall were bound to take a considerable time and, a year later, the scaffolding to protect and enable access is only now imminent. Once that structure is erected limited access can be permitted and the paintings hanging on the walls can be removed and, more importantly for us, the organ played again. It will immediately be checked by Harrison & Harrison, the organ builders. Incidentally, it was good to hear that it had been possible to service the organ's humidifying equipment during this time and that this has been working well. I have had contact over the last year with the Council's Head of Design and Construction Management, who has regularly kept me briefed on the situation.

We all appreciate the financial situation that Local Government is facing at the present time and the City Council is, therefore, undertaking a major review of its assets and how they will be utilised in the future. This has only recently started, and I am in contact with the relevant Strategic Director about this work. There is currently nothing to report, but I have made clear that my view, and that of The Friends, is that they should consider the organ an asset in its own right and not simply as a part of the Town Hall.

It was with sadness that I must report that Alison Smith indicated early in the year that, due to work pressures, she would have to resign as a Trustee and our Treasurer at the 2024 AGM. Alison has done invaluable work for us; in particular registering us with the Charity Commission. I am personally very grateful for her help and support over the last few years.

The Trustees have appointed Adam Masters to replace Alison with effect from her resignation. Adam, who was suggested by Mike Vernon, is a retired anaesthetist and a choral singer in the city. Once we understand where the review of the Council's assets is heading, we will probably aim to seek an additional trustee to broaden the skills amongst the Trustees. As I write this, we are still looking for a treasurer.

I am optimistic about the long term future of what we do, but we must recognise that it will be some time before we can see audiences back in the Moot Hall. I appreciate your support during these challenging times.