

SPONSORED HYMN-PLAYING FOR RSCM “MUSIC SUNDAY 2010”
ST. MICHAEL’S CHURCH, CUMNOR, OXFORDSHIRE
SATURDAY, 10 JULY 2010

As a contribution jointly towards the St Michael’s Church Fete and RSCM’s “Music Sunday 2010”, I undertook to play, on the organ, tunes for all the hymns in Hymns Old and New (New Anglican Edition) – all 571 of them, one verse of each hymn only, and one tune per hymn, in those cases where alternatives are given!

Since each hymn takes about 30-45 seconds to play, I soon realised that this would be a major task, taking about 6 hours to complete. It was difficult to get an accurate estimate: although playing them through in rapid succession on the piano suggested a maximum rate of 110 hymns per hour, this was more difficult to achieve on the organ, with its more severe physical demands (hands and feet, stop changes).

The event caught the interest of the church congregation and those attending the fete, and over several weeks leading up to the event, £1067.10 sponsorship were promised (1p per hymn = £5.71), with Gift Aid increasing the amount to £1250 or more, so I had to do my best! Half of the sum raised would go to RSCM.

On the day, armed with sandwiches and drinks, I decided to make an early start at 10 am and entertain the flower arrangers and any occasional visitors to the church: this should give me time for reasonable breaks through the day and still enable me to complete the schedule by 4.30 pm, when the fete would end. The hymn book is laid out alphabetically rather than seasonally, which means that the progression is very varied, but I decided to start with No 50 (“Awake, my soul, and with the sun thy daily stage of duty run; shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise to pay thy morning sacrifice”).

Morning indeed! As the day progressed, I realised that I was lagging behind schedule, so drinks went by the board, and lunch had to be snatched in about 10 minutes. During the afternoon I had more of an audience, as people drifted in from the fete to climb the church tower, to listen and even to sing! I had a small but willing band of girls from the choir to display the hymn number that I had reached.

Towards the end I got very tired, and had to take frequent short breaks until No 570 came up. Then, with renewed zeal, I added in “All things bright and beautiful” to celebrate the imminent birth of our second grandchild, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow” and “Hail the day that sees him rise”, to the Sydney Nicholson tune “Chislehurst”. Then, finally, and most appropriately, two verses of No. 571 (“You shall go out with joy”) – molto accelerando!

I had learned quite a number of new tunes (some good and some less good!) and...
...it was half past four, exactly!

Terence Carter
Chairman, RSCM Oxfordshire District
Secretary, RSCM Oxford Area