

Inaugural Organ Concert

— Professor David Runia,
7th Master of Queen's College

Dear friends,

A little over three years ago, in this space of the Queen's College chapel, we celebrated the 90th anniversary of the inaugural organ concert given by Dr A E Floyd on 13th June 1924. The concert was well attended and greatly enjoyed. But if the truth be told, the instrument was on its last legs.

When I returned to Queen's as Master in 2002 it was not long before our devoted organist now for over 30 years, David Agg, whispered in my ear: something has to be done about the organ. My reaction was at first: but you are still getting quite a reasonable sound out of it. To which he said, thank you, but it is only a matter of time and it will be unusable.

For a former organist as myself, these warnings did not fall on deaf ears, particularly when they were reinforced by Thomas Heywood, who as the then Director of the Haileybury choir, joined us for a number of services.

So about four years ago the three of us put our heads together. We had a lunch in Eakins and the Queen's College Organ project was born. At first we were attracted to the idea of obtaining another instrument that was no longer in use, perhaps from overseas. But on reflection David formed the view that such a radical step was too risky. The existing organ still had potential, he argued, and he and others also pointed out heritage aspects to be taken into consideration.

So the decision was made to renovate the existing organ. We would modernize its workings and add extra lustre to its sound. We would also restore it to its former place in the middle of the balcony. It had been shifted into the corner to make room for the choir stalls, but they were no longer required. If we could carry out this project, it would be possible to secure the future of church music in the chapel for at least another fifty years, if not longer.

But all of these ambitions had a significant price tag. We had to raise more than one hundred thousand dollars, a daunting sum. But the response of the College community was magnificent. With the help of nearly fifty individual donors, the appeal was a resounding success.

This is now the time for me to join the Master in expressing the College's profound thanks to all our donors. Many of you are present today to witness what has been done with your money. I want to thank you all most sincerely and most profusely for your generosity and the support you gave to the campaign. With your permission, I will mention just a few names. A number of former College organists responded with great heart, especially Les Harrison, but also including Bill Denholm, D'Arcy Wood, Brian Head, Garry Warne, and I might also mention the name of Jim Richardson, who was not the College organist but played elsewhere. Three donors have passed away in the

meantime, and sadly did not live to enjoy the fruits of their gifts: Scotty Macleish, Jack Clarke and Richard Divall. Norah Killip would ask me at regular intervals how the project was going, and finished up making no less than six donations. All in all, it was a thoroughly heart-warming process. The required sum was reached and you can all now see—and above all hear—the results of your kindness.

The successful completion of the project was made possible by Ian Wakeley and his team of organ builders. Ian was selected from three applicants and worked closely with organist David Agg to draw up a list of works. The entire inner workings of the organ, including the windchests, were reconditioned, to which was added a brand new blower. It was of course not possible to go back to the original mechanical tracker action for the keyboard. But now a state-of-the-art solid-state control system has been installed. Ian has also added two new registers in order to make the sound more brilliant and diverse in tone. And, as you can see, the organ is now back in its original position in the middle of the balcony, its case has been refurbished and it looks simply magnificent. The College is most grateful to Ian and his team for all their efforts in bringing the project to such a successful conclusion and we are also thankful that he has recovered from the illness which caused a delay in completing the project.

Finally, if I may end on a personal note, it gives me great joy to know that for many many years to come, organ music will continue to resound in this beautiful and sacred place—in the very heart of this College that we all love so much.

The next organist who will play for us is Edwin Kwong. In 2014 Edwin was the inaugural holder of the Queen's College Organ scholarship, generously made available by the Director of the Choir, Mr John Weretka, who regrettably is overseas at present and so not able to be with us. Since then Edwin has gone from strength to strength. He is now Director of Music at St Bartholomew's Anglican Church in Burnley and one of Melbourne's most accomplished and energetic young organists. I invite him now to play.

— David Runia, 17 September 2017