

Derek Fry pens a few autobiographical notes:

'I was one of 7 children and my parents were Rachabites which meant among other things that alcohol never came into our house. Three of my sisters prayed in tongues and one married a Pentecostal minister.

We all had piano lessons but I was the only one who made real progress and became the favourite of my teacher who was badly crippled and lived with her mother who was also handicapped with Parkinson's disease.

She had many pupils but I was the only one who was allowed to roam the house. I took her dog for daily walks for which I was paid 4 pence a day. When I paid her a visit some years after she told me of this event which I had half forgotten: She gathered all her pupils together every term and we all played a piece of music on the piano. Whilst I was playing she looked over my shoulder and saw that the music was upside down!

On 1st of September 1939 I was evacuated to Carisbrooke, I.O.W. My best pal was Jimmy Buckett and we went everywhere together. Jimmy got religion and eventually became Chaplain to Highbury College and later Archdeacon of the I.O.W.

As all seemed quiet on the war front I went home for a week and on the first day there was an air raid which was quite frightening after which I decided to stay with my parents. School time was mainly spent in shelters. On a Saturday I went with a friend to the Odeon, Festing Road and shortly into the programme there came on to the screen advice to leave and go to the shelter which we ignored at first but when the cinema began to rock we scampered out to the sound of dive bombers and explosions. On walking back home through Albert Road we were amazed by the size of the yawning craters. I lost a girl friend in that raid who was killed in St. James's Road.

There was no point in schooling so my father got me a job as an electrical apprentice and on the first morning I had to help in clearing up the debris from a night raid. Running parallel with my work I was appointed organist of the Garrison Church in 1941 where the nave had just been destroyed but the chancel and organ saved. There was a good choir with 12 boys and 9 adults which, at the age of 15, I had some difficulty in controlling.

There were other wartime adventures when I collected a beautiful silk holed parachute from a landmine dropped on a job we were working on which wrecked an electric sub station. More of our work was destroyed by a bomb on the local airport. Towards the end of the war I worked on the Mulberry Harbours at Hayling which involved climbing pylons in the bitter cold winter. I would work at night, take the ferry to Portsmouth then run along the front to the Garrison Church to play Sunday morning service.

After the war I was working for a private firm which re-wired St. John's Cathedral so I asked Canon Burrett if I might try the organ: he hesitated as I was in working clothes but agreed and said that I was not allowed to play jazz!

Some years later, when the war was over, I was practising on a Saturday night at the Garrison Church for the following Sunday and became aware of two school girls watching from the chancel so I turned and asked if they would like to join the choir and this they did. One of them is now my wife and we have been together for 55 years. Musicwise, I had lessons from a local organist but bought and listened to recordings of Albert Schweitzer on 78 disks so can claim to have had lessons from a great man. I had a photo of Albert Schweitzer by my bedside and tried to read some of his books but found them too deep.

When I took ARCO diploma I had to ask for two days leave from the dockyard to sit for it in London. It involved written music, an English test and practical organ playing. Shortly after, I had a letter, out of the blue, asking me if I would take on the music teaching

at Stubbington House Prep School and this I did but it was morning only so I found another school to fill the afternoons, Portsea Modern Boys. (Very contrasting schools). My headmaster at Portsea went on to become an Anglican Priest.

My next school appointment was Pauslgrove Modern where I built up a brass band of 36 players which were in demand for concerts and fetes etc. The headmaster was Les Street who went to Corpus Christi School, Portsmouth and later suffered much in a Japanese POW camp.

I was asked by the Education Dept to apply for the post as director of music at the Northern Grammar School and was interviewed and appointed. We had an enormous choir which included 8 of the staff and performed Messiah with an imported orchestra.

After 8 years at the Garrison Church I went to St. Simon's as organist where I stayed for nearly 20 years and during that time the organ received a major rebuild. My wife, Ann had been organist and I took over from her.

As the school work took up so much time and energy I left St. Simon's and offered my services as stand-in organist to any church in need which turned out to be almost every Sunday.

In 1976 I received a 'phone call asking me to play at St. John's Cathedral for the consecration of Bishop Anthony Emery and as I had spent a week on a retreat at Quarr Abbey previously I jumped at this opportunity. After this installation, Father Peter Doyle asked if I would like to be the official organist and without hesitation I accepted and greatly enjoyed working with an exceptional administrator. And 30 years after it is with great pleasure occasionally to be working with our highly gifted dean as one of a team of organists.'