

## **Royal Musical Recognition for a talented Organist in Norham Village**

In September 2018 Julian Bonia received a Certificate of Special Service from the Royal School Church Music for his unstinting and selfless service to churches and their communities over many decades. The presentation was at Salisbury Cathedral in mid September, where he was presented with his certificate by the Bishop of Salisbury The Right Honorable Nick Holtman.

Julian is presently the rock on which church music at the Historic Church of St Cuthberts, Norham survives and thrives, in a remote and sparsely populated area of the county, and the community are thrilled to celebrate Julian's Award.

Julian is an outstanding musician and craftsman who has given unstinting and selfless service to churches and their communities over many decades. He began as a Chorister at St Michael's, Alnwick, where he became fascinated by organ music and technology. His grandparents (who brought him up) declined his requests for lessons so he taught himself, first by ear and then by scribbling the note names over the music. At 17 in London with his first week's pay he bought a piano and then managed to finance some lessons with the international recitalist, Nicholas Danby. He gave recitals in and around the City of London and played for broadcast services, including a special service at Westminster Cathedral. Noting his practical skills, Danby persuaded Julian to renovate the organ at the City University, London.

Since 1965 Julian has been the organist at eight different churches in the South and the North East. He moved back to Northumberland in 1974. At Berwick Parish Church he revived a small choir and built it up to about 40 members. The music was of a high standard and Julian took the choir to sing Choral Evensong at Newcastle Cathedral and elsewhere. He started playing at St Cuthbert's Norham for two Sundays in the month and also helped at Ayton Parish Church. He then became full time organist at Norham without any financial recompense; and for more than 20 years he regularly dashed across the border after the Norham service to play for a service at Ladykirk on the organ he had installed there. In 1990 he started a major restoration of the Binns organ at Norham, working in his free time, and completed it in 2000. For the last 17 years, since the present choir was formed, he has been the rock upon which the choir has been built and continues to thrive today.

Amongst many other activities, he took a leading role over a period of 30 years in the annual RNLI Carol Concert. He has helped with the music at Norham Village School, including playing for Carol Services, Nativity Plays, Ceilidhs, etc. He has carried out many organ restorations or installation of refurbished organs for local churches including Lowick, Doddington, Berwick RC church, Spittal, Fogo, Swinton, Ladykirk, He has taught many pupils over the years, without fees, and many have carried their organ playing on into adult life. In 2015 Julian ran a "Piano to Organ" workshop at the RSCM Festival weekend.

In the 1970s he rescued an historic organ which was being eaten by woodworm and it now stands restored in a specially built (by himself) extension to the family home. He considers himself as custodian of it and will be gifting it to a museum or similar establishment when he is no longer able to maintain it. Each winter Norham Choir rehearsals migrate from the church to Julian's home.

Julian's life and work have been of immense value and benefit to all around him and he does everything, and takes all the pressure, with charming modesty and good humour. There cannot be a more deserving candidate for recognition.