

St Andrew's Organists

The Presbyterian Church of St Andrew, Canberra is home to a fine two-manual Hill, Norman & Beard pipe organ, originally built in 1933 and substantially rebuilt in 1965. Since 1975, the instrument has been maintained, with further improvements, by Sydney organ builder Peter Jewkes. He also recalls boyhood visits to his grandparents when his grandfather was a member of the church's Board of Management. For many years, the organ was played regularly for two morning services and an evening one each week. It is currently used for 9.30 am Sunday services only, more occasionally for weddings, funerals, recitals and on other special occasions. How many of the church's appointed organists are remembered today and who were they?

The first was **Charles Studdy Daley**, a prominent Commonwealth public servant and honorary organist (1934-1953). As Secretary of both the Federal Capital Advisory Committee and its successor, the Federal Capital Commission, Daley moved from Melbourne to Canberra in late 1924 and soon became active in community music in the fledgling national capital. He lived to see the Canberra School of Music established some 40 years later. At retirement in 1952, aged 60, he was Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior. The following year, with a planned overseas trip to coincide with the coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II, he also retired as St Andrew's organist. Described as 'an enthusiastic amateur musician', Daley died in 1966, his funeral being held at St John's Anglican Church, Reid.

Daley's successor at St Andrew's was a war bride, **Mrs Cyril Richard (Suzanne) Cole**, from Alnwick, Northumberland, England. She met her husband (a forester) during World War II when he was a serving officer with 2/1 Forestry Company, Royal Australian Engineers and she with the women's branch of the British Army, the Auxiliary Territorial Service. They subsequently lived in Arthur Circle, Forrest. In 1953, she visited England for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and, five years later, met the Queen Mother on her visit to Canberra. At St Andrew's, Mrs Cole was organist for five years (1953-1959) and considered very competent, continuing to play 'when needed' until mid-1971. She was also active in the Day PWA (Women's Guild) and gave 'a great deal of voluntary service' in the wider community. The Coles later moved to Sydney, where Mrs Cole died in 1977.

Another Commonwealth public servant, **Garth Mansfield**, succeeded Mrs Cole in 1959. Previously her assistant (1957-1958), he remained as

organist at St Andrew's for the next twenty years, with responsibility for the choir added in 1964. Mansfield had studied with GF Allman, then Professor of Organ at the NSW Conservatorium of Music in Sydney, in the 1940s and was Organ Scholar at St James, King Street in a period when buying music was expensive for aspiring church musicians. St Andrew's choir flourished under Mansfield, with encouragement of young organists also an important aspect of his work as organist. Both interests continued to mark his subsequent years at Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest (1979-2008).

Mansfield was succeeded by husband and wife, **Ken** and **Mary Hastings**, as organist and choir leader respectively. Essentially private music teachers offering 'piano, organ and singing tuition', the Hastings had come to Canberra in 1973, both with various music diplomas from respected London institutions. After only three years as organist at St Andrew's, however, Ken moved to All Saints Anglican Church, Ainslie for a short time, then to Tasmania. The Hastings both died in Hobart in 1997.

The next two organists, **Sheila Thompson** and **Lorraine Macknight**, were both married women, university graduates with academic husbands and young families. Well-known to St Andrew's longest-serving minister, the Rev Hector Harrison, of whom they retain many memories, they had benefited from experience playing for smaller services in the 1970s during Mansfield's time as organist. Thompson and Macknight were later also organ students of Dr Donald Hollier at the Canberra School of Music, with organ as primary study towards their second degrees.

Thompson, originally educated in Melbourne, was organist and choir leader for six and a half years (1981-1988), before moving to St John's, Reid, where she has been Director of Music for 35 years. She continued to play for many weddings at St Andrew's and for St Andrew's Village services for several years. **Macknight**, a Tasmanian, was initially assistant organist (1981-1988) before succeeding Thompson as organist and choir leader (1988-1993).

She moved interstate in early 1994. Returning to Canberra in 2000, Macknight has since chosen to play for various churches, Anglican, Uniting Church and Lutheran including, more occasionally, at St Andrew's. This exposure to different denominational traditions assisted her completion of a doctoral thesis on the transmission of German hymns to Australia, 1845-1999 (2014).

Two staff members at the Canberra School of Music were the next appointed organists at St Andrew's. **Barbara McRae**, a University of Melbourne graduate and fine harpsichordist, was a School of Music lecturer. She relinquished her position at St Andrew's after only eighteen months (Dec 1993-mid-1995) and was succeeded by **William (Bill) Hawkey** (1995-1999). A New Zealander and experienced choir conductor, he had been appointed the first Assistant Director of the School (1979). The following year, he established the Canberra Community (now Llewellyn) Choir, later becoming the School's Director (1996-1998). Hawkey was the first organist to live in St Andrew's Cottage.

The Cottage is now home to **Beth Cathcart**, the present organist and choir leader at St Andrew's. Appointed in January 2000, following Hawkey's retirement, she has been a member of the church since 1977, remains active in maintaining the precinct garden, was a member of the choir for several years and assistant organist (1995-1997). A primary schoolteacher and relative latecomer as a church organist in Canberra, Cathcart has served St Andrew's in that capacity for almost 25 years, making her the church's longest continuous serving organist.

In addition to the above-named, at least twenty other organists have played for services at St Andrew's at different times over the last ninety years. Excluding those who played intermittently or very occasionally and visiting organists, special mention is due to **Judith Baskin, Robert (Bob) Cunningham, William (Bill) Fraser, Rupert Loof** and **Jean Miller**.

Loof, a Parliamentary officer (Senate), was assistant organist and choirmaster in CS Daley's time (1934-1947). He was effectively succeeded by **Cunningham** (1947-early 1960s), a RAAF ex-serviceman from Western Australia who had recently come to Canberra. Post-World War II, housing in the national capital was problematic, but the Cunningham family stayed at least until his death (1970). **Baskin**, daughter of a World War II Anglican chaplain and a former student at Canberra Girls' Grammar, played at St Andrew's for about three years (1960-1963): one of the first organists to play for the 9.30 am service when it was introduced (October 1959). A career librarian with the National Library, she left St Andrew's to become the library's liaison officer in London. **Miller**, a senior public servant in the Commonwealth Department of Education, was from Sydney. Mainly remembered at St Andrew's as a stalwart alto in the choir, she conducted it successfully at the Canberra Eisteddfod (1978). Miller also played for several 9.30 am

services in the 1970s, however, and was subsequently organist at St Ninian's Uniting Church, Lyneham until retiring aged 80. **Fraser**, also from Sydney and a continuing member of St Andrew's, chose the same age to retire from regular church playing. As well as evening services at St Andrew's (1976-1978) and some other services (mainly 1988-1993), he has played regularly at St Columba's Uniting (formerly Presbyterian) Church, Braddon, Central Baptist, Kingston and elsewhere over extended periods.

Several points emerge from this brief overview of St Andrew's organists. There has been a good gender mix. Eight of the organists played regularly for fifteen or more years and three have played for most (or all) of St Andrew's inducted ministers (Thompson, Macknight, Fraser). Only two have had war or defence-related service (Cunningham, Cole), in contrast to many of the church's choir members (past and present). Most of the organists have been university graduates, some with additional educational qualifications and pursuing a range of professional occupations on weekdays: public servants, administrators, schoolteachers, music teachers and an archivist. Some have also played regularly for aged care facilities, given organ recitals or been active on behalf of the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM). Three had young families at the time of appointment (Mansfield, Thompson, Macknight). Each of these longer-serving organists, and Fraser, can also claim over 50 years of church playing in Canberra, including for other denominations. In sum, St Andrew's organists have made a substantial contribution to life under the much-respected spire on the hill and to the wider community.

Lorraine Macknight

Sources: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8 (entry for CS Daley), *The Echo* (Presbyterian Church of St Andrew, Canberra, early issues to date), TROVE newspaper database, personal knowledge.

