

Tribute to Bill McKelvie

It is a privilege for me to present a tribute to one of our esteemed members, Bill McKelvie (1934-2017).

The Organ Society of Queensland was founded in 1952, and Bill joined soon after its formation. So his association with OSQ goes back over 60 years. He was on the OSQ Committee for many years and was Honorary Secretary from 1996 to 2004.

In October 1977, while Bill and his wife Lynda were living near Lismore, he wrote to the Society to ask if a group of organ enthusiasts (he referred to them as “pipe organ cranks”) living in the Lismore area could become country members of OSQ. This was readily agreed to by the Committee, so the Constitution was changed to allow members from other states to join, and OSQ gained some new members from northern NSW.

The Society kept up the connection with the Lismore area, and organised a number of organ crawls, organ rambles, as we now call them, to the area, to hear, see and play the pipe organs in the various churches in the area. We still have two members from northern NSW on our membership list.

When Bill and Lynda returned to Brisbane, Bill was an enthusiastic member of the OSQ Committee, eager to spread the word about the great sound of pipe organs, and keen to organise events that furthered the aims of the Society. He always saw the lighter side of things and was quick to make a joke in difficult situations.

Bill played the organ for services of worship over many years at various churches, usually in the area where he was living at the time. He played at:

- Ann Street Church of Christ for 13 years,
- Lismore Uniting Church for 5 years,
- Beaudesert Uniting Church for 6 years,
- Kenmore Anglican Church for 5 years, and
- Cleveland Uniting Church for 9 years.

Bill will leave a legacy of pipe and digital organs in many parts of Queensland. When he and Lynda moved from Lismore to the Beaudesert area, he was responsible for obtaining the redundant two-manual pipe organ from Fortitude Valley Presbyterian Church in Warner Street and installing it in Beaudesert Uniting Church in 1991-92.

When Bill and Lynda moved to Kenmore in 1995, Bill was responsible for obtaining a two-manual digital Allen organ for Holy Spirit Anglican Church, Kenmore. Bill had a great input into the extension of the pipe organ in Cleveland Uniting Church. The organ was originally in Woolloowin Methodist/Uniting Church.

In 2007, Bill and his colleague, Ernie Day extended the organ from 17 stops to 30 stops, so that it now has an impressive specification. It has a Principal Chorus with Mixture plus a Trumpet on the Great, a Flute Chorus with Mixture plus Oboe and Horn on the Swell, and a good range of stops on the Pedal, including a Mixture and 16', 8', and 4' reeds.

That's an impressive specification for a pipe organ in a suburban church; impressive enough for fine organists such as Dr Robert Boughen and Christopher Wrench to agree to give recitals on it. Bill also built a Schober electronic organ and restored numerous reed and electronic organs.

So Bill, you have left your mark on the organ community in Queensland and Northern NSW, and we thank you for your great contribution to furthering the aims of OSQ. We will miss your friendship, your cheery greeting, and your enthusiasm for the organ.

Rest in peace, Brother Bill.

(by Dr Steven Nisbet, Past President of the Organ Society of Queensland)