

LILIAN WEAVER (1885–1976)



I need to declare an interest in adding the kindest, most unassuming, genteel lady to those who have left an indelible mark on this village, and we need to extend the above time span to 1976. I was privileged to know Lilian Alice Weaver, organist for 60 years in the parish church, piano teacher, singing teacher, accompanist and promoter of love of music in this parish.

Born 1885, she began her long and faithful service as organist on Easter Sunday 1908. Those of us who knew her in old age will never forget the love that radiated from her frail body – her love of music and her love for her fellow parishioners. It did not surprise us that she never thought of material gain or aggrandisement. She started her organist's duties literally for the love of God. Once a year a grateful congregation made a house-to-house collection for her round the village. When, in later years she had to agree for tidiness' sake to accept a salary she was wont to post a part of it back into the alms box in church. Did she sell herself short on home comforts? The story goes, that she enjoyed a sandwich with butter and mustard with an imagined piece of ham in between! She looked upon the church as her home, spent a good deal of her day in it, writing letters, receiving visitors and finding out parishioners' likes and dislikes of hymns!

Parishioners also remember her for her sense of fun and eagerness to use her gift for the good of the village. In the good old days when villagers had to make their own entertainment she never refused a request to play at a dance, a village hop, play at dancing classes or accompany a budding soloist at a concert. She taught the piano to many children and adults in and around the village.

In the 1940s Edward Short remembers spending four pence ha'penny on a bus ride from North Aston to Deddington where in her home, next to the Co-op, surrounded by her many rescued cats, he started his musical career. She enthused him to try out the organ and graciously sat beside him at the console to advise and encourage. Edward Short celebrated, last year, his 50th year as organist in North Aston church.

In the musical world of Deddington, she was irreplaceable. She died at the ripe old age of 91, never I am sure, having harboured an unkind thought, or spoken an unkind word. Until her mother's death she cared for her. In her own old age she brushed handicaps aside, let her mind dwell on joyful memories and placed her trust in God. Her many friends looked after her and cared for her to the end.

Ruth Johnson, 2003, with help from Topper Davis and Edward Short

It had to happen. The past is catching up with the present. On Sunday, April 9th, 2000 we admired a brightly polished plaque mounted on the organ surround in the Parish Church. The inscription reads 'A memorial to Lilian Alice Weaver 1885–1976, who was organist of this church for 60 years.' Her long and faithful service began on Easter Day 1908. Over the years, enthusiastically but always very humbly, she made music to the glory of God. She played the 'Dead March' in Saul at the close of the Memorial Service to King Edward VII in June 1910; saw out the old organ – the oldest in the

district – and coped with an American organ until enough funds were raised to install a new one. Then, on Sunday August 20th 1912, she enjoyed the majestic sound of the new 'Binns' organ at the dedication service performed by the Bishop of Zanzibar, leaving the actual play to various organ scholars of fame. But very soon afterwards she mastered the intricate and wonderful instrument.

And so, year after year she played on as the choir sang on the occasion of her Diamond Jubilee in 1968:

*'Saints days and feast days
Weddings and christenings
Music in autumn, winter and spring
Some people singing and some people listening
Always the urge to give a voice and to sing
Old hymns at Harvest, at Christmas new carols
Yet through the choir changes
Miss Weaver plays on
For tenors like bean poles and basses like barrels
Tunes to play out whether earnest or fun
Music below to be heard up above
20 years, 40 years, 60 years on
Playing on! till the church ring again and again
with the sound of the organ and choir.
Playing on!'*

Ruth Johnson, 2003