

## The organ through the years



The organ

The organ, originally built by Bishop for St Peter's, Eaton Square in the 1830s, was bought for £150 by Revd Fitz Wygram in 1874. A year later an organ-blower was appointed at a salary of £6 a year. The first mention of the organ in the magazine was in May 1885: *"The organ is a very good instrument, but somewhat old-fashioned in its mechanical structure, and very much out of repair."* At the cost of about £210 it was repaired and improved in that year by Messrs. Bishops of Norwich, and a pedal bourdon stop added. The organ was ready for the Confirmation Service and *"the improvement effected by the repair and additions is very marked. The rich soft tone of the Bourdon pipes which form the western front of the organ is very pleasing."* In 1901 the organ was cleaned and further repaired and improved using the profits made from a sale of work and 'Battle of Flowers'. According to the report: *"this rendered the instrument almost as complete and perfect as it could be made with its powers being largely increased by the alteration of various stops and the addition of new ones which added to the enjoyment of the services"*.

Mrs Isdell Carpenter, whose father was the first warden of St James's and whose husband was vicar's warden for fourteen years, with her sister painted lilies and foliage in cream and gold on the pedal pipes in 1894 (shown below). The real gold leaf used was specially supplied by the Admiralty. These pipes were originally visible to the congregation.

The organ was rebuilt in 1912 by Messrs Hele and Co, of Plymouth and London, as a three manual instrument with adequate pedal organ and new pneumatic actions using Hale's patent key stops. The pipes were reused and the characteristic mellow tone was greatly enhanced when the accumulated dust was cleared out and some of the pipes were revoiced.

The painted wooden pipes were later unfortunately moved out of sight to the rear of the organ chamber and substituted with the silvered metal open diapason pipes that now fill the arch. Electric blowing equipment was installed, the swell shutters were made to open vertically, thus sending the sound straight down the church, and two new stops were added. The magazine of April 1912 reported: *"The latest form of tubular pneumatic action will be fitted throughout. The touch will be as light and flexible as that of the finest pianoforte. The fingers will merely have to move the key or stop and the compressed air will do the rest. All cumbersome and noisy mechanism will be entirely absent."* During the rebuilding, the services were accompanied by a dozen instrumentalists or by a harmonium. The substitution of an electric blower for the old hand-blowing mechanism meant that the church had to dispense with the services of Mr Thomas Willis, who had carried out the office of 'blower' for thirty six years.



Metal and wooden pipes

In 1921 a report from the same organ builders stated that certain parts of the organ were in a deplorable condition. The vicar, Revd Coad-Pryor, said *"The music in the church is so good that it must not be handicapped by a faulty organ."* So the necessary work was done, with future organ recitals paying the bill. The organ again was cleaned and underwent a thorough overhaul, being *"relieved of its accumulation of dust"* in April 1932.

The December 1950 magazine reported: *"If music is to be raised to its highest level of usefulness, there must be soul, technique, and a proper means of expression. That is where the Organ Builder becomes our ally, and to secure the best results we must be in possession of an Organ that is the expression of these qualities, so that the whole service may be lifted to a dignity and beauty that is otherwise impossible."* As nothing apart from tuning had been done

to the organ since 1932, dirt had again accumulated, the leather work was perishing and the action motors were worn out. As a result many notes did not speak and the mechanism became unreliable, so the organ was renovated during 1951.



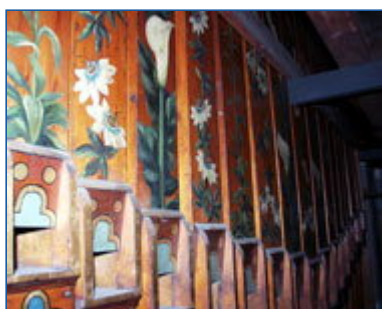
The miniature computer

Despite this work, by 1962 *"the deterioration of the organ is now cumulative and rapid"* and *"the question of what to do about the organ has been tossed about like a hot potato for several years"*. Advice was eventually sought from the London Diocesan Advisory Board who sent an expert on organs to give his opinion. He submitted a detailed report expressing his view that *"The instrument possessed a fine tonal quality, that the worn out pneumatic action should be replaced with the latest electric action, the pipework should be retained after cleaning and revoicing, the blowing equipment should be renewed, the bellows renovated and the present eccentric console discarded and a new one installed."* The organ restoration in 1972 by Bishop and Sons,

the original builders, incorporated a new electric action replacing the old pneumatic mechanism. There was a recital to inaugurate the restored instrument and September edition of the Spire reported: *"The selection of music in the recital ..... demonstrated the various tone-colours of the rebuilt and revoiced organ and the instant response of the new action in place of the former old inert pneumatic action."*

Twenty-five years later, the February 1997 Spire reported: *"The organ is need of considerable work, both in repairing dilapidations and in adapting its nature if it is to continue to prove useful for our needs both in worship and recital."* An Organ Appeal was successful with over £15,300 being raised, with a tax refund of around £1,100. The organ was again overhauled, serviced and modernised by John Males of Eastbourne. Three completely new stops were added: a bass oboe, a clarinet and a cornopean (trumpet). Together these constituted one hundred and sixty two new pipes of varying sizes. Some of the new pipes were salvaged from a neighbouring church while others were paid for by sponsors who were dubbed 'organ donors'. This work made it the biggest organ in the Borough of Richmond at the time. A reception in the church hall followed a blessing by the vicar and a short recital. Later, in 2006, work was done on the brickwork in the organ chamber to prevent the entry of dust particles from the original mortar into the operating mechanism.

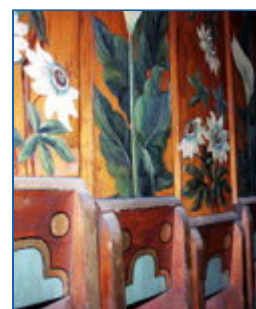
The above information covers the period from when any records could be found until November 2016. This was when Revd Derek Winterburn became St James's tenth vicar and from this time onwards any new information can be found on the main site.



The painted organ pipes



Have a look at the photo album  
- ['Inside the organ chamber'](#)



The painted organ pipes



Metal pipes



Wooden louvres



Metal pipes