

From ‘Whole’ to ‘Hole’ in Three Days!

Over the years a number of EDOA events have been held at St Mary's Church, Ponsbourne, with its 1858 Walker organ. Those who attended will have heard the noise from the worn action, but noted the beauty of the display pipes and the quality of the voicing. After many years of working and waiting, the organ-restoration project is now (April 2013) well under way.



In the autumn of 2012, the parish applied for a grant from the ‘Your Heritage’ Lottery Fund, together with a Faculty from the Diocese of St Albans, to allow works on the organ and the surrounding area to go ahead. Affirmative responses were received at the end of 2012, with a grant of just under £100,000 from the Fund, and the Faculty (roughly the equivalent of planning permission) from the Diocese.

Since then, arrangements have been made for the restoration work, and also for education and outreach events (a condition of the grant being received). For instance, we worked with three of the local schools and the Royal College of Organists to introduce pupils to the way the organ works, the sounds it makes, and something of its history and repertoire. Other events provided an insight into how the display pipes have their decorations restored.

At the time of writing, the organ chamber is looking very strange: the instrument was dismantled just after Easter and, apart from a few of the largest pipes, has been removed to the premises of Mander Organs in Bethnal Green, London to be restored. In the meantime, repair work on the roof above the Vestry and Organ Chamber has been completed, the blower

motor has been sent for overhaul, work is about to start on the inside of the Organ Chamber – and the first coat of paint has gone on the console mirror!

All being well, the instrument will be returned to site within three months or so, after which it will need to settle down and be given some fine adjustment to both action and voicing. We should then be in a position to think about arranging the re-dedication of the instrument, giving an Opening Recital, and other events in celebration of its return.

In one respect, however, the instrument as it was lives on: A set of sample recordings of the sound of the instrument was made, pipe by pipe, before it was dismantled. A set of these recordings was passed to the organ builders, for reference. Another set was passed to an expert in the field (and long-time friend of the organist) who has processed them so that they can be played on an instrument of his own design. The results have been described in an article on his website (www.pykett.org.uk) and make interesting reading.

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