

Past Events

The Restoration of the organ at St Luke's Church, Enfield

It's not often that the colour orange is chosen for organ pipe decoration, but that's not the only unusual aspect of the Bishop & Son organ at St Luke's Enfield. The casework is teak, and there is some oriental styling in the pipe shade carving, suggesting it may have been made originally for export to Asia. But it never made it further than Enfield, installed there in 1906 at a cost of £600, half of which was met by a donation from the philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie.

The pipes were originally grey metal apparently, and the painting was done in house, under the supervision of local sign-writer Ian McCoig. The congregation did the orange background, and McCoig did the artwork.

Some slightly more significant alterations to the organ had been made over the years (notably the 4ft Flauto Traverso stop on the Choir being converted to a 2ft Piccolo Harmonique by moving the pipes down an octave in relation to the keyboard), but the organ was substantially in original condition in 2010, such that it was awarded an Historic Organ Certificate Grade II. However, failing and un-repairable notes, collapsing Cornopean pipes, and a host of leaks in the winding meant that it was now in need of major repair.

A five month major renovation by Tarquin Wiggins has just been completed, with Heritage Lottery Funding. Much of the existing pneumatic mechanism was too worn for repair, so it was stripped out and many elements replaced by an electrical system, providing more space for access behind the consoles, but leaving the more reliable pneumatic parts unchanged. The original 4ft Flauto Traverso was reinstated (the bottom octave pipes had been stacked all this time inside the organ case). It was discovered that the bottom octave of pipes for the Choir 8 Clarinet was missing, so a set of replacement pipes was installed.

Along with the electrification, programm- able thumb pistons have been installed below each keyboard, as well as toe pistons replacing the original fixed foot operated combination levers. Finally, a midi interface means organ music can be recorded and played back, in the absence of an organist.

As the project was reaching completion, the church organised several events in June to which EDOA members were invited. Two evenings involved Tarquin Wiggins telling us about the restoration, commenting ruefully how difficult it was to find suitable leather for restoration work. It's sad that the quality of the leather now isn't as good as it was in 1906, he said – there used to be manufacturers who just made it for the organ trade. Tarquin's talk was preceded by Jeremy Sampson demonstrating how the organ works with his WOOFYT (Wooden One-Octave Organ for Young Technologists). This was mainly for the benefit of the non-organists in attendance of course, and it was encouraging to see a large number of local people of all ages enjoying getting some simple music out of the contraption. If you haven't encountered the WOOFYT, it's a functioning model of an organ built in the main out of dishwasher components. Jeremy's demos are supported by the Institute of Physics, and he estimates that the various WOOFYTs in existence have now been played by 15 thousand people. The tuning leaves a bit to be desired, but Jeremy tells me it's as temperamental as a real organ, especially if it's been stored in a garage. On the day I attended, the plan had been for Robert Evans and Peter Smith to give a demo on the organ to round off the evening, but

Tarquin had only been able to restore electricity at 8am that morning, and had not been able to tune more than a few ranks on a single manual, so the demo was reluctantly abandoned.

By the end of August, however, everything was back in place, and the EDOA were invited to come and play the organ over a Saturday – the church being keen to bed everything in and chase any niggling issues before the recital series starts in earnest. You can find the concert series to celebrate the return of the organ at <http://clayhillparish.org.uk/concerts.html>.

The EDOA will return this September to St Luke's for their Members' Recital, and you are warmly welcome to play the organ at other times by arrangement with John Wright (johnskaywright@gmail.com or 0208 482 2936).



Robert Evans playing on June 11th
Photo copyright © Morwenna Brett



Robin Coxon playing on June 18th
Photo copyright © Hilary Bailey



St Luke's finished console
Photo copyright © John Wright

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Pictures of the WOOFYT can be seen in the Gallery section of the website – Ed.