

ORGANS IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST GLASTONBURY

ST. DUNSTAN

The Saxon Abbot Dunstan was reputedly an organ builder whilst at Glastonbury in about 960AD. There's a tradition that some of the pipe work from the abbey organs was incorporated in St John's organs after the dissolution of the abbey in 1537. However, none of this material could have pre-dated the catastrophic fire of 1184.

MEDIEVAL AND TUDOR ORGANS

It is likely that the original organs were damaged by the collapse of the central tower. When it was removed and the chancel arch built in the 1460s organs were placed on the chancel screen rood loft. The small blocked opening above the chancel arch, 35' up, may have been put there for the organists' benefit, enabling them to follow the service in the Sanctuary beyond. Our Churchwardens' accounts for 1484 record the payment of '12d for capping the small organs' and later 'for repairing anew, and mending the greater organs which had been broken down - £1.6s.8d. piece work. For carrying the same organs onto the rood loft, with their expenses - 4d.' The accounts for 1490 and 1497 also record work done by George the Organ Builder and Stephen the Carver on the organs in the choir of the church. In 1584; 'item, for new trimmyng the organes and clensynge the pypes 46s.' We assume that these were all swept away during the Commonwealth.

GEORGIAN MUSIC

18th Century expenditure was on singers and instruments. In 1771 a bassoon cost £1.1s.0d and six reeds 4s.6d. In 1788 a new bassoon and 'hobo' cost £5.15s.0d. In 1789 a new pitch pipe for the singers cost 2s.6d. - and cider 10s.6d! These may have operated from the western gallery in the tower, later used for the organ.

1817 ~ THE REGENCY ORGAN

In 1817 John Yeoman offered to advance £600 to St John's to purchase an organ upon receiving the interest during his life. The offer was accepted, the Churchwardens paying the cost of carriage and erection. The organ, by Flight, was put on a Regency 'gothick' gallery at the west end of the church for a further £219.8s.6¼d. This gallery was high against the west window, blocking the lower half of it, and projecting into the nave to the first pair of pillars. Henry Wilcox Down was appointed organist for £20 per year and the men and women singers with him in the gallery received £20.4s.0d per year.

1860 ~ HENRY WILLIS ~ RE-BUILD

Sir Gilbert Scott was engaged in 1856 to 'restore' the church. This included the removal of all furnishings including the pulpit, box pews and gallery before re-paving. The organ was taken down in 1857.

In 1859 Henry Willis reported on the state of the organ. There were then 939 metal pipes not counting the trumpet; 464 in the Great Organ, 290 in the Choir and 185 in the Swell. He agreed to 'put up the organ in a temporary way, the permanent situation not having been determined upon - which is as per agreement to be done for the sum of ten or twelve pounds.'

The cost of repairing and rebuilding was to be £82 and to service it for £3 per year. A further £69 was quoted 'to provide an octave and a half of German pedals, an octave and a half of Bourdon pipes, a new Trumpet and three composition pedals.' The 1860 secretary of the Restoration Committee 'stated Mr. Willis had recommended the organ should be placed in the north transept and read a letter from Mr. Scott sanctioning that arrangement.' A discussion ensued and 'it was ultimately determined to leave the question to the decision to the Bishop.'

1886 ~ WILLIAM SWEETLAND ~ ENLARGE & MOVE

William Sweetland, Organ Builder of Cleveland Place, Bath undertook to:

'Remove the organ to the North Transept - add three new sets of manuals, the fronts made to project 1¼" over the others so that the Organist may reach the top set easier. Remake the pedals concave with the front on the sharps to form a circle.

Swell organ, add new Cornopea G to top note

Swell organ, add new Oboe G to top note

Swell organ, add new Fifteenth G to top note

Swell organ, add new Bourdon G to top note

Great organ, add new Trumpet CC to top note

Pedal organ, make new soundboard

Add new Pedal Open Diapason from CCC 16feet to F 30, pipes arranged at the Bass end of the organ.

Two composition Pedals to Swell organ.'

All for the sum of £180. For another £25. 10s. Od. he added a zinc pedal Principal from CCC 8' to F (30 pipes) and made a coupler Choir to Swell.

1914 ~ REST CARTRIGHT ~ ENLARGE & 1926 ~ MOVE

Archdeacon Day, Vicar, and Major Bath, Churchwarden, purchased a number of ranks from various organ builders in 1912. These were assembled by Rest Cartright in 1914, extending the organ from the north transept to the foot of the pulpit steps. The choir organ and console were in the Lady Chapel and the bellows in the vestry. No case work was provided, perhaps because of the war, and the works were shielded by waterproof sheeting. The use of a water powered blower caused many drought-time quiet periods.

The Revd. Lionel Lewis, in 1926, after a 18-17 vote in the Church Council, authorised the removal of the organ and choir to the west end of the church. The organ was enlarged again and placed in the western two bays of the north aisle behind screens designed by Bligh Bond (the upper part by Lewis). The four manual console protruded into the Nave from the easterly bay and the choir sang from pews on a raised platform against the tower arch. The new electric blower was housed in a shed on the north churchyard boundary.

1972 ~ CHARLES SMETHURST ~ REBUILD

During the fifties and sixties the organ deteriorated badly, partly because of the complicated layout and limited access for tuning and maintenance work. By 1970 it was evident that parts of the instrument were un-usable and the annual cost of repairs was increasing.

In 1971 Charles Smethurst of Manchester proposed a comprehensive rebuild and modernisation which, together with a detached console, cost £5,000. He changed ‘a large four manual instrument, containing many low pitched stops which created a “woolly” and comparatively characterless tone, into a smaller two manual instrument that allowed each stop to be usefully employed in many different combinations’ - his description.

The console was sited at the foot of the staircase which led to the original organs, close to the north transept and midway between the organ and the choir. The organ blower is in a pit beneath the partition which divides the old organ space into two equal parts; the western half is now occupied by a kitchen and music library above. The two Lewis cases were swapped over by Churchwarden Neill Bonham, the console opening being enlarged to form the doorway into the kitchen. The dedication of the new organ took place in May, 1972 by the vicar, Preb. Peter Haynes.

1986 ~ DANIEL & CO, CLEVEDEN ~ SUPPLEMENT

In 1986 the Church Council supplemented Smethurst’s specification with the addition by organist Robin Walker of an Open Diapason for the Swell and a Solo Trumpet for the Great.

2020 ~ CLEVEDON PIPE ORGAN SERVICES ~ RENOVATE AND MODERNISE

As part of the reordering of St John’s in 2020 (including the removal of the pews), the organ console was made mobile. To achieve this, a new electric action was installed using CAT 5 technology; this also allowed for general pistons to be added, vastly increasing the instrument’s versatility. A setter and general cancel pistons were also added. All pipes were cleaned and repaired where necessary. The Swell Nazard 2 2/3 was replaced by a much more useful Oboe 8.

SPECIFICATION

Two manuals, compass CC to A, 58 notes. Pedals, compass CCC to E, 30 notes.

Couplers: Swell Super Octave Swell Sub Octave Swell Unison Off
Swell to Great Swell to Pedal Great to Pedal

Blowing: electric Tuning: Eq Temp Pitch: A=440

Accessories: Five Thumb Pistons to Swell Organ
Five Thumb Pistons to Great and Pedal Organs
One Thumb Piston reversing Swell to Great
One Thumb Piston reversing Swell to Pedal
One Thumb Piston reversing Great to Pedal
Eight General pistons/Setter Piston/General Cancel Piston *
Three Toe pistons (Great to Pedal, Stepper +, Stepper -)*
Balanced Swell Pedal

Great Key action EP Stop action EP Compass-low C Compass-high a3 Keys 58

1	Open Diapason	8	49 from Small Open
2	Chimney Flute	8	
3	Octave	4	
4	Wald Flute	4	49 from old organ
5	Twelfth	2 2/3	
6	Fifteenth	2	
7	Mixture	III	22.26.29
8	Solo Trumpet 8		added 1986

Swell Key action EP Stop action EP Compass-low C Compass-high a3 Keys 58 Enclosed

9	Open Diapason	8	added '74-'88
10	Gedeckt	8	24 from old Sw Bdn
11	Salicional	8	49 from old organ
12	Voix Celestes	8	TC
13	Principal	4	49 from old Sw Diap
14	Fifteenth	2	
15	Mixture	II	19.22
16	Double Trumpet	16	C
17	Trumpet	8	C
18	Oboe	8	(in place of Nazard 2 2/3)*
19	Octave Trumpet	4	C
20	Solo Trumpet 8		Great, unenclosed
21	Tremulant		

Pedal Key action EP Stop action EP Compass-low C Compass-high f1 Keys 30

22	Violone	16	A, from old organ
23	Bourdon	16	B
24	Principal	8	A
25	Bass Flute	8	B
26	Fifteenth	4	A
27	Double Trumpet	16	C
28	Trumpet	8	C
29	Octave Trumpet	4	C

*these items were added in the 2020 rebuild

Neill Bonham March 2020