

History of the Organ

The first reliable reference to an organ in St Mary's is an entry in the Churchwardens Account Book¹ for July 27, 1840: "*Pd Mr Lincoln for repairing Organ £1 0s 0d.*" This organ probably dated from the early 19th century. Up to that time church music was generally provided by a band or 'quire' placed in a gallery at the west end of the nave. With the rise of the Oxford Movement these bands tended to fall out of favour, to be replaced by pipe organs, or even barrel organs.

A west gallery was recorded⁷ here in 1799, but it had been removed by the time of Archdeacon Bonney's visitation⁶ in the 1820s. So it is fair to assume that an organ was first installed here during that period - although it may have been only a barrel organ that could play a small selection of psalm tunes.

However, it does not seem to have been a durable or enjoyable instrument since in 1883 we find this entry: "*Organ purchased from Trustam and Sons of Bedford for £200 less an allowance of £10 for the old organ*".² Trustam and Sons were, until 1911, a local family of organ builders based in Castle Road, Bedford, where their workshop-building can still be seen adjacent to The Slipe. Josiah Trustam, then in his early forties, and his son Arthur, were responsible for the instrument at Bletsoe, and many other church organs in Bedfordshire.⁸ The £10 allowance for the old organ implies that parts of the older instrument, particularly the pipes, could have been re-used in the new organ.

Shortly afterwards, in 1887 Mary Green, the organist, aged 21, was practising the music for the funeral of the Fifteenth Earl St John when she was frightened by an 'apparition' in the St John mortuary chapel where the vault lay open in readiness for the funeral. At that time the organ was positioned opposite the chapel, in the South Transept. On investigation by her father, the apparition turned out to be a somewhat tardy monumental mason who had crept into the church unobserved in order to carve the memorial inscription for the Fourteenth Earl who had died some thirteen years earlier.³

In 1902 Mr Miller, an organ builder of Cambridge was paid £91 2s for altering and repairing the organ. The entry in the minute book² records that "*The organ had not been cleaned since it was built in the Rectorship of E T St John. It was then placed so far under the arch in the South Transept as to be out of touch with the choir. To remedy this defect a new soundboard was built for the Great Organ & placed partly in front of & partly under the arch. In the front row of pipes, 6 large metal pipes were added in place of wooden pipes, thereby making the Open Diapason uniform in tone throughout. The action of the whole instrument was repaired & improved. Arrangements were made of the action for an additional pedal stop, in case such be desired in the future. The whole organ was thoroughly cleaned. The existing woodwork & decoration were retained for sentimental & economic reasons*".

By 1937 Electric Light had finally been installed⁴ in the church, but the organ was still hand-blown.

In 1946 Harold Whitworth was appointed organist at Bletsoe. Harold remains church organist to this day, having served for 55 years.

The PCC minute book⁵ of 3rd May, 1955 records that: "*The Rector reported that Messrs Fraser Son and Mackenzies' estimate had been accepted for supplying an electric motor for the organ and stripping the whole instrument & supplying many new part for £200.*" It goes on to state: "*It is hoped that the organ will be finished by Whitsunday, a great delay has been caused by an epidemic at the factory.*" However, on 12th July it records a more positive note: "*The organ is now completely restored and in first class condition. The electric blower has been installed.*"

In 1965, following earlier closure of the chancel, the Organ was removed from the south transept and placed in its present position in the north west corner of the nave.

Following 30 years of wear and tear, in 1996 the organ was almost completely stripped down, cleaned, parts replaced, action repaired, and new pedal board installed, all at a cost of £3,450 pounds.

Edward Bean, Churchwarden, March 2000.

1. Bletsoe Churchwardens Account Book, 1822 to 1894, BCRO P36/5/
2. Bletsoe Vestry Minute Book, 1852 to 1952, BCRO P36/8/1
3. A Mysterious Happening at Bletsoe, Reg Green, Bedfordshire Magazine, vol 17, p284
4. Faculty, 17 September 1939, BCRO P36/2/18
5. PCC Minute Book 1955 to 1971, BCRO P36/32/2
6. A Brief History of the Parish Church of St Mary, Bletsoe. David Baker, 1993
7. History of Willey Hundred, Harvey
8. Information supplied to the author by the Donnelly brothers, great-grandchildren of Josiah Trustam

BLETSOE.

**OPENING OF A NEW ORGAN AT
ST. MARY'S CHURCH.**

The new organ which has just been erected in the parish church, Bletsoe, by Messrs Trustam and Sons, of Bedford, was opened on Tuesday last, with special services, and under particularly successful circumstances. The sacred edifice, dedicated to St. Mary, was profusely decorated for the occasion by Miss Thomas, Miss Richards, Miss Trapp, Miss Leuty, Miss Green, Miss Campion, Mrs Hipwell, Mrs Lynn, assisted by the Rector (the Hon. and Rev. E. Tudor St. John), Lady St John, the Churchwardens, and others. On the pulpit and reading-desk hung a wreath of flowers and at the base were a number of roses set in moss. On either side of the entrance to the chancel were a number of wild flowers which had been gathered by the children of the parish, and these mingled with cultivated flowers, asparagus, and laurel boughs constituted a tasteful arrangement. The windows were ornamented with cut flowers of various hues, embedded in moss, which presented a pretty appearance. Round the top of the font were flowers and moss, the inside being filled with water lilies, and at the bottom was a beautiful cross, composed of flowers. On the Communion rails, at the back of the altar, in front of the reredos, in the window above, and at the side of the sanctuary, were a number of choice flowers, some of which were encircled with ferns. The new reredos attracted much attention. It was erected in the style of the architectural, such as the arches and

decorated monuments adjoining. The reredos occupies the width of the chancel, the central portion being the width of the east window and divided into three compartments by marble columns, carved capitals, and moulded and sunk buttresses, finishing with carved pinnacles, &c. The central compartment contains a white alabaster cross and marble background, and on either side, in the other two niches, are figures of St. John and the Virgin Mary, the church being dedicated to St. Mary. These statues have canopied cusped tracery over, with carved gable crockets deeply moulded with a rich marble background, and supported by a corbled super-altar of marble. On either side of the central portion, forming the reredos proper, is an arcade of four arches with carved panels and moulded cusped arches supported on marble columns and carved capitals forming panels, containing the Commandments, Lords Prayer, and Belief, cut and painted in red and black, giving a very good effect from the nave of the church. The whole of the work has been carried out by instructions of the Rector, by Mr R. L. Boulton, ecclesiastical sculptor, Cheltenham.

The services of the day commenced with the celebration of Holy Communion, at 11 a.m., at which the organ was dedicated. At 3 p.m. there was an evensong, the preacher being the Rev. R.B. Poole, B.D., Head Master of the Modern School, Bedford. The service was full choral, and was intoned by the Rector, the choir from St. Andrews, Kettering, kindly assisting. The processional hymn was "Onward, Christian Soldiers," sung to Sullivan's music; the proper psalms appointed were xlvii, cxlviii, and cl; and the lessons, read by the Rev. F. H. Bolingbroke, vicar of of

Melchbourne, were I Chronicles xxix, and Revelations iv. The preacher took for his text, "Thou art worthy, O lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." (Rev. iv., 11). The discourse was very appropriate to the occasion, and in it, the preacher pointed out that from the earliest times music had occupied a prominent place among the Jews; that it was an accompaniment not only of their religious services but of their family life. Triumphal processions were enlivened by it, and in the time of David it played a most important part; 4000 persons were said to have been praising God together, and that it could not have been done if they had not made a study of music. From time to time there had been persons who had found fault with the introduction of instrumental music into public worship but that objection had been overcome, and now there were but few places where it was not to be found. The uses and aims of church music were also dwelt upon, the preacher remarking that it was an offering to God of what they might call the fruits of that talent and the skill with which God had endowed His creatures. Just as they dedicated to God the first fruits of the harvest, so they should dedicate to Him musical talents He had given them. What, he asked, was the feeling which prompted them to rear stately temples in His honour? Was it not to show that they were fond of doing something to honour Him? And just as affectionate children like to make some little present to their parents, however small and trivial it might be, so they liked to make an offering to their heavenly Father. As they had heard the tones of their new and beautiful organ, pealing forth its sweet notes in that House of

God, they should remember it was to assist them in their worship, and that God would accept that humble offering whereby they wished to make His worship more complete. Then it helped to keep alive their feeling of devotion. They all needed some aids in their worship. Most of them knew that their prayers and praises were at times very cold and dead, and over that every true Christian felt deeply grieved. He would not ask them to despise or look down upon simplicity of worship; on the contrary. Still what could be more invigorating than to join in some grand strains upon such an instrument as that which had been dedicated to God in that place that day? There was a soothing effect in music which prepared the mind for prayer. How often when they had entered the House of God, they had been thinking of other things rather than His worship, and how at such times the softened tones of the music had recalled their thoughts. The greatest use in church music was to help them to praise the Triune God, but he found they were too lax in the performance of this part of their religious creed. Many went to church but did not join in the praises. Their greatest joy should be to praise Him, and their services of song the yearnings of the spirit for communion with God. – The other hymns included in the service were: – "Sing Alleluia forth in dutious praise," "Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven," and "O Lord of heaven, and earth, and sea, to Thee all praise and glory be."

Immediately succeeding this afternoon service, an organ recital was given by Mr. P. H. Diemer, R.A.M., organist of Holy Trinity Church, Bedford, who rendered the following selections: – "My heart ever faithful" (J.S.Bach), *Andante Religioso* and *Allegretto* from Sonata No. 5, op. 65, of

Mendelssohn; "Waft her, angels" (*Jepthah*) (Handel), "Ave Maria" (Schubert), variations, "Jerusalem the golden" (Dr Spark), *Andante* in G (Battisto), "With Verdure clad" (*Creation*) (Haydn), introduction and fugue on the name of Bach (C. P. E. Bach). The tones of the organ were much admired both for their sweetness and power, – the soft stops, such as the Keraulophon on the Swell, and the Flute, Gamba, and Stop Diapason on the Great, being especially so. The pedal pipes are most effective. All the tones and power were well brought out in the various pieces by Mr Diemer, – the *Andante* in G, "With verdure clad," and "Jerusalem the Golden," which were most artistically played, exemplifying to a degree the richness of the various stops, to the great delight of the congregation present. Unfortunately the organ is placed in a recess at the side of the church. If a more prominent place could have been found for it the effect would have been better.

The following are the respective details of the new instrument :—

<i>Gt. Organ CC to G, 36 Notes</i>	<i>Swell</i>
<i>Organ CC to G, 36 Notes</i>	
Open Diapason, metal 36 pipes	Open
Diapason, metal 36	pipes
Stop Diapason, bass,	Lieblich
Gedact, wood 36	"
Wood 36 "	
	Keraulophon, metal
Clarabella, wood 44 "	Principal,
metal 56 "	
Gamba, metal 44 "	Hautboy,
metal 56 "	
Dulciana, metal 44 "	Double
Diapason, wood 44 "	
Principal, metal 56 "	
Flute (?????) wood 44 "	

Pedal Organ C to F, 30 Notes

Bourdon, wood, 16 feet tone, 30 pipes

The organ is constructed in a deal case, stained and varnished, the lower pipes of open diapason, planted in front, being painted and decorated. The whole erection reflects greatly to the credit of its enterprising Bedford builders, Messrs Trustam & Sons.

Another full choral service was held in the evening, when the preacher was the Rev. H. B. Wilkinson, the vicar of Sharnbrook. "Rejoice to-day with one accord" was the processional hymn; while other hymns were "O Lord, how joyful 'tis to see," "Pleasant are Thy courts above," and "Our day of praise is done (tune St. Michael). The lessons were read by the Rev. G. Digby Newbolt, rector of Souldrop. At this service the preacher took his text from Hebrews xii., 22-24.

Throughout the day the congregations were large, many persons being present from the surrounding villages, some from a greater distance, including the Head Constable and Mrs Jacquest, of Luton; and Mr Hipwell, Mr Edmunds, Mr Campion, and Mr Sanders were most attentive to them, providing seats and supplying copies of the hymns and order of the services. The offertories were for the Organ Fund. At divine service Mr Diemer also presided at the new instrument. Besides the clergy, named, there were also present the Rev. J. Hill Banham⁴⁴, vicar of Keysoe, Rev. E. Beckett, Bedford; Rev. E. Sutton Dodd, vicar of Milton Ernest; and the Rev. B. Trapp, vicar of Thurleigh. After the evening service, the church bells rang out a merry peal; while many of the congregation lingered to hear the sweet strains of the organ, again illustrated by Mr Diemer.