

The Church of St Winifred, Manaton – the Organ

The organ in the church is an instrument of two manuals and pedals. Its date of building is undetermined, but the style of the casework perhaps suggests 1880-1900. It was presented to the church by Philip and Katherine Champernowne in memory of their son Richard Harrington Radcliffe Champernowne, a cadet at Sandhurst College, who died from pneumonia on 7th March 1917. The organ was installed by Hele & Co. of Plymouth, and dedicated by the Bishop of Exeter on 4 December 1921, and replaced the previous American organ.¹

It has popularly been assumed that the organ came from Dartington Hall, presumably because of the Champernowne family connection, and the fact that the Dartington Estate was advertised for sale by auction in August 1921, but the PCC minutes make it clear that the organ was bought by Mr and Mrs Champernowne from a Mrs Young at Crowsley Park.² It seems probable that this refers to Maud Lucy Young, née Baskerville, of Crowsley Park, Shiplake, Oxfordshire, who married Rev. Walter Capel Young, Rector of Fawley, at Shiplake, 24 January 1912. There may have been some family or social connection between the Champernownes and the Baskervilles, but it may be also be significant that Hele & Co. had built a new organ at Shiplake parish church the previous year, and so may well have known that Mrs Young's house organ was available.³

The organ was initially placed in the north-east corner of the church, behind the screen, and near to the church choir in the chancel, and to achieve this the heating boiler was exiled to an outhouse outside the church. It seems that the donors paid for this work and the dismantling, renovation and re-erection of the organ as well as its purchase.⁴ However, in 1924 Sir Charles Nicholson undertook a major restoration and re-ordering of the church. The organ was removed and stored by Hele & Co., and thought was given to where it should be placed in the new setting. After some discussion with the relevant authorities it was decided to move the organ to the north west corner of the church, and the choir with it; Nicholson was very keen to restore the eastern ends of the aisles as chapels, and commented 'I don't like the idea of perpetuating pews which are really not wanted. Or an organ with a collection of candle ends and pails and brooms behind it, on the spot where the sacred mysteries were at one time celebrated'.⁵ The church was re-opened on Tuesday 24 April 1925.⁶

Only nine years later, and unexpectedly in view of all the work done on the organ during the 1920s, George Osmond & Co. of Taunton gave an estimate for repairing the feeders to the reservoir: 'The Feeders are in a precarious state and liable to give out at any moment'.⁷ The organ was of course still blown by hand at this time. They seem to have carried this out and thenceforth took over the tuning of the organ. They also commented on the poor quality of the Swell Oboe, but it is unclear what if anything was done to this.

¹ Western Times, 6 December 1921.

² PCC minute, undated but seemingly summer 1921. Devon Heritage Centre, 1541A/add2/PP1.

³ The details of the Shiplake church organ are from the National Pipe Organ Register (record D02128), but I have not seen any corroborating evidence.

⁴ PCC minute 1 September 1921; Faculty granted 27 September 1921.

⁵ Letters from Sir Charles Nicholson dated 2 April 1924 and 8 August 1924. Devon Heritage Centre, 1541A add 3/ P11.

⁶ Western Times, 17 April 1925.

⁷ 25 July 1934. Devon Heritage Centre, 1541A add 3/ P11.

A faculty was granted for an electric motor, presumably for the organ, in 1950 (Manaton did not have a mains electricity supply until after 1945). In 2006 the organ was restored by William Drake of Buckfastleigh, who substituted a Principal for the 4ft Lieblich Flute on the Great, and transposed the Great 4ft Gemshorn to 2ft. The redundant pipes are stored within the organ.

The stoplist was recorded by the Rev. Andrew Freeman c1924 as being:⁸

Pedal CC-f 30 notes

1 Bourdon 16

Great C-g3 56 notes

2 Open Diapason 8

3 Claribel Flute 8

4 Dulciana 8

5 Gemshorn 4

6 Lieblich Flute 4

Couplers

Swell to Great

Swell to Pedal

Swell Octave

Great to Pedal

2/3 combination pedals

lever swell pedal

Swell C-g3 56 notes

7 Gamba 8

8 Gedact 8

9 Voix Celeste 8

10 Wald Flute 4

11 Oboe 8

The identity of the original builder is obscure. The organ is usually ascribed to Hele & Co., but does not appear in their opus list published c1920. A chamber organ by this firm as far afield as Oxfordshire would in any case be rather unexpected as early as this organ appears to be. The quality of the casework and its location suggest perhaps one of the major London organ-building firms.

Dr. Nigel Browne. 25 May 2019.

⁸ National Pipe Organ Register, record D01163.