



The 1874 William Hill & Son Organ

All Saints Church, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire

This report has been prepared at the request of Peter and Andrew Francis, Irving Lodge, Batheaston, Somerset. It follows a visit made by the author on the morning of Tuesday, 25th July, 2017.

All Saints Parish Church, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire

The Organ

All Saints church was built between 1872 and 1874 and was intended from the outset to be a building of distinction with a seating capacity of 600 people. The architect was G E Street and unusually, the church had a baptistery in the centre. It is particularly noted for its stained glass to designs by Clayton & Bell, R J Newbury and H Davis, and is listed grade II.

The organ which is contemporary with the church, was built by William Hill & Son, London. Hill is a name synonymous with the very best of English organ building in the nineteenth century. Their style was noted for its French influence but always with roots firmly maintained in the English tradition. Attention to detail was scrupulous and the interiors were generously laid out with substantial construction. Instruments by the firm were installed in many of our cathedrals and other principal ecclesiastical and civic buildings. Among them might be mentioned Birmingham Town Hall; Peterborough Cathedral; Kidderminster Town Hall; Queens Hall, Mayfair and the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace.

All Saints' organ was finished at the end of June 1874 at a cost of £620; the job number 1510 is inscribed on the upper lip of the pitch pipe (Great Principal 1' C). It is listed grade II* by the British Institute of Organ Studies as 'A fine organ by Hill & Son substantially in original condition'. Newspaper reporting of the service of consecration described it as 'a beautifully toned instrument, fitted with all the latest improvements and finished with great taste'.¹

The organ was never completed. Hill's records in the British Organ Archive show that space was left for a number of stops of which several were added just as the organ was almost ready, presumably as funds came in; Hill's estimate book shows additions being made barely a month before the organ was completed.² A report in the *South Wales Daily News* 23 September 1874 gives the specification at the time of construction indicating that several stops were prepared for especially in the Swell and Choir divisions. What should have been an organ of three manuals

¹ Western Mail, 23 September 1874.

² Hill estimate book vol. 2, p. 168 (British Organ Archive)

and pedals with 26 stops ended up as one 20 of which four on the Choir were only prepared for at the console and one stop, a Bourdon, for which there is a vacant slide on the Great. A third Pedal stop, a Violoncello, also had space left for it, though no chest was provided. The Choir organ now has a two-stop soundboard but space exists on the building frame for one of six. Of interest is that a Mr H Radcliffe received commission of 2½ % presumably for having 'facilitated' the contract; money which could have been used to provide the extra registers.

This instrument has received excellent attention throughout its life so far and despite the need for cleaning and overhaul, still presents an eminently satisfying portrait of itself. Overhaul appears to have taken place on a fairly regular basis. The date 1911 is pencilled in on the roof of the swell box together with the names of the men who worked on it: Hilton, Bishop, Flood – presumably a cleaning though given that Hill's estimate books are not preserved after 1893, nothing is recorded. In 1921, an electric blower was fitted, the remains of which are evidenced by a trunk running up from the side of the organ into the ringing chamber above.³ This has since been disconnected and replaced by a more modern unit at the back of the instrument. In 1932, in addition to cleaning and overhaul, a tremulant was added and the Swell Octave to Great coupler made to act on the Swell manual as well so adding some flexibility.⁴ Very little otherwise has been altered: both Swell and Great Chorus reeds have had their top octaves replaced with harmonic trebles and a Voix Celestes added on the Swell in place of the Piccolo (holes in the rackboard indicate the compass of the stop), by whom is not known though the pipework is of good quality. However, it does mean the only 8' flute is the Great Stopped Diapason. The Mixture work, perhaps unusually, is still cone-tuned and in excellent condition - evidence of the exemplary care taken when tuning. At some stage since, it is probable the Pedal organ was put on pneumatic action and then subsequently electrified. It remains as such today.

Summary

This is an outstanding instrument which has had an illustrious history and demonstrates all the qualities for which its builder was renowned. The chorus work is brilliant and full with superb balance and scrupulous attention to voicing and cohesion. The full Swell organ belies the fact there is only a double flue, 8' reed and a mixture, giving the impression of something far more expansive – an English Full Swell in miniature. Though the organ is very dirty inside and there

³ Hill, Norman & Beard order book vol 3 p159 no. 2306 (BOA)

⁴ Hill, Norman & Beard order book vol 10A p28 no. 8674 (BOA)

is obvious need for careful and sympathetic refurbishment (cleaning of pipework for example will bring back the fire and splash for which Hill is renowned) this should not detract from its potential which is considerable - either restored as it stands or with completion of the tonal scheme and perhaps some judicious additions in the Hill mould. This applies especially to the Choir and Pedal divisions where there is scope for an imaginative interpretation of the original scheme.

Specification (2017):

Great:

Spare Slide (Bourdon)		
Open Diapason	8'	
Stopped Diapason	8'	
Keraulophon	8'	stopped bass
Principal	4'	
Wald Flute	4'	
Twelfth	2 2/3'	
Fifteenth	2'	
Mixture	III	
Trumpet	8'	(harmonic trebles)

Swell:

Double Diapason	16'	(lowest 23 notes stopped wood)
Open Diapason	8'	
Salicional	8'	
Voix Celestes	8'	(later addition, date not known, replaced Piccolo)
Gemshorn	4'	(Principal ie not tapered)
Mixture	III	
Cornoepan	8'	(harmonic trebles)
Oboe	8'	
Tremulant		

Choir:

<i>Clarabella</i>	8'	
Dulciana	8'	(full length, basses voiced with freins)
<i>Voix Celestes</i>	8'	
<i>Gemshorn</i>	8'	
Suabe Flute	4'	
<i>Clarinet</i>	8'	

Pedal:

Open Diapason	16'
Bourdon	16'
<i>Violoncello</i>	8'

registers in italics are noted in Hill's estimate book with space provided for them but no chest or action work.

Couplers:

Swell Octave (plays through to Great)
Swell to Great
Swell to Choir
Choir to Great
Swell to Pedal
Great to Pedal
Choir to Pedal

Accessories:

three combination levers each to Great and Swell
rocking toe lever Great to Pedal

Actions:

manual and stop: mechanical
pedal: electric (was mechanical)

Details:

blowing: electric
windpressure: 2³/₄" wg. (marked on pitch pipe)
pitch: A = 444 Hz @ 18.8° C & RH 69%

Overall Dimensions (approximate):

height: to middle pipe of SW front - 5720 mm
depth: at floor level: 3600 mm; to rear of swellbox: 4600 mm
width: 4100 mm

Andrew Hayden 15/8/2017

Andrew Hayden studied Music with Applied Physics at Surrey University graduating in 1978. He was a pupil of Richard Hickox and Robert Munns gaining FTCL under the latter's tutelage. His early years were spent in sound engineering in Germany and as a postgraduate researcher leading to an MPhil in the history of radio drama recording technique.

As an organ consultant he has been active since 2003 and has worked with, among others, Churches Conservation Trust, Norwich Anglican Diocese, and with BIOS as Historic Organs Listing Scheme assessor and Casework Officer. His experience of the instrument from both a playing and a technical standpoint is extensive, drawing on over twenty years involvement as a church musician with a strong focus on project fundraising and guidance particularly where resources are limited, and, from his experience as BIOS Casework Officer, mediation in instances where a way forward appears elusive. He has a particular interest in the work of northern builders such as Forster & Andrews, Wordsworth & Maskell and Isaac Abbott.

Advice can range from single condition and status reports to full project supervision with close attention paid to organbuilder/client-matching and relations. Coverage is throughout the United Kingdom.

Well known for his historical feature articles in *The Organ* and *Choir & Organ*, he was one of the team of organists for the East Anglian Historic Organs Sound Archive project. He is presently completing a PhD at Cardiff University on *The Organs and Organists of Great Yarmouth, St Nicholas 1733-1894* and is the originator of the *Star Organs of Britain* photographic archive and calendar.

Illustrations:



Console



Great Organ Pipework



Great Organ Vacant Slide

Great Mixture Cone Tuning





Great Open Diapason
Tuning Slots

Choir Organ Pipework





Swell Organ Pipework - Cone Tuned Mixture



Swell Organ Pipework - Double Diapason Trebles



Signatures on swellbox ceiling: Hill & Son London, Hilton, Bishop, Flood June 1911 (image enhanced)



Organ Interior showing Swell and Choir Action runs, and Choir Dulciana Basses