

The Building of an Organ



Those lucky enough to have heard the mighty sound of the organ in the parish church may spare a thought, and offer a silent 'thank you' to parishioners of yesteryear who gave their donations freely and those who sponsored generously the building of a new organ.

The whole process can be followed in the *Deanery Magazines* from 1894 to 1912:

'*August 1894* The next great work to be undertaken for the Church seems to be a new, or improved organ. It has occurred to us whether any person connected with the parish by birth or otherwise would like to present an organ ...'

'*July 1895* The Choral Association of this Deanery held its 31st Annual Festival at Deddington Church.

There could be no more appropriate place in the district for this Festival than the little town of Deddington with its noble church. The only drawback was the organ, but that difficulty was overcome by the happy thought of an orchestra ...'

'*December 1910* The Vicar and Church Wardens have decided to make an effort to improve the organ which is the oldest in the district having been built in 1840. It has done some good service but is small, old fashioned and not worthy of our fine Church. It has been decided to open a subscription list at once and it has been arranged by a large and influential committee of parishioners to have a Bazaar and Variety Entertainment next Easter ...' (regular reports of funds state names of individual donors from as far afield as Skibo Castle, Scotland and Taunton, Somerset, but mostly Deddington parishioners).

'*March 1912* The organ has now been ordered. It will be built by one of the best builders of the day, Mr J J Binns, of Bramley, Leeds, and the case will be made in our own parish by Messrs Franklin & Co. It will be placed in the same position as the old one, the console being on the opposite side of the Chancel, the connection being under the floor.'

'*May 1912* Owing to the coal strike, the organ builder is unable to promise us the organ by June 11th for the Choral Festival. The festival will be held at Adderbury this year, and we hope at Deddington in 1913.'

'*July 1912* The old organ was removed during Whitsun week and the Chancel has been prepared for the reception of the new organ, the erection of which we expect to begin about the middle of this month.'

'*September 1912* The chief object of interest during the past month has been the erection and dedication of the new organ. The organ began to be erected on August 2nd, and the dedication of it, which was performed by the Right Revd Bishop Richardson, formerly bishop of Zanzibar, took place on August 20th when in spite of the unfavourable weather a large congregation and full Choir were present.'

'*June 1913* All the money required for the organ has now been raised. Total cost: Organ £460, Case £171 11s., Trench £17-6s., Architect's fees £9 9s., Incidentals £3 14s., In Hand 4s. 8d.'

No Organist ...

SS Peter & Paul Church is presently without an organist. Some of us, who have been members of the church choir for nearly 40 years, are trying to recover from a deep sense of loss which has unsettled our comfortable and well-loved way of life. A choir family in bereavement!

How did our forebears cope? The choir existed before my records start in 1879. Thomas Manchip, Headmaster of Deddington Boys School led it for 34 years. He raised the necessary funds to robe his men and boys' choir and allowed lady singers to enjoy in 'mufti', Miss Boniface, sister of the Vicar, played the organ from 1889 to 1903. Miss Edith Churchill then took over until 1907. The following year Lillian Alice Weaver became organist and remained in the post for 60 years. She is remembered with love by many parishioners. Her devotion was that of a saint. In 1976 Glyn Davies became organist / choirmaster, giving a generous slice of his time to the Church. He stayed until 1990. There followed a younger generation of organists who seldom stayed long but who enriched music in church.

Deddington struck lucky again when Linda Bloxham became organist in 1994 and stayed until 2000. A brilliant organist, she gently nudged the congregation in the 21st century of church music. She was followed by Graham Thornhill, one of her choristers who served church and choir until his retirement at Easter this year.

Only now, when bereaved, do we realise how much commitment and devotion by organists we take for granted. Organists willing to serve in village churches are becoming a very rare species! The sad thought springs to mind: what of the future of village church music bereft of organists? Pipes and shawms or canned music?

2002

Thomas Alexander Manchip (1843–1911)



Deddington Church Choir, 1906, the Revd Thomas Boniface (c) and Thomas Manchip on his right

In the Church of SS Peter & Paul Deddington hangs a memorial tablet above the choir stalls. We read: 'To the memory of Thomas Manchip, for 37 years Headmaster of Deddington Boys School and 34 years Choirmaster of this Church who died March 9th 1911, aged 68 years. This tablet is erected in affectionate remembrance and grateful appreciation of his work in this Parish by old boys, members of the choir and personal friends.'

And in the *Deddington Deanery Magazine* of April 1911 his obituary includes praise for his ability and courtesy with which he fulfilled his offices: 'He was always ready to aid any undertaking for the benefit and amusement of the people' ... 'his vocal powers were very useful' were some of the comments. Also in the Church in the choir vestry, hangs a photograph, dated 1906. Here the jolly, rotund Headmaster sits to the right of the vicar surrounded by the choir he developed over so many years.

As Headmaster he had plenty of opportunities to 'sell' music and choir music in particular to his pupils and their parents, and judging from their numbers in 1906, he must have been most successful. His life's work in the school also coincides with great events in the Victorian age. He and his pupils were the lucky contemporaries of such great names as Bell, Edison and Pasteur. He was able to tell his boys at first hand that the first successful transatlantic cable had been laid, that the Eiffel Tower was being constructed and (dare I mention it in the same breath), the first ascent of the Matterhorn! He would have been the first to embrace with approval teaching methods in our present, go-ahead Deddington Primary, where lucky pupils can surf the internet and contact every corner of our world. But, looking at the friendly face of Headmaster Manchip, I think I would rather sit at his feet than stare at a cold screen, but that rather gives away my age.

2003

Lilian Weaver (1885–1976)



I need to declare an interest in adding the kindest, most unassuming, genteel lady to those who have left an indelible mark on this village, and we need to extend the above time span to 1976. I was privileged to know Lilian Alice Weaver, organist for 60 years in the parish church, piano teacher, singing teacher, accompanist and promoter of love of music in this parish.

Born 1885, she began her long and faithful service as organist on Easter Sunday 1908. Those of us who knew her in old age will never forget the love that radiated from her frail body – her love of music and her love for her fellow parishioners. It did not surprise us that she never thought of material gain or aggrandisement. She started her organist's duties literally for the love of God. Once a year a grateful congregation made a house-to-house collection for her round the village. When, in later years she had to agree for tidiness' sake to accept a salary she was wont to post a part of it back into the alms box in church. Did she sell herself short on home comforts? The story goes, that she enjoyed a sandwich with butter and mustard with an imagined piece of ham in between! She looked upon the church as her home, spent a good deal of her day in it, writing letters, receiving visitors and finding out parishioners' likes and dislikes of hymns!

Parishioners also remember her for her sense of fun and eagerness to use her gift for the good of the village. In the good old days when villagers had to make their own entertainment she never refused a request to play at a dance, a village hop, play at dancing classes or accompany a budding soloist at a concert. She taught the piano to many children and adults in and around the village.

In the 1940s Edward Short remembers spending four pence ha'penny on a bus ride from North Aston to Deddington where in her home, next to the Co-op, surrounded by her many rescued cats, he started his musical career. She enthused him to try out the organ and graciously sat beside him at the console to advise and encourage. Edward Short celebrated, last year, his 50th year as organist in North Aston church.

In the musical world of Deddington, she was irreplaceable. She died at the ripe old age of 91, never I am sure, having harboured an unkind thought, or spoken an unkind word. Until her mother's death she cared for her. In her own old age she brushed handicaps aside, let her mind dwell on joyful memories

and placed her trust in God. Her many friends looked after her and cared for her to the end.

2003, with help from Topper Davis and Edward Short

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It had to happen. The past is catching up with the present. On Sunday, April 9th, 2000 we admired a brightly polished plaque mounted on the organ surround in the Parish Church. The inscription reads 'A memorial to Lilian Alice Weaver 1885-1976, who was organist of this church for 60 years.'

Her long and faithful service began on Easter Day 1908. Over the years, enthusiastically but always very humbly, she made music to the glory of God. She played the 'Dead March' in Saul at the close of the Memorial Service to King Edward VII in June 1910; saw out the old organ – the oldest in the district – and coped with an American organ until enough funds were raised to install a new one. Then, on Sunday August 20th 1912, she enjoyed the majestic sound of the new 'Binns' organ at the dedication service performed by the Bishop of Zanzibar, leaving the actual play to various organ scholars of fame. But very soon afterwards she mastered the intricate and wonderful instrument.

And so, year after year she played on as the choir sang on the occasion of her Diamond Jubilee in 1968:

'Saints days and feast days
Weddings and christenings
Music in autumn, winter and spring
Some people singing and some people listening
Always the urge to give a voice and to sing
Old hymns at Harvest, at Christmas new carols
Yet through the choir changes
Miss Weaver plays on
For tenors like bean poles and basses like barrels
Tunes to play out whether earnest or fun
Music below to be heard up above
20 years, 40 years, 60 years on
Playing on! till the church ring again and again
with the sound of the organ and choir.
Playing on!'

2003

Church Choir

Linda Bloxham, the organist and director of SS Peter & Paul, has decided, after six years of faithful service, to move on. So where does a choir, feeling bereft



Church choir, 1912

and anxious, look for comfort? Naturally in the pages of the *Parish and Deanery Magazines*, where the choir's history, its ups and downs, are recorded from 1879. I like to think that certain anthems sung and still sung by the choir, are so deeply ingrained in the church stonework that, could stones speak, they would be the best critics. They might echo the praise recorded at Christmas 1892: 'that we never remember hearing the musical

proportions of the service rendered with so much spirit and heartiness and so well'.

Or, less flattering in 1892, 'the singing, upon the whole, was good though there were some imperfections'. The choir's history is not 'glorious' as in reaching famous heights, but it records a group who share a love of church music and who have always been encouraged by enthusiastic leaders, from Deddington School's headmaster, Mr Manchip in 1879, to Linda Bloxham in 2000. Their music-making joined them into a family who, generation after generation, not only sang but, moving with the times, enjoyed outings and holidays.

In June 1883, the choir travelled 'in Mr Howe's famous break, Mr Hedge's wagonette and Mr Thrussell's dog cart'. In 1995 the same choir, by name, went by coach and cross-channel ferry to sing in Holland. As the saying goes: those who wish to sing always find a song'. To that I want to add confidently 'and a leader'!

2000

Choir Festival

As a member of Deddington Church Choir still to attend the Choir Festival of 2001 I tremble with apprehension. Will the critics of our day be as forthright as the critics (no names supplied) who reported on that Deanery Choir Festival in the Parish Church in 1900?

'The weather was kind, almost every choir escaped a wetting ... our hosts in Deddington did all that could be done. They could not provide us with an organ worthy of the occasion (an American organ and an orchestra accompanied the singers) ... nothing is more important for an Oxfordshire choir than to learn to produce a good quality of tone. It does not come to them naturally. Their untrained voices are often very harsh but this can be cured by good teaching. If the tenors and bases, no less than the altos and trebles, will pay attention to him (the conductor), and not be satisfied with themselves as they are, we look for great improvement in quality of tone next year.

But there is one thing quite essential. Those who are going to take part must attend the rehearsals. The service on the 12th would have been rendered in a much more satisfactory way if the orchestra had found out beforehand how loudly or softly they were expected to play, and if all the singers, particularly all the altos, had been present at the rehearsal

As we have allowed ourselves to criticise the choirs, will the committee forgive us for a grumble aimed in their direction? Why should not the speechmaking after tea be rigidly limited to a quarter of an hour? After being in church the whole afternoon the boys want to stretch their legs and their elders like to see their friends, and everyone wants fresh air.

2001

The complete collection of Ruth Johnson's writings, which originally appeared in Deddington News between 1990 and 2010, can be found [here](#)