

## ***Gleanings from the Cash Book St.Mary's Hatfield: Church Expenses 1874 - 1923***

***by Paul Minchinton***

*The original version of this piece appeared in the May 1999 issue of Organists' Review. Since it first appeared, it has been possible to correct some errors in the original, and to add additional information. During 1999, the worth of the 1858 Walker pipe organ referred to was recognised by the British Institute of Organ Studies, who awarded it a certificate under their Historic Organs Certificate scheme. At the time of writing, it is undergoing a thorough restoration, with the aid of a grant from the "Your Heritage" Lottery Fund.*

In the Hertfordshire Green Belt north of London there is a patch of land, triangular in shape (but with no Bermudan connections) bounded by Potters Bar, Hatfield, and Hertford. Four of the parishes in this area are the Hartford Hundred Group, one of which, the subject of this article, was originally part of the parish of Hatfield, or Bishop's Hatfield.

The church now known as St.Mary's, Ponsbourne has over time been variously known also as St.Mary's Hatfield and St.Mary's Tolmers. In its early days the Cash Book in question was used by a succession of (anonymous) church treasurers to record income and expenditure each year. Whereas today the financial year for the church is the same as the calendar year, the financial year then was from Easter to Easter, so these records were usually examined at the Easter Vestry (the parish AGM).

The accounts for some years bear the signature of an auditor, or the parish priest. (In other years they look to have been compiled hurriedly the night before the meeting.) As with any such source, the quality of information varies according to the compiler; it can be easy to jump to false conclusions.

Regular payments included those to the Clerk, the organist and organ blower, a sum most years to pay someone for washing of surplices (presumably all of them - just before Easter), and the church insurance. The Diocesan Quota, or equivalent, did not then exist.

In the first part of the book, the majority of the recorded income comes from no more than two or three large donations. The names Carlile, Miller, Mills and Cholmondley appear repeatedly, these being families living at nearby "big houses". It is not until about 1910 that mentions of regular service collections appear (Of course, this may merely be due to a change of treasurer, and therefore of accounting method).

My primary aim, on first reading through the book, was if possible to learn more about my predecessors as organist at St. Mary's, and also of course about the early history of the instrument itself. There are also insights to be obtained as to the way church affairs were organised at the time.

### **Organists**

The earliest entry in the cash-book dates from 1874. There is no clue as to who was organist between the consecration of the building in 1849, and late 1876. However, the succession of organists appears to be:

1849 - 1876	Anon
1876 - 1883	Mr.Turton
1883 - 1890	Miss Rough
1890 - 1898	Anon (may still have been Miss Rough)
1898 - end of book	Mr. John Spelt Caines

It is known that Mr.Caines, as well as being the Organist and Choirmaster, was also the village Schoolmaster and lived in the School House. The School Log Book for the period records that he took up his duties on 24th October 1892. His tenure as Organist may also have started in 1892; it certainly lasted past the end of this Cash Book and on to his retirement from the school in 1927. There is still a label, with his name on it (now barely legible), on the back of the vestry door above the hook where today my robes hang between services.

By comparing the school logbook with the church records we have confirmed that, unlike Mr. Caines, the previous schoolteachers were not also organists. On the other hand, some of his successors were, though none have matched his length of service of years (out of curiosity, I checked to see who had length of service next to Mr.Caines - and was shocked to discover it was actually myself!)

Nothing more has so far come to my attention regarding Mr.Turton, Miss Rough, and their predecessors. We do not yet know whether they lived in the village, or came from elsewhere, nor how they earned their living.

In October 1876 the book records a quarterly payment of £5.6.0 to "Turton and blower" (i.e £5 for Turton and 6/0 for the blower).

Quarterly payments were made to the organist and the blower at the same rates for 46 years, from 1876 to 1912 (so much for inflation!).

In 1913 there appears to be a payment for only one quarter, then (presumably again after a change of treasurer) there are annual payments of £21 for the organist and £1.8.0 for the blower, a pattern which continues to the end of the book.

### **Organ Tuning**

The present organ was built for the church by J.W.Walker in 1858, at a cost of £367.15.0 (An allowance of £100 was made for the previous instrument - details unknown to me - in part exchange). Its specifications then and now are given below.

Tuning visits by Walkers are recorded until about 1915. In 1874 the cost of a visit was £1.12.0, rising to £2.2.0 in 1876 and going to £3.13.6 between 1893 and 1912. No payments are recorded for 1913 and 1914, then a payment of £4.16.0 in 1915.

In 1916 there is what may be the first entry for a tuning visit by another firm, at a cost of a guinea (£1.1.0). An entry in 1918 for tuning - at the same price - identifies the tuner as "Monk"; a later entry still refers to A.Monk, but with no other details.

By 1921 the cost of his tuning visits had increased to £2.12.6. Interestingly, in late 1922 (just as the book finishes) are entries not only for the annual tuning visit from Monk, but also "repairs to the organ" carried out by J.W.Walker at a cost of £4.15.0, and then a second Monk tuning visit.

I know from personal experience that the organ generally holds its tuning very well. Even so, with only an annual tuning (usually just before Christmas) there must sometimes have been some "interesting" sounds coming from it. Despite this, there are some periods when no expenditure on tuning is recorded at all: between 1881 and 1884, for instance, and 1913-1914.

### **Work on the Organ**

I have been able to compare the Cash Book dates with extracts given to me from Walker's own archives, (for which I am grateful to Mr.Bruce Buchanan).

According to the Walker records, the stages of evolution in the organ's early life were:

- 1858 built and installed. Console in N.Transept, facing West
- 1860 pedal compass increased from 20 to 29 notes
- 1867 tuning changed to equal temperament
- 1884 clean and overhaul
- 1887 organ turned thro' 90 degrees; console in chancel, facing South
- 1909 clean and overhaul; Gamba fitted, replacing Great Mixture
- 1914 (approx.) left Walker's care

We understand that the radical change in 1887 was connected with equally drastic changes to the East end of the church itself. Originally apsidal, the chancel was apparently rebuilt entirely, and enlarged in the process. It seems that the addition of the present sanctuary and squared-off East end made it possible to put the choir-stalls and choir into the Chancel, so the sensible position for the organ console itself was then to face onto the Chancel, rather than the North Transept as previously.

We are still hoping to confirm the exact dates of all the alterations to the building itself during this period, and the details of its original shape.

The change of specification in 1909 may only partly be due to changes in musical fashion. The present organist has found that the Gamba is very useful as a foundation stop for choral accompaniment, while a Mixture would have been more useful for accompaniment of a full congregation, by giving brightness and life to the sound without necessarily adding a great deal more sheer power. By 1909 there is evidence of a large and active choir and so choral accompaniment would then, as now, be a musical priority.

As listed above, the Walker archives state that major work was carried out on the instrument in 1884, 1887 and 1909. However, the only corresponding entry in the Cash Book is for February 1885, recording payment of £25 for "Special expenditure on the Organ" (This was when the organ was cleaned and overhauled.). It is interesting to speculate on what happened on the other occasions: did the cost become hidden in with other work (as may have happened in 1887), or did someone just write a personal cheque? Some of the answers are found in the Walker archives:

Thanks to the kindness of J.W.Walker & Son, I have been provided with a copy of the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century ledger entries concerning the instrument. These show that payment for major work in 1884 and 1887 came directly from the Mills family (The church and contents were paid for by Thomas Mills, M.P. who lived at the house called Tolmers, and it, like the village school next door, was built on land donated by the residents of Ponsbourne Park, the other "big house" in the village). These monies did not, therefore, go through the church accounts at all.

More recently, around 1960, work was carried out on the instrument by one George Kirby, of Hitchin. Apart from a reference to some work on an instrument in Luton, I have been unable to discover anything about this gentleman or his firm, and would be delighted to hear from anyone who can shed any light on him or his work.

Most of the story has been deduced from dry entries in lists of payments. It has not yet been possible to cross-check all the facts with other sources of information, but already I have a greater sense of the continuity of events than ever before. When I started reading through the cash-book, my main interest was to learn more about the history of the organ and my predecessor organists, but as I deciphered the columns of entries they gave fascinating glimpses into life at the time. For instance, the original heating system in the church was coal fired, and the lamps burned paraffin. Throughout the book, therefore, there are regular payments: to McMullens of Hertford for coal, and to other firms for paraffin and candles. The smell in the building, it may be imagined, would not be today's mix of flowers and wax polish!

The boiler-room and coal-hole at Ponsbourne are mostly underground, being two adjoining chambers, each with a brick barrel-type ceiling, both actually underneath the organ! Being one of the few people to have been into them in recent years, I know how steep are the stairs going down, and can imagine how difficult it would have been to get the boiler started on a winter's morning. When one contemplates the business of keeping the boiler going (on shipments of 1/4 ton of coal at a time, carried down those stairs), and tending the paraffin lamps, the sheer convenience of the electricity supply seems miraculous. In the same way, the need for another person to work the bellows whenever the organist had to play for a service (or indeed in order to practice) suggests that there were firm limits to the time for which one would be allowed to play on any one occasion. Perhaps we may have seen a small degree of progress in life, after all. . .

*Paul Minchinton is a PCC Member and former PCC Treasurer, in addition to being Organist & Choirmaster in his small parish. He therefore has an interest in several aspects of the history of the church and its organ. The original article, and the updated version, arose out of research in preparation for raising funds to allow work to be carried out on the organ and adjacent parts of the building.*

St. Mary's Church, Ponsbourne  
1858 Walker, in chamber on N.side of chancel.

**Specification as at April 1997**

Manuals : 56 notes, C to G  
Pedals : 29 notes  
(top F of 30-note R & C pedalboard is not connected)

Tracker action throughout

Trigger Swell pedal

3 combination pedals to Great

Great to Ped. coupler  
Swell to Great coupler  
NO Swell to Ped coupler

**Swell**

(stops TC; bottom octave from Gt. St. Diap Bass only)

Oboe	8
Fifteenth	2
Principal	4
Stop Diapason	8
Open Diapason	8
Double Diapason	16

**Great**

Fifteenth	2
Twelfth	2 2/3

Flute	4
Principal	4
Gamba	8 (TC)
Stop Diapason Treble	8 (TC)
Stop Diapason Bass	8 (bottom 8ve only)

Dulciana	8 (TC)
Open Diapason	8

**Pedal**

Open Wood	16
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St. Mary's Church, Ponsbourne  
1858 Walker, in chamber on N.side of chancel.

**Specification as per J.W.Walker's Order Book**

Manuals : 56 notes, C to G  
Pedals : 2 octaves  
(original pedalboard believed to be straight & flat)

Tracker action throughout

Trigger Swell pedal

3 combination pedals to Great

Great to Ped. coupler  
Swell to Great coupler  
NO Swell to Ped coupler

**Swell**

(stops TC, bottom octave from Gt. St. Diap Bass only)

Cornopean	8	
Fifteenth	2	*
Principal	4	
Stop Diapason	8	
Open Diapason	8	
Double Diapason	16	*

**Great**

Fifteenth	2
Twelfth	2 2/3

Mixture	III	*
Flute	prepared for	
Principal	4	
Stop Diapason Treble	8	(TC)
Stop Diapason Bass	8	(bottom 8ve only)

Dulciana	8	(TC)
Open Diapason	8	

**Pedal**

Pedal Pipes	16
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*\* added to specification between original order and delivery to site*