



A History of the Parish
of Our Lady and St. John,
Heswall

CHAPTER VI

"The Musical tradition . . . a treasure of inestimable value"

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Vatican II)

The first mention of music to enrich the liturgy is found in the intention to form a children's choir early in December 1928. No time was being lost to establish the tradition of the sung (or high) Mass on Sunday, and four masses were supplied by Rushworth and Dreaper at a cost of 8/3d.¹ Much devoted work lay ahead, and significant pride may be detected in the announcement: "Christmas Masses: **sung** Mass for the first time in this church at midnight . . ."² The area assigned to the choir was a red-curtained recess with a clutter of music stands to the left of the church door. Here motets were sung by John Duff, tenor, Mr. Crowden and Mr. Sparling, baritone; Marjorie Conlon, Margaret Crowden, Peggy Gibbons and Carmella Prendiville, soprano, Mrs. Gibbons and Miss. R. Conlon, contralto, conducted by Mr. Cook and others, and by Mr. J. McManus. Accompanist on the harmonium was Mrs. Crowden assisted by Peter Oakley. In simple fashion, and in so humble a building was the storehouse of sacred music unlocked to begin that tradition of music for which the "tin" church is remembered and that this church treasures and continues to develop.

Spring and summer 1939 were times of earnest exhortation for choir members. The music for the opening of the new church was under consideration and no effort was being spared to make the occasion a joyous and dignified one.

Throughout the war years the choir though depleted maintained its high standard. All the priests who have served this parish have been active in their interest. People have been urged to offer their services; 'If God has given you a gift why not use it in His service.'³ Mr. J. McManus, choir master, and Mrs. M. Ryan, organist, were devoted in their service to the church's heritage and made memorable the liturgy in sung Latin. For some years, Mrs. V. McGoldrick has been choir mistress and organist and is supported by Mr. Kevin Williams and Miss Margaret Hetherington, organists, and approximately thirty choir members some of whom come from neighbouring parishes to augment the voices for 'Music is the handmaid of the liturgy and Holy Church has always urged that it be used to clothe the celebrations with the raising of voices of the faithful in praise of God.'⁴ Preparation for the great feasts of Easter and Christmas is rewarding for the Liturgy of Holy Week is spiritually uplifting, while the festival of Carols and Lessons centred on joy and humility bears the true meaning of Christmas. Nor may the ecumenical importance of these festivals be underestimated.

Instrumental accompaniment adds another dimension to choral work and though the first church was only a temporary structure, burdened with a debt relative to its worth and with the additional responsibility of raising money for a new permanent building, yet an organ was secured, and from an unexpected source — the Trocadero Cinema, Liverpool. Collections for its renovation were taken. The richness it bestowed was gratifying. This instrument was replaced when the present church was opened in 1939 by an Apollo organ, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Crowden, in memory of their son Cuthbert William who died at Whitsuntide, 1936. It is now being used in St. Anselm's School, Birkenhead, and 'in the hope that it will help to train the next generation of organists.'⁵

For a short time in 1982 the church had by arrangement with Wirral Organ Centre, the use of Rodgers and Scarborough Electronic Organ prior to its debut at the Edinburgh Festival. A series of recitals was arranged, one given by Simon Russell of St. Saviour's, Birkenhead, another by Ian Tracey of Liverpool Cathedral and a 'Composite Recital' by local organists drawn from Liverpool and Chester Associations of Organists.

But such is the tradition of liturgical music in this church that the installation of a pipe organ was decided upon. The prayerful grandeur of the church with High Altar spacious and dominant and organ loft architecturally complementary to it means it is a church built for ceremonial, and demanding that volume and cadence such an instrument bestows: "Please God the music that it produces and the singing it supports will always inspire us and enhance our liturgical celebrations "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam."⁶ In 1984 therefore the pipe organ from Widnes Methodist Church was purchased at a cost of £1,000. This organ had originally been designed for Cardiff Town Hall in 1886 by Messrs. Willis and now the re-building and adapting of the instrument to suit this church has been carried out by Hawkins (Organ Builders) Ltd. of Lichfield, at a cost including installation, of almost £21,000; 'Our church will have one of the finest organs in the Diocese . . .'⁷

The blessing by Bishop Gray took place on the Feast of St. Cecilia, Patroness of Church Music, and was followed by the Mass of St. Cecilia composed by the Rev. G.E. Turner, O.S.B.

Roger Fisher, Organist and Master of Choristers at Chester Cathedral gave the opening recital on the 30th November, 1984. Proceeds were for drought and famine victims in Africa.

REFERENCES

- 1) Mission Account Book.
- 2) Notice Book 20.12.31.
- 3) Notice Book 6.8.44.
- 4) Notice Book 9.11.80.
- 5) Notice Book 6.5.81.
- 6) Rev. J. Carney's foreward to the programme of the opening Recital, 30th November, 1984.
- 7) Notice Book 6.5.84.

Hawkins (Organ Builders) Limited,
Unit 6,
Greenhough Road,
Lichfield,
Staffs. WS13 7AU.



The new organ is an amalgamation of re-furbished components and pipework from the Methodist Church, Widness and the stocks of Hawkins (Organ Builders) Limited.

Console new and detached giving stop key control.

SPECIFICATION

GREAT ORGAN COMPASS CC to A, 58 NOTES

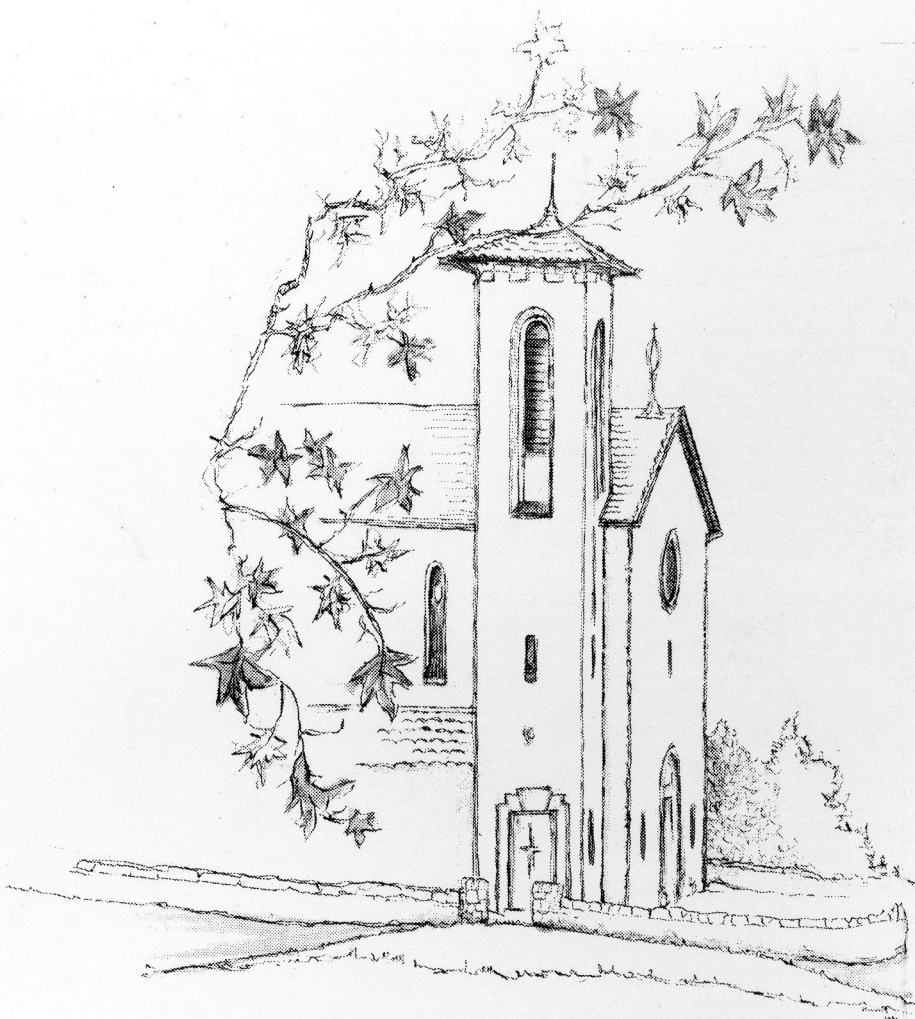
No.1 Open Diapason	8ft.
No.2 Gedact	8ft.
No.3 Dulciana	8ft.
No.4 Principal	4ft.
No.5 Mixture	II Rk. 12-15
No.6 Tromba	8ft.

SWELL ORGAN COMPASS CC to A, 58 NOTES

No.7 Stopped Diapason	8ft.
No.8 Gemshorn	4ft.
No.9 Flute	4ft.
No.10 Piccolo	2ft.
No.11 Mixture	II Rk. 19-22
No.12 Cornopean	8ft.

PEDAL ORGAN COMPASS CCC to F, 30 NOTES

No.13 Bourdon	16ft.
No.14 Quint	10.2/3ft. Extension of No.12.
No.15 Bass Flute	8ft. Extension of No. 12.
No.16 Choral Bass	4ft. Extension of No. 12.
No.17 Flute	2ft. Extension of No. 12.



Our Lady and St. John – Bell Tower.

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