

THE ORGAN OF CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH, LAUNCESTON.

HISTORY, pre - 1910 TO 1997.

Little is known about the organ preceding the present one, except that it is likely to have been built by Hele & Co. of Plymouth in the hey-day of that firm, and that a chamber was provided for it by the architect at the "east" end of the "north" transept. (I use conventional directions). The space is now used as a storeroom. What follows is an anecdote told by the organist of the time, Mr. C. Stanley Parsonson to M.V.Ugnow. The Hele instrument suffered badly from damp and was giving serious trouble. Mr. P. was constantly having ciphers, dumb notes and so on. He had complained repeatedly to no avail. One Sunday evening after the last hymn, he turned off the wind, drew all the stops, pressed down all the keys he could remember that stuck and waited for the end of the Benediction. At the final AMEN he turned on the wind again, got off the bench and set off for home leaving the instrument screaming. A meeting of the Leaders was called without delay. A new organ was ordered!

The Hele organ was bought by West End Methodist Church at Callington, was rebuilt and has given good service there ever since.

The replacement organ was ordered from and built by the John Compton Organ Company in 1910. It was of three manuals (61 note compass) and pedals (32 note compass), the action was pneumatic (exhaust) throughout, the console was integral, stop control was by pneumatic stop-keys and toe-pistons. There were no thumb pistons as such, but below each manual a tab labelled *Pedal Bass* operated one of Jimmy Taylor's devices which provided suitable pedal combinations and coupling for whatever was "drawn" on the respective manual. I have played many services without touching a pedal stop-key.

The Specification was unashamedly **Romantic** (see below) and incorporated several characteristics which mark it out as unmistakably Compton. The **Great** and **Pedal Organs** were derived entirely from four ranks: a *Tibia*, a *Small Open*, a *Large Open* and a *Tuba*. The details of the extensions are indicated by letters in the Specification. The **Swell Organ** contained seven ranks,(eight if you include the two rank *Celeste*). The only stop above 8' pitch was the *Principal*! BUT the chest ran to 73 notes so that the *Octave Coupler* worked to the top note. The **Choir Organ**, which had but 61 notes, was in fact an **Accompaniment/Solo Department**: four soft stops (8884) of interesting tonal quality provided for the quiet accompaniment of the Communion, and solo combinations on **Swell** and **Great**, and a *Clarinet* (full compass), plus the **Great Reeds** borrowed. The quirk in this department, (and a very valuable one in the circumstances when one got used to it) was the *Great to Choir Coupler* rather than *Choir to Great*. [This idea would make sense in a great many organs where the so-called **Choir Organ** is in fact a hotch-potch rather than a classical **Positive** or **Choir Organ** with proper upperwork and mutation ranks.] Both **Swell** and **Choir Organs** were enclosed. Oddly the two pedals were crossed over (by today's standards) with the Swell on the left and the Choir on the right. Another Compton characteristic worth noting is the polyphonic basses which provide 19 notes for the *Pedal Double Open 32'*, *Quint 10 2/3'*, and *Open Wood 16'*. Sadly the bottom pipe, which would have provided the bottom five notes, was never installed. The architect insisted that the instrument be moved back into the transept in line with the wall so the polyphonic basses had to be moved around to the side where there was only about 25' of height available. Wind was trunked across from the blower room in another building, underground. A spring-loaded reservoir was fed by two feeders, driven by a hydraulic ram, parts of which may still be seen. A chrome handle (as on a machine-tool) at the treble end of the console operated the water-valve by a chain linkage, and there was a main supply cock in a tall box in the choir lobby (where the Communion-ware is kept). Mains water was of high enough pressure to work the system satisfactorily. There were no regulations against the use of this cheap source of power!

In the thirties an electric motor (reputedly of 4 HP) and fan were provided, but the chrome handle remained! Tonally the instrument was a little monotonous and lacked brilliance but gave a good account of itself in the context of the typical Methodist (Wesleyan) worship, and also for the accompaniment of large choirs singing oratorio: Messiah, Olivet to Calvary, Crucifixion etc. for which the church was noted at that time. It is a tribute to Compton that the instrument continued to function satisfactorily up to the end of the Second World War. By 1949 however, trouble was brewing. The miles of "compo" tubing, which was stacked up 5 and 6 deep, had begun to collapse on itself and note by note the organ began to fail. Efforts by the tuner to work on a whisper of wind usually resulted in a cipher the following Sunday.

Plans were put in hand to get the instrument cleaned and overhauled. The work was entrusted to Hele & Co. of Plymouth, who proposed to remove the bulk of the pneumatic action and replace with electric, retaining stop-keys and replacing the *Pedal Bass* system with a settable thumb-piston mechanism. Tonally the organ would remain unchanged. I tried hard, as a teenager away in the RAF, to interest the Committee in a detached console, but the idea was turned down on grounds of cost (£350 extra!) Unfortunately in practice the electric action was applied to the existing pneumatic chain instead of direct to the motors resulting in sluggish response and poor repetition. The cabling was executed in DCC which was subsequently shellacked giving trouble with runnings. The considerable coupling required was effected by "North Eastern" type couplers and relays. These too were rather unreliable. With due respect to Hele & Co. the job was not an outstanding success. This rebuild took place in 1953. By 1976 it became clear that further work would be necessary in order to bring the instrument up to scratch. By this time I was well out of my teens(!) and in a position to exercise a little more influence. We invited three builders to look at the organ and to put forward proposals. The result was three different prices for three entirely different schemes! We consulted a Mr. Joynson, a retired organ builder who had been for many years with the firm of Rushworth & Dreaper, and as a result were able to produce a clear specification of our own with which we went back to the three builders. Value-for-money comparisons were then possible and we entrusted the work to the Plymouth-based builder Raymond Greaves (a former J. W. Walker & Co. man). There would be a detached console. The electro-mechanical relay system would be replaced with "solid state" switching and a four-rank chest would be added to the **Great** to provide independent ranks of upperwork: *Principal*, *Flute*, *Fifteenth* and *Mixture III* to eliminate the worst shortcomings of the extension. Hopes of providing an independent rank or so on the **Pedal** came to nothing. **Swell** and **Choir** remained unaltered except that the **Swell Virole** and the **Choir Salicional** were interchanged (except for the bottom 12). The result was certainly a great improvement in terms of brightness and variety. Sadly though there were shortcomings, which subsequently became apparent. The new chest was a *Kegellade* type, which was a bit noisy and inclined to whimper. It had to be placed at the top of the **Swell** box and because of temperature "strata" the pipework was inclined to go out of tune, The electro-magnetic action remained unaltered, being re-leathered only "where necessary". It remained rather sluggish and this has gone worse with passing of the years. Some of the 1953 DCC cable remained and gave trouble. However, with the **Swell reeds**, sent back to the pipemakers, (and subsequently the *Clarinet* and *Tuba* having the same treatment), the rebuild was far more successful than the previous one. This work was completed in the summer of 1979.

Since that time the Church has suffered (if that is the right word) an almost continuous series of improvements. The roofs were insulated and relined, walls re-pointed outside, windows double-glazed, interior decorated throughout, a new and improved heating system and subsequently a further re-ordering during which the console was moved back several feet into its transept (though without disconnection of the cabling), the bricking up of the window to the rear of the organ chamber, removal of pews, introduction of carpet and soft chairs and general modernisation. The result was a warmer, drier and more comfortable church, but the organ has suffered. Acoustically it lost much of the brightness gained by the provision of independent upper work, and physically the much drier atmosphere caused hardening of the leatherwork and shrinkage of the woodwork. In 1996 the generally dry climate produced crisis conditions and the instrument gradually became unplayable. Wind was escaping all over the place, the stop engines failed to

function (or, worse, half-worked resulting in gross off-tuning), many of the purse motors of the **Great** and **Pedal** actions tightened up causing various ciphers or dumb notes. Only determined, daily spraying with water, leaking-wet sheets hanging inside and so on, eventually brought the instrument back to playable condition. At this stage humidifier equipment was added in the blower room and this kept the organ in fairly good shape. There was still some mal-function however.

It is with this series of events in mind that the church authorities took the view that something should be done to the organ ahead of the twenty or twenty-five years which normally could be expected to elapse between overhauls; to adapt it to the new conditions, to make it reliable, responsive and to restore the sound to something like it "belongs" to be. (The **Pedal Organ** for example is very feeble compared with my memories of it in, say, 1950).

The Specifications at various dates are appended.

M. V. Uglow

THE JOHN COMPTON ORGAN AT CENTRAL (formerly Wesley) METHODIST CHURCH, LAUNCESTON.
Specification as from 1910 when it was built, to 1953 when it was rebuilt by Hele's.

The stop-keys are listed as arranged on the console reading from bass to treble.

Departments were arranged PEDAL SWELL GREAT CHOIR.

Letters A, B, C and D have been used to identify the extended ranks on the **Great** and **Pedal Organs**. The action was pneumatic (exhaust) throughout including stop-keys.

PEDAL ORGAN

Quint	10 2/3	C
Double Open Wood	32	C
Bourdon	16	A
Open Metal	16	B
Open Wood	16	C
Flute	8	A
Tuba	16	D
Swell to Pedal		
Great to Pedal		
Choir to Pedal		

GREAT ORGAN

Contra Tibia	16	A
Double Open Diapason	16	B
Tibia Minor	8	A
Small Open Diapason	8	B
Large Open Diapason	8	C
Octave Tibia	4	A
Principal	4	B
Fifteenth	2	B
Tuba	8	D
Tuba Clarion	4	D

Swell to Great

The bottom 5 notes of the C rank were acoustic; the next 19 were obtained from five polyphonic pipes, 44443.

SWELL ORGAN

Viole Celeste (2 ranks)	8
Viole	8
Hohl Flute	8

CHOIR ORGAN

Quintadena	8
Salicional	8
Lieblich Gedackt	8

Large Open Diapason	8	Flauto Traverso	4
Principal	4	Clarinet	8
Oboe	8	Tuba	8
Harmonic Trumpet	8	Tuba Clarion	4
		(borrowed from Great)	
Sub-Octave		Sub-Octave	
Super-Octave		Super-Octave	
Unison off		Swell to Choir	
		Great to Choir (sic!)	
Tremulant on treble key-cheek		Tremulant on treble key-cheek	
Enclosed: balanced pedal (left)		Enclosed: balanced pedal (right)	

Accessories: 5 toe-pistons to Great; 4 toe-pistons to Swell; lozenge-shaped tabs beneath each keyboard labelled "Pedal Bass" provided a suitable Pedal Combination and Manual to Pedal coupler to balance what was "drawn" on the manual. Wind supplied by a "Kinetic-Swanton" Hydraulic engine.

Specification as from Hele & Co. rebuild in 1953.

The organ remained tonally unaltered and although electric action replaced the pneumatic, the console layout remained the same. 4 thumb-pistons were provided to **Swell**, duplicated by toe-pistons; 4 thumb-pistons to **Great** and **Pedal**, duplicated by toe-pistons; 3 thumb-pistons to **Choir**; 1 thumb-piston (reversible) *Great to Pedal*, duplicated by toe-piston; 1 thumb-piston *Swell to Great* (reversible) and 1 thumb-piston *Pedal Tuba* (reversible). The "Pedal Bass" mechanism was lost. The individual Tremulants to **Swell** and **Choir** were replaced with a single one, which affected the whole organ. It proved most inartistic in practice and mercifully did not work most of the time! The console remained integral within the organ case.

Specification as from the Raymond Greaves rebuild in 1979.

The main thrust of this rebuild was to replace the unreliable switchgear with transistorised coupler boards by Solid State Logic Ltd. and to provide a detached console. New pipework would also be provided to replace the **Great** upperwork previously supplied by the extension of four ranks. The opportunity was also taken to revise and rationalise the stop-list a bit. Considerable thought was given to the placement of the console. The only sensible position, which afforded good visibility and audibility, appeared to be the opposite transept which was rather far from the organ. In practice the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. The four new ranks: *Principal*, *Flute*, *Fifteenth* and *Mixture* were planted on a Kegellade Chest perched up above the **Great** behind the central tower, the only available position. This chest has proved rather noisy and inclined to whimper, but again the improvement in clarity and brilliance as well as variety was a more important consideration. The solid-state equipment has proved very reliable except for a mysterious gremlin, which eventually was traced to mains-borne interference. The instrument would from time to time and quite without warning emit a series of short screams with 20 or 30 notes all sounding off at once on full organ. Very disconcerting when the congregation were at prayer or whatever! Key contacts were renewed and the action was re-leathered where necessary.

The stop-list now looks like this. Letters A, B, C, D, are again used to identify the remaining extended ranks.

PEDAL ORGAN			GREAT ORGAN		
Double Open Wood	32	C	Double Open Diapason	16	B
Open Wood	16	C	Large Open Diapason	8	C
Open Metal	16	B	Small Open Diapason	8	B
Bourdon	16	A	Tibia Minor	8	A

Quint	10 ² / ₃	C	Principal	4	new
Flute	8	A	Gedact	4	new
Tuba	16	D	Fifteenth	2	new
			Mixture	III	new
Swell to Pedal			Tuba	8	D
Great to Pedal			Tuba Clarion	4	D
Choir to Pedal					
The bottom 5 notes of the C rank are acoustic; the next 19 to BBB are obtained from the 5 polyphonic pipes.			Swell to Great		

SWELL ORGAN

Large Open Diapason	8
Hohl Flute	8
Salicional	8
Viole Celeste (2 ranks)	
Principal	4
Oboe	8
Harmonic Trumpet	8

Sub-Octave
 Super-Octave
 Unison off
 Tremulant to whole organ!
 Enclosed: balanced pedal (right)

CHOIR ORGAN

Quintadena	8
Viole	8
Lieblich Gedact	8
8 Flauto Traverso	4
Clarinet	8
Tuba	8
Tuba Clarion	4
(borrowed from Great)	

Sub-Octave
 Super-Octave
 Swell to Choir
 Great to Choir (retained)
 Enclosed: balanced pedal (left)

The piston arrangements and reversibles, including the setter board (which is diabolical) remained as left by Hele in 1953 except that a Great and Pedal Combinations coupled switch was added and the Tuba reversible provided a useful Pedal Solo combination by coupling the Choir Tuba and Clarion.

Specification as from the Lance Foy rebuild in 1999.

The excellent refurbishment of the building in 1993, making it a warm and comfortable place in which to worship, unfortunately caused havoc with the organ, causing leathers to harden and wood to shrink, until in January 1996 the instrument broke down and became unplayable. From this date it was realised that a major overhaul was needed. In the meantime Mr. Fothergill from Dorset provided a humidifier for £1,500, which overcame some of the problems experienced. A specification of work needed to be done, was sent out to organ builders, and in November 1998 Lance Foy's tender was accepted to refurbish the organ at a cost of just under £40,000. Work was started in March 1999 and the service of re-dedication was held on Sunday 7th November 1999.

The work was thorough and time consuming. The organ was almost completely dismantled and all pipes etc. cleaned, re-voiced and mended where necessary. Likewise with the chests, with a new chest, replacing the noisy Kegellade chest fitted over the store area to the right of the organ but at the same height as the other chests.

A new console of the horseshoe type was purchased and new adjustable stool and a capture system fitted. The new stop list now looks like this.

THE JOHN COMPTON ORGAN AT CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH, LAUNCESTON

After the latest rebuild by Lance Foy, April to Oct./Nov. 1999

The stop-keys are arranged on the console reading from bass to treble. New work/pipes replaced in **bold italics**. Departments are arranged:-

SWELL

GREAT

PEDAL

CHOIR

The letters A, B, C and D identify the extended ranks on the Great and Pedal Organs.

PEDAL ORGAN (Lower left)

GREAT ORGAN (Upper right)

Great to Pedal			Swell to Great		
Swell to Pedal			Double Open Diapason	16	B
Choir to Pedal			Large Open Diapason	8	C
Double Open Wood	32	C	Small Open Diapason	8	B
Open Wood	16	C	Tibia Minor	8	A
Open Metal	16	B	Principal	4	
Bourdon	16	A	Gedact Flute	4	
Quint	10 ² / ₃	C	Fifteenth	2	
Principal	8		Mixture	- 3 ranks	
Flute	8	A	Tuba	8	D
15 th	4		Tuba Clarion	4	D
Ophicleide	16	D	Great & Pedal Combinations coupled		
Tuba	8				

Generals to Swell Toe-pistons

(The bottom 5 notes of the C rank are acoustic; the next 19 to BBB are obtained from the 5 polyphonic pipes.)

SWELL ORGAN (Upper left)

CHOIR ORGAN (Lower right)

Large Open Diapason	8	Great to Choir	
Hohl Flute	8	Swell to Choir	
Viole	8	Quintadena	8
Viole Celeste (2 ranks)	8	Salicional	8
Principal	4	Leiblich Gedact	8
15th	2	Flauto Traverso	4
Mixture - 2 ranks		Flagiolet	2
Harmonic Trumpet	8	17th	1³/₅
Oboe	8	Clarinet	8
Swell Sub-Octave		Tuba	8
Swell Octave		Tuba Clarion	4

Swell Unison off
Tremulant to whole organ

Enclosed: balanced pedal (right)

(borrowed from Great)

Choir Sub-Octave

Choir Octave

Enclosed: balanced pedal (left)

ACCESSORIES 0 to 8 pistons per manual; provision for 10 reversible's; 8 Swell toe pistons; 10 pistons for whole organ; capture system .

M. V. Uglow and J. Beare.

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