

Organ of Burntisland Parish Church.

Built by Cousans of Lincoln the organ was donated to the church by the Andrew Carnegie trust. The organ was however not welcomed by all within the church as the congregation was used to the singing being led by the presenter, as was the fashion in the presbyterian church at that time. He would be put out of a job if that “devil’s box of tin whistles” was installed in the church. Rumour has it that the organ sat in it’s crates out in the street for three days before common sense prevailed and the organ builder was allowed in to begin the installation. Even still all was not well as the organ pipework instead of being spread out along the balcony to allow the best acoustic response was hidden behind the pillar to appease the objectors.

The organ first let forth it’s voice on the 31st. of January 1909.

When the organ was first installed the console, where the organist sits, was underneath the pipework next to the vestry door and connected to the pipework by hundreds of lead tubes working the pneumatic action to control the pipes. The wind for the organ was supplied by a water engine in the vestry cupboard driving sets of bellows. This was the norm at this time as electric supplies were still not reliable and certainly not to be trusted.

This would have made playing the organ difficult for the organist as they were crammed in the corner of the building under the pipes with a giant pillar between them and the congregation. The sound they heard from the instrument would have been very different to what the congregation would hear.

Things continued like this until 1937 when through a generous donation from the Misses J and A Williamson the console was moved to the centre of the chancel which contained the choir stalls at the time. This meant that the original pneumatic action would not be possible, so a secondhand electric console was obtained and electric to pneumatic conversion units were installed up underneath the organ pipe chests. These were connected together using a mass of wires which ran under the floor and up through the cupboard in the vestry. At this time the water engine was replaced by an electric blower housed in the small building at the rear of the church.

During the sixties the console was moved up to the balcony and the choir stalls were removed to give more room on the chancel.

The organ continued to give reliable service for the next four decades leading worship week by week. During the renovation of the church in the late 1990s the organ sat out of use for three years. This time of unuse and the dirt and dust caused by the building works and the lack of any heating in the church took it's toll on the old girl. When services resumed in the church after the renovations were finally complete it was obvious to the two organists, myself and the late Susan Wilson, that the organ was not happy. As time went by more and more of the organ started to fail with it becoming a lottery as to what would or wouldn't work from week to week.

The decision was taken by the session that the organ should be overhauled. The prices quoted were well out with what the church could realistically afford. After a great deal of discussion, it was decided that I would lead a team to overhaul the organ ourselves. The team consisted of Finley Seaton, Ken

Cameron, George Johnston and myself (Neil Robertson) working in the evenings and any other spare time available. We had to ensure that at all times at least some part of the organ was available for the Sunday service. Most of the funding came from the Friday coffee mornings ran by the late Maude Wood and her team at that time. The work was carried out during 2008 and took nearly six months.

The original specification of the organ whilst quite generous, was of it's time and was no longer suitable for the newer styles of church music being used so a new specification was drawn up using as much of the original pipework as was possible, therefor retaining the best of the excellent workmanship of the original builders and altering the remains to provide an instrument which could be used for all types of music. The pipes are now arranged in two separate boxes with shutters on the front so that the volume of the whole organ can be controlled as required. New chest work was manufactured and a new computer control system was installed to connect between the console and the pipes. By unifying five of the ranks of pipes on the new chest work, we were able to extend the stop list significantly with the remaining five ranks on the original swell chest. The five unit ranks are – Diapason, Tibia, Flute, String, and Clarinet. The straight ranks are – Oboe, Cornopean, Geigen, Celeste, Gemshorn.

This remodelling has ensured that the organ is capable of being used for many different types of music from Bach to Blackpool and everything in between. It has to be the only church organ in Scotland with a real crash cymbal fitted. Hopefully the organ will continue to find a purpose and use in whatever future the building may have.