

Organs and Organ-Builders on the Isle of Man

General Introduction

In 2008, there are around 55 instruments on the Island, including 5 house organs, and these include representative instruments of well-known mainland builders, such as Forster and Andrews, Hill, Norman and Beard, Brindley and Foster and Harrison. We also have organs of lesser-known makers, such as Wadsworth, Hewitt, Keats, and those of builders almost confined to the Island, significantly Morgan and the present Island organ builder, Peter Jones.

In terms of numbers, the firms of Moses Morgan of Douglas, Henry William Hewitt of Leicester and Peter Jones of St John's are the most significant.

Morgan's earliest instrument (Andreas Parish Church, 1898) was the first of a dozen or more organs, the last being St Catherine's Church, Port Erin in 1912 – a remarkable record of more than one instrument per year. These organs were solidly made, with an internal arrangement, mechanism and pipework which bear a strong family resemblance. There is some evidence to suggest that many of the metal pipes were supplied by August Laukhuff of Weikersheim, Germany, a firm which continues today as the largest of the organ supply houses to the trade. Morgan arrived on the Island as an experienced builder, and must, therefore, have built other instruments in the UK. He was obviously a successful businessman, and ran a hotel or boarding house alongside the organ-building and piano tuning and supply enterprise.

Some of the earliest organs have bellows weights marked, 'M&P', (for Morgan and Pollard) but the later ones do not, and there is no instrument bearing a nameplate with both names, so it seems that the partnership was not an equal one. The link between Morgan and Pollard evidently existed, but just what it was remains unclear.

Intriguingly, a tuner named Francis Kitts, who worked on the Island just after the last war, remembers Frank Pollard, who had evidently had something to do with organs and/or pianos, but was not active in the field at that time. Francis Kitts was working for the John Compton Organ Company, when they had a brief presence on the Isle of Man, and they were based in what he described as 'Pollard's old workshop', at 12A St George's Walk. This was the address of Moses Morgan's workshop, when his concern was flourishing.

H W Hewitt, whose father was a London-based organ-builder, and who had brothers in the trade, had a workshop in Glebe Street, Leicester and catered for those churches requiring a cheaper instrument, and there are at least 9 of his organs which are known on the Island. His usual practice was to obtain second-hand organs, and

install them, usually with some modification to make them more suitable for church use. His work was rough and ready, sometimes crude and ill-designed, but it has to be said that the instruments that have survived were all working (after a fashion) and those that have been renovated and improved have all made very acceptable, musical organs, ideally suited to



St Paul's, Ramsey

the smaller church. The fact that they were made up from parts and organs which were redundant, typically, in the 1880s (and must, therefore, date from 50 years or more before this date) means that their pipework and mechanism is often of considerable age, and interesting for that reason alone. The instrument at St Mark's, for instance, is unique in having a keyboard and mechanism which start at GGG (5 notes lower than any other on the Island) a feature which was common before church organs had pedals. All but one of his instruments still remaining are one-manual.

Peter Jones has been working on the Island since 1979, mainly in tuning, maintaining and renovating (or rebuilding) existing instruments. At the time of writing (2008) he is responsible for the regular maintenance of all the Island's instruments, including those two recently installed by

other builders (the Walker organ at St Anthony's, Onchan, and the Harrison and Harrison in St George's, Douglas. He has also built new organs from his workshop in St John's – 4 house organs and the portable continuo organ at the Erin Arts Centre in Port Erin. Though he seldom leaves the Island, visiting organists occasionally commission work, and this has resulted in trips to Cambridge, Haverford West, Chester, Winchester and Rehoboth Beach (Delaware). Anyone interested in the organs of the Isle of Man, or who has further information or corrections to this account, is invited to contact Peter Jones (current telephone: 01624 801368). Any information regarding organs, organists and organ-related events of the past will be welcome, especially photographs featuring organs which no longer exist, or from years gone by.



Peel Methodist Chapel