

The Organ at St. Leonard's, Clent.

Ours is an "antique" instrument, constructed originally by J.R. Walker (London) in 1869 in a pre-'horseless carriage' era and, though dismantled and re-assembled twice in the 1980 / 90s, no new parts were added or replacements made.

It is a tribute to its builders (and those who have maintained it subsequently) that it has lasted this long and continues to do good service.

The lock-down 'lock-out' without regular activity to revitalise its inner workings - and changes in our climate temperatures and humidity levels - have done it no favours.

The effects of previous hot summers have been countered by placing buckets of water within the casing to increase internal humidity and reduce shrinkage in the wood of the chests / soundboards as they dried-out and the pressurised air leaked.

Recently, as the humidity changed when we emerged from winter into summer, things got radically worse and 'siphons' were distinctly audible, inhibiting or prevent the use of some 'stops' and meaning I had to 'warm things up' before the services to encourage warmth and the swelling of timber so that things weren't so noticeable, and I then 'played around' audible problems.

At the beginning of the month it received its first attention for 2021/22, from Nicholson's, at which I was able to be present and so had the opportunity to get inside both the instrument and the tuner's thoughts on how things could be improved.

Basically, he's done his best - and an incredible best.

You can hardly hear the problems which are now endemic in the instrument; but they persist.

I think it advisable that a thorough, professional appraisal is required to appreciate what needs to be done in order to keep this 'gem' going for the next century.

For those of you who might not be aware, this is a recognised 'organ of interest' - having a

- *'fine display rank'*
- *'good' flute work*
- *'interesting' reed additions*
- *a (modern) 'flat, parallel pedalboard' (which replaces an attempted C20th modernisation of a 'concave, radiating pedalboard' - the easier-to-play contemporary style - and returns to the original pattern)*
- *it is a very early example of a "Lady's Organ" in that the player's position is 'sheltered' from public view (and so her modesty was maintained)*

I therefore seek approval to make contact with either / both

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and ask whether they would be prepared to attend St. Leonard's and produce an itemised report with appropriate costings.

There might be a fee for this which, as is usual in these cases, should be off-set against their being awarded such work.

I have raised this matter with the Parish Treasurer and we have discussed the part which the Churchlands Charity can make towards such a project and I would undertake to make enquiries about grant provision for work to restore a historic instrument such as ours which gives the player insight and experience of the skills required by players 150 years ago.

In the meantime, as advised, I have placed a tray of water next to the Blower intake to increase the humidity of the air being drawn inside the instrument and help mitigate the drying of the timber and the leather seals.