

INSCH – LESLIE- PREMNAY-OYNE PARISH CHURCH

Organ Visit – 8th August 2016

The organ is a 2 manual and pedal instrument by Wadsworth Bros. It is free standing and occupies a central position within the sanctuary against the back wall. The decorative stencilling on the front pipes creates an aesthetically pleasing design, which tones in well with the pitch pine casework and the general décor of the building.

The Organ Builders.

The firm of Edward Wadsworth was formed in Manchester in 1860 by Edward Wadsworth. His brother Ernest joined the firm in 1875 and in 1879 they set up a branch of the business in Aberdeen at 6 Hadden Street when the firm became known as Edward Wadsworth and Brother and later as Wadsworth Brothers¹ From the 1880s up until the middle of the First World War they built a significant number of instruments in North-east Scotland, many of which are still in use today. Although they only built small to moderate sized instruments, the firm had a reputation for sound workmanship.

Their early instruments were built with tracker action and later with tracker action to the manuals, but with tubular pneumatic action to the pedals, (of which the organ at Inch is an example) before building instruments with fully pneumatic action from 1911 onwards.²

History.

The organ at Inch has an integral console with angled stop jambs and since instruments built before c.1905 usually had straight stop jambs, this places the date of this instrument somewhere between 1905 and 1910. There is evidence in the form of a piece of paper fixed to the inside of the organ chamber, which, although rather torn, is nevertheless quite informative. It shows the name “Wadsworth” (which is also displayed on the console label). “Aberdeen” is also written in the top right hand corner. There is also some other evidence which is barely discernable as somebody at some stage has tried to obliterate it. It looks like the signature of John Wardle, who was at the head of the Aberdeen branch of the Wadsworth firm and who would have played a large part in the construction and finishing of the organ. Also barely discernable is a date which looks like 1907 and in fact an article in the Banffshire Journal bears this out³. The piece of paper bears the name of a Huntly printer at the bottom of the page and this would suggest that it was possibly a page from the dedication service or inaugural recital, which took place after the evening service on 24th February 1907. The article does not state who played the organ on that occasion, but is possible that John Wardle may have given the inaugural recital, as he was organist of an Episcopal church in Stonehaven as well as having given inaugural recitals on some of the instruments he had built, for example at Auchterless in 1905.

¹ The National Pipe Organ Register DBOB-ref=2146 also mentions that they were known as Wadsworth & Bro. from 1889 – 1902 and Wadsworth Brothers from 1903 – 1911 operating from 12 Hardgate, Aberdeen.

² Email correspondence from AF (Sandy) Edmonstone, February, 2003.

³ Banffshire Journal, 26th February 1907, p.5

More importantly, this piece of paper lists the specification of the organ, which is exactly as it is today and is an indication that the instrument has survived largely unaltered⁴. The stop marked Bass Flute on the Pedal organ is listed as Flute Bass on the piece of paper – but the natural fading on the stop knobs over the years displays further evidence that no alterations have been made to the specification.

Details.

The specification of this organ is fairly typical of a 2 manual organ by Wadsworths of this period, with no stops above 4' pitch (i.e. sounding an octave above the written pitch). The Swell Organ is a larger department than the Great Organ and has a Lieblich Bourdon 16' (sounding an octave lower than the written pitch) and only one reed stop, namely the Oboe. In the Pedal Organ there are 3 stops, although the Bourdon 16' and Bass Flute 8' use a single rank of pipes extended by an octave, allowing two pipes to sound an octave apart when both stops are drawn. In an instrument of this size, this extension principle was used as a space (and cost?) saving device. The third Pedal stop has the rather unusual name of Minor Bass, which suggests a quieter 16' stop than the Bourdon. Such a stop, when present on an instrument of this size would actually use the bottom 30 pipes of the Swell Lieblich Bourdon 16'.

As mentioned above, the action to the manuals is tracker action with tubular pneumatic action to the pedals. The bass pipes that make of the façade, which are too large for the main soundboard are also same way operate by pneumatic relays from the soundboard in the same way as the Pedal organ. Instead of pipes on the main soundboard there are lead tubes that convey wind to the pneumatic actions in the off-set windchests that accommodate the front pipes.⁵

The organ was originally hand pumped and signs indicating “Full” and “Empty” and a “tell-tale” weight are placed near the wind reservoir to indicate to the bellows blower when to stop pumping and when to start again. The other tell-tale weight is still functioning at the console and indicates even with electric blowing, that the wind reservoir is full and ready to play. Another feature of note at the console is the position of the balanced Swell Pedal, which is at the right hand side of the knee board and slightly angled, rather than in the more central position. The 2 combination pedals which operate jointly on the Great and Pedal are in the central position, but those for the Swell are in the normal left hand position. The short pedal keys (i.e. the “black notes”) are painted black rather than being left the natural colour of the wood.

Condition.

Overall the organ is reliable and in generally good playing condition. As with most organs of this age there are one or two issues, but fortunately not many and they appear to be of a minor nature. There is some noticeable wind noise to be heard at the console when the organ is idling or playing quietly, which is not noticeable when playing louder, although this is unlikely to be heard by the congregation at some distance from the console. It sounds as if one of the wind ducts or conveyances is loose, the remedy for which should be quite straightforward. All of the tracker actions on the manuals are working and are quite responsive and all of the manual to pedal couplings are working apart from one where the fault is most likely a broken pull-down wire, which again is easily remedied. On the Pedal Organ all of the notes are working apart from one which is mute and another which is slow to respond. The mute note may be due to a leaking pneumatic motor or

⁴ This refers to the fact that none of the pipework has been changed and the action has remained the same. Any replacement of action parts or re-leathering of pneumatic motors would not be considered as alteration.

⁵ See Figs.1&2 Appendix 2

simply that the lead tubing has come loose. A slow response suggests porous or stiffening leather in the pneumatic motor. The Minor Bass stop does not appear to play anything at all. A possible explanation for this is that the pivot pin in the draw stop linkage has come out, or it may have been deliberately disconnected for a particular reason. If such a stop were intended to be shared with the Lieblich Bourdon 16' then it is unlikely that this was simply a "prepared for" ⁶stop.

The full Swell makes a good solid sound although when coupled to the full Great there is some "robbing" evident at certain pitches. On the Great Organ the Claribel Flute 8' and Wald Flute 4' speak with clarity and sound well together as a flute chorus, although there are some mute notes in the top octave of the Wald Flute 4' and some where the speech is weak. In the case of the mute notes it may be the case that these smaller pipes may have been knocked off their wind in the process of tuning.

On the day of the visit the Great Organ was found to be at a very slightly different pitch from the Swell, but this is simply a matter for the tuner to match up when the building is heated to the normal temperature for Sunday services as is usually required for tuning visits. There is a piece of paper at the console with instructions as to what to do in an emergency, related to what action to take if notes are ciphering⁷. It would appear from this that some problems have been experienced with warping keys in the winter months which can move the action enough to open the pallets slightly and just enough to make the pipes sound when stops are drawn. While the instructions say that the heating should be 65° F maximum, it is just as important, if not more so, to watch the humidity level as it is low humidity more than the actual temperature that causes wood to warp, although a rise in temperature will cause the level of humidity to drop even further.

It should be borne in mind that these observations have been made by playing from the console and any explanations offered as to the cause of any faults are based on dealing with problems displaying similar symptoms on other instruments. There was no internal examination of the instrument in order to find actual causes.

Conclusion.

The fact that the instrument is still serving its purpose in what is more or less its original condition is a tribute to the original organ builders. As such it should be seen as part of the town's heritage and a tangible link with the past.

Robert W Milne, BMus(Hons), ARCO
Macduff, 04/08/2017

⁶ A "prepared for" stop is where space is provided on the sound board and draw stop action installed with the possibility of adding pipes at a later stage. This was often done on instruments where the cost of the pipe work could not be met in the initial installation.

⁷ Ciphering is a term used to denote the sounding of a note when no keys are depressed

APPENDIX 1

INSCH- LESLIE-PREMAY-OYNE PARISH CHURCH

Specification of the Organ

Organ by Wadsworth & Bro., Aberdeen - February 1907

PEDAL ORGAN

Minor Bass	(silent)	16
Bourdon		16
Bass Flute	(from Bourdon)	8

GREAT ORGAN

Open Diapason	8
Claribel Flute	8
Dulciana	8
Principal	4
Wald Flute	4

SWELL ORGAN

Lieblich Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedact	8
Echo Gamba	8
Voix Celestes (tenor c)	8
Lieblich Flute	4
Gemshorn	4
Oboe	8

Tremulant

Couplers

Great to Pedal Swell to Pedal
Swell to Great Swell Octave

Accessories

Balanced Swell Pedal
Two combination pedals to the Pedal & Great Organs
Two combination pedals to the Swell Organ

The manual compass is 58 notes, pedal 30 notes.

APPENDIX 2



Fig. 1 – The lead tubes (left) coming from the Great soundboard.



Fig.2 - The same lead tubes under the offset chests under the façade pipes.



Fig. 3 The Swell shutters (top left hand corner) with the tuning access panel for the reeds (with the rope handles)



Fig. 4 – Tracker actions to the Swell (on the right)