

Notes on some early Tasmanian organs And also on the commencement of the Hobart Town Choral Society

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In the course of research for my article on the 'Port Arthur organ' (*OHTA News*, vol.22, no.4, pp.25-34), information on other early organs in Tasmania, and on the commencement of the Hobart Town Choral Society was discovered, and the purpose of this article is to bring these items together and to place them on permanent record.

The organ built by William Hance in 1832

On page 30 of *Historic organs of New South Wales* an extract was reproduced from *The Hobart Town Courier* of 21 April 1832 reporting that William Hance was 'engaged in building' an organ for a Freemasons' Lodge. Attention was drawn to the significance of this, as Hance might have been the first to build an organ in the Australian colonies.[1]

Hance arrived in Hobart Town in the *Mariner* on 26 September 1823 and served as organist at St David's Church until c.May 1826. In 1825 he erected the John Gray organ imported from London for St David's Church. He was also employed as a public schoolmaster and upon receipt of a substantial land grant, he resigned both positions to apply himself to farming.[2] At the time of his death at Hobart on 10 October 1842 he was aged 50 years and his occupation was that of postmaster.[3]

Research effort has since been directed to the Hance organ, but with only limited success. A further report at the end of June 1832 said:

On Monday the original Tasmanian Lodge observed the memorable day [anniversary of the Nativity of St John the Baptist] in a similarly agreeable and elegant manner through the help of Mrs Cox at the Macquarie Hotel, Mr Lempriere, the master, filling the chair. The splendid organ building [sic] by Mr Hance for the Brotherly Union is, we are glad to see, in an advanced state.[4]

Until such time as more details of this organ are discovered, the status of Johnson & Kinloch of Sydney as the first builders of organs in the Australian colonies (1840) must stand, but the prospect that Hance may have been the first is of profound importance and should not be overlooked.

Organs by James Eagles, London

This relatively unknown builder commenced in business about 1839 at 4 The Crescent, Hackney Road, London. He was previously employed as foreman to James Chapman Bishop of London, with whom he had served from at least January 1823. [5] Three organs by Eagles are known to have been ordered for Tasmanian churches last century. These were for Holy Trinity, Launceston (c.1854), Christ Church, Longford (c.1855),[6] and St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Hobart.[7] The latter organ was probably built in or after 1856 as it is not mentioned in copy supplied by Eagles to *The Tasmanian Church Chronicle* and published in January 1856 in which he states that he had built the abovementioned organs for

Launceston and Longford. He also said that 'In England he has built several organs of very considerable dimensions; and has repaired and remodelled several others, including the noble instrument at Canterbury Cathedral'. Apparently Eagles somehow gained the patronage of Bishop F R Nixon (first Anglican bishop to Tasmania, appointed 1842) 'Mr Eagles has received several commissions through the Bishop of Tasmania, by whom he is highly appreciated for his skill as a workman, and for his uprightness and punctuality as a tradesman'. Only one other organ by Eagles is known to have been supplied to Australia - to the Methodist Church, Pirie Street, Adelaide, in 1855.[8]

The first organ at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Launceston (c.1854), has been incorrectly attributed to Henry Bevington of London.[9] The stop list remains to be confirmed, but was possibly that of the first of several standard specifications offered by Eagles, and quoted below, in full:-

One row of keys compass from GG to F, with GG, and containing the following stops:-

- 1 Open Diapason
- 2 Stop Diapason Bass
- 3 Clarabella Treble
- 4 Principal
- 5 Fifteenth
- 6 Dulciana
- 7 Flute
- 8 Hautboy or Trumpet £150
- with 9 Keraulophon
- 10 Twelfth £160
- with Sexquialtra and Cornet 3 ranks £170
- 11

Each enclosed in a general Venetian Swell with 1-1/2 Octaves of German Pedals, and Three Composition Pedals. The Cases to be either Gothic or Grecian, stained, and to vary in dimensions according to requirement, from 7 feet wide, 13 feet 6 inches high, and 4 feet deep.

If to either of the above Instruments a Second row of Keys for a separate Swell is added, from F to F 35 notes, with the following stops:-

- 1 Open Diapason
- 2 Stop Diapason
- 3 Principal
- 4 Hautboy £30 extra
- with 5 Trumpet £36 10s extra
- with 6 Cornopean
- 7 Fifteenth £55 extra

If the Swell Keys in either Organ are carried down to Tenor C:-

For No.1, with 4 stops £185 extra

For No. 2, with 5 " £200 "

For No. 3, with 8 " £240 "

Each Organ to have a Coupler Stop to unite Swell to Great Organ. Should Pedal Pipes be desired:-

If 1 Octave of Unisons £16 extra

If 1-1/2 Octaves of Double Diapason, from CCC 16 feet,

with two Octaves of German Pedals and Octave Coupler £30 extra

If 2 Octaves of Double Diapason £35 "

And so on in proportion for any greater number of Stops. If the Compass of the Manuals is only from CC:-

One more Stop in each Great Organ for the same cost. [10]

Henry Bevington organ of 1867 - St Paul's Anglican Church, Launceston

The original stop list and specification of this organ was as follows:

Open Diapason, Gamut G to F in alt. 47 pipes

Stopped Diapason bass, CC to Gamut G 7

Clarabella Treble (continued by stopped bass) 47

Dulciana, to Tenor F, ditto 37

Flute, Tenor C to F in alt. 42

Principal, CC to F in alt 54

Bourdon, CCC to CC 13

Manual compass, 54 notes; total pipes 247; mechanical action.

The newspaper description from which these details were taken, does not indicate whether the Bourdon of 13 pipes was played by the bottom octave of the manual keys, or if separate foot pedals of 13 notes (and manual to pedal coupler?) were provided.[11]

A barrel organ for sale

A newspaper advertisement of December 1846 confirms the presence in Hobart of barrel organs (probably for both sacred and secular tunes) as in Sydney at that time. Messrs Lowes & Macmichael's auction on 14 December 1846 included 'one barrel organ with four barrels'.[12]

Anon. organ bought by Hobart Town Choral Society from Bishop F R Nixon

An abbreviated specification for this organ was presented in my article on the 'Port Arthur organ' but it is desirable that all details of this instrument be recorded as an aid to further research that may reveal its subsequent movements. The complete description of this organ is given below:

The public and friends generally of this pleasing society will be much gratified to hear that the subscription towards the purchase of an organ proceeds most prosperously. The organ is the property of the Bishop [Nixon], and is of admirable tone, well calculated for the purpose of the Choral Society. The instrument contains 313 pipes, which are comprised in six stops; the open and stopped diapasons, principal, fifteenth, dulciana and hautboy. It is also provided with an octave of German pedals for holding bass notes, and composition pedals to produce various combinations. The first, draws out the dulciana stop alone; the second adds the diapasons and the third brings on the full organ. The compass of the notes is from GG to F in alt, being seven and a half [sic] octaves. The height is 10 feet 6 inches [3.20 m]; width 7 feet 3 inches, and depth 3 feet 6 inches. [Manual key compass 5 octaves, dimensions 3.20 m high, 2.21 m wide, 1.067 m deep]. It will form a most important and valuable addition to the property of the Choral Society; be of the utmost assistance in teaching and practising the *choir*, and add most materially to the general effect in their public performances.[13]

The organ, as purchased by the Choral Society in July 1846, was without a case. [14] A subsequent report, in March 1847, said subscriptions were sought 'so as to complete the organ before the return of the Lord Bishop to Tasmania'.[15] Nothing

more is known of this organ and it has not been identified as any instrument still extant.

The organ ordered by Bishop Nixon from J C Bishop of London

The shipping arrangements and purpose for the organ ordered by Bishop Nixon while he was in England in 1847 (one manual, 12 stops, eight ranks[16]) remain obscure. Reference to cargo lists and imports published in newspapers of 1847 and 1848 have not revealed when it arrived in Tasmania. Bishop Nixon sailed from England on the brig *Himalaya* in January 1848, arriving in Hobart on 19 May.[17]

From subsequent press reports it seems the J C Bishop organ was not intended for Nixon's own use, but for Christ's College at Bishopsbourne, Norfolk Plains, near Launceston; on 11 March 1847 it was reported that 'His Lordship has sent an organ to the College - one of Bishop's best'.[18] So far it has not proved possible to establish when or at which port the organ arrived, or if it went to Christ's College before it was installed in Nixon's residence.

The formation of the Hobart Town Choral Society

The Hobart Town Choral Society was established in January 1843, 'by a few individuals (chiefly amateurs) for the practice of sacred music, and more particularly the works of those great masters whose noble compositions of oratorical music have shed such lustre on the science'. Its further objectives were the 'creating and fostering in the youth of the colony a taste for that branch of music. It is intended to establish schools, under competent professional teachers, to instruct the members and their families both in the vocal and instrumental parts'. Mrs Elliott (organist of St David's Church) was engaged 'to teach the treble voices, which will be composed of ladies, girls, and boys'. One or more 'professional gentlemen' were to be engaged 'to teach the other voices and the instruments'. It was intended by the Society to give performances of extra oratorios to augment the funds for the purchase 'of music and of instruments (including an organ)'. In March 1845 the Society completed arrangements with the Mechanics' Institute for joint occupancy of its Lecture Hall in Melville Street, where practices were held every Tuesday evening. The President of the Society was Bishop Nixon; annual subscription for membership was fixed at one guinea.[19] Its 'FIRST GRAND PERFORMANCE' took place 'in Mr Russell's New Music Hall, Collins-street, on TUESDAY 7th day of May next [1844], at 7 o'clock in the Evening. Mr Deane and his talented family, also Monsieur and Madame Gautrot, have kindly offered their services on this occasion'.[20]

In order to discover the subsequent history of the Society's organ, it would be necessary to trace the progress and demise of the Society, if this has not already been done.

I wish to acknowledge the generous assistance of Bill Chapman whose enthusiastic research made this article possible.

References

- 1 Rushworth G D, *Historic organs of New South Wales, the instruments, their makers and players, 1791-1940*; Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988, p.30
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 *Tasmanian Pioneer Index 1803 -1899*; extract from register of Deaths in the District of Hobart.
- 4 *Hobart Town Courier*, 29 June 1832, p..2
- 5 Elvin L, *Bishop and Son organ builders*; Lincoln: Elvin, 1994, pp.53, 337
- 6 *Tasmanian Church Chronicle*, 1 May 1856, p.3
- 7 Clark B A and Johnson J M S, *Pipe organs of Tasmania*, 2nd ed., Hobart: Hobart Guild of Organists, 1981, p.52.
- 8 *Tasmanian Church Chronicle*, op. cit.; Naylor B, *Gazetteer of South Australian Pipe Organs*, Melbourne: Society of Organists (Vic.) Inc., 1974.

9 Clark & Johnson, op. cit., p.49

10 *Tasmanian Church Chronicle*, op. cit.

11 *Australian Churchman*, 16 Nov 1867, p.45

12 *Hobart Town Courier and Van Diemen's Land Gazette*, 12 Dec 1846, p.3

13 *ibid.*, 18 July 1846, p.3

14 *ibid.*, 6 March 1847, p.2;

15 *ibid.*, 11 March 1847, p.4

16 Elvin L, op. cit., pp. 108-9

17 Nixon N, *The pioneer Bishop in Van Diemen's Land 1843-1863*, Hobart, 1954, p.50; *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 May 1848, p.2

18 *Hobart Town Courier*, 11 March 1848, p.2

19 *ibid.*, 18 March 1845, p.3

20 *ibid.*, 3 May 1844, p.1

Addendum

Since the foregoing notes were completed, it has been established that the Hobart Town Choral Society had by August 1848 almost paid off the original cost of the organ purchased from Bishop Nixon. However, the organ was still without a case, as subscriptions for this had apparently not been forthcoming. [1]

The prosperity of the Society declined and in March 1850 the AGM decided to make arrangements for its cessation and disposal of its assets. The organ was then advertised for sale by tender, but searches of the local newspaper have so far not revealed a report of its sale. [2]

In May 1850 a seraphine 'suitable for Church or Chapel' was advertised in the *Hobart Town Courier* by 'J. Williams, Pianoforte Maker, Hobart Town who also warranted to keep it in order. [3]

In my article on the 'Port Arthur organ', I mentioned the organ (with a case designed by architect J F Bentley) for Bishop F R Nixon in 1863 while he was at Bolton Percy, Yorkshire. This instrument was possibly the first new organ built by T C Lewis, and was of one manual and eight stops. It survives intact in the Anglican church of St Leonard, Beeford, Humberside. [4]

1 *Hobart Town Courier*, 2 Aug 1848, p.2

2 *Ibid.*, 6 April 1850, p.2 and 27 April 1850, p.3

3 *Ibid.*, 8 May 1850, p.3. John Williams was a former employee of John Broadwood & Sons, London and the grandfather of noted architect Louis R Williams (1890-1980)

4 Gray, C. 'The Highest Style of Art': an introduction to the life and legacy of T C Lewis (1933-1915), *BIOS Journal*, Vol.22, p.9 and National Pipe Organ Register (BIOS)