

## AN ORGAN TRANSPLANT

BY REV PETER CRICK (RECTOR OF ST MARY'S DENHAM FROM 1975 TO 1988)



This picture shows a sight that for most of the past - what, 175 years? - nobody will have seen. The bellringers see the window, and have done for about 40 years, but we don't get to see it from a further perspective as in this photo.

### So how did it come about?

One day our doorbell rang. When I answered it there was a lady who asked if I could help her daughter. She explained that her daughter was hoping to gain entry to the Royal Academy of Music, and her chosen instrument was the organ. The vicar's wife in their own parish church had complained that her organ practice disturbed the flower arrangers. Could she practise at St Mary's?

I could hardly believe it. Of course we would help. The musical life at

Denham was in fact going through its own issues at that time. For a variety of reasons we had changed organist a couple of times so the young lady was suddenly an asset, and the choir liked her too! Then she went to college and ultimately became the organist. You have probably guessed she now is, of course, Mrs Louise Hardy.

The organ we then had was located where it now is, but the console was in the chancel and stood where the digital piano now sits. The link between them was electrical, and problems were becoming constant. The advice we were given was that we had the choice between a complete rebuild and modernization of the current instrument, or to replace it entirely. Initial enquiries gave us the surprising information that we would probably get a new organ for much the same cost as a rebuild, and if we chose wisely it





would be a better instrument.

Opposite the Church lived Stirling Moss' manager. Hearing of our crisis, he very generously offered to donate the organ completely if (he was a modern techie) we got a high-grade electronic one. The PCC, Rector, and Organist were extremely grateful, but felt such a historic building really required a wind instrument. So we ruefully declined.

In the end, guided and advised by Louise, we selected the design and quotation submitted by one Nigel Church. A Shepherd, he was also organist for his local Parish Church in Otterburn, Northumberland. He had begun servicing his own, and then other organs, till in the end he decided to build them. Louise and I travelled to Otterburn to see



our instrument when it was mid-construction. The workshop was a beautifully converted stone barn. It was a captivating visit which doubled our eagerness to see this beautiful oak creation in Denham.

It was to be a Tracker organ; which means that all the valves that allow air into the pipes are activated by rods, not electric contact breakers. They are very light and can easily be repaired if necessary. The wind box interested me as a sailor. It was built of marine grade plywood, which would never warp or split as the previous 19th century one of thin wooden sheets, had. The organ also was divided into two separate units. The smaller section, called a "Chair Organ" was located behind the organist - fascinating.





### Finally – installation

It was decided to support the chair organ by steel beam cantilever into the main nave and make room behind for the bellringers, and use the door in the tower as the main entrance. We had many hands to achieve all this: Bernard Collins was Bell Captain, he was also a carpenter and a director of a construction company. He not only directed the work, he also acted as Clerk of works. Alongside him was another ‘chippy’ – Church Warden Ron Udell – one of the best Church Wardens God ever created: a mainstay of my ministry in St Mary’s. He was also head of set construction at Pinewood, and a mainstay of 007! One of his finer touches was that all the balusters of the safety rail of the new organ loft match the pew ends. Have you ever noticed that?

These two worthies also spotted that the largest pipe of the old organ was made of good wood. It is still in the tower to this day – it is the staircase by which one gains access to the bell tower and organ. Serendipity. The choir were uncertain about this new instrument. It meant the organist was far away, and communication might be difficult. Then they discovered what fun it was to sing some choral works from above and behind the congregation, and this brilliant young choir mistress and musician soon had their musical quality rising to new heights, musical, as well as physical. What is certain is the spiritual enhancement that musical contribution has made to the worship at St Mary’s. Incidentally, that distancing probably helped prepare the choir for coping with “virtual choir practices” this year!

