

**A Short History of the Organs
of
St Mary Magdalene's,
East Ham**



Christopher Maxim

A Short History of the Organs of St Mary Magdalene's, East Ham

by

Christopher Maxim Ph.D.

Organist & Choirmaster of St Mary Magdalene's

© C D Maxim MMXXI

The first organ (c.1830-c.1847)

Built around c.1130, St Mary Magdalene's did not, it would seem, acquire its first organ for some 700 years. The earliest known reference to an organ is found on one of two boards that originally formed the front of the west gallery and are now under the tower. Painted with lists of benefactors, they are dated 1830. The first donation recorded is £10 given for the organ (probably a barrel organ) by William Streatfeild, Vicar 1827-1860.

First panel of the old gallery front (now under the tower)



Nothing more is known of this instrument; but we do know something of the man who operated it from around 1837: his name was John B. Charters¹ – more of him anon.

We may assume that the organ was placed on the west gallery – the usual place for organs at this period. A new gallery had, in 1820, replaced an earlier one that was in bad repair;² and would be the location of the second organ.³

¹ Rev. John Buckler Carlos, *East Ham Parish Church*, 2nd edition (East Ham, 1928), p. 14

² Buckler Carlos, p. 14

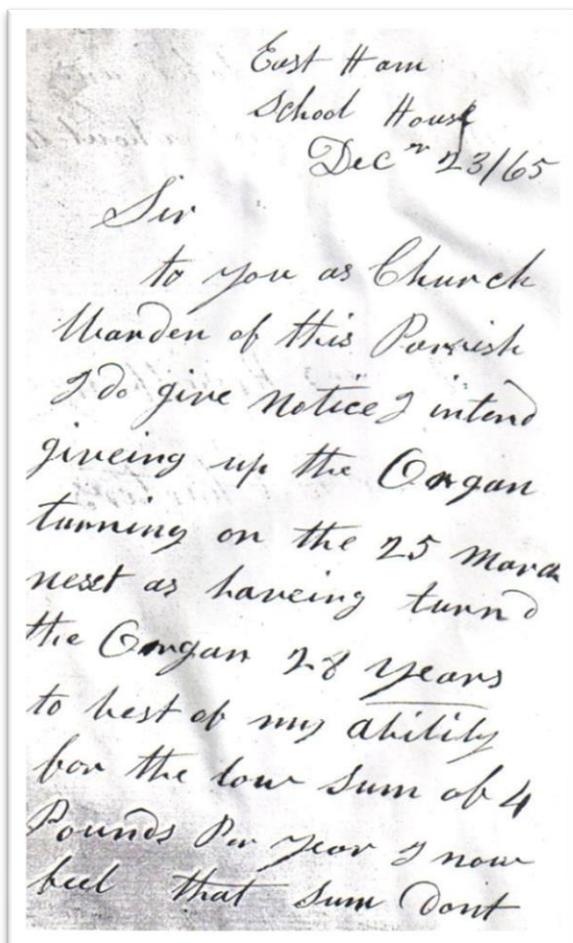
³ Buckler Carlos, p. 14

The second organ (c.1847-1897)

The second organ (certainly a barrel organ) was also acquired by Streatfeild.⁴ It had been installed previously in St John's, Stratford in 1844⁵ and presumably came to East Ham when St John's commissioned G. M. Holdich (1816-1896) to an organ with two manuals and pedals, erected in 1847.⁶ This second-hand barrel organ contained six stops and was reputed to be a 'very fine-toned instrument, with pipes, rather loud-voiced'.⁷ There were four barrels that provided a total of 45 tunes: 38 hymns, 5 double chants, and 2 other settings.⁸

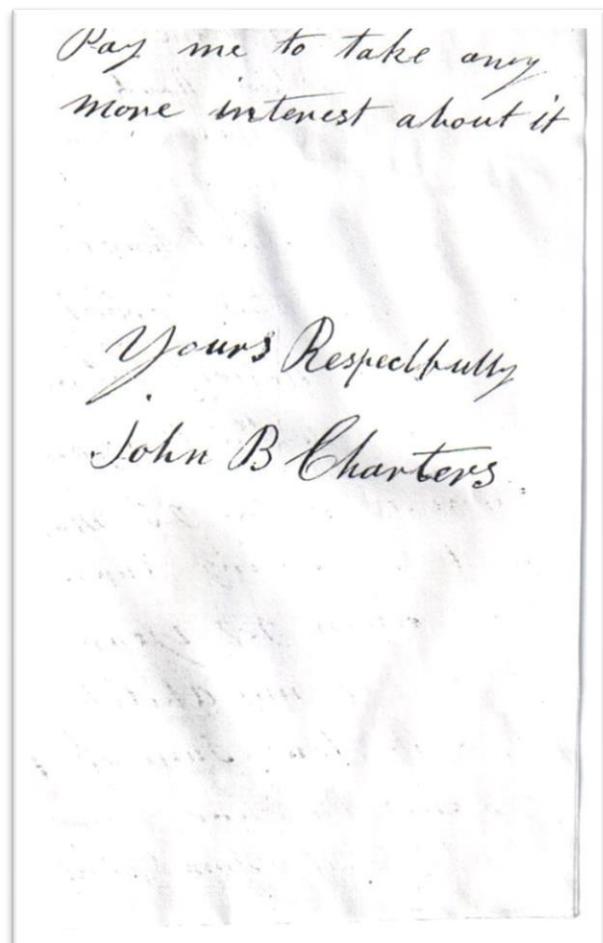
John. B Charters 'turned' this organ, too, continuing to do so after Streatfeild's death. A letter dated 23rd December 1865 exists in the church archives in which he wrote to the churchwarden asking for an increase in his salary.

John B. Charters' letter of 23rd December 1865



East Ham
School House
Dec^r 23/65

Sir
to you as Church
Warden of this Parish
I do give notice I intend
giving up the Organ
turning on the 25 March
next as having turn'd
the Organ 7-8 years
to best of my ability
for the low sum of 4
Pounds Per year I now
feel that sum dont



Pay me to take any
more interest about it

Yours Respectfully
John B Charters

⁴ Buckler Carlos, p. 14

⁵ Buckler Carlos, p. 14

⁶ *National Pipe Organ Register*, [NPORView D03833](#) (accessed 14 April 2021)

⁷ Buckler Carlos, p. 14. The information about the organ is ascribed to 'the son of Mr John Charters'

⁸ Buckler Carlos, p. 14

Transcription of John B. Charters' letter of 23rd December 1865 (original spellings preserved)

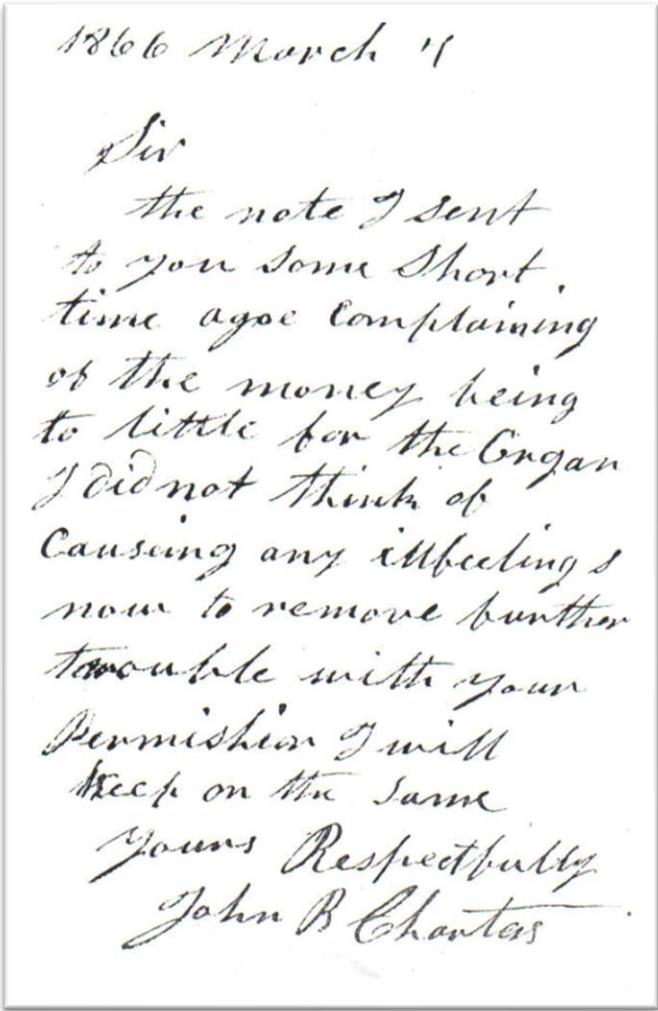
East Ham
School House
Dec^r 23/65

Sir
to you as Church Warden of this Parrish I do give notice I intend giving
up the Organ turning on the 25 March next as haveing turnd the Organ 28
years to [the] best of my ability for the low Sum of 4 Pounds Per year I
now feel that Sum dont Pay me to take any more interest about it

Yours Respectfully
John B Charters

A little over a fortnight before the date he had stated that he would quit his post, Charters seems to have had a change of heart, prompted by regret for the ill feeling that his request for an increase in pay had evidently engendered.

John B. Charters' letter of 7th March 1866



1866 March 11

Sir

the note I sent
to you some short
time ago complaining
of the money being
to little for the Organ
I did not think of
causing any illfeeling
now to remove further
trouble with your
permission I will
keep on the same

Yours Respectfully
John B Charters

Transcription of John B. Charters' letter of 7th March 1866 (original spellings preserved)

1866 March 7

Sir

the note I sent you some Short time agoe complaining of the money being to little for the Organ I did not think of Causing any illfeeling & now to remove further trouble with your Permishion I will keep on the Same

Yours Respectfully

John B Charters

We do not know whether or not Charters was allowed to continue in his role, but the organ remained a barrel organ until 1882 when it was converted to be played with a keyboard and a 'lady organist' was 'arranged for'.⁹

The second (?) organ (c. 1890), after it had been converted to be played with a keyboard



⁹ Buckler Carlos, p. 14

The 'Positive' organ (1897-1918)

In 1897 the west gallery was taken down and a small 'Positive' organ was acquired.¹⁰ It was placed at the south-east end of the nave, under the hymn-board. It cost £100 and was played by the wife of Hubert Ware (Vicar 1893-1908).¹¹ It was almost certainly a 'Casson Positive', designed by Thomas Casson (1842-1910) and built by William Andrew (1853-1914).

The church looking east c.1914-1918

The 'Positive' organ is below the hymn board in the south-east corner of the nave

The chancel still has a flat, plastered ceiling

Also note the blackout curtains, reflecting the date the photograph was taken



¹⁰ Buckler Carlos, pp. 14-15

¹¹ Anon. [Dennis Pridmore] 'based on information collated by Dennis Large', *St Mary Magdalene East Ham: A Brief Guide*, (East Ham, 2014), p. 18

The picture (above) enlarged to show more clearly the 'Positive' organ



A Casson Positive organ similar to that installed in 1897 (for comparison)¹²



¹² Picture used by kind permission of Mr George Bruce of *Bruce of Ballater*

The Rushworth & Dreaper organ (1918-the present)

The present organ was erected in 1918 in memory of Vincent Coke Boddington, Curate 1910-1914 and Chaplain to the Forces during WWI.¹³ Built by the Liverpool firm of Rushworth & Dreaper Ltd, it is the first organ in St Mary Magdalene's to have two manuals and a pedal keyboard.

The Reverend Vincent Coke Boddington



The builders' plate above the manuals



¹³ See brass plate on the side of the organ

The archaeological evidence indicates the Rushworth & Dreaper organ *might* not have been new when installed, and its size and shape suggest that it was *possibly* originally intended for a domestic setting. Alternatively, it *might* have been an 'off the peg' instrument, built to a standard design for small churches and *perhaps* slightly adapted for St Mary Magdalene's.

The Rushworth & Dreaper organ, probably soon after it was first installed in 1918

Note the original façade pipes; and the pumping handle protruding from the treble end of the case, towards the back



The church looking east with the Rushworth & Dreaper organ on the left

Although the picture was probably taken not long after the photograph above, the curtain rail around the console has now been installed. This same rail remains in use, but has been repositioned



In 1966 the façade pipes and much of the interior pipework of the Great Organ were stolen and had to be replaced.

In 2020 the organ underwent a complete restoration by Harrison & Harrison Ltd of Durham. They provided new façade pipes because those from the 1960s were of poor quality and in bad condition. The opportunity was taken to increase the length of these pipes to make them better able to sound the requisite notes, and to improve the proportions of the instrument, making it more visually pleasing.

In other respects, the organ was kept as true as possible how it would have been in 1918. It should be noted, however, that it is possible that the clear voicing Great pipework owes something to the tastes of the 1960s, and the influence of the twentieth-century classical revival in organ design.

The original hand pumping mechanism, which had been removed at some point in the organ's history (possibly in the 1960s), was reconstructed: more for the sake of completeness than out of a sense that it was necessary. However, it proved its worth when, in early 2021, very soon after the organ had begun to be used again following its restoration, the church suffered a small fire in the fuse box during a service. Electrical power was lost to the organ, but members of the congregation came to the rescue and the organ was operated just as it would have been in 1918 – and worked perfectly.

Specification of the Rushworth & Dreaper Organ

Pedal Organ (CC-f)

Lieblich Bourdon 16'

Great Organ (C-g³)

Open Diapason 8'

Lieblich Gedact 8'

Principal 4'

Fifteenth 2'

Swell Organ (C-g³)

Gedact 8'

Salcional 8' *Spelling as on drawstop*

Vox Angelica 8' *Lowest octave grooved into the Salcional*

Flute 4'

Couplers

Great to Pedal

Swell to Pedal

Swell to Great

- There is a Tremolo to the whole organ activated by a drawstop on the Great/Pedal jamb
- The Great, Swell and coupler actions are mechanical. The Pedal Organ has pneumatic action but there is evidence that it, too, was originally mechanical (converted in 1918?)
- There are two composition pedals to the Great stops and one to the Swell. The second Great composition pedal appears to be a later addition (1918?) and reduces whatever combination is drawn down to the Lieblich Gedact only
- There is a centrally positioned balanced swell pedal which, if the organ pre-dates 1918, would probably have originally been a lever pedal at the treble end of the pedalboard
- All the pipes in the side towers of the façade speak. They belong to the Open Diapason. Unusually, the lowest two notes (C and C#) are inside the case and are mitred to reduce their height so the pipes in the towers belong to low D-B. Tenor C and C# are also within the case, but the notes D-F# above them are within the central flat being the central pipe and the next four pipes to the left. The other pipes in the central flat do not speak

The drawstops



The pedal clavier, swell pedal and composition pedals

Note the pedalboard is concave and radiating, but is of a non-standard design



The start of the reassembly of the Rushworth & Dreaper organ (2020)



Reassembly of the console (2020)



The 2020 restoration nearing completion



The restored Rushworth & Dreaper organ (2020)

