

## Bevington Organ

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In 2007 St Mary's church in Hay-on-Wye was given the gift of a rare Victorian pipe organ by Holmer Church in Herefordshire. Parishioner, Rita Tait, recounts how she traced the history of the organ since it was built in 1883:

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"We had hoped to get hold of something special to replace a dysfunctional instrument and to do justice to the expertise of our priest Fr Richard Williams.

Fr Richard studied at Trinity College London and plays organ to concert standard; his area of expertise being extemporisation. He is in demand in Wales and farther afield for recitals in churches themselves fundraising. His next such event is scheduled for Cork Cathedral.



Nothing could have prepared us at St Mary's for what is coming. The fabulous instrument was built in 1883 by one of the leading firms, Henry Bevington & Sons of Soho. It was commissioned for the music room of a private house and initially all we knew about its early story

was the name John Carbery Evans of Hatley Hall, Cambridgeshire and the subsequent owner George Wright of Olton Hall; the latter took it with him in 1912 when he moved to Pudleston Court in Herefordshire.

The case, in perfect condition, is of gilded light oak with two larger than life female figures scantily clad in classical drapes. These we have christened the Bevington Belles. The pipes were painted, in all probability, by William Lamb, gilder, sign writer painter who painted pipes for all the leading organ makers in London at this time.

I started to burn the midnight oil online in an effort to learn more about Carbery Evans and the setting into which "our" organ had been placed.

A member of the distinguished family that was, and still is, the Barons Carbery, John Carbery Evans was described in various census returns as "Hop Merchant", "Brewing Merchant", J.P. & Magistrate and grandly, onetime High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire as well as Deputy Lord Lieutenant of that county.



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His father, Robert Evans of Fatherwell Hall, Ryarsh in Kent appears to have died in 1878 and this might well have a bearing on the amount of money that was spent at that period on the restoration of Hatley Hall in the Italianate style. According to Kelly's Directory of 1883

'the mansion contains some splendid apartments elegantly furnished, containing many works of art and vertue, pictures by Old Masters, bronzes, cabinets filled with antique china, miniatures and many other articles of a unique, costly and curious character.'



The pipe organ certainly fulfilled the "unique, costly and curious" part of that. I now know that included in the collections were mediaeval coins and paintings by fashionable local painters including one John Fulleylove (1845-1908) whose painting of Hampton Court from the

River is recorded as having been on loan from Carbery Evans to a major London exhibition.

The coins came up for auction at Christies immediately after the death of their owner. Despite every possible artifact which a wealthy man could acquire to show his good taste at home (the clock above the Stables was by Dent who held the Royal Warrant) Carbery Evans did not live very long to enjoy his luxurious mansion but died in 1896.

His death certificate states that he died of " laryngitis and heart disease ". He was 59 years of age. His death was registered by J S Glover his groom "present at the death" suggesting that he was a close and trusted friend not merely an employee.

The house did not stay in the family for long though his son John Carbery Evans Jnr a barrister, was in residence during 1891 when his father was at his London residence 109 Lancaster Gate. In 1890 Carbery Evans Junr. had married Lady Henrietta Wallop, daughter of the Earl Of Portsmouth. They did not appear to want to be at Hatley long term.



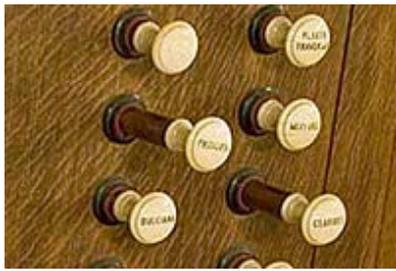
In my historical research into the family I have noted the fact that Carbery Evans did not live long to benefit from his splendid mansion and it seems strange to us now that the second Mrs. Carbery Evans did not stay on after his death to enjoy the house and the fine life that must have come with the role of Lord Lieutenant and family, just a few miles from the University town.

Quite by chance I was able to confirm her maiden name of Pitman and to find her family in the census returns. Her father had been a curate in a quiet country church and he and his wife had run a small boarding school.

After his death his widow carried on running the school and Alice Mary herself was sent to complete her education out of

the area. I wondered whether she had ended up as a teacher herself. I also speculated on whether the difference in social class between the widower at Hatley Hall and his bride, would have been an issue at that period. The Carbery family was descended from Welsh and Irish Princes and from William the Conqueror.

Alice Mary certainly might be said to have married above her station. On an impulse I looked again at the census for 1881 to see the list of servants at Hatley Hall and there she was as "Governess" aged 20! It is possible that once her husband died she was given the cold shoulder by Cambridgeshire Society, assuming they had ever accepted this marriage in the first place. Maybe she was keen to leave the area once her husband had died. Perhaps Hatley had not been a totally happy experience for Alice despite its magnificence.



The Organ was sold in 1899 when it was removed from the house and taken to Olton Hall Solihull, the home of George Edward Wright who was the Managing director of a Gas Stove company. (Olton Hall is now a public house near the gates of the Rover factory).

Unlike the Carbery Evans heir George appears to have had some feeling for the organ and when he moved from Olton in 1912 to Pudleston Court, Hereford he took it with him. It was in the house until 1934 as far as we can tell, finally being deposited in nearby Holmer Church.

It was with some interest that we heard recently that Holmer was home to one of the most distinguished organists and composers of church music of his day, that being the early 1800s.

Dr John Clarke-Whitfeld was a Professor of Music at Cambridge and long time organist at Hereford Cathedral. His daughter married the grandson of the founder of the Bulmer Empire. Clarke-Whitfeld died at Holmer.

In a planned concert to show our "thanks" to the people of Holmer Father Richard plans to perform on the organ before it is dismantled. He hopes to find some of Clarke-Whitfeld's music to play as a tribute to a Holmer man who achieved considerable fame in his profession.

The plans for the Bevington Organ, once it is rebuilt for us, include regular professional recitals and teaching, together with scholarships in extemporisation. Parties of enthusiasts from Organ Societies worldwide are expected to put us on their lists of tours and local schools, primary, comprehensive and public will be alerted to the availability of what Fr Richard calls "one of the best organs in this part of Wales".

Exhibition panels will be designed to tell the story of the organ in words and pictures and place it within the context of Victorian pipe organs and church music of the period.

The British Institute of Organ Studies has recently given a Grade 11\* rating citing "a unique case of flamboyant Classical design" and flagging it as deserving of preservation as part of the Nation's Heritage. In view of the latter accolade it is with some nervousness that I end with the

following story.

My husband Jack Tait, a professional photographer semi retired from the world of academia took the photographs of the Organ in situ at Holmer.

Several early prints were distributed until he noticed that the top left hand edge of the case was clipped. Cursing himself for such carelessness in composition he spent some time exercising his skills with Photoshop to rebuild the missing piece. It was months later that we revisited and realised that the piece of the case was simply not there. It appears that it had been removed in order to facilitate assembly into one of its three former homes.

It is possible that careful measurements taken originally had omitted to include the usual ornate moulding that the music room in a large house probably had at that height."

For further information about the Bevington Organ Appeal ( Patron: Julian Lloyd Webber) contact Rita Tait (bronyddrt@btconnect.com) or Elm Cottage, Bronydd, Clyro HR3 5RX

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