

The History of the former William Hill Organ at St Peters Upper Church Pembury



The William Hill pipe organ formerly in St Peters Upper Church, now in a private residence in Sydney, Australia has seen many changes over its lifetime. The instrument in question started out as two separate single manual organs both by William Hill. When it was first installed in 1877 the organ stood at the back of the church on the tower side. It would remain in this position until 1895 when William Hill and sons combined the instrument with an earlier single manual Hill Organ circa 1847 which is believed to have previously been in a church in Hatfield. The organ became a 2 manual with 13 speaking stops. An extension was added to the building and the instrument was moved to the chamber on the north side of the chancel. It is thought one influential lady in the congregation insisted that the instrument be tucked away due to her being unable to bear the sound.

Richard Sheppard of Sheppard and Cross, who would care for the instrument towards the end of its time in the church thinks the grand gothic case would have probably come from a chamber organ.

A notable person associated with the organs history is Mrs A.G.B Archer who was choirmaster and organist at the Upper church for around 50 years. Stories of her detail that she walked to Pembury from Tunbridge Wells to play for the Morning Service, after which she would then play at the Old Church also a William Hill instrument for the afternoon service and finally return to the Upper Church for Evening song before walking home to Tunbridge Wells at the end of the day.

The organ would remain on the north side of the chancel until 1972 when due to the needs of the parish changing over time it would was moved to the back of the church. At this time the Organ Builders Percy Daniel and Sons of Cleverdon would rebuild enlarge and somewhat alter the inner workings of the instrument. Sadly some of the changes would prove to make the organ very difficult to care for.

At the beginning of the 1990s it was clear that the building was very much in need of some proper facilities to make it more usable and flexible for worship and the re-ordering campaign soon commenced. Regrettably the Organ was very much in the way of this project and was dismantled and sold to a church in Hoxton. The instrument was stored at this location for several years and sadly the funds were never found to re-erect in it former home.. The organ was bought in 1995 by Australian organ builder Mark Fisher and shipped to Australia. It was reconstructed and re-erected in the Schureck Early Keyboard collection in Sydney at the beginning of the 21st century and has been used for many concerts held in the collection.

