

THE EMPLOYMENT OF AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
ORGANIST

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WHEN Charles Sloane rebuilt St. George's Church, then the Parish Church of Gravesend, after the fire of 1727, there was no provision for an organ in the building agreement of which there is a copy in the earliest Vestry Minute Book. (Printed in Philip's *History of Gravesend*, 1954, p. 152.) Neither is there any reference to a parish band or musicians in the Minutes or Church Wardens Accounts both of which are in existence from 1711.

The first reference to an organ in the Minutes is as follows:

"25th March 1764. Mr. Sam. Hazard and Mr. Thos. Dalton Executors of John Ison late of Gravesend Victualler who left by his last Will (among other things) £400 or such part thereof as should be necessary to be laid out in the purchase or building of an organ to be placed in some commodius part of the Parish Church as should be agreed by the Church Wardens and his said Executors and this Vestry being further informed by the said Executors that an organ had already been prepared by them pursuant to the direction of the said Will. It was now ordered and agreed by the Church Wardens and Parishioners of the said Parish whose names were subscribed that in gratitude to the memory of the said Mr. John Ison the organ be received and placed in the said Parish Church."

The West Gallery or at least the part constituting the organ loft was probably erected at this time as there was only a south gallery provided in the agreement for building the church, and there was at one time the following inscription on the West Gallery "Mr. John Ison late of this Parish bequeathed £400 for this Organ and Loft in the year 1764 John Gamble David Amey Church Wardens." (Pocock's *History of Gravesend*, 1797, p. 79.)

The erection of this organ loft resulted in the Royal Arms then at the West end of the Church being moved to the Town Hall. "24th February 1765 Agreed with the consent of the Bishop to remove the Royal Arms out of the Parish Church to the Town Hall". There are at present three coats of Royal Arms in the Town Hall. However, the only Hanoverian one is a large one over the Chairman's seat in the Magistrates' Court, and this is presumably the one removed from the Church. The small coat of arms at present on the organ loft in

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the Church was originally behind the Mayor's Pew and was rescued from the vestry in 1895 and placed in its present position by Rev. J. H. Haslam when he was Rector.

That the gift of an organ was not universally welcomed is shown by the following comment by William Crafter in a manuscript note in his copy of Pocock's *History* now in the possession of Mr. L. R. A. Grove at Maidstone Museum, "Mr. John Ison kept *The Catherine Wheel* facing the Town Hall of Gravesend (there is an illustration of *The Catherine Wheel* in Cruden's *History of Gravesend*, 1843, p. 391) where he accumulated a considerable sum of money which would have redounded more to his credit had he left it to his poor relations instead of which he bequeathed £400 for this organ thereby entailing an everlasting expense on the Parish as he left no sum to pay an organist whose salary and the annual repairs of decoration is considerable. In this uncharitable donation (for uncharitable it certainly was to deprive his own kindred of the sum which might have made them comfortable) we cannot give him thanks . . ."

The Crafters, father and son, were local antiquaries and connected with the Forts at Gravesend and Tilbury. The elder Crafter took some part in the negotiations with the mutineers at The Nore in 1797 and was subsequently Ruler of Pilots. In spite of their remarks they do not appear to have been related to Mr. Ison.

The organ was built by George England and there are various payments to him for tuning and repairs. The usual charge seems to have been £4.4.-, with 3s. for "his man" but in 1793 there is an item of £10.10.- to Mr. England with 10s. for "Labourer".

The main expense, however, was the salary of the organist. The first organist was Mr. Lewis Pearce who was elected by the Vestry on the 20th June, 1764. Forty-four Parishioners signed this minute in addition to the Wardens and Overseers. An unusually large number. His salary, however, was not fixed until the 19th August when the Vestry agreed to pay him £25 per annum. The first payment was of three-quarters salary at the end of the year and thereafter he was paid at rather long intervals such as "1766 Lewis Pearce five quarters salary £31.5.-."

There is a curious agreement between him and the Parish in respect of (apparently) a pauper pupil which appears in the Vestry Minutes as follows:

"1st December 1766. Agreed with Mr. Lewis Pearce Organist of the Parish that he shall teach John Carr to play upon the organ spinet and violin for the space of three years to be accounted from the first December being the day of the date hereof and that he the said Lewis Pearce shall be paid for the same the sum of one guinea and a half a quarter by the Overseers of the

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Poor for the time being and also one guinea entrance which he doth hereby acknowledge to have this day had and recived and it is hereby agreed that the said John Carr shall attend the said Lewis Pearce for his instruction in music as often as required within this Corporation during the said term and shall be assisting so far as he shall be able at all times in the Daytime in going to Church with the said Lewis Pearce and if the said John Carr should appear to be qualified to do Church duty within the said term he shall do the Church Duty for the said Lewis Pearce without fee or reward and the said Lewis Pearce doth hereby agree to find and provide the said John Carr at the end of the said term with one violin and to deliver the same unto the said John Carr for his own use and benefit and it is further agreed that the said Lewis Pearce shall have and receive all profits that shall arise from the said John Carr playing upon the violin during the said term. Dated this 1st day of December 1760."

The agreement is signed by one of the Church Wardens, the two Overseers, and eleven Parishioners. Lewis Pearce signed with his mark and although an Organist was apparently unable to sign his name. After the signatures appears:

"Memorandum that before signing the within agreement with Mr. Pearce it was agreed that the said John Carr shall have the use of the said Lewis Pearce's spinet and violin to learn upon during the said term of three years. Witness Jn. Evans."

Immediately preceding this on the same day there is a much shorter agreement for another pupil:

"At an Adjourned Vestry at *The White Hart* Gravesend aforesaid on Monday the first of December 1766. It was agreed that Mr. Thomas Usher shall teach Edward Thomas to play upon the violin and shall be paid and allowed for the same the sum of one guinea a quarter to commence from the first day of November last and one guinea entrance which Mr. Usher doth hereby acknowledge to have received on the day of the date hereof and it is hereby agreed that the Parish shall find an instrument and strings from time to time to keep the same in repair."

This was signed by one Church Warden, the two Overseers, Mr. Usher, and fourteen Parishioners and witnessed by the Vestry Clerk.

These are the only two agreements of this nature which appear in the Vestry Minutes.

Apparently Mr. Pearce was unable to find sufficient work as a teacher of music as in a rough Minute Book used for the monthly meetings of the Overseers the following appears on the first April 1776:

"A Petition from Lewis Pearce Organist of the said Parish read setting forth that from the time he first settled in Gravesend

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his Wife had uninterruptedly been afflicted with sickness. That another person having been introduced into this town to teach dancing he has but little employment exclusive of his duty as organist of the Parish and is therefore desirous of residing in or near London where he flatters himself he shall not only meet with more employment himself but have an opportunity of placing his Wife in some business whereby to procure a more comfortable support for himself and family.

That he will take care constantly to attend his duty as Organist whilst his health permits (and if rendered incapable by sickness will send a proper person in his stead) should he be permitted to reside out of the town of Gravesend yet he will not depart without the approbation of the Parishioners.

And therefore praying that he may be at liberty to reside in or near London he being willing to engage not only to attend upon all occasions as Organist but also to wait upon any of his Friends who will honour him with the care and instruction of their children at any time when required.

Resolved that the said Petition be allowed so long as the said Lewis Pearce attends to his undertaking as therein set-forth."

Whether Mr. Pearce was any more successful in London does not appear. He apparently ceased to be organist in 1778 as on the 27th of June of that year Mr. Richard Killick was elected.

On his death in 1784 the Vestry held a meeting on the 8th February when it was resolved by a very great majority that the salary shall be continued at £25 per year. (It was increased to £30 in 1804.) This was followed by a meeting on the 10th February 1784, "Thomas Killick elected organist by a very great majority". Samuel Campion was the only other candidate and the election apparently caused a fair amount of interest as 35 Parishioners signed the Vestry Minute Book five of them by mark.

Mr. Thos. Killick was only 13 when he was appointed and his salary was paid to his guardian. "1784 Pd. Mr. Thos. (*sic*) Goldsmith as Guardian to Thos. Killick organist one years salary £25.--. 1791 Pd. Mr. John (*sic*) Goldsmith one years salary for the Organist £25.--."

Mr. Killick became Post Master for Gravesend about 1800 and lived in a house on the West side of Chapel Lane at the junction with Church Street opposite the main gates to the Church. (There is an illustration of what appears to be this house shortly before its demolition in Philip's *History*, p. 135.)

Mr. Killick took an active part in the affairs of the Vestry and was Church Warden from 1808 to 1816. Apparently holding this office was not considered inconsistent with being employed by the Parish. He also served as Overseer from time to time and supported the Parish

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in a dispute with the Rector, Dr. Watson, in 1822, over the appointment of a lecturer when the Rector refused the use of his Pulpit to the Lecturer elected by the Parish.

The following entries relate to Mr. Killick:

“30th January 1814. Mr. Styles stated that at the next monthly meeting he intended bring forward a motion relative to the duties of organist (nothing seems to have happened, Mr. Killick was Church Warden at the time).

4th May 1826. Ordered that an intimation be made to Mr. Killick by the Church Wardens of the wish of this Vestry that the organ be played on Good Friday, Christmas Day and Public Fast Days as on Sundays.

1st June 1826. A letter read from Mr. Killick stating his readiness to play the organ upon Good Friday and that it had always been played on Christmas Day (there follows a copy of the letter from Mr. Killick in which he states “the Organ had never been played on Good Friday because it was a fast day”).

One other item also seems to relate to Mr. Killick. In 1801 the Vestry paved Chapel Lane. This lane lead from West Street to a point opposite the main gates of the Church in Church Street and probably derived its name from the time when St. George’s was built as a Chapel of ease at the end of the fifteenth century. It was at one time gated and during the eighteenth century cleansed and paved out of the church rate instead of the highway rate. After a long list of items for paving appears:

“Expenses paving footway at the top leading to the Post Office 7.11.8.”

This is followed by a note, “This was not allowed by the Auditors” and it would appear that Mr. Killick may have had some connection with this as he was then Post Master.

In the flysheet to the second volume of the Accounts appears:

“Died April 12th 1829 Mr. Thomas Killick many years Organist of the Parish Church.”

He was then aged 58 and was buried in St. George’s Churchyard.

He was followed as Organist by his daughter Elizabeth Ann who was elected unanimously and in 1832 by his Son also named Thomas who died on the 25th March, 1842, aged 31.

My thanks are due to the staff of the Gravesend Public Library in whose custody the Vestry Minutes and Church Wardens Accounts are now (except one volume of Accounts still at the Church), Mr. G. Tatchel, Church Warden of Gravesend and Honorary Custodian of St. George’s Chapel, and Messrs. J. Benson and A. J. Edwards of the Gravesend Historical Society.