

Pipe Dreams – a new Pipe Organ for Pershore Abbey

In recent years the PCC has promulgated its ambitious and visionary aspirations to develop the Abbey through a series of seven major projects. The objective is to respond to the changing needs of the wider community by restoring, reinvigorating and enhancing the appeal of the Abbey as a place of worship and by creating a visitor attraction of merit for the overall benefit of Pershore Town, the local and wider community. In addition to the new pipe organ, the list of projects include a new LED lighting system, the redevelopment and expansion of the vestry block, the renovation of the bell chamber and ringing platform, the conservation of the Victorian and medieval wall paintings, the development of the site of St Edburga's chapel and the redevelopment of St Andrew's Centre.

As ever normal running and essential maintenance of the Abbey continues. During the past year we noted that our resident and protected congregation of Daubenton's bats in the Wick chapel and Apse roof had damaged the roofing felt causing water leakage damage to the woodwork – you may have noticed the scaffolding around the east end of the building towards the latter part of 2019. We replaced the damaged felt and some tiles and have created an improved home for the little darlings with special mesh (to protect the roofing felt) on which they can roost and exercise their maternal instincts during their visitations!

Towards the end of 2019 we began the installation of our new energy efficient and flexible LED lighting system. Whilst yet to be completed, the new lighting has already transformed the main interior of the Abbey into a warm and welcoming space with the ability to alter lighting levels and the ambient feel within the Abbey for a variety of services and events. We are now planning a second phase to install energy efficient lighting in the tower crossing.

Having satisfied all the faculty conditions for the new organ, the contract between the PCC and Fratelli Ruffatti was signed by Revd Claire Lording in October 2019. The organ, which is to replace the Bradford Computing Organ, is now being built at the Ruffatti factory in Padua, Italy. It will be shipped to the UK and transported to Pershore for installation by their skilled craftsmen during 2021. In spite of the short time elapsed since contract signing, significant progress has been achieved as shown in the following photographs. The recent effects of the coronavirus and lockdown in Italy means that work has been suspended for the time being.



Completed stops from Great Octave 4', Positiv Cromorne 8' and Positiv Koppelflote 4'. Pipes are partially wrapped in clear plastic to avoid direct contact with hands during pre-voicing.



Completed stops from pipes for Great Superoctave 2' and Positiv Blockflote 2'. Pipes also partially wrapped in clear plastic to avoid direct contact with hands during pre-voicing.



Mahogany pipes already cut to size but yet to be assembled.

Following receipt of a most encouraging progress report from Francesco Ruffatti earlier in January, the enabling works to accommodate the new organ in the Abbey commenced on 27 January.



The montage on the left illustrates the location of the organ casings when they have been installed at the North West end of the Abbey. The enabling works include the installation of the steel support beams and platforms on which the two organ casings will sit; the boring of nine holes through the wall into the roof space; the installation of a new access ladder and platform to the north aisle roof space above the west end entrance to the north aisle; the installation of a blower room in the north aisle roof space behind the casings; and the removal and subsequent replacement of the tiles of the north aisle roof after new felting has been installed. The period February - April has been selected as it provides a window of opportunity to undertake this work and cause the least disruption to the seasonal commitments and day to day running of the Abbey.

The internal works have required the erection of scaffolding and a working platform on the north side of the main aisle, and scaffolding for the new roof access. This has naturally caused some disruption to services and other events in the Abbey.



The new roof access has required the removal of stonework for a new access doorway in the wall at the West end of the north aisle roof space. An early discovery was a Romanesque arch buried in the wall behind the outer stonework. This caused great interest and excitement amongst archaeologists who visited the Abbey to formally record the find.



The masonry of the inner arch had many fractures. It is pink in colour was probably caused by the extreme temperatures of one of the fires of either 1239 or 1286. The latter event is reported to have brought down the upper part of the Norman tower which in turn brought down the quire vault. After being recorded by the archaeologists the inner arch was removed to make way for the doorway.



Further removal of stonework revealed a Romanesque column and capital. The column shaft and base are in remarkable condition and are to be retained as a feature of the opening with the new doorway adjusted to suit.

The present vestry stands on the site of the north transept which collapsed in the seventeenth century. The large raking buttress on the north side was erected in 1686 to stabilise the tower, and the Romanesque arch, column and capital which formed part of the east side of the north transept were probably embedded during the masonry repairs at that time.



The Romanesque column and capital has been repaired and the joints will be pointed and blended with the stone.

The organ casing support steelwork has now been installed and grouted into place. This is very solid and even showed no deflection when load tested by the Architect!





Floor to blower room being installed in the north aisle roof space



External scaffolding erected on the north side of the Abbey for the removal and subsequent replacement of the north aisle roof tiles after roof felt has been installed.

The PCC is most grateful for the funding support given by members of the congregation and the wider community both through the “Adopt a Pipe Scheme” and individual donations. We have also received donations from grant making bodies and we will continue to seek funding support in these ways as this exciting project unfolds. The PCC is especially grateful to the Friends of Pershore Abbey who, whilst not wishing to stand in the way of others prepared and willing to give, has agreed to provide the additional funding support that has enabled the contract to be signed and the project to proceed.*

Having progressed thus far, the Government’s measures to deal with the coronavirus pandemic required us to close the Abbey as lockdown became a reality and all work is therefore suspended for the time being.....

Watch this space!

**Further details about Pipe Dreams may be found on the Abbey website: www.pershoreabbey.org.uk*

