

the tuning contracts. (This was the same year that Taylor's closed). However, they did not keep major rebuild contracts some of which went to Henry Groves and Son Ltd. of Nottingham during the 1970s and 1980s, including those for St Mary's Leicester (1985). In later years no special connection for Porritt organs has been retained.

The Porritt Organ Case at Loughborough Baptist Church



These notes have been written by David Gabe, © 2008

## **JOSHUA PORRITT & CO: ORGAN BUILDERS of LEICESTER**

Joshua Porritt (c1831-c1920) was articled to Forster and Andrews of Hull from about 1860 becoming voicer, finisher and tuner. He started his own organ building business in Leicester in 1867, with a claim of being the only organ builder in Leicester to have served a full apprenticeship, and began a local rivalry with Stephen Taylor (founded 1866); Taylor generally had a business lead largely through local connections and obtaining one or two prestigious contracts notably the new De Montfort Hall concert organ in 1912-4.

Porritt's first major contract in Leicester was to build an organ for the Temperance Hall which he did in 1880 at a price of £767, paid for by two concerts and a personal gift by Henry Nicholson. The second in the same year was to rebuild the 1850 organ (by Foster and Allen of Hull) positioned on the south wall in St Mary de Castro Church as an enlarged instrument on each side of the east window. The reason was to remove it from the exhaust gases of the heating system which caused it to require frequent 'desooting'. The third in Leicester was the Great Meeting House which was completely renewed in 1882: originally built in 1800 and restored in 1856 it had become an example of poor materials and poor workmanship. Porritt's style of robust structural work was needed.

Porritt occupied several premises on a temporary basis (in Clinton St, Portland St., Friar Lane, Silver St. and Nelson St.) acquiring permanent premises in Leicester at 66 and 64½ London Road in 1883 with the grandiose name 'Midland Counties Organ Manufactory'. He later moved to 84 London Road in 1902 where he rebuilt a joinery works to suit his requirements. By 1900 a reputable business had been well-established building church organs in the Midlands often of a modest specification. For example:

- 1887 2 manuals with pedals, 19 stops, URC, Grantham
- 1895 2 manuals with pedals, 10 stops, St.Margaret's, Wormhill

1905 1 manual with pedals, 5 stops, Holy Trinity, Peak Dale

One of the largest organs was in Coventry (£1500 in 1871) but clearly did not set up a long-term expanding business as it might have done although one or two notable contracts were obtained.

1871 3 manuals with pedals, 42 stops, Holy Trinity, Coventry

1878 3 manuals with pedals, 30 stops, St.Mary's, Prescott, Lancs.

1879 3 manuals with pedals, 33 stops, St.Mary's de Castro, Leicester



The Porritt Console (1908) at Loughborough Baptist Church

He early accepted the need for the usual couplers, concave and radiating pedal boards, and combination pedals. The actions were usually tracker with pneumatic assistance for the pedals. The reputation was for sturdy and reliable construction. Amongst other new organs were those at St Luke's Leicester, the Unitarian Church in Derby both in 1869, St Patrick's in 1873, St Peter's in 1875,

Melbourne Hall Baptist in 1882, Clarendon Park in 1901 all in Leicester. Local village churches included Blaby Baptist and Markfield Parish churches.

Joshua Porritt retired in 1904 and was succeeded by his son Walter Samuel Lord Porritt. Porritt junior was born in 1873 and entered the business at the age of 14 gaining full experience but specialising in voicing. The company was renamed J.Porritt and Son and expanded into works at first (from 1928) 83 Wanlip Road Syston and later (from 1941) at 46 Broad Street Syston with an office in Woodgate Loughborough from 1916 which moved to 58 Baxter Gate after WWII. Amongst the first organs Walter Porritt built with larger specifications were

1908 3 manuals with pedals, 31 stops, Baxter Gate Baptist Church, Loughborough. (cost £720 including a Carnegie grant of £250).

1912 3 manuals, 39 stops, Chipping Norton Parish Church

A second job in Loughborough at the Parish Church has been described by Laurence Elvin who noted the 1915 scheme for the rebuilding of an unreliable Hope-Jones 4 manual organ to a 3 manual 46 stop instrument possibly making it Porritt's largest instrument. However, it was never carried out and eventually the church bought a Binns organ from the Bridgway Hall Methodist Mission in Nottingham and had it rebuilt by Henry Willis in 1966.

Walter Porritt became a well-respected figure in the Federation of Master Organ Builders and was a practicing musician playing piano, organ and cello. He died in 1953 at the age of 80 and with him the firm lost its drive and expertise because his son William Henry Porritt was a science master at Downside School and although intending to take over the company died prematurely in 1956 at the age of 56. A manager was appointed, H.Walmsley formerly of Rushworth and Dreaper, and the company name was changed to Porritt and Son (Organ Builders) Ltd. But he limited himself to tuning and minor maintenance. He in turn retired in 1965 when the company closed on its takeover by Rushworth and Dreaper of Liverpool who continued