

# Church pulls out all the stops as restored organ plays again

Parishioners praise sweet sound of success in £100,000 project



History: The work was undertaken by Harrison & Harrison, the Durham company that originally built it

BY CHRIS STORY

IF ONLY everything at 101 years old could look and sound as magnificent as this grand old girl...

She's had years taken off her with a makeover that's been carried out to surgical specifications. Each one of her 1,200 pipes has been individually removed, her inner workings finely tuned.

The operation's given her a new lease of life - with the music bellowing from her sounding just that little bit sweeter.

Parishioners at St Mary's Church in Wigton have been sampling the first sounds from their magnificent organ after specialists completed a £100,000 restoration. And their response is that the hard work taken to make it happen has been well worth it.

David Shingler is the man perhaps best placed to judge how successful the overhaul has been. He's been the organist at St Mary's for 20 years and says the difference is noticeable.

"It's very good to play - much more responsive. It sounds a bit brighter and clearer because the pipes have been cleaned and all the inner mechanisms repaired and renewed," he said.

"We had an open evening on Friday and there was a good response. A lot of people



Perfect working order: The stops on the 101-year-old organ

commented on how good it sounded."

The organ is one of the key features of St Mary's. A survey about a decade ago highlighted work that could be done as the years rolled on.

One of the main problems was with the action mechanism. Some notes were not working while others started sticking, along with problems with the foot pedals.

About two years ago a fundraising campaign for the repairs was stepped up. A fantastic response from parishioners, the wider community and grant-giving organisations has made the work possible.

Restoration has been carried out by Harrison & Har-

rison, the Durham-based company that originally built the organ - regarded as a fine example of its time - in 1912.

"They have done an excellent job - really good," Mr Shingler said.

The organist, whose day job is an accountant, was also delighted by the response to the fundraising appeal - highlighting the importance of the church's place in the community.

"Money's come from generous local people, along with one or two grants from national trusts. Several local organisations have given money as well," he added.

"I think people regard St Mary's as a real part of Wigton and part of their lives.

"We've had these good responses to appeals before. We had a roof appeal a few years ago and raised quite a bit of money."

Mr Shingler is only the fourth organist at St Mary's in the century that the organ has been in place, having succeeded William Mitchinson, who had been playing it since the 1940s, in 1992.

"This shows that once you get this job you don't want to give it up," he said.

"The work that's been done will last a long time. Hopefully for the rest of my career it should need very little doing to it - although I hope I have many more years."



Well worth it: Church organist David Shingler at St Mary's Church in Wigton plays the organ after it had its first complete overhaul since being built in 1912

PICTURES: DAVID HOLLINS