

RE-BUILT ORGAN DEDICATED AT TADLEY

MANY present and past members of St. Mary's Church, Tadley, travelled long distances to attend the dedication of the new church organ on Saturday by the Bishop of Basingstoke, the Rt. Rev. Michael Manktelow, followed by a recital by Timothy Rishton.

The Bishop made a presentation to Mr. Philip Wells on behalf of the parish for designing and building the organ with voluntary helpers over the past six years, of a gold pocket watch and chain. The total cost of the installation has been about £3,000 and the organ will be insured for around £34,000. A separate organ fund was launched in 1974 and proceeds from jumble sales, whist drives, a Christmas bazaar and summer fairs etc., together with donations have enabled the organ to be paid for before it was finished — an example of parish enthusiasm for the project.

The Church of St. Mary in North Tadley began with the formation of the Conventional District in 1957 and the licensing of the first priest-in-charge. In 1959/60 the present church was built on the site of a wooden hut which had served in a temporary capacity. Parish status was granted in 1973. Until 1978 an American reed organ was used, first in the hut and subsequently in the new church building.

The pipe organ dedicated on Saturday was acquired from the redundant Chapel of St. Mary Abbots Hospital, Kensington in 1973. The instrument was built in 1875 by Henry Jones of London, whose sons carried on the business until 1920 when it was taken over by another firm. During the reconstruction a number of interesting points have come to light about this instrument, which proved its origin.

An inspection of the instrument in 1973 revealed that it was in need of major attention. Indeed in 1972 the organ tuner at the time, a Mr. F. Anderson (of Bishop and Sons) commented: "Sir, I have done all that is possible with the organ in its present state. It is in a deplorable condition and should be rebuilt."

With the thought in mind that a pipe organ should be



The rebuilt organ at St. Mary's Church, Tadley was dedicated on Saturday. The Vicar, the Rev. Jack Talbot is pictured with Mr. Timothy Rishton (left) who gave a recital and the church organist Philip Wells (centre).

ment was the most promising seen. It was carefully dismantled by church members in the last week of August 1973 and transported to Tadley in a large removal van for subsequent storage. Redesigning of the instrument was necessary for St. Mary's to the extent that it is not unrecognisable in sight and sound. Reconstruction, with restoration where necessary, continued until August 1976 when, following a temporary rearrangement of the chancel furnishings, the installation of the lower part of the framework was begun in the church.

The work of assembly continued in subsequent months until part of the instrument was heard for the first time in an outgoing voluntary when the Rev. Michael Simcock (first priest-in-charge) visited the parish in June 1977. The latter part of the year saw the completion of the

vice at Christmas 1977. In 1978 the old American organ was sold to Holland and the chancel furnishings returned to their original positions. The past year has seen the construction and finishing of the casework and console surround together with the decorative screen.

The organ recital by Timothy Rishton of Reading University included works by Dietrich Buxtehude, Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn and Sigfrid Karg-Elert.

The celebrations continued on Sunday with the Service of family Eucharist, the preacher was the Rev. Graham Smith vicar of St. Anne, Wandsworth, a friend of the vicar, the Rev. Jack Talbot, since they served in the RAF and went to India together in 1946. They have kept in touch ever since. Following the

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NEW ORGAN FOR CHURCH

PEOPLE are a bit odd when it comes to organs and organists. They tend to hide them up near the roof of the church — as though they were to be heard but not seen.

Not so in Tadley, where a local man has done for the church organ what the mini-skirt did for kneecaps. For there, revealed in all its glory is the very fine organ Philip Wells built for St Mary's Church. "Why stick your most expensive piece of furniture away in a corner?" he argues.

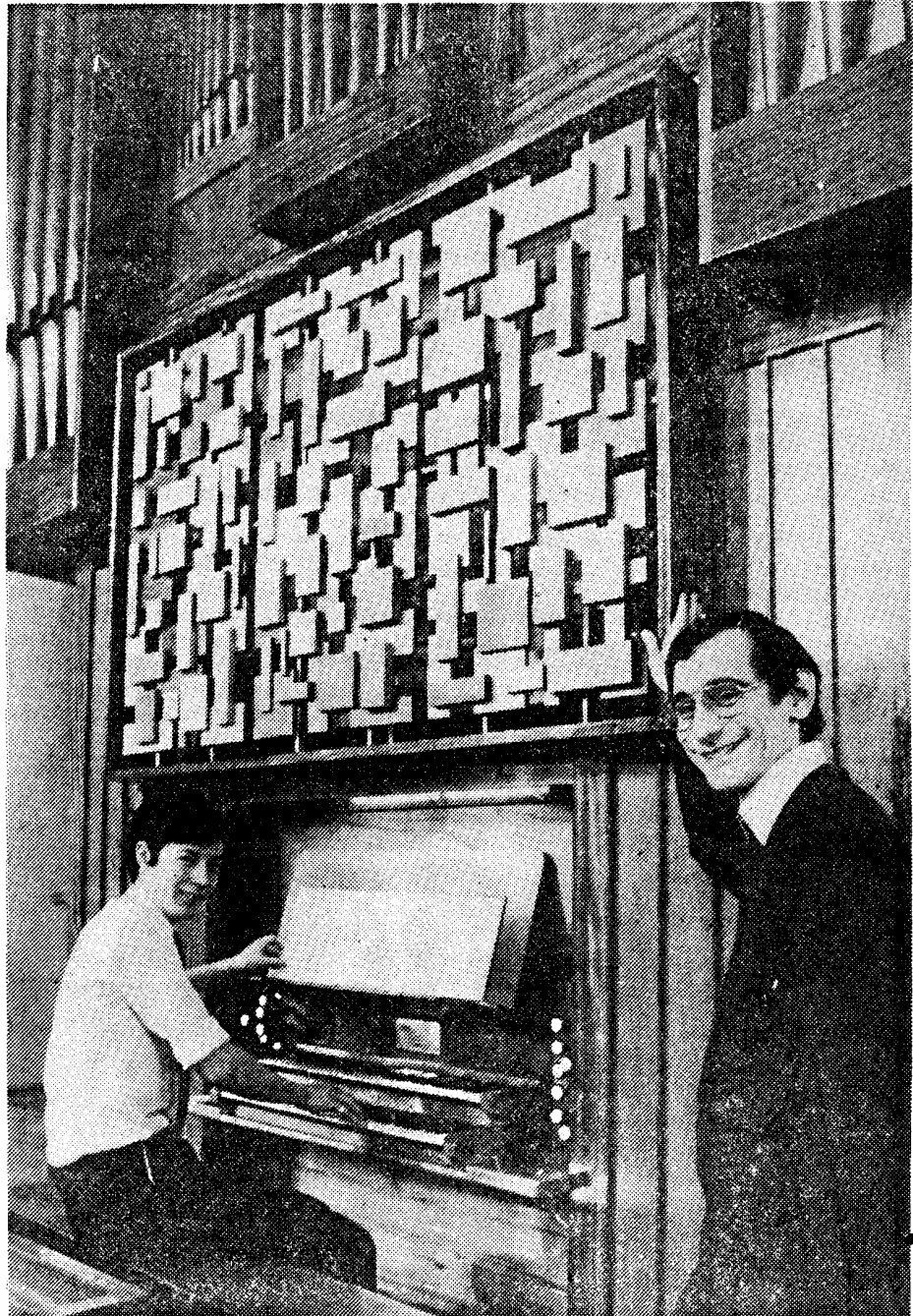
And he had to search quite a few dark corners for the parts he needed to build the instrument.

Most of it came from a very dilapidated pipe organ sitting in the redundant chapel of St Mary's Abbots Hospital in Kensington. Other bits and pieces, like the reed stop for the swell organ came from St Mary's, Castle Street, Reading. While a hunt around the Royal College of Organists in London produced five of its pipes.

But what inspired this civil servant to embark on this fabulously complicated jigsaw puzzle, taking six years to complete?

It all started when Philip Wells was about 15 and helped to instal an organ in another church in Tadley. He was hooked from that moment on, read every book he could get hold of on the subject, and went around watching experts renovating instruments.

He worked on various instruments in the area, but longed to build one in his own village. His chance came when it was decided that the new



Organist Timothy Rishton (left) and maker of the organ, Mr Philip Wells, inspect the new instrument at St Mary's Church, Tadley.

church of St Mary's in Tadley needed something better than an old harmonium.

The church provided £3,000 and he soon got cracking, collecting the parts for a new

organ and spending six months at the drawing board.

The design he produced corresponds almost miraculously to the proportions of the church. The pedal organ is exactly the same width as the windows. And the design of the casework reflects the shapes and colours of the woodwork in the rest of the church.

But one of the most unusual features of this organ is the decorative screen panel that covers the swell shutters — while still allowing the sound to come through.

All of which seems fine, but what does the organ sound like?

Well according to Philip Wells it is unrecognisable in sound as well as in looks to the worn out wreck of an instrument he picked up in Kensington. And the man who plays

the organ, Timothy Rishton, a music student at Reading University agrees.

"It's really a very good organ," he commented. "And it's got a very natural sound."

While the instrument's mechanical action provides, he said, "very accurate control over the way the note ends, so that you can "shape" the notes. The 20-year-old organist, who has been giving public performances since the age of nine, plays in the church every Sunday.

And St Mary's Church has now become a regular venue for concerts given by him and other organists from all over the country. For the Tadley organ is suitable for music of all periods, from Bach to Hindemith.

The next concert is on June 6 and will be given by Philip Crozier.