

DALLIANCE WITH DODD

Organ Society members and enthusiasts turned out on Saturday 20th March 2021 to attend the first event on the OSWA calendar for this year. The event was held at St Thomas the Apostle Roman Catholic Church, Claremont, where Jacinta Jakovcevic presented a talk on Josiah Eustace Dodd (1856-1952) and played a selection of pieces chosen to demonstrate the fine qualities of the instrument in the church.

Jacinta is Director of Music at St Mary's Cathedral in Perth where she combines her great loves of liturgy and music together with her keen interest in choral music, music administration and the development of young musicians.

Born into a musical family, Jacinta indeed started her musical career in the church and became involved at a very early age as both organist and chorister. Having completed her Bachelor of Music (Hons) at the University of Western Australia and gaining a number of performance diplomas she became a sought after musician in Perth and, in addition to her continuous work in church music, took part in ABC broadcasts and extensive work with major organisations including the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO), Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), the University of Western Australia and the Australian Opera Studio: always bringing the wealth of expertise and experience to her work in church music.

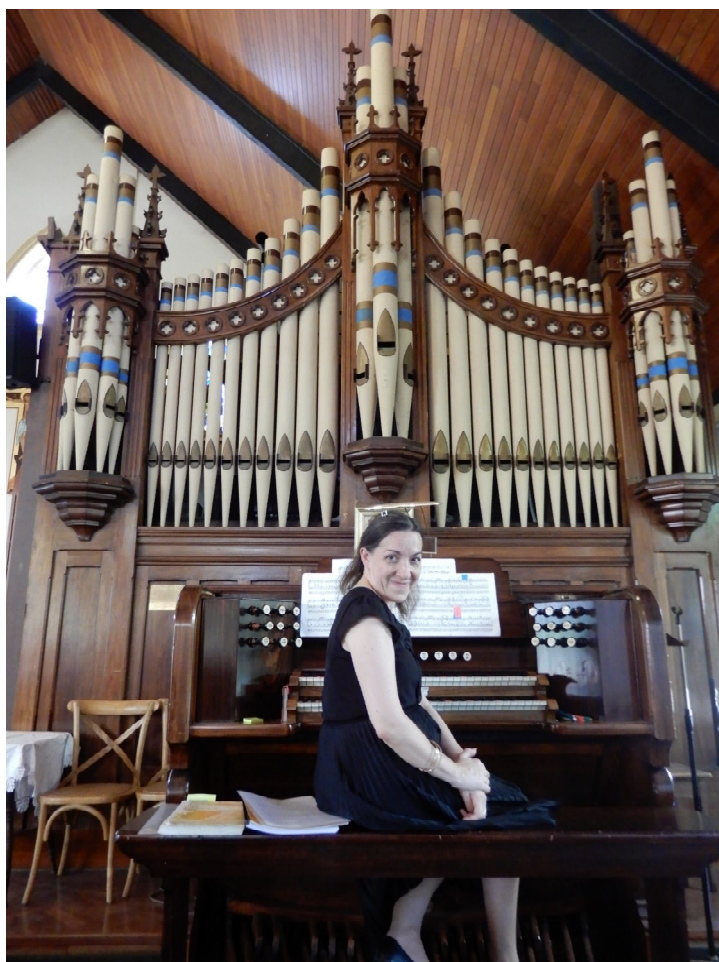
For her demonstration pieces, Jacinta chose to play:

- *Allegretto Grazioso*—Tours
- *March in G*—Smart
- *Behold the Lamb of God*—Handel
- *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*—Handel

These selections were interspersed throughout the talk.



When I was first approached by Graham Devenish to give this presentation, he mentioned the title would be 'Dalliance with Dodd' which I thought sounded quite snazzy and had a slight feel of elegance about it – almost sounds a bit like 'dancing' with Dodd. But I actually didn't know what 'dalliance' meant. So I looked it up.



Looking this up, I saw that 'dalliance' was synonymous with 'frivolous action', 'trifling away of time', 'fun and games frolicking', 'amorous play' – hmm, maybe let's just leave it at that.

So I thought, well maybe we'll have some fun exploring the world of JE Dodd – what he did, why he did it, etc

So who was JE Dodd?

Well, let's take one step back and wind the clock back a little - and chat briefly about George Fincham.

So who was George Fincham?

Well, George Fincham was a young English organ building apprentice born in 1828 who served his apprenticeship with the firm of Henry Bevington and then worked for three years for the firm of James Chapman Bishop. Both these firms were exporting pipe organs to Australia with many new churches being built and the establishment of many churches and civic buildings. He could see many pipe organs heading off to Australia, so he decided in the early 1850s to try his luck and head down under himself – only to find that when he had reached Melbourne, the Ballarat goldfields had opened up and everyone rushed to the goldfields. After heading off to the goldfields, himself, for a short time, he returned to Melbourne - Richmond, to be exact - and established his own organ-building firm. His was the first organ factory in Australia (and the only one to date) to build every part of a pipe organ. He also set about training apprentices who would become organ



Josiah Eustace Dodd (1856-1952)

builders in their own right. And so the pipe organ building industry became well and truly established in Australia – among these apprentices are Frederick Taylor, J.W. Slatterie, Arthur Hobday and of course, our man Josiah Eustace Dodd.

Dodd was born in Richmond, Victoria in 1856, and at a very young age of 13 he began an apprenticeship with the firm of George Fincham. Following his apprenticeship, he worked with Fincham's firm and became the foreman of its newly established branch in Adelaide eventually becoming branch manager. In 1894 Fincham sold this Adelaide branch to Dodd who then established his own firm, JE Dodd, and began building and restoring organs - and quickly made a name for himself.

Now I'd like to at this point share with you my own musing of how Dodd

probably got into organ-building and how all this started – no-one knows for certain, and apparently he wasn't an organist per se: but it could well have happened like this: his family lived in Richmond, Victoria – an inner-city suburb of Melbourne. Fincham had, of course, set up his organ-building factory there in 1852. We know that Dodd started his apprenticeship with Fincham at the age of 13 – Dodd's parents probably looked at him and thought 'Hmm – what are we going to do with him?' and there just happened to an organ factory down the road – so they sent him there. The young Master Dodd turned up at the door and knocked on it – after a few seconds it was opened by George Fincham. Master Dodd says matter-of-factly 'Hello Mr Fincham. My mother and father sent me here to ask you if I could start an apprenticeship in your factory'. And the rest, as we say is history...

Anyway, back to Dodd and 1894: part of the agreement Dodd had made with Fincham as part of the his purchase of Fincham's Adelaide branch was that Fincham was not to build another organ in South Australia for 10 years. Fincham probably didn't think much of this at the time since there was a recession in South Australia at the time – but what a mistake !! As it turned out, Dodd's business went very well and he went on to build numerous instruments and, in time, Dodd's firm went on to become a real powerhouse of the Australian organ-building industry with its innovations in tonal colours and general sonority,



innovations in accessories: his firm built over 80 instruments and rebuilt and restored many more.

So, in 1903, having established himself firmly in Adelaide and having built, at this stage, around 16 new instruments, he turned his sights westward across the Nullarbor – to Perth.

Why did he come to Perth?

It's interesting to note that Perth in the early 1900s was reaping the benefits of WA's own gold-rush and money was fairly plentiful – there was, apart from the work of Robert Cecil Clifton, no local organ-builder. Fincham's firm was very strong and firmly established in Melbourne, so it made sense to look west. In 1903, Dodd was awarded the commission for the refurbishment of the Hill organ at St George's Cathedral. This organ was already over 30 years old and was in need of repair and major maintenance. Dodd's work on this instrument was highly successful in that it introduced Perth to his style of organ-building – in particular his tonal style. It involved an extensive list of additions including a Phonon Diapason which Graham actually showed me in his

workshop a few years and held it up in front of me asking me do I know what it is – I was so thrilled to see it !!

Dodd's work on this project brought him much acclaim and really brought him to the attention of the Perth music and church communities – later that year he opened up a branch of his firm in Hay St, Perth and was soon awarded other commissions such as building a new pipe organ for St Matthew's Anglican Church, Guildford (1905), St Brigid's Catholic Church, West Perth (1906) and a new organ for Wesley Church, Perth, in 1908. This was then the largest instrument in Perth at the time and proved to be a very successful project judging by contemporary descriptions. In addition to maintenance of existing instruments, he also tuned pianos. At this time, his Adelaide headquarters was rapidly expanding and he had 20 employees working there. Although Dodd, himself, didn't live in Perth, he brought his son Ebenezer to Perth to manage his new branch.

It's quite interesting at this point to note what the organ environment was like in Perth 'pre-Dodd': before 1903: Perth and its surrounds did have some instruments built by a variety of builders: Bishop (St Patrick's Fremantle), Robert Cecil Clifton, Norman and Beard (Trinity Congregational Church, Perth), Alfred Fuller (Scots Church, Fremantle – so we can clearly see, apart from Clifton, an absence of local organ building. The city of Perth itself had 7 pipe organs by the beginning of 1910.

These were all generally of a romantic style and were small-medium size. Interestingly, an article from the Daily News in 1910 (May 31st issue) mentioned that 12 years earlier, the organs of Perth were in a 'parlous state' and went on to say that Dodd was the 'magician who worked this change'. Dodd really did become a driving force in organ building in Perth and was to change the organ environment significantly.

The building of two organs, in particular, were to prove important for organ building in this state and for the future of Dodd's firm and his work.

The building of his new instrument for Wesley Church, Perth and the example of how St Mary's Cathedral, Perth obtained the organ he built for it in 1910, I suppose, shows the high regard people had for Dodd and his work.

At the time, St Mary's Cathedral didn't have a pipe organ but it had, by contemporary accounts, a very good musical outfit – a young Director of Music Walter James Sydney Westhoven (1880 – 1913), the St Mary's Cathedral



Choir (men and ladies) and some wonderful soloists who seemed to pop up around Perth at major musical events – soprano Minnie Waugh, tenor Peter Roxby and baritone JC Westhoven (the brother of Walter) – these names seemed to come up in major concert events around Perth as well as regularly at St Mary's. The Cathedral had a 2-manual harmonium in its choir loft and the choir was already singing Masses by Charles Gounod sometimes with an orchestra in the choir loft. So you can imagine their interest really perked up when this new organ-builder from Adelaide came to Perth and started building some very impressive instruments. Incidentally I found this quote recently when I was working on this presentation – it comes from The Record May 1908 (May 16th issue) and it illustrates the obvious frustration at the time of not having a good instrument in the Cathedral - it makes the shortcomings of this harmonium fairly obviously in quite colourful language:

'The Cathedral Choir is practising another of Perosi's beautiful Masses, under the directorship of Mr. W. J. Westhoven. The organ box with which they are condemned to sing is one of the most preposterous caricatures that ever squeaked in any church, much less in a Cathedral. An itinerant organ grinder would tar it and set it ablaze to spare the ears and nerves of those who are blessed with the most elementary knowledge of music.'

The Wesley Church organ built in 1908

seemed to have caught the imagination of the whole community of Perth with its tonal colours and sheer tonal strength – and its very attractive case – so an Organ Committee was set up at St Mary's and the possibility of an actual pipe organ in the Cathedral was looked into. The Organ Committee invited Dodd to give them a proposal for their new pipe organ and, interestingly, also invited Fincham and Charles Richardson (Sydney) to submit proposals.

In the meantime, the Organ Committee visited Wesley Church and were most impressed with Dodd's instrument there.

The Richardson proposal doesn't seem to be anywhere in our archives – the Fincham proposal was for a modest size instrument but Dodd's proposal involved a tonal plan for a larger instrument; he also provided a list of extra stops mentioning that if the Organ Committee was to procure some extra funds he could add these 'extras' at a discount (and listed them). The Organ Committee considered this and came back to Dodd with a reply which basically said 'yes, please'. I sometimes think to myself that I am so grateful to these people (who are really my musical forebears) and the fact that they said: 'yes please' !!

Being awarded the contract to build the new pipe organ for St Mary's I think really proved to be an important breakthrough for Dodd since it not only ensured security for his firm in Perth, but perhaps, one can imagine, that being awarded this contract over Fincham

must have provided him with a great degree of confidence in general for the future of his firm and his work and what he was trying to achieve.

This instrument, when built, was the largest in WA (slightly larger than its sister organ at Wesley but very similar) – it not only had an impressive and very attractive-looking case, but its sonorities were large and broad – yet full of many varieties of colour thus rendering it able to accompany as well as support congregational singing, and play in a solo capacity in a most magnificent fashion. Also, it was very exciting to play for the organist with all the new accessories he made available which had never been seen before his arrival in Perth. One of these was the *sforzato* pedal which basically allowed the player to, on demand, access tutti organ and then just as quickly go back to a smaller registration: there was also a melody coupler which allowed the player to, whilst playing chords in the right hand, have the melody note (on top) played by a particular stop. This instrument really took Perth by storm – the *West Australian*, when reporting on its blessing in May 1910 (May 30th issue) mentioned:

‘the Roman Catholic community can be congratulated on the possession of a magnificent instrument, the many beautiful qualities of which are displayed to the utmost advantage by the remarkable acoustic properties of the edifice in which it stands...Dodd has built some of the most favourably

known organs in the Commonwealth and this his latest achievement ranks amongst his very best work...the front case is of striking and imposing design...viewed from the floor of the Cathedral is very imposing.

So we can see how even though Dodd had served his apprenticeship with Fincham, his style was somewhat different – perhaps we could look at it as being the next step in organ-building and moving from a finer/romantic style to a larger sounding, symphonic style with huge, exciting orchestral sonorities and an amazing array of colour variations. Dodd keenly kept up with the latest innovations in organ building in England and France and incorporated these trends into his own work producing these exciting new instruments.

The organ was paid off within a few months of its installation and Dodd was given a reception by the Cathedral to



thank him for the wonderful work he had done. From contemporary accounts of this event and various correspondences, the speeches by senior clergy were very complimentary towards Dodd - through his hard work and the work he did in relating with the Cathedral clergy and staff he had obviously impressed this particular client !! Dodd seemed to present St Mary's with the product they were looking for.

So why was he so special?

So what was Dodd doing that was so special? What was about his work that was capturing people's imagination so much so that his instruments became a sort-of 'must-have' item?

Well, I suppose these few details I've already mentioned enlighten us on this point: generally in music at the time, there was a great appetite for larger and louder sounds – the orchestras by this stage were becoming gargantuan with the appearance of tubas and large string sections, percussion, sonorous brass and plentiful woodwind – it seemed to egg choruses on who were also becoming larger singing with some 200-300 singers – bigger was definitely deemed better !!

Were Dodd's tonal soundscapes just louder and was it their volume that was so impressive? Not really – Dodd's sonorities are so full of variety of colour they are quite rich and create a feel of being all-encompassing – never strident but very much full and rich with some very beautiful solo stops – which ingeniously double up as chorus stops

almost like chameleons.

He took these tonal ideas and developed them further than anyone else in Australia at the time – when I first went to Adelaide and played a number of his instruments, in particular ones built earlier than the ones he had built here in Perth, it was so interesting to see that the open diapasons seem to have become tonally larger in his later work; melodic diapasons appear and cornopeans tend to disappear in favour of horns and trombas – and phonon diapasons appear – wow !! It's interesting to note with the larger scaling of the open diapason that he seemed to really be aiming for a larger sound and aural pyramid.

Another point I find so interesting is how Dodd creates his soundscape and the differences in the various 8' stops and 4' stops – and it makes you realise how much these instruments are really 'colour instruments' – sometime a 4' flute can, in combination with some 8' flutes/soft diapason just be a lighter colour rather than another voice speaking on top – which makes for some amazing effects and expression !!

I also think one of the features of his work also was the way he related to his clients: often in his biographies it is mentioned that he had very strong business acumen – and, amongst other things it makes me think of some very early name plates of his which state 'JE Dodd: Adelaide, Perth, Auckland and London' – WOW – that would look VERY impressive to a prospective client !!! In reality, he did have branches

both here and in Adelaide, but his London and Auckland contacts were not actual branches but rather contacts of his.

After the First World War, though, his building of new organs in Perth slowed considerably: in this period we encounter the organ built in 1917 for the Ross Memorial Church, West Perth, and the organ for St George's College Chapel which was built in 1931 and also much later the organ at the Chapel of St Michael the Archangel, Leederville, in 1964. This was due to the financial conditions in the community, challenges he experienced with his own firm with the defection of some of his workers to form a rival company Gunstar Organ Works. Another challenge Dodd encountered was the arrival in Perth of William Roberts from England whom Dodd took on as a worker but who was later to establish a rival organ-building firm building instruments for St Andrew's Uniting Church (Perth), Perth College Chapel and Mercedes College Chapel. But despite this slowing down of building new instruments, Dodd's firm was still very much present on the organ scene in Perth with the rebuilding and maintenance of many organs. Included in amongst these is of course, the rebuild of our own organ at St Mary's Cathedral in the early 1960s. Incidentally this coincided with the building of a brand-new organ by none other than J.W. Walker and Sons (an overseas firm) for Winthrop Hall at the University of WA – but that's another story for another time. The Dodd firm still held on to the branch here in Perth,

though, and it was managed in this period by Mick Dodd, the grandson of JE Dodd and son of Ebenezer – Mick looked after our instrument at St Mary's until his death in 1973 when the Dodd line, so to say, ended here in Perth after 70 years.

It's almost sad to see the apparent decline of such an illustrious organ builder and his firm; BUT we can certainly still enjoy his work even now and marvel at the important innovations he made in organ building – it not only gives us a glimpse into our own history in many ways, but also we see how Dodd's ingenuity did so much for the development of the pipe organ itself as an instrument – I've heard it said a number of years ago that in Australia and New Zealand we are so lucky to still have so many fine examples still in existence of the English-style symphonic pipe organ – and I do believe it. I also think that Dodd's legacy continues not only with us as organists, but also with organ-builders of our own time who have an important part to play to maintain these instruments, keeping their original essence and nurturing it, maintaining it for us and for future generations – so I think they have a very important responsibility.

Jacinta Jakovcevic

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Photographs by Peter de San Miguel

Details of the St Thomas the Apostle Church organ can be found at www.oswa.org.au