

On a Positive Note

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Birmingham 21st February 2026

Bernard Edmonds Research Conference

British Institute of Organ Studies



St Cadoc's church
Llangattock Vibon Avel
Monmouth

Photo: Friends of
Friendless Churches

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I was asked by Friends of Friendless Churches to visit one of their churches near Monmouth in east Wales, at Llangattock Vibon Avel.

Llangattock Vibon Avel (LVA) Aug 2024, state of **Vowles 1875** organ



Photo: Friends of
Friendless Churches

The blue curtain hides a multitude of sins



Investigations



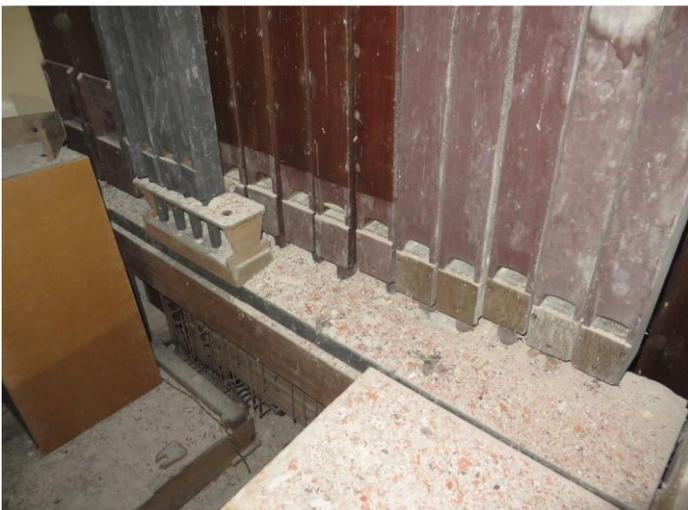
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The aim of my visit was to see if Kingsley Robinson, a local volunteer, might be capable of restoring an organ made by Vowles of Bristol in 1875. It had been neglected for many years.



Great pipework as found August 2024
- with loudspeakers

I was there for three days in early August 2024 to investigate the state of the organ. It was pretty bad. Water had come onto the Great and console; there were loud-speakers partly on the Great pipework and this pipework was in a bad state, as you can see.



Pedal Soundboard as found, August 2024

Because of water infiltration, a whole wall had spalled its covering of sandy plastering all over the pedal pipes and onto and into their soundboard...

Friends of Friendless Churches

Appeal leaflet

FRIENDS OF FRIENDLESS CHURCHES

WE'RE REPAIRING THE PIPE ORGAN AT
ST CADOC'S,
LLANGATTOCK VIBON AVEL

CAN YOU HELP?

Made by W G Vowles of Eristol and installed in 1875, the pipe organ has fallen into disrepair. Skilled volunteers are working to return it to playable condition in time for its 150th anniversary in 2025.

**WE NEED TO RAISE £5,000
FOR MATERIALS AND COMPONENTS**

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT,
YOU CAN DONATE BY POST OR ONLINE**

Scan the QR code to donate online
(please put 'LVA organ' in the additional info box)

Cheques made payable to Friends of Friendless Churches
can be sent to FoFC, 70 Cowcross St, London, EC1M 6E3

THANK YOU!

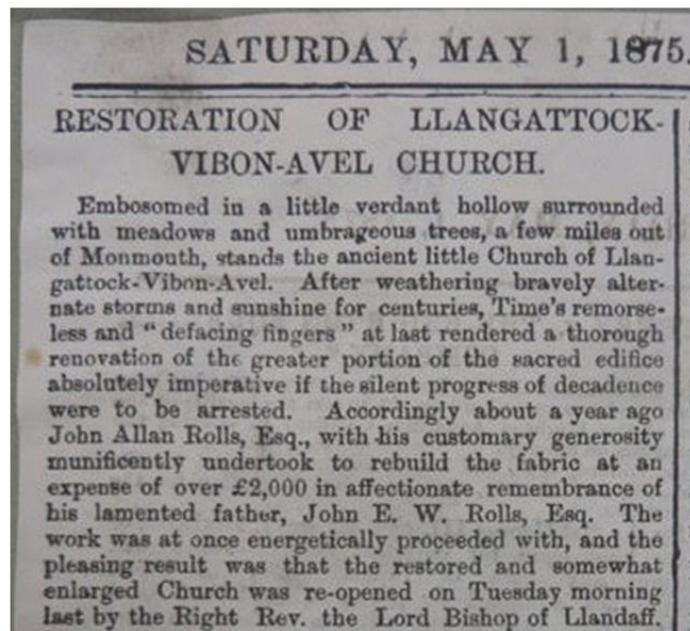
*If we exceed the target, donations will contribute to other FoFC work and projects.
Questions about the project? Email: volunteers@fofc.org.uk

But the quality and interest of the original work was high.

I reported back to Friends of Friendless Churches that the project seemed worth the attempt and that I'd help by keeping an eye on progress and by supplying materials etc as needed.

The Friends put out an appeal. We hoped that the organ would be working by April 2025, which would be the 150th anniversary of the Victorian restoration of the church. Its re-dedication in April 1875 had been reported on by the local press, with resumés of the services, their music and their sermons, one of which was given by Dr Jebb of Hereford cathedral.

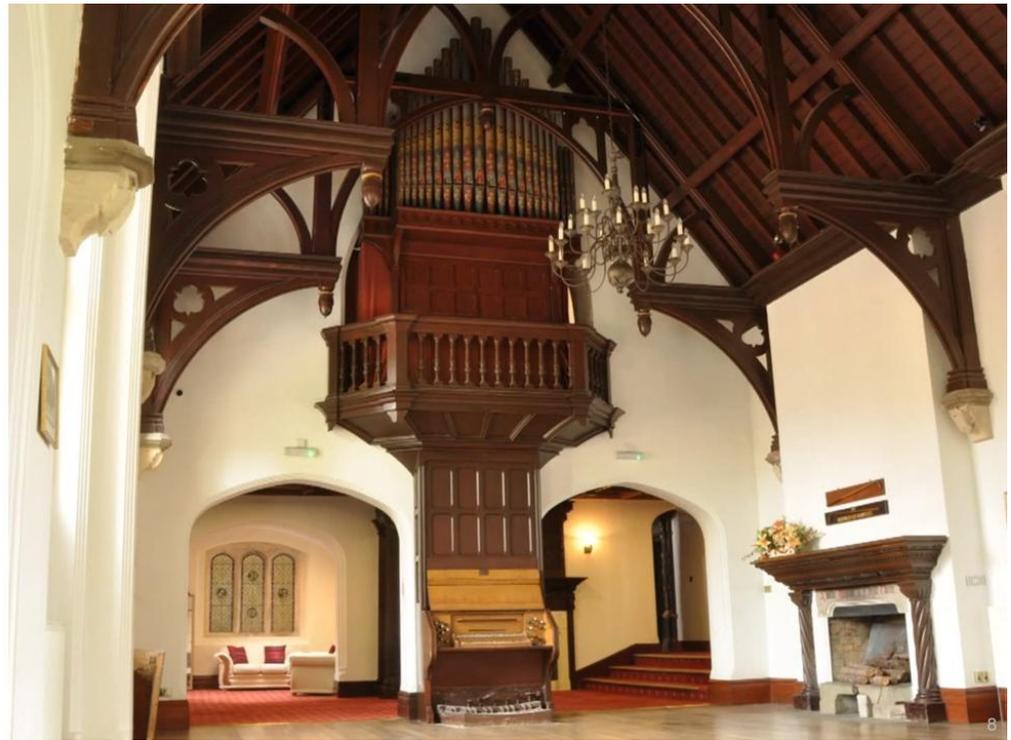
Press report of LVA's 1875 opening



The organ and this C19 church restoration were funded by the Rolls family that lived in The Hendre, a rambling mostly-Victorian mansion a mile or so away. The mother of the family was

The Hendre,
Monmouth

Bevington 1872



organist at the church, and we discovered that she also had an organ to play at The Hendre. This is a large Bevington instrument of the later 1860s whose console is on the floor of a sort of baronial hall with its pipework about 20 feet above on a quasi-gallery. Originally, the only pedal stop was an open 16' wooden rank. Its installation was a feat of adaptation to a difficult placing, to say the least; but quite possibly its engineering appealed to the family, which was to become known world-wide as one half of the Rolls-Royce car-making firm. Like the church organ was, it has been derelict for many years. It would be a very challenging organ to restore.



Work under way at LVA
with volunteers



Back at Llangattock church, work got under way. With help from his family and other volunteers, Kingsley Robinson dismantled and renovated the organ section by section.

Fortunately, we found at my first inspection that the pallet coverings could be cleaned and re-glued where necessary in situ, so the manual soundboards and swell-box did not have to be removed. By contrast, the pedal soundboard and its mechanical actions needed a huge amount of restorative work. The console area was dismantled and its woodwork, stop-knobs etc carefully cleaned and refinished.

Restored keyboards, stop knobs and woodwork



Initially, funds did not allow for the ivories from the keys to be replaced and matching old ivories found to replace missing ones, but the position of each ivory had been carefully noted. So the keys were temporarily covered with thin plastic held in place by double-sided tape. The present plan is to re-ivory the keyboards, using where needed some ivories from Elmore church's 1913 Liddiatt organ.



Work on bottom C of
8' Open Diapason



Restoring wooden pipework

Nearly all the wooden pipes on the Great and Pedal had come apart more or less completely. We found all the parts of these, and they were repaired after some tuition in the use of hot organic glues. Missing metal pipes were replaced with matching second-hand pipes, and

some were fitted with new tuning slides. The collapsed lowest C of the Great Open Diapason was repaired with the help of Kingsley's older daughter, two pews and a large pole.

Restored Great pipework



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The loudspeakers have gone, front pipe conveyances repaired and the Great pipework cleaned and tuned along with the rest of the organ.

LVA organ: as restored,
April 2025



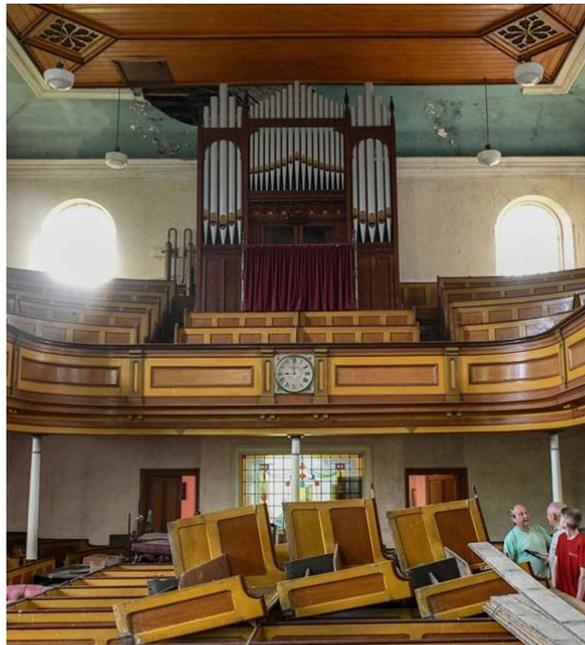
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And, as hoped, on 27 April 2025 the organ was used again for its original purpose, 150 years later than it was originally heard. During the previous day, International Organ Day, the organ was introduced to the public. Its actions are comfortable to play, and the console is now open to any visitor. A good second-hand electric blower with a timer has been installed, in addition to the original hand-blowing system.

**New lives for
Welsh Chapels**

- and their organs

Gorphwysfa former chapel,
Skewen
Norman & Beard, 1906



Gurnos chapel, Ystalyfera
now Community Centre
Peter Conacher, c1900



Sardis former chapel, Ystradgynlais
Future Josef Herman Centre Peter Conacher, 1890s

Last year Kingsley and I and others including Vicki helped with work near Skewen (near Neath) and in two chapels up the Swansea valley. At Gurnos, the organ was partially dismantled and thoroughly cleaned, tuned and brought it back into full use as an open-console organ in this community centre. We began work on the two other organs at Skewen and Sardis to prepare them for future use in chapels, now in private and community hands. At least three more Welsh churches, one of them with a slightly-younger Vowles organ, are in the course of applying for a Pipe Up ‘sleeping beauty’ grant to bring them back into use.

Capel Rhondda

purchased by the
Community 2026

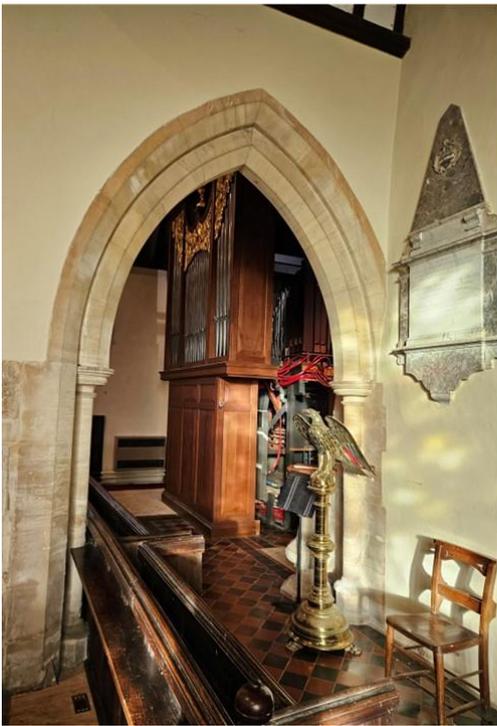
Blackett & Howden 1907

Pontypridd
male voice choir



Photo: Guardian / Welsh government

Among the many closures, the rescue by the local community of the chapel, for whose new organ the tune ‘Cwm Rhondda’ was written by John Hughes in 1907, has been another, rare beacon of light, and hope.



Andrew
Freeman's church
Hardwicke, Glos
to
Elmore, Glos

Vowles, 1878

Stephen Dykes Bower
case, 1938

under
construction



Kingsley also took a major role in the work near Gloucester which Paul Tindall has already mentioned. He, my French apprentice and I moved another, unwanted Vowles organ of 1878 from Andrew Freeman's church at Hardwicke, to the nearby church of Elmore, with massive help and support from the local parishioners. We also moved its splendid Stephen Dykes Bower case of 1938 and its eye-catching carving. We restored the Vowles organ and adapted the 1938 work by Daniel to the new site, including (without any alteration at all) a Tierce rank – very unusual in a village church organ then, as it would still be now. Otherwise, I revised the organ tonally for its new site, and incorporated good wooden and metal pipework from Elmore's previous Carnegie-aided 1913 Liddiatt organ. This was very well-made, but unfortunately it had a slider-less pneumatic action which had totally failed.



I'm pleased to report that Kingsley Robinson, at the age of 40, decided last autumn to become a full-time organ builder. This makes him probably the only one actually residing within the borders of Wales.

And, in the otherwise very gloomy context of the future for organs on this island, what could be more positive than that?

Thank you.