

The Stanley Elliott Memorial Organ

by Dr Christine Oldham

The pipe organ in our church, the Stanley Elliott Memorial Organ, is unique. Armadale Uniting Church is the only place where the symphonic vision of organ-builder Frederick Taylor may be observed today. This article traces some milestones in the history of the instrument.

In 1909 Armadale Methodist Church resolved to acquire a suitable pipe organ for the church as the existing one was in very bad condition. An organ trust was formed in 1910 and fund raising began. Subscriptions to the new organ were solicited. By July 1911 church members had promised £451. A committee was elected to proceed with the purchase of an instrument after obtaining necessary specifications and plans.

Quotes were received from George Fincham & Sons of Richmond, J E Dodd of Adelaide and Frederick Taylor of Hawthorn for a 2-manual pipe organ with tubular-pneumatic action to be driven by motor power. Both plans allowed for seating the choir with an extended console to enable the organist to conduct the choir from the front of the pulpit. In August 1911 the committee resolved that expert advice be obtained and recommendations be submitted to the trustees.

In November 1911 the 'expert', Melbourne City Organist Dr W G Price, recommended that Taylor's plan was the most modern in tonal and accessory appliance. Three additional stops were donated and funds for an extra coupler were raised. In March 1912 the contract for the church pipe organ was let to Taylor.

It was decided that the organ should have a handsome wooden case of Blackwood or Anjily wood rather than the lighter-coloured Kauri wood that had been specified. The metal pipes arrived from Palmer and Sons, England in December 1912. The cost of the complete organ was £660.

Taylor's progress in completing the organ was hampered by unforeseen circumstances. The opening service for the organ was planned for 13 July 1913 but it was not finally opened until 24 August 1914 after endorsement from Dr Price on 27 July 1914.

In August 1918, Mr Stanley Elliott was appointed choirmaster and organist.

In 1974 the organ was rebuilt by George Fincham & Sons Pty Ltd. The original tubular-pneumatic action was converted to electro-pneumatic and the console was fitted with new stopkeys, keyboards and pistons. The majority of Taylor's pipework remained intact.

On 4 August 1974 the organ was dedicated by the Chaplain General, Rev C K Daws, as the Stanley Elliott Memorial Organ to commemorate Stanley Elliott's 52 years as organist and choirmaster. At that time a plaque was placed on the organ with the wording:

STANLEY ELLIOTT MEMORIAL ORGAN
Originally built by F Taylor in C 1910
Restored by Geo Fincham & Sons Pty Ltd
Dedicated 4th August 1974

In 1990 Sydney and Stanley Graham donated the Mixture III stop dedicated to the memory of Stanley Elliott.

Currently, the Stanley Elliott Memorial Organ has 2 manuals, a full pedalboard, 31 speaking stops, and electro-pneumatic action. Most of the pipes are made of a tin-lead alloy metal. Some pipes are made of wood. There are 1,534 pipes altogether. The façade pipes are finished in aluminium.

Mr John Maidment, chairman of the Organ Historical Trust of Australia council and author of the *Gazetteer of Victorian Pipe Organs* has identified our instrument as the only significant example of a Taylor organ where the majority of the original pipework and tonal scheme survive. The only comparable organ is the 1912 instrument that was once in the Uniting Church, Ashfield, NSW but is now in storage. Other somewhat similar organs at St Clements's Church, Mosman and the Presbyterian Church, North Carlton have been rebuilt and are now in storage.

Information for this article came from: the Armadale Methodist Church Trustees Minute Books housed at Uniting Church Archives; *Armadale Uniting Church: A Brief History*, written and researched by Dr Joy Parnaby; and John Maidment's account of the Armadale Uniting Church organ on the Organ Historical Trust of Australia website at <http://www.ohta.org.au/organs/organs/ArmadaleUniting.html>

The OHTA website includes fascinating photographs of treasures hidden behind the façade pipes.

(based on an article that appeared in *The Mustard Seed* issue 6, Lent 2011, which also includes some photographs)