

KENWYN CHURCH

A HISTORY OF THE PARISH MUSIC

1259-1935

Music has always played its part in the Worship of God. Of St Keyne, who built the first Church at Kenwyn circa 463 AD, it is said by her chronicler writing some 600 years later that 'she built a house for the Singing of the Praises of God'.

When the present Church was dedicated in 1259 the music of those days was the plain-song Proper and Common of the Mass with many of the great plainsong hymns, used even today, being sung unaccompanied.

With the Reformation came the regular recitation of the Psalms and this was followed by the metrical version in 1592 which may have been used at Kenwyn very early and was certainly in use in 1621 as the publisher (Ravenscroft) lived in Truro. This version was still used in Kenwyn Church as late as 1855, for the Clergy and Churchwardens presented a copy as a prize to one Nathaniel Bullen (aged 10).

The Choir of the eighteenth-century resided in a gallery on pillars at the west-end of the Church by the tower arch. They were paid, as was their leader and given an Annual treat. They had a pitch-pipe to get their note and sang unaccompanied. But Bishop Gibson complained in 1724 'they sometimes seem to be contending as to who can sing the loudest. You may see them often strain themselves with shouting, till their faces are red as scarlet'. There is a reference in an accounts book of a pitch-pipe being acquired in 1787 and in 1788 'For Pricking Musick 5s 10d', 'To Mr Brown for writing 70 pages of Musick 5s 10d', and in 1789: 'Deduct Sam Brown pricking tunes twice 5s 10d'. It seems clear from the last entry that writing and pricking the music meant the same thing. ^{4, 11}

In 1819 Kenwyn Parish Church became dilapidated and unsafe so a major restoration was started. The pitch-pipe unaccompanied singing was replaced in 1820 by a village orchestra requiring the Churchwardens to regularly find money to pay for repairs to the instruments. We know from a sketch of 'The Village Orchestra' that Kenwyn had a band which played in the gallery, which consisted of a flute, clarinet, bassoon, serpent, violin and double-bass. ^{4, 12}

It is apparent that the Anglican Church in Cornwall was trying to reform its liturgical practice by exercising more control over its musical content by introducing organs. As Dr Busby wrote in 1820:

'an instrument powerful enough to drown the voices of the parish clerk, charity children, and congregation, is an inestimable blessing.' ^{1, 2, 8}

In 1823, the Reverend Coleridge, newly installed Vicar of Kenwyn, had high ideals of reform when one of the first acts of his incumbency was to set up a subscription to install an organ in the church. There was certainly opposition to the proposal: when considering

'the best method of improving the singing in Kenwyn Church, which of late has been dependent upon the exertions of a single individual having for some time been in agitation; it appeared to the Rev. Mr Coleridge that a hand organ would be the most effectual and certain method of leading the congregation in that part of the divine service.' ^{2, 3}

His argument was that the instrument – presumably a barrel organ – would be a considerable financial saving of the current expense of £11-£12 per annum; and after considerable opposition from some parishioners 'especially in a quarter from whence it was least expected', the proposal was carried though the full cost of

£90-£100 must be raised by subscription as the parish agreed to pay annually £20 'to get rid of the perpetual tax for singing.' In February 1824, a Barrel Organ of five-stops from Lincoln (containing '2 8" barrels each of 12 tunes. 80 guineas + 8 guineas for each barrell' with sets of psalms and hymn tunes) was acquired to augment the village orchestra. ^{2, 6}



Rev. James Duke Coleridge, Vicar of Kenwyn 1823-28 ¹⁰

It is known that Kenwyn bought a cello in 1845 to use alongside the barrel organ. Perhaps the last remnant of the old village band. We found the story from Kenwyn of the cello player who said, 'Give us the rosin, Bill, and I'll let 'em know who's the King of Glory!' ¹¹

In 1846 'it was proposed to raise by subscription, a Finger Organ' to replace the small barrel organ which had 'become unfit even for the simplest celebration of Divine Service'. This new one-manual organ was eventually built in 1848 by G. M. Holdich of London. ^{3, 6}

The Royal Cornwall Gazette, April, 1848, reported:

'...on the occasion of the opening of the new organ...the Rev E Shuttleworth officiated at the reading desk, and to those of our readers who are acquainted with that reverend gentleman's musical capabilities and his zealous application of them to the service of the sanctuary, any praise from us, of his intoning, or of the results of his superintendence of the choir practice, would appear superfluous. He was ably sustained by the choir, under the immediate direction of Mr Hempel presiding at the organ with his usual good taste and great ability. And, while both Priest and Choristers ably acquitted themselves, it was highly satisfactory that the congregation were thus enabled to join heartily, throughout the service, in the beautiful chants and responses...The new Organ recently erected in this Church is to be opened next Wednesday morning; on which occasion it will be played by Mr Hempel, the organist of St Mary's. The Choir will be assisted by a portion of St Mary's Choir and by members of Truro Choral Society. The tone of this instrument is full, mellow rich; and amply powerful. It possesses some peculiarities of construction as will be seen from the following scheme, with which we have been favoured by the builder, Mr G M Holditch, [sic] Greek Street Soho, London. The compass of the keys is from CC to F in alt, with a Bourdon to CCC. The other stops are Open, Diapason Bass, Open Diapason, Treble, Stopt Diapason Bass, Clarabella, Dulciana, Principal, Twelfth, Fifteenth and Diaocton. This last named stop was invented by Mr Holditch [sic] and is said to be of great value in a small organ, by making each small stop equal to two; and in playing fugues, it produces an exceedingly brilliant effect by imparting strength to the chorus parts. By the application of this stop the Kenwyn Organ possesses the power of the following stops: Open Diapason, Principal, Twelfth, Larigot, Fifteenth, Doublette and Bourdon. There are three composition pedals with double action to pull the stops in and out; and also an octave and half of German pedals.' ^{3, 4}

On 20 December 1860 Kenwyn Church Tower was struck by lightning and the Church had to be closed for 15 months for the building once more to be restored. By 1862, the organ was also rebuilt by James Grover with a second manual added and sited in the south transept. It was designed to allow light to come in from the south transept window, which was of clear leaded glass.

A report on the opening service in The Royal Cornwall Gazette, May, 23, 1862, commented:

‘The organ is now a fine instrument of rich and powerful tone, and the organist, Miss Dunn, played it with great ability.’³

Most of the money for the reconstruction of the instrument was in fact raised by Miss Ellen Dunn.* Mr Arthur W. Gill, a later organist, writes:

‘The twenty-two years during which Mrs Carter was organist saw a great revival in Church music not only at Kenwyn, but throughout the country. *Hymns Ancient and Modern* took the place of the Metrical Psalms; the Psalms were sung (a daring venture in those days) from Mercer’s *Church Psalter*, selections from the Oratorios and Anthems were performed and the choir and organ were fortified with an orchestra on special occasions.’^{4,5}

The organ was added to by Hele & Co., of Plymouth in 1866 and overhauled by Messrs Brewer & Co., of Truro in 1877 and the result ‘much improved its external appearance’.

The Royal Cornwall Gazette reported:

A great many people have felt interested in the re-opening of the Kenwyn Organ, and the Church was full on Sunday morning. Opinions notoriously differ on everything under the sun, and hence it is not surprising that various estimates have been formed as to the work Messrs. Brewer and Co. have just accomplished. The general verdict, however, is a very favourable one, and no doubt those acute (not long) ears which detected some imperfections in the quality of the notes will, in a few weeks, come round to a different conclusion. The fact is, I believe, that a newly-constructed organ is never wholly in tune at once. The vibration caused by playing shakes the reeds a little out of their original position; and hence, until they get into thorough working order, they require frequent tuning. Of the quality of the singing and of Mrs. Carter’s playing, on Sunday, for a wonder, I have not heard two opinions. The sermons, too, were very noticeable, especially that by the Vicar in the afternoon. He dwelt with much force on the duty of congregational singing. In my humble opinion clergymen have another and even more effectual way of obtaining this desirable end: let them see that the music to be sung is not of too elaborate a character; but such as it is really possible the congregation can join in; and let the choir and organist thoroughly understand that their duty is to lead the congregation, not to sing to them.

Royal Cornwall Gazette, Friday 16 February, 1877

* The Kenwyn organist Ellen Dunn married Mr R.H. Carter [Harry Carter] the artist in 1866. She was also accompanist of the Truro Philharmonic Society until she left for Plymouth in 1884. She died in 1913 and is buried in Kenwyn churchyard.⁹

Arthur Gill tells us:

‘At that time, the choir stalls were of three rows in the south transept in front of the organ where there was also a small fireplace to provide warmth. Amongst the names of members of the choir are many well-known in Kenwyn: Carlyons of Trevrea; Paulls of Bosvigo; Chilcotts of Gwendroc; the Bullen family; Carus-Wilsons of Penmount; Gills of Comprigney; Philips of Hendra; R.H. Carter; members of Bishop Benson’s family and, later, the daughters of Bishop Wilkinson...The great work done by Mrs Carter and Mr N.B. Bullen during these years laid the foundation of the good name that Kenwyn has had for its excellent music, a tradition that is still being carried on. Mr N.B. Bullen spent forty years with the choir as chorister and choirmaster and was presented with a handsome silver salver in 1895.’^{6, 12}



*After the restoration of the Church Interior 1862*¹⁰

For a short time, Mr Crosby Smith was appointed organist and choirmaster in 1890.³

Arthur Gill succeeded as organist, and in 1894 a new organ was rebuilt from the existing instrument, and added to, by Brewer’s, at a cost of £325, and at that time it was moved from the south transept to the east end of the south aisle (where the choir stalls now stand) It was a pitch pine case and painted pipes and was dedicated on 27 July by the Vicar of Kenwyn, Archdeacon Cornish and an organ recital followed by Dr M J Monk from Truro Cathedral.^{4, 5, 6}

THE NEW ORGAN AT KENWYN CHURCH.

To all Church people, and not a few Non-conformists, there is a charm associated with the beautiful old parish church of Kenwyn, nestling among the trees on the northern slopes of the city of Truro, surrounded by a typical example of an old-world God's Acre, where the "rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep" in cool sequestered solitude, save for the song of birds, the lowing of cattle, the periodic ringing of the bells in the old tower, or the impressive toll which now and again denotes the gathering of one more soul unto its fathers. Within the old edifice, a solemn stillness reigns, and the dim religious light reflected through the coloured windows imparts a sense of restfulness and worship which attracts so many citizens to its shrine on the Sunday. Within, so to speak, and yet without the city, there remains a link with the past, a remnant of the old country church service, with its mixed choir and congregational singing, which for many a devotee of the Church of England, has still its charms and endearments. Many have cause to remember impressions for good after attending this church on holy days, or days when special services have been held, and many more may yet be enwrapped by the impressiveness of the ancient fane and the solemn services and rites conducted within its walls, for another addition to the accessories of worship has been added within the last few weeks. For many a year the organ has been located within the south transept. This by those responsible for the musical portion of the service has been considered an undesirable place, and to render more effective the service of praise, a new organ has been provided in a more becoming location—the south-east end. This, it will at once be seen, not only places the organist in touch with the officiating clergy, but provides a more suitable place for the choir in leading the musical portion of the service.

The organ is essentially new, though, in fact the old instrument has been rebuilt and added to by Messrs. Brewer and Co., of Truro, at a cost of £325. Those who have been familiar with the old instrument will readily recognise, on hearing the new, that Messrs. Brewer and Co. have done themselves great credit by building one of the finest and most beautiful-toned instruments in the country. If there is one defect at all it is not with the organ, but in the fact that the church being low, and its roof of open wood work, a great deal of the power of the organ is lost. The new instrument has a metal pipe front facing down the church, forming a very handsome end with a case of pitch-pine. The old front, greatly enlarged, forms one side of the chancel, and the organist is partly hidden from view by the erection of the old oak screen on the south side. The work has been carried out in the most satisfactory manner, and the instrument is one of which the people of Kenwyn as well as the builder may be justly proud. In connection with the erection of the organ, a new heating apparatus has been laid through part of the church, forming the basis of a scheme for warming the whole at some future time. A sum of about £100 is still wanting towards the various improvements. An arrangement for lighting with gas the centre aisles, has been passed by the Church Council, leaving the brass candelabra in the transepts and east end.

The organ, which was opened on Friday afternoon, is built to the following specification:—

Great Organ—CC to G, 56 notes, with the following stops: 1, Open Diapason, 8ft.; 2, Principal 4ft.; 3, Clarabella, 8ft.; 4, Dulciana, 8ft.; 5, Flute Harmonic, 4ft.; 6, Piccolo, 2ft.; 7, Trumpet, 8ft.; 8, Cremona, 8ft.

Swell Organ—CC to G, 56 notes:—9, Double Diapason, 16ft.; 10, Violin Diapason, 8ft.; 11, Stop Diapason, 8ft.; 12, Gamba, 8ft.; 13, Celeste, 8ft.; 14, Gemahorn, 4ft.; 15, Flute, 4ft.; 16, Twelfth, 3ft.; 17, Fifteenth, 2ft.; 18, Oboe, 8ft.; 19, Cornopean, 8ft.

Pedal Organ—CCC to F:—20, Open Diapason, 16ft.; 21, Bourdon, 16ft.

Couplers:—22, Swell to Great Unison; 23, Swell to Great super octave; 24, Swell to Pedals; 25, Great to Pedals; 2 composition pedals to Great; 2 composition pedals to Swell.

The opening ceremony was taken part in on Friday afternoon by a large congregation, from all parts of the city and neighbourhood. An organ recital by Dr. Monk, of Truro Cathedral, was prefaced by a short dedication service by the vicar, Archdeacon Cornish. The recital was of a high order, and was only marred by the constant peregrination of the aisles by late arrivals. Dr. Monk opened with the overture to "Athalie" (*Mendelssohn*), which was followed by a delightful rendering of "Angels ever bright and fair" (*Handel*), by Master Hawke, the leading treble of the Cathedral choir. He possesses a voice of great sweetness, and for a boy throws into his execution a great deal of taste and soul, which bids well for his future. Perhaps no solo upon the organ was sweeter than *Chipp's* "Pastorale," which was bracketed by the organist with *Salome's* "Grand Chœur." *Spohr's* "Adagio" (from a quartet) was followed by a vocal selection from the "Elijah" (*Mendelssohn*), "Ye people rend your hearts," and "If with all your hearts," by Mr. N. B. Bullen. It was fitting that one who has for so many years been associated with the musical service here should have been one of the vocalists on this occasion, more especially as he for many years acted as choir master, and his son, Mr. Harold Bullen, presided for a time at the organ. Mr. Bullen's singing is no new thing in the old church at Kenwyn, and his friends greatly appreciated his services on Friday, when he interpreted with feeling and taste the beautiful excerpt from the "Elijah" to which we have referred. He joined Master Hawke in the delightful duet, "Love Divine," from the "Daughter of Jairus" (*Stainer*), which was one of the most delightful items of the afternoon recital. Other selections included *Sonata Pascale* (*Lemmens*), *All-gro-Andante* (*Adoration*)—*Finale* (*Alleluia*), *Meditation* (*Klein*), and *Fugue in D major* (*Guitmant*). During the singing of the Festival Hymn, composed by the Rev. S. Childs-Charke, an offertory was taken in aid of the organ fund, and the service was brought to a close with the

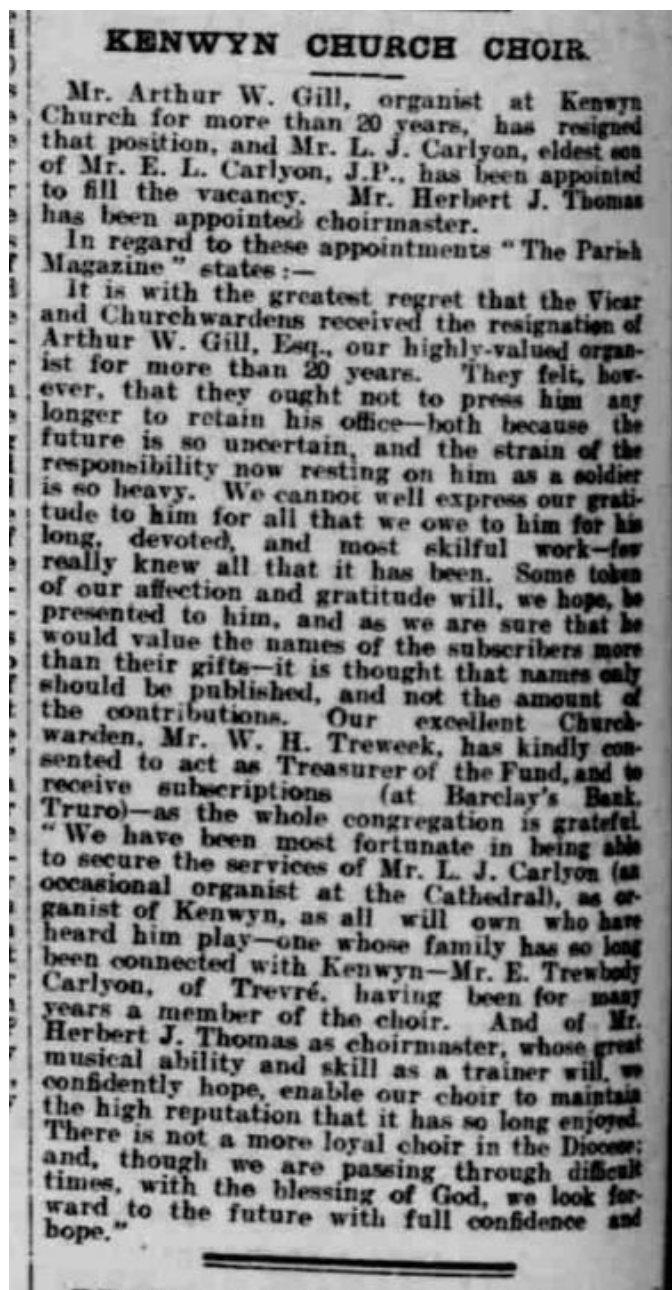
collect and the Blessing pronounced by the Archdeacon.

In the evening a delightful service was held, after tea had been served on the grounds at Lis Escop to a large number of visitors. The Rev. T. F. Maddrell intoned the service, the Rev. S. F. Marsh and Chancellor Worledge reading the lessons. The preacher was the Rev. Professor Walpole, whose discourse was founded on S. John v., 23. Though the world had had some 1,800 years of education and training in worship, how far, asked the preacher, were we to-day off that worship in spirit and in truth of which Christ spoke in His ideal and perfect form of worship indicated by the words of the text? A worship which spoke of a spirituality so intense and living, a realization so true and deep and full, as to brook of no suspicion of coolness or chill, no possibility of waning. If that ideal had not been reached, there had been much to be thankful for, and the last fifty years had witnessed a real advance. If the worship of God must be one in spirit (and any other was inconceivable) music must be called in to help to give it expression. It predisposed the mind to receive truth, it gave time to take in the great truths and suggestions for expressing them. It made them feel they were all members of one body, and gave them a feeling of the corporate life of the Church and its services. How good a work had been done that day by the giving of that instrument to the worship of God in His Church? When they remembered what Kenwyn Church had done in the matter of sacred music during the past 15 years, that gift from the parish was at least not inopportune. If their Church was to have her full heritage they needed to conserve all the characteristic features that marked the life of her parishes. There should be in her Cathedrals a beautiful idea of music, but it spoke there as expressive of diocesan, and not parochial worship. They must in the parish churches utilise the gifts that existed, remembering music was intended to express the church's life, and not merely the choir life, to help and develop the truth of worship, not formality and unreality.

The music of the service was chiefly festival. The processional hymn was 390, the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, as well as the anthem "Sing Praises unto the Lord," all being from the festival service. The addition of a few boys' voices has considerably improved the choir, who sang with heart and soul, as well as taste and expression. Mr. A. W. Gill is the organist at Kenwyn, and he has now the material wherewith to make the musical service at this church one of the best, if not the best and most effective in the neighbourhood of Truro outside the Cathedral.

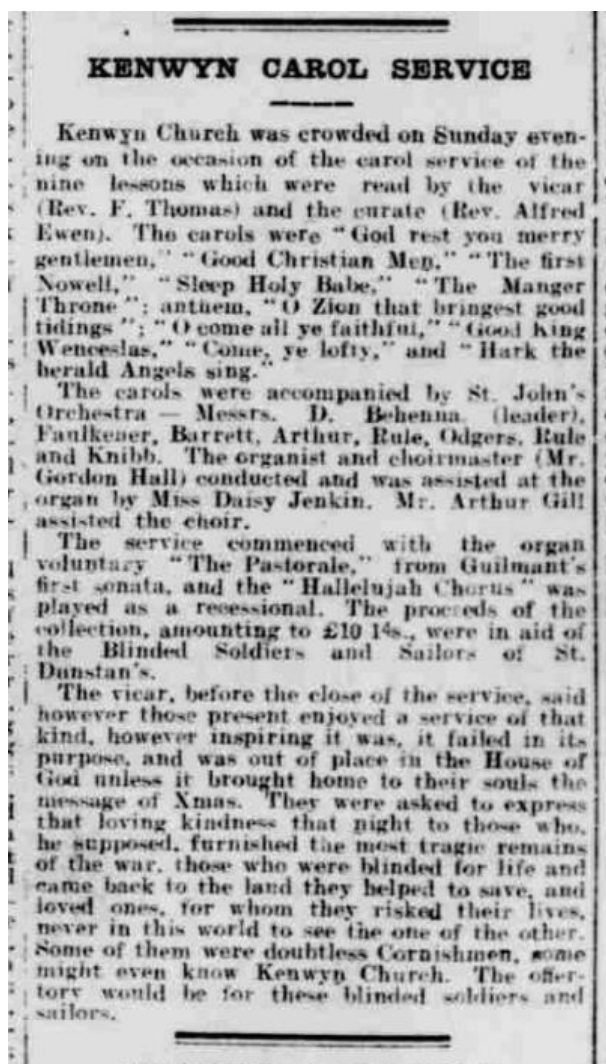
There is a report of a Choral Harvest Festival in September 1907 where '...the choir sang Turner's harvest cantata, "Festal Song" ...[and] "The Lord is my Strength" (Josiah Booth) was intelligently rendered by the choir... Mr. A. W. Gill (organist) played Best's "Fantasia in F," Lemare's "Romance in D flat," with artistic method and skill, and the overture to "Athalie" [Mendelssohn]...creditably rendered by the organ and orchestra'.³

In the Spring of 1915, amidst the Great War, Arthur Gill, 'our highly-valued organist for more than twenty years' resigned his post. '...the responsibility now resting on him as a soldier is so heavy.' The vacancy was filled by Mr. L. J. Carlyon. Mr. Herbert J. Thomas was appointed choirmaster.



West Briton - Saturday 3 April, 1915 - (p.2 col.6)

By 1920 the organist and choirmaster was Mr. Gordon Hall. There are interesting reports in The West Briton of two carol services given during this period (1920, 1923).



Monday 5 January, 1920 - (p.2 col.4)



Thursday 11 January, 1923 - (p.7 col.2)

In a report entitled 'KENWYN ORGAN RECITAL – CHURCH ORGAN RENOVATED.' – The West Briton – Thursday 15 February, 1923, we are told:

'After complete overhauling and cleaning by Messrs. Hele and Co., Plymouth, Kenwyn Church organ was re-opened on Sunday [11 February 1923]. The work, which cost about £35, included the removal of a portion of the mechanism, and a number of stops were revoiced. Up to yesterday £7 more was required, but this sum was met by the collections at the services. On Sunday evening, the organist, Mr. Gordon Hall, gave an excellent organ recital. Included in the programme were selections from Mendelssohn, Goss-Custard, Lemare, and Hollins. They were: - Overture to "Athalie" (Mendelssohn); "Impressions du Soir" (Goss-Custard);* Andante in A flat (Lemare); and Concert Overture (Hollins). – The anthems "Comes at Times" (Oakeley), and "The Radiant Morn" (Woodward), were admirably given by the choir, and Miss N. Pascoe effectively contributed the solo "O for the wings" (Mendelssohn). The service was conducted by the vicar, the Rev. F Thomas.'

* Probably "Impressions du Soir" by Heinrich Stiehl (arr. Reginald Goss-Custard)

In 1935 in the hope of restoring Kenwyn Church to its former glory, it was decided to move the instrument once more. So the present organ chamber was built. The organ was completely restored by Hele & Company of Plymouth and turned into a three-manual instrument. A detached console and electric blower were also fitted. The total cost of £4,200 was met by Arthur William Gill in memory of his father William Nicholas Gill (for 34 years a Lay Reader and 23 years a Churchwarden of Kenwyn) and his mother, Ada Gill. It was rededicated on Saturday 11 February 1935 by the Venerable G W Hockley (Archdeacon of Cornwall) and an opening recital was given by Mr F Guillaume Ormond from Truro Cathedral. In the book celebrating this event edited and mostly written by Arthur Gill, there is an article by R.F. Wheatly explaining the advantage of building a separate chamber outside the main aisles of the church as by this method:

‘priceless heritages left to us by former generations are not blocked off or hidden. Two of the modern windows have been moved. One has been placed in the west wall of the south transept to give extra light to it, and the other utilized to light the new organ chamber. This opens into the chancel, built of granite and following in detail the fifteenth-century arcade. The arches are filled with richly carved oak screens which serve to hide the rebuilt organ. All this has been made possible by the munificence of the donor, Major Gill. This is the first step in the endeavour to bring back what must have been a beautiful church in the fifteenth-century and which has been sadly ruined by the mistaken methods of restoration of Victorian times.’^{4, 5, 7}

Arthur Gill tells us:

‘The rebuilding and removal of the organ from the south-east end to the new organ chamber, in 1935, opened up two stained-glass windows and made it possible to bring back this space to its original purpose of a morning chapel.’⁴

The fruits of these changes can be enjoyed to this day where the choir and organ at Kenwyn continue to do justice to this beautiful church.

Andrew Wells, 5 February, 2021

SOURCES

1. Nicholas Temperley – The Music of the English Parish Church (Cambridge, 1979)
2. Richard McGrady – Music and Musicians in early nineteenth-century Cornwall (University of Exeter Press, 1991)
3. Royal Cornwall Gazette, 18 October 1823; 25 December 1846; April, 1848; 23 May 1862; 9/16 February 1877; 3 April 1890; 2 August 1894; 26 September 1907; The West Briton, 3 April, 1915; 5 January, 1920; 11 January, 1923 (Courtesy of the British Newspaper Archive and The British Library Board)
4. Major Arthur Gill - Church booklet on Kenwyn Church (1935); Cornwall Organists' Association (1989)
5. June Palmer – Kenwyn Churchtown & the Vicinity (Truro Buildings Research Group, 1996)
6. Cornwall Record Office P98/8/2; British Institute of Organ Studies
7. R.F. Wheatly – article in book celebrating the enlarged organ (1934)
8. Dr Thomas Busby (1755-1838)
9. <https://cornwallartists.org/cornwall-artists/richard-henry-carter>
10. Photo illustrations taken from Kenwyn Church
11. Harry Woodhouse – Face the Music – Church and Chapel Bands in Cornwall (Cornish Hillside Publications, 1997)
12. Church History - Kenwyn: St Keyne - A Church Near You