



The Stephen White Organ of Second Presbyterian, Belfast.

London-based John Snetzler (1710-1785), born Johannes Schnetzler in northern Switzerland and naturalised British citizen in 1770, had built organs for Armagh Cathedral, Hillsborough Parish Church and St Anne's Parish Church in Belfast. In the new 19th century in Belfast, the spotlight now turns on the organ-builder Stephen White, said also to be from London, 'a man of eminent abilities'.

It was he who built the organs for the Second Congregation in Rosemary Street (1806) and, seemingly, the new Chapel of Ease (St. George's) in High Street (perhaps 1816). Separate PDFs on this Edward Bunting webpage deal with the Chapel of Ease instrument and with Stephen White (q.v.).

In a newspaper article, *An Old Belfast Organ* in the *Larne Times*, Saturday 22 January 1916, page 6, S. Shannon Millin, the Second Congregation's historian, noted that, 'Early in 1801, Bunting approached the First Congregation, Rosemary Street, with "a very liberal proposal respecting the purchase of an organ," but this offer was declined'.

That's confirmed in Tom Moore's *A History of The First Presbyterian Church Belfast*, Belfast, 1983: 'At a meeting of the Heads of Families in [May] 1801 "a very liberal proposal from Mr. Edward Bunting respecting the purchase of an organ" was considered and it was agreed to request Dr Bruce [the minister] to "return their thanks to Mr. Bunting in the warmest terms of gratitude", but apparently they decided against the installation of an organ at that time as the first organ was not installed until 1853.'

As Millin recalled, a few years later, Bunting 'approached the Second Congregation with a similar offer, and this time his efforts were more successful.' Most of Millin's article has been transcribed on page 5 of this PDF. Tom Moore also mentions that the First Congregation's Heads of Families was consulted [in August 1806] about changing the times of services, because of worries about the likely extraneous noise from the neighbouring church's new organ. Two months later the relieved church-goers noted that the new organ next door did not 'disturb the worship of this House'.

The majority of Presbyterians rejected the use of organs for many more years, well beyond this time. However, the First and Second Church congregations in Belfast were Non-Subscribing Presbyterian congregations, i.e. they did not subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and were more liberal, less-Calvinistic, in their views.

Here are the relevant newspaper reports which deal with the Second Congregation's new organ:

Belfast Commercial Chronicle, Saturday, 6 September 1806, page 2:

Tomorrow, a Charity Sermon will be preached in the Meeting of the Second Congregation of Presbyterians, by the Rev Mr DRUMMOND, for the Benefit of that excellent Institution, the Dispensary and Fever Hospital. This is the first Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, in the North of Ireland, which has introduced an organ into the public worship. It will be played by Mr EDWARD BUNTING, whose musical talents are well known and acknowledged. It has been built by Mr WHITE, an ingenious mechanic from London, and is constructed so as to acquire considerable power from the use of pedals. – The organ is reckoned by judges one of the best in this part of the country.

Belfast Commercial Chronicle, Monday, 8 September 1806, page 2 (not so relevant!):

Yesterday the Rev. Mr. Drummond preached a Charity Sermon for the Benefit of the Fever Hospital and Dispensary of this town, to a most respectable Congregation ... [no mention of the new organ!] ...

... LORD CASTLEREAGH, in the uniform of his Regiment, received the Collection in a considerable part of the Meeting-house, with the most condescending and affable politeness.

Belfast News-Letter, Tuesday, 9 September 1806, page 2:

DISPENSARY & FEVER HOSPITAL.

On Sunday last, the new Organ, in the Second Congregation of Protestant Dissenters of Belfast, was opened by Mr. Bunting, with the music of the old 100th psalm, the composition, as Handel said, of Martin Luther, the Reformer. The instrument was conducted with chaste gravity, suited to the simplicity of Presbyterian worship; and the finest effect produced by an admirable finger, directed by pure taste. The solemn majestic melody, selected for the occasion, excited a similar wish to that expressed by the poet: —

That strain again! It had a dying fall;
O, it came o'er my ear, like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing, and giving odour. [Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, I.i.4-7]

Or in the language of a sacred dramatist, might be added —

At length a soft and solemn breathing sound,
Rose like a stream of rich distill'd perfumes,
And stole upon the air. ——— [Milton, *Comus*, lines 555-557]

The sermon was preached by the Rev. Mr. Drummond, and a large collection made for the support of the Dispensary and Fever Hospital, an institution which has produced the happiest effects, by limiting the quantity and reducing the virulence of contagion.

The preacher, in an animated flow of eloquence, impressed every mind with a conviction of the excellence of the charity; and from the sick pallet of the poor man, brought it home to the feelings and interests of the most wealthy. ...

Though the hearers were many, the house being very crowded, a number of opulent gentlemen and ladies were absent; whose charity will, no doubt, be sent in, as usual on such occasions.

The Right Hon. Lord Castlereagh was present in the uniform of his regiment, and assisted in receiving the collection after the sermon.



Rev. W.H. Drummond (1778-1865)
from an oil painting by Thomas Robinson (before
1770-1810)

What was the specification of the new 1806 Stephen White organ? The instrument eventually followed the Second Congregation in 1898 when it migrated to All Souls', Elmwood Avenue.

In his *History of the Second Congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Belfast*, Belfast 1900, S.Shannon Millin provides the following specification of the organ at that time and he also details the changes and additions over the years (see the full section transcribed on pp.4-5 below):

GREAT	SWELL	CHOIR	PEDAL ORGAN
CC to F, 54 notes	Tenor C to F, 42 notes	CC to F, 54 notes	CCC to F, 30 notes
Open Diapason Stopped Diapason* Principal Viol di Gamba 4' Fifteenth Sesquialtera, 3 ranks	Double Diapason 16' Open Diapason Stopped Diapason Principal Flute 4' stopped Fifteenth Cornoepan Oboe	Cone Gamba ** Dulciana** Stopped Diapason*** Metal Flute**** Principal** Flute 4' ***** Clarionet (Cremona)†	Open Diapason 16'‡

* with chimney from mid C, wood, Bass

** Tenor C

*** wood, Bass (12 pipes)

**** with chimney to mid C, wood

***** 54 pipes, metal, with chimney to Tenor C, wood, Bass

† 8' metal spotted, Mid C, 30 pipes

‡ wood

The following specification was my attempt to reverse-engineer that 1898 specification by applying Millin's description of the changes made to the instrument over the intervening years.

GREAT	SWELL	CHOIR	PEDAL ORGAN
GG to F	from tenor F	GG to F	
Open Diapason Stopped Diapason Principal Twelfth Fifteenth Sesquialtera [3 ranks]	Open Diapason [Open Diapason II] Stopped Diapason Principal Flute Hautboy (Oboe)	Stopped Diapason Principal Flute Fifteenth Cremona	[Pedals (likely limited in number) but probably no actual pipework in 1806. Some added before 1808]

However, Millin's 1916 article for the *Larne Times* gives the following specification, some of which seems more likely and more typical of the period.

GREAT	SWELL	CHOIR	PEDAL ORGAN
[GG to F]	[from tenor F]	[GG to F]	
Open Diapason Stop Diapason Principal Fifteenth Sesquialtera [3 ranks] Trumpet	Open Diapason Stop Diapason Principal Flute Cornet Hautboy	Stop Diapason Dulciana Flute Principal Fifteenth	[Pedals (likely limited in number) but probably no actual pipework in 1806. Some added before 1808]

Even more information can be gleaned from Alistair McCartney's Northern Ireland Pipe Organ website referred to shortly below. See also the separate PDF on the Edward Bunting webpage for details about the organ-builder, Stephen White, and some of his instruments.

Firstly, there now follows the relevant section on the organ, from S.S. Millin's *History of the Second Congregation*, pp.84-86.

'[The new organ] was erected in Rosemary Street under the personal supervision of Edward Bunting, whose name will ever be intimately associated with the revival of Irish music.

'It was opened on Sunday, 7th September, 1806, when the tune selected was suited to the simplicity of Presbyterian worship — viz., "The Old Hundred." The opportunity was embraced of assisting the Belfast Charities, in which good work the Second Congregation has ever distinguished itself, and the sum of £137 19s 7d was handed over to the Fever Hospital and Dispensary as the result of the day's collection.

'The introduction of an Organ seems to have been viewed with some amount of trepidation by the First Congregation, who feared "that it may disturb worship in this house," and consequently a proposal was made to change the hours of worship, which proposal, however, was not acted on. The old prejudices against instrumental music are fast fading away, and those happy effects and influences which music is calculated to produce upon the mind in the Service of God are becoming every day more generally acknowledged. The squabblings and bickerings of the General Assembly over the introduction of an Organ into the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have now passed into the domain of history, and the outcome of the lengthened controversy has been that several Congregations have followed our example, while in the course of a few years we may expect to see instrumental music in every place of worship.

'In 1837 the Committee decided that "in order to secure the greatest possible improvement in the musical department the Organ should be repaired," and Messrs. Bewsher & Fleetwood, Liverpool, were entrusted with the work at the sum of £40. It was again repaired by Messrs. Bevington, London, in 1854, and on the occasion of it being re-opened (12th January, 1855) the Classical Harmonists kindly assisted.

'In April, 1857, it was decided to make very considerable alterations and improvements, and the Organ was sent to the factory of Messrs. Robson, London. The compass of the Great and Choir Manuals was changed from GG to F (the lower octave wanting GG *sharp*) to the modern compass of CC to F. The compass of Swell Organ was extended from Tenor F down to Tenor C, and a new Cornopean and Fifteenth were added. The eight lower notes of Open Diapason of Great Organ were made new of metal (CC and CC *sharp* were previously of wood). A complete set of new open [sic] Diapason Wood pipes from CCC, 16 feet, to F, 30 notes, was supplied.

'The draw-stop action of Great and Choir Organs was re-arranged, all the stops of Choir Organ being made to draw at the one side. The draw-stop action of Swell Organ was entirely new, and brass plates were attached to distinguish the stops of the various Organs. The stops in Swell Organ were re-arranged, the smaller of the two open Diapasons being changed into a Double by being shifted up an octave, and continued down with stopped wood pipes. The bellows were enlarged, and a new blowing action was attached. A separate wind Trunk was fitted so as to supply Great Organ with wind direct from the bellows instead of being supplied through wind chest.

‘The Choir sound-board was lowered to give height for a new swell-box. Three new sets of keys were supplied, and brought out beyond the line of case about 7 inches; new Pedals, Pedal action, Brass Roller Board, new Manual action, and new Draw-stop knobs; new Couplers, Great Organ to Pedals and Choir Organ to Pedals, both shifting on and off. The action of Swell Coupler was changed so as to draw beside the other Couplers. All the pipes in the Organ were cleaned and re-voiced to a weightier pressure of wind — viz., $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches. The total expense was £210.

‘The organ was re-opened on 22nd November, 1857, and on the following Tuesday evening a Sacred Concert was held in the Meeting-house. ... [Concert programme omitted in this transcription.]

‘In 1870 the Organ was again overhauled, and the following alterations were effected:— In the Great Organ the Twelfth was removed and replaced with a new Viol di Gamba of 4 feet pitch. In the Choir Organ the Fifteenth was removed and the Principal put on its slide down to Tenor C, the lower octave being done away with. A new Cone Gamba of 8 feet pitch, down to Tenor C, was put on Principal slide. The draw-stop knobs of the Great and Choir Organs were altered to suit the above changes, the Treble part of Stopped Diapason being called Metal Flute. The whole Organ was tuned and regulated throughout. One front pipe of Great Open Diapason (Fid. G *sharp*) replaced with a new one.

‘In 1891 the Congregational Committee voted to the Music Committee the sum of £13 18s 4d, which was lodged in the bank as the nucleus of a fund for renovating the Organ. On 3rd March, 1892, Professor Henry Morley delivered two lectures in the Meeting-house in aid of same fund, which realized £12 nett. Various contributions were given to the fund, and in 1898 it amounted to £60.

‘When the Congregation removed to All Souls’ Church it was found inadvisable to erect the Organ in a new building, as the damp might have a very serious effect upon it, and for two years the organist had to use a vocalion, kindly lent by Mrs. A. M. Carlisle. At the annual meeting of 1898 the question of removing the Organ from Rosemary Street or purchasing a new one came up for consideration, and after a lengthened discussion it was unanimously decided not to part with an old friend.

‘The work of removing was entrusted to Mr. J. Field of Belfast, who, in addition to thoroughly cleaning it, made the following alterations — viz., Divided Pallets were added, and also four Composition Pedals, two to Great Organ and two to Swell Organ. The opening Services were held on 30th October, 1898, on which occasion the “Old Hundred” was sung — the tune with which it was originally opened in 1806 under Edward Bunting. To the members of the Second Congregation it is a connecting link with past generations who raised their voices in unison with its chords in the public worship of Almighty God.’

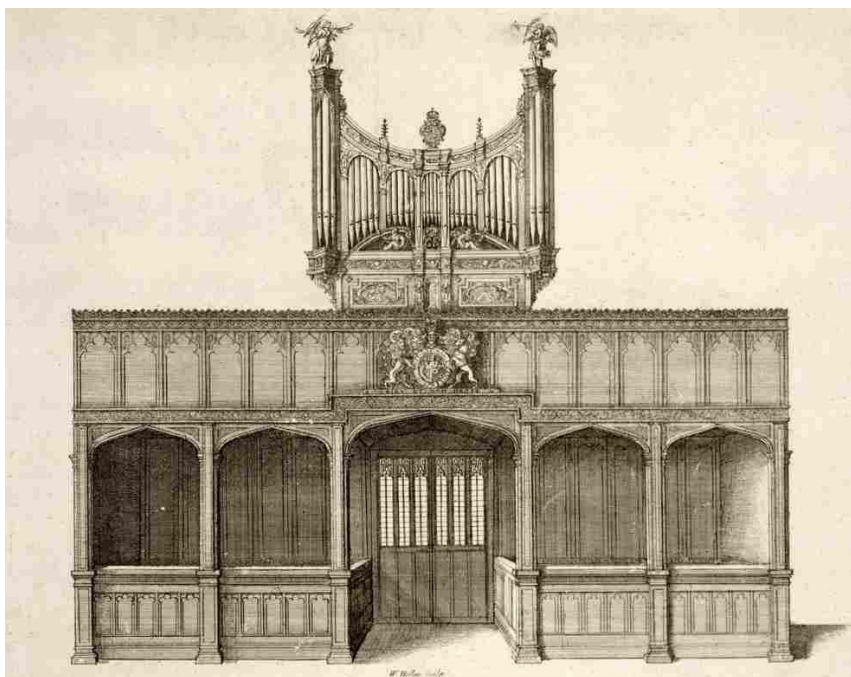
Millin’s book about the Second Congregation was published in 1900. In 1916, and already referred to, he wrote an article about the organ (and indeed about Edward Bunting) which was published in the *Larne Times and Weekly Telegraph*.

The original article includes three illustrations, the Brocas drawing of Edward Bunting, and two pictures of organs which surely were captioned by a very misguided sub-editor!

Given Millin's knowledge and his opening repudiation of the 'story' that the 1806 organ may have come from St George's Chapel, Windsor, it is very odd indeed to have a picture of the Dallam organ from St George's Chapel captioned as 'Organ of 1806, Rosemary Street'. The illustration's proper title is *Prospect of the Chancell or Screen from the West* by Wenceslas Hollar (1607-1677).

Likewise, John Vinycomb's illustration, properly entitled *Organ and Choir Loft, Rosemary Street* in Millin's 1900 book, p.83, and used in the newspaper article, has here been entitled 'Present Organ, All Souls', Elmwood'. True in one sense, but certainly not set in its Elmwood surroundings.

All three illustrations have been omitted from the following transcript. Two of them appear within the webpage feature, but I cannot resist including here the remaining one, the Dallam organ as drawn by Hollar.



Larne Times and Weekly Telegraph, Saturday 22 January 1916, page 6

AN OLD BELFAST ORGAN
EDWARD BUNTING AS ORGANIST

(By S.S.M.) [= S. Shannon Millin]

In the "History of the Second Congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Belfast" there appears a statement on page 83 – "A halo of uncertainty enshrouds its (the organ's) early history, and there is an interesting tradition of its being formerly erected in St. George's Church, Windsor." After making various inquiries with a view to obtain some information regarding the accuracy of the tradition, I am now in a position to state definitely that, in common with many other traditions, there is no foundation whatever for the statement.

The earliest known organ in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, was built by Ralph Dallam immediately after the Restoration [see pic above]. It was a one manual, containing seven stops, with 479 pipes. Its compass was GG., short octaves, to c3 – 50 notes. This Dallam organ remained in St. George's till 1789, when, owing to very extensive alterations at the instigation of George III, the old organ was sold, and removed to the Windsor parish church.

At that time Edward Bunting was 16 years of age. and was acting as deputy for Ware at the Snetzler organ in St. Anne's Church, Belfast. It should, however, be mentioned that Bunting never was organist in St. Anne's, although his name is often mentioned in that capacity. The mistake has probably arisen through the fact that he presided at the organ in that church on Sunday, 2nd August, 1801, when a selection from Handel's Oratorios was given in aid of the old poor-house and infirmary. The well-known topographical authority, Belfastiensis, has stated 'there is no evidence that Bunting was ever officially recognised even as assistant organist in St. Anne's'.

Early in 1801 Bunting approached the First Congregation, Rosemary Street, with 'a very liberal proposal respecting the purchase of an organ', but this offer was declined. Five years later he approached the Second Congregation with a similar offer, and this time his efforts were more successful.

On 7th September, 1806, the organ which is at present in All Souls', Elmwood, was opened in the Second Meeting-house, Rosemary Street, and for a period of eleven years Bunting continued organist of that church. There is no record preserved in the congregational minutes as to who was the builder of the organ. But the following facts appear in the contemporary accounts of the opening ceremony. It was built under the personal supervision of Edward Bunting, by Stephen White, 'an eminent organ artist from London, who came over to put it up.' 'In sweetness of tone it is not inferior to any other in the kingdom. It consists of the following stops, viz.: — The Great Organ — Open diapason, stop diapason, principal, fifteenth, sequilatera [sic], and trumpet. The Choir Organ — Stop diapason, dulciana, flute, principal, and fifteenth. The Swell — Open diapason, stop diapason, principal, flute, cornet, and hautboy. This instrument is constructed to play with pedals.'

Another local contemporary states — 'It has been built by Mr. White, an ingenious mechanic from London, and is constructed so as to acquire considerable power from use of pedals. The organ is reckoned by judges to be one of the best in this part of the country.'

Two years later we find

MR. WHITE, "ORGAN-BUILDER,"

"Pianoforte and Harp Maker, from London," advertising for orders to be addressed to him at Orr's Entry, High Street. In an editorial of the same paper he is described as "the person who was brought over to Ireland by Mr. Bunting, and was the maker of perhaps the finest-toned instrument in the kingdom for the use of the Protestant Dissenters in Belfast. Since its erection in 1806 he had added a number of pedal pipes which render it in power equal to the organ in Westminster Abbey."

The following minutes regarding Bunting appear in the congregational books —

10th April, 1808: — "Resolved unanimously that Mr. Bunting be waited on by the chairman and Thomas Andrews, Esq., to return him the thanks of the congregation for his very great attention since the introduction of the organ, and at the same time to pay him the sum of £50 for performing thereon, said sum to be considered in full to the 1st May next, from which date he is to be paid annually the sum of £40, and to be informed that the congregation regret extremely their inability to give a sum more suitable to his very great abilities."

2nd April, 1815: — "Messrs. Ritchie and McKibben laid before the meeting a letter from Mr. E.J. Bunting, dated 25th February, expressing his consent to continue to supply the meeting-house with music for another year from 1st May next."

10th May, 1817 – “Your committee conceived it their duty to state that, having heard that Mr. Bunting had made, or was about to make, an engagement to play the organ in the Chapel-of-Ease, they thought it right to make inquiry respecting the fact, from which they find that Mr. B. had made such engagement and entered upon the duty of it two months ago.”

During Bunting’s connection with the Second Congregation a system was adopted of binding boys from the poorhouse to the organist in trust for the congregation, and they were allowed a guinea a year each “as an encouragement to learn.”

In October, 1813, a series of sacred concerts, known as

THE BELFAST FESTIVAL

was given in aid of the Old Poorhouse. The first concert was given in the theatre on Tuesday evening, 19th October, and was miscellaneous. On the following Thursday evening another concert was given in the theatre, and embraced works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Three morning concerts were given in the church of the Second Congregation, Rosemary Street, where, in addition to the organ, there was a band of 50 performers. On Wednesday there was a grand selection of sacred music; on Thursday, Haydn’s *Creation*; and on Friday Handel’s *Messiah*.

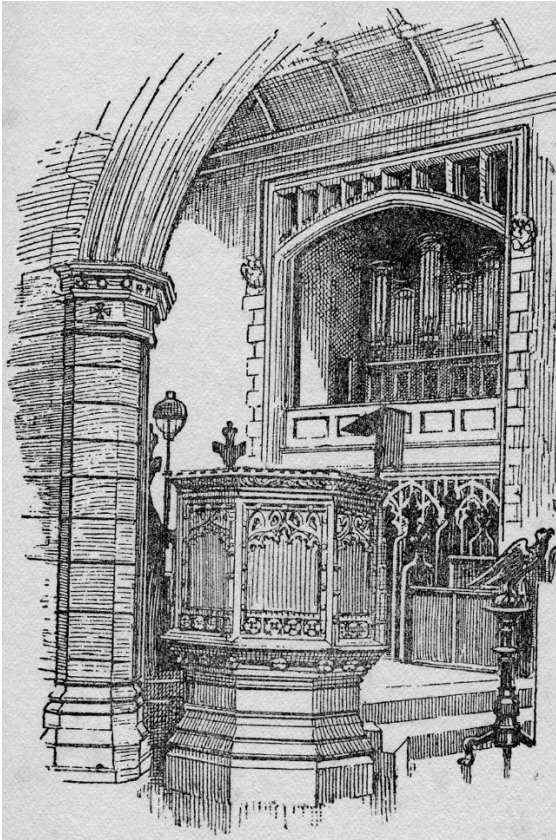
Bunting presided at the organ, and to his untiring energy was largely due the success of the Festival. One who was present at the Festival writes as follows: – “In the whole performances, both in the meeting-house and in the theatre, the trombones and the trumpets had the most astonishing effect in the choruses, which were magnificent and truly grand. The organ played by the conductor was so judiciously introduced and finely managed that it seemed to combine and harmonise the whole, and at the same time it was so delicately touched as to mingle its sound almost imperceptibly.”

The expenses of the festival amounted to £638, and there seems to be no record on the books of the Old Poorhouse of any balance having been paid over to that charity. However, the Festival seems to have been successful in arousing a good taste for music, and in the following year the Belfast Anacreontic Society was inaugurated by Vincent Guerini, Dr. S.S. Thompson, Paul L. Munster, Richard Dobbs, and John Bunting, with the Marquis of Donegall as their president.

Bunting continued his position of organist of the Chapel-of-Ease from March, 1817, till his removal to Dublin, about 1820. In 1827 he was appointed, out of twenty candidates, as organist of St. George’s Church, Dublin, where a new organ had been lately erected at a cost of £1,000. He was indebted for this appointment, at a salary of £90 per annum, to the Attorney-General (Henry Joy), afterwards Chief Baron Joy, one of the Belfast family with which Bunting had resided in his early life, and with the members of which he had always been on the most intimate terms of friendship.

Edward Bunting’s name will always be honourably associated with the preservation of Irish airs, which was the outcome of the Meeting of the Harpers in July, 1792, in the Old Belfast Exchange. But it should not be forgotten that it was due to the untiring efforts of Bunting that the first performance of Handel’s *Messiah* was given in Belfast in 1813, almost three-quarters of a century after its first performance in Dublin.

Having been moved to All Souls’ church, the Stephen White organ didn’t last too long there, though it looked well in the organ chamber (see pic on the next page from Millin’s *History*).



Money was left to All Souls' by John Montgomery, 2 Cranmore Avenue, for the purchase of a new organ in memory of Agnes Montgomery.

John's obituary in the *Northern Whig*, Tuesday 28 June 1927, page 6, records that he was connected with the linen trade for over 60 years. He had been manager of the Falls Flax Spinning Company and then of Messrs. Ewart's Mountain Mill. He became a director of the Ulster Spinning Co., Ltd., in 1892, retiring in 1917.

'Mr Montgomery was organist at Comber, of which town he was a native, for a number of years, and on coming to reside in Belfast joined the First Presbyterian (Non-Subscribing) Church, Rosemary Street. Later he took a great part in the erection of All Souls' Church, Elmwood Avenue. He was a member of the Masonic Order, being a P.M. of Lodge 272, and was a staunch Unionist.'

The old Stephen White organ was sold to Newry's First Presbyterian Church (Non-Subscribing).

Writing in the *Review - Journal of Craigavon Historical Society*, Vol.6, No.2, Elaine McClure records that organ, now powered by electricity, was opened and dedicated in November 1928 (the complete article is available online at

<http://www.craigavonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/rev/mcclureroyalorgan.html>):

'Repairs were carried out again in 1943, 1949 and 1951. In 1953, the 1806 Choir Organ stop was removed by Mr W Dilley of Queen's Buildings, Thomas Street, Portadown. Twenty-six years later, the organ was completely re-conditioned by the Wells-Kennedy Partnership of Lisburn. ... all the old pipe-work of the organ has still been maintained with the addition of some new pipe-work which replaces missing parts. The early 19th Century casework has been cleaned down, restored and wax finished and the front pipes have been splendidly gilded with 21 carat best gold leaf.'

Details of the 1979 restoration, including which pipework dates from 1806, is well worth a read and is available online at Alistair McCartney's *Northern Ireland Pipe Organs* website at

<http://www.amccartney.org/niorgan/specs/newrymsp.html>

A pic of the organ in its 'new' setting is available at <http://www.firstpresnewry.org/gallery.html>

David Byers, 8 April 2018, Belfast

In addition to the sources mentions in this article, see also:

David Steers, '*An admirable finger directed by pure taste*': *Edward Bunting and Belfast's Second Presbyterian Congregation*, *Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, Vol.25, 1996, pp.22-29.