

Lot 732 Massive three-manual organ with 30 stops and pipes, by Gulielmus Allen, London, 1806, in Gothic-pattern oak case with parqueterie panellings.

The organ was situated in Greville Smyth's Museum, which is now known as the Music Room.

Greville Smyth made alterations to Ashton Court Mansion during the late 19th century. The space, now called the Music Room, was converted from stables and harness rooms to a large room to serve as a museum to house his zoological specimens. Anton Bantock reports that it was during these alterations that the organ was moved from the Great Hall to the Museum and a new oak cabinet was made for it.

The Western Daily Press of the 3rd of June 1947 reports:

'One of the less portable of what the Army calls "attractive items" in the sale at Ashton Court which commences today, is a three-manual organ.

The catalogue bears the date 1808, but its more recent move from the hall to the music room argues a degree of portability which should comfort the would be purchaser.

Apparently an expert in that sort of thing has come down to give his advice upon the question of removal, but to our ignorant eye the organ seems to be very effectively panelled up, and one cannot even get round the back top peer at long ominous dusty pipes'.

The Western Daily Press of the 7th of June 1947 reported:

'The three manual organ was sold for £800 to Hanham Baptist Chapel. It is understood that dismantling and removing will cost another £100'.

It was used at the Chapel for 10 years until faulty wiring started a fire. The Hanham Baptist church account of the incident is that:

"The organ had been purchased in 1950 from Lady Smyth's estate, Ashton Court, at a cost of £1,500".

The fire destroyed the organ, choir stalls and two vestries. The Church was rebuilt after the fire.



Image: Mb6069 ©Bristol Culture

Hector Paterson's image shows the organ at the far end of the Music Room, the lower part obscured by several screens. The organ was well cared for even after Greville died.

Anton Bantock reported that:

'... Esme employed Mr. Marchant of Abbots Leigh to come in once a week to play the organ, whether she was in residence or not.'

The Western Daily Press of the 3rd of June told this story with the head-line: *'Organ pipes froze!'*

'A large number of people, glorying in the beauty of this majestic room, with the warm slanting sunshine investing it with a mellow glow, as well as the beautiful furniture contained there, restrained us from testing whether the tones of the organ matched its outward appearance.'

In a little black book there is a record of every time the organ has been played since 1926, with one entry recurring every January with monotonous regularity: "Out of Order: pipes frozen."

And on a music stand there is still a piece of music dedicated to Lady Grenville [sic] Smyth of Ashton Court, a march by Mr Van-Strawbenzee, sold in aid of the Bristol Royal Infirmary.'