

JOHN WARDLE



Arrival in Aberdeen

John Wardle, aged 22, arrived in Aberdeen. Quite why this occurred remains a mystery. It is likely that he, or his master, Edward Wadsworth, recognised that there was a significant market opportunity in the North-East which was not being exploited by other organ-builders.

The first Wadsworth order in Scotland was in 1879 for St Paul's, Loch Street, Aberdeen (now John Lewis's!), where John Wardle had been appointed organist after the previous one left hurriedly under a cloud. The second order was for St Bride's, Onich, North Ballachulish – about as far away from Aberdeen as you can get – and no railway service there then.

The St James' organ was ordered on 7th October 1881, and played for the first time at a service on 21st December that year. It now has 'Historic Organ' status from the British Institute of Organ Studies.

An accomplished and dedicated musician

Despite running an organ-building business, which must have taken him all over Scotland, John Wardle was devoted to Stonehaven. He was appointed Organist and Choirmaster in early 1882, soon after installing the organ here, and remained in post until his death in 1941 – 58 years' devoted service to St James'.

After his marriage to Ellen Wrigley in Oldham on 24th August 1882, they lived in a number of houses in Aberdeen. John travelled down to Stonehaven on Saturday night, staying overnight in Arduthie Street before playing on a Sunday. She was also a musician, often mentioned as a soprano soloist in concerts throughout the North East.

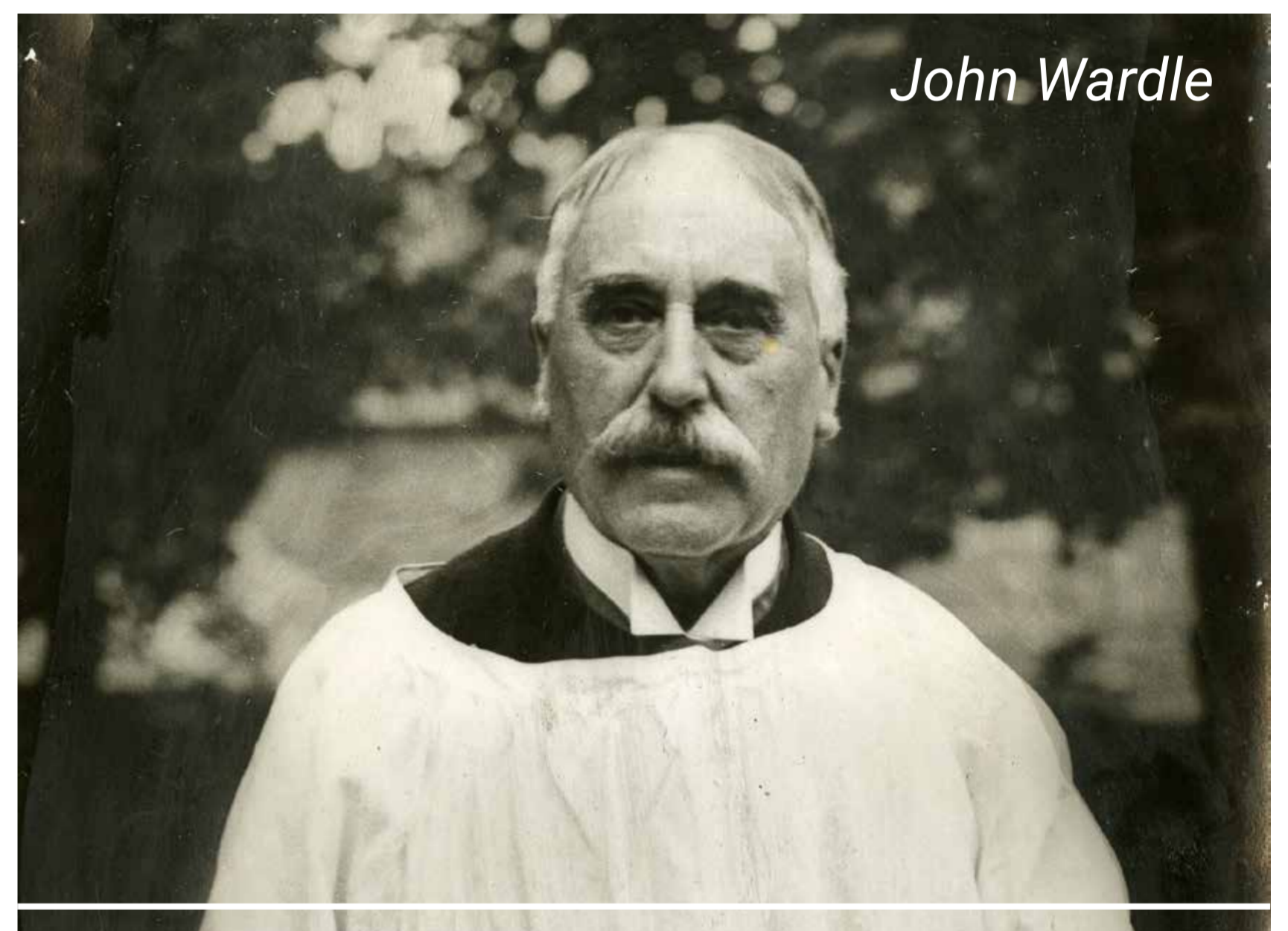
In about 1892, the family moved into Ingleside, 8 Bath Street, Stonehaven. However, some ten years later, he moved into 449 Great Western Road in Aberdeen, in order to be closer to his workshops in Hardgate.

His Family History

John was born in Chorlton-upon-Medlock, Manchester on 27th June 1854, the second of 6 children of Robert Wardle, an engine fitter in the woollen industry. After schooling, John Wardle was apprenticed to Edward Wadsworth as an organ-builder. At the age of 22, he came to Aberdeen in 1877, and brought his young wife with him in 1882.

- His eldest son, William Geoffrey did not follow his father's musical career, but became an insurance broker, and married and moved to England in 1918.
- His second son, John Cecil, did however, follow his father's footsteps, and living in the same house in Aberdeen until his death in 1955.
- His third son, Arthur Wrigley, tragically died in the Spanish 'flu outbreak in 1919, and before the birth of his son, also Arthur Wrigley Wardle, who became a quarry master in Aberdeenshire.

John Wardle – The Man



The Entrepreneur

Like his mentor, Edward Wadsworth, John Wardle struck out on his own at an early age in 1877 to establish, in effect, his own business in Aberdeen. In the early days, the organs would have been assembled in Manchester, and then shipped to their final location. By the turn of the century, John had created a full workshop in Aberdeen, and much of the work would have been done locally. When the Wadsworth company was declining after the First World War, John was managing an almost self-sufficient operation.

The Musician

John was an accomplished musician, running the choir at St James, playing for services every Sunday, but also as an accompanist for concerts throughout the North East.

The Organ-builder

Wadsworth organs were suited for parish churches. John's main claim to fame was in 'voicing' the organ, i.e. designing its pipes to achieve an excellent range of tones to suit the building. It was said that his motto was to treat the building as an extra 'stop' on the organ, using its acoustics to enhance the overall sound.

The 'in-about-comer'

Like many people before and after, John emigrated to Scotland, and clearly felt at home here, settled down and became an active member of the community. He must have felt at home in the 'English Church' at St. James, although there is no record that his wife and sons came with him to church in Stonehaven on a Sunday morning. But he was not parochial, clearly gaining friends in all the many denominations throughout Scotland who bought his organs.

More information can be found by visiting our website www.stjames-stonehaven.org.uk