

Gosport's Glory

Paul Hale

This is the tale of a project which encountered more than its fair share of all-too-common problems and obstacles. As with many other challenging activities it only reached the finishing-line due to a driving force – someone with the vision, determination, persuasiveness, credibility and sheer energy to carry it through. That person was Geoffrey Holroyde, and the organ is in Holy Trinity Church, Gosport – just across the harbour from Portsmouth.

18th-century Gosport was prosperous – the home of the Royal Navy. In 1748 the elegant and acoustically live Holy Trinity church (erected in 1696 and Classical in inspiration) gained in its west gallery an organ made in 1720 by Abraham Jordan. This organ's original home was at Canons, the sumptuous residence of the Duke of Chandos, at Little Stanmore, Middlesex. The First Duke was reputedly the wealthiest man in the country, and a patron of G.F. Handel. Family losses in the "South Sea Bubble" collapse of 1720, plus punitive duties in 1744 on the death of the First Duke, led to his son, the Second Duke, auctioning off the contents of Canons over 12 days in 1747, then demolishing the great house. The organ was bought at the auction by the shrewd congregation at Gosport; much of the remaining contents went to Great Witley Court in Worcestershire. This grand house was consumed by fire in 1938, leaving ruins (now conserved and open to the public) and the superb James Gibbs chapel with another ex-Canons organ. What is less well-known is that the superb wrought-

iron gates at Canons were bought by New College, Oxford, where they herald the entrance to the gardens, from the elegant Garden Quad.

The Jordan organ was installed at Gosport by Abraham's son, who added a Swell (or enlarged an existing Swell), bringing the organ up to a sizeable 20 stops. It cost £343 to buy, rebuild and install, a large sum at the time, the equivalent to more than £20,000 today. The 1720 case was somewhat altered owing to lack of headroom, though it retained the Chandos coat of arms above the central tower – to be seen there to this day. After alterations by five different organ builders during the next 150 years (one wonders why), the instrument was moved by Hill in 1897, and placed behind the north choir stalls, at the head of the north aisle. In this move it suffered the same fate as countless parish church organs, as the Oxford Movement swept almost all before it, re-establishing "liturgically-correct" sanctuaries for the priest, and choir-stalls with adjacent organ for the musicians. Thankfully at Gosport there was no chamber to confine the instrument, so it remained free-standing, gaining a very plain but inoffensive case front pointing south across the choir. The Jordan case was mounted on the left-hand ("bass") side of the organ, elegantly facing west, up the nave's north aisle.

Hill built a structurally new organ, using as much Jordan pipework as he could make fit his scheme (about eight ranks). The 32-stop organ was progressive in that its action was not mechanical but tubular-pneumatic, on the "charge" system that predated the later

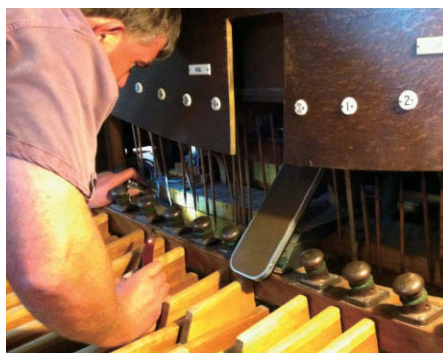


A patched-up organ pipe

"exhaust" systems. This new organ lasted until 1972 without alteration, at which point Hill, Norman & Beard ingeniously added octave couplers to the Swell, tapping in to the original charge action still in use. Clever though this was, the additional bulky machinery came to block access for tuning and maintenance, signalling the start of a slow descent into unreliability.



New console and pedals



In 2006 Geoffrey Holroyde bought a flat in Gosport. Older readers will, like me, remember his outstanding work building up and directing the choir at St Mary's, Warwick, in the 1960s, where the young Edward Higginbottom was for a while, his assistant. Holroyde also founded the renowned Chapter House Choir at Coventry Cathedral. A man of energy and vision, he was asked by the incumbent at Holy Trinity to drive a project for the restoration of the organ. Following a survey of the Jordan pipework by Dominic Gwynn, Geoffrey and the Vicar were convinced that the way forward would be to make a replica of the Jordan organ, based on the remaining Jordan ranks, adding only a pedalboard. The other option considered was a rebuilding of the Hill organ as it existed, with the

Holy Trinity Church, Gosport
*1897 Hill embracing 1720 Jordan.
 Restored Cooper 2012*

GREAT	
Double diapason	16
Open diapason	8
Open diapason	8
Stopped diapason	8
Clarionet flute	8
Principal	4
Wald flute TC	4
Twelfth	3
Fifteenth	2
Mixture	III
Trumpet	8
CHOIR	
Stopped diapason	8
Gamba	8
Dulciana	8
Principal	4
Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Cremona	8
Trumpet	8
SWELL	
Double diapason	16
Open diapason	8
Lieblich Gedackt	8
Salicional	8
Voix Celeste TC	8
Principal	4
Piccolo	2
Mixture	III
Oboe	8
Cornopean	8
Clarion	4
PEDAL	
Open diapason wood	16
Sub Bass	16
Bourdon	16
Flute	8
Trombone	16
Trumpet	8
Capture system with 6 pistons to each department and 12 generals.	
Electro-pneumatic action	

pneumatic action either restored or electrified.

When a group of Diocesan Organ Advisers gathered at Holy Trinity during their annual conference in 2007, the organ was used as a test case for us to ponder in groups, perhaps to come up with a generally accepted way forward. Would we feel that the Hill had to be sacrificed on the altar of the Jordan pipework or should Hill's work be respected as every bit as important? Should the charge-pneumatic action be retained and restored? Should the action be electrified and the console modernised? And what would best suit the needs of the church and parish? We had attempted this exercise a few years before at St Peter's, Nottingham, and the result was equally inconclusive: each huddle of advisers came

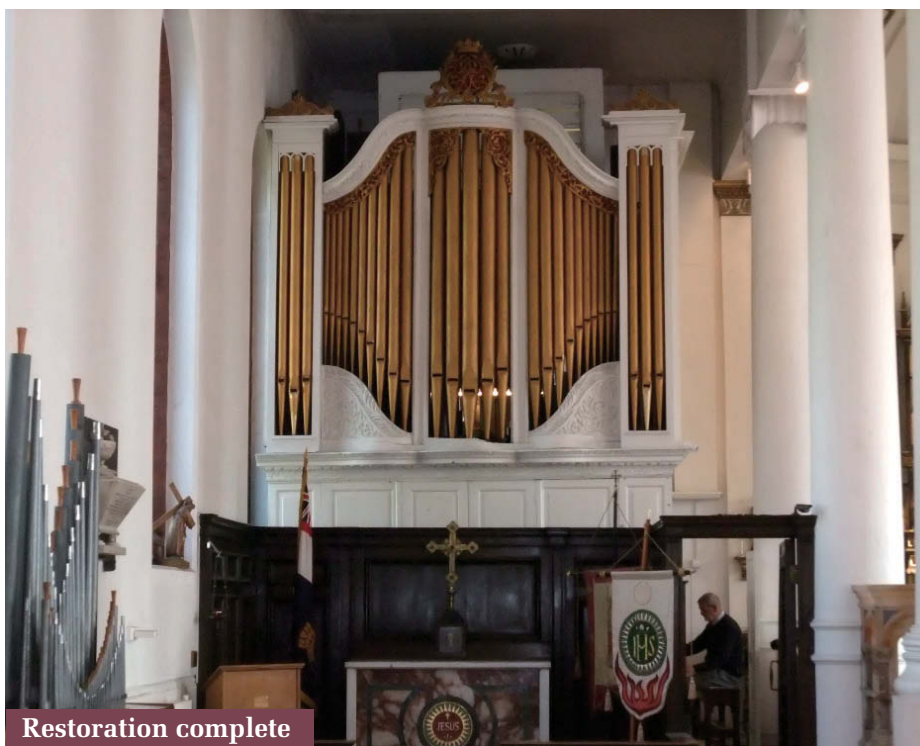
up with a different concept. At first this appeared not to help Holy Trinity, except that the great majority felt that scrapping the Hill was the wrong route to take. That view was eventually adopted by the church, and the decision was taken to restore the organ, with the inaccessible action electrified.

Isle of Wight organbuilder and IBO member, Andrew Cooper, drew up proposals, won the contract, and in 2012 (six years after the project was first mooted) carried out the work. The instrument already had a Grade 2 BIOS *Historical Organ Certificate*, and the DAC recommended that the instrument retain as much of Hill's work as possible and this helped the church with a spectacularly successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which awarded £165,000. Additional funds were raised from an "Adopt a pipe" scheme, a huge concert schedule where performers waived their fees, grants from charitable trusts, including the Hampshire Heritage Churches Trust (a major donor), and gifts begged from countless individuals.

Andrew Cooper's restoration kept the characteristic Hill console from 1897, augmenting its controls with a modern combination system. The Great Trumpet – really a solo stop – was made also to draw on the Choir, and as the Pedal 16ft Trombone. The only other tonal alteration was the addition of a gentle and much needed 16ft Lieblich Bourdon on the Pedal. Andrew Cooper presented the church with the bottom octave of the sorely needed Trombone and the organ was re-opened by Andrew Lumsden of Winchester



Case with no pipes



Restoration complete

Cathedral on 3 November 2012.

I bring this story to you this month to celebrate not the country's most spectacular or interesting organ, but to show that an ordinary parish church, if led by a determined incumbent and a committed and vigorous organist, can bring to pass a £210,000 organ project – complete with educational outreach – despite these straitened

financial times, even persuading the Heritage Lottery Fund to pay out for a less than historically "pure" organ. Their great achievement should inspire us all to "go and do likewise".

Left-hand page images
Middle: Organ builder removing pedals
Bottom: Organ stop being sawn off



Paul Hale is Cathedral Organist at Southwell and a professional organ consultant.

Whilst Organ Scholar of New College, Oxford (1971–4), Paul Hale began to write about the organ – his first published piece was in *Organists' Review*, of which he was later to become Reviews Editor and then Editor (1990–2005). A noted recitalist, lecturer and choir trainer, Paul is well-known in the UK, in Europe and in the USA. As well as being an Organ Adviser for the Dioceses of Southwell and Lincoln, Paul is an accredited member of the AIOA and has designed many new and restored organs throughout the UK. He is a diploma examiner for the RCO, Chairman of the RSCM in his area, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM for his contribution to church music. More information is available at www.PaulHale.org