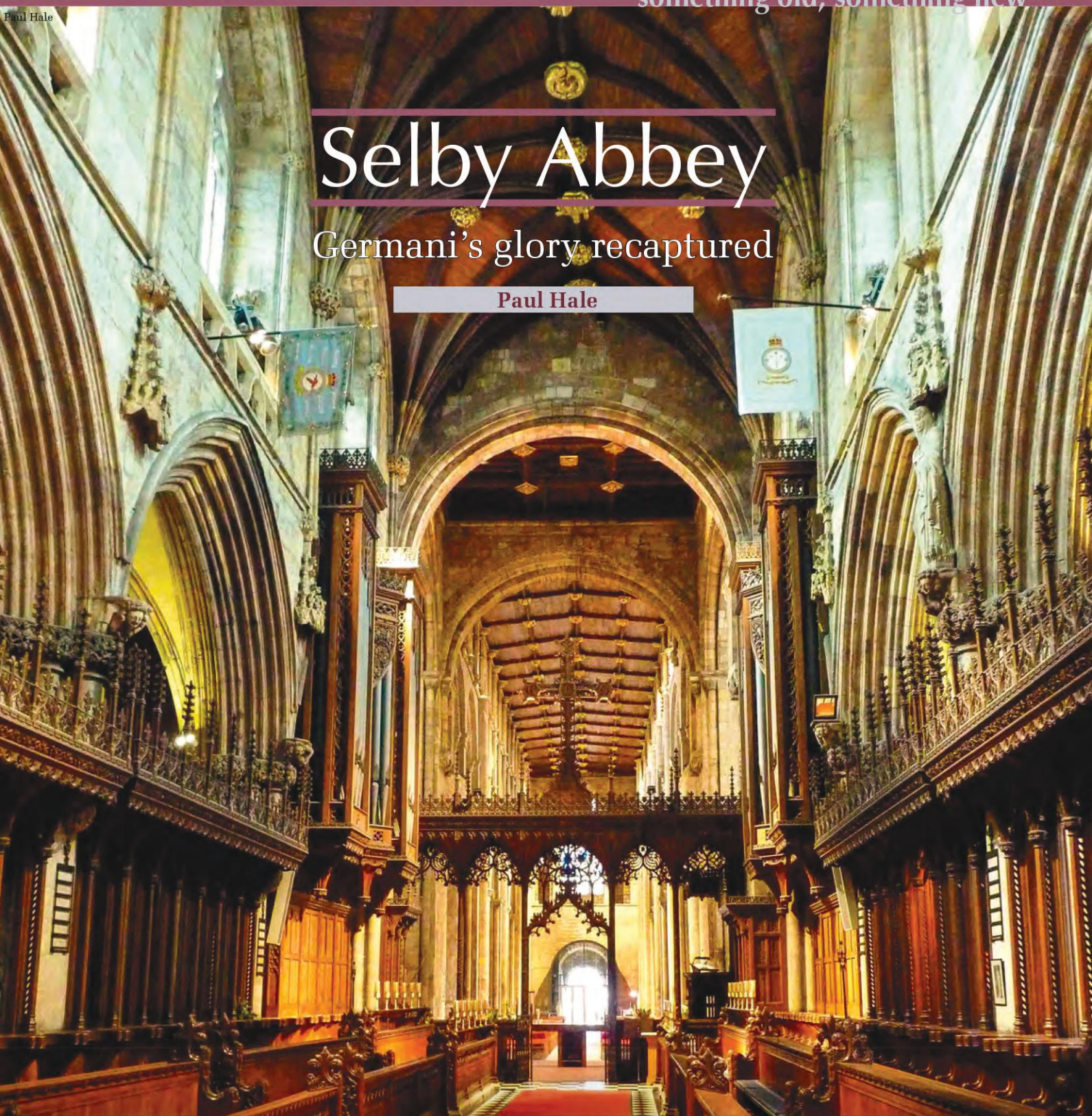


# Selby Abbey

Germani's glory recaptured

Paul Hale



A remarkable organ restoration has been quietly and diligently taking place over the past two years in Selby Abbey, one of Yorkshire's most magnificent and historic church buildings, reputedly founded by William the Conqueror in 1069. Principal Pipe Organs (York), led by Geoffrey Coffin, has completely restored the Hill organ in the Abbey. This organ was built in 1909, following a fire which started in the previous organ (a 1906 53-stop John Compton rebuild of an 1891 Binns) and largely destroyed the Abbey.

In the sumptuously rebuilt Abbey, Hill & Son installed a new four-manual 58-stop tubular-pneumatic organ in a

matched pair of cases designed by John Oldrid Scott. The Great was placed in the South case, the Swell at the top of the North case, with the Choir beneath it and the console and pneumatic relays below that. The Solo and Pedal stood north of the organ, in the Lathom chapel. The 32ft Double Open Wood stood against the north wall of the chapel, with the 32ft Contra Trombone in front of it. The Solo box originally enclosed only an Orchestral Oboe, Clarionet and Vox Humana. Also in the Lathom Chapel was the blowing apparatus, which consisted of three of Hill's hydraulic engines acting on six pairs of double-acting horizontal feeders. In all there were seventeen





**Left:** The 1909 console  
**Above:** The Hill, Norman & Beard 1924 leaflet

wind reservoirs, the wind pressures being set as: 'ordinary flue work' 3½ins; Choir 3ins; Great and Pedal reeds 7ins; Swell reeds 6ins; Solo 5ins; Tuba 12ins. In 1912 the Pedal Open Diapason 16ft (metal) was replaced with a new rank, of 11¾ins scale at CCC. In 1924 Hill, Norman & Beard produced a leaflet about the organ, from which its original specification can be gleaned.

In 1930 the Solo box was extended to enclose the entire department including the Tuba – which it still does. During 1948-50 the Hill was rebuilt with electro-pneumatic action by Hill, Norman & Beard. A new console, using the 1909 Hill stop-knobs as far as they would go, was installed at the south east end of the chancel. The north case was extended across the north aisle to contain the Solo organ; the Pedal reed unit 32/16/8 was moved to within the arch north of the organ, the Lathom Chapel being reclaimed for planned use '...as a War Memorial to the men and women of Selby' [1947 Abbey Guide]. The Pedal stopped 16ft Sub Bass pipes were relocated on the roof of the Solo box and the treble of the Open Wood was placed east of the Solo. The bottom seventeen notes of the 32ft Open Wood were

relocated horizontally in the north nave triforium, with a new Discus blower. The Choir organ filled the base of the north case, was augmented with a Dulciana unit (using the existing Dulciana rank with 24 extra pipes) 8,4,2⅓,2,III, and became enclosed in a swell-box; a Tierce was mounted on the vacated Dulciana slide. The Choir flues were revoiced to give them 'a little firmer tone' (Abbey organist Walter Hartley, in *The Organ* quarterly journal, January 1953). The Great Posaune was revoiced and placed on an elevated Roosevelt unit chest; an Octave 4ft was installed in its place, regulated to balance the Open Diapason II. The original 4ft Principal was softened, to match the Open Diapason III, making these two stops usable for choir accompaniment, along with the Dolce and flutes 8/4. The Pedal Sub Bass/Bass Flute was extended up a further 12 notes to 4ft pitch. The Solo Tuba was revoiced with more sonority (by making more treble pipes 'harmonic' and by raising its wind pressure from 12ins to 15ins), as Hartley, whose brainchild this scheme was, considered it coarse and used it only with the Concert Open Diapason 8ft. In the event this solo Diapason was removed

and replaced by a Viole d'Orchestre and Octave Viole (a clamp slide was fitted for the latter). The Solo 4ft Harmonic Flute was made available at 8ft by piston only, which drew the stop at 4ft, with the Sub Octave and Unison Off couplers (it erroneously appeared in print on the Germani LP sleeves as a separate 8ft rank).

In 1955 the console was moved to its present position on the north side of the chancel, which heralded the period of the organ's greatest fame – a fame resulting from a series of spectacular recordings by Fernando Germani, recordings which have a devoted following to this day. Franck, Reger, Frescobaldi, Widor, Liszt – all were recorded during 1962 and 1963 and issued by E.M.I. on three long-playing records. For many of my generation, Germani's recording of the three Franck *Chorals* and the Reger *Halleluja! Gott zu loben* were definitive performances which inspired and informed our youthful attempts to play these great works.

Despite the fame of the Selby organ spreading far and wide following these wonderful recordings, changes – reflecting 'neo-baroque' leanings – were made to the organ from the mid



## SELBY, YORKS

The specification of the reconstructed instrument:

10, HORNSEY, N.8. MOUview 2271



**Left:** Article in 1951 *Musical Opinion* following the HN&B rebuild **Above:** The 1950 console

Some sixty years after the superb 1950 Hill, Norman & Beard rebuild it became clear that similarly major work needed carrying out to the organ once more. The console was electrically and mechanically worn out – several knobs having been re-engraved so often that they looked appalling. The 1909 soundboards were in a terrible state; for reliability in the future they needed replacing. The 1950 (and later) wiring and electrical systems were on their last legs; the wind system leaked like a sieve, the 1909 reservoirs still being clothed with their original leather. The pipework was generally sound, despite some reed basses collapsing, though all was thoroughly dirty. Underactions, stop actions and swell

To give more details: the 1970 Great Sharp Mixture was improved and retained (it replaced an 8ft Dolce) as it adds so much to the chorus and, as well as helping project the Great down the nave, it also helps the flue chorus to stand up to the imperial Great reeds 16/8/4. The Swell, similarly, retained two Mixtures (completely

The Solo organ was even more of a challenge. On the one hand it was desired to restore some of the romantic colours lost since the 1950s, but on the other, a true ‘cornet séparé’ was considered as equally important a solo colour on an organ of this size. Principal Pipe Organs has cleverly managed to include both features, room being created by removing the useless Cymbel and the 16ft Contra Viola (which latterly had drawn only on the Pedal and had lost





**Above:** the 1950 console, restored 2016

its treble pipes), which took up a disproportionate amount of space. Thus a vintage 4ft Harmonic Flute has replaced the Spitz Principal, working remarkably well with the rare double-mouth 8ft Doppel Flute and the wide-scale Nazard (1975, revoiced with some nicking!), Piccolo (was 1975 Blockflute) and Tierce (was 1975 Larigot, later transposed to a Tierce). In addition an 8ft Viole Célestes has been added, using matching vintage pipes; a generously-scaled vintage 8ft Vox Humana too has been reinstated – so Germani's Franck registrations can, at last, be recreated. Five Solo stops retain a 73-note compass, for use with the Octave/Unison off couplers.

The Pedal has lost its 16ft Contra Viola but gained a more neutral (and therefore more useful) soft double by borrowing the Great Bourdon. The 'Great Bass' 16ft was always borrowed from the Great 16ft Double Open Diapason; this rank is now available at 8ft too, so that the Pedal has an element of choruswork on both the south and the north sides of the chancel. The Pedal upperwork along with the

Sub Bass (previously on the roof of the Solo box!) has all been planted on a new chest, the Mixture being revised to 19.22.26.29 in the 16ft series, it and the Octave/Fifteenth rank being considerably loudened. Although these ranks are on the east side of the north case, they now can be heard in balance from the nave.

Such a building – such an organ – really needs a console in the nave, for all those grand services and concerts. A large four-manual console is, of course, enormously expensive, so, with reluctance, the idea was shelved (though allowance had been made for it – wisely – in the transmission and wiring). Then the miracle occurred: a suitable console became available. Just as PPO were halfway through the Selby project the 1950 Harrison & Harrison console from Manchester Cathedral became available. Funds were raised, the console purchased, and Geoffrey Coffin's team completely rebuilt it for Selby's nave. This console is not only perfect for the job (and a very handsome piece of furniture), it has an historic significance of its own

because organist of Manchester Cathedral Norman Cocker designed this console with curved stop-jambs (perhaps influenced by his 'other job' as a cinema organist). It was the first console built with curved jambs by H&H; on a visit to their Durham factory on Royal Festival Hall business Ralph Downes spotted this console being made and immediately asked H&H to build the RFH console also with curved jambs. And so organ history was made! The curved jambs remain (albeit with new jamb plates for fewer stops) and the console was made full use of during the opening concerto concert at Selby. How happily coincidental it is that both these grand consoles date from the same year – 1950.

Selby Abbey has made remarkable strides in the past fifteen years, the building to all intents and purposes reinventing itself, through a complete physical restoration and a vigorous programme of outreach and welcome. It is hard to believe now that in 2002 the Abbey was included in the World Monuments Watch List of 'The World's 100 Most Endangered Historic Sites'.







## Specification as revised in 2016

GREAT ORGAN			CHOIR ORGAN			PEDAL ORGAN		
1	Double Open Diapason	16	30	Geigen Principal	8	51	Double Open Diapason	32
2	Bourdon	16	31	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	52	Open Diapason (wood)	16
3	Open Diapason I	8	32	Viola	8	53	Open Diapason (metal)	16
4	Open Diapason II	8	33	Gemshorn	4	54	Open Diapason (Great)	16
5	Open Diapason III	8	34	Suabe Flute	4	55	Violone	16
6	Claribel Flute	8	35	Flautina	2	56	Sub Bass	16
7	Octave	4	36	Sesquialtera 12.17	II	57	Bourdon (Great)	16
8	Principal	4	37	Mixture 19.22	II	58	Octave	8
9	Harmonic Flute	4	38	Trompette	8	59	Principal (Great)	8
10	Twelfth	2½		Tremulant		60	Violoncello	8
11	Fifteenth	2	39	Posaune (Great)	8	61	Flute	8
12	Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV	40	Tuba (Solo)	8	62	Fifteenth	4
13	Sharp Mixture 29.33.36	III	<b>SOLO ORGAN</b>			63	Stopped Flute	4
14	Contra Posaune	16	41	Doppel Flute	8	64	Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
15	Posaune	8	42	Viole d'Orchestre	8	65	Contra Trombone	32
16	Clarion	4	43	Viole Célestes (GG)	8	66	Trombone	16
<b>SWELL ORGAN</b>			44	Harmonic Flute	4	67	Fagotto (Swell)	16
17	Open Diapason	8	45	Nazard	2½	68	Trumpet	8
18	Rohr Flute	8	46	Piccolo	2	Wind pressures:		
19	Echo Dulciana	8	47	Tierce	1½	Pedal, Great and Swell flues		
20	Voix Célestes (GG)	8	48	Clarinet	8	Choir flues		
21	Principal	4	49	Vox Humana	8	Pedal and Great reeds		
22	Chimney Flute	4		Tremulant		Swell reeds		
23	Fifteenth	2	50	Tuba	8	Solo main		
24	Mixture 15.19.22	III				Solo Tuba		
25	Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV						
26	Oboe	8						
	Tremulant							
27	Contra Fagotto	16						
28	Horn	8						
29	Clarion	4						

**Large image:** The crossing and chancel from an elevated position in the nave  
**Inset top image:** the north case (Choir Organ behind newly-pierced lower panels). **Inset middle image:** the south case glowing after its restoration. **Inset bottom image:** the 2016 nave console, formerly in Manchester Cathedral

An appeal was launched for £4.5 million, estimated to be the cost of restoring the Abbey's exterior fabric. The appeal was supported by English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and many other funds; thanks to the generosity of its many supporters, the final appeal target was reached in July 2008. Since then an extraordinary additional list of projects has been completed in addition to the external stonework: re-glazing of the fourteenth century Washington Window, replacement of the heating system, restoration and re-glazing of the great East Window and restoration of the East End, restoration of the Lathom Chapel, the North Choir Aisle and

the West End, new choir lighting and an upgrading of the electrical systems, bell augmentation and tower safety works, installation of modern lavatories, conservation and repair of the medieval North Porch, conservation and relocation of the Norman font and of the carillon (both on-going). One is full of admiration for these Herculean achievements.

The building now invites all comers through its welcoming west entrance; rarely is it that the cheery café in the north transept is not busy with locals and visitors. The Abbey dominates this historic market town in just the right way – promoting pride among the locals and proving a magnet

for those who enjoy its liturgy, fine music making (directed by Dr Roger Tebbet) and regular concerts. Now that its famous organ is undoubtedly sounding finer than at any time in its history, the stage is set for a new period of glory for one of Yorkshire's 'crown jewels'. Fernando Germani would doubtless have been delighted that the organ on which he made his most famous recordings is in glorious voice once more.

I encourage readers far and wide to make their way to Selby and savour its delights.



**Paul Hale is a professional organ consultant, recitalist and choral conductor.**

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, 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](http://www.PaulHale.org)