

# A Hill refreshed

Paul Hale

The cathedrals of Wales have quietly done great things to their pipe organs over the past decade. St David's has a wonderful double case with a 'new' Willis/Harrison inside it; St Asaph has a fine case containing a 'new' Hill/Wood (of Huddersfield); Newport (HNB/Nicholson) and Brecon (HNB/Daniel) have carried out major works, and Llandaff is about to replace its Hope-Jones/HNB with a brand new Nicholson four-manual organ. Exciting times indeed. However, the largest organ in Wales will remain that in the other cathedral – Bangor – and that, too, has just undergone a complete rebuild. Bangor is the focus of this article.

As a teenager, I started reading back numbers of *The Organ Quarterly* (in Birmingham's old Central Reference Library) and buying records, as my pocket money allowed. Bangor Cathedral organ soon figured, both in a detailed article by Leslie Barnard published in 1955 and on a Rymuse EP recorded in 1965 by esteemed cathedral organist, Dr Leslie Paul. Bangor is one of the oldest sees in Great Britain; it was founded by St Deiniol in about AD 546. The first organ was installed as far back as 1359, and a new organ appeared at the Restoration – this was replaced by a Samuel Green organ in 1779. In 1873 the Quire screen was removed by Sir Gilbert Scott and a new organ by William Hill was installed in a chamber on the north side of the Quire. The Hill company returned in 1897 and rebuilt the instrument, adding a Solo Organ. The stop-list grew to 64 speaking stops and 23 couplers, making it one of the largest cathedral organs in the UK – then, as now.

It is worth remembering that the Hill company built or entirely rebuilt a host of significant cathedral, concert hall or university chapel organs in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The commonly-held view that a Father Willis (rebuilt Harrison & Harrison) is the 'default' cathedral organ is readily countered when one considers Hill's major cathedral (or similar) works, among them Lichfield; Manchester; Beverley; Arundel; Chichester; Westminster Abbey; Brecon; King's, Cambridge; Ely; Bradford; Trinity, Cambridge; St Asaph; Chester; St John's, Cambridge; Chelmsford and Worcester. The complete list is a huge body of work, of which Bangor, re-opened by Sir Walter Parratt in 1897, is another magnificent example.

Unfortunately, the Bangor organ was also one of the worst examples of attempting to squeeze a large organ into too small a chamber: its tone entirely failed to make a significant impact in the main body of the Cathedral, a building which itself suffers limited acoustic liveliness. Only the two 32ft stops and

the 16ft open metal remained out of the chamber – powerful witnesses to what the organ might have been. The 1897 Solo Organ fared the worst: there was no room in the low and cramped swell-box for the basses so they were all conveyed off – outside the box! The solo tubas were 'mitred and mitred again to follow the slope of the roof' (Barnard), cutting little ice outside the chamber. The Hill company must surely have been frustrated in having thus to entomb such a potentially fine example of its work.

However, Hill's organ worked well enough so the Cathedral musicians (between 1871 and 1927, Roland Roger and T. Westlake Morgan) soldiered on, as did the young Leslie Paul, appointed in 1927. After 27 years, Paul managed to persuade the Dean & Chapter to release the organ from its gloomy prison. His years as organist coincided with the rise



*Bangor Cathedral chancel with small case*

## Bangor Cathedral Compton specification

GREAT ORGAN		
Double Open Diapason		16
Bourdon		16
First Diapason		8
Second Diapason		8
Third Diapason		8
Spitzflöte		8
Claribel		8
Stopped Diapason		8
Octave		4
Principal		4
Stopped Flute		4
Twelfth	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	
Fifteenth	2	
Mixture	IV	
Contra Posaune		16
Posaune		8
Clarion		4

  

SOLO ORGAN (enclosed)		
Harmonic Flute		8
Viole d'Orchestre		8
Viole Celeste		8
Harmonic Flute		4
Cor Anglais		16
Clarinet	B	8
Orchestral Oboe		8
Vox Humana		8

  

SOLO ORGAN (unenclosed)		
Contra Tuba		16
Tuba		8
Tuba Minor		8
Tuba Clarion		4

  

PEDAL ORGAN		
Open Wood	C	32
Major Bass		16
Open Metal		16
Open Wood	C	16
Open Diapason	Great	16
Violone		16
Bourdon		16
Quint		10 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Octave		8
Violoncello		8
Flute		8
Fifteenth		4
Mixture		III
Contra Trombone	E	32
Tuba Bass	Solo	16
Ophicleide		16
Trombone	E	16
Trumpet	E	8

  

SWELL ORGAN (enclosed)		
Bourdon		16
Open Diapason		8
Rohr Flute		8
Viola da Gamba		8
Voix Celeste		8
Echo Gamba		8
Principal		4
Flauto Traverso		4
Ottavina		2
Mixture	IV	
Oboe		8
Contra Fagotto		16
Cornopean		8
Clarion		4

  

CHOIR ORGAN (enclosed)		
Lieblich Bourdon		16
Contra Dulciana	A	16
Geigen Principal		8
Stopped Diapason		8
Dulciana	A	8
Vox Angelica		8
Viola		8
Unda Maris		8
Gemshorn		4
Suabe Flute		4
Rohr Flöte		4
Dulcet	A	4
Nazard		2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Dulcet Twelfth	A	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Harmonic Piccolo		2
Dulcet Fifteenth	A	2
Tierce		1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Dulcet Mixture		III
Double Clarinet	B	16
Clarinet	B	8

  

CHOIR PEDAL ORGAN		
Lieblich Bourdon	Choir	16
Contra Dulciana	A	16
Dulciana	A	8
Clarinet	B	16

numerous stops derived from parent ranks. The Swell was generally left alone (there being no room for additional chests) but the Great, Pedal and (particularly) Choir organs were greatly augmented by diapason, Dulciana, flute and reed ranks. At Bangor there was no need for much of this, as the organ was already remarkably complete. The only rank added at multiple pitches was a 16ft–2ft Dulciana on the Choir Organ (based on the Hill Dulciana). The Pedal Organ was augmented by only two further extensions and by the common expediency of borrowing several manual 16ft stops, including a new 16ft extension of the Hill Choir Clarinet. The Solo organ remained in the chamber – though speaking directly out of it, and the new console was placed on a platform on the south side of the Quire. The Choir also gained an independent Nazard and Tierce (a sign of the times) and Dulciana Mixture, the Pedal 8ft Trumpet giving way to a Mixture III (still on the Hill pedal slider soundboard). The Swell and Great Mixtures were re-arranged. The Solo gained a Viole Celeste in place of a Musette, and a new Tuba Minor to partner the revoiced Hill Tubas.

Compton's work (which also included a large amount of rescaling and revoicing of chorus-work and reeds on higher pressure) had transformed the organ and made it fit for purpose. It was opened on St Peter's Day, 29 June 1954, with a Dedication service and recitals by Sir William Harris (who had advised) and Dr Paul. The leaflet published at the time (its cover is shown on the next page) lists the Compton men who worked on the project; notable among them is Johnny Degens ('Voicing Finishing Department'), who a few years later left (with console-hand Ted Rippin) to found the next generation of 'progressive' organ-builders: Degens & Rippin (later, Grant, Degens & Bradbeer).

Fifty years on it was time for the organ to be revisited, so Andrew Goodwin, Leslie Paul's successor, called in David Wells (Organ Builders) of Liverpool. David writes:

'The need for extensive work was growing as the Compton electrical components started to fail, but matters were brought to a head by the ongoing development work in the

to eminence of the firm founded by John Compton. Compton's work was popular with Leslie Paul's generation (players such as Percy Whitlock spring to mind), so it was not surprising that Dr Paul turned to them (in the mid-1950s still doing sound work) to rebuild and electrify the Bangor organ. Other firms also tendered, but Compton won the contract; Compton had significant cathedral experience and was used to the difficult positions in

which cathedral organs often had to be placed. His work in many other places showed that large instruments and awkward sites held no terrors for him.

Comptons were allowed to remove the bulk of the organ from the chamber, setting it up proudly in the north transept. Usually Compton had a standard method of rebuilding an organ: he would keep the slider soundboards and add extra unit chests to augment the stop-list with



Cover of the 1954 Dedication Service Booklet for the Bangor Cathedral organ



Leslie Paul playing the Compton console, c.1960

Cathedral. This work made claims on some of the space at the east end of the north aisle, then occupied by the Solo and Choir divisions. In conjunction with resulting re-arrangement, the console was moved from the south side over to the north side in front of the main organ and the Choir division mounted over it in a “new” case, as designed and managed by the Architect with his contractor, using reclaimed material.’

Mechanically it was a straightforward task, all the usual jobs needing doing. The main section of the organ was dismantled where necessary for cleaning and an overhaul of the manual soundboards, reservoirs and pipework. The Solo and Choir sections were completely removed to facilitate a new meeting room, kitchen and toilets.

The Hill external lever-motor

actions were replaced with new all-enclosed electro-pneumatic actions. Existing key actions with enclosed power motors were completely restored. A new Taylor solid-state transmission system controls couplers and derivations. The console was completely refurbished with new electrical systems and moved from the south to the north side of the chancel, elevated and enclosed at the front of the organ, behind new panelling.

The smaller space available for the Choir Organ reduced it in size as listed below. However, five of the removed Choir ranks were transferred to the enclosed Solo, whose revised stop-list is printed below.

The Pedal stop-list remains the same as Compton’s, losing only the old Choir Lieblich Bourdon and the 8ft Dulciana; the Great and Swell also remain the same.

It is a difficult organ to photograph, so I hope you enjoy the more historical approach we have taken in illustrating this article with archive material.

Wales has much to be proud of in its thriving cathedral music tradition. It is marvellous to see this great Bangor instrument once more in perfect health; we now look forward to developments at Llandaff, more of which anon.

### Bangor Cathedral revised specification

CHOIR ORGAN (unenclosed)			SOLO ORGAN (enclosed)				
Above console behind North chancel arch			West facing in new chamber				
Geigen	8		Harmonic Flute	8	Clarinet	8	ex Choir (unit)
Stopped Diapason	8		Viole d’Orchestre	8	Orchestral Oboe	8	
Gemshorn	4		Viole Celeste	8	Vox Humana	8	
Rohr Flöte	4		Dulciana	8	Tremulant		
Fifteenths	2	contemporary pipework	Unda Maris	8			(unenclosed)
Flautina	2	ex Suabe Flute	Viola	4	Contra Tuba	16	
Cornet	12 17 II	old Nazard & Tierce	Harmonic Flute	4	Tuba	8	
Tremulant			Harmonic Piccolo	2	Tuba Minor	8	
Clarinet	8	(Solo)	Double Clarinet	16	Tuba Clarion	4	