

Paul Hale

Up the Hill to Ealing

The story of an organ transplant

On 29th August 2007 a group of Diocesan Organ Advisers, attending their annual Conference, were taken to see and hear the Hill organ in St Jude's church, Southsea, near Portsmouth. We were struck with the fine tone and comprehensive tonal appointments of the organ but left somewhat aghast when informed that this distinguished instrument was too large to be accommodated within the revised and reordered church. Discussion then took

place both as to what sort of organ could be fitted into the refitted church, and as to where such a large instrument, once redundant, might find another home. We left the church full of uncertainty.

Four years later, writing this the day after another such conference, it is a great joy to be able to record that not only has St Jude's found a worthy replacement organ but that the St Jude's Hill has itself found a splendid new

home. St Jude's will install a 28-stop 3-manual 1905 Harrison & Harrison organ from Tabernacl Aberystwyth in their redesigned building when funds are available (see National Pipe Organ Register N11719). From a rather awkward position at St Jude's, which led to balance problems, the Hill has now found a commanding position in the west gallery of St Barnabas's church, Ealing, London.

The instrument itself was first constructed by Gray & Davison in 1871/2 using some pipes from an older, fire-damaged organ in the church. It was reconstructed and enlarged by Hill in 1877, fitted with tubular pneumatic pedal action by Hill in 1901, and with tubular pneumatic action throughout and a new console by Hill in 1912, was repaired by HNB in 1948 following war damage, and last cleaned by HNB in 1967.

Consultant for the project has been Paul Joslin, and Nicholsons have carried out what turned out to be a major project. Paul has researched and supplied much interesting background information, from which I will now quote:

In 1916 Ernest Sherman completed, or to be correct *almost* completed his largest church, St Barnabas, Pitshanger Lane, Ealing, London W5; the west-end towers and a chapel remain incomplete to this day. Significantly a large organ by Henry Willis & Sons was envisaged for a revised west-end layout of the church. Unusually for an Anglican church the choir sings from this position; a near perfect location for sound projection throughout the building. The church authorities ran out of money. Sherman was sacked because he had sanctioned all the building material to be hoisted in place for the completion of the towers without permission from the church! Sadly, the Willis organ was also a casualty of this shortage of funds. Had it ever been installed, this organ would have been one of the finest romantic instruments in West London. As a 'temporary' measure a small second-hand two manual organ by Norman & Beard c.1912 was obtained and located centrally on the West Gallery. With a rebuild in 1966 by Noterman this organ, which was never designed to fill such a cavernous church, soldiered on until 2010. The church has an enviable programme of music to this day including regular symphony orchestra concerts, which are usually a sell-out. The weekly Friday lunchtime concerts are rarely attended by fewer than 80; the list of artists is astonishing, many of international standing.

The St Jude's Hill organ appeared to provide



St Barnabas, Ealing, specification

GREAT		SWELL	
Double Diapason	16	Bourdon	16
Open Diapason no.1	8	Open Diapason	8
Open Diapason no.2	8	Stopped Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8	Keraulophon	8
Claribel	8	Salcional	8
Gamba	8	Vox Angelica	8
Principal	4	Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4	Fifteenth	2
Twelfth	2 ^{2/3}	Piccolo	2
Fifteenth	2	Mixture (15.19.22)	III
Mixture (15.19.22)	III	Double Trumpet	16
Mixture (26.29)	II	Cornopean	8
Posaune	8	Oboe	8
Trumpet	8	Vox Humana	8
Clarion	4	Clarion	4
<i>Swell to Great</i>		<i>Tremulant</i>	
<i>Great to Pedal Pistons</i>		<i>Swell Octave</i>	
		<i>Swell Sub-Octave</i>	
PEDAL		CHOIR	
Open Diapason	16	Lieblich Bourdon	16
Violine	16	Lieblich Gedackt	8
Bourdon	16	Dulciana	8
Quint	12	Gamba	8
Principal	8	Gemshorn	4
Bass Flute	8	Suabe Flute	4
Trombone	16	Flageolet	2
<i>Swell to Pedal</i>		Clarinet	8
<i>Great to Pedal</i>		<i>Swell to Choir</i>	
<i>Choir to Pedal</i>		<i>Great Reeds on Choir</i>	

Further detail can be found on the National Pipe Organ Register (NPOR)
 BIOS Website reference: E01B02 Version 3.1

Left: Organ in its new home, St Barnabas, Ealing
 Above: As the organ looked in St Jude's, Southsea



an ideal opportunity for St Barnabas to install an organ as comprehensive as that planned by Willis in 1914. This has now come to pass. Joslin picks up the story:

How should this organ now relocated in London be assessed? Is it the same organ as that heard in St Jude's 1877–2010? The answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. The specification remains unchanged but for the first time the organ speaks from an unhindered location so it does sound different.

The Swell and Choir are both beautifully balanced either side of the Great; trio sonatas are now a delight to play with equal balance between the two departments. The 'fonds' sound has more than a hint of the French sound with fluework breathing in that distinctive way. Guy Russell, tonal director at Nicholson & Co. said the Vox Humana is one of the finest he's heard on any British organ. The roar of the Swell chorus reeds can for the first time be really heard (previously tucked away on a 'shelf', the department sounded nearer to Southsea Common than in the church). The Great now needs to be used with care. The brilliance of the five ranks of Mixtures can only

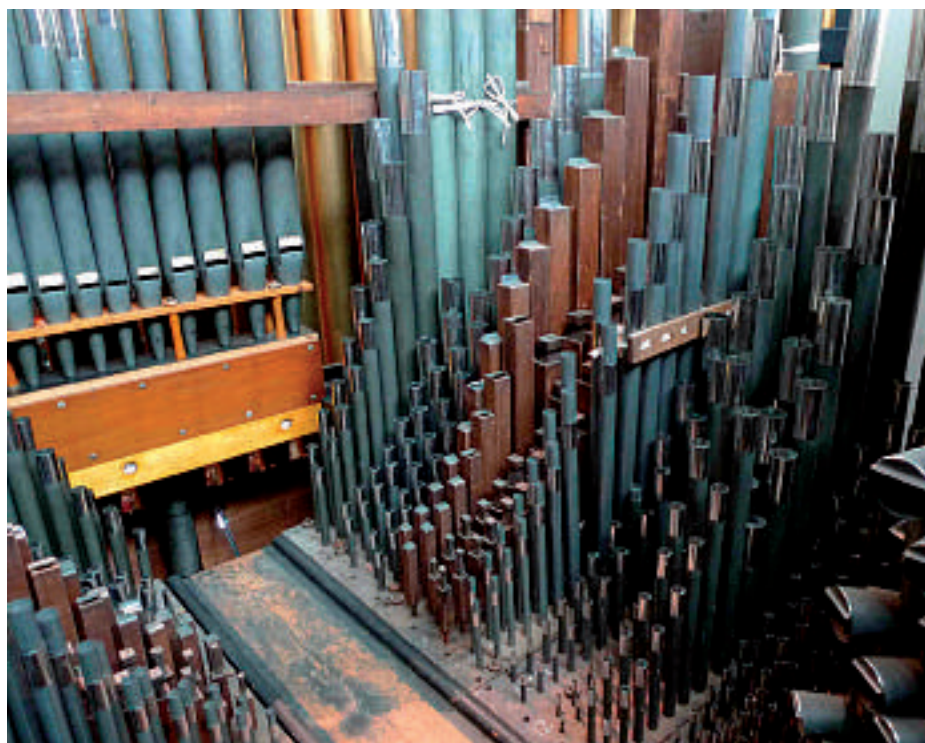
be occasionally used; they are big. The three reeds and pedal Trombone are also definitely climax stops.

The specification, on p.29, is unchanged from St Jude's though with the addition of a *Great Reeds on Choir* transfer.

Let us turn to Andrew Moyes (Managing Director of Nicholson Organs) to learn about the technical challenges; he has much of interest to say:

When you have to change the shape

of an organ, a simple transplant can become very messy! It would have been perverse and expensive to redesign the charge pneumatic action to suit the new layout. In any case, the action was not original – this organ has had successively tracker, Barker lever, tubular pneumatic – so a pragmatic approach was taken and it was converted to exhaust electro-pneumatic.



Above: Choir organ as it is now
Right: Great organ as it is now

The structural strength of the gallery was a major concern. The front of the gallery had been altered in the past and cantilevered forwards in such a way that it would not take the weight of the new organ. Once the exact position of the building-frame posts had been determined using CAD, and the weights on them calculated, new steel beams were run within the thickness of the gallery to take the weight of the heaviest posts.

The change from a square chamber to a shallow but wide layout to fit the gallery had major repercussions:

- The original main case is flanked on one side by the original side case and on the other by a mirror-image copy. When the case was first drawn, it did not look right as the centre flat was lower than the other two – the case ‘sagged’ in the middle – so it was raised and a panel inserted over the console. The two ‘side’ cases had to be cantilevered out at impost level to preserve gallery access from the staircase.
- The largest reservoirs would not fit and had to be replaced by smaller ones.
- The walls of the original chamber formed the original swell box so a new box had to be made.
- A new building frame was made using old timbers where possible.
- The original layout of pedal chests with cross-trackering (one soundboard and four chests all with a common under-action) was much too deep for the new case. Separate actions were provided so the chests could be distributed within the available space.

The Great soundboard had three sets of pallets worked from a common under-action; two for the flues and one for the reeds. The pallets for the reeds were given a separate under-action (making the *Great Reeds on Choir* possible) while the other two sets of pallets were replaced by a single larger set in order to eliminate the external trackering – simpler and quieter.

The appearance of the 1911 console was preserved except for the increased complement of pistons and the addition of a *Great Reeds on Choir* stop, both at the client's request.

The pitch was very sharp – 14Hz above A=440. The church wanted the organ at standard pitch as it will be used in concerts with orchestras. Some pipes would retune, others required longer slides but approximately 25% of the pipes needed lengthening or an extra pipe inserted.

This shows us that there is rarely such a thing as an easy organ transplant other than for small free-standing

instruments. The cost is considerable and the work much greater than people often imagine. However, all the effort was very much worthwhile and the project rendered possible by a bequest, as Paul Joslin points out:

Due credit must be given to a generous bequest by the late Hazel Baker, organist for forty years, without whom the project could never have succeeded. Credit also to Dr Hugh Mather, organiser of endless successful fundraising concerts, and to John Hudson, Chairman of the Organ Committee and administrator of the whole project. This is an organ to go and see and hear. You will always receive a warm welcome at the church.

Andrew Moyes took many photographs of the organ and he has kindly allowed us to use a selection to illustrate this article.

The organ transplant industry is clearly alive and well!

Paul Hale is Director of Music at Southwell Cathedral, Nottinghamshire.



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 Association of Independent Organ Advisers and has designed new and restored organs for cathedrals, churches, concert halls and universities 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

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PaulHale@diaphone.clara.net www.PaulHale.org
4 Vicars' Court, Southwell, Notts NG25 0HP 01636 812228