

# Willis & Walker at the Whitworth Hall

Paul Hale

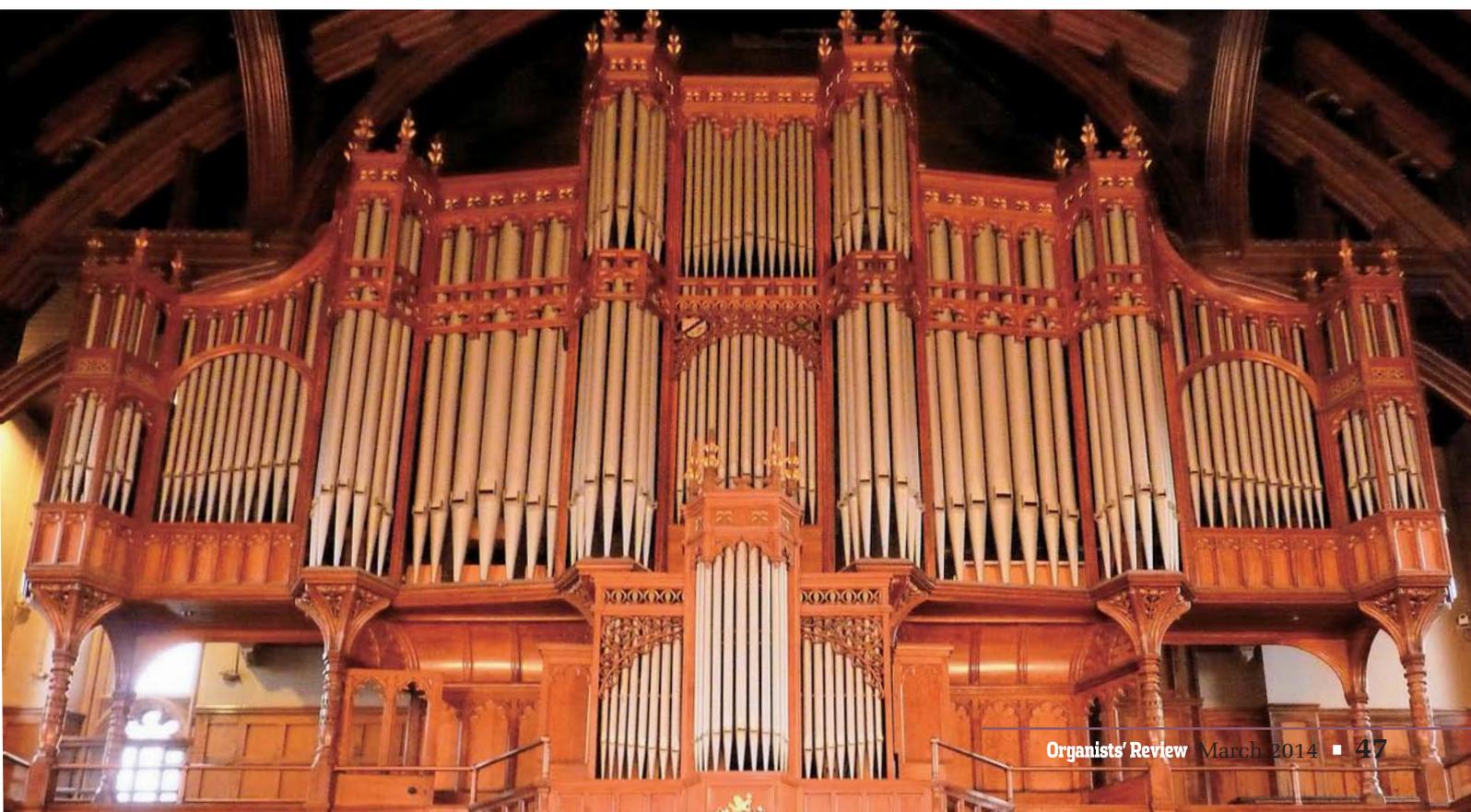
Manchester University has long held a fine reputation for the study and performance of music. This was enhanced as long ago as 1902, when in the Whitworth Hall a new organ was installed, built by Henry Willis & Sons Ltd. This was an early and significant essay by Henry Willis II, who had only just taken over the famous company on his father's death. In the same year Willis built a similar, somewhat larger, organ for St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, which remains one of the most renowned organs in Ireland. The Whitworth Hall organ is currently being restored by David Wells, though today it is far from being the instrument as built in 1902, as I shall relate. Here is its story to date – a second article will describe its recent refurbishment when that is complete.

The Whitworth Hall organ was the gift of Mrs E.A. Rylands, the third wife and widow of entrepreneur and philanthropist John Rylands, Manchester's first multi-millionaire textile manufacturer. It was inaugurated by the University Organist, Dr James Kendrick Pyne (1852–1938), at the opening ceremony of the Whitworth Hall, on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1902. Kendrick Pyne – a pupil of S.S. Wesley – was the leading organist in the city, being Cathedral Organist, professor at the Royal Manchester College of Music and organist of Manchester Town Hall, where he gave many recitals.

The 1902 specification (as printed in *The Organ Quarterly Journal*, April 1947) can be seen on the next page. In that article the

well-known organ writer, Reginald Whitworth, discusses the organ; his comment and interesting story are next to the specification.

The observation about the lack of mutation ranks is pertinent, for in the year following Whitworth's article (1948) Willis III returned to restore the organ, when changes were made to several ranks of pipes to bring the instrument's tonal resources more into line with the then current thinking (among other tasks, the 32ft reed was revoiced louder); the swell pedals had already been "balanced" by then (in 1939). Respected veteran Manchester organist Mr Harold Dawber helped draw up the plans. See the next page for the specification of the organ following the 1948 work as printed in a Willis leaflet.

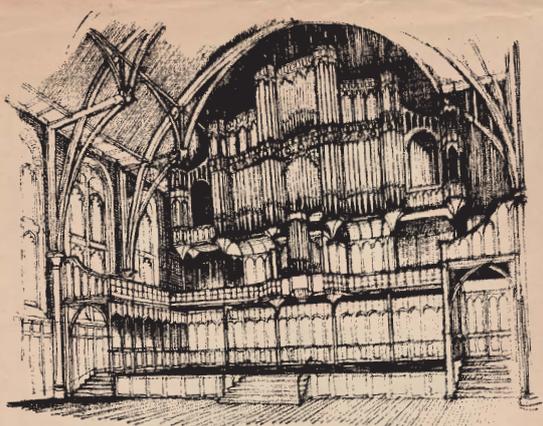




The major changes from the 1902 stop-list are found on the Choir Organ, which evolved from being a rather bland department into something with more colour. Even for the time this was a conservative rebuild, doubtless owing to the age and taste of Harold Dawber. Dawber was born in Wigan in 1886, serving as

with their sonorous majesty, towards lighter and brighter sounds, sounds inspired by the stops used by the leading Baroque European composers such as Buxtehude, Bach and Couperin, together with their Spanish and Italian contemporaries. For a university organist and organ teacher these registers would have

J.W. Walker to transform the organ, indeed Downes visited to comment on the scheme which Ann Avery and Walker's progressive voicer – Dennis Thurlow, later joint owner of Nicholson's – were conceiving. Encouraged by her faith in this style of organ Walker proposed a similarly thorough and radical scheme to those they had



**'Its own most eloquent advocate'**

AMONG THE MANY ENDEAVOURS of which Manchester University may be justly proud can be ranked the new University organ in the Whitworth Hall.

It has been designed to re-create vividly and authentically, for recital purposes, the entire range of organ music, particularly that of the great historical traditions.

Voiced on classical lines to ensure the maximum vitality of speech, this instrument will also lend colour and dignity to ceremonial occasions and will, we feel sure, prove to be its own most eloquent advocate.

Opening recitals were given, in November 1962, by Allan Wicks of Canterbury Cathedral, and Dr. Francis Jackson of York Minster.

**SPECIFICATION**  
Compass of Manuals, CC to C, 61 notes  
Compass of Pedals, CCC to G, 32 notes

<b>Great Organ</b>		<b>Pedal Organ</b>	
1. Double Open Diapason	16ft. 61 pipes	38. Contra Bass	32ft. 56 pipes
2. Open Diapason	8 61 pipes	39. Open Wood	16 32 notes
3. Spitzflute	8 61 pipes	40. Principal from No. 1	16 32 notes
4. Octave	4 61 pipes	41. Bourdon from No. 38	16 32 notes
5. Koppflute	4 61 pipes	42. Quintation from No. 13	16 32 notes
6. Twelfth	2 61 pipes	43. Octave	16 32 notes
7. Super Octave	2 61 pipes	44. Bass Flute from No. 38	8 32 pipes
8. Mixture (19-22-26-29)	4 ranks 244 pipes	45. Choral Bass	8 32 notes
10. Bourdon	8 61 pipes	46. Mixture (19-22-26-29)	4 ranks 32 pipes
11. Orchestral Trumpet	16 61 pipes	47. Trombone	16 128 pipes
12. Clarion	8 61 pipes	48. Bassoon from No. 22	16 44 pipes
	4 61 pipes	49. Octave Trombone from No. 47	8 32 notes
		50. Sibilancy	4 32 pipes
<b>Swell Organ</b>		<b>Couplers</b>	
13. Quintation	16ft. 61 pipes	51. Positive to Pedal	8
14. Open Diapason	8 61 pipes	52. Great to Pedal	8
15. Gedackt	8 61 pipes	53. Swell to Pedal	8
16. Viola	8 61 pipes	54. Swell to Great	8
17. Gemutshorn	8 61 pipes	55. Positive to Great	8
18. Chantry Flute	4 61 pipes	56. Swell to Positive	8
19. Bass Flute	4 61 pipes	57. Great and Pedal Combinations Coupled	8
20. Scapillars (12-17)	2 61 pipes		
21. Mixture (22-26-29)	2 ranks 183 pipes	<b>Accessories</b>	
22. Bomboon	3 ranks 183 pipes	Five Thumb Pistons to Positive	
23. Trumpet	16 73 pipes	Five Thumb Pistons to Great	
24. Hautboy from No. 22	8 61 pipes	Five Thumb Pistons to Swell	
		Five Toe Pistons to Pedal	
		Five Toe Pistons to Swell (duplicating)	
		One Reversible Thumb Piston for Great to Pedal	
		One Reversible Toe Piston for Great to Pedal	
		One Reversible Thumb Piston for Swell to Great	
		One Reversible Thumb Piston for Positive to Great	
		Balanced Swell Pedal	
		Detached Drawstop Console	
		Electro-pneumatic Action	
<b>Positive Organ</b>			
25. Bourdon	36ft. 61 pipes		
26. Principal	4 61 pipes		
27. Rohlflute	4 61 pipes		
28. Nazard	4 61 pipes		
29. Octave	2 61 pipes		
30. Tierce	2 61 pipes		
31. Larigot	1 61 pipes		
32. Sifflet	1 61 pipes		
33. Cymbal (26-29-33-36)	1 61 pipes		
34. Cromhorn	4 ranks 244 pipes		
35. Tremulant	8 61 pipes		
36. Bourdon from No. 10	16 61 notes		
37. Orchestral Trumpet from No. 11	8 61 notes		
37. Clarion from No. 12	4 61 notes		

Specification has been drawn up in collaboration with Miss Ann Avery, University Organist and Lecturer in Music.

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Registered Trade Mark

J.W. WALKER & SONS LTD., BRAINTREE ROAD, RUISLIP, MIDD. VIKING 6501 (7 lines)

The 1962 Walker leaflet

assistant organist at Manchester Cathedral before becoming organist and choirmaster of St George's, Stockport from 1908 to 1956 (with a six-year break), also organist and choirmaster to the Hallé and organ professor, Registrar and Warden of the Royal Manchester College of Music (later the Royal Northern College of Music). He died in 1956.

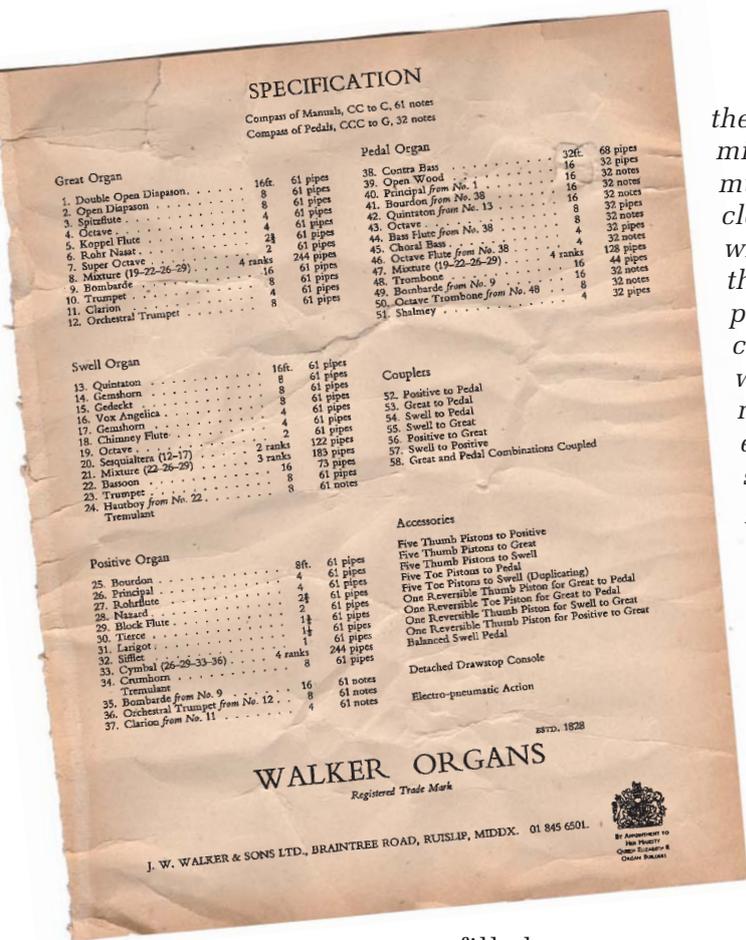
In 1957 Ann Avery (later Ann Bond) became University Organist and Lecturer in Music, and also for a period President of the Manchester Organists' Association. It is to her era that the next chapter in the story of this organ belongs.

During the 1950s the condition of the organ seriously deteriorated, to the extent that major work became due by 1960. Informed taste was changing rapidly away from its largely Edwardian tones,

been vital, in order that students came to understand historically appropriate registration, so Ann Avery sought out organ-builders who were establishing reputations as progressive, informed and modern in outlook. One firm fitted the bill perfectly: J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd of Ruislip, whose work she had observed and enjoyed in London, especially their 1959 organ in the Italian Church, Hatton Garden.

Ralph Downes (designer of the RFH organ) collaborated with J.W. Walker in a number of projects in the 1950s and 1960s, notably his own church, the London (Brompton) Oratory (1952-4) and Buckfast Abbey (1952). Downes' influence played a part in encouraging Ann Avery to persuade the University to employ

carried out for Downes, indeed a scheme notably similar to the Hatton Garden organ. Thus they replaced almost the entirety of the Willis ranks (some 3,000 pipes, including the never very successful but space-consuming 32ft Contra Posaune) with their own, rearranging the internal layout of the instrument, fitted electro-pneumatic mechanisms to the Willis soundboards for Great, Swell and Choir/Positive departments (there were new unit chests for the Pedal ranks), installed a modern space-saving wind system (based on somewhat experimental Schwimmers), a new blowing plant, and of course an all-electric console, detached and placed at the right-hand end of the curved organ gallery. A Positive section with its own new casework



the disposition of the mixture-work and mutations, and the clarity of the voicing, will greatly favour the convincing performance of contrapuntal music, which one can rightly regard as the essence of true organ style. A feature of particular interest is the Positive organ, occupying the site of the old console, which replaces the old Choir Organ and is in the style of the classical Rückpositiv. However, organ music since Bach has not been neglected in the design.

In particular, the Bombarde group of reeds will lend striking colour to much Romantic and modern music. These reeds are playable from either the Great or Positive manuals, and they replace the tubas of the old Solo manual, which have been eliminated. The resulting three-manual organ, with a fine new detached console, was completed in September 1962.

The leaflet published by J.W. Walker in 1962 can be seen on the previous page.

Some aspects of the scheme did not work out perfectly in practice. Thus, after Brian Runnett's departure, his successor, Keith Elcombe (also fresh from Cambridge) commissioned Walkers to move some ranks around and alter or replace others. Their 1969 leaflet, above, gives the specification, which has remained tonally the same until now. Sadly Dr Elcombe died unexpectedly in 2002 but his length of service ensured a degree of continuity in the treatment of this organ.

Over the years the organ has had upgrades to its electrical systems.

The relays and the capture system were replaced with a processor-based transmission supplied by A.J. Taylor. New thumb-pistons including generals were fitted, the console drawstop solenoids and slider machines replaced with Taylor solenoids, and the pedalboard contacts improved. The company maintaining the organ since 1992 – David Wells of Liverpool – in addition carried out a limited but necessary programme of releathering, and raised the Swell organ to a higher position in order for its tone to project better, also installing baffle-boards over the Great and behind the Positive for the same reason. The acoustics of the Hall do not help the organ.

Nearly all the fluework is Walker. The reeds are mainly Willis, but all were rescaled and revoiced with French “boat” shallots. The Orchestral Trumpet is an important stop, a first for Walkers, in the manner of the famous Hill, Norman & Beard *Trompeta Rèal* at St John's College, Cambridge. It is of small scale with prodigious “bells” to cap the resonators, all mitred at 90°; it stands above the Swell box at the very top of the organ. Walkers went on to make at least three similar stops out of brass, projecting in the Spanish manner from the front of the organ cases at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, Wimborne Minster and Holy Trinity, Sloane Square, London (recently lamentably scrapped). This effective and important prototype dominates the *tutti* at the Whitworth Hall in no uncertain manner, even though its thin and penetrating tone is not one currently fashionable in the UK. Willis slider soundboards remain for the Great, Swell and Positive.

Although there is a degree of subjectivity about the tone of any organ, it can reasonably be argued that the pendulum has swung back from the extreme and inadequately informed neo-Baroque tendencies of the 1960s, towards a broader appreciation of a wider range of music and thus of organ sonorities. At Manchester, as elsewhere in the

filled the original console position.

Such was the immediate impact of the organ that Brian Runnett was attracted in 1963 to replace Ann Avery as University Organist. A stellar player, fresh from St John's College, Cambridge, Runnett must have set the place alight until he moved in 1967 to Norwich as cathedral organist (he died tragically in a car accident in 1970).

In their publicity material about the new organ, J.W. Walker wrote:

*The old organ, originally built by Henry Willis and in its prime a distinguished instrument, had by 1960 come to the end of its working life. The decision to rebuild it coincided with the renaissance in this country of the principles of classical organ design – principles which, though overlooked for many years in England, lay behind the output of the great historical organ schools, and have for some time inspired fine organ-building on the continent. This movement has to a large extent influenced the re-modelling of the specification:*

1960s, there was an overwhelming desire for clarity and transparency of tone, eschewing anything Victorian or Edwardian. Thus this organ was thoroughly expunged of most sonority and richness. The pipework was all voiced on the “open foot” principle, whereby each pipe is regulated at the mouth; there is no “nicking” on the languid or lower

lip, and the top lip is often kept sharp. This makes the tone crisp, articulate, bright and somewhat “chiffy”. In the 1940s–1960s it was believed that Baroque pipework was made and voiced in this manner, a belief later found erroneous. Consequently, in recent years this organ has not been highly rated by Manchester organists.

We are confident that this will soon change, as the time and funding arrived recently for a thorough restoration. The question then arose as to whether the Walker concept should be retained. In the next issue I shall reveal what was decided and how it has been carried out.



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

## What’s on your iPod?

**Kimberly Marshall**

I must be the only person in Phoenix (perhaps in the entire USA) who is working out to the accompaniment of Machaut’s *Douce dame jolie*. There is a wonderful incongruity in listening to Gothic Voices’ recordings of late-medieval music on an iPod. These CDs were revolutionary in the way they brought Machaut’s and Dufay’s music to life in the 1980s, and digital technology has made it possible to access them anywhere, even in a gym.

I was a student at Oxford from 1982–6, when Christopher Page was developing his ideas about a *cappella* performance of polyphonic chanson. This gave me the chance to listen to some of the first rehearsals of Gothic

Voices with Rogers Covey-Crump and Margaret Philpot in New College Chapel. I still remember the excitement of hearing these singers work out details of phrasing and intonation...I became so inspired that I decided to focus my research on the late-medieval organ, with Chris as my thesis supervisor.

Gothic Voices prepared three recordings during my time in Oxford: *A Feather on the Breath of God: Sequences and Hymns by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen*, released 1984; *The Garden of Zephyrus: Courtly Songs of the Early 15th Century*, 1985; and *The Mirror of Narcissus: Songs by Guillaume de Machaut*, 1987. They sound as vital now as they did 30 years ago, and Page’s scholarly preparation and innovative programming continue to motivate my own work as an organist. He’d probably be surprised to learn that his old recordings also help to keep me in shape!

*Kimberly Marshall is an American organist with many British connections, having earned the DPhil in Music at University College, Oxford. Winner of the St Albans Competition in 1985,*

*she has played throughout the UK, most recently as part of the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music at St John’s, Smith Square in 2012. She will be performing in London in March, 2014, including at the London Organ Day, St George’s, Hanover Square on 1<sup>st</sup> March. She currently holds the Goldman Endowed Professorship at Arizona State University.*

