

# A PAIR OF ORGAN TRANSPLANTS

Paul Hale

I have written before about redundant organs happily finding new homes. Here's the story of two more. It shows just how contrasting are the types and sizes of organs which become available – they are not always Victorian octopods entombed in chancel chambers.

The first organ we look at this time is in St Mary's Catholic Church, Hexham. Director of Music & Organist there, Paul Berry, writes:

*'The Northumberland market town of Hexham and its extensive rural environs had been a Catholic stronghold throughout recusant times, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were two Catholic chapels in the town; the present church was opened in 1830 to replace these. It was built in a prominent position from sandstone with a Gothic façade. The church and its interior are now Grade II\* listed. One of the earlier chapels possessed "a handsome organ", however this was sold when the new church, dedicated to Our Lady, was opened. It's reasonable to believe that the new church opened with a newly-commissioned organ.*

*This organ survived until 2019, albeit in a much-altered form. There are no known pictorial records of how it looked as built, but it started life with a GG compass Great, a short-compass Swell and a set of pedal pipes – possibly the work of J.C. Bishop, with its Clarabella stop, but again there is no documentary evidence. A rebuild by the local firm of Blackett and Howden in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century converted it to a CC compass, gave it a larger swell-box with some additional*

*8ft ranks, and a larger and somewhat dull post-and-rail case with zinc basses.*

*The organ never had much of a presence in the building – in fairness it was built before congregational singing became the norm in Catholic churches, and while pleasant-sounding it was very gently-voiced. As it grew increasingly unreliable, it was clear that the B&H rebuild had robbed it of the historical and musical value that would have made restoration worthwhile, so the search for a replacement was on.*

*Matters came to a head with Storm Desmond, when much rainwater penetrated the flank wall of the building; the subsequent remedial and drying-out work wasn't kind to the organ – and was fatal to the original Great soundboard, which suffered splits and severe runnings.*

*The timing was particularly unfortunate, as the church had recently undergone much costly restoration work; a new build was financially out of the question, and it was difficult to find a redundant organ of musical and visual merit which would easily fit within the confines of the gallery position.'*

It was at that point that St Mary's became aware of the availability of a fine Wells-Kennedy two-manual mechanical-action organ, made in 1983 for St Martin's, Belfast, later moved to another church, and once again available for re-housing. The St Martin's organ promised a step-change in musicality and versatility

## Hexham specification

GREAT ORGAN	
Open Diapason	8
Claribel Flute	8
Principal	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Fifteenth	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Mixture 19.22.26	III
SWELL ORGAN	
Stopped Diapason	8
Salicional	8
Celeste	8
Gemshorn	4
Doublette	2
Mixture 26.29	II
Trumpet	8
Tremulant	
PEDAL ORGAN	
Acoustic Bass	32
Subbass	16
Bourdon	16
Bass Flute	8
Fagotto	16

within exactly the same footprint as the old organ, for the same cost as a good digital installation, and a case was prepared, on financial, musical and aesthetic grounds, for replacing the old organ with the St Martin's instrument.

Advice was sought and the decision made to go ahead with the organ, making some modest tonal changes to suit St Mary's. These comprised the addition of a second Pedal 16ft flue (a small-scale Bourdon, as the original Subbass is large and full-toned), and the moving of the Swell Sesquialtera to the Great, on two clamp slides, the ranks drawing individually, its place in the Swell being taken by a Celeste. The organ-builder, Alistair McCartney, suggested (and donated) an Acoustic Bass 32ft, being an extension of the Subbass with the Bourdon acting as a quint rank in the bottom octave. The case sides were remade to suit its new gallery position, the light oak panels were re-stained and some elegant pipe-shades added to the front prospect



*Installed in Hexham*

towers. New electrics and additional pistons were fitted to the console, along with new mahogany stop-jamb plates and elegant new stop-knobs.

Standing on the north side of a spacious west gallery and speaking clearly and boldly into a large open nave with gently barrelled ceiling, the organ fits the building like a glove. The work was completed just in time for Christmas 2019, following which

Paul Berry wrote: 'I have to say that the organ gave a superb account of itself over Christmas and the period leading up. We had some wonderful feedback from the congregation, and it really did energise the singing at all the services. Music for the Midnight Mass was mostly straight-down-the-line *Carols for Choirs* arrangements, but it was wonderful to do them, for the first time, with a "proper" organ

accompaniment.'

One feels that the late Christopher Gordon Wells MBE, founder of Wells-Kennedy, would have been delighted that one of his fine instruments has been relocated so successfully. A chorister at St Michael's College, Tenbury, Christopher began his career in organ building with Alfred E. Davies & Son of Northampton and then from 1956 tuned organs for







*The Lewis / Walker organ  
now at Potters Bar*

Davies in Northern Ireland, settling there in 1965. He established the Wells-Kennedy Partnership in 1966 with his colleague, Philip Kennedy, a native of Belfast (later succeeded by David McElderry, who continues to run the firm) with the simple aim of making a living from tuning and repairing organs. However, influenced in particular by the pioneering tonal and mechanical work of Grant, Degens & Bradbeer, together with study visits abroad to Germany, Austria and Scandinavia, it was not long before he became involved in a personal crusade to uplift the perception of the pipe

organ in the Province both aurally and visually. The firm acquired a high reputation for its new organs and its restorations. Christopher retired as Managing Director in 1997 but remained Chairman of the firm and continued working part-time. In the 1998 New Year Honours List he was awarded the MBE for his services to music in Northern Ireland. Christopher Gordon Wells died in April 2007 after a period of chronic illness, in his 75<sup>th</sup> year.

It is rare that a modern organ such as this finds itself in need of a home. More common are larger organs, and they are often harder to place. One

The building of a new St Alkmund's in Derby brought the opportunity for a complete reconstruction of the fine Lewis organ of 1888. Transformed, it now occupies a spacious bay adjacent to the sanctuary area of this large, elliptical church where it is equally well positioned for choral accompaniment and the support of full congregations. The completed church was consecrated by the Bishop of Derby on Saturday 18 March 1972. Douglas Hawkrige, FRAM, FRGO, who was born and educated in Derby and is a freeman of the town, gave the inaugural recital in the month following.



#### SPECIFICATION

GREAT ORGAN			POSITIVE ORGAN			COUPLERS		
1	Contra Salicional	16ft 7½ pipes	25	Bourdon	8ft 6½ pipes	57	Positive to Pedal	
2	Open Diapason	8 6½ "	26	Salicional from no. 1	8 6½ notes	58	Great to Pedal	
3	Liedlich Gedackt	8 6½ "	27	Spitalfontaine	4 6½ pipes	59	Swell to Pedal	
4	Dulciana	8 6½ "	28	Blackbottle	4 6½ "	60	Swell to Great	
5	Octave	4 6½ "	29	Tierce	18 6½ "	61	Positive to Positive	
6	Violante	4 6½ "	30	Largely	18 6½ "	62	Positive to Great	
7	Twelfth	2 6½ "	31	Clacker Cymbal (34-39)	2 ranks 12½ "	63	Swell Octave	
8	Super Octave	2 6½ "	32	Crumhorn	8 6½ "	64	Swell Sub Octave	
9	Sequenza (13-17)	2 ranks 12½ "	33	Tremulant	8 6½ "	65	Swell Union Off	
10	Mixture (19-22)	2 ranks 12½ "	34	Trumpet from no. 11	8 6½ notes	66	Great and Pedal Contributions Coupled	
11	Trumpet	8 6½ "				67	Double Touch Cancellor	
SWELL ORGAN			PEDAL ORGAN			ACCESSORIES		
12	Gedign Principal	8ft 6½ pipes	35	Violone Bass	16ft 12 pipes	68	Six thumb pistons to Positive	
13	Reinforced	8 6½ "	36	Sub Bass	16 10 "	69	Six thumb pistons to Great	
14	Voix de Champe	8 49 "	37	Principal	16 12 notes	70	Six thumb pistons to Swell	
15	Voix Celeste T.C.	8 49 "	38	Bass Flute from no. 35	8 12 notes	71	Six toe pistons to Swell (multiplicating)	
16	Gedign Principal	4 6½ "	39	Salicional from no. 1	8 12 notes	72	Six toe pistons to Pedal	
17	Flauto Traverso	4 6½ "	40	Octave Flute from no. 35	4 12 "	73	One reversible thumb piston for Great to Pedal	
18	Nazard	2 6½ "	41	Eleventh from no. 37	4 12 "	74	One reversible thumb piston for Great to Swell	
19	Scharf (11-14-19)	1 rank 18½ "	42	Octave Flute from no. 35	4 12 "	75	One reversible thumb piston for Swell to Great	
20	Contra Fagotto	8 6½ notes	43	Salicional from no. 1	4 12 "	76	One reversible thumb piston for Swell to Pedal	
21	Flauto	8 6½ pipes	44	Recorder	4 12 "	77	One reversible thumb piston for Swell to Great	
22	Flauto from no. 21	8 6½ notes	45	Mixture (19-22)	2 ranks 8½ "	78	One reversible thumb piston for Positive to Great	
23	Clarin	8 6½ notes	46	Trombone	16 12 notes	79	One reversible thumb piston for Positive to Swell	
24	Clarin from no. 21	8 6½ notes	47	Agitato from no. 21	16 12 "	80	to Great	
			48	Trumpet from no. 11	8 12 "	81	Balanced swell pedal	
			49	Horn from no. 21	8 12 "	82	Detached stop-key console	
			50	Trunk from no. 11	4 12 "			

#### WALKER ORGANS

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such is the subject of our second project – the organ now in the Anglican parish church of St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar.

With the coming of the railway to Potters Bar during the 1850s, the population grew rapidly and soon outgrew the parish church of St John. A spacious new church designed by J.S. Alder was dedicated to 'St Mary the Virgin & All Saints' on 15 June 1915. It lacked the final bays of the nave – finance, as so often, being a problem. The unsightly temporary west end was replaced by a strikingly modern glazed west wall in 1967, fitted to one additional bay built in the style of Alder's work. The church continues to flourish today, with an especially lively musical tradition, following in the footsteps of Alan Wilson, who was organist here in the 1970s before moving to the University Church of Christ the King, Gordon Square, London, with its enormous Romantic Walker organ.

The first Potters Bar organ was a modest affair. The small (2/13) 1885

Forster & Andrews which had stood in St John's church was installed in the new church in a wonderfully spacious organ gallery on the south side of the chancel. There are large arches opening across the chancel and down the south aisle of the nave, allowing the tone of any organ in this position to speak out unimpeded into the church. The F&A soldiered on until a thorough rebuild in 1963 by Hill, Norman & Beard fitted it with an electro-pneumatic action, additional stops and an extremely compact console (of the style nicknamed by the firm's staff as a 'fish-fryer' – thank you, John Norman, for that morsel of information!) on the floor of the church. Further work was carried out in 1991, leaving the instrument looking like this:

Great – 8.8.8.8.4.4.22/3.2.III;  
Swell – 8.8.8.4.III.16.8.8;  
Pedal – 16[electronic].16.8.8.4.16 [fr.Swell].

By 2016 the organ was giving trouble and was deemed undistinguished in tone, lacking blend, balance and projection. The church's director of music, Dave Miller, had aspirations for a far finer organ and in 2017 he discovered that what might be the perfect instrument was available for relocation.

The story now moves to Derby, where at St Alkmund's Church T.C. Lewis had installed a three-manual organ in 1888. St Alkmund's Church was replaced by a large modern building in 1972 and the Lewis organ was rebuilt and electrified for the new church by J.W. Walker, with many tonal changes and a new detached stop-key console. The young Keith Bance did much of the voicing and the site foreman was the equally young Andrew Carter – two organbuilders who will be well-known to many of our readers and who are now approaching the end of their distinguished careers.

The St Alkmund's worship

tradition soon developed away from using the organ as its primary musical instrument, and within a few years the organ became almost redundant.

Another 25 years or so would pass before the church considered getting rid of the organ. However, finding a home for such a large instrument with two full-length 16ft open metal façades was easier said than done, so many more years passed until Henry Groves & Son (who nominally had the maintenance of the organ) were called in by Potters Bar to consider what might be done. To Jonathan Wallace at Groves, the spacious organ gallery with its two wide 16ft arches seemed purpose-made to house the Derby organ, and a proposal was made and accepted. Both Dioceses agreed and so the project came to pass during 2019.

The organ was reconfigured to fit the differently-shaped space, the building frame being remade

### Potters Bar specification

GREAT			
1	Contra Salicional	16	rank B
2	Open Diapason	8	
3	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	existing Potters Bar Great 8ft Stopped Diapason
4	Octave	4	
5	Waldflöte	4	
6	Twelfth	2⅔	
7	Super Octave	2	
8	Sesquialtera	12.17	
9	Mixture	19.22.26.29	upper two ranks added to Walker Mixture
10	Trumpet	8	rank C
	i. Swell to Great		
	ii. Positive to Great		
SWELL ORGAN			
11	Geigen Principal	8	
12	Rohrflöte	8	
13	Viole da Gambe	8	
14	Voix Celeste (t.c.)	8	
15	Geigen Principal	4	
16	Flauto Traverso	4	
17	Fifteenth	2	replacing Piccolo
18	Scharf	22.26.29	
19	Contra Fagotto	16	rank A
20	Horn	8	rank A
21	Oboe	8	
22	Vox Humana	8	replacing Nazard
23	Clarion	4	rank A
	iii. Tremulant		
	iv. Octave		
	v. Unison Off		
	vi. Sub Octave		

POSITIVE			
24	Bourdon	8	revoiced
25	Salicional	8	rank B
26	Spitzflöte	4	revoiced
27	Nazard	2⅔	formerly Swell, replacing Glocken Cymbal
28	Blockflöte	2	
29	Tierce	1⅓	
30	Larigot	1⅓	
31	Crumhorn	8	
	vii. Tremulant		
32	Trumpet	8	rank C
	viii. Sub Octave		added
	ix. Swell to Positive		
PEDAL			
33	Contra Bass	32	added [digital]; uses Quint stop-key re-engraved
34	Open Wood	16	added [digital]; uses Salicetina stop-key re-engraved
35	Violone Bass	16	independent
36	Sub Bass	16	rank D
37	Salicional	16	rank B
38	Principal	8	rank E
39	Bass Flute	8	rank D
40	Fifteenth	4	rank E
41	Octave Flute	4	rank D
42	Recorder	2	independent
43	Mixture	19.22	independent
44	Contra Trombone	32	added [digital]; uses Salicet stop-key re-engraved
45	Trombone	16	rank C
46	Fagotto	16	rank A
47	Trumpet	8	rank C
48	Horn	8	rank A
49	Zink	4	rank A
	x. Swell to Pedal		
	xi. Great to Pedal		
	xii. Positive to Pedal		
	xiii. Great & Pedal Combinations Coupled		
	xiv. Generals on Swell Toes	added, replacing 'Double Touch Cancel'	



to place the Great, Swell and Pedal upperwork soundboards speaking down the south aisle of the nave, the Positive facing north across the Chancel, the Pedal 16ft Violone and Salicional filling the two arches, the remaining Pedal 16ft stops placed against the south wall of the chamber and the console placed on a mobile plinth on the north side of the Crossing – where the previous console had been.

The 1888 Lewis at St Alkmund had been a fairly standard 3/30 for its period:

Great 16.8.8.8.4.4.2.II.8;  
Swell 16.8.8.8.8.4.III.8.8.8.4;  
Choir (enclosed) 8.8.8.4.2.8;  
Pedal 16.16.16.8.

A glance at the Walker leaflet (see page 42) shows that the company had altered this specification to embrace a new Positive (with a rather odd stop-list), additional upperwork to Swell and Great and

a much-augmented Pedal resulting in 50 speaking stops. It was decided that at Potters Bar a slightly revised stop-list would be wise, so the Swell Nazard replaced the Glocken Cymbal II on the Positive, to form a complete Cornet ensemble, its place being taken by a vintage Vox Humana (as in the original Lewis organ). The soft Swell Piccolo was replaced by a Lewis-style Fifteenth, and the inadequate 2-rank Walker Great Mixture was enlarged to a Lewis-like 4-ranker. The Lewis 16ft Open Wood had – regrettably – been removed by Walkers. The Potters Bar building really needs some sonorous bass tones to be generated by the organ, so it was decided, as space was at a premium, to incorporate a digital 16ft Open Wood and use the system for two 32ft stops as well.

The 1972 Walker console had received so little use that all it needed was a clean and polish.

All its electrical equipment, and that in the organ, was replaced and the Schwimmer wind regulators in the organ were re-leathered. Very little needed to be done to the voicing, other than to warm slightly the rather dry Walker Positive 8ft and 4ft flutes.

The parish has taken to their new organ with enthusiasm and I had the great pleasure of giving an inaugural recital to a large audience on 14 March.

I hope these two successful transplants will inspire readers who may be pondering such a project to search for fine redundant organs to suit their needs. There are plenty out there and the future is likely to see many more becoming available.

*Paul Hale, Southwell Cathedral Organist Emeritus and a well-known organ consultant & recitalist, has been writing for OR for four decades and was Editor for 15 years.*



# The listening post

## Ourania Gassiou

*What's the last recording you bought?*

Beethoven *Violin Sonatas* with Leonidas Kavakos and Enrico Pace

*What have you been listening to for work recently?*

A lot of organ music by Jeanne Demessieux

*What have you been listening to for pleasure recently?*

*Peter and the Wolf* by Prokofiev (because my son is obsessed with it)

*Which recording would you take with you to your desert island?*

*Goldberg Variations* with Glenn Gould (1955 recording)

*What's the most surprising/unexpected recording you own?*

*Albion Sutras*, a recording of throat (*khoomer*) chanting accompanied by indian instruments

Ourania Gassiou is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she studied with Nicolas Kynaston. Aided by an Eric Thompson Trust Grant she continued her studies with Johannes Geffert in Cologne and Susan Landale in Paris.

As a soloist and chamber musician, she has performed extensively throughout the UK and Europe in recital series and major international festivals.

In 2011, Ourania was appointed Organist and Curator of the organs of the Athens Concert Hall, and she is also the organist of the French Protestant Church in London.