## 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 18th 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 20th 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 stepchange in musicality and versatility

Hexham specification				
GREAT ORGAN				
Open Diapason	8			
Claribel Flute	8			
Principal	4			
Nazard	$2^{2}/_{3}$			
Fifteenth	2			
Tierce	13/5			
Mixture 19.22.26	III			
SWELL ORGA	N			
Stopped Diapason	8			
Salicional	8			
Celeste	8			
Gemshorn	4			
Doublette	2			
Mixture 26.29	II			
Trumpet	8			
Tremulant				
PEDAL ORGA	N			
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 pipeshades added to the front prospect



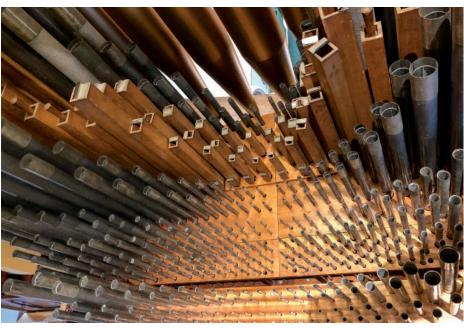
towers. New electrics and additional pistons were fitted to the console, along with new mahogany stop-jamb plates and elegant new stop-knobs.

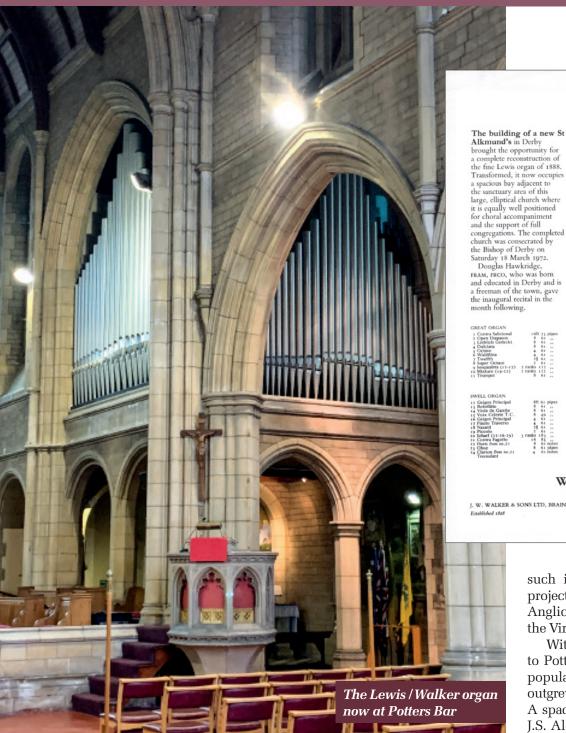
Standing on the north side of a spacious west gallery and speaking clearly and boldly into a large open nave with gently barrelled ceiling, the organ fits the building like a glove. The work was completed just in time for Christmas 2019, following which

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-theline 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 Davies & Son of Northampton and then from 1956 tuned organs for

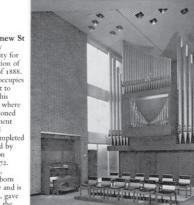




Davies in Northern Ireland, settling there in 1965. He established the Wells-Kennedy Partnership in 1966 with his colleague, Philip Kennedy, a native of Belfast (later succeeded by David McElderry, who continues to run the firm) with the simple aim of making a living from tuning and repairing organs. 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 parttime. 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 75th 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



SPECIFIC/	MOITA	ě.
POSITIVE ORGAN		
2 g Bourdon	81	ft 61 pipes
26 Salicional from no. I		61 notes
27 Spitzflöte	- 4	61 pipes
28 Blockflöte	2	61
29 Tierce		61
10 Larigot		61
11 Glocken Cymbal (26	-29)	
	2 ranks	
32 Crumborn Tremulant	8	61
33 Trumpet from no.11	8	61 notes
PEDAL ORGAN		
34 Violone Bass	16	ft 32 pipes
3 c Sub Bass	16	56 11
36 Salicional from no. 1	16	32 notes
37 Principal		44 piper
38 Bass Flute from no. 35		32 notes
39 Salicet from no.1	. 8	. 37 10
40 Octave Quint from no	-35 5	32 11
41 Fifteenth from no. 37	4	32 11
42 Octave Flute from no.	35 4	32 11
43 Salicetina from no.1	4	32 10
44 Recorder	2	32 pipes
45 Mixture (19-22)	2 ranks	66 11
46 Trombone	16	32 notes

## 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 electropneumatic 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		Р	OSITIVE			
1 Contra Salicional 16	rank B	24 Bourdon	8	revoiced			
2 Open Diapason 8		25 Salicional	8	rank B			
3 Lieblich Gedeckt 8	existing Potters Bar Great 8ft	26 Spitzflöte	4	revoiced			
	Stopped Diapason	27 Nazard	22/3	formerly Swell, replacing			
4 Octave 4				Glocken Cymbal			
5 Waldflöte 4		28 Blockflöte	2				
6 Twelfth 22/3		29 Tierce	13/5				
7 Super Octave 2		30 Larigot	11/3				
8 Sesquialtera 12.17		31 Crumhorn	8				
9 Mixture 19.22.26.29	upper two ranks	vii. Tremulant					
	added to Walker Mixture	32 Trumpet	8	rank C			
10 Trumpet 8	rank C	viii Sub Octave		added			
i. Swell to Great		ix. Swell to Pos	sitive				
ii. Positive to Great				PEDAL			
		33 Contra Bass	32	added [digital];			
	LL ORGAN	oo comua bass		uses Quint stop-key re-engraved			
11 Geigen Principal 8		34 Open Wood	16	added [digital]; uses			
12 Rohrflöte 8		or open weed	10	Salicetina stop-kev re-engraved			
13 Viole da Gambe 8		35 Violone Bass	16	independent			
14 Voix Celeste (t.c.) 8		36 Sub Bass	16	rank D			
15 Geigen Principal 4		37 Salicional	16	rank B			
16 Flauto Traverso 4		38 Principal	8	rank E			
17 Fifteenth 2	replacing Piccolo	39 Bass Flute	8	rank D			
18 Scharf 22.26.29		40 Fifteenth	4	rank E			
19 Contra Fagotto 16	rank A	41 Octave Flute	4	rank D			
20 Horn 8	rank A	42 Recorder	2	independent			
21 Oboe 8		43 Mixture	19.22	independent			
22 Vox Humana 8	replacing Nazard	44 Contra Trombone	32	added [digital];			
23 Clarion 4	rank A			uses Salicet stop-key re-engraved			
iii. Tremulant		45 Trombone	16	rank C			
iv. Octave		46 Fagotto	16	rank A			
v. Unison Off		47 Trumpet	8	rank C			
vi. Sub Octave		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 Tou					

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 16.8.8.8.4.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.



What's the last recording you bought?

What have you been listening to for work recently?

What have you been listening to for pleasure recently?

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

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

Beethoven *Violin Sonatas* with Leonidas Kavakos and Enrico Pace

A lot of organ music by Jeanne Demessieux

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

Goldberg Variations with Glenn Gould (1955 recording)

Albion Sutras, a recording of throat (khoomei) 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.