

BIRMINGHAM'S FORGOTTEN HARRISONS

Paul Hale

Ask yourself where the most significant Harrison & Harrison organs of the first decade or so of the 20th century are or were to be found, and I'm pretty sure that you might come up with a shortlist such as this: St Nicholas Whitehaven (1904), the rebuilding of the Father Willis organ in Durham Cathedral (1905), the rebuilding of the Hill at Ely Cathedral (1908) and, of course,

the new organ at Redcliffe (1912). Some readers in the know, or with local knowledge, might add All Saints', Tooting (1906), St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast (1907), the West London Synagogue (1908), Glasgow Cathedral (rebuild of a Hill, 1909), Clifton College (1911), the rebuilds at Trinity College, Cambridge, and at Newcastle Cathedral (both 1911), or St James, Muswell Hill (1913). All

these organs have received their full due, over the decades, in articles in this journal, in *The Organ*, *Musical Opinion*, *The Musical Times*, and so on.

However, few readers – and none of those journals – have ever turned their eyes to the Harrisons of Birmingham – with one small exception. 'Birmingham?' you ask; 'What on earth is to be found there of Harrison & Harrison's greater works?'. Read on...

Recalling that all the above-mentioned organs are strongly in the style that H&H came to adopt from around 1904 – elements of which style prevail in their eminent work to this day – let us go back a little further than 1904. Before that date – a time when Arthur Harrison and George Dixon burnt the midnight oil in Dixon's college rooms at Cambridge, discussing the ideal tonal design of the future – the company had established a reputation for excellent solid organs, very well built and immaculately finished. One such was supplied in 1900 to St Mark's church in Wolverhampton. Its stop list – typical of the firm's work at the time – could have come out of an organ by Father Willis in virtually every respect. You can look up the detailed specification of this organ on the NPOR, but in brief it was:

Great 16.8.8.8.4.4.2 $\frac{2}{3}$.2.III.8;
Swell 16.8.8.8.8.4.2.III.8.8.;
Choir 8.8.8.4.2.8; Pedal 16.16.8.16.

Add Willis names for such a specification and you will be 95% accurate.

Wolverhampton is but a step from Birmingham, where at this time flourished a group of highly able organists, playing in the large



King's Heath Methodist Church

Anglican, Catholic and various wealthy non-Conformist churches with which the city came to be furnished towards the end of the 19th century. A beautiful new Methodist church had been built in Cambridge Road, King's Heath, in 1897, replacing a smaller building. Organist of that church from 1897 (aged 17!) was Leslie White, a man of drive and energy who set out to commission the best organ-builder he could find to supply the new church – and his very able church choir – with a suitable new organ. In 1902 White was invited to Wolverhampton to play the new H&H at St Mark's. Evidently, he was impressed, and wrote to Harrisons about the possibility of an organ for Cambridge Road, enclosing a suggested specification. This was amended by Arthur Harrison; a scheme and a price (£750, rising to £850 on completion) were agreed by the end of 1904 and the organ was installed during 1905, being opened on 28 January 1906.

The stop-list of the King's Heath Methodist Church organ is, somewhat inevitably, more akin to the 1900 Wolverhampton Harrison than to the work they were developing elsewhere, though it shows slight signs of things to come. The Choir Organ was 'prepared-for' at first and installed to a more advanced specification in 1923. Its stop-list was originally rather different, probably due to White, who had suggested: Violin



Diapason 8, Lieblich Gedeckt 8, Wald Flute 4, Clarinet 8, Orchestral Oboe 8. During the 1923 work, the Swell Horn was revoiced as a Great Tromba and a new Trumpet was fitted to the Swell in its place. At the same time, the organ was enhanced by a new screen by Henry Garner, and the enlarged instrument was re-opened by Sir Edward Bairstow. As can be seen from the specification below, it is just a little smaller than the Wolverhampton organ (which, incidentally, was removed to Wolverhampton Grammar School in 1978), and is lacking, in particular, the Pedal Trombone. However, note the 16ft Geigen. As with three of the organs we are considering today, this organ had a case facing south across the chancel, containing 8ft basses, with a taller case facing up the north aisle of the nave. What a perfect

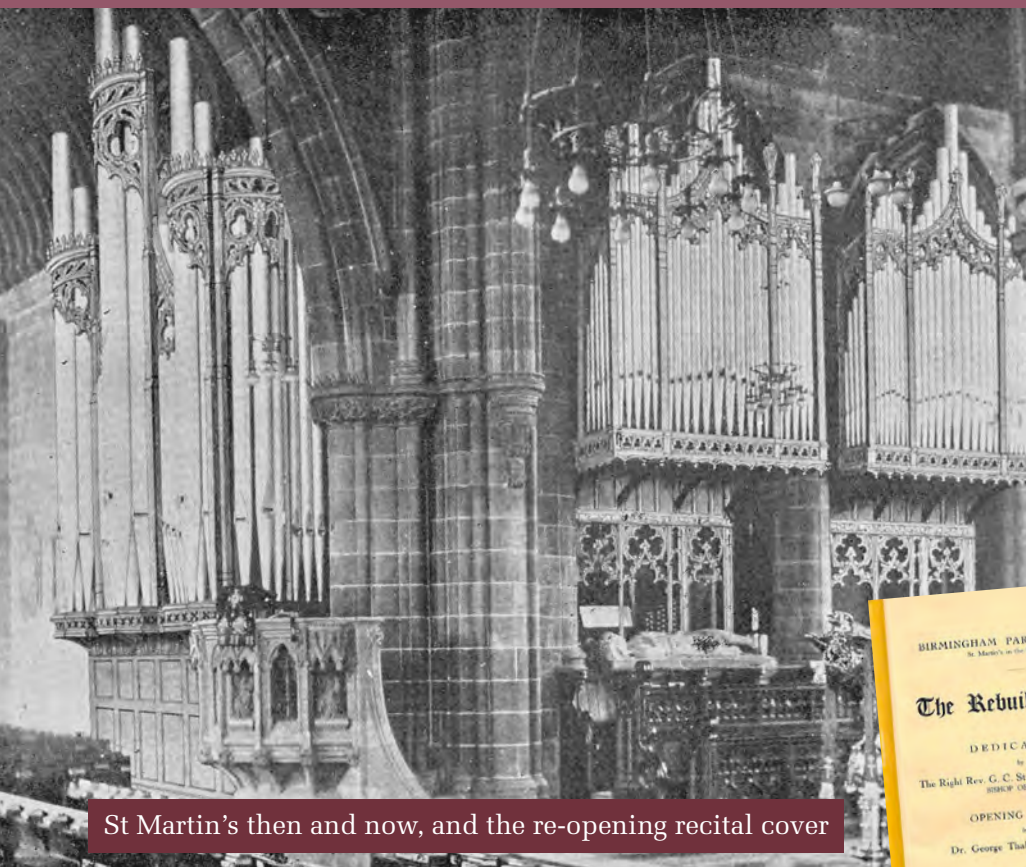
place for a handsome set of 16ft front pipes: at King's Heath the Geigen/Violone basses.

The Cambridge Road Harrison was written up by Laurence Elvin in 'The Organ World' section of *Musical Opinion* in 1948. Warmly complimentary about the organ, he also congratulates Leslie White, still organist at the time, on the quality and length of his service. Under White the Cambridge Road choir achieved a high reputation and performed major works such as the Brahms *Requiem*, Haydn's *Creation*, *Elijah* and *St Paul* (Mendelssohn), Dvořák's *Mass in D*, etc. – in addition to the inevitable and ever-popular *Messiah*. Remarkably, Leslie White carried on in post until he died in 1960, as is well remembered by former IAO Vice-President, Richard Popple, who sang in the choir there in the 1940s, was an organ pupil of Leslie White and returned as organist from 1980 to 1993. In White's memory, his son and daughter commissioned a stained-glass window to be found towards the rear of the south side of the church. Installed in 1963, at its centre is Charles Wesley and immediately below is Leslie White seated at the organ, flanked by Bach and Handel on either side.

Following an Appeal launched in September 1966, Nicholson of Worcester electrified the Pedal action and added some further Pedal extensions in 1968. Otherwise the organ remains to this day as described

KING'S HEATH METHODIST CHURCH ORGAN 1923 SPECIFICATION

GREAT ORGAN		CHOIR ORGAN (ENCLOSED)	
Contra Geigen	16	Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Open Diapason No.1	8	Viola da Gamba	8
Open Diapason No.2	8	Viole d'Orchestre	8
Claribel Flute	8	Harmonic Flute	4
Principal	4	Clarinet	8
Wald Flute	4		
Fifteenth	2	PEDAL ORGAN	
Mixture 12.19.22	III	Open Diapason (wood)	16
Tromba	8	Violone (Great Geigen)	16
		Bourdon	16
		Octave (ext. Open Diap.)	8
		Flute (ext. Bourdon)	8
SWELL ORGAN		WIND PRESSURES	
Open Diapason	8	Manual flues 3½ ins	
Hohl Flute	8	Swell reeds 6 ins	
Echo Gamba	8	Tromba 7 ins	
Voix Celeste	8	Pedal 3 ins	
Gemshorn	4		
Harmonic Piccolo	2		
Mixture 15.19.22	III		
Contra Fagotto	16		
Trumpet	8		
Oboe	8		



St Martin's then and now, and the re-opening recital cover

here, all but the Pedal still playing (just) on its 1905 tubular-pneumatic action – despite being ‘cooked’ by over-vigorous gas convector heaters installed when the church was re-ordered in 1982. An attempt to raise funds for its restoration began in 1991, but failed, so although this fine organ has been awarded an Historic Organ Certificate by BIOS, it remains in serious need of restoration.

As plans for this relatively modest organ were being drawn up, back in 1902–5, an altogether more

dramatic scheme was being planned for the most important Anglican church in Birmingham – St Martin, the city's first medieval parish church, placed right next to the historic Bull Ring. This 1906 organ was clearly an enlarged version of the remarkable and epoch-making scheme Harrisons carried out at Whitehaven in 1904, the specification for which became that to which the company worked, give or take a few stops, for the next

50 years. St Martin's is an organ I knew as a young player in the 1960s – but, alas, not as built. I am indebted to Owen Woods, of Harrison & Harrison Ltd, for the following information, sourced from the company's invaluable records:

Harrison & Harrison's involvement in the St Martin's organ dates from late 1903 and may have been the result of a speculative enquiry by H&H. The

ST MARTIN'S ORGAN SPECIFICATION

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		(ENCLOSED SOLO SECTION)	
Quintatön (t.c.)	32 *	Lieblich Bourdon	16	Contra Viola	16 *
Gross Geigen	16	Open Diapason	8	Harmonic Flute	8 *
Double Claribel Flute	16	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Viole d'Orchestre	8
Large Open Diapason	8	Echo Gamba	8	Clarinet	8
Small Open Diapason	8	Vox Angelica (t.c.)	8	Cor Anglais	8 *
Geigen	8	Octave Gamba	4	Tuba (unenclosed)	8 *
Hohl Flöte (open throughout)	8	Lieblich Flöte	4	PEDAL ORGAN	
Rohr Flöte	8	Flautina	2	Double Open Wood	32
Stopped Quint	5 1/3 *	Mixture 12.19.22	III	Open Wood (ext. D. Op. W.)	16
Octave	4	Oboe	8	Open Diapason	16 *
Geigen Principal	4	Double Trumpet	16	Geigen (Great Geigen)	16
Wald Flöte (triangular)	4	Harmonic Trumpet	8	Sub Bass (Great D. Clar. Fl.)	16
Octave Quint	2 1/2	Clarion	4	Violone (Solo C. Viola)	16 *
Super Octave	2	CHOIR & SOLO ORGAN (UNENCLOSED CHOIR SECTION)		Octave (ext. Open Wood)	8
Harmonics 15.17.19. ^b 21.22	V	Gross Spitz Flöte	16	Flute (ext. Sub Bass)	8
Trombone	16 *	Spitz Flöte	8	Violoncello	8
Tromba	8	Flute d'Amour	8	Bombardon	32 *
Octave Tromba	4 *	Viola da Gamba	8	Ophicleide (ext. Bombardon)	16 *
WIND PRESSURES		Dulciana	8	Trombone (Great Tromb.)	16 *
Great flues 3ins and 4ins, reeds 9ins		Gemshorn	4	Posaune (ext. Oph.)	8 *
Swell flues and Oboe 4ins, chorus reeds 9 ins		Flauto Traverso	4		
Choir unenclosed flues 2 1/2ins; Tuba 16ins; enclosed flues & reeds 5ins		Harmonic Piccolo	2		
Pedal flues 2 1/2–5ins, reeds 9ins and 16ins		Dulciana Mixture 15.19.22	III		
Action 11ins		Cornoepen	8 *		
		Clarion	4 *		



main contact was the organist, W. John Reynolds, who visited Whitehaven at H&H's behest in January 1904. Also involved were C. W. Perkins, the City Organist, who acted mostly through Reynolds. Sir George Martin [of St Paul's Cathedral] approved the project but does not seem to have had a direct input. A specification was drawn up by Reynolds in March 1904, which has almost nothing in common with what was built. Mr Arthur [Harrison] instead drew up his own specification and comment was invited from Reynolds, Perkins and George Dixon. The similarity with Whitehaven, particularly on the Great, is obvious. Worthies other than the above who approved of the specification included James Wedgwood, Meyrick Roberts and Sir Walter Alcock. The organ was dedicated on 1 December 1906 with much of the instrument prepared for. The Swell was installed in full, alongside all bar the reeds of the unenclosed choir, the Great Diapason chorus and most of the Pedal. In 1913 the Great fluework was partially completed. In 1925, the soundboard and swell box were

installed for the enclosed choir, alongside a few stops. The Great reeds chest was also installed, alongside the Tromba. This stop was the old Swell Trumpet revoiced, a new Swell Trumpet 'of fiery tone' being installed at this time.

On the left is the stop-list of the St Martin's organ, including all the stops 'prepared-for' [marked * in the specification], some of which remained absent until 1955 – of which, more below. When reading this stop-list (3 manuals, 61 speaking stops), I recommend the reader having the St Nicholas, Whitehaven, stop-list (3 manuals, 47 speaking stops, including a Great 32ft Quintatön) open as well, either on the NPOR or in Laurence Elvin's book about the Harrison firm, page 101.

This remarkable organ stood in a two-bay chamber on the north side of the chancel. Casework faced west and south (a double case). The Great and Tuba were placed under the western arch, projecting into the north transept; the Choir and part of the Pedal stood in the two arches, behind the south-facing cases; the enclosed Solo section was placed above the Swell box which itself was placed in the angle behind the Great and Choir organs, speaking south. The imposing 32ft Pedal Double Open Wood pipes (the bottom five of which played at 16ft pitch with the Sub Bass at 10²/₃ft) stood against the east wall of the chamber.

Why does this wonderful organ not survive to this day in its original position and with its original H&H tone? I am indebted to Dr Roy Massey, once a chorister at St Martin's, who, as a young man, had organ lessons from David Willcocks on this organ. Dr Massey writes:

As a seven-year-old in 1941 I joined St Martin's choir under the redoubtable Dr Richard Wassell and the sound of that old H&H thrilled me to the core and made me want to be an organist.

The present St Martin's as a building is largely by J.A. Chatwin who designed many church enlargements as well as some original churches in the Birmingham area – St Augustine's in Edgbaston being one of the most expensive. The 'old' St Martin's had been heavily Georgianised and was a real mess, so was carefully demolished about 1872. The tower and spire remained, as P.C. Hardwick had restored and re-faced it earlier in the 19th century. Chatwin's new St Martin's re-opened about 1875, slightly bigger than the old building but with sections of old masonry included in some of the walls. A fine nave with new hammer-beam roof and impressive chancel with two chapels either side of it. The clergy vestry was built off the south chapel and the organ placed in the north chapel with the smallish choir vestry behind it.

However, in the mid-1950s it was discovered that the east wall of the north chapel – behind the organ – was an original part of the chapel of the Guild of the Holy Cross which had been a medieval chantry with an income to pray for former members of the Guild. After the 1939–45 war, some funds arrived, which may have come from America or the family of an American airman killed in the war, so what better than to re-create the Guild chapel as a memorial to the airman and move the organ in order to do so? This was decided upon, and George Pace from York furnished the chapel in his usual style. The organ went to the back of the deep north transept. Chatwin's quite seemly woodwork on the nave front was scrapped and Pace specified a row of gold painted bass pipes and called it an organ case. City Organist George Thalben-Ball looked at the scheme and rumbled contentedly that it

looked nice and big – but that was about it.

The scheme that Dr Massey mentions was one drawn up by the John Compton Organ Company in 1954. The organ was to be moved, the action electrified, the Choir Organ enclosed, a new detached console installed on the other side of the church, and some tonal changes made, including adding a Pedal Contra Bass with a 16ft diaphonic bass, extended from the Great Open Diapason No.1. The revised specification can be seen on the NPOR. Though it still looks rather like a big Harrison (it has 68 stops and only one extended manual rank – the Solo Harmonic Flute, which appears at 8/4/2) it doesn't sound like one, being disappointingly bland and somewhat buried in the north transept of this red sandstone church, spacious yet acoustically completely dead. The enclosure of the Choir Organ draws forth particular criticism from Roy Massey: 'That gorgeous Choir Organ, bracketed out over the console behind the choir stalls from 16ft to Dulciana Mixture was stuck in a box and became a quite useless Echo organ because no-one in those days knew what it really was.' Even the new Tuba was enclosed: the organist of the time being afraid it would drown his – very fine – choir. With 30 boys and 18 men this was never very likely! Roy adds 'There were many errors of judgement in that project and, sadly, the job lost its magic. Two memories remain though. On my first visit after the rebuild I met an old gentleman who

had also dropped in. He introduced himself as W.C. Jones who told me he had voiced the Swell reeds in 1906. The other was to hear J.I. Taylor of Comptons improvising on the job which he was doing absolutely splendidly with great fluency.'

Cleaned and overhauled by Nicholsons in more recent years, it remains in use, along with other more contemporary musical resources, in this very popular Evangelical church, perhaps awaiting the day when its Harrisonian spirit can be rekindled.

Had that been the only truly grand Harrison in England's second city, that would perhaps have been enough. But no – in 1909 a second large 'Whitehaven-style' Harrison arrived, this time down the Bristol Road on the way out of the City, in the Old Meeting Church. The Old Meeting Church was a spacious and lavish church with a tall spire, built in 1885 at a cost of no less than £26,000, for a strong and wealthy Unitarian congregation. Designed by J.A. Cossins, in 13th-century Gothic style, it had a raised chancel with spacious choir stalls and an organ by William Hill & Son (costing £1,000) on the north side. As congregations grew, so did the church's aspirations, so a distinguished local musician was appointed as Organist. This was A.J. Cotton (1867–1933), who 'was accompanist for several of the famous Birmingham Triennial Festivals and also conducted the Midland Musical Society, so must have been well thought of in the City' [Roy Massey]. The 1885 Hill was pretty standard (a 31 speaking-stop 3-manual), though distinctly 'un-modern' – there being



St Basil's, Deritend

no Swell 16ft reed, a mere 4-stop Pedal and a rather dull Choir organ.

Cotton wanted something better for the church and must have been immensely impressed by the 1906 Harrison in St Martin's. It is therefore not surprising that Old Meeting House ordered a very similar, if slightly smaller instrument, installed in a similar position to the Harrisons in King's Heath Methodist Church and St Martin's – on the north side of the chancel, with a 16ft front facing across the church (the old Hill Great Double Open Diapason) and a 16ft front (the Harrison Pedal Open Diapason) facing imperiously down the north nave aisle. The organ was a gift by Mrs Harding in memory of her recently-deceased husband Charles, who had given the large 1908 Norman & Beard in the Great Hall at Birmingham University; they were both leading members of this flourishing Unitarian congregation. The stop-list can be seen on the left.

Unlike St Martin's, no stops

THE OLD MEETING CHURCH SPECIFICATION

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		SOLO ORGAN (ENCLOSED)		PEDAL ORGAN	
Gross Geigen	16	Lieblich Bourdon	16	Double Salicional	16	Major Bass (open to FFFF)	32
Large Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason	8	Violin Diapason	8	Open Wood (ext. D. Op. W.)	16
Small Open Diapason	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Harmonic Flute	8	Open Diapason	16
Geigen	8	Echo Gamba	8	Viole d'Orchestre	8	Geigen (Great)	16
Höhl Flöte (open throughout)	8	Vox Angelica (t.c.)	8	Concert Flute	4	Sub Bass	16
Octave	4	Principal	4	Salicet	4	Salicional (Solo)	16
Wald Flöte	4	Lieblich Flöte	4	Piccolo	2	Octave Wood (ext. Op. Wd)	8
Octave Quint	2½	Fifteenths	2	Clarinet	8	Flute (ext. Sub Bass)	8
Super Octave	2	Mixture 12.19.22.26.29	V	Orchestral Oboe	8	Ophicleide	16
Harmonics 17.19.21.22	IV	Double Trumpet	16	Great Reeds on Solo		Posaune (ext. Oph.)	8
Tromba	8	Horn	8				
Octave Tromba	4	Trumpet	8				
Great Reeds Sub Octave		Oboe	8				
		Clarion	4				

WIND PRESSURES

3–12 ins



Quaker Meeting House

were 'prepared-for', so although slightly smaller than the former, its effect in the church would have been more impressive, as the big reeds were all present. Note, however, that the Great Trombas had to do double duty as solo reeds, as there was no Tuba. Roy Massey adds 'I have a copy of the service paper for Sunday, 3 October 1909, from Old Meeting – the day the organ was opened. It contains the specification of the organ in typical H&H style, and detailed explanatory notes on the back page from A.J. C[otton] describing the new organ.'

Alas, Old Meeting was one of several significant Birmingham churches to be bombed in April 1941 – the west end of St Martin's was badly damaged, too. The damaged building became known locally as 'Rheims Cathedral' by British Army troops who then – rather shockingly – used it to practise urban combat. Harrison's was asked to remove the organ back to Durham (though Roy Massey recalls that, as a small boy, he saw that although the windows had been blown out, the church was largely intact and the woodwork of the organ case was still visible), the church site was sold to the City Council in 1946 and then cleared. A pupil and *protégé* of Cotton, John Taylor (to whom Cotton left his fine house in Grove Avenue, Moseley), became organist of another bombed church, St Agatha's, and hoped to install the Old Meeting Harrison in

its two spacious organ chambers once the church was restored. Fortune, however, did not smile on the endeavour, for the restored St Agatha's (and a 1949 Walter James Bird rebuild of its damaged 1901 Norman & Beard) then suffered a terrible fire and ended up with a 3/37 Nicholson instrument made in 1960 partly out of what was salvaged from the fire. What, then, of the Old Meeting organ? Harrison's records reveal that ranks were used, one by one, in post-war projects, examples being the Great Harmonics, pipes of which ended up in the extended meantone organ built for Dr Ronald McClure in 1950, and the Great Tromba and Swell Oboe, which went to Durham School in 1941 (information kindly supplied by Owen Woods, of Harrison & Harrison).

The only organ in Birmingham to compete at the time with these two large Harrison's for size was the Town Hall, the final two Birmingham pre-WWI Harrison's being smaller instruments. St



Old Meeting Church

Basil's church in Deritend, just down the hill from St Martin's, must also have been inspired by the instrument there, for when this Romanesque brick building was completed in 1911 (designed by Arthur Stansfield Dixon) it was fitted out with a small but effective Harrison. The stop-list, as remembered by Roy Massey from his youth, is on page 44.

The pipes were placed in a raised chamber on the north side with the 16ft Salicional in front

(‘Impressive’ [Roy Massey]). Trigger swell (it was originally to have been balanced, according to

Harrison records) ‘with wire going along a roof beam’ [RM] to the console, which was on the south side. ‘Blower starter was a lever on the wall by the console which was pushed up and held in position until it clicked. Blower was outside and I recall earthenware trunks to carry the wind.’ [RM] The important and unusual thing about this organ is that it was a very early example of a Harrison &

ST BASIL’S, DERITEND, SPECIFICATION

GREAT ORGAN		PEDAL ORGAN	
Double Salicional	16	Harmonic Flute	4
Open Diapason (leathered)	8	Contra Oboe	16
Claribel Flute	8	Cornopean	8
Octave	4		
SWELL ORGAN		Sub Bass	16
Violin Diapason	8	Salicional (Great)	16
Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Flute (ext. Bourdon)	8

The listening post



Stephen Disley

What’s the last recording you bought?

I can’t recall the last time I bought a physical recording (as opposed to an MP3 file), it was quite a while back, probably in 2019. However, lockdown has provided ample time to trawl vast online music libraries, listening to anything that catches my eye and buying whatever pleases my ear. What an age we live in, when tens of millions of recordings are available at the push of a few buttons!

What have you been listening to for work recently?

Thinking about future recitals, as and when they re-start: I’ve been listening to EMI’s Great Cathedral Organ (GCO) series. Many organists grew up on these recordings but few of us had the whole lot. It’s great to have the entire set on CD. I wanted to hear how people registered the instruments ‘back-in-the-day’, how they dealt with tempi, how they generally played things. Of course, some instruments have changed but some still sound broadly the same. Either way, I’m getting some performance ideas for future concerts from past recordings.

What have you been listening to for pleasure recently?

The Duruflé *Suite*, Op.5 – arranged for orchestra by Pieter-Jelle de Boer. It’s available on his YouTube channel and is an astonishing rendition of a familiar work in an unfamiliar setting, i.e. by an orchestra. It’s very luscious, quite Debussy-esque in places, and

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the orchestration certainly doesn’t detract from the quality of the music. If anything, it could be said to enhance it.

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

The King of Instruments. It was an EMI LP with about a dozen tracks from the GCO series. The last one was Nicolas Kynaston playing Vierne’s *Carillon de Westminster*. My dad bought it for me and regretted doing so, as I listened to it, especially the Carillon, endlessly. And I mean endlessly. Many years later, I introduced Nicolas to my dad and he recognised the name; ‘He drove us mad playing your record,’ my dad said. Fortunately, Nicolas saw the funny side and was very gracious but, even so, I was embarrassed beyond measure!

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

I have a YouTube playlist of musical things gone wrong. Organists messing up big-time, orchestras falling to pieces, choirs going to pot, that sort of thing. No matter how often one hears them, they’re still shocking/surprising. Believe me, in the strange times of the last year, watching these occasionally has helped keep me sane and given me a ‘there but for the grace of God’ laugh.

Harrison electro-pneumatic action – necessary as the console was on the other side of the church to the pipes. Roy Massey recalls there being batteries by the console – doubtless for the action current.

The church closed for services in 1978, the parish being united (logically) with St Martin’s. With some readers this organ may ring a bell, because when removed by Harrison & Harrison, its Swell (plus a 2ft Fifteenth) found a new home as the Swell of the 1973 Nave Organ in Worcester Cathedral. In due course this Nave Organ was replaced by a digital organ, yet the St Basil’s pipework didn’t all disappear into the melting-pot: three ranks, including the Contra Oboe, plus most of the rest of the new 1973 Worcester ranks, were used by Michael Farley in his major 1992 rebuild at St Peter’s, Budleigh Salterton, where they continue to give delight.

In 1824 the Quaker, John Cadbury, established his soon to be successful chocolate business in Birmingham. He developed the Bournville estate for his factory and his works – a model village just outside Birmingham. His third son, George, keen on music, with an organist wife, had high-quality organs installed in several Bournville buildings – sacred and secular – principal among them the Friends Meeting House (Quaker) which they attended. As the First World War broke out, he commissioned the last of the Birmingham Harrisons from this golden period, a 16 speaking-stop 2-manual on tubular-pneumatic action, to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.



Quaker Meeting House

Its stop-list (see below) shows similarity to other small Harrisons (such as St Basil’s), though the firm may have wondered what it was to be used for, in a building where worship is conducted in total silence!

In 1956 the local firm of Harris Organs electrified the key actions, replaced the Swell Harmonic Flute with a Gemshorn, deleted the Contra Dulciana from the Great (it remains on the Pedal) and added a Great Fifteenth in its place. The instrument was restored by Harrison & Harrison in 1988, following wise advice from Roy Massey, who gave the opening recital.

We end as we began – with one of the only two Harrisons from this remarkable decade of installations still in place and in almost original condition. Perhaps the loss of Old Meeting House and the Comptonisation of the St Martin’s organ have led us to forget the glories of these instruments. I hope that this article will do something to redress that.

I regret that Covid restrictions and the loss of the Old Meeting House organ, the St Basil’s organ and the St Martin’s cases have meant that photographs have been extremely hard to obtain. I thank Nicholas Fanthom and others from the Birmingham Organists’ Association for searching out images, and I am particularly grateful to Dr Roy Massey and Owen Woods (of Harrison & Harrison) for supplying me with much information to enrich this article.

QUAKER MEETING HOUSE SPECIFICATION	
GREAT ORGAN	
Contra Dulciana	16
Open Diapason	8
Geigen	8
Claribel Flute	8
Octave	4
SWELL ORGAN	
Violin Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Echo Gamba	8
Vox Angelica (t.c.)	8
Harmonic Flute	4
Contra Oboe	16
Cornopean	8
PEDAL ORGAN	
Sub Bass	16
Dulciana (Great)	16
Flute (ext. Bourdon)	8
Oboe (Swell)	16



Paul Hale is a professional organ consultant, recitalist and choral conductor.

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, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM and the Archbishop of Canterbury’s ‘Thomas Cranmer Award’ for his contribution to church music. More information is available at www.PaulHale.org