

# A pair of Royal Organs

Paul Hale

2022 is proving to be a year notable for significant musical anniversaries and also – regrettably – for the passing of some of our finest organists and organ-builders. As we rejoice in the richness left to us by César Franck and Ralph Vaughan Williams, we also keenly feel the loss of Francis Jackson, Harold Britton, and Simon Preston, along with renowned voicer David Frostick and highly-regarded Scottish organ-builder Alexander ‘Sandy’ Edmonstone.

Of course, the whole country has been rejoicing not so much in musical anniversaries but in the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. Musical activity has – certainly in the past – been a central delight of the Royal Family, commissioning pipe organs being one of their more costly supporting activities. These can be heard in the various royal chapels, large and small, and also in Westminster Abbey, which remains a ‘Royal Peculiar’, owing allegiance to none but the monarch.

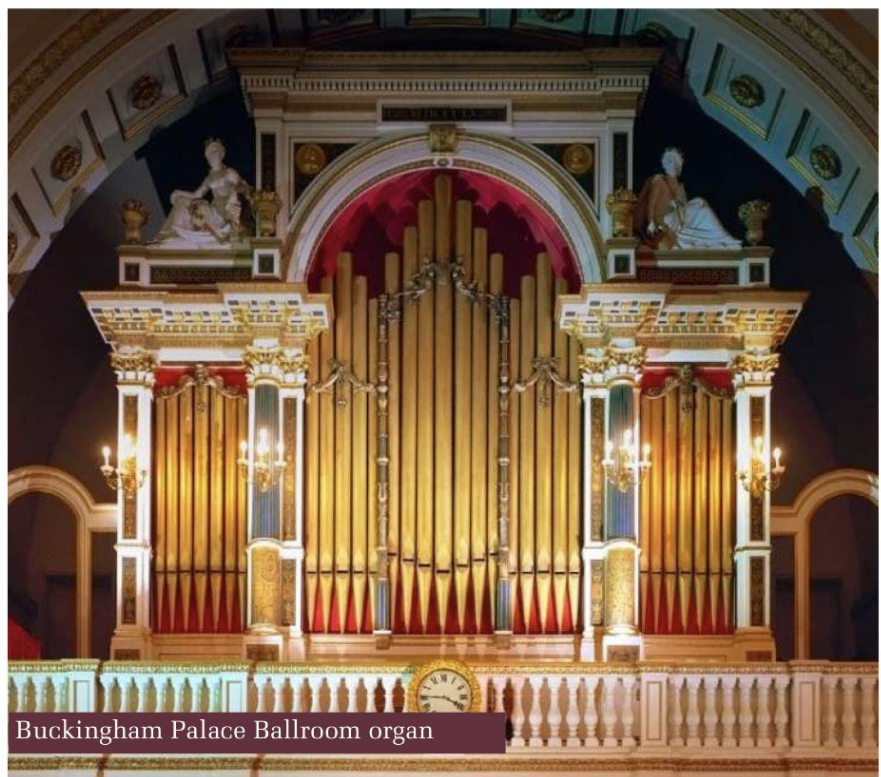
In this article we look at two Royal pipe organs little heard by the public: the H.C. Lincoln instrument now in the Ballroom at Buckingham Palace and the Harrison & Harrison in the Private Chapel in Windsor Castle. The first has a complex and significant history, starting in 1818; the latter was built anew, following the devastating fire of 1992. Let’s start at Buckingham Palace.

In 1818 H.C. Lincoln installed an organ for the eye-watering price of £3,014 4s in Nash’s newly built Music Room at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton. It was said to have been ‘the largest and most powerful

instrument in England’. The case was designed and decorated by Frederick Crace at a cost of £733 7s. It had three manuals (Great and Choir down to GG, Swell to tenor F) and one Pedal stop – a 16ft Open Diapason. On ascending to the throne and then marrying Albert in 1840, Queen Victoria decided that the Pavilion was tasteless, so its contents were removed to other royal residences and the Royal Family used it no more.

Thus it was that in 1848 Lincoln was commissioned to dismantle and pack up the organ at Brighton and send it to Kensington Palace for storage. A new Ballroom at Buckingham Palace was built by Thomas Cubitt in 1852-5. On 12 July 1855 Lincoln was paid £68

for ‘adapting the organ for the Ballroom at Buckingham Palace’. However, being somewhat aged, Lincoln carried out only part of the work, much woodwork being undertaken by Cubitt’s men and by the organ-builders Gray & Davison. The G&D accounts state: ‘For completing Mr Lincoln’s Contract, £100. New Bellows for a proper supply of Wind, New Action, New Wind Trunks to Swell & Pedal Open Diapason, with valves & draw stop action, new set of German Pedals, Two coupling actions, Double pallets to lower Octave of Great Organ, Six Composition Pedals Extending Double Diapason in Great Organ, and supplying large Metal Pipes, new reed stops adding swell coupler per estimate, £200. New



Buckingham Palace Ballroom organ

key fittings, Desk, Key Jambs, draw Stops Rods & Jambs of Maple, new draw stop Knobs engraved and fixed, £28. Organ stool, £4'. In addition, the original tenor F Swell was extended five notes down to tenor C.

The figures on top of the organ, which were modelled by William Theed at a cost of £300, were carved under Ludwig Gruner's supervision at a cost of £67 10s. Gruner charged a further £364 10s for painting the organ case, which was designed by Sir James Pennethorne. New dummy front pipes were supplied by Gray & Davison.

The organ was heard publicly for the first time on 2 July 1855 when Queen Victoria commanded a concert be given to inaugurate 'the new Ball and Concert-room'. Its specification by then was (and remains to this day):

During the 1990s its restoration was planned under the supervision of consultant Nicholas Thistlethwaite, being executed by William Drake and completed in 2003. The work of renovation and conservation was very considerable, all the instrument being in a sorry state. Seven stops of the Great Organ had to be furnished with new metal pipes, along with the Choir Bassoon, to replace those 'missing'. An electric blower had never been fitted, so instead of installing a conventional rotary fan, Drake designed a machine to activate smoothly the hand-blowing equipment and thus enable the wind supply to sound naturally-blown. The organ gained a humidification system, a roof, and – uniquely – an electrically-operated blind behind the front pipes, so that

It is such a joy to be able to enter the organ gallery and be greeted with the magnificent view of Buckingham Palace's Ballroom, not only because of the glorious chandeliers that overlook the splendour of the Ballroom, but also seeing two thrones at the other end of the room and thinking of all the incredible people that have been in this room before; Royalty, Heads of State, people receiving knighthoods, Duke of Edinburgh awards etc.; the list goes on and on. Turn around and there is the organ, gazing over the balcony, in all its beauty with the console right in the middle, facing away from the ballroom and attached to the case.

The organ in Buckingham Palace is great fun to play. I think what makes this instrument unique is the combination of the manual compasses going down below bottom C, to G and, even with all the manual stops, there being only one pedal stop of 16ft pitch on the straight, flat pedalboard! To ensure there is no loss of weight in the pedals however, the Great to Pedal coupler couples the Great an octave lower with most of the Great pipes extending to the C below the bottom G, thus ensuring that the pedals are never left with just that one 16ft sound. Curiously, the Choir also has an extended manual compass but the Swell does not (the bottom four keys being dummies). Granted, with this situation, one does find oneself slightly off centre with one's legs slightly too far over to the left on quite narrow pedal keys, but I feel that this just adds to this instrument's wonderful character.

GREAT ORGAN (GG, AA TO F <sup>3</sup> )		CHOIR ORGAN (GG, AA TO F <sup>3</sup> )	
Double Diapason Bass [from CC, 12 notes]	16	Ch. Dulciana	8
Double Diapason Treble	16	Ch. Stop <sup>d</sup> Diapason	8
Open Diapason No1	8	Ch. Principal	4
Open Diapason No2	8	Ch. Flute	4
Stop <sup>d</sup> Diapason	8	Ch. Fifteenth	2
Principal	4	Ch. Bassoon	8
Twelfth	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>		
Fifteenth	2	PEDAL ORGAN (CTO F1)	
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>	Grand Open Diapason	16
Sesquialtra Bass 15.17.19.22	IV	Great Manual to Pedal (a sub-octave coupler with extra bass pipes to complete the compass)	
Sesquialtra Treble 8.12.15.17.19.22	IV	Choir Manual to Pedal	
Mixture 22.24.26	III	Swell Manual to Pedal	
Trumpet	8	Swell to Great Manual	
Clarion	4	Swell to Choir Manual	
SWELL ORGAN (CTO F <sup>3</sup> )		4 composition pedal to the Great	
Sw. Bourdon	16	2 composition pedal to the Swell	
Sw. Open Diapason	8	Lever swell pedal	
Sw. Stop <sup>d</sup> Diapason	8		
Sw. Principal	4		
Sw. Mixture 15.17.22	III		
Sw. Cornopean	8		
Sw. Oboe	8		

How much the organ was used after Queen Victoria's death is not known but it seems very likely that for much of the twentieth century it slumbered, unused, and apparently unplayable. Indeed, much of its metal pipework was discovered to have disappeared when its restoration began seriously to be considered. Miraculously, the rest of it survived – despite being in the way of the bandsmen who regularly crowded around it when playing at great banquets.

humidity within the instrument could be further controlled.

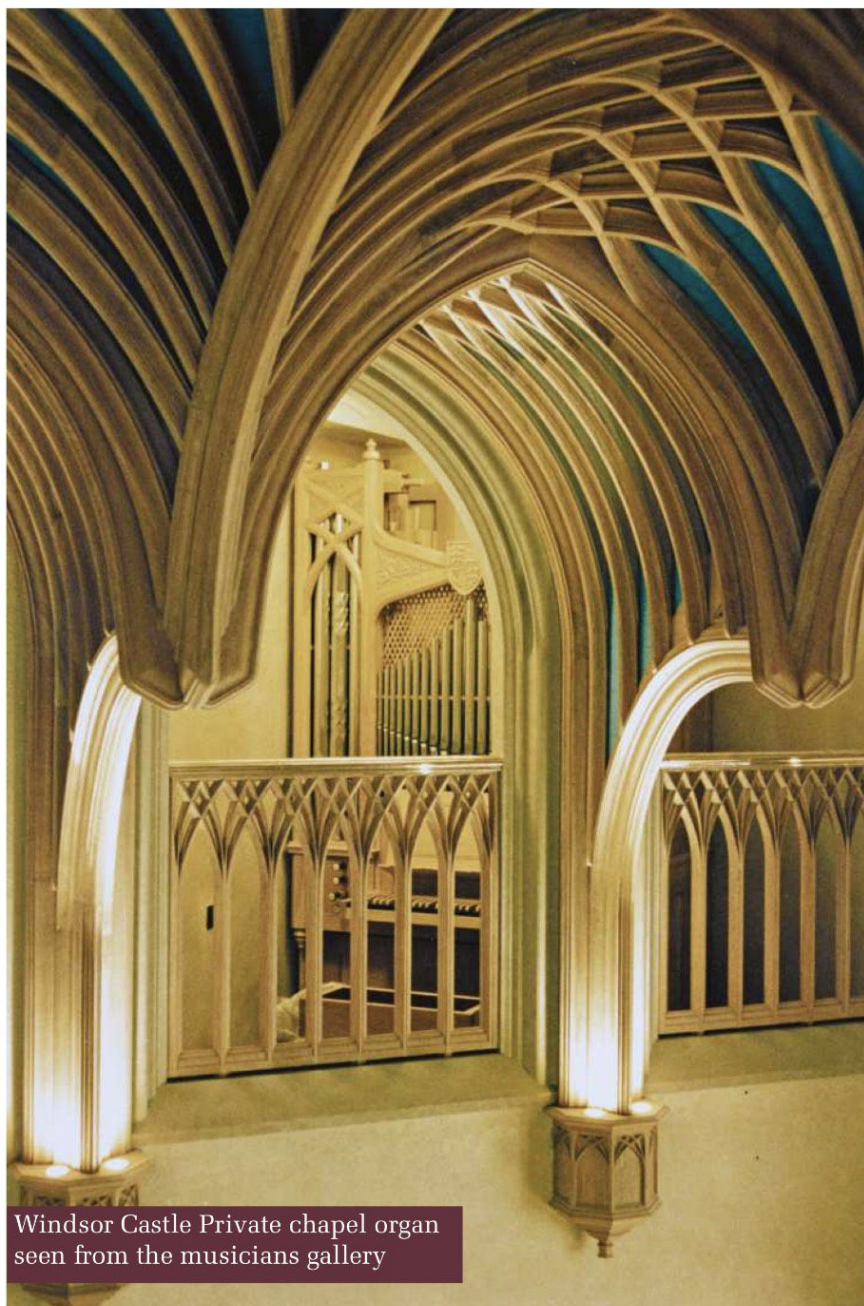
A fine recording by Joseph Nolan, along with video recordings by Martyn Noble (to be found on line), give a good idea of the unusual and perhaps unique sound of this organ, and of the pleasantly unequal temperament selected for it, based on the evidence of the surviving pipework. Martyn Noble, who now has charge of this organ, has kindly supplied the following assessment of its character:

The key action is pleasantly light (uncoupled) with a delightful top-resistance as the player feel the pressure of the wind on the pallets. The Great has a slightly shallower touch than the other manuals and the Great and Swell manuals seem to be relatively far away from each other with no tilting of the manuals for ease of reach, though once you become acquainted with the instrument, it's not difficult to play at all. The other quite special thing about playing this organ is that you can hear the organ breathing. It still uses its original hand pump (granted it's now attached to an electric motor)

but you can hear when the hand pump changes direction which, to me, adds an element of humanity to the sound of this instrument. If you were to try hard enough the instrument can run short of wind (with manuals coupled and 16ft manual stops drawn) but back in time this would easily be solved by pumping faster ...

In terms of balancing, the Great is definitely to be thought of as a manual to be used in solo repertoire (or very minimally in loud accompaniments) but the Swell and Choir suit accompanying well. For reference, Full Swell (to reeds) with the box open can balance the Great Open Diapason No.1 alone. The organ is slightly sharp (roughly A=443) and its temperament is very subtle, so most things are playable on it. Even though the organ was designed for a much smaller space, the *tutti* fills the hall quite well, especially when the Great 8ft Trumpet acts as a 16ft pedal reed. It even has some divided stops (16ft Double Diapason and Sesquialtera) on the Great; useful when you need to have two different sounds on one manual. So the organ is quite versatile.

Although there are player aids, in the form of composition pedals (two for the Swell and four for the Great), I must admit I don't often use them, or at least I only use them when I have a registrant present to ensure all stops come out all the way and you're not left with some stops half speaking, as pulling out several stops on a large, purely mechanical organ can make them heavy at times. The stop-knobs come out quite a long way and are arranged on sloping jambs, with the higher knobs getting further and further away from the player, so a registrant is definitely advised unless suitable gaps in pieces can be had. The Swell pedal also is heavy to operate, which is fine for sections that are either box open or box closed but, as it's spring loaded with the pedal being latched down when open, it's very difficult to be expressive whilst playing, unless you ask your registrant to do it – quite possible as the pedal is nicely placed to be on the far right near the top of the pedals.



Windsor Castle Private chapel organ seen from the musicians gallery

To sum up, the organ in the Ballroom is wonderfully special and it is always a joy and an honour to play it as part of my role at St. James's Palace.

At Windsor Castle, in the monarch's Private Chapel, is quite a different organ, dating only from 1997. Roger Judd MVO has researched in minute detail all the Windsor organs; I am very grateful to him to be able to use his *The Organs in Windsor Castle* (Positif Press, 2015) as my main source for that which follows.

The Private Chapel has had an organ at least since 1628, when a new instrument was installed. This was replaced by a one-manual instrument by Bernard Smith in 1673-4, quite possibly that which was removed in 1711 to St Mary's, Walton-on-Thames, remaining there to this day. Samuel Green made another one-manual organ for the Castle around the year 1770; it is not impossible that it stood in the Chapel. With the advent of Prince Albert, pianos and organs began to be bought and



Buckingham Palace Swell Bass extension Soundboard - split table being removed



Buckingham Palace Swell Bass extension Soundboard - table and sliders being planed



Buckingham Palace manual keyboards being restored

commissioned for the Castle in some numbers: it was a golden period for the Royal Family's music-making. The organ-builder Robert Gray installed somewhere in the Castle an instrument which is assumed to have been imported from Albert's home area in Germany, though apparently of Florentine make. Having established a good working relationship with Albert, Gray was employed for hire organs, tunings and other organ work for some years. The one-manual Samuel Green organ was enlarged to two manuals with pedals and much work was done to the organ in Buckingham Palace, too – an organ which predated the Ballroom instrument we have already looked at.

Eventually, once Edward Blore had carried out major remodelling

work in the Castle, William Hill was commissioned to construct a 31-stop 3-manual organ which had to do double duty – speak into St George's Hall and also at right angles to that into the much smaller Private Chapel. Two consoles were fitted – and this with tracker action, back in 1852! In 1882 Sir George Elvey drew up a list of repairs and improvements, yet perhaps nothing was done, for in 1886 another report was made, in response to the organ's poor condition. It failed completely on an occasion in 1887 when Queen Victoria 'had come to the Chapel to hear some music'. Hill carried out repairs, but it appears that this complex organ was always over-heated and problems soon re-emerged. The Queen therefore determined upon a new organ – and a new organ-builder.

So it was that Henry Willis came to install another two-sided, two-console organ, in 1888-89. Parratt and Willis disagreed over the tonal scheme and other matters, but compromises were found and a 4-manual 33-stop organ was installed, the pneumatic lever being used for the key action of each manual. The not inconsiderable quotation (later reduced somewhat) was for £2,354 (around £325,000 in today's money). Roger Judd writes that 'the whole organ was completely enclosed, with louvred shutters on both fronts and in the roof. There was a foot lever at each console which enabled the performer to open or close the shutters on the relevant side, thereby directing the sound only into the space being used. The Swell box was

arranged laterally across the organ chamber, thus speaking equally into the Hall and the Chapel, and the pedal controlling the box was Willis's pneumatic locking swell pedal, found on a number of his instruments at this period.'

The synoptic stop list was:

Great 16,8,8,8,8,4,4,2,III,8,4;  
Swell 8,8,8,8,4,16,8,8,8;  
Choir 8,8,8,8,4,8;  
Solo 8,8,8;  
Pedal 16,16,8,16; six couplers.

Perhaps because of its complexity and also the heating system in building, the Willis instrument failed to prove reliable; J.W. Walker took over its maintenance in 1907, when some restorative works were carried out. Cleaning took place in 1931 and in 1946 the old and unreliable hydraulic blowing was finally replaced with an electric blower. Under the beady eye of consultant Ralph Downes, the Walker firm undertook a successful restoration project in 1979. The Fr. Willis was commercially recorded by Jonathan Rees-Williams in September 1991, a few days after he had replaced Christopher Robinson as organist of St George's Chapel. Tragically, on 20 November 1992 a terrible fire tore through the castle, its seat being in a curtain near the organ, and that was the end of the Willis. A new Private Chapel was designed by Giles Downes, on the site of the former Holbein Room. Seating only thirty people, this beautiful space presented a real challenge for an organ-builder, for the floor area available is triangular (!), 9ft x 8ft x 11ft. A compact one-manual instrument would fit this space and was considered adequate for the modest musical needs of the Private Chapel. A scheme was drawn up by Jonathan Rees-Williams and Mark Venning (Managing Director of Harrison & Harrison), and the advent of this jewel-like instrument returned to the castle the size and type of instrument installed all those years before by Father Smith and Samuel Green.



Windsor Castle Private chapel organ assembled at Harrison & Harrison's factory

## Stop List

MANUAL (56 NOTES)	
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Principal	4
Fifteenth	2
Sesquialtera Bass (notes 1-24)	II
Sesquialtera Treble (notes 25-56)	II
PEDAL (30 NOTES)	
Bourdon (ext. Stopped Diap.)	16
COUPLER	
Manual to Pedal	

Roger Judd describes the new instrument thus:

The organ is founded on a warm and supportive 8ft Open Diapason, which has a stopped bass with 4ft open pipes as 'helpers', an arrangement that has good historical precedents and works well, as well as saving space. The action is mechanical throughout, and the bellows and blower are placed below the floor, which was made by Harrisons as an integral part of the organ. The case is of solid English oak, and the initial design concept was devised by Didier Grassin, while the carvings are the work of Derek Riley de Cayless. The organ [...] was installed in the Castle by John Richardson, who was responsible for the main design, and by Neil Watson, who made the case. The organ was voiced and completed by Peter Hopps, Harrisons' Head Voicer, and Mark Venning in October 1997.

As Her Majesty the Queen celebrates the unique distinction of seventy years on the throne, I'm sure that all readers of *Organists' Review* congratulate and thank her, also hoping that in some modest way, these two wonderful and totally contrasting Royal Organs may continue to bring her joy in the years ahead.



### 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](http://www.paulhale.org)