

The Joseph Walker organ in All Saints' Church, Broseley

(Part One)

Paul Hale

Earlier this year, an outstanding book was published by the British Institute of Organ Studies. Written by organ historian Nicholas Plumley, it is the largest study of a significant British organ-builder ever to appear in print, and is entitled *A History of J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd (organbuilders)*. Its 400+ pages outline the story of the Walker firm, founded by Joseph Walker (1802-1870) and carried on by family members through several generations – indeed, until well after the Second World War. For most of its history the firm was London-based, moving to Brandon (Suffolk) in the early 1970s and now situated in Devizes, Wiltshire.

Joseph Walker's early organs, we learn from Plumley's seminal book, were small instruments, often of one manual only, many of them barrel organs, and most of them situated in the west gallery of country churches. He had numerous styles of casework, most of them influenced by the rise of interest in 'Gothic' forms and decorations, though some decidedly 'classical' in appearance.

The organ which really made the firm's name was that still to be found in Romsey Abbey (1858). Over the next few decades this led to significant commissions for York, Rochester and Bristol Cathedrals, with major churches in London, Northampton and Portsea also ordering Walker organs of cathedral dimensions.

As with most organ-builders of the first half of the nineteenth century, the firm was to see many of its earlier organs either replaced with larger instruments or enlarged, most of them being moved from the previously popular west gallery position to the newly fashionable 'Oxford Movement' position on one side or the other of the chancel. There they could accompany the church choir, which in turn could lead



Image 1 | Joseph William Walker



Image 2 | Broseley organ case from the nave

Broseley Church, Salop.			
with the Churchwardens & Vestry			
1863 Nov	Taking down the Organ in the Old Church & removing it to the Town Hall. Amount of Assistant.		20 10 6
	Amount of Assistant to put up Organ when determined on to be used in the Town Hall - which could not be done without the instrument undergoing some repairs & temporary adjustments - the total cost as under		
	Path. Town at Broseley Meeting Expenses	1	
	For Locomotive Wagon from Broseley	4 2 6	
	Country Meeting Exp. to & from Broseley	1 12	
	Local Expenses at Broseley	4 6	
	Path. Meeting Exp. to London	1 10	
		11 10 6	16 10 6
1865 June	2. 282 2. Four Organ for the Church		250 -
	2. Rows of Pipes		87 17
	3. 1. Organ, 4ft 10" in all incl. 10" 8 1/2 ft		30 -
	4. 1. Organ, 4ft 10" in all incl. 10" 8 1/2 ft		
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Image 3 | Broseley page in the JWW Order Book

the congregation in song. As the twentieth century ran its course, many such instruments had their original mechanical key action ('tracker' action) replaced with electro-pneumatic action, with additional stops added to make the organ more versatile and larger.

This is how the vast majority of the larger parish church instruments in the Church of England are now found. But there remains a handful of instruments – a tiny handful – still in west galleries, still with their original casework, still with their original mechanism and console, and still with most of their original pipes. This article is about one of these rare instruments.

Nicholas Plumley has discovered that Joseph Walker had connections in Shropshire, starting from when his older brother, John, married the daughter of a Shropshire farmer. In 1838 Walker added pedals to the organ in Ludlow parish church, supplying new organs in the same year for Onibury and Diddlebury, then at Nash in 1844, and Stockton in 1848. The Stockton organ may have been ordered following the success of the organ with the largest and most impressive organ case Walker made in the area – that installed only five miles away, in 1845, for the new church at Broseley, the organ which is the subject of this article.

The entry from the Walker Ledgers, courtesy of

Nicholas Plumley (see Image 3), is most interesting. It shows, first, that a previous organ in the church was removed 'to the Town Hall' (demolished in 1963) and altered to fit its new home. The Ledger then states that the new organ for the church would have two 'rows of keys', the Great keys running from 'GG to F in alt' (59 notes), the Swell running from Tenor C to F in alt' (42 notes). A 59-note Great running from GG to top F means that the bottom five notes (GG to BB) were chromatic and not a 'short octave', with fewer useful notes omitted. The Swell running only from Tenor C was entirely typical of Walker's work until the 1870s, when the firm's Swells became of full compass – by running down to the now usual bottom C.

One and a half octaves of Pedal pipes are specified, from bottom G to tenor D. However, two octaves of pedal keys are specified, called 'German pedals'. They would have been permanently coupled to the Great. There were some extras, perhaps asked for by the church organist: for £20 the church received two more large Pedal pipes; for £2.2s the Swell keys could be made to couple to the Great (a 'Swell to Great' coupler); for £5.5s a Great 4ft Flute (from tenor C) was provided; and finally for £10.10s a Swell 'Double Diapason' was included. Extra carving for the case 'to Mr Banks design' cost 30s [£1.10s]. The case itself is specified as being 'A Carved Oak Case about 15ft high, 10ft wide and 6ft deep'. That width and height are precisely what we find today.

In 1890 it was decided to move the Walker organ out of the gallery, to join a choir (in new stalls) in the chancel. Doubtless this was at the instigation of the Revd George Fleming Lamb (Rector for 36 years), in trying to move the church to a more 'advanced'



Image 4 | Organ when at the east end, as seen from the south gallery

liturgical position. This became a major operation because the significant height of the organ meant that the eastern bay of the gallery then present in the north aisle needed to be removed. Nicholson of Worcester did the work, also enlarging the Swell and Pedal departments. The organ faced south, the player, projecting some three feet in front of the case, sitting half-way across the north aisle close to the vestry door – hardly an aid to dignified processions. On the bass end (west-facing left-hand side) of the organ ranged a row of 16ft wooden Pedal Open Diapason pipes, to which, after the First World War, a wooden war memorial was fixed and a chapel created. That war memorial is now affixed to the north wall, adjacent to its original position.

Removal of the organ from the west end revealed a large plain glass west window. As part of the beautification and re-ordering of the church, a stained-glass window was commissioned from the leading stained-glass studio of the period, that of Charles Kempe (1837-1907), who was inspired by William Morris and later studied with the leading architect G. F. Bodley. It is doubtless no coincidence that under the next Rector the church installed a fine Bodley reredos, formerly at Eardisley.

Here is the specification of the organ throughout its period of residence in the north aisle:

Great	Top 4 notes of all ranks by Nicholson
Open Diapason 8	
Stopped Diapason 8	
Dulciana 8	
Principal 4	
Flute 4	
Twelfth 2 ² / ₃	
Fifteenth 2	
Sesquialtera III	
Trumpet 8	
Clarionet 8 (tenor C)	
Swell	Bass octave and top 4 notes by Nicholson
Double Diapason 16	probably Nicholson
Open Diapason 8	
Stopped Diapason 8	
Echo Gamba 8	probably Nicholson
Voix Celeste 8 (tenor C)	Nicholson
Principal 4	
Fifteenth 2	
Horn 8	Nicholson
Oboe 8	Nicholson
Pedal	
Open Diapason 16 [wood]	probably Nicholson
Bourdon 16	rank completed by Nicholson
Couplers etc	
Swell to Great	
Swell to Pedals	
Great to Pedals	
3 composition pedals to the Great	
3 composition pedals to the Swell	
Ratchet swell pedal	
Hand blowing – later an electric blower	

In the late 1970s it was decided to reorder the church, removing the north and south galleries, glazing the enclosed Lady Chapel at the east end of the south aisle, and removing the organ back to its 1845 position in the west gallery – a position for which, it has to be said, the organ, the west gallery and the western arch were all conceived as a unity. In 1985 it was proposed to make significant alterations and Pedal additions to the organ (of which, more below). This task was entrusted to a Dutch organ-builder, living in the Hereford diocese, who, unfortunately, went out of business during the work.

Paul Derrett, who then lived not far away, was asked to get the organ at least into working condition. He had much to do, for a minimal budget, and has recently explained what that was: to get the Great action working properly, add the missing Great Clarinet, voice two new Mixtures, assemble the Swell action, supply many missing Swell pipes, supply the missing Pedal ranks, make the Pedal tracker action, and devise a stop action for the new Pedal soundboard. Having completed as much of this work as proved possible, he played for a dedicatory service taken by the Dean of Hereford, giving a recital to demonstrate the instrument.

The organ has remained playing – just – though year by year getting into worse condition, with only one Pedal stop (of a projected six) working, despite a Pedal slider soundboard being installed in 1985 (see Image 5). Unfortunately, this soundboard had taken the place of the 16ft Open Wood, which disappeared. One of the side tower pipes fell down into the nave in recent times, so the remaining front pipes have been stored inside the organ to prevent further accidents, hence their absence in some of the photographs illustrating this article.

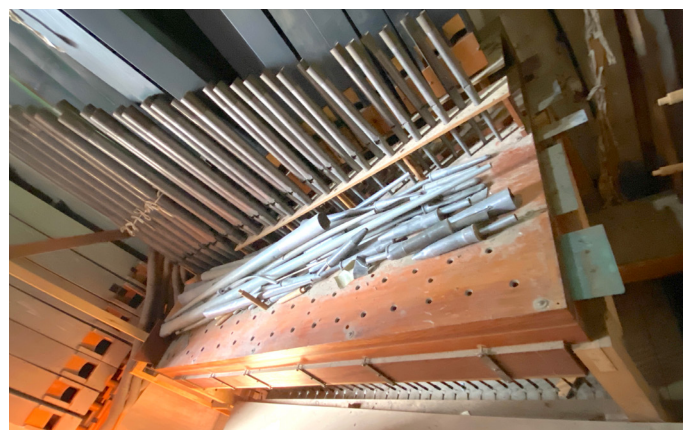


Image 5 | Pedal slider soundboard with pipes

The church would like to restore the organ to its ‘Nicholson’ period specification. To that end, a vintage 16ft Open Wood rank has been sourced and stored locally.

Part Two of this article will be written at some as yet unspecified date once the work has been carried out. There will be considerable local rejoicing when the organ’s current semi-playable state has been transformed and the instrument once again sounds and looks worthy of its fine surroundings.

Donations welcome, I’m sure. As they say, “watch this space”.



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 has been a diploma examiner for the RCO, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lambeth 'Thomas Cranmer Award' for his contribution to church music. More information is available at www.paulhale.org.

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