Technical

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

The old and new organ in Wimborne Minster

Wimborne Minster's organ, a remarkable blend of historical craftsmanship, has undergone numerous transformations since its creation in 1664. Over centuries it has been expanded, rebuilt, and restored by renowned builders, including Hayward, Seede, Robson, and Walker. Despite these many changes, the organ has maintained a harmonious and unified sound, making it a unique and beloved instrument. This article explores its fascinating evolution and the recent comprehensive rebuild by Mander Organs, ensuring its continued legacy.

PAUL HALE

Rarely has the title of my regular column been so apt as on this occasion, for this article concerns an organ made in 1664, enlarged in 1764, 1812 and 1844, then rebuilt in 1856, 1865, 1899, 1965 and finally in 2002 (though not before some additional work in 2000 and 2006). A bit of a dog's dinner, then? A curate's egg? A hodge-podge? Not a bit of it! Somehow the Wimborne Minster organ manages to combine ranks by Hayward, Seede, England, Robson, Walker and Mander into a homogenous and entirely convincing whole. How did this come about? This is its unique story…

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The record of organs in Wimborne Minster goes back as far as 1408; they are memorably and fully written-up in the various editions of Betty Matthews' booklet *The Organs & Organists of Wimborne Minster from 1408*, from which this article draws. The origins of the present organ are found in the new instrument set up on the Choir Screen by Robert Hayward (of Bath) in 1664. This seems to have comprised an eight-stop Great and a four-stop Chair; some of its ranks of pipes remain in the organ to this day. Church accounts show the usual occasional repairs over the next century, until, in 1764, Brice Seede executed a contract in which he was enjoined "to repair, amend and compleat the Organ

2 View looking east from the west end

3 The new cases and Orchestral Trumpet pipes in position

of this Church upon such conditions as shall be Mentioned in the sd. Agreement entered into by the sd. Churchwardens & the said Brice Seede." Robert Hart was engaged to rework the organ's casework, and John Taylor was commissioned "to Paint the Organ a Bright Mahogany Colour … to Gild the Organ Pipes … and Gild the Carved Work with the best large Gold…". A 2ft Fifteenth was added to the Chair. Brice Seede maintained the organ until 1771, when his son Richard succeeded him until 1792, at which point the maintenance passed to more local organ-builders and the organist himself. In 1812, the relatively large sum of £114 19s 0d was paid to George Pike England. The records and Betty Matthews' account are silent on what work he carried out, but I surmise that as well as repairs, England added a small short-compass Swell Organ, for when Joseph Robson came on the scene in 1844–5, he "extended the Swell to tenor C". England also added [pedals and?] pedal pipes, the pedals being connected to the keys of the Great.

Those who preferred a 'vista' to an organ on a pulpitum were at work in Wimborne no less than in so many cathedrals (more's the pity), sweeping away screens and screen-mounted organs. So it was that in 1856 the Choir screen and gates were removed, and we find Robson setting up the old organ in the south Choir aisle. We learn that "The Swell was extended an octave upwards and a super octave coupler added; besides a [Swell] Sesquialtera, three ranks, double Trumpet and double Diapason…the compass being C to f4". Unsurprisingly, the instrument – removed from its ideal place on the Choir screen and distinctly buried in the south Choir aisle – failed to have sufficient power to accompany large choirs or congregations, so a mere decade later we find J. W. Walker & Sons called in to rectify matters. The organ was removed to their London factory, rebuilt and enlarged to the following specification:

Great (56 notes)
16.8.8.8.8.4.4.2$^{2}/_{3}$.2.IV.II.8.4
Swell (68 notes [sic])
16.8.8.4.2.III.16[t.c.].8.8.4
Choir (56 notes)
8.8.8[t.c.].4.4.2.8[t.c.]
Pedal (30 notes)
16.16.16.8.16
Five unison couplers, plus Swell Super Octave and Choir Sub Octave to Great

This complete rebuild cost £764 and was ready in time for a grand opening in 1867. After 20 years, Walkers returned to modernise the tracker action and fit some additional casework. This 1899 work cost an enormous £1,171, and it is hard now to imagine how such a sum could have been spent. I suspect that at least two soundboards with their associated actions were replaced, leaving only the Swell soundboard from the

pre-1865 organ (which survives to this day). It is known that 'modern devices' were also incorporated, so one imagines that the whole console might have been remodelled in the manner that J. W. Walker was then making its consoles – quite differently than those of the 1860s. The fitting of hydraulic blowing soon followed.

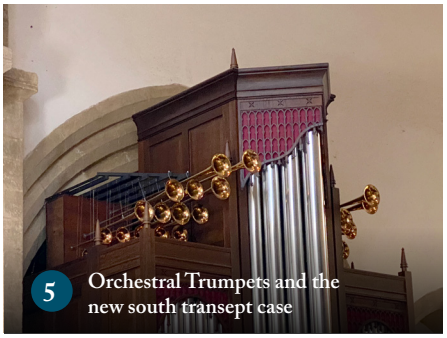
The organ then proved a reliable and satisfactory instrument for the church's considerable musical needs until time and taste took their toll, so Walkers returned more than 60 years later. Their 1965 rebuild resulted in one of the company's finest instruments, at a time when they were working at the peak of their production, with many rebuilds and new organs large and small. Their recasting of the Hayward, Seede, England, Robson and nineteenth-century Walker pipes was carried out skilfully, albeit with more than a nod to the neo-baroque ethos of the period. Almost inevitably, the Choir Organ was converted into a Positive, with a full *Cornet séparé*, Cymbal and Crumhorn (the Robson Cremona revoiced). The old soundboards were excellently restored and augmented with new 'Roosevelt' and other unit chests for the Walker trademark *en chamade* Orchestral Trumpet, and for a large new Pedal Organ (no fewer than 17 stops, including two independent 2fts – a Nachthorn and a Schalmei – plus a 16ft extension of the Positive Crumhorn, though, sadly, it lost its 16ft Open Wood). The three manual departments acquired the inevitable 'top-note' machines (despite the Swell soundboard's already extended compass). The layout was completely changed, in a necessary attempt to project the organ's tone down the nave: an almost impossible task, given the position of the organ, the fact that there is a large tower space and two low arches between it and the nave, plus the dry acoustics of the building. The wind system employed a newly-developed wind regulator type, based on the 'Schwimmers' being made by some European firms such as Rieger, used instead of traditional double-rise reservoirs. This saved a great deal of space, though the distinctly experimental nature of the 1960s Walker regulators led to permanent wind and tuning problems. The console, of oak and rosewood, is handsome and solid; I recall it scarcely looking its 44 years' age when I reported on the instrument back in 2009. The low-voltage electrical components were all the best of their type available at the time, being by 'Stero' (R. H. Williams, of Shirley, Solihull), a firm sadly no longer with us.

Between 1965 and the recent complete reconstruction, minor tonal changes were made by Lance Foy, who maintained the instrument. A vintage 4ft Harmonic Flute replaced the 1965 Great Koppel Flute, and the bland 1965 Great Dulciana was replaced with a vintage 8ft Viola. Both displaced ranks were stored within the organ.

Mechanically, the organ has for at least 15 years been in need of a complete overhaul. When this could eventually take place, Mander Organs won the contract, with Dr William McVicker as the consultant. He has written a detailed and interesting article about the organ – centred on its historical aspects – in *Organ Building* Volume 23 (publ. IBO), which I commend to our readers, especially if they would like to see the origin of every rank in the current organ. The opportunity has been taken to re-orientate the organ, the better to support congregational singing, to add much-missed sonority to the Pedal by adding a new stopped wooden 32ft Sub Bass at the back of the organ (rather than a 16ft Open Wood, which perhaps might have been more generally useful), to louden the Great reeds by placing them on a heavier wind pressure, and to add a Tuba (on 10ins wind pressure) as an alternative solo reed to the edgy Orchestral Trumpet (a stop whose sound was once likened to 'tearing calico').

The work was even more comprehensive than the 1965 Walker rebuild, as it started with an entirely new building frame, seven new conventional reservoirs; new wooden wind trunking; new slider soundboards for


4 Restored console


5 Orchestral Trumpets and the new south transept case

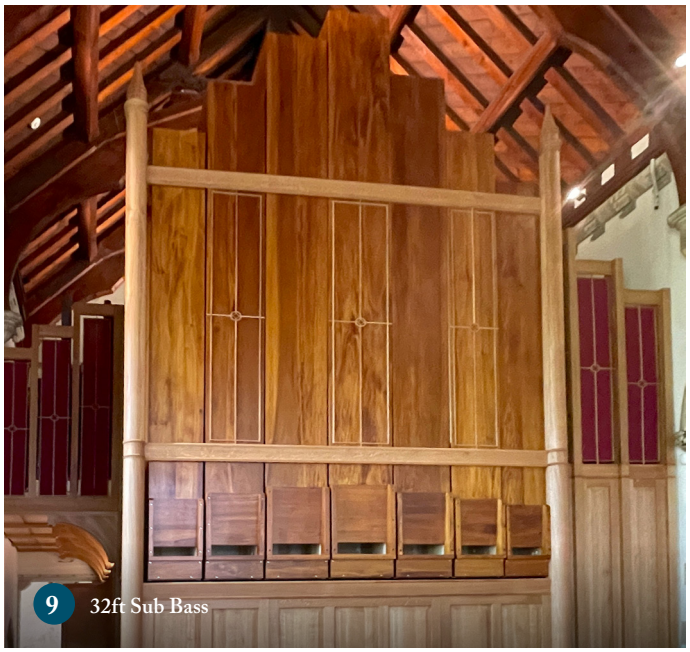

6 Pipe shades being prepared for installation on the cases


7 View of both cases


8 Orchestral Trumpets under restoration

Great Organ	
Bourdon	16
Open Diapason No. 1	8
Open Diapason No. 2	8
Rohr Flute	8
Viole de Gambe	8
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Twelfth	$2^2/_3$
Fifteenth	2
Sesquialtera 12.17	II
Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
Reeds Sub Octave	
Trumpet	8
Clarion	4
Swell Organ	
Double Diapason	16
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Viola	8
Vox Angelica (tenor C)	8
Principal	4
Flute	4
Twelfth	$2^2/_3$
Fifteenth	2
Mixture 22.26.29	III
Tremulant	
Double Trumpet	16
Cornopean	8
Hautbois	8
Clarion	4

Choir Organ	
Violin Diapason	8
Gedeckt	8
Dulciana	8
Principal	4
Chimney Flute	4
Quint	$2^2/_3$
Blockflute	2
Tierce	$1^3/_5$
Larigot	$1^1/_3$
Sifflute	1
Cymbal 29.33.36	III
Crumhorn	8
Tremulant	
Orchestral Trumpet (tenor C)	8
Tuba	8
Pedal Organ	
Sub Bass (ext.)	32
Principal	16
Violone	16
Bourdon	16
Salicional	16
Octave (ext.)	8
Bass Flute (ext.)	8
Salicet (ext.)	8
Fifteenth (ext.)	4
Octave Flute (ext.)	4
Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
Trombone	16
Posaune (ext.)	8
Clarion (ext.)	4
Swell Reeds on Pedal	



9 32ft Sub Bass

Great and Choir; two completely new large oak cases with new front pipes; new electrical components throughout (including two electric swell-shutter motors for the two sets of shutters – north and west); the new ranks being those already mentioned, plus a stopped wooden Swell 16ft Double Diapason, a Choir Violin Diapason and a new bass for the Robson Great Open Diapason No. 2, being front pipes in the transept case (from above which the horizontal Orchestral Trumpet pipes peep). The previously supplanted Great Dulciana has been added to the Choir. The console has been completely restored, with the awkward 1965 toe levers ('composition pedals') replaced with elegant turned brass toe pistons on sweeps. Octave couplers have been added to the Choir (the renamed 'Positive'), plus a Great Reeds Sub Octave and a Swell Octave to Pedal, as well as controls for the West and East Swell shutters. With a nod to playing French repertoire, there is also a Manual I/II exchange, which also exchanges the divisional pistons for those two divisions. This also helps when accompanying the Minster choir, as the Choir Organ can then be played from the Great keys, allowing ready access to the Swell thumb pistons.

In the second week of July last year I travelled down to Wimborne to try the organ for myself – and, importantly, to hear it from the nave. I had given a recital on it back in 1979, had surveyed it in 2009, and had occasionally listened to recordings made by Barry Ferguson and Michael Austin when they were Organist & Choirmaster at the Minster. Naturally, I was particularly interested to hear for myself the results of this complete reconstruction.

The building has a significantly dry acoustic, the sort of acoustic which sucks tone out of any organ – as Ralph Downes famously discovered when the initially puny sounds first emerged from the new organ in Royal Festival Hall. It was gratifying to note that the rebuilt organ has gained warmth and depth in the rebuild, especially when the Choir Organ is coupled to the Great and when the new Pedal 32ft flue is added (though I still feel that an Open Wood would have been more useful than the 32ft). The Choir is able to achieve this owing to the addition of a delightful Violin Diapason and the former Great Dulciana. At a stroke, these two additional 8ft stops have transformed a 'Positive' into a 'Choir', without losing any of the Walker upperwork. Acting as a minor Great Organ, and with the Swell coupled, using the north Swell shutters only, the organ now has all the resources needed to accompany the excellent Minster choir (except an enclosed Clarinet, but you can't have everything). The Choir retains the amusing three-octave gap between the 4ft Principal and the bottom rank of the Cymbal. A 2ft Principal is the key element in getting such a chorus to pull together, not a 4ft. However there was no space for an extra rank, and the 4ft Principal clearly had to stay for it is so important a stop. One no longer listens to 8.4.Cymbal combination and fondly considers it an ideal 'Bach' secondary chorus to the Great, but one can still enjoy such a

decidedly 1960s tonality for what it is rather than what it is not.

Musically, the revised Choir is one of the instrument's greatest improvements, along with the repositioned Great, which now sits behind the transept case, speaking clearly into the nave, and the added versatility of having two sets of shutters on the Swell box. The Pedal has gained blend and balance by being rearranged, and the previously poor speech of the 16ft Principal has largely been corrected, enabling it to underpin the Pedal chorus in the manner it should but never did. What of the Tuba – and why, given the presence of the Orchestral Trumpet? The Trumpet has such a strong character all of its own that there are many places in solo and choral repertoire where a loud solo reed of more sonorous tone is to be preferred, especially in such a dry acoustic. Thus the Tuba. But don't draw it and expect a Hereford or St Paul's Tuba, for it is not. At first hearing it may be considered somewhat disappointing – a fine tone, indeed, but not really particularly loud. However, after using the Tuba in a variety of repertoire it becomes apparent that a less than *fortissimo* Tuba is ideal for use with the choir, and that if a louder solo reed is required, one simply draws the Orchestral Trumpet with it. They do blend, the Trumpet adding a whole range of harmonics and doubling the volume of the Tuba. Whilst it might be considered a shame that the 16ft Crumhorn derivation has gone from the Pedal, 'Swell Reeds on Pedal' means that a secondary Pedal 16ft reed ('for Bach') remains available, the Swell Double Trumpet being a more suitable stop than the Crumhorn in any case. Irritating is the fact that the Swell Tremulant does not work for the Hautbois. This is because the Hautbois is on the reed soundboard, to which a second tremulant unit has not been fitted. I recommend that this omission is rectified, because the very stop for which a Swell Tremulant is so often fitted is an Oboe / Hautbois.

> "Mechanically the organ is now in perfect condition, the most obvious aural improvement being the new traditional wind system which replaces Walker's early type of Schwimmers."

Mechanically the organ is now in perfect condition, the most obvious aural improvement being the new traditional wind system which replaces Walker's early type of Schwimmers (one of many variants), which never produced a musically satisfactory wind supply to the pipes. New Great and Choir soundboards ensure all pipes receive their full wind (for the first time in many years), and the vintage Swell flue soundboard has been restored well. The two new organ cases are a fine adornment to the church and helpfully give the organ-builders somewhere to place the 8ft basses. The console has been beautifully refurbished and refitted, all in the Walker style, and what a relief it was to find the toe levers replaced by toe pistons.

Why am I against electric toe levers? Simple – for three reasons: (1) the springs are usually set too light for resting one's toe on a lever just before pressing it; (2) it's so easy to slide off such a narrow polished surface; and (3) it's hard to mount levers in two rows (necessary with a full complement on a large organ) without the player catching one in the upper row when going for one in the lower row. Pistons are so much safer on all counts, and far easier / less expensive for the organ-builder to fit.

Performing at a console which helps the player, rather than making their life a trial, leads to happy organists and fine music-making, which I am quite sure will be the hallmark of organ playing at Wimborne Minster for the next several decades, thanks to this successful root-and-branch rebuild by Mander Organ Builders.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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