
Organ Works

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

New wine in old skins

In this issue, we delve into two outstanding organ restoration projects by Nicholson & Co., each a blend of historic preservation and contemporary craftsmanship. At Dedham and Addiscombe, vintage pipework from renowned builders J. J. Binns and Lewis & Co has been expertly revived and reimagined. These instruments, thoughtfully adapted to their architectural surroundings, speak with clarity, colour, and renewed purpose. Far more than technical feats, they stand as living examples of how the heart and soul of old organs can thrive anew – offering inspiration, beauty, and musical vitality for generations to come.

PAUL HALE





This column began precisely 20 years ago upon my retirement after 15 years as Editor: incoming Editor Sarah Beedle not only generously invited me to write it, but also gave it a title: ‘Something Old, Something New’. The title has offered the widest choice of topics over the years, as almost all organs fit into one or both categories. Among those that fit particularly well are old organs saved and transplanted to new homes; even more so when the transplants are a real combination of Old and New – for example, old pipes with new soundboards. It’s particularly fitting then that, 20 years on, we are today looking at two such projects: both, as it happens, conceived and executed by that busy firm, Nicholson & Co. It pleases me, too, that pipework by two of my favourite organ-building firms (J.J. Binns and Lewis & Co) has been saved and used in these two projects.

Both projects are based on fitting replacement instruments inside existing organ cases – hence the title of this article. The two churches are St Mildred’s, Addiscombe (near Croydon) and St Mary’s, Dedham (Essex). Let’s look at the Dedham project first.

St Mary’s boasts an attractive west-end case, boldly projecting forward on its own platform. It was installed in that position by Bishop & Son in 1975, based on elements of the casework (plus the 8ft front pipes) made for a west-end organ by William Hill in 1843, rebuilt at the east end by Hill & Son in 1887. As the photograph shows, its flat three-tower profile is greatly enhanced by carved pipe-shades and gothic caps to the towers and the two flats. All is enlivened with a subtle colour scheme and gilding. Behind this case stood the Hill organ as rebuilt by Bishop & Son with electro-pneumatic action and a detached console at the east end. When the instrument wore out, the church decided to seek a high-quality replacement organ of the right size for the case. They were in luck, for the two-manual 26-stop organ built in 1902 by James Jepson Binns for Glasgow’s Kinning Park Burgh Hall (removed in 1933 to Glasgow’s Mosspark

Parish Church), became available. All the pipework was original, except the Great Hohl Flute which in 1953 had been cut down and converted into a Stopped Diapason by Henry Willis & Sons.

The original 'battleship Binns' structure had to be replaced in order to reconfigure the organ for the completely different shape of its new home, so only the pipework (unaltered) and elements of the console (manuals, pedals, jams and drawstops) were retained. All other components – soundboards, unit chests, building-frame, swell box and wind system (of traditional design) – were new.

Nicholson's Managing Director, Andrew Caskie, comments:

From time to time, we inspect organs and conclude that an instrument does not merit further expenditure. Such was our view with the previous organ at Dedham. What to do then, however? Fortunately I had recently been made aware of the availability of the Binns organ in Mossparke. I'd never heard it or been there, but a few photos, the assurance of someone whose opinion I trusted, and experience of Binns organs made us confident that this was the right way forward.

We enjoy relocating organs without alteration – such as our project at St Lawrence's Church, York (and many tenders for similar schemes have been despatched from Malvern) – but this is often unfeasible due to space constraints. Dedham had a perfectly good case, but needed a new organ inside it. Making all of the mechanism new allowed us to create an internal layout and pipe set-out that was ideal for the new location. We wanted to provide a winding system as similar as possible to Binns' practice, so the instrument has traditional concussions instead of Schwimmers. The console is unashamedly in Binns style, helped by the retention of the pedalboard, keyboards and drawstops from the original console, itself remodelled from *en fenêtre* to detached when the organ was moved to its second home.

The original provenance of the organ as a concert instrument, albeit of modest size, is evident. Not many Binns organs of this size for churches had a pedal reed, nor such weight and breadth of tonal colour.



2 Dedham's attractive casework



3 Dedham console: Binns meets Nicholson

Specification:

Great Organ 61 notes		
1	Bourdon	16 C ¹ –B ¹² from Subbass
2	Open Diapason No. 1	8
3	Open Diapason No. 2	8 C ¹ –B ¹² from Subbass, + Hill case pipes from A ¹⁰
4	Hohl Flute	8 C ¹³ to top are vintage Open Wood pipes
5	Dolce	8 C ¹ –B ¹² from Hohl Flute
6	Octave	4
7	Flute Harmonique	4
8	Twelfth	2 ² / ₃ Existing Dedham Hill rank; top 5 pipes new
9	Fifteenth	2
10	Mixture 15.19.22	III
11	Trumpet	8
Swell Octave to Great		
Swell to Great		
Swell Sub Octave to Great		
Swell Organ 61 notes		
12	Lieblich Bourdon	16
13	Open Diapason	8
14	Gedact	8
15	Viol d'Orchestre	8
16	Celestes (tenor C)	8
17	Salicet	4
18	Piccolo	2
19	Mixture 15.19.22	III
20	Horn	8
21	Oboe	8
Tremulant		
Octave		
Sub Octave		
Pedal Organ 30 notes		
22	Harmonic Bass	32 ext. Open Diapason, bass octave quinted
23	Open Diapason	16 wood
24	Sub Bass	16
25	Octave	8 ext. Open Diapason
26	Flute	8 ext. Sub Bass
27	Trombone	16
Great to Pedal		
Swell to Pedal		
Great and Pedal pistons		

Anthony Watson, organist at St Mary's, writes:

Dedham feels it has been very fortunate to have chosen Nicholson & Co. to provide such an amazing legacy for the church and community for many generations to come. The use of Binns' wonderful pipework (thoroughly restored and expertly voiced from being a concert organ to one suitable for accompanying the liturgy) was an inspired choice, and it is wonderful to think that these pipes speak once again, rather than standing idle. Nicholson's craftsmanship is exemplary; it is a real joy to be in the organ gallery and to marvel at the design. Where there was once a cramped jumble of flexible trunking, loose wiring and collapsed pipework, all of which was utterly filthy, now there is easy access, plenty of space and lighting, and the organ speaks clearly, filling the church with a crystal-clear timbre. It would be very difficult to choose my favourite stop, but I think that the Swell strings give a most prayerful sound, and the combination of the 8ft Hohl Flute and the old Hill organ's Twelfth together is very sparkly indeed.

We have noticed a considerable improvement in the congregational singing; the feedback is that the organ 'reaches deep into one's soul', to quote one delighted member. The organ is clearly very versatile in what it can produce by way of incidental music before and after the service. It is a real joy to play.

The Dedham work was carried out during 2024. It was immediately preceded by the Addiscombe project (2023–24). St Mildred's was built in 1931–32 to the design of architect C. G. Hare (1875–1932). It was his very last church and he died before it was completed, a memorial to Hare being added to the building. A pupil of G. F. Bodley, he became Bodley's assistant when Bodley's partner, Thomas Garner, left the firm (on converting to Roman Catholicism). Bodley, who died in 1907, considered Hare as his successor. In addition to his churches and war memorials, Hare did much design work for the church furnishers, Watts & Co.



4 View east across the Dedham Great

St Mildred's has always enjoyed a particularly high standard of choral worship. When the building opened, a pre-loved Lewis organ from a now unknown source was installed temporarily at the east end. This survived until 1959, when Noel Mander built a divided organ for the spacious west gallery from where the church choir then sang, according to Hare's design. As were so many post-war Greater London organs (and this was a skill for which Mander was known), the instrument was made largely from ranks and chests of various instruments salvaged from destroyed churches. The console, actions and 16ft Dulciana rank (with copper bass pipes on display) were new, and a Choir Organ was prepared for at the detached console in the nave. The neoclassical Choir division – a two-rank extension organ – arrived in 1965 and was located at the east end. A fire at this end of the building in 1985 led to the replacement of the Choir division in 1987 with a wholly new two-manual tracker organ by Mander. The case was designed by Stephen Bicknell, who then worked in their design office. Its console was equipped also to play the west-end Mander, so only one player was needed.

This solution worked well, until the 1959 organ became less and less musically satisfactory and eventually wore out. A fine second-hand organ was then sought to replace it. Happily, one was found close by in St Paul's United Reformed Church; this was a 1907 instrument by Lewis & Co. As at Dedham,

Nicholson used the pipes and underneath them built a new organ, played from the revised 1987 Mander east organ console. To the St Paul's pipes Nicholson added three aurally significant stops in Lewis style, plus the existing Mander Dulciana basses (front pipes), to enhance and complete the specification. The result, in these warmly resonant acoustics, is extraordinarily effective – certainly the finest Lewis & Co I have ever heard from this period of the firm's work.

Lewis himself had left the company a few years before this organ was made, and sometimes the Lewis organs of this period have less tonal beauty than those made under Lewis's direction (the Bute Hall in Glasgow is one such). My experience also is that Lewis's bold Diapason choruses work far better in resonant buildings than in dry ones. Hence the remaining Lewis sounds in (for instance) the dull acoustics of Newcastle Cathedral make a less than lovely sound, yet the smaller Lewis organs in J. L. Pearson's resonant churches at Cullercoats and Upper Norwood sound absolutely glorious. Here at St Mildred the tone is finer than that of many famous late-romantic British organs – made all the more impressive by the Nicholson additions of a Lewis-type Great Mixture IV (the stop that inspired the phenomenal Grand Chorus V in the 1926 Willis/Lewis Great at Westminster Cathedral), an imperial Tuba, and an open-throated Pedal Bombarde, both reeds also being faithful Lewis replica ranks.

Nicholson's Head Voicer, James Atherton, comments:

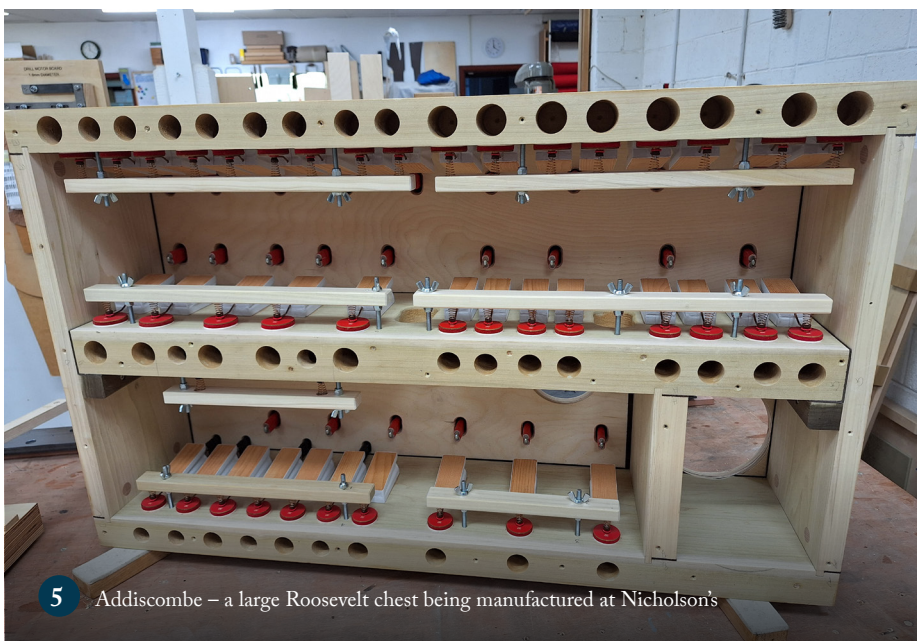
When we visited St Paul's to assess the Lewis and Co pipework it was clear there was an organ of superb musical value. The condition of the action meant we couldn't hear every stop, but what we could hear affirmed that this pipework was ideal for the musical requirements at St Mildred's. When we had cleaned and repaired the pipes it was a case of regulating every pipe to its optimum speech. Richard Mander requested that the two Harmonic Flutes on the Great were gently 'opened up' in the treble to have more singing quality in that part of the registers, to make the most of the opulent acoustics in St Mildred's. These really sing and have a wonderful solo quality to them. The Great Dulciana was incredibly soft; it had been voiced this way to provide a very soft accompanying stop in St Paul's. We were using the Mander copper bass in the case for this and its 16ft octave, and to ensure a good blend with these existing pipes I had to give the Lewis Dulciana a little more help so that it was audible in its new home. This lovely stop blends beautifully with the other flutes with a truly haunting quality. No changes to any of the mouths or voicing style was necessary, and the pipes came to life with a little work at the tips.

The new stops were inspired by similar examples elsewhere. The Great Mixture composition was copied from Ripon Cathedral and scaled from the Great Fifteenth. I voiced this in the same style as the rest of the Great, and it sounds like it has always been there. The Tuba is an exact copy from Ashton-under-Lyme (on 10in wind) and the Pedal Bombarde scales and shallot sizes are from Kelvingrove (albeit on 4in wind). These stops have matched perfectly with the existing Lewis material, and the whole organ speaks with a unified and convincing voice.

The beautiful little Mander organ at the east end is now used exclusively to accompany the Choir, and I gently warmed up the voicing so that this now fulfils that purpose well and doesn't have a voicing style which is at odds with the Lewis at the west end. This now speaks in all with an unforced romantic voice and blends very well with the Lewis.

Specification:

Great Organ 56 notes			
1	Contra Dulciana	16	C ¹ –B ²⁴ Mander, 1959; bass in case fronts
2	Open Diapason No. 1	8	
3	Open Diapason No. 2	8	
4	Flûte Harmonique	8	C ¹ –B ¹² from Lieblich Gedact
5	Lieblich Gedact	8	
6	Dulciana	8	C ¹ –B ¹² from Mander Contra Dulciana
7	Octave	4	
8	Flauto Traverso	4	
9	Super Octave	2	
10	Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV	new, in Lewis style
11	Trumpet	8	
12	Tuba	8	new, in Lewis style
Swell to Great			
Swell Solo to Great			
Swell Organ 61 note soundboard			
13	Lieblich Bourdon	16	C ¹ –B ¹² unenclosed
14	Geigen Principal	8	
15	Rohrflöte	8	C ¹ –B ¹² from Lieblich Bourdon
16	Viole de Gambe	8	
17	Vox Angelica (tenor C)	8	
18	Voix Célestes (tenor C)	8	
19	Geigen Principal [S]	4	
20	Suabe Flute [S]	4	
21	Mixture 15.19.22 [S]	III	
22	Horn	8	
23	Oboe [S]	8	
24	Clarionet [S]	8	
Tremulant			
25	Tuba	8	from Great
Octave			
Unison Off			
Sub Octave			
Pedal Organ 30 notes			
26	Great Bass	16	wood, open
27	Sub Bass	16	
28	Bourdon	16	from Swell Lieblich Bourdon
29	Contra Dulciana	16	from Great Contra Dulciana
30	Quint	10 ² / ₃	ext. Sub Bass
31	Octave	8	ext. Great Bass
32	Bass Flute	8	ext. Sub Bass
33	Dulciana	8	from Great Dulciana
34	Bombarde	16	new, in Lewis style
Great to Pedal			
Swell to Pedal			
Swell Solo to Pedal			



5 Addiscombe – a large Roosevelt chest being manufactured at Nicholson's



6 Addiscombe – matching makers' nameplates



7 Addiscombe – the elegant Mander east-end console, reworked by Nicholson's

Notes

Although the manuals of the 1987 Mander console are of 56-note compass, the West Swell stops are of 61-note compass, the top five notes being activated when the Octave coupler is drawn.

Drawing the Tuba on the Swell manual will render silent on that manual all other Swell stops. If *Swell to Great* is also drawn, any other Swell stops that are drawn will play on the Great manual (ditto when coupled to the Pedal), leaving the Tuba as a solo stop. This feature allows solos to be played on the Tuba against combined Great and Swell combinations.

The *Swell Solo to Great* will, when drawn, transfer those stops marked [S] from the Swell manual to the Great manual, meaning that they can be accompanied by a selection of the remaining Swell stops.

The *Swell Solo to Pedal* will, when drawn, transfer those stops marked [S] from the Swell manual to the Pedal.

Richard Mander, Director of Music at St Mildred's, has waxed enthusiastically about the new Lewis/Nicholson organ:

We at St Mildred's could not be happier with the new instrument. Its purpose is to accompany the congregation in hymns and the liturgy. It excels at this, providing all the colour and support that is needed, and has enough power to support the most robust hymn singing from a full church. It has very strong fundamentals, and the congregation has responded very well to this in how they sing now. At the same time, it has incredible beauty in the quieter strings, flutes and reeds, and it provides an exceptional range of 'mood music' to set the tone for the service. The gorgeous Vox Angelica, for example, is barely a whisper with the box shut. Everyone who has visited and played the new West organ has gone away impressed with its quality.



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Addiscombe – the new west organ behind Mander
16ft Dulciana case pipes of flamed copper

A final word. All those involved in organ projects feel all too keenly the loss of organs when a new home cannot be found. One of the aims of the British Institute of Organ Studies – whose fiftieth anniversary will be celebrated next year – was to prevent pipe organs becoming redundant, or, if their fate was unavoidable, to find a home for a complete, unaltered instrument. The succeeding decades have served to remind us – despite numerous successes – how rarely an organ of reasonable size can simply be slotted into another church.

‘Just’ using the pipes would have seemed, in the heady early days of BIOS and its adherents, almost sacrilegious. But time has moved on and most people have come to appreciate that saving and re-using the pipes is to keep the heart and soul of an organ alive, even if the supporting structure and components have to be replaced.

These two Nicholson projects are highly successful examples of just that, the Addiscombe organ outstandingly so: the best examples imaginable of ‘Something Old, Something New’.

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

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