

The Organ in Holy Saviour Church, Hitchin

Brian Caswell

The Church was built in 1865. The architect was William Butterfield, who was also responsible for All Saints Margaret Street, St Alban's Holborn and the Chapel of Keble College Oxford. The new building was consecrated on Ascension Day 1865, and a report of the occasion in Paternoster's Monthly Advertiser stated that the church had been provided with "a very fine toned organ of large compass, the gift of Miss Gainsford (the first Vicar's sister), built by Mr Walker of London from specifications prepared by Mr W Carling, organist, Hitchin". The specification of the organ was as follows:

Great		Swell		Pedal	
Double Diapason	16	Bourdon	16	Double Diapason	16
Open Diapason	8	§Open Diapason	8		
Stopped Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8		
§Keraulophon	8	Principal	4		
Harmonic Flute	4	Mixture	II		
Principal	4	Sharp Mixture	II		
Twelfth	2 $\frac{2}{3}$	*Hautboy			
Fifteenth	2	*Horn			
Mixture	IV	*Clarion			
*Trumpet					
*Clarionette		§ cont'd by Stopped Diapason			
		* prepared for			
				Couplers	
				Swell to Great	
				Swell to Pedal	
				Great to Pedal	
				Total pipes in organ: 1298	

The organ was situated on the south side of the chancel. We know little about its appearance, except that the case pipes were probably the spotted metal bass pipes of the Great Open Diapason.

By 1911, the organist, J H White, was reporting that the organ was in need of complete renovation, and in 1913 he produced an ambitious scheme which added a third manual and several new stops. But by 1915, the onset of war had greatly reduced the possibility of funding such a scheme, and instead the organ was moved across the church (for reasons not now known) and installed in a small chamber off the north side of the chancel. The work was carried out by Brindley & Foster. The console was positioned in the arch, and the space above was filled by a screen of zinc pipes - some dummies, some replacements for the spotted metal ones. The specification, which saw the removal of all three mixture stops and the addition of more 8' stops, was now as follows:

Great		Swell		Pedal	
Open Diapason	8	Bourdon TC	16	Double Diapason	16
Dulciana	8	Open Diapason	8	Bourdon	16
Stopped Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Flute	8
Aeoline TC	8	Vox Angelica TC	8		
Principal	4	Viole de Gambe TC	8		
Harmonic Flute TC	4	Principal	4		
Twelfth	2 $\frac{2}{3}$	Piccolo	2		
Fifteenth	2	Hautboy	8		
Cornetto Muto	8	Tremulant			
Clarinet TC	8				

Couplers	3 composition pedals to Great
Swell to Great	3 composition pedals to Swell
Swell to Pedal	Balanced swell pedal
Great to Pedal	

The move was not a success. In order to fit the organ into the available space the Swell box had to be mounted high up in the roof, with the top cut away to accommodate a rafter and several larger pipes bent over. Access for tuning was severely restricted. The Great was hidden behind rows of Pedal pipes and could not be heard to advantage in the nave. Over the years the condition of the organ deteriorated owing to the impossibility of essential maintenance work. To overcome these problems, Grant, Degens & Bradbeer of Northampton were commissioned to provide a free-standing organ at the east end of the north aisle to be built to a new design, but using existing materials and pipework where possible. The new instrument was installed in May 1987 with the following specification:

Great		Swell		Pedal	
Open Diapason	8	Gedackt	8	Subbass	16
Stopped Diapason	8	Viola TC (Gedackt bass)	8	*Octave	8
Principal	4	Gemshorn	4	Bass Flute	8
Fifteenth	2	Flageolet	2	Fifteenth	4
Mixture	IIII Larigot	1½		§ Schalmey	4
Couplers		Compass		§ replaced in 2012 by Trumpet 8	
Swell to Great		CC - g (56)		*Gt Open bass octave	
Swell to Pedal		CCC - F (30)			
Great to Pedal					
Balanced Swell Pedal		Total pipes in organ: 798			

The Viola (Walker 1966) and the Gemshorn (Walker c.1975), both in spotted metal, were supplied by the builder from stock. The Mixture and the Larigot contain some new pipework. With these exceptions, the pipework was derived from the original. The Schalmey was installed as a temporary measure only, and was replaced in 2012 by an 8' Trumpet.

Turning to the layout of the organ, the Great and Swell divisions stand on the old Great soundboard, which has been divided internally and provided with a second set of pallets. The Pedal stands on the old Swell sound board and is below and behind the Great and Swell. The action is mechanical and entirely new. The console has been refurbished and is surmounted by the 1915 pipe screen. The rest of the organ is enclosed in a new oak case designed by Martin Priestman.

The organ was designed and built by John Bailey, who was then with Grant, Degens & Bradbeer. He had moved with the firm from London to Northampton, and subsequently transferred to Bishop & Son of Ipswich in 1989. He still maintains the organ.

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revised September 2015