



Belper Parish Church and its Organs

by **RODNEY TOMKINS**

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with a Foreword by

Canon Robert M Parsons

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FOREWORD

by

Canon Robert M Parsons

Vicar of St Peter's, Belper

Whatever variety of music St Peter's Church enjoys, it is all done in the knowledge that our organ provides a solid foundation. Other instruments and voices are used with good effect, but the organ is always there to provide a good lead for singing, sensitive accompaniment to our occasional choir, and appropriate music before and after services.

We are particularly blessed in having Rodney Tomkins as our organist. He is supremely "at home" with the instrument, and uses its many tone colours to enhance the worship week by week.

His writing of this booklet reveals his love for this organ, his gentle humour and also his meticulous historical research and broad knowledge of organs in this area. May the 150th anniversary of the Holt organ be a time when we appreciate in new ways the treasure we have.

Robert Parsons



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to consulting the diocesan archive collection at Matlock and contemporary news reports in the Derby Local Studies Library, I have drawn very heavily on two booklets, both published privately and both unfortunately now out of print. The first is "Music in Belper (1824-1975)" by Denis Makin, my predecessor as organist of the church. Denis had clearly done much research on the Belper musical scene - especially with regard to the various holders of the post of organist. The second publication is "The History and Restoration of the Organ in St Peter's Church Belper" (1979) by Edmund R Stow, to whom I must pay tribute, both for masterminding the initial rescue operation as well as for his continuing interest in, and care of this priceless instrument.

I am also grateful to Sharon Hurt who has assisted me with her enthusiastic genealogical investigations respecting the various organists and organ builders, to Bill Attenborough and Peter Wallis for their excellent photographs, and to the "Belper News" for allowing me to use the attractive 1897 line drawing of St Peter's Church as it was, complete with all its pinnacles.

Restoration of the organ in 1978 and in 1991 could not have gone forward without the encouragement of the clergy at the time - the late Canon Richard Eldridge and The Reverend Martin White - and my thanks go to our present incumbent, Canon Robert Parsons, for so kindly offering to write the Foreword to this book.

*Rodney Tomkins
Duffield
2002*

PREFACE

This booklet has been written to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the 1853 Holt organ in St Peter's Church, Belper - the earliest surviving organ of substance within the county of Derbyshire and one in which, despite later additions and modifications, all the original stops are still there to provide us with the complete tonal ensemble of an early Victorian organ designed specifically for the large building in which it still stands.

It is a story with a fearful gap - the forty years from 1938 to 1978 when it stood unused and unloved. During this period anything could have happened to it. Fortunately (as it turned out) a substitute electronic instrument was installed whilst the pipe organ was just left in situ until 1978, by which time, with restoration about to begin, its value and importance - not just as a historical artefact but also as a viable musical instrument - was once more appreciated.

The story told in my own book will show (I hope) that this organ is not just a museum piece. If that were so it would have been returned (most inappropriately we feel) to its 1853 state, without the later Choir Organ and increased compasses and pipework of the Swell and Pedal sections. As it is, the various modifications have never interfered with the basic Holt sound; they have merely responded, with the utmost discretion, to the needs of their time. The result is an organ that is alive to the present and one in which we can hear the true sounds of 1853 together with much more besides. Perhaps our only regret is that the general pitch remains about a quarter of a tone sharp, making it impossible to use it with most other instruments. After much deliberation we have concluded that to alter the pitch would be far too great an upheaval of the historic material - it is, after all, only a minor handicap in the face of so much that this organ has to offer as a superb musical experience.

BELPER PARISH CHURCH AND ITS ORGANS

"Prior to the year 1776, Belper was as low in population as it was backward in civility, and considered as the insignificant residence of a few uncivilised nailers"

(The Revd D P Davies, writing in 1811)

Belper, at the start of the eighteenth century, was but a chapelry within the mediaeval parish of Duffield. Other chapels of the Established Church ("chapels of ease" we would call them now) belonging to that same parish were to be found at Heage and Turnditch. The parish was large, extending from that of Derby St Alkmund in the south to Wirksworth in the north.

At that time Belper itself was just a hamlet (population 532 in 1741) with a market and a native cottage industry of nail-making. The thirteenth century chapel of St John-the-Baptist (now St John's Heritage Centre) was never able to accommodate more than about two hundred people, even when a gallery was added. Dissenters were also in evidence, an Independent meeting house (of Presbyterian persuasion) having been founded in 1689 by the "ejected" Vicar of Mickleover. From this body of worshippers evolved the present-day Congregational and Unitarian churches of the town.

By the early nineteenth century the situation was transformed and Belper was bursting at its seams. The whole of the Derwent Valley had become alive with mills and mill workers during the last three decades of the previous century. For Belper the great turning point was 1776 (the year referred to in the quotation at the head of this page), for it was in that year that Jedediah Strutt built his first great cotton mill by the river Derwent and thereafter the new community never looked back. The population of Belper by 1801 had increased to 4,500 (going on to more than double this by the middle of the century) and it was now the second largest town in Derbyshire. The Strutts, followed closely by the Brettles, fulfilled the roles of "mill-kings" and general benefactors.

The Wesleyans had also arrived on the scene, a visit by John Wesley in 1782 (or maybe 1786) having resulted in the building of a chapel - to be replaced soon by the present, larger one in 1807. Interestingly it was a Wesleyan Methodist, Samuel Slater (whose family at Shottle had been prime movers in the local Methodist movement), who, in a spirit of espionage, took Strutt's secrets regarding the technology of mechanised cotton manufacture to America in 1789 and helped to found what is now Belper's twin in that country, the mill town of Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

Dissent was clearly strong in the new community and, not to be outdone by the Wesleyans, the Unitarians were provided with a new chapel in 1788 by Jedediah Strutt (who was himself a member of that body) while the Independents (Congregationalists) replaced their old seventeenth century meeting house with a new one in 1790. By 1817 one of the earliest break-away Primitive Methodist chapels had been established in the town and three years later it was the turn of the Baptists.

And what has this necessarily brief historical background to do with the town's main parish church and its organs? The answer is: quite a lot.

EARLIEST ORGANS IN BELPER

Until the late eighteenth century the whole of Duffield parish could be considered as an "organ desert", the nearest instruments being found in a handful of Derby town churches (eight miles from Belper) and at Kedleston Hall (six miles). The first record of an organ anywhere in Belper (or greater Duffield parish for that matter) was a chamber instrument by Stephen White of London (c1796) which stood in the Strutt family home, Bridge Hill House, until 1905, when it was donated by G H Strutt to St Mark's, Openwoodgate - a mission church within the modern parish of St Peter. This organ, first noted in 1822-24 by the jobbing organ builder, Alexander Buckingham, was enlarged later in the nineteenth century and subsequently further modified. In 1987 it was re-erected by Martin Renshaw in the Yorkshire home of Dr Francis Jackson (former Organist of York Minster) where it still contains some old pipework (both by White and by Buckingham) within its charming three-towered eighteenth century case.

Two other chamber organs belonging to members of the Strutt family are also noted by Alexander Buckingham. The first was an 8-stop instrument, which he described as "one of Snetzler's make", at the Derby home of William Strutt (eldest son of Jedediah) and "First set up at Mr Strutt's by Holland, 24 March, 1813". The other, with no details of which member of the family or which place, was simply described as a 6-stop organ "with two Ovals in front with gilt pipes and glass doors by John England and Hugh Russell in 1784". The origins of these two organs are totally unknown as is also their eventual fate: like the majority of chamber organs they probably just disappeared without trace.

JOSEPH GRATIAN, ORGAN BUILDER, 1784-1863

Enter on the Belper organ scene one, Joseph Gratian. *The Derby Mercury* of 8 October 1818 ran the following news item:

On Sunday last, at the Established Church, Belper, a new Organ (built by J. Gratian, musician of that place) was opened and played by his daughter, 10 years of age, and both the Instrument and the Performance gave great satisfaction to a crowded congregation.

In local-press parlance then (as now) a "new" organ could imply anything from a second-hand transfer or rebuild to a totally new creation. In this instance a transfer from elsewhere would seem the most plausible interpretation. There are no contemporary clues as to the provenance of this instrument, though later (in the section on The New Church of St Peter) we shall find a reasonable hypothesis that it may possibly have been by Snetzler.

Joseph Gratian, bearer of a name familiar in the area from the seventeenth century to the present, was the eldest son of Richard ("a joiner") and Hannah, who were married at Derby St Peter in 1777. Joseph's baptism took place at Turnditch All Saints (at that time, like St John's, a chapel within the parish of Duffield) on 5 May 1786, his probable year of birth being 1784. He lived nigh on eighty years and married twice, both wives confusingly being called Sarah.

The first marriage was recorded in Duffield church register on 31 May 1807. A daughter, Charlot (sic!), was born in July of the following year and it was she who was to become something of a musical performer at an early age. There followed up to 1830 a further seven children. In the earlier baptismal registers Joseph was described as a "nailer" though by 1827 he

is referred to as "musician". His address was variously given as Chapel Street or Gratian's Lane (the latter, though no longer existing, apparently being off Chapel Street and near to the Wesleyan Chapel).

Pigot's 1835 Directory lists "Gratian Joseph, organ builder Chapel Street, Belper". It was no doubt through the example of his father's skill in woodwork coupled with his own in ironwork (as a nailer) plus his musical interest that he was led into the rapidly booming market for church and chapel organs - though, with his no doubt amateur training, this work is hardly likely to have involved anything as complex as building a new instrument from scratch.

It is not known when the first Sarah died or when Joseph moved away from Belper but his second marriage, in 1840, was at Derby St Alkmund and his address was now given as Upper Brook Street, Derby. Their second (and youngest child), Henry, born in 1849, appears to have been musical for on Joseph's death he inherited all his father's music and instruments. It may have been he who later turned up in West Ham (then in Essex) as a reed organ maker and pianoforte tuner. Another child, the last one born (c1830) to the first Sarah, called Joseph (though possibly also called James to avoid confusion with his father), may have been the same person who emigrated to America in 1857 and was described in Fox's *North American Organ Builders* as "a son of Joseph Gratian".

Following the 1818 instrument at Belper's "Established Church" (ie St John's chapel) the known musical achievements of Joseph Gratian in the area may be listed as follows:

1821. The skill and exertions of Mr Gratian, the leader of the band, were such as to merit great praise - *Derby Mercury* report on the opening of the new church at Ripley. (*we assume this refers to our Joseph Gratian since he was known to be something of a general musician.*)
- c1824-1831. It was probably Gratian, at some time prior to the appointment of an organist in 1831, who installed an organ in the new St Peter's church. This instrument may quite well have been the one from St John's chapel.
1828. a new organ built by Mr Gratian of Belper, was opened in Eastwood church -*Derby Mercury*.
1844. Installation in Belper Wesleyan Chapel of 1824 Alexander Buckingham organ ex Derby St Alkmund following closure of that church for rebuilding. This 1-manual, 9-stop instrument was sold in 1873 to Kilburn Wesleyan. After further wanderings it ended up at Aysworth Methodist just across the border in Nottinghamshire, where it has been restored to something close to its original specification by Peter Bumstead. Inside may be seen scratched the inscription: "J Gratian 1847".
- 1849 Could an organ at Sandiacre church by "Mr Gresham, of Derby" (*Derby Mercury*) be a typical news-reporter's misrepresentation of "Gratian"? The verbal pronunciation would actually sound very similar.
- (no date) An organ for the Congregational chapel, Belper.

BELPER'S "NEW CHURCH"

Five brand new churches were constructed in Derbyshire as a result of the 1818 "Million Act" (by which Parliament granted a sum of one million pounds for new churches in rapidly growing industrial areas as a thanksgiving for the victory at Waterloo). One of these - probably the largest in the County - was Belper St Peter, built to a design by the architect, Matthew Habershon, and opened in 1824 (though not to achieve full parochial status independent of Duffield until 1880). Reports in The Derby Mercury make interesting reading:

The Consecration of the New Church at Belper will take place on Monday, September 6th., 1824 In consequence of the low state of the funds for the erection of the Church, a Collection will be made after the Service. (18 August 1824)

And elsewhere in the same issue:

We are happy to observe that the New Church at Belper, which is so great an ornament to the town, and which we trust will prove eminently conducive to the religious welfare of the inhabitants, is now so nearly completed, that the interesting Ceremony of Consecration will be performed by the highly reputed Lord Bishop of the Diocese (*i.e. of Lichfield and Coventry, as he was then known*).

The service itself was treated to a lengthy column in that same newspaper on 8 September, containing a very detailed account of the Lord Bishop's sermon. Scant reference is made, however, to the music other than that a hymn was sung "with musical accompaniments" and that another hymn, entitled "With grateful hearts, O God of Grace", was "admirably sung by the choir". One may therefore be forgiven for surmising that the "low state" of the funds referred to in the first newspaper extract quoted above may have meant that St Peter's was not, at this stage, able to indulge in an organ.

THOMAS MAWKES - THE FIRST ORGANIST

Thomas Mawkes - a colourful character by any standards - was born c1811 in Bridge Street where his father had a jewellery and clock making business. Following lessons from a local teacher the young Thomas studied in London and, in his fourteenth year, obtained first prize in violin playing at the Academy. There are reports on his brilliant playing, and for a while he was leader of The King's Band before going to Germany to study under the violinist and composer, Louis Spohr. The story goes that while there he "fiddled" a match with the celebrated Paganini but judiciously "retired with a broken string"! On the homeward voyage his ship was wrecked in a storm; he himself was saved but vowed never to touch the violin again in public - a vow which he kept, becoming first an organist and then a clergyman.

His appointment in 1831 as first Organist of St Peter's must indicate that there was by now an instrument for him to play. For information about this organ we must look at The Revd J H Sperling's mid-nineteenth century notebook which records an organ in "Belper Church" (this can only, by that date, be St Peter's) as follows:

Snetzler, 1754. GG short octaves to D in alt., one row of keys

Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason bass & treble
Principal
Fifteenth
Sesquialtra V bass
Cornet V treble
Trumpet

(Note: Interesting as it would be to think that Belper really did once possess a Snetzler organ, we must bear in mind that Sperling's attributions and dates are known to be not always entirely reliable.)

We have already noted that Joseph Gratian had installed an organ in St John's Chapel in 1818 and one may reasonably guess that it was this same instrument which would have been transferred to the new church - maybe during or soon after 1824 or, at least, in time for the appointment of the new Organist in 1831 - and it may quite well have been Joseph Gratian once again who carried out the transfer.

Thomas Mawkes was clearly well thought of in the area. He was invited by the Wesleyans to advise on the installation of an organ in their Chapel Street chapel and it was no doubt he who procured for them in 1844 the Alexander Buckingham organ from Derby St Alkmund (described above). *The Derby Mercury* of 7 August 1844 tells us that, for the occasion,

A Selection of Sacred Music from Handel, Mozart and Haydn, will be sung by a Select Choir from Derby under the superintendence of Mr. Thomas Mawkes, who has very kindly consented to preside at the Organ.

In that same year, 1844, Mawkes gave up his organ post and musical career in order to study for the ministry. In appreciation of his work the congregation presented him with a silver coffee service. He was eventually appointed to the curacy of Hulland in 1848, returning to preach at St Peter's on a couple of occasions. Three years later he moved right away from the area to become prison chaplain at Portland and married into a wealthy Dorset family. He died at Wyke near Weymouth in 1880, aged 69.

THE CHEVALIER NEUKOMM AND THE *ORGUE EXPRESSIF*

The widely travelled Austrian composer, pianist and organist, Sigismund Neukomm, was no stranger to the area - indeed he is believed to have been involved in the plans for Birmingham's new Town Hall organ during the 1830's. In 1832 he offered to give a concert for the benefit of the Derby Dispensary in Derby All Saints - the organ there being "particularly suited to the display of that wonderful power of extemporaneous composition and performance which the Chevalier is said to possess" (*Derby Mercury*). A similar concert took place a week later in Bakewell Church, and again there in 1837.

On 27 February 1833 Neukomm came to St Peter's, Belper, to take part in a concert of sacred music in aid of funds for building a new infants' school (St John's). Perhaps on account of the limited nature of the small pipe organ he was billed to perform on the "Expressive Organ", a keyboard reed instrument newly invented by Grénié of Paris and a forerunner of the harmonium. The newspaper advertisement went on to say:

This Instrument which produces the most wonderful effects and every variety of expression which a Singer is able to give with the most pure and beautiful Voice, is the property of Mr. John Strutt, and (excepting that in the possession of the Chevalier Neukomm) is the only one in the Kingdom.

The announcement concludes with the comforting statement that:

The Church will be perfectly well aired and warm.

The instrument itself was quite small - about three feet in height and of limited power, having only one stop (or rank of reeds) from which a crescendo could be elicited by foot movement. An example is still to be seen in the Museum of Reed Organs at Saltaire, West Yorkshire.

WILLIAM HOLT ORGAN, 1853

By the middle of the nineteenth century tastes were changing rapidly and larger, more powerful organs were fast becoming the norm. The intimate sound of a seven-stop Snetzler organ may have been acceptable in St John's Chapel but it must clearly have been quite inadequate for the large, thousand-seater, galleried auditorium of St Peter's. With the advent in 1853 of the new organ by William Holt the old instrument was sold to nearby Heage Parish Church where, twenty years later, it was replaced by the present two manual organ supplied by the London builder, W M Hedgeland. It is anybody's guess as to what happened to the presumed Snetzler after this.

The Holt family had been involved in organ building in the West Riding of Yorkshire (with bases variously in Halifax, Leeds and Bradford) from the 1830's, William himself being born about 1821. An important commission for him was the rebuilding of Leeds Parish Church organ with many of the pipes being provided by Edmund Schulze. It is not known whether the Leeds Organist, R S Burton (successor to S S Wesley in the post), had been approached by Belper for advice: if that were so it might account for the choice of Holt as a builder and for the fact that the Leeds choir came over (at a cost of £14) to sing "a full cathedral service" at the opening ceremony on Thursday, 22 December, 1853. It is interesting to note that three days later, on Christmas Day (which was a Sunday), the festivities continued, with William Holt himself presiding at the organ.

The old organ had probably stood within the arched recess behind the west gallery. There are still marks to be seen on the north and south walls of this area indicating that terraced seating must have existed each side of the small instrument. Modifications to the gallery are known to have been made to accommodate the new organ which was built entirely forward of the arch, the old seating in the recess being removed to create a room-like space behind (which, as it happens, has proved to be a useful resonating chamber for the Choir Organ section added to the rear at a later date!).

The specification of the new organ by William Holt (of Bradford) is given in the programme printed for the opening. Everything about it - casework, compasses and stops, together with irregular lengths among surviving Holt pipes (suggestive of unequal temperament) - reflects a conservative design, clearly belonging to an early Victorian Classical style that shows very little deference to the new Romantic trends that were beginning to loom on the horizon.

GREAT ORGAN (<i>CC - F 54 notes</i>)	SWELL ORGAN (<i>tenor C - F 42 notes</i>)
Double Diapason [<i>16 - added 1855</i>]	Double Diapason [<i>16</i>]
Open Diapason [<i>8</i>]	Open Diapason [<i>8</i>]
Stop Diapason [<i>8 - bass, 12 notes</i>]	Principal [<i>4</i>]
Clarabella [<i>8 - tenor C</i>]	Fifteenth [<i>2</i>]
Viol de Gamba [<i>8 - tenor C</i>]	Octave 15th [<i>1</i>]
Principal [<i>4</i>]	Cornopean [<i>8</i>]
Flute [<i>4</i>]	
Twelfth [<i>2-2/3</i>]	PEDAL ORGAN (<i>CCC - D 27 notes</i>)
Fifteenth [<i>2</i>]	Open Diapason [<i>16</i>]
Sesquialtra [<i>II-III ranks</i>]	Pedal Coupler [<i>ie Great to Pedal</i>]
Trumpet [<i>8</i>]	
Swell Coupler [<i>ie Swell to Great</i>]	

Composition of Sesquialtra:

CC - mid C 19-22, mid C# - top C 8-15-17, top C# - F 8-15

The cost of this fine instrument was 300 guineas (£315). A report in the *Derby and Chesterfield Recorder* tells us that "The softer stops claribella (sic), viol de gamba and flute are considered particularly sweet and melodious; soft but very clear in sound. The trumpet in the great organ, and the cornopean in the swell are very fine reed stops. The chorus stops are particularly brilliant and pleasing to the ear". These are all sentiments that we can still echo since, in spite of later enlargements and modifications, virtually all of Holt's pipework still functions in the manner envisaged by its builder.

It will be seen that the Great was of conventional early Victorian design, though the Flute (of wide-scale, with a "chimney") and the composition of the Sesquialtra (clearly dependent on the use of the separate Twelfth) are noteworthy. The Double Diapason was prepared for originally as a second Open, "to be introduced if the collections allow": in fact it materialized two years later as a very effective stopped 16ft rank.

The Swell, with its 1ft stop and its general chorus emphasis, is more unusual: not to have a Stop Diapason and an Oboe is certainly most unexpected in an instrument of this type. These deficiencies were ultimately made good in Radcliffe & Sagar's 1873 enlargement but, in so doing, the provision of a new, full compass Swell chest removed any evidence as to whether Holt had made any preparations in his original scheme for the installation of these ranks at a later date.

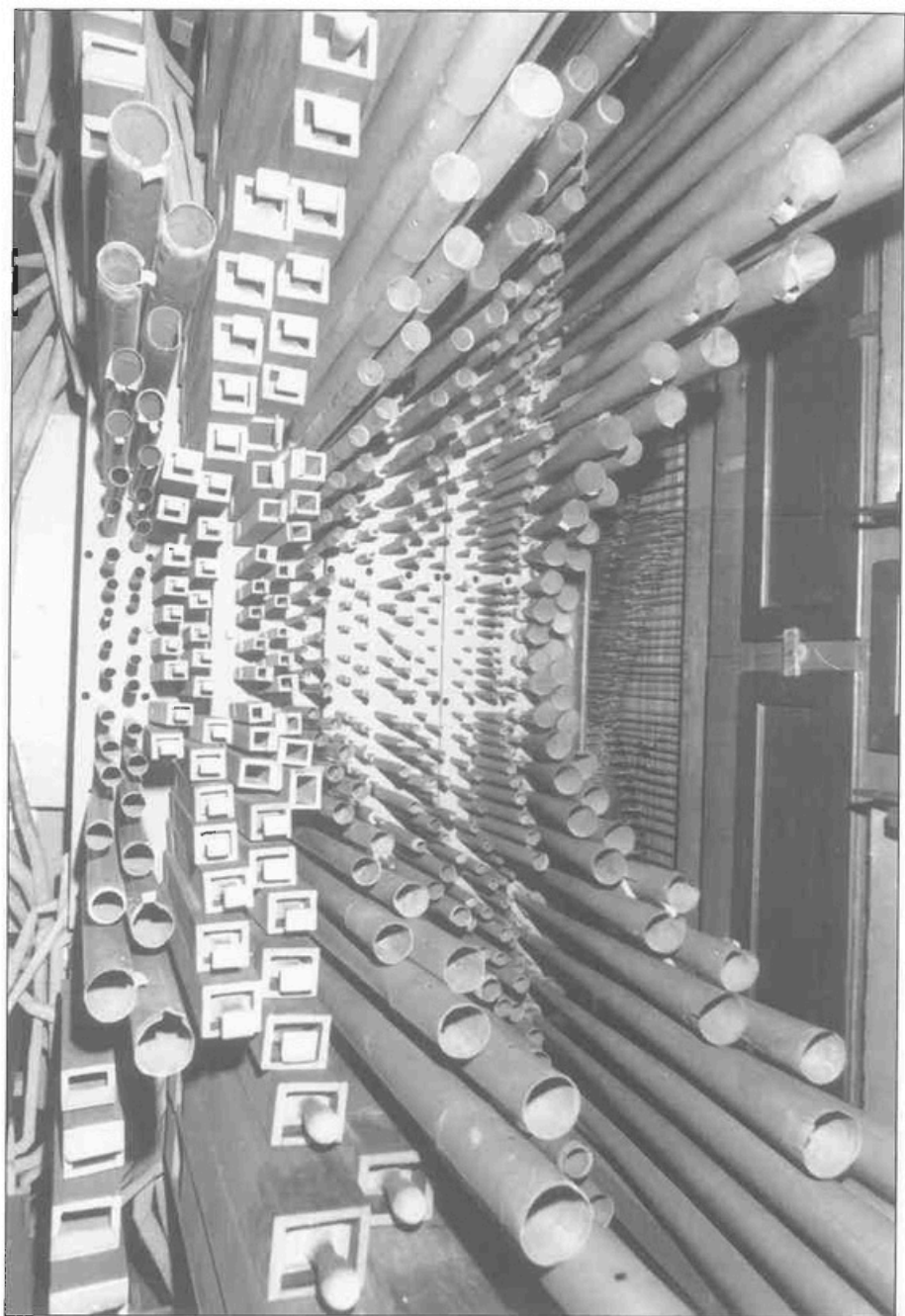
The original Gothic casework, which survives intact (though extended rearwards in 1873), has battlemented cornices and a large central "flat" with twin arched openings containing the ten largest Open Diapason pipes of the Great Organ. Between this and the projecting corner turrets of pipes are smaller arches containing, instead of pipes, wooden, lozenge-patterned grilles (could these have been intended locations for the originally proposed second Open Diapason?).



*St. Peter's Church in the 19th century
(by courtesy of The Belper News)*



*The 1853 Holt casework
(W. H. Attenborough)*



Holt Great Organ pipework
(Peter Wallis)



*The 1874 Grunwell organ in its present location at Milford.
(Author)*

RADCLIFFE & SAGAR'S ENLARGEMENT

Thomas Mellor, Organist from 1865 until 1875, was another important holder of the post, well-known as a choral and orchestral conductor as well as a teacher. For his own private use he installed a small 3-manual instrument in his own house which, after a somewhat circuitous career, was to serve at a much later date as a temporary organ in the main church (described later in this booklet). After leaving Belper Tom Mellor moved on to Bakewell where he founded a Choral Society and organized many large scale choral festivals.

During Mellor's time at St Peter's great changes took place under the curacy of The Revd F A Friend. The three decker pulpit was removed, new choir stalls erected at the east end, a robed choir of men and boys established and Hymns A&M introduced together with the chanting of psalms. All this happened during the early 1870's, culminating in the rebuilding of the organ in a manner appropriate to the new musical status of the church (a common phenomenon throughout the Anglican church at this period. At St Peter's the effects on both the organ and the building itself were fortunately nothing like as catastrophic as was often the case).

The Leeds firm of Radcliffe & Sagar, in their 1873 rebuild, gave the organ more or less its present format. The new 3-manual console (still in use) was required to have drawstop jambs "in a diagonal form like those seen by Mr Mellor when at Holbeck Church, Leeds". These were almost certainly the earliest example of this feature in Derbyshire. It was probably at this time that the temperament was equalized.

Holt's splendid Great Organ and chest were left untouched. The Swell was given its missing Stop Diapason and Oboe together with a new 54-note chest and a box large enough to contain the two additional ranks plus new bass pipes throughout. All stops save the Oboe were now of full compass. The only modification to Holt's pipework was that the 2ft and 1ft ranks were adapted to form a conventional Mixture (19-22 breaking back to 12-15).

The four stop Choir Organ was added behind (and partly below) the Swell. In spite of the cramped location it must be said that the rear chamber behind the organ has always acted as a very effective sounding box for this charming little department. Though originally planned to have a 4ft Gemshorn this section eventually ended up with the following stops:

Stop Diapason	[8 - wood: referred to as "Leiblich(!) Gedact" in original estimate]
Dulciana	[8 - bass grooved from Stop Diapason]
Flute	[4 - stopped metal: referred to as "Flute Traverso" in original]
Clarinet	[8 - tenor C]

On the Pedal Organ a new Bourdon rank was added on to the back of the Choir chest. It was provided with 29 notes, even though Holt's large wooden Open Diapason and the couplers continued with only 27. This compromise arrangement and the apparent last-minute change of mind over the Choir Organ specification, not to mention some other curious features of construction, tend to suggest that Messrs Radcliffe & Sagar were not the most highly organized of firms.

An interesting discovery during the 1970's restoration work was the pencilled signature of "James J Binns" in three places within the swell box. Binns was in the employment of R&S until 1875 and must therefore have worked on this instrument. One of these signatures, under which another hand had added "Organ Butcher", was preserved when the interior of the box was papered during this same restoration.

From the above description it should be easy to perceive the essence of the 1873 specification. Unfortunately accounts differ as to the precise nomenclature and spelling of several of the stops - again something that may be attributable in part to the imprecisions of Messrs R&S - so we shall refrain from giving a full, printed stop list for the 1873 instrument as we are unable to be definitive in this particular matter.

The origins of the present two-stage pressure pneumatic action on the Pedal Organ are uncertain. It is probably not as early as 1873, neither does it appear to be the work of the next documented builder, J H Adkins. Together (presumably) with the straight, but slightly concave, 30-note pedalboard, it must therefore have been provided at some point between 1873 and 1902.

In 1902 the Derby firm of J H Adkins carried out a "restoration" which seems to have been largely cosmetic - including the "relettering" of stop-knobs. Little change appears to have been made to the pipework as left by Radcliffe & Sagar although certain stops acquired new names: Viol de Gamba becoming Keraulophon and Sesquialtra becoming Mixture "III" (actually only II since it was probably now that it lost its 17th rank). It was in this state - still hand-pumped and cone-tuned - that the Holt organ was decommissioned in 1938 and so it remained, derelict and unplayed, until the commencement of Edmund Stow's restoration work in 1978. The stop list at this stage read as follows:

GREAT ORGAN

Double Diapason
Open Diapason
Stop Diapason Bass
Clarabella Treble
Keraulophon
Principal
Flute
Twelfth
Fifteenth
Mixture III rks
Trumpet
Swell to Great

SWELL ORGAN

Double Diapason
Open Diapason
Stop Diapason
Principal
Mixture II rks
Oboe
Cornopean

CHOIR ORGAN

Stop Diapason
Dulciana
Flute
Clarionette
Swell to Choir

PEDAL ORGAN

Open Diapason 16ft (*sic*)
Bourdon
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Choir to Pedal

3 composition pedals to Great Organ

Trigger swell pedal

Manual compass 54 notes

Pedal compass 30 notes (but only 27 pipes for Open, 29 for Bourdon)

Manual mechanical (ie "tracker") action

Pedal pneumatic action

THE HAMMOND ORGAN

The general lack of any twentieth century "modernization" would probably indicate that the pipe organ was fairly low in the church's priorities. By the late 1930's an overhaul was needed but, to the disappointment of the Organist, Reginald Harvey, the decision was made not to restore it. In 1938 the church was left a bequest which was used to purchase a Hammond electronic organ following a demonstration that the Vicar had witnessed in the Queen's Hall, Derby. From then on the "real" organ fell into disuse, apart from occasional resuscitations due to teething problems with the Hammond. The console was installed at the east end while the valve cabinets and speakers were placed in the west gallery in the space behind the pipe organ. The latter, most fortunately, remained in situ and no damage occurred - apart, that is, from a stray cannon shell from a German aircraft penetrating one of the front case pipes during the 1939-45 war.

THE 1978-79 RESTORATION

With the Hammond beginning to show its age, thoughts turned to the neglected Holt organ and two builders were approached in the early 1970's by the Organist, Denis Makin. One offered to buy the pipes for £200, the other to build a smaller instrument using some of the existing pipework (with electric action, needless to say!). Neither would consider restoration and, in any case, the cost of such work was considered to have been beyond the resources of the church.

It was a chance remark of the author's to the new Vicar, The Revd (later Canon) Richard Eldridge, that sowed the seeds of a project which came to be regarded as something that might mark the forthcoming Golden Jubilee (1977) of the Diocese - namely the restoration of what was potentially Derbyshire's earliest surviving historic church organ of substance. The scheme was discussed with Edmund Stow (later to become a professional organ builder), at that time engaged in a "do-it-yourself" project on his own instrument at the Queen's Hall Methodist Mission in Derby. Encouraged by the results of the latter, preliminary investigations were carried out at St Peter's which showed that, beneath a useless appearance, a basically sound instrument probably remained.

Proposals were presented to the PCC in April 1978 for restoration to be carried out by volunteer labour under the direction of Edmund Stow and it was agreed that the work could be done at a material cost of around £1,000. An Archdeacon's Certificate was accordingly obtained and work commenced in July. The whole scheme had the enthusiastic backing of the Vicar who saw it as a major, unifying project for the large number of parishioners who were to work together over the next twelve months - some forty of them, whose names are fully recorded in Edmund R Stow's 1979 booklet, *The History and Restoration of the Organ in St Peter's Church Belper*.

We can only be thankful that this "time warp" of an instrument, virtually unaltered for a century, had been left quite unmolested throughout its years of enforced retirement. By the mid-1970's a new awareness was developing in this country with regard to the importance of our early Victorian organ heritage - an awareness that was currently being provided with a focus and mouthpiece by the newly established British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS). Guided by this philosophy our deliberations in Belper did not even consider a more modern tonal concept or a new action: what faced us therefore was a number choices for manner of restoration, ranging from unaltered retention as left by Adkins to a total return to the original Holt specification. The policy eventually adopted was governed by the following three criteria:

- (1) to restore the Holt sound on Great and Swell whilst retaining the obvious improvements in the latter department;
- (2) to retain the less historic Choir Organ, but with some tonal improvement;
- (3) to retain and thoroughly restore the Radcliffe & Sagar actions and to complete the pedal compass to 30 notes throughout.

To achieve these aims the Great, still on its Holt chest, was left unchanged save for the provision of a 17th rank to the renamed Sesquialtera. On the Swell the Holt 2ft and 1ft ranks were restored from the R&S Mixture, though combined as a 2-rank "Doublette". The Choir Organ received a 2ft Flageolet in place of (and using some pipes of) the Dulciana. Externally the casework was stripped professionally and given an attractive varnish of medium shade. Front pipes were also repainted and the war damage repaired. Finally a BOB single phase electric blower was installed (the instrument having previously remained hand-pumped).

The restored organ was brought back into use with a service of dedication on 8 September, 1979, involving combined local choirs. This was followed by a recital on 20 September given by Dr Francis Jackson, Organist of York Minster. Thereafter the instrument's use for services, concerts, lessons, broadcasts and regular practice ensured that it was used almost daily, thus vindicating the aspirations of those who had the faith and courage to promote the revival of this splendid early Victorian survivor.

For twelve years following completion of restoration in 1979 the specification stood as follows:

GREAT ORGAN	SWELL ORGAN	CHOIR ORGAN
Double Diapason	Double Diapason	Stop Diapason
Open Diapason	Open Diapason	Flute
Stop Diapason Bass	Stop Diapason	Flageolet
Clarabella Treble (tenor C)	Principal	Clarionette (tenor C)
Viol de Gamba (tenor C)	Doublette IIrks	Swell to Choir
Principal	Oboe (tenor C)	
Flute	Cornopean	
Twelfth		PEDAL ORGAN
Fifteenth		Open Diapason 16ft
Sesquialtera II-IIIrks		Bourdon
Trumpet		Great to Pedal
Swell to Great		Swell to Pedal
		Choir to Pedal

3 composition pedals to Great Organ

Balanced swell pedal at RH side (in place of former trigger)

Compass: manual 54 notes, pedal 30 notes

Action: manual mechanical, pedal pneumatic

The restored organ proved a great joy and inspiration. Certain deficiencies, however, became manifest with continued use. Large congregations (particularly at special services) coupled with a greater emphasis on congregational singing meant the frequent use of a fairly full sound in accompaniments. Historically characteristic as the Sesquialtera may be, especially when used with the reeds, the tonal effect of such a stop can pall if over-used. It was therefore felt that the alternative of a chorus mixture without a 17th rank should also be available on the Great Organ in order to provide an alternative "top" for the ensemble. Two other areas were also considered less than satisfactory by those who used the instrument - the limited Pedal Organ and the combined 2ft plus 1ft Doublette stop on the Swell.

Creation of the west end meeting area beneath the gallery together with the re-ordering of the east end during the mid-1980's had left an undesirable covering of dirt over the organ. The advisability of a clean offered the chance to consider how the instrument's apparent deficiencies could be most effectively and appropriately remedied. A number of builders were approached (all now quite keen to do the work, as opposed to the reactions of the profession a decade and a half before!) and a number of options were discussed. Eventually it was decided to ask Messrs Wood of Huddersfield to undertake the task. They came up with a package that provided the required tonal enhancement (and more) while at the same time preserving the basic Holt/Radcliffe & Sagar ethos of the instrument.

THE GRUNWELL ORGAN

Wood's work was scheduled to last about six months. Throughout that period (summer 1991 until spring 1992) the church was very fortunate to have the temporary use of a small, compact 3-manual tracker organ built in 1874 by Grunwell (Derby) for the residence of Thomas Mellor (qv), one-time Organist at St Peter's. This generous loan was on the part of its then owner, Edmund Stow, who in 1987 had rescued and stored the instrument from Belper Baptist Church, where it had stood since the beginning of the century but was now no longer in use. It was installed in St Peter's under the north gallery, in the easternmost-but-one bay. Though of only eleven manual stops and two on the pedals it served remarkably effectively throughout its period of residence in the large building.

In 1992, with the main organ once again back in use, the Grunwell was transferred (also on a temporary basis) to the Queen's Hall Methodist Mission in Derby which had just been refurbished following a fire and was still awaiting construction of its main replacement organ. In 1994 it was moved yet again for installation - permanently this time - in Milford Parish Church.

Specifications of this interesting little organ are given in the Appendix at the back of the book.

THE 1991-92 RESTORATION

The important work carried out by Messrs Wood of Huddersfield commenced in September 1991. David Wood's excellent 3-rank Mixture - a perfect blend with the existing diapason work as well as an ideal foil to the Sesquialtera - could not have been bettered. Space was found for it by the expedient of taking out the Viol de Gamba. The decision to remove the latter was not taken lightly with it being original Holt material and probably the earliest surviving example of "string" tone in Derbyshire. In its context, however, it was non-contributory to the Great Organ ensemble and could therefore be regarded as dispensable. Its forty-two pipes were stored behind the organ for safe-keeping and possible use elsewhere in the future.

The Swell Organ received a conservational bonus with the division of the Doublette slider, thus allowing its two component ranks to be drawn separately once more, as they had been from 1853 until 1873. The Fifteenth now has a very useful role to play, leaving the Twenty-Second for occasional touches of extra brightness. Indeed it would be most interesting to know how Holt envisaged this 1ft stop - very unusual for the period - should be used.

The problem of cramped access to the Choir Organ was addressed by renewal of the mechanical action, extending it horizontally to allow the department to be moved back about nine inches. Replacement pipes for the Flageolet were introduced instead of the cut down Dulcianas and some better Clarionette pipes were also installed.

Finally, the pneumatic action of the Pedal Organ was expanded to accommodate a late Victorian 16ft Trombone, thus adding an exciting punch to the bass line of the Full Organ ensemble.

The organ came back into use (albeit with the Choir Organ not yet completed) in February, 1992, and at a special service, with combined local choirs, it was dedicated by the Bishop of Repton. With everything eventually complete a grand organ recital was given in June by Dr Roy Massey of Hereford Cathedral.

THE FINISHING TOUCHES

The biggest item of unfinished business was what to do with the displaced Viol de Gamba pipes. Adding the rank to the Choir Organ - an obvious (and stylistically appropriate) move - had not previously been possible without sacrificing the very useful Flageolet. But now, with this department further back and more space available, the idea began to look feasible. In 1998 Edmund Stow, now professionally in charge of the instrument, by adding a clamp to the Choir chest to accommodate the rank of small Flageolet pipes, was able to put the Viol de Gamba where Radcliffe & Sagar's Dulciana had once stood, complete with a reinstated shared bass with the Stop Diapason. The new availability of this historic "string" stop on the Choir Organ has well proved its worth in practical use. To provide space on the right hand jamb for this new drawstop the Stop Diapason Bass of the Great Organ was removed and its twelve pipes, now no longer needing to be shared with the Viol de Gamba, were permanently linked to the Clarabella (albeit still retaining its former stophead labelled "Clarabella Treble").

In addition, during 1998, Stow very cleverly devised a pedal operated on-off lever to control the Trombone drawstop. This gadget, to the right of the pedalboard, is a very useful addition to the otherwise characteristically limited registrational aids.

And so ends the story. At the time of writing we approach the 150th anniversary of William Holt's fine organ and we can look back on a history in which various modifications have been made to meet current needs - modifications which have always been judiciously conservative and never drastic enough to lose sight of the unique 1853 character of this important and precious instrument. The specification as it now stands (and it is difficult to see why it should not now stay this way) is as follows:

GREAT ORGAN

Double Diapason
Open Diapason
Clarabella Treble
Principal
Flute
Twelfth
Fifteenth
Mixture IIIrks
Sesquialtera II-IIIrks
Trumpet
Swell to Great

SWELL ORGAN

Double Diapason
Open Diapason
Stop Diapason
Principal
Fifteenth
Twenty Second
Oboe (tenor C)
Cornopean

CHOIR ORGAN

Viol de Gamba
Stop Diapason
Flute
Flageolet
Clarionette (tenor C)
Swell to Choir

PEDAL ORGAN

Open Diapason 16ft
Bourdon
Trombone
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Choir to Pedal

*3 composition pedals to Great Organ
Toe operated on-off lever to Trombone
Balanced swell pedal at RH side of toe board
Compass: manual 54 notes, pedal 30 notes
Action: manual mechanical, pedal pneumatic*

APPENDIX I : ORGANISTS OF ST PETER'S

THOMAS MAWKES 1831-1844

(See account in earlier section)

ELIZABETH THORNLEY + MARIA JANE HEY + WILLIAM SHAW 1844-1854

Mrs Thornley was wife of a tallow chandler in the Market Place; William Shaw was a grocer and brewer in King Street; Mrs Hey was a teacher and the wife of The Revd Robert Hey, curate-in-charge.

CHAPPELL BATCHELER 1854-1858

Born in Southwell where his father was a lay clerk in the Minster. Pupil of Vincent Novello. He himself became Organist & Rector Chori at the Minster in 1841, from which he resigned in 1857 (having, it seems, already taken up the post in Belper!).

ISAAC HANSON 1858-1865

Pupil of Thomas Mawkes. Worked at Brettles Mill, eventually becoming a Managing Partner.

THOMAS B MELLOR 1865-1875

Pupil of William Woodward, organist at St Mary's RC in Derby. Appointed to St Peter's at the age of sixteen, having played at Christ Church, Belper, for the previous three years.

(See account in earlier section)

ISAAC HANSON + HERBERT GREGORY 1875-1877

Though now busy with affairs at "t'mill", Hanson and a young chorister, Herbert Gregory, shared the playing until the next permanent appointment.

MARION HEY 1877-1882

Daughter of Maria Jane Hey (*above*). She held the post until her marriage to John Hunter, agent to the Strutt estate. A brass plate on the south side of the organ case records her service as organist.

WALTER WARDLE WINDLE 1882-1930

Mr Windle is distinguished both for his long service and for his alliterative name. He was well known locally as a composer and an organ recitalist, giving many concerts with his pupils and choristers.

REGINALD G HARVEY 1930-1961

Pupil of T H Bennett (Derby All Saints - now the Cathedral). Well known as organist, pianist and conductor. His appointment to St Peter's at the age of twenty was marked by the decline of the ailing pipe organ and the installation of the Hammond instrument.

DENIS MAKIN 1961-1988

Denis Makin had previously held appointments at eight different churches and chapels in Derby, Duffield, Milford and Belper. He was also active as a choral conductor from the 1930's onwards.

RODNEY TOMKINS 1988

Rodney Tomkins, a native of Essex, was Assistant Organist at Derby Cathedral from 1982 until 1985. Following this he became Diocesan Adviser on Organs. His involvement at St Peter's, however, dates back to the initial restoration of 1978+ and thereafter he was a frequent performer at services, concerts, etc., eventually taking over after the retirement of Denis Makin in 1988.

APPENDIX II : THE GRUNWELL ORGAN

The small 3-manual organ was originally in the house of T B Mellor, Organist of St Peter's, and was built in 1874 by J M Grunwell of Derby. Following construction of a new Baptist Chapel in 1893 the Grunwell organ was installed there - tradition has it in 1901, though it may have been a few years earlier. The builder's label tells us that he was "From Hill & Son, London". The pipework, certainly, is not inconsistent with such a claim and implication of quality. Musically it represents the tonal priorities freely selected for his own private use by a professional musician of considerable talent and local repute. The original specification is therefore of interest:

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		CHOIR ORGAN	
Open Diapason	8	Gedact	8	Lieblich Gedact	8
Stopt Diapason	8	Gamba	8	Dulciana	8
Principal	4	Gemshorn	4	Flute	4
Fifteenth	2			Clarionet (TC)	8
Swell to Great				Swell to Choir	
PEDAL ORGAN					
		Sub Bass	16		
		Gamba	8		
		Great to Pedal			
		Swell to Pedal			
		Choir to Pedal			

Trigger swell pedal

Compass: manual 58 notes, pedal 30 notes

Mechanical action throughout

The Great was (and still is) bold and full-toned, in the Hill tradition. The Swell made little effect on the full Great though was useful when coupled to the Choir (the latter being identical to that department added to the St Peter's organ only the previous year). On the Choir itself the Lieblich Gedact and Flute formed a perfect partnership. The Clarionet, however, was unserviceable by the time the writer first made its acquaintance in the 1970's. Surprisingly, in such a small scheme, the Pedal had two independent ranks, the Gamba being of narrow-scale wooden pipes with a mild Principal tone.

On account of refurbishment of the Baptist chapel in 1987 the Grunwell (by now in fairly derelict condition) was dismantled and taken into store by E R Stow, later to be re-erected in St Peter's as a temporary instrument during Wood of Huddersfield's restoration work, 1991-92, on the main organ. Some tonal alterations were made, partly to replace missing pipework and partly to enhance its usefulness in accompanying congregations in the big church. The modifications were effected either by transposition (Gemshorn) or by switching departments (Gamba) or with replacement nineteenth century pipes (Wald Flute and Sesquialtera). Whilst in St Peter's the specification stood as follows:

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		CHOIR ORGAN	
Open Diapason	8	Gedact	8	Lieblich Gedact	8
Stopt Diapason	8	Wald Flute	4	Gamba	8
Principal	4	Sesquialtera Ilrks		Flute	4
Fifteenth	2			Gemshorn	1
PEDAL ORGAN					
Sub Bass					
16					
Gamba					
8					

Couplers and other details as before, as also the pitch (semitone sharp).

After a further period of substitution at the Queen's Hall Methodist Mission in Derby (following a fire) the Grunwell arrived in 1994 at its final resting place in Holy Trinity, Milford. By this time the Sesquialtera had been converted to a Mixture (with pipes of an 1866 2-rank Lloyd & Dudgeon stop formerly at Queen's Hall), the Wald Flute had become a Spitz Flute and the Gemshorn had been transposed down to 2ft pitch. The operation had also included a general transposition to concert pitch. So, in this way, an important link with St Peter's, and with an eminent organist of that church, still survives in good health in a neighbouring parish church (where it is even played on a monthly basis by the present holder of the post at St Peter's, the author of this book).

Since the publication of this booklet a substantial amount of work has been done on the organ, although the essential character of the organ has remained unaltered. This work took place in 2013-14.

The biggest change was that the pitch of the organ was altered to modern "concert pitch", A440. This means that the organ can now be used in conjunction with other instruments, not previously a possibility, as it was tuned to A446. There was much soul-searching before this radical step was undertaken as the organ was still cone-tuned; but the benefit of being able to use it with other instruments both during worship and for concerts in the superb acoustic, which is St Peter's, won the day. Pipework becomes very dusty, dirty and damaged and they were all removed, cleaned and the pitch lowered; the chimney flute being the only rank requiring extensive work.

Originally much of the action would have used iron centres working in felt bushings; the bushings were badly worn and the iron changed for phosphor-bronze. As each note will have many bushings associated with it, the scale of the work can be appreciated.

With pipes and action removed, attention could be given to the soundboards and chests but fortunately very little needed to be done to them. The bellows were a different matter as the leather was beginning to shew signs of its age and they were removed and re-leathered. The 16ft Double Diapasons had not been used for some time because the bellows, being leaky, could not sustain the wind needed for these stops. Those on the Great remained conveyanced off the sound board and were once more available to the player, whilst the Swell rank were given a new pneumatic action and were placed above the Swell soundboard, giving more space in the Swell-box.

On re-assembly, the pipes for the Choir Flageolet and the Swell Fifteenth were simply swapped over as it was felt that their characteristics were more suited to their new positions.

Finally, Rodney Tomkins retired in 2018 and Richard Brice, who had moved into the area from Cumbria where he was the organist at the URC in Whitehaven, took over.

RWB July 2018

