The Bevington Organ in St John's Church, Menton: making organs in 19th-century Soho

Martin Renshaw

20th November 2021

Good afternoon

More than a year ago, Vicki and I talked to you about the Bevington families and the makers of the organ here in St John's.

John Snetzler (b1710)
Rose Yard, Soho
Last business partner
James Jones
Apprentice
Jonathan Ohrman (born c1747)
HENRY BEVINGTON (c1778-1839)
Apprenticed to Ohrman & Nutt (1802)
Indentured for seven years at Rose Yard, Soho then Tottenham Court, New Road
30 May 1812 m **Elizabeth Ling** (1785-1850)
at *St George's, Hanover Square*

Henry	Elizabeth	Alfred	Martin	Charles
1816-1887	b1823	b1822	b1824	1826-1881

Firm: **Henry Bevington** of *Greek Street, Soho* from 1815
later **Bevington & Sons**

Henry Bevington c 1778-1839
miniature c1816
By kind permission of Anthony Bevington

By the time this organ was made in 1872, the Bevington firm had been in Soho, just west of Tottenham Court Road and south of Oxford Street, for 80 years. Its predecessor organ building businesses had been on this site for another fifty or so years before, making a total of 130 years on site before this organ was made there.

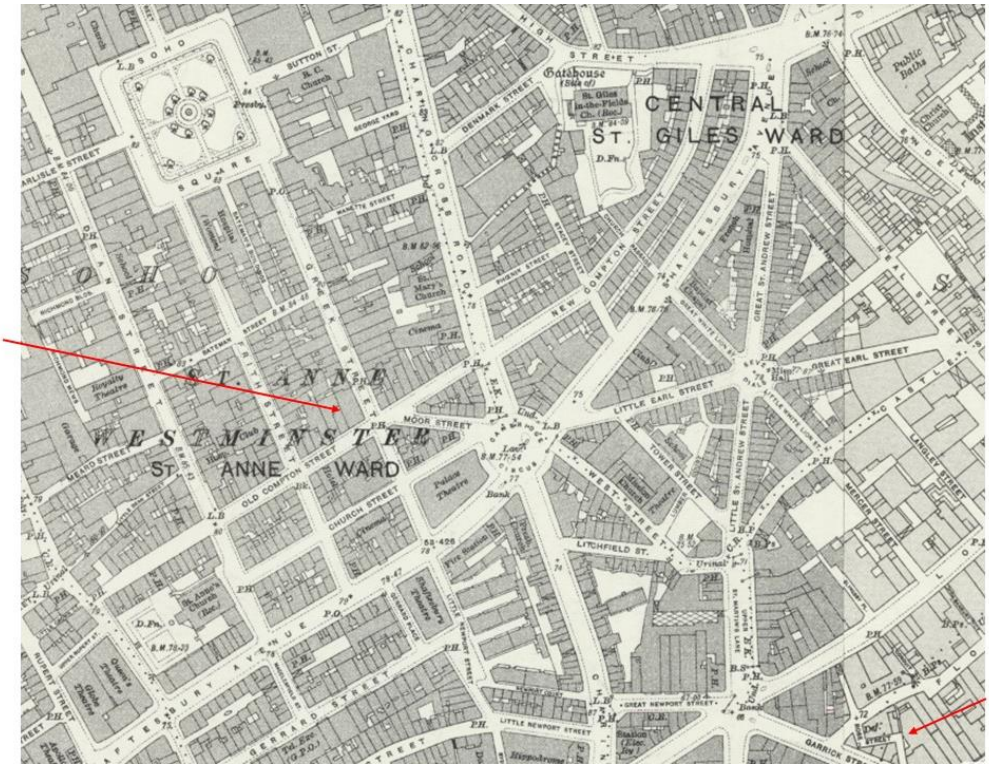
The background to innovative organ building

The Bevington organ building firm was founded by the first Henry Bevington during the last few years of the C18, almost certainly in Soho. He had been apprenticed in 1792 to Jonathan Ohrmann and John Nutt. Jonathan Ohrmann had been apprenticed in 1777 to James Jones, the last business partner of John Snetzler. John Snetzler, arguably the most influential organ builder in C18 Britain,

was born in 1710 in Schaffhausen. Here his father was one of the millers who used the power of the Rhine waterfalls to turn their grinding stones. At the age of about 20, Snetzler came to England and set up what was to become a very successful business, making more than 110 organs of all sizes, and for all parts of the UK and for the western colonies, in fifty-five years. He retired in the 1780s to Switzerland, having demonstrated the efficiency of producing organs which were varied but which had underlying patterns and standardized procedures which could be adapted to all circumstances.

Why did John Snetzler choose Soho?

1870 OS map



Bevingtons Greek Street organ works

Ohrman & Nutt's Rose Yard organ works off Rose Street

Like almost all parts of London, north and south of the Thames, before the 1970s, London was full of workshops, which were often inside the terraced houses themselves as well as in buildings in their back yards. I remember visiting a number of these in the 1960s. I saw parts of organs being made on all floors of a four-storey house near King's Cross, with the pipemakers in the basement. Another organ builder in Tottenham had a series of huts in the back garden of a quite ordinary house. One of these huts was stacked with new radio sets which were – inexplicably – all labelled in Russian.

London in those days was a place full of such workshops and suppliers where you could obtain anything you could need, from all sorts of non-ferrous metals near the Angel, Islington, or hand-cut 18th-century veneer from a loft near Shoreditch church. You could have keyboards made or restored in what seemed like a tottering tall, narrow building in Kentish Town, occupied by the successors of the firm that probably made the keyboards for this organ. Or you could order specially-made blowers for organs of all sizes to be made in White Lion Street in Islington, home of all sorts of small engineering workshops.

Late Georgian terraced workshops, photo taken c1839

This was the area where Thomas Young the mathematician and polymath used organ pipes in his physics experiments in laboratories in his house. In 1800, he noted and found a way of writing down how organs were tuned in his day – and this the same way in which I have tuned the organ here, too. All these establishments are no more in existence, having been driven out of London by developers, high rents and the trend to find almost everything on line. These workshops were places where experiments and innovation mingled with highly-specialized fine craftsmanship.

The Bevington family, which came from the Berkeley area of the Severn river and then from Shipston on Stour, had set up three different businesses under the same difficult circumstances of the 25 years of wars between, first, the British and the revolutionary French and then between Napoleon and the rest of Europe, from 1793 to 1818.

Bevington & Sons, leather manufacturers

Neckinger Mills, Bermondsey, London
founded by Samuel Bevington

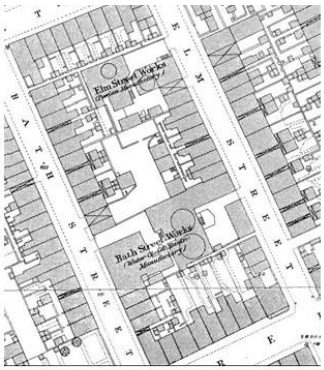
Col Samuel Bourne Bevington 1832-1907
Head of Bevington & Sons, grandson of the firm's founder & the first mayor of Bermondsey Borough Council

6

Henry Bevington's younger brother, Samuel Bevington, established a leather-processing manufactory in Bermondsey on the site of former paper mills on the Neckinger river in Bermondsey by 1795; this became the Bevington Neckinger Mills in 1801.

The Potter Bevingtons

Stoke-on-Trent



Samuel Bevington 1808-1863
Established the Swan Works in
Elm Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent


THOMAS BEVINGTON,
BURTON WORKS,
HANLEY, STAFFORDSHIRE,
MANUFACTURER OF
NOVELTIES in FANCY CHINA,
COMBINING THE USEFUL AND ORNAMENTAL IN
Raised Flower Goods,
CONSISTING OF
Flower Baskets, Vases, Centre-pieces, Table Ornaments, and other
ARTISTIC CHINA OF EVERY DESCRIPTION.
TEA, BREAKFAST, DEJEÛNER, and DESSERT SERVICES,
TRINKET TOILET SETS, TURKISH CANS & SAUCERS,
WHITE & GOLD & CHEAP 40-PIECE TEA SETS,
WHITE CHINA FOR DECORATORS AND THE TRADE
Having made the Trade in Fancy China a speciality, New Designs and Novelties are being constantly introduced.
SAMPLES AND PRICES UPON APPLICATION.
Special and prompt attention paid to Shipping Orders.
MANUFACTORY—BURTON WORKS, HANLEY, STAFFORDSHIRE

Thomas Bevington b1845
Burton Works, Hanley

John Bevington 1835-1892
Elm Street Works until 1870

7

By 1808, another Samuel Bevington (son of Richard) had established the Swan pottery works in Hanley near Stoke-on-Trent and he would go on to produce fine pottery in several places in that area.

In 1808, organ builder Henry Bevington and his then associate, Mr Goyer, advertised an innovation: a special contrivance to make blowing an organ more easy.

Times, Friday 29 April 1808:

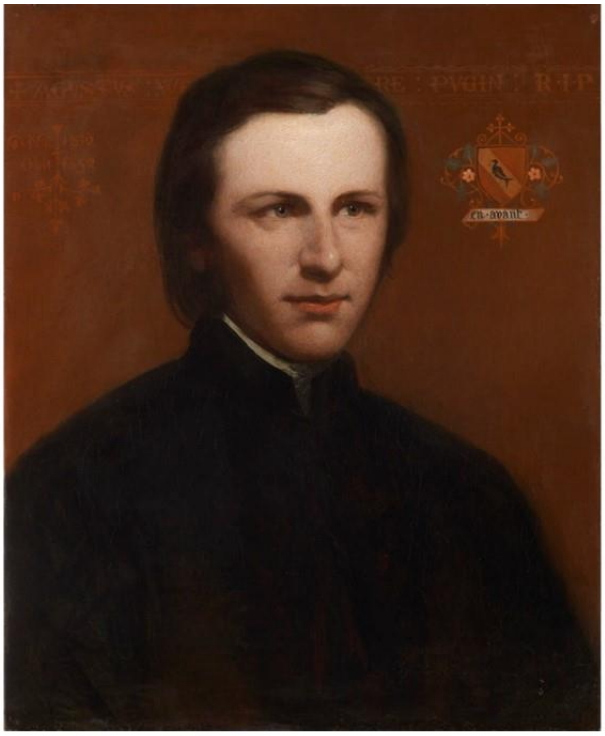
PATENT CHAMBER ORGANS – BEVINGTON and GOYER, Organ-builders, 42 Newman-street, Oxford-street, most respectfully inform the Nobility and gentry, that, being long aware of the trouble of blowing with foot in Chamber Organs, they have invented and added to that Instrument a MACHINE to blow the Bellows, so as that noble Instrument may be played with as much ease as a Piano-forte.

Instruments for inspection.

What this was is not at all clear, especially what was meant by the phrase about making the organ as easy to play as a piano. This sounds rather as if the Machine was operated by someone else – perhaps a house-servant – rather than the player.

Such a machine might have been used in a forge, perhaps, rather than the more normal organ-like bellows. Or might it have been a machine used in the theatre to blow stage smoke across the stage? Soho is very close to theatre land now and it was then.

Theatre-land – Pugin and the Bevingtons



AW Pugin c1840 by Unknown artist © National Portrait Gallery, London No. 1404

Augustus Welby Pugin
born **1812** Bloomsbury, London

Henry Bevington m **Elizabeth Ling**
(c1778-1839) **1812** (1787-1850)

Sons

Henry (1813-1887)
Martin (b1821)

9

In 1812, Henry Bevington married Elizabeth Ling. In the same year, and in the same part of London, the designer and architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin was born, and it seems to me that he was to have a very considerable influence on his younger contemporaries, Henry Bevington junior and Martin. Augustus Pugin's short and turbulent life was certainly spent being inventive, daring and energetic. In his later teens, he was already haunting the demi-monde of the theatres as well as

designing furniture for Windsor castle. In 1831, at the precocious age of 19, Pugin was commissioned to design the scenery for the London première at Covent Garden of 'Kenilworth', the opera by Donizetti based on Walter Scott's novel. He forthwith lost no time in taking up with and then marrying an actress.

The course of Pugin's architectural life would lead him to design many churches, most of them Roman Catholic (including five cathedrals), but a few Church of England ones as well. Naturally all these needed organs, as did Pugin's own houses and his large private church at Ramsgate. And nearly all the organs for these places were made by the younger Bevingtons. They also made an organ for the church of the ancestral birth-place of Pugin's mother, Catherine Welby, at Denton on the Leicestershire-Lincolnshire border near Belvoir castle. Although – as he did with everyone else – Pugin occasionally expressed his exasperation with the Bevington brothers, the three men seem to have had faithful and even cordial business dealings. This association with Pugin could well have been a further inspiration for the innovative tendencies of the Bevington brothers.

A new passion for Gothic

We now tend to think of the C19 as being the century of the Gothic Revival. But this is not really the case. In fact, until the 1830s – well into the century - any idea that overall architectural taste would change from Classical to Gothic would have seemed very unlikely.

Horace Walpole's house at Strawberry Hill near Twickenham

But this innovative transition did take place, quite suddenly, although in fact it had been pioneered by architects and designers of houses for about fifty years, one of the very first these being Horace Walpole's continually-extended country house at Strawberry Hill near Twickenham. But an important catalyst for what was to become a universal architectural revolution was the choice of what was then called 'Elizabethan Gothic' for the new houses of parliament. This choice might indeed have been influenced by the pre-existing taste for gothick houses. And it was Augustus Pugin who produced the detailed 'gothic' drawings for the parliament buildings which enabled Charles Barry, already an experienced planner of grand houses, to win the design competition.

©National Portrait Gallery, London

The new parliament complex was constructed throughout the 1840s on the largest building site in Europe. And, as is well known, almost their entire exterior and interior decorative and furnishing schemes were also designed by Pugin, right up to his death in 1852.

In the late 1830s Henry Bevington senior, the founder of the firm, died. For the next 45 or so years, it was Henry Bevington junior who directed the business, later together with his younger brother Martin.

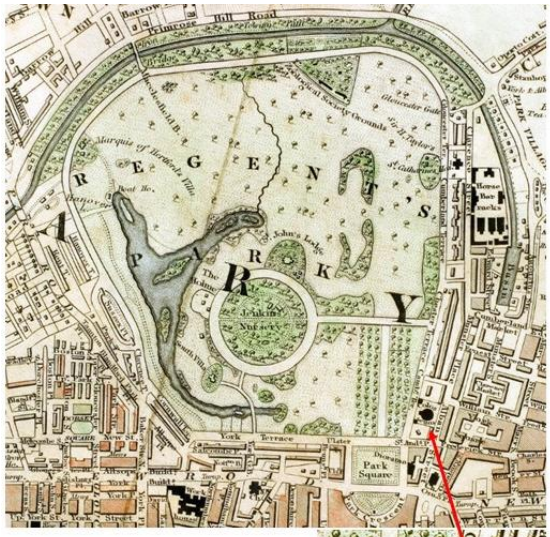
Background

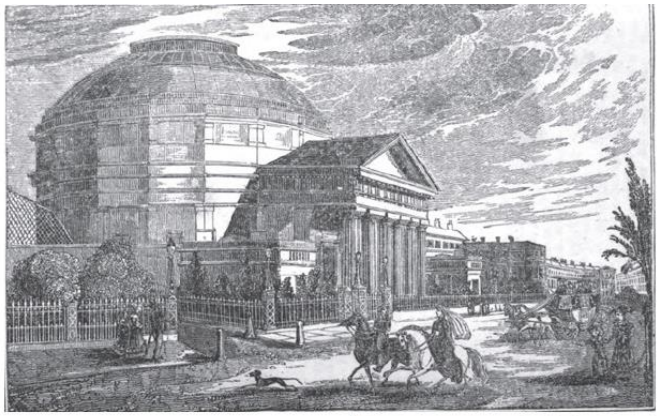
Soho's Organ Building Old & Family Firms, New Generations & New Firms

OLDER GENERATION 1820s		
Bevington & Sons **Henry Bevington (d1839)**	53 Greek Street, Soho	1815-1816
England & Son **George Pike England (c1768-1815)**	Woods Close, Clerkenwell 31 Theobalds Road	1763-? 1776-?1788
Hugh Russell (c1731-1825) **partnered with Englands in 1770s**	28 Theobalds Road 2 Terrace Grays Inn Lane	1802-1825 - c1828
Elliot (c1759-1832) & Hill (1789-1870)	12 Tottenham Court, New Road	1825-30s
John Gray (c1787-1849)	6, New Road, Fitzroy Square, then 9-11 Quickset Row, New Road, Fitzroy Square	1824-1835 - 1849
NEW GENERATION 1840s		
Bevington & Sons **Henry (1813-1887) & Martin (b1821)**	12 Greek Street, Soho 48 Greek Street, Soho	1822-1841 1842
Timothy Russell (1823-1861)	2 Grays Inn Terrace	1832-1861
NEW PARTNERSHIPS		
Hill & Davison	12 Tottenham Court New Road	1837-8
Gray [3rd generation] & Davison	9&11 Quickset Row, New Road, Fitzroy Square	1845-1853
NEW FIRMS		
Joseph William Walker (1802-1870)	5 Bentinck St, Soho 166 High Holborn 27 Francis Street, Tottenham Court Road	1827-1831 1831-1837 1837-1925
Willis & Sons Henry Willis (1821-1901)	Foundling Terrace, Grays Inn Road	1848-1850
George Maydell Holdich (1816-1896) **[with Bevingtons until own workshop]**	12 Greek Street Soho 4 Judd Place East, New Road	1842-1848 1851-1857
James Bishop (c1783-1854)	1 Lisson Grove South 17 Albert Terrace, Westbourne Grove	1829-1841 1852-1855

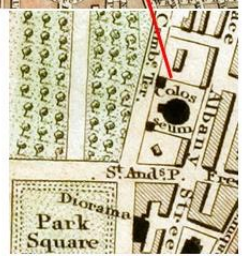
The 1840s was a pivotal decade, especially in London-based organ building but also nationally, when new generations in their family firms took over control, and new business partnerships and a large number of new businesses came to supply a new, competitive and very busy marketplace. During the C19, something like 30,000 organs were built and installed, a legacy that now, in the early C21, we are finding very difficult to protect in the face of wide-spread church closures. I'll say more about this serious problem a little later; meanwhile, let us return to Victorian enterprise and expansionism.

Colosseum



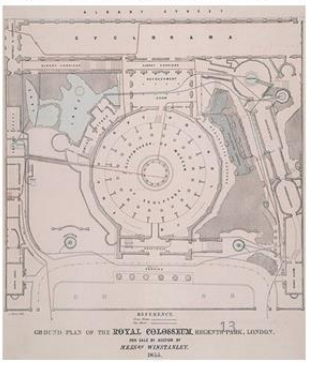


Royal Colosseum and Cyclorama, Regents Park



Installed organs listed by Bevington:

Grand Apollonicon, Cyclorama, Colosseum
Grand Orchestral Organ, Colosseum



At the same time as the new houses of parliament were being built, the Bevingtons were making a name for themselves in a large and permanent exhibition in London. At the head of a list of their organs drawn up about 1851 came their two organs at the Colosseum in Regent's Park, which were described as 'The Grand Appolonicon, Cyclorama, removed to the Colosseum', and 'The Grand Orchestral Organ at the Colosseum'. It is one of the many ironies of history that the Bevingtons were working here, in a building designed by Decimus Burton, who was to be Pugin's future arch-enemy and bête noire. Burton designed this Colosseum as an enormous domed round building in a grand classical style. It was situated in the south-east corner of Regent's Park and was built from 1823 to 1827 to house what was then (and since) the largest painting in the world.

Panoramic View of London, completed 1829 in the Colosseum by Thomas Horner

The original sketches were made in 1821-2 at several feet above the lantern of St. Paul's Cathedral

This was a cycloramic, all-round view of the whole of London, originally drawn by Thomas Horner from a studio set up on the top of the lantern of St Paul's cathedral while its cross and ball were being replaced in 1821-2. The Colosseum was like an indoor theme park, and its various exhibitions and shows were major attractions in London. Having passed through the hands of various impresarios, it lasted until 1874-5 when it was demolished.

We cannot find an illustration of either of the two Colosseum organs; but the press described what they called 'the Grand Apollonicon organ' with a few useful details.

The Apollonicon at the Colosseum

***The Illustrated London News* (20 Dec 1848):**

The apollonicon, built by Messrs. Bevington & Sons, of Greek Street, Soho, is an instrument of great compass and variety of effect, containing contra-bass, violoncelli, viollini, corni, tromba, fagotti, hautbois, clarionetti, flauto, piccolo, flageolet, &c. It has four distinct organs, and has nine composition pedals, with three coupling movements, sixteen pedals, fifty-three stops, and two thousand four hundred and seven pipes.

***London Journal* (20 Jan 1849):**

[The Apollonicon organ] is of enormous dimensions, being thirty feet in height and in depth, and fifteen in width, and in its loudest tones it is so deafening that the proprietors of the Colosseum have found it incumbent to place it in a room seventy feet in length.

The organist of the Apollonicon

***The Times* (25 Dec 1848):**

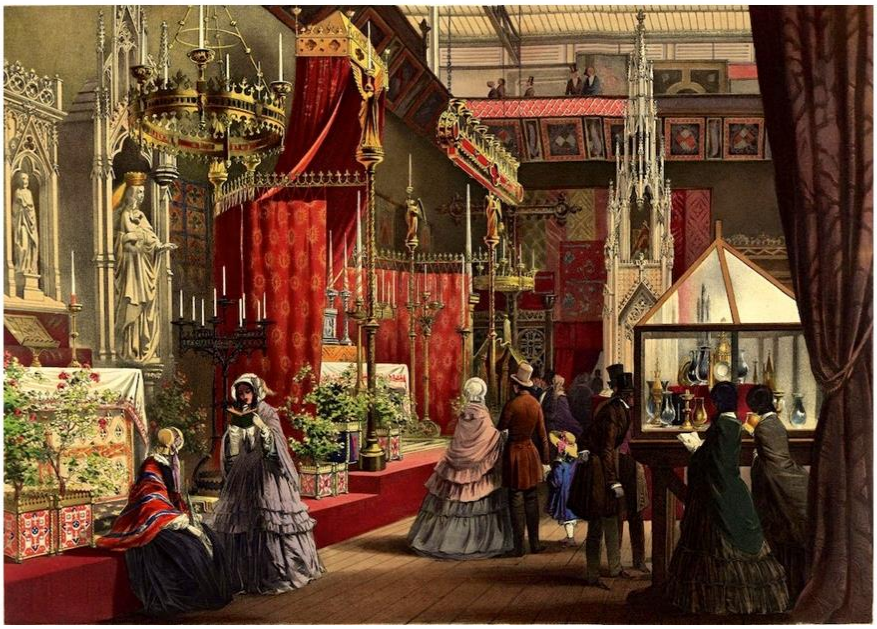
It was operated by one man—the church and theater organist Mr. Pittman—who also deployed the apollonicon's "set of Kettle Drums, Triangle, and Effects for the Storm," and machinery to trigger a drum roll.

But it's not certain which of the two Colosseum organs is being described here, partly because the title of 'Grand Apollonicon' seems to have been used for any large organ made for public exhibitions, ever since the first of these was made by Flight & Robson around 1817. We need to remember that no other organs had been made in Britain larger than about 30-35 stops, so anything over 40 stops was regarded as highly unusual and adventurous - and the Apollonicon had 53! And here were two of them – and more were to follow from the Bevington workshops.

Exhibition organs

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in 1851 was the brain-child of the inventor and engineer, Henry Cole, and was the first of its kind.

Medieval Court at the 1851 Great Exhibition, designed by Pugin



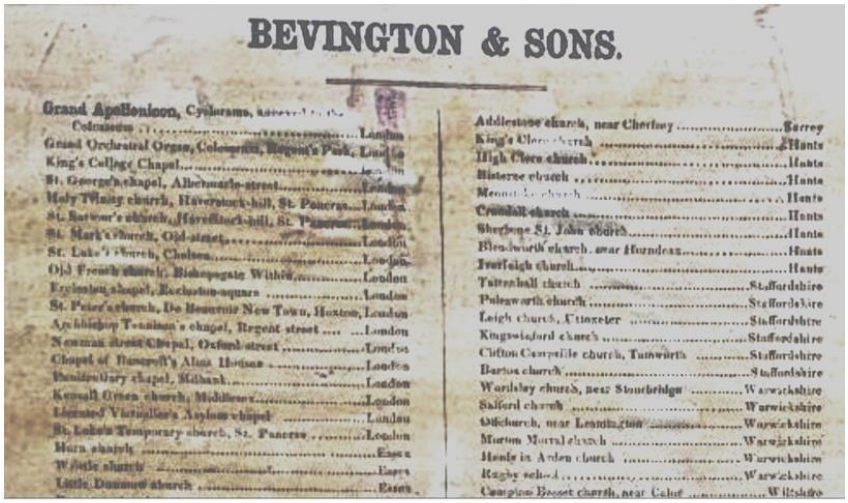
This Exhibition formed the book-end to the pivotal decade of the 1840s; inevitably and rightly it was Pugin who designed its highly-influential medieval court.

'America' at the Great Exhibition, with its centrepiece Gray & Davison organ

Although it is not certain that the Bevingtons exhibited their work at it, it is surely the case that they did. Their absence from the published records of the jury which awarded medals at the exhibition might well be due to the fact that the Bevingtons realized that it would have been dangerous to leave organs for six months in the humid and hot climate generated by the glass-house design of the Crystal Palace. A much safer ploy would have been to exhibit a series of small organs. By changing these from time to time, their organs would have suffered much less harm from the exhibition's environment, so perhaps that it is what the Bevingtons did.

However, it seems that the Bevingtons did not lose the opportunity the Great Exhibition gave them for publicity.

Organ list of c1851 found by Andrew Cooper in the Bevington one-manual barrel and finger organ at St Andrew's Rockbourne, Hampshire



BEVINGTON & SONS.

Grand Apollonicon, Cyclorama, installed in the Colosseum.....London
Grand Orchestral Organ, Colosseum, Regent's Park. London *etc*

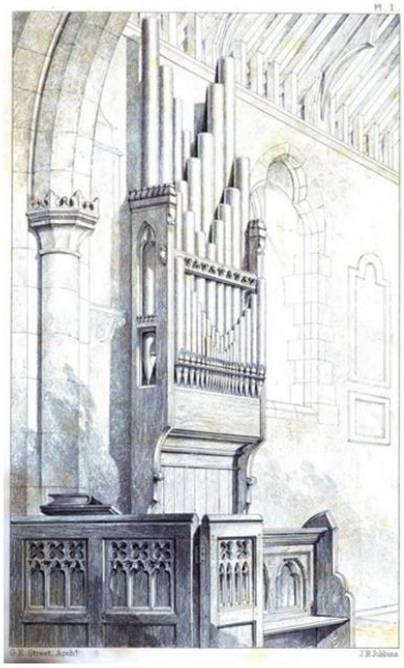
A list of about 250 organs made and installed by the firm, dateable from internal evidence to about 1851, was found by Andrew Cooper. It had been pasted to the back of the music desk of the one-manual Bevington barrel and finger organ installed at Rockbourne church in Hampshire in 1851. This organ is not on the list, which suggests that someone may have bought the organ as a result of having seen this advertisement. The organ at Rockbourne is one those described in the list as a Church Barrel and Finger Organ. It is one of the last of its type, with a 'gothick with a k' style of casework with gilt dummy front pipes, quite unlike the chancel organs of the future.

Bevington small organ prices list c1851		
Church Finger Organs	Five Stops, German and Composition Pedals, Venetian Swell, Gothic or Grecian Cases	£100
Church Barrel and Finger Organs	Full compass, German and Composition pedals, complete	£100 to £200
Church Finger Organs	Two rows of Keys, Swell and Great Organs, Full Compass with German and Composition Pedals, complete	£120
House or Chamber Organs	In elegant Rosewood and Mahogany cases, containing Stop Diapason, Treble and Bass, Dulciana, Principal and Flute, with Octaves of Pedals	60 and 70 Guineas
Small sized Church Barrel Organs		30 Guineas
All descriptions of Church and Chamber Organs made to order. Barrels made and re-set. Organs tuned and repaired by contract in every part of the United Kingdom.		

At the end of the list, is the first description of the various kinds of small organs, with their technical details already fully worked out. These were to become the typical Bevington 'chancel' organs of later years, although they are not described as such there. Each size of organ is clearly priced, too, so

that churches of all depths of pockets could find something to suit them. The prices were competitive too; only smaller and local rural firms were able to make organs at a lower cost.

'Mediaeval' organ built by Gray & Davison for 1862 International Exhibition designed and decorated by John Seddon (1827-1906), Stowlangtoft, Suffolk



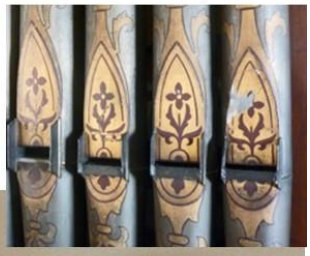
'Mediaeval' organ design by George Street *from* 'Scudamore Organs' by Rev John Baron, 1858

Following the Great Exhibition, the style of small organs they made changed quite radically. Their new designs were based on the 'medieval' organs exhibited at the Exhibition which had been decorated by various artists, as well as being influenced by the much plainer designs by George Street illustrated in John Baron's 'Scudamore Organs' book.

High quality painting of pipes on 3-manual Bevington organ of 1855-6: St Saviours Chalk Farm

Bevington pipe decoration

1873 House organ now at St John's Downshire Hill, Hampstead



All Saints Parish church Wellington NZ 1879

The Bevingtons certainly adopted the general forms of George Street's simple designs, but for the next three decades they also decorated the front pipes and cases of their organs of all sizes, to the extent that this became almost their trademark or signature.

St Martin's in the Fields

Bevington case 1850s

22

Perhaps because the two Colosseum organs so well known to the public, the younger Bevingtons were perhaps the natural choice to build two other large new organs. The first of these large instruments was made in 1854 with 49 stops for St Martin in the Fields.

Foundling Hospital Chapel

Engraving 1774, John Sanders

FHC case as rebuilt 1989 at St Andrew, Holborn

23

In the next year they constructed one with 48 speaking stops for the very public chapel of the Foundling Hospital chapel. In both of these organs, the Bevingtons employed many of the unusual and new features which were pioneered in English organs, and then taken to Paris and subsequently the continent in general by Charles Barker. They added other ideas which seem to be innovations exhibited at the Great Exhibition and some that they seem to have thought up for themselves. Their large choruses and pedal departments foreshadowed much of what was to become the later high romantic organ in England, exemplified in the large organs in town halls and cathedrals.

At this time, in the early 1850s, it seems that the Bevingtons employed a permanent staff of about 18 men and three apprentices. They would also have used journey men, working at daily rates of pay, and almost certainly also other teams of workers to pack, transport and put up and finish their larger organs on site.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 had drawn the attention of businesses to the possibilities of much wider export markets - and to the high standards and efficiency these demanded of organ builders.

Entire list provided by Andrew Cooper, found glued to the back of the music desk of the 1851 Bevington & Sons finger & barrel organ at Rockbourne Church, Hants

Berkshire
Cambridgeshire
Cornwall
Coventry
Derbyshire
Devonshire
Dorset
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hampshire/Isle of W
Hertfordshire
Kent
Lancashire
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
London
Manchester
Middlesex
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Salop
Somerset
Staffordshire

Suffolk
Surrey
Sussex
Warwickshire
Wiltshire
Worcestershire
Yorkshire
Edinburgh
Dublin
North Wales
South Wales
Scotland, *then*

Australia
Bengal
British Guinea
Canada
Cape of Good Hope
France
Ireland
Jamaica
Mexico
New Zealand
North America
Spain
West Indies

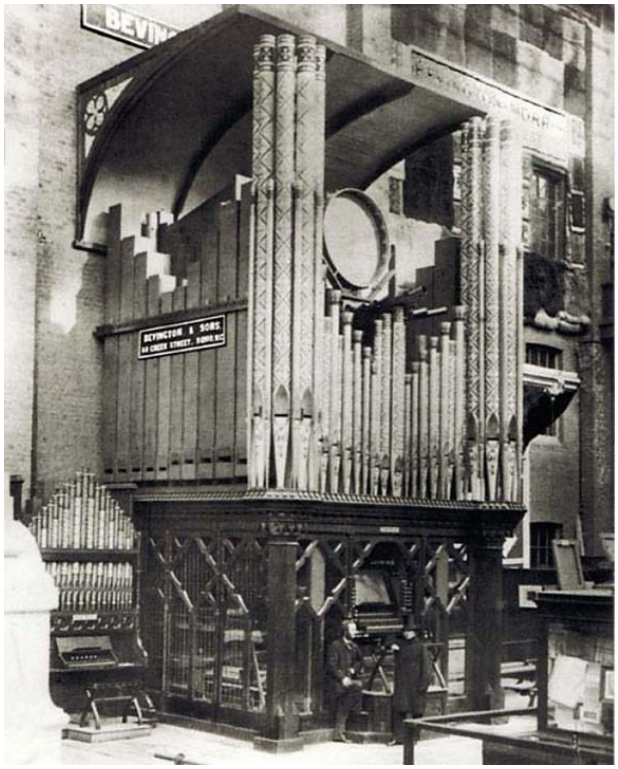
Bevington & Sons were anyway by then no strangers to exporting organs. Their c1851 list shows that they had already by then sent organs to Mexico, India, Canada, Spain and the West Indies. They made an organ for an independent chapel in Paris in the early 1850s, too. The scene was set for the rest of the dramatic opera of typical Victorian semi-industrialised organ building, with its cast of often larger than life characters and their supporting choruses of pundits and players.

Whatever may have happened at the 1851 Great Exhibition, we do know that the Bevington brothers did not lose the chance of showing their work wherever possible in subsequent exhibitions. In 1855 they took organs to the Paris International Exhibition and they gained a medal there.

Medals recorded on Menton's 1872 organ

1878 ex-Swanwick Hall, Derby organ

When a somewhat smaller-scale Industrial and Arts Exhibition took place in Cromwell Road in London in 1862, the Bevingtons exhibited their work and won more medals.



Bevington & Sons

Two organs exhibited at the Industrial & Fine Arts Exhibition, Cromwell Road, London in 1862.

The huge 3 manual and pedals organ with a drum received a medal for "superior quality and finish of workmanship".

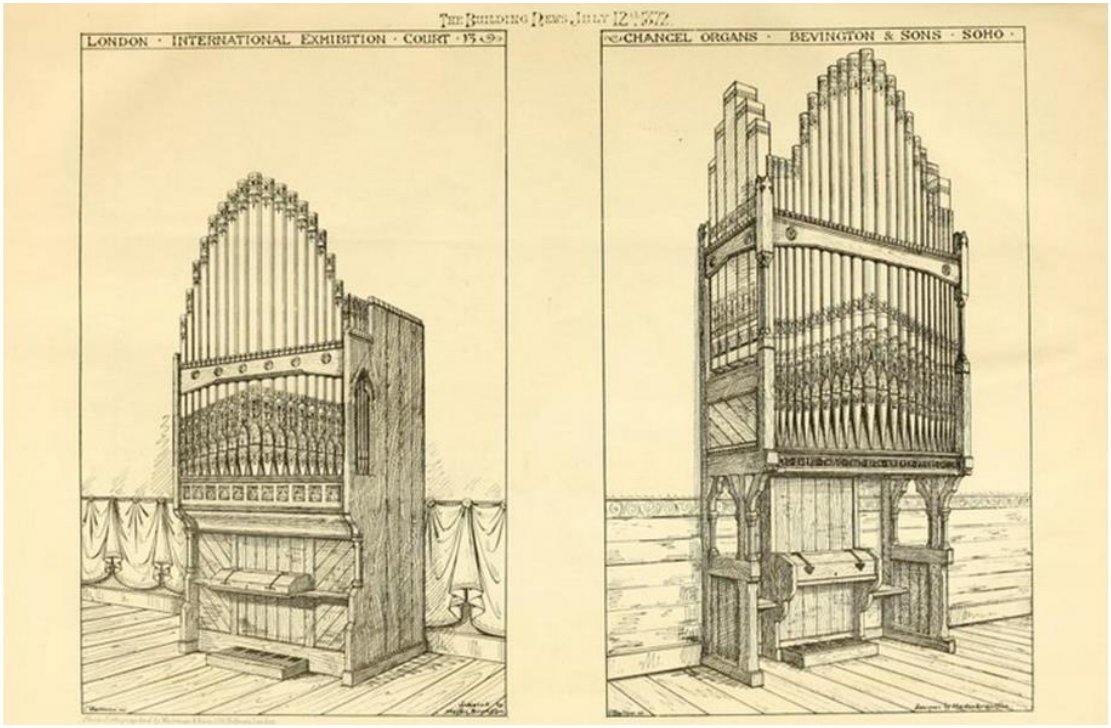
The interior of the organ including the drawstop shafts and trackers were French polished because they could be seen through the windows in the lower case.

from NPOR

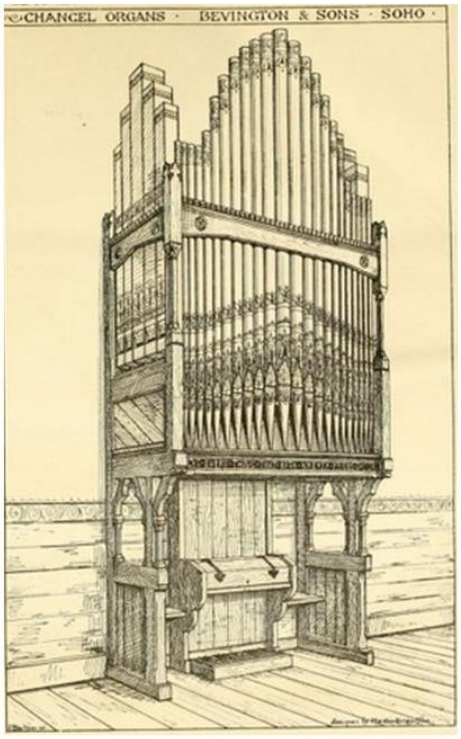
This time, fortunately, we *do* know what two of the organs they exhibited looked like. If you can take your eyes away from the highly-characteristic design of the large organ with its prominent bass drum and look down towards the left, you will see a small 'chancel' organ tucked in underneath its very big brother. Its overall height of about 11 or 12 feet scarcely reaches the impost of the large organ, which also towers over the men standing in front of it. This large organ subsequently went successively to two large music rooms in private houses and then to the equally remarkable municipal concert room the Victoria Hall in Ealing, before being sold off for parts in the 1950s. I'm sure you will have noticed that both organs have decorated front pipes …

London International Exhibition Court 13 : Chancel organs Bevington & Sons Soho

The Building News July 12th 1872



At another Exhibition, ten years later in 1872, the Bevingtons exhibited two organs to illustrate their production of chancel organs, making which was by then a significant part of their business. These two organs were apparently designed by Martin Bevington, whose signature appears in the lower right-hand corners of these drawings,



Bevington chancel organ built c1885 for Congregational church Greasbrough, Yorks West Riding, now in Kendal PC, Cumbria

and they exemplify the gradual stylistic shift in the appearance of their organs that was happening as time went on.

1878 Bevington house organ ex-Stanswick Hall, Derby

Here is an organ made for the owner of Swanwick Hall in Derbyshire in 1878, which illustrates well this style, with its fine woodwork – which is quite similar to the style of the organ here at Menton – and its many highly decorated pipes.

Organs of all kinds

Nether Stowey, Somerset

Bevington small organs

Bekesbourne, Kent

Chislet Kent

North Lopham, Norfolk

The firm of Bevington & Sons was very well known in its time (and since) as makers of really effective small organs for churches and chapels - so much so that these days most people who know something about their work think of them of them as only making these small organs. It's true that they made, packed and despatched a lot of these organs, all smaller than the organ here and often with just one keyboard, to all corners of the Empire. I would estimate that they sent out around 750 of these organs during the fifty years from the 1840s through to the 1890s. Back in the UK, I expect that you would find a sprinkling of them in churches in every county you might know. They were made on the crest of the wave of church building that caught the country's imagination and swept through it. Hundreds of churches were built, like this church at Menton, designed in the accepted C19 universal, European, restored-Gothic style. In these C19 churches, with their revived chancel choirs in their choir stalls (as here) organs were placed so as to accompany the singers in these stalls. In medium and larger churches, organs were placed to one side – preferably the north side as here, away from the sun's direct heating – and (as here) very often in a specially-built tall recess. Such recesses were also quite often added as extra rooms to medieval buildings.

The organ that was first installed in this church, presumably quite early in the church's history, was (I am told) made by the firm founded by John Nicholson in Worcester. It was placed in that recess behind the choir stalls. But the casework you can see there now is not the original one; this was made, as a plaque on it says, in 1924 for a reconstructed and enlarged version of the original organ. The front pipes you can see are from that date as well, and their style suggests a maker from Switzerland. Other signs inside the case suggest that the organ was remade then with an over-complicated pneumatic action, so it is maybe not too surprising that by the latter years of the last century it had become unreliable. The whole internal workings of the organ and any original pipework were removed and sold to a church in Ventimiglia, where I understand it has had to be remade again in recent times.

Going back to the United Kingdom in the 19th century, and its many new and 'restored' churches: in smaller churches, the size of their 'organ chamber' recesses allowed for only quite small organs,

smaller than the organ you now have, and the Bevington firm made the design and making of these small ‘chancel’ organs something of a speciality, as we have seen. To make an effective small organ is not at all easy if it is going to do its job well, and although many other firms made small organs, they rarely were as reliable and efficient as those produced by the Bevingtons. This is, I suggest, because the Bevingtons took them seriously and, unlike other firms, they did not leave them to be made by junior workers or apprentices.

Three small 1860s Bevington chancel organs now in France

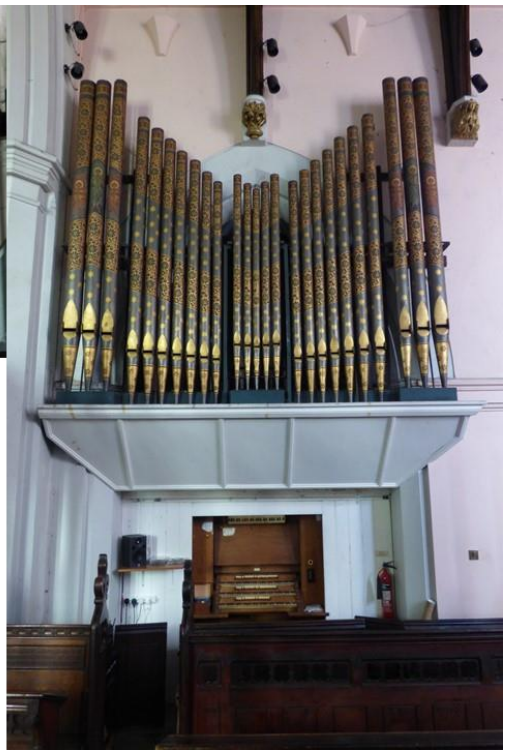
St Martin l'Aiguillon, Normandy

Plounez, N Brittany

Pléhédel, N Brittany

I have installed three of these smaller chancel organs in northern France. They were all made in the 1860s, and they now perhaps unexpectedly fill quite large buildings with ample and rich sounds.

St Saviours Eton Road



St Peter’s Belsize Square

In larger new C19 churches, organs placed behind the choir stalls were made on a grander scale, and as early as the 1850s, the Bevingtons were producing these too. Here are two in adjacent churches south of Hampstead in London, at St Peter’s Belsize Park and St Saviour’s in Eton Road near Chalk Farm.

As you can see, the former is quite monumental in scale and even has (false) trumpets sticking out of it at the top. The organ at St Saviour's has particularly good and rich examples of painting on its front pipes, which when patrons could afford it became quite a signature feature of the Bevington organs of all sizes.

Ford Baptist church

Lockwood
Baptist church

Snetzler
Hillington Norfolk

St Cybi, Holyhead 1881
Charles Whiteley

Smeeth

Unfortunately, we do not know who did this art work, but some of the small organs associated with the Great Exhibition of 1852, were beautifully decorated, and several smaller organ builders also made quite a feature of this in their organs.

Organs for Roman Catholic churches

Let us now leave exhibitions and return to the c1851 list. In it, out of nearly 250 organs, are listed 53 organs made for Roman Catholic churches, chapels, colleges, monasteries and nunneries. About three-quarters of these are in England and about a quarter in Ireland. Not surprisingly, a substantial number of these were made for buildings designed by Augustus Pugin. They include the one made for his own large chapel-church at Ramsgate in Kent, and we know that there was also a small one in his adjacent house, which was used for family prayers every morning and evening.

Ushaw College main chapel
Bevington, 1885

from NPOR

It has been thought that James Bishop took the lion's share of the new market for organs in Roman Catholic churches, but in fact the Bevingtons took a large part of it too. At Ushaw College, they even replaced an earlier Bishop organ with a new one made in 1885 for the enlarged main chapel as well as making a smaller 'chancel' organ for the chapel of the junior school, which had been designed by Pugin's son Edward at about the same time.

From the 1830s onwards, the younger Henry Bevington, who must have been a more than capable organist, very frequently played at the opening of the firms' organs.

3-manual Bevington, 1850-1

original as abandoned, 2002

Wickham church, Berks

One of these was a large church organ which survived in restorable condition until earlier this year in the parish church of Wickham near Newbury. Here the Revd Mr Nicholson had rebuilt the church to designs by one of Pugin's pupils and supplied both the organ and a well-paid organist. This organ was - rather unusually - opened twice by Henry Bevington: first in 1850 and again in 1851 after it had been enlarged.

Making church, Masonic and house organs

During the three decades from the 1850s right through to the end of the 1870s, organs of all sorts and sizes were leaving Soho at the rate of about one a week. This rate of production might seem to us to be amazing, but by this time at least three other London firms were producing organs at much the same rate.

Let's just have a look at what this implies, in the middle years of the century. The only machines available, and only to those with the financial resources and the space, would be fairly basic wood-cutting machines such as circular saws, working through leather belts connecting to wheeled shafts driven by a steam engine. Although these would replace an immense amount of labour, and the timber would be somewhat pre-dimensioned when purchased, almost all the other operations of cutting to shape, planning, drilling and finishing would be done by hand.

Victorian workshop

In 1873 the Springwood Organ Works was opened.

It was said at the time to be the largest and best equipped in England.

With its large steam engine, full complement of machinery and eighty craftsmen, Peter Conacher & Co built around thirty large organs each year.

From somewhat later in the century, more machines were used, notably in the works of Peter Conacher and Co. in Huddersfield. They were able to undercut their London competition up until the first world war by having a very well-equipped factory which even included standardised mechanical carving aids, all driven by overhead cams and belts. This factory lasted until its disgraceful dismantling as recently as the 1970s, but it gives us an idea of what some of the other highly-productive organ building and furniture-making firms must have been like as well. But making an organ essentially also involves a huge amount of highly-specialised hand-made carpentry and joinery, together with specially-equipped workshops for the production of metal pipework, where (then as now) there is very little scope for mechanization at all.

Among the items particular to organs and other musical instruments with keyboards are (naturally) the keyboards themselves. These were almost always made in other premises by specialized sub-contractors. Some machinery can be used for this work, but there is a great deal of hand-work to plate them with ivory and ebony and then finish them carefully. The other major items in an organ are the soundboards on which the majority of the pipes stand. These contain the valves opened by the keys and sliders which are opened to allow wind into the various ranks of pipes (there is up to one pipe for each note on the keyboards, making 56 pipes per ‘stop’ as we now call it, in this organ). It is a complex piece of work and requires the best available timber – usually mahoganies or American walnuts and Canadian yellow pine in organs of this period – as well as highly-skilled workmanship and knowledge to design and make them and all they contain. Linking the keys and stop-knobs and the soundboards are the various smaller action parts. All of which have to be made with high precision and well-chosen materials so that they work efficiently and with the utmost reliability - even under difficult circumstances of over-heating (or its opposite, dampness) – so that they work ‘first time and every time’ at the command of the player.

As well as being almost wholly hand-made, and involving many different processes, every pipe has to be ‘voiced’ as well – that is, put on wind and made to sing. There are many ways of doing this to

achieve any number of musical results, depending on how large the pipes are, what they are made from (wood or metal), whether they are stoppered or open. It is the skill of the voicer and his or her knowledge which determines how the whole ensemble will knit together as well as ensuring that each rank or voice sounds musical on its own as well.

But none of these things would be any use without a system to produce the wind. And making of the bellows and the reservoirs to store and pressurize the wind – and the electric fans to produce the right amount of wind as silently as possible – and then constructing systems for getting the right amount of wind to every part of the organ is another major department.

All these various elements stand on a substantial wooden frame whose design has to include room for all that has to go into it and on top of it but be as solid and rigid as possible in all possible circumstances of humidity. And specialized joiners would make the finer visible parts of the casework and the surroundings of the keyboards and pedalboard. The stop-knobs were turned from fine exotic wood with inserts which were engraved by hand and often inked in various colours.

Altogether inside an organ, and mostly hidden from view, are to be found the skills of working wood of all kinds, forging and fabricating metals ranging from iron to bronze and brass and tin and lead (and sometimes pure zinc, though not in this organ). On the outside you can see the work of finishes such as the French-polished oak and the silvered brass hinges here as well as the other visible ones of painting the front and side metal and wooden pipes. There are around 600 singing pipes of all kinds in this organ and around 8000 other mechanical and other parts – those of you who saw the organ when it arrived in pieces will have been able to some extent to appreciate such statistics.

The employees of Bevington and other similar workshops would normally have worked a 55-hour week, usually including at least Saturday mornings. No doubt as organs were being completed against a time-limit for delivery to a church or for completion in it, or to the dockside, much overtime would have been worked as well. In one of his Walks Around London (I think it was), Charles Dickens mentions hearing the sound of organs being tuned in Soho …

The Bevington brothers had found a way of making organs at accessible prices in versions that were variable enough for all situations. Although some parts of them, such as reservoirs with their bellows, may have been somewhat standardised, differences in their voicing and their layouts suggest that they may have been made by teams of workers. These workers were up at the top of their profession as craftsmen, equal to those working for the most famous furniture makers, such as Chippendale and Sheraton in the 18th century and Waring and Gillow in the 19th.

With such a large through-put of organs, of about one per week in the middle decades of the C19, it was necessary to mark essential components and the pipework with a job number.

Glued inside the soundboards are large pre-printed labels onto which the organ's number, year-date and the place for which the organ was made were written in ink. The organ here at St. John's is number 1012. The largest wooden pipes and the largest metal pipes also have this number marked on them.

Label for job no. 770 dated 1866

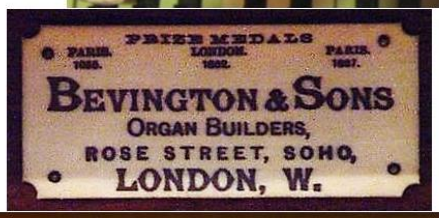
Label for job no. 1215 dated 1878

'Medals Awarded' printed onto Bevington & Sons labels and invoices along with dates and job numbers

Invoice

The loss of the firm's business records when the Soho workshops were bombed in 1941 (and in previous fires) meant that a full work-list could be compiled only by using these job numbers and year dates – and the month-dates on a bass pallet, as I'll explain later - inside the soundboard. This would be a huge task, since there could be up to about 2000 organs to find, research and list.

Name plates with Exhibition prize medals

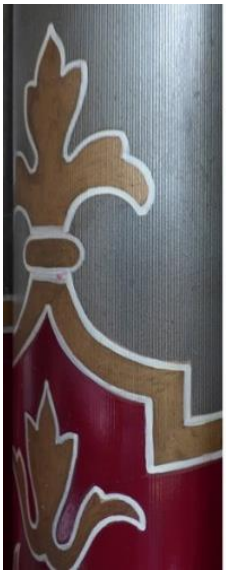


These soundboard labels often also include something else that is practically unique to Bevingtons' organs: engravings of their medals from three successive Exhibitions, at Paris in 1855, London in 1862 and Paris again in 1867. After this last date, they displayed them on the consoles as well, using either stuck-on labels with gold print, or written out with their typical and also unique fine lettering in black or sometimes gilded, as well as being printed on the labels in the soundboards.

The medals were given for 'excellence of tone', among other things. And this may have been emphasised as a public reply to the organist and critic Henry Smart's criticism of their organ at St Martin's in the Fields. It is true that sometimes their voicing is not so immediately ingratiating in the

way that the rather unfocussed voicing of say Hill's voicing might be, but their bright and quick-speaking stopped diapason basses and clear choruses are thoroughly effective musically in the same slightly 'brisk and no-nonsense' way that is also characteristic of Snetzler's organs.

The Bevington's expertise in making organs extended to a system of packing them with colour-coded instructions for assembly on arrival. This could have been done by local organ builders or even workmen who were part of a church's congregations where organ builders were in short supply, such as in the colonies. One would love to know what these instructions were – they might well be copied with real advantages in present circumstances, when organs have to be saved from destruction by being rapidly and efficiently dismantled and stored in transit.



St Saviour's Eton Road front pipe

Painted ribbed metal Menton front pipes

Unpainted back of a Menton front pipe

At some time in the later 1850s or early'60s, another unique feature of Bevington's organs was introduced. This was to cast the metal alloy for front pipes onto a grooved steel plate that gave these front pipes of their organs a characteristic ribbed finish. There are two possible reasons for doing this: first, because the metal cools quickly on the steel, so that it is relatively strong for its fairly-low tin content.

Equally important is that this ribbed finish holds paint much better than a smooth surface, and we have seen how integral the art of decorating front pipes had become to the aesthetic appeal of Bevington organs. Those clients who were able to afford the extra few pounds for this work would have had skilled artists at their command. I hope that someone will find time soon to research this aspect of English organ building thoroughly. At Menton, the pipes were very plainly finished with only some touches of colour; this may be another indication that the organ was made for exhibition at the workshops, with the final client being able to choose a colouring scheme which would be applied on top of their tin-paint background colour.

Menton's Bevington organ in Duke Street, London, its second Masonic Lodge home from 1909

It seems that the first Masonic lodge this organ went to wished to have a soberly-coloured organ; by the time it went to its second masonic lodge in 1909, the fashion for painting pipes had all but died away.

Glass windows and dates on pallets

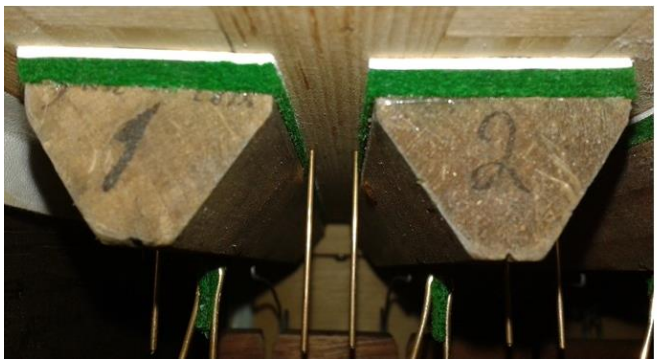
Organ palleted in 1864, installed in the midlands 1868

Organ palleted 1872, sold 1876 to Masonic Temple

The organ here in St John's is one of two Bevington organs I know well that have glass windows in the face-boards of their soundboards. The only sensible reason I can think of for doing this, which risks leakages from broken or loose glass, is to show what there is inside the wind-well in the soundboards: the pallets and their pull-wires, guide pins and springs. These windows further suggest

to me that organs with them were made for exhibition and in fact their large 1862 Exhibition organ is reported to have had windows in its casework so that people could view its mechanisms. Since it is known that Snetzler exhibited important organs made for home and export in what he called his 'warehouse' in Dean Street, it is likely that this organ also started life by being shown there.

Dates on Swell pallets of Menton organ, number 1012



In both of these organs with glass soundboard windows, their date of making, as noted on their pallets, predates the date of their first-known installations, and this fact strengthens my supposition. One of these was made in 1864 but it was not installed until 1868 in its present home in the midlands. The other organ, the one here, was made in 1872 and was first installed four years later in masonic rooms in London. In 1909, it was moved, and altered and loudened, and placed in the masonic rooms in Duke Street, Paddington.

Hinge straps

Hinge strap detail from 1872 London International Exhibition catalogue

Nether Stowey, Somerset

Menton, S France, ex-Duke Street Masonic Rooms W London

The organ now here at Menton organ has another special feature which may also indicate its origin as a workshop-exhibition piece. Its key-fall hinge straps are not made of iron as would be normal, but they are formed from brass, cut to a different design from solid plates, which were then electrolytically plated with silver. This was not obvious at first because the silver had completely blackened, and I discovered the silver only when dismantling the straps to clean them. They are now silvered again, done in a local workshop here in Menton, thanks to George Owen's kind offer of a donation to cover the cost of this work.

If the hinge straps are shaped like these and are not like the usual iron straps, they may well be of silvered brass too, and quite possibly for a special reason as well, such as being made for a house.

St Saviours, Eton Road: strap hinges on 1878 Bevington built for Swanwick Hall, Derby

Re-silvered strap hinges back in place now in St John's Anglican church, Menton, SE France

Bevington strap hinges before re-silvering as originally in done in 1872, possibly to exhibit the organ

The organ I mentioned before that I rescued and placed in St Saviour's church in Eton Road which was made in 1878 for Swanwick Hall near Derby also has silvered straps – but until we discovered these in this organ here at St John's last year, I had not even thought of looking for them! So I looked, and there they are in the Swanwick Hall organ … though not re-silvered yet.

Stop-lists

Both of these organs with 'windows' in their soundboards have slightly unusual stop-lists as well, with seemingly as much variety as was possible to pack into them. And this aspect seems additionally to confirm the likelihood that they were special exhibition organs – if not in great international exhibitions, perhaps in other more local ones, or simply placed in their show-room (probably in Dean Street, where. Snetzler's was) to exhibit some particular features of the firm's work at the time.

The earlier organ, made in 1864, is the larger of the two. It contains a sort of tonal catalogue of all the stops in the styles that Bevington had made part of their house style; it has altogether 17 stops, and is arranged to be low in height – as if for a house – using a style of mechanism that was unusual, in my wide experience of many organs by all makers of this period. It also has some components in it that do not appear in other Bevington organs, as if it was experimental in this direction as well. It was eventually purchased by the rector of a church, himself part of the ancestral Thorold family, for his church at Stainby on the borders of Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, not far from the birth-place of Augustus Pugin's mother, and was installed there in 1868. (It has been silent for over 60 years and is soon we all hope to be restored to its original glory, complete with the fine case that the rector himself designed and carved for it. Its gilded front pipes with floral decorations on the lips above and below the mouths will also be restored.)

1868 Bevington, Lincs

Original condition in original case

The organ at St John's is dated 13 March 1872 on one of the Great pallet valves – you can see these for yourself from the back of the organ. It was apparently sold to a Masonic temple in central London in 1876. At this time, the organ's sale price would have been about £220, and it would have taken between 1800 and 2000 hours to make – this represents a month's work for a team of 9 or 10 people.

Menton's Bevington organ in Duke Street, London, its second Masonic Lodge home from 1909

It was then moved to another temple in Duke St in the Paddington area of west London in 1909, apparently by the Bevington firm. At one of these moves, probably the second one, the organ was loudened, its pitch raised and the pedal pipes' actions systems changed. At the second move it was also altered to accommodate it in a very restricted space (in both area and in height). In the 1970s, the organ was overhauled and altered slightly, with at least one new (or rather second-hand) rank of

pipes to replace pipes that had probably by then become quite damaged because of being difficult to access to tune.

In 1995, the organ was offered to Honing church in Norfolk and carefully dismantled and labelled by some of the freemasons. Unfortunately, en route from London, the load shifted and damaged the largest front pipes severely. The story then goes that the church did not want to pay for the repair of these pipes and refused the gift. Fortunately, an organ builder near Norwich named Richard Bower was able to rescue the organ. He set it up in his own organ warehouse ….

Menton's Bevington organ saved and in storage (near left) in Norfolk

….the organ is the nearest on the left of this picture. Richard hoped to find a home for it, by putting the organ on exhibition once more among other organs he had rescued. There is a glimpse of Richard Bower's warehouse in the trailer to the film 'Organ Stops'.

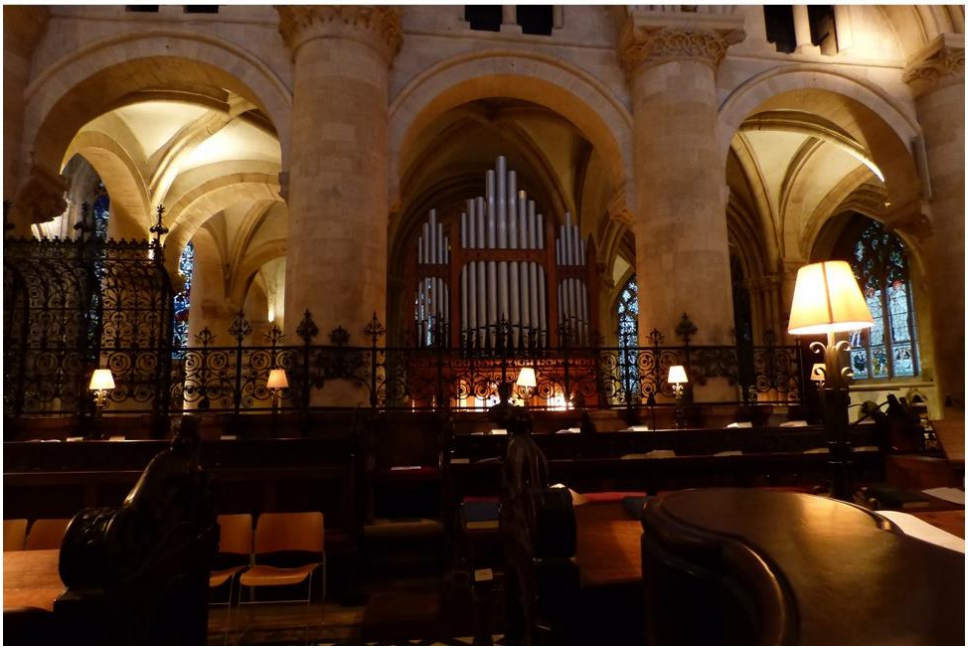
Summary

My own direct experience is that Bevington organs are made from good and appropriate materials, that they employ excellent workmanship and often creative and clever technical design ideas, just a few of which I have mentioned today. *Above all, they are built to last and to be restorable….*

This organ now at St. John's is in the state in which it was left in 1909, with just three changes. I have also now repitched it lower to normal orchestral pitch. This is a job that required a lot of work, particularly on the wooden pipes, especially the large ones played from the pedals. My pipe-maker, Kevin Rutterford, did an amazing job of restoring the front pipes to their pristine roundness. Mirella Nudo repainted these front pipes with tin-paint and a brighter red colour at their mouths, picking up the colour of the floor tiles, and repainting the pedal pipes to match the predominant colour of the Lady Chapel altar.

I first visited this church in August 2018, and then recommended an organ made in Durham for a mining village near Ushaw, west of Durham city.

Durham mining village Nelson organ at Christ Church cathedral, Oxford

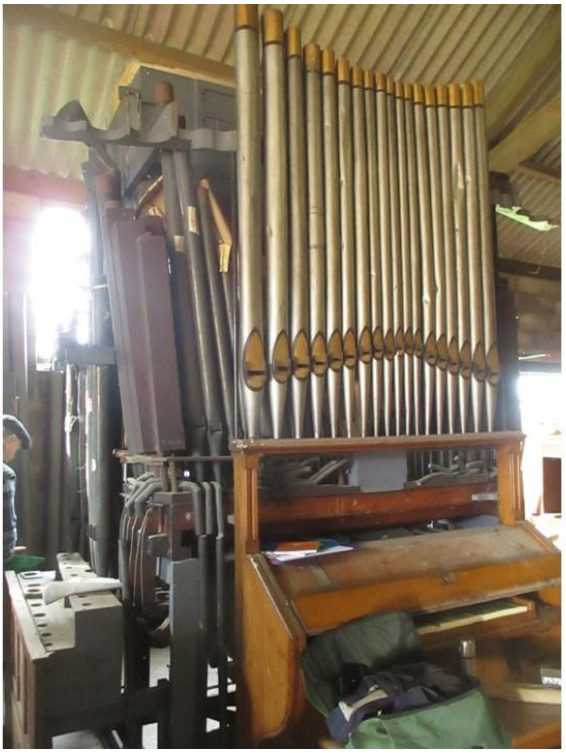


A passing self-proclaimed expert told the church here that this organ was 'no good', but since January 2019 it has been on loan to Christ Church cathedral to accompany its internationally-renowned choir – and is 'broadcast' at least twice a week on You tube. This other organ would have had to have been placed further forward than the Bevington organ is now, with its front pipes in front of the arch; it would have looked quite different when viewed from where you are in the church. It was I who asked that any new organ should not be placed in the chancel, where the previous organ was. This was partly because that would place it further away from the people it was likely to accompany but also because it would have distanced the player from the main possible performing site for musicians just in front of the chancel steps. I hope that in future this choice will be vindicated when the organ is used with choirs and orchestras here.

In the end, the Bevington proved to be just the right size to fit (with very little room to spare) between the Lady Chapel altar and the passage to the small outside doorway in the north-east corner of the church. The other proposed organ, the one now in Oxford, would almost certainly have meant that the Lady altar would have had to be moved further west than it is now, making the chapel smaller than it is. (This was lucky, because in fact I did not have a final plan of the kitchens etc when I chose the Bevington organ. The kitchen and other rooms in the former aisle turned out to take up more space than I had originally been given to understand would be the case, making the chapel smaller than I'd expected.)

I checked with all my usual contacts, and found this Bevington organ in Richard Bower's store in Norfolk and saw it in early February. This was a fortunate find. Because it was not in a church, this organ was available immediately, without the usual legal and bureaucratic rigmarole involved in getting organs out of even those churches which are closed and redundant.

1872 Bevington being dismantled in Norfolk organ store prior to move to Menton, S France



My UK team got immediately to work on restoring its major parts once the contact was signed and the organ dismantled, so that all these were ready for transport to France by April 20th. I had meanwhile restored all the smaller mechanical parts in my workshop in NE London. But as we now know, the pandemic had taken hold, with neighbouring Italy being especially seriously hit, and we were all at its mercy. The 30 May dedication was postponed; only much later was it decided to try for 22 November 2020.

The organ had to be stored somewhere, so I found a secure workshop area in east London, off the Lea Bridge Road, and moved the organ there in early May. During the first pandemic summer last year, I was able to put the organ together with its various revisions and test it; George Owen came to see it in August, by which time it was playable and making promising noises .... This work helped greatly to reduce the on-site time for the installation of the organ last year. The organ was once again dismantled and wrapped for transport and delivered in two journeys.

Vicki and I then put the organ together here, with some substantial work on the swell-box. The exact position and size of this box was difficult to pre-determine without knowing the organ's final position in the aisle.

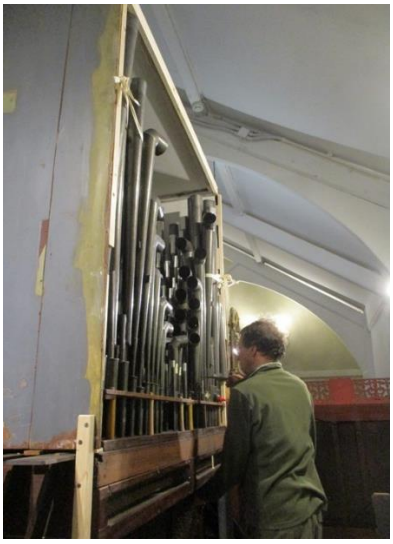







Passage through great soundboard to swellbox

New tuning access



The height available under the quite low sloping north-aisle ceiling in the church here is restricted, and that was one of the main reasons for choosing this organ. But it allowed me just enough room to turn the symmetrical Swell M-soundboard through 180 degrees, and to make a new access to tune the Swell pipework through large doors on the back of the box. The Swell reed (a Trumpet-style rank called a Cornopean) can easily be tuned from a platform over the reservoir, which is still placed behind the organ. And now the 'windows' in the Swell soundboard can also easily be seen by anyone going round to the back of the organ and switching on a light there.

After installing the organ, in mid-October last year, Vicki and I went to her house in southern Tuscany for the olive harvest, which was later than usual because of a dry summer. We expected to come back to Menton in mid-November to complete the voicing of the organ and a few other final details. But when the second wave of the pandemic came along, most of the church's congregation left Menton, and Italy and France went into lock-downs, as did the UK of course. Vicki and I were trapped in Tuscany and for the first time experienced late autumn and winter there. We were finally able to get back to London at the end of April.

So here we are again, eighteen months later than originally expected, and what will soon be <u>your</u> organ will be dedicated tomorrow …. This organ is one of the fortunate ones; two years ago it had no future, but now I hope this grand and interesting 150-year old Victorian work of handcraft and art will serve your church and future concerts for many decades to come.

However, not all organs are so fortunate, as you can see in the trailer to the film 'Organ Stops' [find at *https://vimeo.com/ondemand/organstops/520060433*]. Although this is something like the 36th English organ I have rescued, restored and moved to France over the past 20 years or so, together with another few organs to other countries, similar organs are at the same time being lost at a terrifying rate. Just this summer I had to rescue four more organs; two are already in France and awaiting restoration, for placing in churches and two for private houses. One organ will, I hope, with the keen help of Network Rail, be placed in a London railway station for all to try out and play, with others to follow. Yet another organ for another French church will be moved next Easter, but I know that even while I am doing all this, other less-fortunate organs are being totally lost at the rate of at least one a week.

So I am all the more grateful to Michael and this church for taking this organ to your hearts! Very soon you will hear Benjamin putting the organ through its paces … And tomorrow afternoon, in addition to the announced programme of events at the church, I am proposing to show the full documentary film called 'Organ Stops' and follow this with a visit to have a closer look at the organ, and I'll be able to answer questions about it and the problems facing organs in the UK in general. The film will be shown at 6 o'clock tomorrow (Sunday) afternoon, so please do come along if you are able to do so - there is no charge for seeing it. James Dawson, whose idea it was to make this film over the last nearly five years, is a well-known and experienced film maker. The film was premiered earlier this summer at two festivals in the US and is going on national tour in England from early next month onwards.

A group of seven of us are now also setting up a new CIO Trust called 'Pipe Up for Pipe Organs' and we will try to stem the losses of organs. Our pro-active organization will be run on much the same lines as SAVE Britain's heritage, whose offices we will be sharing near Farringdon station. I will say more about this tomorrow.

But now we must make way for Benjamin and the organ itself after a cup of tea. Thank you again to Michael and to all the others who have guided this amazing church restoration project to its fruition.

And 'thank you', Vicki, for your picture research and putting together today's power point illustrations with your usual skill and taste ...

Thank you …