

Part 1



Frederick Rothwell and the Historic Organ

MARTIN RENSHAW

Bernard Edmonds Research Conference

Birmingham 22nd February 2025
British Institute of Organ Studies

In the autumn of 2023, I was being interviewed in various locations in London by Pat Rhodes for BBC 1's 'Songs of Praise' TV programme.

Alarmingly and unexpectedly, this otherwise enjoyable romp around London organs both old and new, included my having to improvise a prayer. I can't remember what I said, but for a musician more used to being on the receiving end of prayers than uttering them - and for someone of my religious non-persuasion - it was an awkward moment. One even more challenging than talking to such a stellar assembly as we have here today.



One of the organs I was filmed with, was this one. Its case may remind you of another:



- one at Richmond in Surrey's parish church, made for the Thomas (?) Knight organ in 1770. Both have the same layout and although I don't know for certain, it seems likely that one influenced the other, although at a distance of 160 years.

Knight case (1770)
St Mary Magdalene, Richmond

Frederick Rothwell (1928)
Swedenborgian New Church, Kensington



The Knight case, on the left, is (like its more recent counterpart) now no more than a case-front, here not-quite-hiding an organ far larger than it was in the 1770s. It is now basically just a screen which faces west from a north-eastern organ chamber. I haven't visited the

church in Richmond for a long time, but I think I may be right in saying that the front pipes are original and probably little changed in their voicing. In other words they are potentially a very valuable source for knowing what techniques were employed by late-18th century pipe-makers and voicers. If these were two individuals, as I suspect they would have been, as now, each of these craftsmen would have gone about designing and doing their work in quite different ways from modern practice. These pipes and their casework, even in their reduced and presently silent form, are therefore of considerable historic importance.

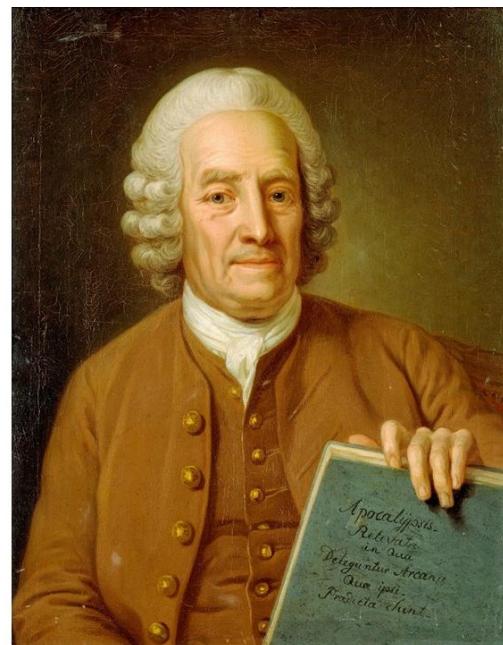
While writing this last sentence, I checked on NPOR to see if this case had any kind of historic recognition. Apparently, it does not. And that is surprising. I therefore suppose that the front pipes have not been examined carefully and all their parameters recorded. They should be, especially since our knowledge of just this period – from later Snetzler to early Green – is not exactly massive. Actually, despite the long existence of BIOS, the on-the-spot archaeological exploration of historic organs and their cases has been at best patchy, even though I pioneered doing this in 1969 with the large Hill organ once at Great George Street, Liverpool. I published two articles about it in 'The Organ', the printers reportedly having to buy in special type to cope with my pipe-diameter measurements!

We might have gained a good deal of knowledge of the early history of the organ in King's College Cambridge's chapel, if a proper archaeological survey of its woodwork had been carried out a few years ago. But it seems that it was not empty for long enough for this to have been done. If there is anyone here who knows if this archaeological work will be done at Gloucester cathedral, now that the organ there has been removed, I'm sure we would all be interested to hear.

With that thought in mind, let us go back to the other near-twin case-front and its organ, on the right. Like the case and organ in Richmond, this can be found in NPOR. Its entry under the title 'Kensington New Church', would be confusing if it were not for an explanation on the organ's description page that this is in fact a Swedenborgian church, which is not exactly a 'normal' style of church. Emanuel Swedenborg's writings were based on the idea that a

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772)
published some of his theological works
anonymously; his writings promoted
one universal church based on love and charity,
"rather than multiple churches named after
their founders and based on belief or
doctrine".

(Wikipedia)



theoretical 'New Church' would be monotheistic like other mainstream Churches but would also be a universal church whose belief system was based on mutual love and charity 'rather

than multiple churches named after their founders and based on belief or doctrine', as Wikipedia sums it up.

New Church, north Kensington



Dismantling, Sept 2024

The New Church in north Kensington was built to the designs of an architect unknown to the London authors of the Buildings of England, who apparently failed to see the church while supposedly walking along the road called Pembridge Villas. The Swedenborg Society has equally failed to respond to questions about this from me. Its style suggests an architect-designer unusually for the time interested in the smaller, rural Georgian church. I would think that such an architect might have been Albert Richardson. Its rather pared-down interior with fine stained glass from a previous church was complemented with an organ made by Fredrick Rothwell of Harrow, which he installed in 1928. Frederick Rothwell also appears to have designed the organ case, judging from these drawings he made of it.

Rothwell organ, 1928

Drawing Front and Side Elevations

Endorsed:

"Organ for the Kensington Society of the New Church
5 Pembridge Villas
Westbourne Grove London W.
by Fredk Rothwell
Organ Builder
Bonnersfield Lane
Harrow-on-the-Hill"



If Richardson had indeed been the architect of the church, the likelihood that Rothwell designed this case makes sense, because nowhere in his work does Richardson show the slightest sign interest in designing organs. Least of all in his large early 1960s chapel at St Mary's college, now university, in Twickenham - or indeed at the Merchant Taylor's Hall in the City of London, which he restored after war damage. The 1966 organ case there was designed by Stephen Dykes Bower.

Merchant Taylors Hall, Mander organ, 1966



Case by Stephen E. Dykes Bower,
some pipework Renatus Harris, 1722

The Rothwell organ at the New Church, Kensington, does not have any 'historical' tag on NPOR, or any other special recognition, although eight other organs by the same builder do have such a mention. The case-front hides a brick organ chamber only just large enough for the organ, which is a way of saying that Rothwell rather over-filled it, even though the tonal scheme is (on paper) quite modest. Another builder - and one thinks of Nelson of Durham - could have put the same tonal content twice over into the same space. A present-day organ builder exclaimed when I mentioned this organ that anyone removing it would have their work cut out. He was right ...

When I stood in front of it for 'Songs of Praise' in September 2003, I was asked what the future of the organ might be. I reflected momentarily on the question, but it did not take long for an answer to become obvious... given

- 1) that even then the church had been closed for some time, and work to reshape it into a Greek Orthodox church was under way ... given
- 2) that it was due then to be rededicated three months later.... given
- 3) that the organ is a pneumatic-action and one with Rothwell's uniquely-arranged console, and knowing that such an unusual organ would be extremely difficult to re-home... and given
- 4) that in the British Isles, available organs were and are many times more numerous than places that might take them ... my only possible answer could be that I was 'doubtful' - and that was an understatement.

In the event, the developer of the church became otherwise occupied with his high-class building work. (He developed and rebuilt residences in the wealthier quarters of Kensington

and Cadogan.) And so the date for re-opening the church fell back, month after month, during the rest of 2023 and well into 2024.



By the late autumn of that same year, in November 2023, I had come to hear about the exploits of the Petherick family in France. They had settled in northern Mayenne, the department just to the east of Brittany, about 90-minute's drive from my own base near Nantes in south-east Brittany. They had been filming their work and putting it on You Tube every day for a few years while they restored a late 19th-century chateau. By 2023, they had gathered several hundred thousand fascinated viewers, and the advertising revenue from these You Tubes began to give them the income with which to buy materials and pay sub-contractors.



Subsequently they acquired a large former nunnery in the nearest town, Ernée, and embarked on the daunting task of restoring and renovating it.

Convent chapel organ



Gifted from Norwich cathedral



Just arrived at the convent



Installed

Convent chapel organ: Norman & Beard 1876 on back of James Scott label



During November 2023, they filmed themselves putting back together a two-manual organ, day by day, in the convent's former chapel. They had obtained an organ from the Roman Catholic cathedral in Norwich, a medium-sized 2-manual tracker with a pneumatic-action pedal rank, labelled as being made by the Norman brothers. I say 'labelled' because there is now some doubt, certainly in my mind, that they made the organ originally. And in fact when the label bearing their name was removed for cleaning, another rather less well-known organ builder's name was revealed on the back of it, as you can see.

While this installation was going on I went to see it and meet the Pethericks. They invited me, there and then, to talk about Pipe Up for Pipe Organs for one of their You Tubes which I did. Later a new deadline of Christmas last year was given for removing the Rothwell organ at the New Church. So I asked the Pethericks if they might like it as a central feature of their proposed cultural centre in the former nunnery. To my relief and surprise, they agreed - and even wanted to pay the costs of transporting it from London to the convent. The developer was persuaded to pay most of the costs of dismantling and wrapping the organ for transport, so in September last year I was able to start to remove it. On the second day, once the casework was dismantled and the Great pipework removed from its soundboard, I was able to have a good look at the Swell for the first time. On opening the tightly sprung-shut shutters, I found that the whole of the tall sides and wide and deep top of the inside of the large swell-box was covered with sheet asbestos. This was surprising, since this asbestos was either not noticed or deliberately ignored in an otherwise very good report made on the organ about 15 years ago.

The delay in getting the asbestos assessed, paid for and removed was such that it took a further three months and three loads, to get all of this organ to France. Finally, I was able to deliver the last parts in December last year.

One of the small organs that also went to France, with the second load, was a three-stop Willis 'Scudamore' organ I had been given and had restored. We had just enough time to re-assemble and tune this little organ before Christmas, with the help of an excellent young



Willis Scudamore organ re-assembled in the chateau de la Basmaignée

French lad working with me as an apprentice. So the Petherick family was able to celebrate the festive season with appropriate carols.

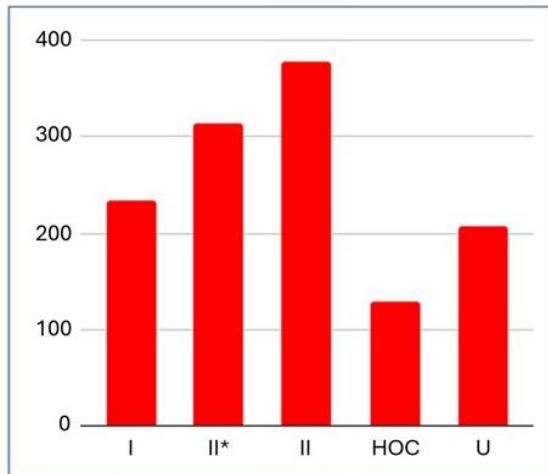
The various arrivals of the Rothwell organ and the other organs were of course also filmed and broadcast on their You Tube channel. And the Rothwell organ now waits in its many hefty pieces for renovation and re-assembly in a space yet to be agreed. There is plenty of choice among the large and tall convent rooms now being revealed by demolishing 1960s plasterboard partitions everywhere in the quadrangle of buildings.

Why say all this in the context of a talk that is supposed to be about historic organs? Well, this is because what a historic organ is – at least for me – not a foregone conclusion. This organ by Rothwell, unchanged since first made, has as strong a claim to be as ‘historic’ as the pipes and case at Richmond.

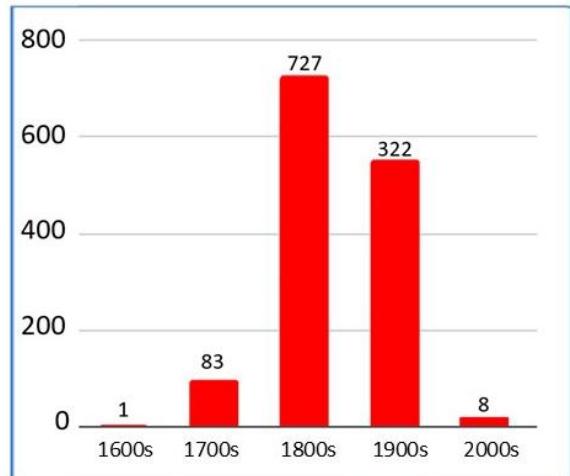
And here is the main point of this talk, at this stage: The highly-individualistic design of the pipework and pneumatic actions of Rothwell’s 95-year old organ are already as remote from our present way of making organs as is the organ Thomas Knight made for Richmond 255 years ago. In consequence, it has every right to claim to be equally ‘historic’. Indeed, I would go further and apply the same standard to organs made in the 1970s. The best of these that have stood the test of time (not always the case) with mechanical key and stop actions and pipework with so-called ‘open-foot’ voicing (meaning, flue-controlled voicing) have a right to be called ‘historic’ too. Why? Because they also are already so dissimilar from the great majority of organs being made now, especially in this country. Only two organs from the 1960s are tagged on NPOR as ‘historic’, as we will see, but Grant, Degens and Bradbeer were not by any means the only organ builders to experiment successfully with the then-current voicing style. Some diehards even use it now when they can, and good examples of this style should be jealously preserved, even if they may have fallen out of favour by those who prefer loud, large neo-symphonic organs these days.

To sum up (so far), I suggest that a historic organ might be defined as 'one that has proven by use to be a good example of past work'. Adding, in parenthesis, 'whatever its style' ...

Numbers of grades and HOCs awarded



Frequencies by century



Legend

I, II*, II Grades

HoC Certificate of Recognition (pre 2013)

U Uniform Certification (pre 2002)

A global look at the organs BIOS has 'listed' by grades - or previously-given certificates - shows that the vast majority of these date up to about 1920. After that, there is almost nothing listed except the two more-'modern' 1960s organs by the firm founded by Maurice Grant, as I have just mentioned.

So, I wonder if this grading system is actually fit for purpose in present circumstances? I ask for these reasons:

1. Every organ is at risk these days. Even new organs are not exempt from sudden changes of fashion, or personal whim. A well-known and I think deservedly celebrated Walker organ of 1963 might have been removed within three years of its installation in a London church without vigorous protest.

Organs in Oxbridge Colleges

Organs installed or heavily modified at these dates:

Magdalen College, Oxford:

(un-dated medieval organs), 1631, 1690, 1812, 1855, 1877, 1936, 1963, 2022

St. John's College, Cambridge:

(undated medieval organs), 1635, 1839, 1868, 1889, 1902, 1955, 1974, 1994, ?2025/6

2. Oxbridge chapel organs, invariably lauded when first built, are now being removed when hardly 40 or 50 years old.

3. The Compton organ at Wolverhampton civic hall, restored and enlarged in 2001, was peremptorily dumped only 18 years later for no good reason.
4. An organ in the country's largest first world war memorial, Charterhouse School Chapel, itself subscribed to as part of that memorial, has been removed.

So, if the object of grading or certifying an organ is to try to protect it, then why should not every organ be protected that way? Or is grading an organ a sort of royal 100th birthday card to say 'thank you' for any organ that somehow reaches its centenary year, despite the hazards of fashion and all the other slings and arrows of outrageous fortune?

Be that as it may, much more serious for the future of organs in the British Isles are the overall challenges to all our organs' environments.

**Church
For Sale**



Churches are now closing at a galloping rate. In addition, organs in many otherwise active churches have been abandoned, either deliberately, or for lack of funds to maintain them. Complaints about the lack of organists are heard everywhere. A bleak future awaits ecclesiastical buildings of all stripes and colours. About three or four organs are being consigned to skips every week.

Recent calculations suggest that nationwide the number of theoretically playable organs still in buildings has dropped from a peak of about 42,000 fifty years ago to around 25 to 30,000 now. Of these, another sample survey suggests that the proportion of the 25-30,000 organs still in buildings that are actually still playable is about one-third of these, that is about 10,000 organs.

Another sample survey suggests that of these 10,000 organs, only half are being played regularly, that is more than once a month. That brings us to the surprising, even shocking, nationwide figure of 5,000 organs in regular use. Or, to put it another way, it would seem that, nationally, organs are being heard regularly in only about one-sixth of all churches still

open and theoretically still active. This fits with the findings of a Pipe Up supporter in Darlington who did a survey of organs in this town very recently. The results were shocking: of the 40 church organs listed in NPOR, he found that only six were reckoned to be in playable condition and played regularly, that is more than once a month.

If you find these figures appalling or perhaps think they are plainly wrong, I invite **every one of you** to do a sample survey in a defined area you know well, and then let me know what you find, via the Pipe Up for Pipe Organs site:



With your survey details, please contact us at:

www.pipe-up.org.uk

Here in Birmingham, for instance, students and teachers at this conservatoire can usefully find out what proportion of the very many organs in the city are actually being played regularly. Those of you from rural areas can do the same; then we will see if there is a town/country divide or not. And then, for the first time, we might know what we are up against in wishing to protect our unique, intangible culture of organs, organ music, its players and choral singing. The results of this – your – research can then be presented to the world at large with confidence and academic rigour.



Edith Weston church, Rutland
Samuel Green organ

Someone will (rightly) suggest that more than 5000 organs are being tuned/maintained nationwide, and that may well be true. But a few years ago, I was talking about this with Dominic Gwynn and he said that he had just tuned an organ – a historic one in a rural church – and that in doing so had himself played it, on his annual visit, more often than anyone else had that year since he was last there. Or, as he more pithily put it, ‘That’s an organ that is tuned more often than it’s played’.

Most tuners will know that many of the organs they look after are played very irregularly or at long intervals. They will certainly also know that they are being asked to come to tune organs less frequently than in the past, their previous maintenance costs now being beyond the church’s resources.

What the present situation suggest to me is: that practically every surviving organ, whatever its date, in or out of fashion as it might be deemed to be, now deserves the fullest possible protection.

Organs have become the chief collateral victims of what one can only describe as institutional asset-stripping. Church buildings are being abandoned or sold off, even those with Historic England grade II* listing, like this building. Local communities actually built these monumental churches and acquired their organs by contributing their own pennies.



Here they somehow found a lot of money to have their organ restored about 20 years ago.



And then it was only a short time before lead was stolen from the roof, setting off a train of events that led to the abandonment of this very fine building by the congregation.

It was then handed to the care of the diocese of Manchester. You can see what care they exercised!



And this is not the only time in my experience that this has happened: that a wonderful building with enormous potential with an excellent organ has been abandoned by the local diocese.

In this and other cases, a government scheme to repair roofs could have reimbursed them.



There is currently another place, with one of the most beautiful and important mid-19th century organs in it that is now similarly not being looked properly after by its diocese.



Let us now widen our perspective to another country.

Church For Sale - Scotland

St Columba, Glasgow's A-listed "Cathedral of the Highlands"



This church, known by the locals as 'the cathedral of the Highlands', has been closed. In this picture, to the right, are the machines being used to demolish a 1960 plate-glass monument to architectural minimalism. Many feared the claws of these diggers would be turned on the church next. But, under a scheme only available in Scotland and still very little used even there, a local community and arts group is hoping to obtain ownership, as preferred candidates prior to any auction. In the second part of my talk this afternoon, we will meet another church obtained by a similar group in England under the weaker Asset of Community Value legislation. But the Achilles' heel of such schemes is that a community has, not only to be determined to face down the institutional churches, but must also have a good lawyer at hand to aid them.

But here is another church (see next page), which for some here is probably much nearer home Astwood is half-way along the road from Milton Keynes to Bedford. What a sign of abandonment this was to the many people who drive along that road! A sign was up saying 'Grade 2 church for sale'! The organ there, made by Trustam of Bedford, was said to have been placed 'in the care' of Oxford diocese...

Nearby is the former parish church at Hardmead, since the 1970s fortunately preserved by the Friends of Friendless Churches. This contains the Walker former house organ on the front cover of the BIOS 2024 Journal. I have had the privilege of rehabilitating it recently.

Church For Sale - England, Home Counties

Astwood church (Grade II*), Bucks



The communities that built fine churches like these in cities and rural parishes all over Britain are now very often left without any communal spaces for the multitude of activities that could take place in them if allowed to do so. It may be that many of these activities are likely to be para-religious, and some not 'religious' at all; that may be the communities' choice.

At the end is a list of the organs I have taken or sent abroad. This includes one organ that has already gone to the Philippines and been restored there - very well - and more that have gone there recently. And I know that a few have been sent by other organ builders in UK. They join the very many second-hand organs that have been taken or sent all over the world during the last 50 years. But taking organs abroad does nothing at all to help the crisis of organ-playing or singing here. That is what I will address when I talk to you again this afternoon.

To end for now, I will repeat what I said in an article in *Organists' Review* for March 2025: 'It took only a century for organs to disappear totally between the Edwardian-Calvinist destruction of the Latin service and its music in 1548 and the Puritan's total abolition of organs in 1644.'

Now organs are, I calculate, disappearing at *twice* the rate they did in those years. Having suffered the near-death of organs, the mid-17th century saw the onset of two centuries which I call the Cultural Dark Ages, as they most certainly were for 95% of the population.'

The last (or latest) Trump is sounding a call to action. Either we answer that call, or we take the blame of future generations for dereliction of duty, and a new descent into another Cultural Dark Age.

Part 2

Organs: A Call to Action

Opinion

The
Guardian
UK

Simon Jenkins



In the Guardian for 15th February 2025, Sir Simon Jenkins, author of 'England's Thousand Best Churches' (and much else), wrote:

'Churches are the biggest – and usually most beautiful – monument dominating the heart of almost every village and town in Britain. The national church may not matter to the nation, but the local church is prominent at the hub of almost every community. It represents history, ceremony, cultural activity - and much of its charitable welfare. Everyone knows their church, even if few pay for it. The C of E's accumulated repair liability now runs at more than £1bn, with 900 on Historic England's heritage at risk register.'

Jenkins continued:

'It is simply unrealistic for these glorious buildings to rely on tiny groups of mostly elderly people to look after and pay for them. Local churches and especially unused ones must be somehow transferred to their local communities, as happens across Europe, or they will go the way of medieval castles. Sooner or later they will collapse and die.'

Post-Reformation collapses



Walberswick and Covehithe, Suffolk coast



Mid-20th century roof collapse

Clophill church, Beds

Sooner or later BIOS will have to decide where it sits in this dreadful situation. Will it accept change – even radical change – in the churches in which Britain's other major cultural items sounded or once sounded? Are historical 'unheard melodies' really 'sweeter' than others still being heard?

Simon Jenkins continued his article, making this point:

'As high streets decline and pubs close, communities face begin left with a large building empty and bleak at their heart. [Their church] should revert to what it once was: the focus of communal activity.'

West Hampstead church, Post Office, Softplay, Café, Debt Advice



There are glimmers of possibilities, as Jenkins says:

'Lively churches are at least finding new uses, like Herefordshire's "shop in a church", or Oxfordshire's pilates centres, or the post office, cafe and soft play area in London's West Hampstead. They are becoming libraries, gyms, performance spaces, cafeterias and food banks. Some are reverting to being places of meditation and wellbeing.'

One at least has become a place for opera singing....



Opera star Yuri Sabatini opens first event at village's new Heart Of Headcorn centre

Published: 12:53, 30 May 2023 [Alan Smith ajsmith@thekmgroup.co.uk](mailto:ajsmith@thekmgroup.co.uk)

Heart of Headcorn Activities



Italian opera singer Yuri Sabatini serenaded a packed audience of around 100 people in the pews of what had once been Headcorn's Methodist Church.

The building had been saved from the threat of conversion to housing by the determination of villagers who raised funds to buy it from the church authorities for use as a community centre.

What Simon Jenkins highlights is indeed what places like the former Methodist church at Headcorn near Maidstone in Kent have become. This is now a community hub called 'Heart of Headcorn', complete with its Nelson organ. This church and another at Wye near Ashford were wrested with great difficulty from the clutches of the Methodist church's financial vultures.

I gave a 1917-built Nelson organ to the hub at Headcorn to replace a Carnegie-funded organ taken away in the dying days of Methodist control, so that this social and cultural centre can once again become a place where an organ can be heard and played – by everyone, this time. This is especially important now we are about to begin the RCO-sponsored 'Play the Organ Year' (2025).

Elsewhere, the potential for organs to become the focus for the exploration of sung music and band music of all kinds is beginning to happen. A south-London church with a well-known organ (a 'historic' one) is raising funds with 'organ-oke' evenings. Another London church regularly uses its organ in band concerts. An organ with advanced pipe and wind technology is right now being planned for a performance venue in Kent.

Doom band accompanies organ at Huddersfield Town Hall



So, this is what is already happening, *and it's positive*, and could happen much faster if we let go of the old habits that are proving to be unproductive. These include organists who cling to their consoles and keep others out, and organ builders who give out 'death estimates' and shun voluntary help. Grading the churches themselves does not seem significantly to have helped their overall dire status with so many, currently not far short of a thousand on the 'at-risk' register. Nor has grading organs noticeably done much practically to ensure their continued use and maintenance. What might, on the contrary, help to do that, is positively to get organs closer to the public in general. They are clearly very much less likely to see or hear organs in church services. But they now have a chance to do so now, and to play them, at London Bridge station, the Whitgift Centre in Croydon and Headcorn. [Dec 2025: now also in Widecombe (Devon), Gurnos chapel, Ystalyfera (Swansea Valley) and Llangattock Vibon Avel (Monmouth) too.]

It would be useful to have Historic Organs Certificates displayed not only on all those organs whose tenants wish to do so, but a copy of it also placed prominently in the building's porch or entrance. This would show - hopefully – that the community at large recognised the value of their most costly single asset. It would also be good to have a visual recognition fixed to all the 4000-plus British organs funded by Andrew Carnegie, whose aim was precisely to improve the music of the communities in which 'his' organs were going to play a major part.

If not a Historic Organs Certificate, what could we call a Certificate that announces the potential of every organ to play again a major cultural role in its community? A Statement of Significance, perhaps? Does that sound sonorous enough?!

It should include a QR code too, so that people can learn more about it from NOPR, when that is up-dated, complete and accurate.

It really is time, following the 'Play the Organ Year', for all those concerned to come together to defend, protest and publicly raise concern about our precious and unique tangible and intangible heritage of organs and choral music. We have potential allies in many quarters, not least Simon Jenkins, of course, but also all the other heritage bodies that battle in their various sectors for the preservation and re-use of our built heritage – of which organs are of course a part – and we all need to meet and talk together.

Echoing his dissenting submission to the 2018 Taylor report on the future of churches, Simon Jenkins repeated last Saturday:

'Whatever it may be, like sports centre and museums, churches should become the responsibility of local trusts or parish and town councils, with precept taxes to support their upkeep.'

The implication here is that the three national church institutions will have also to let go. They must allow the communities, to which these churches rightly belong, to reclaim them.

For us, musicians and organ lovers, the implication is clear: that organs must also become publicly-available property. The very idea may shock you, but a moment's thought suggests that this could unlock a new lease of life for organs. It would allow them once again to become a central part of public life, as they have been in the past. I see this possibility as in line with the current demand for more public access to roam and explore our landscape. The public also has a right to explore a soundscape beyond that offered by headphones and loudspeakers – one that goes naturally, with wind and pipes, straight to the heart, and is not just another annoying background noise.

What part BIOS and more important its members will play in this may not be totally clear, but faced with the threat of losing our cherished culture, I'd say that *any* experiment is worth trying. There are always 'good reasons' not to try, and entrenched attitudes always place obstacles in the way of trying. The proof of our seriousness will be to battle against the odds stacked against us. The institutional churches are not by any means infallible, nor should they ever be thought of as immune from criticism. They are - by contrast – too often defensive, obstructive or even downright dishonest. They certainly seem completely unable to see that their continual systemic failures will lead to an eventual implosion. Organs are, as I have often said, the collateral victims of the institutional churches' current policies, and it is time to stand up and say 'stop' to them!

We all enjoy visiting ruined medieval castles or great houses that are not ruined. But in almost all of these, the sounds and smells of life, laughter and shouts - and music - are missing. It's the same for practically every medieval church too, but they were certainly not built with perpetual silence in mind - far from it. When music stopped in them in 1548, they already risked becoming ruined castles. Some were indeed ruined, losing the chancels in which music was made every day. Eventually, as collateral damage caused by royal and then puritan-evangelical edicts, they lost their organs too.

Below, is a relatively modern church, called 'the cathedral of Rossendale'. It is fast becoming a ruin right now, in front of our eyes. It is already at the stage, only 13 years after being abandoned by the diocese of Manchester, where one can lament, with Shakespeare, the: 'Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.'

Crawshawbooth church: recent view from east



On the right of the picture above, you can see what remains of the sweet song of what I have been told was once a very fine 1920s Rushworth & Dreaper organ. (Not, incidentally, detailed in NPOR.)

Below is just one historical example out of many, that should serve as a warning to us of what might be round the corner. Around 1700, this magnificent once-collegiate church suffered the disastrous collapse of its six-bay chancel, cloisters and (until recently) the roof

Bare, ruined choir

Howden Minster, near Goole, Yorks



of its chapter house. It therefore lost its entire staff of singers of all ages, its music and organs by the end of the 17th century. It's a perfect emblem of the then-dawning cultural dark ages.



Llangattock Vilon Avel, 1875 Vowles organ



Previously derelict organ under restoration by local volunteer Kingsley Robinson, with advice from MR.

First sounds, Christmas Day 2024

But let's end on a more positive note. In a remote place – hardly even a village - in eastern Wales, where neglect over decades had wrought terrible harm, an organ that some thought was hopelessly lost has now (February 2025) been revived. A partial reconstruction of the service at which it was inaugurated is planned for its 150th anniversary in April 2025.

According to a local press report of the reconsecration of the church in April 1875, Dr Jebb, canon of Hereford cathedral, concluded his sermon to his congregation that day - as I will mine this afternoon - with these words:

'I will conclude now, trusting that the words you have heard with your outward ears might be so grafted onto your inward hearts **as to bring forth fruits.'**

Or to put it another way: He that has ears to hear, let him hear...

He that has ears to hear, let him hear



APPENDIX: Organs from UK taken abroad by Martin Renshaw

(from/to churches unless otherwise indicated)

France, from 1999

Normandy

1. Seés, Croix de Vents school, 2-m N & Lord, Walsall c1880 (Staple, Kent)
2. St Martin l'Aiguillon (on loan), Bevington chancel organ in an earlier case (unknown chapel in E Anglia/Pluckley, Kent)
3. St Léger-de-Rostes near Bernay, Elliot c.o. 1806 (u kn, via workshop of Tony Foster Waite, near Newbury, Berks)

Brittany

1. Plouaret, Holdich c1835 (his 1st 2-manual ?) ex-Sittingbourne PC (Sittingbourne URC)
2. Lannion (Brélévenez) house: Thomas Jones 2-m house organ (Stoke Edith (?), Herefs) ††
3. Penvenan, Nelson Hall 1-m (Highbridge Baptist, near Bridgewater)
4. Pléhédel, Bevington chancel organ (Cogenhoe, Northants)
5. Plouézec [?], Bevington chancel organ in earlier large carved gothic case (u kn, E Anglia)
6. Mur de Bretagne, anon 2-m organ (Winston Methodist, Co Durham ; an organ featured in 'Organ Stops')
7. near Tréguier, substantial Walker 1-m (London hospital, via storage in Devon) ††
8. Rennes, College, 3-m 1896 N&B (St Phillip, Highgate/Archway, London)
9. Tréguier workshop, Casson positive (Chop Gate Methodist, Bilsdale, Cleveland)

Mayenne

1. Ernée, former convent, 2-m 1928-9 Rothwell, pneumatic (New Church, Kensington)
2. Ernée, former convent, large 1-m box organ, Conacher/Woodstock c1972 (Leagrave Methodist, near Luton)
3. Chateau de la Basmaignée, Willis 3-stop 'Scudamore' (temporarily, on loan) (u kn)

Loire-Atlantique

1. School, Nantes, small altered 2-m Gray and Davison (Crockenhill Baptist, Kent)
2. Carmes, Nantes, anon 2-m organ c1830 with carved mahogany case † (House, Ashford Methodist, Middx)
3. La Meilleraye-de-Bretagne Church, 2-m c1948 Samuel Wort of Camden Town, tonal scheme MR 1972 (Lympne, Kent)
4. La Meilleraye, Private house: Hugh Russell c.o. 1789, (Music Club/Masonic Temple, Canterbury)
5. anon. house organ c1830, (u kn, remade case in store elsewhere) [temporarily, also: internal parts of GP England organ for St Peter Chester, 1790; parts of James Davis ?c1800 house organ; anon c.o. c1830 ex-Allestree Methodist church near Derby]
7. Private house nearby: 1-m Cramer of Brighton (Saltby, Leics)
8. Private house nearby: anon 2-m as rebuilt MR c1975 (Birchington Methodist, to Hawkinge, Kent)

Vendée

1. La Tranche-sur-Mer, 2-m Hunter mechanical house organ, c1900 in carved mahogany case (house in Paisley/Stocksfield Methodist, near Hexham, Northumbs)

2. La Garnache, large 2-m Hunter pneumatic, 1896 (St James, Ch Scotland, Dulwich, to Pont Street, London W, Ch Scotland, 1972)
3. Sables d'Olonne, St Michel, 2-m anon c1860 with some Nelson modifications (Frosterley, Co Durham)
4. L'Ile d'Olonne, Bevington chancel organ as remade by AWHyatt 1966 with earlier case now re-painted (u kn E Anglia, then Norwich suburban church)
5. Le Tablier, 2-m Hill c1890 (Causewayhead nr Silloth, Cumbs)

Touraine

1. St Cyr sur Loire near Tours, modern church St Pie X, 2-m c1820 organ as rebuilt by Thomas Harrison c1880 (**Methodist** church, Tees-side)
2. Villebarou near Blois, c1770-5 2-m George England, restored to near-original & early C19 (Sw) condition, painted and carved gothic case, fronts re-gilded (Aylesford Methodist, Kent)

Deux-Sèvres

1. St-Aubin-du-Plain, 2-m c.o. as rebuilt by Hill 1905 (Monkton, Kent)
2. Private house, Hill c.o. 1845 (Handsacre, Staffs)
3. Another private house, 2-m Hardy of Stockport c1905, as revised by Edwin Stow (Openwoodgate Methodist, Belper, Derbyshire)
4. Bouillé-Loretz, 2-m Walker 1834 (his first 2-m) ‡ (various, Devon)
5. Bouillé-Loretz, chancel organ, anon small 2-m as revised by AWHyatt, c 1965 (school, Kent)
6. Cersay, 1829 and 1926 2-m Bevington with carved mahogany case (former large c.o./ Winslow URC, Bucks)
7. Bouillé-St-Paul, anon 1-m c1860 (Wrington Methodist, near Bristol)
8. St-Pierre-à-Champ, 2-stop Walker (?) c.o., c 1830 (u kn)
9. Massais, 2-man Henry Jones 'model organ' c1860 (Shillington Methodist, Beds)
10. Nueil, Bevington chancel organ as converted to 2-m by Browne c1910 (Cheriton, Folkestone, Methodist, Kent)
11. Les Aubiers, 2-m Nelson, 1899 (Witton Park, Co Durham)
12. Voultegon, 2-m Nelson, probably c1905-10 (Great Broughton Methodist, Cleveland)
13. Moutiers-sous-Argenton, 2-m Trustam 1899 (Houghton Conquest URC, Beds)
14. In store: pipework etc of large 3-m Hugh Russell, 1824 (Holy Trinity, Newington Butts, Southwark)
15. Case and parts, 2-m John Donaldson, 1796 (Glasgow Sacred Harmonic Society)
16. 2-m Brindley & Foster, 1873 (various, then Dulwich URC, London)
17. 2-m tracker Browne, 1905 (Grain, Kent)
18. 2-m Nelson, c1905 (Houghton-le-Wear Methodist, Co Durham)
19. 2-m Walker, 1854 & c1885 (Sidcup, Kent)

Elsewhere in France:

1. Alpes Maritimes, Menton Anglican church, c1872 'exhibition' 2-m Bevington (various, incl. Duke St Masonic, Mayfair, London)
2. Landes/Chalosse: Pomarez, large 1832 Elliot & Hill house organ (Keswick, Cumbs; In Buckingham's Notes) as reb. Alex Young c1899 (new gallery in preparation) [c50 organs]

Switzerland

1. new copy of Knole organ, 1981
2. Debierre 1-m polyphone (convent in Folkestone, Kent)
3. Debierre 1-m polyphone (1944) (Olonne sur Mer, Vendée)

Holland

1. Nicholson & Lord 2-m (with some late-C17 pipes) (Oxon)
2. Bevington 2-m c1870 (Southwark, London)
3. Small new continuo organ, 1977

Norway

1. Gray & Davison 2m c1860 (Oxon. Mission, Southwark)

Denmark

1. new copy of Knole organ, 1980

USA

1. Banfield large c.o. c 1850 (ukn)
2. Small new continuo organ, 1977

Italy

Private house, Sorano, Tuscany

1. MR continuo organ, 1973
2. Mander regal, ?1970s copy of c1693 model
3. Willis 3-stop 'Scudamore' organ c1849, of uncertain origin, inaugurated 1 Nov 2025 in La Collegiata di San Niccolò, Sorano, southern Tuscany
[Temporarily, casework of 1790 GP England organ for St Peter, Chester]
(Four other organs are also due [Dec 2025] to go to churches/abbey etc in Italy.)

Philippines (dismantled and sent only) :

1. Nelson 2-m c1910 (Skinningrove, N Yorks)
2. J Adkins c1920 or earlier 2-m (Glascote Methodist church, Tamworth) [also under discussion, 2025: Nicholson & Lord 2-m c1905 † (Tamworth Central Methodist, Staffs)]
3. Kirkland 1-m c1890 (Markyate Methodist, nr Luton, Beds), part-restored
4. Kirkland 1-m c1890 (Chipperfield Baptist, Herts)]
5. Anon/Sweetland 2-m c1910 from Sir William Romney's school, Tetbury, Gloucs
6. Remaining parts of Vowles and Liddiatt organs formerly in Hardwicke and Elmore churches, Gloucs

† organ with HOC or similar

†† removed/set up by 'Breton' team

‡ recently moved to unknown place; MR was organist here for 25 years

‡‡ damaged by electrical fire; future uncertain