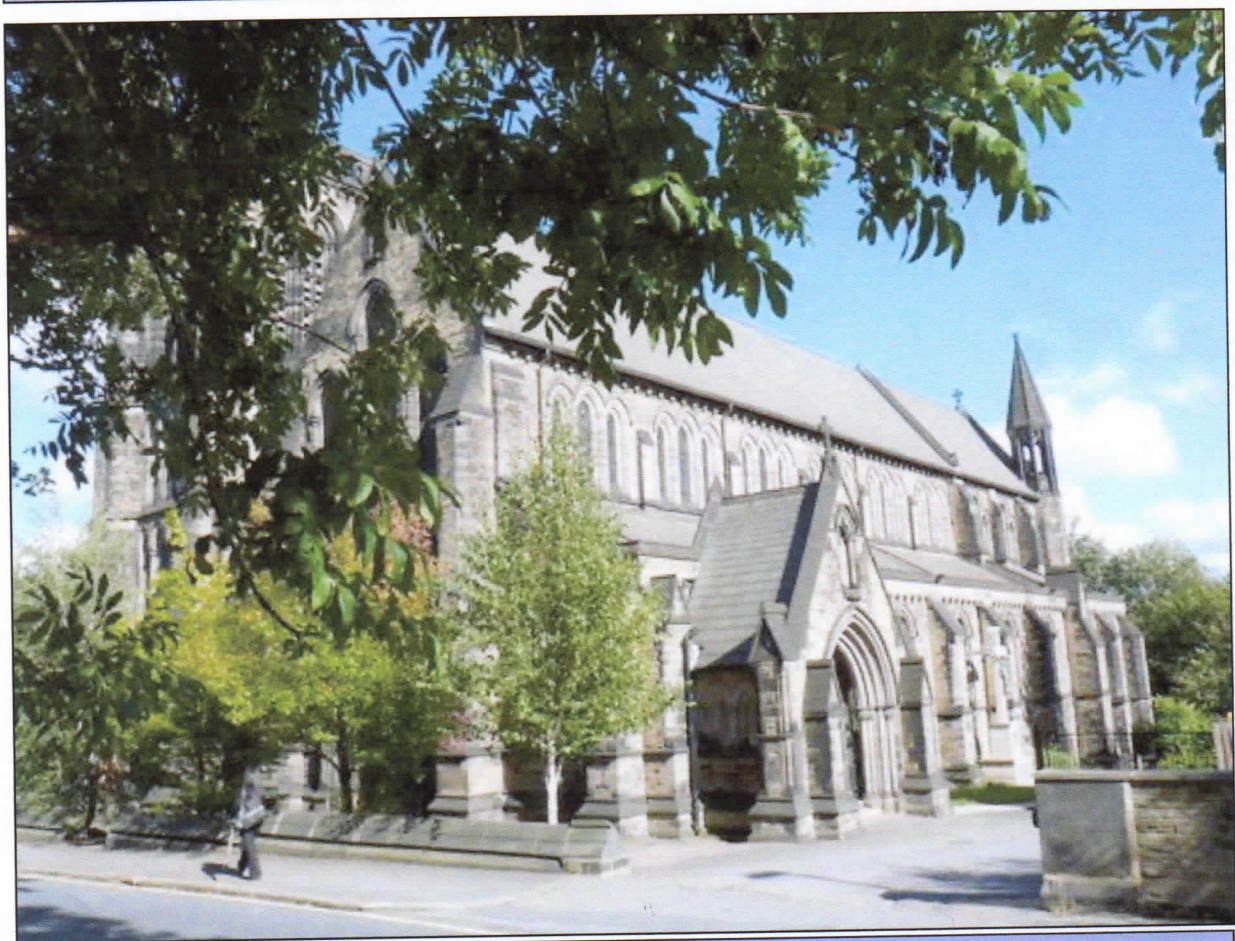


All Souls' (Hook Memorial) Church, Leeds

THE ORGAN



A REPORT BY PAUL HALE

August 2010

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1. History, 1881-2010



The Organ in All Souls' (Hook Memorial) Church, Blackman Lane (Leeds) was built by the local organ craftsman Isaac Abbott and his team at their Blackman Lane works in 1881, shortly before Head Voicer James Jepson Binns left to found his own firm – soon local competitors – at Bramley.

The organ was built as a good-size 3-manual complete with Pedal 32ft Subbass (stopped 16ft wooden pipes with 'German' mouths in the Schulze style), with mechanical action and the pneumatic lever to the Great plus the Swell and Choir when coupled to the Great. The Pedal also used the pneumatic lever so it is likely that there was a slider soundboard for some of its ranks. It is possible that the flues were voiced by Binns, as Abbott's Head Voicer. The fine gothic cases were added in 1893 (chancel) and 1903 (north nave aisle) to the designs of A. Crawford Hick

[though a church welcome leaflet says by 'R.Johnson']; they contain only non-speaking pipes and match well the remainder of the furnishings of the church, designed as they were by George Gilbert Scott and John Oldrid Scott. The basses of the Great Open Diapason No.2 used to stand in front of the organ as they are decorated with a gold background and stencilled designs. They now stand on a chest flanking the East side of the swell-box.

In 1938 Abbott & Smith (the later name for Abbott's company) carried out a complete rebuild, altering the layout and providing a new console, still in use today. Pedal, Swell and Choir soundboards were built with one valve per pipe (and a ventil stop-action for Swell and Choir), whereas the Great soundboard was a traditional slider soundboard. The stop-list was somewhat altered, the Great (curiously) reduced in size and power, a Nazard included on the Choir, a Tierce on the Swell – their modernity curiously at odds with the anachronism of building a tubular-pneumatic auction organ just at the time that all other firms were going over to electro-pneumatic action. During this work the louder reed stops were altered by being moved up one note with a new pipe inserted in the bass, then slotted and revoiced on heavier pressure with new shallots, tongues and felt/lead weighting. This work was done well; the organ's reeds make a distinguished sound. The original Great reed was placed on a unit chest, revoiced and made to draw on Great and Choir.

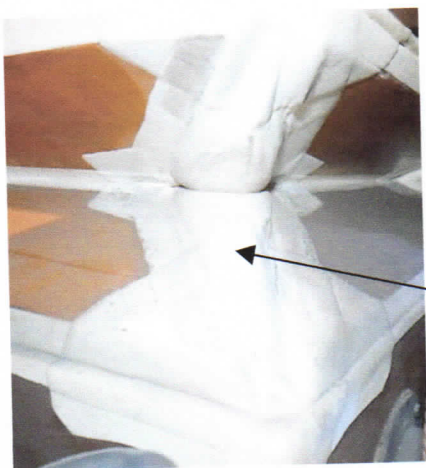
In the mechanically conservative nature of this 1938 rebuild lies one of its most important traits: it is a very late and fine example of A&S pneumatic action design, and thus of historic significance. Fortunately, this action has not been altered, simply maintained and occasionally patched-up (albeit with some convenient but non-authentic red plastic tubing, easily replaced once again with lead during full restoration).

The organ has had work done to it on various occasions, particularly in 1976 (Wood Wordsworth) and 1997 (John T Jackson). The Great Furniture (a 'Mixture' stop) was stolen so the present IV-rank stop dates from 1997 (it replaced the original Great Bourdon). Many of the internal pneumatics to Great and Swell have apparently been releathered (though I could not get at them to check during my visit) and there has been piecemeal releathering elsewhere. Currently A J Carter Ltd is maintaining the instrument and replacing those portions of the pneumatic tubing which have (most unusually) crumbled.



2. Current condition of the organ

The organ has benefitted from regular maintenance and occasional larger works of restoration. However further restoration work needs undertaking to improve its reliability and ensure its reliability for the next fifty years or so.



The reservoirs in the organ all date from 1938; I surmise that previously there would have been one large reservoir with perhaps one or two smaller ones. The 1938 rebuild installed a new system (a better one) of individual smaller reservoirs for each soundboard and wind pressure. The leather on all of these appears to be pliant and sound: they do not need releathering and will last for many years.

There was insufficient time during my visit to survey the reservoir in the blower-room; an organ-builder quoting for restoration work will be able to comment on that in due course. It may be more decayed, as blower-room bellows often are.

The leatherwork on the smaller moving parts – the pneumatic ‘motors’ – is quite another matter as some is extremely thin and does a great deal of work. Much of it is beginning to fail.

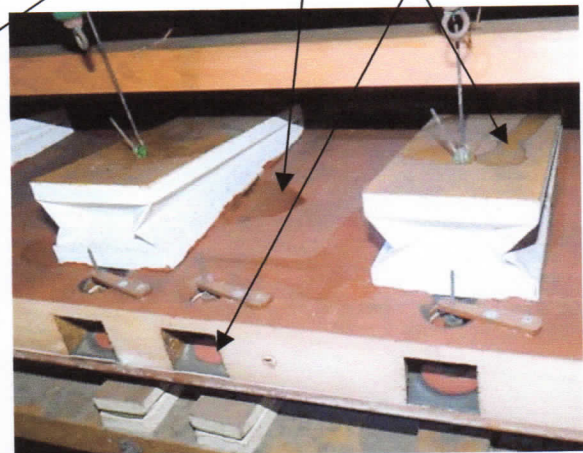
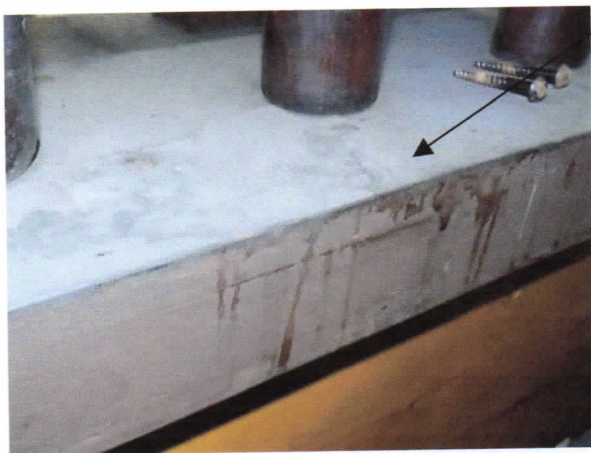
The Great and Swell actions had their leatherwork renewed in the 1990s, if the Jackson quote on file was fully carried out. This needs checking by the quoting organ-builders.



This means that the Choir actions and all the Pedal chests – internal and external motors – all still need releathering.

In addition, water has entered the chamber at the East end, run down the 32ft stopped pipes and entered their soundboard. This has seized some of the internal valves and

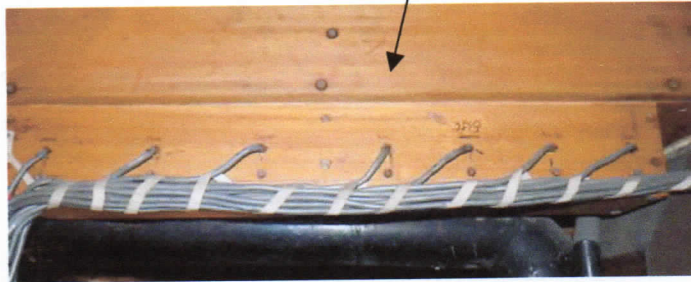
stuck the pallet-leather of some pallets to the underside of the top board. All this needs restoring as there will be many notes off until it has been. The roof above the East end of the organ chamber needs checking for soundness, unless this has been done already.



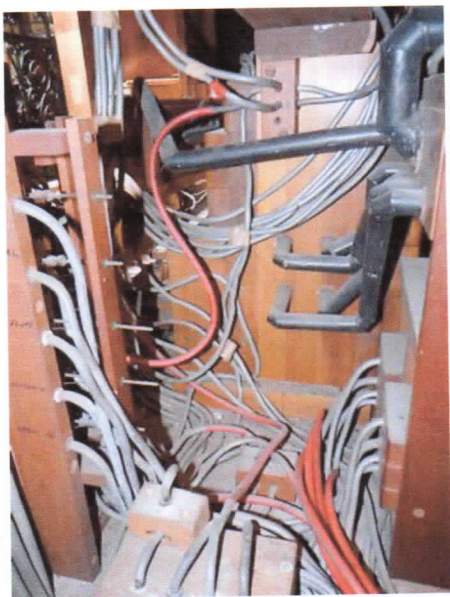


In addition there is a relay under the Swell soundboard which divides the action into two; this also needs releathering, as do any other small relays such as that for the 'stood-off' bass octaves of the Great Diapasons.

The stop actions need releathering, too – that for the Great being a double-acting machine operating the sliders, those for the Swell and the Choir being ventilators allowing wind into each rank of pipes when a stop is drawn,

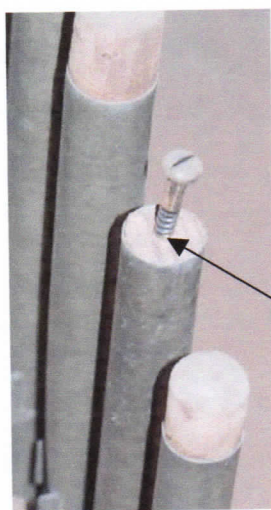


The major task, however, is not this work, much of which can be done piecemeal: it is to address the complex pneumatic machinery behind the console. This mass of tubing, wooden boxes and pneumatic motors has five interlinked functions: (1) to route the pneumatic tubes from each keyboard to their respective soundboards and chests, (2) to enable coupling between manuals and at the octave within / between manuals to take place, (3) to allow certain Pedal ranks to operate at more than one pitch, (4) to operate the organ's stop action within the instrument, and (5) to control the stop-knobs by the pistons between the keyboards and above the pedals. Some of this work is undertaken by pneumatic motors of small and large size; some is undertaken by extremely thin membranes (in the main coupler machine) and some by more sturdy leather pans (operating the stopknobs pneumatically). As far as I can see, no restoration work has been undertaken on all this mechanism, though the sagging and patched-up tube-runs suggest piecemeal attention from time to time.



The pipework varies in the amount of dust and dirt sitting in it and around it. That in the Choir box remains pretty clean; the Swell is a little dustier than the Choir (it has two sets of shutters and so admits more dust) and the Great is quite grubby. The Pedal is the dirtiest, because of what falls on it from the walls and ceiling.

The Great/Choir Tromba rank is kept clean only by the sloping board above it, on which fall quantities of grit and dust from the intersection of the chamber roof with the top of the wall above the arch at the head of the north nave aisle.



The pipework is generally in excellent physical condition except for three tasks which need undertaking: (1) the bass octave of the Swell Contra Fagotto is collapsing around the tips/knuckles of the resonators, (2) some of the cork stoppers in the Gedact, Rohr Flute etc are in need of replacement, although they do appear to have been thoroughly worked on before, and (3) some wooden pipe feet (e.g. Hohl Flute) have come loose.

The new Great Furniture appears to have been voiced by the pipe-maker and simply dropped-in and tuned. It needs attention to the voicing style, which is not the same as of the Abbott pipes (less nicking and lower cut-ups, for a start), and it is generally too loud.

The general areas of the organ are rather dirty, the underneath of the Swell suffering from fine powdery dust drawn in to the actions from a section of lead pneumatic tubes (which appear to be oxidising away to nothing) and expelled out onto the bellows and trunking beneath.



The rogue tubes appear to have been replaced by Mr Carter; further checks are needed to ensure that all such tubing has been identified. It is a highly unusual failing caused by faulty lead casting and can be eliminated from the organ with care and diligence, once some dismantling has taken place.



Where tubing has sagged or become untidy (anywhere in the organ) it needs replacing or re-running and re-staying.

It is collapsing, for instance, where it hangs off unit chests, weakened by the bleed-holes pierced by organ-builders to improve note repetition.



The soundboards are of three types, as has been mentioned: (1) slider soundboard (Great), (2) some sort of cone or pouch valve chests (Swell and Choir) and (3) unit chests (Pedal, Tromba and some off-note chests). The timber portions of the chests are in pretty fair condition; I heard just one 'running' between notes. Other than checking for splits, the Swell, Choir and unit chests need very little work other than the action releathering already mentioned; the Great will need attention to its upperboards, sliders and table to ensure that any splits are sealed and that all is flat and wind-tight.



The console is looking smart and well-polished – would that all consoles were so well-tended by their organists. Keys, pedals, pistons, swell-pedals, knobs and wooden surfaces are all lightly worn and would respond well to modest restoration, of which the keys and pistons probably need the most.

The insides of the two swell-boxes have been painted gloss white to help reflect light and tone. One swell-shutter facing east on the Swell box is broken and remains shut; this needs repairing. The shutters of both boxes should be checked for a perfect closure, and the connections from swell pedals to swell shutters should be checked for any loose centres or lost motion. The Choir box needs a light fitting – currently there is none.

Access to the upper levels is by two ladders. Neither is ideal and that to the Choir is unsecured and therefore hazardous. I recommend careful attention to them.

Blower: regrettably there was not time to visit the blower room. The blowing plant should be examined by a blower engineer who will report what if any work needs to be undertaken.

3. Prioritising restoration work

This organ is special enough to stand a good chance of gaining some grant-aid for restoration work. Should that be the case, then all restorative works should be carried out at the same time, as this is always the most cost-effective way of working.

If, however, the work has to be staged, I recommend a priority list as follows:

1. (a) Releather all remaining soundboard and unit chests actions along with all relays and stop actions. Clean and repair pipework which needs to be removed from the chests or soundboards. This to include Fagotto bass, flute stoppers and loose pipe-feet.
(b) Attend to structural matters such as swell-boxes, ladders, general cleaning and lighting whilst soundboard upperboards and pipes are removed.
2. (a) Remove all pneumatic machinery behind the console for full restoration and retubing.
(b) Whilst pneumatic machinery is out the console restoration should take place as the two are integral.
3. Re-run and/or replace any remaining tube runs which show any stress or degradation through age.
4. (a) Clean any remaining pipework.
(b) Revoice & regulate Great Furniture IVrks to blend perfectly with the chorus.
5. Carry out any necessary work to blower and blower-room reservoir.

Tendering organ-builders can be sent this report as the basis for an itemised quote, and should be encouraged to suggest any other items they consider should be mentioned.

Paul Hale, August/September 2010

APPENDIX

(NB: not for sending to organbuilders)

Organ Builders

I suggest that Andrew Carter is perfectly capable of undertaking all the above work, and at very reasonable prices. As he is maintaining the organ and understands its complicated mechanisms it is logical for him to do the restoration work.

If the PCC feels that nonetheless there should be competitive quotations, then Wood of Huddersfield is the only other firm in the area I would recommend. The larger 'national' firms such as Mander, Nicholson or Harrison & Harrison will be unnecessarily expensive.