

A REPORT ON THE ORGAN IN ALL SOULS CHURCH, LEEDS

I inspected the organ on 26 October 1989. From previous correspondence available the history of the organ appears to go back to an Abbot & Smith specification of 1938, but this estimate is for the rebuilding of the (presumably existing) organ at All Souls.

This 1938 specification included new manual and pedal soundboards together with a new Tubular Pneumatic Action. The main problems with this Pneumatic Action, now over fifty years old, is one of old age and wear on leather motors as well as metal fatigue especially on the small gauge lead tubing used to connect the primary and secondary actions. Leakage of wind too results in an unresponsive action.

CONSOLE

Repetition was poor especially on the swell, choir and pedal. The touch on all manuals is very shallow and much too near to the key surface, most probably due to wear on felts.

The pedal-board is in a non-standard position with D of the keys over E on the pedals, instead of D over D, so that the pedal-board is some $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches out of alignment. Likewise the swell pedals are non-standard. (The swell pedal should be between D# and F#.)

There is considerable wear on the pedal board felts and some side-play resulting in "clatter".

Springs on manual keys and pedal keys are irregular and generally the action is slow when playing rapid passages.

The stop action is slow on the majority of stops, although the piston action is still quite responsive.

All these faults are not surprising in view of the action being over fifty years old.

Several notes are not sounding on pedal stops no doubt due to break

down in pneumatic motors.

Generally, the condition of the console - stop knobs, keys and framework (except the pedal board) - is such that it could be used and refurbished if a rebuild was to be considered.

PNEUMATIC ACTION

This is showing signs of considerable wear. Pneumatic motors, valves and hundreds of yards of lead pneumatic tubing deteriorate with the passage of time. Lead tubing in many places shows signs of damage due to fatigue and has been re-glued at joints and there are many runs which have been patched with red P.V.C. tubing.

It is possible to "play out" the wind on full organ due no doubt to leakage of wind in very many places.

SOUNDBOARDS

There is a slide on the Great Soundboards with space for a 4-Rank Mixture. All this pipework is missing. There is a considerable amount of dust and masonry grit on the soundboard tables and in the pipes. Apart from this, the pipework, both wood and metal, is in quite good condition and could be restored if a rebuild was considered. Rusty tuning slides can also be corrected.

The pneumatic action goes right up to the soundboards with lead tubing to exhaust internal pneumatic motors which pull down the pallets immediately below the pipes. Much of the lead tubing is damaged where it enters the soundboard and there is considerable wind leakage at this source.

WIND SYSTEM AND SOUNDBOARD ACTION

The double-rise reservoirs are in quite good condition considering their age. (The leather work on the double-rise reservoir in the blowing chamber shows signs of hardening of the arteries!)

The Great Soundboard has had bleed-holes drilled in the table top (possibly in 1975) which leads one to assume that there were problems with wind leakage between bars in the soundboard.

There was also leakage of wind in trunking, particularly at the flanges on joints where trunking joins either the soundboards or reservoirs.

Pallet leathers are showing signs of hardening of leather work as indeed are internal motors.

ORGAN MOTOR AND BLOWERS

This appeared to be running satisfactorily - but rings on the right hand bearing of the motor were dry due to insufficient oil in the sump. It is well worthwhile checking this oil level at least every three months and topping up when necessary in order to keep the bearings lubricated. Dry bearings can eventually seize up and this can be expensive to repair.

→ FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The above remarks are par for the course with an instrument of this age - fair wear and tear and metal fatigue having taken their normal course.

Basically most of the faults can be put down to what is now obsolete action. Having said this, the organ is not about to cease working possibly for several years, but the pneumatic action can only deteriorate further with the passage of time and the longer it is left, clearly, the more inefficient it will become - particularly with disconcerting cyphers possibly appearing with increasing frequency and at inconvenient times during a service.

I am convinced in my own mind that it is not good husbandry to spend money on obsolete pneumatic action, nor would it be wise to consider refurbishing only certain sections of the action as they are all inter-related and inter-dependant. The letter from J. W. Walker & Sons Ltd., of 3 May 1984 is a very fair assessment of the situation and points out the hazards of approaching the problem in this manner.

The work carried out in 1975 was in the nature of a typical cleaning and overhauling of the action and soundboards - rather in the manner of an M.O.T. and leather work only replaced "as found necessary" and in no way can this be construed as renewing the then existing action - merely as a check that it was in working order.

The console, soundboards and pipework are all suitable for using in a rebuild with a completely new electric action. At today's figures in organ building to do the job thoroughly, one would be thinking of a figure in the region of £55,000 to £60,000 for the rebuilding of an instrument of this size and specification.

This is an expensive item for a church with a small congregation and with other calls on its financial resources, but such a programme would ensure the future of the instrument for the next fifty years.

In my own mind I think it would be a wise move to try and keep the organ in reasonable playing order so that it fulfils a need in accompanying the liturgy, and, if the future of All Souls is assured, to look into ways of rebuilding it with a new action some time in the future.

An alternative consideration might arise if a good tracker-action organ became available from a redundant church in the vicinity. But it, likewise, may well require a lot of money spending on refurbishment and the cost of installation as well as the dismantling of the present instrument, which again might be a false economy if this was the case.

Noel Rawsthorne
F.R.C.O., F.R.M.C.M., L.R.A.M.