



ORGANS

A pipe organ is invariably the largest and costliest single item of furniture inside a church building.

Organs were frequently installed in cathedrals and larger city churches from the sixteenth century onwards (and sometimes earlier) but the widespread installation of organs into parish churches only took place in the last three quarters of the nineteenth century. On the continent, organs have traditionally occupied a position on a west end gallery, acoustically and excellent location for leading singing in the church. A high proportion of English organs, however, are built into specially constructed organ chambers leading off of the chancel – a product of the Oxford Movement and the desire for a robed choir at the east end of the church.

Most Victorian organs were built using mechanical or tracker action (ie rods and levers) for the working mechanism. Such instruments were invariably well built; there are many which have given good service for well over a century and which will continue to serve for as long again in the future. Organs of this kind, which remain in basically unaltered condition, frequently qualify for historic restoration grants when maintenance becomes necessary. The Organs advisers will be glad to give advice and further information on making applications.

The twentieth century saw an increase in the size of organs. Along with the provision of more stops, pipes and keyboards came the development of other working mechanisms to cope with the additional demands and to keep the weight of touch light for the player. First came pneumatic-assisted action and then purely pneumatic action. These in turn gave way to electro-pneumatic action and in some cases even direct electrical action. A booklet to help you understand these terms – ‘Sounds Good’ - is available from the Council for the Care of Churches or Church House Publishing (see Useful Bits and Pieces for further information).

Organs of this type, including many fine larger instruments, are inevitably more costly to maintain in the long term. Most new organs built today use the old tracker system but with modern materials and improved design to keep the weight of touch lighter for the player than their nineteenth-century predecessors.

When churches are considering work on their pipe organ, the DAC is always pleased for the Organ Advisers to be involved at an early stage. They can help the church to assess:

- ❖ The history and integrity of the organ and its case (if there should be one)
- ❖ The position of the instrument in relation to modern liturgical use
- ❖ The condition of the instrument and of its workings

❖ The options for the future

In some cases, where a good instrument meets the needs of a parish well and is in good condition, simple cleaning and attention to working mechanisms may be all that is required. In other instances a more fundamental approach may be necessary to improve or enhance an existing instrument. Occasionally, a church may question whether the instrument which they have is in fact adequate or suitable for today's use; options include the provision of a new pipe organ or the purchase of one of the many fine redundant organs which have become available through the closure of churches of all denominations. There are find examples of both categories to be seen in this diocese.

The DAC believes, in common with many other similar, authorities that a good pipe organ, well maintained, provides the best musical result and in the long term represents the best stewardship for a parish. A good instrument forms part of the heritage of a parish and should be maintained for the future.

There are sometimes circumstances when the introduction of an electronic organ into a church may be seen as the only solution in the current situation. Often this, if it becomes necessary, is best done as a second instrument, leaving the original pipe organ in situ for a future generation to consider restoring once an electronic instrument has reached the end of its lifespan.

There are two Diocesan Organ Advisers who may be contacted via the DAC office. They will be very pleased to offer advice to parishes and also, where appropriate, to give information about organ builders, consultants and grant-giving bodies and trusts. The advisers work in an honorary capacity and no fees are incurred by a parish for their time or expertise, although travelling expenses would be expected.

The Council for the Care of Churches (Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ tel. 020 7898 1000) has a number of publications on conservation and restoration of church organs.

The British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS) studies the history of organs in England and runs a certification scheme for organs of historic interest. They produce a short leaflet on fundraising for the restoration of an historic church organ. Contact them via The Honorary Secretary, 17 Wheeley's Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2LD.

The Association of Independent Organs Advisers has members who are able to give independent expert advice (for a fee) on new instruments, major rebuilds and conservation projects to organs. Contact the Administrator Jose Hopkins, Lime Tree Cottage, 39 Church Street, Haslingfield, Cambridge CB3 7JE