

# The Organs of St. Peter's

This is the third revision of notes on the organ.



## **An Illustrious Request Denied**

We must begin the story in 1605 when Robert Cecil, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and James I's chief minister, had approached Sir Edward Paston on the subject of borrowing the organs from St Peter, Sudbury to be used in King's College Chapel, where the organ had been declared unfit for use. Paston, with great courage, refused to let the Sudbury organs go to Cambridge, claiming that 'it goese againe my conscience to grant my good will to take them awaie' and adding that the organs had been a gift to his father from Henry VIII. It would indeed be fascinating to know more of this organ.

## **A Snetzler Organ – Old Betsie**

Sperling refers to an organ installed in St Peter's church and dates the organ precisely at 8<sup>th</sup> October 1778. This is in accord with a note in the Vestry Book, "7<sup>th</sup> October 1778. Sudbury St Peter. Gallery already erected. Permission for an organ (already built) 9 foot from north to south (width). East to west 6 feet (depth). Height about 18 foot." The gallery is usually described as being built in 1777.

This organ is attributed to the illustrious organ builder Johannes Snetzler and is ascribed a date, by some, of 1750. The specification was as follows:

### **Great Organ**

Open Diapason  
Stopped Diapason  
Principal  
Flute (to mid c)

### **Swell Organ**

Open Diapason  
Stopped Diapason  
Principal  
Trumpet



Twelfth  
Fifteenth  
Sesquialtera Bass  
Cornet Treble III  
Trumpet

Hautboy

If the date (1750) is correct, then the Sudbury Snetzler would have been one of the first organs by the builder in this country and therefore of considerable historic significance. The implication must also be that the organ was built originally to stand elsewhere and was transferred to Sudbury. That would explain the “already built” reference.

The organist for the opening recital in 1778 was Mr Taylor from Chelmsford. There was a band led by Mr Kotzwara from London and musicians were brought from London, Cambridge and elsewhere. The recital took place in the morning and in the evening there was a concert and ball at the Rose and Crown.

In April 1827 an estimate by Mr Ambrose for repairing the organ was accepted. The quality of the repair must have been high because in April 1828 the Vestry resolved to grant Mr Ambrose a further £5 “on account of the excellent and workmanlike manner in which he has accomplished the said repairs.” Mr Ambrose was the organist Christopher Ambrose, who was succeeded by his brother, William Ambrose (of Coggeshall) who was organist for many years.

This instrument was affectionately referred to locally as ‘Old Betsy’ but the reason for the name remains a mystery.

The records suggest that ‘Old Betsy’ was transferred to St Gregory’s in 1841. That seems to have been the prelude to an unfortunate demise. ‘Old Betsy’ was sold from St Gregory’s, about 1866, to Alphasstone church for £20. Sadly, in enticingly mystifying circumstances, Old Betsy came to grief and had to be disposed of by George Buttle of Alphasstone.

### **Was it a Parsons or Russell Organ?**

The organ to replace ‘Old Betsy’ may have been built by S. Parsons. Sadly that builder is not known to the National Pipe Organ Register. The specification was probably as follows:

#### **Great Organ**

Open Diapason  
Stop Diapason Bass  
Stop Diapason Treble  
Principal  
Twelfth  
Fifteenth

#### **Choir Organ**

Stop Diapason Bass  
Stop Diapason Treble  
Flute

This is not as versatile a specification as that of its predecessor but, as Sir John Sutton tells us, Snetzler organs were noted for 'the extreme brilliancy of their chorus stops' but 'fall short of that fullness of tone' which characterised some other builders of the day. Perhaps Mr S Parsons was able to provide a new 'fullness of tone'.

Mr Parson's handiwork in due course found its way to St Gregory's whence it was sold for the sum of £100.

Doubt is thrown on the creator of the organ in a note appended to the later Jones organ specification which tells us that 'the old organ' was by Russell. A further difficulty exists because the sometime offered specification for this instrument is that of the earlier Snetzler instrument.

### The Jones Organ

The next fresh start came in the form of an organ built by Henry Jones and Son of Fulham Road, London at a cost of £406. 11s. 6d. inclusive of removal of the old instrument.



Henry Jones

It was opened on St. Peter's day, 1866 by William Ambrose. The specification was as follows:

#### Great Organ

Open Diapason	8ft.
Clarionet Flute	8ft tone
Principal	4ft.
Twelfth	2 2/3 ft.
Fifteenth	2ft.
Mixture	3 ranks
Trumpet	8 ft.

#### Swell Organ

Double Diapason (tenor c)	16ft. tone
Open Diapason (grooved)	8ft.
Lieblich Gedact	8ft. tone
Principal	4ft.
Mixture	2 ranks
Hautboy (tenor c)	8ft.
Cornocean	8ft.

#### Choir Organ

Dulciana (grooved)	8ft.
Clarabella	8ft.
Flute	4ft.
Cremona	8ft.

#### Pedal Organ

Open Diapason	16ft.
Bourdon	16ft. tone
The latter represented 12 pipes taken from the previous organ.	



The note relating that the 12 Bourdon pipes were taken from the previous organ might suggest that St Gregory's took delivery of an organ without any sixteen foot pedal pipes.

On December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1876 £20 was paid to Messrs. T. T. and W. Ginns, organ builders, for cleaning, regulating and tuning this organ.

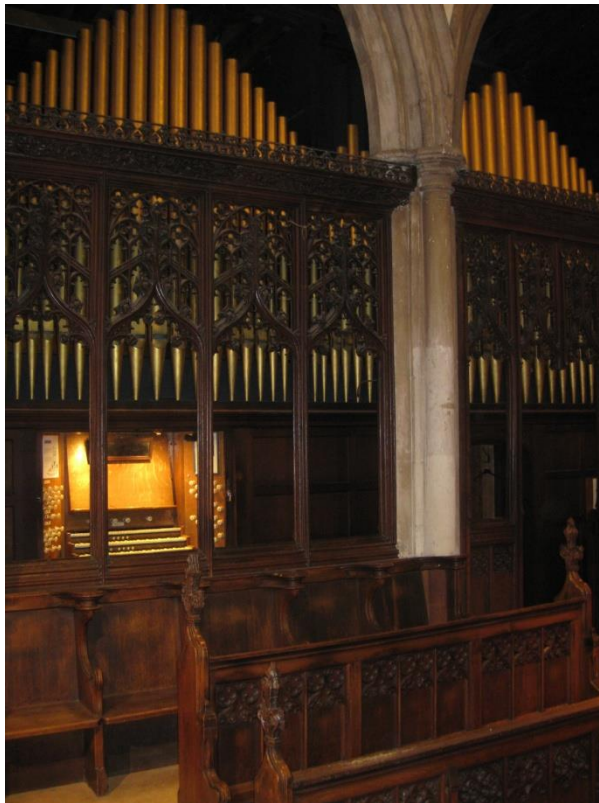
In 1887 Mr. W. Last was paid eleven and six pence for engraving and filling stop- knobs.

The organ stood facing west over the lower vestry, probably in the north chapel, until the spring of 1890, when it was turned through 90 degrees to a position similar to the present instrument. At the same time a Harmonic Flute to tenor c was substituted for the twelfth, a bearded gamba (to CC) for the three rank mixture, and all the reeds were re-voiced. These changes might by some be hardly regarded as improvements but were seen to be so at the time. The long backfall action to the swell was improved by substituting squares for backfalls and a tremulant was added to the swell.

### **The Lewis Organ**

By 1907 the bellows and swell action of the Jones organ began to fail and a considerable outlay was inevitable. Accordingly Thomas Elliston, one of the assistant organists of the day, was requested to overhaul and examine the instrument and report on it. His opinion was that the cost of renovating would be so great as to be inadvisable. In 1908 a challenge was thrown down by an anonymous donor who promised to pay £100 to start a fund for a new organ, provided that the congregation raised an adequate sum within reasonable time. The main discussion point was whether to renovate or seek a new instrument.

Mr. E. E. Vinnicombe F.R.C.O., organist, was asked to draw up a specification and did so with assistance from Dr. W. Inglis Mason and Thomas Elliston, The result was submitted to Sir George Martin, M.V.O., organist of St. Paul's Cathedral and Dr. H. A. Harding, secretary to the Royal College of Organists who both approved the scheme. Tenders went out to eight organ builders. After trying and hearing a number of instruments in London and the provinces, Mr. Vinnicombe unhesitatingly recommended Messrs. Lewis and Co. of London and Glasgow whose organs were considered unequalled for beauty of tone and unsurpassed for excellence of workmanship. The contract was accepted and there was great satisfaction within church circles that the committee had made the best decision.



Dedication of the organ by the right Rev. W. T. Harrison, D. D. lately bishop of Glasgow and Galloway was on St. Peter's Day, 1911 and the number and scope of the events was quite amazing given that it was Thursday. The dedication service was at 11.a.m., preceded at 6.45 in the morning by a Choral Celebration of Holy Communion. The dedication anthem, by E. E. Vinnicombe, was 'Rejoice in the Lord , O Ye Righteous'. Dr. A. H. Mann, of Kings College, Cambridge, gave an organ recital after the service with music by Beethoven, S. S. Wesley, and Handel's Organ Concerto in G. number 1, set 1. At 4.0. p.m. he gave another recital, including the Toccata and Fugue in D minor by J. S. Bach alongside works by Dussek, Saint-Saens, Sterndale Bennet, Haydn and Mendelssohn and including another Handel Organ Concerto. Some of the items were vocal solos.

At Evensong at 7. 30 the dedication anthem was performed again and the Te Deum as set by Stanford in B flat was also performed. This was followed by yet another recital by Dr. Mann, with works by Bach, Widor (not the famous Finale), Mendelssohn, Berthold Tours and Henry Smart. Earlier, at 1.0.p.m. a public luncheon was provided at the Church Lad's Brigade headquarters in Queen's Road for half a crown.

On the following Sunday, at Evensong, the dedication anthem was given again and, after the service, E. E. Vinnicombe gave a recital of Handel, Lemare, Wagner, Bernard Johnson and Henry Smart.

The organ seems to have given good service over the years. There was certainly a considerable renovation to leathers and action in 1942, by the firm of Henry Willis and Sons. At an unknown date, the original hydraulic blowing apparatus was replaced by

an electric one (the organ was never hand-pumped). Over the years the organ was attended by Messrs. Bishop and Sons as well as Messrs. Hill, Norman and Beard.

Sadly by 1971 when services ceased in St. Peter's the instrument had been allowed to reach a very poor state, with much of the pedal section and other stops out of action and generally very unreliable. During the five years before vesting the church with the Churches Conservation Trust the future for the instrument was often bleak, despite the ministrations of the greatly respected Reg Lane of HN&B who kept a large part of the organ going for many years, finding ways round the ailing eccentricities. On one particular evening he was called out to silence a cipherring pipe. He discovered the fault in a huge escape of wind from one of the reservoirs which was making an edge tone in the course of its egress.

In 1980 Christopher Dearnley, organist of St Paul's Cathedral, played the organ. As a result he inspired the Friends to raise funds towards its refurbishment. The first stage in this process was completed in 1987 when Christopher gave a recital, celebrating the return to life of the instrument following work by Messrs. Bishop and Sons, commencing in December 1986 and taking nearly a year to complete. The work was funded by the Friends of St. Peter. Mrs. Dora Vinnicombe, widow of the late organist, Edward Ellis Vinnicombe, who had served in the church for nearly 50 years, attended this event. Part of the work was undertaken by local engineer, Peter Taylor, who patiently repaired the blower blades which had shattered in December 1985.

In 1999 the organ enjoyed a major rebuild, including the provision of a new blower, at a cost alone of over £100,000. This work was carried out with the aid of a most generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the remainder of the funding from the Friends of St. Peter. The contract was undertaken by Messrs. J. W. Walker and Sons under the leadership of Andrew Pennells who took a close personal interest in the work. Sadly it was the last major work that Andrew undertook before his untimely death.



Andrew Pennells at J. W. Walker's works with one of the new 32 foot pipes

Two years earlier it had been found that the seven largest pipes were falling to pieces because of serious worm infestation. They had to be removed and destroyed in August 1997.



The old pipes after removal from the organ

In 1999 seven new pipes (to the original measurements) were made and installed. Reputedly it was the first time pipes of this size had been constructed in this country for over 50 years.



The new pipes arrive at the church

The first recital on the refurbished instrument was given in May by Dennis Townhill, Organist Emeritus, St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh. The following year a recital was given by Stephen Cleobury, Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge, to mark the re-inauguration of the instrument and, at the same time, to 'echo' the opening recitals in 1911.

Sadly, just when all seemed secure, following work on the roof, damage was caused to the organ upon unsupervised removal of the protective plastic covering. Four weeks of remedial work by J. W. Walker and Sons in 2001 once again restored the organ.

Putting our organ into a historical context, in 1911 Lewis and Co. was certainly one of the leading organ builders. Thomas Lewis set up business in London around 1863, greatly influenced by the German organ builder Schulze who had shown his work at

the Great Exhibition of 1851. In 1897 all the stock was bought out by John Courage, the brewer, who took control of the company. Lewis left to set up in business independently. He died in 1916 having lived to see John Courage sell off the firm to the manager, Herbert Tuckwell, in 1909. It is from this period that our instrument dates.

Under Tuckwell there was a certain taming of the fire and freedom, some would say coarseness, of earlier instruments. The new sound was more dense and more profound. The product, emanating from the Brixton factory remained of the very best, both tonally and in construction. Tuckwell died in 1914 and the firm amalgamated with Henry Willis and Sons (who moved into the famous Rotunda Factory) in 1919. By 1925 the Lewis name had disappeared for ever.

Signs of the fancy pipe work much in favour in 1911 are to be seen in the rare Dolce stop and the finely constructed Triangular Flute.



A few of the triangular flute pipes

All the pipe-work is of predictably superb construction. Comparatively few organs built by Lewis and Co. survive unaltered. Therefore our organ must be set aside from those that have been 'improved' or 'modernised' and its heritage status is thus acknowledged.

There are some anomalies. The shutters on the boxes open away from the congregation and this, added to the very cramped site, deadens the most exciting qualities of the instrument, heard from the Nave. The Echo Cornet on the Swell is not a Cornet at all and breaks at a most inconvenient point. Was the pedal reed intended



for this instrument? Places for bass pipes of the Tromba rank exist, complete with motors, on the great soundboard but were not needed when a downward extension, off the main chest, was decided upon. This extension, together with the pedal string stop is detached from the rest of the pedal work and placed just behind the west case. From this position, the pedal reed makes, perhaps, a slightly over-impressive effect on those seated in the vicinity. There is a curious and seemingly wasteful array of pedal combinations and perhaps the manual pistons were cut back in number from the original design as some descriptions tell of five to a department, whereas the reality is only four.

These oddities do very little to detract from the many wonders. There is a fulsome diapason chorus on the great organ, complete with a solo character large scale diapason rank. All the flute stops are exquisite and contrasted in timbre. The swell organ chorus reeds are excitingly fiery, especially with their octave coupler.



Swell reeds - 16', 8' and 4'

The choir organ clarinet makes a delicious melting sound and the tuba is so gloriously rich and round. The action is as instant as any charge pneumatic action could be although the key movement is very shallow, inspiring even the finest organists to offer extra notes to their performance. The grand organ speaks from its high pressure chests with a characteristic certainty, boldness and solid assurance borne of the late Edwardian age.



## Specification of the Lewis and Co. Organ, Sudbury

The organ is of charge pneumatic action with three manual CC to c, 61 notes and pedal CCCC to G, 32 notes.

### Great Organ

1. Contra Viola	16
2. Open Diapason Large	8
3. Open Diapason Medium	8
4. Hohl Flote	8
5. Dolce	8
6. Flute Harmonique	4
7. Octave	4
8. Super Octave	2
9. Harmonics 3 ranks	(2 2/3)
10. Tromba	8
11. Tuba (from Choir)	8

### Choir Organ

1. Salicional	8
2. Cor de Nuit	8
3. Echo Dulciana	8
4. Unda Maris (Tenor C)	8
5. Flauto Traverso	4
6. Orchestral Oboe	8
7. Corno di Bassetto	8
8. Tuba	8

### Couplers etc.

1. Great to Pedal
2. Swell to Pedal
3. Choir To Pedal
4. Swell to Great
5. Swell Octave to Great
6. Swell Sub Octave to Great
7. Choir to Great
8. Swell to Choir
9. Choir Octave
10. Choir Sub Octave
11. Choir Unison Off
12. Swell Octave
13. Swell Sub Octave
14. Choir Tremolo
15. Swell Tremolo

### Swell Organ

1. Rohr Bourdon	16
2. Open Diapason	8
3. Rohr Flote	8
4. Viole de Gambe	8
5. Voix Celeste (tenor C)	8
6. Geigen Principal	4
7. Flute d'Amour	4
8. Piccolo Harmonique	2
9. Echo Cornet 3 ranks	(2 2/3)
10. Double Trumpet	16
11. Horn	8
12. Clarion	4
13. Oboe	8

### Pedal Organ

1. Major Bass (lowest 5 notes are acoustic)	32
2. Great Bass (from 1)	16
3. Sub Bass	16
4. Violone (from Great 1)	16
5. Echo Bourdon (from Swell 1)	16
6. Violoncello (from 4)	8
7. Flute Bass (from 3)	8
8. Bombarde (from Great 10)	16

The organ was tuned to French Diapason normal C 517.3. Metal pipes are of best spotted metal. Wind pressures vary from 4 inches to 10 inches. Stop knobs and keys are ivory. Stop rods are in rose wood. There were two bellows, the feeders for which were operated by two hydraulic engines manufactured by Messrs. Watkins and Watson of London. These supplied the eight reservoirs.