

THE CATHEDRAL ORGAN

Brief History of the Organs in Carlisle Cathedral

In the year 1634 three military officers were making a tour of the northern counties of England. They described their impressions of Carlisle as follows:

'We repayr'd to the Cathedrall, where is nothing soe fayne and stately as those wee had seene, but more like a great wild country church. The organs and voices did well agree, the one being like a shrill bagpipe the other like the scotish tone.'

The organ referred to in this extract was probably the same as the one mentioned in an inventory of 1571 - the earliest surviving reference to an organ in Carlisle Cathedral. The fact that a new instrument of six stops was commissioned by the Dean & Chapter from Thomas Preston in 1661 would seem to indicate that the earlier organ had been destroyed during the Civil War (the Cathedral's nave suffered a similar fate). In 1684, after twenty-three years service, it was sold to Appleby Church, where the case still exists today along with some of the original pipework.

The organ which replaced it had one manual and nine stops. We do not know who built it (although some believe it could have been "Father" Smith), nor do we know what became of it when, in 1806, John Avery was commissioned to build a three manual instrument. At that time, the arch separating the quire from the crossing had been blocked up and the Avery instrument was placed centrally on the screen. Unfortunately Avery died before his Carlisle project was complete, the instrument eventually being finished in 1808 by Elliott. At that time there was still no independent pedal department, although this was added in 1834 - along with a Venetian Swell - by Davies of Liverpool.

In 1856 Henry Willis was commissioned to build a new instrument for the Cathedral, the specification being jointly prepared by the then organist, Dr. Henry Ford and the celebrated recitalist W.T. Best. The arch between the choir and the crossing had by this time been re-opened, thus enabling the new organ to be sited in its present position. The Avery organ was initially sold to a private individual but eventually it found its way to Hexham Abbey where, while mutilated remains of the casework can still be seen, the pipework has not survived.

The organ Willis built for Carlisle in 1856 was only his second Cathedral project (Winchester was built two years earlier) and came at a period of great change in English organ building. It was larger and better appointed than most Cathedral instruments at that time and the involvement of W.T. Best (who incidentally was born in Carlisle) guaranteed that the design included many of the latest innovations. Thumb pistons were provided to the Great and Swell from the start - making this in all probability only the third organ in the world to have them. It was also the first instrument in an English Cathedral to be screened by a simple pipe display without formal casework and was blown by huge cylinder air-pumps driven by a gas engine, the apparatus being housed in what is now the vergers' vestry. The west-facing 32 foot open metal pipes, which immediately impress the visitor to the Cathedral, were added in 1875, along with a few other additions and alterations.

Although further work was done both to the blowing mechanism and the action in 1893, the next major rebuild took place in 1907 when Sydney Nicholson was Acting Organist.

The work was undertaken by Harrison & Harrison, and the instrument was substantially enlarged, with the addition of a fourth manual. Both Willis and Harrison contained the Choir organ within the main case but in 1930 this division was moved into the south aisle, where the Positive of the present organ is still situated.

The next rebuild was in 1962, when J.W Walker & Sons, in line with the fashion of the day, tonally remodelled much of the pipework along classical lines and added a substantial amount of upperwork.

In this form the organ served the Cathedral for well over thirty years. Towards the end of that period however it was becoming increasingly obvious that there were serious problems requiring urgent attention. The accumulation of dirt since the last cleaning in 1976 was resulting in unstable tuning and ever more frequent malfunctions and, to make matters worse, the electrical systems - untouched since 1962 - were not only unreliable but also posed a very real fire risk!

In 1995 tenders were invited from three reputable organ builders, and after much careful consideration the contract was awarded to David Wells of Liverpool. The work which commenced in August 1996 included the refurbishment of the console, the replacement of the transmission and piston systems, the cleaning and repair of all pipework, the renewal of all leatherwork and the overhaul of every remaining part of the instrument. In addition some relatively modest tonal modifications were effected with the intention of regaining some of the Father Willis/Harrison character. The mixturework was rearranged to blend more cohesively with the foundation stops and new ranks included a second Diapason on the Great, an Oboe on the Swell, a Dulciana and Fifteenth on the Positive and a Claribel Flute and Tierce on the Solo.

Specification of the organ as it is now:

Great Organ		Positive Organ	
Double Open Diapason	16'	Chimney Flute	8'
Open Diapason	8'	Dulciana <i>new</i>	8'
Geigen <i>new</i>	8'	Principal	4'
Gemshorn	8'	Flauto Traverso	4'
Stopped Diapason	8'	Nazard	2 2/3'
Principal	4'	Fifteenth <i>new</i>	2'
Wald Flute	4'	Blockflote	2'
Twelfth	2 2/3'	Tierce	1 3/5'
Fifteenth	2'	Sharp Mixture (22,26,29)	III <i>revoiced</i>
Fourniture (19,22,26,29)	IV	Trompette	8'
		Tremulant	
Double Trumpet	16'	Double Trumpet (Gt)	16'
Trumpet	8'	Trumpet (Gt)	8'
Clarion	4'	Clarion (Gt)	4'

Swell Organ

Lieblich Bourdon	16'
Vox Angelica (ten. C)	8'
Echo Gamba	8'
Lieblich Gedeckt	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Suabe Flute	4'
Octave	4'
Fifteenth <i>revoiced</i>	2'
Sesquialtera (12,17) <i>revoiced</i>	II
Mixture (19,22,26) <i>revoiced</i>	III
Contra Fagotto	16'
Oboe <i>new</i>	8'
Cornoean	8'
Clarion	4'
Tremulant	

Solo Organ

Claribel Flute <i>new</i>	8'
Quintaton <i>revoiced</i>	8'
Viole d'Orchestre	8'
Viole Celestes (FF)	8'
Gemshorn	4'
Concert Flute	4'
Quint	2 2/3'
Piccolo	2'
Tierce <i>new</i>	1 3/5'
Cor Anglais	16'
Vox Humana	8'
Clarinet	8'
Tremulant	
Tuba	8'

Pedal Organ

Double Open Diapason	32'
Open Wood	16'
Open Diapason	16'
Violone	16'
Subbass	16'
Octave	8'
Principal	8'
Flute	8'
Octave Quint	5 1/3'
Choral Bass	4'
Octave Flute	4'
Nachthorn	2'
Mixture (19,22,26,29)	IV
Ophicleide	16'
Trombone	16'
Posaune	8'
Bassoon	8'
Octave Bassoon	4'