A Brief History of the Organ in Holy Trinity Church, Eccleshall

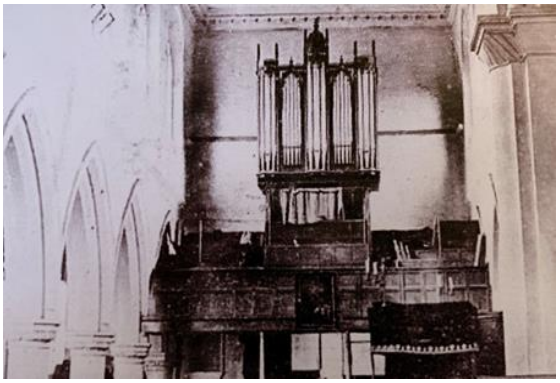
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The first record of an organ in Holy Trinity was of one which was installed by the Manchester based organ builder Samuel Renn in **1827**. It was situated in a west end gallery and consisted of two manuals (keyboards), pedals and twelve speaking stops.

Great Organ		**Swell Organ**		**Pedal Organ**	
Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason	8	Bourdon	16
Stopped Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8		
Principal	4	Principal	4		
Fifteenth	2	Hautboy	8		
Sesquialtra Bass	III				
Cornet Treble	III				
Trumpet (treble only)	8				

It is likely that the Swell would have had a 'hitch-down' pedal, and a box with Venetian swell shutters and straw-filled hessian panels covering the inside surfaces.



This instrument was dismantled in **1866/7** as part of a major restoration of the church. It's probable that the instrument would have been stored somewhere in the south aisle awaiting rebuilding.

The intention was to construct a rebuilt and improved instrument in the north aisle against the vicar's vestry wall (now the site of the Lady Chapel altar).

A serious fire in **1868** destroyed the north aisle, part of the nave roof and floor along with many of the furnishings. Historical records regarding the organ are sketchy from this time, but it is likely (according to records kept in the University of Birmingham's *British Organ Archive, and the National Pipe Organ Register*) that the organ was rebuilt by James Kirtland (a nephew of Samuel Renn) and his new business partner Frederick Jardine sometime between 1867 and 1870.

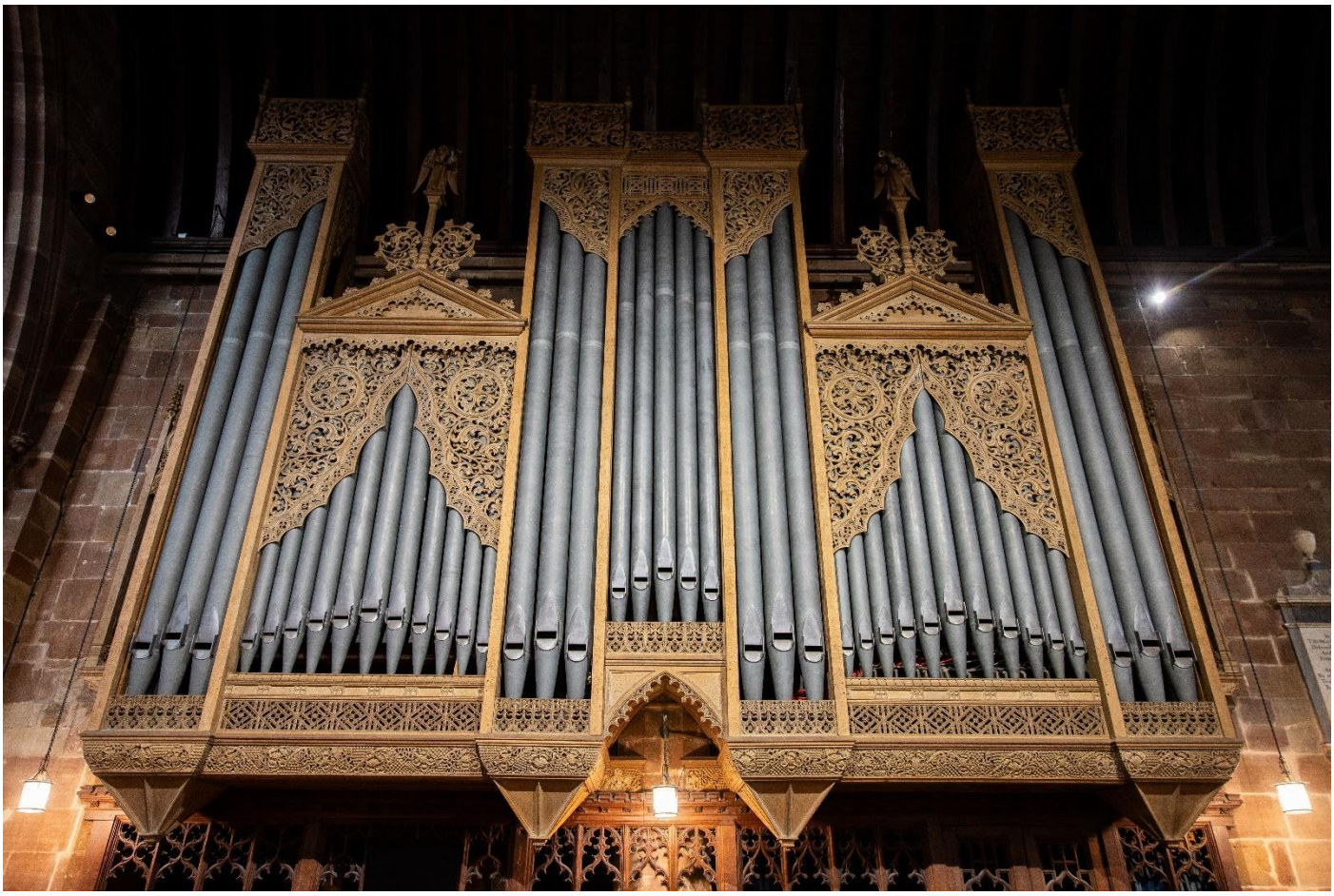


An organ which had a similar background to the one in Holy Trinity is the Renn organ in St Mary and All Saint's Church, Great Budworth, Cheshire. This instrument (see photo below) was moved from a gallery to a chancel position in the north aisle and was also in the care of Jardines and Co (1918). It is possibly the closest 'artists impression' of how the organ in Holy Trinity would have looked after the rebuild following the fire.

There are unsubstantiated claims that work was carried out in **1913** by Kirkland and Bryceston. More likely is a renovation carried out by Jardine & Co during **1920 and 1921.**

Accounts, contracts, plans, and letters exist which detail the work that was recommended and the materials that were purchased. This included a complete overhaul, cleaning, replacing the bellows and feeders with new sheepskin linings, new leather fastenings for the tracker action, and applying tubular pneumatic action to the Pedal Organ. The cost of the work came to around £424 (equivalent in purchasing power to £23,749.64 in 2024).

The instrument you see today was reconstructed in **1930** by the renowned organ builders Hill, Norman and Beard (other examples of their installations can be seen and heard in Lichfield, Norwich and Peterborough Cathedrals).



The eye-catching organ case was designed by William Douglas Caröe (1857–1938), constructed using limed oak for the panels and carvings. The intricate carving was crafted by Bridgemans of Lichfield and the display pipework used was a 16' Open Metal rank playable on the Great and Pedal Organs.

Three significant changes to the instrument were, firstly, the changing of the keyboard playing action from tracker (mechanical) to electro-pneumatic (wind/bellows assisted), secondly, the addition of a third manual (the Choir Organ) and finally the installation of an electric blower. Tonal alterations would have likely included the addition of a Dulciana and Viol di Gamba 8', a flute chorus of 8', 4' and 2', a Mixture II, a Clarinet 8' and a Cornopean 8'. Sadly, details about the organ from 1930 to the present are incomplete because of a fire at the Hill, Norman and Beard factory in the 1950's.

In 1977, the organ again required attention having had little spent on it (apart from regular tuning) for more than 45 years. The instrument was dismantled, cleaned, with repair or replacement of parts that were particularly worn, such as stiff leather pads and pneumatic motors. Tonally, a Nason Flute 4' replaced the Double Diapason 16' on the Great Organ. This work was undertaken by Hill, Norman & Beard at a cost of around £3,400 (equivalent to £19,300 in 2024).

By **2013**, it was becoming clear that the organ needed serious attention. The pneumatic keyboard actions were becoming slow and unreliable. Each manual note had an action consisting of three pneumatic motors, all of which required re-leathering. For the three manuals, that would be a total of 549 motors, plus the 90 motors on the Pedal Organ. The advice from two of Lichfield Cathedral's organists along with three independent organ builders was to install a microprocessor which would control the keyboard and stop actions. It would mean the removal of around 260 lead tubes that carried increasingly unreliable pneumatic signals to stiff leather motors. The upgrade work was carried out in two phases, the first in 2017, the second in 2023.



Tonally, several important additions were made which include:

- Trombone, Trumpet, Principal and Octave Flute on the Pedal Organ
- Trumpet, Clarion, Larigot and Tierce on the Choir Organ
- Celeste and Gamba on the Swell Organ
- Bourdon on the Great Organ

Accessories include: -

- Six pistons to each department (these allow preset combinations of sounds)
- Six general pistons
- A MIDI recorder



The specification of the Holy Trinity organ, May 2024.

Pedal Organ

1. Open Metal 16
2. Open Wood 16
3. Bourdon 16
4. Echo Bourdon 16
5. Principal 8
6. Bass Flute 8
7. Octave Flute 4
8. Trombone 16
9. Trumpet 8

Choir to Pedal Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal

Choir Organ

10. Stopped Diapason 8
11. Viol Di Gamba 8
12. Dulciana 8
13. Clear Flute 4
14. Flageolet 2
15. Tierce 1⅗
16. Larigot 1⅓
17. Clarinet 8
18. Trumpet 8
19. Clarion 4

Octave Swell to Choir Pedal to Choir

Great Organ

20. Bourdon 16
21. Open Diapason 8
22. Claribel Flute 8
23. Principal 4
24. Nason Flute 4
25. Twelfth 2⅔
26. Fifteenth 2
27. Sesquialtera III
28. Trumpet 8

Swell to Great Choir to Great Pedal to Great
Great and Pedal combinations coupled

Swell Organ

29. Bourdon 16
30. Open Diapason 8
31. Stopped Diapason 8
32. Gamba 8
33. Voix Celeste 8
34. Principal 4
35. Fifteenth 2
36. Mixture II
37. Oboe 8
38. Cornopean 8
39. Cymbelstern
(to be installed 2025)

Tremulant Octave Sub Octave
Unison Off Pedal to Swell

Accessories

Six foot pistons to the Pedal Organ
Six pistons to the Choir Organ
Six pistons to the Great Organ
Six pistons to the Swell Organ
Six general pistons (duplicated on foot pistons)
Stepper (+ & -), operating general pistons in sequence
General cancel piston
Balanced swell pedal
MIDI recorder with MIDI in, MIDI out (1 & 2) and MIDI through ports
Record and playback system on an iPod
General and Divisional piston memories (100 levels)

November 2024

Sources

Sayer, M, (1974), 'Samuel Renn, English Organ Builder' London, Phillimore.

The British Organ Archive held in the Cadbury Research Library, (Special Collections), University of Birmingham and The British Institute of Organ Studies.