

THE MINSTER ORGANS

Paul Hale, 21.01.1995

“The key to the future lies in the past” (Enoch Powell)

1. Chamber Organ built 1968 by Grant, Degens and Bradbeer, on permanent loan to the Minster, shows clearly the origins and early form of organs: a single keyboard and a few pipes, in a small portable case which could be moved about a church and carried in processions.

First English organ 10<sup>th</sup> century in Winchester Cathedral. Later a fixed organ, usually on the screen, was introduced, with the small one in case behind the organist's chair: hence 'chair organ' corrupted to 'choir organ'. This led to the console having two keyboards, one for each organ.

This small organ was used to demonstrate the mechanism: keys pull down backfalls, leading to a grid with a space for each key above the well of the soundboard, with a valve opened by the backfall for each note. The more rows of pipes for each note, the greater the sound: in the 15<sup>th</sup> century a mechanism was invented to block off some pipes – so the rows were called “stops”. This was done by slides run at right angles to the grid, with knobs to move sliders to stop off some rows.

2. Earliest Minster Organs

No records, not even for in the 1635 visitation, but one requested 30 years later and payment for repair in the 1699 accounts. First recorded against Popely; he wrote a lot of music, all lost by the 1930s. Bernard (“Father”) Smith was supposed to have built the first organ. Early cases had elaborate east side, plain west side (“backfront”). Fire of 1711 catastrophic – case burnt but patched up, many repairs recorded during 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Swell box added – small pipes in a box creating an ‘echo’ effect and necessitating a 3<sup>rd</sup> manual. Later, box could be operated by the organist – then called a ‘Nag’s Head Swell’.

3. 19<sup>th</sup> Century – mainly more patching up until 1884 creation of diocese, when the old organ was scrapped, Bishop & Son built a new 4 manual in 1889, but the screen was too tall for the longest pipes to be placed on it vertically; so 16’ pipes were put behind the pillars on either side, 32’ pipes horizontally in the Quire triforium. The organ was built with tubular pneumatic action, common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and until –

#### 4. 1920s on -

By this time, the organ had become unreliable, so Messrs. Hill, Norman & Beard devised a rebuild on electro-pneumatic action, unfortunately a bad period for organ design. New case designed by Carøe (2 bits of old case survive, one in Cromer Parish Church, one in Weston super Mare!). This contained swell boxes and one pedal stop only. Other stops in nave triforium, with mobile nave console (the first in an English Cathedral)). It produced a heavy opaque sound with heavier wind pressure.

Sir Edmund Bairstow played at the opening service, and by mistake used the tuba stop for a ppp passage!

Robert Ashfield tried without success to get changes made.

David Lumsden got a Positive organ under the Screen with more baroque type sound.

Kenneth Beard in 1971 got it put all back on the Screen, but Hill, Norman & Beard neglected the mechanical side; 1933 wiring not replaced!!!

1989 Paul Hale - by the time he came 4 reports had been received, 3 of which condemned the organ. So it was decided to find a second hand one for the Nave and a new one on the Screen for the Quire. Woods offered a redundant Binns organ free, charging only for the installation, full restoration and augmentation.

Modern technology means it is digitally operated through a single cable with only 4 wires and a decoding computer in the triforium.

Temporary electronic organ in the Quire operated by a similar but more comprehensive system.

#### 5. New Quire Organ of the future:

Carøe case will just hold 4 - manual organ (top keyboard for solos).

Great organ at impost level east side )

Swell box at impost level west side )

Choir organ under great organ )

Pedal organ under and behind swell box )

all tone will go eastwards.

16' pipes behind the case. There will be just enough stops (50) for authentic repertoire; mechanical, not pneumatic action.

From the screen console, either or both organs can be played, and the stop combinations can be programmed in advance by a plastic card like a bank card.

Paul then took those present up to the triforium to see the pipes, etc. of the Binns organ.