

The 1996 Screen Organ

An organ was built in the Minster in 1662/3 by 'Mr Derby'; this was replaced in 1701 by a new one-manual instrument in a fine case on the screen, probably built by Father Smith. Repaired after a the Nave roof fire in 1712, and again in 1727, a second manual (in a 'chair' case) was made by Dallam of York in 1730 and finished after his death by Thomas Swarbrick. In 1765-66 John Snetzler effected a complete rebuild and added a four-stop Swell, after which the organ gained a fine reputation for the quality of its tone. Work by G P England (1804), Buckingham (adding pedals in 1821), and Groves on London (c. 1854 - a new and larger Swell) did not help to make the organ readily serviceable, and in 1892 Bishop & Son replaced it with a completely new 4-manual organ in four divided cases on the screen. A 1934 rebuild by Hill Norman & Beard placed the Great and most of the Pedal in the Nave triforium, electrified the action and enlarged the tonal scheme considerably; there were two consoles, one mobile in the nave. The pipework was revoiced on very smooth lines. Carøe & Passmore designed a new screen case (partly modelled on the Father Smith case). There were 81 speaking stops on three manuals and pedals. In late 1959 a Positiv organ was added under the screen on the south side, its pipework being visible from nave and quire. Another rebuild took place in 1971, when the Great was placed back within the screen case, along with some of the pedal. The organ was revoiced on Baroque lines. By 1989 the organ had become completely unreliable; its sound was undistinguished, making little impact in the nave.

Discussions between 1989 and 1995 took place between the Rector Chori and organ experts. John Norman (the C.F.C.'s advisor), the organ builders N. P. Mander Ltd and Ian Bell, were particularly helpful in clarifying what could or could not be done, once the decision had been taken to preserve (on historical and financial grounds) the Carøe case. A new case had been proposed and drawn by the Architect, Martin Stancliffe, as an alternative to which it had been hoped to add a 'Chair' case to the existing case in emulation of Southwell's eighteenth-century case, but constructional difficulties prevented this. At this point Nicholson of Worcester were invited to tender as their recent work at Portsmouth Cathedral and (with Paul Hale as Consultant) at Birmingham Cathedral suggested that they might have the ability to design and voice a tracker-action organ to fit within our relatively small case.

The Screen Organ scheme was finally taken to the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England in March 23rd 1995. During 1994, plans with Nicholson had been refined and almost finalised, but the cost was still a worrying factor when it became clear that the Appeal would probably not raise the £250,000 needed to augment the Minster's Organ Fund. In December 1994 Paul Hale was told of a fine 1868 Nicholson organ in St Peter's Church, Malvern Wells, which had just been closed. It had just the tone we were after, and so we decided to buy it and use its pipework as the basis of an otherwise new instrument. The Diocese of Worcester kindly arranged for Southwell to purchase the organ (for £2,000). Meanwhile a generous legacy (via the Friends) from the late Charles Cope meant that work could proceed. In March final permission was granted by the Cathedral Council (for a total project cost of £320,000) and then by the C.F.C..

The contract (for £276,600, no VAT being levied) was signed in April 1995 and work immediately began in Nicholson's works at Quest Hills Road, Malvern. At the same time the case was cleaned and repaired, the old organ having been stripped out by voluntary labour, the pipework taken by Wood of Huddersfield for scrap or possible re-use. Some of the 1959 and 1971 ranks duly found their way into other organs. By mid November Nicholsons were ready to erect the organ in the Minster. That work proceeded steadily into the New Year when voicing and regulating began. The instrument was handed over at 4 p.m. on Maundy Thursday, just in time for Assistant Organist Philip Rushforth (who in September 1994 had replaced Peter Wood, Assistant from 1958) to work up Vierne's *Messe Solennelle* for the organ's first appearance, on Easter Day.

Incorporated in the scheme are Copeman Hart digital electronic basses for the two 32ft stops and the 16ft Open Bass (wood). There was no room for these in the case as ranks of pipes, and such had been the success of Copeman Hart's temporary organ, that it was felt worthwhile employing their expertise to produce a satisfactory solution. In the event it proved impossible to find room for a large bass horn, so reflex cabinets were mounted above the stairway on the South side of the Screen and up in the walkways of the most Westerly bays of the North and South Quire triforia. The extreme bass is helped by a large bass horn within the Nave Organ. Built in too is a sophisticated closed-circuit television system with five cameras so that the player can observe a conductor or a procession anywhere in the building. Also incorporated was circuitry allowing much of the Nave Organ to be played from the Screen console, to help with large congregations and processions. All this proved its great worth from that very first Easter Day.

The organ has four manuals and pedals, 51 speaking stops, 60 ranks of pipes and 3,725 pipes. A 66-page illustrated booklet about the Minster's organs is on sale in the Minster Shop.