

## ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, WESTBOURNE

### THE NEW ORGAN FROM THE DESIGNER'S VIEWPOINT

In 1862 a one manual organ by J.W. Walker was installed in the church. Built within a self-contained case, it stood in an open position in the north aisle. Before long, the influence of the Oxford Movement had led to its enlargement and repositioning in a chamber on the south side of the chancel: the better to accompany the new, robed choir. Subsequent rebuilds saw further alterations and enlargements now, paradoxically, with the aim of making the organ more effective for supporting congregational singing in the Nave. The key actions were converted to electric action, but, after several decades of use, they had become worn and noisy, and there were other deep-seated problems within the sound boards.

An all too familiar story - organs built into chambers beside the chancel may give good support to the Choir, but, as the sound is effectively trapped in a separate room, they are rarely effective at leading singing in the Nave.

By the mid-1990s, the Parish had been advised that a further rebuild of the organ was not advisable. Whilst it would have been possible to return the instrument to mechanical reliability, the collection of pipework from differing periods and builders was never going to produce a truly artistic result, and the fundamental problem of the position of the organ could only be solved by a radical approach. These factors lead to the decision that the purchase of a new organ should be considered.

On my first visit to Westbourne, therefore, the main topic of discussion was to agree on a more effective location for the potential new instrument. I first suggested that an organ could be placed in the first bay of the Nave arcade, facing across the church. This would have given the organist a good relationship with the choir, and allowed the new organ to speak directly into the main acoustic space of the building. The proposal initially found some favour, but it was eventually felt that the physical bulk of an organ in this location would be too prominent in this relatively modest sized church and, furthermore, the slightly larger specification which was by then under consideration required more space than was available in the arcade. It was therefore decided that the organ would stand at the head of the south aisle, where the depth of the casework would be less intrusive, and there was more head room. I produced a design for a three tower case with bottom C of the Great Open Diapason in the centre which would make the best use of the available height and, as the aisle is relatively tall, we felt that this position would still produce good projection of sound into the Nave.

The new organ case is made of solid Oak (*Quercus robur*). The timber was obtained from France, where, unlike in this country, oak trees are still commercially managed and harvested, mostly to facilitate the production of wine barrels. The oak has been finished in its natural colour with an oil polish, and the carvings are derived from gothic motifs, some of which are to be found on other items of furniture within the church. The front pipes are of polished high percentage tin.

The console is slightly detached from the organ case, placing the organist within line of sight of the north side of the choir. The key and pedal actions are mechanical, the trackers passing below a raised platform into the organ case, where they connect to the soundboards. The stop action is electric, and a solid state control system provides a full complement of pistons and eight memory levels. The soundboard and pipes of the Great organ are contained in the upper part of the organ case, behind the front pipes, while the Swell organ is placed in the lower section of the case, speaking out through pierced grilles. The Pedal division is sited just within the original chamber, inside a panelled oak screen.

In order to facilitate the accompaniment of the Choir in the Chancel, the Swell box has been fitted with twin sets of shutters, each controlled by its own balanced pedal. The effect of the Swell in the chancel through the East shutters has proved remarkably effective, and the twin shutters also allow some subtle tonal manipulation: the West set giving prominence to the two reed stops, while the East set emphasizes the flue upperwork.

Within the scope of 23 stops we have sought to provide a versatile instrument which can effectively accompany both Choir and Congregation as well as do justice to a wide range of the organ's solo repertoire. The unique tonality of the pipe organ is the Diapason, or Principal tone, and this is represented in choruses on both manuals and on the Pedals. The organ contains several varieties of Flute ranks, including the characterful wooden Stopped Diapason, the more rounded Chimney Flute, as well as tapered pipes in various pitches - the Spitzflute, Flageolet and Larigot, and also wide scale open flutes which make up the French inspired III-rank Cornet. Narrower scaled "string" ranks are included on both Swell and Great divisions, enabling soft accompaniments and the mixing of unison ranks as required for the nineteenth century romantic repertoire and indeed the later music of the twentieth century. A complement of reed stops completes the specification - a bold Trumpet and Trombone on the Great and Pedal respectively, and the colourful Hautboy and Cremona on the Swell.

The organ is tuned in a mild unequal temperament: that of Vallotti. This tuning system produces "purer" chords in the common keys with up to two or three sharps or flats, whilst still being usable in all other keys. It particularly favours the Sesquialtera and Cornet stops, both of which contain a pure-tuned tierce rank.

The organ was made in our Northampton workshop during the spring and summer of 2001 and installed in the church during October and November of that year.

**Kenneth Tickell**

*From the inaugural recital booklet.*