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Front cover: Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Flentrop 2021. (Martin Perkins)
Back cover: St James Episcopal church, Aberdeen : see pp. 84-86. (David Shuker)

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FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the latest edition of the BIOS *Reporter*.

Postgraduate studentship at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

The principal development to report is the establishment of the much-discussed postgraduate studentship at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC), in association with the University of Birmingham. The agreement has now been finalised and signed, clearing the way for recruitment to begin.

This is an important step in supporting postgraduate study and research in organ history and heritage, and in strengthening links between BIOS and the academic community. The studentship will be publicised jointly by the Conservatoire and BIOS through their respective social media channels. I hope that it will attract strong interest and encourage a new generation of researchers in our field.

Membership Recruitment

I have written to more than 100 prospective members, principally organ scholars and students at conservatoires and universities, inviting them to consider joining BIOS. This initiative aims to strengthen our membership and broaden engagement with the next generation of organists and scholars. I would warmly encourage existing members to bring BIOS to the attention of prospective members and to help spread the word about the benefits of joining the Institute.

Grant Aid

An application for grant aid has been submitted to support a two-year extension to the post of Archivist and a pilot project to digitise selected items in the British Organ Archive (BOA). The proposed digital records would link directly to the relevant entries in the National Pipe Organ Register (NPOR).

The application is expected to be considered in November. If successful, the pilot could provide the basis for a more extensive digitisation programme, making the Archive's resources accessible to a wider audience.

Other Developments

Council noted continuing progress in the work of the BOA, alongside developments in the NPOR website and the availability of BIOS publications. I encourage members to make use of the Archive and to explore the resources available to support their own research.

Hope-Jones Scrapbook

The Hope-Jones scrapbook is to be deposited in the BOA, where it will be preserved for future research into the history of organ building. I am grateful to Paul Tindall for securing this interesting addition to the Archive.

Papers of J. W. Walker and R.H. Walker

BIOS has received a relatively small, but fascinating collection of family and historical material relating to the distinguished organ builder Joseph William Walker (J. W. Walker), generously sent by his descendant, Sarah Walker. The collection is destined for the BOA, where it will provide valuable insights into the history of the Walker family and nineteenth-century organ building.

A group comprising Bruce Buchanan, Katie Pardee, Nigel Stark and Elliott Fountain, BOA Archivist, met at my house on 15 October to examine the material. The subsequent deciphering and transcription of the letters was undertaken by Sam Sleath, one of BIOS's newest members. His work has already revealed some exciting discoveries, which he is expected to explore further at the Bernard Edmonds Conference Day at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire on 20 February 2027. Please put the date in your diary!

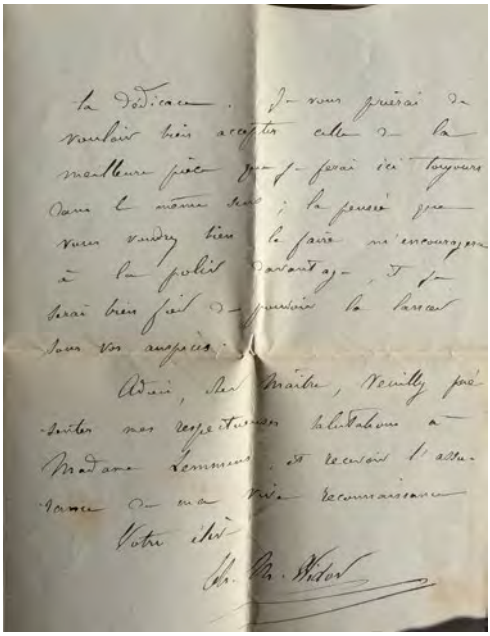
The material contains family recollections and historical notes assembled by Peter Walker, Sairah's father, together with a Walker family tree identifying those who worked in the firm. Peter was the last Walker family member to work for J. W. Walker & Sons. Following his departure around 1960, he established R. H. Walker & Son, continuing the family's organ-building tradition. His papers also reflect his extensive travels in Europe and America, where he studied organ-building techniques and visited fellow builders.

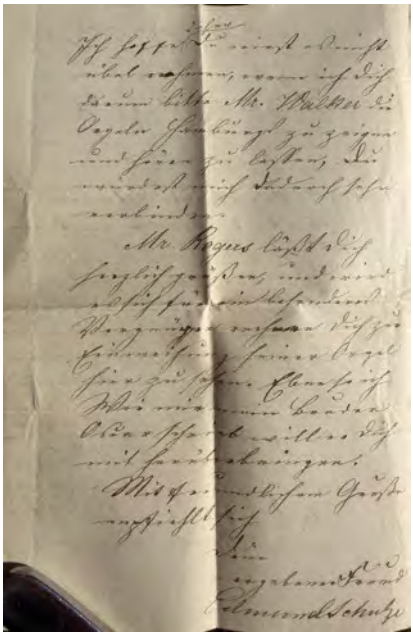
Among the most intriguing discoveries is what appears to be J. W. Walker's personal wallet, containing business cards and a series of letters of introduction to organists and other contacts. These documents illuminate the professional networks that supported his travels and work. An accompanying letter offers practical advice on organs and builders to visit, recommending, among others, the firm of Merklin-Schütze in Brussels, Friedrich Ladegast's contemporary German organ-building milieu, and the celebrated Walcker workshop at Ludwigsburg. The recommendations offer a revealing glimpse of the European organ scene as Walker prepared to travel to Riga in 1861.

Two letters stand out. In October 1861, the celebrated German organ builder Edmund Schulze wrote to the Hamburg organist C. F. Armbrust, explaining that Walker was travelling to Russia to install an organ and wished to inspect German instruments. Schulze asked his friend to show Walker Hamburg's organs and allow him to hear them. The letter provides direct evidence of Schulze's personal support for Walker's professional enquiries.

Even more remarkable is a letter dated 18 September 1865 from the young Charles-Marie Widor, then approximately 21, to his teacher Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (then living in London). Carried by Walker, it describes the successful premiere of Widor's symphonic overture for organ, orchestra and military band at the International Exhibition in Porto. Widor explains that he had taken his teacher's criticism to heart, writing more broadly for the large hall. He also reveals that the King of Portugal had requested the dedication of the work.

These are merely tantalising glimpses of a collection whose full significance is still emerging. Sam Sleath's forthcoming presentation promises to bring further detail to light.





Left: A letter from Widor to Lemmens, taking advantage of J.W.Walker's visit to see him. No date, but approximately October 1861.

Right: A letter of from Edmund Schulze to C.F. Ambrust in Hamburg. Walker wrote to Mr Rogers at Doncaster, asking for some letters of introduction to German organists known to him, so as to have the opportunity to hear and see some German organs. Dated Doncaster, 20 October 1861.

FROM THE SECRETARY

BIOS Council (October 2026)

Council met on Saturday 17 October 2026. 10 members were present.

Council received updates and Reports and from them noted the following

- The aim would be to hold the BIOS AGM 2027 by Video Conferencing on a weekday evening (date to be confirmed)
- The Chair had written to over 100 individuals (mainly Organ Scholars and Universities) inviting them to consider joining BIOS.
- The RCO were in the lead for a reinvigorated *OrganFest* on 23 October 2027 in Birmingham.
- Some material of great interest relating to the Walker organ building firm had been acquired recently and it was hoped there would be a presentation on this at the Bernard Edmonds Conference at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire on 20 February 2027.
- Sales of publications in the year were at a record level, the greatest part being the sale of the *The Tonal Architecture and Music of the English Organ* (William McVicker). The Freeman, Walker and Nicholson books were now all out of stock.
- Income to the NPOR Fund was slightly down with fewer donations from Organist Associations.
- A data refresh form (Gift Aid & GDPR) had been sent to Members
- There would be no BIOS Lunch in the pre-Christmas period this year but possible dates in the Spring would be explored.
- Richard Moore was now in post as Reviews Editor in succession to David Knight.
- Further titles were being considered for publication in the future.
- A complete run of BIOS Reporters would soon be available on the Website
- On the recommendations of the Listing Committee Council approved the listing of 4 organs..
- Significant changes had been made to the NPOR Website in recent months to bring it technically up to date and more user friendly.
- Katelyn Emerson was now in post as Publicity Officer in succession to Christopher Gray.
    - A Report had been received from Elliot Fountain, the BOA Project Archivist and Council was pleased to note the progress that had made since April 2026.

BIOS Council meets next on Saturday 16 January 2027.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

In late November the usual subscription renewal notices will be going out. It is not certain which bank payments arrive as a result of a standing order so if you do have one in operation, be sure not to pay twice! For everyone else, payments are welcomed by card, cheque or bank transfer. All subscriptions are due on 1st January, regardless of when you first joined BIOS and it helps enormously if it is not necessary to send additional reminders. With 2027 subscriptions still unchanged from the figures set thirteen years ago, membership offers remarkably good value for money.

Over the summer a major data refresh exercise was undertaken to update our records, confirming you are willing for us to hold your contact details in our database. It would certainly pose a dilemma for us to operate a membership system without keeping records! There are still several members who have not responded. For now, their continued consent is being assumed, but it would be nice to have positive confirmation and email reminders have been sent out. The data refresh also aimed to update confirmations of Gift Aid status for those who are UK taxpayers and not already using their payment as Gift Aid will be accepted as still valid, but it will be good if that section of Gift Aid will be accepted as still valid, but it will be good if that section of the data refresh form can also be completed. As well as updating these records, we would like to verify if any members are in receipt of complimentary copies of reciprocal publications sent by some of our Institutional partner members. It may be an organisation began sending you such material at a time when you were holder of a BIOS office. If so, an email to the membership address would be appreciated.

It is now possible for you to update your own contact details such as postal and email addresses when logged in to the member area of the website. There is no need to duplicate the fresh information, but if you do edit your details, please drop an email to membership@bios.org.uk to let me know there is changed information so some other systems can be kept in step.

Finally, I will sign off with my name, partly to see how many read this column. It is surprising how many members still begin correspondence to the Membership email box "Dear David..."!

Melanie (Mel.) Plumley

HISTORIC ORGANS LISTING SCHEME

Applications approved for listing, October 2026

Yealand Conyers, St John, Thorold & Smith 1883 II/P 11 S00201
Grade II – An unaltered organ dating from 1883 built in the Jardine style when the firm was in the hands of Thorold and Smith.

Hammersmith, School of the Sacred Heart, Loret c. 1861 II/P 14 S00376
Grade II* - A substantial *orgue-de-choeur* by Hippolyte Loret of Belgium and built for *Les Dames du Sacré Coeur* in Paris. Having been smuggled out of France, the instrument was rebuilt in the chapel of the Convent (now School) of the Sacred Heart in 1904. The organ is almost intact, with the later addition of a Pedal stop, but missing the Trompette. It was originally fully enclosed but at some time the shutters were removed. It is a remarkable survival and the only known organ by Loret in Britain.

Merstham, St Katharine, Harrison & Harrison 1913 II/P 18 D00420
Grade II* - An excellent example of a pre-World War One, Harrison and Harrison organ from 1913 incorporating earlier pipe work and with its action and winding intact.

Treslothan, St John the Evangelist, Alfred Noble 1902 II/P 13 D07634
Grade II – A rare example in West-Cornwall of Noble's output dating from 1902 that survives in original condition, though having been relocated in 1958 from its original home. to its current location by Hele & Co of Plymouth.

Jeffrey Williams

Philip M.G. Wright (1946-2026) died recently, and the paper below is his final publication. He was a native of Aberdeen, and spent his working life at House of Fraser, while pursuing a determined and life-long interest in the organ. He wrote a short but useful monograph on E.H. Lawton in 1971, and contributed thousands of invaluable references to others involved with documenting Scotland's organ-building history. He was also involved practically, for instance with the saving of the splendid Wood, Small & Co. organ of 1820 (now in Monnickendam), moved to St Machar's Cathedral in 1972.

‘Messrs Botcher and Firewood’[1]

Philip Wright

Disparagingly nicknamed by trade competitors, Bewsher & Fleetwood, Organ Builders of Bronte Street, Liverpool built over 100 instruments throughout Lancashire and beyond between 1819 and 1856 when the business was bought by Frederick Davison to become Gray & Davison’s Liverpool branch.
They built both church and chamber instruments - a 1848 printed list by the firm exists in Liverpool Record Office but this mentions only some of their output. Obviously virtually all have been altered, rebuilt or scrapped but one survivor in original condition is the focus of this essay.

William Bewsher was born in 1781 in Crosthwaite, Kendal. His training is unknown, but he may have started building as early as 1815.[2] From 1819 at the earliest John Fleetwood was his partner, until 1843 when he left, working independently for a short time. The dissolution was mutual but not amicable – Newspaper reports allow the reader to learn that whilst Bewsher undertook the building Fleetwood was responsible for the entire tonal output.

In 1825 the firm was invited to build the chamber instrument described here. As seen from the photograph it was a one manual with 7 stops and an octave and half of toe button pedal pull downs within a swell box enclosed by a Spanish mahogany case with pleated silk screening instead of the usual gilt pipes- a pointer perhaps to a refined gentry first owner anxious to preserve his residence’s appearance rather than that of a chapel.[3]

That this organ exists in its original condition bears further scrutiny.

Its 1825 date was confirmed when the Master Organ Builder Sandy Edmonstone rescued it from the Perthshire mansion where it is believed to have arrived c. 1855. Balmyle was the principal residence of the Constable family who were large landowners in Glenardle. They had three talented daughters - the Misses Constable - Agnes a Photographer, Jane an Artist and Mary an Organ player. They never married but were a major feature in the social world of Glenardle - further they were early feminists judging by the photographs of them cycling in 1890…not what chaste gentlewoman did!

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[1] An unknown commentator in *The Organist*, 1866

[2] An advert of 26 March 1819 in the *Liverpool Mercury* by Thomas Greenwood of Leeds comments adversely on Bewsher, and implies that they both had some connection with the building of the Leeds Parish Church organ in 1815. (Ed.)

[3] Bevington also made chamber organs with silk fronts (Ed.)

Constables and their descendants lived at Balmyle until 1982. Where the organ resided for the thirty years prior to Perthshire is yet to be discovered. Moving it may have been one of the first jobs for the Liverpool Branch of Gray & Davison.

Edmonstone overhauled and cleaned the instrument, later (in 1991) installing it in St Nicholas Kirk Aberdeen where the 'Oil Chapel' had been created to mark 25 years of North Sea oil exploration. Regrettably in 2023 in line with the Church of Scotland's church premises review the building was sold off to commercial enterprises. Therefore the Bewsher & Fleetwood chamber organ faced an uncertain future, until a Scots Educationalist became aware of the unique example of these Liverpool builders' work, (taking especial interest in the toe button pedals reminiscent of Snetzler style which he felt should be preserved to enable more research) and funded the transfer to and installation by David Shuker at St James Episcopal Church, Holburn Junction, Aberdeen. The organist Kamil Mikka - a professional musician - is using it regularly.

Manual GG to F enclosed

Open Diapason
Stop Diapason Bass
Stop Diapason Treble
Dulciana
Principal
Fifteenth
Hautboy

Pedal GG to C
Octave and a half pull downs via toe button pedals
Cut-off pedal to withdraw stops above 8ft.
Lever Swell

Finally a comment about an appreciation of their work to counter the 'Botcher and Firewood' nickname: the young W T Best polished his phenomenal technique at their 1838 three manual (30 stops including 5 pedal) at Pembroke Chapel in Liverpool. Furthermore, Best was often invited to play demonstration recitals on completed organs at the Bronte Street workshop for current and potential customers.

Acknowledgments are due for assistance from
Liverpool Record Office - British Newspaper Archive
Mount Blair Archive Glenardle - Dr Albert Bil - Professor David Shuker

At the time of his death Philip Wright was engaged in further research regarding Bewsher and Fleetwood , in collaboration with David Shuker, and David would be pleased to receive further input : info@signofthepipe.com





A secular Compton

Melanie Plumley

Among the aims of BIOS is the promotion of 'objective, scholarly research into the history of the organ and its music in all its aspects.' and for understandable reasons linked to the history of where organs were placed, much of our attention focuses on instruments in churches. The early twentieth century saw a new market for organ builders with theatres showing silent movies looking for cost effective ways to provide both musical accompaniments and special effects. One UK organ builder to exploit the new market was William Hill & Son & Norman & Beard Ltd, taken over in 1923 by John Christie. He chose to attach his own name to instruments for the theatre. Another company was that of John Compton who also realised that with only minor adaptation, it required the same well established organ building skills to build cinema organs. Compton had developed an expertise in creating instruments with large stop counts, derived from relatively few ranks, as illustrated in his 1931 instrument for Downside Abbey with 142 speaking stops coming from just 38 ranks of pipes. Such concepts were already being employed by Wurlitzer and others and lent themselves to the cinema organ where theatres wanted to have the greatest possible effect in the minimum space, at the lowest cost.

The 1930s were a prolific time for Compton, delivering among many others, the BBC Radio Theatre organ and later that decade, Derby Cathedral. In 1932 the newly built Plaza Cinema in Stockport, now part of Greater Manchester, contracted the Compton company to supply a three manual instrument and they engaged the services of Norman Cocker, then organist of Manchester Cathedral, as consultant. The scheme drawn up with 132 stop tabs and a treble/bass divided top manual (Solo) was the first Compton delivered with an illuminated surround and matched the art deco style of the theatre. Sadly, much of the console glass was lost in a mishap with the lift some years ago which also damaged the multicore cable to the electromechanical relay system.

Like many cinemas, changing tastes gave it periods of disuse and operation as a bingo hall, but the organ survived. For reasons that are not clear, a couple of ranks got substituted in the distant past and the organ remained in that playable, but compromised state for several years. In more recent times, a charitable trust took over the building with the aim of restoring it to its former glory in the fullest possible way. That includes equipping it for stage shows as well as screening films and providing stylish catering in the elegant art deco café. The organ survived all these phases of the building and continued to be used in its traditional manner, the console and organist rising into view at appropriate times, but it was prone to intermittent electrical problems caused by the damaged cable. A dedicated team of volunteer restorers, with specialist assistance from Goetze & Gwynn director, Robert Balfour- Rowley, have performed a restoration. The ethos of this fully respects the historic conservation concept embodied in that BIOS aim '…to work for the preservation and, where necessary, the faithful restoration of historic organs in Britain.' The substituted Cello

and Celeste ranks have now been replaced with authentic ranks that match the originals in scale, voicing and timbre. Wednesday 9th September 2026 was the re-opening event with a plaque unveiled by Mark Llewellin DL High Sheriff of Greater Manchester, himself something of a thespian.

Restoration work has been an ongoing project for some time, and the lift that allows console, bench, and player to rise from 'Hades' is once more fully operational with the shattered coloured glass replaced. It might have been tempting to adopt a modern digital transmission system for ease of wiring. Sticking to historic organ conservation principles, using only original type components, the cable from the console to the electro-mechanical relay has been replaced with a new multiway cable of several hundred cores. On 9th September, after a witty speech from Mark Llewellin, Michael Holmes the resident organist, climbed onto the bench, drew himself and the console to maximum elevation and provided an entertaining demonstration of what the organ can do. For one who tends to be very pre-occupied with her own branch of organ music, it was a refreshing afternoon, reminding me of just what a diverse instrument the organ can be and the important contribution people such as John Compton made to 20th century culture. It does none of us any credit to ignore the diversity of our instrument.
https://npor.org.uk/survey/N02488



Thoughts about 'The 'Double Organ': a New Reading of the Development of the Organ in England', by Paul Stubbings

Paul Stubbings's article in *Journal 49* contains numerous new theories and assertions. One of the more surprising (page 126) is his view that the organ now at Stanford-on-Avon originated at the Chapel Royal of Whitehall Palace, an old idea which I had thought now superseded. Stubbings refers us to his doctoral thesis, as follows:[1]

> Note that, although this instrument appears to have spent a short time in Magdalen College Chapel, Oxford, and seems to have been built by the same builder (as explored in John Harper. 'The Dallam Organ in Magdalen College, Oxford.' British Institute of Organ Studies 9 (1985): 51–64), the present study, in embracing Boeringer's exhaustive research in Boeringer, Organa Britannica, I: 266–78 and further weighing up all the available evidence relating to the comings and goings of the organs in Magdalen College, Hampton Court, Tewkesbury Abbey, Stanford-on-Avon and the chapel at Whitehall, establishes that this is an entirely separate organ to the larger Dallam organ referred to at pp. 104ff and elsewhere in this thesis. The larger instrument was built for Magdalen College c. 1631 and now resides, much altered apart from its front case, in Tewkesbury Abbey; the smaller was built around ten years earlier for Whitehall Chapel and now rests, as an entirely empty case, in St Nicholas', Stanford-on-Avon.[2]

The word 'establishes' is here doing a great deal of heavy lifting. Anyone familiar with organ research (and one might hope Mr. Stubbings's supervisor) might well see a red flag at the mention of the name *Boeringer*. Dr Boeringer's research might well be called exhaustive, but the results were also extremely confused, and for the last forty years the opinions and ideas in his book have been regarded with suspicion and treated with great caution. In addition, although Stubbings notes John Harper's article in Journal 9, he appears to ignore his later essay in Organ Yearbook XXIII (1992/93), which provides extensive evidence for the Stanford organ being the chair case from Magdalen College, a position also accepted by Martin Goetze and Dominic Gwynn from their study of the physical remains of the organ. The front pipes have been repitched twice, first by a semitone, a process documented at Magdalen College in 1690. Some of the embossings on the pipes at

[1] Paul Stubbings, *This day the Organs did begin to play at White-hall before the King. The work and influence of Christopher Gibbons (1615-76)*, PhD thesis, Christ Church University, Canterbury 2022, 127, note 335

[2] The case is not in fact 'entirely empty', but contains the soundboard and parts of the action, keyboard and winding.

Tewkesbury and Stanford are of the same design, and exactly the same size.[3] The lilies in the pipe shades are just that, ordinary lilies (as found on the coat of arms and motto of Magdalen College), not *fleur-de-lis*, which Stubbings contends are evidence for the organ's origin connected with Queen Henrietta Maria (who had her own chapel and musical establishment anyway).

Instead Stubbings puts forward a putative organ built for the Chapel at Whitehall c.1620, and supposedly moved to Stanford-on-Avon when an entirely new organ was built by Robert Dallam for Whitehall in 1663. There is absolutely no evidence for this. There was certainly an organ at Whitehall to which a chair organ was added before 1637, but the only organ builder mentioned at this time (in relation to similar work at Hampton Court) was John Burward. It, or part of it may have been retrieved at the Restoration, as in some cathedrals, but there is surely no reason to think that it was moved to Stanford in or about 1663. Francis Smith, architect of Warwick was working in Oxford and also for the Cave family in Stanford in the 1730s, and the alterations to the organ (and the gallery in which it stands) are entirely consistent with that date.

One might also point out that the dummy case at Stanford concealing the player resembles (in an unusual design) not only the former back front at Tewkesbury but also the case now at Winchcombe, which was a chamber organ made by Swarbrick for the Earl of Plymouth at Hewell Grange.[4] The plain, flat arch in each of these cases finds no parallel in the work of other eighteenth-century builders. Hence it is not too much of a leap of faith to believe that Swarbrick divided the old Magdalen organ (when he built a new one in 1737) between Tewkesbury and Stanford.[5]

Paul Tindall

[3] It is a great pity that whatever investigations were made of the Tewkesbury organ in the 1990s have not been analysed and made publicly available.

[4] Avery advertised the Earl of Plymouth's organ in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 24 August 1782 as being the work of Swarbrick, and Sperling (Volume 2, 113), records its original owner and the transfer to Winchcombe.

[5] Swarbrick undoubtedly moved the main Magdalen organ to Tewkesbury. See Nicholas Plumley, *The Organs of Tewkesbury Abbey*, (Much Wenlock, R.J.L. Smith and Associates for the Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey 2008), 7-9

The Organ Handel Envisioned: Reflections from Great Packington

Dr Zsombor Tóth-Vajna

On 1 October 2026 I had the opportunity to play the historic organ of St James's Church, Great Packington, in a recital with the soprano Gabriella Ács entitled *Handel's Voices: Opera, Oratorio and the Organ He Envisioned*. The programme ranged across Handel's operatic and oratorio output, from *Serse*, *Atalanta*, *Radamisto* and *Rinaldo* to *Semele*, *Alexander Balus*, *Samson* and *Jephtha*, with Buxtehude's *Jesus Christus, unser Heiland*, BuxWV 198, as a solo organ interlude. For me as an organist, however, the highlight of the evening was the instrument itself. Playing it as an accompanying instrument, rather than simply exploring it through solo repertoire, provided a rare opportunity to consider what an eighteenth-century English organ of this scale can tell us about the relationship between organ and voice in Handel's musical world.

Handel, Jennens and the Gopsall organ

The historical connection is unusually direct, but the authorship of the instrument is less straightforward than has sometimes been assumed. On 30 September 1749 Handel wrote to Charles Jennens concerning an organ for Jennens's country seat at Gopsall. He recommended Richard Bridge and described an instrument extending from GG to d^3, with Open Diapason, Stopt Diapason, Principal, Twelfth, Fifteenth, Great Tierce and Flute. Handel deliberately omitted reeds, since they were 'continually wanting to be tuned', something he considered particularly inconvenient in the country.[1]

A valuable contemporary piece of evidence complicates the picture. The engineer John Grundy visited Gopsall in 1750 and recorded in his journal that the organ was 'now

[1] George Frideric Handel to Charles Jennens, 30 September 1749, Moldenhauer Archives, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, https://www.loc.gov/resource/music.musmolden-2774/?sp=3 (accessed 10 October 2026).

making by Briggs in London'.[2] Yet an inscription in pencil behind the key-slip reads: 'This organ was made by Thos Parker London'. Thus, while the instrument was evidently understood at Gopsall in 1750 to be in the making in London under a name recorded by Grundy as 'Briggs', the surviving instrument itself carries Parker's name.[3] Rather than resolving the discrepancy, the evidence makes it prudent to distinguish between Handel's recommendation, the contemporary account of the commission, and the physical inscription on the organ. The later history can be traced more securely. After Jennens's death the organ was at Packington Hall from 1773. An inscription records that Michael Woodward of Birmingham repaired it in September 1792 and moved the instrument that year from Packington Hall to Great Packington Church, where it remains.[4] Dominic Gwynn has further suggested that the Great Tierce and Choir Fifteenth were inserted by Woodward. This makes the present specification the product of more than one historical phase rather than a simple, untouched realisation of Handel's 1749 proposal.[5]

There is no documentary evidence that Handel himself played the completed instrument at Gopsall. Its importance therefore lies less in an unverifiable association with Handel as performer than in the unusually close conjunction of his surviving written specification, the contemporary evidence surrounding Jennens's commission, and the physical history of the instrument itself.

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[2] John Grundy, 'A Book of Minutes Taken in a Journey to and for Chester and Liverpool,' Leeds University, Brotherton Library MS Gen. 2 volume 4, 3–25, cited in Paul Tindall, 'Beware of Puffers! Organs, Organists and Organbuilders in Birmingham in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the British Institute of Organ Studies 47* (2023): 97.

[3] On the basis of this evidence, Paul Tindall now considers the attribution to Richard Bridge the most likely, with Parker probably working for him as a journeyman. Private communication with the author, October 2026.

[4] Tindall, 'Beware of Puffers!' 97.

[5] Paul Tindall, 'Beware of Puffers!' 97; nn. 41–42.

An organ for the voice

At the keyboards, historical description very quickly becomes practical experience. Perhaps the most immediately striking characteristic of the organ is its sensitivity to touch. Minute differences in the attack and release of a note, and in the degree of separation between successive notes, have an audible effect upon its speech. The light and direct mechanical action encourages rhetorical playing: articulation, subtle inflection and improvised ornamentation feel less like devices imposed upon the instrument than natural consequences of playing it. For accompanying the voice, the Open and Stopped Diapasons of the Great were perhaps the greatest revelation. Both possess considerable warmth and body, but without obscuring the singer. Their sound supports and envelops the voice while leaving the text and its articulation remarkably clear. This is a rather different experience from accompanying eighteenth-century vocal music on the small portable box organs that have become ubiquitous in modern historically informed performance practice. Their practical virtues are obvious, but their restricted scale and tonal resources can easily reduce the organ's role to that of discreet harmonic support. Great Packington suggests a more substantial relationship between voice and organ. Here the instrument can have real tonal presence while remaining flexible enough to follow the smallest rhetorical gesture of the singer. The remaining Great stops considerably extend this palette. The Principal provides a firmer and more projecting sonority and, in reductions of orchestral material, can produce an almost orchestral sense of presence. The Flute is surprisingly powerful while retaining softness, and the Twelfth and Fifteenth make it possible to increase brilliance and intensity without simply increasing volume. This distinction proved particularly revealing. Dynamic contrast on such an instrument need not be understood primarily as a matter of loud and soft. Registration changes colour, harmonic profile and apparent distance. In Handel's vocal music, where the organ may be asked to suggest or replace elements of an orchestral texture, this becomes an extraordinarily useful resource.

The Choir provides an ideal foil. Its three stops establish a distinctly more intimate tonal plane, which proved particularly effective in recitatives and in piano or echo passages

within the arias. A change of manual can therefore become a rhetorical gesture in itself: not simply a reduction in volume, but a change of perspective.

Bass, touch and space

Equally revealing is the depth of the manual bass. Handel's specification extended down to GG (the typical English 'long-octave compass' of the period), and the resulting bass has an authority difficult to reproduce on a small modern continuo organ. Bass lines acquire weight and direction without becoming ponderous; they can lead the harmony while leaving the upper texture supple. This became especially apparent when playing reductions of Handel's orchestral writing. One begins to understand how an organ of this type can occupy a position somewhere between continuo instrument and miniature orchestra. Its diapason chorus gives it substance, its mutations and upperwork supply colour and definition, while its immediate action permits the flexibility necessary for accompanying a singer.

The organ's present 1/6-comma meantone temperament adds a further dimension to this experience, lending particular colour and direction to harmonic progressions, though it can also present practical challenges in remoter keys – notably E major, a key for which Handel had a particular fondness. Where the temperament makes such repertoire excessively pungent, transposition into a more congenial key can offer a historically and musically persuasive solution, provided that the resulting tessitura remains comfortable for the singer. In this respect I was exceptionally fortunate in working with Gabriella Ács, whose remarkable flexibility allows her to adapt almost immediately to different pitches, temperaments and transpositions.

The acoustic of St James's completes the picture. Its gentle resonance allows the Diapasons and bass to bloom while retaining sufficient clarity for the organ's exceptionally articulate speech. Instrument, repertoire and building consequently seem to reinforce one another.

An instrument with a modern history

Great Packington is also an instructive witness to changing attitudes towards historic organs. In 1957 repairs and a controversial alteration of the tuning were undertaken in connection with E. Power Biggs's plans to record Handel there. An electric blower was also provided. By 1968 serious woodworm damage necessitated a much more extensive restoration by Noel Mander, supported by the Pilgrim Trust. Mander retained the altered pitch, and Biggs gave the reopening recital. The work prompted a lively contemporary debate in *The Times, Musical Opinion, The Musical Times* and *The Diapason*. Seen from the perspective of present-day conservation practice, that episode is itself historically revealing. The desire to make an old instrument playable, recordable and usable alongside modern orchestral instruments could come into conflict with the emerging principle of preserving physical evidence.[6] The instrument we encounter today should therefore not be regarded as an untouched object frozen in 1750. It contains different historical layers, and its twentieth- century history forms part of its identity. Yet a remarkable amount of its eighteenth-century musical character remains perceptible – enough for the instrument to ask some uncomfortable questions of modern performance practice.

Rethinking the continuo organ

For me, this was the most important outcome of the concert. Playing continuo and reductions of Handel's orchestral textures at Great Packington made me reconsider how readily we equate the modern box organ with the eighteenth-century organ as an accompanying instrument. The comparison is not entirely fair: the modern portable organ exists in response to practical conditions very different from those of Jennens's music room. Nevertheless, Great Packington demonstrates what is lost when the organ is reduced to a quiet provider of 8′ and 4′ harmonic support. Here, the warmth of the Diapasons, the

[6] Barbara Owen, *E. Power Biggs: Concert Organist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), discussion of the Great Packington recording project and subsequent restoration; online edition, Indiana University Press, https://publish.iupress.indiana.edu/read/e-power-biggs-concert-organist/section/dc730d96-1961-47b0-b674-8dfed9b41918 (accessed 10 October 2026).

authority of the long-compass bass, the variety of the upperwork and, above all, the extraordinary responsiveness of the action allow the organ to participate actively in the rhetoric of the music. This does not prove that Handel accompanied every aria on an instrument of this size or character. Nor should the Great Packington organ be treated as a universal model for Handelian continuo practice. What it does provide is something rarer: surviving physical evidence closely connected with an organ specification written by Handel himself. Historic instruments are often approached as objects upon which conclusions derived from documentary research can be tested. Great Packington suggests that the process can work in the opposite direction as well. An instrument can itself become a historical source. Its action suggests articulation; its pipework reveals relationships between colour and dynamics; its bass changes the balance of an ensemble; and its physical response can make musical possibilities that appear abstract on paper immediately comprehensible under the fingers. Rarely have I experienced such a close symbiosis between instrument, repertoire and space. The organ did not simply provide an attractive historical sonority for Handel's music: it changed the way I accompanied it.

Perhaps this is ultimately what makes the description 'the organ Handel envisioned' so compelling. Its importance does not depend upon proving that Handel himself once sat at these particular keyboards. Rather, it gives us the considerably rarer opportunity to place our own hands on an instrument closely related to his documented ideas – and to discover how persuasive those ideas remain in sound.





William Jones of Nayland: Ten Church Pieces op. 2.

Editor: David Patrick

Published by Fitzjohn Music and obtainable from **Banks Music**

William Jones was a priest, writer and composer born in 1726 who lived until 1800, whose other works include publications on various aspects of the church, science and music. Like many of his contemporaries, he was a pupil of Pepusch, and also of the Scottish composer James Oswald. These ten pieces date from 1789, when he was a curate at Nayland, Suffolk, and are dedicated to Lady Rushton, whose generosity had assisted in placing a good organ in the church; the title also tells us that they were written for the use of the church in Nayland and published for its benefit. The original title mentions the organ only, and not the harpsichord and/or piano forte, interesting and unusual in an age when the title-page of the great majority of publications of organ voluntaries or pieces also specified these two stringed instruments as alternative options for performance, although the final movement of Piece no. 10 does mention the piano forte as an alternative. The extensive preface, here published in full, gives us some interesting, not to say controversial, thoughts on Haydn's compositional ability! Praised are Stanley and Keeble, but there is no mention of later composers such as Dupuis or the Goodwins. His thoughts on registration are also worthy of careful perusing and show the declining reputation of the cornet, and, more surprisingly, of the trumpet. The original edition also included four church anthems, not included here.

Of the ten pieces, four (nos. 1, 3, 4 and 6) are in only one movement, one and four for the Diapasons, with no. 3 alternating passages for the Diapasons with passages marked Swell (left hand would play on the Choir), sometimes with double notes. No. 6 also alternates passages for the Diapasons with passages for the RH on the Swelling Hautboy against a Soft Bass. Five, nos. 2, 5, 7-9 are in two movements, with the opening movement in each case apart from no. 8 being for the Diapasons; in no. 2 the second movement, marked Not too fast is for the Swell. Although much of the left hand writing falls within the compass of the Swell of the time there are occasional notes which fall below this. No.5 opens with a largo in 3/2, followed by an Andante for Swell with copious dynamic markings. and no.7 opens with an Andante in D minor which finishes in the relative major, the second movement being a largo cantabile for Soft organ alternating with Swell. The left hand writing for the latter interludes falls within the Swell compass. No. 8 is a two-movement prelude and fugue, the opening movement switching between full organ and soft and is followed by a vigorous fugue. No. 9 opens with a Diapason movement, followed by a movement for Bassoon or Vox Humana. The composer's direction for alternative registration is interesting. The final piece is somewhat longer. It opens with a movement in 3/2 which begins in minims, but halfway through quaver passagework marked Soft Organ takes over. The second movement is for Swell, and the final movement described, as Allegro for Organ or Piano Forte, is in mainly two voices, bars 5-8 marked P, followed by F in bar 9. It contains Alberti and murky basses such as would be decried by John Marsh in his Treatise

of ca.1790; indistinguishable from the myriad contemporary lessons and sonatinas for the harpsichord or piano forte, it would, nevertheless, make a good concluding voluntary for a festival. Apart from no. 4 in C minor which has three flats, the key signatures do not exceed two sharps or one flat.

While not such a variety of registrations as in many contemporary publications is called for, the level of compositional ability is high enough to make the pieces interesting and not over-demanding for those aware of the performance practice requirements. The movements for Swell contain detailed dynamic markings, including a rare use of hairpins in no. 3 and 5, which may take some practice to execute cleanly without the "sawing backwards and forwards" lamented by Marsh and the other treatise writers of the 1790s! Articulation marks are used sparingly, but will reward scrutiny. Of great value are the written-out cadenzas, which can act as models for such requirements in the voluntaries of other contemporary composers. That which closes no. 2 has figures below the bass. The editorial introduction contains a critical commentary. These pieces make a further welcome addition to our knowledge of the English repertoire of the late 18th century, particularly of composers active in the provinces.

John Collins

DAVID KINSELA (1941-2026)

David Kinsela, a native of New South Wales, studied both engineering and the organ, and spent five years at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland. He lived in Britain for some years until 1977, and was a founder member of BIOS, He was widely active both as performer and writer, and was a pioneer in promoting accurate restoration of old organs in Australia, serving as a council member of the OHTA for eleven years. He also commissioned a number of new organ works from Australian composers. David's musical interests were wide, from Reubke and Poulenc to early fingerings, of which he was a leading proponent.
A longer obituary may be found in *OHTA News*, Volume 51 No. 3 (September 2026).



Great Packington. Bridge/Thomas Parker 1750.

THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF ORGAN STUDIES

BOOKING FORM

BERNARD EDMONDS RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2026

Saturday 20th February 2027 10:30 for 11:00

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, 200 Jennens Road, Birmingham B3 7XR

There are three ways to reserve a place for the BIOS Day Conference in Birmingham for £35.00 (including lunch):

1. By booking online at https://bios.org.uk/bernard-edmonds-research-conference-2027/
2. By returning the form below to the Meetings Officer by post (addresses at the bottom), accompanied by a cheque made payable to 'BIOS';
3. By returning the form to the Meetings Officer by email and paying by BACS. Account: BIOS; sort code: 52-30-44; ac no: 05097169. Please identify the payment as Birmingham, and highlight option 3 before returning your form.

Please fill out a separate form for each person attending:

Name (inc. title):

Address (inc. post code):

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Please note any dietary requirements

Acknowledgements will be sent by email. If you do not have an email address and require an acknowledgement, please send a SAE with your booking form.

Please return this booking form to:

Richard Hobson, [redacted]

[redacted] Email: meetings@bios.org.uk

CALL FOR PAPERS: BERNARD EDMONDS CONFERENCE, 2027

Proposals for papers are invited for the British Institute of Organ Studies' annual Bernard Edmonds Recent Research Conference to take place on Saturday 20th February 2027 in the Organ Studio at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, 200 Jennens Road, Birmingham B4 7XR.

Proposals should present some recent research into aspects of organ history, including music and performance. A broad range of subjects is encouraged, and papers on organs and organ builders, including British organ-builders working overseas and organs built in Britain by foreign organ-builders, will be welcomed alongside papers more broadly based and those reflecting recent developments and contemporary insight into organs and organ music. Papers about organ repertoire, organ playing and teaching, composers and performers are also encouraged. Papers should be no more than twenty-five minutes in length, and the use of musical and pictorial illustrations is encouraged. The venue has full audio-visual facilities and the organs will be available.

We would especially like to encourage those who have not taken part in the in the conference in the past to consider reading a paper, and some financial assistance towards travel for younger student researchers is available. There are usually 40 plus members present and the informal atmosphere encourages a stimulating exchange of views and genuine discussion.

Proposals will be reviewed by members of BIOS Council and the authors of successful proposals will be notified as soon as possible.

A summary proposal of 200 words, along with a brief biographical note, should be sent by 1st January 2027 to the Meetings Officer, but enquiries are welcome at any time.

Meetings Officer, Richard Hobson, [redacted]

[redacted] email meetings@bios.org.uk



AIMS OF BIOS

To promote objective, scholarly research into the history of the organ and its music in all its aspects, and, in particular, into the organ and its music in Britain.

To conserve the sources and materials for the history of the organ in Britain, and to make them accessible to scholars.

To work for the preservation and, where necessary, the faithful restoration of historic organs in Britain and to encourage their use and appreciation.

To encourage an exchange of scholarship with similar bodies and individuals abroad, and to promote, in Britain, a greater appreciation of historical overseas schools of organ-building.