

St George's, Douglas





Gt: 8,8,4,4,2 2/3,2,III,8 Sw: 8,8,8,4,2,III,16,8,8, Ped: 16,8,4,16.

The present organ (2 manuals and pedals) was installed by Harrison and Harrison of Durham in 2003. It has a modern mechanical action to the manuals and pedals and direct electric stop action and piston action. The usual layout in British organs is to position the pipes of the upper keyboard (the Swell) on the same level as and behind the pipes of the Great (lower keyboard). The design at St George's is unusual, but not unique, in having the Swell section of the instrument sited above the Great. This allows the builders to have as much of the pipework as possible well forward in the case – a feature used to overcome the problem of a deep, narrow chamber. (The same arrangement of Swell and Great may be found at St Olave's, Ramsey and Trinity Methodist Church, Douglas).

The previous instrument was by Jardine, and dated from about 1950. It was rebuilt from an earlier instrument to the requirements of the then organist, Dr George Tootel, who was well-known in his day as a cinema organist. Dr Tootel must undoubtedly have been an accomplished musician. His

doctorate in music was from Durham University, and he was also an FRCO, and the author of a book, *How to play the Cinema Organ* (published by Paxton). But his experience as a cinema organist, together with the total lack of experience of the church's architect of the day, and Jardine's willingness to accommodate the client, resulted in an instrument which was truly remarkable for all the wrong reasons.

In 1865, the east end of the church had been remodelled, removing the old semicircular apse and providing a new chancel, vestry and organ chamber. In April of that year, a new Jardine organ was opened which presumably occupied the whole of the chamber, much as does the present Harrison organ. For the 1950s organ, Dr Tootel requested that this 'old' instrument be rebuilt into a comprehensive 3-manual organ with all the trimmings. The architect reduced the size of the organ chamber, cutting it in half with a concrete floor at the level of the present gallery and providing a metal grille for the egress of sound. Jardine's (who by then built cinema

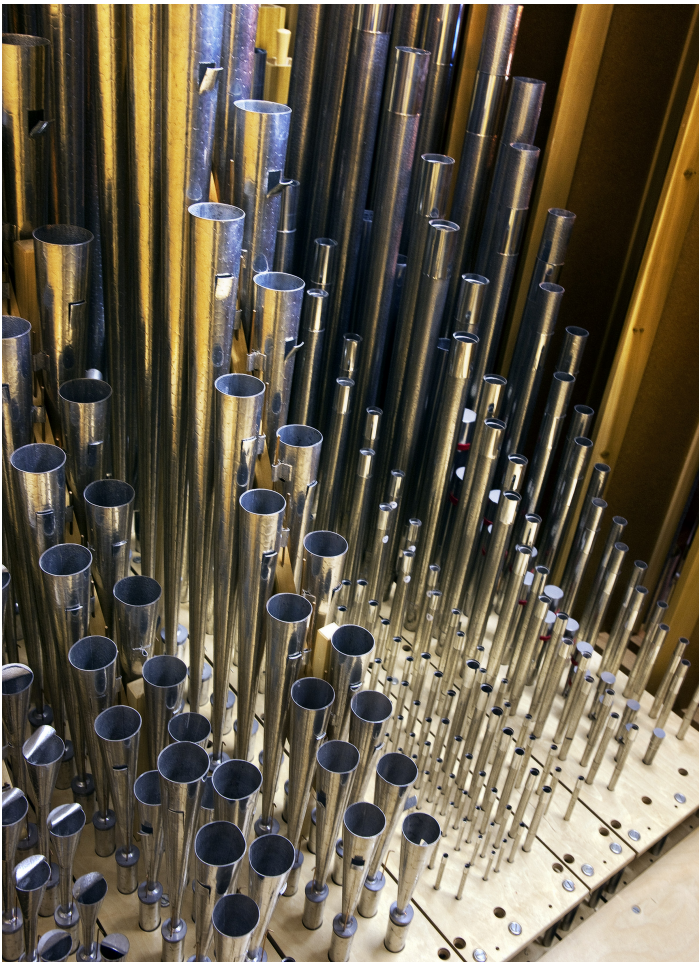


organs as well as church organs, and were thus adept at squeezing much pipework and mechanism into a small space) obliged. The result was a neatly packaged mountain of mechanism and pipework which was difficult to maintain or hear, and therefore doomed as a musical instrument.

The 1950s Jardine had its console slotted neatly away under the concrete floor of the chamber, where the player could see and hear very little. The builders provided a typical cinema organ console (with the usual 'horseshoe'-shaped arrangement of stop tabs) in a dignified stained oak finish complete with roll top. Behind the console was a largely empty room, which became used, inevitably, as a junk store. It contained the enormous blower, and also a most useful feature – a tiny door (which, though now sealed up, can still be seen from the outside). This door was said to be used by Dr Tootel to make an unobtrusive exit from

the church before the last hymn on Sunday evenings, so that he could fulfil his commitments at the Picture House Cinema in Strand Street (the façade of which building is still preserved above modern shops).

Above the concrete floor, behind the totally inadequate grille, the mechanism, manual and pedal pipes of the organ were compressed into a tall, narrow, deep space with little opening into the church. The third manual (the Choir) and the Great both spoke into the solid masonry wall which had originally been the east wall of the building. Around 3 feet thick, this wall allowed no sound whatever into the church. The Swell pipework was housed in a room close to the present east end, from which its sound emerged through the few swell shutters which could be accommodated into one end. The large pedal pipes were buried on the back wall, behind everything else, and



coloured timber make a stark contrast to the old instrument. The mirror-finish display pipes are of tin.

The idea that the previous organ had some connection with Handel has often been mentioned, but this is unlikely. The 1950s Jardine incorporated parts of an older instrument, but the size of the soundboards and type of mechanism have nothing to do with the kind of organ which Handel would have known. It is just possible that one or two sets of pipes from a 'Handel' organ might have been present amongst the rest, but Peter Jones, as the last organ builder to maintain the instrument, thought this very doubtful.

To hear the previous Jardine organ being played, shortly before its removal, paste the link at the bottom of the page into your browser.

were little heard. Maintenance was difficult or impossible, due to lack of space. Out in the church, the organ had a smooth, dark sound, at its softest inaudible, at its loudest a muffled roar. It is an unhappy truth that mistakes such as this have been made many times in the past, and continue to be made in the present day, most of the blame often lying with the architect.

The pipework of the old organ, and parts of the console, were removed by Peter Jones just prior to the new organ's installation. The concrete floor was taken out and the new instrument, which is much smaller than its predecessor, but has much more impact in the building, now occupies all the space available, with a large opening for the sound behind its oak case. Its modern mechanical action, gleaming metal pipework, wooden pipes and components in polished, light-

