

# Malvern Priory Organ Rebuild

## **Organ History**

*This section is taken mainly from 'History of Organs at Malvern Priory', an excellent booklet written in 1979 by Richard Dacey, the Priory organist from 1977 to 1980. This booklet, although out of print, contains fascinating details and specifications of all Priory organs for the past 200 years.*

The first record of an organ occurs in an inventory of 1551 which listed 'a Peyre of Organyes' (pair of organs), the phrase used in those days to denote a single instrument. It would probably have stood upon a screen at the entrance of the choir. Towards the end of the 18th century, a gallery was erected at the west end of the church for the "psalm singers". In 1817/18 the church bought an organ by the English builder Samuel Green, which is thought to have come from the Concert Room in The Opera House, Covent Garden, where it had been installed in 1794. This was subsequently sold in 1850 to the United Methodist Church at Dudley Port, Birmingham, and replaced by a new two manual instrument from Nicholson's of Worcester.

In 1861, during the restoration of the building by Sir Gilbert Scott, this instrument was moved from the west end to a gallery position under the south arch of the central tower, the position of the present organ. A third manual (Choir) was added at this time, and in 1880 a fourth manual (Solo). The gallery was then removed and the console placed at floor level. With the addition of lever pneumatic action, the organ was now 'an imposing instrument', but its great size required three men to operate the bellows! By 1904 the organ was in serious need of repair, but work had to be postponed because of the First World War.

Dr Louis Hamand FSA (organist 1910-1945) was responsible for the specification and also raising nearly £6,000 for the four manual organ. This was built by Rushworth and Dreaper Ltd in 1927. A portion of the existing pipework, mostly from the organs of 1861 and 1880, was incorporated in an otherwise entirely new instrument. The oak case, which was added in 1932, was designed by Mr W D Caroe, the Priory architect. It was made by Messrs Haughton Brothers of Worcester from wood grown in Malvern Chase.

The organ loft (i.e. the oak screen around the organ console) was erected in 1961 in memory of Dr Hamand, who not only master-minded the specification and fund-raising for the 1927 organ, but also meticulously supervised the storage of the Priory's mediaeval glass during the Second World War.

In 1977 a complete overhaul was undertaken by Rushworth and Dreaper Ltd, the builders.

## **Why was the organ rebuilt?**

Although the organ was regularly maintained, it had deteriorated considerably its reliability became unacceptably poor.

An April 2000 report by Nicholson and Co., who maintained the organ, concluded that 'it is in a very poor state and we are having difficulty containing the situation'.

Several major problems were identified:

- The complex and unusually cramped internal layout made maintenance difficult, since much dismantling of the organ was required for access. Indeed, some parts could not be reached, either for tuning or for maintenance and repair.

- The pipes operated at unusually high wind pressure, resulting in continual wind leaks in both wooden trunking and leatherwork. The need for frequent repairs was very costly, while those leaks that could not be repaired caused a highly disturbing level of background noise.

- Many ranks of pipes were so located that their sound was not effectively projected into the church.
- Maintenance of the pneumatic action, which included extensive lead piping, was expensive and difficult.
- The pneumatic action resulted in a significant delay between key action and note production, and gave a far from ideal response for the organist.

### ***The Rebuilding***

Following discussions with the organ consultant, Adrian Lucas (Organist and Master of the Choristers at Worcester Cathedral), and with various organ manufacturers, the Priory PCC adopted the following, which was considered to be an achievable, cost-effective and long-term solution which best met the musical requirements of all the Priory's activities.

- The organ was completely rebuilt, the current pneumatic action being replaced with an electro-pneumatic action incorporating the latest developments in construction techniques and long-lasting materials.
- The new organ is similar in size to the previous organ.
- Nearly all the pipes from the previous organ were retained and were refurbished.
- A new blower system was constructed to remove the noise problems associated with the previous arrangement.
- The internal layout of the organ was completely redesigned with two principal objectives – to improve the access for tuning and maintenance, and to ensure that the sounds generated by all sections of the organ are more effectively projected into the church.
- The new action is now far more controllable and responsive.
- The existing magnificent oak case of the organ was retained and cleaned and waxed.

### ***The Cost***

The cost of the rebuilding was about £380,000.

The Contract was awarded to Nicholson & Co., the world-renowned Malvern firm of organ builders. They had a long history of making fine organs and an unequalled reputation for the quality of their work including examples include Portsmouth and Gloucester Cathedrals, and Christchurch Priory. The Priory project was the first to be completed in their new, extensive factory near Malvern.

## ***The Inaugural Recital***

**THOMAS TROTTER**

16 October, 2004

Bach Fantasia & Fugue in G minor BWV 542

Flagler *Variations on an Old American Air*

Locklair *Rubrics*

Widor *Allegro vivace (from Symphony No 5)*

Mathias *Toccata Giocosa*

Elgar *Vesper Voluntaries*

Wagner *Overture: Rienzi* arr. E H Lemare

### **Inside organ before rebuilding**



