The Church of St John the Evangelist, Ranmoor, Sheffield

The Organ

The First Organ - 1877

The first church of St John's, Ranmoor was built in 1877 to the design of architect EM Gibbs in the Early English Style. This church had a new organ by Brindlay and Foster. The church was built amongst the mansions of the steel barons for a very select congregation. On Sunday 2nd January, 1887 before the morning service, the verger returned to find the organ screen on fire. Unfortunately, the fire soon spread to the roof. The tower and spire were the only parts of the building to survive the flames. It transpired later that a beam of wood in the organ chamber was too near a ventilation brick in the chimney flue and had caught fire. There are no details in the church archives about this Brindley and Foster organ.

The Second Organ – 1888

20 months after the fire, on September 9th 1888, a new and grander church was completed and opened for worship, with a new Brindley and Foster organ.

Great Organ	
Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Claribel	8
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Mixture 12-15	II
Posaune	8

Swell Organ	
Bourdon	16
Geigen Principal	8
Echo Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Unda Maris	8
Geigen Principal	4
Mixture 12-15	II
Horn	8
Oboe	8

Pedal Organ	
Major Bass	16
Bourdon	16
Flute Bass	8
Octave	8
Bombardon	16

Choir Organ	
Dulciana (TC)	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Concert Flute	4
Piccolo	2
Clarinet (TC)	8

It is known that this organ was built with ventil chests and tubular-pneumatic action. (Each pipe would have had its own pallet). The console was underneath the North Chancel casework.

The 1900 Rebuild

In 1900 the organ was enlarged, by the original builders, Brindley and Foster, in the fashion of the time, with its wealth of string and imitative reeds stops in the orchestral tradition. A new chancel case was made to incorporate the basses of the pedal Violone and great Open Diapasons.

Great Organ	
Bourdon	16
Open Diapason 1 *	8
Open Diapason 2	8
Dolce *	8
Claribel	8
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Mixture 12-15	II
Mixture 17-19-22 *	III
Posaune	8
Clarion*	4

Swell Organ	
Bourdon	16
Geigen Principal	8
Echo Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Unda Maris	8
Geigen Principal	4
Mixture 12-15	II
Mixture 19-22-26 *	III
Cor Anglais *	16
Horn	8
Oboe	8
Vox Humana *	8

Pedal Organ	
Sub Bass*	32
Major Bass	16
Violone *	16
Bourdon	16
Quint *	10 ⅔
Flute Bass	8
Octave	8
Bombardon	16

Choir organ	
Viola *	8
Salicional *	8
Viole de gambe *	8
Viole Céleste *	8
Dulciana	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Concert flute	4
Piccolo	2
Clarinet	8

* denotes new stops

In 1911 an Orchestral Oboe was added to the choir and an extra 12 pipes were added to the Sub bass to make it sound at 16ft pitch. There were 9 coupler draw-stops, 9 composition pistons and 15 coupler and composition pedals. In 1927, all the bellows motors were renewed (3000 in number!) and a new pedal-board added.

The 1963 Rebuild

Fortunately, the organ remained in a relatively good state till the 1950's when mechanical problems became evident and the instrument was due for a major overhaul.

There were quotations from Walker, Harrison and Nicholson for a full rebuild, including new slider soundboards with electro-pneumatic action and some tonal modifications to improve the instrument's impact. One of the more radical ideas put forward included a small division in the Triforium (for which there would have been very little space available!).

The contract was awarded to Nicholson on Norman Barnes' recommendation. It had been suggested that an entirely new instrument be installed, but the funds for this were not available. Therefore, on a budget of £10,000, a comprehensive scheme for renovation was undertaken using as much as possible from the old Brindley. The tonal revisions included new swell reeds at 16ft and 4ft, mutations on the choir, a more independent pedal division and a Tuba/Ophicleide rank.

Electro-pneumatic action was applied, and a modern combination action.

A new console, of "sumptuous appearance" was installed at the back of the south choir stalls, raised on a platform with the organist facing south.

The Current Console – Nicholson adapted by Wells

It was commented that it was a "pity that funds did not allow for the opening out of the organ and a more spacious disposition of the sections of the instrument". For this the church had to wait until 1997 and the David Wells rebuild.

Nicholson 1963

Great Organ	
Bourdon	16
Open Diapason 1	8
Open Diapason 2	8
Claribel	8
Octave *	4
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Twelfth	2⅔
Fifteenth	2
Mixture 19-22-26 *	III
Posaune	8
Clarion	4

Swell Organ	
Geigen Principal	8
Echo Diapason	8
Unda Maris	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Geigen Principal	4
Koppel Flute *	4
Twelfth	2⅔
Fifteenth	2
Mixture 19-22-26 *	III
Double Trumpet *	16
Horn	8
Oboe	8
Clarion *	4

Pedal Organ	
Sub Bass	32
Major Bass	16
Violone	16
Sub Bass	16
Bourdon	16
Salicional *	16
Octave Wood *	8
Principal	8
Flute Bass	8
Quintade*	4
Fifteenth	4
Mixture 12-19-22-26 *	IV
Ophicleide *	16
Trombone	16
Tuba	8

Choir Organ	
Contra Salicional *	16
Viola	8
Viole de Gambe	8
Viole Céleste	8
Salicional	8
Dulciana	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Salicet *	4
Concert flute	4
Nazard *	2⅔
Piccolo	2
Tierce *	1 3/5
Orchestral Oboe	8
Clarinet	8
Tuba *	8

* indicates new stops

6 pistons to each division, adjustable by mini-switchboard behind music desk. Usual complement of couplers etc.

The 1997 Rebuild

The organ gave good service to the church over many years and proved to be reliable. In the early 1990's, some 30 years after the rebuild, some minor problems began to occur in the action. Some notes didn't work, others ciphered from time to time: the stop machines had noisy air-leaks. The inside of the organ chamber needed cleaning after the accumulation of many years' dust and dirt.

Mr John Norman, an adviser with many years' experience, was appointed consultant to the PCC and submitted a thorough report on the organ. Several firms of organ builders were called in to report on the condition of the organ and a possible future scheme of work. One of the most important factors in the present scheme of work was the desire to make sure the organ was fully equipped to serve future needs, especially in supporting the long-established choral tradition at St John's. Just as important was the organ's role in supporting all the needs in worship, including giving an effective lead in hymns and other congregational music.

The acoustics of the church do not help the sound of the organ to travel down the nave and this problem was compounded by the fact that the north aisle case was completely blocked by the swell box to the pipes of the choir organ. It was felt by the consultant, all the organ-builders and Director of Music that the logical course of action was to remove this box and open out the whole organ chamber to enable all sections to travel down the building to best effect.

Therefore, the design of the choir organ, with the expression box removed, was altered to include a Diapason Chorus to support congregational singing. Other alterations included relocation of the Tuba/Ophicleide rank above the great organ with higher wind-pressure, the addition of 12 pipes to form a 32ft Contra Trombone (full length to low F#), a new expression box for the orchestral reeds and new chests for the pedal upper work at the top of the chamber. Careful regulation has greatly improved both the tone of individual stops and the ensemble.

David Wells 1997

Great Organ	
Bourdon	16
Open Diapason 1	8
Open Diapason 2	8
Claribel	8
Octave	4
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Twelfth	2⅔
Fifteenth	2
Mixture 19-22-26	III
Posaune	8
Clarion	4

Swell Organ	
Geigen Principal	8
Viole de Gambe+	8
Viole Céleste+	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Geigen Principal	4
Koppel Flute	4
Sesquialtera 12-17*	II
Fifteenth	2
Mixture 19-22-26	III
Double Trumpet	16
Horn	8
Oboe	8
Clarion	4

Pedal Organ	
Sub Bass	32
Major Bass	16
Violone	16
Sub Bass	16
Bourdon	16
Salicional	16
Octave Wood	8
Principal*	8
Flute Bass	8
Fifteenth*	4
Mixture *19-22-26-29	IV
Contra Trombone*	32
Ophicleide	16
Trombone	16
Tuba	8

Choir Organ	
Contra Salicional	16
Open Diapason*	8
Salicional	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Principal*	4
Concert flute	4
Nazard	2⅔
Fifteenth*	2
Piccolo	2
Tierce	1 3/5
Mixture* 19-22-26	III-IV
Posaune(Gt)	8
Orchestral Oboe (Enc)	8
Clarinet (Enc)	8
Tuba	8

* indicates new stops/pipes
+ indicates transferred to swell (from choir)
16 Divisional Memory Levels (8 pistons to each Department)
96 General Memory Levels (8 pistons to each Level)
on 4 channels giving a total of 3232 settable pistons.

Recent Work

The organ settled down well following the work by David Wells, and is considered one of the finest instruments in the area.

However, there was a small amount of work left out of the contract in 1997. The leatherwork on the manual under-action machines and wind chests on all manuals was old and in need of renewal. This work was carried out in 2007, and the action is now much more reliable.

The Specifications of the Organs of St John's Church Ranmoor – a Comparison

* denotes new stop; + denotes transferred from choir

Brindley & Foster 1888		Brindley & Foster 1900		Nicholson 1963		David Wells 1997	
Great Organ		**Great Organ**		**Great Organ**		**Great Organ**	
				Bourdon	16	Bourdon	16
Bourdon	16	Bourdon	16	Open Diapason 1	8	Open Diapason 1	8
		Open Diapason 1*	8	Open Diapason 2	8	Open Diapason 2	8
Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason 2	8	Claribel	8	Claribel	8
		Dolce *	8	Octave*	4	Octave	4
Claribel	8	Claribel	8	Principal	4	Principal	4
Principal	4	Principal	4	Harmonic Flute	4	Harmonic Flute	4
Harmonic Flute	4	Harmonic Flute	4	Twelfth	2⅔	Twelfth	2⅔
Mixture 12-15	II	Mixture 12-15	II	Fifteenth	2	Fifteenth	2
		Mixture 17-19-22 *	III	Mixture 19-22-26*	III	Mixture 19-22-26	III
Posaune	8	Posaune	8	Posaune	8	Posaune	8
		Clarion *	4	Clarion	4	Clarion	4
Swell Organ		**Swell Organ**		**Swell Organ**		**Swell Organ**	
Bourdon	16	Bourdon	16				
Geigen Principal	8	Geigen Principal	8	Geigen Principal	8	Geigen Principal	8
Echo Diapason	8	Echo Diapason	8	Echo Diapason	8	Viole de Gambe +	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Viole Céleste +	8
Unda Maris	8	Unda Maris	8	Unda Maris	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Geigen Principal	4	Geigen Principal	4	Geigen Principal	4	Geigen Principal	4
Mixture 12-15	II			Koppel Flute *	4	Koppel Flute	4
		Mixture 12-15	II	Twelfth	2⅔	Sesquialtera 12-17 *	II
				Fifteenth	2	Fifteenth	2
Horn	8	Mixture 19-22-26 *	III	Mixture 19-22-26 *	III	Mixture 19-22-26	III
Oboe	8	Cor Anglais *	16	Double Trumpet *	16	Double Trumpet	16
		Horn	8	Horn	8	Horn	8
		Oboe	8	Oboe	8	Oboe	8
		Vox Humana *	8	Clarion *	4	Clarion	4
Pedal Organ		**Pedal Organ**		**Pedal Organ**		**Pedal Organ**	
		Sub Bass *	32	Sub Bass	32	Sub Bass	32
		Major Bass	16	Major Bass	16	Major Bass	16
Major Bass	16	Violone *	16	Violone	16	Violone	16
Bourdon	16			Sub Bass	16	Sub Bass	16
		Bourdon	16	Bourdon	16	Bourdon	16
		Quint *	10⅔	Salicional *	16	Salicional	16
Flute Bass	8			Octave Wood *	8	Octave Wood	8
Octave	8			Principal	8	Principal *	8
Bombardon	16	Flute Bass	8	Flute Bass	8	Flute Bass	8
		Octave	8	Quintade *	4	Fifteenth *	4
				Fifteenth	4	Mixture 19-22-26-29 *	IV
				Mixture 12-19-22-26*	IV	***Contra Trombone **	***32***
				Ophicleide *	16	Ophicleide	16
		Bombardon	16	Trombone	16	Trombone	16
				Tuba	8	Tuba	8
Choir Organ		**Choir organ**		**Choir Organ**		**Choir Organ**	
				Contra Salicional *	16	Contra Salicional	16
		Viola *	8	Viola	8	Open Diapason *	8
		Salicional *	8	Salicional	8	Salicional	8
		Viole de Gambe *	8	Viole de Gambe	8		
		Viole Céleste *	8	Viole Céleste	8		
Dulciana (TC)	8	Dulciana	8	Dulciana	8		
Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8
				Salicet *	4	Principal *	4
Concert Flute	4	Concert flute	4	Concert flute	4	Concert flute	4
				Nazard *	2⅔	Nazard	2⅔
Piccolo	2					Fifteenth *	2
		Piccolo	2	Piccolo	2	Piccolo	2
				Tierce *	1 3/5	Tierce	1 3/5
						Mixture 19-22-26 *	III-IV
						Posaune(Gt)	8
				Orchestral Oboe	8	Orchestral Oboe	8
Clarinet (TC)	**8**	Clarinet	8	Clarinet	8	Clarinet	8
				Tuba *	8	Tuba	8
		9 coupler draw-stops, 9 composition pistons 15 coupler & composition pedals.		6 pistons to each division		8 pistons to each division 8 General pistons 4 x 96 level memory. 8 Sw & 8 Ped/Gt toe pistons	

A Report on the Organ from 1971 - Mr William Sumner

The eminent organ historian Mr William Sumner visited the church in 1971 and wrote the following report, which provides an interesting account of the History of the Organ in St John's and the voicing ideas that prevailed at that time. The report is quoted in full:

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"The church stands attractively in its own garden in one of Sheffield's best suburbs. Pevsner says that it is 'opulent outside and inside, in the Early English style'. Within it is large and lofty and it has comfortable acoustics; indeed, one would have expected a longer reverberation period.

The original organ, built in the new church in 1887, was regarded as one of the finest Sheffield organs as well as an outstanding example of the work of its builders. The church soon built up a reputation for the quality of its music. The organ was housed in an undistinguished Gothic case on the North side of the chancel. Its general effect was good but it was soon apparent that there was much stifling and absorption of the tone before it escaped from the organ case.

The old Brindley organ had many of the German characteristics found in the work of the firm towards the end of the nineteenth century. Pipes, mechanism and even workmen were imported. In the organ of about forty speaking stops there were two mixtures on each of the great and swell organs. The whole instrument reminded one of a Walcker organ of about the same period, both in its ensemble effects and the tones of the individual stops such as the reeds, the Geigen principal 8ft, the Dolce, Violone, Strings and Flutes. It does not seem possible to say whether the pipework was imported, or made by Germans working in England.

Another Teutonic feature was the 'blind' combination action. The thumb and pedal pistons did not move the stops, which were made of china or pot and were large and clumsy; another piston had to be employed to cancel the effect of the one previously used and so restore the Registration to the state represented by the stops drawn. The whole system was affected by pressure-pneumatics. Of course, hand-registration, as the Germans would say, could be prepared or re-arranged when the pistons rendered the stops inoperable, and could be brought into operation when the piston, which cancelled the ventil pistons, was pressed. These registration 'helps', as they were

optimistically called, were a part of the late Romantic German Organ and have since disappeared.

The organ has been rebuilt by the firm of Nicholson, under the direction of Mr Stanley Lambert, himself an excellent performer and improviser. Large Nicholson organs, of first-rate quality are to be found, particularly in the West Midlands, around Birmingham, Malvern and Worcester. There is a fine rebuild by the firm of an old Walcker organ, at the Central Hall, Birmingham. At Ranmoor, money was not forthcoming to start afresh, and Mr Lambert has done marvelously in using everything that was worthy in the old Brindley.

Electro-pneumatic action has been applied, and there is now a modern combination action. The console, of sumptuous appearance, is at the back of the south choir stalls, and is raised on a platform with the organist facing south. It is inviting and comfortable to play. It is a pity that funds did not allow for the opening out of the organ and a more spacious disposition of the sections of the instrument.

Cleaning and some revoicing have brought great freshness to the tone of the Brindley pipes. On both great and swell there is now only one mixture each, and a better build up has been ensured by providing separate Twelfth and Fifteenth. The Cor Anglais and Vox Humana of the former swell organ have been replaced by Double Trumpet and Clarion, with improved chorus effect. The new Koppel Flute is a stop of great character and beauty. The choir organ has been increased by five stops; two mutations, a Tuba with good and not overwhelming trumpet tone, and an extension to the Salicional at 4ft and 16ft. This, also playable on the pedals, gives a quiet, pleasant definition to the bass. The choir organ is really a solo organ, capable of producing a multitude of distinctive tones.

The pedal organ has been increased from nine to sixteen stops. The old Bombardon has been tamed, regulated and become a satisfactory Trombone. The Ophicleide, extended from the choir Tuba, is more penetrating and powerful. The Quintade 4ft, is a useful quiet stop with a prominent twelfth in its tonal composition. The flue work builds up smoothly through the mixtures to the reeds. The whole instrument is a good example of a general purpose organ obtained by an enlightened rebuild of a romantic organ."