

A Brief History of the Hill Organ

The Organ

The church's first musical instrument was a harmonium, but Thomas Peacey was keen to see an organ installed as soon as the debt for the first portion of the building was cleared and the firm of William Hill and Sons was approached in May 1894. As one of the pre-eminent firms of the time, Hills had in 1890 provided the largest pipe-organ in the world for Sydney Town Hall, NSW. Not surpassed in size for over 40 years, this instrument remains one of the greatest organs from any period.

The first surviving correspondence is dated 9 May 1894 after Peacey visited the Hill factory in London to discuss the specification of the new instrument. In the letter, Hills propose building a portion of the permanent organ for which the parish would pay rent – in effect an HP agreement. The company secretary mentions that “Mr Hill knows your beautiful church very well and attends its services when at Brighton”.

In a letter of 16 May, the firm produced a specification for “such an instrument as would, without being too large, be suited to the church, and of sufficient calibre to fill it adequately when the building is completed”. It was to stand in the north aisle until the church was completed.

The scheme was for a sizeable three-manual instrument, perhaps some ten stops smaller than the eventual realisation. Hill's price for the completed organ was £1400 net (“built in the finest and most scientific manner throughout.”) whilst the initial portion was to cost £785. On 24 May a specification was sent with cost of each stop included; it is from this that we know the price of ranks installed that year, of which are included:

Harmonic Flute	£30	Hohl Flute	£35
Salcional	£35	Horn	£40.

A letter on 28 May proposed a payment scheme – £350 on completion and then four equal payments at intervals of six months, bearing interest at 5% (“unusual and highly advantageous terms”), the organ to be ready in four months. The company also asked for tracings of Pearson's plans of the building for measurements.



The arrival of the Kinetic blower in 1904 – after more than a century of constant service, it is still in use today

was regarded as one of great importance. Hills advertised it as “one of the finest organs in the south of England and suited to the magnificent church in which it stands”. However, the finished appearance of the instrument was not as we see it today. The interior of the organ and its workings were in full view for the first ten years of its life; the

On 22 June, a lengthy letter from the firm suggested substantial additions for the final specification of the organ as being requisite, as “the organ chamber is of such fine dimensions, and the arches looking into chancel and transept so lofty, that 16 feet metal open pipes will be required to fill them”. It is in this letter that the 32' Open is first mentioned in lieu of a stopped 32', “for there is ample height in the chamber”. The first section of the organ was used on All Saints' Day 1894 and stood in the first archway down from the north transept.

Peacey turned his attention to completing the eastern end of the building in the following years and it was not until early 1904 that the order was placed to complete the organ and move it to its proper chamber. Later that year, Hills removed the instrument to their factory in London and during its absence loaned the church a two-manual organ which stood in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. Installation of the completed organ started in September 1904.

The instrument was dedicated on Saturday 4 March 1905 by the Archdeacon of Lewes and a recital given by Mr (later Sir) Walter Alcock, Mus. Bac., Organist and Composer to His Majesty's Chapels Royal. The cost for the completion was £1900, bringing the total sum to around £3000 and, from the very beginning, the organ

only casework, if it can be so called, comprised two towers of 16' pipes (five on each side) on the two fronts, that of the Great 16' Open in the chancel and the Choir 16' Gamba in the transept. It was not until 1914 that the magnificent carved cases, to the designs of Frank Loughborough Pearson, son of the original architect, were ordered from Luscombes of Exeter to clothe the instrument; a donation was given for this as a thank-offering by Adam Mortimer Singer on the occasion of his marriage to Aline Madeleine Pillavoine.

Owing to the outbreak of the Great War, the cases together with the choir stalls and screens were not erected until 1915, when they were dedicated by the Bishop of Sheffield who had until a few months previously been Vicar of Hove and Bishop of Lewes. The double casework, on the chancel and transept, form, perhaps, one of the most beautiful organ cases in the United Kingdom and are internationally famous. No other cases display 16' fronts of such magnificence in rich 'spotted' metal. The extraordinary fact about them is that only twenty pipes actually *speak* – all the other 207 pipes are *dummies*. The other 2453 speaking pipes are hidden behind these beautiful fronts.



The status of the instrument as one of only two in Sussex to be listed by the British Institute of Organ Studies as being of international importance is perhaps for two reasons:

- its place as a very large Hill organ that has never been altered,
- its outstanding qualities as musical instrument, perfectly fitted to the great church in which its voice is heard.

Its survival, unaltered, owes everything to its first two custodians, Frank Butler and A.V. (Geoff) Reynolds (1933-1974). At a time when fashions in organ-building were changing, the integrity of the instrument was preserved by those who recognised its worth.

It has been my privilege to hold the post of Organist and Musical Director since 1980 and to oversee the instrument's restoration by the firm of N. P. Mander and Son in 1987.

Michael Maine, 2008



Organ Specification

GREAT ORGAN

1	Double Open Diapason	<i>m</i>	16
2	Open Diapason I	<i>m</i>	8
3	Open Diapason II	<i>m</i>	8
4	Open Diapason III	<i>m</i>	8
5	Hohl Flute	<i>w</i>	8
6	Stopped Diapason	<i>w</i>	8
7	Principal	<i>m</i>	4
8	Harmonic Flute	<i>m</i>	4
9	Twelfth	<i>m</i>	2 $\frac{2}{3}$
10	Fifteenth	<i>m</i>	2
11	Mixture	<i>m</i>	4 rks
12	Double Trumpet	<i>m</i>	16
13	Posaune	<i>m</i>	8
14	Clarion	<i>m</i>	4

SWELL ORGAN

1	Bourdon	<i>w</i>	16
2	Open Diapason	<i>m</i>	8
3	Rohr Flute	<i>w & m</i>	8
4	Echo Gamba	<i>m</i>	8
5	Voix Celestes (B ^b)	<i>m</i>	8
6	Principal	<i>m</i>	4
7	Wald Flute	<i>w</i>	4
8	Fifteenth	<i>m</i>	2
9	Mixture	<i>m</i>	4 rks
10	Contra Fagotto	<i>m</i>	16
11	Horn	<i>m</i>	8
12	Oboe	<i>m</i>	8
13	Clarion	<i>m</i>	4
	Tremulant		

CHOIR ORGAN

	<i>unenclosed</i>		
1	Contra Gamba	<i>m</i>	16
2	Salcional	<i>m</i>	8
3	Lieblich Flute	<i>w & m</i>	8
4	Gemshorn (tapered)	<i>m</i>	4
5	Flautina	<i>m</i>	2
6	Tuba	<i>m</i>	8
	<i>enclosed</i>		
7	Dulciana	<i>m</i>	8
8	Vox Angelica	<i>m</i>	8
9	Suabe Flute	<i>w</i>	4
10	Clarinet	<i>m</i>	8
11	Orchestral Oboe (B ^b)	<i>m</i>	8
12	Vox Humana	<i>m</i>	8
	Tremulant		

PEDAL ORGAN

1	Double Open Diapason	<i>w</i>	32
2	Open Diapason W	<i>w</i>	16
3	Open Diapason M	<i>m</i>	16
4	Violone (Ch)	<i>m</i>	16
5	Bourdon	<i>w</i>	16
6	Principal	<i>m</i>	8
7	Bass Flute	<i>w</i>	8
8	Trombone	<i>w & m</i>	16
9	Trumpet	<i>m</i>	8

COUPLERS

1	Great to Pedal	6	Swell to Choir
2	Swell to Pedal	7	Swell Sub Octave
3	Choir to Pedal	8	Swell Unison Off
4	Swell to Great	9	Swell Octave
5	Choir to Great	10	Great Pistons to Pedal

ACCESSORIES

5	Thumb Pistons to Great	One Poppet Pedal
4	Thumb Pistons to Swell	(Great to Pedal)
3	Thumb Pistons to Choir	Two Balanced
5	Pedal Pistons to Pedal	Swell Pedals
4	Pedal Pistons to Swell	Adjustable Stool

Pneumatic Action, with Mechanical Manual to Pedal Couplers – 1905 Kinetic Blower

COMPASS Manuals : CC to A (58 notes) Pedals : CCC to F (30 notes)

WILLIAM HILL AND SON, LONDON – 1905

