

A PERFECT STORM



**FORSTER AND ANDREWS
ORGAN BUILDERS 1843-1956
& THE ORGAN AT ST. PAUL'S, CLAPHAM OLD TOWN,
LONDON, SW4, IN CONTEXT.**



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[ORGANIST: ST. PAUL'S, CLAPHAM]

**(MAIN SOURCES: "FORSTER & ANDREWS ORGAN BUILDERS", LAURENCE
ELVIN, 1968 & "THE ORGAN IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, CLAPHAM", NICHOLAS
THISTLETHWAITE, JUNE, 2014)**



1. Introduction - Following the Money – Beginnings

Introduction

Both Messrs. Forster and Andrews were “parlour” apprentices¹ at the London organ builder JC Bishop in the 1830s. They set up their own business in partnership in 1843 and chose to locate in Hull, the birthplace of James Forster.

The explosion of industrial and economic growth in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and beyond, brought with it a building boom in the cities, an exponentially rising population and a proliferation of new established and non-conformist churches. Economic and urban development increased the wealth of many provincial cities, added to which there came an embedded sense of municipal pride, charity and community. Kingston-Upon-Hull was an excellent choice for the new business, not just because of Forster’s local connection and the fact it fitted perfectly the template of a thriving provincial city, but because it was a burgeoning port at the centre of British imports of raw materials, particularly wood. In 1843 Hull had been connected to the railway network (via Leeds) for just three years. By 1850 it was the fourth largest port in England.

Economic development, provincial independence and money were all implicated in the flourishing of the organ-building industry in Britain during the Victorian age. This phenomenon is not unusual. It is no surprise that an expensive luxury, such as a pipe organ, would appeal to wealthy municipalities, churches and others at times of “boom” but be less attractive in times of “bust”. The “golden age” of organ building in so many countries across the world ties-in more or less exactly with economic and political dominance. This is true of Spain in the 16th century, the Hanseatic Cities, northern Germany and Holland in the 17th century, France between 1650 and 1750 (and again a century later) and more recently, the USA followed closely by the concert halls and universities of Japan and South Korea in the 1980s and 1990s.

National “Schools”

Historically, the music written for and played on these “national instruments” was distinctive. The instrument informs the repertoire, whilst in turn, the intended function of the instrument informs what is built. Many organists in Britain will quietly confess to finding the organ music of *Couperin* and *De Grigny* incomprehensible when played on a British church or concert hall organ. Even some historically and musically informed performances today can sound odd and unconvincing. However, hear a *plein jeu* or *recit de tierce en taille* on a classical French instrument and, even to an old cynic like me, it is as if the Word of God is being broadcast through the agency of the organ pipes. Globalisation has tarnished many of these national characteristics. Perhaps an accessible analogy is with motor cars. Until about 1980 it was possible to identify a French, Italian, British or American car by its look. Now, one Ka is very much like another.

¹ This was the era of “*Oliver Twist*”, but whereas Dickens’s hero relied on inherited wealth and privilege to make good in the end, Messrs. Forster & Andrews had nothing but their own wits and skill on which to build.

Northern Powerhouse

The point is that Messrs. Forster and Andrews² established their business in Hull at the very start of the British Imperial boom. Their instruments are the epitome of British organ building in its own “Golden Age” and span the entire period of British economic power. The instruments were designed for particular functions and encouraged the development of a new national organ repertoire. It is poignant that the company finally went bust in 1956. Suez!

They were not alone, naturally. Names such as *Hill, Willis, Gray & Davison, Bishop, Binns, Rushworth & Dreaper, Brindley & Foster, Norman & Beard* and several others will be all too familiar to organ aficionados. However, it is undeniable that Forster and Andrews contributed magnificently as part of what we might now call a “Northern Powerhouse” of Victorian organ building. It is not a coincidence that all this was at the time of the similarly explosive growth of the railways. Before 1840 the majority of people barely left their own towns and villages. Commerce was constricted accordingly. The railway did not eradicate travel and communication problems, but it certainly opened up fresh possibilities and opportunities³. Laurence Elvin quotes directional instructions from the Forster and Andrews order books:

“Briercliffe Church – train to Burnley ... across the fields two miles”. “Fletching – four miles by trap, send to the Landlord of the Griffin Inn to meet same at station”.

These instructions illustrate that many challenges still prevailed, but the chance of getting from Hull to Burnley without a railway, to build, or even tune an organ would have been limited, even if, after the railway came, the prospect of a two mile walk across the fields would have been quite demoralising. Reaching the Surrey village of Clapham must have been a comparative doddle. Along with the railway came improvements in shipping which the Hull-based firm took advantage of from its base. This explains its success in the provision of dozens of overseas instruments. These would have been constructed in Hull and shipped Ikea-like for reassembling in far-flung corners of the world. The organ for the Congregational Church in Sydney, Australia took 100 days to reach its destination.

Distribution

Over the course of 113 years Forster and Andrews built or rebuilt 1,378 instruments. There is almost a perfect symmetry about these numbers. Most were in Britain, but not all. They provided instruments for places as far afield as Durban, Penang, Sydney, Newfoundland and the Punjab – and Wales. They did churches, chapels, basilicas, town halls, secular concert venues and private homes. They are particularly well represented in Scotland, Ireland and, unsurprisingly, Yorkshire (209 instruments). However, they also pop up in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Naples.

² A complete history of the firm might be derived from microfilm held at the Hull History Centre which collates a large quantity of commissions, orders, pricelists, press-cuttings, scrap books and specifications. Nothing in the indexes refers to St. Paul's, Clapham. The microfilm has, as yet, not been examined.

³ Some social historians maintain that the impact of the railways was as significant as the internet.

Clapham, Surrey.

So how does it come about that Forster and Andrews are handsomely represented in Rectory Grove, Clapham, SW4? Twenty-nine “London” instruments are to be found in the company’s books⁴. Most appear to have been commissioned between about 1870 and 1900. However, if one looks at the list for *Surrey* there you will find “**S. Paul’s Church Clapham**” alongside St. Stephen’s and the Wesleyan Chapel also in Clapham. I offer the following possibility. Towards the end of the 1870s James Forster spent increasing amounts of time on the business development and sales side of the firm. He was much travelled as a result. Tiring of Hull (who wouldn’t?), he relocated to Upper Norwood in or about 1880. It will be remembered that he had been an apprentice in London 40 years earlier and can have been no stranger to the capital. The firm had a branch office in London. It must be probable that at or about this time James Forster was drumming up business in and around London and St. Paul’s is likely to have fallen into his clutches as a result. It is not too much of a flight of fancy to imagine James Forster, the provincial, Victorian gentleman of business, being driven around in his carriage and pair visiting London rectories, portfolio in hand, busily undercutting his metropolitan competitors – let’s imagine, much to their chagrin⁵. This reflected the perfect marriage of commerce, art and craftsmanship that is the hallmark of the Forster and Andrews brand. It is of note that in 1877 the firm provided (at a cost of £900) a large 3 manual instrument for the Royal Normal School for the Blind in Upper Norwood⁶.



2. A typical Forster and Andrews church organ

It is dangerous to talk about a “typical” church organ. Any organist will tell you that no two are the same. Nonetheless, comparisons can be instructive. In 1889, St. Ambrose, Westbourne, Bournemouth commissioned a Forster and Andrews organ for £400.00⁷. It is noted of this instrument⁸ that it is “*A typical example of a two manual instrument ... a considerable number of which were built between 1870 and 1900*”. The specification (stop list) of the organ is provided in the tender and is as follows:

⁴ “London’s” boundaries (including Middlesex) were not the same then as now. There are several instruments listed in Kent & Essex that would now fall to be considered as being in Greater London. The same is true of Surrey.

⁵ When he died in 1886, James Forster’s estate was valued at a fiver less than £15,000 – a considerable fortune in those days.

⁶ This instrument has been retrieved from mothballs and is being translated to the Malton Wesley Centre (a preaching chapel dating from 1811 (like St. Paul’s)) from its interim home at St. Mary’s, Hailsham, East Sussex.

⁷ It is impossible to translate this exactly into the modern value of money – indexes of inflation vary so radically. However, it is unlikely that such a project would be less than £250,000 today. Alfred Hollins in his autobiography *A Blind Musician Looks Back* recalls being paid £1 (“a new sovereign”) as a 17 year old to demonstrate an organ bound for Demerara in the F&A factory. Using the same inflation index, that would be equivalent to £625.00 today. PCCs should take note!

⁸ Laurence Elvin: page 53.

Great Organ: Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason
Dulciana
Principal
Flute
Fifteenth
Clarinet

Swell Organ: Open Diapason
Flute
Salicional
Voix Celeste
Gemshorn
Piccolo
Cornopean
Oboe

Pedal Organ: Bourdon & Open Diapason 16'

One does not need to know what these stop names mean to realise immediately that this “typical” example is very close to what was commissioned for St. Paul’s at or about the same time. Clapham was able to afford a few enhancements. The Great Organ at St. Paul’s had, in addition, a *Gamba* (a string-sounding stop) and a *Clarionet* (as distinct from the more “polite” Clarinet). The Swell organ enjoys a three rank *Mixture* to add extra sparkle to the chorus. When first installed it also had a 16’ Lieblich Bourdon on the Swell. I venture to suggest that these additions would have cost an additional £75.00 or thereabouts. Those were the days.

Quality and Value for Money

A great number of instruments of similar size were built by Forster and Andrews for churches of all denominations the world over. The hey-day was between 1870 and 1900 during which the firm averaged up to 25 instruments a year and enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity. It is to this period (1881) that the organ at St. Paul’s belongs. On the page they look modest and limited. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are instruments of immense power and versatility. Obviously, when the stop list is compared with some cathedral and concert hall “monsters”, the absence of *Trompettes Militaire; Tubas* and *Bombardes* may seem a little disappointing. Such a conclusion would be unfair, ill-informed and indeed unmusical.

Laurence Elvin writes⁹: “*Their small organs were notable for their sense of ‘bigness’ giving the impression of much greater resources. The main diapason was of a big scale giving generous output ... Full and round in tone and of great nobility ... the full Great combines dignity and drive with scintillating brilliance ... The whole has a clarity and cohesion which we would do well to copy today when clarity so often means hardness and shriek*”. In other words, they were, and are, modest instruments packing a big punch.

This summary of conclusions about the tonal quality of the instruments partly explains why the firm was so successful. The purpose of the instruments in churches was to accompany congregations and choirs (separately and together) as well as to present repertoire as voluntaries and in recital. Another factor explaining the firm’s success was their determination to offer value for money (essential in and around Yorkshire) whilst maintaining the highest attainable standards of craftsmanship and raw materials.

⁹ Page 34.

A combination of liturgical function and popular taste in the latter part of the nineteenth century (not just in Britain) led to an emphasis on foundation tone – the classic and basic “organ sound”. This meant that Stop lists focused on rich, broad and clear Diapason and Principal choruses of pipes at lengths of 16’ (on larger instruments), 8’ and 4’. “Upper work” was to enlighten and inform the foundation; not to overpower and dominate it. Every Stop spoke with authority and every Stop counted. This, and the search for value for money, illustrates why on a “typical” organ of the late nineteenth century in Britain, mutations, cornets and a multiplicity of mixture stops are not, as a rule, to be found. “*Hardness and shriek*” re-emerged after World War II during the *Orgelbewegung* (Organ Reform Movement) as builders strived to produce neo-baroque instruments in a search for historical authenticity. Some even attempted to add neo-baroque elements to Victorian instruments. The result was invariably more “Neo” than “Baroque”. This trend has moderated in recent years but there remain pockets of *shriek* to be found in new instruments capable of making the listener’s ears bleed.

The tonal fashion, enthusiastically adopted by Forster and Andrews, and many others, had an influence on the composition of organ music (or perhaps it was the other way around) well into the twentieth century. Composers of church music such as Samuel Sebastian Wesley, Henry Smart, John Hopkins and later, C.V. Stanford and Hubert Parry (to name but a handful), wrote organ music and choral accompaniments perfectly suited to the “typical” parish organ of their time. St. Paul’s Forster and Andrews instrument is a paradigmatic example. That is not to say the instrument is unsuited to other styles and genres. There is not much from the organ repertoire it cannot handle convincingly¹⁰. The *presentation* of the organ at St. Paul’s – that is to say, the look of the console – conforms to Forster and Andrews’ style of the late nineteenth century and has been handsomely restored as part of the 2019 rebuild.

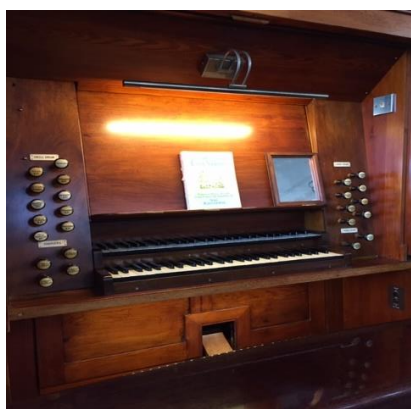
Liturgical function

In the middle of the nineteenth century, three liturgical factors also helped to boost the demand for pipe organs of the type produced by Forster and Andrews. First there was the proliferation of new, urban non-conformist chapels in which forthright congregational hymn and metrical psalm singing performed a fundamental role. Secondly, at about the same time as Forster and Andrews was founded, Anglican liturgy was partly realigned and reinvigorated around the “High Church” Oxford Movement. This brought with it (amongst other things) a demand for more formal, robed parish choirs. Organs were needed to accompany such choirs as well as the congregations. In turn, this explains why so many British church organs were to be found in chambers adjacent to the chancel in order for both instrument and player to be close at hand. Earlier church organs had more often than not appeared in a gallery. The same realignment also informed the architectural style of new Anglican churches. Out went the eighteenth century, low church “parson” and with him his chapel-like building, and in came Victorian gothic, vestments, music and mystery. Thirdly, in the long aftermath of the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, Pope Pius IX, in 1850, re-established the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England. All of them wanted organs.

¹⁰ The capabilities of the organist are quite another matter.



Classic Forster and Andrews Stop jamb. Larger organs later had the Stops arranged on angled jambs to allow the player easier access. This side is the Swell & Couplers for the organ at St. Paul's.



A view of the whole console at St. Paul's. The balanced or "rolling" expression pedal, (Swell Pedal), can be seen bottom centre. The mirror through which the organist has to follow the service is perched at the right end of the music desk. The pre-set combination pedals (to the Great) are below and to the right of the Swell pedal.

Social Context

The firm should also be seen in a wider social context. From a standing start in 1843 it ultimately grew to employ 120 men by the turn of the twentieth century. An appreciable proportion of the employees came from a cohort with their own family connections. Fathers, sons, uncles, nephews and cousins worked together. The firm's regular works outings, celebration dinners and other sundry shenanigans were frequently reported in the local press in and around Hull. The firm clearly enjoyed a prestigious standing in the local commercial and social community and looked after its valued staff. Both partners were well respected locally, nationally and internationally and secured unsolicited testimonials from many leading church musicians and recitalists from Britain and the Continent. All this contributed to an atmosphere of commercial, financial and artistic stability; another precondition of success. Perhaps the only surprise is that nobody appears to have been able to source any portrait photographs of either of the founders.

The workforce was entirely male (with the possible exception of some secretarial support). Organ world was largely a man's world – but not entirely. On the 8th April 1852 James Forster gave an illustrated lecture in the Grand Saloon at the Hull Mechanics Institute costing 6d. but gentlemen could bring "*Two Ladies free*". The following year the firm received a commission to build an organ in Scarborough with the provision that "*the touch be light, suitable for a lady*".



3. Smaller Toys & Bigger Beasts

Apart from “typical” parish instruments, Forster and Andrews designed, built and supplied instruments on a much larger and a much smaller scale.

Smaller Toys

Up until about 1860 there was a fashion for Barrel Organs. These were intended for the church and, occasionally, the parlour. They were supplied with rolls on which were imprinted a selection of hymn and song accompaniments. They were the Victorian precursors of today’s digital hymn-playing machines (12 hymn tunes per roll¹¹) or an mp3 download for those churches without an organ or an organist. Forster and Andrews provided their fair share of these monstrosities¹², but they fell out of fashion, as much as anything because neighbourly competition between a growing number of churches encouraged the commissioning of “proper” organs with which to show off¹³. These barrel organs were housed within organ cases mimicking the appearance of a real church organ, but without a keyboard. The instrument was played by means of turning a handle much as one would with a street organ which would engage the roll which would play the selected tune. *Gray & Davison* colourfully called theirs “Grinder Organs” and hundreds were supplied to churches in the fifty years from about 1810.

In 1849, Owersby Church in Lincolnshire, commissioned from Forster and Andrews (for £70.00) a one keyboard and pedals “proper” organ that incorporated a barrel organ capable of playing 10 tunes. No doubt the barrel organ was intended to cover those embarrassing occasions when the organist overslept. At Longnor in 1852 the barrel organ was incorporated into what is described as a “finger” organ (with an octave of pedals nonetheless).

Wondrous Machines

The inventiveness of the Victorians is legendary. Many inventions which enjoyed a promising start never made it any further.¹⁴ The pedal piano (an ordinary piano with an organ pedal board attached) enjoyed a short sparkle of success in the mid nineteenth century. Robert Schumann and Charles Alkan were virtuosi on this bizarre instrument and wrote music especially for it. This music is seldom heard these days except occasionally on the organ. Another fabulous Victorian concoction was the “Flageolet”. Indeed, a Flageolet was the first instrument constructed by Forster and Andrews in 1843-44. This device was to be played with one hand whilst the other hand played the piano¹⁵. Small wonder they never caught on. Another expensive *bon-bon*, this time for the parlour, was the Cabinet Organ - think 1950s radiogram or early television sets. For

¹¹ Extra rolls could be bought for psalms and voluntaries.

¹² Cost: £15-£35.

¹³ *Forster and Andrews: Their Barrel, Chamber and Small Church Organs.* (Laurence Elvin). “Small” church organs in this context means organs of only up to half a dozen stops.

¹⁴ The “Sinclair C5s” of their day.

¹⁵ The instructions are silent as to which hand should play which instrument.

about £95 you could buy such a piece of mahogany furniture as a display of wealth to display to your jealous neighbours; but in this instance you had to be able to play (or pretend that you could). Unlike barrel organs and the pianola, they did not play themselves. Each would have a single keyboard, up to 5 stops, often with a trumpet solo available in the upper octaves. Quite what your jealous neighbours would think of a trumpet blasting into the upper middle-class streets of Hull in the late 1840s has to be left to the imagination. A Mr. Reinherdt, a founder member of the Hull Vocal Society and prominent Hull music lover, purchased just such an instrument from Forster and Andrews¹⁶ in 1845.

There was nothing particularly new about cabinet organs. Visit any Dutch stately home and you are likely to discover a miniature 17th or 18th century organ masquerading as a chest of drawers, wardrobe or china cabinet only to be unmasked by a showy tour guide to gasps of (often feigned) delight on the part of the visitors. One should not imagine that cabinet organs have entirely fallen out of fashion, although they have largely disappeared from the parlour. Even in the Victorian age they were largely supplanted by the ubiquitous harmonium. It is increasingly common today to find that churches and orchestras are the proud owners of small *continuo* instruments (without pedals) for the accompaniment of choirs or string ensembles. The business of their design and construction is booming. As they are expected to be played standing up it is just as well they are without a pedal keyboard.

I have discovered nothing to suggest that Forster and Andrews built musical clocks or automatons of the sort fashionable in the latter part of the eighteenth century and for which Hayden and Mozart wrote extensively.

Bigger Beasts

Away from the common or garden variety of parish church organ, as the firm's reputation burgeoned, it became responsible for instruments on a more heroic scale for concert halls, municipalities and large, collegiate churches. In addition to the 4 manual instrument at All Soul's, Halifax (1868), larger 3 manual organs were provided for the Corn Exchange, Kilmarnock (1871), Wednesbury Town Hall (1872) and Arbroath Public Hall (1874) amongst many others. In the early twentieth century, Forster and Andrews provided instruments for the King's Hall and Queen's Hall both in Hull. The firm's crowning glory of municipal instruments was the secular organ in Hull City Hall in 1911 - the largest instrument they ever built: 125 stops, 4 manuals and all at a cost of £4,892.00.

The Hull City Hall instrument was not without its critics. The inclusion of a *celesta*, *tubular bells* and *iron bars*, designed to replicate the sound of thunderstorms and rolling seas, did not meet with universal adulation from the purists. This is a shame and unworthy of the critics. Musical and other "toys" have been associated with organs for centuries. The tinkling *Zimbelstern* has featured since before the days of *Couperin* in

¹⁶ Job No.2.

eighteenth century France and is still frequently encountered¹⁷, and the French organs of their “Golden Century” often had rising and setting suns and twirling stars and moons above the organ case, operated by levers at the organist’s disposal. What is a *Tremulant* if not just a “toy”? Without such or similar baubles, how else is one to perform the incomparably jaw-dropping “*A Church Service Interrupted By A Thunderstorm*”?¹⁸

In order to finance the cost of the organ, the city of Hull had to borrow the money from the Local Government Board. This resulted in a public enquiry. Can you imagine such a thing in this day and age? It provoked support and outraged opposition in equal proportions such as we might recognise as being generated by HS2. All this just a century ago.

Audiences & Congregations

This is no place for a long discussion about Town and Public Hall, secular organs. Suffice it to say that they were responsible for bringing music of many forms and genres (including monumental orchestral transcriptions¹⁹) to a general public with limited access to or experience of classical music. Municipal concerts given by the likes of Edwin Lemare, Alfred Hollins and W.T. Best attracted huge audiences all over the country, as did inaugural concerts for new church organs – audiences were sometimes measured in thousands. Indeed, right up to the outbreak of World War II, Percy Whitlock’s Sunday afternoon Promenade Concerts at the Bournemouth Pavilion regularly attracted a capacity audience of 2,000. In comparison, moving forward to 2020, Sunday afternoon Promenade Concerts at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, regularly attract audiences of only 30 in a Viennese baroque space that sits 2,500²⁰. At Lancaster’s Ashton Hall the rebuilt Norman and Beard organ (1909) with its “*tweeting birdsong*” stop now only draws an audience that can be counted on the fingers of one hand. It’s a long way to go to play to four people eating sandwiches. However, at the height of the demand for municipal organs (1850-1910) Forster and Andrews’ municipal instruments were up there with the best.

In 1859, two thousand people are reported to have attended the opening of the Forster and Andrews organ at Clowes’ Chapel in Hull. In one instance, in 1860, special excursion trains were laid on from all over Yorkshire to populate a similar event at Cottingham Parish Church outside Hull²¹. In other cases, there are reports of large crowds gathering in church graveyards “*for want of room*” in the church at an official opening (for example, Christ Church, New Mill in 1857).

¹⁷ There is one for sale on *Ebay* I discovered in the course of my researches – perhaps St. Paul’s would be interested?

¹⁸ Clegg: 1909.

¹⁹ From Bach Cantatas and Handel Oratorios to Mahler symphonies.

²⁰ The virtuoso Municipal Organist, as a creature, is still very much alive and well. For example, Thomas Trotter at Birmingham Town Hall and Gordon Stewart at Huddersfield Town Hall (Kirklees) still attract good audiences for weekly, lunchtime recitals in their respective municipalities.

²¹ A large 3 manual instrument costing £760.00 described by a witness as “*...if not the grandest, then one of the grandest church organs in England*”.

As for larger church instruments, in addition to All Soul's Halifax, Forster and Andrews rebuilt the already 200 year old, historic Father Smith instrument at the Temple Church (1882) and provided a large instrument for the City Temple at Holborn Circus. Both were pulverised in the Blitz²². The conservative character of the restoration at the Temple Church instrument was said to be: "*as regards mechanical perfection or beauty of tone ... one of the very best in Europe*".²³

Technical Developments

It will come as no surprise that, as the nineteenth century unfolded, the technology in the field of organ building also improved and, to some extent, globalised. These improvements included the development of mechanical and ultimately electrical equipment and facilities to enable the organs to be powered and played more efficiently (at least in theory). However, more importantly, such developments incorporated changes in the design and build of the instruments. Until the 1830s English²⁴ organs were mostly comparatively small, two-manual instruments (occasionally three) without pedals or with an octave of pedals permanently attached to the keyboards. There was an absence of any uniformity or generally applicable standard of design. As early as about 1820 an organ with a pedal keyboard had been built by JC Bishop at St. James's, Bermondsey, but the builder had conveniently provided a separate keyboard from which the pedal Stops could be played by the hand of a second player to cover the predictable possibility that an English organist might not be able to play with his feet²⁵. It is surely likely that both Messrs. Forster and Andrews would have been acquainted with this organ during their youthful apprenticeships with Bishops in the 1830s. Another feature of English instruments (although not uniquely so) was that one keyboard would often only be half a keyboard. The Stops would only play on the top 2½ or 3 octaves. This was for solo sounds (reeds and cornets) and this manual would just as often be called the "Solo" or "Echo" as the "Swell" (into which it developed). Restored (but updated) instruments of this character can still be found close at hand in London at St. Botolph's, Aldgate and Christ Church Spitalfields²⁶. There are vestiges of this old tradition at St. Paul's. The Clarionet (Great) and the Voix Celestes (Swell) extend down the keyboards only to tenor C. In the case of the Clarionet this means it is possible to play on one keyboard and produce different sounds in left and right hand – a split keyboard.

By the early nineteenth century, English congregations had tired of the endless stream of trumpet and cornet voluntaries by Stanley, Boyce, Greene and their ilk. English organs could not convincingly cope with the works of JS Bach²⁷ or much of the rest of the continental repertoire, neither were they ideally configured for congregational and choir accompaniment. Then, along came Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn's popularity as a performer on the organ was at its height between 1840 and his death in 1847. His

²² By the same token, in 1942, RAF bombing destroyed the historic *Marienkirche* in Lubeck (Buxtehude's church) and along with it, the historic organs and medieval music library.

²³ Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley

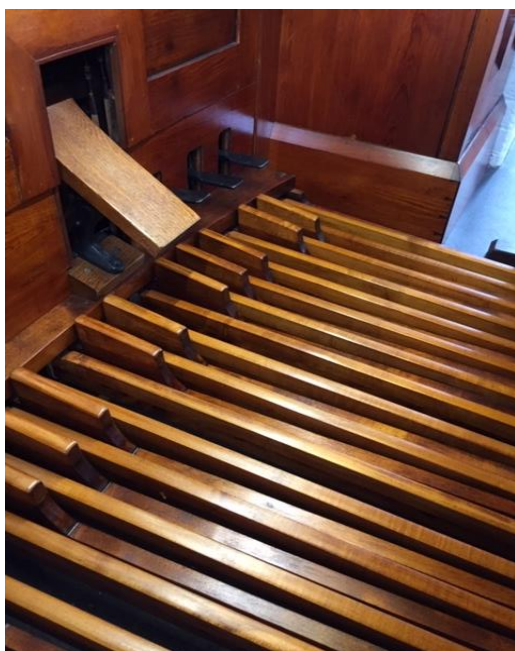
²⁴ By which they then meant "British".

²⁵ This instrument is still there and very much in restored, working order.

²⁶ In its day (1735) the biggest organ in England.

²⁷ Long forgotten and virtually unknown at the time.

patrons included Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (to whom he gave organ lessons). So it was that by the 1840s the fashion in Britain was for the provision of “*German Pedals*” – that is an independent pedal keyboard of (usually) 30 notes with full length pedals in the shape of the naturals, sharps and flats to found on the manuals. There are early entries in the Forster and Andrews’ order books of instruments that do not have such pedal boards despite some pull-down and short compass pedal units being described as “German”; but by the 1850s what we now regard as a full pedal keyboard of 30 German pedals had become so commonplace and so routinely expected as a given, that special reference to “German” anything in the order books is omitted. In other words, they caught on very quickly²⁸.



A closer view of the “German Pedals” at St. Paul’s. The keyboard follows, in larger form, the pattern of a keyboard for the hands. Without these the organ works of JS Bach and Mendelssohn himself (to name only two) would be impossible to play.

The balanced or roller Swell pedal is top left (1966) and replaces what would have been an old ratchet device on the far right. The 3 iron composition pedals are just about visible to the right of the Swell pedal.



A close-up of the “coupler Stops”. These Stops allow one part of the organ to be joined-up (coupled) with another. Judicious use of these couplers allows the player to use the pedals (for example) to play sounds normally heard on the Swell or Great and provide many more options on the pedals than the 2 pedal Stops themselves would allow.

²⁸ The various organs exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851 no doubt fuelled this process.

By the 1880s the firm's books reveal, not only that German pedals had become expected (and thus, unmentioned), but the Swell became the conventional second, complete keyboard. There was increasing use of pneumatic and hydraulic devices to power and operate the instruments, pneumatic combination foot pedals and balanced (roller as opposed to ratchet) Swell pedals. However, St. Paul's did not "benefit" from all of these so-called improvements until 1966. It is possible that some of the technical developments were sacrificed in order to use the available funds for the Stops and sounds of the instrument – a priority that commissioners of new instruments and refurbishment projects in the modern age might profit from adopting.

A Perfect Storm

So it was that imperial dominance, economic and industrial growth, the railways, improvements in shipping, technology and the Victorian genius for inventiveness; Mendelssohn and liturgical changes including those brought about by the 1840s Oxford Movement that so transformed the liturgy of the Church of England, coupled with the tolerance of non-conformist denominations²⁹ and the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850, all combined to provide the ideal landscape on which Forster and Andrews was to thrive. By the time the organ at St. Paul's, Clapham was commissioned, the firm had enjoyed 30 years of success and that experience explains how it was that Forster and Andrews came into their pomp in time to provide the instrument here.



4. St. Paul's, Clapham

Joseph Andrews³⁰ the younger and junior partner died in 1896. Thereafter the firm was run by James Forster junior and Philip H. Selfe (another expert poached from the London firm of JC Bishop), the former retiring in about 1904. Even so, there remained good days ahead, as we have seen, right up to the outbreak of World War I, including the production of the 3 major municipal organs in Hull between 1907 and 1913. In the mid nineteen twenties the firm was sold to a private buyer and in its remaining 30 years of existence its work was mostly limited to tuning and repairs. The radical social changes brought about in the aftermath of World War I were unhelpful for firms like Forster and Andrews. There was a significant reduction in new commissions, for obvious reasons, and the corporate stability that prevailed prior to 1914 was lost in the wake of mass conscription and the consequences of world war.

²⁹ A significant number of northern industrialists were non-conformists. Joseph Andrews was a Baptist.

³⁰ One wonders if his parents admired the 1742 novel by Henry Fielding: *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*.

St. Paul's Specifically

As for St. Paul's, Clapham, the history of the organ is as follows. The church was originally conceived as a chapel of ease when built in 1815³¹. The interior would have looked similar to how the sanctuary appears today. In the 1870s it was enlarged and extended by the addition of a chancel and sanctuary in keeping with its rededication as a parish church in increasingly urban Clapham. It was at the time of the enlargement of the building that the organ was commissioned from Forster and Andrews. It was installed in 1881 on the south side of what would have been the new chancel. The church was again radically re-ordered in 1969 and the organ was moved to its present position being realigned to face outwards into the church which now resembles in size and shape what it would have looked like before the 1870's extension. The church is only half its enlarged size and the extension (now behind the altar as we see it today) is devoted to community spaces and facilities. Originally, the organ would have faced across the chancel and had floridly coloured and decorated front, display pipes.

The gold coloured display pipes facing into the church now (or the concept of them), date from the first renovation of the instrument undertaken in 1966 with a few other modest alterations by Henry Willis & Sons Ltd at a cost of £1,375.00. The repositioning and realignment of the organ occurred in 1969 and was undertaken by Hill, Norman and Beard for £2,650.00. Further alterations were made of a tonal nature at this point. A further, recommended overhaul and cleaning in 1979, did not happen.

For those unfamiliar with pipe organs, the (now gold) display pipes are *not* the organ! The organ itself comprises thousands of moving parts, pipes and machinery in a chamber behind the façade. The blower that supplies wind via a reservoir and the bellows to the pipes to make them sound is operated by electricity (originally it would have been hand-pumped³²). In the Victorian era, larger instruments would have benefitted from hydraulic pumping mechanisms.

The organ has a mechanical or "tracker" action. This "...consists of a system of wooden levers and rods which transmit the action of the player at the keyboards and pedals to the pallets or valves which admit wind to the pipes causing them to sound."³³ Despite many experiments in the years between 1875 and 2000 with pneumatic and electric actions³⁴ to replace the trackers, tracker action instruments are, by common consent, far the most musical and reliable. Tracker action organs have enjoyed a considerable revival over the last 50 years or so.

The sound the organ makes is not produced by electricity but directly by the player using the keys and Stops to allow air to be pushed through the pipes from a reservoir supplied by the blower. An electronic organ has no pipes at all and if you open up the space behind the manuals (keyboards) all you find is a spaghetti of wires leading to an

³¹ There had been a church on the site for centuries, but its importance had been overtaken by the new Holy Trinity on Clapham Common 50 or so years before and the previous parish church on the St Paul's site demolished.

³² Parish folklore has it that an elderly parishioner still hand-pumped the organ in the 1960s.

³³ Thistlethwaite 2014.

³⁴ Along one branch-line of these developments was born the Theatre organ – the mighty Wurlitzer.

amplifier and speakers³⁵. The Stops on an electronic organ only connect a few wires in a feeble attempt to replicate the sounds of a pipe organ (like using a remote on your Sky Box). The Stops on a real organ are pulled out as required (they should really be called “*Starts*”) in order to engage the type of sound needed by the player³⁶ and they may be engaged in an almost infinite number of ways in combination to vary the volume and type sound produced.

The organ at St. Paul’s remains, as it always was, divided into three divisions: the *Great*; the *Swell* (or Swelling organ)³⁷ and the *Pedal*. Each does more or less what “it says on the tin”. Each has its own keyboard (the pedal organ being played with the feet). Each may be mechanically coupled to another to provide greater power, weight or variety to the available sounds. Alternatively, they may all be played at the same time (with one hand on each keyboard). The Swell is contained or enclosed in its own shuttered box in the organ chamber (not visible). The shutters can be opened or closed by the player to provide a “swelling” or *crescendo/diminuendo* effect using a foot roller-pedal now placed just above the pedal keyboard³⁸. When the organist masters all this, all he or she must do is follow the service by means of a mirror and learn to play the music; simple.

The specification at St. Paul’s *today* is as follows.

Great Organ:		Swell Organ:	
Open Diapason	8’	Open Diapason	8’
Stopped Diapason	8’	Salicional	8’
Gamba	8’	Voix Celestes (c)	8’
Dulciana	8’	Principal	4’
Principal	4’	Stopped Flute	4’
Flute Traverso	4’	Gemshorn	4’
Fifteenth	2’	Fifteenth	2’
Clarionet (c)	8’	Mixture III	
		Oboe	8’
		Cornopean	8’
Pedal Organ:			
Open Diapason	16’		
Bourdon	16’		

³⁵ Whatever the merits of electronic organs may be (and I am aware of very few) the sound produced is not the same as that produced by a “proper” organ.

³⁶ One theory is that very early organs started with all the sounds engaged by default and the player *pushed in* a lever to “stop” a set of pipes from speaking.

³⁷ In the 17th century in England (before pedals were introduced) it was commonplace to refer to “a pair of organs” – like a pair of scissors – emphasising that the 2 keyboards and divisions were independent of each other: the Great organ in front of the player and the Chair organ behind creating a sort of organist sandwich.

³⁸ Swelling devices were first invented in England and the very first such mechanism was probably at St. Magnus the Martyr on Lower Thames Street in London in about 1712. Modern roller or balanced swell pedals have replaced those originally designed which were ratchet-like devices to one side of the pedal keyboard. St. Paul’s originally had a ratchet swelling pedal. This was replaced by the current arrangement in 1966.

<i>Tremulant</i> <i>(redundant)</i> <i>3 composition</i> <i>pedals to Great.</i> <i>Balanced swell</i> <i>pedal.</i>	Couplers: <i>Great to Pedal</i> <i>Swell to Pedal</i> <i>Swell to Great</i> <i>Swell Octave</i>
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The Stops

The similarity with many other Forster and Andrews parish organs of the last quarter of the nineteenth century (e.g. St. Ambrose, Bournemouth) has already been noted. All of the original “additional” Stops at St. Paul’s were cunning extras which exponentially increased the variety of sounds available and rendered more convincing large parts of the organ repertoire. The *Mixture* provides an integral glitter that is consistent with the performance of music by JS Bach, his contemporaries and predecessors. The *Gamba* adds a further variety of basic foundation (string) tone congruent with the preference of the day for multiple foundations of different types. The *Clarionet* is bolder and more forthright than the often more luscious, but subdued, Clarinet. Perhaps the clue is in the name *Clarion -et*. It provides the possibility of a solo trumpet-like effect (although it is *not* a trumpet) on the *Great* as an alternative to the *Cornopean* (which *is* a small trumpet) on the *Swell*. Listening to this instrument one cannot help but be impressed with its power and sonority on the one hand, and its many delicate colours and sweetness, on the other. The boldness of the instrument in the building is partly the result of it having been realigned to face the congregation in 1969 (instead of speaking across the 1870s chancel).

It is unfortunate that the 16 foot Lieblich Bourdon on the Swell was removed as part of the 1966 “improvements”³⁹. This would have added a sense of greater depth and profundity on the keyboard foundations. Painting over the decorated display pipes (also in 1966) by spraying them gold, was an unforgiveable act of vandalism⁴⁰. With hindsight, many would have preferred that the original, ratchet swelling mechanism, had been left intact too.

Nonetheless, *Thistlethwaite* considered the organ to be worthy of historic restoration in 2014. The console was considered to be largely original, if a little “tired”. All its features being typical of the 1880s for Forster and Andrews. The pedals, too, are original – and do not conform to contemporary dimensions - as are the three combination pedals that operate some pre-set Stop combinations on the Great. The tonal effect of the instrument “*is exactly what one would expect of a Forster and Andrews organ of the 1880s*”. He concluded: “*The Clapham organ is of significant heritage value and musical quality. It deserves careful restoration...*”

³⁹ Although *Thistlethwaite* did not think so in 2014.

⁴⁰ This is analogous to the public’s “taste” in the 1950s and 60s for removing and boarding up with plasterboard Victorian fireplaces and removing other original features in historic homes.

Restoration

Careful restoration is precisely what was undertaken by *Andrew Cooper & Co Ltd*; the work being completed in 2019. The cost was in the region of £100,000⁴¹. The instrument was restored, so far as was economically practicable, to its original condition. However, the 16' Swell Bourdon is lost; the expression Swell pedal is as modernised in 1966, the front pipes are still gold and the Swell Fifteenth was not re-ordered as a sweeter “Flageolet”. The “*questionable merit*⁴²” of the 1969 tonal alterations, was, however, addressed and the changes reversed. Notwithstanding all this, the instrument is a more than fair reflection of what must have been heard when the organ was first installed in 1881.

Organ Cases

By the 1870s, providing organs in architectural cases became less common. Before about 1860 and after World War II arranging an instrument in a gothic, classical or contemporary architectural framework was routine.



Example 1.

An organ on the scale of that at St. Paul's might have looked something like this when first installed. The display is all about the decorated pipes. It is unlikely that St. Paul's had two trumpeting angels on top. It is not improbable that the *expense* of encasing organs in gothic, baroque or classical style enclosures had something to do with the increasing tendency to present them in this more “open” manner.



Example 2.

An example of an architecturally encased instrument of similar scale probably from the eighteenth century. However, you will also note that British church organs were often positioned in stone alcoves to the side of the chancel to be close to the increasingly evident parish choir, rather than on a west gallery or at the crossing. When stuffed into an alcove (as *Example 1*) there was less justification for a fancy case.

⁴¹ 500 times the original cost.

⁴² An understatement in the *Thistlethwaite* Report for the PCC in 2014.



Example 3.

An example of an enclosed, free-standing instrument, in a more modern idiom. This modern example clearly mimics the pre-Victorian idea of the church organ as a large piece of furniture – or a small building! Forster and Andrews *did* build enclosed instruments in the early years – and even later, the Wednesbury Town Hall instrument (1872), was within a classical-style enclosure.

Example 4

St. Paul’s as it appears beautifully restored and reimagined these days – the Christmas tree being a seasonal option. Unlike *Example 1* the organist is very much on view and unenclosed. Regrettably, there is no opportunity to “*just slip out for a moment*” if the (visiting) preacher is taking liberties with our time⁴³.

Personal Comment

On the technical details of the 2019 restoration I must defer to the organ builders at *Andrew Cooper & Co. Ltd.* Many organists (but by no means all) play the organ like they drive a car. They can *play* it (at least up to a point) but, lift the bonnet, and all they see is a bewildering dungeon full of wires, trackers, leathers, trunking, soundboards, spotted metal, wooden mouths and grooved tongues (and the odd rodent). Faced with the inevitable, and hopefully occasional malfunction, the “tuner” assumes a role similar to that of the RAC. The analogy is not as inexact as you might think. The hapless organist will attempt to describe over the ‘phone what is wrong and why, as the listening craftsman-technician invisibly rolls his eyes on the other end of the line in despair. More often than not the “driver’s” diagnosis is wide of the mark, and just as often, when the expert arrives to execute a roadside repair, the problem has resolved itself – just switch it “off”; and then “on” again. Continuing the analogy, brute force is another viable option. When the dreaded cipher⁴⁴ strikes, a solid thump with foot or hand will sometimes do the trick. This is the equivalent of kicking the tyres. Still, I venture to

⁴³ Stories (mostly apocryphal) about organists and gentlemen of the choir popping across the village green to the pub for 15 minutes during the sermon are legion – just like less apocryphal tales of peripheral orchestral players at the Royal Opera House doing likewise when not needed in Acts II & III.

⁴⁴ A sticking note or notes that will not be silent irrespective of whether they are being played.

suggest, that the car-driver-organist is preferable to the “bravado-tinkerer”. This person (invariably a man) will see no need to call the experts and incur such unnecessary expense. No; he will jemmy open the nearest panel and blunder through the delicate innards of the instrument tapping and pulling as he goes. At the end of such an intervention one problem may be solved at the cost of three new ones (with a spare part left over). Such a person may have, at some time or another, insisted on “fixing” your central heating with analogous results.

It is enough to note that by the turn of the twenty first century the organ was in a deplorable condition with many features of it being unplayable. The wind pressure had become leaky and inadequate causing much wheezing and sighing. Malfunctions were constant and irreparable. Performance was compromised by accumulating dust and rust. The effects of a new heating system did not do the instrument any favours either. It was well beyond the ministrations of an expert tuner, let alone the “bravado-tinkerer”. After a century and a quarter this is not surprising.

Sources

As you might hope (but not necessarily expect) St. Paul’s keeps records, including some records pertaining to the organ. These I have described in the bibliography, rather grandly, as an “*Archive*”. This archive includes some snippets of information included in this pamphlet and some mildly interesting, original tuning contracts dating back to the 1950s, as well as floor plans of the church in the 1960s including those for the 1969 changes. Other than that, I am sorry to note, much of the documentation relates to various letters evidencing disagreements from the organists and various key-players within the parish organisation, in mostly despairing tones, bemoaning the lack of both interest in the instrument and, one implies, appreciation of the organist.

Conservation

We are all, necessarily, people of our time. The organ at St. Paul’s has recently benefitted from two things. First, the absence of any major tinkering with the instrument between 1881 and 1966. Such tinkering as there was, was mostly reversible. Secondly, the organ survived in this only modestly altered condition into the age of informed conservation.

The mostly unaltered state of the organ until 1966 was probably borne of poverty and lack of interest. At this juncture we come full circle in a way. Organs are not a high priority in times of comparative economic hardship, a factor that is likely to be compounded by the decline in church attendance and the wider availability of music in all its varieties to the masses. This can be unexpectedly advantageous. The less an organ is altered, the more likely it is that a valid historic restoration can be attempted. The greatest bonus of benign neglect at St. Paul’s was the fact that the instrument always remained a “tracker” instrument and the temptation to electrify it was avoided. Had that occurred, it is extremely unlikely that a reversal of such an “improvement” would have been feasible.

When the possibility of renewal arises in an era of informed conservation, as opposed to ambitious and subjective “improvement”, the atmosphere is ripe to achieve what has been achieved at St. Paul’s. This has happened before, even though the principle is not

one of universal application. Ignored, and even neglected Dutch instruments, from as early as the fifteenth century, as well as from their own their golden age of commercial wealth in the 1600s and 1700s, survived in tolerably fine fettle, surviving intact until the Dutch state stepped in with an historically congruent nationalised programme of restoration and maintenance. The result: dozens of historically preserved and restored instruments. Perhaps to a lesser extent the same might be said of organs in Italy, Malta, Iberia and France.

The consequences of well-intended but misguided “improvements” is nevertheless, to a small extent, evident at St. Paul’s. The loss of the decorated display pipes is nothing short of a tragedy. The replacement of the ratchet Swell pedal with the balanced roller-pedal is unfortunate – not just because of the loss of historical accuracy, but because the central, balanced Swell pedal is not easy to get at. The console is not designed nor proportioned to allow the player to use it comfortably or without banging a knee against the lower keyboard⁴⁵. The 16’ Swell Bourdon is gone. It will surprise nobody that these changes were made in the 1960s. All of these changes could be reversed, but the additional cost would likely be prohibitive, and the result would be imitation rather than restoration. Mercifully, discussions in 1966 to replace the Great Gamba with a Great Mixture, did not result in any change. We can be certain beyond peradventure that the result of a 1966 Mixture would have been an unsuitably shrill mockery of the baroque, worthy of the name “Banshee”.

Folklore

One must always treat parish folklore with a degree of sceptical caution. However, stories that the organ was hand-pumped until the late 1960s appear to be accurate. This may partly explain why the organ was left unaltered in other ways. Post war organists at St. Paul’s could not possibly have done much practice (unlike previous eras, it would have cost more than 1d to pay someone to pump the organ into action and keep it going during a practice session). This, in turn, suggests that there was insufficient interest to warrant the organ being attended to⁴⁶.



Other stories are harder to dispel or corroborate. Some say that a pedal trombone was installed and later removed at some point. This seems unlikely from what appears in

⁴⁵ In all seriousness the physical comfort of the organist at the console is important – it lessens tension and for the older player reduces the risk of injury to dodgy knees and ankles.

⁴⁶ The cartoon is downloaded from the freely available “*The Young Persons Guide to the Pipe Organ*”. (American Guild of Organists) www.agohq.org

the few available documents⁴⁷. If there ever was such a thing, its removal must be applauded. A pedal Flute (8') was added in 1969 and removed in 2019. It was not part of the original, Forster and Andrews' scheme and, as *Thistlethwaite* reported in 2014, "...would be no loss".

Goodness knows what happened to the *Tremulant*⁴⁸ – if in the unlikely event there ever was one. The Stop is there, but it is only cosmetic. It was common enough in the 1880s, as now, for Stops to be "*prepared for*" in the expectation that funds would become available to pay for them in due time. A tremulant would be a curious option for this process. Forster and Andrews obliged in this respect on occasions. At Burbage in Buxton (1862) a Dulciana Stop was "*prepared for*" without being provided. The additional cost of £12.00 was a step too far for the parish. This did not prevent them asking if they could have the Stop anyway and pay for it later when they could afford it. History does not record Forster and Andrews' reply – it was probably unprintable.

The second "storm"

So, circumstances at St. Paul's between 2013 and 2019, presented a second perfect storm. A more than worthy, almost unaltered, High Victorian instrument encountered a congregation willing to countenance (and pay for) informed conservation and restoration. *Voila!*

The organ was officially inaugurated at a concert on 8th. November 2019 featuring three previous organists with a walk-on part for the newly appointed organist (from Advent Sunday 2019 – myself). This must be an event unique in history; the encore being offered by a person who had not played in the main concert.

The challenge now is to ensure this instrument is maintained to its current high standard for the foreseeable future – at least the next 125 years.

Alan Saggerson

Organist, St. Paul's Clapham, from 1st. December 2019.

May 2020



⁴⁷ The addition of a fair ground organ trombone to an 1880s Bishop organ at St. Mary's, South Hampstead in the 1960s was both effective and appalling in equal measure. This instrument was also the victim of ill-formed "baroque-isation" of its Mixture stops as late as 2008.


⁴⁸ As the name suggests this is the mechanism by which a trembling (*tremolo*) effect can be applied to the organ or some parts of it.

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Biography

 A portrait photograph of Alan Saggerson, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a plain wall with a framed picture.	<p>ALAN SAGGERSON BCL MA (Oxon) ATCL ARCO alansaggerson@yahoo.co.uk</p> <p>Alan came to St. Paul's in December 2019 after 12 years at St. Mary with All Souls, Kilburn, NW6. Before that he was organist at St. James' Islington. In the outside world he is a lawyer.</p>
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