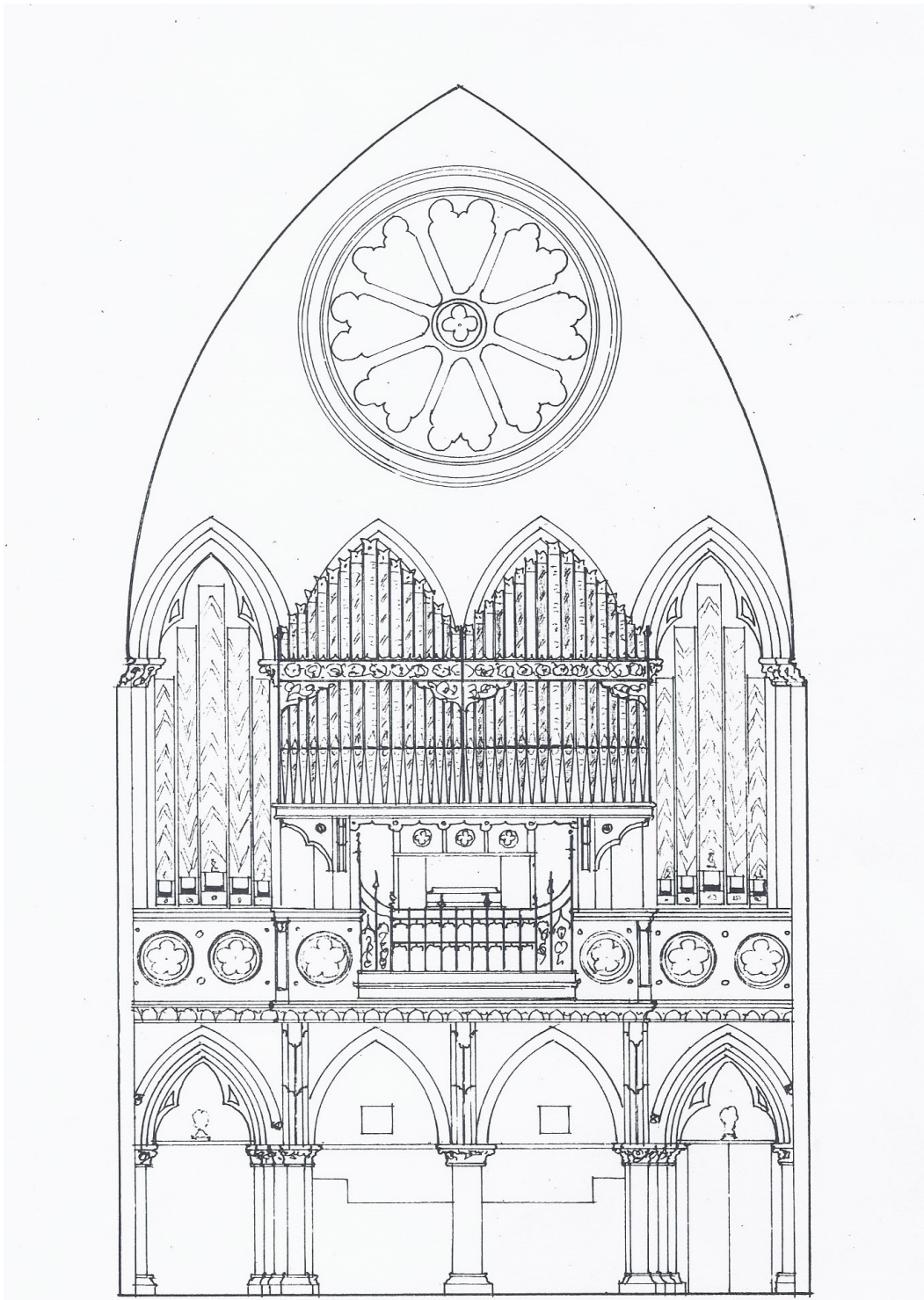


FORTH-TELLING THE ORGAN'S PRAISE



A Festschrift in honour of the twentieth anniversary of
the Walker Organ in the Chapel of Exeter College,
Oxford.

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Preface

Frances Cairncross, Rector

Exeter College's chapels have not always resounded with music, but the present one, consecrated in 1859, has had an organ almost all its life, and a choir and organ scholar since the introduction of Sunday services with music in 1871. This year sees the 20th anniversary of the present organ, replacing one installed in 1967. The position of the Chapel, at the heart of the College, means that the organ has a special importance: its sound carries throughout both front and back quads (sometimes to the chagrin of those who are trying to concentrate on their studies), but always to the delight of Chapel congregations.

Exeter also has always had an undergraduate Organ Scholar, who has acted both as organist and as Director of Music, rehearsing and conducting the choir. The choir, in which boy choristers were replaced by women students in the 1990s, has acquired an impressive reputation. Augmented by the choristers among our Old Members, it sang both in the Sheldonian on Founder's Day and at Evensong in the Chapel over the Founder's Day weekend – accompanied, on the latter occasion, by our splendid organ.

During my Rectorship I have enjoyed hearing the organ, and hope its fine tones will resonate for many more years.

Floreat Exon!

Sketching the previous organs of Exeter College

Andrew Allen

The earliest depiction of Exeter College, by John Bereblock in 1566, shows the chapel situated to the east of Palmer's Tower, approximately between today's Library and Rector's Garden. As a mediaeval, ecclesiastical foundation, the chapel was one of the pillars upon which collegiate life rested, and was dedicated to St Peter ad Vincula and St Thomas of Canterbury in 1326, twelve years after the College's foundation. In size, this chapel was small: Bereblock's engraving shows the tops of four windows in the nave, and this number of bays is reproduced in Ralph Aga's map of Oxford, dated 1578. The last image of the chapel – having been converted into the library following the building of the 1624

chapel – is in a watercolour dating from the late eighteenth century.

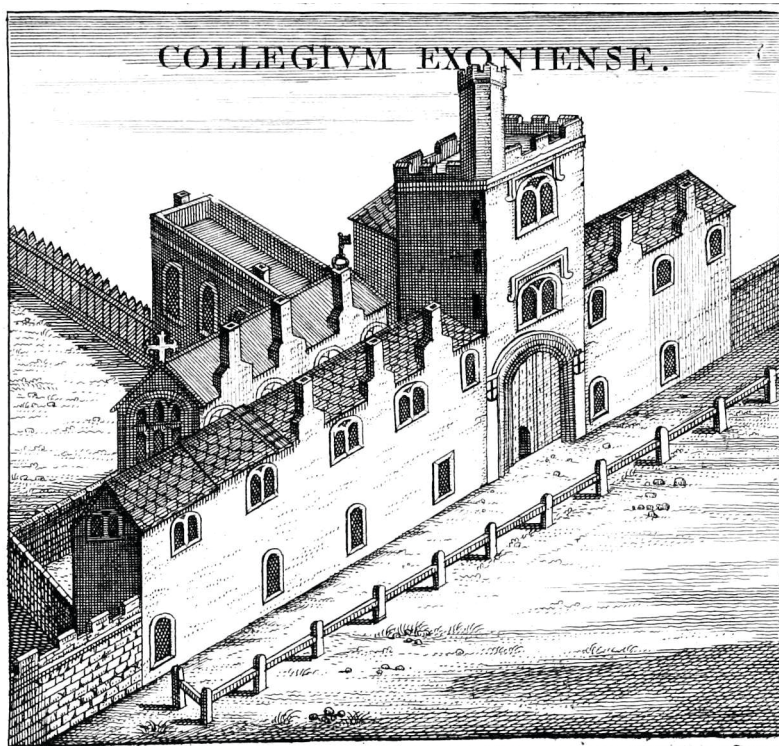


Figure 1 Bereblock's engraving showing the chapel to the left and behind the front buildings. The gate is today's Palmer's Tower.

The College's original foundation provided for 12 scholars plus a rector and chaplain. The founder, Bishop Walter de Stapledon, laid out in his statutes that the monastic offices should be kept by all members of the society, although in reality the chaplain would have prayed

the majority of these alone. In addition to these canonical hours, he would have prayed the litany of the dead, and prayers for the living. This meant the earliest chapel was primarily an Oratory, where psalmody dominated the worship, although the Mass would also have been offered. John Maddicott's research has shown a chapel with stone floor covered in reeds, walls decorated with images of saints and judgment.¹ This, with its small number of students suggests an intimate space, quite dissimilar from the huge and grand cathedral of the diocese of Exeter.

¹ Maddicott, *Founders and Fellowship*, (Oxford, 2014), 153 - 54

It is reasonable to suggest that the first organ at Exeter College was a portative organ, however this is only a guess. There is no evidence, in the College's extensive account rolls, of the purchase of an organ: either the organ was bought and recorded on one of the few missing rolls, or it may have been bequeathed to the College. There is, however, evidence that there was an organ in the chapel, because the Rector's Accounts for Lent Term 1424 record 16d was paid for a bench [*scabellum*] to support the organ in chapel.² In 1465 and 1533 the College paid 4d 'for mending the organ.'³

Apart from these records there is no more concrete evidence to build a picture of the organ of the first chapel, but, it is possible to set it within the landscape of pre Reformation organs. Manuscripts dating from the 900s tell of bells and organs sounding out in celebration of the great festivals.⁴ Cathedrals had large organs at the west end, and a smaller one situated in the Quire, at the heart of the liturgical action.⁵ The portative organ was small, with few ranks and no stops; the earliest illustrations show large keys, which were played by a hand, rather than keys depressed by individual fingers, as is the case today.⁶ This would suggest that one note was played at a time [rather than a chord], and because of their key compass, pitch, and modest scale, they were used in assisting in the accompaniment of singing. The playing of one note at a time and the sustained recitative note would make such key pads possible for the accompaniment of plainsong. William of Malmesbury, writing in the C12th talks about how organs were only used on festivals, and probably a combination of organs, accapella, and instruments were used in the chapel: the College roll also lists a fiola – a viola type instrument bought for the chapel in 1377.⁷

Schlick's 'Spiegel der Orgelmacher und Organisten', published in Speyer in 1511 suggest that by this period the broad keys have become reduced in size similar to modern width.⁸ Organ making did develop in the late mediaeval period, and Henri Arnault de Zwolle's treatise written between 1436 and 54 shows how the Blockwerk was divided up into separate sounds. It is uncertain whether these developments were reflected in Exeter's chapel organ: the entries in the Rector's accounts are not specific; it is unlikely that the 1533 entry would have referred to the addition of stops; evidence from the Wetheringsett and Wingfield organs in Suffolk from approximately the same period [1520] show

² Rector's Accounts, 126/2, Lent Term 1424

³ RA 163/2; RA 227/4

⁴ Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ*, (Cambridge, 1996), 14

⁵ Bicknell, *ibid*, 17

⁶ Bicknell, *ibid*, 21-23

⁷ Maddicott, *ibid*, 154; RA, 63.

⁸ Bicknell, *ibid*, 21

how soundboards had developed,⁹ but it is unlikely that this could be executed for a few pence, and it is more probable that these entries refer to general maintenance work; an extant receipt from St Peter's West Cheap shows that 2d was paid for the leather and glue of the soundboard, and a further 6d to provide wire for the great basses.¹⁰ College orders then, as today, were economical in their use of words.

Exeter College remained closer to the Catholic heritage during the Reformation, but could not escape its impact. In 1553 some organ pipes were sold for 5s;¹¹ whether this refers to the removal of the organ it isn't clear. However clear records show a more protestant, book based worship in the chapel, with 20d being spent on books of psalms in 1552 [the second edition of the Book of Common Prayer], and a further 10s for four psalters in 1559; more psalters were bought in both 1565 and 1566, amounting to 13 shillings.¹²



Figure 2 Joseph Nash's watercolour of the 1624 chapel. Is it possible that the wooden screen in the front left hand corner is part of the organ case?

A new chapel was built on approximately the site of the current chapel and dedicated on 5 October 1624. The first few decades of this chapel corresponded with two defining periods in Anglican worship: the Laudian Movement and the Puritan Republic under Cromwell. Laud was an Oxford man: Chaplain of St John's College, and was Archbishop of Canterbury until he was executed in 1645.

⁹ Bicknell, *ibid* 21

¹⁰ Freeman, *Records of British Organ Builders* (Second Series) 236 – 39

¹¹ Boase, *Registrum Collegii Exoniensis*, (Oxford Historical Society, 1894) lxxviii

¹² Boase, *ibid*, lxxviii

He sought to regain colour and flourish in worship: his vestments on display at his old college still, despite centuries of exposure to sunlight, point to a dramatic, almost theatrical liturgy.

This new chapel was vast in comparison to the mediaeval one: this reflects a change in Exeter's fortune, and growth in numbers: in 1612 it was the fifth largest college.¹³ A small portative organ would not have much impact in so large a space. Records from 1620s to the Civil War do survive but there is no mention of an organ being purchased or built; certainly during the austere period of the Commonwealth the playing of musical instruments was frowned upon, and when possible, Parliament outlawed accompanied music in worship.¹⁴

Accompanied music returned to Anglican worship with the monarchy and Episcopal church in the 1660s, and English organ builders, who had fled to the continent were repatriated. Among them was Thomas Harrison, whose name was abbreviated to Harriss to avoid confusion with the Thomas Harrison who signed the death warrant of Charles I.¹⁵ Thomas Harris [died 1685] was the father of the more prolific, and famous Renatus Harris [c 1652 - 1724]. It is probably, though not certain that Harris senior was the 'organ maker' referred to on an account in the Inventory of Silver. Some time between 1660s and 1680s the college paid the following:

The Organ

To ye mason for working ye wall	0 – 11 – 0
To Mr Harriss ye organ marker	35 – 0 – 0
To Ed Wild ye joiner	35 – 0 – 0
To Good ye painter	12 – 10 – 0

The mention of Ed Wild as joiner rules out the possibility that Mr Harriss could refer to William Harris a joiner who made the gallery and organ case at New College.¹⁶ £70 for a new organ was not a vast sum of money, but the civil war and the confiscation of the silver had contributed to the College entering the Restoration impoverished. £70 in 1660 was worth approximately £6,500 in today's currency, but such comparisons are not meaningful. More useful is the comparison of other Harris organs: £85 in 1664 to Mr Harris for the organ at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. The chapter was to spend £200 thirty years later for a new organ built by Renatus,¹⁷ the son of Exeter's organ builder. St

¹³ Boase, *ibid*, cviii.

¹⁴ Price, *Patrons and Musicians of the English Renaissance* (Cambridge 1981), 154.

¹⁵ Bicknell, *ibid*, 107

¹⁶ Bicknell, *ibid*, 112

¹⁷ Gratton Flood, *The Organs of Christ Church Cathedral Dublin*, *Musical Opinion* 40 (1916-17), 659

John's College, Cambridge paid John Dallam £185 to build an organ with 49 pipes per stop.¹⁸ These accounts combine the cost of the organ builder and joiner. In comparison to other commissions, Exeter's organ was neither grand nor important; there are no existing organs built by Thomas Harris to compare how it would have sounded.

To pay £12, just over a third of the cost of building the organ, for painting, would imply that the organ was gilded. Unfortunately there is no extant image of the organ. Exeter Chapel stood apart from other Oxbridge chapels by having two aisles, and Vallance notes that the organ was on a gallery at the east end of the south aisle.¹⁹ Nash painted the chapel in the 1830s and it is possible that the wooden screen in the bottom left hand corner is the base of this screen. This chapel was primarily a preaching auditorium: the chapel had a pulpit, which was unusual for chapels, and sermons were delivered every Sunday evening from 1833 onwards, overseen by the Sub Rector.²⁰

Growing intimacy with the Tractarian movement and a fervor for new building led the fellowship to decide to build a new chapel in the 1850s, and thus the current chapel was dedicated on the feast of St Luke, 18th October 1859. The order of service for the dedication of the chapel includes no music; psalms 84, 121, and 122 were said at various points; this combined with a letter dated 22 March 1860 which discusses Gilbert Scott's approval of the pipe designs²¹ suggests that the organ was added once the chapel was built. This may explain the positioning of the console, to the north side of the west end, and which was the cause of many complaints in the succeeding century.²²

William Hill constructed the organ and for the first time a list of specifications is known:

GREAT	Open Diapason	8ft
	Keraulophon	8ft
	Stopped Diapason	8ft
	Principal	4ft
	Twelfth	2 2/3ft
	Fifteenth	2ft
	Mixture	II ranks
	Cor Anglais	8ft

¹⁸ Bicknell, *ibid*, 86

¹⁹ Vallance *The Old Colleges of Oxford*, (London, 1912), 26

²⁰ Boase *ibid*, clvi

²¹ E.V.7.[1a]

²² E.V.7

	Stopped Flute	4ft
SWELL	Bourdon (T.C.)	16ft
	Open Diapason	8ft
	Stopped Diapason	8ft
	Principal	4ft
	Mixture	II ranks
	Cornopean	8ft
	Oboe	8ft
PEDAL	Open Wood	16ft ²³



Figure 3 The first organ with its original Gilbert Scott pipes. Note that the organ sits lower than today, and that neither the stained glass nor fellows' canopies had been installed.

The cost of the new chapel exceeded all estimates, and many fellows gave £100, which was nearly the value of their year's fellowship. The undergraduates paid for both the organ and the screen²⁴ that divides the chapel and antechapel, and today the JCR continues to give financial support to the music in the chapel.

²³ Barnett, *The Organs of Exeter College, Oxford*. The Organ 188, (1968), 146

²⁴ Boase *ibid*, clv

From 1871 onwards, musical services had been introduced in on Sunday evenings, and saints' days:²⁵ the organ scholarship and a choir of boys and men made this possible. It was during this period that C. Hubert H. Parry was an undergraduate and contributed to the musical life of the chapel and College.

Within thirty years plans were discussed to augment and rebuild the organ, and an Organ Fund was established with Messrs Parsons, Thomson & Co²⁶ from 1891 – 93, and £522 8s was raised. This went towards paying for a reconstructed organ by Hill, which was installed between 1892 and 93. As shown from the specifications, the addition of more foundation stops allowed for a much warmer, more colourful tone:

GREAT ²⁷	Open Double Diapason	16ft [to tenor 6]
	Open Diapason	8ft
	Stopped Diapason	8ft
	Keraulophon	8ft
	Principal	4ft
	Harmonic Flute	4ft
	Twelfth	3ft
	Fifteenth	2ft
	Trumpet	8ft [to be kept soft in tone]
SWELL	Bourdon	16ft
	Open Diapason	8ft
	Stopped Diapason	8ft
	Horn	4ft
	Lieblich Flute	4ft
	Voix Celeste	8ft
	Salicional	8ft [lower octave grooved to stopped diapason]
	Oboe	8ft
CHOIR	Clarinet	8ft [from Great]
	Gamba*	8ft
	Suabe Flute	4ft [from Great]
	Lieblich Gedeckt*	8ft
	Dulciana	8ft [to be very soft]
PEDAL	Bourdon	16ft
	Open Diapason	16ft

* denotes stops prepared for, but not installed until 1907.

²⁵ Boase *ibid*, clvi

²⁶ E.v.7 [2]

²⁷ E.V.7 [2]

The organ rebuild of 1892 had one significant restriction: space. The creation of a third manual meant the organist had to work in cramped conditions, and from plans, it would appear the console was in the same place as the 1860 organ, [at the top of the stairs to the loft] making it difficult for the organist to hear and see the choir. Correspondence from 1928 – 29 with Edward Wyatt²⁸ and an estimate by J.W.Walker and Sons, and Harrison²⁹ for a rebuild sought to alleviate that problem, as well as to ‘allow Exeter College to hold its own as regards its Chapel Organ with any College in Oxford or Cambridge’³⁰ but funds were not sufficient.

Lack of money, especially once the College bought the northwest corner where the Turl and Broad meet meant attempts to reconstruct or replace the organ in the 1940s failed. Chaplains at Exeter today hold office for three to five years, but it is remarkable that Eric Kemp over saw both the failed 1944 – 49 attempt at replacing the organ, and was more successful in the 1960s.

The rebuilt in the 1960s sought to remedy the problem of where to position the organist: a survey undertaken by the organ scholar, John Nicholl [1963] showed that of the colleges and cathedrals examined, Exeter Chapel had the greatest distance between organist and choir.³¹ This, combined with the deterioration of the organ seems to have been the main reasoning behind the rebuild. Discussion about where to locate the console suggested building a gallery above the main entrance to the chapel or to move the console to the current location, and to purchase from New College, iron grilles to support the organist.

The organ thus was composed:³²

GREAT	Quintaten	16ft
	Open Diapason	8ft
	Gedeckt	8ft
	Octave	4ft
	Clear Flute	4ft
	Quint	2 2/3ft
	Fifteenth	2ft
	Tierce	1 3/5ft
	Mixture	III ranks [19 – 22 – 26]

²⁸ E.V.7 [3a]

²⁹ E.V.7 [3b]

³⁰ E.V.7 [3b], letter to College from Walker and Sons 1/10/29

³¹ E.V.7. [7b]

³² E.V.7 [7]

Mounted Cornet V ranks [1 – 8 – 12 – 15- 17]

SWELL Rohr Flute 8ft
Salicional 8ft
Voix Celeste 8ft
Principal 4ft
Nason Flute 4ft
Octave 2ft
Block Flute 2ft
Larigot 1 1/3ft
Scharf III – IV ranks [22 – 26 – 29]
Schalmey 8ft
Tremulant [adjustable]

PEDAL Principal 16ft
Bourdon 16ft
Octave 8ft
Bass Flute 8ft
Spitz Flute 4ft
Nachthorn 2ft
Mixture III ranks [2 2/3 – 2- 1 1/3]
Trumpet 8ft

COUPLERS Swell to Great
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedals

Hill built the organ, and Norman and Beard³³ designed the organ case, splitting up Gilbert Scott's 1860 pipes with large zinc pipes either side of the console. The organ was dedicated on Sunday 22nd October 1967, and served the choral liturgy of the chapel, with its choir of men and boys until the 1990s with varied degrees of success. The ascetic of Gilbert Scott was not well received in the 1960s, which is why it was thought possible to break up his painted metal work pipes with large zinc pipes. Choral music, and in particular English church music, was about to undergo a renaissance: the publication of books such as 'The Oxford Book of Tudor Anthems' in 1978 heralded a new era and standard of choral music, and this is reflected in the worship in the chapel: the choir began to sing more of the service, and within a couple of decades of its installation, it was becoming apparent that the 1967 organ was neither suitable nor in good repair.

³³ Hill, Norman and Beard merged in 1916 to form Hill Norman and Beard. However, invoices in the college archives are from two separate firms.

Although much of the material relating to the organs prior to the 1869/70 organ is speculative, it is hoped that this article contributes somewhat to creating, if only a rough sketch, of what the organs possibly were like and how they were used, and reminds us that the current instrument is by far the finest the College has ever commissioned.

The Organ of Exeter College Oxford: 1989-1994

Richard Tanner

When I arrived at Exeter College in September 1989 I was in the unusual position of starting my first year as the only organ scholar. It was clear to me from the outset that the organ needed serious attention and that one of my priorities over the next three years, in addition to running a choir of men and boys, and reading for a degree in music, was going to involve persuading the Governing Body that the organ needed replacing and achieving that. Thanks to my two



predecessors, David Trendell and James Henderson, I was not a lone voice. Two months before my arrival in Oxford, Dr John Harper, then Organist and Tutor in Music at Magdalen College, had already been asked by the Rector, Sir Richard Norman, to offer his views about the instrument.³⁴

Figure 4 The Hill organ installed 1967. Note the reconfiguration of the pipes.

Dr Harper reported that substantial leaks from the winding meant the

³⁴ Dr Harper's views set out in a letter to the Rector, Sir Richard Norman, 19/7/1989

constant unreliability of the organ, that the unresponsive action was detrimental to good organ playing, and that the sound of the organ, “rebuilt at an inauspicious time in English organ building”, was widely considered to be unattractive musically. Mark Shepherd, David Trendell’s predecessor as organ scholar, remembers it as: “A classic example of the well-intentioned but misguided attempt to convert a modest English organ into a neo-classical wonder with disastrous effect”.³⁵ Harper pointed out that it seemed likely that the organ would not be viable in the very near future. This prediction turned out to be accurate, for the organ became unplayable just twenty-three months later. Harper also put forward what turned out to be a persuasive argument. It centred around the calibre of candidates for organ scholarships in a pool of young organists that seemed to be shrinking from year to year. The quality of chapel organs was becoming an increasingly important criterion for them when selecting a college in which to serve as organ scholar. Furthermore, Harper pointed to five criteria which he believed should be, and indeed over the next five years became, central to the strategy in planning for a new organ: a) the function of the instrument, b) the building in which it stands, c) its musical style and quality, d) its durability and e) its cost.

Harper concluded that there was a “need for an English nineteenth-century style” instrument and suggested that the college approach three suitable and reliable English firms for estimates for a substantially new instrument. He also suggested that the Reverend Dr Nicholas Thistlethwaite, an expert in the field of Hill pipework, should be asked to advise on what might be preserved of the nineteenth-century materials. This advice and three estimates were duly sought and although an English nineteenth-century style of instrument never came to fruition, the majority of Harper’s views were important in many aspects of the planning, and perhaps even more so in convincing those that needed to be persuaded of the necessity for a new organ at Exeter College.

Thislethwaite’s brief report on the Chapel organ of January 1990 also concluded that a new instrument should be in an English style.³⁶ He was clear that there was little to be salvaged from the organ of 1967 on grounds “of historical importance or usefulness in an otherwise new organ.” He explained:

Much of the nineteenth-century pipework has been re-voiced to give it a more ‘classical’ tonality, and new pipework has been introduced exhibiting the exaggerated scales and crude voicing that were widely adopted in the 1960s. The organ is thus a hybrid, lacking both the integrity and the quality of a first-class musical instrument. The only real conservation issue arises in

³⁵ Email from Mark Shepherd to Richard Tanner, 14/9/2014

³⁶ The Reverend Dr Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *A brief report on the Chapel Organ*, 8/1/1990

connection with the diapered pipes and the decorative ironwork which survive from the organ of 1860. In view of Scott's probable involvement in their design it would seem desirable to retain them. It would be difficult to restore the original disposition in all its details, but the attempt should be made to reverse some of the changes made in 1967.

Thistlethwaite's report explained further that the instrument had been raised and brought forward two feet in 1892 to make space for an enlarged specification and raised further in 1967 when the console was moved from a position on the south side of the organ to its current position: a swallow's nest gallery bracketed over the antechapel. Furthermore "the large wooden pipes which stood at each side of the case were removed and the proportions of the flats of painted metal pipes were recast by relegating two groups of 7 pipes to the sides. The ironwork was accordingly reduced in width, and ten large zinc pipes (unpainted) were introduced to the front".

At the start of 1990 the organ was deteriorating rapidly. Correspondence between the Home Bursar and myself shows that despite the fact that the College was "investigating deeply the costs and other ramifications of providing a new organ"³⁷ there was agreement that realistically it seemed that the timescale for a new instrument would most probably be ten years away. There was considerable sympathy regarding the effect that the organ might have on my own development as a player as well as its unreliability in accompanying chapel services. Given the state of the instrument, I pressed for a temporary measure, namely the hire or purchase of a small two-manual pipe organ that could be placed on the left-hand side of the chapel, just beyond the choir. This stop-gap had also been suggested by John Harper and was endorsed by my organ teacher, David Sanger. The time, however, was not right and it was decided not to go to this expense until such a time as the College had decided on the long term future.

By May 1990 tenders and recommendations from a number of organ builders had been received. Discussions took place between John Warrack (tutor in music), Alwyn Pettersen (chaplain), David Trendell and myself regarding the rising expense of maintaining the organ. This resulted in a letter being sent to the Rector that reported our belief that the College was "throwing good money after bad" and asking if the Governing Body would agree to initiate an appeal for a new instrument.³⁸ A Chapel Organ Committee was formed and met for the first time on 8th June to discuss this letter. An appeal was launched which, within three months, raised about £20,000 from Old Members. John Warrack persuaded Alfred Brendel to give a recital in the Sheldonian, for which he waived his fee.

³⁷ Correspondence between Richard Tanner and the Home Bursar, 24 & 25/1/1990

³⁸ Letter from John Warrack to The Rector, 31/5/1990

This was followed by dinner in College for some 100 of the audience and raised approximately £30,000.

Meanwhile the organ was continuing to deteriorate yet further and on 17th May 1991 a letter from Hill, Norman & Beard (who were still maintaining the instrument) reported that problems with perished leather meant that repairs of around £7,000 were essential to keep the organ playable. The Home Bursar asked for my advice and I responded that I believed that spending this amount of money on an organ that we were hoping to replace was “wasted money”.³⁹ I suggested that “we either let the organ burn itself out or replace it now, either temporarily or permanently”. I also used this opportunity to say that I thought that pursuing the idea of a new organ in an English style was not necessarily the best course of action:

The three schemes that have been suggested lack imagination. They certainly wouldn't accompany late nineteenth century music very well because of the thin nature of the swell on all three proposals. I believe that this is a difficult problem due to the space in the organ chamber. I am told there are ways of overcoming this, though... I think that a French organ would be rather exciting in the Chapel. After all the architecture is heavily influenced by French design and as yet there is no “French” organ in Oxford.⁴⁰

I went on to say it was time to appoint a professional organ advisor and suggested David Sanger. I concluded: “I am beginning to feel that a carefully chosen electronic organ (on a very temporary basis!) would be preferable to what we have at the moment... However, it must be understood that it would be embarrassing for an educational institution of such high standing as Exeter College to go for this option on a permanent basis”.

The annual service of Commemoration of Benefactors took place on 9th June 1991 and Robert Sharpe, who was due to join me as organ scholar the next term, visited to accompany the choir for the service. During the anthem, Parry's ‘Hear my words ye people’, the organ ground to a halt due to a rapid escape of wind from the instrument. A few days later I wrote an impassioned and lengthy letter to the Home Bursar in which I asked for permission, with Robert Sharpe, to inspect a six-year-old Allen electronic organ, originally built for the concert organist Carlo Curley and recently used by Winchester Cathedral whilst their organ was being restored.⁴¹ It was available for us to use with immediate effect.

³⁹ Correspondence between the Home Bursar and Richard Tanner, 20/5/1991

⁴⁰ Richard Tanner, Report on the proposed schemes for the Exeter College Organ, May, 1991

⁴¹ Letter from Richard Tanner to the Home Bursar, 17/6/1991

Both the Home Bursar and the Finance and Estates Bursar responded with sympathy and the inspection visit duly took place. Within a week the Allen organ arrived in the chapel and the 1967 organ was never heard again. Robert Sharpe remembers clearly:

...the excitement of a new organ for Exeter when I arrived as junior organ scholar to Richard Tanner in 1991. The old organ had been taken out of use as it was in such a perilous state and an Allen digital substitute was hired on which we altered various stops with sticky labels to "Sharpe Mixture" (with the 'e') and "Flauto Tannero" amongst others!⁴²

Although the service on 9th June had been embarrassing from a musical perspective, it did provide the catalyst for speeding up the timescale for providing a worthy instrument for the chapel. The fact that we had identified a six-year-old electronic organ was important as it sounded better and was more reliable than the instrument that we were used to, but the technology was not the most up-to-date and to most ears was clearly no long term substitute for a pipe organ. John Harper had raised the suggestion of buying or hiring an electronic organ in 1989: "this might suit choral needs, but my own view is that this would be suicide if you hope to attract an acceptable line of organ scholars. An electronic instrument would be a major deterrent. Only use one if the new organ is in sight and is expected within a year."

The appetite for a new organ gained momentum and the Rector wrote:

Music has long been an important feature of Exeter College life and the link between it and the liturgy as practised in the Chapel has always been strong... Despite increasingly frequent maintenance during the last few years, the organ has performed so erratically that we have now had to abandon it; an electronic organ has been hired to tide us over. Unless a replacement of suitable quality can be provided, the musical life of the College will undergo a marked deterioration and the performance of the choral liturgy may cease altogether.⁴³

A week earlier, following discussions with David Trendell and Robert Sharpe (recently arrived in Oxford) about the idea of pursuing an organ in the Romantic French style, I wrote to the Home Bursar enclosing a paper, written by Robert, summarising our thoughts about such an instrument.⁴⁴ I again suggested

⁴² Email from Robert Sharpe to Richard Tanner, 11/9/2014

⁴³ Letter from Sir Richard Norman, 3/10/1991.

⁴⁴ Robert Sharpe, *Exeter College Oxford: Organ Scholars' Specification*, 1991.

that the College approach David Sanger to act as consultant.⁴⁵ Dr Warrack reported on 27th November that “the expectation is that we shall have available, by the end of the academic year, £130,000, from the Appeal”. He also proposed to the Rector that David Sanger be appointed as consultant and, by the end of the year, this was agreed.

David Sanger was also of the opinion that the new organ should be French inspired as he wrote later in his inaugural recital notes:

In discussing the style of the proposed organ for Exeter College Chapel with those who played it here regularly it became clear that one in the spirit of the French Romantic builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll could be the most appropriate for several reasons: the wide dynamic range of such organs, even when of modest proportions; the wealth of colourful soft stops suitable for accompanying the choir; the lack of such an instrument elsewhere in Oxford, the harmonizing of such a scheme with Gilbert Scott’s design for the chapel, in the style of the Ste Chapelle⁴⁶ in Paris.⁴⁷

Further proposals were sought from reputable organ builders taking the total number to eight (4 in the UK and 4 abroad) since 1989. One of the proposals that was not accepted was of particular interest as it made a very dogmatic case for restoring the appearance of the organ to its original and authentic Scott/Hill form of 1860 keeping both the profile of the façade low, so that it would not obscure the arcade, and the projection of the organ gallery to a minimum so that it would not dominate the antechapel whilst restoring the console to its position at the side of the organ. The stop list of this proposal was very similar to that of the chosen instrument by J.W. Walker. Although Walker’s proposal (and the eventual 1994 façade) was more similar in dimension to its immediate predecessor than to Scott’s original vision for the organ, the 1967 zinc pipes, totally out of keeping with the architecture and other pipework, were removed in 1994 and replaced with new wooden façade pipes to the left and right of the original William Hill grillwork. The central display pipes were restored with re-gilded crowns. Although none of the central display pipes actually speak in the current instrument, they were “a characteristic of Scott’s organ cases, seldom employed by others” (Nicholas Thislethwaite) and help to create “an aspect which is imposing but sympathetic to the architecture of the west wall” (David Sanger).

⁴⁵ Letter from Richard Tanner to the Home Bursar, 26/9/1991.

⁴⁶ Note that subsequent research has shown that the chapel was not based on Ste Chapelle – Tyack; *Le Clerc, The Register 1996*, 45 – 50.

⁴⁷ Sanger, *Inaugural Recital of the Grand Organ*, programme notes, 30/9/1994, E.V.7

Where Walker's proposal particularly seemed to have the edge was the strength of its argument in terms of suitability as well as Walker's ability to deliver an organ in the French romantic style, Walker's proposal stated that:

A new organ must consider all schools of organ playing. It would seem that the French tradition considers those aspects of music that are of benefit to service playing: contrasts between light and dark, loud and soft, gentle and grand. It would also seem that polyphonic music suffers less on pipes that are broadly scaled and rich in tone than does romantic music on narrow, hard sounding stops, which lack foundation. In an instrument for Exeter College Chapel, we have a wonderful opportunity to explore sounds and ideas that have not been experienced in a new instrument in England for quite some time. The rich varieties of sound and nearly endless textures available from a carefully designed instrument will reward the college, the listener and the musician with a tonal palette that is unknown in recent times. For decades, the wealth of colour and sound opportunities available in romantic instruments has been declared decadent. Colourful flutes, strings and reeds do not necessarily mean that polyphonic music will be ignored or ineffective, although there are many examples where this is the case. The two are not mutually exclusive. Our instrument would explore every resource available to us in terms of colour possibilities whilst addressing literature outside the boundaries imposed by the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

The contract for J.W.Walker to build the organ was signed just before I completed my tenure as organ scholar in the summer of 1992. Robert Sharpe, who was organ scholar along with Charles Cole, at the time of the installation of the new instrument in April 1994 writes:

Michael Butler and Bruce Buchanan did the tonal finishing in the chapel. As part of the tonal finishing, Nigel Robson, who was then singing alto in the choir, came in one afternoon to sing some verse anthems in order that the *Grand Orgue Bourdon 8* could be balanced to accompany a solo voice in this kind of choral accompaniment.

In terms of the console design and playing aids, I had the idea that we should put the reeds and upperwork drawstops next to the keyboards and the foundations further away, in the French style.

Walker's original proposal had the terraced layout but with the

⁴⁸ Exeter College Oxford Scheme 2: A Proposal for a New 2 Manual and Pedal Organ by J.W. Walker Ltd of Suffolk, 24/4/1992.

stops grouped in a more traditional English manner. David Sanger and I came up with the idea of the dual English piston system and French '*appel*' pedals and Walker cunningly incorporated this in the rotating drawstop which controlled the original 8 piston memories (engraved "*memoires*") with a ninth position for the French system.

Walker's proposed the draft stop list which was very similar to ones we had discussed ourselves; I had wanted the *Grand Orgue* 16 reed to be a *Basson* but David opted for the more throaty *Bombarde* 16 - rightly or wrongly! Walker's original Pedal proposal included the 8-foot registers by transmission from the *Grand Orgue* and at my suggestion, the 16-foot *Bourdon* and 4-foot *Octave* were also included in the borrowed stops: the first to allow two powers of 16-foot pedal and the second to give the option of a solo 4-foot pedal line. The 4-foot *Prestant* in the *Recit* is not a usual register to find in this size of French scheme, but was included to allow more flexibility in choral accompaniment.⁴⁹

The inaugural recital was given by Olivier Latry of Notre-Dame, Paris, on Saturday 30th April 1994 with a programme that celebrated the contribution of French composers to the development of the organ repertoire.

When Olivier Latry had dinner with Dr John Warrack and me the night before and was asked his opinion of the organ, he replied that it was 'a French organ with an English accent' - an accurate description, I think!⁵⁰ The programme notes paid tribute to:

the late Rector, Sir Richard Norman, and the former music lecturer, Dr John Warrack, for their enthusiastic support for the project; the generosity of Old Members and others (especially our Honorary Fellow, Alfred Brendel) who have contributed so much to its cost; the wise counsel and technical expertise of our consultant, David Sanger, and our architect, Robert Montgomery; and the consummate skill and craftsmanship of the builders, J.W. Walker Ltd. of Suffolk.

⁴⁹ Email from Robert Sharpe to Richard Tanner, 11/9/2014

⁵⁰ *ibid* 16



Figure 5 The current organ photographed soon after its installation.

Although the organ was finished almost two years after I left the College, I have enjoyed regular association with the instrument over the past twenty years. Experiencing the new organ in the workshop of J.W.Walker Ltd in Suffolk, before it arrived in Oxford, was a very exciting moment for me and for the first

ten years I played an annual concert to conference delegates in chapel, performing alongside the choir. Not only did this give me the opportunity to explore the thrilling dynamic range and wide palette of colours available on the organ, but working with a succession of organ scholars made me realise how astute the College had been to heed John Harper's advice that a quality organ would attract the best organ scholars to the College. Working closely with the organ scholars George de Voil and Timothy Muggeridge over the past two years, listening regularly to the results of their choir training (even occasionally accompanying the choir myself, under their direction) and hearing their sensitive accompaniment has reinforced my view. The success of recent music making in chapel owes much to the enthusiastic support given to these organ scholars by Rector Cairncross and the current Bursar, Chaplain and Governing Body, just as support was given to organ scholars of the past, as David Trendell recalls:

The College was wise to listen to the then organ scholars whose involvement was crucial in determining that the organ was going to be a French style instrument. When I recorded a disc of French twentieth century choral music with my choir from King's College London last year we made it at Exeter because of the suitability of the organ for this repertoire.⁵¹

When I arrived in Oxford, the Hill Norman & Beard organ was just twenty-two years old and ready for replacement. It is a great tribute to the wise decision making of the governing body in the 1990s that, after twenty years in the wonderful acoustic of the chapel, the Walker organ shows every sign of continuing to give pleasure for many years to come.

⁵¹ Email from David Trendell to Richard Tanner, 15/9/2014

Twenty Years On: The organ today in worship and concert.

Timothy Muggerridge

The installation of the new J.W. Walker organ of Exeter College came at an eventful time in the history of the College. It was 1994: Marilyn Butler had just been appointed the first female head of a previously all-male college, and two years later the decision was made to replace the historic choir of men and boys with a new mixed-voice choir. The new organ in itself was equally revolutionary. An organ built by an English maker in the Cavallé-Coll style had never been done before and Exeter's organ remains the only organ of its kind in an Oxford or Cambridge College. The post-war years saw a rise in neoclassical organ-building and one of the major pitfalls encountered by churches undertaking innovative organ installations was that the organ produced was often a rather niche instrument; exceptional at the style it was intended for but limited for other repertoire outside of this style. One of the great successes of the team behind Exeter's installation is that the Walker organ has not succumbed to this danger. It is arguably one of the most versatile instruments in Oxford and its wide range of colourful stops allows it to perform as both a stunning soloist and sympathetic accompanist.

It was decided that an organ in the style of Aristide Cavallé-Coll should be installed at Exeter College in order to reflect the beautiful neo-gothic architecture of the chapel, inspired by the French Late Gothic, and designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The organ the Walker engineers left behind when they departed in 1994 is a fine companion to the great French instruments. The organ is far smaller than many of its relatives in France, with only two manuals compared to, say, five at the Eglise Saint Sulpice in Paris and is therefore more similar in size to the *Orgues de Choeur* (Choir organs) of the great French churches. However, the power of the *Anches* (reeds) and *Plein Jeu* means that a full organ has the ability to fill the building like a *Grand Orgue* (Great organ). The *Grand Orgue* (Great) manual has the standard quartet of foundation stops: the *Bourdon*, *Salicional*, *Montre* and *Flute Harmonique* (the latter of which having been popularised by Cavallé-Coll during his organ-building career). These stops can be used together when supporting a full organ, yet they also all work exceptionally well as solo stops. It is rare that an English organ is sufficiently colourful to allow such flexibility, and this is one of the great delights of the Exeter instrument. The *Montre* in particular has such clarity of tone that it can blend with the *Récit* accompaniment, yet also soar above it when used as a solo stop. The *Récit expressif* (Swell) also has the typical Cavallé-Coll collection of strings, foundations, reeds, and mutations. The *Trompette harmonique* and *Cornet* are effective solo stops, as is the *Basson-hautbois*; although this makes a somewhat more invasive impression than a subtle Cavallé-

Coll oboe, and will be toned down later this year. The *Récit* is also complemented with an *Octave graves*, which, combined with the swell box, allows for considerable control of volume and timbre when accompanying and can create an impressively cathedral-esque full organ sound. The *Plein Jeu* and *Trompette* on the *Grand Orgue* are especially powerful stops and are rather loud for regular service use, but bring the organ alive during recitals.

Olivier Latry, *Titulaires des Grandes Orgues* of Nôtre Dame de Paris, gave the inaugural recital on 30th April 1994. Since then, Exeter has maintained an organ recital series, which has grown significantly in popularity over the last few years, attracting some of the finest organists not only from Oxford and its surrounds but from as far afield as Italy, Estonia and even Australia. These recitals, which take place every Tuesday lunchtime during Full Term, have an established audience and enable both members of the public and local community to witness the incredibly diverse capabilities of the organ. It is a great testament to both the organ and the players that the Exeter College recital series attracts a sizable regular audience in a time when the general public's interest in organ music is limited.

Recitalists enjoy the opportunity to play such a unique instrument and it is during these recitals that organists make most frequent use of the *Ventils* and *Tirasses*: playing aids possessed by the Exeter organ. Another innovation of Cavallé-Coll's, these allowed the coupling of manuals, and the addition or subtraction of the *Anches*, to be controlled by a pedal which engaged the higher wind pressure of a divided wind chest. Although useful for historically-informed performances of solo repertoire, they lack the necessary subtlety for accompaniment, and thus the organ was equipped with both general and divisional memories, on eight channels. In 2013 the organ benefitted from the installation of a new, expanded memory capture system, with stepper. This now allows organists far greater registrational control in complex recital programmes (particularly when managing music designed for three- or four-manual organs) and more colourful accompaniment of the choir during services.

The versatility of the Exeter organ is accountable in no small measure for the great success achieved by the Chapel Choir over the last twenty years. The fact that the organ can accompany Tudor verse anthems and nineteenth-century Victoriana as convincingly as the French school it would initially appear to suit has allowed the choir to explore a wide range of repertoire not only within services but also on a number of CD recordings. Indeed, the chapel has become an extremely popular recording venue over the last twenty years not only with its own choir but also with other groups, including Lincoln College Chapel Choir, and the Choir of King's College London. The combination of the chapel's fabulous acoustic and the organ's ability to fill it means it is an ideal venue to

record repertoire old and new. The organ also made a famous appearance in the final episode of the Morse television series, in which Fauré's *Requiem* was sung by our own choir as Morse passed away. The Fauré and Duruflé *Requiems*, which the choir sing on alternate years on the feast of All Souls', have become one of the highlights of the college's musical calendar not least because of the way this organ brings the music alive. Events like these have come to define the musical life of Exeter College, for it is then that its two great musical assets – its superb mixed-voice choir and its fabulous Walker organ – come together to lead a congregation in worship and thus fulfil their joint purpose within College life.

Both the organ and choir have become central not only to the life of the chapel but to the College itself. Beginning with the Freshers' Evensong at the start of their first year and culminating in a chorus of Parry's *Jerusalem* during their College graduation ceremony, students experience the wonders of church music throughout their time here. This connection with College life has been one of the great successes of the Walker organ, helping it to touch not only organ aficionados and choristers but also those who would not normally take an interest in such things. In many ways organ has helped to keep the chapel as a focal point of College life and will continue to do so for many years to come. After all, there is nowhere in College where one can escape the thunder of full organ!

Specification of 1994 Organ by J.W. Walker & Sons

<p>GRAND ORGUE (85mm wg)</p> <p>Bourdon (wood & metal) 16' Montre 8' Flûte harmonique 8' Bourdon (wood & metal) 8' Salicional 8' Prestant 4' Flûte 4' Doublette 2' Plein jeu IV-VI Bombarde 16' Trompette 8' <i>Trémolo</i></p>	<p>PÉDALE (85mm wg)</p> <p>Soubasse (wood) 16' Bourdon 16' * Flûte 8' * Violoncelle 8' * Bourdon 8' * Octave 4' * Bombarde 16' Trompette 8' * <i>Effets d'Orgue</i></p> <p>(* from the Grand Orgue)</p>
<p>RÉCIT EXPRESSIF (90mm wg)</p> <p>Flûte traversière 8' Virole de gambe 8' Voix céleste (from c) 8' Flûte octavante 4' Prestant 4' Octavin 2' Cornet II Trompette harmonique 8' Basson hautbois 8' Voix humaine 8' <i>Trémolo</i></p>	<p>ACCOUPLLEMENTS</p> <p>Récit au Grand Orgue Récit Octaves graves Tirasse Récit Tirasse Grand Orgue</p> <p>Six thumb pistons each to Recit & G.O. Six foot pistons to Récit Six General pistons (thumb and toe) Ninety-six general piston memories Sixteen divisional piston memories Three "Advance" pistons (two thumb, one toe) One "Retard" thumb piston</p> <p>29 stops, 1638 pipes</p>