

## History of the pipe organ in Wesley Uniting Church, York

The oldest known pipe organ was built some 5,000 years ago in China. Organs were used in many ancient cultures and it was during the awesome period of the Greek and following Roman Empires that history records remarkable development of organ construction and use. When those civilizations declined, the organ continued to develop through the powerful and wealthy Byzantine, Persian and Arabic empires.

Interestingly, there was an organ in the Temple of David in Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> that is said to have been so powerful it could be heard in Jericho – 10 miles away. Jesus would have heard this organ when He lived and worked in the Jerusalem area. It was destroyed in AD70 along with the Temple, and it seems the Jews did not construct an organ again till modern times when their nation of Israel was restored to them in 1946. There are now several beautiful pipe organs in Israel.

With the event of the more recent Christian era, sometime in the sixth century the Arabic organ was adopted and the art of organ building reached new heights of development. The early organs were very noisy and the common practice was for the organ to play the tune of a hymn then the congregations would sing unaccompanied in alternate verse. By the thirteenth century technology and musical beauty had been incorporated into organ design in England, Ireland, France, Holland, Italy and Germany, and the instrument became very widely used in those countries.

The Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque periods in European history saw huge leaps in organ development and the construction of really huge pipe organs. It is during this time that the Pedal organ came in to being. By the seventeenth century organs of two or more manuals were being built. From this additional versatility and tonal beauty the organ became a widespread instrument of praise and worship, spreading with the colonial outreaches of Europe throughout the world.

York, one of the oldest country towns in Western Australia, is fortunate to have two very good 19<sup>th</sup> Century English organs. The older of the two organs is the 1895 organ built by Alfred Monk of London for the Wesley Methodist Church.

This organ has two manual keyboards of 56 notes and a 30 note pedal board, all mechanical action, and there are seven ranks of pipes totaling about 400 pipes. The mechanism employs a floating backfall, making it extremely suitable for the extremes of heat and cold experienced in York. It is regarded as the best of the 19<sup>th</sup> century organs in Western Australia, in both warmth of tone and brilliance of sound and in capability to fill the sanctuary with sound. The organ is one of three Western Australian instruments listed in the Organ Historical Trust of Australia<sup>2</sup>.

The specification of the organ stops is:

SWELL ORGAN	Gedeckt 8' Gemshorn 8' Principal 4' Tremulant Hitch down lever to operate the swell shutters
GREAT ORGAN	Open Diapason 8' Clarabel 8' Harmonic Flute 4' SWELL to GREAT coupler
PEDAL ORGAN	Bourdon 16' GREAT to PEDAL coupler

Alfred Monk (born 1848) was an organ builder of repute in London during the period 1862 to 1926. He, his wife, daughter and a housekeeper lived in Islington, London, at the time of building the York organ<sup>34</sup>. There were 67 of his pipe organs installed throughout Great Britain and a number of others exported to other countries, although information on these is difficult to obtain. Mostly his exported organs went to Europe; some also went to Africa and Asia. There are no other known organs by Alfred Monk in Australia, although

there are some components in the large organ in Randwick Uniting Church, Sydney, built by him for W G Rendall, an Adelaide organ builder<sup>5</sup>.

Miss Florence Monger of Faversham House, York, offered to secure subscriptions for the purpose of erecting a pipe organ in the church in the mid 1890's<sup>6</sup>. The organ was subsequently ordered and was delivered and erected in the church on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August 1895, following which special services were held at which the organ was used for the first time. It is thought the organ may have already been in Perth at the time the church ordered it, because the period of time from when subscriptions were commenced to the installation date is extremely short, almost impossible for an organ to have been built in England and shipped to Australia.

The organ was hand blown for some 30 years by the young men of the church, a somewhat arduous physical task but one that allowed some retribution to the organist. It seems that on occasions the organ unexplainedly ran out of wind at crucial moments during the service if during the week before there had been some cross words or other event that irked the organ blowers. In 1929 an electric blower was fitted to the organ. Although this aided the organist and benefited the congregation by giving a steady wind supply, the names of the blowers are still scratched in the back of the organ case to remind us of their earlier contributions.

It is not recorded when the organ was stained dark brown and the pipes were painted over with silver, hiding the original stenciled designs on the display pipes, but it is thought to have been about 35 years ago. This may have coincided with the shifting of the organ from a raised platform to the floor of the church, the move allowing more ingress of light to the worship area from the stained glass window on the south wall behind the organ. In 1982 it was necessary to affect some restoration work to the organ and in 1990 a tonal adjustment was made to substitute a Violin Diapason with a delicate Gemshorn stop in the Swell division<sup>7</sup>.

The organ was designed to compensate in the mechanical key action for extremes in temperature and climate experienced in York. As a result, the organ is in excellent condition for it's age and, on this basis, F J Larner and G A Devenish (organ builders) were commissioned in June this year to conduct a study on restoration of the organ to it's original condition. The restoration is now complete. Restoration was not extensive, due to the excellent condition of the organ, and involved mainly a thorough clean, replacing felt bushes, leather buttons, pallet leathers, Gedeckt stopper re-leathering and coupler regulation.

In addition to refurbishing the internal workings of the instrument, the display pipes were stripped of the silver paint and have been beautifully diapered in line with the original patterning. The exquisite design, drawing colours from the stained glass windows, greatly enhances the visual impact of the instrument and is based on the original pattern and similar patterns found in organs of that era. The overall result of the restoration has been to make the organ look elegant, revitalize the sound of the instrument and improve the responsiveness of the action.

This organ is 106 years old, still in good voice, and ready now for another hundred years of service. It is the great privilege and honor of the York Uniting Church to continue a very proud and long history of the use of the pipe organ in Christian worship. This church is the steward of a fine and noble instrument. On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August the church united in praise to God for His provision and celebrated the anniversary of the organ and it's new rebuild. The morning worship included many previous organists of the church who had returned to play part of the service music.

In the afternoon a recital was held. Graham Devenish was the recitalist and he played to a responsive audience who filled the main floor and gallery of the church. People had traveled from Perth and further afield to attend the recital, including members of the Organ Society of WA.

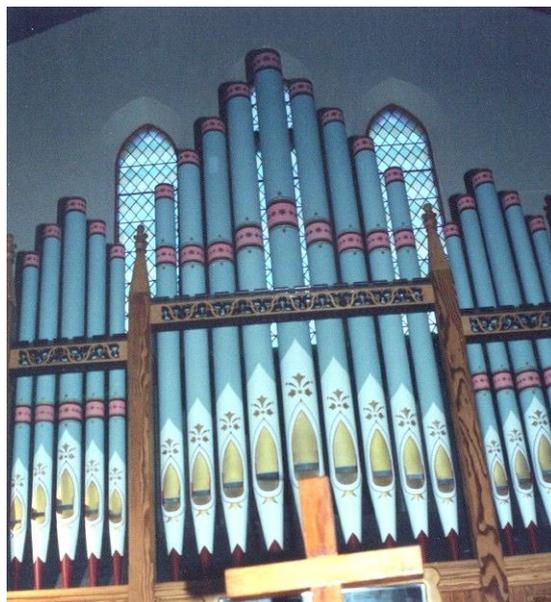
Graham presented a varied selection of music, all of it well executed in both technical skill and appreciation of the instrument and its environment. The program was:

Fanfare	Jacques Lemmens
Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme	J S Bach
Grand March from Tannhauser	Richard Wagner

Prelude and Valse Lente from Coppelia	L Delibes
Partita on “Hyfrydol”	David Lasky
Graham played a selection of hymn improvisations and invited participation of the audience to sing (words were provided in the program). These included “Love divine”, “To God be the glory”, and the rousing “Guide me, O my great Redeemer”.	
Adagio from Toccata and Fugue in C major	J S Bach
Fantasia and Fugue in G minor	J S Bach
Encore:	
Toccata and Fugue in D minor	J S Bach

The evening service was a combined churches of York sing-a-long and once again the church resounded to the organ accompanied by piano leading a large congregation. On this occasion, Bruce Duncan, organist at York Uniting Church, played the organ and Shirley Winton, Churches of Christ, played piano. In all, Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August will go down in the history of the church as being a rather magnificent day and one on which the organ well and truly acquitted itself in all its old age and new glory.

*“Almighty God alone can never be given sufficient thanks for having granted to man in His mercy and great goodness gifts as have enabled him to achieve such a perfect, one might almost say the most perfect, creation and instrument of music as is the organ in its arrangement and construction; and to play upon it with hands and with feet in such a manner that God in Heaven may be praised, His worship adorned, and man moved and inspired to Christian devotion.”*<sup>8</sup>




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<sup>1</sup> “The Organ”, William Leslie Sumner  
<sup>2</sup> OHTA web site detail  
<sup>3</sup> Census Reference: RG12/144 f.174  
<sup>4</sup> The British Institute of Organ Studies  
<sup>5</sup> Gazetteer of New South Wales Organs  
<sup>6</sup> Wesley Uniting Church, York, records  
<sup>7</sup> Organ records, F J Larner & Co  
<sup>8</sup> Michael Praetorius, 1619