

Christ Church + Waltham Cross

The Organ - A History & Description

The Organ at Christ Church was built by **J. W. Walker and Sons Ltd** in 1898 (*as recorded on the console nameplate*) from a second-hand organ brought from the Church at Old Windsor. Originally housed in the Gallery at the West End of the Church, it was moved to its current position in a chamber high up on the south side of the newly built Chancel in 1914.

Originally the "wind" for the Organ was provided by a large hand-pump. In 1937 an electric blower was installed.

The materials used and the standard of workmanship and finish are first-class as one would expect from one of the great names in British organ building.

Tonally, the organ would have been typical of many small church organs produced at that time and well into the 20th Century by Walkers and others.

The design philosophy was to provide a number of quiet colourful effects for use in the Liturgy and in choir accompaniment, plus a bold Great Open Diapason for congregational accompaniment and to provide dignity and weight.

Slight extra volume and brightness was achieved by adding the Swell Principal 4ft with octave coupler, making the organist work hard, since this adds to the weight of the key touch.

The brilliance and power we expect today were deemed more appropriate to the concert hall or cathedral.

The original 1898 specification was as follows:-

Swell		Great		Couplers	
Oboe	8	Suade Flute	4	Swell Octave	
Principal	4	Dulciana	8	Swell to Great	
Leiblich Gedact	8	Wald Flute	8	Swell to Pedal	
Gamba	8	Open Diapason	8	Great to Pedal	
		Pedal			
		Bourdon	16	2 Composition Pedals	

Such an organ, beautiful as it was, had its limitations when leading the singing of a large congregation or providing music for great Festivals or Weddings. It was to address this problem that the organ underwent restoration and a tonal transformation by **Mr Brian Bunting** in 1974.

Transposing and rescaling some of the pipework, and providing some new pipes to replace quiet stops, Mr Bunting produced a bright, well balanced chorus on each manual. It is a great tribute to his artistry that the organ has retained its "Walker" character.

The current (1974) specification is as follows:-

Swell		Great		Couplers	
Trumpet	8	Block Flute	2	Swell Octave	
Fifteenth	2	Principal	4	Swell to Great	
Suabe Flute	4	Stopped Diapason	8	Swell to Pedal	
Leiblich Gedact	8	Open Diapason	8	Great to Pedal	
		Pedal			
		Bourdon	16	2 Composition Pedals	

The action is "tracker" (*mechanical*) throughout – the best action for responsiveness, reliability and longevity, requiring minimal maintenance. The bellows are still made of the original leather and are in good condition with "plenty of life left" in them.

Tonally (*with one exception*) the organ is an absolute gem. The two **Swell Flutes** (*Suabe Flute & Leiblich Gedact by Walker*) are well contrasted and full of harmonic interest. Though originally on different manuals, they combine impeccably.

The beautiful **Fifteenth** (*old "Dulciana" rescaled*) tops them most effectively and plays an important role in adding brightness to its own manual (*the Swell*), but is potent enough to make itself heard in the full organ. The **Trumpet** (*old "Oboe" revoiced with new resonators*) is snappy and colourful; a useful solo stop that also blend well with the flutes.

The Great **Open Diapason**, though not of a very large scale, is a typical Walker specimen, broad, mellow and rich, whilst the **Principal** (*formerly on the Swell*) has almost certainly been rescaled and contrary to Walker practice, is now almost equal in power to the Open Diapason, giving a broad, warm tone, which perfectly suits the very helpful acoustics of the Church.

The **Stopped Diapason** provided by Bunting is both characterful and appropriate, blending well with the rest of the organ, and not too loud to accompany the Trumpet with the Swell Box closed.

The **Pedal Bourdon** (*Walker*) provides a solid foundation, without being too heavy or booming for lighter combinations.

The one unfortunate addition in 1974 was the **Great Block Flute**, a huge scaled, wind-guzzling baroque-style stop imposed on a quintessentially English Organ! In fairness to Brian Bunting, it must be said that he was complying with the wishes of the Organ Consultant at the time and would have preferred to have added a Fifteenth on this stop. Block Flutes were the "in thing" at the time - It was believed that they could fulfil a dual role as part of the Flute chorus and to top the Diapasons. The result (*as here*) was frequently not the best!

It is to be hoped that any future restoration of the Organ will see this replaced by a Fifteenth voiced to blend with and enrich the Diapasons 8 & 4.

Thanks to a generous bequest of **Mr Charles Maxfield** (1911 - 1995), son of Selina and Charles Maxfield (in whose memory the 1974 tonal changes were made), the future upkeep and maintenance of the Organ is assured for a good number of years to come.

Drawn from a report on the Organ by Richard Bond, Diocesan Organ Consultant: Aug, 2002

The Organ in the Gallery on the South Side of the Chancel

Access to the Organ Loft is by means of a spiral staircase in the Church Hall. There is very little room in the loft - it is definitely not a place for those suffering from claustrophobia or vertigo! Mirrors mounted above the console help the Organist to keep an eye on what is happening down in the Chancel and body of the Church.

A brass memorial plaque in the chancel records the 1974 restoration in these words:

*March 1974
The Organ was restored in memory of
The Reverend Ronald Charles Jefferyes
Vicar of this Parish 1959 - 1970
And the tonal alterations made in memory of
Selina Maxfield 1873 - 1952
and her husband
Charles E Maxfield 1873 - 1960*

