

NICHOLSON & Co.

PIPE ORGAN BUILDERS

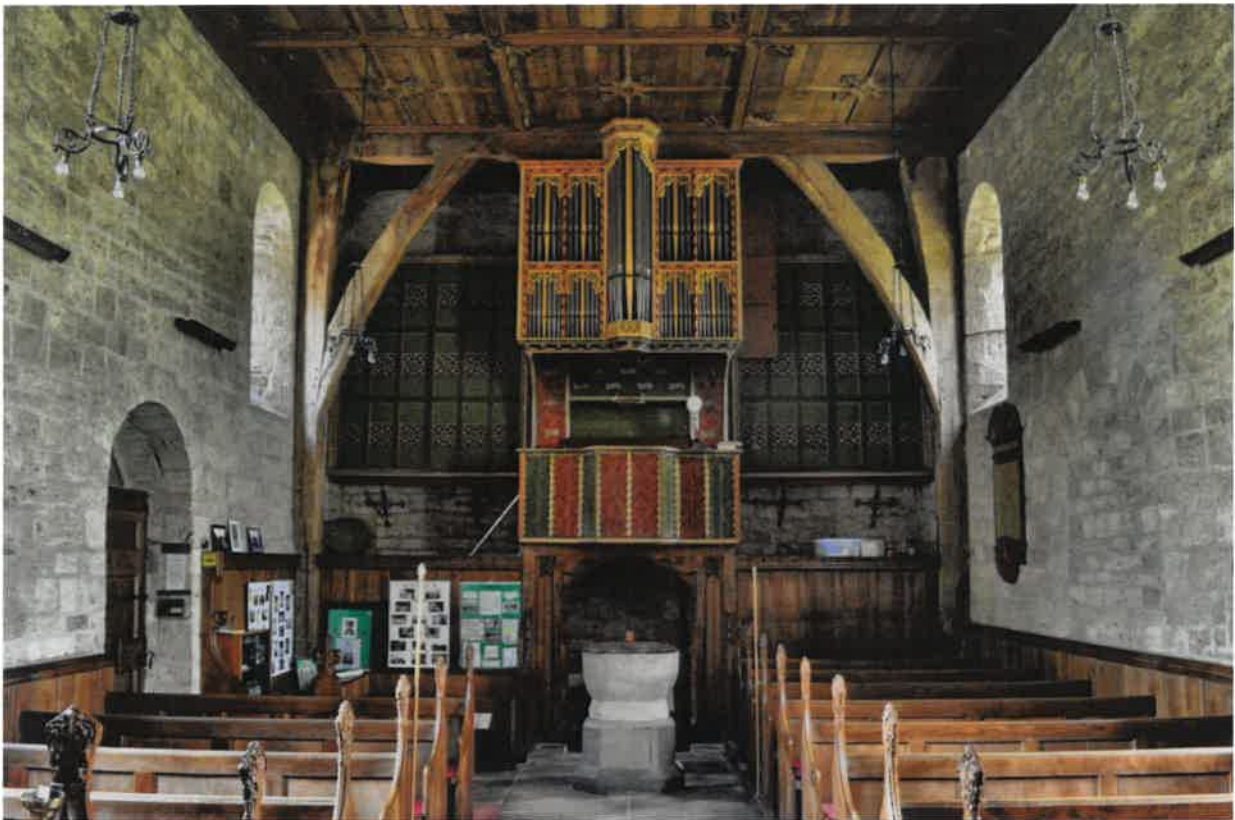
EST. 1841



ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH MOCCAS

THE ORGAN

REPORT AND PROPOSALS



The organ in St Michael's Church in Moccas dates from 1871 and was installed during the course of a comprehensive restoration of the church building under the guidance of George Gilbert Scott Jr. The organ was built by the London firm of J.W. Walker & Sons who were among the pre-eminent English organ builders of the mid-19th century.

The organ replaced a previous instrument built by Samuel Green in 1786, which was moved to Dinmore Manor in 1871 and happily survives today in Croft Castle, Herefordshire.

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The 1871 Walker organ enjoys a splendid position on the west wall of the nave, and is housed in a striking case designed by Scott. The case is decorated with a design of exceptional detail and craftsmanship, though it is not known who undertook this work.

As a simple village organ exemplifying the highest quality of Victorian organ building, the organ lived a peaceful existence until it was tragically rebuilt in 1972 by Anthony Wordsell of Clun. This work was misguided in intention and crude in its execution. The tonal scheme of the organ was altered to try to reflect the prevailing fashion at the time for organs to have more brilliance and sparkle in their sound, and much original pipework was discarded or revoiced. So disappointing were the results of this work, both tonally and mechanically, that in 1978 we were asked to step in and undertake the minimum necessary level of remedial work required to return the organ to reliable playing condition and to an acceptable sound. Some of our staff involved in this work are still with the firm today. The limited tonal restoration work in 1978 was not an attempt to return the organ exactly to its pre-1972 specification, but to recreate an organ in the spirit of the original instrument. Thus the present specification of the organ is similar to, but not identical to, the pre-1972 specification, as can be seen in the specifications at the end of this report.

It was our privilege to tune and maintain this instrument until 2007, when we were advised by the church that tuning was to cease for budgetary reasons. It is heartening to learn that there is now a renewed appreciation of the potential of the instrument.

The organ remains in reasonable playing order today, but is worn and dirty. The problem can essentially be summarised as reflecting that the organ is now 146 years old, and has had no sympathetic comprehensive restoration in its lifetime. The organ was spoiled in 1972 and the situation partly recovered, at a budget, in 1978, now nearly 40 years ago.

Appraisal

Pipework

The large wooden pipes of the Bourdon stop on the Pedal Organ are arranged in rows within the long cases either side of the organ. The pipes of the Great Organ (lower manual) are in the central case behind the façade pipes, and the pipes of the Swell Organ (upper manual) are behind them in a small box.

The Great Organ contains the main foundational chorus of the organ's tonal scheme. In 1972, it was altered by removal of the Gamba 8' and Flute 4', these being replaced by a Nazard $2^{2/3}$ and Tierce $1^{3/5}$ in the fashion of the day for such non-unison mutation stops. In 1978, we removed the Tierce and replaced it with a Stopped Flute 4', and re-named the Nazard to a Twelfth.

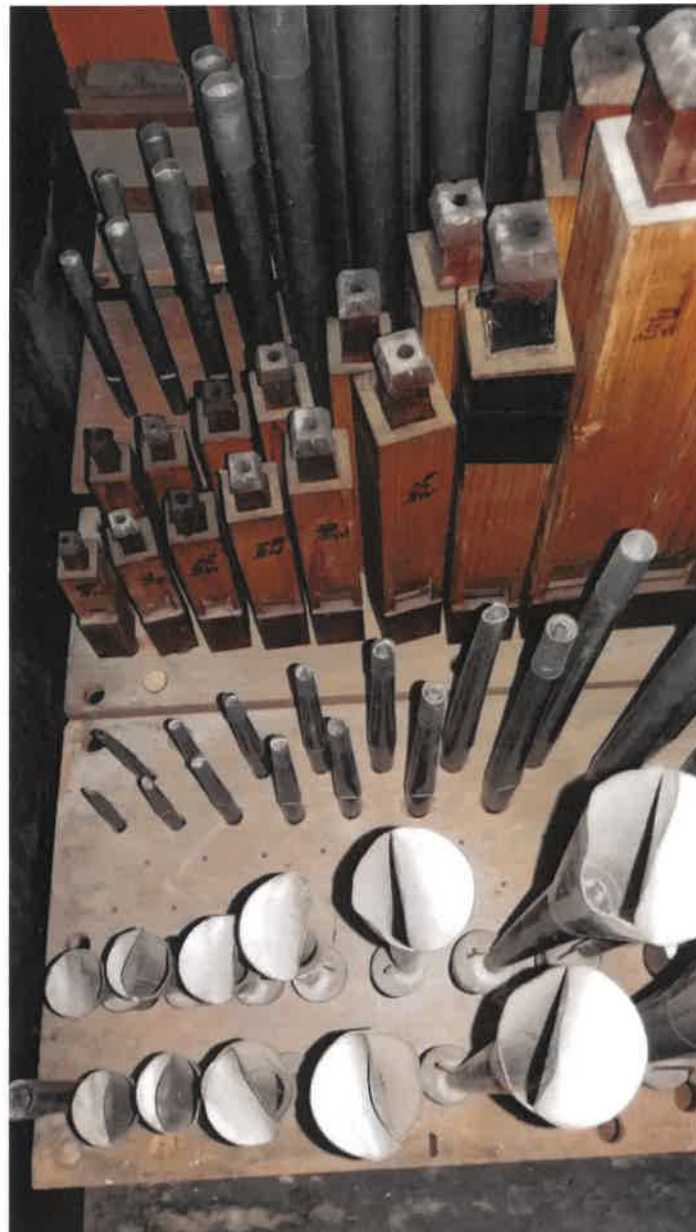
It could be argued that any work now under consideration should include removal of the Twelfth and its replacement with a replica Gamba. However, we feel that this was actually a sensible substitution. The 1871 work was not without a nod to fashion, and the specification had an over-provision of 8' tone. We recommend leaving the pipework of the Great Organ as it is presently, though it would benefit from some attention to speech and some re-balancing between the stops. As the only non-unison stop in the organ, the Twelfth adds a distinctive and welcome interest to the sound of the instrument.



*Great Organ pipework, with tuning platform and rear of façade pipes on the left
and the Swell Organ expression box on the right*

The small Swell Organ suffered badly in 1972. The Open Diapason was replaced by a two-rank Quartane mixture, and the Oboe was revoiced as a Fagotto. In 1978, we returned the Fagotto to Oboe tonality, and replaced the Quartane with a second-hand Viole 8'.

This division works well, but the Viole is somewhat lightweight and the organ lacks a smaller diapason to contrast against the large example on the Great Organ. We recommend leaving the Swell Organ as at present but replacing the 1978 second-hand Viole with a new Horn Diapason 8'. A Horn Diapason would restore the missing secondary chorus effect, noted above, but would give a little more tonal interest and contrast to the Open Diapason on the Great Organ. Horn Diapasons were a typical inclusion in 19th-century Walker organs and we would propose to match the scales of the new pipework on an existing example elsewhere.



Part of Swell Organ pipework

There are a number of badly damaged pipes in the organ, which we will repair in our specialist workshop. Some of the rackboards installed in 1972 and to a tight budget in 1978 are functional but not of matching quality to the original; we propose to re-make these properly.



Damaged top of bass Open Diapason pipe



Original (left) and 1972 (right) rackboards

Soundboards and chests

The soundboards upon which the pipes of the Great and Swell Organs stand, and the chest upon which the pipes of the Pedal Organ stand, are all in fair condition. Made of long pieces of grained timber, they are susceptible to shrinkage and expansion upon changes in relative humidity in the atmosphere within the church. Although it is clear from the tuning book that some problems have been experienced in the past, the soundboards were not giving trouble during our inspection. However, to ensure their long-term reliability, the soundboards and chest would benefit from off-site restoration to true up straight faces and close up any splits.



Slider actions

The slider actions on the Great and Swell soundboards (bringing in and out of play individual ranks of pipes) are all mechanical. These appear to be moving freely, but in need of overhaul to renew bushing, remove lost motion and reduce leaks.



Slider lever arms, with notable cobweb

Key actions

The mechanism that converts the player's pressing of a key to a valve beneath a pipe opening to admit wind to the pipe is known as the action. The action for the manuals on this organ is entirely mechanical, formed of thin wooden rods called trackers. Mechanical action organs are highly regarded by organists; the touch is altogether more satisfying to play than an electric action. The action is in reasonable condition, but dirty. Bearings are worn and some rudimentary repairs have clearly been carried out in places, using inappropriate modern components. After nearly a century and a half of service, the action is long overdue for careful dismantling, cleaning, repair and re-bushing to take up lost motion and regulate an even, crisp touch. Such repair ought to be undertaken using the same materials and components as originally installed.



Coupling mechanism behind console (Swell keys visible at bottom of picture), with non-standard plastic buttons.

Winding

Wind for the organ pipes comes from a substantial double-rise reservoir (bellows) within the cupboard at the base of the organ on the opposite side of the console steps. This would originally have been blown by hydraulic power: the pressure of a mains water supply was used to move cranks that raised and lowered small bellows (known as feeders) underneath the reservoir to fill it. At some point an electric blower was fitted, to which a replacement electric motor appears to have been attached recently. During our visit we were advised that the organ remained water-powered until the 1960s. Interestingly, the Bailey's Patent water engine remains in place, though non-functional.





Water engine

We were requested to include within our quotation an option for the restoration to working condition of the water engine, as a historical feature. While this would certainly be possible and would be an attractive function, it should be noted that modern legislation and sustainable energy policies would necessitate the introduction of a recirculating water system, so that the water pressure is created by an electric pump within recirculated water, rather than constant use and disposal of clean mains water when the engine is in use. Restoration of organ water engines is a specialist task and we recommend that if the church wishes to give further consideration to this, it should request a quotation from a specialist supplier, with whom any contract should be placed directly. We recommend James Richardson-Jones of the Duplex Pipe Organ and Blower Company¹. Although any work at Moccas would need a bespoke survey and quotation, he has indicated that similar work elsewhere has cost in the region of £8,000.

If the water engine is to be restored, the leatherwork on the feeders will require replacement with new; if the water engine is not to be restored, we would leave the feeders in situ as a historical feature but seal them off from inside the main double-rise reservoir. In either instance, the leatherwork on the reservoir will require replacement with new.

The reservoir feeds another, smaller reservoir used to supply lower wind pressure to the Great and Pedal Organs than to the rest of the instrument. This should also be re-leathered.



Mouldy and perishing leather on reservoir

Trunking within the organ is generally in good condition, though it appears that metal conveyancing to the façade pipes has been replaced by flexible cardboard tubing at some point. This is not in keeping with the original style or quality of the instrument. However, it is perfectly functional and is only seen by the organ tuner. We have quoted as an option the replacement of this flexible tubing with metal conveyancing in period style.

¹ www.duplexpipeorganandblowerco.co.uk



Flexible cardboard tubing to façade pipes

Internal layout and cleanliness

Although this is a small organ, the layout is very cramped and maintenance access to some parts of the mechanical action is very difficult. We do not, unfortunately, see any way to improve this.

Parts of the organ are filthy, with much evidence of wildlife finding a home inside the organ. It is not a pleasant working environment for tuners, with much scattered mouse poison, thick cobwebs, and evidence of woodworm.



Interior of organ, showing mouse nest, urine stains, liberal quantities of (blue) poison, and woodworm

Console

The console is a lovely period piece. It is simple and rugged in construction, with few refinements other than two candle sconces, which thankfully remain. The appearance of the console would be greatly improved by the tidying up and – hopefully – removal of the variety of plastic electric fittings that organ consoles tend to accumulate over the years. The key ivory is in sound condition and needs only a clean and polish.



Variety of electrical fittings screwed into decorated case

There are a variety of styles of lettering on the drawstop labels, a legacy of the various changes to the instrument's tonal scheme over the years. We will replace all the non-original labels with new in exact matching style to the original labels.



Variety of lettering on drawstop labels



The woodwork in the pedalboard area is tired and has been subject to piecemeal repair over the years. One area of concern regards the expression pedal to the Swell Organ. The Swell Organ pipes are all enclosed in a large wooden box, one face of which is fitted with louvres like Venetian blinds. The organist can manipulate these blinds by a foot pedal to control the volume of sound from this division. The expression pedal at Moccas would originally have been of lever type, where it would naturally be inclined to rise, closing the shutters, and would be held open by notches in an adjacent wooden bar.



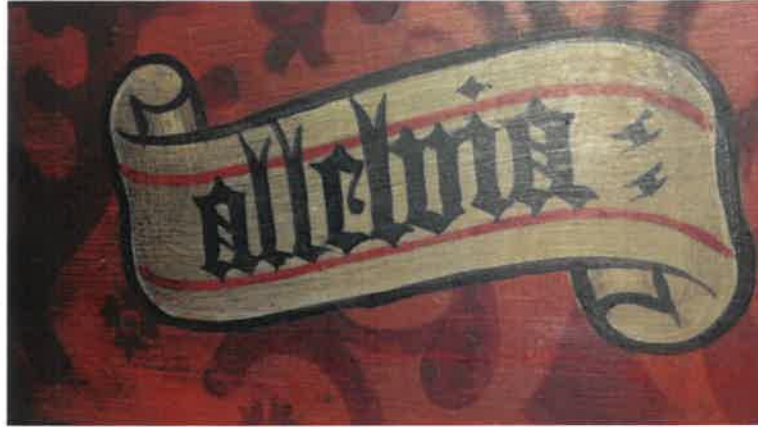
Pedal area showing non-original expression pedal and damaged woodwork

At some point in the past, a crude attempt has been made to convert this to a balanced type, where the pedal can be left in any position. The mechanism was not re-made but simply fitted with a friction block, out of which the hinge pin has fallen. Although a balanced pedal is more straightforward to use, we feel that the appropriate way forward here would be to restore the original lever pedal to match the historical nature of the instrument.

Our approach to the console would otherwise generally be an overhaul: taking up lost motion, replacing felts, repairing corroded metal, etc. The pedalboard appears to be relatively recent and is in fair condition.

Case

Perhaps the most captivating feature of the Moccas instrument is the sumptuously hand-decorated case. Although still impressive viewed from a distance, a closer investigation shows the decoration to be much in need of specialist restoration. Every part of the decoration is dirty, and bruises and scrapes acquired over the years abound. Some of the decoration e.g. sunbursts is missing. Restoration of painted decoration such as this is a highly specialist task, and we recommend that the church consider such work in tandem with restoration of the organ. We



Pictures illustrating detail and condition of case decoration

Conclusion

The organ in St Michael's Church was a prudent investment by former generations, and enjoys a splendid location and decorated case. It was much spoiled by ill-advised work in 1972, from which some recovery was completed in 1978. It is now in need of a comprehensive restoration to return it to pristine condition along with further tonal recovery work to reinforce the ideals of the original tonal scheme. We recommend that serious consideration be given to commissioning expert conservation work on the case decoration, and would be pleased to work with any such specialist.

Restored to its original character, the tonal scheme of the Moccas organ would finally coalesce once more to give characterful accompaniment and support of sung worship, but with its warmth and blend returned for another century of service.

For over 175 years, Nicholson & Co. has been building and restoring pipe organs in the finest traditions of English organ building. We are currently building the largest church pipe organ to be built in Britain in 75 years – for Holy Trinity Cathedral in Auckland; in 2010 we completed a new pipe organ for Llandaff Cathedral, the largest new cathedral organ to be built in Britain for almost half a century. Recent acclaimed restoration projects include the organs of Leominster Priory; St John's Hyde Park Church, London; All Saints' Church, Clifton, Bristol; the Old High Church, Inverness; and Sofia Church, Sweden. Details of these and many other projects can be found at www.nicholsonorgans.co.uk.

Funding, education and after-care

As the building is listed, VAT payable to Nicholson & Co. on pipe organ restoration work in listed church buildings should be recoverable from the Government under the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme (see www.lpwscheme.org.uk). Grant funding could be explored for all or part of this work; the case in particular may prove of interest to awarding bodies. We have enclosed a leaflet on grant funding for work on pipe organs.

We see educational outreach as a key part of our work, and when on site would be delighted to explain our work to the congregation and/or the children of a local school.

Committed after-care to the organ is assured: we operate a nation-wide tuning and maintenance service.

have recently collaborated with Elizabeth Holford Associates² on the restoration of historic decoration on the organ of St John's Hyde Park Church in London, and would recommend that this firm be approached regarding the Moccas case.



² www.elizabethholford.co.uk