

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORGANS IN HOLY TRINITY PARISH CHURCH, BRADFORD ON AVON, WILTSHIRE

The first organ for which meaningful records exist at Holy Trinity was a two-manual instrument built by Sweetland of Bath in 1875. This replaced an earlier eighteenth-century instrument (builder unknown) in a gallery at the West End of the church, for which almost no records survive. There is a picture of this earlier organ hanging close to the present organ at the East End of the north aisle. It must have been quite an impressive instrument, as the case is large and ornate for its time, and covers most of the west (tower) wall of the church. It is not known what happened to this organ after removal in the 1860s. There are rumours that it was dismantled and exported, sold to a church in Canada to provide funds for the construction of the Sweetland instrument, but it is simply hearsay and there is no documentary evidence for this whatever.

A little more is known about the Sweetland instrument, including a complete stop list specification. This can be found in the National Pipe Organ register, File no. E00026<sup>1</sup>. The Sweetland organ was positioned in a small chapel – now used as the Sacristy – at the East End of the south side of the nave. Almost all of the mutation, mixture and reed stops of the Sweetland organ were left as ‘prepared-for’ when it was installed in 1875, and it is not known whether the full specification of the organ was ever actually completed. In any case, the church was badly flooded in 1882 – Holy Trinity is situated close to the bank of the River Avon, which is prone to flooding – and this severely damaged the organ. Despite a rebuild in 1900, it is said that the organ never really recovered, and it eventually became clear that replacement was the only way for the church to gain a completely reliable instrument suitable to its needs.

The contract was awarded to Henry Willis and Sons, who installed a brand-new instrument in 1926. Once again, the fate of the Sweetland organ is unclear. Since it had not been possible to restore it properly after the flood damage, most likely it was simply scrapped. But again there are rumours that it was sold on, possibly to a church in Kent. It might also have been taken by Willis in part-exchange for the new instrument, in which case it would have been broken up and the parts which could not be reused or recycled would have been sold for scrap.

Henry Willis (III) installed the new instrument at the East End of the North Aisle in 1926. This positioning allowed the organ to speak more fully into the church, as well as offering slightly more protection against flooding. The new organ, largely the gift of the local engineering family of Moulton, was conceived as a small three-manual instrument with a detached console on the south side of the church. It is said that the organ as originally installed had the Swell and Great manual divisions only, and the Choir was added later when funds permitted. But once again there is little evidence for this; and considering the position of the Choir Organ right at the bottom of the building frame underneath the Swell Organ, the author considers it unlikely! It is likely that Willis had planned for a unit-chest 8' Tromba on the Great, duplexed on the Choir and extended to a 16' Trombone on the Pedal. This rank has never been added, although there are clear signs that it had been ‘prepared-for’. The organ was built after Willis had returned from



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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the photograph attached to this file is not of the Sweetland organ, but is a reproduction of the picture of the earlier organ, mentioned above.

visiting the famous American organ builder, Ernest Skinner (who had himself been tutored by 'Father' Willis many years earlier). So the console bears a strong resemblance to Skinner consoles of the time, with the speaking stops on drawstops, and an impressive array of couplers etc. on rocking-tabs above the Swell manual. The main divisions of the organ are also founded on Pitman-type windchests, rather than the slider chests of traditional European organ construction.



By 1960, the 1920s electro-pneumatic action was showing its age badly. In 1963 the organ was rebuilt by Henry Willis V, who modernised the action. Some very limited tonal remodelling was carried out at the same time. While the assertion on NPOR that the Great and Choir flutes were exchanged is (in the view of the author) almost certainly incorrect, there is some evidence for ranks of pipes having been moved about - the labels on the windchest inspection covers sometimes do not correspond to the ranks of pipes that are above them.

By the late 1980s, it was clear that the organ's action again needed substantial attention and a further rebuild was undertaken by a local organ builder, who converted the Pitman windchests to direct electric action. At the same time the console was moved to its present position in the North Aisle, directly next to the organ case. Sadly the electrification of the Pitman chests was not an unqualified success, and more work was needed as soon as 1992 when Michael Farley Organ Builders, now of Sidmouth, again replaced many of the magnets. This phase of the work was brought to completion in 1999 when Farley replaced the console electrics with a modern multilevel capture system with solid-state transmission, bringing the organ to its current state of revision.

In summary, Holy Trinity Church has been home to three organs of some note since the eighteenth century, including the present splendid example of Willis's work. It is curious though that the documentary history, even of the present instrument, is rather less than one might expect. That of the Sweetland instrument is scanty, and that of the eighteenth-century instrument seems to be all but non-existent, buried in hearsay. The author would commend this as an excellent project to an interested organ historian, or local historian, to attempt to unearth more evidence about the life and times of the Sweetland instrument and its predecessor to help provide a full picture of the music-making in Holy Trinity church all the way back to the Reformation.

*Gareth Bennett, January 2012.*

The specification of the Willis III instrument is given on the following page.

# Holy Trinity Church, Bradford on Avon

## The Willis III Organ (1926)

Great	Swell (enclosed)	Choir (enclosed)
Bourdon 16	Geigen Diapason 8	Dulciana 8
Open Diapason 8	Rohr Gedackt 8	Cor-de-nuit 8
Spitzflute 8	Echo Viole 8	Flute Ouverte 4
Clarabella 8	Viole Celeste 8	Clarinet 8
Principal 4	Octave Geigen 4	Tremolo
Flauto Traverso 4	Flute Triangulaire 4	
Twelfth $2\frac{2}{3}$	Mixture 3rks	<b>Pedal</b>
Fifteenth 2	Contra Hautboy 16	Open Bass 16
	Cornoepen 8	Sub Bass 16
	Tremolo	Flute 8
		Octave 8
		Octave Flute 4

Above registers on drawstops, Swell and Pedal to left of manuals, Great and Choir to right of manuals.

### Couplers (on rocking tabs above Swell manual)

### Accessories

Great to Pedal	6 thumb-pistons to Great Organ
Choir to Pedal	8 thumb-pistons to Swell Organ
Swell to Pedal	6 thumb-pistons to Choir Organ
Choir Octave to Pedal	8 general thumb-pistons (in Swell keyclip)
Swell Octave to Pedal	
Swell Suboctave to Great	Reversible thumb-piston, Great to Pedal*
Swell to Great	Reversible thumb-piston, Swell to Great*
Swell Octave to Great	Reversible thumb-piston, Choir to Great
Choir Suboctave to Great	Reversible thumb-piston, Swell to Pedal*
Choir to Great	Reversible thumb-piston, Choir to Pedal
Choir Octave to Great	Reversible thumb-piston, Swell to Choir
Swell Suboctave	Octaves Cancel thumb-piston
Swell Unison-off	General Cancel thumb-piston
Swell Octave	8 toe-pistons to Swell Organ
Choir Suboctave	6 toe-pistons to Pedal Organ
Choir Unison-off	* Duplicated by toe-pistons
Choir Octave	
Swell Suboctave to Choir	Solid-state capture system with 8 memories and
Swell to Choir	‘Setter’ thumb-piston
Swell Octave to Choir	
Great & Pedal Combinations Coupled	Balanced swell pedal to Swell Organ
Generals on Swell Toe-pistons	Balanced swell pedal to Choir Organ