

The Organs of St Mary's Warwick – a brief history

The earliest mention of any organ in the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick, comes in mediaeval times when an instrument stood on a stone screen under the choir arch. Little detail is known about this instrument, but what is certain is that it was destroyed in the fire of 1694, which also claimed the 14th century nave and tower of the church and destroyed much of Warwick's town centre as well.

When the church was rebuilt, a new organ was placed on a screen between the nave and chancel by Thomas Schwarbrick, a German organ builder who had settled in Warwick. This work was completed in 1717, and the organ remained in that position until 1795 when it was removed to the west gallery of the church where the case remains to this day, although now slightly larger than its original form. The craftsmanship of the case is particularly fine, the carving at its base being by Grinling Gibbons.

During the next hundred years, the instrument was modified and enlarged on a number of occasions, most notably by Bishop in 1834, Banfield in 1836 and 1842, and a rather more thorough restoration by Hill in 1865, when the west case was brought slightly further forward.

By the end of the 19th century it was evident that drastic action had to be taken with the organ, and so in 1897 Robert Hope-Jones was invited to provide a new instrument. This was one of the first organs in the country to have electro-pneumatic action. It had a four-manual console, some thirty-six speaking stops, and was spread over the church in four separate cases – one in the chancel, one each on the north-east and south-east transept walls, and a small part in the old Schwarbrick west case. This organ lasted for almost another hundred years, tonal adjustments and additions being made by Norman and Beard (1918), Compton (1928) and a more substantial rebuild in 1966 by the Northampton firm of Alfred E. Davies and Son Ltd.

The present specification was drawn up by the organist, Andrew Fletcher, in consultation with Roy Massey, and was built by the firm of Nicholson and Co. Ltd. of Worcester in 1980. The aim was to produce an instrument well able to serve all the needs for accompanying the very fine Collegiate Church Choir and also to be a very versatile recital instrument. The result is effectively two fine organs played from one console in the nave. The two-manual transept organ, now contained entirely in the north-east case (although the empty chancel and south-east cases remain in church to this day) retains much of the old Hope-Jones pipework and is most English in character, whereas the west organ, in the enlarged Schwarbrick case, is a neo-classically voiced three-manual organ ideally suited to the demands of the European organ schools. Both organs can be played singly, or used together to great effect.

Further small tonal modifications and a modernisation of the console were completed in 1998.

The church also possesses a three-stop chamber organ, made in 1993 by Richard Moore of Leamington Spa. Situated in the chancel, it is sometimes used to accompany mid-week choral services there, but can be moved to any location in the church and is often used in concerts or in services including music of the 18th century or earlier.

*Notes by Simon Lole (1987)
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Organ specifications

West organ (Nicholson, 1980)

Pedal

Sub Bass 32
Principal 16
Bourdon 16
Diapason 8
Bass Flute 8
Choral Bass 4
Octave Flute 4
Mixture III (26.29.33)
Schalmei 4
Tremulant

Bombarde Pedal

Contra Bombarde 32
Bombarde 16
Fagott 16
Octave Bombarde 8

Swell to Pedal
Great to Pedal
Positive to Pedal

8 thumb pistons to each division
8 toe pistons to Pedal
8 toe pistons to Swell
8 general pistons
Reversible thumb pistons for all couplers
4 thumb pistons Sequencer advance (+)
1 thumb piston Sequencer regress (-)

1 toe piston Great to Pedal
1 toe piston Swell to Great
1 toe piston Bombarde 16
1 toe piston Contra Bombarde 32

Great

Bourdon 16
Principal 8
Stopped Flute 8
Octave 4
Flute 4
Grosse Tierce 3 1/5
Larigot 1 1/3
Quartane II (12.15)
Fourniture III-IV (15.19.22.26)
Trompette 8
Tremulant
Trompeta Real 8 (from Positive)

Swell to Great
Positive to Great

Swell

Gedackt 8
Viola 8
Voix Celeste 8
Principal 4
Octave 2
Sesquialtera II (12.17)
Plein Jeu IV-V (12.22.26.29.33)
Fagott 16
Posaune 8
Tremulant

Positive

Stopped Diapason 8
Nachthorn 4
Nazard 2 2/3
Principal 2
Blockflute 2
Tierce 1 3/5
Sifflote 1
Cymbel III (26.29.33)
Regal 16
Voix Humaine 8
Tremulant
Trompeta Real 8
Trompeta Octava 4

Swell to Positive

Great & Pedal pistons coupler
Swell & Pedal pistons coupler
Generals on Swell toe pistons
Transept Great on Positive
Transept Swell on Positive

(see next page for specification of the Transept and Chamber organs)

Transept organ (Alfred E. Davies & Sons, 1969 – rebuilt Nicholson, 1979 / 1998)

Pedal

Geigen 16
Bourdon 16
Principal 8
Bass Flute 8
Fifteenth 4
Trombone 16
Trumpet 8

Swell to Pedal
Great to Pedal

Great

Contra Geigen 16
Open Diapason 8
Stopped Flute 8
Octave 4
Wald Flute 4
Twelfth 2 2/3
Fifteenth 2
Furniture III-IV (15.19.22.26)
Trumpet 8

Swell to Great

Swell

Stopped Diapason 8
Salicional 8
Vox Angelica 8
Principal 4
Stopped Flute 4
Fifteenth 2
Mixture III-IV (19.22.26.29)
Contra Oboe 16
Oboe 8
Cornopean 8
Clarion 4
Tremulant

Swell Octave
Swell Sub-octave

Both organs are played from a single detached 3-manual and Pedal console situated in the North Aisle.

Compasses: Manuals C - c4 Pedals C - g1

Chamber organ (Richard Moore, 1993)

(Stopped Diapason) 8
(Stopped Flute) 4
(Principal) 2

Compass: C - a3

Transposable between A = 440 and A = 415