

William Anderson - 19th Century Melbourne Organbuilder

An Overview

by John Maidment



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The organbuilder William Anderson was a descendant of his namesake grandfather William Anderson who was based in Edinburgh, Scotland. His son, Andrew Anderson, the organbuilder's father, was born in that city in 1808 and died on 14 September 1866 at Bond Street, South Yarra. He married Ann A. Auchterlonie in London in 1830.¹ Andrew Anderson was a pianoforte manufacturer and servicer and his descendants still have a box of his tools, including a number of tuning hammers, clearly for use on wooden-framed pianos.²

Andrew Anderson, his wife and children, arrived in Melbourne on the ship *Clifton* in 1850 and were assisted passengers on what was known as one of the 'Lang ships', after Dr John Dunmore Lang. Andrew and Ann had a total of 10 children, four of whom sadly died in infancy. William Anderson, the organbuilder, was born on 13 November 1832 in London and died at Brighton, Victoria on 17 January 1921 at the grand age of 89.³ He lived with his brother Andrew Anderson in his house at Wellington Street, Brighton, as he was unmarried. They were all staunch Presbyterians.⁴

William Anderson initially headed off to the goldfields after his arrival in Victoria (maybe in 1851 as gold was only discovered that year) and then joined his father manufacturing pianos in Geelong. A partnership with Robert Mackie lasted from 1858 to 1864 when Mackie's ill-health forced its dissolution. Anderson moved to Britain in 1864 for a short period to gain more organbuilding expertise.⁵ It is not known with whom he worked in Britain, but several features of contemporary Gray & Davison organs (particularly the use of inclined parallel stop jambs, the Keraulophon and divided registers) hint that it may have been with this firm.⁶ Gray & Davison also exported at least four organs to Victoria (to churches in Ballarat and Bendigo) in the 1860s so that Anderson may indeed have been the link. Interestingly, in 1866 he was awarded an honorable mention for a pianoforte exhibited at the Intercolonial Exhibition of that year.⁷

William Anderson was appointed a juror to judge the musical instruments exhibits at both the 1880 and 1888 Melbourne exhibitions. The official record of the 1880 exhibition and an admission pass and a certificate of appreciation (1889) from the United States Government survive with his descendants.⁸

In 1888, the massive two-volume work *Victoria and its Metropolis* was published. Celebrating the centenary of settlement in Australia, this incorporated biographies of notable citizens including the three principal organbuilders in Melbourne – William Anderson, George Fincham and Alfred Fuller, which were presumably written by these people and submitted for publication. Anderson's copy of the work still exists.

Anderson, William, Melbourne, is the eldest son of the late Mr. Andrew Anderson, and came to Victoria in 1850 in the ship *Clifton*. His father built, over thirty years ago, at Geelong, the first pianoforte made in Victoria. Mr. William Anderson commenced business as organ builder at 32 Swanston-street in 1858 in partnership with Mr. Robert Mackie, and has been connected with the industry ever since. In 1864 the partnership was dissolved, and he visited the old country to gain experience, and perfect himself in the voicing and general mechanism of organs. Returning to Victoria the following year he started on the present site, 75 Flinders-lane east. Since then over fifty organs have passed through his hands. Among the principal ones he has built are those at SS. Peter and Paul's Roman Catholic Church, South Melbourne; St. George's (R.C.), Carlton; St Mark's, Fitzroy; St. Mary's, Hotham; St. Philip's, East Collingwood; besides a number of others in different places of worship.⁹

Apart from the manufacture of new pipe organs, Anderson seemed to acquire numerous second hand instruments both locally and from British sources and installed these in various churches around Victoria. There are also instances of where he purchased second hand organs from Fincham & Son, as indicated in this firm's records, now at the State Library of Victoria. He appears to have utilised components from older organs in some instruments of his own manufacture, such as the organ in St Mary's Catholic Church, Williamstown. Sadly none of his business records survive, nor can many of the instruments be accurately dated. A number of his instruments appear to have been moved around.

He never placed nameplates on his instruments, but the tonal design, case and console design and façade pipe decoration show consistent patterns.

A copperplate for his business letterhead survives with his descendants. His business premises were located off Flinders Lane, Melbourne in Hosier Lane which still runs south, behind the former State Theatre.¹⁰

Many of his instruments were built or supplied for the Catholic church and a number were opened by the organist of SS Peter & Paul's South Melbourne, Charles Sykes, who may have promoted Anderson's work.

Anderson, who was unmarried, died at Brighton, Victoria on 21 January 1921 at the age of 89.¹¹ Relatives still survive and have memories handed down of Uncle William.

ANDERSON'S INSTRUMENTS

I have been able to document around 25 substantially new instruments built by Anderson. The dates are those of their opening.

1870 Methodist Church, South Yarra (casework of Huon pine – present location unknown)¹²

1871 Congregational Church, East Melbourne (broken up, parts used at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Ringwood)

1874 Presbyterian Church, Williamstown (later at 'Dhurringile', Baptist Churches Kew and Elsternwick and now at St John's Anglican Church, Flinders)¹³

1875 SS Peter & Paul's Catholic Church, South Melbourne (present location unknown)

1877 St Mark's Anglican Church, Fitzroy (rebuilt: now at St Francis-in-the-Fields Anglican Church, Mooroolbark)

1877 Baptist Church, Fenwick Street, Geelong (now at Darnum Museum, Gippsland)

1879 St Mary's Anglican Church, Hotham (North Melbourne) (rebuilt and broken up)

1879 Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Kew (now at Thomson Memorial Presbyterian Church, Terang)

1881 Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Westbury, Tasmania (original condition)

1882 St George's Catholic Church, Carlton (first organ) to Christ Church Anglican Church, Beechworth 1887 (original condition)

- 1882 St Philip's Anglican Church, Collingwood (broken up, parts to South Australia)
- 1883 All Saints' Anglican Church, Northcote (front casework missing)
- 1884 SS Peter & Paul's Catholic Church, South Melbourne (broken up c.1970)
- 1887 St George's Catholic Church (later Sacred Heart Catholic Church), Carlton – (second organ - later enlarged to three manuals with new casework)
- 1887 St John's Anglican Church, Footscray (largely original condition apart from loss of Great Dulciana)
- 1888 Methodist Church, Daylesford (original condition – possibly the best surviving instrument)
- 1889 St Mary's Catholic Church, West Melbourne (attribution only: this may be the nucleus of the Old Museum organ, Brisbane¹⁴)
- 1891 St Ambrose's Catholic Church, Brunswick (original condition apart from painting of case and façade pipes - refurbished by Knud Smenge & revoiced)
- 1894 St Joseph's Catholic Church, South Yarra (original condition – overhauled George Fincham & Sons)
- 1896 Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Williamstown (original condition – 1898 Clarionet from St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat placed on spare slide)
- 1902 St James' Catholic Church, Gardenvale (using some Fuller components – restored/rebuilt Stewart Organs)
- 1902 Presbyterian Church, Prahran – opened February. Moved to Baptist Church House, East Melbourne and destroyed by fire. In 1907 Geo

Fincham & Son converted for Anderson a single manual organ to two manuals for Anderson, adding a swell of Open, Gedact, Gemshorn and Oboe, new action, pedal board and façade pipes – this may have been the organ placed in the Baptist Church, Eastern Hill shortly afterwards.

There were further organs built after this date according to the orders of pipework from Fincham & Son.

Dates unknown

Methodist Church Mt Erica, Prahran (broken up, parts used at Koonung Heights Uniting) – probably 1880s, judging from the façade pipe mouths of French formation

Methodist Church, Clifton Hill – enlarged single manual Hamlin & Son organ from Baptist Church, Collins Street to two manuals (removed and rebuilt)

St Joseph's Catholic Church, Collingwood – installed before 1900 (destroyed by fire 2007)

Residence of W.R. Bennetts, Fitzroy before 1885 (later at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Kensington 1887 and St Luke's Anglican Church, North Fitzroy c.1890)

St Mary's Catholic Church, Williamstown (using older components)

Second hand organs

Methodist Church, Mt Erica, Prahran c.1866 (now at Wesley College, Clunes)

St Paul's Anglican Church, Clunes (ex Daylesford and Melbourne)

Beechworth Town Hall (now at St Alban's, North Melbourne)

St Peter's Anglican Church, Brighton Beach (present location unknown)

St Matthias' Anglican Church, Richmond 1887 (broken up 1960s)

Congregational Church, Camberwell 1896 (rebuilt HN&B)

St Michael's Catholic Church, North Melbourne 1911 (rebuilt GF&S)

Holy Trinity Anglican Church, East Melbourne 1912 (Boom residence organ)

Prahran Town Hall 1860s??? (vanished – an engraving of this instrument exists)

Church of Christ, Carlton, 1913 (correspondence GF&S 15 December 1913 to William Anderson states "Enclosed please find a/c for erection of Organ at Carlton", presumably the organ at the Church of Christ, Lygon Street, which was a stock Fincham organ built in 1906 and hired to Holy Trinity Anglican Church, East Melbourne 1906-1912.

Other possible attributions

Presbyterian Church, Brunswick. Opened 1876.

Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Albert Park. Opened 1892.

Holy Advent Anglican Church. George Fincham & Son on 11 April 1916 referred to this as a two manual organ, Hautboy sw prepared for; the Great had a Stopped Diapason Bass and Clarabella and a metal-stopped Flute 4. This organ was destroyed by fire c. 1955. It would have been installed there second-hand.

SOME SPECIFIC INSTRUMENTS

SS Peter & Paul's Catholic Church, South Melbourne

The Advocate of 5 July 1884, p.15 reported:

"A fine new organ is now being built for SS. Peter and Paul's Church, South Melbourne, by Mr. William Anderson, of Flinders-lane East, whose father, by the way, manufactured at Geelong the first piano ever made in the colony. The instrument has two manuals, and contains twenty-six stops, amongst which are some excellent solo ones – namely, the oboe, flute, gemshorn, keraulophon, and trumpet. The pedal organ is particularly fine, and contains grand open (16ft.), bourdon (16ft.), and Principal."

St George's Catholic Church, Carlton (the precursor of Sacred Heart Church, Carlton)

The Advocate of 14 August 1886, p.16 reported:

"On Sunday (to-morrow) at the eleven o'clock Mass a new organ will be opened at this church. It has been built by Anderson, of Flinders-lane, at a cost of £600, and is replete with all modern improvements. It has twenty stops, two manuals, two sixteen feet pipes [stops] in pedal organ and one sixteen foot in the great organ."

Organ now at The Old Museum Building, Brisbane, Queensland

I propose that this was the organ originally in St Mary's Catholic Church, West Melbourne opened in August 1889 (see *The Advocate* 31 August 1889, p.17). No clues are given here regarding the builder – all it states is that "On Sunday last a new pipe organ which has been procured for the above church, was used for the first time during High Mass..." but we know from E.N. Matthews' work that earlier on William Anderson supplied to the church in 1885 a 26-stop Alexandre organ – of course a harmonium – that established his link with the church.¹⁵ The new St Mary's Star of the Sea Church was opened in February 1900, which has the important George Fincham organ. The old St Mary's was located at right angles and to the west of the present building and constructed of bluestone; it is shown in the work *Some of the Fruits of Fifty Years: Ecclesiastical Annals* ¹⁶ It was not demolished for some time afterwards, so the organ could have remained there. When the building was demolished, it would seem likely that Anderson took the organ back and enlarged it to three manuals. The 54 note choir windchest may have even come from a very early four-stop organ that was replaced in 1896 by a new Anderson organ at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Williamstown. The metal pipework of the organ and some components would seem to have come from the Fincham firm, although there are no identifiable orders for this material in its records. However, there are three vital clues: the zinc façade pipes, and especially the central pipe of each flat with their ogee mouths, are typical of contemporary Fincham work, as also is the fitting of circular 'umbrella' caps to the Great Trumpet (later removed), to be found here and the swell box itself, with vertical screwed on wooden panels on either side of the horizontal shutters, a typical Fincham trait.

Three letters from George Fincham & Son are relevant. The first on 6 September 1911 to William Anderson, refers to this morning's conversation regarding the large organ in your store and discusses the possible installation of the organ at the Armadale Methodist Church and the removal of the Choir Organ to save funds. As the Old Museum organ was the only three-manual organ for which Anderson was responsible, it is very likely this

one. The second letter, on 24 November 1913 to G. Hume, 84 William Street, Melbourne, is a quotation of £105 to remove, clean, re-erect, silver pipes, varnish case of the "Anderson organ" for the Snowden Picture Theatre, Princes Bridge, Melbourne. There are no records to suggest that this took place. The third letter, to William Anderson, on 15 December 1913, refers to freight on the "big organ". So the organ may not have left Melbourne until after this date. It could indeed have been taken over and stored by Frederick Taylor, as shown in the 2007 conference book,¹⁷ as Anderson is likely to have retired from business.

Regarding the builder of this organ, it is clear that it has not been imported. If it were built in the late 19th century in Melbourne, it is certainly not the work of either Fincham or Fuller. Robert Mackenzie was out of Melbourne by then. Anderson seems the only contender. The chamfered stop jambs and key cheeks seem identical to Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Williamstown.

SOME COMMENTS ON TONAL DESIGN

A Stopped Diapason Bass was used on the Great Organ to continue the 8ft Clarabella and Dulciana 8ft to CC. Occasionally, a Swell Organ 16ft was divided to form a Lieblich Bourdon CCC-BBB and Double Diapason CC upwards.

A standard selection of stops was used. The smallest Great Organ might have just an Open Diapason, Stopped Diapason Bass, Clarabella, Dulciana, Principal and Fifteenth and to this nucleus was added a wooden open Flute 4ft, Twelfth 3ft, and on one or two occasions a Keraulophon, Trumpet and Mixture. Similarly, the nucleus of the Swell Organ was Horn Diapason (usually with grooved bass), Stopped Diapason, Gemshorn, Piccolo and Hautboy, as he almost invariably called the Oboe. To this was occasionally added a divided 16ft Lieblich Bourdon/Double Diapason (as at Carlton and South Melbourne), Keraulophon and Cornopean. Pedal divisions started off with a Bourdon 16ft and then larger instruments had an Open Diapason 16ft, earlier on labelled Open Pedal Pipes 16, and in two instances a Principal 8ft. His instruments contained many ranks of wooden pipes, presumably made by Anderson himself. In at least one instance, the Fenwick Street Baptist Church in Geelong (1877), a metal stopped flute, in the Hill style, was provided.

Most of the instruments he built were modest, either of a single or two manuals. The organ now at the Old Museum Building in Brisbane appears to have had the Choir Organ added later.

CASEWORK

Casework in most instances consisted of two uprights and a transom rail (often carved with quatrefoils), the uprights either capped with pinnacles or turned finials; some uprights also had attached turned wooden colonettes. Occasionally, the impost was pierced with carved Gothic motifs, possibly deriving from the Hunter organ at Christ Church, Hawthorn which Anderson installed. The impost rail could also have carved quatrefoils. Three instruments (East Melbourne Catholic Ladies College, East Melbourne, Holy Trinity Williamstown and the Old Museum) had three flats. Some of the lower case panels supported the upper structure (East Melbourne Catholic Ladies College, Beechworth, St Joseph's, Collingwood, St Mary's, Williamstown).

Stencilling of façade pipes. Elaborate stencilling was almost always found except at St Joseph's Collingwood where the organ may have been provided for a very basic price and the zinc façade remained undecorated. Brian Andrews has indicated how the use of cartouches in the decoration derived from Pugin's precepts, these including Christian symbols such as IHS, MR, or saints' initials, etc.¹⁸ It appears that the same designer or artist was also used by the organbuilder Alfred Fuller at St Brigid's North Fitzroy, Victoria.

CONSOLES

Consoles were earlier located behind folding doors but later ones were built out from the front of the casework and closed by a roll top lid. Sloping parallel stop jambs were used for a number of instruments, as also used in England by Gray & Davison, Forster & Andrews and Nicholson of Walsall. Two later instruments had chamfered edges to the stop jambs (Holy Trinity, Williamstown and Old Museum Building). Scrolled keycheeks were used in the latter two instruments, which appear to date from later in his career.

WORKMANSHIP

The best of the Anderson organs were competently constructed but sometimes the use of earlier components, or the need to keep to a low price, meant that the overall quality could suffer. Certainly, Anderson's organs could not be compared with those of Alfred Fuller in terms of generosity of construction. The finest surviving examples of his work are at Daylesford, Flinders, Williamstown and Westbury, Tasmania.

PIPEWORK ORDERS

Much of Anderson's metal pipework appears to have been made by George Fincham at his Richmond factory. Unfortunately, the records of his metal shop only survive from 1887 onwards. However, there are a number of references to orders from Anderson.

14 September 1887

Open Dia	CC to A zinc front 19 pipes	58
Gamba	ten C to A	46
Principal	CC to A	58
Twelfth	CC to A	58
Fifteenth (stock)	CC to A	58
Oboe (black metal)	ten C to A	46

Voiced to 3 inches weight of wind

The above may have been for the Methodist Church, Daylesford which has 19 zinc pipes in the façade, 58 note key compass and a Great Gamba. The remainder of the swell may have had second-hand pipework.

15 April 1888

7 pipes Clarionette from Ten C to F#

Top octave of Piccolo

No organs by Anderson at the time are known to have had a Clarionet

13 April 1891

Horn Diap ordinary scale	44
Gemshorn small	56
Oboe mid C to F	32

24 December 1891

Open CC to A CC-b 24 in zinc, metal mid C to A	
Horn Dia ten C to A	46
Dulciana no 2 ten C to A	46
Gemshorn no 2 CC to A	58

11 pipes in front, longest foot 1'5"

December 1891

Gt		
No 2	Open further orders	56
2	Dulciana	56
2	Principal	56
	Twelfth	56
	Fifteenth	56
Swl		
No 3	Open	44
2	Gemshorn	56
	Oboe	44
	Piccolo	12

Only the earliest of the 1891 orders may have been for St Ambrose's Catholic Church, Brunswick as the organ was opened in September of that year

8 February 1893

Opens 19 pipes

6 April 1893

Zinc front 17 + 2 dummies

Could either of the above have been for the Old Museum building?

30 May 1893

No 3 Principal 56

19 June 1893

2	Dulciana	44
2	Gemshorn	56
1	15th	56
	Piccolo	12
	Oboe	44

The above 1893 orders may have been for St Joseph's Catholic Church, South Yarra opened July 1894

22 March 1895

Gt		
No 1	Open	45
1	Principal	56
2	Dulciana	44
1	12th	56
1	15th	56

Sw		
1	Oboe ten C	44
2	Open	44
2	Gemshorn	56
	Piccolo	12

Front 11 pipes

The above is likely to have been for Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Williamstown

1 December 1907

Open	44
Gemshorn	56

Façade 11 pipes

Possibly for the Baptist Church, East Melbourne

These orders clearly indicate that there were more Anderson organs around than we can at present account for.

The shape of the façade pipe mouths may also provide an indicator of dating. All of the instruments supplied up to the mid-1880s had Gothic pipe mouths and after that French (rounded) mouths were used. This could also explain that from this period onwards the façade pipes, of zinc, were supplied to Anderson by George Fincham, who largely standardised the use of French mouths after 1880.

This study has been based upon surviving sources and sadly it seems that a complete understanding of William Anderson's organbuilding career is unlikely to be written.



References

1. *Descendants of William Anderson* [compiled by Ros Taylor]
2. Owned by Warwick Anderson
3. *Descendants of William Anderson*
4. Pers.comm. Warwick Anderson to John Maidment December 2007
5. Matthews, E.N. *Colonial Organs and Organbuilders*, pp.3, 24-25
6. Deduction by author
7. Certificate held by Warwick Anderson
8. Objects held by Warwick Anderson
9. *Victoria and its Metropolis, Past and Present*, [edited] by Alexander Sutherland. Melbourne: McCarron, Bird, 1888

10. Letter to William Anderson in George Fincham letter books, vol 4, p.442
11. *Descendants of William Anderson*
12. Matthews, op.cit., p.154
13. See Matthews, op.cit., p.158; the Anderson organ is confused with a secondhand Courcelle organ that appears never to have been at Williamstown
14. There is no written source to confirm that Anderson built the St Mary's organ
15. Matthews, op.cit., p.156
16. *Some of the Fruits of Fifty Years: Ecclesiastical Annals.* Melbourne: Massina, 1897, pp.20-21
17. *The Twentieth Century and its Legacy: Indigenous, Interstate and Imported Organs of Queensland: 30th Annual Conference.* Camberwell, Vic.: Organ Historical Trust of Australia, 2007, p.105
18. Brian Andrews, *Creating a Gothic Paradise: Pugin at the Antipodes.* Hobart: Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, 2002, pp. 149-151

Other sources

Genealogical research carried out by Roz Taylor

Information supplied by Warwick Anderson, Armadale, Victoria

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