

"A skilled and refined artist in this department": A fresh appreciation of the career of Arthur Hobday

by Ronald G. Newton

EXTRACT FROM OHTA JOURNAL JANUARY 1995, pp.16-17, 20-32.

A paper presented at the 17th annual OHTA conference, Kyneton, on Sunday 25 September 1994.

I would like to thank the Council of the Organ Historical Trust of Australia for inviting me to present this paper to you this morning.

The relationship between George Fincham and Arthur Hobday may well have begun even before Arthur was born. After finishing his apprenticeship with Bevington in 1849 at about age 21, Fincham worked as a foreman for Bishop, and then for a short time with Forster & Andrews in Hull. Also in 1849 at about age 27, Joseph Hobday was appointed organist of Waltham Street Methodist, the leading Methodist church in Hull. Forster & Andrews had the tuning and maintenance contracts for most of the pipe organs in Hull, and as Fincham was at this stage a journeyman organbuilder, it is quite possible that Fincham and Hobday may have met.

Arthur Hobday was born March 1851. Fincham left England for Australia July 1852. The Hobdays left England for Australia March 1853.

After a somewhat dramatic entrance in the best Romantic traditions, involving a dark and stormy night, some rugged rocks and a lifeline, Joseph and his family settled into the social life of Geelong. He became a leading organist, music teacher and music importer. In 1859 he was appointed organist at Yarra Street Methodist, the leading Methodist church in Geelong.

In 1863, however, he had a row with the Trustees and resigned. In December of the same year Christ Church Anglican in Geelong ordered a Courcelle pipe organ. Their previous organ had been built by Bevington at the time when Fincham, Courcelle and Alfred Hunter had been apprenticed to him. It is quite possible that Joseph had a hand in the design of the Courcelle, as he may well have been organist at Christ Church from the time of his departure from the Methodists. The point I am coming to is this: at the time that Fincham installed the Courcelle organ in Christ Church, Geelong, in January 1865, Joseph Hobday was the organist, and his son Arthur was turning 14. Here is a description of the installation:

The churchwardens have been very fortunate in securing the services of Mr Fincham, of Richmond, as builder. The man who can unpack five large cases, and out of the 842 different pipes which he takes out, together with trackers, pallets and slides innumerable, not to mention wind-chests, bellows and swell-box, a chaos of materials, construct a

musical instrument in perfect order and tune, is one of whom the colony may well be proud.

What teenager could possibly resist being fascinated by such a plethora of mechanical marvels, perhaps even helping out? It is quite plausible that it is this event which brought Arthur and George into contact. It is also important to point out here that Fincham had started building new organs the year before, and was therefore in need of apprentices.

Fincham was to continue his contact with the Hobday family in Geelong, working on organs where Joseph was organist, and building organs for churches with which the Hobday family was associated.

But now to focus on Arthur Hobday himself. Arthur's life falls neatly into segments of roughly 15 years each. His apprenticeship at age 14, his partnership with Fincham in Adelaide and later Melbourne at 30, his departure for New Zealand at 45 and his death at 61.

First we will look at his 16 years as an apprentice and employee of George Fincham in Melbourne. The first seven years of this period, 1866 to 1873, yields no references to him whatsoever, so we do not know the date or length of his apprenticeship, but it is interesting to consider some of the instruments he would have worked on. Their fifth organ was for Dunedin Catholic St Joseph's, opened in the workshop November 1866, and was to be rebuilt by Hobday 30 years later. A one-manual organ for the Melbourne Exhibition of that year was built in eight weeks. It seems that, altogether, they built over 20 instruments up to the beginning of 1873.

The second eight years of this first period with Fincham beginning in 1873 is more informative. It is at this point that we come across the first specific references to Arthur Hobday as an employee of George Fincham, when he is listed with other men in a portion of Fincham's second letter copy book, dealing with tasks and wages. The first nine pages of this section cover the four weeks 27 January to 22 February of that year, and each employee is allocated a page for that period. We see that nine men were working six-day weeks. Sam Lewis, reputed to be Fincham's first apprentice, was working mostly at cutting and glueing up soundboards and pipes; Saunders was casting pipe metal; Smith was involved in general building; Joe Dodd was making action work and pipes; Sheedy was doing odd jobs and tuning; Whitby was driving the engine, cutting wood, building and tuning; Bell was making cases; and Trinnick was constructing building frames and pedal pipes. Hobday, however, was given quite different responsibilities, and it is in the very first of these entries that we can see the future path of his career:

Fincham letter book II

[3-11] / 27 January - 22 February 1873:

1873 Monday Jan 27 A Hobday Voicing Double Octave flute.

to Bank, and see Mr. Plunkett about Exhibition organ.*

Tuesday 28

Letter to Mr. Hitchcock & Mr. J. Corbett,

voicing Stop Diap Gt organ High Church

29 Stop Dia High Church

30 Do " " "

31 Do tuning Hawthorn & St Kilda

*C. T. Plunkett was a prominent local organist; the Exhibition organ had been opened the previous year and was soon to be moved to St Kilda Catholic St Mary's and opened 25 May 1873.

"High Church" was the main Presbyterian church in Geelong, properly known as St Giles'; the Fincham organ was to be opened 19 February 1873.

St Kilda would have been their organ for All Saints' opened 28 October 1868, and Hawthorn would have been the Walker organ of 1855 in Christ Church.

So, we see that even at the age of 21, Hobday was involved in voicing, letter writing, finance, and meeting with clients. The next week he was again writing letters to organists, voicing, tuning, and visited their organ in the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind in Prahran. He was fully occupied the two weeks from 10 February in taking down the new organ in the factory for Geelong Presbyterian St Giles' and installing it in the church. He returned to Melbourne on the 21st.

The second part of the tasks and wages section of the letter book is a series of weekly summaries of work, two per page, with employees listed in order:

Fincham letter book II

[13-35] / 22 February - 2 August 1873:

Feb 1873 Week ending D, p

22 Lewis, Geelong Wesleyan Soundboards 4" ,

Dodd CC Dia

Whitby Cutting wires tuning etc 6 "

Trinnick Geelong pedal open 6

Bell pedal open 4"4

"A Becketts front*1"4

Smith Geelong 4" 3

"A Becketts wind trunks 1" 5

Saunders All Saints [St Kilda]" 4

"Geelong, Principal, Mixture 5" 4

Hobday, Geelong & Tuning

*Edward A'Beckett had an organ built for his home in Brighton.

Seeing as this covers the week ending 22 February, Hobday's entry here duplicates his last entry in the first part of this section, so was summarised quickly. From the next entry on, Hobday is always listed at the head of each weekly summary, next being Lewis, Saunders, Smith, Dodd, Sheedy then Whitby. At the end of February he voiced a Dulciana, and went to Geelong again. From the beginning of March he finished voicing and regulating A'Beckett's organ, did some banking, and wrote letters to organists. Other organs he voiced pipes for over the next few months were Geelong Methodist Yarra Street, opened in June, Geelong Presbyterian St Giles', the Exhibition organ (no doubt being revoiced for St Kilda St Mary's), and, more significantly, he voiced the organ in the Swedenborgian church, East Melbourne from the middle of June. This instrument is still in its original state in the showrooms of Bernies Music Land, Ringwood, Victoria.

Hobday, throughout this six-month period, is not credited with any of the work of construction, of pipes or otherwise, and while other workers did tune, none are mentioned in connection with voicing. Indeed, with only one exception, each of Hobday's entries includes voicing. Unfortunately, there are no other sections dealing with tasks and wages in the letter books.

From early 1873 until 1881 the factory produced over 30 pipe organs. What Hobday was doing in these years is not known exactly, but it can be assumed that he was continuing with his previous responsibilities, such as meeting with potential clients. In March 1881 Fincham, while writing to one organ committee, mentioned "When Mr Hobday saw you re Organ for your Church you were good enough to express your high opinion of the productions of my Factory." Fincham was very keen to secure the contract, and so on this occasion stepped into the situation to add his own authority; the Fincham organ was opened there 11 May 1882.

Hobday's responsibilities in other areas, such as finance and voicing, become more obvious from now on. The reason for this is that Hobday bought himself into partnership with Fincham, his absence in Adelaide enabling him to be mentioned as a third party in correspondence.

The second 15-year period with Fincham began about July or August 1881, when Fincham sent Hobday to Adelaide to start a branch of the business there. It is not known exactly how the partnership was initiated and organised, but in 1887 Fincham made it clear that it was Hobday's ability which was the major factor. He had set to work by early October planning a new instrument, as he could see two possible clients needing similar organs. He sent a specification up to Fincham, organised the carpenter to start working on some timber after he had finished building the work benches in the factory, and had planned exactly what Dodd was to do when he arrived (finishing the bellows and starting the Great soundboard). He included a list of materials which he would require from the Richmond branch. Within a fortnight the building frame was completed, the bellows incorporated, and the swell box was next on the list, the building of which would fill in time before the Richmond consignment arrived. It was later installed in the Norwood Baptist church.

Hobday in Adelaide did not see himself as proficient in the construction of organs, but he was very particular and careful about the work he was

involved in. Dodd, however, was good at the construction side, and Hobday was proud of his work:

There is evidence of very good work in these keys the next set he makes should be very good and quickly made now that he has the appliances to hand. He is very particular about the appearance of his work at which I am very pleased as it coincides with my own view of what musical instrument work should be.

Towards the end of 1882 Arthur was not sure of the future in Adelaide, and contemplated his own shortcomings as an organ builder:

I feel very dull and miserable and often wish I had never seen Adelaide but must do my best, your words that a man wants the heart of a bullock in Organbuilding often recurs to my mind very forcibly, the want of practical experience in the mechanical department is what I feel most.

Back in Richmond, Fincham had added in 1881 another voicing room to the factory, and Arthur's comments on this emphasise this important aspect of his previous work in Richmond:

So you have built a voicing shop, I am very glad to hear it for Alec's sake, I know my liver suffered by my being so much on the old shelf.

His letters are full of references to tonal ideas:

We note with pleasure that you have decided to add the Mixture to Great. You would much like another Dulciana in the Swell, and we agree with you that it would make a delightful addition, a Dulciana, very light Gamba or Keraulophon under the influence of the Swell Crescendo is one of the prettiest effects, but you want the Open Diapason (or Salicional) for giving fullness and body, again it is almost indispensable for Church purposes, another very strong reason or argument is that by omitting the Open Dia. the organ would be, as it were, without part of its backbone - the Swell in modern organs, as doubtless you are aware, is the feature and is very generally larger than the Great (in 2 manual organs) for the reason that although the great may individually have a less number of stops still there is the facility of increasing in power and weight by the mechanical application of the Swell and Great Coupler... the Organ would then be very complete and no professional could take exception to the scheme.

Hobday's orders for pipe work make it plain that the pipes were sent unvoiced, and that the case designs were Arthur's.

Letters relating to his work on the additions to the Town Hall organ in 1886 and the new organ for Flinders Street Baptist make it clear that he was putting a lot of effort into the voicing of the reed stops. Fincham then sent his congratulations "I am very pleased to read of your success with the Town Hall instrument and that the Reeds are of such good character."

By February 1887 it had been decided that Fincham & Hobday of Adelaide would exhibit the organ being rebuilt for Adelaide Methodist Archer Street. Hobday's pipe order included seven new reeds:

will you kindly get out the reeds and leather at once so that I may have time to spend on the Voicing; as the Organ is to be placed as an Exhibit I should like to do our best with the Reeds

It was opened with great success 21 June 1887. Fincham wrote "I was glad to receive the papers, giving such an excellent report as they did of the Organ and Recitals and shows that you have scored a big success."

While Hobday was away from the Richmond office his financial responsibilities fell on others' shoulders, such as Alex Ground, who had to chase up tardy clients:

As Mr Hobday has gone to Adelaide to start a branch of our business there I have been appointed to the books, and would like to have a clear start, but cannot do so unless accounts of such long standing are settled. Trusting to receive a cheque at your earliest convenience.

When Hobday visited Melbourne he was often required to give aid in sorting out financial difficulties:

Mr Hobday has been to Melbourne since I last wrote you and I learn from him that your a/c should have been £25-7-6 but owing to a mistake of M. Ground's it was rendered to you as £19-10-0.

In April 1888 Hobday sent Fincham copies of all accounts to do with the Adelaide branch, showing overall profit and loss both before and after 3 January 1885, when a new system of accounting was put in place. He showed Fincham that he had made over a thousand pounds in profit during the past three years and two months, and indicated that it would be easy to work out a valuation of the business. He did not, however, want Fincham to sell the business, nor turn it into a private company. He then expressed his plans for the future. He had enough cash at that time from a sale of one of his wife's properties to buy into a full partnership with Fincham; he would take over the voicing and office work in Richmond, so relieving Fincham of much worry "we should then be able between us to maintain a constant supervision over the works generally." Fincham agreed.

The second eight years of the second period with Fincham was from June 1888 to September 1896, when Hobday was working in partnership with Fincham in Melbourne. The first letter in Hobday's hand in the Richmond letter books appears with the date 2 July 1888. Hobday continued to oversee the Adelaide branch, making frequent trips there. Business in Australia, however, became very poor, and six years later in 1894 Dodd bought Fincham & Hobday out for £1000.

From his return to Richmond, Arthur regained responsibility for the office work, including letter writing and financial management, and voicing and tuning. The letter copy books demonstrate this clearly, and in no better case than for the new organ for the Australian Church of Melbourne. Fincham had installed a Hunter organ temporarily at the end of November 1887, until the church could decide what they wanted. In September 1888 the Secretary Thomas Husband enquired about the possibility of English pipes and voicing in a Fincham & Hobday organ, and Hobday took the opportunity to expound the wisdom of a completely local-made instrument:

Taking into consideration the very favourable conditions surrounding the placing of an Organ in your fine Church we are most anxious to be allowed the privilege of producing the pipes and Voicing in our own establishment and so make the Organ thoroughly Colonial.

Our Mr Hobday who is now settled with the parent firm will personally devote the whole of his energies to the production of the finest tone quality, the Reed department has been a special study and his late successes as instanced in the Adelaide Exhibition Organ, the additions of Solo and Tuba Organs to the Town Hall Organ at Adelaide ... warrants us in saying that by your allowing us this privilege the result will be higher class than if the pipes are imported.

Husband had wanted information on various pipe makers, which Hobday gave, but he also repeated Fincham's original offer:

To build the Organ using spotted metal containing 50% of pure tin for the metal pipes of the most approved scale and specially Voiced to suit the acoustics of the Church and the position of the Organ, the same to be subject to the approval of unbiased arbiters mutually agreed upon and should any of the stops be judged unequal to the requirement we hereby agree to replace the same with English pipes and voicing.

They wrote again in November to Husband urging a late completion date:

It is not desirable [that] the men should be overtasked in order to rush through, our object is, in this instance specially so, to produce a perfect result; Mr Hobday, who purposes giving his personal attention to the whole of the Voicing of your organ, feels that, should we be compelled to finish by the earlier date, he could not hope to be so successful as desirable, his object being to make this instrument the premier church Organ in the Colony.

He continued travelling to visit clients, and during his absence in Adelaide at the end of the year, correspondents with questions on voicing and finance were asked to wait for his return. His return in January 1889 was also awaited to decide the question of a new foreman to supervise the construction side of the organ building. Two New Zealand builders had applied in December, Jones of Auckland and Jenkins of Christchurch. They decided that Jones could possibly work as a tuner and voicer, and Jenkins as construction supervisor. In their letter to Jenkins they made it clear what their present situation was:

Hitherto our Mr Fincham has attended to the entire construction of all works in connection with this factory, we are now anxious to obtain relief from the necessary close supervision of our numerous staff in the mechanical department and have considered the advisability of obtaining a competent foreman.

Jenkins' appointment did not eventuate. Hobday visited churches to sign contracts, and examined and reported on organs. Replying to a potential client Hobday wrote:

Facts speak for themselves, our business has made such rapid strides that the staff and facilities we have had to increase at least 100%

within the last year or two. Our contracts for organs now in course of construction totals about £6000.

In addition to the foregoing, the standard of excellence is now considerably raised, and we claim to compete with advantage with the greatest builders of Organs in the Old World. The advent of Mr Hobday in the firm is of the greatest importance in-as-much as the direction of the mechanical and Voicing is divided allowing of the concentration of skill upon each department individually, Mr Hobday with his staff giving his undivided attention to the tonal department.

Hobday visited Ballarat again in June 1890 to meet with a potential client, and their new organ for St John's Anglican was opened September 1891. His visit to Balaclava Methodist the next month resulted in another new instrument, opened August 1891. He visited Geelong Methodist Newtown in October 1890, a new organ being opened there November 1891.

1891 proved to be a very busy year, with at least nine organs being produced at Richmond. Hobday was in Ballarat in April to make arrangements for an hydraulic blower for St John's Anglican; in Adelaide again late May; in Ballarat in June to visit Neil Street Methodist, resulting in a rebuild opened October 1892; and in Essendon in September to arrange financing of an organ recently opened in the Methodist church. When Ballarat Anglican St John's quibbled about paying full price for their recent blowing installation, Fincham waited for Hobday's return. Hobday then wrote:

We decidedly object to any discount. The contract was for a specified sum. At the meeting at the Church before the contract was made, the question of discount was raised, when Mr Hobday distinctly informed you the price was a cash quotation without discount.

In November came the order to build a large organ for Warrnambool Catholic St Joseph's, their second instrument in that town since 1888. It is the second largest intact 19th-century organ built in Australia. Fincham replied, saying that Hobday would be on his way with plans and specifications. He then wrote to Horsham Anglican St John's concerning repairs needed to their organ; Hobday was going to be at the opening of their Presbyterian organ there in December, and would inspect then.

In 1892, five new Fincham & Hobday organs were opened. Economically, things began to take a turn for the worse, and Hobday began writing letters to churches which could no longer afford tuning fees:

...we deeply regret that you decided to take the organ out of our hands more especially being an instrument built by us. Mr Hobday called to see you on the subject but you were out

St Kilda Town Hall was opened 26 August 1892, and a long article appeared in the local newspaper the next day, and it included a paragraph on Hobday:

Mr Hobday, who is also an enthusiast in his profession, joined Mr Fincham in partnership in 1881, and was entrusted with the establishment of a branch of the business in Adelaide, where he distinguished himself by securing the first prize at the recent Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition. Mr Hobday returned to the Melbourne factory about

four years ago, and with the combination of skill and excellent business qualifications of the partners, it is not to be wondered at that Messrs. Fincham & Hobday are so popular individually, and that their reputation as organ builders stands so high.

When visiting churches to negotiate contracts for new organs Hobday had to determine the cost, financial terms and completion date. When the contract for Warrnambool Catholic was signed February 1892 he decided on a nine month completion date, but:

in giving date Mr Hobday expressly stated that it could only be approximate as we had other big contracts in hand which might influence completion of yours to date.

In 1893 the economic situation worsened, and Fincham had to release some of the workers. Also, the suspension of a major bank meant that churches would not disburse money. They began to look for work which, when there was plenty to do, would not have been thought important to the reputation of the firm. Hobday wrote to Coburg Anglican (Fincham & Hobday, 1888) in May about the possibility of additions to the organ, and explained that it was due to "present financial affairs, and to keep our skilled staff together we are willing to make the suggested improvements, if entered upon now, at bare cost."

Apart from three organs being opened in the first four months of 1893, the only organs being built in this year were those for the Princess Theatre and Carngham Presbyterian.

Arthur visited Carngham in September to discuss the positioning of their new organ there:

As the organ would very materially interfere with view of large Memorial window we have made a design with one end ornamented to match front view - see plan. If the organ is to occupy the position suggested when Mr Hobday was at the Church, near porch entrance we think it would look appropriate and be very effective.

The recession in New Zealand was in full swing considerably earlier than in Australia, but was not as serious or long-lasting, and in 1893 Fincham & Hobday considered the possibility of undertaking work there. A trip was then planned, and Hobday was to leave 20 January 1894. This had to be delayed a week, due to the opening of the Carngham Presbyterian organ (30 January).

The New Zealand period of Fincham & Hobday lasted more than two and a half years. Four trips were made: early 1894 by Hobday; November and December 1894 by Collings; February to October 1895 by Hobday, Taylor, & Leslie Fincham; January to September 1896 by Hobday & George Fincham, George Fincham's nephew. Three new organs were built in Melbourne and installed during these trips, two important rebuilds were undertaken, as well as a host of smaller overhauls and revoicings.

The New Zealand organists were quite taken with Hobday's abilities at voicing instruments. The work of overhauling the 1881 Hill organ in Christchurch Cathedral took place after the opening of Nelson Catholic in July 1895, this being completed 21 September.

Messrs Hobday, of Melbourne, have nearly completed their work of renovating our Cathedral organ, and the results are very surprising. The whole organ is brighter and clearer, and many beautiful characteristics of tone, which have not been heard for many years, are now brought out. The Vox Humana, after a silence of twelve years, is found to be a most beautiful stop, and in Mr Hobday's opinion is quite equal to that in the Sydney Town Hall organ, which was built by the same firm.???????

During Hobday's absence in New Zealand until the end of March we again see discussion of his financial and voicing roles in the partnership. George and Leslie wrote to churches confirming financial arrangements Hobday had made, and in matters to do with tuning and interest rates, estimates and voicing, the Employers Liability Proposal and architectural matters, they always informed clients of Hobday's absence, advising them that problems would be dealt with on his return.

At the end of March their bank manager made enquiries concerning their account, and was told:

Our Mr Hobday is now returned from a successful business trip through New Zealand and has set to work to get some of the outstanding a/cs in, we hope to meet with the usual fair response to our applications and will reduce our a/c with you at the earliest possible date.

Hobday then sent off a number of letters to tardy clients, but as the bank was still not satisfied Fincham wrote again to quell fears:

The firm have opened up a new field of operation, New Zealand which promises to be very profitable already over a £1000 worth of work secured with every prospect of continued support.

Hobday also returned to his familiar work of meeting potential clients. Further evidence for Hobday's financial responsibilities in Melbourne appears in the following months. He met with a client 28 May concerning their organ account, and wrote the next day to convey his decision:

after consideration decide to offer the option of settling the principle amount of account, viz £270 allowing rebate of 5% or a sum of £13-10-0 if concluded within one month from date.

Discussion was delayed until Hobday's return from Adelaide 24 June, where he had gone to arrange for the sale of the business there to Josiah Dodd. On his return he wrote to Samuel Symons of Auburn Methodist, no doubt regarding payment for additions to their organ done in 1892.

A letter in May refers to some of Torrance's commissions having been arranged through Hobday, and in August Hobday met with Torrance to discuss the possibility of some prepared stops being added to the specification of Stawell Anglican Holy Trinity. Considering the economic situation, it is not surprising that Hobday could see the need to bring in every possible piece of work, no matter how small. He then wrote to the vicar:

Don't you think you could strain a point and provide for about 4 more stops we are willing to take a further Bill 12 mos. extension on terms

named, at 7% cost of preparation for 4 extra stops say £50. Dr Torrance, Mr Wood and we advise this, also I believe the Bp. of Ballt. expresses himself to this effect. A. Hobday.

Fincham had written to a friend in Tasmania in June outlining the situation:

Mr Hobday has been in New Zealand and Adelaide on business, we have some work in from New Zealand and expect when this is delivered we shall have more- in fact for the next year or two we expect to have more work in New Zealand than Victoria.

Hobday's work in New Zealand was, however, plagued with difficulties. The sound boards for the rebuild at St Mark's Wellington were defective: runnings and whisperings had not been tested for before the work left the factory; Fincham admitted that they were having the same problems with new organs for Camperdown Anglican St Paul's and other churches. Repairs and other setbacks took an extra two months. Hobday wrote to Fincham 4 May to outline the present situation, and Fincham replied:

I see you are still hampered with all sorts of little difficulties. This comes at a very awkward time, inasmuch as it seems to have consumed a great deal of time, and delayed the completion and opening, but most of all the remittance.

He then wrote to a Brisbane enquirer that: "more than half our business since the boom burst has been with the other Colonies; the stagnation in Melbourne is abominable."

The Nelson organ was shipped 27 March, the cases containing the top of the St Mark's swell box, which had inadvertently been left behind in Melbourne. Fincham warned Hobday that the Nelson organ would not be straightforward to install, as they had not the time to check that everything was working perfectly:

The conveyances are got out, designed & executed without the different portions being fixed. The Swell shutters are not connected with rod. The discs in sound-board are not glued because they were put in hurriedly, especially the larger ones therefore it will be quite justifiable, in some instances to pay special care; for instance some of the 1" motors in the smaller chambers do or almost touch the sides. We have had a desperate rush to get this through, still I think you will not have much trouble over there if you test each part as you fix it.

I am sending some wires for coupling action if I have not time to tap them - you had better get a tap over there.

Hobday arrived in Nelson to install the Presbyterian organ June 1895. He was concerned about the lack of finish to the instrument, which Fincham simply put down to lack of time. To Hobday, who was not as skilled or experienced in the constructional aspects as Fincham, the problems he faced with this instrument, as with St Mark's, meant that a lot of time was wasted repairing and testing parts.

When Hobday installed their new organ in Nelson Catholic in February 1896 he again struck similar troubles with the workmanship of parts as he had experienced with the St Mark's and Presbyterian organs. He wrote to

Fincham to say that the organ had arrived in good order, but that the slides in the valve chest were broken. He also pointed out that the soundboard motors were defective. Fincham replied that although some motors had had to be repaired, they had been thoroughly tested by himself before leaving the factory. He again turned to financial matters:

I view it as a pity you cannot get the organ opened before the 12th inst as it cannot require three weeks to erect the organ, and of course any surplus time with other expenses must mean a heavy drain on the profits.

Fincham warned him that Dixon, the accountant in charge of finances in Hobday's absence, had wanted to see the profit from the last trip, and that he would have to cut back Mrs Hobday's income unless remittances were forthcoming.

Hobday struggled on, and the organ was opened 18 and 19 February.

Fincham was facing similar setbacks at this time as well. He had been in Hobart from 11 June overseeing the installation of the Exhibition organ in St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, and shared his anxiety over this job. Silk used in the soundboard pneumatic action had proved unreliable, and had to be entirely replaced with leather at the expense of much time and money; also the bellows were changed from diagonal to parallel ribbing. Fincham had written to H. J. Rice, organist of Khyber Pass Anglican Holy Sepulchre in Auckland, a year before this, offering to place a pneumatic organ in his church and, as an inducement, donating the cost of the pneumatic action. He countered Rice's fears about the deterioration of the leather parts by saying that: "in place of leather we use rubber silk of very light texture, which is absolutely airtight, durable and not subject to atmospheric influence."

Hobday and George proceeded to Christchurch February 1896 to prepare for the arrival of the parts for the St Michael's rebuild. Fincham had written earlier that:

We have nearly finished the work for Christchurch and you will find that there is very little to do indeed, beyond connecting the slides to drawjams and changing Great stops & compositions from left to right.

Again, things were not to turn out so simply. The cases were not entirely in order, as Fincham had been absent when the parts were shipped. It seems that a missing invoice meant some parts were not available from the wharf immediately, and they faced some problem with the conveyancing: "I suppose it was one of my slips," wrote Fincham, "hope you will overcome the difficulty without trouble." Other cases did not arrive complete or in good order:

I am sorry to hear that some of the loose pipes in the smaller case were damaged. The cases were packed by Taylor in my absence but this should have been avoidable. From your letter I learn that the coupling blocks were omitted & forwarded by post. I suppose Taylor in the hurry forgot them.

Hobday then informed Fincham that he had gained another contract worth £240, to overhaul and revoice the organ in New Plymouth Anglican

St Mary's. He wrote again 4 April complaining of insufficiency of smaller items such as buttons and wires. The trackers sent were not long enough, which Fincham put down to the size of the packing cases; and, of course, again more problems with the pneumatic soundboards, which Fincham put down to the weather:

I am sorry to learn that the whisperings increased and became intensified as I know they were reduced to a minimum & were improving before the soundboards were packed, however if it has become so self-evident it proves that there must be something wrong with the climate & of course the proper thing to do is to put the automatic exhaust.

Fincham was very unhappy about the financial results of the work at St Michael's. He sent his own estimate as to what Hobday ought to have figured the cost to be:

I notice you have been twelve weeks at Christchurch and considering the number of stops etc forwarded (all of the stops valuable except the Fifteenth) I can only consider it as a superb failure financially.

If I have made any remark in any previous communication that has implied a desire that you should push things through, I think when you digest these figures, you will admit that there has been ample justification.

Back in Melbourne, things were not going well either. Fincham was finding it hard to keep everything going smoothly in Hobday's absence, and wrote to his bank manager:

duties of the office, factory, &c &c fall entirely on my shoulders. I trust that under the circumstances, you will not attach too much importance to your instructions not having been attended to.

The wages of all the staff had been cut "to avoid an unpleasant development at the Bank." Fincham made it fairly plain that he expected Hobday to make a profit at New Plymouth to make up for the previous losses. He could not see the economic situation improving:

In reply we have to inform you that the Organ Building trade in Victoria since the late unfortunate boom has dwindled in our case from a wage list of £100 per week to £30 and the bulk of the work we get is from New Zealand.

This state of things as far as we can judge is likely to last for some few years.

Hobday wrote from New Plymouth 4 June to say that he was well under way with the overhaul and enlargement at St Mary's. Fincham was pleased, but reiterated the bad situation in Australia:

With regard to the improved prospect of business I am sorry to say that the outlook is not improving. The only work we have in hand is the enlargement of St Patricks. There is no money from Hobart and as the committee met last week I must conclude that they object to follow my advice viz:- to forward a cheque.

Hobday wrote 14 June to again assure Fincham of the probable financial success of the present work, and enclosed copies of testimonials, probably those he had asked for from St Mark's. He had been nine weeks in New Plymouth when his work on the organ in St Mary's was reported 14 August as being completed:

The organ has been voiced by Mr A. Hobday, the tone now being very rich.

This amount of time was only one week longer than what he had estimated to Fincham.

Hobday arrived back in Melbourne the second week in September 1896 after eight months away, and met with Fincham, who was very upset about the results of the work in New Zealand. He cancelled the partnership Monday 14 September, and gave his explanation to Dodd three days after:

No doubt you will be surprised to learn that I and Mr Hobday have separated in consequence of the work done in New Zealand under his supervision having proved a serious financial failure, and considering the establishing the name of the firm has cost so much I have advised him to go to N.Z. and turn it to his own account, which advice he has taken. He and his family with my nephew left for N.Z. last Saturday.

The examples I have chosen to illustrate Hobday's role in Fincham's organ building enterprise for this paper are simply a few of the many to be found in the letter books; doubtless rigorous searches of newspapers and church records will reveal more. Considering the letter books themselves do not contain copies of perhaps even one half of the letters actually written, it is quite possible that his role is here undervalued.

Hobday's association with Fincham covered 30 years, two-thirds of Fincham's Australian career, their 15-year partnership, one third. Seeing that Arthur's voicing responsibilities began at least as early as 1873, it seems safe to assume that of all the one hundred and thirty or so pipe organs produced before September 1896, Hobday had substantial voicing input into perhaps half of these. As a successful, even celebrated voicer, Hobday won the admiration of leading organists of Victoria and New Zealand, and brought the firm prestige. In liaising with commission agents, meeting with potential clients to draw up specifications, discuss plans, arrange finance and sign contracts Hobday was performing the functions of public relations officer and marketing manager. His efforts in all these fields assured a continual supply of new contracts.

Fincham's increasingly caustic rhetoric concerning Hobday after his departure may be explained more as a growing realisation that Hobday had been indispensable, rather than that Hobday had been dishonest. Indeed, Fincham's attempts to establish blame on Hobday's part in New Zealand were fruitless. No financial records of the business are known to have survived from last century, but enough evidence survives in the letter books to show that each instance of financial loss attributed by Fincham to Hobday can be linked to problems arising in New Zealand from insufficient parts and faulty workmanship supplied from Melbourne. Fincham had trained Hobday as a voicer not a mechanic, and Hobday himself was only too aware of his shortcomings on the construction side. The resulting extended installation periods, prolonged further by Hobday's perfectionism, cost the partnership

dearly. The final product at Hobday's hands in New Zealand was of a high standard, therefore in his opinion, and in the opinion of others, a success. In Fincham's mind it was a threat to the financial survival of his firm. Also, Hobday knew that to gain contracts one had to offer considerations, inducements, discounts, which practice Fincham endorsed and adopted many times when times were prosperous.

The partnership ended 14 September 1896 by mutual consent. Hobday's work in New Zealand, although firmly establishing the possibility of further contracts there, had proved much too expensive for the Melbourne branch to provide financial and constructional backing. Compounded by serious problems with pneumatic technology, second-rate construction work, illness, and the prolonged Australian recession, Fincham decided to cut his losses. He suggested to Hobday that he should set himself up in New Zealand to take advantage of the firm's reputation there, a reputation, it should be pointed out, which was established by Hobday in spite of the quality of the production of the Richmond works, not because of it.

I do not believe that Hobday "robbed" Fincham; it is clear, however, that money was lost on unprofitable transactions. Hobday could see the economy improving, Fincham could not. Under the influence of a temporary accountant Fincham was persuaded to place short-term profit before long-term goals, and as result lost Hobday and his vision, his entrepreneurial skill and his artistic flair to New Zealand.

I hope that this paper will help the members of the Organ Historical Trust of Australia come to a new appraisal of the role of Arthur Hobday in Australian organ building.