

Amateur and professional: the organ in private residences in Australia

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During our 200 year history, organs have been placed in a wide variety of venues, sacred and secular. Sacred organs have been installed in places such as churches, cathedrals, chapels, abbeys, convents, monasteries, hospitals and funeral parlours. Secular organs have been seen in concert halls, mechanics institutes, exhibition halls, schools, amusement parlours and private homes.

This paper discusses the world of the private organ, a luxury item of domestic furniture which has formed an important part of secular music-making almost since the founding of the nation. Indeed, our earliest organs were imported for domestic rather than public use: the first organs to be used in churches arrived somewhat later.

It is difficult to estimate how many organs have been placed in private residences here in Australia. I would estimate that the number could be as high as a couple of hundred. For those we know about, and are documented in organbuilders' records, the press, or in standard texts, there have undoubtedly been many more. Numerous instruments were built by their amateur owners rather than by professional organbuilders. Guided by texts such as Wicks, Milne or Whitworth, and sometimes making all their components by hand, including pipework, many of these instruments have undoubtedly vanished, unrecorded, into oblivion.

Wealthy individuals were able to commission substantial instruments from local and overseas makers. The Melbourne organbuilder George Fincham built a number of residence organs while prestigious overseas builders such as the English firms of Hill & Son, J.W. Walker & Sons and Henry Willis & Sons, together with the American Aeolian Company built numerous organs for private clients in Australia.

It is interesting to note that there is a continuous history of organs being installed in private homes from the founding of the country to the present. The earliest instruments were simple chamber organs with a single manual, mechanical action and a basic chorus usually up to 2ft. They were frequently enclosed in a swell box, hand or foot blown, and clothed in an elegant case, often of Greco-Roman inspiration, containing wooden dummy facade pipes. Organs continued to be built to this recipe until the conclusion of the 19th century.

It was probably not until the 1850s that two-manual instruments were being placed in private homes while in the succeeding decade, with increasing

private affluence, a few three-manual organs appeared in a private situation, such as the Walker organ built for 'Rose Hill', Toorak, Melbourne, in 1865. Mechanical action continued to be used until the closing years of the previous century, but tubular-pneumatic was the preferred option until the 1920s and 30s, when electrics took over. The tonal design of the organs changed with time, and as early as the 1850s we can observe builders providing a selection of succulent softer registers, a trend which was to increase to the earlier years of the present century when a wide choice of undulating strings and quiet flutes was seen to be highly desirable.

In the early 20th century, a number of residence organs were playable by rolls. The Aeolian firm of New York pioneered this trend, which was adopted by other builders such as the German firm of Welte.

The provision of electric actions enabled borrowing and extension to be freely resorted to, this being necessary in many installations where space was at a premium, giving wider tonal resources than would otherwise have been possible. Two Wurlitzer instruments, which utilised such principles, were placed in private homes in Sydney.

Following the second world war, the extension principle continued to be adopted for residence installations, albeit with a more classically inspired tonal scheme. In the 1960s, Hill, Norman & Beard built a few small instruments which were unenclosed and included complete choruses on all divisions, with pipework voiced on low wind pressures.

Mechanical action was reintroduced in 1964 by Ronald Sharp in a small practice organ built for Norman Johnston, and shortly afterwards, in 1968, Graeme Rushworth built a small organ for his home in Melbourne. During the 1970s and 1980s, Canadian builder Fernand Le Tourneau and local builders such as Roger Pogson, George Fincham & Sons, Australian Pipe Organs, Knud Smenge and Bellsham Pipe Organs have built mechanical action organs for private houses. These instruments have invariably included full casework, sometimes with carved detailing, and classically-inspired voicing.

Some of the amateur builders of these organs should be mentioned in greater detail. In New South Wales, Joseph Massey (1854-1943), who lived in the harbourside suburb of Woolwich, built a number of small organs for his use, some of which have found their way into churches. These instruments are thought to have been built using second-hand components. In Victoria, John and H.J. Alsop, of 'Darley', Kew, and their descendants are known to have built a handful of instruments, only one of which may now be readily identified; Alsop lived close by Alfred Fuller's organ factory and it is interesting to speculate whether materials and expertise were obtained from this source. The other major amateur builder was Robert Cecil Clifton (1854-1931), in Western Australia, who built a number of excellent instruments not only for his own use, but also for churches in that state. Clifton's life and work is well documented in Leon Cohen's book *Gathered Fragments* (1979).

some notable instruments

New South Wales

Among the earliest chamber organs built in New South Wales was a small single-manual instrument of three stops. This instrument was built in 1845

by W.J. Johnson for W.H. Aldis, a tobacco merchant, of George Street, Sydney. With a delightful crenellated 'Gothicke' case of cedar, this instrument now resides in the Powerhouse museum.

Possibly Australia's most substantial residence organ was a large three-manual instrument of three manuals and 36 stops built in London in 1865 by Henry Bryceson, possibly for the residence of Nathaniel Holmes in London and later shipped to Australia where it was placed in the ballroom of 'Bomera', Potts Point, the residence of William McQuade. This magnificent instrument, with complete choruses and symphonic effects, was later moved to St Brigid's, Marrickville where it still survives, bereft of its original casework, action and windchests, although retaining most of its original pipework.

Another notable import from England was the 1892 Hill & Son instrument of three manuals and 24 stops built for 'Frog Hollow', Leichhardt, the residence of R.T.B. Andrews. Placed in a large hall seating up to three hundred persons, and clothed in a delightful A.G. Hill case, this outstanding instrument was moved to Christ Church St Laurence, Sydney in 1906 where it survives in a substantially intact state.

A number of smaller instruments were imported for use in City and country residences from such builders as Harrison & Harrison, Hele & Co., Alfred Hunter, W.E. Richardson and J.W. Walker, some of which still survive in New South Wales churches.

In 1879, the London builder Alfred Hunter built a diminutive two manual organ of six stops for 'Fairfield', Windsor, the residence of Henry McQuade. This instrument still survives intact in St Matthew's R.C. Church, Windsor, where it was moved in 1881.

The noted west-country firm Hele & Company, of Plymouth, built a three-manual organ of 12 stops for the Mudgee residence of R.H.D. White in 1881. This instrument was lost at sea and a second instrument of three manuals and 14 stops was built by Heles in 1886 and installed in White's residence 'Tahlee House', Port Stephens. Later moved to St Philip's, Eastwood, this instrument was irretrievably altered as a result of enlargement and rebuilding in 1968.

In 1888, Harrison & Harrison, of Durham, built a small two-manual instrument of six stops for 'Annerley', Bowral, the residence of H.E. Jones. The only Harrison organ in Australia, this instrument was later placed in the Methodist, now Uniting, Church, Camden, where it has since been enlarged, although retaining most of the original material.

Charles Richardson, the prominent Sydney organbuilder from the 1880s to the 1920s, built a fine three-manual organ about 1885 for the residence of E.L. Sutton, at Wollongong. It was installed in St Andrew's Uniting Church, Singleton, in 1920 where we can see and hear it today, largely in its original state.

Charles Leggo, a prominent Sydney organbuilder in the 1920s and 1930s, built in 1939 the windchests, action and console for a large two-manual instrument of 36 stops for 'Runnymede', the residence of Victor Worley, at Bowral. This was one of the most complete residence organs of the period, although sadly it was broken up in 1956 following its owner's death.

Amongst the work of gifted amateur organbuilders should be mentioned that of Joseph Massey, who built several organs at his home in Woolwich.

Queensland

Relatively few organs are known to have been installed in private residences in Queensland.

In 1881, it is thought that the Melbourne organbuilder Alfred Fuller built a substantial two manual instrument for the residence of A.H. Barlow in Ipswich. This organ was moved in 1882 to the Central Congregational Church, Ipswich where it was rebuilt and ultimately destroyed by fire in 1953.

Two notable residence organ imports took place later in the same decade. In 1884, the Hon. W.H. Wilson imported a two manual organ of 10 stops built by Henry Willis & Sons, London, for his Brisbane residence. This organ was later moved to St Andrew's, Gympie where it has since been electrified. In 1888, the Manchester builder George Benson built a two manual organ of 9 stops for the residence of James Lord, Brisbane, and this, too, can now be found at Gympie in the Surface Hill Uniting Church, where it survives unaltered.

Various amateur organbuilders were at work in Brisbane in the earlier years of this century building organs for their homes, including such names as W. Myers King, J. Nebe, C. Snow, L. Somerville and J. Peel.

South Australia

Like Queensland, organs were not to be found widely in private homes in this state in the earlier years.

The indigenous builders Wolff, Rendall and Dodd are known to have made a few instruments for private clients. Dodd built organs for the residence of Leo Conrad, Adelaide in 1898 and for C.H. Fisher, Medindie, in 1907, the latter since moved to Knox Presbyterian Church, Ivanhoe, Victoria, where it was later rebuilt by Fincham & Sons.

Victoria

One of the earliest chamber organs of significance was a two-manual instrument of 12 stops built in 1853 by Forster & Andrews, of Hull, for J.T. Charlton of Melbourne. This instrument had a fine mahogany case in the Grecian style and was totally enclosed. Following a number of moves, this delightful instrument was broken up in the early 1960s, while at St Augustine's, Shepparton, and the casework dismembered in the 1980s -- a sad end to a fine instrument.

This was followed in 1858 by a two-manual instrument built by William Hill, of London, for the residence of Mr Davis of Melbourne. This instrument still survives at St Peter's Lutheran Church, Stawell. It has two manuals and 12 speaking stops and a particularly delightful classical case with a fine cornice embellished with egg and dart moulding.

About 1860, the little-known firm of Hamlin & Son, London, built a delightful two-manual instrument of 10 stops for a private client in Melbourne. Clothed

in an elegant classical case veneered in walnut, this organ still survives intact at St Paul's, Clunes.

In 1865, the London firm of J.W. Walker built a substantial instrument of 26 speaking stops and three manuals for 'Rose Hill', Toorak, the residence of William Philpott. This organ survived at 'Rose Hill' for only four years when it was sold to St Stephen's Church, Richmond, where it still survives in a substantially unaltered state.

Around 1870, Peter Conacher & Company, of Huddersfield, built a three-manual organ of 19 speaking stops for 'Rippon Lea', Elsternwick, the residence of Sir Frederick Sargood. Later moved into the ballroom of this property, where photographs of the instrument survive, it was moved in 1903 to the Methodist Church, Semaphore, South Australia, where it survives intact.

In 1877, the distinguished London firm of Henry Willis & Sons built a two-manual instrument of 17 stops for 'Findon', Kew, the residence of Henry Miller. This organ, of superlative constructional quality, was later moved to Wesley Uniting Church, Box Hill, where it survives intact.

In 1892, the Casson Patent Organ Company built a two-manual organ of 16 speaking stops for the Hon. William H. Winter-Irving, of Toorak, this containing the earliest known examples of imitative string stops in the country, thought to have been voiced by William Thynne. This organ was later placed in Christ Church, Hamilton, where it has since been rebuilt and enlarged, although retaining most of the original pipework.

During the later 19th century, a number of organs were built by George Fincham for private clients in Victoria. These included single-manual organs for Henry Kemmis, Warrnambool (1869), Edward A'Beckett, Brighton (1873) and Cullis Hill, Hawthorn (1888). Two-manual organs were built for George Peake (1875), Joseph S. Summers, Windsor (1882), A. Morgan (1885), and S. Stokes, Brighton (1889). Some of these instruments can no longer be traced.

Moving to the present century, Hill & Son received in 1908 the commission for a three manual organ of 25 stops from Niel Black, a wealthy pastoralist, for his property 'Dalvui', Noorat, in the Western District of Victoria. This three-manual organ boasted tubular-pneumatic action and a fine Gothic case containing spotted metal pipes. This organ was later moved to the chapel of Geelong Grammar School, where it survives in a greatly enlarged state following rebuilding in 1958.

In 1928 the Aeolian Company of New York supplied two substantial instruments (2/16 with Echo) fitted with roll-playing mechanisms for the residences of Alfred N. and George R. Nicholas (of 'Aspro' fame) at Toorak and Auburn. Both instruments were later moved into non-secular venues where their intensely symphonic tonal schemes proved difficult for the purposes of congregational accompaniment. One of the instruments is about to be restored for residential use. Another roll-playing instrument of distinction was built by Welte & Soehne, Freiburg, for the residence of T.J. Noske, Toorak in the late 1920s and sold to St John's Lutheran Church, South Melbourne in the 1930s where it was rebuilt in 1960 by Hill, Norman & Beard and converted to 'orthodox' operation and specification.

The Melbourne firm of George Fincham & Sons built a number of residence organs in the earlier decades of the present century. Three-manual organs were built in 1905/enlarged 1910 for W.G. Sharp, of Albert Park (later moved to the Assembly Hall, Melbourne) and R.A. Raymond, of Heidelberg - 1927 - (later incorporated into the Baptist Tabernacle organ in Hobart) while the firm rebuilt in 1925 a three-manual instrument for the residence of H.A. Balfour, Toorak, begun by John and H.A. Alsop for their home 'Darley', Kew, in the 1880s. Two-manual organs were built for a number of clients including Montray Bunbury, of Bunbury, Western Australia, in 1905, A.T. Danks, for his home 'Hazeldene', Canterbury in 1909 (which still survives intact), George Richardson, of St Kilda, in 1926 (now in the Uniting Church, Newtown Hobart), and Geoffrey Chambers, of Ivanhoe, in 1934 (which survives in a home at Balwyn).

Frederick Taylor, who trained with Finchams and started up his own firm in 1900, built a substantial three-manual organ of 20 stops for the home of F.E. Wilson at East St Kilda about 1909. This instrument was later sold to Charles Stickland and finally installed at St John's, Colac, where it was rebuilt as a two-manual in 1971.

C.W. Andrewartha, a cabinet-maker turned organbuilder, later built a second instrument for Charles Stickland, again of three-manuals, later placed in the Congregational Church, Warrnambool, and which still survives, albeit greatly altered, in St Gabriel's, Reservoir. Andrewartha also built a two-manual organ for his home in North Caulfield which has since been broken up.

Raymond Fehmel, an assistant organist at St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, built in the 1930s for his home in Essendon a two-manual organ of 20 stops, this incorporating a Nazard and Tierce scaled along Willis lines. This instrument is now owned by OHTA member Eric Stokes who plans to restore it for his home in Kew.

Tasmania

A number of imported instruments were installed in private homes in Tasmania. Perhaps the earliest residence organ in Tasmania was a single-manual instrument brought out by John Elliot, the son of Thomas Elliot the illustrious English organbuilder who built the instrument. In the 1830s and 1840s, J.C. Bishop sent out three delightful single-manual chamber organs which may still be found in the Anglican churches of Carrick and Cressy and the Presbyterian Church at Campbell Town. These instruments have elegant casework and incorporate Bishop's inventions: the Clarabella and composition pedals. In 1867, J.W. Walker sent out a substantial two-manual organ for 'The Grange', Campbell Town, the residence of Dr Valentine. Other imported residence organs were built by William Reed, of Huddersfield, and J.E. Reeve, of London.

The most important Tasmanian organbuilder in the 19th century was Samuel Joscelyne, of Launceston, who built at least four instruments, three of these being for private use. Two of these survive today. The organ which Joscelyne built for his own home in Launceston is now at St James-the-Great, East St Kilda, Melbourne after a number of moves and a total reconstruction following an abortive electrification. The other instrument is now at St Luke's, LaTrobe, Tasmania, where it has recently been restored. Both instruments have casework of superlative excellence.

Western Australia

Very few organs have been installed in private homes in Western Australia.

A rare example last century was an organ of two manuals and nine stops built by Hill & Son, London in 1891 for the residence of George Hillman, Perth and later placed in St Luke's, Mosman Park. Early this century, both J.E. Dodd and George Fincham & Son sent organs across to Western Australia for installation in residences.

Robert Cecil Clifton, the gifted amateur organbuilder, began building a two manual organ of 12 stops for his home in Perth in 1898 and completed the instrument in 1908. Possessing a fine Gothic case with carved cornices and pipeshades, and spotted metal facade pipes, this instrument still survives at St Alban's, Highgate Hill.

In this paper, I have almost entirely discussed instruments placed in private homes before the second world war. In recent years, a number of mechanical action instruments of classical design have been acquired by private owners, but I fear that insufficient time is available to discuss these at this juncture.