

# *The Organ at All Hallows, Gospel Oak*

By GILBERT BENHAM

ALL HALLOWS is a large church, built in the Gothic style and having excellent acoustical properties, and with a well placed organ. It is a pity that the roof of the church was not built of stone before the cost of such work became prohibitive, for the tops of the pillars break off from stone to dark wood with unhappy effect, marring the many beautiful and somewhat unusual views to be obtained.

The organ is the work of Messrs. Hill & Son, built in 1915, and is the last example of Dr. Arthur G. Hill's supervision. There is no case-work, which is a pity, for Dr. Hill's special interest was in organ cases, his designs being of outstanding merit. The acoustics of the church being so favourable, it is not easy to estimate the degree of success that would attend this instrument under less helpful conditions; but it should be accepted that, whereas reasonable echo is beneficial, it also extends or magnifies the less happy features. It would appear that builders were unable to combat bad acoustics, for pretty much the same tonal character was followed, whatever the acoustics. I know other instruments that bear this out. Even to-day builders are chosen for reasons other than their ability to supply organs of the type necessary for the particular church. Hill's seem of later years to have favoured a harder tone for their diapasons, especially in unison pitch, the object apparently being greater clearness of tone and driving force. For my part, I prefer the older kind of tone, though it may lack the power and force of that of later days: it was more musical and stood the test of use better. I think the great diapasons in this organ are less horny and of fuller tone than other examples, and seem to represent a mean between the types indicated, as we may find around the 1880-1900 period.

The general character of this organ at Gospel Oak is of considerable brilliance, and of a silvery quality: there is great foundational body of tone of a somewhat close, firm kind, and in full organ a definite prominence of reed tone, made up chiefly of tuba and great reed, but not strong enough completely to dwarf the diapasons. Whatever may be one's personal taste or analytical ability, few if any would deny the majesty and absolute splendour of these combined forces. Though I dislike the application of the word "thrilling," it may justifiably be used for the whole of this organ from start to finish. However, it represents more than one questionable

ratio of power, which if rectified would lead to the display of even greater beauties. It is an organ of conspicuous personality, and the full swell is really magnificent. All the reeds show some tonal likeness and are of large scale: very fiery posaunes of better quality than was often the case, with normal basses. They blend well with the rather silvery and very strong diapasons.

I dislike the large diapason on the great for two reasons: first, the two smaller ones seem quite sufficient, and the bass and tenor show some poor quality and windy notes. It is not a refined, natural specimen, but very bright and hard, upsetting the otherwise good quality of its neighbours and imparting a forcefulness that is hardly artistic. If such powerful unisons are considered necessary for some occasions, they should be held in reserve for their allotted office and not be allowed to interfere with chorus-work by drawing on the set combinations.

#### THE GREAT ORGAN.

Unless otherwise stated, my remarks refer to effects without the large open. The medium and small unisons are of considerable power and strength of tone, producing ample foundation work for the church, which is certainly very large. When we study the rest of the great, we shall notice that it is built on these two unisons: it could not well be otherwise. A careful study by an unbiassed mind of the legitimate office of very large unisons on a great organ (as distinct from the solo organ) is long overdue. The medium open is of bright, somewhat hard and close tone, having great clarity, drive and weight: a firm stop, with a bright treble and a clean bass, but with approximately average treatment throughout, producing a full flood of weighty tone from an unhampered position. No. 3 is similar, but more gentle and with less edge. It adds a little drive to No. 2, its tone being fresh and interesting, having ample power for the choristers below to deal with. The double open is magnificent, and rather on the lines of the medium unison though with less edge: it is a big double, but not too much. As may be imagined, neither the medium nor the small open adds anything to the colossal large open. These three stops (of 16ft., 8ft., 8ft.) together are magnificent, and the bold voicing of the medium unison prevents any sense of thickness. However desirable a tone of open texture may be, one must be just to other types, such as is found here, praising what may be successful in a certain building.

The principal lies midway between Nos. 2 and 3, but is brighter and stronger than No. 3. It is a bold stop throughout, but certainly not overdone. The fifteenth is a little smaller and softer than the principal. The mixture is quite big, bold and strong, blending fairly well and adding some silvery brilliance. The output is kept well up throughout. All these diapasons have a reasonable family likeness, with quite apparent and essential characteristics, some in their treble and some in their bass, but a slight individual difference is obvious all through the chorus. There is ample weight and silvery brilliance to make this chorus alone an effect to memorise, especially when it is heard against the superb pedal reed. The mixture is



designed to add brilliance rather than cohesion to the chorus, presumably as a foil to the tromba and tuba. Big mixtures have always been a feature of Hill organs.

The tromba is really a large posaune of good quality, and of better tone than many of Hill's great reeds. Whatever its merits, I prefer the diapasons to stand without its assistance, although I would hesitate to say that it definitely ruins their effect; it unquestionably does offer some opposition of a definite nature, the resulting proportion of flue to reed becoming quite equal, which to my mind is not right. This reed does not melt into the diapasons as many do, which feature is probably the result of the close tone of all the diapasons,—at least, I can see no other reason. Probably a smaller, more silvery and tighter reed would be happier. It is apparent to me that this diapason chorus is excellent enough to remain supreme on its own manual: but it does not, nor does it bow the knee to a superior tone. If a great diapason chorus becomes appreciably lessened on drawing the great reeds, of what main character must the full organ be? I am not unsympathetic to the claims of a certain class of reed for inclusion in the great chorus: but a reed should be excluded when it is clearly wrong either in proportion of power and actual tone. Some reeds have the effect of considerably extending the brilliance, as well as the body, of the flue chorus, in addition to imparting a tinge of reed-colouring that is artistic if not strictly logical. Of the 8ft. flute, one need only say that tone and power are quite satisfactory, with a well-controlled bass. There is no 4ft. flute.

#### THE SWELL ORGAN.

The swell is possibly the most striking effect of this instrument: it is very full and rich, and also brilliant and splashy. Thanks to a fine swell box, with shutters opening towards the nave, the amount of crescendo obtainable is tremendous. Although the 16ft. reed is decidedly large, it is so voiced that its effect is not too oppressive. It varies a good deal in its texture, being thinner and lighter than the horn in its middle and upper octaves, and much more open and free lower down, especially in the bass octave. Although its 16ft. octave is full large, it can scarcely be thought overdone, as the general type of tone is weighty and majestic. In these matters, one is forced to grasp the tonal purposes of the particular builder. If he reaches his goal, and it is a worthy one, then praise must go to him. The tone below, say, middle C is extremely rich, fiery and weighty. This double is as big as the clarion can set off: and the clarion is decidedly smaller than the double and the horn, also a little quieter in tone, smoother and less assertive. These features were a surprise to me after hearing the brilliance down the church. Its tone does not vary much, and the treble is good; but its influence is only just sufficient, and quite an amount of the brilliance of the chorus comes by reason of the mixture and some portions of the horn. But the upper part of the horn is a trifle thick. These three reeds contribute a great deal to the output of the full swell, and are not dependent on the mixture to make them blend together. The horn is of the



posaune type, but with more body. In its middle and lower portions it has looseness and splash.

As to the flue-work, here again the highest honours are rightly due. The unison diapason has a slight suspicion of stringiness; it is a warmer stop than those on the great, being a species of dulciana that has always been popular for the swell 8ft. open. The treatment is normal throughout and of lovely quality. The principal is appreciably more powerful, brighter and silvery. The mixture is quite enough, and more gently voiced, of course, than its great namesake, but still silvery and most effective.

The quieter stops in the swell call for comment. There are two pairs of strings,—a keen and a soft. The dolce is not of tapering construction, and is virtually a dulciana. By "crossing" these sets of string tone, a considerable degree of variety is obtainable, and the quality is exceptionally high. All they lack is a suitable 32ft. to show them off in all their beauty. The other quieter stops are of superb quality. The tremulant is a little fast and somewhat heavy.

Considering the solo organ, we notice that the colossal tuba has great edge and splash, good free tone and quality, becoming smoother and rounder as one ascends the compass. It has some degree of body, but the bass and tenor are quite free enough for their power; it comes through full swell and great in no half-hearted fashion, and needs to be treated with some respect and judicious opening of its swell-box if it is not to become a little tedious. But, all the same, it is a fine stop. The two harmonic flutes are quite good, the 4ft. being perhaps the better. The basses are kept well in hand. The orchestral oboe is of good, hollow tone, similar to a cor anglais in parts, but not at all biting or keen. The tremulant is much too fast, although quite silent.

The choir organ is not equal to the other departments. The gamba is indifferent in tone and regulation; the lieblich gedackt is quite un-lieblich; the lieblich flöte is extremely good, though not piquant; but the suabe flute has a brighter treble. The piccolo is of bright tone, but it is scarcely a flute, more resembling a flageolet. The clarinet is a corno di bassetto of good tone.

The pedal organ is a comprehensive scheme, although carried out extravagantly. One of the manual doubles could have saved the cost of the separate double dulciana, even though the stop may be beautiful. There is no adequate 32ft., not even a contra bourdon extension. The method of obtaining the acoustic bass can rarely be approved—namely, by the open wood in fifths on itself—producing a thud that could be dispensed with. Ample room exists for a proper 32ft. open, or a bourdon extension if economy dictates. The open wood is big and weighty, with normal tone and clean speech. The dulciana is true to name and much quieter than the bourdon. The violone is emphatic, raising the flue-work to great heights, and is a stop of pungent tone and good scale. The bourdon, which speaks well, is of average tone and quality.

The reed is telling and majestic, having blaze, edge and power. Its regulation, speech and quality are good, but not very foundational, which

is not wanted here on account of the life imparted by the violone. This reed is suitable for use against the diapason chorus; but in view of the exceptional power of the swell and great coupled, I think an 8ft. pedal reed would improve the balance, although the solo tuba can be brought in. All the 8ft. stops are extensions from their appropriate unisons: the 'cello is from the violone, and the octave from the open wood.

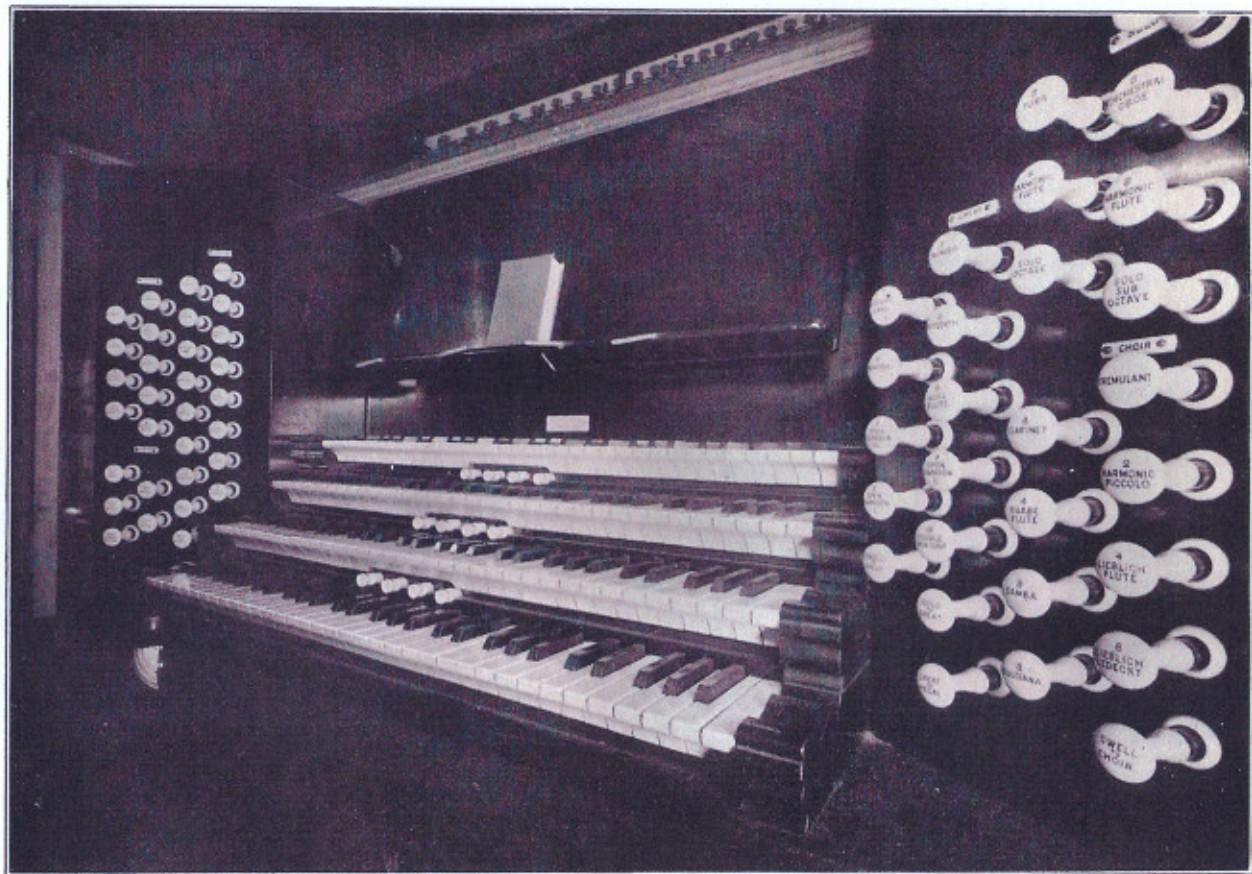
It will be observed that there are three stops in this organ unfortunate in the chorus sense. It may be suggested that the large open is unnecessary in any capacity, and the great reed would be better employed as the solo tuba, which could be discarded. In that event, the great mixture could be slightly restrained in output, to the advantage of the full organ.

The specification follows:—

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		PEDAL ORGAN	
Double open diapason	...16	Double diapason	...16	Acoustic bass	... 32
Open diapason	... 8	Open diapason	... 8	Open wood	...16
Open diapason	... 8	Gamba (keen)	... 8	Violone, metal	...16
Open diapason	... 8	Voix céleste	... 8	Double dulciana	...16
Hohl flöte	... 8	Dolce (soft)	... 8	Bourdon	...16
Principal	... 4	(not conical)		Octave	... 8
Fifteenth	... 2	Unda maris	... 8	Flute	... 8
Mixture	... rks III	Rohr flöte	... 8	'Cello	... 8
Tromba	... 8	Principal	... 4	Trombone	...16
		Fifteenth	... 2		
		Mixture	... rks III		
		Oboe	... 8	COUPLERS	
		Contra fagotto	...16	Swell to pedal	
		Horn	... 8	Great to pedal	
		Clarion	... 4	Choir to pedal	
		Tremulant		Solo to pedal	
				Swell to choir	
				Swell to great	
				Solo to great	
				Solo suboctave	
				Solo superoctave	
				Swell suboctave	
				Swell superoctave	
				PISTONS	
				4 to solo.	4 to great
				4 to swell	
				1 to great to pedal	
				PEDAL PISTONS	
				4 to great.	4 to swell

Wind pressures: All flues, except great large open, 3½in.; great large open and reed, and swell chorus reeds, 6in.; tuba, 10in. All 8ft. and 4ft. reeds have harmonic trebles.





The Organ at All Hallows', Gospel Oak: the Console

*(Photograph by Gilbert Benham)*