

Not one Willis but two!

The Hartford Hundred Group of parishes, in Hertfordshire, has four parishes with five churches. Within the Group it may be fairly well known that the organ in the parish church at Essendon, although rebuilt by Henry Jones in 1917 and added to by Saxon Aldred ca. 1996, was originally made by Henry Willis, the famous Liverpool-based organ builder. It may be less well known that Henry Willis was also involved with a church at the other end of the Group – at Bayford, where he supplied a “Scudamore” organ having three stops.

This note attempts to answer three questions:

- What are “Scudamore” organs, and why were they developed?
- What did they look like?
- What is known about the Bayford instrument, and its later incorporation by J.W. Walker into the current organ?

To avoid confusion, it should first be noted that there is a present-day organ builder named Keith Scudamore. For our purposes, however, the term “Scudamore” comes from the name of the parish of Upton Scudamore in Wiltshire, where a nineteenth-century rector found himself with a church in need of renovation but without the funds to do everything necessary (this situation may seem familiar). With the help of Mr Nelson Hall (a local organ-builder) and the architect G. E. Street (then an assistant to G. Gilbert Scott) the rector, the Rev. John Baron, derived a design for a small pipe organ. The minimum-cost design had only a few stops, but with the pipework mounted well above the keyboard, the pipes were all able to speak freely into the building to maximise their effect, and the floor space used was minimised.

The “Scudamore” principle turned out to be exactly what many small parishes were looking for during the nineteenth century when churches all round the country were being built, or rebuilt, or re-built. Many organ building firms, even the very big ones, came up with their own variations on the idea.

In the case of Henry Willis, his firm started making these small organs in the 1850s and turned out about two hundred between 1858 and 1862 alone. His variants (in increasing order of size) were known as the “Upton”, the “Douglas” and the “Saint Cecilia”.

The instrument delivered to Bayford was of the “Douglas” type with a single manual keyboard and no pedalboard. It had three ranks of pipes, which were almost certainly of these types of stop:

Open Diapason	8 foot
Stopped Diapason	8 foot
Principal	4 foot

It is quite possible that the two 8 foot stops shared one set of pipes for the bottom 12 notes. These may have had their own stop knob, perhaps labelled “Stopped Diapason Bass”. This arrangement, which was quite common on small to medium-sized instruments in general, saved money for the customer (the bass pipes are the biggest and therefore most expensive) and also saved some space in the organ in exchange for a little more complication in the mechanism.

Within the Hartford Hundred Group, the instruments and Bayford and Ponsbourne have the same arrangement today. The “Diapason”, of course, is the native sound of the pipe organ, i.e. not an imitation of another instrument. We can only speculate as to what the original Bayford instrument looked like, but one possibility is shown by the Walker organ at Dullingham, Northamptonshire. Here the pipework reaches up to the roof with the case hard against the wall and (though most Scudamore organs would have been much smaller) it can be seen how the pipes can speak straight out across the building.

Having covered the origin of the Scudamore organ, and its possible appearance, we can turn to what is known of the history of the Bayford instrument, and in particular when it was first installed. Here we introduce another important name: the Rev. B. B. Edmonds (1910 – 2003). With a lifelong interest in the organ, he kept a series of notebooks giving details of those he had come across (including periods spent as Diocesan Organ Advisor for the Ely and St. Albans Dioceses).

Local research had already shown that the Church archives hold no information about mid-nineteenth-century Bayford, and it seems that the records for the Willis firm prior to about 1875 have also been lost. However, a footnote in the National Pipe Organ Register (NPOR) refers to records kept by Rev. B. B. Edmonds which give 1860 as the date for installation of the Willis organ at Bayford.

It is understood that the present church of Bayford, St Mary’s, dates from 1871, replacing a previous building of 1804, so it seems that the Willis was used for about 10 years in the older building, then was re-installed in the new. Joseph Walker died in 1870, so when in 1874 the organ was enlarged and rebuilt by the organ builders Joseph Walker & Son of London, it was Joseph’s son, James, who was then head of the firm. Before we leave the Willis instruments, it may be worth noting that another instrument of the “Douglas” type was delivered to the church at Wormley (according to a contemporary list, though there is no mention of it in the current National Pipe Organ Register). Yet another, type unknown, went to Ickleford, near Hitchin, ca. 1860. Apparently this one was later moved to St. Luke’s, Hitchin. (In passing, those of us who associate the name of Willis only with larger instruments should remember that such jobs do not come along too often, so in the intervals between them a flow of smaller jobs is needed, since even organ-builders have to eat!).

The Walker rebuild left the console built into the end of the case, at the west end. This arrangement, while unusual, is not unique. A few miles south of Melton Mowbray, in the village of Little Dalby, there is an instrument with a similar layout, but here placed north-south so that the console is next to the nave, the main front of the case faces west across the east end of the south aisle and extends on into the south transept. The similarities between the instruments continue: both organs were built by Walker in 1874, and it may be seen from the pictures that the layout of the stop-knobs at the console, and the shape of the key-slips (the wood pieces at the ends of the keyboards) are also very like those at Bayford. It is hoped that on a return visit arrangements may be made for me to play the Little Dalby organ.

From later church records, the original pedalboard lasted until 1954 when (according to a quinquennial parish report) it was replaced by a new one of the radiating and concave pattern (a design standard in the UK from the late nineteenth century). The configuration of the original is not known. By 1998 it was apparent that the display pipes - those facing the chancel, above the choir stalls - were in danger of collapsing under their own weight. Discussions were held with Eric Pask (then Diocesan Organ Advisor) and with the firm of E. J. Johnson (who held the tuning contract) as to what might be done in a cost-effective

manner. An E. J. Johnson quotation dated February 1988 covered removal, cleaning, repair and reinstatement of all the pipes for the Great organ and associated components for the sum of £1500.

The Bayford instrument, as rebuilt by Walker, had provision for the future addition of another stop; over the next few months the discussions were widened to consider the addition of the prepared-for stop on the Great, also re-voicing of the Oboe stop on the Swell and the reinstatement of the hand-blowing mechanism (this to be in addition to the electric blower motor).

Eric Pask, in a letter dated September 1999, advised against re-voicing the Oboe but acknowledged that an extra stop on the Great “would add to the effectiveness of the organ and be an attractive option provided the new register was in keeping with the existing 1874 pipework and its builder's style”. The options considered were a reed (probably a Trumpet) or a 2-rank Mixture. In the event, the Mixture was the selected option, the Oboe was left as is and nothing was done about the reinstatement of the hand-blowing mechanism. A faculty was issued, and (according to the 2005 quinquennial report) the work was carried out in October 1999.

As it stands today (September 2014) the instrument has 12 speaking stops over the two manuals and pedals. The new Mixture certainly adds brightness but can easily be over-used, this not being helped by the fact that the full effect, particularly on the choir, is not easily appreciated by the organist, who is hidden away from direct lines of sight or hearing. Some of the Flute sounds are quite beautiful and the much-discussed Oboe is a good if slightly shy example of its type.

It seems possible that the Willis pipework was re-used in the Walker rebuild, so one might speculate that the Open Diapason pipes on display above the choir stalls, for instance, are Willis not Walker, but further research is needed to confirm this. However, its mixed origins notwithstanding, the organ at Bayford has done its job well for many years and should last for many more.

Posthumous thanks are due to Lawrence Elvin and Rev. B. B. Edmonds, whose work respectively confirmed the type and the date of the Bayford Willis. Thanks are also due to the Rector and Churchwardens for making it possible to examine more recent church records.

Paul Minchinton

See illustrations below:



Illustration 1 Dullingham – Walker organ

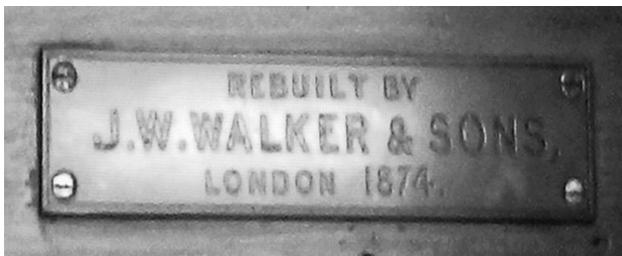


Illustration 2 Bayford – Walker nameplate



Illustration 3 Little Dalby - Walker organ



Illustration 4 Little Dalby – Walker nameplate



Illustration 5 Little Dalby – Swell stops and couplers



Illustration 6 Bayford — Swell stops and couplers



Illustration 7 Bayford – Display pipes facing choir stalls

The Bayford Willis – some corrections and comments (June 2015)

Since writing the notes on the Willis at Bayford, some further information has come my way: First of all, I am told that the secondary 8ft stop on a Willis Scudamore organ would more likely be a dulciana than a stopped diapason (though of course this might be changed for an

individual customer, and there were several models of Scudamore-type organ in the Willis range).

NPOR entry for Wormley refers to notes by the late Rev. B B Edmonds which include: "Willis 1860: 'Scudamore' organ".

From recent correspondence with William Johnson, organ builder:

The Scudamore organ from Hitchin St John (now demolished) was moved to Hinxworth by his father (E.J. Johnson) in 1970. 1 manual, 4 stops, with pedal pulldowns
NPOR notes that Frank Haycroft records it as having come from Ickleford.

However, Frank Haycroft also records an organ from Ickleford as having gone to Hitchin St Luke (date unknown). Willis c 1860 1 manual 3 stops, 884

An NPOR search for Hitchin St Luke comes up blank. Could this have been confused with Hitchin St John?

Finally, it now seems likely that nothing remains of the Bayford Willis at Bayford. Neither the diapason nor the dulciana pipes, it seems, have a 'Willis' look about them, and while the Great soundboard may date from 1874, those who inspected the Swell soundboard fairly recently say it is actually rather earlier than that in construction, but again not obviously Willis.

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