

From the Durham Diocesan Deputy Organs Adviser  
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### St John's Church, Darlington - NPOR [N12161]

I visited St John's Church, Darlington, on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2023 with Richard Hird and Daniel Spraggon to inspect the organ following the closure of the building. Built in 1890 by H.S. Vincent & Co of Sunderland when he was just 29 years old, this organ is one of a number built in the local area by that firm prior and is an excellent example of their work of this period. *[There's another similar at Dent Parish Church in Cumbria, restored H&H, also surviving in good order after 130 years]*. Stylistically it shows the influence of the more well-known firms of the late Victorian era, particularly Willis and Lewis. The organ is located in a chamber on the north side of the church, and replaced a smaller instrument by James Nicholson of Newcastle which was built in 1865. The Church itself is large and lofty, and the rather modest stop list of the Vincent organ belies its impact in the vast space of the Nave. The opening recital was given on the 18th of September 1890 by Philip Armes, Organist of Durham Cathedral.

The specification is as follows:

#### Great Organ (C to a, 58 notes)

Lieblich Bourdon	16 ( <i>Added later on a pneumatic relay, possibly in 1970 by H.E. Prested</i> )
Open Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedact	8
Dulciana	8
Octave	4
Flute Harmonic	4
Super Octave	2
Trumpet	8
Clarinet	8 (TC)
<i>Swell to Great</i>	

#### Swell Organ (C to a, 58 notes)

Bourdon	16
Violin Diapason	8
Rohr Flöte	8
Viol de Gamba	8
Voix Celeste	8 (TC?)
Geigen Principal	4
Mixture 15.19.22	III
Horn	8
Oboe	8
<i>Tremulant (by ratchet pedal)</i>	

#### Pedal Organ (C to f<sup>1</sup> 30 notes)

Open Bass	16 ( <i>Open Metal pipes, part in nave façade</i> )
Sub Bass	16
<i>Swell to Pedal</i>	
<i>Great to Pedal</i>	

## Accessories

3 composition pedals to Great

3 composition pedals to Swell

## Notes

Historic Organ Certificate Grade II\* listing

Located in a chamber off north side of chancel

Decorated pipe array to the Nave

Swell behind Great with console attached

Great and Swell speak across the chancel

Attractive multi-post and rail casework on cantilever impost in the chancel with pitch pine panelling below and spotted metal front pipes

Much use of spotted metal throughout

Tuning slides are used throughout and the pipework is generally in good condition with just a few dents and wrinkled pipe tops here and there

Mechanical action to the manuals, pneumatic action to the pedals

Varnished oak console with straight stop jambs

Central balanced swell pedal

The organ chamber is very tight, and access for maintenance is difficult, partly because of the Great Lieblich Bourdon relay

The reservoirs are very large

The blower is located behind the organ in a separate room and should be checked by a specialist for asbestos before being worked on or moved

## Dimensions:

The main bulk of the organ - Great, and Swell in a box behind, both on a frame with reservoirs below is all sitting in a pit 33in deep, down to nave floor level.

The main footprint seems to be:

**Front to back:** Front case to rear of Sw. box = 135in., with v. small gap [5in] to rear of Sw. box.

**Width:** [W side to E side] = 100in.

**Height:** perched console floor level to top of front case = 228in [19ft], but organ in chamber behind is in a pit of 33in.[3ft] depth. The top of the Swell box is at height of front arch, with case top higher in front of arch.

The West side case was measured at 204in high. The Pedal chests are laid out front to back in a space to the West of the main frame space, behind the solid block of stonework [E/W 60in x S/N 57in] where the North chancel wall abuts the East nave wall, filling the large archway to the North aisle. This Pedal area must add a 60in x 80in to the footprint to the West side of the main rectangular footprint of the organ.

On the day of the visit the organ was working very well. It has been looked after by the church and is in good condition. The Great is bold and sings into the church with clarity. The swell is at the back of the chamber and is quiet at the console but more present in the church. It would sound well in a more exposed position should the organ be moved. Every stop really counts in this instrument. The strings are keen, the reeds are bold and colourful, the diapasons are warm and strong, and the flutes are bright and clear. It is ideal for congregational and choral accompaniment, and the versatile stop list allows for the successful performance of much of the mainstream organ literature.

## Recommendations:

This organ is very well made and is an important survivor of the work of this important local firm. It should be preserved intact at all costs. It would be ideal for a medium sized church, either as the main instrument, or as a quire organ in a major choral foundation. It would also be an excellent organ in a school or college chapel. If the organ stays in its current home, consideration should be given to improving access for tuning and maintenance, perhaps by removing the Great 16ft. Should the organ be relocated, the Lieblich Bourdon could usefully be made playable on the Pedal at both 16ft and 8ft

itches. This organ should not be underestimated, and while its large scale might prove its undoing in locating a new home, it is precisely this which gives it such an excellent character and personality. Given the closure of the church, I would recommend offering this instrument for relocation through the IBO redundant organs list.

### Photos overleaf



Main casework in the Chancel



Manuels and Nameplate.



Nave case work and Pedal Open Bass pipes.



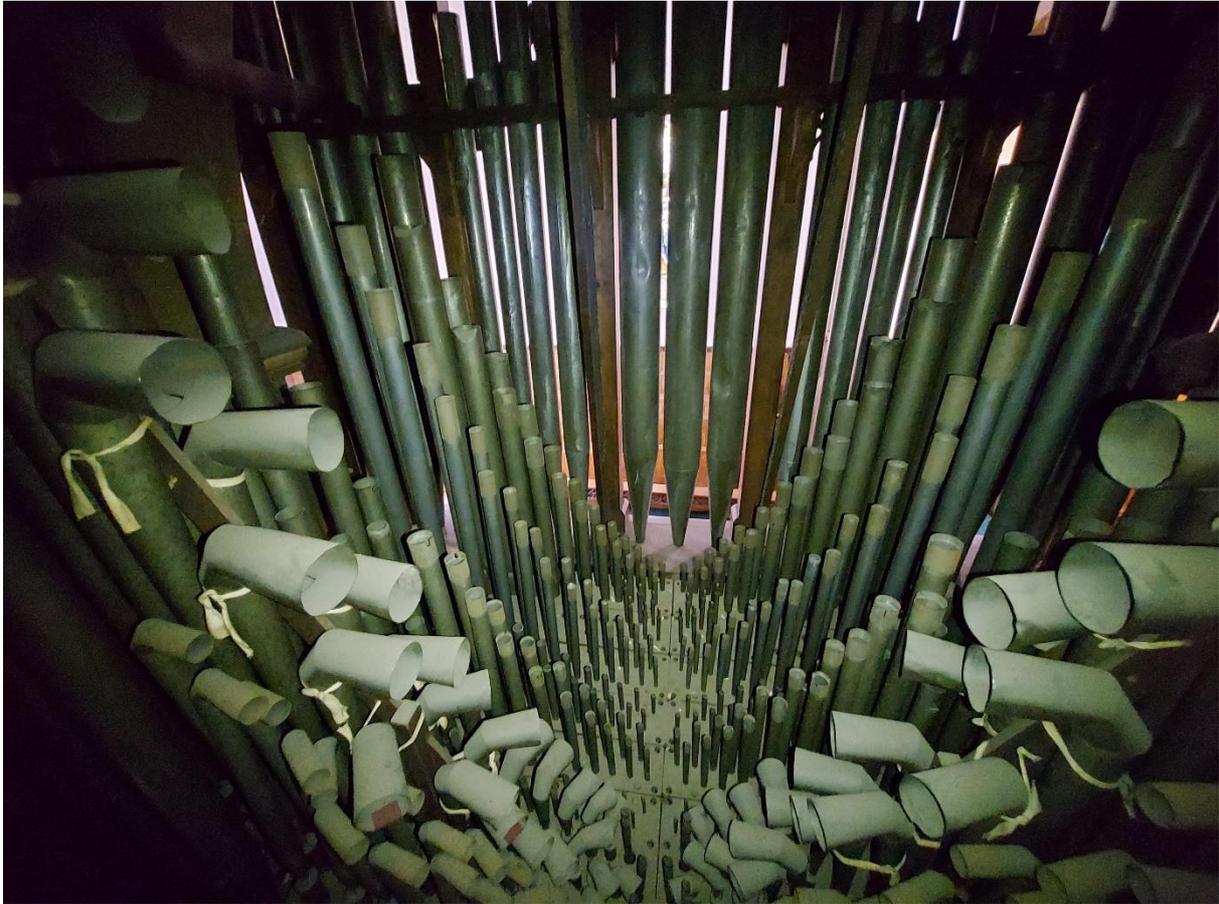
Swell stops and couplers.



Great stops.



Pedal Stops



Great Pipework



Swell Pipework 1



Swell Pipework 2



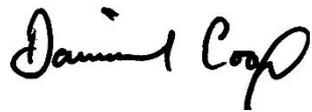
Great Pipework and Pedal Bourdon



Blower

## Notes on the Vincent Family:

Henry Sherborne Vincent was the youngest son [one of 4, all musical] of Charles J. Vincent who came from Bath to found and run a large music emporium in Sunderland selling [and making?] instruments, sheet music etc. An organ by Charles built in 1872 for the Sunderland Victoria Hall remains at High House Chapel in Weardale [though currently in store pending restoration of the Chapel and Museum]. Charles, his musical family, and their 3m Willis house organ [now at Brancepeth], feature in T.H.Collinson's "The Diary of an Organists Apprentice at Durham Cathedral" in 1875 Diary entries. Son Henry, later the builder of the St.John's organ, would have been but age 14 in 1875, but evidently soaking up and learning about organs and church music. The Vincent family is an important contributor to North East history.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Cook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the name.

Daniel Cook

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