



1875 HILL & SON ORGAN RESTORATION PROGRESS REPORT MARCH 2006

from John Maidment

Overall, work is proceeding well both at the factory of George Stephens Pty Ltd and inside the hall itself at Tanunda. It is hoped that the key and stop actions will be complete within the next few months and that the whole of the instrument can be transported to Tanunda and installation may start later in the year.

Building frame

This has been erected in the Stephens factory up to the level of the Great and Choir windchests. The horizontal key desk sections have been restored behind the console to the rear of the main framing while the new main bellows and barker lever bellows rest on new frames. Some repairs have taken place. The upper frame of the swell has not been erected owing to restrictions in height. A temporary staging has been erected for the console, which is placed around 2.5 metres above ground level.

Console

The outer frame, side panels, music desk, key supports and panels above the pedals have been reconstructed in Australian ash and await the drilling of the stop holes, fitting of ferrules (most of which have been reconstructed by Irwin Beitz based on surviving samples provided by George Stephens) and overall polishing in a medium oak flat finish. The drawstops have been sorted, fitted with new dowels and square wooden blocks and await the fitting of stop labels (the originals almost entirely survive). The new manual keyboards have been made in the UK by P&S and have elaborate scrolled keycheeks and overhanging fronts in the Hill style. These await the polishing of the keycheeks and the covering of the rear sections with felt and leather where they link with the key actions. A new parallel/concave pedal board has been manufactured in Australian ash and awaits repolishing. New steel composition pedals have been made by Irwin Beitz in the Barossa Valley.

Key action

The barker lever actions are progressing very well and are substantially complete, awaiting the making up of the pneumatic motors (leather work had been cut up and pasted with cardboard sections) and fitting of linkages. New facsimile brass action squares have been fitted. The manual roller boards have been fully restored: those for the Great and Choir were in position. New roller boards will need to be constructed for the two large pedal chests, together with linkages to the console and chests at ground level for the 32ft Double Open Diapason pipes. A new roller board will also need to be constructed for the manual to pedal coupling actions. The intermanual couplers await construction, although the supporting beams for the octave and sub octave coupler backfalls have been made.

Stop action

Steel components for the stop action have been manufactured by Irwin Beitz and await final welding up. They can then be painted black and fitted to the wooden frames that will enclose them behind the console. Upon erection in the hall, large wooden trundles will then be fitted that link to the sliders. The composition pedal action awaits reconstruction.

Windchests

The Great C and C# windchests have been stripped back to the table. These have clearly suffered from considerable movement in the past, with evidence of cracks, screwing and nails to rectify problems as a result of huge climatic variation at its former location. Some of the sliders are warped and have been cut to alleviate past difficulties. It is likely that the other chests will suffer from similar problems. All will clearly need to be planed flat, the note channels flooded with hot animal glue, some of the damaged sliders replaced with replicas, the upperboards and rackboards repaired as required (many of the latter were altered in 1970), and the moving parts coated with graphite. The pallets may require recovering.

Wind system

The double-rise reservoirs for the pipework and barker lever action have both been reconstructed. The workmanship is magnificent. They are fitted with iron counterbalances and feeders, so that hand blowing can be restored. A 'Discus' blower is housed at the Hall that appears to be adequate for blowing the organ and dates from the early 1970s.

The short wind trunks for the bass of the 32ft from the pallet box will need cleaning back and leaks rectified through leathering of joints and cracks.

Site work

The walls of the stage area have been carefully cleaned back and repainted. A new suspended ceiling has been fitted together with a metal gantry above the proscenium arch and steel ladders connecting this to ground level and to the upper roof space. The new ceiling has greatly improved the hall acoustic, well reflecting the sound, and also offers an excellent insulative barrier from the upper roof space. Windows at the upper left will require roller blinds to be fitted so that the organ is not subjected to any sunlight penetration.

Preparatory work including the cutting out of the floor behind the organ case, and laying of concrete pads, have been completed for the lowering of the stage floor. The structural steelwork for the supporting beams has also been completed. A significant in-kind donation, the whole process will be accomplished prior to the return of the building frame later in the year, which will enable the installation to commence.



The restored barker lever (David Shield)



The building frame showing console platform at front (John Maidment)



Reconstructed composition pedal (John Maidment)



*Organ Historical Trust
of Australia citation:*

"A three manual organ, originally of 37 speaking stops built by the noted London firm of Hill & Son for the Adelaide Town Hall where it was opened in 1877. One of three organs built by the firm for Australian town halls, it remains the oldest concert organ on the Australian mainland and is notable for its impressive casework with carved details, its generous tonal scheme and outstanding sound."

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