

Early Pipe Organs of Maitland (Before the Willis Organs)

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Maitland has a very rich pipe organ history dating back to the early 1850s. The five Willis organs to arrive in Maitland churches between 1867 and 1882 are of national importance but it should be remembered that at least three of these churches had pipe organs before the Willis organs were installed. New information about the first organs at St Mary's, St Paul's and St Peter's Anglican churches has come to light and this provides a fascinating, if complex, picture of early organ-related activities in Maitland.

In 1854 and 1855 'finger organs' by James Davidson Bishop were advertised for sale by his brother John Charles Bishop who was a bookseller in East Maitland. J. C. Bishop also acted as an agent for organ builder, William J. Johnson of Sydney in offering 'organ, seraphine and piano tuning.' Organ builder, J. D. Bishop arrived from London in 1855 and worked in Maitland from late 1855 for about one year before moving to Sydney.¹

From at least 1867 James Patrick Broderick was working as an organ builder in Maitland, erecting, tuning and repairing organs into the 1890s. He was resident in Elgin Street and in 1867 erected the first Willis organ to arrive in Australia at St Paul's, West Maitland.² Broderick also erected the other Willis organs when they arrived from England (as well as numerous other organs) and in 1883 was referred to as the local agent for Messrs H. Willis & Sons.³

St Mary's Anglican Church, West Maitland

The first church to acquire a pipe organ seems to have been St Mary's Anglican Church. The first St Mary's Church was completed in 1843 and early instruments included a Coelophone (a type of mechanical reed organ), lent to the church by Bishop Tyrrell in 1848.⁴ A pipe organ was installed in 1856 with the initial costs being raised by subscription.

In March 1856 it was reported that 'The ORGAN has been erected in this Church, at a cost of £225, inclusive of all expenses' and that £81 5s 6d had been collected towards this sum. A list of subscribers was also published!⁵ The debt had been reduced to £98 by April 1860.⁶ Later evidence shows that the organ was built by J. W. Walker of London and it is possible that it was erected by J. D. Bishop who was still living in Maitland at that time.

The old building was used until the present church was opened on 18 Jul 1867. When the new church was approaching completion it was reported that:

. . . The organ from the old church has been removed, and rebuilt in the organ loft of the new church by Mr. James Broderick, who has made several improvements in its construction, and has altogether performed the task entrusted to him with considerable care and skill.⁷

When Melbourne and Sydney organist, Charles Edward Horsley (1822-1876), visited Maitland to play the new Willis organ at St Paul's Anglican Church in September 1867 he also performed at St Mary's: Advantage has been taken of the presence of Mr. Horsley in Maitland, to afford the lovers of good music an opportunity of hearing that gentleman's performance on that monarch of instruments, the organ. On Sunday evening Mr. Horsley performed during the service at St. Mary's new church, greatly to the satisfaction of the crowded congregation, and evolving a body of harmony from the comparatively small organ in that church, which fairly surprised all who heard it. On Thursday evening St. Paul's church was crowded by an audience composed of people of all denominations, from the whole district round, who assembled to hear Mr. Horsley exhibit his skill on the fine organ recently presented to the church by the Rev. J. R. Thackeray. . .⁸

In February 1880 a meeting of parishioners resolved that:

. . . the present organ in St. Mary's church is unsuitable, should be disposed of by the churchwardens, and replaced by a new and larger instrument.⁹

The subsequent advertisement for the organ provides a good description of the instrument:

CHURCH ORGAN FOR SALE.
BUILT BY "WALKER" OF LONDON
COST £225,
And has 8 Stops in a General Swell viz.:-
Dulciana Oboe
Bourdon Pedals Fifteenth
Open Diapason Principal Front
Coupler Principal

One and a half Octaves of Pedals, 16 feet tone, Three Composition Pedals and Pipes of Metal Speaking in front. This BEAUTIFUL and EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT is being sold solely because of its inadequacy of power for so large a church as St. Mary's, West Maitland.¹⁰

The organ was sold to St Luke's, Wallsend for £100 and opened with the church in December 1880.¹¹ Fortunately the organ has survived at St Luke's in substantially original condition. It is known that this instrument was originally built by J. W. Walker (Job No. 545) in 1855 for Sydney organ builder William J. Johnson.¹²

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Speaking in front.

THIS BEAUTIFUL and EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT is being sold solely because of its inadequacy of power for so large a church as St. Mary's, West Maitland.

Apply to the Churchwardens

1350

per JAMES D. PRENTICE.

St Paul's Anglican Church, West Maitland

The Parish of St Paul's was constituted 13th May 1856 and St Paul's Church was opened 26 Sep 1858. In April 1861 Revd James Robert Thackeray, the incumbent, purchased an organ for the church at a cost of £150.¹³ The organ was erected by Sydney organ builder Thomas V. Bridson and opened on 19th May. This organ was almost certainly that described in an advertisement of 1876 as built by J. W. Walker of London and 'containing 7 Stops and Swell.'¹⁴

A general description of the organ was given in August 1861:

. . . On entering the church, the most prominent object attracting attention is the new organ, which, as well as from its ornamental appearance as from the purity and sweetness of its tone, is a most important gain to the church . . . The organ is mounted upon a platform raised on open timber of great strength, some four or five feet above the floor of the church, so as to secure the instrument against injury in the event of such a flood as that of August, 1857, recurring . . .¹⁵

This organ remained in St Paul's until it was replaced by the Willis organ in 1867. Research now shows that the Walker organ was purchased in 1867 by St Peter's, East Maitland for £150 and remained there until 1884.

In 1863 the Rev. J. R. Thackeray purchased a much larger instrument - the old organ from St John's, Parramatta and had it erected in the Maitland School of Arts. This organ had been opened at a special service at St John's on 27th June 1841 and was replaced in 1863 with one ordered from Walker of London.¹⁶ In March 1863 the organ was advertised for sale by Thomas Bridson and bought by Thackeray for £50, including £2 10s for packing cases, and £2 commission on the sale to Bridson.¹⁷

This 2 manual 'London-built' organ was erected in the School of Arts, West Maitland and the local press reported that:

On Monday evening the new organ belonging to the Rev. Mr. Thackeray, and recently erected in the School of Arts, was for the first time in West Maitland, played upon publicly. Notwithstanding the disagreeable state of the weather and streets, the hall was well filled with a respectable and intelligent audience, who seemed fully to appreciate the skilful manipulation of the performers – Messrs. T. V. Bridson, M. H. Wilson, and J. Broderick. The entertainment was most agreeable, and was evidently well enjoyed.¹⁸

The specification of this organ can be deduced from newspaper advertisements of 1863:

Great	Swell
Open diapason	Open diapason
Stopped diapason	Stopped diapason
Principal	Principal
Flute	[extra slide for Oboe]
Twelfth	Couplers
Fifteenth	Swell to Great
Tierce bass	Great to Pedal
Cornet	1½ octaves of
Sesquialtera	'German pedals'
[one extra slide]	Compass GG to f ³
One composition pedal	

The organ was advertised for sale in November 1863 by Thackeray but remained in his possession and in 1865 it was moved to the newly opened St Ethel's school-room, built by Thackeray as a 'seminary for young ladies.'¹⁹ It was here destroyed when a fire broke out in the building in November 1866:

On Thursday evening the greater part of St. Ethel's School-room ... together with the most valuable of its contents, including a large organ valued at £150, was destroyed by fire. . . The fine large organ, which stood at the western end of the building, could not be approached, and even if it could have been it would have been impossible to get it out of the room. . .²⁰

This history of this instrument is of great interest as it was one of the earliest large two-manual organs in the colonies.

St Peter's Anglican Church, East Maitland

St Peter's parish was formed in 1834 and the first church building was consecrated in 1843. The present church building was opened in 1886.

In 1865 it was reported that:

. . . the church choir remains in an unsatisfactory state, owing to the want of a good instrument. The Bishop of the diocese recommended the purchase of an organ at an expense of £300, offering to lend £100 of the amount.²¹

By September 1866 an organ had been 'ordered from England at a cost of £300.'²² The order was probably placed with the firm of J. W. Walker which was predominant in the supply of organs to NSW at that time. (The organ for St John's, Newcastle which was opened in November 1866, was also supplied by Walker.)

In May 1867 St Paul's congregation decided to sell their soon to become redundant organ:

. . . The Rev. Mr. Thackeray . . . announced that he shortly expected to receive from England the large new organ (costing £400 without expenses) which he had ordered, as his gift to St. Paul's Church. Resolutions were thereupon passed unanimously, approving of Mr. Thackeray's selling the present organ towards defraying the freight, taxes and other expenses on the new organ (estimated at over £100) and thanking Mr. Thackeray for his munificent gift to the church.²³

The parishioners of St Peter's quickly decided to purchase the organ from St Paul's:

A meeting of parishioners of St. Peter's, East Maitland was held on Monday evening . . . [in order to decide whether] to purchase an organ from the Rev. Mr. Thackeray, or not, as they might think proper. We understand that the committee have since purchased the organ.²⁴

The order for an organ from England was evidently cancelled and £150 paid for the old St Paul's organ. At the same time school buildings were erected at St Peter's. It was recorded that:

. . . the liberal amount of £274 had been expended in the purchase of an organ and in the building of the excellent new schools. . .²⁵

When the Willis organ was ordered from England it was intended that a new chancel should be built on to the old church to accommodate it. This was never built and when the organ arrived in 1876 it was erected in the school-room attached to the church and opened on 1st September.²⁶ This was well before the laying

of the foundation of the present church in 1884. An advertisement appeared in the *Maitland Mercury* in August 1876:

FOR SALE, a CHURCH ORGAN, Built by Walker (London) containing 7 Stops and Swell. Cost £150, Price £50 Cash. Apply to JAMES P. BRODERICK, Elgin-street Next door to former residence.²⁷

This undoubtedly refers to the instrument in the old church of St Peter's and formerly in St Paul's. The price of £50 is an indication of the poor condition of the organ and it seems that the organ was not sold but remained in the old church until at least 1884. In 1882 it had been recommended by the Parochial Council to the churchwardens that, 'in view of the almost useless state of the organ in S. Peter's Church,' it should be sold or exchanged for an American organ. It was not until 1884, when it was recorded that the choir and organist had laboured 'under the serious difficulty of a very imperfect instrument', that an American organ was purchased from James Broderick for £51 13s.²⁸ The fate of the old organ is not recorded but it seems probable that it was removed by Broderick and broken up.

The foundation stone of the new and larger church was laid on 12 Sep 1884 and, upon completion, the Willis organ was moved by James Broderick from the school-room to the new church and was played there for the dedication service on 29 Sep 1886.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1. Organs of Maitland 1854 - 1912

Feb 1854	J. C. Bishop's, East Maitland	3 stop 'finger organ'	For sale, prob. built by J. D. Bishop
Nov 1855	J. C. Bishop's, East Maitland	Finger organ	For sale, prob. built by J. D. Bishop
Mar 1856	St Mary's	J. W. Walker, London	
19 May 1861	St Paul's	J. W. Walker, London	
Sep 1863	School of Arts	'London built'	from St John's, Parramatta
Jan 1865	St Ethel's Schoolroom	'London built'	from School of Arts – destroyed by fire Nov 1866
Jun 1865	Hillcoat's Musical Repository	J. D. Bishop	For sale, again advertised for sale in 1866 & 1868 at Raymond Terrace
19 Jul 1867	St Paul's	Henry Willis, London	
May 1867	St Peter's	J.W. Walker, London	from St Paul's. Remained in St Peter's (old church) until 1884
1 Sep 1876	St Peter's Schoolroom	Henry Willis, London	
25 Jul 1880	St John's	Henry Willis, London	
3 Jul 1881	St Mary's	Henry Willis, London	
3 Oct 1882	Wesleyan	Henry Willis, London	
8 Jan 1884	St Mary's Dominican Convent	Bishop & Son, London	
1886	St Peter's (new church)	Henry Willis, London	from St Peter's Schoolroom
9 Jul 1897	St Stephen's Presbyterian Church	Charles Richardson	
1906	Scott's Presbyterian Church	Charles Richardson	
1912	Congregational Church	Norman & Beard, London	Rebuilt 1965 & moved to St John's College, Morpeth

- ¹ Ward, R. 2010, 'The Bishop connection in Maitland,' *Plenum*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 12-13.
- ² *Maitland Mercury* 18 Jul 1867 p.3
- ³ *MM* 21 Apr 1883, p.7
- ⁴ Rushworth, G. D., 2006, *A supplement to historic organs of NSW*, Organ Historical Trust of Australia, p. 112
- ⁵ *MM* 1 Mar 1856, p.3
- ⁶ *MM* 12 Apr 1860 p.2
- ⁷ *MM* 22 Jun 1867 p.5
- ⁸ *MM* 21 Sep 1867 p.4
- ⁹ *MM* 12 Feb 1880 p.5
- ¹⁰ *MM* 24 Feb 1880 p.5
- ¹¹ Rushworth, 2006, op. cit., p.67
- ¹² J. W. Walker order book, p. 184.
- ¹³ Newcastle Church Society Reports, 1861.
- ¹⁴ *MM* 12 Aug 1876 p. 9
- ¹⁵ *MM* 29 Aug 1861 p.2
- ¹⁶ Rushworth, G. D. 1988, *Historic organs of New South Wales*. Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, pp. 23-25
- ¹⁷ Jervis, J. 1963. *A Short History of St John's, Parramatta*, p.15
- ¹⁸ *MM* 20 Aug 1863 p.3
- ¹⁹ *MM* 10 Jan 1865 p.2
- ²⁰ *MM* 1 Dec 1866 p.4
- ²¹ *MM* 23 Dec 1865 p.3
- ²² *MM* 27 Sep 1866 p.2
- ²³ *MM* 30 May 1867 p.3
- ²⁴ *MM* 30 May 1867 p.3
- ²⁵ *MM* 14 May 1868 p.2
- ²⁶ Waddell, J. 1996, *A history of St Peter's Church, East Maitland, NSW*. James Cook Univ. p. 119
- ²⁷ *MM* 12 Aug 1876 p.9
- ²⁸ Waddell, op. cit.