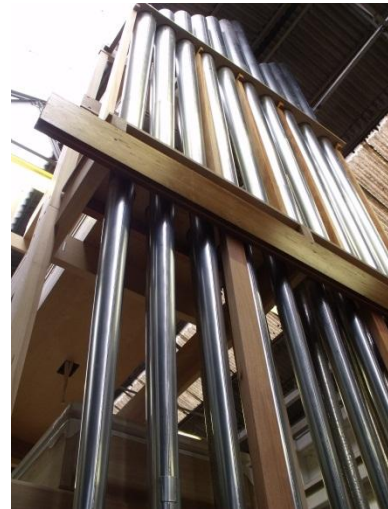


## What's happening to the organ?



Seeing the organ in parts in various areas of Henry Willis's

factory during their Open Day was a very strange experience. As I walked through the Wood Shop, the Metal Shop, the Assembly Halls and the technical areas, among the work benches and machinery, past and under the huge parts being assembled for the new cathedral organ in New Zealand, I would suddenly see a stop board, a set of lead tubes, a console mirror or a pedal board and recognise it as part of our Norman and Beard instrument. Even in the Assembly Hall, whose roof is higher than that of a normal house, the huge 32' pipe to provide bottom C for the Auckland Cathedral was nearly touching the roof, yet the top eight foot section was standing on the floor beside it, as it was too big to be fully assembled! In comparison, the parts of our organ looked Lilliputian, but they seem to be receiving just as much care.



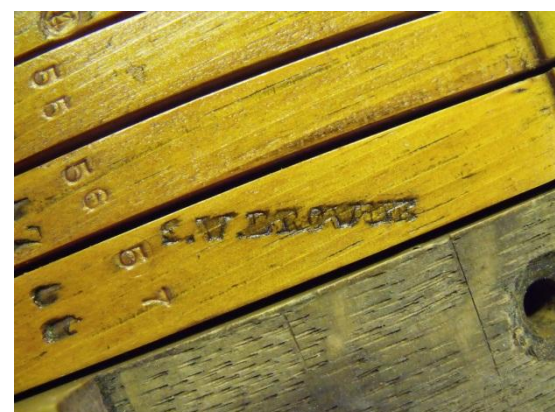
Peter Bellis had been waiting for me, in order to show me the work which he had done on the manuals, the keyboards. Each of the keys has been lovingly cleaned and polished: there are a hundred and four of them; we see only the first six inches or so of a lever over two feet long, which is held in place by three metal pins. Those first few inches are covered in ivory, which Peter has painstakingly polished by rubbing them in chalk dust on a soft leather pad. The dirt, discoloration and scratches



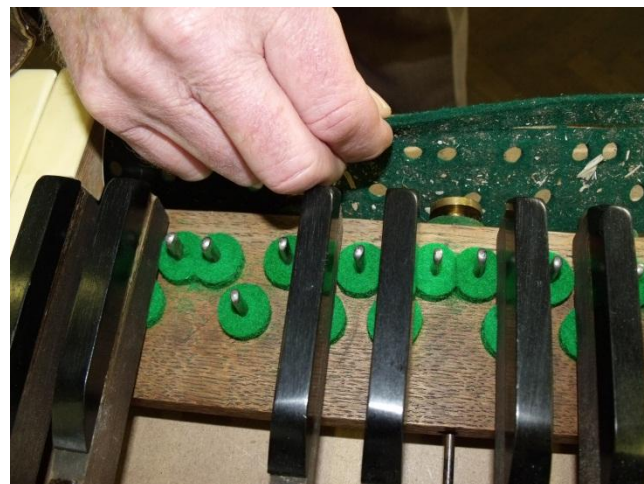
of a hundred years' use have been gently removed, leaving eighty-nine of them gleaming. Fourteen of the worst damaged ones have been sent away to be recovered with matching antique ivory, while Peter had left one unfinished to show the "before and after" effect of his



work. Each manual was proudly "signed" on the right hand key by the original craftsman, stamping his name into the wood, and that pride in craftsmanship is clearly shared by Peter and the other workers at the factory.



The marks on the frame of the manuals show that originally each of those hundred and four levers had rested on individual felt buttons, which give the response to the action. At some time in the past, these had been replaced, but instead of using individual buttons, the repair had been done by taking a long piece of felt and making rather sloppy holes around each of the pins. Each key now rests on its own tightly-fitting button, so that our organists should find a much more responsive instrument.



Those dull brassy buttons under the keyboards are now gleaming as the cleaning has revealed the gold plating in its full glory. Those buttons are for the “Combinations” – not Long Johns, but quick ways for an organist to change the sound by engaging a different “Combination” of stops with just one press. At least, they should be a quick way of doing it, but after a hundred years the maze of thin lead tubes which control the action was so choked with dust and the occasional kink where the pipes turned corners that they were too unreliable for an organist to

use during play. One of the pistons was so dirty that it would stick in the “on” position and be impossible to turn off. In a modern organ these Combinations would be set by electric switches and relays, but it is one of the special historically-important features of our instrument that it is all done by wind pressure through leather valves and tiny lead pipes. When these skeins of lead pipes (Kit thought that they looked like some giant alien spider crawling across the workbench) have been unravelled, cleaned and reshaped, everything should once more be available to our organists “at the touch of a button”.





The aluminium linkages in the actions were corroded and suffering from metal fatigue so that some of them had already been repaired. Each of these has been replaced by new linkages carved from hornbeam, the strongest and most durable wood available. Each one takes two hours to carve into shape, and when the intricacy and precision of the shapes is examined, the marvel is that it can be done so quickly! In 1906 it was thought that the new wonder metal, non-rusting and easily pressed into shapes, could replace the old materials and methods, but we are now reverting to the former methods used in the nineteenth century.

Investigations during the rest of November should show why the wind supplied by our new blowers is not properly replenishing the “reservoirs”, the giant bellows which hold the wind pressure. The trunking, of course, was designed at first to work with the water turbines which drove the fans in 1906, then was adapted for hand-blowing when the water rates were prohibitive, adapted in the 1930s to fit an electric fan, and then again in the 1990s for our new blowers. Some rationalisation of the system may be necessary, but again the result should be that our Swell Organ gains more flexibility in the range of volume which it can offer.

If you have managed to struggle through this account so far, you will have realised what a complex machine our organ is, and how much skill and expertise are being employed upon it. To replace it today with an equivalent pipe organ would cost between three- and four-hundred-thousand pounds, yet we are ensuring its future, possibly for the next hundred years, for a tenth of that price, all of which has come from donations to the church from individuals and charitable trusts for which we should be very thankful, as without them we would not have been able to preserve what has been entrusted to us.

Whether the work will be completed by our target date of the second week of December depends very much on whether changes to the trunking are needed. John and I think it sensible that such work should be done while the large reservoirs which store the wind are out of the way and that our priority must be to ensure that the organ faces its second century in better shape than when it was new!

