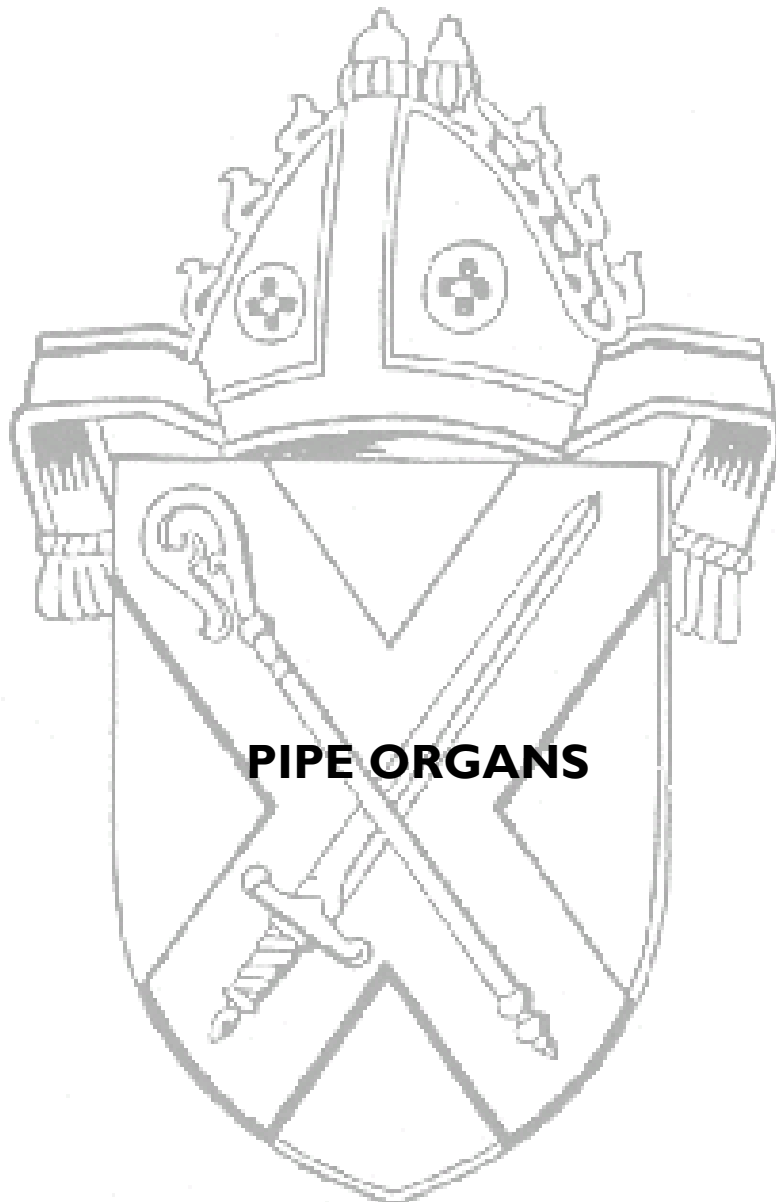


DIOCESE OF CHELMSFORD

DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE



PIPE ORGANS

GUIDELINES TO ASSIST PARISHES

Issued January 2002

PIPE ORGANS

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The organ has long been accepted as the normal musical instrument to lead worship. Many of the organs in use today are entirely or partly Victorian in origin; a small number are from the 18th century and one or two date from an earlier period. Clearly instruments of this age can be of considerable musical and historical interest and deserve careful attention. It is only in approximately the past forty years that electronic instruments have played any significant part in worship. There are several reasons why these have been chosen by some congregations. These are mainly because of lack of space, economic strictures or the nature of the music that is used in services. A set of Guidance Notes is available which deals with these instruments; in the following notes, therefore, the term 'organ' refers exclusively to the traditional pipe instrument.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING INSTRUMENTS

2.1 Formerly churches were not heated to the same levels that they are today. Consequently, the organs were not built to withstand the warm, dry environments that we expect for our comfort. Unless the organ is a new instrument, almost all of the materials used in its construction will be of natural origin. This will be mainly wood, leather and animal glue, though modern instruments incorporate some synthetic materials and are therefore less likely to be damaged by these conditions.

2.2 There are several forms of action in existence to control the pallets (or valves) that admit wind to the pipes when the keys are depressed, or bring into play different ranks of pipes when stops are drawn. The most frequently encountered, and most durable, is a simple mechanical system known as 'tracker' action. There are also types that are worked electrically, by wind pressure, or by a combination of the two. Whilst these have a number of advantages in certain cases, they also have some drawbacks. They can be more sensitive and might not be as long lasting. It is generally felt that they lack the intimate sense of control found in a good mechanical action. Whatever type of action the organ has, it can be damaged by a badly regulated environment.

- 2.3 Natural materials respond to wide variations in humidity or temperature and these can result in damage to the organ. Timber dried by excessive heating will crack; the wind which leaks through the splits may cause no obvious problems, though in the most serious cases it can render the original most unplayable. The cost of repairing these splits might be several thousand pounds in even a small organ. If the environment is too damp, the wood might swell or the glue soften, resulting in parts of the mechanism sticking or components weakening and coming apart. Mould might also grow or rust form, thereby impairing the action. If the organ is thought of as a fine piece of furniture and treated accordingly, avoiding extremes of temperature or humidity, few problems are likely to be encountered.
- 2.4 The organ is a delicate piece of machinery as well as a musical instrument which will require periodic adjustment in the same way that a car needs servicing. Therefore, have the organ tuned and maintained regularly by an experienced tuner. He may work for a recognised company or be self employed. The important thing is to be sure of his competence : more good instruments have been ruined by the wrong attention than by too little. It is difficult to specify how often an organ will need tuning since it depends upon a number of factors. In most cases once or twice a year will be adequate, if in doubt discuss the matter with the tuner.

PROTECTION OF ORGANS

- 3.1 Consult your organ builder or tuner in advance of any work to be carried out in the church which will create a significant amount of dirt or dust as it might be necessary to cover the organ in order to protect it.
- 3.2 Always keep the area around the organ free of clutter in order to allow the tuner access.

CLEANING, OVERHAULING AND REBUILDING

- 4.1 At some point in its working life the organ will require more significant attention in the form of cleaning or rebuilding. It is important that the Diocesan Organ Advisors are consulted before

the work is undertaken. No specific time can be given, but in most parish churches this will probably be at intervals of between thirty and sixty years depending upon the environment, type of organ and how much it is played.

- 4.2 It might be opportune to consider some tonal or mechanical alterations to the instrument as part of the project. Whilst these can be of great benefit they must be considered carefully and made with discretion and sympathy for the character and style of the organ. There can be a temptation to carry out too many changes or make others that are unsuitable in an attempt to render the organ more versatile. The repertoire and style of playing has changed considerably since the majority of parish church organs were built. Seeking to impose uncharacteristic features on an organ can result in diminished rather than enhanced musical value. As with the care of the instrument, the message is clear; make the most of the organ by considering its character and working with it. Seek to emphasise its strengths rather than bemoan its weaknesses : few organs are able (or need) to perform all of the repertoire effectively.

NEW OR REPLACEMENT ORGANS

- 5.1 There will be some instances where, for whatever reason, the existing instrument will have to be replaced. The nature of the replacement must be considered carefully. The Diocesan Organs Advisers are willing to advise on suitable replacement instruments.
- 5.2 The organ is possibly the most expensive piece of equipment in a church. The congregation is therefore urged to care for it properly and encourage those willing to learn to play it by making it available for practice : unless it is in a poor state an organ generally benefits from being played.

FACULTY CONSENT AND ADVICE

- 6.1 A Faculty is required for any work on an organ beyond routine tuning and maintenance. If in doubt seek advice from the Diocesan Registry or DAC Secretary.

- 6.2 Whether seeking advice or applying for a Faculty, please send **copies** of all available information about the organ to the DAC Secretary for copying and forwarding to the Diocesan Organs Advisors. This should include full details including the name of the builder and the firm that maintains the instrument, approximate age and specification, the nature of the proposed work and estimates or letters from the builder whose advice has been sought. This will allow the Advisors to become fully conversant with the situation before entering into discussion.
- 6.3 It is normally recommended that three or four estimates be obtained from suitable firms. Most charge a fee for carrying out an inspection and preparing a report if they do not maintain the organ. When work is being considered the parish might therefore find it helpful to discuss the situation with the Diocesan Organ Advisors before seeking estimates in order to minimise this expense.
- 6.4 The Diocesan Organ Advisors are anxious to make themselves available to give advice : please do not hesitate to contact them through the DAC Secretary.

INSURANCE

- 7.1 Since the majority of organs were purchased many years ago and some were acquired second-hand, parishes should be aware of the replacement cost of the instrument. Your insurer or tuner should be consulted for accurate advice.

POLICY

1. The Diocesan Advisory Committee does not normally sanction the removal of a viable organ without good cause.
2. Specialist advice should be sought when major repairs or replacement are contemplated.
3. All work to organs should be undertaken only by experienced and skilled organ builders.
4. Specialist advice should be sought at an early stage from the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

This is one of a series of guidelines published by the Diocesan
Advisory Committee

Copies can be downloaded from the Diocesan website :

(www.chelmsford.anglican.org)

or can be obtained from the
DAC Secretary at the address below.

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