

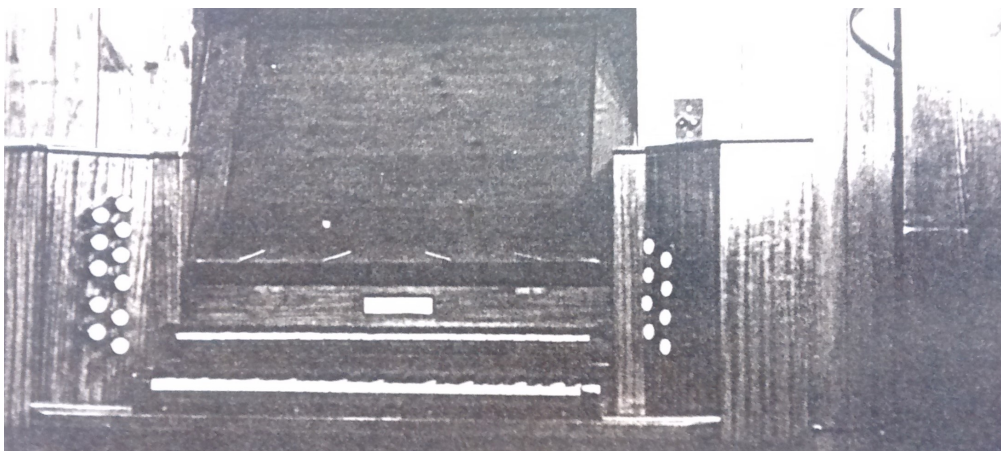


**Organs of St Helen's Church, Stonegate**  
by Dr Maximillian Elliott



The first organ to be installed at St Helen's Church during the nineteenth century was built by John Ward of York in 1819. Comprising one manual and short compass pedalboard, the instrument was positioned on a small gallery at the west end of the church. Few internal drawings of St Helen's Church during the 1820s have survived, but Felix Mendelssohn sketched its lantern on Thursday 23 July 1829 (above). John Ward rebuilt the organ in 1838, adding a larger compass pedalboard and a five stop Swell division.

St Helen's Church was restored in 1858, but its old organ was apparently in poor condition. According to a report published by the *Yorkshire Gazette* on Saturday 18 September 1858, the instrument 'which was situated in a loft in front of the west window and obstructed the light, has been taken down. The instrument is very imperfect, and throughout is in a bad state of repair. To render it anything like efficient would require an expenditure of a considerable sum, an outlay in fact which would be nearly as great as the cost of a new instrument, and therefore the parishioners have determined that the old organ shall not be again placed in the church. When the debt incurred by the restoration of the structure is entirely liquidated, an effort will then be made to raise a fund for the purchase of a new organ and we entertain no fears that an adequate amount will be obtained for the purpose. At the eastern extremity of the north aisle space is left for the erection of a new organ'.



Pilcher Jones of York was commissioned to build a new organ for St Helen's Church in 1860. Despite an announcement in the *Yorkshire Gazette* of Saturday 18 August 1860 proclaiming that there is 'no doubt he will complete the organ for St. Helen's Church in a superior style', no instrument appears to have been produced. The decision to hold a bazaar in aid of a new organ on Friday 17 June 1864 perhaps indicates that church finances had prohibited Pilcher Jones from fulfilling the commission.

A new organ was finally installed at St Helen's Church in 1865. Built by Robert Postill of York, the instrument comprised two manuals and fifteen speaking stops with space prepared for four more. The organ was officially opened on Thursday 8 June 1865 by the Rev John Bacchus Dykes at two special services.

<b>Great</b>	Open Diapason	8	<b>Swell</b>	Bourdon	16
C to g <sup>3</sup>	Gamba	8	C to g <sup>3</sup>	Salicional	8
	Stop Bass	8		Stop Diapason	8
	Clarabella	8		Principal	4
	Principal	4		Wald Flute	4
	Oboe Flute	4		Twelfth*	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
	Fifteenth	2		Fifteenth*	2
	Mixture	III		Oboe and Bassoon Bass	8
	Clarionette*	8	<b>Pedal</b>	Violon	16
	Trumpet*	8	C to f <sup>1</sup>		

\* prepared for

**Couplers** Swell Octave, Swell to Great, Great to Pedal, Swell to Pedal

**Accessories** Three composition pedals.  
Trigger Swell pedal.

St Helen's Church was united with St Martin-le-Grand Church in 1909 and fell into disuse. Occasional midweek services were resurrected in 1916, but the organ was considered to be unusable by 1921. The organ was eventually restored by Harrison & Harrison of Durham in preparation for the reintroduction of regular worship on Sunday 30 April 1923.



1865 Robert Postill organ





1865 Robert Postill organ



1865 Robert Postill organ

The current organ at St Helen's Church was designed by Dr Francis Jackson and built by J. W. Walker & Sons at a cost of £4300 in 1959. Housed in a case designed by architect George Pace, the instrument comprises two manuals and twenty-four speaking stops. The organ-builders claimed in 1972 that their instrument was 'perhaps the first in this country with modern tracker action'. Dr Francis Jackson played the organ during its official inauguration on Monday 6 July 1959.

<b>Great</b>	Principal	8	<b>Swell</b>	Röhr Flute	8
C to g <sup>3</sup>	Open Flute	8	C to g <sup>3</sup>	Viola Da Gamba	8
	Dulciana	8		Principal	4
	Octave	4		Octave	2
	Stopped Flute	4		Larigot	1½
	Twelfth	2⅔		Mixture	III
	Block Flute	2		Crummhorn	16
	Tierce	1 □		Cornopean	8
	Mixture	IV		<i>Tremulant</i>	
<b>Pedal</b>	Open Wood	16	<b>Couplers</b>	Swell to Great, Great to Pedal,	
C to f <sup>1</sup>	Bourdon	16		Swell to Pedal	
	Quint	10⅔			
	Violoncello	8			
	Flute	8			
	Octave Flute	4			
	Fifteenth	4			

**Accessories** Six thumb pistons for Great and Swell.

Six toe pistons for Pedal and Swell.

Eight general thumb pistons. Eight general toe pistons (six from Swell).

Reversible thumb piston and toe piston for Swell to Great.

Reversible thumb piston and toe piston for Great to Pedal.

Reversible thumb piston for Swell to pedal.

Setter thumb piston and General Cancel thumb piston.

Great & Pedal pistons coupled stop.

Balanced Swell pedal.

Principal Pipe Organs of York restored the organ in 1998. Eight channels of memory were installed. The number of thumb pistons and toe pistons was increased from four to six per division. Eight general thumb pistons were added with setter and General Cancel. Two extra toe pistons were provided, so that the Swell toe pistons could be used as generals.

The organ at St Helen's Church represents an important chapter in British organ-building history. According to historian Andrew McCrea, the tonal conception of this instrument 'signal-led the birth of what one commentator has called the 'compromise classical' design beloved of many firms in the 1960s' and its significance is now widely acknowledged.



# An Organ worthy of the Civic Church of York

No commission could be more inspiring than to be asked to rebuild the organ in St. Helen's—the Civic Church of York, whose foundations date back to the 14th Century.

The scheme has been drawn up in consultation with Dr. Francis Jackson, Organist and Master of the Music of York Minster, and will be a further example of the present-day trend towards "classical" organ design: pipe-work voiced on light wind pressure, tracker action to the manuals, electric action to the pedals, draw-stops and pistons.

### SPECIFICATION

#### Great Organ

1. Principal . . . . .	8ft.	56 pipes
2. Open Flute . . . . .	8	56 pipes
3. Octave . . . . .	4	56 pipes
4. Stopped Flute . . . . .	4	56 pipes
5. Twelfth . . . . .	2½	56 pipes
6. Block Flute . . . . .	2	56 pipes
7. Tierce . . . . .	1½	56 pipes
8. Mixture (19-22-26-29)	4 ranks	224 pipes

#### Swell Organ

1. Rohr Flute . . . . .	8ft.	56 pipes
2. Viola Da Gamba . . . . .	8	56 pipes
3. Principal . . . . .	4	56 pipes
4. Octave . . . . .	2	56 pipes
5. Larigot . . . . .	1½	56 pipes
6. Mixture (22-26-29)	3 ranks	168 pipes
7. Cornhorn . . . . .	16	56 pipes
8. Cornopean . . . . .	8	56 pipes

Tremulant

#### Pedal Organ

1. Open Wood . . . . .	16ft.	30 pipes
2. Bourdon . . . . .	16	54 pipes
3. Quint (from No. 2 Pedal)	10½	30 notes
4. Violoncello . . . . .	8	42 pipes
5. Flute (from No. 2 Pedal)	8	30 notes
6. Fifteenth (from No. 4 Pedal)	4	30 notes
7. Octave Flute (from No. 2 Pedal)	4	30 notes

#### Couplers

1. Great to Pedal
2. Swell to Pedal
3. Swell to Great

#### Accessories

- Four thumb pistons to Great
- Four thumb pistons to Swell
- Four toe pistons to Pedal
- Four toe pistons to Swell (duplicating)
- One reversible thumb piston for Great to Pedal
- One reversible toe piston for Great to Pedal
- One reversible thumb piston for Swell to Great
- Balanced Swell Pedal
- Attached console in oak—Piston combinations adjustable from the console by the "Walker" patented key-switch selector.

#### Wind pressure 2½"

*A new organ case will be provided to the design of George G. Pace, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., the Church Architect.*

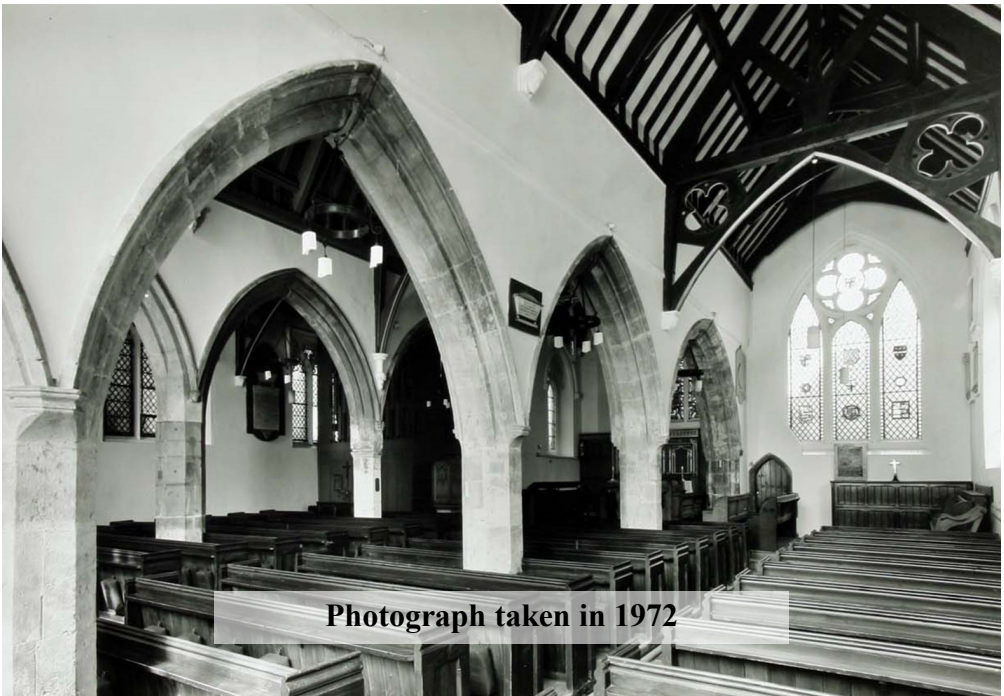
**Vicar: The Rev. N. F. Porter**

**Organist: T. F. Henderson, Esq.**

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Photograph taken in 1972





**Francis Jackson at the console**



Photograph taken in 2020