

# PIPE UP'S MANIFESTO FOR PIPE ORGANS

September 2023



Pipe Up is a charity<sup>1</sup> formed in 2022, campaigning to conserve and improve public appreciation of Britain's pipe organs.

## Why Pipe Organs Matter

The pipe organ is one of the most glorious of all human achievements, of all time.

Over two thousand years, pipe organs have provided some of the most profound music ever heard. Organ music knows no ethnic, religious, age or gender boundaries: it is a universal human experience.

Britain is fortunate that this musical power has never been confined to the largest or finest instruments or to the hearing of small elites. On the contrary, it has long been present in virtually every community in the country, either in its churches or in other public venues, providing millions of people with access to the world of both organ and community choral music.

---

<sup>1</sup> Registered in England and Wales No. 1199597

In Britain, organ builders, large and small, reached new heights of artistic achievement, technical innovation and craftsmanship, recognised by the entire world.

### **The Crisis facing Britain's Organs**

Tragically, this heritage – and the access to music it brought about – has recently come under major threat.

No-one knows how many organs there are in Britain: estimates vary between 30,000 and 40,000. Pipe Up estimates that up to four pipe organs a week are being scrapped and their contents dispersed or sent to landfill.

This wave of destruction is sweeping across the country, falling particularly hard on deprived areas, which are now being stripped of their pipe organs, not just destroying the instruments but diminishing the cultural life of the communities of which they were once an important and valued part.

The problems are complex.

A major factor is the relentless fall in church-going and funding, which both threatens organs, and (in our view) contributes to it. Pipe Up estimates that one church closes every day in Britain, and virtually all have organs, many of them worthwhile instruments which have served for a hundred years or more and could, with care, speak for hundreds more.

But it is not just a **wave of destruction**. Alongside it is a **wave of disuse**. Worthwhile instruments are insidiously falling silent as church communities cannot face the expense of routine care or the effort of fundraising for the periodic (50-year+) need for more extensive work. *Pipe Up estimates that 70% of Britain's organs are at risk of decay, or are already silent.*

**North London:** a 3-manual & pedal Walker 1886 organ with 33 stops in an Anglican inner-city parish. Unplayed for 30 years, unmaintained for 50. Four ranks of pipes had collapsed. After a day's work by two Pipe Up volunteers, four stops on the Great manual were coaxed back into use. It needs major work, but at least it can now be heard. [picture here]

**Suffolk:** a 2 manual & pedal Wordsworth organ (?1890s) in an Anglican church. Needed repairs, plus "*the last organist in the village died 10 years ago.*" Removed with the permission of the Diocese and replaced by a kitchenette, despite Pipe Up objections. Fate unknown.

A few are spared – as instruments – by being exported to communities elsewhere in Europe or even further, where appreciation of British organs is at a high level. But the organs' original communities are the losers.

Paradoxically, just as public interest in pipe organs is rising under the influence of a new generation of young organists, more and more organs are falling silent. While large numbers of hesitant pianists could be persuaded to play them, they paradoxically get little encouragement from churches.

These trends mean that organ music is at serious risk of being lost to large swathes of Britain, and worse – at risk of becoming a niche, elite affair.

Something radical and urgent must therefore be done to reverse these trends.

That is why Pipe Up has been formed. Our vision is that pipe organs are valued, cared for, played, heard and appreciated, as a fundamental part of the nation's musical heritage.

But how can this be achieved?

### **A Plan of Action**

Complex problems demand multiple solutions. No single approach will succeed. And we do not have the luxury of time.

Pipe Up has plans for a variety of such initiatives, some complex and some very straightforward. Here is a summary of them.

### **Re-homing, Volunteering and Storage**

In the short term, we will re-home or store worthwhile, unwanted organs urgently requiring removal. To do this we will recruit and train a network of *organ volunteers*, ready to help remove and re-assemble threatened organs under expert supervision, since without them organ re-homing is often uneconomic. We will use railway arches and redundant churches as transit stores.

We will seek out new homes for threatened organs by promoting the idea of installing a pipe organ in venues which have not so far considered having one. These include redundant churches, arts centres, museums, bars, hotels, holiday homes and cafés.

### **Organ Activism & Advocacy**

We will recruit a network of local "*organ activists*" to research local issues, alert us to organs at risk and advocate for organ care in their areas.

We will use the existing faculty and listed building processes, inadequate though they are, to oppose the unnecessary loss of worthwhile instruments.

### **Reducing the Flow**

Alone, however, these measures are not enough.

In addition, we must act *strategically* to reduce the endless flow of unwanted organs, by tackling the root causes, not the symptoms. Re-homing is a last resort: we must reconnect pipe organs with their communities.

This is how we aim to do this.

### **Inspiration, Advice - and Cash**

We will *inspire* the communities which own organs to appreciate, care for and play their instruments,

We will adopt a systematic approach, identifying worthwhile organs "at risk" and assess what is needed to bring them to full use.

We will seek out those which are playable, but not being played: the "sleeping beauties." We will recruit a network of organists to play them - either occasionally or regularly, identifying any faults and finding solutions.

We will provide information, advice and training in organ care.

We will create grant schemes for routine care or one-off minor repair and a loan scheme for more extensive work.

We will get organs needing only minor attention working again with grants and skilled volunteer effort, using these “sleeping beauties”, as quick wins, and as case studies to inspire other communities.

We will pioneer ways to help communities to fund the expense of major organ repairs, possibly through loans rather than just grants.

We will prioritise the rollout of our initiatives in areas needing them most: the North East, North-West and Wales, possibly after short pilot schemes in the south-east.

### **Research**

We will take a leading role in creating a major research project to get usable, actionable data on all the nation’s organs, with information on their condition and risk level. We will use this to prioritise our work.

### **Access to Organs**

We will improve access to pipe organs, radically and permanently. This will take two forms. First, by placing organs in public places, for the public to play.

The organs we have placed in London Bridge Station in July 2022 in the Whitgift Shopping Centre, Croydon, are only the first.

We have been astonished at the warmth and diversity of the public reaction to both these instruments. We are actively seeking additional public places in which to install organs.

Secondly, we will set up an online system to make it easy for players to access churches and elsewhere, first by identifying churches that have no-one to play their organs, and later, adding those which would be accessible for reasonable hourly charges, bringing back to sacred spaces the joy of organ music to players and visitors alike. Organs we grant-aid would be expected to be made available under the scheme. We believe this could eventually be self-funding.

### **Reconnecting New Generations**

We will connect new generations with the power of organ music, in two ways.

First, we will exploit in full the power of social media. This has been demonstrated by the TikTok and other posts of Anna Lapwood, some of which feature her performing at London Bridge<sup>2</sup>.

Secondly, we will commission and inspire new forms of organ entertainment which break away from traditional models and reach new audiences, even if often in traditional venues, building on existing initiatives and related arts, notably the cinema organ world, dance and even new concepts such as “*organoke*.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.tiktok.com/@annalapwoodorgan/video/7121407677481127174?\\_r=1&\\_t=8U55Tm9zMY9](https://www.tiktok.com/@annalapwoodorgan/video/7121407677481127174?_r=1&_t=8U55Tm9zMY9)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.organoke.com](http://www.organoke.com)

## **Better Protection**

We will campaign for effective statutory protection of Britain's pipe organs. We will seek the same international recognition of our organ tradition that Germany has achieved by inscribing its organ music and building tradition under the UNESCO convention on intangible heritage.

## **Changing how we think about Organs**

Above all, we want to change how Britain thinks about pipe organs.

No longer at risk of becoming the preserve of an elite, organ music will once again be part of the mainstream of the national musical experience once enjoyed by millions of Britons.

## **Existing Organisations**

We will work alongside existing organisations such as Royal College of Organists, the British Institute of Organ Studies, the Institute of British Organbuilding, the Cinema Organ Society, the Society of Women Organists and the Incorporated Association of Organists, each of which brings unique strengths to the solution of the problems. Where they have existing programmes in line with our vision, we will support them with enthusiasm.

## **Resources Needed and Offered**

We have already made a flying start. Our Trustees are now working at full capacity to find new homes for unwanted organs now being notified to us.

We have invested in online member and donor management software and plan to launch a membership and fundraising scheme which it is hoped will cover some of our core costs. We already have free hotdesking and meeting facilities and funds are already flowing in, even before we launch. Our Trustees have organ building, financial, legal and engineering skills. We have been offered rent-free railway arches for organ storage.

We are, however, a small group of enthusiasts and we are already reaching capacity, and the limits of our own expertise. We seek pump-priming funding from a handful of foundations or individuals who might be able to turbo-charge our launch by enabling us to making a flying start to all or most of our planned initiatives, urgently.

Our most immediate need is to recruit staff and to kick-start both the short-term measures and the more strategic initiatives now needed,

We assess our priorities as these, starting with Phase 1 (likely to be 12 months) and developing through two further phases.

### **Phase 1**

The first-year priorities are:

- The recruitment of a Director and an Administrator;
- creating capacity to remove and store unwanted organs in acute need of removal;
- the provision of advice to owners of organs;
- web site development;

- fundraising: getting advice and creating multiple sources of sustainable income
- the development and funding of grant schemes to reduce the number of unwanted organs;
- the development of an online system to facilitate casework and re-homing of unwanted organs;
- the development of a national research programme to determine the state of Britain's organs; and
- the launch of a membership scheme and recruitment of network of activists.

## **Phase 2**

In this phase, the priorities are:

- The continuation of the programmes in Phase 1;
- the roll-out of a pilot “organ access” programme;
- the development and delivery of courses in organ care, workshops on removal etc for venues;
- membership recruitment and fundraising; and
- participation in the proposed research programme.

## **Phase 3**

The proposal envisages that the programmes identified above are stabilised and rendered sustainable through fundraising, events, membership and legacies.

There is therefore a need to embed these programmes, some of which may become self-sustaining and others will need continuing support.

## **Conclusion**

The fate of Britain's pipe organ heritage hangs by a thread. The time has come for decisive action to bring the joy of pipe organ music back to every community through a campaign of vigorous and sustained action described in this manifesto. Your support could make all the difference in achieving this.