ORGAN-BUILDING IN SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DUBLIN, AND ITS ENGLISH CONNECTION

As the established church, the Church of Ireland prospered during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dublin, the capital city, became predominantly Protestant, and the period after the Restoration in 1660 saw many new parishes being founded for the increasing population. From the church records a detailed picture of musical activity has been established. As in England, the organ-building trade in Dublin expanded after the Restoration. The development of the instrument, which had been so stunted by the attitudes and events of the first half of the seventeenth century, at last forged ahead under the influence of such builders as Bernard Smith and Renatus Harris in England. The organ-building trade in Dublin had many links with England and this connection has been significant.

The earliest authenticated mention of an organ in Ireland referred to an instrument in St Thomas’s Abbey, Dublin, in the 1450s.1 According to W. H. Grattan Flood, the first definite allusion to an organ in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin (hereafter ‘Christ Church’) occurs in 1358, when John of St Paul, Archbishop of Dublin, subscribed to a fund for a new organ. The same historian also records that new organs were built in Christ Church in 1470 by John Lawless, who was also active as an organ-builder in Kilkenny and Armagh. Unfortunately, Flood does not give details of his sources and these references have not been verified.2 In 1471 Archbishop Tregury bequeathed his ‘pair of organs’ for use in the Lady Chapel of St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin (hereafter ‘St Patrick’s’).3

Little information is available about organ-building in the sixteenth century. Flood records that an organ was built in Christ Church prior to 1541 by James Dempsey, who had completed one for Ripon Cathedral in 1531, and who was said to have been ‘organ-builder to the Earl of Kildare’.4 The organ-builder Henry Nugent is also recorded by Flood, who states that he was active in Dublin around 1595.5 In 1594 and 1595 there had been payments at Christ Church for ‘removing the organs [to the choir]’.6 In 1612 Henry Alynston was paid £1 ‘towards the mending of the organs’7 and some work was carried out in the vicinity of the organ a year later.8 In October 1616 the organist Thomas Bateson was contracted for the sum of £35 to ‘make or cause to be made a sufficient Instrument or organ’ for the cathedral, with an additional £5 being allowed if needed.9
Although organs were in use in the two Dublin cathedrals in the early seventeenth century, very little is known about the situation in parish churches. It is likely that the majority did not have organs but relied for their music on the parish clerk, who led the singing of the psalms. The oldest extant vestry minutes in Dublin are from St John’s Church in Fishamble Street; they date from 1595, but the first reference to an organ occurs in March 1684. There was, however, an organ in St Audoen’s Church as early as the 1540s. The religious guild of St Anne had its chapel at St Audoen’s and there is a reference in that decade to two clerks who were appointed to be engaged generally in the worship and pastoral affairs of St Audoen’s parish. The duties of Robert Fitzsimon, one of these clerks, included playing the organ at all services, principal feasts and holy days, for which he was paid an annual salary of £8.10

The Civil War, which had broken out in Ireland in 1642, led to a bill being passed by Parliament in January 1643 ‘for the utter abolishing and taking away all archbishops, bishops ... deans and chapters ... and all vicars choral and choristers, old vicars and new vicars of any cathedral or collegiate church ... out of the Church of England.’11 In May 1644 an ‘Ordinance for further demolishing of Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition’ decreed that ‘all Organs, and Frames or Cases wherein they stand in all Churches ... shall be taken away, and utterly defaced, and none hereafter set up in their places’.12 This order was clearly not carried out at Christ Church as there are references to the organist in the Chapter Acts of 9 November 1642 (reduction of organist’s salary) and 22 December 1644 (approving the voice of a boy petitioning to become a chorister). Appointments to positions as vicars choral and stipendiaries continued right up to the final chapter meeting on 14 June 1647,13 so the choir (and presumably the organ) was still being used up until then. However, the organ undoubtedly was dismantled following the suppression, for arrangements had to be made to install a new organ as soon as the cathedral reopened, in 1660.

The year 1660 marked the restoration not only of Charles II but also the established church and its liturgy. The art of organ-building flourished again in Dublin as in England. At Christ Church, John Hawkshaw (the organist) was in 1661 ordered to procure a temporary organ, and there are records of payments to him for its erection. When Randal (or Randolf) Jewett, who had been organist at St Patrick’s from c.1630 to 1643, failed to return from England after the Restoration, John Hawkshaw, who had deputised during the former’s absence, was in 1661 permanently appointed as his successor,14 and in 1662 he built an organ for the cathedral.15

In 1661 the dean and chapter of Christ Church commissioned George Harris to build a new organ, and a total of £160 was paid to him during the years 1663–1667.16 Lancelot Pease was then commissioned to provide this organ with a choir division in 1667, at a cost of £80. A native of Cambridge, Pease had built a new organ for Canterbury Cathedral in 1663. He had previously carried out various improvements and additions to organs at King’s College, Cambridge, Norwich Cathedral and elsewhere during the period 1660–1663.17 Pease subsequently left England, where the competition among organ-builders was particularly keen at that time, and settled in Dublin. There he was appointed a
stipendiary in the choir of Christ Church in February 1667. As well as his salary as a ‘singing man’, Pease received £2 per annum up to 1682 ‘for keeping the organs’ at Christ Church.¹⁸ At St Patrick’s, Pease (who was possibly a vicar choral) was responsible for maintaining the organ prior to 1695. In 1678 the chapter decided to engage Pease ‘for making a great organ’ but it would appear that this contract was unfulfilled.¹⁹ In the same year, 1678, the following payments are recorded in the accounts for the parish of St Catherine:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payd for the organs</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payd for bringeing ye organs to ye church</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payd Mr Pease for worke about ye organs</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payd the organist ffor playing in St Katherine’s</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This organ that was bought for St Catherine’s Church was probably an old instrument judging by its cost and the amount of work that had to be carried out in the following years. In 1679 the organ bellows were mended at a cost of 4s. 6d. and the organist was paid 10s. for ‘tuneing ye organs’.²⁰ In 1682 £2 and one (?) shilling was paid for ‘rafting the pipes of the organ’;²¹ at the same time a sum of money (the amount is missing due to damage to the page) was paid for ‘tuneing the organ’.²² In 1681 Pease built an organ for St Auden’s Church, Dublin, at a cost of £110.²³ On 28 May 1684 Pease signed an agreement to build a new organ for the chapel of Trinity College for a sum of £120.²⁴

The outstanding English organ-builder Renatus Harris (1652–1724) had a profound influence on the organ-building trade in Dublin. Harris became the only serious rival of Bernard Smith in Restoration England by building imaginative organs with a distinctively French tonal bias.²⁵ On 12 August 1695, Harris agreed to build an organ for St Patrick’s, and by 18 May 1697 this new organ had been completed.²⁶ In November 1696 the vestry of St Catherine’s Church, Dublin agreed to raise the sum of £200 for erecting an organ and ‘to article with Mr Harris for ye making an Organ’.²⁷ Seven months later the work on the organ was complete.

In May 1694 the chapter of Christ Church authorised the dean ‘to treat and conclude for a new organ ... according to his Lordship’s discretion’, and in November an agreement was ‘confirmed and sealed’ between the dean and Bernard Smith, a German builder who had settled in London in 1660. Smith received £100 on account in March 1696.²⁸ It is not known why Smith failed to honour his agreement, but as the foremost organ-builder in England at the time, it may have been due to pressure of work. The dean and chapter then turned to Renatus Harris and entered into an agreement with him for a new organ for their cathedral. On 7 June 1697 they granted him a letter of attorney authorising him to recover from Smith the £100 which he had received on account.²⁹

The intense rivalry between Smith and Harris culminated in the famous ‘battle of organs’ at London’s Temple Church with Smith emerging victorious. Harris’s rejected organ was divided, part of it going to St Andrew Holborn. The other part was purchased for Christ Church, Renatus Harris receiving a further £700 payable in nine bonds at half-yearly intervals.³⁰
Whether or not Renatus Harris actually visited Dublin is unclear.\textsuperscript{31} It is possible that the Christ Church instrument was installed by John Baptiste Cuvillie, who was to become the leading organ-builder in Ireland in the early part of the eighteenth century. That Cuvillie was already working with Harris prior to his coming to Dublin is confirmed by references from Norwich Cathedral, where Harris was working in February 1693. Here an assistant of Harris is named as ‘Monsr Cussille’ and ‘Joanes Castistac(?) Vullie’; allowing for variations in spelling and possible difficulties in transcribing sources, these surely refer to John Baptiste Cuvillie.\textsuperscript{32} Later, in 1699, Cuvillie was contracted by the dean and chapter of Christ Church to make adjustments and certain additions to the organ.\textsuperscript{33}

In addition to his work as an agent for the Harris firm, John Baptiste Cuvillie built organs at Trinity College, Dublin (1700), St Peter’s Church, Dublin (1713), Cloyne Cathedral (1713), St Michan’s Church, Dublin (1725) and rebuilt or enlarged the organs at St Finn Barre’s Cathedral, Cork (1710) and St Canice’s Cathedral, Kilkenny (c.1710) as well as being employed as organ tuner and repairer at many Dublin churches. He may have built the new organ at St Mary’s Church, Dublin in 1713. No contemporary documents have been found which name the original builder of the organ. On the basis of the case design it has been suggested that this organ is the work of Harris, an attribution first made by Henry Leffler.\textsuperscript{34} However, John Baptiste Cuvillie added new stops to the organ the year after it was built,\textsuperscript{35} and in December 1714 was employed as ‘organ keeper’ at a salary of £5 per annum, a position he retained until his death in 1728. As a former assistant of Harris, it would not be surprising for Cuvillie to have used similar designs.

The English organ-builder John Byfield (c.1694–1751) was also active in the Dublin trade. He built instruments in the same style as Harris and was known for his excellent reed stops and many fine organs in London. In August 1728 he added a trumpet stop to the Great organ and a Principal stop to the Chair organ at St Michan’s Church, Dublin, which Cuvillie had built in 1725. The total cost of these additions was £60. In 1730 he added bassoon and sesquialtera stops to the organ in St Patrick’s, having succeeded Cuvillie as its custodian. The care of the Christ Church instrument also passed to Byfield after Cuvillie’s death in 1728. He was to receive the same fee (i.e., £10 per annum) as Cuvillie, and was to be obliged to come from England on proper notice in case the organ should at any time be out of order during the year. In June 1728 he was asked to carry out some repairs (which he had suggested) and was to be paid £20. Byfield, probably considering that his time could more profitably be spent building new organs than maintaining those constructed on the other side of the Irish Sea by rival firms, seems to have terminated his contract with the dean and chapter of Christ Church, who in 1733 appointed Philip Hollister, the local builder, in Byfield’s stead.\textsuperscript{36}

However, in June 1750 the dean and chapter of Christ Church decided that:

Mr Byfeild of London Organ-builders proposal being read, It is agreed and ordered that a new Organ be erected in This church and that the Dean be desired and Impowered to treat with Mr Byfeild about it.\textsuperscript{37}
This new organ, which cost £800, was first played on Monday, 27 July 1752.\textsuperscript{38} After Byfield’s death, Harris’s organ was sold in 1757 by his widow to the parish of St John, Wolverhampton, for £500.

In November 1731 at St Mary’s Church, Dublin, repairs to the organ bellows were carried out by one ‘Joachim Beyfield’ who was also employed as organ keeper at the annual salary of £5. This name has not been encountered elsewhere in organ-building in Ireland and is likely to be merely a mis-spelling of John Byfield’s name.

The outstanding organ and harpsichord builder in Dublin in the mid-eighteenth century was Ferdinand Weber. A native of Saxony, he came to Dublin in or before 1749 and settled in Werburgh Street. As well as building organs in a number of churches in Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland, Weber tuned the organs of most important Dublin churches, including Christ Church. He is known to have lived and worked for a short period in England between leaving Saxony and coming to Dublin.

The Hollisters were an important Irish family of organists, keyboard instrument makers, and organ-builders in Dublin and throughout Ireland during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Robert Hollister, the earliest known member of the family, was appointed organist at St John’s Church in Fishamble Street, Dublin, in 1688. It is possible that he may have come from England around this time. He may have been the father (or a brother) of Thomas Hollister, who was organist at several Dublin churches between 1693 and 1721, when he is reported as having ‘gone out of the Kingdom’. In 1719 he had built an organ for St Werburgh’s Church, but this was declared unsatisfactory just one year later when inspected by a committee consisting of Daniel and Ralph Roseingrave, Robert Woffington and John Baptiste Cuvillie.

In November 1754 a fire destroyed St Werburgh’s Church and the organ built by Thomas Hollister in 1719. It was not until 1766 that the parish could afford to provide a new organ. This was made possible by a bequest from the Revd Sir Philip Hoby in whose incumbency the fire had occurred. He bequeathed the sum of £1,000 for ‘erecting a Spire on the Tower of the ... Church and an Organ in same’.\textsuperscript{39} On 21 January 1767, the money being available, a contract for the building of the organ was made with Henry Miller, organ-builder, George Smith, carpenter, and William Palmer, merchant. The cost of the organ was £400 and ‘it was duly opened with an anthem, June 6’.\textsuperscript{40}

This contract for building the organ at St Werburgh’s is the earliest reference to Henry Miller’s work in Dublin. He was listed in the Dublin Directories of 1769 to 1775 as ‘organ-builder’ with an address at 15 College Street. In 1774 he built ‘an elegant new organ’ in St Mary’s Church, Kilkenny.\textsuperscript{41} At St Werburgh’s Church in April 1769 the vestry ordered that:

\textit{Mr John Miller be appointed to take care of and Keep the Organ in Order for which he is to be paid a Salary of Five Pounds a year and that he be paid his bill of Three Pounds fifteen shillings for Extra-ordinary work done about the Organ.}

At the same meeting it was resolved that ‘Mr. Miller put two new stops in
the Chair Organ which he has agreed to do for Twenty Guineas'. It is not known if this entry relating to John Miller is an error in the vestry minutes or if, perhaps, it refers to a son or other relation of the Henry Miller who built the organ two years previously.

Unfortunately, like the work of Renatus Harris, few traces now remain in Ireland of the work of the English organ-builder Samuel Green (1740–1796). Like Harris, it is unclear whether he ever visited Ireland in person. Organs built by him in England were shipped to Ireland and assembled by local builders. An organ built by Green in 1786 was presented to Cashel Cathedral by Archbishop Agar, and the maker’s name-plate still remains over the manuals. In 1802 an organ reputed to have been the work of Samuel Green and said to have been a gift of George III was erected in the partially restored cathedral in Down by Woffington of Dublin. David Wickens, the leading authority on this builder’s work, found no material by Green in the present organ; the claim that the organ was a gift from George III seems to be without foundation.

The bursar’s accounts for Trinity College, Dublin provide a very interesting and informative insight into the purchase of a new organ from Samuel Green and the shipping of this instrument to Dublin. The organ was ordered in 1793 and in May of that year the sum of £300 was paid to Samuel Green ‘on account of the organ for Trinity College Chapel’. On 19 December 1794, he received £108 6s. 8d. ‘on account of new Organ’, and on 23 September 1796, £110 5s. was paid ‘to Mrs Sarah Green, for the new Organ’. A bill dated 24 October 1797 from the ‘Gentlemen of the Board of Trinity College Dublin to Sarah Green’ gives details of the expenses involved in the purchase of this new organ:

| Description                                      | Cost   
<table>
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<tr>
<td>a Large New Organ as by agreement</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance on 525 at 4/6 &amp; policy £15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping expenses Bills of lading etc.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packing Cases &amp; Packing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three W[al]ggons from Howth to London</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning the Inside of the Organ and New Polishing the Case etc.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Blyth’s time</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for man</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling Expences from London to Dublin</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and from Dublin to London 2 men</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>678</td>
</tr>
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</table>

A bill of lading for £30 dated 27 October 1797 states that ‘One large Organ in 22 Packages on board the ship the *Irish Volunteer* was to be delivered in good Order and well Condition’d at the ... Port of Dublin (the Danger of the Seas, only excepted’). On 16 January 1798, £42 18s. 8d. was paid to John Cavanagh for Capt Munro of the *Irish Volunteer* for freight on an organ from London. The
final payments for the organ were made in March 1798, when £194 3s. 11d., the balance due to Mrs Green for the organ, was paid.

William Hollister installed the new Samuel Green organ in Trinity College Chapel during 1798 and a number of payments to him are recorded. On 22 June 1798, £11 7s. 6d. was paid ‘To Hollister for extra Work’. The accounts for 21 September record a payment of £2 17s. 4½d. for ‘dinner for Mr Hollister from July 23 to September 3’. On 21 December of the same year, £40 was to be paid ‘to Hollister on account’. However, some of these payments appear not have been made, for on 21 June 1799, £52 13s. 9d. was paid as ‘arrears due to him for organ work’.

The English connections with organ-building in Dublin have proved to be significant. The organ-building trade in Dublin was sufficient to provide a good standard of living for local builders as well as immigrants such as John Baptiste Cuvillie and Ferdinand Weber. The visits of English organ-builders to Dublin, to carry out repairs and maintenance work, and the building of organs in England for shipment to Dublin also had an influence on organ-building in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The extent of musical activity, particularly in the organ-building trade, provided a strong incentive to English organ-builders, as well as others involved in music, to live and work in Dublin.

Notes
3. ibid., 133.
4. ibid., 243.
6. The relevant Chapter Acts and Proctor’s Accounts are held on behalf of the Cathedral at the library of the Representative Church Body. RCB MSS C/6/1/26/36, fol.[2r], C/6/1/26/37[b], fol.[1r].
7. RCB MS C/6/1/26/3/9, fol.3r.
8. RCB MS C/6/1/26/3/9, fol.5v.
9. RCB MS C/6/1/7/1, fol.80v.

Patrick J. Corish (Dublin, 1990), 14.
13. RCB MS C/6/1/8/2, 147, 173.
17. Holmes, loc. cit.
18. Grindle, op. cit., 140.
19. ibid., 134.
20. RCB, MS P.117/5/1, 201.
21. ibid., 233. The page is torn after the figures ‘02:1’. The amount may have been two pounds and ten (or more) shillings.
22. ibid., 233.
24. ibid., 42.
27. RCB, MS P.117/5/2, 52.

26
29. ibid., 66.
30. ibid., 140.
31. ibid., 133.
33. Grindle, op. cit., 140–141.
34. Michael E. Callender, Philip G. Prosser and Peter T. Whyte, ‘The Organ of St Mary’s, Dublin’, The Organ LVIII (1980), 134.
35. RCB, MS P.277/7/1, 96.
37. RCB MS C/6/18/6, 66.
39. RCB, MS P.326/5/1, 466.
41. Finn’s Leinster Journal, Wednesday, 28 September 1774.
42. RCB, MS P.326/5/1, 494.
44. ibid., 246.
45. TCD MUN/P/4/67/9. I am grateful to Barra Boydell for giving me this reference.

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