

## Hill & Son Organ Appeal

**Our Church:** Pitt Street Church is the mother church of Congregationalism in Australia: its foundation stone was laid in 1842 and the building opened for worship in 1846. It was designed by English-trained John Bibb who in 1832 joined John Verge, one of the leading architects in Sydney, as an assistant. It was enlarged between 1857 and 1867. This included the internal galleries, resting on fluted iron columns cast by Dawson of Sydney, and the vestry to the rear.

The building is of particular note for its distinctive classical sandstone facade with massive Ionic columns, pedimented doorways and balustraded parapet. The spacious and uncluttered interior, with plaster ceiling, is of rectangular shape, the organ apse with rounded edges providing an ideal acoustical setting for the 1910 Hill & Son organ. The joinery is of cedar and includes a pulpit approached by a winding stair. Bibb's other work include the present Westpac Bank and Museum at The Rocks.

**Our Organ and its history:** It is believed that four pipe organs have stood in Pitt Street Church. The first was built in Sydney in 1845 by W.J. Johnson. The church's next organ, by Gray & Davison of London, was purchased second-hand in 1858 and survived until 1902 when a much larger instrument by W.G. Rendall was purchased. The Rendall organ was removed because of constant reliability problems: a remnant is the small case above the rear gallery, behind which a set of "gongs" was operated electrically.

The present instrument, built in 1910 by Hill & Son, London, as job no. 2396, is one of the firm's best-

preserved later instruments and one of the few larger organs from the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to survive in Australia with tubular-pneumatic action intact. The Hill firm exported many fine organs to NSW between 1871 and 1910 and the largest of these is the world-renowned instrument of 1890 in Sydney Town Hall.

For over 50 years, Pitt Street's famed organist, Miss Lilian Frost, delighted capacity audiences with her lunch-time recitals, which by 1945, had numbered over 1,000.

In the early 1970s the organ fell into disrepair, owing to uncertainty over the building's future: the loss of the building was prevented, however, by a ban imposed by the Builders Labourers Federation in 1972. Some basic re-leathering work to bring the organ back into use was carried out in 1974 by Pitchford & Garside and in 1985 the firm completed a staged restoration project which was assisted by a NSW Heritage Grant. Additional stops, prepared for in 1910 but not supplied, were installed by Pitchford & Garside between 1987 and 1996, all based upon Hill models. These additions were made possible through the enthusiasm and generosity of Mr Brian Allen. The instrument today is remarkably intact, with the original mechanisms preserved in their entirety and the open metal chorus work retaining cone tuning throughout. The organ is currently used not only for services, but is also made freely available to the community for use in solo recitals and concerts.

**Work currently required:** Although the organ's mechanisms were fully restored during the work carried out in 1974 and 1985, it was always realised that perishable leather components in the pneumatic action would require replacement every 20-30 years. In 2003 the actions connected to the

top keyboard were re-leathered. In 2009 the actions connected to the middle and lower keyboards, as well as those of the pedals underwent restoration. This work cost \$16,500 and involved the removal and replacement of some 334 leather motors and the fine regulation of the action upon completion. We were grateful for the support of organ lovers for this project.



*Photo: Hazel Hogarth*

**The organ builder and consultant:** The firm of DA & CM Pitchford was entrusted with the work. This firm took over the maintenance of the organ from Pitchford & Garside, following Stuart Garside's untimely death in 2002. The firm has always been highly regarded for quality restoration work. The present project was certified by Kelvin Hastie, who supervised the earlier restoration and additions on behalf of the Uniting Church (NSW Synod) Church Music Committee. Kelvin was awarded an Order of Australia Medal on Australia Day 2009 for his work in the area of pipe organ conservation.

**To make a donation to our appeal please complete this form:**

I/we would like to help with ongoing organ restoration work at Pitt Street Uniting Church

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....Postcode:.....

Amount: \$.....

Payment methods:

Cheque       Visa       MasterCard

Card No: *(please write numbers legibly)*

...../...../...../.....

Expiry Date: ...../.....

Name on Card:

.....

.....

Signature

Date

Donations are not currently tax deductible. Please make your cheque payable to: **Pitt Street Uniting Church**

Please send this form with your donation to:

**Pitt Street Uniting Church  
Hill & Son Organ Appeal  
264 Pitt Street  
Sydney NSW 2000**

**The Appeal**

The Appeal is to build a trust that will cover future restoration works and assist in the ongoing maintenance of this historic organ.

**Pitt Street Uniting Church  
Hill & Son Organ Appeal Committee:**

**Chair of Appeal:**

The Rev Ron Denham

**Minister:**

The Rev Ian Pearson

**Organ Builder:**

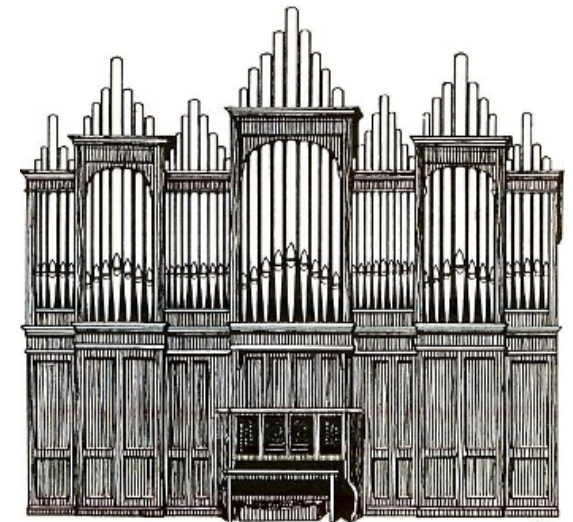
DA & CM Pitchford

**Organ Consultant:**

Dr Kelvin Hastie OAM

(Historical notes above were prepared in 2005 by Kelvin Hastie for the Organ Historical Trust of Australia, and contain information from Graeme Rushworth's *Historic Organs of NSW: the instruments, their makers and players, 1791-1940* [Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988]. Drawing by Graeme Rushworth used with permission).

*Pitt Street Uniting Church  
Sydney*



*1910 Hill & Son  
Organ Appeal*