



35 stops for 35 years, the Jubilee Organ as designed with Dr Simon Lindley



A Cavaillé-Coll style console



Managing Director of Makin Organs, Dr Keith Harrington

Makin Waves

David Baker visits Makin organs' head office in Lancashire

In 1970, the firm of John Compton went bankrupt. Compton's various activities were split between three other companies: Rushworth and Dreaper - who took over the pipe organ part of the business; Edwards, who concentrated on standard production of electronic organs; and Makin, who focussed on custom building, also of electronic organs. The firm of Makin was founded and financed by John Robert Makin Pilling - a man interested in the church organ and willing to put significant amounts of his own money (he also owned paper mills) into developing the firm. David Clegg, recently retired as Managing Director of Makin Organs, ran the business on John Pilling's behalf. David was already running an organ factory when approached by 'Mr Pilling'. The firm became renowned for top-of-the-range instruments that were popular in church and home alike.

The factory was re-located to Oldham, where there was a staff of 30, with every element of the manufacturing process undertaken 'in house'. The firm had always been a leader in technology development, introducing, for example electrostatic generators in 1980, or providing a 'nave' organ for Ripon Cathedral. During the 1980s,

Makin began to develop a new digital system. However, Johannus, the Dutch firm, was also moving along the same lines, but had the 'critical mass' to go into production more cheaply. Business imperatives prevailed, and Johannus took over Makin in 1997, but kept the company completely separate. Makin organs are now effectively made in Holland and imported into the UK. Makin staff specify the organs to be built and provide many of the samples to be used. David talks proudly of the instruments that have been sampled over the years. Harrison organs feature prominently, though I detected that David was especially proud of the fact that the Parr Hall Cavaillé-Coll is on the firm's sampling 'books'. 'Mixing the stops is the secret', he says.

Moving to Lancashire

The firm moved into its present headquarters in Shaw, Lancashire in 2001, opening a southern office and showroom at Mixbury, near Oxford in 2004. The Shaw building was formerly a church institute and more recently a ju-jitsu club! The premises are roomy, and offer the visitor a wonderful opportunity to try out the various models - both Makin and Johannus - from the smallest home instrument, to large custom-made

four manual organs. It is a player's paradise up there! I made sure that I'd tried every instrument before I left the showroom.

Dr Keith Harrington took over from David Clegg as Managing Director of Makin in May 2004, with David scheduled to retire in December 2005. David is still very much a part of the company though as a Director. Keith is an organic chemist by background, with a BSc and PhD from Leeds University. Keith is a player himself, and also the owner of a Makin organ, a custom three-manual drawstop instrument which he bought in 2001. He jokes that maybe he is something of a Victor Kayyam - he liked the organs so much that having joined the company perhaps he should buy it! The company has experienced significant growth in the last few years in the installation of both Makin and Johannus organs. Makin's largest church organ to date - at Inverness Cathedral - was featured in the last issue of *The Organ*. Another large church installation - at St John's Cathedral, Salford - is featured on VGP-CD 0043, played by Simon Lindley. Simon Lindley also worked with the company's Technical Director, Jeremy Meager, on the final intonation and voicing work on the new Westmorland 35 Tab Jubilee limited edition instrument, built to commem-



A 4 manual Monarke home installation



A 3 manual Westmorland home installation

orate the company's 35th anniversary this year.

The Salford disc is available from the company at their Shaw offices. I was particularly struck by the clarity of the choruses on this recording. Keith stressed that the mixture stops on Makin organs were independently sampled, with breaks similar to those on pipe organs. Blending the diapason choruses is also important. Playing the Jubilee organ in the showroom I was impressed by the high quality of the sounds: you really did feel that you were hearing and playing a pipe organ! The real test for me was the lower notes of the pedal stops and the sub-unison manual stops – whether reed or flue. I found that all the Makin organs that I tried passed the test!

Sampling

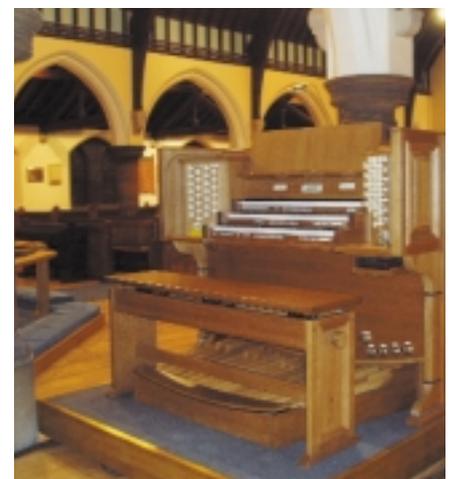
Keith explained that the firm aims to sample two or three renowned organs with 'little wind noise' a year, so that there is nothing to get in the way of the sound proper. This was

problematic at Leeds Parish Church; though you can't hear any wind noise when it comes to the loud stops there! Sampling is done in stereo; every single note on the pedal stops is sampled, and every white note on manual flue and all notes on reed stops. Keith's personal ambition is to sample the Harrison organ at the Temple Church in London, where his hero George Thalben-Ball was organist for so many years. The two men share the same birthday, although Keith is 67 years younger!

If the company samples 2-3 organs a year, it installs 2-3 per week. Some 60% of business is for church organ installations. There is the occasional concert hall and lots of schools, crematoria and, of course, home installations. The 27-stop model is the most popular for both church and private house. What impressed me about this organ was the look and feel of the instrument as well as the sound. I remember when I was Diocesan Organ Adviser for Norwich how important it was to ensure that digital installat-

ions in churches looked good, especially when it came to blending with their surroundings and the other furniture in particular.

The people are important to Keith. The firm is an 'Investor in People' and the 16 staff featured in the firm's Spring 2005 Newsletter are all clearly part of a 'family'. I was much struck by the fact that many of them are organists themselves, some with church connections, too. The firm produces a useful *Digital Organ Buyers' Guide* which tells a straight story about digital organ acquisition. It will be useful to many church organists and clergy as they struggle with what to do for the best in terms of organ renewal or replacement. In this context, I was interested to hear that Keith is not a particular fan of hybrid organs, though Makin has supplied 'the odd extra stop' when required. They also supply consoles



The Westmorland 41 Drawstop console at Cheadle Hulme, All Saints



A beautiful 3-manual drawstop console with Monarke technology and fifty speaking stops

for pipe organs.

What of the future for the digital organ? Keith believes that Research and Development is important, and aims to ensure that Makin will always improve its technology and products. He feels that the digital organ will look and feel ever more like the pipe organ equivalent. Smaller, cheaper, more powerful chips will enable increasingly faithful sound reproduction. What is particularly important, though, is not just the robustness of the technology, but the longevity of the firm

What a view for the organist at St Mary, Greenock!



and its ability to guarantee its organs as well as to provide periodic upgrades. This latter point is important in terms of the economics of pipe versus digital instruments, as Keith points out.

There is no doubt in my mind that Makin is an impressive firm, proud of both its heritage and its reputation. Every instrument that I tested was impressive: I have to admit that it is really hard to 'tell the difference' when you are dealing with instruments like these. Long may the firm flourish! With Keith Harrington at the helm, building on David Clegg's hard work of 25 years, they'll be making serious waves at Makin for many years to come!



The Makin Showroom in Shaw, Lancashire

