

PRESS RELEASE

Legal Protection for Pipe Organs in future legislation: a Glaring Anomaly

Pipe organs are not fully protected under current heritage legislation nor under Government proposals in the recent White Paper.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport in March 2007 issued a White Paper 'Heritage Protection for the 21st century'. It noted that the DCMS would 'also begin work to develop new selection criteria for designating historic assets under the new system.' Pipe organs, however, as much a part of the cultural heritage of this country as other contents of our churches (pulpits, monuments, pews etc), are not mentioned or adequately covered either now, or apparently in the future under present DCMS intentions. This applies even more so to secular buildings.

Annex 1 of the White Paper was a suggested format for the new listing register entry proposed under new legislation, for St. Mary Magdalene Church, Taunton. The important and virtually unaltered Willis organ of 1882 was ignored. Confusing and misleading areas where organs MAY be situated in churches were mentioned elsewhere in the proposals.

We are practically the only country in Europe not to offer clear protection. BIOS asks that pipe organs in this country be given no less protection than in France, Italy, Spain or the Netherlands. Organs will continue to be under threat so long as present confusion and ignorance over their legal status continues. BIOS is calling for any new legislation to cover explicitly the listing and preservation of our heritage of historic pipe organs.

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

1. *The Consultation Paper 'Protecting our Historic Environment: Making the System Work Better, (DCMS July 2003) recognised the need for reforms in order to improve listed building legislation. In March 2007 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published a White Paper 'Heritage Protection for the 21st century'. Pipe organs are not covered in the proposals.*

2. *BIOS considers it essential that historic pipe organs be given a clear legal status and protection under any new legislation. The current legal position means that there is a lack of protection for our historic organ heritage. Organs can be destroyed, damaged or altered without regard to their historic importance. Ecclesiastical Exemption, for organs owned by the Church of England, provides some protection for church organs, but even with this system advice given is not always consistent. Secular organs eg. in Civic Town Halls, cinemas and private homes do not have the benefit even of this protection.*

3. *For listed buildings the case law debate continues as to whether organs are fixtures or fittings and protected when situated in a listed building. Even if the appearance might be protected, the internal workings of the organ and the sound it makes probably are not. Organs in non listed buildings are not protected at all.*

4. *The British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS) is an educational charity which has as its main aims the study of the organ and its music, and the preservation of historic organs in Britain. It has a wide range of expertise amongst its members, and serves as the voluntary amenity society for the pipe organ in Britain. A recently completed project has been the inauguration of a Historic Organ Sound Archive (see www.bios.org.uk, click on Historic Organ Sound Archive)*

5. *For further information telephone Barrie Clark, BIOS Heritage Adviser, 01737 243 463, or email José Hopkins, <bios@drawstop.plus.com>.*

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