

Alexander (Sandy) Edmonstone (1953-2022)

Sandy Edmonstone, who has died aged 68, was one of the most accomplished Scottish organ builders of recent times. His work encompassed over 100 major projects: overhauls, restorations, rebuilds, transplants and virtually new organs. On top of this he serviced a wide tuning round, which has not been easy to fill since his retirement in 2013. With a few exceptions, all the instruments which he serviced lay north of Edinburgh and Glasgow

While showing a clear preference for a modernist (rather than conservationist) approach to organ projects, he was nevertheless willing to tackle strict restoration where the instruments were of clear musical quality and of undoubted historical worth. The instruments on which he worked ranged from barrel organs and tiny chamber organs to the large Ingram/Miller/Nicholson in his own church, St. Ninian's Episcopal Cathedral in Perth, which he transformed into a stunningly eclectic four manual organ in 1996.

That Sandy was proficient in an enviable range of organ building skills (design, tuning, voicing, action, leatherwork, woodwork) is reflected in the fact that he was also a very fine organist and pianist himself. He knew instinctively what a good organ should have and how it should sound. In addition to technical and musical skills, Sandy's administration, accounting and marketing were very efficient. Throughout 30 years as an independent builder he was faithfully assisted by Roger Maxwell from Crieff.

Sandy's most ambitious rebuilding (or new organ) projects were St. Giles, Elgin (completed 1983), St. John's Kirk, Perth (1986), Dunkeld Cathedral (1987), St. Columba's, Elgin (1989), Aberlour Parish, Speyside (1992), Aberdeen Rubislaw (1995), Perth St. Ninian's (1996), Auchterarder Parish (2004) and Blackhall St. Columba's, Edinburgh (2006). With all of these the rebuilding work was thorough, including new consoles, actions, and drastic revision of stoplists to include complete choruses with convincing, well balanced and bright *plena*. With the exception of Blackhall (where a new case was designed by architect Derek Watson-Briggs), existing casework was generally retained and restored, though sometimes modified. This was especially important at St. Ninian's Cathedral where the Pearson-designed case, built in 1901 by the Dundee organ builder John Miller, though incomplete, was left unaltered.

At least sixteen transplants of organs were successfully undertaken by Sandy, about eight of which were sizeable two manual instruments, including the Harrison organs from Selwyn College, Cambridge (moved to St. Andrews University in 1990) and King's College, Aberdeen (moved to Ballater in 2008).

Strict restorations included the c.1850s Postill organ in Arbroath RC Church (2001), a pre-1820 James Bruce organ at Carlops, Peeblesshire (2008), an 1820s Bruce barrel organ from Argyll (2011), and the 1850 David Hamilton organ at Woodhead, Fyvie (1999), inexcusably discarded by the church in the middle of Covid in 2020. Similarly conservative work to the 1881 Willis at Haddo House happily left original features like a lever Swell pedal intact. His last major *opus*, in 2012, was in fact his first pneumatic restoration, to a 1902 Binns organ at Stenhouse and Carron Church near Falkirk.

Sandy Edmonstone was born in Forres, Moray in 1953 but the family soon moved to Aberdeen, where his father (also Sandy 1930-2018) opened a piano shop in the centre of town. As a twelve year old, Sandy jun. was fascinated by the work being carried out by J.W. Walker to the organ his father played at Midstocket Church. This led to an apprenticeship with Walker from 1969. In the early 1970s he moved to Rushworth & Dreaper, based first in Edinburgh, then in Stonehaven. In 1976 married Carol Diehl, who had come to Edinburgh from Boston, USA to carry out postgraduate study. They had two sons, Malcolm (1980) and Alastair (1982). In 1977 Sandy became Scottish representative for the firm of Wood Wordsworth. On the demise of that firm in 1981 Sandy established his own firm, first at Dunning and then in a former joiner's workshop at Forteviot, which also provided extensive storage facilities. From this part of Perthshire he was well placed to reach all parts of Scotland. He remained an accredited member of the IBO for thirty years.

Though as robust and fit as any organ builder has to be, Sandy suffered throughout his life from Type 1 diabetes, which led to multiple health problems by the early 2010s, leading in turn to immobility. Though obliged to take full retirement in 2013, he continued to provide advice and was happy to talk to groups and individuals in his remaining years. Throughout this difficult time he was supported and cared for by his devoted wife Carol.

We shall miss his friendly nature, witty conversation and splendid *bonhomie* which he exuded at all times. His excellent instruments will remain as a monument to his achievement. Our sympathies go to his wife Carol, his sons, grandchildren, brothers and sister both on Sandy's death in January and also the passing of his mother Jean at the age of 91 in early March.

Alan Buchan