

WESLEY UNITING CHURCH
BOX HILL

WILLIS PIPE ORGAN RESTORATION APPEAL



The Appeal is conducted in association with the Organ Historical Trust of Australia, a national body founded in 1978. The Trust is listed on the Australian Government's Register of Cultural Organisations and is able to offer tax deductibility for gifts over \$2.00. The Trust's website is at www.ohta.org.au

The Original Organ Owner

The Hon. Henry 'Money' Miller was the wealthiest man in Australia when the organ was imported from England in 1877. He had bought the property of 30 acres, 'Findon' in Kew, in 1871, and felt that the grand ballroom of his mansion was in want of an organ. Miller sought out the best that money could buy. He specially imported one of the finest chamber organs to the colony.

Born in Londonderry, Henry Miller came to Port Phillip before Victoria was created. Melbourne was then only a few huts on the banks of the Yarra. He was a member of Victoria's first Parliament and helped to frame its constitution. He gave £5,000 towards the building of St Paul's Cathedral, more than \$700,000 in today's value. When in 1868 the Corporation of Melbourne floated a loan of £50,000 for public works, £40,000 was taken up by Henry Miller.

The Organ Builder

Henry Willis, one of the greatest organ builders of the Victorian Era, was honoured with the name 'Father Willis', partly to distinguish him from his two sons, but more especially as a mark of high appreciation of his great abilities and artistic worth.

Henry Willis (1821 – 1901) taught himself to play the organ as a boy. From age 21 he spent three years as an assistant in the construction of a new organ, and his first success was the rebuilding of the Gloucester Cathedral Organ in 1847.

In 1851 he built the organ for the Great Exhibition. It was afterwards erected in Winchester Cathedral, and is still in use after several rebuilds. His largest organ was for the Royal Albert Hall, London in 1871, and he built the new organ for St Paul's Cathedral in 1872. He was directly concerned in the building or rebuilding of over a thousand organs including Canterbury, Durham, London, Oxford, Salisbury, Truro, Wells and Winchester Cathedrals.

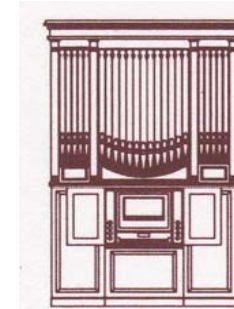
The Willis Organ at Wesley Uniting Church, Box Hill

The organ is an outstanding example of 19th Century organ building, one of the finest in Australia. It is the only 'Father' Willis organ exported to Victoria. No expense was spared in the construction of the organ, and it was lavishly finished in ornate detail. It is a 'luxury' Willis production, with its spotted metal pipe-work, thick keys of one-piece ivory, and solid ivory draw-stops with bushings of ivory and stems of rosewood.

In 1912 the organ was moved by Fincham & Son to the ballroom of the mansion 'Whernside' at Toorak, owned by Henry's sons, Albert and later Edward Miller. In 1929 Box Hill Methodist Church purchased the organ for £650, and paid £350 for installation by W.L. Roberts. The organ was an almost perfect fit for an alcove in the west wall of the Church. It is admirably suited to the building, and the acoustics of the Church do it great justice.

The organ generally is in remarkable condition given that it is 130 years old. It survives in an outstanding state of originality, and almost all components of the 1877 organ survive. It is classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) as a pipe organ of great musical and heritage significance.

Any Enquiries?



of Australia

Enquiries are welcome and should be addressed to:
(03) 9890 0064

Information is also available on the Organ Historical Trust of Australia web site at the following address:

www.ohta.org.au

Organ Historical Trust



The keys are of one-piece ivory, and the solid ivory drawstops have bushings of ivory and stems of rosewood.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Citation

The National Trust citation supporting the classification of the organ on 9 August 1983 reads:

“This organ was built in 1877 by the major English organ-builder Henry Willis for Findon, Kew, the mansion of the Hon. Henry “Money” Miller. Here it stood at the end of a large ballroom where it was depicted in *Victoria and its Metropolis* 1888. No expense was spared in the construction of the organ, with superlative materials and lavish finishes being freely employed. The instrument well exemplifies the domestic aspirations of a notable resident of “Marvellous Melbourne”. It is the only example of Willis’s work in Victoria. In 1929 the organ was moved to the Methodist Church, Box Hill, where it survives today with little alteration from the original. Restoration work was carried out in 1969 and 1983. The fine Willis sound has been preserved, and the casework, incorporating ornately diapered pipes, is unaltered except for the lower left and right hand panels.”

Why Renovate the Organ?

The quality of the original workmanship is of an outstanding level of excellence, but the actions have become noisy and unresponsive owing to the wear of the perishable components, such as felt and leather. Because felt and leather bushings have worn away, metal action parts are able to make contact with each other, resulting in noise, and, slowing the organ’s response to the playing of the organist.

Apart from the historical significance of the Willis organ, and its essential place in Victoria’s heritage, an authentic restoration will preserve the musical and cultural significance of the organ. This will ensure its continued place in services of worship, as a concert instrument for organ recitals, and as an accompaniment to singers and instrumentalists.

The restored Willis organ will also be a fine vehicle for teaching students of the pipe organ.

What Work Needs to be Done in Order of Priority?

- Overhaul the pedal key actions to eliminate mechanical noise and provide precision of movement
- Overhaul the manual key action, re-felt the key beds and adjust the coupler action
- Overhaul the stop actions and adjust them for optimum performance
- Overhaul the wind system and re-leather the bellows
- Restore the console to pristine condition
- Clean and regulate the pipe-work
- Clean and polish the casework.

You Can Help!

The appeal target is \$81,000.

All donations will be suitably acknowledged.

Donations of \$2.00 or more to the Organ Historical Trust of Australia for this Appeal are tax deductible.

My/Our Support for the ‘Father’ Willis Organ Restoration Appeal

I/We would like to help with the restoration of the historic organ at Wesley Uniting Church, Box Hill. ***All gifts of \$2.00 or over are tax deductible.***

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Amount \$.....

Payment Methods:

Cheque Visa Mastercard

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Expiry Date ____/____

Name on Card.....

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Signature

Date

To ensure tax deductibility, please make your cheque payable to: *Organ Historical Trust of Australia.*

Please send this form with your donation to:
 Organ Historical Trust of Australia,
Willis Organ Restoration Appeal,
 2-6 Oxford Street,
 Box Hill, Victoria, 3128