
MERKLIN-SCHÜTZE PIPE ORGAN



Merklin organ_view of pipes
pipes when in Cato church



Merklin organ when in Cato
Church



Merklin Schutze
organ_dismantled & in
storage_11 Feb 08

Location

144-158 COLCHESTER ROAD BAYSWATER NORTH, MAROONDAH CITY

Municipality

MAROONDAH CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2160

VHR Registration

June 12, 2008

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - March 11, 2008

What is significant?

The Merklin-Schütze organ was built in 1870 by the Brussels firm of Merklin-Schütze et Cie using Merklin's own patent, which was technically very advanced for the time. The sound of European instruments was quite different from that of English organs, and composers wrote their music with the sounds of this type of instrument in mind. It was the largest European organ to be exported to Australia in the nineteenth century and the first Belgian organ sent to Victoria. It was imported by the musical entrepreneur George L Allen, probably for St Patrick's Cathedral. It was instead placed in the west end of the incomplete nave of St John's Anglican Church at Toorak, which was an unsuitably small acoustic environment for such a loud instrument. In 1877 George Fincham cleaned the organ reeds and covered them with metal 'shades', which still cover the tubes, in order to subdue the sound in accord with contemporary British taste. A new organ was installed in St John's in 1913 and the Merklin-Schütze organ was placed in a chamber to the south of the chancel (now the Lady Chapel), and in 1914 was sold to the Methodist Church at Elsternwick. In 1919 the instrument was rebuilt by Meadway & Slatterie, a Melbourne organbuilding firm, which replaced all the original actions with a new tubular-pneumatic action, and the 1870 console with a new detached one. The original bench survived but was stolen in the 1990s. In 1923 the organ was re-erected in the new church building on the site and in 1926 another full overhaul was carried out by George Fincham & Sons. The replacement action was failing by the 1950s and by the mid 1960s the organ was becoming increasingly unplayable; by 1978 its use and maintenance had been discontinued. The organ was given to the Australian Catholic University for erection in Central Hall in Brunswick Street, but this space proved unsuitable, and in 2003 the organ was dismantled and placed in storage.

The Merklin-Schütze organ when assembled it is an impressive and elaborate instrument, approximately 9 metres tall, 5.7 metres wide and more than 2 metres deep. The oak case is decorated in a Gothic style, with carved pinnacles, cusping, finials and crockets. Although the original action and console has been lost it retains its pipework, casework, two slider windchests, two reservoirs, building frame and swell box from the 1870s.

How is it significant?

The Merklin-Schütze organ is of historical and aesthetic significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Merklin-Schütze organ is historically significant as the largest European organ exported to Australia during the nineteenth century, and the only large example of the French Symphonic Romantic school of organbuilding surviving in Australia in substantially original form. The firm of Merklin-Schütze was the major determining influence on the French Romantic organbuilding style, and many French organ composers of the late nineteenth century wrote their music with the sounds of this type of instrument in mind. Organs in Australia designed for the playing of a particular section of the organ repertoire, which has now achieved international artistic recognition, are extremely rare.

The instrument is aesthetically significant for its symphonic tonal qualities and for the unusual mechanical arrangements, which permit the accurate interpretation of such composers as Guilmant, Widor and Vierne.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions:

1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.
3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.
4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

Routine maintenance: Pipe Organs require regular servicing particularly tuning and attendance to action problems. Such procedures usually take place monthly, quarterly, half yearly or annually. Such activities would not impact in any way on the heritage status of the instrument provided they are carried out by appropriate firms, and would not require a permit.

Construction dates	1870,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered object,
Other Names	Pipe organ Cato Parish Uniting Church,
Hermes Number	1280
Property Number	

History

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

(from Organ Historical Trust of Australia website at www.ohata.org.au)

Pipe organs were brought to Victoria by British settlers throughout the nineteenth century, some commissioned specifically from British firms. From 1840 organs were also made in Australia. By the end of the nineteenth century Australia possessed some of the finest contemporary examples of the organbuilder's craft to be found anywhere in the world. All of the illustrious English organbuilders of the period were represented by instruments in Australia, including J W Walker & Sons (fifty-four instruments) and Hill & Son (thirty-four instruments), together with many regional builders from Birmingham, Bristol, Huddersfield, Hull and Manchester. Many of these

surviving instruments are now of international significance. Principal imports included the town hall organs in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne, all built by Hill & Son, the latter being the largest organ in the world at the time of its construction. A number of organs also arrived from continental Europe, the largest coming from such firms as Merklin Schütze of Brussels, E F Walcker of Ludwigsburg, R A Randebrock of Paderborn, and Theodore Puget of Toulouse.

Many of the old organs have been lost and the significance of others substantially eroded by insensitive rebuilding, particularly the introduction of electric actions and tonal modifications.

Merklin-Schütze et Cie

Joseph Merklin was born in 1819 at Oberhausen (Baden), Germany as the son of a respected organbuilder. After attempting to set up his own workshop when he was eighteen years old, he spent some time travelling in order to acquaint himself with the current styles of European organbuilding. He took the opportunity to work with the distinguished German organbuilding firm of E Fr Walcker of Ludwigsburg. In 1843 he went to Belgium, and commenced his own firm in Brussels. He succeeded in raising the art of Belgian organbuilding from the state of decadence it had reached by that stage. He took his brother-in-law, Friedrich Schütze, into partnership (until 1870) operating as Merklin-Schütze et Cie.

Merklin acquired the prestigious Paris firm of Ducroquet in 1855 thus acquiring a base in the French capital. His breakthrough in Paris resulted from an instrument which he built for the 1855 Exhibition. This organ had many innovations for its time and aroused the attention of the famous French organbuilder, Aristide Cavaille-Coll, who then copied many of Merklin's ideas in his own organs. In this manner, the French Romantic Symphonic organ evolved, of which the firm of Merklin-Schütze must be considered as one of the major determining influences, and remained the most important competitor for Cavaille-Coll. The main factory was moved to Lyon in 1870, where remnants of the firm still existed until a short time ago. His factory was the largest in Europe employing a staff exceeding two hundred in its Paris establishment and the firm was an important rival to the great name of Aristide Cavaille-Coll.

Joseph Merklin died in Nancy in 1909.

Merklin built prestigious organs for many cathedrals and large churches in France and Belgium and elsewhere, including the cathedrals of Liège (?), Arras, Blois, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, Guadalajara (Mexico), Havana (Cuba), Moulins, Murcia (Spain), Rennes, Rouen and Soissons; St Eustache, St Eugène-St Cecile and St Ambroise in Paris, and St Epvre, Nancy, which was exhibited at the 1867 Paris Exposition (See Kurt Lueders, 'Merklin, Joseph', *Grove Music* online).

HISTORY OF PLACE

The three-manual organ formerly at Cato Uniting Church, Elsternwick was built in 1870 by the Brussels firm of Merklin-Schütze (Inscription on bottom of case of 16ft reed "Basson de 16 pieds 1870"). Imported by the Melbourne musical entrepreneur George L. Allen (see the work *The Music Sellers* for details of Allen's Australian career), it was apparently destined for "Melbourne Cathedral" according to the firm's records (Jurine, tome 2, p. 425 'Société Anonyme des grandes orgues et harmoniums, 1870: Principales orgues construites dans la maison de Bruxelles sous la direction de M. Pierre Schyven, directeur des travaux'). Melbourne Cathedral would have been St Patrick's Catholic Cathedral, the nave of which was opened in 1868. The Merklin-Schütze organ was a large French-romantic style instrument of three manuals and 28 speaking stops, with an outstanding neo-Gothic case in grained oak, and a reed chorus on the Grand Orgue at 16, 8 and 4 foot pitches that would have sounded splendid in the resonant acoustics of the cathedral's nave. The sound of European instruments was quite different to that of English organs, and many French organ composers wrote their music with the sounds of this type of instrument in mind, and organs in Australia which were designed for the playing of this section of the organ repertoire, which has now achieved international artistic recognition, are extremely rare.

The organ was built utilising Merklin's patent (*Brevet d'Invention*) of 27 August 1868 (Jurine, tome 3, pp.196-197), that allowed for the mechanical borrowing of stops between keyboards and pedals by purely mechanical means. This involved the use of duplicate wind channels, sliders and pallets in the windchest. By these means, an additional eight stops were provided on the Positif (later termed Choir Organ) and three Pedal stops were provided from the manuals. This was a very *avant-garde* mechanical feature at the time and could not be seen in any other Australian organ of the period.

However, the instrument was not to be placed in St Patrick's Cathedral, where there was a small pipe organ of English origin. *The Argus* of 13 September 1870 recorded that an organ "of Belgian manufacture by Merklin-Schütze of Brussels, which will have three-manuals and will embrace every variety of modern improvement. The organ will possess such combination of stops as hitherto have been unknown in this country. This will be the first Belgian organ imported into the colony" (Matthews, p.155). It was then erected at the west end of the incomplete nave of St John's Anglican Church, Toorak, probably by Lee & Kaye, who tuned the instrument up to 1877. Here it must have sounded devastatingly loud. Later it was moved to a chamber opening off the chancel. St John's Church would have provided a very unsatisfactory acoustical environment for this instrument, where a resonant acoustic was an important component of the overall sound.

There are no printed sources that document the original specification of the organ. No contemporary newspaper accounts, alas, list the stops that the organ contained. However, it is possible to deduce what this would have been from an internal examination of the pipework and windchests.

(The 1870 specification (Deduced by John Maidment from pipe markings and Stiller Documentation) is in the file.)

In March 1877 George Fincham took over the tuning and maintenance. He wrote to the organist L.L. Lewis in March 1877: "The work I propose doing for the sum named (£18) is to clean and cover with metal shades the Great Organ reeds [this work is still evident, clearly affecting the quality and projection of the original voicing] and to equalize same. To lengthen the Pedal Open Diapason [this work is also still evident; this stop is not of Merklin-Schütze construction so must have been added after the organ's arrival in Melbourne] and make the most of them. Also to make two new pipes to take the place of those pointed out - these two pipes have been cut up too much in the voicing and have been pasted over mouths to lower same to proper position. There are many other pipes in the organ that have been treated in a like manner but more successfully of course these I will not meddle with." [George Fincham letters 2/41]

In a letter dated 27 January 1898 to the Vicar of St John's, the Revd W. Fellows, Fincham wrote: "I have been requested to estimate for new Open Diapason in place of Montre [This work was carried out from Tenor (4 foot) C utilising the original tin bass pipes in the facade], new Trumpet in place of present one [Not carried out], and Principal in place of Flute Harmonic [Carried out]. Also a new Tremulant. I wish to point out that this is a favourable opportunity to make the Pedal soundboard sound, repair the Pedal Open Diapason [The Pedal Open Diapason and its windchest (of fairly crude workmanship) were added after the organ arrived in Melbourne] and recentre the blowing action. I have estimated the whole of the work closely and can do all the above work for the sum of £80 [George Fincham letters 11/311].

In July 1905 refurbishment of the organ was being considered by St John's Church (Ibid 20/798). In October 1905, George Fincham & Son wrote to Colin Templeton, 31 Queen Street, Melbourne. The scheme of alterations included a new Great Open Diapason 8 foot 56 pipes, Great Principal 4 foot 56 pipes and Swell Gemshorn 4 foot 56 pipes, all in spotted metal, together with 9 composition pedals. Also, the "rearrangement and proper grouping of the whole drawstop action, the knobs to be placed in proper position, also the supply of new knobs throughout. Removal of keyboards, pedal board, etc from present position to the Northern side of the organ (where the show front pipes are)." (Ibid 20/927) Mercifully, none of this work took place.

A new organ was installed at St John's Anglican Church in 1913, built by Hill & Son, London as the firm's job number 2432. This was placed in a new purpose-built chamber on the northern side of the chancel. The Merklin-Schütze organ had been placed in a chamber to the south of the chancel (now the Angel Chapel) where it must have occupied the whole space, with minimal tonal egress. It remained at St John's until 1914 when it was sold to the Methodist Church, Orrong Road, Elsternwick.

On 7 May 1914 an estimate of £50 from George Fincham & Son was supplied to Fredk K. Levens, from the Elsternwick church, "to take down and re-erect above instrument in your church." This quotation was accepted on 10 June 1914. During the dismantling of the organ, at least three of the oval shaped porcelain plaques that indicated the functions of the various toe pedals were buried in the St John's churchyard, only to be resurrected in the 1990s.

The organ was initially erected in the original Elsternwick church building, at the southern end of the site, and presumably remained unaltered mechanically. In 1919 the instrument was rebuilt by Meadway & Slatterie, a Melbourne organbuilding firm based in Crossley Street in the city. [Date of 1919 rebuild from Stiller, *Detailed Documentation*. Organbuilders' names from Miss Hilda Trevena, Organist of the church, personal communication to John Maidment November 1966. Edward P. Meadway was a former employee of Norman & Beard Ltd, of

Norwich, who emigrated to Melbourne to install the Norman & Beard organs at St Peter's Anglican Church, Eastern Hill, in 1912, and the Chapel of St Peter, Melbourne Grammar School, in 1913. Meadway returned to England in late 1924 according to a Fincham letter dated 18 September 1924 to Mr McNaughton. J.W. [Jack] Slatterie was a former employee of George Fincham & Son who went to Britain to gain experience with Hill & Son.] This work involved the removal of all the original Merklin-Schütze actions and console of 1870 and replacement with exhaust tubular-pneumatic action, a new double-rise reservoir as a breakdown for the electrical blower, the conversion of the barker lever reservoir to a swell reservoir, and the introduction of a detached three-manual console with endolithic drawstop heads and anglicised stop names; the original oak Merklin-Schütze bench survived (Details of the work noted by John Maidment 1966. The original bench was sadly stolen from the church in the 1990s - a photograph exists in the Stiller documentation). In 1923 it was re-erected in a large and spacious chamber at the present red brick Elsternwick church. This work appears to have been very unsatisfactory as a full overhaul was carried out in 1926 by George Fincham & Sons Pty Ltd at a cost of £258, quite a substantial sum for a renovation. [George Fincham & Sons letters 7/ 9 August 1926]

The tubular-pneumatic action became increasingly unplayable and maintenance work was carried out in the 1950s by George Fincham & Sons Pty Ltd without effecting any significant improvement. By the mid 1960s the organ was becoming increasingly unplayable (a sound recording exists from 1966) and by 1978 its use and maintenance had been discontinued owing to the failure of the 1923 actions.

The instrument was dismantled in 2003 by Wakeley Pipe Organs Pty Ltd and initially placed in storage in Fitzroy, but the parts have since been moved to Kilsyth.

The organ is a rare example of the firm's work of the period. Additionally, it remains the largest organ in the country built in the French Romantic style, of which Aristide Cavaille-Coll and Joseph Merklin were the prime exponents. Additionally, the markings of Pierre Schyven may be observed on several of the pipes, indicating that he was responsible for the voicing and possibly the completion of the instrument in the Brussels workshops after Joseph Merklin had departed for Paris. Schyven became, after 1870, the leading organbuilder in Belgium and built the acclaimed organ in Antwerp Cathedral in 1890.

REFERENCES

George Fincham & Sons letter books (housed at State Library of Victoria Manuscripts Collection)

Peter Game, *The Music Sellers*. Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, 1976

Michel Jurine, *Joseph Merklin facteur d'orgues europeen; Essair sur l'orgue francais au XIXe siècle*. [Paris]: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1991. 3 tomes.

E.N. Matthews, *Colonial Organs and Organbuilding*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1969

John Stiller, *Documentation of pipe organ built by Merklin-Schütze 1870: Cato Parish Uniting Church, Elsternwick*. Camberwell: Organ Historical Trust of Australia, 1978

Assessment Against Criteria

a. *The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object*

This Merklin-Schütze organ was the largest pipe organ brought to Australia from Europe in the nineteenth century, and is a demonstration of the wealth of Victoria in the second half of the nineteenth century.

b. *The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness*

This Merklin-Schütze organ is a rare example of the work of Merklin-Schütze et Cie of the period, and represents the only large example of the French Symphonic Romantic school of organbuilding surviving in Australia in substantially original form. Many French organ composers wrote their music with the sounds of this type of instrument in mind, but organs in Australia which were designed for the playing of a particular section of the organ repertoire, which has now achieved international artistic recognition, are extremely rare. The markings on the pipes of Pierre Schyven, after 1870 Belgium's leading organbuilder who built the acclaimed organ in Antwerp Cathedral in 1890, indicate that he was responsible for the voicing and possibly the completion of the instrument.

c. The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage

d. The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects

This Merklin-Schütze organ is a major example of nineteenth century European organbuilding, which was significantly different in sound, materials and technology from English organbuilding of the period.

e. The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features

The instrument is aesthetically significant for its symphonic tonal qualities and for the unusual mechanical arrangements, which permit the accurate interpretation of such composers as Guilmant, Widor and Vierne.

f. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements

This Merklin-Schütze organ was the most mechanically advanced instrument in Australia at the time. The technical arrangements, with its ranks borrowed from the Grand Orgue to the Positif and Pedale by purely mechanical means was unique in the local context, as was the provision of ventils for the reeds.

g. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations

h. Any other matter which the Council deems relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance

Plaque Citation

Made in Brussels in 1870, this was the largest organ sent to Australia in the nineteenth century, and is the only intact surviving example of the French Symphonic Romantic School of organ building in Australia.

Extent of Registration

The object described as the Merklin-Schütze Organ, currently in storage.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>