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Your church organ needs regular maintenance, and every 20 to 30 years it might also need a few repairs.

We can help you make good choices when the time comes to repair or replace it.

Download our guidance

- [Repair or replace your organ](#) (214.7 KB)
- [A Brief Guide to the Maintenance and Restoration of Organs](#) (630.58 KB)
- [Organ case conservation](#) (334.16 KB)
- [Amplification of organs](#) (219.92 KB)
- [Pipe organs](#) (240.51 KB)
- [Electric organs](#) (206.09 KB)
- [Redundant organs](#) (241.87 KB)
- [Play the organ](#) (245.56 KB)
- [Organ builder reports](#) (272.81 KB)



Routine maintenance and tuning

Your organ needs to be regularly maintained and tuned by a professional organ builder.

We strongly encourage you to use an accredited organ builder whose work is regularly assessed for its quality.

[Find an organ builder now](#)

Important:

Do not use the inside of your organ for storage!

The organ builder needs to be able to get inside your instrument safely. It also reduces the risk of accidental damage to your organ and the materials you stored in it.

To repair or replace?

Are you making changes to the use of your building, your style of worship, or simply need to do some repairs? Then, you may have to discuss the future of your organ.

Before you take any decisions, you need to understand your current instrument. [Contact your Diocesan Advisory Committee](#) for help. Ask yourself:

- Who built the organ? And when?
- Has it been restored or rebuilt? If so, by whom and when?
- Does it contain earlier material which may be of historic value (e.g. pipes or casework)?
- Is the organ of any musical distinction?
- Is it mechanically well-made?
- How suitable is it for the liturgical and wider uses of your church?
- How much will it cost to repair?

"An organ by a good maker is a work of art."

David Knight, Senior Church Buildings Officer

Remember:

Destroying or substantially altering an historic instrument is poor stewardship and a loss to our cultural heritage.

Carefully restoring your organ may well produce a visual and musical improvement. You might even be able to [get a grant](#) to help you do it.

If your organ is of historical value or is fundamentally sound, then the best advice is to restore it.

What are the reasons why you want to make changes to your organ?

It's too small to meet our musical needs

What do you need the organ for?

- Leading and sustaining congregational singing
- Accompanying a choir
- Performing organ music for worship, concerts and recitals
- Educating, supporting and encouraging current and future organists

How large does an organ really need to be? If it has served your parish for many years, why is it suddenly too small?

Small organs, properly placed and voiced, can support very large congregations. And they are less costly to maintain.

Get independent, expert advice

It's unreliable and has been declared irreparable

Why is it unreliable? Can it be repaired?

Get the advice of an organ builder or an organist.

And talk to your diocese

It's in the wrong place

The best position for your organ is in the open, where the sound can speak clearly and effortlessly into the main body of your church.

But yours might work well from chambers by the chancel, particularly when there is a choir singing from there.

If you think your organ is in the wrong place, ask yourself:

- What does the present position of choir and organ say about the function of music in worship?
- Has there been, or is there likely to be, any liturgical re-ordering of the church which might affect the position of the choir and the organ?
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Is there a choir?

- Is there any reason why the choir should not move during the service?
- Where, given the position of the altar, choir, etc., is the best place for the organ?

It's ugly

Ideally, your organ should be a free-standing musical and architectural entity. Its pipes and mechanism should be protected by casework to blend and project the sound.

A well-designed case in the right place ought to be a significant visual enrichment to your church's interior.

We can't afford to fix it

See if you qualify for one of our [grants for historic organs](#).

Or search the Institute of British Organ Building's website for more [funding schemes](#).

Permissions and advice

You need a faculty to restore or replace your organ. So, contact your diocese early on for advice.

Also, get qualified and independent advice from the Association of Independent Organ Advisers. They can help you with:

- Contractual arrangements
- Managing an organ project
- Selecting an organ builder

There are some routine maintenance and tuning works to organs that fall on List A. For these, you will not need permission.

What does “routine maintenance and tuning” mean?

The emphasis is on the word routine.

This is intended to cover visits for:

- Tuning
- Regulation
- Fixing the occasional off-note
- Cyphers (notes stuck on)
- Etc.

Conditions

Works on List A do not involve:

- Tonal alterations
- Changes to the action
- Major dismantling of the instrument

But it is allowed to do minor dismantling during tuning visits (e.g. removing covers for access)

Improve your organ’s sound distribution

Natural acoustics means that your organ will sound louder in some parts of the church than in others. Often, this is not a problem.

But if your organ doesn't speak well to any part of the building, then you may want to look into subtle amplification.

Use a microphone and set it up to amplify only the organ. You will need to use a different sound system intended for speech, singing, or band music.

And don't forget about loop system users.

Choose the best heating system for you and your organ

Your church's heating system will affect the performance of your organ. It can make the organ:

- Shrink and crack if the air is too dry
- Swell if the air is too damp
- Sound "out of tune"
- And more

Choosing the right heating system is about keeping people comfortable and the organ in good order to avoid expensive damage.

The same system will not work for every church, so you should talk to your heating specialist and your organ builder for advice.

[Find out more about heating](#)

Dispose of a redundant organ

If your organ has no future use where it is, you may want to see if another church will take it.

1. Step one: Contact your diocese

They can help you evaluate the possibility of relocating the organ and will give you advice about your faculty application.

2. Step two: Advertise on the Institute of British Organ Building website

When it is agreed that relocating the organ is the best way forward, send the administrator of the IBO:

- A completed online form
- The organ's dimensions
- Photographs

Avoid online auctions or only use them as a last resort. You will need a faculty before putting the organ up for auction.

3. Step three: Make a full report of the organ before dismantling it

Important:

Putting an organ into storage is very much a last resort.

Buyers want to see and hear what they are getting.

The different types of organs

Most churches have pipe organs, but there are other options: using electronic sounds and a mix of pipe and electronic.

What are the benefits and drawbacks of each?

Pipe Organs

Appearance

A pipe organ can be designed to fit the architectural setting of your church.

For new organs, the organ builder will work with you to design something for your space.

If you are re-using an existing organ, make sure it's suitable for your church. Some organs adapt more easily than others.

Cost and reliability

The bigger the organ, the more expensive it will be.

But, there are plenty of examples of well-built pipe organs that have been in regular use for many years. The cost of installation and maintenance is modest compared to the use made of them.

A pipe organ is an investment for many generations.

Long-term costs

Most pipe organs need tuning once or twice a year.

Those with mechanical action need cleaning and minor repairs at intervals of 25-40 years. The cost is about 5% that of a new instrument.

In the long run, your pipes and casework will last almost indefinitely.

Electronic Organs

Appearance

An electronic organ can be designed to fit the architectural setting of your church.

The loudspeakers are larger than those used for speech.

They should be positioned to musical and visual advantage. And they should be designed to fit your church, not the inside of an existing pipe organ.

Cost and reliability

A good, well-designed electronic organ is not inexpensive. But it will normally be less than an adequate new pipe organ.

The cost largely depends on the type and quality of the basic equipment and the time spent setting it up in your church. The number of stops will make little difference, so be disciplined about the number you choose.

A good rule of thumb: If the organ is too big to fit inside the building because it was made as pipe organ... then it is simply too big!

Long-term costs

Experience has shown us that you can expect your organ to last an average of 20 years.

Sometimes, you can extend that by fitting in new components within the console.

Hybrid organs

A hybrid organ combines pipe and electronic technology to produce sound.

This has been around for many years, but is not common in our churches.

Just as with pipe and electronic organs:

- Consider how you will use the instrument
- Make sure its design fits the architectural setting of your church
- And don't buy something that is too big for your building

Advice for organ builders on preparing reports

An organ builder's report is used to:

- Advise the organ's owner and their advisers
- Get a faculty to do repairs to an organ
- Apply for grant funding

The report should include information about:

1. The instrument

- Builders
- History
- Specification
- Alterations
- Compass
- Pitch
- Type of mechanism
- Casework

2. Its significance (e.g. local, national, or international)

3. Its condition

4. The surrounding environment

5. Any recommendations

6. A cost estimate

7. And good, high resolution photographs (inside and out)

Advice for organ builders on conserving organ cases

There are some organ cases that are more significant than the instrument inside them.

Work to its joinery, carving, decorative metalwork or painted decoration is a specialist job. You should get advice from:

- The diocese
- And a conservator

The church will also need a faculty before starting any work to the case.

Treatments

You can accidentally damage the case by using the wrong material or using it incorrectly. So you should always ask your conservator for advice.

A wide range of approaches are possible for treating an organ case. The conservator may try:

- Restoring the form and finish of the case
- Replacing missing elements
- Refinishing surfaces with varnish, paint or gilding
- Consolidating damaged painted schemes with suitable materials

Removing an existing finish

You may consider removing a finish if it is of no, or negative, significance. But you need to adequately justify your action.

An analysis might reveal if an earlier decorative scheme is underneath. This will require consolidation or infilling.

The relationship of the organ case to its setting will need to be considered, since changes to the one could well have implications for the other.

“An organ is seen more than it is heard. So it is worth taking care over how it looks.”

David Knight, Senior Church Buildings Officer

Advice for closing churches

If your church is closing, you should try and find a future home for your organ before it is removed.

Your diocese will be asked to submit a report about the organ to:

- ~~The Church Commissioners~~
- ~~The Statutory Advisory Committee on Closed and Closing Churches~~

Find out more about ~~furnishings no longer needed for worship~~

Play the organ

Keeping an organ in regular use is good for it and the development of future organists.

Find out if your diocese has an organists training programme or visit your local branch:

- ~~The Royals School of Church Music~~
- ~~Incorporated Association of Organists~~

Also of interest



[Apply for a grant](#)



[Get help conserving your organ](#)

[Understand how to manage your project](#)



Re-ordering projects



The Institute of British Organ Building

[Get more advice or search for grants](#)

Stops

A set of pipes of a similar tone in an organ.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/organs>