

HARRISON & HARRISON LTD

ORGAN BUILDERS

ST JOHN'S ROAD, MEADOWFIELD

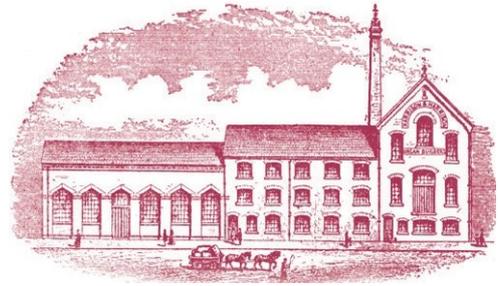
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Advice regarding organs being put out of use during the COVID-19 lockdown

Some clients have asked us whether they should be concerned about organs being placed out of use during the lockdown. With the lockdown having been recently extended and organs not having been used in worship in many cases for a month now, we have decided to offer this information more widely.

It should be read in conjunction with guidance from the relevant authorities on access to places of worship, and in particular in relation to provisions for checks and maintenance. We are aware that many employees have been furloughed, and that creative ways may be required to address any concerns arising. Our intention is to represent issues relevant to different types of instrument so that owners of instruments can make a proportionate response.

Most of our tuners are presently furloughed, though we retain the ability to offer tunings and/or maintenance throughout the UK where necessary. If you need further guidance, please ring our office in Durham.

1. Organ mechanisms remain more reliable when they are used regularly. As a general rule we recommend that an organ is played for at least 15 minutes a week, preferably more frequently, and that all parts of the instrument are used. This applies particularly to organs with complex pneumatic, electric or electro-pneumatic actions.
2. In buildings where relative humidity levels regularly exceed 70%, the organ is likely to suffer the effects of disuse. Organs with mechanical action are those most likely to be affected, though pneumatic mechanisms are also vulnerable. Problems may range from action mechanisms seizing and leather becoming stiff up to the development of surface mould. The use of low-level heating to reduce humidity, as propounded by the National Trust and other such bodies, is recommended in these cases. Regular use of an organ in such an environment will help to maintain its long-term reliability. Switching off all power to a building will put out of use low-level electrical heaters, which are sometimes installed in organs to reduce the effects of high humidity; this may prove detrimental.
3. Use of an organ may help to identify problems that are developing in the fabric of the building. Storm damage or lead theft is often first identified by an organbuilder who is called out to remedy a defect on the organ. Finding a problem with the organ through its use may lead to other issues being discovered.
4. Regular use of an organ may help to discourage the activities of vermin.
5. Some older electronic piston systems which rely on battery back-up to retain the settings may lose their settings or have them scrambled. Deeply discharged batteries may not re-charge. Again, regular use will help to prevent this problem.
6. It would be wise to make use of cloth key covers if available, though tightly-fitting console doors should be left ajar to allow air to circulate.
7. It would be sensible to switch off and unplug CCTV and suchlike equipment in the vicinity of an organ.

8. Where an organ **humidifier** is fitted, there is a risk of excessive build-up of moisture in the wind system if the instrument is not used. This may affect leather and glue bonds, and serious damage has been caused to organs due to this. Playing the organ as in 1. above would lessen the possibility of this, due to the flow of air that would then be encouraged. Outside the heating season, the humidifier will normally switch itself off automatically in accordance with the atmospheric conditions; as an additional precaution it could be switched off manually while the organ is out of use. Humidifiers should be cleaned and sterilised at least once a year to avoid the build-up of bacteria in stagnant water. The effect of a bacteria-laden humidifier in combination with an organ that has been out of use has not, to our knowledge, been studied, but there is the potential for distribution through a wind system and into a building when a long-silent organ is brought back into operation.
9. Modern organ **blowers** should not suffer any detriment when out of use. Older, pre-1960, blower motors in damp conditions, such as a cellar or out-house, may develop insulation problems. If such a motor is not used for a prolonged period then it should be checked by an electrician before use. This requires a high-voltage insulation test at 1000V, which should not result in a reading below 50 megaohms; if a reading below this is obtained then repairs will be required. Using a blower regularly will avoid this issue, as the motor will become warm in use and dispel moisture.

Harrison & Harrison
23 April 2020

These comments are based on our experience of building and maintaining organs for over 150 years but do not pretend to be exhaustive, and others may take a differing view.

Each location where an organ is found may be subject to official advice: for example, the guidance document issued by the Church of England. Our recommendations should be read in conjunction with such guidance – some relevant links are provided in the images below.

