

## MONUMENTS IN SOUND

*By the Rev. Noel Boston, M.A., F.S.A., F.A.M.S.*

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THE attraction of an ancient monument is twofold. First, it is evidence of a culture, a devotion or a prowess of times gone by, and then it whets that delicious sense of inquisitiveness, it poses the puzzle whose solution is restoration mental or material. The antiquary, when he discovers from evidence carefully sifted and put together just what some ancient building really did look like, experiences a satisfaction enjoyed by others in the successful solution, over breakfast, of the *Times* crossword puzzle, or the accurate anticipation of the villain in a detective story. The trouble is, however, that no matter how accurate may be our reconstruction on paper of a mediaeval monastery or castle, few of us can afford to bring our work into material being and, even if such an undertaking were possible or desirable (at least in the case of the castle), we could not put it to the use for which, originally, it was intended. We might, if we were rich enough, restore our castle, but we could not make it work.

Now there is one type of 'ancient monument' which does afford us full scope, not only for restoration but for use: that is, ancient musical instruments. True, the appreciation of this fascinating branch of antiquarianism requires that its devotees combine in themselves some of the qualities both of the antiquary and the musician, but why should such a combination be regarded as more unusual than the combination, say, of architect and antiquary or painter and antiquary?

The antiquary who makes musical instruments his study will pay as much regard to their tone as to their appearance and general condition. It is just here that we have been so remiss in the past. For a good many years now I have been concerned with the recommendation or otherwise of faculties for the repair of churches or the introduction into them of new objects. The cases, shall we say, of eighteenth-century organs are, on the whole, well preserved and appreciated. No church would be allowed to destroy a beautiful case or, indeed, to alter it in such a way as to interfere with its character. But the actual tone of the organ, which is just as much of its period as the case, is, as often as not, left to an organ builder who may revoice and add new stops or replace old ones in such a manner that the organ ceases to be an eighteenth-century organ at all,



Webster's "Village Choir", 1845

and becomes a twentieth-century instrument in an eighteenth-century case. Something precious and irreplaceable will have been lost for ever.

Long before the mechanical accuracy of photographs, careful drawings and paintings have preserved for future generations the appearance of buildings and other monuments which now no longer exist. The recording machine, which is for sound what the camera is for sight, is far too modern an invention to help us. The only way, therefore, to recover the musical sounds our forefathers heard is the preservation of their musical instruments. In this there are, generally speaking, two major problems. Some musical instruments may rightly be called machines: that is, they possess mechanical parts, which inevitably wear out, and then the instrument certainly does not sound as its maker intended it to sound. This is particularly the case with the various keyboard instruments. When this happens, what is needed is that the worn part should be renewed, but that the renewal should be an exact and accurate copy of the original part. In this way the instrument can be brought back to mechanical perfection.

The other problem with these ancient instruments is, of course, the playing of them. The only two ways of finding this out are a general knowledge of the music of the period and an acquaintance with the earliest editions and manuscripts, and assiduous practice on the instrument itself. This latter will soon familiarise the player with the tricks and habits of the instrument. There are few things so fascinating as learning to play some ancient instrument, and once you can make any show of playing you will be very much in demand. Another doubtful advantage is that there is no one to tell you you are not playing in the right way!

Since the study of ancient instruments is not a common one it may be well to say something of the way in which it may be begun. The grand textbook of the subject is surely Canon Galpin's *Old English Instruments of Music*, published by Methuen at 15s. (third edition, 1932). This excellent book will provide a complete reference library on the subject. There is also a sumptuous work by A. J. Hipkins, published by Black, in 1921, entitled *Musical Instruments*. This work deals with specific instruments rather than the subject in general. Another work I have found most useful is the five volumes of the catalogue of the collection of musical instruments in the Conservatoire Royale, Brussels. There are many other books dealing with the history of particular instruments, but to the beginner I most strongly recommend Canon Galpin's book.

The student of architecture or painting rightly regards the visits to great and famous buildings or pictures as of more importance than the reading of books about them. Similarly, the student of old musical instruments will wish to visit the various collections that exist.

My own interest in old instruments began when, as a child, I was shown the small collection that Sir Granville Bantock and Mr. W. Bentley had got together at the Midland Institute, Birmingham. Later, I was taken by Mr. Bentley to an attic at the top of the building which was full of instruments, either too battered or too large to be displayed with the others in a show case. Then there came the day when, in an antique shop at Worcester, I recognized one of these instruments. It was a flageolet by Goulding (fig. 1), and I bought it for a very few shillings. I was still a

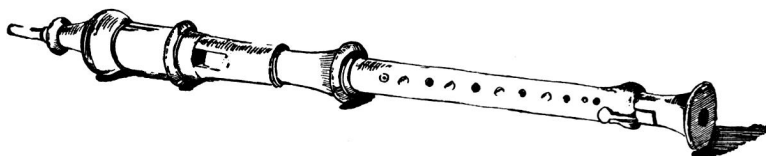


FIG 1

Flageolet, by Goulding & Co. (1799-1811) 16"

schoolboy then, but I can well remember the excitement and the hours I spent teaching myself to play it. I was told not to waste my time but to get on with practising the piano. Waste my time! I might, I suppose, hold an audience at a Sunday School concert with my piano playing, but the number of times I have, so to speak, dined out on my flageolet playing is past remembering, and, incidentally, that flageolet has, over the years, been worth more than its weight in gold in lecture and broadcast fees.

I mention this to illustrate the very elementary principle that, in order to collect, you must be able to recognize what you are looking for. Here an immediate difficulty arises: there are very few collections. Perhaps the biggest collection of wind instruments is the Adam Carse Collection in the Horniman Museum in London Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E.23. Canon Galpin's own collection is now, alas! in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass., U.S.A., but many museums contain some old instruments. The new edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music* contains a list of the more important private collections and Grove may always be consulted at the nearest reference Library. Study and collection will go hand in hand. Nor is it to be supposed that it is an expensive business. I have a collection now of between thirty and forty instruments and have never paid more than five pounds for any instrument. Within the last two years, I purchased at an auction at a very famous old house, a superb late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century piano for thirty shillings, and recently bought seven flutes of the same period at a second-hand shop for fifteen shillings. It is not the price but the finding of the instruments that is the difficulty.

Very soon the student of this branch of history will begin to specialize.

I do not mean to say that he will refuse to add to his collection any instrument of age and interest that may come his way, but he will follow the bent of his inclination and the resultant collection will be mainly of wind instruments, or string, military instruments, instruments of one particular period or country, or those used for one specific type of music. It must be obvious that a very wide choice is open to the student or collector. In writing of woodwind and church instruments I am choosing the particular line of study which I have endeavoured to pursue myself, and of instruments which form the bulk of my own collection. No doubt there are many other types of instruments which make just as fascinating a study.

It is sometimes assumed that, in mediaeval days, church music was unaccompanied. We have evidence of organs even in Saxon days, and the number of organs mentioned in the various inventories early in the sixteenth century puts it beyond doubt that most of the large churches possessed an organ or, as it was put, "a pair of organs". These organs were usually on the screens. A particularly fine specimen of an organ case still exists (though hardly in its original position) at St. Nicholas', Old Radford. The date is about 1520. But an article of this length and purpose is not the place to deal with the vast subject of organ history. What must be stressed is this: that in any old organ, whether sixteenth, seventeenth or eighteenth century, it is not just the case which is of value as a "period piece," but the pipes and general tonal arrangement and "balance" also. This should always be most carefully retained and, if any addition is made, it should be made in such a way that it disturbs neither case nor tonal balance. The old organ must be capable of being played as it was played when first built. Any additional stops should be clearly marked and old keys, whether the "reverse" or not, should not be swept away. Old stops knobs, which are often beautifully inscribed, should also be retained. Eighteenth-century draw stops are usually square, and the actual knob is sometimes completely round, with the name not on the stop but inscribed above it.

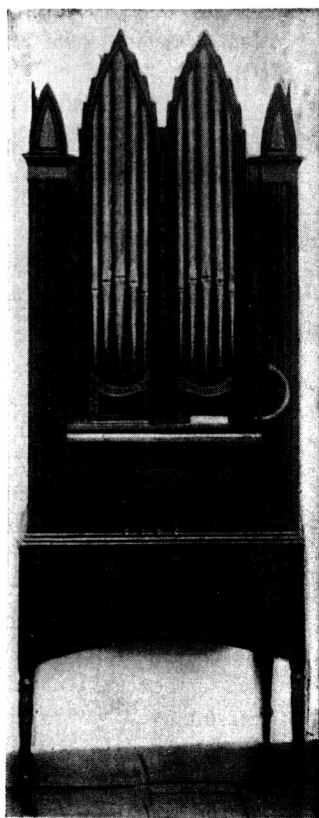
The number of people who could collect organs must be very limited, so that conservation is the thing that matters. Many of my readers may sit on parochial church councils and other bodies which sometimes hold the fate of an organ in their hands.

But there is one kind of organ that is sometimes to be found by the

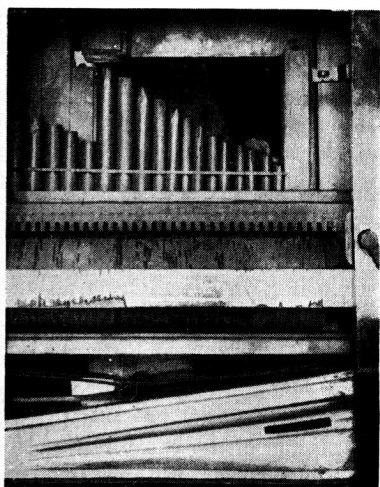
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- (a) Organ by Snetzler (1710-1774) at Sculthorpe, Norfolk.
  - (b) Early 19th century Barrel Organ now in St. Peter's, Hungate, Norwich.
  - (c) 19th century Barrel Organ by Henry J. Prosser.  
(Front view with case open.) 3 ft. 8 ins. by 2 ft. 6 ins.  
This organ was formerly in Aldridge Church, Staffordshire.
  - (d) 19th century Barrel Organ by Henry J. Prosser. (Back view.)



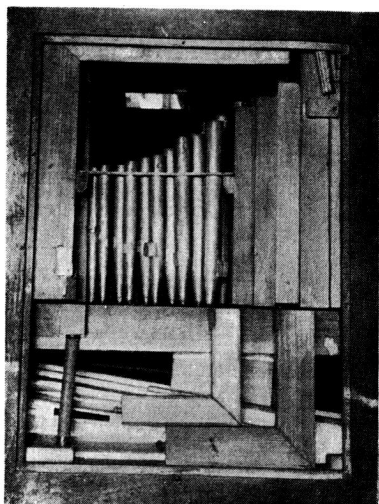
(a)



(b)



(c)





collector and which is both interesting and very much neglected, namely the barrel organ. The very name barrel organ is almost invariably connected with the mechanical piano that used to be hawked about the streets of towns. Like the hurdy-gurdy, it is treated as a joke. Both are usually the subject of abysmal ignorance for the barrel organ is often a beautiful instrument, both to see and to hear. It is simply an organ, usually a small organ and sometimes a minute one, which is played, not by keys, but by the slow turning of a barrel on which are pins that open the valves of the organ and so sound the pipes. The stops must, of course, be operated in the same way as any other organ. Barrel organs have an ancient and honourable history; Queen Elizabeth the First sent one to the Sultan of Turkey, and Bach, Handel and Mozart knew them and even wrote for them. To the musical antiquary they have the double interest in that they are not only ancient instruments sounding just as they sounded when first built, but are unique in the whole field of musical instruments, with the exception of musical boxes and chiming clocks, in that they give us the music of a past age played by that age itself. All the little trills and grace notes, all the particular fashion of the playing of the period are there. No recording machine crystallized for ever the playing of the eighteenth century, but the barrel organ has done that for us. There is always an excitement in playing an old instrument, in making the identical sounds that were made, perhaps, two centuries ago, but then we may not make them in quite the same way. Our playing technique may be different, but the handle of the barrel organ releases not only the old tones but the actual playing of the old craftsman who designed the barrel.

Generally speaking, barrel organs fall into two classes, church and secular. Both may still be found on the market from time to time. The hey-day of the barrel organ was about 1830. In many a church they succeeded the village band (of which more later) and were themselves outmoded by the reed organ. Many fine instruments, however, date from the latter half of the eighteenth century. These instruments range in size from moderately-sized church organs to tiny instruments only a few inches high. The latter are always secular instruments, and I have a little organ which measures only 13 by 11 inches and is 7 inches deep. It was made in the late eighteenth century, and is inscribed "Geo. Godfrey Organ Builder at No. 12 in the Strand, Temple Bar, makes all sorts of finger, barrel and Clock Machine Organs. N.B.—Harpsichords, Spinets made and tuned." This little organ has one barrel but the barrels on all barrel organs can be changed quite easily just as a fresh record can be put on a gramophone. The barrels, however, play anything from six to twelve tunes each, the tune being varied by the sliding of the barrel. The one barrel which remains in this little organ plays eight tunes, among them

being "French King's Min(uet)," "Lady Elizah Burrels Dn," "Le Pulleys Fancy," "The Chamber," "Ranelagh Gardens." Here we are right back in the eighteenth century. Is there any question as to how a dance should be played? The barrel organ answers it.

In my drawing room are four other barrel organs, three built for churches and one other small secular one. They are all interesting instruments, and some are really beautiful. With one exception, none takes more room than an average radiogram, and none as much as a modern piano. Yet here is musical history and, incidentally, a very easy way of entertaining even the most difficult guest. Few can resist turning those handles. A number of these organs remain in various stages of neglect in the galleries of our churches or put away in towers or stored in vicarage attics. They should always be most carefully preserved and, if possible, put into working order. Then there are a number of ordinary organs which also have barrel attachments. Again, these should be preserved with the greatest care. The study of psalm tune and hymn tune music would be greatly enriched if a book could be produced which catalogued all these barrel organ tunes, and it is to be hoped that one day such a book will be written.

So much for organs. We passed from organs to barrel organs because they are really no more than different ways of sounding the same instrument, but, in most village churches, the barrel organ succeeded the village band. Again, the great days of the village band were the first thirty years of the nineteenth century.

No one who is at all familiar with the carvings both in wood and stone in our mediaeval churches and cathedrals can doubt that musical instruments were used in the mediaeval church. Not only is there the famous musicians' gallery at Exeter with the sculptures of musicians and their instruments, but Norfolk alone possesses many hundreds of such carvings on bosses, fonts, hammer beam roofs, the spandrels of screens, etc. Here is another piece of work that cries out to be done. Throughout the country there must be many thousands of thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth century musical instruments depicted in our churches. The photography of them would, indeed, be a formidable task, but the knowledge and information that would result from the comparison which the photographs would make possible would be something of very great value indeed. Very few mediaeval instruments exist, though there was an interesting rumour of a shawm being found in Gloucestershire a year or so ago.

Prior to the late eighteenth century, the village churches, if they did not possess an organ, sang the metrical psalms unaccompanied, and all the rest of the service was spoken. Very often the note was sounded on a



pitch pipe. We read, in the De Coverley Papers, how the singing in Sir Roger's church used to be started off with a pitch pipe. This is just like a small wooden organ pipe. The stopper can be pulled in or pushed out till the desired note is found and the notes are marked on the stopper (fig. 2).



FIG 2  
Pitch Pipe. 18th century

A good many of these pitch pipes still exist, and some churches still possess and even use them.

The prevalence of military bands during the troublous times of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to a keen interest in wind instruments. Most coastal districts had their company of fencibles. About this time the village band began to make its appearance. These bands usually sat in the West gallery of the church. Sometimes they were entirely string, with violins, 'cellos and basses. Sometimes they were

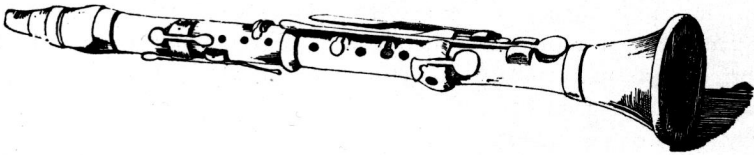


FIG. 3  
Clarinet by Geo. Woods, London (1804-1822) 26"

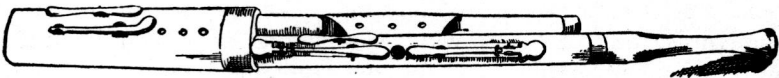


FIG. 4  
Bassoon by G. Astor (1801-1802) 48"

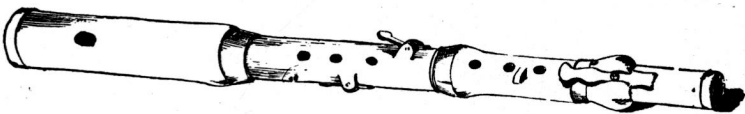


FIG. 5  
Flute by G. Astor & Co. (1801-1802) 24"

entirely wind, the clarinet being the most popular instrument, and very often the bass was supplied by bassoon and serpent. There was no special group of instruments; anyone in the village who played an instrument just took it to church with him on Sunday. Thus all over the country you may find musical instruments left in churches, a bassoon at Montgomery,

an oboe at Efenectdy, a 'cello at Berkswell, a copper 'cello at Briston, etc.

These woodwind instruments are, I confess, my own interest. Sometimes they are to be acquired in a "junk" shop for a very few shillings. Occasionally there is a history attached to them. They were played in this church or that. Usually they are just instruments of a period with no indication as to whether they were used for sacred or secular music or, as most likely, for both. The collection of such instruments is both an inexpensive and fascinating hobby.

The only sure way to date these flutes and clarinets and other instruments is by the maker's name, and students of this subject owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Lindesay Langwill, who has compiled lists of hundreds and hundreds of wind instrument makers, together with the dates in which they worked. A rough and ready method is to look at the keys. The older the instrument the fewer the keys. The eighteenth-century instruments had square-shaped keys. In the nineteenth century these keys had rounded corners, and finally about 1830-40 the round key came in. These instruments were usually made of a yellow wood with ivory bands. The present all but universal black wood came in about the middle of the century.

A charming instrument is the flageolet. It is played on the whistle principle and is the final development of the "recorder." That in the illustration (fig. 1) is the work of Goulding and Co., who practised in London between 1799 and 1811. An even more fascinating instrument is the double flageolet. Here, blown from one mouthpiece, are two pipes,

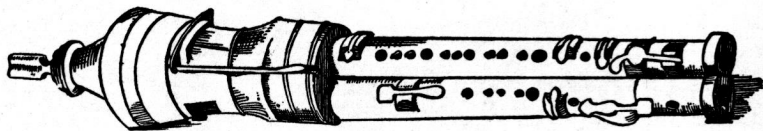


FIG. 6

Double Flageolet by Simpson (1835-1869) 16"

one tuned a third below the other so that the player is able to play simple harmonies. Samuel Pepys, who was a keen flageolet player, mentions a double flageolet by Dumbleby, "a fashion of having two pipes of the same note fastened together, so that I can play on the one and echo it on the other, which is mighty pretty." We do not know much of Pepys' double flageolet, for the instrument as we know it was mainly the work of Bainbridge (1821-33). He had a successor, Hastrick (1838-55), and a pupil, Simpson (1838-69). Flageolets by these makers are always delightful instruments. A certain amount of music was published arranged for these instruments. A charming series of volumes entitled "Philomel" was edited by John Parry for "The Patent double Flageolet."

Another most interesting instrument is the serpent. Invented about 1590 by Canon Guillaume of Auxerre, this instrument is really the bass of the cornet family. It is eight feet long and made of wood covered with leather. It is played with a cup mouth-piece and, owing to its size, a complete range of notes (chromatic) may be obtained by the lips alone, although the accuracy of the notes may be improved by the use of the six holes. Later serpents, like that in fig. 7, have no holes at all but rely on

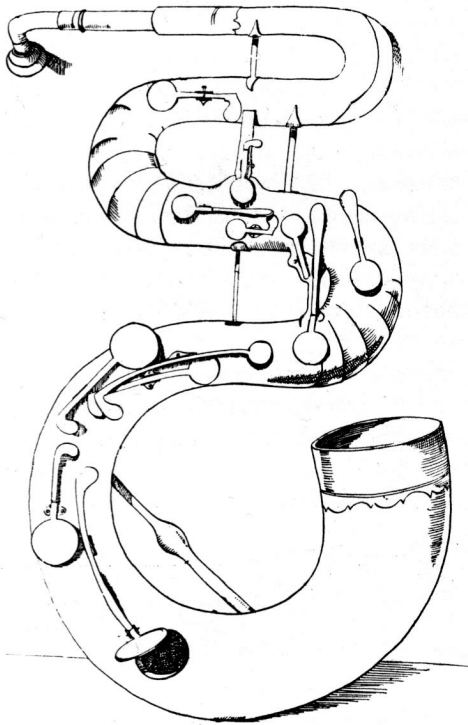


FIG. 7

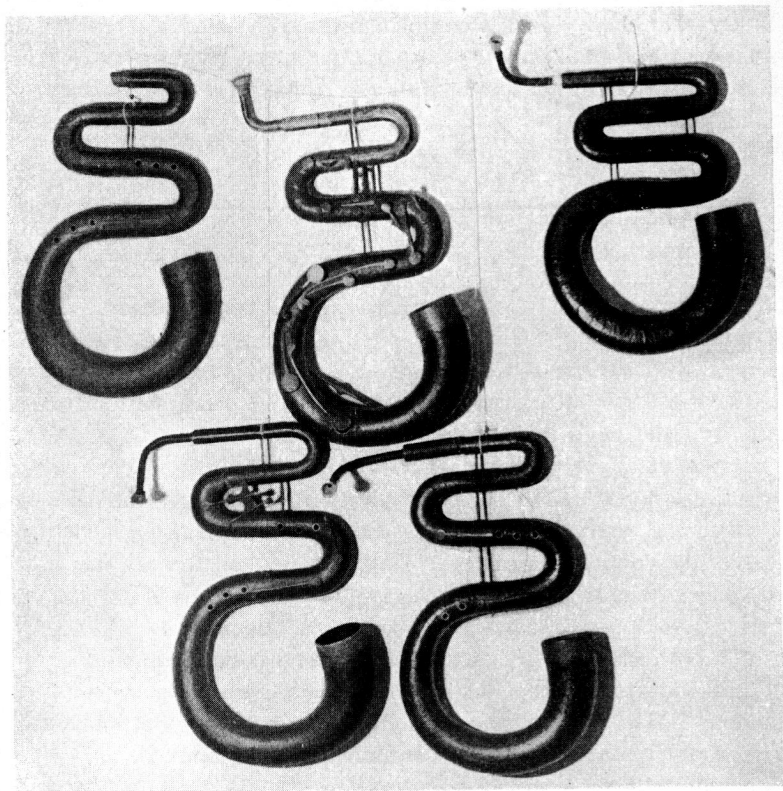
Improved Serpent. T. Key (1820-1821) 28"

keys of the wood wind type for the accuracy of the note. This particular instrument is by T. Key of Charing Cross, who worked between 1800 and 1820. Properly used, the serpent can be a very effective instrument.

The principle of providing the brass wind with keys like the woodwind was also carried into effect on the key bugle and ophicleide, two brass instruments which appeared in the early years of the nineteenth century. Readers of *The Pickwick Papers* may call to mind how, on the fateful journey from Bristol to Birmingham, Mr. Bob Sawyer from the roof of

the post-chaise "performed a great variety of practical jokes . . . the least conspicuous among [these feats] being a most vociferous imitation of a key-bugle."

And so we go on. There is no space to enlarge upon the features of harpsichord and spinet. Both are now extremely rare but what is not so rare and still very beautiful is the square piano. This instrument was



Various Serpents

often made by men who were apprenticed to the building of harpsichords and it has a thin but very poignant tone. It is usually a delight to play, for its touch is as light as the most modern organ. Because the case is often a fine specimen of the furniture of the period, square pianos are not difficult to find. Only too often, however, they have been "murdered" by having their entire "insides" taken out and the instrument turned into a side-board or dressing-table. May I make a plea for the preservation of the "square" wherever it is found? These pianos are usually tuned three

whole tones below the modern piano, but then so are the flageolets. They should never be tuned to modern concert pitch because the extra pressure may do serious damage to the frame.

The study of old instruments is a very large one. It will be obvious that I have only mentioned a few. The collector and student is almost bound to specialize. But if we have a love for the works of the great masters of old there is held out to us a prize such as few branches of antiquity can offer. The voices which first sang "Messiah" are long dead but, if we are assiduous in our search and careful in our restoring, we may yet hear the exact tones in which the great masterpieces were first given to the world. That is the goal of those who seek to preserve monuments in sound.

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### YORK SUMMER SCHOOLS AND COURSES

Since its formation in 1946 the York Civic Trust has performed many services not only for the City of York but in general cultural and academic fields as well. It has aimed at making available to all serious students the two great unique heritages which the City of York possesses, archives, both civil and exxlesiastical, and architecture.

In the past five years its Academic Development Committee has organised a series of annual Summer Schools of Archives and Historical Research and Architectural Study. These Schools attract students from all over the country and indeed many from abroad. Both Schools are run concurrently at St. John's College and the tuition given is maintained at the highest possible level of scholarship and learning.

A more recent activity of the Committee has been the setting up of the first fully residential Courses on Protection and Repair of Historic Buildings. This subject although badly neglected in the past is one of the greatest importance, and these courses make a unique and valuable contribution to the training of architects, surveyors and builders for this type of work. Indeed the courses have the active support of every official and private society or organisation interested in the preservation of ancient buildings.

The Committee has far-reaching plans for the future development of the Summer Schools and Courses, and judging by the response to and interest shown in the Committee's various activities over the past five years a sound future seems assured. Anybody interested in the work of the Civic Trust and its Committee should write for information to The Secretary, St. Anthony's Hall, York.

August, 1953.

*William A. Singleton.*