

What is a Tracker Organ?

A tracker organ can be played in a manner that more closely approximates the sounding of the human voice. There will be soft and hard sounds, like a person singing.

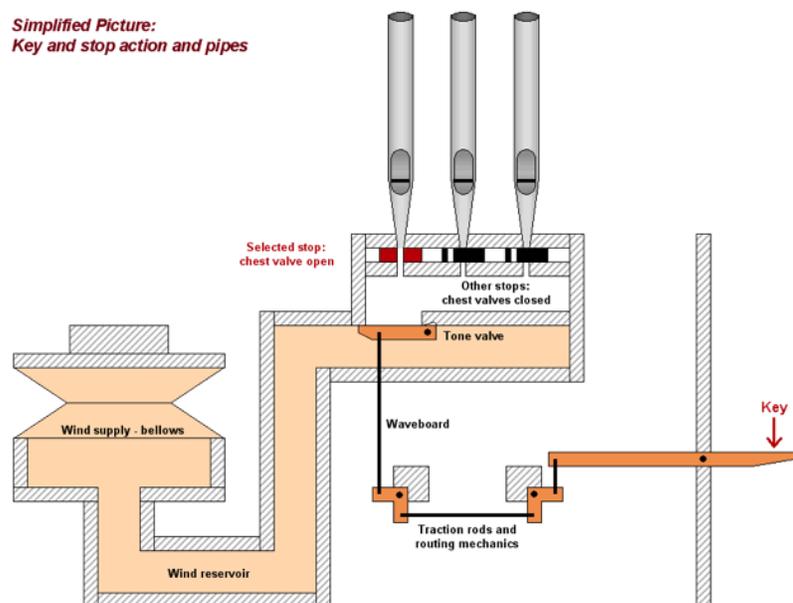
The organ St. Andrew's currently uses is an 'electro-pneumatic' organ. The keyboard—where the organist sits—is connected to the pipes by bundles of wire. When the organist presses a key, an electric signal traverses the wire and opens a solenoid valve, allowing the pipe to sound. Organs made in the electro-pneumatic manner are designed to be replaced every 30-35 years, as the circuitry and the valves wear out. At St. Andrew's we have been obliged to replace our organ on this schedule, requiring the congregation to mount a replacement campaign every few decades.

Tracker Organs

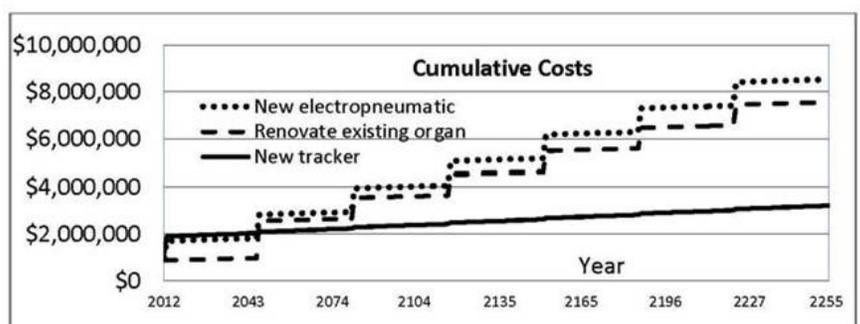
Tracker organs - sometimes called manual organs - are built to last for centuries. There are no electronic components (except the blower, which is powered by an electric motor). Nothing about the instrument is designed to be replaced.

In tracker organs the pipes are housed in the same case with the keyboard. The connection between them is physical, not electronic: the pressing of a key opens a small channel at the bottom of the pipe, allowing the air to enter from the wind chest and the pipe to sound.

*Simplified Picture:
Key and stop action and pipes*



The tracker organ makes sense for St. Andrew's for at least two reasons. The first consideration is financial. While the purchase cost of a new tracker organ is somewhat higher than the cost of a new electro-pneumatic instrument, the tracker organ will far outlast the electro-pneumatic organ, which will have to be replaced on a regular schedule. Over the course of decades the cost to the parish of a tracker organ will be much lower than the cost of continuing to replace our electronic organs on a regular basis.



The second reason for a tracker organ is musical. In the electro-pneumatic organ the connection between organist and solenoid valve is either on or off. Electrical action organs do not respond to the organist's touch: whether the touch is fast or slow, the response of the electrical circuit is instantaneous. In the tracker organ, by contrast, an organist physically opens the valve at the base of the pipe; the way in which the key is struck in turn shapes the sound that the pipe produces. A tracker organ will give better support to congregational singing, making it feel as though our voices are being multiplied by the organ's sound.