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The Mutin Cavaillé-Coll

Ten

Anniversaries

Ralph Vaughan Williams

his attitude to
organs & organists,
and William Cole

A new organ
for Jesus College
Cambridge

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Editor
Professor David Baker
Editor Emeritus
Dr Brian Hick
see page 64 for full contact details

Contributors

Saxon Aldred
David Baker
Andrew Benson-Wilson
Christopher Berry
David Butterworth
John Collins
David Hart
Andrew Hayden
Brian Hick
Chris Kearl
Frances Presley
Jonathan Kendon
Johan Norrback
Roger Rayner
Jane Rogers
Graham Mark Scott
Kenneth Shenton
Caroline Snell
Christopher Smith
Kathryn Taylor

Advertising

Display Advertising contact
Gordon Roland-Adams
Cabbell Publishing Ltd
Tel: 0208 971 8451
Fax: 0208 971 8480
Email: gordon@cabbell.co.uk

Design and Production

Yellowduck Design Ltd
Tel: 01424 422105
yellowduck@btclick.com

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Shirley Hawke 01424 855544
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The New Organ of Jesus College Cambridge

David Butterworth

Cambridge has long been held as something of a Mecca in the organ world, with its high concentration of college chapels, and long established and thriving musical traditions. Well managed finances, the not infrequent visitations of generous benefactors and the entrepreneurial skills of successive generations of directors of music and organ scholars, have all played their part in creating a veritable kaleidoscope of instruments reflecting the various tastes and needs of their respective times. For many years, the scene was relatively 'settled' and clearly dominated by a number of fine organs, large and small, built by Harrisons in a style admirable of its (Romantic) type but increasingly regarded, in the light of modern research and travel, as less than satisfying. Even so magisterial an instrument as the King's organ has been continually 'tweaked' over the years since it took more or less its present form in 1933.

Notwithstanding bold efforts on the part of some of our native builders to break out of this mould, the empirical 'breakthrough' into a lighter, livelier, more musical scenario came in 1965, actually at Oxford, with the installation at James Dalton's behest of the new two manual Frobenius at The Queen's College. This stunningly beautiful instrument, equally good to look at, to play and to listen to, came as a revelation to many of us, and to this day sets a standard to which others aspire with difficulty. Six years later, Clare College, Cambridge installed England's first von Beckerath organ of almost identical dimensions and specification. Though perhaps now perceived as a little bland and less refined than the Frobenius, it is nevertheless a thoroughly good organ and was a bold and timely 'wake-up call' for the 'other place', undoubtedly helping to pave the way for further projects involving several first class continental builders. At the same time, Noel Mander was doing good work in Cambridge, interpreting all that was best of past native traditions in his creation of modern instruments at Corpus Christi, Pembroke and Peterhouse.

At Jesus College, the little four manual Harrison of 1927 – actually the 1847 Bishop organ intact, coupled to a miniature 4+4+2 Harrison lurking behind it - had been giving sterling service as an accomp-





animental instrument, but, certainly by the mid 1960s, was widely acknowledged as incapable of doing justice to most of the organ repertoire, not to mention any attempts on the part of the player to make sense out of the exhaust pneumatic touch! Thanks to the untiring efforts of the then Bursar, Dr Derek Taunt (later revealed as having been one of the Bletchley Park masterminds), serious consideration was now able to be given to involving Flentrop in a brand new scheme. This would ideally have revisited the glorious west end position in the ante-chapel, occupied up until 1927 by an enormous four manual Norman & Beard, at the same time retaining the faithfully restored Bishop – or alternatively even retaining the Harrison ‘as was’ for the role it fulfilled best, as an accompanimental instrument to the Chapel’s flourishing choral tradition. Another proposal – in retrospect perhaps little more than an entertaining diversion – was put forward by Professor Thurston Dart, at that time University Professor of Music and Director of Studies at Jesus College, in conjunction with Sam Clutton. This was to retain the Harrison/ Bishop hybrid structurally and mechanically, but to ‘convert’ it into the University’s – indeed the country’s – first French neo Baroque organ, complete with exhaust pneumatics. This wonderfully bizarre scheme could only have been contrived by two such brilliant minds as these, but of course it took no account whatever of the Chapel’s accompanimental requirements, and was firmly rejected by the organ scholar and others.

With a subsequent change of organ scholar, the proposal for a west end instrument of uncompromising integrity was also shelved, along with the opportunity to employ Flentrop, who had already declined to build a two manual instrument in the other possible position – the empty bay adjacent to the existing organ. Thus it was that, ultimately, Noel Mander was chosen to build, in 1968, a three manual mechanical action instrument of considerable size in that restricted space over the choir. This was a fearsome challenge and

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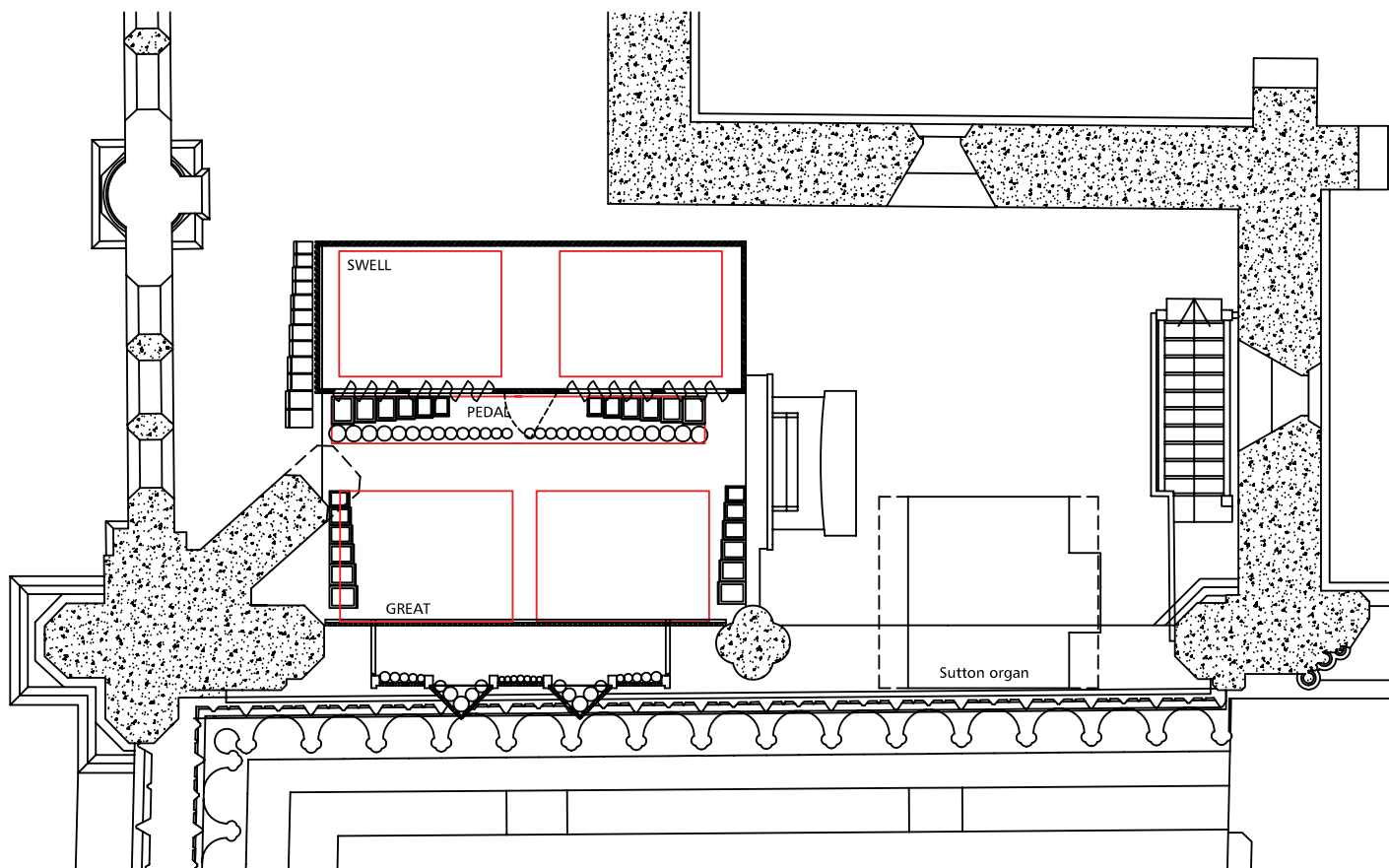
must be said to have represented something of a triumph of ingenuity on the part of one of our foremost British builders. But, given the appalling strictures presented by the site, and the consequent effect of these upon the internal layout, it was doomed inevitably to a life of only partial success and of ongoing

nagging dissatisfaction, and this notwithstanding its many intrinsic merits (hopefully soon to be enjoyed in its new location at Truro School). Furthermore, though, the appearance of its façade in that very special architectural setting was controversial, not just because of its idiosyncratic design, but also because it was so obviously

only a front, with no supporting casework beyond.

With an unbroken succession of top rank (and subsequently high profile) organ scholars and, ultimately, the major upgrading of the Chapel music with an additional choir and a full time Director of Music (in the first place Timothy Byram-Wigfield, now at St George’s Chapel, Windsor Castle, and subsequently Daniel Hyde), serious action on the organ front could no longer be delayed. Initial approaches were made to two British firms, working with a basis of old Hill pipe work from the Portsmouth area and probably involving electric action, but these did not progress. However, the appearance of a potential donor at around the same time provided the requisite focus – and finances – for a completely fresh approach. Daniel’s agenda necessarily embraced in equal measure the desire for a first class teaching and practice instrument (as might have been achieved with the Flentrop scheme), along with a flexible and stylistically appropriate accompanimental medium with a good range of Romantic subtlety (as achieved in some measure by the little 1927 Harrison) for the Chapel’s ever more flourishing, and very diverse, choral tradition. That it might add yet a further dimension to an already rich and varied Cambridge organ scene would also not be inappropriate.

Far from the tortuous paths of committees, sub-committees and compromises with which many of us are all too ►



Cambridge Jesus College
Horizontal section

familiar, this project bears all the hallmarks of a singular, focussed, mind. With his considerable experience of continental instruments, not least through the several tours he undertook abroad as Organ Scholar of King's College, it was clear to Daniel virtually from the start that the answer – or at any rate an answer – lay with Orgelbau Kuhn. This is a firm – now headed by Dieter Utz – that stands alongside the greatest. Their organs are musical instruments par excellence; they are superbly crafted; the customer service is second to none. But, of particular relevance here, is that through all the manifestations of the Orgelbewegung and reactions to this and that, they have never truly let go of that Romantic understanding which must have been the taken-for-granted norm by the time they were well established in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This is beginning to sound like compromise! Actually not; for here is an organ which, at 33 stops – from the hands of master voicer Rudolf Aebischer – will truly do almost anything with considerable con-

viction. The flue work does not chuff excessively but it is nevertheless clear and precise, and the Principal choruses are well balanced. The speech of the basses is particularly fine. All the flutes are exquisite, and the Swell mutations very flexible and always convincing in whatever context they are employed, so that altogether the organ offers more than adequate resources for virtually all music of the Baroque era. In Romantic accompanimental and solo work alike, the organ is quite at home. The five 8' flues on the Swell, for example, make an exceptionally friendly team, being able to be mixed every which way to produce an almost limitless palette of colours. As the foundation tone is built up through the Great, a further luxuriant choice of 8' tone embracing the Principal, a fine Gamba and the two contrasted flutes, ensures that a warm authenticity prevails. Indeed, on one recent occasion in my experience, I could easily have been fooled into thinking I was listening to the old Harrison!

So much for the chameleon-like character

Plan showing respective positions of Kuhn and Bishop/Sutton organs. The 1927 Harrison work was neatly situated behind the Sutton, the two pedal ranks flanking the wall area currently occupied by the (original) staircase; this in turn had been sited more or less in the space between the present Swell and Great c# side soundboards.

of this musical instrument. The question remains – or certainly was – as to how it has all been fitted into that 'impossible' space. This is where Kuhn's engineering flair has really come into its own. Crucially, the console is situated in the side of the instrument. By no means a new concept here! The console of the Bishop organ was in the East side of the Pugin case; this, commendably, was left intact (albeit disconnected) in 1927 when Harrison applied their console to the west side of the same. The Mander console was to the front, a quite understandable

Specification

GREAT

Bourdon	18 pipes wood	16
Open Diapason		8
Harmonic Flute		8
Stopped Diapason	12 wood	8
Gamba		8
Principal		4
Flute (open metal)		4
Quinte		2 ² / ₃
Fifteenth		2
Mixture	19.22.26.29	IV
breaking on a#s		
Trumpet harmonic	trebles	8
from f' 8		
Tremulant		

SWELL

Geigen Diapason		8
Lieblich Gedackt	12 pipes wood	8
Salicional		8
Celeste	TC	8
Dolce		8
Principal		4
Chimney Flute		4
Nazard		2 ² / ₃
Octave		2
Tierce		1 ³ / ₅
Plein Jeu	15.19.22.26	IV
breaking on f#s		
Trumpet harmonic	trebles from f'	8
Oboe		8
Tremulant		

PEDAL

Violone	12 pipes wood	16
Subbass	wood	16
Lieblich Bourdon	(tr. Gt.)	16
Principal		8
Gamba	(tr. Gt.)	8
Stopped Diapason	(tr. Gt.)	8
Octave		4
Posaune		16
Trumpet	(tr. Gt.)	8

COUPLERS AND PISTONS

Swell to Great
Swell Sub Octave to Great
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Swell Octave to Pedal
8 general pistons (199 channels)
8 each to Great, Swell, Pedal (99 channels)
Ventus 1.5 H.P. blower; 2 external regulators

WIND PRESSURES

Great	80 mm
Swell	90 mm
Pedal	80 and 90 mm

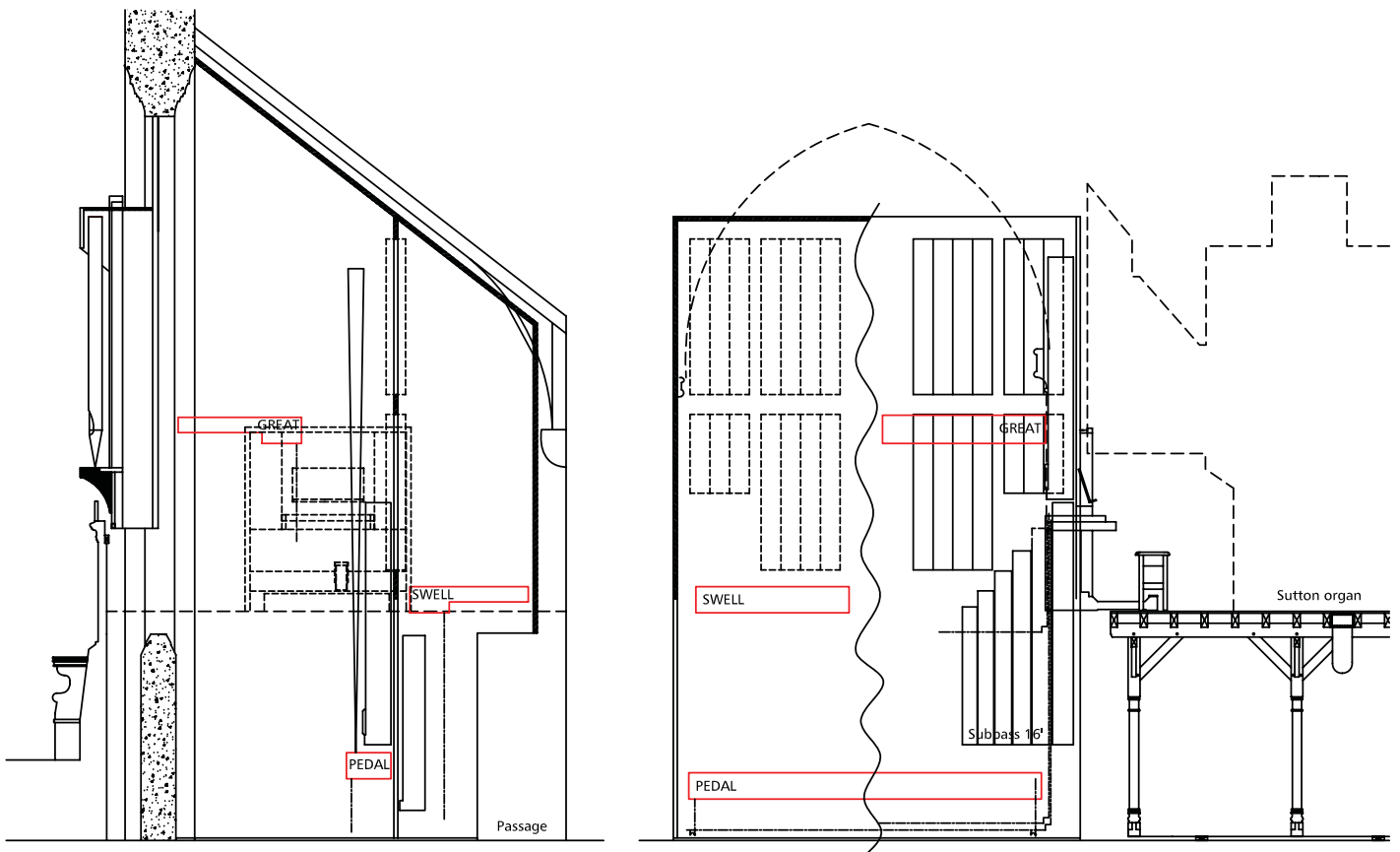
Pictured top: Racking in some manual pipework - Matthias Fuchs

Pictured bottom: Pre-voicing a Salicional pipe - Rudolf Aebischer (head voicer)

decision in 1968 when direct contact was correctly deemed all important. With a revolution since that time in accepted, day to day, CCTV technology, an East side console position has once again been adopted, freeing up invaluable space not only for the full-faced and very clever asymmetric façade, but also for a very good action layout with room for the relatively space-hungry pipe work that this kind of scheme requires. The manual soundboards are, incidentally, facing into the Chapel in a quite orthodox manner, so the 90° action runs – not unreminiscent of the Nicholson screen organ in Southwell Minster – must deserve especial praise for their lightness and sensitivity. As a result of all this careful design work, it has been possible for the whole organ, bar understandably a few Violone basses, to be fitted into a proper case all around, with a sloping top, seamlessly melding into the Swell box, faithfully maximizing what little space is permitted by the steeply angled vestry roof.

The console itself, an unashamedly ▶





Cambridge Jesus College

Lateral and frontal sections

modern state-of-the-art affair with all mod cons, is set surprisingly far back from the gallery edge. CCTV is all but essential, although there is no hearing problem. Indeed, with the façade well clear of the player, there is perfectly satisfactory aural contact with the choir below. For solo playing, practice and so forth, the sound might seem a little remote; but if immediacy is the order of the day, then it is instantly restored simply by opening one of the case doors above the console! Finally, though by no means unimportantly, mention must be made of the new prospect which is very much an integral part of the whole. The obvious and burning issue was how to handle the juxtaposition with its beautiful Pugin neighbour. The in-house answer, specifically that created by Claude Lardon, was to complement, not to imitate; and he has achieved this by a kind of almost cheeky asymmetry which says 'I know you're there, but I still need to do my own thing!' I am sure it will not be without its critics; but I doubt whether it could be bettered.

How does this new organ fit in with the existing Cambridge organ scene? At this moment in time, I would say that it heads it. Essays by Metzler, Frobenius, Carsten Lund, Goetze & Gwynn, Orgues Létourneau and not least by another Swiss organ builder, La Manufacture d'Orgues Saint-Martin SA, all have much to say, and each speaks its own language quite beautifully. The Jesus organ, with its multi-faceted talents, goes just that step further without falling into a pit of compromise. All is superbly crafted, the mechanical key action is a delight, the voicing is of the highest order yielding a finished tone which is powerful and bright, yet warmly 'solid' – just about everything one could ask for in an instrument of 33 registers costing a little under £500,000. To quote Daniel Hyde, 'there's a lot more organ in there than one might think at first glance on paper'.

I do not doubt that a handful of other builders could have met this severe challenge with equal brilliance. But there was to be only one bite at this cherry of an

No space wasted here. The 'Pedal' soundboard houses the three 16' stops, others being on the Great/Pedal common soundboard. The old gallery seen to the right used to extend across the left bay now occupied by the Kuhn, flanked by the staircase behind and the fellows' stalls to the front.

opportunity. Daniel Hyde has maximized his accumulated knowledge and astute judgement to provide the College with a triumph over adversity. He and the College and their generous benefactor James Hudleston are to be congratulated on this magnificent addition to the cultural life of the City and University of Cambridge. ■