



# A WORK OF BEAUTY

## St Mary's RC Cathedral, Newcastle, Part 2

Paul Hale

My first article about the organ history of St Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle, outlined the story of the "lost Lewis" and finished by describing the Nigel Church organ of 1981, now happily removed to St Mary and St Joseph's Catholic church, Poplar (London). Although by 1981 the Pugin heritage at St Mary's was largely forgotten and a modern "werkprinzip" organ case was chosen, by 2005 Pugin's work at the Cathedral was once again very much in the ascendant and the Nigel Church/Roger Pulham case was seen to fit uneasily with the plans for redecoration. The organ in any case had proved to be in the wrong place.

When the Cathedral authorities realised that a more comprehensive organ was needed, a Working Party was formed, which proposed a *Statement of Need*, drawn up by

Brian Varley, who in many ways was the driving force behind getting the organ project up and running. As the *Statement of Need* contains material which might be of use to others in a similar situation, extracts are worth reproducing:

### *St Mary's: the opportunity*

- Thanks to a generous benefactor, St Mary's has a unique opportunity nationally to install a brand-new organ of first-class quality and scope. This is a moment to be seized.

### *The new organ: initial definition of requirements*

- Provide robust support for congregational singing, with or without choir;
- Accompany the choir [which will also be situated in the new west gallery];

- Provide liturgical organ music: both grand sounds for ceremonial occasions and quiet, reflective music for meditation and devotions;
- Serve as the region's leading instrument for organ teaching and practice;
- Create a new venue of note for recitals and concerts.

### **Characteristics of the new organ**

- Direct mechanical action, for longevity and fine musical control;
- Capable of giving a good account of all major schools of organ music;
- Good for accompaniment with a wide variety of soft stops, a full complement of registration aids and sited so that the organist can readily interact with choir and congregation;

## St Mary's RC Cathedral, Newcastle

### GREAT

Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Harmonic Flute	8
Cone Gamba	8
Principal	4
Spitz Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Cornet III	12.15.17 2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Full Mixture IV	15.19.22.26 2
Sharp Mixture III	26.29.33 2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Trumpet	8
Chamade	8
Tremulant	

### SWELL

Open Diapason	8
Chimney Flute	8
Viola da Gamba	8
Voix Céleste	8
Principal	4
Traverse Flute	4
Flageolet	2
Mixture III	19.22.26.29 1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Contra Fagotto	16
Trumpet	8
Hautboy	8
Vox Humana	8
Clarion	4
Tremulant	

### CHOIR

Gedackt	8
Salicional	8
Principal	4
Chimney Flute	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Octave	2
Recorder	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Mixture III	22.26.29 1
Cromorne	8
Tremulant	

### PEDAL

Contra Bass (wood)	16
Open Diapason (metal)	16
Sub Bass	16
Octave	8
Flute	8
Choral Bass	4
Mixture IV	19.22.26.29 2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Bombarde	16
Fagott (wood)	16
Trumpet	8

### COUPLERS & ACCESSORIES

Swell to Great, Choir to Great, Swell to Choir, Swell to Pedal, Great to Pedal, Choir to Pedal, Great and Pedal combinations coupled, Generals on Swell toe pistons.

Usual complement of pistons with multiple memories and a Stepper and Sequencer.

Manuals C-c 61 notes (bone and ebony)  
Pedalboard C-f 30 (oak, maple and ebony)

- Located to speak right along the centre-line of the nave so as to project a direct, enveloping, full, clear and warm sound;
- Located as high up as possible so that the sound projects over the congregation's heads and is only minimally absorbed by their clothing.

In 2008 six organ-builders each recommended a west gallery position in their varied proposals; the present writer was appointed Consultant and began to help the Working Party and the Diocesan Trustees develop a way forward. Eventually a scheme by Kenneth Tickell & Company was warmly accepted by all parties. The final casework design took many months of work to achieve authorisation from the Diocesan Trustees, who were naturally concerned that the tracery of the west window would still be visible from the nave floor, and that it should still help to illuminate the west end of the building. Other areas of development were the size of the gallery, space for the Cathedral choir, the carved pipe shades and the Pugin-inspired colour scheme. Kenneth Tickell writes:

*For my initial design I proposed a free-standing main organ case in a gothic style, with a complementary chaire case on the gallery front. The resulting small footprint of the main case would allow the maximum floor area for choir seating, with most of the pipework placed above the singers' heads. By placing the larger pipes of the Pedal organ in towers at either side it would be possible to see the upper tracery of the west window through the centre of the organ. This design had loose connections with the medieval case at Amiens (one of the organs drawn by Pugin), which stands in an immensely tall building. In contrast St Mary's, Newcastle, is not especially tall, and the mostly-fixed dimensions of gallery height, organ impost and Great pipework left only limited scope for the treatment of*

*the centre part of the organ case. Accordingly the Swell organ and 16' open wooden Contra Bass pipes were to be placed behind the main case. It was to be a compact and disciplined layout. After a revised design was submitted, aimed at revealing more of the window tracery, I was further encouraged to lower the centre of the case even more. The reduction in height required some changes to the specification of the Great, and became as low as sensibly possible. The dramatic sweep of the case flats and angled pipe mouths of this design has some redolence with the 17th-century Dallam cases in Brittany, such as at Quimper and St Pol-de-Leon. After the casework and gallery were approved, Keith German prepared a series of lovely drawings for the pipe shades, all based on flowers having Marian symbolism. The cases would be made of oak with the panels painted a deep red with blue surrounds, and finished with gilded chamfers and stencilled stars. A final touch was the decision to employ Latin texts, gilded around the edge of the gallery.*

The tonal make-up of the organ follows the principles established by the Working Party right from the start. It has Diapason/Principal choruses on all three manuals and Pedal, a Pedal stop-list which for counterpoint renders it independent of the manuals, chorus reeds and strings on three divisions, a rich selection of independent mutations and a mounted Cornet, a horizontal solo trumpet, harmonic flutes on Great and Swell, a complete Full Swell ensemble and many traditional romantic Swell voices, with the luxury of two 16ft Pedal reeds.

Canon James Lancelot, Organist and Master of the Choristers at Durham Cathedral, who gave the inaugural recital on 16 March, assesses the organ's tonal qualities thus:

**Right:** detail which illustrates pipeshades, embossed pipe, chamade pipes and case colours  
All imagery for this article  
© Kenneth Tickell

The building of a brand-new cathedral organ, while certainly not unique in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain, is nonetheless an outstandingly noteworthy event. Admiration (and personal thanks) must be extended to the Dean, the Reverend Peter Leighton, to Brian Varley as facilitator, and to Paul Hale as consultant.

First impressions are excellent. The new gallery and the organ situated on it look both stylistically sympathetic and beautifully crafted. Importantly, the organ makes a visual statement about beauty and proportion before it is even heard.

What of the sounds? I feel immensely privileged to have been asked to give the opening recital, and it has been my pleasure to start to get to know the instrument, both from the console and from a seat in the congregation for the opening Service of Blessing, at which Paul Hale preached eloquently and Dr Magnus Williamson gave a fine improvisation in his inimitable and enviable style.

I started with the Great Open Diapason, and was not disappointed. Noble yet singing in character, it is generously scaled, and makes its presence known in even the loudest tuttis. The slightly smaller Principal and the Fifteenth (slightly smaller still) sit happily upon it, and the chorus is crowned by a Full Mixture which adds texture and grandeur and a Sharp Mixture which adds brilliance and sparkle; the Sharp Mixture can happily be used without the Full Mixture to give a brighter chorus. I personally miss a separate Twelfth rank, which if sympathetically voiced can be useful in a variety of ways.

The Great is commendably rich in 8' colour; the Cone Gamba will prove a useful stop in supplying smaller open-metal



tone, and the Stopped Diapason is charming. Together, they sit comfortably under the Principal, though additional chorus stops without further 8' tone tend to top-heaviness. The Harmonic Flute is well done; large enough to be an effective solo stop, it works well in chorus where a really rounded texture is required. The Spitz Flute, while I found it perhaps a little bland, works well with either the Stopped Diapason or the Harmonic Flute; the Bourdon on the other hand lends real gravitas, and can also act an octave higher as a stronger substitute for the Stopped Diapason. The Cornet is excellent in mid-range and remains powerful to the top of the compass. Reed tone is

provided firstly by the single 8' Trumpet, a versatile stop which seems at home both in the grand jeu and in the principal chorus. But the climax of this division – and of the organ – is the Chamade, deafening at the console but actually effective downstairs to complete the scheme. It is of necessity placed on the Great; in an ideal world it might have boasted its own fourth manual, but one cannot have everything!

The Pedal section is predictable on paper and probably so in reality. The open wood Contra Bass (at the back of the organ) is small enough to be used flexibly but sufficiently strong to underpin the flue tutti in the absence of a 32' stop (an absence

one slightly regrets in a building of this size, indeed, though height constraints probably rule it out); its presence is necessary and it works well. The principals, too, are effective. The fact that the Octave is smaller in scale than the Great Open Diapason is at once a plus and a minus; given that the full Great chorus really demands the drawing of the Open, it is not easy to balance the Pedal independently without drawing a reed. At the same time, pedal 16' 8' (and 4') works well with a variety of combinations on the different manuals. The Bombarde and Trumpet are designed to be forceful, with French influences; the full organ needs them, though they

will have to be drawn with caution in anything other than a fortissimo. The Fagott gives a smaller option, though in the Bach works which I played I opted to couple a Swell reed or two down to the pedal instead; the result seemed to gain in comfort and coherence.

The Choir is in a chaire case well behind the player; the distance is noticeable (the gallery seats a choir of some size) and its position not only helps to focus the sound of the instrument downstairs but is also often necessary in terms of the need for volume. The chorus is built on an attractive Gedackt and on a Salicional which is a delight, and which will be extremely

useful; in fact I find the chorus a little top-heavy when built on the flute alone. The Principal and Octave, both slightly smaller than their equivalents on the Great, do their work well, and the Mixture sparkles with life without becoming shrill. The Cromorne is boldly voiced and does just what one expects of it, combining well with either the 8' flute or the attractive 4'. The Nazard, Recorder and Tierce likewise fulfil their respective roles; the Cornet décomposé is effective, though I found myself regretting the absence of a narrower Sesquialtera, and wondering whether the Nazard and Tierce should have been placed in a somewhat modified Swell.

## My "Damascene" moment

Stephen Tharp



One of my greatest joys is the commissioning of new music for the organ, which I feel is vital for the instrument's future. This stems from a specific event that happened to me when I was 13 years old which, ironically, did not include the organ at all.

I had been studying Aaron Copland's thorny 1923 *Piano Variations* with my teacher in Chicago – responsible for both my organ and piano training – when he informed me that I had an opportunity to meet Copland and, following the composer's lecture, play the work for him. So, at Chicago's Roosevelt

University, I sat next to Copland at a beautiful Steinway piano and performed for him his *Piano Variations*. I remember much of his commentary yet little of my overwhelming nervousness at the time, but what stuck is the electricity that inspired me like a bolt of lightning and changed me permanently. To interact directly with the creator of a piece of art spawned a passion for working with living composers that stays with me to this day, having since my studies commissioned works from composers such as Thierry Escaich, Jean Guillou, Philip Moore and many others.

Stephen Tharp, named the 2011 International Performer of the Year by the New York City chapter of the American Guild of Organists, is one of North America's most prolific concert organists. His nearly 1,400 recitals worldwide span five continents, amplified by 14 commercial recordings, including those from St Sulpice, Paris, and St Bavo, Haarlem, on the JAV label and the award-winning Complete Works of Jeanne Demessieux from Aeolus Recordings. He has also taught extensively, giving masterclasses for the Hochschule für Musik, Stuttgart; The Eastman School of Music; the Juilliard School and Yale University. His website is [www.stephentharp.com](http://www.stephentharp.com).



As it is, the Swell is composed very much on the traditional romantic English model, the stop-list being typical. Placed behind the Great, its flues sound somewhat distant downstairs; its greater depth enables richer sonorities to be produced by manual coupling (for example the two Open Diapasons coupled together work well, that on the Swell adding an extra dimension), but perhaps diminishes the tone of the full organ (partly made up for by the forceful Swell reeds). The Principal chorus, with a relatively bright but mild Mixture, will be useful in accompaniment; it is more muted than either of the two other manual choruses. The Flageolet is voiced as a small Fifteenth, working well in this context. The Vox Humana is both useful and attractive, working well with or without the Tremulant. And the Hautboy works well both in chorus and as a solo stop – necessarily so, as it will find itself busy as the soft solo reed of choice. The Traverse Flute is quite assertive, more than a match for the

Chimney Flute, and lending colour to larger ensembles (something that is equally true of the 4' Harmonic Flute in the Swell at Durham Cathedral). The two strings are mild, very much in the English tradition; they disappear into nothingness happily, but do not make their presence felt in anything other than a piano context. Personally I would have preferred something warmer and richer, able to permeate through combinations involving more than one manual. Apart from the chorus reeds, which (again French in character) announce themselves in no uncertain terms, this division will have no difficulty in accompanying the romantic English choral repertoire. The Swell box is comfortable to operate and gives adequate differentiation of volume.

The console is well laid out and likewise comfortable to play; there are no surprises, though I wish it were possible to disconnect the stepper, whose advance buttons lie between the Great to Pedal and Great 1 pistons (similarly on

the other manuals); to have a piston which could well cause mayhem during (for instance) the playing of a hymn so close at hand with no means of escape seems to threaten trouble. The action is good on individual manuals and manageable with two manuals coupled; all three manuals coupled rapidly becomes demanding, and I would not wish to venture on the final page of *Transports de joie* with both Swell and Choir to Great drawn [this has now been adjusted by staggering the couplers].

As an expression of vision for the Cathedral's ministry and a statement of the importance it attaches to music, beauty and quality in its worship, the instrument is eloquent, as is the story of its genesis and the courage and patience of those who have brought it about, to whom future generations will find themselves rightly indebted. Do come to Newcastle and judge for yourselves!

James's words so fully describe the instrument that there is little more that need be said. As the project's consultant I might be allowed just

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a few words on the concept behind this new Tickell. This organ was conceived as a richly colourful instrument, which beguiles and delights listeners rather than shouting at them. The Swell's low, rear position – dictated by the plungingly depressed centre of the case – suggested that it should indeed (as James has said) be a fully romantic division and not attempt to match the Great or Choir, stop for stop. In an acoustically dry building we considered it important to conjure up "atmosphere" where we could, which finds its expression in the refined voicing of the Swell and in the gentle strings and beautiful flutes on the Great and Choir. The Swell might well have received a Sesquialtera (a

favourite stop of both Ken Tickell and me) to give the player the "narrow-scale" Germanic option James misses, but in the event we considered a Cavaillé-Coll pattern "Voix humaine" to be closer to the Catholic ethos of the Cathedral. The Swell is also the workhorse department for accompanying the Cathedral choir, whose members share the gallery with the organ; another reason for refinement and a degree of restraint in its flue chorus/fonds output.

The organ is as generously scaled as the tight space permitted. It is voiced boldly and fully; the wooden roof of the nave prevents better tonal projection, but the pipes are speaking at their full capacity – any louder and the

tone would be spoiled. The organ needs to be played with the (very forward) "chaire" Choir coupled to make the maximum impact for accompanying a large congregation. This in my view is a good thing: a multi-rank richness of Principal choruses/*plein jeu*, as in the great west end organs of North Germany, the Netherlands, and indeed of pre Cavaillé-Coll France, is less wearing and far more beautiful than the hectoring of chorus reeds.

Finally I can but echo James' last sentence and encourage readers to visit St Mary's Cathedral, with its gloriously 're-Puginised' appearance. The journey will be richly rewarded, in both sight and sound.



**Paul Hale is Cathedral Organist at Southwell and a professional organ consultant.**

Whilst Organ Scholar of New College, Oxford (1971–4), Paul Hale began to write about the organ – his first published piece was in *Organists' Review*, of which he was later to become Reviews Editor and then Editor (1990–2005). A noted recitalist, lecturer and choir trainer, Paul is well-known in the UK, in Europe and in the USA. As well as being an Organ Adviser for the Dioceses of Southwell and Lincoln, Paul is an accredited member of the AIOA and has designed many new and restored organs throughout the UK. He is a diploma examiner for the RCO, Chairman of the RSCM in his area, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM for his contribution to church music. More information is available at [www.PaulHale.org](http://www.PaulHale.org)

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