

# All the colours of the rainbow

Paul Hale

This article celebrates the re-emergence of full glorious colour in British organ cases, three new examples of which have been completed in recent months.

A 'pipe-rack' case was good enough for Father Willis and for many of his contemporaries – even in his grand cathedral organs at Salisbury, Wells, Carlisle and Durham. Indeed until recent years, paucity of case design remained a depressing feature of British organs despite the not inconsiderable influence over the decades of the Scotts, the Suttons, Pugin, Bodley, Comper, Dykes-Bower and other wonderful designers. However, today's leading organ craftsmen simply will not build an organ without designing a decent case, or at least a façade. This trend was led for many years by the imaginative Peter Collins and Kenneth Jones, and more recently by Kenneth Tickell and by the designers at Mander

Organs, Nicholson Organs and Harrison & Harrison. Other companies have employed, and continue to employ, case-designers, among whom the undoubted giant was David Graebe who worked with J.W. Walker on numerous stunning examples such as Lancing College Chapel and St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham. Smaller companies come and go but they too aim always to produce a properly encased organ (in varying styles); one thinks of Grant, Degens & Bradbeer, Roger Pulham (with his Silbermann influences) and, of course, Nigel Church. Other modest-sized firms making fine cases include Goetze & Gwynn, Lammermuir, William Drake, and a handful of craftsmen who make exquisite 'box' organs for continuo use.

A study of these cases reveals the most common materials to be oak (finished in various degrees of

darkness/lightness) with tin front pipes. Occasionally one sees a designer daring to introduce colour, from Frank Bradbeer and George Pace with their painted chipboard at New College Oxford in 1969, to bolder splashes in the 1980s and 90s by David Graebe. But it is only recently that colour has really started to come into its own as it must have done in those halcyon pre-Commonwealth days when churches and organs were a glorious riot of colour. It is almost as if the jewel-like 1999 organ case in the Houses of Parliament Crypt chapel (worked up by John Bucknall from concepts by Pugin/Sutton and built with John Norman's advice by William Drake) has given other organ builders the confidence to use colour boldly and lavishly. Three such organs, built in recent months with painted casework, form the subject of this article.

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Long view of the new organ at St John the Evangelist, Carrington

The organ in St John the Evangelist, Carrington (Nottingham), has recently been rebuilt by Henry Groves (also of Nottingham) in a new west gallery; at St Andrew's, Old Headington (Oxford), Kenneth Tickell has built a new divided case instrument at the west end; and at St Peter's, Cranbourne (Berkshire), Peter Collins has built a colourful new instrument into the north side of the chancel. Let's take a closer look.

Carrington church has long been famed for its Anglo-catholic liturgy, its fine acoustic and its exciting little Roger Yates organ (rebuilt Wood of Huddersfield in 1991). The decision to build a large new west gallery allowed the organ to be removed from its cramped chamber and entirely reconstructed standing proudly in the middle of the gallery. But what to do for a case? Funds for the project were limited, so the idea was conceived that as the church has plain cream walls, the organ case should provide a splash of colour. A glance at the accompanying photograph will show a simple gothic-inspired shape which goes well with the "Commissioners' gothic" of the building. The colours used on the case are taken up in various features at the east end, also.

The layout of the organ is clever, using a swell-box in the lower half of the organ to support the casework and upper structure. The upper level contains the

Great at the front with the Pedal behind. The Open Wood stands on the gallery floor behind the swell box.

The Roger Yates pipework (high tin content) and soundboards have been used, along with his smart rosewood and ivory console. The structure, wind system, blower, transmission and several stops are new. Groves carried out all the work including making the case. In the ringing acoustic the instrument sounds like a cathedral organ in miniature and it looks unusual and attractively tabernacle-like. The stoplist can be found below (there is a little extension and borrowing, and, unusually, a Great Octave coupler).

At the west end of St Andrew's, Old Headington, near Oxford, stands an even more colourful organ, though not on a gallery as the fine west window needed to be seen. Kenneth Tickell built it in 2008/9. He writes with illuminating detail:



Close-up of case

*'The parish wished to consider a new organ, in conjunction with uncovering and restoring the west window. A mechanical action organ was envisaged disposed on either side of the window; there would be a connecting platform between the two cases to enable the trackers to pass to the various divisions, and allow wind trunks etc. to pass to either side. I suggested that a low, terraced console should be built, with the organist facing east. The console would be positioned between the two cases, and this would free the floor space in front of the organ. The church choir sings from the west end, and part of the project was to consider the provision of new choir stalls.'*

*The two new oak cases precisely frame the restored window, and the colours of the glass continue into the stained and coloured carvings of the organ, together*

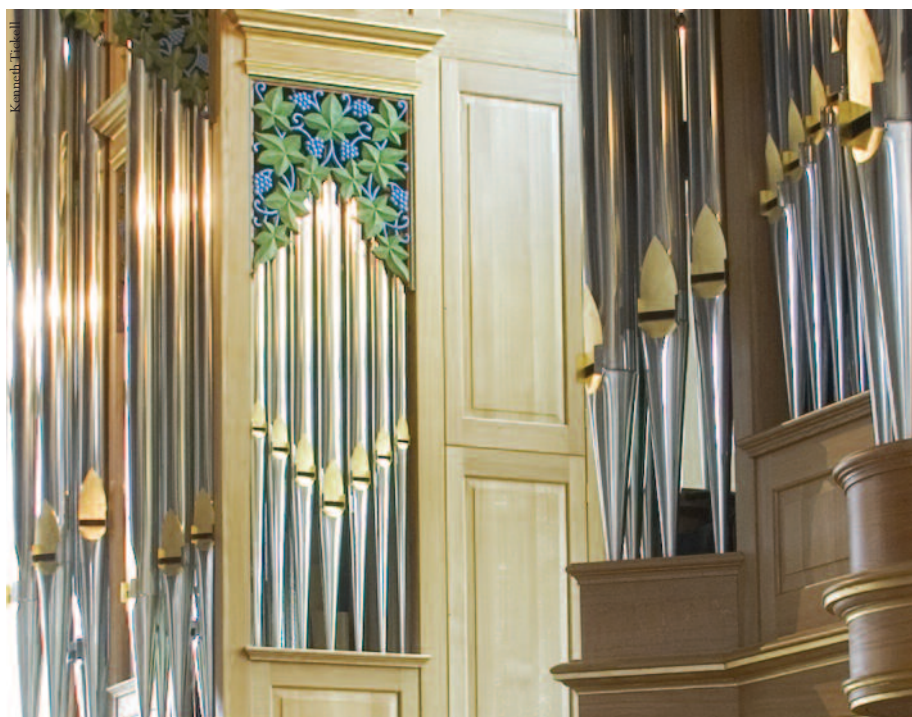
### Carrington specification

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		PEDAL ORGAN	
Violone	16	Geigen	8	Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason	8	Bourdon	8	Violone	16
Claribel Flute	8	Salicional	8	Sub Bass	16
Viola	8	Vox Angelica (T.C.)	8	Quint	10 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Octave	4	Principal	4	Principal	8
Fifteenth	2	Flûte Ouverte	4	Flute	8
Mixture 19.22.26	III	Octavin	2	Fifteenth	4
Posaune	8	Cornet 12.17	II	Octave Flute	4
Oboe (Swell)	8	Mixture 15.19.22	III	Posaune	16
Tremolo		Bassoon	16	Bassoon (Swell)	16
		Trompette	8		
		Oboe	8		
		Tremolo			





The beautifully crafted new case at Old Headington



A close-up of the carving and pipes

### Old Headington specification

GREAT ORGAN	
Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Gamba	8
Principal	4
Spitzflute	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Fifteenth	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
Trumpet	8
Tremulant	
SWELL ORGAN	
Gedackt	8
Viola	8
Voix Celeste	8
Principal	4
Chimney Flute	4
Gemshorn	2
Sesquialtera 12.17	II
Mixture 22.26.29	III
Cremona	16
Hautboy	8
Tremulant	
PEDAL ORGAN	
Sub Bass	16
Principal	8
Flute	8
Octave	4
Trombone	16

with gilding which has been applied to the front pipe mouths and lines of the impost and cornice mouldings. The greens, blues, red and gold also complement the colourful woodwork of the church roof.

The south side case is devoted to the Pedal organ. The manual divisions are housed in the north case. The Great is at impost level; the Swell is at ground level, its shutters immediately behind the fretted grilles (which were designed for us by John Brennan, and carved by Keith German). The grilles are made of maple, for strength as they are at person height, and are fretted with a little under and over carving of the entwined vine stems. The pipeshades in the upper parts of the cases are fully carved with more detail, and are of Limewood. The green colour is a transparent wood stain, not paint, which allows the grain of the timber to show through.

The clever stop-list can be seen above. What an inspiration it now must be for the congregation to be accompanied by an organ with such visual and aural colour. The stop-list proclaims that the music of all schools can be played reasonably authentically; note the wide-scale mutations on the Great and the narrower-



scale Sesquialtera on the Swell. At a stroke, German, French and English repertoire can be played with little compromise. The Swell reeds are clever: lack of height might preclude a full-length 16ft reed or even 8ft Trumpet; a bold Hautboy is a semi-trumpet and the 16ft cylindrical reed acts as both the basis of 'full Swell' and also, played an octave higher, as the organ's Clarinet/Cromorne register. A worthy example of the '*multum in parvo*' appellation – always the mark of a clever organbuilder/designer.

The most visually colourful organ of the three is the 2008/9 Peter Collins instrument in St Peter's Church, Cranbourne, near Windsor. With the church's little c.1870 Father Willis destroyed in a devastating fire, it took some years for the building to be restored and the Collins organ to be installed. Its tonal scheme is nearly as colourful as the Headington Tickell (see below). The case is stunning – dominated by a feast of decorated front pipes. The ochre colour of the stop-jambs picks up the same colour used on many of the pipes and thus imaginatively ties in the console with the case design.

So – are we back to the 'rolls of linoleum' so derided by those who abhorred Victorian painted pipes, or are we at the dawn of a new era of vibrant, inspiring organs which delight the eye as much as the ear? Well, at the same time as colour is regularly appearing in new organ cases, there is a growing awareness of the need to conserve and restore older painted cases and front-pipes, even standard Victorian 'pipe-racks'. Interestingly some of the impetus for this has come from Australia, where the front pipes of many Victorian organs imported from the UK have been re-stencilled by skilled restorers such as Marc Nobel, to great acclaim. This is such a change from thirty years ago, when the beautifully-decorated case pipes of the Willis organ at Wells cathedral were painted pipe-metal grey to go with the otherwise fine new Alan Rome case. One hopes no such thing would occur today. Such pipes should be conserved and treasured, which is happening at this very moment to the sumptuous front pipes of the Thomas Casson organ at Thorpe Malsor (Northants), which will feature in a future *Something Old, Something New*.



*The glorious case at St Peter's Church, Cranbourne*

### Cranbourne specification

GREAT ORGAN		SWELL ORGAN		PEDAL ORGAN	
Open Diapason	8	Rohr Gedackt	8	Bourdon	16
Stopped Diapason	8	Salicional	8	Principal	8
Principal	4	Voix Celeste	8	Bass Flute	8
Chimney Flute	4	Gemshorn	4	Octave	4
Fifteenth	2	Octave	2	Trombone	16
Sesquialtera 12.17	II	Mixture 22.26.29	III-IV	Trumpet	8
Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV	Bassoon	16		
Trumpet	8	Shawm	8		
Tremulant					