

Beckenham's new baby

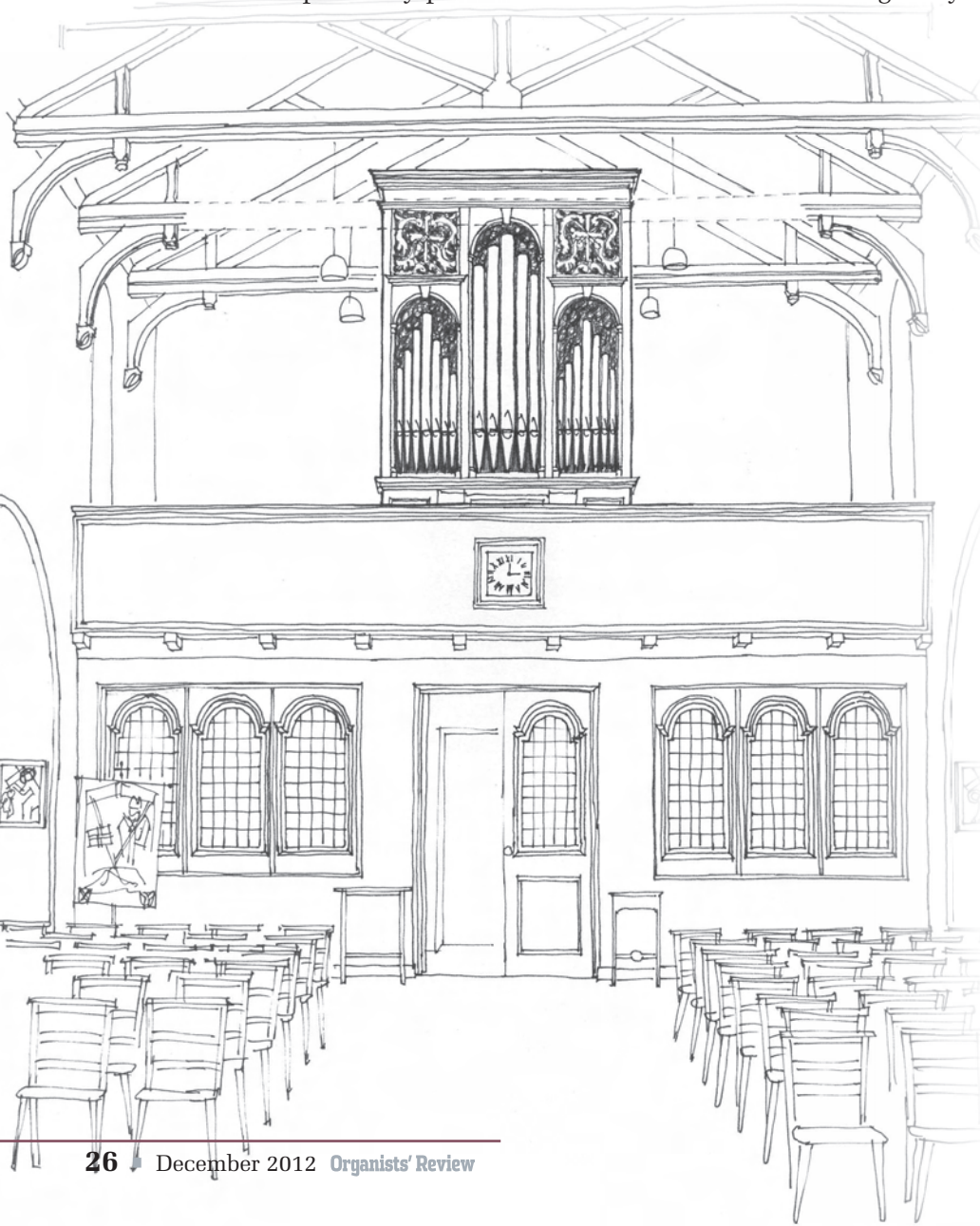
Paul Hale

The first church of St Michael and All Angels in suburban Beckenham, in the Diocese of Rochester, was designed by A.H. Hoole (www.archiseek.com). It was built in 1905 and was unfortunately destroyed in 1944. The replacement building, constructed in 1956, is a more modest affair, built to a similarly modest budget. It included an inexpensively-priced

pipe organ too: around 1960 Osmond of Taunton installed a small nineteenth-century organ by Bishop & Son at the east end of the church to accompany the choir. In 1978 Ralph Arnold moved this organ to a west end gallery and in 1982 further work was carried out by Martin Cross. The stop list was Great 8.8.8.4.4.2, Swell 8.8.8.4.2, Pedal 16. It was a singularly

utilitarian organ of no great virtue.

Showing commendable determination and imagination, the church elected to replace this instrument with something far more visually and musically inspiring – a new instrument, fully cased, by Mander Organs. This organ, now complete, has been donated by the church organist, Alan Burtonshaw, who had seen and heard the new Mander organ at St Giles' Cripplegate and decided that an organ of similar size and specification would be suitable for St Michael and All Angels. The stop-list is below. Mander Organs made virtually all elements of this organ – including the case. The drawstop action is mechanical and the tremulant is (as always with Mander) of the Dom Bédos variety. There is traditional reservoir



St Michael & All Angels, Beckenham, specification

GREAT

Open Diapason	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Principal	4
Fifteenth	2
Fourniture 19.22.26.29	IV
Trumpet	8

SWELL

Gedackt	8
Principal	4
Chimney Flute	4
Recorder	2
Sesquialtera 12.17	II
Oboe	8
Tremulant	

PEDAL

Bourdon	16
Principal (Great)	8
Trumpet (Great)	8

Swell to Great }
Swell to Pedal } by pedal
Great to Pedal }

Left: Preliminary sketch

Right: Organ under construction
in the workshop

winding and all wind trunking is of wood. The Pedal is free-standing behind the organ as is the large single-rise bellows. The case is made of stained ash. The carving, inspired by the theme of St Michael, is of lime-wood, and was executed by Mander craftsman, Michael Köllmann. The front pipes are 75% tin, the flutes mainly 35%, and the principal chorus stops are of 56% spotted metal. The organ is conetuned to Kellner's temperament.

The layout of this organ is clever and worthy of study. Over the page are a side and a front elevation kindly supplied by John Mander. John explained to me the background to the project and some of the design decisions:

"Although the specification is identical on paper to the new St Giles' Cripplegate organ, the scaling is different and some stops, such as the Oboe 8, are of different construction. The casework design is completely different, of course. The gallery on which the organ is placed is of an ideal size, but for the presence of the roof beams. In order to keep the height of the case to a minimum, I proposed an Italianate design, which also reflects elements of the design



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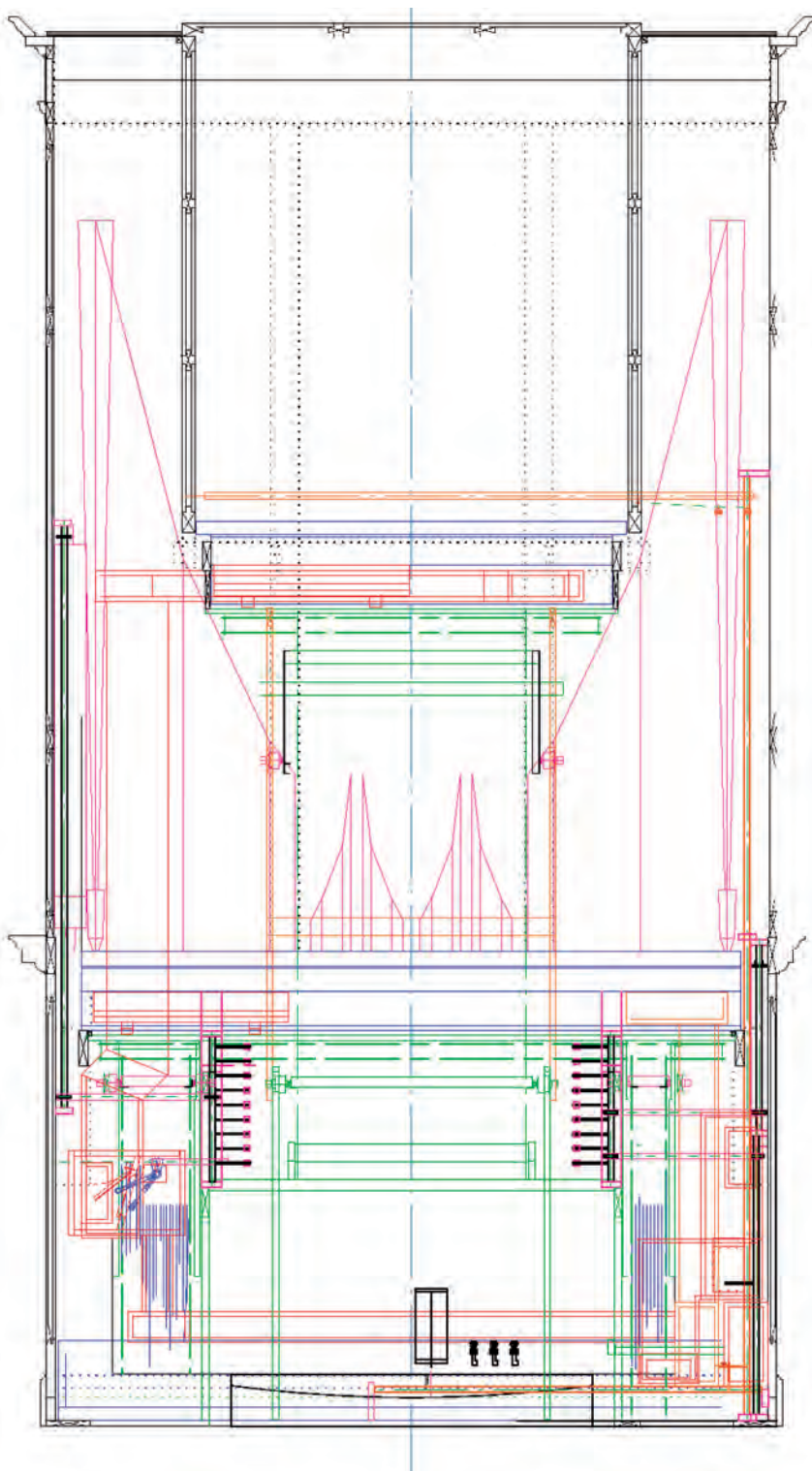
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of the west end of this post-war church.

The church itself is of medium size with a decent acoustic. Occasionally the church is full, so the organ had to be voiced to fill the church well when it is, but not be overpowering for more modest congregations; not an unusual requirement, of

course. The organ thus has a remarkable dynamic range. The modest Swell, with a particularly effective box, acts as a perfectly respectable secondary chorus, the Sesquialtera working well as a mixture [as well as in its normal solo capacity].

I think it is important, wherever possible, to have a vertical

disposition for the manual departments. A Swell Organ placed behind a Great Organ always loses some of its clarity and impact, and the lack of proper panelling behind the Great Organ in such an arrangement also mitigates the effectiveness of the Great. This desirable vertical disposition has been achieved here with the Swell Organ placed above the Great Organ. The Pedal Bourdon is free standing behind the organ, as are the bellows and blower.

In the interests of long-term reliability and life, it was decided to make the organ entirely mechanical, key as well as drawstop action. Two stops on the Great Organ, the Open Diapason 8 and Trumpet 8, are borrowed mechanically to the Pedal Organ to enhance flexibility. When used on the Pedal as a Principal 8, the bass of this stop is slightly more profound than when used as an Open Diapason on the Great.

The organ is tuned to Kellner's temperament. After many years of experimenting with equal and unequal temperaments, we have come to the conclusion that Kellner's temperament (which employs five tempered and seven pure fifths) certainly has a claim to be the most flexible of means of tuning, allowing the performance of that repertoire which does not require an unequal temperament, whilst enhancing that which does benefit."

Beckenham resident Dr William McVicker, who played the organ during and after its tonal finishing, comments:

Left: Front elevation

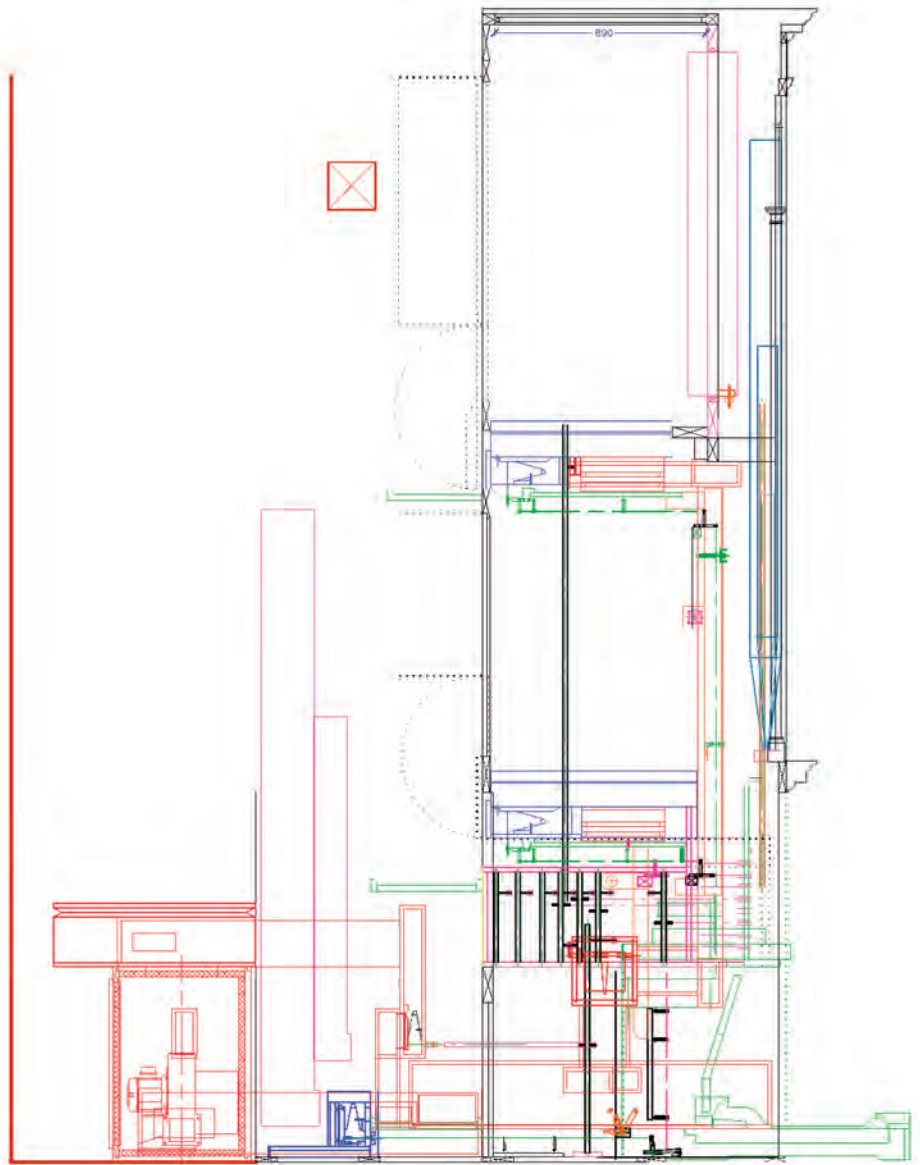
Right top: Side elevation

Right bottom: John Mander, Aidan Nutter, Michael Köllmann (works manager) discussing details of the console chassis construction.

"This is a beautiful new instrument – a veritable peach of an organ. Because it is small, the selection of stops (in a way) works itself out. The focus is on providing two choruses, rather than, say, providing a selection of registers which inches towards an orgue de chœur scheme. There is no choir to worry about here; this is an organ in a commanding west gallery position, which needs to lead a congregation.

The flutes are charming and sweet-toned. The Swell flutes and perky chorus contrasts well with the Great diapason chorus; the balances are well thought-out so that there is no real discrepancy in volume levels between the two manual choruses – partly because the Swell is located above rather than behind the Great. The Open Diapason is a lovely stop, not overstated, but possessing a bright singing tone which is delightful as a solo register as well as being able to support the full organ. Such intricate balances are a real challenge for an organ builder, but the result here is excellent.

The dynamic range is interesting. The effective Swell box takes the Gedackt right down in volume, whilst the power in the organ comes from the Great Mixture IV and the Trumpet. The latter is well contrasted with the Swell Oboe, and is strong without being strident; it is a bright, free-toned Trumpet, which is well blended into the full organ but easily capable of carrying a solo line. Both reed stops have character without being overstated – and this is true for each of the registers. The advantage of the organ's position is a salutary reminder that egress of sound is really important. It allows the pipework to sing without being forced and so the stops can develop their character without needing to be driven. This character and charm is perhaps the most attractive



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feature of the instrument and consequently makes it a pleasure both to hear and play.

Some smaller instruments can occasionally have a key action which is uncomfortably light; this is not the case here – the weight of key-touch is just perfect. Those who have not seen Mander's recent work

would do well to visit the Beckenham organ or that in St Giles' Cripplegate. Both of these instruments look and sound good; making the Diapason and Trumpet available on the Pedal Organ is a touch of genius, giving an attractive economic flexibility. As I heard a BBC Radio 3 continuity announcer

say recently 'what's not to like?'"

I am grateful for John's insight and William's enthusiasm, and (space being tight) can add only "why not go and hear it for yourselves?"



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