The organs in Ottobeuren Basilica

Paul Hale

In this column I usually write about recent British organs; however, I hope readers will be happily translated with me on this occasion to Bavaria, for as every organ enthusiast knows, some of the most spectacularly beautiful organs ever conceived are to be found in the great Rococco churches southwest of Munich.

It was my great privilege in August to give a recital on two of the organs in one of the most renowned of these churches – Ottobeuren Abbey, now a Basilica and still with a resident monastic community (unlike Weingarten). Returning home utterly inspired, I would like to share some reflections on these organs and a selection of photographs showing aspects of the instruments which have not often been published in the UK. The organs in question are indeed "something old, something new". The 4-manual Riepp "Holy Trinity" organ dates from 1754–66 (it took 11 years to construct) whereas the 5-manual organ in the west gallery was built by Steinmeyer in 1957 and rebuilt by Klais in 2001–2. Here is their story.

The "Holy Trinity" organ on the south (Epistle) side of the chancel in the abbey church of Ottobeuren, near Memmingen, south-west of Munich, is the masterpiece of organbuilder Karl Joseph Riepp (1710–75), German by birth but awarded French citizenship as a reward for his remarkable skills and his embracing of the French school of organ design and building. Together with its partner on the north (Gospel) side of the chancel (the smaller "Holy Spirit" organ) these two instruments are among the most treasured historic organs in Europe. Although a small instrument was placed in the west gallery, it was not until 1957 that G.F. Steinmeyer & Co. built an organ worthy of its position (though caseless), which has recently been renovated and augmented by Johannes Klais, making 100 stops available on five manuals.

The 1,000th anniversary of the founding of the Abbey, at the head of the picturesque village of Ottobeuren, was celebrated in 1764. In the new church, the construction of which began in 1737, stalls for the large monastic community were installed in the chancel in 1755, and organs were planned to complement them visually as well as serve the monks musically. These two organs, facing each other on each side of the chancel, form an extension of the monastic stalls and were designed by cabinetmaker Martin Hoermannn and the sculptor Joseph Christian. The "Holy Spirit" organ was to have been completed by 1762, as Riepp told famed organ-builder J. Andreas Silbermann, in a letter dated 10th March 1763. In the event the stalls and decoration of the church were completed only in 1764 and the "Holy Spirit" organ just before the commemoration service, on 26th September 1766.

After Riepp's death in 1775, Johann Holzhey became responsible for the maintenance of the organ until he died at Ottobeuren in 1809. Holzhey had trained with Riepp and probably absorbed his style, building some 40 organs. In 1787 he executed an important renovation that included raising the pitch, doubtless because the pitch of these French-style organs was more than a tone below that usually found in central Germany's organs. The "Holy Trinity" organ was renovated by Joseph Bohl (from Augsburg) in 1862. At that time, the instrument

still had Riepp's 25-note pedalboard *à la française*; Bohl replaced the French-style pedal "stubs" with a German-style pedalboard. He also fitted a horizontal bellows to replace the old cuneiform bellows. In 1914, the large Bavarian organ-building company G.F. Steinmeyer & Co. carried out a conservative but thorough restoration of the "Holy Trinity" organ, and in 1922 of the "Holy Spirit" organ also. In 1979 a restoration of the action of the "Holy Trinity" organ was executed by Gerhard Schmid (of nearby Kaufbeuren, the inventor of "Schmid rings" used as slider-seals by many organbuilders today), who was in charge of maintaining the Abbey's instruments.

Over a period of time, the Abbey church created its own culture and its own musical tradition around these two chancel organs built by Riepp; they are considered to be perfect examples adapted to the 18th-century South-German catholic world. For these organs, Riepp chose rather narrow pipe-scales due to the very generous acoustics in the church, but owing to the sharpening of the pitch, the pipework has been shortened by more than a tone. Although one might therefore assert that Riepp's organs do not sound as Riepp voiced them, the tone is singularly beautiful and yet bold. The "Holy Spirit" organ incidentally, has three manuals with 27 registers, and has not been restored.

The Holy Trinity organ

The Trinity organ houses all but the large *Positiv* in its main case, a remarkable structure with sinuously curved façades to the north, east and west. This case is arched over a space allowing those in the south gallery to walk through its midst; in this space the player sits, the console being mounted behind the section of the case which looks across the chancel. The *Positiv* pipes are divided between the two smaller cases – the basses being the more westerly case and the trebles in the other. Despite the unique and spatially-contorted layout of the instrument, the touch is a delight to play, being crisp, responsive and even. This is achieved in part by Riepp using small pallets, designed in the French manner so that either the *Plein Jeu* (Principal chorus) can be drawn in full, or the *Grand Jeu* (reeds and cornets), but not both together as the pallets and bars contain insufficient wind. The keys of the upper two manuals are short and demand of the player a harpsichord-like precision with curved fingers. The only coupler is a "shove" coupler between the *Positiv* (bottom manual) and the *Hauptwerk* (manual II). The pedalboard is a tricky thing to manage as the keys are wide and the compass short. The overall impression left after playing the instrument is of exhilaration and – frankly – joy. Every stop is exquisite, the flutes beautiful, the principal chorus bright yet majestic, the reeds colourful and remarkably varied. In the vast central crossing of the abbey, the Holy Trinity organ makes an impact comparable to the larger and bolder west end gallery organ, to which we will now turn.

The West Gallery organ

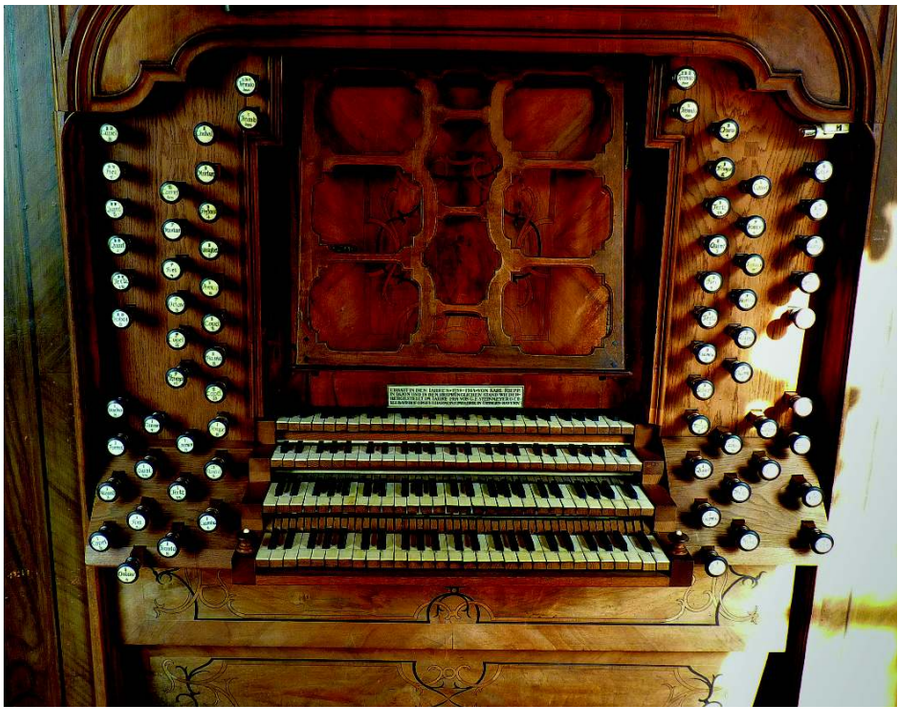
Owing to a shortage of funds the gallery organ, as planned by Riepp, was not built. In 1795, Johann Nepomuk Holzhey (1749–1809) built a small positive organ for the gallery; this instrument is now in Babenhausen. Riepp prepared a scheme for the gallery organ and later Dom Bédos de Celles prepared another one – for a 70-stop instrument. In 1952 when funds became available thanks to post-war cultural support of the German Association of Industry, G.F. Steinmeyer & Co. built a new organ, named the "Marienorgel" ("St Mary's organ"). The organ is divided into a main organ (without organ case) located centrally on the rear gallery and two separated divisions in swell boxes partially masked by 8ft front pipes, located on balconies forward of the left and right sides of the gallery.

The construction of this organ came at a turning point in the organ-building history in South Germany.

"Holy Trinity" specification

I POSITIV (C^1–d^{51})	
Princip (treble)	16
Flauta	8
Copel	8
Octav	4
Flet	4
Gamb	4
Nazard	3
Quart	2
Tertz	1⅓
Quint	1⅓
Fornit	V–VI ranks
Trompet	8
Cromor	8
Voxho	8
Clairon	4
II HAUPTWERK (C^1–d^{51})	
Copel	16
Princip	8
Flauta	8
Copel	8
Salicet	8
Gamb	8
Prestant	4
Flet	4
Tertz	3
Quint	3
Waldflet	2
Tertz	1⅓
Mixtur	IV ranks
Cimbal	IV–VI ranks
Cornet	V ranks
Trompet	8
Clairon	4
III RECIT (G^{16}–d^{51}) (BASS FROM IV)	
Cornet	V ranks
IV ECHO (C^1–d^{51})	
Copel	8
Flet	4
Quint (bass)	2⅔
Larigo (treble)	2⅔ + 2
Quart (bass only)	2
Tertz (bass)	1⅗ + 1
Tertz (treble)	2 + 1⅗
Hauboi	8
Bass = C1-F#31	
Treble = G32-D51	
PEDAL (25 NOTES: C^1–e^{51})	
Princip	16
Copel	16
Octav	8
Gamb	8
Quint	5⅓
Flet	4
Mixtur	III ranks
Bomba	16
Trompe	8
Trompe	4
Shove coupler: Pos/HW	
Tremulo dous	
Tremulo fort	

The Steinmeyer, inspired by the concepts of Riepp and Dom Bédos, was designed by Arthur Piechler (1896–1974, a renowned organist and composer, from Landau) and Dom Albert Hohn (1911–97) who were anxious to create something new and durable. As organ-building techniques were fast developing, the instrument profited from the introduction of modern chests



and actions. A mechanical action console was used for the main organ (manuals I, II, III and main pedal) while an electric console, located on the gallery, was used for the complete organ (I,II,III,IV,V and pedal). This instrument was inaugurated on 22nd June 1957.

As all instruments are subject to wear due to usage, the *Marienorgel*, after 45 years of heavy use, was no exception. Furthermore organ design and tastes have changed considerably since 1957. The instrument was ideal for the literature (mainly North German neo-Baroque) "rediscovered" and played at that time. Today, there is a need for a wider dynamic range, expressivity and for the presence of "Romantic" tonalities. These requirements meant a more powerful instrument, with higher

Marienorgel specification

I. POSITIV (C¹–g⁵⁶)	
Bordun	16
Principal	8
Rohrflöte	8
Gamba	8
Octave	4
Koppelflöte	4
Quinte	2⅔
Octave	2
Terz	1⅗
Mixtur V	1⅓
Trompete	8
Cromorne	8
Tremulant	

II. HAUPTWERK (C¹–g⁵⁶)	
Principal	16
Principal	8
Gemshorn	8
Doppelflöte	8
Gedackt	8
Octave	4
Hohlflöte	4
Quinte	2⅔
Octave	2
Grossmixtur III–IV	2
Mixtur IV–V	1⅓
Bombarde	16
Trompete	8
Clarion	4

III. BRUSTWERK (C¹–g⁵⁶)	
Salicet	8
Coppelgedackt	8
Praestant	4
Blockflöte	4
Nasard	2⅔
Waldflöte	2
Terz	1⅗
Larigot	1⅓
Flageolett	1
Scharffcymbel IV	1
Musette	16
Vox humana	8
Tremulant	

IV. RÉCIT (ENCLOSED) (C¹–g⁵⁶)	
Récit pedal stops:	
Subbass	16
Flute (case pipes)	8
Fagott	16
Récit manual stops:	
Bourdon	16
Montre	8
Flûte harmonique	8
Quintade	8
Salicional	8
Unda maris	8
Praestant	4
Flûte octaviante	4
Octavin	2
Septimcornett III–V	2⅔
Plein jeu V	2
Basson	16
Trompette harmonique	8
Clairon harmonique	4
Tremulant	

PEDAL (C¹–f³⁰)	
Principal-Untersatz	32
Principalbass	16
Subbass	16
Octave	8
Violon	8
Gedackt	8
Octave	4
Choralflöte	2
Hintersatz V	2⅔
Contraposaune	32
Bombarde	16
Posaune	16
Trompete	8
Clarion	4

V. MANUAL (C¹–g⁵⁶)	
Echo pedal stops:	
Salicet bass	16
Violoncello (case pipes)	8
Flûte	4
Echo (enclosed) manual stops:	
Principal	8
Bourdon doux	8
Viola di gamba	8
Vox angelica	8
Venzianerflöte	4
Viola d'amore	4
Nachthorn	2
Viola piccola	2
Harmonia aetherea IV	2⅔
Cymbel III	1
Dulcian	16
Hautbois	8
Regal	8
Tremulant	
Trompeteria stops:	
(unenclosed, heavy pressure):	
Cornet V	8
Tuba magna	16
Tuba mirabilis	8
Fanfare	8
Clarion Fanfare	4

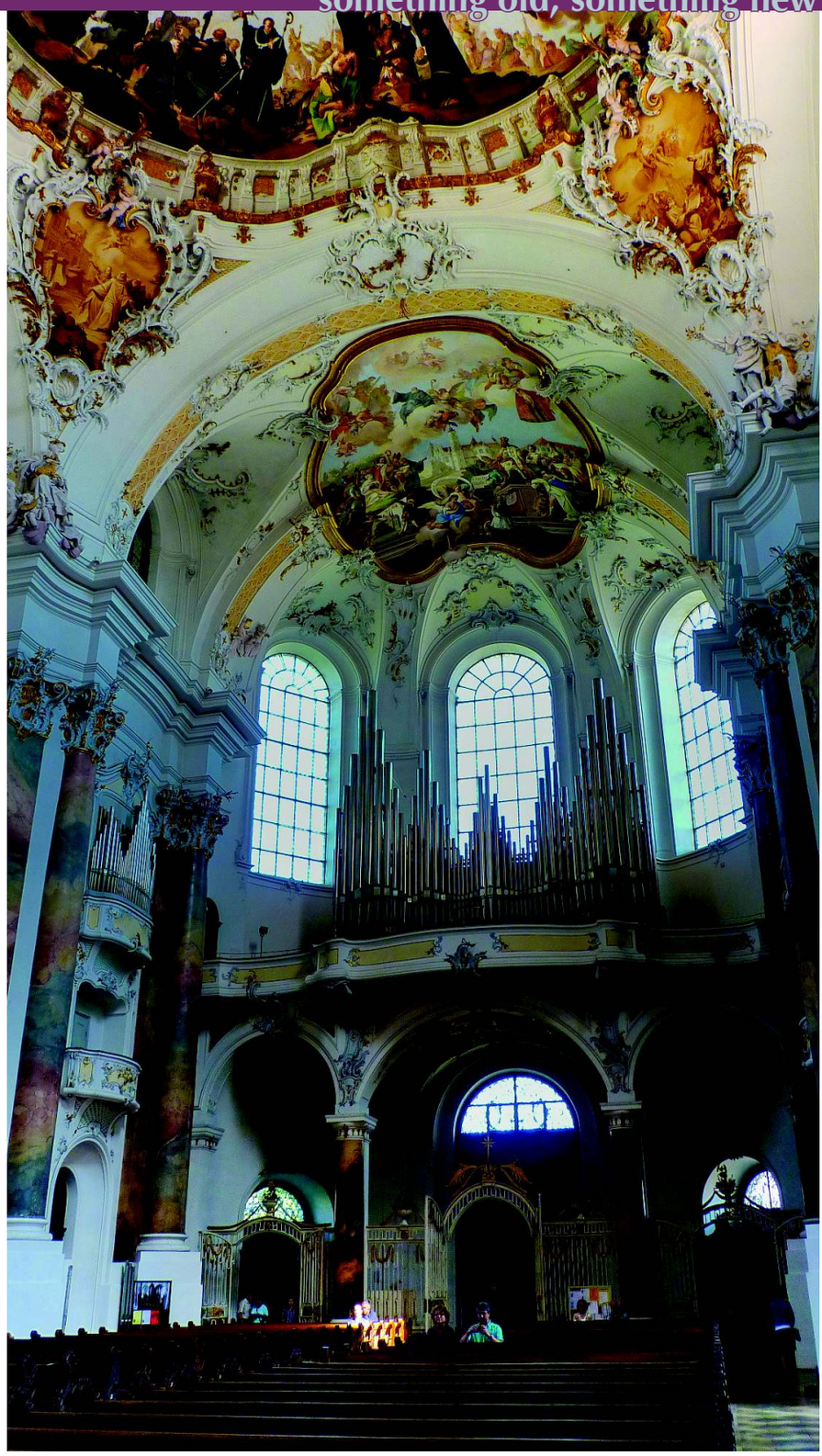
All photographs by Paul Hale who would be happy to email them to any interested readers.

More images can be found on page 96.

wind pressures and modern control systems to ease the organist's task. The restoration and revision, executed in 2001–2 by the busy firm of Klais (from Bonn), had, as its main objective, to preserve the renowned qualities of the instrument while introducing technical improvements, modest tonal enhancements and an ergonomic console.

The most important modification was the new 5-manual "ampitheatre" console. The two consoles from 1959 – an electrical console and a mechanical *en fenêtre* console – were replaced by this single central console which copes with the mechanical action of the organs and the electric action of the two remote enclosed divisions, along with the optional electric inter-departmental couplers. Several octave couplers were added, along, of course, with a comprehensive combination system with multiple memories and three entire memory sets for three different players.

Three stops were added and a few were changed (the Echo Nonencarillon IV for instance, was replaced by a more useful chorus mixture – a Plein jeu V, and the 4ft Zink by an 8ft Principal). Pipe-scale charts, as used by Dom Albert Hohn and preserved in the archives, show the approach he used based on writings by Riepp and Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. These scale concepts were applied when the new pipework was made, and the archival material was also used for the design of a new wind system. Archive scales for the following two new stops were particularly useful: the sonorous Pedal 32ft Contraposaune, and an 8ft Gamba to augment the *fonds* of the *Positiv* division (replacing a Cymbel III). Klais added one of their signature stops – a full-bodied 8ft Doppelflöte – to the *fonds* of the *Hauptwerk* division. The Trompeteria division, on its own windchest but sharing manual V with the Echo, was added, with heavy-pressure reeds designed rather in accord with British organ-building. It can be usefully transferred to any manual.



I had not known the organ before the Klais rebuild so could judge it only as a visiting recitalist. First impressions at the console were that the scales were large and the tone big and bold – overwhelming in the gallery when playing *forte/fortissimo*, but nicely-judged to be just right on the floor of the Abbey. The colourful and unashamedly eclectic stop-list largely speaks for itself but there are some aspects worthy of mention. Note the French-style *Récit* (enclosed) as well as the Germanic *Brustwerk* (unenclosed). Using one or the other can steer the overall sound of the organ in a French or German direction, given the fairly neutral tone of the (full-bodied) *Hauptwerk* & Pedal. Having the *Récit* on Manual IV proved something of a

ADDING A LITTLE

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challenge in my recital: in Healey Willan's *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue* he writes a passage on the Swell with a countersubject thumbed out on a Great 8ft flute – not so easily accomplished here! On the other hand, the powerful Tubas and Trumpets can usefully be transferred to whichever manual necessary, leaving manual V to function as the delightful Echo organ – not really softer than a Romantic English Choir Organ, but gently glittering with delicious little colour-stops. The action to the *Hauptwerk* is heavy, so it was a relief that optional electric coupling was available.

To say that this astonishing building and its organs are "worth a visit" would be to patronise them. They are worthy of a pilgrimage – a pilgrimage which might, like our stay this year, take the pilgrim further, to experience the glories of Weingarten Abbey and its Gabler organ…but that's perhaps a story for a future column.

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

My "DAMASCENE" *moment*

Richard Moore

Journeying outside the UK to play organs from other traditions, be it Spain, Italy, France or Germany, caused a moment of recognition every trip; however the most incredible moment was a gradual, unfolding realisation which came out of a trip to Saint-Antoine l'Abbaye. A group of us spent a week staying in the village, playing the tribune organ in the Abbey – a Bernard Aubertin reconstruction project from 1992, which took Dom Bédos as the starting point. The organ itself is a beautiful instrument and an interesting document of contemporary imaginings of a real past, but for me the great discovery was of the interconnectedness of things – loosely, culture and music. The music of Couperin, Marchand, Lebègue *et al* became more real as the group ate (and drank!), walked around the area and briefly experienced what was probably a slightly surreal life in the south of France. If the experience was surreal, it was because of the intensity of it – but the intensity made the music more real, and so my Damascene moment was the beginning of the knowledge that everything affects everything else, and that music cannot exist in isolation.

Richard Moore is the William and Irene Miller Organ Scholar at St Paul's Cathedral. He read Music as Organ Scholar of St John's College, Oxford, where he was responsible for the Chapel music programme, including curating a celebrity organ recital series showcasing the 2008 Aubertin organ. In September 2011 Richard took up a place at the RCM, studying Organ with David Graham, and graduated from the MMus degree with distinction, attaining the Walford Davies Prize in organ performance in July 2013.