LECTURE FOR
THE MAURICE FORSYTH-GRANT
MEMORIAL CELEBRATION

YORK UNIVERSITY,

14th MAY 1994.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I seek to address the question "The GDB organ - trail-blazer or dead-end". As we all know, both viewpoints are found in organists' circles.

Inevitably, to deal with the arguments, I cover some of the ground already discussed since yesterday, and it was difficult to know in advance whether to address the paper to organists or organbuilders. But I have tried to be objective and dispassionate and would ask any organbuilders mentioned not to take umbrage at anything I might say!

The intention is to provoke after my talk a lively debate on the issues it raises, both musical and technical. It would please me if the technical side were to receive a thorough discussion with input from those organ-builders present. There is *so* much we can all learn from one another - the current spirit of openness among organ-builders would have been frankly unimaginable in the years Maurice began his odyssey. Perhaps his open-minded willingness to learn, to observe, to listen and to share are those characteristics from which we can all gain the most.

Paul Hale, May 1994

(45-50 minutes)

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The venerable organ-buff looked up at the dramatic lines of the GDB case in New College Chapel, grinned knowingly at his friend and declared "Thank heavens they don't build them like that any more; what a relief it didn't catch on over here". "Yes," agreed his friend, "the GDB style was mercifully short-lived. You won't find firms like Mander or Walker building organs like this anymore. We've gone all British again, haven't we?"

Well, have we? And didn't it catch on? And don't they build organs like that any more? And what does *British* mean, anyway? For Maurice, being British meant none of the unimaginative insularity illustrated by that hypothetical conversation in New College Chapel. No, he was possessed of some of the more positive virtues which over the centuries have produced in this land generations of engineers, inventors, organ-builders and entrepreneurs. Among his virtues were a fundamental generosity, an ever-enquiring mind, a sponge-like ability to observe and learn, coupled with inventiveness, utter dedication to the task in hand, an absolute sense of perfectionism, a highly-developed mechanical and electrical grasp and the sheer charisma to enthuse others to make about turns in their thinking and even in their careers and very lives. It is surely inconceivable that a man such as he would <u>not</u> leave a permanent mark on the British organ - after all, even Robert Hope-Jones (the prophet to another generation) managed that.

Let us then consider various aspects of his work and influence. In 1971 Cuthbert Harrison, in conversation with Roy Massey and me observed "As for Larigots and Koppel flutes, I'll put them in if they ask for them, but I've really no idea what they *want* them for." Despite the quality of Harrison work, and despite organs like the RFH and Coventry, together with informed advisers such as Ralph Downes and Sidney Campbell, this senior member of the British organ building profession was still thinking on that plane - with respect, a plane of benevolent ignorance or indifference.

Maurice could never ever have been like that. Though immersing himself in establishment organ builders as a youth his nature was such that while soaking up

knowledge, he avoided absorbing also the prevailing mores of the British trade which in many quarters was averse to innovation, musically ignorant and whose employment practices had scarcely advanced since the Great War. Of crucial importance was the equal influence of the fine musicians who had surrounded him in his school days at Wellington - his teacher Dr Walter Stanton, who played Brahms and Schubert symphonies from full scores as Sunday organ voluntaries, and his contemporaries, John Gardner, Anthony Lewis, Philip Cranmer, and John Addison, no fewer than three of whom, along with Dr Stanton himself, were to become professors of music in major universities. On leaving school, the next vital ingredient in his make-up was the training he received at Faraday House Electrical Engineering College, where a state-of-the-art innovative approach made its indelible mark on his outlook as well as his abilities.

So, the young man who, like many of us, misspent countless hours of his youth building and rebuilding organs, learning from his own mistakes as well as from the skills of others, and scrounging innumerable parts from long-suffering organ builders, was also armed with a deep love and awareness of real music, and naturally inclined to the good modern engineering principles which were rapidly bringing a new look to every aspect of life in post-war Britain - except organ-building. No doubt he would have remained a dedicated amateur had not fate taken a hand when, at the end of the Compton era, Ted Rippin, Johnny Degens and Eric Atkins met him and persuaded him to help them set up a new company.

By happy chance their skills were considerably greater and more rounded than many ex-employees who set up business on their own. We all know of good action-hands who cannot voice, regulate or tune to save their lives, or of good tuners who are mechanically inept. Every Diocese has two or three of them working on their own and producing unsatisfactory work. Degens & Rippin had the skill; Maurice had the money, the imagination and eventually the vision. Fuelling the vision was almost the last link in the positively nuclear reaction which produced the GDB organ.

In 1959 Maurice had first visited Germany and its organs. The Steinmeyers he saw made no significant impression, but it was the Laukhuff factory that made an indelible impact. It was in Germany - poor, smashed, defeated, humiliated Germany - that the organ trade found its modern, state-subsidised renaissance in a plethora of new ideas, new machinery, new organs and historically aware musical ideals - ideals which directly continued the unbroken line of the great German Lutheran tradition. The return to tracker action which Maurice observed at Walcker's also set him thinking. Further trips throughout the 60s and early 70s brought him firm friendships at Rieger, Klais and at the West Berlin Karl Schuke, and it was particularly the influence of these three progressive firms which was to

have such bearing on the GDB organ. Indeed, we only have to look at the York GDB to see an organ case which could not have existed without Karl Schuke. It is interesting to speculate whether these staunchly North-German influences would have been modified in the 1970s, had Maurice's full attention still been given to the company, for in 1968 Laurence Phelps' work with French shallots of various types at Casavants excited him considerably and it is not hard to imagine that the GDB organ might have gone much further along the current lines of the 'American classic' had French-inspired influences begun more markedly to be assimilated. His reeds might also, it must be said, have been more uniform in quality.

But I digress. The purpose of restating this background - known well to many of you - is to help focus our minds on how GDB had arguably become a *mainstream European* company in a very few years. The influences which Maurice absorbed from Germany and then began to develop are those very features which Klais, Rieger and the others continue to display and rework their own way; most of them remain central to the type of pan-European organ which they now build. Our hypothetical friends standing in New College chapel were happily confident that the GDB influence is no more to be found in Britain, and that the British organ once again has little in common with its European counterpart. Let us observe how wrong they are.

Virtually every element of the organ as developed by Maurice is present in current British organ-building. Let us look at a few.

Back in the early 1960s no-one was building tracker organs over here. Then in 1967 an enterprising young chap called Collins, fresh from training with Rieger, built an instrument for Shellingford Church. It was free-standing at the West End, had tracker-action, Schwimmers, open-foot voicing, and a vertical stop-list which included a *None* and a Cimbelstern. By then Maurice himself had already brought all these ideas back and was developing them further, incorporating them one by one in his organs.

He had observed that a long thin pallet was a significant factor in reducing the weight of touch; he therefore went a stage further and made them of T-section light alloy, with excellent results. He incorporated Beckerath-inspired *balancier* assistance in the bass ends of soundboards as early as 1968 at the Servite Priory and in 1969 at New College. Aluminium trackerwork and collets, tapped plastic adjusters, needle bearings and clip-on connections, along with plastic-sheathed stranded wire for pedal tracker runs were other features of his actions. Despite the current trend away from these materials, GDB actions stand out as being far superior to anything else produced in this country until the early 1980s. Why this should be so is perhaps answered in two ways. First of all, he not only observed

new technologies, he worked out the mechanics behind them, improved them and then had them built to the highest standards by his excellent workshop. He had experimented at home with slider soundboard design in a manner which few commercially successful organ-builders were able to, and thus produced a pattern superior in performance to anything else being made over here at the time.

Secondly, other builders, affected by British insularity, were astonishingly slow at catching on to sensible new techniques. Thus, a firm like Mander, while building tracker organs with Schwimmers in the early 1970s, could at Jesus College Cambridge and elsewhere completely ignore the principle of the long thin pallet in favour of the short fat one - ostensibly to fit the Schwimmers in to the well. Thus, a small organ like St Matthew's Croydon, also from 1971, ended up with impossibly heavy touch. Even Peter Collins, if he'll forgive me, with his Rieger experience, spent many years in developing an action that was as crisp and responsive as Maurice's. Other firm's actions gave more trouble than Maurice's ever did, and were far less pleasant to the touch. We need not name or blame them - virtually every company seemed reluctantly to go through the painful and slow process of re-inventing the wheel. Who in Britain had even *heard* of balanciers when Maurice, having spotted them in Beckerath's and Schuke's new organs, was quietly fitting them at Fulham and New College in 1968 & 1969. Actually, they were of course nothing new - the Hill firm had used them almost a century ago, but how they had been forgotten!

Schwimmers, though currently receiving a bad press in this country and amongst the historically-minded in the USA, are still the preferred option for most European builders. As Maurice was to declare - let no-one doubt that they are a marvellous invention. They save space, provide for wonderful tremulants, are relatively cheap to make and to re-cover, and provide steady wind. Those who decry them are not all historical purists, though many might claim to be. The simple fact is that unless you have an advanced understanding of mechanics, you will probably be unsuccessful in designing an input valve control which does not lead to that well-known and feared pressure-drop on initial demand. Maurice must have deduced that the simple direct-linked disc pallet systems always led to setting-up problems and pressure drop. The superb system he adopted overcame these at a stroke. It consists of a stout steel roller with two arms and ball-races which run along critically shaped curved wedges on pan and on lightly spring-loaded inlet pallet. This worked a treat and showed others the way. The advocates of double-rise reservoirs are still with us - notably Harrison and now Mander, but although one can perhaps understand some designers not liking the almost unnatural perfection of Schwimmer wind, the effects of other systems can be capricious in the extreme.

Giving a recital at Ely Cathedral last week, I could not be but painfully aware of the temperamental nature of the Great wind, complete with vast double-rise reservoir. There was no musical compensation in its gasps and wobbles. For a cost-effective, space-conscious, and cheaply re-covered wind system, and one which will take a seductive tremulant, there is nothing to beat Maurice's Schwimmers. The pantograph spring arrangement he imported and improved was immeasurably better than the crude harmonium springs being used in Britain. His tremulants were copied mainly from Klais; a pneumatic pulsator adjustable within a certain tolerance for speed and depth, which sends a pulse of wind into a square-drop motor under the Schwimmer. Again, he was well ahead of the opposition in this. Other British builders either used far cruder Schwimmers and largely ineffective fan tremulants (Walker, for instance, in organs such as St James-the-Greater, Leicester), or electro-magnetic tremulant impulsers which proved too noisy (Mander, for instance, Jesus College and elsewhere). No, there is no doubt, Maurice led the British field in this area.

His actions inevitably used parts which now with hindsight and experience have fallen out of favour - the needle-bearings and stranded wire pedal-tracker runs already mentioned, for instance. Similarly, does anyone use chipboard in construction now? Chipboard fell out of use as better quality laminated timbers became more cheaply and readily available in this country and when far more sophisticated particle boards such as the very useful Medium Density Fibreboard came into popular use. Have no doubt about it though, Maurice would have been the first to use them - indeed the Portuguese *tabopan* which he so prized was well on the way to being MDF.

So many other devices and techniques of his are still in use in this country, sometimes hidden away in the most unlikely of organs. Slider-seals, plastic slides, electric slider motors (though few now use the noisy and temperamental Heuss motorised types he employed), balanciers, adjustable bleeds on the bars; all these are of course the stock-in-trade of most builders now, but you might not expect to find any of his clever ideas in an organ such as Mander's avowedly mid 19th-century style instrument in St Andrew's, Holborn. But what do you think is an integral part of action, couplers and composition pedals there? None other than the *Kinetrol* fluid dampers used by Maurice with his Schuke-inspired floating backfall beams. In fact, this clever device is now used in organs the world over, and even, by Rieger for instance (Marylebone is a local example), on Schwimmers. Maurice was among the earliest of modern British organ-builders to devise a simple mechanism for a limited amount of octave derivation on a mechanical-action soundboard. Using a simple clack-valve arrangement he managed to extend the 32ft Fagot from the 16ft at New College, as well as the 8ft Flute from the 16ft

Subbaß (which, by the way, are Fr. Willis pipes from the old organ, as are the Swell strings). This was not, however, one of his more successful devices as the thin plastic valve hinge cracked early in life. This became a familiar nightmare for American builders using Perflex on pneumatic motors and indeed for our own J W Walker who used it on organs such as St Margaret's Westminster, which has just had to be releathered.

One could say more about the constructional side of GDB - its clever and space-saving steel building-frames for example, or its rather too ready use of veneered timber on consoles where it was likely to get chipped, but there is only one other aspect I will mention here, and that is the electrical side. It may well seem curious to us that a man whose primary profession was being at the cutting edge of electronic design, was content to use so few and such unsophisticated electrical devices on his organs. I suppose to some extent he shared Noel Mander's abhorrence at that time of over-gadgetted console such as the Willis III type, and therefore provided even New College with only four pistons to each department, three generals and two reversers. But why did he use such relatively crude devices? The piston relays at New College were horrible German two-pole magnets where the compressed coil-spring on the armature quickly developed a bias in one direction or the other, the stop therefore either becoming inclined to set in one direction only. On the other hand, the individual piston setter buttons at the top of the jambs (imitating Harrison's at Westminster Abbey) were a brilliant idea and should have found more general favour. Then again, the crudest of Swell-pedal indicators was fitted to New College, with heavy phosphor-bronze contacts operated by a trace rod in the Swell mechanism; this never worked well because of the sideways movement of the wooden rod to and from the contacts. A curious blind-spot. One would have thought that Maurice, of all people, would have been the first in Britain to have applied computer technology to organ mechanisms. Or are we missing something? Perhaps he knew better than anyone that computer technology is ephemeral, built to a short design and working life-span, potentially less reliable than something purely mechanical, and (certainly in the 1960s) an expensive option. We shall never know his thinking now, unless Frank can tell us, but I should like to have asked him.

Let us turn to other areas of GDB work.

For most people, of course, it is the <u>sound</u> of the organ which determines their reaction to it, not the style of construction. Maurice had decided early on that the open-foot principle was the one for him, and like all his beliefs, he embraced it whole-heartedly -100%. Now he was not alone in Britain in going down that particular path, Harrison, Mander, Walker, Collins, even Rushworth made and voiced pipes in that style, but I would argue that - remarkably - the voicing of the

GDB organs was markedly superior to virtually any other open-foot voicing in this country then or since. Why? Well, I believe that there are three answers. Talking to Frank Bradbeer about this the other day, he emphasised the extreme care which Maurice took with his scalings. It was their view that correct and appropriate scaling is absolutely critical if open foot voicing is to work musically and physically.

Contact with the major German builders gave Maurice reams of information on which to work, and he must have been the first to use a computer to help devise scales for a particular building or for a special stop (such as the fine Great Cornet at New College). The second factor was his voicer. Few voicers were so skilled as Johnny Degens. For his whole previous career, he voiced thick well-nicked pipes on heavy wind in the Compton style. For him, this change was absolute. But so skilled as he was, he clearly was able to turn his hand and ear to making any pipe work superbly in any style. I have never heard a badly-voiced pipe of his. The transitional Degens & Rippin organs were just as exciting as the later GDB ones, though in a different style. Who can forget the stunning yet still musical impact of the 1964 Nave chorus at Christchurch Priory? May it soon be revived. I wonder how many of you have played the Holy Trinity Bournemouth reconstruction of the same year? This three-manual 1885 Father Willis was thoroughly rebuilt (of course we wouldn't be allowed to do it like that *now*) with electric action and a revised tonal scheme. The new mixtures were superb, as was the crisp, well-balanced pedal chorus complete with striking Bombarde. The point is, that the new additions (including well-scaled Sesquialtera) were not only supremely well done, but also blended with and enhanced the Willis tonalities quite remarkably. This fine organ is now in St Swithun's Church in Bournemouth, where I hope it still inspires people. Another of these large transitional organs of great character is to be found in St John's Boscombe, to which John Bailey, now running Bishop's at Ipswich, but for many years the prime mover at GDB, has just added a new console and a splendid solo trumpet. This was an 1895 Hill and was one of the first organs to involve Frank Bradbeer, as the fine Arthur Hill casework needed some resiting. The very dramatic and comprehensive tonal scheme contains really the very final fling of the old Compton Bombarde and extended multi-rank mixtures style, together with a quite fully-developed Positive, and complete choruses in all departments. Again, Degens was able to make the very best of this slightly curious concept and tonally the organ is beautifully finished as well as dramatically exciting.

Mr Degens' skill is to be found in aspects of all their organs - in little clever touches as well as in basic voicing skill. Few people, for instance, discover that the bottom notes of the Great 16ft Quintatons at New College and at York are actually of 5 1/3 stopped pipes. The scale and mouthing of the basic rank is so skilfully adjusted in

the tenor to emphasise the quint more and more, that in combination, when the pure quint takes over, it is well-nigh undetectable. Similarly, his use of the Compton/Walker pattern haskelled basses at York (bass 6 of the Great Principal), Sussex and elsewhere has gone unnoticed by most players. The third reason why the GDB sound is so fine is the quality of regulation. This is a skill requiring a particular personality, not necessarily a personality possessed of every voicer. We all know of one or two famously skilled and experienced voicers, often indeed called geniuses, but who are not possessed of that last degree of steady, unflappable patience. It is patience and perfectionism allied to skill and a good ear which maker for the good regulator, and in Johnny Degens all these attributes existed. They also exist in John Bailey, without whom the later life of many GDB organs would have been very different, particularly the New College organ. When Edward Higginbottom had lived with the New College organ for some time, he decided that it was generally too loud for its daily use. It had long been felt that the Swell was disproportionately loud to the rest, mainly because the pressure was set higher for the sake of the old Willis strings and the chorus reeds. Edward also found the Positif too loud for Choir accompaniment. It was John Bailey who set about the arduous and (especially with open-foot pipework) potentially hazardous task of softening the whole organ. He started with the Swell and then worked through the Positif and Great. The actions were tightened up, the Pedal stranded tracker wires replaced with wooden runs and the piston action replaced by a solid-state system. The organ was then tuned to an unequal temperament. The points are that a) John Bailey was able to re-regulate the instrument as truly immaculately as before with no musical loss and b) the pipes were well enough scaled and voiced to take such softening at the flue without going off speech or suffering in tone.

To this day I never cease to be amazed at Johnny Degens' skill, and having observed open foot voicing by many other British voicers at close quarters for nearly 25 years now, I would venture the opinion that his work is rarely equalled and never yet bettered.

Since the early days of open-foot voicing in this country, the policy of "nick where necessary to get the speech right" has become perhaps a sensible norm. It produces good musical results and I'm sure it's the sensible approach. Nevertheless, GDB managed to obtain the most evenly regulated and musical results without a nick in sight - though they may have been among the earliest in Britain to learn the trick of feathering the edge off the languid.

Ah, you say, but what of the firm's reeds? Well, the low-pressure reeds were not so good, so well thought out or so well balanced as the flues; indeed, some were far more experimental. This country seems desperately short of distinguished reed voicers now, and it was then. The reeds were bought in voiced or unvoiced from the

usual variety of sources and one of Maurice's rare mistakes of judgement was to let some be voiced by an insufficiently skilled young hand. Some of the New College reeds still suffer from this. It was probably little more than the Swell reeds alone which caused the New College organ to acquire a reputation in some quarters for being harsh and aggressive. I could never understand such criticism otherwise, as the flues are so beautiful. It would have been good for Maurice to have had a few more years' experience in designing and scaling reeds to the same quality as his flues.

We have not yet considered the stop-lists themselves. Almost at a stroke, with the first GDB tracker organs came their fully-developed schemes. Choruses in all departments (North German in style) form the backbone. Mixtures are particularly well thought-out - far better than any other British builder of the time, many of whom seemed to have no idea what the true and various functions of mixtures *are*, nor how to scale them or arrange the breaks so that each mixture fulfils its correct function. I am constantly amazed at the number of builders and players of the 1990s who *still* display ignorance of this critical aspect of organ design and use. Maurice seemed instinctively to get his mixtures <u>right</u>!

Reeds, as already mentioned, were a rather uneasy mixture of French, German and Dutch types, with Maurice perpetuating the Downes / RFH philosophy of mixing French reeds with German Principals. The fact is that the two do *not* sit happily together. French reeds are wonderful at adding the spice and vigour to broad warm, fairly slow-speaking French Montres; smoother more honky German reeds add warmth and body to thinner more aggressive North German Prinzipals. When viewed in that context, it is easy to see why this particular mix of national styles sits uncomfortably on the ear, especially in a dry acoustic such as the RFH and many other British buildings.

When it comes to mutations, I cannot quite comprehend the GDB aim. In general, and as Frank Bradbeer mentioned this morning, these were French in scaling and treatment, the most fully-developed being at New College, with its Cornet separé on the Swell, and its warm tapered flute 3 1/5 Terz and 2 2/3 Quint on the Great. But where are the Germanic <u>Sesquialteras</u>? I have never been able to understand the lack of this vital ingredient in the language of the Chorale Prelude. The bold, narrow Principal-scale Schnitger-type Sesquialtera is such a dominant and memorable feature of so many of the famous historic North European organs which were in vogue in the 1960s, such as Alkmaar, Haarlem and Zwolle, that one might have expected Maurice gleefully to have put one on every organ. If he *had*, the English confusion over the contrasting colour and use of German and French mutations might by now have more fully evaporated. Even the York Sesquialtera is essentially of flute tone, though graded from a bright treble to a warmer bass - a

devise that certainly helps it to fulfil a dual role - German Chorale Preludes in the treble register and a *tierce en taille* lower down. But the organs are the poorer for the lack of the real thing.

Maurice's work included several Schuke-inspired ideas on the possibilities of new designs and pitches of mutations and solo mixtures, witness the None and Teint at New College, the Aliquot (now suppressed) and the original Pedal Mixture at York, and the Nonen-Cornet in his house organ (now in Aldenham School Chapel). This imaginative and innovative approach was matched in France by the thinking and influence of Jean Guillou, the virtuoso organist, composer, teacher and organ designer. It is no coincidence that Guillou, having learned his art under Dupré and Duruflé, spent several formative years playing and composing in West Berlin, where he too came under the Karl Schuke spell. It seems to me that we rather need a Guillou in this country to keep our organists aware of the limitless rôle of mutational colour as arguably the only legitimate tool for the organist and composer to use in discovering and creating new tonalities and textures.

The eclecticism of the style adopted by GDB has been developed further around the world and is arguably the prevailing European style now. In Britain, though we have moved to a more "English" style once more, Maurice's cleansing influence, his ear for colour and his awareness of the needs of the solo repertoire have luckily permeated most areas of organ design and player/listener awareness.

A final thought on GDB tonal design concerns the Pedal organ. It seems to me a great pity that no sooner than had we in this country come to accept, largely through Maurice's influence, the fully-developed pedal organ as a critical component of a well-designed instrument, restrictions of space and cash are once again tending to turn the British pedal organ into little more than a permanently coupled bass division, often with no 4ft register or Mixture, and but a single 8ft. Let us try to reverse this decline where we can, or counterpoint - the glory of the organ - will once again be the victim.

What about the visual impression? GDB organs certainly became striking to look at. This was due to the work of Frank Bradbeer coupled to the inspiration provided on Maurice's German travels, the spirit of clean-lined modernism and the concept of *werkprinzip*. It was largely through the GDB influence that the British organ became a cased and focussed instrument once more. As with all visual design it is always interesting to look at an organ and try to spot other influences at work. Schuke (Kaiser Wilhelm Church in Berlin and elsewhere) was an inspiration, Beckerath (St Stephan, Bremen and elsewhere) was another, as were organs by Marcussen and, I rather think, by Paul Ott, whose work resembles quite a few of Frank's sketches. The genesis of the New College case was probably the most

difficult, with two strong-minded and individualist architects (George Pace and Frank Bradbeer) collaborating on a case which had artistically to satisfy both of them and also was fully functional. I assure you the archive correspondence on this project makes interesting reading! Their case style was at its most relaxed in the model organs such as Dunchurch and Belfast, and it was these cases in particular which seem to me to have been a starting point for many of our small fine tracker builders of today, most of whose casework has developed and embellished this tone cabinet style, softening the edges and including the decorative work which GDB generally eschewed. Perhaps we could prevail upon Frank Bradbeer to put aside his customary modesty and write a book or paper setting out his views on organ-case design. As many have said, it is long overdue.

The influence of the firm is not in its works alone. From its workshops emerged several young organbuilders of distinction, who served some or part of their training at GDB. John Bailey I have already mentioned, Martin Goetze, Edward Bennett, Kenneth Tickell - they and others spent formative time at Northampton or Hammersmith. Indeed, at Hammersmith for a period from 1969, Bob Pennells was running Pennells & Sharpe from the same premises, so some input into what J W Walker was to do a few years later may be discernible. Interestingly, only John Bailey stuck with the 'house-style', the others quickly developing their own style or moving towards more historically-based designs.

For players the GDB instruments proved a revelation. I blush to remember that when interviewed in 1970 by David Lumsden for the New College Organ Scholarship, as a very inexperienced 18-year-old fresh from the electro-pneumatic Nicholson at Solihull School, the only comment on the new GDB which I think I made was that perhaps the white paint in the lettering of the black plastic stop-knobs might wear off rather quickly! Actually, there is an analogy to be made here.

So many listeners and perhaps players are so struck by the startling initial impression of the GDB, perhaps mystified, intimidated, visually overwhelmed, that, frightened, they retreat into their cosy little worlds and say - "not for me", and then "don't like it anyway". This is the superficial approach which bedevils all organ criticism, particularly in this country. First impressions of course count. An organ opened before it is fully ready (an all too common experience here) will never recover from the adverse initial impression it may create (New College fell into that trap). An organ listened to once on CD or perhaps in the flesh is immediately assigned a value judgement and rarely a second chance.

No-one would criticise an old Hill in the same terms that they might a GDB - they may just be bored with it rather quickly. But - and here is the point - both styles of instrument (and there are others to which this applies) only reveal their profoundest

qualities, subtleties and beauties to the player who takes time to live with them, to explore them in all their richness and above all to work through the repertoire with their aid. I remember Roy Massey recounting how, on becoming organist of Croydon Parish Church with its 4-manual Hill of about 1904, he found the organ uninteresting and somewhat dull at first. Soon, however, he found subtle beauties and understated quality which he fell in love with. GDBs could never be described as dull, but misunderstood, yes. You will not believe me, but it's true, if I tell you of a certain now internationally famous British recitalist who in 1972 sat at the New College console and in all seriousness turned to me and said "that's not a proper Spitzflute on the Great; it doesn't spit".

Those who did persevere with the GDB organ immediately found a musical treasure house. Nick Danby, teaching here and at New College, was to instil in many players now in notable positions in the profession a grasp of tracker-action technique. Of attack and - often neglected - release, of phrasing, line, articulation, contrapuntal integrity, ornamentation, registration, musical architecture. Without the GDB organs as a teaching medium none of this would have been feasible, and the grasp which many of us managed to obtain of such techniques would simply not have been possible. Twenty years on, the impressions of those us learning in the early 1970s on these instruments, are in turn influencing the next generation. In Music Academies, Universities, Cathedrals and great Churches both Anglican and Roman, we are playing and teaching, sharing Maurice's vision - at second-hand, certainly, but with no less enthusiasm and commitment.

If proof be needed that the GDB organ was indeed a trail-blazer and not the dead-end which our hypothetical organ-bores in New College Chapel clearly considered it, the presence of this distinguished company here today is just such proof. We were all affected profoundly by Maurice in one way or another and I rejoice that such an opportunity has been found for us all to stand up in public and say so.

I have tried to show that virtually all elements of the GDB organ are to be found in instruments being designed today. Where good music is to be made Maurice's ideals live, vibrantly. Let us hope that in the realms above he is still able to declare - "what do you think of *that* for a Cornet then?".

[ends]