

Sixty years of collecting organ literature

For most musicians, a handful of favourite books will suffice. For one devoted organist, however, a chance early discovery sparked a six-decade journey that would result in a collection both extraordinary in scale and deeply personal in meaning.

PAUL HALE

I once thought I was normal. Let me explain. From the age of 13, I have been an avid collector of books – old and new – about the organ. The Editor invited me to write this article when in all innocence I sent him a photograph of my library, casually mentioning that I had, over precisely 60 years, collected some 1,400 books and booklets about the organ, along with many hundreds of organ-builders' specification leaflets.

I used to imagine that such a passion for collecting organ books was – well – *normal* for organists. But over the years I have been to the houses of innumerable players and enthusiasts of all persuasions, and, despite quite a few of them being pretty keen on collecting such books, I realise that my passion – nay, determination and sheer good fortune – have resulted in what may be a unique personal library. Put it like this: if you can think of a book in English about an/the organ, a copy is probably on my shelves. Not just British organs, either. There's no great *virtue* in this, and it hasn't cost me a fortune, but important to me now, as a regular author about organs and organ-builders and as a busy organ consultant, is the huge research value of having all this material to hand – along with complete runs of key journals such as *The Organ*, *Organists' Review* (naturally!), *Rotunda*, *Organ Building*, *ISO Information* and so on. Some 20 years ago, our then teenage son, a whizz at databases, was earning himself some fairly substantial pocket-money cataloguing my library when he asked, "Dad, have you actually read all these books?". The answer was, of course, "No, not from cover to cover, because they are mainly books of *reference*." In



1 The library

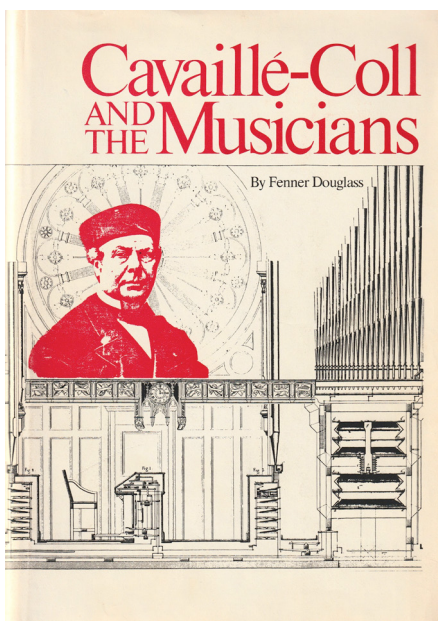
his eyes I could see the penny dropping. It may have been that sudden revelation of the concept of using materials (printed and otherwise) for research that led him ultimately towards the PhD which he has just been awarded.

Before I discovered the organ, I was a 'Meccano' boy. I loved making cranes and diggers from my Meccano sets, loved playing with Tri-ang 00-gauge trains that *did* things (i.e., Goods rather than Passengers) and loved watching the excavators and bulldozers working on a building site near our house. I'm pretty sure that a career in mechanical engineering would have beckoned had the organ not come along. I also loved reading, sang quite nicely, and started learning the piano at the age of eight, taking an Associated Board grade each year. Little did I realise that, at the age of 12, these interests would coalesce in Solihull School Chapel.

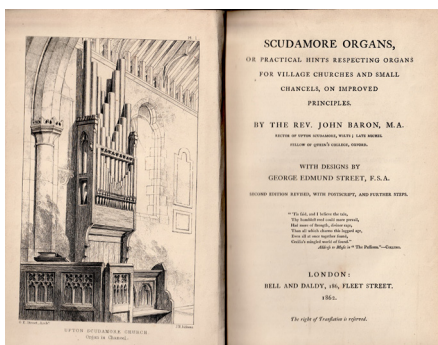
Following the 11 plus and an entrance exam, I started at Solihull School (an Independent school founded in 1560 as a Free Grammar School for boys) in September 1963 and entered the very capable Chapel Choir. The Chapel organ was being built at the time; part of it – including the Tuba! – was playing (from the remains of a Compton cinema organ console, thus sparking my interest in all things Compton), and part of it was being constructed. I fell in love with the sound of the organ, was fascinated by the craftsmen at work in the organ chamber and in



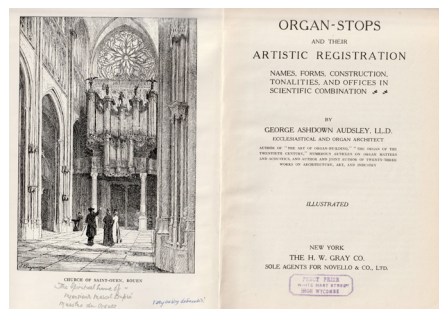
2 Die Brabanter Orgel - Dr M. A. Vente



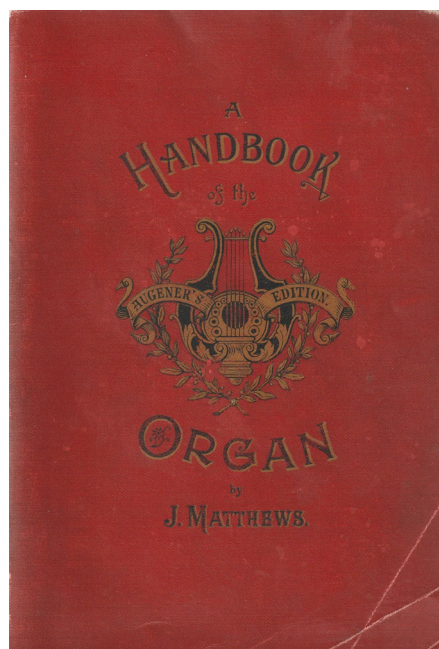
3 Cavaillé-Coll and the Musicians - Fenner Douglass



4 Scudamore Organs - Revd John Baron



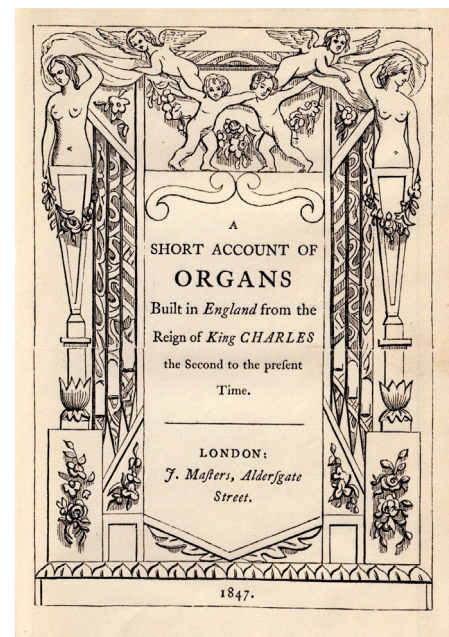
5 Organ-stops and their artistic registration - George Ashdown Audsley



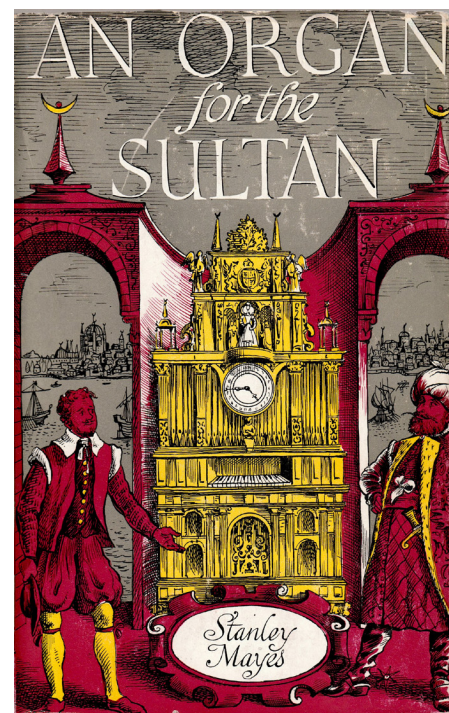
6 A Handbook of the Organ - J. Matthews



7 Die Gotische Orgel von Halberstadt - Karl Bormann



8 A Short Account of Organs built in England - John Sutton



9 An Organ for the Sultan - Stanley Mayes



10 A shelf of large-format books reviewed for Organists' Review



11 Part of Paul's instrument collection

their workshop under the organ gallery, and was beguiled by the wonderful improvisations of the organist and choirmaster, John Flower – who became my first musical hero. I asked whether I might start learning the organ, since I had Grade 5 piano; Mr Flower said he'd probably have to saw the bottom off the bench so that I could reach the pedals. But somehow we managed, and I have to say I took to it like a duck to water.

I didn't know then, of course, that there were books written about the organ; after all, I'd played the piano for five years and it never occurred to me that there might be books about the piano. So when I was awarded a book prize for Music at the end of my first year, I asked Mr Flower whether there was an organ book that I ought to read. He said, "Yes; you should ask for Reginald Whitworth's *Organ Stops and their Use*", and so I did. I seem to remember it cost £1, but as the prize was only 15 shillings, my parents forked out the extra five bob. I loved this book because it opened a door into so many fascinating aspects of the organ. Not just families of stops / pipes / registration

/ how organs work, etc. – which was interesting enough – but also esoteric delights such as organ percussions, sustainers, double-touch, the use of the tremulant, the vox humana and so on. All were a revelation. I can remember to this day one poetic passage in the section about percussions. Here it is, following on from where Whitworth has described the tubular bells and resonating gongs sometimes found, as in the Echo organ (now long gone) at Norwich Cathedral and the Celestial Organ at Westminster Abbey:

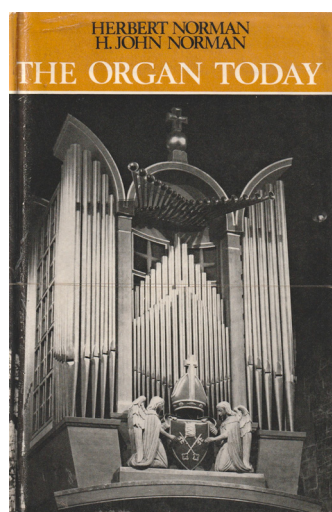
At Christmas time the late Sir Frederick Bridge used the gongs at Westminster Abbey with great artistry when improvising between the carols. One of his favourite combinations was gongs together with the slowly undulating flauto unda maris. The sound of the gongs faded away, leaving the unda maris sounding. To hear this effect descending from the triforium, about 300 feet from the console and above the tomb of Handel, on such occasions, while the last rays of a winter's sun illuminated the stained glass, was a pure joy. Possibly sentimental, yes, but sentiment in the correct place and at the right time.

Wow! Of course, I longed to hear the famed gongs, but – alas – the Celestial Organ at the Abbey, though still in place in the triforium of the south transept, has not been heard since it was disconnected during the 1937 rebuild. Stop-keys were provided for it (a one-off for H&H) above the Solo but when Simon Preston added the fifth manual in the early 1980s, the stop-keys had to disappear and, consequentially, the Celestial organ was made almost impossible to bring back into use. I live in hope...

I was enchanted by Whitworth's writings and, as luck would have it, when I was 16 and a 'Younger Member' (with some friends) of the Birmingham Organists' Association, we visited the house of George Jeynes, a lovely man who had the misfortune to be a personnel manager at the troubled Longbridge British Leyland car factory, where 'Red Robbo', the Communist shop steward, brought the workers out on strike no fewer than – yes – 523 occasions. To relax after the stresses of his day job, George built a small organ in his front room – a copy, really of a Compton *Miniatura*. Whilst waiting my turn to play, I idly looked at a group of books on his shelves. Lo – there were two large volumes by my favourite organ author, Reginald Whitworth: *The Electric Organ* and *The Cinema Organ*. I wasn't bothered about playing George's house organ after that – my nose left neither book until it was time to go home. From that moment, I passionately wanted my own copy of both these books, but of course they had been out of print for at least two decades. "Well", some kind person said (little knowing where this would lead me in future years), "why not try a second-hand bookshop?". I'd never heard of such a thing, but from then on, wherever I went, I sought them out. In those days there were abundant copies of old organ books to be found, and the two Whitworths were soon on my shelves, along with Sumner's invaluable book *The Organ: its Evolution*,



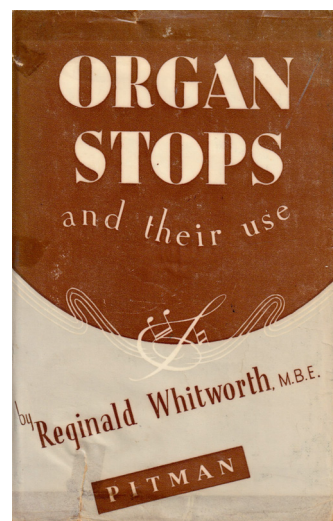
12 Gottfried Silbermann
- Werner Müller



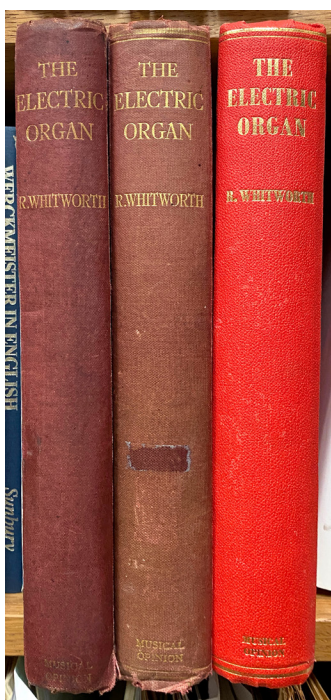
15 The Organ Today
- Herbert and John Norman



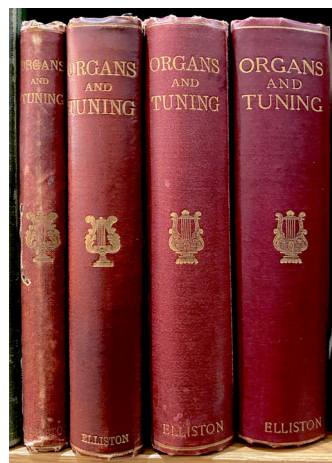
18 Nine editions of *The Contemporary American Organ*
by William Harrison Barnes -
most discarded by USA libraries



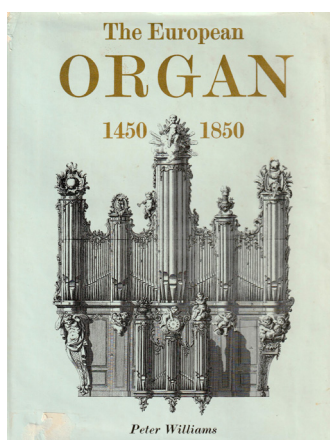
22 Organ Stops and their use
- Reginald Whitworth



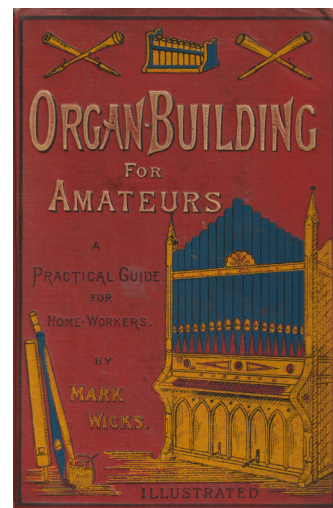
13 Three editions of *The Electric Organ* - Reginald Whitworth



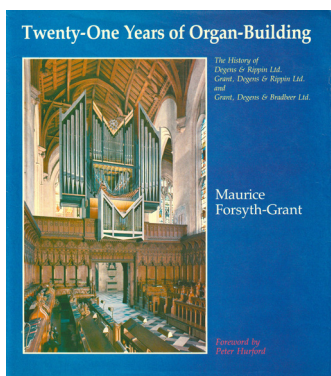
16 Four editions of *Organs and Tuning* - Thomas Elliston



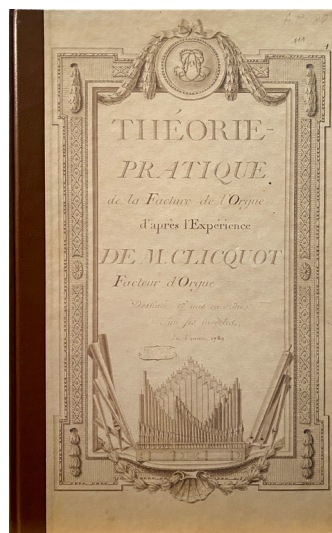
19 The European Organ
- Peter Williams



23 Organ-Building for Amateurs -
Mark Wick



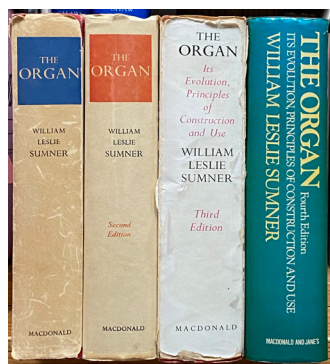
14 Twenty-One Years of Organ-Building - Maurice Forsyth-Grant



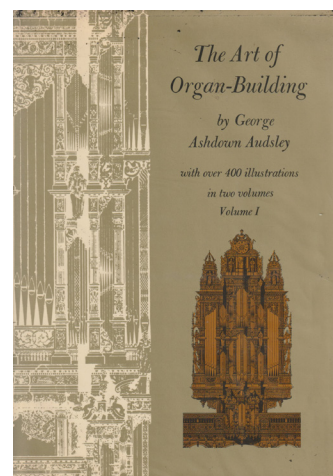
17 Clicquot's remarkable *Theory and Practice of Organ Building*



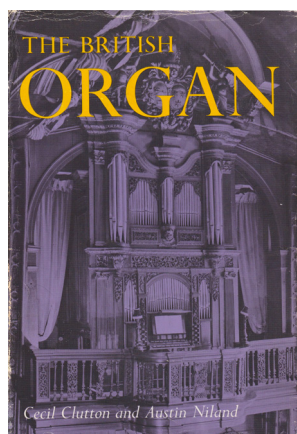
20 Large and rare books



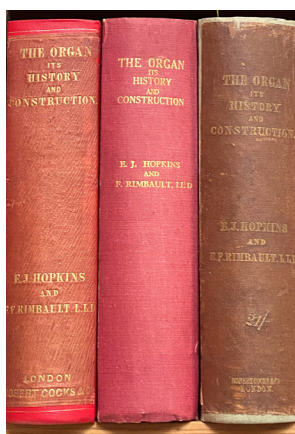
21 Four editions of Sumner's
The Organ



24 The Art of Organ-Building
- George Ashdown Audsley



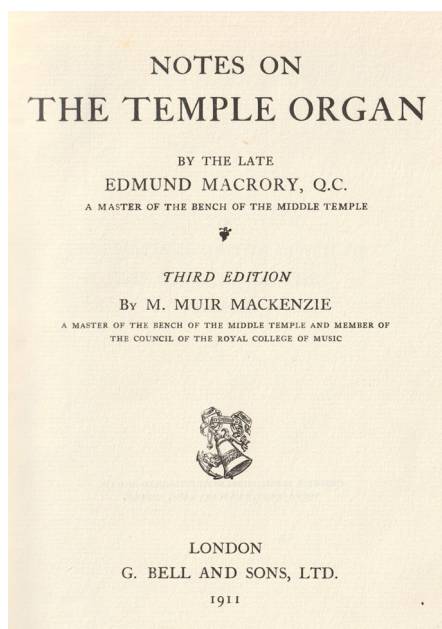
25 *The British Organ* - Cecil Clutton and Austin Niland



26 The three editions of *The Organ* by Hopkins and Rimbault



27 *Werckmeister* - new English translation



28 *Notes on the Temple Organ* - Edmund Macrory



29 *Organ Cases of Western Europe* - Michael I. Wilson

Principles of Construction and Use (my second Music prize at school), Sumner's rather 'thin' *Father Henry Willis, Organ Builders, and his Successors*, and – a real treasure, gifted me by a local organist – the second edition of Hopkins and Rimbault's *The Organ: its History and Construction*.

By the time I'd moved from the organ loft of Solihull School to the very different environment and challenges of that at New College Oxford, I had collected a further clutch of new books: *The British Organ* by Cecil Clutton and Austin Niland (my final school Music

prize), *The Organ Today* by Herbert and John Norman, *The European Organ* by Peter Williams, and *Modern Organ Building* by W & T Lewis (whose explanations of tubular-pneumatic actions bewildered me for years and still do), the first of Laurence Elvin's books – *The Harrison Story* – and an elegant second-hand book Roy Massey gave me: *The Organs and Bells of Westminster Abbey*, by Jocelyn Perkins. Oxford in the 1970s was still a city of second-hand and antiquarian book shops; Blackwell's Music Shop had an especially tempting second-hand section. When my rather

modest student grant allowed, I would buy the occasional second-hand organ book and so my collection slowly grew.

Towards the end of my four years in Oxford, the first of several pieces of good fortune on the book-collecting front occurred. During Holy Week 1975, New College Choir was in the USA, singing the services in Battell Chapel, Yale University (on Good Friday, trying to perform Kenneth Leighton's *Easter Sequence*, we were mesmerised by the first example of 'liturgical dance' we had ever experienced – but that's another story). In Yale's Woolsey Hall is arguably the finest large romantic organ in the USA – do look it up. It has been maintained and restored since 1952 by the A. Thompson-Allen firm. Aubrey Thompson-Allen was a clever Willis man who left for the USA in 1949 to join G. Donald Harrison (another clever ex-Willis man, whose wife left him, travelled back to the UK and became Henry Willis III's second wife) at Aeolian-Skinner. Three years later, Thompson-Allen moved to Yale as Curator of Organs. His son Nicholas and their business partner Joseph Dzeda have carried on this work since Aubrey's retirement in 1973. I sought out their workshops underneath the Hall, and spent several hours engrossed in all they had to say, whilst admiring their superb pneumatic restoration work and immaculate tuning. On leaving, I was amazed to be given by Joe his hardback two-volume Dover reprint of Audsley's seminal *The Art of Organ Building*. They remain among my most treasured books and, half a century later, Joe and I are still in touch. He and Nick are still at work; amazing!

The next stroke of luck came thanks to my work a decade later reviewing for this magazine, then becoming Reviews Editor and eventually Editor. That 20-year period turned out to be a remarkable era for new organ books, many of them from Germany or France about major organs and important organ builders; some from America and a few from Great

Britain and Australia. I enjoyed reading, thinking about and then reviewing many of the books that came along; the perk of doing such reviewing is keeping the item reviewed. My shelves grew pretty rapidly during those years, with very interesting and often richly illustrated 'coffee-table' books on important organs and organ-builders. Many of the books I had collected by this point proved particularly useful when teaching pupils for their RCO exams, so I had 'lending' copies of the key volumes, knowing that they might come back adorned with coffee mug / wine glass stains! Actually, I learned that lesson the hard way at New College, having leant my precious and pristine Williams *The European Organ* to a recitalist as he traversed Europe. On its return, the book was hardly recognisable as that which I'd lent him. Never again.

In the mid-1980s I performed two recital/lecture tours behind the Iron Curtain – in what was then Communist East Germany, the DDR – all being arranged through the British Council. Being paid in the *Mark der DDR* was a problem, as the currency was worthless in the West. So, off I went to find music shops in Potsdam, Dresden, Freiberg and Magdeburg, where music and books were embarrassingly inexpensive. So I stocked up with miniature full-scores (cloth-bound Peters Edition) of the four major Bach choral works, and bought books (in German – which was a bit of a problem as I don't speak it) about German organs, and especially about Silbermann. More good luck came later: in 2005, The Organ Club had to move its large library to smaller premises, so a remarkable number of duplicate volumes were offered to members. Hearing of this quite early on, I had a marvellous trawl, which added probably a shelf of books to my growing library. Occasionally inheriting books from deceased organ enthusiasts not only continued to fill gaps in my collection, but also – to this day – brings those lovely people back to mind every time I open a volume with a former owner's name

or bookplate on the fly leaf. They are all treasured possessions.

Another stroke of good fortune stemmed from my habitual visiting of second-hand bookshops. Staying in the Bristol area for a few days, I wandered into such a bookshop and although the music section was not large it had a few really significant and quite rare organ books. The member of staff on the counter clearly spotted my avid interest in these, came over to me and

said, "If you're interested in organ books, you might like to know that the owner has a roomful in his house. Would you like to have his phone number?" Well, what a question to ask somebody like me! Fortunately, this coincided with a particularly large fee I'd earned. Those of us who sang in the choir when Pope John Paul II visited Canterbury Cathedral on 29th May, 1982, as I had, (Canterbury and Rochester [where I was Assistant Organist during the



30 Paul's Hauptwerk organ



1980s] had joined forces and I wasn't needed in the organ-loft) were paid the extraordinary fee of £400 (mainly by the television companies who broadcast this memorable event world-wide), a sum now valued at around £1,100. Peter Gooden was the Bristol bookshop's owner, and it was to Mr Gooden's house that I went that evening. It was a spacious, elegant, high-ceilinged Victorian Bristol villa, whose stairs led up to a large former bedroom on the first floor. Opening the door, I discovered all the walls of the room bedecked with shelves, and on the shelves every organ book you could possibly imagine – and many I'd never heard of. Talk about Aladdin's cave! I was in absolute heaven (albeit a distinctly pricey heaven – the fee was gobbled up by the time I'd finished). Probably two hours later I struggled out to the car with more than one very large

pile of books – which formed the next major growth of my library, allowing me to tick off a particularly satisfying number of titles on the 'wanted' and 'scarce' lists.

'My 'working library' is the real joy and a completely invaluable resource for my daily work'

I carried on enjoying second-hand bookshops until one by one they closed, or the number of organ books on their shelves dwindled to a trickle and then pretty-well dried up. I remember, some 25 years ago, asking such a bookseller in

Ripon (whither I'd taken the Southwell choristers for an inter-cathedral football match) why this was happening. He said, "Well, everybody buys off the Internet now, so we sell more on-line than in the shop". At that time the Internet was a new concept for most of us, and I had no idea you could *buy* things on it. He said, "Oh yes" and gave me the name of what is now probably the best-known second-hand book-selling site. However, I really didn't want to use it. Why? Well, for me the real thrill was going into a little bookshop one had never visited before and suddenly finding that 'special something', that book on one's wanted list for which one had been searching for 20 or 30 years. I knew I would miss that and felt I was cheating if I went online. But online I had to go if I were to complete my list of *desirabilia*, among which were the rare and rather expensive

pair of huge volumes of Arthur Hill's glorious drawings published as *Organ Cases of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Once I'd secured those online, my guilty feeling rapidly disappeared and several such purchases followed, notably a fine first edition of Audsley's two-volume *The Art of Organ Building* (to supplement that treasured smaller-size Dover reprint Joe Dzeda had so generously given me at Yale, 30 years earlier).

There is still the occasional jewel of a find in a second-hand book shop, of which a notable one was my discovery of a beautiful first edition in mint condition of F. H. Sutton's 1872 *Church Organs – their position and construction* (280 x 370mm in size!), where it was the *only* music book in the Yorkshire Dales shop! Another experience I recall very clearly: it was in Walsingham, where I'd been giving a recital on the beautiful Williamson & Hyatt organ in the parish church. The next morning, I found a delightful antiquarian bookshop near the Anglican Shrine. I went in, not expecting very much other than religious books (which I do also collect), but, as ever, slightly keyed up just in case, and after a few minutes I spotted a book on a high shelf which had a familiar appearance to me. You'll remember that as a teenager I was given 'Hopkins and Rimbault' (second edition); well, I'd later acquired a third edition (and yes, one does get into multiple editions eventually, as you'll see in some of the images illustrating this article) but I've never seen the first edition of 1855. I took the book off the shelf and discovered it to be just that – an 1855 Hopkins and Rimbault – and in absolutely immaculate condition. No dust on top nor any diminution of shine in the bright gold blocking on the cover and spine. How could this be, I wondered? I asked the bookseller where he had obtained the book. "Oh," he said, "It's an interesting story. In the late 1850s, not so far from here, a convent was built, the chapel for the nuns being fitted out with everything that a such a

building should contain, including not only a pipe organ in a little west gallery, but a cupboard next to the organ full of publications that the organist would need. When the convent closed recently and we were asked to sort out any books that might be of interest, we discovered in the long-closed music cupboard this immaculate copy of Hopkins and Rimbault, which seems never to have been opened – from 1856 to date. Would you like to buy it, sir?". Well, you can imagine my answer, and as I sit here typing this it's just next door on my library shelves, snugly sitting alongside the second and third (final) editions.

The 'next door' I'm talking about is the music room / library we had built, when in 2016 I retired from Southwell Minster. We moved to nearby Bingham and bought a house with sufficient space on the side to build such an extension. It's long and quite narrow and has a sloping ceiling which ends high up on what was the outside wall of the house. That wall is now covered from end to end and from floor to 12ft 6ins ceiling with bookshelves, drawers for CDs, and cupboards below for folders and boxes of organ specifications. Opposite is the pipe organ I built over the years (played from the 1947 Walker stop-key console made for Portsmouth Cathedral), a four-manual Hauptwerk, and my hi-fi, sitting on top of a unit housing LPs. The room is a delight – and something to which I had aspired for many years – but I have to say (no surprise here) that my 'working library' is the real joy and a completely invaluable resource for my daily work.

Rather than split it up when the time comes to downsize (if it does!), the whole collection of organ books plus my organ music has been gifted to New College, where I spent four such formative years, and to whom I and other organists owe so much. There it will, I hope, provide a rich resource for the wonderful musicians who play and learn in that great college for many years to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Hale is a professional organ consultant, recitalist and choral conductor.

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 has been a diploma examiner for the RCO, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lambeth 'Thomas Cranmer Award' for his contribution to church music.

More information is available at www.paulhale.org