

The Organs  
of  
Southwell Minster

Paul Hale

## The Arrival of Pedals

Towards the end of Spofforth's period in office, it appears that musical standards were not always the highest, for in the *Journal* of John Marsh for August 1801 we read:

Having been disappointed of going to Southwell to see the collegiate church there the last time I was at Nottingham [...].we went to the church, in the first appearance of which I was much disappointed, owing to the two spires at the west end (which I had seen represented in prints of the church) having been from their ruinous state recently taken down. Having attended the choir service, which was perform'd in as bad a manner as I ever heard, we went into the chapter house [...] at four went to the afternoon service, when I went into the organ loft and played the chant and voluntary, the rest of the service being played in a slovenly manner by a boy, the apprentice of Mr Spofforth, the organist.

Marsh (1752–1828) came to have close family connections at Southwell. He was a talented amateur musician and composer and was by far the most prolific composer of orchestral music in England in his time. In his *Journal* for Sunday 14 September 1817 he writes:

[...] I went twice to the minster, where the singers were sadly over-powered by the organist, Mr Spofforth, an old, deaf man, who, to make matters worse, used the cornet besides the sesquialtera in the full organ.

In 1804 the organ builder George Pike England was building a fine new organ in Newark Parish Church. A letter from him (see British Library Add Ms 15544) sets out work to do at Southwell which was carried out in that year. He cleaned and repaired the organ, replacing the Great Trumpet and Choir Dulciana with new ranks. He also raised the choir organ to a level above the parapet of the screen so as not to obscure the figure of the Virgin nor any other part of the screen. Upon the author's inspecting the reverse side of the parapet in 1995, on the occasion of the organ case being empty, it was evident that the stonework had been hacked away to accommodate access to the old choir (Chair) organ and made good with brickwork at a later date or dates. Two engravings of the organ (see illustrations on pp 13 and 19) show the choir case in its original low position whereas photographs taken before its removal in 1889 (see illustrations on pp 21 and 22) show it in this higher position.



*A mid-nineteenth-century view from the quire*



*The Smith case viewed from the quire (1880s) — note the curious wind-trunk (?) to the Chaire case*

## Minor Repairs and a Major Rebuild



*The Bishop case, viewed from the quire (after 1892)*

Robert Liddle must have been delighted with his comprehensive and modern organ. It was cleaned in 1902 when the Vox Humana and Orchestral Oboe were revoiced, and some bellows re-leathering was carried out in 1916. One must remember that with coal-burning Gurney stoves around the Minster, with candle smoke, deposits from gas lighting and the gas engine, the organ was bound to become dirty rather quickly. Southwell was typical of many cathedrals in this respect, where organs needed to be cleaned and possibly re-leathered far more often than they do now.

On Liddle's death Harry Tupper was appointed *Rector Chori*. His previous appointments had included a spell as Acting Organist at Lichfield Cathedral and a year at Hexham Abbey before arriving at Southwell in 1918. He held the FRCO diploma and had been awarded an Oxford B.Mus. in 1899.

Tupper was soon requesting more work. On 25 April 1922 he wrote to the Rector to state 'how badly the organ is in need of a thorough cleaning and overhauling [...]. Interior condition filthy'. He mentioned an abundance of stone grit and that a new pedalboard was badly needed as the old one was of an 'obsolete pattern with entirely wrong measurements', pointed out that 'some system of control for the Pedal stops is also badly wanted' and that 'the wind chests and trunks are also badly leaking' (an attendee at one Evensong in 1922 wrote 'The organ was very asthmatic — the noise of escaping

wind out-performed the choir!’). Bishops accordingly cleaned the pipes, regulated the action, replaced the red felt bushing the stop-knobs, waxed the console and fitted a new RCO dimensioned pedalboard, all for £201 10s. Before they could do the work ‘water from a faulty tank in the tower’ flooded the Solo Organ, which had to be disconnected. Its repair cost an extra £15.

Tupper died in 1929 and George T Francis (FRCO) was appointed in his stead. Francis (known later locally as ‘Captain’ Francis) had been a pupil and assistant to Bairstow, at Wigan, Leeds and York Minster. He immediately warned Archdeacon Conybeare, then Rector but in 1938 to become the first head of the Foundation styled ‘Provost’, that all was not well with the organ, and that about £2,000 needed spending on a rebuild. Francis used to tell the story of how he persuaded the powers that something needed doing to the organ. Apparently, whilst playing the choir in one day, he reached out vigorously for a distant pedal but kicked the metal waste-paper bin instead. Conybeare asked him what had caused the noise, so Francis, sensing an opportunity, kicked the bin on every occasion possible after that, convincing all who heard that the organ’s mechanism was in a terrible state. Conybeare backed him with the Commissioners, writing that ‘we cannot delay any longer’ (letter, 28 December 1929), pointing out that much of the mechanism was worn out and could not be reached for repair.



*George Francis (Rector Chori 1929–46)  
at the 1892 console (photograph 1932)*

The Commissioners immediately invited their Architect W D Carøe (Ewan Christian’s successor) to comment. He obtained estimates from Bishop & Son for £3–3,500 and from Harrison & Harrison for about £4,000, both of which used the old pipes but replaced much of the mechanism. Any casework was to be extra. Conybeare soon became fixed on the idea of a vista (and also on the idea of congregational nave services) and so encouraged Bishops to tender for an organ tucked away in the nave triforia, with only the Choir Organ (hidden) and a Pedal Bourdon on the screen. Such a proposal was sent to Carøe and Passmore on 4 December 1930. From his letters Carøe is clearly convinced neither by the Bishop scheme, nor by the quality of their current work. Having discussed matters with Dr Alan Gray (distinguished organist of Trinity College Cambridge, with its large Harrison & Harrison organ) he is inclined to promote the more expensive scheme by Harrison & Harrison, whose Choir, Swell and three Pedal stops would be placed centrally on the screen, with the remainder in the north (sic) triforium of the nave. This scheme, however, was rather dull and found no favour at Southwell, even when Harrisons offered to build it in two stages (18 stops and then the rest).

The Harrison & Harrison June 1931 scheme, in brief, was:

Pedal: 32 (D.O.Wood), 16, 16, 16 (from Great), 16 (bass from Choir), 8, 8, 16  
 Choir: 16 (Double Salicional, stopped bass), 8, 8, 8, 4, 4, 2  
 Great: 16 (Double Geigen), 8, 8, 8, 4, 2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub>, IV (Harmonics), 8, 4  
 Swell: 8, 8, 8, 8, 4, III, 8, 8 (Clarinet), 16, 8, 4

Usual inter-departmental couplers, plus Swell Octave, and Great Reeds on Choir. New French

pitch. Tubular and electro-pneumatic action. 'All the sound material of the present organ to be used again at the builders' discretion'. £3,000 plus the old organ; Discus blower £280.

Conybeare was not convinced. Months passed with no decision. On 29 March 1932 he wrote to the Commissioners passionately pleading for the Bishop scheme, quite certain that it would be possible to accompany voices in the quire with an organ mainly in the nave, despite the prospect being 'strongly condemned by Dr Gray'. He wanted the organ built in time for the 1934 Diocesan Jubilee. Carøe, on the other hand (letter to the Commissioners of 16 April 1934), was quite clear that he wished to have a modest-sized organ case on the screen following 'mediaeval precedent'. He did not like the concept of the vista which can 'tend to destroy a sense of mystery or something beyond, which is always a most valuable adjunct in architecture for worship or reverence'. Meanwhile the newspapers had got hold of the story, *The Times* for 6 June 1932 reporting the bare facts of the Bishop scheme and price.



*The empty screen viewed from the nave c.1933*

Suddenly the impasse was broken — and in an extraordinary way. On 28 June Conybeare wrote to the Commissioners that organ builders John Compton and Herbert Norman had appeared in the Minster (unbidden) 'having heard of the rebuilding of the organ'. [I told them that it was] 'not much use in them sending in their specifications and that if they did so I held out no hope for them. The strange thing was that they had come independently. The rivalry is strong and the dislike of Harrison very clear!'

But by the end of September the die was cast — Conybeare wrote to the Commissioners on the 23rd wildly enthusiastic about the Hill, Norman & Beard scheme, whose 70 stops (including some extension) and two consoles for £2,896 he obviously found almost unbelievable. He was interested too in Compton's scheme (some extension, 79 stops, £3,000) and one submitted by Rushworth & Dreaper, the well-known Liverpool firm (some extension, 54 stops, £2,500 or 36 straight stops for the same price). He recommended the HN&B scheme, which was approved by the Commissioners on 16 February 1933. The Agreement with the organ builders was dated 12 July 1933, by which time, curiously, the old case had already been taken down, the organ dismantled, and the screen left empty for a while (enthusiastically, Conybeare photographed the vista!). The Commissioners in their turn gave the new oak case, which was designed by Carøe & Passmore (in collaboration with Herbert Norman) and made at a cost of £1,500 by Dart & Francis of Crediton. On completion (after the organ itself had been finished) it was described by Dr Henry Ley (then Precentor [Director of Music] at Eton) as 'the best modern organ case in England'.

## A Fresh Start



*The 1934 nave console in its final (1971–92) layout with Paul Hale (Rector Chori from 1989)*

When Kenneth Beard retired at Christmas 1988 the author was appointed *Rector Chori*, starting on 1 April 1989. The outgoing *Rector Chori* presented me with reports from four leading organ builders, three of whom declared the organ not worth keeping. After having lived with it for a while it became clear to me that musically it was unsatisfactory in both parts of the building. In the quire the sound of the Great and Swell was muffled as it all spoke west, whereas the Choir Organ was very dominant. In the nave, Full Organ had to be used all the time to accompany a large congregation. The Pedal reeds were of course still in the nave so they sounded huge there yet inconsequential in the quire.

Clearly the provision of two separate organs was the only answer. In due course this principle was accepted by the Cathedral Council and an Appeal set up, ‘Southwell 2000’, with the wider brief of raising money for a new Visitors’ Centre, and for essential repairs to the building. Whilst the Appeal was running, a scheme for the nave organ was drawn up with Wood of Huddersfield (see Chapter 8). The two-organ concept envisaged a fine second-hand two or three-manual organ on electric action in the nave triforium, to play for congregational services in the nave and also to accompany the Minster choir flexibly for the many services when it sings west of the screen. The screen was to receive a completely new mechanical-action organ, facing east only, of about 50 stops on three or four manuals. Its stop-list would make it not only a colourful and comprehensive accompanimental organ, but also an eclectic recital organ, based on English mid-nineteenth century tonalities but with a full complement of mutations and a full palette of reeds.

By Christmas 1992 the old organ had reached such a state of decrepitude and was costing so much money to keep going that it was decided to abandon it and install temporarily a purpose-built digital Copeman Hart organ instead. This was duly designed and bought for £31,000 (being sold on to St Edmund’s School Canterbury, for £28,000 three years later). The loudspeaker cabinets were placed in the north quire triforium, with a seventeen-foot long bass reflex cabinet behind the high altar. The three-manual console was mounted on a platform in the third bay of the south quire aisle. It was first used at Easter 1993.

Meanwhile, discussions over many months had taken place between the author and those experts with experience of similar problems. John Norman (no longer an organ builder but now the CFC’s organ adviser), the organ builders N P Mander Ltd and Ian Bell, were particularly helpful in clarifying what could or could not be done, once the decision had been taken to preserve (on historical and financial grounds) the Carøe case. A new case had been proposed and drawn by the Architect, Martin Stancliffe, as an alternative to which it had been hoped to add a ‘Chair’ case to the existing case in emulation of Southwell’s eighteenth-century case, but constructional difficulties prevented this. At this point Nicholson of Worcester were invited to tender as their recent work at

Portsmouth Cathedral and (with the author as Consultant) Birmingham Cathedral suggested that they might have the ability to design and voice a tracker-action organ to fit within our relatively small case.

Initial plans had already been approved by the Cathedrals Advisory Committee and in 1992 the nave organ was built, paid for from Minster resources. Meanwhile the screen organ scheme was still under development and was not finally taken to the new body, the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England, until 23 March 1995. During 1994, plans with Nicholson had been refined and almost finalised, but the cost was still a worrying factor when it became clear that the Appeal would probably not raise the £250,000 needed to augment the Minster's Organ Fund. In December 1994 I was told of a fine old Nicholson organ in St Peter's Church, Malvern Wells, which had just been closed. Nicholson assured me that it had just the tone we were after, and so we considered buying it and using its pipework as the basis of an otherwise new instrument.



*The John Nicholson organ (1868)  
in St Peter's church, Malvern Wells*

The organ had been built by Nicholson in 1868 and rebuilt and enlarged in 1906, with two stops replaced in 1922. It still had tracker action and its original layout and case (see photograph above). Its specification was:

**Great Organ** (CC to a, 58 notes)

1.	Open Diapason	8	1868
2.	Clarabella & Stopped Bass	8	1–24 1868, 25–58 1906
3.	Small Open Diapason	8	1922 (small scale), replacing Keraulophon
4.	Principal	4	1868
5.	Flute	4	1868 (open wood treble, stopped bass)
6.	Fifteenth	2	1868
7.	Mixture 17.22	II	1868 (1–24 17.22; 25–36 12.15; 37–58 1.8)

**Swell Organ** (CC to a, 58 notes)

1.	Bourdon	16	1868
2.	Open Diapason	8	1868 (possibly later)
3.	Stopped Diapason	8	1868, treble from old Great Stopped Diapason
4.	Salicional	8	1868 (grooved into 3)
5.	Voix Celestes	8	1868
6.	Principal	4	1868
7.	Fifteenth	2	1922 (pipes older?), replacing Harmonic Flute
8.	Cornopean	8	1868
9.	Oboe	8	1–12 1922, 13–58 1868

The opening series of recitals was as follows:

**Roy Massey** 19 June

**Mozart** Fantasia in F minor  
**Vivaldi/Bach** Concerto in D minor  
**Sweelinck** Variations on 'Mein junges  
Lebet hat ein End'  
**Guilmant** Sonata No 1 in D minor  
**Bach** Passacaglia and Fugue  
in C minor  
**Reger** Benedictus  
**Jongen** Chant de May  
**Bonnet** Elfes  
**Dupré** Variations sur un Noël

**Paul Hale** 17 July

**Couperin** Offertoire sur les Grands Jeux  
**Le Begue** Tierce ou Cromorne en Taille  
**Dandrieu** Variations on 'O Filii et Filiae'  
**Bruhns** Prelude and Fugue in E minor  
**Bach** Chorale Variations on  
'Sei gegrüßet Jesu gütig'  
**Franck** Choral No 1 in E  
**Vierne** Clair de Lune  
**Bonnet** Romance sans paroles  
**Willan** Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue  
in E flat minor

**Philip Rushforth** 7 August

**Egil Hovland** Toccata on 'Now thank we all our God'  
**Dupré** Prelude and Fugue in F minor  
**Dvořák** Largo ('New World' Symphony)  
**Swayne** Riff Raff  
**Buxtehude** Toccata in D minor  
**Durufié** Scherzo  
**Reubke** Sonata on the 94th Psalm

**David Sanger** 18 September

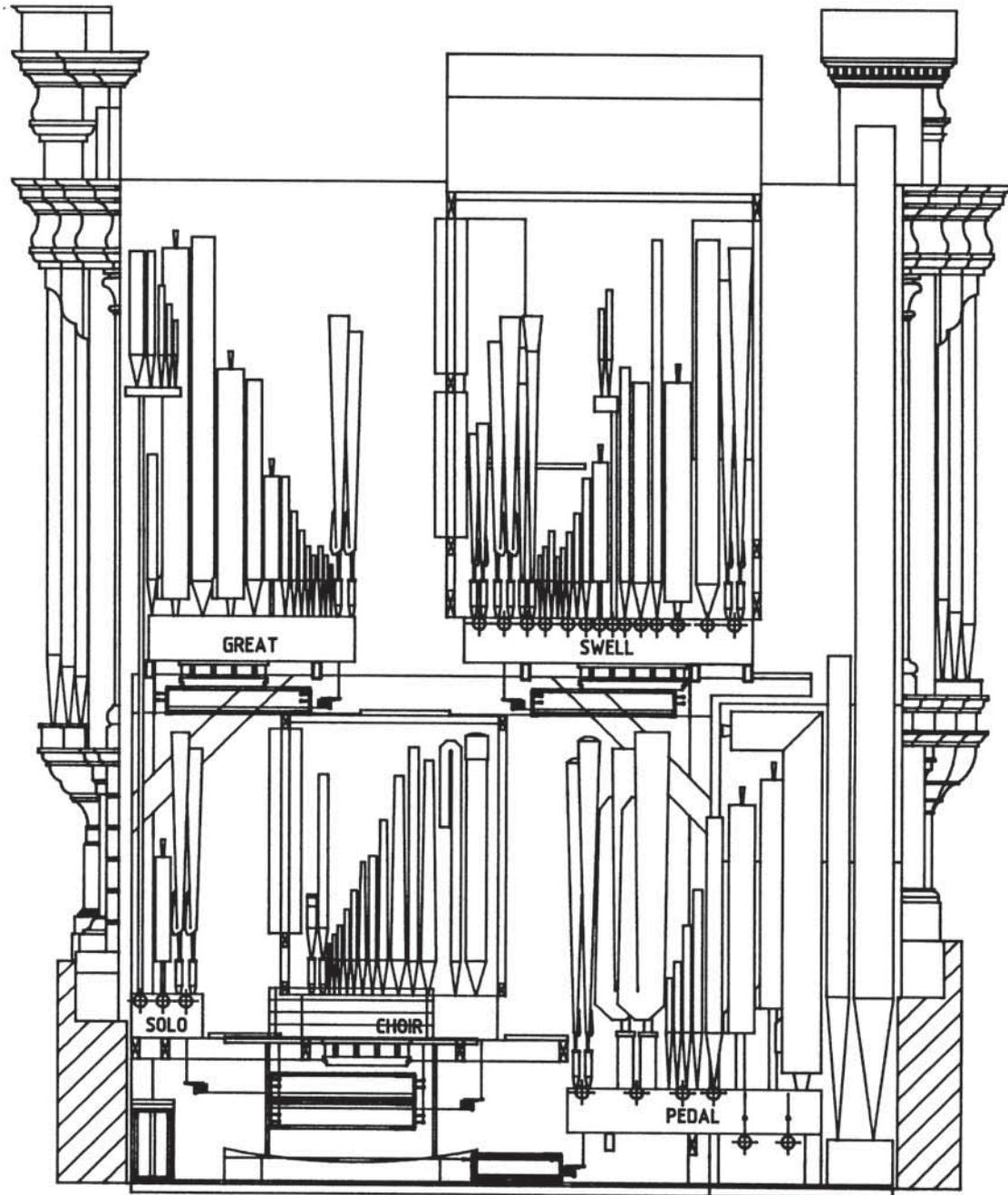
**Sanger** Sonata fort'e piano  
**Lübeck** Chorale Partita on 'Nun lasst uns  
Gott, dem Herren'  
**Guilain** from Suite du second ton  
**Grainger** 'The Immovable Do' or  
'The Cyphering C'  
**Bach** Prelude and Fugue in A minor  
**Liszt** Prelude and Fugue on BACH  
**Franck** Cantabile  
**Messiaen** Chants d'oiseaux from Livre d'Orgue  
**Vierne** Symphonie III

**John Scott** 9 October

**Wagner** Prelude 'Die Meistersinger'  
**Bach** 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon', Toccata,  
Adagio and Fugue in C  
**Schumann** Fugue No 3 on BACH  
**Naji Hakim** Variations on Two Themes  
**Whitlock** Sonata in C minor  
**Daniel Roth** Final 'Te Deum'



*The screen viewed from the north nave triforium  
(photograph 2007)*



*The interior layout of the 1996 Nicholson quire organ, as observed from the north side*



*The quire case-front showing the tin display pipes of the Great Small Open Diapason  
(photograph 1996)*



*The console of the 1996 Nicholson quire organ*

## An Organ for the Nave



*The J J Binns organ (1904) in Heckmondwike Upper Independent Chapel, West Yorkshire*

Having decided in 1989 that a Nave Organ was required, enquiries were made of the organ builders Wood of Huddersfield, who had shortly before completed impressive rebuilds at Wakefield Cathedral and Chesterfield Parish Church. In his report dated 23 January 1990, Philip Wood offered the use of a large organ by J J Binns of Leeds, which had been in store for some years. He suggested that it could be rebuilt as a large two-manual, with a third manual for Southwell's 1933 HNB Tuba. This suggestion (and his eventual price of £68,050) was enthusiastically received and over the next eighteen months agreed to by the Cathedral Council and the CAC.

The scheme evolved somewhat, gaining an extra Great Mixture and a Solo Clarinet (the personal gift of Philip Wood). The great majority of the organ came from the 1904 Binns formerly in the Upper Independent Chapel, Heckmondwike (see photograph above). As this organ had suffered some vandalism before being removed, several other ranks came from another fine Binns, the 1924 organ at Waterbarn Baptist Church, Stacksteads (Lancashire). The 1933 south triforium blower was used, along with a new BOB booster producing 16 inch wind for the Tuba. The bottom octave of the 1892 Bishop 16ft Open Wood was also used as it was already lying down in the triforium — the last remaining link with the 1892 organ. The new mobile console employed the HNB keyboards from the 1933 console, together with the adjustable bench. The ivory-headed stop-knobs are from the Stacksteads organ, re-engraved.

Work began in the Autumn of 1991. The soundboards were fully overhauled and repalleted and all other necessary restoration work was carried out throughout the organ. The action was converted to electro-pneumatic, with a SSL digital link to the console, which has four plug-in positions in the nave and a cable long enough to reach the west door. New chests were made for 8ft basses and for Pedal ranks. The instrument was installed during the Spring, fine regulation being undertaken by David Wood after Easter. The first recital on the new nave organ was given by Roger Fisher, then Organist of Chester Cathedral, on 25 May. His programme contained works by Cabanilles, Bach, Rheinberger and Christopher Steele.



*The Wood 1992 nave console*

‘Smart Card’ memory device for storing combination information  
 Pitch control knob for fine-tuning digital stops  
 Indicator lights for Vestry and West Door

Manual compass CC to c, 61 notes. the keys made with cow bone and ebony  
 Pedal compass CCC to F, 30 notes, the keys made of beech and rosewood

Console of oak (external woodwork fumed), stop jambs of rosewood, department labels of ivory recycled from stop keys of HNB 1933 console. Stop-knobs of rosewood, with casein inserts.

Square thumb pistons  
 Adjustable bench

Closed circuit television system for observing conductors and processions.

Copeman Hart loudspeaker cabinets: two above the Pedal Organ, one on the south side of the Screen, one bass cabinet in south nave triforium with Nave Organ.

#### Wind Pressures

Great 80mm; Swell 85mm; Choir 80mm; Solo 130mm; Pedal 130mm

Schwimmer regulators in the Great (2), Swell and Choir soundboards. Free-standing compensators for Solo and Pedal, with two single-rise breakdown reservoirs on the south side of the screen. Reconditioned X10B BOB blower.

#### Mixture Compositions

(planned by the author)

	Great IV	Great III	Swell III	Swell IV	Choir III
C1	15.19.22.26	26.29.33	15.19.22	19.22.26.29	19.22.26
A10		22.26.29		15.19.22.26	
C13	12.15.19.22				
D#16					15.19.22
F#19		19.22.26	12.15.19		
A22				12.15.19.22	
C25	8.12.15.19				
D#28		15.19.22			
F#31					12.15.19
A34			8.12.15		
C37	1.8.12.15			8.12.15.19	
D#40		12.15.19			
C49				8.12.12.15	8.12.15
F#55		8.12.15			

#### Pedal IV

19.22.26.29 throughout

The organ was first used on Easter Day 1996 and Dedicated by The Right Reverend Patrick Harris, Lord Bishop of Southwell, on Saturday 20 April at an extended Festal Evensong. The music included Kenneth Leighton’s canticles for Magdalen College Oxford, Parry’s anthem *Hear my Words, ye people* and the G major setting of the *Te Deum* by Vaughan Williams. The final organ voluntary, played by Philip Rushforth, was the first movement of Lemare’s *Symphony in G minor*.

## Chapter 10

### The Song Room Organ

The Song Room (in the Great Hall complex of Bishop's Manor, and once the Bishop's chapel) contains a two-manual extension organ by Grant, Degens and Bradbeer. This was designed and built by GDB as an 'improved' version of their house organ for Peter Hurford. Commissioned by Hurford pupil Dr Richard Gabriel it was made in 1978 and was Dr Gabriel's practice organ until on retirement in 2003 he sought to find a new home for it. During a conversation with Paul Hale he offered the organ as a gift to the Music Department at the Minster, for the organists to use as a daily practice instrument. This saves the Cathedral organ having to be used in public for note-learning and is a great boon, particularly for the organ scholars, who have benefited enormously.

Auxiliary lay clerk and organ-builder Christopher Gray assisted Paul Hale with the move and after the organ was installed in the Song Room he added the bottom octave of the flute rank, so that the previously 'prepared-for' Pedal 16 Gedacktbass could be activated. The organ employs direct electric action to its four ranks, on two different pressures, both under two inches, the higher being supplied to the Holzregal rank and 16ft Gedacktbass. There is a small Discus blower and two inbuilt schwimmer regulators. The 'open-plan' console uses black square-section steel tube construction and afromosia, the timber which also encloses the base of the organ. Stop control is by rosewood stop-keys.

#### Ranks:

A	Koppelflöte	16	spotted metal, zinc & wood stopped bass
B	Principal	8	tin, zinc haskelled bass
C	Quint	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	tin
D	Holzregal	16	wood, 1/8 length, then 1/4 length, then 1/2 length

Tremulant to flues

Tremulant to reed

#### Stop-list:

	Lower manual	Upper Manual	Pedal
A	8, 2	4, 1	16, 8, 2
B	4	8, 2	8, 4
C	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> , 1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
D	8	16	16, 8, 4

**Compass:** CC-g, 56 notes

Adjustable bench

Discus blower