

The organ in Shelford Parish Church, Nottinghamshire

by **Richard Eaton**

In the Middle Ages, Shelford was a large and important village; this explains why we have a large church in what is now a small village of some 250 people. The building has marvellous acoustics for chamber music, for vocal music, and for organ music. By good fortune, although sad for the church in general and for St Catharine's church Nottingham in particular, we now have a fine organ to match that acoustic. St. Catharine's became redundant some three years ago. The building was sold and the new owners did not need the instrument. Jonathan Wallace and his team from Henry Groves and Son have moved it, cleaned it, restored it and built it in St Peter and St Paul's church Shelford where it stands resplendent at the west end of the nave.

The organ was not made for St Catharine's however. It was built in 1870 for Tockington Manor near Bristol by August Gern, installed within a late 18th-century case, possibly by Richard Seede of Bristol. The Cuban mahogany case is typical of the period. Each side tower was originally topped by a Greek-style urn in mahogany, with a crown device also in mahogany over the central tower. These, sadly, were looted before the organ could be taken out of St Catharine's. The music desk is beautifully inlaid with lighter woods. What happened to the organ that originally filled this case is unknown, but the case itself has many features similar to Seede's 1780/85 mahogany double case at Lulworth Castle Chapel, Dorset. The front pipes (original?) have been mute since 1870.

August Gern was born in Germany. He settled in London in 1866 having been a foreman in the workshop of Cavaillé-Coll in Paris. Since this is an early English example of his work it reflects the Cavaillé-Coll style much more than does his later work. Gern put sixteen stops (fifteen ranks, the Basson being divided) into the old case.

Why the owners of Tockington Manor decided to part with the organ in 1947 is not known but St Catharine's had a good reason for needing it - the old organ had been lost in a fire. The Tockington organ was rebuilt by Roger Yates. Having trained and worked for many years for Henry Willis III, Yates enjoyed a high reputation in the Nottingham area where he had built or rebuilt several organs, notably St John's, Carrington (subsequently excellently rebuilt by Wood of Huddersfield) and - another Gern rebuild - in the beautiful J L Pearson church of St Paul's, Daybrook. He made few alterations to the Tockington organ. The handsome booklet produced at the time tells us that he made "some tonal and mechanical modifications" but the author based this on comparison of the specifications and so "tonal" may not mean changing the sound of existing pipes. Later in the same booklet the author talks about the tonal modifications "increasing the resources of the organ while preserving its original characteristics". This too leads one to think that there was no revoicing.

Jonathan Wallace and Southwell Diocesan Organ Adviser Paul Hale are of the opinion that the pipework, all of which was used, was not altered tonally but that the scheme was changed by addition and a very little re-ordering. Yates removed from the Swell the Lieblich Bourdon (16ft), making it available instead on the Great and the Pedal. He replaced the Octavin 2ft on the Great with a diapason-scale Doublette which must have altered the Great chorus, shifting the balance upwards. He then used the pipes within the clever II-Vrank Fourniture (its 'progressive' composition based on Cavaillé-Coll) with which he replaced the Swell Lieblich Bordun. To the Pedal he

added a piquant Quintade 4ft and also made the Basson available. The Quintade is a most characterful stop; an early example of a rank to be popularised by Ralph Downes a few years later in the RFH organ and elsewhere. It does not really blend with the rest of the pedal but makes a splendid solo sound. The 1948 booklet claimed that it is “in scale and form of construction....similar to the stops found in Baroque period continental organs”. Most interestingly, it was Downes himself who gave the opening recital in September 1948, playing an intellectually rigorous programme of Bach, Sweelinck, Jongen, Mozart, Vierne, Wagenaar and Franck. One wonders if he had been an influence on Yates’ historically-inspired additions to this organ.

Yates retained the low wind pressure ($2\frac{5}{8}$ ins) and the organ sings most musically on it. He replaced the pneumatic action to the pedal organ which was “of primitive design and in a sorry state of repair”. Both claims are perhaps surprising given Gern’s pedigree and the quality of the instrument generally. The wind chest for the new pedal Quintade is also pneumatic as is the mechanism to facilitate the 16ft stops being playable on the pedal. All the pipework is of high quality, a large proportion of it being spotted metal. The organ works well as a whole: the flues have clarity yet blend, the reeds a marvellous ‘snap’.

Jonathan Wallace has made no alterations to pipework or action. His team has carefully and thoroughly cleaned and restored the whole instrument, changing the position of the two Bourdon ranks to accommodate them in their new home and to improve the layout. The action tubing obviously has had to be re routed – a task necessary anyway, the original (1948) layout being surprisingly torturous for a builder of Yates’ skill.

Taking an organ out of one building for another is not straightforward. The church authorities at St Catharine’s (or, more relevantly, St Mary’s High Pavement, of which St Catharine’s had become a daughter church) generously gave the organ to Shelford. This was encouraged and in part facilitated by Paul Hale, who wanted to keep such a fine and historic instrument in the area. Nevertheless it could not be removed until the sale of the building was complete and the new owners had confirmed that they did not want it. During this period we lost some decorative elements of the case, the thieves also treading on a few small Great pipes to reach the parts they removed. Fortunately these were repairable. We hope to complete the case in due course.

The builders clearly identified closely with the project recognising the quality of the instrument they were handling. The pipework has cleaned up superbly and the richly glowing mahogany case, with which the builder took especial pains and professional advice, looks magnificent, despite still showing evidence on its side returns of being cut around the smaller arch at St Catharine’s. Organ historian the Revd Andrew Freeman once described this case as “one of the best examples of its period and an ornament to any church”.

The organ was dedicated by the Rector of Radcliffe on Trent on 5 December 2004. Paul Hale will give the opening recital on 14 May at 7.30 pm. The choir from Tockington Manor (the house has been a Preparatory school for over forty years) is to sing at Shelford on 11 June completing a history circle for the organ - and showing a bit of real living history for the children.

Specification of the organ in Tockington Manor

August Gern c.1870, case by Richard Seede (?)

Great Organ (CC to G, 56 notes)

1	Open Diapason	8
2	Lieblich Gedact	8
3	Vox Angelica	8
4	Geigen Principal	4
5	Lieblich Floete	4
6	Octavin	2

Swell Organ (CC to G, 56 notes)

7	Lieblich Bordun [sic]	16
8	Flûte Harmonique	8
9	Viole de Gambe	8
10	Voix Celeste	8
11	Gemshorn	4
12	Basson Dessus)	
13	Basson Basse)	16
15	Trompette	8

Pedal Organ (CCC to E 29 notes)

16	Bourdon	16
17	Viola	8

Couplers

Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Swell to Great
Swell Octave

Accessories

Two combination pedals to Great
Two combination pedals to Swell
Trigger Swell pedal

Tracker action to manuals
Pneumatic action to pedals

Wind pressure $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches
Hand blowing

Specification of the organ as rebuilt in St Catharine's Church Nottingham, by Roger Yates, 1948. Cleaned and restored for St Peter and St Paul's Church, Shelford, by Jonathan Wallace (Henry Groves & Son) 2004.

Great Organ (CC to G, 56 notes)

1	Lieblich Bordun	16 (wood and metal, old Swell, on a pneumatic chest)
2	Open Diapason	8 (metal)
3	Lieblich Gedact	8 (metal)
4	Vox Angelica	8 (wood and metal, bass grooved to no 3)
5	Geigen Principal	4 (metal)
6	Lieblich Floete	4 (metal)
7	Doublette	2 (1948, metal)

Swell Organ (CC to G, 56 notes)

8	Flûte Harmonique	8 (metal, open throughout)
9	Viole de Gambe	8 (metal)
10	Voix Celeste (TC)	8 (metal)
11	Gemshorn	4 (metal)
12	Fourniture	2 to 5 ranks (mainly 1948, metal, on Basson slide)
13	Basson	16 (metal, on a 1948 pneumatic chest)
14	Trompette	8 (metal)

Pedal Organ (CCC to F, 30 notes)

15	Bourdon	16 (wood)
16	Lieblich Bourdon	16 (from no 1, wood and metal)
17	Quint	10 ² / ₃ (from no 1, wood and metal)
18	Viola	8 (open, wood)
19	Quintade	4 (1948, stopped metal)
20	Basson	16 (from no 13, metal)

Couplers

Great to Pedal

Swell to Pedal

Swell to Great

Swell Octave

Swell Octave to Great

Accessories

Two combination pedals to the Great Organ

Two combination pedals to the Swell Organ

Balanced Swell pedal.

Radiating and concave pedalboard.

Action:

Tracker and pneumatic to manuals

Pneumatic to the pedals

Wind pressures: pipework 2⁵/₈ inches, action 5 inches

Composition of the Swell Fourniture:

C¹ to B²⁴, 24 notes, 12.15

C²⁵ to F³⁰, 6 notes, 8.12.15

F^{#31} to B³⁶, 6 notes, 5.8.12.15

C³⁷ to G⁵⁶, 20 notes, 1.5.8.12.15

Electric blower

All metal pipework, including reeds and with the exception of the lowest octave of the Open Diapason, Flûte Harmonique and Viole de Gambe which are of zinc, are of fine spotted metal. The lowest octave of the Quintade is of plain metal.