The cases at Newnham

Upstairs & Downstairs

Paul Hale

I dare say all reading this article can think of churches where pipe organs have been ejected to make space for kitchens, vestries, lavatories, chair-stores, meeting-rooms and the like. All these items enhance a church and make its life more vibrant, enabling it to offer a full weekday ministry as well as making Sundays more comfortable and sociable. But why is it so often the organ that suffers? Ejected organs in such situations tend to be those in need of restoration or rebuilding, those which have perhaps no-one left to love them and to fight their corner, so one by one they join the ever-lengthening list of 'redundant' organs. An electronic comes in (even if with regret by those concerned), and the cycle of costly replacement every couple of decades is locked into – such a shame.

Yet, with a bit of thought, this need not happen.

Virtually all the extra space a church needs, as listed in my first paragraph, are ground-floor rooms; meeting rooms are sometimes 'upstairs' – particularly in a west end tower – but these are the exception, for building 'downstairs' is less costly and, of course, offers disabled access. Organs, on the other hand, traditionally take up two floors – 'upstairs and downstairs'. Downstairs are the base of the building-frame, the main reservoir, the console, actions, relays, blower and the pedal chests (at least for any 16ft basses); upstairs are the soundboards, swell-box, passage-boards, smaller pedal chests, and, of course, all the manual pipework.

Only if one takes the rigid view that an organ must be completely traditional in construction will it be found impossible to combine an organ and a useful church room in the same spot – just think how much useful unused height there is in most churches compared with the competition for insufficient floor space. Use the height, design a non-tracker organ which does not need a large wind reservoir, and the door opens on a range of possibilities.

This is precisely the approach taken recently by Henry Groves & Son (of Nottingham) at St Mark's parish church, Newnham (Cambridge). The organ there stood on the north side of the chancel, had been made in 1907 by George 'Paddy' Benson of Norwich (mainly out of Norman & Beard cast-offs), rebuilt by Miller of Cambridge in 1911 with a poor pneumatic action, and brightened up, with electric

Newnham specification before the recent work

GREAT ORGAN	
8	Open Diapason
8	Claribel
4	Principal
2	Fifteenth
SWELL ORGAN	
8	Rohr Flute
8	Gamba
8	Celeste
4	Geigen Principal
4	Flute
8	Trumpet
PEDAL ORGAN	
16	Bourdon
8	Bass Flute (ext)
4	Flute (ext)

action, by Norman Hall & Sons of Cambridge in 1973. The pipework was something of a hotchpotch (for example, the Fifteenth was a cut-down Dulciana and the Trumpet an opened-up Cor-Oboe) and it did not sound even as decent as its stop-list suggests that it should (see above).

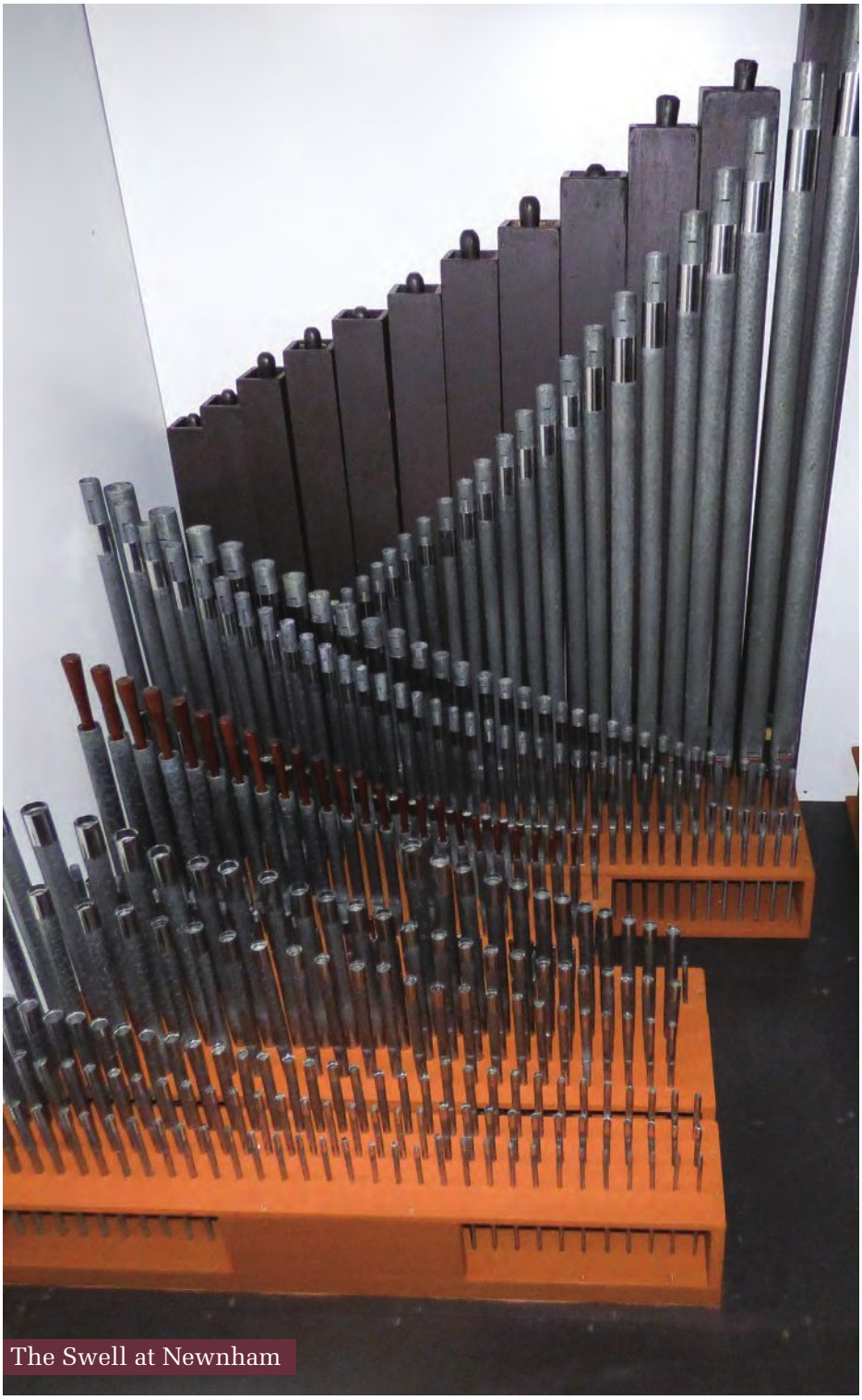
Jonathan Wallace, of Groves, suggested to the church that his firm build a new organ on the 'upstairs' level, sitting on a new mezzanine floor whilst retaining the original front/side casework and panelling. This would give the church a much-desired vestry beneath the organ, and the console would remain attached to the case just as before. The suggestion was received with alacrity and Groves designed an instrument using the 'modules' they have developed in recent years, which are rather akin to a small version of the famous Austin 'Universal Air Chest', inasmuch as the organ tuner can crawl (not stand!) around inside the chests – with the wind on – to adjust the pallet magnets for optimum pipe speech and repetition. Coupled with Groves's very compact wind regulators, the space the chests and wind take up is minimal and the wind so steady that it is quite hard to get the tremulants to work effectively.

The ability to make the pipe modules any size or shape that is convenient has meant at Newnham that the Great Diapason chorus now sits behind the original 8ft dummy front at the head of the north nave aisle, with the Great 'cornet decomposée' chest behind that, speaking equally into chancel and nave; speaking south are the front case pipes of the Great Open Diapason. All case pipes have now been painted gold (rather than the N&B 'silver'). Behind (east of) the Cornet chest is the Swell box (in the N/E corner) with shutters on its west face, angled S/W. The Pedal has a Haskelled 16ft Geigen, which stands with the Bourdon rank in front of the south side of the swell box.

As neither space nor money was abundant, limited use of extension/derivation and of fine quality vintage pipework has been employed to contrive a colourful and flexible specification (see over).

There are some unusual features, it will be observed. One is the availability of both the Swell reeds at 8ft on the Great. The idea is that solos can then be played on the Great and accompanied on the Swell, rather than the player struggling to find a soft enough stop to balance the Oboe (there is no Dulciana)

The console at Newnham



The Swell at Newnham

New specification:

GREAT ORGAN	
8	Open Diapason
8	Stopped Diapason *
4	Principal
4	Harmonic Flute *
2⅔	Nazard *
2	Fifteenth
2	Blockflute *
1⅗	Tierce *
1⅓	Mixture III
8	Swell Trumpet (C)
8	Swell Oboe (B)
	Tremulant (to *)
SWELL ORGAN	
8	Geigen Diapason
8	Lieblich Gedeckt (A)
8	Gamba
8	Voix Celeste
4	Geigen Principal
4	Lieblich Flute (A)
2	Fifteenth
2	Mixture III
16	Contra Fagotto (C)
8	Trumpet (C)
8	Oboe (B)
	Tremulant
PEDAL ORGAN	
16	Geigen Diapason (D)
16	Bourdon (E)
8	Principal (D)
8	Bass Flute (E)
4	Fifteenth (D)
4	Flute (E)
16	Swell Fagotto (C)
8	Swell Trumpet (C)
COUPLERS	
	Swell Octave
	Swell Unison Off
	Swell Sub Octave
	Swell to Great
	Great to Pedal
	Swell to Pedal
	Great Cornet * on Swell
	Gt & Ped Combs Coupled

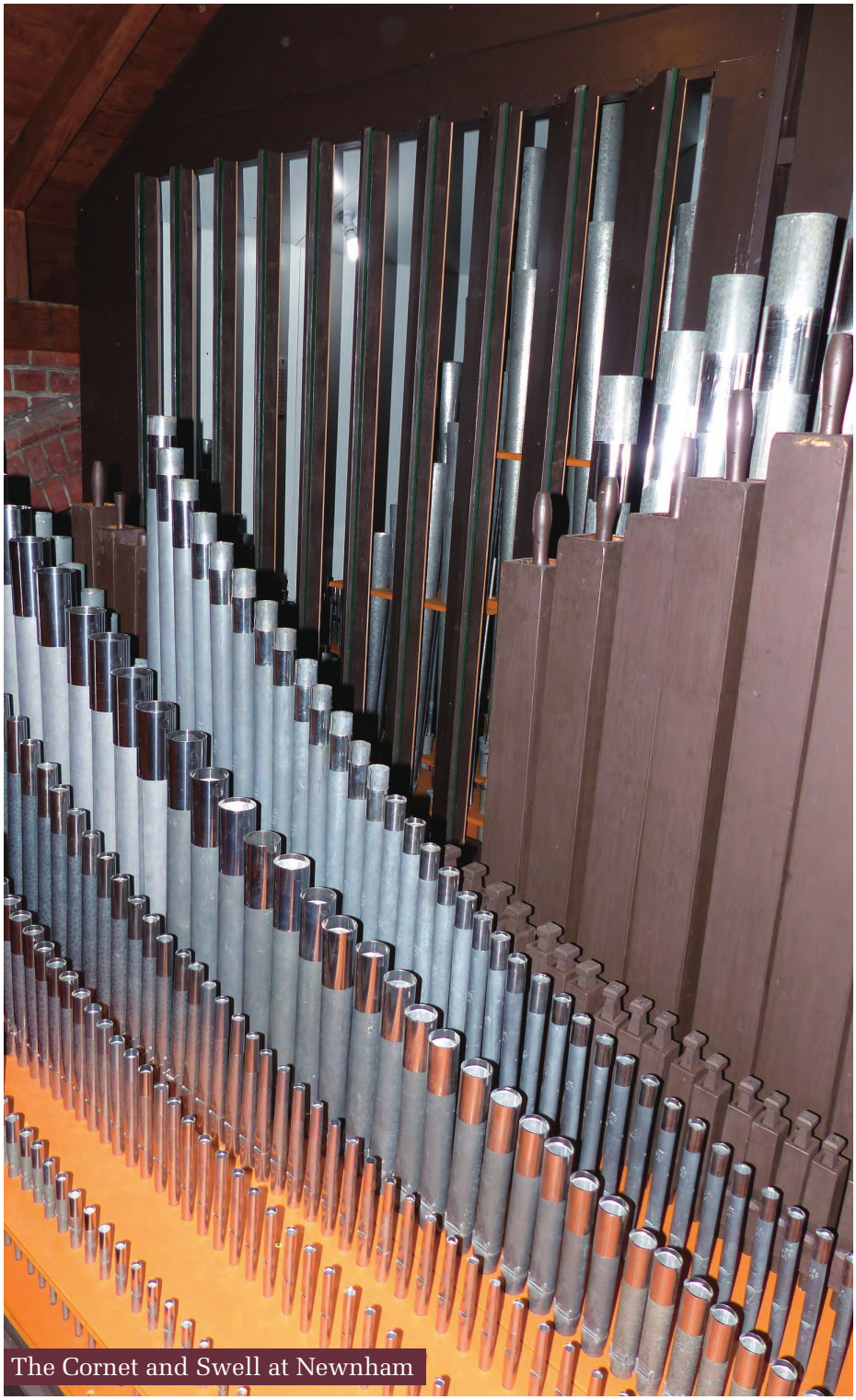
or to accompany the Trumpet in Trumpet 'voluntaries'. The Swell itself provides a rich variety of such accompanimental stops. Readers may recall in my article in the September issue that at St Alphege, Solihull, the Swell Oboe draws also on the Choir for the same reason. Next is the grouping of the Great flutes 8.4.2⅔.2.1⅗ (each engraved with a *) on one module in the centre of the organ, just where a Choir or Positive soundboard might otherwise go. This enables these stops to have a measure of independence such as their own Tremulant and wind supply (there are two small blowers in this organ, being more convenient than one larger one). Full advantage is made of this by the unique transfer 'Great Cornet on Swell'; this selects these five stops (blind) as a group playing from the Swell manual. The joy of this arrangement is that the Cornet can then be accompanied on the Great by drawing some of its own ranks independently (flutes 8ft & 4ft, for example), or indeed the Great Open Diapason, or Stopped Diapason and 4ft Principal; there are numerous possibilities.

Of the old St Mark's manual pipework only the Swell 8ft Rohr Flute and 4ft Flute were considered worthy of re-use: revoiced, the former is now the Great Stopped Diapason; rescaled several pipes larger and with new trebles, the latter is now the Great Nazard. The Pedal Bourdon/Bass Flute also was retained. The Great Blockflute and Tierce were new (wide scale), the 4ft Harmonic Flute is a beautifully melodic 1913 Norman & Beard rank from Holy Trinity Church, Southwell;

the Haskelled 16ft Geigen is a fine Rushworth & Dreaper stop from a redundant Nottingham extension organ. All the remaining ranks (of top quality thick spotted metal) came *en bloc* from the superb Norman & Beard organ in Battersea Polytechnic (see NPOR N17254), thus matching the Newnham organ's Norwich origins. A new low-level stop-knob console was built (by Renatus) into the casework of the old console and a new adjustable bench was provided. For more information, see the church's webpages and NPOR K01271.

The result is striking – an organ which in its decibel output and internal balances fits this modest-sized 1901 brick church to perfection, and within only 20 independent registers (delivering 30 speaking stops) delivers a really wide and satisfying range of colours, including two excellent Diapason choruses up to Mixture, a powerful Full Swell and an effective Pedal with both drive and warmth. The organ was dedicated by the Bishop of Ely on 28 June 2015 and a plaque on the newly-polished original casework states that the project is in celebration of the 41 years Jonathan Hellyer Jones has been organist at St Mark's. I hope he feels it was worth the long wait!

Don't forget – this is an 'upstairs' organ: nothing 'downstairs' except the console. Where are you going to put yours?



The Cornet and Swell at Newnham

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Whilst Organ Scholar of New College, Oxford (1971–4), Paul Hale began to write about the organ – his first published piece was in *Organists' Review*, of which he was later to become Reviews Editor and then Editor (1990–2005). A noted recitalist, lecturer and choir trainer, Paul is well-known in the UK, in Europe and in the USA. As well as being an Organ Adviser for the Dioceses of Southwell and Lincoln, Paul is an accredited member of the AIOA and has designed many new and restored organs throughout the UK. He is a diploma examiner for the RCO, Chairman of the RSCM in his area, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM for his contribution to church music. More information is available at www.PaulHale.org