



The Kidlington Organ

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 122, No. 1662, (Aug., 1981), pp. 555-557

Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/964178>

Accessed: 27/06/2008 17:37

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# Church and Organ Music

## The Kidlington Organ

Richard Vendome

The organ of Kidlington Parish Church, some five miles north of Oxford, was reconstructed in 1976 by a group of volunteers led by Paul Hale and myself, with professional assistance from Grant, Degens & Bradbeer Ltd of Northampton. It was dedicated in December 1976 by the Bishop of Dorchester.

The church, fairly large, dates from 1220; until the Reformation it was served by the Augustinian monks of Osney Abbey. The expanding parish is classified as a development area by the diocesan authorities; a reordering of the church interior was carried out in 1974–5, with the provision of a new stone floor, modern lighting and comfortable chair seating. Adjustable staging was provided for the nave altar, and has also been used for plays, operas and concerts. The small organ built by Willis in 1888 had always been unsatisfactory on account of its remote position in the north transept, and it now became quite impracticable for accompanying nave services. It clearly needed to be moved to a suitable site in the nave, but with sides of pitch-pine panelling some 15' deep and an exposed zinc front it was too unsightly and the wrong shape to be placed in any visible position.

A typical village instrument, it had been installed to supersede a barrel organ (dating from 1836), before which the singing had been led by a 'choir' of instrumentalists. Examination revealed that the manual soundboards and much of the mechanical action were in excellent condition, though the pedal pneumatics were perished, used as nesting material by the church mice. It was a 'budget' instrument, using stock pipework; some ranks had two sets of markings, indicating that they had been used elsewhere. Tonally the organ was undistinguished, the mixture of wide and narrow scaling producing a poor blend.

The Early English nave is quite plain,

with a solid north wall unbroken except by a single window towards its east end; the west wall has a central window and door. Tests showed that the north-west corner would be the ideal position for the organ, both acoustically and visually.

With the bulky pedal stops removed, the depth of the organ was reduced to that of the basic building frame, 6' 6"; the frame was positioned on reinforced concrete stilts, raising it 4' from the ground. The Great soundboard was replaced in its old position, and the Swell soundboard was kept behind the Great, but raised 4' 6" to speak unhindered as an unenclosed *Oberwerk*; by this means, alterations to the action were kept to a minimum. Schwimmer wind regulators were installed to replace the old reservoir, formerly in the base of the instrument, which now houses the new Pedal soundboard. The Pedal pipes speak directly into the church from below the gallery, and can be heard with clarity from the console. The instrument is set at a slight angle to the wall, focussing the sound into the centre of the nave.

The most challenging part of the project was the tonal design: not being limited by the exigencies of a normal 'rebuild', we were able to plan a new instrument, but using some old material in good condition. The restrictions of soundboard size and the need to re-use some of the pipework provided a valuable discipline. The two specifications are shown below.

Architecturally, the church has changed little since c1440, and it was our intention that the instrument should be at home from the point of view of sound and appearance. This has been realized largely by mild voicing and the design of the new organ case of English oak in a conjectural 15th-century style. After much discussion it was decided that the fresh but warm sound we were aiming at could be obtained only from a carefully

scaled new Great chorus. Its sound is full but not over-loud, the large Mixture IV–V especially being delicately voiced.

The absence of a principal in the five-stop Positive is not a handicap since the three flutes are of a narrow scale with low cut-ups; the Gemshorn is almost a *Spitz-principal*. The Cimbball III is constructed with two octaves and one quint throughout its compass: at tenor C, for example, the ranks are  $\frac{2}{3}$ ',  $\frac{1}{2}$ ',  $\frac{1}{4}$ '; this imparts a bell-like brightness to the chorus, while avoiding shrillness.

The higher wind pressure and cut-up of the old principal ranks produced a firm tone well suited to the new Pedal division, with some transposition of pipework. The basic scaling adopted was one note larger than that of the Great, and there were few problems in balancing the two choruses.

The manual flutes are contrasted in tone: the wooden Bourdon 8' is full-bodied, but the Chimney Flute 8', formerly the Swell Lieblich Gedact, is more distinctive, its half-length wooden

1888		1976	
<i>Great</i>		<i>Great</i>	
1 Open Diapason 8'	8'	1 Principal	8' a (bass, d)
2 Claribel Flute 8'	8'	2 Bourdon	8'd
3 Dulciana 8'x	8'x	3 Octave	4'a
4 Principal 4'x	4'x	4 Nazard	2½b
5 Harmonic Flute 4'	4'	5 Fifteenth	2'a
6 Fifteenth 2'x	2'x	6 Tierce	1½'b
7 Clarionet TC 8'	8'	7 Mixture IV–V	1½'a
		8 Trumpet	8'a
		Tremulant to both manuals	
<i>Swell</i>		<i>Positive</i>	
8 Horn Diapason 8'	8'	9 Chimney Flute	8' (9)
9 Lieblich Gedact 8'	8'	10 Nason Flute	4'b
10 Gemshorn 4'x	4'x	11 Gemshorn	2'd
11 Cornopean 8'	8'	12 Cimbball III	½'a
Tremulant		13 Dulcian	8'c
<i>Pedal</i>		<i>Pedal</i>	
12 Open Diapason 16'y	16'y	14 SubBass	16' (13)
13 Bourdon 16'	16'	15 Principal	8' (1, 4)
		16 Octave	4' (10)
		17 Mixture IV	2½' (3, 4, 8, 6)
		18 Septima	4½'d
		19 Bombard	16'c
		20 Trumpet	4'd
		2½" manuals, 3" pedals	

Wind pressure: 3"

Couplers: II–I; II–Pedal; I–Pedal

x – pipework in 1888 instrument with 2 or more markings  
y – wood, added 1908

a – new pipes by Giesecke, Göttingen

b – new pipes by Grant, Degens & Bradbeer

c – new pipes by F. J. Rogers, Leeds

d – old pipes by Father Willis and Holdich, from elsewhere  
nos. in parentheses refer to re-used stops from 1888 specification

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## ROYAL COLLEGE OF ORGANISTS

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chimneys imparting considerable harmonic richness; the Nason Flute 4' is a mild Quintadena. The Nazard and Tierce are narrow in the bass, increasing in scale throughout the compass. Used in various combinations, they produce many solo colours and give a mild reediness to the principal chorus.

The horizontal Trumpet 8' of copper was designed and made for us by Giesecke; it is of narrow scale, intended not for loud solo use but as part of the plenum, to which it adds excitement rather than measurable volume. The Dulcian 8' is full-bodied, effective both as a solo voice and in chorus. On account of limited space the Bombard has half-length resonators but produces a fairly solid tone by means of large shallots of Schnitger-type construction. The Septima 4½' is a colourless stopped flute occupying minimal soundboard space; heard at a distance it adds depth to the pedal line, being the seventh harmonic of the 32' series.

With the exception of the reed stops, the new pipework was voiced entirely in the church by John Bailey and Martin Goetze of Grant, Degens & Bradbeer; voicing *in situ* is slower and therefore more expensive than factory voicing, but it has the advantage of allowing plenty of scope for experiment, which in our case was very useful.

The mechanical key and stop action is a mixture of old and new; sections of the old manual action have been replaced with lighter trackers of American whitewood. The touch is firm but not heavy. The pedal action is of aluminium and duralumin, designed and constructed by Roger Ainsworth of the Department of Engineering Science at Oxford. The stop action to the Pedal division is by remote-control cable (as on the Frobenius at Queen's College, Oxford).

More than 50 people assisted the project in various capacities over a period of two years or so; the total cost was around £6000. At times we were inclined to treat the venture as an extended academic exercise, an attitude quickly corrected by our professional adviser, John Bailey, who assisted us to achieve the necessary fine balance between matters technical, musical, historic and financial, and to whom we are greatly indebted.

The instrument can be heard on Sunday evenings during August and September; recitalists will include James Dalton, Alena Veselá, Susi Jeans and David Briggs.

### Sir John Dykes Bower

The memorial service for Sir John Dykes Bower will be held at St Paul's Cathedral on Wednesday, 23 September at 5 p.m. On that day the College will close at 3 p.m.

### Elections to the Council

The following have been re-elected to the Council.

London: W. S. LLOYD WEBBER. Country: HER-RICK BUNNEY, DERRICK CANTRELL, WILLIS GRANT. Elected to the London section: RICHARD HICKOX.

### Biennial College Dinner

The Dinner will be held in Imperial College of Science and Technology, Prince Consort Road, London SW7, on Thursday, 1 October at 7.30 p.m. Guest of honour: His Eminence Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB. Sherry and musical entertainment at the RCO before dinner. £10.50 all inclusive. Members or guests of members only. Application form with full details obtainable from the Clerk.

### Annual Membership Subscription 1981 - 2

Members are reminded that the annual membership subscription of £11 was due on 1 July.

### Summer Vacation and Late Summer Bank Holiday

The College will be closed from Saturday, 1 August to Monday, 31 August (both dates inclusive).

### Year Book 1981 - 2

Please check your entry in the Year Book. If you wish to have it altered, details should be sent to the Clerk by 1 September.

### College Opening Hours

With effect from 5 September, the College will be open on Saturdays from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. instead of from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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STEPHEN CLEOBURY  
(Hon. Secretary)



*The rebuilt organ  
in Kidlington  
Parish Church  
(photo: J. F. Morris)*