

Something old, something new

Paul Hale finds refreshment in a couple of nag's heads

Have you ever come across a nag's head? No, I don't mean a public house, but that antique form of swell box generally only read about and not seen. In all my travels I've only found one (in Gloucester) ...until now.

Kenneth Tickell and Goetze & Gwynn have recently each restored an historic organ (1820 & 1779 respectively) which features a 'nag's head' swell box. Below is the one reconstructed by Goetze & Gwynn.

Notice the sliding shutter operating as the swell-front, controlled by a device the shape of which gives the 'nag's head' swell its name. Observe, too, that such devices can only be used for a short compass swell, as is found in late 18th and early 19th century organs. Imagine the weight of such a front on a full size box; no foot could lift it.

This delightful tiny swell is found on an organ by John Avery which Goetze &

Gwynne have just restored; sadly for UK readers it can only be found in New Zealand.

Edward Bennett, responsible for the restoration, writes: "The organ in Ponsonby Baptist Church, a mile from the centre of Auckland, New Zealand, was made in London in 1779 by John Avery. Following a request by Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand, Dr (later Sir George) Elvey, organist of St George's Chapel, Windsor, selected this organ to be sent out to an Anglican church in Auckland in 1859. Bishop, Starr & Richardson rebuilt it in that year, and it sailed on the ship *Avon*. Since 1897 the organ has been in Ponsonby Baptist Church, and is (apart from Te Aroha) the oldest organ in New Zealand.

The aim of the restoration was to restore the organ to its original condition. Inevitably the Mixture had been lost; new pipes being copied from other existing

Avery examples at Black Torrington (Devon) and Northborough (Cambs).

Other pipes too, including the wood Stopt Diapason and Hautboy (with its swell box – modelled on the 1790 Robert and William Gray organ at Burghley House), are new. On dismantling the organ, we discovered the original slider and plated-over holes for such a reed stop. Avery may never have supplied one, but he certainly made every provision for a Hautboy."

Avery Specification

1	Stopt Diapason Bass & Treble	8
2	Open Diapason (front pipes, from ten c)	8
3	Dulciana (from mid c)	8
4	Principal	4
5	Twelfth	2 ² / ₃
6	Fifteenth	2
7	Sesquialtera Bass (17.19.22)	III
8	Cornet Treble (12.15.17, from mid c)	III
9	Hautboy (from mid c)	8



The Goetze & Gwynn "nag's head" swell box



The Avery in the Goetze & Gwynn workshop



The pipes at St George's RC Church, York

Whilst the Goetze & Gwynn partnership was working on this organ (consultant John Wellingham), Kenneth Tickell's company was busy with a similar project (consultant Dr John Rowntree) – the restoration of the James Davis organ in St George's RC Church, York.

Ken Tickell writes: "The original instrument by James Davis dated to 1820. Later in the nineteenth century Hill worked on the instrument, at which time it lost its short compass swell and the lower notes of the long compass Great, the original bellows was exchanged for a small double-rise reservoir, a Pedal Bourdon was added, and a larger Swell box was stood to one side of the organ, on pneumatic action. The Great Sesquialtera and original Trumpet disappeared, and a new Trumpet was placed on a pneumatic chest, the tubing fed from the bars of the main soundboard. Of the original material, what remained was therefore the casework, the Great soundboard and most of the Great pipework, parts of the Great key and stop action, and some Swell pipework. Everything else had to be reconstructed".

The glorious mahogany casework has been stripped of the paint which had covered it for years, and furnished with an elegant console featuring new long compass bone keyboards, new stop-knobs, a new pedalboard and a new music desk, which can be appreciated to the right.

The treatment of the Swell here was rather different: "The arrangement of the Swell was based closely on that of the Davis organ at Teigngrace in Devon, though there are some differences – the Teigngrace Swell begins at middle C, whereas the York Swell is from tenor F. This resulted in a slightly larger swell box, though still copying the nag's head shutter. As the Swell soundboard had to be made entirely new, a concession to modern use was made in providing the Stopped Diapason down to bottom C. The bass notes are interspersed with the tenor octave on the soundboard and rollerboard, and are grooved to stand at the back of the box".

St George's (current) specification:

Great Organ (FF to f, 61 notes)

1 Open Diapason	8 new bass
2 Stopped Diapason	8 new bass
3 Dulciana (bass from St Diap)	8 new bass
4 Principal	4 new bass
5 Flute	4 new bass
6 Fifteenth	2 new bass
7 Sesquialtera	III all new
8 Trumpet	8 all new

Swell Organ (C to f, 54 notes)

9 Open Diapason (from F ¹⁸)	8
10 Stopped Diapason (from C)	8 1-17 new
11 Dulciana (from F ¹⁸)	8
12 Principal (from F ¹⁸)	4
13 Hautboy (from F ¹⁸)	8 new

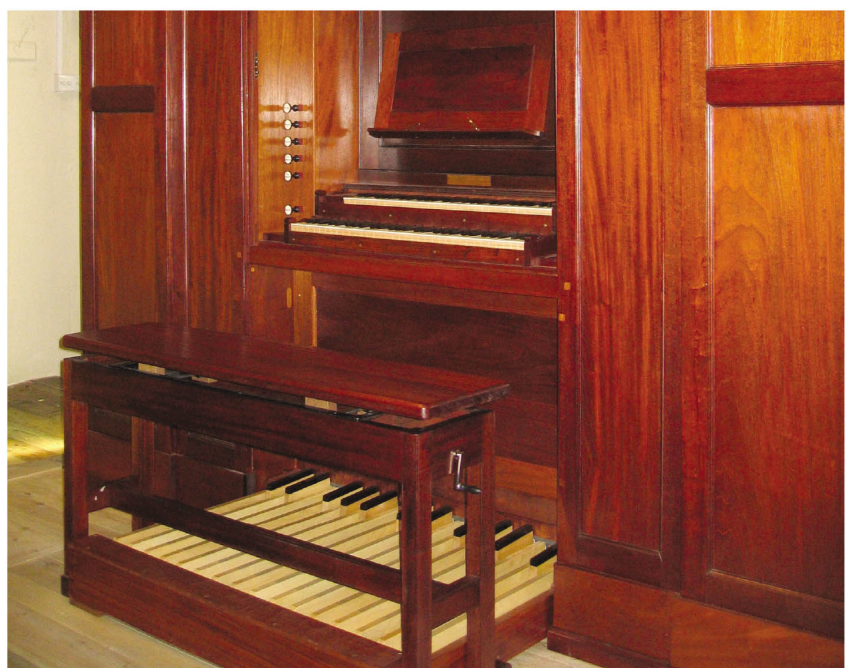
Pedal Organ (C to d, 27 notes)

14 Bourdon	16 (Hill)
<i>Great to Pedal (permanently coupled)</i>	

"The scaling of the Sesquialtera was derived after examination and consideration of the scales of the Davis organ at Teigngrace. There are very few examples of reed stops of this age in the United Kingdom, and as far as is known, none remaining by Davis. Following research by David Frostick, the reed pipes and their shallots have therefore been based on the scaling of two old ranks by other builders – the Trumpet on an example by Hart at Little Walsingham, 1809, and the Hautboy on an example by William Hill at Ingrave, Essex, 1856".

We can rejoice that through such thorough restoration based on wise counsel and extensive research, two superb historic organs are once more in immaculate condition and fine voice. It was my privilege to record the Avery organ before its re-exporting to New Zealand (though I had thought I was only going to 'try it out' for the evening!); what a pleasure it was to hear how the 8ft stops sang, how the chorus sparkled, how the tierce ranks added spice – and how the nag's head swelled.

Paul Hale



The newly-stripped mahogany case at St George's RC Church, York