

Case study
The restoration
of the
1755 John Snetzler Organ
at
Clare College Cambridge

Case & Carving

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Case

The finish of the case was in quite a shabby state and had been interfered with at least once during the lifetime of the instrument. The front uprights had endured some damage in the past, possibly because of collapse of the scalloped toe board facing which supports the middle uprights and thereby also the pipe shades. Repairs can be spotted at the top of the arched middle section where tenons have been replaced. These repairs were accepted as historic and have been left as they are during this present restoration.

Condition of the finish during dismantling



The name plates were also quite tarnished and the black letters not clearly legible. These name plates, which were already partly loose, were taken out, cleaned up and the letters were filled up with ink. The finished name plates were given a layer of clear varnish to protect them.

The broken pediment, very fragile once removed from the cornice, was indeed fractured in one place. This was repaired and it was refitted to the cornice with two steel brackets. This broken pediment had originally an ornament standing on the central pedestal. The lead straps which held it in place are still fixed to the pedestal.

The pumping mechanism is fixed to a rather insignificant structure of frame and panel which forms the floor of the organ. This was in an unstable condition and was thereby reinforced from below.

Cracked panel where a pumping trundle bracket is fixed (condition during dismantling)



General shrinkage exposes the weakness of the floor



The case was completely stripped from its finish using denatured alcohol. During the restoration of the finish one could notice that the finish of the wood surfaces was rather rough, as if finished with a scraper rather than with a plane.

This type of surface dictated the style of finish the case should be restored with. This should be waxy rather than shiny, as not to show up these imperfections unnecessarily.

The side panels stripped back to the wood showing the beautiful corners to the fielded panels



The refinishing was done with oils, earth pigments and a modicum of filling of the pores in the mahogany. The built-up finish was completed with a wax finish.

Carving

The carved pipe shades were in a bad condition. Old bad repairs had been done with inappropriate glues and were very difficult to get apart again. Sometimes where bits were missing in the past, new bits of carving weren't quite right and the old carved surfaces were compromised to fit the bad matching new bits.

All finish and all non-original bits of wood were removed from the pipe shades, and historic repairs repeated once again. The central pipe shade had a substantial piece of new carving (almost a quarter) which was found to be of inferior quality and not to match the old work. This also was removed and replaced with a newly carved piece.

Repairs

An original fragment with a new piece inappropriately carved (the old piece also re-shaped) and fitted with modern glue



Splits being spliced in with veneer and repaired with hot glue and clamped any which way possible



Conclusion

The quality of this carving is of an especially high and fine calibre. The original artist has made the wood come alive like pieces of very expensive lace.

Finished result

Restored casework still shows the repaired extended uprights. Note the exquisitely restored carvings



The original artist has managed to create a maximum feeling of life and depth, in what is actually a very thin piece of carving.

Close-up of the middle section showing the excellent movement in the form

