

The New Orford Organ

by Graeme Kay, choir director of Orford Church
and curator of Orford Organ Project

St Edmundsbury Cathedral  The Foundation of St Edmund 



Visitors to St Bartholomew's Church in Orford, which contains artefacts and fittings from every century since medieval times, will be struck by the arrival, in the north west aisle, of a very modern organ: this is the three-manual Peter Collins organ originally built in 1977 for the Turner Sims Concert Hall at Southampton University, now magnificently restored by Cousans Organs Ltd of Coalville, Leicester.

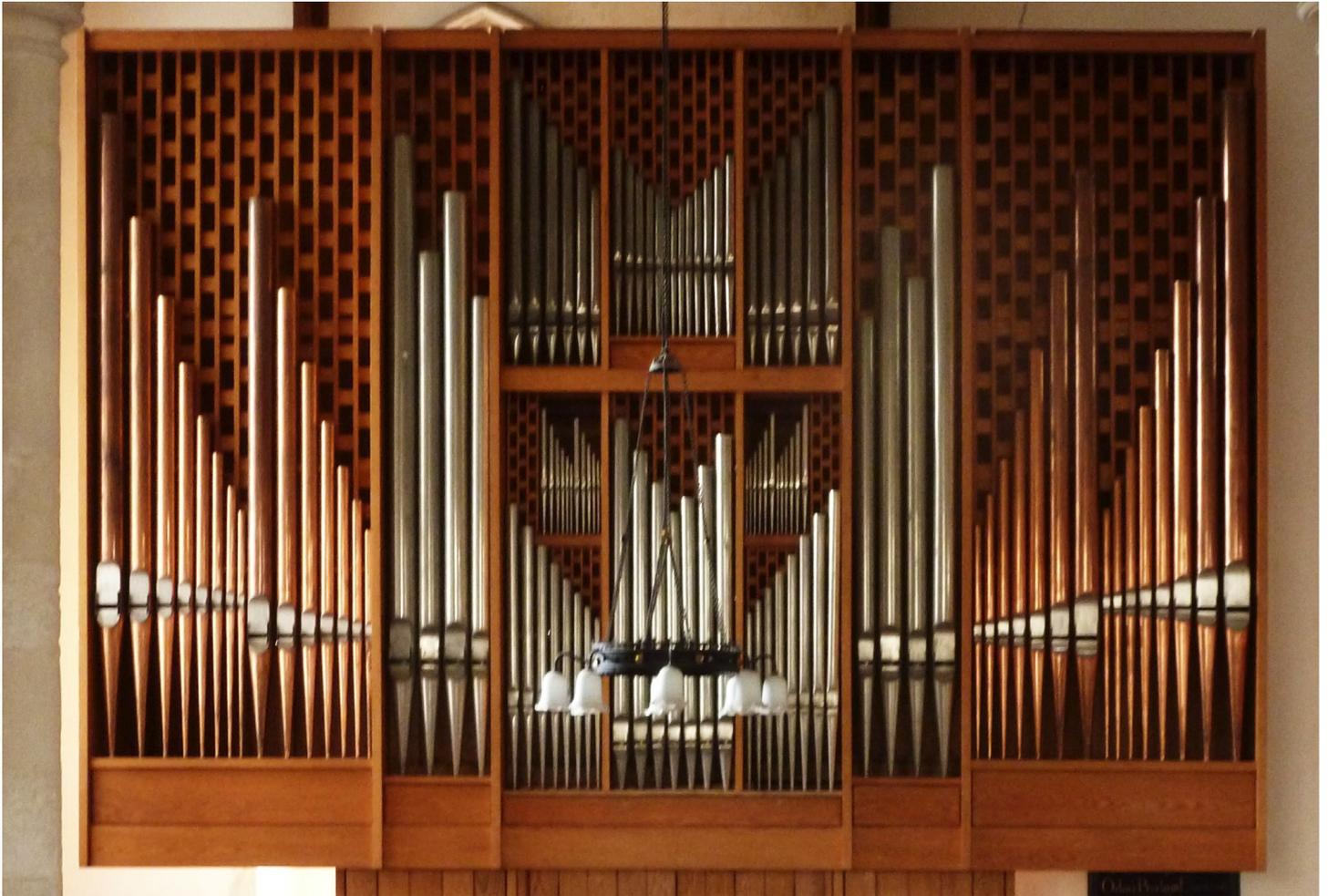
The story begins in March 2017 with a phone call from Prof David Owen Norris of the university's music department to Orford's former team rector, the Rev David Murdoch, offering the organ to a

good home at no cost. It had been in store for seven years after being removed from the concert hall over fears of flooding from an underground river; as the university needed performance space for a symphony orchestra, the organ was no longer required.

Orford Church had a long-standing ambition to replace its small, six-stop organ, which had been brought in over a hundred years ago as a temporary measure after the original 18th-century west gallery organ was destroyed when the tower collapsed in the 19th century. Lacking both the funds and the availability of any suitable redundant instrument, the project was on hold. The Collins organ – freestanding and of narrow width – was a neat fit for an underused corner of the church: seemingly a godsend, the PCC agreed to take it on.

An independent organ adviser, Paul Hale, former director of music at Southwell Minster, was appointed, and the organ's parts were liberated from their shipping container and brought to a disused bomb store at RAF Bentwaters near Orford while the PCC applied for a faculty to install it. The





application having been recommended for rejection twice by the diocesan advisory committee, the PCC petitioned the consistory court, which found in the church's favour, the green light being given in August 2018.

The organ was removed to Cousans Organs' works to begin off-site restoration; a full-scale fundraising campaign was launched in November 2018, to raise the £120,000 required to complete the project (the organ would cost about £0.75 million to build new). It was returned to the church in March 2019, was playable by Palm Sunday and fully operational by Easter Sunday, when it was dedicated by Bishop Mike Harrison. In May the dedication was celebrated with an Organ Festival which showed the organ off as an ideal solo, liturgical and concert instrument, speaking into the perfect acoustics of Orford Church: the immediate consensus is that the organ, which has a Baroque North German specification but has proved versatile enough to cover all repertoires, might have been built for Orford.

Orford Church has a strong musical tradition – Britten's Three Church Parables were premiered there. It now has an instrument worthy of that tradition, but with wider implications. The organ project was always seen as benefiting the whole community of Orford – not only providing support and encouragement in the liturgy for Orford's accomplished church choir, but also bringing more diverse concert opportunities, as well as – for the first time – the chance to offer teaching to young people and adults. Orford sees the organ – which has been nicknamed 'Anna Magdalena', after J S Bach's second wife – as central to the long-term sustainability of music and worship in the Church.

Location of Orford Church:

<https://w3w.co/cats.crowd.costumed>