

Break out



Henk van Eeken's new organ in Crosshaven: in designing its case, the builder studied Gothic organs in Italy and Iberia

Crosshaven's new instrument, based on north German historic principles, marks a radical departure from the traditional mould of organs in Ireland. **Simon Harden** assesses its potential

PHOTOS BY JOLENE CRONIN

The picturesque Irish coastal town of Crosshaven has established a prominent position on the country's organ landscape with the creation of a highly individual instrument, thanks to a combination of strong personalities: the flamboyant 19th-century architect of Holy Trinity Church, an energetic and visionary rector, an organ consultant not afraid to deviate from the norm, and a research-driven and exacting organ builder.

The story behind the Crosshaven organ project is intriguing. The church, built after the design of William Burges in 1866 and in stark contrast to his extrovert design of St Fin Barre's Cathedral in nearby Cork city, is simply laid out and devoid of excessive ornament. Although clearly a product of the 19th century, the simple concept echoes medieval French models and confirms Burges's position as a Gothic revivalist. Burges insisted on the highest quality of building materials; his attention to detail was impeccable and many of the interior features, including most of the stained glass, were furnished to his specification. For the past decade architect and conservation consultant Christopher Southgate has led the congregation in a restoration of the church building, using historic techniques and materials. The approach has been



The keys of Turkish boxwood are chiselled and sanded by hand



The stops are made of ebony

thorough, uncompromising and faithful to Burges's original concept. This background and mindset paved the way for the choice of organ.

Burges's newly completed building had no instrument; but at a later date an organ built by the Cork firm T.W. Megahy, originally for another church, was installed on the west wall. This decidedly mediocre instrument partially obscured two lancets containing stained glass from Burges's original design. The organ's ungainly proportions, disagreeable tonal concept, not to mention its state of disrepair rendering it almost unplayable, led to serious discussion about having it replaced. Repairing and rebuilding the Megahy instrument would have solved the issue of functionality, at least in the short term, but the musical and aesthetic defects would have remained. Fired with enthusiasm for the church restoration project and a sense of *noblesse oblige*, the congregation, under the guidance of rector Daniel Nuzum and organ consultant Mark Duley, agreed on a larger investment in an instrument that would not only complement Burges's aesthetic concept but also serve generations to come.

Excursions were made to workshops of several highly regarded organ builders in Britain, France and Holland, and the proposal made by Henk van Eeken caught

The finished organ is a result of carefully selected blocks of wood and metal having undergone a rigorous production process consistent with historic techniques

the imagination of the Crosshaven delegation. A significant challenge was posed by the very limited available space: the distance between the windows on the west wall spans a mere 1.9 metres. In contemplating the case design, Van Eeken visited St Fin Barre's Cathedral but found little inspiration in the rather heavy design of Burges's liturgical furniture there. Then, on a trip to Tuscany during the initial planning phase, the organ builder stumbled on the idea of not attempting to copy Burges's Gothic revival architecture but rather to go back a step and to follow Burges's design process of studying the original Gothic examples. An ensuing study of Italian and Iberian organ cases led to the current design, which incorporates Great, Choir and Pedal divisions in an elegant slender case measuring 71 Rhineland inches (1,857mm) across and reaching an overall height of over 5.3 metres. The builder decided to use English nomenclature for all parts of the organ. The pipes

are arranged essentially on two levels, the Choir division directly above the console behind opening doors, and the Great division on a higher level fronted by the Open Diapason pipes. The single Pedal Trumpet register is located behind the Great pipes against the wall, the upper parts of the pipes painted black to remain inconspicuous behind the carefully arranged façade. The blower is to the side of the case for obvious space reasons and the bellows, wedge-shaped and constructed in the historic manner of oak and leather, are squeezed into the base of the case.

The techniques and approach used at Van Eeken's workshop are based largely on the findings of the North German Organ Research Project at the University of Gothenburg. This research institute made detailed analysis of materials used in pre-19th-century north European organs as well as studying the building techniques applied. The finished organ at Crosshaven organ is a result of carefully selected blocks ▶



The meticulously constructed mechanical action is sensitive to the touch

of wood and metal having undergone a rigorous production process consistent with those historic techniques. All wooden parts are planed by hand and all joints are glued with traditional hide glue. The case is of quarter-sawn continental oak, fumed with ammonia, similar to the chancel furniture of Holy Trinity. The keys are of Turkish boxwood, the stops of ebony, and quantities of reconstructed antique English tin and Scottish lead were imported from Sweden. The pipe metal was cast on sand and contains trace elements of rare metals that would have been found in pipes of the 17th century that, according to research, are beneficial to the sound. The metal sheets were cast and left to sit for a year before being soldered into pipes.

The specification relates closely to the physical layout and space restrictions of the instrument. The first plan was to build a 1-manual instrument based on a Principal 4 with a single Pedal stop. The small dimensions of the case ruled out the possibility of a 16ft register being incorporated within. Seen in this context, the Open Diapason is a welcome addition, albeit limited in

compass at the lower end to bottom G. The notes from bottom F sharp downwards are 'borrowed' from the Stopped Diapason and speak really very slowly, dissuading the use of the Open Diapason on its own for pieces that require the lowest half octave. However, this compromise finds precedent in many continental baroque organs and is reasonably unnoticeable in a plenum registration. The inclusion of a second manual, although with a minimal specification, is also a bonus.

The decision for a Pedal Trumpet 8 and a Great Cornet was taken with pre-Victorian congregational singing in mind. Anglican parish singing during that era was quite close in style to the contemporary Reformed churches on the continent and is, in these islands, largely forgotten. The melody was often placed in the tenor, hence the decision to have a Pedal reed that could play the *cantus firmus* at tenor pitch. The middle C Cornet (alternatively from C sharp by the operation of a simple switch) can be used to play the melody with an appropriate accompanying registration in the lower part of the same manual. This

also opens up the possibility of playing repertoire written for a split-manual registration, such as Spanish baroque.

The voicing is very lyrical and harks back to a time when techniques like nicking were uncommon and a slow speech, rich in overtones, was favoured. In his *Orgel-Probe* (1698), Andreas Werckmeister bemoans voicing methods that lead to faster speech but result in dullness. The Open Diapason has a significant amount of chuff before the tone reaches its steady state, and responds quite differently depending on the touch of the player. Surprisingly, when played fast with a brilliant articulation the pipes respond clearly, albeit without the full, rich sonority produced when played slowly. This gives the sensitive player much scope to produce a range of sonorities by means of a refined and differentiated touch. The Principal 4 also sings beautifully and a tasteful level of chuff gives this register an unusual potential for expressivity. The Flute 4 is also worthy of mention as a particularly lyrical and charming stop. Speaking faster than many of the other stops, it lends itself as a ▶

GALLERY

◀ solo stop for brilliant passages. When the Mixture is drawn to form a plenum, the brightness of sound increases dramatically. This register is unapologetically voiced to be loud, clear and bright, and in combination with its high composition the result is rather silvery. For some, the sound is somewhat overpowering and the rejection of this aesthetic in the 19th century is brought to mind. However, worlds apart from the type of Mixture typically produced during the Organ Revival Movement, the Mixture plenum is full and well supported by the Principal chorus. Similarly, the Cornet is a powerful agent in the style of Dutch baroque organs where this register was conceivably used to keep congregational singing 'in line'. The Pedal Trumpet 8 is quick to respond, has a clear character and produces a warm and pleasant sound. Unlike many modern reeds, this stop has the ability to blend with the principal registers of the Great as well as making its presence known when uncoupled to a plenum in the manual. Fast semiquaver passages can be played on the uncoupled Trumpet without the organist having to battle with slow speech. The specification of this organ allows a convincing interpretation of baroque works, including the large-scale works of J.S. Bach. Venturing into 19th-century repertoire, however, should not be precluded. The 8ft registers can be combined to produce a warm romantic sonority, and the character of the Pedal Trumpet provides sufficient gravity so that the lack of a 16ft register in the Pedal is not as grave as one might think.

The Choir division is located directly in front of the player and therefore sounds rather direct. However, in the body of the church this division functions like an echo to the Great. Some solo registrations are possible, for example the Stopt Diapason 8 and Fifteenth 2 accompanied by the Stopt Diapason 8 in the Great. In turn, the Choir can be used to accompany certain solo combinations on the Great. When I visited for this article, playing with Choir doors shut presented problems: the restricted enclosed space affected the tuning, badly in the case of the Flute 4. After extensive experimentation and tests by the builder, the pipes have now been retuned with the

doors in a closed position, apparently alleviating the problem.

The carefully crafted mechanical action (consistently using historic techniques) is sensitive and gives much scope for expressivity. As one could expect in a coastal town in the south of Ireland, humidity is relatively high. This has led to a certain amount of sticking of keys and pedals and has required some minor corrections at critical points. The architect has designed a 'conservation heating' system, aiming to maintain acceptable and stable humidity levels.

The organ has been greeted with mixed reactions from the wider community. It is indisputably a radical move away from the rather insular trend of contemporary Irish organ building. For example, the Trumpet 8 as the sole Pedal stop was greeted with some raised eyebrows among Irish *cognoscenti*, not to mention the lack of a 16ft register or swell box. An organ of this type, based on painstaking research into continental pre-19th-century instruments, is truly a first in Ireland and in order to be accepted requires a liberal mindset and a departure from the obsession with the miniature cathedral model. The thought and careful research behind its conception and construction has resulted in a self-confident and convincing instrument. For those unaccustomed to well-restored continental baroque instruments, the sound is somewhat alien; but one cannot deny the unquestionable high level of craftsmanship and the refined processing of quality materials.

From a practical perspective, a very disciplined approach is required of an organist accompanying Anglican liturgical music in the *cantus firmus* manner described above, and the parish has certainly been broad-minded in embracing this eye-opening break from the commonplace. The organ has been received with much enthusiasm by the community that sponsored it and, according to the rector, congregational singing has improved noticeably since its arrival. Undoubtedly, this first instrument from the Van Eeken workshop in the British Isles will attract discerning organists and enthusiasts to Crosshaven and will serve future generations admirably. ■

www.henkvaneeeken.com



Pipes, hand-cast on sand, of the Great division

Holy Trinity Church, Crosshaven

HENK VAN EEKEN (2010)

LEFT JAMB

Flute (Choir)	4
<i>Tremulant</i>	
Cornet (Great)	III
Principal (Great)	4
Mixture (Great)	III-IV
<i>Coupler (Great-Pedal)</i>	

RIGHT JAMB

Stopt Diapason (Choir)	8
Fifteenth (Choir)	2
Open Diapason (Great)	8
Stopt Diapason (Great)	8
Fifteenth (Great)	2
Trumpet (Pedal)	8

Manual compass: C-f'''

Pedal compass: C-d'

Shove coupler for Choir-Great

Temperament: Kellner/Bach

Cornet c/c sharp switch located inside

Choir door right side