

Aquinas College Chapel

The Chapel of St Thomas Aquinas is the school chapel of Aquinas College, Manning. The school sits quietly hidden in a natural bush setting, high above the Mt Henry Bridge spanning the Canning River.

The Chapel was heritage listed in 1989 owing, in part, to its distinctive semicircular sandstone rear wall. At the time of its building in 1966 it seated around 350, adequate at the time, but as the school grew larger the chapel proved inadequate and school Masses have been held in the other larger auditoriums in recent years.

As a result the chapel has been neglected and underutilised, even vandalised by students and it was common for it to be locked during school hours.

Paul Hufner provided a new organ in 1966 for the new chapel. It was a single manual extension organ of 4 ranks, no pedals, the ranks being an Open Diapason, Lieblich Gedeckt and Gamba in a swell box, and an unenclosed Dulciana. There was also an octave of 16'

Bourdon pipes which formed an Autobass feature, allowing the lowest note of a chord to provide 16' tone.

Paul Hufner was invited by the school to enlarge the organ in 1999 and this was his last work in organ building. He added a second keyboard and pedal board, provided a new Great windchest on which he re-sited the Open Diapason unit from the Swell, provided a smaller Geigen Diapason unit in the swell box and then complemented the pipe ensemble with an array of stops using the latest digital technology from Makin, UK; reeds to each division, a Celeste to the Swell and Claribel flute to the Great. He also provided space on the new windchest for a separate Twelfth 2 2/3' and Mixture III.

Unfortunately, due to the sparse use of the chapel and other factors the organ more or less became unusable within 3 or 4 years, except for the pipe part, which continued to soldier on with the little maintenance it was offered. However, having so many other stops not playing on the console was not conducive to a





Entrance to the Aquinas College Chapel

happy situation, especially with visiting organists for weddings.

Our firm was asked in about 2005 what we would propose doing to improve/fix the organ situation and my initial thought was to have the digital system repaired and to complete the organ to Paul Hufner’s concept with the Great Twelfth and Mixture. However progress on this front moved at such a glacial pace (remember the chapel was hardly being used) that another 5 or 6 years passed until I was asked to revisit the scenario.

By this time the digital work was over 10 years old and would obviously require quite a sum of money to make it work properly. I therefore took the view to scrap the digital part of the organ completely and to complete the organ specification with pipework and make the organ similar to the 3 larger Paul Hufner organs of 6 ranks built in the 1960’s – St Nicholas Floreat Park (1962), Wesley College (1964) and Wesley Church Albany (1966).

It took a change of Head Master at Aquinas in 2015 and a re-focus by the school with the Chapel as the centre of it for this project to gain momentum. We

received the go ahead at the end of 2016 and set about planning the following work:

1. Supplying a 16’ Trumpet unit (scaled and voiced to match that at Wesley Church, Albany).
2. Supplying a Celeste rank (matching the existing Gamba – the Celeste was thought an indispensable retention from the digital stops).
3. Supplying a wooden Claribel unit (made to match the tapered Claribel at Wesley Church Albany)
4. Supplying 12 pipes for the bottom octave of the Gt Open Diapason (previously provided digitally).
5. Supplying a software driven organ transmission from Peterson EMP.



Waiting for six largest Subbass pipes between Gt Diapason



Swell Trumpet

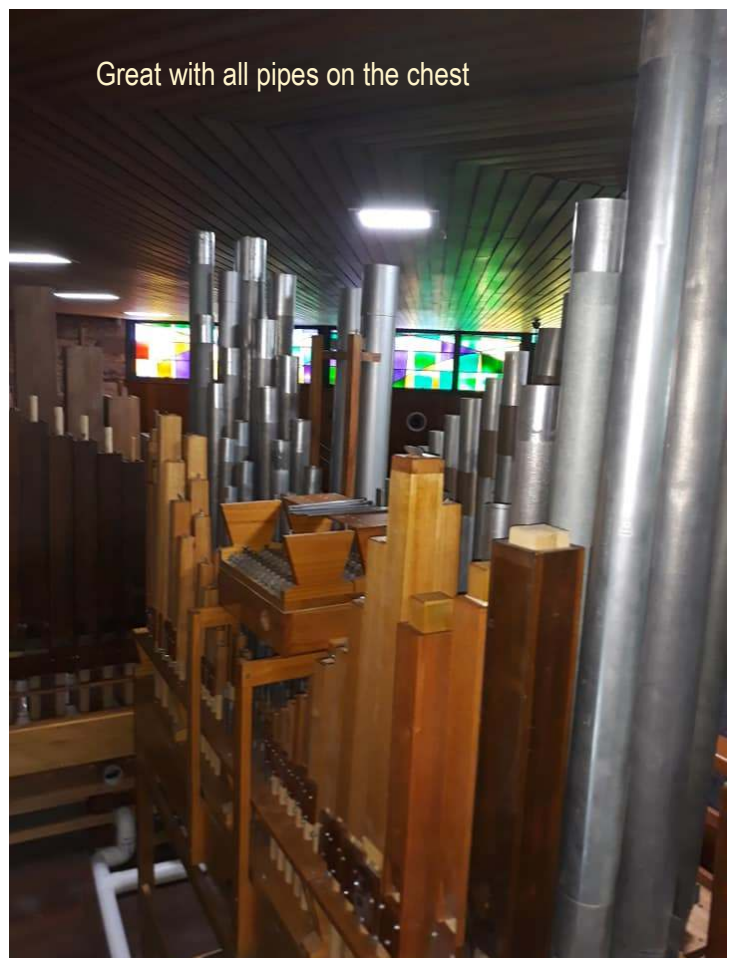
Paul Hufner, in the 1960's, obtained all of his metal pipework from FJ Rogers, Leeds, UK and to this end care was taken in finding and ordering new pipework from former Rogers men so that the new pipework would closely match the existing. Shires Organ Pipes, Leeds, UK, provided the Trumpet unit (voiced by famed reed voicer David Frostick) and the Celeste and bottom octave of the Open Diapason from Tim Gilley in Melbourne (a former Rogers employee).

We had most of the factory work completed by February 2018 and then the school decided to increase the seating capacity of the chapel from 350 to 650! This sent a bit of a shudder through my system as suddenly the goal posts had shifted dramatically. The organ bits were put into storage and the chapel closed in

August 2018 for this work.

When we were able to inspect the chapel in January this year we were amazed at the job that had been completed. The Heritage listing of the building meant that the work needed to be judicious and it was to such an extent that it's difficult on first viewing to tell where the changes were made. However there was a downside in that the gallery (where the organ is situated) was now doubled in size and covered in carpet and with a balustrade clad in double thickness plate glass, effectively creating a sound-proof booth. The school and architects are still arguing a way forward from this ridiculous scenario.

The school has recruited Choral Director, Hugh Lydon, and established a Choral Scholarship. The 12 boys in the new



Great with all pipes on the chest

choir are already singing daily at school Masses and are also to sing at Saturday night Masses at St Patrick's Basilica, Fremantle.

We completed the installation of the organ in March after the following work was completed in the chapel. The swell box was deepened by 205mm to allow the 16' Trumpet basses to be fitted at the back with new access doors provided in the back of the swell box. Paul Hufner had provided a spare bar on the Swell windchest (under which was written "Trumpet" – so he obviously intended to add a trumpet at some stage) and the Trumpet to tenor C sits there. The Swell Geigen Diapason has gone to the Great as a separate Octave 4', 2 2/3' and 2' allowing us to drive the Open Diapason 8' a bit harder without compromising the chorus sound through the extension of it. The Celeste is fitted in the swell box in the space vacated by the Geigen Diapason. The new wooden Claribel stop (made of Australian oak with mahogany caps) was fitted to the Great windchest.

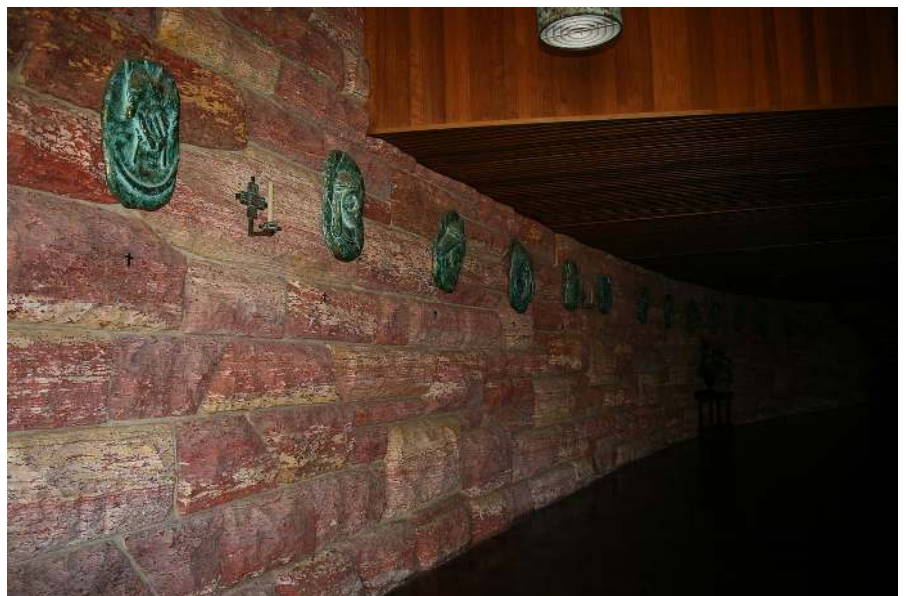
The organ is driven by a Peterson ICS 4000 computer system, which allows multiple organist pages, recording playback system, transposer and the usual array of pistons and playing aids. We choose to use Peterson EMP for our organ systems because they supply parts and technical backup for every system they have made since 1965 and this is a huge plus in our

estimation.

A Peterson 16 stage swell shade machine operates the swell shutters (previously having been pneumatically operated). The organ console has been relocated to the gallery on a moveable platform (previously it was at the front of the chapel hidden from the organ behind a pillar), with the only connection between console and organ being via a data cable and normal power extension chord.

Tonal finishing was completed after Easter and the organ makes a very grand and cohesive sound in the chapel, despite the carpet and double glazing. The school is currently preparing to remove the carpet, which will make a huge difference to the sound of both organ and choir. The comprehensive stoplist allows the organ to accompany very well and also play a large amount of repertoire, albeit with the usual limitations found in extension organs.

Patrick Elms



Dramatic Stations of the Cross at Aquinas Chapel