

The Organ at Dingestow Court

The organ at Dingestow Court dates from two periods. It was originally made around 1680, and the pipes from this organ were used in a new organ by Robert Gray in 1775. These pipes are all made of wood, and are typical of seventeenth-century chamber organs. Such organs are often attributed to 'Father' Smith, the 'King's organ maker', and the pre-eminent organ builder of his day. It is a tradition that started early in the eighteenth century, though the style was already in existence when Bernhard Schmidt came over to England from Germany in 1666, and it seems more likely that his workshop took over native organ-building traditions to such an extent that later generations thought of the style as his.

Robert Gray provided the case (decorating it with the inscription quoted above) and the mechanism, and he provided an eighteenth-century mixture stop, about two thirds of which consist of the smallest wooden pipes of the seventeenth-century organ, although some of the pipes that Gray added were of metal. He divided the mixture into bass and treble halves, so that one can use the treble as a Cornet, a stop whose mixture of fifths and thirds gives a reedy sound, which was exploited by the Georgian composers.

Robert Gray may possibly have done his work for the Bosanquet family. They certainly had Gray & Davison move the organ from Forest House, their residence at Leyton in Essex, to Dingestow Court in 1848. John Gray was Robert Gray's nephew. It has remained unaltered, but very much played, at Dingestow Court ever since. It was restored by N. P. Mander in 1961, when the organ was provided with an electric blower.

The organ's appearance is entirely Robert Gray's, with a mahogany case, gilded dummy front pipes, and fretwork shades backed with red silk above the pipes. The keys are well decorated, with ivory naturals and ebony sharps, with arcaded fronts to the naturals, veneered key cheeks and a moulding round the bottom edge of the cheeks and key rail. The bellows, wind chest, stop and key action are all Robert Gray's. He probably also provided the lead tuning flaps to the open wood pipes, which would originally have been cut to length and fine-tuned with a knife. He may therefore have altered the pitch and the tuning.

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