

**Martin Renshaw**  
**The removal of organs from churches**  
**1540s to the 1640s**

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In my last two talks here, I hope that I showed that there was a much larger and wider late-medieval organ culture than perhaps we might have expected. Though I must admit that even after more than four years' work on archives I am only a bit nearer to answering Peter Williams' question, the one that set off this research in the first place five years ago : 'How many organs were there at the Reformation in Britain?' I have found that archival research alone will not, for all sorts of reasons, yield all the answers. So we are now turning to researching churches themselves and what *they* can tell us. So far we have so far investigated about 75 churches in the southern half of England. They have already told us much more than we ever expected, and I hope that we may be able to report next year on the first phase of our exploration of about 800 churches which have some evidence of musical activity.

But today I would like to begin to close a gap in the history of the organ in these islands.

**1549 and the first Prayer Book in English**

- Commissioners were sent round to inventory all church goods
- 'Superfluous' goods sequestered
- Music books no longer wanted had to be burnt
- John Merbecke's musical setting not a success

We know that the effects of the Reformation, particularly the changes that followed the death of Henry VIII in early 1547, were disastrous for liturgical and other music associated with late-medieval communities and their churches.

We also know that almost exactly a century later, an attempt was made at the highest level to remove organs from churches. But what actually happened to organs and why they were removed from churches during those hundred years has been far from clear, and this talk is our first attempt to fill in the gap.

### **1644: organs to be removed and destroyed**

An ordinance for the further demolishing of Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition [9 May 1644]:

*Representations of God, Angels, and Saints; Copes, Surplisses, Roods, &c.; Organs*

The Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, the better to accomplish the blessed Reformation so happily begun ... do Ordain

- that all Representations of any of the Persons of the Trinity, or of any Angel or Saint ...shall be taken away, defaced, and utterly demolished;
- and that the Chancel-ground ... shall be laid down and levelled
- and that no Copes, Surplisses, superstitious Vestments, Roods, or Roodlofts, or Holy-water Fonts, shall be used [... and shall be defaced]
- and all Organs, and the Frames or Cases wherein they stand in all Churches or Chappels aforesaid, shall be taken away, and utterly defaced, and none other hereafter set up in their places ...

### **Slender evidence for removal of organs under Edward VI**

- Temperley appears to have based his suggestion on the work of a pupil whose own work was based on just three London parishes
- London was a 'godly' hotbed and few organs survived the 16<sup>th</sup> century there
- Temperley has been followed by others since

Some have thought – on very slender evidence - that organs disappeared totally and suddenly from churches under Edward VI. This is not true. They did mostly disappear from London churches by the 1570s, twenty years later, but London was an exceptionally hot bed of 'godly' believers, then the term for what were later referred to as 'Puritans'. As a result London-based historians of the organ have thought that organs everywhere had gone by the 1570s. But we have found evidence of organs lasting well into the 1620s *and* much later, even in what had by then become 'Puritan' East Anglia.

Perhaps not too surprisingly, written evidence of what was really happening locally and 'on the ground' in the first fifteen years after the accession of Edward VI in 1547 is rather scanty. During that short time there were three radical changes of religious direction. Edward's grasping protestantism was followed by hard-line Romanism under Mary, during her short reign of just five years and three months. Then there was a swing back to a more cautious protestantism under Elizabeth – cautious, that is, until political and economic events overtook her increasingly disaster-prone reign.

### **Churchwardens' duties**

#### **Formerly**

- Guardians of the treasures of the church
- Maintainers of the ongoing social and seasonal activities 'of the whole parish'

#### **Then obliged to become**

- Keepers of armour and guns in churches
- Civil administrators of increasingly repressive laws against the poor and dispossessed whose local social services had been dissolved
- Informers
  - against those who preferred the old ways – the 'recusants'
  - and against those who felt that the process of change was not fast enough

It is very clear from their written yearly accounts that being a churchwarden during these times was extremely stressful. They had to change from being guardians of the treasures of the church, and maintainers of the ongoing social and seasonal activities 'of the whole parish', into keepers of armour and guns in churches. They were forced to become civil administrators of increasingly repressive laws against the poor and dispossessed, whose local social services had been dissolved. The new Elizabethan poor were in fact the victims of her father's reckless mal-administration. Churchwardens were also obliged to act against both those who preferred the old ways – the 'recusants' – and those who thought that the Elizabethan church was no improvement on the Roman one. Bishops were ordered to survey those refusing to attend parish church in 1577 ; a census of recusants begun in October that year produced a total of 1,562 names, a third of whom were gentlemen, mostly in the south of England.

### **Tolerance at Luton, but not Rome**

During the 1560s persons of all sorts of religious views - Romanists and Puritans as well as Anglican - continued to worship in the parish church of Luton.

But Pius V's papal bull issued on 25 Feb 1570 called on those who adhered to Romish doctrines and practices to withdraw from the churches to form conventicles for themselves.

Those failing to attend church were fined more and more heavily until by the end of the century these fines were simply punitive. Churchwardens were obliged to put this divisive legislation into effect, even in parishes which had been tolerant of religious differences. The Pope's intervention in 1570 added to their burden by forbidding catholics to attend their parish church.

Finally, and most difficult of all, churchwardens had to carry out these obligations against increasingly desperate economic circumstances. These problems had their roots in the 1580s and were so severe that they are known to modern historians as the 'general economic crisis of the seventeenth century'.

Most of you will be familiar with the general sweep of politico-religious history in this period – the gradual supremacy of godly and puritan thought, culminating in the abolition of the monarchy and the Church of England in the mid-1640s – so I will not dwell too much on this. I want to look at two other unconnected aspects:

First, the change of use of churches under the new Church of England contrasted with those on the continent of Europe, still under Roman jurisdiction, and then the effects of the 'general crisis' which I have just mentioned.

#### **Results of The Council of Trent**

- To centralise control of the north-western European church more firmly in Rome
- To ensure that decisions made at that centre would be universally and rigidly applied
- Another holocaust: rood-screens and lofts were removed and destroyed in RC churches ...
- ... and organs and choirs moved towards the west end of the churches

Changes in churches under Roman control were the consequence of decisions deliberately taken by the Council of Trent which met in 25 sessions from December 1545 to December 1563, as the Roman church tried to face up to the effects of the protestant Reformation. The overall result of these decisions was to centralise control of the north-western European church more firmly in Rome. In addition, throughout continental Europe, slowly but surely, rood-screens and their lofts in parish churches and pulpitums in larger churches were removed and destroyed, so that formerly enclosed choirs were opened up towards the nave. Organs and choirs were moved westwards in the churches, beyond where the screens and rood lofts used to be, and that is why we still see them *there*, in practically all Roman churches on the continent. The Roman church grew to hate 'gothic' or barbarous churches and did everything possible to rebuild, disguise and rearrange them. They were so much altered that it is far more difficult to imagine what continental Roman churches were like in late medieval times than it is to visualise what churches in England were like then...

...Because back in these north-western isles, things were going along differently. Although rood images – the crucifix, Mary and John and their supporting angels – were abolished under Edward VI, only these images were removed, together with the dividing doorways in the rood screen. The screens themselves remained - and incidentally many more would have remained in churches here if Elizabethan

bishops and later clergy, right up to Victorian times, had not removed them, copying Roman practices illegally, contrary to canon law.

### Quire or Chancel?

**Quire:** the English word for the singers and the screened off area where they sang.

**Chancel:** a later Roman term, from *cancelli* meaning screens



Kerfons chapel screen door open



Kerfons chapel screen door shut and locked

But the other essential reason for the roodscreen, to cut off the quire from the peoples' part of the church, was also compromised. Previously the eastern parts of the church, just as in Greek churches to this day and in Roman ones till the Council of Trent, were set aside and inaccessible to the laity. They were the province of the ordained clergy – bishops, priests and deacons – and the lay-clergy, the musician singer-organ players.

### Quire entry doors

Separate doors from the outside into the quires (these days called chancels) for the ordained and lay clergy and musicians.



That is why there is still a separate entry into the chancel in all medieval churches; the rood-screen and other screens across the church were closed to, and locked against, the laity.

## Musicians' training

- **Sing plainsong** with
  - improvised descant,
  - improvised basses and
  - accented ornamentation
- **Play the organs**
  - 'in alternim' or 'verse by verse' with singers
  - improvising on plainsong with ornaments
  - developing a song-based keyboard style
- **Sing highly complex polyphonic music**

It was in these circumstances that musicians, trained from their early youth, sang plainsong with improvised descant, improvised basses and accented ornamentation. They alternately played the organs in the same way, improvising and ornamenting plainsong, developing a song-based, accentuated, ornamented keyboard style. They also sang, where possible, complex polyphonic music, for the composition and excellence of execution of which these islands were famous.

When the music-less catastrophe of the first Prayer Book arrived and old music books had been burnt, what did these musicians do? The simple answer is that we do not know precisely, the archives being understandably as silent with shock as they might well have been.

## Title and first two pages of Merbecke's Common praier noted

**The booke of Common praier noted.**

**In this booke**  
 is conteyned so muche of the Order of  
 Common prayer as is to be song in  
 Churches: wherein are vied only these  
 iiii. sortes of notes,

The first note is a strene note and is a breue. The second a square note, and is a lemp breue. The iiii. a pycke and is a mynymme. And when there is a pycke by the square note, that pycke is halfe as muche as the note that goeth before it. The iiii. is a clofe, and is only v. led at y end of a versle.

**Mattins.**  
 The Quere with the Priest.

Cre father which arte  
 in heauē, halo. &c.

Priest. And my mouth shal shew forth thy praise  
 Priest.

One clue might be the publication of a Prayer Book Noted by one John Merbecke in 1550. This cleverly adapted an unornamented plainsong style to new English service texts, and promised to supply an accompaniment. In fact, it was a flop, and the promised accompaniment was never published. One has to wonder if

this was because the idea of accompaniment was too novel. Were musicians simply too conservative? The whole question of what music was used in churches in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century needs more work, I suspect.

The conservatism of those 'ordinary' people who had built up these fine, decorated and coloured churches should not be underestimated, either. 'Reformation' change in these islands, and particularly in England and Wales, over the next hundred years during what we now call the reformation period, was slow and - one senses - grudging. Quite understandably so.

#### **Survival: English conservatism or chance?**

- Oxford and Cambridge colleges - when all other colleges and chantries were abolished.
- Choir schools in cathedrals - when almost all other professional singing had ceased.
- Churches were not radically altered to suit new patterns of worship following the first English Prayer Book, 1549.
- Church furnishings were to remain 'as in the third year of Edward VI' (canon law of the Church of England).

This conservatism led to the more-or-less accidental survival of Oxford and Cambridge colleges and to the survival of choir schools in cathedrals, fortunately for the survival of church music in Britain! And churches here were adapted rather than remade for the new patterns of worship, so it is still possible in churches in these islands to see substantial traces of what went on in them 500 years ago. It is much more difficult to do this work on the continent, and it has not been done at all except in a recent study of the effects of the counter-Reformation on Venetian churches.

#### **Reasons for selling organs**

- Arrival of a new keenly-protestant or (later) a puritan-godly priest or minister
- The exercise of episcopal diktat through visitations
- Economic pressures, much more keenly felt as the sixteenth century approached its woeful final decades

When change was forced on a church and its wardens, it came as the result of external pressures : either when a new keenly protestant or 'godly' priest or minister was appointed, or the bishop and his officials intervened, or (increasingly) through dire economic pressure. And this brings us to the more serious threat to organs, and probably the chief cause of their removal.

### Contrasts

The village economy was much stronger in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century than ever since. It supported town economy which was based on markets and traders with fewer producers.

London, Bristol, Norwich, Lynn and many smaller ports lived by coastal trading and links with the continent, exporting wool and textiles, and metals such as tin and lead.

In late medieval times, by contrast with the present, the fortune of organs was closely linked with the fortune of the *village* economy, which was much stronger in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century than ever since. One must not forget that there were no large and economically self-contained towns except the major ports. Inland towns were, and had always been, markets - not centres of primary production. The general economy was an agrarian-industrial one, not a town-centred one.

### Crises during the fifty years from 1560 to 1610

- Bad harvests leading to
  - two dearths of food (early 1500s and the 1520s) then
  - actual famines in 1556 and from 1596 to 1598
- Serious outbreaks of plague
- Disease, war, chronic lack of government money
- Rising population, from around 3 to 5 million
- Prices doubling
- Rents tripling
- Real value of pay almost halving

Elizabeth's reign was punctuated by crises caused by bad harvests, disease and (consequently) war, and chronic lack of money. In the hundred years from 1560 to 1660, prices doubled, and the population almost doubled despite continual plagues - some the worst ever suffered in these islands. Rents tripled in cost while pay fell and there were shortages of food, and actual famine. The last twenty years of Elizabeth's reign were the worst for most people since the catastrophes of the fourteenth century.

### Thomas Hobbes on the human condition 1651

*'...poor and solitary, nasty, brutish and short'*

- echoing the views of utterly bleak neo-Calvinism

When, somewhat later, Thomas Hobbes wrote in 1651 that life for most was 'poor and solitary, nasty, brutish and short', he was echoing the views of many, religious or not. When you are just trying to survive against all the odds, it is

hardly the time for the long-term investment that building and repairing churches and organs represent. Both fell into disrepair, and bishops' visitations are full of laments that parts of parish churches had fallen into disuse or collapsed. You can still see rural churches where aisles, transepts or even chancels have been abandoned and walled up.

Just when you thought it could not get worse, it did.

**... and it got worse during the 17th century**

- Much of Europe enveloped in a small ice-age
- Social instability
- Only one year (1610) free of war in Europe in the whole century
- Trading, even of wool and textiles, the basis of much of England's rural economy, fell away from the 1620s
- Risings in Midlands 1607, in south-west (around Wells) 1628-1630, in fen country 1630s, London 1641
- Civil wars and their consequences took up much of the rest of the 1640s and 1650s

The sixteenth century finished with much of Europe enveloped in a small ice-age. Social instability meant that in Europe in general the next half-century was free from war in only one single year (1610), but even that was slightly better than the record of the previous fifty years. Trading, even of wool and textiles, the basis of much of England's rural economy, fell away from the 1620s onwards. There were popular uprisings in the midlands and the south-west, and even in London in 1641. Then the English civil wars and their consequences took up much of the rest of the 1640s and 1650s.

Why all this emphasis on economic gloom and doom? Because then as now the health of the arts, and music and organs in particular, depends on the health of the economy generally. And when social, economic and religious stresses all come together, the organ is their falling barometer. The churchwardens' accounts for the period under review are proof of this. I cannot now go into each and every situation in detail, but here follows a selection of churchwardens' accounts which indicate the various local reasons for the removal of organs.

When I have been able to see all the available accounts for this period – many are still lying unpublished in county record offices - it will become clearer what the most common causes of the removal of organs were. But what follows now, will, I hope, give you a good idea of the sort of conditions that led to their abandonment.

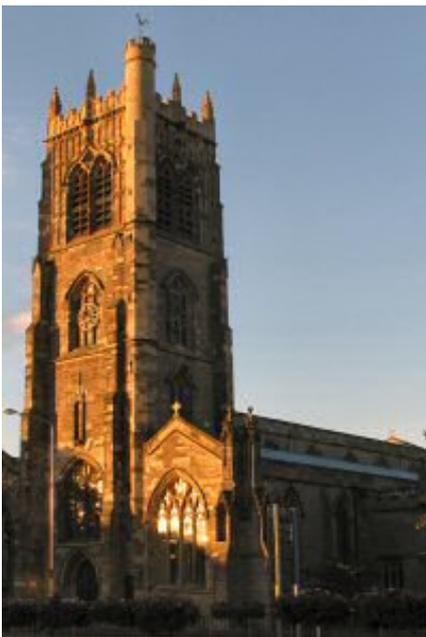


Photograph by Alan Carter, Devizes Heritage  
[www.devizesheritage.org.uk](http://www.devizesheritage.org.uk)

**Devizes, Wilts 1561-2**

- 1561 ...for taking down of the Roodloft vj s  
 1562 ...recd. for xxx [40] pound of the organ  
 pypes and the copper at vj d the pound xx s  
 ...recd. of the bellows of the organist [sic] ij s

At Devizes, the organ came down early on, in 1561, as did the rood loft. Here, pipe-metal and copper (perhaps from monumental brasses), brass from candlesticks and lead from the organ bellows were all sold at the same time. This seems like a general and all-too-typical 'godly' clear-out of the church's metal wealth under guise of 'extirpating' popish symbols.



**St Margaret's Leicester**

[www.crosbyheritage.co.uk/location/leicester/st-margarets-church/](http://www.crosbyheritage.co.uk/location/leicester/st-margarets-church/)

**Leicester, late 1560s**

**St Martin 1566-7**

*Received for the organ pipes and the case of all things belonging, 5s*

*Paid for putting out the imageries out of the pulpit 3s*

**St Margaret, 1568:** John Launde became vicar 'and in the same year he, with the consent of his loving parishioners, did extyrpe and pull down all monuments of superstytione ...' So

1569: *Rec'd for the Organ's Case* 0.10.0.

*Rec'd for the Organ Pypes* 1.8.1.

*Rec'd for part of the Organ Case* 0.7.6.

1570: *Rec'd of Mr Newzamm for the Eagle* 5.0.0.

Much the same seems to have been the case at Leicester's two larger churches, where 'godly' or puritan ministers seem to have urged destructive tendencies on their 'faithful' congregations.

But it is impossible to generalise about the reasons for churches removing organs, as these further examples will show.

### Cratfield, Suffolk 1576

It. for takyne downe the organ case iiiij s



In Suffolk, Cratfield dismantled its quire organ and gallery or 'perk' in 1576 and it seems that part of the organ's gallery was moved to the tower to enclose the clock. But as we will see in a moment, in the same county, fifty years later, there was a small church which still had two organs in the 1620s ...



Photograph from [www.reading.co.uk/page/history](http://www.reading.co.uk/page/history)

### St Lawrence, Reading:

#### St Andrew's Day 1578

*It was agreed that the organs in St Johns chauncell, for that they shoude not be forfeited into the hands of the organ takers shoulde be taken downe and solde; and the tymbre of them be applied to sett up two seats higher for Mr Main and his brethrene above the seate yt now they sett in.*

At Reading, an organ survived until only the late 1570s. Then, threats by what are called in the churchwardens' accounts 'the organ takers' – presumably a determined 'godly' grouping – caused an evidently reluctant and heart-searching acceptance by the wardens that their organ would have to be sacrificed for public peace.



[www.vauxhallcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.vauxhallcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Lambeth St Mary, next to the Archbishop's London Palace**

**1569/70**

*Item to the Organ maker for his Fee xij d*

**1573-4 Last repair/tuning entry:**

*Item payd to harry Lythe for mendyng the Organs x s*

In London, most organ activity, under increasing 'godly' pressure, seems to have ceased with the death of John Howe the younger in the early 1570s. But one has to remember that the various court chapels of James I and Charles I just across the river from Lambeth continued with their music almost as if nothing was happening beyond their walls. Here, just outside the walls of the Archbishop's Palace, St Mary's church seems to have given up its organ early in the 1570s too, perhaps giving way to what Eamonn Duffy called 'the inexorable pressures of the Tudor state'...



Photograph by Keith Glover [www.lan-opc.org.uk](http://www.lan-opc.org.uk)

**Prescot, Lancs 1579-80**

**Memorandum**

*Bryan Fells of Prescotte in the Countie of Lancaster, yoman, receyved of vs the said churchwardens, the xiiijth daie of Auguste, anno domini [1580] predicto, seaven score and nyne pices of organ pypes*

**List of goods 1605-6**

- *The Vicar his surples;*
- *a communion cup of silver;*
- *twoo table cloaths, one linen, one woollen;*
- ***the case of a pare of organs;***
- *a communion table;*
- *a greate ould cheste in the roode loft [sic];*
- *two chistes, one in the church and the other at vicarage;*
- *oulde armour for v men, in the reuestry.*

At Prescott the wardens reported in a memorandum the sale of organ pipes in their 1579-80 accounts, but in 1605-6 (25 years later) a list of goods still includes the organ case.



**Steeple Ashton, Wilts 1620**

*Item, certain old pipes and fragments of the Organs sold 1620 for 14s 6d*

By contrast, at Steeple Ashton, in rural Wiltshire, the small organ lasted out until 1620.



**Great Dunmow, Essex 1621**

*The old organ seems ... to have existed up to the year 1621, the last year in which accounts were kept in the old book. One of the last entries is 'for organes pypes sold'.*

*(Antiquities of an Essex Parish, or pages from the History of Great Dunmow, W T Scott 1873)*

Photograph by John Whitworth [www.essexchurches.info](http://www.essexchurches.info)

The church at Great Dunmow was appropriated to Stoke-by-Clare College. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century author of a history of the church supposes that the organ was 'broken up, the pipes sold, and the woodwork employed perhaps about the church.'

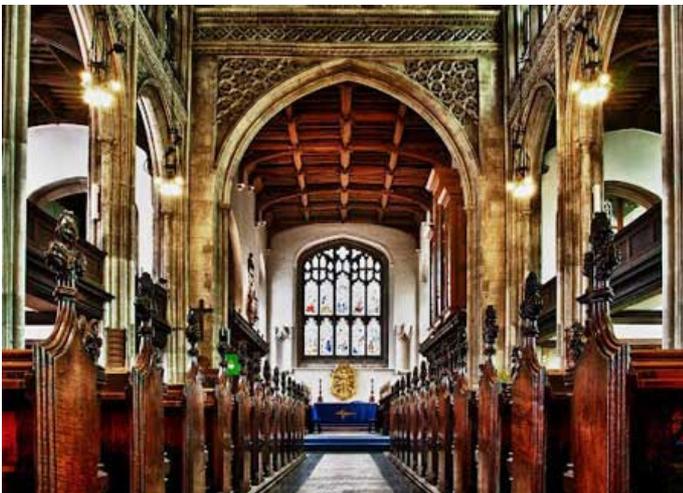


Image: David Hollingworth (www.flickr.com)

### Southampton St Lawrence 1613

*Certain ratepayers have signed the book, against whose names is written, in a contemporaneous hand, 'A pack of knaves', and underneath the signatures occurs the note 'Delivered to the two new elected churchwardens in organ pipes of metal, 35 lb' ... In 1618, 65 lb weight of organ pipes was sold, at the rate of ninepence per pound.*

At Southampton St Lawrence, we discover the end of the old instrument in the 1613 accounts when the organ pipe metal (probably tin) as sold in two batches.



Photograph Jack Tol www.panoramio.com/photo/67332657

### Cambridge, Great St Mary

*Successive inventories show that the organ just dwindles away ...*

- 1578 organ there
- 1584 'broken'
- 1601 'case and some pipes'
- 1631 taken down
- 1643 lead sold

Perhaps more common was the experience at Great St Mary's Cambridge; the organ just dwindles away ... against a relatively 'godly' background. One asks oneself if there was really so little interest in church music at this University church? The disappearance of printed music from the inventories as well suggests this was in fact the case.

INVENTORY, 1578: ... ther Remayneth in thands of the new churchwardens... these parcells following ... Two old communion bocks/another new one with psalter and psalms [music and words]/Item iiij psalters/Item the Organs/Item iiij pricktsong books

In the next inventory in 1584 are included: Item iij saltern/Item the organs broken

Then in 1601: two Psalters/Item an Orgaine Case with some pypes/Item one new sirplisse

And finally in 1643 ... just the lead from the bellows, perhaps?

.....

Now we enter the 1630s, when Laud's influence became felt, and this may explain why in certain local circumstances (with the consent or even active encouragement of bishops of similar persuasion, like Matthew Wren at Ely or Brian Duppa at Salisbury) organs lasted longer or were even remade ...

**Hawstead, Suffolk: inventory 15 April 1637**

Item, two payer of orgaynes ftanding in the chancell

(Quoted in '*The History and Antiquities of Hawsted in the County of Suffolk*', Revd Sir John Cullum 1784)



In the same county as Cratfield, it seems probable that the local family, the Cullums, protected the organ or even brought in another, unless we have a very unexpected example of a double organ in a village church ...

The actual inventory entry of 'two organs high up in the chancel' provoked the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cullum-author to remark that: 'these organs must have been of small dimensions to have been placed conventionally in a room only 33½ by 18 feet'. He is right, especially now that it is crowded with Cullum monuments from floor to ceiling as well ...



[www.heardfamilyhistory.org.uk](http://www.heardfamilyhistory.org.uk)

### **Broadclyst, Devon, 1640s**

*...an old paire of organs now used in the church...*

*(Diary of the Marches kept by the Royal Army during the great Civil War Richard Symonds 1642-9)*

One wonders if the organ here survived long after the arrival of the Parliamentary army?



[www.norfolkchurches.co.uk](http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk)

### **Redenhall with Harleston, Norfolk 1641**

*pd Lynne for taken doune the  
organe Casse & settige up the  
skreane and ffor mendinge ye stoles  
[stools] at the lower end of the  
church by the Southe dore vij s ij d*

From the churchwardens' books of Redenhall with Harleston, Norfolk, like Hawstead in Suffolk is an area thought to be heavily influenced by Puritan activity: here the organ case at least survived a long time...



Image: Andrew Martin International  
www.andrewmartin.co.uk

### Coventry Holy Trinity, 1641

**3 June 1641:** ...no more Salary paid.

**6 November 1641:**

*Ordered – that whereas the orgaynes now standing in the church, hath been formerly silenced, shall, betwixt this time and the 21<sup>st</sup> day of december, be sould and taken down, for the best advantage; and if they can not be sould betwixt this time & 21 december, then shall have them taken down and set them in the old Vestry, until they can be sould.*

***Illustrations of the history and antiquities of Holy Trinity Church Coventry, Sharp 1818 p22:***

*The original vestry was on the north side of the Chancel, and after ... 1593, used as a store room... It must however be observed, that the old Vestry as it was afterwards called, bears evident proofs of having been a Chapel, the piscina and recess for the locker, still remaining; **and there are marks of a flooring having originally divided it into two rooms.***

The large church of Holy Trinity Coventry, for which the combined efforts of Clynmowe and the older Howe had rapidly made a very large £35 organ in 1526-7, kept its organ until the 1640s, and even then had difficulty in disposing of it. It seems they may have stored some of it in an upper vestry, where the bellows probably had been...

In the 1641 accounts are these items: Expended in several Journeys [days] about the Orgins, & in taking them downe, & laying them in the old Vestry, according to order, 22 s 4d, a lot of time and money ... Paid for building up 5 Seats, where the Organs stood, 24s 4d.

It appears the organ was sold to Sir Henry Willoughby, for on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 1649, an order was made that the purchase money, £30, 'be immediately procured from him'. In 1651, an item occurs among the Receipts, of £2 10s 3d from Mr Bewley, for 67 lb of organ pipes, at 9d per lb. [The next organ, incidentally, was set up in the chancel in 1684, apparently in a loft, possibly the same loft as the previous one had occupied, once the five pews had been removed from it...]



### Westminster St Margaret

**1644** *Itm [received] of Arthur Condall, in part of ['£ : 5' in margin] for the screene and organ-loft £50;*

**1645** *Rec. for the organ pipes £4. 0. 0.*

This was and is the parliamentarians' church; they obeyed their own Ordinance of May 1644 of course, but only at the last minute, taking down an organ they had built in 1600 at a cost of at least £17 2s 7d.

.....

This is the moment to say a word about the famous 1644 Ordinance. Two years before, the 'puritan' parliament had given itself the jurisdiction that had formerly been held solely by the King, and began to make laws by decree. But in May 1644 the conflicts of the first civil war were in full spate, and the many parts of the country that were still Royalist were obviously not likely to obey this decree. Organs in Worcester and Winchester cathedrals were early victims of the godly anger of parliamentary troops, it is true, and the organ in Norwich cathedral had been in danger of being destroyed by apprentices, but nationally the fate of organs would be determined, like everything else, by the result of the wars, and that was far from being clear at that time.

.....



### Hartland, Devon

**1634/5**

Paid John Loosemore for setting upp 6 Sentences in the church, and on the porches, and for playing the organs, 1 l [£1]

Paid John Loosemore for a diall for the church, 12s ...

**1651/2**

Paid for taking down the organs, 4s

In the far west-country, still then relatively prosperous from wool, textiles and tin until the slump of the mid-seventeenth century, the organ John Loosemoore played in Hartland was still in place until the early 1650s.

If we think of Salisbury as being 'more London' than 'south-western' we may be surprised to know that singing and organs continued in two of its city churches (one formerly a collegiate chapel) right into the 1640s. Presumably this had been sanctioned by Brian Duppa, bishop here until the episcopacy was abolished in 1646.



#### **Salisbury St Edmund: new organ 1567 (dismantled about 1646-7)**

*Charges layd owte by John' Robyns & Robert batchat for ye makeinge of a new pere of organs be gone the xxij of Awgust in the yere of or lord 1567 and fynished the same yere the vi off november ...*

They noted all the materials used, and the total amount paid out:

*Sm' totalys layd owt a pon ye organs xxiiij li xvj s v d [£24 16s 5d]*

#### **Contract 1569**

*Mm [memorandum] that Hughe Chappington' of Southe Molton in the Countie of Devon' organ' maker for a yerlie fee of vi s viij d to be paied vnto him During' all his liefte, Dothe bynde himself to repaire thorganes newly by him late made in St. Edmundes in sarum. In withnesse whereof' he hathe Receyved vi s viij d in hand the thurd day of january in the xith yere of the Raigne of or soveraigne Ladie quene Elizabeth etc and he hat promysed to fynd all soche stofe as shall mynd the organs wt all.*

At St Edmund's, a former collegiate church, the contract made with the Chappingtons in 1569 was still being serviced in the 1620s by the same family, then into its third generation.

All was still going well in 1633-4, when 2s 6d was paid for three keyes, new locke, & mendinge of two lockes for ye organs. J. Burte was paid in full of his Byll for repayrenge the organs £10 ...and Mr Tocker of the Close was paid in full for his paynes aboute the Organs £3 6s 8d ... But the organ was eventually dismantled about the same time as the one in St Thomas's church.

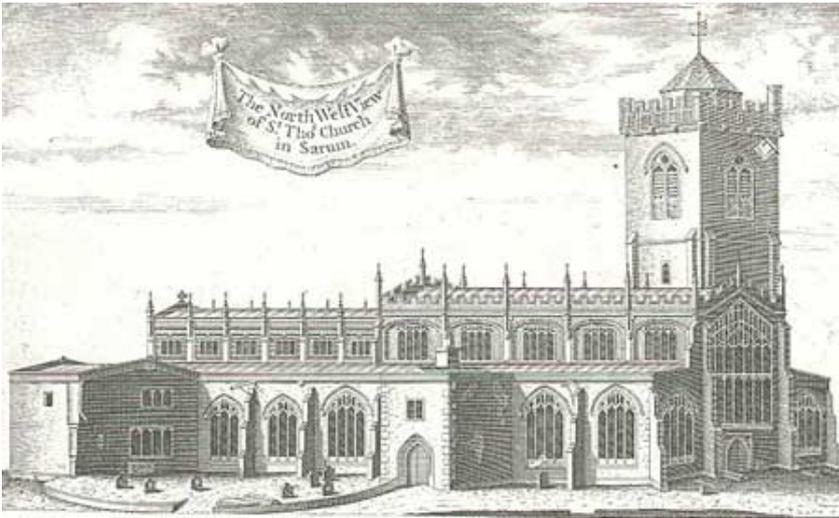


Image courtesy of Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre

**Salisbury St Thomas:  
new organ 1568/9;  
removed 1646/7**

[paid] ... sextone & labourer  
Carying and incarying the  
organ Pipes 1s ...[and].  
labourer moveing the Organ  
case 10d

At St Thomas church, Salisbury, they went right up to the wire in 1644, having paid the clerk to play the organ as well as doing his other duties up to that year. Then they paid a 'Joyner for ½ a daies work about taking down the organs' and for 10d worth of tuppenny nailes...

And finally on July 4, 1646 ... they noted that "There is in weight of the organs 271 lb at 10s [per quarter?] - £12 8s 5d. This suggests a sizeable organ, as do two later entries later in the same year : to ... sextone & labourer Carying and incarying the organ Pipes 1s ... labourer moveing the Organ case 10d

**Minehead, Somerset: new organ 1637 dismantled 1645, set up again 1672**

**1637:** the church purchased a new organ from John Hayward of Bath. The organ, which was set on the rood loft, was provided with curtains and Mr Loosemoore, presumably John, was paid 7s 6d a year to keep it in tune...

**1645:** the organ was dismantled....

**1672:** the organ was set up again and painted on both sides by the former organist who received £3 a year for playing it and maintained both organ and clock.

(County Record Office, Taunton)



Photograph Paul McCrombie

<https://picasaweb.google.com/115277689318568588089>

At Minehead in coastal Somerset, it seems that the same organ served the church until 1645 and then again from 1672! The local records indicate that in 1637 the church purchased a new organ from John Hayward of Bath, selling the old pipes. A Mr Serridge (probably a go-between) was paid £90 for 'building' the organ and his widow received the remaining £70 in 1638. The organ, which was set on the rood loft, was provided with curtains and Mr Loosemoore, was paid 7s 6d a year to keep it in tune. The organist, Henry Cozens, was only paid when required to play, and in 1645 the organ was dismantled....

In 1672, the organ was set up again and painted on both sides by the former organist who received £3 a year for playing it.



[www.suffolkchurches.co.uk](http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk)

#### **Framlingham, Suffolk, 1630s and later**

**Dowsing, the local and infamous iconoclast, thwarted by clever churchwardens:**

- They removed the organ before the arrival of his henchmen
- And put it up again three weeks later!
- This organ was to be replaced later by the Thamar organ from Cambridge whose case is still in the church...

(Local tradition: to be verified)

I really do hope that this local Framlingham story can be shown to be true..!

## Launceston, Devon, 1718

### Statement by Mayor to council

*'In the Church there was, long since, an organ, taken down and destroyed in the times of the civil wars, but some of the pypes, the bellowes, and wind boards, are still in being, but lying in the vestry. The organ was then placed between the Church and the Chancel...'*

*(The Histories of Launceston and Dunheved ' Richard Peter 1885)*



Malcolm Balmer <http://dorsetcamera.co.uk/>



Philip Halling [www.geograph.org.uk/profile/1837](http://www.geograph.org.uk/profile/1837)

It seems that substantial relics of the old organ in Launceston were still around, sixty years later. And the mayor of this corporation church was keen on doing the right thing! He concluded his remarks by saying:  
'The inhabitants are now desirous to have a new organ placed on a gallery to be built towards the lower end of the Church...'

### 1511 : An epitaph for the medieval organ

*Have mercy, good Lord, on the soul of Thomas Holden,  
That hit may rest wyth God, good neyghbours, say  
Amen.*

*He gave the new organs whereon his name is set,  
For Because only yee should not hym forget  
In your good preyers: to God he took hys way  
On thousand five hundryd and eleven, in November the  
fourth day*

*( 'Funeral Monuments' Weever 1631)*



[www.photosofchurches.com](http://www.photosofchurches.com)

Saffron Walden had been given an organ in 1511. Luckily this epitaph was noted by John Weever for his 'Ancient Funeral Monuments' book of 1631, as now there is no trace of it. But the organ did not last all that long, according to the inventory made in 1553, in which items previously sold include 'certain organ

pipes for 3s 4d [and] certain more organ pipes for 25s'. Later they sold '...An orgayn case for 15s'...



[www.norfolkchurches.co.uk](http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk)

**On a slightly more positive note: Foulsham, Norfolk**

Sir Thomas Hunt, who had a house in the parish of Hindolveston c1590

*...was a great benefactor to both parishes. His legacy of £10 per annum for the maintenance of the organ in Foulsham Church has not been paid since a terrible fire in 1770..*

(R W Purdy (1907) A Valley in East Norfolk.  
*Norfolk Arch Trans* 16:95)

**Could an organ have survived in this backwater until 1770?**

An extraordinary bequest for a small country church may have helped preserve an organ (or perhaps its relics) in an out-of-the-way place, until the 1770 fire. Who knows?

In conclusion...



**Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang...**

There is no way one can fabricate a tidy conclusion to this history, which ended in messy civil and fratricidal wars. The Dallam and Harrison families (who we never see in parish church accounts) had moved to Brittany some time before and were busy building large organs for counter-Reformation churches and abbeys there. It seems likely that Barnard Smith had also left some years before to work in the other area nearest to England, the German-speaking low countries. As we all know, most of these would come back after 1660, and the painful business of rebuilding a musical culture in Britain would start all over again. But it was going to be a very different culture from the post-medieval system, whose long-drawn-out death agonies we have been hearing about this morning.