

# THE PLACE OF THE ORGAN IN THE MEDIEVAL PARISH CHURCH

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## Introduction

When first challenged in early 2008 to find out about the state of the organ in late medieval England, this author, perhaps naturally, thought that a search for the medieval organ should start with written sources. Thanks to the administrative structures developed by Henry VII and his ministers, England was a country where record-keeping had become important. The survival of documents from more than 500 years ago however is likely to be very patchy and the range of possible sources broad, but the first stage in tracking down surviving documents for parish churches and a substantial number of colleges and monasteries up to the 1640s has now been completed. Serendipity has brought other sources of contemporary comment on organs to attention and, though rare, other clues have been discovered through mentions in later books on related subjects. About three hundred churchwardens' accounts have been examined, with about forty more to be seen in local record offices.

Using this documentation along with other published work, a list of eight hundred existing parish churches with *a priori* evidence of organs has been drawn up, forming the basis for exploration of medieval churches for physical evidence of liturgical musical arrangements, including organs. It is hoped that this article—the report of a work in progress—will inform and enable a systematic and more complete survey by a wider group of enthusiasts.

## A case study: opus Dei in a collegiate church

In the medieval period, the church trained and supported its musicians – particularly in cathedrals and monasteries – to an extent hard to comprehend today. Whilst evidence from documents relating to these larger establishments cannot be assumed to apply to parish churches, it is useful to look at musical provision and training in these larger, well-equipped places. In Exeter cathedral, for example, most of the personnel were concerned one way or another with the daily musical offering of the church. In his history of the cathedral, Nicholas Orme wrote, 'By the 1260s there were three official groups of minor clergy: fourteen boy choristers aged between about seven and fourteen, twelve adolescent secondaries officially aged between eighteen and twenty-four but sometimes younger, and twenty-four vicars choral, all priests and therefore over the age of twenty-four.'<sup>1</sup> Orme also noted that the senior clergy, which comprised twenty-four mostly-resident canons, took part in the services and fed and boarded the vicars,

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<sup>1</sup> Orme, Nicholas, *Exeter Cathedral, The First Thousand Years, 400-1550*, (Exeter: Impress Books, 2009), 100.

secondaries and choristers in their houses, seeing also to the free education of the boys and the secondaries, who performed domestic duties in return.

The 1339 statutes of the collegiate church of St Mary at Ottery, Devon, provide one of the clearest descriptions of the daily round in a collegiate church of medium status. J. N. Dalton, in his explanation of these statutes promulgated by Bishop Grandisson for the foundation of the College,<sup>2</sup> (paraphrased here) wrote: ... first, the quire was to be closed ... ‘undequaque’ ... that is by its three gates, one of which was in the centre of the pulpitum and the other two on the north and south sides leading into the quire aisles. The church clerks were the key bearers for these doors, and no one was to be admitted after service to the quire except ‘per eos’ (‘by them’), and on their responsibility. (Orme says that at Exeter cathedral these church clerks were dressed in ‘choir habit’, a white surplice covered with a long black cloak reaching to the feet and including a long black hood and a black cap.)<sup>3</sup> The time of Mattins was midnight in winter, and sunrise in summer (Statute vj). There came a long pause after Mattins until the quire was to be needed again (Statute xvj), and then it was to be locked. During that time there would be many people walking about in the church and the morn priest would be singing the morrow-mass at our Lady’s altar ‘exterius’ (Statute lxxvij, 27) in the transept in front of the pulpitum, and after that private masses would be said by other priests at the side altars (Statute xxxj), which would draw ‘others’ (parishioners, presumably) into the church. Our Lady’s mass would then follow in her chapel (Statute xv). All these services would be over before the College met in the quire again for Prime, preliminary to Chapter and *Preciosa*, to which nearly everyone would go into the Chapter House; and if there were any parish services required they would then take place in the Nave (Statute xlj).<sup>4</sup>

After this followed the High Mass, the great service of the day in quire. Nones were said immediately after High Mass, and ‘all the afternoon’ the quire would not be used again until Evensong, and so would again be locked up. But not the church itself: the nave and transepts at least would always be open for private prayer till after Compline, so one of the church-clerks or ‘holy water clerks’ had always to be in attendance. Clerks and boys were to be in their place before service began (Statute xxj).

After Compline, the quire gates were locked until opened at the second chime on the clock installed at this period (and still working) for Mattins the next day (Statute lxxvij, 2). After curfew the gates of the close were bolted, and it was time for all to go to bed (Statute xxj, *n*). The church keys were taken to the morn priest who would open the gates next dawn (Statute xlix), and meanwhile the church clerks and ‘benets’ after going their rounds locked themselves in the church for the night (Statute lxxvij, 2 and 27).

Other statutes reveal further details of the life of the musician-clerks: for instance, the whole of the fiftieth Statute deals with the life and education of boy

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<sup>2</sup> Dalton J. N., *The Collegiate Church of Ottery St Mary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917). This description opens with the Statute concerning those who looked after the quire and church, *De custodia chori et ecclesiam*.

<sup>3</sup> Orme, N, op.cit., 138.

<sup>4</sup> In 1520, an extra north aisle was built for the parish as their nave; they also used the north transept, and the north tower there served as their belfry.

choristers ('pueros choristas'). The statutes are however only part of the detailed and careful planning of the building in which they worked. Dalton continues with a description of the physical space. The 'gradus chori' occupied the whole of the third or middle bay of the quire, and the floor of the presbytery took up the two easternmost bays. Into this in the fourth bay there was one step up from the third bay, and from the quire into the 'gradus chori' in the third bay there was also one step up. The hole through which the chain descended for carrying the lamp-bason (a basin filled with oil with a floating wick) ordered by Bishop Grandisson (Statute lxxxvij, 6) is clearly visible in the ribs of the vaulting of the roof immediately in the centre of the 'gradus chori'. Under this light stood the large lectern, on which was laid every morning the Venitarium (Statute lxxvij, 2) or folio music book. On the 'gradus chori' also were a 'pair of organes', and at least two 'pair of dexis [desks]' for chained books.

The organs at Ottery College were placed on various structures designed for them when the building was remade to accommodate the newly-established College. The place of the largest organ was described by Dalton, based on his research and the dissolution inventory, as being on the pulpitum, 'built of stone, broad and solid, about ten feet high and at least six feet deep'.<sup>5</sup> This was still *in situ* at the beginning of the nineteenth century when boys of the local King's School had seats on it, and there was a stone staircase in the depth of it. 'By this stone staircase there was an easy ascent to the top for those whose duty it was to read the lessons facing east or to play upon the large "pair of organs" that were placed there as were "organes" at Exeter.'<sup>6</sup>

Continuing with Dalton's description, the gallery which still exists in the Lady Chapel was built for the instruction of boy musicians in 'organici cantus' by our Lady's chaplain there (Statute xvij). The stair for ascending to this gallery (which contained 'a pair of organes', the third pair in the Church) is in a turret on the north side of the Lady Chapel.<sup>7</sup>

The church at Ottery St Mary was, then, divided into two by its main screens, which could be passed through only by unlocking their doors, as we have seen. Clerks and priests entered the church by the north door from the cloisters. The statutes and the surviving church itself demonstrate that churches did not arrive at their original form by accident or as abstract designs, despite the misunderstandings of later commentators, but were designed and built for purely practical reasons. That understood, we too can make the effort to understand what their designers had in mind with regard to music and organs.

Singers and players spent many hours a day (and night) performing the offices, the low and Lady masses and the daily high mass. Writing about Exeter Cathedral, Orme says, 'On a normal day the adult minor clergy – the vicars, annuellars, and secondaries – were there [in the quire] for five or six hours, rising to seven or eight on major festivals. The choristers worked for almost as long, partly in choir and partly in

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<sup>5</sup> Dalton, op. cit., 53.

<sup>6</sup> Dalton, loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Dalton, op.cit., 70. Inventory of Ottery College, surrendered 30 May 1537, under 'Yeron and glas': ... Item, a paire of organs in the Rodlofte prayesd at xls. Item, a new paire of organs in the quere, prayesd at v. *lib*. Item, a paire of organs in our Lady chapel prayesd at xs. (Dalton, op. cit., p. 296)

school, and only the canons got away with a mere couple of hours. As clergy, however, they were still expected to say the daily round of services and merely had the privilege of doing so in their own houses.”<sup>8</sup>

This demand on the singers’ stamina is perhaps a primary reason that ‘alternatim’ practice developed. Just as the singers took it in turn to sing the psalms and canticles by verse (that is, by turns) alternating between Decani and Cantoris sides, so the singers could rest when one of their number played verses on the organ. Verse books for singers and for the organ, noted in an inventory compiled at Stoke College, Suffolk, in 1534, refer to this practice:

...Item ij lytyll boks for the chyltern to syng verses apon  
Item ij boks contaynyng grayles [graduals] & verses for the Organs...<sup>9</sup>

## Cultural background

There is evidence that music was well furnished in London before 1400. An inventory made not long before the infamous Friday 13 October 1307, when the Templars were brutally closed down by Philip IV of France and his allies, shows that there were two organs in their London church, as well as music and expensive liturgical clothing for twenty-eight adult and four boy singers:

Account of Nicholas Pygott, one of the sherrifs of London, and  
Nigel Drury, the last sherrif, taken the 10 January, 1st Edward II.,  
1307.

*In the Great Church* ... two pairs of organs 40s ...

*In the Choir*: —Five antiphoners, 3 marks ; four psalters, 6s. ; two legends, viz., one of Festivals and one of Saints, 10s. ; two Bibles, 2 marks ; one ordinal, 6d. ; one capitular, 3s. ; one martyrology, 18s. ; one pastorage, ½ a mark ; four gradales, 20s. ; three tropers, 3s. ; one epistolary, 18d. ; eight processionaries, 4s.; one processionary, 12d. ; two cushions to chanters’ chairs, and one book for the organs, 5s. ; one ivory paten, 3d.—found in the Choir at the time aforesaid.

... *In St. Mary’s Church* [the Lady chapel] :—One missal, 20s. ; seven tropers 7s. ... one book, called “Chabel,” 1 mark ...

*In the Vestry* ... nineteen divers books, 10 marks ... twenty-eight choral copes and four little copes for the choristers, in all 10<sup>li</sup>. [£10]  
... one sword, with which the blessed St. Thomas of Canterbury was killed, as it is said, of the value of which the accountants are ignorant

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<sup>8</sup> Orme, N, 152-3.

<sup>9</sup> Stoke College inventory, 1 July 1534, from Matthew Parker’s note-books (collected by M.R. James) in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (MSS 108), with grateful acknowledgements to Suzanne Paul, then Parker sub-librarian.

; two crosses of the wood on which Christ was crucified, value unknown ...<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps these early fourteenth century Templar organs resembled the one in the central west façade of León cathedral, northern Spain, carved about the same time, and the only carving of such size and detail. Called ‘portatyffes’ (or similar) in England,<sup>11</sup> they could be moved to where they would be most useful. This carving shows the tonsured angel/clerk/player, the costumes of the redeemed, and the delightful equation made by the sculptor between the boys with their bellows who are just as actively engaged in heating up the cauldrons to broil the damned as they are in blowing the organ. It is a moot point whether the player is pulling out sliders with his palm upwards or not: the whole scene is set very high so that the viewing angle makes it difficult to be sure. But the relationship of the size of the organ to the people surrounding it looks convincingly taken from life, making this a valuable document.



León cathedral west façade, over central doorway  
Photograph by Alesso Damato

During the latter part of the fourteenth century there seems to have been a radical shift from blockwerk (with large finger-keys admitting wind to many pipes simultaneously) to keyboard-and-stop organs. Was the musical incentive for this change associated with increasingly complex choral polyphony? This shift involved several imaginative technical changes, including some lateral thinking to change the sliders to which keys had been attached into stop-registers with which selected ranks could be silenced. The keyboard may also have been arranged at this point into octaves of twelve notes that were manageable by the compass of thumb and fingers of a single hand. Two other important and novel elements in the transformation were the use of pallets under some sort of grid that had been calculated to the size of the ranks of pipes, and transmission

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<sup>10</sup> As translated and transcribed in Harrold, Henry, ‘From a roll at Carlton Ride of possessions of Templars at their dissolution’, a footnote to ‘Goods and ornaments in Norwich churches in the fourteenth century’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. 5 (1852), 90-1.

<sup>11</sup> That these were not necessarily small instruments is attested to in the contract made between Richard ‘Charpyngton’ and church men of St Olav’s Exeter in 1536, where the ‘portatyve’ organ was to be maintained regularly by Chappington, though the ‘stop off Regals’ (reed stop) was to ‘be tuned by the player thereof’. These reed pipes must therefore have been easily accessible; just as they are in the ‘Wetheringsett’ reconstruction, which can therefore perhaps be classed as a ‘portatyve’ as it is (self-evidently) moveable, though it contains seven ranks, six of which are of metal. Perhaps the word ‘portatyve’ where it occurs implies simply an organ of modest size not placed in a loft and so available to be moved around as necessary? (Which provokes the obvious question of what ‘as necessary’ might mean in the context of English liturgical use.)

by rollers of the keys' action to these pallets. All these technical developments seem to have taken place during the later fourteenth century, with what may be the first non-blockwerk organs appearing in English churchwardens' accounts from the 1380s onwards.

Organs continued to be part of the musical and liturgical apparatus that became ever more complex and professional during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. A church without singers would not necessarily need an organ, or have anyone to play it, but one that was monastic or collegiate (whether a local college or a secular cathedral) or connected in some way with one of these would equip itself with singer's stalls (usually with misericords), books with lecterns and desks, singers and the means to train them, and whenever possible (it seems), organs as well. These were essential ornaments of the quire and sanctuary, in the sacred, set-aside, eastern parts of the church to which only priests, lay and ordained clerks and quire-isters had regular access. Other furnishings, many examples of which still can be seen today, are cupboards and lockers (what we now call 'aumbries'; their original purpose was not to shelter the consecrated host, which in England was suspended over the altar in a pyx), seats for priests and deacons ('sedilia'), Easter sepulchres (if not always recognised as such), and screens to side quire chapels. Most significantly, the aforementioned misericord-stalls were arranged in 'collegiate' style with stalls returned against the rood-screen to seat those regulating the service of worship: the abbot, prior, dean or warden (the senior presiding priest) and the precentor (the senior priest-musician). Furniture such as large and smaller candlesticks, large music desks, stone altars, alabaster side tables, veils and their beams, have mostly gone and have left little or no trace. But organs, organ lofts and rood screens with their platforms were often large enough fixtures to have left substantial and still-visible traces in quires and their chapels.

Other activities whose traces we now often under-appreciate took place in the people's western part of the church. By the end of the fifteenth century or a little later, energetic church folk would have installed furnishings they thought necessary in the areas which we now call the nave and its aisles. These furnishings may have included carved and coloured fonts and their covers, fixed carved benches or pews, banner lockers, moveable benches and stools, and a rebuilt tower with its bells. (These were not at this time arranged to be rung in peals, but to be struck to call people to church, at significant moments during the mass, and to signal deaths). Also included in the people's part of the church was the complex of rood screen, rood loft with access stairway, and the rood (crucifix) itself, with depictions of Mary, John and angels and perhaps even skulls and bones.<sup>12</sup> Behind it, fixed midway within the arch or higher up, there might be the Doom or Last Judgement, painted on boards or the plastered wall. In order to light the rood, the people took the original (often thatched) nave roof off and raised the walls with new windows.<sup>13</sup> Then, their carpenters placed a new finely-

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<sup>12</sup> The Golgotha at Cullompton, Devon, seventeen feet long, with mortises for a very large crucifix and smaller ones for statues of Mary and John, is a unique survival.

<sup>13</sup> An interesting feature is that in northern counties (from Leicestershire northwards) these windows, now called 'clerestory' windows, are sometimes smaller on the north side of the nave than on the south. This again demonstrates that church design-decisions were practical rather than symbolic.

crafted and decorated roof over all, its colours and complexity often heightened at the east end of the nave where the rood stood. If what we now call a ‘clerestory’ could not be afforded or foundations were too fragile to bear the increased weight, a large south-aspect window might be opened near the east end of the nave, or dormer windows opened in the roof adjacent to the rood-loft and its figures. These rood-screens are often still in place, especially in East Anglia and the south-west, though deprived of the figures they were erected to celebrate. They are among those medieval fittings still to be found in churches alongside the much more obvious basic architectural structure. They are just as important to a proper understanding of *why* a church was built as the arches, capitals and ornamentation that inform architectural and other historians as to *when* a church was built.

Indeed, in addition to ‘reading a building’ in the manner of Nikolaus Pevsner, we should also ‘listen to a building’.<sup>14</sup> A church building’s function was above all to shelter the celebration of the daily offices, all of which were sung. The quires of monastic, secular and collegiate churches and the chapels of chantry colleges were designed with architectural proportions such as double cubes – and even constructional details such as the shape of ceilings – that suited sung music well. These proportions create acoustic conditions that allow singers to hear each other and to sing easily into a space sufficiently resonant to aid them in their task as much as possible – an important advantage in a church where offices and the daily high mass could demand so much singing.

Those churches that are known to have had organs needed to place them appropriately, so it might be expected that traces of them are still to be found. The singer-players of these organs, alongside those other professionals (designer-builders and artists in glass, stone and painting) who had made churches vibrantly visual, also made them resound with the singing of chant and polyphony and its associated organ-playing.

### *The effects of the English Reformation*

Fortunately, re-invoking this aural world is possible in England to an extent not possible elsewhere, because the English Reformation was unique among the European religious upheavals of the sixteenth century:

- It was gradual: starting with the events of 1533, the process of dismantling the monasteries, and later the chantries and hospitals, with the final attempts to rob churches themselves under Edward VI’s ministers, took altogether nearly twenty years.
- While it was to become a prolonged revolution, as contemporary and subsequent social events showed, the time-scale must at first, under Henry VIII

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<sup>14</sup>‘He [Pevsner] was principally interested in buildings for their architectural quality and their interest, and he was always putting them into patterns as he saw them, architecturally and stylistically.’ John Newman, interviewed 2 April 1992 by Harries, Susie, author of *Nikolaus Pevsner, the Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), 391.

and his ministers, have made it seem more like a slow cultural change. Sudden changes came later, with the accession of the two successive half-sister queens, Mary and Elizabeth, when religious objectives veered wildly twice within less than seven years. These changes must have seemed much more like a revolution quite out of the control of the minor actors caught up in it.

- It was top-driven: a rulers' revolution, not a people's one. Therefore the social destruction typical of other revolutions (particularly in France, 250 years later) was not nearly so prevalent.
- It left monuments of religion, apart from most monasteries, largely unaltered. There are more intact 'gothic' medieval churches in England and Wales than practically the whole European continent put together. Even the civil wars of the next century did not deliberately destroy churches, though they occasionally became inadvertent targets.
- The independent church in England was not at all influenced by the outcome of the Council of Trent and the Romanising influence of the newly-reascendant papacy. The Roman church considered their gothic churches on the continent of Europe to be barbarian and fit only for remodelling in the Roman style; but in England the post Reformation English puritan tendency was always to simplify and pauperise, and not to rebuild and glorify, their churches.

The result of this unusual Reformation is that there are about nine thousand medieval churches in these islands that survive to testify to the reasons (some not always very obvious to us now) for which they were built.

## Sources

When the present study was undertaken, it aimed to find as much as possible of the available documentary evidence for organs in all kinds of churches and monasteries. However, it soon became clear that the structure of the late medieval church was so complex and varied that archival evidence from each element of it ideally requires separate and careful assessment.<sup>15</sup> In this article, we will consider some of those elements found in the initial study of sources that enlarge our knowledge of daily life in parish churches.

### *Stock-taking inventories*

The oldest available sources are inventories made at various times from the thirteenth century onwards. Some churchwardens were careful in carrying out their obligations by drawing up lists of the church goods to pass on to their elected successors. A bishop's or archdeacon's visitation to inspect the functioning of the church might be another reason for compiling an inventory. In the case of the monasteries – and later the

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<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Thompson, A. Hamilton, *The English Clergy and their Organization in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), *passim*.



hospitals and chantries – closing-down commissioners would take inventories of all that was saleable (usually with an estimated sale price). The survival of these latter inventories is very unpredictable, despite the thoroughness of the Court of Augmentations office at Westminster which collected the revenues from all these sales on behalf of the Crown, and the many documents calendared in the thick volumes of State Letters and Papers.

### *Edwardian inventories*

The most extensive and thorough inventories were those taken throughout the country by order of the Edwardian Protectorate between 1549 and 1552. Every church's wardens were either visited or summoned to account for all their goods, sometimes more than once, and the vast majority of their returns have survived (placed now in the National Archives) either on scraps of paper or parchment or as fair copies made at the Augmentations office. Some were lost (there are no returns for Sussex or most of Leicestershire, for example), some were detailed (those of the City of London), and some seem to be laconic in the extreme.

Edwardian inventories were inconsistent in their reporting, and varied in their thoroughness. It seems that the listed organs were not large fixtures (these seem to have been omitted or even overlooked) but were smaller fittings. Just why the commissioners' terms of reference did not include the removal of organs and the sale of their metal is not clear; medieval chalices were often melted down or sold, so it was hardly a matter of taste or conscience, and the new service rubrics in the 1549 Prayer Book (the first in English) were unclear as to the role of the organ and music generally. Perhaps the organs were thought to be too complicated, or removing their pipework was not cost-effective. The explanation might be that organs still had some purpose, one not now obvious but worth investigating. In the returns there is often a marginal or other note to indicate that an organ was 'reserved' for the use of the church concerned, and in some places organs were even installed at this period, as is noted below. All these factors rather suggest that received opinion about the status of organs at this time needs to be treated with caution.

Two inventories from Foulsham in Norfolk in 1549 and 1552 are interesting because of their differences with regard to the organ there. The initial 1549 return to the commissioners said:

100 [Hundred of] Eynsford – 'Follsham':  
'ffyrst [actually 2<sup>nd</sup>] we the fforesayd ynhabitantes have payd & must  
pay to one arnold off norwyche ffor on payre off organs whych we  
bowght off him abowght Chrysmas last xij li / It'm we have bestowyd  
abowght a clocke yn the same churche xxs'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Walters, H. B., 'Edwardian Inventories', *Transactions of the Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society*, Vol. XXVIII (1942), 7. The organ maker Arnold and his son appear in various CWA.

Neither this organ nor the clock is mentioned in the 1552 inventory at all, but it seems that both were still present (church clocks were never removed). A local landowner later endowed this (or perhaps another) organ's maintenance 'in perpetuity', or so he thought: Sir Thomas Hunt (who had a house in the parish of Hindolveston c.1590) '...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 destroyed most of the woodwork in the church as well as sixteen houses close by.'<sup>17</sup>

After Edward, under Mary, organs could again take up their earlier rôle once the necessary service books could be reprinted, copied or brought out of hiding, but this resurgence was short-lived: it died with her and Cardinal Pole on successive days in 1558. Some inventories were taken during her reign when bishops and archdeacons became active in helping parishes regain some of their despoiled goods, and where these documents survive they are useful.

### *Churchwardens' accounts*

The most useful archives documenting the place of organs in parish churches are the accounts kept by churchwardens (CWA), as part of their obligation to take care of church goods, set out in a Council of London act of 1127. These were usually brought up to date each year as wardens handed on the goods of the church to their successors and were eventually, and irregularly, bound up into books, sometimes as fair copies. Few are continuous over a long period, some survive for only a year or two, some are from early in the period and others start later. Survival of these accounts often depended on sheer chance, so they are patchy in geographical distribution. They are valuable for being relatively accessible: most of them have been published in adequate transcriptions in county archaeological journals. However some still reside in county archives, no copies or transcriptions having been made or sent to either the British Library or the National Archives.

Church organs required tuning and repair, and their players and organ blowers needed payment. In practice, the CWA tend not to mention regular payments for either of these. It may be that the players were salaried priests and the organ blowers were paid wages for *all* the work they did around the church. It is likely that organs and their players were mainly financed by donors, or by guilds or chantries, or paid from other accounts. Taken overall, by examining such a large documentary resource, it has been possible to put together a more complete picture from a host of small details. Occasionally, existing information such as the well-known contract made at Holy Trinity, Coventry can be complemented from the accounts (see footnote 31 below). Despite the blurred picture the CWA give, they nevertheless suggest a rather higher

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<sup>17</sup> Purdy, R.W., 'A Valley in East Norfolk', *Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society*, Vol. XVI (1907), 95. It is of course not certain that this organ was the same as that later endowed by Sir Thomas Hunt.

number of organs in parish churches than expected, though Dr Cox's comment in 1913 that every CWA he had seen referred to an organ seems over-enthusiastic.<sup>18</sup>

### *Contracts for organs and their maintenance*

There are very few contracts, but those extant contain useful detail. There are two major purchasing contracts (see below) and three of what we would now call maintenance contracts. One of the latter was drawn up in 1569 at St Edmund's church (formerly collegiate), Salisbury:

Mm 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 lief, Dothe bynde himself to repaire thorganes newly by him late made in St. Edmundes in sarum. Jn withnesse whereof he hath 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 stoffe as shall mynd the organs wt all.<sup>19</sup>

### *Wills*

Wills which mention organs are difficult to find as they are not well catalogued, and their contents not at all. When references to organs and music are found, this is often by chance, as in the will of Nicholas Fyncham (1505):

... My bodye to be buried in the vestiary of Sent Martyns chirche in Fyncham ... I wyll that myn executors pforme & fynyshe up the vestiary that I have begune, as ferforth as my goods wyll extend a cordyng as I have shewyd on to them by my mouth afore tyme ... [land given to St Martin's church ; churchwardens to take] seyde yssues & yerly pfyts, upon this condicion folowyng, that ys to sey that the seyde church wardens for the tyme beyng wt thadvyce & assent of such pson or psons as shall be ryght heyrs and inheritours of Fyncham Manr in Fyncham, sall hyer yerly an abyll and a convenient clerk to s've & to helpe to do divine servyce yn the same church of Sent Marten in Fyncham, and to pley at the organs, and to teche chyldern, whereby that God's s'vyce may be bett' mayntened & susteyned, and they to gyve hym a marke yerly of the seyde issues and pyfts, to be peyd a iiij termes yn the yer, that ys to set at ev'y quart' xl d, and that the seyde marke shall be no pcell of his hyer that he takyth of the pyshe, &c. [also tapers, wax ...] ... [and] yf yt happen ony curate for non cunying of song to wythdrawe the kepyng of devine servyce by note or by any othyr

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<sup>18</sup> Cox, J. C., *Churchwardens' Accounts* (London: Methuen, 1913), 195: 'So far as the investigation of pre-Reformation churchwarden accounts is concerned, not one single case has been found wherein the mention of these instruments is omitted.'

<sup>19</sup> Swayne, H. J. F., 'Churchwardens' Accounts of St Edmund and St Thomas, Sarum, 1443-1702', *Wiltshire Records Society* (1896), 193.

evyll occasyon, so that the divine s'yce of God is not maytened nor sustenyd, but by the seyd curat mynyshed & hurt &c [then the said mark to be given to the poor yearly on Good Friday, as long as they shall be without an] able and convenient clerk to occupye & excersye [sic] as yt is above rehersyd.<sup>20</sup>

The rather casual way in which an organ is mentioned here perhaps indicates a widespread and normalised organ and music culture in this part of East Anglia. It is remarkable however, that a small parish had been given - with the simplest of sustenance - the means to train musicians.

## What sources tell us

### *Organs in accounts*

Organs are invariably referred to as plural in accounts in English until well into the seventeenth century. They are called (in modern spelling) 'a pair of organs', after the Latin plural word 'organa', once English became the usual language of parochial archives from the middle of the fourteenth century. With a few exceptions (Westminster/St-Brieuc, St Paul's cathedral, Warwick's small panel of stained glass and small MS illuminations) we do not know what these organs looked like. We can be fairly sure that medieval cases were highly coloured and gilded, as were possibly the front pipes themselves.<sup>21</sup> The depiction of a portable organ in the glass of the Beauchamp chapel at Warwick is too small to be of any detailed help, but from the archives there are still a few clues, even of front pipes' layouts, which might give an idea.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dashwood, G.H., 'Wills at Stoke Bardolph, from Muniment Room there', *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. 2 (1849). Martin Renshaw's modernisation: 'My body is to be buried in the vestry of St Martin's church in Fincham. I will that my executors carry on with and finish the vestry I have started, as far as my assets allow, in the manner that I have previously explained verbally to them. [The churchwardens are to use the rents and profits of the land I have given to the church] for the following provision, that is to say that the said church wardens in office at the time, taking into account the opinion and agreement of the person or persons who are the rightful heirs of Fincham Manor in Fincham, shall hire on an annual basis a suitable and appropriately-trained clerk to serve at and assist in holy worship in the said church of St Martin at Fincham, and to play the organ, and to teach children so that God's worship may be improved and supported, and they are to pay him a mark [13s 4d] every year from the said rents and profits, to be paid four times a year, that is 40d [3s 4d] a quarter, and that the said mark will not be deducted from his pay for work he does for the parish ... And if it so happens that any 'curate' does not keep up divine worship because he does not know how to sing, or for any other misdemeanour, so that the holy worship of God is not improved and supported, but diminished and damaged by the curate [, then the said mark to be given to the poor yearly on Good Friday, as long as they shall be without a] suitable and trained cleric to have and to do this job ...

<sup>21</sup> As at Wimbledon Manor, where a Republican survey of the buildings in 1649 described the organ as 'a faire and riche payre of organs of curious worke, the cases [note plural] of which are wainscot [oak], well guilt and wrought with flower worke', quoted in Caley, John (1789), 'A Survey of the Manor of Wymbledon', *Archaeologia*, Vol. 10, 404.

<sup>22</sup> Mere (Wilts.) CWA quoted by Ponting, C. E., 'The parish church of St Michael, Mere', *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, Vol. 29, 33-4: The 'last state' of this organ is related in an Inventory of 1636./ 'Itm in the lofte over the northe Ile one payre of olde decayed Organes wth xxvj Orgayne Pypes of the greater sorte in them besides the three Pypes hereafter chardged, beside a

### *Where were organs placed?*

An organ needs at least two bellows to ensure an uninterrupted supply of wind. It also needs a structure to support the keys, mechanisms, soundboard(s) and pipework. The decoration of the case which protects these would be integrated with the overall decorative scheme of the building and its other furniture.<sup>23</sup> An organ of any size above the very smallest ‘portatyff’ would, with its bellows, take up so much room that it would probably be difficult to find space for it in many chancels. A few chancels had been enlarged in the same way as some naves, for sometimes the foundation of a local college meant substantial alterations, or even the whole church being rebuilt. In the larger cities such as London, Bristol, Norwich and Winchester, a restricted ground plan and encroaching buildings would make any enlargements difficult or impossible. There, an ingenious solution had to be found for housing two or three bellows, an organ case that could be almost any size, the organ player’s seat, and sufficient space for access. All this would take up a good deal of space in a chancel that might be only sixteen feet wide and perhaps twice as long.

In a large establishment the organ player was a musician dedicated to this task,<sup>24</sup> but in parish churches, it seems that it was a singer who played and that the organs were – where traces exist – therefore placed near the singers’ stalls. Organ players, as we saw at Fincham (above; see the modernised text in fn.20), were there for other reasons, chiefly to sing. Where information exists, we find this was typical.<sup>25</sup> We also saw that choristers were trained in the Lady Chapel at the College of St Mary at Ottery to sing with the organ there (and to play it, one supposes). It can also be suggested that when these choristers rose through the ranks to become organ players, they played what they had been taught to sing: the plainsong with the improvised descant they were taught as boys and the improvised bass lines one presumes they were taught as youths.<sup>26</sup>

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quantitye of small pypes wch were not numbred and were in the pype case [i.e. inside the organ case?]. / In the Treasurie Lofte over the Northe Porche theise goods. / Three Great Pypes of the Organes.’ Does this represent an organ with (e.g.) a 13-3-13 front pipes layout, perhaps?

<sup>23</sup> One has to remind oneself of this, most of our churches having become (except for windows) rather lacking in colour – mostly thanks to continually limewashing plaster when not hacking it off.

<sup>24</sup> Valor Ecclesiasticus (1535), vol. II, 238: All Souls’ College, Oxford, under ‘Diete Clerico et Chorustas’ (Food for clerks and singers) ... pro dietis tredecim scolariu[m] videlicet duos cl[er]licos capelle unius organiste sive pulsant[or] organa octo chorustas unius scolaris vocat[ur] le Booke Bearer q[ui] cotidie legit bibliam in aula ... £33 16s [to feed thirty scholars, that is two chapel clerks, an organist or organ blower (?), eight choristers, a scholar called the Book Bearer who takes books into hall every day ...] and, under Stipends: ‘Et solut’ annuatim pro stipendio dict’ organiste ... xxs’ [Paid out annually for the said organist’s stipend, 20 shillings.]

<sup>25</sup> For instance, at the small College of Wingham in Kent, Valor Ecclesiasticus (Vol. I, 36) mentions the provost (Edmund Cranmere) and four canons by name and includes the salary of two priests paid ‘for their daily service in Wingham’. It does not note any specified organ player, though we know that at the surrender of the Colleges, Wingham’s goods included ‘j paire of organs with Service books in the quier’.

<sup>26</sup> See Jane Flynn, ‘To play upon the Organs any manner Playnsong’ *JBIO* Vol. 34, 6 ff *passim*. Also, John Milsom (1995): ‘We can imagine a typical day at a choral foundation in the 1470s, when Walter Lambe and Richard Davy were themselves still choristers. There were old plainchant melodies for the boys to sing from memory, and new ones to be learned by heart, or read from the book. Then came the daily dose of improvisation, guided by the master of the choristers. Not only did that improvisation train the boys’ ears and minds in basic musicianship, it introduced them to the very foundations of

Organs in eastern and central England were in galleries of some sort, called ‘lofts’ in CWA. Some CWA mention the sometimes considerable cost of hauling organs up into them and other associated work,<sup>27</sup> or taking them down while other building work was going on,<sup>28</sup> or while an adjacent structure (which might be the rood-loft complex) was being altered,<sup>29</sup> or the building itself,<sup>30</sup> or even finally dismantling them when the organ itself was no longer wanted.<sup>31</sup>

*Two contracts: All Hallows Barking, London, and Holy Trinity, Coventry*

A very expensive organ costing £50, the equivalent in modern organ-purchasing power of more than half a million pounds,<sup>32</sup> was the subject of a contract signed in 1519 for the church of All Hallows Barking (by the Tower), City of London. This is a large church,

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composition giving them a firm grounding in skills that made them competent composers in their turn.’ CD booklet to ‘The Voices of Angels’ Eton Choirbook Vol V, *The Sixteen Edition*, COR16002.

<sup>27</sup> CWA York, St Michael Spurriergate (1536), in Webb C. C. (1997), ‘Churchwardens’ accounts of St Michael Spurriergate, York, 1518-1548’, *Borthwick Texts and Calendars* 20, 314: ‘Rec’d of the Stok in the Churche to help pay for the Organs ... Item rassavid of the roid lyght iiij li ... Item off Seynt Seyth lyght iiij li ... [p179:] Item for a pare of orgons viij li \_Item for temer [timber] and <j> bordes to make up the qwere a bowitt the orgons viij d \_Item to John Heryson, carver, for ij days xij d ... Item to John Stoltrope for a day and di., ix d \_Item in ayll when the orgons was sett iij d ...

<sup>28</sup> CWA St Helen, Worcester, 1519-20, from Amphlett, John, ‘The Churchwardens’ Accounts of St Michael in Bedwardine, Worcester’, *Worcester Historical Society* (1896), 2: under ‘Charges about the new organs’: ‘Item paid for the taking downe of the old organs and the lofte and for the mending of the Rode loft iiij s iiij d’.

<sup>29</sup> CWA St Andrew’s Canterbury (1560-2), from Cotton, Charles, ‘Churchwardens’ Accounts of the Parish of St Andrew’s, Canterbury 1485-1625, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, Vol. XXXII (1917), 181-246; introduction 181, a/cs 201: ‘It payd to ye good man mammer and hys man ffor iij days and half pluckyng downe ye roode lofte v s x d ... It payd for a lok and a key and an hasp ffor ye orgayns vj d.’ This purchase of a (pad-)lock and key for the hasp presumably to prevent unauthorised access to the organ keyboard must have arisen because the rood-screen doors were usually ordered to be removed when the rood-loft was dismantled. Therefore the organ in the quire was no longer protected; similar purchases of locks can be found in numerous accounts.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Lydd (Kent) CWA in *Records of Lydd*, transcr. Hussey & Hardy, ed. Finn, (Ashford [Kentish Gazette], 1911) for 1526 show considerable activity around the rebuilding of the chancel, in which the organs were implicated.

<sup>31</sup> For example, the organ at Holy Trinity Coventry remained in place until 1641, when on 16 November it was ‘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.’ The dismantling took ‘severall’ days, and cost 22s 4d, a considerable expense. Seats were then built and it took up to eight years finally to dispose of the organ: ‘Pd expended in sev’al Journeys [days] about the Orgins, & in taking them downe, & laying them in the old Vestry, according to order, xxij s iiij d. Pd for building up 5 Seats, where the Organs stood, xxiiij s iiij d.’ (CWA 1641). It appears they were disposed of to Sir Henry Willoughby, for on 5 October 1649, an order was made that the purchase money ‘30 l be immediately procured from him’, (CWA 1649). ‘In 1651, an item occurs among the Receipts, of 2 l 10s 3d from Mr Bewley, for 67 lb of organ pipes, at 9d per lb, perhaps some old pipes which were not sold with the Organ to Sir H. Willoughby.’ Sharp, *Illustrations of the History and Antiquities of Holy Trinity Church Coventry*, (Coventry, 1818), 25-6.

<sup>32</sup> Working on the basis of a wage for a skilled craftsman at this period of 6d a day, this sum would, allowing £10 for purchase of materials, buy 40 times 40 days’ work: a total of 1600 man-days (with practically-unpaid apprentices in addition). In modern terms, a day’s work is now charged out at about £250 (at around £30 an hour) to pay wages and overheads. So 1600 times £250 comes to £400,000, to which the cost of all materials and VAT (itself currently 20%, equalling £80,000 on just the wages bill), have to be added – all of which would bring the total to well over £500,000. This would now (2013) buy a new organ of around thirty speaking stops.

and parallel with it to the north was a very large chantry chapel, made royal in 1465. They are near Tower Hill, the open field where political and other executions were carried out; victims, including Laud, were often buried in the churchyard.

The contract was made between the organ maker, Anthony Duddington<sup>33</sup> and the Vicar (William Patenson D.D.), churchwardens and apparently other senior parish men of All Hallows, on 29 July 1519.<sup>34</sup> As in other extant building contracts and accounts, it is clear that much was taken on trust, with the organ to be assessed as being satisfactory or not when finished, rather than being specified in detail from the start.

The wardens of Holy Trinity Coventry made a contract on 17 December 1526 with two London organ makers, John Howe and John Clynmowe. Their organ was to be less costly at £30, so somewhat smaller, but the time-scale for its making was very short. Its technical description is very brief:

A peir of Organs wt vii Stopps on & besides the Towers of Cases of  
the pitche of Doble Cffaut wt xxvij pleyn Keyes xix Musiks xlvj  
Cases of Tynn & xiiij Cases of Wodd (wt two Sterrs & the Image of  
the Trinity on the Topp ...)<sup>35</sup>

### *Interpreting these contracts*

It is important to forget much of what we now take for granted from present-day descriptions of an organ. Although a system of stop-sliders was available from late in the fourteenth century, if not earlier, these were probably used (as the English word still suggests) to silence ranks of pipes – but not necessarily all of them. Therefore organs like those at All Hallows Barking and Holy Trinity Coventry were large organs with many ranks, even though the contract for the first mentions only ‘as fewe stoppes as may be convenient’ (leaving the choice of those ranks to have stops to be determined between maker and player), and the second was made ‘with vii stopps’ (where it seems the choice had already been made). As the most frequent use of the organ was in ‘verses’ (turns) with the singers, it seems likely that a combination of two or more ranks at vocal pitch would be an important sound. Other effects, including a small blockwerk-like mixture and reed ranks, would be available when the occasion called for them, as at major festivals or in competition with the unregulated ringing of tower and other bells.

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<sup>33</sup>Perhaps he came from Doddington in Kent, not far from the large royal Cluniac abbey of Faversham and its almost equally-large parish church, which was bequeathed an organ in the early 1530s. Doddington is referred to in early medieval documents as ‘Dudintune’. Duddington, or at least ‘Anthony the organ maker from London’, worked at St Andrew’s church in Canterbury, 1520-1 (CWA). He may already have made a new £13 organ there, one whose delivery or ‘cariage and conveying ... by water and by lande’ for 6 shillings was paid 1512-13 (CWA). This payment suggests strongly that the organ was ‘conveyed’ by the usual route from London via the port of Faversham.

<sup>34</sup>For a full transcription and facsimile of the very legible contract, see Blewett, P. R. W. and Thompson, H. C., *The Duddington Manuscripts at All Hallows by-the-Tower London* (Croydon: Mitchell, 1977). It should be remembered that Duddington also ‘kept’ (maintained) an organ already in ‘oure Ladys chapelle’, the royal chantry chapel adjacent to the church, as is mentioned in an undated receipt for £36 13s 4d, in part payment for the organ, together with a guarantee and bond. He was to receive 6s 8d yearly for the upkeep of these two organs, a large sum (between 1s and 2s was more typical) for what one must assume to be sizeable organs which would also require frequent visits to tune reed-stops.

<sup>35</sup>Sharp, loc. cit.

The vocal pitch, whose lowest note is perhaps not co-incidentally represented by a pipe about the same height as a man (around 5½ feet), was (unsurprisingly) called the Principal pitch of the organ. Any other pitches were related to this norm, the Octaves being an octave or more above and the Diapasons or Basses an octave below.<sup>36</sup> The All Hallows contract includes ‘Dowble pryncipalles thorowe out’ so the (doubled) vocal rank pipes were available on all keys (‘thorowe the seid instrument’). It is clear that the longest Principals were ‘v foote or so’, giving a lowest note around bass G at modern pitch, the normal lowest note of a male bass-baritone singer. The keyboards of both organs had ‘xxvij playne/pleyne keys’ and both contracts stipulate or suggest that the keyboard started at C. Twenty-seven natural keys lead up to A in the treble octave. There is no real need to worry about the five-foot length of the longest pipe, as a low A (required in surviving music) could easily be played from the lowest C sharp key. One can readily understand why the contracts do not mention this extra technical complication. The one playable English organ that survives from the (very late) sixteenth century, at Knole,<sup>37</sup> has an original soundboard with only enough grooves in it (45) to have either this low A note<sup>38</sup> played from the C sharp key, or a top G sharp.

The number of pipes to be contained in the All Hallows organ was not specified; only the front pipes (‘the utter parts ... of pure Tynn’) and the number of keys. We do not know how many keyboards there were, but this expensive organ may well have had more than one (as organs in France and Flanders already had), especially as there would have been around 1500 pipes in it, some able to be silenced by stops (‘as few [or as many] as convenient’), but some to be silenced simply by moving the hands to another keyboard. Perhaps it had pedals too, to work the ‘Bassys called Diapason’, sounding an octave below the doubled (two) Principal ranks. The case pipes were to be of pure tin, as we have seen, but the inner ones were to be of no less quality, made of ‘fyne metalle and stuff’, which may indicate that the inner pipes were made with what we now call plain metal feet (‘stuff’) and tin-rich (if not pure tin) ‘fyne metalle’ bodies. The lower lips of the more leady feet would be helpful to the voicer as they would be more easily adjusted than if they were of pure tin – perhaps also easier for the pipemaker, seeing that languids would presumably be of pure lead. Plain metal would also be useful for reed boots or sockets, and presumably their blocks were also of pure lead. The organ was to be installed in fourteen months from the date of the contract, though the contract terms imply a building and installation period of twelve months: ‘from the Fest of Seynt Mighelle the Archaungelle next folowing [29 September 1519] to the Fest of Seynt Mighelle the day twelmonethe folowing [29 September 1520]’, these fourteen months being (roughly) the ‘v quarters of Respytt’ requested by its

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<sup>36</sup> The actual pitch of this and other organs is much less easy to determine; even if there was a generally-agreed basic pitch (in London?), it is unlikely that organs across the country could have been at the same pitch, even if this was then thought necessary.

<sup>37</sup> The oak pipework in this organ was used as the model for the pipework in the reconstruction of the ‘Wingfield’ organ. For further details of this and the ‘Wetheringsett’ reconstructions, see <http://www.goetzegwvnm.co.uk/tudor.shtml>.

<sup>38</sup> A low A Principal open pipe would fit into the original case without any trouble, as it does in a fourth copy of this organ, made by the author in the 1990s.



maker. He was paid what seems to have been a final part-payment of £30 on 22 March 1521 (new style), signing that he had received the agreed £50 for the organ then.

Modern commentators have been troubled by an additional clause in the All Hallows contract:

And also vnder nethe this condicione the foresaid Anthony shalle convey the belowes in the loft a Bowff in the seid Quere of Alhalows wythe a pipe to the song bourde ...

It is likely that the church had a rood-screen and platform running across its full width. The position of this can still be seen, set about twelve feet above the present floor level and marked by lower and upper northern stairway doorways, three bays along from the west end of the church. Here the arches of both north and south arcades were built wider than the others. They were presumably designed so that the rood-loft platform could run against their eastern edges while still leaving head-height to pass under them to get to maintain the votive lights. These were placed on the western parapet of the loft in the centre of the church; the crucifix and Mary and John were placed either on the eastern parapet or on a beam above it.

The contract does not concern this loft-platform however, but one ‘in the Quere’, as the contract puts it. The word ‘loft’ was then the normal word for an upper floor in a house. The word ‘convey’ meant to ‘move’, the same word being used for the transport of an organ to Canterbury, 1512-13 (see footnote 33). Thus a modernisation of this clause would be along these lines:

And there is an additional stipulation: that the aforesaid Anthony will move the bellows up into an upper floor in the said quire of All Hallows church and that there will be a wind-trunk from the bellows to the soundboard ...

Town-centre churches frequently had problems fitting in the bellows needed for a sizeable organ into a restricted space ; below we will see what seems to have been done in a country church (Stoke by Clare) with restricted space in its chancel. An engraving of the Tower Liberties made in 1597 by Haiward and Gascoyne shows All Hallows church with what looks like a short chancel at its east end. A later engraving shows two low buildings here (probably vestries). There is nothing there now.<sup>39</sup> It is therefore suggested that in 1519 there may have been a two-storey building either on the north side of this short chancel/quire or to the east of the present sanctuary, with a chapel on the ground floor (or perhaps a sacristy or vestry, as there is none now) whose upper room was a bellows room. The contract goes on to say that if the purchasers

be not content nor lyke the seid Instrument: that they shalle allowe hym for the convayng of the Belows xl s for his cost of them  
[if the organ does not please them and they do not accept it, they will pay 40 shillings for the cost of the bellows and moving them.]

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<sup>39</sup>The current church guide, *All Hallows by the Tower* (Delaney, P., based on Blewett, P. (Pitkin Pictorials, Andover, 1990), 1, 2.

This clause suggests that the bellows were to be mounted into a restricted space and that even if the organ itself was not satisfactory they were to be left there for use in another organ. The '40 shillings' cost implies up to sixty man-days' work plus materials, so these are not small bellows, but several large ones (consistent with the size of this very expensive organ) with a substantial frame to carry them and the levers to work them.

Nor is it likely that either these bellows or a large organ could have been sited on the rood platform, which was probably not more than five feet wide, for three reasons. First, an organ on the northern rood-loft platform (where the access staircase used to be) would impede access to the maintenance of the lights in the central area in front of the crucifix. Secondly, the south part of the screen, the only other possible place for an organ on the platform, does not appear to have been accessible from that end, and it would have been dangerous for a player dressed in clerk's robes to traverse the central part of the platform with all its candles and other lights. Thirdly, the lower access doorway is narrow (27") and very low (50", with three steps up to it from the original floor level) so it would have been very awkward for someone in clerks' cap and robes to pass through it. Thus, the rood loft idea seems unlikely if only on practical grounds. The most likely interpretation, then, which follows the contract's wording 'in the Quere', is therefore one that allows these bellows to be in an upper room or 'loft' adjacent to an organ placed somewhere in the quire, the area east of the rood-screen, which in this church is equivalent in size to the part west of it.

Holy Trinity, Coventry's contract may have induced workshops to collaborate, because their expensive organ was due for delivery 'this side the Feast of Pentecost nexte comyng after the date of thes presents'. This means, since the contract was drawn up 17 December 1526, that the organ was due for delivery – even completion – within around five months, because in 1527, Whit Sunday was in May. It can be estimated that the price represents at least a thousand man-days' work plus materials. Therefore it would seem that at least ten men and their associated apprentices were hard at work on this organ during that winter to create an instrument which had a substantial case with forty-six tin front pipes down to Double C. These forty-six pipes were the same number as the keys on the keyboard with its low CC sharp and top G sharp, which were the extreme two 'xix musicks' or sharps. There were also fourteen wooden front pipes in the case (presumably the sub-Principal 'Diapason' basses) and its design included 'Towers'. This arrangement suggests that the Coventry organ might have resembled the organ in St-Brieuc cathedral, Côtes d'Armor, whose case was made in London in 1540, and survives today. At St-Brieuc there are five towers of three different designs, and before the 1840s there were apparently the same number (46) of tin front pipes in the flats and the three inner towers. (Perhaps this 1540 case originally contained up to five wooden Diapason pipes in each of its tall half-hexagonal outer towers.) The St-Brieuc case is over twenty feet wide and around twenty-five feet tall: could the Coventry one have been of similar size – and the All Hallows one even larger? In the latter church,

less than half the size of Holy Trinity, Coventry, such a large instrument would have been very impressive indeed.<sup>40</sup>

*Brass, tin and lead (and gold)*

Bound with the CWA for Holy Trinity Coventry is an inventory made in 1558 which includes

It'm a greytt orggonll of braus in ye queyr ...  
4 children's surplices, 2 antiphoners, one manual and a grayle,  
3 processioners, 2 mass books ...  
It'm iiij woll webs of leyd & iiij peses  
[four whole sheets of lead and four weights]

'Brass' did not mean then what we now call that metal, an alloy of copper and zinc. In midlands dialect, the word meant iron pyrites, found with coal, which we know as 'fools' gold'. It is what Shakespeare, born not far away from Coventry, refers to when he writes 'all that glisters is not gold'. 'Brass' also had a less common technical meaning at the time, indicating an alloy of some kind, usually of copper with another metal. (Shakespeare mentions brass cannons in 'Henry V'.) More common was the term 'latten' which meant an alloy of copper, tin and lead used for the inlays in monuments, the presence of lead making engraving and polishing these somewhat less difficult. ('Bronze' comes from the Italian, and was the word used in English from the early eighteenth century onwards for the copper-tin alloy used in bell-founding.) But the word 'brass' was also used for candle-stands (presumably actually made of bronze like Shakespear's cannons) as well as for the organ, so in this instance, it is likely that the front pipes of the organ were gilded and looked (in modern and older parlance), 'brassy' or pretentious – and such gilding is found in some accounts; the practice seems to go back a long way.<sup>41</sup>

We know from the 'Wetheringsett' soundboard and from CWA that deal with 'regals' (the generic term for reed stops until the early part of the eighteenth century) that the later medieval organ included reed stops. Their presence in a small organ like Wetheringsett may imply that they were common by the second quarter of the

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<sup>40</sup> For illustrations of the case at St-Brieuc, see *JBIOS*, Vol. 33 (2009), 194, 196. The organ and case of 1540 have been at St-Brieuc cathedral since the later sixteenth century, first on a 'jubé' or pulpitum, where it was apparently in place by the 1630s. Following the destruction of the pulpitum in the early eighteenth century it was placed on a west gallery by 1735. This gallery was reconstructed when a new organ was built inside the restored 1540 case, with a new Positif case, by A. Cavallé-Coll, 1847-8.

<sup>41</sup> Cox (op. cit, 1913), 195: 'Aldhelm, *ob.* 709, states that native workmen ornamented the front pipes of their organs with gilding.' Aldhelm was abbot of Malmesbury abbey and subsequently bishop of Sherborne; Cox's idea that organs or organ pipes were gilded then, based on a line in Aldhelm's 'Carmen de virginitate' in which he refers to 'auratis...capsis' ('with golden chests'), has been challenged. It is not clear what 'capsis' means; 'capsa' (singular) can mean a box or reliquary, but Peter Williams (The King of Instruments, SPCK London, 1993), 28, 'wonders if the poem meant by *capsae* the gilt pipes themselves, sitting on the chest', so apparently concurring with Dr Cox's interpretation.

The organ at Cratfield was gilded, and the cost of boarding the man who did this for four or five days is to be found in their CWA: during 1499 the church appears to have spent a total of £9 8s 8d on 'mending' and gilding the organ.

sixteenth century. A modern organ builder might wonder what metal was used for tongues in reed stops if modern brass was not available, at least not until towards the end of the sixteenth century, when regular production of copper-zinc brass seems to have begun. Tongues made from phosphor-bronze were briefly fashionable in the 1960s; so it is possible that in earlier times bronze tongues were hammered to harden them, then scraped, curved and annealed. In 1557 at St Mary-at-Hill, London City, an organ builder (perhaps John Howe) was 'Paid for three springs for the regales 0 1 0 / For 10 springs and 4 songs [tongues ?] for the regalles and for his glew 0 2 0'. The shilling for making three springs for the regals and (presumably) installing them must include some further work; the price of two shillings (equivalent to at least three days' work) implies some lengthy preparation time, which would have included obtaining (perhaps) thin bronze (then called 'brass'), filing and scraping it to the right dimensions, installing it and voicing. We do not know if the springs were tuning springs, but common sense would indicate that they probably were, and not pallet springs, or not all of them. (The question of what the pallet springs were made of is also an open one, as is the question of which springs – pallet or reed-tuning – are being referred to when they appear in CWA.) In 1555 and 1556 Howe was definitely involved in similar but more expensive work at St Peter Cheap, London City, during Mary's reign:

[1555:] To Howe the organ maker for makynge sprynges to the doble regalls and for tonges of the ij regalls, which is called the pryncypalls in the base regalls ... iij s.

[1556:] To Howe for ij new pypes for the organs and brasse to the regalls ... ij s.

The sheets of lead or 'webs' mentioned in the 1558 inventory at Coventry above remind us that lead was omnipresent in England, and used especially for roofing as well as for leading stained-glass windows and for making water pipes, gulleys and gargoyles. Many churches kept their own stock of lead, perhaps in rolled-up webs, for repair work. CWA refer to lead on bellows being renewed from time to time, perhaps after the remaking or moving of an organ or after a theft. They also refer occasionally to tin, usually in the context of purchasing a small amount of metal and 'tyn glasse' (bismuth), perhaps for soldering large pipes on site, as at the large former collegiate church of St Edmund Salisbury, in 1567.

One might think that tin would be the normal metal for pipes, as it is light and therefore more easily carried about, and can be used in thinner sheets than tin-lead alloys for large pipes. However, what may be the oldest existing English pipes still inside an organ, at La Roche Derrien, Côtes d'Armor (having been taken there from St-Brieuc cathedral, see above, in the 1840s), are of a lead-rich alloy. Only the front pipes have a high tin content. Samples from these pipes, which include a Cornet, will shortly be analysed so as to check their provenance. If they prove to include English tin, this

will show that pipes from the mid-sixteenth century in England were alloyed with lead ; analysis will also indicate the proportions involved.<sup>42</sup>

## Two case studies, illustrating on-site research

### 1. Stoke by Clare College, Suffolk

Evidence of an organ gallery in the parish church of Stoke by Clare, Suffolk, helps to solve two separate mysteries. Two early sixteenth-century inventories of the *College* of Stoke by Clare include an organ described as ‘standing in the chancel’, another on the rood loft and up to two in the Lady Chapel.<sup>43</sup> The author of a recent book on Colleges was not sure if the parish church was the College chapel or if that had been incorporated in what are now scant and much-rebuilt remains of the College house across the fields away from the church. He wrote: ‘it seems better to believe that the collegiate church no longer exists’ ... ‘though it [the church] has some old fittings there are none that suggest a collegiate connection’.<sup>44</sup>

In the north wall of the chancel of what is now the parish church there are stubs of three joists which may have supported an organ gallery raised over the sacristy doorway. These are at the same height as a previously unexplained opening in the wall from the northern chancel aisle, which could have been linked by a raised passageway to a ‘standing’ organ on this gallery. (In the sixteenth century, ‘standing’ meant ‘raised high’.) An upper room behind these joists, over the sacristy, would appear to have been the bellows room because there is so little available space in the rather restricted quire and sanctuary.<sup>45</sup>

The rood loft stairs here carry on upwards to the aisle and nave roofs in a narrow spiral staircase, but the lower doorway and first flight of steps are wide enough to allow access by a player of another organ placed on the northern part of the rood loft platform. There is a chapel to the north of the chancel, and an organ on the rood platform west of this might have been connected with this. The Lady chapel, with its own organ(s), seems to have been to the south of the chancel. Many fixtures have disappeared, including the rood screen, though carved quire stalls and benches and a late-medieval pulpit have survived. These survivals and the relics of the standing organ’s gallery, if these have been correctly interpreted, appear to confirm the organ sites mentioned in the inventory and enable one to assert that what is now the parochial

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<sup>42</sup> Modern analyses have shown that Devon and Cornwall mines produced an ore that after smelting still contained about one per cent of copper (and traces of silver) which made it possible to turn a sheet of ‘pure’ tin round a mandrel without the risk of fissuring. For instance, see Barnes, A. and Renshaw, M., *The Life and Work of John Snetzler* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 236.

<sup>43</sup> Stoke College inventories: from Matthew Parker’s note-books (collected by M. R. James) in *Corpus Christi College Cambridge* (MSS 108), with grateful acknowledgements to Suzanne Paul. [see fn. 9]

<sup>44</sup> Paul Jeffreys, *The Collegiate Churches of England and Wales* (London: Robert Hale, 2004), 354.

<sup>45</sup> At Dennington, Suffolk, there is a rectangular hole about 5” by 6” which goes 21” through the chancel’s north wall from a similar upper room or ‘loft’ towards a blank wall-space, until 1613 hollowed out for an organ, in the chancel above the present vestry door. Here and at Stoke by Clare (and elsewhere), it is proposed to use hand-held radar to check for signs of anomalies which might allow one to establish the extent and design of the original arrangements.

chancel was formerly the College's chapel. This arrangement of a blank north chancel wall associated with a double-storey vestry has now been observed in many churches throughout the east and central parts of England.

 <p>Stoke by Clare: to the right (north), the window of the upper room, over the sacristy, perhaps used to house the organ bellows.</p>	 <p>Stoke by Clare: three joist stubs of a possible organ gallery in the north wall of the chancel over and to the right of the sacristy doorway. On the upper left, the access to a passage to this gallery.</p>	 <p>Cratfield: Half the original organ loft, adapted to contain a clock.</p>
<p>Photographed by: Vicki Harding</p>	<p>Martin Renshaw</p>	<p>Vicki Harding</p>

## 2. Cratfield, Suffolk

In the church of Cratfield (well known for its extensive CWA) there are the remains of what seems to have been an organ gallery, which since 1576 and until recently has served to house a clock. This loft, made of substantial peg-jointed oak, is supported on large curved braces set into the north wall of the tower. It would originally have been about eleven feet long – it has been cut at just over its half-way point to fit into the space available in the tower – and this length would have been perfectly suitable for a position over the ‘vestry’ door on the blank north wall of the chancel. The vestry, a former chantry chapel, is the lower floor of a two-storey building with a still-existing stone spiral staircase to the now-missing upper floor. The current church warden speculates that

... by 1500 there was a handsomely decorated organ in an appropriately fine loft, which was possibly in the chancel over the vestry door. By 1576 the organ had become redundant and was dismantled. It is not known where the mechanism for the 1546 clock was installed; perhaps it was in the silence chamber in the tower in order to provide a clear drop below for the weight. However, that would have involved a regular climb of 25 feet up a ladder to wind it – so it would have been a good idea, after 30 tiring years, to reuse part of the redundant organ gallery to house the clock mechanism in the bottom of the tower. This would save the climb and still provide the weight drop. No matter that it obstructed the west door because by 1576 there were no more processions.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Donald Peacock, Cratfield churchwarden, in a personal communication, 6 December 2012.

## Conclusion

Archival evidence has proved to be useful, enlightening and interesting, but it is limited in scope. If we ignore other evidence, we risk not investigating those elements which were more relevant to the daily lives of late-medieval people than the written word: the aural and visual impact of liturgy, decoration, singing, speech, bells and other incidental sounds. Documentation alone is not enough, especially since the survival of parochial documents is often the result of pure luck, particularly when political and religious changes are afoot.

Visits to churches and monastic ruins where there is documentary evidence for the existence of organs have found that physical evidence of music and organs was still there, despite alterations made over the course of five hundred years. Exploring this aspect of churches has now become a three-year research project with the working title 'Looking for the origins of English music', with expenses initially funded by a grant from the Society of Antiquaries<sup>47</sup>, from a benefaction of Marion Gilchrist Wilson, FSA. What has been found in the first hundred or so churches to have been surveyed has begun to cast further light on the archives and how they might be interpreted, as exemplified in the four churches cited above. When visits have been made to all the churches that seem for various reasons (acoustical, archival, historical, architectural) to have encouraged musical activities on more than a modest scale, it is hoped that a much broader understanding of the whole medieval musical culture, set within its physical context, will have been reached.<sup>48</sup>

*Thanks are due to the archivists and staff at the National Archives and the British Library, the staff at the Society of Antiquaries, and the many helpful people who have opened and allowed us to explore their churches. And above all to Vicki Harding, expert finder of the relics of organ galleries, without whom serious on-site research would not have begun.*

(c) Martin Renshaw, 2013

## ADDITIONAL NOTES, January 2014

The above article, published in the 37th Journal of the British Institute of Organ Studies in December 2013, was written in the early part of 2013. Further research into matters raised above suggests these comments :

- A. The early Temple church inventory of 1307 which includes two organs is not unique. An inventory of the goods of the Lady chapel of Westminster abbey made in 1304 included two organs (WAM 23180) : *unum par Organorum inferius super gradum aliud par maiorum Organorum superius in Muro cum ij*

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<sup>47</sup> [www.sal.org.uk](http://www.sal.org.uk)

<sup>48</sup> See [soundsmedieval.org](http://soundsmedieval.org) for further information, recent lectures, case studies, inventories and a preliminary master list of churches to be visited and surveyed.

*pannis depictis circa eadem [sic] extentis* [one pair of lower organs on the [choir] level/step and the other pair of great organs high up on the wall with two painted panels extending from them/it (that is, with shutters in the ‘usual’ triptych arrangement ?)]. See essays by Barbara Harvey and Roger Bowers in *Westminster Abbey/ The Lady Chapel of Henry VII* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2003).

- B. I am beginning to think that the change from a *blockwerk* organ with key-sliders to the organ with keyboard and stop-sliders may have taken place in two broad stages. First, the introduction of the finger-keyboard into such instruments as the shoulder-carried portable organs (which contained just one rank of pipes) and/ or into the larger ‘portatyffes’ which contained perhaps two or three ranks. (Or if there was more than one keyboard in a larger organ, a *blockwerk* played from one keyboard and some unison pipes from another.) Then came the use of the key-slider to stop off ranks ; this later stage perhaps co-inciding with the rise of the professional Lady chapel choirs in monastic cathedrals and the employment of head-hunted musicians to run these new establishments from around 1480 onwards (see Bowers in *Westminster ...* cited above). These choirs (which became the permanent choirs of these monastic cathedrals when they were secularised in the 1530s) were among the most skilled in singing complex polyphony, so it is not hard to imagine that such musician singer-players could have propelled organ-makers towards increasing musical sophistication as well as visual elaboration.
- C. The case of Fincham in Norfolk, where it seems that a local manorial family (the Finchams) not only supported the church but produced some of its priests as well – perhaps trained through the monastic or collegiate system – can perhaps be paralleled, though on a larger scale, with Etchingham in Sussex and Lingfield in Surrey. In both of these places local sub-aristocratic families built and endowed what were essentially private chantry colleges in churches which were only partially parochial as well. (I am indebted to Nigel Saul for pointing me towards Etchingham and for showing me forthcoming work on the buildings of Lingfield College.)
- D. To date, we have surveyed around 250 churches in 28 counties in England and Wales. This work has tended to reinforce our hypothesis that (in midlands and eastern counties) bellows were placed in upper storeys in a building NE of a now-blank wall in the chancel. In a few places we have seen more evidence of gallery supports and possible wind-trunk holes. We will be looking in more detail at the design of south-western churches and making our first visits to northern counties during the course of 2014.
- E. Analysis of the samples of pipework possibly dating to 1540 has not yet been carried out because the laboratory that used to do this work for me has apparently closed. It will be done as soon as we can find another.