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Organs in England at the start of the Reformation

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Peter Williams asked me a question three years ago here in Birmingham. How many organs were there in Britain at the Reformation? I couldn't answer Peter's question then, but it set me off on a trail I've been following for the last fifteen months.

Inevitably, though, I started my researches with some received ideas about organs in the British Isles in the early 16th century, based on what I had read.

Received ideas about pre-Reformation organs

- Historical records of late medieval organs are scanty.
- There weren't many organs anyway - and they were only in major churches, cathedrals and monasteries.
- They were usually placed on rood-screens.
- Organs all disappeared when Edward VI's ministers veered radically towards a stripped-down version of Catholicism.
- Organs were small and without reed stops.

I don't know if you share these preconceptions, but I can now tell you now that not one of these received ideas has turned out to be true. As a result I find that I need to see the historical perspective of the organ in these islands quite differently. And I'll now try to give you some idea why I say this in the next twenty minutes or so.

But I need to start with a bit of essential background, or none of what I have to say will make much sense to us, nearly 5 centuries and 20 generations later.

Valor Ecclesiasticus I

Where did the monasteries get their income from?

- Lands bequeathed to them.
- Payments for masses to be said or sung to ease souls through purgatory.
- Parish churches that depended on them.
- Fairs and other trading activities, including corn and fulling mills.
- Sheep farming and mining coal and minerals.

The north-western branch of the Catholic church ruled from Rome was a complex beast in its immediately-pre-Reformation form. The interdependence of its various

parts is most strikingly seen in the first major survey of it, carried out in the early years of the 1550s, by order of Henry VIII's ministers.

Henry wanted to know where the money sloshing around in the church was coming from and going to, for obvious reasons. A Domesday-like survey of the whole monastic structure called 'Valor Ecclesiasticus' was the result, and it was completed in 1535.

Valor Ecclesiasticus II

Where did monastic money go to?

- To 'brother' establishments
- A semi-tithe (about 5 per cent) of annual profits went to Rome

This money interested a government under Henry VIII that was

- Warlike
- Spendthrift
- Chronically short of ready cash

A few years before, the senior cardinal and pluralist bishop Thomas Wolsey, son of an Ipswich butcher, was trying to establish two colleges to perpetuate his name, at Ipswich and in Oxford. With the Pope's permission in 1527 he closed down 21 smallish monasteries and took over their revenues. His fall from grace and death at Leicester Abbey left his hopes of immortality unfulfilled, but his modus operandi did not go unremarked, especially by one of his protégés.

This was Thomas Cromwell, the son of a Putney innkeeper. Using the same methods, but now without the Pope's permission, the monastic structure was re-examined, this time by the King's commissioners in 1535, not by the church itself.

'Comperta' found (allegedly)

- Few monks or nuns
- Lazy and venal monks
- Corruption
- Maladministration and debts

Commissioners were sent to enquire into the moral standards of the monks and nuns. Not surprisingly they were not too bothered by the facts, so they reported that all was not well. This gave the excuse for action that was needed. The whole monastic structure was brutally dismantled, its buildings were emptied and dismantled and their goods, furniture and books, including music, sold.

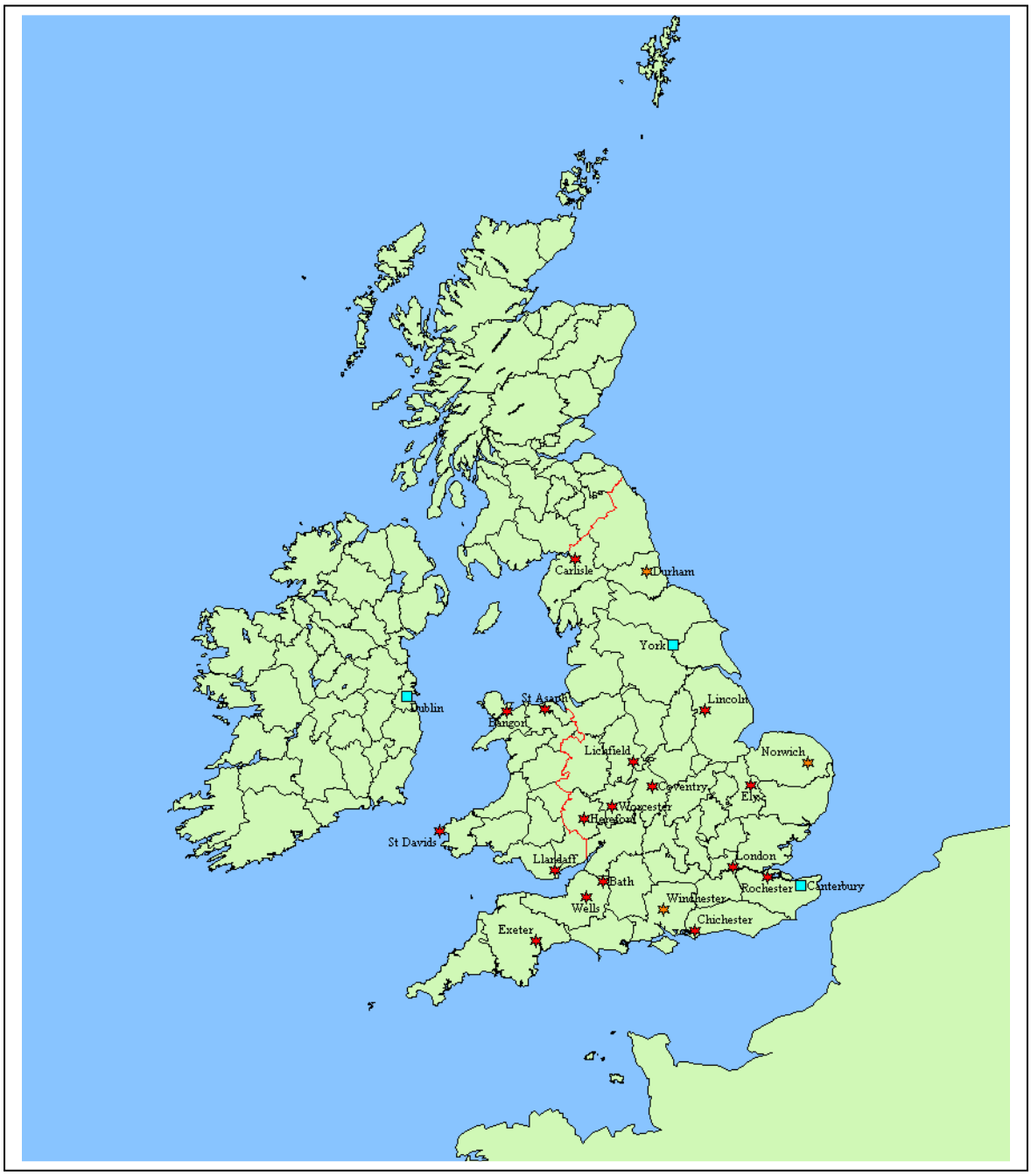
The destruction of monasteries

1536	**376** smaller monasteries emptied and sold
1539	**186** larger monasteries emptied and sold
1540	**110** hospitals of the order of St John of Jerusalem and their chapels abolished
1541	**90** colleges closed down

Later, under Edward

1547 **2374** chantries and free chapels
Cash result: about £141,000 in the money of the time, just for the monasteries
Cultural result: a whole social, artistic, literary, musical and architectural system literally and figuratively left in ruins

The *social* result of the destruction of the monasteries was to dog the country for another century. The *musical* result was the loss of most of the music that had made British composers and choirs famous throughout the Catholic world.



DIOCESES BEFORE 1530

What *was* the structure that was attacked so viciously?

The structure of the church

- Cathedrals, monastic and 'secular'
- Royal foundations (Westminster, Eton, Fotheringhay…)
- Major abbeys with mitred abbots
- Colleges (Oxford, Cambridge, Winchester…)
- Priories, male or female or mixed
- Dependent 'cells' and chantries
- Parish churches

At the top of the pyramid were the cathedrals. Uniquely in Europe, there were major cathedrals, like Christ Church Canterbury, that were monasteries as well, ruled by a prior nominally under the (arch) bishop, not an abbot. On the same level were the royal foundations – in and around London, as at Eton and Westminster – and the royal chapels and collegiate churches, run by canons, as at Fotheringhay, and King's, Cambridge.

Abbots of major establishments were themselves 'mitred' and more or less on a par with bishops. Like them they sat in parliaments whenever these were called. Under them were the priories and the houses dependent on them. Then there were also hospitals and colleges, as at Oxford and Cambridge, where many colleges were founded as places for monks to go to study, for instance Canterbury and Gloucester colleges at Oxford.

Monastic orders

- Majority were Benedictine, monks and nuns: Cistercian, Cluniac.
- Friars: grey (Franciscan), white (Carmelite), black (Dominican), 'sack' or brown
- Collegiate structures: 'secular' (i.e. not cloistered) canons

Monastic orders which followed the Benedictine rule in various ways were in the large majority. Some versions of the Benedictines were more strict than others and, like Cluniac and Cistercian orders, the results of internal reform.

These were all cloistered monasteries, theoretically having no contact with the outside world. But another set of monks was there to teach, preach, heal and generally shepherd the population at large. These were the friars who were usually known from the colour of their habits. Finally, there were many colleges of secular canons, who often ran parish churches, and sang all the daily offices. They lived in a separate building near the church, as at Tong in Shropshire and Wingham and Wye in Kent. These naturally had organs at their disposal, placed in the church's choir area.

Local churches

- Corporation churches (Launceston, Melton Mowbray, Faversham…)
- Town parish churches
- Rural parish churches
- Town and rural chapels

The top layers of the non-monastic church were the corporate churches. These were basically run by churchwardens who were major figures in their towns' lives, working in parallel with aldermen and mayors. To an extent they imitated the monastic system, controlling markets and fairs and taxing the local population. Their churches were staffed by paid priests or lay clerks. At the bottom of the heap were the nine thousand or so parish churches. These were usually served and taxed by local monasteries, and were subsidiary to them and dependent on them.

Sources

- Background … Valor Ecclesiasticus and Comperta
- Inventories of to-be-destroyed monasteries, colleges etc.
- Inventories of parish churches, 1549-1553 and under Philip & Mary and Elizabeth
- Churchwardens' accounts
- Letters and papers of Henry VIII

What are the sources for the study of this period?

They are not universal and complete individually, but because the church was a complex network each source can shed light on the others. A good general picture can emerge. Today is not the time to go into the sources in great detail, or even to answer Dr Williams' question yet, but I want now to show you briefly what they can tell us.

Monastic inventories
Wolsey (1527) & from 1536 onwards

Includes monastic cathedrals, noting:

- Size of buildings (for sale of materials)
- Extent of roofs (for sale of lead)
- Size and numbers of bells (for sale of bronze)
- Fixed church furnishings for sale, including organs
- Other saleable furniture in the conventual buildings

Detailed inventories of monasteries were made before they were closed down, their occupants ejected and (for the most part) their buildings destroyed for the basic

value of timber, stone and lead – and the bronze of their bells. Where the sale inventories survive, they show what one might expect – that the great and lesser abbeys and major priory churches contained organs, and very often more than one.

Since the other major technologies of the time – mills and clocks – were under monastic control, it is reasonable to expect that the third technology, organs, were to be found there too. In addition, there was a cheap but skilled labour force of monastic dependents. And monasteries not only had the purchasing power to acquire organs, but also had access to their own timber and minerals.

What happened to the proceeds?

The whole operation was financially overseen by the Augmentations Office at Westminster, who

- Paid pensions to monks and nuns (not lay brothers)
- Sometimes paid off musicians and canons
- Collected proceeds
- Sold off lands
- Organised the change of monastic cathedrals to purely 'secular' ones
- Paid for the founding of a few new cathedrals

1547

- Death of Henry VIII, January
- Accession of his only son, Edward, aged 12

At the start of my researches, the most obvious source seemed to be the parochial inventories made during the short but rather disastrous reign of Henry VIII's only surviving son, Edward VI, a boy of twelve when he became Head of the Church of England.

Parish church inventories I

- Of 'goods and ornaments'.
- Made under Edward VI, from 1547 onwards.
- Supposedly to prevent thefts.
- Made by county officials or 'commissioners' at local meetings.
- Churchwardens had to declare moveable goods held in churches.
- Written in English.
- Usually two copies on indentured paper, by local scribes.
- One copy kept at church, the other for the commissioners.
- Fair copies made at the Augmentations Office at Westminster.
- Gold and silver collected and sent to the Tower of London.

These parish church inventories were made under warrants issued to each county's administrative officials, usually sheriffs or local dukes. They commanded each parish's churchwardens to account for their churches' valuables. The given reason was to safeguard the church's treasures, but in some cases – not all – they became all too quickly a means of confiscating them for the crown 'at his majesty's pleasure'.

Most of the inventories were made in 1551 and 1552, but some were done earlier. In some recalcitrant or more remote places, a bit later. Edward died in the summer of 1553, putting an end to the process for the time being. The great majority of these parish inventories survive, and they are a substantial though not complete record. Unlike the Valor Ecclesiasticus, which is in Latin, the inventories are in English. This fact gives the game away: it shows that the impetus was purely secular.

Parish church inventories II

They list:

- Gold : chalices, crosses.
- Silver : thuribles, incense boats, ornaments on statues.
- Brass : large and small candlestands, lectern eagles.
- Bronze : bells in tower, sanctus and sacring and other small bells.
- Fabrics : vestments, altar and other cloths, veils, painted cloths, etc.
- Books : missels, breviaries etc. and music books, hand written and printed.
- - and sometimes organs.

The parish church inventories describe what seem to us to be the amazing riches of even the smallest churches: vestments, gold and silver vessels, books, large brass candlesticks, desks and lectern eagles, bells of all sizes – and sometimes organs. I say 'sometimes' because organs then - as later and even now - fall between the two stools of being ornaments and being large fixed parts of the church's architecture. The commissioners were not in fact charged with listing organs. It seems that they weren't interested in their intrinsic value of tin and lead either, so sometimes the inventories list them and sometimes they don't. I wonder if their wooden pipes may have masked metal ones…

Why weren't organs listed?

Because

- They were thought of as fixtures (that is, they were large…)
- Their intrinsic value (tin, lead) was not of interest (Why?)

I thought at first that organs were not listed because they were not there. Other people, like Nicholas Temperley, seem to have assumed this too. However, there are two major arguments against this assumption:

First, there are other sources which describe work on organs in churches whose inventories do not list them.

Second, that even when churches were being forced to sell or give up their precious ornaments, some of them went on buying or repairing organs, which were therefore obviously still very much in use. (There are two examples of this on your hand-out.)

In fact, I have come to the conclusion that organs were normally too large to be considered just as goods or ornaments. They really were sizeable *fixtures.*

Why organs occur in churchwardens' accounts

- Bellows' leather worn out by constant pumping had to be replaced.
- New ropes were bought to replace worn-out ropes connecting the bellows levers to the bellows.
- Glue for other small repairs and locks for keyboards or bellows was bought.
- Organs were tuned and sometimes overhauled.
- Players and blowers were paid.
- Music was bought, copied or borrowed.

Charles Cox published a book on his researches into churchwardens' accounts in 1913 which should be better known. He writes that in his experience virtually every church whose accounts he has examined possessed an organ. There are about two hundred accounts that survive from this period, and it is true that many of these do mention organs.

Other sources

- Inventories made
  - under Philip & Mary from 1553 onwards.
  - under Elizabeth from 1558 onwards.
- Diaries.
- Travel journals.
- Letters.
- Wills.
- Probate inventories.

Another source, but much less complete, are the returns made under Mary and Phillip whose own commissioners made efforts to recover what they could of the goods taken under Edward. At one church, for example, Houghton Conquest near Bedford, the organ seems to have been removed and perhaps sold by the local lord, Edmund Conquest. Mary's commissioners ordered his widow to replace it.

But again most records of this kind are rather quiet about organs, and one has to conclude – not that they were removed, but that they had remained and were in use in some way or other.

I say 'in some way or other' because one thing is dreadfully clear, and that is that the music that organs had been associated with was very severely, almost totally,

destroyed by Henry's and Edward's gangs. The antiphoners, graduals and polyphonic books (called 'pricksong') of the monasteries were nearly all ruthlessly destroyed. They were burnt along with choir stalls and carved wooden screens to help melt the lead from the roofs into ingots. Then the parish churches also were forced to give up their old books in favour of the newly-Englished Book of Common Prayer of 1549, edited and written by another Thomas, this time Cranmer. Another episode of book-destruction was the result.

What do the various sources tell us?

- How much organs cost.
- Where they were placed.
- Who made them.
- Who played and blew them.
- Who repaired and tuned them.
- Who sang with them.

What is perfectly clear from accounts and inventories written prior to the 1550s is that when a musical establishment had been set up or renewed, the necessary apparatus – books, desks and benches and organs – were bought and set up too. I think it is reasonable to say that if Edwardian inventories include these essential collateral items (books and reading desks) then there was an organ there as well. And the surviving churchwardens' accounts back up this theory time and again.

Taken altogether, the various sources from the first part of the 16th century tell us a lot about organs. They tell us how much they cost, and sometimes who made them and where they were placed. A statistical analysis of the sources will tell us fairly accurately how large an organ culture there was – but it is already certain that it was a large one. Did not Erasmus say that the English, even reformed, were not to be easily detached from their music?

The late 1400s onwards

Organs were part of the rich ornamentation of the church, which included

- Rood screens and their lofts.
- The rood (crucifix, Mary and John) fixed to the parapet of the rood screen loft.
- Doom painting above the rood loft, and other frescoes.
- Chantry chapels and chantry enclosures.
- Statues.
- Rich and varied vestments, cloths and veils.
- Easter sepulchres, carved fonts and their covers.
- Bells of all sizes.

The rôle of the organ in the late medieval church

Most parochial sources do not go back much beyond the 1480s, but those surviving from this time show that organs were already in place. It seems to me that the process started in the mid-15th century, when organs had acquired keyboards and

stops. An early representation of a moveable choir organ is carved under a 14th-century misericord at Boston church.

The latter part of the 15th century seems to have been the glory time for the church and its furnishings. Churches cashed in on a general rise in affluence by suggesting that peoples' souls might be well looked after in the hereafter – on condition that the churches were well looked after in the here-and-now, of course !

Churches were equipped with new altars and statues sponsored by guilds and fraternities. Rood screens and the roods above them, and doom paintings above the chancel arch, became fashionable about the same time as organs were supplied. Bells were placed in towers and in small bell-cotes over the sanctuary. Small bells were rung by hand at important points in the services - even banners used in processions were equipped with tinkling chimes. Desks and music were bought, singing and playing clerks were hired, and organs were placed near them in the choir-chancels. The church became a feast for the ears just as much as for the eyes.

I might say here that Eamon Duffy's otherwise wonderful book 'The Stripping of the Altars' mentions organs just four times, in passing. He leaves out the whole musical side of the church's liturgy and customs. It's time to rectify this omission and give music the pre-eminence it deserves…

IN THE QUERE 19 May, 37th year of Henry VIII

- uppon high altar a here clothe …
- 2 alter cloths one of olde diaper, and thother of fine lining clowth …
- a mesboke, and a deske …
- a great sacring bell …
- 4 high latten candelstickes …
- a conoby with a pixe of coper …
- 4 deskes, wth two cloths of old sylke …
- a paire of organce, with a torned chane to the same …
- 2 formes …
- a canoby over the beams head of old sylke …
- 15 antiphoners and 9 grayells …
- 2 grayells for the choristers …
- 13 processioners and a colett bok with bosses.
- prickeson bokes for men and children…

Here is a description of a typical chancel in a town-centre monastic church. This layout was imitated by parochial churches as far as their resources allowed.

In modern English, this means:
…a hair cloth on the high altar … an old stripy altar cloth, and another of good linen … a missel and its stand … a large bell to ring at the consecration … four tall brass candleholders … a copper pix with its cloth canopy…four desks, two covered with old silk cloths …an organ with a twisted forged chain…two benches…an old silk cloth slung over the rood beam…fifteen anthem books and nine gradual music books…two gradual music books for the boy singers…thirteen books of processional music and a

book of collects whose binding is studded with semi-precious stones…books of polyphony for men and boys to sing…

(And ten surplices for the singers were kept in a cupboard in a nearby aisle.)

IN THE QUERE 19 May, 37th year of Henry VIII

The late colege of saincte Ffrideswyde in Oxforthe called King Henry the Eightes college

- intended by Wolsey to become Cardinal College
- it was previously a town-centre priory.
- now better-known as the chapel (and cathedral) of Christ Church, Oxford.

You will have noted that the organ is part of the chancel furniture here – it is not on the rood screen, where access would have been, to say the least, complicated. If an organ is on a rood screen, or temporarily moved to it for the Holy Week ceremonies, the sources often say so specifically. Otherwise it was in the choir-chancel, at floor level or on its own loft.

In other places too, the organ was also clearly associated with the chancel:

City churches in London

Cushions of green cloth; an offertory plate of pewter; two communion books and six psalters; red mass vestments; blue, velvet and blue bawdekin vestments… an altar cloth of arras and another old dornyx, three surplices …three borders for the sepulchre, one payre of grete organs and one payre of small olde organs …

St Andrew Undershaft, 1552

Three stools, a long chest, two desks, a chest covered with leather, two pairs of organs, a large cupboard, a large iron chest, nine banner poles, three hangings for the sepulchre and a sacrament cloth…

St Alban, Wood Street, 16 July 1552

Grey Friars' church, Worcester c1537

[In] *The Quere* a payre off organs a frame for ye sepulchre a crose with a staffe a lamp hanging…

In modern English, this means:
In the chancel/quire, an organ, a supporting framework for the Easter Sepulchre, a processional crucifix, a hanging light…

Fixed architectural objects like the rood screen and its figures (including the rood itself) are never mentioned in inventories unless, as happened rarely, they were sold by permission of Edward's commissioners.

Price list for a new organ c1530

- A large organ £26
- A medium-sized organ £13
- Smaller ones down to around £6
- Second-hand small organs from around £2

These organs were not small – any such idea must have come from a lack of realising what monetary values we are dealing with in the early 16th century, when large organs cost about £26, medium-sized ones about half this, and small ones a few pounds sterling.

What do these prices really represent?

£13 organ

- £3 for materials: tin, lead, timber, colours, gold leaf, etc.
- £10 for labour.

£10 or 2400 pennies represents 600 days' or a full 2 years' work at 4d a day - or (more likely) a whole year's work by three persons:

- The master at 4d a day, the wage of a free mason.
- His assistant at 3d a day.
- Their apprentice at 1d a day.

Three people working on an organ for a whole year (600 days, or 4800 hours) in modern terms would now cost about £152,000 - on the basis of £40 per hour …

… so

- a large £26 organ = 25 stops ?
- a medium £13 organ = 12 stops ?
- a small £ 6 organ = 5 stops ?

So, even the £13 organ was by no means a small one, and there is potential for it to have been highly decorated. Some churchwardens' accounts mention 'braces' for the organ, which seem to imply that it was fixed to the walls in some way. Others mention building work like blocking a window or making an alcove, and this too suggests that organs were quite sizeable and tall.

The large size of organs

St Laurence, Reading

- So large that its bellows were placed in a vault under the organ
- Lead bought just for its bellows cost 6s 8d or 80 pence
- At around 1½ pence a pound meant that each of its presumably 2 bellows was weighted with about 26 pounds (about 11 kilos) weight of metal

St Saviour, Southwark

- 'two pair of good organes furnysshed…' (*two sizeable and highly-ornamented organs…*')
- 'v great peaces of lead squayr lyeinge upon the bellowes…' (*'five large square weights of lead lying on the bellows…*')

Were these two organs (great and small) winded by the same bellows?

From a contract for an organ, 1512

- payd for a payre of organs to the seide chirche xiii li
- for the carriage and conveyeng of the seide organs by water and by lande vi s
- for makyng of a peyr of indenturs of covenants for makyng and delyveryng of the seid organs viii d
- paied to the maker of the seid organs in yernest iiij d
- *paid for an organ for the said church £13*
- *delivery of the organ by sea and over land 6 shillings*
- *cost of drawing up and writing two copies of the contract for the building and carriage of the said organ 8d*
- *a gratuity paid to the organ maker on the day of signing the contract 4d*

The organ at St Andrew, Canterbury, like the one at All Hallows Barking by the Tower, was built following an indentured agreement with the organ maker, who may even have been the same Antony Duddyngton. (From Doddington near Faversham in Kent?) At any rate it was he who overhauled probably this organ following building work in the church 8 years later.

The last payment was a gratuity paid to the organ maker at the time of signing the indentured copies of the contract. These copies were cut apart in random wavy lines so that they could not be reworded or forged.

Reed stops I

St Peter Parmentergate, Norwich: Churchwardens' accounts

- a peir of organs x li
- paid to the Organ maker in ptie of payment for making a peir of Orgons xxvis. viijd
- paied to a Carpenter for making of a Plancher in the qwere to settle on the organs viijd
- for making of the regalls of the Organs pfite iiijd
- further for the organs v li

- *[for] an organ £10*
- *part-payment for an organ to the organ maker 16s 8d*
- *paid to the carpenter for making a platform to put the organ on, in the chancel/quire 8d*
- *paid for the final regulation of the reed stop(s) on the organ 4d (about a day's pay)*
- *further payment for the organ £5*

Total cost of organ: £15 17s, including work on its reed stop(s)

References to reed stops do occur in the sources, though references to them, or any stops in detail, are quite uncommon and usually imprecise. After all, the sources are all written by or for people without any special interest in the workings of the organs they dealt with. Reed stops were collectively called 'regals' until the early 18th century, and unequivocal references to work on them can be found.

Reed stops II

St Peter, East Cheap, London

1555 …to Howe organ maker for making sprynge to the doble regalls and for the tonges of the ij regalls which is called the pryncypalls in the base regall, iij s

1556 …pay'd to Howe for ij new pypes for the organs and brasse to the regalls, ij s
…for cordes for the bellowes of the organs, j d

1555 *…paid to Howe the organ maker for making springs for the 2 reed stops [?] and for tongues for the [basses of the?] two unison reed stops, 3 shillings*
[about 9 days' work and materials]

1556 *…paid to Howe for two new organ pipes and brass for the [tongues of] the reed stops, 2 shillings*
[about a week's work and materials]
…for rope for the bellows, 1d

Organ transplants

- 'John Sacntclere' supplied an organ to Ashburton, Devon, 1540-1, for £15. It may have come from Essex, where at the dissolution of the priory of Castle Hedingham, the 'contents [were] sold 12 June 1536 to Sir John Seyntcler'
- Halesowen, 1539: the churchwardens replaced an organ with one from the nearby abbey on its dissolution in 1539 ; it was set up by an organ maker from Worcester
- Wing, 1539: 'payd for the organs and the ornamentes that cayme from Woburne ix li [£9]'

At Louth, their new organ – to go with the other three already there - came from an unusual source. In 1501, George Smith, a merchant, brought an organ along and sold it to the church corporation for £13 6s 8d. This sounds like a standard fee sum, not the actual cost of the organ as newly made, because this organ was bought by Smith 'beyond the sea'. This turns out to be Flanders, as the accounts describe it as being 'flemych' when it was 'mended' (meaning, maintained) in 1520.

Organ makers I

- **Michael Gloucester** (St Mary at Hill, 1496)
- **Raff and John Orgyny** (Walberswick, 1470s ; and Robert Bortyn c1496)
- **Arnold of Norwich** (at Foulsham / 'Follsham', where a certificate of 1547 states:

'…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'

('*the parishioners have paid and will need to pay Arnold of Norwich for an organ which we bought from him around Christmas last year, £12*')

We don't know who made the organ in Flanders, but here are just a few of the named makers of organs, not just local people who mended their bellows when they were worn out by use. There were organ makers in major monasteries, in cathedral towns and even in what were then much smaller towns.

Organ makers II

Sir William Corvehill, sub-prior of Wenlock Abbey, made organs for

- **Halesowen** (1529)
- **Worfield** (1532)

The accounts for 'fatchyng' them from Wenlock survive in both places.

('Sir' is the courtesy title for a priest, translating 'Dominum' as 'master')

And acknowledging where we are today, you will be pleased to know that the parish of Halesowen brought their organ to 'ye organmaker of Bremychem' to be repaired around 1503, and fetched it back again.

Tuning fees

Lambeth and Wandsworth churches:
12d a year [3 days' work by John Howe].
Other places at comparable rates.

In London and around, and elsewhere near larger towns, organs were maintained on a fee basis of generally about 12 d per year ; any repairs were paid for in addition. John Howe the elder did this work at Lambeth and Wandsworth churches, for example. Other places where annual fees are noted, paid similar amounts.

When were organs used and who played and blew the organs?

Who played the organ and how much was he paid?

St Margaret, Westminster, 1480s
to Mathew Motynygham for playing at the orgons when we had butt one clerk 8d

St Alphage, London Wall, 1530
to an organ pleyar for Wytsonday & Corps christi day viij d

Boston Parish Church, Lady Chapel, c1530
William Warde, chaplain, for playing the organ… 43s 4d [per annum]

Barnstaple, Devon, 1560s
paid to Mr William Dawkins for his stipend in kepinge of the organs their this yere, £3 6s 8d

Organ blower

Louth: salary 3s 4d a year

Churchwardens' accounts show that in major churches there was either a salaried organist on the staff, or that by about the start of the reformation process in the 1530s the parish clerk performed this duty when not otherwise engaged.

In other places, organists were brought in especially for local or major feast days, and this makes sense when you remember that the organs were not used in Advent or Lent or on fast or ember days. Solo singers were better paid therefore, as they sang every day. We occasionally know their names and even something about their music. Choral singers were paid relatively little but were rewarded with plenty of wine - often malmsey…

New organ fund

St Andrew, Canterbury 1512-13
A list of more than thirty names, including
- 'hym that made the seid organs ij s'
- 'Thomas Talas xiii d'

The subscribers gave the neat total of £9 9s 9d

Music

The list of books inventoried at St Andrew, Canterbury, in 1485 is very long. Out of some 44 books, no fewer than half are of music, including polyphonic 'pricked song'. Interestingly, someone called Thomas Talas was one of the collectors of money for a new organ for this church in 1512-13. Did he have a son of the same name, then aged about six, who saw the organ being installed?

English case (Great organ) 1540
Line drawing by Hill, after architect's proposal of 1847