



THE
EXPERIENCE
OF WORSHIP
IN LATE MEDIEVAL
CATHEDRAL AND
PARISH CHURCH

THE ST TEILO ORGAN



Photo :Adrian Holgeth

The St Teilo organ, St Teilo's church

Description

The St Teilo organ draws on cutting-edge research in attempting to recreate the type of instrument known to have been used around 1520. It was designed and constructed by the Worksop firm of Goetze and Gwynn in collaboration with John Harper, the team that had already researched and constructed two English organs based on early sixteenth-century archaeological remains of organs found in Wetheringsett and Wingfield, Suffolk, in 2001 and 2002 for the Early English Organ Project. The third organ is a piece of creative archaeology proceeding from earlier findings, and has been specifically designed to accommodate changes in performance practice (e.g. music sounding 'in C' rather than 'in F'), allowing research into sixteenth- and seventeenth-century repertoire for organ, and organ with voices.

Traditional materials and manufacturing techniques are used throughout. The oak case is a much-reduced version of the only surviving pre-Reformation organ case in the British Isles, which still stands in St Stephen's parish church, Old Radnor, Powys (c.1520); its carved wooden frieze and pipe shades are based on late medieval Welsh idioms. The doors of the organ are painted with scenes of the Annunciation and Nativity, again using materials authentic to the early sixteenth century. Painting and gilding were undertaken by Fleur Kelly, an Italian-trained specialist in medieval and Renaissance painting techniques, who had worked on both the rood screen figures and the panels at St Teilo's. She was assisted by Lois Raine, who also painted the St Teilo reredos of the five wounds, and the pyxes.

Measurements and Specification

Height total 340cm (134ins); 375cm (148ins) with pinnacles)

Height to impost 122cm (48ins)

Plan at pipe level 170cm wide x 78.5cm (67ins x 31ins)

Plan at ground level 98cm wide x 78.5cm (39ins x 31ins)

Ground plan of the wind system 134cm x 134cm (53ins x 53ins)

Staging (= total floor space required) 300cm x 150cm (120ins x 60ins)

- I Open metal principal 5ft (C – g^{#1} in front)
- II Open metal principal 5ft (c^o - a²)
- III Open metal octave
- IV Open metal octave
- V Open metal fifteenth
- VI Stopped wood diapason 10ft (full compass)

Key compass: The key compass is C to a², 46 notes, which is the number of grooves in the Wetheringsett soundboard and the compass specified in the contract for Holy Trinity Coventry (1526). It matches the ranges needed for the surviving repertory. This key compass allows for transposition by the player, extended by the sub-octave diapason for choral and vocal accompaniment in the early seventeenth-century verse style. There is a second keyboard which can be folded down to give 'singing pitch' at F to d³, for demonstration purposes.

Pitch: The nominal pitch is 5ft, i.e. a plainsong pitch a fourth above singing pitch, the basis for all the Tudor organs of which we know. The actual pitch is a semitone above A440 at singing pitch.

Tuning: The tuning system was recommended by Arnolt Schlick in his *Spiegel der Orgelmacher* published in Heidelberg in 1511, and intended as a guide for good practice throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Schlick was the first writer to give a recipe which mentions every note of the scale. It is a modified form of mean tone tuning, with good (not pure) major thirds and the wolf spread to some extent over neighbouring fifths to allow some modulation (though a flat is still much closer to being g sharp).

Model

Based on various connected pieces of evidence, including the two early sixteenth-century soundboards found at Wetheringsett and Wingfield, Suffolk, that probably date from the 1530s, although the St Teilo organ is physically smaller than the two earlier organs. Voicing style is familiar not only from seventeenth-century English organs, but also Italian and Spanish organs. Pipes are based on the only survivals from the medieval West Country tradition, from John Loosemore's 1665 organ for Nettlecombe Court – chosen because of the medieval trade links with Wales across the Bristol Channel. They are very narrow-scaled and without nicking, so the speech is sibilant and the tone rich. The hand-operated bellows, which provide wind for the organ, are based on medieval illustrations.

Craftspeople

Martin Goetze and Dominic Gwynn, Welbeck Estate, Worksop, Nottinghamshire
(<http://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/>)

Fleur Kelly, specialist artist, Mellis, Frome, Somerset (<http://www.fleurkelly.com/>)

Lois Raine, specialist painter, Exeter, Devon (<http://www.loisraine.co.uk/>)

Bibliography

John Harper, 'An organ for St Teilo: a Welsh instrument in the pre-Reformation tradition', *Journal of the British Institute of Organ Studies*, 35 (2011), 134–153.

Dominic Gwynn, 'A New pre-Reformation Organ for the church of St Teilo', *Late Medieval Liturgies Enacted: The Experience of Worship in Cathedral and Parish Church*, ed. Sally Harper, Paul Barnwell and Magnus Williamson (forthcoming, 2014).

Note compiled by Sally Harper

