Case study

The restoration

of the

1755 John Snetzler Organ

at

Clare College Cambridge

Introduction

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History of the 1755 Snetzler organ

The early history of this organ is unknown; it may be the Snetzler organ, 1756[sic?] that Andrew Freeman reported as having once been in Shaw House, Newbury. We are however able to follow its history with an increased degree of certainty from the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1906 it was sold to J.A. Fuller Maitland, the musicologist, and moved by Frederic Rothwell to his house in Kensington, London.

On c'' of the Principal, one can find the inscription:
'Pitch M^{r} Fuller Maitland 2'' wind'.

In 1920 Fuller Maitland had it moved to Borwick Hall, Carnforth, Lancashire.

It was acquired by Margaret Royds of Heysham, Lancashire in 1939, and she presented it to St James, Heysham.

The move of the organ and minor restoration work, were undertaken by Ainscough of Preston in 1939.

Information on the N.P.O.R about the organ as having been installed in Heysham by Ainscough, gives a wind pressure of $2^{1}/_{4}$". The organ has now been restored to the pressure as indicated on the pitch pipe, which pre-dates Ainscough, 1939 and which, we believe, is more likely to be the original pressure.

The reservoir was repaired and an electric blower fitted in 1955.

In 1970, the organ was purchased by Mr Bernard Bibby of Winchester.

In the mid- 1980s, the organ was again available for sale.

Clare College purchased the instrument in 1985 with the intention of having it erected in the Chapel.

The move was undertaken by John Budgen and Simon M. Pulham of Bishop & Son, Ipswich.

Minor repairs were necessary to optimise its condition after the dismantling and move to the Ipswich workshop. The conveyances to the Hautbois required many ends to be replaced or re-soldered.

The renovated organ arrived in its present home in 1986, during which time an organ humidifier was installed.

The organ was restored by William Drake Limited in 2015-2016.

It is commendable that the organ did not suffer significant alterations during the 20th century. One can only assume that the quality and the reputation of the original builder, the responsible attitude of its custodians through the ages, and the intrinsic musical qualities of the instrument contributed to the factors helping it to survive without any really significant alterations.

This history is a culmination of information from 'The Organs of Cambridge' by Nicholas Thistlethwaite, and of information gathered from the N.P.O.R. (National Pipe Organ Register).

General Description of the Organ

Restoring an instrument as this has revealed some interesting details, as well as posing some questions. This is for a chamber organ a relatively large specimen with a very complete specification.

Specification

Compass GG,AA – f’’’
Stops divided between h^o and c’
Pitch a 422.5Hz @ 17.5^{o}Celsius

(Bass GG - h^o)		(Treble c’- f’’’)	
Sesquialtra	(17-19-22)	Hautbois	(8’, swelling)
Principal	(4’)	Cornett	(8-12-17)
Flute	(4’)	Fifteenth	(2’)
Dulciana	(8’, GG-$FF^{\#}$grooved)	Flute	(4’)
Diapason	(8’)	Dulciana	(8’)
		Diapason	(8’)

All front pipes are speaking and are CC – e’ of the Principal stop.
A shifting movement acts on the Principal, the Fifteenth and the Sesquialtra – Cornett.

Bass jamb

Treble jamb

The stop names are engraved into a precious metal and let in to the stop jambs.

The case is made of sumptuous mahogany with a broken-pediment cornice. The individual case components are interconnected by means of forged hooks and eyes.

Solid double hinged panelled doors are closing off the front of the organ. Some other Snetzler organs are known to have glazed doors instead. The keyboard is not retractable but has a removable cover which used to have a lock. The swell pedal moves a sash frame, opening two slots in the front of the swell box.

Swell box closed and swell box opened. (photo taken before dismantling)

The bottom of each slot has a V-shape ensuring a gradual crescendo and decrescendo. On the swell sash front also survives one of the two brackets, which would have also opened two hinged roof panels by means of rods connected to the still present lugs fixed to the underneath of those panels. These push rods have not survived. At a guess this arrangement might not have lasted very long, due to the enormous strain put onto the fragile (and through torsion severely damaged) mechanism. The largest pipes of the Principal were originally mitred to fit under the swelling roof. This must have posed problems with the stability of those pipes because at some stage these mitres have been reversed and holes have been cut into the roof to allow them to stand up straight. The Dulciana pipes were always projecting above the roof. Due to the holes cut into the roof, the swelling effect had become negligible, also do the pipes obstruct the smooth working of the hinged panels. We have therefore decided not to try and reconstruct this feature.

One of the two large hinged panels in the roof of the organ.

The instrument has survived remarkably well, perhaps due to the respect to the quality an object such as this imposes.
There is no internal building frame. The case itself supports the different internal parts of the organ without much strengthening. Some distortion has occurred to the middle frame outer mitres, as a result of the front rail having been twisted through the weight of the soundboard.
Apart from the two access doors to the bellows under the keyboard, the box structure with the music desk above the keyboard and the two doors closing off the front, there are no other ways of access into the organ. Access to the pipework requires front pipes to be removed.
The image on the next page shows the instrument close to being finished in the workshop in Buckfastleigh.