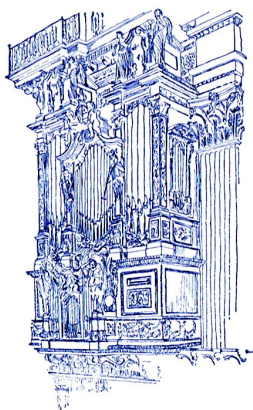


THE



ORGAN

CLUB



JOURNAL

October 2005

A Spanish Restoration

Restoration of the organ at the Convent of Santa Clara in Santiago de Compostela

On April 1st 2005, the firm of Goetze and Gwynn celebrated its 25th birthday in Santiago de Compostela, with the inauguration of the organ which we had restored for the convent of Santa Clara. The celebrations consisted of three concerts, Sunday mass on Galician television, and a dinner, attended by presidents, archbishops, mayors and other dignitaries, and, in a slightly bemused way, the organ builders, and their wives and partners. It was the culmination of an unusual sequence of events, providing us with one of the most challenging restoration projects of our careers, and a steep learning-curve about Spanish organs, Spanish culture and Spanish business methods.



The story started two and a half years before, when I was asked to go and look at the organ, with a view to restoration—not, as I discovered, that I had much choice in the matter, though I had reservations about ability to do the work. The convent of Santa Clara is a closed order, which makes dealings with the outside world more problematic than it might be. Mother Superior, Sor Maria de los Angeles Couto Amido, was eager to restore the organ in their church to playing order, and to restore it to its original condition, since the keys and stops of the original

organ were so evidently missing. Her efforts to interest national and local government advisers were less than satisfactory, partly because the Church, with its association with the Franco regime, has been less than popular among officials of the government in recent years. She did not have much more luck with organ builders and advisers, most of whom condemned the organ, and also condemned every previous visitor, so that she ended up distrusting the organ world as well as government advisers. But she did not lose sight of the value of the organ to the convent, for whom it was built, and for whom it was a precious part of their inheritance.



The convent church, looking east (above) and west, showing the open mesh grille communicating with the nuns' choir, where the organ stands against the left (i.e., south) wall



Fortunately, although the nuns themselves live a frugal and self-sufficient life, the convent itself is quite wealthy, and was able to act independently. Mother Superior enlisted the help of a friend of the convent, Maria Iglesias, who works in London, with the object of finding a nice English gentleman. Her visit to the gentlemen at the Royal College of Organists landed her on our doorstep.

My visit in September 2002 could well have been my last, though the pressure to accept the commission was subtle but firm. It was evidently a very interesting and exciting organ, but it had suffered terribly from masters in the arts of coarse organ-building—both, as it happened, Franciscan friars. Now, if an organ is to be restored as found, a restorer can use his experience and ordinary craft skills to restore it to working condition. But if there are parts missing or altered, and elements require reconstruction, then a detailed knowledge of the organ-building style is required. Our knowledge of the Iberian organ is not great, and especially not of the local style in Santiago. However, at the end of my week, examining the organ, seeing other organs in the same style, and other restorations of local historic organs, I thought we would be able to do it, if not in the style of the original builder, then close enough to the style of the period. Just as important, I passed muster as an English gentleman, and won the confidence of Mother Superior. And Santiago himself seemed to be encouraging.

So, the following year, Martin and I paid another visit, and took detailed measurements and photos of the organ and of the organs we would use as models for the missing parts. We had the great good fortune to be joined by Sergio del Campo Olosa, a Basque organ-builder from the village

of Ochandio in the mountains above Bilbao, who has come to work with us for a couple of years. He not only provided us with much-appreciated local knowledge and expertise but carried out research in the course of which he discovered the organ's original builder, and its date. To my chagrin, I took very little part in the project, as it has taken place during the year I have taken out from organ-building, as a Leverhulme Fellow, researching and writing a book on early British organ-building (which I hope will see the light of day in about two years' time).

Sergio has discovered that the organ was built in 1709 by Manuel de la Viña, an important builder from the mainstream of Spanish organ-building. He also made the organs in the Cathedral, of which only the cases survive. Of his organ in the Convent, the case and much of the pipework survive. The horizontal reeds were probably supplied in the years 1750-52. The whole organ was rebuilt by a local builder, Ramon Cardama, in 1865, with a new chest, wind-system and key- and stop-mechanisms, increasing the compass from 45 notes (C, short octave, to c³) to 56 notes (C to g³), but using the existing pipework and inserting new pipes for the extra notes.

Some twenty years later, his daughter, Sor M^a de la Asunción de Jesús, was the organist in the convent. In 1932, the first Franciscan friar rebuilt the organ, with new pneumatic key- and stop-actions, with new detached console, and adding to, altering and re-arranging the pipework, including the extension of some stops with zinc, and the provision of zinc beards to turn them into strings, and a second manual with rudimentary swell-box. In about 1970, the organ was rebuilt by the second Franciscan friar, who replaced the lead tubing with plastic, and painted almost every metal pipe with aluminium paint, filling the flues as he went. If the organ worked at



all before his restoration, it certainly cannot have worked afterwards, and hasn't done in the memory of any of the nuns. The work was even worse than the rebuilds perpetrated by Koenig on the Dallam organs in Brittany in the late 1930s, which is saying something.

Under the aluminium paint it was difficult to authenticate the pipes, but it was obvious that many of the flue pipes dated from 1709. Many had been extended or given ears, though almost none had been nicked. I was familiar enough with classical Spanish organs to know that for much of the 18th century, the compass had been C to c 49 notes, stretching to d towards the end of the century (with one or two notable exceptions). But this wind-chest was for a 54-note organ. Once Martin, with superb confidence, had removed the amazingly heavy angel bracket under the middle tower, we were able to look inside the wind-chest, and it became obvious that this had been made by Ramon Cardama as part of his alterations in 1865; so we decided that this was the date the restoration should aim for.

It is usually sound policy to restore a historic organ to the date of the main wind-chest, since that establishes the specification of the organ. In this case, although a remarkable proportion of the pipes survived from before Cardama's work, the 1709 stop-list could not be established with certainty, and most of the horizontal reeds seemed to date from the later 18th century, a process which may have strained the efficiency of the 1709 wind-chest. The 1865 stop-names, however, were pencilled on the ends of the wind-chest, and where evidence of Cardama's organ had been removed by the Franciscan friars we were able to copy details from a surviving organ of his at the Convento de Belvis (Dominican nuns), whose second chapel had an untouched organ built in 1868 by Cardama. It provided information about the keyboard, key- and stop-action, and a nice example of contemporary decoration similar to the area around the Santa Clara keyboard, and probably carried out by the same person.

Left hand stops C – c'

Flautado (8')
 Violón (8')
 Octava (4')

 Docena (2²/₃)
 Quincena (2¹/₃)
 Decinovenas (1¹/₃)
 Llano (III)

 Trompeta Real (8')
 Dulzaina (8')
 Bajoncillo (4')

Right hand stops c#¹ – g³

Flautado (8')
 Violón (8')
 Octava (4')
 Flauta (4')
 Docena (2²/₃)
 Quincena (2¹/₃)
 Decinovenas (1¹/₃)
 Llano (III)
 Corneta (VI)
 Trompeta Magna (16')
 Trompeta Real (8')
 Dulzaina (8')
 Oboe (8')
 Clarín (8')

Pull-down pedals for bottom 12 notes C–B

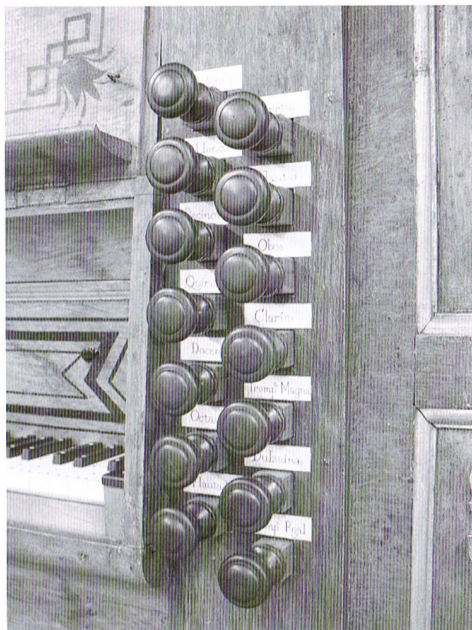
Knee operation of Corneta box lid

Pitch: 440Hz; Barnes 'Bach' temperament. Wind-pressure: 64mm

Composition of *Lleno*

	C	c# ¹	g ²
I	1	2 2/3	4
II	2/3	2	2 2/3
III	1/2	1 1/3	2

The front pipes are taken from the lowest pipes of the Flautado 8 and the Octava 4, but the front displays the short octave of the 1709 organ, so Cardama had to supply four pipes inside to fill in the long octave (as he did for most of the other ranks). The horizontal reeds are not in a logical order, presumably because they were made to fit first the 1709 chest, and then were fed off the 1865 chest. The Trompeta Real and the Dulzaina are on the chest, the Bajoncillo, Trompeta Magna, Clarin and the Oboe are horizontal. The Corneta stands in a small box, whose lid is lifted by a knee stirrup, set in the kneeboard.



An early-17th-century development for the Spanish organ, which formerly had had a chest-layout that followed the order of the front pipes, was that the wind-chests became chromatic, with a division into bass and treble for a new style of playing, in which left and right hands could use different registrations. The extra space required for the bass pipes was found by using vertical groove-boards, with short metal conveyances to the upperboards. With groove-boards provided for the horizontal reeds, front pipes and larger inside stops, the layout can be confusing, and the maintenance is restricted. I have seen one late-eighteenth-century Aragonese organ where there was so little space round the groove boards that it was impossible for the tuner to get at the chorus pipes, though the reeds were accessible for tuning from the front: evidently an organ made for a single occasion.

The organ stands not in the main church, but in the nun's choir. The convent church is arranged in typical Spanish fashion with the nuns' choir in a separate room, its floor much higher than that of the church; a simple grille in the west wall of the church links the two spaces. Below the nun's choir is the room which was used as their burial place, and to receive the host. The organ stands in an embrasure in the wall, on the south side of the nun's choir next to the grille, facing across the choir, and the nuns used to take their seats around the three sides of their choir facing into the church.

In the centre of the choir is a large, square, revolving reading-desk, on which were placed the missals, one for the ordinary days, and if needed another for feast days, presumably with a choir standing to the west side, and the reading-desk turned from the missal of the ordinary day to the feast day as appropriate. The convent still has some beautifully-illustrated 18th-century missals, slightly damaged from being buried in the vegetable garden during the Carlist wars in the 1830s and 1840s,

when Spanish monasteries were routinely looted.

In other words, the music for the service was provided entirely by the nuns, both sung and played on the organ, from their choir, for the priest and congregation in the large domed church below. The church still accommodates a congregation who come in every day for mass. The church is very resonant, and the sound of the nuns' singing (for they still lead the singing) penetrates very satisfactorily. But it may be imagined that the sound of the organ in the nuns' choir is quite startling, at least if the reaction of today's nuns is anything to go by. The sound of the Flautado (the open 8') and the Violon (stopped wood 8') are definitely the favourites. The Octava is acceptable. But the mixtures and the reeds are probably only listened to from the safety of another room. It is difficult to imagine the 18th-century nuns expressing themselves in battle pieces with massed ranks of horizontal reeds describing the victory march. But there we are: the glory of the convent's music has once again been restored, and we the slightly bemused group of British organ-builders have known the experience of being kissed by a queue of nuns.



Presentation-time in the nuns' choir. Martin Goetze stands with the chamades fanning out above and behind him

A book on the organ and its restoration (£15) and a CD (£10) are available (£20 only for both; all prices including postage) from the builders at 1 East Workshops, Welbeck, Worksop, Notts. S80 3LW [martin@goetzegwynn.co.uk]. On the CD, Timothy Roberts plays music from the 16th to the 21st centuries, including music from the Santiago Cathedral archive, and Clara Sanabras sings and plays guitar. The book includes a long essay about the influences on Galician organ-building by Sergio del Campo Olaso, unfortunately in Spanish.