TWO PRE-REFORMATION ORGAN SOUNDBOARDS

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE FORM OF EARLY ORGANS AND THEIR POSITION WITHIN SOME SUFFOLK CHURCHES

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DURING RENOVATIONS TO Meadow Farm, Blacksmith's Green, Wetheringsett (TM 142659) in 1977, a door was discovered in the service area of the 16th-century house, behind a partition wall which was being demolished. The studs used in the partition, including the jamb on which the door is still hung, were made from roughly-hewn timber, in marked contrast to the careful finish given to the four oak planks of the door (Pl.XXIV). The two board-like ledges, which are nailed on to the back to hold the planks together, are also of unplaned sawn timber of a later date (Pl.XXV). Most noticeable is the overall pattern of long, narrow grooves, or channels, gouged part-way through the 1¾in (4.5cm) boards and the multitude of different-sized drilled holes which pierce the planks. Many of these holes were filled with daub at the time when the door was concealed.[1] The door measures 4ft 11½in (151cm) high by 2ft 2½in (67.5cm) wide and has a pair of stout H-shaped hinges, probably of 17th-century date (Pl.XXVI). The widths of the planks are 8½in (21.5cm), 7⅞in (20cm), 6⅛in (15.5cm) and 3½in (9cm). There is no rebate between them and they are butted up to each other with great precision. Inspection of the planks shows them to be straight-grained, slow-grown timber, which is largely free from knots and imperfections. The ends of the planks show closely-set annual rings.[2] It is clear that the four refined planks were not originally made to be used as a door, and that the pattern of holes and slots was made for air-passages in a soundboard which was part of an early organ.

The *soundboard* is the term used to describe the part of the mechanism at the heart of an organ: a wooden framed construction on which the pipes stand, containing the valves and channels that distribute wind to the pipes as required (Fig. 60). Wind is fed from the bellows, through a pipe called a *trunk* to a pallet-box, in which there is a valve or *pallet* for each note on the keyboard. When a pallet is opened, wind is admitted into a channel above, over which stand all the pipes for that note. Above the channel is a perforated *slide* operated by the stop-knob. When the stop in question is on (i.e. pulled out), the holes in the slide line up with the hole under the pipe and that pipe will speak. In a conventional soundboard the channels are made in a frame or *grid* with wooden divisions between. The pallets are bedded with leather on the lower surface of the grid. Over it is glued a *table* of thin (typically ¼in or 6mm), close-fitting wooden boards, with the appropriate holes bored through (Fig. 60). The slides are laid on the surface of the table, and over them are the *upperboards* on which the pipes themselves stand.

In the Wetheringsett soundboard the grid and table are made as one unit: the channels are mortised on the underside of the thick (1¾in, 45mm) table and the pipe-holes are drilled in the upper surface (Fig. 61, also Pls XXIV, XXV). The slides and upperboards are missing, but some of the holes in the upper surface may indicate how the upperboards were fixed. Either or both sides of the table may have been sealed with leather or parchment.[3] Where the two widest boards abut each other, there are some staggered channels cut into each side (Pl.XXVII). A cross-section of one of these boards shows how each groove is cut and chiselled, with inclined sides that form wedge-shaped channels. This method of shaping seems regular and purposeful, and is not the usual way in which mortices or channels are cut out. At present the purpose of such consistent shaping is not certain, but each groove might, perhaps, have been lined with a material such as parchment or paper. Since the base was wider than the top, the lining would be held in place on the floor of each channel. The boards have no rebates between them – could this indicate an

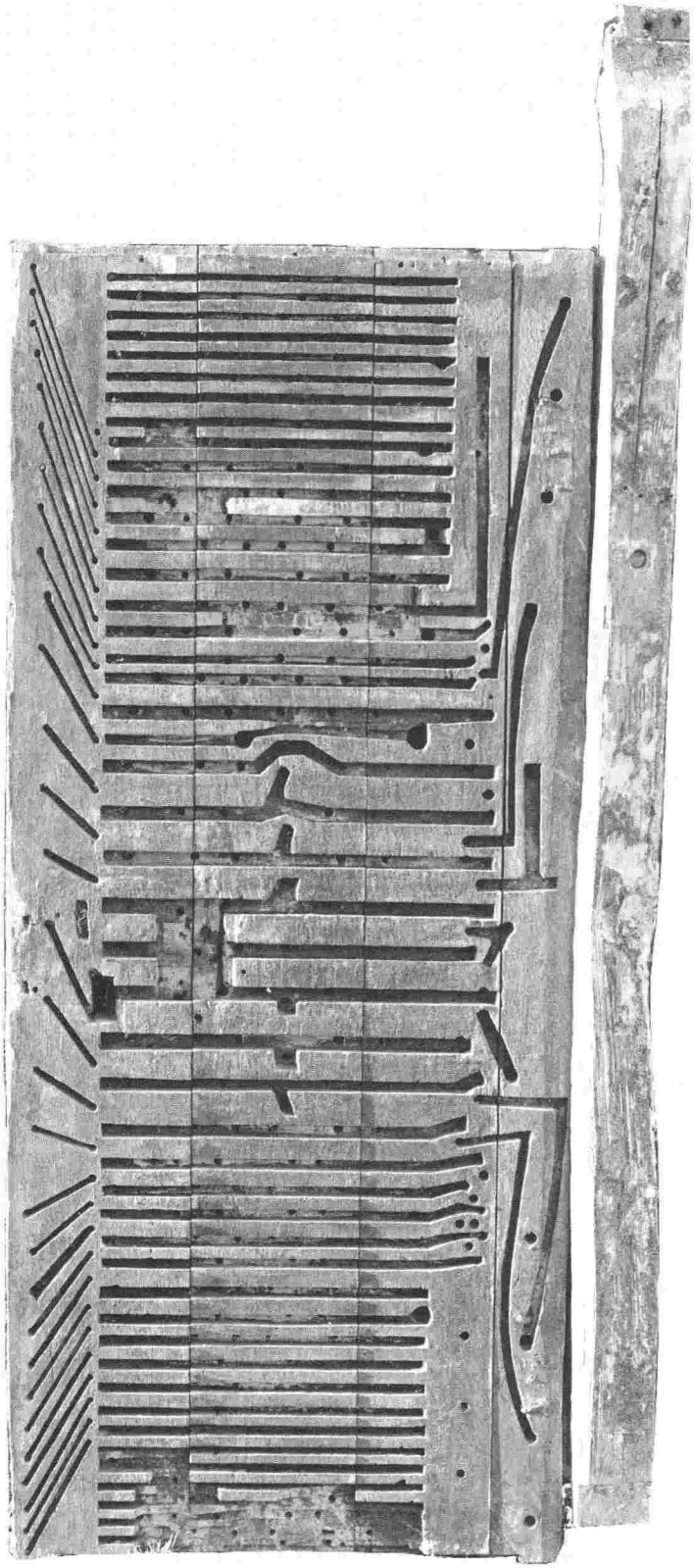

PLATE XXIV – The underside of the soundboard, used as a door at Meadow Farm, Wetheringsett.

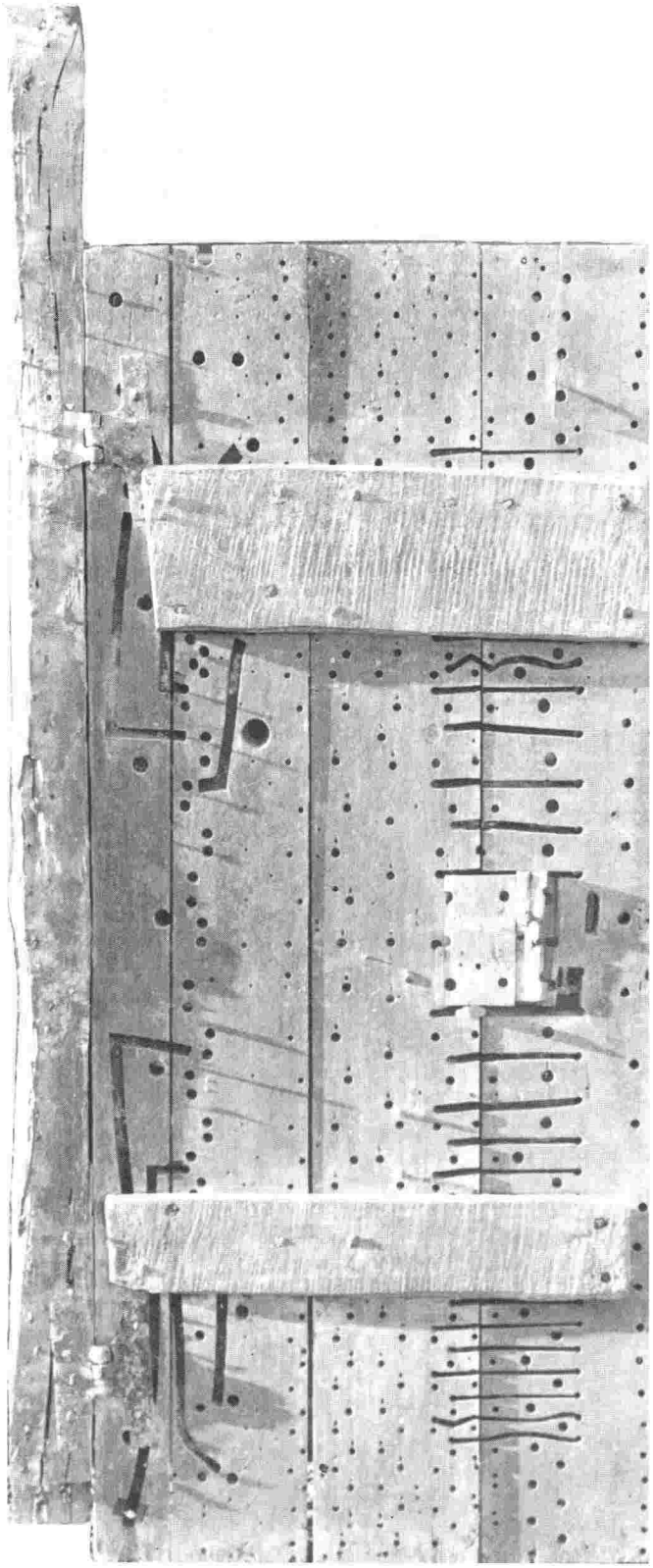

PLATE XXV – The back of the door, with 17th-century hinges and flat ledges; this side is the upper face of the soundboard. The inserted loose square section of soundboard, between the two ledges, is where the door lock was positioned. A key-hole is to the right of it.

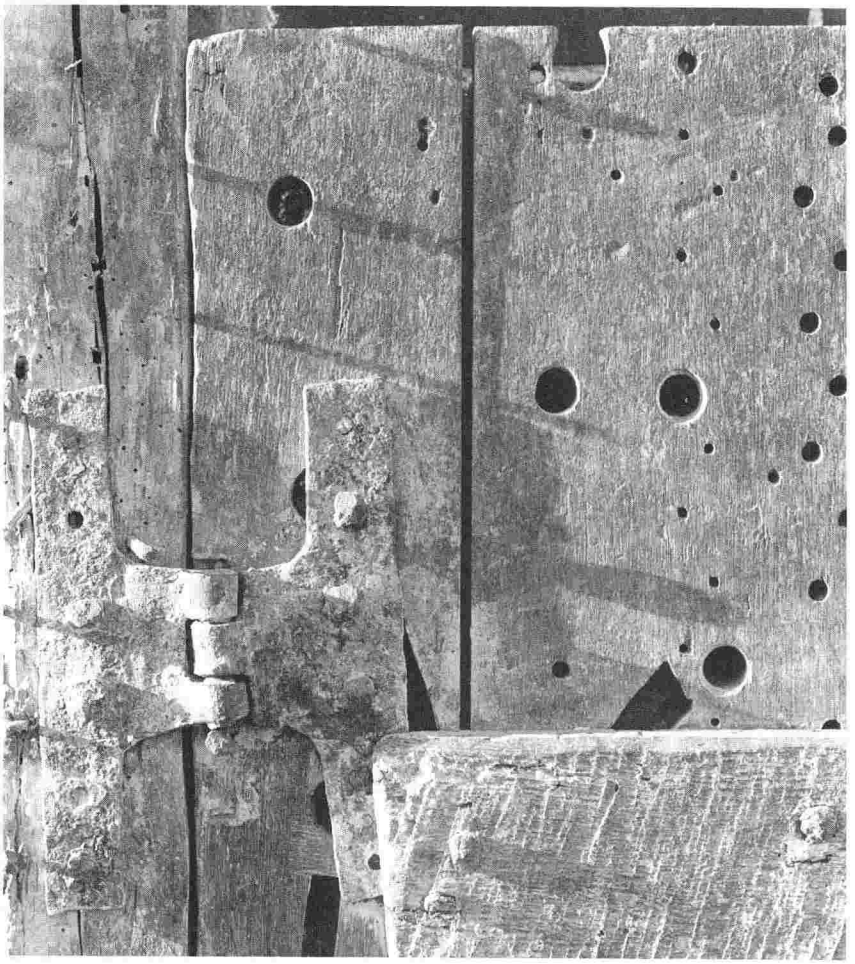

PLATE XXVI – Detail of top corner at the back of the door, showing 17th-century hinge under part of door ledge.

additional attempt to prevent the leakage of air? There are also small oblong pieces of leather or parchment, which are folded and glued into the walls of the grooves (Pl.XXVIII). The purpose of these is not understood, but could they, too, be linked with the reasons for the curious shaping of each channel?

The four planks that make up the table are complete in their length. Long rebates are provided at each end, which may indicate the position of the pallet-box below (Fig. 62). The ends of the pallet-box would have acted as a clamp across the four boards of the table. It is possible that some portions of the old pallet-box ends were trimmed back and left in place as clamps when the soundboard was hung as a door. The board-like ledges on the reverse may be later than this, as they are nailed over the hinges in a careless way.

Preliminary investigation suggests that the organ had forty-six keys. The pipes were arranged symmetrically, with the largest in the middle and the smaller pipes towards each end, implying the existence of the customary roller-board mechanism between the keys and the pallets (see annotated drawing, Fig. 62, for this and the following points). A forty-seventh groove appears to have had a different function, connected either to a toy such as a *Zimbelstern* (a rotating star with a bell on each point which jingled when it moved) or a Saracen's head, or possibly used as an

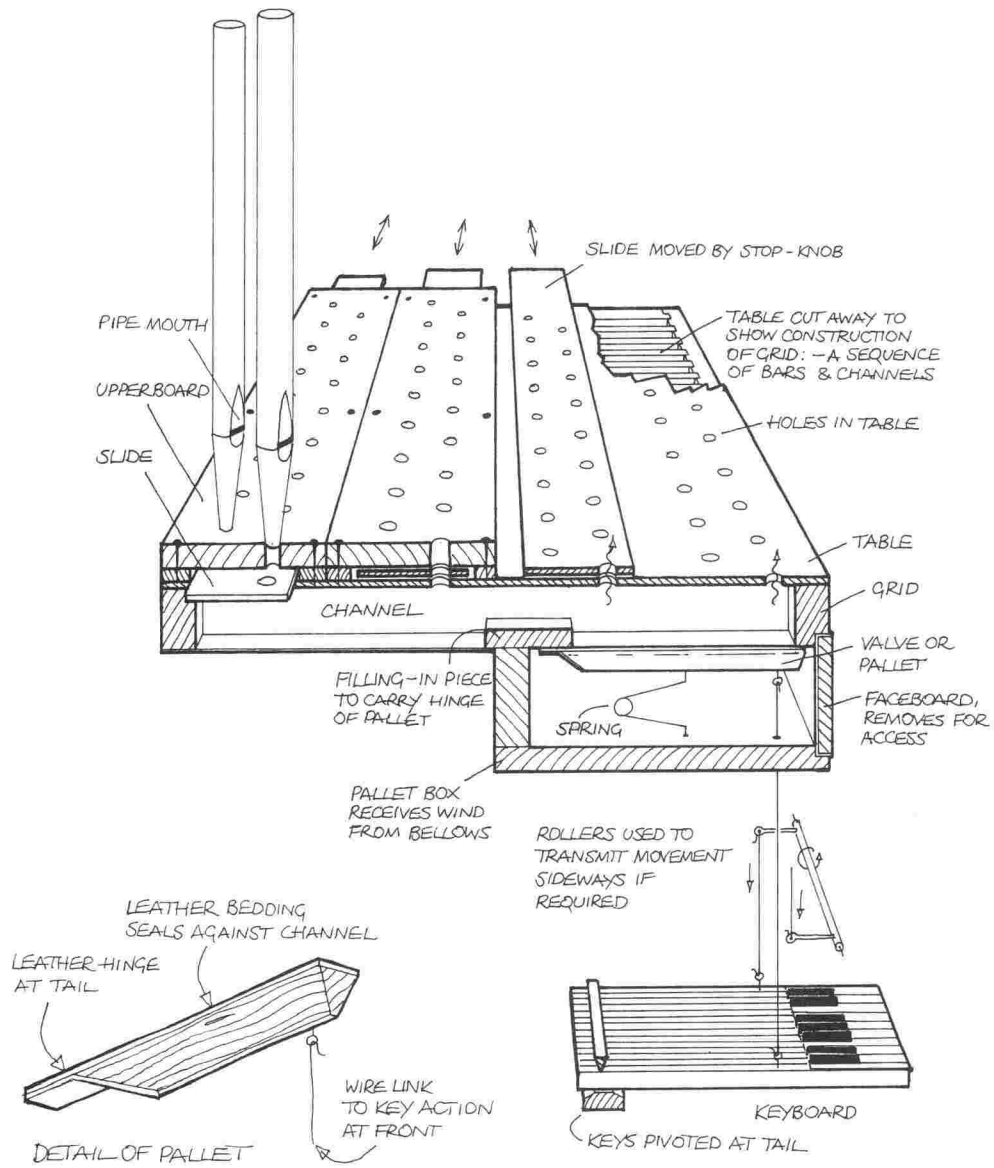

FIG. 60 – The cross-section of a typical soundboard in relationship to the keyboard.

escape valve to empty the bellows quickly in case of malfunction.[4] That the organ had sliders is evident from the staggered layout of the pipe holes. There appear to have been eight stops, though the holes bored in the table for one of them consist of centres pricked through for position only and not bored out to their final size, suggesting that one rank of pipes was prepared for, but not in fact installed (Pl.XXIX). A careful examination of the layout and size of the pipe holes may in due course lead to a good understanding of what pipes the organ contained and of its musical function. Other evidence still visible includes: the remains of brass pallet guide pins between the channels on the underside of the table; smaller holes which had been bored at an angle from the top surface of the table into the holes of two of the ranks – the

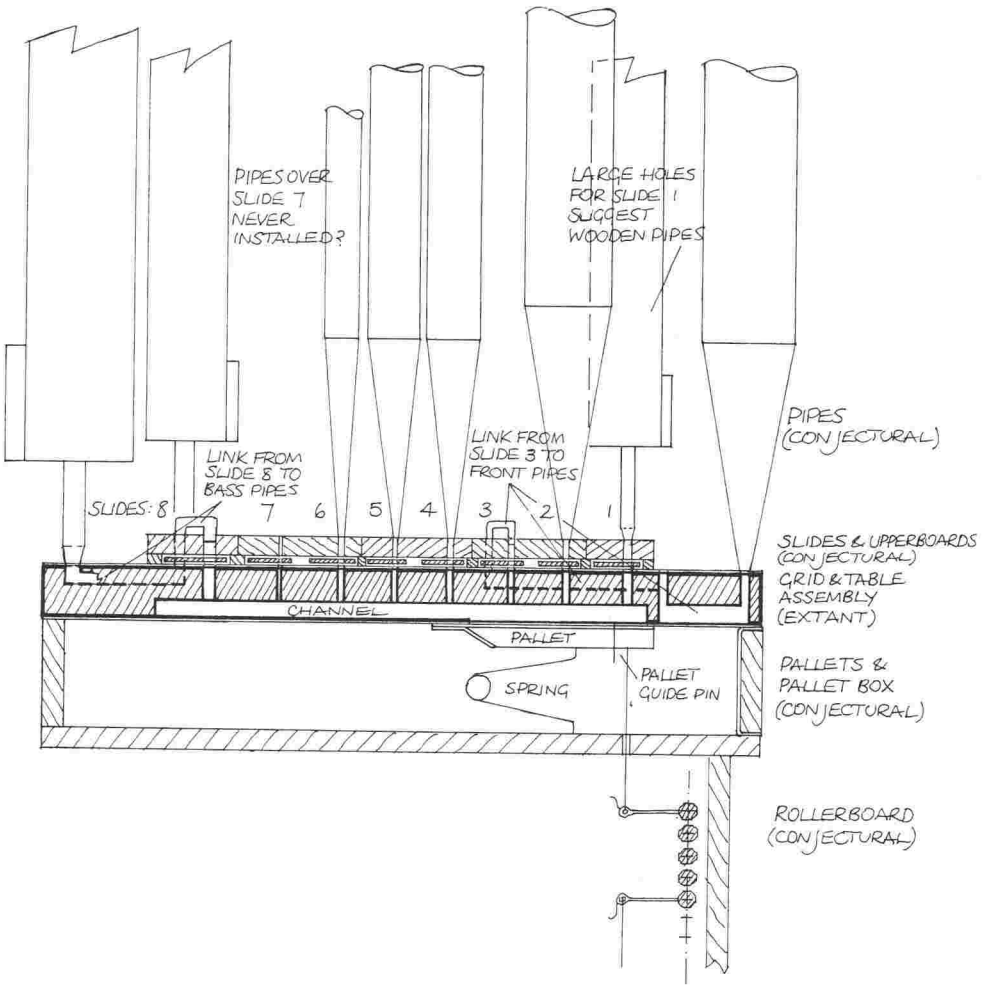

FIG. 61 – The cross-section of an earlier form of soundboard, based on the fragment from Wetheringsett.

purpose of which is not yet clear[5] (see diagram, Fig. 62; and Pl.XXIX); the grooving in the soundboard to thirty pipes along the front edge to act as a façade; and grooving in the soundboard to nineteen bass pipes, possibly wooden, at the back of the organ. As the channels are cut from the solid wood, the date for the organ's construction is likely to be before the mid-17th century, for after that time the grids were constructed with individual divisions inside a frame.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Organ-building in England had reached a peak by the 1530s, as contracts and other evidence show, but virtually ceased at the time of the Reformation. In the middle and later 16th century, religious upheaval caused many parish church organs to be dismantled, but many must have survived into the 17th century. Henry Chitting, for example, expressed no surprise at finding

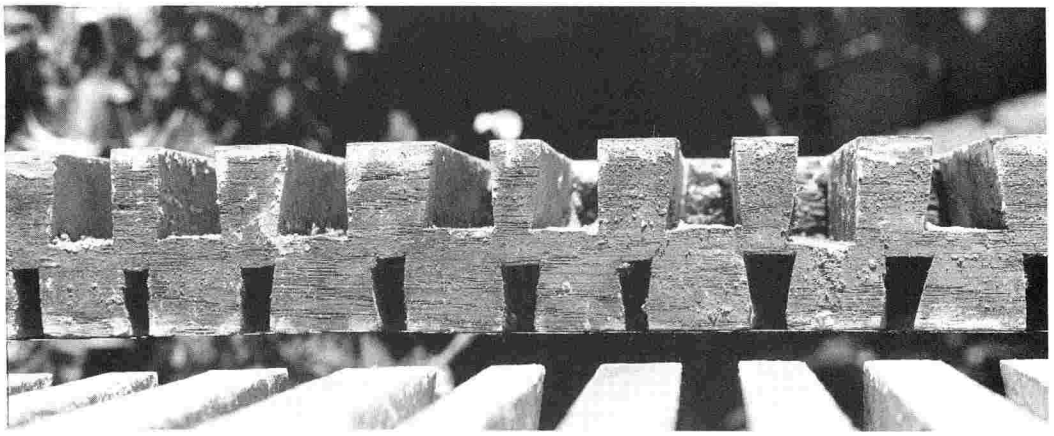

PLATE XXVII – Cross-section of one of the two widest planks, with staggered wedge-shaped channels on both sides of the board.

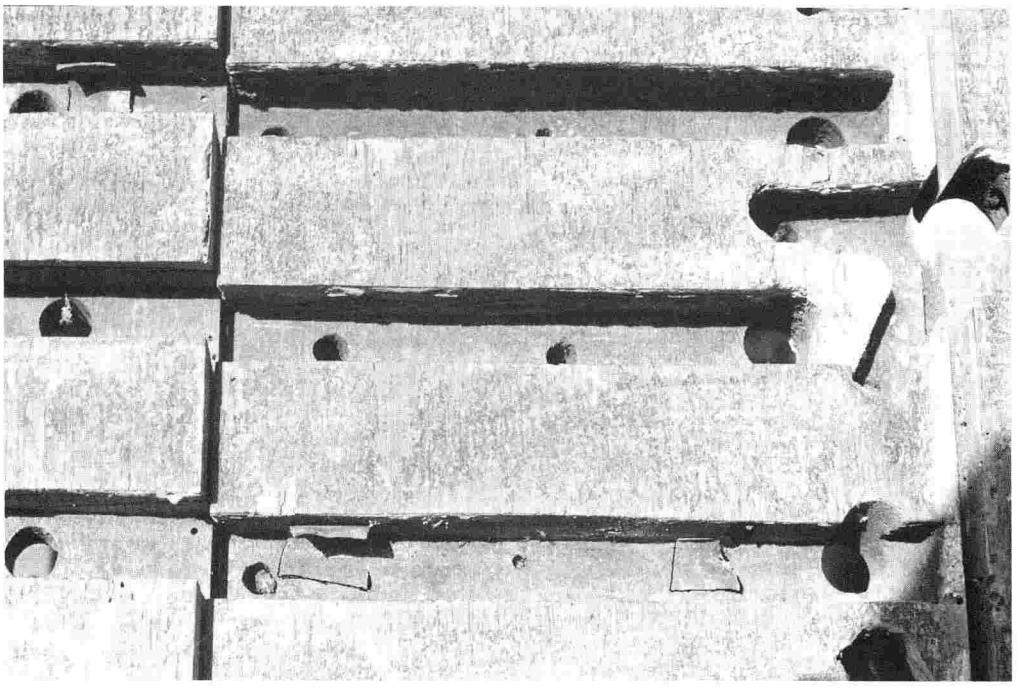

PLATE XXVIII – Close-up of grooves with three of the parchment strips glued into the walls.

such an instrument in Hessett church early in the 17th century, when he noted that there were shields 'on the north window by the orgaines' (MacCulloch 1978, 111, 124 n.18). Some organs simply fell into disuse in the 17th century, although a few seem to have continued in use until the 18th century. Despite the fervour of the Laudian revival in the early 17th century, organs were not built or replaced in any great numbers, but it is probable that many more survived the Interregnum than we have previously suspected.[6] There is a churchwarden's record of the organ being moved in Framlingham church shortly after a visit on 10 August 1644 by Francis Verdyn, who was working with William Dowsing: 'September 4th, to Thomas Ladd and John Morrice

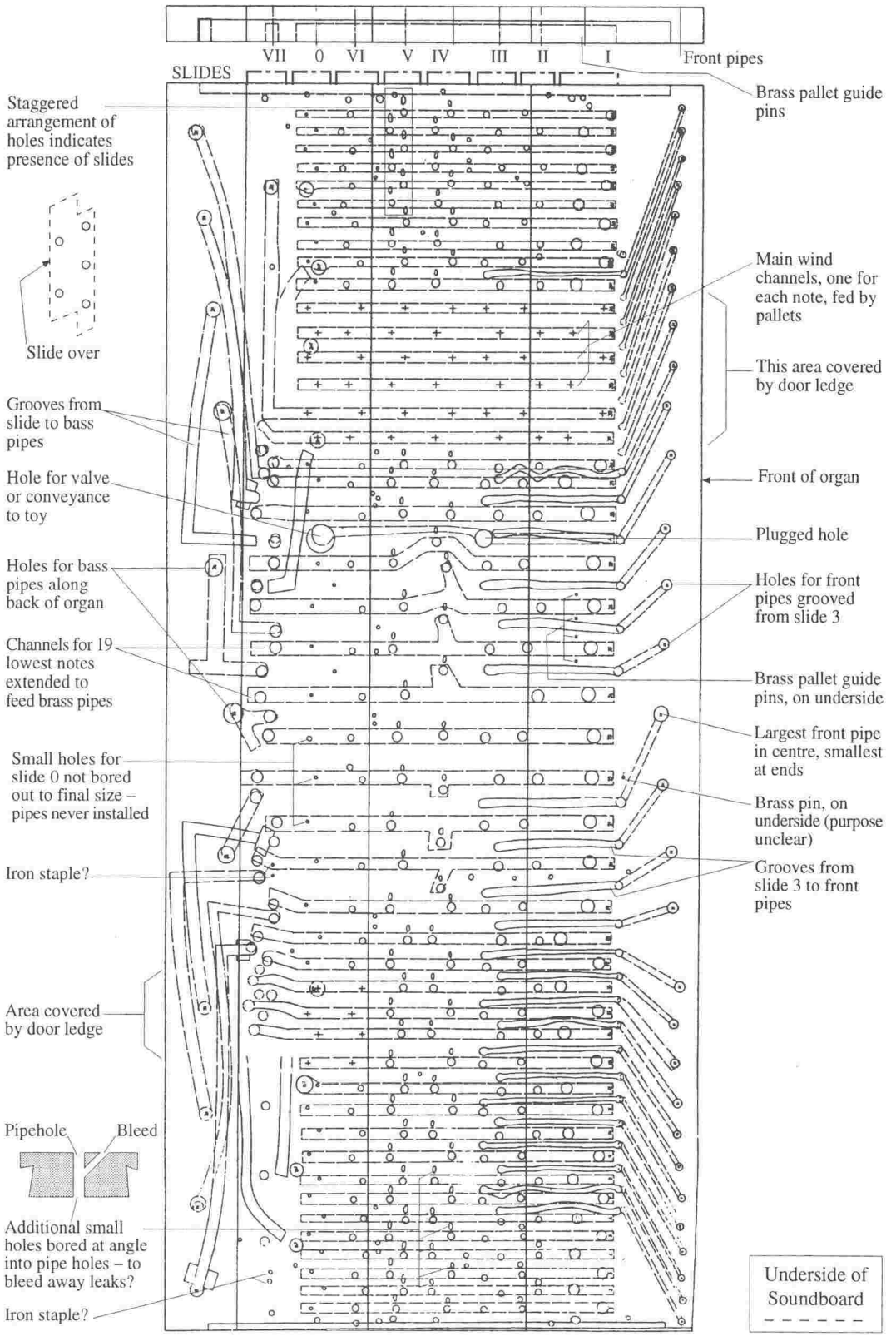

FIG. 62 Measured drawing of the Wetheringsett soundboard, with principal features annotated.

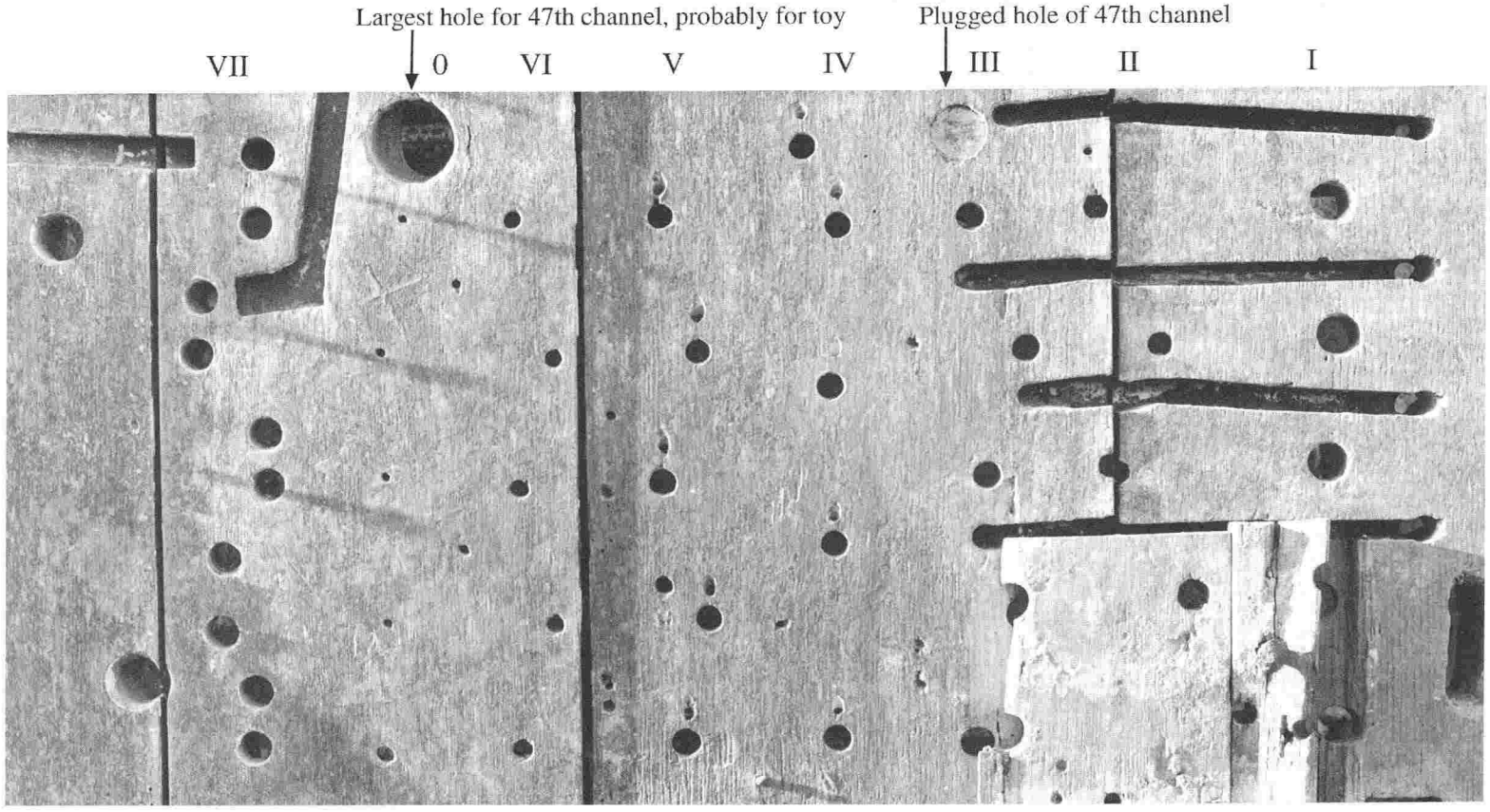

PLATE XXIX – Detail across the central portion of the upper face of the Wetheringsett soundboard. Each of the holes in slide rows IV and V has a bleed hole. Row 0 has been marked out with small holes, but these have not been bored out to their final size. This rank of pipes was never installed. (See Note 5.)

each two days to help John Adkyns about the removal of the organes and setting them up agayn . . . 4s'. As this does not state that the organs came from another church, it is likely that the instrument was being re-sited within the church. The next entry, 'a skin to mend bellowes . . . 6d' indicates that the organ was to stay in commission (Green 1834). Could there be an indication here that the organ was concealed, or at least seen to have been dismantled, prior to Verdyn's visit, and then brought out and re-sited after a safe period of a few weeks?

As we have seen, it is most likely that the Wetheringsett soundboard was built during the early 16th century, rather than the 17th. Because no other comparable 16th-century British soundboard is known to exist, we have to turn for details to those mentioned in surviving contracts from other parts of England. The organ at All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower, London, was built by Anthony Duddington, and the contract is dated 1519. This organ had 'as fewe stoppes as may be convenient' and cost around £50 (Blewett and Thompson 1977). The organ of Holy Trinity, Coventry, was constructed by two London organ-builders, John Howe and John Clymmowe. The contract was made in 1526, and the instrument was built 'with vii stopps' at a cost of £30.[7] The earliest reference from England to the making of a new organ with stops is from Westerham, Kent, in 1511–12, where the organ was 'to be made with iii stoppis after the new making'.[8]

Comparisons of the organ contracts for Coventry and Barking indicate instruments of modest size, with the largest pipe probably having a speaking length of 10ft (3.05m). Both appear to show organs with forty-six keys, and the organ at Coventry had seven stops. The Wetheringsett soundboard has provision for forty-six keys and eight stops but, as described, one stop appears not to have been installed, leaving only seven. All but a few large organs in northern Europe at this time had only thirty-eight or forty-one keys, though they may have had more stops. Only the organs of Italy and Iberia regularly exceeded this number of keys. One hypothesis is that the long-compass English keyboards of the period may have been related in some way to the use of the English organ for accompanying voices. In 1617, when the English composer John Bull was in Holland, he recommended forty-nine keys for a new organ in 's Hertogenbosch, but his plan was not accepted. There is no evidence of any English organ having more than forty-six keys before 1600, and this number was achieved by the early 16th century: some organs had fewer keys, such as the lost Wingfield soundboard (see below) with forty or forty-one notes.

OUTWARD APPEARANCE

From the soundboard alone it is barely possible to establish the appearance of the Wetheringsett organ but, combining the evidence with a knowledge of other early organs, it is possible to make a highly speculative guess at the kind of instrument we may be dealing with. The organ built in 1856 by the workshop of Béthune of Ghent under the direction of Sir John Sutton for the church at West Tofts, Norfolk, but now in South Pickenham church (Pl.XXX) was designed using his knowledge of 16th-century continental examples such as that in the church of St Valeria, Sion, Switzerland (Fig. 63). Its outline and form come out of the Gothic tradition, with the pipe-field at the front arranged so that the longest pipe is placed centrally, with the others graduated outwards, having the shortest pipes on the outside, as is implied by the layout of the holes on the Wetheringsett soundboard. This arrangement creates a mitre form for the pipe-field, with an outer case following the upward movement to terminate in either a decorated point or a ball-flower finial. Typical late medieval carved forms of decoration follow the line of the sweep with crocketting on the upper side and brattishing pointing towards the pipes. This type of mitred pipe-field is illustrated in a window in the Beauchamp Chapel at St Mary's, Warwick (Pl.XXXI).

It seems likely that this Suffolk soundboard was made to fit the complete width and depth of the organ: this is important in order to realise the overall size of the instrument. Here the soundboard, 5ft (1.5m) long, seems to belong to a five-foot organ: this denotes the speaking

PLATE XXX – The 19th-century organ made for West Tofts, Norfolk, as it now appears in South Pickenham Church.

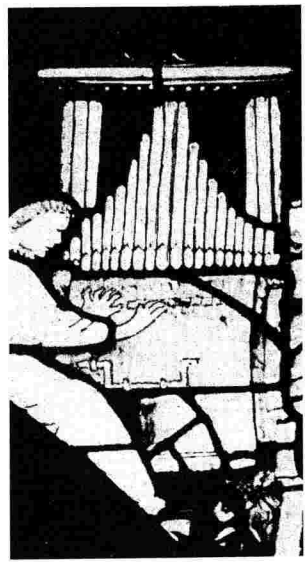

PLATE XXXI – A small or *positive* organ with mitred pipe-field, from a window in the Beauchamp Chapel, St Mary's, Warwick, *c.*1447.

length of the largest pipe in the instrument from the mouth to the top.[9] With the addition of the pointed foot below the pipe-mouth, and the width of the outer casing, this upper part could rise 6 to 7ft (1.85–2.15m) above the soundboard. The lower section would be roughly square, perhaps with the soundboard being set about 5ft 6in (1.7m) from the ground. This would imply an organ 12ft (3.65m) high by 5ft (1.5m) wide with a depth of 2ft 4in (71cm). The depth of the case at the base might well extend to 5ft or 6ft (1.5–1.83m) to accommodate the bellows-house. The leather of the pair of bellows was always an attraction to rats and mice, and by housing these in a panelled case they could be made more secure.[10] It is also possible that the bellows were sometimes located away from the organ for reasons of space or quietness.

There are other forms of organ-case at this period. Some incorporate towers linked by flat fields of pipes, and others rise to a flat top or cornice. The earliest surviving complete British organ-case is in Old Radnor church, Wales. Made in the early 16th century, it is oblong in form with a predominance of linen-fold panels. The flat top is ornamented with semi-circular shell motifs between crocketted finials. Although these show Renaissance influence, some of the other decoration around the pipes uses trailing branches and dragons, and is medieval in influence. This perhaps suggests a date between the 1520s and the 1540s. Organ-builders were often conservative with their decoration on cases during the 16th and 17th centuries, continuing to use old-fashioned ornamentation.[11]

LOCATION WITHIN THE CHURCH

From inventories and other sources it is possible to deduce the possible positions for organs in English parish churches at the beginning of the 16th century. They were frequently in the choir,

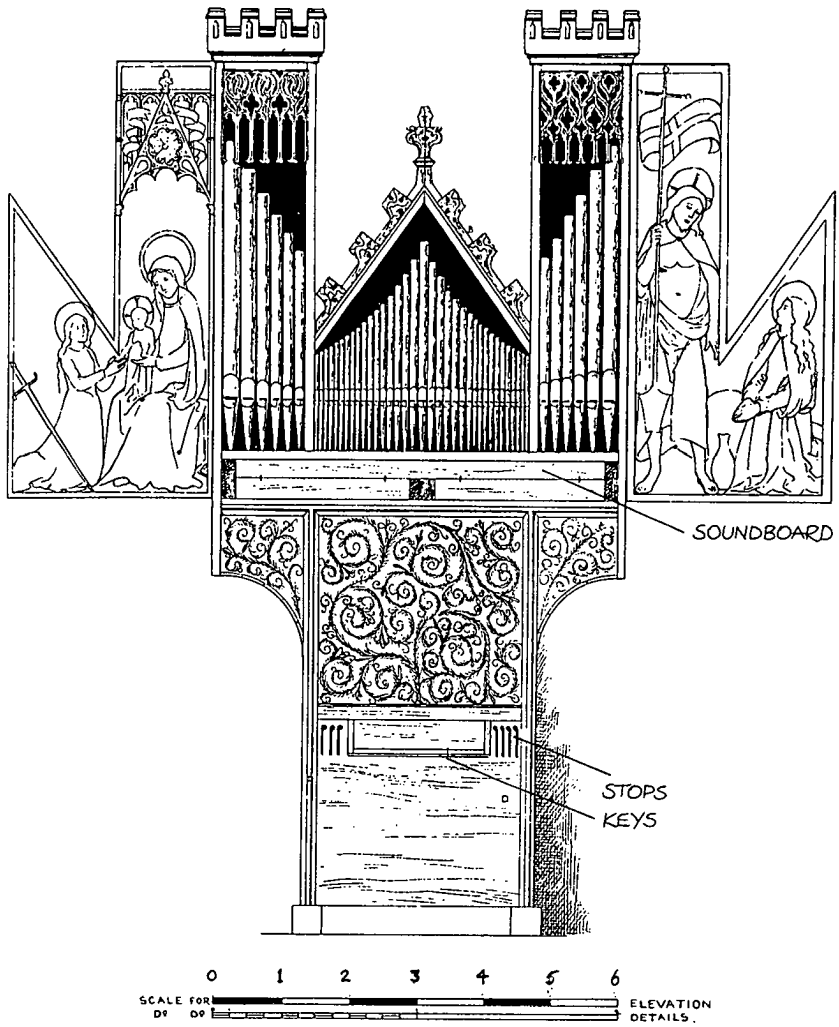

FIG. 63 – Arthur Hill's drawing of the late 14th- or early 15th-century organ in the cathedral of Notre-Dame, Valère-sur-Sion (Switzerland). The position of the soundboard is exposed to view.

possibly standing at floor level on one side, and sometimes on the rood-loft. In richer churches there was sometimes a second instrument in a chapel. There seems to be little evidence of English medieval organs being placed on nave galleries or at the west end. This was a popular practice in England in later centuries, and is typical of some large continental instruments. It is possible that some choir organs were raised on their own wall-mounted galleries to elevate them to rood-loft level. This could be for practical reasons in a collegiate or monastic church or a cathedral (such as Durham) because of fixed choir-stalls, or simply to free the chancel area for the use of the choir. The improvement of the sound projection beyond the screen could equally be a consideration for raising them from the floor, and in some cases they might be seen to more advantage through or above the screen.

Around 1582, amongst some entries in accounts for Walberswick church (formerly ascribed to

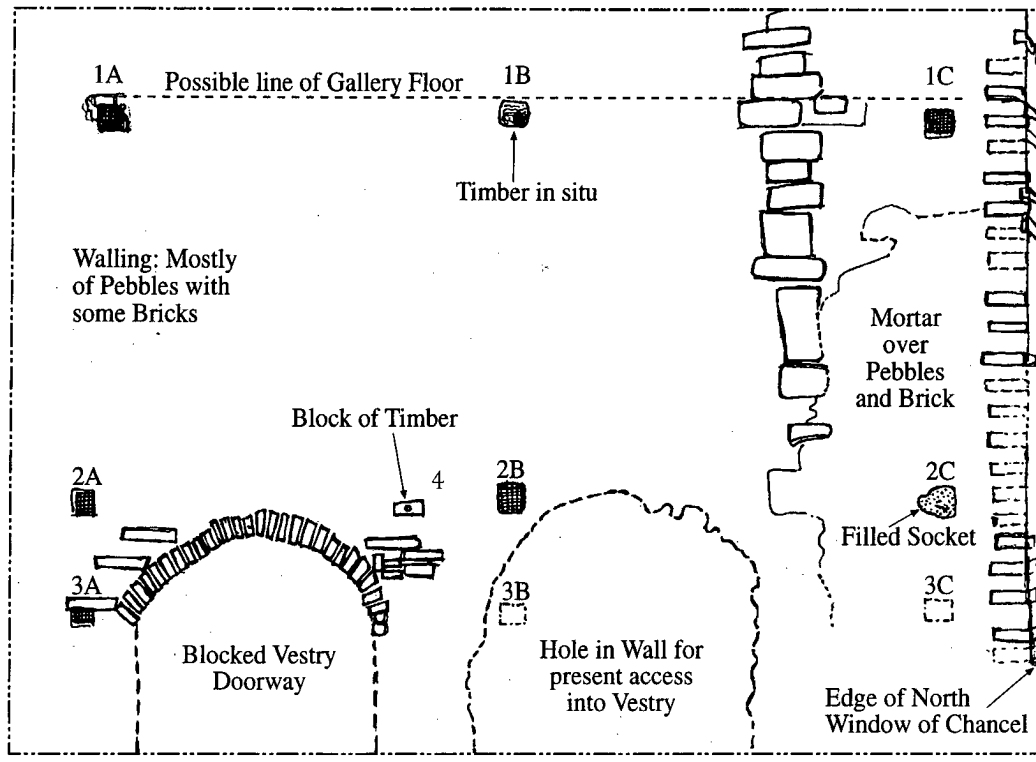

FIG. 64 – Central portion of the north chancel wall, Walberswick, showing two, and possibly three, rows of square sockets above and around the blocked vestry door. These contained timbers projecting from them, which could have acted as a series of perches to support an organ gallery floor (not drawn to scale).

Blythburgh), there are references to the sale of timber which included 'the bottom of the organe perke, and the steyers' for 7s., and 'the organe case' for 8s.[12] The term *organe perke* or *perch* is likely to refer to an independent, wall-mounted gallery (with access by its own ladder or stair), rather than to the rood-loft. As there is no wall-space within the nave to hang an organ gallery without blocking at least one of the arches of the arcade, this must have been on one of the chancel walls. There is evidence that around 1500 building-work on the new chancel was well under way, and that a new organ was being made for the church.[13] In his will, dated 7 October 1500, John Almyngham left £10 to buy a pair of organs, with further money for the embellishment of the high altar.[14] An additional sum of £2 was left by John Baret in his will of the same year for a pair of organs (presumably for the same new instrument).[15] That there was an organ in the chancel is confirmed by another entry for 1543, which records 'An organ maker for his coming and seying, and little mending of the quere organ - xxd'.[16] What is not clear is whether this organ could have been a second, older, instrument, as there are several other entries in the churchwardens' accounts for work carried out before 1500. The last recorded payment, in 1496, was for 'mending and dressyng of the orgonys', for a total sum of £3.[17] This is larger than all the previous amounts for work carried out between 1480 and 1495 added together. One wonders whether, once this large sum had been spent on improving it, St Andrew's would have retained the older instrument as well as the new one, which may have been installed within the next five years. Perhaps one of the two was accommodated on the rood-loft, or assigned to a chapel.[18] Some remaining parts of an organ were finally disposed of in 1644: perhaps these were some of

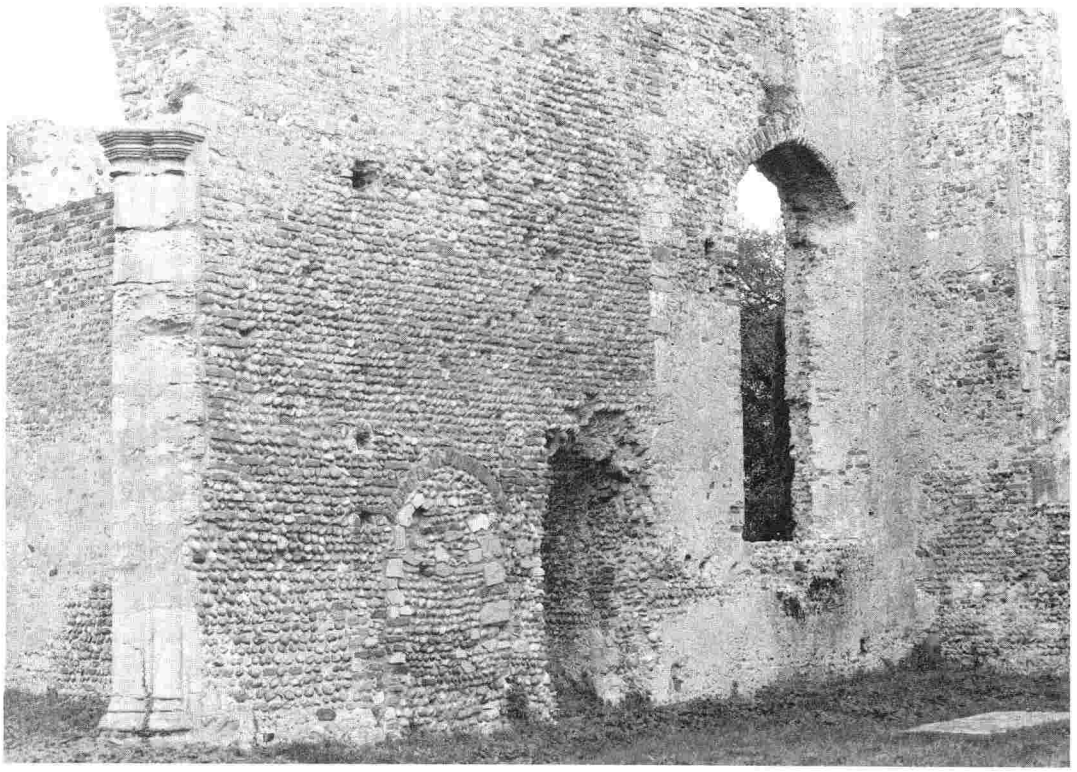

PLATE XXXII – Looking towards the north side of the chancel, Walberswick. The blocked door to the vestry can be seen next to a later opening. The vertical line of sockets nearest to the nave can be seen to the left of, and above, the door arch.

the mechanical sections not acquired in 1582 by the purchaser of the organ perke, case and ladder.[19]

There is residual evidence in the ruined part of the building at Walberswick that might indicate the place that was prepared for a new organ-gallery as the work on St Andrew's was nearing completion. On the north wall of the chancel there are two prominent horizontal rows of square-shaped sockets, which could have contained timbers extending out of the wall that acted as perches for the gallery floor (Fig. 64, Pl.XXXII). One of the sockets (1B) still has timber in it. There is at least one other additional socket (3A) in line vertically with the two nearest the nave, and there may have been two other matching holes in line horizontally (3B and 3C). The middle one (3B) could have been in the place where a hole now allows access into the vestry, and the third (3C) might be under the mortar on the right-hand side. If this were to be uncovered, a third row of sockets may be established. The purpose of the oblong block of timber (4) adjacent to socket 2B is as yet unknown. None of these sockets penetrates into the vestry behind the north wall, nor do they have any corresponding holes on the south wall to imply that beams went right across the chancel. Some substantial structure was evidently placed against the north wall above the vestry door. If the floor supporting the organ was fixed to the top row, approximately 14ft up from the chancel floor, the next row of in-line sockets, 6ft 6in (2m) below, could have had smaller projecting timbers, on which interconnecting braces might have rested (Fig. 65). If a third row of sockets was established, then a lower section of curved braces could be conjectured below the upper set. It seems likely

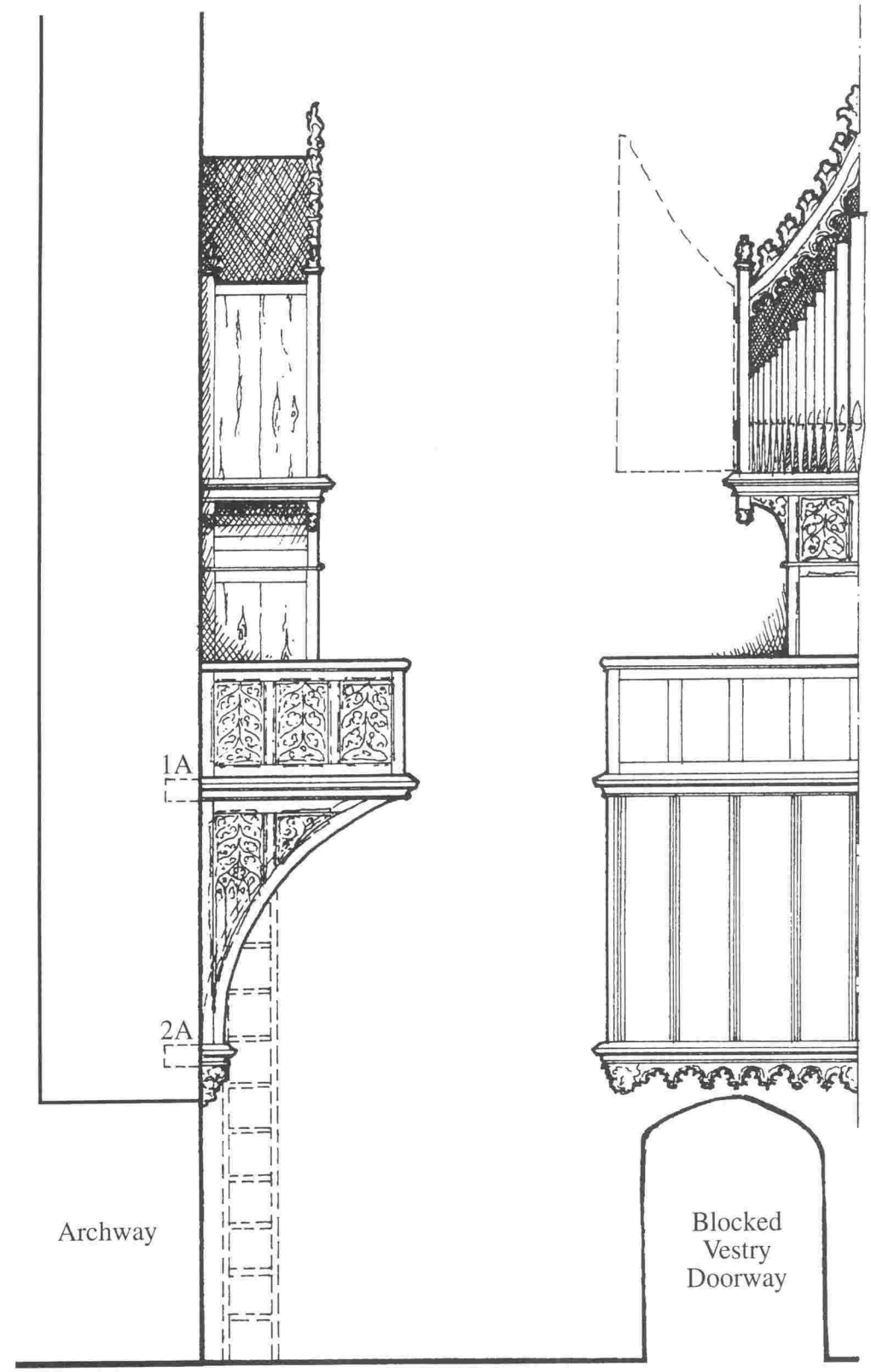

FIG. 65— The elevation and half the width of a speculative reconstruction of the organ perch and organ at Walberswick, based on the position of socket holes in the north church wall. The organ shown is an instrument with a 5ft (152cm) front, similar to that indicated by the Wetheringsett soundboard.

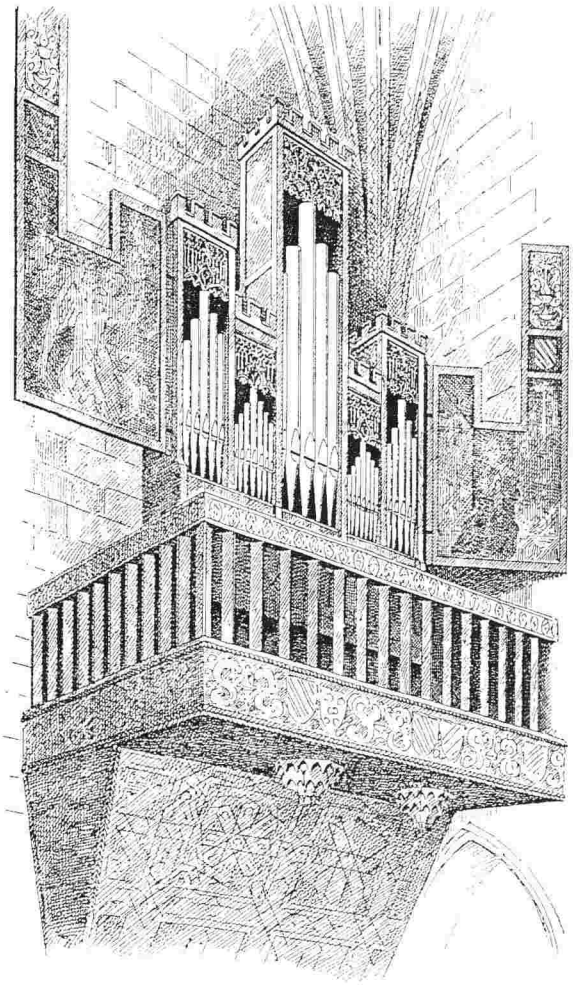

FIG. 66 – The 15th-century organ gallery of St Bartholomew in Salamanca (drawing by A.G. Hill).

that, like some extant European instruments with their own galleries, such as the 15th-century organ gallery in Salamanca[20] (Fig. 66), these English wall-mounted organs could have been wider than the instruments destined for an existing rood-loft with limited space. From the projected size of the organ deduced from the Wetheringsett soundboard it is possible that it stood on the chancel floor, but there is no reason why this, too, should not have been wall-mounted, like the Walberswick example.

With regard to rood-lofts, Munro Cautley, writing in 1937, noted that 'there is abundant evidence that in them were to be found altars, "pairs of organs" and that they were even used by singers in the musical parts of the service' (Cautley 1937, 144). In a footnote he states that 'Mr H.P. Raven of Eye tells me that he and the late Dr Montague [M.R.] James, Provost of Eton, saw the fragments of such a pair of organs in Wingfield Church fifty years ago, but they disappeared a few years later'. This is not entirely correct, as the Wingfield soundboard was still largely intact in 1951, but it is tantalising to wonder how much else was on view around 1887. The Wingfield

soundboard was photographed and recorded in 1951 (Eglen 1951, 22–23), but it was removed at the time for critical examination, and its present whereabouts are unknown. Observations deduced from the photographs are useful here for appreciating the smaller size of some organs that would be ideal for placing on narrower rood-lofts. The author of the 1951 article stated that this soundboard was made of a plank of walnut (Pls XXXIII and XXXIV) and that the two long edges had been severely attacked by woodworm. The size of the soundboard is given as 3ft 10 $^{5}/_{8}$in (1.185m) long by 13in (33cm) wide, so it is approximately half the depth of the Wetheringsett soundboard, and just over a foot shorter. The Wingfield soundboard appears to have had forty or forty-one notes and five stops. Again, the pipes were arranged with the largest in the middle, graduating to the smallest at each end (Fig. 67). Of the five stops, one had no slide and was permanently 'on', its pipes grooved alternately to the two long sides. This would have given the instrument similar façades of pipes front and back, suggesting that the organ may have been on a rood-screen, or in a position where it could be seen from both sides. The slides and upperboards for the other four stops were extant, still fixed in position, and moveable on the table (Pls XXXIV, XXXVI, XXXVII; Figs 67–69). There is also the question of where the fragments were when seen by Raven and James, for there is no record of the rood-loft surviving until that time. There is a chapel of the Holy Trinity, which is entered through the north wall of the chancel: it is subdivided for two-thirds of its length by a floor, now accessible by a ladder. This upper-level room seems to have been built in the late 15th century, and may have been used as a storage area since the Reformation. Was this where the organ fragments lay in the late 19th century? The soundboard was certainly recorded as being found here in 1951.[21] One other unusual feature of the rood-loft is that it could be entered by two stairs which rise in the window reveals of the north and south aisles. If the organ was indeed positioned on the rood loft, then passing right across the candle-beam, largely blocked by the instrument, would have been difficult, and having the two entries would have been a distinct advantage.

To give some idea of the form of English rood-loft organs and the cramped conditions for the organist it is worth quoting from the comments made by 'Observator' in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1789:

> In the parish church of Tong (once collegiate), in Shropshire, the gallery over the entrance to the choir is yet unremoved, and the organ-case remains, with little more room than was sufficient for the player. This organ, to judge by what is left of it, seems the most ancient of the sort that has come under my observation, which, for the entertainment of your musico-mechanic readers, I shall endeavour to describe. And first the case. It is in the true Gothic, with pinnacles and finials, after the manner of ancient tabernacles, and very like the one just finished and erected in Lichfield Cathedral, only on a smaller scale. Now as to the other parts. The keys are gone but the sounding-board remains, and is pierced for one sett of pipes only, seemingly an open diapason, whether of metal or wood could not be determined, there being not a single pipe left; from the apparent positions and distances, I presume they were of metal. I perceived no registers or slides for other stops, and observed the compass to be very short, only to A in alt for the treble part, two short octaves in the lower bass; therefore not more than forty tones [notes] in the whole. The bellows are preserved in a lumber room near the vestry, double-winded, without folds, and made with thick hides, like unto a smith's or forge-bellows.[22]

The description of the case hints at the decorative shape of organs, linking their form with that of tabernacles. Some English organs may well have had doors with painted panels, as many early European examples still do (see Figs. 63, 66). Placed high on a rood-loft, with their towers and pinnacles, these instruments could be interpreted as small-scale representations of the idealised Holy City. The early 16th-century illustration from Arnott Schlick's published book on

organs (Fig. 70) shows a continental organ with a pointed pipe-field set between two towers. The overall height appears to be about 6 or 7ft (1.83–2.15m), and judging from the scale of the organist the soundboard appears to be about 4ft by 1ft (1.22m by 30cm). This may well represent the type and size of the organ at Wingfield and would be an ideal size for placing on a rood-screen.

THE WETHERINGSETT SOUNDBOARD: FOR WHICH CHURCH WAS IT MADE?

The four planks remained together until they were made up into the door, making it unlikely that the soundboard had been moved a great distance, so that the church where it is most likely to have started out as part of an organ is Wetheringsett itself. All Saints' church is about a mile and a quarter from Meadow Farm (Fig. 71). On 23 March 1496/7, when William Bradway of Brockford, a prosperous yeoman, made his will, he bequeathed £10 'to the church of Wetheringsett for a pair of organs to be set in the church, that God's service might be the more solemnly sungen'.[23] Eight years later, when William's son Geoffrey made his will (6 March 1504/5), he bequeathed 'as much land as shall be worth by year, all charges borne, 13s. 4d. to the finding [i.e. supporting] and stipend of a parish clerk in Wetheringsett for to play at the organs'.[24] One point that would have to be reconciled is that here we have a provincial organ, probably built in the latter part of the 15th century, but certainly completed and installed by 1504, which had stops some eight years before the first recorded example in England, at Westerham. The costs noted earlier, of between £30 and £50 for an organ with 10ft (3.05m) pipes and seven or so stops, might be rather less for an instrument with 5ft (1.5m) pipes and the same number of stops (say £20 to £30). The generous gift of £10 made by William Bradway would go a long way towards the building of such an instrument, and it is possible that this was the total cost.[25] The chance survivals of the records of such contributions toward projects rarely make it clear whether these represented total costs. In some cases they might have been for the upgrading of an older instrument, although in this example and the three wills cited in note 26 they all appear to be gifts for the purchase of new organs.

Other locations for this organ might have been Debenham or Mendlesham, which are both about three miles distant from Meadow Farm. A farmer living at this house might well have been a regular visitor to the markets in either town, and could have been in the right location when an organ was being dismantled. The constructional elements that go to make up the door could date from any time in the second half of the 17th century. Debenham probably had a new organ by the 1520s, and Mendlesham during the late 15th century.[26]

It is fortunate that the three most likely churches for supplying this surviving fragment of a pre-Reformation organ have all retained a record of the dates and some of the costs for obtaining new organs. Since the likelihood is that this soundboard was made some time around 1500 to 1520, it is not only the oldest of its type known to survive in England, but the only example so far from this period that may have documentary evidence associated with it. Dendrochronological testing of one of the boards, which still has its sapwood, might establish the church that this fragment is most likely to have come from (see note 2).

WHY USE A SOUNDBOARD AS A DOOR?

The use of planks pierced by holes in the construction of a door impairs two main functions: those of privacy and the exclusion of draughts. As this soundboard was re-used in a partition within the service-rooms, possibly in a dairy, it could be argued that this allowed ventilation, which could be desirable. Ventilation-openings are not commonly found in the doors of

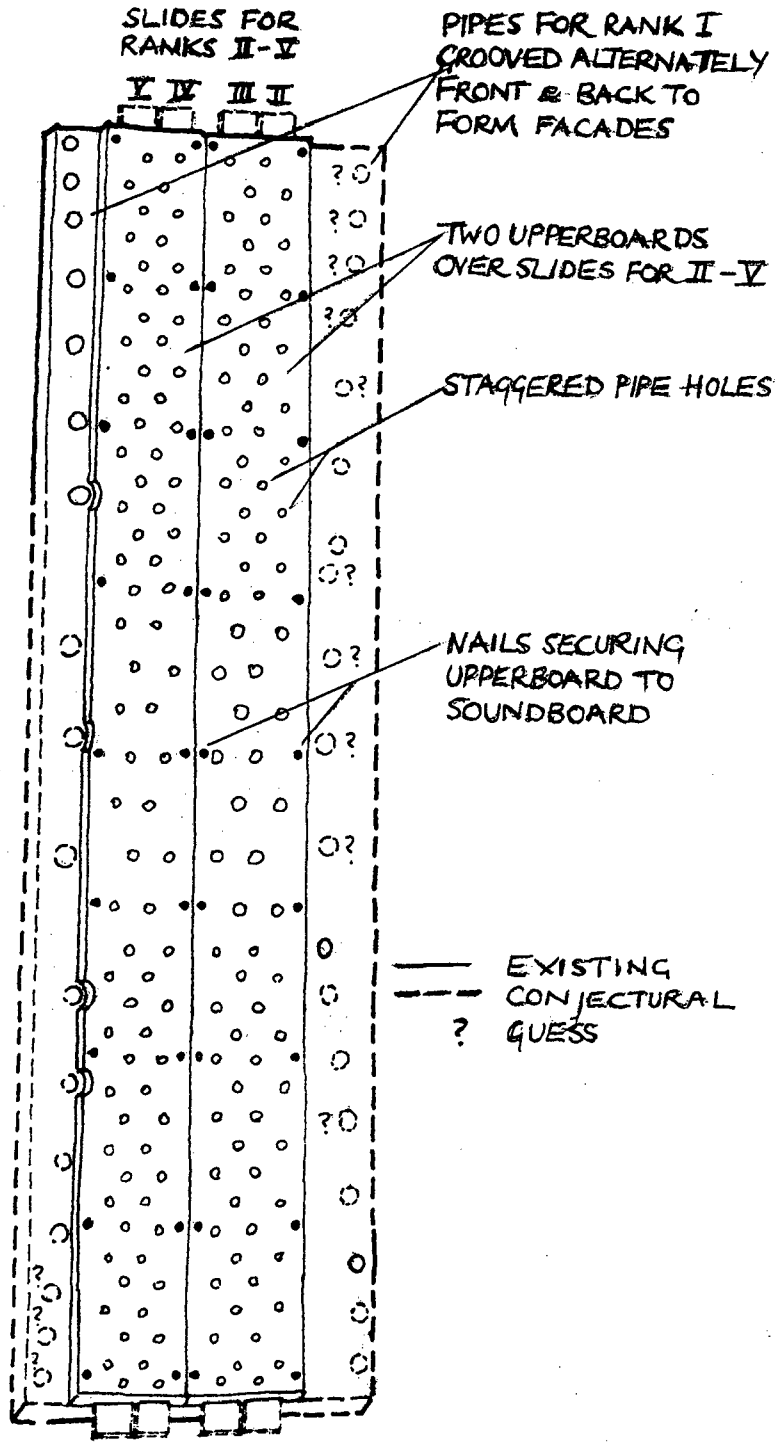

FIG. 67 – Conjectural drawing re-establishing the eroded sides of the Wingfield soundboard and indicating the position of missing holes. These show an arching pattern which matches similar façades of pipes to back and front of organ.

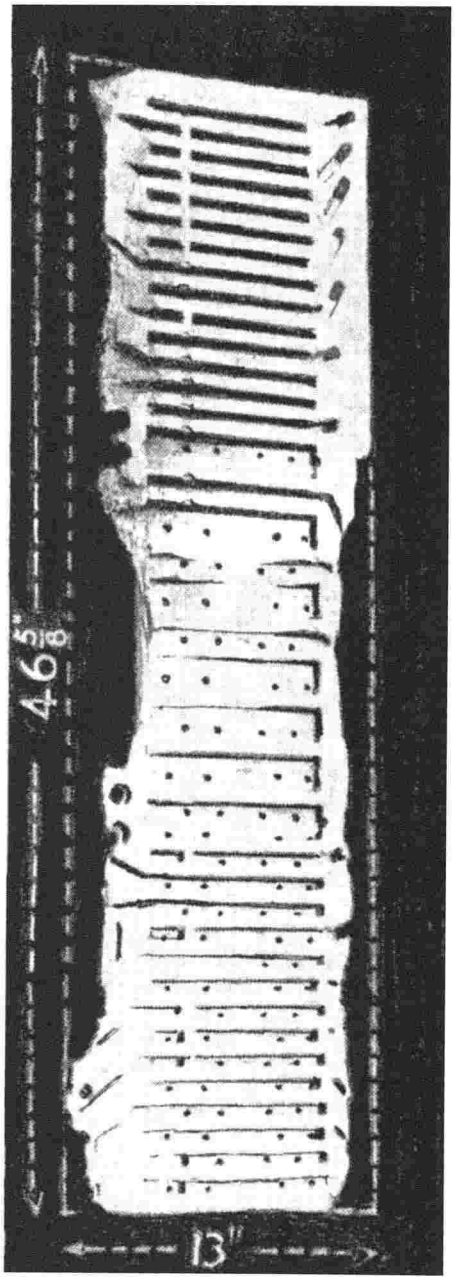

PLATE XXXIII – The underside of the Wingfield soundboard, made from one plank of walnut. The sides are considerably eroded by woodworm.

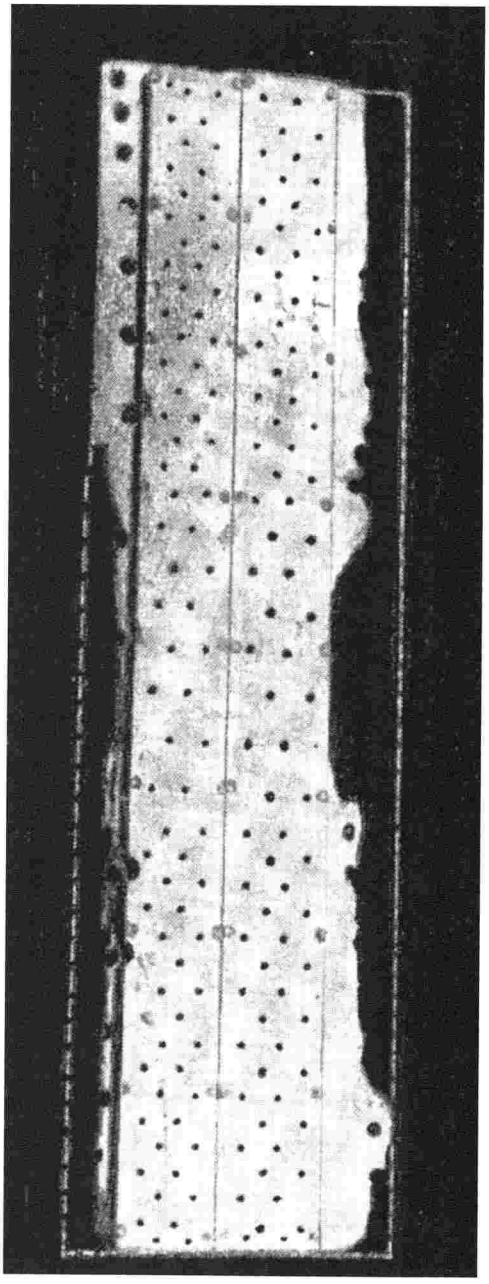

PLATE XXXIV – The upper face of the Wingfield soundboard, showing the two upperboards laid over the lower section, with its much eroded sides.

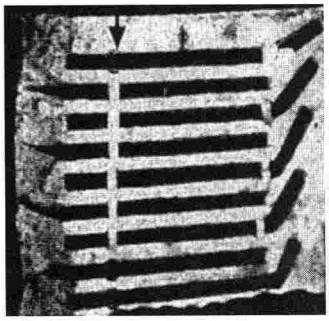

PLATE XXXV – Detail of the underside of one end of the Wingfield soundboard, showing the channels cut into the solid timber. The sloping shoulder on the left side has been caused by woodworm erosion.

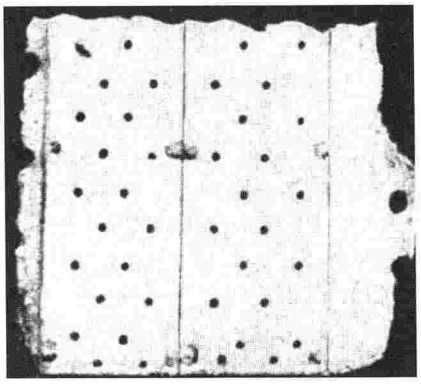

PLATE XXXVI – Detail from the top of the Wingfield soundboard; the two upperboards contain four rows of staggered holes.

dairies, as the windows usually performed this function. Ventilation grills can sometimes be found in fixed food cupboards, built in near chimneys or understairs, where no outside air will reach stored food. Because there was a generally held belief that dairy foods could be contaminated deliberately by witchcraft, pierced grills were sometimes formed in shapes that were thought to be apotropaic.[27] There are also a number of instances where star symbols or clusters of holes representing constellations were used in Suffolk houses to avert evil.[28] These could be painted on a ceiling,[29] impressed in wet daub,[30] inscribed in plaster,[31] drawn with a lighted candle by a specialist using secret scripts,[32] or pierced through the planks of a door.[33] The fact that so many of these finds have been recognised and revealed in the last few years suggests that there may have been a widespread use of star symbols as an apotropaic device, perhaps connected to a contemporary interest in astrology. Although the soundboard's new owner in the 17th century is likely to have known that his acquisition had formerly been used for a practical purpose, might he also have conceived the idea that the random distribution of holes could represent star patterns on a door that would help to protect the foodstuffs in his dairy?

There is another reason why a piece of a church organ may have been used for apotropaic purposes: other articles of ecclesiastical property have been discovered in secret places in buildings, such as the painted boards which have been found in Somerset and Suffolk. A depiction of Christ's head was found nailed to the ceiling in an outbuilding of a cottage in Templecombe (Somerset),[34] and two early 15th-century boards depicting parts of angels holding tournament shields, with the scourges on one, and the vernicle on the other, were found nailed to the underside of rafters in a roof void of Dowsing's Farmhouse, Laxfield, in 1983.[35] In both cases these appear to have been a secret re-use of ecclesiastical material, possibly to frighten away feared forces and protect the household. The reassignment of Bibles and prayerbooks to 'spiritual middens' in a number of Suffolk houses is likely to be a related practice.[36] There are several (perhaps apocryphal) rumours of broken-up organs finding their way into local houses, but this appears to be the first example of this practice to be recognised. Perhaps a combination of two requirements, something coming from ecclesiastical use and also representing pierced star patterns, made the mid-17th-century owner of Meadow Farm prize this soundboard as an evil-averting charm of potent force.

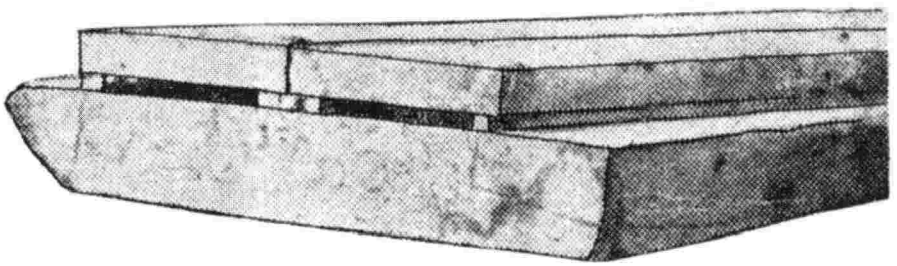

PLATE XXXVII – End view of the Wingfield soundboard with upperboards placed over the lower section of table and grid: compare this also with the drawings, Figs 61, 68 and 69.

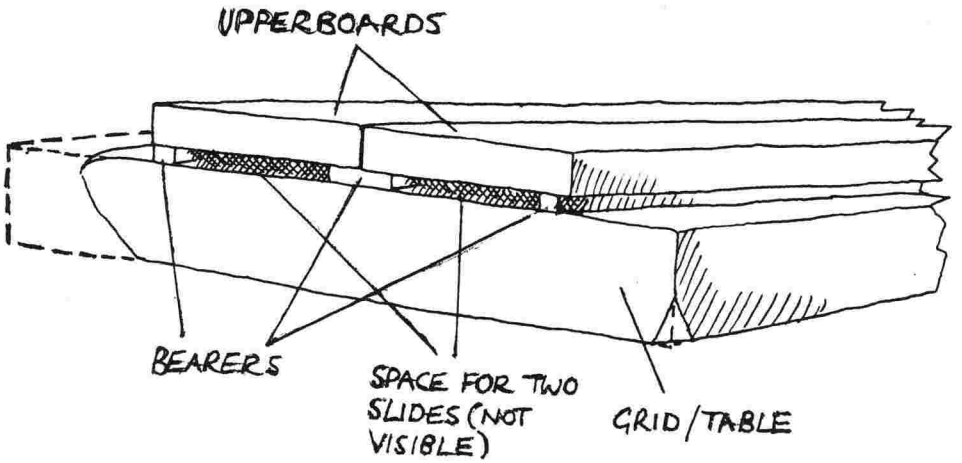

FIG. 68 – Drawing of the end view of the Wingfield soundboard, showing two gaps left between boards; three spacers raise the upperboards above the table and grid. In these gaps are two pairs of moveable slides without dividing bearers.

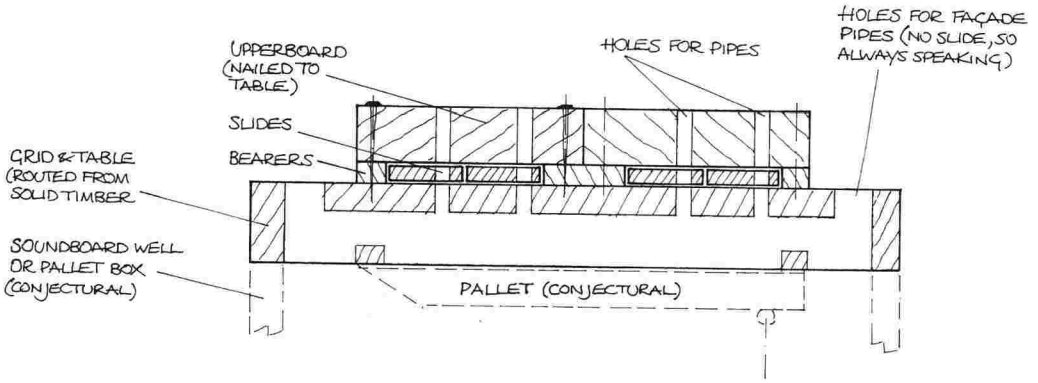

FIG. 69 – End view diagram of the Wingfield soundboard with conjectured pallet box.

FIG. 70 – Frontispiece from Arnold Schlick's *Spiegel der Orgelmacher und Organisten* ('mirror of organ-builders and organists'), published in 1511.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that, after further careful study, culminating in a technical paper in a specialist organ journal, and with the owner's permission, the Wetheringsett soundboard will enter a national collection, to facilitate permanent accessibility.[37] This artefact is of national importance, and despite the large cost of such a project, in time it may be possible to reconstruct a late-medieval organ, based on this fragment from around 1500.

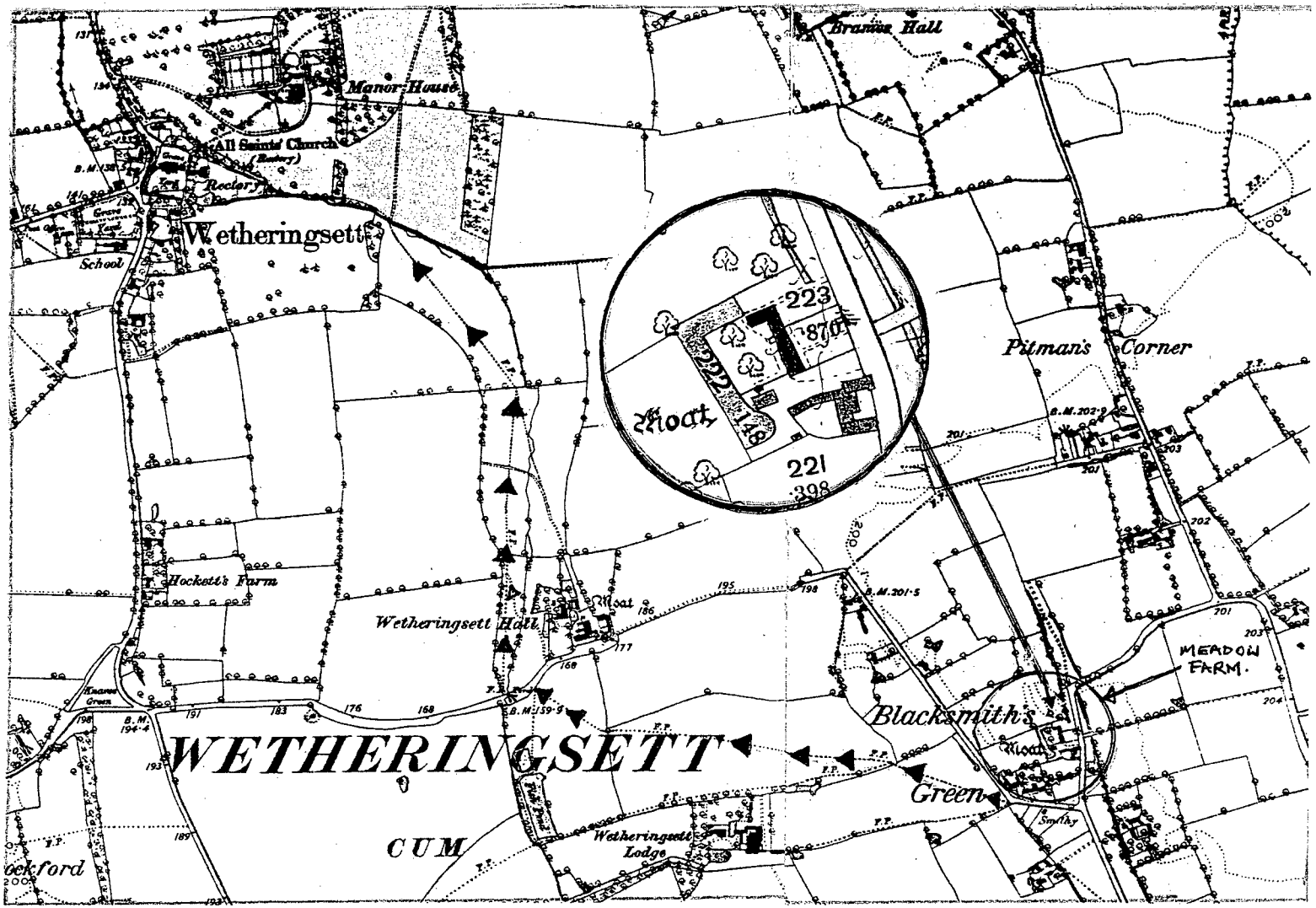

FIG. 71 – Detail from the 1902 edition of the Ordnance Survey map of Wetheringsett. The footpath between Meadow Farm and the church is marked: this may have been the most direct route in the 17th century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Mr and Mrs John Hurdley for the long loan that has made possible the close inspection necessary for this article. Thanks are also due to Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Street, who brought this to our notice initially. We are particularly indebted to Peter Northeast for supplying the extracts from wills relating to gifts made for organs and checking some of the original sources of material quoted by Andrew Freeman. For their helpful advice we would also like to thank Noel Mander, Roger Pulham, Martin Goetze, Dominic Gwynn and Adrian and Helen Gibson. Dr Simon Cotton made available lists of Walberswick bequests. The photographs of the Wingfield soundboard are reproduced by courtesy of Herbert Norman, who has also supplied useful information. Mrs Sheila Kent supplied the information found in the two P.C.C. minute books from Wingfield. The photograph of the West Tofts organ was supplied by Jim Berrow. For supplying the details of the Wrexham parish church organ, thanks are due to Dr Lynn Hulse, and to the Huntington Library, San Marino, U.S.A., for permission to reproduce the reference here.

NOTES

1 When the door was found within the wall, pine lathing and plaster were present on both sides. Close inspection of the residue on the door showed that the front (the underside of the soundboard) had been whitewashed over, including the inside and back of some of the channels. The back of the door had no paint, but was covered with daub infill, and there were 'shadow' lines where horizontal wattle bars had been in place to support an earlier daub infill. The door was photographed with most of its daub deposits in place before they were cleaned off the soundboard. A few holes have been left with the daub inside. Some of the daub was also present on top of the whitewashed side, so it would seem that the holes had always been on show during the time of its use as a door.

2 There is a strong possibility that the high-quality timber was imported *via* one of the Baltic ports from eastern Europe, where more controlled climatic conditions would allow for evenly-growing timber. The widest plank still has part of its sapwood edge, and so should respond to dating by dendrochronology: this should give a clearer idea of a felling-date. The boards might well have been stacked for drying over a two to three-year period. The door-post also retains its bark on one edge, so dating by dendrochronology could help to show when the wall was constructed and the soundboard was converted into a door.

3 There are residual traces of a dark-grey coloured substance over much of the door, and the idea was considered that this might be the residue of glue which affixed the parchment or leather. There are, however, some identical dark grey deposits along one edge of the soundboard which was trimmed back at an angle to fit the rebate of the door. The same colour is present on the upper side of the ledges, but not on the soundboard below, so the conclusion must be that this is a covering of the dark grey pigment so much in use for painting woodwork in early 17th-century Suffolk interiors. See Easton 1986. Scientific analysis of the paint and any glue deposits may help to establish this point in the future.

4 A few records mentioned stars surmounting organs (Coventry, King's College, Cambridge, and Exeter). On 13 May 1620 rotating stars are recorded in the work done on the organ in Dulwich College Chapel as 'making ye conveighaunce for ye starrs turning' (*Musical Times* 1907, p.439). For another example of a mobile on an organ, there is Henry Hastings's observation on the parish church organ in Wrexham: 'the great organs play many sev[er]all notes and one which goeth like the Drum hath the picture of a Sarazins head that jogs up and down as the Organ plaies' (Huntington Library, San Marino, Box 18).

5 An initial thought was that these were made to draw wind away from pipes tending to 'murmur' because of faulty or unsound pallets, but the large number of them is unusual, and so other possible conclusions may have to be advanced.

6 In Suffolk, the 16th-century organ in Framlingham church survived to *c.*1660. It was noted by John Borret in his description of Framlingham church (S.R.O.I., Iveagh MSS. HD 1538/94, Phillipps vol.94). This organ may have continued in use until its replacement by the present Thamar organ in 1708. See MacCulloch and Blatchly 1989, 18–30.

7 Thomas Sharp, *The History of Holy Trinity, Coventry, 1818.* Quoted in Freeman 1921.

8 Notes of Andrew Freeman quoted in Bicknell 1985.

9 Though there may be a nominal link between the speaking length of the largest pipe and the actual length of the soundboard, as suggested here, this rule of thumb may not have been followed consistently. The organs at Barking and Coventry, probably larger with bass pipes 10ft (3.05m) long, would certainly have had larger soundboards than this one.

10 There is an extension to the back of the 16th-century organ case in Old Radnor church, Wales to house the bellows. The bellows for the organ at All Hallows, Barking, by Anthony Duddyngton, were conveyed 'in the loft a Bowff in the seid Quere', separate from the organ.

11 In the organ cases for Magdalen College, Oxford, built by Robert Dallam *c.*1632 and now divided, with part at Tewkesbury Abbey and part at Stanford-on-Avon, a similar scheme of stylised carved foliage and dragons survives, extending early renaissance imagery well into the 17th century. Dallam's case of 1654 for Plestin-les-Grèves, Britanny, now at Lanvellec, is more archaic still, its bucolic mannerist carving overlaid on a purely Gothic timber structure.

12 *Gentleman's Magazine* 83 (1813), 315. Both this source and Suckling 1848 state that this account is for Blythburgh church, but it is almost certainly for St Andrew's, Walberswick, which was a chapelry to Blythburgh. Two sets of churchwardens' accounts survive for Walberswick. The earlier, published, set covers the period 1450–1499 (R.M.W. Lewis, 1947) and the next volume starts in 1543–4. No pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts for Blythburgh are known.

13 In 1500 John Almyngham asked to be buried on the south side of the chancel, just by the desk-side, S.R.O.I., IC/AA2/4/67; Robert Poty 1512, P.C.C. 17 Fetyplace.

14 John Almyngham gave £20 to the church, directing that 'with £10 of the said sum be boute a peyer of organs', S.R.O.I., IC/AA2/4/67.

15 N.R.O., N.C.C. 151 Cage.

16 Suckling 1848, 155–57. Again ascribed to Blythburgh. This reference does not appear in the volume starting in 1543/4. Did this belong to the earlier missing volume, or were there some loose leaves which have gone astray?

17 This is made up of two sums: 13s. 4d. for mending, and 7 nobles and 40d. for dressing the organs. The sum has been calculated at 6s. 8d. for a noble. Dressing the Walberswick organ was done previously, in 1482, at a cost of 2s., and seems to refer either to the finishing-off of the timber parts or to decorative paintwork.

18 As more than one organ could be used for certain sections of the service, it is possible for there to be two organs in different parts of the chancel.

19 From Gardner 1754, 160 (wrongly ascribed to 'Blythburgh'): '1644, April 26th: Rec. of John Trappit with the consent of the paryshners, for 2 bellows, and wooden stofe from the orgens – 6s.8d.'

20 Similar well-known organ galleries still hang in the chapel of St Bartholomew in Salamanca (15th century) and in Roskilde cathedral (15th-16th centuries).

21 From the Wingfield P.C.C. minute book covering 1951. In the minutes of a meeting of the P.C.C. held in the vicarage on Thursday 26 July at 8.00 p.m., there is the following entry, under the heading 'Eliz. organ': 'the vicar [G.H. Dyer] reported on the discovery in the vestry loft of the part of an Elizabethan organ[the Holy Trinity chapel is now used as the vestry]. The council approved sending this to the managing director of William Hill and Son, and Norman and Beard Ltd., organ-builders, for preserving treatment. Signed G.H. Dyer, October 11th 1951'. In another minute book it is recorded that at the Annual Parish Meeting, held in the schoolroom on Tuesday 26 February 1952, at 7.30 p.m.: 'He[the new vicar, K.W. Thornton]also reported the discovery of a fragment of an "Elizabethan" organ, which has been examined by experts including Mr[Herbert] Norman, director of William Hill and Son and Norman and Beard Ltd. He proposed hanging the fragment in the church, together with an account of it by Mr F.C. Eglen, M.I.S.O.B.' Kenneth Thornton signed this record as being correct on 13 April 1954. This is the last reference to it in the P.C.C. minute books. Both minute books are held in the vestry, and were inspected by T. Easton, Mrs Sheila Kent and Ian Chance in November 1994. It seems curious that no record exists, after this initial excitement and interest, of this board being returned to Wingfield or enquired after, particularly after the publication of Eglen's article, which must have been sent to the vicar. Herbert Norman remembers taking the photographs, and is sure he recalls seeing it packed up into one of the firm's green vans for transportation back to Wingfield [conversation between Herbert Norman and Dominic Gwynn, November 1994].

22 Quoted in Hill 1883, 14–15.

23 N.R.O., N.C.C. 150 Typpes.

24 P.R.O., P.C.C. 9 Holgrave.

25 Robert Buxton of Ipswich St Nicholas left instructions in his will, dated 10 July 1490, for the acquisition of a pair of organs for less that £10: 'to the said church [St Nicholas] a pair of organs to be in the church, the purchasers of them to pay 10 marks for the pair, at least [*dumtaxat*], out of the debt that Sir John Wyngfeld owed me' (N.R.O., N.C.C. 33 Typpes). Perhaps William Bradway's bequest should be interpreted as an outright purchase (see also notes 17 and 18 for another £10–£12 organ).

26 The 1517 will of Margaret Father of Debenham (S.R.O.I., IC/AA2/7/183) includes a bequest of 40s. 'to the church of Debenham, to buy a new pair of organs . . .'. In 1520 John Exham of the same town left 26s. 8d. 'to a new pair of organs to be had in Debenham church, to the honour and worship of God' (N.R.O., N.C.C. 103 Robinson or Fedymontt). In 1488 Margery Watyr the elder of Mendlesham left £4 'to the procuring of new organs for Mendlesham' (S.R.O.B., IC500/2/11/388). In the future, dendrochronology may indicate whether the soundboard was made from timber cut around 1500 for Wetheringsett church; ten years earlier for Mendlesham; or twenty years later for Debenham.

27 Pierced grill in the planked wall of a storage cupboard under the staircase in the parlour wing, Bedfield Hall, Suffolk,

dating from the first half of the 17th century. The grill was cut as a Wheel of Fortune with twelve pierced ventilation slots, and is related to six- and three-petalled hexafoil signs more commonly used for apotropaic purposes.

28 This point is illustrated in 'Scribed and painted symbols', by Timothy Easton, in Oliver, forthcoming.

29 Stars are frequently depicted with the sun and moon on painted ceilings and canopies of honour in churches, with the implied reference to heaven and its protection. In Waylands Cottage, Wicks Lane, Forward Green, Stowmarket, stars, sun and moon are painted on the exposed 16th-century boards between the joists on the ceiling of the parlour chamber. In the parlour below, individual crosses are painted around the walls as a protective device, just below the painted ceiling.

30 Dogetts, Stradbroke, has clusters of small holes impressed in a pattern in the 16th-century daub walls of one of the upper chambers. These are not the usual larger holes made to assist the drying of the infill material and to provide a key in the plaster skin. The house was visited by the S.I.A.H. in 1990, and noted in the *Proceedings* vol. XXXVII, pt 3 (1991), 288, as being exceptional for the large range of different forms of protective markings found all over the building.

31 This is the most common situation for groups of solar symbols used for protective magic found around the world. In England these are scribed into plaster, as well as wood and brick, on walls and ceilings in agricultural buildings, to protect the livestock and crops. Stables frequently have them above the horse-stalls, as there was a widespread belief that witches rode the horses by night (the nightmares). Less frequently found in houses, although an early example is inscribed into the painted surface of the 17th-century kitchen at Bedfield Hall. Illustrated in Oliver, forthcoming.

32 Fourteen ceilings have been recorded since 1989 in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, mostly 17th-century in date, that are covered with pictograms drawn with a lighted candle, which may be the work of a specialist 'wise-man' brought in to sanctify a building. Some of the symbols are based on secret scripts, collected by philosophers and astrologers such as Cornelius Agrippa of Cologne, around 1500. The symbols chosen appear to be adaptations of Hebrew letters representing, and arranged as, star patterns. As these ceilings appear in houses, mostly of gentry status, this may give credence to the idea of a specialist being paid to lay out a star map of an important room, perhaps involving the owner's horoscope.

33 A 17th-century door, formerly in the dairy of Hulver Street Farm, Laxfield, was made with two planks pierced with holes. Over both sides of the door are inscribed marks, most of which are recognised as apotropaic symbols. In this instance it can be established that both the pierced holes and the scribed symbols were made by the carpenter on the individual prepared planks before he assembled them into the door. He presumably knew to what use the room would be put before beginning. These holes do appear to have some sort of pattern to them, possibly representing stars, and they were not made by the nails affixing planks to the ledges: these structural nails are still in place and the rust from them has leached into the surrounding wood. The star-pattern-holes are free of rust and are carefully finished.

34 *Western Gazette*, 12 May 1979. The painting was discovered in 1944 or 1945, and is reputed to be 12th-century, but stylistically it is probably more likely to belong to the 15th or early 16th century.

35 From the way the board fragments were nailed to the rafters, they were not adding structural strength or helping to prevent draughts. They are now on display in the museum in part of the Laxfield gildhall.

36 Easton, 'Spiritual middens' in Oliver, forthcoming.

37 The owners of the soundboard have agreed in principle that this would be an ideal solution for the long-term care and protection of the fragment.

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Abbreviations

N.C.C.	Norwich Consistory Court.
N.R.O.	Norfolk Record Office.
P.C.C.	Prerogative Court of Canterbury.
S.R.O.B.	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch.
S.R.O.I.	Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.

ADDENDUM

Since this article was written, the second soundboard has been found at Wingfield. Additional information gained from a detailed examination of it will be presented in a future issue of these *Proceedings*.