

# French treasure on the Isle of Wight

Paul Hale

Enjoying the ferry crossing from Portsmouth to Fishbourne on the Isle of Wight, the traveller soon becomes aware of a group of curious red-brick buildings – complex yet somehow self-effacing – which gradually emerge from the dense trees as one approaches the Island. Doubtless many who wonder what this is are soon distracted by the prospect of a few days break in that delightful ‘back to the 1950s’ refuge which is The Island. But for those who determine to seek out this place, a wonderful surprise awaits them as they turn down a leafy drive and find themselves approaching Quarr Abbey.

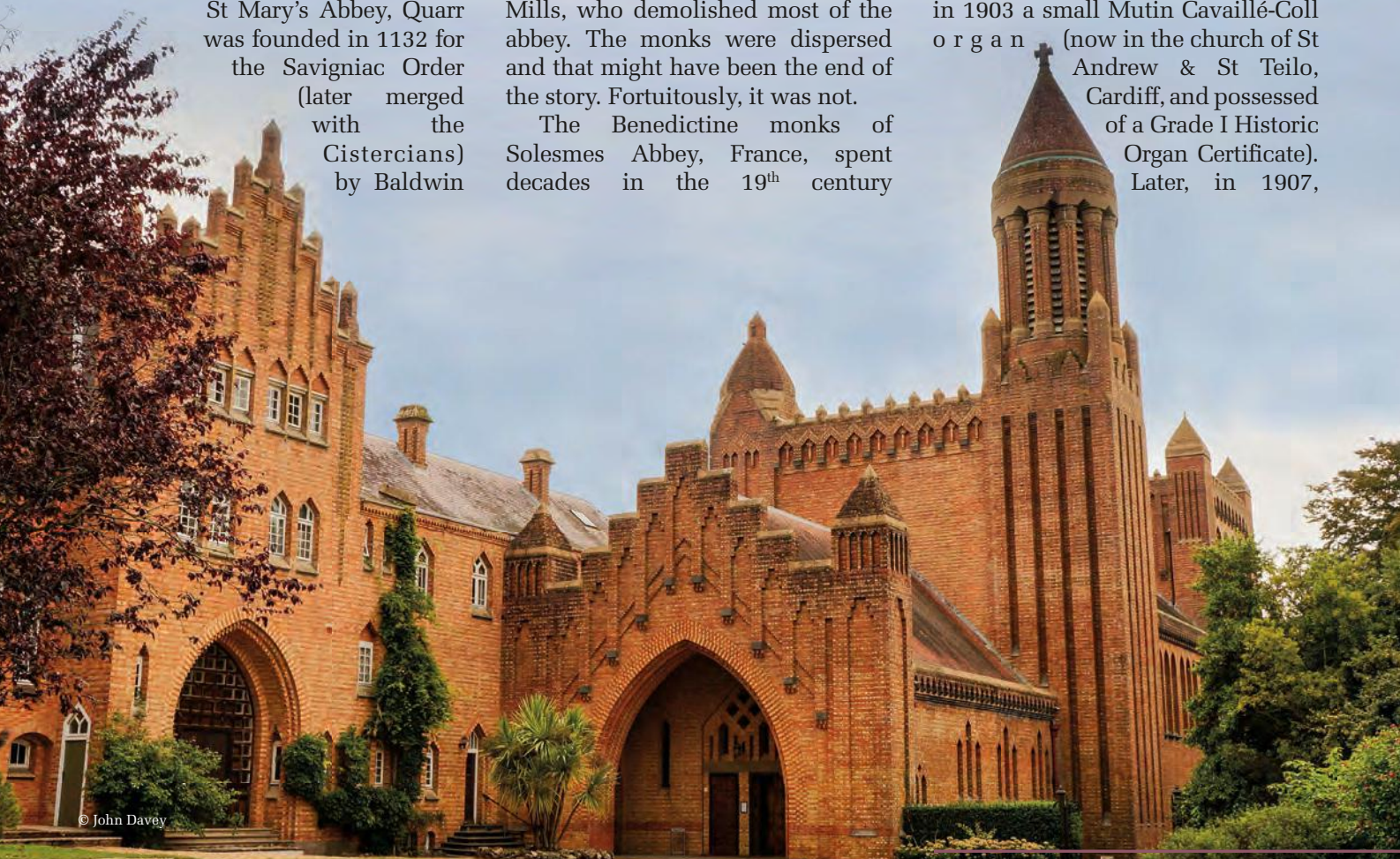
St Mary’s Abbey, Quarr was founded in 1132 for the Savigniac Order (later merged with the Cistercians) by Baldwin

de Redvers, First Earl of Devon and Fourth Lord of the Isle of Wight. His remains, along with those of Princess Cecily of York (d.1507), second daughter of Edward IV and godmother of Henry VIII, still lie on the site of the mediæval monastery. The name Quarr comes from ‘quarry’: stone from this quarry was used in the Middle Ages for both ecclesiastical and military buildings, including parts of the Tower of London. After the Monastery was dissolved in 1536 (the year in which the Dissolution of the Monasteries began, the smaller houses such as Quarr falling first), the land was acquired by a Southampton merchant, George Mills, who demolished most of the abbey. The monks were dispersed and that might have been the end of the story. Fortuitously, it was not.

The Benedictine monks of Solesmes Abbey, France, spent decades in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

researching and reconstructing plainchant and the liturgies of the Church, which ultimately led to Pope Pius X’s *Encyclical* on sacred music of 1903, *motu proprio*, which aimed to rid the church of ‘profane’ music. However, following the election of the French Third Republic’s anti-clerical government, a law was passed which banned religious orders, except by special dispensation. As a precaution, Abbot Paul Delatte of Solesmes (1848–1937) sent a monk to England to seek out a house to shelter the community. He chose Appuldurcombe House on the Isle of Wight (now a ruin) where the community moved in 1901, buying in 1903 a small Mutin Cavaillé-Coll organ (now in the church of St

Andrew & St Teilo, Cardiff, and possessed of a Grade I Historic Organ Certificate). Later, in 1907,



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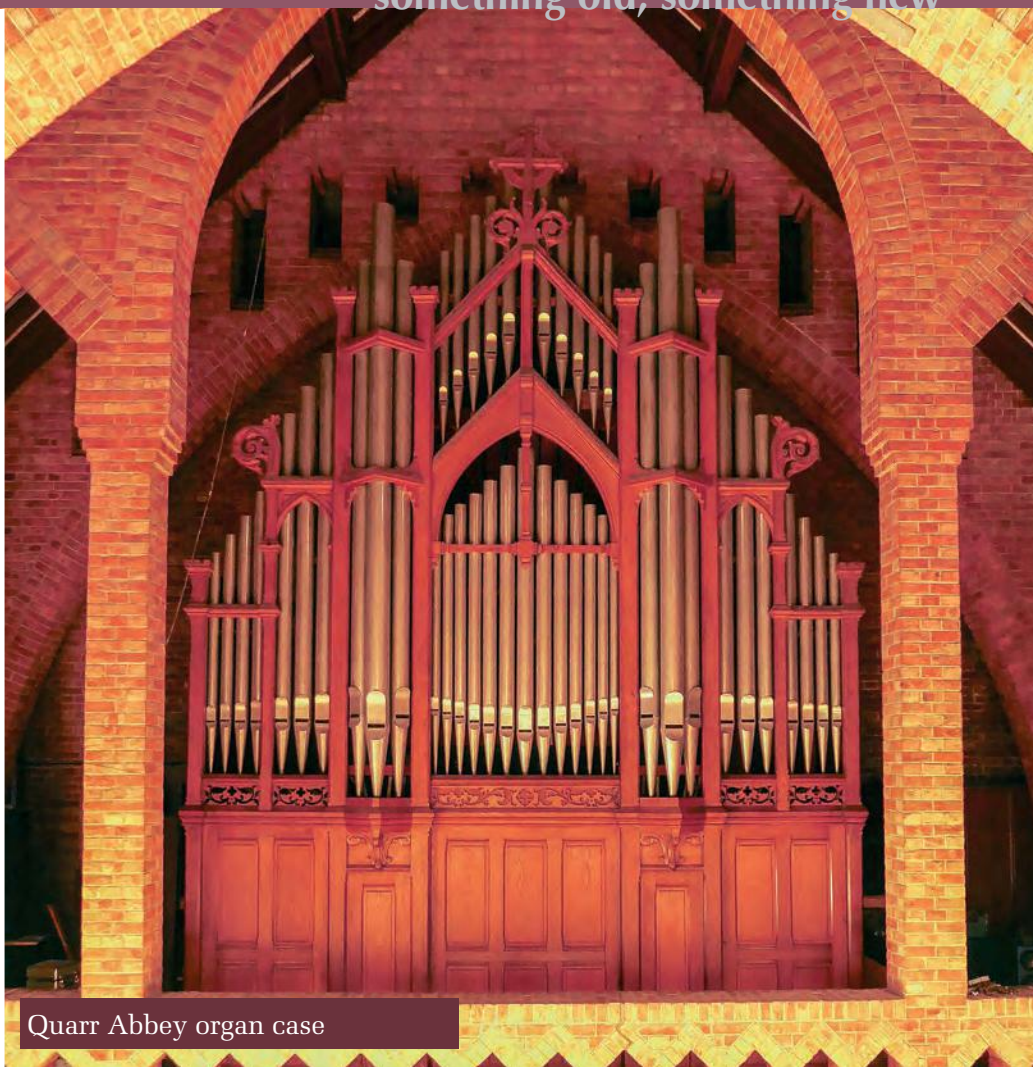








Concertina trunk



Quarr Abbey organ case

stalls. Materials were gathered and stored, but the plan was eventually abandoned.

The Mutin Cavaillé-Coll might have been lost, but fortuitous circumstances came to its aid. Adrian Mumford takes up the tale:

*'Interest in restoring the organ started with the election of Dom Xavier Perrin as Prior (now Abbot and himself an organist) and the appointment of visiting Titular Organist, Hamish Dustagheer (now Maestro di Cappella at St John's Co-Cathedral, Malta). My first visit was in early 2013 when the organ was coaxed into action, but it was mechanically unreliable with a copiously leaking wind system and choked with dust. Inspection of the interior presented a sorry sight, not least wiring and wind conveyancing solutions worthy of Heath Robinson.*

*Nevertheless, it was clear that a significant proportion of the Mutin Cavaillé-Coll organ was extant, not least the pipework, soundboards, wind reservoir, case and panelling, and much of the console. There was*

*interest in reviving the instrument and bringing it back into regular use, so I was invited to prepare a report which then formed the basis of an invitation to tender.*

*In as many aspects as possible, the underlying philosophy was to seek to restore (or recreate) the organ to how it would have looked, sounded and been operated a century earlier. No work would be undertaken that moved further away from the original conception.*

*After due process, Andrew Cooper was appointed to undertake the work. Very much the local organ-builder, Andrew recognised the historical importance of the instrument and was also keen to seek to return it, as far as practicable, to its original condition.'*

Adrian's thorough assessment of the instrument revealed many aspects where major decisions had to be made, starting with the pipework.

Mercifully, much of the pipework was readily restorable, though the *Récit* Flûte Octaviane had been radically altered, removing its

## Specification

### GRANDE ORGUE

Bourdon	16
Montre	8
Bourdon	8
Flûte Harmonique (enclosed)	8
Salicional (enclosed)	8
Prestant	4

### RÉCIT

Diapason	8
Cor de Nuit	8
Viole de Gambe	8
Vox Céleste	8
Flûte Octaviane	4
Plein Jeu	III
Basson	16
Trompette Harmonique	8
Basson Hautbois	8

### PÉDALE

Contra Bass (stopped with helpers)	16
Soubasse (fr. GO Bourdon 16)	16
Bass Ouverte (fr. GO Flûte H. 8)	8
Bourdon (fr. <i>Récit</i> Cor de Nuit)	8
Trombone (fr. <i>Récit</i> Basson)	16
Tirasse <i>Récit</i>	
Tirasse <i>Grand Orgue</i>	
<i>Récit</i> to <i>Grand Orgue</i>	
<i>Récit</i> to <i>Grand Orgue</i> , Octaves Graves	
Ventil	
Expression pedal	

#### notes:

1) the knobs could be turned to set 'on' or 'off' for 'Appel' and 'Renvoi' pedals [no longer].

2) the *Grand Orgue* had a Barker-lever machine, through which the *Récit* coupled [no longer].





Enclosed pipework, with new *Plein Jeu* visible

harmonic overlength, so needed remaking to return to it the striking treble-ascendant harmonic trebles which are the glory of these Cavaillé-Coll stops. The *Plein Jeu* had been altered at each rebuild; by 2006 it was reduced to single orphaned rank. Correspondence from Bonnet shows that he was not satisfied with the composition of the stop from the start. Research was undertaken by studying the upperboards and rackboards to see what they would reveal about the original composition, and at the same time a study of other examples of a Mutin Cavaillé-Coll *Récit* *Plein Jeu* was

made. Eventually a composition was decided upon (using Cavaillé-Coll pipe scales) which, whilst not exactly as made in 1912, was near to that, consonant with the company's regular practice and musically satisfactory.

Next, the action had to be addressed. To return to mechanical action and build a new Barker machine, or to stick with electro-pneumatic action? In the event, pragmatism and cost played their part, and Mander's well-made and responsive electro-pneumatic note action was retained, fully restored and with a new control system,



Restored *Récit* reeds on the left

naturally. The 1995 electric swell shutter machine was removed, the mechanical linkages remade and two missing shutters located and re-installed. In addition, as sufficient of the original mechanical stop-action remained for a reconstruction not to be hypothetical, this route has been followed.

Remaking the mechanical stop action meant rebuilding the original console once again. Although Mander had left it alone and built his console on the other side (south) of the organ, the original console had suffered questionable alterations. Consultant Canon Mumford and organbuilder Andrew Cooper were determined thoroughly to research and re-create a Mutin Cavaillé-Coll console, so trips were made to similar sized instruments in original condition, photographs and measurements were taken, and the Quarr console was remade in the correct style – right down to the appropriate labelling of the new coupler and ventiler pedals. A similar 1912 Mutin Cavaillé-Coll organ in Highlands College, Jersey, proved an invaluable source of information and the new straight/flat pedalboard is copied from that organ. The manual keys were considered beyond redemption, so





Récit stop knobs above inlaid nameplate

the ivories were removed, sanded and buffed, worn or cracked plates were replaced with better matches from reclaimed stock and all were then glued to completely new keys with tracker touch, made by P&S of Brandon as a copy of Mutin Cavaillé-Coll originals.

The wind supply was found to be unsatisfactory, partly owing to the manner in which an electric blower had been installed. Once the beautiful concertina trunks had been painstakingly restored (they had been stored in the blower room when replaced with flexible

connections) and the blower more efficiently routed to the organ, all was well once again. The two slider soundboards – beautifully made – remained in generally sound condition, other than their pallets needing recovering. A new rackboard was made for the new Plein Jeu; new rackboards and stays were manufactured for the reed stops. The timber selected was Albizia to match the materials used by Mutin Cavaillé-Coll. The casework was cleaned and waxed and left quietly glowing in its subdued, slightly yellow elevated west-end lighting.

As a result of this meticulously researched and executed work, an extremely rare and special U.K. example of the work of the house of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (even though made 13 years after his death) has been saved and restored. As Adrian Mumford writes: *‘the restoration has brought back to life a distinctively French-flavoured instrument with an extraordinarily rich colour palette that once again serves the needs of the Benedictine community’s daily cycle of worship from the simply contemplative to the majestically ceremonial’*.



**Paul Hale is a professional organ consultant, recitalist and choral conductor.**

Whilst Organ Scholar of New College, Oxford (1971–4), Paul Hale began to write about the organ – his first published piece was in *Organists’ Review*, of which he was later to become Reviews Editor and then Editor (1990–2005). A noted recitalist, lecturer and choir trainer, Paul is well-known in the UK, in Europe and in the USA. As well as being an Organ Adviser for the Dioceses of Southwell and Lincoln, Paul is an accredited member of the AIOA and has designed many new and restored organs throughout the UK. He is a diploma examiner for the RCO, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM for his contribution to church music, along with the Thomas Cramer Award presented to him by the Archbishop of Canterbury. More information is available at [www.PaulHale.org](http://www.PaulHale.org)