



▲ Dominic Gwynn in the Welbeck workshop

# Work in progress

**Paul Hale** visits Martin Goetze and Dominic Gwynn Ltd, Organ Builders & Restorers, at Welbeck, Nottinghamshire. WORKSHOP PHOTOS COURTESY PAUL HALE

**N**ottinghamshire is a county known best for a famous figure who almost certainly never existed – Robin Hood – and for Sherwood Forest, which has almost entirely disappeared, swallowed up by centuries of naval ship-building. It is a county often passed through, by train or motor-car, by those travelling north or those travelling south. At first glance there is not much to detain the traveller; but it was not always so. A spine road (now the A614) runs through an

area in the county known as ‘The Dukeries’. Either side of this major artery were four ducal seats: Worksop Manor (a home of the Dukes of Norfolk), Clumber House (seat of the Dukes of Newcastle), Thoresby Hall (seat of the Dukes of Kingston and then of the Earls Manvers) and Welbeck Abbey (seat of the Dukes of Portland). Not far away are Rufford Abbey (seat of the Lords Savile) and Newstead Abbey (home, from 1540, of the Byron family, Lord Byron being the last to live

there). All came to derive enormous wealth from the coal which, conveniently, was found beneath their estates.

It is Welbeck which concerns us. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-41), the Abbey buildings were reconstructed as a great house and sold in 1607 to Sir Charles Cavendish, son of Elizabethan socialite Bess of Hardwick. It passed to his son William Cavendish, later first Duke of Newcastle, whose family seat it became. In the 18th

century, it came into the Bentinck family and became the seat of the Earls and Dukes of Portland. Following a period serving for the army as Welbeck College, the member of the family currently owning the estate and living there is William Parente, who has served as High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire. The Welbeck Estates Company and its associated charitable Harley Foundation (founded by Ivy, Duchess of Portland, in 1978 'to encourage creativity in all of us') converted many estate buildings for new uses

in 1985, relocating to a larger workshop in 2003. But how and why did they begin? As a pupil at Christ's Hospital, Horsham, Dominic had a Damascene moment during a trip organised by Nicholas Plumley to visit historic organs in the Netherlands. Smitten by the Schnitger at Zwolle, and intrigued by visits to the workshops of Flentrop and Van Vulpen, Dominic determined (after reading for a degree in Modern History at St John's College, Oxford) to become an organ builder, specialising in the study and

to work for a couple of years with Gabriel Kney in London, Ontario, to learn to make organs efficiently. Also with GDB was Edward Bennett, who had studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and was interested more in new modern organs than in historical models. Edward, too, sought further experience abroad, working with the Austrian firm Hradetzky, who were employed at the time to help Ronald Sharp complete his vast instrument in the Sydney Opera House.

Leaving Bruggencate in 1980, Dominic set up the firm with Martin, who had returned from Canada. Their initial work was for early music groups, Opus 1 being a continuo organ (complete with a Regal stop) for the Consort of Music. Edward joined them as a third partner in 1985 as they moved to Welbeck. The three partners soon attracted other craftspeople, attracted by their ethos, which was very much in tune with the times and coincided with the launch of the British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS), with its devotion to the conservation of the traditional British organ.

Their stated aim ever since then has been to make 'English classical organs' and 'to work with a small team of committed organ builders, flexible and with a complete range of skills, built around the permanent input of the skills and experience of the three directors.' Their goal was, in Martin's words,

**'Martin was excited by the sheer variety of organs in this world, and we have tried to recapture that by collecting the technical details of each project we have worked on' – Dominic Gwynn**

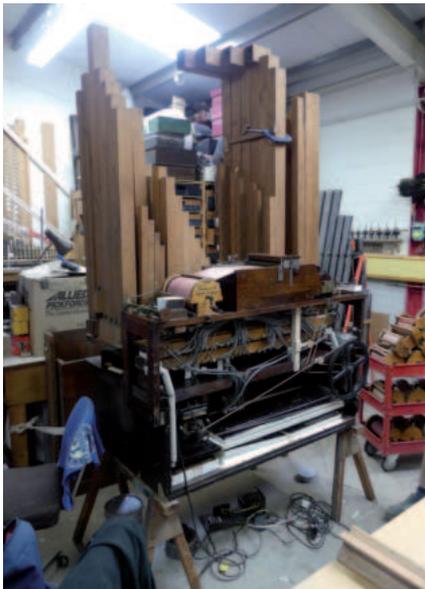
and established a series of craft workshops, mainly in convenient new buildings of imaginative design by John Outram.

Among the craftspeople who found a welcoming home in these relatively inexpensive premises were two keen young organ builders, Dominic Gwynn and Martin Goetze, soon joined by their near contemporary Edward Bennett. Having started in a small way in 1980 in Northampton, the firm moved to Welbeck

reproduction of historic instruments. He started out in Northampton in 1976, learning the craft under Hendrik ten Bruggencate, who had trained with Metzler in Zürich and set up by himself, having worked for a period with Grant, Degens and Bradbeer (by that time sharing the spacious and well-equipped factory of Davies of Northampton). Meanwhile, his soon-to-be partner, Martin Goetze, who had been with GDB and Bruggencate since 1971, moved to Canada

▼ Early days: (from left) Martin Goetze, Dominic Gwynn and Edward Bennett aimed to 'make new organs in historic styles, and restorations to museum standards'





▲ (clockwise, from top left) The motor driving the Orchestrion's player mechanisms; Joe Marsden demonstrates the player mechanism; Dominic Gwynn tries an Orchestrion pipe; new conveyances and leathering; the wooden pipework of the Orchestrion

'making new organs in historic styles, and restorations to museum standards.'

The directors share responsibility for the design, supervision and finishing of each organ, one taking the lead on a particular project. Between 1985 and 2003 they benefited particularly from the experience and advice of their neighbours, Derek Adlam (formerly of Finchcocks), described by Dominic as the 'doyen of early keyboard instrument makers', and Bernd Fischer, one of the finest craftsmen in this field. Many of their restoration contracts have been part-funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (the large St James's Bermondsey organ, in 2002, to the tune of 90 per cent). Their very particular corner of the organ world is such that over the years little competition has come from other UK firms; whether projects come to pass is dependent much more on funding.

The Goetze, Gwynn and Bennett partnership lasted 35 years, before Martin

Goetze, after a long and valiant struggle, succumbed to cancer in 2015. His loss, as a person and as an organ builder and teacher, is keenly felt. After his death, Dominic wrote, 'Martin was a supreme craftsman. He had that combination of curiosity, knowledge, dexterity and amazing persistence needed to produce a good result. I doubt if any organ builder in the world could have designed and produced the whole instrument to the standard that Martin could. Our firm has completed over 100 organs, new and restorations. Their quality would not have been so high without Martin's contribution and direction.'

Over 40 years, Goetze & Gwynn have helped in the training of some 20 keen young organ builders, 12 from outside the UK. Indeed, the training and inspiring of the next generation[s] of organ builders was something about which Martin felt passionately, working as president of the

Institute of British Organ Building (IBO) towards setting up a national in-service training scheme for organ builders, soon to come to pass.

How is G&G different from other UK organ builders? Although they make every component of an organ except for the blower, that is not unique among the country's 'craft' firms. What is probably unique to them is the 'Dominic factor'. A professional historian in his very bones, Dominic Gwynn researches in minute detail the history of any organ coming for restoration, and researches in similar detail the instrument which is to be the inspiration for every new organ they make. Thus, there is no 'house style', every new organ being inspired by a model or a specific historic instrument, and with every restored organ having its essential original character retained or rediscovered. Dominic's research finds an additional outlet in the Harley Monographs – no fewer than 50

## GOETZE & GWYNN

◀ detailed technical reports on organs based on his researches, with immaculate drawings by Martin, who was a long-time member of what is now called the International Institute for Conservation. Martin wrote of the start of his interest in historic organs: ‘My interest in old organs stems from a busman’s holiday to see Polish organs in 1976 [with Edward Bennett]. It was fascinating and exciting to see so many weird organs in ruins, and some that had been documented and restored.’ Dominic comments: ‘What excited him after that visit was the sheer variety of organs in this world, and it is what we have tried to recapture by collecting the technical details of each project we have worked on.’ Dominic’s and Martin’s interest in historic restoration and conservation led the company to work for the National Trust, the Royal Collection, and for a number of other collections and museums.

Of their recent projects, the most eye-catching is the new instrument they built

during 2017 for the Public Theatre at Trinity College, Dublin. This organ sits within one of the most visually and historically remarkable painted organ cases imaginable, the Great case dating from 1684, a precious survivor of the work of Lancelot Pease. The Chaire case, dating from 1705, is by John Baptist Cuvillie (who had worked with Renatus Harris). The new organ is typical of their approach in that it was scrupulously researched and based on a relevant model – in this case the 1702 organ built by Harris for St Botolph, Aldgate, in the City of London. The original Dublin case pipes survive and were used as the basis for the pipe scales. As usual, their team made everything, to Dominic’s design: Nick Hagen (joined in 2008) reconstructed the case; the metal pipes were made by Joe Marsden (who has been with G&G since leaving school locally in 2009); Chris Davies (with the firm since 2016) made the keys and the wooden pipes; Edward Bennett made

the soundboards and the mechanism. The reeds were voiced by Abigail Balfour-Rowley (with the firm since 2013) and her husband, Rob, who is Harrison-trained. Emma Hagen (administrator from 2009) is the other member of the current team.

Because they needed more height for taller organs, Goetze & Gwynn moved from their first Welbeck workshops to their current two spacious and lofty workshops just 100 yards away. Here they have plenty of floor space, height and light, the workshops being augmented by an upstairs office and a capacious L-shaped timber store and mill where it is a joy to see planks of oak, pine and many other fine woods awaiting their day in an organ.

Their current work embraces, as usual, restorations and a new organ. A ‘first’ for them is the restoration of an Orchestrion. This instrument was made by Fidel Heine, in Vöhrenbach near Baden in 1862, according

▼ (clockwise, from top left) Edward Bennett drilling the holes for the soundboard of the new Positiv; Chris Davies racks in pipes for the Positiv; the casework of the Positiv in the main workshop; the compact wind system of the Positiv; Dominic Gwynn assembles Regal pipes for the Positiv

