

Restoration report Positive Organ Antonio Pilucchi



oldest available picture (about 1930, Paris)



the organ after second restoration phase in 2004

We bought the small organ at Sotheby's New York auction in the fall of 1976, catalogue nr 15, described as:



■ 15 POSITIVE ORGAN

ITALIAN, POSSIBLY MID-18TH CENTURY

The painted wood case with two doors, the interiors with tooled, gilt and polychrome leather panels, the three and a half octave keyboard, EE to c³, with arcaded boxwood naturals and ebony accidentals, the single rank of pipes with hand operated bellows at the rear.

Length 29¾ inches (75.5 cm.); width 37 inches (94 cm.)

See illustration

This description was obviously wrong, the compass is C-c³ with bass short octave, and at that time contained 3 ranks of pipes. As may be seen in the Catalogue, the table that was under the organ in the earlier picture was no longer present (this table cannot be original, since the organ originally was connected to a pull down pedal board for the bass short octave).

The organ after arrival contained 3 stops:

- principal 4', with stopped wooden bass octave, lowest note (should have been C) situated below the bottom of the wind chest was replaced by a stopped wooden pipe that seems have been previously used in a barrel organ.
- Fifth 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ ', c-c''''
- Double octave 1'

The 7 original bass pipes (D, E, F, G, A, B, H – evidently a short octave) had not-original hats, designed to lower the pitch of some of these to accommodate a pitch of A=440. Completed with the non-original E pipe these were re-used to accommodate a range of E, F, F#, G, G#, A, B, H.

All other pipes were not original and too long for the original pitch of A=464 (estimated from the original bass pipes and the common pitch of all organs from the period 1770-1820 in the region of Florence).

The organ was covered in dark brown oil paint over the remains of what seemed early paint with animal glue and chalk.



the front of the organ closed,



back with bellows connected by later wooden frame



front with desk closed and -



- open (evidently a later change, cut from the front board).



strip cut off shutter and connected to front



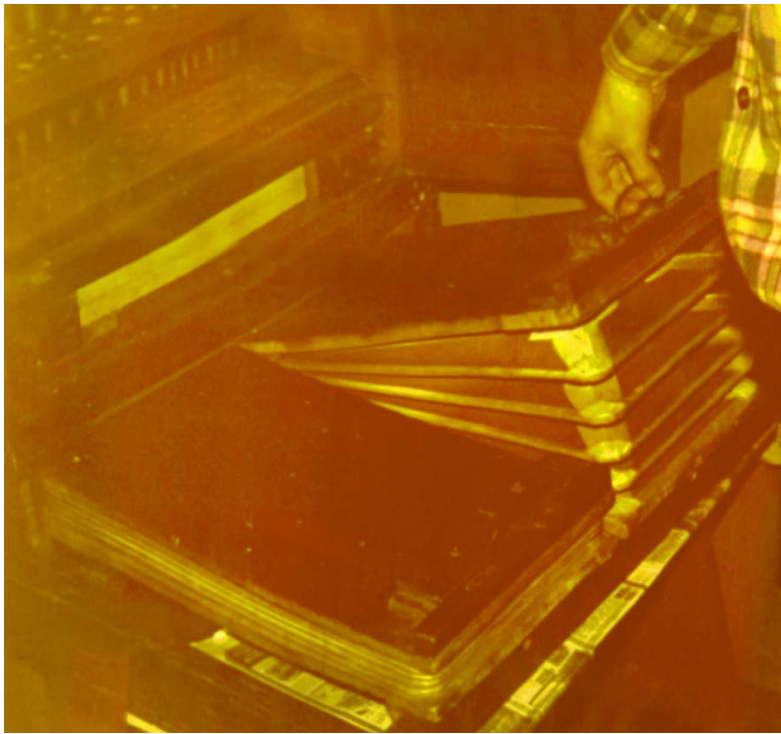
side: only 3 register pulls and re-positioned handle



Top decoration, partly damaged and crudely restored



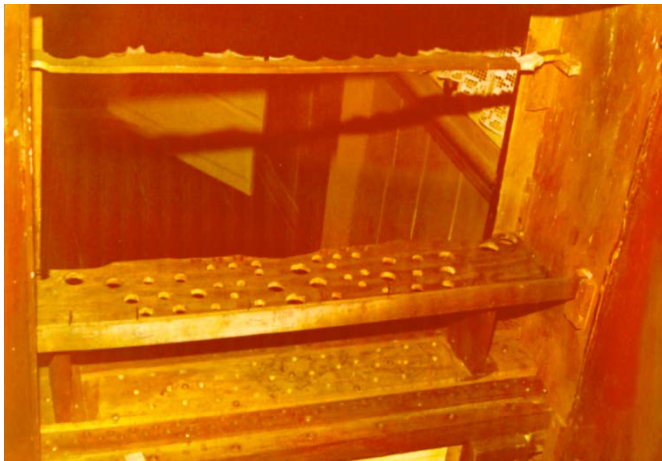
keyboard and detail of music desk, later construction cut out of front board



Bellows seem original, some leaks to be covered with leather



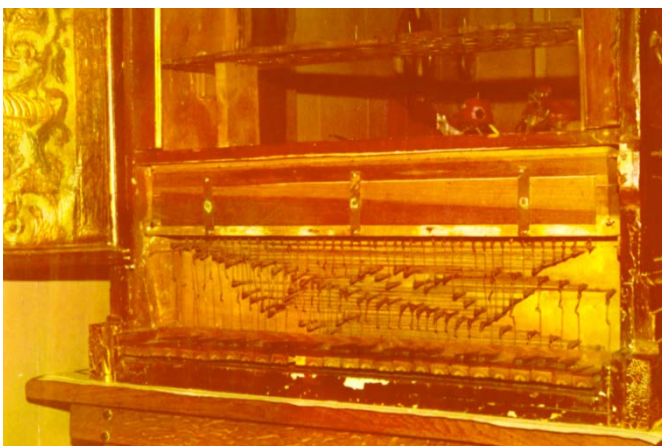
front pipes and rack boards viewed from back



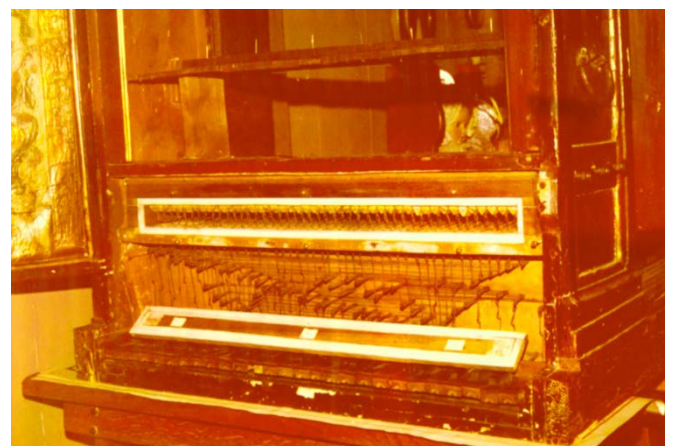
rack boards not original, build for 3 rank state, viewed from back -



- and from front side



rollerboard, with closed (left) -



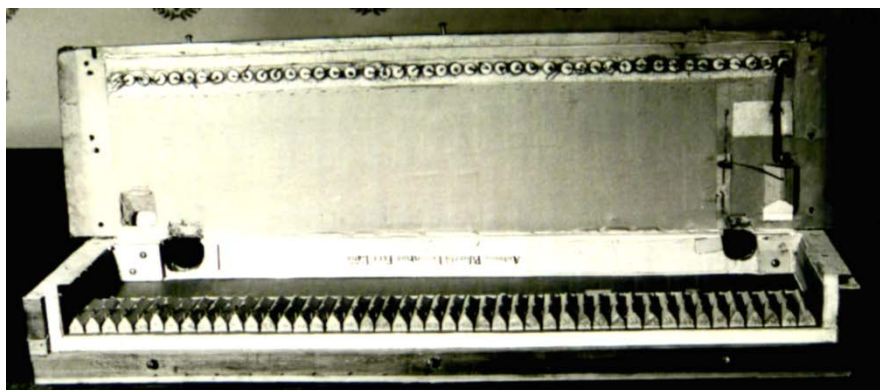
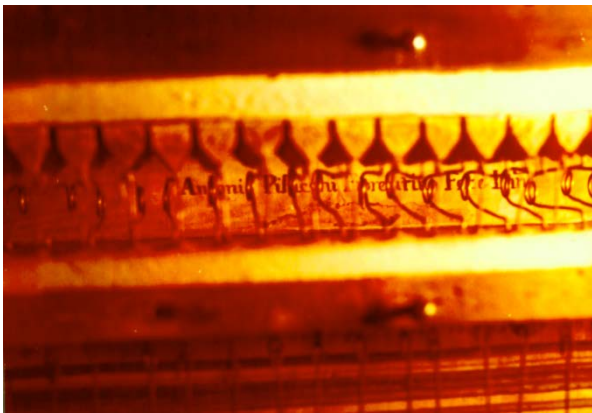
- and open (right) wind chest



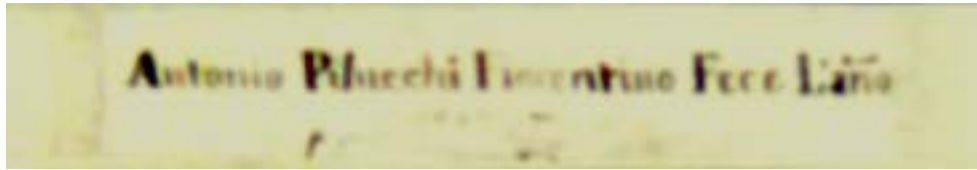
back of roller board, with indication "27"



open wind chest descant



wind chest with signature (date not preserved)



Signature: Antonio Pilucchi Fiorentino Fece L'anno

We know that Antonio Maria Gaspero Pilucchi worked on Church Organs in and around Florence:

Year	attività	organ in church:	location:
1791	"intervention"	S Andrea	Pestigliano
1793	"intervention"	S Maria a Pontanico	Firenze
1795	"intervention"	S Maria Primarana	Fiesole
1809	"intervention"	S Caterina	Firenze
1810	"intervention"	S Gervasio e Protasio	Firenze

He was baptized in 1750 in the parish of S. Frediano, Firenze (archival research Renzo Giorgetti), he was also known as a "clock maker", and worked in/for the Museum in Florence:

"Record of the dates on which books, tools and other materials are temporarily taken from the Museum by the Director, by the Prefect of the Botanical Garden, etc., with an indication, in some cases, of repayment, date June 21-26 December 1782:

....

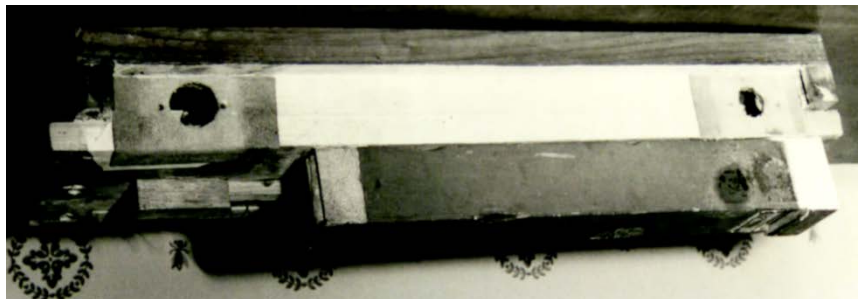
Pilucchi, Antonio, clock maker, [Real Gallery], receiver borrowed from the Real Museum "Viennese Shells" to copy some (?) to his work.

...

Received payment work on the machine of "anemoscope" (?).

...

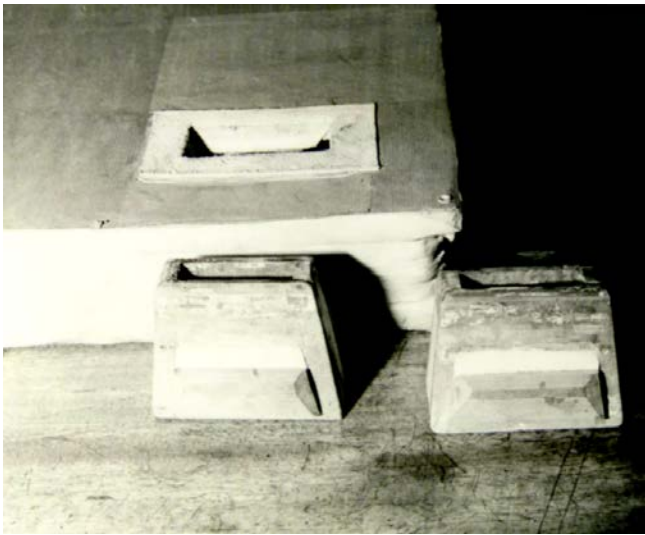
Accounts for bits for brass parts invoice to a marble pillar that sustains a balance, to remake some pieces to the car "traslet", to work for a "horizontal" thermometer, ("mercury level machine")." (translation Gerrit van der Veer)



wind chest with lowest pipe (a non original E probably from a barrel organ)



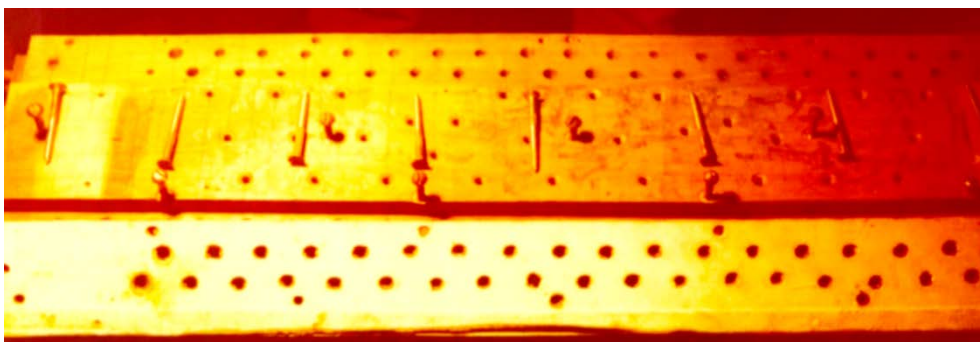
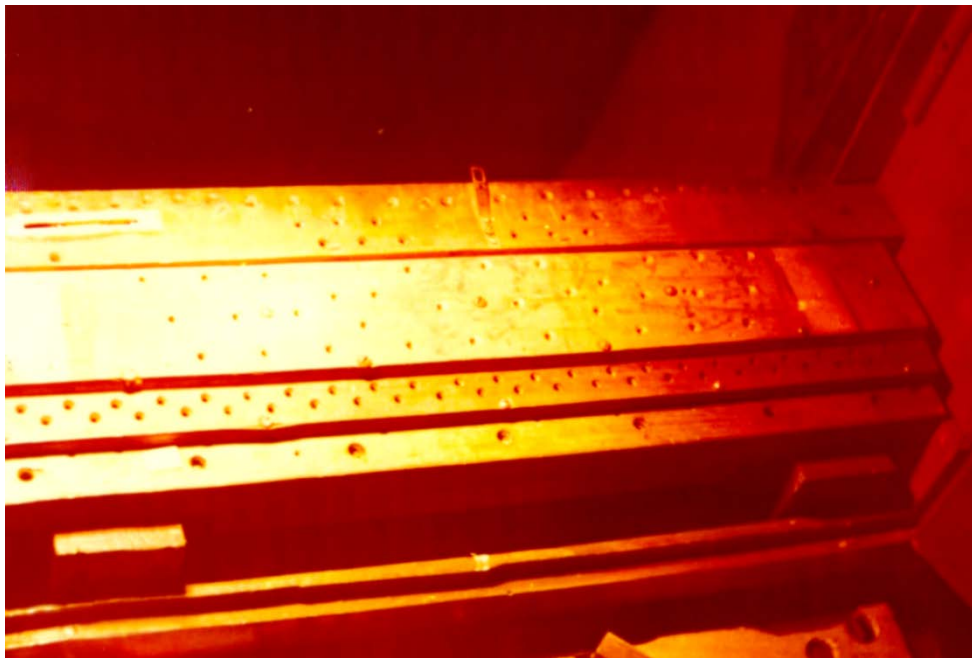
keyboard with and without batters



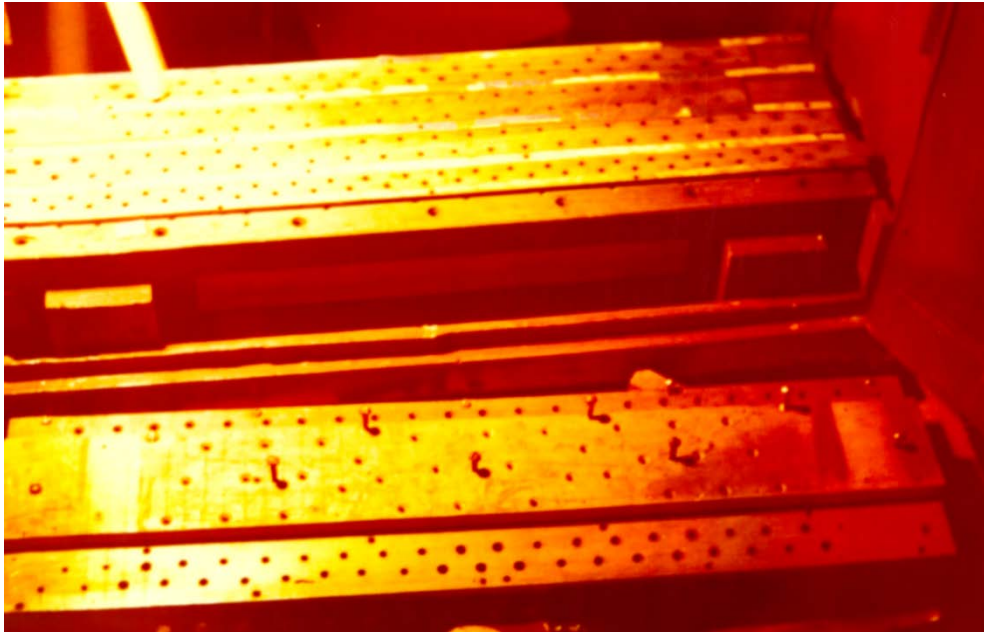
original valves of the bellows



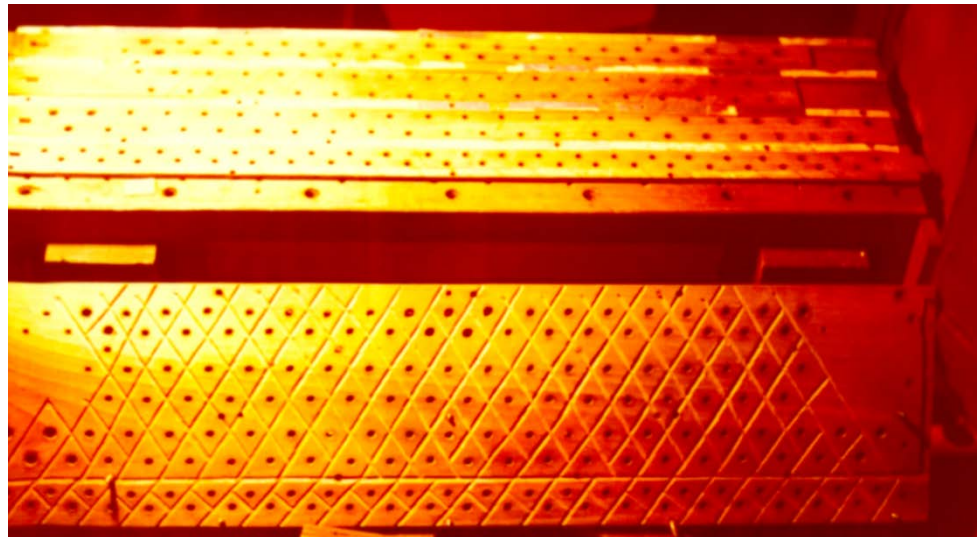
bass short octave keys with original pedal attachment (only C, D, E, F, G, A, B, H)



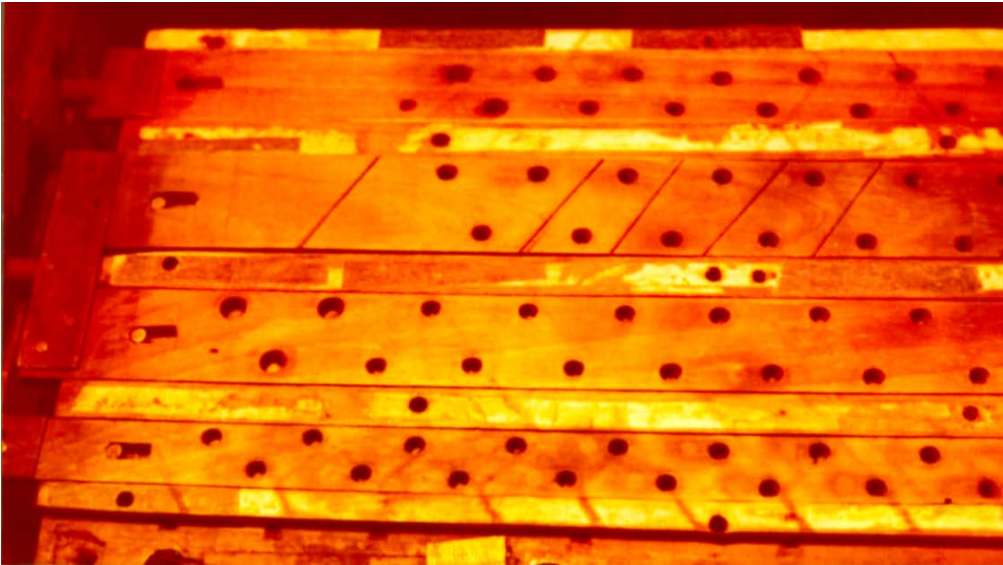
toe board with later added top for (non original) fifth $2\frac{2}{3}'$



toe board removed to view sliders

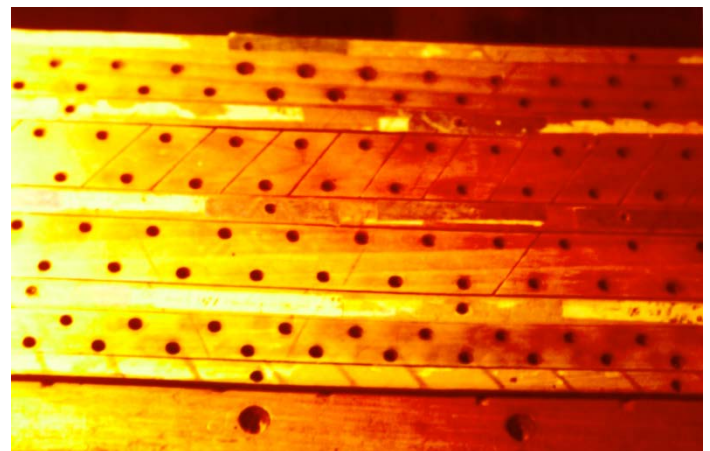
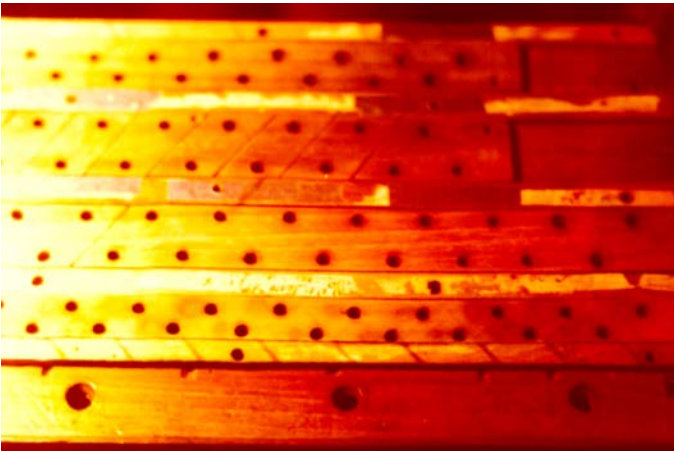


toe board turned upside down to show original holes are well preserved



sliders in place, showing original octave 2' and fifth 1½' combined to new fifth 2¾'

sliders bass side



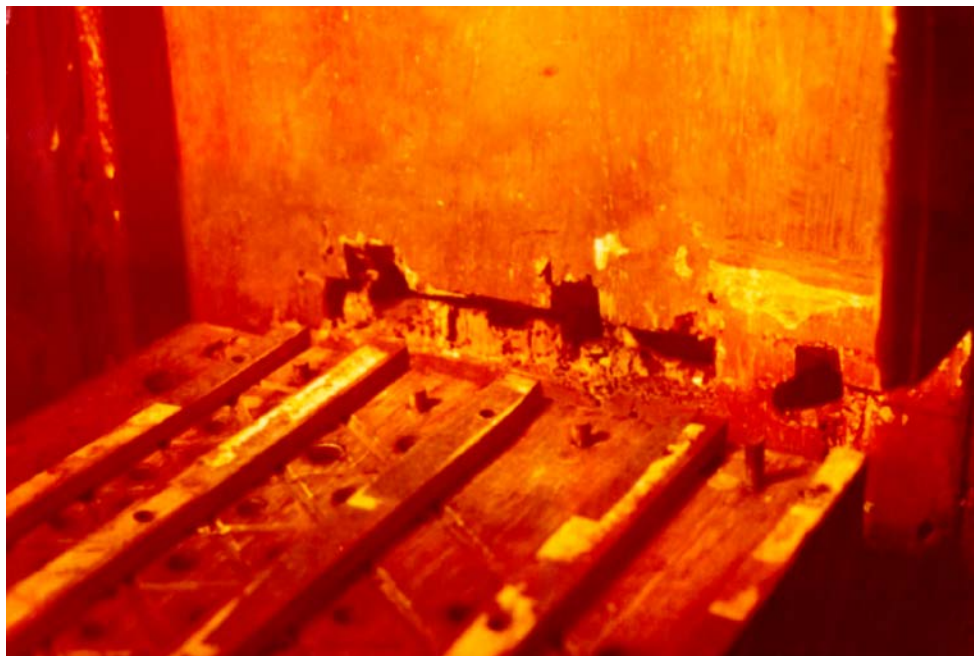
sliders of 4' and original 2' are short, omitting bass octave: for 4' the wooden pipes are always sounding, 2' starts at c.
pictures also showing holes for bass octave 4ft



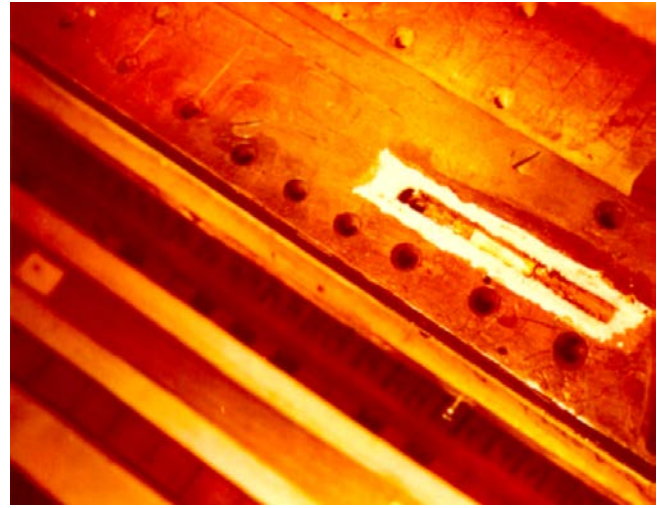
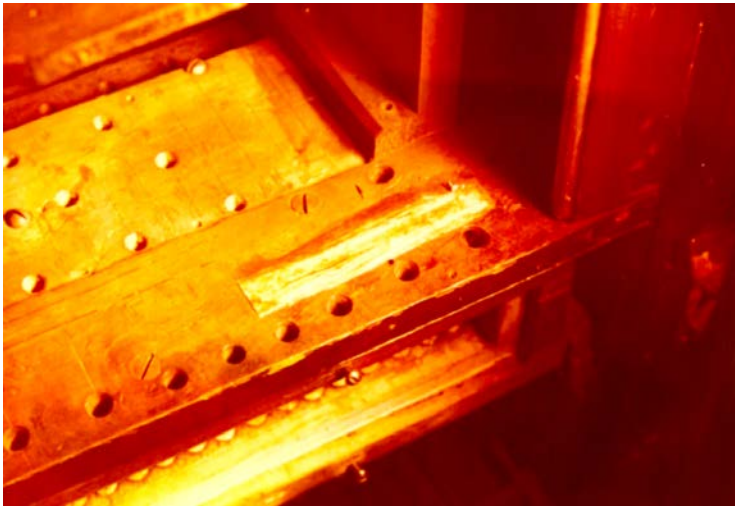
sliders removed, pictures also showing holes for bass octave 4ft



sliders removed (detail)



after removal of sliders, the change of stop pull holes became visible



front pipes (principal) 4' toe board top side, with one routing, remains of original leather cover, and after removal



underside of toe board showing routing channels for all front pipes, with (original) sketches and annotations



The organ case was in neglected state. We carefully removed 19th century layers of paint and found changes in the the shutters (a strip was removed and screwed to the case, consequently new hinges were added, a tiny music desk was cut out from the front and attached with hinges. A rather new wooden frame connected the original organ case to the (original) bellows.

The only original pipes were 7 stopped wooden pipes of the bass short octave (D, E, F, G, A, B-flat, B), the stopped wooden lowest pipe C was replaced by a stopped E pipe that evidently came from a street barrel organ.

All of the original wooden pipes were covered by rather new and funny hats to make them sound to A=440, where evidently they were sized for $\frac{1}{2}$ second up (about A=465).

In order to lower the pitch of the organ, all other pipes were replaced and not original, and showed two different types of (non Italian style) manufacture.

Luckily the action and the wind chest was original and complete and showed it was made for 4 ranks:

- 4' principal – with the bass short octave always sounding
- 2 ft from c-c'''
- Fifth $1\frac{1}{3}$ '
- 1' repeating (bass octave $\frac{1}{2}$ ', top octave 2')

All of this quite standard for positive organs and small organs of the region and time which all seem to originally have the same high pitch, and are supposed to be (and sometimes till are) tuned in mean tone tuning.

However, one of the previous owners misunderstood acoustic laws, and tried to make the organ sound at 8' by adding a fifth $2\frac{3}{4}$ '. This was accomplished by putting a new piece of wood over the pipe holes, removing the two middle registers, connecting both, and drilling some large holes to accommodate this new register for the top 3 octaves.

Luckily the original action was completely saved below this contraption.

For the time being (because of lack of resources) we kept the 4' and 1' (not repeating) that were in the organ when we bought it (not original and at the wrong pitch of A=440), and moved part of the $2\frac{3}{4}$ ' to install a 2' discant.

In this way the organ was playable.

We removed the tooled leather inside the shutters (that did not fit the original shutter dimensions) and many layers of oil based paint. The lowest layers showed animal glue based paint that we could reconstruct: the pigment turned out to be copper arsenic, a highly poisonous material that currently cannot be sold in my country and that law does not allow to be used by professional painters (luckily I am not a "professional painter"). For the paneling we choose to use original end-of-18th century "Nurnberger Buntpapiere" – a kind of gold leaf printed decoration paper that we bought at an antique auction – each small sheet is signed "*Malsch Nurnberg*". And we applied gold leaf at the ornaments where this was still visible at several places.

We restored the case to its original situation (for the shutters and the front all wood was in fact still present as it was re-used to make the music desk and to reshape the shutters.

-O-O-O-

In 2004 we had enough resources to continue restoration:

We reconstructed the original 4 ranks of pipes and brought back the original pitch, for which we kept the remaining original wooden bass pipes. The original pipe holes allowed a complete, and working, set of pipe ranks, for which we choose the best guess of pipe material.

We reconstructed the pull down pedal board by copying what can still regularly be found at many Italian organs of this period (up till 1850!).

We designed a stand to keep the pedals and to match the instrument, though we have no good example for this – most organs of this type currently are put on top of ugly wooden boxes.

The organ is completely playing, and is sometimes actually used but not transported.

Below are some pictures of the current state. One might wonder why there is a little cupid on top of the top ornament – well, there was a hole in the ornament, and this orphaned Neapolitan Christmas angel (end of 18th century) just fits there, so we let him.





the only original pipes, the bass short octave, with new hats,
a reconstructed pipe for the lowest note (C) connected below the wind chest, as originally was the case



new ranks of pipes: from backside (closest to the camera) 1'; fifth 1½'; 2'; principal 4'



original bellows, fantasy stand, reconstructed pedal board



reconstructed original animal glue based paint and gold leaf,
paneling covered with 18th century gold leaf printed decoration paper



Original keyboard, action, wind chest, and attachment for pull down pedal board