

The Richard Bridge organ

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Chronology

1735 New organ by Richard Bridge installed to the following specification:

Great Organ (GG-d3, 56 notes)
 Open Diapason
 Open Diapason (GG-F#, helpers)
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Principal
 Twelfth
 Fifteenth
 Tierce
 Larigot
 Sesquialtera V
 Fourniture III
 Cornet V (c#)2
 Trumpet
 Trumpet
 Bassoon
 Clarion

Choir Organ (GG-d3, 56 notes)
 Stopped Diapason
 Flute (C) [some sources]
 Principal
 Flute
 Fifteenth
 Mixture III
 Cremona
 Vox Humana
 French Horn (d)

Swell Organ (g-d3, 32 notes)
 Open Diapason
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Flute
 German Flute [some sources]
 Cornet III
 Trumpet
 Hautboy
 Clarion

- 1779 Organ renovated (builder unknown); French Horn and Kettle Drum added
- c1811 1½ octaves of pedals added by G.P. England
- 1822 Repaired by J C Bishop; Dulciana added and Mixture III from Choir removed
- 1837 After a fire in the steeple in 1836, H C Lincoln was brought in the following year to make repairs necessitated by extensive water damage.
 In addition, the following changes were made:
 French Horn and Vox Humana from Choir removed; Swell extended to tenor c
 Double Diapason and Sexquialtra IV added to Swell; German Flute removed
 Pedal Pipes GGG – G, 25 notes added

- 1852 Organ partially reconstructed by Gray & Davison
 Pedal Organ acquired three new stops from c 16'; Pedal bellows added
 Swell Organ extended to C with revised specification
 Some Great stops altered
 Some Choir stops altered
 New stop knobs
 New horizontal double-rise reservoir
- c1870 Alterations and additions by T.C. Lewis
- c1899 Alterations and additions by W.J. Northcott
- 1926 Further modifications by Bishop & Son:
 New concave and radiating pedals
 Electric blower added
 Tuba added on pneumatic action
 Pneumatic action to pedals
 Some further stop changes
- 1998 Organ dismantled by William Drake and stored for safekeeping during the church restoration.

The organ

The Pipes

Bridge's pipes were designed to 'speak' in a certain way, and his mechanisms to work in a particular way. This will require a scrupulous and considered restoration embodying best contemporary conservation practice.

The Case

The case is an important piece of 18th century furniture and its conservation is a significant project in its own right. It is made of mahogany and the exuberantly carved double serpentine front is one of only eight ever made to that pattern and by far the largest. This is a rare form of case and one that is distinctly English from the second quarter of the 18th century. When it is restored, it will complete the west end of the nave.

Remarkably, there have been only two major alterations to the case in its long history: the console, which was cut away on both sides in order to insert a Victorian keyboard; and alterations to the high level 'shoulders' to mask the insertion of the Swell in 1852. Both these alterations will be restored to the original 1735 scheme.

The case is in a very poor condition. The carving and woodwork has been neglected for 150 years and a number of sections are broken.

At present it is empty, the pipe work, stops and pedals having been removed in 1998 for safe storage at the start of Christ Church's lengthy restoration.

The Friends commissioned a report from historic paints expert Catherine Hassall on the surface finishes to the case to establish the original decorative scheme of 1735. Determining the date of each section of the woodwork has also helped establish the original arrangement. The report also confirmed that the shoulders at high level were installed in the 1850s, probably to hide from view the new Victorian Swell box. In order to restore the instrument to its 1735 state it follows that the case should also be returned to that date, and the shoulders will be removed (and preserved) along with the Swell.

Pedal Organ

Few English organs had pedals before 1800. From that date the absence of pedals poses increasing constraints on repertoire, and it affects earlier repertoire from other schools of composition that did have pedals (e.g. Germany). The Spitalfields organ first acquired pedals around 1811. More extensive provision was made in 1837, and again in 1852.

In order to increase the instrument's musical versatility and to equip it to perform much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century European organ repertoire, a Pedal Organ is to be constructed using H C Lincoln's surviving Double Pedal Pipes and the former Great Open Diapason of Gray & Davison. A reed of 16' pitch is also to be included, possibly using the pipes of the Gray & Davison Posaune.

The pedal board is to be flat with parallel keys and will be constructed so as to be removable. Two manual to pedal couplers (Great to Pedals, Choir to Pedals) will be provided.

Swell

Eighteenth century Swells were treble divisions, consisting largely of solo registers and echoes; they had only a modest role in the repertoire, and this is the background to Bridge's Swell. By the mid-nineteenth century the Swell keyboard was often full compass and its musical resources had been greatly expanded. Organists today make extensive use of the Swell and the lack of a 'modern' Swell will undoubtedly be felt in certain repertoire. However, whereas the introduction of pedals could be justified as an addition to the Bridge scheme, the extension of the Swell compass and necessary enlargement of the Swell box would be a modification to Bridge's scheme, meaning that the organ could not be heard quite as he intended. The Friends have been advised, and have decided together with the PCC, to reinstate the 1735 scheme.

Pitch and temperament

Pitch is an important consideration when re-establishing the sound of the altered pipes, since a variation of pitch in a voiced pipe by as little as one quarter of a semi-tone will influence the harmonic structure of the pipe. The original voicing, pitch and compasses will be retained and an appropriate temperament used.

Project plan

First the magnificent mahogany case and intricate carving will be repaired and restored. The mitres and crowns will be returned to their positions at the top of the three towers.

The pipes will be restored in the workshop and then, pipe by pipe, they will be brought back to Christ Church to be reinstalled in their original position.

William Drake of Buckfastleigh has been appointed as Organ Builder. Drake already has an impressive portfolio of historic organ restorations, including Lulworth Castle Chapel, Dorset (1780-5) St Paul, Deptford (c.1745), St Anne, Limehouse (1851), the Ball Room organ in Buckingham Palace (1818,1855) and, most recently, the Sutton organ (1849) for Jesus College Cambridge.

Professional team

Dr Nicholas Thistlethwaite, Organ Consultant
 Dr William McVicker, Associate Consultant
 Dow Jones Architects, Architect/Project Manager
 Catherine Hassall, Historic Paints expert
 BBS Services, Construction, Design and Management (CDM) coordinators
 Gordon Tomalin Partners, Measured Survey of the organ case
 Buro Happold Ltd, Environmental Control Consultant
 Hockley and Dawson, Structural engineers

Contractors

William Drake, Organ Builder
 Emplan Builders, Scaffolding and ancillary building works

Stop list

Great Organ, GG – d³, 56 notes

Open Diapason	Bridge
Open Diapason	Bridge/new
Stopt Diapason	Bridge
Principal	Bridge
Twelfth	Bridge
Fifteenth	Bridge/new
Tierce	new
Larigot	new
Sesquialtra V	Bridge/new
Fourniture III	new
Mounted Cornet V	new
Trumpet	Bridge/new
Trumpet	Bridge/new
Clarion	Bridge/new
Bassoon	Bridge/new

Pedal Organ, GG – e¹, 34 notes

Open Diapason (16)	Lincoln
Principal (8) C – e,	G & D
Trumpet (16) C - e	G & D/new

Drum pedal (4 pipes) ⁱ

Swell Organ, G – d³, 32 notes

Open Diapason	new
Stopt Diapason	new/Bridge
Principal	new
Flute	new
German Flute	new
Cornet 3 ranks	new
Trumpet	new
Hautboy	Bridge
Clarion	Bridge

Choir Organ, GG – d³, 56 notes

Stopt Diapason	Bridge
Flute c fa-ut	new
Principal	Bridge/new
Flute	Bridge/new
Fifteenth	new
Mixture III	new
Cremona	Bridge/new
Vochumane	Bridge/new
French Horn d ⁰	new

Couplers

Great to Pedals
 Choir to Pedals