

Columns

NUMBER 34 • AUTUMN 2011

THE FRIENDS OF CHRIST CHURCH SPITALFIELDS
REGISTERED CHARITY NO 276056

The newsletter of the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields who are leading the restoration of Nicholas Hawksmoor's church, one of the most important Baroque churches in Europe.

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Work begins on the organ case

Finally there is something to see of the work that has been going on behind the scenes for the restoration of the Richard Bridge organ. Scaffolding, 17 metres high, has been erected to enable research to be completed and to start the repairs to the magnificent mahogany case. The start of work on site has depended on three crucial factors:

1. Money

Through the generosity of our many Supporters and grant-giving charities, the Friends have raised £560,000 towards the project and sufficient to start the restoration. We would like to thank again and most warmly those of you who have responded so generously to the Appeal.

To complete the work and hear the organ again we still urgently need to raise a further £355,000 and seek your generous help in achieving this.

2. Faculty and permissions

The Friends have made wide and careful consultations with many professional people and organizations

interested in the project to hear their views and to make sure that we have achieved a plan which will follow best practice. The permission to restore the organ, and its important and historic case, ultimately depended on the approval of the Diocesan Advisory Committee ('DAC').

3. Reaching the top of the Organ Builder's queue

Most recently the appointed Organ Builder, William Drake was building a new organ at Lincoln College Oxford and subsequently one for the OBE Chapel at St Paul's Cathedral. Drake has been involved with the Richard Bridge organ for many years and in 1998 was responsible for dismantling the pipes for their safekeeping before the restoration of the church. Now he is ready start work at Christ Church, first repairing the case then restoration of the instrument itself.

Meanwhile much has been going on behind the scenes. The Friends and the PCC have appointed Dow Jones Architects to manage the works to the case and the ancillary building works associated with the project. The

Detail from the exuberantly-carved 1735 organ case at the bottom of the towers, showing a violin, a recorder, a shawm or oboe and a trumpet (damaged), with fruit and flower, swags and tassels.



project to restore the Spitalfields organ is a large one by historic organ standards and needs to be carefully managed in order to control the budgets and to fit around parish life and the church's busy commercial schedule.

In 2008 The Friends commissioned the historic paint expert Catherine Hassall to investigate the surfaces and finishes to the case. Her findings told us much about the original finishes and colours that were originally used in 1735. But her report could only take us so far. The fragile case reaches to the top of the nave and these parts at high level could not be reached by a ladder.

For some time there have been questions as to the provenance of the carved 'shoulders' between the pedestals which hold the carved crown and the mitres. While it was thought that they might have been added in 1852 when the larger Gray & Davison Swell replaced the original, this could not be certain until they could be examined. This left the Friends with something of a logistical dilemma. To reach those high levels it was necessary to erect scaffolding. Scaffolding would also be needed for the repairs to the case, but it is expensive and the Friends were understandably reluctant to leave it up unused for long periods whilst research was being discussed and permissions sought.

All other aspects of the project had been approved and the DAC agreed that the full Faculty could be granted quickly if, when the case was examined at high level, the findings were straightforward. So, early in August the 17-metre high scaffold was erected for the consultants to complete their research. We discovered that the shoulders were indeed later additions. Since it is planned to restore the instrument to its 1735 state it follows that the case should also be returned to that date and the consultants recommended removing (and preserving) the shoulders along with the Victorian Swell box.

With the DAC fully involved the process was completed within ten days and William Drake, on stand-by, was able to start work the day after the permission and full Faculty was granted – a logistical miracle!

The investigations at this high level have also found that the case is much more fragile than could ever have been imagined and the repairs to the intricate carvings will be extensive. The Friends are currently examining the cost and time implications of these findings.

Following the repairs to the case the surfaces will be restored. Tenders are presently being sought for this next stage of the project.

If you would like to support the project to restore the 1735 Richard Bridge organ, please contact the Friends' office, or you can donate online at: www.christchurchspitalfields.org

Christmas card 2011

New for 2011

Chandelier viewed across the nave from the south gallery

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S R B HUMPHRIES

Original pierced carving from the top of the organ's central tower

Personal column

Robert Chitam RIBA, a longstanding trustee of the Friends, writes this appreciation of A. D. ('Red') Mason who in 2010 retired after long and devoted service as project architect for the restoration and subsequently as consultant architect to the Friends.

I can't remember when I first met Red Mason. He was certainly there very soon after the formation of the Friends in the mid nineteen-seventies and may even have been involved before. For all practical purposes the story of the restoration of Christ Church Spitalfields is his story, for as soon as the aspiration to restore the church and bring it back into use took shape Red was busy beginning to probe into the minutiae of Hawksmoor's design.

From the outset it was apparent that he was not going to be content with any approximation. There is a good deal of evidence of the appearance of the building before Ewan Christian's nineteenth century re-ordering. This evidence, pictorial and documentary, albeit of varying accuracy, gives a quite good overall idea of the way in which the church was originally laid out, and some of us might have felt justified in extrapolating from this information to produce a very reasonable approximation of the form of the interior.

But not Red. He was not interested in knowing *roughly* what it *looked* like, but needed to know *exactly* what it *was* like. He therefore embarked on a scrupulous and minute examination of the actual fabric, to reconstruct the details of the design. Nowhere was his passion for accuracy more evident than in his research into the original form of the nave galleries. He investigated every possible source of information, written and built, from the mortice holes in re-used timbers to the faint shadows of former joinery work where it had touched the shafts of columns. I remember his delight at finding a quantity of old, disused timbers in the crypt, and being able to confirm that they were elements of the gallery framing, and thus capable of adding to his knowledge of the structure.

Red has a courtesy and a wry sense of humour which stood him in good stead in the many anxious meetings we trustees had in the Vestry Room. He could infuriate those of us with less patience, with what we thought the

obstinate and unreasonable length of his research, but my goodness, it was always worth the wait! The results were always presented in a combination of clear explanation and beautiful draughtsmanship, were always convincing and always added to our imperfect understanding of the church and our love for it. In this way he threw a light for us on the genius of Hawsmoor.

The conservation of buildings of rare quality demands a broad range of skills. Combining the diligence of the historian, the forensic capability of the detective and the invention and understanding

of structures of the good conservation architect, Red proved the perfect practitioner for this unique project. So, in a sense the Christ Church project was the culmination of all his professional and technical experience. The wonderful outcome is of course due to the support and hard work, over a long period, of a great number of people, the parish, the professional team, the builders and the friends, but the credit for the quality and authenticity of it all is due chiefly to Red Mason. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to know him.

October 2011

Thank you

The Friends are grateful for the generosity of the many individuals and organisations who support the Restoration and Organ Appeals. We would like to thank the law firm Ashurst for generously providing an office; for printing this issue of *Columns* and other printed material. Thank you to our volunteers who come and help

both in the office and at special events. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who prefer to remain anonymous and those who give to the restoration by standing order, thereby saving on administrative costs.

We would also like to thank the following for their recent donations:

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Published by the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields
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