

# Columns

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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.*

*Please support us by subscribing or making a donation: use the form with this issue, or telephone the Friends' office, 020 7859 3035, or visit our website: [www.christchurchspitalfields.org](http://www.christchurchspitalfields.org)*

## Restored Georgian Organ Case revealed

Scaffolding has just been removed to reveal the newly decorated organ case at Christ Church Spitalfields.

The original 1735 Richard Bridge organ is being brought back to life by a team of expert craftsmen. One of the few remaining large English organs to survive from the age of Handel, the instrument with its magnificent case is a testament to the craftsmanship of the early Georgian period and is of international significance.

During the last twelve months, sections of the organ case were removed and repaired in the organ builder's workshop in Buckfastleigh, Devon. Earlier this year the large 55 foot (c. 17 m) scaffold was re-erected so that the repaired sections of the case could be reinstalled in the church ready for decoration.

The reinstatement of the original decorative scheme has allowed us to see Richard Bridge's elaborate design anew. For many years the detail of the case has been largely hidden under its Victorian brown varnish and by decades of neglect and decay. Much of the delicate carving was badly damaged and cracked and needed painstaking repair work. The newly restored case reveals the delicate finish of the pale limewood carving which stands out against the exquisite mahogany woodwork of the case.

The crown and mitres have been returned to the top of the case. While the size of these impressive objects can only be appreciated close up, now re-gilded to spectacular effect – the only gilding in Christ Church – they look absolutely magnificent and perfectly scaled.

Meanwhile, in William Drake's workshop, work continues on the organ pipes themselves, the great soundboard, the bellows motor and the new pedal board. The return of the repaired and restored pipes will begin later this year. With over 2000 pipes this is a lengthy and complex exercise and requires the planned return of the pipes in the order in which they need to be reinstalled into the case.

### Funding update

The cost of restoring the organ is £1.2 million and the Friends have been working hard to raise this money. We are exceptionally grateful for the extreme generosity of our Supporters and the many trusts and foundations who have taken an interest in this project.

Although we are nearly there, we haven't quite reached our fundraising target and we still need



S R B HUMPHREYS

*Two stages in the restoration of the organ case:  
Above: At the top of the organ are the two mitres and the crown. The crown sits upon an ermine collar on a cushion.  
Below: Flowers and swags being painted; protective plastic behind.*

£130,000 to complete the work. Please continue to support us and help us complete this extraordinary project.

### Project team

Organ builder: William Drake of Buckfastleigh

Case decoration: Luard Conservation Ltd

Historic paint analysis: Catherine Hassall

Organ consultants:

Dr Nicholas Thistlethwaite, Dr William McVicker

Architect and project management:

Dow Jones Architects

## Dates for your diary

### Ride & Stride

Saturday 14 September

Christ Church is taking part in this year's Ride & Stride event. Organised by the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT), the event raises money for the restoration of historic churches.

This is an enjoyable way to visit lots of different churches and raise money for their repairs. Half the money you raise goes towards the church that you nominate and half towards HOLT. Download a sponsorship form from <http://www.heritageoflondon.com/> or contact Fay Cattini : [fay@ccspitalfields.org](mailto:fay@ccspitalfields.org) for further information.

The money raised from Ride & Stride will go towards the repair of the organ pipes. The Friends have recently received a generous grant of £3,000 from HOLT towards the repair of the organ case and so we felt that this would be a nice balance to their generous gift to us. Do take part if you are able.

### Open House London

Saturday 21, 10 am–4 pm and

Sunday 22 September, 1–4 pm

Please come and visit Christ Church over this weekend. This will be a good opportunity to see the newly restored organ case.

If you would like to volunteer to help on this weekend, even only for a couple of hours, please let the Friends' office know.

### St Paul's Cathedral Study visit

Tuesday 5th November 2.00–4.30pm

The building of St Paul's: Hawksmoor's hand in the office of Sir Christopher Wren.

For further details see the enclosed flyer or visit our website and choose "Events".

## Thank you

To our volunteers who come and work in the office and help us at public events. They are an invaluable resource for our work. If you are interested to come and help, please contact the office.

## Recent grants

We are extremely grateful for the considerable level of support we have received from our many Supporters towards the organ project. Recently, we have been particularly pleased to have received a grant of £35,000 from the J Paul Getty Jnr Foundation. We are also indebted to Andrew Martindale for nominating The Friends to receive a gift of \$10,000 from the Joseph F. McCrindle Foundation.

Friends' Director Carolyn Fuest says, "We are well on the way to reaching our fundraising target for this major project. The generosity of our many individual donors contributing gifts big and small is significant as it encourages the major grant givers to support us which in turn enables the project to happen. We are hugely appreciative of all our donors."

## Media

You can view this edition of *Columns* with colour photos on our website where we have recently added photographs of the case restoration. Do take a moment to look at our excellent and growing archive of photographs in this section:

[www.christchurchspitalfields.org](http://www.christchurchspitalfields.org)

The Friends now has a Facebook page. Please visit this and spread the word to people you think might be interested. We are offering a Hugh Casson print of Christ Church to the person who posts the best description of a visit to the church, either before or after its restoration, on our wall.



S R B HUMPHREYS

Above: Painted acanthus leaves on organ case  
Below: Michael Madden painting a cherub

## The crafts at Christ Church

One of the joys of the organ restoration has been to witness first-hand superb craftsmanship at work. While the scaffolding was up, we were able to see the level of skill and range of expertise, very often using methods that were used in the eighteenth century by the original craftsmen. One such is **Michael Madden**, specialist decorator, and *Columns* recently had the opportunity of talking to him about his work.

### What led you into the work you do today?

I trained as a specialist decorator under master decorator Len Pardon, who in turn had been apprenticed to an acknowledged master of decorative/faux painting of the twentieth century, A E Baxby. I learnt the techniques of graining, marbling, gilding and some *trompe l'oeil* work.

### Who have you collaborated with and is this a satisfying way of working?

I have worked on many collaborative projects, such as the new terracotta figures and lions, as part of the £42 million restoration of the London Coliseum. The most recent collaboration was for a new tabernacle in Preston where I was in constant and close collaboration with the architect.

I also spent over eight years at the Natural History Museum painting murals and working on exhibitions, where I worked as part of a team, including designers, graphic designers and other technicians. I really enjoy working with other people as sometimes I think artists can become isolated. Restoration grounds me in the real world and is a good balance from my gallery work, which can become a little removed from reality.

### You are most passionate in your belief that apprenticeships are the way to go. Why is that?

I don't think that people value the skills of artisans enough. If there were more apprentices learning to do this sort of work properly then many latent talents could be nurtured and society would gain. I benefited from my apprenticeship and also my course at the City and Guilds of London Art School. There I met Arthur Ayers who also taught me to carve, by example.

In the same way I have Lawrence Sparey working with me on this project. An excellent painter and decorator by trade, I first met Lawrence when he asked me to teach him some carving and this is our first project together. He has been excellent.

I feel so strongly about the value of apprenticeships that I am writing a book about artisanship and the ill-effects of the abolition of the Apprentices Law in 1814. I have seen no other in-depth study of this subject.

### Tell me something about the work to the organ case at Christ Church

When David Luard asked me to work on this project I was very pleased. The Spitalfields organ case is of exceptional quality. It is possibly the first case built from mahogany - earlier organ cases would have been built from oak.

Here we have used a process of dry-stripping to remove the old paint and varnish. We used scrapers to get off most of the varnish and then palm sanders; finishing by hand. On small parts of the case, the varnish had to be removed by wet-stripping to avoid the delicate carving being damaged. This is a process using strippers to loosen the old varnish and then scraping off and sanding it. We then re-varnished the unpainted areas with five coats of matt varnish and finished it by buffing with wire wool. Matt varnishes are quite difficult – they can appear streaky on dark wood and so you have to finish them by hand. The painstaking dry-stripping process proved worthwhile as the quality of the grain now shows up as new.

The sides of the case, built from pine, have been painted to match the rich red of the mahogany of the front in a lead-based paint.

We also painted the limewood carved areas. Limewood is the traditional material used for such carvings in the style of Grinling Gibbons because it is an excellent wood for intricate and detailed work. Tests showed that the carvings had been painted in a 'limewood' colour. This is customary because the wood itself can often vary greatly in colour and because it quickly discolours after carving. The first coat was a lead-based sealer prime, and then we applied three coats of the lead-based eggshell finish. The paint can take up to two days to dry and the number of coats helps build up the depth and richness of colour.

Gilding: the surfaces are prepared using a lead-based eggshell ochre: a little deeper in colour than the gold. Then a gold size, an oil-based varnish, is applied ready to receive the gold leaf. We tried out several before deciding to use a size that I had kept for over twenty years. This particular size takes almost 15 hours to dry and it is crucial to apply the leaf only when it is just about to dry. The moment of application is important for the depth of the lustre you can obtain. This process has been used for all the gilded sections of the case - largely the detailing around the panels of its front.

The gilding on the crown and mitres was a mixture of water and oil gilding. In water gilding the surface is prepared with several layers of gesso mixed with ground Armenian clay. The gold leaf is first made wet with water and the leaves of gold are laid carefully onto this surface, and later burnished with an agate burnisher.

An extraordinary discovery was made during the restoration: when working on the original tassels I noticed that all the gold had been rubbed away on the tops of the tassels, but the indentations had a layer of gold of the highest lustre. The gold had been crudely over-painted - possibly during the 1920s restoration of the organ, and what was showing was the remains of the fine eighteenth century gold work. Apart from being an exciting discovery, this also informed the approach and particular type of gilding to be used at this high level.

More of Michael's work can be seen at [www.michaelmadden.co.uk](http://www.michaelmadden.co.uk). His book, *The politics of ornament: the case for a skilled society* will be published in 2014–5.



## 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 have recently changed our bank accounts. Thank you to all who have taken the trouble to change their standing order details because of this. We are most grateful for your continuing support and for the many who have generously increased their giving. We would also like to thank the following for their recent donations:

### Gifts of £25 and over

Susan Angus  
Mrs V T Baker  
Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville, CH, PC

*In memory of Bryan Ferry*

Mr E D Brownbill  
Mrs Sylvia Butler  
Mr M D D Chaloner\*

J Davis  
Marion Dyke  
D Glayzer\*

Fiona Gledhill\*

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Mr J W Scott\*

Peter Stormonth Darling

Kevin West\*

The Rt Rev Clive Young\*

### Gifts & Grants of £1,000 and over

Anonymous *In memory of Eric Elstob*\*

Heritage of London Trust\*

Joseph F McCrindle Foundation

The Leche Trust\*

The On Organ Fund\*

Hamish Parker\*

### Major Grants of £25,000 and over

J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust\*

The Linbury Trust\*

*\* partly or fully for the Richard Bridge Organ Appeal*

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## How to support the Friends

To become an acknowledged Supporter of the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields please make a minimum annual donation of £30 (£35 for overseas). You can contribute towards the restoration of Christ Church or the Richard Bridge organ. Supporters receive the Friends' newsletter *Columns* and advance notice of tours, lectures and other special events that the Friends organise.

You can give money in several ways:

- with a **credit or debit card** or **PayPal** through our web site.
- by **payroll giving** through Give As You Earn

Or, by completing the appropriate parts of this page:

- by **standing order** (helping us plan ahead and keep down administrative costs)
- by bank or CAF **cheque**.

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- ☐ Christ Church Spitalfields
- ☐ The Richard Bridge Organ

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