

# Columns

The Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields  
Registered Charity 276056

**Columns** is the supporter's bulletin for the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields.

The Friends are leading the restoration of Nicholas Hawksmoor's church, regarded as one of the most important Baroque churches in Europe. This project will take several years.

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## The restoration work starts on site

Work on the first phase of the restoration of Christ Church started this month. An immense 210-foot high scaffolding is rising on the west front and tower of Hawksmoor's church to enable stonework repairs to be carried out. Much of the stonework on the upper levels of the tower has not been touched since the early 1860s following lightning strikes and other parts have not been restored in 260 years. The weather and London's pollution have since taken their toll upon it. Work will proceed from the top down, and the scaffolding will be dismantled layer by layer as the work is finished.

Contractors for the first stage of the work are Cathedral Works Organisation (Chichester) Ltd, a company that was originally formed to restore Chichester Cathedral but which now carries out high quality stonework on many sites. They won the contract in competitive tender against five other companies, all

specialist stonemasons. The first phase of repairs at the west end of the church will be followed by works to the other three elevations; no decision has yet been taken by the Trustees about the contractor for the later phases.



*Friends Chairman Eric Elstob and our project Quantity Surveyor Michael Wright open tenders*

Although recent grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Monument Trust have enabled a start on site to be made, fundraising efforts are being redoubled by the Friends' office, as there is still a major shortfall in the amount needed to complete the restoration both inside and out.

## Meanwhile, the landscaping is completed

New planting and handsome York stone paving has been installed in the Christ Church Gardens, the former graveyard adjacent to Christ Church. Generously funded by Bethnal Green City Challenge, the project cost £35,000, and the Friends played a key role in negotiating finance. Though still

consecrated ground containing thousands of burials, the Gardens are a public open space, which has been maintained by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets since 1948. Roland Jeffery, Campaign Director for the Friends, said 'The Friends are involved in several initiatives — of which this is just one — to improve the immediate setting of Christ Church. The new, and easy to maintain, landscaping should help the Borough keep the Gardens looking good within their hard-pressed municipal budget.'

### The churchyard railings

Another project dear to the Friends' collective heart is the railings around Christ Church Gardens. Removed for the War Effort, the unsightly 'temporary' railings erected immediately after the war are still in place some fifty years later! Now the Friends have negotiated funding to replace them with railings of the sort that were originally there. Old photographs of the railings in the National Monuments Record were consulted, and fragments that had been salvaged when the originals were taken away to be melted down have been used for an accurate recreation of the elegant 8-foot high Greek Revival design. Whitfield Partners, architects to the restoration, will supervise this project. The railings will be of cast iron set on a Portland stone plinth. The total cost is estimated to be £100,000, every penny of which is to met by grants negotiated by the Friends from the National Heritage memorial Fund and Bethnal Green City Challenge. 'The new railings will

make a tremendous improvement to the setting of Christ Church on Commercial Street, which at present is pretty tatty and depressing,' Eric Elstob, Chair of the Friends' Trustees, said .



*Giles Gilbert Scott's competition winning design for telephone kiosks*

### Red phone boxes return

Three red 'K6' telephone kiosks, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, will replace the stainless steel ones currently outside Christ Church. This is part of a programme co-ordinated by English Heritage to return K6 boxes to important sites throughout London; the Friends put in a strong, and successful, bid for this site to be included. The K6s that had originally stood outside Christ Church were taken away just eight years ago. The kiosks are being paid for by British Telecom, who have come to regret the wholesale removal of the traditional boxes, and there will be no cost to the Friends' own resources. This is another case of the Friends acting as facilitators

of improvement to the surroundings of Christ Church and general amenities.

### **Secretary of State's visit**

Rt. Hon. Virginia Bottomley, Secretary of State for National Heritage, and Lord Inglewood, the Under-Secretary of State, used Christ Church as the venue to launch their Green Paper on Heritage Policy, Protecting Our Heritage, in May. This unusual setting for such a press conference — journalists usually go to a Whitehall conference room for briefings — was chosen because, in Mrs Bottomley's words, 'Christ Church was fitting for the launch as it typified new life for heritage buildings. I am particularly encouraged by the joint approach of English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund here, where a parish cannot be expected to repair a great monument like this.'

### **Benefit Concert**

The concert given by Gustav Leonhardt, of harpsichord music by J.S. Bach, which he most generously agreed to perform in aid of the Friends' appeal for restoration funds, was a great success. HRH the Duke of Gloucester graciously attended, and afterwards he met Dr Leonhardt and a number of the Friends donors. The event raised over £5,000.

### **21st Anniversary events**

With the Friends celebrating its 21st anniversary next year a bumper series of events is being planned. These will include walks tours and lectures.

Most events will focus on architecture and Hawksmoor's work in particular. Regular donors will receive details through Columns. Our events sell out quickly, so to be sure of a place please book early.

### **Open Days**

Christ Church is open to the public on the *fourth* Sunday of every month, except August and December, from 1 pm to 4 pm. Volunteers are needed to help on these days, when we welcome on average 130 visitors.

Contrary to rumour, Christ Church is normally open during the week, subject to staff availability, special church services and rehearsals, between 12 noon and 2.30 pm on Mondays to Fridays. Daily opening is made possible by a grant from the Friends to the Parochial Church Council towards the employment of a verger. The Friends funding for this was given specifically for running costs, rather than the restoration itself. Sadly, the church would otherwise remain locked except for services.

We hope normal opening will continue throughout building works, but for safety the entrance will sometimes be via Christ Church Gardens and the south door: follow the signs.

### **Thank You**

- To City lawyers Linklaters & Paines for reproducing this issue of Columns for us free of charge.

- To our office volunteers who help in many ways: John D'Arcy, Dave Rush, Eddie Geater, Christopher Woodward, Fiona Ligonnet and Ceri George.

## Personal Column

Eleanor Murray

*Eleanor Murray was for two decades the Secretary of the Georgian Group. On retiring she became Chairman of the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields, a position from which she recently stood down.*

Twelve years at close quarters with a building of the awesome quality of Christ Church is an unforgettable experience and one that, as Chairman of the Friends for all those years, I look back on as a great privilege. So I am glad to have this opportunity to thank all the Friends who supported me through some dark moments.

I remember asking the architect, early on, how long the builders would take once we had the funds available to complete the restoration. He said three years. That sounded a long time to me in my innocence, and I never imagined — even though I knew we did not then have the money — that for a variety of reasons it would be more than ten years before we could even start to raise funds, let alone undertake major works. But Christ Church is unlike any other building that I have ever come across. We kept finding that we could not take what appeared to be an obvious single first step because several other steps emerged as needing to be taken beforehand. At times it was as if the very stones were obstructing the Friends' endeavours. Every small detail always seemed to take an eternity.

Happily, there were good moments too: the parish coming back to use the church for services; the clearance of burials from the crypt; the excitement when the

scaffolding inside both aisles came down and revealed Hawksmoor's window forms; and refurbishment of the Old Vestry Room as an office for the Friends and the Festival, neither of which had had any space within the church before. Festival time meant at least that the church was swept and looked as good as we could make it. Some people said we ought to leave it looking like a Piranesi ruin. I never subscribed to that view myself because I believe that Hawksmoor's interior will look far better — and certainly more English.

Now at last, thanks mostly to the excellent work of our Campaign Director, serious money has started to come in and the Friends are really beginning the work of recreating, rather than unstitching and research. With the heady knowledge that we have the support of English Heritage, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and private benefactors on the scale of the Monument Trust, we can look forward confidently to the completion of the project. We might still be in time to celebrate in Spitalfields a 2000th birthday in the restored church dedicated to Christ himself. Whenever it happens, I hope I shall be there to give thanks for a long and difficult task finally accomplished and which will benefit future generations not just in Spitalfields but far beyond.

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