

Number 6 Spring 1997

# 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 Europe's most important Baroque churches.

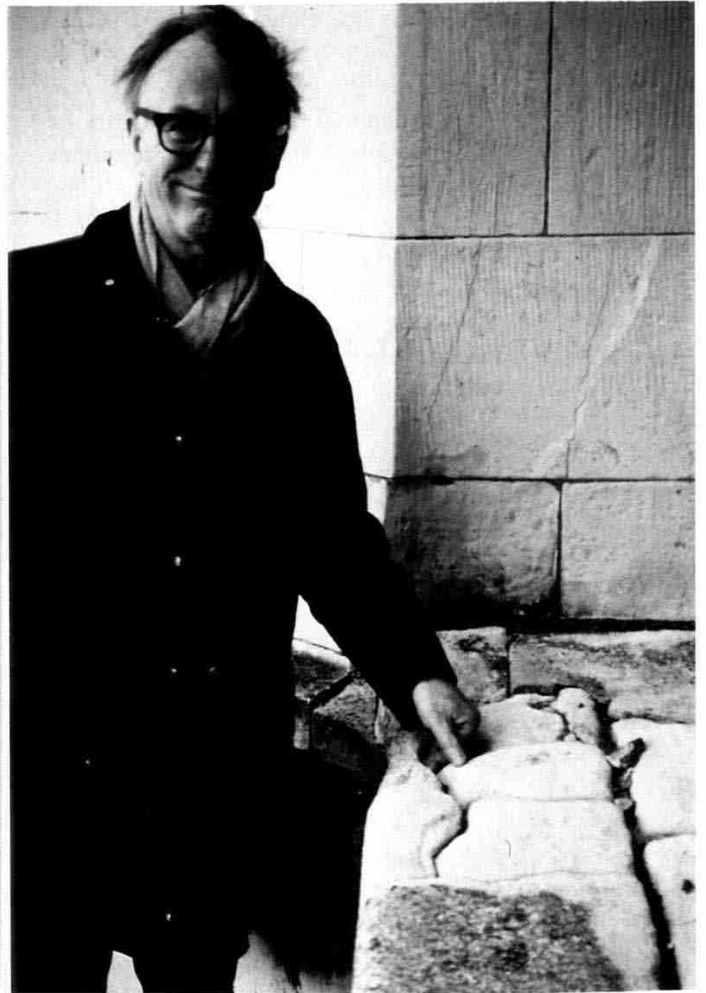
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## Inside this issue

- The first 21 years
- Summer events programme
- The largest Georgian organ in England
- Recent donors to the appeal



The 200ft high scaffolding giving access for stone repairs and structural works



Andrew ('Red') Mason, Project architect, examines a crack in the tower stonework

## **The Richard Bridge Organ**

The organ in Christ Church has attracted national interest as one of the finest 18th-century instruments in existence. Its restoration is an exciting new venture for the Friends, and the revived organ will enhance the church both visually and musically.

## **William Drake, organ builder**

Appointed by the Trustees to carry out the restoration of the Richard Bridge organ, William Drake is now regarded as one of the most distinguished organ builders in Europe.

He was apprenticed in Austria and spent his early career there. In 1975 he established his workshop in Buckfastleigh, Devon, since when he has carried out a number of important restorations to historic organs, among them the 1791 organ at Black Torrington, Devon, and the 'Father' Willis organ at Totnes. His restoration of the seminal 1786 organ by Seede at Lulworth Castle, Dorset was hailed as setting new standards for restoration.

He has also built new organs in the style of period instruments, among them Grosvenor Chapel, Mayfair (which was recently acclaimed in *The Guardian* by Howard Goodall as one of his 'top ten' instruments in the country) and at Jesus College, Oxford. Since being appointed to restore the Richard Bridge organ at Christ Church Spitalfields he has been commissioned to build a new organ for the Palace of Westminster, and appointed to restore the Gray & Davison organ at Buckingham Palace.

William Drake says of his work at Christ Church, 'Our work to the organ will return the full character of the 18th-century instrument, retaining the compatible elements which were added in the mid-19th century. It represents the largest work of this type undertaken in the country.'

## **Personal Column:**

Michael Gillingham

*Michael Gillingham FSA has supervised the restoration of a number of historic organs and organ cases and is leading the restoration of the Christ Church organ*

Late on a November evening in 1955 I came upon Christ Church rearing up out of the London fog. Astonishment and excitement (it was like turning a Paris street corner to find St Sulpice) led me back the next day to explore the building and its organ.

Hawksmoor made no clear provision for organs in his churches, but in 1733 the Vestry began a subscription list for an organ. Built by Richard Bridge, one of the most celebrated organ builders of his day and the favourite of Handel, it opened in 1735. The minutes record that 'by the most competent judges the tone is pronounced to be unexcelled, combining sweetness with great dignity, breadth and power'. It cost £600 and, with 2126 pipes, was the largest organ in England for over a century.

In 1852 the organ was enlarged by Gray & Davison, a firm of great repute who had won a Council Medal for their organ for the 1851 Great Exhibition. They treated Bridge's work respectfully; discreet additions brought the organ into the mainstream European tradition.

This is an organ which generates an atmosphere, and the comparison with St Sulpice still holds good. One approaches it by one of the grand west staircases, and into the eyrie of the organ loft, high on Corinthian columns. Here are the tall doors of the console, still with their original hinges and lock. Seated at the long keyboards we are back in the age of Gauntlett, Wesley and Smart.

This organ is of national importance. The survival of so much pipework and mechanism, the sympathetic work of 1852 and the magnificent richly carved walnut case all make it so. This is a Grand Organ. It *must* be restored.

## We are grateful to all Supporters

Very recent donations and payments by standing order will be acknowledged in the next Columns.

### Donation of £500,000

The Monument Trust

### Donation of £61,000

Spitalfields Market Community Trust

### Donations of £10,000 or more

L B of Tower Hamlets

Bethnal Green City Challenge

Dalston City Challenge (City Fringe Partnership)

### Donation of £2,000 or more

29<sup>th</sup> May 1961 Charitable Trust

The Leche Trust (for Bridge organ)

### Donations of £1,000 or more

Norman Routledge (for Bridge organ)

Foreign & Colonial Charitable Foundation

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Mr Peter Beckwith

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- and a number of donors who prefer to remain anonymous

## The Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields-the first 21 years

**1976** • Following widespread concern about the future of Christ Church and an effective press campaign orchestrated by the Hawksmoor Committee, SAVE Britain's Heritage and the BBC organise a concert attended by 200 people in Christ Church to demonstrate the acoustics of the building. The church is always kept locked and is quite unused-except for storage of old gas stoves!-so the excitement generated by opening the church for the first time since its closure as dangerous in 1957 is palpable.

The Friends of Christ Church is incorporated as a Charity. The founders are Louis Bondy, Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, Edward Croft-Murray, Viscount Esher, The Hon. George Howard, Lady Kennet, Revd Eddie Stride, Jonathan Balkind, Peter Burman, Eric Elstob, Robert Chitham, Neil McCance, Eleanor Murray, Michael Gillingham and John Earl.

The Rector, Revd Eddie Stride, appoints Mr, later Sir, William Whitfield's firm of architects for the restoration, and asks the Friends to raise funds and organise the church's restoration. The Friends commission job architect Andrew ('Red') Mason to research the building's history from archive sources and forensic examination of the fabric, a process which will continue over twenty years as works slowly proceed.

**1977** • First public meeting of the Friends of Christ Church to bring Supporters up to date on progress. The sanctuary beam, which threatens imminent collapse under the weight of the Royal Arms sitting on it, is strengthened-the first restoration project undertaken by the Friends.

**1978** • Following emergency repairs to broken windows to keep out draughts and traffic noise, Jonathan Balkind and the Friends organise a concert series in Christ Church, for which the audience sit on very primitive seating and enjoy no cloakroom facilities. The huge enthusiasm generated will lead to the Friends running and annual Spitalfields Festival to help publicise London's 'best-known unknown church'.

**1979-80** • *The Story of Spitalfields* exhibition, organised in association with the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust, is shown in Christ Church and then tours.

**1979-82** • The Friends restore the great west portico, relay the west steps to Hawksmoor's design, and install temporary power supplies. The south doorway, long blocked, is opened up as a fire escape, thus enabling the church to be used for public concerts. Major funding for these works is negotiated by a 'planning gain'

agreement for the development of a nearby site and in grants from the Greater London Council.

**1982-84** • Reinstatement of the aisle windows to Hawksmoor's original design, construction of new forecourt railings, and several minor urgent repairs are undertaken with further funding from the GLC and many individual well-wishers.

**1986** • The magnificent vaulted Old Vestry Room in the tower of the church is restored with grants from the Leche Trust and many Friends supporters.

**1983-87** • Archaeological excavation of the crypt burials proceeds, under the aegis of the Council for British Archaeology with the involvement of the Museum of London, Natural History and Victoria & Albert Museums, with funding from the Nuffield Foundation and Wellcome Trust. The discoveries about daily life and death are recorded in a BBC *Chronicle* film, *The Skeletons of Spitalfields*, which is shown three times, and in a subsequent book, *Life and Death in Spitalfields*.

**1987** • The parishioners return for weekly Sunday worship for the first time since 1957.

**1990** • The Spitalfields Festival becomes a separate charity from the Friends, who from now on concentrate their efforts solely on fundraising for, and organising the restoration of, the church.

**1990s** • Nineteenth-century memorials from the church are salvaged and re-erected on the west staircases.

**1994** • A Master Plan for the restoration is prepared by the Friends in consultation with the parish and other users of the building. A major public appeal is launched with professional participation. Friends Supporters number 430.

**1995** • Structural repairs and new lighting to the west vestibule are carried out from donations in memory of the architect Sir James Stirling. The Friends negotiate a £435,000 grant from English Heritage for the restoration, the largest single grant ever awarded under the scheme for parish churches. Friends Supporters number over 1000.

**1996** • The Friends secure a £2.44 million grant by the National Heritage Memorial Fund for the restoration, the largest grant from Lottery funds for a parish church, which is closely followed by the announcement of a £500,000 donation from the Sainsbury family through the Monument Trust. Friends Supporters now number 1500. The Richard Bridge organ is dismantled for study, which shows it to be one of the most complete Georgian organs in England; an appeal for its restoration is launched.

**1997** • The contract for the restoration of the tower and spire and for new railings to the

churchyard is let. Meanwhile, the fundraising continues... There is almost £1m still to find.

### **Forthcoming events**

Following the great success of our Spring Lectures, we continue this year with a bumper programme of events organised to celebrate the 21st Anniversary of the Friends. We hope you will be able to come to as many as you can, and will introduce new Friends to us by inviting those you know.

#### *Fifty Guinea Mystery Tour, Monday 14 July*

To celebrate the 21st anniversary of the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields our varied itinerary remains a closely-guarded secret. There will be much of interest for devotees of Hawksmoor and of the 18th century, including both architecture and music. In between stops, we will lunch in a Hawksmoor building, and conclude with a champagne reception in a fine 1720s private house in Spitalfields. The cost, inclusive of coach, admissions, expert guides lunch and reception for this unrepeatable day is £52.50, and tickets are strictly limited to 30.

#### *The Spitalfields Organ, Saturday 5 July*

The British Institute of Organ Studies is holding a one day conference on the restoration of the Bridge organ at Christ Church. Lectures by Michael Gillingham and organ builder William Drake. (See other stories in this issue.) Slides taken by organ historian John Brennan record the dismantling of the organ. The day is aimed at enthusiastic amateurs as well as professionals: knowledge of organ building techniques is not necessary. The event will take place at Haberdashers' School, Northwood (parking available or Underground to Moor Park), from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm, including lunch, an organ recital of 18th-century music, and optional tour of the school buildings (by Giles Gilbert Scott and others). Cost £25 inclusive. Bookings to Alfred Champriss, Southacre, Mount Park Road, Harrow, HA1 3JU. Cheques payable to 'BIOS', not the Friends.

#### *Hawksmoor Churches, Wednesday 14 May, Saturday 17 May, Saturday 24 May*

Some places are left (although prompt booking is advised) on the ever-popular bus tours of all Hawksmoor's six London churches. Travel, as in previous years, will be by double-decker, and the price is £35 (£27.50 for those who have given £15 or more to the Friends' appeal in the past year. This includes notes, bus, lunch in a riverside pub and donations to churches.

Cheques to 'FOCCS' with an SAE. Please state which date you require. Tours start near Holborn Underground at 9.30 am.

#### *Easton Neston, Monday 6 October*

A privileged visit to Easton Neston, Northamptonshire, the only surviving house by Hawksmoor and completed in 1710. The house is not normally open, and we visit by kind permission of Lady Hesketh, who will be our guide. The house has a grandeur far beyond its relatively modest scale. We will also see Drayton House, an Elizabethan mansion with baroque work by John Talman, an interesting contrast with Hawksmoor's English Baroque. We will travel by coach, starting near Holborn Underground. The cost, including coach, pub lunch, guides and admissions is £45, or £40 for those who have given £15 or more to our appeal this year. Please send cheque to 'FOCCS' with an SAE please.

#### *All Souls College Oxford and Blenheim Palace, Wednesday 17 September*

Both these noble piles were built to commemorate military victories over the French — but it is the Hawksmoor connection that interests us. At All Souls, we will see his Classical and Gothick designs side by side. These interiors are not normally accessible to the public; we visit them by kind permission of the Warden and Fellows. We will also see Blenheim, where Hawksmoor worked with Vanburgh and several of the most important elements are to his design. We will start from central London at 9.30 am. The cost for the day, including coach, notes, admissions and lunch in Oxford is £45, or £40 for those who have given £15 or more to the appeal this year. Cheques payable to 'FOCCS' with a SAE please.

### **Spitalfields Festival 1997**

The dates are 4-25 June and the programme is announced. For details and bookings please phone the Festival Hotline on 0171-377 1362 and not the Friends

### **Thanks to**

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