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# 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.

Please support us by subscribing or making a donation. Use the coupon sent with this newsletter or telephone 0171-247 0165.

## The Tower and Spire

The drawing overleaf, by architect and active Friend Christopher Woodward, shows in detail the works that have been undertaken at Christ Church over the course of the past few months. The tower and spire have emerged gleaming from behind the green netting that was covering the scaffolding during the works. The view from Brushfield Street, always one of the incomparable sights of the City and East End, has been transformed.

## What Happens Next?

In May this year the galleries inside the west end of Christ Church will be dismantled. These comprise the original Georgian woodwork which has already been dismantled and re-erected once in its lifetime: in the middle of the nineteenth century when architect Ewan Christian reorganised the interior. The dismantling will be done painstakingly so that the woodwork and the beautifully carved brackets can again be re-assembled along the aisles of the church as part of our programme to recreate the interior of Hawksmoor's design.

At the end of June this year — just hours after the end of the Spitalfields Festival, during which no

work can be carried out — builders will arrive on site to start the work on the outside south elevation of the church. Extensive stonework repairs are involved. As part of this contract the massive double flight of south steps will be recreated to Hawksmoor's design.

In 1999 major works inside the church will start, including a new floor and heating, reconstruction of the side aisle galleries and panelling to the walls.

## Good Neighbours

Three more of our new neighbours in Spitalfields have helped the restoration appeal.

The London International Financial Futures Exchange — usually known as LIFFE — recently obtained planning permission for a development at the Old Spitalfields Market site. They have agreed to make a £12,000 contribution to the appeal by paying that sum towards the fees of the engineers who are designing a heating system for the restored church. Currently on the drawing board, the heating will be installed late in 1999.

Christopher Tupker, Vice President Europe of ABN-AMRO Bank, met Eric Elstob, Chairman of the Friends, at the topping out of the bank's new headquarters in Spitalfields against the background of the tower of Christ Church under scaffolding. A generous donation was received from ABN-AMRO bank towards the works, and the Friends look forward to a neighbourly relationship with the bank and its employees, many of whom will look out of their offices over the newly-restored tower of Christ Church.

Steve Wood, Development Director of the Spitalfields Development Group, is giving informal advice to the Friend's Trustees on the programming of the remaining phases of the restoration programme to ensure that the work is carried efficiently and as fast as funds permit.

## Restoring the Tower

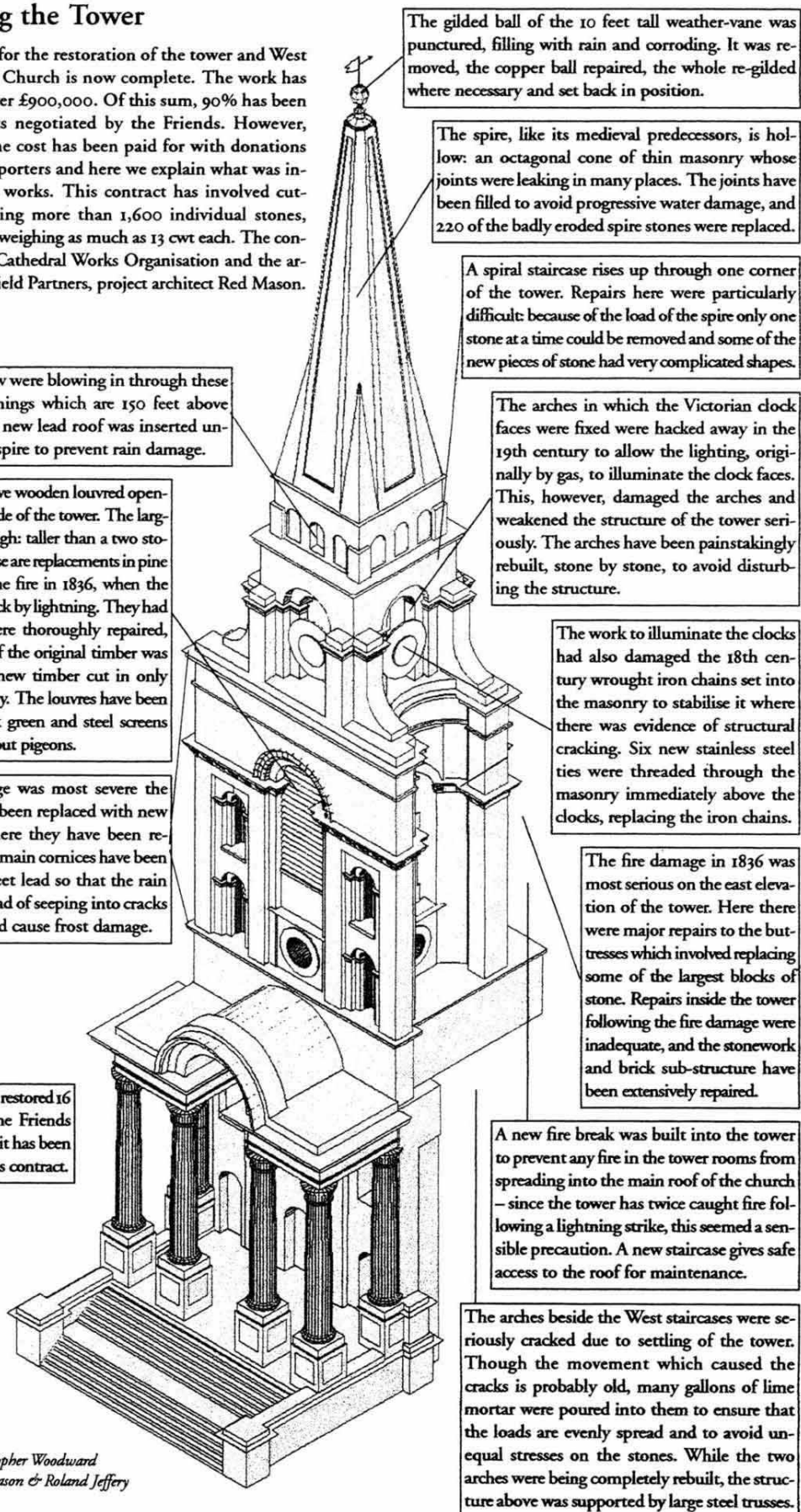
The contract for the restoration of the tower and West end of Christ Church is now complete. The work has cost a little over £900,000. Of this sum, 90% has been met by grants negotiated by the Friends. However, £90,000 of the cost has been paid for with donations from our Supporters and here we explain what was involved in the works. This contract has involved cutting and placing more than 1,600 individual stones, some of them weighing as much as 13 cwt each. The contractors were Cathedral Works Organisation and the architects Whitfield Partners, project architect Red Mason.

Rain and snow were blowing in through these louvered openings which are 150 feet above street level. A new lead roof was inserted underneath the spire to prevent rain damage.

There are twelve wooden louvered openings on each side of the tower. The largest is 24 feet high: taller than a two storey house. These are replacements in pine dating from the fire in 1836, when the tower was struck by lightning. They had decayed so were thoroughly repaired, though 75% of the original timber was retained and new timber cut in only where necessary. The louvres have been painted a dark green and steel screens fitted to keep out pigeons.

Where damage was most severe the cornices have been replaced with new stone. Elsewhere they have been repaired. All the main cornices have been covered in sheet lead so that the rain runs off, instead of seeping into cracks where it would cause frost damage.

The portico was restored 16 years ago by the Friends and no work to it has been done during this contract.



The gilded ball of the 10 feet tall weather-vane was punctured, filling with rain and corroding. It was removed, the copper ball repaired, the whole re-gilded where necessary and set back in position.

The spire, like its medieval predecessors, is hollow: an octagonal cone of thin masonry whose joints were leaking in many places. The joints have been filled to avoid progressive water damage, and 220 of the badly eroded spire stones were replaced.

A spiral staircase rises up through one corner of the tower. Repairs here were particularly difficult because of the load of the spire only one stone at a time could be removed and some of the new pieces of stone had very complicated shapes.

The arches in which the Victorian clock faces were fixed were hacked away in the 19th century to allow the lighting, originally by gas, to illuminate the clock faces. This, however, damaged the arches and weakened the structure of the tower seriously. The arches have been painstakingly rebuilt, stone by stone, to avoid disturbing the structure.

The work to illuminate the clocks had also damaged the 18th century wrought iron chains set into the masonry to stabilise it where there was evidence of structural cracking. Six new stainless steel ties were threaded through the masonry immediately above the clocks, replacing the iron chains.

The fire damage in 1836 was most serious on the east elevation of the tower. Here there were major repairs to the buttresses which involved replacing some of the largest blocks of stone. Repairs inside the tower following the fire damage were inadequate, and the stonework and brick sub-structure have been extensively repaired.

A new fire break was built into the tower to prevent any fire in the tower rooms from spreading into the main roof of the church – since the tower has twice caught fire following a lightning strike, this seemed a sensible precaution. A new staircase gives safe access to the roof for maintenance.

The arches beside the West staircases were seriously cracked due to settling of the tower. Though the movement which caused the cracks is probably old, many gallons of lime mortar were poured into them to ensure that the loads are evenly spread and to avoid unequal stresses on the stones. While the two arches were being completely rebuilt, the structure above was supported by large steel trusses.

*Drawing: Christopher Woodward  
Captions: Red Mason & Roland Jeffery*

## Personal Column: Tim Whittaker

*Tim Whittaker, an architectural historian and flooring consultant, lives in Spitalfields. His National Trust Book of House and Cottage Repair will be published next year.*

On a dreary wet afternoon in October 1996 I sat at my window in Princelet Street watching the tower of Christ Church. The grey stone spire was streaked with rain and soot, marking out Spitalfields against the City skyline. Out of sight, work has begun and scaffolding poles are beginning to rise from the pavement.

Spring 1997, and I wake early and look out of the same window. Builders and stonemasons are already on site. Over the past months I have watched the scaffolding slowly climb up the tower which is now hidden beneath a skeleton of metal and a skin of plastic. All I can see in the bright morning sunshine are brightly-coloured hard hats darting from side to side beneath the plastic sheeting.

Some months later in November 1997 the spire starts to emerge again. I am now living further along Princelet Street and through our first floor bedroom window I can just see the tip of the spire as the afternoon sun catches the newly re-gilded weather-vane on the top — a bright ray in the gathering autumnal gloom.

Walking home in February 1998, I turn the corner from Bishopsgate into Brushfield Street and get my first clear view of the dramatic west front of Christ Church, free of scaffolding, glowing in the floodlight against a dark sky. The sombre grey masonry has been transformed into the silver and golden hues of Portland stone. The complex sculpture of the tower, its massive scale, its playful but bold forms are quite Piranesian in their grandeur.

## Book review

*London's Parish Churches*

by John Leonard.

Breedon Books, Derby, 1997; 210 pp, many plans and illustrations.

This welcome guide includes not just those better-known treasures of London ecclesiastical architecture but many of the lesser ones as well. The author always avoids technical architectural terms where ordinary words will suffice and gives enough historical background without making any of the entries cumbersome. Glad to say, he gives a good account of all Hawksmoor's works; the entry on Christ Church Spitalfields — one of the longer ones in the book — gives an account of the struggle by the Hawksmoor Committee to stave off the threat of demolition in the 1960s and the work done since by the Friends of Christ Church to restore the building. The book starts with the Norman survivals and ends with a selection of significant 20th century churches including the youngest Grade I listed parish church in the country (St Paul's Bow Common in Tower Hamlets). This is a book which those who like to visit churches should buy not least since it is far more compact than many of the alternatives. Better still, the profits are being donated to the Church Urban Fund to support projects in the inner cities. **RJ**

### Thank you :

City law firm Linklaters & Paines for photocopying this issue of Columns.

UBS, Ashurst Morris Crisp and Herbert Smith for other photocopying for us.

Our faithful office volunteers, Fiona Ligonnet, Ceri George and Christopher Woodward. We are always looking for people to help us in the office during the daytime on a regular basis.

Spitalfields writer David Souden for editing the first nine issues of Columns. We will miss his help and now seek a new Editor. Is there anyone out there with a computer and wordsmith skills?

### Among Our Visitors

The Rt. Revd John Sentamu, Bishop of Stepney, visited Christ Church and spent some time discussing progress on the restoration. Bishop John is a man of many parts: a former Ugandan High Court judge — before he fled that country in fear of his life — an accomplished musician and composer of church music, and now bishop. He was particularly excited about the restoration of the Richard Bridge organ and looks forward to playing it himself.

Lady Stirling, widow of the late architect Sir James Stirling, visited to see how money collected in her husband's memory had been put to use. Christ Church was a favourite building of Sir James's since his days as a student, when he borrowed a bicycle and toured the East End discovering the splendours of Hawksmoor's work. Perhaps one can discern a suggestion of the inspiration of Hawksmoor in Stirling's last work, No 1 Poultry, opposite the Mansion House, just a mile away.

### Bus Tours

There are a few places left on our ever-popular bus tours of the six London Hawksmoor churches on Wednesday 13 May and Saturday 30 May. We will travel by coach and the price includes coach, buffet lunch in a riverside pub, donations to each church, notes and expert guiding. The guide on the first date is Christopher Woodward, co-author of *A Guide to London Architecture* and on the second Roland Jeffery, Director of the Friends of Christ Church. Supporters may book at the concessionary price of £37.50 per place. Seats are limited and the events will shortly be publicised in the architectural press at a higher price. To book a seat at the Supporter's price please send your cheque, payable to "The Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields" together with an SAE.

### Wot, no K6's?

Readers of Columns may remember that British Telecom were due to replace the stainless steel telephone boxes outside Christ Church with the original red cast iron K6 design by Gilbert Scott. The proposal was supported both by English Heritage, in a continuing programme of selective replacements of the older style boxes on which they had been consulted, and by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Two years to the day after we heard the news that boxes were due for replacement, no boxes had appeared. New stone paving outside Christ Church had been laid by Bethnal Green City Challenge, new railings erected by the Friends with funding from LB Tower Hamlets and Heritage Lottery Fund, new landscaping to the gardens had been provided. Sylvie Pierce, Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets, exasperated at the delay over the phone boxes, has written to the Chairman of BT pressing for action. But still no boxes. Columns phoned BT to find out why. A BT spokesperson phoned back to say it was under 'active consideration'. Watch that space....

### Heritage Lottery Fund

Among many donors and benefactors to whom we owe thanks for their generous contributions to the work at Christ Church, we have a particular debt of gratitude to the Lottery Heritage Fund.



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