
Christ Church Spitalfields: the restoration

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The comprehensive restoration of the interior and exterior was conducted in several phases from 1966–2015. The work to repair and restore Christ Church involved considerable amounts of research and extensive and complex building work.

1 Chronology of building works, research and investigations since 1966

- 1957 Church closed to the public due to structural faults. Hawksmoor Committee formed to save Christ Church from threat of demolition.
- 1966 Roof rebuilt and building made safe supervised by Cecil Brown FRIBA, funded by the Church of England through the sale of St John's Smith Square.
- 1972 Tower restored and bells, salvaged from St Stephen's Clapham Park, installed.
- 1976 Save Britain's Heritage met in the nave. That day the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields was formed as an informal group, and a Trust from 1978.
- 1977 Whitfield Partners, Architects appointed.
- 1978–1979 Repair and stabilisation of sanctuary beam, and minor works including glazing repairs and fitting window guards.
- 1979 Re-opening former south door with temporary external steps to churchyard.
Survey of tower and steeple.
- 1979–1982 Works to west portico: stabilisation of structure; strengthening walls; timber treatment; stone repairs; new lead work to roof; new ceilings and rainwater system.
- 1980 Repairs to nave floor.
- 1981 Upgrading electrical supply: new electrical main, switchgear and distribution system.
Minor works: repairs to windows; provision of window guards and toilet in south-east vestry.
- 1982–1984 Reinstatement of aisle windows: rebuilding reveals to openings and forming new transoms and cills at original height; installing new iron window frames in all openings; re-glazing and fitting window guards.
- 1983 Works to west forecourt: new cast iron railings with stone plinth; new drains and paving; re-siting the war memorial; repairs to the vault door and repairs to the portico columns pedestals.

- 1983–1987 Crypt excavation: human remains were removed and studied. The work carried out by the Museum of London Archaeological Service. The Friends set up the excavation including negotiations with Health & Safety Executive, London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the World Health Organisation; grant applications to the Greater London Council, Historic Buildings Division, Nuffield Foundation and the Wellcome Trust; liaison with the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Natural History Museum; initial supervision of the excavation; co-ordination of all building works involved with the excavation; negotiations concerned with the ‘smallpox’ crisis; co-ordination with the Centre for the Surveillance of Communicable Diseases.
- Reinstatement works in the crypt and vestry room on completion of the excavation.
- 1986 Advice and Design Proposal for disabled lift.
- 1987 Restoration of vestry room: removal of unsuitable double-glazing; new windows and opening casements; repairs to the floor including timber treatment; new electrical services and painting and decorating.
- Installation of interim nave heating system.
- Minor works including repairs to nave floor and alterations to north-east vestry.
- Parish worship returns.
- 1989 Installation of lighting and power circuits in tower.
- 1980–1990 Report on aisle galleries: research into original arrangement of galleries and organ, including preparation of report and numerous drawings on proposed restoration of galleries.
- 1991–1992 Re-erection of memorials removed from aisle walls, on north-west and south-west gallery staircases.
- 1996 Funding awarded:
- Heritage Lottery Fund: £2.4 million
 Monument Trust: £500,000
 English Heritage: £435,000
- 1997 Tower and spire consolidated and cleaned.
- 1998 Brick infilling of window and door openings between aisle galleries and west staircases removed.
- Pipes from the 1735 Richard Bridge organ dismantled and stored for safekeeping by William Drake.
- 1999 South façade cleaned and repaired. Rebuilding of double flight of Portland stone steps on the south side. Repair of rectory yard gate piers and iron gates.
- 2000 Timber floor structure of the aisle galleries rebuilt. Repair and cleaning of north and east façades.
- Rebuilding of the nave parapets.
- 2002–2004 Contract for the main restoration signed with Wallis Special Projects of Bromley.
- Installation of disabled lift at east end of church; some re-levelling works in east yard; paving slabs laid for disabled ramp.
- Stone repairs to the entrances to the east end of the church.

At the east end, 1970s maisonettes removed; original staircases between church and gallery level reinstated; new staircases installed between nave floor level and crypt.

Brick infilling of window and door openings between aisle galleries and east staircases removed (mirroring that at the west end which was carried out in 1998).

New boiler and services under west portico steps.

Roof trusses installed to strengthen roof; insulation and flooring in roof void.

Brick, stone and plaster repairs to nave and other areas; cleaning of columns and capitals; repainting of whole.

Repairs to the east window.

Repair of Royal Arms on sanctuary beam.

Installation of heating and electrical services under new Purbeck stone floor.

Laying of new Purbeck stone floor.

Sanctuary floor returned from 1860 level to original (lower than Victorian) level.

Galleries reinstated.

Framework for gallery fronts, fix oak panelling to framework. Install new (wood) floor at gallery level.

Original nave pews adapted for gallery level. (Previously, the pews had been taken out from the nave during the remodelling by Ewan Christian in the 1860s and some of them had been stored in the chancel.)

Oak brackets supporting the galleries carved by Gonzalez & Harms near Chard. Eleven new brackets were carved and twenty-seven surviving brackets repaired.

Plasterwork to the new aisle ceilings.

New doors and panelling.

At the west end below the portico roof, the exterior walls were repaired and cleaned.

2004 Summer: Completion of contract works.

2004–2011 Conservation of internal monuments etc.

Re-installation of font.

Electrical works to facilitate public performances and use.

Return of the pulpit remains.

Feasibility study on crypt redevelopment and use.

2009 Contract for restoration of Richard Bridge organ signed.

2011 Stone commemorating the restoration, dedicated by the Bishop of London, Rt Revd Richard Chartres, installed in the portico.

2012 Start of organ restoration.

2015 Completion of organ restoration.

2 The Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields Officers

Chairs:

Peter Burman	1976–1984
Eleanor Murray	1984–1996
Eric Elstob	1996–2002
Christine Whaite	2002–2018

Honorary Surveyors:

Robert Chitham	1976–1978
John Earl	1978–1985
Peter Masterman Davies	1985–2013
Paul Hammond	2013–2018

Campaign Directors:

Roland Jeffery	1994–1998
Carolyn Fuest	1998–2016

3 Project Team for works 2002-4

Professional team for 2002–2004

Whitfield Partners, Architects (1977–2001), Sir William Whitfield, A D ‘Red’ Mason; Purcell Miller Tritton, Architects (from 2001), Michael Morrison and A D ‘Red’ Mason; Arup Consultants, Acoustics; Chapman Taylor Project Services; Cook & Butler, Quantity Surveyors; Hilson Moran Partnership, Services Engineers; Hockley & Dawson, Structural Engineers; Malcolm Reading Associates Ltd, Project Management.

Main Contractor for 2002–2004

Wallis Special Projects of Bromley.

Principal Sub-Contractors for 2002–2004

Ashford Wood Turners (reredos columns); Patrick Baty (paint analysis); Beamfast (on-site joinery fixings); Bowling & Garrard (mechanical and electrical); Campbell Smith (decorations); G Cook (plaster specialists); Davenheath (fire alarms and security installation); Dernier & Hamlyn (chandeliers and lights); Dorothea Restoration Services Ltd (architectural ironmongery); Gonzalez & Harms (carvers); Gordon Tomalin Partnership (survey drawings); Haysom (Purbeck stone); Holden Conservation (stone conservation); Movement Management (disabled lift); Palcon Systems (commissioning engineers); Simpsons of Norfolk (pews); S J M Polishers (French polishing); Stone Restoration Services (stonework and brickwork); Wallis Joinery (joinery).

4 Awards

2004 Stone Federation's Natural Stone Awards: Commendation.

The restoration work to the stone on Christ Church, both inside and outside (with the exception of the tower & spire) was carried out by Stone Restoration Services Ltd.

2005 Georgian Group Architectural Awards: Restoration of a Georgian Church

2005 The Wood Awards: Winner in the Conservation/Restoration Category.

'It is evident that a very high level of workmanship has been used...great attention to detail. This is one of the most impressive pieces of architecture in London and has been extremely well restored...the quality of the finish is superb.'

2005 Building of the Year Award Royal Fine Art Commission Trust: a specialist award for 'A Glorious Restoration'.

2006 RIBA Conservation Award.

2006 Civic Trust Award.

5 Book of the Floor Appeal

The Friends launched an appeal in 2002 to raise funds for the new stone floor at Christ Church. The floor's Purbeck stone slabs were cut from St Aldhelm's Quarry at Worth Matravers in Dorset. The floor was awarded a Commendation at the 2004 Stone Federation's Natural Stone Awards.

Contributors to the appeal were able to make a personal dedication and this was recorded in an especially commissioned book. The dedications cover a wide span of Christ Church's history from acknowledgements of 18th century Huguenot and Spitalfields ancestors to present day celebratory birth dedications. The book was beautifully designed and lettered by Nancy Winters, Fellow of the Society of Scribes & Illuminators.

The book is kept with the archives in the Bishopsgate Institute and can be viewed there by appointment.