

Columns

NUMBER 28 • SPRING 2007

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.

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Exquisite sculptures revealed after restoration

Ever since Christ Church reopened in 2004, the condition of the two large monuments to Edward Peck and Robert Ladbrooke on either side of the Sanctuary has stood out in stark contrast to the finished interior. It has always been part of the plan to restore these monuments but, for both economic and strategic reasons, it made sense to do this work after completing the main building contract. Now, through the generosity of our Supporters and with allocated funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund grant for the restoration, the Friends have been able to commission the monuments' cleaning and conservation.

The monument on the south side of the Sanctuary is a memorial to Edward Peck (d.1736) who was one of the commissioners appointed by Parliament under the 1711 Fifty New Churches Act, and who laid the foundation stone of Christ Church Spitalfields. The monument was erected in 1737 and is by Thomas Dunn, stone mason of the church. The workshop of Thomas Dunn was based in Southwark, a prolific centre for sculpture at that time as it was outside the City of London and thus free of the restrictions of the Guilds.

The monument on the north side is a fine example of the work of John Flaxman, RA (1755-1826). It commemorates Sir Robert Ladbrooke (d.1773), wearing his Lord Mayor's robes, and his wife Elizabeth (d.1768), granddaughter of Edward Peck. It was erected by Richard Ladbrooke in 1794. Flaxman was one of England's most distinguished and prolific Neo-classical sculptors and, while other works by this sculptor can now be seen in Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral and the Victoria and Albert Museum, it is surprising to find one in what was a poor East London parish church.

The restoration of the monuments is being undertaken by Taylor Pearce, a small firm of conservators whose clients include English Heritage and the National Trust. They also look after the Royal Collection at the Queen's Gallery and the permanent collection at the Royal Academy as well as overseeing their visiting exhibitions.

The aim of the work in Christ Church has been to return the monuments as far as is possible to their original glory. An essential first step in the conservation of any monument is the production of a detailed appraisal documenting its condition, causes of deterioration and proposals for treatment. Although the amount of



Debra Collis, one of the two conservators at work on restoring Flaxman's monument to Sir Robert Ladbrooke.

repair required to these monuments has been relatively small, it has been noted that the discolouration of the Carrara marble of the Ladbrooke monument is due to inappropriate cleaning in the 19th century, something that unfortunately cannot be reversed.

The cleaning method has been deliberately non-invasive. The ethos is of a sympathetic response to the needs of the monument and of conservation rather than restoration. The intended finished result is that they should not look as if they had been carved yesterday, but rather to bring back their original lustre with their sense of history and patina intact.

The conservators have been using a poultice process. Powdered clay (attapulgitite) is mixed with water to a

reasonably stiff, wet poultice; no chemicals are added. The mixture is applied to the area being cleaned and covered with polythene so that it dries out slowly while the poultice softens up the dirt which can then be easily lifted out of the marble. The clay mixture is then removed, area wiped and a dental steam cleaner used to remove the loosened dirt and grime. The advantage of this instrument is that it is non invasive: the nozzle is tiny and so even the minutest details can be carefully cleaned. In some areas the whole process needs to be repeated several times. After that, the cleaned area is waxed – in delicate areas the wax is often applied with a small paint brush – and then buffed. You can be sure that the buffing involves a great deal of elbow grease.

Cleaning the monuments has brought unexpected but rewarding discoveries. On the Peck monument, two bits of the urn were found tucked behind the statue; so what was thought to have been three to five pieces at the top of the monument was actually eight in total. The urn was therefore considerably larger and the scale of the whole monument consequently much grander.

Dismantling and mending the urn provided considerable challenges. The pieces which were in place were not in fact fixed, nor were they correctly aligned: they were precariously balanced. The first challenge was to dismantle the urn safely. Some of the pieces were very heavy and tricky to get down without damaging the rest of the monument or the conservators themselves. It has been rebuilt using small stainless steel locating pins to fix the pieces together.

With restoration the vibrancy of the Peck monument has once more been revealed. Although it is a highly stylised and controlled example of Baroque design, the exuberant and individualistic characters of Peck and the two little putti are clear for all to see. Similarly, Robert Ladbroke has been transformed from a rather restrained if dignified figure into the man of character that he must surely have been.

Now that the restoration of these monuments nears completion, we are turning our attention to the thirty-five stone plaques on the west staircases and in the west vestibule. Many of these record the names of people buried at Christ Church. Some of these are in a very poor state. The stones will cost, on average, £1000 each to clean and repair and the Friends are looking for donations of £250 per monument to match the Heritage Lottery funding. There is a photograph of every one of the stones on the Friends' website www.christchurchspitalfields.org which Supporters may like to visit: follow the link to 'Monuments'.

As this edition of *Columns* goes to print, the work to the Peck and Ladbroke monuments has just been completed. We hope to have photographs of them in our next issue.

The Richard Bridge organ

In the last issue of *Columns* (27) we reported that the Friends were seeking grants to help fund the restoration of the organ. We have since learnt that unfortunately the Heritage Lottery Fund has decided not to offer a grant towards this project. Although this is a setback to the fundraising plans, the Friends are still determined to continue with the project. The historical and musical significance of the organ is without question and the Friends have received many letters from all over the world in support of both the project and the approach to be taken for its restoration.

The intention of the scheme is to restore the organ and its case to its original 1735 state but with the addition of a small pedal board. While details remain to be refined, the three keyboard divisions of the 1735 organ will be reinstated using the surviving material and where

“The Spitalfields organ by Bridge, 1735, is of the greatest importance.”

Gustav Leonhardt

necessary providing replicas for lost components and registers. The stop list, compasses and pitch will be those of 1735. To allow players to perform organ music from other repertoires such as the French and German of the eighteenth century and earlier, it is intended to include a small pedal division, re-using the wooden pedal pipes provided by Lincoln in 1837. The pedal board will be removable so that the performer can reproduce the experience of playing the Bridge organ without compromise.

As well as the organ's working parts, its case is also significant. It is of solid walnut and the exuberantly carved double serpentine front is one of only eight ever made to that pattern and by far the largest. With the money that Friends' Supporters have already generously donated we hope to start work on the case next year.

Now the work to the Peck & Ladbroke monuments has been finished, the reinstatement of Christ Church's original organ is the only large piece of work remaining to complete the restoration of the nave of this extraordinary building. Our appeal is for £300,000 and your support is ever more vital to its success. Thank you.

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 law firm Ashurst for generously providing an office; for printing this issue of *Columns* and other printed material. We value donations large

and small. Thank you. We would also 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 would like to thank the following for their recent donations:

Gifts of £25 and over

Mrs Valerie Anderson *
Miss R G Ansell*
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Mr Rex M Davis*
Mr Jeremy Hill
James and Clare Kirkman Trust
In memory of Simon Sainsbury
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**Partly or fully for the Richard Bridge Organ Appeal*

How to support the Friends

To become an acknowledged Supporter of the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields please make a minimum annual donation of £25 (£30 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:

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

Or, by completing the appropriate parts of this page:

- by **standing order** (helping us to plan ahead and keep down administrative costs)
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Dates for your diary

The **Gabrieli Consort & Players** directed by Paul McCreesh will be performing *Acis & Galatea* by George Frideric Handel on Wednesday 25th April at 7.30pm. *Acis & Galatea* is a delightful pastoral masque setting of Ovid's mythological tale of two lovers torn apart by a jealous giant. Handel's beautifully restrained and elegant English setting, with its echoes of Purcell, has remained one of his most popular works. Tickets at £5-£35 including a post-concert drink are available from the Barbican box office 0845 120 7543 or online at: www.barbican.org.uk/eticketing.

The **Spitalfields Festival** will take place this year from 5th to 22nd of June under its new artistic director Diana Burrell. The programme and booking details are at www.spitalfieldsfestival.org.uk, and the telephone hotline is 020 7377 1362.

In the autumn the Friends are running another of the popular **bus tours of all six of Hawksmoor's London churches** on Saturday 29th September. Information and booking details are included with this issue of *Columns*.

This memorial stone for Eric Elstob was dedicated on 28th January 2007. Carved by Gary Breeze in Purbeck stone from St Aldhelm's quarry, Worth Matravers, Dorset, it is fixed to the wall on the landing of the north west staircase at Christ Church overlooking the nave.

Personal Column

Abigail Maxwell-Bowen, conservator with Taylor Pearce, spoke to *Columns* about her work in conserving the Peck and Ladbrooke monuments.

How did you start doing this type of work?

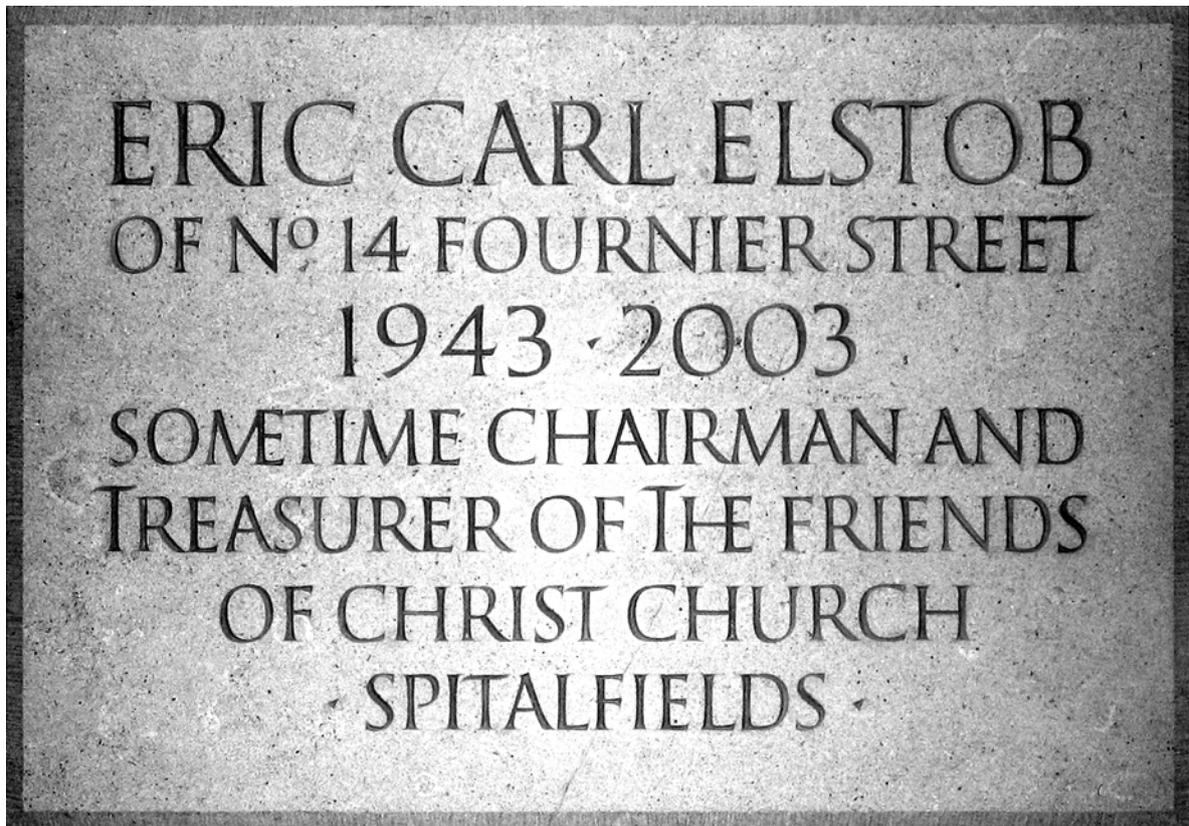
'I wanted to do something practical and not work in an office all the time. I did a joint degree at Goldsmiths College (part of the University of London) in History of Art and Art Studio Practice. I followed this with voluntary work at the Guildhall Art Gallery and at Oxfam as well as studying chemistry and maths at night school.'

For Abby, the prospect of working with sculptures was more attractive than perhaps being a picture restorer and it was the V&A who suggested that she might go and look at some conservation studios to see the work that went on there. She was offered an apprenticeship at Taylor Pearce and has now been with them for sixteen years.

While still working full time, she has recently obtained a Masters in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester on a distance learning programme. This has provided a valuable insight into the museum world of conservation and its management and future funding.

What memorable things have you worked on?

'Well, there's the Botero Venus in Broadgate, which I've done maintenance cleaning on. Also we did some of the chapels in Westminster Cathedral, interesting because of the range of materials - marble and stone architectural detail, and mosaic walls. It's



always satisfying to take care of big chunky bronzes ... and I also have a soft spot for a Mr Joshua Ward by Carlini, at the V&A, as he was one of the first pieces I worked on (supervised of course) as an apprentice. The opposite in materials, but equally interesting, was a more recent piece, by Duane Hanson (his best known works may be 'Florida Shopper' and 'Tourists' – the hyper real figures of Middle America made of fibreglass, wigs, real clothes). It's also pretty special when you get to work on pieces by your own heroes (for want of a better term) so for me that has to include people like Bernini, Giacometti, Duchamp, and Mach.

'Things are memorable for many different reasons: often because beforehand one has no idea that these works are there in the first place; and often for the unexpected small things – for instance in the Peck – with the little putti on either side at the bottom which were almost black and the stone had become very dull. The contrast when one had been cleaned and the other not, was dramatic.'

Coincidentally, Abby and Debra Collis, her co-worker on the Christ Church monuments, have recently been working on the Buxton Memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens near the palace of Westminster. The monument (designed by the architect Samuel Sanders Teulon in 1865) commemorates the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire in 1834 and is dedicated to Thomas Buxton (of the Truman, Hanbury, Buxton & Co brewery in Brick Lane) who was instrumental in campaigning to stop slavery after the abolition of trading in slaves. The restored monument was recently unveiled by the Deputy Prime Minister to mark the bi-centenary of the Act abolishing slavery. Supporters of the Friends might have seen the BBC's Songs of Praise broadcast on Sunday 25 March and filmed in Christ Church with the bass-baritone Willard White, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Act.

Not all your work is actual conservation. What other types of work do you do?

'Sometimes our work involves overseeing valuable works of art which come to England for exhibitions. For instance when the Royal Academy of Art has an exhibition of sculpture, they would employ us to oversee the unpacking of the works. We then would write a condition report on each monument or sculpture. While an exhibition is on, we check weekly to ensure everything is as it should be. At the end of the exhibition we would write another report and oversee the packing up. Being involved with visiting exhibitions can be very interesting and it's good to have the chance to see how conservators and curators from different parts of the world work: how they'd lift, pack and transport something, and their different ideas on display and treatments.'

Could you say a little more about working as part of the team at Taylor Pearce?

'The work is extremely varied which helps make it such an interesting job. We rarely work on our own: more often we will work as a team of two or more depending on the size of the project. A lot of the work is very physical and can require heavy lifting. Not all the work is as warm as at Christ Church where one of the challenges was to keep our noise levels down, especially during a BBC recording! As a complete contrast, if you are working at the front of a church in the middle of January it can be very cold; and if on a building site, for example as at St Martin-in-the-Fields, you often have to work alongside the noise of construction.'

'However, the compensations are many and rewarding: to get close up to some of these extraordinary pieces of art and so see hitherto unnoticed features and to appreciate their quality.'

'There is a great satisfaction to be had from bringing a monument back to life so that its intrinsic value and original glory, as well as the accumulated history of the centuries is revealed for all to see.'

Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



Published by the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields
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