

Columns

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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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The organ appeal

As reported in the last edition of *Columns*, the Rector, PCC and the Friends have appointed William Drake of Buckfastleigh to restore the 1735 Richard Bridge organ at Christ Church.

Work to the pipes is likely to start at the end of 2011 but before that it is hoped to begin repairs to the magnificent Georgian case as early as the end of this year.

Repairs will need to be carried out to the internal building frame which supports the organ case and also the components of the organ including the sound boards, action and the two thousand pipes, as well as to the case itself. The case is a beautiful and rare piece of eighteenth-century furniture in its own right; the front with its exuberantly carved and pierced serpentine 'flats' is largely mahogany. When restored the case will complete the west end of the nave. The organ is a remarkable survival from a hugely important period of English musical history, and it represents a missing piece in a jigsaw of eighteenth-century musical culture.

The Friends are concentrating their efforts on raising the remaining funds to restore the organ. The total cost for the organ and the case will be just over £1 million. Generous support for the Friends' work means that we can begin this project, although some £250,000 is still needed.

Our readers will remember that much of the £5.7 million needed for the award winning restoration of the interior of the church was raised by the generous donations of the Friends' loyal two thousand-plus Supporters. This sum was daunting but these numerous smaller donations helped us raise it: it really was a case of proving that 'every penny counts'.

So far we have fewer major funders for the Richard Bridge Organ Appeal but we are confident that we will be able to raise the substantial funds required. We hope that you will be inspired to support this exciting and important restoration project.

The crown and mitres from the top of the organ case with organ builders William Drake (right) and Joost de Boer. (Photographed in 1998 when the organ was dismantled for safekeeping and eventual restoration.)



Stone plaque commemorates the restoration of Christ Church

A Portland stone plaque, commissioned by the Friends and designed and carved by Caroline Webb, has recently been installed under the portico of Christ Church. It is carved in Pond freestone from Haysom Quarry in Dorset, the same quarry that provided the stones for the new floor of the nave and aisles. The inscription commemorates the entire campaign of restoration from the start of the Friends in 1976 until the church reopened in 2004. It acknowledges the major donors to the campaign – Simon Sainsbury, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage as well as the many individuals, charities and companies who so generously gave to the Friends to achieve this massive project. A ceremony to unveil it is being planned later in the year.

Caroline Webb was selected by the trustees to carry out the letter carving. The Friends' interview with her follows below.



The Webb family has a long tradition of working in the Arts and Crafts. Can you tell me a little about them and how this has influenced your work?

Edward Webb, a watercolourist and pupil of David Cox, was the father of Sir Aston Webb (1849–1930), president of the RA and RIBA. Aston Webb was the architect of many important London buildings around 1900. His work includes parts of Imperial College, the eastern façade of Buckingham Palace, Admiralty Arch on the Mall, the Cromwell Road frontage of the Victoria and Albert Museum and a restoration of the medieval church of St Bartholomew-the-Great in London. He

also designed, among other buildings, the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth and Christ's Hospital, Horsham. Aston's nephews Geoffrey, and Christopher Webb my grandfather, were stained glass artists whose work can be found in cathedrals and churches throughout the country. Christopher's work includes windows in Sheffield, Exeter, Salisbury, Chichester and Southwark Cathedrals. My father John Webb has spent his working life making fine ecclesiastical silver.

One of my earliest memories is of my grandfather, Christopher, who was very elderly then, working at his easel in a studio in our garden in St Albans in the shadow of the Abbey. My father also worked from home; I spent many hours in his workshop as a child.

My grandmother was a great influence on me too; she was a less conventional artist – a wood engraver, painter and writer – and would have been very good had she had her own career. She would take me to churchyards and, possibly to keep me quiet and give me something to do, would give me a piece of paper and some heel ball and I would make rubbings of the lettering on the gravestones.

What led you to be come a letter carver?

When I was very little my father bought me a wooden napkin ring with eight sides and carved each letter of my name on each. I saw and held it every day and this small object was almost certainly to be a big influence on my future!

I studied typography and graphic communication at Reading University. At that time it was a very practical course, as well an academic one. Ralph Beyer taught lettering; he was a highly respected carver who designed and carved the inscriptions for the new Coventry Cathedral and was the first person to show me how to carve a letter. Michael Harvey, another well-regarded lettering designer and carver, also used to come to teach on a visiting basis. He has continued to be an influence and a mentor.

Can you tell me about your collaboration with the poet Ian Hamilton Finlay?

Working with IHF [1925–2006] was a very special experience. He approached me with commissions when I was just starting to work for myself. It was a special relationship: unlike the usual client-carver relationship his was an equal partnership. Although IHF was very specific about what he wanted, it was a real collaboration. His pieces tended to be very site-specific; the location was crucial to the design. Some were for exhibitions in major galleries in America and Europe; others were for his garden Stonypath (now known as Little Sparta). One of our first collaborations was a series of small wooden folding icons for an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1992. Inside each were tiny versions of his bigger works. I carved them at the kitchen table while also working on other bigger projects. They taught me a great deal about carving letters into wood.

I also did a number of larger pieces for him: benches, plaques, wooden poles and designs for works in neon,

among others. The works varied hugely in scale and material. Sometimes I wouldn't see the finished article, for example the lettering for a glass bridge in a garden in Provence. He was a great correspondent.

How do you view your approach to lettering?

Reading University was very rigorous in its teaching. We studied the history of type design and letterforms in depth as well as the practical use of both. So unusually perhaps my approach tends to be from a design perspective rather than that of a stonemason. I am happy to draw inspiration from Roman, Renaissance, and particularly the lovely English vernacular letters of the eighteenth century.

I tend to draw my letters, rather than using a brush. I focus on the words and try to design an inscription that will best convey the meaning of the text. I like my lettering to have a purpose and in that sense I see myself more as a craftsman than an artist.

Can you tell us a little about the practical processes of working on a stone commission: for instance choosing the material to work with, tools that you use, things that can go wrong?

I like to use our native British stones. Some stones are becoming more difficult to obtain. The Purbeck stone quarries, for example, are limited to the number of times they can blast and then much of the stone goes to big corporate projects in London; it can be quite hard for a small business or individual stonemason to get suitable pieces. But there are still some lovely stones to choose from, such as slate from Wales and the Lake District, Delabole slate from Cornwall and Caithness slate from Scotland. Also good for lettering are the Purbeck and Portland stones and sandstones from Yorkshire.

In contrast to the wide variety of chisels that one needs for carving letters in wood, the tools needed for carving letters in stone are very simple. I use tungsten chisels and a zinc dummy. Wood-carving requires gouges and curved chisels to coax the letter out of the material. Lettering in stone is more immediate and only requires one shape of chisel as there is no grain to contend with.

What do you do if something goes wrong while you are carving?

I have to check the text very carefully a number of times before starting to carve as by that stage the letters appear to the carver as shapes rather than words! Sometimes the edge of a letter might chip or the shape might not be quite right. In those cases and if the carving is quite shallow it is possible to rub the stone back. On some stones small blemishes can be filled. That would have been very difficult to do with the Christ Church stone as it was very even in texture with few shells.

How did you find working on the Christ Church project?

It was very enjoyable. I enjoyed working with my clients and particularly Red Mason whose opinions I respect.

Communication was good and there was enough time to get the inscription right. Between us a lot of thought was put into the size of the stone and the material, the letterform, the balance of the lettering, and how best to retain the visual integrity of the plinth.

What's next for you?

I am currently working on two large wooden panels with inscriptions for St Peter's Church in St Albans, designing a wooden piece for a new George Harrison memorial garden, a number of memorials and headstones as well as pieces for various exhibitions.

See more of Caroline Webb's work at:

<http://www.carolinewebblettering.com>



For your diary

Friends' Organ Day Wednesday 9 June 2010

The Friends are arranging an all day organ tour to visit three significant architectural venues and to explore the organs installed in them. The day begins and ends at Christ Church Spitalfields. We will also visit St Botolph Aldgate and Dulwich College Chapel. There will be an opportunity to see, hear, explore and learn about these instruments in the company of Dr William McVicker, organ curator at London's Royal Festival Hall.

The cost including bus, lunch, donations to the churches, notes and the chance to view the pictures at Dulwich Picture Gallery is £75 per person (£65 for paid-up Supporters). Places are limited and will be allocated as received. Booking is essential.

Please contact the Friends office for further details and to book tickets.

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 the law firm Ashurst for generously providing an office; for printing this issue of *Columns* and other printed material. Thank you to our volunteers who come and help both in the office and at

special events. We would 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 also like to thank the following for their recent donations:

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** partly or fully for the Richard Bridge Organ Appeal*

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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:

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