

Columns

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THE FRIENDS OF CHRIST CHURCH SPITALFIELDS
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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 case revived

The restoration of the Spitalfields organ has two components: the wooden organ case – one of the largest surviving Georgian furnishings in a London church – and the mechanical and sounding parts of the instrument.

William Drake undertook the woodwork repairs and secured the physical structure of the massive case including the intricate carving. The re-finishing of the surfaces in accordance with the original scheme of 1735 was undertaken by David Luard. The work on the case was completed in the summer of 2013.

Repair of the historic pipework

Work has been steadily progressing in the William Drake workshop in Buckfastleigh, Devon, on the restoration of the many thousands of active components, and the design and construction of new parts to replace those lost or irretrievably damaged since 1735.

The organ builders returned to the church in September 2013. The soundboards – huge wind chests on which the pipes stand, and which contain the mechanism that supplies wind to the pipes – were reinstated on the restored building frame inside the case. The new keyboards (made in the original style, based on the surviving keys at nearby St Leonard's, Shoreditch) were put in place, together with surviving parts of the key action, and the laborious process of fitting the hundreds of thin wooden rods which connect the keys to the valves which (in turn) admit wind to the pipes has begun. The equally demanding task of making and fitting the wooden and metal linkages between the stop knobs and the sliders in the soundboards is now underway. All this work has to be done on site to ensure that the dimensions are correct, so that the various mechanisms can be finely regulated.

Meanwhile, the surviving pipes are being repaired. Missing flue and reed pipes will be replaced with new ones in the correct style and to the original dimensions and made by Shires Organ Pipes Ltd in Leeds, recognised as among the finest craftsmen in Europe. The missing wooden pipes will be constructed in the organ builder's workshop in Devon. This is where the flue and wooden pipes will be regulated; the reed pipes will go to the reed voicer in Essex before being delivered to Christ Church.

We continue to be extremely grateful to every one of our Supporters for their generosity: with your help we have almost reached our target of £1.2 million and this is a tremendous achievement. Our final request for funding for this project is to go towards the gilding and



S R B HUMPHREYS

Restored organ case from nave

voicing of the pipes. This last phase brings together the visual and the aural. **Our target is to raise £80,000 for this work. Please continue to support us and help us complete this extraordinary project.**

The pipes will be installed in the final phases of the project, once the mechanism and wind system are complete. Some 950 hours will be required for their expert tuning and regulation.

The front pipes facing the nave will be gilded by expert John Brennan. This is a critical job requiring skilful preparation of the pipes: the application of the gold size needs to be seamless to ensure no blemishes in the gold leaf. Gilded pipework is probably our most enduring image for an organ. The completed organ at Christ Church will be a revelation.

William Drake, Organ Builder

1943–2014

It is with great sadness that we bring the news of the death of organ builder William Drake in January of this year. Our deepest condolences are with Bill's family, his friends, and his colleagues. It is a particular sadness that Bill will not see the completion of the Spitalfields organ.

We are pleased that the contract is continuing with the highly skilled craftsmen who have been working with Drake since the organ was dismantled in 1998 and who have been closely involved with the meticulous research and scholarship which has informed the instrument's restoration. Nicholas Thistlethwaite, one of the Friends' two Organ Consultants, contributes this obituary.

Later this year the eagerly-awaited restoration of the 1735 Richard Bridge organ in Christ Church will be completed by the workshop of William Drake. Sadly, Bill Drake died in January at the age of seventy. Yet the project would have been impossible without his skill, vision and determination to make Spitalfields a landmark restoration of international significance.

Bill Drake was born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA where his father (who held a research post in pharmaceuticals) was working at the time. Both his parents were musical: they played piano duets and Bill's formidable mother (an American citizen of Swiss-German origin) was also a singer. Bill inherited an acute ear and an interest in music.

When Bill's father died in 1952, he and his sister returned to England to live with his father's sister in Bere Alston, Devon where the Drakes had lived for generations. He attended Kelly College (where he built a secret den beneath the organ to evade games), and then Dartington College where he was taught the organ by John Wellingham who introduced him to the early keyboard repertoire and the performance issues it raised.

In the 1960s, he became an apprentice for three years to the Austrian organ building firm Rieger Orgelbau. Here he received a comprehensive training in the craft from Josef Glatter-Götz then moved on to work as a journeyman for Rudolf Janke in Göttingen. He completed his 'masterpiece' in the workshop of Patrick Collon in Brussels for which he was awarded the certificate of master organ-builder.

Back in Devon, Drake and Wellingham conceived the idea of creating a centre where organ teacher and organ-builder could work side by side, each discipline informing the other. Named after the seventeenth-century Devon organ-builder, The John Loosemore Centre was opened in 1974 in a disused chapel in Buckfastleigh: its programme included tuition in music and dance, choral classes, and lectures on organ history and

design. Meanwhile, Drake built his first organs in an adjoining workshop.

Most were small and all adhered to classical principles: mechanical ('tracker') actions, low wind-pressures, and architectural cases. He made bureau and continuo organs as well as small church instruments, and also undertook the first of the restorations of historic organs which became vital sources of information and inspiration for his later work; the restoration of the Seede organ of 1780 in the Catholic Chapel at Lulworth Castle, 1986-9, was particularly significant. As his work became more widely known the business grew. Prestigious contracts followed for including Jesus College, Oxford, 1993; the Palace of Westminster, and Lincoln Cathedral, 2010. Bill and his team restored historic organs in Buckingham Palace (1818), and Jesus College, Cambridge (1849). All these were characterised by responsive mechanical actions, impeccable voicing and regulation, and a wonderful musicality.

Spitalfields was to be Drake's magnum opus. His legacy here, and the many other organs he built or restored, will enable new generations of players to explore the organ repertoire on instruments of transparent beauty and refinement, and to admire the craftsmanship of past master organ-builders, to which honoured list the name of William Drake must now be added.



S R B HUMPHREYS

In the foreground, Geert Noppers checking through the components of the mechanical action behind the new keyboards. Joost de Boer at the back working on other parts of the action.

The extraordinary reed stops at Christ Church Spitalfields

The 1735 Richard Bridge organ in Christ Church Spitalfields remains unique in English organ-building, because of its sheer size and the number of reed stops which it possessed.

'Reed' stops are so named because the pipes (controlled by the stops) produce their sound through the vibration of a brass tongue against a brass aperture known as a 'shallot'. The principle is almost identical to the way in which clarinets produce their sound – a reed vibrating over the opening in the mouthpiece.

Reed pipes have various component parts: a boot, tongue, shallot, tuning spring, block and resonator. The key components in the production of the reed sound are the shape and angle of the shallot, the thickness of the tongue, the amount of curvature which the voicer imparts to it, and the shape of the resonator. This latter component amplifies and shapes the sound made by the reed tongue as it beats against the shallot opening. The shape of the shallot and the size of its opening essentially govern the quality of the sound (roundness, incisiveness, etc.) and the resonator amplifies it, strengthens the harmonic structure of the note and rounds-out the tonal quality.

In the Spitalfields organ the reeds have an amazingly varied style of tone and construction. Over the centuries some of these pipes have been interfered with, some have been lost completely, or their tonal quality lost by 'revoicing' work carried out by later builders. But enough survives of the reeds to be able to reconstruct the components and to add the missing pipes.

The original reed ranks from 1735 are:

- Great Organ – Clarion, Trumpet (I) and Trumpet (II) and Bassoon
- Choir Organ – Cremona, Vochumane, French Horn
- Swell Organ – Trumpet, Hautboy, Clarion

This collection of stops represents an extraordinary and unique set of tonal colours for an English organ of this period. The instrument must have been able to produce a most intriguing array of sounds. As tastes changed, some of these stops evidently fell from favour in later generations. Recent research indicates that a later organ builder must have dismantled some of the pipework's components and reused the shallots in new ways within the instrument. William Drake Ltd has undertaken painstaking research in assessing each of the components of the pipes and the voicer has reunited some shallots with original blocks and resonators. Pipes which have been lost or destroyed have been remade by working out the mathematical progressions of the pipe scales and dimensions of the constituent parts of the reeds.

There is a wealth of tales to be told about these pipes – just a few curious stories are presented here. In general, the reed pipes follow the method of construction illustrated in Mersenne's *Harmonie Universelle* of 1637, as opposed to the type of reed construction illustrated in Dom



WILLIAM MCVICKER

The curious chokes (discs drilled with holes) in Hill & Son's magnum opus at Sydney Town Hall. The simpler versions of these chokes have proved of great interest in respect of the recreation of the Richard Bridge's French Horn stop

Bédos's great organ-building treatise published thirteen years after the construction of the Bridge organ. The two Great Trumpet reeds are (perhaps surprisingly) of subtly different construction. The French Horn stop is a rarity; eighteenth-century organ music survives which is written in imitation of the sounds of orchestral French Horns – and so to be able to hear such music played once again on this kind of stop is a most intriguing prospect. There are a handful of examples of French Horn reed stops which have been examined, including St James's Bermondsey (1828, Bishop), Birmingham Town Hall (William Hill, 1834) and Sydney Town Hall (built in England by Hill & Son between 1885 and 1889). The latter instrument probably represents something of a compendium of English organ-building techniques. The Bermondsey, Birmingham and Sydney pipes of their Horn stops have a 'choke' inserted into the upper part of the resonator to muffle the sound and produce a muted horn effect.

Of the Choir Cremona very little survives. A small pipe, thought to be from a Cremona stop by Byfield (c.1760) was discovered under the floorboards of the Lord Mayor's Chapel in Bristol. The pipe probably belonged to an instrument which may once have stood in the Assembly Rooms in Bristol. The original components of this eighteenth-century pipe – resonator, block, shallot and tongue – appear to be intact. The pipe was sent to the organ builders in Devon who have measured it in detail. The information will provide evidence for how the mathematical progression of the Spitalfields Cremona pipe scale might have been conceived.

These examples, together with the research and study of surviving material at Christ Church, help the organ builders to piece together how the missing reed pipes might have been constructed and so will give a good impression of how the stop should sound.

William McVicker

Dr William McVicker is consultant to the organ project together with Dr Nicholas Thistlethwaite.

We have many more photographs of the restoration on our website:

www.christchurchspitalfields.org

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 and for printed material. Thank you to our volunteers who 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 by standing order, thereby saving on administrative costs. We have recently changed our bank accounts. Thank you to all who have taken the trouble to change their standing order details because of this. We are most grateful for your continuing support and for the many who have generously increased their giving. We would also like to thank the following for their recent donations:

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