

# Columns

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THE FRIENDS OF CHRIST CHURCH SPITALFIELDS  
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## All stops out for completion of pipes

Early in the summer of 2014, the front organ pipes were installed, and their gilding completed the work to the case. The overall effect is breathtaking.

The work on the organ is now entering its final stages. Most of the structure of the instrument is in place. Over the summer, both the soundboard (wind chest) for the pipes of the third keyboard – the Swell Organ – and the box which encloses the Swell pipes were put in place. This box has a sliding front controlled by a pedal which the organist operates from the console; as the front rises the sound increases in volume (hence ‘Swell’ Organ); as it closes again, the sound becomes softer. This ‘swelling’ effect had first been used in England about twenty years before Richard Bridge built the Spitalfields organ, and it soon became a popular feature of English organs. Builders liked to place semi-orchestral registers such as trumpets and hautboys in the Swell so that the player could give musical expression to a melody by operating the swell mechanism. Usually, the Swell box was placed high up in the organ so that the sound projected well into the building, and this is the case at Christ Church. The soundboard for the Pedal pipes has also been placed and the builders will be working during the autumn on the stop and pedal action for this section. All the other key and stop actions are now complete.

One of the final pieces of work will be the installation of the electric pump to operate the bellows. It is being manufactured at present and should be installed towards the end of the year. Much of the remaining work concerns the pipes. The old pipes are first being repaired as necessary in the workshop and then placed on a voicing machine (looking like a small chamber organ) while the organ-builder checks the ‘speech’ and undertakes some preliminary regulation. They are then transported to the church and installed on the appropriate soundboard, after which the voicer spends many hours on the final regulation and tuning. This is to ensure that the tone is consistent from pipe to pipe, that the volume is even, and that the ‘attack’ of the pipes when they begin to sound is also consistent. This is highly skilled work and requires considerable concentration; as far as possible silence within the building is essential until it is completed.

As we go to print the reed stops are being voiced and tuned in the church. The extraordinary range and quantity of reeds is part of what makes the Christ Church organ so remarkable (see *Columns* 37). The

*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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S R B HUMPHREYS

*Above: Joost de Boer regulating some of the original flue pipes on the voicing machine*

*Below: Marek Matuszyk completing the construction of the wind chest on which some of the pipes of the Pedal organ will stand*

painstaking research on surviving material carried out by William Drake Ltd has enabled them to restore and, where necessary, recreate the ten reed ranks from 1735: ‘this collection of stops represents an extraordinary and unique set of tonal colours for an English organ of this period’ says William McVicker, organ consultant for the restoration.

When the organ is completed there will be a period of a few months for it to be played-in after which opening celebrations will take place. The Friends are planning to record the restoration by a publication to coincide with this event.

We continue to be extremely grateful to our many Supporters worldwide for their continuing generosity for this work.



S R B HUMPHREYS

## Eleanor Murray

### Former Chair and Patron of The Friends

The Friends are extremely sad to record the death of Eleanor Murray in August 2014. Eleanor was Chair of the Friends from 1983 until 1996 and played a key role in the 1980s and 90s when the progress of the restoration was slow and any possibility of money from the Heritage Lottery Fund appeared as a distant dream.

*Peter Davies, trustee of the Friends writes:*

When asked to write about Eleanor Murray for *Columns*, my immediate reaction was 'Why me, surely other people knew her better than me?' And then the penny dropped. Almost all of the people I was thinking of, those who I would have thought of as her closest contacts: Michael Gillingham, Eric Elstob etc., the dearest and most loyal Friends of Christ Church twenty and thirty years ago, have also died. So, perhaps, she is the last of a generation and it does fall to someone a generation younger to try and do her tribute.

As Honorary Surveyor to the Trustees of the Friends of Christ Church, a person over 30 years her junior and only 25 when I began, I always regarded my relationship with Eleanor as professional. This is why I do not claim to have known her personally. However, it soon became obvious that, amongst the difficulties, complexities and conflicts which saving Christ Church threw up, Eleanor, as Chair of the Friends, was a rock solid bastion of integrity, selflessness and calm, who could be relied on, without question, to stay whatever course we might be presented with. She had the culture, education, wisdom and faith not only to know the difference between right and wrong but to stick with it against all odds in the sure belief that only that approach could guarantee to put us on the right side of history in the long run.

In this, Eleanor personified so many other similar Friends and the very culture of the Friends itself: a body which, even in my own time, has seen three Rectors and many PCC members arrive with their well-intentioned bright ideas, throw their ideas in and then leave after a few years. Oh how Christ Church, enormous, glorious Christ Church, needed and needs long-term guardians like Eleanor, a true bastion against the short-sighted, the vain and the self-righteous.

To put Eleanor and her contribution into perspective, we have to remember and tell those who never experienced it, what London, East London, Spitalfields and Christ Church were like only 30 years ago. This was before the City of London we now know existed. East London still had uncleared bomb sites from the Second World War, the decline in the population of London after the Second World War had not reversed and areas like Notting Hill, Pimlico and Spitalfields were characterised by squatted houses, empty properties and urban decay. I bought my first house in Bow for £10,000 in 1983. Eric Elstob bought 14 Fournier Street for £20,000 at about the same time and Michael Gillingham bought 4 Fournier Street for £16,000 (if my memory serves me correctly). We all took our hearts in our hands moving into East London and seriously feared that we were making the biggest mistake of our lives. Things got worse: by the end of the 80s,

mortgage interest rates rose close to 20% and the housing market collapsed. Those who dared to walk down Fournier Street or Princelet Street in those days could still experience Dickensian London. The daily and normal experience was rats, prostitutes, boarded up houses, homeless people, drunks and bottles in the gutter. It was as if no-one wanted to know. The only *raison d'être* for Spitalfields was the early morning fruit and veg market in which 4 Fournier Street served as a banana warehouse. Bangladeshi immigrants had taken over many houses, including 14 Fournier Street, as probably the cheapest real estate available near Central London and packed the floors with sewing machines continuing the Spitalfields rag trade tradition from the 18th century when the French Protestant refugees had brought the silk industry to the area.

Towering above this Dickensian dereliction and den of iniquity was Christ Church, also derelict, closed and a ripe target for vandalism, de-consecration, demolition and redevelopment. Only Eleanor and a handful of stalwarts held the line against the assets strippers and Philistines. Luckily, they were people of such calibre and resolve that they held the ground long enough for history to turn out right.

In passing, I also mention Richard MacCormac, the architect and Spitalfields resident who sadly also died this year. Forty years ago, he personally paid for the floodlighting of the tower at Christ Church, which was then an empty and derelict building. What a farsighted idea that was to give nightly prominence to Christ Church on Commercial Street even only as a monument. This was done with a single very large light bulb strategically located at ground level shining up obliquely at the full height of the tower from the south west to create the mysterious and unforgettable perspective, shadows etc. which still strike night-time visitors today. Richard, like Eleanor, both Scots, knew instinctively how 'less is more'.

London, the City, Spitalfields and Christ Church in 2014 are now in a completely different world from that of 30 years ago. Literally no-one then envisaged Rolls Royces parked in Fournier Street. Actually, Eleanor, Eric Elstob and Michael Gillingham surely did not envisage or care about that either. What they did in their own time and their own way was just what they believed to be right and true to their culture and history as they believed it should be preserved and written. Look at Christ Church now, be reminded of how it was and consider how otherwise history might have turned out. Then add up the credit due to Eleanor and the early Friends of Christ Church.

*Eleanor Murray b. 28 November 1931, d. July 2014*

## Thank you

The Friends are grateful for the generosity of the many individuals and organisations who support the restoration and Organ appeals.

We are particularly grateful to law firm Ashurst who have generously provided the Friends with office space since 2002. With Ashurst's help, the overheads of this charity have been kept very low. We have run two major projects, the restorations of the church and the organ with a small part time staff and a number

of volunteers. The help we have received from Ashurst has been crucial to our success.

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 would also like to thank the following for their recent donations:

### Gifts of £30 and over

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Mrs M Summerson *\* In loving memory of my  
husband Stephen who so loved the church until  
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Mrs John Greig  
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Arabella Hobson \*  
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Mr A P Williams \*

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

## Change of phone number

The Friends have a new telephone number:

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Our other details remain the same:

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