

The Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields

Christ Church, Fournier Street, London E1 6QE

23 August 2017

Dear Supporter

Last year marked the Friends' 40th anniversary and our principal task - funding and managing the restoration of Hawksmoor's architectural masterpiece – is complete. This was only made possible by your extraordinary generosity.

Today, the church is a thriving place of worship, successful in drawing thousands of visitors from all over the world. Its earnings from secondary uses, including event hire, are such that the future of Christ Church is secure.

So, with our charitable objective largely satisfied, the trustees will discuss the Friends' future at our September meeting. Most of the trustees have stated their intention to vote for the charity to close by the end of 2017 and we shall of course be contacting you to advise you of the decision and of its practical consequences, including how you might continue to support the church's upkeep.

Should the Friends resolve to close, it is intended that the charity's remaining funds will be paid to Christ Church Spitalfields Foundation (Charity no. 1091925). The Friends established the Foundation in 2000 to hold funds for the long-term upkeep and maintenance of the church as a condition of grant aiding, and it was initially endowed by the late Eric Elstob, former chair of the Friends. Today, the Foundation receives income from the church and other sources.

Restoration 1976-2016 and action to protect the churchyard from illegal development

In 1976, a concert was held to celebrate Christ Church's fine acoustic, and to bring public awareness to Hawksmoor's derelict architectural masterpiece. This marked the foundation of the Friends and their annual music festival. Fourteen years later the music festival became a separate body, now internationally renowned as Spitalfields Music, while the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields concentrated on the restoration of the fabric.

Thanks to your generous support, the trustees were able to apply for major grants, the largest (£5.9m) from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The main restoration contract was completed in September 2004 to high acclaim, winning seven major awards, and by 2009 the further work to restore the church monuments and memorials was completed.

In 2009 a contract was signed with William Drake Limited to restore the magnificent 1735 Richard Bridge organ and, after years of meticulous repair, renewal and reconstruction, work finished in 2016 with the installation of the organ's final and unique rank, the Quintadena. Funds raised at the organ's gala recital by the late John Scott in June 2015 enabled the Friends to establish a Travel Bursary to encourage excellence and research in organ building. The next edition of the Columns newsletter will contain an interview with Mateusz Jablonski, the first beneficiary.

By 2010, the Friends had also funded and managed £0.5m of work to restore parts of the consecrated churchyard, the setting of the church. Since then, joined by the local amenity societies, the trustees have regretfully had to take action to protect the churchyard from destructive and unlawful building development by the local primary school.

The consecrated churchyard comprises 1.3 acres, and extends from Commercial Street to Brick Lane, including land beneath the local school. It contains some 67,000 burials and rare 18th century burial vaults. The churchyard closed for burials in 1859 and, since 1949, the local authority has been responsible for maintaining nearly 70% of the entire churchyard as a public open space protected by

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statute. As the setting of the Grade 1 listed church, it also forms an integral part of Hawksmoor's masterpiece and is identified as such in the 1995 Restoration Masterplan.

The Friends' work to protect the churchyard began in 2010 with dialogue with the local authority and church. This was followed by hundreds of written objections to the same parties, challenging the local school's development proposals. The objectors included Christ Church's own Inspecting Architect as well as many members of the local community. The trustees suggested that the churchyard public open space could be shared with the school during school hours, but not built upon; by implementing the school's original 2010 intention to expand its existing buildings, it would have achieved the improved facilities it desired. In spite of this, the local authority granted planning permission in 2011 for a new school building in the consecrated churchyard immediately to the south of the church and right in the middle of the statutory public open space, cutting off some 60% of the land from lawful public use.

In 2012 Friends trustees, the Spitalfields Society and other local groups established an umbrella organization, Spitalfields Open Space "SOS", to protect the churchyard from the proposed development. Notice was served on the local authority and the Church of England, setting out the serious breaches of law that would take place if the churchyard development were to proceed. Despite this, a new building was erected in the churchyard in 2013 leading to the loss of much of the churchyard public open space, immediately next to the Grade 1 listed church, on which some £15m raised by the Friends, including large sums of public money, had been spent. This unlawful development has also caused very significant loss of scarce green land in this inner-city area.

After taking legal advice, the Friends decided to pursue the necessary protection of the churchyard and challenge the breaches of law with, if necessary, support for litigation in the civil and ecclesiastical courts. Following SOS' applications for Judicial Review in 2013, and after several unsuccessful attempts at mediation, the Friends, the Spitalfields Society and others supported and funded SOS in its application to the church Consistory Court for the illegal building to be removed and for the churchyard to be restored to its designated use as public open space and the proper setting for the Grade 1 listed building. SOS and other objectors are together referred to as the Open Space Parties.

The initial court judgment of March 2017 has upheld the Open Space Parties' legal case in its entirety, confirming multiple breaches of law in the erection of the new building. Those responsible for the unlawful development have been ordered to pay the court costs of the ten days hearing held in summer 2016, adding to the costs already awarded against them by the ecclesiastical appeal court in 2015. Nevertheless, the Consistory Court judge, using her discretion, has so far not ordered the removal of the new building.

Following a further day of court hearing in June 2017, final judgment is still awaited. When this judgment is published, the Open Space Parties will decide whether any further action is necessary, including a possible appeal to the Court of Arches, the ecclesiastical appeal court. The Friends, as at present advised, have done as much as can reasonably be expected to protect the churchyard.

For now, we thank you all for your generous support and will contact you again soon when the Friends' future has been decided.

With sincere thanks and best wishes

Christine Whaite
Chair

Alastair Brown
Hon Treasurer