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Isn't it great when things just click...



1735 organ, Christ Church Spitalfields, by Dow Jones Architects

30 October 2015 | By Hugh Strange

Following completion of the building renovation works at the Hawksmoor gem in 2004, its organ remained unrestored. Determined teamwork has now led to the renovation and reinstallation of the instrument to its former glory



Source: [SRB Humphreys](#)

Christ Church Spitalfields – The restored organ set within the west gallery

Following the Great Fire of 1666, monies were raised to fund the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral and the city churches through an increase in coal duties in the Port of London. Nicholas Hawksmoor was famously one of the two surveyors subsequently appointed by the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches and, as part of this remarkable programme, produced designs from 1714 onwards for Christ Church Spitalfields. However, while the commission's budget allowed for works to the building fabric and liturgical fittings such as the pulpit and communion rails, other fittings, including the organ, were deemed the responsibility of the parishioners and, when construction was completed in 1729, the church was organ-less.

Five years later, in 1734, the vestry sought local donations so as to acquire a suitable instrument, and the organ builder, Richard Bridge, based in nearby Clerkenwell, was selected for the works. When the organ was subsequently completed in 1735, it was the largest in the country. It was installed on the west gallery, above the entrance from Spitalfields, although this space was not obviously designed to accommodate an organ, and had to be altered and enlarged to suit. Facing on to the church's great interior space, the organ presented three towers of gilded pipes, with a stretch of flats between the central grouping and each of the side towers. Within the alteration works, and of perhaps greatest visual impact, the stone cornice to the columns to the north and south were truncated to fit the full width of the new organ pipework.

A timber case was constructed to house the organ, the front of which was formed with intricately carved mahogany, while the sides were constructed

with painted softwood. At the base the housing for the keyboard was relatively simple. Above this a delicate framework of cabinetry contained the organ itself, culminating at the top in a symbolic celebration of the union of church and state; the central tower topped by a richly coloured crown while the two outer towers support gilded mitres.



Source: [SRB Humphreys](#)

Christ Church Spitalfields – Joost de Boer preparing an original pipe of 1735 for reinstallation in the case front

Over the century and a half following its installation, the organ was adjusted a number of times in accordance with evolving techniques and tastes. In the early 19th century pedals were added, allowing the lower notes to be held, and freeing the organist's hands for the middle and upper notes. Significantly, in the mid-19th century a series of changes were made that reflected developing Victorian musical sensibilities. The following 100 years brought yet more changes, resulting in a gradual hybridisation of the instrument's historical character and sound.

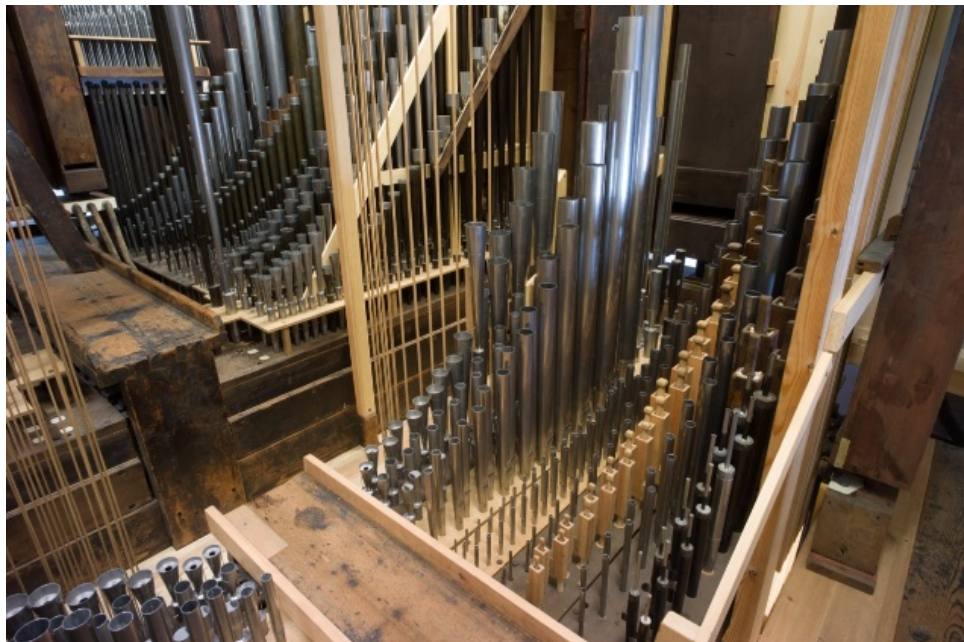
Deterioration to the building's roof led the church to be closed in the late 1950s and there was even discussion at the time of demolition on the grounds of safety. In response, first the Hawksmoor Committee, and then the Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields, were formed to raise funds and restore the building. As a result of these efforts, the church was reopened in 1987 and works were finally completed to the exterior in 2000 and the interior in 2004.

Source: [SRB Humphreys](#)

Christ Church Spitalfields – The pipework of the Choir Organ – foreground – and Great Organ – rear – with the vertical trackers of the Swell Organ in between

At the time of the church's closure, the organ had reached its nadir and was no longer in use. The building's restoration, however, offered an opportunity not only to bring it back into use, but also to take stock of the various changes that had been made to it over the years. After deliberation, it was decided to return the organ to its original 1735 configuration. This involved restoring and reinstating components and pipes from the original Bridge organ, and carefully storing those beyond reasonable re-use, which were replaced with matching new parts. Critically it was decided that the tonal scheme of the reconstructed organ would relate to that of the original instrument. The exception to this rule was the decision to retain and repair the pedals that, although not original, were deemed to be a significant part of the organ's history.

Source: [SRB Humphreys](#)



Christ Church Spitalfields – The new keyboard (2015) with the Great and Pedal drawstops in the right hand jamb, and the Swell and Choir drawstops in the left hand jamb: the short compass keyboard is the Swell Organ

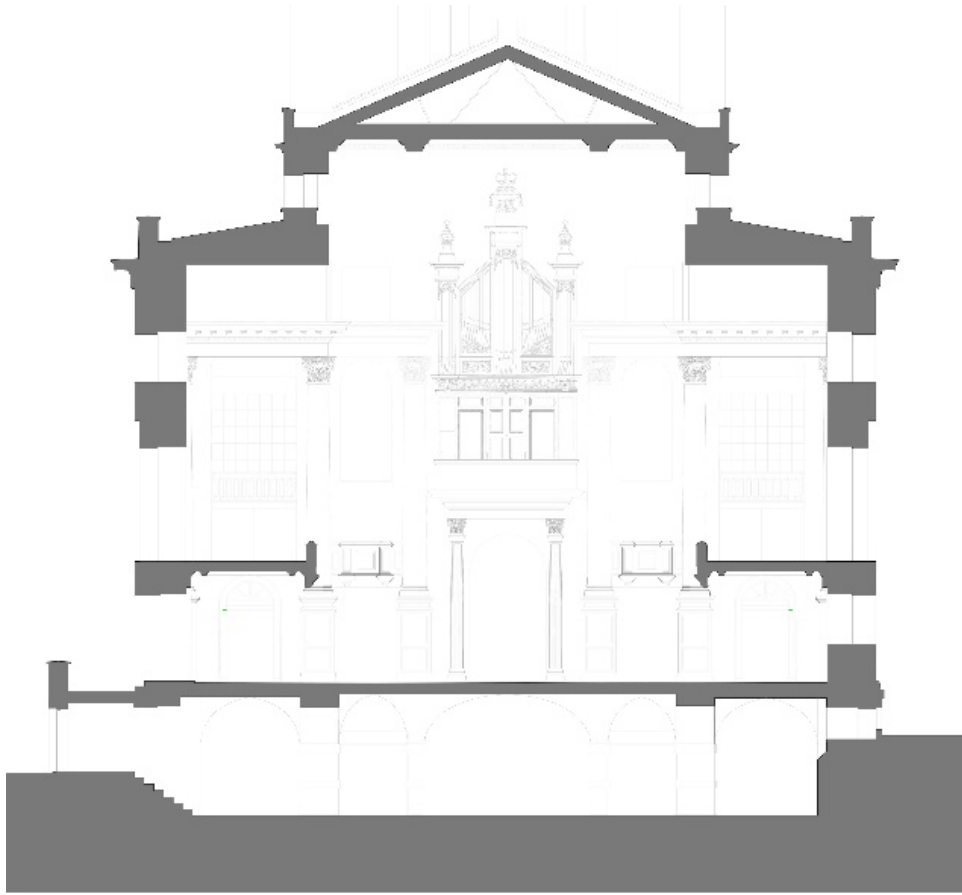
Works commenced in 2011. The soundboards, pipework, key and pedalboards, bellows and swell box were all researched and carefully repaired, their installation taking a full 18 months, with each component regularly tested along the way. In parallel, it was decided that the organ case should similarly be returned to its 1735 state. Numerous paint samples were taken from the various surfaces so as to be able to match the original finishes and the case structure and carvings repaired before, finally, the front pipes were re-gilded.

Christ Church Spitalfields – section through church – Dow Jones Architects

Throughout this period Dow Jones Architects worked closely with a diverse client organisation, Historic England, the Georgian Group and the Diocesan Advisory Committee, developing a consensus on the way forward and obtaining the necessary approvals and permissions. Similarly, once on site, close coordination of a number of specialist consultants and craftsmen was required. With its restoration now complete, the 1735 Bridge organ, and its casing, once again sit atop the west gallery. Looking back along the nave towards the entrance, the eye is drawn upwards and, within this great masterpiece of the English baroque, the soaring height of Hawksmoor's extraordinary interior is made fully evident.

Christ Church Spitalfields – section – Dow Jones Architects

Christ Church Spitalfields – from left – side elevation, front elevation, side elevation of organ – Dow Jones Architects



PROJECT TEAM

Client The Friends of Christ Church Spitalfields

Services engineer Buro Happold

Project manager Dow Jones Architects

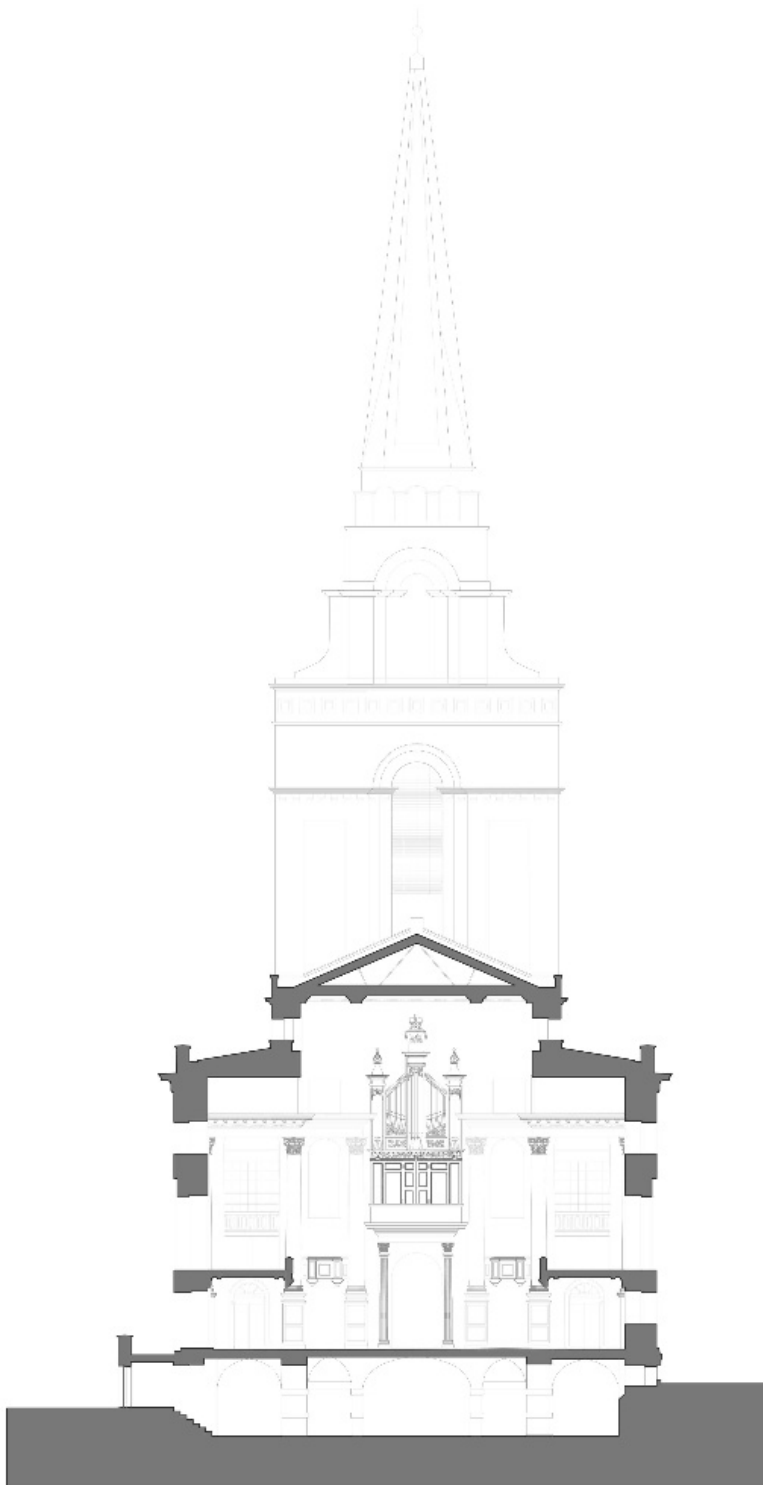
Organ contractor William Drake

Case joinery William Drake

Case decoration Luard Conservation

Enabling works Emplan

Humidifier Watkins and Watson



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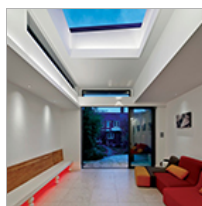
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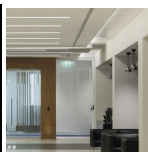
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