

Christ Church Organ History

The organ in Christ Church Chelsea was originally sited in St Michael's, Queenhithe, a Wren church (1677) not far from St James Garlickhythe. The church was demolished in 1876, and the organ was moved to Christ Church.

The organ, built in 1779, was the work of John England and Hugh Russell, the former being the second generation of a highly regarded family of organ builders. The specification was as follows:

St Michael's Queenhithe 1779

Great Organ GG to E		Choir Organ GG to E		Swell Organ G to E	
Open Diapason	8	Stopt Diapason	8	Open Diapason	8
Stopt Diapason	8	Principal	4	Stopt Diapason	8
Principal	4	Flute (stopt)	4	Principal	4
Twelfth	2 2/3	Fifteenth	2	Cornet	III
Fifteenth	2	Cremona (G)	8	Trumpet	8
Sesquialtera	IV			Hautboy	8
Mixture	II				
Trumpet	8				
Clarion	4				
Cornet Mid C	IV				

Slightly altered in 1837 by Gray and the organ was moved to Chelsea in near its original state, although without the Great Cornet.

More radical alterations were made in 1890 by Abbott and Smith of Leeds, including the conversion to tubular pneumatic action. The organ was moved to a position above the chancel, on the South side of the church, retaining some of the original casework.

Christ Church 1890

Great Organ		Swell Organ		Choir Organ	
Large Open Diapason	8	Bourdon	16	Stopt Diapason	8
Small Open Diapason	8	Geigen Principal	8	Gamba	8
Hohl Flöte	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Dulciana	8
Principal	4	Salicional	8	Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4	Voix Celestes	8	Stopt Flute	4
Fifteenth	2	Principal	4	Fifteenth	2
Trumpet	8	Gedact Flute	4	Cremona	8
		Mixture	III		
		Trumpet	8		
		Hautboy	8		
		Clarion	4		
Pedal Organ					
Open Diapason	16				
Bourdon	16				
Bass Flute	8				

A major rebuild was undertaken in 1957 by N.P. Mander Ltd of London, which included a reorientation of the organ, with the case now facing West, and a conversion to electro - pneumatic action.

Christ Church 1957

Great Organ		Swell Organ		Choir Organ	
Bourdon	16	Open Diapason	8	Stopt Diapason	8
Open Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Dulciana	8
Open Diapason	8	Salicional	8	Principal	4
Hohl Flöte	8	Celeste	8	Flute	4
Principal	4	Principal	8	Twelfth	2 2/3
Flute	4	Flute	4	Fifteenth	2
Twelfth	2 2/3	Mixture	III	Tierce	1 3/5
Fifteenth	2	Contra Oboe	16	Larigot	1 1/3
Mixture	III	Trumpet	8	Twenty-second	1
Trumpet	8	Clarion	4	Clarinet (compound)	8
				Trumpet (Gt)	8
Pedal Organ					
Open Wood	16				
Bourdon	16				
Lieblich Bourdon (Gt)	16				
Flute	8				
Principal	8				
Fifteenth	4				
Octavin	2				
Trombone (prepared)	16				
Trumpet (Gt)	8				

In the years after 1957, a trombone was found for the Pedal, the Great Mixture was recast as a Fourniture IV, and a Cromorne was added to the Great, by Bishop and Sons.

By the late 1990's, the organ had become mechanically unreliable, and the church commissioned Ian Bell to investigate the situation; he reported in November 1998. Bell showed that there were two courses of action open to the church: the first, to refurbish the instrument as it currently stood; the second, to commission a new instrument, which perhaps included some of the existing pipe work from 1779. The church felt that the latter course would represent the best value for money for the present congregation, as well as ensuring a high quality instrument for succeeding generations, with the hope that such an instrument would help us to form new connections with the wider musical community.

Christ Church was visited in early 2007 by the late Cees van Oostenbrugge and Frits Elshout, from Flentrop Orgelbouw B.V. of Zaandam, in the Netherlands. Their enthusiasm for the surviving pipework from 1779 was immediately apparent, and their proposal for the building of a new organ was one which took those pipes as its inspiration. The existing organ was dismantled in September 2008, and the new organ was installed in Christ Church in the Autumn of 2009.

Christ Church 2009

Great

Bourdon 16
Open Diapason 8 †
Stopped Diapason 8
Quintaton 8
Principal 4†
Flute 4
Twelfth 2 2/3*†
Fifteenth 2*†
Mixture IV*†
Trumpet 8*

Pedal

Bourdon 16§
Principal 8
Flute 8
Fifteenth 4*§
Trombone 16*§
Trumpet 8*

Positif to Great
Great to Pedal
Positif to Pedal

Positif

Stopped Diapason 8†
Salicional 8§ (from g)
Principal 4†
Flute 4
Nasard 22/3*
Fifteenth 2*†
Tierce 1/35*
Sharp Mixture IV*
Cremona 8*

Manual compass: C to g''' (56 notes)

Pedal compass: C – f' (30 notes)

Positif Tremulant

3 sets of mechanical combination pedals:

Great on, Great off; Positif on, Positif off; Pedal on, Pedal off

* denotes ranks controllable by the combination pedals

† denotes ranks, whole or in part from 1779

§ denotes ranks from the previous organ, postdating 1779

Erik Winkel, deputy director of Flentrop Orgelbouw writes,

John England was of the second generation of a well-known family of organ builders. This explains why the original pipes which are still present in this organ paint a rather archaic picture for 1779: languids without, or with hardly any, nicks and relatively low cut ups.

Two things are worth mentioning here:

- The quality of sound of these pipes has, through all the alterations, been so impressive, that no major changes were introduced here. However, there was little to indicate that the successive alterations had understood that these pipes could only fulfil their true potential in a coherent whole. We recognised that this necessary coherence could not be found in the instrument as we found it.

- Pipes built by a second generations of organ builders often show that this second generation continues in the tradition of the first. In this case, we can see that the pipe work from 1779 must have had a lot in common with pipe work built in the first half of the 18th century. This makes a close connection plausible with an even older tradition, going back to, e.g. the work of Father Smith, in the Netherlands known as Barend Smit, the builder of the organ in the Reformed Church of Edam, in 1663, which was restored by us in 1980.

On the basis of these ideas we chose to maintain and restore the surviving, original pipe work, and also to base the scaling for the new stops on these surviving pipes. Needless to say, any new material was made to conform to the original pipe work.

Apart from the original pipes, we also found pipe work which dates from 1837 and 1890. We thought it made sense to maintain the valuable stops from these years in the new organ, provided they fit into the cohesion of the scales of the original instrument.

Because the organ in 1779 had three manuals and no pedal, it was not possible to use all the pipes in their exact historical location, which also was never a goal.

The old pipe work was carefully restored, without altering the situation around the languids and the cut-ups. Extreme care was taken, so that none of the original sound traces were lost. All the metal open pipes that were re-used were lengthened, so that the present tuning slides were omitted and these pipes were cut to length to be suitable for "cone-tuning". The material and the thickness of the walls of the extensions at the top of the old pipes were made exactly according to the characteristics of the old pipe work

The gold-leaf on the front pipes was fully renewed by a gilder from London.

The new pipe work was made according to the scales and the kind and thickness of the materials of the old pipes. The wind supply consists of an organ blower with one V-fold bellows. The leathering consists of top quality material.

The measurements of the whole of the bellows and windtrunks were chosen to allow a flexible wind. This flexibility needs to be so, that when performing organ music of the Romantic era that flexibility is not experienced as interfering. Considering the size of the church interior and of the organ it was assumed that one overall degree of wind pressure would be sufficient.

Fine-grained deal was used for the manuals and they form part of a suspended action. The covers of the naturals are of bone and the sharps of ebony. The cheeks and the rest of the framework are oak. The flat pedal board is also oak.

The trackers are also made of straight-grained cedar, their proportions as small as possible. This is because the weight of the moving action-parts should be as light as possible. This again

contributes to an optimal touch. Bushings are as firm as possible without losing their silencing effect.

The missing lower part of the case was reconstructed. The front frame was carefully restored and the missing parts of the decorations were supplemented. Lower- and upper case, excluding the front frame, were made new in a style derived from the traditional organ cabinets from the second half of the 18th century.

The new parts of the case were made in oak and the colour was touched up, so that the old front and the parts of the case that are new are of the same colour.

The instrument was erected in our workshop. After all the technical parts and the pipe work were transported from Zaandam to Christ Church, the organ was constructed by us in the church. When the technical construction was completed the pipe work was carefully voiced, whereby the acoustical characteristics of the church-building played an important part in the assessment of the sound. This is when the degree of wind pressure was finally decided. The instrument was tuned in Neidhardt 1724 temperament, at approximately $a = 440$ Hz.

Those who worked on the organ include:

Ian Bell, consultant

For Flentrop Orgelbouw B.V.

Cees van Oostenbrugge & Frits Elshout, directors

Erik Winkel, deputy director & Michel Lagrand, technical design and drawing.

Erica Hoorn and Helèn Smeenk, secretaries

Ed Lustig, administrator

Gerrit Passenier, planning

Martien Spaan, wood shop

Ko Boogaard & Michiel Meeuws, assembly

Rutger Boogard and Michel Jongens, casework

Rob Oudejans, keyboards and key action

Paul Winkelmeijer, stop action.

Geert Spronk, Mees Qualm & Adri Stavast, windchests

Marcel Oranje, windtrunks and bellows.

Jur Way, pipemaker - reeds

Nico Ouwehand, Jeroen Rijpkema, Arjen de Boer, Yu Nagayama, Eelco van der Meijden, Sigrun

Franzen, pipemakers - flues

Paul Winkelmeijer & Marcel Jongens, re-assembly in Christ Church

Frits Elshout, director & Dick Koomans, with Yu Nagayama, voicing

Our thanks are due to all these skilled crafts men and women, as well as to the clergy, church wardens and congregation of Christ Church, Chelsea for the energy, determination and kindness they displayed in brining this project to fruition. Finally, our thanks go to those who donated so generously to the Organ Appeal.

Joseph McHardy
Organist