



**THIS ORGAN**  
WAS DEDICATED  
**TO THE GLORY OF GOD**  
EASTER TUESDAY. 1909.

E. R. PRICE DEVEREAUX,  
VICAR.

## The Christ Church Organ

Brian Wichmann

### 1 Introduction

The Christ Church organ is 'a quality instrument'. Few organs besides Cathedrals can match it. Moreover, it is essentially in the same condition as when it was installed in 1909 by the organ builder, Alfred Hunter & Son. It cost £1,300. The two inscriptions above appear on the organ console.

When looking at the organ, many pipes are visible directly above the console and also above the reredos in the North Transept. All of these pipes are ornamental. The working pipes are hidden from view behind the console. If you walk round to the back of the organ you see the longest working pipes which are 16' long. (Organs do not seem to have gone metric yet; feet are used throughout the world just like in the height of aircraft.) The organ has 1688 pipes.

The recent history of the organ is well-recorded, but the earlier history relies upon the PCC minutes which are available in the Surrey History Centre. A summary of the events recorded appears on page 4.



HOUSES IN THE CLAPHAM ROAD, LONDON.—MR. HENRY D. J. SMITH, ARCHT.

**The Hunter Residence and Works in High Street, Clapham.**  
(Sketch from *The Builder*, September, 1885.)

## 2 A Brief History

Date	Event	Estimated cost at year 2000 prices
1909	Purchase of organ	£65,000
1927	Organ cleaned	£3,900
1927	Organ repairs	£5,300
1928	Organist and choir wages	£3,500
1929	Trombone stop added	£5,500
1931	New organist's wage (per year)	£970
1936	Fees to Performing Rights Society	£100
1938	Organ cleaned	not recorded
1945	Organist salary	£2,300
1945	Organ tuning	£360
1946	Organ repair	£5,200
1949	Organ rewiring	£420
1951-53	Organist salary	£1,700
1959	Organ overhaul	£7,500
1966	Organ repairs	£120
1967	Resetting pistons	£110
1973	Organ repairs	£370
1973	Reconditioned motor fitted to blower	£160
1977	N P Mander takes over maintenance and says the organ is in excellent condition	—
1978	Organ repairs	£12,000
1979	Organ repairs, after damage by vandals	£1,500
1980	The drawstops were repaired which appears to have involved re-leathering of the slider motors for all three manuals	£5,100
1981	Organ repairs, after further damage by vandals	£490
1994	Motors for the Great, Swell and Choir all re-leathered	£9,500
2000-2004	Annual maintenance costs	≈ £800
Nov 2004	Pneumatic tubing on Great and Swell reglued and strapped	£1,400
Sept 2007	Humidifier fitted	£3,900

All the above estimates are just to give an idea of the costs involved — it is unlikely that a pipe organ of the same quality as this instrument could be purchased for £65,000 today — perhaps £300,000 or £100,000 for a major rebuild. See [3] for details of historic cost estimates.

### 3 The Church records

This material has been extracted from the Surrey History Centre [1] and current Christ Church records.

**1909.** At Easter 1909 a new organ was installed and dedicated by the Bishop of Guildford. The cost of £1,300 had been met by parochial subscription. The organ builder was A Hunter & Son. Apart from the inscription on the organ, these basic facts are recorded in a leaflet in the Surrey History Centre as a manuscript addition.

**1927.** On 11th January, it was reported that Hunter's estimate for cleaning the organ was £140. It was decided that two further estimates be obtained; Heals & Co Plymouth and Hill's, London.

9th February: Captain Adams and Mr Maxwell explained the repairs (as distinguished from cleaning) which Hunter recommended. Captain Adams was asked to obtain competitive estimates.

15th February: That the estimate of £190 for repairs to the organ be accepted and the work be put in hand as soon as possible.

7th April: £160 allocated to the organ.

7th July: In the Reserve fund, £100 was earmarked for the organ.

20th September: It was proposed and adopted that a Trombone Stop be installed to complete the organ and a Rummage Sale was to be held on the 12th inst in aid of above.

Renovation Fund: Two amounts of £95 for the organ.

Organ Stop Fund: It was reported to amount to £76. It was decided to recommend to the PCC to allocate the proceeds from the Masonic Service to the Renovation and Organ Stop Fund.

**1928.** On 5th July, diverting the Organ Stop Fund was discussed, but nothing agreed.

10th October: Deferred discussion of the Organ Stop Fund.

Organist and choir wages were £121 15s 7d. Two Organ recitals raised £6 10s 3d.

Musical Times reported in July Mr H. Scott-Baker was appointed Organist;

**1929.** 16th January: No action regards removal of the Motor from the organ loft. Woking Electric Lighting Co should strengthen the earth wire and replace fuse wire of the Organ Motor.

13th March: Organ Completion Fund: 'It was agreed to inform the organist in reply to his letter that the addition of the Trombone Stop might be proceeded with, subject to the consent of the Church Wardens, so as to ensure that there would be no interference with Church Services.'

**1930.** 9th July: Christ Church Organ. A question was raised as to whether anything could be done about the excessive noise made by the organist during the Services, also if a voluntary could be played right up to the entrance of the Choir.

**1931.** 15th April: New organist hired at £30 per year.

**1933.** The Vicar reported that Mr Knight and Mr Taylor assisted by Mr Shepherd had done splendid work in silencing the Engine which blows the organ.

**1935.** Accounts for that year shows £38 15s 0d for the organist salary and £15 for tuning.

Musical Times reports that in October, Mrs Margaret Walker was appointed Choir-master and Organist.

**1936.** Accounts for that year shows a fee of £3 3s to the Performing Rights Society.

**1938.** 19th October: The organ requires cleaning. The choir members gave up their outing in order that the money should go towards this necessary expense (shown as £12 saved in AGM of 1st February 1939).

- 1941.** The entry for 14th May shows £500 for the Christ Church Organ.
- 1942.** The entry for 19th January again shows £500 for the Christ Church Organ.
- 1945.** Accounts shows £100 for the salary of the organist and £15 15s for tuning.
- 1946.** 10th April: Organ Repair Fund. Mr Askew said the organ would be ready for next Sunday. The cost would be £225, towards which about £50 had been received.
- 1949.** £20 for rewriting of the Organ. Annual accounts gives Organist salary as £100 and Organ tuning as £16/16/-.
- 1950.** Annual accounts gives Organist salary as £100 and Organ tuning as £21.
- 1951.** Annual accounts gives Organist salary as £100 and Organ tuning as £17/14/-.
- 1952.** Annual accounts gives Organist salary as £108/6/8 (for 13 months) and Organ tuning as £18.

During the late 50's, the accounts were giving for Christ Church and St Paul's and hence it is not possible to find the Christ Church expenses for the Organ.

**1958.** From July to December, the PCC minutes records discussion on an organ overhaul. Three tenders were obtained, but eventually a further tender which was £200 cheaper was accepted.

**1959.** £545 was spent on an Organ overhaul from Mr Colmer's tender.

**1966.** £11 6s 0d was spent on repairs.

**1967.** £10 spent on resetting the pistons.

**1973.** £51 on repairs and £23 on a reconditioned motor for the blower.

**1976.** A letter in the Church archives dated 18th October gives a quotation for Wood-Brown (organ builders) for £10,000 + VAT for putting in an electric action. This quotation was not taken up.

**1977.** The maintenance was taken over by N. P. Mander Ltd who commented then that it was in excellent/splendid condition and that a humidifier was not considered necessary.

**1978.** Appeal for a major overhaul. The leaflet had a section entitled 'What's the matter with the organ?' 'The organ, which was built in 1909, was last overhauled in 1927. Before he left us for another post in 1976, our former organist drew attention to undue wear in the action and we sought advice from the Diocesan Organs Adviser and from three firms of organ builders. All of them advised that irreparable damage will occur unless a major overhaul is carried out. The Church Council have therefore engaged the services of Mr Noel Mander, the eminent Organ Builder, to undertake the required work which should ensure the life of the organ for at least another 50 years.' (The appeal was for £20,000, of which £3,250 was for the organ.)

Action for Swell, Choir, Pedal notes and pistons now removed for overhaul. (This probably refers to the combinations.)

**1979.** £514 was spent on repairs after damage by vandals.

**1980.** The drawstops were repaired which appears to have involved re-leathering of the slider motors for all three manuals at a cost of about £2000.

**1981.** Further £213 on repairing vandal damage.

**1984.** Serious leak repaired.

**1994.** Motors for the Great, Swell and Choir all re-leathered at a cost of £8,000 by Manders.

**1996.** The Church had temporary loan of a Bradford electronic organ for assessment. This would have cost £30,000, but was not purchased.

**2004.** The F# on the Swell failed and Manders at first thought it would not be possible to correct this. However, they did manage to do so, but recommended that work be done to avoid this fault recurring. This work was done immediately after some building work was done on the dias in November at a cost of £1,400.

### 3.1 Some gaps in the records

The early Church records are sometimes missing and often vague. For the recent years, more information can be found from the Church records which are currently being catalogued. Some of the missing information is as follows:

- The current blower motor is thought to be dated around 1930; however the current motor is a re-conditioned one put in in 1973. The excessive noise recorded in 1932 is presumably from the original mechanism. We do not know when an electric motor was first fitted. The entry for 1929 might suggest the electric motor was operating then.
- The organ does not have a Trombone stop, and hence the one recorded as being fitted in 1929 is probably the one marked 'Trumpet' on the Organ.

## 4 Specification

This can also be obtained from [2].

### Console

Swell to Great  
Swell to Pedal  
Swell Octave  
Swell Suboctave  
Choir to Great  
Choir to Pedal  
Choir Octave  
Great to Pedal  
Choir Sub Octave to Great

### Actions

The action is tubular pneumatic throughout.

### Pedal

	Stop name	Pitch	
1	Open Diapason	16	Wood
2	Subbass	16	
3	Lieblich Bourdon	16	Swell
4	Octave Diapason	8	
5	Octave Bass	8	
6	Violone	8	

## Great

	Stop name	Pitch
7	Contra Gamba	16
8	Open Diapason Major	8
9	Open Diapason Minor	8
10	Clarabella	8
11	Octave	4
12	Hohl Flute	4
13	Superoctave	2
14	Trumpet	8

## Swell

	Stop name	Pitch
15	Lieblich Bourdon	16
16	Open Diapason	8
17	Stopped Diapason	8
18	Salicional	8
19	Voix Celeste	8
20	Octave	4
21	Superoctave	2
22	Harmonics	III
23	Contra Fagotto	16
24	Cornocean	8
25	Oboe	8
26	Clarion	4
27	Tremulant	

## Choir

	Stop name	Pitch
28	Geigen Diapason	8
29	Dulciana	8
30	Wald Flute	8
31	Harmonic Flute	4
32	Harmonic Piccolo	2
33	Clarinet	8
34	Tremulant	

The combinations are set in such a way as not to be useful.

The organ is tuned to concert pitch.

The organ specification is also to be found in the National Pipe Organ Register [2].

## 5 Hunter the organ Builder

Alfred Hunter was born in 1827 and first produced organs with Webb in the years 1856-1866. In 1866, he set up his own business, and was joined by his son Robert in 1885. The Company Hunter & Son continued until 1937 when the firm was taken over by Henry Willis & Sons Ltd. Alfred Hunter died in 1911 and hence the Christ Church organ was actually built under the direction of Robert. The largest organ produced

under Alfreds direction was that of St Cuthberts, Philbeach Gardens, London SW5 9EB, which was built in 1890. (This instrument has been restored by Eric Shephard.)

Hunter built several organs per year. With, say 1,000 pipes in an average instrument, this was a major engineering effort. In fact, Hunter built an organ for Mr J. M Boustead of Wimbledon, which at one time, probably one of the largest instruments in the UK (perhaps exceeded by the Albert Hall). That instrument was broken up by 1922, but many of the pipes survive in other organs, such as in Ringmer Parish Church.

The best example of Hunters work that is still being used is that in the RC Church of St James at Spanish Place, London, W1U 3QY.

The workmanship of Hunter organs is regarded as being of high quality, although not that easy to maintain due to the restricted space within the instrument.

## 6 Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to produce this document without the assistance of Steve Dunk, Michael Toll [4] and Peter Beaven.

## References

- [1] Surrey History Centre. See records 1961/1-6 and 1961/2/2.
- [2] National Pipe Organ Register. See N12762
- [3] Lionel Manby. *How much is that worth?* ISBN 0-85033-741-0. See also Retail Prices Index from the Government web site.
- [4] Michael Toll. *The Life and Times of the Organ Builder Alfred Hunter & Son.* Thesis for MA. University of Reading. December 2004.

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