

The Organ Restoration Article Inspire September 2020

Those who have been in church in recent weeks will have noticed that the main church organ has been fully dismantled as the project to restore it is underway. Our contractor, Andrew Carter, and his team commenced work in June whilst the church was still closed. They have worked safely and socially distanced to disassemble the whole organ and relocate it to their premises in Wakefield.

All the pipework, over 3,000 pipes in total, will be given a specialist clean. This will improve the clarity of the sound. The pipes will all be checked for damage; the metal pipes will have any dents removed and the wooden pipes will have any splits repaired. They will then be voiced using specialist equipment in the organ builder's workshop.

On the console all of the keys have been removed and they will be thoroughly cleaned and have new contacts and felts as required. The pedalboard has been taken out and this is undergoing significant repair along with the fitting of new leatherwork.

The work also includes a full overhaul of the pedal action which has a long-standing fault. The mechanic action will be replaced with a new electronic action, in both the swell and choir. The bellows are also being stripped back and new leatherwork fitted. Some wind leaks will be rectified and the tuba chest, usually inaccessible, will be fully serviced.

As is often the way with a large project, we have had a setback (in addition to a global pandemic!) On removing the organ, Carter found that some of the electrics needed upgrading and there was a sizeable crack on the external wall of the organ chamber. Our Architect and a Structural Engineer have inspected the crack and have found that it isn't a symptom of anything more sinister. They have advised on the repairs.

Andrew Carter and his team are busy working on the restoration in their workshop. The re-installation is planned for October so it is hoped that the organ will be working by Christmas. The extent of the work will mean that the organ will only require routine maintenance for the foreseeable future.

As for our fundraising, the appeal has now exceeded £60,000. We've been grateful to have received grants from The Sheffield Church Burgesses Trust, The Sheffield Town Trust, The James Neill Trust Fund and the Allchurches Trust. Over £35,000 has been given in donations and further funds have been raised from Gift Aid and fundraising events. The initial project cost was £94,000, the additional work has cost £7,000 and we are also paying to have the project overseen by an organ consultant – bringing the fundraising target to £105,000 (plus VAT, which will be claimed from the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme).

There is still some way to go to reach our fundraising target. Over £20,000 has been set aside from the PCCs funds leaving an outstanding fundraising target of around £25,000. The Covid pandemic has inhibited our fundraising and we will be deferring our fundraising concert until next year, when hopefully it will be safe to come together for a festival celebrating our musical heritage.

Andrew Carter has been diligently documenting the organ's removal and we have amassed lots of photos of the organ's inner workings. We're hoping to organise an evening viewing the photos in the autumn, a perspective that many of us won't ever see again.

It's now two years since we discovered that our organ had deteriorated during the church's closure for ceiling repairs. We've planned and fundraised and finally the restoration is underway. Thank you to everyone that has supported the project and do continue to hold the restoration and our fundraising in your prayers.

More information about the appeal and how you can support it, can be found on the St John's website.