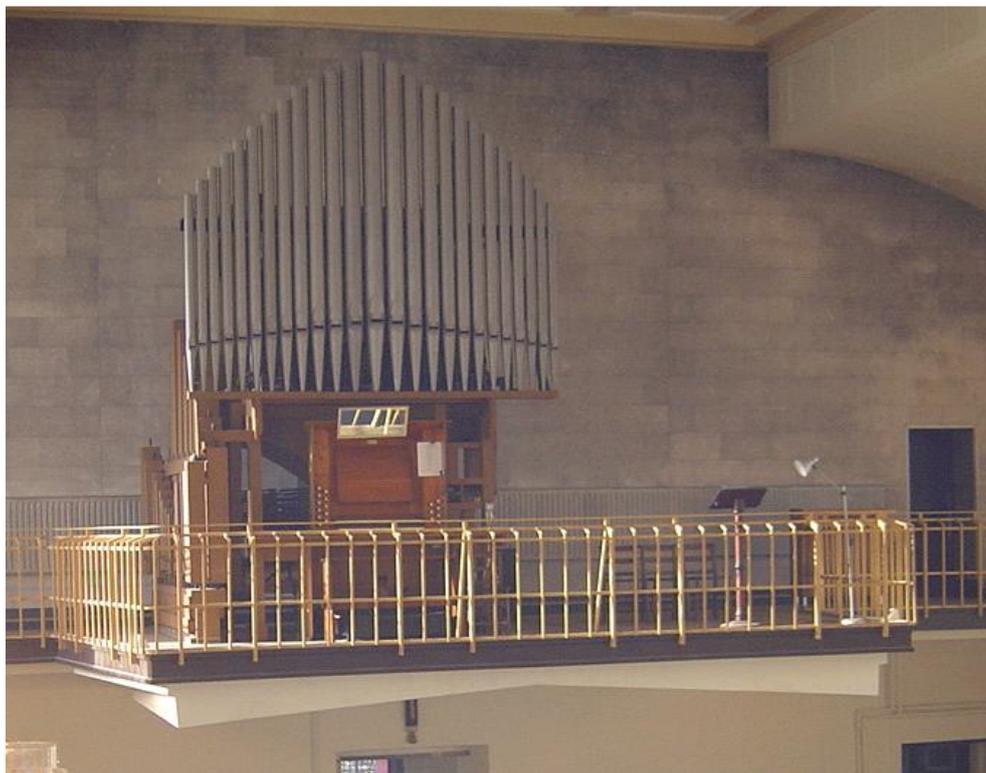


The History of the Organs
of
St Matthew's Bethnal Green
London



Christopher Maxim

Second edition

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CHAPTER ONE

The First Organ (1772-1859)

The Parish Church of St Matthew, Bethnal Green was consecrated by the Bishop of Llandaff on 15th July 1746.¹ Then, as now, Bethnal Green was not a rich area and financial problems had dogged the project which had begun with discussions about carving a separate parish out of Stepney as early as 1690.² Hawksmoor had been invited to design the building, but his plans for a basilica-type church were deemed too expensive and the church was eventually built to a less ambitious, but nevertheless graceful, scheme by the eminent architect George Dance the elder (1739–1752),³ who also designed the Mansion House and several other London churches, including St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate (1725), St Leonard's Shoreditch (1736-1740), St Botolph-without-Aldersgate (1741-1744), and St Botolph's Aldgate (1744). Dance's original drawings for St Matthew's survive in Sir John Soane's Museum.⁴



St Matthew's Bethnal Green c. 1818⁵

¹ Fr John Oldland (rev.), *A History of the Parish Church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green* (n.p. [London?], n.d.), p. 5. Yes, the church really was dedicated by the Bishop of Llandaff!

² Oldland, p. 3

³ Oldland, p. 3

⁴ Adey Grummet, *A short and anecdotal history of St Matthew's Bethnal Green* (St Matthew's Parochial Church Council, London, 2011), p. 11

⁵ Source: church archives. The inscription under this etching reads: *Bethnal Green Hamlet was separated from Stepney, and made a distinct Parish 16 Geo. II. On the N.E. corner of Hare Street is situated the above Ch. which was built 1743, and is a neat and commodious Edifice, the Interior is plain but handsome, the Tower contains 8 small Bells. The Roman way from London led through Bethnal Green, joining the Military Way from the West. The Rector the Rev^d. Joshua King A.M. in 1809 succeeded the Rev^d. W^m. Loxham A.M. Drawn by G. Shepherd and etched by W. Angus for the Architectural Series of London Churches. Published by J. Booth, November 2nd 1818*

It would appear that St Matthew's did not gain an organ until 1772, when an instrument was acquired from St Nicholas Newbury.⁶ The financial limitations of the parish probably account for both the delay and the purchase of a second-hand instrument. This organ is said to have been by Byfield & Green⁷ but no records have been found to confirm whether they were the original builders, the team who transplanted the organ to Bethnal Green, or both. Samuel Green (1740-1796) is known to have been in partnership between 1761 and 1768 with one of the three organ builders called John Byfield. Sumner believed it to be with John Byfield [II] (d. 1774);⁸ but Bicknell more recently stated that the partnership was with his son, John Byfield [III].⁹ The Byfield family were well established as organ builders and it is perfectly possible that Newbury might have commissioned John Byfield [II] and the young Samuel Green to build them an organ. Indeed, it is possible that the family's reputation might have secured John Byfield [III] the work. On the other hand, Green had been born in Oxfordshire¹⁰ so perhaps he had formed connections with, or established a reputation that extended to Newbury, which may have won him and the youngest Byfield the contract for a new organ at St Nicholas when Green was still in his 20s.

But it seems unlikely, even had the Newbury organ been built as early as 1761 (at the very start of the Byfield & Green partnership, when Green was about 21 years of age), that the church would have sold it to Bethnal Green just eleven (or even fewer) years later. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the Newbury organ was probably built *before* Byfield and Green went into partnership and quite possibly dated from the first half of the eighteenth century or maybe even as early as the late seventeenth century.¹¹ If we accept that the attribution to Byfield & Green is correct, it may be stated that the first organ in St Matthew's Bethnal Green was *installed* by them in 1772; but its *original* builders are unknown. And yet, the Byfield & Green partnership ended in 1768: four years before St Matthew's gained its first organ, which seems to prove that the attribution to Byfield and Green cannot be correct. There is, on the other hand, the possibility that Byfield and Green came together again for the purpose of installing the organ in St Matthew's. Green is known to have set up his own business in London in 1772:¹² the very year in question. Perhaps, then, being on the threshold of his new venture, Green called on his former business partner(s) for assistance with the large task of dismantling the Newbury organ, transporting some 70 miles to Bethnal Green, re-erecting at St Matthew's, and carrying out the remedial work that relocating a pipe organ requires – and probably undertaking some 'improvements'/modernisations, too. Alternatively, the Byfield family may have approached Green to help with the work. John Byfield [II], would die just two years later and he may have been in failing health in 1772. Green, in contrast, was in the ascendant and would become one of the most eminent men in the history of British organ-building, providing:

*new or substantially new organs for the cathedrals at Canterbury, Wells, Lichfield, Salisbury, Rochester, Bangor and Cashel in Ireland; the organs at St George's Chapel, Windsor; the Royal Hospital Greenwich; New College, Oxford; and many for parish churches in London and the provinces.*¹³

⁶ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=E00925>

⁷ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=E00925>

⁸ William Leslie Sumner, *The Organ*, 4th edn (McDonald and Jane's, London, 1973), p. 172

⁹ Stephen Bicknell in *The History of the English Organ* (CUP, Cambridge, 1996), p. 181

¹⁰ Bicknell, p. 181

¹¹ As we shall see, the organ installed after World War II had been built in 1877 and so was over 80 years old when erected in the rebuilt church

¹² Bicknell, p. 181, referencing D. C. Wickens, *The instruments of Samuel Green* (London, 1987)

¹³ Bicknell, p. 183, referencing *Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1814), quoted in Hopkins and Rimbault, *The Organ* (Robert Cocks & Co., London, 1877). Many Green's organs are no longer extant or have been altered beyond

Regrettably, no drawing of the first organ at St Matthew's survives and its specification is unknown. Nevertheless, an idea of what this instrument might have looked and sounded like may be gleaned from study of extant contemporary organs in churches within a few miles of Bethnal Green.

The organ in **St Botolph's Aldgate** is believed to have been originally the work of the Harris family.¹⁴ Having been built for the old church, it was rebuilt by John Byfield [I] in George Dance's new St Botolph's in 1744.¹⁵ While we do not know when the organ that would later be transplanted to Bethnal Green was first built, it is interesting to note that the St Botolph's organ was installed in the new church by the eldest Byfield just two years before St Matthew's Church was dedicated. One wonders whether there a connection was made (via Dance the architect?) that would lead to St Matthew's approaching Byfield (and Green) in 1772. Restored by Martin Goetze & Dominic Gwynn Ltd in 2005-2006,¹⁶ the St Botolph's Aldgate instrument is possibly the oldest working church organ in England – and the best surviving example of its period. Its 1744 specification was probably as follows:

St Botolph's Aldgate (Thomas Harris, c. 1676/Renatus Harris 1704-5/J Byfield [I], 1744)¹⁷

Choir Organ (*GG (short 8ve)-d³*)

Stopt Diapason (wood)

Principal

Flute (metal)

Bassoon (from *c*)

Vox Humana (from *c*)

Great Organ (*GG (short 8ve)-d³*)

Open Diapason

Stopt Diapason (metal treble)

Principal

Twelfth

Fifteenth

Sesquialtera (IV ranks)

Furniture (II ranks)

Cornet (V ranks)

Trumpet

Ecchos [sic] (*c¹-d³, enclosed*)

Open Diapason

Stopt Diapason

Cornet (IV ranks)

Trumpet

Hautboy



St Botolph's, Aldgate¹⁸

Accessory: Drum

recognition, though there is, for example, surviving pipework in the organ of Rochester Cathedral. The organ in the Royal Naval College Chapel in Greenwich is believed to be the largest instrument by Green still in its original position (see <https://ornc.org/our-story/royal-hospital/the-chapel/>)

¹⁴ Stephen Bicknell, p. 117 states that the instrument contains work by Thomas Harris (c. 1676), while Goetze and Gwynn state that 'It looks as if the organ dates from shortly before 1704-5, when Renatus Harris was paid for the Trumpet and Echos' [sic] (<https://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/organ/aldgate/>)

¹⁵ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=R01332>

¹⁶ <https://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/organ/aldgate/>

¹⁷ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=R01332>

Though altered by Bishop in 1913, damaged in World War II, rebuilt with a detached stop-key console by N. P. Mander Ltd in 1951 and now unplayable, the original case, console and much of the pipework of the organ build by Richard Bridge (d. 1758) in **St Leonard's, Shoreditch** (also by Dance) survives.¹⁹ The specification (below) shows how standardised English organ stop-lists were at this period, additional stops frequently amounting to little more than duplications (note the two Open Diapasons on the Great and the two Trumpets).

St Leonard's Shoreditch (Richard Bridge, 1757)²⁰

Choir Organ (GG-e³)

Open Diapason
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Fifteenth
 Flute
 Cremona (from G)

Great Organ (GG-e³)

Open Diapason
 Open Diapason
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Twelfth
 Fifteenth
 Tierce
 Sesquialtera (III ranks)
 Furniture (II ranks)
 Cornet (V ranks) (from c⁴)
 Trumpet
 Trumpet
 Clarion

Swell Organ (g-e³)

Open Diapason
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Cornet (III ranks)
 Hautboy
 Trumpet

Pedal Clavier (GG-C)

Choir to Pedal
 Great to Pedal
 [No independent pedal pipes]



St Leonard's Shoreditch²¹

¹⁸ Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Messrs Goetze & Gwynn www.goetzegwynn.co.uk

¹⁹ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=R00632>

²⁰ Joseph Warred (ed.), *Hamilton's Catechism of the Organ*, 7th edition (Robert Cocks and co., London, c. 1865), p120. The specification given in the National Pipe Organ (<https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D04969>) is not the original

²¹ Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Bob Speel
<http://www.speel.me.uk/chlondon/chl/stleonardshoreditch/stleonardorgan.jpg>

The organ in **St Mary's Rotherhithe** (south of the Thames, but still not far from Bethnal Green) is an example of an instrument originally by John Byfield [II]. It has a particularly fine and (for the period) modern case with 'serpentine' elements – probably finer and more modern than the first St Matthew's instrument which may be supposed to have looked more like the Aldgate or Shoreditch instruments (above), especially if dated from the first half of the eighteenth century (or earlier).

St Mary's Rotherhithe (John Byfield [II], 1764-5)²²

Choir Organ (GG,AA,C,D (short 8ve)-e³)

Stopped Diapason

Principal

Flute

Fifteenth

Vox Humana

Great Organ (GG,AA,C,D (short 8ve)-e³)

Open Diapason

Stopped Diapason

Principal

Nason

Twelfth

Fifteenth

Sesquialtera (IV ranks)

Cornet (V ranks) (from tenor C)

Trumpet

Clarion

Swell Organ (g-e³)

Open Diapason

Stopped Diapason

Principal

Cornet (III ranks)

Trumpet

Hautboy



St Mary's Rotherhithe²³

Although the first organ of Matthew's was originally built for a provincial church, the specifications of organs in 'town' churches outside London varied little from those found in the capital at that time.²⁴ We may therefore surmise that the first organ of St Matthew's would have been an instrument of three manuals: Choir, Great and Swell (possibly called Echoes). The Choir and Great would have been of low compass, extending down to GG, but with a 'short octave' (no GG#, AA#, BB or C#); while the Swell would have been of short compass, starting at c

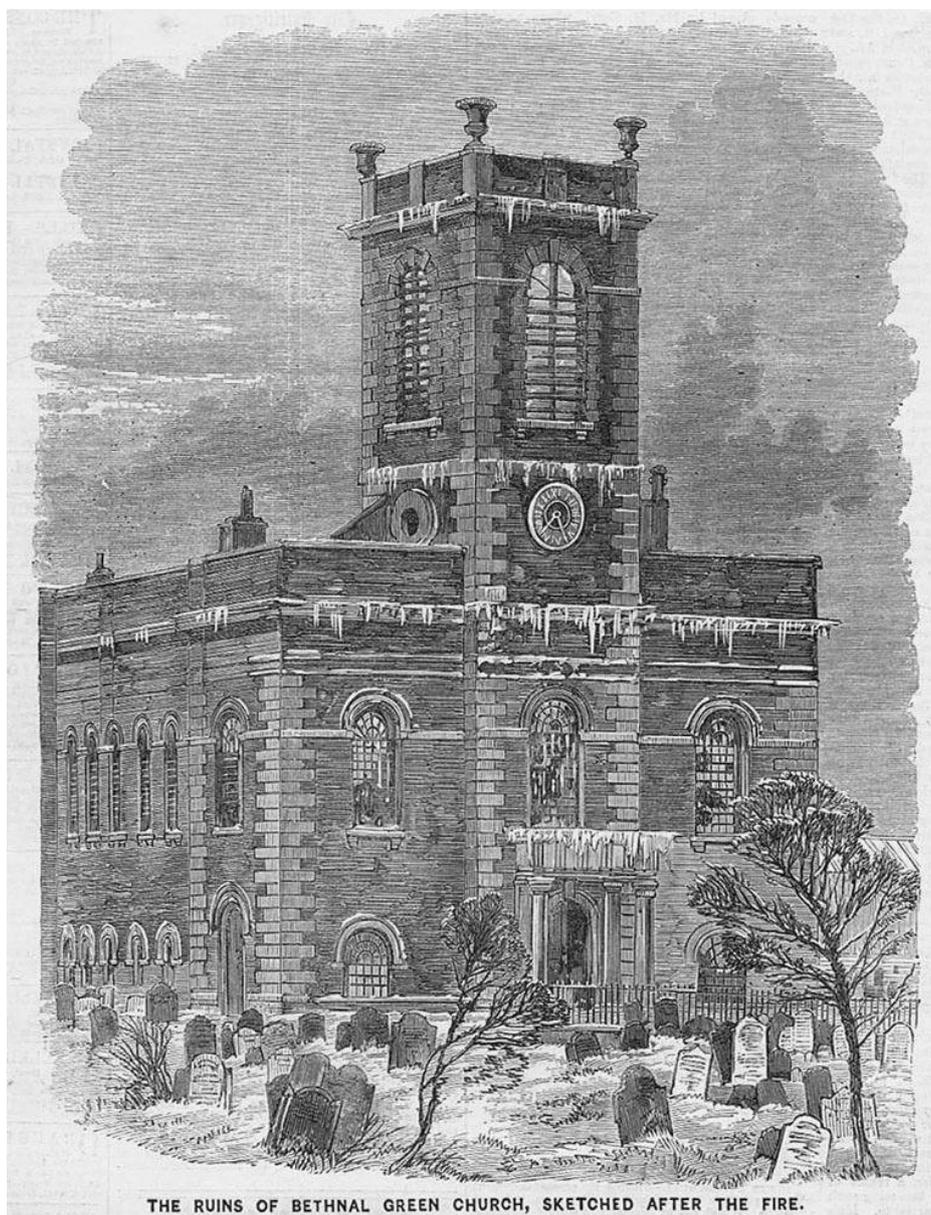
²² Bicknell, p. 169; *Hamilton's Catechism*, pp. 111-112; <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N16179>. Stop names have been modernized here

²³ Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Messrs Goetze & Gwynn www.goetzegwynn.co.uk

²⁴ See, for instance, the specification of the 1763-6 Snetzler organ of Halifax Parish Church (Bicknell, p. 176), and the specification of the 1794 George Pike England organ of Blandford Forum Parish Church (Bicknell, p. 180)

(‘tenor C’), *g* (‘fiddle G’ – as in the case of St Leonard’s and St Mary’s) or possibly *c*’ (‘middle C’ – as in the case of St Botolph’s). There would either have been no pedals at all; or, at most, a set of ‘pull-downs’ acting on the lowest notes of the Great (and Choir) manual(s). The stop-list is likely to have included the usual Open and Stopped Diapasons, Principals and Flutes, Twelfths and Fifteenths; several Mixture stops (Sesquialteras, Cornets and perhaps a Furniture); and a number of reeds (Trumpet, Hautboy, Vox Humana etc.). Such an instrument would have been entirely typical of its day, ideal for St Matthew’s as a building, and perfectly suited to eighteenth and early nineteenth century English musical repertoire.

The organ installed by Byfield & Green served St Matthew’s for nearly ninety years until 12th December 1859. That night, a fire ravaged the church. The story goes that ‘the night was so cold that the firemen were covered in sheets of ice as they worked’.²⁵ The original Georgian interior, including the organ, perished in the flames.



St Matthew’s after the fire of 1859, in the *Illustrated London News*²⁶

²⁵ Oldland, p. 7

²⁶ Picture source: author’s collection

CHAPTER TWO

The Henry Jones Organ (1862-1940)

Following the fire, the church was rebuilt, and reopened two years and a day later on 13th December 1861.²⁷ Aspects of the original design seem to have been preserved, including the galleries; but, either at this time or later, significant changes were made, such as the erection of a rood screen, a newly designed roof and the addition of a hideous cupola to the tower, as may be seen in the pictures below.



Pencil drawing of the pre-World War II sanctuary²⁸

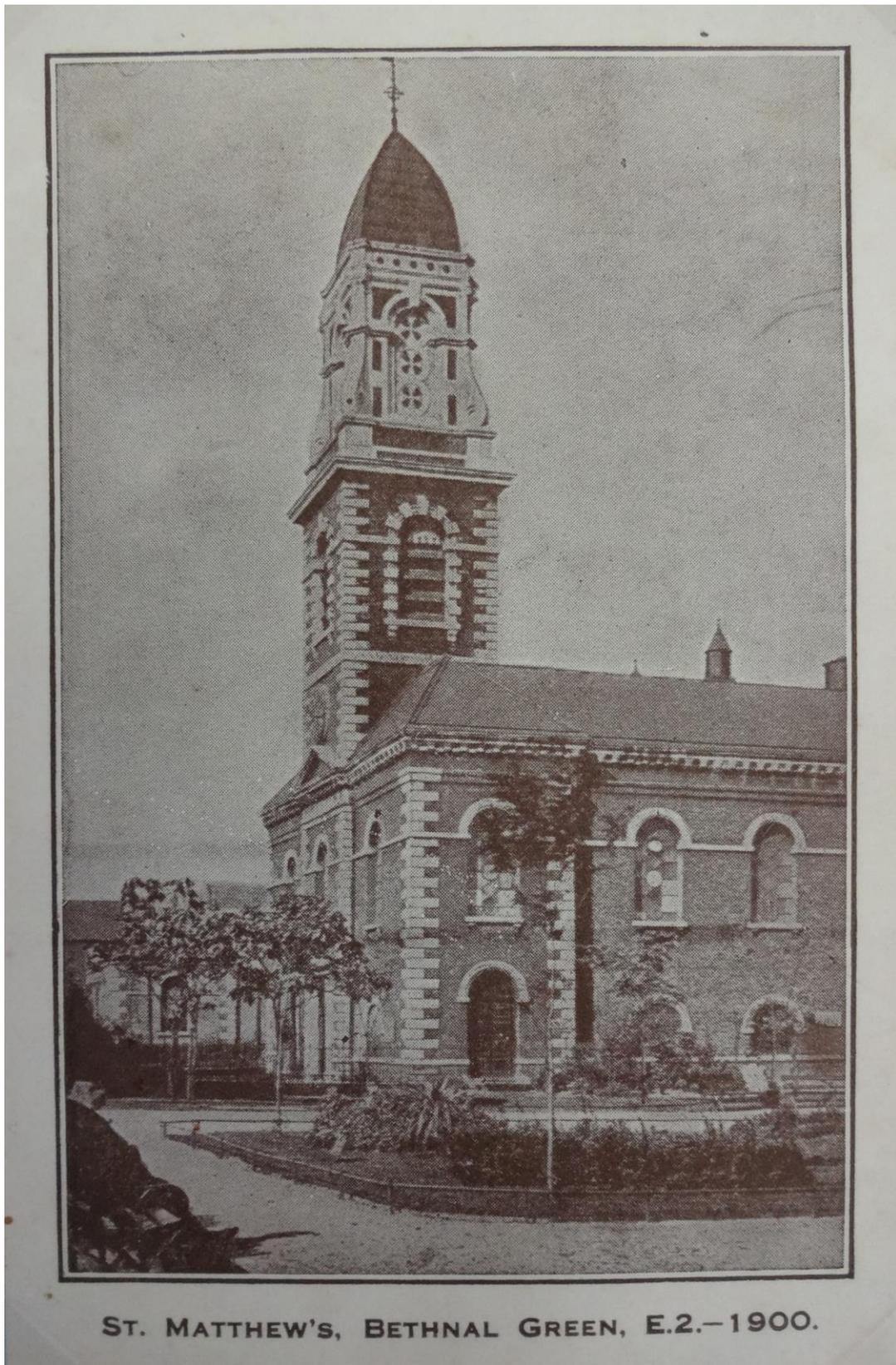
²⁷ Oldland, p. 7

²⁸ Source: church archives. Artist and date unknown. The drawing was rescued from the rubble after the church was bombed in 1940 – hence the damage



Photograph of the pre-World War II interior²⁹

²⁹ Source: church archives



The exterior in 1900³⁰

³⁰ Source: church archives. It is not known when the cupola was removed, but it is absent from the pictures that show the church after it was bombed, though a flagpole may be seen on the top of the tower, suggesting that that cupola had been dismantled some time before the Second World War

In 1862, the year after the church reopened, an organ was erected in the west gallery by Henry Jones (1822-1890).³¹ Jones had worked with Walker before setting up on his own³² and had first emerged on the London organ-building scene around 1848.³³ The specification, drawn-up by ‘the late Dr Wallace, to replace the fine old instrument destroyed by the fire in 1859’,³⁴ was as follows.

St Matthew’s Bethnal Green (Henry Jones, 1862)³⁵

Great Organ (C-g ³)		Swell Organ (C-g ³)	
Double Diap & Tenoroon	16’	Double Diapason	16’
Open Diapason	8’	Open Diapason	8’
St Diap & Clarionet Fl	8’	Stopped Diapason	8’
Clarabella	8’	Principal	4’
Dulciana	8’	Fifteenth	2’
Gamba	8’	Mixture	III ranks
Principal	4’	Cornopean	8’
Flute	4’	Oboe	8’
Twelfth	2 2/3’	Clarion	4’
Fifteenth	2’		
Mixture	III ranks		
Trumpet	8’		
Cremona	8’		
Pedal Organ (CC-e)		Couplers	
Open Diapason	16’	Great to Pedal	
Bourdon	16’	Swell to Pedal	
Violoncello	8’	Swell to Great	
Trombone	16’		

- Mechanical action to manuals, drawstops and couplers
- Four composition pedals to Great Organ

As can be seen, Wallace designed sizable two-manual instrument with twenty-six speaking stops and three couplers. The Great Organ was particularly impressive, boasting no fewer than thirteen speaking stops. It is interesting to note the five 8’ flue stops on the Great, the softer of which were possibly intended to compensate for the lack of a Choir Organ. In view of the small-scale diapason/string stops (the Dulciana and the Gamba) on the Great, the absence of any comparable stops on the Swell is significant, indicating that the Swell was still regarded as a smaller Great Organ (as the Choir had traditionally been), rather than the home of more exotic voices, as it was to become later in the century. This was, nevertheless, a ‘modern’ instrument for it was based on the ‘German System’,³⁶ having manuals of the same compass, both beginning at C (rather than the old English ‘long’ compass Great descending to GG and a short compass Swell); and a pedal department of over two octaves, equipped with four independent speaking stops. In other words, this organ was designed, unlike English instruments of earlier times, to be able to play the works of Bach.³⁷ This instrument was overhauled in 1901 and 1912. Sadly, as

³¹ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D07913>

³² Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (CUP, Cambridge, 1990), p. 527, note 14.

³³ Thistlethwaite, p. 305

³⁴ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D07913>

³⁵ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D07913>

³⁶ For an extended examination of the ‘German System’, see Thistlethwaite, chapter 7

³⁷ The re-discovery and reappraisal of Bach’s music by Samuel Wesley, Felix Mendelssohn and others in the nineteenth century had far-reaching effects on music in general and on organ music in particular, in turn causing

with the first organ installed at St Matthew's, there is no surviving image of the Henry Jones organ, though surviving instruments suggests that it would have been of fairly plain appearance, perhaps with colourful stencilled patterns (*diapering*) on the display pipes, as was common on British organs of the second half of the nineteenth century.

It would appear that there may also have been a second organ in St Matthew's in the first half of the twentieth century, built by the Positive Organ Co.³⁸ Such instruments were built under a patent of Thomas Casson (1842-1910). They usually had only one manual and could be pumped by the player using pedals similar to those on reed organs. An instrument of this kind may well have been used to accompany the choir at floor level and/or for services when there was no one available to pump the main organ.

The Henry Jones organ served St Matthew's for nearly eighty years until 7th September 1940. That night, the church was bombed in a German air raid and, for a second time, the interior, including the organ, was destroyed.



The exterior after World War II bombing³⁹

The presence of the flagpole on the top of the tower suggests that the cupola had been removed some time before the bombing occurred

organists to insist on instruments capable of playing his music. English organs such as those as described in the earlier chapters of this present work were not suitable for the performance of Bach's music, not least owing to their often complete lack of a pedal department, or (at best) a limited set of pedals, usually just 'pull-downs'.

³⁸ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D04195>

³⁹ Source: church archives



The interior of the bombed church (looking towards the south east) before clearing⁴⁰
The remains of the south gallery can be seen with two pillars still standing



The interior of the bombed church (looking towards the north east) after clearing⁴¹

⁴⁰ Source: church archives

CHAPTER THREE

The Estey Reed Organ (1950-1954)

The bombing of the church in World War II did not spell the end for St Matthew's, however, and services continued. At least one took place in the ruins, complete with vestments and other liturgical trappings, as surviving photographs in the church archives testify.



A service in the bombed church, looking east⁴²



A service in the bombed church, looking west⁴³

⁴¹ Source: church archives

⁴² Source: church archives. The priest is the Rector, Fr Francis

⁴³ Source: church archives

The photograph below is of special interest because, among the people pictured, there is a lady playing a reed organ.



A service in the bombed church, showing a reed organ in use⁴⁴

The instrument in the photograph may well be the 'Estey organ'⁴⁵ that was moved to St Matthew's from St Matthias's, Bacon Street, Bethnal Green in November 1950.⁴⁶ Prior to that, in October of the same year, this instrument was repaired by the local organ-building firm of N. P. Mander Ltd, at a cost of £4.8s.0d.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Source: church archives

⁴⁵ Estey was an American company, so rather than being a harmonium, this instrument was probably an 'American organ'. This term is used to denote a kind of reed organ (developed in the USA) that worked on the principal of sucking air over the reeds. Harmoniums, in contrast, generally work on the pressure principal: i.e. air is blown over the reeds. No specification of the Estey organ used in St Matthew's survives

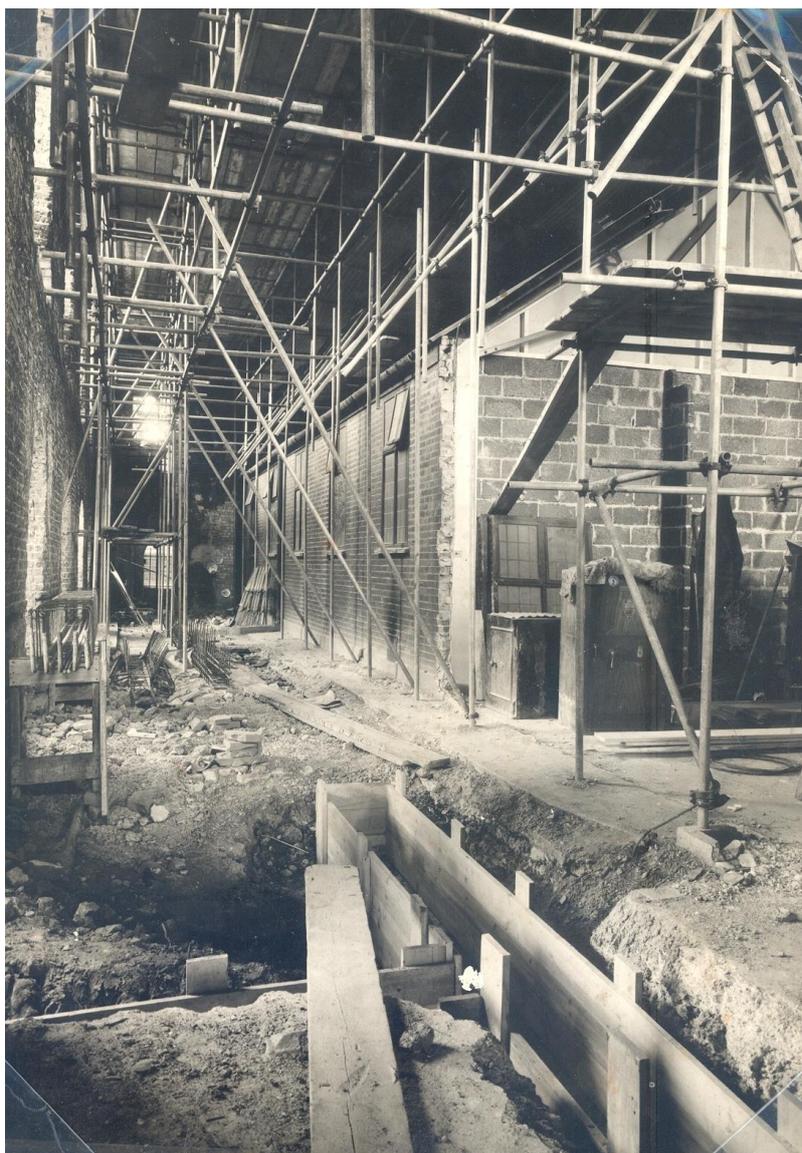
⁴⁶ File for St Matthew's Bethnal Green in the N. P. Mander Ltd archives (henceforth 'Mander archives')

⁴⁷ Mander archives

CHAPTER FOUR

The Eustace Ingram Organ in the Temporary Church (1954-1960)

In due course, a temporary church was erected in the bombed shell of St Matthew's. It was dedicated on 27th November 1954.⁴⁸



The temporary church built inside the bombed shell of the church⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Oldland, p. 10

⁴⁹ Source: church archives

The church had called upon local organ builder Noel Mander (1912-2005) at least four years earlier to assist in finding a suitable instrument. Mander did much to provide organs for London churches that had been bombed during the War⁵⁰ and, although he gave St Matthew's a couple of options, he advised that the organ in St Matthias, Bethnal Green (the source of the Estey organ) would be suitable for the temporary church.⁵¹ On 9th June 1950, Mander estimated that it would cost £600 to install the St Matthias instrument in the temporary parish church building.⁵²

In anticipation of the installation of the pipe organ, the church advertised for the post of Organist & Choirmaster and Mander thoughtfully supplied the rector with a specification of the organ, should applicants request it.⁵³ Leslie F. Pye ARCO LRAM of Dunstable was appointed and duly wrote requesting a specification of his new instrument.⁵⁴ It would seem that he had accepted the post without being entirely sure what his organ would be like!

Some 'improvements' to the workings of the St Matthias organ were undertaken at the time of its installation in the temporary church. They included the provision of pneumatic action to the Pedal Bourdon, a new concave and radiating pedalboard to replace the original straight pedalboard, a balanced swell pedal (presumably to replace a 'trigger' swell pedal that would have been located at the treble end of the pedalboard), a new roller board for the pedal couplers (we may assume necessitated by the relocation of the swell pedal), and adaptation of the composition pedals. Although the majority of these items had been included in the 1950 estimate, the bill had risen from £600 to £1030.⁵⁵ A new stool was also provided, the quality of which was not entirely to the church's liking, it would seem, since a letter from Mander to the church explains that the organ builders purchased the organ bench from a manufacturer, but had to finish it themselves; and stating that the bench is of a reasonable quality.⁵⁶ By October 1954, the installation of the organ in the temporary church was complete.

A plan of the temporary church in the Mander archives shows the organ in a chamber with a pitched roof, adjoining the main building. To enable the St Matthias organ to fit into the chamber, the largest of the Great Open Diapason and Gamba pipes of the façade were mitred, i.e. their tops were cut off and re-soldered at angles.⁵⁷ The organ was installed without whatever casework it may originally have had and, instead, a new case was constructed, the plans for which are also to be found in the Mander archives. These plans are undated, do not give a complete front elevation and are not easy to decipher. Nevertheless, they appear to correspond with the picture below and show a construction extending from wall to wall at the rectangular mouth of the organ chamber. The casework seems to have stood a small distance in front of the organ and the gap between the casework and the console was met by sections of woodwork angled at 45°.

⁵⁰ See obituary of Noel Mander by his son, John Pike Mander, in *Organists' Review*, vol. XCL, no. 4 (November 2005), p. 79

⁵¹ <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D04195> states that the organ came from the Lutheran Church, Bethnal Green, but the Mander archives provide ample evidence that the organ came from the church of St Matthias and the fact is stated on an inscribed label on its console (see picture on page 26)

⁵² Mander archives

⁵³ Mander archives

⁵⁴ Mander archives. A gentleman by the name of Mr Mossman, who formerly attended St Matthew's and whom the author met by chance in Blackheath in December 2006, recalled that Pye was blind

⁵⁵ All this information is taken from documents in Mander archives

⁵⁶ If this bench is the same as that currently in use – and in all probability it is – then the author can confirm that it is a rather lightweight piece that used to have a habit of moving while one was playing. At the author's request, a former churchwarden kindly fashioned a couple of pieces of timber to hold the bench in a fixed position: this makeshift arrangement has been in operation for several years. Though the bench in question must (at the time of writing) be heading towards seventy years old, a sturdier one in the first place would have been a far more satisfactory solution

⁵⁷ Mander archives. The information is confirmed by a letter of 31st May 1961: 'When the organ stood in the temporary church the front pipes had to be mitred over to conform to the roof, we have now had to straighten these making new tops'

The casework also appears to have included sliding doors to the upper part of the console to protect the manuals, stops knobs and music desk.⁵⁸ The plans show a cage-like wooden structure at the level of the façade. This can be seen in the photograph below: the mitred façade pipes are visible between the pieces of wood. The casework was finished by December 1954.⁵⁹



The interior of the temporary church⁶⁰

The organ can be seen on the left side of the photograph, immediately behind the banner

The statue of Our Lady and Child (right) and the Crucifix (suspended from the ceiling) are among the furnishings in the rebuilt church to this day. Other items are harder to discern in the photograph; but, having examined the picture under magnification, it is certain that one of the two identical hymn boards, the lectern, the processional cross and possibly the sanctuary lamp and even the congregation's chairs are those in the church today. Furthermore, the altar rails are those installed in the shallow sanctuary at the east end of the present building, while the riddel posts around the altar in the photograph are in storage (damaged) in the muniment room. The Christ in Majesty is not displayed in the current church, however.

⁵⁸ The instrument probably had sliding doors at St Matthias, as part of its original casework. This may be asserted because the grooves in which the lower parts of the doors would have rested are still to be seen today. However, the organ now has neither the doors themselves nor the upper runners to hold them in position

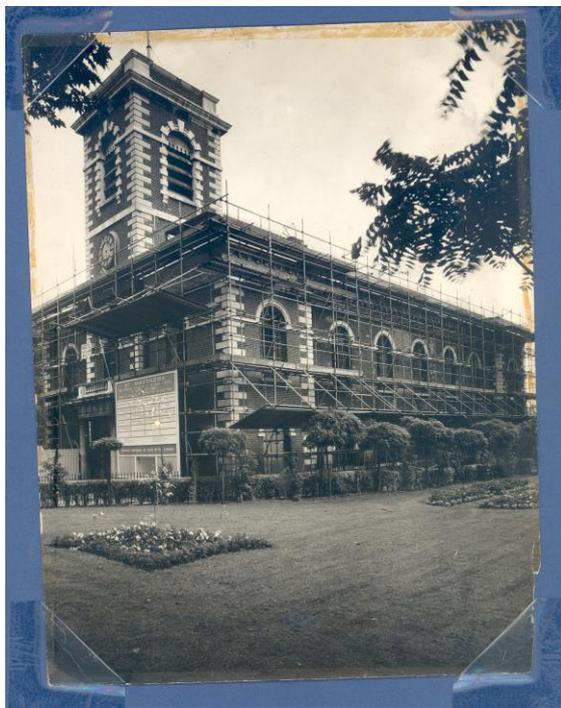
⁵⁹ Mander archives

⁶⁰ Source: church archives

CHAPTER FIVE

The Grand Plans for the Organ in the Rebuilt Church

Rebuilding work began on the church in 1958 and the organ was taken down and put into storage some time before the demolition of the temporary church in 1960. The exterior of the church was restored to something very close to its eighteenth-century appearance,⁶¹ while the interior underwent a transformation inspired by the new liturgical ideas of the time. The building was re-dedicated on 15th July 1961: 215 years to the day since its original consecration.



*Left: The church under scaffolding
During the post-war rebuilding⁶²*

*Right: Architect Antony Lewis presents
his model of the rebuilt church
to Princess Alexandra⁶³*

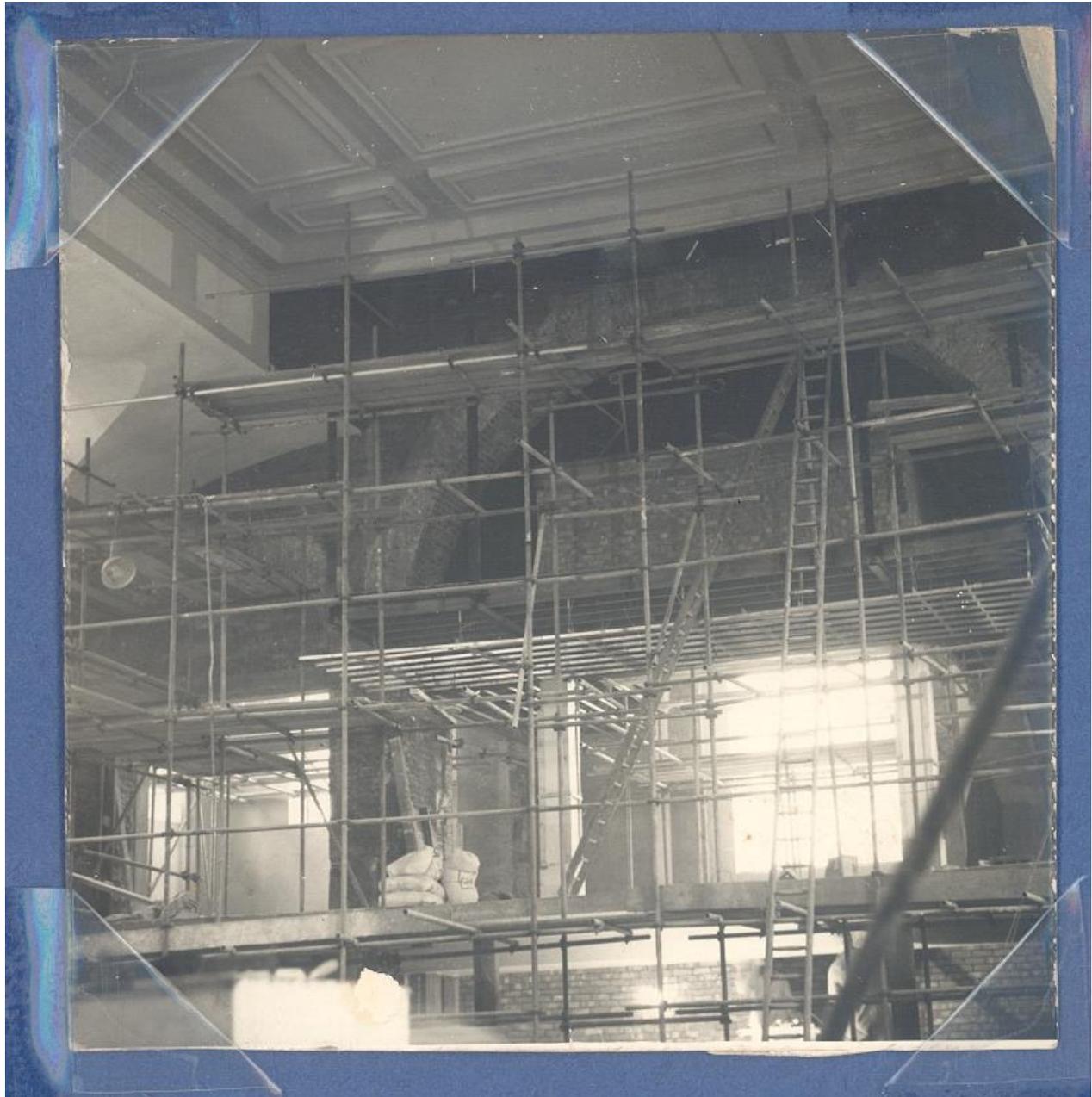


⁶¹ The urns that graced the top of the tower and which were presumably removed when the cupola was constructed have never been replaced; while the pediment under the clock, which does not appear in the various earlier images of the church, was retained

⁶² Source: church archives

⁶³ Source: church archives

In his new scheme, Lewis planned that the organ should be placed in a specially constructed chamber at the east end of the church. This chamber occupies what was formerly the upper part of the chancel. The organ chamber sits on top of a chapel, which, in turn, is situated on top of a shallow sanctuary behind the main altar. Behind the sanctuary, also beneath the chapel, is the sacristy.



The east end of the church during the construction of the upper chapel and the organ chamber⁶⁴

Note the original chancel arch which is now hidden by the organ screen

In Lewis's completed scheme, the organ chamber is screened from the nave by a construction that forms part of a dramatic backdrop to the main altar. Beneath the organ screen, dividing the upper chapel from the nave, is a set of twelve shutter-panels that bear images of the apostles, forming an iconostasis. These shutter-panels may be drawn back to reveal the upper chapel.

⁶⁴ Source: church archives



Architect's model for the interior of the rebuilt church⁶⁵
The chancel arch is now hidden behind the organ screen (above the iconostasis)



The interior of the rebuilt church, shortly after completion⁶⁶
The pulpit, altar rails and choirstalls visible in this photograph are no longer in situ

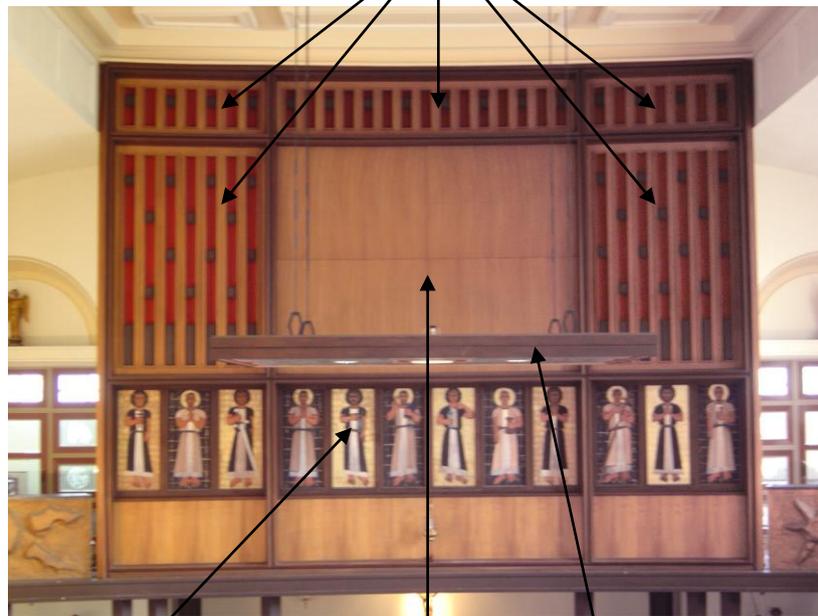
⁶⁵ Source: church archives

⁶⁶ Source: church archives

As can be seen in the picture below, the organ screen above the iconostasis is made up of six sections, five of which consist of wooden frames with what appears to be red solid boards behind. In fact, the red parts of the structure are separate wooden planks, each mounted a small distance behind the frame, so as to hide the interior of the chamber, while allowing sound to travel into the nave. There is presently paper fixed to the rear of the two largest panels to prevent light from the window at the top of the organ chamber being visible in the main body of the church.

The Organ Screen⁶⁷

These sections of the screen are designed to allow sound to pass through



Iconostasis (chapel behind) Solid central panel Tester (hanging above altar)

The central panel of the organ screen is solid and is constructed from four pieces of wood mounted on fibreboard. It is likely that, had an organ been installed in the chamber, this central panel would have been removed. This is because, although the other portions of the organ screen are designed to allow egress of sound, an instrument would still have sounded very 'boxed in' if the central panel had remained in place. A façade of pipes (speaking or dummies) may have taken the place of the central panel; but it is equally possible that, inspired by such instruments as that of the Royal Festival Hall (installed 1954), the pipes of the Great organ might simply have been placed behind the opening, without any adornment, with the Swell box on the upper level and the pedal pipes to either side (see picture on next page).

⁶⁷ Photograph: author

The interior of the Organ Chamber (looking north)⁶⁸

Upper portions of the organ screen
(light from the nave can here be seen between them)

Original chancel arch



*The solid central panel of the organ screen
(this is the panel that would probably have
been removed had the organ been installed
in the chamber)*

*Lower floor level of
the organ chamber
(intended location of
the Great and Pedal
soundboards?)*

*Upper floor level of
the organ chamber
(intended location of
the Swell box?)*

As for the console, it was intended that it should be sited in the arch under the staircase that sweeps down the eastern portion of the south wall of the church.⁶⁹ This arrangement, with the pipes and console some distance from each other, would have necessitated the use of an electric (rather than mechanical) action to connect the console with the pipework.

⁶⁸ Photograph: author

⁶⁹ Oldland, p.11



Arch under the south staircase⁷⁰

originally intended as the location of the organ console

Since the work would have been carried out by N. P. Mander Ltd,⁷¹ it is reasonable to assume that the instrument would have had a stop-key console. Stop-key consoles were typical of Mander organs after the War, particularly when the console was detached from the main body of the organ, as would have been the case in St Matthew's.⁷² A console of this kind would have enabled the player to look over the top and see the liturgical action in the sanctuary. Furthermore, it would be difficult to fit a drawstop console beneath the arch under the staircase, while a more compact stop-key console would fit snugly.

The documents in the Mander archives hint at the hope that a brand-new organ might be provided for the re-built church. It is evident, however, that it soon became apparent that there were insufficient funds for this dream to be realised, and so architect and organ builder looked to cannibalise the St Matthias organ that had served in the temporary church, placing its pipework in the organ chamber, and providing a new console and action. Yet there was not even enough capital for this version of the plans to be achieved, and so a temporary solution was sought until such time as the money had been found.

⁷⁰ Photograph: author

⁷¹ The Mander archives provide ample evidence that it was accepted that the company would have carried out the work

⁷² Larger instruments tended to have their stops-keys arranged in a horseshoe: e.g. Mander's console for Christ Church, Isle of Dogs, London, pictured in *Fanfare for an Organ-Builder* (Positif Press, Oxford, 1996), p. 44 / <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N16728>. Two manual organs, however, generally had the stop-keys arranged in a straight line above the Swell keyboard. E.g. St Clement, King Square, Finsbury: <https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N17552>

CHAPTER SIX

The 'Temporary Solution' for the Organ in the Rebuilt Church (1954-the present day)

In 1961, ninety-nine years after Henry Jones had built his organ in St Matthew's, N. P. Mander Ltd installed in the newly rebuilt church the organ that had been salvaged from St Matthias Bethnal Green in 1950, and which had served for six years in the temporary church. Like the Henry Jones organ and, presumably, the organ installed by Byfield & Green before that, the organ was placed on the west gallery. At the time, this arrangement was deemed unsatisfactory, not least by Noel Mander himself who, in a letter of 30th September 1960 to the architect Antony Lewis, expressed his hope that he would one day put the organ in the chamber that had been designed for it.⁷³ As time passed, however, Mander's opinion on this matter changed significantly, as we shall see.

Contrary to normal practice, the organ's position on the cantilevered west gallery of the rebuilt church was not central, but towards the south side. It has been assumed that this was because the construction of the gallery was such that it could not support the weight of the organ, had the instrument been positioned centrally.⁷⁴ However, a letter of 5th June 1961 from Antony Lewis to Noel Mander instructs the organ builders to put the organ on the south side of the gallery 'so it just misses the electric light point on the South side. This will give more room for seats on the North side'.⁷⁵ This suggests that the architect had no concerns about the ability of the gallery to take the weight of the organ.

In contrast to the installation in the temporary church where the organ was given a case, in the striking interior of the rebuilt church, the organ was erected without any kind of casework at all, with all its pipes and action exposed. This was almost certainly not for aesthetic reasons, but rather because the placement of the organ on the gallery was supposed to be a temporary solution. Mander noted that the façade pipes (which, having been mitred for the chamber in the temporary church, had to be straightened out again) were pitted and did not look good, and gave prices for various treatments, including gilding. Predictably, since the church would not have wanted to spend a penny more than could be avoided on an organ that was destined either to be transformed and relocated to the organ chamber, or condemned to the scrapheap, the option taken was that which was offered by Mander free of charge: a couple of coats of aluminium paint.⁷⁶

⁷³ Mander archives

⁷⁴ Assertions made by certain long-standing members of the church when the author was newly in post as Organist

⁷⁵ Mander archives. The electric light fittings have now been removed but the plugs in the ceiling that can be seen in the photograph of the organ on the west gallery of the church show where the pendant lights were until the church was rewired in the early 2000s

⁷⁶ Mander archives



The organ on the west gallery of the rebuilt church⁷⁷

In a letter to the rector of St Matthew's, Mander confessed his misgivings about the appearance of the caseless organ.⁷⁸ Yet beauty is, as the saying goes, in the eye of the beholder – and beauty of sound is in the ear of the listener, one might add. Unhindered by a case, the organ could speak freely into the resonant acoustic of the church. As tastes changed and mechanical action became valued once more, the worth of this organ was gradually realised, and in a letter to the rector of 21st August 1970 (dictated on 20th August), Mander praised the instrument and advised against meddling with it:

Concerning the organ itself, when the church was rebuilt ten years ago I simply moved the organ from St Mat[t]hais, gave it a minor overhaul,⁷⁹ and re-erected it at St Matthen[']s, because a[t] that time it was intended to be a temporary arrangement; the Architect wanted the organ over the altar and the console in the position provided for it. There was no money to pay for this and in a way, this has been a blessing because the temporary arrangement is, I am sure, a better solution than what was to be the permanent plan.

The little two manual tracker organ which stands there will last for generations and I think will enable the organist to control his choir and his congregation far better than an electric action and a detached console. If he finds the instrument too loud himself it is probably that he is under estimating [sic] the amount of singing going on, and possibly playing a little too loudly, this is something on which I am not able to give an opinion.

⁷⁷ Photograph: author

⁷⁸ Mander archives

⁷⁹ Mander appears to have forgotten the time that the organ spent in the temporary church, and the work that was undertaken on the instrument at the time of its installation there

I ought to mention that in any case any alteration to the organ must be the subject of a faculty for which the Diocesan Advisory Committee will have to issue a certificate.

I gather nothing much is likely to happen for the next twelve months, nevertheless, I think the Parish ought to be conditioned to leaving the instrument as it is.⁸⁰

Mander subsequently wrote to the rector on 14th November 1972 advising that maintenance should be carried out. The organ eventually received attention in 1974: a document dated 11th September reveals that no more was done than a cleaning and an overhaul for the price of £734.40.⁸¹

Thus, the organ that was salvaged from St Matthias, Bethnal Green, and which spent some time in the temporary church, has survived on the west gallery of the rebuilt church to the present day. In September 2004, fifty years after it was installed in the temporary church, the organ was cleaned and overhauled, once more by N. P. Mander Ltd. This work cost £12,700 and included the mending of splits in the Swell soundboard. The stop combinations selected by the composition pedals were altered,⁸² but other than that, the instrument was unchanged. It remains a nineteenth-century organ with a few modifications carried out around 1954.



Mander's plate above the Great Organ Stops⁸³

⁸⁰ Mander archives

⁸¹ Mander archives

⁸² Screw holes in the action indicated that the previous combinations were probably not the originals, and this is confirmed by the documentary evidence cited above that the work undertaken when the organ was erected in the temporary church included adapting the composition pedals

⁸³ Photograph: author

CHAPTER SEVEN

Description of the 1877 Eustace Ingram Organ

An ivory plaque on the console gives the name of the builder of the organ and the date of its construction.



Maker's nameplate on the music desk⁸⁴

According to Thistlethwaite:

*Ingram was born in 1839. He was apprenticed to an organ-builder called Snell [Robert Snell fl. 1825-1860] and at the age of twenty-one was articled to Willis to learn reed-voicing. After having established his own business he was briefly in partnership with Speechly (from 1873). His sons established businesses in Hereford and Edinburgh. Ingram (senior) acquired Holdich's business in 1894, but the firm Holdich & Ingram was shortly afterwards taken over by Gray & Davison.*⁸⁵

The 'Willis' referred to by Thistlethwaite is Henry Willis [I], founder of the organ-building dynasty, and commonly known as 'Father Willis'.⁸⁶ The St Matthew's organ has several characteristics, in both its construction and in its sound, that reflect its builder's training under Willis. Particularly reminiscent of Willis organs of the same period are the rounded ends of the manual black keys, and the carving of the key cheeks at the ends of each keyboard. Like many of Willis's Swell Mixtures, the pungent Mixture stop on the Swell Organ contains a tierce (17th) rank in the bass, although it becomes a quint mixture from *c*¹ (middle C).



Console detail⁸⁷

Note the Willis-style rounded sharps and key cheeks

⁸⁴ Photograph: author

⁸⁵ Thistlethwaite, p. 527. He takes his information from *BIOS Reporter* 4/4:11

⁸⁶ Father Willis was builder/rebuilder of a vast number of instruments up and down the country. His cathedral organs include St Paul's, Durham and Lincoln; and his instruments for concert and town halls include the Royal Albert Hall, the Alexandra Palace and St George's Hall, Liverpool. He is generally regarded as one of England's greatest organ-builders

⁸⁷ Photograph: author

There are two manuals, fifteen speaking stops and three couplers. The stop-list is as follows:

Great Organ (C-g³)

Open Diapason	8'
Gamba	8'
Stopped Diapason	8'
Principal	4'
Lieblich Flute	4'
Fifteenth	2'
Trumpet	8'

Swell Organ (C-g³)

Concert Flute	8'
Open Diapason*	8'
Melodia*	8'
Principal	4'
Mixture	III ranks
Horn	8'
Oboe**	8'

* bottom octave from Concert Flute

** from tenor C only

Pedal Organ (C-C-f)

Bourdon	16'
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Couplers

Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Swell to Great

- Mechanical action to manuals, drawstops and couplers
- Pneumatic action to Pedal Bourdon
- Three composition pedals to Great Organ
- Balanced swell pedal

This organ is a splendid example of *multum in parvo*: a small number of stops yield a broad spectrum of sounds; and the player can trick the listener into thinking that the instrument is larger than it really is. Every stop is beautiful on its own, yet each one blends with every other. The stops range from the delicate (and unusually named) Melodia of the Swell Organ, to the majestic Trumpet on the Great, which is both a good solo stop and the crowning glory of the Full Organ. Although one cannot but regret the loss of both the first organ and the Henry Jones instrument, it is a cause for celebration that, owing to lack of funds, a fine Victorian organ was saved and continues to give much pleasure to player and listener alike. It serves the liturgy of St Matthew's very well and, to paraphrase Noel Mander: this little two manual tracker organ will last for generations. At least, let us hope so!

APPENDIX

Pictures Showing the Layout of the 1877 Eustace Ingram Organ

Pipework of the Great Organ⁸⁸
viewed from the north-west



*Swell
shutters*

*Basses of the Open Diapason 8'
and Gamba 8' form the façade*

Open Diapason 8'

Stopped Diapason 8'
*The Gamba pipes are hidden
at the ends of the soundboard
by the Stopped Diapason basses
which, being bulky, occupy the space
left by the Gamba pipes in the façade*

Principal 4'

Flute 4'

Fifteenth 2'

Trumpet 8'

⁸⁸ Photograph: author

The organ from the south⁸⁹



Swell box

Great Organ pipework

Pipes of the Pedal Bourdon

A view of part of the action of the organ⁹⁰



Swell Organ rollerboard

Swell Organ stop action

⁸⁹ Photograph: author

⁹⁰ Photograph: author