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

Christopher Maxim

Third edition

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NOTE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Having substantially revised this History in early 2020, I received an email on Easter Eve (11 April 2020) from Paul Tindall who had seen the new edition online. Mr Tindall's email contained some invaluable information about the history of the organs of St Matthew's Bethnal Green, the most significant being the stop-list of the first organ. In an email of 16 April 2020, he provided further facts and insights. I am immensely grateful to Mr Tindall and have revised this History in light of the information he has so kindly supplied.

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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 to build a church, 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. 1818 (from the north west)[5]

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[1] Fr John Oldland (rev.), *A History of the Parish Church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green* (n.pl. [London?], n.pu. [St Matthew's Parochial Church Council?], 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* (London, St Matthew's Parochial Church Council, 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 Revd. Joshua King A.M. in 1809 succeeded the Revd. Wm. Loxham A.M.* Drawn by G.

The earliest information about an organ in St Matthew's comes from *The Leffler Manuscript*, a collection of stop-lists compiled around 1800 by Henry Leffler.[6] The entry for Bethnal Green states:

> *Organ erected in this Church in 1772 by Byfield & Green. Came from Newbury in Berkshire in exchange for a new Organ.*[7]

Background information of this kind is quite common throughout the source. Sometimes the organist is named and the year (occasionally also the month) of his/her appointment may also be noted. In a few cases the salary is stated.[8] But such information usually appears only if the entry includes the list of stops. 'Blank' entries contain the name and location of the church only, with space below for the stops and any additional material to be inserted at a later date. Basically, no stop-list means no other information. The entry for St Matthew's is unique because, having noted the historical background, Leffler did not list the stops. Instead he wrote:

Not worth £20. Rubbish.[9]

St Matthew's is not the only organ to fail to impress Leffler. Other dismissive comments include: 'A very good for nothing Organ' (Chapel Royal, St James's, p. 16), 'A very bad organ' (St George's Bloomsbury, p. 22), 'A very bad organ all through' (St George the Martyr Queen Square, p. 23), and 'The Chorus is noisy but not very Musical' (St Giles Cripplegate, p. 26). There is plenty of praise, too, with the organ of the Temple Church awarded the highest accolade: 'This is the finest organ in London' (p. 44). Nevertheless, no matter how poor he thought the instrument, Leffler always wrote down its stop list – except for St Matthew's Bethnal Green!

The financial limitations of the parish probably account for both the delay and the purchase of a second-hand instrument that was (it would seem) of poor quality/condition and may therefore have been acquired cheaply. Leffler describes the (new) three-manual Newbury organ fully and notes that it 'Cost £330 and the Old Organ valued at £100'[10]

Leffler states that the (new) Newbury organ was by Byfield & Green.[11] Since it is they who later installed the old Newbury organ in St Matthew's, it seems likely that that they kept the old organ in storage for a couple of years before erecting it in Bethnal Green. As Paul Tindall notes: 'The first organist at Newbury was appointed in 1709, so it is a reasonable supposition that an organ from about then was the one sold to Bethnal Green. Nothing is known about its builder.'[12]

Shepherd and etched by W. Angus for the Architectural Series of London Churches. Published by J. Booth, November 2nd 1818

[6] I am indebted to Mr Paul Tindall for kindly bringing the reference in *The Leffler Manuscript* to the first St Matthew's organ to my attention in his email to me of 11 April 2020 (see *Note to the Third Edition* above). Mr Tindall notes that 'Leffler, organist of St Katherine by the Tower, was a busy multi-instrumentalist in London, and it's unlikely he would have seen personally all the organs that he mentions' (email of 16 April 2020). Nevertheless, the tone of the subjective judgments passed on the London organs in particular suggests that Leffler was familiar with them. Formerly in private hands, *The Leffler Manuscript* is now the properly of the British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS) and is held in the British Organ Archive in Birmingham. It has been published in facsimile: *The Leffler Manuscript: Facsimile Edition with Introduction by Peter Williams* (Reigate, BIOS, 2010) and, having obtained a copy, I have consulted it in preparing the Third Edition of the present work

[7] Leffler, p. 67

[8] E.g. Alhallows [sic] Lombard Street: 'Organist Miss Rodd / 1812 / Salary 30£' [sic] (p. 6); St Lawrence Guildhall: 'Organist Mr Chichely / Salary 30£. / Died April 11 1805. / Mr Banner May 1805' (p. 31)

[9] Leffler, p. 67

[10] Leffler, p. 178

[11] Leffler, p. 178

[12] Paul Tindall, email of 11 April 2020. The installation of an organ that was over 60 years old is entirely feasible. 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

Having given up all hope of ever knowing the stop-list of the first organ of St Matthew's, the author was delighted to be informed by Paul Tindall[13] that it is recorded in another source: *The Sperling Notebooks*.[14]

St Matthew's Bethnal Green (Anon, c. 1709 (?); installed by Byfield & Green, 1772)[15]

Great Organ *(GG (short 8ve)-e^3)*	***Swell Organ*** *(c^1 [-e^3], enclosed)*
Open Diapason	Open Diapason
Stopt Diapason	Stopt Diapason
Principal	Principal
Fifteenth	Cornet 2 ranks
Sesquialtera 3 ranks (bass)	Trumpet
Cornet 3 ranks (treble)	Hautboy
Trumpet	

It is interesting to note that the two manual departments on this instrument were Great and Swell. This has been normal on English organs since around the middle of the nineteenth century. However, before that time, it usual for the second manual to be a Choir department. This secondary division would typically have been played from the lower of the two keyboards, the Great manual being the upper one.[16] By virtue of having a Swell department as its second (upper) manual, this organ must have seemed curious to Leffler, which may have influenced his negative opinion of it.

As was typical during the period, the Great Organ of the first St Matthew's organ descended to 'Double G' (GG in organ builders' shorthand), a 4th lower than the lowest note on modern organs, but with a 'short octave'.[17] The Swell Organ began at middle C and was intended principally for playing solos with the right hand (accompanied by softer stops on the Great Organ, played by the left hand). The 'swelling' device was a relatively recent invention that enabled melodies to be played more expressively with crescendos and diminuendos. The early English Swell Organ was not a complete secondary chorus (i.e. a softer version of the Great

[13] Email of 11 April 2020

[14] *The Sperling Notebooks* comprise three large volumes that belong to the Royal College of Organists but are on long-term loan to the British Museum. They have been published in a modern edition: James Boeringer, *Organa Britannica: Organs in Great Britain 1660-1860: a complete edition of the Sperling notebooks and drawings in the Library of the Royal College of Organists* (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1983-89). Mr Tindall notes that 'Sperling was a clergyman (and amateur architect, who designed at least two churches). He wrote a book about Middlesex Churches in the 1840s which mentions some organs, but not all the information is the same as in the notebooks. This suggests that he acquired the bulk of his information from someone else later on: most of it seems to have been copied in the early 1850s before he married in 1854 and stopped recording things. His information is voluminous, especially for the years 1820-1850, but not necessarily always accurate. There are also a number of drawings of organs, which are pasted in, and clearly considerably earlier than the text' (email of 16 April 2020)

[15] Sperling, Vol. 1, p. 61. Information obtained by Paul Tindall via a British Library loan

[16] An important extant example being the organ of Adlington Hall, Cheshire (https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N04410). Its survival may be attributed to it being in a private residence rather than a church

[17] This was a common arrangement and meant that, to the left of the lowest C key on the Great Organ, there would have been a 'white' key that looked like a B but played GG. The key that appeared to be the lowest C sharp/D flat would have sounded AA. English organ music of the period often calls for GG and AA (which causes problems when performing the repertoire on modern instruments) but does (usually) require the missing notes – though some organs had them (this was called a 'long octave')

Organ): that was the role of the Choir Organ. A short-compass Swell Organ can be seen in the picture (below) of the restored organ in St Botolph's Aldgate. The absence of pedals was also typical of English organs of the time.

As noted above, Leffler states that the organ had been valued at £100 in 1770,[18] which suggests that this is what St Nicholas's Newbury was given for it against the cost of their new organ (£330). St Matthew's presumably was charged this amount, plus erection and restoration /improvement costs. Perhaps the two-year interval between the organ being removed from Newbury and installed in Bethnal Green was because St Matthew's, having secured the instrument, took several months to raise the necessary funds. Alternatively, it might simply have been a matter of fitting the work into Byfield & Green's schedule.

Since the original builder(s) of this instrument are unknown, some information about Byfield & Green, who installed it in St Matthew's, is provided here. The Byfield family were well established London organ builders. Samuel Green (1740-1796) was born in Oxfordshire[19] and is known to have been in partnership between 1761 and 1768 with one of the three organ builders called John Byfield. W. L. Sumner believed it to be with John Byfield [II];[20] while Stephen Bicknell more recently stated that the partnership was with his son, John Byfield [III].[21] Paul Tindall has confirmed, however that it was with John Byfield [II] and lasted from 1768-1772.[22]

> *Samuel Green married Sarah Norton on 1 January 1772 and set up on his own sometime that year. Byfield announced in October that he was 'carrying on Business on his own account.' This was John Byfield II, who […] died in 1799: he struggled after Green left, went bankrupt in 1774 and did not make any more new organs. John Byfield III was not born until 1767.*[23]

So the erection of the organ in St Matthew's was one of their last pieces of work together and while John Byfield [II]'s career would soon decline, Green, in contrast, was in the ascendant. He was to 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.*[24]

Regrettably, no drawing of the first organ at St Matthew's survives.[25] 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.

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[18] Leffler, p. 178
[19] Stephen Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ* (Cambridge, CUP, 1996), p. 181
[20] William Leslie Sumner, *The Organ*, 4th edn (London, McDonald and Jane's, 1973), p. 172
[21] Bicknell, p. 181
[22] Email of 11 April 2020
[23] Email of 11 April 2020. For further information see Paul Tindall, 'A New Look at the Byfields', *BIOS Reporter*, Vol. XXXII, No. 3 (July 2008), pp. 30-32
[24] Bicknell, p. 183, referencing *Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1814), quoted in Hopkins and Rimbault, *The Organ* (London, Robert Cocks & Co., 1877). Many of Green's organs are no longer extant or have been altered beyond 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/)
[25] Paul Tindall has confirmed (email of 16 April 2020) that there is no picture of the St Matthew's organ in either *Leffler* or *Sperling*; and that it is not even mentioned in other nineteenth-century sources such as *Organographia* (Library of the Royal College of Music), the so-called *G.P. England Notebook* (property of John Mander), nor the notes of Alexander Buckingham (who was an organ builder). Mr Tindall notes that Buckingham's work was

The organ in **St Botolph's Aldgate** is believed to be originally the work of Renatus Harris.[26] Having been built for the old church (1704-5), it was rebuilt by John Byfield [I] in George Dance's new St Botolph's in 1744.[27] It is interesting to note that this organ was installed in the new church by the eldest Byfield just two years before St Matthew's was dedicated. One wonders whether a connection was made (via Dance?) that would lead to St Matthew's later obtaining an organ from Byfield & Green. Given the date of its original construction and the likely date of the first St Matthew's organ (c. 1709), it may well be that this is the instrument that comes closest in appearance to the organ installed in St Matthew's in 1772. Restored by Martin Goetze & Dominic Gwynn Ltd in 2005-2006,[28] 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[29]

St Botolph's Aldgate (Renatus Harris 1704-5/J Byfield [I], 1744)[30]

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 (4 ranks)
Furniture (3 ranks)
Cornet (5 ranks)
Trumpet

Ecchos [sic] *(c¹-d³, enclosed)*
Open Diapason
Stopt Diapason
Cornet (4 ranks)
Trumpet
Hautboy

Accessory: *Drum*

transcribed (not entirely completely) in *The Organ* [Magazine], Nos. 206-213 (c. 1972-3) (email of 16 April 2020)

[26] Bicknell, p. 117 states that the instrument contains work by Thomas Harris (c. 1676) but 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/)

[27] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=R01332

[28] https://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/organ/aldgate/

[29] Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Messrs Goetze & Gwynn www.goetzegwynn.co.uk

[30] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=R01332. This varies slightly from Leffler (p. 13)

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 built by Richard Bridge (d. 1758) in **St Leonard's, Shoreditch** (also by Dance) survives.[31] 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[32]

St Leonard's Shoreditch (Richard Bridge, 1757)[33]

Choir Organ *(GG-e^3)*
Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Fifteenth
Flute
Voxhumane [sic]

Great Organ *(GG-e^3)*
Open Diapason
Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Twelfth
Fifteenth
Tierce
Sesquialtera (4 ranks)
Furniture (3 ranks)
Cornet (5 ranks) (from c^1)
Trumpet
Trumpet
Clarion

Swell Organ *(g-e^3)*
Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Cornet (3 ranks)
Trumpet
Hautboy

[31] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=R00632
[32] Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Bob Speel
http://www.speel.me.uk/chlondon/chl/stleonardshoreditch/stleonardorgan.jpg
[33] Leffler, p. 31

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.

St Mary's Rotherhithe[34]

St Mary's Rotherhithe (John Byfield [II], 1764-5)[35]

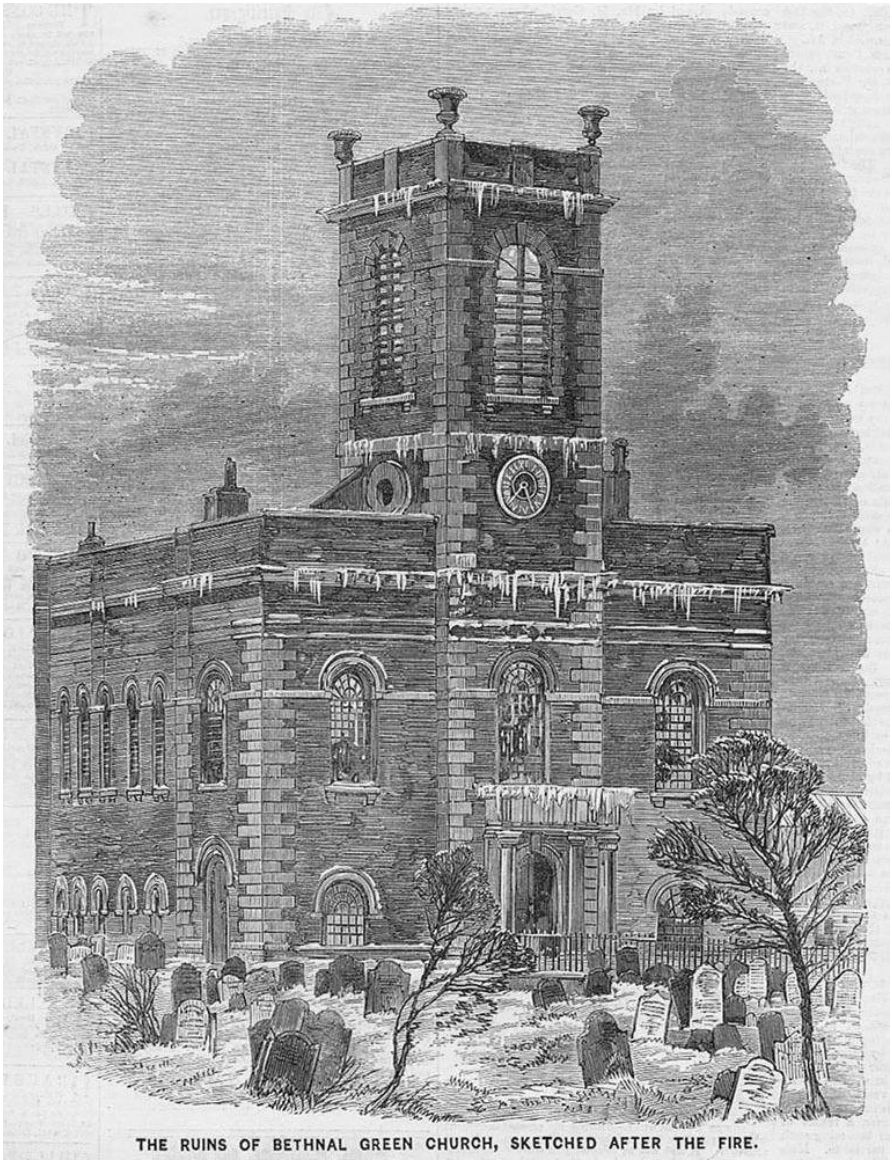
Choir Organ *(GG (short 8ve)-e^3)*
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Flute
Fifteenth
Vox Humana

Great Organ *(GG (short 8ve)-e^3)*
Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Nason
Twelfth
Fifteenth
Sesquialtera (4 ranks)
Cornet (5 ranks) (from tenor *C*)
Trumpet
Clarion

Swell Organ *(g-e^3)*
Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Cornet (3 ranks)
Trumpet
Hautboy

[34] Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Messrs Goetze & Gwynn www.goetzegwynn.co.uk
[35] Bicknell, p. 169; *Hamilton's Catechism*, pp. 111-112; https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N16179; Leffler p. 69. Stop names have been modernized here

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'.[36] The original Georgian interior, including the organ, perished in the flames.



St Matthew's after the fire of 1859, in the *Illustrated London News*[37]

[36] Oldland, p. 7
[37] 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.[38] 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.

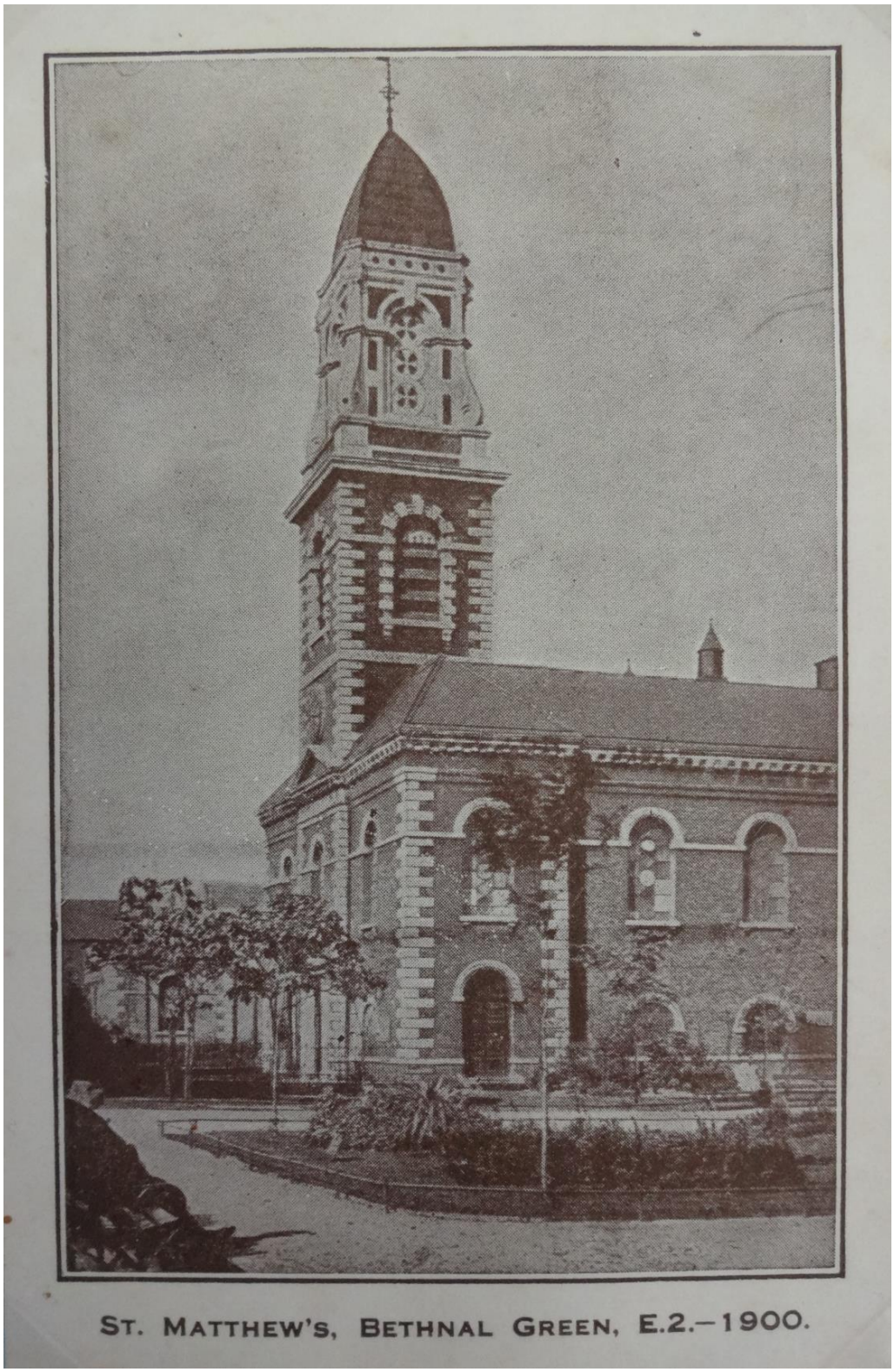
Pencil drawing of the pre-World War II sanctuary[39]

[38] Oldland, p. 7

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

The pre-World War II interior (looking east)[40]

[40] Source: church archives



The exterior in 1900 (from the south west)[41]

[41] 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 the cupola had been dismantled some time before the Second World War. The now demolished mortuary chapel may be seen on the left-hand side of the picture, with the school behind

In 1862, the year after the church reopened, an organ was erected in the west gallery by Henry Jones (1822-1890).[42] Jones had worked with Walker before setting up on his own[43] and had first emerged on the London organ-building scene around 1848.[44] It would seem that the instrument was actually ready in 1861 since Paul Tindall has discovered that it was heard in two recitals in Jones's factory: the first given by J. F. Goodban of St Peter's Vere Street on 30th September,[45] and the second by W. Biggs of St Johns' Wood Congregational Chapel on 11th October.[46] Sadly there is no record of what repertoire was performed in either recital.

The specification, drawn-up by 'the late Dr Wallace, to replace the fine old instrument destroyed by the fire in 1859',[47] was as follows.

St Matthew's Bethnal Green (Henry Jones, 1862)[48]

Great Organ *(C-g³)*		***Swell Organ*** *(C-g³)*	
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	3 ranks
Principal	4'	Cornopean	8'
Flute	4'	Oboe	8'
Twelfth	2 2/3'	Clarion	4'
Fifteenth	2'		
Mixture	3 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

[42] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D07913
[43] Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (CUP, Cambridge, 1990), p. 527, note 14
[44] Thistlethwaite, p. 305
[45] West Middlesex Advertiser, 28 September 1861. Information communicated in email of 11 April 2020
[46] West Middlesex Advertiser, 5 October 1861. Information communicated in email of 11 April 2020
[47] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D07913 The anonymous author of this phrase judged the instrument rather differently from Leffler, perhaps on account of its age (nearly 150 years)
[48] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D07913

As can be seen, Wallace designed, and Jones built, a 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',[49] having manuals of the same compass, both beginning at *C*; 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.[50] This instrument was overhauled in 1901 and 1912. Sadly, as with the first organ installed at St Matthew's, there is no surviving image of the Henry Jones organ, though surviving instruments suggest 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.

The interval between the completion of the organ and its installation in St Matthew's parallels that between the first organ's removal from Newbury and erection in Bethnal Green. It once more begs the question whether that it was the builders' work schedule or the church's need to find the money that caused the apparent delay. Indeed, the rebuilding of St Matthew's after the fire and the subsequent installation of the Henry Jones organ should not be taken to indicate that the people of the parish had become prosperous. Rather, we may assume that much of the money came from wealthy benefactors. Bethnal Green was so poor and squalid a place in the middle of the nineteenth century that it was the subject of a public health study by Hector Gavin M.D., F.R.C.S.E. His *Sanitary Ramblings: Being Sketches and Illustrations of Bethnal Green*, published in 1848, paints a hideous picture of the living conditions of the local people, some of whom would have comprised the congregation at St Matthew's. And among them, singing along to the old organ at the time of Gavin's study, would have been the children who attended St Matthew's School,[51] situated a stone's throw from the church.

> *The St Matthew schools consist of the Charity, National, and Infant Schools. They were built in 1846 and consist of two large rooms for scholastic purposes; there are other rooms for other purposes. The building is situate* [sic] *in the north western corner of the church-yard, which is filled to repletion with corpses. The underground portion of the building consists of a central passage 49 feet long, and a side entrance. This passage is branched with seventeen brick vaults, or low cellars, which are used as catacombs. Four of these are public cellars. In these last I counted ninety-six coffins piled one on the other, like so many bales of goods. I could not ascertain the number of bodies deposited in the other vaults, one only of which was bricked up. There is a large aperture at the end of the passage, for the emission of air from this place. The aperture is right under, and close to, the back entrance to the school, as well as to a most abdominally filthy privy used by the children. On endeavouring to examine the state of this place, I was overcome by the most distressing nausea I have ever experienced during my sanitary investigations. Whether this nausea should be entirely attributed to the filthy cesspool or was partly due to the escape of foul air from the*

[49] For an extended examination of the 'German System', see Thistlethwaite, chapter 7

[50] 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 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'.

[51] The school building stands to this day: it is now used for residential purposes, having been converted into flats some years ago

catacombs, I did not stay to inquire. I presume, however, that it was chiefly attributable to the former cause. How the children can use, and remain in, such a place, is almost incomprehensible.[52]

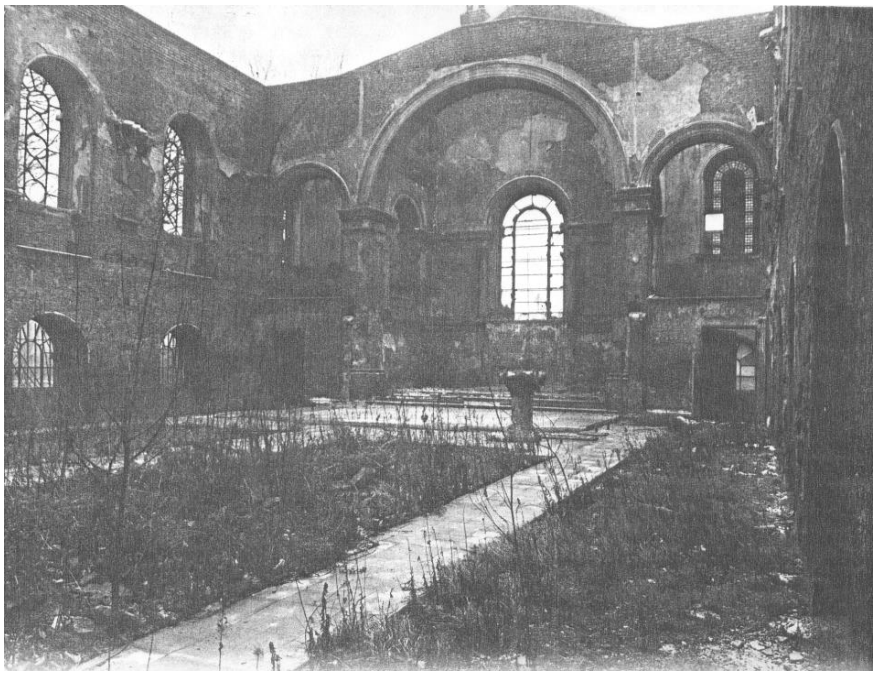
Dr Gavin's description of the school, while not part of the history of the organs, is quoted here because it contrasts so starkly with the respectable image conjured up by the installation of a brand-new pipe organ just fourteen years later.

There is evidence to suggest that, by the early twentieth century, there may also have been a second organ in St Matthew's, built by the Positive Organ Co.[53] Such instruments were made 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 interior of the bombed church (looking towards the south east) before clearing[54]
The remains of the south gallery can be seen with two pillars still standing

[52] Hector Gavin, *Sanitary Ramblings: Being Sketches and Illustrations of Bethnal Green* (London, John Churchill, 1848), pp. 73-74. I have taken the liberty of altering some of Gavin's punctuation so as to make the prose clearer
[53] https://npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=D04195
[54] Source: church archives



The interior of the bombed church (looking towards the north east) after clearing[55]

The exterior after World War II bombing (from the south west)[56]

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

[55] Source: church archives
[56] 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 east)[57]

A service in the bombed church (looking south west)[58]

[57] Source: church archives.
[58] 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 (looking south east), showing a reed organ in use[59]

The instrument in the photograph may well be the 'Estey organ'[60] that was moved to St Matthew's from St Matthias's, Bacon Street, Bethnal Green in November 1950.[61] In October of the same year, this instrument had been repaired by the local organ-building firm of N. P. Mander Ltd, at a cost of £4.8s.0d.[62]

[59] Source: church archives

[60] 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

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

[62] 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.[63]

The temporary church built inside the bombed shell of the church[64]

[63] Oldland, p. 10
[64] 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 War[65] 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.[66] On 9th June 1950 Mander estimated that it would cost £600 to install the St Matthias instrument in the temporary parish church building.[67]

In anticipation of the installation of the pipe organ the church advertised for the post of Organist and Choirmaster, and Mander thoughtfully supplied the rector with a specification of the organ, should applicants request it.[68] Leslie F. Pye ARCO LRAM of Dunstable was appointed and duly wrote requesting a specification of his new instrument.[69] 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.[70] 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 explains that the organ builders purchased the organ bench from a manufacturer, but had to finish it themselves; and states that the bench is of a reasonable quality.[71] 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.[72] 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°.

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

[66] 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

[67] Mander archives

[68] Mander archives

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

[70] All this information is taken from documents in Mander archives

[71] 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 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

[72] 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.[73] 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.[74]

The interior of the temporary church[75]

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 found 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 still in use. 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 above the altar is not in the current church, however.

[73] 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
[74] Mander archives
[75] Source: church archives

CHAPTER FIVE

The Grand Plans for the Organ in the Rebuilt Church

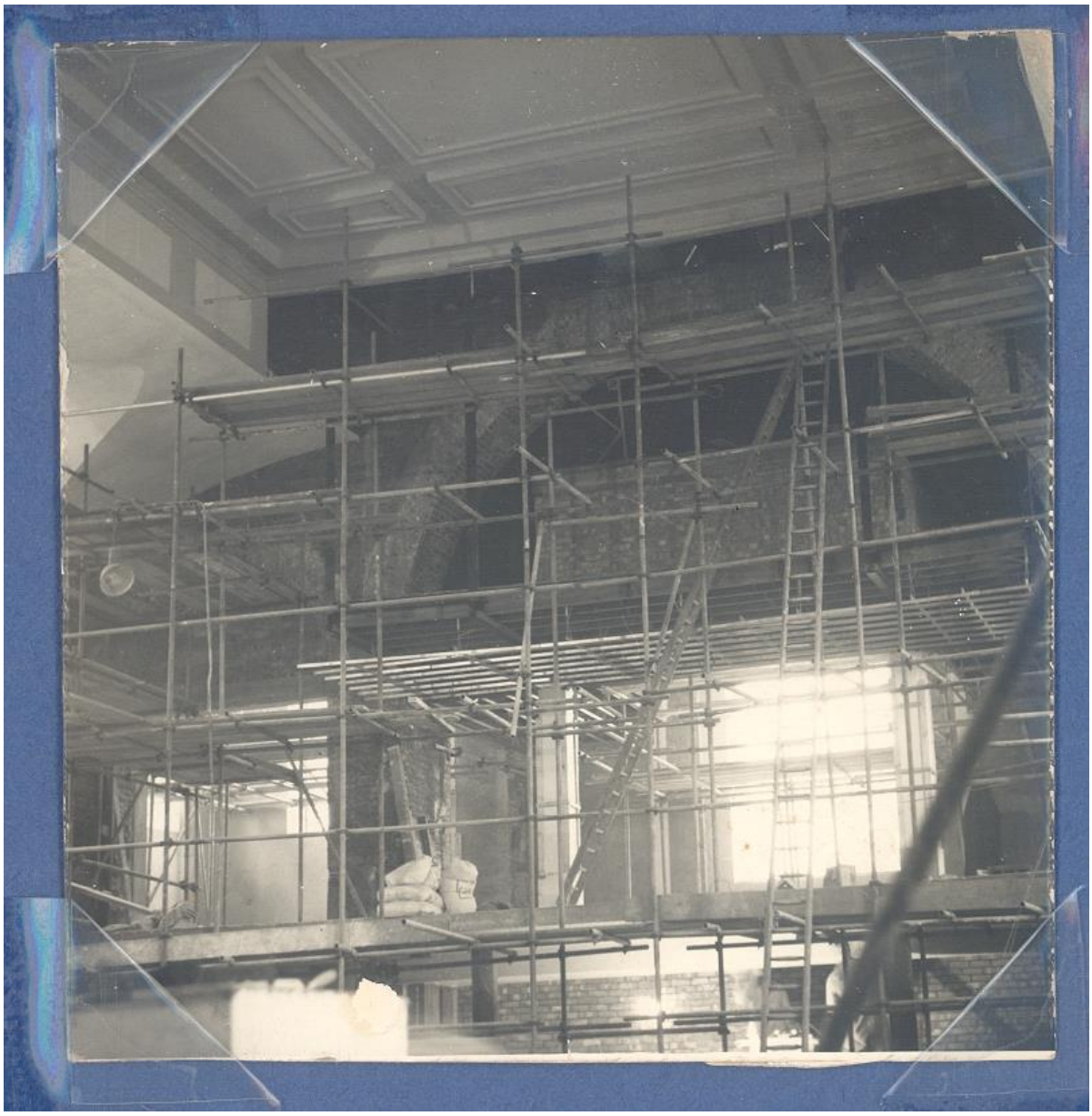
Rebuilding work began on the church in 1958 and the organ was taken down and put into storage some time before the demolition of the temporary church in 1960. The exterior of the church was restored to something very close to its eighteenth-century appearance,[76] while the interior underwent a transformation inspired by the new liturgical ideas of the time. The building was re-dedicated on 15th July 1961, this time by the Bishop of London:[77] 215 years to the day since its original consecration.

Left: **The church under scaffolding During the post-war rebuilding**[78]

Right: **Architect Antony Lewis presents his model of the rebuilt church to Princess Alexandra**[79]

[76] 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
[77] Plaque in the porch under the tower
[78] Source: church archives
[79] 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 above 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 chamber[80]

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.

[80] Source: church archives

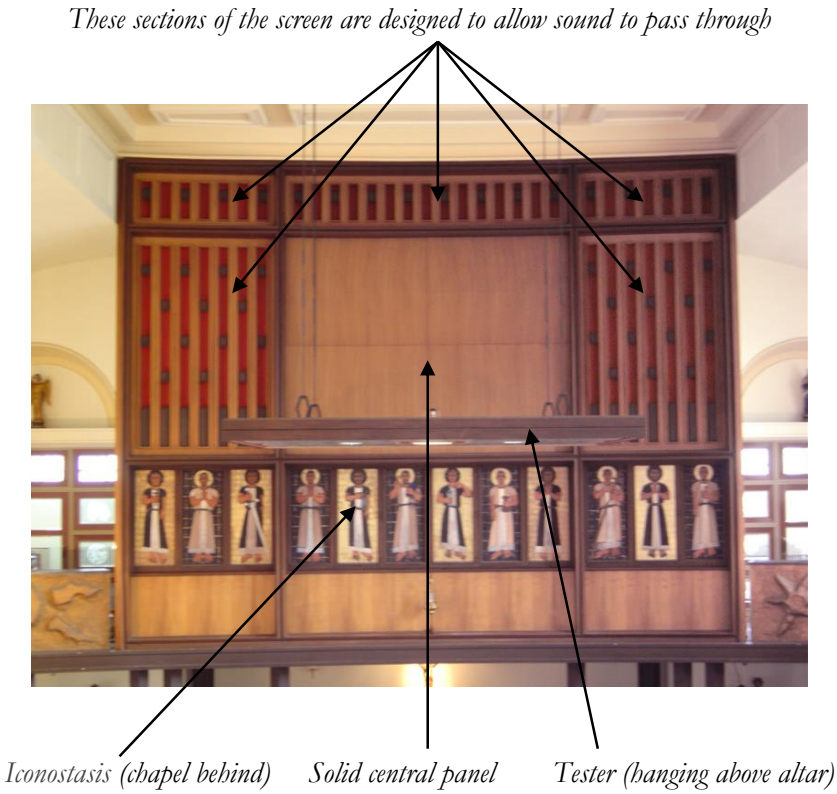
Architect's model for the interior of the rebuilt church[81]
The chancel arch is now hidden behind the organ screen (above the iconostasis)

The interior of the rebuilt church, shortly after completion[82]
The pulpit, altar rails and choirstalls visible in this photograph are no longer in situ

[81] Source: church archives
[82] 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. At present, paper is 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 Screen[83]



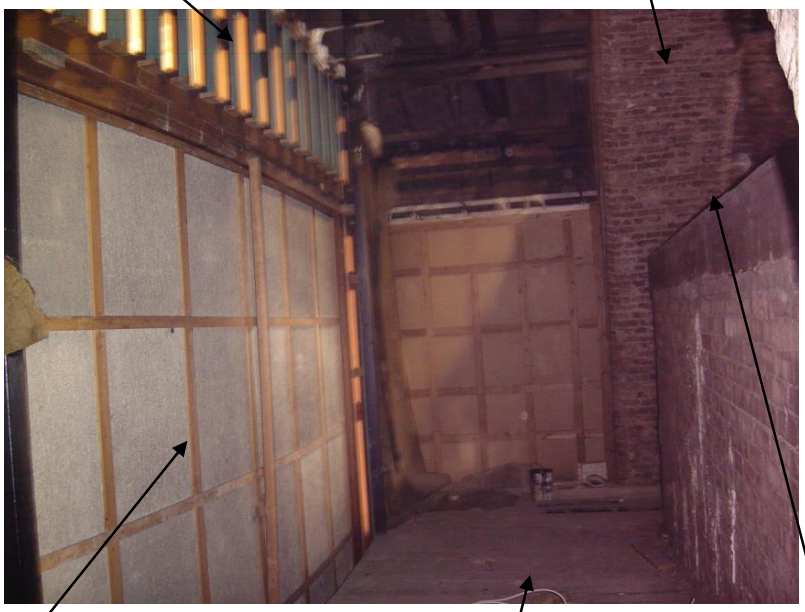
The central panel of the organ screen is solid and constructed from of four pieces of wood mounted on fibreboard. It is likely that, had an organ been installed in the chamber, this central panel would have been removed. This is because, although the other portions of the organ screen are designed to 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).

[83] Photograph: author

The interior of the Organ Chamber (looking north)[84]

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.[85] 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.

[84] Photograph: author
[85] Oldland, p.11

Arch under the south staircase[86]

originally intended as the location of the organ console

Since the work would have been carried out by N. P. Mander Ltd,[87] 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.[88] 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.

[86] Photograph: author

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

[88] 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 Arrangement' of the Organ in the Rebuilt Church
(1954-the present day)

In 1961, ninety-nine years after Henry Jones installed his organ in St Matthew's, N. P. Mander Ltd erected 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 the hope that he would one day put the organ in the chamber that had been designed for it.[89] 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.[90] 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'.[91] 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 temporary. 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.[92]

[89] Mander archives
[90] Assertions made by certain long-standing members of the church when the author was newly in post as Organist
[91] 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
[92] Mander archives

The organ on the west gallery of the rebuilt church[93]

In a letter to the rector of St Matthew's, Mander confessed his misgivings about the appearance of the caseless organ.[94] 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; and, as tastes changed and mechanical action became valued once more, the worth of this organ was gradually realised. In a letter to the rector of 21st August 1970 (dictated on 20th August), Mander now praises the instrument and advises 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,*[95] *and re-erected it at St Matthew[']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.*

[93] Photograph: author
[94] Mander archives
[95] 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.[96]

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.[97]

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,[98] 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 Stops[99]

[96] Mander archives
[97] Mander archives
[98] 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
[99] 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 desk[100]

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.*[101]

The 'Willis' referred to by Thistlethwaite is Henry Willis [I], founder of the organ-building dynasty, and commonly known as 'Father Willis'.[102] 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 detail[103]
Note the Willis-style rounded sharps and key cheeks

[100] Photograph: author
[101] Thistlethwaite, p. 527. He takes his information from *BIOS Reporter* 4/4:11
[102] 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
[103] Photograph: author

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

St Matthew's Bethnal Green (Eustace Ingram, 1877; installed by N. P. Mander Ltd., 1961)

Great Organ *(C-g³)*		***Swell Organ*** *(C-g³)*	
Open Diapason	8'	Concert Flute	8'
Gamba	8'	Open Diapason*	8'
Stopped Diapason	8'	Melodia*	8'
Principal	4'	Principal	4'
Lieblich Flute	4'	Mixture	3 ranks
Fifteenth	2'	Horn	8'
Trumpet	8'	Oboe**	8'
		* *bottom octave from Concert Flute*	
		** *from tenor C only*	

Pedal Organ *(CC-f)*		***Couplers***
Bourdon	16'	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 (let us hope!) last for generations.

APPENDIX

Pictures Showing the Layout of the 1877 Eustace Ingram Organ[104]

Pipework of the Great Organ
viewed from the north-west

[104] All photographs: author

The organ from the south

A view of part of the action of the organ

The stop knobs

Left: Swell Organ, Couplers and Pedal Organ

Below: Great Organ