

The History of the Organs  
of the  
Parish Church of St Matthew,  
Bethnal Green, London



*by*  
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## The Byfield & Green Organ (1772-1859)

The Parish Church of St Matthew, Bethnal Green was consecrated on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1746. Then, as now, Bethnal Green was not a rich area and financial problems had dogged the building project.<sup>1</sup> Hawksmoor had been invited to design the building, but his submission was deemed too expensive and the church was eventually built to a less ambitious, but nevertheless graceful, design by the eminent architect George Dance the elder (1739–1752), 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.



**St Matthew's, Bethnal Green<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>d</sup>. Joshua King A.M. in 1809 succeeded the Rev<sup>d</sup>. W<sup>m</sup>. Loxham A.M.*

It would appear that the church did not gain an organ until 1772, when an instrument was installed that had come from St Nicholas, Newbury.<sup>3</sup> The financial limitations of the parish probably account for both the delay and the installation of a second-hand instrument. This organ is said to have been by Byfield & Green.<sup>4</sup> No drawing of it survives and its specification is unknown, but an idea of what this instrument might have been like may be gleaned from study of contemporary organs in churches within a few miles of Bethnal Green.

The organ in St Botolph's, Aldgate pre-dates the present church. It is believed to have been originally the work of Harris; and it was re-built by Byfield in the George Dance's new church in 1744. Restored by Martin Goetze & Dominic Gwynn Ltd in 2005-6, it lays claim to being the oldest working church organ in England and the best surviving example of its period. Although the casework is of an older design than that which would have adorned the first St Matthew's organ, this is nevertheless an example of a Byfield organ in a Dance church and therefore probably provides not only the best clues as to what the specification of the first organ in St Matthew's would have been, but also what it would have sounded like in the building. Its specification, as rebuilt by Byfield, was probably as follows:

**St Botolph's, Aldgate (Harris, 1676/1704; Byfield, 1744)<sup>5</sup>**

***Choir Organ*** (*GG (short 8ve)-d<sup>3</sup>*)

- Stopt Diapason (wood)
- Dulciana (from *c*, in place of Vox Humana)
- Principal
- Flute (metal)
- Bassoon (from *c*)

***Great Organ*** (*GG (short 8ve)-d<sup>3</sup>*)

- Open Diapason
- Stopt Diapason (metal treble)
- Principal
- Twelfth
- Fifteenth
- Sesquialtera (IV ranks)
- Furniture (II ranks)
- Cornet (V ranks)
- Trumpet

***Ecchos [sic]*** (*c<sup>1</sup>-d<sup>3</sup>, enclosed*)

- Open Diapason
- Stopt Diapason
- Cornet (IV ranks)
- Trumpet
- Hautboy

***Pedal Clavier*** (*1 ½ octaves [GG-c?]*)

[Pull-downs]

***Accessory***

- Drum



**St Botolph's, Aldgate<sup>6</sup>**

*Note the short-compass Ecchos keyboard*

St Leonard's, Shoreditch, also by Dance, had an organ by Bridge. The specification (below) shows how standardised English organ specifications 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 (Bridge, 1757)<sup>7</sup>**

***Great Organ* (GG- $e^3$ )**

Open Diapason  
 Open Diapason  
 Stopped Diapason  
 Principal  
 Twelfth  
 Fifteenth  
 Tierce  
 Sesquialtera (III ranks)  
 Furniture (II ranks)  
 Cornet (V ranks) (from  $c^1$ )  
 Trumpet  
 Trumpet  
 Clarion

***Choir Organ* (GG- $e^3$ )**

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

***Swell Organ* (g- $e^3$ )**

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

***Pedal Clavier* (GG-C)**

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

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 Byfield. Its magnificent surviving casework may give accurate clues to what the first organ in St Matthew's would have looked like, with three 'towers' and two 'flats' of pipes in the façade (see below). Its original specification provides further insight as to what stops the first St Matthew's organ may have had:

**St Mary's, Rotherhithe (Byfield, 1764)<sup>8</sup>**

***Choir Organ* (GG,AA,C,D (short 8ve)- $e^3$ )**

Stopped Diapason  
 Principal  
 Flute  
 Fifteenth  
 Vox Humana

***Great Organ* (GG,AA,C,D (short 8ve)- $e^3$ )**

Open Diapason  
 Stopped Diapason  
 Principal  
 Nason

Twelfth  
Fifteenth  
Sesquialtera (IV ranks)  
Cornet (V ranks) (from tenor C)  
Trumpet  
Clarion

**Swell Organ** (*g-e<sup>3</sup>*)  
Open Diapason

Stopped Diapason  
Principal

Cornet (III ranks)  
Trumpet  
Hautboy



**St Mary's, Rotherhithe<sup>9</sup>**

Although the Byfield & Green organ of Matthew's was originally built for a provincial church, the specifications of organs in comparable churches in the provinces varied little from those of organs found in and near the capital at that time.<sup>10</sup> 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* ('tenor C'), *g* ('fiddle G' – as in the case of St Leonard's and St Mary's) or possibly *c<sup>1</sup>* ('middle C' – as in the case of St Botolph's). There would either have been no pedals at all; or, at most, there may have been a set of 'pull-downs' acting on the lowest notes of the Great and/or Choir manuals. 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, 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 repertoire.

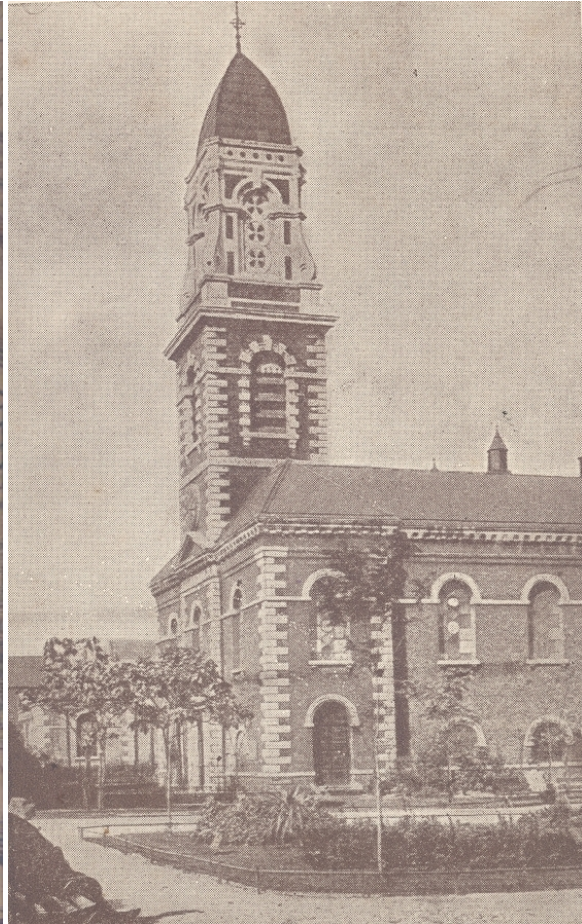
The Byfield & Green organ served St Matthew's for nearly ninety years until 12<sup>th</sup> December 1859. That night, a fire ravaged the church. The story goes that 'the night was so cold that the firemen were covered in sheets of ice as they worked'.<sup>11</sup> The original Georgian interior, including the organ, perished in the flames.

# The Henry Jones Organ (1862-1940)

Following the fire, the church was rebuilt and re-opened on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1861.<sup>12</sup> Aspects of the original design seem to have been preserved, including the galleries; but, either at this time or later, other changes were made, such as the erection of a rood screen, a newly designed roof and the addition of a hideous ‘pepper pot’ top to the tower (see below).



**Pencil drawing of the Victorian interior<sup>13</sup>**



**The exterior in 1900<sup>14</sup>**

In 1862, the year after the church re-opened, an organ was erected in the west gallery by Henry Jones (1822-1890). Jones had worked with Walker before setting up on his own<sup>15</sup> and had first emerged on the London organ-building scene around 1848.<sup>16</sup> The specification, drawn-up by ‘the late Dr Wallace, to replace the fine old instrument destroyed by the fire in 1859’,<sup>17</sup> was as follows:

## St Matthew's, Bethnal Green (Henry Jones, 1862)<sup>18</sup>

<b>Great Organ</b> (C-g <sup>3</sup> )		<b>Swell Organ</b> (C-g <sup>3</sup> )	
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'	Cornocean	8'
Flute	4'	Oboe	8'
Twelfth	2 2/3	Clarion	4'
Fifteenth	2'		
Mixture	III ranks		
Trumpet	8'		
Cremona	8'		
<b>Pedal Organ</b> (CC-e)		<b>Couplers</b>	
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 an instrument of some size. Although there were only two manuals, there were 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 interesting, 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 was to become later in the century. This was, nevertheless, a 'modern' instrument for it was based on the 'German System',<sup>19</sup> having manuals of the same compass, beginning at C, rather than the old English 'long' compass descending to GG; 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. This instrument was overhauled in 1901 and 1912.<sup>20</sup> There may also have been a second organ in the church in the first half of the twentieth century, but the facts are unclear.<sup>21</sup>

The Henry Jones organ served St Matthew's for nearly eighty years until 7<sup>th</sup> 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 bombed-out shell of St Matthew's<sup>22</sup>**



**The interior of the bombed-out church<sup>23</sup>**

## The 'Estey 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.



**A service in the bombed-out church<sup>24</sup>**

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



**The same (?) service in the bombed church, showing a reed organ in use<sup>25</sup>**

The instrument in the photograph may well be the 'Estey organ'<sup>26</sup> that was moved to St Matthew's from St Matthias's, Bacon Street, Bethnal Green in November 1950.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

## The Organ in the Temporary Church (1954-c.1960)

In due course, a temporary church was erected in the bombed shell of St Matthew's. There is conflicting evidence as to when the temporary church was completed, but evidence regarding installation of the organ supports the view that the date was 1954.



**T**  
**The temporary church built inside the  
bombed-out shell of the church<sup>29</sup>**

The church had called upon 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<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> June 1950, Mander estimated that it would cost £600 to install the St Matthias instrument in the temporary parish church building.<sup>32</sup>

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.<sup>33</sup> Leslie F. Pye ARCO LRAM of Dunstable was appointed and duly wrote requesting a specification of his new instrument.<sup>34</sup> 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 (presumably 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. 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 points out that the bench is of a reasonable quality.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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°. The casework also appears to have included sliding doors to the upper part of the console to protect the manuals and the stops.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>



**The interior of the temporary church<sup>39</sup>**  
*The organ can be seen on the left side of the photograph*

## 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, while the interior underwent a transformation inspired by the new liturgical ideas of the time. The building was re-dedicated on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1961: 215 years to the day since its original consecration.

**The church under scaffolding during the post-war rebuilding<sup>40</sup>**

**Architect Antony Lewis presents his model of the rebuilt church to Princess Alexandra<sup>41</sup>**



In the new scheme, it was 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 chamber<sup>42</sup>**

*Note the original chancel arch.*

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, screening the upper chapel from the nave, is a set of twelve shutter-panels that bear images of the apostles. These shutter-panels may be drawn back to reveal the chapel.

**Architect's model for the interior of the rebuilt church<sup>43</sup>**

*The chancel arch is now hidden behind the organ screen (above the shutter-panels).*

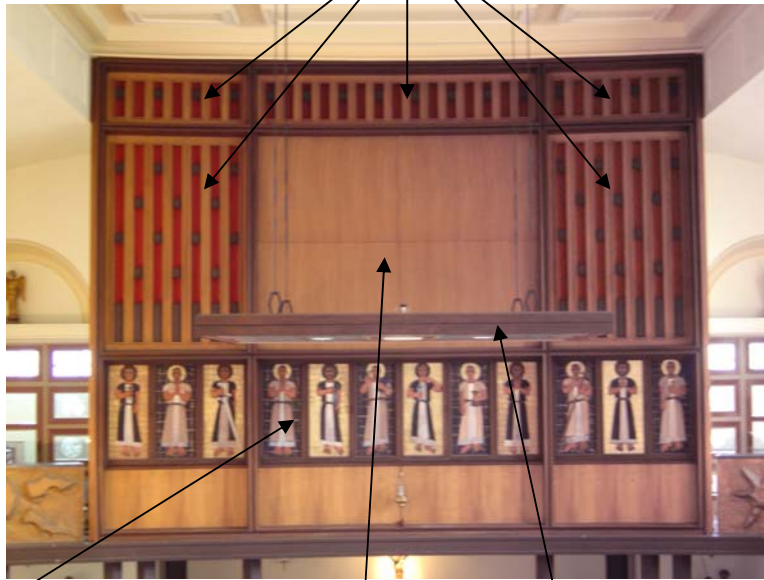
*Note the choir stalls in the sanctuary area and the pulpit (constructed but later removed).*



As can be seen in the picture below, the organ screen 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 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 stop light from the window at the top of the organ chamber being visible from the nave.)

### The organ screen<sup>44</sup>

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



*Shutter-panels (chapel behind)    Solid central panel    Tester (hanging above altar)*

The central panel is solid and is constructed from of four pieces of wood mounted on fibreboard. It is likely that this central panel would have been removed if an organ had been installed in the chamber 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 pipes 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, the pipes of the Great organ might simply have been placed behind the opening, without any adornment.

Owing to the shape of the ceiling of the upper chapel, the floor of the organ chamber is at two levels. Nevertheless, there is ample room for a sizeable organ.

**The interior of the organ chamber (looking north)<sup>45</sup>**

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

The two floor levels of the organ chamber  
(chapel below)

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.<sup>46</sup> This arrangement, with the pipes and console some distance from each other, would have necessitated the use of an electric (rather than a mechanical) action to connect the console with the pipework.



**Arch under the south staircase**  
*(originally intended as the location of the organ console)<sup>47</sup>*

Since the work would have been carried out by N. P. Mander Ltd,<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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 soon became apparent, however, that there were insufficient funds for this dream to be realised, and so architect and organ builder looked to butcher 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 money for this version of the plans to be realised, and so a temporary solution was sought.

## The 'Temporary Solution' for the Organ in the Re-built Church

In 1961, ninety-nine years after Henry Jones had built his organ in St Matthew's, N. P. Mander Ltd installed the organ that had been salvaged from church of St Matthias, Bethnal Green in 1950. Like the Henry Jones organ and, presumably, the Byfield & Green organ before that, the organ was placed on the west gallery. At the time, this arrangement was deemed unsatisfactory, not least by the Noel Mander himself who, in a letter of 30<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> As time passed, however, Mander's opinion on this matter changed significantly, as we shall see.

The organ was placed on the cantilevered west gallery of the rebuilt church, not centrally, 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. This may be so, but a letter of 5<sup>th</sup> June 1961 from Antony Lewis to Noel Mander gives another, very practical, reason. The letter 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'.<sup>51</sup>



**The organ today on the west gallery<sup>52</sup>**

In contrast to the installation in the temporary church, where the organ was given a case, in the striking interior of the re-built church, the organ was erected without any kind of casework, and with all its pipes and action exposed. 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, perhaps, the church took the option offered without charge: a couple of coats of aluminium paint.<sup>53</sup>

In a letter to the rector of St Matthew's, Mander confessed his misgivings about the appearance of the caseless organ.<sup>54</sup> 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 of 21<sup>st</sup> August 1970 (dictated on 20<sup>th</sup> August) to the rector, 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,<sup>55</sup> 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 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.*

*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.<sup>56</sup>*

Mander subsequently wrote to the rector on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1972 advising that maintenance should be carried out. The organ eventually received attention in 1974: a document dated 11<sup>th</sup> September reveals that no more was done than a cleaning and an overhaul for the price of £734.40.<sup>57</sup>

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,<sup>58</sup> but other than that, the instrument was unchanged. It remains a nineteenth-century organ with a few modifications carried out around 1954.

## The Eustace Ingram Organ (1954-the present day)

And so to a description of the organ that was taken from St Matthias's Church to serve St Matthew's in the temporary building, and which now stands in the rebuilt church.

According to the ivory plaque on the console, this instrument was built in 1877 by Eustace Ingram. Thistlethwaite summarises his biography thus:

*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.<sup>59</sup>*



**Maker's nameplate on the music desk<sup>60</sup>**

The 'Willis' referred to above is Henry Willis [I], founder of the organ-building dynasty, and commonly known as 'Father Willis'.<sup>61</sup> 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 (17<sup>th</sup>) rank in the bass, although it becomes a quint mixture from *c*<sup>1</sup> (middle C).



**Console detail<sup>62</sup>**

*Note the Willis-style rounded sharps and key cheeks*

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

**Great Organ (C-g<sup>3</sup>)**

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

**Swell Organ (C-g<sup>3</sup>)**

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 (CC-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 instrument can trick the listener into thinking that the organ 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 Byfield & Green and the Henry Jones instruments, 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.

# Appendix

## Pictures showing the layout of the organ

**Pipework of the Great Organ<sup>63</sup>**  
*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  
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'

**The organ from the south<sup>64</sup>**

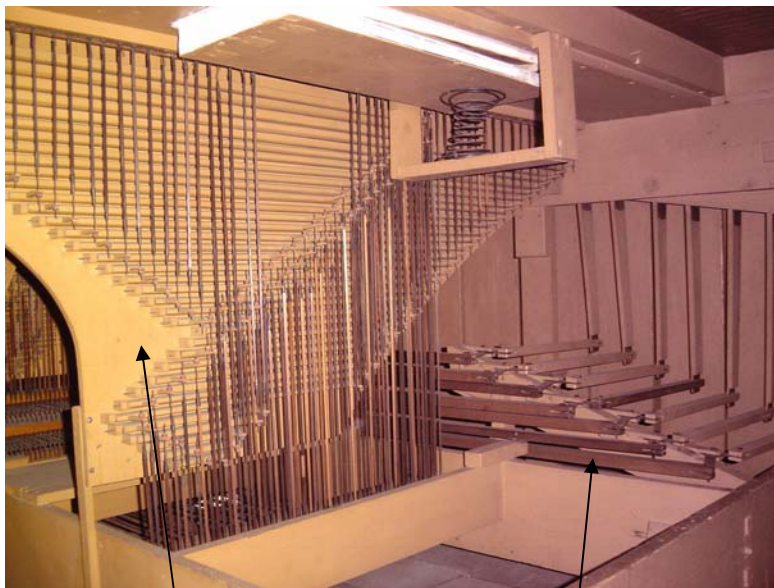


*Swell box*

*Great Organ pipework*

*Pipes of the Pedal Bourdon*

**A view of part of the action of the organ<sup>65</sup>**



*Swell Organ rollerboard*

*Swell Organ stop action*

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<sup>1</sup> See *A History of the Parish Church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green* (date and place of publication unknown), revised by Fr. John Oldland (1989), pp. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Drawn by G. Shepherd and etched by W. Angus for the Architectural Series of London Churches. Published by J. Booth, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1818. Source: church archives.

<sup>3</sup> The information about the first organ comes from National Pipe Organ Register <http://npor.emma.cam.ac.uk> (henceforth NPOR), entry E00925.

<sup>4</sup> NPOR E00925 notes that this organ was possibly by Byfield only, rather than Byfield & Green. One wonders whether 'Bethnal Green' led the joint attribution of the instrument to John Byfield and (presumably) Samuel Green. Born in 1740, Samuel Green was an important English organ builder who built organs for cathedrals, London churches and churches in the provinces. He worked in partnership with the youngest of the three John Byfields from 1761-1768 (Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ* (CUP, Cambridge, 1996), p. 181) – which may or may not confirm that the first organ in St Matthew's was by Byfield & Green.

<sup>5</sup> NPOR R01332. *Hamilton's Catechism of the Organ*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn, rev. by Joseph Warren (Robert Cocks & Co., London, [n.d. but after 1864]), p. 108 has also been consulted. The NPOR specification makes no mention of pedals. *Hamilton's Catechism* states (probably incorrectly) that the original builder was Smith; and this source possibly gives a later version of the Choir Organ specification. In addition, *Hamilton's Catechism* calls the Ecchos 'Swell', giving its compass as 'Tenor C to D in alt.' – i.e. an octave more than the NPOR version. *Hamilton's Catechism* states that, although the Bassoon was 'to Tenor C', it 'used to go through': i.e. it formerly extended to the bottom of the compass. *Hamilton's Catechism* does not mention the Drum. See [www.goetzegwynn.co.uk](http://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk) for the current specification of the organ.

<sup>6</sup> Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Messers Goetze & Gwynn [www.goetzegwynn.co.uk](http://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk).

<sup>7</sup> *Hamilton's Catechism*, p. 120. NPOR D04969 gives the Swell compass as GG-e<sup>3</sup>, which seems unlikely, unless the lower keys acted on the Choir. The NPOR version of the specification omits the Choir Fifteenth and variants to the specification of the Great Organ (Gamba, a second Principal, no Cornet, no second Trumpet, and a stop knob with no name) suggest that the NPOR specification is not the original one.

<sup>8</sup> Bicknell, p. 169; *Hamilton's Catechism*, pp. 111-112; and NPOR N16178. Stop names have been modernized here.

<sup>9</sup> Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Messers Goetze & Gwynn [www.goetzegwynn.co.uk](http://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk).

<sup>10</sup> 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).

<sup>11</sup> *A History of the Parish Church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green*, p. 7. 1859 is given as the date of the fire in NPOR E00925. A further entry on the NPOR website has erroneously 'corrected' the date of the fire to 1861.

<sup>12</sup> *A History of the Parish Church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Artist and date unknown. Source: church archives. The drawing was rescued from the rubble after the church was bombed in 1940.

<sup>14</sup> Source: dated postcard in the church archives.

<sup>15</sup> Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (CUP, Cambridge, 1990), p. 527, note 14.

<sup>16</sup> Thistlethwaite, p. 305.

<sup>17</sup> NPOR D07913.

<sup>18</sup> NPOR D07913.

<sup>19</sup> See Thistlethwaite, chapter 7.

<sup>20</sup> NPOR D04195.

<sup>21</sup> NPOR D04195. There is mention of the Positive Organ Co. under the 1861 organ. Perhaps that company undertook some work on the instrument. The entry then notes 'Casson (?second organ)', but does not expand.

<sup>22</sup> Source: church archives. Note the flagpole on top of the tower. The 'pepper-pot' top must already have been removed.

<sup>23</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>24</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>25</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> File for St Matthew's Bethnal Green in the N. P. Mander Ltd archives (henceforth 'Mander archives').

<sup>28</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>29</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>30</sup> See obituary by John Pike Mander in *Organists' Review*, vol. XCL, no. 4 (November 2005), p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> NPOR 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.

<sup>32</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>33</sup> Mander archives.

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<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> All this information is taken from documents in Mander archives. If this bench is the same as that currently in use, the author can confirm that it is a rather lightweight piece.

<sup>36</sup> Mander archives. The information is confirmed by a letter of 31<sup>st</sup> 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'.

<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>39</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>40</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>41</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>42</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>43</sup> Source: church archives.

<sup>44</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>45</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>46</sup> *A History of the Parish Church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green*, p.11.

<sup>47</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>48</sup> The Mander archives provide ample evidence that it was accepted that the company would have carried out the work.

<sup>49</sup> Larger instruments tended to have their stops keys arranged in a horseshoe (see, for example Mander's console for Christ Church, Isle of Dogs, London, pictured in *Fanfare for an Organ-Builder* (Positif Press, Oxford, 1996), p. 44); while two manual organs generally had the stop keys arranged in a straight line above the Swell keyboard.

<sup>50</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>51</sup> Mander archives. The electric light fittings have now been removed.

<sup>52</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>53</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>54</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>55</sup> 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.

<sup>56</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>57</sup> Mander archives.

<sup>58</sup> 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.

<sup>59</sup> See Thistlethwaite, p. 527. He takes his information from *BIOS Reporter* 4/4:11.

<sup>60</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>61</sup> 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.

<sup>62</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>63</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>64</sup> Photograph: author.

<sup>65</sup> Photograph: author.