

St James' Islington Organ Project
Congregational Meeting 26th January 2020 at 11.30am in Church

There were 21 parishioners in attendance. Kerry Sabine (PCC Secretary) took the Minutes.

Fr John thanked everyone for attending and said he would talk through a presentation regarding the organ. He said the purpose of today was to give an update on how the project was progressing.

A year ago a 'yellow paper' was circulated outlining the key reasons why the organ needed work. In August 2017, the organ builder recommended by our organ consultant Dr Christopher Batchelor (Nicholson's of Worcester) gave a summary of the condition of the organ, in which they said they felt that the rebuilding in 1989 and the subsequent care of the organ over the last thirty years had not been the best and that the musicality of the organ needed restoring. The DAC had agreed with this assessment.

Fr John said a great deal of time has been spent considering how the organ should sound and what specification (range of sounds) our organ should have to meet future needs. The working group concluded that a combination organ (pipe and digital ranks) would deliver best value for money. Additionally it was proposed that the pipework should be rotated to face the nave in order to scale down the 'effort' demanded of the organ to fill the building. This revoicing would markedly improve the quality of the sound.

To gain full DAC approval we asked an architect (Tom Bell of Freehaus) to prepare detailed plans of how the new pipework would appear and these were finally agreed on 22nd January 2020. The pipes would be gold (to match those in the chancel) and the side frame would exactly match the colour of the walls. With reference to the technical drawings, Fr John indicated the depth of the new organ case and the width of the pipework. As with many larger organs around the world dummy gilded pipes would be needed to provide a screen to hide the less sightly pipes behind.

Fr John said that the technical elements of the Project had been thoroughly researched and the need for this development tested among experts and musicians familiar with St James'. The DAC had agreed that not only should we repair this historic instrument but also that we should enable the organ to serve a broader range of musical opportunities at St James'.

The fourth element to consider was the cost. Can we afford to complete this project? And is it right that we should spend such a significant sum at this time? We were extremely fortunate that we have £150,000 from the William Lambe bequest and £50,000 from the Richard Cloudesley Trust.

The costs:

- removal of the organ, refurbishment of the pipe work etc and installation of digital ranks, the upgrading of the console and blower, new pipe work in the south aisle - £207,000
- building of the new platform - £15,000 (subject to verification)
- gilding of the south aisle pipework - £6,500

Fr John asked if there were any questions from the floor. Jane Kilgannon asked if we had budgeted for contingencies. Fr John said the PCC has budgeted 10% contingency based on the initial cost of the proposals i.e. 10% of £207,000. Isabel said the PCC had agreed this would be the expected ceiling for the work. Jane said the contingency should be intact before work begins. Fr John said there may also be funds from Vicarage rents that we may be able to draw from if needed.

Mark Hodge asked if these PowerPoint slides could be put on the website. Fr John said they could be. Offprints are also available on the noticeboards at the back of the Church. Rosemary Ross asked about the finish on the Church pillars; Fr John said this was outside the scope of this project.

Norah Hodge asked to what extent using this money would affect the funds we have for other things. Susan said that the scheme is affordable within our resources (the Church has investments totalling over £250,000). Susan said the money we have in the William Lambe Trust is 'restricted', ie it can only be used for the repair and maintenance of the Church building and its contents. The present figure in the Trust has been accumulated over many years. The Organ Project would use the remainder of this reserve.

Susan asked about the size of the new platform and how far it extended into the south aisle. Fr John indicated where the platform would come out to in the south aisle. Susan said she thought the platform would break the symmetry of the arch at the east end of the south aisle.

Susan asked if we have heard a similar organ in practice. Isabel said a team from London had visited a much larger organ of Paul Mortier's at St Peter's in Nottingham where the mix was 75% digital and 25% pipe. It was not an exact comparison but it did provide a lot of reassurance about the quality of the digital sound. Fr John said all organs are different and no matter what we were doing it would be hard to find an exact comparison. He said the visit to Nottingham had helped Rhidian Jones our current organ adviser in particular to understand the interface between pipe and digital and to be reassured that the digital ranks blended harmoniously with the pipework.

Susan asked why Tarquin Wiggins, who had looked after our organ from around 2001 until when his company moved out of London, wasn't asked to provide a quote for this project. Susan said she was not convinced we had considered all the options and she was not happy that we were getting the value we need for our congregation. Susan said this was her view as Treasurer of the PCC.

Lucy Haire said she believed the refurbishment of the organ would lead to intangible and indirect benefits; for example, new groups wanting to play and different people coming into the Church. These could in turn lead to new types of mission in Church. Lucy said she was in favour of the upgrade. Lucy asked if we had done projections on what revenue a sophisticated organ could bring in. Fr John said that a cost benefit analysis was impossible in these circumstances.

Susan said there are lots of Churches who have benefitted from endowments, as we have, and reflected that where such 'rainy day' funds exist we are expected to have a plan for the income from those funds. It was agreed that we shouldn't hold large sums of money for 'just in case' but St James' did rely on income from investments to maintain its annual budget.

Maria Burniston agreed that the Diocese had indicated that parishes are not supposed to keep large sums of money as 'rainy day' funds but said there is also an expectation that we should be using historic reserves such as those in the William Lambe Trust for identifiable purposes such as this. Maria said she felt that the project had followed due process at both PCC and AGM levels. She said she had been surprised to hear that Tarquin Wiggins had been approached informally to provide a quote. Isabel said that she did not know Tarquin Wiggins and could not comment on the quality of his proposal. She suggested that the proposals from the three pipe organ builders recommended to us followed a high-level decision to go for a substantial refurbishment of the organ rather than a more limited range of repairs. On a like-for-like basis all proved to be more expensive than the combination organ approach we were considering.

On the governance process, Isabel said that the statutory consultation period was an opportunity for everyone, including those involved in considering options earlier, to take stock of the proposal and the supporting documentation. Sinead said this was a once-in-a-generation project. The organ has not been touched in a very long time. By far the greater amount (up to £150,000) would be spent on basic repairs. After much discussion the PCC had decided to spend a relatively small additional sum to make the organ sound even better, as opposed to just a like-for-like repair. Sinead said the improvements would be a small percentage of the work that has to be completed to keep the organ functioning overall.

Eric Sorenson said he felt that aesthetically the platform was inappropriate; it would be a box-like intrusion into a Church where the north and south aisles had a natural symmetry. He also said he didn't understand why false pipes were needed on the front. Eric said he had been in Church during two very well attended funerals recently and the organ seemed loud enough on these occasions. He said there is no dispute that the organ needs repair but that these should be done as economically as possible. Eric repeated Susan's question about why Tarquin Wiggins had not been asked to provide a quotation for the project. As to St James' being a venue for concerts Eric said there are two very good organs in our local area and he could not see why those who liked organ music could not go to concerts at the Union Chapel or St John's, Duncan Terrace.

Maria Flavius asked whether, if we use the William Lambe Trust, we would we have no funds left for repairs to the Church. Fr John said the Church had other substantial reserves, ones rather greater than most other churches in the Deanery. Maria reminded the meeting of those occasions when the organ had failed and we had had to use the piano. Maria said she felt this Church deserved a proper organ and that it was due an upgrade for the next generation. She said she felt that in five to ten years it would cost even more to repair. Maria said that as we have the money we should get it done. Just like the lighting, the repainting and the internal reordering of the chancel completed in the last few years, nearly all of which were opposed when first discussed, the congregation were glad when the work was finished.

Ken Thompson said he knew a Church in Burgundy where they had improved the organ and it had transformed the Church, changing the atmosphere and bringing in new people. Ken said he liked the ambition of this project; he understood that the current organ is loud enough for large funerals but he felt it is a good idea to be ambitious and see if we can improve the quality of the sound and exceed expectations. Ken said he felt we can do better than average.

Rose Baker said at Jim's funeral there was a great crowd and she had been so proud of St James'. But she felt the organ had let the building down. Rose said the organ is the last big thing to do internally and it needs to get done. She said she wanted people to come to St James' and say that it is a great Church and has an organ that can blow the roof off. Isabel noted that there is a formal process for raising objections and it is important that people feel they have the right to express their concerns in all forums.

Fr John thanked everyone for their viewpoints. He reminded the meeting of the theme for today, the way Jesus turned water into wine. What we were doing was to thoughtfully spend the money given by benefactors in the past. Our task was to draw people to faith through the quality of our worship and by enhancing the Church building. Both speak of the love of God. Fr John said that, because of bequests and grants, we had never asked the congregation to financially support any of the improvement projects in his ten years at St James'. He felt the plans for the organ were both proportionate and exciting and would draw more people to want to worship with us.