

The London Organ Competition 2024

The organ in St Michael's, Cornhill, EC3V 9DS



Beneath St Michael's church lie the remains of the Roman Basilica – the great Forum built in the 1st century AD. Here, or nearby in AD179 King Lucius is said to have established the first Christian place of worship in London. Its known there was a church here before the Norman Conquest when the living was given to the Abbott of Evesham. In 1503 the patronage was transferred to the Drapers' Company which remains to this day. The original church was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. It was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren between 1669 and 1672. It escaped serious damage during WW2. The nearest tube station is **BANK**, on the **Central Line**.

The earliest surviving reference to an organ in St. Michael's Cornhill dates from 1459. The present one owes its origins to Rhenatus Harris and contains 9 ranks from that organ, on which the opening recital was given in 1684 jointly by Henry Purcell and John Blow (from Westminster Abbey) and G.B. Draghi (organist to Charles II's Queen Catherine). Re-builds took place by Samuel Green in 1790, who added the Swell, Joseph Robson in 1849, who included an independent 3 stop pedal organ, Bryceson in 1868, who added electric action, William Hill & Son in 1885/86 and 1901, and Rushworth and Dreaper in 1926, who provided tubular pneumatic action and enlarged the organ with high pressure reeds; and who carried out further work in 1960/61 and 1975. In the following years, the organ became unreliable and only the dedication of the tuners kept it going. Happily, a Heritage Lottery Grant of £349,000 was obtained towards the organ restoration in 2010, with the balance of the total cost of £500,000 due to the generosity of many individual and corporate donors .

The 2010 restoration was carried out by Nicholson of Worcester with the aim of returning the organ to its 1926 state. Musically the only changes were the re-configuration of the mixtures, the replacement of the Great Tierce with a more compatible specimen and some alteration to the Pedal 32' Sub Bass. However, much attention was given to mechanical defects in the instrument; the old blower was on the roof and blew in cold air causing tuning instability, also the hole through the roof for the wind-trunking was prone to leaking rainwater. The new blower is housed in a well-soundproofed

cabinet within the instrument and the wind-trunking was completely renewed. Pipes with markings characteristic of Snetzler were discovered and, in addition a detailed examination of the pipes showed many more markings by successive builders.

Some soundboards were split and were replaced. The old electric action, which dated from several different periods, was replaced by a solid-state system and the console smartened up with new drawstops. The instrument's full-bodied tone and wealth of finely voiced tone-colours make it an ideal vehicle for the English and French solo romantic repertoires and as a service accompanying instrument. It also boasts old and ravishingly beautiful quiet flute registers. The building's radiant acoustics add warmth and glow, to produce the sound widely known through recordings and radio broadcasts.

Organists and Music: In the eighteenth century, organists of the church included Obadiah Shuttleworth (who also played first violin in the concerts at the Swan Tavern, Cornhill, where later the eight-year-old Mozart was exhibited daily from twelve to three o'clock to anybody who could afford the 2s 6d admission charge). The Master of the King's Music, William Boyce, played at St Michael's for thirty-two years, to be succeeded by Theodore Aylward (the Gresham Professor of Music). Another Gresham Professor, the glee-composer R J S Stevens, served St Michael's for 29 years. Later in the nineteenth century Richard Limpus founded the (later Royal) College of Organists at the church, and it was here that the College's early Fellowship and Associateship examinations were held.

During the twentieth century St Michael's had only four organists, of whom Harold Darke was in post for fifty years (1916-66). He is widely known for his carol 'In the bleak midwinter' and his communion settings in F, E and A minor. He gave more than 1,800 of the Monday lunchtime recitals, believed to be the longest running series in the world and directed the St Michael's Singers. He was followed by Richard Popplewell (1966-79) and Jonathan Rennert, President Elect and member of The Organ Club, who has over forty years at the church.



Great		Swell (enclosed)		Choir (enclosed)	
Double Open Diapason	16	Contra Salicional	16	Open Diapason	8
I Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason	8	Lieblich Gedeckt	8
II Open Diapason	8	Aeoline	8	Dolce	8
III Open Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Vox Angelica (TC)	8
Hohl Flute	8	Voix Celeste	8	Viola	4
Wald Flute	4	Principal	4	Flute	4
Principal	4	Lieblich Flute	4	Nazard	2 ² / ₃
Twelfth	2 ² / ₃	Octave	2	Flageolet	2
Fifteenth	2	Mixture (15.19.22.26)	IV	Mixture (19.22)	II
Tierce	1 ³ / ₅	Oboe	8	Clarinet	8
Mixture (15.19.22)	III	<i>Tremulant</i>		<i>Tremulant</i>	
Posaune	8	Contra Fagotto	16	<i>Unison Off</i>	
Tuba	8	Trumpet	8	<i>Sub Octave</i>	
<i>Choir to Great</i>		Clarion	4	<i>Octave</i>	
<i>Swell to Great</i>		<i>Unison Off</i>		<i>Swell to Choir</i>	
		<i>Sub Octave</i>			
		<i>Octave</i>		Choir (unenclosed)	
Pedal				Posaune (Gt)	8
Subbass	32			Tuba (Gt)	8
Open Diapason	16				
Violone	16				
Bourdon	16				
Salicional (Sw.)	16				
Octave	8				
Salicional (Sw.)	8	<i>Gt. and Ped. Pistons</i>		Compass	
Bass Flute	8	<i>Sw. Toe Gen. Exch</i>		Manuals 61 notes	
Trombone *	16	<i>Choir to Pedal</i>		Pedal 30 notes	
Fagotto (Sw.)	16	<i>Great to Pedal</i>			
Tromba *	8	<i>Swell to Pedal</i>			

Thumb and toe-pistons control Solid State combination memories and other accessories; ventril switches to Posaune and Tuba

* = unit

We have to thank Jonathan Rennert and the Church Authorities for allowing the Organ Club to hold the competition at this special City of London church.

JM/JR/ mdj 10/3/24