Church pulls out all the stops to herald historic organ’s return

13/01/2010

Delighted parishioners at St George’s Church, Southall, will be celebrating the return of the organ at a special event on Saturday January 16. The £350,000, 14-month project was made possible thanks to a grant of £297,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The work, carried out by specialist organ restorers, has returned the instrument to its original condition when built in 1723 by Abraham Jordan junior who was also responsible for helping to build the famous organ in Westminster Abbey.

The Jordan organ at St George’s was originally installed in a church of the same name in Botolph Lane in the City of London but when this building was demolished in 1904 the instrument was re-located to Southall.

Described by the British Institute of Organ Studies as being of national importance, the St George’s organ is Grade II listed and contains outstanding features including the second oldest windchest of any organ in the UK and a beautifully carved case.

The restoration project began with a series of workshops enabling the wider community to participate in the project. Local schools, including Tudor Primary and Blair Peach Primary, have been involved in workshops studying the history of the church and music, and what it was like for children to live in Georgian and Victorian times. They also visited restoration experts Mander Organs in London.

St George’s has a multi-ethnic congregation and is situated in one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London. Other workshops involved Sikh musicians, looking at the role of music in other religious faiths and comparing this with Christian music played on the organ.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: “The grant has enabled this historically important church organ to be returned to its original condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. It has also given local school children and the community the opportunity to learn all about the construction of such a valued instrument.”

Vicar the Rev’d. Christopher Ramsay, says: “This has been like discovering a box of treasure buried in your attic. No one knew how special this organ was, but now we are delighted to be making the same joyful noises that it was first built to do nearly three hundred years ago. It has been great to get lots of local children from all backgrounds involved and welcomed into our place of worship for the first time.”

A morning of celebration is planned at St George’s Church on Saturday 16 January between 11 am and 1 pm. Activities will include art, drama, poetry, dance and drumming. There will also be tours of the newly renovated church which has just raised a further £370,000 to provide facilities to enable the church to be used every day for community activities such as a toddler group and language classes.

Notes to editors

Originally designed and built in 1723 for St George's, Botolph Lane in the City of London, a church re-built by Christopher Wren in 1671 following its early destruction in the fire of London, the organ was removed from its original location when the church was demolished in 1904.

Abraham Jordan, who also in 1740 built the organ in Westminster Abbey in collaboration with Christopher Shrider, invented the 'swell box', a device providing a means of adjusting the loudness of the sound allowing gradual crescendo or decrescendo.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further information

HLF Press Office, Vicky Wilford on 020 7591 6046 / 07973 401937 or vickyw@hlf.org.uk or Phil Cooper on 07889 949 173.

Revd. Christopher Ramsay, St George’s Church, Southall, on 020 8574 1876