

Statements of Needs

St Simon Zelotes, Upper Chelsea

Project: Organ Restoration



1. General information about St Simon's:

The Parish of St Simon Zelotes, Upper Chelsea, is a small parish, with 802 households and 1779 residents (2021 census). There are 204 people on the electoral roll (2024 roll).

St Simon's holds three regular services each week. Two Sunday services and a Friday service for a local boy's school which owns property within the parish (Sussex House School).

10AM Sunday Morning Service: This is a traditional choral BCP service of either Morning Prayer or Holy Communion. The organ is used throughout the service. C.65 adults and c.20 under 16s attend on an average Sunday. A range of ages are represented, with young families and those aged 50+ being the largest 'groups'. An additional 'online congregation' of anything from 12-25 people livestreams the service. A Sunday school for 3-12-year-olds takes place during the service and there is also a creche with video and audio livestream of the service available.

6.30PM Sunday Evening Service: This is a Service of the Word or Holy Communion service in modern English. The organ is sometimes used. C.40 adults and c.1-2 under 16s attend on a normal Sunday. A range of ages are represented, with young single professionals in their 20s and 30s being the largest 'group'.

8.55AM Friday Morning Service: This short Service of the Word is held for the boys and staff of Sussex House (180 boys and c.15 staff at each service). The organ is used throughout by an organist hired by the school.

In addition to these regular services, our Harvest Festival and Remembrance day services (all with the organ) are well attended (c.80+ people). Our Christmas Carol service in early December has c.300 attendees and the organ is used throughout.

The church is also used for special services, memorial services, funerals, weddings and christenings. We host and lead an RNLI London Branch carol service each year, as well as a Sussex House Founders Day service attended by parents.

In addition to services, a monthly prayer meeting is held in the church building, as are PCC meetings, termly Saturday women's brunch meetings and fortnightly home group meetings. We also use the church building to run our weekly Free English class for 20-40 people whose first language is not English.

The church building is used by various community groups. The local resident's association holds its AGM in the building. We also host a Liz Earle Christmas Concert and other choral or musical events or book launches etc. as and when possible and appropriate.

The organ is used by Sussex House for Monday organ lessons for those boys who wish to learn the organ.

The Church building is open every day between 8am and 6pm (5pm in the Winter months), apart from the days between Christmas and New Year. It is used by tourists, parishioners, local residents and others as a warm and quiet place for reflection and prayer.

For more information on the church building's architectural/heritage significance, see the accompanying Statement of Significance.

2. Our Proposed Project: What we need

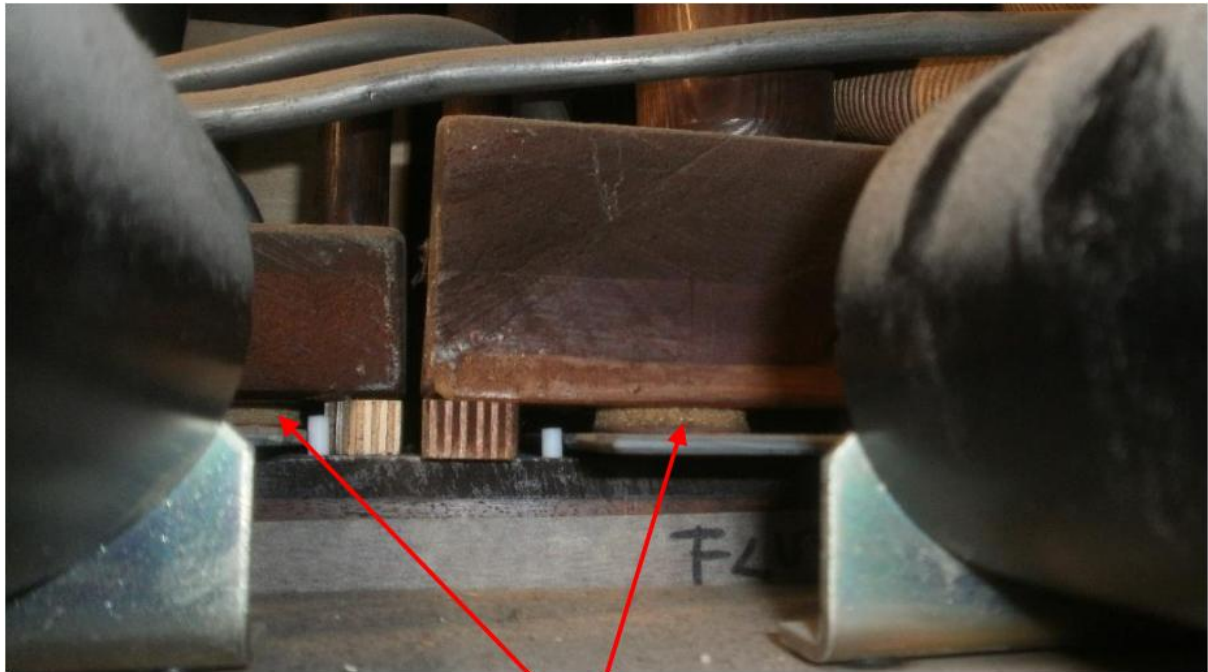
This section is best read alongside the accompanying report from Nicholson & Co Organ builders, from which it borrows, as well as alongside the Schedule of Works document also provided.

We wish to restore our pipe organ to remedy the underlying causes of current performance problems, to prevent the sound quality from being further impacted by these underlying causes, and to moderately improve the range and quality of the organ.

2.1. Remedying the underlying causes of performance problems and preventing a further deterioration in sound quality

The current organ was built and installed by J.W. Walker & Sons in 1925. Walker's returned in 1994 to rebuild and electrify the organ. It was rebuilt with Schwimmer wind controls and new action.

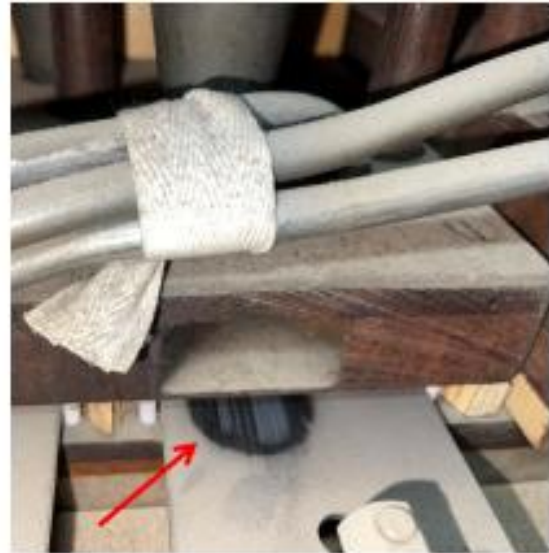
The two soundboards – one each for the Great and Swell Organ manuals – are presently causing trouble. Both soundboards are “showing clear signs of distress” (Nicholson's 2023 Report). These soundboards, probably built in 1994 and made of long pieces of grained timber, have warped slightly. This is evidenced by, for example, a visible crack in the edge of the Great soundboard table, and the tightening of slides. This warping is causing wind leakage, exacerbated by the addition of leaking sponge slider seals in 1994.



Sponge slider seals



Split in table (Great) (highlighted)



Evidence of tightness of slide (highlighted)

These problems are currently impacting the performance of the organ. Both sound boards are producing 'murmurs' (notes sounding faintly without keys being pressed) and 'runnings' (extra notes sounding when a single key is pressed). Our Director of Music further reports that some keys are slow to respond when pressed. On 23 March 2023, the organ's tuner wrote in the tuning book: "the organ is in desperate need of restoration." We expect that these problems will get worse with time if left unaddressed and will increasingly impact the quality of organ music at St Simon's for the worse.

The restoration of the organ would involve solving the underlying causes of these performance problems. This restoration would involve:

- **Replacing the current soundboards with new soundboards of modern construction, and with new underactions.** These soundboards will be made of “materials impervious to changes in atmospheric humidity” (Nicholson’s 2023 Report). These soundboards would not use slider seals and so they would be less likely to leak wind.
- **The cleaning, repair and regulation of all associated pipework.** The last time the pipes were properly cleaned was in 1994 and so they are due such a clean.



Pipework of the Great division



Pipework of the Swell division

2.2. moderate improvements to the instrument

In addition to solving the problems noted above, the proposed restoration work would also improve the range and quality of the instrument in three ways:

- The new soundboards can be built as 61-note soundboards, replacing the “crude” (Nicholson’s 2023 report) top-note machines that have been added to the current soundboards to make accessing 61 notes possible.
- The present Bassoon 16’ on the Swell soundboard was originally an Oboe 8’ which has been transposed to a 16’ pitch. Our Director of Music has stated that it would be more useful to have this back at an 8’ pitch and this was reinforced by a similar finding in Nicholson’s 2023 report. Doing this work would involve the manufacture and voicing of a new octave of pipes and the re-engraving of the relevant draw stop.

- A Twelfth 2 2/3' stop can be added to the new Great soundboard, along with a matching draw stop.

3. Our Proposed Project: Why we need it

3.1. To preserve the quality of musical worship in the parish, and so protect the current mission opportunity this represents.

Our principal Sunday Service at 10am is a BCP service with four-part choir and organ accompaniment. The quality of music attracts some people to the church. We depend on the organ's good working order for this service of worship and some problems with the sound it is producing can already be discerned by our semi-professional choir and certain members of the congregation. If these problems were left unchecked and became more noticeable it might cause some members of the church's community to leave or discourage music lovers who might otherwise join this worshipping community from visiting a second time.

All our largest services in the year (the Christmas Carol service, Remembrance Sunday, Harvest Festival, Good Friday and Easter services) use the organ. Part of the attraction of these services, which are an opportunity to share the gospel message of Christ, is the quality of the music, to which the quality of the organ contributes.

3.2. To better serve the local community.

Sussex House School uses the organ for the service of worship we hold for them each Friday morning. The quality of the organ playing is a part of our service to them.

Sussex House also use the organ for organ lessons and ensuring the organ is restored means it can continue to function well for this purpose, thereby introducing a generation of young people to the organ.

3.3. To create new mission opportunities.

Our Director of Music has explained that the organ can be difficult to play for those who are unfamiliar with its current problems and how to mitigate the symptoms arising from them. It will be possible for us to put on or host more events with the organ when its current 'problems' are resolved, and there are no more issues for visiting organists less used to the organ to have to work around. We also believe that the restoration of the organ will itself be a 'draw'. For example, we hope to put on an organ concert for Sussex House parents once it is complete, bringing those parents into closer contact with the church.

4. Our Proposed Project: Why we need it now

We are proposing this project now because:

4.1. the problems with the organ are now urgent

Concerns about the problems noted above date back to 2018, when initial reports on the potential for organ restoration were commissioned. In 2023 the organ tuner described the organ as “in desperate need of restoration,” a view affirmed by our experienced Director of Music, by Mander’s 2023 report and by Nicholson’s 2023 report.

4.2. we want to catch these problems before they become noticeable to a wider ‘audience’

Our semi-professional choir and some in our congregations who know what to listen out for have noticed problems with organ ‘murmurs’ and ‘runnings’ in the last year. If the warping of soundboards, and so wind leakage, gets worse, more members of the congregations may start to recognise the problems and find their experience of the musical worship affected. This will undermine the church’s reputation as a church with a high quality of music.

4.3. A substantial donation towards the work has been offered

The parent of an alumni of Sussex House boys’ school has offered to make a donation to cover, or cover most of, the cost of the organ’s restoration. He is making the offer with the expectation that this project will proceed shortly.

4.4. A delay in another project

We had expected that we might be carrying out works in the South Transept (where the organ is located) on another project. However, this project has been delayed until at least the Summer of 2026. This gives us a window of time between now and then to complete the organ work.

4.5. The potential to carry out the work in the 2025 Summer Holiday

If consent is given for a faculty at this time, Nicholson’s has told us it is possible to carry out the work in the 2025 Summer Holiday. This is the least disruptive time for the renovations because: the choir is in recess during August; Sussex House School does not use the church for services or organ lessons in the holiday; many regular members of the church are away on holiday. We would expect to manage musically during the short project by using our Grand Piano or hiring an electric organ.

5. Our Project: What is the evidence for the need?

5.1. The experienced organ tuner’s opinion – March 2023 – the comment that the organ is now in ‘desperate need of restoration’.

5.2. The Director of Music’s opinion – April 2023 – our experienced director of music wrote to the vicar describing the problem and asking for a report to be carried out. *Included in submitted resolution document.*

5.3. Nicholson & Son's report – November 2023. Submitted.

5.4. Sussex House Boys School – meeting with headmaster in January 2025 – the headmaster was delighted at the prospect of the organ's restoration and suggested the idea of a concert for parents to celebrate once the project is complete.

5.5. Our regular Sunday morning and occasional special services – these all depend on the organ and the quality and reliability of sound it produces.

6. Our Project: How is our proposal contributing to environmental sustainability?

6.1. Durability: the new soundboards will be made of “modern materials impervious to changes in atmospheric humidity,” which we expect means they would not need replacing for many years. This durability is reinforced by other recent measures taken to reduce the dryness in the air which may have contributed to the warping of the soundboards in the first place – the installation of a humidifier and gentler heating regime in the church building.

7. Our Project: What other options were considered?

7.1. A replacement of the entire organ.

Advantages:

- the problems with ‘runnings’ and ‘murmurs’ would be solved.

Disadvantages:

- The same problems are solved by the more modest restoration work proposed.
- Cost: we estimate the cost of a new organ as c. £800,000 as of 2023. This is beyond what the PCC can afford.

7.2. Proposed restoration plus re-electrification of the organ.

This was the only significant proposal made in the Mander Organ Builders July 2023 report that was not also proposed in the Nicholson & Co April 2023 report.

Advantages:

- the problems with ‘runnings’ and ‘murmurs’ would be solved.
- Allows for Great and Pedal pistons to be decoupled, and for a Stepper to be put in.

Disadvantages:

- The same problems are solved by the more modest restoration work proposed.

- The current electrification system is in good working order and replacing it is unnecessary.
- Cost: the addition of such work would increase the cost of the project (Mander quoted in total £224,780, excluding VAT). This is beyond what we believe it is prudent to spend given potential future building and mission commitments and our hall-link project.