



The Father Willis Organ: an instrument of praise, prayer and community

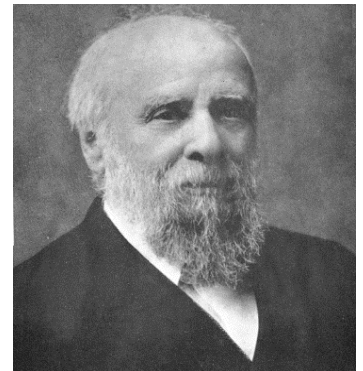
We are seeking philanthropic partners to join us in our mission to fully renovate the Chapel organ, part of the Strand campus at King's College London. The renovation will rebuild the organ using much of the original nineteenth-century pipework, replacing damaged or old fittings to create an instrument of true artistic integrity that will stand at the heart of our musical community for the next generation. We are seeking contributions towards an overall budget of around £500,000 for which King's College London will provide matched funding.

Background

The organ within the King's Chapel was built by the pre-eminent organ designer Father Henry Willis, one of the most prominent figures in Victorian organ building. The organ was installed 150 years ago in 1866 whilst Willis was building his craft and reputation, and before he completed the new organs for the Royal Albert Hall, the Alexandra Palace, and St. Paul's Cathedral. Although altered in 1932 and 1977, the organ still remains an integral part of the Chapel's Grade I listed status and history.

The Father Willis organ completed the Chapel's design by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1864. The finished result deeply resonated with the University's motto - Sancte et Sapienter (with Holiness and Wisdom) which is still very much at the spiritual heart of King's to this very day.

Through daily services, concerts and radio broadcasts, the Chapel and organ are known and loved by generations of the local congregation, professional and amateur musicians, as well as the students, staff and alumni of King's who rely on the instrument for their education, teaching, and worship.



Father Henry Willis

The Need

In 1932, the Chapel was substantially altered to accommodate the installation of an Anatomy laboratory above. This resulted in many of the organ pipes being rearranged in order to fit into the new space which impacted on the sound quality in the altered acoustic of the building.

A further renovation in the 1970s extended the life of the organ however these alterations have now run their course and the organ sometimes malfunctions, disrupting rehearsals and services. Today's advancement in materials offers the opportunity to make a substantial and long-term improvement to the state of the organ. The 2,500 pipes will be arranged to maximise their sound quality, whilst preserving as much of the original pipework as possible. The organ's currently compromised musical identity is far from Willis's original design, and we would like to restore the musical integrity to this object of historic and religious value.

Why is the organ an integral part of King's College London?



“As the organ was situated seconds away from my lectures, it was extremely easy to fit practice in around a busy academic timetable. Without such ready access to an organ, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to take part in the Advanced Performance module, accompany the choir, and perform at services every week.”

Sandy May, former King's Organ Scholar

Education

The organ is as an important educational instrument for music students both at King's and outside the university. In particular, our King's Choral and Organ scholars receive the majority of their training from playing and singing with the organ which forms an integral part of their education.

However, the organ's frequent mechanical malfunctions mean that our students often have to adjust their performance repertoires at the last minute to accommodate a programme of purely unaccompanied songs. They also occasionally have to wait for the organ to be fixed during lessons and rehearsals. This regularly undermines their creativity and confidence in the organ. For our students, the organ renovation will provide a robust instrument to learn, practise and perform on, enriching their musical educations and elevating rehearsals and performances during services, concerts, recordings and broadcasts.

Community

The Chapel's timetable of activities saw nearly 10,000 people use or visit the Chapel within the last year and all of them will have experienced first-hand our exceptional music making environment.

The Chapel holds a number of annual services in addition to the weekly timetable. One of the Chapel's most popular services, the Advent Carols service, is a highlight within the liturgical year for many in the community. Beyond London, our national broadcast of Choral Evensong every year on BBC Radio 3 regularly reaches audiences of thousands. Unfortunately, recent concerts and broadcasts have necessitated having an engineer on hand to deal with any organ related problems during the transmission, and in 2016 we had to pre-record the broadcast rather than broadcasting live, because we could not rely on the instrument.

Renovating the organ will elevate rehearsals and performances during services, concerts, recordings and broadcasts, and will also renew our once thriving concert series in a part of London which has a limited number of affordable concert venues. It will allow us to once again become the venue of choice for amateur choirs and young developing musicians, performances for which there is a strong appetite amongst local residents. We will have more confidence in hosting external groups for whom the chapel and organ are very important, for example, Christian Aid holds a Thanksgiving service that is normally attended by around 250 attendees.

"The organ at King's plays a vital role in the development of our organ scholars, many of whom have gone on to significant appointments around the country. Over our weekly Evensong and Eucharist services, they learn the arts of advanced hymn playing and choral accompaniment, as well as solo performance. My hope is that this renovation will provide us with an organ to sustain and inspire future generations of organists and students, for decades to come."

Joseph Fort, College Organist & Director of the Chapel Choir.



How can you help?

The full cost of renovating the organ is approximately £500,000, and we are seeking the support of philanthropists like yourselves to help make this a reality. King's is fully committed to the renovation project and will match any donations made, thus meaning that donations will have an even greater impact. Some example gift levels include:

- 1) A gift of £30,000 would renovate the solid oak console. Costing £60,000 in total, your donation plus matched funding from King's would enable Manders to renovate and redesign the console.
- 2) A gift of £20,000 would repair and restore four rows of pipes, enabling experts to address the aesthetic and mechanical damage of the 2,500 pipes.
- 3) A gift of £10,000 would enable us to repair two organ stops to ensure that future performances and rehearsals are elevated.