

Christ Church was built between the years 1714 and 1729 as part of the church building programme initiated by the Fifty New Churches act of 1711, backed by Queen Anne, which was implemented by four different parliamentary commissions. At the time, there were fears that ‘godless thousands’ outside the City of London had no adequate church provision, and that non-conformists – including large numbers of French Huguenot silk weavers – were moving into Spitalfields and bringing their non-conformist worshipping ways with them.

The Commission appointed to build the 50 new churches stipulated that the new buildings should have tall spires so that they would tower above the smaller, non-conformist chapels! The idea was to fund the work through taxes on coal coming into London, although monies ran low in about 1719 and building progressed fitfully.

One of the two surveyors employed by the first Commission, at an initial rate of £200 per year, was Nicholas Hawksmoor – a Nottinghamshire-born architect who had worked with Sir Christopher Wren since his late teens. Of the 12 churches completed (out of the projected 50), six were the work of Hawksmoor, and Christ Church was his masterpiece. For further information about the other five Hawkesmore church visit:

- [St George-in-the-east](#)
- [St Alfege Greenwich](#)
- [St Anne's Limehouse](#)
- [St Mary Woolnoth](#)
- [St George's Bloomsbury](#)

If you are interested in learning more about Nicholas Hawksmoor and the architectural story of Christ Church, there are several good books on the subject including [Kerry Downes's Hawksmoor](#) and [Vaughan Hart's Nicholas Hawksmoor](#). To find out how the area of Spitalfields developed, look at Sheppard's 1957 Survey of London, available [online](#).

For the past 300 years Christ Church has remained a Christian centre of worship and today it has thriving congregations that meet on Sundays and throughout the week. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, preached here towards the end of his life, and staff members have included the 18th century curate Samuel Henshall, who invented the modern corkscrew (and reputedly died owing £400 to his wine merchant).

The church has seen at least two large-scale alterations, the first in 1866 (directed by the architect Ewen Christian) which changed the entire look of the interior, and the second which began in the 1960s and was only recently completed – a restoration of the church to its original state, which it was initially estimated would cost £1 million and in fact cost £10 million. Since reopening in 2004, the church has been visited by more than 100,000 people.

Famed for the eloquence of its stonework, Christ Church Spitalfields is also full of fascinating human stories. In the 1980s a project to excavate 1,000 bodies from its crypt helped to change the way archaeological dating is done. It has been the site of scandal (a furore in the 1820s over the huge expense by Christ Church vestrymen on new furnishings saw the case going to Parliament, and laws changed on the power of vestries) and also of spectacle: in recent years the church has hosted many grand events including opera, classical music premieres, a documentary and dinner to celebrate the work of local artists Gilbert & George, and performances by pop acts Mika and The Feeling.