



Pipe dream comes true

Promise of fine tunes as broken Moot Hall organ on the mend

Zoe Forsey

AFTER more than a decade of campaigning, scores of fundraising events and months of restoration, Colchester's prized Moot Hall organ is being put back together – piece by piece.

The organ, first played at Colchester Town Hall's official opening in 1902, has not worked properly for more than a decade.

For years, the Friends of Colchester Moot Hall Organ group called for its restoration. And now, thanks to their dedication and a £416,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant, the work is complete and the long process of putting it back together again is well under way.

Former mayor Nigel Chapman, who started the restoration campaign, became involved when he was mayor in 2002. When he tried to organise an event to mark the Town Hall's 100th



Restoration: Czesla Ladogorski levelling the keys of the organ and top, with colleague Jordan Gutteridge.

Picture: Nigel Brown C0103996

anniversary, he found the organ did not work properly. He hoped to raise money to fund the repair work during his year in office, but did not expect it would cost hundreds of thousands of pounds.

To raise the money, he set up the Friends of the Moot Hall Organ, and the team

have spent 13 years trying to complete the project.

Last year, Colchester Council received a £416,000 grant from Heritage Lottery Fund, which finally meant the work would go ahead.

Mr Chapman said: "Once I started it, I wanted to finish it. I'm thrilled to bits. It's been 13 years of pretty

hard work. I'm delighted it's back in situ. I think it is an important, integral part of the Moot Hall."

Durham-based organ restorers Harrison and Harrison were given the contract to repair the instrument, which had not seen much repair work done during its 110-year history, and a team has been busy restoring it since July.

They washed and cleaned each of the organ's 3,000 pipes, made replacements for the damaged ones, and replaced the small pieces of leather which stop air escaping from the pipes.

Despite the major repairs, the organ will not look much different, though the visible pipes which had been painted white, will shine again in their original golden colour.

They aim to have the work finished for a demonstration session on March 4.

■ The group now hope the organ will be used as much as possible. They would like to see organ concerts, which used to be a regular event in Moot Hall, reintroduced.

The organ will also come into its own at big council occasions, such as the mayor making, and during weddings in the hall.

A series of collaborations with schools and others groups are being organised.



Delighted: Nigel Chapman.