

REVIEW
ENGLAND AND IRELAND ORGAN TOUR, July 10 - 23, 2007

The many hours of music-making and concerts during Leslie Peart's two-week tour of England and Ireland brings to mind the famous quotation by Omar Khayyam, "When Time lets slip a little perfect hour, O take it-for it will not come again." At each of the fifteen cathedrals that we visited, we were treated to an impromptu concert of pieces, ranging from Guillemant and Mendelssohn to improvisations showing the many colors of the beautiful instruments. The trip also included many concerts and worship services in London and Dublin.

Beginning our tour on Tuesday, July 10, with a luncheon at the Holiday Inn to get acquainted, we then took the tube to Oxford Circus. St. George's most famous parishioner and worshipper, G. F. Handel, was involved in the selection of the first organ installed in the rear gallery, a three-manual by Gerald Smith, completed in 1725. Harrison and Harrison built the present organ in 1972 inside the old case. The organist, Simon Williams, also demonstrated a beautiful one-manual chamber instrument on loan from the Handel House, playing a few pieces by early English composers. Following Mr. Williams' short concert, all who wished played our favorites from Handel's concertos on the gallery organ. That evening we attended a choral concert at Westminster Abbey featuring settings of the poetry of William Blake by John Tavener, Stephen Hough, and Vaughan Williams. We all became self-avowed anglophiles in the singing of Parry's setting of Jerusalem by the choir and audience, accompanied by the organ.

Wednesday, we were privileged guests at Blenheim Palace, playing the four-manual Willis organ in the Long Library for a couple of hours. Originally built in 1891/2 with 52 stops, the organ was a visual and aural delight with ornate carvings on a white with gold trim case and beautiful inlaid designs in the wood above the manuals. We also played a delightful one-manual instrument in the chapel before having time to tour the stunning palace and gardens.

In the afternoon we traveled to Birmingham to play the organ at the recently refurbished Victorian-style Town Hall. The original four-manual organ by William Hill was built between 1833 and 1837 and was the largest organ in England at that time, with 3 full-length 32' stops in the Pedal, one displayed in the impressive case-front. The Tuba Mirabilis, installed in 1837, was said to be the first ever high-pressure solo reed stop. S. Wesley and Mendelssohn were two of the early recitalists. The organ was recently rebuilt Mander.

On Thursday, we traveled through the enchanting Clwydian hills to quaint and historic Ruthin, Wales to meet with organist Philip Smith at St. Peter's Church, which was founded in 1284. Willis Organ recently restored the 3 manual instrument. After playing the organ, we continued our journey to Holyhead to catch the ferry for Dublin. In Dublin, we visited four churches on Friday and Saturday. The mechanical 3-manual 51-rank organ at Christ Church Anglican Cathedral was designed and made in 1984 by Kenneth Jones of Ireland. The console has beautiful inlaid woods and hand-scripted stop labels. An historic note: the choirs of Christ Church and St. Patrick's sang the first performance of Handel's Messiah in Dublin in 1742.

Fergus McCullough was our host at St. Bartholomew's Church, another Anglican church whose interior design is unique in Ireland. Dating from 1878, it reflects Italian and Byzantine influence. The organ was built in 1887 by Gray and Davison and most recently restored by Trevor Crowe.

Friday evening we attended an outstanding concert by the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland to a packed house with many young people in attendance. The program featured the Organ Symphony No 3 by Saint Saens played on a 1991 mechanical four-manual organ by Kenneth Jones.

On Saturday at St. Patrick's Anglican Cathedral, Peter Barley helped us navigate the Willis organ of 65 stops, which is located in the triforium above the north choir stall. A beautiful spiral staircase of marble provides access. Harrison and Harrison restored the organ in 1995. Later in the afternoon, we visited St. Mary's Pro Cathedral. The organ dates from the late 19th century, with rebuilds by Hill, Willis and Walker, most recently in 1995.

The bells of St. Patrick's greeted us on Sunday morning as we arrived for Sung Eucharist, giving us another chance to hear the magnificent organ. Following the service, we traveled across the lush countryside to the west coast of Ireland and stayed overnight in Galway. The next morning we visited Galway Cathedral, which was built in 1957 in a

medieval style with round stone arches, inlaid designs in the marble floor, and exquisite stained glass windows. The organ we played was a 1966 Rushworth and Dreaper, recently rebuilt by Trevor Crowe.

Also on Monday, we traveled to Limerick to play instruments at St. John's Roman Catholic Church and the Cathedral Church of St. Mary. St. John's has the tallest spire in the country. The 3-manual organ has stenciled pipes in red and gold.

St. Mary's Cathedral, founded in 1168, is the oldest building in Limerick that is in daily use, and was interesting to see because of the current renovations. Organist Trevor Selby performed for us on the four-manual organ rebuilt by Grinstead and Co. and then many of us added to the concert.

The next day we took a vacation from Cathedrals and organs and toured the Ring of Kerry where the panorama of ocean and mountains is unforgettable.

St. Fin Barre's Anglican Cathedral in Cork was our first stop on Wednesday. The 4-manual, 56-stop organ shows an interesting solution to the front window issue. Originally in the West Gallery, the organ was moved in 1889 to a pit fourteen feet deep in the north side aisle next to the choir. The organ was originally by William Hill in 1870 and most recently rebuilt by Walker and Sons in 1966. Our host was Colin Nicholls.

St. Colman's Cathedral, overlooking Cobh Harbour, is a gem of neo-Gothic architecture. In 1916 a Carillon of 47 bells was installed. Adrian Gebruers, son of the first carillonneur of St. Colman's, led several of our group up to the Carillon and demonstrated the instrument which was restored in 1998 and is featured in many concerts.

After an enlightening tour of the Waterford Crystal factory, with all of us drooling over the final products displayed for sale, we headed back to Dublin.

The next morning saw us back at the ferry dock in Dublin, and, after arriving in Holyhead we lunched in that Welsh town with the longest name, Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch! Then, we motored through a driving downpour to Northampton, England, where we were greeted at All Saints church by Lee Dunleavy, the Director of Music. This church houses 2 organs, the mechanical action gallery organ by J. W. Walker & Sons (1983) housed in the original case from the 1730's, and an equally exciting 3 manual mechanical action chancel organ.

Friday was another rainy day, but in the morning we enjoyed a visit to St. Matthews Church, also in Northampton. An interesting church with an equally interesting organ, (a Walker from 1895 with recent updates from Harrison & Harrison and Kenneth Tickell) which conveyed a robust and most friendly 19th c. sound.

Later that day we arrived in St. Albans before Evensong. Some of us took advantage of the extra time to browse in the nearby music store. After Evensong we heard most of the finalists in the 24th St. Albans International Organ Festival before taking our leave.

On Saturday, several of us visited Southwark Cathedral and lunched there before riding on the London Eye. The views of surrounding parts of London and the Thames were quite spectacular. That evening we were seated in Royal Albert Hall, for the 11th concert of the summer Proms. The BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC National Chorus of Wales and the National Youth Choir of Wales all participated, with orchestral music of Debussy and Saint-Saëns preceding Fauré's Cantique de Jean Racine and Requiem.

Sunday, July 22ND was our last day. Most of the group attended the sung Eucharist at St. Paul's Cathedral. After lunch there were several choices: the 3:00 Evensong at Westminster Abbey; the 4:45 recital by Simon Lloyd at Westminster Cathedral (what a huge Willis!) featuring Buxtehude and Reger; and the 5:45 recital at Westminster Abbey featuring organist Michael Bower. The weather that day was fine for walking, and many of the group took in all of these uplifting programs. We said farewell to friends new and old at dinner that evening at our Kensington Forum Hotel.

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