

REVIEWS - SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND TOUR 2010

The 22nd annual England castle, choral and organ tour hosted by master tour guide Leslie Peart began in magnificent, historic Edinburgh, Scotland. We were guests at the Mount Royal Hotel right on Princes Street in the heart of the city with spectacular views of the gardens and Edinburgh castle. Our guest of honor was Simon Nieminski, organist of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral, who graciously guided us through our two days with visits to Greyfriars church where the statute of the dog Greyfriars Bobby stands, (the P.D. Collins organ in the church contains an unusual 32' stop called "Rumbles"), the Episcopal Cathedral with its fine Willis organ and St. Giles Cathedral.

On our second day in a rainy Edinburgh, (where even the locals had to agree that they were not used to so much rain), we toured the Royal Yacht Britannia used for many years by the Royal family and now out of commission. In the afternoon we were treated to a recital by Simon, and were then able to play the large Copley organ with its swivel console at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral. This was followed by a visit to St. Cuthbert and a delightful smaller yet versatile instrument in the Freemason's hall with its reverberant acoustic. The day ended with a virtuoso recital by Michael Harris of St. Giles Cathedral. Our stay in Edinburgh was capped by an impromptu sighting of Her Majesty the Queen on her way to Holyrood Palace by a member of our tour group.

Our next stop was Glasgow where we were able to experience and play the organ at Kelvingrove Museum before the rush of tourists arrived. This was followed by a quick trip to St. Mungo Cathedral and back to Kelvingrove for a lunchtime recital by two of our tour group, Robert McDonald and Dene Barnard, who in spite of virtually no practice time and no combination pistons, wowed the tourists having lunch in the food court. The day ended with a trip to Paisley Abbey with its beautiful stained glass windows.

Our next stop was Carlisle where our coach driver extraordinaire, skillfully navigated some very tight streets and turns. Here we experienced the little organ of the Parish Church of St. Cuthbert and the organ at Carlisle Cathedral. The next two nights were spent in Keswick in the lush countryside of the Lake District where we stayed at the historic Country House Hotel with spectacular views of the hills and grounds. Our first visit in the Lake District was the last organ built by Henry Willis in 1899 which remains untouched and was the first parish church organ in the country to have programmable pistons. The church is rich in historical artifacts and is the home of the famous St. Bees man, a perfectly preserved

mummy which was discovered during excavations to the church foundations in 1986 dating from about 1500. A.D. The afternoon was spent enjoying the lush English countryside with its quaint stone walls and a relaxing boat ride on Lake Windermere, England's largest lake.

Sunday morning was spent enjoying the magnificent Sung Eucharist at Durham Cathedral, followed by a visit to Ripon Cathedral where there is a new floor console, and ending in York. The next day we enjoyed a visit to spectacular Beverley Minster with its Hill, Norman and Beard organ containing Snetzler pipework from 1769. The afternoon was spent enjoying the grounds at Castle Howard, a magnificent estate still occupied by the Howard family and where the film *Brideshead Revisted* was filmed. The day ended with an entertaining demonstration by John Scott Whiteley of York Minster and an opportunity to explore the cathedral organ. Further visits included the catholic Cathedral of Leeds with its restored organ by Klais in Edwardian style, Manchester Cathedral and the unusual and futuristic Metropolitan Cathedral of Liverpool with its 93 rank J.W. Walker from 1967.

The following morning we were treated to a visit of the Willis Organ shop where construction is underway for a new organ for Auckland. The afternoon was spent playing the wonderful, huge old Willis in St. Georges Hall which sadly is in need of major repair. A quick trip to Christ Church Port Sunlight across the Mersey River was followed by a visit to the largest organ in England at the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral (now larger than Royal Albert Hall). Our colorful host was the amazingly talented Ian Tracey who talked us through the huge organ cathedral with its remote control (on the new five manual floor console) which enables an assistant to change pistons!

Our next stop included a visit to Lincoln Cathedral, Rugby School in Rugby (where the game was invented) and the very moving Coventry Cathedral with its modern building attached to the ruins of the old cathedral, destroyed during World War II and for which Benjamin Britten composed his War Requiem. A quick detour to view the house of Hyacinth Bucket of *"Keeping Up Appearances"* fame was a highlight for a member of our tour.

Our last weekend included a stop at Worcester with its new Kenneth Tickell organ, and Sandhurst military academy where we were the last group to play the organ before it will be replaced and the 28th instrument we had visited in Scotland and England.

Saturday was spent "relaxing" in London with visits to the London Eye, shopping, sight-seeing and ending with a Proms concert at the Royal Albert Hall where the program was a tribute to *"Dr. Who"*.

Sunday morning was spent in reserved seats under the opulent dome of St. Paul's Cathedral enjoying the sung Eucharist which included a moving performance of the great Mass in c minor by Mozart and later in the afternoon a visit to the bell tower of St. Paul's where we experienced the incredible and complicated change ringing of the bell ringers. Our farewell dinner at the Holiday Inn, Kensington Forum was enjoyed by 31 satiated, yet blissfully content organists, singers and music lovers who vowed to join us again in 2011 for another spectacular tour.

This year's England tour will be from July 12 – 25, centered around the Southern Cathedrals Festival at Winchester Cathedral, and visiting organs in London and all along the south coast of England. For more information, go to www.organtours.com, or contact Leslie Peart, at stopknob@aol.com, phone 217-546-2562.

Craig Tocher, Manhasset, NY.

SECOND REVIEW

Robert Noehren impressed me with his concern that organists should spend more time listening to music. I think he would have approved of the Leslie Peart organ tour of 2010 that included organ concerts, an evening at the BBC proms, and choral services. We heard some impressive sacred and secular music in Scotland and England as well as sharing memorable meals of representative local cuisine.

This year's Scotland and England organ tour began with a welcome luncheon at the Ramada Mt. Royal Hotel in Edinburgh. This hotel is located on Princes Street, above shopping and restaurants, and it provided a great base to visit the varied organs of Edinburgh. We began by playing the 1989 Collins organ at the Greyfriars Church, followed by the fine Willis organ at the Episcopal Cathedral. That evening we enjoyed generous time playing on the wonderful 1992 St. Giles Cathedral organ, built by Rieger Orgelbau of Austria.

The next day Scottish rain and chill failed to dampen our spirits as we explored Queen Elizabeth's yacht, Royal Britannia. We were treated to lunch at St. Mary's Metropolitan Catholic Cathedral, where concert organist Simon Nieminski is music director. Afterward we

played the large 2007 Copley organ in the church.

Next we visited historic St. Cuthbert Church, which has a large organ by Robert Hope-Jones dating from 1899. The 93-register organ was extensively reconstructed in 1997-1998 by J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd. of Brandon, Suffolk. We found an unexpected treat in the Freemason Hall of Edinburgh where there is a 1913 vintage Bridley and Foster pipe organ that has been preserved in original condition by Forth Pipe Organs of Edinburgh. The day concluded with a memorable organ recital at St. Giles, played by the Cathedral's Director of Music, Michael Harris.

An early arrival before the public at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow gave us time to see and play the historic Lewis organ from the 1901 International Exhibition. Later, we joined the public for the lunchtime concert played by our fellow tour members, Bob MacDonald and Dene Barnard.

Notable experiences in northern England included visiting Keswick in the beautiful Lake District, where we stayed at the Country House Hotel and cruised on Lake Windermere—England's largest lake. We were warmly welcomed at St. Bee's Priory, which has a historic 1899 organ built by "Father" Willis that is basically untouched. It was the last major instrument he personally supervised. The original (the first in England) programmable pistons are still in place.

On Sunday we enjoyed the Sung Eucharist accompanied by the historic Willis organ at Durham Cathedral. After playing the organ at Ripon Cathedral, we travelled to York Minster for Evensong in the large Gothic cathedral.

The highlight of the next day was touring Castle Howard, the location for *Brideshead Revisited*, where we played the organ in the castle's beautiful chapel.

Our host in Liverpool was concert artist Ian Tracey, who helped us discover the impressive Willis organs of Liverpool. "Father" Henry Willis founded his British pipe organ firm in 1845 in Liverpool. He contributed much to the science and art of organ building, and he was regarded as the leading English organ builder of the Victorian era. Willis organs were placed in town halls and churches throughout the UK. Many remain today, including the 121 rank 1855 Father Willis organ in St. George's Hall, Liverpool. Ian Tracey, Liverpool's City Organist, has great enthusiasm and concern for the maintenance of this historic organ.

A second great Willis organ is located in the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral where Ian Tracey

is Organist Titulaire. It was the largest musical instrument ever conceived when dedicated in 1926. Today it is the largest organ in the UK, even larger than Royal Albert Hall, with recent additions. It is playable from two matching 5-manual consoles.

We toured the Willis organ factory, where we were impressed with the quality of their current instruments and the historic Rolls Royce that David Wyld, the new owner of the company, had driven to work that day. Our Liverpool adventures were capped by an evening visit to the dramatic Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King where a 1967 Walker organ is installed.

The last few days flew by with visits to play many varied organs including: Coventry Cathedral, Rugby School where the game of rugby originated, Worcester Cathedral, with its wonderful 2008 organ by Kenneth Tickell, and the military academy–Sandhurst.

On our way to London we realized we had visited a total of 28 instruments in England and Scotland!

A special memory of our London visit was the Sung Eucharist at St. Paul's Cathedral, where we had reserved seats under the dome for Mozart's Mass in C minor with orchestra, organ, and soloists. The service concluded with the Fantasia in F minor on the organ. Sunday afternoon evensong at Westminster Abbey was followed by an organ recital by Christian Lane, Assistant University organist at Harvard.

We flew home from London well rested, with great memories, new friends, and thankful for exposure to such wonderful and diverse organs.

If you are interested in seeing the highlights of our UK organ tour, visit gallery.me.com/janbela#100052 for a 24 minute slideshow. (Note: Grid allows manual control of timing; Slideshow is automatic. Titles telling the locations are above or below the pictures.)

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