

Derby & District Organists' Registered Charity No. 510567 *Association*



**The Father Willis Organ
St George's Hall, Liverpool**

The Annual Outing of the DDOA to Liverpool was a great success and was adjudged by several members to be the best visit the Association had made in some years.

The visit had taken a considerable amount of organisation and, thanks to our indefatigable secretary, Siann Hurt, the arrangements went very smoothly. I know that this particular visit has cost Siann a considerable amount of time and has been very tricky to arrange in three much-used public venues.

For the first time in some years there were sufficient people travelling on the coach to cover the cost of the transport. Advertising had brought members from the Nottingham and Lichfield Associations and members' friends and acquaintances who took advantage of the cheap travel to spend a day in Liverpool. In addition to the cost of the coach there is the donation made to each venue we attend: advertising Association visits to our congregations is a cost-free way of engaging more people in Association activities as well as easing the charge against our finances.

Although the weather was uncertain we were untroubled by the widespread heavy showers that saved their worst for the periods during which we were travelling – always a bonus on a long day away from home.

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 13th June 7.30pm
Members' Recital, St James, Riddings

Monday 20th July 7.30pm
Evening Visit to Tibshelf and Somercotes

Saturday 12th September 2.30pm
Chairman's Event – Repton

N.B. The Mendelssohn Event at St Mary, Ilkeston will now be on Wednesday 14th October.

Tuesday 17th November 7.30pm
Annual General Meeting – St Werburgh, Spondon.

Victoria Hall Hanley Saturdays 12 noon

Ian Tracey	20 th June
Michael Rhodes	11 th July
Clive Driskill-Smith	22 nd August
Paul Prieto Ramirez	17 th October
Donald Mackenzie	21 st Nov.

Southwell Minster

Wednesdays 7.30pm

Robert Sharpe	17 th June
Gabriel Dessauer	15 th July
Johann Hermanns	12 th August

Derby Cathedral Organ Recitals

Ben Bloor 1.00pm 12th June

The summer series of recitals will be on Wednesdays at 7.45pm and will feature the music of Mendelssohn. Admission will be £10 for the Thomas Trotter recital and £5 for the others. Season tickets are £35 and are available in advance

Thomas Trotter	1 st July
Matthew Owens	8 th July
Peter Williams	15 th July
Robert Sharpe	22 nd July
Ian Tracey	29 th July
Peter Gould	5 th August
Tom Corfield	12 th August
Paul Hale	19 th August

Lichfield Cathedral

Martyn Rawles 9th June



The console of St George's Hall, Liverpool

Our first venue, St George's Hall, proved to be most interesting as the General Manager of the Hall, Frank Richardson, had taken the trouble to give up some of his day off to greet us and take us on a short tour of the building. Members were shown the 'small' Concert Hall - small only in relation to the Great Hall as it seated several hundred in great comfort. The decor and style are reminiscent of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton; it was an elegant space, oval, with what at first glance appeared to be a domed ceiling, though this was a carefully created optical illusion. It was clear that no expense had been spared in the restoration of the room, as indeed was clear in the rest of the building; Mr Richardson was justly proud of the massive restoration programme undertaken by the city.

The sheer size of the building and the number of rooms quickly became apparent to us as we made our way up and down granite staircases, glimpsing into rooms transformed from courtrooms to artists' retiring rooms.

Our guide gave a commentary on the architecture and the changes of function in each area, leading us to the Great Hall and the Father Willis organ.

We were shown to the gallery of the Great Hall so that we could gain some sense of perspective on the sheer size of the instrument and the Hall. Mr Richardson arranged for extra chairs to be brought for us whilst Professor Ian Tracey presented a brief history of the organ and some entertaining anecdotes about WT Best, the first City Organist. Best was a

self-taught phenomenon who would discover the programme for the Saturday Philharmonic concert and then perform transcriptions of the works for those unable to afford the cost of a ticket to the orchestral concert. This was a weekly occurrence and one can only wonder at the ability of someone able to transcribe works with such ease and such frequency. His recitals were attended by hundreds who were able to hear a vast orchestral repertoire that would otherwise have been beyond their reach, both financially and socially.

Perhaps Professor Tracey's most entertaining anecdote related to the period when Best and SS Wesley were planning the construction of the organ. Best attended the Great Exhibition of 1851 to sample organs built by Willis, Hill and

Schulze, amongst others. Whilst he was playing, a woman, dressed in black, approached him and started talking to him – we all know how irritating that is! Best told her to go away in no uncertain terms: unfortunately, it was Queen Victoria, so . . . no knighthood for Mr Best!

The Willis Great Exhibition organ had 70 stops over three manuals, an improved pneumatic action and pistons. Willis also had the foresight to tune his instrument in the early hours of the morning whereas his competitors had tuned theirs the previous day. Best played the same piece on each instrument; as the tuning of the other instruments was poor it took the panel only twenty minutes to offer Willis the contract to build the St George's Hall organ. The success of the St George's Hall organ paved the way for contracts for Willis at the Royal Albert Hall and St Paul's, amongst many others.

So, what of the organ today? After a demonstration of the organ by Professor Tracey we were invited to see for ourselves. It is a comfortable console, though several members found the pedal board slightly unusual; everything is within reach, the stop jams having basically the same disposition as those in the Anglican cathedral. The Diapason chorus is full, with a pleasing gradation of power across the three 8' Diapasons and 4' stops; the mixtures were bright and provided all one might ask in terms of brilliance and richness of harmonics.

The Bombarde Diapason chorus with its seven rank mixture is mounted at the top of the case and was quite stunning in the very resonant acoustic. An acquaintance told me that we were lucky that the magnificent Minton tiled floor in the well of the Hall was covered during our visit; whilst it would have been nice to see it, the added reverberation it creates would not have been welcome in an already over-generous acoustic.

Gillian Chatto next to one of the 32' Open Diapason pipes in St George's Hall. The thick layer of dirty varnish covering the gilding can be seen.



The reeds on both Great and Swell were splendid, exhibiting the fine balance between presence and power we associate with a Willis of that period, topping the full organ sound without drowning the flues. The quieter stops also proved to be of great charm and character as several members discovered, particularly the Choir flutes and the strings on both Swell and Choir. As members played, Professor Tracey helped with registrations and turned pages – a great help to those of us used to much smaller instruments. There was a good range of pieces and styles and it was clear that members had prepared well.

The case pipes are in a poor state due to the original gas lighting in the Hall, which, over the years, discoloured the varnish protecting the gilding on the pipes; Professor Tracey estimated a cost of between £400,000 – £500,000 to restore them; the accumulation of dirt in the pipes is also easily seen. There were notes on the Pedal reeds which did not play and, even after work by David Wells Organ Builders and Nicholson Organs, a steady escape of wind from the chests. However, none of that detracted from the pleasure we experienced playing this great instrument. All credit to Liverpool City Council for having the vision and determination to make this part of Liverpool's history speak once more.

Our thanks go to Mr Richardson and members of his staff who were extremely helpful and accommodating – even after we had been playing for two hours!

Evensong in the Anglican Cathedral included: *Beatitudes* Arvo Pärt; canticles by Le Flemming; Responses by Rose. During the choir rehearsal before Evensong, I wandered through the vast central space and was surprised by how much of the sound reaches the nave. A significant proportion of the choirboys were very young yet the boys still managed to project a strong sound with a good tone; intonation was excellent and the cohesion in the psalm was, to my ear, excellent. Accompaniment was provided by Professor Tracey who displayed some of the more subtle orchestral colours of the Solo and Choir for us in an improvisation before the service and during the psalm.

The concluding voluntary was Gigout's *Grande Chœur Dialogue* which demonstrated the balance between the Tubas (or was it the Tromba Real?) and the splendid Great/Swell choruses.

The organ here was our second Willis of the day, this time Henry Willis III, who, in this instrument, demonstrated that he was the equal of his grandfather in his ability to conceptualise and realise an instrument that is both an architectural masterpiece

and a magnificent instrument, conceived on a colossal scale to fill the largest cathedral in the country. However, the great power of the instrument is founded upon a consistency of scale and vision that many builders fail to achieve in much smaller instruments. Each of the five 8' Diapasons on the Great has a place in the Great Diapason Chorus, presenting a careful graduation of scale yet with a splendidly consistent tone. What is most impressive is that Willis III conceived both voicing and scaling before the cathedral was finished. The dedication ceremony took place when only the choir and first crossing were complete; at that time the scale of the pipework must have been quite overwhelming.

Once more, our host was Professor Tracey who devoted more time to us, demonstrating the organ after Evensong and allowing five of us to play. He presented an entertaining history of the organ and demonstrated the latest additions - the Corona and Central Space divisions. The Corona consists of only one stop, the Trompette Militaire which is playable from either the Bombarde or Choir. The original Trompette Militaire was lost during WWII: the Willis factory was in London at that time and the pipework was loaded onto a train and placed in a remote siding for 'safe keeping'. Unfortunately, a bomb found the siding and destroyed not only the Trompette Militaire but other pipework destined for Liverpool. The present stop is on 50" wind and is mounted in a high gallery - just as well as it has a truly stunning impact on the listener anywhere in the building, but most particularly in the Central Space.

Professor Tracey related the tale of borrowing the middle C pipe of the St Paul's Trompette Militaire, which was found to be wanting in the Liverpool building. An American firm was commissioned to build a stop even more powerful than the one in St Paul's. I should perhaps make clear that this stop has a musical sound and, unlike some Tubas I have encountered, can be used for chords. It was interesting to watch visitors in the Central Space flinch when Professor Tracey demonstrated it - most definitely not a stop to be argued with!

The Central Space division comprises a large scale Diapason chorus, crowned by a six rank mixture, used to support congregational singing in the nave. The pipework is from a redundant Willis III organ and blends extremely well with the choruses in the main cases, both in voicing and scale. It allows the organist to provide a solid lead to congregations without sending overpowering waves of sound from the main organ - it was not unusual, before its installation, to hear hymns antiphonally, with those at the

back of the nave a full line behind those at the front.

We were most fortunate in that five members were allowed to play the organ after Evensong as this is not usually allowed. Lots were drawn for the privilege, the five winners being: Siann Hurt, Laurence Rodgers, Gillian Chatto, David Franklin-Kitchen and your editor. Siann very nobly offered her place to Jack Stone, the youngest member of our party, who had joined us for the day with David Butterworth of the Nottingham Association. We had understood that we were to play quietly: however, with Professor Tracey drawing stops for us that did not seem to be a concern.

There is surprisingly little delay on the Choir, Pedal and Swell though there was on the Great, but that may have been due to the console's position. The experience of playing the largest organ in the country is one that will stay with us for some time.

The Association President, Peter Williams, offered a formal vote of thanks to Professor Tracey for the generous amount of time he had given us and for the entertaining and informative talks. For many of us who, as visitors to churches and cathedrals, have dealt with unhelpful staff, this was a day to remember for the warm welcome, assistance and entertainment offered by Professor Tracey.

Whilst five of us were playing in the Anglican Cathedral, others in the party moved on to the Metropolitan Cathedral where there was a slight delay whilst someone was found to open the Walker organ. This was, for several players the finest Walker organ they had encountered, though like many Walker organs, the pedal uses extensive borrowing and so appears to be a little light at the console. However, listeners at the opposite side of the cathedral thought that there we no such weakness and that there was a sweetness of tone that made it an attractive and pleasing instrument to listen to.

There were plenty of beautiful colours to be found and Walker, in their voicing of the instrument, certainly played to the acoustic of the building. There was a noticeable difference in the response of the reverberation in the three buildings: in St George's and the Anglican Cathedral the acoustic emphasises mid-range and low frequencies; in the Metropolitan Cathedral it is the high frequencies which are caught before floating into the central lantern – a quite charming effect which several members played to.

The console is the original 1967 one and is now beginning to look and feel a little tired: the key action was surprisingly stiff and the response of the pistons somewhat slow. None of this, however, detracted

from the pleasure of listening to the sound of the organ with, perhaps, the exception of the Orchestral Trumpet, which did not find much favour. It had a harsh metallic sound which, although powerful, held little charm for me.

Further information on the organs and their specifications can be found on the Association website. Siann Hurt has information about the organ appeal at the Anglican Cathedral: the organ there is now in need of attention and the cathedral authorities are trying to raise £900,000. A range of events and recitals is planned and further information on them can be found on the cathedral website www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk

Laurence Rogers tells me that the DVD made by Professor Tracey is excellent; it can be obtained from the cathedral shop or on-line.

Finally, our thanks to Willis and Garrett who drove with their usual skill, and to our navigator.

TW

'Organ-ise' at Worcester Cathedral

Since we are ourselves engaged in some 'outreach' work I thought it would be good to visit this rather more ambitious and wide ranging event which was put together by a range of groups including the RCO and the Cathedral Education Team.

It was aimed at children of 11 – 18 years and, in addition to the obvious activities of hearing, trying out and learning about the wonderful new organ, they were given opportunities to try the 'Woofyt' (wooden, one octave organ for young technologists) - huge fun for all concerned! The children were also

encouraged to explore the scientific and technological aspects of the instrument - airwaves, hearing, resonance, electro magnets, solenoids etc. The day was rounded-off with a duet version of *Ride of the Valkyries* played by the cathedral organists. The event was on offer for four days and attracted a wide range of pupils.

The organisation, background preparation and follow up were all impressive and I felt it was an excellent example of a big event that would convince teachers and pupils alike that the organ is a learning opportunity, not just for music, but for other areas of the curriculum. That has been the thinking behind our own more modest project working with Primary schools and it was encouraging to feel others had the same aims. A rather fuller report is published in the current 'RCO News'.

Stephen Johns

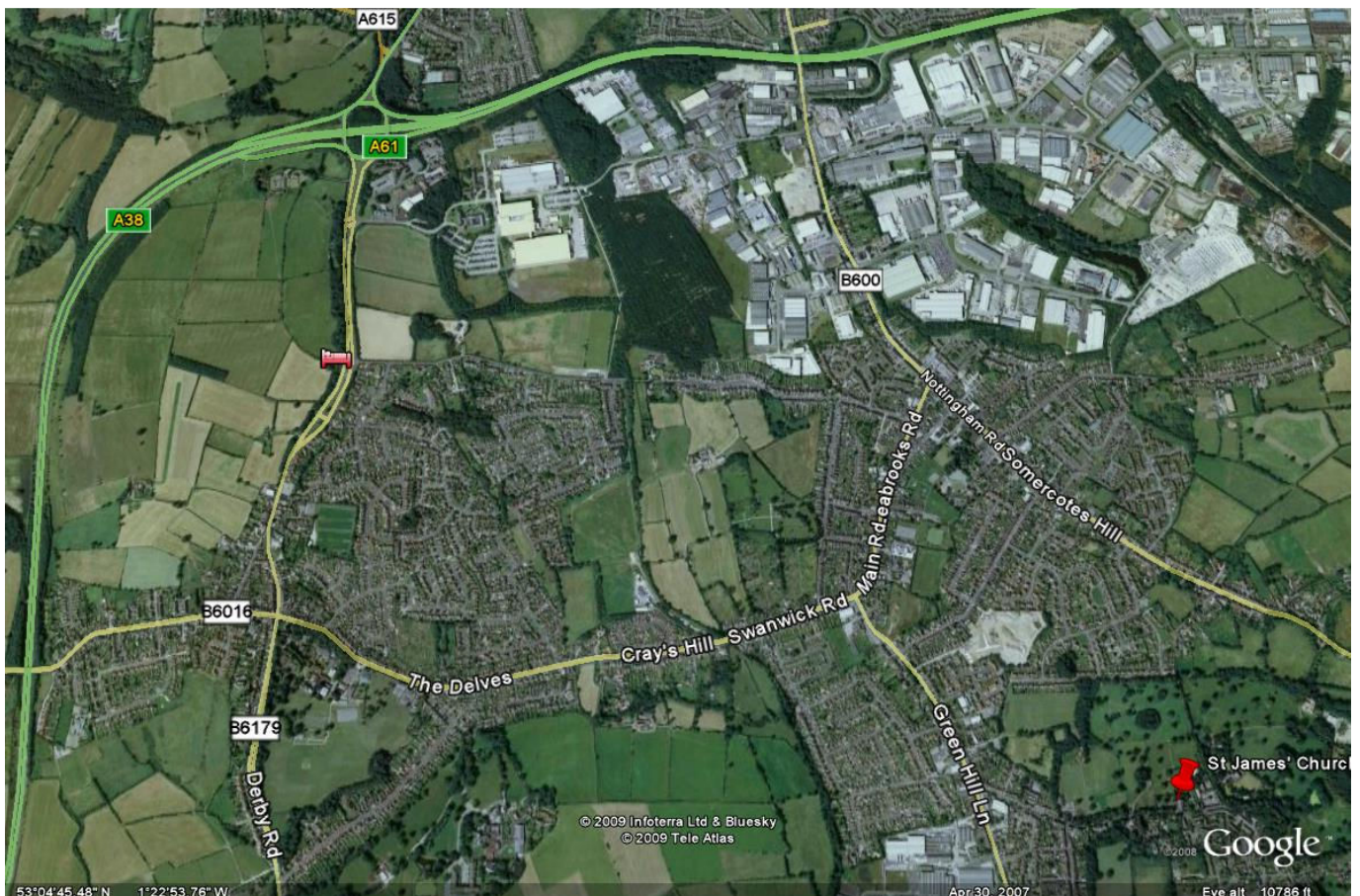
Member's Recital Saturday, June 13th, St. James, Riddings

The varied programme will be played by: David Bott – Languais; Gillian Chatto – Couperin, Bach; Laurence Rogers – Walther, Bach, Maillolchaud; David Wells – Buxtehude; Tony Westerman – Dubois, Edmondson.

This is the first event of its kind for over ten years, so please support our recitalists who have gone to a lot of trouble to present pieces which will sound excellent on the large, three manual organ.

The church is most easily approached from Green Hill Lane and then West Street, which becomes Church Street. There is on-road parking though sharing transport would be prudent.

SJ



Articles for the July edition of the *Newsletter* should reach me by Thursday 18th June, either via e-mail: twes@fsmail.net or by post: Tony Westerman, 44 Beeley Close, Allestree, Derby, DE22 2PX. The Secretary, Mrs Siann Hurt can be reached via: mail@derbyorganists.co.uk