

22nd Annual UK Organ Tour Led by Leslie Peart

Janice Feher



The 2010 Peart UK organ tour participants after the sung Eucharist at St. Paul's Cathedral, London

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.

The 2010 Scotland and England organ tour—July 13–26—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 for visiting 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 a generous amount of 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 1997–98 by J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd. of Brandon, Suffolk. We found an unexpected treat in the **Freemasons' Hall** of Edinburgh, where there is a 1913 vintage Bridley & 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. Bees Priory**, which has a historic 1899 organ built by "Father" Willis that is essentially untouched. It was the last major instrument he personally supervised. The original programmable pistons (the first in England) 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 traveled to **York Minster** for Evensong in the large Gothic cathedral.

The highlight of the next day was touring **Castle Howard**, the location



1989 Collins organ, Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh



1901 T. C. Lewis organ, Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow

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 pipe organ firm in 1845 in Liverpool. He contributed much to the science and art of organbuilding, and he was regarded as the leading English organbuilder 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 cathedral organist. 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 five-manual consoles.



Last "Father" Willis organ, St. Bees Priory



Lewis organ enlarged by Harrison & Harrison, Ripon Cathedral

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 organs, including those at **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 and 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 al-



The 121-rank 1855 "Father" Willis organ in St. George's Hall, Liverpool



The largest organ in England today, the 1926 Willis organ in Liverpool Anglican Cathedral



One-half of the split-case Kenneth Tickell organ (2004) in Worcester Cathedral

lows manual control of timing; slideshow is automatic. Locations are identified above or below the pictures.)

The twenty-third annual England Choral, Castle, and Organ Tour will be July 12–25, with four days in London, three at the Southern Cathedrals Festival at Winchester Cathedral, and many other organs and castles along the south shore of England. For more information, go to www.organtours.com, or contact Leslie Peart at stopknob@aol.com, phone 217/546-2562. ■

Janice Feher is organist in residence at First Presbyterian Church, San Diego. She holds a BM from Michigan State University and an MM from the University of Michigan, and she is a Colleague of the AGO. Her teachers included Corliss Arnold, Leslie Spelman, Donald Sutherland, Robert Noehren, and Marilyn Mason. She and her husband, Bela Feher, published two photobooks as part of an ongoing project on pipe organs of Europe—Sacred Spaces of Germany and Denmark (with Marilyn Mason) and Sacred Spaces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (available from Blurb.com http://Blurb.com).

Photo credit: Bela Feher