

Anglo-Dutch Organ Transplant

A Henry Willis organ in Leiden, the Netherlands

By Frank Ressler



Willis organ in the Hooglandse Kerk, Leiden, Netherlands



Hooglandse Kerk

Roughly midway between Amsterdam and The Hague lies Leiden, at one time the second largest city in the Netherlands. Leiden boasts numerous monumental buildings, typical Dutch canals, and world-famous museums. The city also has a number of old churches, two of these being quite large, all of them with interesting, historic organs, and all within walking distance of one another. In fact, Leiden has the nickname ‘City of Organs.’ To be found in the heart of the city is the Hooglandse (or St. Pancras) Kerk. The Gothic, cathedral-sized church, with its incredible seven-second reverberation, is the home of a project initiated by the Stichting Cathedral Organ Leiden.

This foundation’s aim is to install a large English Romantic organ (IV/P/50) in the church. When completed, the organ will be significant, not only in Leiden but also in the Netherlands—and perhaps even in the whole of mainland Europe. The realization of this project will permit the performance of the widest possible range of organ music. The organ will not only be used in religious services, but also in a variety of other events, for CD recordings, and for educational purposes.

The church’s choir (the Leidse Cantorij), which will benefit greatly from the installation of the instrument, is regularly invited to sing services in major U.K. churches, such as York Minster, St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, and St. George’s Chapel, Windsor Castle.

It is worthy of note that Leiden has a strong connection with both the U.K.

and the U.S.A.: the Pilgrim Fathers settled in Leiden (1609–1620) before sailing to America. A museum dedicated to them is located opposite the Hooglandse Kerk’s tower.

The foundation has been fortunate in acquiring an original 1892, 30-register (Great, Swell, Choir, and Pedal) “Father” Henry Willis organ, which is to form the basis of the Hooglandse Kerk’s organ. This instrument was originally installed in St. Mark’s Church, Birkenhead (U.K.). When the church closed in 1991, a Dutch organ enthusiast bought the organ, which he then rebuilt in his specially constructed private “concert barn,” as he called it. After he moved, he offered the organ to the foundation, at whose request organ builders and independent advisors examined the organ, confirming its unique qualities. The instrument has many of the typical “Father” Willis features, including his famous Corno di Bassetto 8’, and will serve as an ideal basis for the proposed organ.

After several consultations it was decided that, subject to the availability of sufficient funds, Henry Willis & Sons Ltd.—who still have tools used at the time that the organ was built—would realize the project. As a result, in early 2012, the “Father” Willis organ was moved to their Liverpool workshop for refurbishing and expansion.

The first phase of the project will be the installation of the restored Willis organ, complete with a new case. It will be located in the first bay of the north

transept, speaking south into the choir but reaching all parts of the church with ease. The Great organ will be expanded by the addition of a Double Open Diapason 16’, forming the new front pipes. This division will be given a 16’ reed stop. The same applies to the Swell organ, which will be extended with a 16’ Contra Fagotto. A Vox Angelica 8’ and tierce mixture will also be added. It is intended that the Pedal organ will have the 32’ Double Open Wood in phase one, funds permitting. The Great 16’ reed will be made playable on the Pedal organ. All these additions will be in true “Father” Willis style, and will be incorporated in the existing console.

The second phase will include the addition of the Solo division. Again, this will be designed in Willis style, but besides having a second pair of string stops, it should also include a high-pressure Tuba 8’. The Pedal organ will be expanded with independent reed stops, including 32’ and 16’ Ophicleides. The Solo organ and Pedal will not be playable from the original console but from a new, four-manual mobile console. The specification of the original Willis organ is shown below.

Despite the current difficult economic climate, the foundation continues its efforts to secure sufficient funds for both phases of the project. Readers are invited to visit the English section of website, www.cathedralorgan.nl, or to ask for further information via info@cathedralorgan.nl. Donations will, of course, be most welcome. The names of all donors will be listed on a special plaque attached to the organ. In case of a major benefactor, the organ might even be dedicated to this donor. Remarkably enough, the foundation already has donors in more than ten countries, including the United States and Canada, proving great international interest in the project.

It is hoped that the Willis organ will be heard in 2015, the year that the Hooglandse Kerk celebrates its 700th birthday. ■

Frank Ressler is a tax lawyer specializing in international VAT. He is also an organist in Leiden, the Netherlands, at de ‘Regenboogkerk’ (‘Rainbow Church’), where he accompanies services on an 1875 Forster & Andrews organ, imported from the U.K. (I3/II/P). He is one of the founders of the English organ project.

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Willis organ, current specification

- GREAT**
 16’ Bourdon
 8’ Open Diapason I
 8’ Open Diapason II
 8’ Hohlfute
 4’ Principal
 2½’ Twelfth
 2’ Fifteenth
 III Mixture
 8’ Trumpet
 4’ Clarion
- SWELL**
 16’ Lieblich Bourdon
 8’ Open Diapason
 8’ Lieblich Gedackt
 8’ Salicional
 4’ Principal
 2’ Piccolo
 8’ Trumpet
 8’ Hautboy
 4’ Clarion
- CHOIR**
 8’ Claribel Flute
 8’ Dulciana
 8’ Viola da Gamba
 4’ Flute Harmonique
 2’ Piccolo Harmonique
 8’ Corno di Bassetto
- PEDAL**
 16’ Open Diapason
 16’ Violine
 16’ Bourdon
 8’ Octave
 8’ Bass Flute

Willis organ, future specification

- GREAT**
 16’ Double Diapason
 16’ Bourdon
 8’ Open Diapason I
 8’ Open Diapason II
 8’ Hohlfute
 4’ Principal
 2½’ Twelfth
 2’ Fifteenth
 III Mixture
 16’ Trombone
 8’ Trumpet
 4’ Clarion
- SWELL**
 16’ Lieblich Bourdon
 8’ Open Diapason
 8’ Lieblich Gedackt
 8’ Salicional
 8’ Vox Angelica
 4’ Principal
 2’ Piccolo
 III Mixture
 16’ Contra Fagotto
 8’ Trumpet
 8’ Hautboy
 4’ Clarion
- CHOIR**
 8’ Claribel Flute
 8’ Dulciana
 8’ Viola da Gamba
 4’ Flute Harmonique
 2’ Piccolo Harmonique
 8’ Corno di Bassetto
- SOLO**
 16’ Contra Gamba
 8’ Harmonic Flute
 8’ Gamba
 8’ Voix Celestes
 4’ Concert Flute
 8’ Cor Anglais
 8’ Tuba
- PEDAL**
 32’ Double Open Wood
 16’ Open Diapason
 16’ Violine
 16’ Bourdon
 8’ Octave
 8’ Bass Flute
 8’ Violoncello
 4’ Principal
 32’ Double Ophicleide
 16’ Ophicleide
 16’ Trombone
 8’ Posaune
 4’ Clarion

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