

AN ORGANIST'S TOUR DIARY



Choirs standing in front of their national flags at Bushey

WEEK ONE

Two days after the end of term and here I was back at school! The eleven other schools had been arriving at Bushey throughout the weekend of Palm Sunday. On the Sunday evening a drinks party and buffet allowed staff and pupils to officially meet and several old acquaintances were renewed.

The following morning I had a rehearsal on the organ at the Greenwich Royal Naval College Chapel. The College was given by William II for use as a Naval Hospital to match the Royal Hospital for soldiers at Chelsea. It was built in two halves to allow an unimpeded view of Inigo Jones' Queens House from the Thames. The chapel organ was built by Samuel Green, who was one of the most celebrated organ builders of the eighteenth century. The original Chapel was designed by Christopher Wren in the seventeenth century and was restored by James Stuart after a fire destroyed the building in 1779. It was the setting for one of the weddings in the film "Four Weddings and a Funeral". The visitors had spent the day sightseeing in London and returned to Bushey for their first choir rehearsal in the school hall. The schools had prepared the music well and it was a good rehearsal.

On the Tuesday morning we had our second choir rehearsal before departing for London, arriving at Greenwich by boat for our first concert, which was very well-attended and a great success. Wednesday saw a daytrip to Windsor and Oxford with a rehearsal in the evening. It was back to London on Thursday for a flight on the London Eye followed by free time for sightseeing or shopping. Supper at the Rainforest Café was followed by a theatre performance.

It was an early start for the party on Good Friday with a ten-hour coach trip to Edinburgh. I did not travel with the rest of the party as I remained in London until Easter Sunday to fulfill my organist commitments at my local church. The schools were accommodated in two Youth Hostels and a boarding school.

On Saturday morning the group travelled to Dunfermline for their second concert. Queen Margaret and Malcolm III of Scotland were married in the town in 1070 and a

Benedictine priory was established there shortly afterwards. It was Margaret's youngest son, David, who established the abbey in around 1150. Margaret herself died three days after her husband and eldest son in 1093 and Dunfermline is her final resting place. The concert went very well and Abbey organist Norman Mitchell coped most admirably with the tricky accompaniments on just one short rehearsal.



York Mister Rehearsal. Ian Hope (Conductor), Drew Tulloch (Piano)

WEEK TWO

Easter Day and many attended church services in one of the city's many churches. I flew up to Edinburgh from Luton in time for the evening reception. This was hosted by the St Margaret's Chapel Guild and was held in the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle. There was an excellent buffet and a demonstration of traditional Scottish dancing. The choirs also gave an impromptu *a capella* performance of "The Dashing White Sergeant"!

While the rest of the party went on a city tour on Monday morning, I was at St Giles's Cathedral to familiarize myself with the organ for the evening concert. The Cathedral, dedicated in 1243, was named after the 7th Century French hermit St Gilles, it is thought, in support of the Auld Alliance of Scotland and France against England, their common and much hated enemy. The organ was built in 1992 by the Austrian firm Rieger Orgelbau and is fully computerised. An unusual feature is the thirty-seven Whitechapel bells incorporated in the instrument. The concert itself was a great success and was recorded by a BBC engineer (contact me for ordering information – mark@mark-hammond.co.uk).

On Tuesday the group went on a boat trip on Loch Lomond and also visited Stirling. In the evening we went to Kinross Park. Some went to the cinema while others tried their hand at ten-pin bowling, including the Bushey staff v Bushey pupils challenge match!

On Wednesday the group travelled to York, stopping off at the beautiful Castle Howard en route. Our accommodation was the impressive Queen Margaret's School just south of the city and the girls certainly enjoyed making use of the indoor swimming pool.

It was an early start for me on Thursday as I took the 7.30am bus into York for a morning rehearsal on the Minster organ before the tourists arrived. It was deserted as I walked in and it was a magical experience to have the magnificent building to myself as I practised. The present Minster was begun in the twelfth century and completed over the following two hundred years. The organ has twice been destroyed by fire, once in 1829 by Jonathon Martin, a madman who disliked organs! The basis of the present instrument dates from 1832, although it has had five major refurbishments since, the most recent being in the early nineties. The present instrument has four manuals and contains over 5,300 pipes.



Mark Hammond at the York Minster console

After my rehearsal, I joined the rest of the group for a most interesting walking tour of the city. We had a full rehearsal in the afternoon and the acoustics of the building caused a few initial problems of balance between choir and organ. The concert itself went well although the size of the audience was a little disappointing. Following the concert, we returned to Queen Margaret's School for a farewell party which included a staff cabaret performance and massed Scottish country dancing! On Friday morning it was time to return home. Everyone had had a fantastic time and on a personal note it was a privilege for me to perform at three wonderful venues in

Greenwich, Edinburgh and York. Some of the staff are already talking about the next event and who knows, maybe we'll all be off to Australia or New Zealand in three or four years!

Mark Hammond