

# ENGLAND TOUR DIARY

by Dennis and Heidi James

The early morning sun glinted on the tiny jewel-sized cars far below us. We grinned sleepily at each other while waking up under the steaming cloths our stewardess gave us. After a year of letters and anticipation we were finally in "this island, this kingdom, this England."

Landing and customs passed by quickly, and soon we were riding in organist Len Rawle's Peugeot for a quick look at his magnificent Wurlitzer home installation before toddling off to be at the home of our hosts, Les and Edith Rawle.

That evening we were treated to a ride on London's famed "tube" subway system, where everything is as circular as J.R.R. Tolkien's hobbit holes. The purpose of the tube trip was to attend the Cinema Organ Society's monthly meeting at the Magic Circle (London Headquarters of the famous magician's club). C.O.S. members prepare programs from record and slide collections for a pleasant evening of entertainment. Tonight's program was special in that it was a memorial to noted English organists Jackie Brown, Vic Hammett and Gerald Shaw, all popular artists who are deeply missed.

Dennis was invited to show his

slide presentation of the Ohio Theatre. As a number of beautiful theatres are closing or are about to close in England, much interest was generated in how Columbus was able to save and restore her theatre and organ.

The next morning, April 10, saw us speeding up to the northwest part of England with Len Rawle, who was to present a demonstration concert for Yamaha in Kendal. While talking shop with Len, we couldn't help remarking occasionally over the beautiful rolling hills laced with networks of brooks and stone walls.

That night we relished the thick northern accents of the hotel waiters. Len, in return, regaled us with his imitation of a broad American accent. These contrasts were to provide all of us with a constant source of amusement throughout our tour.

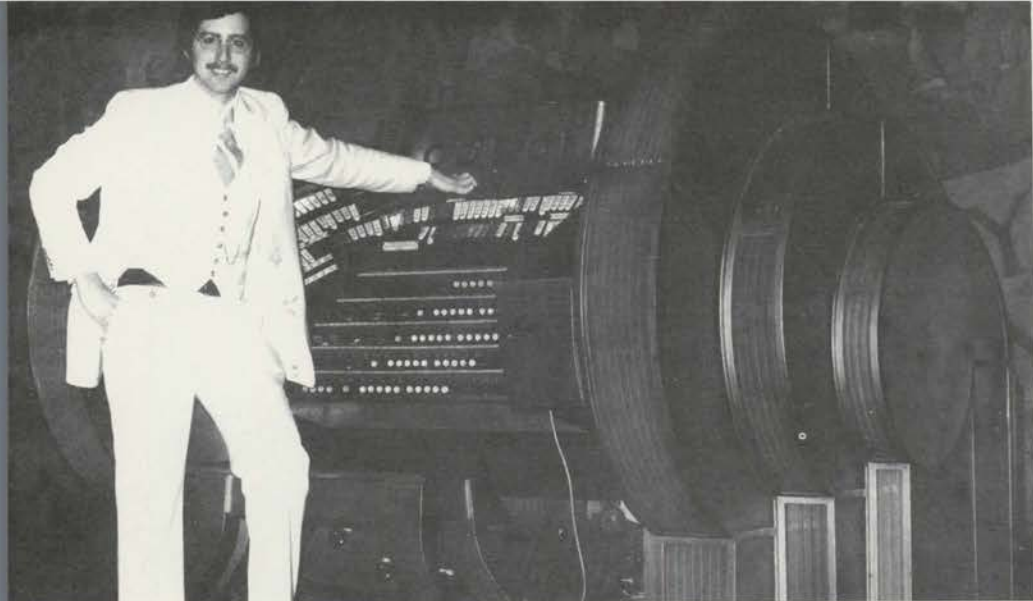
The next day Len treated us to a grand backroads tour of the beautiful Midlands Lakes country. Thousands of pie-faced sheep dotted the tarns and thwaites (lakes and meadows). Lake Windermere reminded us of a miniature Switzerland with white-capped mountains in the distance and wildflowers blooming



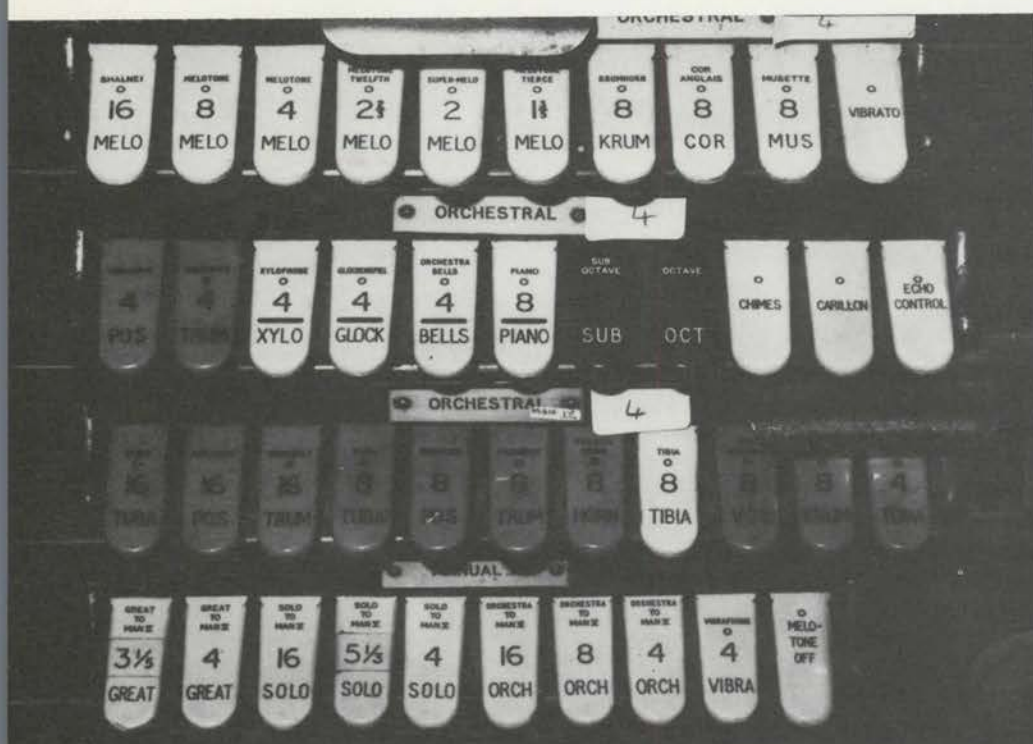
An English Beefeater.

everywhere. A stop at a pub in Beetham provided a classic English meal, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, along with a quick game of darts.

The 12th brought Heidi's birthday celebrated with gifts from our new-found English friends. The entire Rawle family spared no effort to make us feel as welcome as long time friends, though we had only met just briefly the year before in Detroit. Later that day it was on to a practice session at the Kingston

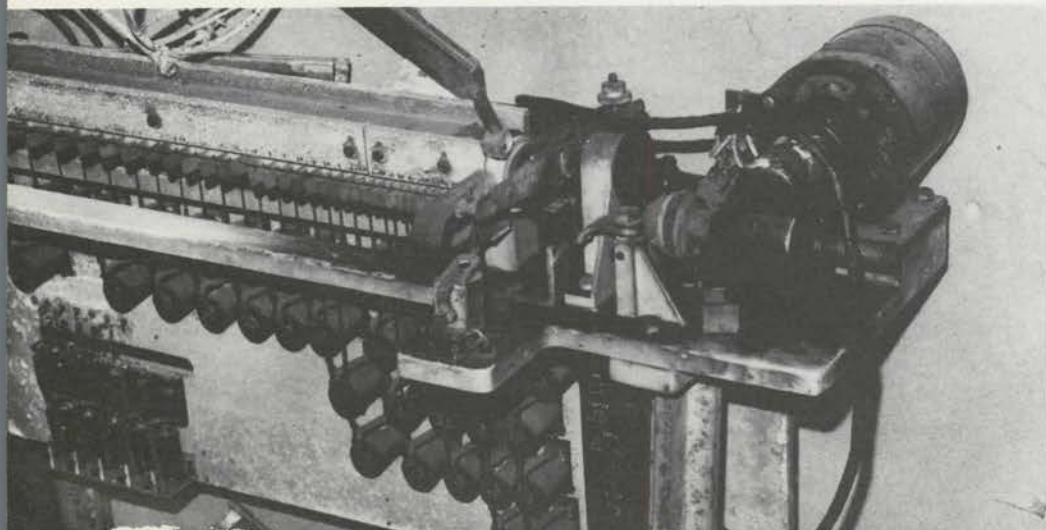


The famous 5/15 Compton at the Leicester Square Odeon.



Top row of stop tabs on the Odeon Compton console controls the Melotone and its derivatives, the Krumhorn and Cor Anglais.

A Compton "Solo Cello"



Granada, site of our first concert.

The Kingston organ is a 3/10 Wurlitzer installed entirely on the left side of the hall, as was the custom on a large number of English instruments. Although the organ piano served as an accessory instrument quite well, it was not suited for solo use, so arrangements were made to bring in a Steinway grand for the concert.

Then on to Hampton Court, former residence of the likes of Henry VIII and William and Mary. Les Rawle, who helps maintain the chapel organ there, showed us the beautiful formal gardens in full spring bloom. He also pointed out that every one of the several dozen chimneys was bricked in its own unique pattern, a fact that intrigued another American visitor — Lowell Ayars.

That evening we sat in on the initial meeting of the group planning next year's England Organ Safari. Officials from each of the organ clubs in England were present to discuss which of the many instruments available would be included in the 10-day planned organ tour for the American ATOS visitors.

The Leicester Square Odeon and its huge 5/15 Compton with "jelly" surround attracted us the next morning. The appearance of the console with colored lights flashing away is quite a sight on first viewing. The curved glass additions provide an interesting visual effect for the audience to watch while the organist plays his solos.

The overall sound and playing "feel" of the instrument was quite similar to the Atlanta Fox Moller. Powerful reeds and concert organ voicing in the Diapasons and Strings gave the organ a brilliant ensemble. The pipework, unfortunately, is located under the stage, so the organ sounded at its best in the pit. Sadly, much of the brilliance and power is lost only a few rows back in the theatre, and even the organist has a rough time when the console is in up position.

Comptons are equipped with a number of devices not found on the American theatre organs. For instance, capture combination action for ease of piston setting and 2nd touch cancel on the stop tabs enable entire divisions to be cancelled and changed with ease. Ventil controls

enable the organist to turn off the air in individual chests, should ciphers occur during a performance. Last, but not least, the electronic Melotone units, unique to the Compton, provide a very interesting added tone color with a result not unlike attaching a Hammond organ to each manual.

Organist David Shephard, who was preparing for his portion of the then upcoming Gerald Shaw memorial concert at the Odeon, provided us with a detailed tour of the entire instrument and a demonstration of its unique sounds. David proved to be very adept at handling the large console and he was able to provide a good representation of the many playing styles heard in the Odeon over the years.

The Rawles then gave us the Jaguar Coach Tourlines view of London, complete with a stop at Trafalgar Square. Under the watchful eyes of giant black lions and Admiral Nelson, the Trafalgar pigeons waxed so friendly that one even began to nest in Dennis' hair!

We tried a number of "American" restaurants in London during our visit. It got to be a stand-off as to who was more amused by whom. The waiters were horrified when we requested catsup, mustard, pickles, onions tomatoes, lettuce and cheese on our hamburgers. The compromise became a plain burger topped with a slice of cucumber and a separate plate of cold cheese slices. The "American" pizza turned out to be sans herbs, spices or seasoning of any kind. We imagined what British visitors must think of our "English" fish and chips back home.

Edith Rawle took us to the resort city Brighton on the southern coast on April 15. We went by tube, train, bus and foot, enjoying the whole gamut of English public transport. Of interest to visiting organ buffs is the Brighton Dome, a converted horse stables-to-auditorium that was once a part of the Persian-styled Royal compound. The building houses a 4/40 Christie concert-theatre organ. The instrument is of the "straight" variety with a few theatre organ amenities such as Bass Drum and Cymbals, which house organist Douglas Reeve uses to great effect. In addition to his organist duties Mr. Reeve also produces the "Tuesday Evening at the Dome" enter-

tainments — presentations straight out of the Vaudeville tradition with black-face singers, comedy acts, soloists, amateur bands and, of course, the organ solo.

Vaudeville-type entertainment appears to never have died in England, which may be an explanation for the general lack of real public concern and interest in the gradual disappearance of the theatre organ from their musical scene. In the States theatre organ is so far removed from the current musical entertainment trends that there is now a definite revival of a part of the past for another look. This especially applies to the organ and silent film presentations. In England there was little, if any, silent film use of the organs. The heyday for them was the period from 1930 to 1945 with many hold-overs all the way to recent years in such places as the Odeon Leicester Square and the Blackpool Tower. The theatre organ is just too recent a phenomenon and is still a part of the public consciousness. This fact was brought home to us while watching a T.V. variety program when we heard the host crack a joke about theatre organists — the audience laughed uproariously, for they knew exactly what a theatre organist is.

We were fortunate to be able to sample three excellent London theatrical productions: "Jeeves" with David Hemmings, "Hans Christian Anderson" with Tommy Steele and a revival of the classic "Harvey" with Jimmy Stewart. All were performed in beautiful, very intimate theatres dating back to the 1800's.

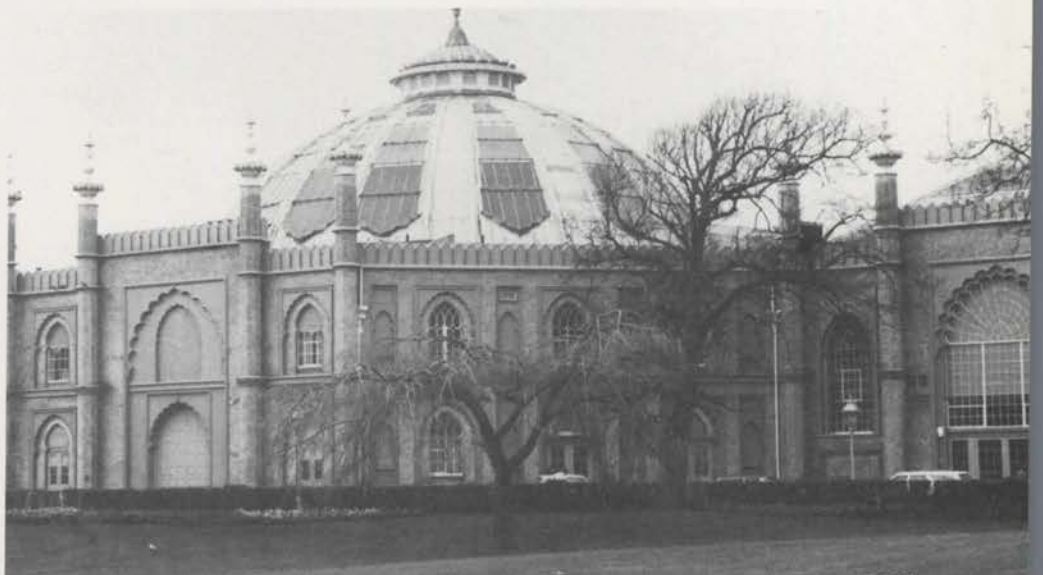
The Brighton Dome houses a 4/40 Christie. It was once a horse stable, part of the Persian-styled Royal compound.



Heidi finds that Trafalgar Square is for the birds.

On the evening of the 18th we were invited as special guests for the Premier showing of Barbara Streisand's "Funny Lady" at the Henley-upon-Thames Regal Theatre. At the interval (intermission) we were introduced on stage by an actor from the popular BBC series "Upstairs/Downstairs." Several other prominent English actors were present, including Ian Carmichael (of Lord Peter Whimsey fame). Music for the occasion was played on the theatre's 3/7 Compton, the first organ in England to be reinstalled in a theatre.

Saturday morning Les Rawle took





Dennis and Heidi at the Granada Theatre, Kingston-upon-Thames.

us to Harrow where Dennis played the 3/8 Wurlitzer in the Granada Theatre. This organ proved to be a feisty little instrument. The original factory specifications featured three bright reeds (Post Horn, Brass Saxophone and Tuba) for this small instrument. The console is really a glorified two manual with additional woodwork on the ends to make it appear much larger. The added third manual has only two speaking stops and a few couplers. The Tibia is unified through 2' and Sub and

Super Octave couplers are included, so the end result is a very versatile instrument — ideal for an American pizza parlor installation.

Sunday afternoon, April 20, we performed a duet concert at the Granada Kingston-upon-Thames. The organ was in fine shape and well tuned. The Steinway arrived and was placed onstage after the management graciously surmounted the technical problem of getting past the anchored cinerama screen by dismantling a portion of it.

Dennis and Heidi were interviewed by Robin Richmond on BBC radio.



The audience sat in the balcony, for the Kingston Granada is one of the newly "tripled" theatres. The downstairs area has been walled in under the balcony and split into two separate theatres leaving only the balcony, orchestra and stage areas intact to form the third theatre. We found the audience here, and everywhere we went, extraordinarily warm, friendly and enthusiastic. It was a real joy to perform for such responsive people.

The next week or so we spent as tourists and loved it. We saw many of the famous attractions in London and surrounding areas. One interesting occurrence was Heidi's impromptu performance on an 1851 Klein giraffe piano we chanced upon while investigating antique shops in Eton.

We visited a number of familiar faces from the British delegations to our ATOS Conventions. Michael Candy happens to be an amateur magician, and we were invited by him to return to the Magic Circle for a highly entertaining evening of magic.

We also visited Father Kerr who has recently completed winding on the 3/7 Compton he is installing in his church, St. Mary's Mother of God. This is the second theatre organ in a church installation for this very active theatre organ buff.

Another couple who frequent our conventions own the Horse and Groom pub in Ascot where we spent an evening entertaining the troupes on the Baldwin electronic and a strange little piano that lost an octave of keys somewhere along the line.

Out in the very middle of nowhere among the hay and cows stands the Plough, an English pub housing a 3/11 Compton theatre organ. David Shephard currently plays there between his teaching duties. The Compton has all of the special devices including a rather unique effect called the "Solo Cello." This stop is literally a metal cello string played by spinning discs and steel fingers much in the manner of a Violano-Virtuoso machine. The device is situated in the chamber and is run through electronic amplification resulting in an eerie sound similar to the humming of a thousand giant bees (all in tune).

That evening we listened to the

BBC broadcast of our visit to the "Organist Entertains" radio show. Organist Robin Richmond hosts this very popular program listened to weekly by an estimated fifteen million people. Excerpts from our "Puttin' On The Ritz" album were played as we discussed the tour and the American organ scene in general. At the end of the program we announced the upcoming theatre organ concerts in the general London area and were surprised to note there were so many.

Les Rawle next took us to Blenheim Palace, home of the Duke of Marlborough and birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill. It is a truly magnificent structure currently open for public tours. Les arranged for Dennis to play the beautiful and richly ornamented 4/60 Willis pipe organ installed in one of the great halls. Warned ahead of time to perform only classical organ works Dennis played works of Buxtehude, Bach and Guilman for the Palace visitors.

At the end of this session the palace caretaker came to the console and asked, "You are an American organist, yes? Can you play any boogie-woogie?" Taken aback but happy to oblige Dennis played his arrangement of the "Bumble Bee Boogie." With trackers clacking away Dennis performed the next request from the household staff for "Colonel Bogey March." Ragtime was requested, a piano was uncovered halfway down the hall and Heidi joined in for a spirited Joplin duet. This performance was only slightly marred by the individual tunings of the instrument — a half-step apart!

The Sunday before leaving England we played our second public concert for a near-sell out crowd at Tony Manning's studio in Farnborough. Dennis found the 3/9 Christie well suited to the room and in good shape for the concert. Heidi tackled the newly installed Hupfeld Solophonola upright piano with gusto and won. Again the audience was enthusiastic and quite demonstrative of their pleasure.

Other organ crawls took us to the Style F Wurlitzer in the New Gallery Theatre and to the Gaumont State Kilburn 4/16 Wurlitzer opened by noted organist Sidney Torch. Of course we mustn't forget the lovely



Dennis at Sidney Torch's favorite, the Kilburn 4/16 Wurlitzer.



Heidi listens to Len Rawle, at his 4/20 Wurlitzer.

Not one, but two! A private concert in Les Rawle's home.



instruments in Les and son Len Rawles' homes. As mentioned before Len is a professional organist who has already had some American concert exposure. His concerts in Rochester, New York and on the West Coast recently had audiences charmed by his fine playing style.

After playing his 4/20 Wurlitzer (from the Empire Theatre on Leicester Square) one wonders why Len would even leave his living room. The organ is without a doubt one of the finest home installations anywhere. Ideally matched to the room by clever mixing chambers and swell shade placements the organ has a sound which caused Dennis to start thinking about acquiring his own some day.

Les Rawle has not one but two 3 manual Wurlitzer consoles in his living room, a startling sight indeed at first viewing. The main console controls some 19 ranks of Wurlitzer pipe work gathered from here and there over the years. The sound is quite potent and should be even better yet when Les finishes his new addition onto the living quarters which will allow for even more tonal expansion. It was quite a treat to know that at the end of the day's journeys there was always a Wurlitzer ready for practice.

After staying with them for over a month, Les and Edith Rawle seemed more like our parents than the gracious hosts they were, and it was really like leaving home when the time came at last to go. We had a truly unforgettable time and are looking forward with great anticipation for our return trip next year. □

Cheerio 'til next year!



The CATOE booth became a busy spot at the Home Organists Adventure.

(Photo courtesy Conn Organ Corp.)

## Rapport Maturing in Organ Groups

by Almer Brostrom

The difference between pipe organs and electronics is personal, cash and space. Since pipes are available only to the few, electronics are filling the desire for the many. The interest of ATOS, as we know, is in pipes. But we note the evolution of a closer relationship between the two factions which is good!

The Chicago Home Organist Adventure in August of 1975, demonstrated the mutual interest of both groups. There were many pipe people among those present, and most of them have an electronic instrument.

The affair was the third one at which ATOS was given a booth by Bill Worrall, publisher of *The Organist Magazine* which sponsors these conventions. CATOE members managed the Chicago booth and the interest and response was surprising. The first day they were unprepared for signing up new members — didn't expect that in August! And CATOE's large mailing list grew larger with the bright interest shown in theatre organs.

Thus, let us not slight nor neglect the electronic gang. Their interest is music and particularly organ music. Let's nurture this interest

and get them into our organization.

These Home Organist Adventures are a great opportunity for furthering organ interest. The general format is: instructional classes (workshops), six each day which are conducted by very knowledgeable people, for example: Richard Bradley, Johnny Kemm, Rosemary Bailey, Stan Zimmermann, Marion Ritchie, Stan Hertz, Val St. Regis, Carol Jones, Danny Brown, Dan Bellomy, Paul Renard and Al Hermanns.

Of course, you don't know all of them. But, why not? You should, because they are all active and furthering interest in organ music.

Then in addition to the classes, there is a concert each day featuring two or more good artists on instruments from the various manufacturers. The banquets and social opportunities are a plus, as we know. Also each session has special workshops for teachers through NAOT.

Bill Worrall is scheduling these Adventures for many areas of our United States. The next one will be in St. Petersburg, Fla., in February 1976. For information write to *The Organist Magazine*, Box 4399, Downey, Calif. 90241. It is a worthwhile experience and reasonable! □