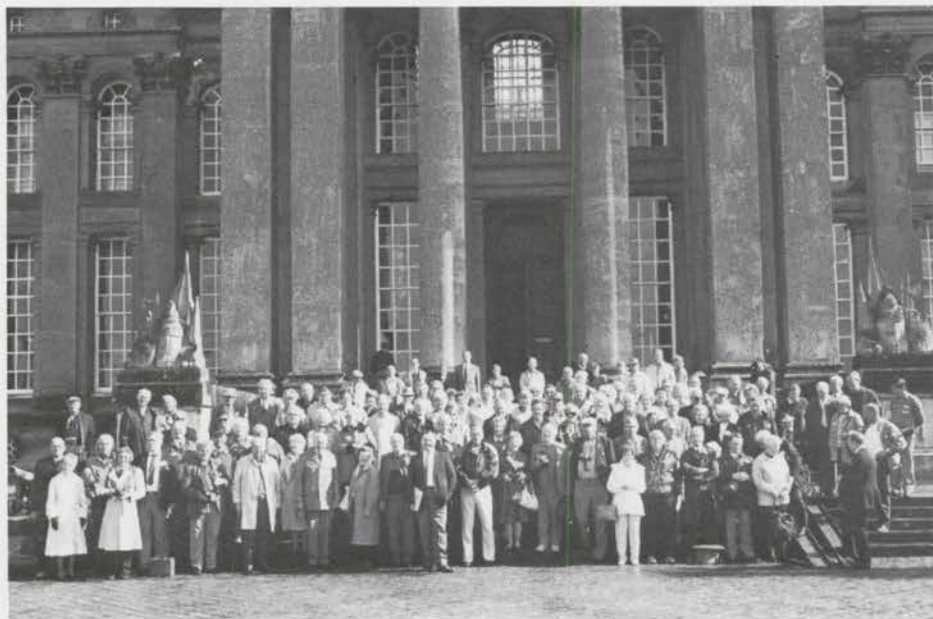


A British Adventure

by Robert M. Gilbert
Photos by John D. Sharp



Above: The entire Safari group on the steps of Blenheim Palace.

At Right: The artists at the Cannon Harrow. L to R: Peter Holt, Georgina Rawle and Martin Harris.



Below: Frank Fowler and Dr. Joanna Fraser at Watford Parish Church. The Christie Multiplex Transmission System can be seen at the left of Joanna.



Each day, for eight days, three coaches named "Compton," "Christie" and "Wurlitzer" departed on schedule to travel around southern England and to south Wales. The passengers visited theatres, town halls, palaces, churches, a cathedral, museums, schools and private homes. But this was no ordinary tourist group. It was made up of some 150 theatre organ enthusiasts, traveling from place to place to see and hear their favorite musical instrument, with a few classical organs included for variety.

The event was billed as the "Springtime Safari." At times, the weather was more like winter, but that was no deterrent to our enjoyment of this beautifully planned affair. In our travels, we saw towns and villages, some of London, parts of the beautiful countryside, as well as two palaces. After a short time, a spirit of camaraderie prevailed in each coach, helped along by the able and friendly crew — driver, captain and hostess.

Middlesex Day

On opening day, Sunday, April 16, participants registered in the lobby of the Cannon Harrow theatre during the late morning. Then we all headed back to our nearby hotels, or to fast food places, for some lunch. The opening concert took place in the afternoon at the Cannon Harrow, featuring competition winners Peter Holt (1985) and Martin Harris (1986) at the 3/8 Wurlitzer. Both young men played very well.

Following the concert, the coaches loaded near the theatre and we were off to the town of Watford, a few miles northwest of London, for the inaugural concert on the 3/59 organ in Watford Parish Church (St. Mary's). Prior to the concert we were treated to an English afternoon tea provided by Hill, Norman & Beard Ltd. The organ is based upon a J.W. Walker instrument built in 1935, rebuilt by Hill, Norman & Beard and using their Christie Multiplex Transmission System. The artists were Dr. Joanna Fraser, recitalist for the builder, and Frank Fowler, Managing Director of Hill, Norman & Beard. Joanna's program was in the classical vein, but Frank's two numbers were not what one would expect in a church — "Dance of the Three Old Maids" by Reginald Porter Brown, and "The Radetzky March" by Johann Strauss. The Vicar of the church stated at the outset that the pews in St. Mary's were undoubtedly the most uncomfortable seats to be found anywhere, and he was right! Our return trip took us on a tour of many parts of London, a very enjoyable experience.

Buckinghamshire Day

Monday, April 17 — Our coaches left the hotel at 9:30 a.m. for the trip to Aylesbury, a little farther northwest of London than Watford. The morning concert was in the Civic Hall on the 4/22 Compton/Standaard organ. The artist was Paul Kirner who, with his wife, operates Compton Lodge in Sapcote, Leicester. A buffet lunch was provided in the Hall after the concert.

Our next destination was the Leisure Center in Stevenage, about 25 miles north of London. The organ in the Center is a 3/10 Christie, and the artist on this instrument was Ken Stroud. Another buffet tea was provided following the concert, after which we climbed back aboard the coaches for a ride to St. Albans, where we stopped at the Music Museum.

The museum was filled with a great variety of automatic musical instruments, including the 3/8 Spurden/Rutt organ which we were to hear, and a Wurlitzer organ not yet fully installed. Our artists were two young ladies, Dena Cooper and Suzanne Hancock, both of whom were runners-up in the London Chapter competitions. After their program, three of the player organs in the museum were demonstrated. Then it was back to the coaches and off to our hotels.

Sussex Day

Tuesday, April 18 — We were off early again, this time to Walthamstow in the northeastern part of Greater London, to hear Simon Gledhill playing the 3/12 Christie organ in the Cannon Cinema. He used the stage console, as the main console is buried under the pit. Simon's program was up to the standard we have come to expect of him. Here we had to make do with refreshments from the theatre kiosk, but no one appeared to be starving.

At 12:30 p.m. the coaches left for the south coast, arriving there at Brighton, then turning west and going to the Town Hall in Portslade. Here Michael Maine and David Houlgate, with the help of friends, have installed a 3/13 hybrid Compton/Christie organ. Michael Maine and Michael Wooldridge were the artists on this instrument. Following the organ solos, the two Michaels played a duet with Maine on the organ and Wooldridge on a Yamaha Clavinova. Unfortunately, the duet was spoiled by setting the volume level of the Clavinova so high that, to us, it did not sound like the instrument it was meant to be.

From the Town Hall we rode to the nearby seaside town of Hove, where we



Top Left: Paul Kirner at Aylesbury Civic Hall.

Above: Ken Stroud at the Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage.



At Left: Dena Cooper (left) and Suzanne Hancock at the St. Albans Music Museum.



Simon Gledhill at the Cannon Walthamstow.

Below: Michael Maine (left) and Michael Wooldridge at Portslade Town Hall.





Top: Chapel organist Neil Cox at the console of the large organ in Lancing College Chapel.

Center: View of the choir in Lancing College Chapel, showing the two-manual tracker organ in the center.

At right: The large Lancing Chapel instrument.



enjoyed a fine dinner at Langridge's Hotel. To help us keep to a tight schedule, the dining room staff served the dinner quickly and efficiently, without seeming to rush us. A short ride after dinner took us to Lancing College on a hill not far from Worthing, where we were to hear a concert in the college chapel. To those of us not used to English church architecture, the chapel seemed almost as large as a cathedral. It contains two beautiful organs, a small two-manual tracker instrument in the choir and a large four-manual instrument above the chapel entrance. Some ranks of the large organ could be coupled electrically to the small organ. Chapel organist Neil Cox played a short program on each instrument. Before we left, Lowell Ayars tried his hand at the two-manual organ. To us, both organs were a delight to hear, especially with the reverberation of the large chapel.

London Day

Wednesday, April 19, was a day which was alternately sunny and cloudy. We were off at 9:30 a.m. for the Top Rank Club Kilburn (formerly the Gaumont State Kilburn). Kilburn is a very busy district within London. Louis Mordish gave us a fine concert on the 4/16 Wurlitzer. Following the program, a light lunch was provided in the upper foyer of the theatre.

The coaches then took us to the New Gallery Cinema, Regent Street, a theatre without the usual facade to mark its presence. In fact, we had walked past it several days earlier and had not even realized it was there. Here we were entertained in a short concert by Ena Baga at the 2/8 Wurlitzer, followed by the Buster Keaton film *College*, for which Ena provided the accompaniment. The program ran a little over its allotted time, and when we emerged from the theatre we found our coach drivers in a bit of difficulty with the police for parking in a restricted area during rush hour (although how "rush hour" in London differs from the rest of the day was not clear to us).

We were returned to our hotels to freshen up and have dinner, afterwards setting off for either of two choices: a visit to the homes of Les and Edith Rawle and Len and Judith Rawle, or a visit to the Brentford Music Museum. We opted for the home tour, as we planned to visit the museum later on our own. Our first stop was at Les and Edith's, where the famous 3/19 Wurlitzer is probably the most used theatre organ anywhere.

Lowell Ayars was host and artist, and did a fine job. We wished we could have had a full program from him. Then it was off to Len and Judith's home and their 4/24 Wurlitzer, which, though less used, is very well known to T.O. buffs. Len was our host and artist, explaining and demonstrating the installation and its features. Again, we would have liked to have had a full concert.



Ena Baga, who played at the New Gallery Cinema.

Below: Lowell Ayars was the artist at Les and Edith Rawle's famous Wurlitzer.



Louis Mordish at the Top Rank Club, Kilburn.



Richard Cole, who demonstrated the Wurlitzer at the Brentford Museum.



At Left: Frank Holland, founder of the Brentford Museum and Joe Marsh.

Berkshire Day (Day in the Country)

Thursday, April 20 — Abingdon, just south of Oxford, was our first destination on this day. We traveled through the beautiful Thames Valley to reach the town. The coaches stopped in a car park alongside the river and we walked over a bridge and on to the Abingdon Abbey Hall, where a 4/14 Compton organ was installed. Nigel Ogden very capably demonstrated the instrument for our enjoyment. After a brief side trip in the hall for a look at the collection of plate ware, we set off for the coaches. It had started to rain, so we were unable to do any sightseeing around town.

On our way to Blenheim Palace, a little way northwest of Oxford, we stopped at a motorway rest stop for lunch. Before starting on a tour of the palace, John Sharp, our official photographer, collected the whole Safari group on the front steps for a photo. At the end of our self-guided tour we gathered in the huge library (183 feet long) to listen to Nigel Ogden play the beautiful 'Father' Willis classical tracker organ. One of our party fell asleep in a corner of the library, thus being able to say he slept in Winston Churchill's home.

From Blenheim, the coaches took us to Old Windsor Memorial Hall, passing nearby Windsor Castle en route. Old Windsor is located a short distance due west of London. First on the schedule at the hall was a very tasty buffet supper, then it was an open console jam session on the 3/11 Compton organ. The music was provided by five members of the Safari — Con Docherty, Jinny Vanore, Joe Marsh, Dick Loderhose and Jean Kettle. It was a great ending for a great day.



Nigel Ogden at the console of the Compton in Abingdon Abbey Hall.

Below: Nigel Ogden at the Blenheim Palace console.



At left: The organ in Blenheim Palace.

At Right: Three of the jam session artists, L to R: Dick Loderhose, Con Docherty and Jinny Vanore.

London Heritage Day

Friday, April 21 — An extra half-hour of sleep! The coaches left at 10:00 a.m. for central London, where our first concert of the day was to be at St. Stephen Walbrook church at noon. The church is located a few blocks east of St. Paul's and just south of the Bank of England. It was rebuilt under the direction of Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of 1666.

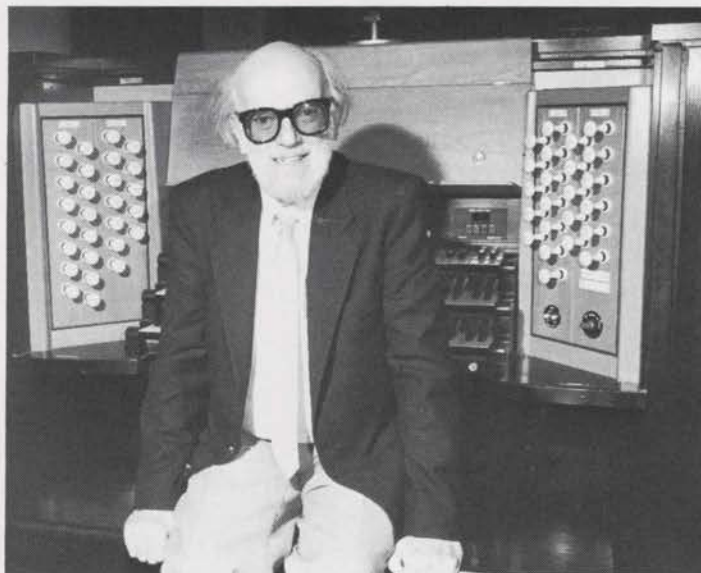
We sat in pews and folding chairs around a huge stone altar in the center of the floor, with the organ console at one side. William Davies was the artist at the three-manual, 51 stop, Hill, Norman & Beard instrument. He played a very interesting program which included "Nola," "Yankee Doodle," and some orchestral transcriptions.

Our next stop was Hampton Court Palace, located adjacent to Bushy Park in the southwest part of central London. We really didn't have enough time here, as there was just too much to see in the palace and gardens. We did manage to get a quick bite to eat before the coaches left for the ride to the South Bank Polytechnic in London. We were able to see parts of the city we hadn't seen before as the coach drivers maneuvered through traffic.

The evening concert was in Edrick Hall of the South Bank Polytechnic. The Cinema Organ Society has installed a 4/21 Wurlitzer in the hall and they maintain it. They have chosen to install an electronic reverberation system, which to our ears was not necessary. The artists for the occasion were Rachael Ward and Carol Williams.



Above: Rachael Ward (left) and Carol Williams at the South Bank Polytechnic Wurlitzer.



William Davies at the console at St. Stephen Walbrook.



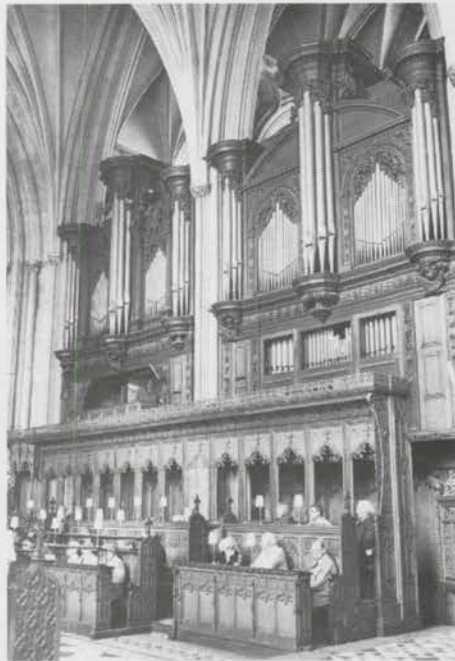


Malcolm Archer, organist at Bristol Cathedral.

At Right: The organ in Bristol Cathedral.



Stephen Dutfield at the Christie in Barry Memorial Hall. In front, L to R: Les Rawle, Marie Watts, Edith Rawle, Mavis Sharp, Judith Rawle and Jean Pitteway.



Edith Rawle and Father Kerr enjoy a dance at Barry.

South Wales Tour

Saturday, April 22 — It was cloudy and rainy as we set off in our coaches for a Welsh weekend. The first stop was at Bristol Cathedral. It was founded in 1140 as St. Augustine's Abbey. The Abbey was dissolved in 1539 and portions of the building demolished. In 1542, the remaining parts of the building became the new Cathedral, on which work has continued almost to this day.

The Cathedral organ was built by Renatus Harris in 1685. It was restored in 1907 by J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd. While it is in need of further restoration now, it has a beautiful sound in the Cathedral. Malcolm Archer, the Cathedral organist, played for us. After the concert we had tea at the Cathedral before leaving for Wales.

We traveled along the river to the Severn Bridge, where we crossed into Wales, then traveled southwest through the beautiful countryside to the coastal town of Barry. Our coach, the Compton, was assigned to the Barry Hotel, a Victorian resort hotel. Our one-night stay there was an interesting experience. (The other coaches were assigned to other hotels.)

We were picked up at 7:00 p.m. for the short ride to Barry Memorial Hall. An excellent dinner was served in the Hall, after which Stephen Dutfield played the 4/15 Christie organ for dancing. A very enjoyable evening. Returned to our hotel at about 11:00 p.m.

Barry Memorial Hall

Sunday, April 23 — Last day of the Safari! After breakfast at our hotel we were taken back to the Memorial Hall, where we listened to a talk by Frank Fowler on the Christie Multiplexing System. During the same period Father Kerr held Mass in the refreshment hall for those who wished to attend. For others who wanted to do some sightseeing, there was available an optional tour of Cardiff Castle. We had a little time for visiting before lunch at 1:00 p.m. The lunch was excellent, with more food than we could possibly eat.

At 3:00 p.m. we were treated to more organ music with Len Rawle at the Christie console, playing both solo numbers and accompanying The Barry Male Voice Choir in several numbers. Oregonian Gary Zenk, in the balcony, provided the solo trumpet for one number, and Martin Harris on piano with Len Rawle on organ played one duet. A very enjoyable final day.

The coaches left at about 6:00 p.m., stopping en route at a motorway rest stop for refreshments, and arriving at our hotels at 9:30. Next morning, we said our goodbyes to those who were leaving and made plans for our own longer stay.

In retrospect . . .

The entire Safari experience was very enjoyable. It was well organized and moved smoothly from one event to another. Food, fun and fellowship were plentiful. The hostesses — Edith Rawle, Judith Rawle, Mavis Sharp, Jean Pitteway and Marie Watts — couldn't have been nicer. So, too, were the coach captains — Barry Niven, Tony Roose, Bill Watts and Mike Clemence. The same three drivers were with us for the entire Safari, and they were excellent. They handled the big coaches smoothly and never got lost. Of course, genial John Sharp was everywhere with his trusty camera. Len and Judith's daughter, Georgina, contributed a little spice to the opening concert at Harrow and the final concert at Barry with her dancing, and lovely Joan Dovener, as compere, gave a nice touch to the activities at Barry. Les Rawle was on hand throughout the Safari, taking care of technical details and helping in many other ways.

We will not attempt a critical appraisal of the artists' efforts, nor of the instruments heard; we will merely state our own impressions. A few of the artists did not do as well as they might have under other circumstances, but, in general, the calibre of the performances was good. It seemed to us that, in some cases, the artists did not adjust the volume of their playing to suit the halls in which they were performing, resulting in sound which was much too loud. Among the theatre organs heard, we found the Wurlitzer and Christie instruments more to our liking than the Comptons. On the other hand, the classical instruments we heard always seemed to be just right for their environments. To sum it up, we would gladly do it again, finances permitting.

The "Compton," the "Christie," and the "Wurlitzer," our three faithful coaches and the three very capable drivers.



Gary Zenk and his trumpet.



Len Rawle gave the final Safari concert on the Barry Christie.

Below: The Barry Male Voice Choir.

