A ROYAL WELCOME TO LIVERPOOL

As we drove to Liverpool City Centre we were greeted by signs “Three Queens”: Cunard’s transatlantic liners: Queen Victoria, Queen Mary 2 and Elizabeth were in port giving the city a May Bank Holiday visit.

As Liverpool welcomed the three majestic liners we were welcomed to Liverpool Anglican Cathedral which towers over the city. There we attended the Bank Holiday recital, given by David Poulter (The Director of Music). He played a brilliant programme which included Elgar’s Sonata in G major and Pierre Cochereau’s Variations on ‘Frere Jacques’ (trans François Lombard), as well as pieces by Bach and Gigout filling the vast space with sound – an amazing experience.

After the recital Professor Ian Tracy, the Cathedral organist led us to the bowels of the Gilbert Scott structure to observe the organ blowing chamber with its almost nautical trunking system which blows the 10,000 or so pipes in this huge organ, He then took us back to the mobile console positioned in the centre of the building, and we were allowed time to play the organ – a dream come true!

The following day the party visited the Roman Catholic Cathedral, only a few minutes from our hotel. This circular building with its imposing lantern stands at the far end of Hope Street (the Anglican Cathedral at the other end.) Originally designed to be the largest Cathedral in Europe in the 1920’s, it was scaled down to accommodate a congregation of 2,000 arranged around the altar with the 102 stop 1967 Walker organ, a very fine instrument, dominating the wall behind the altar. Colin Porter welcomed us to this spectacular building and demonstrated the power of the organ. We were then let loose – with a request for some soft music!

Besides these two visits Colin Porter, a friend of David Warner welcomed us, on the Sunday evening to St Barnabas, Penny Lane to hear and play the first of three large organs in equally large churches in the city. As we were in Willis country our first organ was a large 1914 2 manual Willis with 9 couplers and a large complement of pistons rebuilt by S Reeves of Liverpool. Colin then invited us to his home where we were introduced to a small 2 manual Miller of Cambridge which he had rescued, and was both restoring and enlarging with the help of Mr Reeves, in his garage.

Before visiting “Paddy’s Wigwam”, the affectionate term for the RC Cathedral on the Tuesday, we were taken to St Peter’s Church Woolton (Foster and Andrews) a fine organ in another large church (3 manuals with 60 stops) This organ had a generous amount of pistons and made a fine sound in the church.

Then off to Mossley Hill Parish church a grand building badly damaged in the 2nd World War. Here the 1874 Father Willis had been rebuilt by both Willis, and then in 1980 by S Reeves. It was a large organ with a fine vertical case, it has 66 stops and a large number of pistons. This was a powerful instrument with a Tuba, Trumpet and French Horn on the Choir.

On Wednesday morning members were invited to St Mary’s Church West Derby another imposing edifice, where the Gray and Davison 3 manual organ of 56 stops
was available to play. Again we received a warm welcome and were invited to have lunch at the church.

I am sure that all of us who went on this trip organised by David and Colin will have enjoyed the experience of playing superb organs with such lavish electrical equipment, in a fine city where we received a warm welcome wherever we went. Another feature of the trip was the communal meals we had together: both Chinese and British!

Keith Brown