

Summer Outing, June 2018: Selby Abbey and Beverley Minster.



A new Mercedes Benz minibus transported the 14 members in comfort directly to Selby Abbey on a fine, not too hot, day. Arriving before the time we were due to be greeted, we had chance to explore the Abbey, see the new mobile nave console that came from Manchester Cathedral and have refreshments in the excellent café.

The original organ was on the east side of a wall that separated nave from choir, before being moved to the fourth bay in the south side of the choir. Builders involved were Booth of Wakefield, Forster & Andrews of Hull and Conacher of Huddersfield, being rebuilt and enlarged by Binns of Bramley, and further rebuilt by Compton in 1906. One has to wonder why there was such a succession of different builders.

However, in that same year fire completely destroyed the instrument and it has been suggested that it was caused by an organ builder's candle. The present organ was built in 1909 by Hill, Norman & Beard, rebuilt by them between 1947 and 1950, with further work by John T. Jackson in 1975, the organ now being situated in both sides of the choir, just behind the screen.

Meantime, in 1961, Fernando Germani made a recording here for EMI. Apparently, he had been engaged by them to make a recording on an English organ but was only informed it would be at Selby Abbey a few hours before. The first LP (remember those?) included Franck's *Piece heroique*, Liszt's *BACH*, Reger's *Hallelujah* and Widor's *Toccata from the 5th Symphony*. Germani was organist from 1948 for a short time at St. Peter's Rome and was renowned for his ability to very quickly (i.e., in a few minutes) memorise music, almost always playing from memory.



The organ as it now stands was rebuilt by Principal Pipe Organs of York in 2016 and is a fine four manual instrument of 68 speaking stops. It is a credit to Geoffrey Coffin's voicing that the stops sound so well and work together wonderfully. From the console, however, it is almost impossible to judge the effect in the nave. The very loud great reeds and many pedal pipes speak into the nave whilst most of the organ is contained within the confines of the choir. One could say that the great mixture sounds too loud and bright at the console but, in the nave, it only adds a little colour. Of course, an organ builder can never remedy these issues whilst the organ remains in its current position.

Several members played the organ and had a wonderful time, the acoustic being not too big for playing small, dainty pieces.

We went our own ways for lunch, most people taking it in the café of a department store next to the Abbey, and then it was on to Beverley.

Beverley Minster is a wonderfully light, spacious and lofty building and is in a very fine state of repair and decoration. We were met by a tour guide who showed us around the Minster. Apparently, the great east window, possessing some of the greatest amount of medieval glass in the country, was replaced in the wrong order, so causing tops of some figures to be separated from their legs. I was occupied taking photographs from the west end of the nave when the Director of Music, Robert Poyser, began demonstrating the organ, stop by stop. I was astonished by the clarity of even the softest stops, yet so far away, and the way that they seemed to hang in the air. The acoustic is one of the most wonderful that I have experienced.



The organ of 75 speaking stops at Beverley Minster stands on top of the wooden choir screen, designed by Gilbert Scott in 1880, within the organ case by Arthur Hill of 1916, speaking equally into nave and choir. It was originally built by Snetzler in 1767, and the original stops made by him are denoted on the drawstop heads at the four-manual console. William Hill rebuilt the instrument in 1884, and Hill, Norman & Beard in 1963. Some tonal improvements were made in 2015.

Several organists played this magnificent instrument and, I'm sure, all will treasure that experience. Finally, Robert Poyser played a truly astounding improvisation ("just making it up", he said!) on Noel Nouvelet, during which he must have used every single stop as an individual and just about the lot together.

This was a great day out and our many thanks go to Sheila and Edward for organising it and for the Abbey and Minster authorities for being so hospitable and welcoming.

John Chapman.