



HLF Willis Pipe Organ Restoration and Reach-out project

## Willis Organ History Research Plan

### Introduction

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has given substantial funding for six key purposes. We are being funded not only to restore the organ, but also to extend knowledge and appreciation of the organ and its history as widely as possible. We must evaluate our work and report back regularly to the HLF about the progress we are making.

One of the six key purposes is to carry out Research on the history of the Stony Stratford Willis organ and record its history online.

### Research Willis organ history and record online

The history of our organ has never been officially recorded and thus there has been no basis for educational activity. Our project includes the systematic collection and analysis of documentary source material which describes the building and evolution of the organ and its care and usage in different ownerships. We have identified records and information sources in Edinburgh, in the Willis archive, and in local records; and we know that there are both written and oral memories since the 1960s of local people's engagement with the organ.

All the source material we can collect will be included in a Digital Information Source available online. We will use a 'timeline' structure to show what was happening with our organ and what was happening in related aspects of society (social, innovative technology, etc) at that time.

The Digital Information Source will be used by our Learning Resource groups to develop materials, in audio-visual, print and web-based formats; to support a variety of learning events for audiences with different interests.

### Schedule of Research activities

Research will be carried out from April 2014 until March 2015. The activities involved include the following actions:

1. Upload the research plan and a research volunteer form to the website.
2. Send messages to contacts outlining the plan for research – invite them to volunteer help via email or via a bespoke contact form on the website.
3. Have the Pipe organ display at the next Wolverton & District Archaeological & Historical Society meeting; take research volunteer forms for completion.
4. Use concept of the organ contextual timeline to engage interest.
5. Visit other local groups to give a short presentation about the project, take research volunteer forms for completion.
6. Place printed copies of the Research volunteer form in St Mary & St Giles Church.
7. Contact all the volunteers via email and discuss with them which aspects of the research they would like to do and when they can fit it in.

8. Provide research volunteers with the history we already have and the specific focus of their research.
9. Anna Page to visit archives in Edinburgh during May to investigate the minute books, following on from the work started by David Scrutton. If any other volunteers are able to visit the Records Office in Edinburgh, preferably as part of a planned visit for holiday or work, they can help scrutinise the minute books and search for newspaper articles about music events in St George's, Charlotte Square.
10. Examine Willis archive and BIOS archive for other Willis organs built in the 1882 period – what percentage were for primarily secular use (concert halls, civic buildings) rather than religious use. Do similar comparisons for the other major periods of change to the SMSG Willis organ (1896, 1932 and 1967).
11. Set up Google document online which shows the progress of research – each volunteer to be given permission to edit the document (which will be visible on the website). Any researcher who prefers not to edit the online document will be asked to send their findings directly to Anna via email or by letter.
12. When requesting copies of records, ensure that permission is sought and obtained to use the copy in the online archive and exhibition. Keep receipt for payment for copies and pass these to Project team for reimbursing and for HLF budget maintenance.
13. Oral history records of the organ in use - seek recollections of the organ in use and arrange to record and transcribe interviews.
14. Keep in regular contact with volunteers and provide highlights of discoveries made via email to encourage everyone.
15. Make research records available to the Learning Resources group as soon as possible to assist the planning and design of Learning resources and Educational programme.
16. Update the history story of the organ based on findings and upload this to the organ fund website.
17. Arrange a volunteer researchers meeting in July to discuss progress.
18. Arrange a history research event for presenting findings to the public in September 2015 (as part of Heritage Open Days weekend).
19. Provide the organ builders with the research information discovered so far when they come to remove the organ for restoration.
20. While the organ is being dismantled and restored, a photographic and video record will be made of the work by volunteers and by the organ builders. When the organ builders discover anything of historical significance during the restoration, they will be asked to record it (by contacting Anna Page with details and taking photos if a project photographer isn't visiting at the time). This will inform any further avenues of investigation which might be worth pursuing.
21. Arrange a volunteer researchers meeting in January 2015 to discuss any further progress or potential leads, and decide whether the research period needs to be extended by a couple of months.
22. Invite all volunteer researchers to re-launch event(s).

## Research Budget

Funding is available for reasonable travel expenses to Aylesbury Records Office, Edinburgh Records Office and if a visit to the BIOS archives in Birmingham is necessary. There is also the possibility of examining the Ledgers at Willis in Liverpool. Depending on what is discovered in the various archives some of the budget will also be allocated to paying for digital copies or photocopies of particular records.

## Research routes

### Edinburgh

Edinburgh – to find out organists, major concerts, social history of the Willis in Edinburgh  
National Archives of Scotland (estimate of up to 8 days):

- Minute books for St George's Edinburgh (See David Scrutton's initial investigations during a visit to Archive office in Edinburgh. Checked Autumn 2013 email about access online but no plans to make minute books available online.)
- Newspapers for articles about concerts
- Newspapers for articles about organists

Visit plans:

- look for decision to commission the organ and arrival of Willis at St George's - anytime from 1879
- look for reference to work in Willis Ledger (we have copies of 1882, 1896 and 1914 ledger entries)
- look for reference to William Bowie appointment and for appointments of other organists
- look for reference to St George's church Singers/Choir
- The Scotsman report on organ pipes stolen
- Visit the former church to take photos of the exterior of the building (it is a records office but is not open to the public, though it is worth asking if special permission for a visit can be granted).

The Edinburgh Society of Organists (founded 1913)

<http://www.edinburghorganists.org/Pages/History.aspx> will advise if any of the organists who played the organ during its time in Scotland were members of their society (twitter discussion). Organists to investigate include:

- Letter from J L Hope (Edinburgh organist) found in SMSG Parish Records Box – dated 22 May 1969 (transcribe for clarity)
- Personal visit to the address in Edinburgh of J L Hope who played organ in Edinburgh. Letter sent September 2013 but no reply. Contact Edinburgh Society of Organists to ask if they have a record of this organist as a member.

St Andrews & St George's West Church, Edinburgh <http://www.stagw.org.uk/about-us/history-and-heritage/> have Kirk Session records and may have some older parishioners who still recall the Willis Pipe Organ in St George's Church before the two churches combined. Arrange to visit this church during an archive research visit to Edinburgh.

### Aylesbury

Aylesbury Records office – to seek information about installation of Willis in Stony Stratford

- SMSG minutes (1960s onwards)
- Papers regarding restoration of SMSG church after fire (some of these are probably duplicates of what is in the Parish Records box)

## Online/email/telephone/letter enquiries

- Starmer Shaw – already explored several avenues, but find out whether BIOS has more in their archive
- Letter from Canon Davidson (2012), Northampton (scan it)
- BIOS archives – anything else apart from what we've already got (contact is Chris Kearn)
- Contact a retired Willis enthusiast on South Coast (apparently Fr Ross was given his name by Bishop Alan)
- Richard Webb at Finchingfield who recalls Parkers Pipes and doing work for Willis (see letter)
- The National Pipe organ Register allows search on Willis and date range. David Scrutton has started searching 'Willis' 1850 to 1859 then 'Willis' 1860 to 1869. Two objectives: try to quantify all Willis organs up to III generation; get more info on Willis III in Parish Churches. Maybe this information already exists and may be more up to date than NPOR.

## Liverpool

- Visit Henry Willis & Sons Ltd to examine their archive for any further details about the Willis organ and to discover which other organs were built or restored in key periods (1882, 1896, 1932 and 1967).

## Stony Stratford

- Go through the scanned records from the Parish Records box and collate all the information which mentions the organ.
- Search through all the published books of Stony Stratford history for any mention of the organ.
- Examine minute books from 1970s onwards for any reference to the organ and musical events in SMSG