

George Frideric Handel was born in Germany, lived in Italy for four years, and made London his home for the last fifty years of his life. With musical traditions firmly established in many European cities, why did Handel choose London? As today's residents and tourists are aware, London is one of the finest cultural centers in the world. We can only speculate that Handel had the same feeling about the city when he arrived in 1710. Although many of the landmarks associated with Handel's life in London have disappeared over the intervening centuries, it is hoped that this guide will assist all music lovers in retracing some of Handel's footsteps.

Part I  
A Guide to the Past

Setting the Stage...

Handel's London did not have the convenience of an efficient Underground system and red double-decker busses. Streets were unpaved, muddy, and it was not until 1737 that pedestrians and carriages were separated by posts erected on the major roads. The area surrounding the city's most prestigious theater in Haymarket was just that—with 1300 hay wagons on market days to fuel the city's equine transport system.<sup>1</sup>

The half century which Handel lived here was a time of expansion, development, and opportunity for artistic and business endeavors. London in 1710 was a compact city: the western limit was Bond Street, north of Oxford Street were hamlets of Marylebone, Paddington, and Tottenham Court, and the area above Piccadilly consisted of meadow and farmland. By 1750, many fashionable squares had been built in the area bordered by Oxford Street, Hyde Park, and the Thames.

London had a royal court and a long flourishing tradition of church music; enthusiastic amateur performances were common in taverns and private homes. And so when the twenty-five year old Handel arrived on the scene, with his career well under way as a result of his years in

**Schaub currently resides in Rockford, Illinois. For the past seventeen years she has taught music in the American Schools of Beirut, Lebanon; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; and London.**

# A Guide to Handel's London

by Carol J. Schaub



25 Brook Street, London—Handel's residence from 1723-1759.

Italy, he found London to be a center of intellectual and cultural activity. Society was receptive to new musical ideas (especially Italian opera, introduced in 1705), and support from the aristocracy offered some measure of financial security. Since the death of Purcell some fifteen years earlier, the thriving cultural environment had been without a musical leader. London was ready for Handel—and he was right for London.

A Place to Live . . .

During his first visit to London, Handel apparently stayed with friends. After a brief trip to Germany, he returned in 1712, and the wealthy Earl of Burlington became one of his most important patrons. Although contemporary writings give little information about Handel's early years in London, it seems that he stayed at *Burlington House* from 1713-1716. During this time, Handel established his reputation as a composer of Italian opera.

In 1717 he received an invitation from James Brydges (later Duke of Chandos) to become composer-in-

residence at *Cannons*, Brydges' grand house near Edgeware in Middlesex. Handel's first biographer, John Mainwaring, wrote in 1760 that *Cannons* was "a place which was then in all its glory, but remarkable for having much more of art than nature, and much more cost than art."<sup>2</sup> Handel stayed at *Cannons* until 1719 when his love for the theater and the newly established Royal Academy lured him back to London.

In 1723, Handel moved to the house at 25 *Brook Street* where he lived until his death on 14 April 1759. It was in a neighborhood inhabited by "people of quality"<sup>3</sup> and Handel must have been quite comfortable there. The parish church was *St. George's, Hanover Square*. Although there is no evidence that any of Handel's music was ever performed there during his lifetime, he was a regular worshipper at the church and records show that he rented a place in one of the pews from 1755.

A Place to Perform . . . Theaters

The *King's* (originally *Queen's*) *Theater* on Haymarket provided a venue for more than forty of Handel's operas, oratorios, and other stage works. It was here Handel's first opera, *Rinaldo*, was performed in 1711. *Rinaldo* was an instant success, and Handel composed three more Italian operas in the next few years. These operas were revived at the *King's Theater* until 1717; for a variety of reasons there were no opera seasons during the years that Handel was at *Cannons*.

The Royal Academy was established in 1719 to provide Italian opera for London's cultured society, and Handel was called upon to produce a great number of works for the *King's Theater*. The productions were of high quality, and the fame of the Royal Academy was widespread. In spite of in-house bickering and quarrels, the Academy was an enormous success.

However, competition from other attractions eventually led to the

financial downfall of the Royal Academy. John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728) in English opened up the world of theater to the middle class; audiences flocked to the theater at *Lincoln's Inn Fields* to see this new ballad opera. A revival of Shakespeare as well as popular farces and comedies also contributed to the decline of public interest in Italian opera. And so, in 1729, the Royal Academy was declared bankrupt.

In an effort to preserve Italian opera as an art form, arrangements were soon made for Handel and his manager, Heidegger, to take over the King's Theater for a further five years. Handel composed seven new operas for this venture, but also turned to oratorios in English to attract audiences away from his competitors. The oratorios were received with enthusiasm and an added feature was the introduction of organ concertos played by Handel between the acts. A rival opera company, the Opera of the Nobility, finally forced Handel out of the King's Theater in 1734. He moved his productions to the new theater at *Covent Garden* until the Opera of the Nobility collapsed in 1737.

After two more seasons back at King's Theater, Handel was again obliged to move—this time to the less prestigious theater at *Lincoln's Inn Fields*. Opera continued to be Handel's favored form, but audiences became increasingly indifferent and performances were poorly received. Handel directed his final opera, *Deidamia*, at *Lincoln's Inn Fields* in 1741. It was a failure, as was his other operatic production of the season; Handel got the message and reluctantly abandoned Italian opera.

Disillusioned with London audiences, Handel must have welcomed an invitation to give a season in Dublin. He was warmly received by Dublin's society, and presented a season of English oratorios and odes. The "new Grand Oratorio"<sup>4</sup> *Messiah* (which had been composed at his Brook Street house in twenty-four days) concluded his successful nine-month visit to Dublin.

Back in London, Handel's winter seasons at *Covent Garden* (and occasionally the King's Theater) were firmly established as he continued to produce one or two new oratorios each year. These seasons were

generally well supported by subscription, but always subject to the whims of London's fickle aristocratic audiences. During the 1747 season, Handel felt that his aristocratic patrons had failed him and so appealed to the middle class. The general public welcomed the dignity and seriousness of Handel's music and became his most enthusiastic supporters.

By 1750, a Lenten season of English oratorios was a regular feature at *Covent Garden*, and always concluded with a performance of *Messiah*. With the onset of blindness, Handel was forced to seek assistance with the management and conducting of his performances. Revivals of his music continued as his former pupil, John Christopher Smith, Jr., successfully carried on the oratorio seasons during Handel's last years and following his death.

#### *A Place to Perform . . . Churches and the Royal Court*

Although the bulk of Handel's musical output was theatrical, his career was interspersed with royal commissions for music in the private chapel and for ceremonial occasions. This pattern was evident by 1713 when Queen Anne asked Handel to write a *Te Deum* for a thanksgiving service to celebrate the Peace of Utrecht. Handel was

also commissioned to write a "Birth-day Ode for Queen Anne," but there is no evidence that it was ever performed for her, due to the Queen's poor health.<sup>5</sup> The *Utrecht Te Deum* was first performed at the recently completed *St. Paul's Cathedral* in July 1713.

Handel was very interested in the organ at *St. Paul's* during his early years in London, and would attract large audiences as he played it after evensong. He and his acquaintances would then go to the Queen's Arms tavern in *St. Paul's Churchyard* where a harpsichord was available for patrons.

In 1717 a royal boating party provided the occasion for the *Water Music*. The Thames was an important thoroughfare in the early eighteenth century, and there are many accounts of river parties accompanied by music. King George I and his party followed a route from *Whitehall* to *Chelsea* (where they disembarked for supper) and back to *Whitehall*.

During his residency at *Cannons*, Handel wrote the eleven "Chandos Anthems" for the chapel services at the nearby church of *St. Lawrence, Whitchurch*. The chapel at *Cannons* was not completed until 1720. *Acis and Galatea* and *Esther* were also composed during this time; these "masques" were revised in 1732 and appeared as Handel's first English



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oratorios. It is curious to note that these early efforts at English musical drama were laid to rest for nearly fifteen years as Handel returned to Italian opera.

Meanwhile, the royal commissions continued. There had always been a close association between Handel and the royal family, and he was appointed "Composer of Music to the Chapel Royal" in 1723. Handel's naturalization as a British subject in 1727 made it possible for him to compose the *Coronation Anthems* for George II. The coronation took place in *Westminster Abbey*, and although by all accounts the service was disorganized and the anthems "in confusion,"<sup>6</sup> the music has been performed at every British coronation since.

George II proved to be Handel's life-long supporter and a steady patron during the difficult theater seasons. In return, Handel continued to provide music for state occasions, and for services in Westminster Abbey and the *Chapel Royal*. The grand celebration for the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ended in a well-known fiasco. The structure erected in Green Park for an ambitious display of fireworks caught fire and burned to the ground in the middle of the show. This mishap must have at-

tracted more attention than Handel's *Music for the Royal Firework*.

#### *A Place to Perform . . . And Charity*

A glimpse at Handel's commitments to various charities reveals his kindhearted nature. The first performance of *Messiah* in Dublin in 1742 was given in aid of three charitable causes, and by this time Handel's generosity was well known in London. His finances were never stable, and yet he was always ready to help those less fortunate. In 1728 a Fund for the Support of Decayed Musicians (now the Royal Society of Musicians) was established, and Handel was an original subscriber. He gave annual benefit performances for the Fund, and left the charity ☆1000 in his will.

The *Foundling Hospital* was established by Thomas Coram in 1739 for the maintenance and education of abandoned children. This charitable institution also benefited from Handel's patronage throughout the last ten years of his life. Annual *Messiah* performances, other fund-raising concerts, and the gift of an organ all reflect the composer's good will and support of this worthy cause. The *Foundling Hospital* performances were respon-

sible for the ultimate acceptance of *Messiah* in London, and Handel left the Hospital a score of *Messiah* to ensure continuation of the benefit performances after his death.

Mainwaring ends his *Memoirs* by referring to Handel as an "illustrious Foreigner."<sup>7</sup> Thankfully, this "Foreigner" made England his home and shared his gift of music with the world.

#### *Part II A Guide for Today*

Many of the places associated with Handel's life in London have long since disappeared or been greatly altered. However, some buildings have survived, sites exist, and with some imagination the visitor may recapture the essence of London in Handel's day.

25 *Brook Street* was Handel's residence for more than fifty years. Records show that when he moved in, he had a short term lease at £60 per year. The house stands just west of Bond Street and is marked with a blue plaque. The upper floor was added in the late nineteenth century and the ground floor was converted to a shop in 1906. Between the two world wars there was interest in restoring the house and making it a Handel Museum, but there was not enough financial support and the scheme was abandoned.

*Burlington House*, on Piccadilly, is the present home of the Royal Academy of Art. When Handel first stayed here, it was a fairly plain house on a large property which extended towards Cavendish Square. The house was remodelled and refaced between 1712-1720 and further modified in later years. Lord Burlington was a patron of the arts, and it was here that Handel probably enjoyed the company of the intellectuals of the day.

*Cannons* was demolished shortly after James Brydges' death because its upkeep was too expensive for the heirs. The remains were sold for building materials, and its treasures were auctioned in 1747. Today nearby Canons Park, and local streets bearing names such as Handel Way and Chandos Crescent recall an earlier time. The area is located west of Edgware Road between Canons Park and Edgware, about ten miles north of London in Middlesex.

The use of candles for illumination in theaters presented a very real fire hazard. Therefore, it is not sur-

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Interior view—Church of St. Lawrence, Whitchurch, Canons Park.

prising that theaters often burned to the ground and then were rebuilt on the same site.

*King's Theater*, on the site of Her Majesty's Theater, Haymarket, was the venue for most of Handel's operas. The original Queen's Theater (after Anne) was built in 1704, and was renamed King's Theater in 1714 for George I. The theater of Handel's time was London's opera house during the eighteenth century, and was destroyed by fire in 1789.

*Covent Garden Theater* was completed in 1732, but not used exclusively for operas until the nineteenth century. The first theater was modelled after the Opera House (King's) in Haymarket, but was intended to be more magnificent. This theater burned down in 1808, and today's Royal Opera House is the third on this site at Bow Street.

*Lincoln's Inn Fields*, the theater Handel knew, was on the south side of the square, on Portugal Street. It was the third on the site, and had been rebuilt from a tennis court in 1714. After it had outlived its usefulness, it became a warehouse and was torn down in 1848.

The visitor wishing to see the churches associated with Handel's life in London will find them still standing and virtually unaltered.

*Church of St. Lawrence, Whitchurch*, is the local parish church. James Brydges had it rebuilt, incor-

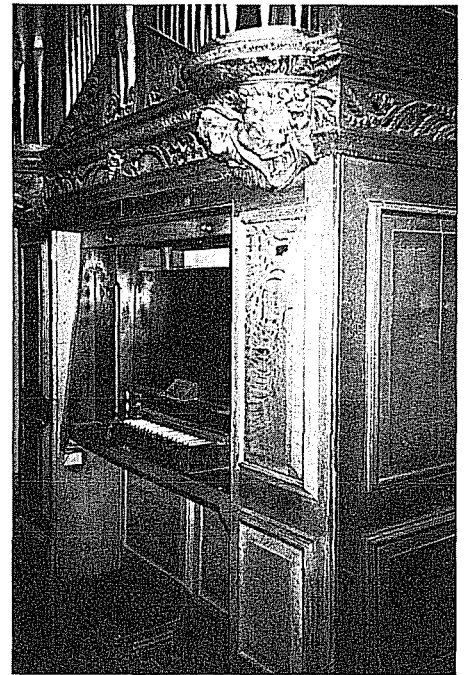
porating the thirteenth century tower, and it was in use by 1716. The church has undergone recent restoration, and the paintings and Grinling Gibbons woodwork appear much as they were in Handel's day. The organ has been enlarged several times, and the new console of 1913 has a stop which is connected to the original pipes. The original keyboard, with three octaves and six stops, is still in situs; Handel probably played it since the organ at Cannons was not built until the chapel was completed in 1720. A monument to the Duke of Chandos, and his family vault, are located in the mausoleum. This is the site of the charming but fictitious story about the blacksmith who inspired the "Harmonious Blacksmith." A marker at his grave in the churchyard perpetuates the legend.

*St. George's, Hanover Square* was the parish church during Handel's residence in Brook Street. It was completed in 1725, and although he apparently had little connection with the musical activities of the church, he did compose a theme for an extemporization by organ candidates there.

*St. James's Palace* is closed to the public, but the chapels where Handel's royal commissions were performed for weddings and funerals are open for services. The *Chapel Royal* (sixteenth-century Tudor) has services October through Good Friday, and the *Queen's Chapel* (1625 Inigo Jones), Easter through July.

*St. Paul's Cathedral* had recently been completed when Handel first arrived. The original organ stood across the entrance to the choir as a screen; it was rebuilt, divided, and placed at the sides in 1870. Handel seems to have been associated with St. Paul's only during his early years in London. However, he employed its choir to supplement that of the Chapel Royal for later state occasions.

*Westminster Abbey*—In his will, Handel wished to be buried privately at Westminster Abbey. However, it was a grand funeral with at least



Original organ - ca. 1716—Church of St. Lawrence, Whitchurch, Canons Park.

3000 people in attendance. His monument in the "poet's corner" of the south transept was unveiled in 1762; the sculptor, Roubiliac, took a death mask of Handel, and this may have been the basis for this monu-

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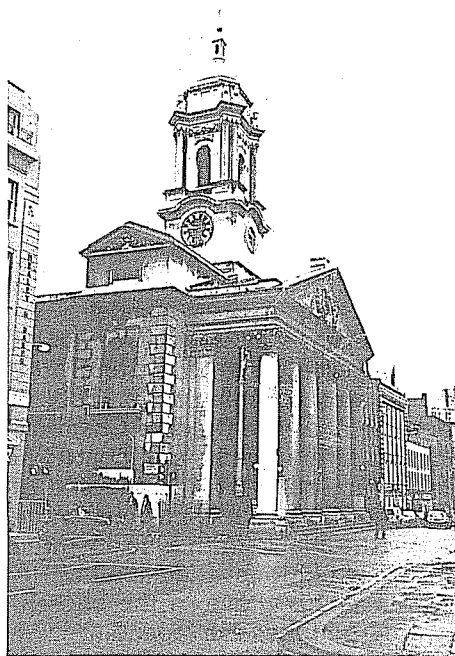
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ment. It is interesting that the year of birth is inscribed as MDCLXXXIV, a year earlier than is documented in the baptismal register of the Liebfrauenkirche in Halle, Germany. This confusion may result from the fact that England used the Old Style (Julian) calendar until 1752. This also may explain why the first Handel Commemoration (in Westminster Abbey for the centenary of his 1685 birth) was held in 1784.<sup>6</sup>

To complete a tour of Handel's London, two sites remain. These locations were the scene of Handel's performances in his later years, away from the world of the theater and church.

*Green Park* is part of London's oldest royal park. Charles II added these acres to St. James's Park in 1667. The proximity to the royal residence at St. James's Palace made it an ideal setting for the "Royal Fireworks" of 1749.

*Foundling Hospital* is now known as the Thomas Coram Foundation, after its founder. The hospital and chapel for which Handel raised



St. George's Church, Hanover Square, London.

funds was torn down in 1926. Today the Foundation continues to provide for children with special needs. Treasures displayed at their offices at 40 Brunswick Square (the site of the old Foundling Hospital) include the three-manual keyboard of the original organ presented and played by Handel, and a terracotta bust by Roubiliac. The "fair copy" of *Messiah* (score, vocal, and orchestral parts) and the conducting score of the "Foundling Anthem" are also on display. Both are in the handwriting of Handel's scribe, John C. Smith, Jr., with annotations by the composer.

### Manuscripts

Handel bequeathed his "musick books" to his old friend and scribe John Christopher Smith, Sr., and he passed them to his son in 1763. Smith, Jr., gave them to the Royal Family in the 1770's in gratitude for a pension from George III. Seven volumes (mainly containing rough sketches) went to the Founder's Collection in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The remaining volumes were kept in royal residences until they were deposited on permanent loan in the British Museum in 1911. Queen Elizabeth II donated the collection to the Royal Music Library in 1957.

These autographs had been bound in eighty-eight volumes since the time of George III, with portions of large works distributed throughout several volumes. These were broken up and rebound in the 1920's in order to bring whole works together, resulting in the present set of ninety-seven volumes of autographs. The volumes contain ninety percent of all of Handel's surviving autographs and constitute the largest collection of autographs of any famous composer housed in one institution anywhere in the world.<sup>9</sup>

Conveniently for researchers, Handel dated most of his manuscripts. Curiously, in 1739 he started using astrological signs to denote the days of the week. The fact that he developed the practice of dating each Act or Part provides invaluable information about his work habits.

The collection of manuscripts in

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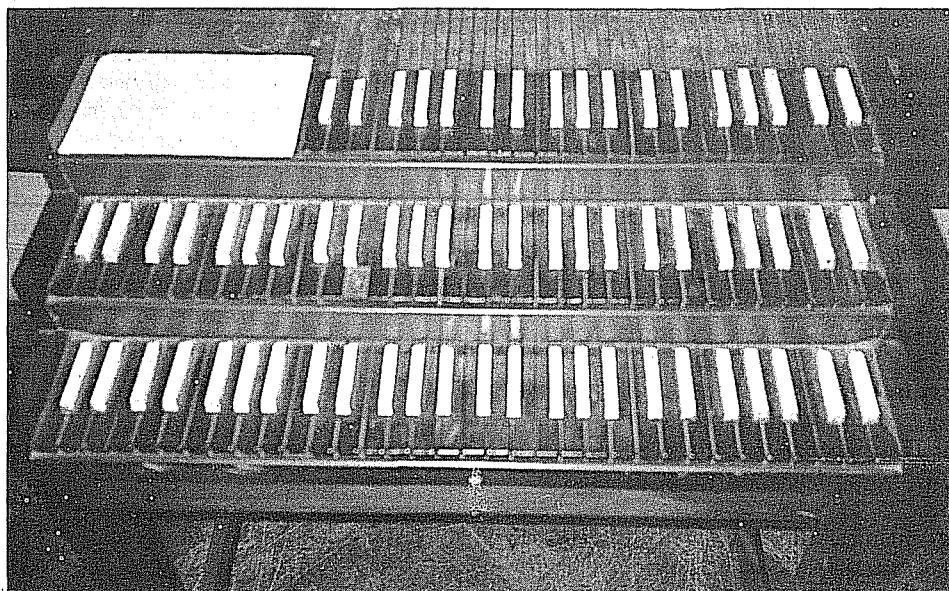
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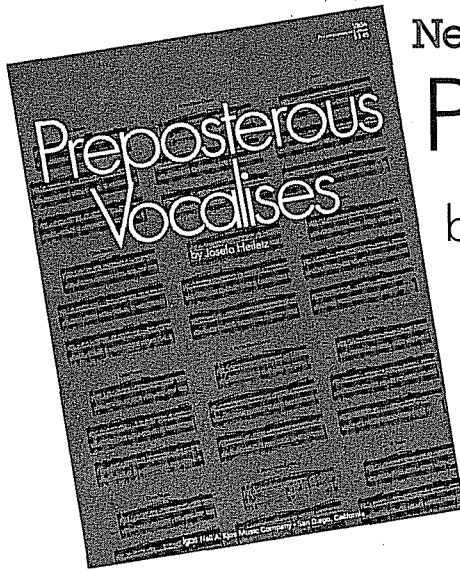
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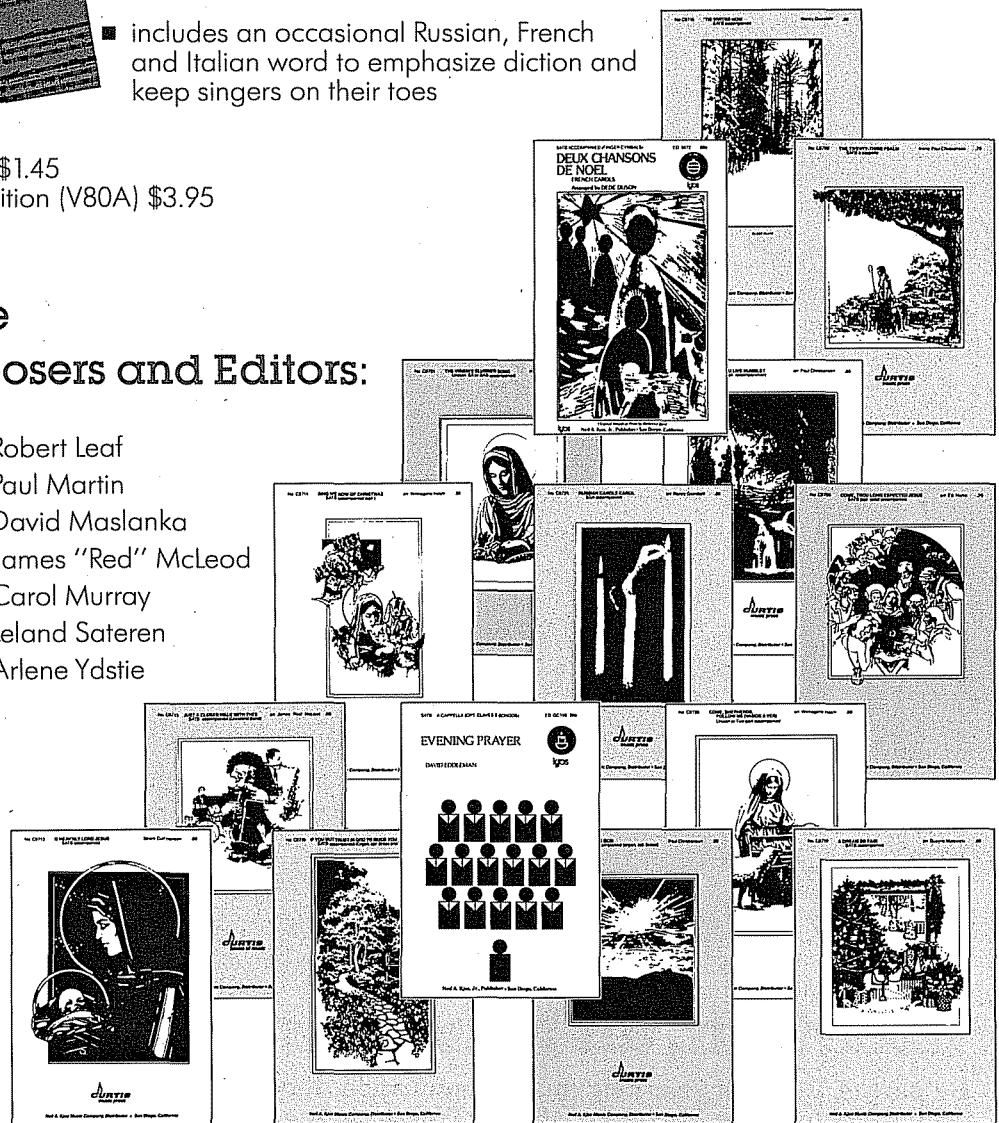
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the British Library (at the British Museum) is kept in the Music Library. With a pass to the Reading Room and a letter of reference from a university or other research institution, it is possible to study the manuscripts.

### Portraits and Monuments

Many likenesses of Handel have found their way into private collections, but there are some which are readily accessible to the general public besides those at the Coram Foundation and Westminster Abbey.

**National Portrait Gallery:** The portrait by Hudson (1756) with *Messiah* score is the only one on show. Other portraits and a bust are kept in reserve and can be seen by special arrangement.

**Victoria and Albert Museum:** A statue by Roubiliac (1738) depicts Handel in casual attire. This statue was erected in Vauxhall Gardens during Handel's lifetime, and after the Gardens were demolished, it stood in Novello's music shop. The statue was sold to the V & A in 1965.

Additional portraits exist in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Bodleian Library, Oxford; Royal Society of Musicians, London; and in the royal collections in Kensington Palace and Buckingham Palace.

### ... And More

For the true Handelian who wishes to indulge in a pursuit of trivia:

**Handel Street** in Bloomsbury, just north of the Coram Foundation.

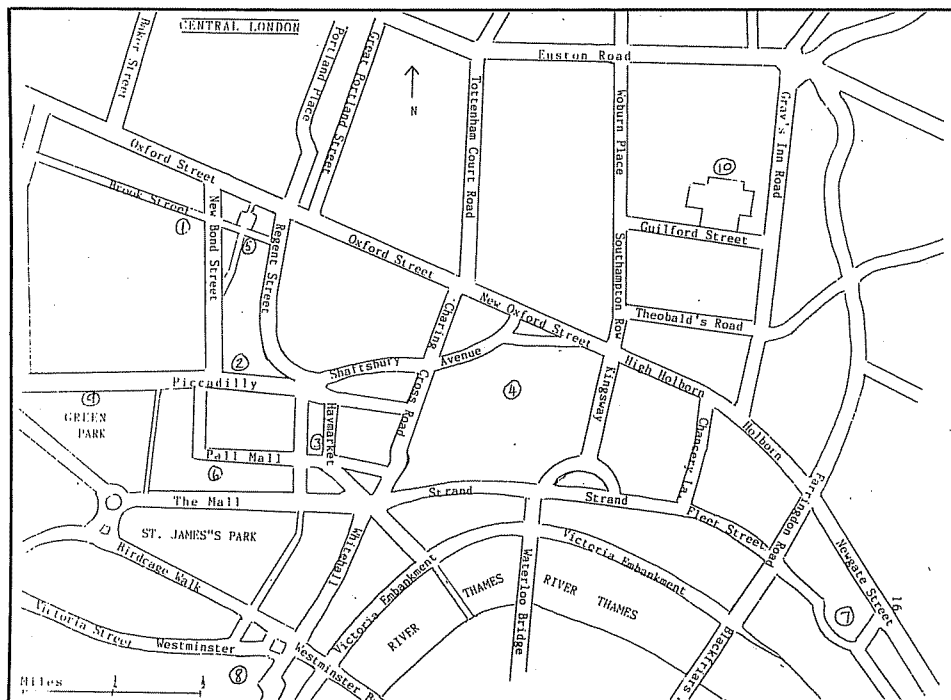
**St. Andrew's Church, Holborn** The organ case is from the organ presented to Coram by Handel.

**Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Holborn Viaduct**—organ supposedly played by Handel.

**Sir John Soane Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields**—houses an eclectic collection. It contains a plaster medallion of Handel and Hogarth's "The Levee" with harpsichordist reputed to be Handel.

**Cannons Treasures:** St. John's Church, Hampstead—wrought iron gates in churchyard. Trinity Church, Gosport—purchased the "Jordan" organ from the chapel. It can still be seen, bearing the Chandos crest. Victoria and Albert Museum—Gibbons' "St. Stephen" from library.

**Three Choirs Festival** (Worcester, Gloucester, Hereford)—dates from 1724 and is the world's oldest sur-



viving music festival. By the 1750's, Handel's music was part of the regular repertoire, and his oratorios dominated the festival by 1780.

### For Further Research

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
 Guildhall Library, London  
 Royal College of Music, London  
 Royal Society of Musicians, London

It is hoped that the reader has enjoyed this tour, whether it was the walking or armchair variety. Perhaps it will lead to a fuller understanding of the life and times of George Frideric Handel.

### Map References (Nearest Underground Station)

1. 25 Brook Street (Bond Street or Oxford Circus)
2. Burlington House (Green Park or Piccadilly Circus)
3. King's Theater (Piccadilly Circus)
4. Covent Garden Theater (Covent Garden)
5. St. George's, Hanover Square (Oxford Circus)
6. Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace (Green Park or Piccadilly Circus)
7. St. Paul's Cathedral (St. Paul's)
8. Westminster Abbey (St. James's Park or Westminster)
9. Green Park (Green Park)
10. Thomas Coram Foundation (Russell Square)

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YEAR	TITLE	TYPE	VENUE
1711	Rinaldo	opera	Queen's Theater
1712	Il Pastor Fido	opera	Queen's Theater
1713	Tesco	opera	Queen's Theater
1713	"Birthday Ode for Queen Anne"	ode	no known perf.
1713	Utrecht "Te Deum"	anthem	St. Paul's Cathedral
1715	Amadigi	opera	King's Theater
1717	"Water Music"	orchestral	Thames River
1717-18	"Chandos Anthems"	anthems	St. Lawrence Whit-church
1718	Acis and Galatea (revised 1732)	masque	Cannons
1718	Esther (revised 1732)	masque	probably Cannons
1720	Radamisto (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1721	Floridante (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1723	Ottone (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1723	Flavio (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1724	Julius Caesar (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1724	Tamerlano (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1725	Rodelinda (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1726	Scipione (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1726	Alessandro (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1727	Admeto (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1727	"Coronation Anthems"	anthem	Westminster Abbey
1727	Ricardo Primo (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1728	Siroe (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1728	Tolomeo (Royal Academy)	opera	King's Theater
1729	Lotario	opera	King's Theater
1730	Partenope	opera	King's Theater
1731	Poro	opera	King's Theater
1732	Ezio	opera	King's Theater
1732	Sosarme	opera	King's Theater
1733	Orlando	opera	King's Theater
1733	Deborah	oratorio	King's Theater
1733	Athalia	oratorio	King's Theater
1734	Arianna	opera	King's Theater
1734	Wedding Anthem "This is the Day"	anthem	Queen's Chapel, St. James
1735	Ariodante	opera	Covent Garden
1735	Alcina	opera	Covent Garden
1735-6	Six Concertos, organ or harpsichord	orchestral	Covent Garden
1736	"Alexander's Feast"	ode	Covent Garden
1736	Atalanta	opera	Covent Garden
1737	Arminio	opera	Covent Garden
1737	Guistino	opera	Covent Garden
1737	Il Trionfo del Tempo & dello Verità	oratorio	Covent Garden
1737	Berenice	opera	Covent Garden
1737	"Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline"	anthem	Westminster Abbey
1738	Faramondo	opera	King's Theater
1738	Serse	opera	King's Theater
1739	Saul	oratorio	King's Theater
1739	Israel in Egypt	oratorio	King's Theater
1739	"Ode for St. Cecelia's Day"	anthem	Lincoln's Inn Fields
1739	Twelve Grand Concertos	orchestral	Lincoln's Inn Fields
1740	L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato	oratorio	Lincoln's Inn Fields
1740	Imeneo	opera	Lincoln's Inn Fields
1741	Deidamia	opera	Lincoln's Inn Field's
1742	Messiah	oratorio	Dublin
1743	Samson	oratorio	Covent Garden
1743	Dettingen "Te Deum"	anthem	Chapel Royal, St. James
1744	Semele	oratorio	Covent Garden
1744	Joseph and His Brethren	oratorio	Covent Garden
1745	Hercules	oratorio	King's Theater
1745	Belshazzar	oratorio	King's Theater
1746	Occasional Oratorio	oratorio	Covent Garden
1747	Judas Maccabaeus	oratorio	Covent Garden
1748	Alexander Balus	oratorio	Covent Garden
1748	Joshua	oratorio	Covent Garden
1749	Susanna	oratorio	Covent Garden
1749	Soloman	oratorio	Covent Garden
1749	"Music for the Royal Fireworks"	orchestral	Green Park
1749	"Foundling Hospital Anthem"	anthem	Foundling Hospital
1750	Theodora	oratorio	Covent Garden
1752	Jephtha	oratorio	Covent Garden
1757	The Triumph of Time and Truth	oratorio	Covent Garden

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Royal Society of Musicians, *Handel in London* (n.p.: Royal Society of Musicians, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760), pp. 95-96.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Simon, ed., *Handel: A Celebration of His Life and Times: 1685-1759* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985), p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> *Dublin Journal*, 27 March 1742, quoted in Jonathan Keates, *Handel: The Man and His Music* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> Simon, *Handel*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> Mainwaring, *Memoirs*, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Simon, *Handel*, p. 249.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Hogwood, *Handel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 232.

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