Chester & North-East Wales
Organists' & Choirmasters' Association
Affiliated to the Incorporated Association of Organists
www.cnewoca.org.uk

Newsletter April 2026

Our next meeting: Monday 13th April 7:30pm
Christ Church Willaston



Christ Church Willaston was built in 1854, the architects being Fulljames and Waller. The north aisle was added in 1926 by Bernard Miller. It is constructed in sandstone with Westmorland slate roofs. It has a porch in timber and stone. The stained glass in the east window by William Wailes, dates from 1855 and there are windows by Kempe, dating from 1902, and by W. B. Simpson and Sons, dated 1897.

The organ in Christ Church is a two manual and pedal instrument. It was built by Nicholson (Worcester) in 1925/6 and rebuilt in 1999 by David Wells (Liverpool). Details may be found on the NPOR (N01136). (Pedal 16,16,8,8; Great: 8,8,4,4,2; Swell: 8,8,4,II,8,8; Sw Oct, Sw Sub, Sw unison off, Sw-Grt, Grt Oct, Sw-Ped, Grt-Ped)



The church has recently been reordered and the acoustic improved and the organ sounds better than ever.

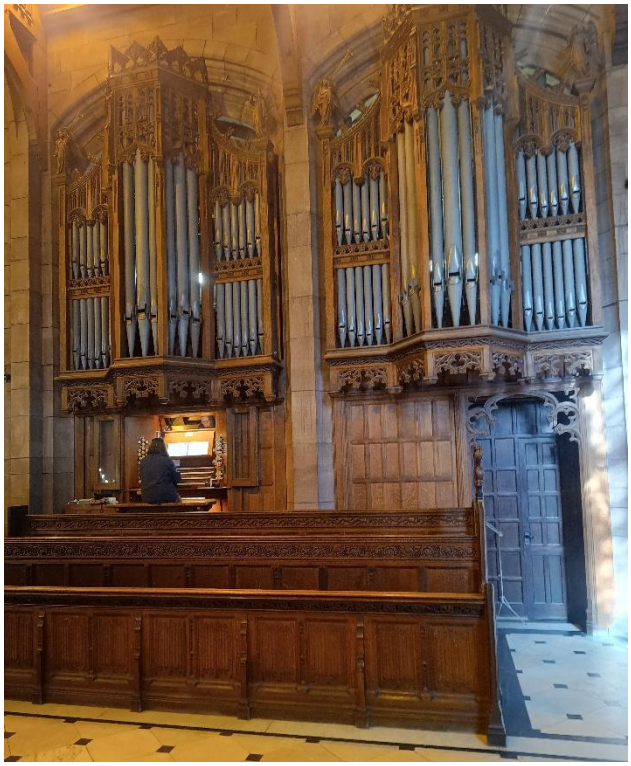
Professor David Speechly, the organist at Christ Church, will demonstrate the organ for us and then members will be able to try it themselves. We are very grateful to David for hosting this meeting.

The church is in the centre of Willaston Village, and the address is Christ Church, Neston Road, Willaston, CH64 2TL. The church web site is https://willastonchristchurch.com/. There is public parking in the village (Backley Lane) and street parking near the church is sometimes available.

Our meeting at Christ Church, Port Sunlight (Saturday 14th March)

A good number of members came along to Christ Church Port Sunlight for our meeting on 14th March. Jonathan Bowden the organist at the church gave a short history of the organ. The instrument was built by Henry Willis II in 1904 and has four manuals and 41 speaking stops. It is substantially unchanged from that installed in 1904 and remains fully pneumatic throughout. The only known alterations are the provision of a Rockingham blower in the organ basement in 1933 and the replacement of the Trigger Swell pedal by a Balanced Swell pedal in 1948. (The Solo Vox Humana is enclosed in a tiny box which is still operated by a trigger swell pedal.)





A major programme of restoration was undertaken by Henry Willis & Sons in 2006. The work carried out included complete re-leathering of all 24 reservoirs, re-leathering of all Willis-lever key actions and piston combination actions. The instrument was cleaned and overhauled and the pipework and console were cleaned and restored.

Further details about the organ may be found on the NPOR (N04405) and on the Willis website. The church web site has information about the church and more details about the

organ, http://www.ccpsurc.info/. *Please note this is not a secure website.*

Jonathan demonstrated the organ for us, taking us through the complete range of the sounds available. The organ sounds magnificent in the large church.

After enjoying Jonathan's talk and playing our members were able to try the organ for themselves.

Jonathan opened the organ for us to view the wonders of the mechanism and pipework of this "wondrous machine". He also opened the trap door in the vestry to the subterranean blower chamber. Members were able to see the huge scale of the blowing equipment (reservoirs and the multi-stage electric blower): amazing to think this was once powered by water.

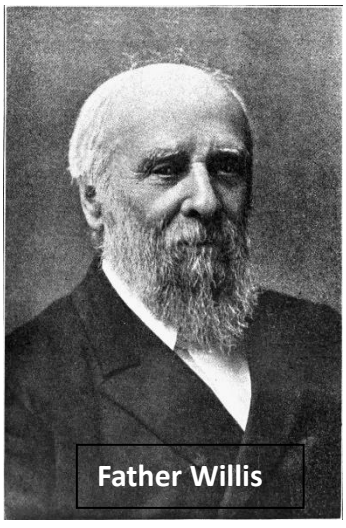


Our most sincere thanks to Jonahan and the Christ Church Port Sunlight for facilitating such a wonderful visit. (Photos: Nigel James)

The Willis Organ Building Dynasty

Few names in the history of the pipe organ carry as much weight as Willis. Spanning five generations and more than 150 years, the Willis family transformed British organ building — and the legacy they created has been carefully preserved by the man who followed them.

Father Willis: The Founder *(1821–1901)*


Father Willis

Henry Willis I shot to fame with the organ he built for the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851. This instrument featured an unprecedented 70 speaking stops and introduced several novel features including piston buttons between the manuals for automatic selection of stops, and a Barker lever servo action to overcome the constraints of tracker action for an instrument of such size.

The founder was nicknamed "Father Willis" because of his enormous contribution to the art and science of organ building, and to distinguish him from his younger relatives working in the


St George's Hall, Liverpool

firm. The Exhibition organ led to the contract for St George's Hall, Liverpool, where the virtuosic playing of W. T. Best drew large crowds and spread Willis's fame still further. In a long career stretching to the end of the 19th century, he built the organs at the Alexandra Palace, the Royal Albert Hall, and St Paul's Cathedral, among approximately 1,000 other organs built or rebuilt, including cathedral instruments at Canterbury, Durham, Exeter, Hereford, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Winchester.

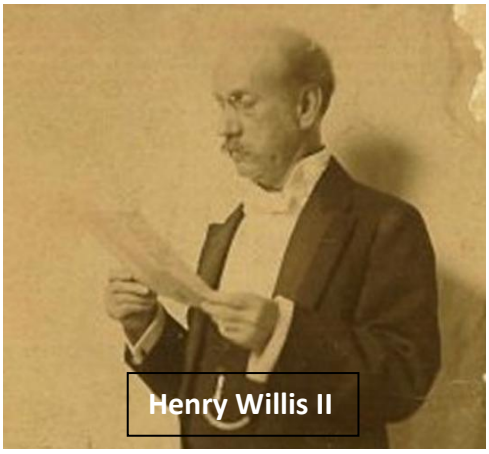
Willis's organs may be described as "orchestral" in character, making use of pipe ranks designed to imitate orchestral instruments, though they were also well balanced tonally, with an abundance of traditional organ voices. His reed stops were particularly renowned.

George Willis: The Brother (1826–1872)

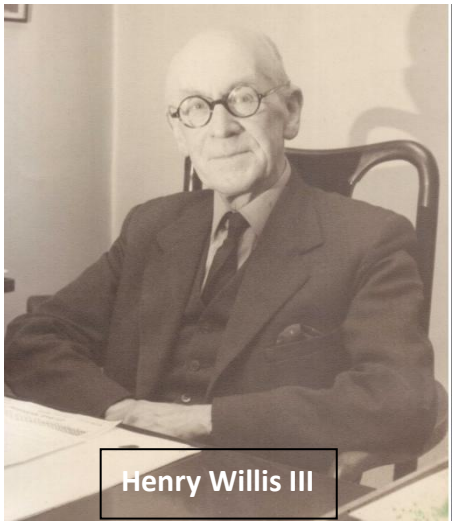
Talent for the organ ran in the wider Willis family. George Willis was Father Willis's brother, and his forte was reed voicing — a skill he passed on directly to the next generation. The Willis family developed the smooth reed tone, such as the Corno di Bassetto — a bass clarinet sound — as well as the first high-pressure reeds, such as the trumpet and trombone. George's influence on the distinctive Willis sound was therefore profound, even if he worked largely behind the scenes. It was he who was responsible for much of the celebrated reed work at the Royal Albert Hall and Alexandra Palace.

Vincent and Henry II: The Sons

Father Willis's two sons took very different paths within the firm. In 1878, Henry II (1852–1927) and his older brother Vincent were (1848-1928) taken into partnership by Henry I, and in 1883, Henry II was sent to Liverpool to assist Vincent in running the Liverpool Works. Vincent spent much of his time devising new actions, leaving Henry II with full responsibility for the output of the Liverpool branch. This obsession with invention became a cause of dispute and eventually led to Vincent leaving the partnership in 1894.


Henry Willis II

Vincent subsequently left the firm to work in the United States.


Henry Willis III

Meanwhile, after Henry I's death, Henry II was so absorbed in keeping the company's affairs in order that his health suffered, and he retired aged 60, leaving the company in the capable hands of the young Henry III.

Henry Willis III (1889–1966)

Henry Willis III was born in Liverpool and completed his apprenticeship with the company in 1910, after which his father made him a partner. He gradually assumed more responsibility until 1912 when his father retired. Henry Willis III built and worked on many organs across Britain, most notably in Westminster Cathedral and Sheffield City Hall, both completed in 1932. The Grand Organ built between 1923 and 1926 at Liverpool Cathedral became the largest pipe organ in the UK, with two five-manual consoles and 10,268 pipes. Henry III also collaborated with Ernest Skinner, an American organ builder, to bring further technical innovations to English organ building, including the electric console.

Henry Willis IV (1927–2018)



Henry Willis IV

Henry Willis IV was the youngest of Henry III's four children and his only son. He was educated at Giggleswick School, which he left in 1945 to join the Army. After service abroad, he returned to England and started his apprenticeship in 1948. On completion, he was sent to manage the Liverpool branch and to supervise the restoration of the organ in St George's Hall after war damage. He remained in Liverpool until his father's death, following which he reorganised the firm by selling the London premises and building a new factory at Petersfield in Hampshire. Henry IV took the firm in a new direction, favouring less unison tone, fewer open and harmonic flutes and more mutations, and developed a series of small organs called the "Willis Junior Development Plan". Crucially, before retiring he personally trained his own successor in the Willis craft. Henry IV retired in 1997 and moved to India, where he and his wife Barbara remained until his death on 23rd June 2018, aged 91.

David Wyld: Carrying the Torch

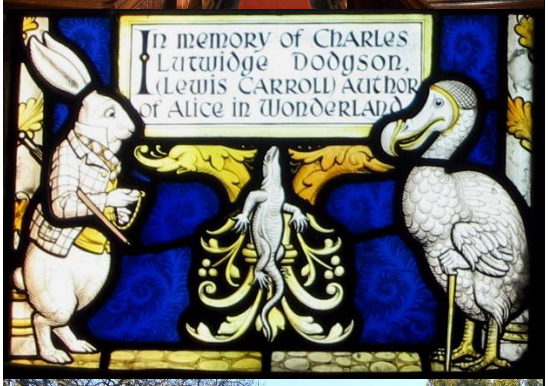
In 1997, Henry Willis IV appointed David Wyld as Managing Director; Wyld subsequently became the majority shareholder. His background made him an unusual but exceptionally well-prepared successor. David was a chemist by training, working in the laboratory and manufacturing side of a major rubber and plastics company, but at the same time carried out musical studies including the organ, counterpoint and composition. He was the founder and Managing Director of Mirabilis Records from 1989 to 1995, and prior to being appointed Managing Director of Henry Willis & Sons, he was taught pipemaking and voicing personally by Henry IV. On taking over, David's objective was to bring the company back to the forefront of British organ building and strictly to maintain the Willis characteristics and house style, which in some areas has meant a reversion to the older methods of the firm. In 2000 the head offices and factory relocated from Petersfield in Hampshire to Liverpool — a city where Willis

organs have been heard since Father Willis himself won the St George's Hall contract over 170 years ago.

Whilst the surviving work of other nineteenth-century organ builders may be admired, the work of Father Willis is treasured — and under David Wyld's stewardship, that tradition remains very much alive.

Generated by Claude, Anthropic's AI assistant

Future meetings

Saturday 16th May, 2pm All Saints Church Daresbury	  	The Church is strongly associated with Lewis Carroll, who was born at All Saints' Vicarage in 1832. There was a church on the site from the 12th century, and the church was largely rebuilt in the 1870s. The Lewis Carroll Centre at the church has information about Charles Dodgson and Lewis Carroll. As a part of our visit to the church we will be given a special tour and short talk about Lewis Carroll's association with the church. The organ is a fine 2 manual and pedal instrument built by Jardine & Co (Manchester) and most recently rebuilt by Andrew Carter (in 2002). NPOR C01333 may not be up to date.
Saturday 13th June, 2pm All Saints' Gresford Annual Meeting and organ visit.		The organ in All Saints' is a fine three manual Wm Hill & Son instrument built in 1871, and rebuilt in 1912 by Hill and in 1995 by Roy Billingsley. Details on the NPOR N11754.

Saturday 25th July 2pm. Christchurch Chester		We are going to visit the Brindley & Foster two manual organ in Christchurch, Chester. The specification is given on the NPOR, N04295. The special Brindley & Foster registration aids (noted in the NPOR entry) are still working on this instrument.

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Meetings for the 2026-27 Season

Your committee will soon be working on the programme for meetings for our next season, which begins in September 2006.

- Have you ideas for meetings that you would like to suggest?
- Are there some organs in the area (or not too far away) that you think we might find interesting to visit?
- Are there different types of events that you think would be of interest?
- Are you able to help arrange or host a meeting?

Your committee would love to hear from you. Please let any member of the committee have your ideas.

Live music!

Chester Cathedral organ recitals

The recitals take place on Thursdays at 1:10pm. The suggested donation is £5.

2nd April	Philip Rushforth (Chester Cathedral)
9th April	Alexander Lanigan-Palotai (Chester Cathedral)
16th April	Richard Lea (Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral
23rd April	Anthony Gritten (Royal Academy of Music)
30th April	Thomas Coxhead (Newport Cathedral)

Details of other recitals from https://chestercathedral.com/visit/organ-recitals
Details of Chester Cathedral Grand Organ NPOR: E01969

Sponsor a Recitalist

If you would like to sponsor a recitalist, please get in touch with Philip Rushforth at philip.rushforth@chestercathedral.com (01244 500974)

Music at Wesley

Wesley Church Centre, St John Street, Chester

Tuesday Lunchtime Concerts

12.45pm – 1.35 pm

Retiring collection

7th April	Edward Harris-Brown (piano)
14th April	The Vale Royal Singers
21st April	Brian Heald (piano)
28th April	Chetham's School of Music Instrumentalists
5th May	The Apricity Trio (Cello, Clarinet, Piano)
12th May	Yuxuan Zhao (Piano)
19th May	Rachel Fillhart (Clarinet), John Gough (Piano)
26th May	Richard Haslam (Guitar)

Saturday Organ Recitals 12.45pm – 1.35 pm

Retiring Collection

18th April	Graham Eccles (St Asaph)
16th May	Jeremy Heald (Wesley)
20th June	Paul Carr (Birmingham)

Organ Centenary Recital July 2026 marks the centenary of the opening of Wesley, Chester's Binns organ. The opening recital was on 10th July 1926). Philip Rushforth has very kindly agreed to give a one-hour Organ Recital at Wesley at 2pm on *Saturday July 11th 2026* to celebrate this anniversary and will conclude it by playing the whole of Widor's 5th Symphony. It will be a free concert with a retiring collection and tea and cake afterwards for the audience.

Details of all concerts from https://www.wesleychester.co.uk/whats-on/music-wesley/
Details of the Binns organ in the Wesley Centre are at the NPOR D04853.

Liverpool Cathedral

The 2026 Centenary Recital Series celebrating the centenary of Liverpool Cathedral's magnificent Willis Organ continues.

Saturday 18th April 2026 – Jean-Baptiste Dupont (Bordeaux Cathedral, France)

Saturday 6th June 2026 – Nathan Laube (Rochester, U.S.A.)

Saturday 26th September 2026 – James Orford (St Paul's Cathedral, London)

Saturday 17th October 2026 – Professor Ian Tracey. 100th Anniversary Evensong & Recital.
Saturday 7th November 2026 – Isabelle Demers (Quebec, Canada)
Tickets £15.68 per recital. You can book online here. All recitals begin at 6pm except the recital on 17 October which follows evensong at 3:00pm. Booking is advised and aim to arrive early! More details in the January newsletter.
Details of the Willis Organ in Liverpool Cathedral may be found on the NPOR E00301.
(This does not include the details of the Echo organ.)

Liverpool St George's Hall

Usually Tuesdays from 12:45pm – 1:30pm. Tickets (at the door) £10.75
Professor Ian Tracey, Organist to the City of Liverpool.
14th April, 12th May, 2nd June, 5th September, 20th October, 17th November, 8th December..
Details of the Willis Organ in St George's Hall may be found on the NPOR N01921

Music at Blackburn Cathedral

Wednesday Concerts

1st April	Milkica Radovanovic
22nd April	Andrew Canning
29th April	John Robinson

***The concerts begin at 12:15pm and are free to attend*.** Suggested donation £5. Unless stated, all Wednesday concerts feature the iconic Wood/Walker organ.
Bank Holiday Monday 6th April 11:00am: Dr Colin Walsh, Organist Emeritus at Lincoln Cathedral (Tickets £10 at the door).
Details of the JW Walker / David Wood organ may be found on the NPOR**: E00533**

Bangor Cathedral

Check the website https://bangorcathedral.churchinwales.org.uk
Details of the Bangor Cathedral organ may be found on the NPOR: R01575

St Asaph Cathedral

Check the website https://stasaphcathedral.wales/en
Details of the cathedral organ may be found at
https://stasaphcathedral.wales/en/music/the-organ

Hoole Methodist Church, Hamilton Street, Hoole, Chester

Sundays at 3pm. Suggested donation £5 (including refreshments)

19th April	*"Stage & Film"* – popular songs and theme tunes John & Angie Evans (organ, piano, contralto)
17th May	*Victorian-Style Songs & Solos* Including songs for audience with John Evans & Dennis Jones (voice & piano)
21st June	Jeremy Heald (piano & organ)
19th July	*"Show Songs & Solos"* Kelsborrow Choir

Kelsborrow Choir

Sunday 10th May 2:30pm — *"Show Songs & Solos"* Norley Methodist Church
Raising funds for OPAL (Older People Active Lives)
Suggested donation: £10 (includes refreshments)
Further details and tickets: 07788 134181 or
info@norleymethodistchurch.org.uk

Wednesday 1st July 1:00pm	St John The Baptist's Church, Chester City Centre Free admission – donations welcome
Sunday 19th July 3pm	"Show Songs & Solos" Hoole Methodist Church Suggested donation £5 (including refreshments)
Saturday 22nd August 7:30pm	St John The Evangelist Parish Church, Ashton Hayes Raising funds for the Church Tickets: £10 including refreshments
Saturday 12th September 7:30pm	***Kelsborrow Choir 70th Anniversary Concert*** with Jonathan Scott (International Concert Organist) Raising funds for The Joshua Tree (children's cancer charity) Tickets: £20 including refreshments Further details and tickets: angiejohnevans@gmail.com
Friday 9th October 7:00pm	St Mary's Without The Walls, Handbridge, Chester Free admission – including refreshments Donations welcome - raising funds for Choral Scholarship Fund

organrecitals.uk lists recitals across the country. You can search for recitals in particular area and register your own recitals, and it's free.



St Oswald's Grasmere. NPOR 09344