Gosport’s historic Handel Organ to be saved thanks to Heritage Lottery Fund

23/08/2011

The money, along with £42,000 raised locally, will enable the Grade I listed instrument to be returned to its former working glory, so that it can take pride of place in Holy Trinity Church, Gosport once again. As part of the project a heritage outreach officer will also be employed to work with primary and secondary schools, youth clubs, colleges and music groups. A DVD will be created and working model built to show how an organ works – telling the rich and fascinating story of the instrument and bringing it to life for future generations.

The organ is one of only a handful with a genuine claim to have been played by Handel. It was constructed by Abraham Jordan – one of the most respected organ builders of the time – for the great chapel of Canons, the 1st Duke of Chandos’ magnificent palace. In 1720 – when Handel was employed as the Duke’s musician-in-residence, chiefly composing and directing concerts and recitals at the nearby church of St Lawrence Whitchurch, Little Stanmore – the Duke of Chandos was the wealthiest man in England and hence only the best of organ builders would do. Handel undoubtedly advised on the choice of organ builder and its design, and subsequently played it. He also composed the famous eleven “Chandos” anthems whilst in the Duke’s service.

By the 1740s however, the Duke had fallen on hard times, and Canons was sold. The local parishioners of Holy Trinity bought the organ for their fine late 17th century church in Gosport, installing it in the west gallery, however it was not until 1897 that it was rebuilt by William Hill in the form that we see it today. Its early eighteenth century beauty and rarity however survives intact, and the eight ranks of pipes and its fine case – all dating from Handel’s time – give the instrument its exceptional heritage importance.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the South East, said: “We are pleased to be able to help Holy Trinity Church in their quest to restore this remarkable Handel Organ so that people of all ages can learn from, experience and enjoy it for many years to come.”

Rev Andy Davis, of Holy Trinity Church, said: “We are so pleased that HLF has generously supported this project. It is further evidence of the quality and heritage significance of this organ, the actions of which are now 110 years old and need urgent work. Some of the pipes are 300 years old. Wooden pipes split and soft metal pipes bulge and need delicate restoration. The work will be entrusted to a local organ builder, Andrew Cooper from Ryde, who has looked after the organ for many years, and kept it going despite its age.

It is also a credit to the church that £42,000 has been raised during five years by an impressive regular concert programme which has attracted musicians and listeners to the church from near and far in large numbers, an “adopt-a-pipe scheme” by individual donations, and the support of several charities. We look forward to the start of works in earnest.”

Caroline Dinenage, MP for Gosport, also added support for the project: “The ‘Handel Organ’ is one of Gosport's historical jewels and its full restoration will certainly be a source of great pride to my constituency. The parishioners at Holy Trinity Church along with all those who have contributed to this worthy cause should be commended for playing a vital part in the organ's renovation, and I am pleased that all their hard work has been rewarded with this important

milestone grant award from HLF."

In addition to a large scale outreach programme planned for local people of all ages, a continued programme of concerts will attract people to the church and many will feature the organ once it is restored. The Handel organ will be promoted widely in partnership with the other heritage sites in Gosport and Portsmouth, and the restoration work is expected to be completed by Easter 2012 when a series of concerts are planned. .

Notes to editors

The HLF grant to the project Holy Trinity Church, Gosport: The Handel Organ Restoration and Heritage Outreach Project, is for £176,100 (80% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award. The organ's heritage importance is recognised through its Grade I listing by the Diocesan Advisory Committee and Grade II* Historic Organ Certificate, issued by the British Institute of Organ Studies.

Support for the Handel Organ
A wide variety of support has been registered for the restoration of the Handel Organ at Holy Trinity Church, Gosport, including the following stating that it is:
"An organ of national importance in terms of heritage [which] really should be heard to its best advantage. The church itself is a very busy church with a large and comprehensive recital series in a rather poor borough, and so deserves as much support as possible for its mission and ministry." Andrew Lumsden, Director of Music, Winchester Cathedral. "A magnificent instrument in a fine building with a generous acoustic. The action is 110 years old and desperately in need of renovation." Dr David J C Price, Organist and Master of Choristers at Portsmouth Cathedral.

"A rare example of eighteenth-century musical craftsmanship…of great significance both as a cultural-historical artefact and as a focus for musical activity in the local community." Dr George Burrows, Senior Lecturer in Music and Conductor of Portsmouth University Choirs.

"Within Gosport, Holy Trinity Church is not only a prominent landmark but also a significant building in terms of concerts and community activities." Alan Thurlow, President of the Incorporated Association of Organists. Previously Organist & Master of the Choristers at Chichester Cathedral from 1980 to 2008. Also organ adviser for the Diocese of Chichester and a member of the Diocesan Advisory Committee, and Church Buildings Council of the Church of England.

Further information

HLF Press Office: Vicky Wilford, 020 7591 6046 / 07973 401 937, email vickyw@hlf.org.uk.
Holy Trinity Church, Gosport: Dr Carey Bowker, 07836 204 691, email Carey@chbowker.com / Revd Andy Davis, 07709 919 602, email andy-chris@adavis.fsbusiness.co.uk.