



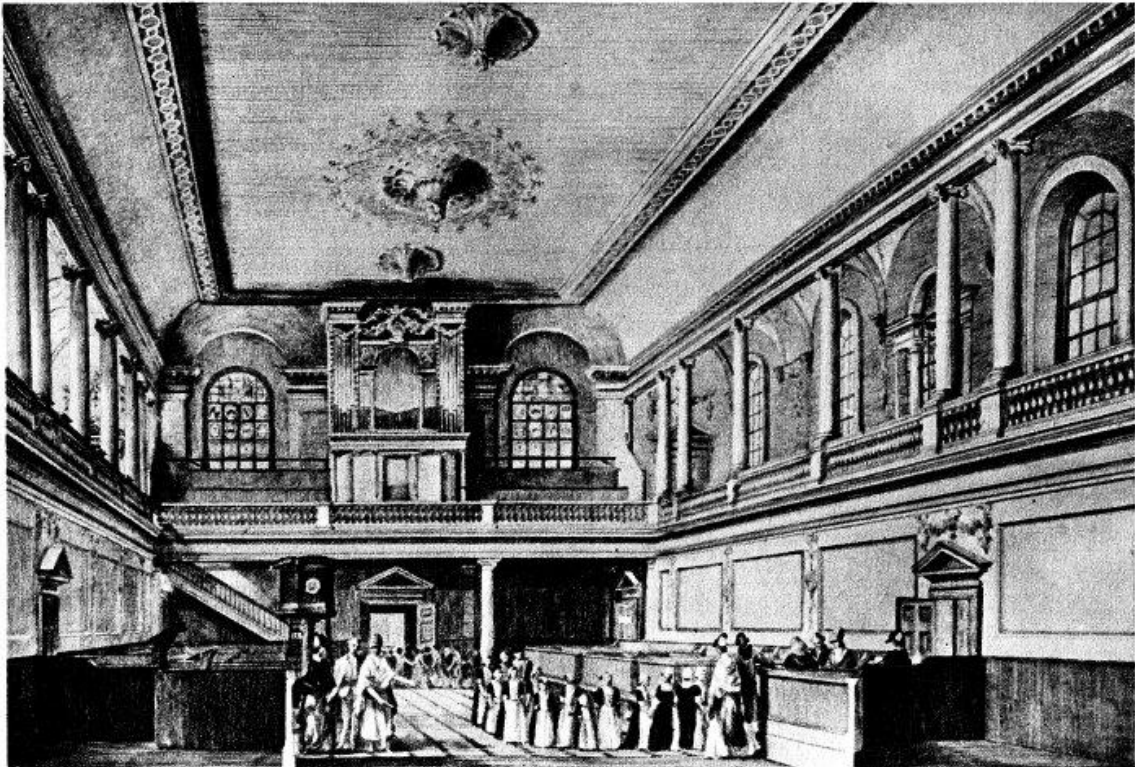
THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL

The Hospital, where Handel was a Governor, was founded in the year 'Messiah' was written
Engraving by Grignion and Canot after S. Wale, 1749

Governors. The concert took place in the chapel, and was attended by a large and fashionable audience, including the Prince and Princess of Wales. The *Firework Music* and some selections from *Solomon* were given, and in addition Handel composed an anthem "Blessed are they that consider the poor" specially for the occasion. A sum of over £500 was raised by the sale of tickets, and King George made the Hospital a gift of £2,000.

This was only a beginning. The following year (1750) Handel presented the Foundling Hospital with an organ for the chapel, and offered to open it with a performance of *Messiah*. Enormous interest was aroused by the announcement of the concert, and all the tickets were quickly sold. The performance was due to take place at noon on May 1, but long before that time the chapel was besieged by the whole of fashionable London, some with tickets and some without. Many noble persons paid their half-guineas at the doors and gate-crashed without tickets, many others who came provided with tickets found that all the places had been taken. The confusion was so great that a repeat performance had later to be arranged to accommodate the disappointed ticket-holders.

✧ 'I give to the Foundling Hospital . . .' ✧



CHAPEL OF THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL

Annual performances of 'Messiah' were held in this building. Handel presented the organ depicted
Engraving by John Sanders, 1773

Outside the chapel the scene must certainly have resembled pandemonium: over five hundred coaches jammed together, with the chairmen endeavouring to push their way past. Anyone arriving on foot would have had little chance of escaping without a torn dress or the loss of hat or wig. Inside the scene must have been indeed impressive. The choir included Bernard Gates's boys from the Chapel Royal. The orchestra contained thirty-six of the best instrumentalists in London. The five solo singers (for Handel always used two sopranos for *Messiah*) probably included the Signoras Frasi, Passerini, and Galli, with the popular tenor John Beard and the bass singer Reinhold. Handel himself played a voluntary on the new organ, a fine instrument with three keyboards and twenty-one stops.

So began the series of charitable performances which Handel gave yearly for the Foundling Hospital up to the time of his death. The Foundling Hospital governors were duly grateful, particularly since Handel had promised to reserve a performance of *Messiah* every year for the benefit of the Hospital, and to direct it himself. Being good business men the governors felt they should secure their legal rights in this generous offer, and accord-