

"THE PLACE WHERE MOST PEOPLE CAN'T COME IN"

Abbey Road Studios, August, 2018

Abbey Road Studios opened their doors twelve times this year during the first two weekends of August and I was fortunate enough to get in on 3rd August. Visitors were instructed to arrive an hour early to allow time for photos (both inside and outside), to view Studio 1 and to walk around Studio 2, viewing vintage recording and mixing equipment, instruments and old photographs. We were permitted to walk up the steps in Studio 2 to the tiny control room, to get the view that George Martin would have had as The Beatles recorded below.

On that day we also heard a lecture. The speakers were the producers Brian Kehew and Kevin Ryan who wrote *Recording the Beatles*. They began their 90-minute lecture, in Studio 2, by telling us "Most people can't come in here"—reminding the audience how lucky we were! Kehew and Ryan's lecture covered the entire history of EMI/Abbey Road Studios, not just the period with The Beatles. We were told that the house was purchased by the Gramophone Company (a predecessor of EMI) because they were looking for a quiet environment—no trains, no tube, no planes—for recording. The company was especially impressed with the house's large back garden where the main two studios were eventually built.

Studio 1 was opened in 1931. We were only permitted a limited view of this studio (and to take photos) from the doorway as it was set up for a recording session. This studio was used primarily for classical recordings but also for the famous 'All You Need is Love' broadcast in 1967. Currently, the studio is used extensively for recording movie soundtracks.

Studio 2 was opened in 1932 and, of course, is most famous for the work of The Beatles. Unlike Studio 1, Studio 2 'feels' old. There are large wall hangings which are stuffed with dried grass coming down from the ceiling. They are called 'Cabot's Quilts' and they have been in the studio since the 1950s. You can easily see them on many photos of the studio. One man on the tour said they looked like "old bedding". In 1955 the stairway to the control room was added—an unusual feature in a recording studio according to the speakers. At the back of the studio, doors lead to an old bomb shelter that was converted to an echo chamber. Three pianos, including ones used by The Beatles, were in the far, back left corner. The speakers told us this corner was where The Beatles usually worked. One exception was the recording of 'Yer Blues' which occurred in a small room off the second-floor control room. The speakers reminded us of the many artists who have recorded at Abbey Road: Cliff Richard, Cilla Black, Pink Floyd, Oasis, Adele, U2, Ed Sheeran, etc.





The studios have moved into the 21st century, building on their reputation while integrating the newest technologies available. New, smaller studios have been added. It is now possible for musicians to use the resources of Abbey Road while working from their home computers anywhere in the world. For example, a person can send their music online to ARS for remixing/remastering by the staff in London. This certainly is a wonderful resource, but I think there is something lost when you are not at the iconic site yourself, taking in the historic atmosphere.

The studios tour and lecture were a very special experience for Beatles and non-Beatles fans alike. How many times have I stood outside those gates and the graffiti filled wall at 3 Abbey Road wondering what it looked like up those steps and inside that door? The speakers encouraged us to imagine what it would be like to sit in Studio 2 "watching the Beatles make timeless art." Now I can. Thank you to Abbey Road Studios for opening their doors!

Mary Ann Thompson