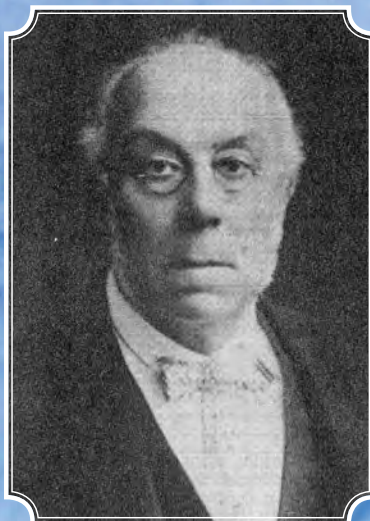


# A Lewis resurrected

The T.C. Lewis organ in St Marie's  
Catholic Cathedral, Sheffield

Paul Hale



T.C. Lewis  
1833–1915

This is the story of a little-known organ by a leading builder, now scrupulously restored to perfect working condition and ringing voice after years of being in the doldrums.

Thomas Christopher Lewis (1833–1915) was born in London, the son of Thomas A. Lewis (1780–1862). Lewis senior was *apparitur* (secretary) to Charles Blomfield, Anglican Bishop of London, whose nephew Arthur (1829–99) became a noted church architect. T.C. Lewis, too, trained as an architect (probably in Arthur Blomfield's office). In 1855 he almost certainly joined the architectural practice of Robert Wheeler, in Canon Row, Westminster. Whilst in that partnership Lewis is recorded as having been the 'architect' for William Hill's 1856 instrument in Lincoln's Inn Chapel (since replaced). Lewis clearly felt drawn toward organs, so left the architect's profession to found a firm of organ builders with John Tunstall and John Whitacker around the year 1860. Nevertheless, Lewis's interest in architecture and his close connection with leading architects proved an ongoing feature of his career. Arthur Blomfield recommended Lewis to the Dean & Chapter of Westminster Abbey in a letter written on 20 January 1879 (only four years after Lewis had built the organ for St Marie's):

"...my long acquaintance with him enables me to bear the strongest testimony to the soundness and conscientious nature of his work, which I do not think anyone can be found to impugn. Mr Lewis's knowledge of Architecture makes him much more agreeable to deal with (for an Architect) than many eminent Organ Builders, who seem to think that a Church is built for an Organ, and not an Organ for a Church."

In 1866, the Lewis staff moved into premises in Shepherds' Lane (now Ferndale

Road), Brixton, London. Under Lewis's direction over nearly 40 years, the firm built instruments ranging from small chamber organs to sizeable cathedral and concert organs. Lewis was strongly inspired by the organs built in Germany by Edmund Schulze and in France by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. He was renowned for instruments that had a bright, vibrant tone with low, wide mouths, a selection of flute types that included the narrow-scale Lieblich Gedeckt (following Schulze), 'Töpfer' pipe scales and powerful upperwork, along with the Flûte harmonique and string voicing of Cavaillé-Coll. In his organs the flue-work (Diapason chorus) always dominated the reeds, in classic German/English tradition, in contrast to builders led by one of his main competitors, Henry Willis, who used higher wind pressures to develop powerful reed stops which totally dominated the ensemble. It was the Willis style – as later developed further by Harrison & Harrison and others – which came eventually to lead the field. This led to Lewis's largest organs often being rebuilt by others in a less than sympathetic style; the most significant of these remodellings were the Anglican cathedrals at Southwark (restored back to its Lewis roots in recent times), Newcastle and Ripon.

Lewis left the firm before 1900, but it continued to maintain the standards set by its founder. In 1919, there was a merger with Henry Willis & Sons Ltd, which moved into the Brixton works and traded as *Henry Willis & Sons and Lewis & Company Ltd* until 1925 when the Lewis name was dropped. T.C. Lewis continued to build organs for some time after leaving the firm that he had founded.

It is fascinating to speculate as to why St Marie's church in Sheffield chose an instrument from a relatively unknown London firm. However, it is likely that the Duke of Norfolk



– a leading Roman Catholic – had been introduced to Lewis's work, as there is some evidence that the young Lewis had a hand in the design of one of Norfolk's houses, and it was the Duke who presented St Marie's with the instrument.

No other churches by St Marie's architect Matthew Ellison Hadfield (1812–85) were fitted with Lewis

organs, but my researches show that a Lewis organ was proposed for Hadfield's St John's Catholic Cathedral, Salford, built 1844–48. It was to have had a case by the architect John Francis Bentley (1839–1902). The Salford organ was eventually built by a.n.other, but Hadfield must have been sufficiently impressed with the Lewis/Bentley design that he

allowed them to design the organ and casework for his later great catholic church – St Marie’s, Sheffield.

Bentley was eventually to produce organ casework drawings for over 40 of Lewis’s instruments. He went on to design Westminster Cathedral (in 1894) where he included an Apse organ in a case of his design – built by the Lewis firm after T.C. Lewis had left it. Research shows that Lewis’s friendship and close professional association with John Bentley began at the International Exhibition of 1862, when they met for the first time.

Bentley’s daughter (in *Westminster Cathedral and its Architect* Vol.II, 1919 [author’s collection]) writes:

‘Thomas Christopher Lewis, architect, bell-founder, inventor, and organ-builder and one of the finest judges of musical tone of his time, was drawn to him [Bentley] by an identity of taste and a

similar love of fine detail and craftsmanship. This ripened in time to a very deep friendship; much was done in common in acquiring old furniture, pictures and china, and Bentley came to owe a great deal to Lewis’s kindly anxiety to put commissions in his way [St Marie’s would have been one of the earliest]. Through the latter’s introductions a considerable amount of work, especially that of a domestic nature, together with church furniture and organ cases was brought to his friend’s office.’

Lewis had to become adept at fitting organs into small spaces. At no time in his career was that more apparent than at the very time he was building the instrument for St Marie’s: his other two 1875 organs (St Mary’s Church, Studley Royal, and Christ the Consoler, Newby Hall Estate, Skelton on Ure) were also placed within almost impossibly

small and oddly-shaped cases (both by the architect William Burges [1827–81]). The Austrian oak case at St Marie’s is typical of Bentley’s attempt to fit the organ into as small a space as possible (rather to the detriment of the instrument) but mercifully it is not of his later type where Bentley attempted to eschew any visible pipes at all, designing pierced oak panelling through which the sound could filter (such as in the Apse organ at Westminster and the organ now at Westerham).

In coping with having to fit a three-manual organ effectively within one arch, taking up as little floor-space as possible, Lewis’s design skills were stretched to the limit. The organ is as packed in as it possibly could be, resulting in access for tuning and maintenance being limited. Not only are some of the pipes hard to reach for tuning and adjustment, but so are the note and (particularly) stop actions.

Left top: Organ and East End

Left: The small floor area occupied by the organ

### Organs for which Lewis is particularly remembered:

St Hilda’s Church, South Shields (1866) [restored]

St Mary’s Catholic church (now cathedral), Newcastle (1869) [destroyed]

Wymondham Abbey (now at St Mary the Virgin, Westerham) (1871/1883) [changed]

St Marie’s Catholic church (now cathedral), Sheffield (1875)

St Mary’s Church, Studley Royal (1875) [restored]

Christ the Consoler, Newby Hall Estate, Skelton on Ure (1875) [poor condition]

St Andrew’s Hall, Glasgow (1877) [destroyed by fire]

Ripon Cathedral (1878) [completely changed]

Holy Trinity, Beckenham (1879) [completely changed]

Newcastle Cathedral (1880) [completely changed]

All Saints’ Church, Maidstone (1880) [completely changed]

St John’s Church, Upper Norwood, (1882) [altered]

All Saints’ Church, Ilkley (1882) [completely changed]

St George’s Church, Cullercoats (1884) [restored]

St George’s Church, Jesmond (an exhibition organ) (1887/8) [changed]

St Luke’s Church, Southport (1889) [destroyed]

St Paul’s Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia (1891) [restored]

Southwark Cathedral (1897) [restored]

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow (1901) [restored]



## Specification

### GREAT ORGAN (58 notes)

1 Bourdon	16
2 Open Diapason	8
3 Small Open Diapason	8
<i>a later addition</i>	
4 Stopped Diapason	8
5 Octave	4
6 Octave Quint	2 $\frac{2}{3}$
7 Super Octave	2
8 Mixture 19.22.26.29	IV
9 Trumpet	8
Swell to Great	

### SWELL ORGAN (58 notes)

10 Geigen Principal	8
11 Lieblich Gedact	8
12 Vox Angelica	8
<i>originally on the Choir</i>	
13 Geigen Principal	4
14 Flautina	2
15 Horn	8
16 Oboe	8
Tremulant	
<i>lever to the left of the Swell pedal</i>	

### CHOIR ORGAN (58 notes)

17 Lieblich Gedact	8
18 Salicional	8
19 Eolian	8
<i>Originally on the Swell</i>	
20 Salicet	4
21 Flute Harmonique	4
22 Clarionet	8
Swell to Choir	

### PEDAL ORGAN (30 notes)

23 Open Bass	16
<i>zinc, with 4 open wooden basses</i>	
24 Sub Bass	16
<i>wood</i>	
Swell to Pedals	
Great to Pedals	

Balanced swell pedal [far right of the kneeboard – was a lever swell]  
 3 combination pedals to the Great Organ  
 The pitch is A=440hz  
 Electric blowing [was originally hand blown]

Unusually, the Swell speaks north – away from the Sanctuary into the chapel to the northeast.

It may be that Lewis wished to project the sound from both sides of the organ, fearful that the Swell would be too masked by the Great and Choir to be heard as loudly as it should be. There is also an oddly situated and almost certainly non-original second Open Diapason,

*Organ in St. Marie's Catholic Church, Sheffield.*  
 PRESENTED BY THE DUKE OF NORFOLK.  
*The Case from the design of J. F. Bentley, Esq.*

*Choir Organ, C C to A, 58 Notes.*

Salicional ... .. 8 feet	Salicet ... .. 4 feet
Vox Angelica .. .. 8 "	Flûte Harmonique ... .. 4 "
Lieblich-gedact ... .. 8 "	Clarionet ... .. 8 "

*Great Organ, C C to A, 58 Notes.*

Bourdon ... .. 16 feet	Octave Quint ... .. 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ feet
Open Diapason ... .. 8 "	Super Octave ... .. 2 "
Stopped Diapason ... .. 8 "	Mixture—4 ranks ... .. 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ "
Octave ... .. 4 "	Trumpet ... .. 8 "

*Swell Organ, C C to A, 58 Notes.*

Geigen Principal ... .. 8 feet	Flautina ... .. 2 feet
Rohr-flöte ... .. 8 "	Horn ... .. 8 "
Æolian ... .. 8 "	Oboe ... .. 8 "
Geigen Principal ... .. 4 "	

*Pedal Organ, C C C to F, 30 Notes.*

Open Bass ... .. 16 feet	Sub-Bass ... .. 16 feet
--------------------------	-------------------------

*Couplers.*  
 Choir to Pedals ; Great to Pedals ; Swell to Pedals ; Swell to Great ; Swell to Choir.  
 Three Pedals of Combination.

**The instrument's original specification which appeared in Lewis's Organ Building and Bell Founding (1883) [author's collection]**

which speaks north. This, plus the swell shutters opening in that direction, suggests it is possible that the organ was planned also for use at services in the northeast chapel, unusual though this certainly would have been for the period.

The instrument was built to the specification which appeared in *Lewis's Organ Building and Bell Founding* (1883).

In 1973 a local organ-building company attempted to address the problems caused by ingress of rain on to the organ. Doubtless the note actions had become significantly worn after 100 years' hard work; the touch would have been perceived as very heavy. Despite this heaviness, owing more to the design of the soundboard pallets than to weighty action components or to wear and tear, the firm clearly felt that it could improve matters by replacing most of Lewis's action components – stickers, trackers, squares, rollers, registers etc. – with modern. This work proved in the event *not* to lighten the touch, as some of the materials used: aluminium, Perspex (etc.) were actually heavier and less suitable than the parts they replaced. In addition,

the pivot points of both note and stop-action were rendered stiffer by the methods employed (most bizarrely using Perspex in the stop action), and the roller arms were miscalculated – instead of being set so as to create a 'mechanical advantage' they were installed the opposite way round! Inevitably the work was not a success.

In 1986 another attempt to improve matters led to the manual soundboards being overhauled. As no alterations to the pallet design or springs were made, the touch remained heavy, with an unpleasant feel caused by the various points of friction. The Pedal chests and actions seem not to have been attended to: at the time the organ was recently dismantled these were scarcely working and the mechanism connecting the pedals to the note action had pretty well collapsed through old age and through working at a mechanical disadvantage. Mercifully, the pipework was largely left unaltered, though the reeds clearly went through the hands of a voicer who had little sympathy with them. So the organ, in this lamentable state, gradually fell into a condition

where, rather than being widely known as one of T.C. Lewis's significant achievements, it became a completely forgotten instrument, ignored even by Lewis admirers.

St Marie's Cathedral has been wonderfully restored in recent years, in the manner of the catholic cathedrals in Birmingham and Newcastle, with many decorative Victorian features put back, a new stone floor with under-floor heating and the ugly excesses of over-zealous interpretations of Vatican II removed. The result is a beautiful and resonant building – perfect for a bold Lewis organ. The Heritage Lottery Fund was immensely supportive of this work, and followed this up by offering significant funding for the restoration of the Lewis organ.

This restoration has been scrupulously carried out by A.J. Carter (organbuilders) of Wakefield, with responsibility for reconstruction of the mechanical action being given to Nicholson Organs, whose particular speciality this is. Project planning began in 2013, when the organ was removed for the building's refurbishment; its reinstallation was complete by Christmas of 2017. Oliver Latry, of Notre Dame de Paris, performed the opening recital on 12 April.

Lewis organs are known for their powerful bell-like choruses, delicious flutes, prompt Pedal basses, and crisp, bright low-pressure reeds. This organ proves a textbook exposition of those characteristics. The Great chorus fills the building with tone, capped by one of Lewis's typically grand mixtures, starting at 19.22.26.29 and breaking back an octave twice during the manual compass. This adds brilliance in the bass, reinforces the chorus in the middle, and adds gravitas (especially with the Great 16ft Bourdon drawn) in the treble. The reeds add controlled and nicely balanced fire, in both Great and Swell, whose major choruses are underpinned by two substantial Pedal 16ft flues. The flutes are varied to a degree – more so than one would find in a Father Willis – the Choir 4ft harmonic flute having a luscious richness and a Cavallé-Coll-like *crescendo* in the treble; it forms a marvellous solo stop for Widor and Vierne. The string voicing is assured and as varied in character as the flutes. Nicholson's cleverly re-engineered key action has utterly transformed the touch into something completely delightful.



This restoration was an enormous challenge for Andrew Carter's team, as they will readily tell the interested visitor. The result is a triumph to which all should make a pilgrimage. If the beautiful cathedral does not bring you to your knees as you enter, then the sound of the organ surely will. Well done, St Marie's!



**Paul Hale is a professional organ consultant, recitalist and choral conductor.**

Whilst Organ Scholar of New College, Oxford (1971–4), Paul Hale began to write about the organ – his first published piece was in *Organists' Review*, of which he was later to become Reviews Editor and then Editor (1990–2005). A noted recitalist, lecturer and choir trainer, Paul is well-known in the UK, in Europe and in the USA. As well as being an Organ Adviser for the Dioceses of Southwell and Lincoln, Paul is an accredited member of the AIOA and has designed many new and restored organs throughout the UK. He is a diploma examiner for the RCO, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM for his contribution to church music. More information is available at [www.PaulHale.org](http://www.PaulHale.org)