

# Newcastle's lost Lewis

## The story of the organs in Newcastle's Roman Catholic Cathedral: Part 1

Paul Hale



St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Newcastle is one of the most elegant of Pugin's beautiful large church buildings. Standing opposite the railway station its slender spire dominates the area.

In July 1838 it was decided by the Catholics of Newcastle that a great church should be built, spacious enough to seat "about twelve hundred persons". By 1842 £6,500 had been raised and Augustus Welby Pugin (a Catholic convert) visited the city, surveyed the site, and completed his design the following year. The modest budget meant that at first the tower and spire could not be built. A 15-stop two-manual Nicholson organ was placed by J.C. Bishop over the west doors, bought second-hand for £325 from the Principal of Ushaw College.

St Mary's Church was dedicated on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1844 when the organ was heard for the first time, played by Mr Redshaw. The first parish priest, Fr William Riddell, had been appointed as a Bishop earlier that year. It took only six years for the Diocese of Hexham to be created; this was developed in 1861 as the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle, and on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1860 St Mary's was re-dedicated as The Cathedral Church of Our Lady of the Assumption. With the growth of its congregations and liturgical requirements a larger organ was needed, and so it was that in 1869 a three-manual 33-stop instrument costing £1,400 was built by the London firm of T.C. Lewis in a greatly enlarged west gallery. The organ case – mainly of panelling with five "flats" of pipes above, divided by posts and held in with a cross-rail – was one of several for Lewis organs designed by J.F. Bentley; it extended right across the west wall and housed the 2,042 pipes. The organ was blessed at a Pontifical High Mass, complete with choir and soloists (with entrance charged for!) on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1869.

The apparent success of this organ, in its striking west-end position, resulted in Thomas Lewis winning a steady stream of contracts in the area, among them St Nicholas Cathedral (c.1880), St George's, Cullercoats (1884), Newcastle St Cuthbert's (1885), the Royal Mining, Engineering and Industrial Exhibition (Newcastle, 1887 – an instrument very similar to that in St Mary's Cathedral), Jesmond Presbyterian Church (1890), Jesmond Parish Church (1895), and numerous others in the North East region.

The specification of the T.C. Lewis organ is known from an article heralding the inauguration of the organ, published in the *Newcastle Chronicle* and a similar one printed in the *Newcastle Guardian* for Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October 1869. The articles contain much useful detail, and as little of this has been published since, I quote the *Guardian* at some length:

*The magnificent new organ, which for several weeks past has been in course of erection in St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Newcastle, was opened on Wednesday by the celebration of Pontifical High Mass in a manner worthy of the auspicious event. The organ is estimated to cost upwards of £1,400, the greater part of which sum has been raised by subscriptions from principally the Catholics of Newcastle and neighbourhood. Messrs Thomas C. Lewis and Co., of Brixton, London, a firm of great eminence as organ builders, were entrusted with the order for manufacturing the instrument, and the unanimous verdict of experienced organists, who have seen and heard it, is that it is without doubt one of the finest in England. The organ occupies the entire width of the nave of the cathedral, under the west window, and surrounded by a highly ornamented gallery front, extending more than thirty feet, and admirably planned to harmonize with the main structure. A splendid engraving of it as it stands in the cathedral appeared in last week's British and Foreign Mechanic, and in*

## Lewis specification as given in the newspapers

### GREAT (CC-A, 58 notes)

Bourdon (wood & metal)	16
Open Diapason	8
Open Diapason (small)	8
Hohl Flute (wd & m.)	8
Octave	4
Gemshorn	4
Full Mixture II	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
<i>[NB: the Chronicle gives this as:</i>	
Octave Quint	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> and
Super octave	2]
Mixture III	2
Trumpet	8

### SWELL (CC-A, 58 notes)

Bourdon (wd & m.)	16
Geigen Principal	8
Lieblich Gedact (wd & m.)	8
Viole de Gambe	8
Voix Celeste (tenor C)	8
Geigen Principal	4
Mixture II	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Bassoon	16
Trumpet	8
Oboe and Bassoon	8
Vox Humana	8
<i>[not listed in the Guardian, though mentioned in its text]</i>	
Clarion	4
Tremulant	

### CHOIR (CC-A, 58 notes)

Lieblich Gedact (wd & m.)	16
Lieblich Gedact (wd & m.)	8
Salicional	8
Vox Angelica (tenor C)	8
Salicet	4
Flûte Harmonique	4
Clarinet and Bassoon	8

### PEDAL (CCC-F, 30 notes)

Great Bass (wood)	16
Open Diapason (zinc & m.)	16
Sub-Bass	16
Great Quint (wd. & m.)	10 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Posaune	16
Octave Coupler (full compass)	

Three Pedal couplers, plus Swell to Great.

3 composition pedals to Great

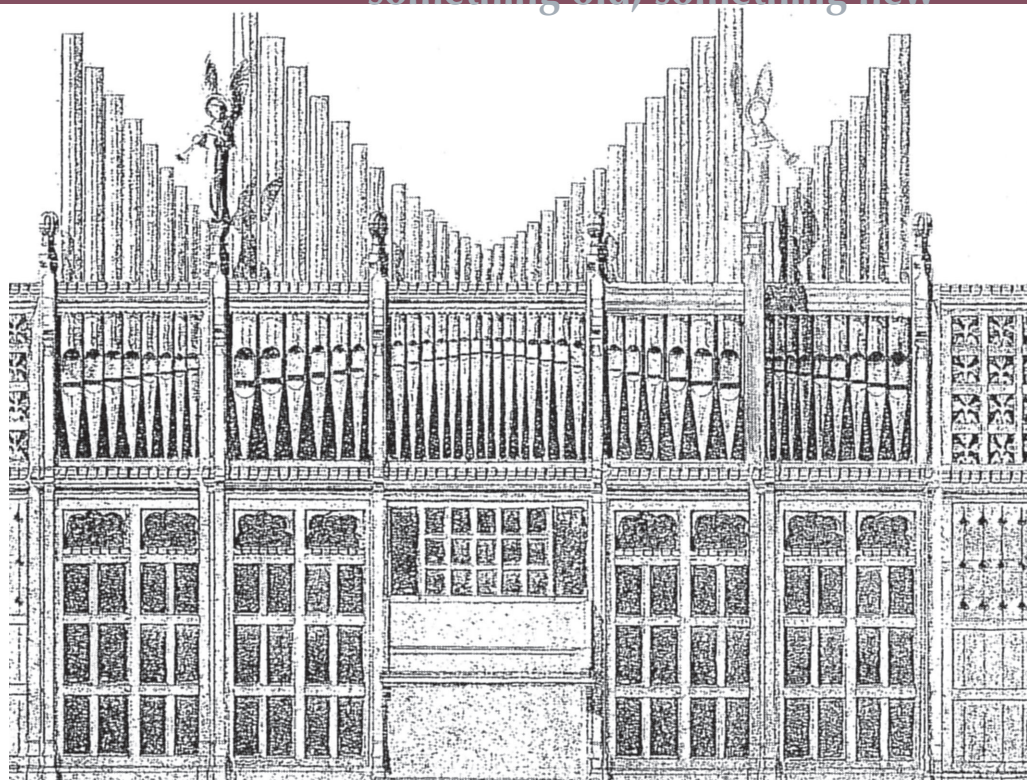
3 composition pedals to Swell

Reversible pedal to Great to Pedal

Pedal for Swell front shutters

Pedal for Swell rear shutters

Pedal for Vox Humana box (within Swell)



an able article in that paper, written by Mr Harmann Smith, its general appearance is thus described:- 'It is noticeable that in all the works of Messrs Lewis the organ cases are specially designed to accord with the style of the building in which the organ is to be placed, and the professional architect is called upon to add his quota towards completeness; a practice which it would be well to have more generally observed, that the eye might be gratified with the harmony of proportion, as essential to its pleasure as the harmony of sound is to the ear. In the present instance the case was entrusted to Mr John F. Bentley, than whom no more competent artist could be named in the province of Gothic design. The bold outline of the case, the rigid buttresses, the deep

mouldings, cusped headings and battlements, are peculiarly appropriate to the building, and as regards musical results the organ benefits greatly by the adoption of the free open-fronted style to which modern taste inclines.'

The dimensions of the instrument are 25 feet 6 inches wide, 15 feet deep, and 21 feet high. The front – the plan of which recedes in two breaks on either side of the organ to the depth of nine feet – is divided into seven compartments, five of which are occupied above the impost, by the two diapasons of the Great organ, the remainder having small panels filled with gilt ornaments, as are also those of the side elevations. The massive case is of pine, the posts being buttressed and surmounted by finial terminations. The



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## Nelson specification

### GREAT

Bourdon	16
Large Open Diapason	8
Small Open Diapason	8
Hohl Flute	8
Rohr Flute	8
Principal	4
Gemshorn	4
Superoctave	2
Mixture	III
Tromba	8
Octave	
Sub Octave	
Unison Off	

### SWELL

Bourdon	16
Violin Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedact	8
Viol d'Orchestre	8
Voix Celeste	8
Geigen Principal	4
Piccolo	2
Mixture	III
Contra Fagotto	16
Horn	8
Oboe	8
Vox Humana	8
Clarion	4
Tremulant	
Octave	
Sub Octave	

### CHOIR (ENCLOSED)

Lieblich Bourdon	16
Lieblich Gedact	8
Salicional	8
Vox Angelica	8
Salicet	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Flautina	2
Clarinet	8
Tremulant	
Octave	
Sub Octave	

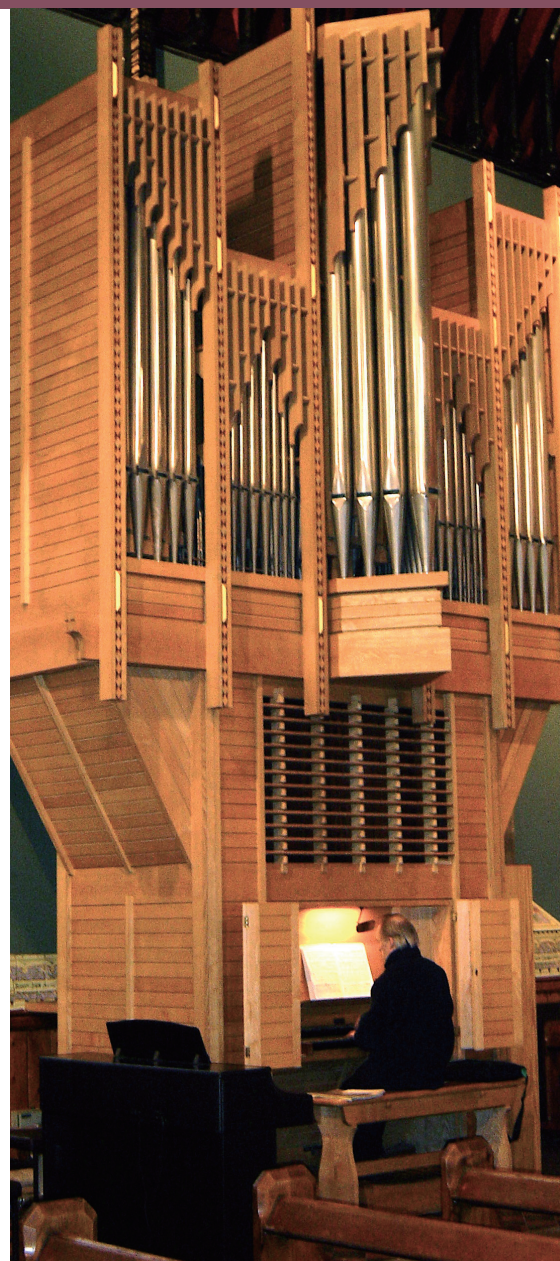
### PEDAL

Harmonic Bass	32
Open Wood	16
Open Diapason	16
Subbass	16
Echo Bourdon	16
Bass Flute	8
Trombone	16
Octave	
Normal unison couplers	
plus certain intermanual	
octave couplers.	

design includes figures of angels on the angle posts of the principal section of the front, playing musical instruments. The imposts, and also the rail supporting the diapasons, are deeply moulded and battlemented. The case below the impost is filled with panelling, the upper part having cusped headings and battlements. The

whole of the framework of the case is stained and varnished, and the panels of the five centre compartments are painted Indian red. The supply bellows, placed on either side of the organ, are caused by two double-action vertical feeders. There is also a large automatic air reservoir, intercepting the wind between the manual soundboards and their supply bellows, for the purpose of rendering the wind perfectly steady. The total surface of bellows and reservoir measures 150 feet, and they contain 160 cubic feet of air. The swell-box has Venetian shutters back and front, worked by independent pedals, for the purpose of equalising the temperature between the manuals, by leaving both sets of shutters open when the organ is not being played upon; it will also allow a moderate form of crescendo in accompanying solo voices. The voix humaine is again enclosed in a box within the swell, which is acted upon by a separate pedal.

The appearance of the noble interior of St Mary's when the service commenced at eleven o'clock in the morning was grand, [the] magnificent stained windows showing to the greatest advantage... There was a full attendance, including most of the principal Catholic families in Newcastle and surrounding district. Admission was by ticket only, the proceeds being given to the organ fund, as was also the offertory. The mass—Haydn's No. 3 or 'Imperial'—is acknowledged to be one of the most sublime compositions ever dedicated to the praise of Almighty God, and in the hands of the talented and powerful choir who performed it, received every justice. The organ was played by Mr Leggatt during the celebration of the mass... The first offertory was played by Mr Corelli Bere, the organist, the music being by Lef. Wely; and the second offertory was executed in masterly style by



Mr Rea, who also played during the procession out of the church, No. 1 sonata, and Beethoven's 'Hallelujah'. The Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle delivered an earnest and in some parts, eloquent discourse from Luke x., 27, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart'. He spoke of the ritualistic tendencies of the times, as manifested in the Church of England more and more every year, and defended the symbolic rites or ceremonials of the Roman Catholic Church as being of divine origin, many of the incidents in the life of our Blessed Saviour having, he contended, been purely ritualistic.

The specification of the Lewis organ as given in the newspapers is listed on page 23.



### Nigel Church specification

#### GREAT (CC-g, 56 notes)

Bourdon	16
Principal	8
Chimney Flute	8
Octave	4
Spitz Flute	4
Nazard	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Fifteenth	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Mixture	IV-V
Trumpet	8
Echo to Great (by pedal)	

#### ECHO (enclosed, 56 notes)

Bourdon	8
Salicional	8
Celeste	8
Chimney Flute	4
Recorder	2
Larigot	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Sifflet	1
Regal	16
Dulcian	8

#### PEDAL (CCC-F, 30 notes)

Sub Bass	16
Posaune (¼ length)	16
Great to Pedal (by pedal)	
Echo to Pedal (by pedal)	
'open-foot' voicing case made of solid ash	

Shortly after the advent of the organ, a tower and spire were finally added to the Cathedral, to a design by the Pugin-inspired Dunn and Hansom, the foremost Catholic architects in the north of England. Responsible later for the Colleges of Downside, Stonyhurst and Ushaw, it was their first collaborative work. To celebrate the Golden Jubilee of 1894, considerable redecoration work was carried out in the Cathedral with a vast amount of stencilling around the arches and windows. In 1901, the work continued and included the erection of the Baptistry, re-tiling the floor and the installation of decorated tiles around the walls and on the window sills. In 1966, before the Vatican II reforms caused the Cathedral to be heavily treated and stripped of much of its Pugin or Puginesque decoration, the organ was for some reason removed from the west end and squeezed behind an elevated arch in the south-east corner, above the cloister door – actually taking over the Dean's bedroom! Nelson of Durham carried out this work, after which the organ was so inaudible in the Cathedral that it had to be amplified to be heard at all.



Left: The Nigel Church Organ

Above: The pipes of the Echo organ





As Nelson left it, complete with a new action, and a detached console using some of the Lewis console, the specification for the altered and slightly enlarged Lewis instrument is listed on page 24.

It is clear to see that Nelson used the Lewis organ in full, substituting and deriving a very few stops, adding a Choir 2ft, a Swell 2ft and Clarion, a Great Rohr Flute, deriving a manual Bourdon to the Pedal, transposing the 10 $\frac{2}{3}$ ft to 8ft, and changing several names. The instrument was appallingly cramped, with all long pipes mitred into extraordinary shapes. Access for maintenance was minimal. With the advent of dry rot in the

organ chamber, this instrument was removed in 1980 – to local howls of protest at the scrapping of an instrument considered once the finest in the City.

Its place was taken by a new mechanical-action instrument by Nigel Church. Nigel Church (of Stamfordham, near Newcastle) built a number of characterful tracker organs, all with imaginative cases often *Werkprinzip* in style during the 1970s and 1980s; that installed in St Mary's Cathedral in 1981 was one of his larger instruments. Placed in the north nave aisle, facing south and with the Cathedral choir seated to its west (left/bass) side, this instrument was built to

the specification on page 25.

After much discussion and the appointment in 2009 of Paul Hale as consultant, the contract for a new organ was awarded to Kenneth Tickell & Company. The instrument was made and installed during 2012 and finished in January this year.

In my next article I shall fully describe this beautiful and exciting 46-stop 3-manual organ. Meanwhile, here is a taster – a workshop photograph of the nearly complete double case before painting. Notice the horizontal trumpets – a particular request of the Dean!



**Paul Hale is Cathedral Organist at Southwell and a professional organ consultant.**

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, Chairman of the RSCM in his area, 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)