



All Saints', Clifton

The 'Clifton Sound' refreshed

A famous 1967 Walker given a new lease of life by Nicholsons

Paul Hale

Before such firms as Noel Mander, Grant, Degens & Bradbeer, Peter Collins, Kenneth Jones and Kenneth Tickell came to be seen as leaders in the 'tracker revival' in the UK, another of the largest companies had invested the most time and effort into developing a modern mechanical action – J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd, at Ruislip; then re-formed under new ownership and management, at Brandon.

Admired in the 1960s/70s for their bright, articulate voicing which owed much to the work of Dennis Thurlow, Walker Organs was busy on four fronts: (1) large electro-pneumatic rebuilds (many parish churches, and cathedrals such as York, Carlisle and Dublin); (2) new electro-pneumatic organs (such as Liverpool RC Cathedral and Ampleforth Abbey); (3) unit

extension organs (the 'Walker Positif', often for small or modern churches, many of them Catholic); and (4) new tracker organs – many of them at the behest of enthusiastic consultants such as Francis Jackson. One of the tracker organs which received particularly favourable press and became one of their best-known organs was that built for All Saints' Church, Clifton (Bristol), in 1967.

All Saints', a notable Anglo-Catholic church, built in the 1860s to a design by G.E. Street, was equipped in 1870 with a 37-stop three-manual Hill, an instrument replaced in 1924 by a 43-stop Harrison & Harrison (complete with Tuba and 32ft Double Open Wood), the gift of Dame Monica Wills in memory of her husband. Almost entirely destroyed during the Second World

War during the bombing of Bristol (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Blitz), a radically modern rebuilding, by architect Robert Potter, allowed the progressive organist of All Saints' – Edward Fry – to press for a similarly modern organ. Thus what became known locally as 'The Clifton Sound' came into being, in time (just) for the Dedication of the rebuilt church, on 1 July 1967.

J.W. Walker built the organ, which in itself was no mean achievement, but when seen against their order book for 1967 it is quite remarkable. They executed more than 25 contracts that year, including their *magnum opus* in Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral, a notable small classical organ for Holy Trinity, Penn, a new small tracker organ (in the RC church of Our Lady, Fleet), many rebuilds

All Saints' specification:

GREAT ORGAN

Bourdon	16
Principal	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Octave	4
Rohrflöte	4
Octave Quint	2 ² / ₃
Fifteenth	2
Tierce (TC)	1 ³ / ₅
Fourniture 19.22.26.29	IV
Trumpet	8

SWELL ORGAN

Open Diapason	8
Gedeckt	8
Salicional	8
Voix Céleste (TC)	8
Venetian Flute	4
Principal	2
Twenty-second	1
Scharf 22.26.29.33	IV
Basson	16
Trumpet	8
Tremulant	

POSITIVE ORGAN

Bourdon	8
Principal	4
Koppelflöte	4
Nazard	2 ² / ₃
Blockflöte	2
Tierce (TC)	1 ³ / ₅
Larigot	1 ¹ / ₃
Cymbel 26.29.33	III
Cremona	8
Tremulant	

PEDAL ORGAN

Contra Bass (A&B)	32
Principal (B)	16
Salicional	16
Sub Bass (A)	16
Octave	8
Bass Flute (A)	8
Choral Bass	4
Nachthorn	2
Mixture 15.19.22	III
Bombarde	16
Schalmei	4

and about ten new Walker 'Positifs', from three to eight ranks (one of which I saw as a 15-year-old being installed into Solihull Methodist Church – beautifully voiced, it remains as musically useful as many of their 'Positifs' still do). 1967 also saw the start of work on the major Walker rebuild of the Cavaillé-Coll at Paisley Abbey and the planning of the new tracker organ for Merton College, Oxford.

This extraordinary volume of work was achievable only with a large workforce: there were at the time eight Walker pipe-makers (despite some pipework being bought in from Stinkens) and six voicers (including Arthur Jones, who voiced the Clifton reeds, Keith

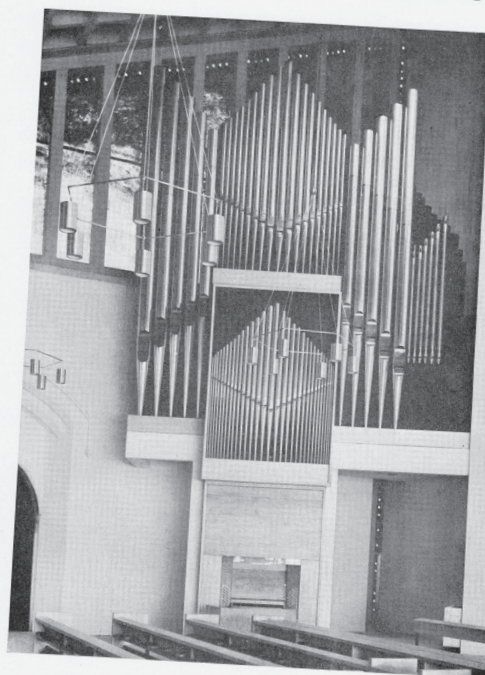
Bance, Cecil Wade, who voiced the strings, Michael Butler and Michael Broome – what a team!). Walter Goody was the Tonal Director and Dennis Thurlow was the Head Voicer, who had been strongly influenced by Walker's work for and with Ralph Downes (Brompton Oratory in 1952/4 and subsequently many more). It was Thurlow who carried out the final tonal regulation at All Saints', as he did on most of the company's organs at this time, before leaving a few years later to go freelance and then (with Raymond Todd) to buy out Nicholsons.

Nothing was skimped at All Saints' – the organ was imaginatively and colourfully specified, fitted with all the latest Walker inventions and developments and voiced to make the most of the lively acoustic and exciting modern Anglo-Catholic liturgy which All Saint's embraced – as it still does.

The case front is clearly inspired by the *Werkprinzip* though relates only loosely to the soundboards, the Pedal being placed mainly at the right (treble/east) side of the concrete platform. Oddly, despite this fine façade of smartly polished pipes, the zinc bass and tenor octaves of the 16ft Salicional, complete with tuning slides, were left all too visible to the left and right of the main case – leaving the whole thing looking uncomfortably unfinished. The 16ft bass pipes 'return' the case to the north wall on the bass/west end of the case and have never been seen in a published photograph – for rather obvious reasons when one beholds them.

Tonally the organ is typical of Walker's more progressive work at the time – bright but warm Principal choruses in all departments, rather high Swell and Positive Mixtures, a fine *cornet décomposé* atop a

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, CLIFTON



The first All Saints' was completed in 1868 to the design of G. E. Street. It was similar in style and proportions to the many fine churches which owed their ecclesiastical arrangement to his association with the Oxford or Tractarian movement. Its choir school established a musical tradition which not even the bombing of the church in 1942 could destroy.

A noble new church has since risen in its place, incorporating certain parts of the former building. Robert Porter FRIBA was its architect, and the boldly coloured windows which are a striking feature of the interior were the work of John Piper. The new Walker organ, whose front pipes of burnished zinc and tin reflect and are highlighted by the radiant blue of the windows, is spacially and visually integrated with the architectural scheme. The tonal disposition of this instrument, which represents a successful blend of modern ideas with those of the classical organ, was planned in consultation with the parish organist, Edward Fry. There is modern mechanical action to the manuals; electro-pneumatic to the pedals and drawstops.

Following the consecration of the church and organ on July 1st 1967, autumn recitals were given by Lionel Rogg and the late Brian Runnet.

GREAT ORGAN

1. Quintation	16ft	61 pipes
2. Principal	8	61 "
3. Stopped Diapason	8	61 "
4. Octave	4	61 "
5. Rohrflöte	4	61 "
6. Octave Quint	2	61 "
7. Fifteenth	2	61 "
8. Tierce, T.C.	1 ³ / ₅	49 "
9. Fourniture (19-22-26-29)	4 ranks	244 "
10. Trumpet	8	61 "

SWELL ORGAN

11. Gedeckt	8ft	61 pipes
12. Salicional	8	49 "
13. Voix Céleste, T.C.	8	49 "
14. Venetian Flute	4	61 "
15. Principal	2	61 "
16. Twenty-second	1	61 "
17. Scharf (22-26-29-33)	4 ranks	244 "
18. Dulciana	16	61 "
19. Echo Trumpet	8	61 "
20. Clarion	4	61 "
Tremulant		

POSITIVE ORGAN

21. Bourdon	8ft	61 pipes
22. Principal	4	61 "
23. Koppelflöte	4	61 "
24. Nazard	2 ² / ₃	61 "
25. Blockflöte	2	61 "
26. Tierce, T.C.	1 ³ / ₅	49 "
27. Larigot	1 ¹ / ₃	61 "
28. Cymbel (29-33-36)	3 ranks	183 "
29. Regal	8	61 "
Tremulant		

PEDAL ORGAN

30. Principal	16ft	32 pipes
31. Sub Bass	16	44 "
32. Salicional	16	32 "
33. Octave	8	32 "
34. Bass Flute from No. 31	4	32 pipes
35. Choral Bass	8	32 notes
36. Nachthorn	2	32 "
37. Mixture (15-19-22)	3 ranks	96 "
38. Bombarde	16	32 "
39. Schalmei	4	32 "

COUPLERS

40. Positive to Pedal	
41. Great to Pedal	
42. Swell to Pedal	
43. Swell to Great	
44. Swell to Positive	
45. Great and Pedal Combinations Coupled	

Walker Organs

Registered Trade Mark

J. W. Walker & Sons Ltd.
Baintree Road
Ruislip
Middlesex HA4 0EL
Telephone: 01-845 6501
Established 1828



Original publicity material created by Walker Organs



The Clifton Console

selection of beautiful flutes, and distinctly characterful reeds – on the thin side and notably snappy. A ‘clarified’ ensemble indeed, if somewhat lacking in sonority and richness, particularly in the manual 16fts. Mechanically the soundboards, though tracker, still had electro-pneumatic elements such as over-large pallets, which, when combined with aluminium and steel cord trackers, needle-pivots, metal squares and backfalls, led to a disappointingly heavy and spongy key action. The Walker design of Schwimmers for regulating the wind was an early attempt to do what the firm and many others came to achieve more successfully in later years. The early designs suffered from a poor internal valve mechanism and various springing arrangements which between them

were imprecise enough to mean that the pressure was not regulated as perfectly as is needed for the tuning to remain spot-on. This is the reason why so many 1960s Walker organs sound out of tune – it’s nothing to do with the pipes but all to do with the wind system; replace the Schwimmers with good modern units and the organ is transformed.

Putting these imperfections to one side, the Clifton organ had a distinguished first 40 years’ of existence before the need for restoration became evident. After a long process of assessing proposals by various companies, the PCC put its trust in Nicholson, who restored the organ during 2015.

The soundboard, action and wind problems were all addressed, a completely new mechanical action being fitted, along with

smaller pallets on pallet-boards with smaller slots. The electro-pneumatic slider machines (which worked on 6ins pressure, fed by a small booster blower) were replaced with solenoids, the Schwimmers replaced by those of modern Nicholson design, the console refurbished, the electrical systems replaced, and more pistons including generals fitted (though no Stepper, oddly).

Tonal changes were considered very carefully, as the basic sound of the organ was cherished. Weaknesses were considered to be the thinness of the Great 16ft Quintaton, the Swell 16ft Dulcian, the Positive 8ft Regal and the Pedal 16ft Bombarde. A lack of a Swell Open Diapason was also keenly felt, given the liturgical use of this organ. Some upperwork adjustment was also considered necessary – the Great Fifteenth was

loudened and the Mixture softened, a new top break being added; the Positive Cymbel was recast, one pitch lower. The Great Quintaton was revoiced as a 16ft Bourdon, the Swell 16ft Dulcian replaced with a 16ft Basson (French type), the Positive Regal with a Cremona, and the Swell 4ft Venetian Flute was moved to the slide of the Clarion (which was discarded) with new Open Diapason pipes placed on its slide, the basses being stood off at the back of the box. The Pedal Bombarde was revoiced – interestingly its pipes are wooden Trombone pipes of nineteenth-century age with open Walker shallots – some have suggested their origin to be the Hill in York Minster (perhaps the Pedal Fagotto, which disappeared in the 1960 Walker rebuild?) An Acoustic 32ft stop was derived from the Pedal Principal 16ft and from the 16ft Sub Bass, which is itself extended to the 8ft Bass Flute. This was readily achieved as the Pedal has always been on electro-pneumatic action; its chests were fully restored. A Positive to Great (long desired) was also added.

Access to the lowest part of the organ – the rear and sides of the console – had always been a real problem as the concrete verticals considerably restricted space. The messy task of cutting a door through the right-hand reinforced concrete upright has now allowed ready access to the console actions and solenoids (all new, of course) so future maintenance is assured. It has to be said that this was considered such a problem that other firms suggested electrifying the organ as a mechanical action would otherwise have been unreachable. Happily

the action remains mechanical and pleasant to the touch.

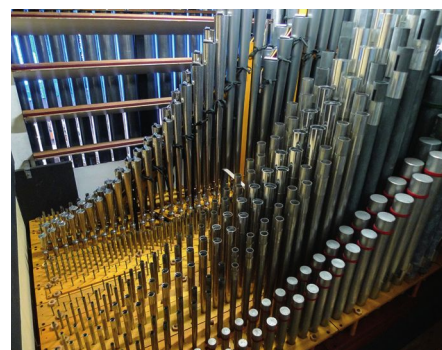
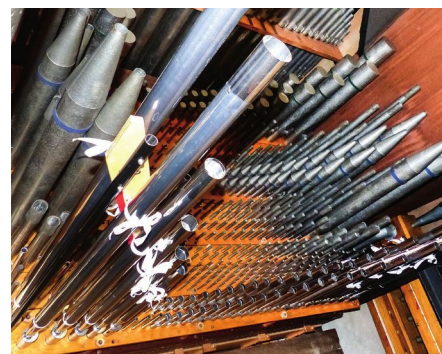
With the pipes cleaned, the reeds replaced/regulated, and a new wind system which ensures that the Schwimmers remain at the correct pressure at all times (the main failing of the old Walker units), and with some revoicing, the organ sounds completely convincing. It has gained warmth, blend and an enhanced ensemble, a sonorous full Swell (though I'd rather have gone without the 1ft than the Clarion, but doubtless there was insufficient room), and a useful Positive reed rather than a joke stop. A romantic warmth to the Swell has been provided by the beautifully-silvery new Open Diapason, and a perfectly integrated *tutti* where the three manual Mixtures now add to one another seamlessly rather than competing for attention.

There is a neat link from Walker Organs to Nicholson Organs, for not only did Dennis Thurlow end up at Nicholsons but his colleague, Guy Russell (Tonal Director of Nicholsons since Thurlow's retirement in the 1990s), began as an apprentice at Walkers just before the All Saints' organ was started. He recalls visiting the site as installation was going on. How fitting, then, that 50 years later it should fall to him to 'gild the lily' as he carried out the voicing and revoicing work to bring about this refreshment and perfection of 'The Clifton Sound'.

Top: Positive with new Cremona in front

Middle: Pedal Bombarde and Schalmel

Bottom: Swell



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