

Nairobi Cathedral and its British organ

Paul Hale

European Anglicans in the Nairobi region first received their own chaplain in 1902; two years later a church, St Stephen's, was built. This was initially shared with an African congregation, who worshipped in their own language and were ministered to by CMS missionaries. As the size of Nairobi and of both congregations grew,

this sharing became increasingly impractical, so in 1914 it was decided to launch an appeal for the erection of another church. Plans for All Saints' were commissioned from the Gothic Revival architect Temple Moore (1856-1920), who had been articulated in 1875 to George Gilbert Scott (1811-78) and set up his own firm in 1878. On 3

February 1917 the first foundations stones were laid, and work started on the three westernmost bays of the nave, complete with north and south side-aisles, which were dedicated on 31 July 1918, such was the speed of construction.

In 1922, the north tower, eventually to form the northern end of the transept (and to hold a ring of bells) was started, but for eight years remained separate from the uncompleted nave, unroofed, and with most of the southern side open to the elements. In 1924 the Diocesan Synod decided that All Saints' should be raised to the status of a cathedral. It became known as 'The Cathedral of the Highlands', thus giving the Diocese of Mombasa the rare distinction of having two cathedrals. All Saints' was a 'parish church' cathedral (with a Provost – as it still has) and the musical standard was high, though the services were basically congregational. In 1930 the nave was completed with a further two bays, joined to the north tower and to the south transept, then the south tower was started. This work was completed in 1934 and for many years the building remained thus, with a temporary east wall to link the transepts.

A 33-stop organ was made for the cathedral by E.H. Lawton of Aberdeen (1898-1947), who came out personally to install it, the work being completed (except for 13 'prepared-for' ranks) in December 1934. Lawton had been apprenticed in 1881 (aged 12!) to the busy Sheffield organ-builders Brindley & Foster, developing a special interest in pipe voicing and tuning. Marrying in 1890, he and



Image 1 | Choir and main organs



Image 2 | Fanfare Trumpet – Trombone bass

his wife (both Quakers) moved to Manchester, where he worked for Ernest Wadsworth & Co. Identifying promising opportunities for work in Scotland, he moved to Aberdeen at the age of 29, setting up in business on his own account in February 1898. The following year he built an outstanding organ (still there to this day) in Rhynie parish church, and, from its success, other orders began to come in. Only a few years later he began the often challenging and arduous work of making and installing organs in Africa, so that by the time the Nairobi contract came in, he had had three decades of invaluable experience. Hence the well-documented success of the Nairobi instrument, which was and is the largest in East Africa.

The organ author Reginald Whitworth wrote of him: ‘Lawton organs are vigorous but never coarse, with free, open tone for the diapasons, delicate, mild string tone and rather fiery chorus reeds.’ He charged £3,000 for the 1934 All Saints’ organ, built in a busy year for the firm, which exported further instruments that year to Namirembe Cathedral (Kampala), Entebbe, and Murray Town Methodist church in

Sierra Leone; over the following two years the firm exported to Salisbury (Rhodesia), Bulawayo, Napier, and Auckland.

The Nairobi organ is built in a sturdy loft (later reinforced with large and all-too-visible steel beams) high up in the south transept. The console was on the

transept floor 20 feet below the organ loft, connected by hundreds of tubes for its tubular-pneumatic action (a mixture of ‘charge’ and ‘exhaust’ mechanisms). In his monograph about the work of E.H. Lawton, Philip M.G. Wright writes ‘This contract really was the *magnum opus* of his African market, and brought him world-wide fame.’

Usual couplers, plus plenty of mechanical devices for stop control (including a ‘Melodic Bass’, as was often found on organs by Thomas Casson, for helping pianists who do not use the pedals).

The accompanying photograph of the Lawton console shows stop control by tilting tablets, pistons, and three expression pedals, the right-hand one being an unusual *Sforzando* pedal. The organ casework (then as now) is basically a framed pipe front running across the whole width of the archway between the south tower and the transept. A central tower contains the bottom 11 pipes of the Dulciana (now mute) plus two dummies, being flanked by two flats containing the bottom 16 pipes of the Large Open Diapason, beyond

Lawton specification, 1934

GREAT ORGAN (61-NOTE SLIDER SOUNDBOARD)		CHOIR ORGAN (61-NOTE SLIDER SOUNDBOARD – PREPARED FOR)	
Double Diapason	16	Spitz Flute	8
<i>prepared for</i>		<i>prepared for</i>	
Large Open Diapason	8	Rohr Flute	8
Small Open Diapason	8	<i>prepared for</i>	
Hohl Flute (wood)	8	Aeoline	8
Stopped Diapason	8	<i>prepared for</i>	
<i>installed 1940</i>		Unda Maris (ten.C)	8
Dulciana	8	<i>prepared for</i>	
Principal	4	Salicet	4
Harmonic Flute	4	<i>prepared for</i>	
Fifteenth	2	Clarinet	8
Trumpet	8	<i>prepared for</i>	
<i>prepared for</i>			
SWELL ORGAN (61-NOTE SLIDER SOUNDBOARD)		PEDAL ORGAN (30-NOTE INDIVIDUAL CHESTS)	
Lieblich Bourdon (ten.C)	16	Acoustic Bass	32
<i>installed 1940</i>		<i>from O.D. & Bourdon</i>	
Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason	16
Lieblich Gedackt	8	<i>wood</i>	
Echo Gamba (ten.C)	8	Bourdon	16
Viol d’orchestre (ten.C)	8	Echo Bourdon (Gt.)	16
Gemshorn	4	<i>prepared for</i>	
Lieblich Flute	4	Principal Bass (ext. O.D.)	8
Flageolet	2	<i>top oct. prepared for</i>	
Horn	8	Flute Bass (ext. Bourd.)	8
Oboe	8	Trombone	16
<i>installed 1940</i>		<i>prepared for</i>	
Tremulant			



Image 3 | Polyphone

which are two smaller towers and small end flats containing the bottom 18 pipes of the Small Open and four more dummies. Immediately behind the centre of the pipe front is the Great slider soundboard, its reservoir being underneath. Behind this again, at the same level, is the Swell slider soundboard with its reservoir. Pedal chests flank the south and west walls of the chamber, though there were no chests (or space) for the proposed Choir organ or the 'prepared for' Pedal stops.

The Organist for many years was J. Trevor Cole (succeeded by J.A. McCabe). Cole wrote an article about the instrument for *The Organ* of January 1943, in which he writes 'in my opinion [the voicing] could scarcely be improved upon. There

is not a bad stop in the instrument... Full Swell is thrilling... Full Great is equally satisfactory, but one looks forward to the installation of the Great Trumpet and the Pedal Trombone.' Nonetheless, the instrument lacked its Choir Organ and other desirable stops and it soon became mechanically unreliable, through no fault of its maker.

Once the Diocese of Nairobi had been formed in 1954, there was a great push to complete the cathedral, so the east end (Chancel, offices, Chapter House, Provost's Vestry, and so on) was rapidly added, to somewhat different designs from the original architect, Temple Moore, who in his plans for All Saints' had not allowed for the ancillary buildings required for

its elevation as a cathedral. It was intended at the time to add further sections of the organ behind arches high up on the south wall of the Chancel (the better to accompany the cathedral's choirs), but, in the event, the space was used for a corridor and offices instead.

In 1946, Mr Owen Seaman was appointed Choirmaster and did much to raise the standard of the music, introducing regular 'cathedral' services of Choral Evensong and Choral Communion (which still take place weekly today, along with Choral Matins). The Lawton organ had, for various reasons, been giving trouble before this, so on Mr Seaman's appointment an organ committee was formed, to whom it was soon obvious that the cathedral instrument needed at least a new action, augmentation/completion, and possibly also relocation within the enlarged building. By 1948 a suggested specification had been drawn up, mostly following Lawton's original plan. There were some changes proposed to the Great and Swell, and the Choir (in the Chancel) was to comprise the former Great Stopped Diapason and Dulciana, the latter extended down to 16ft pitch also, plus the Swell's former Echo Gamba and Flageolet, together with a new Clarinet, the Flauto Traverso 4ft and the duplexed Great Trumpet. The Pedal was to be as envisaged by Lawton, with the addition of Echo Bass 16ft and Principal Bass's top octave. Messrs Harrison & Harrison, Henry Willis, John Compton, and J.W. Walker were all invited to tender. Willis was 'not interested'; however, the Walker firm had a contract in Khartoum in late 1949, and were prepared to travel the relatively short extra distance to inspect the organ. They found it better than expected: the building-frame and bellows reportedly being good, the Swell box and wind trunks fairly good, but the reeds and strings needed revoicing. After further consultation between McCabe,

Walkers, and the committee in 1952 a final specification was agreed; the reeds and certain other ranks being returned to England for revoicing at Walker's Ruislip factory.

Rather than move the whole organ to a new position, which would have been a major undertaking, or merely attempting to squeeze a Choir organ in the existing loft, it was planned to add a 2-rank extension Choir organ in the new Chancel and to augment the Great, Swell, and Pedal in the existing organ loft. After delays, the pipework was returned to England in June 1954, and a year later Walker staff Messrs Englefield and Button arrived in Nairobi and 'worked all hours to get the job finished'. The organ was dedicated on 10 July 1955 and on 19 July the inaugural recital was given by Dr Harold Darke (of St Michael's Cornhill), who was in Kenya to adjudicate the Kenya Musical Festival. Sadly, there were insufficient funds for the Chancel's Choir Organ, but the organ was rebuilt with electro-pneumatic action and a new stop-key console situated on the north side of the chancel.

Usual couplers on a standard Walker stop-key console with double-touch cancelling. A new 'Discus' blower was fitted along with a reservoir at 8ins pressure for the Swell Trumpet and Great/Pedal Tromba ranks. The casework was enhanced with solid wooden panelling below the pipes. Of the 1,722 speaking pipes in the organ, 914 were from the Lawton organ. The instrument was duly written-up by J. Trevor Cole in his second article for *The Organ* (January 1956).

In 1978 Walkers (in the shape of their then-representative Geoffrey Coffin) returned. They installed a brand-new 2-rank Choir Organ just inside the chancel (at high level) and re-covered the many hundred small pneumatic motors, using Perflex, a thermoplastic leather substitute developed in the USA. Sadly, Perflex proved to have a short life, so Walkers, at



Image 4 | Walker 1955 stop-keys

Walker specification, 1955
[omitting the large number of extended stops forming the proposed Chancel Great/Choir/Pedal]

GREAT ORGAN		CHOIR ORGAN (THE REST WAS PREPARED FOR AT THE CONSOLE)	
Double Diapason	16	Double Clarinet (ten.C)	16
rank A, Walker		rank C, Walker	
Open Diapason No.1	8	Clarinet	8
Open Diapason No.2	8	rank C, Walker	
Hohl Flute	8	Tromba	8
Dolce	8	rank B, Walker	
Walker		Octave Tromba	4
Principal	4	rank B, Walker	
Harmonic Flute	4		
Twelfth	2 ² / ₃		
Walker			
Fifteenth	2		
Mixture (17.19.22)	III		
Walker			
Tromba	8		
rank B, Walker			
SWELL ORGAN		PEDAL ORGAN	
Open Diapason	8	Acoustic Bass	32
Lieblich Gedackt	8	ranks E & F	
Viola da Gamba	8	Open Wood	16
bass Walker		rank E	
Voix Céleste (ten.C)	8	Open Diapason	16
Walker		rank A, Walker	
Gemshorn	4	Bourdon	16
Lieblich Flute	4	rank F	
Fifteenth	2	Octave	8
revoiced		rank E, treble Walker	
Mixture (19.22.26)	III	Principal	8
Walker		rank A, Walker	
Double Clarinet (ten.C)	16	Bass Flute	8
rank C, Walker		rank F	
Clarinet	8	Octave Flute	4
rank C, Walker		rank F, treble Walker	
Oboe	8	Trombone	16
Double Trumpet	16	rank B, Walker	
rank D, bass Walker		Double Trumpet	16
Trumpet	8	rank D, bass Walker	
rank D, Horn revoiced		Tromba	8
Clarion	4	rank B, Walker	
rank D, treble Walker		Trumpet	8
		rank D, Horn revoiced	
		Clarion	4
		rank D	

great expense, had only a few years later to re-leather the motors once again in sheepskin (as they did for several other 'Perflexed' organs such as the famous instrument in St Margaret's, Westminster). The Choir Organ comprised a Gedact rank drawing at 8, 4, $2\frac{2}{3}$, 2, and $1\frac{1}{3}$ ft and a Dulciana rank drawing at 8 and 4ft only. Both were voiced 'open foot'! Later, the Great 16ft Double Diapason was made to draw also on the Choir at 8ft. This brought the number of speaking pipes to 1,880.

After a further forty years or so the organ had fallen into

a poor condition, particularly the 1955 electrical components. Accordingly, whilst Hannah Emmrich was Director of Music, a rebuild was decided upon, the contract being won in 2021 by Michael Farley of Budleigh Salterton, England. His team, with local help, dismantled the instrument that November, following which the entire organ (save the Swell box and basses of the 16ft Open Wood and Open Diapason) was shipped to England. Restoration and rebuilding took place during 2022 (the Walker console being rebuilt with stop-

knobs and new 'top-resistance' keys by Renatus of Bideford), the instrument gradually being assembled in the workshops until it could all be played. The current writer acted as consultant from an initial enquiry in 2018 and much enjoyed his visits to Budleigh Salterton, culminating in signing-off the organ in December 2022 as complete and ready to be returned. Shipped back to Nairobi (where by then Antony Muriuki had taken over as Director of Music), the organ was reinstalled during January and early February, at which time I flew out for the final tonal regulation



Image 5 | West end of cathedral

Farley specification 2023

GREAT ORGAN

Double Diapason	16
<i>rank A</i>	
Open Diapason I	8
Open Diapason II	8
Hohl Flute	8
Dolce	8
Octave	4
<i>rank A</i>	
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Twelfth	2 ² / ₃
Fifteenth	2
Tierce	1 ³ / ₅
Mixture (17.19.22)	III
Tromba	8
<i>rank B</i>	

SWELL ORGAN

Lieblich Bourdon	16
<i>bass rank G</i>	
Open Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedact	8
Viola Di Gamba	8
Voix Celeste (ten.C)	8
Gemshorn	4
Lieblich Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Mixture (19.22.26)	III
Bass Clarinet (ten.C)	16
<i>rank C</i>	
Clarinet	8
<i>rank C</i>	
Oboe	8
Tremulant	
Double Trumpet	16
<i>rank D</i>	
Trumpet	8
<i>rank D</i>	
Clarion	4
<i>rank D</i>	

CHOIR ORGAN

Open Diapason	8
<i>rank A</i>	
Rohr Flute	8
<i>rank I</i>	
Dulciana	8
<i>rank J</i>	
Stopped Flute	4
<i>rank I</i>	
Dulcet	4
<i>rank J</i>	
Nazard	2 ² / ₃
<i>rank I</i>	
Flautino	2
<i>rank I</i>	
Larigot	1 ¹ / ₃
<i>rank I, top 7 pipes repeat</i>	
Twenty Second	1
<i>rank J, top octave repeats</i>	
Tremulant	
<i>new</i>	
Clarinet	8
<i>rank C</i>	
Tromba	8
<i>rank B</i>	
Fanfare Trumpet (ten.C)	8

PEDAL ORGAN

Contra Bourdon	32
<i>rank F, polyphone bass</i>	
Open Wood	16
<i>rank E</i>	
Open Diapason	16
<i>rank A</i>	
Bourdon	16
<i>rank F</i>	
Echo Bourdon	16
<i>rank G</i>	
Octave Wood	8
<i>rank E</i>	
Principal	8
<i>rank A</i>	
Bass Flute	8
<i>rank F</i>	
Fifteenth	4
<i>rank A</i>	
Octave Flute	4
<i>rank F</i>	
Harmonics (5,10,12, ^b 14, ^b 16)	V
<i>rank B, plus harmonics from A & F</i>	
Trombone	16
<i>rank B</i>	
Double Trumpet	16
<i>rank D</i>	
Tromba	8
<i>rank B</i>	
Trumpet	8
<i>rank D</i>	
Clarion	4
<i>rank D</i>	

and to make a detailed ‘snagging’ check. I signed off the organ on 9 February 2023 and it was dedicated during a magnificent service the following Sunday.

The two slider soundboards have been completely restored and fitted with direct electro-magnetic action to the pallets, with small ‘helper’ magnets. The Walker Roosevelt unit chests were largely replaced with new chests employing pallet-magnets and glass sliding bottom-boards. The pallet-magnets in the direct-electric Choir Organ chests have been replaced, so the only chests retaining perishable thin sheepskin are the largest old Pedal chests. All reservoirs have been releathered and three new (very quiet) B.O.B. Stevenson blowers installed. The cathedral had some years before commissioned and held in store a short-compass Fanfare Trumpet, made by Terry

Shires of Leeds and voiced by the late lamented David Frostick. This has had its compass extended and has been fitted horizontally on to new chests inside the organ (not on display). A fine 32ft Polyphone has been added in place of the Acoustic Bass (this large pipe was originally part of the World War 2 Memorial organ built by John Compton in 1956 for Southern Grammar School for Boys in Portsmouth) and a Compton-esque 32ft Harmonics programmed, synthesising most effectively a 32ft reed. The Choir gained a 1ft Dulciana extension (to develop something of a chorus) and the Great 16ft Double Diapason rank has been retained on the Choir at 8ft and made available on the Pedal at 4ft and on the Great at 4ft (to boost the 4ft line, support the slightly loudened upperwork, and help the Great with more projection into the Nave). A long hoped-for 16ft Pedal

Echo Bourdon has been added (the cathedral had these pipes in store), sharing its bottom octave with a Swell Lieblich Bourdon sourced by Michael Farley, mounted over the original Lawton slider.

The whole of this complex project was undertaken by a dedicated Farley team: Ashley Tooze (workshop and on site construction, plus project planning), Bob Millington and Geoffrey Archer (pipework restoration and workshop tonal finishing), Simon Brown (Ark Voicing – reed voicing and workshop tonal finishing), Alison Henman (pipe restoration and bellows re-leathering), Gary Cook (on-site dismantling and re-installation, plus tonal finishing / fine tuning), along with Michael Farley and Ladda Noytaisong.

Usual couplers (including octave couplers to Swell and to Choir) plus Great to Choir. Full

modern accessories on the console, including a stepper, a recording facility with iPad, a transposer, and a 'Melodic Bass' for pianist/organists.

The work Michael Farley and his skilled team have carried out, plus the Renatus transformation of the console, have resulted in an extremely fine

organ of real 'cathedral' nature, filling the building with sound and possessing a particularly wide range of distinguished colours. It can be heard here: <https://paulhale.org/2023/02/10/10th-february-2023/> – a filmed recording of me signing it off by playing Fela Sowande's attractive piece based on 'Joshua

fit de Battle ob Jericho'. I think Mr Lawton would be truly delighted to hear his Kenyan *magnum opus* in its fully developed and impressive new guise. Certainly, without the high quality of his work – still the very heart and soul of this instrument – All Saints' Cathedral would be unlikely now to have had anything nearly so fine.



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 and the Archbishop of Canterbury's 'Thomas Cranmer Award' for his contribution to church music. More information is available at www.paulhale.org



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