

Four Jewels of the Lake District

Paul Hale

Let's face it, a holiday in the Lake District generally turns out to be a wet experience, which means that holiday-makers are on the look-out for indoor attractions. Among the many indoor attractions of the Lakes – museums, art galleries, important houses – there are others for the church crawler or, better still, the organ crawler.

In this article I am going to introduce readers to four organs to seek out on wet days in the Lakes. Not just any old instruments but a set of real jewels – now polished and gleaming, yet their beauties are enjoyed by all too few organists. All four are known to me from working as a consultant for their restoration. Two – St Mary's, Ambleside and St James's, Whitehaven – I've written about before, in our September 2012 edition, so they will get but a brief mention here, just to bring them back to your attention. The other two, restored recently, are both dedicated to St Oswald: Grasmere and Ravenstonedale.

Let's start at Ambleside, where in 1898 the Hope-Jones Organ Company Ltd installed a small but powerful three-manual instrument. It was actually manufactured for Hope-Jones by Norman & Beard, as many of his organs were – though to his unique designs. Added to and altered in 1900, 1905, and 1909 by Norman & Beard, its wiring, magnets, and contacts were replaced by Hill Norman & Beard in 1935, and its Choir Organ added by them at a later date. Its stop list became and remains:

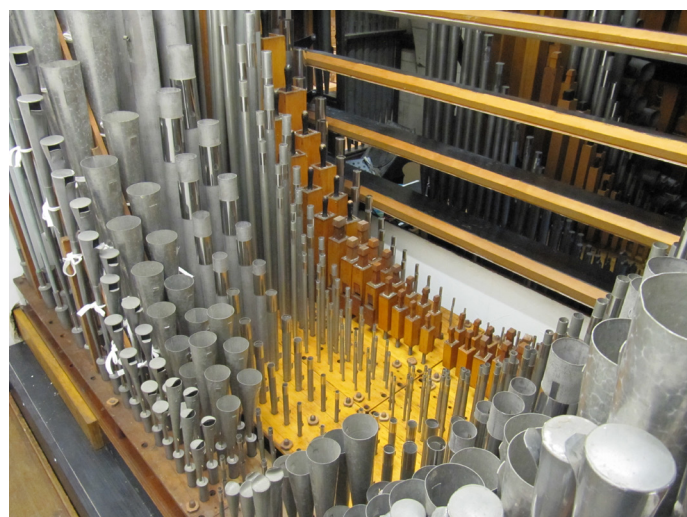


Image 1 | Ambleside pipework

St Mary's, Ambleside

Hill Norman & Beard, 1935

Great Organ	
Rohr Gedeckt (part from Ped Bourd.)	16
Open Diapason No.1	8
Open Diapason No.2 (1905)	8
Hohl Flute (1905)	8
Octave	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Fifteenth (1935?)	2
Swell to Great, Choir to Great	
Swell Organ (concrete Swell box)	
Open Diapason	8
Tibia Clausa	8
Viol d'Orchestre	8
Echo Gamba (1935)	8
Gemshorn (1905)	4
Cornocean	8
Oboe (1905)	8
Tremulant	
Swell Octave, Sub Octave, Unison Off	
Choir Organ (post-1935)	
Stopped Diapason	8
Dulciana	8
Nazard	2 ² / ₃
Clarinet	8
Tuba (16ins wind, in the Swell box)	8
Choir Octave, Sub Octave, Unison Off	
Swell to Choir	
Pedal Organ	
Contra Bourdon (quinted bass)	32
Open Diapason (ext. Great)	16
Bourdon (ext. Contra Bourdon)	16
Flute (ext. Bourdon)	8
Diaphone (16ins wind, wooden)	16
Swell to Pedal, Great to Pedal, Choir to Pedal	

Following severe water ingress in 2011, the huge soundboards were glue-flooded and re-palleted; the reservoirs were re-leathered and in one instance restored back to double-rise (glue-flooding is when you turn a slider soundboard upside down, remove for re-leathering all the pallets, then pour hot glue through each of the bars of the grid to seal up any cracks and so reseal them to the underneath of the

table where they might have come away). The Choir soundboard – mounted by HNB mid-air in the cavernous Swell box – has been moved to the rails always intended for it behind the Great. It sits adjacent to the stentorian 16ft wooden Diaphone which proudly dominates the centre of the organ. All the pipework was restored, the church in addition paying for the restoration of the Great, which had not been water-damaged. This work was carried out by John Lightbown & Son. The organ has a particular sonority, helped by the large-scale diapasons, flutes, and Diaphone, contrasted vividly by the keen Swell strings. The unusual Choir stop list is not a misprint: in the mid-1930s HNB often included a lone Choir Nazard for ‘colour’ use.

Next, we travel to St James, Whitehaven, some 45 miles away, and, I suppose, inclined to consider itself more seaside than lakeside. In St James’s is one of those iconic instruments designed by Lt-Col George Dixon of St Bees (a neighbouring town with its famous ‘Father’ Willis). Unlike his two most significant designs – Ely Cathedral and St Nicholas, Whitehaven (destroyed by fire in 1971), which were both built by Harrison & Harrison – this characterful 1909 instrument was built by Norman & Beard. Although Dixon’s original scheme became watered down before it was built, the organ still has a most interesting stop-list, unchanged to this day.



Image 2 | Whitehaven, Great pipework

St James, Whitehaven

Hill Norman & Beard, 1909

Great Organ (58 notes)	
Rohr Bordun	16
Open Diapason	8
Geigen	8
Claribel Flute	8
Principal	4
Twelfth	2 ² / ₃
Fifteenth	2
Bombarde to Great, Orchestral to Great, Swell to Great	
Swell Organ (70 note soundboard)	
Horn Diapason	8
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Echo Gamba	8
Gemshorn	4
Mixture 15.19.22	III
Corno di Bassetto	16
Trumpet	8
Tremulant (acting also on Orchestral)	
Swell Octave, Swell Octaves alone	
Orchestral Organ (enclosed, 58 notes)	
Hohl Flöte	8
Viole d’Orchestre	8
Viole Célestes (TC)	8
Concert Flute	4
Oboe	8
Orchestral Octave	
Bombarde to Orchestral, Swell to Orchestral	
Bombarde Organ (floating, 58 notes)	
Harmonic Tromba	8
Clarion (ext. Tromba)	4
Pedal Organ (30 notes)	
Open Wood	16
Subbass (from Great Bordun)	16
Octave Wood (ext. Open Wood)	8
Flute (from Great Bordun)	8
Trombone	16
Orchestral to Pedal, Great to Pedal,	
Swell to Pedal	

Readers will notice that this is not too many miles away from the sort of ‘orchestral’ organ schemes designed by Hope-Jones. The difference is that Dixon never forgot that an organ needs choruses and upperwork, not simply a list of colourful 8ft registers. His small organ designs generated the *multum in parvo* epithet and his schemes and thinking considerably influenced his friend Arthur Harrison and consequently Harrison & Harrison’s tonal outlook. The RSCM’s little 1931 H&H, formerly in St Nicolas’ Chapel at Addington Palace and now in St Alkmund, Shrewsbury, is an excellent example of his influence on H&H: Great 8.8.8.4; Swell 8.4.2²/₃.2.16; Pedal 16.8; octave couplers to the Swell and the inclusion of a rare ‘Great to Swell’ coupler.

Like the Ambleside organ, Whitehaven's, too, fell victim to severe water ingress in a fierce storm in 2010, so was scrupulously restored by Mander Organs during 2011. Alas – worse damage was to come its way a decade later as the organ chamber ceiling collapsed into the instrument under the weight of a further deluge in September 2020. I was called in again by the loss adjusters and kept an eye on a second large overhaul, this time by John Lightbown & Son, who had done such fine work at Ambleside. Returned to perfect health, the instrument's glorious tones once more roll around this attractive church. It, and the Ambleside Hope-Jones, are certainly 'musts' for visiting players seeking refuge from the rain.

The *leitmotif* of water follows us to Ravenstonedale where in the riverside parish church of St Oswald there resides an early Harrison & Harrison, costing £283 in 1891. The tonal design (particularly of the Swell department) is unusual for Harrison's and was specified by Frederick Roper, Organist of Barnard Castle Parish Church, where he played an 1870 Brindley & Foster organ of the same specification (now regrettably replaced by an electronic). The Harrison was limited by the height available in the church, its height apparently being reduced at the last minute to 16ft 8ins as the church was disinclined to employ a joiner to lower the floor. In 1934 the organ was cleaned and overhauled again by Harrison's, a Discus blower being fitted in 1938, replacing a water engine which in turn had supplanted the original hand-blowing.



Image 3 | Ravenstonedale organ

When I inspected the organ in August 2017, I found that the Swell soundboard was badly split and was leaking copious amounts of air from one note to another. All the Swell pipework needed cleaning and refurbishing, as did that of the Great. The Great soundboard was in far better condition than the Swell, requiring only a top overhaul. The tracker action needed re-bushing and generally repairing and the Pedal's pneumatic action was beginning to become unreliable so needed a full refurbishment. Particular attention needed to be given to the console, which had suffered considerable wear through nearly 130 years' playing.

David Wells of Liverpool won the contract and all seemed pretty straightforward – until they began dismantling. It soon became apparent that many dozens of large screws had been attacked by damp for many decades, resulting in their heads rusting almost down to the bottom of the slot for the screw-driver. Dismantling this very tightly-compressed instrument became a real challenge – a challenge made far more extreme when, in the workshops, it came to dismantling the soundboards. Slider soundboard have their sliders and upperboards held in place with dozens and dozens of sizeable screws. Almost all were found to have rusted too far to be removed with a screwdriver, yet they must not be damaged as new screws had to fit the same holes. Extracting all these screws took an inordinate amount of time and the David Wells team fully merited the church's (and the consultant's) thanks for their dogged determination. Work (including a quiet replacement blower) was complete in July 2021, four years after I had first surveyed it.

St Oswald's, Ravenstonedale

Harrison & Harrison, 1891

Great Organ (56 notes)

Open Diapason	8
Lieblich Flute	8
Dulciana	8
Principal	4
Lieblich Flute	4
Twelfth	2 ² / ₃
Fifteenth	2

Swell to Great

Swell Organ (56 notes)

Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Principal	4
Mixture (12.15)	II
Horn	8
Oboe	8

Pedal Organ (30 notes)

Bourdon	16
Swell to Pedal, Great to Pedal	

The parish is delighted with the result and the restoration means we can add this modest but very musical organ to my list of ‘must see in the Lakes’ instruments. Note that the Great Organ has some of the characteristics of a Choir Organ (two Lieblichs and a Dulciana), so that with imaginative playing, it can sound like a 3-manual instrument. Furthermore, just look at that Swell – so similar to the Addington Palace flue chorus of 1931. All it would need to match it would be the Oboe drawing at 16ft pitch; however, in 1891 a Swell double reed was far from ubiquitous.

Our final ‘gem’ is to be found in St Oswald’s, Grasmere, and it is the largest instrument of the four (by two stops). The order for the organ – a First World War Memorial – was given in March 1923 to J.J. Binns of Leeds; it was installed in November the same year. 40 years later, J.W. Walker restored the instrument during 1964. Pneumatic motors were re-leathered and there was a complete cleaning along with the replacing of cork stoppers by felted metal canisters. Improvements were made by placing the Tromba on a new pneumatic windchest of its own, making it available on both Great and Choir. In addition, the Choir Gamba was removed and replaced by the Great Flautina, which was in turn replaced by a bright new Fifteenth. The empty front slider left by the removal of the Tromba was filled with a new three-rank Mixture. The excellent Fifteenth and Mixture added much-needed brightness and vigour to the chorus and transformed the sound of the Great. No other changes were made but a fine new Watkins & Watson ‘Discus’ blower was installed.



Image 4 | St Oswald's, Grasmere

In 2004 some further work was needed; this was carried out in sections by the local organ builder Victor Saville. At the same time, a Watkins & Watson humidifier was installed. By 2017, when I was called in to assess the instrument's condition, it was clear that considerable work needed doing to the whole organ. The key, stop, and piston actions had all become very slow; rapid note repetition was impossible. The situation was made more complicated by the large pneumatic relays through which the Swell, Choir, Pedal, and Tromba actions plus the couplers played. And it was made even more complicated by the fact that none of the mechanism at the treble end of the console could be accessed for repair as the console was set at 45 degrees to the casework.

St Oswald's, Grasmere

J.J. Binns, 1923

Great Organ (61 notes)

Bourdon	16
Large Open Diapason	8
Small Open Diapason	8
Hohl Flute	8
Principal	4
Flute Harmonic	4
Fifteenth	2
Mixture (19.22.26)	III
Tromba	8
Swell to Great, Unison, Octave, Sub Octave, Choir to Great	

Swell Organ (61 notes)

Geigen Diapason	8
Rohr Flute	8
Viol d'Orchestre	8
Vox Angelica (full compass)	8
Salicet	4
Dulciana Mixture 12.15	II
Cornopean	8
Oboe	8
Tremulant	
Octave, Sub Octave, Unison Off	

Choir Organ (enclosed, 61 notes)

Lieblich Gedact	8
Dulciana	8
Flauto Traverso	4
Flautino	2
Clarionet	8
Tremulant	
Octave, Sub Octave, Unison Off, Swell to Choir	

Pedal Organ (30 notes)

Harmonic Bass (ext. Diap; acoustic)	32
Open Diapason	16
Bourdon (bass 12 from Great Bourdon)	16
Octave Diapason (ext. Diap.)	8
Bass Flute (ext. Bourdon)	8
Great to Pedal, Swell to Pedal, Choir to Pedal	

The decision was therefore taken – with some reluctance – to convert the Binns actions to electro-pneumatic and to fit the console with a modern, if modest, electronic piston system. Nicholson & Co won the contract, carrying out the work during 2022-23. I had the pleasure of giving a demonstration recital on 5 August. The parishioners have the great fortune to have Ian Hare as their Director of Music, for Ian (a former Organ Scholar of King’s College Cambridge)

has been lauded in the Lake District for five decades as an outstanding player and musician. In his hands the Binns makes a truly distinguished sound in this lovely church.

While hoping not to tempt fate, Grasmere’s is the only organ of the four to avoid getting soaked. Long may it remain so and long may damp organ-loving visitors to the Lakes enjoy experiencing these four very special organs.



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 has been a diploma examiner for the RCO, and has been awarded honorary fellowships by the GCM and the RSCM, and the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Lambeth ‘Thomas Cranmer Award’ for his contribution to church music. More information is available at www.paulhale.org.



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