

# Liverpool Cathedral's long-awaited Echo Organ arrives

Paul Hale

How many of us have sat down to perform at an unfamiliar organ only to be told 'Oh, the Pedal Trombone's only prepared-for'? If it's not the Trombone it will be the Swell 16ft reed (or sometimes just its bottom octave!), or the Great Mixture, or the solo reed, or some sort of 32ft. It's a sad fact that few 'prepared-for' stops are ever installed, mainly because once an organ project has taken place, churches turn their minds to other priorities and are usually reluctant to fund-raise again for the organ – particularly as the missing stops are usually the most expensive ones. Mind you, I recently played a large new organ in the USA with many expensive stops, where the prepared-for rank was a tiny 1ft!

Whole sections of an organ are sometimes prepared for (such as proposed Solo divisions at St Mary's, Portsea and St Augustine's, Kilburn), though this is more rare. In this article we look at probably the best-known long-term prepared-for section in any organ in the UK: the Echo Organ in Liverpool Cathedral, all but complete as I write this at the end of May.

Professor Ian Tracey writes: 'References are made to it from the very inception of the specification, but as a result of the financial losses from World War I, and then World War II, it never came into being. In a letter of 5th October 1922 to the Executive Committee, Henry ('Harry') Goss-Custard, the first Organist of the new Cathedral writes:

*I assume that the Echo Organ, though now only prepared for, is still to be considered an intrinsic part of the complete design, and its subsequent insertion eminently desirable.*  
H. Goss-Custard.

The organ as originally conceived included a comprehensive Echo Organ, and though the instrument's specification, as first revealed in print in *The Musical Times* of 1st January 1913 and *The Musical Opinion and Trade Review* for February 1913, was to change before being built, the stop-list of the Echo remained unaltered and the console was fitted out with the necessary stop-knobs. Here is the stop-list as planned from the start (as given in the aforementioned journals); all stops were to be enclosed in an expression box:

<b>Echo Manual</b>	
Quintatön (stopped metal)	16
Echo Diapason	8
Cor de Nuit (stopped metal)	8
Carillon (gongs, tenor C)	8
Flauto Amabile (open wood)	8
Muted Viole	8
Æoline Céleste (FF)	8
Celestina (open wood)	4
Fernflöte (stopped metal)	4
Rohr Nasat (stopped metal)	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Flautina	2
Harmonic Ætheria (flute tone)	10.12.15
Chalumeau*	16
Cor Harmonique*	8
Trompette*	8
Hautbois d'Amour	8
Musette	8
Voix Humaine	8
Hautbois Octavante	4
Octave	
Sub Octave	
Unison Off	
Tremulant	
<b>Echo Pedal</b>	
Salicional	16
Echo Bass (stopped wood)	16
Fugara	8
Dulzian	16
<b>Echo Couplers</b>	
Echo to Swell	
Echo to Choir	
Echo to Solo	
Echo On	
Nine adjustable composition pistons	
One reversible piston to 'Echo On'	
1,343 pipes	
Wind pressures to be 3.5ins; 7ins for stops marked*	

Notice the Cor Harmonique (one of many stops with fancy names in this specification!). In the event, Henry Willis III only ever made one such stop, for the company's excellent 1929-30 rebuilding of the organ in All Saints, High Wycombe. The stop is still there – a modest-scale French Horn in construction, with a haunting, beautiful tone – a cross between a soft French Horn and a Cor Anglais. Would that he had made more examples.

In *The Musical Times* of 1st September 1918, G. Donald Harrison (styled in the article as 'Lieut., R.A.F.')

writes about progress in the construction of the great Liverpool organ, stating that 'during the past two years the writer has periodically visited Messrs. Willis's factory to inspect the various portions of this giant instrument'. Harrison (1889-1956) was soon to join the Willis firm before emigrating to the USA in 1927, famously taking over from Ernest Skinner at Aeolian-Skinner and developing the 'American Classic Organ', a style which

came to dominate organ-building in that country – and to an extent still does. He writes: 'It is very regrettable that the designer of the organ, the late W. J. Ridley, did not live to hear the instrument, which was his greatest interest in life. He passed away on January 20, 1918. Curiously, Mr. Ridley's death, which was very sudden, was closely followed by the death of Mrs Barrow, the donor of the organ, whose nephew Mr Ridley was. Mrs Barrow has, I understand, left a handsome legacy to the Cathedral, which will entirely relieve the authorities from all cost

in connection with the upkeep of the instrument, and ensure her gift being maintained in a perfect state of preservation'. As prices rose steeply after the 1914-18 World War, it transpired that even the great generosity of Mr Ridley and Mrs Barrow was insufficient to finish the organ, so the Echo Organ remained a 'prepared-for' division.

The 1913 specification was twice recast before manufacturing work began, the final version being published in *The Organ* (Quarterly) for April 1924, within an explanatory article by Sidney W. Harvey (issued as a reprint by the Willis firm). The organ – all



Image 1 | The arch containing the hidden Echo Organ



Image 2 | Echo stop-knobs



Image 3 | Echo soundboard within swell box under construction at David Wells Ltd

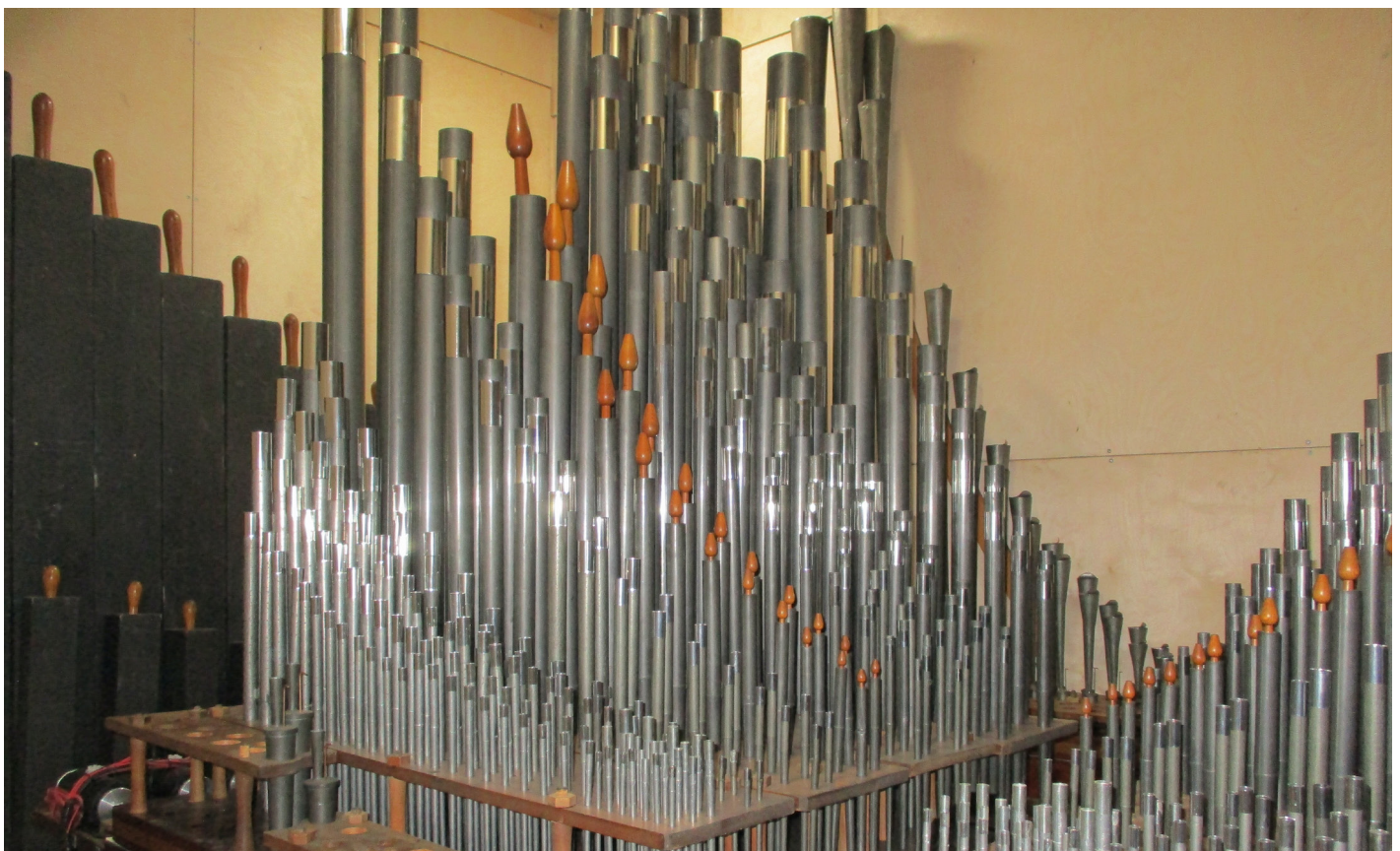


Image 4 | Echo pipes - Hautbois d'Amour at the back



Image 5 | The south case of the main organ

but the Echo division – was dedicated by the Bishop of Liverpool on 18th October 1926 with this powerful prayer: ‘In the joy of our Lord Christ we dedicate this organ for the worship of His Holy Church unto God Immortal, in Whom all harmonies are one, Who made us so that in music we can hear His voice, to Whom be praise and glory in the Eternal Spirit here and in the world to come’. Dedicatory recitals were played by Goss-Custard, Charles Macpherson (St Paul’s Cathedral), Walter Alcock (Salisbury Cathedral) and G. D. Cunningham (Birmingham City Organist). A great deal of true organ repertoire was played, orchestral transcriptions being kept to a minimum – unusual for the period.

In ‘a full account’ of the organ, written by R. Meyrick-Roberts (organist of St Mary’s Church, Brecon, formerly of the American Church, Paris) and published by *Musical Opinion* in 1926 as an elegant book, the author describes the prepared-for Echo Organ in these terms: ‘Of the Echo Organ and the Echo Pedal department, one must perforce be silent, for it is at present only prepared for; but when a careful study is made of its composition and contents, it is not impossible to have a tolerably good idea of what the ultimate effect will be. The selection of stops is exceedingly well thought-out: there are fascinating tone colours and consequently (we can be sure) endless variety of tonal combinations. It

is a perfectly distinct organ in itself, with its own pedal department; though, of course, when erected, it can be used in combination with other departments. The tonal scheme is composed of a small family of quintatöns, an echo diapason, some muted string-toned stops, a very delicate and useful mutation rank of flute tone, and a harmonica ætheria of three ranks, together with a delightful selection of seven reed stops of various tones.’

Plans were drawn up in the 1930s for a distinctly different completion of the organ. With the vast Central Space being almost complete, and the cavernous nave beyond it soon to start construction, Goss-Custard came to realise that additional sections of organ tone would be necessary in these spaces. One section was planned to be situated in a beautiful case (designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott) on the majestic Bridge at the west end of the Central Space, another in the Corona (tower) ‘for ætherial and antiphonal effects’. A second console was built, being installed during 1940 in an elegant oak enclosure in the north-east of the Central Space. This console was fitted out with stop controls for the entire organ – as then envisaged – and it is significant to note that the original Echo Organ (as planned for the South East Chancel Triforium) was not included. Instead, a reduced version of the original Echo stop-list was assigned to a Corona Organ in the Central Space section. Its specification would have been as follows:

**Corona Manual**

Quintaten	16
Flauto Amabile	8
Muted Viole	8
Vox Ætheria (tenor C)	8
Celestina	4
Rohr Nasat	2 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub>
Flautino	2
Tierce	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>5</sub>
Sifflöte	1

**Corona Pedal**

Quintaten (from manual)	16
Dulzian	16

Corona on Choir

Corona on Bombarde

Four adjustable composition pistons

Despite war raging (once more), the Willis firm busied themselves in making this Corona section in Liverpool and at their Rotunda Works (the former Lewis premises) in Ferndale Road, Brixton, London. Almost inevitably, tragedy struck during the Blitz when in April 1941 the London factory was destroyed. In the following month, Willis employee Aubrey Thompson-Allen (who was eventually to follow G. D. Harrison to the USA, founding his own firm, still in existence, in New Haven), wrote to his former colleague Roger Yates:



Image 6 | Bass pipes



Image 7 | Tulip stoppers – typical Willis

I am sorry to say that the factory was totally destroyed by a parachute mine last month. All that is left standing is the No. 1 voicing shop and my former office underneath it. The new L[iverpool] C[athedral] O[rgan] Corona section and part of the Canterbury Cathedral job went with it[,] and others. I'm not complaining but we've had some bad nights through which one never expected to live.

That proved the end of the line for any of the proposed Central / Corona sections of the organ. The original Choir console never had knobs for these sections and eventually it lost the original Echo Organ knobs, too. Other than a few tonal changes Goss-Custard's successor, Noel Rawsthorne, had carried out – his major one was recasting the unenclosed section of the Choir organ as a Positif – the organ's stop-list remained for eight decades as completed in 1926, albeit with one – very loud – exception. In 1997 David Wells (whose firm has lovingly and capably tuned and maintained this mammoth instrument for many decades) installed a spun-brass Trompette Militaire (nominally on 50ins wind pressure), high up in the East Gallery of the Corona, partially visible and extremely audible from the floor of the Central Space. This (which had been

planned for in the West End section of the 1940 scheme) was the generous donation of Dr Alan Dronsfield, who a few years later also funded the 1965 Henry Willis IV two-manual mobile Central Space console to be reconfigured and connected to the Lady Chapel Organ.

Then, by great good fortune, a Willis instrument (contemporary with the Cathedral organ) was acquired by David Wells. This was the organ made by Henry Willis III (the youthful genius behind the Cathedral organ) for St James's church, Waterfoot (Rossendale). Its 26 speaking stops provided sufficient ranks – perfectly matching those in the Cathedral – for both a Central Space Diapason chorus (the Waterfoot Great: ideal for hymn singing) and an Echo Organ (the Waterfoot Swell: placed where the original Echo Organ had been planned, being ideal for an ætherial, distant sound). Thus it was that in 2007-8 the Central Space Organ (16[on manual and pedal].8.4.2.II-VI) was installed, the gift of the McKinlay family, 'as a fitting memorial to the devoted service of Eleanor Wright (Cathedral Music Administrator, from 1989 to 2005), who loved this place and its music and cared for generations of its choristers'. It was placed in the South Central Space gallery and was made invisible from the Cathedral floor by the stretching of fabric (matched to the colour of

the building's sandstone) behind the carved openings of the gallery's stone balustrade.

Professor Ian Tracey – Noel Rawsthorne's successor, still in post – is a patient man. In recent years there has been a rolling programme of restoration by the David Wells team, working right through the organ, with specialists removing vast quantities of asbestos, and the Tuba Magna pipes (in a truly sorry condition) being completely remade in their original style (and back on their original 50ins wind pressure) by Henry Willis & Son. It had always been Prof. Tracey's hope that the addition of an Echo division would be one of the final acts of the Appeal, completing the original scheme for the Cathedral's Grand Organ. As a result of a generous donation from the estate of the late Mrs Eileen Golby, a long-standing supporter of the organ and music of the Cathedral, it has at last been possible to realise the long-awaited Echo. The division is housed in the easternmost bay of the South-East Triforium, just above the Sanctuary, and provides a distant 'echo' effect, also acting as an accompanimental division for the Cathedral Choir when singing in the Sanctuary area.

Based as it is on the Waterfoot Swell, the stop-list is inevitably a reduced version of the original concept; in fact, it is about the same size as the Echo had become when changed in the 1940 scheme to a Corona Organ.

Echo Manual	
Lieblich Bourdon (bass from Echo Bass)	16
Echo Diapason	8
Flauto Amabile	8
Muted Virole	8
Æoline Céleste (tenor C)	8
Octave Geigen	4
Flageolet	2
Harmonica Ætheria	12.15.17
Chalumeau (ext. Hautbois)	16
Trompette	8
Hautbois d'Amour	8
Carillon (gongs, tenor C)	8
Octave	
Sub Octave	
Unison Off	
Echo Pedal	
Echo Bass	16
Dulzian (from Chalumeau)	16
Tremulant	
Echo on Bombarde	
Echo on Solo	
Six adjustable thumb pistons plus cancel piston	
Wind pressure: 3.5ins	
752 pipes	
Four adjustable composition pistons	

The Echo Organ in its new swell enclosure sits on the floor of the triforium (136 steps up!), completely invisible from below. Two sets of swell shutters are mounted in its roof, allowing the sound to strike the stone vault above and be reflected into the building.

At the time of my visit for *Organists' Review*, kindly arranged by Ian Tracey a few weeks before the Echo was complete, organ builder Adrian Griffiths (who led the installation team) had rigged up two combinations which would play from the Choir console: strings with octave coupler, and the diapason chorus. The Echo strings perfectly match the Swell strings of the Grand Organ, completing the already amazing diminuendo of the main Swell box with a further diminuendo to 'audible silence' (Huskisson Stubington's description of the Echo Dulciana in the Tewkesbury Abbey Echo division). A magical effect. The diapason chorus sounds silvery and delicate, and I'm sure the flutes and reeds will also gain that 'something extra' which the Echo's position and the wonderful acoustics undoubtedly give. The musical possibilities of this section are numerous and its delicate effect will surely beguile many a listener and worshipper in the years to come.

So, the UK's most famous 'prepared-for' Echo Organ is finally installed – after a 98-year wait. Inspired by this, perhaps Westminster Abbey might be persuaded to reinstate its still extant 1895 South Transept 17-stop Celestial Organ – silent since 1937. We can but hope.

Meanwhile, on 19th October at 3 pm, the Liverpool Echo Organ will be revealed by Ian Tracey in the Annual Festival Evensong and 98th Anniversary Recital (tickets £10); not to be missed!



**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](http://www.paulhale.org).