

## *Organ Works*

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

# A Lewis Revived

**Nestled in the rolling hills of Gloucestershire, the village of Cranham is home to a hidden musical treasure – a beautifully preserved organ by the renowned T. C. Lewis. Built in 1894 for St James the Great church, this exquisite instrument has served faithfully for over a century. Thanks to a recent meticulous restoration, its rich, vibrant tones now resonate as powerfully as ever. This article explores the organ's fascinating history, its unique craftsmanship, and the dedicated efforts that have secured its future.**

PAUL HALE





**T**his article concerns a beautiful small organ by T. C. Lewis in St James the Great church at Cranham, a tiny village hidden in a fold of the hills near Prinknash, Gloucestershire.

The history of the organ is easily and briefly stated.

## 1894

A new organ was commissioned from Lewis & Co. Ltd of Brixton. Job No. 534, it cost £322. The case design was by Sidney Gambier Parry (1859–1948) of Highnam, half-brother of the composer Sir Charles C. H. Parry, who had been a student of Sir Arthur Blomfield. From the 1880s to the 1930s, Sidney Parry worked on many churches in his native county, his work being influenced by his family's Tractarian inclinations.

## 1954

The organ was restored by J. W. Walker & Son of Ruislip.

## 1963

A 'Discus' electric blower was installed by J. W. Walker.

## 1971

The organ was overhauled by Keith Jones of Ruardean.

## 1986

Further repairs were carried out by Keith Jones.

## 1990

Keith Jones fitted the Pedal couplers with new tapped wires and buttons.

## 2024

Full restoration by Ross Daly and colleagues.

## Specification

### Great

56 notes – towards the rear of the organ; tracker action

1 Open Diapason	8
<i>Bass pipes above the console</i>	
2 Claribel Flute	8
3 Dulciana	8
<i>CC-F# grooved from no. 2</i>	
4 Flauto Traverso	4
Swell to Great	

### Swell

56 notes – behind the front pipes, facing east; tracker action

5 Geigen Principal	8
<i>CC-B grooved from Rohr Flöte</i>	
6 Rohr Flöte	8
7 Echo Gamba	8
8 Geigen Principal	4
9 Oboe	8

### Pedal

30 notes – on the floor at the back of the organ, on pneumatic action

10 Sub-bass	16
Great to Pedal	
Swell to Pedal	

Two combination pedals to Great

Two combination pedals to Swell

Reversible pedal to Great to Pedal

Balanced Swell pedal

Watkins & Watson 'Discus' blower in silencing cabinet



2 The Lewis console refreshed

T.C. Lewis, too, trained as an architect (probably also in Arthur Blomfield's office). Lewis clearly felt drawn toward organs so left the architect's profession to establish a firm of organ-builders with John Tunstall and John Whitacker in about 1860. Nevertheless, Lewis's interest in architecture and close connection with leading architects was a feature of his career.

Arthur Blomfield recommended Lewis to the Dean & Chapter of Westminster Abbey in a letter written on 20th January, 1879:

"... my long acquaintance with him enables me to bear the strongest testimony to the soundness and conscientious nature of his work, which I do not think anyone can be found to impugn. Mr Lewis's knowledge of Architecture makes him much more agreeable to deal with (for an Architect) than many eminent Organ Builders, who seem to think that a Church is built for an Organ, and not an Organ for a Church."

In 1866, the Lewis staff moved into premises in Shepherds Lane (now

Ferndale Road), Brixton, London. Under Lewis's direction over nearly 40 years, the firm built instruments ranging from small chamber organs to major cathedral and concert organs. Lewis was strongly inspired by the organs built in Germany by Edmund Schulze and in France by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. He was renowned for instruments that had a bright, vibrant tone with low, wide mouths, a selection of flute types that included (from Schulze) the narrow-scale Lieblich Gedeckt, 'Töpfer' pipe scales and powerful upperwork, along with the Flûte harmonique and string voicing of Cavaillé-Coll. In his organs the flue-work (Diapason chorus) always dominated the reeds, in classic German/English tradition, in contrast to builders such as Henry Willis, who used higher wind pressures to develop powerful reed stops (Trumpets, Trombones and Tubas), which totally dominated the ensemble. It was the Willis style – as later developed further by Harrison & Harrison and others – which came to prevail. This led to Lewis's largest organs being rebuilt by others in a less than sympathetic style; the most

## The maker – Thomas C. Lewis

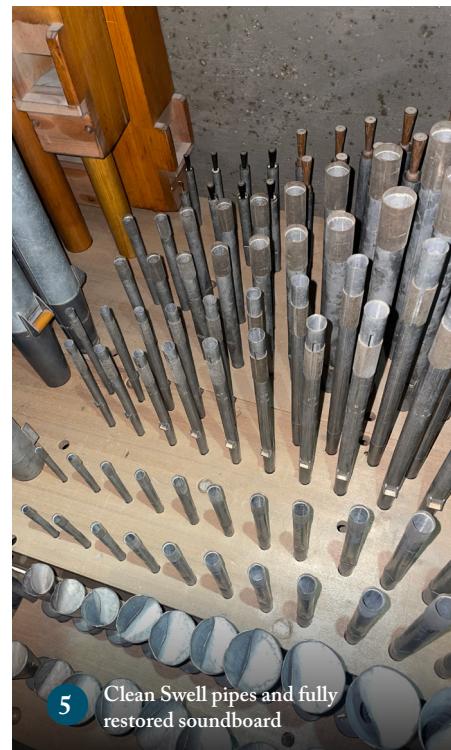
**Thomas Christopher Lewis** (1833–1915), an organ-builder of great repute though relatively modest output, was born in London in 1833, the son of Thomas A. Lewis (1780–1862). T. A. Lewis was *apparitur* (secretary) to Charles Blomfield, Anglican Bishop of London, whose nephew Arthur (1829–1899) became a noted church architect, training, *inter alia*, Sidney Gambier Parry.



3 Swell stop-knobs



4 Trackers, stickers and backfalls restored



5 Clean Swell pipes and fully restored soundboard

**“A glance at the stop-list might quickly conclude that the organ was dull and of no particular interest. In fact, the reverse is true!”**

significant of these remodellings being the Anglican cathedrals at Southwark (restored back to its Lewis roots in recent times), Newcastle and Ripon.

Lewis left the firm before 1900, but it continued to maintain the standards set by its founder. In 1919, there was a merger with Henry Willis & Sons Ltd, who moved into the Brixton works and traded as ‘Henry Willis & Sons and Lewis & Company Ltd’ until 1925 when the Lewis name was dropped. T. C. Lewis continued to build organs for some time after leaving the firm that he had founded.

Organs for which Lewis is particularly remembered are:

**St Hilda's Church, South Shields**  
(1866) [restored]

**St Mary's Catholic Church**  
(now Cathedral), Newcastle (1869)  
[removed]

**Wymondham Abbey** (now at St Mary the Virgin, Westerham) (1871/1883)  
[changed]

**St Marie's Catholic Church**  
(now Cathedral), Sheffield (1875)  
[recently restored]

**St Mary's Church, Studley Royal**  
(1875) [restored]

**Christ the Consoler, Newby Hall**  
Estate, Skelton-on-Ure (1875) [poor  
condition]

**St Andrew's Hall, Glasgow** (1877)  
[destroyed by fire]

**Ripon Cathedral** (1878) [completely  
changed]

**Holy Trinity, Beckenham** (1879)  
[completely changed]

**Newcastle Cathedral** (1880)  
[completely changed]

**All Saints' Church, Maidstone** (1880)  
[completely changed]

**St John's Church, Upper Norwood**,  
(1882) [altered]

**All Saints' Church, Ilkley** (1882)  
[completely changed]

**St George's Church, Cullercoats**  
(1884) [restored]

**St George's Church, Jesmond** (an  
exhibition organ) (1887/8) [changed]

**St Luke's Church, Southport** (1889)  
[destroyed]

**St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne**,  
Australia (1891) [restored]

**Southwark Cathedral** (1897) [restored]

**Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**,  
Glasgow (1901) [restored]

In Gloucestershire, a slightly larger Lewis & Co organ is to be found at St Edward, Stow on the Wold (1903). Several more were supplied to churches in the greater Bristol area, then still in the county of Gloucestershire. One of them – at St Dunstan, Bedminster Down – is almost identical to that at Cranham. Dated as late as 1926, this shows that this size and style of Lewis organ had proved its worth in small churches and remained in demand.

The modest Lewis at Cranham is a worthy example of the type of compact parish church organs the company made over some 40 years, designed essentially for accompanying a surpliced choir in the chancel, whose singing in turn led the congregation. Such small organs, placed in chancel chambers (following the tenets of the Oxford Movement), were never supposed to be loud enough to lead nave congregational singing without the support of the church choir.

This is not quite the case here, as the church is small and the organ quite bold, but it does explain the preponderance of gentle stops on the organ at the expense of more bold sounds. The instrument was

hand-blown until an electric blower was installed in 1963. It has had only two organists since 1948 – Laurence Head and his daughter Beryl – a remarkable and possibly unique story of family dedication.

Reporting on the organ in April 2023, I found that, after nearly 130 years' weekly service, the instrument was due for a complete sympathetic restoration. It was very dirty; the reservoir and feeders needed re-leathering; the main wind-trunk from the Discus blower needed replacing; the tracker action needed new cloth washers and leather buttons; the rollerboards and backfall beams needed their pivots rebushing; the pneumatic action to front pipes and Pedal pipes needed restoring / re-leathering; the stop action and swell pedal action needed loose play removing; the pipework needed a certain amount of repair; the soundboards needed a complete overhaul; the console needed attention where light switches had spoilt it (they were removed); the keyboards and pedalboards needed restoration; and, finally, there needed to be new elegant and effective console lighting.

All this work was carried out by Daly Organs (Worcestershire). The organ was completed in time for Christmas 2024, and opened in a recital by this author (which included illustrated talks by Ross Daly and me) on Saturday 11th January – to a church full of enthusiastic audience members.

A glance at the stop-list might quickly conclude that the organ was dull and of no particular interest. In fact, the reverse is true! Every stop brims with character and can be used in many different ways, perhaps up an octave or down an octave as well as at its real pitch. The tone has that powerful 'ring' of all Lewis's voicing; I imagine that this is the reason why Lewis designed it to face the east wall of the south aisle rather than being the usual way round, speaking west. Had it done that it would have been altogether too loud for this small church. But facing the other way, every sound is not heard direct but bounces off the east and south walls: thus its energy and tone are maintained, but at a lower volume level. Readers might be interested to know that this was not the

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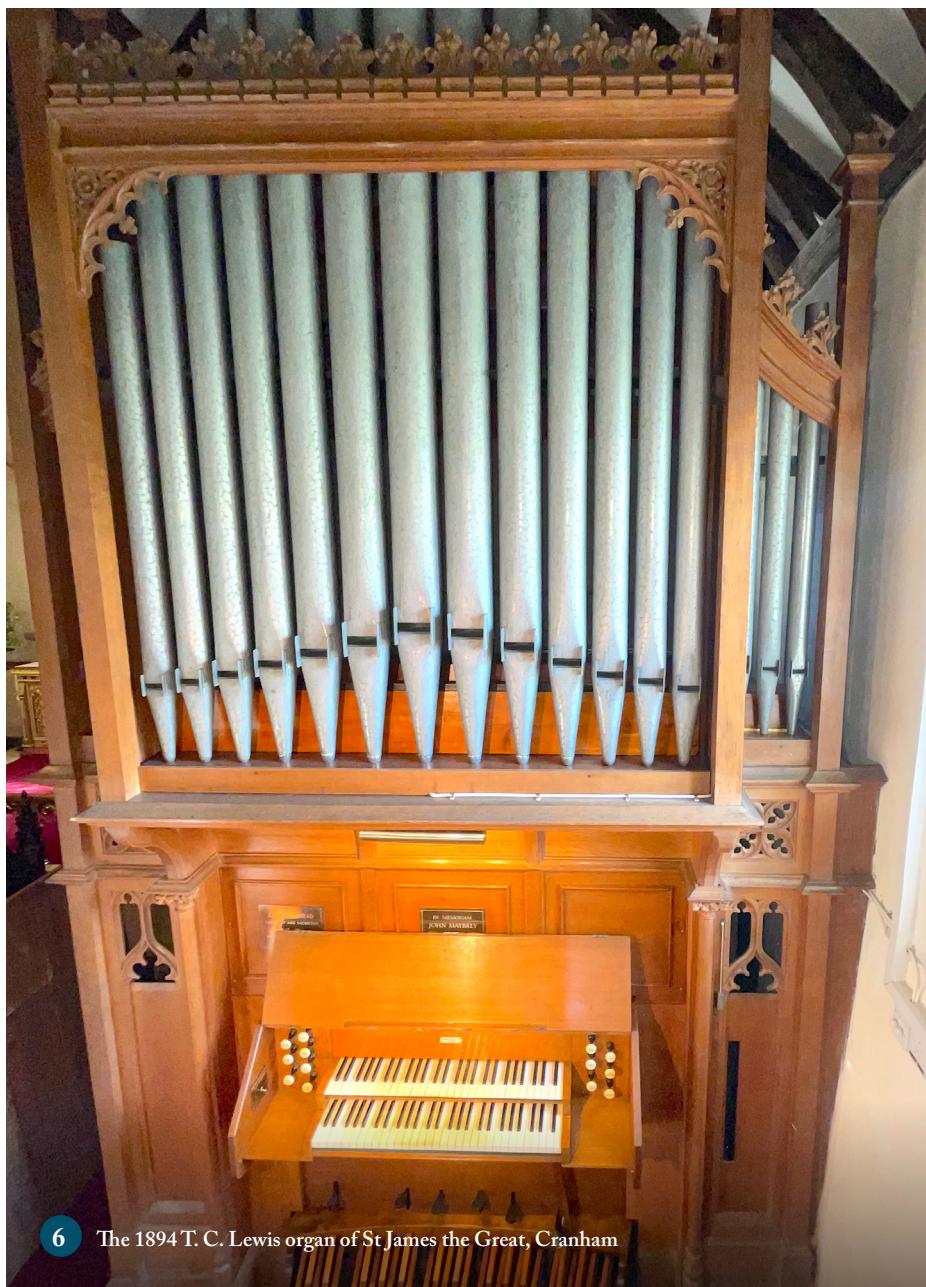
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6 The 1894 T. C. Lewis organ of St James the Great, Cranham

only time Lewis situated an organ with the Great at the rear and the back of the swell box behind the case pipes: another (three stops larger) used to be found in St Patrick's church, Nuthall, Nottingham, having been made in 1871 for a private residence where, similarly, it would have been too loud if facing into the room.

This delightful Lewis organ is not the only reason for finding one's way to the village of Cranham. If the name 'Cranham' seems vaguely familiar to you, it's probably because of the well-known hymn tune of that name, composed in

1906 by Gustav Holst for the carol *In the bleak midwinter*. Holst's mother came from Cranham, and it is locally asserted that the composer wrote the hymn-tune while staying in the village at the local hostelry. Pride in 'their' composer and his famous hymn-tune is evidenced by a hassock in the church beautifully embroidered with the first four words and bars of music. And I'm pleased to report that the good folk of Cranham are now equally proud of their splendid little Lewis organ, looking and sounding as good as new.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**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)