

by James McKellican

HARRISON & HARRISON

ORGAN BUILDERS



The Caird Hall, Dundee III/50

The organ was built by H&H in 1923. Major restoration work was completed by H&H in 1992, with the addition of a Swell to Orchestral coupler. A modern piston system was introduced, alongside the pneumatic drawstop mechanism.

*Organ building for over
150 years*



Glenalmond College

II/26

The Chapel dates from 1851. It is built in gothic revival style, with some later furnishings by Sir Ninian Comper and Sir Basil Spence. The seating is collegiate, and the organ is on the north side.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRIENDS



The Harrison and Harrison organ in the Caird Hall is one of the finest concert organs in the UK. Indeed it is one of the most impressive organs Harrisons ever built. More than that, it was the sound of that organ which made me want to be an organist. For a young organist the magnificent Swell organ, massive Pedal Open Woods and the Tuba were the main attractions! Later it was the solid Great Chorus and the fabulous quiet stops which delighted, and continue to do so.

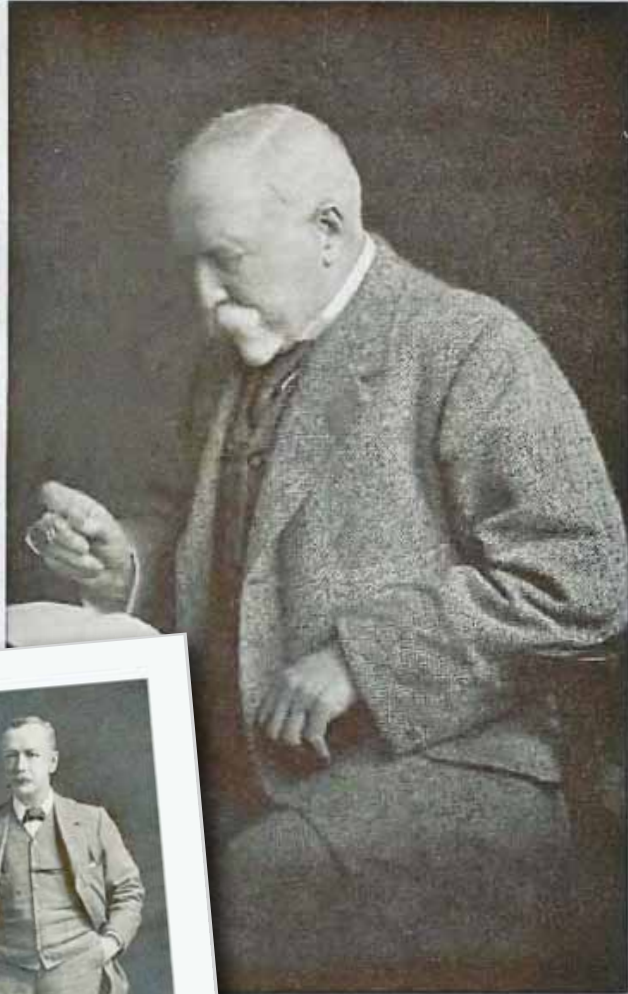
That the organ has had so few changes since it was built over 90 years ago makes it very important in the history of organ building in the UK. The pneumatic action is superb, even after all those years!

I have the privilege of being President of the Friends of the Caird Hall Organ, and I try to make time to visit it every time I am in Dundee. It never fails to thrill.

I am delighted that there is now a brochure about the instrument. I am pleased that the organ is being looked after so well and that the Friends make sure that lots of school children hear it every year. It is part of their heritage; it is part of Dundee's cultural heritage.

Dr Gordon Stewart

President of the Friends of the Caird Hall Organ



● Sir James Key Caird - Benefactor



● James Thomson - Architect

IN THE BEGINNING

In the early 1900s, James Thomson, Dundee City Engineer and Architect, was redesigning the rather tired, run down town centre and waterfront of Dundee into what he was envisaging as the 'Venice of the North' when, in 1914, Sir James Caird, a local jute baron and philanthropist came to him with a proposal towards a concert hall for Dundee. In a letter to the Lord Provost he suggests, 'If the plans for the proposed City Hall and Council Chambers which have been prepared *under my direction* [author's italics] meet with your entire approval.....I would be willing to defray the cost of building as it proceeds to the amount of £100,000 if the work be carried out by the City Architect (Thomson) and completed in three years.' [Attempts to equate this to 2014 valuation are difficult but that amount would represent a minimum of £10,000,000 today] Despite the apparent 'you do it my way,' he seems to have got on well with Thomson. Cynics have said that Caird wished the rectangular hall to resemble a jute mill so that the citizens would be comfortable in that environment. Far from that being the case, Thomson produced an acoustical masterpiece with unimpaired vision throughout the hall.

Two foundation stones were laid on the 10th of July 1914. King George V pressed a large emerald button and Queen Mary pressed a jade one in Sir James Caird's Ashton Works, Dundee, remote from the foundation site and 'an ingenious contrivance caused the ponderous stones at Greenmarket, more than a mile away, to shift into place...' The emerald was a gift to the King but he returned it to the city authorities and it is now part of the chain of office of the Lord Provost. Queen Mary, known for her 'collecting' ways, is reputed to have retained the jade! Be that as it may, the stones were duly laid and building was commenced only to be stopped shortly due to the advent of the First World War.



● *Laying of the foundation stones*

Integrated in the hall was to be a pipe organ – a concert organ. It should be remembered that at this time radio was still in its infancy and often the only way by which the public could hear classical and popular music was to attend concerts. Orchestras could provide this, but for many years town halls had used pipe organs to play adaptations of all forms of music.

Dundee 'People's Journal' announced on 11 December 1915 the 'City Hall Organ will cost between £3000 and £4000 (and be) ready in 1917. In considering this matter, the committee have secured the assistance of Mr Alfred Hollins, organist of St George's U.F. Church, Edinburgh and that gentleman has visited Dundee and had a consultation with them. Mr Hollins is recognised as one of the leading authorities on the organ in Scotland...'

Harrison & Harrison, Organ Builders, Durham secured the contract in May 1920 to supply the Caird Hall with such an instrument. They were renowned for their church and cathedral organs but had never actually supplied a concert organ – the difference being that instead of a choir manual as in a church organ, an orchestral manual with orchestral stops was provided to imitate the 'real' thing.

Alfred Hollins had come to St. George's West, Edinburgh, in 1897 and had a wide experience of advising on organ construction in churches and town halls across the world, as well as being a known concert pianist and organ recitalist. He was also blind, and thought to have been so from birth. He was born in Hull, Yorkshire, eldest of three sons in 1865. But at an early age, after the death of his mother (1871), he was sent to York to be brought up by paternal grandparents and, more importantly, his Aunt Mary who more than anyone was responsible for encouraging his already present musical talents.

Later he attended the Blind School, York whence he went to the Royal Normal College for the Blind in Norwood, London. Whatever Harrison & Harrison expected from a consultant, and they had worked with him previously, Hollins proved to be a very diligent and 'hands on' expert advisor. In his correspondence with the firm he always addresses Mr Arthur Harrison as 'My Dear Harrison.'