

Atworth's Little Gem

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If you walk your children to school at the Village School, or if you live on Bradford Road, you'll know that down Church Street, off Bradford Road, there sits the church of St. Michael (also known as "St. Michael & All Angels"). But did you know that St. Michael's contains a little gem?

The "little gem" to which I refer is the pipe organ in St. Michael's. It sits up above the nave, on the left side of the gallery as seen from the east, altar end, of the church, its decorated façade pipes clearly visible.

Atworth is indeed fortunate to have such an instrument, because so many churches have had their pipe organs removed or replaced by electronic instruments, either because funds were insufficient to maintain and tune them, or because the singing of traditional hymns diminished in their services. But the organ in St. Michael's battles on!

So, let me tell you about our little gem. It is not the first pipe organ to serve St. Michael's: probably it is the third. Whilst the ancient Egyptian and Greek civilisations had small pipe organs, in this country and across Europe they mainly flourished in churches and cathedrals during the second millennium (AD), perhaps with the exception here, of the English Commonwealth period under Cromwell when quite a few very significant instruments were destroyed. But I digress! Atworth's first pipe organ came quite late on the scene, some 800 years after the first church on the site, when a small single manual instrument was installed in about 1889. That organ lasted almost a hundred years, until it was replaced in 1975 by a much larger, three manual instrument from the John Compton company; a famous English organ builder who built theatre organs as well as classical instruments. That organ dated from 1909, having had several rebuilds whilst previously serving two Leicestershire churches. Atworth's then vicar, the Revd. Geoffrey Griffiths was a keen musician and composer, and during his tenure he added many ranks of pipes to the instrument until it occupied three quarters of the gallery space!

So much for the first two organs. About two years after Geoffrey Griffiths' retirement the Compton was removed and replaced with the present instrument. Funded by generous residents and other contributors, it came from the Cirencester Baptist Church in 1996-7. It was built by Henry Speechly of Camden in north London in 1892, and was considered to be more in keeping with the size of St. Michael's.

The present instrument has two manuals, each of 56 note compass C-G: the lower controls the Great division, the upper the Swell division, which is enclosed behind moveable shutters. The pedal organ has a compass of 30 notes, C-F. You may know that organ pipes produce only one note each, so that the manual divisions require 56 pipes for each stop or

rank. The pitch at which an organ pipe speaks is primarily determined by its length, indicated by the longest pipe, in feet ('). An 8' rank speaks at piano pitch; a 4' rank an octave higher. A 16' rank plays an octave below piano pitch. The Great division has six speaking stops (336 pipes). The stops of the Great division are *Open Diapason 8'*, *Claribel 8'*, *Dulciana 8'*, *Octave 4'*, *Harmonic Flute 4'* and *Fifteenth 2'*. The Swell division has four speaking stops (224 pipes). The Swell stops are *Violin Diapason 8'*, *Lieblich Gedackt 8'*, *Principal 4'* and *Trumpet 8'*. The pedal division has only one rank, a *Bourdon 16'* with just 30 pipes, making 590 pipes in all. Large organs have many thousands of pipes! Couplers allow us to play on one manual whilst making the pipes of any other division speak from that manual and from the pedals. Thus we can make more noise!

There are several types of pipe in most organs giving various tonal

qualities. *Principals* and *Diapasons* give the typical organ tones, and are often made of a lead and tin alloy; like giant tin whistles! *Flute* pipes are often wood and have a gentle recorder-like tone, especially the *Gedackt* pipes which have a stopper ("gedeckt"=closed) which sweetens the tone by quenching the odd harmonics. Our *Lieblich Gedackt* has a very lovely tone. *Reed* pipes are usually loud and a little brash, often used as solo voices. Our organ has only one Reed stop: the *Trumpet 8'*. Large organs have big reed ranks such as *Tubas*, although *Clarinet* and *Oboe* stops are gentler.



You can hear the organ at some of the 9:30am services. It features in several YouTube videos: <https://youtu.be/Bwx4sgxC3z8> is gentle, while <https://youtu.be/tTHv6yRt5s4> is louder. If you are interested in seeing it pay a visit to the church, or send an email to kenneth@kaspencer.com.

[References: 1. *A Short History* Dowdeswell, WH; 2. Wiltshire History]