



Department and Stop list

Pedal Key action Tr Stop action Me Compass-low C Compass-high f1 Keys 30
 1 **Bourdon Pedal Pipes** 16 no f1 pipe

Great Key action Tr Stop action Me Compass-low C Compass-high g3 Keys 56
 2 **Open Diapason** 8
 3 **Stopped Diapason Bass** 8
 4 **Clarabella** 8
 5 **Principal** 4
 6 **Flute** 4
 7 **Twelfth** 2 2/3
 8 **Fifteenth** 2
 9 **Mixture** II 1995 19.22, was Gamba

Swell Key action Tr Stop action Me Compass-low C Compass-high g3 Keys 56 Enclosed
 10 **Open Diapason** 8 TC
 11 **Stop Diapason** 8 TC
 12 **Dulciana** 8 TC
 13 **Principal** 4 TC
 14 **Hautboy** 8 TC

Couplers: Gt. to Pedal Swell to Great Swell Octave

George Maidwell Holdich was born in Northamptonshire, and took his middle name from the village of his birth. Conveniently, it is an apt homophone for someone who constructs complex mechanical objects!

His fame rests chiefly upon a large organ that he built for Lichfield Cathedral in 1860. It was remarkable at the time in that it had a very full pedal department. The elderly organist, Samuel Spofforth, who was the cathedral organist for over 50 years, is reputed to have said of the pedal organ: ***"I have never in my life played upon a gridiron. You may put them there, but I shall never use them."*** Players since his time have been rather more enlightened!

Rockwell Green Baptist Chapel commissioned the Holdich company to make them an organ of 2 manuals and pedal at about the same time as the Lichfield instrument was being built. That church closed in 1984, and St. Michael's church acquired the organ for a modest sum (£50). It was dismantled and re-erected at St. Michael's as a project, overseen by the organist of the day, John Guttridge – now The Reverend John Guttridge. It was completed and dedicated in January 1985, a year to the day when dismantling had begun.

There had been some tonal alterations at the Baptist Chapel, including the replacement of the Great mixture with a Gamba. In 1995, it was decided to restore the organ to its original specification, putting the mixture back, with the addition of an internal electric blower and a balanced swell pedal.

One odd omission is the inclusion of a Swell to Pedal coupler. This creates a few problems, as the pedal department is limited to one stop, and coupling to the Swell, were it possible, would add flexibility. The swell organ pipework only extends to tenor C.

Nevertheless, this is an enterprising organ to find in a village church, which has some other interesting features: some wall paintings and a West gallery for musicians.

If you wish to try this organ, please contact:

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John has added some extra information about the organ as follows:

Further notes on the Holdich Organ. Creech St Michael

I believe the Baptist elders originally commissioned the organ having visited the Great Exhibition of 1851 where there was a tiny one manual Holdich of just three stops, one of them being a "Diacoton", basically a full range octave coupler that was furnished with an extra octave of pipes to provide octave coupling across the whole range. This concept was apparently invented by Holdich and used on several of his smaller instruments. It is believed that the elders fell in love with this tiny instrument and therefore commissioned a more substantial instrument for their new Baptist Chapel in Rockwell Green.

Our acquisition of the organ was somewhat accidental. Creech already had a small one manual instrument sited in what is now the Cuff Chapel blocking the magnificent Cuff tomb and ensuring the chapel around it went into disrepair. It was decided to reorder the chapel and move the organ, although it was totally inadequate for the church being a small Osmond with just seven stops: 16' Pedal Bourdon, an 8' Diapason, 8' Stopped Diapason Bass, 8' Salicional, 8' Stopped Diapason, 4' Gemshorn and a manual to pedal coupler.

At that time, the churchwarden, Brian Fletcher, knew someone in his work from the Baptist Church that was closing down and due to be demolished, to be replaced with the modern Christian centre that is there today. As we were looking for some pews, Brian's colleague offered a few. In passing, he also asked jokingly, if we were interested in a pulpit, a baptistry, and an old, decrepit organ that was due to be bulldozed (no recycling back then!). Brian's ears pricked up, Brian asked me, I asked the vicar, the vicar asked the PCC and we all jumped at the chance. So Brian and I visited a couple of days later in the January, with no light, heat, water etc in the church, and snow on the ground. Having seen it, and realising it was not the usual "Osmond", but something far more interesting and ideal for Creech, I cheekily staked my claim to it by removing some of the Great pipework (I believe the gamba, fifteenth, twelfth and principal ranks) there and then, which found their way into the boot of my car and then to my garage. Though the Baptist Church wanted nothing for it, we gave them a donation of £100 (not £50 as you stated), but this was donated to St Michael's by a music-loving parishioner.

We enquired about the cost of a rebuild - around £12,000, but as the south wall had to have structural repairs, this sum could not easily be found. So we decided to do the job ourselves. During the rebuild I spent around £50 on timber for broken trackers, woodworm treatment and so on, but we also received £100 later for the old one manual Osmond that was sold to a tiny church in Herodsfoot, near Liskeard, Cornwall, where it was perfect acoustically for it, replacing a clapped out harmonium. So we actually made £50 on the deal!

The parts were stored all over the village - smaller pipes, manuals, trackers, stickers, the pedal board, the blower etc in my garage, the casework and wind chests in Court Barton barn, the large pipes in the church gallery etc. During the time we were waiting for the dreaded faculty, I spent time repairing the action, making new trackers, stickers and so on in my garage, but thankfully the backfalls and roller boards were all in good condition, only needing cleaning and a drop of oil/grease on the metal parts. After the faculty arrived, we had four concrete plinths built into the floor by a local builder, and began reassembly. Though I had done a few running repairs in the past (when I regularly played an organ in South Wales that was always giving problems) I had never done anything like this before. So with a little "muscle" help, we managed to get everything together (with no screws left over!!) for dedication a year to the day I "stole" those first few pipes.

The organ made the local newspapers ("Organ transplant at Creech" sort of stuff) and the local radio ("Sunday Starts") where I played and spoke about it. The exposure reached the USA where a Somerset born organ enthusiast called John Speller who was now working with an American organ preservation group, took interest. He often visited Rockwell Green Baptist Church with his mother as a child, and wondered what had happened to the Holdich organ after hearing of the church's demise. On a visit to his mother from the States, he gave the organ a visit, and he then wrote a stunning article on it in "the Organ" the international organ magazine. That article spurred more visits from people who wanted to listen/play the instrument.

We realised, however, that the organ had been tampered with over its history, the main problem being the removal of a 2-rank mixture replacing it with an inferior 8' Gamba. So we decided that, when we had the money, we would have the instrument professionally restored to its original specification with improvements, in keeping, where we could afford them.

In 1995, it was decided to get the organ restored and so Deane Organs of Taunton (a now defunct offshoot of Osmonds) were commissioned to do the work. As you rightly said, they replaced the mixture. There was some debate whether the mixture should be a 19,22 mixture or a Sesquialtera. We plumped for the 19,22 because it was just about in keeping with the era, but also the Sesquialtera would have included a 12th rank along with the Tierce, and there was a 12th in the Great chorus already. They also enclosed the blower inside the organ (it previously stood outside and was noisy), incorporated a balanced swell pedal, and also built a Swell Octave coupler to allow for a 2' pitch when the full swell was used.

The rest of the organ was revoiced, including the Hautboy, which sounds half way between an oboe and a corneopean, and can be used as a solo as well as in combination. The twelfth is particularly nicely voiced as it is at home in the diapason chorus, but also sounds not unlike a Nazard when used as a solo with the Claribel.

The organ has served us well since then. However, in recent years, partly through neglect caused by not being used during Covid, a few minor problems have shown up. The Bourdon seems to have lost its bite and is quite feeble and probably needs cleaning. And the mixture voicing is particularly shrill and needs to be looked at. The other problem is that the bottom notes of the Great 8' diapason are very slow of speech. I suspect that it may be because the pipes themselves are beginning to collapse closing off the wind entry a little. Collapse like this was evident when we first dismantled the organ, as the 8' diapason has an unusually high lead content - great for a mellow tone, but not so good for pipe durability!

Other than that, the organ plays well, and actually sounds far grander when you are at a distance than it appears sat at the console.

I notice you mentioned the lack of a swell to pedal coupler. As the swell is a tenor C primarily, I guess that Holdich thought this unnecessary.

If I were very honest, if any improvements were ever to be made, It would need a better bass, meaning the pedal Bourdon would need to be improved and the 8' Diapason on the Great sorted. Also, extending the Swell downwards would be a real bonus, even to extend the Hautboy alone, but I don't think that would be possible given that the Swell Box is already pretty full, and another 12 pipes of the bottom octave of an 8' tone pipe simply would not fit in there.

I hope this helps somewhat. As for Holdich organs, there are not that many about locally with the NPOR listing only two others in this area, a small 2-man 11-stop instrument in Ilchester, and a small 2-man 13-stop instrument in Wookey. I don't know what condition they are in or even if they are playable. So it's a little of a rarity here.