

Abroad in Norfolk

A recent restoration takes **Andrew Hayden** back four hundred years, to a time when it was possible to buy organ pipes for a mere 6d. per lb.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HAYDEN



St Agnes, Cawston

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The church of St Agnes, Cawston, is one of those magnificent East Anglian buildings built on the proceeds of the wool trade. It was begun towards the end of the 14th century by Sir Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. After Sir Michael and his son were killed in France in 1415, it fell to his wife, Catherine, to complete the church building using flint. Unlike most rural churches in Norfolk, however, its tower is built of ashlar imported from France. It remains unfinished, but even so scales almost 120ft. Together with those of Salle and Wood Dalling nearby, it forms a trinity of high peaks in mid-Norfolk.

The hammer-beam nave roof is one of the finest in the county, with a veritable heavenly host of angels on the ends of the beams and traces of lavish painted decoration. We know too that this wealth of provision and adornment extended to organs.

Records of organs at Cawston can be traced back to as early as 1615 when an inventory, quoted in Walter Rye's *An Account of the Church and Parish of Cawston in the County of Norfolk* (1898),

mentions 'the upper part of a pair of organs. Two pairs of bellows for organs and divers pieces of old organs and in the belfry in the treasurer's house 109 organ pipes weighing 60lbs good, at 6d. the lb. = 30/-'. A later inventory of 1642 no longer refers to an organ or organs, so we may assume that it, or they, had been removed.

The next mention of an organ is in 1780, with a second-hand instrument in an imitation Chippendale case. This was in use until 1870, when it was transferred to Wreningham church and then to Lincoln cathedral.

In 2009 Richard Bower completed a restoration of the present instrument at Cawston, grant-aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund. His work has revealed the extent and scope of a much older organ supplied more or less second-hand in 1814 by G.P. England to St Stephen's, Norwich, and which then found its way to Cawston immediately after the removal of the old one.

The early history of the organ is quite well documented in records held by Norfolk Record Office. St Stephen's vestry minutes of 21 December 1813 state: 'It was

unanimously resolved that an organ should be purchased for the church, and a proper gallery erected... that a committee... be empowered to treat with Mr England of London for an organ which that gentleman has offered to the Parish at the price of 270 guineas'. In anticipation of the arrival of the new instrument, the vestry proceeded to elect a Mr Alfred Pettet to the situation of organist at a salary of 20 guineas per annum. Eventually, after some delay due to the lead soloist, a Mr Salmons, being detained by engagements in London, the organ was opened on the morning of Friday 29 April 1814, in the presence of various dignitaries including the mayor, and the Dean and Bishop of Norwich.

A glance at the vestry minutes in later years indicates that St Stephen's had quite a lively musical tradition. In 1846 a separate choir and organ account was set up, and from 1851 no less a personage than Dr Zachariah Buck officiated as organist. The organ was regularly maintained by virtually all the organ builders, and one or two others, who either resided or passed through Norwich, including a Mr Abell, the Revd R.F. Elwin, Samuel Street, Mark