

## **Medal for veteran church organist, 97**

By David Thomson, Reporter for the “Bury Times” 11th April 2013



A MAN believed to be the UK’s longest-serving church organist has been presented with the British Empire Medal.

Ninety-seven-year-old Arthur Hoyle Smith received the honour from the Lord Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, Warren J Smith, at the start of last Sunday’s service at Christ Church Walmersley as the packed congregation looked on.

Also present at the ceremony were the Mayor of Bury, Cllr Joan Grimshaw, and her consort, husband, Paul.

Mr Smith has been organist and choirmaster at the church since 1935. He said: "I'm exceptionally proud. It was a very good occasion and I was fortunate to be at the head of it."

The father-of-two, who lives in Walmersley, played football for Bury and Leicester City in the late 1930s, has served 78 years as organist at Christ Church Walmersley, a stint only interrupted when he served with the Army during the Second World War.

He was awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's New Year Honours, much to the delight of parishioners and church officials. Mr Smith, who celebrates his 98th birthday next month, became a choirboy at the age of seven and then choirmaster and organist.

It was during a children's service when he and others were approached by the vicar and asked who could play the piano.

Mr Smith was put forward and was told just to do his best.

He has played down the national honour, saying modestly he has not done anything special.

"I have just gone to the church and played the organ for more than 70 years," he said.

And Mr Smith has no plans to stop and will continue to prove that age is no barrier when it comes to serving his church.

"I might be getting on a bit," he acknowledged, "but, of course, I'm going to carry on."

Nigel Silvester, of the Parochial Church Council, said: "We had around 180 worshippers at the service, more than double the normal attendance. They included many people who had not been there for a while who came back to support Arthur during his presentation. We are so pleased for him and it's good he's received some recognition for the fact he's served 78 years as organist."

Everyone at Christ Church Walmersley is absolutely delighted to learn of the honour bestowed on our long serving organist and choirmaster, Arthur Smith.

Arthur joined the church choir in 1922 and has been our organist and choirmaster for well over seventy years. Even now at ninety seven years young he never misses a church service. Last winter when there was snow on the ground and plenty of ice under foot he walked up the hill from his house to church to play at the Christmas Midnight Communion. This is so typical of the man and his commitment to the church he has attended, and served, since his childhood.



He is a great example to us all of steadfast Christian ministry. We give thanks to God that such devoted service, which Arthur has given in his professional,

yet unassuming and quiet manner, has been recognised in this way by Her Majesty who is head of our country and church. We are all thrilled for him.

On Sunday 7 April Mr Smith was presented with his award by the Lord Lieutenant, Her Majesty's representative in Greater Manchester, in the presence of the Mayor of Bury and her Consort and Canon Paul Denby, Deputy Lieutenant. The Archdeacon of Bolton, the Venerable David Bailey, brought greetings from Chris Edmondson, Bishop of Bolton, together with congratulations from the Diocese of Manchester.

Family, friends, past choir members enjoyed refreshments afterwards in the Hall where Arthur cut a celebration cake.