

The Coming of the Andrews Organ to All Saints.

Around 1973 /4 All Saints was fortunate in its music . The choirmaster , Vaughan Chetwynd , a comparative newcomer to the village , was youthful , charismatic , energetic and able ; as such , he attracted young and older into a choir which he trained in skill and enthusiasm. However , he was not an organist .

Suddenly , out of nowhere it seemed , arrived a man keen to play . Tall , serious , young , clearly a trifle odd , and an organ nut , Michael Pretty seemed , and certainly to Vicar Derek Shaw, a Godsend. He blew in , enthused , and set about raising the organ to a central position in church life. His first target was the old sixteen stop Hill organ , presented in Victorian times by the Lane Fox family .

By now , to the uninitiated , a rather cranky old girl with a touch of the rheumatics , the Hill was nevertheless held by some to be very much the right instrument for Bramham Church , and of some rarity value to boot. But not for Mr. Pretty . His ideal was one of Carlo Curli 's American electronic jobs , and he set about the task of trying to convince the doubters , the ignorant and the traditionalists . He even promised to put on a concert featuring the great man himself , though , to general disappointment [for he had raised expectations very high] Carlo Curli never appeared. Perhaps we should have taken the hint .

Undaunted and doubly determined , Michael Pretty settled for second best , persuading all who would listen , and the then PCC in particular , that he had secured a bargain not to be missed to replace what he convincingly presented as the ailing Hill machine. He had found in Darlington , at a Methodist church about to close , the very thing -- an

organ which would just suit Bramham 's needs , and at minimal cost . He himself would do the dismantling and the re-building in All Saints , if the PCC would give permission and provide the transport and labour . A very persuasive man , he got his way.

So it was that Michael , with Wardens Leslie Young and David Machin , summoned some muscle , and we all set off for Darlington in a large van one Saturday morning . We found a church in the process of being gutted , and an organ already in pieces after Michael 's labours during the previous days . Under his strict supervision we loaded up and returned with our prize to Bramham . The old organ was quickly dispatched , sold off no doubt as an interesting museum piece [and one likely still to be performing who knows where] . For the next weeks and months , its replacement became the focal point of Michael Pretty 's life , as he shoe-horned its body and pipes into the space available. And so it was that All Saints gained its Andrews organ .

Not that this was quite the end of the story , for , as suddenly as he had appeared , Michael Pretty vanished. Perhaps , some thought , we had had a visitation , and that , task accomplished , our enthusiast had passed on his messianic mission elsewhere . Others , not least his Bramham fiancée , had more mundane suspicions.

And soon they proved to be right . Rumours , which Derek Shaw tried hard to contain , were flitting round the village , as such juicy tales always will . Michael Pretty was the subject of a police enquiry . He was wanted on fraud charges to do with past deceptions . Even more intriguing , he was said to be a bigamist , a man on the run from his responsibilities. Were the tales false or mere exaggerations ? We never

again saw Michael Pretty , organist extraordinaire , though the Andrews machine remains. A tribute , some would say, to one man 's vision and dedication ; to others , a fitting memorial for one of life 's mavericks with a seductive tale to tell.

Our story doesn 't quite end here . In fact , it leaves a mystery to which Bramhamers have little clue. After serving two years in Rudgate for fraud, during which time he played the prison organ [naturally] , was visited by Derek Shaw and had Mrs. Hale of Bramham as his probation officer , Michael Pretty disappeared . But , when we read some years after , of a Michael Pretty whose clothes were found beside the Lakeland waters, lost , presumed drowned , was this OUR Michael Pretty ? And , if it was, had he taken his guilty secrets to a watery grave? Or is he still peddling his dreams around the parishes of England , persuading the naive to install a Carlo Curli , or at least acquire a bargain from a closed down church ?

One thing is for sure ; if he IS around , he will be finding a wealth of discarded churches , and plenty of innocent PCCs on whom to practise his wiles and fulfil his fantasies.

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