

Snippets from England

TONY BERNARD SMITH

A man much envied by the British theatre organ fraternity is *Gerald Carrington*. Why? He is both mine host of a good old English pub and also the owner of a fine Compton instrument.

Which is not quite so surprising when you know that he has spent



Gerald Carrington, amid the works of the Pavilion, Hoddesdon, Christie.

much of his life as an organ builder — and much of that for the firm of Comptons. He's still active in that field, too, as well pulling pints behind the bar of the Plough, Great Munden, in Hertfordshire. That's where he has installed the 3/9 plus Melotone and piano from the Gaumont, Finchley, adding two ranks in the process.

An acoustically designed lounge houses the console and audience and two large chambers were built for the pipes. Every weekend the serious drinkers are augmented by the organ buffs who come to listen to resident and guest performers.

Recently, *Gerald* was able to help some enthusiasts who restored the lovely little Christie 3/6 in nearby Hoddesdon and a firm of which he is managing director have rebuilt a three-decker Compton in the church of St. Andrew, Chorleywood. This ex-theatre job has been put in with all traps and effects.

"It has been a very great success," he says. Which is useful to note at a time when many theatre jobs are getting new homes in churches.

He proffers a technical distinction between church and theatre organs in

general: "Generally speaking, it is in the voicing of the pipes. Whereas a theatre was always very dead — no reverberation, no echo — it required a much higher wind pressure, a much louder sound to compensate for this deadness. Mechanically they are very similar and, in fact, companies who built church organs before the war learnt an awful lot from theatre organs. Whereas a church organ would be used for maybe a couple of hours on Sunday a theatre organ could possibly be switched on in the morning and the blower would run . . ."

Would he recommend clergy to buy ex-theatre organs for their churches? "Nothing wrong with that at all."

One of his jobs in hand is the rebuilding of the four-manual Compton from the Odeon, Southend. This had the distinction of being the only Compton with both Melotone and patent solo cello (mechanically bowed and electrically amplified). With basic ranks enlarged from 10 to 12, and minus, a few of the extras, this is to go into a small concert hall being specially built for it by farmer Peter Palmer, of Huntingdon.

Organ builder *Ron Curtis* has also won fame as a performer and in his own gloriously titled Paramount Organ Works in Bolton he's now built himself a fine set of whistles. It's a four-decker with 10 ranks and is mainly the Compton from the Paramount, Liverpool. The Tibia, though, is a Wurlitzer one from the Gaumont, Preston and various bits and pieces join the ensemble from other sources.

Ron has been arranging some recitals since the organ was opened earlier this year. One performer — it was his first British concert date since a tour of Australia — was *Andrew Fenner*.

Now *Andy* is noted among his friends and colleagues as a bit of a perfectionist, but he described *Ron's* re-creation to me as "an incredibly excellent job".

"The lift (elevator) operating was silent and as safe as houses," he told me. "Spotlights changing colour, plus the sound from so big an organ which was massive without offending the ear.

"The first time I can say this — I've

always disapproved of the end noises — but *Ron* has done a superb job of showing the biggest organ can be successfully shifted into a house."



STACCATO SNIPPETS — High-class preservation job is indicated by the news that organist *Roy Bingham* has gained zoning permission to modify four Elizabethan cottages in the heart of England so that he can install his own Wurlitzer . . . Local enthusiasts have reached agreement with the management of the Astoria, Corstorphine, in Scotland. Theatre boasts a unique Ingram 2/4 and the local boys have agreed to patch it up as best they can in return for promise of first option if the building should close and the organ be for sale . . . Here's a small sensation — an organ going into a theatre! The management of the Regal, Henley-on-Thames, have completed arrangements for the Compton 3/7 of the Regal, Tunbridge Wells, to be transplanted. With luck it will sing again by Christmas. "Let's hope we can set the trend," says manager Gordern Mintern who is — you've guessed? — also an organ buff first class . . . Many instruments in Granada circuit houses have been sold recently but I hear the famous Granada, Tooting, Wurlitzer 4/14 is being kept playable through "grafts" from the nearby Granada, Woolwich . . . Among the many European theatres slated for twinning is the Rembrandt, Utrecht. The house boasts a Standaard 2/5 and there are hopes that this will be retained, playing only in the 775-seater lower auditorium . . . Seeking all the long-lost treasures, my Dutch friends have now discovered the Standaard 2/5 from the Rialto, Tilburg (now demolished). It's in a local penitentiary's chapel and played by a farmer's wife who has gained some reputation among the convicts for her use of the traps and effects . . . Nostalgic volume tentatively titled *The Mighty Organ* is now being penned by *Geoffrey Wyatt* who is currently seeking out all the old photos he can find . . . Sign of the times? The famous Odeon, Leicester-square London, now displays a billboard to announce that *Gerald Shaw* plays there daily. □