

# BIRMINGHAM MAIL 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1976

## **SOLVED – the mystery of a forgotten genius**

Stroll down what is left of Aston's Alma Street and the last impression you get is that you are in a monastery garden.

Or a Persian market, if it comes to that.

Yet Alma Street, it has now been established beyond dispute, was the birthplace of the man who has become known as Birmingham's forgotten genius of melody – Albert Ketelbey.

Forgotten in the official civic, sense, that is.

Certainly not forgotten by the people of his native city.

## **Family**

Letters and telephone calls from all over the country have poured into the Evening Mail offices following articles about Ketelbey.

For the composer, the centenary of whose birth was marked last year by a conspicuous lack of celebration, has remained something of a man of mystery as well as genius.

Where was he born? Handsworth seemed the best bet. Probably in Antrobus Road or perhaps Murdoch Road.

But then again there were suggestions that his birthplace could have been in Witton or Aston.

And how was the family name really spelt? So many thought that it was Kettelbey because it was also pronounced that way.

Someone did unearth the fact that the composer sometimes used the name Anton Vordorinski: this for the music he wrote for silent films.

But a discordant note was thrown in by a further suggestion that his name was not even Ketelbey, give or take a "t", but was in fact Arthur Aston.

Well, the Mail has settled the business once and for all. we obtained a copy of his birth certificate.

He was born Albert William Ketelbey, at 41 Alma Street, Aston on August 9, 1875. And as for being called Aston, there is a helpful clue. Before she married his mother's name was Sarah Ann Aston.

What of Alms Street now? In the name of progress it has been beheaded. In what remains of the street which used to lead up to the old Six Ways junction at Aston, there are factories on one side and the New-town Shopping Centre on the other.

The top part has vanished in a modern development of tower flats and maisonettes.

I did, however, succeed in tracing the course of the old street and estimated that a small block of lock-up garages marks the spot where No. 41 used to stand.

This was confirmed by 64-year-old Mrs Edna Perks of nearby Wiggin tower, Clifford Walk, who has lived in the area for 38 years.

"I reckon you are standing just about on the spot," she said. "I remember all the houses here. They were all the same. Two rooms up and two down. Never knew Albert Ketelbey lived there though."

## **Humour**

There is, it must be admitted, a plaque on the site. Not the kind that commemorates the birth of a famous composer, though.

Just a sign that says: "Ball Games Prohibited".

And directly below are a set of defiantly chalked cricket stumps.

Albert Ketelbey would have liked that.

