

# HE WAS MR PENNY ARCADE

## REMEMBER WHEN

IN the latest of his profiles of leading figures on Bradford's music scene, DEREK AJ LISTER looks back at vocalist and songwriter Sammy King. Although well known through the rock n' roll era and beyond, perhaps what brought Sammy King to prominence was writing the popular song Penny Arcade and to have it recorded by Roy Orbison.

Alan Twohig, aka Sammy King, was born in 1941 in Batley Carr and attended St Joseph's RC Primary School in Batley then St Bede's School in Heaton. A keen sportsman, he was Captain of the school football team, a talented player who wanted to become a professional footballer. But all that was turned upside down when in 1954 he suffered a hip injury playing for St Bede's against Grange Boys Grammar School. He ended up in Pinderfields Hospital, Wakefield, for two years. A hip infection destroyed the cartilage in his hip, and his dream of becoming a professional footballer was over.

When he eventually became mobile again he'd missed all his schooling and had no idea what to do for a living. He went to art college because he was unfit to do any manual work. He'd always been interested in music and could play the piano, so he joined the South Side Skiffle Group in Batley. He was originally a drummer then an acoustic



guitarist before electric guitar. Having taken piano lessons as a kid, he didn't pursue it, but it came in handy when he taught himself to play the guitar, which he picked up quickly. He joined a band called The Saints then the Dingos in Bradford for a few years. After the Dingos broke up he found himself with

no group. One day he was in a Batley bingo hall, sat at the back with a bingo card his mate who ran the hall had given him. A band called the Voltaires played during the interval. The singer walked out and, as he knew the lads, Sammy got up and sang a twist song then a ballad. He was so successful he became the

group's singer. All the top groups had the singer's name then the group's name, so it was decided it should be Sammy King and the Voltaires.

The Voltaires supported many acts including the Rolling Stones and the Beatles at Queens Hall in Leeds. The

**Sammy King, front with Bradford group The Voltaires. Sammy was a talented musician and songwriter who penned a hit for Roy Orbison**

only regret Sammy had was that he never spoke to George Harrison. He also appeared on stage with Shirley Bassey, Louis Armstrong, Dusty Springfield and Cilla Black.

The pressure of performing with the band took its toll and after a break Sammy hit the road as part of a duo. He went back to writing songs, but didn't know what to do with them. A friend, Derek Smith, who managed Batley Variety Club, said Roy Orbison was coming to perform and that he should see if he thought his songs were any good! After introductions, Sammy approached Roy about songs he'd written. He played a few on tape and Roy asked if he could take the songs, including Penny Arcade, to his recording manager in Nashville, Tennessee. Sammy didn't think he'd like Penny Arcade because he'd written it with the Eurovision Song Contest in mind and it wasn't really his style. He didn't hear anything for months then received a tape through the post of Roy singing the song and a note saying it was going to be his next single. Orbison insisted the song be featured on several of his albums and it is still played today, 40 years on.

Sammy King, friend of the stars, is still playing and writing music and is always on call, especially at Bradford Rock n' Roll Reunions. He lives in Heckmondwike with his wife, Linda.

\* Derek and musician Reuben Davison profile Bradford's 50s and 60s acts at [www.whenbradfordrocked.co.uk](https://www.whenbradfordrocked.co.uk)

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